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"The mouths of their rancid features opened like caverns,
and sounds like the wailing of damned souls issued therefrom..."

—W.E. "Billy" Hamilton in the *Odebolt Chronicle*

Cast of Characters

EFFIE, the youngest, the smartest.

ADDIE, the next youngest, the funniest.

LIZZIE, the middle one, the prettiest.

ELLA, the next-to-eldest. Slow, prophetic.

JESSIE, the eldest.

POPS, their father; and also their agent.

Time

1892-1935, and the present.

Place

Various. The stage is fluid but in its foundation looks like the husk of an old, decrepit barn in Iowa, a wintry landscape outside.

Notes

While many scenes are meant to take place somewhere specific, usually marked in the script by a scene title, much of the play takes place in a kind of limbo outside time and space: at once the theater itself, and the memory of a ghost inside an old, decrepit barn, heartless plains wind howling through the boards.

Regarding the ages of the various Cherry Sisters: ideally all of the actors will be in their 20s and 30s or thereabouts, playing a little younger and then older as the play progresses. As the play is meant to be a vaudeville and a fable, and happens in the theatrical present tense, the age of the actors doesn't really matter so much as the dynamic between them.

Concerning the "true story" of the Cherry Sisters, I am indebted to Avery Hale's 1944 article for *Coronet*, "So Bad They Were Good," as well as Anthony Slide's *Selected Vaudeville Criticism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1988).

Acknowledgments

The Cherry Sisters Revisited premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2010. It was directed by Andrew Leynse with the following cast:

EFFIE CHERRY Renata Friedman
ADDIE CHERRY Katie Kreisler
LIZZIE CHERRY Kate Gersten
ELLA CHERRY Cassie Beck
JESSIE CHERRY Donna Lynne Champlin
POPS John Hickok

And the following production staff:

Music Director/Pianist Stephen Malone
Scenic Designer Scott Bradley
Costume Designer Lorraine Venberg
Lighting Designer Brian J. Lilienthal
Sound Designer Matt Callahan
Properties Designer Mark Walston
Wig/Makeup Designer Heather Fleming
Movement Director Delilah Smyth
Production Stage Manager Paul Mills Holmes
Dialect Coach Rocco Dal Vera
Production Assistant Cadi Thomas
Dramaturg Julie Felise Dubiner
Casting Stephanie Klapper
Directing Assistant Jay Briggs
Scenic Design Assistant Ryan Wineinger
Lighting Design Assistants John Burkland,
Andrew Cissna
Stage Management Intern Nick Bussett
Assistant Dramaturg Emily Feldman

Music commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville with the support of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust.

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THE CHERRY SISTERS REVISITED

by Dan O'Brien
music by Michael Friedman

ACT I

EFFIE. Do you believe in ghosts?

You, in the audience. Think about that. *(Pause.)* 'Cause you're looking at one.

(She points a finger.)

—You did this to us.

(Iris-light widens on the sisters in the world...)

Scene 1

(Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Outside the theater.)

EFFIE. Let's see it again.

JESSIE. You say that every time we see it, Effie...

EFFIE. And every time it's beautiful. —A miracle!

ADDIE. I'll go back inside the theater with you, Effie. If you want.

(ADDIE takes EFFIE's hand.)

JESSIE. Lizzie, stop looking at yourself in that mirror, it's vain!

LIZZIE. It's not a mirror, it's a shop window, that dress is pretty—where's Pops?

(They all look for him.)

JESSIE. I'm beginning to get worried... He should've been here by now...

(ELLA points. The others look to where she's pointing.)

(JESSIE takes ELLA's hand in hers.)

That's not Pops, dear, that's a pile of dead leaves.

EFFIE. Let's see the show again! Can we? Please? —Just one more time—

LIZZIE. You can't spend all day inside a theater, Effie.

ELLA. Effie can.

(They're all a bit startled, but only a bit, by what ELLA's said.)

EFFIE. Thank you, Ella.

ELLA. Don't mention it.

EFFIE. I only like it in there because it's not like at home. It's the opposite of home. It's profound! in there...

LIZZIE. "Profound," Effie?

ADDIE. It means very much.

LIZZIE. I know what profound means. I'm not stupid, like Ella is...

JESSIE. It's too crowded in there. It's raucous, and it smells like sin. You mark my words: in the Twentieth Century, there will be no such thing as the vaudeville!

EFFIE. You say that every week, Jessie. And every week we come back.

JESSIE. We have to—someone has to make sure Pops gets home...

(ELLA points to the pile of dead leaves again. JESSIE takes her hand once more.)

Stop pointing at nothing, dear, that's rude.

EFFIE. We've never seen some of them before. Some of them were famous—

ADDIE. They're on jump-break from New York City—

JESSIE. You don't even know what "jump-break" means.

ADDIE. Do you?

(LIZZIE starts singing to herself, absentmindedly beneath the ensuing dialogue.)

LIZZIE. *(Wistfully;)*

I'M SO LONELY FOR OLD BROADWAY,

I'M SO BORED BY THESE CORNFIELDS AND HAY...

EFFIE. Then came the Spanish gypsies! Remember? That daring young girl in her pink underwear—

JESSIE. Pull your skirts down now, Effie—

EFFIE. —holding onto that long, thick rope with just her long, strong teeth. She clenched herself, spinning there, like a great, pink, blurred abstraction... She can't be much older than we are!

JESSIE. Get down off that post, Effie Cherry—you're going to fall down—!

EFFIE. Then she falls! like an angel on a pin, upon a prancing pony's jouncing spine—

JESSIE. Oh, Effie, stop! Please! —People are *looking* at us!

EFFIE. That's the point!

—Then on one leg she poses (*She poses*), the daintiest ballerina—better than that, because she's balanced on a gosh darned moving horse!

ADDIE. Hurrah! Huzzah! "Gosh darn"!

JESSIE. Such language—!

(JESSIE covers ELLA's ears.)

EFFIE. She *leaps*!

(EFFIE *leaps, and lands—or falls, rather, ungracefully, possibly painfully.*)

(*The others look on, concernedly...*)

(JESSIE *runs to her, kneels, gathers EFFIE into her prodigious bosoms.*)

JESSIE. Oh Effie dear, are you all right...?

(EFFIE *stands, a bit shaken: she's fine.*)

(*She smiles at her sister JESSIE. A moment.*)

ADDIE. Then her sister bounds onstage—

(ADDIE *bounds in the dirt and dust.*)

JESSIE. Oh no, I'm not playing—

ADDIE. I'm talking about myself.

LIZZIE. That's funny, that misunderstanding.

ADDIE. In her pink underwear also—

JESSIE. Pull your skirts down, girls! Now you both look like whores!

ADDIE. —Jessie!

JESSIE. What?

ADDIE. "Such language"!

JESSIE. "Whores" is in the Bible, my dear Addison—all the time.

EFFIE. —They defy gravity! They shimmy upside down! They shift from palm to palm as graceful as any two Orientals do!

(ADDIE and EFFIE attempt some approximation of the above, failing badly at it but who cares?)

(LIZZIE giggles, JESSIE disapproves; ELLA might smile, then yawn, or drool.)

LIZZIE. Then a handsome young man erupts on the scene—like a gazelle—

(She prances herself—a gazelle, but a clumsy one.)

EFFIE. A gazelle?

ADDIE. “Erupts”?

EFFIE. There were others—Ella, come here.

JESSIE. Don’t you involve her in this—

ELLA. (To JESSIE:) I want to—let me go!

(JESSIE does let her go.)

(The four sisters have formed a kind of human pyramid around JESSIE, as if their older sister is in on the act.)

EFFIE. An entire family of Spanish gypsies balanced there, one beside—

ADDIE. —on top of!

EFFIE. —the other! A structure of un-heretofore-dreamt-of perfection...!

(The five of them: a very imperfect pyramid.)

(Another pause.)

I want to go into show business.

(They all come tumbling down.)

JESSIE. Don’t joke like that.

EFFIE. I want to write acts. And perform them. I want to make costumes. And wear them. I want to rehearse in our own little barn, during long winter months, while the snow piles four fathoms deep on the prairie outside. I want to travel out ahead of ourselves in time and space on the steam of our own imaginative locomotion—leave Pops behind, leave Iowa behind, and journey—to New York City!

(As before, LIZZIE sings to herself while EFFIE goes on talking.)

LIZZIE.

I'M SO HOMESICK FOR BROADWAY'S CROWDS,
I'M SO SICK OF THESE DONKEYS AND PLOWS.
THE SOMETHING, SOMETHING, SOMETHING ELSE...

EFFIE. New York City, which might as well be Rome for all I care, for New York's so far away and full of fast-talking wisenheimers, immigrants and sons-of-immigrants who'll swindle you within a dime of your life—oh, New York City! (*She swoons, a little*), where the banks are like churches, and the people all live in coffins so close to one another you can reach out your hand, out your window, and boil your tea right off your neighbor's stove. And all the streets are numbered because nobody knows how to read—who's got the time? and time's money, in New York City. And the only livestock to be found are pigeons, and roaches, and rats... Oh, the manifold lovelinesses of New York!

We'll tour, the old world, to Europe—and Spain! Somewhere brown and papery—I love paper—where it never snows, and corn is an alien commodity... A land full of gypsy girls, just like us, who wear kerchiefs round their heads to keep the robust lice in, and squat round fires on their wide, mannish haunches, singing and joking their rough gay lives away...

And men too!—of course there'll be men there... Brown gypsy-types with wavy black hair and dark eyes set in a face of tan wrinkles, like the lines in a leather-bound book...

(She gasps, an epiphany of some kind.)

(The others look at her as if they're looking in a mirror—and liking what they see.)

(Except JESSIE, who looks disturbed.)

(A long pause here. They wait to see what JESSIE will say.)

JESSIE. What about Pops?

(A long, long pause here.)

ADDIE. What about him...?

JESSIE. He needs us... He'll fall apart without us.

ADDIE. Good.

LIZZIE. Oh, Addie...

JESSIE. Remember that time we found him in the barn, with a rope in his hand, standing on a chair...?

(Pause.)

LIZZIE. He said he was about to hang something.

ADDIE. He was.

(Another pause.)

EFFIE. Well we'll have to leave him one day...won't we?

JESSIE. We will. When we get married.

LIZZIE. Someone has to ask us first.

(Another pause. They look each other up and down.)

EFFIE. Jessie's right: we can't leave him, ever. Poor Pops...where do you think he's gone?

(Slowly, again, ELLA points to the pile of dead leaves downstage.)

(A cold wind blows.)

(This time no one scolds her.)

(Pause.)

(EFFIE moves downstage first.)

(She pulls away the blanket of leaves to reveal:)

(POPS Cherry.)

(Curled up like a fetus.)

(Hugging whiskey bottles to his chest. A stub of wet cigar bit tightly in his teeth...)

(His face is deathly pale.)

(He looks dead.)

(He is.)

(After a short beat of horror, and then a mysterious, long exhalation of something like relief...EFFIE speaks to us.)

You saw it coming, didn't you.

You're used to such surprises, in "the theatre."

As my slow sister Ella had discovered, I know not wherefrom—from the ether, perhaps?—our father died that day. While we were inside at the show...

How—providential, you might say...

Because our father, Pops Cherry—"Pops" is just a nickname, by the way, and he's only a Cherry by way of corruption from the Irish—O'Chernussy, probably, originally, though who can be sure of anything he's ever told us?

Our father had not been well since the death of our mother, now many, many years ago. Nineteen years ago, in fact. My age, to the day. And since that day he'd been drunk. Sometimes worse.

(POPS jumps to his feet, his whiskey bottles stuck to him. As if he's wearing a suit made of whiskey bottles.)

POPS. You always were unlucky!

EFFIE. I love you, Pops. I miss you.

POPS. Ech?

EFFIE. I said I—

POPS. Everything you touch turns to pewter!

EFFIE. “Pewter”?

POPS. I ought to say manure, but this is a family crowd.

EFFIE. (*Looking out:*) It is?

POPS. —Like your mother was, bedad!

EFFIE. (*Excited.*) In what ways am I like Momma, Pops?

POPS. You're too smart for your own good, that's what. Look at that great big horse's head of yours. Like a great big horse's skull! all long in front and fat in back. It's what killed your mother before the start of it all, that great big horse's nut of yours...

(EFFIE touches her head, with fear and wonder.)

You took what it was your mother had.

EFFIE. What did she have, Pops?

POPS. Babies. One Cherry right after the other—pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. And heaving one last long sigh she took a great big soaring lep' out of that writhing birdlike body of hers up into the basin of sky and out of the throes of trying to bring you and that monstrously fat head of yours out into the world of men. (*He inhales extravagantly, staggers.*)

Poor girl, poor wife, poor me.

(*He tries to rip one of the bottles off his clothes. But they're empty now anyway.*)

Damn it all to Hell!

(*He tries to smoke his cigar. He asks the audience:*)

D'you got a match?

EFFIE. We're going into showbiz, Pops.

POPS. —*Shoe*-biz? what for? Do you know what that's like, handling feet all day...?

EFFIE. Show biz, Pops, the vaudeville.

POPS. Oh. Och no.

EFFIE. What's wrong?

POPS. You're not whores now, are you?

EFFIE. Not all prostitutes are actresses, Pops.

POPS. Name one. —And you can't do nothing, neither!

EFFIE. Like what?

POPS. —Like talent!

EFFIE. How do you know that? You don't know that yet—we're good! You'll see!

POPS. Will I? I don't think I will...

EFFIE. Why not?

POPS. You see, because I've died...

EFFIE. Oh, I forgot...

POPS. And so have you, died, too... You're a ghost now too, you know.

EFFIE. Am I?

POPS. Don't forget that now.

EFFIE. I always do...

POPS. Don't we all?

EFFIE. Where am I then?

POPS. In the ether.

EFFIE. Where's that?

POPS. In the theater.

EFFIE. Which theater?

POPS. In the barn, back in Iowa. In a way. In the future. Or no-time at all... You're haunted, me girl. Ghosts can be haunted too, you know.

(Pause. She pushes him offstage.)

EFFIE. Get offstage now, Pops. —Go!

POPS. If you're ever famous, remember—you got your talent from me!

(He sings, as he goes:)

ME BODICE, NEAT AN' MODEST, O, IS SLIPPIN', SIR
—BE CAREFUL, SIR, BE CAREFUL, PLEASE!
THE SILKEN THREAD THAT HOLDS IT UP IS RIPPIN', SIR

—O, DO BE CAREFUL! —O, DO BE CAREFUL!
THERE NOW, IT'S DOWN ABOUT ME WAIST,
ME PEARLY GOODS ARE ALL UNCASSED,
I HOPE THEY'RE TEMPER'D TO YOUR TASTE
—ST. PATRICK'S DAY IN THE MORNING!

(He disappears, singing, bottles tinkling into the wings.)

FIDDLE-DEE-DEE, FIDDLE-DEE-DIE...

(Emphasis on the "die"...)

(EFFIE doesn't want to cry.)

(Wind and snow.)

Scene 2

(The Barn in Marion. Rehearsal. Winter.)

(ELLA's not here.)

(LIZZIE's wiping the dirt on her skirt...)

LIZZIE. He looked so sad in that pinewood box, as they lowered him into the ground...

ADDIE. You couldn't see his face. The lid was screwed on.

(JESSIE eats some cheese, and sighs.)

JESSIE. Sad...

EFFIE. Here's what I envision:

Numerous acts, some funny, some sad. Some songs, Lizzie, you'll sing a few pretty ditties. Something sentimental of the euphemistic school. You know the score. I have the titles, you can fill in the rest.

One: "I Ain't Never Been Kissed." Two: "Let's Canoodle in the Doodle-ee-doo." And three—"Corn Juice!" Exclamation point. Naturally.

Let me write this all down:

(She does, in a little brown book that seems to appear in the ether.)

ADDIE. Where'd you find that?

EFFIE. In the ether.

JESSIE. *(Eating cheese:)* You're nuts, Effie Cherry...

EFFIE. What's nuts? to dream? —Perchance to dream, Jessie!

LIZZIE. Who said that?

ADDIE. Walt Whitman.

LIZZIE. Who's he?

ADDIE. Some nurse.

LIZZIE. How's this sound?

(LIZZIE sings, with her ukulele:)

LET'S CANOODLE IN THE DOODLE-EE-DOO
AND FOODLE WITH THE POODLE-EE-PEE.
I'LL PIDDLER YOUR DIDDLE
IF YOU FIDDLE MY MIDDLE,
CANOODLING IN THE DOODLE-EE-DOODLE-EE-DOODLE-EE-
DUM-M-M!

EFFIE. Keep working on that one.

We'll need some playlets—

LIZZIE. What's a "playlet"?

ADDIE. Like a play, but suckling.

LIZZIE. —That's a good one, Addie!

ADDIE. Is it? I don't know about that one yet...

EFFIE. And some comic monologuing. Addie, that's your forte, make it fresh, make it funny.

JESSIE. —What about me?

EFFIE. What about you, Jessie.

JESSIE. What do I do?

EFFIE. Well, so far. I've got you down for the..."heavy lifting." Jessie.

(Pause.)

JESSIE. Lifting what?

EFFIE. Props and scenery, mostly.

LIZZIE. You're the most athletic, Jessie. Everyone knows that...

JESSIE. What about Addie?—she's got man-hands!

(ADDIE examines her hands.)

LIZZIE. It's true...

JESSIE. I'm heavy...if that's what you mean. I don't eat much. Lord knows we don't *ever* eat much, any of us, except maybe cheese, on a good day... Corn... It's a mystery to me.

I'm just naturally matronly...

(JESSIE *eats some more cheese.*)

—But I can't lift much! My heart's not strong. Like Momma's wasn't...

(*A deep pause, surprisingly felt.*)

(*They all glance at, or away from, or just think about EFFIE and her very large head...*)

(*EFFIE touches said head, without noticing what she's doing...*)

(*ADDIE changes the subject.*)

ADDIE. So I'm reading this book:

(*Shows the cover.*)

LIZZIE. *So You Want to Live in Vaudeville?* (Pause.)

Well do you?

ADDIE. It's a rhetorical question. It's got killer Brooklynese.

EFFIE. Definitions?

ADDIE. You betcha.

EFFIE. Phonetic?

ADDIE. No, English.

LIZZIE. Where is Phoenicia, anyway?

EFFIE. Let me hear some please:

ADDIE. "Take my seat, young goil! I'm only goin' so far as Yahnkers!"

(*Pause. EFFIE savors.*)

EFFIE. That's beautiful.

ADDIE. Isn't it?

LIZZIE. Where is Yonkers anyway?

ADDIE. Brooklyn, I guess.

JESSIE. That's crude. I think such speech is vulgar.

LIZZIE. What about a Negro song? some kind of sassy soft-shoeing? some black face maybe? Addie would make a very convincing coon, I think.

JESSIE. That is also in poor taste.

LIZZIE. Whose taste? I find their music stirring.

JESSIE. In the Twentieth Century no one will laugh at Negroes.

LIZZIE. Why not? Where will they have all gone?

ADDIE. The Twentieth Century is eight years from now, Jessie...

JESSIE. I know that. —This is *America*, Addie!

EFFIE. And when our act is strong and tight we'll do a show, at home, at the Marion Grange Hall. We'll hone our craft on friendly turf, then raise enough in capital to take our show all the way to Cedar Rapids—

(LIZZIE gasps.)

Don't gasp, it's true—it's within our reach, our grasp. Every day, a great actress dries up onstage, like a prune, and every day another one *blooms!*

JESSIE. But what if we're not good enough...?

(A sudden, long pause ensues... JESSIE eats some more cheese, morosely.)

(EFFIE's about to touch her head again, but ADDIE takes her hand and holds it.)

LIZZIE. He looked so sad in that coffin, the earth was frozen six feet down...

(JESSIE eats more cheese.)

EFFIE. We'll need a name.

ADDIE. We have one already, don't we?

LIZZIE. Do we? Which one?

JESSIE. The name God gave us.

ADDIE. You mean Pops gave us...

LIZZIE. "The Cherries."

(It just sits there in the barn.)

ADDIE. We'll be popular with the men.

LIZZIE. Why?

JESSIE. Yes, why, Addie?

ADDIE. Where's Ella with our lunch?

LIZZIE. I'm hungry now too...

JESSIE. Have my cheese.

(She offers LIZZIE some.)

LIZZIE. I've got to watch my figure. *(Pause.)* We all do.

JESSIE. *(Eating more cheese.)* We all do what?

EFFIE. What's wrong with our figures, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. Well. With the possible exception of you, Effie, who's already bone-thin, like a thin old swayback mule—

EFFIE. Like a what?

LIZZIE. —the rest of us are far too...matronly. (*Pause.*) Like Jessie said.

EFFIE. How can we be matronly? We're not even married—

LIZZIE. That's my point exactly.

It hardly matters much for you, Addie—you're the funny one, all that matters is your wits. If you get fat you'll be *more* funny, probably, because fat people are mostly jolly, except when they're mean, and then they're positively evil...

And as for Effie it's her brains inside that great big head of hers... And Jessie here is for the heavy lifting, as we've discussed, despite the danger to her heart.

No: I'm the one who must stay pretty, Pops would always say.

ADDIE. Where's Ella with our gosh-darned lunch!

JESSIE. —Such language!

EFFIE. She's inside sewing our new leotards.

JESSIE. Are you sure that's such a good idea?

ADDIE. Some of history's best seamstresses have been mentally impaired.

LIZZIE. Really?

ADDIE. No, I was just trying out a joke—does it work?

JESSIE. I don't think she should be let loose out there, what with all this wind and driving snow...

EFFIE. She's not a cat.

ADDIE. *It is* snowing fiercely out there, Effie...

EFFIE. It's always snowing here.

LIZZIE. I know. Why *is* that?

EFFIE. —We need to focus, girls! —Focus! We've got so much more work to do!

LIZZIE. I think I see her coming now...

JESSIE. That's her outside in the wind and driving snow—keep walking, Ella! You can make it!

LIZZIE. Are you sure that's Ella out there in the wind and...?

JESSIE. Driving snow.

LIZZIE. Driving snow?

JESSIE. Who else could she be?

LIZZIE. I don't know, a ghost maybe?

ADDIE. Whose ghost?

LIZZIE. She looks a lot like Momma did...

JESSIE. Do you remember when Momma would take the washing from the line, in the snow? The temperature would drop, and the snow would sweep in... The sheets would be frozen, they'd crack like boards when she folded them in front of the fire.

EFFIE. —What about: "The Beautiful Cherry Sisters"?

(They look each other up and down.)

No.

ADDIE. That won't work.

LIZZIE. —*I'm* not ugly!

ADDIE. That's mostly true.

EFFIE. "The Four Cherry Sisters" simply?

LIZZIE. "The Four Cherry Sisters Simply" is far too modest.

JESSIE. Five. With Ella.

(Another pause.)

Well we have to, don't we?

We can't leave her alone out here, surely...

ADDIE. Can she sing and dance?

JESSIE. She's one of us, Addie, she's a Cherry!

ADDIE. She's an idiot, Jessie. *(Short pause.)* I mean that in the clinical sense.

JESSIE. So?

EFFIE. People are going to laugh at her...

LIZZIE. But that's the point, isn't it?

JESSIE. —Come on, Ella! You can make it!

LIZZIE. She's teetering in the wind!

JESSIE. She's wandered off the trail!

LIZZIE. She's carrying our new leotards—they're pretty! They're bunched before her face!

JESSIE. Look—one's flown away!

LIZZIE. Like a flamingo!

JESSIE. Do you remember how silent mother was? how graceful and composed...?

LIZZIE. Like Ella, though not as dumb...

JESSIE. I remember her standing at the stove, with baby Addie in her arms, rocking her to sleep and singing... She had such a pretty voice, like you do, Lizzie...with her breast in Addie's mouth...

ADDIE. I wish I could remember that.

EFFIE. —You were too young when she died, Addie.

ADDIE. What do you know—you weren't even fully born yet!

(ADDIE immediately regrets what she's said.)

JESSIE. —Keep walking, Ella, you're almost here!

LIZZIE. Oh look—she's fallen in a drift—

ADDIE. Oh now she's up again! Here she comes!

EFFIE. —“The Musical Cherries”?

LIZZIE. Redundant.

EFFIE. “Cherries A-Poppin'!”

JESSIE. Been done before.

EFFIE. “The Five Ripe Cherries”?

ADDIE. That sounds like we smell bad.

LIZZIE. Or taste good.

ADDIE. That's filthy!

JESSIE. —It doesn't matter what we're called, girls! No one's going to care! No one's going to believe us, when they see us up there on that stage at the Marion Grange Hall. They'll say, Who do these girls think they are? We knew their poor mother, we knew Pops—we know what *he* was like...

No, they won't believe us for a minute.

EFFIE. Then we'll have to believe it first. (*Pause.*) If we believe it, then they will.

JESSIE. Is that how it works...?

EFFIE. What do you say, girls? Can you believe it?

(No one answers.)

(The answer would seem to be "maybe?")

That's it: "The Unbelievable Cherry Sisters!" *(Pause.)* Exclamation point!

JESSIE. Well it's accurate, anyway...

(Enter ELLA, all covered in snow.)

(She carries a great big bass drum, strapped vertically to her chest.)

(She bangs the drum slowly, loudly, with a dirty wooden spoon...)

(She stops drumming. Turns slowly to reveal that one side of the drum reads: "The Unbelievable Cherry Sisters!")

ELLA. I believe in you, Effie.

(All look to EFFIE.)

EFFIE. How did you know that, Ella? were you listening outside...?

Scene 3

(Marion Grange Hall. Night.)

(ELLA continues to beat her drum occasionally, throughout the following.)

ADDIE. Good evening, ladies and Germans! *(Silence.)* That was supposed to be—just a bit of bidness. *(Pause.)* Because there's a lot of folks here of German extraction, in Marion, Iowa, you see. Immigrants, via Ellis Island, etcetera. Well— *(To herself:)* "don't explain your jokes," Chapter Twelve...

Welcome, everyone, to *le premier* performance of what everyone's just dying to pop inside their mouths: The Cherries! *(Silence.)* That's right, "The Unbelievable Cherry Sisters!" Exclamation! Point!

(Much more silence. JESSIE steps forward.)

JESSIE. You can clap, you know. It's considered polite.

(A few hands applaud.)

(The sisters sing the following song together, to the tune of "Ta-ra-ra boom-dee-ay.")

(ELLA is beating the rhythm out on her giant bass drum. She is not very rhythmical.)

ALL.

CHERRIES RIPE, BOOM-DEE-AY!
CHERRIES RED, BOOM-DEE-AY!
THE CHERRY SISTERS
ARE HERE TODAY!

CHERRIES SWEET, BOOM-DEE-AY!
CHERRIES WET, BOOM-DEE-AY!
THE CHERRY SISTERS
CAME ALL THIS WAY!

CHERRIES FAT, BOOM-DEE-AY!
CHERRIES TART, BOOM-DEE-AY!
THE CHERRY SISTERS
—WON'T GO AWAY!

(Big finish, big drumming: no clapping.)

ADDIE. So what is it about these Iowa winters? I mean, come on—we get it already!

(Silence. ELLA bangs the drum: a rimshot, of sorts.)

Have you heard the one about why the cow jumped over the moon? The farmer's hands were cold! *(Pause.)* On her udders. *(Pause.)* Because udders are kind of like nipples...on a cow.

(ELLA's rimshot.)

What do you call a very clean Norwegian? —German!

(ELLA's rimshot. Silence.)

Tough crowd...

(ELLA's rimshot.)

That's not a joke, Ella.

And now for a pretty little ditty from our pretty little Lizzie...!

(LIZZIE takes the fore, singing.)

LIZZIE.

I AIN'T NEVER BEEN KISSED,
I AIN'T NEVER BEEN KISSED.
I AIN'T TALKING CHEEKS, I'M TALKING HOT LIPS!
NO MATTER HOW HARD I SWING THESE HIPS,
I AIN'T NEVER HAD NO LOVER'S KISS.

I AIN'T NEVER BEEN A DISH,
I AIN'T NEVER BEEN A DISH
FOR A BOY, A GOY OR AN AMISH.
NO MATTER HOW MANY FROGS I KISS,

NOT ONE BECOMES MY PRINCE!

WHAT DO YOU THINK, FELLAS?

WHAT DO YOU SAY, DAMES?

AIN'T I GOT THE GOODS?

AIN'T I GOT GOOD GAMS—?

(Awkward finish. This question hangs lewdly in the air.)

EFFIE. *(To us:)* It was a magical moment...

Everything could have changed. They could clap, or they could not...

They is you now: What will *you* do?

(Pause.)

Then it happened—a smattering, a spattering of applause.

We went on, holding them, or so we thought, enthralled, through the comic bits, played by Addie, and then Addie and me together. More songs from Lizzie, including her newest, "The Spaniard That Marked My Wife."

LIZZIE. *(Correcting.)* "My Life!"

EFFIE. My life, my life...

And Jessie providing a cautionary tale of lost virtue entitled,

JESSIE. "My First Cigar!"

EFFIE. And then we rounded out the evening with the five of us in leotards in what was fast becoming our signature spectacle: all the way from the banks of the River Denial...the Human Pyramid!

(They've shucked their calico dresses. They're in their pyramid now, in leotards that look homemade, more like long underwear, dyed im-perfectly pink, threadbare and puckered at the knees and elbows.)

EFFIE. If only Pops could see us now.

(He appears.)

POPS. You look like fat whores, bedad.

EFFIE. Pops—

(She tumbles down out of the pyramid.)

POPS. The five of yous wailing and shrieking, squealing, and wailing, leaping about in just your undert'ings like a horde of sex-starved banshees—

EFFIE. Pops!

POPS. There's nothing special about you! —The five of yous are nothing—you're *nothing!*

EFFIE. The audience is clapping, Pops, they're loving us—

POPS. That's not love...

EFFIE. They're clapping for us—what do you think that means?

POPS. —They know who you are!

(Pause.)

It's a very small town, bedad... This is the Midwest, me girl: They're clapping because they're *trying to be nice!*

(EFFIE is shaken.)

(POPS tries to detach a whiskey bottle from his clothing: it's stuck. And it's empty anyway.)

POPS. Damn it all to Hell! *(He tries to smoke his cigar, calls offstage.)* I need a match—

(He's gone.)

EFFIE. Our hands were laced together...as we bowed our heads...

And for a moment, for no reason I could figure...I imagined that this little stage we stood upon had become a kind of gallows.

(ELLA begins beating her drum again.)

ADDIE. Who are you talking to, Effie?

EFFIE. We're a hit. *(Pause.)* Aren't we?

(Backstage.)

ADDIE. What did you expect?

LIZZIE. A boy just asked me for my autograph. He said, "You girls really *are* unbelievable!"

JESSIE. Did you hear that applause? So well-mannered.

EFFIE. —Ella, stop beating that drum!

(ELLA stops for a minute. Then starts again, a little more quietly.)

(EFFIE is counting the money.)

(Astounded.)

One hundred dollars...

LIZZIE. That's more than Mr. Vlanck makes all year!

JESSIE. —So generous of them!

LIZZIE. Mr. Vlanck asked me in the wings, he said, "Ven are you goink to Cedar Vapids?"

ADDIE. That's good, Lizzie—"Cedar Vapids"!

JESSIE. Why do you know so much about Mr. Vlanck, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. He said we should just hurry up and get to Cedar Vapids right away: "Do not vaste anozher day—get out of zees town. Please!"

EFFIE. We're not ready.

LIZZIE. That's what he said, Effie, and he's a teacher. And German. And Germans never lie!

EFFIE. Cedar Rapids is the city, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. So? I know that...

EFFIE. They're cosmopolitan there, they're savvy. They're used to the best entertainment the corn-belt has to offer. These people out there tonight, they're just—rubes.

JESSIE. Effie!

(Pause. Even ELLA pauses.)

We're rubes too...

EFFIE. They *had* to be nice, that's all I mean to say... They know who we are. How do we know they're not lying when they clap?

JESSIE. Oh, Effie... That's the saddest thing you've ever said.

EFFIE. —Ella! Stop beating that drum!

(ELLA stops.)

ELLA. What's the matter, Effie? Don't you love us too?

(Pause.)

EFFIE. ...How do we get to Cedar Rapids, girls?

LIZZIE. By boat?

EFFIE. No, we practice.

LIZZIE. Practice what? swimming?

EFFIE. *(To us:)* We went home and polished our routines. Pyramids grew taller, arms and thighs grew lithier beneath pink underthings...

And the songs—the songs needed no work at all. A beautiful little ballad entitled "Why Speak of Love When the Rent Is So High?" promised to bring Cedar Vapids to its knees.

LIZZIE.

WHY SPEAK OF LOVE WHEN THE RENT IS SO HIGH?
WHY TALK OF SPRING WHEN WINTER IS NIGH?
WHY GIVE A DARN ABOUT NOTHIN' AT ALL
IF I CAN'T HAVE YOU?

WHY SPEAK OF LUNCH WHEN YOUR STOMACH'S UPSET—?

EFFIE. Thank you, Lizzie.

ADDIE. Thank you, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. There's more.

EFFIE. No, there's not.

LIZZIE. It's a much longer song—

EFFIE. We've heard it already. Several times.

ADDIE. Today.

(Pause.)

LIZZIE. —Where's Ella with our gosh-darned lunch!

JESSIE. Such language!

LIZZIE. Darn my language all to heck I'm wasting away to nothing!

EFFIE. (To us.) And the jokes were flying fast, especially in Brooklynese, which came out thick and spicy these days:

ADDIE. (As a man:) "Take my seat, young goil! I'm only goin' so far as Yahnkers!"

EFFIE. "Oh no! I can't take your seat, sir!"

ADDIE. "Yes you can. And I'll take yours!"

("He" pinches her.)

EFFIE. "Ooo!" —That's too hard, Addie, don't pinch me so hard.

ADDIE. That's how men are...

EFFIE. How would you know?

ADDIE. (Prompting.) "My dear sir—"

EFFIE. "My dear sir, I think you're fresh!"

ADDIE. "I think *you're* fresh! Like a summer rain!"

EFFIE. "And you're like a winter drizzle."

ADDIE. "I can't help it! You make me feel damp!" —Damp?

EFFIE. "Fresh!"

(EFFIE *slaps* ADDIE.)

ADDIE. Ow, Effie. That hurt.

EFFIE. That's how women are. You have to pay attention.

—Say your rhyming couplet now, Addie: not to me but to them.

ADDIE. "A woman is a fragile beast! She needs a man to give her peace!"

That's not funny at all.

EFFIE. I know. It's cow shit. (*To us:*) We were ready for Cedar Vapids!

Scene 4

(*Cedar Rapids. Night.*)

EFFIE. The stage there was so immense...like the surface of some enormous grand piano...

And midway through our first comic sketch, the rehearsal of which you were just a party to...what should happen but a horn should toot?

(*A horn toots.*)

(*ELLA enters, covered in snow again.*)

(*More importantly, perhaps, she clenches a cardboard horn tight in her teeth.*)

(*She toots again and again, etc.*)

EFFIE. And another. And another...

And soon that entire theater in Cedar Rapids was clogged with such a cacophony of cardboard horns, like a flock of captive geese—no, like the Israelites at the walls of Jericho—no, as if we'd found ourselves suddenly at the center of some hive of demonically possessed bees—*shut up, Ella, please!*

(*ELLA toots her horn.*)

(*They're smiling at the audience, terrified.*)

LIZZIE. What's going on out there...?

ADDIE. They're blowing horns at us...

LIZZIE. I can hear that—

JESSIE. How rude!

EFFIE. What's going on out there...?

LIZZIE. They're blowing horns at us!

EFFIE. I know but what does it all *mean*?

ADDIE. —Let me see that horn.

(ADDIE takes the horn from ELLA, examines it.)

There was a rally here last night. See? Political. That's what it says on the horn: "Up With Greevey!" Exclamation point.

JESSIE. Who's "Greevey"?

LIZZIE. What's going up him?

EFFIE. *(To us:)* It was strange. Not a boo, not applause...neither cheers nor jeers nor silence... A horn.

But if applause can be a lie...then maybe a horn might mean applause?

(Pause.)

ADDIE. Effie, are you listening to us?

EFFIE. They're so grateful for our performance here tonight, girls... that mere clapping will not do.

(Pause. She tries again.)

In Cedar Rapids, if you love an act so much and mere clapping will not suffice—you blow! Your horn!

JESSIE. It's a theory...

(ELLA takes her horn back from ADDIE, starts tooting again.)

LIZZIE. What should we do now?

EFFIE. —Give them more, girls! More!

ADDIE. "You say you're going downtown, doll, well I've been there before!"

EFFIE. *(To us:)* We finished our euphemistic comic interlude, and sang a song or two. Jessie came out alone and spun her speech on—

JESSIE. "Marriage and the Advantages of Male Chastity in the Twentieth Century!"

EFFIE. Exclamation point, naturally. —She was so obsessed with this coming century!

ADDIE. What did the corn cob say to the corn stalk? You leaf around here?

(ELLA's rimshot.)

Two cows in a field: one cow says moo. The other says, You readin' my mind?

(Rimshot.)

What do you call a lonely bull in a pasture all alone? —Beef stroganoff!

(A very long, confused rimshot.)

LIZZIE. What does that one even mean, Addie?

ADDIE. I don't know but Pops used to say it...

EFFIE. *(To us:)* And gradually, horn by horn, the tooting died away.

Silence returned. No laughter, no applause. Nothing. Just one long, unbroken hush...

We can't see a thing, with the lights in our eyes. We know you're out there. Breathing. Watching. Listening...as if concentrating, mightily...trying to figure something out...

What are you trying to figure out?

(Silence.)

Then something even stranger occurred:

ALL.

WE ARE ALL FIVE YERROW QUEENS.
SOME ARE FAT AND SOME ARE REAN.
PREASE TO TAKE A ROOK AT US
WHIRE WE DANCE OUR FINE LOUTINE!

(They're all dancing, in a line:)

(ELLA looks Chinese, in a "coolie" hat; LIZZIE is dressed like a Japanese geisha; EFFIE has a Hindu dot on her forehead, and a sari; and ADDIE wears Eskimo furs and brandishes a spear with a fish on it.)

(JESSIE, the Hawaiian Queen, wears a grass skirt and lei.)

JESSIE.

I AM QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI,
I AM QUEEN OF ALL HAWAI'I.
FROM O'AHU TO GREEN MAUI
I ENJOY THE MAHI-MAHI.

AT EVERY ROYAL LUAU
I WILL EAT MY PIG KALUA.
THEN SOME MANGOS AND PAPAYA,
AND THEN SOMETHING CALLED HAPIA.

MAI TAI COCKTAILS, LOMI SALMON,
COCONUT SURE CURES YOUR FAMINE!
AND DON'T FORGET THE PUPU PLATTER—
AVOID THE POI OR YOU'LL GROW FATTER.

SOME HAVE SAID THAT I TOO HEAVY
BUT I THINK THEY SIMPLY JEAL-Y.
WATCH MY SISTER'S UKULELE
WHILE I DANCE MY HULA-HULA.

WIKI! WIKI! WIKI! WIKI! WIKI!

EFFIE. (*Whispering:*) Jessie!

JESSIE. What?

EFFIE. Move over that way—

JESSIE. There's a footlight over there—

ADDIE. Move your feet!

LIZZIE. —Keep smiling, girls! Move those hips like you mean it!

JESSIE. Don't you push me please missie—!

ADDIE. Jessie—

JESSIE. What—

EFFIE. Jessie!

LIZZIE. —You're going to catch on fire!

(And LIZZIE screams, as: JESSIE catches fire.)

(Or, rather, JESSIE's skirt goes up in flames. Or up in smoke, as the case may be. Now JESSIE screams.)

(The others scream now too. Pandemonium, Pan-Asian style.)

(They try to put it out, blowing, screaming, waving their hands, swatting her skirt with their skirts.)

(But ELLA, somehow, has been quickest. Here she comes running back onstage with a fire extinguisher.)

(She sprays it all up and down JESSIE's front. She sprays her sister's face too, a lot, just to be safe.)

(JESSIE's skirts smolder, her face drips: a tableau vivant, with a touch of presentiment, perhaps...)

(Pause.)

(A seismic eruption of laughter in the audience now, rolling on beneath the following.)

EFFIE. They could not stop laughing...

(More laughter. The girls are in ecstasy, bewildered.)

Is this what love feels like?

POPS. *(Appearing.)* Hear that?

EFFIE. —Do *you* hear that?

POPS. They're laughing at you, Effie...

EFFIE. They're laughing *with* me, Pops. With us. We made them laugh, it's beautiful—!

POPS. You made them laugh because you caught yourselves on fire! *(Pause.)* Jessie did. At least she's got *some* talent... They wish you'd all catch fire, that way they'd be sure to get their money's worth.

EFFIE. —Liar!

POPS. When have I ever?

EFFIE. What you've seen tonight is the mark of true genius. We encounter accident and we subsume—we spin it into gold!

POPS. You're mixing up your metaphors now, me girl.

EFFIE. Why don't you just go back to Hell—that's not a metaphor, that's where you live!

POPS. Your sister went up in flames. Does that mean nothing to you at all?

(Pause.)

I need a match...

(He walks over to JESSIE's still smoldering skirts, lights his brand new cigar off it.)

EFFIE. Where'd you get that?

POPS. Me stogie?

EFFIE. Where are your bottles?

POPS. Me drink?

EFFIE. Your whiskey. You've always got them, hanging off your person like cowbells so I can hear you coming...

Why are you wearing that suit? You've changed, you're changing now...

POPS. Listen, sweetheart—

EFFIE. Your brogue—

POPS. This is where we say goodbye for now.

EFFIE. Your hair's not even white anymore... That mustache—

POPS. You're getting ahead of me now, Effie. Watch it.

(POPS finishes wiping the death-pallor from his face with his handkerchief. He affixes a mustache.)

(He pushes her out of the way.)

EFFIE. —Pops!

Scene 5

(Backstage, Cedar Rapids, moments after the show.)

POPS. Pops is my name, talent agency's my game.

(He doffs his hat. EFFIE is suddenly quite shy. ADDIE is folding her arms.)

ADDIE. We knew a Pops once...

POPS. It's a popular name these days, Pops, in the voe-dee-veal at least, 'specially 'mongst us men. Managers and agents mostly—"of course," you say!—whose job it is to fan the flames of the artist's soul into a more mature, that is, profit-making, conflagration. A veritable forest fire of profit, if you will. Smell that smoke? *(He inhales his cigar.)*

I've got a real name, of course, one my mother gave, but I'm not about to give that to you...

(He laughs. A pause, then to LIZZIE.)

Except you, maybe you, you I might tell one day.

(He touches LIZZIE on the chin: she swoons.)

LIZZIE. —Oh!

JESSIE. May we help you with something, "Pops"?

POPS. Who's this, your spinster aunt, visiting from England?

JESSIE. —Oh!

POPS. Please, do not become affronted. I mean merely to be familiar with you girls. A real confidante.

ADDIE. We've already got confidantes, Pops: each other.

LIZZIE. We can always use more confidence, Pops—we're so insecure!

POPS. You girls really are something, you know that?

I was out there tonight, watching the show, as is my wont, whenever I'm on jump-break from Chicago—

LIZZIE. "Jump-break"!

JESSIE. "Wont"?

ADDIE. You don't sound Chicago, you sound Brooklynese.

POPS. —I always make a point of slowing myself down here, in Cedar Rapids, of all places, to peruse the local talent.

LIZZIE. You think we've got talent? —I do.

POPS. Who cares what I think? The audience loved you! You killed them! You slaughtered them! They're decimated! Massacred! —It's beautiful!

ADDIE. (*To JESSIE:*) He's spitting on you—

POPS. Only in America... I mean, I'm a patriot. And only in this country, in this day and age, could five motherless girls from Wherever-The-Fuck-You're-From-Iowa—

JESSIE. Oh-h!

(*JESSIE almost faints—at the language.*)

POPS. —find stardom on the voe-dee-veal stage!

ADDIE. Why do you keep saying it like that, the "voe-dee-veal"?

POPS. It's French. Don't you girls know any French?

LIZZIE. You mean like kissing?

EFFIE. How do you know we're motherless?

POPS. Well that's obvious, isn't it?

(*Pause. Is that compassion in his eyes?*)

(*Then, to ELLA.*)

Fatherless too?

(*ELLA shakes her head, "No."*)

(*She points at him.*)

What's wrong with her, she dumb?

ADDIE. She's an idiot.

POPS. I can see that.

JESSIE. She means that in the clinical sense, Pops.

LIZZIE. She got kicked in the head by a mule when she was five. It wasn't all her fault.

(ELLA smiles, and nods, and holds up four fingers.)

POPS. Testy beast, the mule. It's because they're so sterile.

No, I mean is she dumb in the sense of speechlessness? Can she talk?

JESSIE. She can talk if she wants to. Say something, Ella.

ELLA. You're the very bad man.

(Pause.)

POPS. She's perfect, don't ever change.

Who's in charge here?

LIZZIE. Jessie's the eldest.

JESSIE. I'm only twenty-nine. —And I've never even *been* to England!

POPS. No no, who's the brains, the *artiste*. Who's got the vision here?

(Another pause.)

(EFFIE shyly replies.)

EFFIE. That would be me. The *artiste*...Effie Cherry.

(He sizes her up and down. She lowers her gaze some more.)

POPS. Beauty and brains. It just isn't fair.

EFFIE. (Blushes crimson.) Lizzie's the pretty one.

POPS. Oh no, you're pretty also. 'Cause you got prettiness...in here.

(He taps her big fat head. She smiles widely, though she's trying not to.)

Want my opinion though?

EFFIE. Of course!

POPS. You're gonna be stars.

(He re-lights his cigar.)

LIZZIE. We are?

POPS. Aren't we?

ADDIE. Who's we?

LIZZIE. Even Ella is?

POPS. Especially Ella! Audiences love retarded gals—

JESSIE. We prefer "idiot," if you don't mind.

POPS. —so long as you keep their noses clean.

(He gives ELLA a handkerchief: she uses it, a lot.)

POPS. Keep it.

I'm gonna take you fours to Chicago. What do you think of that idea?

JESSIE. Five.

LIZZIE. What's in Chicago, Pops?

POPS. The Chicago World's Fair's in Chicago next year, that's what.

EFFIE. You want to take us to the World's Fair?

POPS. That's the next step in this story of ours, the story of your lives, and you are writing it, I'm just proof-reading and there ain't no type-o's I can see:

Chicago World's Fair, 1893. It's your destiny!

EFFIE. He's a philosopher...

POPS. I don't like books much, they make me suspicious of my fellow man. —But trust me: you four girls are one of a kind—

JESSIE. Five.

POPS. —and I'm not the only one who's gonna think so!

(He takes out another handkerchief to mop his brow.)

JESSIE. He's sweating so much...

LIZZIE. He can't help it. He's Latin.

ADDIE. I don't trust him at all...

EFFIE. What's not to trust?

JESSIE. The slicked back hair...

LIZZIE. *(She sighs.)* His slicked-back hair...

ADDIE. The olive skin...

EFFIE. Such olive skin!

JESSIE. His waxed-up mustache.

LIZZIE. —Let me stroke your waxed-up mustache!

(Pause.)

POPS. I'm sorry, doll. You say something?

LIZZIE. Did I?

EFFIE. Are you originally from Spain?

POPS. What's that?

EFFIE. A country near France. —Don't you have some Spanish blood in you somewhere?

POPS. As a matter of fact, I do... Let me see here, I'm part Spanish-Dutch-Welsh-French-Slovakian-Sioux. If you go back a generation or—ten. How'd you know all that?

LIZZIE. It's your mustache.

POPS. You're observant. You both are.

EFFIE. And your skin—like a leather-bound book...

(Pause. Both LIZZIE and EFFIE are batting their eyes, blushing fiercely.)

POPS. You girls sure know how to flatter a man.

But listen: there's one thing you gotta do if you want to go all the way with me.

(JESSIE gasps, maybe gags a little.)

EFFIE & LIZZIE. —What?

POPS. Write...a one-act play!

LIZZIE. Ew. Why?

POPS. You're darling because you're so dim.

(He touches LIZZIE on the chin, again. She swoons—again.)

Everyone knows that every multilayered, multifaceted vaudeville show needs a stirring one-act play—a “short dramatic thunderbolt!” as they say, within the machinery of variety—a diamond, if you will, set upon the ring of the revue...

EFFIE. He's poetic, too...

LIZZIE. I love diamond rings!

POPS. And, as a short, dramatic thunderwork, it must contain some deep human truth.

LIZZIE. What's a human truth?

POPS. You're the ingénue: thinking gives you wrinkles. *(Her chin, again: swoons.)*

It's good business sense, girls: if you want to reach the top of your profession you'll have to write a short, sharp one-act play with deep, human truth.

EFFIE. I've been working on that.

(Pause.)

ADDIE. No you haven't, Effie—ow.

POPS. Oh yeah?

EFFIE. "Yeah."

POPS. Well you work on it some more, doll. And you work hard. Till your hand cramps. Then longer.

And when you're done working you send it on to me, via U.S. parcel post. On my dime.

(POPS gives EFFIE a shiny, sparkling dime.)

There's plenty more where that came from...

And if your one-act play is any good, I promise you girls we'll go all the way together...to the Chicago World's Fair! —In Chicago!

(He reaches into his pants pocket again, pulls out a chocolate bar, offers to LIZZIE.)

LIZZIE. What's that.

POPS. Milk chocolate.

LIZZIE. I can't, I'm matronly.

POPS. Who ever told you such a thing? You're as skinny as an aborigine! As your agent, I am telling you, in the next few months you must all gain at least thirty to forty pounds per female person. *(To EFFIE:)* Maybe more, in your case.

LIZZIE. —Oh!

(LIZZIE takes the chocolate bar, begins eating ravenously.)

POPS. Here's my card.

(POPS reaches into his pants pocket again, pulls out his business card.)

LIZZIE. —There's so much in your pocket!

POPS. What's your name again?

EFFIE. Effie. It's short for Iphigenia.

ADDIE. No it's not, Effie—stop touching me!

POPS. No, I'm talking about your show.

LIZZIE. *(Mouth full.)* "Unbelievable Cherry Sisters"!

POPS. That's the name of your act. You're going to have many more shows, I promise you, for years to come... Let's name your first show...something special...

EFFIE. *(Thinking.)* Let me think—

POPS. How's about: "The Unbelievable Cherry Sisters in: Seeing Is Believing!"

(He gives EFFIE his card.)

(She takes it.)

Because you girls need to be seen to be believed.

Scene 6

(The barn. Winter again. Is it ever not winter?)

(EFFIE's alone this time.)

(She speaks to us:)

EFFIE. I know what you're thinking...

But I'd never known men could be beautiful before.

I didn't even know you could use that word, "beauty," with men...

And I don't think he's handsome in the conventional sense. He is a touch...mature.

—But he said I was an artist.

He touched my big fat head.

He told me to write a one-act play—for him...with deep, human truth...

ELLA. *(Appearing.)* How can a face be like a book?

EFFIE. —Ella! You scared me.

(ELLA's carrying a basket of supplies. She has some snow on her hair and shoulders.)

ELLA. Can a face be like a book...?

EFFIE. Is that a riddle, Ella?

ELLA. Do you want to have a wedding one day?

EFFIE. Of course. Don't you?

ELLA. I won't have a wedding... I'm too slow... I'll never catch a man.

EFFIE. Maybe he'll catch you.

ELLA. Will it be beautiful?

EFFIE. My wedding? I hope so. One day.

ELLA. What will you wear?

(Before EFFIE can answer.)

I see you in a white dress, like snow...

A veil over your face...of snow...

Your wedding will take place out of doors, at night.

EFFIE. *(To us:)* Like Tiresias in the plays of William Shakespeare, Ella had the gift of second sight. Or future sight. As the Scots say. As you may have guessed already...

It could be unnerving sometimes.

ELLA. Let me stay and watch you write.

EFFIE. Okay. *(Time passes.)* It's boring. *(Time passes.)* Do you see anything happening yet...?

(ELLA shakes her head "no.")

ELLA. I'll be making your waxed-up mustache...

(She pulls out some tarpaper, a scissors, a bottle of glue.)

EFFIE. *(To us:)* How did she know I'd need a mustache for Addie...?

And why did she say I'd be married out of doors at night, with a veil of snow?

ELLA. *(Dreamily, quietly:)* How can a face be like a book?

EFFIE. *(To herself, as much as to us:)* How old am I now? I must be twenty-one, twenty-two... *(Time passes.)* What on earth should I be writing about? *(Another pause.)*

If I close my eyes, weeks later, I can still hear his voice...

(An idea. She writes.)

LIZZIE. "Enter an innocent young gypsy girl."

(LIZZIE enters, dressed innocently enough: something white, diaphanous; though dirty and ratty still, her nightgown maybe.)

(She has a few pages of script in her hand. She shakes off some snow.)

EFFIE. What are you doing?

LIZZIE. I'm freezing!

(LIZZIE grabs a "gypsy" shawl.)

EFFIE. That's my part, I'm the innocent young gypsy girl.

LIZZIE. No you're not—you're writing.

EFFIE. I can both write and act.

LIZZIE. You can't—you have to choose—!

EFFIE. Why?

ELLA. *(As she works:)* How can a face be like a book?

EFFIE. —What does that even *mean*, Ella?

LIZZIE. Sounds like witchcraft to me...

EFFIE. You can play her for now, Lizzie. While we rehearse. But when I'm done writing I will play the innocent young gypsy girl—

LIZZIE. No!—why? I'm prettier than you are, I'm the (*Mispronouncing:*) ingénue—

EFFIE. “Ingénue.”

LIZZIE. Who cares? —I hate French people!

JESSIE. (*Offstage.*) Hurry up, it's snowing outside!

LIZZIE. Again?

EFFIE. (*Writing:*) “Enter the innocent young gypsy girl's very matronly mother.”

(JESSIE enters, shaking off snow, script pages in hand also.)

JESSIE. “I am the innocent young gypsy girl's very matronly mother. I wear a kerchief wrapped round my head to keep the robust lice in. I squat on wide mannish haunches and cook dinner out on open flames. I am rife with superstition. I fear no man, only Fate. Yes, Fate, and—the Spanish Cavalier!”

(Enter ADDIE, with gusto, script pages too. In leather chaps.)

ADDIE. “I am the Spanish Cavalier! A-ho! Hallo!”

(ADDIE's “Spanish Cavalier” strongly resembles POPS the agent.)

EFFIE. (*Murmuring, writing:*) “Spanish Cavalier, with olive skin, swaggered thighs...chest cocked out and mustache...”

ADDIE. Mustache.

LIZZIE. Mustache?

EFFIE. —Waxed-up mustache! —Ella!

(ELLA has just finished crafting her tarpaper mustache.)

(She moves to ADDIE, daubs glue on her lip, sticks the mustache in place.)

ADDIE. “A-ha! A-ho!” —A-choo. This itches, Ella.

EFFIE. (*Prompting:*) You are the Spanish Cavalier.

ADDIE. —I know who I am!

LIZZIE. Why can't you be the cavalier, Effie? if you have to act. Why does Addie always have to play the man?

ADDIE. “I am the Spanish Cavalier! Hallo! As I have already made mention! And my way is to be cavalier—with women!

(“He” does a little dance. Castanets.)

ADDIE.

LIST TO ME WHILE I TELL YOU
HOW MUCH I ENJOY YOUR YOUNG WOMEN!
IN SOME VERY NAUGHTY WAYS
I HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO HAVE MY WAY
WITH THEM!

BECAUSE YOU SEE I AM GUAPO,
MUY GUAPO,
MUY MUY MUY MUY MUY MUY
MUY GUAPO,
AND I NUNCA TAKE NAY FOR AN ANSWER!

LIZZIE. "Hello. I am the innocent young gypsy girl."

ADDIE. "You're squatting."

LIZZIE. "Yes. Do you like it?"

ADDIE. "Yes. —But also, you are squatting on my land."

LIZZIE. "I don't pretend to understand what it is you think you're saying, Señor Cavalier! We gypsies are like the Red Indian that way, like the mighty Sioux, or the wily— (*A la the French.*) —Iroquois, in that we know this land to be no man's land. It is God's land, and we are all but gypsies wandering God's frontier."

JESSIE. That's good, Effie. That's patriotic.

ADDIE. It's too wordy. As usual.

EFFIE. Don't make me self-conscious—it's flowing through me!

ADDIE. "Impertinent gypsy tramp! How dare you speak to me in such bald romantic platitudes. This is my land, not God's! ("*He*" *spits. Dances.*) I will punish you now, striking you once, no twice, firmly, upon your delicate soft bustle with my stiff riding crop—and yet, I won't. Why? Because I see something in you."

LIZZIE. "You see something...?"

ADDIE. "In you."

LIZZIE. "In me? Already?"

ADDIE. "Something... I've never seen before. Something quite like—"

LIZZIE. "What. Tell me. Oh do not be afraid, Monsieur Cavalier, to tell me what-all you are seeing inside of me already!"

(*A pause. The "Spanish Cavalier" turns away.*)

ADDIE. "I must go. ("*He*" *turns back.*)

"But tonight: meet me here again, young buxom gypsy wench. And we shall wed. You and me. By the light of the full, full...full moon."

(ADDIE exits the scene – but not the barn – singing.)

MUY MUY MUY MUY MUY MUY
MUY MUY MUY MUY MUY...

(ELLA moves to ADDIE, gives her mustache a touch-up of glue.)

EFFIE. (To us:) A wedding! Out of doors! at night! How do I come up with these things?

ELLA. How can a face be like a—?

EFFIE. Okay, we get it already, Ella.

(JESSIE shuffles on.)

Come on, Jessie, be quicker than that...

JESSIE. I'm old.

EFFIE. Then start sooner.

JESSIE. —My character is old!

LIZZIE. —"Mother!"

JESSIE. "There, there, my child. There, there. There. Now, rest your head, here, upon my pendulous breasts. These breasts are large with mother-feeling. As if bursting with the sweet milk of mother-love. Rest your head...and unburden your heart's woe to me."

LIZZIE. (Smothered in JESSIE's breasts:) "I met a man!"

JESSIE. ...Hmn?

(LIZZIE breaks free.)

LIZZIE. —I said "I met a man!"

JESSIE. "O dear Lord! Undone!"

LIZZIE. "In the woods—"

JESSIE. "How often have I told you not to wander these woods alone? You may be nothing but an impertinent gypsy tramp, but you are virginal and therefore tasty as a cherry tart, and men will snap you up if they can."

LIZZIE. "He is a Spanish Cavalier—"

JESSIE. "O Lord! O Lord! Undone! Undone!"

LIZZIE. "His hair is dark, and his face is brown—like a book."

JESSIE. "A book?"

ELLA. A book.

LIZZIE. "And his mustache—"

ELLA. Is made of paper.

EFFIE. Ella! Be quiet!

LIZZIE. "He said I should meet him, in the woods again tonight. By moonlight we shall wed. In a wedding dress like snow. A veil of snow, also. And then...well, then—I know not what will become of me!"

(She swoons. Falls down.)

(JESSIE, as the Gypsy Mother, seems to think long and hard about something.)

JESSIE. "Here is what I think: I have thought long and hard about this..."

"If you meet him tonight in the woods, he will only pretend to wed. One can not wed by moonlight without a priest. I learned that the hard way. Have you never wondered who your father is? Never mind. Because he won't bring a priest, your Spanish Cavalier. He hates God, and all that God stands for. *(She spits.)* It will be a *façade*. A *charade*. A *canard*. And he will fool you just to have his way!"

LIZZIE. *(Standing up:)* "His way with what?"

JESSIE. "Why—with whatever it is men do with women."

LIZZIE. "Which is what, exactly?"

JESSIE. "Which is what?"

LIZZIE. "Exactly."

JESSIE. "What do they *do*?"

LIZZIE. "Yes, tell me please, Mother, I've never understood!"

JESSIE. "Why—they *love* them!"

LIZZIE. "O!"

JESSIE. "Yes, over and over again—and not always in very nice ways."

LIZZIE. "O! O!"

JESSIE. "List to me while I tell you, young innocent gypsy girl tramp daughter: if you meet this Spanish Cavalier in the woods again by moonlight: you are lost! Forever! —Do not go, my girl, do not go!"

EFFIE. *(To us:)* She goes.

Just as we go, to the World's Fair, in Chicago, 1893...

It really is the World's Fair: the whole world's there...

(She sings softly, to herself.)

I'M SO LONELY FOR OLD BROADWAY...

It's not New York...but we're getting closer...

In a dark room at the Palace of Fine Arts, Edison exhibits a moving picture machine. It will kill the vaudeville, someone whispers by my side... But when I turn to see who's speaking: I see Pops with his mouth next to Lizzie's ear...

(In tableau, in shadow, POPS is whispering to LIZZIE, who giggles...)

(The sound of an audience laughing.)

I let her keep her role, for the time being... She's right: you can't both write and act.

(On stage now, ADDIE and LIZZIE are off-book, more costumed: a cape and gleaming sword for ADDIE.)

ADDIE. *(Swaggering:)* "You've come! My innocent young cherry-tart-like gypsy wench!"

LIZZIE. "Of course I've come—you rake!"

("She" slaps "him.")

ADDIE. "You love me!"

LIZZIE. "Of course I do! How could I not do? —But I know you not! I know not love. How could we two but love? You are a mystery to me, a buzzing hive of bees. You are the dark, sea-salty depths—"

ADDIE. "Take off your clothes."

LIZZIE. "Yes, right away."

(LIZZIE takes off her clothes, down to her pink leotard.)

"What ho! Where is the priest?"

ADDIE. "Don't be so naïve. A 'padre'? *("He" spits.)* Do you see this sword that hangs from my belt? This is all the padre I need!"

LIZZIE. "I don't even understand the comparison!"

ADDIE. —"Take off *all* your clothes!"

("He" draws his sword.)

(LIZZIE screams, a long drawn out contralto scream...)

(Lights out. Lights up again.)

Scene 7

(Backstage, World's Fair.)

LIZZIE. I feel so different...

(LIZZIE sits. Her hands go to her stomach.)

(JESSIE is reading a newspaper.)

JESSIE. It makes no sense at all... It's like they saw some other show, someone else, not us. Some *imposters*...

ADDIE. Read it out loud to everyone.

JESSIE. "The Unbelievable Cherry Sisters in: Seeing is Believing!"—exclamation point—"wowed the audiences last night"—

LIZZIE. That's not bad.

JESSIE. —"with their awesome dearth of saving graces,"

(Pause.)

ADDIE. That's bad.

LIZZIE. What's "dearth" mean? a little or a lot?

JESSIE. "with their alternately mewling and booming howls disguised as music,"

LIZZIE. I do not howl!

JESSIE. "their leotards like madhouse uniforms,"

ADDIE. Sorry, Ella.

(ELLA seems quite hurt by this.)

JESSIE. "their disgraceful bovine leaping,"

LIZZIE. What's "bovine"?

ADDIE. Worse than matronly. But only just a little.

JESSIE. "and their one-act melodramatic play, *The Gypsy's Warning!*"—exclamation point—"which betrays an all-too-obvious spinsterish anxiety."

(A long pause. JESSIE puts the paper down.)

LIZZIE. What's "spinsterish anxiety" mean?

(EFFIE sits down heavily.)

EFFIE. It means I wrote it.

(LIZZIE is wearing the white dress.)

LIZZIE. ...Where's Pops?

JESSIE. He's dead, Lizzie. He's been dead these last few years...

ADDIE. She's talking about the other one, Jessie.

LIZZIE. Am I?

JESSIE. Oh.

ELLA. I'm going to be going away...

(She raises her hand and points spookily at:)

(POPS, who's entered the scene, unseen. His new suit's newer, his slick hair's slicker. He's smoking a thicker, longer cigar.)

(But he's sweating a lot more.)

POPS. How's it feel to be famous?

ADDIE. —Infamous, more like it.

JESSIE. Have you read these reviews?

POPS. Who reads reviews? Sure, I read them...

JESSIE. *The New York Times* sent someone—

POPS. What's that, a weekly?

JESSIE. —and the headline reads simply: "Five Freaks From Iowa."

(Pause.)

POPS. That depends on your interpretation.

ADDIE. Of Iowa?

POPS. We're sold out all week long, girls. Now tell me: would that happen if we were a flop?

LIZZIE. Maybe...

POPS. Lizzie! ...I'm surprised at you.

(He goes to chuck her under the chin—she turns away this time.)

LIZZIE. Sometimes I get the feeling...

POPS. What feeling?

LIZZIE. —I'm going to throw up.

(She exits to throw up. POPS takes out his handkerchief to mop his face. His handkerchief is getting bigger and bigger...)

POPS. What's the matter with you gals? Didn't they laugh?

ADDIE. In all the wrong places.

POPS. Ipso facto, that's a contradiction in terms—!

JESSIE. What about Lizzie's songs? They laughed at the sweet ones, and they laughed most impertinently, I must say, at the comic...

POPS. Do not doubt, my girls! Do not give in! remember what Lincoln said.

ADDIE. What did he say?

POPS. "Don't worry about it!"

Look, you're green. It's sweet. I see this every day. You don't yet know how hard this business can be... But this is how they love you on stage!

Love is a mysterious thing, onstage...

It does not always come when you want it to. It does not always come from whom you would like it to come from. Sometimes people love people they're not supposed to love. Or they love you in a way you really wish they wouldn't—that's a crime, in certain states.

But love is love, like money's money, so please, girls—don't be so picky!

(The sisters look unconvinced.)

ADDIE. You sure are sweating a lot, Pops...

POPS. Am I? I think I got a touch of whatever Lizzie's got...

(LIZZIE has returned, looking peaked.)

(POPS reaches into his pants pocket.)

Guess what I have for you here, girls...

LIZZIE. Please don't say chocolate.

(He pulls out a telegram.)

POPS. It's a wire—

LIZZIE. That's a piece of yellow paper.

POPS. From Hammerstein.

JESSIE. Who's Hammerstein?

ADDIE. A kind of cow.

POPS. You're kidding me, right? Only the biggest producer on Broadway...

And here it says, in regulation English, that you four gals have been invited to New York City...to play the Olympia Theatre on Broadway!

JESSIE. What do you mean four?

(Pause.)

LIZZIE. You mean five of us, right Pops?

ELLA. I'm going to be going away...

POPS. Try to understand things, girls. Hammerstein runs a family establishment. He's cleaned up the vaudeville. He values, as do I, as does everyone who's ever seen your show, your...fidelity to one another.

But he knows you'll get more laughs without her.

And I have to say I agree. I was wrong about Ella. In a melodrama, she'd be fine. Drama's kind to imbeciles. But no one wants to laugh at a girl like this...it's *too* cruel.

(Pause.)

Here's your advance: five hundred dollars. One for each of you—even Ella.

(He holds out a hundred-dollar bill to ELLA.)

What do you say, Ella? You don't mind going home, do you girl? There's a good girl... I'll bet you miss it there, all that snow.

(ELLA takes the bill. Puts a corner in her mouth, tastes it.)

...So what's it gonna be, Effie? New York City, yes or no?

(He's holding out the remaining cash to EFFIE.)

(A quick beat; then EFFIE takes the money, gives a hundred dollars to ADDIE, then to LIZZIE.)

JESSIE. How could you...?

ADDIE. We'll send her more money, Jessie...

LIZZIE. She'll be happier at home—

JESSIE. Alone? —Have you all lost your minds?

ADDIE. It's for her own good, Jessie.

LIZZIE. She's ridiculed, I hear them sometimes.

JESSIE. —So are we!

EFFIE. We'll never get where we need to go if we keep her with us. She's holding us back.

JESSIE. She's our sister.

EFFIE. You can go home with her, if you want. We're going to New York City.

(ELLA smiles mysteriously.)

(EFFIE holds the remaining hundred-dollar bill out to JESSIE.)

...What's it gonna be, Jessie? Are you coming with us? Yes or no.

(JESSIE looks away from ELLA. She looks away from all her sisters.)

(After a pause, she takes the remaining hundred-dollar bill from EFFIE.)

(To POPS:)

Wire Hammerstein we're coming.

(Lights out. Or down to that sharp iris-light again, on:)

(EFFIE, to us:)

And that's how we got to the top of our profession.

(Iris-light shrinks to black.)

(Intermission.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(New York, Oscar Hammerstein's Olympia Theatre on Broadway.)

(All the sisters onstage, except ELLA.)

(JESSIE's banging the bass drum now, still with that old wooden spoon.)

(Bright lights, big show, big finish.)

ALL.

CHERRIES RIPE, BOOM-DEE-AY!

CHERRIES RED, BOOM-DEE-AY!

THE CHERRY SISTERS

—ARE ON BROADWAY!

EFFIE. —Oh!

(A small dense head of cabbage has come flying out of the darkened house and pegged EFFIE in the back, or the front, or the side of her very large head.)

(She's down.)

(The other sisters rush to her aid, help her to stand, etc.)

JESSIE. *(To the audience, with fury:)* Who did that? *(No response.)*

Who threw that head of cabbage at my sister's head? You? fat man, fourth row, mustache, very sad-looking wife... Did you throw that cabbage at my sister? *(No response. Some titters. To another.)*

You—you look like the sort of man who'd throw a vegetable at a girl... What do you have against women? You came from a woman, if I'm not mistaken, from her *womb*—

(Someone throws a rotten tomato at JESSIE—it explodes off the wall.)

EFFIE. Let's move on, Jessie.

JESSIE. Yes, let's.

Let's move on to the homily then, shall we? —Does everyone know what a "homily" is? Probably not. I'll let you in on a little secret here: a homily is "a tedious moral lecture," according to Dr. Webster. And let me *also* tell you, my homily's going to be *very* moral tonight, and exceedingly tedious! I can assure you... There's no reason why the theater can not be both tedious *and* educative, is there?

(EFFIE whispers in her ear.)

JESSIE. (*To the audience:*) Not tedious. —Not tedious at all! or tedious to you, perhaps, who have no moral compass...

VOICE. (*In the audience:*) Why don't you go back to Idaho!

JESSIE. "Idaho"? No, sir, I am no lowly spud-grubber... I am one proud Iowonian woman, of the golden-tasseled corn state. Though I doubt very much you'd be able to find either Iowa or Idaho on a color-coded map of the Union—with labels. —Can you even read?

No, I shall remain here on stage. Because my sisters and I have been engaged by one Mr. Oscar S. Hammerstein—the S. is for savings!—to perform for you all here tonight. And we are at the top of that bill—for a reason: "The Cherry Sisters in: Something Good, Something Sad!" Exclamation point!

(Some lettuce lands limply onstage.)

That's it. That's good. Get it out of your system. Any more fruit and veg'? Cough it up:

(Several more tomatoes hit the back of the stage; a sack of potatoes; some overripe melons; a chicken carcass.)

(Silence.)

(JESSIE steps into a special light.)

Tonight's homily is entitled, "Manners in the Twentieth Century!" Exclamation point, naturally.

(Silence, as JESSIE arranges herself for oration.)

(The other three sisters stand patiently upstage, listening, or pretending to listen. EFFIE is still rubbing her sore head.)

(JESSIE speaks with the overblown gestures and rhetorical flourishes of a temperance crusader, or some other zealot.)

"There are many things one must do, and many more things one must *never* do! These are the customs of a people...

"From sun-spangled Borneo, to the snow-swept Aleutians. From stone-strewn Tierra del Fuego, to the fish-friendly coasts of Nova Scotia. (*Pause.*) From Mohamed-loving Istanbul—"

VOICE. To your fat white ass!

JESSIE. (*Trying to ignore:*) "—every people have evolved their own especial manners, for good and for ill. Sometimes manners differ, from a people to a people, in their particular. But all good manners have one thing in common:"

VOICE. Shut your cake hole!

JESSIE. “—kindness!

“For what are good manners ‘good’ for? Well, as Dr. Darwin has suggested none too recently, nothing exists for no good reason at all—”

(Someone throws a cat on stage—ADDIE quickly hurls it off.)

(Flustered, heroic:) “—Well. I don’t know about you, but I believe that in the coming century Man’s manners will have evolved to such dizzying heights of decency that wars shall have become uncouth. *Gauche*, if you will.”

(Some offal, internal organs. A cascade of dubious condoms.)

“—*Famine!* What well-bred man will withdraw his crust of bread from within the mouth of one starveling Swahili?

“Nay, as I have proved, and as Dr. Darwin has none too recently divulged, as I mentioned, we learn, and we learn. And then we learn some more. And as we learn we become much nicer mammals. — Ah! For we are mammals, are we not? Argue me that! What man amongst us here will argue with me that we are not mammals!”

(A kitchen sink.)

“And so I believe, in the very core of my being, nay, in the white-hot wet molten core of my most feminine parts, *(She beats her chest.)* that one hundred years from now we shall live together, every last one of us—even you, Mustache!—in a state of Edenic good manners.

“For who amongst us desires pain and cruelty before kindness and love? Who confounds the rose for the knife, the slap for the tickle, the—?”

(A watermelon is heaved out of the front row and hits her in the gut.)

(She catches it, staggering back.)

Oh dear God—

(An enormous wave of laughter.)

EFFIE. *(Stepping forward, to us:)* There it is again. There you go...

I heard it this time, maybe for the first time...

I’m thinking...is this what laughter is?

LIZZIE. *(Gamely; jauntily:)*

CORN JUICE!

I’M SO THIRSTY FOR CORN JUICE!

IT’S BEEN SO LONG

SINCE I SANG THIS SONG

O, FOR CORN JUICE!

I'VE HAD THE JUICE OF NARANJAS,
I'VE SLURPED THE JUICE OF THE GRAPE,
I'VE SUCKED THE NECTAR OF THE GODS,
BUT IOWA'S JUICE IS GREAT!

EFFIE. I'm thinking of Jessie's Dr. Darwin. I'm thinking: you're an audience of baboons, of chimpanzees and apes in your tuxes and your gowns, or whatever it is you're wearing these days, sitting up on your hind legs, baring your yellow fangs...as you howl and shriek and gibber and drool...

I could've said something. I could've shut you up. I could have shut my sisters up. We could always just leave the stage. Can't we?

Why can't we—?

LIZZIE.

O, CORN JUICE!
I'M ADDICTED TO CORN JUICE!
I'VE GOT THE SHAKES
AND MY STOMACH ACHES
FOR SOME OF YOUR CORN JUICE!

I'VE SNIFFED THE COCAINE POWDER,
I'VE SMOKED THE MARIJUANA LEAF,
I'VE JACKED THE MORPHINE IN MY VEINS,
BUT IOWA'S JUICE IS SO CHEAP!

EFFIE. The fruit and veg' rained down...

(The fruit and veg' rains down.)

(A dumb-show of dodging:)

(Every time a Cherry sister's hit, the audience erupts in an orgy of laughter and applause.)

(LIZZIE begins to cry. Despite the assault, she finishes her song, tears and refuse staining her face.)

LIZZIE.

O CORN JUICE!
I'LL DO ANYTHING FOR CORN JUICE!
JUST NAME YOUR PRICE
AND I'LL TREAT YOU NICE
FOR SOME OF YOUR CORN JUICE!

(Lights move in on LIZZIE, a grotesque mask, then out.)

(POPS is waiting in the dressing room.)

Scene 2

(Backstage, Hammerstein's Olympia Theatre on Broadway.)

POPS. Don't be so naïve. This is what happens in New York when they love you: they feed you!

It's like the zoo, girls. Consider it a compliment.

(LIZZIE's still crying. JESSIE tries to comfort her.)

(POPS is drenched in sweat. He mops his face with a handkerchief throughout. This handkerchief is now really a towel.)

ADDIE. Those weren't compliments they were throwing out there...

LIZZIE. Do they hate us? —They don't even *know* us!

POPS. They're jealous, I'm telling you.

JESSIE. Jealous of what?

ADDIE. Yes, what exactly are they jealous of, Pops?

POPS. Not the audience, girls. The stars!

LIZZIE. Stars get jealous?

JESSIE. Which ones?

LIZZIE. You mean like astrology?

POPS. The brightest in the firmament today: Dixey, Dockstader. That slut Lottie Collins. Sheldman's Educated Dogs. —They're all so jealous of you and your red-hot ascendancy. Face it, girls: you're hot. And what happens in New York City when you're hot is they hire some young gallery gods to pelt you with defunct fruit and veg'. And other things. Rubbers. —It's time-honored Gothamist tradition!

ADDIE. Are *you* hot, Pops?

POPS. Just a little.

ADDIE. It's November.

POPS. Maybe I got T.B., I don't know.

LIZZIE. I don't find T.B. funny anymore...

POPS. I'm excited is all! It's obvious we got something going here, girls. Your talent, I dare say your genius, and of course your very popularity right now, are all so enormously immense that you're gonna have to expect fruit and veg' at every show!

LIZZIE. I had no idea that stars could be so cruel.

POPS. Believe it, doll, they're heartless.

(POPS *touches LIZZIE on the chin; she turns away.*)

ADDIE. Should we do it back to them, then?

POPS. Do what, Butch.

ADDIE. Go to their shows and throw garbage at the stars.

POPS. No no no—

ADDIE. Why not?

JESSIE. Yes, why not, Pops?

POPS. We're better off being stoic. Like what's his name, Jesus. Or Joan of Arc—in your case.

There's only one thing Americans love more than success, and that's failure.

(*EFFIE sits down, looking dejected and confused.*)

(*ADDIE takes her hand.*)

(*To EFFIE, re: her head:*)

You should ice that thing.

And now, ladies. For your own protection—

(*A net rises up, or descends, between the audience and the actors.*)

(*EFFIE talks to us through it.*)

EFFIE. We made the stars jealous, every time we stepped on stage...

(*EFFIE starts to slowly undress, throughout the following.*)

LIZZIE. Did you see how much garbage I got during "Corn Juice!" tonight? A steady barrage, a constant volley, a deluge of rotten envy!

ADDIE. I got sprayed during my comic monologue: some joker threw diced carrots through the net.

JESSIE. That fellow with the melons was back again tonight. Thank goodness for our protective netting!

EFFIE. (*To us:*) I read the papers to myself instead. I don't know why I did it.

LIZZIE. Someone threw a bottle at me tonight!

EFFIE. "The most talentless act to hit Broadway since Poodles Malloy in '84"...

ADDIE. Someone threw their chair!

EFFIE. "Miss Lizzie Cherry narrowly escapes being pretty, but her sisters were never in any such danger"...

JESSIE. (*Pulling a gun out.*) Someone threw this gun at me during my homily—

(*ADDIE and LIZZIE duck for cover.*)

It's not loaded...but it's the thought that counts, right?

EFFIE. (*Reading, in her underwear:*) "Their long, skinny arms, equipped with talons at the extremities, swung mechanically, and anon were waved frantically at the suffering audience. The mouths of their rancid features opened like caverns, and sounds like the wailing of damned souls issued therefrom."

(*EFFIE puts the newspapers down. Looks out at us.*)

And every night: we sold out.

ADDIE. They hate us...

LIZZIE. They loathe us!

JESSIE. They absolutely despise us.

(*EFFIE joins in:*)

ALL. —We're the best act in New York City!

ADDIE. What's the matter, Effie. Aren't you coming with us?

(*JESSIE and LIZZIE and ADDIE disappear, leaving EFFIE alone, backstage, late at night, in her underwear.*)

(*Her underwear is rather ornate, frilly, almost a bit tarty.*)

POPS. (*Appearing.*) Baby doll.

EFFIE. You scared me.

POPS. Who'd you think I was?

You decent? I'll turn around.

EFFIE. No, I'm fine.

POPS. No you're not: you're in your underthings.

EFFIE. Am I? (*Coquettishly:*) I'm sure it's nothing you've seen before, Pops...

POPS. You mean it's nothing I've never seen before.

EFFIE. That's a double negative.

POPS. I know. Ergo I have seen women in their underwear before, Effie. All the time.

EFFIE. Have you? that's fresh... (*She flirts strenuously:*) I don't think you should be talking to me like this, Pops...

POPS. Abramowicz. Myron Abramowicz.

(He sits down beside her.)

That's my name... I ever tell you that?

EFFIE. Are you Jewish?

POPS. Is my fly open? Just kidding. I'm Episcopalian. You got a problem with the Jews?

EFFIE. No.

POPS. Good. 'Cause my father was Hasidic.

EFFIE. Is that near Spain?

POPS. Not in a very long time...

Where is everyone? You know, I thought you were Lizzie from behind.

EFFIE. —Oh!

(She moves in for a coquettish slap.)

POPS. What are you doing?

EFFIE. I wasn't going to do it hard...

POPS. Well don't do it at all, okay? —Where is she?

EFFIE. Home. At the boarding house... She's not feeling well, as usual.

POPS. What about you?

EFFIE. I feel—

POPS. Desperate? just kidding.

What do you think of New York City, Effie? Is it everything you ever dreamed it would be?

EFFIE. I don't know yet...

POPS. Well you should find out. Fast. You should go out sometime, on the town. Find a man. An accountant, maybe. Somebody with very poor eyesight. You like men, don't you?

EFFIE. Like them how?

POPS. You're not like that sister of yours, are you?

EFFIE. I get lonely sometimes...if that's what you mean... After the show.

POPS. Tell me about it...

(He lays his head lightly on her shoulder.)

EFFIE. You smell like my father.

POPS. That's probably just 'cause I'm drunk.

(Pause.)

—And shvitzing! Jesus! all the time... I keep sweating around you girls... It's disgusting—I'm disgusting, aren't I?

(Pause.)

It's so hard, Effie...

EFFIE. What's hard? —It is?

POPS. Performing, all the time. You know? Isn't it?

EFFIE. You're not performing.

POPS. I am! All the time! So are you...

Sometimes I get so, so tired...

(He leans his head against her shoulder again.)

(He closes his eyes.)

You're the smart one... You're so much smarter than the other girls... Why are they all so dumb?

Are they dumb? or do they just pretend? Maybe I'm the stupid one here. I mean, you knew what was going on the whole time, right?... you've always known what was really going on...

(With his eyes closed, slowly, his hand has begun moving up her body, to her breasts.)

(He gropes her for a bit. She's frozen.)

(After a beat: EFFIE tries to kiss him.)

(POPS stands up.)

POPS. Sorry, you're not my type.

EFFIE. But—

POPS. It's not personal—

EFFIE. You said my head was beautiful—!

POPS. Listen, Effie, I'm marrying your sister.

EFFIE. —Which one?

POPS. Which one? Are you crazy? We're doing it Monday morning. City Hall. Hot shit.

EFFIE. Why?

POPS. Monday? It's our day off.

EFFIE. Why are you getting married at all?

—Because she's pretty? She's not that pretty, she's prettier than me, but—

POPS. Effie—

EFFIE. Did you knock her up? You seduced her, right? —You forced yourself on her probably, backstage, in Chicago, I saw you whispering—

POPS. This isn't one of your one-act plays! ...I love her. Simply put. In my way. More or less.

EFFIE. What about the show?

POPS. Show's over. Don't cry—New York City, at least. That's what I came back here to tell you girls. That's why I've been out celebrating... Hammerstein's cancelled our gig. Something about a joke getting old.

EFFIE. What about the money?

POPS. I'm keeping most of it. You'll understand...for Lizzie, the kids... It's the right thing to do.

You'll tell the other girls, okay? I can't face them all tonight...

(Pause.)

Hey, don't look so sad... We had some fun, didn't we? —We were popular! Most people are *never* popular, even with their own families...

And remember, love's like money: every bit counts.

You'll get home okay?

(She doesn't answer. He turns the lights out on EFFIE as he goes.)

(From off:)

So long!

LIZZIE. So long, everybody! Good-bye!

(LIZZIE appears in a wedding dress, bouquet in hand.)

(Crowds, train whistles, shoes clacking on marble...)

JESSIE. Congratulations, Lizzie!

ADDIE. Congratulations, Lizzie...

(JESSIE is crying.)

LIZZIE. I only wish Ella could've come! What a hurry it's all been!

EFFIE. What do you expect from a shotgun wedding?

LIZZIE. What did you say, Effie...? I can't hear you so well anymore, what with all the crowds of Grand Central Station, and the whistles of the trains, and the sounds of shoes clacking on marble—

EFFIE. I said you got knocked up!

(A train whistle shrieks.)

POPS. *(Offstage:)* —Come on, Lizzie, train's leaving!

(LIZZIE begins to cry now too.)

LIZZIE. I'll write you from Saratoga Springs. We're going there for the horses, and the baths. And the horses. Everybody knows the only thing Pops loves more than a good horse race is taking a bath! *(She cries a lot.)* It'll be so lovely, you'll see.

And by the time I'm home again...I promise you all I'll be pregnant!

JESSIE. Where's home, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. What, Jessie?

JESSIE. Where are you going to live from now on?

LIZZIE. Flushing! —Isn't that the most beautiful name? So clean!

(LIZZIE cries, a lot.)

EFFIE. —Did you know his name is Myron?

LIZZIE. Of course, Effie! He told me that months ago...

What's wrong with you...? You look like you've seen a ghost.

POPS. *(Off:)* Lizzie! Train's leaving!

EFFIE. Goodbye, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. What did you say? I can't hear you... I can't hear you so well anymore...!

(LIZZIE goes.)

(But before going:)

(She turns and throws her bouquet up over her shoulder, into the air.)

(She's gone.)

(The bouquet lands onstage and breaks into many small pieces.)

EFFIE. *(To us:)* Five months later she died in childbirth. *(Pause.)* Unlike me, this baby died too.

We never heard from Pops again...

(ADDIE and EFFIE slowly pick up the pieces of LIZZIE's bouquet while they quietly sing.)

ADDIE. I AIN'T NEVER BEEN KISSED...

EFFIE. *(To us:)* After Lizzie died, Addie and I sang her songs as duets. *(She sings.)*

I AIN'T TALKING CHEEKS, I'M TALKING HOT LIPS.

ADDIE. NO MATTER HOW HARD I SWING THESE HIPS...

EFFIE & ADDIE. I AIN'T NEVER HAD NO LOVER'S KISS.

(Music continues, becomes a new song.)

I wrote a new song. Something just for me to sing, alone:

LOVE'S LIKE MONEY,
I AIN'T NEVER GOT ENOUGH.
MY WALLET'S ALWAYS EMPTY,
MY HEART'S ONLY FULL OF FLUFF.

LOVE'S LIKE MONEY,
BETTER SQUIRREL IT AWAY.
WINTER'S GONNA COME, ONE DAY,
AND STEAL YOUR NUTS AWAY.

I USED TO DREAM THAT LOVE WAS FREE
BUT NOW I SEE YOU EARN IT,
YOU SELL IT AND YOU STEAL IT
AND IN A PINCH YOU BURN IT
—IT'S BUSINESS AND YOU'RE THE BOSS!

LOVE'S LIKE MONEY,
EVEN WHEN YOU'RE RICH
IT COULD ALL JUST DISAPPEAR,
AND LEAVE YOU SLEEPING IN A DITCH.

I USED TO DREAM THAT LOVE WAS FREE
BUT NOW I SEE YOU EARN IT,
YOU SELL IT AND YOU STEAL IT
AND IN A PINCH YOU BURN IT
—IT'S BUSINESS AND YOU'RE THE BOSS!

LOVE'S LIKE MONEY,
DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU'RE OWED.
IT'S YOUR JOB TO MAKE IT
OUT HERE ON THE OPEN ROAD...

(Train whistle blows.)

(ADDIE and JESSIE appear, with luggage.)

(ADDIE carries two suitcases—one for EFFIE.)

ADDIE. Let's go, Effie. Train's leaving.

(EFFIE takes her suitcase.)

JESSIE. It'll be so nice to see Ella again...

EFFIE. We're not going home. We're going on tour.

JESSIE. How can we—?

ADDIE. We don't have any money left, Jessie...

JESSIE. We don't have a manager either!

EFFIE. I'll be our manager from now on.

JESSIE. That's absurd! A manager is a man—that's why it's spelled that way!

EFFIE. Not anymore, Jessie. It's the Twentieth Century now. Remember?

Scene 3

(*The Open Road.*)

EFFIE. Pick up the pace, girls! —Pick up those bags, Jessie, they won't carry themselves.

(JESSIE has several bags, in fact, like a pack mule.)

JESSIE. Where are we now...?

ADDIE. In Cairo.

JESSIE. As in Egypt?

ADDIE. Illinois actually.

JESSIE. Where's my ticket? ...Has anyone seen my other suitcase?

EFFIE. We'll need more light in here!

ADDIE. —Drop the net! —Raise the curtain!

EFFIE. That's not what the contract said, asshole.

JESSIE. Effie!... It's like I don't know you anymore...

(EFFIE runs into the arms of JESSIE.)

EFFIE. "Mother!"

JESSIE. "There, there, my child. There, there. There. Now, rest your head, here, upon my pendulous breasts."

ADDIE. Ladies and—one gentlemen. —Is that a gentleman? I beg your pardon, Sister.

—The human pyramid!

(They do it—JESSIE's always on the bottom.)

(They break out of it.)

EFFIE. Let's go.

ADDIE. Look, there's a letter here from Ella—

(ELLA appears, wearing some kind of fancy headdress.)

ELLA. Dear my three remaining sisters:

Snow is cold here; Iowa is cold here, in winter. And fall. And spring. Summer is just about right, don't you think?

Thanks for all that spare change you send...

EFFIE. *(To us:)* If you're surprised she can write like this, so are we.

ADDIE. Is that a semi-colon?

JESSIE. Is she getting someone else to write these letters for her? Whom?

ADDIE. That's Ella's handwriting all right: enormous...

EFFIE. In red crayon.

ELLA. I've been working on my routine.

JESSIE. What routine?

ELLA. Because I know, if only I can get better, if I can find some more talent—in me, somewhere—then one day I'll be able to see you all again, to perform with you, out on the open road...

I miss you all...

I know I was not so good before. I don't blame you all that much.

(She starts to juggle, some old whiskey bottles.)

Every day now I go out to the barn, and I practice my juggling—some of Pops' old bottles. The ones he kept hidden inside all that wet hay. There's so much wet hay—! Which is why it hardly matters when I break a few.

(She breaks all of them.)

JESSIE. That sounds dangerous...

ELLA. *(Cuts her finger.)* Shit.

EFFIE. Let's go girls, train's leaving.

JESSIE. —Again?

ADDIE. Oskaloosa...

(EFFIE's scribbling in her little brown journal.)

EFFIE. Thirteen dollars for deposit please...

ADDIE. Osceola...

EFFIE. Eight seventy-four, no make that -five.

ADDIE. Ottumwa...

JESSIE. Where's that? In Canada?

EFFIE. We're in Dubuque now.

JESSIE. Sioux City.

ADDIE. (*Fading away:*) Waterloo...

JESSIE. As in France?

EFFIE. What difference does it make where we are, Jessie? We're on stage—we're all over the corn-belt these days!

JESSIE. "We're the best the corn-belt has to offer"...

EFFIE. We are!

JESSIE. I'm going to take a nap.

(JESSIE takes out a hip flask and swigs.)

ADDIE. (*Prompting:*) "My dear sir—"

EFFIE. "My dear sir, I think you're fresh!"

ADDIE. "I think you're fresh! Like a summer rain!"

EFFIE. "And you're like a winter drizzle."

ADDIE. "I can't help it! You make me feel damp!"

EFFIE. —"Fresh!"

(EFFIE slaps ADDIE perfunctorily.)

ADDIE. Ladies and—or should I say, nightwalkers and—gentleman farmers:

—The human pyramid!

(*They do it again: JESSIE's on the bottom again, of course.*)

ELLA. Dear Mis Hermanas:

(*Enter ELLA again, with a unicycle, and wearing a dirty army helmet. She's got some mud on her face too.*)

ELLA. Today is spring thaw. Mud is ubiquitous.

EFFIE. "Ubiquitous"?

ELLA. Meaning "everywhere," like God used to be. You should know that, Effie!

EFFIE. I *do* know that but—

ELLA. I've been learning to ride my unicycle.

(ELLA *prepares to ride the unicycle.*)

JESSIE. Where'd she find a unicycle...?

ELLA. I made it. From an old bike with only one wheel left. Hence "uni."

EFFIE. We know what a unicycle is...

ADDIE. "Hence"?

ELLA. And it's difficult but I think I might learn how to do it well, one day. And juggle at the very same time.

(She *tries to juggle and cycle at the same time: she fails.*)

(She *falls.*)

—Damn! Damn it all to Hell I swear it is hard work!

JESSIE. Amen, sister...

ELLA. I think one day you will like my new act, girls. When you come home to visit, I'll show you.

When will you be coming home...?

JESSIE. When *will* we, Effie...?

EFFIE. (*Her book.*) Tulsa. Five flat for deposit please...

ADDIE. Amarillo.

EFFIE. Three dollars and thirteen cents.

JESSIE. Does anyone else have this rash?

ADDIE. That's not a rash, Jessie. Those are bed bug bites.

JESSIE. —Jesus!

EFFIE. —Jessie! Your language—

JESSIE. Oh, blow it out your ass.

(JESSIE *takes another swig.*)

ADDIE. Salt Lake City.

EFFIE. (*Journal.*) Two fifty: "house was small and mean."

JESSIE. These Mormons can be so touchy sometimes...

ADDIE. It's the polygamy. It makes you grouchy.

EFFIE. Manhattan.

JESSIE. Where?

ADDIE. Kansas.

JESSIE. Oh.

EFFIE. Bellevue.

JESSIE. Hospital?

ADDIE. Nebraska.

JESSIE. Right. —Are you going to eat that meatloaf?

ADDIE. That's not meatloaf, that's an old sponge.

JESSIE. ...It's raining so hard.

EFFIE. No that's hail.

ADDIE. And sleet.

JESSIE. It's snowing again...

EFFIE. Flood.

JESSIE. Lift up your skirts, girls—!

ADDIE. Drought.

JESSIE. —Has anyone seen my medicine?

ADDIE. You mean your corn juice?

EFFIE. Twister!

ADDIE. Dust bowl! —A-choo!

EFFIE. Locusts.

JESSIE. Are you going to eat that honey?

ADDIE. That's not honey, I just sneezed.

JESSIE. Is there a draft?

EFFIE. It's winter.

ADDIE. Summer.

JESSIE. Autumn.

EFFIE. Winter.

ADDIE. Winter.

JESSIE. When is it ever not winter?

EFFIE. These years are racing by—like a train—

ADDIE. Like we're *on* that train—

EFFIE. There's a cow. And another. And another.

ADDIE. It's all moving so fast—!

JESSIE. Is anyone else feeling nauseous?

EFFIE. Is this what life's like, getting old...?

ADDIE. Cabool, Missouri.

EFFIE. Twenty-four cents and (*Someone throws these onstage.*) two miniature chickens.

ADDIE. Thank you!

JESSIE. My corns...

ADDIE. Mansfield, Missouri.

EFFIE. One Canadian dime.

ADDIE. —Cheapskates!

JESSIE. Does this feel like a hernia to you...?

ADDIE. Licking, Missouri.

EFFIE. Nobody came. Nobody at all. Left Licking, all our bills unpaid.

ADDIE. Missouri...Missouri...

JESSIE. (*Sounding a lot like "misery".*) Missouri...

EFFIE. What's wrong with you this time, Jessie?

JESSIE. I'm sweating, all over. I'm hot, I'm tired—

EFFIE. Maybe you shouldn't carry that accordion around with you all the time.

JESSIE. My squeezebox? —I've got to practice.

ADDIE. Maybe it's the change of life.

JESSIE. What change of life?

ADDIE. You know...

EFFIE. Already?

ADDIE. *It is* getting a bit stale, Effie... Maybe we need a new act? Something a little more...contemporary?

(JESSIE *plays her squeezebox.*)

(As EFFIE hooks on a very long thick black beard.)

EFFIE. "K-nock, k-nock!"

JESSIE. "Who'sa dere?"

EFFIE. "It is I! The landlord, Teviah Schmalzagazicht! —Oy gevalt!"

JESSIE. "—Oh sole mio!"

ADDIE. "Turn offa de light and shutupa de face!"

JESSIE. "—He wantsa de rent!"

ADDIE. "How cana we paya de renta! We can nota evena feed spaghetti to our own bambinos and bambinas!"

JESSIE. "We can nota feed our bambinitos because you nevera go to a worka!"

ADDIE. "How cana I go to a worka when I'm Italian? —Oh! I wish I wasa back at a home-a in Sicilia with Mama!"

EFFIE. (*Still Teviah:*) "And for this I went to college? —You know what? forget about it..."

JESSIE. (*On her squeezebox:*)

WE CANNOT PAY THE LANDLORD
WHEN HIS HANDS GO K-NOCK, K-NOCK, K-NOCK.

ADDIE.

WE CAN NOT PAY THE LOAN SHARKS
WITH THE MEATBALLS THAT WE HOCK.

JESSIE.

WE CANNOT PAY THE DOCTOR
AFTER A VISIT FROM THE STORK.

ADDIE.

SO WE BLOW OUT ALL OUR CANDLES,
NOT A FLAME AND NOT A SPARK,

JESSIE.

AND WE FEED OUR CHILDREN GARLIC
SO WE CAN FIND THEM IN THE DARK!

(ELLA appears in the barn loft above, wearing an aviator cap,
goggles on her forehead.)

ELLA. Dear Gals:

What a hot summer it's been. Jesus! —Jesus H. Christ! Our barn is falling down practically! The barn has become a bastion of broken bottles and rags—

EFFIE. "Bastion"? I know what that means, but—

ADDIE. Why is she yelling so much...?

JESSIE. She's been drinking. She sounds drunk.

ELLA. I am finally now so good at juggling whilst riding on this unicycle, that I have decided to string a rope from loft to rafter out here in the barn—

JESSIE. Oh sweet Jesus...

ELLA. And any moment now I promise you I'll be ready to wheel out across that empty space above our very hard barnyard floor—

JESSIE. She can't do that!

ELLA. —whilst juggling—

EFFIE. "Whilst"?

JESSIE. —She'll die!

ELLA. And yes, I am afraid that I might die...

So I have taken to fortifying myself with corn juice. I find it gives me strength. No wonder Pops was so fond of the devil drink!—woops.

(ELLA has been climbing up onto the loft railing, reaching out for a piece of dangling rope...and she almost falls.)

(JESSIE almost faints: she sits.)

Effie...?

Remember that dream I told you about? Years ago? That you would get married, out of doors, at night? With a dress like snow, and a veil of snow also...?

Well I was wrong about one thing: it's not a wedding. Not a wedding at all...

(ELLA disappears.)

(JESSIE, below, picks up her suitcase.)

JESSIE. I'm going home.

EFFIE. They paid to see a show, Jessie.

JESSIE. Who cares about them? —Our sister's about to kill herself!

ADDIE. We'll go home together, when the tour's over. Okay? Just for a rest. —How's that sound, Effie? take a month off—

EFFIE. Whose side are you on?

(Pause. Now ADDIE is hurt.)

JESSIE. We can sell the land, keep the house. Or get a house in town—

EFFIE. (*Disgusted:*) In Marion?

JESSIE. In Cedar Rapids, if we want. An apartment, in the city.

EFFIE. Cedar Rapid's not the city.

ADDIE. —What would we do all day, Jessie?

JESSIE. Nothing! Can you imagine how nice that would be?

We'd take care of Ella...listen to the radio, all of us together, to all the acts coming straight to us from New York City. We'd make fun of them for once—it'd be so nice to make fun of somebody else, for once, wouldn't it?

And we'd grow our own vegetables, and fruit. We wouldn't have to dodge them anymore—we'd eat them! And we'd clean up all that mess that Ella's made.

We'd walk up and down that old house in Marion, remembering things how they used to be.

EFFIE. Things were awful in that house.

JESSIE. Then we'd remember it better than it was...

Instead of living out here, on the open road all the time—

ADDIE. I like it out here, on the open road. We meet so many people—

JESSIE. Who we never see again.

ADDIE. Nobody ever tells us what to do—

JESSIE. Don't you want to fall in love? Don't you want a family?

ADDIE. Why?... I already have one.

EFFIE. She's lazy. That's all it is. —You've always been this way, Jessie. —*And pessimistic. You've never once believed in us!*

JESSIE. Oh, Effie. (*Pause.*) That was impolite.

(*Another pause.*)

Tonight, Effie. Because you're my sister. Then I'm done.

ADDIE. —Inmates and guards of Leavenworth Prison—and Warden Johansen, of course:

The human pyramid!

(*They do it one more time.*)

(*This time JESSIE collapses under the weight of her sisters.*)

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The Cherry Sisters Revisited (1st ed. - 05.09.12) - cherrysisters_pianovocal5gm
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THE CHERRY
SISTERS

2. My Bodice Neat an' Modest

Friedman/O'Brien/O'Casey

Music score for "My Bodice Neat an' Modest" by The Cherry Sisters. The score is written for Voice and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is D major (two sharps: F# and C#). The time signature is common time (C).

First System:

- Chords:** A7, D, F#7, Bm
- Voice:** My bo-dice neat an' mo-dest O is slip pin' sir Be
- Piano:** Accompaniment for the first system.

Second System:

- Chords:** G, D/A, A, D, F#7, Bm
- Voice:** care ful sir be care-ful please! The sil ken thread that holds it up is rip pin' sir O do be
- Piano:** Accompaniment for the second system.

Third System:

- Chords:** G, D, G, D/F#
- Voice:** care - ful O do be care - ful There now! It's down a - bout me waist Me
- Piano:** Accompaniment for the third system.

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6. I Ain't Never Been Kissed

Friedman/O'Brien

Music score for "I Ain't Never Been Kissed" by Cherry Sisters Revisited, featuring Friedman/O'Brien.

The score is written for Voice and Piano (Pno.).

Chorus:

ne ver been kissed I ain't talk-ing cheeks I'm talk ing Hot lips no mat-ter how hard I swing these

Verse:

hips I — ain't ne-ver had no lo-ver's kiss. I ain't ne-ver been a dish I ain't

Chords: C, D m, /G, C M7, G7.

Tempo: 4/4.

Key: C Major.

Time signature: 4/4.

Measure numbers: 4, 8.

Rehearsal marks: CUE: "That's not a joke, Ella."

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18. Corn Juice

Friedman/O'Brien

CUE:
"Is this what laughter is?" G E7

Voice

CUE:
"Maybe for the first time"

Piano

VAMP

Corn juice I'm so thirs - ty for corn juice

6 A m D G 6 C

It's been so long since I sang this song oh for corn juice! I've had the juice of the na

SLOWER, ad lib

12 A/C# E m A m E m

ran ja I've slurped the juice of the grape I've sucked the nec-tar of the Gods but

Pno.

Corn Juice

17 D7

I-owa's juice is great O

TEMPO

25 CUE: "Why can't we..." G

Oh corn juice

VAMP

31 E7 A m D7

I'm ad-dic - ted to corn juice I've got the shakes and my sto mach aches for some

36 G C A/C# G/D

corn juice! I've sniffed the coc ayne pow der I've smoked the ma ri-jua - na

SLOWER, ad lib

Pno.

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20. Love's Like Money

Friedman/O'Brien

Music score for "Love's Like Money" by Cherry Sisters Revisited, composed by Friedman/O'Brien. The score is in 2/4 time and features a Voice part and a Piano (Pno.) accompaniment.

The score is divided into four systems, each with a Voice line and a Piano line. The lyrics are written below the Voice line.

System 1:

Voice: Love's like mo ney I ain't ne-ver got e-
Piano: (Accompaniment)

System 2:

Voice: nough My wal let's al ways emp-ty my heart's on-ly full of fluff Love's like
Piano: (Accompaniment)

System 3:

Voice: mo ney You'd bet-ter squirrel it a - way Win-ter's gon-na come one
Piano: (Accompaniment)

System 4:

Voice: day and steal your nuts a - way I used to dream that love was free but
Piano: (Accompaniment)

The score includes chord markings above the Voice line: A m, D m, E7, A, /G#, /G.

Love's Like Money

24 $\text{F}\sharp$ D m E7

24 now I see you earn it you sell it and you steal it and in a pinch you burn it

Pno.

30 A m D m

30 It's bus iness and you're the boss Love's like

Pno.

35 A m D m A m

35 mo ney E-ven if you're rich It could all just dis-a-

Pno.

39 D m E A $\text{G}\sharp$

39 ppear this year and leave you sleep ing in a ditch I used to dream that love was

Pno.

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