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SCRIPT SAMPLE

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**Shakespeare, Moses and Joe Papp**  
by Ernest Joselovitz

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Robert Moses, at age 70  
Jesse Seligman, a young man, his new secretary

Joseph Papp, at age 37  
Jacob Rose, his colleague and friend  
Peggy, his wife

Robert Wagner, New York City's Mayor

The Narrator, who also takes on the roles of the lawyer Silverstein, the lawyer Levenson, and the lawyer Schwartz: all of whom wear dark suits, carry expensive briefcases, and whose names are seldom seen in newspapers.

and various voices

TIME

The end of 1958 to August 1959.

INTRODUCTION

Joe Papp has roots in the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe; Robert Moses carries with him the money, class and proud heritage of the German Jew (who were here first). This is a clash between these two men defining two worlds: Robert Moses' world is of a spacial abundance, a facade of orderliness, a world of plaques and folders, a large solid desk, a model of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Joseph Papp's world seems at first a cramped chaotic mess, except just about everything in it denotes one set of activities, one ambition: the telephones, the manual typewriter, the changing model of the JULIUS CAESAR set. The two men occupying these worlds seem very different, too: Moses, always in a formal suit and tie, is cool, quiet, his emotions under a control nurtured and defined by experience and birth; Papp, dressed in old slacks and an open shirt, is wired, quick energy. But a closer look, and as their drama unfolds, reveal similarities: a vision not only for themselves but everybody else, and a single-minded driving ambition, carrying in its wake large egos.

This is history as myth. There are significant visual images - a wall of plaques, a model of the then-proposed Verazzano Narrows Bridge, a theatre set model - but the central focus is on the larger-than-life individuals. If it's not noted, I don't "see" it. I have tried, in the writing, to encourage a continuous flow, avoiding stagehands in blue light.

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*Robert Moses sits at his desk.*

NARRATOR: Robert Moses.

*The young man, Jesse Seligman, dressed with the same immaculate easy innate grace as his new boss and old family patriarch, walks in with a set of manila folders.*

*He stops to gaze at the wall of plaques and citations.*

SELIGMAN: Uncle? There's a missing plaque.

MOSES: The Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

SELIGMAN: Oh. Great. When did you get that?

MOSES: I haven't yet.

SELIGMAN: Oh.

MOSES: But I will. (Moses is already looking through his first folder of the day.) I will.

NARRATOR: Went to Yale University, Oxford, and Columbia. Entered the Civil Service in 1922. By 1958 Robert Moses was the New York State and City Parks Commissioner, controlled the New York State Public Works Department, New York State Power Authority, New York Bridge and Tunnel Authority. Among other things. Robert Moses built every bridge and tunnel and highway in the state and city of New York, every single public house or building, for thirty-five years. By 1958, Robert Moses had built over six hundred parks in New York City alone, and had decided every event in every one of those parks.

*Cross-fade to:*

PAPP: (entering) Jake? I quit!

ROSE: You what?

PAPP: CBS! - TV! - junk! it's junk!

ROSE: A full-time job ...

NARRATOR: Joe Papp, aka "Yussel Papirofsky", son of Yetta and Shmuel, a trunk maker who was usually unemployed. Did not attend Yale or Oxford or Columbia. Graduated high school to work as a janitor, a barker on Coney Island, delivered laundry. Among other things. Then he joined the Navy. Which is when he started to put on shows. After the war

he joined a sheet metal factory and the Actors Lab, which was mostly Communists, like himself. He wandered through a few marriages and a job as floor manager for CBS.

PAPP: "I turn my back. There is a world elsewhere." Coriolanus, Act 3, scene ...

ROSE: It's a paycheck!

NARRATOR: Not what you'd call a prescription for greatness.

PAPP: Stop! Jake!

ROSE: You have Peggy, the new kid, the alimony payments.

PAPP: I know - I will. I've still got Shakespeare.

NARRATOR: And oh yes, this man passionately loved the plays of Shakespeare. So, in 1953, at a rundown church on Avenue D, Joe Papp and Jake Rose had started the New York Shakespeare Theatre.

ROSE: Oh you do ... A theatre company without a theatre, not even a budget, that charges no admission for a season of 400 year old plays running outdoors for a few summer months? You understand this.

PAPP: There is greatness here, for me, for you, this is it, right here.

ROSE: Well. But. Giving up your day job....

PAPP: You'll do it, mark my words, someday, you'll be out too, out of that ice box job.

ROSE: Oh you think.

PAPP: Think? I know. My bones tell me, my blood tells me . Joe Papp, Jake Rose - can't you see it? touch it? great things. You're here, with me, believe in this, the two of us. Producers!

ROSE: Maybe so, well sure, well yes.

PAPP: Well yes. Jake. The two of us, the North Atlantic, L.A. Actors Lab, New York.

NARRATOR: Unspoken now, the pain and anger too recent: the House Committee, subpoenas and testimony, the two of them, refusal and defiance, and the blacklist.

*Between them, a silence.*

ROSE: Hey.

PAPP: Hey. "We have set our life upon a cast...!"

ROSE: "And we will stand the hazard"!

PAPP: Right.

ROSE: Right. (Holds out one of the telephones) Get to work.

*Cross-fade to:*

MOSES: (dictating to Seligman) "Dear Jerry, Thank you for your article of November-the-22nd, 1958. I am pleased to confirm the accuracy of your reporting, I can always count on your sympathy and your thorough knowledge of the subject. The proposed Verrazano Narrows Bridge will provide tens-of-thousands of jobs, benefit millions of motorists every year, a work of art, commerce and convenience.

"Dear Mr. McConaga, Minneapolis Star, article of November-the-22nd. I am pleased to confirm the accuracy"... so forth so on, the same.

"Dear Mr. Bateman, San Francisco Chronicle, article of November the 23rd. I wish to correct

your misapprehension of the facts regarding the displacement of residencies necessitated by the proposed Verrazano Narrows Bridge. It was, I'm sure, unintentional. Attached is the correct information. Our legal counsel will be in touch with you about the wording of your printed retraction."

"Dear Isaac, Atlanta Constitution, "Your article of November-the-23rd ...

*Moses notices a manila envelope.*

MOSES: How did this get here?

SELIGMAN: Today's 9 a.m. delivery, along with .... oh... my God.

*Having opened it, Moses pours out (as expected) large- denomination dollar bills ...*

MOSES: You did not see this. I did not see this.

SELIGMAN: A bribe, this is a bribe, it's illegal, I'll report it, we have to report it to the proper authorities.

MOSES: I'm the proper authority, Mr. Seligman, over a dozen unions, hundreds of contractors and sub-contractors. So: no name, no return address, you'll mail it from ... Manchester Vermont. It's a donation - with an unsigned cover letter, "in gratitude for ..." and a request for anonymity- send it to Fordham University. That way Fordham University has a new lab. And my hands are clean.

SELIGMAN: But this particular contractor will think you're obligated.

MOSES: ... when I'm not.

SELIGMAN: But they're breaking the law.

MOSES: An anonymous businessman making a generous donation to Fordham University?

SELIGMAN: But if you don't hire them ...

MOSES: They'll think they've succeeded in breaking the law. And that I wield so much power over construction contracts that I got a better offer. (He holds out his tight fist:) I've got them by the balls, Mr. Seligman. (He opens his empty hand:) Without a trace of their dirt, a hint of their stink. (returning to dictating letter:) "...Isaac," Atlanta Constitution, "...your article of November-the-23rd, I am pleased ...." so forth so on.

*Meanwhile:*

PAPP: (on the telephone) Me? Am I what? This makes a difference in your charitable donation? (A beat.) Well yes, I am Jewish. (A beat.) Yes. It's Papirofsky. (A beat.) Shalom to you.

ROSE: (to Papp) Jewish? You? Your mother knows, I know... Does your wife? ...

PAPP: It's New York, it's the theatre: so now I'll be Jewish. For a donation of \$500 I'd be a Nepalese Buddhist.

*And then ...*

SELIGMAN: Temple Emanuel, the High Holidays.

MOSES: Two seats. In the back, you'll insist. Then purchase two seats... (finds the envelope) here, at Temple Israel.

SELIGMAN: Which one will you attend?

MOSES: Neither. Yom Kippur. No disrespect, but on what other holiday does a fella pay \$50 for a seat and then never get to sit down? This way I'm happy, the rabbis are happy. Any questions, remember, my wife insisted we attend ... whichever, "the other one." (A beat.) Next.

*As Moses is handed another, thick folder ...  
Cross-fade to:*

ROSE: (on telephone) Department of Corrections? Mr. Fleming? Jake Rose... We are in dire need of some billy clubs. It's a modern JULIUS CAESAR. One? Two? ...

PAPP: (grabbing Rose's telephone) Ten!

ROSE: (grabbing it back) Three? (A beat.) Three. Yes. Thank you.

PAPP: (On telephones) Sanitation? This is Papp.

NARRATOR: ... Papp, Joe Papp, who reached Mayor Wagner, wanting not money, "not one cent, just in-kind services, from a few, you know, city agencies."

ROSE: Actually, yes, there is more.

PAPP: Right.

ROSE: Handcuffs.

PAPP: A pick-up truck.

ROSE: Whatever you can spare ...

PAPP: (grabbing Rose's telephone) Ten!

ROSE: (having grabbed back his phone) Mr. Fleming? Mr. Fleming. (He's hung up.)

WAGNER: Sure, well, sure. Shakespeare.

NARRATOR: ... the Mayor thinks,

WAGNER: ...A couple shows on the lawn, how much could that possibly amount to?

*Meanwhile, Papp nods, clicks off, dials again.*

PAPP: Office of Civil Defense? Papp here.

NARRATOR: "How much could that possibly amount to," he thought.

PAPP: Paint: that army green, a few gallons ... twenty?

ROSE: (into telephone) Housing Authority.

PAPP: (back into telephone) Department of Public Events?

ROSE: Jake Rose here.

PAPP: Papp.

ROSE: Scaffolding, metal.

PAPP: Two-by-fours.

ROSE: No? (Beat.) Nothing? (Beat.) Where? (Writing it out) Sewer... Services.

*Hands slip of paper to Papp.*

PAPP: You have two-by-fours - How many? (Sign from Rose: four.) Eight. (A beat) Six? OK. By tomorrow.

ROSE: City Armory? Jake Rose. He did? Yesterday/ A cannon? You sent us a cannon?

PAPP: Sewer Services? I could use some scaffolding, metal.

ROSE: Well what have you got in the way of knives and pistol?

*Cross-fade to:*

MOSES: (Goes to another folder) What's this? "Papp ..."

SELIGMAN: Shakespeare in Central Park.

MOSES: What now?

SELIGMAN: He can't ask for donations, that was your ruling. Loophole, he found a loophole: that the Welfare Department actually has jurisdiction over the Park's northwest corner at 81st Street.

MOSES: Which is where his actors passed the hat? (Moses chuckles, shakes his head in admiration. Then.) Letter, New York Municipal Welfare Department; we'll have to put a stop to this.

SELIGMAN: But, sir ...

*Moses goes to the model of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. He is slowly pulling out a piece of one of the girder's foundations ...*

SELIGMAN: The bridge ... Sir? - What you're doing ... it'll collapse ... sir?!

*Moses stops.*

MOSES: One piece, permit one weak spot, Mr. Seligman, one loophole, and the whole structure collapses.

SELIGMAN: Yes sir.

MOSES: Send the letter.

NARRATOR: That's the start of it, the way we see it now.. Joe Papp and Robert Moses, hero and monster. Now that they're both dead. Now that years have gone by. Events become memories become... what? - fiction. Hindsight becomes foresight, two-and-two adds up to five. One story and another, first- second- third-hand. "Magnetism", "vision", "genius". Well not here. Not this.

**END SAMPLE.**