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SF PERUSALS

# Sing On!

## A Comedy about a Musical

by Rick Abbot

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
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**NOTE ON MUSIC:** A piano vocal score is available upon receipt of a $25.00 refundable deposit, and a music rental fee of $25.00, plus postage. These fees must be paid for at the time of ordering the music.

## SPECIAL FOREWORD

Although *Sing On*! is a sequel to that perennially popular play *Play On*!, the author has taken great pains to create this show in such a fashion that groups who have *not* done *Play On*! (if there *are* any groups who have not done that incredibly ubiquitous comedy) can still perform the sequel with equanimity, in the secure certainty that the new show can "stand on its own feet" as a unique entity. However, your author recommends highly that your regular patrons, after enjoying this sequel, might end up with a somewhat "time-warped" feeling if the success of this sequel with them encourages you to *then* do the preceding play, and so it *might* be better to do them *in order* for the optimum audience-enjoyment. Still and all, the two shows will "work" just splendidly, no matter in *which* order you decide to do them. And yet—*developments* among the roles (such as the tentative blossoming of First Romance between Billy and Violet in the original play resulting in Happy Marriage between them by the time of the follow-up play) somehow—to your author's inclinations, at least—make doing the shows in their actual sequence-of-existence a bit more soul-satisfying and logical. But—suit yourself. If you want to do this show without ever having done its predecessor, go ahead. It will be no less hilarious.

Rick Abbot

## CHARACTERS

GERALDINE "GERRY" DUNBAR, a community theatre director
AGGIE MANVILLE, a stage manager, prompter and pianist
LOUISE PEARY, a backstage maid-of-all-work
HENRY BENISH, a middle-aged actor, the spouse of
POLLY BENISH, a middle-aged actress on the plump side
MARLA "SMITTY" SMITH, an eager ingenue in her early twenties
SAUL WATSON, an almost-middle-aged actor
BILL CAREWE, an actor in his mid-twenties
VIOLET [nee IMBRY] CAREWE, Bill's wife
PHYLLIS MONTAGUE, a local amateur playwright
MONTE MONTAGUE, Phyllis's nephew, a hobbyist songwriter

**TIME:** The present
**LOCALE:** The stage of a community theatre

## ACT I

A multi-scened montage of rehearsals

## ACT II

Opening Night of the Montagues' co-created musical

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*SCENE: [NOTE: Because of the multiplicity of scenes in which the sets are slowly created and installed onstage, a Set-Design* series *of drawings would be a bulky mess, so you will not find one in this script. But suffice it to say that the ultimate set will be a Throne Room of suitable majesty (casements, archways rather than doors, a centered royal throne on an imposing dais more-or-less upstage center, and shields, banners, spears, swords-and-the-like suitably arrayed on the various wall-spaces). The stunning magnificence, or woeful lack of it (thanks to "make-do" artifacts/construction) is entirely up to your personal inclination; the way this show turns out, nothing in the world could distract the audience from what's happening onstage.]*

*AT RISE: We find the usual helter-skelter vista of a bare stage (a ladder here, a workbench there, a rack of costumes in need of dusting, etc.), with several folding chairs opened and raggedly lined in center-stage area to face the auditorium. POLLY and HENRY are seated near the center of this grouping, and GERRY is standing facing them from the general center-left area. We find them all in mid-discussion:*

POLLY. Really, Gerry, can't you even give us a *hint* of some kind?

GERRY. I guess I *could,* Polly—but that would start a discussion, and I'd have to keep backtracking to Square One for each newcomer. I'd rather wait till *everyone's* arrived.

HENRY. But it's all so *mysterious,* Gerry. This time of year, there'd normally be an audition-call out for the new show—but there's been *nothing.* (*Turns to POLLY.*) Unless we got a flyer you forgot to tell me about?

POLLY. Have I *ever* neglected to keep you posted on *theatre*-doings, Henry?

HENRY (*Logically.*) How would I have any way of *knowing* if you had?

GERRY. Trust me, Henry, there *was* no flyer. This is a rather—*special* sort of show.

POLLY. Without *open* auditions? Why?

HENRY. Yes, we've never done a show with *pre*-casting of the roles ... is that what *this* is?

GERRY. Honestly—please—I'd rather wait until *everybody* gets here. Then, I promise—

POLLY. But how many are *coming*?

HENRY. And how long do you plan to *wait* for everybody?

POLLY. If there are any no-shows, we could be waiting here all night!

GERRY. Just a few more minutes. I'm sure they'll all come. I said eight o'clock, and it's just barely two minutes past, and the people I asked are usually punctual—(*Pauses, listening toward left.*) Oh, good, I think I hear somebody *now* ...

*(AGGIE enters L, stops.)*

AGGIE. Oh, good, you haven't told them yet.

HENRY. Why, Aggie, how could you possibly know that?

AGGIE. You're still *here.*

GERRY. Aggie, please, this is going to be tough enough, without—

POLLY. What is?

HENRY. This is worse than mysterious. It's starting to feel *ominous.*

GERRY. That's nonsense, Henry. Aggie, why don't you sit down and relax.

AGGIE. (*Has moved D near L proscenium, now lounges against it.*) Uh-uh. When they attack, I want to be on my feet near the exit.

POLLY. (*Stands.*) Now, really, Gerry, I must *insist* that you inform us why—(*Pauses as LOUISE enters L and remains just U of AGGIE.*)

LOUISE. Oh, good, she hasn't *told* you yet! I was afraid I'd miss all the fun.

HENRY. What fun, Louise? What is going *on* here?

LOUISE. I just want to see the expressions on your faces when Gerry drops her bombshell.

POLLY. Gerry, this isn't fair! If Aggie and Louise already know what's going on, why—?

GERRY. (*With an impatient scowl at the newcomers.*) Polly, it's not the same thing. Aggie and Louise work as *individuals* during a show. The cast is something else again. I want to tell our actors as a *group.*

HENRY. Polly, I think I understand what Gerry's getting at. Come on, sit down—(*She will do so, with some reluctance, as he finishes:*) —and let's wait for the

others. It can't be anything really *dreadful* if Aggie and Louise are here. I mean, they *know* whatever it is, and they still showed up.

POLLY. (*Mostly mollified.*) I *suppose* you're right, dear.

GERRY. Of course he is. And as soon as the others—oh, here they are, now!

*(SAUL and SMITTY enter L, stop, look from twosome at proscenium to twosome on chairs, then at GERRY.)*

SAUL. Is there anything wrong?

SMITTY. Everybody seems so ... tense ...

GERRY. (*Waving them toward chairs.*) Don't be silly. Everything's fine, just fine. Polly and Henry are just imagining all kinds of dire things simply because I held off telling them why we're here.

SAUL. (*As he and SMITTY seat themselves.*) Then this isn't a *casting*-call? I figured, this being the middle of February, it was time to try out for the spring musical.

GERRY. Well, actually, it *is* the reason we're here, in a way ...

POLLY. If that's the case, why ever are you being so mysterious about it?

LOUISE. To put it gently—there's a kind of *glitch.*

HENRY. About the musical?

AGGIE. Not *exactly* a glitch, that might be putting it too strongly ...

GERRY. *No* it's not.

SAUL. What *is* it, we're going to do *The Wiz* and there'll be repercussions if we try doing it in blackface?

GERRY. (*Laughs shortly.*) I only wish it *were* as simple as that!

SMITTY. You mean we *are* doing it in blackface?

LOUISE. We're not *doing The Wiz,* Smitty.

HENRY. But how many other shows *need* players in blackface?

POLLY. (*Helpfully.*) Well, there's *The Green Pastures*—

GERRY. This has nothing to *do* with blackface!

SAUL. Okay, I give up. What *is* the dire problem besetting us, all unbeknownst?

POLLY. Yes, what?

HENRY. Tell us, Gerry!

SMITTY. I'm starting to get all nervous!

LOUISE. Maybe you'd better tell them, Gerry. We've at least got a quorum.

GERRY. Well ... uh ...?

SAUL. Quorum? Who *else* is coming?

GERRY. Just two more. Bill and Violet.

HENRY. *Who*?! You don't mean Billy Carewe and Violet Imbry?

POLLY. Henry, she's not "Imbry" any more since she married Billy.

SAUL. But I thought they moved out of town when Bill got transferred?

AGGIE. He was transferred back two weeks ago.

POLLY. Oh, how marvelous! Why, I haven't seen them since—since—?

HENRY. (*Chuckling in reminiscence.*) Since we did *Phyllis's* play! Remember?

SMITTY. (*A rueful groan.*) Who could forget?!

SAUL. Props that weren't there when they should be, telephones that didn't ring when they should, guns going off without warning—

SMITTY. And the *rewrites*! *That* was the *worst* part! Phyllis showing up with new scenes every day, almost until the show *opened*—!

HENRY. It's no *wonder* none of us could learn our lines properly!

POLLY. Still, we *did* pull it off! The reviews were *quite* gratifying!

SAUL. Only because the reviewers thought the show was *supposed* to be a comedy!

SMITTY. (*Shivers.*) Boy, I never want to go through anything like *that* again ...!

HENRY. Amen!

GERRY. Oh, dear. I was afraid of that.

*(The merriment of the seated group subsides immediately; each member of the group will come slowly to his/her feet as he/she speaks:)*

SAUL. Oh, now, wait a minute—

POLLY. Gerry, you surely don't mean—?

SMITTY. Didn't we all take a solemn *vow* that we'd never *again*—

HENRY. —never in a *million years*—!

LOUISE. Now, wait, it's not so bad as all that—

AGGIE. Sure, a few things went *wrong* last time out, but—

GERRY. We did practically *sellout* business!

SAUL. Holy hell! Then—it's *true*?!

SMITTY. A show by Phyllis Montague?!

POLLY. And it's a *musical*?!

HENRY. (*Starts off L.*) I'd better go warm up the car–!

GERRY. *Wait*! (*HENRY pauses short of exit.*) *Please* hear me out. *Then* make up your minds.

POLLY. (*Re-seating herself.*) Oh, come on, Henry. It's not like there's anything worth watching on *TV* tonight.

SAUL. Or *any* night!

*(OTHERS laugh, and the mood brightens slightly; HENRY will move back to sit beside POLLY, and SAUL and SMITTY will sit again, during:)*

GERRY. Oh, thank you! All of you!

AGGIE. (*Un-leans from proscenium.*) Well, if there's not going to be a lynching, I guess I *will* sit down! (*She and LOUISE find chairs and sit with OTHERS facing GERRY.*)

GERRY. The basic problem, see, is economics.

SAUL. Now, wait, that was the spiel you gave us *last* time we did a Phyllis Montague show. We were getting it royalty-free, and—

GERRY. It's *worse* than that, Saul, *this* time. We might—lose our theatre.

OTHERS. (*Various ad-libs of:*) Oh?/No kidding!/Is it *that* bad? [etc.]

GERRY. Business this season hasn't been exactly ... *brisk*, as you all well know. I think it's partly the national concern about spending money in tight times, combined with so many people preferring to stay *home* for entertainment on TV—

SAUL. Is *that* what they call it?!

GERRY. Anyhow, what it boils down to is that we've just been barely making the *rent* on this place, and our lease just came up for renewal and the rent has gone *up*, and—frankly—we *need* to do this musical. Bad.

SAUL. If *Phyllis* wrote it, I'm sure we *will* do it bad!

POLLY. Stop it, Saul! You *know* what Gerry means. But Gerry, seriously, if we're having box office problems *anyhow*, it seems to me that no matter *what* show we do—

GERRY. You didn't let me finish: *If* we do Phyllis's show ... we get a ten thousand dollar *endowment* for the theatre!

HENRY. I didn't know Phyllis Montague *had* ten thousand dollars!

AGGIE. She *hasn't!*

SAUL. Then *where*—?

LOUISE. If you'd clam up and let Gerry *finish*—!

SMITTY. Sorry, Gerry. Go ahead.

GERRY. Thank you. But just a minute—Louise, could you make us some coffee? I'm still shivering after the drive over here.

LOUISE. (*Will start slow stroll toward R wings.*) Sure enough. I guess I've seen all the funny facial expressions I'm going to. (*Will exit, at her own pace, sometime during:*)

AGGIE. Actually, it's kind of *warm indoors* here. I think my *overcoat* is what's causing the chill after being outside. (Will undo front of overcoat, but keep it on [*NOTE: Except for GERRY, the OTHERS are each garbed—buttoned-up or open—in some sort of winter outer garments].*)

GERRY. I think I took *mine* off too *soon*!

SMITTY. Why *did* you?

GERRY. Psychology, I guess. I thought that if *I* didn't look all bundled up and ready to leave, it might keep everyone *else* around till I'd explained matters.

POLLY. (*Delicately.*) Which you *still* haven't *done*, by the way ...

HENRY. Yes, Gerry—where is this ten thousand dollars *coming* from?

GERRY. Have you heard of an organization called "Bess Boosters"?

SAUL. Has *anybody*?

GERRY. (*Ruefully.*) I know what you mean! But the point is—*Phyllis* has, and they've commissioned *her* to *write* this show!

SAUL. A light begins to dawn! We do Phyllis's show, or we lose ten thousand bucks!

AGGIE. *And* our theatre, Saul.

SAUL. Oh boy. Talk about a rock-and-a-hard-place!

GERRY. Exactly. *However*—knowing how you all feel about the trauma from the *last* show of Phyllis's we did—

SMITTY. And we all prayed it *would* be the last show of hers we did!

GERRY.—I've made certain pre-arrangements with Phyllis. First of all, the script she submits will be the *only* script we're going to use. In other words, *no* rewrites!

POLLY. Well, *that* helps, quite a bit!

GERRY Secondly, I made her *swear* that she will *not* constantly *interrupt* when we're in rehearsals!

SAUL. You mean we might actually get through a scene without her offstage *screams*?

HENRY. It's sounding better all the time!

GERRY. And, *finally*, if we *have* to make certain adjustments for practical reasons, in any of her lines or

stage business, she is to bow to *our* decision, and *not* threaten to take her show *elsewhere*!

SAUL. And she *agreed* to your terms?

GERRY. Amazingly enough—yes. Every one. And do you know *why*...?

SAUL. You were sitting on her chest at the time?

POLLY. Saul! Will you cut out being a cut-up?!

SAUL. How's that again?

POLLY. You know very well what I mean! Gerry, I just had a *marvelous* idea! Why don't we make a mandate that every time Saul interrupts with one of his dumb jokes, he has to pay a fine?

GERRY. Really, Polly—!

SAUL. Gerry, she's only saying that because *she's* almost always the *butt* of my jokes!

HENRY. (*Stands.*) Now, *stop* with the fat-jokes, Saul! It's not Polly's fault she's so—(*Stops short, trying to dredge up a polite term.*) —sort of on the *plump* side!

SAUL. *Sort* of? Henry, if Polly were a murder victim, the chalk-outline around her corpse would be a *circle!*

POLLY. There! Gerry, if we *do* fine Saul every time he says something like that, we'll get the ten thousand dollars from *him* by the end of the show!

GERRY. You know, you've got a *point* there ...

SAUL. Aw, Ger, can't a guy have a little fun? I *love* Polly! It's just that she lays herself *open* to teasing so well!

HENRY. But fat-jokes are unkind, Saul. Polly's weight isn't her fault. She has trouble with her *glands*.

SAUL. Yeah. Her *salivary* glands!

POLLY. That's *two!* What do you say, Gerry? We could make a fortune!

SMITTY. Hold it, *all* of you! We haven't *heard* everything yet. *I* want to know *why* Phyllis agreed to Gerry's terms—*without* Saul's interruptions!

SAUL. Actually, *I'd* like to know the reason, *myself* ...

GERRY. Pure and simple: Phyllis *adores* you people! She told me she'll always *treasure* you, because you all worked so *hard* to do her very first *play*!

HENRY. Gerry, *Phyllis* is the reason it *was* so hard!

LOUISE. (*Re-enters from R, stands there, near R wings.*) Coffee's perking.

GERRY. Good! Now, will you all please let me finish?

LOUISE. Who's *stopping* you?

GERRY. *Everybody*, you included!

LOUISE. *Wow*, what side of the bed did *you* get up on today?! (*Turns, not angrily, re-exits R, on:*) Show business is always such a lark!

GERRY. I'm sorry. I guess I *am* being a bit cranky. I've just been so keyed up with worry, wondering how you'd all *respond* to the situation—

POLLY. Well, we haven't walked out *yet*, have we?

SAUL. Relax, Gerry, you're among friends. Go on about this endowment-thing.

SMITTY. And *please* tell us why, with a zillion playwrights on the planet to choose from, this endowment-group selected *Phyllis* to write this show!

GERRY. The Bess Boosters is run by a committee. They'd already selected a *composer* for the show, and asked *him* to select the playwright. And the composer selected Phyllis because—

SAUL. —he's a nutcake?

OTHERS. SAUL!

SAUL. (*Cringing slightly.*) Sorry.

GERRY. The composer's name is "Monte *Montague*." Does *that* give you a clue?

POLLY. Oh, my.

SMITTY. Wouldn't you know!

HENRY. It's beginning to make sense.

SAUL. You mean we get to cope with *two* Montagues, Gerry? What sort of mandates have you laid on *him*?

GERRY. (*Uneasily.*) Well, actually, I haven't *met* the gentleman yet ...

AGGIE. Phyllis is bringing him by at eight-thirty.

SAUL. (*Looks at wristwatch.*) That gives us five minutes to run for our lives.

GERRY. Now, *stop* that, Saul! He *must* have talent, or the committee wouldn't have *selected* him!

SAUL. (*Reluctantly.*) Well ... I suppose *that's* a point in our favor ... What *is* he, some kind of *relative*?

GERRY. It's my understanding Monte is Phyllis's *nephew*—

SAUL.—who has *just* tiptoed out of the asylum—

POLLY. Now, Saul—!

SAUL. Polly, the man picked *Phyllis* to author his script! He *must* be a lunatic!

HENRY. Saul's got a point, dear.

SMITTY. Say, isn't that *nepotism*? I know it has *something* to do with hiring nephews.

AGGIE. Yeah, but he hired her, Smitty. That makes it—uh—"auntie-tism"? (*When OTHERS stare at her, she rises, on:)* I'll just go help Louise with the coffee. (*Will exit R during:*)

POLLY. What *I'd* like to know is—what in the world is a "Bess Booster"?

GERRY. Ah, that's the interesting part—

SAUL. Finally!

GERRY. You know, Saul, I might *take* Polly's suggestion about cut-up fines ...

SAUL. Oh, all right, all right! (*Slumps down a bit in his chair, arms folded, muttering:*) Bunch o' party-poopers...

GERRY. As I understand it from Phyllis, the Bess Boosters is a group of Anglophiles—

SMITTY. A group of *what*?

SAUL. And *you* a college-girl! Even *I* know *that* term!

SMITTY. Then it's probably something *dirty*!

GERRY. *Smitty*! I'm surprised at you! That kind of crack is more in *Saul's* line.

SAUL. I drive her to rehearsals. I must be contagious.

POLLY. Smitty, I thought you got your driver's license *years* ago!

SMITTY. Oh, I did. The problem is, I can't afford college tuition *and* car payments!

HENRY. Could we get back to *our* economic problems?

GERRY. Thank you, Henry. Anyhow ... this is a group who delights in anything having to do with the *English*.

SAUL. (*To SMITTY.*) *That's* what an Anglophile is.

OTHERS. SAUL!

SAUL. Aw, c'mon, you *can't* fine me for being *instructive*!

GERRY. But we *might* for being *interruptive*!

SAUL. Okay-okay-okay! Onward, onward!

GERRY. Thank you. Now, this *particular* group finds its fascination in that part of British history centering around Queen Elizabeth the First, who was also known as "Good Queen Bess."

POLLY. But why do they call themselves Bess *Boosters*?

GERRY. Well, you see—

*(But ALL now look off L as we hear a merry carol from:)*

PHYLLIS. (*Off.*) *Yoo-hooo*! (*ALL EXCEPT SAUL stiffen in apprehension.*)

SAUL. Hark! It's the cry of The Feather-Headed Dramatist!

*(OTHERS make hasty shushing-noises at him, and he subsides as PHYLLIS enters, with a gentle-looking little man, MONTE, in tow.)*

PHYLLIS. (*Flutteringly, cooingly, expansively.*) Hell*o*, hell*o*, hell*o*! Isn't this all simply *thrilling*?! Together again, after so *many*-many years! How have you all *been*?

SAUL. (*Genially.*) Healing nicely.

GERRY. (*Quickly.*) Phyllis, you timed your arrival perfectly! I was *just* about to explain to the group the *reason* those Bess Boosters *call* themselves that! (*With ill-concealed relief:*) Now *you* can do it! (*Will quickly move to group and take a seat.*)

PHYLLIS. Oh, Geraldine, I should be *delighted* to do so!... Ah, but I'm forgetting my manners! I should like all of you to meet my nephew, Monte, who will be doing the *songs* for our little show! (*Ad-lib murmur of Hi/Howdy/Pleased to meet you/etc. from group.*) And Monte—(*He will formally, almost shyly, nod/bow to each introducee in turn:*)—may I present Geraldine Dunbar, our

delightful director ... (*LOUISE and AGGIE, with paper cups of coffee on a tray, will enter L at this juncture, and stop just onstage, listening.*) Polly Benish, my *special* friend and actress ... Henry Benish, her charming husband ... Marla Smith, a clever young player ... Saul Watson, a fine dramatic actor in *older* roles ...

SAUL. (*Restrains himself from a* direct *retort:*) You would *love* my "King Lear"!

MONTE. (*Erroneously impressed.*) *Ah*?

PHYLLIS. And those ladies with the refreshments are Agnes Manville, a simply *sterling* stage manager ... and Louise Peary, who—um—does something-or-other backstage! (*Delivers this last bit with a pretty little laugh of uncertainty.*)

LOUISE. (*Dryly.*) I keep the *mice* from migrating onstage.

MONTE. (*Genuinely surprised.*) Oh, dear, I didn't know this place was infested with *vermin*!

POLLY. Then you don't know *Saul!*

MONTE. Hmm?

SAUL. Point of order, Gerry! Does this fine-threat work *both* ways?

PHYLLIS. *What* threat...?

HENRY. It's just some in-joke stuff, Phyllis, dear. You *know* how our players like to tease one another!

MONTE. (*Relieved.*) Then there *aren't* any mice—?

GERRY. No-no-no, of course not! Louise is our *tech* person—handles lights, sound-effects, like that.

MONTE. (*To LOUISE.*) You don't mean—manually?

LOUISE. Well, see, I *tried* running the lightboard with my *toes,* but—

GERRY. Louise, *please*...?

MONTE. (*To PHYLLIS, uneasily.*) With her *toes,* Aunt Phyllis?

PHYLLIS. Now-now, Louise was just having her little joke—(*To LOUISE.*) —I *presume...*?

MONTE. But that's so *backward*—!

POLLY. Monte, it was a joke, she *doesn't* run the tech with her toes!

MONTE. Oh, I don't mean that. I mean, even doing it *manually* is so out-of-step these days. In the modern theatre, all that stuff is handled by *computer!*

LOUISE. Gosh-a-mighty, I *am* an oaf! That's what I get for falling off the turnip truck!

GERRY. Louise, will you please pass out the coffee, and *listen* to what Monte's saying?

LOUISE. (*As she and AGGIE start handing out coffee to everybody.*) May as well. But it's kind of sad slipping from theatre technician to waitress!

MONTE. Oh, dear, I haven't made myself clear. I wasn't *firing* you or anything, Louise. I was just suggesting we *get* a computer for the theatre-tech; *you* could be the one *running* it, of course.

GERRY. *Get* one?! Monte, those things cost *money*!

PHYLLIS. But surely, Geraldine, your theatre group *has* money—?

GERRY. (*Almost Telling All.*) If we *had,* would we be doing *your* stup—(*Catches herself, changes words with only a millisecond's hesitation:*)—pendous show in such a *tiny* theatre?!

SAUL. (*Admiringly, blurts:*) Gerry, that's what *I* call a *save!* (*As she glares at him, he corrects swiftly to PHYLLIS.*) The *money,* I mean. The *money* we save. By

having a—um—small theatre. Is what I mean. Meant. About the—

POLLY. (*Before he completely submerges.*) Phyllis, please tell us about the show!

HENRY. Yes, we're all fascinated by the project.

SMITTY. Especially why the Bess Boosters *call* themselves that!

PHYLLIS. (*As any author, is distracted by this from SAUL'S fumbling.*) Oh, it's devastatingly delightful. You see, when Queen Elizabeth reigned, she was, alas, *much* maligned.

SMITTY. Much *what*?

GERRY. She got a lot of Bad Press.

SMITTY. Oh.

SAUL. But didn't she *deserve* it? I mean, anybody who disagreed with her got their *heads* lopped off!

MONTE. Rumors! Ugly rumors! The very sort of rumors that the Bess Boosters was founded in order to set right!

AGGIE. I'm getting a glimmering. What they're trying to boost is the queen's *reputation*?

PHYLLIS. Exactly, Agatha! So many terrible things were said about her—it is the purpose of my little show to *correct* all those unfortunate errors!

LOUISE. But how can you correct historical *fact*, Phyllis? I mean, for instance, we all *know* she ordered Mary, Queen of Scots, put to *death*. *That* wasn't very nice.

PHYLLIS. Ah, but that was all a mistake! She was put to death by *accident*!

SMITTY. What *kind* of accident?

PHYLLIS. Well, Mary *was* Scottish, you know, and one day Elizabeth, who much admired Mary's clothes,

happened to say, "You know, I'd *love* to have her *kilt*!" Well, the palace executioner happened to overhear her, and he misunderstood, and—

SAUL. Phyllis. Is *that* one of the details that comes up in your script?

PHYLLIS. Naturally!

SAUL. The script you've promised *not* to alter?

PHYLLIS. Yes, of course. I gave Geraldine my solemn *vow* that the scripts I am going to pass out to you tonight are to be performed *precisely* as they are now written, and I am *not* going to change a single solitary *word*!

*(ALL sit frozen for about one second; then:)*

SAUL. (*Abruptly leans forward, hands clasped to his chest, on:*) Even if we *beg*?!

GERRY. (*Before PHYLLIS can quite figure this out.*) Say, now, where *are* those scripts, *anyhow*?!

PHYLLIS. Oh, dear, I believe I left them in the car! Monte, would you—?

MONTE. (*Turns and heads L.*) Of course, Auntie Phyllis! (*Exits.*)

PHYLLIS. Are there any other questions while we're waiting?

SMITTY. Yes. Who plays who?

SAUL/POLLY/HENRY. (*In actor-eagerness unison:*) *Yeah*!

PHYLLIS. Well, I thought Polly could play Mary, Queen of Scots—

SAUL. (*Despite himself.*) You're going to cover *that* in *plaid*?!

HENRY. Never mind him, Phyllis. Please go on.

PHYLLIS. And the *key* role, that of Elizabeth *herself,* should be played by a *young* girl. (*SMITTY starts to preen.)* Someone fresh ... vital ... ravishingly beautiful ...

LOUISE. I thought the queen was totally *bald*!

SMITTY. "Bald"?!

LOUISE. *Totally*. Didn't even have *eyebrows*!

SAUL. Thus originating the courtly question, "What *have* you done with your *hair*?"!

PHYLLIS. Do you know—I'll bet you're *right!*

SAUL. You *do*?!

SMITTY. But I thought this was going to be a *romantic* role ...

PHYLLIS. Oh, it's *very* romantic. Consider, for instance, her passionate love affair with Lord Essex! Poor woman. So sad that he died before the two of them could wed.

GERRY. Phyllis, she had him *beheaded*!

PHYLLIS. She did?!

POLLY. That's the way *I* remember it!

SAUL. And *she* was an eyewitness!

POLLY. I *read* it in a *book*!

PHYLLIS. A *false* book! The very kind of book the Bess Boosters are trying to stamp out! And if I can *help* them to do so—

HENRY Ah! It's all coming together! *We* get the grant, and *you* get—?

PHYLLIS. Elected to the Bess Boosters Society! It's *very* exclusive, you know! That's why I was so *thrilled* when Monte told me—(*Stops as MONTE re-enters L with armload of scripts.*) But we're wasting precious time! *Wait* until you see what I've done! Monte—?

MONTE. Of course. Immediately. (*He will pass out scripts to ALL except PHYLLIS, during:)*

SAUL. But just how exactly does this thing *work*, Phyllis? We *do* the show, and you send them a note saying we've *done* it? Or—?

PHYLLIS. Oh, they're *much* more careful than *that*, Saul, otherwise *anybody* could *claim* to have boosted Good Queen Bess, after all! No, we'll have to have *proof*, of course.

GERRY. What proof? Theatre programs?

HENRY. Newspaper write-ups?

POLLY. Reviews?

SMITTY. Notarized affidavits?

AGGIE. Maybe a copy of the script?

PHYLLIS. Agatha, they've already *seen* the script!

MONTE. (*Almost through passing scripts out.*) *And* given it their enthusiastic approval, besides!

LOUISE. So what's *left*?

PHYLLIS. They want to *see* the show, of course!

SAUL. One tiny question: Do we get that ten thousand bucks *before* they see the show, or *afterwards...*?

MONTE. Oh, *before*, of course. What the money is for, in effect, is *payment* to you for putting it on! (*OTHERS EXCEPT PHYLLIS sit back and smile, with soft sighs of relief.*) If you agree to do it, once you've read the script, the money will be wired to your theatre *immediately*!

*(As if by Group Telepathy, the selfsame notion has crossed through the minds of all the little theatre group, and without realizing they look almost choreographed, each in turn rises to his/her feet [unless already standing, of course] on each line:)*

GERRY. Bah!

HENRY. What need to read?

POLLY. If this play is by Phyllis Montague—

SMITTY.—then it *has* to be worth our interest!

SAUL. But then, there never *was* a playwright quite like *you*, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS. (*Ecstatic.*) Why, Saul! I'm *profoundly* grateful!

SAUL. (*Claps a hand atop her shoulder, fondly.*) *Not* as grateful as the Dramatists Guild!

*(Luckily, she takes this as a compliment, and simpers prettily.)*

MONTE. Then you'll *do* the play, sight unseen?

LOUISE. It'd help if they *read** it before doing it.

AGGIE. Makes rehearsing so much easier.

PHYLLIS. Oh, and, Agatha—Louise—? You'll be delighted to know that the *setting* of the show should be almost *effortless* to construct!

GERRY. Just *one* setting? For a *musical*?

SAUL. Say, that *is* a break!

SMITTY. What *is* this set, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS. It's just a single room, Marla. Building the set should be utter simplicity!

LOUISE. Now, that's more like it!

AGGIE. What kind of room did you have in mind?

PHYLLIS. (*Rapturously.*) The Throne Room at Buckingham Palace!

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*Past tense: "red," not "reed."

SAUL. (*As the jaws of AGGIE and LOUISE drop in horrified unison.*) Look on the bright side: You'll only need one chair!

POLLY. But Phyllis—do you think a *musical* is the proper format for *this* sort of saga?

PHYLLIS. Why *not*? Elizabeth's *father* was a songwriter!

LOUISE. Henry the Eighth?! What did *he* write?

MONTE. *Greensleeves*, among others.

AGGIE. *I* didn't know that!

HENRY. (*Who's been paging through his script.*) Phyllis—what's a *scop*?

PHYLLIS. Oh, that's a sort of medieval minstrel, Henry.

SMITTY. (*Similarly.*) Hey, *here's* a weird one! Anybody know what an *estoc* is?

MONTE. That's a sort of hand-weapon from the Middle Ages—something like a sword.

POLLY. (*Similarly.*) Here's *another* stumper! What in the world is a *baldric*?

PHYLLIS. Let me think ... ah! That's a kind of *belt* they used to wear, when knights were bold, in order to have someplace to carry their weapons!

GERRY. (*Very uneasy.*) Phyllis, are you sure you should be using words the audience isn't likely to be *familiar* with? I mean, how will they know what the people are *talking* about?

PHYLLIS. Oh, I'm certain that anyone of intelligence will be able to figure the words out from their *context*. The meaning should be *perfectly* plain!

SAUL. (*Glumly.*) Yeah, about as plain as the *estoc* in a *scop*'s *baldric*!

MONTE. (*Slaps SAUL amiably on the back.*) There! I *knew* you'd catch on swiftly! (*SAUL just stares at him.*)

PHYLLIS. Besides, Geraldine, I'm *certain* the Bess Boosters will have *no* trouble understanding the language of the times, so where's the problem?

GERRY. Your theory is fine for the performance *they* attend, but what about all our *regular* customers at *subsequent* performances?

MONTE. You mean you'll be doing the show more than *once*?

AGGIE. We *have* to! That ten thousand bucks isn't going to last *forever*, you know!

SAUL. And business has been sparse *enough* lately without our alienating our patrons even *further*!

POLLY. We might lose our patrons to *other* theatres!

HENRY. Even to *television*!

MONTE. But I'm not sure I could stay *on* for an *extended* run of the show ...

SMITTY. You wouldn't *have* to, Monte. Matter of fact, once you turn your songs over to us, you could turn right around and go home *tonight*!

MONTE. But—I'm the *music* director!

GERRY. You are?!

PHYLLIS. That's why the Bess Boosters paid his way *here*, Geraldine. Otherwise, he could have simply *mailed* the score to you.

AGGIE. What's all the fuss about? Once Monte *has* musically-directed the show, there's no *need* for him to stick around.

PHYLLIS. But *Monte* is playing the Spanish Ambassador!

MONTE. (*Aghast.*) I *am*?

PHYLLIS. You won't be directing music *all* the time, dear! Now, don't pout! After all, if *Geraldine* is going to direct the *acting* part, and *she* doesn't mind playing a part, besides—

GERRY. *Whoa,* Nelly! Who *says* I don't mind?

PHYLLIS. But my dear, you *must*! The queen needs *all* the ladies-in-waiting possible, and I *truly* don't want my script in the hands of *strangers*! I was free to select *any* theatre company to do this show—but you all were so *splendid* about doing my *first* play that I couldn't *dream* of letting that endowment go elsewhere! Because, in case I never mentioned it before—I *love* you, one and all, so *very* much...!

SAUL. (*Helplessly abashed.*) Boy, talk about a *guilt* trip!

MONTE. I suppose I *could* look Spanish with the proper makeup ...

GERRY. And a lady-in-waiting doesn't have *too* many lines, I'd imagine ...

PHYLLIS. Oh, good! Then it's settled!

GERRY. Not quite! Phyllis, those *scops* and *baldrics* have *got* to go!

PHYLLIS. But you made me give my solemn word I *wouldn't* do rewrites...?!

GERRY. (*Gently.*) Phyllis, there's no problem with your fixing the script at the *start* of rehearsals.

POLLY. What bugged us *last* time was that you were still rewriting the play all the way up to dress rehearsal!

LOUISE. Not to mention the fact that the Middle Ages were over *long* before Elizabeth took the throne. She probably never saw a single *scop* in her *life!*

SAUL. (*Who's been leafing curiously through his script.*) Hey, what's this bit about William Shakespeare's knighthood?

HENRY. I didn't know he'd *been* knighted—you never hear "*Sir* William Shakespeare ..."

SMITTY. It *is* kind of *odd*, come to think of it. He was a favorite at court, and Elizabeth kind of *liked* him. Why *didn't* he ever get knighted?

AGGIE. Maybe he flunked out of Knight School!

GERRY. It *is* a mystery, that's for sure!

SAUL. (*Taps script.*) Not any *more*! Phyllis has *solved* the mystery *beautifully*! Nice job, Phyl!

HENRY. Which one of us *plays* Shakespeare?

SAUL. *I* do!

POLLY. No *wonder* Saul was so enthused!

SAUL. Though it seems to be a rather *short* part ...

PHYLLIS. Oh, don't worry about *that*, Saul, you're *also* playing Sir Walter Raleigh!

SAUL. (*Elated.*) *Really*?

SMITTY No, *Raleigh*!

MONTE. (*Moves over to her.*) I *like* a girl with a sense of humor!

LOUISE. *That* was *humor*?

SAUL. (*Who's been looking in script again.*) Hold it! Phyllis, how can I play Raleigh when he makes his entrance right after *Shakespeare* exits?

PHYLLIS. It's a *very* simple device, Saul. As Shakespeare, you wear a high-forehead *wig*, with longish hair hanging down in back, whereas as *Raleigh*, you wear an elegant long *cloak*, and a jaunty cap with a large feathered plume. All you have to do is step offstage, whip

off the wig, don the hat and cloak, and come right on again.

SAUL. Well, I *guess* it could be managed ... I'll have to work on it.

GERRY. *Speaking* of work, I think we should all do a read-through of the play, right away.

POLLY. *Great* idea! And I especially want to hear my *songs*!

HENRY. That reminds me—I can carry a *tune* all right, but as for being a good *singer* ...

PHYLLIS. Now-now, don't worry about that, *any* of you! Just learn the lyrics, and the sheer *pageantry* will take care of the rest. After all, there's no reason to suppose the *Elizabethans* were particularly good singers, so—

MONTE. Oh, Auntie Phyllis, I seem to have one script left over, the one for Lord Essex.

PHYLLIS. Only *one*? You should have *two*. I counted them *most* carefully. One for Lord Essex, and another for *Elizabeth*—

SMITTY. (*Waves script.*) I've already *got* it, Phyllis, see?

PHYLLIS. Ah, *there's* the mistake! (*Takes script back from a shattered SMITTY.*) You don't *need* a *script*. You'll be playing a non-speaking part.

SMITTY. *What*? But—you said the Queen of England should be played by somebody *young*—fresh—vital—who *else* could do the part?!

PHYLLIS. Why ... *Violet*, of course! She was so *devastating* as Lady Diana in my *first* play! One could have *sworn* she was of royal blood!

SMITTY. That was a *part*! *I* could've looked royal if you hadn't had me playing the *maid!* Just what *do* I play in this show?!

PHYLLIS. A very *elegant* part, Marla. You will be one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting!

SAUL. That's Elizabethan for "maid"!

SMITTY. Of all the rotten—!

PHYLLIS. (*Hugs script to her breast.*) My decision is *final*, Marla! There is *no* way you could *possibly* play a queen!

MONTE. By the way, where *is* this Violet you told me about?

GERRY. She and Bill are on their way, I'm sure. Bill had to work a little late, tonight, but he promised they'd be here before nine.

SAUL. (*Consults wristwatch.*) It's almost that, now.

BILL. (*Off.*) Hello! Anybody *here?*

PHYLLIS. Ah, they've arrived! (*To SMITTY.*) And that's another thing, Marla—since Billy and Violet have *wed*, in *real* life, I've naturally assigned *him* the role of Lord Essex!

MONTE. That's this *last* script I've got.

SMITTY. But I'm *sure*, if you'd just let me *try* for the part, that I could convince you—

PHYLLIS. I'm sorry, but *no*, Marla! There is no *possible* way I could permit such a *vital* role to pass into unqualified hands! Violet is the *only* one I would entrust with the part of the renowned Virgin Queen of England!

*(Then BILL and VIOLET enter, L, and stop; VIOLET is obviously at least ten months pregnant.)*

BILL. Hi there, everybody!

*(There is a silence; then PHYLLIS sags, turns to SMITTY, and hands her the script; and as SMITTY clutches it to her heart in triumph—)*

**BLACKOUT**

**End of Scene 1**

*[NOTE: The longest any blackout in this show should last is five seconds, tops. Don't worry; blocking and costuming, etc., have all been taken into consideration so that your players should have no trouble being in their new spots (or offstage, as the occasion demands) by the time the lights come up full again. What we are going for, here, is a montage effect as one swift scene follows another, so that the passage of time will be conveyed to the audience without frazzling the cast. Five seconds is ample time for your players to step on or off the stage, don or doff a garment, move or remove a chair, etc., in time for lights-up. Trust me.]*

**ACT I**

**Scene 2**

*SCENE: During blackout, overcoats and other outer-wear have gone offstage, and won't be seen again unless specified. Players will be in their casual clothing for*

*rehearsals (except when trying costumes, of course), but MONTE and PHYLLIS will look fairly dressy almost all the time. Chairs have been slightly shifted; they're all onstage, still, but one is in a Stage Center position (representing the throne), and the rest are off to one side and the other, as seating for onlookers who are not in whatever portion of the play is being rehearsed.*

*AT RISE: SMITTY is seated on center chair, BILL stands just to her right, facing her, PHYLLIS is standing to her left and slightly behind her, in a passing-on-vital-info pose, and SAUL is lounging on one of the chairs LC, legs stretched out, arms folded, observing. It is still early in rehearsals, so the performers, GERRY, and AGGIE, will usually have a script in hand or at least handy. Right now, SMITTY's script is open in her lap, and PHYLLIS is pointing out a passage.*

PHYLLIS. Now, Marla, pay *close* attention! This is the lovely little scene where Lord Essex, trying to patch up their differences, and to allay Elizabeth's anger, gives her a little *pot*—

SAUL. I'll bet *that* mellows her out!

PHYLLIS. (*Straightens, gives him icy stare, and, as AGGIE strolls on from L.*:) I am *talking* about the pot in which he has grown this lovely little *gillyflower!*

AGGIE. Hey, that reminds me, Phyllis. What *is* a gillyflower, and—more importantly—where can I *get* one?

BILL. Wouldn't *any* flower do?

AGGIE. Not a *Rafflesia!*

SMITTY. Why not?

AGGIE. The blossom's three feet across and the petals are one inch thick.

SMITTY. A *rose* would be nice. I think roses are romantic.

PHYLLIS. Oh, no, we mustn't chance that. The British used to fight *battles* over roses, the Lancasters versus the Yorks, one red, one white, and I'm not sure which faction Elizabeth favored.

SAUL. It'd hardly raise a *ruckus,* Phyllis. And it's nowhere *near* as bad as putting Elizabeth in the wrong throne room! I mean, *you* had her in Buckingham Palace a century before it was *built!*

AGGIE. (*Shrugs.*) Hardly a big deal, Saul. We just change the program to read *"Windsor Castle"* and we're home free.

PHYLLIS. I trust, Agatha, that you and Louise made the necessary readjustments in your plans for the stage setting?

AGGIE. (*Of course they didn't, but why make waves?*) Uh. Oh. Yeah, sure, sure, Phyllis. No problem. But before I start building it—(*Starts L.*)—*I've* got to use the *bathroom!*

SAUL. You'll have to wait your *turn* ...

AGGIE. (*Halts.*) Is *Violet* in there *again*?

SAUL. Well, Violet's been *eating* for two, and *drinking* for two, so it stands to reason, right *now* (*GERRY strolls on from L during:*) Violet's probably—

GERRY. Saul!

PHYLLIS. Probably *what*?

SAUL. Never mind.

BILL. Phyllis, can't Smitty and I just get *on* with the scene?

PHYLLIS. But knowing the *subtext* of what you're doing is *so* important!

GERRY. Phyllis, are you coaching *again*? I thought we decided *Violet* would do that?

PHYLLIS. But Violet's in the ladies room.

AGGIE. (*A small groan to GERRY.*) *Again*!

SAUL. We should build a couple more—we could have Men's, Women's and Violet's!

GERRY. (*Sternly.*) Saul, I suppose, from your merry banter, that you've learned *all* your lines?

SAUL. (*Straightens up in chair, fast.*) Uh, not quite, no. (*Quickly opens his script.*) But I'll get them, I'll get them.

GERRY. See that you do.

PHYLLIS. Geraldine, as long as time is of the essence, don't you think I might *continue*, at least till Violet returns?

GERRY. Oh ... I guess it can't do any harm.

PHYLLIS. Oh, good! Now, Marla, where were we?

SMITTY. Talking about that flower-thing. But I have a question.

PHYLLIS. Yes, dear?

SMITTY. If Elizabeth wasn't a Lancaster or a York, what *was* she?

PHYLLIS. A *Tudor!*

SMITTY. You mean, like a *sedan*?

SAUL. You're thinking of The Hatchback of Notre Dame!

GERRY. (*Warningly.*) Saulllll ...

SAUL. (*Buries head in script again.*) I'm *learning*, I'm *learning*!

BILL. Say, Phyllis, *I* have a question—isn't a potted plant as a gift for a *queen* kind of—oh—*chintzy*?

PHYLLIS. You must understand, William, that at this particular period of history, Queen Elizabeth was probably the wealthiest woman in the world. She had gold, silver, jewelry, costly gowns. So what *Essex* wanted to do was give her something that he was sure she *didn't* have, like a simple *flower*—

SAUL. Or a bottle of *hair*-restorer!

OTHERS. SAUL!

SAUL. Oh, okay, okay! (*Glumly returns to his script-studying as VIOLET enters from L.*)

AGGIE. *Finally*! (*Will half-gallop across and off L.*)

VIOLET. (*Strolling toward GERRY.*) How's Louise doing with the computer?

GERRY. (*Thumbs back R over her shoulder.*) Monte's explaining it to her. It's pretty tricky.

VIOLET. Darn nice of him to get us that loaner for the run of the show.

GERRY. Yeah, but I hope it doesn't *spoil* us, when we have to go back to *manual* tech.

VIOLET. (*By now has halted with GERRY in RC area.*) I doubt it. I don't completely *trust* computers.

GERRY. Who does? They're fast, but they're stupid.

PHYLLIS. Excuse me—I don't like to interrupt, but—should I go *on* while you're chatting, or is Violet ready to take over as coach?

VIOLET. I'm not sure. I mean, I can help people with their *lines* all right, but all this historical *background* is a complete *mystery* to me!

SMITTY. Same here!

PHYLLIS. But Marla, don't you know *anything* about those glorious days when England first became the "Mistress of the Seas"?

SMITTY. I suppose I would if I was majoring in history—but I wanted to major in math.

SAUL. (*Shrugs.*) Go figure! (*Then instantly, even as GERRY starts to open her mouth.*) I'm *studying,* okay? Guy's got to take a break *once* in a while...!

BILL. Look, can we cut all the discussion and *rehearse*? I've gotta get up for *work* in the morning!

SMITTY. It never bothered you when you were in *school,* Bill. You used to rehearse till *all* hours.

BILL. Smitty, I didn't get *paid* for going to school! And I've got a *wife* to support, and a *baby* on the way, and if I try napping in the *office* like I used to do in class—!

GERRY. Bill's right, let's get this thing moving! (*Opens her script.*) Where are we at?

BILL. That flower-bit.

PHYLLIS. (*Still hovering over SMITTY.*) Now, as we go along, I'll try to *explain* to you the *significance* of—

SMITTY. (*To GERRY, desperately.*) Does she *have* to?

GERRY. Phyllis, please, *not* while we're trying to get the scene run, okay—?

PHYLLIS. Certainly, Gerry. I'll just go and see if I can assist Monte and Louise! (*Trots off L and doesn't hear:*)

SAUL. Heaven help them.

GERRY. (*Too much in agreement to pounce on him.*) You can say *that* again! (*As he opens his mouth:*) But *don't!* ... Now, come on, guys, let's get this scene done!

BILL. Where from?

GERRY. (*Scanning script.*) Uh ... your entrance. Good a spot as any.

BILL. Right! (*Looks about uncertainly.*) Where's the *door*, anyhow?

GERRY. Let me think—Aggie showed me the sketch of the set—ah! *I* remember. Roughly upstage right. (*As BILL moves to that point and then turns:*) I don't suppose either of you can do this thing *off book*—? (*When SMITTY and BILL just stare at her:*) No, I didn't think so. Okay, get set—go!

BILL. (*Gets into character, then moves down till he's R of throne.*) "Gracious Majesty—!"

GERRY. Hold it!

BILL. Already?!

GERRY. Bill, this is the land's reigning monarch! It's customary—if you valued your *life* in those days—to move down in *front* of the throne and drop down on one *knee!*

BILL. But that'll put my *back* to the audience!

SAUL. Maybe more than *that* when you genuflect in *tights*!

GERRY. (*Gently but seriously.*) Shut up, Saul. Bill, you can turn your profile to the audience *after* you make your obeisance!

SMITTY. His *what*?

GERRY. Sorry. That was a Phyllis-word. I've got to stop *listening* to that woman! I mean, after you genuflect.

BILL. But won't that look awkward? From an *actor's* point of view—

SAUL. *You*?!

GERRY. Saul—!

SAUL. Aw, c'mon, Ger, I can't study lines with all this *gabbing* going on, *can* I?

BILL. Maybe if we *raked* the throne a bit, sort of angled it to face downstage right, then I could do the genuflection and *still* be seen—

SAUL. Sounds okay to *me*, Ger.

VIOLET. Me, too.

SAUL. About *time* you spoke up, Vi. I was beginning to think you were in a coma.

VIOLET. The baby was kicking.

GERRY. But we *can't* rake the throne, for two very good reasons: First, Louise and Aggie are already building the *throne room*, and if we move the *throne*, they'll have to re-design the *walls*!

BILL. Oh.

VIOLET. What's the *other* reason?

GERRY. Acoustics. We have to have the *piano* onstage, if we want the audience to *hear* it, and the dais for the throne's the only item big enough to *hide* it! If we rake it, the audience will see *Aggie*, sheet music and all!

SAUL. Hey, wait a minute! (*Stands, sets script aside.*) If Aggie's out *here, with* us, playing the piano, who are we using for *prompter*?

GERRY. It's *all* been worked out, Saul. She'll have her *script* with her, *too*, right on the music rack. Matter of fact, she says prompting from the *middle* of the stage is a *damn* sight easier than trying to whisper cues and lines from the *wings!*

BILL. Excuse me—

GERRY. What?

BILL. Could we *please* get this stupid *rehearsal* going?!

*(PHYLLIS reenters from R, during:)*

GERRY. Yes, yes, of course! Why don't you go back to your entrance-position, and—

PHYLLIS. But are you *certain* you have all the *nuances* straight?

BILL. (*Moving to position.*) Can't we run it with *crooked* nuances? It's *only* a *rehearsal*!

GERRY. Bill's right, Phyllis. Let's *block* the thing first, *then* do the polishing!

PHYLLIS. I *just* wanted them in the proper *mood*, Geraldine, with Lord Essex staunchly concealing his *rage*—

BILL. *Boy*, am I in the proper mood!

PHYLLIS. —and Elizabeth numbly facing the prospect of a long and lonely reign!

SMITTY. By the way, how long *did* Elizabeth reign?

BILL. (*Losing it.*) *Forty days and forty nights*!

VIOLET. Bill, darling, *please* don't lose your temper, the *baby* will hear! (*Starts moving off R, speaking gently toward her protrusion:*) Daddy didn't mean it, dearest. He was just play-acting! (*As she exits:*)

BILL. (*Shouts after her:*) Around *here*?! Fat chance!

GERRY. All right, all right! Let's get *on* with it! Places! Begin!

BILL. (*Same business, except that now he genuflects D of SMITTY, on:*) "Gracious Majesty—!"

AGGIE. (*Steps onstage from L, hollers across toward R wings:*) *Louise*! The *piano's* here!

BILL. (*Slams his script down, stands, during:*) Ohhhh—*damn* it!

LOUISE. (*Off R.*) Hallelujah! (*Will enter, trailed by MONTE, and cross toward AGGIE, on:*) Now maybe Monte will leave me *alone* to learn that control-board! (*She will exit L, AGGIE joining her, during:*)

SAUL. Come on, Bill, they could probably use a hand ... (*Exits L after duo.*)

BILL. (*Following him.*) May as well! It'll be nice to get *something* accomplished tonight!

SMITTY. (*Stands, rubs her posterior.*) I hope the real throne's more comfortable than *this*! I can't rule the British Empire from a metal folding-chair!

PHYLLIS. Oh, of *course* it is, dear! Absolutely *stunning* padded velvet on the arms and back!

SMITTY. (*Still rubbing.*) It's not my arms and back I'm *concerned* about! (*Will pick up BILL's flung-down script, during:*)

SAUL. (*Off L.*) We should have had *Polly* play the queen. *She* comes with her *own* padding! (*Then he emerges, along with LOUISE, AGGIE and BILL, rolling a small spinet onstage by group effort; it will end up with its back against center chair over the next several speeches.*)

PHYLLIS. Oh, that reminds me—how *are* dear Polly and Henry, Geraldine?

GERRY. Still fighting their head-colds. I *told* them not to sit around here all night in their overcoats. With the air below *zero* outside, when they went back out all *sweaty*—

MONTE. At least we can work *around* them for the time being ...

SAUL. Maybe around *Henry*—!

GERRY. Saul—!

BILL. Aw, c'mon, Gerry, you can't fine him for wisecracking when Polly's not *here!*

AGGIE. (*As piano moves into position.*) Right about *here* okay, Monte?

MONTE. Yes, that will do marvelously, Aggie!

VIOLET. (*Enters from R.*) Isn't that kind of beat-up for a royal throne room?

AGGIE. Nobody has to look at it but me.

MONTE. But where's the *bench?*

LOUISE. (*Heading L.*) Monte, give us a *chance,* for pete's sake! One thing at a time! (*Exits.*)

SMITTY. (*Dubiously.*) If the dais has to hide *this,* how high will that *throne* be?

AGGIE. *Please* don't tell me you're afraid of *heights*!

SMITTY. Oh, no, of course not, not in *that* way—

GERRY. Then in *what* way?

SMITTY. I was thinking of the *heat*—from the overhead *lights,* I mean. I'll be wearing a heavy gown, and that curly wig, and the nearer I get to those *lights,* the *hotter* it will get!

SAUL. Don't worry, the *velvet* will soak up the sweat!

LOUISE. (*Reenters toting small piano bench.*) Here you go, Aggie. See if this thing fits your behind! (*Will pace it in proper position U of piano, during:)*

AGGIE. I think *Monte* should have the honor. I'm *dying* to hear the *score* of this show!

MONTE. (*Already moving eagerly toward bench.*) Oh, all right, if you insist—!

VIOLET. Say, *about* the songs in this show, I was looking at the *lyrics* the other day—

PHYLLIS. (*Rapturously.*) And aren't they simply magnificent?! Monte is *so* talented!

VIOLET. Well, yes, but—one of the *rhymes* bothers me.

MONTE. (*Between bench and piano, but not yet seated.*) Oh? Which rhyme is that, Violet ?

VIOLET. In that duet between Elizabeth and Mary—

PHYLLIS. "The Throne Is Rightly Mine"? One of my absolute favorites !

VIOLET. Yes, that 's the one.

LOUISE. (*Riffling through script.*) But which rhyme–?

VIOLET. The one about "evil aims." Monte rhymes it with "Thames"! (*She pronounces this, of course, as it looks: Thayms.*) Shouldn't that be [*the proper pronunciation:*] temz?

MONTE. Poetic license, my dear. I mean, I *know* the pronunciation of London's lovely river, but *temz* simply wouldn't fit the *moment* in the lyric-line. I mean, the chorus is singing about Mary's "evil aims," and the very *next* bit is about the area's *geography,* in a sense. How else *could* I have handled it ?

SAUL. How about instead of Mary's evil *aims,* you sang about her "sturdy *stems*"? *That* would rhyme with *temz* ...

MONTE. (*Impatiently.*) It would *hardly* suit the moment!

SMITTY. (*Practically.*) But it'd sure suit *Polly*!

GERRY. Smitty! That's not *like* you!

SAUL. (*Grinning appreciatively.*) I *told* you I was contagious! *Nice* one, Smit!

PHYLLIS. Oh, let's stop all this time-consuming palaver and listen to Monte's lovely score!

BILL. Yes, *please*! There's still time for me to get *some* sleep before morning!

MONTE. Oh, very well, if you all insist. (*Will sit at bench as he continues:*) Now, here is that very number we were just discussing—"The Throne Is Rightly Mine"!

*[SPECIAL NOTE: The placement of the piano is not only because of the sight-line setup. It is because, in case you cannot find an AGGIE or MONTE who can play piano, once that dais is in place you can have a pianist hidden there, to handle the chores of this show's musical phases, with AGGIE only pretending to be playing (that bench should be wide enough for two, for obvious reasons). Since there is no dais at this moment, the smattering of the music we'll hear (if your MONTE cannot play, that is) can be pre-recorded for this spot, which is brief, and played over those onstage speakers (see PRODUCTION NOTES) in place.]*

PHYLLIS. But first, let me set the scene: Mary and Elizabeth are having their vital confrontation, alone onstage except for the chorus, and—

BILL. Phyllis, we *know* where it occurs! Let's get *on* with this, okay?

VIOLET. Bill! The *baby*, remember? It can *hear* you!

BILL. So it knows Daddy's not a *wimp*! What's the *problem*?

MONTE. Should I *start*, or—?

BILL. Of *course* you should! *Play*, dammit, *play*!

MONTE. *(Interlaces and flexes his fingers at arm's length; then:)* Here we go ...!

*(He plays first chord, pauses, plays second chord, pauses; so far, so good; OTHERS listen in rapt attention; and then he starts playing in a sprightly, upbeat fashion, and OTHERS [except PHYLLIS] start to have a unified reaction of puzzlement, until MONTE stops playing as:)*

SMITTY. (*Almost a shout.*) That's "Oh, Susannah"?!

MONTE. (*Impatiently.*) Well, of *course* it is! *All* the music in this show is by *Stephen Foster*!

GERRY. *Banjo*-music in Merry Old England?!

MONTE. Music is what *kept* Old England merry. And a banjo sounds *very* much like a *lute*!

AGGIE. But *we're* using a *piano*!

MONTE. (*Fussily.*) *Only* because I don't know how to score for *banjo*!

PHYLLIS. (*Helpfully.*) *Or* for lute!

SAUL. (*Sincerely, heavenward:*) Thank you, God!

GERRY. But—if all the melodies are by *Stephen Foster*—?

AGGIE. (*Completing her thought.*) —isn't that ... *plagiarism*?

PHYLLIS. (*Stiffly.*) We *prefer* to think of it as a *tribute*!

LOUISE. On your way to *jail*?

MONTE. The melodies are *all* in public domain. I checked.

VIOLET. But aren't Stephen Foster's melodies—um—sort of innately *American*—?

PHYLLIS. Ah, but you see, Violet, that *bridges* the *gap* between our two nations, which is one of the *major goals* of that marvelous Bess Boosters Society!

SAUL. Let me get this straight: We'll be singing *your* lyrics, but to the tune of things like "Camptown Races," "Nelly Bly," and "My Old Kentucky Home"?

MONTE. Why—*yes*. Why do you ask?

SAUL. I just had a kind of come-full-*circle* feeling, is all. (*To GERRY,with ill-concealed amusement:*) You were *wrong*, Ger. We *can* do this show in blackface!

*(And as GERRY shuts her eyes and shakes her head in chagrin at the near-accuracy of his contention, and PHYLLIS and MONTE stare in puzzlement, and OTHERS start to laugh helplessly at SAUL's observation—)*

**BLACKOUT**

**End of Scene Two**

## ACT I

### Scene 3

*AT RISE: Furniture is in the same position, but LOUISE and AGGIE have gone offstage R during the blackout; MONTE is still at piano, but GERRY, SAUL, SMITTY, BILL are standing facing us, with backs toward piano, like people in a police lineup, almost, each with script in hands before them held like hymnbooks; VIOLET is seated on chair at R, and PHYLLIS stands facing quartet from R, about halfway between them and VIOLET; in the fraction of a second before lights come up, we have heard MUSIC-VAMP INTRO, and the instant lights are up:*

QUARTET. (*Sings with uncertainty, scanning lyrics in scripts.*)

"Though Good Queen Bess hungered for
True love, true love,
She'd give up a lung before
She'd share her throne!
Still, Essex had her prone
To melt her heart of stone,
But he keeled over on the throne room floor!
Now she must rule all alone!"

PHYLLIS. (*Applauding briskly.*) Marvelous! Simply marvelous! Don't you agree, Monte?

MONTE. (*Stands, a bit uneasy.*) I think we should run the number again.

GERRY. Monte, we've done it at *least* a dozen times *already*!

MONTE. (*Will come around piano to join group, which has un-lined at song's end.*) But this number is the show's *finale*, Gerry! Of all the songs in the show, *this* one should be utter perfection!

SMITTY. I *still* don't understand why *I* should be singing. I mean, the song's *about* me!

MONTE. It's a small group. We need all the voices we can get.

SMITTY. But *mine's* getting so hoarse I can hardly *talk*! I'm in almost *every* number!

SAUL. She's right, Monte. Do you want an Elizabeth with a *rasp*?

VIOLET. It'll be better when *Polly* sings along. *She's* got a *big* voice, and she never sings *flat*!

SAUL. (*Shrugs.*) *Polly's* got a big *everything*! *She* could only sing *chubby*!

BILL. Aw, don't pick on her when she's not *here*, Saul!

PHYLLIS. And why *isn't* she? I thought she *promised* Geraldine that she would *surely*—

GERRY. She'll *be* here! She and Henry were just going out of their house when I called. I'm a little worried about her, to tell the truth. Smitty's cold is affecting her voice, but Polly's is starting to affect her *ears!* I had to *shout* to make her understand who was calling!

MONTE. Oh, dear. Is *Henry* any better?

BILL. Probably not. Whatever Polly gets, *he* gets.

VIOLET. That's what comes of being married so long. It's really kind of charming.

SAUL. So how come he didn't get her *appetite*?

SMITTY. Maybe he did, but by the time *she's* through eating, there's nothing *left* for him.

PHYLLIS. You two should be ashamed. Polly's not really *that* overweight!

SAUL. Listen, the last train trip they took, she told Henry the porter was trying to *avoid* her, when all the guy *actually* said was he planned to give her a *wide berth*!

GERRY. You're making that up!

SAUL. Oh ... well, maybe a little. Relax, first thing when she shows up, I'll blow her a kiss!

MONTE. Do you *mean* that?

SAUL. Well, *sure*. Can you imagine trying to blow her a *hug*?!

GERRY. *Saul*!

LOUISE. (*Off R.*) *Ow*! Aggie, be more careful with that *hammer*!

AGGIE. (*Off R.*) Sorry, Lou.

MONTE. How *are* they coming with that *throne*-contraption? (*Starts R.*)

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