

IZZY. *(To Fanny.)* Are you making it up?  
 POLLY. She's making it up. I'm going back. I'm hungry.  
 FANNY. There's berries over there.  
 POLLY. Too early for berries. *(Izzy sees the berries.)*  
 IZZY. Those are the biggest blueberries I ever saw. Don't see any squirrels or birds. Sure is quiet here.  
 POLLY. There it is! *(Polly "gooses" Izzy, who squeals.)*  
 IZZY. Where?  
 POLLY. Sun's about to set. There's nothing here.  
 FANNY. Over there.  
 POLLY. Where?  
 FANNY. There. *(She points.)*  
 IZZY. Where?  
 POLLY. An angel?  
 FANNY. Don't know.  
 IZZY. I should be getting back.  
 POLLY. You scared?  
 FANNY. Thought you wanted to see.  
 IZZY. I do.  
 FANNY. *(Suddenly stops.)* Then look.  
 IZZY. Don't see anything. Where am I supposed to look?  
 POLLY. It's getting warmer. Should be getting cooler, but it's getting warmer.  
 FANNY. Hush.  
 POLLY. What do you see?  
 FANNY. Hush.  
 IZZY. I'm scared.  
 FANNY. *(Whispers.)* Don't be scared Izzy. It's the most beautiful thing you ever did see.  
 IZZY. *(Whispering back.)* More beautiful than a hummingbird?  
 FANNY. Like a hundred hummingbirds all at once. *(The lights shift. Fanny holds out her arms.)*  
 IZZY. Ohhh. *(Fanny closes her eyes. Izzy and Polly look skyward.)*  
 Ohhh, I see light.  
 FANNY. Hush.  
 POLLY. Where? *(Fanny stands and faces the light as if it were sunlight streaming on her face after a long dark winter.)* What do you see?  
 IZZY. So beautiful!

POLLY. Don't see anything except the pink clouds!  
 IZZY. The light!  
 POLLY. It's the sunset, silly.  
 IZZY. I hear the wings! Like a hundred hummingbirds! Oh, oh, oh ...  
 POLLY. Just the breeze, Izzy. Just a warm breeze rustling through the trees. *(Polly shakes Izzy, who continues to look all around.)*  
 IZZY. Gold. All gold.  
 POLLY. Where?  
 FANNY. What do you hear, Izzy?  
 IZZY. Music? Singing? Sounds like I never heard before.  
 POLLY. *(Shouting.)* You're making it up! It's just a sunset.  
 FANNY. Look at the clouds, Polly.  
 POLLY. You're making it up!  
 FANNY. Look at the clouds!  
 POLLY. *(Covering her face.)* No.  
 FANNY. Does that look like any sunset you've ever seen before?  
 POLLY. *(In denial.)* No.  
 IZZY. Like a thousand hummingbirds! *(Izzy and Fanny run off. Polly turns to go and runs into Rachel carrying a basket of laundry. Lights change.)*

## Scene 9

RACHEL. Sister Polly, where's the fire?  
 POLLY. *(Out of breath.)* No, I, I, I don't know.  
 RACHEL. Catch your breath. *(Betsy enters with a laundry basket, and sets the benches with Rachel, all the time continuing the scene. They begin folding laundry.)* Something startled Sister Polly.  
 BETSY. *(Laughing.)* Seeing spirits, are you?  
 POLLY. No!  
 RACHEL. Hmm.  
 BETSY. Best not be. 'Til you sign the covenant.  
 POLLY. Really?  
 RACHEL. She's just funnin' you.

POLLY. How did you know you were ready to sign the covenant?  
 RACHEL. Just seemed like the thing to do, one day.  
 POLLY. Did you see...? You just suddenly became a believer?  
 BETSY. Don't have to be a believer to sign the covenant.  
 RACHEL. Hmm.  
 BETSY. Don't have to believe. Just have to try.  
 POLLY. Were you always a believer?  
 BETSY. Sister Rachel was a minister's wife. She had to believe.  
 RACHEL. Joined with my late husband. And the entire congregation. Every last one of us believed.  
 BETSY. (*Beat.*) I didn't believe. When I came here. No. Didn't believe at all. Didn't have any family much, bringing me up. It's nicer here. Never had so many clothes to wear. And shoes. Shoes year-round. And if they wear out they get fixed. And if they wear out again I get a new pair. Always like having shoes. I thought I'd be here a year, two at the most ... Some people here eighty year old. Where else do I see so many people eighty year old? Being taken care of. Who's going to take care of me? Longer I'm here the more I believe.  
 RACHEL. Hmm. Have to want to believe. It's the journey that matters.  
 POLLY. I don't have to always believe?  
 RACHEL. We'll help you.  
 BETSY. Have faith and belief will come. Work like you believe. Sing like you believe.  
 RACHEL. You ever go to a barn dance? You twirl round and round 'til you're feeling dizzy? Same thing at the meeting house. You march round and round, you're bound to feel dizzy. You stop for just a minute to catch your breath, and the singing sweeps you up again, dancing and twirling and freeing yourself from earthly concerns.  
 BETSY. Listen to you, you old Methodist!  
 RACHEL. Don't miss being a Methodist. I like to dance.  
 POLLY. I'm always out of step.  
 RACHEL. You'll catch on to it after a while. Started forming the marches about ten years ago. Some people dancing the same dances for years. Singing the same songs. For years. You'll catch on.  
 POLLY. I don't like singing together all the time. Want some harmony.

RACHEL. Plain and simple.  
 POLLY. (*Confessing.*) And I don't like the circles. Afraid I'll go off in the wrong direction and end up dancin' with the men.  
 RACHEL. That would be a dancin' gift! You a'twirlin' on the men's side. Give the old'ns palpitations.  
 POLLY. End up in the lap of Brother Timothy!  
 RACHEL. He's so blind, wouldn't know what was happening. Be thinking he'd got a gift from heaven and not be able to see what it was!  
 BETSY. Or end up twirlin' yourself into the arms of Brother Abraham.  
 POLLY. Hush!  
 RACHEL. (*Pointing.*) Rosy cheeks. Thinkin' of Brother Abraham. (*They giggle, as Jane enters with a basket of clothes.*)  
 JANE. What about Brother Abraham?  
 POLLY. He's a looker!  
 JANE. I'm not looking. (*To Polly, pointedly.*) You shouldn't be, neither. (*Looks offstage.*) That ole bull Comer will be the death of me. Snortin' and runnin' at the fence. Pastured too close to the wash-house. (*To Polly.*) You shouldn't be lookin' at the men.  
 POLLY. Weren't. We were just funnin'.  
 JANE. Gave all that up. Don't need any men anymore.  
 POLLY. Don't you miss bein' married sometimes?  
 JANE. Not one bit of it. Don't miss havin' a baby every year and wonderin' if they're gonna live long enough to walk. All that pain for nothin'. And if they do grow enough to walk and talk, you start lovin' on them every day and gettin' used to havin' your own family and then they get sickly and leave you quick as anything. I don't miss nursin' sick children who're gonna die anyway. So, no, missy, I don't miss being married. You young'ns think it's all pretty words and bouquets of flowers, but I'm here to tell you that it ain't.  
 RACHEL. Your husband's a good man. Become a good solid Shaker. Works hard.  
 POLLY. Being with a man's a natural thing.  
 RACHEL. For the world's people. Not for us.  
 JANE. Well, I don't miss it. (*Looks offstage.*) What am I going to do? That ole bull won't let me near the clothesline. Flies at the fence every time I try to take down a linen.

RACHEL. Comet wouldn't hurt a no-see-um flying in his face.  
POLLY. But it's natural, wantin' to be with a man.  
RACHEL. Mother Ann Lee teaches us to keep our eyes on heaven.  
Not on earthly wants.

POLLY. We eat and we sleep.

RACHEL. So we can do Mother Ann Lee's work.

JANE. Mother Ann lost four babies. Afore she stopped lying with  
her husband. Four babies.

RACHEL. (*To Polly.*) Fix your eyes on heaven. You won't think  
about earthly wants.

POLLY. If it's natural, like eating and sleeping ...

RACHEL. Some people find a sweetheart and get married. We  
give our hearts to God. (*Rachel grabs some of the laundry and exits.*)  
JANE. (*Looking off.*) That ole bull Comet sure don't like those  
linens on the line. The worst is the petticoats. He sees them a-wavin'  
at him and he goes crazy. Just like a man. Goin' crazy over the pet-  
ticoats on the other side of the fence. (*Izzy comes running in.*)

IZZY. Mischief had kittens!

POLLY. Again? (*Jane keeps working.*)

IZZY. She had kittens! Three, four of 'em! In the laundry basket.  
On the clean laundry! I don't think anyone'll mind, do you? She  
just popped one out and licked it and then another came out and  
another. One looks like Mischief and two look like Mr.  
Chickenhouse. But the last little one, all motley colored, was just  
lying there. Mischief didn't even lick that one. Just pushed it aside.  
(*Izzy looks at Polly, who doesn't speak. Izzy turns to Jane.*)

JANE. Cats are smarter than people sometimes. (*As she gets up to  
go.*) Know when to give up on a sickly child. (*Jane goes back to the  
side benches. Rachel, Betsy and Izzy carry off the laundry baskets as  
they exit to the side benches. Lights change.*)

## Scene 10

*Polly sings as she moves the benches. She stacks one on top of  
the other to make a table.*

POLLY. (*Singing.*)

MY CARNAL LIFE I WILL LAY DOWN  
BECAUSE IT IS DEPRAVED.  
I'M SURE ON ANY OTHER GROUND  
I NEVER CAN BE SAVED.

(*Lights change.*)

## Scene 11

*Polly finishes her song and begins to draw, standing at the  
"table." Betsy enters from one side and Peggy from the other.  
All three women use dowels for brushes and mime drawing.*

BETSY. You have a beautiful script, Sister Polly. And look at that  
apple. That is a lovely apple. (*Betsy and Peggy begin to work.*)  
POLLY. I like making pictures. Drawing the fruit.

PEGGY. Some Sisters couldn't tell the jelly jars apart. Before you  
started making pictures for them.

POLLY. Why not?

BETSY. Can't read. Some of the older Sisters are unable to read.  
And some of the younger ones if they're new.

PEGGY. Your fruit pictures are welcome.

POLLY. I try to make them pretty.

PEGGY. Just make them plain and simple.

BETSY. A little color is nice.