

NOT A WORD

A Comedy

By Wallace J. Pineault

805 Belmont Street
Manchester, NH 03104
Email: wpineault@comcast.net
Copyright: Library of Congress 2022

CHARACTERS

- CLAIRE FORTUNA:** Early to Mid 40s. Part time palm reader/make-up artist; however, still searching for her dream job. At times very opinionated yet compassionate and understanding. Reluctantly puts up with Colonel Burnhart's dirty-old-man behavior.
- COLONEL BRADFORD BURNHART 4TH:** Mid 70s. Retired Military Man. Likes his whiskey and women...not necessarily in that order. Living his prime years but only in his mind.
- FLORENCE CALLAHAN:** Mid 50s - late 60s. Sole proprietor of The Wayfarer Boarding House. A bit forgetful when it comes to names. Known to have a sharp tongue at times yet a warm heart. Most often willing to find the best in people. A peacemaker.
- MIRIAM VAN HIBERHAUSER:** Mid to late 20s. Naïve, sweet, gentle and innocent. Has always dreamed of becoming a movie star, although she has limited talent. Develops a feeling for Albert.
- ALBERT BUSHKOV:** Known as Bertie. Early to mid 30s. Sincere, rational, and all around nice guy. A true gentleman and wannabe film writer. Is attracted to Miriam.
- BERTHA BLANKMIND:** Mid 40s to early 50s. The ideal follower. She does what she's told. Insecure, yet looking for more in life. Outside the comfort of her home and previous routined job, she is a duck out of water.
- EDDIE GENNA:** Early 40s. Legally blind and wears exceptionally thick glasses. Treats his deficiency with humor. Sees himself as independent. Has a distasteful feeling for Lorenzo Primadoni.
- LORENZO PRIMADONI :** Mid to late 40s. Egotistical and in love with himself. The ultimate, stereotypical Italian lover. Sees himself as a great actor; yet the critics, however, see it differently. Thick Italian accent.
- OTTO DEUTCHMANN:** Mid 50s. A die-hard fan of film director, Erich Von Stroheim ...even to the point of adopting a German accent. Harsh, quick tempered and obnoxious. He is all show with no credentials. Pretends to know more than he actually does.

TIME

*Late Spring & Early Summer
1920*

PLACE

*Hollywood, California
The Wayfarer Boarding House*

The symbol “/” indicates the dialogue between two actors is overlapped and spoken at the same time.

ACT I

SCENE 1: MID MORNING

It is a large Victorian Boarding House, (uncommon for California) yet adorned with a touch of Spanish influence. The main entrance, down stage left, opens to a large open space acting as a living/dining area. Stage left also houses a large ornate staircase hugging the wall, leading up to a landing and bedrooms. The outside wall of the staircase showcases a large Victorian window. Opposite the stairwell is a dining table and buffet. A swinging door just up stage of the buffet leads to the kitchen. Further up stage right is a door leading to Florence Callahan's bedroom. The wall separating the dining area and her bedroom (facing the audience) is filled with photos of known film stars and unknown wannabes. Directly below the second floor landing, nestled within the well of the staircase are built-in bookcases, a small table, floor lamp and comfortable arm chair, designating a retreat area for boarders. At the base of the staircase is a small telephone table and wall mirror. Finishing off the welcoming room is a large area rug, chandelier and various collectibles.

Claire Fortuna and the Colonel are seated at the dining table...Claire faces the main entrance, while the Colonel faces the buffet. She is reading the Colonel's palm while softly stroking his lifeline.

CLAIRE: As exciting as your past has been, I see your lifeline stretching on for many exciting years, and with a bright future I might add...filled with happiness and pleasures.

COLONEL: Really? Pleasures! I like that. What kind of pleasures?

CLAIRE: I see something shiny; something glimmering in the sunlight...like a silver beam or something metal indicating...indicating...strength and power.

COLONEL: You must mean my Gwendolyn.

CLAIRE: Ah, yes, your Gwendolyn...strong and powerful Gwendolyn.

COLONEL: My defender of freedom; my shining saber. I've slashed many an enemy with that / sterling weapon.

CLAIRE: Yes...! No! No! Not a sword. It's...it's not silver. It's...it's gold! Pure gold... and round, like a ring.

COLONEL: A ring? You mean a wedding ring?

CLAIRE: Yes! Yes! That's it! I see...a woman in your life. I see...I see...I... I...

COLONEL: Yes! Yes! I know you see, but what do you see ?

-2-

CLAIRE: I see... (*The doorbell rings.*) No! No wait! I hear...I hear a sound...

COLONEL: That was the doorbell.

CLAIRE: Don't interrupt. You'll destroy the flow. I hear...I hear... (*The doorbell chimes again*)

FLORENCE: (*Off stage and impatient.*) I'm coming! The world's not about to end!

CLAIRE: ...some kind of...of / noise.

COLONEL: That's Mrs. Callahan.

CLAIRE: (*Breaking her trance*) Are you interested in knowing your future or not?

COLONEL: Of course / I'm interested!

CLAIRE: Then shut up! (*Returning to her trance*)

There's a loud banging on the door.

FLORENCE: (*Entering from the kitchen, she is now angry.*) I'm coming! Keep your shirt on! (*She removes her apron and tosses it on a chair.*)

Florence primps herself up. Opening the door, she turns on her sweet caring voice.

CLAIRE: I see...it's getting clearer... I see...

FLORENCE: Hello. May I help you?

CLAIRE: No! Wait! I hear.... I don't see. I hear...

COLONEL: Yes. I know. Go on.

CLAIRE: She's beginning to speak to me.

COLONEL: Who? Tell me who!

Miss Miriam Van Hiberhauser is on the other side of the door.

MIRIAM: (*Off stage*) Is this the Wayfarer Boarding House?

FLORENCE: Yes, dear. / It is.

CLAIRE: Her voice! I can hear her voice.

COLONEL: Tell me, / is it sexy?

CLAIRE: Shhhh!

MIRIAM: I'm Miriam Van / Hiberhauser...

COLONEL: Is it/ sexy?

CLAIRE: *(In a loud voice)* Quiet!

MIRIAM: *(Thinking the "Quiet" was for her, she speaks in a softer tone.)* I'm so sorry.
I'm Miriam Van / Hiberhauser. I wrote...

FLORENCE: Could you speak up, my hearing is not what it should be.

MIRIAM: I said my name is Miriam Van...

FLORENCE: I got that part. It was the second / part I missed.

MIRIAM: I wrote to you / about a month ago.

CLAIRE: It's soft and gentle and... *(She stops rubbing his palm.)*

COLONEL: And what? What else do you hear? Keep rubbing! Harder! Harder!

CLAIRE: I can't quite make it out. There's / some interference...

FLORENCE: How rude of me. Please come in.

CLAIRE: Wait! I'm beginning to see/ an image.

MIRIAM: Thank you. *(Carrying her suitcase she begins to enter.)*

CLAIRE: Yes! She's coming into view.

MIRIAM: Oh, If you'll excuse me. I must pay the taxi driver. / I'll be but a few
seconds. *(She exits.)*

COLONEL: What does she look like?

CLAIRE: She's fading. She's... *(Again, she stops rubbing his palm.)*

COLONEL: Don't leave me hanging like that. Rub harder, damn it!

CLAIRE: *(Rubbing his palm harder)* She's gone. *(Miriam returns.)* No! Wait! Yes! Yes!
She's coming back into view. Yes! Here she comes!

COLONEL: Goody, goody! And?

Miriam enters and looks about.

CLAIRE: Ah, Yes. She is quite young.

COLONEL: OOO! I like that. How young? 20s, / 30s...

CLAIRE: ...and very beautiful.

COLONEL: *(Getting rather excited.)* Really.

MIRIAM: What a lovely room. I can tell / I'm going to like it here.

COLONEL: What else?

CLAIRE: Shhhh! She's...

FLORENCE: Can I take your coat? You must be awfully warm.

MIRIAM: Yes, I am. *(Giggling)* / Thank you. *(Removing her coat)*

CLAIRE: She's wearing a pretty /yellow dress with...

COLONEL: Never mind what's she's wearing...what does she look like?

CLAIRE: Stop interrupting! You're muddling my concentration.

MIRIAM: Truly a lovely room. It speaks kindness.

COLONEL: *(Obviously impatient.)* Now what?

CLAIRE: She has brown silky hair/ and her eyes...

COLONEL: I like silky hair.

FLORENCE: And how was your trip? Not too stressful, / I hope?

MIRIAM: Oh no. It was fine. *(She giggles.)* A bit tiring / but that's about all.

-5-

CLAIRE: She has a slight giggle.

COLONEL: Yes...yes...I think I hear it.... And her eyes...you were saying her eyes...

CLAIRE: Ah, yes! Her eyes are / are...

COLONEL: ...are what? Her eyes are / what? Blue...hazel... *(Totally fixated on Claire's trance)*

CLAIRE: Her eyes are...*(Straining to see the color of her eyes.)* Her eyes / are...

FLORENCE: Well let me show you to your room and then I'll fix you something cool to drink. If you will just follow me, please. *(She escorts Miriam up the stairs.)*

COLONEL: *(Starting to turn toward Miriam.)* Mrs. Callahan! Would you please...

CLAIRE: Colonel! Keep your focus on me. This is not the time / to be distracted.

Miriam trips on the way up the stairs.

FLORENCE: Are you all right? *(As Miriam begins to giggle and snort.)* It's not / the heat, I hope?

MIRIAM: Oh, no. I'm known to be a bit clumsy. I was told my mother accidentally dropped me on my head when I was a little girl, and...

FLORENCE: You don't believe that nonsense, / do you?

CLAIRE: I see...

MIRIAM: Oh, heavens no!

COLONEL: What else? Tell me / more.

MIRIAM: Besides, my mother would never do that to me. If anyone would do such a thing, it would be my grandmother.

COLONEL: *(Again, he begins to turn.)* Mrs. Callahan, don't count on me to...

CLAIRE: *(Again, she begins to stroke the Colonel's palm.)* I see...I see. / No wait! She's...she's...ahh...

MIRIAM: My mother was merely covering up for my grandmother's drinking

problem. *(As they continue up the stairs.)* Her hands would shake like a bowl of Jello and her fingers / would go numb.

CLAIRE: She's...she's fading away again. *(As they exit)* Damn! She's gone.

COLONEL: Gone! What do you mean, gone?

CLAIRE: *(Putting her hand to her forehead)* Ohhh...Ohhh...

COLONEL: I'm paying you / good money for this!

Claire suddenly pretends to feel faint. She lets go of his hand.

COLONEL: Miss Fortuna! This is no time to take a nap! Miss Fortuna, wake up! *(He grabs a nearby glass of water and tosses the remains in her face.)*

CLAIRE: *(Coming to)* I'm sorry. I must have fainted?

COLONEL: Fainted! I'm not paying you to faint. My future is in your hands.

CLAIRE: I suddenly felt very weak. My brain was being deprived of oxygen. I felt like I was drowning.

COLONEL: That was only the glass of water.

CLAIRE: The powers were getting too strong. I was losing control.

COLONEL: Powers? What powers?

CLAIRE: Yours, Colonel. Your...strong, powerful masculine being was emitting too much energy.

COLONEL: Really? My being? You don't say.

CLAIRE: Yes! And my weak frail feminine body was incapable of handling it. You have very strong energy, Colonel. Very controlling.

COLONEL: Yes. I've been told that many times before.

CLAIRE: You'll have to excuse me. I need to rest. I must lie down.

COLONEL: Yes, of course. I understand. I seem to have that affect on women. It's a family trait you know among the men. It stems from our military

background... strict discipline, constant exercise to stay in shape, and the uniform of course. Women just love a man in a uniform.

CLAIRE: Yes, that's exactly it...the uniform. Now, if you'll excuse me? (*Exiting up the stairs*)

COLONEL: Yes of course. We can continue some other time. Maybe I can be of some assistance. (*Pursuing her, he mounts the stairs.*) Miss Fortuna!

He meets Florence and Miriam who have re-entered.

FLORENCE: ...and when did you decide to be an actress?

As they proceed down the stairs, the Colonel turns to look at Miriam as if he somehow knows her.

MIRIAM: Ever since I saw my first movie. I just knew I had to be a part of it.

FLORENCE: And what film was that?

MIRIAM: "Poor Little Rich Girl" with Mary Pickford. She is so pretty.

Not making the connection, the Colonel exits.

FLORENCE: Yes. She's very pretty. (Pause) Why don't you sit right there and I'll get you some refreshments. How about a nice cold glass of lemonade?

MIRIAM: Thank you. That's very thoughtful of you. A small glass will do. I have an audition later this afternoon and I'm extremely nervous as it is. Wouldn't want to upset my stomach any more than it already is.

FLORENCE: Not to worry. Besides, a little sugar will help keep up your energy. (*She exits into the kitchen.*)

Miriam looks around the room. She notices the photographs hanging on the wall, some being well-known celebrities. She gets up from the table to get a better look.

MIRIAM: Has Buster Keaton stayed here? And Lillian Gish?

FLORENCE: (Off) I wish.

MIRIAM: But you have their pictures on your wall.

FLORENCE: The pictures merely promote conversation among the boarders.

-8-

MIRIAM: (*Continuing to look at pictures*) Isn't this Harold Lloyd? (*Re-enters with lemonade and cookies.*) Who are the other people? They don't look familiar.

FLORENCE: That's because they're not. That young man and woman are Jonathan McAllister and Ethel Blumberg; and the picture above that one is Harold Hummer...all former boarders and film hopefuls like yourself.

MIRIAM: I see. And where are they now?

FLORENCE: Ethel Blumberg returned to New York where I believe she's working at Coney Island. Still in the entertainment field, you could say. Harold Hummer, a hopeful director is directing but not film.... Traffic at Hollywood and Vine. I'm not sure about Jonathan McAllister. I thought someone told me he got in such a state of depression not having made any headway in the business that he's re-cooperating in some sanatorium playing all kinds of roles, depending on whether it's a good day or not.

MIRIAM: How horrible.

FLORENCE: More sad than anything. So many have such high hopes, but "c'est la vie" so they say.

MIRIAM: (*Confused*) I don't understand.

FLORENCE: It's French. It means "That's life."

MIRIAM: Oh.... And what about all the others?

FLORENCE: Now don't go getting discouraged. There's nothing to worry about. You'll do fine. After all these years, I have what you call an internal sense...a gut feeling when it comes to artists.

MIRIAM: Were you ever in the film business?

FLORENCE: Oh, heavens no. But at times it feels like it, being surrounded by so many eccentric people.

MIRIAM: Am I ecc...ecc...

FLORENCE: Eccentric? Not yet, my dear. But the Film Business is known for doing strange things to people.

MIRIAM: Did you ever have a strong feeling about something, that no matter what the outcome, you just had to do it.

-9-

FLORENCE: You mean like coming to Hollywood?

MIRIAM: Yes! That's right.

FLORENCE: I guess so, but it wasn't to be in the movies.

MIRIAM: Well, I felt that Mary Pickford was calling me to Hollywood.

FLORENCE: (*Gazing at Miriam*) I look at you and I see myself forty years ago, and I sense a woman with tenacity and determination. And you know what Somehow I feel that you're going to play an important role in this industry for years to come.

MIRIAM: You really think so?

FLORENCE: (*Raising their glasses of lemonade*) To you my dear, and to the beginning of a successful film career. (*As Miriam raises her glass, the doorbell rings.*) Good heavens! What time is it?

MIRIAM: According to the clock on your mantle, it's ten o'clock.

FLORENCE: That must be Mr. Bushkov. He said he'd be arriving at ten.

MIRIAM: Who is Mr. Bushkov?

FLORENCE: A young man from Chicago who, like yourself, has dreams of making it in "The Business." (*Handing Miriam her glass of lemonade she crosses to the door.*)

MIRIAM: Does he have aspirations to be an actor as well?

FLORENCE: Oh, Heaven forbid! I think he said in his letter he's a writer, which I believe, having read his most beautiful and eloquent words. (*Checking herself in the mirror*) Furthermore, he sounds intelligent and sincere, two virtues difficult to find in this town.

MIRIAM: (*Concerned and confused*) You don't like actors? Because that's what I...

FLORENCE: Oh, no, no, no. I like actors. It's their egos and phoniness I detest.

MIRIAM: But I assure you I'm...

FLORENCE: Now, now, my dear. You're not like the rest of my previous actor-boarders who felt the world owed them everything. You're sweet and
-10-

considerate, just like Mr. Bushkov's letter. (*The doorbell rings again.*) I'm coming. I'm coming. Hold your horses.... The only thing the world owes them is an opportunity to express themselves followed by a swift boot in the ass. How do I look?

MIRIAM: Very respectable.

FLORENCE: (*Answering the door in her sweet voice*) Yes?

ALBERT: (*Off Stage*) Mrs. Callahan?

FLORENCE: Yes.

ALBERT: Albert Vladimir Bushkov.

FLORENCE: Ah, yes, Mr. Bushkov. I was expecting you.

ALBERT: You got my letter then?

FLORENCE: Yes, I did. Thank you. Yet, I was expecting you to have an accent. I...I shouldn't have assumed...

ALBERT: That's perfectly understandable. I get that all the time.

FLORENCE: Please come in.

ALBERT: Thank you. (*Entering with his suitcase, he looks about*) What a beautiful home... so warm and inviting. And the atmosphere is...is (*Searching for the right words*) exceptionally conducive to writing. It's a pearl planted in a bed of oysters.

FLORENCE: (*To Miriam*) Was I right, or was I right? Oh! Please forgive me. This is Miss Miriam Van...I know I'm going to get this wrong... Hiberdorseldauser.

MIRIAM: Hiberhauser.

FLORENCE: Yes, that's right. And this is Mr. Albert Vla...Vla...

ALBERT: Vladamir, but / you can...

FLORENCE: Vladamir Bushkov.

ALBERT: Well done. (*Addressing Miriam*) A pleasure to meet you, Miss Van Hiberhauser.

-11-

FLORENCE: There. Now that we're acquainted, would you like to join us for some refreshments?

ALBERT: I would love to, but may I first see my room? I'd like to freshen up if you don't mind?

FLORENCE: Of course. If you'll excuse us Miss Housenhorser. (*Reaching for Albert's luggage*)

MIRIAM: Van Hiberhauser.

ALBERT: Thank You Mrs. Callahan, but I'm sure I can handle it. (*Taking it from her*)

FLORENCE: Right. This way please, Mr. Bushkov.

MIRIAM: Would you like me to get an extra glass?

FLORENCE: Thank you, my dear. That's very thoughtful. (*As they mount the stairs*) So how was your trip? Not too cumbersome, I hope.

ALBERT: Oh, no. It was fine...except I feel like a dry mop having been swept across our dusty western prairies.

FLORENCE: Well, there's a fresh ewer of water and towel waiting for you in your room.

Florence and Albert continue up the stairs.

FLORENCE: So, where did you say you were from, exactly?

ALBERT: Chicago, actually.

As Florence and Albert exit, Miriam returns with the extra glass. She then continues to peruse the photos on the wall. After a brief lull, Claire enters from the stairs and cautiously looking about for the Colonel.

MIRIAM: Hello.

CLAIRE: Hello.

MIRIAM: Can I help you?

CLAIRE: Have you seen Mrs. Callahan?

-12-

MIRIAM: She just, this very moment went upstairs with another boarder.

CLAIRE: ...and Colonel Burnhart?

MIRIAM: I don't think I know him.

CLAIRE: Some people have all the luck. (*Approaching*) Can I give you a little bit of womanly advice?

MIRIAM: I guess so.

CLAIRE: The Colonel likes the women, so beware of the fox as he prowls around the hen house.

MIRIAM: I...I'm not sure I understand, but if I see him, I'll give him the message.

CLAIRE: (*To herself*) Hollywood, we have a winner! (*To Miriam*) Never mind, there's no need.

MIRIAM: Okay. But I don't mind.

CLAIRE: Please, no. Forget I said anything. (*Slight pause*) So you're our new boarder.

MIRIAM: Yes. I just arrived / a short while ago.

CLAIRE: Yes, I know.

MIRIAM: You do?

CLAIRE: I'm clairvoyant.

MIRIAM: Well it's a pleasure to meet you Miss Voyant.

CLAIRE: No. You misunder...that's right! A pleasure to meet you Miss...

MIRIAM: Van Hiberhauser...Miriam Van Hiberhauser. I'm an actress.

CLAIRE: An actress. Very nice. I'm a fortune teller...when I'm not doing / make-up on a film.

MIRIAM: Really? Do you think you could tell me my future?

CLAIRE: Anything is possible.

-13-

MIRIAM: How exciting...to be able to predict the future and to see into one's mind. I've heard of people like you.

CLAIRE: Well, based on first impressions, I'd say yours is like an empty book. Blank.

MIRIAM: (*Shocked*) Oh my gosh! People who know me have said the same thing. You're amazing. I have an audition later this afternoon and...well, I'm a little nervous and it would be nice to know how it will go.

CLAIRE: Just keep a clear head, which you already have. (*Hearing Colonel Burnhart singing "PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES IN YOUR OLD KIT BAG"*) But now you'll have to excuse me. I have an important appointment with Rudolph Valentino and / I'm late... (*As she quickly exits, the Colonel enters from upstairs.*)

MIRIAM: Really! Thee / Rudolph Valentino?

COLONEL: Miss Fortuna? (*Noticing Miriam he puts on his flirtatious charm.*) Well, well, who do we have here bringing additional sunshine to our warm and cozy boarding house?

MIRIAM: (*Blushing*) Hello.

COLONEL: Hello and good day to you, Miss...

MIRIAM: Van Hiberhauser. Miriam Van Hiberhauser.

COLONEL: (*Taken aback*) German?

MIRIAM: ...Dutch, actually.

COLONEL: Ah! I like the Dutch. Good sailors. And I especially like their clacking wooden shoes. (*He takes her hand and kisses her knuckles.*) Colonel Bradford Burnhart the Fourth, 3rd Army Division at your service.

MIRIAM: Oh you must be the Colonel Miss Voyant was looking for.

COLONEL: Who?

MIRIAM: Miss Voyant.

COLONEL: Looking for me, you say?

MIRIAM: Yes. She had a message/ for you.

-14-

COLONEL: I don't recall knowing a Miss Voyant. But I'm not adverse to...

MIRIAM: Well, she knows you, and she had a message for you but I can't quite remember / what it was.

COLONEL: Well then, I'm sure it wasn't important.

MIRIAM: Oh, I'm sure it was. She was very specific.... Wait, I remember. It has something to do with your hen house. Yes! That's it.

COLONEL: My hen house?

MIRIAM: Yes. She wanted to tell you herself but she was late for a meeting with Mr. Valentino...thee Rudolph Valentino.

COLONEL: Is that so? Miss Voyant?

MIRIAM: Yes. That's right. She can also read minds you know.

COLONEL: Oh! You must mean Miss Fortuna.

MIRIAM: Who is Miss Fortuna?

COLONEL: Someone who looks a lot like Miss Voyant. Have we met before?

MIRIAM: I don't think so. I just arrived a half hour ago.

COLONEL: I see. Yet somehow you look rather familiar.

MIRIAM: Have you ever been to Passaic?

COLONEL: No. But I've been to Amsterdam. It may be merely a premonition on my part, but you do look familiar. Either way, a pleasure.

Florence and Albert re-enter from the stairs.

FLORENCE: ...but why film? It's nothing like poetry. Matter-of-fact there is very little need for a writer. All there is are those silly little captions they throw up on the screen...which seem to last forever.

ALBERT: That's my point. After seeing "Poor Little Rich Girl" with Mary Pickford, I

wanted to so desperately write for her. She deserves better than colorless phrases, don't you think?

-15-

FLORENCE: I never thought of them being colorless, but now that you mention it, they are projected in black and white.

ALBERT: You see? Great poets throughout the ages have captured the heart and depth of one's feelings with very few words. Have you ever read William Shakespeare's sonnets? The beauty of love expressed in its' most simplistic form.

FLORENCE: How romantic.

ALBERT: Precisely! And Miss Pickford deserves no less.

FLORENCE: (*Changing the subject*) Ah, Colonel. This is Mr. Albert Bushkov from Chicago. He's a poet with a lust to work with Mary Pickford.

COLONEL: Wouldn't we all. (*Standing at attention and extending his hand*) Colonel Bradford Burnhart the Fourth, 3rd Army Division.

ALBERT: Albert Vladimir Bushkov, sir.

COLONEL: Russian! Too bad about the Czar.

ALBERT: Yes...too / bad.

FLORENCE: And this is Miriam Van...

ALBERT: (*Gazing into her eyes*) Yes. We've already met.

FLORENCE: Oh? Now what are the odds of that/ happening?

ALBERT: No, No. You introduced us just after I arrived.

FLORENCE: My mind is beginning to crinkle up like an overused piece of paper.

ALBERT: An extremely colorful metaphor. You see. You're talking just like a poet. It's a pleasure to meet you again, Miss Van ...

MIRIAM: (*Interrupting*) Hi...

ALBERT: ...tut tut! Hiberhauser.

MIRIAM: Yes! That's right! You have a very good memory Mister...Mister...

ALBERT: Bushkov. But you can call me Bertie.

-16-

MIRIAM: Very well Mr. Bertie. And you can call me Miriam.

COLONEL: *(To Miriam)* And you can call me Colonel. *(He smiles.)*

FLORENCE: And you can call me busy. *(Pause)* Well, now that we have all introduced ourselves...again, I will adjourn to the kitchen and prepare lunch. I hope you all like liverwurst? *(She exits.)*

ALBERT: Mrs. Callahan, can I be of any help? *(Following her into the kitchen.)*

COLONEL: Don't forget the apricot jam. *(Addressing the others)* Dilutes the liver taste. Makes it more palatable.

MIRIAM: *(To Mrs. Callahan)* Please! Nothing for me! *(Addressing the Colonel)* I have an important audition later this afternoon and I wouldn't want to upset my / stomach any more...

COLONEL: *(To Miriam)* Are you sure we've never met? Even your voice sounds somewhat familiar...as if I've heard it somewhere before.

MIRIAM: Colonel, I've been speaking to you these past few minutes. I would hope it sounds familiar.

COLONEL: Yes. Yes. Of course! How silly of me. *(They both giggle.)*

Miriam's giggle causes the Colonel's ears to perk up.

COLONEL: That sound. That too is faintly familiar. Where have I heard...

FLORENCE: *(Entering with a tray of sandwiches)* Here we are! Bon appetite!

SCENE 2: THAT EVENING

Everything is quiet. All appears right with the world. The main room is dimly lit from the moonlight casting shadows from the windows upon the main room. No one seems to be around. Claire enters via the main entrance wearing a robe and slippers. Closing the door with a bang, she freezes in her place. Noticing the silence, she tiptoes her way toward the kitchen, banging into a few things along the way. She turns on the kitchen light. Albert enters upstairs from his bedroom. He is wearing a robe and slippers. He reaches for a light switch at top of the stairs. Noticing a light coming from the kitchen,

he decides to leave the main room dark. As he descends the stairs, he hears a noise coming from the kitchen. He looks for something to defend himself in case it's a burglar. Fumbling about he takes off one of his slippers. The kitchen door slowly opens.

-17-

Claire enters with a butcher knife as she cautiously moves toward a wall switch near the kitchen entry. Albert makes his way to the front door reaching for the light switch. Both Claire and Albert have their hand on a light switch. They simultaneously turn on the lights. Both stare at each other.

ALBERT & CLAIRE: Who are you?

CLAIRE: I asked you first.

ALBERT: No you didn't!

CLAIRE: I most certainly did!

ALBERT: Fine! I'm Albert Vladimir Bushkov and I live here.

CLAIRE: I'm Claire Fortuna and I live here.

ALBERT: Then what were you doing snooping around in the kitchen?

CLAIRE: I was about to ask you the same question.

ALBERT: I wasn't snooping, and I wasn't in the kitchen.

CLAIRE: For your information, neither was I...snooping that is. I was getting something to eat.

ALBERT: At this hour?

CLAIRE: Haven't you ever been hungry in the middle of the night?

ALBERT: Yes. But hasn't anyone ever told you that eating just before bedtime is not healthy? You'll get indigestion.

CLAIRE: What are you, a physician?

ALBERT: No! I'm a writer.

CLAIRE: So what are you doing up this late, looking for words?

ALBERT: Very funny. I happen to be looking for Mrs. Callahan? I seem to be

having trouble with my electric lamp. I was in the middle of my writing when suddenly my light began to flicker. Then it went off and stayed off.

CLAIRE: And?

-18-

ALBERT: ...and I would like it to be fixed.

CLAIRE: At this hour? Did it ever cross your mind it may be the bulb, or is your brain flickering as well?

ALBERT: Are you always this contentious when you first meet someone or is it just your nature to be rude?

CLAIRE: I apologize. That was a bit out of line.

ALBERT: Apology accepted.

CLAIRE: I get a bit testy when I can't sleep...and being testy makes me hungry.

ALBERT: Then why were you outside?

CLAIRE: I couldn't sleep. Furthermore, I needed some.... How did you know I was outside?

ALBERT: The banging of the front door for a starter.

CLAIRE: Sorry. I had this terrible nightmare. The Colonel asked me to marry him.

ALBERT: And why is that so terrible?

CLAIRE: He's a self-centered, womanizing, psychologically warped, military man who is sexually aroused by the constant rubbing of his disgusting slimy palm. I'd rather clean fish.

ALBERT: Then stop rubbing his hand.

CLAIRE: If it were only that easy. Besides, it comes with the profession.

ALBERT: I seem to be missing something.

CLAIRE: I'm a fortuneteller and I read palms.

ALBERT: Oh, I see! Well, to put your mind at ease, he turned in about an hour ago. Apparently he was having some disturbing military flashbacks that were upsetting him so he took a few pills and retired for the night.

CLAIRE: (*Breathing a sigh of relief*) Finally! A quiet evening! That man is so exhausting. I wouldn't be surprised if Cleopatra couldn't keep up with him.

-19-

ALBERT: Look. Why don't we start over? I'm Albert Bushkov.

CLAIRE: Claire Fortuna...depending on who you talk to.

ALBERT: (*Perplexed as to her meaning*) So, how long have you lived here?

CLAIRE: Just going on four years now.

ALBERT: Then you must be satisfied with the accommodations despite the Colonel's unwelcomed pursuits.

CLAIRE: It's more like the price is right.

ALBERT: And the rest of the boarders?

CLAIRE: Aside from you, the Colonel and Miss what's-her-name, there are none. Yet those previous to your coming have ranged from slightly interesting to... to natural-born morons.

ALBERT: And on that scale where do I fall?

CLAIRE: Based on our previous introduction, I'd say between interesting and...

ALBERT: You can stop there. I get the picture. (*Pause*) So, what's it like being a fortune teller...hence your surname, Fortuna?

CLAIRE: At times exhausting and other times unsanitary. And you? What do you do?

ALBERT: You tell me. (*Realizing his rudeness*) I'm so Sorry. You can stick moron on my forehead if you'd like?

CLAIRE: Seven out of ten people in this city are somehow connected with the movie business. So I would venture to say that's why you're here.

ALBERT: Apparently the odds of being correct are in your favor then.

CLAIRE: Well, it doesn't hurt. (*Pause*) You don't come across as being the actor type...

ALBERT: You're getting warmer.

CLAIRE: ...because most who come to Hollywood these days are actors.

-20-

ALBERT: Right again. I have no desire to act.

CLAIRE: But you have an interest in writing...hence your late night working hours in search of illumination.

ALBERT: Ah! Now you're cooking. I am a writer...more so a poet...however, recently I've developed this impelling need to write for films....Mary Pickford's in particular.

CLAIRE: Really? How...endearing. But you are aware that Hollywood produces film that are completely silent.

ALBERT: I'm well aware of that.

CLAIRE: Then I'm somewhat confused. If you can't hear her speak, how do you know what she's saying...and if she's saying much of anything?

ALBERT: I've noticed that she and the other actors' lips are moving; so they must be saying something.

CLAIRE: Oh, they're definitely saying something but at times it's something you don't want to hear.

ALBERT: Oh? Well, whatever it is or isn't, I'm sure I can improve on the something they are saying.

CLAIRE: How?

ALBERT: By writing dialogue that is worthy of Miss Pickford in particular.

CLAIRE: Fair enough. And since you're being frank with me, I think it's only fair to be reciprocal. I'm actually a make-up artist; however, when not working on a film I tell people's future. One cannot live on films alone if you know what I mean?

ALBERT: Not really, but I'm sure I'll find that out. How fascinating...your side profession...whichever one that is. *(Pause)* Again, I apologize. Your ability to label people is proving to be quite accurate.

CLAIRE: Look. My real name is Mabel Claire...yet I'll answer to either Mabel or Claire.

ALBERT: Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Mabel Claire. I'm simply Albert Vladimir,

-21-

but I answer to Bertie.... I think I'll get me some water. I'm rather parched. Would you like a glass?

CLAIRE: Yes, I would. Thank you. (*As Albert enters the kitchen*) If we continue to carry on this way, I'm beginning to see the scale tipping in your favor.

ALBERT: In what way would that be?

CLAIRE: Toward normalcy

ALBERT: That's nice to know.

CLAIRE: You don't find many normal people like you in "The Business".

ALBERT: And why is that? (*Returning with two glasses of water*) There you are.

CLAIRE: Thanks. It just is. Everyone associated with "the Business" is out for himself. Friendships are rare. Relationships are more like acquaintances that pass in the night. Out here, we live in a sea of humanity, yet we are all so much alone in our own self-centered little row boat.

ALBERT: Your imagery is deep and colorful yet at the same time very disconcerting.

CLAIRE: Can I give you a little bit of advice?

ALBERT: Sure. Why not.

CLAIRE: Watch your back at all times.

ALBERT: Is this Claire, the palm reader or Mabel, the make-up artist speaking?

CLAIRE: Both, actually. The film business is a wonderful and exciting profession to be in, but it can be hazardous to one's psyche if you don't watch out.

ALBERT: Then I shall have to be on my guard. (*Raising his glass*) To us and our preparedness toward any unwanted or unexpected scuffles we may encounter in "The Business".

As they both raise their glasses the main door opens and Miriam enters. It has obviously been a long day. At first she believes she is alone...not noticing Albert and Claire.

MIRIAM: Oh! Miss Voyant! Mr. Bushkov! I hope I'm not interrupting anything?

-22-

ALBERT: Certainly not. We're just chatting about flickering lamps, late night dinners and the absence of sound. Would you like to join us?

MIRIAM: Oh, thank you, but it's been such a long day. I'm rather tired.

ALBERT: *(To Claire)* Miss Voyant? How many names...

CLAIRE: Just go with it.

ALBERT: Miss Hiberhauser, can I make you a cup of coffee or a cup of tea?

MIRIAM: No thank you, but...

ALBERT: How about some ice water?

MIRIAM: Come to think of it, that would be nice.

ALBERT: Good. Why don't you sit down and you and...and...

CLAIRE: Claire.

ALBERT: Claire can chat while I get your ice water.

MIRIAM: Thank you. My feet could use a little rest. I've been on them all day.

ALBERT: *(As he enters the kitchen)* And all evening as to the looks of it.

CLAIRE: You're lucky it's not your back. Many new actresses seem to find themselves on their backs a lot when they first arrive.

MIRIAM: Why is that?

CLAIRE: We'll tackle that issue some other time. By the way, how was the audition?

MIRIAM: Rather strange. I've never experienced anything like it before.

CLAIRE: Welcome to Hollywood...the land of the bizarre.

MIRIAM: Then again, being new to acting, I had no idea what to expect.

CLAIRE: That's fairly common / in the business.

MIRIAM: Apparently, the director has this new and unusual approach.

-23-

CLAIRE: Don't they all?

MIRIAM: Nothing is written down. There's no script...

CLAIRE: Nothing? No story, no plot?

MIRIAM: He says every film he does is never fully thought out. Apparently it's more exciting when no one knows what will come next. Not even him, I suppose.

CLAIRE: Apparently.

MIRIAM: He says it creates a freshness to the scene.

ALBERT: (*Re-entering with Miriam's ice water*) Here you go. Sorry it took so long.

MIRIAM: Thank you. He also doesn't want his actors to prepare for their role. He says it destroys spontaneity.

ALBERT: Who is that?

CLAIRE: Her potential director. How can they if there's nothing to prepare for?

MIRIAM: (*A moment of thought*) You're right. I never thought of that.

CLAIRE: I'm not surprised.

ALBERT: Is this about the audition?

CLAIRE: Yes, and a rather unusual one at that.

ALBERT: Oh? Why is that?

MIRIAM: Why is what?

ALBERT: Why is what happened at the audition unusual?

MIRIAM: I'm not exactly sure, since I've never been to one before.

CLAIRE: ...and that includes the director as well.

ALBERT: I see. And what did you have to do?

MIRIAM: I had to smile a lot. Then I had to frown and scream and smile some more.

-24-

ALBERT: Did you have to say anything...act out a scene?

MIRIAM: Not a word. It's a silent film.

ALBERT: Right! So there's no need to verbally express your character's feelings.

CLAIRE: (*To Albert*) Exciting, isn't it? Sounds like a winner!

ALBERT: And you're just getting back now?

MIRIAM: Ah ha. And I'm exhausted.

CLAIRE: Who wouldn't be after all that smiling.

ALBERT: So, was it just the two of you...the director and you?

MIRIAM: Oh, no. There was a woman he kept referring to as his script girl.

CLAIRE: Why did he have a script girl if there wasn't any script to begin with?

MIRIAM: I'm not sure, but she did have a pad of paper and took notes from time to time.

ALBERT: Ah! Well, that could be encouraging.

CLAIRE: Did he ever mention a need for a make-up artist?

MIRIAM: A make-up artist?

CLAIRE: Yes. You know...rouge, lipstick, all that stuff to make one look pretty.

MIRIAM: Oh, I don't think so. She's already pretty, but not very bright.

CLAIRE: (*Realizing Miriam is referring to the Script girl*) Ah! Right! Takes one to know one.

ALBERT: So, it was just the three of you?

MIRIAM: Oh no. There was a cameraman there as well.

ALBERT: Oh?

CLAIRE: Sounds exciting. Lights...Camera...Action!

-25-

MIRIAM: He was rather odd. Every time I would talk to him, he wouldn't look at me. He just kept turning his head from left to right. Like this. (*She demonstrates.*)

CLAIRE: What is he, a human metronome?

MIRIAM: What's that?

ALBERT: She's merely making a joke. It's nothing. So what's the film about...the plot?

MIRIAM: I'm not / quite sure.

CLAIRE: There isn't one.

ALBERT: (*To Claire*) You mean he doesn't even have a plot?

CLAIRE: Surprise!

ALBERT: How can a director cast a film when the plot doesn't even exist?

MIRIAM: He says it's in his head. It has something to do with a young American girl who falls in love with a wealthy Italian guy...or did he say spy.... The director has a heavy German accent. Anyway, this Italian fellow happens to meet this young girl...that would be me...and he falls in love with her. But then he discovers she's his long lost sister whom he's been searching for and who was abducted as an infant by this embassy man...and...I don't think he figured out the rest of the story.

CLAIRE: Sounds as if they're desperately in need of a writer.

ALBERT: ...or at least a good story that's not perverted.

CLAIRE: Does sound rather kinky. Could sell, though.

MIRIAM: Did I say or do anything wrong?

ALBERT: No. Of course not. Apparently there was nothing to say.

CLAIRE: And you did everything that was expected of you.

MIRIAM: I think so. That's what the director said.

CLAIRE: I'm sure he did. Depending on the actress they are always complimentary.

-26-

ALBERT: So, when will you find out if you got the part?

MIRIAM: You know, I forgot to ask. I was so excited/ about the audition.

CLAIRE: You did leave your address?

MIRIAM: Oh, yes. The Wayfarer Boarding House, 22 La Cruz Ave. Hollywood, California. Second floor, two doors down on the right.

ALBERT: I don't think that "X" marks the spot was necessary.

MIRIAM: I wanted to be sure he had no trouble finding me. I didn't want to take any chances.

ALBERT: I'd say the odds of him not finding you are rather slim.

CLAIRE: I'd say she's already led the guy to her front door...and invited him in.

MIRIAM: Shouldn't I have done that?

CLAIRE: (*Sarcastically*) If he needs to get in touch with you, how else would he be able to find you?

MIRIAM: That's what I thought. Please...enough about me. How was your day, Miss Voyant?

CLAIRE: A bit uncertain. I just couldn't see my way through it.

MIRIAM: I'm sorry to hear that. And you, Mr. Bushkov?

ALBERT: Bertie is fine.

MIRIAM: Very well. And you, Bertie?

ALBERT: Rather uneventful. However, tomorrow I plan on visiting a few film studios... Vitagraph, Keystone, Metro Pictures. You know...feel them out; see if they're looking for any new zestful writers.

MIRIAM: Who knows, maybe some day we may work together.

ALBERT: (*Playing along*) One never knows what the future might bring.

MIRIAM: Maybe Miss Voyant could help. She can see into the future. What do you

-27-

think Miss Voyant? Will Mr. Bushkov...I mean Bertie and I work on a film together some day?

CLAIRE: Anything is possible if it's in the cards.

MIRIAM: There. You see? (*Yawning*) It's getting late. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go to my room.

ALBERT: Certainly.

MIRIAM: Good night, then; and thank you for the ice water.

ALBERT & CLAIRE: (*As Miriam approaches the stairwell*) Good night.

FLORENCE: (*Entering from bedroom*) Ah! Miss Vaborhisser! How was the audition?

MIRIAM: Long and exhausting. **CLAIRE:** Kinky! **ALBERT:** Scriptless!

FLORENCE: Sounds exciting. You must fill me in sometime.

MIRIAM: Yes, I will. But right now, I'm rather tired. I hope you don't mind.

FLORENCE: Not at all.

MIRIAM: Good night, then. (*Exiting up the stairs*)

FLORENCE: Good night. Sweet dreams. (*Slight pause*) What a lovely girl.

ALBERT: Yes, she is...a bit naïve, however.

As Florence enters the kitchen

CLAIRE: And you don't need a crystal ball to see that.

ALBERT: Mrs. Callahan (*To Claire*) If you'll excuse me...(*Following Mrs. Callahan into the kitchen*)! Mrs. Callahan, my electric lamp's not working. Do you have any suggestions?

SCENE 3: THE FOLLOWING DAY

The Colonel sits in the comfortable chair located by the stairwell. He is enjoying his morning cup of coffee and the daily paper. He then pulls out a small flask and pours its'

-28-

contents into his coffee cup. Fully prepared, he begins to read his paper. The doorbell rings, yet he ignores it. It rings again.

COLONEL: *(Calling out) Mrs. Callahan! There's someone at the door! (There is a second ring. He shouts louder.) Mrs. Callahan!!! (Hearing no response from her) Where is that woman? (There is a loud knock. Frustrated, he gets up and opens the door.) Yes! What is it? (Pause) Yes. Thank you. I will. (He closes the door holding a telegram. Curious as to its content, he holds it up trying to read its message. Without success he returns to the comfort chair, sits and re-opens his newspaper. However, curiosity builds. Putting down his paper, he tries again to read the contents. Without success he takes the telegram, cup of coffee and newspaper to the dining table hoping for better lighting. Failing again and seeing no one, he holds the telegram over his cup of coffee hoping the steam will release the glue. Having been successful he is about to read the message, when Miriam, still in her robe, enters from up stairs. He quickly licks the paper and pounds it with his fist.) Damn flies!*

MIRIAM: Ah! Colonel. How are you this morning?

COLONEL: Splendid, my dear. And you?

MIRIAM: Tired. I didn't sleep a wink last night.

COLONEL: And why is that?

MIRIAM: All I could think about was the audition. I'm so nervous and excited at the same time.

COLONEL: I understand. I had that the same feeling the evening before my first battle.

MIRIAM: So what did you do?

COLONEL: I pulled out my flask and had a good nip for myself. Then, I rolled over and fell asleep. The next day I picked up my saber and faced the enemy with vengeance. It was a dream come true and I wasn't about to let it pass me by.

MIRIAM: That's why I came to Hollywood, to fulfill my dream of becoming a movie star.

COLONEL: And so you will. So you will. So, how did it go?

MIRIAM: What?

COLONEL: Your audition.

-29-

MIRIAM: I'm not sure, but I think they liked me.

COLONEL: Who wouldn't, a pretty little thing like you with beautiful silky hair...a pretty smile! Mary Pickford better be on her guard, because her competition has just arrived.

MIRIAM: *(Blushing)* Oh Colonel. You're such a charmer. *(She giggles.)*

COLONEL: *(His ego perks up.)* Yes. I've been told that...many times. *(Pause)* Somehow I feel we've met somewhere, but I can't seem to place where.

MIRIAM: I don't know where. You don't look familiar at all. Do you mind if I join you?

COLONEL: *(With a smirk in his delivery)* Now or later?

MIRIAM: *(Naive toward his comment)* Now if you don't mind?

COLONEL: I would love it.... And later too / if you'd like?

MIRIAM: I'll be right back. *(Entering the kitchen)*

COLONEL: I'll be waiting my little dove. Don't take too long.

He crosses to the front door mirror, checking his appearance. Hearing her about to enter he quickly returns to his seat, picks up his paper as if reading.

MIRIAM: *(Re-entering with a glass of water)* Sorry to keep you waiting.

COLONEL: Absence makes the heart grow fonder. *(Seeing her glass)* That's it? Aren't you hungry?

MIRIAM: I'm so nervous right now. / I can't eat a thing.

COLONEL: I told you. There's nothing to be nervous about. You're a shoe-in for the part.

MIRIAM: If only I knew whether I got the part or not. It's always better knowing

where you stand with people. Don't you think?

COLONEL: Absolutely! No questions asked. But then a little bit of mystery adds a touch of intrigue.

MIRIAM: I hope they call or send me a letter.

-30-

COLONEL: I'm sure / they will.

MIRIAM: ...or a telegram.../ anything.

COLONEL: Oh! How stupid of me. I'm becoming extremely forgetful!

MIRIAM: Colonel, never put yourself down. My mother use to say...

COLONEL: No, No! A telegram came for you this morning / and it just slipped my mind. *(Handing it over to her)*

MIRIAM: A Telegram? For me? *(Unable to remain still, she quickly opens it. As in a state of shock, she then shouts)* I got it! I got the part! They liked me!

COLONEL: You see! I told you, you would. Didn't I?

MIRIAM: Yes, you did! You did!

As Miriam gives the Colonel a big hug and kiss, Albert and Claire enter from upstairs as Mrs. Callahan enters through the main entrance with a bag of groceries.

CLAIRE: *(Spotting the hug and kiss)* Uh oh! Now / she's in trouble.

COLONEL: *(Fluttering inside)* Don't stop there on my account.

MIRIAM: I got it! I'm going to be a movie star! *(She giggles and snots from excitement.)*

ALBERT: *(Descending the stairs with Claire.)* Congratulations!

FLORENCE: Well done and muchly deserved.

COLONEL: *(Mesmerized by Miriam)* I'm convinced we've met somewhere...like all this was foreshadowed...but I can't seem to put my finger on it.

CLAIRE: I fear my prediction and the Colonel's fortune is about to be realized.

ALBERT: What's that?

Miriam re-reads the telegram and again begins to giggle with excitement.

COLONEL: *(Finally making the connection)* That's it! The brown silky hair, those eyes of...of... that soft, gentle voice...and that silly laugh. *(Looking up at Claire)*
You're brilliant!

-31-

CLAIRE: The lion has finally met its' prey. She's dead meat!

ALBERT: What?

CLAIRE: The vulture has landed

Putting down her groceries, Mrs. Callahan hugs her.

COLONEL: Suddenly I feel...I feel... *(Singing)* "OH, SWEET MYSTERY OF LIFE AT
LAST I'VE FOUND THEE"

SCENE 4: TWO WEEKS LATER

It is early morning. Florence, wearing her working apron and humming, is preparing the table. Albert enters via the staircase.

FLORENCE: Ah, Mr. Buskhov, your breakfast is ready. I'll bring it right out. *(She enters the kitchen.)*

ALBERT: There's no rush., Thank you.*(Whistling he prepares his cup of coffee at the buffet, then sits at the table.)*

FLORENCE: *(Re-entering with bacon and eggs)* Did you sleep well?

ALBERT: Yes I did. Thank you,

FLORENCE: Quite the rain storm, last night. We don't usually get such a downpour.

ALBERT: I didn't hear a thing. I was out cold.

FLORENCE: *(As she begins to enter the kitchen)* Well, enjoy.

ALBERT: Mrs. Callahan?

FLORENCE: Yes? Is there something wrong?

ALBERT: No, no. of course not.

FLORENCE: Is it the eggs? Are they too gooey?

ALBERT: No, no. They're fine.

FLORENCE: The bacon then...Oh good heavens I forgot the toast!

-32-

ALBERT: It has nothing to do with the breakfast. It's just that...well, I've been here now for two weeks and...well, you continue to call me Mr. Bushkov and...

FLORENCE: I'm just a creature of habit Mr. Bushkov.

ALBERT: Then I think it's time you break it. I insist you call me Bertie.

FLORENCE: Well, if that's what you insist.

ALBERT: I do. Please.

FLORENCE: Then I will address you as Bertie from now on.

ALBERT: Thank you. Thank you very much.

FLORENCE: Then I insist you call me Florence.

ALBERT: I couldn't.

FLORENCE: And why not? It's only fair.

ALBERT: You deserve the respect that's entitled you: Mrs. Callahan.

FLORENCE: If you insist.

ALBERT: I do. *(Pause)* This looks heavenly. I can see why the Colonel has been here so long being catered to like a king.

FLORENCE: A King? Sometimes I think he thinks he's a god...to women especially.

ALBERT: Well then, if he's a god you're a goddess and one I worship and adore.

FLORENCE: Now you're beginning to sound like him. Ah! Good morning Miss...

MIRIAM: *(Miriam enters down the stairs)* Good Morning. *(As the others respond with their "Good mornings" Miriam heads for the front door.)* Have a nice day.

FLORENCE: Aren't you going to have any breakfast, Miss Haberhusser?

MIRIAM: I'm sorry but I'm late as it is. We're shooting a very big scene today and I don't want to be late.

ALBERT: And what scene is that?

-33-

MIRIAM: (*Thinking*) I don't know. The director hasn't thought of it yet. But he said it was big.

FLORENCE: Well, whatever the scene is, you won't be shooting many more of them if you don't take care of your health. How about some juice and a piece of toast?

ALBERT: She's right. You haven't eaten very much since you got the role. Furthermore, she's also thinking of your well being.

MIRIAM: All right. If you insist. But nothing else. I'll eat later.

Florence re-enters the kitchen.

MIRIAM: (*Sitting at the table*) How is your writing going, Bertie? And any luck with the studios?

ALBERT: Not yet; and I admit it's getting a little depressing. All this rejection! I've been to all the film studios but everyone wants someone with film experience...and specifically not a writer. How do you get film experience if no one in the business wants to give you a break? Do you think you could ask your director, Herr Dusseldorf. I'm bored just hanging around and...well if things don't change I have no reason to stay.

MIRIAM: Oh, don't think of such a thing. You need to keep a positive mind about your future. You should talk to Miss Voyant. She told me I was going to be a successful actress and look what's happened. And furthermore, if you go (*slightly embarrassed to admitting it*) I'll miss you.

Florence re-enters with a glass of juice and some toast.

FLORENCE: Here you go, my dear.

MIRIAM: Thank you.

FLORENCE: Was I interrupting something?

ALBERT: Oh no. I was just asking Miriam if she thought her director could use

a writer for his film. That's all.

FLORENCE: A writer? What he needs is a brain and not that perverted mass of paper mache between those holes in his head he calls ears.

ALBERT: Now Mrs. Callahan, that's rather harsh wouldn't you say?

-34-

FLORENCE: Any man who thinks making a film about some love affair between a brother and sister should be ashamed of himself.

MIRIAM: But the characters don't know that.

FLORENCE: Of course they don't but he does! Or hasn't he thought that far ahead.

ALBERT: If you don't mind Miriam, I'd appreciate it if you would ask.

MIRIAM: Of course. Anyway, I better go.

FLORENCE: You've taken one bite and a sip. I don't call that a breakfast.

MIRIAM: I'm sorry. I'm too nervous. See you tonight. And I'd still talk with Miss Voyant. She's very good, you know. (*She begins to exit as the Colonel enters from upstairs.*)

COLONEL: Leaving so early? Who will bring sunshine to my breakfast table?

MIRIAM: You're so sweet. I have an important shoot this morning so you'll have to forgive me. Mr. Bushkov just sat down. You can dine with him.

COLONEL: But it won't be the same.

MIRIAM: What a charming man you are. Maybe tomorrow, / but I must go. Good-bye. (*She exits.*)

FLORENCE: Charming's not the word. Over sexed is / more like it.

COLONEL: Toot-a-loo! (*Watching her through the window*)

FLORENCE: (*To Albert*) That child needs to get out more.

COLONEL: Lovely / little thing.

FLORENCE: If she's not careful, this town will swallow her up then spit her out like a bad grape.

COLONEL: One needs to plan a strategy. Maybe I could assist...

ALBERT: She'll be fine. Experience is the best form of education.

FLORENCE: Not around here it's not. Trust me. They're like polar bears out there.

-35-

No matter how cute and cuddly their young are, they'll eat them if need be. It's their instinct. Many film people are sweet to your face, but it's all a front. / I know.

COLONEL: (*Turning around facing the others*) In the army we are taught to always be aware of your right and left flank. (*Looking toward Albert*) The enemy could attack on all sides.

ALBERT: Well, I won't let them do that to her. That's a gentleman's promise.

COLONEL: Ah, yes...the gentleman's promise. Play it safe (*Crossing to the table*) and be / the gentleman.

FLORENCE: Then you better follow her every minute of the day because that's what it's going to take.

COLONEL: I'm sorry. Good morning Mr. Bushkov.

ALBERT: Forgive me. Good morning Colonel.

FLORENCE: (*As she enters the kitchen*) The usual, Colonel.

COLONEL: The usual, Mrs. Callahan!

ALBERT: (*To the Colonel*) What is it with you and cornflakes?

COLONEL: What is it with you and Miss Van Hiberhauser?

ALBERT: I beg your pardon?

COLONEL: I've noticed you two. It's become quite obvious.

ALBERT: What has?

COLONEL: Don't play games with me Bertrand....

ALBERT: It's Albert.

COLONEL: ...you're talking to a man of strategy and the champion of wooing.

ALBERT: Is that so? I wasn't aware of that.

COLONEL: Yes. And it appears the challenge has been made. The gauntlet has been thrown.

-36-

ALBERT: What gauntlet? What challenge?

COLONEL: *(Throwing down his cloth napkin on the table)* Miss Miriam Van Hiberhauser.

FLORENCE: *(Entering with a bowl of cornflakes)* Your breakfast of champions, Colonel. *(She then returns to the kitchen.)*

COLONEL: You see! Even Mrs. Callahan recognizes my wooing abilities.

ALBERT: I see that now. How could I be so blind.

SCENE 5: THAT EVENING

Miriam enters via the front door. She is out of breath and a bit disheveled as if someone was chasing her. She quickly closes the door behind her and rests against it.

MIRIAM: *(After catching her breath)* Mrs. Callahan? *(There is no response. She calls out a little louder.)* Mrs. Callahan! *(She runs into the kitchen.)* Mrs. Callahan! *(She re-enters and runs half way up the stairs.)* Mrs. Callahan! *(Florence enters from her bedroom wearing a robe and slippers.)*

FLORENCE: What is it my dear. Oh good Lord! Are you all right?

MIRIAM: I ran all the way.

FLORENCE: Why? Was someone chasing you?

MIRIAM: Oh no, nothing like that.

FLORENCE: Then what happened?

MIRIAM: To me, nothing. It's you!

FLORENCE: Me? What's happened to me?

MIRIAM: Well, not you exactly, but your house!

FLORENCE: My House? What's wrong with my house.

MIRIAM: Nothing is wrong...

-37-

FLORENCE: Is it on fire? (*Heading for the stairs*) Good heavens! I must get / everyone out.

MIRIAM: Mrs. Callahan, there isn't any fire.

FLORENCE: Then if it's not a fire, then what?

MIRIAM: (*Filled with excitement*) I've been talking with my director, and...

FLORENCE: What does your director have to do with my house?

MIRIAM: He wants to use it in his film. He says there's a big scene coming up and it needs to take place in a large mansion.

FLORENCE: He can actually think that far ahead?

MIRIAM: Well, my brain started to go to work and...

FLORENCE: What finally triggered that off?

MIRIAM: (*Paying no attention to Florence's response*) ...I told him about your boarding house and that was it. He said it sounded perfect.

FLORENCE: He did?

MIRIAM: Uh huh!

FLORENCE: And how much is he willing to pay? Perfect sets don't come easily, you know.

MIRIAM: He didn't say. He probably hasn't thought of that yet.

FLORENCE: I'm sure he hasn't thought of it at all.

MIRIAM: Isn't it wonderful!

ALBERT: (*Entering in his robe and slippers*) What's all the excitement?

FLORENCE: It's Miriam. Scared the hell out of me.

ALBERT: Why? (*To Miriam*) What happened to you? You look terrible! Who did this to you?

FLORENCE: Nobody did anything to her. It's my house.

-38-

ALBERT: What? What about / your house?

FLORENCE: (*To Miriam*) You tell him. He's more likely to believe it if it comes from you.

COLONEL: (*Entering wearing a smoking jacket is armed with his sword*). What's all this noise? It sounds like a war taking place down there. (*Crossing half way down the stairs...to Mariam*) You look terrible. Who did this to you? I'll slice him in pieces when / I see him.

ALBERT: Quiet! She's about to explain what happened.

COLONEL: There's no time to explain. Strike while the iron is hot!

CLAIRE: (*In her cotton flowered pajamas she enters from up stairs*) What's all this noise. (*Noticing Mariam*). Oh good Lord. Are you alright?

FLORENCE: She's fine. She's about / to say something...

CLAIRE: Well, she doesn't look fine to me.

FLORENCE: She was about to say something about my house.

CLAIRE: Why? What about your house?

MIRIAM: It has nothing to do with the house. Matter of fact, it's perfect. While we were filming this scene, Otto...

ALBERT: Who?

MIRIAM: Otto! Otto Deutchmann, the director...

COLONEL: Ah Ha!!! That swine! / Did he do this to you?

FLORENCE: Is that his name. I always thought it was Herr Director.

COLONEL: No matter whatever his name is, I'll chop him...

CLAIRE: Stop interrupting!

MIRIAM: Thank you. *(A slight pause)* Suddenly he / stopped...

ALBERT: Otto.

-39-

MARIAM: Yes, Otto. Suddenly he stopped everything and said that the scene...the one we were filming was not right. The acting was right but not the location. He said that in order for the scene to work, it needed to take place in a large house, like some mansion...you know like one of those celebrity's home in Beverly Hills and not his apartment.

ALBERT: *(Picking up the cue)* His apartment! You've been filming in his apartment?

MIRIAM: Not all of it, just this last scene.

Florence looks at Albert as if "I told you so!"

MIRIAM: He said it was too late to ask Charlie Chaplin if we could use his house. Well, suddenly my brain went to work...

CLAIRE: Ut Oh!!!

MIRIAM: ...and so I told him / about Mrs. Callahan's...

FLORENCE: So the house is what triggered / it off.

MIRIAM: That's it. Isn't it exciting?

ALBERT: That's it? The house? Nothing else? Did you mention anything about needing a writer? *(Feeling angry having been left out, he turns to Florence)*

MIRIAM: I...

ALBERT: *(To Florence)* And have you agreed?

FLORENCE: This is the first I've heard of it.

ALBERT: And...

FLORENCE: And what?

ALBERT: Do you agree?

FLORENCE: No! Not / yet.

MIRIAM: He'd like to start filming tomorrow.

FLORENCE: (*In shock*) Tomorrow!

-40-

COLONEL: And he wants to film here? What a nerve!

MIRIAM: He says he's got a deadline and needs to finish the film soon. I told him I wouldn't think you'd mind. That's all right isn't it? I didn't overstep my bounds did I?

FLORENCE: And what time tomorrow is all this supposed to happen?

MIRIAM: The crew will be here at seven sharp.

FLORENCE: ...in the morning?

COLONEL: Then reveille at six hundred hours.

MIRIAM: Why? Is that too early? They need time to set up the scene before hand.

FLORENCE: But my...! It's such a mess!

CLAIRE: Are you sure they're not looking for a make-up artist, because I have my kit fully stocked and in my room.

MIRIAM: You won't regret this Mrs. Callahan. I promise.

ALBERT: (*To Florence*) You're not just going to let them barge in and... (*Florence begins to exit toward her bedroom.*) Where are you going? You're not just going back to bed, I hope?

FLORENCE: No. I'm going to put on my housedress and apron. I've got a lot of cleaning to do before my guests arrive.

ALBERT: Guests! They're more like intruders...! Cockroaches!

CLAIRE: (*To Bertie*) It's best not to look a gift horse in the mouth (*She quickly exits.*)

FLORENCE: I've regretted a number of things in my life, Mr. Bushkov, but right now, I'd say that owning a boarding house is probably the worst of them.

ALBERT: I can't believe you're going along with this, allowing all these...these

strangers to come in / and take over your home. (*Florence exits.*)

MIRIAM: Thank you so much Mrs. Callahan. Good night and sweet dreams everyone
(*She begins to mount the stairs.*)

-41-

COLONEL: (*As he follows Miriam up the stairs.*) I will defend you, my dear, at all costs!

MIRIAM: (*Stopping at the landing above.*) Oh, Bertie. I mentioned to Otto about your interest in writing the script, but he said he didn't need one. It's not his style...

ALBERT: Right. (*Dejected*) Well, thank you for /trying.

MIRIAM: ...so I said if he didn't hire you, then Mrs. Callahan's house deal was off.
(*She smiles and exits.*)

COLONEL: Don't you worry my sweet. Gwendolyn and I will be reporting for duty at six hundred hours sharp. (*He exits.*)

ALBERT: (*Exuberant*) Mrs. Callahan! Mrs. Callahan! I'm not that bad at dusting. I even like doing dishes. (*He exits toward Mrs. Callahan's bedroom.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 1: THE FOLLOWING MORNING

The main room now represents a Foreign Embassy. The dining table repositioned up stage center faces down stage and used for a desk. An ornate, Spanish designed chair rests behind the dining table/desk. To the right of the desk is an empty flag stand waiting for its' deposit...a crudely made flag representing a-make-believe foreign country, resting by the main entrance. A make-shift wall covering covers the wall of portraits. Everything else remains the same. Bertha Blankmind is walking up and down the stairs counting their number while Eddie adjusts a movie camera perched on a tripod down stage right. A director's chair, holding Bertha's handbag, sits right of the camera. Beside the director's chair is a hand-held megaphone and scene board.

BERTHA: ...four, five, six, seven...

EDDIE: So, Herr Director broke down and decided to hire a writer.

BERTHA: Not entirely, only for those captions that flash on the screen. Darn! I lost my count. *(She starts over.)* One, two, three...

EDDIE: I hate those stupid things. They flash them so fast I can't read them.

BERTHA: Fast...slow. What does it matter. You can barely see three feet in front of you.

EDDIE: Doesn't mean I can't hate them.

BERTHA: *(Flustered)* Stop talking. This is the second time you messed me up. One, two, three, four, five...

EDDIE: Why are you counting them anyway?

BERTHA: Otto asked me to. Seven, eight, nine... There. Did you remember the flag?

EDDIE: Don't worry. I've got everything under control. You're such a worrier.
(Cautiously, he moves toward the flag.)

BERTHA: And be careful. We're only borrowing the place.

Arriving at the flag stand he attempts to insert the flag. Bertha, meanwhile, checks her script, then crosses to the comfort chair and adjusts it slightly. She then crosses to the camera and moves the Director's chair to its left.

-43-

BERTHA: That's better. Now, what's next? *(She sits in the comfort chair by the stairwell and refers to her script.)*

EDDIE: Eureka!!

BERTHA: Why the excitement?

EDDIE: I found the flag stand. *(Crossing back to the camera, he bangs into the director's chair.)*

BERTHA: For heavens sake, watch where you're going.

EDDIE: That wasn't there a minute ago.

BERTHA: Sorry. I should have warned you. *(Crossing to her handbag on the director's chair, she opens it and begins to search for something.)* Do you know the time? I can't seem to find my watch. You don't happen to have a watch, do you?

EDDIE: I can't fit Big Ben in my pocket.

BERTHA: Ah! Here it is. There are so many compartments in this thing. *(Looking at the time)* Good heavens! Otto should have been here by now.

FLORENCE: *(Still in her housedress and apron, enters from the kitchen with a mop bucket and dust rag)* I hope you don't mind but I hate a dirty house.

BERTHA: This house is far from being dirty, Mrs. Callahan.

EDDIE: It looks good to me.

FLORENCE: Thank you. You're both very kind. But I hear the camera picks up things the naked eye doesn't.

BERTHA: I wouldn't worry about that with Eddie behind the lens.

The front doorbell rings.

FLORENCE: Oh, heavenly mercy! I barely started! (*The doorbell rings.*) Just a minute! (*Handing the mop to Eddie*) I'll be right there. (*Again, the doorbell rings.*) Give it a break! (*Removing her apron, she answers the door in her sweet tone.*) May I help you?

OTTO: (*Off Stage*) Gut-en-morgen, Frau...Frau...

-44-

BERTHA: Callahan. Frau Callahan!

OTTO: Ja. Frau Callahan. Ist goot to meet you. (*Clicking his boots, he thrust out his hand.*)

FLORENCE: It's good to meet you...Mr.?

OTTO: Ich bin Herr Otto Deutchmann, za director of zis film.

FLORENCE: Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Dukeland. Please come in. We were expecting you.

OTTO: (*Entering wearing jodhpurs, riding boots, and beret, he carries a riding crop. Looking around*)Ja! Das ist gut. Ja! I like it! Vunderbar!

BERTHA: Herr Director. I have everything set up for the scene.

OTTO: Goot. Und vair iz my leading lady, Miss Cecily Blossom?

FLORENCE: I thought your leading lady was Miss...Habnerbuzzer.

OTTO: Van Hiberhauser? Ja. Ve changed her name to somezing za public vill never forget.

FLORENCE: Heavens be praised!

OTTO: Furzermore, it vouldn't fit on za marquee.

FLORENCE: Well, she's up stairs getting ready. Would you like me to get her?

BERTHA: That would be nice.

OTTO: Ja. Danke schon. (*Florence exits up the stairs.*) So, Dis iz za schtairvay she comes down. Ja?

BERTHA: Yes. And then she hides behind this chair (*Crossing to the comfort chair by the stairwell*) ...over here.

OTTO: I see zat. Ja.

BERTHA: And here is the phone from which our spy makes his call.

OTTO: Ah, za phone. Das ist gut. I like zat phone. Ja?

-45-

FLORENCE: (*Re-entering*) She'll be down in a minute. She's putting on the finishing touches. She's very self / conscious.

OTTO: Ja. Und za camera?

EDDIE: All set.

OTTO: Und you haf za film in it zis time?

EDDIE: (*Thinking*) I think so.

OTTO: Vell, why don't you check. Yesterday, ve vaisted za entire afternoon because of your schtupidity.

EDDIE: Your script girl was suppose to...

BERTHA: I forgot to write it down.

OTTO: (*To Florence*) I'm verking vit two ningcumpoops!

FLORENCE: Well, we all have our weaknesses, Mr. Deuchbag.

OTTO: (*To Bertha and Eddie*) Now, let's walk through za scene so...

FLORENCE: I thought you didn't like to rehearse.

OTTO: Und who are you...za director?

FLORENCE: I'm just repeating / what I've been told.

OTTO: Qviet!

BERTHA: (*Shouting*) Quiet on the set! Quiet please!

OTTO: Not yet! Ve are not filming, vere just talking!

FLORENCE: (*Irritated by Otto's brashness*) Philistine! (*She heads for the kitchen.*)

OTTO: Vait! Schtop! (*Florence stops.*) Not you. Fraulein Blankmind, vair is za rolling pin? Did you forget za rolling pin?

BERTHA: (*Frantically searches her notes*) I thought I wrote it down. Mrs. Callahan! Mrs. Callahan! Do you happen to have a rolling pin? (*Entering the kitchen*)

-46-

OTTO: (*Beginning to ascend the stairs*) Now follow me. (*Eddie ascends the stairs with Otto.*) Vut are you doing?

EDDIE: You said follow you. (*Returning to the camera*)

OTTO: I meant vit za camera you dummkopf! Now, aim za camera toward za top of za schstairs. Ven Miss Blossom enters she vill slowly peek around za corner, like zis. (*Demonstrating*) Zen she vill slowly tip toes down za schsteps like zis... (*Demonstrating*) Ja? You must keep za camera on her face because she is frightened zat somevun might see her. (*Noticing Eddie swinging the camera around the room looking for that someone.*) Over here! Over here! Her face vill be over here, you dummkopf!

Eddie re-aims the camera as best he can toward the top of the stairs.

OTTO: (*Looking around*) Vair is Fraulein Blankmind?

EDDIE: You sent her into the kitchen for a rolling pin.

OTTO: Ja, but not to make vun. (*Shouting*) FRAULEIN BLANKMIND! ACHTUNG!

BERTHA: (*Entering with a wooden spoon*) Yavol, Herr Director.

OTTO: A Schpoon! Vut is she to do vit a schpoon? Serve him for dinner? I vant a rolling pin! A rolling pin! A rolling pin!

BERTHA: Ja! Ja! A rolling pin. (*She re-enters the kitchen.*)

OTTO: Now, vunce she is at za bottom of za schsteps, she vill hear a zound coming from za kitchen. She vill zen hide behind za chair behind za desk. Her lover vill enter und cross to za phone und call headquarters to report zum valuable information. Zis is za first time she finds out vut he actually does for vurk. Now, vile he is talking...

Bertha enters with two rolling pins. Each has a different colored handle. Mrs. Callahan is right behind.

BERTHA: Mrs. Callahan had two.

FLORENCE: I wasn't sure which one you preferred.

OTTO: Eizer vun vill verk. Danke.

BERTHA: But which color do you prefer?

-47-

OTTO: Eizer vun. It doesn't matter.

BERTHA: I'll see if she has a favorite color. She must have a favorite / color.

OTTO: Vut difference does it make? Novun vill be able to tell za color!

FLORENCE: He's right.

BERTHA: He's always right!

OTTO: Ja! Za director is always right! Vair is Miss Blossom? I haf a film to shoot!
Und I don't have all day to shoot it!

FLORENCE: I'll get her Mr. Dickmann. (*She exits up the stairs.*)

OTTO: Fraulein Blankmind, it would be goot if you could concentrate a little harder
on your duties, especially dose vich pertain to zis film.

BERTHA: I'm sorry Herr Director.

OTTO: Goot. Now get your pencil und paper to take zum notes.

BERTHA: Notes? You've never given me notes. All I ever get are orders.

OTTO: Zen vut haf you been writing in your schript?

BERTHA: You mean these blank pieces of paper?

OTTO: Ja, ja!

BERTHA: Apparently nothing of any importance.

OTTO: Everyzing I zay is important!

Florence and Claire enter at the top of the stairs followed by Miriam, a bit overdone with make-up.

CLAIRE: I give you the queen of Hollywoodland!

OTTO: Ah! My beautiful sveet little liebchen.

BERTHA: (*Beginning to write that down.*) How do you spell liebchen?

OTTO: Vut is zat all over your face? You look like zum overdone fortuneteller.

-48-

CLAIRE: I beg / your pardon.

MIRIAM: I'm sorry I took so long. I was having trouble with my left eye. That's the better of the two and having to rely on my right to...

OTTO: Das is fine, my dear. Only you vill know.

MIRIAM: Yes, but I'm afraid it might affect my acting knowing my left eye is not right.

CLAIRE: I tried to help, but she insisted...

MIRIAM: That's true, but I don't like people touching my eyes. I've always been that way. It all started when I was five. I...

OTTO: Ja, ja. Ve can talk about zat later. Now ve need to shoot za next scene. You vill enter from za / top of za stchairs.

BERTHA: Herr Director?

OTTO: Ja?

BERTHA: Herr Director, we can't shoot this scene until Mr. Primadoni comes back.

OTTO: Comes back? Vut do you mean, comes back?

BERTHA: I believe he's out to lunch.

EDDIE: (*Sarcastically*) He's always out to lunch.

OTTO: But it's only eight o'clock!

FLORENCE: And I've already made the sandwiches. I even bought a fresh can of sardines especially for him. All Italians like sardines.

EDDIE: How perceptive. He's actually from Sardinia.

FLORENCE: Even better.

BERTHA: Mr. Primadoni has a very sensitive stomach and easily gets indigestion.

FLORENCE: Well, I wish someone told me that. I'm not a mind reader you know.

CLAIRE: Is someone in need of a mind reader?

-49-

Suddenly the front door opens and Albert enters. He is disheveled and exhausted.

ALBERT: Forgive me. I hope I'm not intruding.

MIRIAM: Bertie!

FLORENCE: Where have you been? Have you / been out all night?

MIRIAM: Are you all right? You look awful.

ALBERT: Yes, and I know. I was celebrating my first film job.

OTTO: Excuse me everyvun, but ve haf a film to make!

MIRIAM: Otto, this is the writer I was telling you about.

OTTO: Vut writer?

MIRIAM: Would it help if I remind you: No writer, no deal.

OTTO: Oh Ja! Za writer! Ja. Ja. Ja.

MIRIAM: Well this is Mr. Albert Buskov. Bertie, this is the director, Herr Otto Deutchmann.

ALBERT: *(Extending his hand)* A pleasure, sir.

OTTO: Ja. Ja, I know.

ALBERT: My friends call me Bertie.

OTTO: Ja. Das goot. *(Focusing on his next shot)* Schtand by everyvun!

ALBERT: I'm not interested in writing plots...just the dialogue.

OTTO: Vy? Zere is no zound; Zey just move zeir lips. Zerefore, za dialogue is irrelevant. Besides, zere are zos schtupid captions.

ALBERT: I know and I'm the man to write them.

OTTO: Write vut?

ALBERT: Write those captions. That's why you hired me.

-50-

OTTO: Ven did I do zat?

MIRIAM: No Bertie, no deal. Remember?

OTTO: But vut can he do zat I can't?

ALBERT: I'm not saying you can't, it's...it's just that.... *(Taking a deep breath)* It's not only what you say but how you say it. Trust me, words can be very powerful if used in the right way. Have you ever heard of Robert Browning? Or William / Shakespeare?

OTTO: *(Ignoring the comment, he picks up his megaphone)* Quiet! Miss Blossom, take your position.

ALBERT: "The sound of thunder may rumble the earth, but gentility of speech is ten times its' worth."

MIRIAM: That was beautiful, Bertie.

Suddenly Lorenzo Primadoni enters with a flare via the front door.

LORENZO: Ciao. I'm a-back. Did you a-miss me?

EDDIE: Like a fart in a diving suit!

OTTO: Places!

BERTHA: Lorenzo, Herr director is ready to shoot the scene where you enter and make that important telephone call.

LORENZO: Si. I remember a-that. *(To Florence)* "Signora, hai una bella bocca."

FLORENCE: I beg your pardon.

BERTHA: Just accept that as a complement.

FLORENCE: Oh, All right. Thank you.

LORENZO: Prego. (*To Bertha*) By-a-the-way, who am I a-calling?

BERTHA: Herr Director, who is Mr. Primadoni calling?

OTTO: An important government official who has valuable information.

-51-

LORENZO: Oh, Benissimo! I like a-suspense.

OTTO: Ja! Places everyvun!

BERTHA: Places everyone. Eddie. Ready the camera. (*Eddie fumbles his way to the camera.*) Miss Blossom, would you please get ready to make your entrance. (*Miriam returns to the top of the stairs.*) We're not supposed to see you at first. When Herr Director says action you make your appearance. Everyone else please stand aside and be quiet. Thank you. All set Herr Director.

OTTO: Goot! (*Into his megaphone*) Schtand by.

LORENZO: Scusi, but a-where do I make my a-entrance? Or do I just appear?

EDDIE: Disappear would be better.

OTTO: You come from za kitchen.

LORENZO: Ah! I a-like a-kitchens...especially Restaurante D'Angelo. His a-spaghetti al pomodoro, and a-pastina in...

OTTO: Schtand by everyvun!

Lorenzo enters the kitchen.

BERTHA: Stand by, / please.

OTTO: (*Into his megaphone*) Qviet!

BERTHA: Quiet, please!

OTTO: Camera!

EDDIE: Set.

OTTO: Action!

Miriam enters as does Lorenzo who crosses to the telephone.

OTTO: Cut! (*Miriam and Lorenzo continue. Shouting into his megaphone.*) CUT!!!!

LORENZO: Now a-what?

MIRIAM: Did I do something wrong?

-52-

OTTO: No, no, my dear. It vas Signore Primadoni.

LORENZO: What do you a-mean, a-me. You said action, I a-gave you action.

OTTO: You are suppose to make zum noise in za kitchen vich vorns Miss Blossom
zat somevun else is in za house und she needs to hide.

LORENZO: How was I a-suppose to a-know a-that? I don't a-have a script.

OTTO: Vell, now you know.

LORENZO: How will I a-know when she is a-hiding?

OTTO: I vill say enter.

LORENZO: Okay. I can a-do a-that.

OTTO: Places everyvun!

BERTHA: Places, please!

(Miriam and Lorenzo return to their places.)

OTTO: Qviet!

BERTHA: Quiet, please!

OTTO: Camera! (*He waits for Eddie's response.*) Camera! Vhat is it vit za camera?

EDDIE: Oh, right. Set!

OTTO: Action!

Miriam peeks around the wall. She listens closely to Otto describing her next move.

OTTO: Ja, dat's it. Now schlowly come to za edge of za rail und look about.
(She does everything Otto asks.) Ja. Das goot. Now, schlowly come down za
schtairs. Qvietly. Ja. Ven you get to za bottom look out za vindow. Make sure

novun sees you. Goot. Now tiptoe toward za kitchen. Ja. Suddenly, zere is a zound coming from za kitchen. (*There is complete silence. Repeating his direction a little louder.*) Zere iz a zound coming from za kitchen. (*Again, complete silence. Shouting into his megaphone*) I need a zound coming from za kitchen!

-53-

BERTHA: (*Crossing to the kitchen*) Mr. Primadoni!

LORENZO: (*Entering*) Now a-what?

OTTO: CUT!!! Vut ver you doing in zair? Schleeping?

LORENZO: You a-said not to a come out until you a-say enter.

OTTO: Ja, but I need a zound to vorn Miss Blossom zat zair is somevun else in za house! Fraulein Blankmind?

BERTHA: I'm sorry, Herr Director. I drew a blank on that one.

OTTO: Primadoni! You're schvetting like a svine. Madam make-up.... (*Shouting into his megaphone*) MADAM MAKE-UP!

CLAIRE: What!

OTTO: Signore Primadoni needs zum powder...und a hearing aid.

CLAIRE: Certainly. (*Pulling out a powder puff from her bag she dabs his face.*)

ALBERT: (*To Florence*) Is this director legitimate?

FLORENCE: Welcome to the art of film making, where make-believe meets lunacy.

LORENZO: (*Pushing Claire away*) "Basta cosi!" I'm a-going to a-look like a piece of Italian pastry.

OTTO: All right! Places!

BERTHA: Places everyone.

MIRIAM: Should I go back to the top of the stairs?

OTTO: No, no. Ve vill take it from you're tiptoeing to za kitchen.

Miriam crosses to the window and waits.

BERTHA: Quiet, please!

OTTO: You're supposed to wait for me to say it first. Quiet!

BERTHA: Quiet, please!

-54-

FLORENCE: *(To Claire)* What an egotistical little man.

CLAIRE: He's German. What do you expect?

OTTO: *(Into his megaphone)* Quiet!!! Camera!

EDDIE: Set!

OTTO: Action!

Miriam tiptoes across the room and listens. Otto indicates for Bertha to cue Lorenzo.

BERTHA: Ok Mr. Primadoni.

There is a loud crash coming from the kitchen.

BERTHA: *(Opening the kitchen door,)* That was good... *(There is another loud crash.)*

OTTO: Vone is enough!

Miriam rushes and hides behind the desk.

LORENZO: *(Entering holding his forehead)* Mama Mia! Who was the a-imbecile who...

BERTHA: Sorry. I was merely...

OTTO: *(Authoritatively)* Never mind zat. Keep acting! Play za moment!

Seeing no one, Lorenzo crosses to the phone and begins to tap the cradle.

LORENZO: Hello? Hello?

OTTO: Quiet! Visper. You don't vant anyvun to hear you.

LORENZO: Who's a-going to a-hear me if there is no a-sound? *(He whispers into the phone.)* Hello. Operator, get a-me Michaelangelo 22 a-4. What? A-no! I a-can't talk a-louder. The audience will a-hear me. *(He looks at Otto and smiles.)*

Hello, is this a-sunflower? (*Brief pause*) Yes, this is a-potted a-plant. Everything is a-set for tonight's a-pickup. (*Brief pause*) A-Right. The airstrip at a-midnight. Arrivederci! (*He replaces the receiver on its' cradle.*)

OTTO: Goot! Now exit up za schtairs. (*To Lorenzo*) Faster!!! Miss Cecily, enter und look about. (*Miriam emerges from behind the desk*) Make sure novun sees

-55-

you. Ja, das goot! Now you know he is a schpy und you need to tell somevun...but who?

BERTHA: Herr director, who are you referring to?

OTTO: I haven't gotten zat far. Cut! Cut! CUT! I need to sink for a moment.

Suddenly the front door opens. The Colonel stumbles in singing. He has been drinking.

COLONEL: "JUST A SONG AT TWILIGHT, WHEN THE LIGHTS ARE LOW" (*Noticing everyone*) Is someone having a party?

OTTO: Qviet!!!!

COLONEL: OOH! And just in time for the cake.

LORENZO: (*Re-entering*) What was a-wrong with a-that?

BERTHA: Nothing. It wasn't you, Mr. Primadoni

OTTO: Who is dis man, und vut is he doing here?

COLONEL: Who is this man, and what is he doing here?

FLORENCE: Mr. Dutchmann, this is Colonel Burnhart, he happens to live...

OTTO: Das ist it! Ja!

BERTHA: What is it?

OTTO: Za Colonel! He vill save our heroine. Can you act?

CLAIRE: He's very good if you rub his hands.

BERTHA: Herr Director, he's in no condition...

OTTO: Ve'll verk around zat. Eddie, set za camera ven Fraulein Blossom enters

from behind za chair. When za Colonel makes his entrance, ve vill turn za camera on him.

COLONEL: Can someone tell me what is going on?

-56-

FLORENCE: They're filming a movie.
We told you that last night.

OTTO: Fraulein Blankmind, please get
Fraulein Blossom und bring her
back. Schnell! (*She exits.*)

COLONEL: You did?

FLORENCE: We did but it's obvious you're in no condition to remember anything.

OTTO: Now, Colonel, ven Fraulein Blossom enters...

COLONEL: Fraulein Blossom? Who's Fraulein Blossom?

FLORENCE: The former Miriam Van Househopper...

COLONEL: The former? What has happened to my sweet little...

FLORENCE: Colonel! Miss Cecily Blossom is her new stage name.

OTTO: Enough! I need qviet.

COLONEL: Her stage name? Oh!!! Yes, of course! And I'm her honeybee who...

ALBERT: (*Getting a little aggressive*) In your dreams...

FLORENCE: Bertie! This is not the time.

OTTO: I said qviet! (*Ushering the Colonel to the front door*) Now Colonel, ven I say
enter, you come in just as you did. Ja?

The Colonel is still confused.

FLORENCE: Just say Ja.

COLONEL: Ja.

OTTO: Goot. Zen you vill close za door und she vill rush over to you und give you a
big hug. Ja?

COLONEL: *(Smiling)* Ja.

Bertha and Miriam re-enter and descend the stairs.

OTTO: Ah! Here she comes now.

-57-

The Colonel intently watches Miriam as she descends the stairs.

OTTO: My dear, za Colonel here iz going to play your rescuer...za Ambassador of za Embassy. After Signore Primadoni exits, you come from behind za chair. Suddenly your rescuer enters und you run to him und give him a big hug. Sinking Primadoni is a schpy, you zen tell your rescuer everyzing you heard.

MIRIAM: Then what do I do?

COLONEL: Don't you worry my dear, I have a plan.

ALBERT: May I make a suggestion? Why doesn't Mr. Primadoni enter and overhear their conversation. He then threatens the Ambassador if he reports him to the authorities. The caption could read: "Divulge my plans, would not be shrewd, for never again your daughter viewed."

BERTHA: Tension builds! / The plot thickens!

OTTO: Vut?

All the others stand silently

ALBERT: Our leading man then notices a large scar on Cecily's right hand. It is identical to the one she received from having been bitten by the family dog when she was a little girl. Recognizing the scar, our hero reveals to them both that he's not a spy but her brother who has been searching for her for years. The Ambassador, having lost his own daughter from parental negligence, abducted our heroine from a local playground while visiting America and fled to this country bringing her up as his own. Our hero has vowed to find her and take her home.

FLORENCE: And they live happily ever after.

OTTO: *(Experiencing a brief moment of shock)* Ja! Ja!. Das Goot!

LORENZO: Magnifico!

OTTO: Und za caption can read: "You scoundrel! You curd! You piece of dirt! May your bones be our dog's next meal!

ALBERT: (*In disbelief, but acceptable at this point*) Right.... Right.

FLORENCE: (*To Albert*) Remember, the audience only sees their mouths move.

-58-

OTTO: Places please! Everyvun take zeir places!

BERTHA: Places please! Everyone take their places! Mr. Primadoni, up stairs.

Primadoni exits with enthusiasm.

OTTO: Cecily, my dear, ve vill take it from your entrance behind za chair. Colonel, you vill vait outside und enter ven I say enter.

COLONEL: Ja. (*Bewitched by Miriam, he doesn't move.*)

CLAIRE: This ought to / be memorable.

OTTO: Zen go outside und I vill let you know ven to come in. (*He Colonel remains stationary.*) Fraulein Blankmind, would you please take za Colonel outside und explain to him vut is going on.

BERTHA: Right this way Colonel.

COLONEL: Where are we going?

BERTHA: Outside...on the other side of this door.

COLONEL: But I want to watch them make the film.

BERTHA: But you're in the film.

COLONEL: (*As they exit*) I am?

CLAIRE: (*To Albert*) I wouldn't miss this for the world.

OTTO: Eddie, after Fraulein Blossom comes from behind za chair make sure you turn za camera und get za Colonel as he enters. Ja?

EDDIE: Ja.

OTTO: Goot. Schtand by. (*Waiting for Bertha's echo*) Fraulein Blankmind? (*Into megaphone*) Blankmind!

BERTHA: (*Popping back in*) Yes?

OTTO: Schtand by!

BERTHA: Stand by, please. (*She exits.*)

-59-

OTTO: Camera?

EDDIE: Set.

OTTO: Action!

Miriam enters from behind the desk.

OTTO: Colonel! (*The Colonel enters. Eddie spins the camera toward the door but is way off. Otto positions the camera to the right position as Eddie continues to roll film.*) Now close za door sofly so you don't vake anyvun up.

COLONEL: (*Slamming the door behind him*) I'm home!

Bertha looks through the window with notebook in hand.

OTTO: Now run to your rescuer und hug him.

The Colonel pats her behind. Claire holds back Albert.

MIRIAM: (*Breaking away from the Colonel's move*) Mr. Primadoni is a spy. He plans to meet with...

COLONEL: Come to papa my little flower. (*Taking her in his arms.*) Let your honeybee rest upon your...

MIRIAM: Papa!

Claire continues to restrain Albert.

OTTO: Ja! Das is goot.

Miriam breaks away. The Colonel pursues her around the room. Eddie is having problems following the action. Bertha re-enters. Otto keeps moving the camera.

OTTO: (*Into his megaphone*) Signore Primadoni!

LORENZO: *(Entering from the top of the stairs)* What's a-going on?

OTTO: Ja, Now come haf vay down za schtairs.

The Colonel catches Miriam and goes to kiss her.

CLAIRE: *(To Albert)* Didn't / I tell you?

-60-

LORENZO: Leave her alone. I a-know who you are.

MIRIAM: You do?

COLONEL: You do?

LORENZO: Si, and this a-man as a-well.

MIRIAM: He is my father.

LORENZO: No, he's a-not. *(Crossing to her)* He is a...a...a-no a-good! *(Coming between Miriam and the Colonel)* He a-stole you from your a-parents when you were a little girl and a-took you far away for himself so no one would a-find you.

MIRIAM: He did? How do you know this?

LORENZO: That a-scar on your right a-hand...you a-got that when you were a "piccola bambina".

MIRIAM: A what? I did?

LORENZO: ...by our a-dog, a-Pizza.

MIRIAM: A pizza?

LORENZO: I am you're a-brother, Alfredo Antonio Luigi Minestrone who has been a-searching for you for a-many years. And a-now that I have a-found you, I am bringing you a-home. *(He begins escort her to the front door.)*

COLONEL: Over my dead body! She's mine! *(Reaching for Lorenzo)*

LORENZO: She's a-mine!

COLONEL: That's where you're wrong. She was promised to me.

LORENZO: By a-who? Some a-crazy fortune a-teller?

OTTO: Ja! / Ja!

COLONEL: Yes! Miss Fortuna saw her in my future.

MIRIAM: I've heard that name before.

LORENZO: You and I are to a-go to the airstrip and a-fly away tonight...back to America.

-61-

COLONEL: Like hell you will! (*He heads for the stairs.*)

LORENZO: Where are you a-going? Stay and a-fight like a man!

COLONEL: I'll be right back. Don't go away. (*He exits up the stairs.*)

OTTO: CUT!!! Brilliant! Magnificent! Marvelous!

FLORENCE: Oh boy! This next scene is one I can afford to miss. (*She exits.*)

CLAIRE: Suit yourself, but I'm staying put.

OTTO: Colonel, you're a natural. Vair is he? Where did he go?

CLAIRE: My guess is that he's getting his sword.

OTTO: Eddie. Did you/ get zat?

EDDIE: Sure thing, boss.

BERTHA: Herr Director, do we need a sword, because I wasn't aware of that.

CLAIRE: Not to worry, he has his own...and it's sharp and deadly.

BERTHA: Oh, thank heavens. I had no idea where to find one.

OTTO: Make-up!! How are you zet for blood?

CLAIRE: There'll be enough of the real stuff once the Colonel gets a few stabs into Primadoni's gut.

LORENZO: (*Giving a nervous laugh.*) You're a-joking, no?

CLAIRE: Does the Pope live in Rome?

LORENZO: (*To Otto*) You never a-said this was to be my a-last a-film!

OTTO: Nein! Nein! He's just acting. Why are all you Italians so high schtrung?

COLONEL: *(Entering with his saber)* Prepare for battle you Italian gigolo! Charge!
(He runs down the stairs waving his sword.)

LORENZO: Well, it a-doesn't a-look like acting to a-me! *(Running behind the desk.)*

-62-

OTTO: Vait! Vait! I didn't call places!

COLONEL: *(Chasing Lorenzo around the room waving his sword.)* You two-bit Italian lover!" *(The others scatter about.)*

LORENZO: You're a-crazy! This a-man is a-crazy

OTTO: Eddie! Roll za camera! Schnell! Schnell!

*Eddie begins to spin the camera in all directions trying to capture the moment.
Lorenzo crawls under the desk pursued by the Colonel.*

ALBERT: Now this is something... "You're not the first that I have slain! From head to toe you'll feel the pain."

LORENZO: "Qualcuno chiama la polizia! Quest'uomo e pazzo!"

The Colonel climbs over the desk as runs to the front door and exits...followed by the Colonel.

OTTO: Ja! I like it! Wunderbar!

BERTHA: Wunderbar!

OTTO: Tomorrow ve go to za airschtrip und shoot za final shot! Ja?

EDDIE, BERTHA & CLAIRE: Ja!

SCENE 2: ONE MONTH LATER

The room is back to normal. A large sign, "Congratulations", hangs over the balcony.

FLORENCE: *(Wearing a smart colorful dress, she enters from the kitchen carrying a tray of sandwiches. Placing them on the table, she re-enters the kitchen only to return with a bowl of fruit humming: "YES, WE HAVE NO BANANAS". The phone*

rings. Answering it...) Hello? Oh, hi Edith. How are you? *(Pause)* That's good.... No. I'm right in the middle of getting the house ready for a surprise party.... It's for the cast and crew, you know, the ones who filmed their movie at the house last month *(Pause)* Yes, that's right, the intruders. Anyway, it's opening night and... *(Pause)* Of course I want to see the film, but there was so much to do. I'll catch it later. *(Pause)* What's that? *(Pause)* Now what kind of surprise would that be if I asked them to help out? I told them I wasn't feeling well

-63-

(Pause) Oh no! I'm fine. I just...*(Pause)* Well of course it was a lie. I needed an alibi so I could stay home and get everything...*(Pause)* Thank you, but I've got everything under control.... *(Hearing noise from the outside)* Hold on just a minute. Don't go away. I'll be right back. *(She crosses to the window and peeks out. Returning to the phone)* Edith, they're here. I've got to go. *(Pause)* What's that..?*(Pause)* Yes, of course. I'll call you tomorrow...*(Pause)* I will.... Yes every detail. *(Pause)* What..? *(Pause)* Yes, I will; and give my best to Butch. *(Hanging up the phone, she scrambles about checking out the room, as well as herself. Noticing she's forgotten her necklace and earrings)* My Jewelry! *(She runs to the bedroom and returns fumbling with her necklace. While doing so, she notices the beverage is not set.)* Oh, good heavens, the drinks! *(She enters the kitchen returning with a large pitcher of lemonade just as the front door opens.)* SURPRISE!

Miriam, stunningly dressed, enters in tears and runs up to her room. Albert, dressed in a tuxedo, runs in and stops at the bottom of the stairs.

ALBERT: Now you're being silly! *(Slight pause)* Miriam! Miriam!

FLORENCE: What's the matter? Why is she upset?

ALBERT: She has somehow convinced herself that her acting career is at an end.

FLORENCE: What? Why? It's only been two months? It takes time.

The others enter, all dressed to the nines. Otto is outraged; the others are in disbelief.

OTTO: Everyvun is a critic! If zay can do better, vhy aren't zay making films?

LORENZO: I have never a-been so humiliated in all my a-life! *(To Otto)* You have ruined my a-career!

OTTO: Vut career? If it vasn't for me, you'd be back in Italy serving pasta in zum zird rate pizzeria.

LORENZO: Well at a-least I would a-have a job making a-dough and not a-wasting my a-time with a-some idiot director.

COLONEL: Well, I could use a good stiff one.

FLORENCE: There's ammonia under the sink.

COLONEL: (*Exiting into the kitchen.*) That should do.

-64-

EDDIE: Well, I saw nothing wrong with the film.

OTTO: Of course you didn't. How could you. Und sankt to you, ve zaw nuzing but ankles und foreheads.

LORENZO: We're a-lucky we saw a-that!

EDDIE: It's obvious my eyesight's not the best. (*To Otto*) Yet it was you who made me the camera man. I wanted to do props.

ALBERT: All right! All right! It's over and done with. There's no need brooding about it. (*Recalling some derogatory comment*) ...and to call my captions brainless. A Shakespeare wannabe! Who the hell do they think they are!

CLAIRE: Well they were partly right. Face it Bertie, you're no better than the rest of us.

ALBERT: I never said I was...but you said my writing was ingenious and original.

CLAIRE: So I made a mistake. I was having a bad day.

EDDIE: Maybe someone shuffled your Tarot Cards when you weren't looking.

LORENZO: The entire a-film was a mistake.

FLORENCE: It was no mistake. And stop being so hard on yourselves. You did the best you could. Just because the audience didn't like it...

BERTHA: All fifteen of them, and that included the eight of us.

COLONEL: (*Re-entering*) The ammonia's not under the sink. All I could find / was some vinegar.

EDDIE: If it wasn't a mistake, then what the hell was it?

CLAIRE: A disaster.

LORENZO: A disaster? We made a-shit!

COLONEL: He's right! And the audience just threw / it in the crapper.

LORENZO: One a-big pile of a-shit!

FLORENCE: Well, while you're all feeling angry and sorry for yourselves, there's a
-65-

young lady upstairs who is distraught and crying her eyes out. And since you're only concerned about yourselves, I'm going up there and see if I can rekindle her Hollywood dream. (*She exits up the stairs.*)

OTTO: (*Without an accent*) And you're a major part of it you little guinea turd!

LORENZO: You're a "*stupido uomo*" ...an imbecile!

COLONEL: No wonder you lost the war!

EDDIE: I can't wait to read the reviews.

BERTHA: Now that's a sight / to be seen.

ALBERT: (*Shouting*) QUIET!

EDDIE, BERTHA, LORENZO: What?

LORENZO: It's a-true. This entire a-film was / a joke.

ALBERT: QUIET! It has nothing to do with the film, but everything to do with
(*Pointing to Otto*) him! Did anyone else hear what I just heard or was it just me?

COLONEL: It's the war, isn't it? The Germans are planning another...

ALBERT: It has nothing to do with the war, and no one is planning anything.
But someone knows exactly what I'm referring to. (*Looking directly at Otto*)
Isn't that true Herr Director...or should I say Mr. Director.

There is complete silence.

CLAIRE: I don't get it? What was it that I was supposed to hear?

BERTHA: Why do I feel I'm being left in the dark?

EDDIE: You'll get use to it.

ALBERT: (*Directly addressing Otto*) Herr Deutchmann, whatever happened to your German accent? Suddenly it seemed to disappeared...like magic.

BERTHA: Yeah! I thought he sounded a bit strange.

ALBERT: Just who are you Mr. Director?

-66-

COLONEL: If you're not German then what are you?

Florence and Miriam appear at the top of the stairs.

MIRIAM: I hope you all will forgive me. I over-reacted and...

ALBERT: There's no need to apologize.

FLORENCE: Sounds as if we missed something?

COLONEL: Barney, here, seems to have unearthed a secret.

FLORENCE: Really? About what?

COLONEL: About Mr. Director, here.

CLAIRE: (*Sarcastically*) Colonel, we may need that bottle of ammonia sooner than later.

BERTHA: Mr. Bushkov, is this to be a game of charades? Because if it is, I stink at it.

ALBERT: No Miss Blankmind, it's not a game of any kind.

COLONEL: I bet you he's some enemy informer...infuriated having lost the war...

ALBERT: Colonel, it has nothing to do with the war. It's about his...

COLONEL: Maybe he's a spy, like the character in his movie.

ALBERT: It's apparent you all weren't listening. I think we all deserve an explanation... Mr....?

OTTO: All right! All right. My name is Oscar Doleman and I'm...

COLONEL: Jewish!

BERTHA: What?

FLORENCE: You'll fit right in with Hollywood.

ALBERT: His faith has nothing to do with it.

LORENZO: Still, he's a-big a-fake! You're a "*grande falso!*"

-67-

MIRIAM: How could you?

BERTHA: You mean I've been taking orders from some German imposter?

OTTO: I'm no more a fake than you are Mr. Donaprimi.

LORENZO: That's Primadoni...Lorenzo Primadoni.

OTTO: In Italy, it's Guiseppe Donaprimi, a dreadful and horrid third-rate actor.

LORENZO: "La Bella Donna" was a-magnifico! Even Signora Angelina Catchitori was a-moved by a my performance.

OTTO: True. And it drove her all the way to the island of Corsica, vowing never to act with you again. According to the critics, you were horrendous. Your acting career was utterly finito. Caput. Over and done. (*To the others*) That's why he came to the States...hoping that no one would discover his lack of talent....hence the name change.

LORENZO: Ha! Speaking of having a-no a-talent....

ALBERT: Mr. Primadoni...or Donaprimi! Whatever. (*To Otto*) Mr. Doleman, can you prove such an accusation?

OTTO: I happened to be in Rome on business when they were filming "La Bella Donna."

ALBERT: On vacation?

OTTO: On business. I was a buyer of men's clothing for Marshall Fields, a large department store in Chicago.

ALBERT: I'm familiar with it.

OTTO: A few months later, when I returned to Italy, I happened to see Mr. Primadoni's performance in that wretched film. Well, it was everything the critics had said...and worse.

ALBERT: Fine. But what brought you to Hollywood? And why directing?

OTTO: It's Erich Von Stroheim's fault. You see, after seeing his film, "Blind Husbands"...

CLAIRE: Finally a film other than "Poor Little Rich Girl".

-68-

OTTO: ...I became hooked on his films, and unconsciously began to identify with his pictures as well as his strong personality.

FLORENCE: But why the accent?

OTTO: To me it exudes power and strength like his movies. I was tired of being a simple complacent purchasing agent. I wanted to be in control of my life...to be in command of my personal world. I felt destined to make more of myself.

ALBERT: Having a German accent doesn't automatically give you power or a knack for making movies. And if you knew of Mr. Donaprimi or Primadoni's lack of talent, why did you hire him in the first place?

OTTO: Being my first film, and knowing no one in the business, I was desperate for an actor...any actor. I didn't care where he came from...as long as he could walk and breathe.

LORENZO: What you're a-desperate for is a brain, not an actor.

FLORENCE: *(To Otto)* Have you any idea how you've destroyed this young woman's dream? I think it's time we all had a good stiff one. *(She returns to the kitchen.)*

OTTO: Now wait a minute. I'm not the only one here with flawed and failed aspirations. You call yourself a writer? "Please! Don't go. I fear the worst. You leave me now, my life is cursed." I call that...

LORENZO: ...a-rubbish!

MIRIAM: Mr. Primadoni!

ALBERT: I had very little to work with.

MIRIAM: Albert! I thought...

ALBERT: No reflection on you Miriam, it's just...

OTTO: ...just what, Mr. Bushkov? Has your dream gone sour like the rest of ours?
What actually is your writing experience? I'm sure we'd all love to know.

LORENZO: He's no a-Luigi Chiarelli! That's a-for sure.

ALBERT: (*Noticing all eyes are focused on him...*) I...I...

-69-

FLORENCE: (*Entering with a bottle of whiskey*) I hope everyone still has their heads
on their shoulders?

COLONEL: (*Noticing the whiskey bottle*) Where was that hiding, pray tell?

FLORENCE: Never you mind. So where are we now?

CLAIRE: Mr. Doleman was...

FLORENCE: Who's Mr. Doleman?

CLAIRE: Mr. Deutchmann.

FLORENCE: Mr. Deutchman is Mr. Doleman?

CLAIRE: Yes. Don't you remember?

FLORENCE: Not really. When did this happen?

BERTHA: When you last went to the kitchen.

FLORENCE: Ah yes. Now I remember.

OTTO: You were saying, Mr. Bushkov?

ALBERT: (*Apprehensively*) I am a writer and have been for some time. Granted, I
don't write novels or short stories...or even poetry. But...well...I do write for
a living.

FLORENCE: Be honest, Bertie. There is no need to be embarrassed.

ALBERT: I'm not in the least embarrassed.

BERTHA: Then tell us what you did before Hollywood. I'm curious.

ALBERT: *(Pausing)* I wrote for Sears.

FLORENCE: Sears?

MIRIAM: Sears who, Bertie?

ALBERT: Sears Roebuck?

COLONEL: That ungodly catalogue?

-70-

ALBERT: I wrote the captions describing the items.

MIRIAM: You mean like shoes and hats...

EDDIE: ...and bicycles?

BERTHA: Typewriters?

ALBERT: Everything. Even women's lingerie.

MIRIAM: Bertie! How could you?

LORENZO: Who is this a-Sears a-Roebuck?

OTTO: So that explains the caption, "My dear little sister at last you're found. Like a lost pair of shoes that's homeward bound."

ALBERT: There's nothing to explain. It's plain and simple; I too had a driving desire and a dream to work in film just like the rest of you... a dream I passionately had a desire to fulfill. Isn't that enough? *(Pause)*. And how about you, miss Blankmind. I'm curious as to your background and prompted what you to come to Hollywood.

BERTHA: I was a secretary in a factory back East. Every day was the same: either take dictation or sit in front of an Underwood and tap away until my fingers began to bleed. My life was going nowhere. I knew there was more out there but I was too afraid to step outside my comfortable and guarded world. Then one day I just knew I had to escape or I'd go crazy. I left everything I had... which wasn't much, but it was mine.

MIRIAM: That is so sad. *(She begins to cry.)*

ALBERT: And so...?

BERTHA: When I saw Mary Pickford in / “Poor Little Rich Girl”...

EVERYONE: (*Simultaneously*) “Poor Little Rich Girl”

BERTHA: ...I decided to take my life into my own hands.

MIRIAM: Why would you even
such a thing?

CLAIRE: You thought the movie
was that bad?

ALBERT: Miriam. I don’t think she was / contemplating...

-71-

BERTHA: Oh, good heavens no. It was then I decided to leave my job and my home
and head for Hollywood. Shortly after arriving, I saw an ad in the paper
calling for a script girl. My qualifications were perfect...so I thought...

ALBERT: And Oscar here hired you.

BERTHA: Yes.

ALBERT: Just like that?

BERTHA: Yes, just like that. Just like you and Miriam and Otto.

ALBERT: You mean Oscar.

BERTHA: Yes...Oscar.

ALBERT: How about you Eddie, since we’re all divulging our secret ambitions.

EDDIE: Me?

COLONEL: Yes, you. Why would anyone hire a blind cameraman?

EDDIE: I’m not blind, blind.

COLONEL: Well, as far as I can see, you’re just shy of needing a seeing-eye dog.

EDDIE: (*Pause*) When I was very young, about ten, my eyesight became...

ALBERT: I don’t mean to interrupt, and I’m sadden that your eyesight is impaired
but we would like to know how you came to Hollywood and partnered up
with Oscar.

EDDIE: Well, I can tell you it wasn’t due to Mary Pickford or “Poor Little Rich Girl.”

OTTO: (*Interrupting*) Let me explain. You see...

EDDIE: Barely.

OTTO: Eddie, please.

EDDIE: Just making / a point.

-72-

OTTO: Please! I'll handle this. You see, Eddie is my brother-in-law...ex brother-in-law. I was married to Eddie's sister, Anna Maria...also the sister of Angelo Genna....

CLAIRE: Not thee / Angelo Gonna?

ALBERT: You're related to Angelo Genna, the mafia boss from Chicago?

LORENZO: Ah ha! You no a-good son-of-a... (*He rises to defend his nationality*)

COLONEL: Sit down or you'll experience an immediate dislike from my Gwendolyn for real.

OTTO: I had just returned from Rome after seeing Primadoni's disastrous film, and within a few weeks I was to experience another disaster. I found myself out of a job and on the street. Before long, I needed money. I heard about this great project : The Mineralite Bowling Ball. It was sure to be successful.... I borrowed a sizable sum of money from the Genna family to invest in the project... To make a long story short, it was a complete failure. My divorce from Anna Maria and my poor investment cut me off from any family protection. I was desperate.

EDDIE: What? That's / not true.

OTTO: I wanted to tell you for months Eddie, but.... Well I couldn't. I just couldn't. I told Angelo I was thinking of going out to California and try my luck in film directing and...well to make a long story short, he agreed to forgive me of any payment on the loan under one condition: to make sure Eduardo, here, came with me...since he was somewhat of a handicap / to "The Family."

EDDIE: Handicap?

OTTO: It was that simple. I knew I would need a cameraman for my film, so I figured why not. Hell! All he needs to do is crank the camera. I could aim it prior to the shot and the rest was easy.

LORENZO: Easy? All you could a-see was my a-feet. And my a-close-ups were a-out of focus.

OTTO: Your entire performance was out of focus you little...

ALBERT: All right! All right!

Irate, Lorenzo rises again.

-73-

FLORENCE: Mr. Primaderci! (*The Colonel heads for the stairs.*) Colonel, where are you going?

COLONEL: To get Gwendolyn. I may need it.

FLORENCE: I don't think that's necessary. Please everyone! We're here to celebrate your film and all the work you've put into it. So please...please...

There is complete silence and an overall feeling of awkwardness.

MIRIAM: (*Breaking the silence*) Miss Voyant? What about you? What brought you to Hollywood?

CLAIRE: I was born here.

MIRIAM: Oh. Okay.

CLAIRE: Actually, my real name is Mabel Leen. And like the rest of you, I too had aspirations of making it in the movies...as a make-up artist. I don't know why I was attracted to make-up. Maybe it was because when I was young I had this terrible complexion. Some of the kids in school used to call me "Blotchy". Anyway, the jobs were far and few between in the business so I took up palm reading. It was easy. Just hang up a sign, give yourself some exotic name and lie through your teeth. You'd be amazed how many people believe in that "future" crap. You've probably noticed the number of palm readers in Los Angeles. Every other block seems to have one. (*Pause*)

COLONEL: So, Miss Blossom is not the young lady you saw in my future?

CLAIRE: Colonel, I'm lucky I can see through tomorrow.

COLONEL: Not only did you lie to me, you've made a fool of me.

FLORENCE: Colonel, Miss...

CLAIRE: That's all right Mrs. Callahan. (*To the Colonel*) Yes, I did. And I'm sorry, but I've also given you back your youth and virility even if it was merely in a dream.

BERTHA: Similar to Mr. Doleman giving us the opportunity to fulfill our dreams...

ALBERT: More like venturing in a world we're not cut out for?

LORENZO: I am a-destined to be a star.... No. I am a star!

-74-

OTTO: Really. What were you in your previous life, the Pope?

ALBERT: Let's face it, we're all lying to ourselves. We're not actors, nor a director and definitely not a film writer. And after tonight how more obvious can it be? So why are we trying to be someone we're not...reaching for a dream that is only that: a dream. What's wrong with accepting ourselves simply for who we are and the abilities we were given.

OTTO: You're right, Albert. Erich Von Stroheim, I'm not.

MIRIAM: We're like many of those pictures hanging on your wall Mrs. Callahan.

FLORENCE: Not exactly.

MIRIAM: What do you mean?

FLORENCE: I don't really know. I just felt it was the right thing to say.

BERTHA: Miss Leen, at least you have your palm reading. Me? How much skill does it take to take notes?

CLAIRE: How much skill does it take to lie about one's future. I'm better at make-up than sizing up one's lifeline.

COLONEL: That's a fact.

ALBERT: Then why don't you start your own business? Many successful business people...for instance, George Vanderbilt or Andrew Carnegie, have taken risks and look where it got them.

FLORENCE: ...and Hiram Ashpernapp.

MIRIAM: Who's Hiram Ashpernapp?

FLORENCE: He owns the fresh vegetable market on Hollywood Boulevard. He started out with a push cart in Van Nuys.

ALBERT: There, you see?

CLAIRE: But what would I do?

ALBERT: You can develop your own make-up product and sell it to the Stars. Mabel Leen Make-up! And Bertha can be your personal secretary.

-75-

CLAIRE: You think so?

ALBERT: It's worth a try.

OTTO: I should have taken that job at the Palmer House, but I was a man with a mission.

FLORENCE: Chicago's "Thee Palmer House"?

OTTO: That's right...the most elegant hotel in Chicago.

FLORENCE: You know, Mr. Doleman, being...

OTTO: Call me Oscar.

FLORENCE: Oscar, being in a related business, I could use a little help around here. It's been difficult since my husband, Herman ran away with some Hollywood starlet.

EDDIE: Well I'm glad that everyone is seeing themselves through this most difficult moment. Me, on the other hand is still groping in the dark.

COLONEL: Count your lucky stars you're still capable of groping.

EDDIE: I would if I could see them.

OTTO: Mrs. Callahan, do you think Eddie...

FLORENCE: Florence...

OTTO: Florence. Do you think there may be something here for Eddie?

FLORENCE: I'm sure we could find something.

BERTHA: How about you Cecily?

MIRIAM: Cecily Blossom is but a dream.

BERTHA: What will Miriam do then?

MIRIAM: I always dreamed of becoming a movie star; however, there was a time I wanted to be a missionary and go to Africa.

ALBERT: So did I!

-76-

MIRIAM: You did?

ALBERT: I wanted to teach the natives English and how to write.

MIRIAM: I wanted to bring the bible to all the heathens and teach them how to dance.

FLORENCE: Then why don't the both of you go? Dr. Livingston could use a little help, I'm sure.

MIRIAM: I'm sure Bertie could find better things to do than roam the jungle with me.

COLONEL: I wouldn't mind roaming the...

FLORENCE: Colonel! *(To Miriam)* That's nonsense! You two belong together. I noticed that the first time you two gazed upon each other...and it wasn't just a how-do-you-do.

ALBERT: You're very kind, Florence, but Miriam would be better off without me.

FLORENCE: More nonsense.

EDDIE: My eyesight may not be the best, and I can live with that; but my hearing makes up for it, and it sounds more like you're running away from something rather than accepting what is.

CLAIRE: Very observant. What are you running from, Bertie?

ALBERT: I'm not running away / from anything.

CLAIRE: Bertie. You expect us all to believe that? The rest of us have been honest.

Why aren't you being...

ALBERT: *(Pausing)* I don't know. *(Pause)* Maybe it's my insecurity...or maybe...

FLORENCE: Maybe, maybe, maybe. If coming out to Hollywood was a risk, how much worse could the Jungles of Africa be?

MIRIAM: Bertie, why not? What have we got to lose... a room at the Wayfarer Boarding House?

COLONEL: Go for it, son. And while you're at it, give my best to the Zulus when you see them.

-77-

The doorbell rings.

FLORENCE: Who the hell could that be? *(Answering it.)* Yes? *(Pause)* Thank You. *(Closing the door she returns with a telegram.)*

MIRIAM: Who was it?

FLORENCE: Western Union. It's addressed to Otto Deutchmann. *(Handing Otto the telegram)*

OTTO: *(He opens it reading in disbelief...)* I don't believe it.

BERTHA: What does it say? **CLAIRE:** Who's it from?

OTTO: It's from Keystone Studios.

CLAIRE: Keystone / Studios!!!!

BERTHA: Never heard of them.

Everyone except Lorenzo speaks simultaneously. "Come on, read it!" and "Don't keep it a secret!, What's it say?"

OTTO: I will. I will.

LORENZO: It's a-someone a-playing a joke.

EDDIE: Or about to throw us out of Hollywood.

FLORENCE: QUIET!!! Mr. Doleman, what does it say?

All remain extremely quiet as they lean in.

OTTO: Saw show. STOP.

FLORENCE: That's good. Very positive!

OTTO: Found it hilarious and unconventional. STOP.

EDDIE: I didn't know it was a comedy.

BERTHA: Does it say anything else?

OTTO: (*Looking up*) Must talk. STOP. M. Sennett.

-78-

ALBERT: That's it?

CLAIRE: M. Sennett? You mean Mack Sennett? (*Grabbing the telegram from Otto*)

MIRIAM: Who is Mack Sennett?

BERTHA: How do we even know it's a he? M could be Mary or Madeline or Matilda or...

EDDIE: Bertha's right. Come to think of it, I did notice a woman who looked somewhat questionable.

LORENZO: I a-noticed her a-too.

MIRIAM: Who is she?

CLAIRE: It's a he. M. Sennet is a he...a very important he...one of the biggest Hollywood film producers in the business!

Suddenly the mood quickly changes.

FLORENCE: When? When does he want to talk?

OTTO: Tomorrow.

Everyone is excited.

LORENZO: It was a-only a matter of a-time. I am a-ready for my a-close-up Herr Director!

COLONEL: You egotistical, greasy Son-of-a....

FLORENCE: *(Quickly interrupting)* This calls for a toast. *(She begins to fill the glasses with lemonade as the Colonel reaches for the whiskey.)*

Miriam parts from the others...standing alone.

ALBERT: *(Crossing to her.)* A penny for your thoughts? *(She gives a forced smile.)* So now what?

MIRIAM: What do you mean?

ALBERT: You have a decision to make. It's either Hollywood or Africa.

-79-

MIRIAM: You have the same decision.

ALBERT: Not really. There's little need for me in this business. I was foolish to think there ever was. Jotting down a few sentences is mindless. Any idiot can do that.

MIRIAM: That's not true. You just heard Mr. Dolemann. Keystone pictures are interested and...

ALBERT: ...and what?

MIRIAM: ...and before you know it, someone will discover a way of making talking pictures and they'll be looking for good writers like you.

ALBERT: I write captions, and rather poor ones at that. Not dialogue.

MIRIAM: Now you're being silly, you silly goose.

ALBERT: Am I? Miriam, I'm not cut out for Hollywood. Can't you see that?

MIRIAM: Of course you are, Bertie. This M. Sennett thought the film was very funny and you were a big part in making it. Don't short change yourself. *(Kissing him on the cheek)* Thank you for being a part of my dream and making it come true. *(She crosses back to the others while Bertie remains alone.)*

FLORENCE: A toast to "The Spy Without a Cause".

OTTO: And Keystone Studios.

ALL: And Keystone Studios!

They all raise their glasses and drink.

CLAIRE: *(Noticing Albert alone, she crosses to him with a filled glass)* You may think that my predicting the future is pure poppycock. Well it is, but when it comes to recognizing talent, I'm honest and sincere. And I see talent in you, Bertie. All you need is a break and refinement. And furthermore, I have a good sense of recognizing one's personal feelings toward another, especially loving ones; and our Maid Miriam has it for her Robin Hood and vice versa. I'm right and you know it. Besides, who's going to protect her from those wretched varmints pursuing innocent damsels in "The Business"? Bertie, you have everything to lose and nothing to gain if you leave now. A dream made in heaven passes by only once in a lifetime. Think about it. And as for your

-80-

career...it's either Hollywood or Africa or back to Sears. *(She hands him her glass lemonade and returns to the others.)*

After some thought Albert crosses to the others.

ALBERT: *(Joining in)* I would like to make a toast. "The Spy Without a Cause", a movie of intrigue and imagination...brought to life by all those who were passionate in fulfilling their dream.

EVERYONE: Here! Here!

FLORENCE: And a thank you to Mary Pickford and "Poor Little Rich Girl."

EVERYONE: Here! Here!

*From the back of the theatre we hear a voice shouting "AAAAAAND CUT!!!!!"
The director approaches the stage carrying a megaphone followed by a woman carrying a script and pencil.*

THE DIRECTOR: That's a wrap. Great job everyone! Great job!

SCRIPT GIRL: Great job everyone. And make sure you hang up your costumes properly. You don't want wardrobe on your backs. No pun intended.

All the actors add lib about the shoot as they slowly leave the stage for their make-up rooms.

THE DIRECTOR: See you all at the premiere. *(He hands his megaphone to his Script Girl. She exits leaving the Director standing alone.)* Frank! Frank Weston! Is my car ready?

FRANK: Yes, it is Mr. DeMille.

THE DIRECTOR: Good. I have an important meeting with Tallulah in half an hour. If I'm late, she'll crucify me. (*Looking up into the rafters*) Oh! And Mike, don't forget to kill the lights. Electricity costs money. (*The director looks around feeling success; then exits the stage. There is a brief moment when the stage is empty of life....then blackout. We hear a loud thud made by the heavy, thick studio door as it slams shut.*)

CURTAIN

PROPS

ACT I

Scene 1

Suitcase - Miriam

Purse - Miriam

*Note: Miriam should have a purse every time she leaves or enters the Boardinghouse

Glass of Water - Colonel

Tray with 2 glasses of Lemonade - Florence and cookies

Suitcase - Albert

Empty Glass - Miriam

Scene 2

Butcher Knife - Claire

2 Glasses of Water - Albert

1 Glass of Ice Water - Albert

Scene 3

Cup of Coffee - Colonel

Newspaper - Colonel

Flask of Whiskey - Colonel

Telegram - Colonel

Glass of Water - Miriam

Bag of Groceries - Florence

Scene 4

Buffet & Breakfast Set-up:

Plates, Silverware, Cups and Saucers
Sugar and Creamer, Bowl of Fruit
Cloth Napkins, Juice Glasses
Glass of Juice & Toast - Florence
Cloth Napkin & Bowl of Cornflakes - Colonel
Letter for Mailman - Florence

Scene 5

Sword - Colonel

ACT II

Scene 1

Foreign Flag & Flag Stand
Movie Camera
Movie Light Pole
Megaphone
Clapboard
Director's Chair
Handbag - Bertha
Charcoal Writing Utensil
Prompt Book & Pencil - Bertha
Mop - Florence
Bucket - Florence
Dust Rag - Florence
Riding Crop - Otto
Wooden Spoon - Bertha
2 Rolling Pins - Bertha
* Different colored handles
Powder Puff - Claire
Sword - Colonel

Scene 2

Sign: "Congratulations"
Tray of Sandwiches
Large Bowl of Fruit
9 Glasses on Buffet
Large Spread of Food
Necklace & Earrings - Florence
Pitcher of Lemonade
Bottle of Scotch - Florence
Telegram - Otto

Flask - Colonel
2nd Megaphone - Director
2nd Prompt Script & Pencil - Script Girl

SOUND EFFECTS

Act I

Page 2: Doorbell (*Twice*) **Note:** The sound is made by turning a knob in the door. 1920 vintage.
Pause between rings.

Page 9: Doorbell

Page 10: Doorbell

Page 28: Doorbell (*Twice*) **Note:** Pause between rings.

Act II

Page 43: Doorbell (*Three Times*)

Page 54: Loud crash in kitchen: Pots and Pans
Loud Thud: Body of Lorenzo is hit by door.

Page 62: Phone ringing: early 1900s Candlestick design

Page 77: Doorbell

Page 80: Loud Thud made by Large, heavy, thick Film Studio Door slamming shut

