

AIN'T SHE SWEET

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Craig Sodaro

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CHARACTERS

EDNA	twenty, a boarder at Mrs. Gunther's
HOPE	twenty, another
LUCILLE LOU LOUT	neighbor next door
HARRIET GUNTHER	owner of Gunther House
CAMILLE	twenties, another boarder
MARIAN	another
MARSHALL FIELDING III	seventy, a tycoon
ZELDA	twenties, another boarder
ITCHY FINGERS KLONTZ	a gangster
PRETTY BABY SCHNERD	another
BABS MALONE	their moll
DEDE	twenties, another boarder
AUBREY HILL	thirty, a film director
RUFUS VALENTINE	twenty-five, a film star
SUZIE	a fan
BLANCHE	another
DOROTHY	another
X. SCOTT FITZHERALD	a would-be writer
OFFICER O'MALLEY	
ELLIOT MESS	a crimefighter
VIOLET	his wife

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene One Parlor of Mrs. Gunther's boarding house for young ladies of good reputation, early evening.

Scene Two The same, several hours later.

ACT II

Scene One The same, an hour later.

Scene Two The same, midnight.

SETTING

The parlor of Gunther House, a boarding house for young ladies in Chicago, 1925. Wing entrance down right leads to outside. Wing entrance down left leads to other parts of the house and the small backyard. Large window up center with curtains on either side that are long enough actors can stand behind them. Window box under the window large enough for actors to get into. (It should have no back so the actors can crawl out) Window looks onto brick wall and a single scrawny tree which fades as night falls. Up left is small fireplace, now not in use. Table up right set with several chairs. Down left near entrance a radio sits on small table or shelf. Couch sits center with perhaps a small table and chairs close by. The room is decorated with a hodgepodge of artifacts from various exotic countries - fans from the Far East, a blanket from Mexico, bras trinkets from the Mideast, a small statue of a Chinaman, and so on, reflecting the 20s interest in exotic, foreign lands.

PROPS

Paper, pencil, notebook (Edna)
Large fan (Harriet)
Cane (Marshall Fielding III)
Paper (Zelda)
Newspaper (Camille)
Ice cream bowl (Dede)
Paper/pencil (Dede)
Books (Zelda)
Hat (Marian)
Plate of sandwiches (Edna)
3 violin cases (Itchy, Pretty, Babs)
Dust cloths or handkerchiefs (Itchy, Pretty, Babs)
Mug (Dede)
Hammers, chisels, crowbars, etc. (Itchy, Pretty, Babs)
Paper bag (Babs)
Guns (Itchy, Pretty, Babs)
Chinese handcuffs (Pretty)
Radio
Small Chinaman statue (Pretty)
Car keys (Marsh)

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ACT I

SCENE ONE

Setting: The living room of Gunther House, a boarding house for young ladies in Chicago, 1925. Wing entrance down right leads to outside, wing entrance down left leads to other parts of the house. Large window up center with curtains on each side looks out on brick wall and one scrawny tree, the branches of which we can see during the daytime scenes. Below window is a window box, large enough so an actor can get inside. (Have a false back so actors can get out easily.)

Up left stands fireplace, though it is not in use. Table up right with a few chairs set around it. Down left near entrance is radio. A couch sits left with chair and table. The room is decorated with a hodgepodge of artifacts from various exotic countries - fans from the Far East, a blanket from Mexico, brass trinkets from the Mid-east, and so on reflecting the interest in the 20s in exotic, foreign lands.

At Rise: It is evening. EDNA sits at table, writing. SHE crosses her last "t" and dots a final "i," with passion, then rises and reads aloud.

EDNA: Dear Mama, I am taking this opportunity to say I hope you're fine in Keokuk; I miss you every day. I'm still here in Chicago where everything is fine. I'm living at Miss Gunther's by the elevated line. I know you hate the thought of my living all alone, but at the age of 20, I am completely grown. I make six dollars every week at Harmon's Books and Stamps, and the girls at Miss Gunther's are nothing but real champs. As you can tell I'm practicing so that one fine day I'll be crowned the new Edna St. Vincent Millay. But my candle burns at both ends; the night is passing through - This stain is but a teardrop that I have shed for you. **(savoring the poem a moment)** Gee, Edna, you're good! **(a knock right; calling)** I'll get it!

(EDNA exits right as HOPE enters left in a slinky robe.)

HOPE: Who's here? Is it that darling man who helped me at the automat? I gave him my address and he told me he'd stop by!

(LUCILLE LOU LOUT, wearing a Victorian dress and shawl, enters right followed by EDNA.)

LUCILLE: **(furiously)** She's not home, hmmmmmm? Just what I'd expect!

EDNA: I'm sure she'll be back in a few minutes, Miss Lout.

LUCILLE: Mrs. Lout! I had a husband, but he went to an early grave.

HOPE: Yeah, he jumped! Oh, hi, Mrs. Lout! How's trix?

LUCILLE: **(pointing to HOPE)** THIS is what I want to talk to Mrs. Gunther about!

HOPE: Me? Gosh, are you on THAT again?

LUCILLE: I saw you in the backyard dressed in trousers!

EDNA: If Hope was in the backyard, what difference would it make?

LUCILLE: Today the backyard, tomorrow the sidewalk! And then...and then... **(crumples into a chair)**

HOPE: Then what?

LUCILLE: Downtown!

EDNA: But Mrs. Lout, times are changing! It's 1925!

HOPE: Yeah! Women can even vote!

LUCILLE: You won't catch ME in a voting booth!

HOPE: We burned our corsets.

LUCILLE: Ladies of breeding did not!

HOPE: Hey, if you want to do any breeding these days, you'd better have burned it!

LUCILLE: Oh! I will not sit and listen to such... such... decadence!

(LUCILLE rises as HARRIET enters right wearing a Chinese ensemble including pants and a jacket. SHE carries a large, Chinese fan.)

HARRIET: Good evening, dears! Look what I found! **(spins the fan)**

HOPE: That's the bee's knees, Harriet!

EDNA: That's your prettiest fan yet. Where are you going to hang it?

HARRIET: I'm not going to hang it. I'm putting it right here. **(places it in front of the fireplace)** It'll cover up this silly old fireplace! With central heating, who needs these dirty old things, anyway.

LUCILLE: Mrs. Gunther!

HOPE: Oh, yeah... Mrs. Lout's here.

HARRIET: Why, Lucy Lou out! How could I have missed you standing there?

LUCILLE: Do NOT call me Lucy Lou!

HARRIET: I think it's a cute name. Like something out of the Sunday funnies.

LUCILLE: I am here to lodge a complaint.

HARRIET: Another one?

LUCILLE: This... this... lady - and I use the term loosely - was in the backyard wearing trousers!

HARRIET: (*indicating her own*) Like these? (*to HOPE*) Did they fit? How did they look?

HOPE: Sinfully good!

LUCILLE: Oh! I don't know what's happening to young people these days, but I can tell you this: unless you mend your ways, young lady, you'll never even SEE the Pearly Gates let alone pass through them.

HARRIET: Why, Lucy Lou, I didn't know you have a hotline to heaven!

LUCILLE: You KNOW what I mean, Mrs. Gunther. And not only have I seen the girls who live in this house wearing slacks, but I have seen them smoking and I've heard them playing jazz! They probably even DANCE in here! If I see any further defiance of social norms, I will contact the police and they'll close this house of ill repute down before you can play the first five notes of Beethoven's fifth.

HOPE: Play Beethoven's fifth! I thought you drink it!

LUCILLE: You, Mrs. Gunther, stand warned! (*LUCILLE moves right, then stops and turns back*) And your new fan is shamefully garish! (*flounces off right*)

HARRIET: Good! If you don't like it, Lucy Lou, I know it's perfect!

HOPE: The nerve of the dame!

CAMILLE: (*enters left*) What dame?

EDNA: Mrs. Lout was here again.

CAMILLE: I told you not to wear pants in the backyard, Hope. She's got binoculars.

HOPE: I had to get the feel of 'em. And they're just lovely! I don't understand how men have kept it a secret all these years.

CAMILLE: Come on! You know how well men communicate.

EDNA: Do you really think she'll call the police?

HARRIET: Oh, Edna, don't worry your pretty little head. The Chicago police have enough trouble trying to round up the rumrunners and gangsters and close the speakeasies.

HOPE: Speaking of which, I'd better get dressed. My millionaire is taking me to Club Babaloo tonight.

HARRIET: Oh, to be young again!

HOPE: There's no age limit. You can come!

HARRIET: Sorry, I'm playing Mah jong tonight.

HOPE: So THAT'S why you're in that getup.

HARRIET: (*spinning around*) Like it?

CAMILLE: It's the cat's pajamas! Say, Mrs. Gunther, I just got a note

from my sister and she said she and her husband are going to be passing through Chicago and wonder if they can stay here tomorrow night?

HARRIET: Well, of course! We've got that extra bed in the attic. It's nice and cozy up there and nobody will bother them.

CAMILLE: You're the best!

HOPE: Say, Camille, did you read that little tidbit in the Trib?

EDNA: That's right! Some big Hollywood producer's coming to Chicago to find a new leading lady for Rufus Valentine!

CAMILLE: Rufus Valentine! Oh, my gosh! I melt when I hear his name.

HOPE: You and ten gazillion other dames.

CAMILLE: But when I get into pictures, I'll probably have to work with him, and all those other women can just eat their hearts out. Do they give a phone number or an address where he can be contacted?

HOPE: Are you kiddin'?

EDNA: You're just going to have to get lucky.

HARRIET: **(leafing through paper)** Girls, are they still running my ad for a couple?

EDNA: Right at the top of the column headed "Domestics Needed."

HARRIET: But no calls?

CAMILLE: Not one all day.

HARRIET: I can't believe how hard it is to get good help these days. ANY help these days. It seems there's always a better job. And it's not like I'm paying chicken feed. I'm offering a dollar a day and a room!

MARIAN: **(enters left, hurriedly)** Oh, gosh! What time is it?

HARRIET: Just about seven.

CAMILLE: I thought you left already.

MARIAN: I feel back asleep! Does my face look all right?

HOPE: It's kind of scrunches up and puffy, but since you're playing a vampire, I guess you look okay.

MARIAN: Hey, a job's a job.

EDNA: You're so lucky to be acting with John Verryman.

MARIAN: He's a real peach, but the stage manager is a creep! He told me if I showed up late one more time, he'd put a stake through my heart!

HOPE: Sirloin, rib eye, or T-bone?

MARIAN: You're about as funny as a hemorrhoid attack! Bye, all! **(races off right; from off right)** Yeah, she's in there! Go on in!

(MARSHALL FIELDING III, an old man wearing a top hat and sporting a cane, enters right.)

MARSHALL FIELDING III: Evening, ladies! I'm looking for Hope.

HARRIET: **(suspiciously)** Well, sir, there's a Rescue Mission just down

the street and they serve lots of hope with their hot soup.

HOPE: Harriet, I think he means me.

MARSHALL FIELDING III: You're the chickee who works at the automat?

HOPE: And you're the cute little fellow who lost his dime in the corned beef and cabbage slot?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: How about lettin' me repay you tonight with dinner?

HOPE: Gosh! You don't have to do that.

MARSHALL FIELDING III: Oh, don't I? **(growls like a tiger)** Grrrrrrrrr!
All my wives call me Tiger!

HARRIET: **(shocked)** How many wives have you had?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: I lost count, so I've given up on marriage. I'm just gonna whoop it up!

HOPE: Then let me slip into something comfortable. **(exits left)**

HARRIET: You know, sir, that these are all upstanding young ladies here at Gunther House. This is Edna, who's quite a poet.

MARSHALL FIELDING III: I know a poem!

EDNA: Really?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: There was an old lady from - -

HARRIET: Wasn't that sweet? And this is Camille, who's going to be in pictures.

MARSHALL FIELDING III: Know who I like? Clara Bow! She's got IT!

HARRIET: My point is, sir, who are you and are your intentions honorable?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: I sign my checks with Marshall Fielding III... but you can call me Bob. And as for my intentions -

HARRIET: You're Marshall Fielding III?

EDNA: You own that big store downtown?

CAMILLE: And have a gazillion dollars? What were you doing at the automat?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: That's how I got my gazillion dollars, my dear!

HARRIET: But your store has so many wonderful restaurants.

MARSHALL FIELDING III: And they cost an arm and a leg. You won't find me paying twenty cents for a dish of vanilla ice cream, no siree!
And regarding my intentions -

HOPE: **(enters, now dressed)** I hope you've got intentions, Bob. Ready?

MARSHALL FIELDING III: Vavavavooooom!

(MARSHALL FIELDING III almost tips over with excitement. HOPE catches him, then leads him off right. ZELDA enters left carrying a sheath of papers, a pencil stuck in her hair.)

ZELDA: Darlings! Listen to this and see if you like it.

CAMILLE: Another chapter of your book *Desire Under the Oaks*, Zelda?

ZELDA: Just a paragraph. Now, listen. **(reads)** He was older and should have been wiser. But when he saw her honey streaked hair and bee-stung lips, a tingle of excitement rushed through him. He felt young again and with the arms of a boy hovering on the brink of becoming a man, he grabbed her and crushed her to his beating heart. She gasped slightly, her eyes pools of liquid reflecting her hopes and dreams. She melted at his touch. Her lips sought his and they kissed - long, hard, and meaningfully. When they separated, gasping for breath, he turned away with remorse. "I shouldn't have done that," he said. But she turned him back toward her and kissed him again, longer, harder.

CAMILLE: **(after a slight pause)** Then what?

ZELDA: I'm not sure!

EDNA: Maybe Hope will be able to fill you in, in the morning.

ZELDA: She's got a date again?

HARRIET: But this time it's a bull's eye!

ZELDA: She's going out with a cow?

CAMILLE: She's going out with Marshall Fielding III.

EDNA: Can you believe it?

ZELDA: Awwwww, what's so great about owning a store? Lots of fellows own stores. I'm going out for a walk. Maybe I'll meet someone copasetic.

(ZELDA exits right.)

EDNA: Do you think she'll ever finish her book?

HARRIET: She's got to fall in love first, Edna. All right, girls? Who wants some ice cream?

CAMILLE: Count me in!

EDNA: Sounds perfectly copasetic to me!

(HARRIET, CAMILLE, and EDNA exit left. A moment later ITCHY, PRETTY, and BABS enter right.)

BABS: This is the dumbest idea you EVER had Itchy Fingers!

ITCHY: **(insulted)** Oh, yeah?!

PRETTY and BABS: Yeah!

ITCHY: You ain't thinkin' about mutiny, is ya? 'Cause if you are, I knows just what to do with a mutinee! And it ain't pretty, right, Pretty Baby Schnerd?

PRETTY: **(nervously)** Yeah, Boss.

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ITCHY: Remember Six Toes Tomlin? He tried to double cross me!

BABS: They say he ended up wearin' cement boots!

ITCHY: And he ain't the only seaweeds I planted in the Chicago River.

So, ya with me?

PRETTY and BABS: Right, Boss!

BABS: But I don't wanna be a maid!

ITCHY: How else are we gonna give this place the once over?

PRETTY: You're sure it's here?

ITCHY: Two Ton Tommy's dyin' words were "865 West Chicago Avenue!" So, what's the address of this place?

PRETTY: 865 West Chicago Avenue.

BABS: Don't look like there's a fortune here.

ITCHY: We're the only one that knows, Dumb Dora! Now...we all on the same page?

PRETTY: I dunno! I ain't learned to read yet.

HARRIET: **(enters left)** I thought I heard voices. Can I help you?

ITCHY: Yeah... we came about the ad in the paper, lady.

HARRIET: Oh, well, I'm Harriet Gunther. Welcome to Gunther House, a boarding house for young ladies.

PRETTY: Young ladies? As in sweet and beautiful?

(ITCHY elbows PRETTY in the stomach.)

HARRIET: Is he all right?

ITCHY: Oh, yeah... just a nervous condition. He upchucks every time he sticks his foot in his mouth! Now, you said you need a couple to do cleanin' and cookin' and general maintenance?

HARRIET: I'm just too busy to tend to all that! Between Mah jong and my psychic readings, I don't have time to wash dishes let alone cook and clean!

BABS: I know how ya feel, lady. What with knockin' off eight -

ITCHY: What my sister is tryin' to say is that she'd love to do the grunt work around here!

HARRIET: Oh, so you're related.

BABS: Not if we can help it!

ITCHY: Of course we're related. I'm Joe, this is my brother Moe, and that's my sister Flo.

HARRIET: Your parents must have been very poetic.

PRETTY: They was pathetic, God rest 'em six feet under.

ITCHY: When do we start?

HARRIET: Oh, well, I need to see some references.

BABS: What are those?

HARRIET: I need to speak with whoever you worked for last. You did work for someone before you came here, didn't you?

ITCHY: Oh, yeah, sure.

HARRIET: Who?

ITCHY: Well, the... the... Rockefellers... Vanderbilts... the Astors.

HARRIET: My goodness! How impressive. Which family most recently?

ITCHY: Take your pick.

HARRIET: The Vanderbilts.

ITCHY: Well, I'll have the old lady - I mean Mrs. Vanderbilt - stop by tonight to tell you how well we did for her.

HARRIET: Might I ask why you left the Vanderbilts?

ITCHY: Well, it was like this -

PRETTY: Too much silver to polish. That's all we did was polish, polish, polish!

BABS: You don't got a lot of silver, do ya?

HARRIET: No, but doesn't Mrs. Vanderbilt live in North Carolina?

ITCHY: She's in town. It ain't generally well-known, but she's seein' a Chicago chiropodist.

HARRIET: Oh, my, well, do tell her to stop by.

ITCHY: C'mon, More and Floe, we gotta go!

PRETTY: Nice meetin' ya.

BABS: Likewise, I'm sure.

(ITCHY, BABS, and PRETTY exit right as DEDE enters right.)

DEDE: Evening, Harriet. Who were the three stooges?

HARRIET: They're the only ones who've applied for the housekeeping job.

DEDE: It looks like it'd take three of 'em to do the job. Somehow they look familiar...

HARRIET: They worked for Mrs. Vanderbilt.

DEDE: The Vanderbilts Vanderbilts?

HARRIET: I assume so. Mrs. Vanderbilt's coming here this evening to give a reference.

DEDE: ***(incredulously)*** Yeah, right.

HARRIET: Good day at the office?

DEDE: Is there EVER a good day at the office?

HARRIET: Maybe you ought to try and find something more exciting.

DEDE: ***(sighing)*** What, exactly, would be exciting to me?

HARRIET: You could be a firefighter.

DEDE: Too hot!

HARRIET: A fisherman?

DEDE: Too cold.

HARRIET: A window washer.

DEDE: Too high.

HARRIET: A geologist.

DEDE: Too low.

HARRIET: I guess you'd better stay at the office.

DEDE: Yeah. It doesn't sound so boring now. I'm glad we had this talk.

HARRIET: I know what will spark you up! Tutti-frutti ice cream!

DEDE: It'll just add pounds, but I'm following you anyway.

(HARRIET leads DEDE off left. A knock off right. After a moment, EDNA enters left. Another knock.)

EDNA: I'm coming! Hold your horses!

(EDNA exits right, returning a moment later with AUBREY, who wears a topcoat and hat, and RUFUS, who is dressed like a monk with the hood up over his head.)

AUBREY: We're sorry to disturb you, but we're making some inquiries about your neighborhood.

EDNA: ***(suspiciously)*** What kind of inquiries?

AUBREY: Well, what kind of inquiries? Well...the kind that Friar...Tuck...here needs to send back to the monastery about opening a new branch here in Chicago.

EDNA: Friar Tuck?

RUFUS: Bless you, child.

EDNA: I didn't sneeze.

AUBREY: We're thinking of opening up a monastery right across the street.

(Knock right.)

EDNA: This place is busier than Union Station tonight! Excuse me!
(exits right)

(AUBREY and RUFUS hide behind curtains. A moment later SUZIE, BLANCHE, and DOROTHY enter right with EDNA.)

SUZIE: We KNOW he's here!

BLANCHE: We followed him here!

DOROTHY: ***(sniffing)*** I can smell his cologne!

ENDA: You're ridiculous! Rufus Valentine isn't here.

SUZIE: We're his number one fans!

BLANCHE: And he's in Chicago looking for a new leading lady!

DOROTHY: I'd kill for the job!

SUZIE: You'll get it over my dead body!

DOROTHY: That can be arranged!

BLANCHE: Yeah! Dorothy used to go out with a gangster!

SUZIE: That's the only thing Dorothy would go out with!

DOROTHY: Watch what you're sayin', sister!

EDNA: Look, ladies...you can see there's nobody here.

BLANCHE: Ya probably hid 'em!

EDNA: Why would Rufus Valentine come here, anyway?

SUZIE: This is a home for young ladies, isn't it?

EDNA: Yes, but -

SUZIE: Where there's smoke, there's fire, if you get my drift.

BLANCHE: We're gonna be watchin' this place.

DOROTHY: Cause if they came in, they gotta come out.

EDNA: That's fair enough.

SUZIE: And you know... if you ARE hiding Rufus Valentine, he doesn't like your type.

EDNA: I'll keep that in mind.

DOROTHY: We'll be right outside.

BLANCHE: So if you see him, give us a holler!

(DOROTHY, BLANCHE, and SUZIE exit right.)

EDNA: The coast is clear, Friar Tuck.

(AUBREY and RUFUS come out of hiding.)

AUBREY: We owe you our lives.

EDNA: Any truth to what they're saying?

AUBREY: Absolutely none! My name is Tim. Tim Wainright. And this is...

EDNA: ***(smiling, playing along)*** I know. Friar Tuck. What order are you with, Friar?

RUFUS: ***(with an Italian accent)*** The Little Friars of the Poor.

AUBREY: Now... do you have a back way out of this place?

EDNA: Oh, they'll see you leave!

AUBREY: Well, we can't exactly stay here.

EDNA: Why not?

AUBREY: That wouldn't be proper.

EDNA: There's a room in the attic. You could stay there until the three witches find Macbeth.

AUBREY: You're very clever, you know that?

EDNA: Flattery will get you safe passage to the attic.

RUFUS: That's a good. I'm dead tired!

AUBREY: ***(to EDNA)*** You sure you don't mind?

EDNA: No skin off my nose! Just go into the hall, then take a sharp right and go on up to the top floor. That's the attic.

AUBREY: Thank you!

(AUBREY kisses EDNA'S hands, then leads RUFUS off left. EDNA grabs her pen, sits, and dreamily writes, adding to her mother's letter.)

EDNA: P. S. Guess who just dropped in wearing a disguise? Rufus Valentine and one of his guys. I sent them into hiding right beneath our roof. I hope that I've not made a monumental goof! All the fans outside can do is shriek, but I'm the one who's locked inside with the sheik!

HARRIET: ***(enters left)*** Did I hear you talking to someone out here, Edna?

EDNA: Oh, no... I was just reading my poetry out loud. You know...to see how it sounds.

HARRIET: That's a very good idea. Get lots of practice reading it so when you read it to the public, you'll know exactly what you wrote.

EDNA: Wouldn't it be wonderful to read your poetry aloud to an audience?

HARRIET: Not mine! But maybe yours. Read me one of your poems.

EDNA: You really want to hear one?

HARRIET: Yes! Imagine we're at Marshall Fieldings and you're pushing your books. Go ahead! Sell me!

EDNA: ***(picking up paper, reading)*** A fly, so small and black sat upon my sunburned back. I tried and tried to give him a whack, but he just came back. Alack, alack! A fly, so small and black! ***(after a slight pause)*** Well?

HARRIET: ***(sweetly)*** Don't give up your day job!

(CAMILLE enters left holding newspaper as HARRIET exits right.)

CAMILLE: I can't believe the Trib didn't give any information about this talent search of Aubrey Hills'.

EDNA: Who's Aubrey Hills?

CAMILLE: Only Hollywood's greatest director! See? Here he is with Rufus Valentine! ***(shows EDNA picture in paper)***

EDNA: ***(surprised, pleased)*** That's Aubrey Hills?

CAMILLE: But he's nothing compared to -

EDNA: I wonder what Rufus Valentine would look like dressed as a monk.

CAMILLE: A monk? That passion? That longing Those blue eyes? Wrapped up in an old woolen robe? Go fly a kite!

EDNA: Just wondering, that's all.

CAMILLE: ***(tossing the paper)*** Well, there goes another golden opportunity. If only there were a place where I could buy some luck.

EDNA: You mean like you can buy some lipstick?

CAMILLE: Why not?

EDNA: You know something, Camille? I think you're gonna get lucky this time, and it won't cost you a cent.

CAMILLE: What are you talking about?

EDNA: Your sister and her husband are going to use the attic, right?

CAMILLE: Yeah.

EDNA: Maybe you ought to check it out and make sure the bed's still there.

CAMILLE: I can do that tomorrow.

EDNA: I'd go now. Just tiptoe in and take a peek to be sure everything's ship shape.

CAMILLE: I think you've flipped your lid.

EDNA: Isn't there some old saying about opportunity knocking and opening that door?

CAMILLE: We're talking about an attic door.

EDNA: Who knows where opportunity will knock? And I think it's knocking loud and clear! Yup! I hear it!

CAMILLE: I think you're full of baloney. But I'll go.

EDNA: You won't be sorry.

(CAMILLE exits left as curtain falls.)

SCENE TWO

Setting: The parlor, later that night.

At Rise: EDNA paces down left reading her latest poem aloud.

EDNA: Opportunity might whisper
Like the wind through a tree.
It may buzz annoyingly
Like a summer bumblebee.

Opportunity might be silent
And not say a word
For sometimes in silence
Whatever's best is heard.

Opportunity may knock
Or stomp across the floor.
No matter how it tries -
You've got to -

Got to what? What rhymes with floor? More? You've got to do more?
Bore. Opportunity's a bore? Shore! We can go to the shore! But what
about opportunity knocking? **(A knock on door right. EDNA jumps.
Another knock.)** Coming!

(EDNA exits right. DEDE enters left with ice cream bowl.)

DEDE: Somebody getting the door?

(EDNA returns with X. SCOTT FITZGERALD who holds book.)

EDNA: **(confused)** Who are you looking for?

X: I... I don't know her name.

DEDE: Are you all right? You look like you're going to be sick.

X: I'm fine! **(passes out on couch)**

EDNA: Oh, my gosh! He's been shot!

DEDE: Where's the blood?

EDNA: I don't know. Maybe he's been poisoned! Sometimes gangsters
use poison!

DEDE: Edna, get Harriet.

EDNA: All right! Harriet! Harriet! There's a dead gangster in the parlor!

(EDNA races off left as X begins to awaken and tries to say something.)

DEDE: Can I help you? Do you need a glass of water? **(X shakes his head.)** Something to eat? **(X shakes his head.)** A doctor? **(X shakes his head.)** Look, I've covered the essentials, and you're not starving, you're not dying of thirst, and you aren't sick. What do you need? **(X pantomimes a pen.)** A pen? **(X nods. DEDE complies. When SHE hands him pen and paper, HE kisses her hand.)** Now that's gratitude!

(X sits up and begins to write. EDNA and HARRIET enter left.)

EDNA: How is he?

DEDE: Holding his own.

HARRIET: What's he doing?

EDNA: Making out a will?

DEDE: Grocery list is more like it.

HARRIET: Sir, can we help you? I'm Harriet Gunther, and this is my home for young ladies of good reputation. **(X looks up, smiles, then returns to his writing.)** Are you looking for someone in particular?

X: Yes! Yes!

HARRIET: One of the girls who lives here?

(HE hands HARRIET what HE'S written.)

EDNA: What does it say?

HARRIET: Do you mind if I read it to the girls?

X: What's written is meant to be read, my dear lady!

HARRIET: She stepped from the brownstone, her hair gleaming in the setting sun. She stepped lightly to the pavement where she looked up at the sky. A deep breath and a sigh were her approval. Then she walked toward the horizon, a sheaf of papers in her hands, clutched to her so tightly as if to keep the words from escaping the pages. Entranced, I followed, but lost her in a crowd of shuffling gray figures that snuffed out her luminance.

DEDE: **(sighing)** Isn't that romantic?

X: Where is she?

HARRIET: Are you sure it was someone from this house?

X: I'll never forget it.

HARRIET: Sir, do you have a name?

X: Of course I have a name. X. Scott Fitzgerald.

EDNA: You aren't an usher at the Chicago theater, are you?

X: Certainly not! I am a writer!

DEDE: What do you write aside from descriptions of girls you fall for?

X: I...I haven't finished anything yet. But I'm off to a good start, don't you think so? I mean, can you top prose like that?

DEDE: Well, Mr. Fitzgerald, maybe you ought to go home and figure out how this story ends.

X: But I can't do that! I've got to live it! I must find her and then...

HARRIET: And then what?

X: I don't know! I've got to live it!

DEDE: Obviously you're not writing about Mrs. Gunther.

X: Goodness, no!

HARRIET: Don't be so acerbic! I've had my moments.

DEDE: And you're not writing about me. I only came home and didn't go back outside.

X: Besides, you've never gleamed.

EDNA: It's not mean! I haven't left home tonight, either.

HARRIET: I've got an idea, Mr. Fitzgerald -

X: Fitzgerald!

HARRIET: That's right. Why don't I keep your description and I'll ask each of the girls. Tomorrow at, say, four in the afternoon... come back and the lady in question will be waiting for you.

X: You mean it?

HARRIET: If she's here, I promise you an introduction.

X: **(thinking to himself)** And then I can see what happens... and for better or worse... I can write my story!

EDNA: Do you have a name for your story?

X: I think I'll call it "That Side of Paradise!"

DEDE: Gosh, you've got it bad, don't you?

X: Wouldn't you? She was nothing less than copasetic! **(races off right)**

EDNA: Copasetic!

(ZELDA enters left, carrying her books, as in a trance.)

HARRIET: **(looking at X's paper)** Well, speak of the devil!

DEDE: Zelda? Zelda!

ZELDA: Oh, hello, everyone! It's a beautiful evening out, don't you think?

HARRIET: Zelda, I think you have become a witch!

ZELDA: A witch? There's no such thing as a witch.

HARRIET: Oh, yes, there is. There are witches who can so bewitch a man he doesn't know whether he's coming or going. That's the kind of witch you are.

ZELDA: I don't know what you're talking about.

EDNA: Did you meet someone on your walk?

ZELDA: Ah ha.

DEDE: He was just here!

ZELDA: How could that be?

HARRIET: He was! He even wrote this about you. **(hands ZELDA paper X wrote)**

ZELDA: I don't understand!

DEDE: He said his name was X. Scott Fitzgerald!

HARRIET: Fitzherald!

ZELDA: I don't know anybody by that silly name.

EDNA: Who'd you meet?

MARSH: **(enters left, drying his hand on a towel)** Sorry I had to use one of your towels, Ma'am, but we were petting a puppy in the park! Pleased to meet you. I'm Marshal Fielding IV.

ZELDA: Isn't he dreamy?

MARSH: You're the one who's dreamy, jazz baby! Run up and get your wrap. We're going for a ride in my new convertible!

ZELDA: I'll just be a minute! **(races off left)**

MARSH: I love a good spin around town at night, don't you?

EDNA: Do you now somebody named Marshall Fielding III?

MARSH: Do I?! The old fool's my father, for crying out loud! Stingiest old duck in the pond.

HARRIET: Well, it's a small world!

EDNA: How did you and Zelda meet?

MARSH: Funniest thing! She was walking across the street in a daze, not looking where she was going and I just about ran into her!

DEDE: With your convertible?

MARSH: What else? Well, I slammed on the brakes and, of course, the car stopped on a dime. Zelda was a bit on the rattled side, but she calmed down once she'd eaten her porterhouse steak.

HARRIET: Best sedative in the world!

MARSH: So, here we are! I didn't realize she lived in such a dump!

HARRIET: Dump? I'll have you know this building is a historical artifact.

MARSH: **(with a laugh)** It's an artifact, all right. Only building on this block to survive the Chicago fire. And who did the decorating? It's early hodge-podge.

EDNA: **(defensively)** I think it's very chic.

MARSH: Chic, my dear? You wouldn't know chic if it ran in here and bit you on the nose. Look at you! You look like a mannequin in our household cleaning department!

ZELDA: **(enters left with a light coat)** All set!

MARSH: Well, ladies, it's been a pleasure!

(MARSH and ZELDA exit right.)

HARRIET: Too bad we can't say the same thing!

DEDE: What a Joe Dilch!

EDNA: Am I really as plain as a mannequin?

HARRIET: Edna, he's never even been in the household cleaning section of his store.

DEDE: It's a rotten world when somebody like that gets to own half of it.

HARRIET: That's why he's so rotten.

(MARIAN enters, hat askew, upset.)

EDNA: Marian! What's wrong?

MARIAN: Some nut in a convertible just about ran over me!

HARRIET: Honey, that's how he meets his girlfriends.

DEDE: How'd the play go?

MARIAN: Awful! We're closing Saturday night!

EDNA: Oh, you poor thing.

HARRIET: Not enough customers?

MARIAN: Not enough laughs.

DEDE: What else is new? Hey? You hear something? A little voice calling...help? Help?

MARIAN: It's me! I'm going to be out on the street begging after Saturday night! If a director calls begging for my talents, I'll be upstairs soaking in a hot... tub! **(bursting into tears, SHE races off)**

left)

DEDE: **(listening intently)** Hey! I heard it again!

EDNA: Oh, my gosh! I wonder if it could be Mrs. Lout. Maybe she's had a gall bladder attack or something.

HARRIET: I suppose I ought to go have a look.

EDNA: Gosh, you might need some help Mrs. Gunther. I mean, you might have to pick her up or something. Dede, you help Mrs. Gunther, and I'll help Marian get calmed down. **(exits left)**

HARRIET: Pick her up? Oh, for crying out loud!

(HARRIET and DEDE exit right. A moment later, EDNA enters left with CAMILLE.)

EDNA: Have you been lying by the attic door all this time?

CAMILLE: **(dazed)** I guess so. I peeked in like you said...and...and...

EDNA: But you can't tell anybody they're here! I mean...you should have seen those fans. One time in Keokuk when I was little, a rabid dog got loose. We all had to stay indoors until they found it. My dad accidentally left a ham hanging up on our porch. Well, that dog smelled it from a mile away and he showed up on our porch steps growling, foaming at the mouth, his eyes red with anger!

CAMILLE: Edna, is there a point to this story?

EDNA: The sheriff shot the dog.

CAMILLE: Good for him.

EDNA: Those fans looked just like that dog! If they find that big ham upstairs, they'll tear him apart!

CAMILLE: Look, they're mature human beings. They'll just have to accept the fact that Rufus Valentine is upstairs, and... and...

(CAMILLE suddenly screams, but EDNA covers her mouth.)

EDNA: Don't make me shoot you!

CAMILLE: It's really him!

EDNA: Yes, and he's really just like any of ups, right?

CAMILLE: No! He's more like Zeus or Appollo!

EDNA: You know what? I'll bet they're hungry by now. I think we ought to make them something to eat.

CAMILLE: You go rustle up something in the kitchen. I've got something else I've got to put on the stove.

(CAMILLE exits left. A knock right.)

EDNA: Camille! What are you talking about? **(moves right)** Coming! I'm coming!

(EDNA exits right and returns a moment later followed by BABS

dressed as MRS. VANDERBILT and ITCHY dressed as her grandfather with a white beard and so on.)

BABS: **(with a terrible British accent)** Yes, my good child, Mrs. Gunther is expecting us!

ITCHY: **(Ibid)** Those fine former servants of ours asked if we wouldn't give a reference.

BABS: Sit down, pater! I'll do the yaking.

EDNA: Yes, you're welcome to wait. She won't be but a moment. She had to check on a neighbor.

(HARRIET runs on right followed by DEDE.)

LUCILLE: **(from off right)** How DARE you come snooping around my place! If you think you're going to get any dirt on me, you've got another guess coming, Miss Nosey Blows!

EDNA: I guess Mrs. Lout didn't need any help.

HARRIET: Her usual loveable self.

EDNA: Mrs. Gunther, these are people here to give a reference for the job applicants?

DEDE: I think I'll go read a good book! **(exits left)**

EDNA: And I'm starved! Anybody want a sandwich? **(exits left)**

ITCHY: **(to HARRIET)** What're you runnin' here, girlie? A library?

HARRIET: A boarding house for young ladies of good repute.

BABS: **(chuckling)** I'd never have qualified for THAT, would I, Pop?

ITCHY: Not in your first forty years! But I finally think you've pooped out.

HARRIET: You certainly aren't the Vanderbilts, are you?

BABS: 'Course we're the Vanderbilts! Just 'cause we got money don't mean we can't have fun, does it?

HARRIET: Well, I suppose not.

BABS: And you want us to tell you about them lovely servants Joe, Moe, and Flo. Well, let me tell you, girlie, you ain't gonna find no finer human beings this side of the Chicago River.

ITCHY: Very honest.

BABS: So honest. Why, I could leave thousand dollar bills around the house and they never touched one of 'em.

ITCHY: Responsible.

BABS: That, too! I'd give 'em a list of two, three hundred jobs to get done in a day and by six they'd have every one of 'em done.

ITCHY: Ethical.

BABS: Highly ethical.

HARRIET: How high are their ethics?

BABS: Why, Ma'am, they are so high they're up there with the top of the

Woolworth Building! We was just so sorry to see 'em go.

ITCHY: But onward and upward!

HARRIET: This doesn't exactly seem upward after having worked at the Vanderbilt estate.

BABS: Well, now, that Flo, she's a dutiful daughter and she wanted to be near her Pa. He lives in Cicero, you know. She is a saint, that woman! A true saint!

ITCHY: And she ain't even dead yet.

HARRIET: How is Flo's cooking?

BABS: Why that woman can make a gourmet feast out of a squirrel.

HARRIET: We don't often have squirrel.

BABS: Just a figment of speech. Just wait 'til you taste her fried chicken.

ITCHY: My mouth's waterin' just thinkin' about what she can do to a turnip.

HARRIET: These three clean well?

BABS: Their motto is "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

ITCHY: And if there's one thing those three want it's to be next to God.

HARRIET: It certainly seems like they'll be suitable. And I want to thank you so much for coming all the way here just to give me the references personally.

BABS: We were glad to help, Ma'am. And now we're catching the midnight train to Georgia.

ITCHY: That's got a nice ring to it, daughter. I think I'll turn it into a song!

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