

NOAH MAKES A SPLASH

A Moistly Comedic Play

By

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NOAH MAKES A SPLASH

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*For Rosemary,
without whose love and support I could not be a writer*

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Cast of Characters

NOAH, male, nearly 600 years old (but looks younger!), patriarch of his clan and a righteous man.

YAHWEH [YAW-way], female, any age, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent creator of the Universe and Everything. Doubles as a costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

SHEM, eldest son of Noah, spiritual disposition, ideally would be played by a Chinese or Indian actor.

JAPHETH [JAY-peth], middle son of Noah, something of a philosopher, ideally would be played by a Caucasian actor. Doubles as Worker 2 in act II, scene 1.

HAM, youngest son of Noah, intellectually curious and inventive, ideally would be played by an African or Afro-American actor.

EMZARA [em-ZAH-rah], female, late 20s to late 40s, Noah's principal wife. Doubles as a costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

SERVING GIRL/ANNOUNCER 1, adult female, any age. Doubles as Receptionist in act I, scene 5; doubles as costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

SERVING GIRL/ANNOUNCER 2, adult female, any age. Doubles as Tambourine Player in act I, scene 5; doubles as costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

ABIJAM [ABBEE-jahm], male, mid-20s to older (but must have an air of caniness and experience), high-pressure sales type. Doubles as IGDALIAH; doubles as Worker 1 in act II, scene 1; doubles as FISH in act II, scene 2; doubles as costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

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IGDALIAH [ig-DOLLY-ah], see ABIJAM, above.

RECEPTIONIST, female, any age, but must be credibly sensual, dressed as a belly dancer complete with zills (finger cymbals). See SERVING GIRL/ANNOUNCER 1, above.

ZERUBBABEL [ze-RUE-bah-bell], male, older, self-satisfied, smug, full of himself, chief loan officer at the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch; should be physically imposing. Doubles as costumed animal in act II, scene 3.

DRUMMER, male, any age, military bearing, must be able to keep a beat on a drum. Doubles as Unicorn in act II, scene 2.

TAMBOURINE PLAYER, female, any age, dressed as a gypsy, flamboyant, hammy theatrical in all her gestures, plays a tambourine. See SERVING GIRL/ANNOUNCER 2, above.

MELCHIZEDEK [mel-KEYS-eh-deck], male, middle-aged burly trucker type, jaded, seen-it-all, heard-it-all, takes-no-crap kind of guy. Doubles as costumed animal in act II, scene 3 (if needed).

WORKER 1, see ABIJAM, above.

WORKER 2, see JAPHETH, above.

UNICORN, an actor costumed as a unicorn; see DRUMMER, above.

FISH, an actor costumed as a fish; see ABIJAM, above.

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Settings

Act I

Scene 1: At a well in a patch of desert near Noah's home.

Scene 2: In a room in Noah's home.

Scene 3: In Emzara's chambers in the Noah family compound.

Scene 4: In a boat shop; then, briefly, in another boat shop.

Scene 5: In a bank's executive boardroom.

Act II

Scene 1: In the under-construction ark.

Scene 2: Bare stage, with a couple of folding chairs.

Scene 3: On the deck of the ark.

Scene 4: On the deck of the ark.

Scene 5: On the deck of the ark.

Casting Notes

With the doubling noted above, the play requires 12 actors. If the actors playing Shem and Ham also double (say as Abijam and Melchizedek, respectively), then fewer actors will suffice. If resources permit, more actors (and no doubling) would be preferable. "Ideal" casting is noted for some parts; but, of course, as a practical matter casting will be driven by the available actor pool. Diversity in casting is urged, whenever feasible.

Although NOAH MAKES A SPLASH is not a musical, a couple of scenes do feature musical elements: there is some rudimentary instrumental percussion work in act I, scene 5; and act II, scene 3 requires some moderately robust a cappella singing (of a summer camp song), both individual and ensemble (and, depending on ambition, perhaps some basic dance moves). So, if possible, in casting some effort should be made to assemble a group of actors comfortable with singing (and maybe doing

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some simple dance movement), or at least that features several good singing voices. Whoever is cast as Ham, in particular, should be a strong singer; Noah, Shem, and Japheth should also be good.

Production Note

Each scene in the play has a title (included in the script as headings in quotation marks), which can either be presented to the audience via projection or set out on large placards, each walked across the stage by an actor at the beginning of the scene. If the latter method is used, the crossing direction should be alternated for each scene: i.e., if the title for the first scene is walked from stage right to stage left, then the title for the next scene should be walked from stage left to stage right & etc.

There is provision for an intermission; however, the play may be presented with no intermission, if that is preferred.

Development History

The original version of this play, titled *The Adventures of Noah*, had its initial reading in 2013 at 4th Street Theater in Chesterton, IN. A revised version had a public reading at the Single Carrot Theatre in Baltimore, MD as part of that year's Dramatists Guild Footlights reading series. Following some radical revision/re-writing (excising 2 characters and 4 scenes), the play was included in Script2Stage2Screen's 2015-16 season reading series in Rancho Mirage, CA. In 2020 the play underwent another revision, including a change of title to the current *Noah Makes a Splash*.

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ACT I

SCENE 1: "The Yahweh Cure"

At rise we see NOAH approaching a well, bucket in hand. As he is preparing to draw water, there is a deafening crash of thunder and flash of light; when the dust clears, YAHWEH has appeared.

YAHWEH. Tantara! Not to mention . . . TA DA!

NOAH. (*Picking himself up from where he's been cowering on the ground, dusting off, reclaiming his dropped bucket.*) Yahweh!

YAHWEH. That's my name, don't wear it out!

NOAH. Leaping locusts, Lord! I'm too old for this sort of excitement. Must your appearances always be so . . . so . . .

YAHWEH. Awe inspiring?

NOAH. . . . loud?

YAHWEH. Come now, old friend. The First Mover of the Universe can hardly slip in and out of places unremarked, like some sort of butler. I have standards, you know. People expect a voice from a whirlwind, a burning bush—a little showmanship, for goodness sake! After all, theater is one of my most inspired creations!

NOAH. Well, Lord, your entrance nearly inspired me into expiring.

YAHWEH. Come, Noah. Surely you don't suppose I would pop in merely to see you pop off?

NOAH. Honestly, Lord? I never know what to expect from you.

YAHWEH. Excellent! Keep 'em guessing—that's my motto. Good to know I haven't lost my touch. But now to the business at hand: Friend Noah, I appear to you this day because I want you to build me a boat.

NOAH. A what?

YAHWEH. A boat.

NOAH. But . . . but Lord, I don't know how to build a boat.

YAHWEH. Yes, I know.

NOAH. I live in a desert.

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YAHWEH. Yes, I know.

NOAH. In all my 599 years, I've never needed a boat. I've never been on a boat. I've barely even glimpsed a boat.

YAHWEH. Yes, yes, enough! You seem to forget that I am the all-knowing Creator of the Universe. I do grasp your history as it relates to boats. And everything else, for that matter.

NOAH. Of course, Lord. Forgive me.

YAHWEH. Forgiven, forgiven. Now then. My boat. I'm thinking of something big, something that makes a statement. Something--just ballparking here--something taller than the tabernacle and impressively long. I'm thinking lots and lots of cubits! Why don't we say, oh, 30 cubits high, 50 cubits wide and 300 cubits long. That's bigger than the proverbial breadbasket, eh?!

NOAH. Yahweh, uh—

YAHWEH. And, of course, something with a touch of class; something a bit out of the ordinary—perhaps a nice gopher wood finish? Brass fittings would be lovely, if only you humans would get a move on and discover how to make brass. And glass! Yes! Glass walls! So you can observe the creatures of the deep swimming about—

NOAH. Your pardon, Yahweh, but—

YAHWEH. Yes, yes, what is it now? I was just getting on a roll here!

NOAH. Well, Lord, not to question your plan, but what use is a boat in a desert? Is it meant to be some sort of roadside attraction? Tourists might pay to see such an oddity--if there were any tourists; but people in these parts don't spend much time sight-seeing, there being no sights to see. Also, to be honest, folks around here aren't very curious or fun loving either. Not to speak ill of my neighbors, of course; but I fear that's how things are.

YAHWEH. Let me put it this way, friend Noah. I have a little festivity in mind, a sort of--oh, what's the description I'm looking for?--a sort of *pool party*, if you will. And the public is most definitely invited. If the revels go as planned, then . . . well, let's just say you won't need to fetch water from this well for a very long time.

NOAH. I'm sorry Lord, I don't follow. I never was very good at interpreting parables. Ask anyone. Parable-impaired Noah, that's me!

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YAHWEH. What I've just said hardly qualifies as a parable, old friend.

NOAH. So, you see what I mean!

YAHWEH. This is rather more tiresome than anticipated. Oh, very well—if you insist on having every little thing spelled out for you, here it is: I'm going to pour a whole lot of water over the earth and drown everyone—

NOAH. Whoa!

YAHWEH. Except *you*, of course, and your immediate family. I'm granting H₂O immunity to all of you! Oh, and to an artisanally curated collection of animals as well.

NOAH. But why Lord? Why would you destroy your own creation?

YAHWEH. First off, friend Noah, this world isn't my *entire* creation, is it? It's merely a teensy-weensy part of my total cosmic creation package. And, truthfully, kind of an icky part at that, like . . . well, like rotting vegetables at the bottom of a bin. It'll hardly be missed, believe me.

NOAH. But the people, Lord! Surely—

YAHWEH. The people! The people, friend Noah, have not lived up to expectations. The people are a disgrace. Disgrace? Yes. I think that's not too harsh a word. Long story short: the people have royally ticked me off.

NOAH. I don't understand, Lord. What have they done that's so terrible? Goodness me, it's not because of all the fornication and such, is it? If I had a shekel for every time I've said to people "you're young, explore, it's healthy, but please, do an old man a favor—get a room!" I'd be an even wealthier patriarch than I already am. Oy!

YAHWEH. Don't be silly Noah. You think that I, the Author of All Existence, give a fermented fig about who's diddling whom? If anything, I'd say humankind has shown a remarkable lack of imagination in this area. Literally millions of creatures milling about this planet, and all humans can think to do is fornicate with each other and the occasional sheep? So lazy! So uninspired!

NOAH. So . . . so it's nothing to do with sex?

YAHWEH. Heavens no. Obsessing about sex is simply silly. Not to mention tedious. Get over yourselves already!

NOAH. Now that's what I call a revelation! But if it's not sex, what is it? Wait! Wait! Don't tell me! Can it be that humankind has become too lax

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in praising you and giving you thanks for the blessings of your creation? Ah, that must be it—a hosanna deficit! Insufficient cringing and groveling!

YAHWEH. Oh, for pity's sake Noah! Are you seriously proposing that the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present First Mover of the Universe created humankind simply to have a personal cheering section? To have my ego stroked? Are you suggesting that I'm some sort of cosmic narcissist?

NOAH. Of course not, Lord! Still--why shouldn't you be admired? You are rather fetching, you know--particularly when you're angry.

YAHWEH. Don't even go there.

NOAH. It's true though.

YAHWEH. You really think so?

NOAH. Oh yes.

YAHWEH. Thank you.

NOAH. You're welcome.

YAHWEH. But that's got nothing to do with it.

NOAH. Still—

YAHWEH. Nothing. To. Do. With. It. Kapish?

NOAH. Whatever you say, Lord! Well, if it's not sex or faint praise, it must be . . . let's see . . . it must be . . . hmmm, what must it be? Oh! Oh! It must be because we're not faithfully following your myriad laws, as masterfully interpreted for us by the priests! Yes! Nailed it! High five! *(Raises hand, but Yahweh leaves him hanging.)*

YAHWEH. The priests! Don't get me started! Some mean well; but when it comes to my divine word most couldn't interpret their way out of a papyrus bag. Their insistence on embellishing my commandments with their own absurd hair-splitting doctrines and rigid rules is maddening. And would it kill them take a science class? No, Noah, the priests are hardly authorities on my word.

NOAH. Then, Lord, I must admit this situation is beyond me. I really can't see why you want to unleash a killer flood.

YAHWEH. Is it so important that you know the reason?

NOAH. Yes, Lord. Inquiring minds want to know.

YAHWEH. Yes! Precisely! Inquiring minds *do* want to know! Excellent! Now you've got it.

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NOAH. Sorry Lord—what exactly have I got?

YAHWEH. Noah, Noah, you're too modest. You've cut right to the heart of the existential dilemma of freedom versus authority, knowledge versus ignorance, enlightened choice versus rote obedience.

NOAH. I have?

YAHWEH. And so succinctly stated. Elegant, really. Noah, you are a wonder. So—you grasp my reasoning. Good. Now what I need from you is less talk and more boatbuilding.

NOAH. I would truly like to help, but in the matter of boats—

YAHWEH. Don't start. We've already been over this!

NOAH. Yes, and I *still* have no skill in boatbuilding!

YAHWEH. You don't have to build it yourself, old friend—you merely have to *have* it built.

NOAH. But how?

YAHWEH. Easy! I've drawn up some plans. Behold! (*Parchment scroll falls from sky, lands at Noah's feet.*) Simply make the appropriate arrangements and oversee the work. If you or your sons want to pitch in occasionally--saw a board, drive the odd nail or two--that's fine. Of course, as that cunning old rascal the pharaoh always says: "Never build your own pyramids." Sage advice, I've always thought. But it's entirely up to you.

NOAH. (*Picks up scroll, unrolls it, begins to look it over.*) Hmmmmmm. Interesting. Is that a skylight? Nice touch! Quite a list of animals in here too. Let's see . . . aardvarks . . . unicorns . . . serpents. . . . Wait—you want to save the serpents?! But I thought—

YAHWEH. Of course. Serpents aren't evil, you know. The serpent was always meant to share knowledge with Eve, and she was meant to share with Adam in turn. Why everyone thinks religion has to be anti-intellectual strains even my all-knowing comprehension.

NOAH. So my Sunday-school teacher had it all wrong? I must say, this has become quite a fascinating day. (*Turning back to plans.*) Well, it looks like you've accounted for every detail here.

YAHWEH. Wouldn't be much of a deity if I hadn't, would I? That's a rhetorical question, of course.

NOAH. Of course. So, when must this boat be ready?

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YAHWEH. If you look closely at the plan, I think you'll find I've chosen a very special date.

NOAH. My 600th birthday!

YAHWEH. I thought that would be a fitting gift.

NOAH. A thoughtful gesture indeed. Still, you know, I really wish you'd reconsider this whole homicidal flood thing.

YAHWEH. You're a good man, Noah. But don't try my patience. (*Sky darkens, thunder crashes, wind comes up; Yahweh speaks in loud, threatening tones.*) Build my boat . . . or perish!

NOAH. (*Debating with himself.*) Build your boat or perish . . . build your boat or perish. (*Comes to a decision.*) I, uh . . . oh, fine then, if that's how you're going to be. You can be a very convincing deity, Yahweh, no doubt about that. Sign me up.

YAHWEH. You're doing the righteous thing, Noah. Never doubt it. Humankind will be indebted to you for all time. (*Looks at the sky; licks finger, sticks in air.*) And speaking of time, I suggest that you waste no more in getting started. I predict that a storm will be blowing up pretty soon. And—trust me—it's one you'll want to be prepared for. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE 2: "Noah Enlists His Sons"

At rise we see SHEM and JAPHETH in the spacious main chamber of NOAH's home. JAPHETH is seated, attempting to read a scroll, but being distracted by SHEM, standing, who is practicing a variety of silly bows, gestures, and vocalizations.

SHEM. (*Actor playing Shem can improv silly movements to accompany the vocalizations here.*) Ooooooooooooooooooh Lord! We beseech thee. . . . No. Too lugubrious. (*Clears throat, begins again.*) Lordy, Lordy, Lord on high, come on Lordy, drop on by! No, no, no. Too informal. (*Sings to the tune of "Born to Be Wild."*) "Get your incense glowing; head out to praise Yahweh. . . ." No, that's ridiculous. C'mon Shem, you can do better! Focus, man, focus!

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JAPHETH. By the prophet's braided beard, Shem, can't you be still! Don't you see I'm trying to read? You're cavorting and yowling like a drunken dromedary!

SHEM. That's a fine way to speak to your elder brother, Japheth. Forgive me for interrupting your reading of the precious sports scroll, but I've been asked to provide the invocation at this weekend's burnt offering and I want to deliver something fresh---not the same tired old prayers the priests have been chanting over charred goat carcasses since the discovery of fire. No wonder young people avoid the temple these days—it's gotten boring and predictable. I want to change that!

JAPHETH. That's as may be, Shem, but remember, you're presenting sacred texts, not performing standup comedy— (*HAM rushes in, excited.*)

HAM. Brothers! How glad I am to find you here! You'll never guess what I've done!

SHEM & JAPHETH. (*In unison, blase.*) You've invented something.

HAM. Gosh! How did you know?! You are the smartest brothers ever! I've always said so!

SHEM. Little brother, you are too kind. And now, I really should be going—

HAM. No, no, don't go, I've something to show you. Come see.

JAPHETH. (*Rises, comes over to his brothers.*) Oh, very well Ham. What is it this time?

HAM. (*Flourishes an umbrella.*) It's this! Isn't it brilliant?!

SHEM. What is that thing? (*Ham points it in Shem's direction.*) Leaping lepers, boy, don't point it at me!

HAM. No need for fear, brother. I call it . . . simply . . . wait for it! . . . an umbrella!

JAPHETH. What an odd name.

SHEM. I hope it's more useful than that last invention of yours. What did you call that?

HAM. A suppository.

SHEM. Ah, yes. I didn't care for that one at all.

HAM. Come now brothers, this is completely different. For one thing, you don't have to stick this up your butt!

SHEM. That's a relief.

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HAM. It's for keeping you dry when it rains! Isn't that brilliant?! See, you carry it around with you and when a storm comes up you grasp it *here*, open it up like *this*. (*Demonstrates.*) Raise the canopy over your head; and it prevents the rain from falling upon you! Mankind has at last mastered the weather!

JAPHETH. Interesting. But, little brother, aren't you forgetting we live in a desert?

SHEM. Yes, how will this . . . umbrella thingy hold up in a sandstorm?

HAM. Oh. Hmmm. Good points, brothers. Perhaps I need to rethink my design slightly—

NOAH. (*Entering, carrying scrolls in a bucket.*) Boys!

SHEM. Father!

JAPHETH. Dad!

HAM. Papa! (*They all embrace.*)

NOAH. You may find that Ham's little invention is more timely than you can imagine.

HAM. Really papa?

SHEM. What do you mean, father? Why should anyone need a water-repelling device? I can barely recall the last time it rained around here.

JAPHETH. And where have you been all morning, dad? You went out to fetch water hours ago.

NOAH. Ah, yes—water. Well, boys, here's the thing. I've had a little chat with Yahweh—

SHEM. Uh--

JAPHETH. --oh!

NOAH. --and I have good news and bad news.

SHEM. Oh, please, father! Like it's ever good news when you speak with Yahweh!

JAPHETH. Didn't you promise not to have these little chats with Yahweh any more, after what happened last time--?

NOAH. Now boys, be fair—you know how it goes with Yahweh. It's not so easy to ignore her when she wants something.

SHEM. She? Yahweh appeared in *female* form? That's it—we're doomed.

HAM. What about my umbrella, papa?

JAPHETH. That's hardly the point, Ham!

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NOAH. All right, all right! Everyone just settle down. Surprisingly, the umbrella is relevant. Though, to be honest, I wish it were not.

SHEM. Very well, father. Though I suspect it'll be painful to hear, tell us—what's your news? Give us the bad news first.

NOAH. Why so pessimistic, Shem? Honestly, you can be such a buzz kill! Just like your mother at times. She was always so afraid you were going to grow up to be obsessively religious! Which, now that I reflect on it, you have. Perhaps that wasn't the best example—

HAM. Papa, please—about my umbrella?

NOAH. Yes, Ham, I'll get to that. Well . . . hmmm, how to put this? Boys, I'll cut right to the chase: Yahweh is going to kill everyone in a world-soaking flood—

SHEM. Oh, isn't that just perfect?! I guess I can kiss my temple appearance goodbye!

NOAH. --but we, that is, our family, will be spared—

HAM. Hooray!

NOAH. --along with, if I understand the plan correctly, a potpourri of wildlife.

HAM. So, my umbrella—?

NOAH. Should be in pretty big demand, at least for about 40 days and 40 nights.

HAM. Oh, goody!

JAPHETH. Okay, so we're going to be saved. Peachy. But how? I hope the plan doesn't call for swimming? Frankly, the prospect of treading water for any length of time holds only marginal appeal.

NOAH. Don't distress yourself, Japheth, there'll be no water-treading. We're building a boat.

HAM. Excellent!

SHEM & JAPHETH. Seriously?!

SHEM. You do recall, father, that we live in a desert?

JAPHETH. Do you know how to build a boat, dad? Because I'm pretty sure nobody else around here does.

HAM. Oh! Oh! Let me invent one, papa! I know I can!

NOAH. No need for that, Ham. Not to worry, boys—Yahweh has provided plans. Come, look. (*Unrolls scrolls, all gather round.*)

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SHEM. This seems like an ambitious undertaking.

JAPHETH. Yeah, dad, that's an awful lot of cubits. Has anyone ever built anything this big? It looks more like a colossus than a boat!

HAM. Oooooo! Look at this list of animals! We're going to need many wildlife-stupefying drugs! I'll invent them!

NOAH. It *is* an ambitious project, boys, I won't deny it. But even though our boat-building skills may be . . . um . . . somewhat suspect—

SHEM. Understatement!

NOAH. --Yahweh has assured me that we don't have to build the boat ourselves. We can farm out its construction to experts!

HAM. (*Has been scribbling away during the conversation; shows drawings.*) Look, papa, I've invented the block and tackle! Those should come in handy in the boatbuilding!

NOAH. Give it a rest, son.

JAPHETH. But dad, who are these experts?

NOAH. Have faith, son—Yahweh will provide. I'm sure we'll find someone suitable.

SHEM. We do have faith, father—but still, I have to ask: If Yahweh wants a boat, why doesn't she simply create one herself?

NOAH. Now Shem, it wouldn't be fair to make Yahweh provide the boat—after all, she's already providing the flood.

HAM. I've just invented the compass! Also, the sport of lacrosse—but I think the compass will be more useful at present.

JAPHETH. I hate to bring this up, dad, but have you spoken to our mothers about this boat business?

SHEM. Yes, father, I'm sorry to mention it, but I don't think they've completely forgiven you for that Amway franchise fiasco—

NOAH. That was not ordained by Yahweh—!

SHEM. Yes, but there have been plenty of other Yahweh-inspired schemes—

JAPHETH. Remember that Garden of Eden development project? That ended badly.

SHEM. --and I'm not certain our mothers are going to be favorably inclined—

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HAM. Here's a new idea! Wheelbarrows! With all those animals, this could really come in handy!

NOAH. Enough! Must I remind you who's the patriarch here? I promised Yahweh that we will do this thing, so we will do this thing. Whether your mothers like it or not, whether we have wheelbarrows or not, changes nothing. Yahweh has spoken. *I* have spoken. There's no more room for any more, um, for any more *spokens*! Can I get an "amen"?

HAM. Amen, papa!

NOAH. Thank you, Ham.

SHEM. I don't know, father—

JAPHETH. I hope you're right, dad—

NOAH. Boys, given the circumstances, I believe I am. Now I want you to go and tell your wives, then begin preparing for the difficult work to come. I'll take care of informing your mothers.

SHEM, JAPHETH, & HAM. Yes, sir! *(They exit.)*

NOAH. *(Falls to his knees, throws arms skyward.)* Yahweh! Did you hear all that? Now I must speak with Emzara about your plan. Please protect me, Lord, from the inevitable spousal outrage—remember, I'm no use to you dead! And I'd prefer not to be maimed too badly either, if you could oblige. Thanks be unto you! *(Rises, reluctantly begins to leave.)*

HAM. *(Voice comes from offstage, as if from a distance.)* I've just invented galoshes!! *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 3: "Emzara Gets the News"

At rise, EMZARA is conversing with SG/A 1 and SG/A 2

EMZARA. Ladies. How go the preparations for my husband's 600th birthday celebration?

SG/A 1. Exceedingly well, Madame Emzara . . . uh, for the most part—

SG/A 2. Yes, mostly pretty nicely, my lady . . . um, generally speaking—

SG/A 1. That is to say, er, more or less on target, considering—

SG/A 2. So very nearly acceptable on select days, depending on how scrupulous a standard one wishes to apply—

Emzara. *(Darkly threatening.)* Ladies!?

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SG/A 1. Horribly!

SG/A 2. Terribly!

EMZARA. (*Sighing heavily.*) What is the problem now? Out with it! The goat didn't swallow the balloons again, did it?

SG/A 1. Oh, no Madame, we have not let the goat near the balloons since the first unfortunate incident.

EMZARA. What then? Quickly ladies! I would like an explanation while I still draw breath.

SG/A 2. Well, Madame Emzara, it's . . . it's the candles.

SG/A 1. Those pestiferous candles!

EMZARA. What about the candles?

SG/A 2. There are so many of them!

SG/A 1. Six hundred!

EMZARA. I know how many candles a 600th birthday requires. What of it?

SG/A 2. Good Madame Emzara, apart from finding an oven large enough in which to bake a cake that will hold 600 candles—

SG/A 1. Oh, that's been solved--young Ham has invented a new kind of oven that works wonderfully! And he says that after we have finished with the cake, we can use it to make steel! Whatever that is.

SG/A 2. --apart from the baking, it takes so long to light 600 candles! Yesterday we attempted a test with a wooden simulation of the cake, and—

SG/A 1. --and by the time the final candle was lit, most of the others had melted into flaming pools of wax. We had to form a bucket brigade to extinguish the blaze. It nearly set the entire marketplace on fire!

EMZARA. That explains all those alarm bells I was hearing!

SG/A 2. Had it been the actual birthday cake, I'm afraid it may have been a bit waxy tasting.

SG/A 1. We are at our wit's end as to what to do!

EMZARA. (*Another heavy sigh.*) Ladies. Had you paid proper attention to the lighting of the candles at husband Noah's 599th birthday, you would know the procedure is simple: have more than one person light them.

Teamwork, ladies--it works wondrously well.

SG/A 2. Oh, Madame Emzara!

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SG/A 1. You are learned indeed!

EMZARA. Would that all our problems were so easily solved! Come, ladies, let us find another store of candles so that you may rehearse properly. *(All exit. A few moments later, Noah enters, tentatively.)*

NOAH. Emmy, my dear? Are you here? Don't be coy, my little desert flower. *(Pokes around the room.)* Emmy, where are you? I need to speak with you. It's me, your No-No Bear. *(Satisfied that she is absent.)* Yahweh be praised! Perhaps I am not meant to tell her about all this boat-building business today! Perhaps there's no need to tell her at all? Why worry her with these details? I could build the boat in secret then surprise her with it when the rains begin. Yes, yes . . . no, no, that won't work. The boys and their wives know, and none of them can keep a secret. Simmering sundials, what a quandary! Still, perhaps the news can keep for a bit. Why do today what can be put off until tomorrow? Perhaps I should wait for a sign— *(As Noah is speaking, Emzara, SG/A 1 & 2 re-enter with boxes of candles.)*

EMZARA. Husband! This is a surprise. What brings you here at this hour? And what's that about a sign?

NOAH. Emmy, my dear! I, uh . . . oh, nothing terribly important; just a tidbit of news—

EMZARA. Husband, you know I am always glad to have news—especially good news.

NOAH. Ah, yes. Good news. Well, you know, on the whole, I think it's fair to say that there's a great deal of good in the news I have to impart, even if not every little *detail* or *nuance* is *completely* good; but I still think any impartial observer would have to agree that—

EMZARA. *(Threateningly.)* Husband! Do you, or do you not, have news?

NOAH. Yes, sorry, dithering darling. I mean, *I'm* dithering, darling. Sorry. Uh, to my news then. Well, you see, Emmy my dear, the thing of it is, is that I had a little chat earlier this morning with . . . well, with Yahweh—

EMZARA. Yahweh!? Not *again*! Not after all your promises! *(A bell clangs, as at a boxing match; SG/A 1 goes into ring announcer mode, while SG/A 2 crosses the stage holding up a placard that reads "Round 1.")* Noah and Emzara don boxing gloves and helmets. During the argument that follows, Noah and Emzara act like boxers, shuffling their feet, circling

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each other, shadow boxing, etc. SG/A 2 eventually joins SG/A 1 as a second ringside announcer.)

SG/A 1. Ladies and gentlemen, it looks like we may be in for quite a bout this evening. Kid Emzara has a big grudge against fighters from the Yahweh stable and Knuckles Noah has been a primo battler on the Yahweh card for more years than most mortals can count.

NOAH. Emmy, be fair! I know I promised to ask Yahweh to find someone else to handle the do-gooding chores for a while—but you know how persuasive she is!

SG/A 1. Uh-oh, it looks like Knuckles is coming out tentative. That could be a big mistake!

SG/A 2. A defensive stance won't give him an edge with Kid Emzara.

EMZARA. Oh, I know Yahweh all right—and I know her powers of persuasion work best on weak-minded goody-two-sandals who *want* to be persuaded!

SG/A 1. Kid Emzara lands a stinging blow!

SG/A 2. A bit below the belt, perhaps, but it scored.

NOAH. Emmy, this isn't like those times with the yetis or the dinosaurs.

Yahweh's not just fooling around with a few oddball species anymore.

This time, she's going to kill off every single human with a massive *flood*!

EMZARA. What's that?! A flood?!

SG/A 1. Good counterpunch from Knuckles Noah!

SG/A 2. Kid Emzara wasn't expecting that one! That's set her back on her heels!

EMZARA. A killer flood you say? If it washes away some of those worthless auxiliary wives of yours, it might be not so bad!

SG/A 1. Oh, that's a nice recovery from Kid Emzara!

SG/A 2. You have to admire her grit.

NOAH. Come now, Emmy! Still on about auxiliary wives after all this time?! Why, I was nearly 460 years old before the two of us even met.

What was I supposed to do—play “tickle the serpent” all by myself for four centuries? Be reasonable!

SG/A 1. Oh no, Knuckles is covering up. What is he thinking?!

SG/A 2. Appealing to reason! That's a rookie mistake all right!

EMZARA. You presume to tell me that your *needs*—

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SG/A 1. Here it comes! *(Bell rings, signaling end of round; Noah and Emzara move to their “corners,” act out being attended to as the SG/As continue their commentary.)*

SG/A 2. Saved by the bell! That’s a bit of luck for Knuckles Noah!

SG/A 1. It sure is! Kid Emzara was loaded for No-No Bear! If she’d uncorked that last one Knuckles would be seeing double from the cheap seats right now, for sure.

SG/A 2. Well, somehow Knuckles just managed to survive that brutal first round. Can he come back from such a pummeling? What’s he have to do to stand a chance?

SG/A 1. First, he’s going to have to cut out the novice mistakes.

SG/A 2. You mean like being truthful and appealing to reason?

SG/A 1. Exactly—no one can win with those tactics. And he’ll need to come out more aggressively. If I were his coach, I’d say to him “Noah, you’re a patriarch: act like a patriarch! Rely on the skills that got you here.” *(Bell clangs for next round; SG/A 1 crosses stage with “Round 2” placard while SG/A 2 continues the blow-by-blow commentary; as in round 1, SG/A 1 & 2 come together for co-announcing.)*

SG/A 2. We’re back, folks, with what promises to be a heckuva round 2. It’s hard to see this fight going the distance after the massive ego-bruising we’ve already witnessed. Knuckles Noah has to be smarting from the punishment he’s taken so far.

NOAH. You know, Emmy, you were always my favorite.

SG/A 1. Knuckles comes out strong!

EMZARA. Shameless! You men will say anything—

NOAH. I’ve never been as happy with any other wife as with you—

EMZARA. Oh, spare me the—

NOAH. That’s why I made you my number 1 wife, you know, even though I didn’t meet you first. You were the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen, and you’ve made me the happiest. And the child we had together has always been my favorite.

SG/A 2. A stunning combination! What a flurry! Can you believe what we’re seeing here?!

SG/A 1. Against all odds, Knuckles has come out scoring big!

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EMZARA. *(She has stopped moving, dropped her arms to her sides.)* Do you really mean . . . you haven't said . . . it's been years—

NOAH. You know I love you, Emmy. I've never loved anyone like I love you. Okay, sure, I spoke with Yahweh—but it was the only way I could make sure you'd be safe when the world becomes a waterpark! All I have to do is build a tiny little boat, maybe care for a few cute cuddly animals, and Yahweh will save us. She's not saving everyone, you know. But I've made sure she'll save you!

EMZARA. You . . . you're doing this for me? To save me? Oh, husband! *(Emzara swoons.)*

SG/A 2. This fight is over! This fight is over! Can you believe it!! Who could have seen this coming?! Oh, the humanity! *(SG/A 1 & 2 revert to their serving girl roles; they and Noah rush to Emzara to revive her. Boxing gloves are removed.)*

NOAH. *(Taking Emzara's hand; kisses it.)* So, Emmy. Do you approve? Shall I keep my promise to Yahweh and build this boat?

EMZARA. Oh, my No-No Bear, I do approve. But on one condition.

NOAH. Anything!

EMZARA. You must remind me how "tickle the serpent" is played. I fear I may have forgotten the rules.

NOAH. *(Smiles broadly; sweeps Emzara into his arms; amidst the giggling of SG/A 1 & 2 he carries her off towards the exit.)* Don't worry my dear. I'm told it all comes back to one, just like . . . well, like riding a bicycle. Whatever that is. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 4: "Abijam Makes His Pitch"

At rise, ABIJAM is puttering about his just-opened-for-the-day shop; door opens with tinkling of bell, Noah enters carrying scroll.

ABIJAM. *(To himself.)* Allah be praised—a customer! *(To NOAH.)* Good morning, sir! Welcome to Boat's 'n' Stuff! I am Abijam, the proprietor—or, as my many, many satisfied customers insist on calling me, Honest Abi! What can I do to get you onto the water today?

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NOAH. Well, Honest Abi, you might begin by offering your nautical wares someplace nearer the water.

ABIJAM. Oh, sir, that is a good one! Ha, ha! I have not heard that one before, no indeed! May I ask whom I have the honor of addressing this fine morning? A celebrated wit, no doubt?

NOAH. I am named Noah. Or as my many, many friends and family insist on calling me--Noah.

ABIJAM. Patriarch Noah?! The same Noah who had that Amway venture—

NOAH. No need to speak of that! I have pressing business—

ABIJAM. But of course, of course! How may I be of service?

NOAH. I have come to you this morning because I am interested in a boat—

ABIJAM. And you have come to the right place, Patriarch Noah! I offer the finest in reed-bundle rafts, dugouts, turtlebacks, shashas—everything from inflated-skin floaters for the children to wood-plank cargo vessels for the serious merchant wishing to expand from local to international markets.

NOAH. Most impressive.

ABIJAM. If it moves by oar, paddle, pole, or sail, I've got it! I also offer some pristine pre-owned craft, never even sailed, used only at dockside by ancient matriarchs for the occasional Sabbath tea party—

NOAH. No, no . . . no thank you! My interest falls in a different sphere altogether. I require a custom piece of work, built to the most exacting specifications--

ABIJAM. Ah, excellent! That will be no problem whatsoever! I employ only the finest artisanal boatwrights at my shipyards in Ur and Girsu—

NOAH. If I might be permitted to complete my thought?

ABIJAM. Of course, patriarch, of course! A thousand apologies. I am simply so eager to serve you! Pray continue!

NOAH. The work must be carried out near my home, not at a distant boatyard. It must conform precisely to a set of plans already drawn up. It must be completed on a very tight timetable. There will be no time for fixing mistakes; therefore, there can be no mistakes. It will be challenging.

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If, knowing all this, you remain interested, I have brought with me a set of plans so that you may study them and submit a bid.

ABIJAM. A bid? Why do you speak of bids? Surely it is not your intention to consider other boat builders for this project?

NOAH. It is. I have found that soliciting bids is the best way to ensure that I receive what I require.

ABIJAM. But Patriarch Noah, bidding is so inefficient! Consider: here at Boats ‘n’ Stuff we can meet all your needs with one simple stop. That’s why we’re called “‘n’ Stuff”! We can build you a boat, seal your driveway, and repoint your chimney as well. In fact, I just happen to have a crew working in your neighborhood this week—

NOAH. I have no interest in these other matters—

ABIJAM. --but, more importantly, here at Boats ‘n’ Stuff we guarantee that we will not be undersold by any competitor. So confident are we of our fair pricing that we will match or beat any advertised price on any product or service we offer! *(Turns to audience and recites the following as rapidly as possible.)* Offer not valid in Mesopotamia. Hidden fees and charges apply. Ads must be notarized by 13 Pharisees. Side effects include seasickness and an urge to talk like a pirate. Decisions by management are arbitrary and final. Void where unprofitable.

NOAH. *(After a beat.)* That’s a very enterprising pitch, Mr. Abijam.

ABIJAM. Thank you. One does one’s humble best.

NOAH. Nevertheless, I must insist on adhering to my original plan.

ABIJAM. Oh, very well! If you will not see reason, what choice have I? It’s sad how untrusting people have become.

NOAH. Indeed, given your example, it is quite mystifying why they should be so.

ABIJAM. *(Motions Noah to sit.)* Thank you, patriarch. You do me honor. So then--let us review your plans. *(They sit, Noah unrolls the scroll and they consider its contents.)* Can these specifications be correct? I have never seen a vessel of such a size!

NOAH. She’s a big girl all right. Isn’t she a beauty?

ABIJAM. All I can say is, that’s a lot of cubits! What manner of craft is this, which must be so large?

NOAH. I call her an A.-R.-K.

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ABIJAM. Ark? An ark, you say? I have never heard of such a thing.

NOAH. No one has. She's the first and, I sincerely hope, last of her kind. Behold the Apocalypse Recovery Keelboat!

ABIJAM. Patriarch Noah, I am but a simple man. But I can tell you this—whatever this craft may be called, its design is fatally flawed.

NOAH. Flawed?! Impossible! Flawed how?

ABIJAM. Where to begin?! For one thing, by what means do you propose to propel this behemoth? I see no provision for masts or sails, no ports for oars, no benches for oarsmen. Furthermore, there's no rudder or wheelhouse—no way to pilot this monstrosity. Assuming she'll even float, it appears she'll be completely at the mercy of the currents and tides—a gigantic piece of flotsam! That is hardly what one would call intelligent design.

NOAH. You are sadly behind the times, friend Abijam. I intend to direct the maneuverings of this fine vessel personally, employing a revolutionary system of faith-based propulsion.

ABIJAM. Faith-based propulsion?

NOAH. Precisely. When, for example, I want the craft to sail northward, I shall simply pray to Yahweh to have the craft move in that direction and it shall be so.

ABIJAM. Pray to Yahweh? So, you intend for God to be your co-pilot?

NOAH. More than intend, my dear Abijam—I've already settled this with Yahweh.

ABIJAM. Yes . . . uh . . . of course . . . of course you have.

NOAH. So, you see, this so-called design flaw of yours is really not a flaw at all. It is a "feature."

ABIJAM. You may imagine how relieved I am to learn this. But, look here—you want this ark, as you call it, to be built on your property. Something so huge?! I know of no way to move such a monstrosity, once it's complete. A body of water large enough to accommodate something of this size is impossibly far away. You must have the construction done at a proper boatyard beside a proper body of water. Otherwise, I regret to say, the effectiveness of your revolutionary propulsion system is going to be a moot point.

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NOAH. The pharaohs have managed to move some pretty impressive objects long distances through the desert, if I'm not mistaken.

ABIJAM. Technically true, patriarch. But, of course, the pharaohs have never been willing to say how they do it; and their workers have a nasty tendency not to survive to talk about their methods. In any event, hiring so many workers would not be cost effective.

NOAH. Good points all. But you need not concern yourself. Moving the vessel is my problem; getting it built properly is yours.

ABIJAM. Very well. As we say here at Boats 'n' Stuff, the customer is always right!

NOAH. An excellent sentiment.

ABIJAM. Do you like it? I came up with it myself one day at lunch. As I recall, it afforded the rest of the sales staff a hearty laugh.

NOAH. A happy workplace is a productive workplace.

ABIJAM. That's a good one too! Do you mind if I use it?

NOAH. Why should I? I stole it from the pharaoh.

ABIJAM. That pharaoh is a surprisingly amusing despot! Well then, patriarch Noah, if you don't mind a final question?

NOAH. By all means.

ABIJAM. Not to belabor the point, but does this ark really have to be so large? Wouldn't something a bit . . . sleeker do just as well? After all—small is beautiful!

NOAH. Did you make that up too?

ABIJAM. I blush to admit I did.

NOAH. Abi, you can certainly turn a phrase. But, alas, the answer to your question is no--it can't be smaller. It's going to have to accommodate a very special, very large cargo; so, I'll need every cubit of the space that's planned.

ABIJAM. And I suppose the nature of this very special cargo is no concern of mine?

NOAH. You are a quick study, sir. So, will you be bidding?

ABIJAM. Allah deliver me, I am insane to say so, but yes.

NOAH. Very well then.

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ABIJAM. A moment more, patriarch! Can I interest you in our buyer-protection extended warranty plan? For a mere 10% surcharge you receive—

NOAH. No, thank you. I don't see the usefulness of such a plan.

ABIJAM. That's what they all say, patriarch Noah, but many come to regret it. I hope you will not!

NOAH. I hope not as well, Honest Abi. Now, I must say good day. I'll look forward to your bid.

ABIJAM. And a good day to you, patriarch Noah. Allah willing, you shall become the newest member of the Boats 'n' Stuff family! *(Noah exits; Abijam is replaced by IGDALIAH; sign flips; store becomes RAFTS & CRAFTS; Noah re-enters to tinkling of bell.)*

IGDALIAH. Good morning, esteemed sir! Welcome to Rafts & Crafts! I am Igdaliah, the proprietor—or, as my many, many satisfied customers insist on calling me, Honest Iggy! What can I do to get you onto the water today?

NOAH. *(To self.)* Yahweh! Hear me! My eyes have been opened. I begin to understand the merits of your flood idea! *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 5: "Zerubbabel Has Talents"

At rise we see the executive board room of the S&L: it is more throne room than board room, with a throne-like seat on a raised dais dominating the center; there are two modest chairs set off the dais. RECEPTIONIST enters, leading Noah and Ham.

RECEPTIONIST. This way, gentlemen, if you please. Welcome to the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch. As we like to remind our patrons "Your Talents Aren't Wasted Here"! I just love that motto, don't you?

NOAH. *(Drily.)* Very clever.

HAM. *(Ogling Receptionist, entranced; Noah nudges him.)* What? Oh . . . um . . . oh, I get it--a somewhat pedestrian wordplay on the double meaning of "talent" as a unit of currency and also an inherent skill—

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(Another nudge from Noah.) Ow! I mean . . . ha, ha! Yes! Exceedingly clever!

RECEPTIONIST. I just *knew* you'd love it too! I'm really good at reading people. *(Motions to chairs.)* Please, make yourselves comfortable. *(Noah and Ham take seats.)* Is there anything else I can do to make you feel at ease?

HAM. *(Clearly infatuated.)* Cavorting concubines, is there ever!

NOAH. *(Another sharp elbow quiets Ham.)* Thank you, no. We're quite content.

RECEPTIONIST. Very well then, I'll take my leave. Chief Loan Officer Zerubbabel will be with you shortly. May your talents not be wasted! Oooh, I do love saying that! *(Exits.)*

HAM. *(Lovelorn.)* Bye, bye!

NOAH. What ails you, Ham?!

HAM. I have a soft spot for seductive receptionists, papa! One meets so few of them in the desert.

NOAH. Remember why we're here, my boy. Focus! *(Sounds of zills, drum, and tambourine beating out a stately procession. Receptionist enters, playing zills.)*

RECEPTIONIST. All rise! *(Noah and Ham stand.)* Behold! The Honorable Chief Loan Officer Zerubbabel approaches! Prepare to receive wisdom, on easy payment terms tailored to your unique personal needs! *(ZERUBBABEL enters, followed by DRUMMER and TAMBOURINE PLAYER. Receptionist leads all in a snaking, stately procession, to the accompaniment of the instruments. The procession should be as fun and silly as possible; ending with Zerubbabel ascending to the throne and sitting. He is flanked by Drummer and Tambourine Player, while Receptionist is seated low on the dais in front.)*

ZERUBBABEL. Greetings unto you, miserable supplicants! **(P)** *[Performance Note: Zerubbabel's pronouncements will generally be punctuated by the 3 instrumentalists percussing with their respective musical instruments—this should be done as emphatically as possible. A (P) following a statement by Zerubbabel indicates that the instruments should be played.]* We are Zerubbabel, Chief Loan Officer of the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan Company, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch.

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(P) *(Noah and Ham begin to sit.)* Stop!!! **(P)** *(Noah and Ham freeze.)*

There is no sitting in our presence without permission! State your names at once, discourteous strangers! **(P)**

NOAH. I am called Noah. I am the patriarch of my clan and a righteous man.

HAM. I am called Ham, which you might expect to be short for something nifty, like Hamilton, or Hamlet; but no, Ham is all there is. I am the youngest son of patriarch Noah, who I don't recommend you trust to name anything. May I also say how much I admire your saucy receptionist?

(Gets the expected jab from Noah.)

Ow! What I meant to say is—I am a righteous man also!

ZERUBBABEL. Righteous! Ha! We shall see about that! **(P)** State your business with the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan Company, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch. **(P)**

NOAH. It will be my pleasure. My son and I wish to present a proposition for the funding of—

ZERUBBABEL. Funding?! You *dare* to mention *funding*?! **(P)** Are we to understand that you propose the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan Company, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch, actually supply you with . . . with *funding*? **(P)** Have you the effrontery to suggest that we part with some portion of the talents currently residing, all snug and warm, in our double-hardened, triple-locked, quadruple-guarded, asp-infested, secret underground vaults? **(P)**

NOAH. In short . . . yes. You are a bank, are you not? The word “loan” is in your title, is it not? You do make loans?

ZERUBBABEL. Make loans?! I must think on this! **(P)** *(Leaps to his feet.)*

RECEPTIONIST All rise! *(Noah and Ham, who have been standing all this time, give each other a look.)* Oh, I mean . . . all remain standing!

(Zerubbabel begins pacing around the room, in thought. This creates another procession, as the instrumentalists follow, beating time—if Zerubbabel walks quickly, the beat picks up; if slowly, the beat slows down. When these little parades occur, they should be made to look as silly as possible—going in circles, going in lines, varying the pace, etc. Ham it

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up, play for laughs; but don't drag it out too long. Eventually, Zerubbabel finds his way back to his throne.)

ZERUBBABEL. We have decided! (P)

NOAH. Thanks be to Yahweh! It's about time!

ZERUBBABEL. Our decision is . . . (*Musicians do drum roll equivalent.*) . . . no funding for you! (P)

NOAH. What!? That's outrageous!

HAM. You must be jesting!

ZERUBBABEL. You may leave us now. Shoo! (P)

NOAH. This is preposterous!

ZERUBBABEL. What did you say?! (P)

NOAH. You heard me! You've refused our proposition without even hearing it! Do you call this businesslike behavior?

ZERUBBABEL. You expect me to *listen* to your pathetic proposal before I refuse it? Why that's absurdly inefficient, you silly man! It's much more businesslike to make decisions without wasting time hearing *facts*! (P)

NOAH. That may be, sir, but we refuse to leave until you have heard our proposition.

HAM. That's right—we refuse to leave! I might even sit down without permission!

RECEPTIONIST. (*Gasps loudly.*)

ZERUBBABEL. Such impudence has never before been heard of! We must think on this! (P) (*Leaps up, precipitating another procession.*)

RECEPTIONIST. On your feet; I mean keep standing; I mean—oh, you know the drill! (*Procession ends as before.*)

ZERUBBABEL. We have thought deeply upon your intolerably insolent intransigence! And we have concluded that . . . we will hear your proposal! (P) (*Receptionist, Noah, & Ham give each other surprised looks.*) Yes, it amuses us to indulge you in this petty matter, particularly as we reflect that, because there are no public floggings or bacchanalia scheduled for today, we must needs pass the time in some other manner. Use what's at hand, we always say. Proceed! (P)

NOAH. Most kind. My son Ham here, a renowned inventor of things, has come up with an idea that should prove highly interesting to a banker eager to expand his prestige and influence. So, with your indulgence, I will ask

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him to present his astounding concept to you. (*Noah motions to Ham, begins to sit.*)

RECEPTIONIST. No sitting in the presence of the Chief Loan Officer!

ZERUBBABEL. He may sit! **(P)**

RECEPTIONIST. You are commanded to sit! (*Noah sits; Ham takes the floor. He has a scroll in hand.*)

HAM. Good day to you, Chief Loan Officer! And hello again to you, you saucy receptionist! (*Waves to her. She is unimpressed.*) Um, well . . . as my father has mentioned, I am fond of inventing things. For example, I have invented a rain shield that I call an umbrella—you may perhaps have heard of it? No? Well, trust me, you will. In any event, for our meeting today I have invented several rather ingenious things, if I do say so myself. And I do. These are things that bankers will find most intriguing and useful.

ZERUBBABEL. Yes, yes, and are we to hear of these things sometime before the world ends? **(P)**

HAM. Dancing dervishes! You are well connected, sir! How did you know about the end of —?

NOAH. (*Cutting him off.*) A figure of speech, son, a figure of speech! Move along now, the Chief Loan Officer hasn't got all day.

HAM. Yes, of course, my apologies. What we propose is that the Fertile Crescent Savings & Loan Company, Yahweh-Forsaken Backwater Branch, lend us a sum of talents—what I call a home equity loan—

ZERUBBABEL. Home equity loan?

HAM. --sufficient for us to build the home improvement I have outlined on this parchment. In return, we promise to repay that sum, plus an additional percentage, called interest.

ZERUBBABEL. Interest interests me! **(P)**

HAM. As security for our promise to repay, you receive a stake in our home and belongings, called a mortgage. If we fail to comply with the provisions of this agreement in any respect, you can take everything we have—

ZERUBBABEL. Take everything! I like that! **(P)**

HAM. —and we call this collateral.

ZERUBBABEL. What a mellifluous word! **(P)**

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HAM. To guard against any downside risk, you can bundle your interests into a debt/equity swap and sell it for a tidy sum to some less progressive banker who has no idea what he's buying. So, you see, you win whatever happens.

ZERUBBABEL. A win-win for me—how delicious! **(P)**

HAM. Please hold your cries of adulation until after our question-and-answer period; which begins now.

ZERUBBABEL. This . . . this is indeed a powerful concept! I must think on it! **(P)** *(Rises; as everyone is about to follow suit, he abruptly sits again.)* Never mind! What's to think about? You offer me a license to manufacture talents! Let me see that plan of yours! **(P)** *(Ham hands over the scroll. Zerubbabel looks it over.)* This is a very odd-looking home improvement project! If it weren't so large, I'd almost say it was a . . . I don't know . . . a boat of some kind. **(P)** *(To musicians.)* Cease that infernal racket, can't you?! **(P)** I mean now! *(In some confusion they stop.)*

NOAH. *(Rising.)* Oh no, it's not a boat!

ZERUBBABEL. It looks like a boat to me.

HAM. Well, it's not a boat.

ZERUBBABEL. I say it is!

NOAH. A common misconception. It's a boat-like rec room addition, that's all.

HAM. Trust us, sir, this is not a boat. For one thing, as you say, the size of it is ludicrous for a boat!

ZERUBBABEL. The size of it is ludicrous for a rec room!

NOAH. If it were an ordinary rec room that might be so. However, this is not an ordinary rec room.

ZERUBBABEL. Indeed? What manner of rec room is it then?

NOAH. It's a . . . um . . . it's . . . Ham, tell the Chief Loan Officer what sort of rec room this is.

HAM. *(Clearly surprised, groping.)* Why, of course it's . . . clearly it is . . . anyone can see—

ZERUBBABEL. Spit it out, boy! You are trying our patience!

HAM. --it's a Man Cave! Yes, that's it! A Man Cave!

ZERUBBABEL. Man Cave?

NOAH MAKES A SPLASH

HAM. Yes, a Man Cave. You know, a refuge a weary patriarch can repair to after a strenuous day of . . . of patriarching, and there do manly things in the company of his manly companions without the interference of . . . of womanly wives or concubines.

NOAH. (*Picking up on the idea.*) Yes, and of course doing manly things with manly companions requires more than a piddly, run-of-the-dunes rec room. Manly pursuits require manly spaces! In short—they require a Man Cave!

ZERUBBABEL. And these Man Caves—they always resemble large boats?

HAM. It's common knowledge!

ZERUBBABEL. Yes, yes, of course. We knew that! What you say makes perfect sense!

NOAH. And so?

ZERUBBABEL. And so, as it is clearly not a boat but a Man Cave, and based upon the ingenious financing options presented earlier, we, the Chief Loan Officer of the Fertile Crescent etc. etc. say—you shall have your funding! (*Motions to musicians; repeats.*) We say—you shall have your funding! (P)

HAM. (*Leering at Receptionist.*) This calls for a huge fornication—I mean celebration! (*Elbow from Noah.*) Ow!

ZERUBBABEL. Gentlemen, if you will follow us, there are parchments to prepare and talents to disburse! We can almost taste that lovely collateral already! (P) (*Rises, leads procession out, Noah and Ham follow, with Ham trying to insert himself in line next to Receptionist as they go, Noah trying to restrain him; lights fade to black.*)

INTERMISSION

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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