

ACT I

Scene 1

(1934: A huge soundstage at MGM studios, transformed into a birthday party venue for Marie Dressler, hosted by studio head Louis B. Mayer. Guests circulate, drink champagne, eat canapés.)

GUEST #1 (female)

You gotta admit. The guy knows how to put on the Ritz.

GUEST #2 (male)

He can afford it. All the biggest stars in Hollywood work for him, so he's raking in the dough.

GUEST #1

Guess that's why he's throwing this bash for Marie. She brings in more than anyone. (Beat, points) Is that Lionel Barrymore?

(Guest #2 looks in that direction.)

GUEST #2

Don't stare!

GUEST #1

Why not? They love it when people stare at them. Otherwise they'd never be in this business.

(Guest #3 joins them.)

GUEST #3 (male)

I was chasing after the waitress with the tray of caviar canapés. Have you tried them?

GUEST #1

(Referring to Guest #1) He'd be more likely to run after the waitress. (Beat) Is Marie here yet?

GUEST #3

(Points) Over there. Looks like she just arrived. (Beat) Have you seen "Dinner at Eight?"

GUEST #2

Twice. I heard it took a lot out of her, though. (To Guest #1) Didn't you hear that, Eleanor?

GUEST #1

They say she fainted on set one day, and Jean Harlow caught her before she fell. No mean feat considering that Harlow is tiny and Marie, well—

GUEST #3

Is that Clark Gable?

(The three gawk. Focus shifts to Marie, who, along with Mamie and Jerry Cox, has just entered. They stand to the side.)

MARIE

(Referring to a corsage pinned to her shoulder.) Is it straight? And what about my hair?

MAMIE

The corsage is straight and your hair looks perfect. Don't you think so, Jerry?

JERRY

Absolutely. Your hairdresser knows what she's doing.

MARIE

Greta recommended her.

JERRY

Well, you look terrific. And you're feeling good? No pain?

MARIE

Nary a twinge. Getting feted is good medicine.

MAMIE

You gotta enjoy every minute of this day, Marie.

MARIE

Oh, I will. (Beat) Did I tell you they've got a hookup that'll broadcast the presentation to hell and gone? I hope they like me in Parsippany New Jersey.

JERRY

They like you everywhere, Marie. And yes, you told us about the hookup. About ten times.

(Several guests, including Nella Webb, approach and greet Marie. Mamie and Jerry stand to the side.)

NELLA

Marie! Darling! What are you doing standing here? This is your night! You should be center stage, the ruler of the heavenly spheres!

GUEST #4 (female)

(Embraces Marie.) Darling! Happy birthday! Thank God Louis invited me, because, I swear, if he hadn't I would have crashed the party and made a scene. I simply *had* to tell you how fabulous you were in "Dinner at Eight" and "Emma," of course, and... but where's Claire?

MARIE

Claire who?

GUEST #4

Ah! I see. Well, nothing is forever, eh?

GUEST #5

You look tired, Marie.

MARIE

You bet I'm tired! And you can thank Mr. Louis B. Mayer for that. He has me going from one movie to another so fast, it's a wonder I haven't mixed them up and said the wrong lines.

GUEST #5

C'mon, Marie. You love working.

MARIE

I can't deny it. And I love my taskmaster, too. Hell. Let's face it. Tonight I love everyone. (Beat) Well, almost. (See Frances, calls out.) Frances! Over here!

(Frances Marion approaches, greets Marie. The others wander off)

FRANCES

Marie! Isn't this wonderful? The whole world is celebrating you.

MARIE

That's a bit of an exaggeration, but yes, it *is* exciting. (Beat) I don't think I've thanked you enough for everything you've done—

FRANCES

What you need to understand is it's a great pleasure writing for someone who's not only a gifted actor, but a dear friend. And there's more to come—

MARIE

Yes. Well. (Beat) There's Louis! I must go scold him. Throwing such a big shindig in my honor! Everyone knows what a shrinking violet I am and how I hate being in the public eye!

(Frances laughs)

MARIE

(To Mamie and Jerry) Don't leave me to fend for myself! C'mon!

(Mamie and Jerry exchange a glance and then join Marie.)

LOUIS B.

There you are! I thought maybe you decided to skip the festivities to stay home and do your nails.

MARIE

(Holds up hands) These ragged things? I don't think so. (Beat) Louis, you've met Mamie and

MARIE cont'd.

Jerry here.

LOUIS B.

Of course. How are you?

(They shake hands, greet each other, etc.)

LOUIS B.

(Pointing) Did you see the Governor over there? He practically begged me for an invitation.

MARIE

C'mon. We both know you got him here by donating big to his re-election campaign.

LOUIS B.

That'll be the day. The man's politics are reprehensible. (Beat) But today, everyone who has the good taste to be your fan is welcome, and—

(An assistant enters and whispers something into Louis B's ear.)

LOUIS B.

Looks like a bit of a technical snafu with the hookup, but they're working on it. (Beat) You know, I think we should just get started. Before the natives get restless and start stamping their feet and yelling "We want Marie!!!" (Beat) You got a speech prepared? For the broadcast?

MARIE

You know me. I'm never at a loss for words.

LOUIS B.

No argument there! So take a seat and enjoy all the love coming your way.

(Louis escorts Marie to a seat of honor, directs an aide to get chairs, placed at the side, for Mamie and Jerry. He nods to the drummer who provides a drumroll as Louis goes to the mic.)

LOUIS B.

Ladies and gentleman. In a few minutes, we'll be broadcasting the festivities to the nation, but for now, a preview of what's to come...(SONG – THE BIGGEST STAR OF ALL – LOUIS B. and ENSEMBLE)

LOUIS B.

WE'VE GATHERED HERE IN DAZZLING ARRAY  
TO TOAST OUR DEAR MARIE ON HER SPECIAL DAY  
SALUTING HOW SHE HAS COME SO FAR  
TO BECOME THE BIGGEST STAR OF ALL

(To Marie) I'LL ALWAYS BE YOUR FAN AND YOUR FRIEND  
AND WE CAN SEE YOUR CELEBRITY WILL NEVER END  
TALENT AND HEART, ARE JUST PART OF WHY YOU ARE  
THE BIGGEST STAR OF ALL

FROM THE EARLY DAYS WHEN YOU BEGAN PERFORMING  
YOU WERE KNOWN FOR STEALING NEARLY EVERY SCENE  
EVERY CHARACTER SO COMIC YET HEARTWARMING  
AND NOW WE THRILL TO SEE YOUR SKILL ON THE SILVER SCREEN

EACH OF US HERE IS YOUR FAN AND YOUR FRIEND  
AND IT'S QUITE CLEAR YOUR CELEBRITY WILL NEVER END  
TALENT AND HEART ARE JUST PART OF WHY YOU ARE  
THE BIGGEST STAR ...

**THE BIGGEST STAR...**

**THE BIGGEST STAR...**

(Lights fade to black. End of scene.)

Scene 2

(Scene morphs back in time. It's 1882. A bored director is auditioning 5 young women for chorus parts in his comic opera, *The Passionate Princess of Poughkeepsie*. The male star, playing Ernest, is in the wings, surreptitiously drinking from a flask. A rehearsal pianist bangs out the music.)

DIRECTOR

(Not happy with what he's seeing) Enough! (Beat) Okay, maidens. If you haven't got it now, you never will. So let's go through it with Ernest here (points) and see, please God, what we have. If you can't cut it, we might as well close before we open. This hick town isn't exactly overflowing with Merrie Maidens. (Beat) Places!

(The women take their places as a drunk Ernest staggers to center stage. The women are the village maidens Winnie, played by Marie, Ginnie, Minnie, Lynn and Gertrude. SONG: MERRIE VILLAGERS – ERNEST and MAIDENS)

ERNEST

MERRIE VILLAGERS ARE WE  
IN OUR FIELDS SO GLAD TO BE  
ALWAYS SHINGING HAPPILY, FOR ME  
MAIDENS

TRALALA TRALALA

WINNIE

LA LA!

ERNEST

LOVELY MAIDENS, SWEET AND BRIGHT  
MUSIC BRINGS THEM SHUCH DELIGHT  
AREN'T THEY A DAINY SIGHT TO SEE  
MAIDENS

TRALALA TRALALA TRALALA.

WINNIE

LA (low note)

ERNEST

THE VILLAGE OF POUGHKEEPSHIE  
IS SHUCH AN ENCHANTING PLAYSH

(Goes up on lyrics – there's an awkward pause while the maidens look at each other helplessly until Marie takes the situation in hand and sings...)

WINNIE

BUT WHEN WE GET TOO TIPSY

WE LOSE OUR GIRLISH GRACES  
AND FALL DOWN ON OUR FACES! (falls, knocks over the girls)

(Brief instrumental transition, maybe a vamp as they get up. Ernest, furious his number has been hijacked, tries to recoup, is too drunk. Marie indicates maidens should do their next line, takes over.)

MAIDENS  
EVERY DAY THE SUN WILL SHINE  
WINNIE  
ON THIS UGLY MUG OF MINE  
LET'S ALL HAVE A DRINK OF WINE AND SING  
MAIDENS  
TRALALA TRALALA  
WINNIE  
LA (LOW NOTE)

(Dance Break)

WINNIE  
A BLUSHING BASHFUL MAIDEN  
MAIDENS  
AHAHAHA  
WINNIE  
SHOULD NOT LET HERSELF BE CAUGHT  
BUT AFTER SOME PERSUADIN'  
A FRIENDLY FARMER'S DAUGHTER MIGHT NOT DO WHAT SHE  
OUGHTER  
MAIDENS  
MIGHT NOT DO WHAT WE OUGHTER

WINNIE  
SO NO MATTER WHAT OCCURS  
WITH US MERRIE VILLAGERS  
WE'LL JUST KEEP ON SINGING ALL DAY LONG  
ALL  
OUR SIMPLE SNAPPY HAP HAP HAPPY SONG!  
MAIDENS  
TRALA LALALA LA  
WINNIE  
LAAAA!

(All curtsey, including Marie, whose wide-spread arms bump into set pieces on both sides, which fall and break. There's another awkward pause during which Ernest glowers at Marie and everyone tries to make sense of what just happened.)

DIRECTOR

Jesus! That was a mess! Ernest, you're this close to being canned. Go get some strong black coffee and don't come back until you can walk a straight line. Girls... You're hopeless but you're hired. Get outta here and come back tomorrow for costume fittings.

(The girls start toward the exit.)

DIRECTOR

(Points to Marie) You. Maiden #3. C'mere.

(Marie obliges. Now that she can be seen closer up, we see that she has a black eye and other visible bruises.)

MARIE

Yes, sir?

DIRECTOR

You're not half bad. You rescued that scene from disaster.

MARIE

Thank you! And that's nothing compared to—

DIRECTOR

What's your name?

MARIE

Leila Koerber.

DIRECTOR

Age?

MARIE

18.

DIRECTOR

(Assessing Marie) If you're 18, I'll eat my shoe, and I'm not very partial to fake suede.

MARIE

Okay, I'm not 18. I'm 16. (Beat) Okay. I'm 15. Well, 14. With a lotta talent packed into a few short years.

DIRECTOR

Yeah? (Points to her bruises) And I suppose you got those when you walked into a door?

MARIE

That's right.



DIRECTOR

Look, kid, I didn't go to Harvard but I'm not stupid. You're 14 and you walk in all beat up like that... You're a runaway, is what you are. I got no business talking to you. It's a shame, because like I said, you're not half bad.

(A dejected Marie turns to leave.)

DIRECTOR

Wait a minute! I guess you could pass for 16. No forget it. You're just too young.

MARIE

I'm not a kid. Not really. I mean... (SONG: BEFORE AND AFTER – MARIE)

MY CHILDHOOD IS OVER.  
I'M VERY MATURE FOR MY AGE.  
OKAY, IT WASN'T PRETTY.  
BUT I'M READY TO TURN THE PAGE.  
THOSE YEARS ARE NOW BEHIND ME  
THEY WEREN'T MEANT TO LAST.  
I'M LOOKING TO THE FUTURE NOW.  
AND BANISHING THE PAST.

FORGET THE BEFORE  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER.  
THERE'LL ALWAYS BE MORE  
THAT'S GONNA GO RIGHT.  
SO MUCH TO EXPLORE –  
ADVENTURE AND LAUGHTER,  
WHILE YESTERDAY FADES OUT OF SIGHT.

IGNORE THE CUTS AND BRUISES.  
YOU JUST NEED TO HEAR I CAN SING.  
I KNOW YOU WON'T BE SORRY.  
SINCE I CAN DO ANYTHING.  
YOU WANT A LITTLE SHAKESPEARE?  
YOU WANT TO SEE ME DANCE?  
I'LL PLAY THE PIANO, DO THE SPLITS,  
JUST GIVE THIS GIRL A CHANCE!

FORGET THE BEFORE  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER.  
'CAUSE THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND  
MY FORTUNE AND FAME.  
SUCCESSSES GALORE  
AND YEARS FULL OF LAUGHTER.  
YOU'RE GONNA REMEMBER MY NAME.

I'LL WORK LIKE HECK I PROMISE YOU  
I'LL GO THE EXTRA MILE  
AND SOON YOU'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO—  
TO GET THEM ROLLING IN THE AISLE  
OR CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY  
WHEN I PLAY A TRAGIC PART.  
I KNOW IT IS MY DESTINY  
TO BE A MASTER OF MY ART.

NO REASON TO LOOK BACKWARD,  
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE IS DONE.  
REGRET WILL GET ME NOWHERE,  
AND THE GOOD YEARS HAVE JUST BEGUN.  
IT'S BEST TO DRAW THE CURTAIN  
ON HISTORY'S DISTRESS.  
EMBRACE THE MOMENTS STILL TO COME,  
FOR THERE LIES HAPPINESS!

WHETHER IT WAS LONG AGO  
OR MERELY YESTERDAY  
IF THE MEMORY IS PAINFUL,  
SWEEP IT AWAY!

FORGET THE BEFORE  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER.  
'CAUSE THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND  
MY FORTUNE AND FAME.  
SUCCESSSES GALORE  
AND YEARS FULL OF LAUGHTER.  
YOU'RE GONNA REMEMBER  
YES YOU'LL REMEMBER  
YOU'RE GONNA REMEMBER MY NAME.

DIRECTOR

You got yourself a nice little philosophy there. Wish I could forget some things in *my* past, like wife number two. (Beat) Okay. You're hired. Six bucks a week, one more than the other Maidens, and you'll travel with the troupe. But if your parents come lookin', I don't know you.

MARIE

Thank you! You won't be sorry. I'm very versatile. (Beat) I'd really like to play Ophelia.

DIRECTOR

Ophelia? I don't think so. We don't do Shakespeare and you wouldn't play Ophelia if we did.

MARIE

(Disappointed) Oh.

DIRECTOR

You're big, see, which means comic relief. Pratfalls. Pies in the face.

MARIE

But—

DIRECTOR

Take it or leave it.

MARIE

I'll... I'll take it.

DIRECTOR

Good. What was your name again?

MARIE

Leila Koerber.

DIRECTOR

No. No, no, no. Sounds like a librarian. Let me think... (Beat) Lottie... Mattie... Marie! Yeah. That'll do.

MARIE

I have an aunt Marie that I like very much.

DIRECTOR

I don't care if your aunt is an ax murderer. And your last name... (Beat) I got it!

MARIE

What?

DIRECTOR

Dressler.

MARIE

Isn't that the name on the awning of the haberdashery across the street?

DIRECTOR

Where do you think I got it? (Beat) So that's that. Be here tomorrow at 10 for the fitting.

(Marie, thrilled, exits. As she leaves... SONG: BEFORE AND AFTER, reprise)

MARIE

FORGET THE BEFORE  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER.

'CAUSE THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND  
MY FORTUNE AND FAME.  
SUCCESSSES GALORE  
AND YEARS FULL OF LAUGHTER.  
YOU'RE GONNA REMEMBER MY NAME.

(Blackout. End of scene.)

### Interlude #1

(Rear projections of reviews and headlines to propel time forward, as in the following...)

1882: “ The Nevada Stock Company has hit the mother lode with *The Passionate Princess of Poughkeepsie* thanks to an unknown soon-to-be star named Marie Dressler. Her bull-in-a-china-shop performance had the audience in stitches as she knocked over and ran into everything in sight.”

(Rodney Asperton, *Iowa Daily State Register*)

1884: “Who was that galumphing girl who stood out as chorus girl Cigarette in the Nevada Stock Company’s otherwise lackluster production of *Under Two Flags*. I predict big things ahead for her.” (Virgil Toomey, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*)

1886: “Marie Dressler, understudy for Clara Maynard in “*Popsie Meets the President*,” made a hilariously huge impression on the audience and this critic, huge being the operative word.”  
(make up source)

Scene 3

(1889: Marie, the star, and chorus members, stand in the wings of a nicer theater, waiting for their cue. Marie is clearly very nervous. Stage Manager hands her a handkerchief.)

STAGE MANAGER

Here. More sweat than usual today. I can see it from 10 feet away. And the folks in the front row will, too.

(Marie wipes her face, hands him the handkerchief, which he doesn't want. Marie tucks it in the bodice of her costume.)

STAGE MANAGER

I'm running out of handkerchiefs, Marie. You've done the show eight times a week for almost a month. I'da thought you'd be over your heebie-jeebies by now.

MARIE

Ain't gonna happen, I'm afraid. I quake in my boots every time I'm about to go on. Just can't help it. But once I'm out there... Oops! Gotta go!

(Hearing their cue, Marie and chorus members enter. SONG:  
BUMP, BUMP, BUMP – MARIE and CHORUS)

MARIE

I'VE GOT THIS FUNNY FEELING  
THAT I'VE TRIED CONCEALING  
BUT I CAN'T HELP REVEALING  
HOW YOU SEND ME REELING

OH WHEN I BUMP, BUMP, BUMP INTO YOU  
MY HEART GOES THUMP THUMP THUMP, HONEY, WHAT'LL I DO  
YOU MAKE ME LOSE MY USUAL GRACE  
I DON'T JUST FALL FOR YOU, I FALL ON MY FACE  
BUT IT'S WORTH BEING BLACK & BLUE  
WHEN I BUMP, BUMP, BUMP INTO YOU

OH WHEN YOU BUMP BUMP BUMP INTO ME  
ON MY RUMP RUMP RUMP IS WHERE I'M GONNA BE  
I WON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT PAIN SO SWEET  
WHEN YOU'RE ACTUALLY SWEEPIN' ME RIGHT OFF MY FEET  
BUT I'LL GRIN THROUGH EACH INJURY  
WHEN YOU BUMP, BUMP, BUMP INTO ME

MY SENSE OF DIRECTION GOES KERFLOP  
I'M LIKE THAT BULL IN A CHINA SHOP

THE KINDA LOVE YOU MAKE  
MAKES ME SHIMMY AND SHAKE  
YOU GOT ME IN A TIZZY AND I'M OH SO DIZZY

I WANNA JUMP JUMP JUMP IN YOUR ARMS  
I GET A LUMP LUMP LUMP WHEN I THINK OF YOUR CHARMS  
WHAT CAN I DO, FOR YOU I FLIP  
FALLIN' FOR YOU (HONEY) IS A WONDERFUL TRIP  
YOU'RE THE DREAMBOAT I'M DREAMING OF  
SO LET'S BUMP BUMP BUMP INTO LOVE

(After song, Marie and chorus take bows. Marie's includes what is becoming her signature curtsey that knocks things over. The applause is clearly mainly for Marie. Flowers thrown, etc. Marie eats it up. Blackout, end of scene)

## Interlude #2

(Rear projections of reviews and headlines to propel time forward, as in the following...)

1892: “Miss Dressler, an utterly preposterous music hall performer, makes the move to New York in “The Robber of the Rhine”  
(make up source)

1896: “As Flo in George Lederer’s “The Lady Slavey,” Marie Dressler earns her star billing and then some with her hilarious muggings and brilliant double-takes. Bravo!”  
(make up source)

1900: “Dressler’s comic resources are inexhaustible, her animal spirits irrepressible, and her comic audacity approaches the sublime.” (Lewis Strand in the *Times*)



Scene 4

(1902: Parlor of Marie's hotel suite. Marie is simultaneously sewing and cracking open and eating peanuts. A small pile of fabric scraps and peanut shells has accumulated. Mamie is hanging up costumes that are on the floor or draped over chairs.)

MARIE

If I keep eating these, we won't have any left to sell.

MAMIE

Seems like you have a couple tons of them in the kitchen. I can hardly move around in there.

(Marie holds up a costume she's just finished. It bears some resemblance to that of an organ grinder's monkey.)

MARIE

I don't see how anyone will be able to resist buying peanuts from boys in these costumes.

(In a burst of enthusiasm, Marie throws the costume up in the air. It lands in the pile of nutshells and scraps. Mamie picks it up, brushes off the detritus, smoothing it out and hanging it up.)

MAMIE

Marie! This place is chaotic enough without coating everything with peanut shells.

MARIE

I'm sorry. I'm just excited about our new venture. Aren't you?

(Before Mamie can answer, the doorbell rings.)

MARIE

That'll be Nella. I hope she's brought that chart.

(Mamie answers door, comes back in with Nella)

NELLA

(Looking around) Heavens! When did the cyclone hit?

MAMIE

She gets this way when she's enthusiastic.

(Mamie moves around, tidying things.)

NELLA

(To Marie) How you survived without Mamie I really don't know. And of course, if you and I

NELLA cont'd.

had never met, you never would have met her.

MARIE

I sense you're angling for a "thank you." Have I got that right?

NELLA

Not at all. I just find it amusing that despite how much you rely on me now, it wasn't always the case. When we first met at Ramona Kemble's Easter tea and you found out what I did...(SONG – I SAID, YOU SAID – NELLA and MARIE)

NELLA

You said "Astrology is bunk,  
Completely ill-conceived.  
You said "You shouldn't spout such junk.  
It's not to be believed.  
Leo, Pisces, Aries?"  
You said my gullible clientele  
Might as well trust in fairies  
And leprechauns, as well."

MARIE

I never uttered anything of the sort!

NELLA

That's what you said!  
Or Pluto strike me dead!

But even so, I did your chart  
And saw disaster loomed.  
I said "The theatre troupe you want to start?  
Its fate is clearly doomed."  
I spoke, alas, to no avail,  
And it withered on the vine.  
An enterprise is bound to fail  
If the planets don't align.

MARIE

I really didn't care about it that much—

NELLA

How hard you cried,  
To see your dream had died!

MARIE

Poppycock and balderdash!

That isn't what transpired!  
I saw at once the brilliance you possess.  
I said "It's clear you have a special gift"  
I said "You're much to be admired,"  
And you became my trusted prophetess.

I said "I am in awe of you,"  
And showed you great respect.  
I championed your talent right away.  
I sang your praises everywhere  
To favorable effect,  
And that's why you're in such demand today.

MAMIE

(Changing the subject) A cup of tea, Nella? (Beat) Some peanuts?

NELLA

You don't have any of those delicious fig newtons you make, do you?

MARIE

Lillian Russell came for tea yesterday and wolfed them down like there was no tomorrow.

NELLA

Well, she has good taste, I'll say that much. (Beat) Remember, Mamie, you brought those cookies here when you first met Marie? You'd been working for my dreadful cousin Celia and I advised you to quite and work for this lady here, who needed help desperately.

MARIE

Now just a minute!—

MAMIE

I remember very well. But the problem was...(SONG – I SAID, YOU SAID – MAMIE and MARIE)

MAMIE

Marie, you weren't quite on board  
"I don't want help," you said.  
You said "A little mess can be ignored.  
Who needs to make the bed!  
You said "I won't have someone coming here  
To clean and rearrange."  
You said "I'm quite set in my ways, I fear,  
And see no need to change."

MARIE

But I'm the most flexible person on earth!

MAMIE

You said "Your time's been wasted, I'm afraid.  
I simply do not need a maid."

Just then I felt a lumpy shape  
'Neath the cushion of my chair  
And what I found left you agape,  
'Cause your missing keys were there.  
And so at last you understood  
That aid was on its way.  
You said, "A little help might do me good."  
And so, I came to stay.

MARIE

Fiddlesticks and tommyrot!  
It's just the opposite.  
I said "I have no luck with tidiness, it's true.  
I said "It's clear that if you work for me  
You'll help me quite a bit  
And then I up and gave the job to you

As I recall we then had tea  
And toasted our new bond  
And you unearthed the coin purse I'd misplaced  
I said "The stars had sent a sign  
From the world of the beyond!"  
And happily the two of us embraced.

(Following stanzas sung in counterpoint)

NELLA

You said "Astrology is bunk, completely ill-conceived."  
You said "You shouldn't spout such junk. It's not to be believed.  
Leo, Pisces, Aries?" You said "Your gullible clientele  
Might as well trust in fairies and leprechauns, as well."

MARIE

(*to Nella*). I said "I am in awe of you"  
I always felt our bond  
I championed your talent right away  
(*to Mamie*). I said "The stars have sent a sign  
From the world of the beyond."  
I knew I needed you and begged you to stay.

MAMIE

Marie, you weren't quite on board "I don't want help," you said.

You said "A little mess can be ignored. Who needs to make the bed!"  
You said "I won't have someone coming here to clean and rearrange."  
You said "I'm quite set in my ways, I fear, and see no need to change."

Nella: You said                      Marie: I said                      Mamie: (*to Nella*). She said

Nella/Mamie: Clearly we see things differently                      Marie: No we don't!

Mamie: I said                      Nella: She said                      Marie: You said

ALL (or alternating)

We'll have to agree to disagree.  
It happens in all good company.  
Besides, it was in days gone by  
Today we three see eye to eye  
And I say, you say, we say,  
We... Are now in perfect harmony!

(The three woman laugh together. Marie does one of her curtseys  
knocking something over that Mamie quickly sets right.)

NELLA

Well, now that we've put our differences to rest, let me tell you what the latest chart indicates  
about your peanut vendor enterprise and the asbestos mine investment.

MARIE

I don't want to hear about the peanuts. It's too late. Starting next week a bevy of darling boys in  
these wonderful costumes (indicates same) will be hawking them at Coney Island and...

NELLA

Oh dear.

MARIE

Tell me about the asbestos mine.

NELLA

(Studying chart) I don't advise it. Jupiter is in retrograde right now, and as you're a Scorpio—

MARIE

You hear that, Mamie? Jupiter is in retrograde *now*. But what about next month? Or in two  
months? I'll just postpone, is what I'll do. Because obviously, asbestos is the wave of the future!  
(Blackout. End of scene.)

Scene 5

(1907: Marie's dressing room in a Broadway theatre, with posted reviews of the play she's in. In her robe, she sits at the makeup table to remove makeup. A knock on her door, and without paying attention, she says...)

MARIE

Come in, Mamie.

(A very nervous Frances Marion opens the door, and enters. Marie, whose back is to the door, doesn't look up.)

MARIE

Now that you've finally gotten to see the show, what do you think? Does it deserve all the hoopla it's gotten?

FRANCES

Miss Dressler? I was hoping that—

MARIE

(Turning around) You're not Mamie! You're the girl who works for that villain, Hearst. I want nothing to do with anyone who has anything to do with that horrible man! Do you know his pet chimpanzee threw his unmentionables at me, and I thought William would bust a gut laughing?

(Marie is about to push a button on the dressing room wall.)

FRANCES

(Desperate. Speaks in a rush.) Please! If you won't talk to me, I'll lose my job!

MARIE

(Stops in mid-gesture.) What?

FRANCES

He told me I'll be fired if you won't give me an interview.

MARIE

He did, did he? (Beat) How do I know this isn't a ploy to soften me up?

FRANCES

(Starts to cry.) It's not. I swear to you. It's...

MARIE

Well, you're either the best actress I've seen in a long time or ... But of course, he *would* do something like that, the beast.

(Marie goes to Frances, hands her a handkerchief to wipe her her eyes, which Frances does, then tries to return it to Marie.)

MARIE

Keep it. Believe me, I have a plenty. (Beat) Goodness, how old are you, honey?

FRANCES

19.

MARIE

I've got twenty years on you, but in terms of experience, probably more like fifty. (Beat) Tell you what. You sit down and I'll give you an interview that's sure to get you promoted, *if*, that is, you have the bad judgment to continue working for that yellow journalist creep.

(Marie points to a chair, and Frances, somewhat stunned, sits, finds handkerchief in purse, wipes her eyes.)

FRANCES

Thank you! Thank you *so* much!

(Frances scrambles to find notebook and pencil while Marie finishes removing her make-up and turns to face Frances.)

MARIE

You're gonna ask about my roots, right? How a little girl from a nowhere town in Canada made it to Broadway? You don't need me for that. Ask my manager. Ask my agent. I'll give you something much more important. Something that won't show up in the program notes.

(Marie, now without makeup, turns and faces Frances. At the start of the upcoming song, Frances is uncomfortable, not wanting to have to answer Marie. But as the song progresses, she listens, rapt, and takes notes. SONG: A GREAT BIG GIRL LOKE ME - MARIE)

MARIE

LOOK AT THIS FACE.  
YOU CAN PRETEND  
WE MET AT A PARTY, AND I'M A NEW FRIEND.  
FORGET THAT I'M FAMOUS. I'M JUST PLAIN MARIE,  
NOT SOMEONE WHOSE NAME IS ABOVE A MARQUEE.  
SO WHAT'S YOUR IMPRESSION? PLEASE DON'T BE AFRAID.  
I'M QUITE WELL AWARE HOW I'M MADE.

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?  
NOTHING TO SAY?  
THAT'S NOT A SURPRISE, 'CAUSE IT'S ALWAYS THIS WAY.

BUT HERE'S WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. YOU KNOW I'M NOT WRONG:  
"HER MOUTH IS TOO WIDE AND HER CHIN IS TOO STRONG.  
HER NECK IS TOO THICK AND HER BROWS ARE BIZARRE,  
AND YET HERE SHE IS...A BIG STAR!"

THEN HOW DID I COME SO FAR?  
WELL...

WHEN YOU'RE A GREAT BIG GIRL LIKE ME,  
YOU'LL NEVER GET TO PLAY THE SWEET INGÉNUÉ,  
BUT THERE ARE OTHER PATHS  
THAT YOU CAN STILL PURSUE,  
YOUR HOMELY LOOKS WILL FURNISH THE KEY,  
WHEN YOU'RE A GREAT BIG GIRL LIKE ME.

WHEN YOU'VE A FUNNY MUG LIKE MINE,  
YOU'LL NEVER SHARE A KISS WITH DOUGLAS OR JOHN  
BUT THERE ARE OTHER ROLES  
YOU CAN DEPEND UPON  
YOU FIND A DIFFERENT WAY TO SHINE,  
IF YOU'VE AN UGLY MUG LIKE MINE.

YOU TURN TO COMEDY!  
PROVIDE HILARITY!  
YOU USE  
YOUR ABSENCE OF GRACE,  
THE PIE IN YOUR FACE,  
THE FALL ON YOUR BUTT...  
AND SOON YOUR SPARK IS A FLAME –  
AND THERE IS YOUR NAME IN LIGHTS!  
WHAT A SIGHT TO SEE,  
WHEN YOU'RE ANY KIND OF GIRL,  
BUT ESPECIALLY A GREAT BIG GIRL LIKE ME!

MARIE

You got that?

FRANCES

Yes. Yes. I do. I can't thank you enough, Miss Dressler—

MARIE

You can "Marie" me now, honey! After all, I've bared my oversized soul to you, haven't I?

FRANCES

You've been so kind... Marie. You've saved my job with this interview. I'll never forget...



MARIE

I believe it's elephants that never forget. People tend to have short memories, but maybe...

FRANCES

Maybe?

MARIE

Maybe we can be friends. Would you like that?

FRANCES

Of course! I'd like that enormously.

MARIE

Well, friends it is, then. C'mere.

(Marie beckons to Frances, who goes to her. Marie gives her a slightly awkward, pat-on-the-back sort of hug. They separate.)

MARIE

I don't subscribe to that monster's rag, so send me the article when it's printed, will you?

FRANCES

Of course. Goodbye, then.

MARIE

And since we're friends, we should try to keep in touch, don't you think?

FRANCES

Yes. Definitely. That would be terrific. (Beat) 'Bye.

(Frances gathers her things and exits. Marie looks after her for a moment, then turns back to the mirror, studies her face. Blackout. End of scene.)

### Interlude #3

More Marie success stories.

Scene 6

(1910: Marie's hotel suite. Marie sits in a chair, looking through the mail. Mamie is ironing.)

MARIE

(Opening another letter, reading) Ugh! Bad news, I'm afraid. About the opossums. Seems they're not as popular as pets as I thought they'd be. They're not selling well at all.

MAMIE

That's a pity, but—

MARIE

But what?

MAMIE

Well, truth be told, they never seemed as cute to me as they did to you. I know they like to eat rats and bugs, but if you can afford to buy one of them, you probably don't have much of a rat and bug problem.

MARIE

I suppose you're right. (Beat) I can't bear to look at the amount of money I lost on them. Here (hands letter to Mamie) You look and then you can tell me. Or not.

(Mamie takes letter, looks, makes a face.)

MAMIE

Best not to say anything just now, I think.

MARIE

That bad, eh? (Beat) Well, you can't win 'em all. Fortunately I'm still flush.

MAMIE

But perhaps you should—

MARIE

Hmm. Nothing from Frances. That's disappointing.

(There's a knock on the door. Mamie answers. It's a bellhop with a huge bouquet of flowers, which he hands to Mamie.)

BELLHOP #1

Fer Miss Dressler.

MAMIE

Thank you.

(Marie goes to drawer, removes coins.)

BELLHOP #1

Feller in the lobby asked me ta bring 'em up. Real snappy dresser. Said he's yer biggest fan.

(Marie gives Bellhop his tip.)

BELLHOP #1

Gee. Thanks Miz Dressler. Yer a dilly. (Exits)

MARIE

(To Mamie) They're beautiful, aren't they? Is there a card?

MAMIE

Don't see one. (Arranges flowers in a vase.)

(Another knock on the door. Mamie answers. It's a different bellhop this time, holding a large heart-shaped box of candy.)

BELLHOP #2

Got somethin' here fer Miss Dressler.

(He hands box to Mamie, who looks for a card, doesn't see one.)

MAMIE

You know who it's from?

BELLHOP #2

A gentleman in the lobby gave it ta me. Said it's fer his one true love.

MARIE

Was he a "snappy dresser?"

BELLHOP #2

Sure was, Miss Dressler. How'd you know?

MARIE

Marie knows all.

(Gets up, takes coins from a drawer, hands them to Bellhop #2.)

BELLHOP #2

Gee, thanks, Miss Dressler. Yer the bee's knees! (Exits)

(Marie opens candy box, eats a piece, holds out box to Mamie, who declines. Another knock on the door.)

MARIE

I hope it's a diamond tiara this time.

(Mamie opens door. Jim Dalton stands there, holding a small long and narrow white box with a red ribbon.)

MAMIE

How'd you get in here? They're not supposed to let people up without our approval.

JIM

It's a wonder what a little cash will do to make people look the other way.

MAMIE

Well, you've gotta go.

JIM

Of course, if you say so. But please give these to Miss Dressler for me.

(Mamie takes box, prepares to close door.)

JIM

I would so have liked a word with her, though. (Beat) But... I'm going.

(He turns, as if to leave, but Marie, now very curious, speaks.)

MARIE

It's all right, Mamie. Let the gentleman in. He's been showering me with presents. The least I can do is give him an autograph.

(Mamie, dubious, allows Jim to enter. Marie goes to desk drawer, takes out a publicity photo, prepares to sign it.)

MARIE

How did you know peonies are my favorite flowers?

JIM

I know because I've studied you, Marie. Isn't that what you do when you love someone?

MARIE

You're certainly an avid fan, I'll give you that. You knew my favorite candy, as well.

JIM

Cadbury Dairy Milk Bars. A woman of good taste. And I have one more gift for you.

(Mamie beckons Marie, who goes to her. They whisper.)

MAMIE

You should sign your picture and say goodbye to this fellow. I have a bad feeling about him.

MARIE

You think he's a ne'er-do-well of some sort I take it.

MAMIE

Maybe or maybe not. But you can't be too careful.

MARIE

I can take care of myself, I promise. If he goes Jack the Ripper on me, I'll hit him over the head with that bust of Shakespeare.

(A worried Mamie shakes her head disapprovingly and exits.)

MARIE

(Approaches Jim) So. Let's see this "last gift." If it's jewelry, be forewarned I won't accept it. Flowers and candy are one thing, but jewelry from a fan? Too many strings attached.

JIM

See for yourself.

(Marie opens box, removes long, white satin opera gloves.)

MARIE

They're beautiful, but they'll never fit. (Shows him her hands.) I think you botched this one. But two out of three isn't bad.

JIM

Just try them on. Please.

MARIE

Fine. But this won't be pretty.

(Marie tries them on and they fit perfectly. She is stunned.)

MARIE

Well, I'll be! How could you—

JIM

(Interrupts) I told you, Marie. I've done my best to learn everything I could about you.

MARIE

(Flattered despite herself) But I know nothing about you. Not even your name.

JIM

James Dalton, but call me Jim. Jim -- your greatest, most loving fan.

MARIE

If you're interested in my money, you're out of luck. I just lost a bundle on an investment.

JIM

Look. I get it. I appear out of nowhere bearing gifts and professing love. Of course you're not gonna trust I'm the real deal. But honest, I saw you on stage six months ago and since then, I haven't been able to get you out of my mind.

MARIE

You need a new hobby.

JIM

You think I'm just an over-zealous fan or worse still, a nut or a swindler. Just give me a chance to prove myself, Marie. Truly. I love you. (SONG: MY DEVOTED HEART – JIM)

JIM

I DON'T CLAIM TO BE PERFECT.  
I HAVE A CHECKERED PAST.  
I DRANK TOO MUCH AND GAMBLED SOME.  
HAD A MARRIAGE THAT DIDN'T LAST.  
BUT ONCE I SAW YOU UP ON THE STAGE,  
I MADE A SOLEMN VOW  
TO MEND MY WAYS AND THAT'S THE MAN  
YOU SEE BEFORE YOU NOW.

LIKE MOST, I'D HEARD OF THE RUMORS...  
YOUR EARLY YEARS WERE ROUGH  
BUT YOU REFUSED TO DWELL ON THEM,  
CLOSED THE CURTAIN AND SAID "ENOUGH!"  
WITH GRIT AND GUMPTION AND ARTISTRY,  
YOU'VE MADE A BRAND NEW START,  
AND DANCED AND SUNG YOUR WONDROUS WAY  
INTO MY DEVOTED HEART

I UNDERSTAND YOU BETTER  
THAN OTHER PEOPLE DO.  
THE GRACELESS GIRL THEY SEE ON STAGE...  
MARIE, THAT ISN'T YOU.  
NO, YOU'RE A GIFTED ARTIST  
WHO'S CHOSEN TO APPEAR  
AS SOMEONE PEOPLE LAUGH AT  
FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR CAREER.

THE REAL MARIE IS GENEROUS,  
AND STRONG AND WARM AND WISE,  
SHE HAS A HANDSOME COUNTENANCE  
WITH KINDNESS IN HER EYES.  
I FERVENTLY ADORE HER,  
I THRILL WHEN SHE IS NEAR, (I thrill ?)  
AND NOW I DO IMPLORE HER  
TO SEE THAT I'M SINCERE.  
LOOK IN YOUR HEART, MY DEAR MARIE  
AND YOU'LL SEE THAT I'M SINCERE

HERE I STAND, THEN, MY DARLING,  
MAKING THIS EARNEST PLEA  
GATHER THE COURAGE I KNOW YOU HAVE  
AND USE IT TO TRUST IN ME.  
I SWEAR WITH EVERY PASSING DAY  
I'LL PROVE MY LOVE ANEW,  
MARIE, YOU ARE MY SOULMATE  
AND I HOPE TO MARRY YOU!

WE WERE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER  
TODAY IS JUST THE START.  
I BEG YOU TO BECOME MY WIFE  
WITH ALL MY DEVOTED HEART!  
MY COMPLETELY DEVOTED HEART!



Scene 7

(A year later, 1911. Prior scene morphs into a lavish do Marie is throwing to introduce her new husband, Jim Dalton. Guests include Frances and Nella, Mamie and her new spouse, Jerry Cox. Servants circulate with refreshments, guests talk and mingle. A few, including Frances and Nella, converse downstage and can be heard above the hubbub and soft music from a small orchestra.)

GUEST #1

Marie Dressler. Married! Never thought I'd see the day!

GUEST #2

I certainly hope she knows what she's doing.

FRANCES

I think it's lovely they found each other. It's what was missing from Marie's life, and I wish them only the best.

GUEST #1

Well, of course. We all do. But...

NELLA

(Changing subject) You saw Marie in Tillie's Nightmare, I hope. Sheer genius. She was about to drop the project, but I told her that according to her horoscope, if she revised the script herself, it would be a hit. And it was!

GUEST #2

Horoscope? Please! What a bunch of gobbledygook!

FRANCES

(To Guest #2) Evelyn, perhaps you two haven't been properly introduced. This is Nella Webb, Marie's astrologer.

GUEST #2

Oh, dear. I didn't know, I—

NELLA

Perfectly all right. I understand completely that some people just aren't capable of understanding the more rarefied truths of the universe. "Into the fog of mediocrity go the multitudes."

FRANCES

What do you think about the reforms Bryant is advocating? Some of them sound intriguing.

GUEST #1

I'm assuming Taft will stick with Teddy's policies, so I'm supporting him.

(Marie, joins the group. She's in high spirits)

MARIE

I hope you're not talking about anything serious. This is a party! You're under orders to laugh heartily and be frivolous.

(Marie sees Jerry nearby, calls him over.)

MARIE

Jerry! Come here for a moment, will you?

GUEST #2

Thank you, Marie. I *am* feeling parched.

(Jerry joins the group.)

GUEST #2

(To Jerry) Do please bring me a glass of that champagne I see making the rounds.

JERRY

(Flummoxed) Uh, well, maybe I could—

MARIE

(To the group) Jerry is a guest, not a waiter.

GUEST #2

Oh! I'm sorry. I just—

MARIE

This is the lucky fellow who captured the heart of my treasured assistant, Mamie Steele.

NELLA

It was I who introduced Marie and Mamie. "When entities converge in the eleventh quintile—"

MARIE

And now Mamie Steele is Mamie Steele Cox. So... Jim and I aren't the only newlyweds here.

FRANCES

Congratulations, Jerry! I know how wonderful Mamie is, and you must be, too, to have won her.

JERRY

I don't know about that, but I do know I love that woman with all my heart. (Beat) You folks excuse me? I gotta make sure Mamie isn't fussing around in the kitchen. (Exits)

MARIE

She really wanted to cater the party, but I insisted she be a guest and she finally gave in.

(Frances motions to Marie to step away so they can talk privately.)

FRANCES

I need to tell you how happy I am for you, Marie. From what I can see, Jim is a lovely fellow and it's clear he dotes on you completely.

MARIE

He does, doesn't he? I'm the cat's meow as far as he's concerned. I've never really had anyone who wanted to take care of me before. And now I'll have an escort to boring dinner parties.

FRANCES

And he'll whisper sweet nothings in your ear while you eat the vichyssoise.

MARIE

(Laughs) Who would have thunk it, eh? An old broad like me? (Beat) And I learned that sometimes you have to...

FRANCES

Have to what?

MARIE

Nothing. Nothing.

(Jim, in his cups, joins the group, as do Marie and Frances.)

JIM

Hello, all. Various and sundry. Whoever you are.

MARIE

You know who they are, darling. Frances and Nella and—

JIM

'Course I do. Course I do. Just pulling your leg. How's it going? Had enough to eat and drink?

MARIE

I think you've probably had enough of the latter, sweetheart.

JIM

S'pose I have. Calms the nerves, you know? Big do like this? Besides, it's a celebration isn't it? And I'm in a celebratory mood 'cause this wonderful woman here has become my wife and I'm the luckiest man in the world.

MARIE

And I'm the luckiest woman. You know what Jim got me as a wedding present? Four hogs, two cows, two goats and eight chickens.

GUEST #2

(Sarcastic) Really. How nice.

MARIE

But it is! I've bought a farm in Vermont. Loafhaven, we call it, prettiest place you ever did see.

JIM

And what good are jewelry and furs on a farm, I ask you? Not much good at all.

MARIE

So now, thanks to my sweet husband, we have cows to milk and chickens to lay eggs and –

JIM

I'd have slaughtered the pigs eventually, but Marie won't have it. She thinks –

MARIE

They have such distinctive personalities, you see. Clover is shy, but Daffodil makes up for it with her tomfoolery and... Well, I just couldn't bear for them to become porkchops!

GUEST#1

But what about your career? Surely that's what's most important.

MARIE

Sometimes one just needs to take a little break, you know. And you wouldn't deny my sweetie and me some uninterrupted time together –

(Jim interrupts Marie by clanging on a champagne glass to get the guests' attention. The room is suddenly quiet. A wobbly Jim stands on a chair, barely escapes falling.)

JIM

Ladies and gents... In case you don't know who I am, I'm Jim Dalton, the luckiest guy in the world, 'cause Marie here was brave enough to accept my proposal and now we're well and truly hitched. I love her to distraction, yes I do, and she's brave enough to love me back. But maybe I already said that. Anyway, if you wanna drink a toast to us, that's fine, but my toast (holds up glass) is to Marie, for making me the happiest man in the world. Or did I already say that?  
(SONG: LIVING LARGE – JIM, FRANCES, NELLA, ENSEMBLE)

JIM

HERE'S TO MARIE, A UNIQUE, UNRIVALED STAR  
HERE'S TO MARIE, WHO I WORSHIPPED FROM AFAR  
NOW THAT SHE'S MADE ME THE HAPPIEST OF MEN  
LET'S RAISE A GLASS TO MARIE, AGAIN AND AGAIN

FRANCES

WE DRINK TOASTS TO THE RADIANT BRIDE AND GROOM

HOPING OUR HOSTS FEEL THE LOVE THAT HAS FILLED THE ROOM  
NELLA  
LIFE IS A SPREE WITH JIM AND MARIE IN CHARGE,  
SHOWING US ALL, LIFE'S A BALL WHEN YOU'RE LIVING LARGE

GUEST solo  
SUCH A WASTE NOT EMBRACING EACH BRAND NEW THRILL  
GUEST solo  
TAKE A TASTE AND THEN YOU'LL WANT TO HAVE YOUR FILL  
GUESTS' duet  
GO FOR THE MOMENT AND ALL THAT IT HAS TO GIVE  
GROUP OF GUESTS  
LIVING LARGE IS THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE

GUEST #3  
I admit he's not bad looking. But what does he see in her?

GUEST #4  
Success and wealth, I assume. Wonder what she wants with him, though.

GUEST #3  
Well, he does seem devoted to her. You know what he gave her as a wedding present for her farm? Animals! Goats and pigs! Apparently, she was thrilled!

FRANCES  
TO JIM AND MARIE, AND THE LESSONS THAT THEY IMPART  
NELLA  
THEIR JOIE D'ESPRIT LIGHTS A SPARK IN EACH MIND AND HEART  
ALL  
LIVE IT UP, AND THE GOOD TIMES'LL NEVER STOP  
DRAIN THE CUP, NEVER MISSING A SINGLE DROP  
LIFE IS ONE GIANT HORS D'OEURVE  
SHOW SOME VERVE AND SOME NERVE  
WHY BE CONSERVATIVE - LIVING LARGE IS THE WAY TO LIVE

GUEST #5  
She's made him her business manager, I hear.

GUEST #6  
I doubt the producers are thrilled about that. She's already well-known for being demanding.

GUEST #5  
And apparently he's even worse. At least, that's the rumor.

(DANCE BREAK – Jim is progressively more inebriated)

JIM  
WHY THINK SMALL, WHEN THE WORLD IS SO BIG AND GRAND  
HAVE A BALL, AND ENJOY EVERY JOY AT HAND

FRANCES (helping him out when he is too drunk to continue)  
DON'T BE CONTENT BEING PENT-UP AND TENTATIVE

ALL  
LIVING LARGE IS THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE

GUEST #1

Apparently he came out of nowhere and swept her off her feet. No one knows a thing about him.

GUEST #2

Well, maybe she liked the mystery of it all, because she didn't resist for very long.

GUEST #1

Or she wanted to squelch the rumors that she really prefers--

MAMIE  
HERE'S TO MARIE

FRANCES  
AND TO JIM

BOTH  
AND TO THEIR GENEROSITY  
NELLA, MAMIE, FRANCES  
HELPING US SEE  
LIFE'S MORE FUN LIVED ABUNDANTLY

ALL  
ABUNDANTLY  
EVERY DAY LOOK FOR SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE  
THAT'S THE WAY TO MAKE GLADNESS YOUR NORMAL STATE  
WHEN LIFE'S PLEASURES CAN BE SO AMPLE  
DON'T BE SATISFIED WITH JUST A SAMPLE  
THAT'S THE EXAMPLE YOU'RE GIVING OF LIVING LARGE!

(Blackout. End of scene.)

#### Interlude #4

1914: Something about war breaking out in Europe

1915: Sinking of the Lusitania

1916: Something about 1916 being a banner year for Broadway, introducing of promising young stars, etc.

Scene 8

(1916: Loafhaven, Marie's and Jim's Vermont Farm. Marie, dressed in overalls, sits on a couch putting on boots. Jim, at a desk, works on an adding machine.)

MARIE

Did you ever in your life see anything as cute as a baby goat? Don't they just lift your spirits? Not a care in the world. Too bad we can't all be like them.

JIM

(Only partly paying attention) You mean jump on bales of hay and butt each other?

MARIE

You know perfectly well what I mean. They're... irrepressible!

JIM

Like you.

MARIE

Not these days. Not with what's going on in Europe.

JIM

Worry about something we have some control over. Like our shrinking bank account.

MARIE

That's just a temporary setback because the opossum ranch thing didn't work out.

JIM

None of our investments work out, Marie. The only thing that makes money is you performing. It was a big mistake to turn down that gig in Buffalo.

MARIE

Since I made you my manager you've become very, well... bossy. If the truth be told.

JIM

If the truth be told, God himself couldn't tell you what to do. You're "unbossable." You don't listen to me and you barely listen to the producers either. (Beat) As your manager, I should be the one dealing with them, but you keep intruding. How will they ever come to respect me if you keep undermining my authority?

MARIE

My poor Jim. You need to relax. C'mere. I'll give you a shoulder rub.

(Jim goes to her. She massages his shoulders.)



MARIE

You know, there's more to life than theater. There's fields and flowers and... and piglets! Daffodil's due any minute and...

JIM

Mmm. That does feel good!

(He turns his head around and begins to nuzzle Marie's hands, then gets up and attempts to kiss her.)

MARIE

(Stops him.) Honey! Mamie might come in!

JIM

So what? We're married. I'm sure she knows we kiss. Not as often as I might like, though.

MARIE

I'm just so exhausted with all the work that needs doing. The south pasture fence is sagging and the pump behind the barn is rusted and—

JIM

If we sold Loafhaven, it'd help financially and you could get back on stage.

MARIE

Absolutely not! I couldn't bear to part with this place. Or the animals. (Stands) I'm gonna see if Daffodil's in labor. I've already chosen the babies' names, and —

JIM

You're incorrigible, Marie. But I love you anyway.

(Exiting, Marie blows Jim a kiss. Jim sighs, returns to desk and adding machine. In a moment the doorbell, imitating a cow's moo, rings. Mamie, accompanied by Frances, enters.)

JIM

(Stands) Frances! This is a surprise! You just missed Marie. Did she know you were coming?

FRANCES

Nope. It's one of those un-invited drop-ins, I'm afraid.

JIM

From Los Angeles to Vermont seems quite a distance to travel for a "drop-in."

MAMIE

Can I get you something, Frances? Tea? Coffee?

FRANCES

Perhaps a glass of water. The walk from the road to the house is a bit uphill for my taste.

(Mamie exits.)

JIM

Well, have a seat.

(Frances and Jim sit.)

FRANCES

I'm afraid you've caught me out, Jim. Of course I made a special trip, but only from New York, where I've had meetings. I couldn't go back to L.A. without seeing Marie's Garden of Eden.

(Mamie returns with a glass of water and some cookies.)

FRANCES

Thank you, Mamie.

MAMIE

My pleasure.

(Mamie exits, Frances drinks, there's an awkward silence.)

JIM

Marie just said the other day she hadn't heard from you lately. I think she was a bit hurt.

FRANCES

Oh, dear. I'm afraid I've been so focused on my job I've let other things slide.

JIM

Working hard, eh? Wish I could say the same for my wife.

FRANCES

What do you mean? In her letters all she talks about is how exhausted she is from driving the tractor and milking the cows.

JIM

That's not the kind of work I'm referring to.

FRANCES

Ah! Her career!

JIM

Yes, the kind of work that pays the bills and allowed us to buy this farm in the first place. Money is going out a lot faster than it's coming in.

FRANCES

It's true the Broadway scene *is* changing. They want fresh young faces now. I do worry that if Marie stays away too long, there won't be anything for her to go back to.

JIM

Then tell her that, please! She won't listen to me. (Beat) Sorry. Let's talk about something more pleasant. How's life in California? Marie says your career is going gangbusters.

FRANCES

She gives me far too much credit. I'm a writing assistant at Famous Players-Lasky, with an emphasis on the word "assistant." I'm as good a writer as anyone there, maybe better. But I have one fatal flaw, and it's something I can't do anything about.

JIM

Which is?

FRANCES

I'm female!

(Before Jim can react, Marie enters.)

MARIE

No piglets yet, but... (Sees Frances) Frances! My goodness! What an unexpected treat!

FRANCES

I had to see this paradise of yours.

(Marie and Frances hug.)

FRANCES

And look at you! Have you been on the cover of *Farm and Fireside* yet?

MARIE

Make all the fun you want, but I've never been happier.

JIM

I'll leave you two ladies to catch up. (Exits)

FRANCES

You've never been happier? C'mon, Marie. This is me you're talking to.

MARIE

Well, I'm very upset about the war, of course. This neutrality is bosh. Our boys should be over there fighting the Krauts, and if they were, and if I were a boy, I'd be there, too. But you know me. Something gets me down but I soon pop up again. (Beat) Goodness, you're a sight for sore eyes. I thought maybe you'd forgotten me.

FRANCES

Forget Marie Dressler? Not possible. But it *has* been too long. It's a shame Los Angeles and New York aren't closer together.

MARIE

You mean Los Angeles and Vermont.

FRANCES

Surely you'll be returning to New York soon.

MARIE

I'm not in any hurry. They wanted me for a comic opera in Rochester, but I turned it down.

FRANCES

My goodness! Why?

MARIE

If you must know, I couldn't bear the thought of another show where I bumble around like a nincompoop and everyone laughs at me. I'm an *actress*, for God's sake, not a cartoon.

FRANCES

I always wondered if it bothered you, the type casting.

MARIE

It didn't at first. Heck, I built my career on being the ugly duckling who makes people laugh. But I thought by now they'd realize I'm more than that.

FRANCES

They should, of course, but... I worry that if you take yourself out of circulation for long enough... You know there's a rumor going around that you're hard to work with.

MARIE

Such baloney! Is it wrong to insist on my own costumes instead of the ones their inept costumers patch together? Is it wrong to require approval rights on casting?

FRANCES

Yes! It *is* wrong. You're handing them the excuses they need to cut you off. Grit your teeth and act agreeable! That's what I do. (SONG: PLAYING THE GAME – FRANCES AND MARIE)

FRANCES

If I were Frances spelled with an I.  
In other words, a man,  
They'd treat me like a colleague,  
A member of their clan.  
Instead I have to work twice as hard for half the credit,  
But I don't let it get it my way.

What it the point of wondering why,  
That's just the way things are,  
But certain compromises  
Have helped me get this far.  
By being savvy and sensible,  
I've made myself indispensable,  
And it's paying off today.  
You have to play with the cards in your hand.  
The odds are against you if you take a stand.  
It's a man's world but you can claim success and fame  
By learning to play the game.

You know how much I care about you,  
That's why I so concerned,  
And why I'm simply sharing some lessons I have learned.  
It helps to use flexibility  
And tools like grace and humility...  
Why, it's really just another role to play.

True, it goes against what we believe,  
But you can cheat just a bit with the cards up your sleeve,  
Since the deck is clearly stacked.  
Using flattery and tact  
You can make those men respect and remember your name  
By learning to play the game.

MARIE

I understand what you're trying to show me,  
But by now, given how well you know me,  
Do you honestly think I could start  
Playing this type of part?  
Feigning and flirting and flattering  
I never do,  
But even if I wanted to  
I couldn't get away with it... like you.

There's nothing about me I want to fix,  
And you can't teach this old broad new tricks.  
I won't pretend or fake it.  
This is who I am. They can take it – or leave it.

FRANCES

But that's just it, Marie. It seems they're leaving it. And where does that leave you?

MARIE

Here at Loafhaven, with my treasured animals. And Jim.

MARIE

I paid my dues long ago...

FRANCES

But this is now.

MARIE

And I won't bow  
To men who are younger and know less than me.

FRANCES

I can't say I blame you,  
But you can't blame me for trying.

MARIE

And though we disagree,  
The fact that you tried really touches me.

BOTH

In this man's world, it's a crying shame  
(FRANCES) That I must keep playing... (MARIE) But I can't start playing...  
The game!

FRANCES

I wish you'd just move to Hollywood. I'm sure I could get you some parts.

MARIE

I will *never* move to that hateful place. My one experience there was a disaster and I got a hideous sunburn to boot.

FRANCES

Marie, Marie, Marie... I'm just so worried about you.

(Frances touches Marie's cheek in a comforting manner.)

MARIE

It means a lot that you worry about me, Frances.

FRANCES

Of course I worry about you. You're important to me.

MARIE

And you're important to me. Perhaps more important than you realize.

(Marie suddenly draws Frances to her and kisses her on the lips. Frances pulls away, shocked.)

MARIE

I'm sorry. I thought... I thought...

FRANCES

I do love you, Marie. But not like that. (Beat) Look. I'd best be on my way. I don't want to miss the bus back to Manhattan.

MARIE

I hope you won't—

FRANCES

Don't worry about it, okay? I'll write when I get back to the Coast. You take care.

(Frances exits hurriedly. Marie, upset, sits on the couch, head in hands. After a moment, Jim enters.)

JIM

Frances left already?

(Marie nods.)

JIM

Well, I hope you had a nice visit. By the way, Daffodil had her babies, eleven of 'em. I heard squeals coming from the barn so I took a look. Too bad you missed all the excitement.

Scene 9

(1917: Prior scene morphs into an outdoor platform and a crowd assembled below. A small army chorus stands at the ready. Marie, in soldier garb, enters. Loud applause from all.)

MARIE

(Salutes the soldiers.) Private Marie Dressler reporting for duty.

(One of the soldiers goes to Marie and whispers in her ear.)

MARIE

You say there are no women in the Army? Dang it! They don't know what they're missin.'

(Marie grabs the hats off the soldiers' heads and juggles them for a minute, then throws them back to the soldiers.)

MARIE

Guess I'll just have to find another way to contribute to the war effort. Let's see. (Beat) I could bake chocolate chip cookies and send 'em to the troops. (Considers) Nah. I wouldn't be doin' 'em a favor 'cause I'm a lousy cook. Hm. (Beat) I know! I could knit 'em cozy blankets for when it gets cold, but ... I can't knit. But ... I gotta do somethin'! It's my patriotic duty. After all, America is...

(She turns to the chorus, gives them a nod and they sing...)

SOLDIERS

THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE.

MARIE

You might not know this, but my family name is Koerber. Sound German? That's because it is. Yep, my father was born in Germany. And you know what? My ancestry doesn't stop me from knowing right from wrong. And wrong, my friends, is what the Central Powers are doin'. Right? So we've gotta help our boys in any way we can. Right? (Urges audience to respond) Right?

(Audience responds with a dutiful "yes." SONG: BACKING THE BOYS – MARIE, SOLDIERS, CROWD)

MARIE

EACH PATRIOTIC CUTIE  
MIGHT BELIEVE HER DUTY  
IS TO HUG AND SQUEEZE EACH SOLDIER BOY SHE KNOWS  
BUT THOUGH YOUR KISSES ARE SWEET  
AND MIGHT KNOCK FRED OFF HIS FEET  
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE HE NEEDS BEFORE HE GOES



SOLDIERS

WHAT'S THAT?

MARIE

BUY A LIBERTY LOAN  
TRY A LIBERTY LOAN  
THAT'S THE POINT I WANT TO MAKE CRYSTAL CLEAR  
START INVESTING YOUR DOUGH  
CAUSE IT'S HOW WE CAN SHOW

MARIE AND SOLDIERS

THAT WE'RE BACKING THE BOYS OVER THERE FROM OVER HERE

MARIE

SURE, SEND A TENDER LETTER  
A PHOTO? EVEN BETTER  
BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT'LL HELP HIM WIN THE WAR  
SO LADIES, ANSWER THE CALL  
YOU SAY YOU GAVE HIM YOUR ALL?  
IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GIVE A LITTLE MORE

ENSEMBLE

OOH LA LAH!

(Dance break – ensemble dances while Marie and other actors  
collect payments, sign autographs)

MARIE AND ENSEMBLE

BUY A LIBERTY LOAN  
TRY A LIBERTY LOAN  
THAT'S THE POINT I WANT TO MAKE CRYSTAL CLEAR  
START INVESTING YOUR DOUGH  
CAUSE IT'S HOW WE CAN SHOW  
THAT WE'RE BACKING THE BOYS OVER THERE FROM OVER HERE

MARIE:

EVERYBODY!

(Gets ensemble 'spectators', other actors, even audience to join)

MARIE AND ENSEMBLE

BUY A LIBERTY LOAN  
TRY A LIBERTY LOAN  
THAT'S THE POINT I WANT TO MAKE CRYSTAL CLEAR  
START INVESTING YOUR DOUGH  
CAUSE IT'S HOW WE CAN SHOW  
THAT WE'RE BACKING THE BOYS OVER THERE

MARIE

AND SHOWING THEM HOW MUCH WE CARE!

(Comedic flirtatious stage business with a 'soldier)

MARIE AND ENSEMBLE

THAT WE'RE BACKING THE BOYS OVER THERE

FROM OVER HERE!

GIVE 'EM A CHEER!

MARIE

HIP HOORAY!

ENSEMBLE

FROM OVER HERE

MARIE

BUY ONE TODAY!

ENSEMBLE

BUY A LIBERTY LOAN! BUY A LIBERTY LOAN!

(Repeat as they exit, Marie collecting payments. Blackout. End of scene.)

Scene 10

(1918: Marie's much smaller hotel room. She sits at a table with four other women, three of whom appear quite agitated.)

LOUISA

So we went to the producer – it was Charles Cochran, may he rot in hell -- and said—

DOROTHY

... it wasn't fair we were expected to perform more than 8 times a week, especially on our measly salaries. And of course he can let us go with the snap of a finger without any--

PEARL

...advance notice or anything, and now--

DOROTHY

...with Actors' Equity, the big stars are protected—

PEARL

...no offense to you, Marie. You've always been square with us and—

LOUISA

...but the chorus is the lowest of the low. When we made our case to him, you know what he did?

PEARL

He told us he'd give it some thought in a year or two if he felt like it, and we should leave because he was late for dinner with his wife at Delmonicos!

DOROTHY

And then, when we turned to go, he pinched my bottom!

MARIE

I wish I could say I'm surprised. The stories I could tell you! And not just about my days in the chorus. (Beat, looks at 4<sup>th</sup> woman.) *You've* been very quiet. Are you in the chorus, too?

CLAIRE

I'm Claire. Claire DuBrey. Afraid I'm something of an interloper. I live in California, just here for a week visiting my sister. (Points to Louisa.)

LOUISA

I asked her to come with me, Marie. Hope that's okay. She's a fan of yours.

MARIE

Of course it's okay, but ... Claire DuBrey? Why is that name familiar?

LOUISA

Maybe you saw her in one of her movies. She's done a ton of them. "The Piper's Price?" "The Reward of the Faithless?"

MARIE

That's it, of course! "The Reward of the Faithless!" You were very good, I must say.

CLAIRE

I'm flattered you think so.

MARIE

I tried my hand in Hollywood once. Not for me, though. Had one hit, maybe you heard of it. "Tillie's Punctured Romance?" But after that, a total bust. The whole experience was underwhelming. (Beat) But you. You've been quite successful there, I believe.

CLAIRE

In a way, but I'm not well-known. At least... not yet.

DOROTHY

So what do you think, Marie? I mean, you're long past being in the chorus, but –

MARIE

Trust me, dealing with management is still hard. Right now they're withholding job offers to punish me for doing my patriotic duty.

CLAIRE

That's terrible!

MARIE

You're darn-tootin' it is. So I'm with you 100 per cent.

DOROTHY

(To Louisa and Pearl) I told you she'd understand. (Beat) So what should we do, Marie?

MARIE

You need to organize, like the actors. Strength in numbers. An association of chorus members with dues and bi-laws and officers and—

PEARL

Dues? I don't know... We make little enough as it is, and—

MARIE

One dollar a year. With enough people, that'll give you a decent kitty and bargaining power. (Thinks) "The Chorus Equity Association of America."

LOUISA

“The Chorus Equity Association of America!” It sounds so official. I love it! I nominate Marie to be our founding president! All in favor say “Aye!”

CLAIRE

Can I vote, too?

DOROTHY

Why not? Like Marie said, strength in numbers. So...

(All four women say an enthusiastic “Aye!”)

DOROTHY

I feel hopeful for the first time in ever so long. (SONG: THE POWERS THAT WERE –THE 3 WOMEN WITH MARIE AND CLAIRE)

DOROTHY

LET’S TELL THOSE PRODUCERS THAT WE’RE SICK AND TIRED  
THEY TREAT US LIKE THE LOWEST OF THE LOW  
BUT IF WE COME TOGETHER WE CAN GET INSPIRED  
‘CAUSE FACE IT, WE’RE THE HEART OF EV’RY SHOW!

ALL 3

THE POWERS THAT WERE - CAN’T IGNORE US  
CAUSING A STIR - FANS ADORE US  
YOU CAN’T DETER THE MIGHTY CHORUS  
WHEN WE’RE FIGHTING FOR CHORUS EQUITY

LOUISA

HERE’S AN ULTIMATUM FOR THOSE GREEDY BOSSES,  
THEY’D BETTER CHANGE THEIR WAYS OR WE WILL STRIKE!  
AND THEN THEY’LL BE COMPELLED TO SIT AND COUNT THEIR  
LOSSES,  
WHICH THEY WILL MOST DECIDEDLY DISLIKE.

ALL 3

THE POWERS THAT WERE - CAN’T IGNORE US  
CAUSING A STIR - FANS ADORE US  
YOU CAN’T DETER THE MIGHTY CHORUS  
WHEN WE’RE FIGHTING FOR CHORUS EQUITY

PEARL

NO MORE WILL WE WORK  
MORE THAN 8 SHOWS A WEEK.

DOROTHY

NO MORE CAN YOU FIRE US AT WILL.

ALL 3 PLUS MARIE AND CLAIRE  
(HEAR, HEAR, HEAR!)

LOUISA  
NO MORE WILL WE SHIRK  
OUR COMMITMENT TO SPEAK...  
NOW WE'LL BE INSISTENT, LOUD AND SHRILL.  
ALL 3 PLUS MARIE AND CLSAIRE  
(WE CAN'T KEEP STILL!)

DOROTHY  
LET'S DEMAND OUR SALARIES AT LEAST BE DOUBLED,  
TO DEMONSTRATE RESPECT FOR WHAT WE DO.

PEARL  
IF YOU REFUSE, YOU'LL FIND THAT WE CANNOT BE TROUBLED,  
TO SHOW UP ON THE STAGE TO DANCE AND SING FOR YOU!

ALL 3 PLUS MARIE AND CLAIRE  
THE POWERS THAT WERE - CAN'T IGNORE US  
CAUSING A STIR - FANS ADORE US  
THEY CAN'T DETER THE MIGHTY CHORUS  
WHEN IT'S TIME TO EVEN THE SCORE. (FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!)  
RIGHTS ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR. (RIGHT, RIGHT, RIGHT!)  
SO LET'S GIVE 'EM HECK FOR CHORUS EQUITY!

LOUISA  
This is so exciting! I feel better already.

MARIE  
(To Claire) There are choruses in Hollywood, too. You could form the California branch!

CLAIRE  
I'm not a political sort, I'm afraid, but I'll be happy to talk this up to my friends. It's been a pleasure being present at the birth of an actual movement!

(All stand)

DOROTHY  
Thank you... President Dressler. With you at the helm and the rest of us committed, I think the future of chorus folks is looking up.

MARIE  
We'll meet in a week or so to draft a mission statement. (To Claire) You should come, too.

CLAIRE  
I'm afraid I'll be back in California by then.

MARIE

Well, do look me up the next time you're in New York.

CLAIRE

I will. (Beat) For sure.

(More goodbyes, thanks, etc. and the women leave. Marie sits down, seems lost in thought. A somewhat drunk Jim enters.)

JIM

They're gone, right? Didn't want to interrupt the gab fest.

MARIE

It wasn't a gab fest. It was important work. And I hate it when you drink so early in the day.

JIM

I drink because I want to forget how close to the poorhouse we are.

MARIE

That's a good one! And I suppose you drank to celebrate when we were flush.

JIM

It was a b-i-i-i-g mistake to turn down the Rochester booking—

MARIE

You're a broken record, Jim. It would have interrupted my war work, and that was unacceptable. I couldn't live with myself if I let my boys down.

JIM

What about letting your fans down? And what about me? Your husband? Don't I count?

MARIE

Rochester would have been going backward. And we want to go forward.

JIM

Your eternal optimism is misplaced this time, Marie. We really are in trouble.

(Mamie enters with mail.)

MAMIE

Mail's here.

(She hands the mail to Marie, leaves. Marie leafs through the mail as she continues talking to Jim.)

MARIE

The war will be over soon and things will go back to normal. You'll see. In the meantime, we've had a nice long stretch of time to spend together and—

(While Jim speaks, Marie reads a letter she has just opened.)

JIM

But we haven't been together, have we? You're busy with your "important work" and I follow you around like a puppy while bankruptcy looms. Our next move will be to the street.

MARIE

Come here, would you, Jim?

(Jim approaches, perhaps expecting a conciliatory embrace)

MARIE

Closer.

(When they are face to face, Marie slaps Jim, hard. Shocked, he staggers backward, sinks onto couch.)

JIM

What the...?

MARIE

(Holds up letter.) This! This is a letter from Elizabeth. Elizabeth *Dalton*. Your wife! The one you told me you divorced before we married.

JIM

C'mon, honey! You know better than to believe—

MARIE

She sent proof, you cad. Official. Notarized.

JIM

But how did she—

MARIE

Publicity can be dangerous. Even the good kind. Seems she saw an article in – let's see – the Kansas City "Sun" about my war bond work, and there you were in the picture with me, identified as "Marie Dressler's husband, Jim *Walton*." But that pesky typo didn't fool her one little bit! (Beat) So you're not only a drunk, you're a bigamist!

JIM

(Stands) You gotta forgive me, Marie. I did it because I adore you. I did it because--



MARIE

You did it because I was your ticket to hobnobbing with rich and powerful people. I guess your *real* wife didn't offer you that opportunity. I see it so clearly now.

JIM

Whatever I've done, it was out of love.

MARIE

Love of the limelight. Love of champagne. How could I have been so stupid? (Beat) She wants money, of course. To keep quiet.

JIM

That's a laugh. We don't have any.

MARIE

We could be millionaires and she wouldn't get a dime. She can blab all she wants. It's fine with me if the whole world knows what a crook you are—

JIM

I'm not a crook, Marie. I've honestly and truly loved you and stood by you faithfully all these years. I went along with your silly projects even though I knew they would come to nothing. I defended you when they said you were hard to work with.

MARIE

*Me* hard to work with! That's rich! Producers were always pulling me aside, asking me to make you stop ordering them around. (Beat) When people said you were using me, I told them to go to hell. We were the perfect pair, I said. Partners in everything.

JIM

Not everything, Marie. Not everything. And I never complained, did I? (Beat) God, my head feels like it's gonna explode!

MARIE

*You're* gonna explode? Ha! I guess you're too drunk to see I'm the victim here, not you.

(Jim falls to the ground. At first, Marie looks on dispassionately.)

MARIE

You don't really have the acting skills to pull this off, Jim.

(Jim starts to seize)

MARIE

Jim! (Kneels down beside him.) Jim!

(Blackout. End of scene.)

### Interlude #5

1918: Marie blackballed by B'way producers/directors because of unionizing activities

1918: End of WWI but not of wounded soldiers jamming hospitals, etc.

Scene 11

(1919: The hallway of a hospital ward whose patients are wounded soldiers. Marie and Mamie are talking. Standing to the side is a small group of soldiers.)

MAMIE

I'm worried that you're overdoing it, Marie. You've been through a lot lately and I wish you'd take a few days off.

MARIE

Look who's talking! You lost your brother and I don't see you—

MAMIE

Work distracts me. At least in the daytime. Some nights I dream about him, though. He's in a bunker and they keep shooting, even after he's gone. Jerry says I cry out.

MARIE

Poor Mamie! I miss him, too, you know. Remember when he visited us and we all played musical chairs and he wound up sitting on my lap?

(Mamie laughs)

MARIE

I miss him and my favorite chorus boys, Rodney and Lucas. Remember them? War really is hell. (Beat) Sometimes, heaven forgive me, I even miss Jim.

(The conversation is interrupted by a nurse's entrance.)

NURSE

They're ready for you, Miss Dressler.

MARIE

Well, I'm ready for them!

(With a nod to the small group of soldiers, who follow her, she enters the ward running, then purposely slips and falls, slides across the floor, and ends up with a (clean) bedpan on her head. The soldiers, in bed or wheelchairs, laugh and hoot. Marie removes bedpan, stands, but her foot is tangled in a roll of gauze, and the more she tries to free herself, the more trapped she is. More laughter and hoots. Finally the nurse, in a pre-rehearsed gesture, helps by cutting the gauze. The soldiers cry "Hooray!" and "Bravo!" Marie feigns exhaustion, bends over to catch her breath and wipes her brow. Nella and Mamie watch from the doorway.)

MARIE

Whew! (Beat) How ya doin', guys?

(Shouts of "Okay," "Been Better," "Good now that you're here.")

MARIE

Betcha this isn't your favorite place to be, though.

(Shouts of "Ya got that right" and "Sure ain't!")

MARIE

Well, you know what? This kinda is *my* favorite place to be right about now, getting to entertain heroes. It's my honor and my privilege.

SOLDIER #1

We love you, Marie.

MARIE

And I love *you*. I look around me and I see your dear faces and I think how much you've been through to defend us. We're grateful beyond all measure.

SOLDIER #2

(Emotional) Sometimes it's real hard, Marie.

(Marie sits on the edge of his bed, holds his hand.)

MARIE

I know it is. (Beat) Go ahead and cry. Crying helps.

SOLDIER #2

I don't know if I can. Things get so bottled up, and...

SOLDIER #3

Sing us something sad, Marie, so we can all cry.

(Understanding, Marie nods, goes over to the group of soldiers that accompanied her, whispers something. SONG: THE ONES WE LEFT BEHIND – SOLDIERS AND MARIE)

SINGER

WE'RE GLAD TO BE BACK IN THE COUNTRY WE FOUGHT FOR,  
SURE THAT THE WAR IS ABOUT TO BE WON.  
GRATEFUL TO BE IN THE LAND OF THE FREE,  
'MIDST THE PEOPLE WE LOVE IN THE BRIGHT SHINING SUN.

BUT WHERE ARE THE ONES WE LEFT BEHIND

AT CANTIGNY AND LYS?  
THE SONS OF MOTHERS  
AND HUSBANDS OF WIVES  
WHO GAVE THEIR ALL  
AND LOST THEIR LIVES.  
(THOUGH THEIR HALLOWED MEMORY STILL SURVIVES...)  
AND WE PRAY THEY ARE AT PEACE.

MARIE

WE'RE THANKFUL TO GOD THAT YOU MADE IT HOME SAFELY,  
GRATEFUL INDEED THAT YOU FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT,  
BURSTING WITH PRIDE THAT THE YANKS TURNED THE TIDE  
AS WE STOOD UP FOR FREEDOM AND ALL THAT IS RIGHT.

BUT WHERE ARE THE ONES WE LEFT BEHIND  
AT BELLEAU WOOD AND AISNE?  
THE FATHERS OF DAUGHTERS,  
THE FATHERS OF SONS,  
WHOSE LIVES SUCCUMBED  
TO BOMBS AND GUNS  
WHILE FIGHTING TO REPEL THE HUNS...  
OH! WE WON'T SEE THEM AGAIN!

THE ONES WE LOST  
AT SUCH GREAT COST...  
THOSE BRAVE AND STALWART MEN...  
THEY'LL LIVE IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER,  
THOUGH WE WON'T SEE THEM AGAIN!

THE ONES WE LOST,  
THE ONES WE LEFT BEHIND...

(Blackout. End of scene. End of Act One)

## ACT TWO

### Scene 1

(1924: A yet again smaller hotel room. Mamie enters with tea and cookies. Doorbell rings, Jerry answers. Nella enters with a flourish.

NELLA

Me voici!

MAMIE

Thank you so much for coming! We didn't know what else to do.

NELLA

(Looks around) How the mighty have fallen! But never fear, I'm here now and all will be well. "The turbulence of the present dances in oblivion." (Beat) Where's Marie?

MAMIE

At the moment, she's down in the hotel personnel office, asking if she can clean rooms in exchange for rent.

NELLA

No, no, no, no! (Beat) I knew it was slim pickings, but—

MAMIE

I'm afraid it's no pickings at all. She spent too much time at the farm, I think. It's gone now, of course. Then with all the months selling war bonds and entertaining the troops—

JERRY

They kinda forgot about her.

MAMIE

(Pours tea as she talks) But the straw that broke the camel's back was her union organizing. They didn't like that one little bit.

NELLA

Yes. I read about the blackballing. Shameful! Such a cutthroat business. It's why I quit performing myself and made astrology my career. Ever so much more predictable! (Beat) She should never have stayed away from the stage for so long. If she had just listened to me... But that woman has a stubborn streak as long as the Eerie Canal! She only listens to the advice that suits her, and—

MAMIE

Well, she's at an all time low now, so I think there's a good chance she'll listen this time.

NELLA

I certainly hope so. She simply cannot afford to waste a Pluto in transit, so the move is imperative! “In the nexus of fulfillment, vibration rules.”

MAMIE

Yes, well... (Beat) It *is* imperative because Frances can get parts for her. Maybe not big ones, at first, but—

NELLA

Frances is a Pisces with Virgo rising so I’m not surprised she’s become such a success. Have you seen any of her movies?

MAMIE

We saw “The Song of Love” and enjoyed it very much. Jerry was swooning over Norma Talmadge, weren’t you, Jerry?

JERRY

C’mon, Mamie. I only swoon over you.

(There’s a knock on the door.)

NELLA

My apprentices, right on time. I thought they’d help us make the case.

(Jerry goes to door, bows as three women and three men enter. All are dressed in flowing robes.)

NELLA

Mamie and Jerry, meet Etheria, Mysteria, Esoterica, Daksanila, Daksapati and Bob. I am attempting to share my vast store of knowledge with them, in anticipation of the day when I am no longer present in this dimension

(General greetings are exchanged.)

MAMIE

(To Jerry) There should be some folding chairs in the closet. Maybe you—

(Before Mamie can finish her sentence, Marie enters, looking forlorn. She speaks without looking up.)

MARIE

It’s no go, Mamie. He said he doesn’t have the authority. And then he had the nerve to ask me for my autograph! (Looks up) What’s going on?

NELLA

(Runs to Marie, hugs her.) Oh, dearest darling Marie. Your troubles are over! I’ve studied your

NELLA cont'd.

chart meticulously, and I can say with the utmost confidence that you're in for a great and wonderful adventure. In Hollywood!

MARIE

*That* is not going to happen. (Beat) And who are these people?

NELLA

My apprentices, of course, here to help me convince you the wisdom of the spheres far outshines that of Marie Dressler. (SONG: IT'S ALL IN THE STARS – NELLA, APPRENTICES)

IN DAYS LONG GONE, BACK IN BABYLON  
THE ANCIENT MYSTICS KNEW  
THERE WAS WISDOM IN HOW THE PLANETS SPIN  
TO ADVISE US ALL WHAT TO DO  
I'VE STUDIED AND COME TO UNDERSTAND  
THEIR SECRETS, STRANGE AND TRUE

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS IT'S ALL IN ASTROLOGY  
YOU'RE GOING TO GO FAR  
THE STARS KNOW YOU'RE A STAR

WITH A MOON IN GEMINI. THE DUALITY IS MAGIC  
NOT JUST COMEDY BUT TRAGIC ROLES YOU'LL PLAY  
THE CHARTS I DREW ARE CRYSTAL CLEAR  
YOU'RE HEADED TO A NEW CAREER  
YOU'LL BE THE TOAST OF HOLLYWOOD SOMEDAY

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS IT'S ALL IN ASTROLOGY  
YOU'RE GOING TO GO FAR  
THE STARS KNOW YOU'RE A STAR

WAZAAN! PLUTO IS IN RETROGRADE.  
SHOOM! MERCURY IS NOW ASCENDANT.  
OOOSH! THERE SHOULD BE SOME CHANGES MADE.  
PARTS THAT ARE DRAMATIC  
CROWDS WILL BE ECSTATIC!  
ZATZ! YOU CAN TRUST THE ZODIAC.  
AAHM! EV'RY ASPECT, EV'RY ANGLE.  
GRAB THE FUTURE! DON'T LOOK BACK.!  
TIME TO TAKE A BRAND NEW TACK.  
YOU CAN SCALE THE HEIGHTS AGAIN  
PLAYING A TRAGEDIENNE!  
WAZAAN TANTRA OOOSH CAMUNDRA  
AAHM FILENSA SHOOM DROSIQUO ZATZ!



WITH A WATER SIGN LIKE YOURS AND THE SUN NOW IN POSITION  
IN YOUR TENTH HOUSE OF AMBITION YOU CAN SEE  
WITHOUT THAT FIXED MODALITY  
I CAN SAY WITH FINALITY  
THE PLANETS ARE ALIGNED AUSPICIOUSLY

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS, IT'S ALL IN ASTROLOGY  
YOU'RE GOING TO GO FAR  
THE STARS KNOW YOU'RE A STAR

WAZAAN TANTRA OOOSH CAMUNDRA  
AAHM FILENSA SHOOM DROSIQUO ZATZ!

(Blackout. End of scene.)

Scene 2

(1924: Same room a month or so later. Mamie is dusting a Tiffany lamp. Marie enters.)

MARIE

Never could read by that thing. Good riddance!

MAMIE

It is pretty, though.

MARIE

You think so? (Beat) Oh, who am I kidding? It's gorgeous! When "The Century Girl" was such a hit, I went straight to Tiffany's and made it mine. Breaks my heart to sell it, that's the truth.

MAMIE

Still in all, it's just a lamp.

MARIE

Oh, Mamie, what are we to do? The farm's gone, my jewelry and furs are gone. The only thing I haven't sold is my soul, and I'd probably sell that, too, if I could find a buyer! (Beat) I haven't even been able to pay you and—

MAMIE

Hush, now. Jerry and I have a little nest egg, and we'll be just fine. In fact, we were thinking we could maybe help you with—

MARIE

Don't even say the words! I would never, ever, allow that to happen.

MAMIE

You're too proud, Marie, if you don't mind my saying. Sometimes it gets in your way.

MARIE

Well, that's who I am, and I'm too old to change. (Beat) I just hate asking for help is what it is. I feel... ashamed.

MAMIE

You helped Frances once, and now she wants to return the favor. People *want* to help because they love you.

MARIE

Love! What an over-used word. I thought Jim loved me, and you saw where that led.

MAMIE

Well, when all was said and done, did you really love him?

MARIE

Of course I loved him! (Beat) In my way. (Beat) You know what the worst of it is? It's not even the money. It's being so totally, utterly, completely forgotten. No one remembers my name. It's like I never existed. Oh! It's all gone to pieces! (Marie starts to cry.)

MAMIE

When Henry died and I couldn't stop crying, you told me it might not seem like it, but there'd be better days ahead. Well, I'm saying the same thing to you now ... (SONG: MAMIE – BETTER DAYS AHEAD)

MAMIE

YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES, YOU'VE GOT PAIN  
YOU'VE GOT A PILE OF GOOD REASONS TO COMPLAIN  
BUT YOUR SORROW, I KNOW, WILL GO AWAY  
'CAUSE TOMORROW WILL BE A BRAND NEW DAY

SO YOU MUST FORGET THE BEFORE,  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER,  
THERE'S ALWAYS MORE  
SATISFACTION AND LAUGHTER.  
PUT YESTERDAY BEHIND YOU, JUST LIKE YOU SAID  
AND FIND THOSE BETTER, BETTER DAYS AHEAD.

YOU'VE GOT WORRIES, YOU'VE GOT FEARS,  
LET ME HELP YOU TO WIPE AWAY THOSE TEARS.  
SHARING WISDOM FROM SOMEONE WHO SHOULD KNOW,  
THAT SHE PASSED ON TO ME SO LONG AGO...

YOU MUST FORGET THE BEFORE,  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER,  
THERE'S ALWAYS MORE  
SATISFACTION AND LAUGHTER.  
PUT YESTERDAY BEHIND YOU, JUST LIKE YOU SAID  
AND FIND THOSE BETTER, BETTER DAYS AHEAD.

RIGHT NOW THE SONG YOU'RE PLAYIN'  
IS THE "I'M SO LOWDOWN" BLUES,  
IT FEELS LIKE YOU CAN'T GO DOWN ANY MORE.  
BUT LISTEN TO WHAT I AM SAYIN',  
'CAUSE I'VE GOT SOME REAL GOOD NEWS –  
THE FUTURE OFFERS PLENTY OF TIME TO SOAR...  
YOU'LL SOAR!

SO JUST FORGET THE BEFORE,  
AND LOOK TO THE AFTER,  
THERE'S ALWAYS MORE

SATISFACTION AND LAUGHTER.  
PUT YESTERDAY BEHIND YOU, JUST LIKE YOU SAID  
AND FIND THOSE BETTER, BETTER DAYS AHEAD.

DON'T YOU REMEMBER, MY MARIE,  
WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAID TO ME?  
THERE WILL BE BETTER, BETTER DAYS AHEAD.

(The two women embrace, as Mamie wipes away Marie's tears.)

Scene 3

(1924-1927: Segue to a collage scene starting with Marie's arrival in Hollywood and ending with her snagging an audition for a major role in "Patsy" with Marion Davies. At the scene's start, Marie arrives at MGM and is greeted by its head, Louis B. Mayer.)

LOUIS B.

Here she is! C'mon in! We're thrilled you're joining our happy little MGM family, and we're all looking forward to the work you're gonna do with us. (To those standing with him) Aren't we, folks? SONG: WELCOME TO HOLLYWOOD: Part 1 – LOUIS B)

LET ME BE THE FIRST TO SING A LITTLE VERSE TO  
SAY WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE  
NOW SOME BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS AND SOME INTRODUCTIONS  
TO YOUR NEW HOME, MY DEAR

WELCOME TO HOLLYWOOD, IT'S QUITE A TOWN  
THIS IS WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE  
AT THIS STUDIO YOU'LL SEE  
WE'RE ONE BIG FAMILY  
I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU, AND YOUR CAREER, TOO

YOU'LL FIND IN HOLLYWOOD, FAME AND RENOWN  
ONCE YOU GET USED TO THE GIG  
IF YOU LISTEN TO ME  
YOU'LL DO BEAUTIFULLY  
MARIE, YOU'RE GONNA BE BIG!

MARIE

(Indicating her figure.) I thought I already was!

LOUIS

This is Miss Polly Moran. I'm sure you've seen her work. She's volunteered to give you a little tour. I know I'm leaving you in good hands. (Exits)

POLLY

WELCOME TO HOLLYWOOD – WE'LL SHOW YOU ROUND  
WHERE TO SHOP, DINE OUT, DO YOUR HAIR

GIRLS

AND JUST WALK DOWN THE STREET!  
HEAVEN KNOWS WHO YOU'LL MEET

GIRLS (Solos)

ALL THE DREAMY STARS, WE KNOW  
CHAPLIN! FAIRBANKS! VALENTINO!

*(Girls sigh, Polly chuckles)*

POLLY

(Laughs) Come on, I'll take you over to wardrobe ...

(A few days later, Marie's first day on set and she's nervous. Frances is there for moral support. They rehearse a scene in the film "The Callahans and the Murphys, silently enacting an argument over a backyard fence. Marie hams it up.)

DIRECTOR

Okay. Stop right here. (Beat) Everything is too... big, Marie. This is a movie, not a play.

(He confers with the cameraman.)

DIRECTOR

Set up for the next closeup.

(Marie is confused. Polly nods reassuringly. SONG: Part 2 – DIRECTOR, STAFF, POLLY MORAN, FRANCES)

DIRECTOR

GOT TO HIT YOUR MARK HERE, DON'T STAY IN THE DARK HERE  
THE LIGHT IS YOUR FRIEND, YOU'LL SEE  
SKIP THE FUNNY FACES, THE CAMERA EMBRACES  
THE SLIGHTEST SUBTLETY

CREW MEMBER #1

All set for Miss Dressler's closeup...

POLLY

I KNOW IN HOLLYWOOD, YOU WILL GO FAR  
ONCE YOU'RE TAUGHT WHAT YOU OUGHT TO DO.

CREW MEMBER #1

PROPS BELONG ON THIS TABLE.

CREW MEMBER #2

YIKES, DON'T TRIP ON THAT CABLE!

POLLY

TONE IT DOWN A BIT AND YOU'LL BE A HIT!

DIRECTOR

IT'S BEST TO AVOID ANY STAGY DISPLAY  
JUST MAKE THE SLIGHTEST GESTURE COUNT.

FRANCES

YOUR TALENT WILL MAKE 'EM SAY WOW.  
JUST TRUST THE EXPERTS FOR NOW.

ALL

AND MISS DRESSLER, YOU'LL CARRY THE DAY!

DIRECTOR

Okay, let's try it again...

(They redo the same scene snippet with Marie clearly having incorporated the advice and Director nods approval. Segue to Marie and Claire on the studio lot, re-establishing contact.)

CLAIRE

Of course I read about your move in "Variety," but I wasn't quite sure when it was happening or if you'd change your mind and then... that telegram! And then that telephone call! And then one day you appeared on my doorstep in all your Marie-ness... (SONG – Part 3 -- CLAIRE)

CLAIRE

I'M SO GLAD WE'VE RECONNECTED  
AND AS I SUSPECTED  
YOU'RE DOING GREAT, MY DEAR  
MAKING SUCH A SPLENDID START NOW,  
WITH SUCH A JUICY PART NOW,  
TO REALLY LAUNCH YOUR CAREER –  
AND I'M SO GLAD THAT YOU'RE HERE

MARIE

When we first met in New York—

CLAIRE

Rabble-rousing on behalf of the oppressed choristers—

MARIE

I had a feeling we could become fast friends.

CLAIRE

I felt the same. But, you know... We lived so far apart.

MARIE

Not any more, though!

(Laughing, they walk off together. Segue to a few months later. Headlines: "The Callahans and the Murphys" withdrawn from circulation due to complaints about portrayal of Irish." Louis B. comes to Marie's home to explain. Mamie and Claire present.)

MARIE

But it was a loving portrayal! A comedy, granted, but if we lose the ability to laugh—

LOUIS B.

Well, the Irish appear to be more comfortable with gloomy narratives in dimly lit pubs.

MARIE

Now there's a stereotype worth contesting. Not our good-natured rollick. It's just so maddening. And what am I going to do now? —(SONG: Part 4 – LOUIS, MAMIE, CLAIRE)

LOUIS

THAT'S HOW THINGS WORK IN HOLLYWOOD – YOU TAKE SOME  
LUMPS,  
BUT YOU MUSTN'T GIVE UP HOPE  
DISAPPOINTING, IT'S TRUE, BUT I'LL FIND WORK FOR YOU  
SWEETHEART, YOU'LL SEE, JUST LEAVE IT TO ME

MAMIE

THE FUTURE WILL ALL BE GOOD – DON'T MIND THESE BUMPS  
AND WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU COPE

CLAIRE

I HOPE YOU KNOW, WE BELIEVE IN YOU SO

ALL 3

SO KEEP YOUR CHIN UP, MARIE

MARIE

Both of them?

LOUIS B.

I've got my eagle eye on the lookout for good parts for you.

FRANCES

And I'm writing one or two even as we speak.

MARIE

Well, it won't be the first time I've had a disappointment and gotten over it. I'm good at that.

(Segue to 1927: Headlines announce a couple of Marie movies in which she had minor parts – “Breakfast at Sunrise,” “The Joy Girl.” Louis and Frances confer in Louis' office.)

FRANCES

King Vidor is making “The Patsy” into a movie and he's looking for someone to play Ma Harrington. I think Marie would be perfect.

LOUIS

It's a sophisticated comedy. I don't think Marie when I think sophistication.

FRANCES

But it *is* a comedy, which *does* suggest Marie. (Beat) C'mon! She deserves a major role. And since Vidor's at Cosmopolitan, if you don't like the picture, don't distribute it.



LOUIS  
I don't know... (SONG: PART 5 – FRANCES AND LOUIS)

FRANCES  
WHY DON'T YOU SUGGEST HE GIVE MARIE A TEST  
AND SEE IF SHE COMES THROUGH . . .

LOUIS B.  
FRANCES, YOUR INSISTANCE, CHIPS AT MY RESISTANCE,  
SHE TRULY HAS A LOYAL FRIEND IN YOU...

FRANCES  
So you'll do it? Ask Vidor to test her?

LOUIS  
If only to get you to stop nagging me.

FRANCES  
Thank you! Then he can make the final decision. That's how confident I am he'll want her.  
(Beat) I haven't steered you wrong yet, have I?

LOUIS B.  
It's true. You haven't. And I've made quite a lot of money trusting your instincts.

FRANCES  
It's settled then. And neither of you will be sorry.

(Headline announces smash reviews for the "The Patsy"  
starring Marion Davies, Orville Caldwell and Marie Dressler,  
direction by King Vidor, as well as a headline touting "Marie  
Dressler's Comeback," etc. SONG – PART 6 – ENSEMBLE)

ALL  
THAT'S THE MAGIC OF HOLLYWOOD - YOU'LL REALIZE  
MIRACLES CAN HAPPEN HERE  
YOU CAN FALL DOWN BUT THEN - YOU'LL BE BACK UP AGAIN  
AND YOUR FACE CAN BE SEEN UP ON THE SILVER SCREEN  
FINALLY HOLLYWOOD WILL RECOGNIZE  
HOW GREAT AN ACTRESS YOU ARE  
MAKE NO MISTAKE THIS COULD BE YOUR BIG BREAK  
MARIE – WE CAN SEE YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY TO BEING A STAR!

(Blackout. End of scene)

Scene 4

(1928: Marie's and Claire's Hollywood villa. Claire reads, her bare feet in Marie's lap. Marie scrutinizes Claire's feet.)

MARIE

You have the smallest feet, Claire. I'm sure mine are twice the size. Let's measure!

CLAIRE

Don't be ridiculous, darling! Who cares?

MARIE

And those adorable toes!

(Marie touches the relevant toe as she recites...)

MARIE

This little piggy went to market. This little piggy stayed home. This little piggy had roast beef at the Brown Derby, and this little piggy got indigestion—

CLAIRE

(Laughing) Stop it! That tickles!

MARIE

You're spoiling all my fun!

CLAIRE

(Coyly) I really don't think I can be accused of that.

MARIE

No. You can't. (Beat) I'm a very happy camper, Claire. Thanks to you.

CLAIRE

And to your triumph in "The Patsy."

MARIE

I admit that helps.

CLAIRE

I'm a little envious, in truth, but...

MARIE

Oh, sweet Claire. It's only a matter of time 'til you'll be in front of the cameras again.

CLAIRE

You really think so?

MARIE

Of course! Careers are like roller-coasters. You're up and then you're down and then you're up again and so it goes. I'm a perfect example.

CLAIRE

(Frowning) I just wonder—

MARIE

With me between movies and you on – we'll call it a hiatus – we have lots of time to spend together, and I for one treasure every hour. Then, when the time is right, I'll help you the way Frances helped me.

CLAIRE

I know you will, darling. And of course, this time together is priceless. (SONG: HEAVEN WITH YOU – CLAIRE AND MARIE)

CLAIRE

OH MY DARLING, OH MY DEAR  
IT'S SO LOVELY TO BE WITH YOU HERE

MARIE

HOW MUCH HAPPINESS CAN ONE WOMAN TAKE?  
PINCH ME TO PROVE I'M AWAKE.

CLAIRE

I FOUND HEAVEN WITH YOU  
TENDERNESS THAT WAS WORTH THE WAIT.  
I PLAYED AT LOVE UNTIL WE MET  
BUT I FOUND WITH YOU A TRUE DUET.

MARIE

DARLING, I FEEL IT, TOO!  
I'D ACCEPTED A LOVELESS FATE  
AND MADE MY PEACE WITH THE LONELINESS.  
BUT WITH YOU THERE IS RAPTURE WORDS CAN'T EXPRESS!

MARIE

FORGET THE SORRY PAST.  
I CAN TRUST IN LOVE AT LAST.  
HOW THRILLING TO SEE WE WILL ALWAYS BE

CLAIRE

WE'LL ALWAYS BE

BOTH

IN A WORLD OF OUR OWN  
WITH A LOVE LIKE WE'VE NEVER KNOWN.  
ALL MY DREAMS HAVE COME TRUE, FINDING HEAVEN WITH YOU.

CLAIRE

HOW I TREASURE EACH EMBRACE

IN OUR PERFECT HIDING PLACE

AND I KNOW IN MY HEART THIS IS JUST THE START.

MARIE

THIS IS JUST THE START.

BOTH

WE'VE A WORLD OF OUR OWN,

SHARING A SECRET THAT'S OURS ALONE

MARIE

ALL MY LONELINESS GONE...

CLAIRE

OUR ROMANCE WILL GO ON AND ON AND ON...

BOTH

YOU'RE MY DREAM COME TRUE. I'VE FOUND HEAVEN WITH YOU!

(They kiss passionately but separate quickly when the doorbell rings, which Mamie answers. In the meantime, Marie does one of her signature curtsies toward Claire, and purposely but gently knocks her back on the couch. Mamie ushers Will Rogers in. He and Marie exchange a friendly hug and he bows in a courtly fashion to Claire. Mamie exits.)

MARIE

Will Rogers, you scalawag! If I knew you were coming I'd have worn my chaps and spurs! (Beat) You know my secretary, Claire Dubrey.

WILL

Sure do. Saw you in "Borrowed Husbands," didn't I? My opinion? Borrowin' a husband is a grand idea. Then, if he don't work out, you can return 'im!

(Claire and Marie laugh)

CLAIRE

Nice to see you, Will. But if you'll excuse me, I have some paperwork waiting. I'll ask Mamie to bring you some refreshment. Coffee? Tea?

WILL

I'm jist dashin' in and dashin' out, so thanks kindly, but I'll decline.

(Claire exits)

MARIE

Have a seat and tell me to what I owe the pleasure.

(They sit)

WILL

Truth to tell, Muree, I'm in a smidge o' trouble, and I'm hopin' you'll help me out.

MARIE

For you... anything. As long as it doesn't involve roping steers or going up in one of those flying contraptions you love so much.

WILL

'Fraid it ain't nothin' quite as much fun as either o' those.

MARIE

Well, out with it!

WILL

I reckon you're goin' to the Hollywood Players' Ball tomorrow?

MARIE

Of course. Why else would I have an appointment at the most expensive beauty parlor in Los Angeles? I sure hope it's worth it!

WILL

Well, speakin' of beauty, I chair a committee that's s'posed to award a gold laurel wreath to the most beautiful woman in the room. Don't know how I got m'self into a fix like this, but anyway... There's gonna be more purty dames than straws in a haystack, and I'm afraid if I pick one, the others'll tar and feather me. So I was thinkin'... Maybe I could bestow the honor on you and, well... Everyone'd have a good laugh! (Beat) Whaddaya say, Muree?

MARIE

(Taken aback) Well... I guess... (Beat) Sure. Of course I'll do it. What are friends for?

WILL

Yer the best, Muree. You ready fer a hug?

(Without waiting for an answer, Will gives Marie a great bear hug and she, hesitating at first, hugs him back. Blackout, end of scene.)

Scene 5

(1928: The next day at the villa. Mamie, Claire, and Frances are doing a jigsaw puzzle. Marie is pretending to read.)

CLAIRE

I hate this puzzle! It's too hard!

MAMIE

(Hands Claire a piece.) I think this goes there (points), part of the ring-master's mustache.

CLAIRE

(Puts piece in.) How did you know that? I would have said it was part of the horses' mane.

FRANCES

You *are* very good at this, Mamie. You put us all to shame.

MARIE

Must you three talk so loud? How am I supposed to study my script with all this noise?

CLAIRE

Why don't you do it in the bedroom, sweetheart?

MARIE

Because there's no comfortable chair in the bedroom.

CLAIRE

Well, the card table is in here, so that's where the puzzle goes. And I didn't know we were under a gag order.

MARIE

(Stands) Oh, never mind! I have to leave anyway. (Rummages around in drawers, on shelves) Where's my house key? I thought the idea was to keep things orderly.

(Mamie stands, picks up Marie's purse, hands it to her.)

MAMIE

Could it be in here?

(Marie opens purse, feels around, removes house keys.)

MARIE

Huh! I must have dropped it back in here after I used it last. Well, I have a hair appointment, so you can talk as loud as you want now. (Beat) I hope Jerry hasn't forgotten to bring the car around.

(Mamie looks out window)

MAMIE

He's right there, waiting.

MARIE

Good. I don't want to be late. (Exits without saying goodbye. There's a brief silence.)

FRANCES

Goodness! She's in a mood!

CLAIRE

Has been all day. Said the coffee was too strong at breakfast and too weak at lunch.

MAMIE

Not like her, really.

CLAIRE

True. Except, well... sometimes. (SONG: TOO MUCH MARIE – CLAIRE, MAMIE, FRANCES)

CLAIRE

I DON'T WANT TO SOUND LIKE I'M COMPLAINING

ALL

(WAH WAH)

FRANCES

BEING WITH MARIE IS LOADS OF FUN

CLAIRE

FUN!

MAMIE

FUN!

ALL

(OH I'LL SAY)

FRANCIS

BUT AT TIMES HER FRIENDSHIP CAN BE DRAINING

ALL

(UH HUH) GOOD TO HEAR I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE – WHO FEELS THIS WAY

ALL

WE ALL AGREE

THAT WE'VE NOTICED OCCASIONALLY

THERE CAN BE A BIT TOO MUCH MARIE

THOUGH WE'RE ALL IN AGREEMENT NOW ON HOW WE ALL LOVE

HER

WE CAN ALSO GET TIRED OF HER

USUALLY WE'RE DELIGHTING IN HER COMPANY  
BUT WHEN SHE STARTS TO ACT UNPLEASANTLY  
MARIE CAN BE A BIT MUCH.

FRANCES  
WHEN SHE ACTS DEMANDING, GRAND AND ROYAL  
ALL

OH MY DEAR

MAMIE  
STUBBORN AS A MULE AND SO HARD-HEADED  
ALL

LIKE YOU SAID IT

CLAIRE  
TO MARIE WE PROMISE TO BE LOYAL  
ALL

NEVER FEAR

ALL  
BUT WE WISH SHE'D MAKE IT JUST A WEE BIT EASIER

ALL  
TAKE IT FROM ME  
THERE'S NO ONE I ADORE MORE THAN SHE  
BUT IT'S HARD TO STAY HER DEVOTEE  
WHEN SHE GETS SOME PETTY BEE IN HER BONNET  
SHE'LL PURSUE IT, YOU CAN COUNT ON IT  
OBVIOUSLY  
OUR AFFECTION IS WHAT HELPS US SEE  
BEYOND THE FOIBLES THAT WE'VE DISCUSSED  
WHEN MARIE IS JUST TOO MUCH

CLAIRE  
SHE SOMETIMES PUTS ON HAUGHTY AIRS  
MAMIE  
BUT THEN SHE TURNS CARTWHEELS DOWN THE STAIRS

FRANCES  
ALL THE CHANGES CAN CATCH US UNAWARES

ALL  
OOHEEE – TOO MUCH MARIE

CLAIRE  
SHE'LL HAVE A SUDDEN FIT OF PIQUE  
MAMIE  
THEN GET SO MAD THAT SHE WON'T SPEAK

FRANCES  
TO ANY OF US FOR OVER A WEEK. -

ALL



YESSIRREE, TOO MUCH MARIE

ALL

ALL HER QUIBBLES, QUIRKS AND COMPLAINTS  
GOOD THING WE'VE GOT THE PATIENCE OF SAINTS!

WE ALL AGREE

THAT WE'VE NOTICED QUITE REGULARLY

THERE CAN BE A BIT TOO MUCH MARIE

THOUGH OUR LIVES ARE MUCH MORE CHAOTIC SINCE WE FOUND  
HER

LIFE'S A PARTY WHEN WE'RE AROUND HER

THAT IS THE KEY

TO WHY NONE OF US WANTS TO BE FREE

'CAUSE IT TURNS OUT THERE REALLY CANNOT BE TOO MUCH  
MARIE!

(At the end of the song, the 3 women hug, then collapse onto the  
couch, laughing.)

Scene 6

(1928: Prior scene morphs into Marie returning home from the Hollywood Players Ball. She's dressed to the nines, hair done though slightly disheveled. She holds the laurel wreath which, upon entering, she throws with emphasis to the floor, then pauses to look at herself in the hall mirror, then turns and begins to sing. SONG: A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL – MARIE)

MARIE

I WAS NAMED "MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN,"  
AND THEY DRANK A TOAST  
SALUTING ME,  
THE EVER-SO-DIVINE MARIE,  
WITH HER CHARLESTON BOB  
AND HER FANCY GOWN,  
AND THE NEATLY WOVEN LAUREL CROWN  
THOUGH PEOPLE WERE AT FIRST CONFUSED,  
THEY WERE SOON AMUSED.

AND EVERYONE LAUGHED  
SO I LAUGHED, TOO,  
MARIE WAS THE BELLE OF THE BALL!  
BRAVAS AND WHISTLES,  
BIG BALLYHOO...  
AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL.

NORMA SHEARER WAS AT THE FETE.  
MARION DAVIES,  
LILLIAN GISH  
AND EV'RY MAN'S MOST FERVENT WISH  
WAS TO BATHE IN THE POOLS  
OF THEIR BECKONING EYES  
BUT THEN, – VOILA! - I WON THE PRIZE.  
THE CROWD APPEARED ABOUT TO CHOKE  
'TIL THEY GOT THE JOKE.

THEN EVERYONE LAUGHED  
SO I LAUGHED, TOO,  
MARIE WAS THE BELLE OF THE BALL!  
BRAVOS AND WHISTLES,  
BIG BALLYHOO...  
AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL.

I CURTSIED WHEN THEY APPLAUDED ME,  
AND SOMEONE THREW A BOUQUET.

WITH GREAT ESPRIT THEY LAUDED ME  
IN A VERY BIZARRE DISPLAY.  
WILL HUGGED ME THEN AND WHISPERED,  
“MUREE, YA SAVED THE DAY!”  
WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY?

YES, EVERYONE LAUGHED  
SO I LAUGHED, TOO,  
MARIE WAS THE BELLE OF THE BALL!  
BRAVAS AND WHISTLES,  
BIG BALLYHOO...  
AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL.  
YES, A VERY GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL.

(At the end of the song, Marie puts her head in her hands and  
cries. Blackout. End of scene.)

## Interlude #6

Reviews of “Min and Bill” with Marie Dressler and Wallace Beery, stressing Marie’s brilliant performance.

Headlines listing nominees for Best Actress of 1931 (which are Marlene Dietrich for “Morocco,” Marie Dressler for “Min and Bill,” Irene Dunne for “Cimarron,” Norma Shearer for “A Free Soul,” and Ann Harding for “Holiday.”

Scene 7

(1931: Outside the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel. Marie has just won a Best Actress Oscar for Min in "Min and Bill." 5 fans are gathered at the back exit to greet Marie when she comes out.)

FAN #1

I knew she'd win! I didn't doubt it for a moment.

FAN #2

She beat Norma Shearer, can you imagine!

FAN #3

And Marlene Dietrich! Talent over legs, I say. (Beat) My husband said he wished I was as interested in him as I was in "Min and Bill." I saw it four times.

FAN #4

Six times for me.

FAN #5

You think she'll let us touch it? The Oscar? If she does, I'll never wash my hands again!

(Marie, holding her Oscar, enters with Frances, Mamie and Jerry.  
The fans all speak at once.)

FAN #1

Miss Dressler! Over here!

FAN #2

Congratulations, Marie! You've reached the pinnacle!

FAN #3

They said you were through, but you showed 'em!

FAN #4

Will you sign my autograph book, Marie!

FAN #5

I can't believe it's really you. In the flesh!

FRANCES

You're all very kind, and I know Miss Dressler appreciates it, but it's late, and--

MARIE

It's okay, Frances. I'm not the least bit tired. You three go on to the car and I'll talk to these good folks. Then you can pick me up here.

(Frances, Mamie and Jerry look at one another, dubious.)

MAMIE

You two go on. I'll stay with Marie.

(Frances and Jerry, a bit mollified, exit. Marie goes to fans.)

FAN #1

Miss Dressler—

MARIE

You can “Marie” me, you know. People who think a lot less of me than you certainly do.

FAN #2

Gee, thanks... Marie. We wanted to introduce ourselves. We're the officers of the “Marie Dressler Silver Jubilee Fan Club of Stockton, California.”

FAN #4

We bussed all the way down here to celebrate you. That's how sure we were you'd win.

MARIE

Stockton. My goodness. But “Silver Jubilee?”

FAN #3

Because we've been admirers of yours for twenty-five years!

MARIE

Heavens! Well, thank you so much! I'm honored that you— (SONG: Interrupted/Not Finished Yet – FANS)

FAN #3

YOU'RE NOT LIKE SO MANY  
WHO TURN UP THEIR NOSES  
AT REGULAR PEOPLE LIKE US.  
YOU'RE NOTHING LIKE SHEARER,  
IT COULDN'T BE CLEARER.  
JUST TRY TO GET NEAR HER, SHE MAKES A BIG FUSS.

MARIE

Really? I've always found her quite pleasant, and—

FAN #4

So how does it feel, Marie, winning an Oscar?

(Marie starts to answer but Fan #4 cuts her off.)

FAN #4

YOU MUST BE EUPHORIC!  
YOU CAN'T QUITE BELIEVE IT,  
BUT WE HAD NO WORRIES OR FEARS.  
YOUR TALENT AND HEART, WELL,  
THEY'RE WAY OFF THE CHART, AND  
THEY SET YOU APART FROM THE REST OF YOUR PEERS.

ALL 5 FANS

AND WE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN YOU, MARIE  
WE KNEW THAT YOU WOULDN'T FAIL  
TO TRIUMPH AT LAST, OVERCOMING YOUR PAST  
AND IN THE END PREVAIL.

FAN #5

You sure did prevail. But did you ever think it would be such a bumpy road and take so long?

(Marie again starts to respond but is cut off. She and Mamie exchange a look.)

FAN #5

YOU'VE BEEN AT THIS SO LONG.  
AND PLEASE – DON'T TAKE THIS WRONG, BUT  
LIKE US, YOU'RE... LET'S CALL IT "MATURE."  
STILL, IN SPITE OF YOUR AGE,  
AND AT THIS ADVANCED STAGE  
ONCE AGAIN YOU'RE THE RAGE.... IT'S A VICT'RY FOR SURE!

MARIE

It's true that success at this point is especially—

ALL 5 FANS

AND WE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN YOU, MARIE,  
YES, EVEN WHEN THINGS SEEMED DIRE.  
STEADFAST AND TRUE, WE ALWAYS STUCK WITH YOU...  
AND NOW... (spoken) DO YOU PLAN TO RETIRE?

MARIE

Me? Never! I've got lots of projects planned and—

(Fans ad lib their delight with "hoorays" and "bravos" and other expressions of approval.)

FAN #1

JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE OLDER DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE THROUGH  
YOU JUST KEEP ON SHOWING 'EM WHAT YOU CAN DO

MORE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS LIE AHEAD FOR YOU  
'CAUSE YOU'RE NOT FINISHED YET

MARIE

I'm certainly not! I'm going to—

(Interrupted again, Marie and Mamie exchange another look.)

FAN #2

JUST 'CAUSE THERE'S A TOUCH OF SILVER IN YOUR HAIR  
DON'T LET 'EM CONSIGN YOU TO A ROCKING CHAIR  
PUTTING YOU OUT TO PASTURE WOULD BE SO UNFAIR  
'CAUSE YOU'RE NOT FINISHED YET

MARIE

That's right. I wasn't finished. What I was going to say was—

FAN #3

THIS OBSESSION WITH WHAT'S YOUTHFUL AND UPDATED  
MAKES US OVERLOOK THE TRIED AND TRUE  
BUT EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE APPRECIATED  
DON'T ASSUME YOU'RE DONE, WHY YOU'VE ONLY BEGUN!

(Marie starts to talk, gives up. She and Mamie laugh.)

FAN #4

ALL THE YEARS OF TAKING LUMPS AND PAYING DUES  
GIVE YOU SO MUCH KNOW HOW YOU KNOW HOW TO USE  
TELL THOSE WHIPPERSNAPPERS THE HAPPY NEWS  
YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SO MUCH MORE  
'CAUSE YOU'RE NOT FINISHED YET

MARIE

You're—

ALL 5 FANS

Darn tootin'!

BY EVERYTHING YOU'VE SAID TO US TODAY,  
MARIE, WE ARE SO IMPRESSED  
YOU'RE INDISPUTABLY, ABSO-FABSO-LUT-ABLY,  
ROOT-TOOT-TOOT-TOOT-TOOT-ABLY...THE BEST!

MARIE

Well, I never! You ladies are too much! I'm, well...



(Initiated by the fans, they share a group hug with Marie.  
While hugging, Marie looks over at Ruth and says...)

MARIE

I'm speechless.

MAMIE

And that would be a first.

(Blackout. End of scene)

Interlude #7

1932: Marie Dressler gets Best Actress nomination for “Emma”

1932: “Prosperity”

1933: “Tugboat Annie”

Scene 8

(1933: Louis B. Mayer's MGM office. He sits behind desk, with Claire, Mamie, Frances and Nella sit facing him. Coffee and tea on a table, from which they drink occasionally while people chat.)

NELLA

It's not that I take credit, mind you, but I *did* foresee that the move to Hollywood would be life-changing for her in a wonderful way. "A retrograde transit bespeaks volumes."

MAMIE

It *has* been wonderful and then some. I've never seen her so happy, except...

LOUIS B.

Except what, Mamie?

MAMIE

Well, you know. The tummy aches. (Beat, changes subject) I think we should thank Frances here for the beautiful parts she writes for Marie. I cry every time I watch "Emma." She should have won that Oscar!

FRANCES

And *I* think we should thank Mr. Mayer for believing in me and believing in Marie. (To Louis B.) Without you, there wouldn't be a "Min and Bill" or an "Emma."

LOUIS B.

Let's face it. Everyone in this room is a gigantic Marie Dressler fan.

CLAIRE

Along with 90% of the American public.

LOUIS B.

You know, I've always adored that woman, warts and all. She's feisty and she's funny and she even has her own brand of charm. I treasure my stable of lovelies, of course. Greta, Hedy, Norma... But why must an actress be a looker to be a star? Your average housewife is no beauty. The public can relate to Marie. She's warm, she's earthy—

CLAIRE

I think you're preaching to the choir, Mr. Mayer.

LOUIS B.

Of course I am. It's why I asked you here today. I regret to say I have some bad news.

NELLA

It can't be *that* bad. The stars told me Marie would have at least seven wonderful years here, and it hasn't been anywhere near—

LOUIS B.

Marie has cancer.

(Shocked responses and murmurs from the group.)

CLAIRE

It must be a mistake!

LOUIS B.

I'm afraid not. The tests results leave no doubt.

CLAIRE

Well, what's the treatment?

LOUIS B.

The best we can do is weekly shots that may slow the progression, but they're not a cure.

CLAIRE

Weekly shots? She's not going to like that!

MAMIE

This news is gonna lay her low, Mr. Mayer. It's gonna undo her.

LOUIS B.

I know, Mamie. But I think I have a way of avoiding that. (SONG: WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO? – LOUIS B., CLAIRE, RUTH, FRANCES, NELLA)

LOUIS B.

I BELIEVE WITH EV'RY FIBRE OF MY BEING,  
THAT IT'S KINDER BY FAR IF SHE'S KEPT IN THE DARK.  
WHAT IS THE POINT OF HER KNOWING HER FATE,  
IF THE DIE HAS BEEN CAST AND BY NOW IT'S TOO LATE?  
HOW CAN WE ASK HER TO BEAR SUCH A WEIGHT?  
IT WOULD EXTINGUISH HER SPARK.

IF WE REALLY LOVE THE WOMAN,  
AND WE DON'T WANT HER TO SUFFER  
THEN WE MUST EMPLOY A BUFFER,  
AN EFFECTIVE, CLEVER RUSE.  
IF WE REALLY LOVE THE WOMAN  
THEN THERE MUSTN'T BE A GLIMMER  
THAT HER LIGHT IS GROWING DIMMER.  
SHE MUST NEVER HEAR THE NEWS.  
FOR IF SHE FOUND OUT WHAT'S TRUE...  
WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO?

MAMIE

SHE ALWAYS SAYS, "LOOK TO THE FUTURE!"  
SHE ALWAYS SAYS, "DON'T LOOK BEHIND!"

FRANCES

A BRILLIANT CAREER ALL TO SOON HAS TO END,  
BUT THAT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO THE LOSS OF MY FRIEND.

NELLA

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!  
IT FILLS ME WITH UTTER DESPAIR.

CLAIRE

I'VE GIVEN UP SO MUCH TO BE  
COMPANION TO MY DEAR MARIE,  
AND NOW SHE'LL UP AND DIE ON ME?

ALL 4

IT'S JUST TOO MUCH TO BEAR/IT'S JUST TOO MUCH TO BEAR  
(OVERLAPPING)

IT'LL HURT TO SAY GOODBYE TO HER  
AND I SURE DON'T LIKE TO LIE TO HER

MAMIE: BUT WE MUST DO IT                      CLAIRE: I'LL DO IT

ALL 4

TO SHIELD HER FROM PAIN

ALL

IF WE REALLY LOVE THE WOMAN/IF WE REALLY LOVE HER  
WE'LL PROTECT HER FROM DISTRESS  
AND ENSURE SHE CANNOT GUESS - WHAT LIES IN STORE.  
IF WE REALLY LOVE THE WOMAN/IF WE REALLY LOVE HER  
LET'S GIVE HER REASON STILL TO SMILE,  
LET HER BE HAPPY YET A WHILE  
'TIL SHE GAINS THAT DISTANT SHORE.  
FOR IF SHE FOUND OUT WHAT'S TRUE... (FOR IF SHE FOUND OUT)  
WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO?

LOUIS B.

So we're agreed. Marie is not to know her diagnosis. We want her to continue working and playing and, well ... being Marie, for as long as possible.

CLAIRE

Continue working? I don't know...

LOUIS B.

She's at the top of her game, now, and loving every minute. Finally getting the acclaim she deserves. How can we take that away from her?

CLAIRE

(To Louis B.) Are you sure there isn't a little self-interest involved here? I mean, the more

CLAIRE cont'd.  
money her movies make, the more money *you* make.

LOUIS B.  
I don't deny it. But if Marie retired today, my life style wouldn't change one iota. I'm a rich man with or without Marie.

MAMIE  
I do plainly see how she perks up when she's due at the studio.

FRANCES  
And if she isn't working, she'll have all that time to look into new investments. She'll wind up with a turtle ranch or a jujube concession!

(They all laugh ruefully.)

NELLA  
Marie's chakra is *so* not compatible with turtles! Turtles represent peace, resolution, taking life slow. They represent... longevity!

(Nella starts to cry. Mamie comforts her.)

LOUIS B.  
These weekly injections... They're very important. Tell her she has anemia and the shots are vitamin therapy.

CLAIRE  
She doesn't like needles.

LOUIS B.  
No one likes needles, but it's a small price to pay if it gives her a bit more time. Claire? Mamie? It's on you to see she doesn't play hooky.

(Claire and Mamie nod in understanding.)

LOUIS B.  
That's it, then. We'll leave our dear Marie free to enjoy the time she has. Word of honor, yes?

(All indicate their agreement. SONG: WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO? REPRISE— LOUIS B., FRANCES, MAMIE, CLAIRE, NELLA)

ALL  
IF WE REALLY LOVE THE WOMAN/IF WE REALLY LOVE HER  
LET'S GIVE HER REASON STILL TO SMILE,  
LET HER BE HAPPY YET A WHILE

'TIL SHE GAINS THAT DISTANT SHORE.  
FOR IF SHE FOUND OUT WHAT'S TRUE...  
WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO?  
WHAT GODDAMN GOOD WOULD IT DO?

(Blackout. End of scene.)

Scene 9

(1933: Marie's and Claire's Hollywood villa. Marie and Claire are sitting at a card table, playing gin. Both are silent and intent on the game, but there is a sense of inaudible tension in the room as they make their respective moves. Then... )

CLAIRE

Gin! (She lays down her winning hand for Marie to see.)

MARIE

Dammit!

CLAIRE

It's only a game, sweetheart. Would you like it better if I purposely let you win?

MARIE

Of course not! I'd see through that in a second and it'd be insulting.

CLAIRE

Well, since I'm such a consistent winner, I think I should get a prize.

MARIE

A prize? Forget it! If anyone should get one, it's me. Yes. I should get a consolation prize!

CLAIRE

(Laughs) Please!

MARIE

How about I give you a prize and you give me a prize?

CLAIRE

I like to think I'm already enough of a prize for you, darling.

MARIE

Of course you are, but just, you know... For fun. (Beat) You go first. What can I do for you that you'd extra love?

CLAIRE

Okay, then. (Beat) I'd extra love it if you cancelled your trip to New York. It wouldn't be good for you to miss your injections. They're... important.

MARIE

The injections aren't doing a damn thing, and I feel fine most of the time, anyway. The shot in the arm I need is a taste of the Big Apple.



CLAIRE

Well if you go, I'm not going with you. I refuse to be part of something I think will harm you.

(The phone rings. Claire answers.)

CLAIRE

Hello. (Beat) Speaking. (Beat) Really? When exactly? Yes, I'll be there. (Beat) Thanks. Thanks very much. (She hangs up.)

MARIE

What was that?

CLAIRE

I got an audition for a role in the new Cukor film!

MARIE

Really.

CLAIRE

Maybe you'll put in a good word for me.

MARIE

And when were you planning on telling me about this?

CLAIRE

I just found out about it, for godsake!

MARIE

Well, you must have expressed an interest. Otherwise, they wouldn't have given you a slot. But you never said a word.

CLAIRE

Because every time I bring up the subject of my career, you get grumpy.

MARIE

That's not true! And I've told you that when the time is right, I'll help you.

CLAIRE

But the time is never right, is it? It hasn't been for five years.

MARIE

That's the real reason you won't come to New York with me, isn't it. Because of the audition.

CLAIRE

That's ridiculous! I just found out about it, and it's ten days before the trip, anyway.

MARIE

You know what I think, Claire? I think half the reason you're with me is to use me as a stepping stone for your career.

CLAIRE

Well if that were the case, I'd be pretty stupid to have stuck around all this time when you've done absolutely nothing on my behalf.

(Marie suddenly wilts, sinks onto the couch. Claire runs to her.)

CLAIRE

Are you all right? Do you feel faint? Put your head between your legs.

(Marie does so.)

CLAIRE

You see, darling. You're really not well. You mustn't—

MARIE

(Raising her head) I thought you loved me, Claire. More fool I.

CLAIRE

Of course I love you. We love each other.

MARIE

But your career is obviously your first priority.

CLAIRE

No it isn't. But it *is* important to me, yes.

MARIE

So now you're leaving me—

CLAIRE

Leaving you? I'm not leaving you. I'm just going to an audition.

MARIE

But if you get the part, that'll be it. The beginning of the end.

CLAIRE

What more must I do to prove my loyalty? I gave up my career to be your... your... friend and your helper and your traveling companion and your nurse and... When my mother was sick and I wanted to go see her, I didn't, remember? Because you said you needed me more than she did.

MARIE

I was going through a bad time.

CLAIRE

Well, so was she! But everything has to be about you. The great Marie Dressler, center of the world. And if I resume my career and it's successful, you might have some competition.

MARIE

Competition? With you? Don't make me laugh. I've been on the cover of Time magazine, dearie, and I'm supposed to feel threatened by someone who's... no one?

CLAIRE

I'm "no one?" That's what you think of me? You're a selfish old woman.

MARIE

Is that so? Well, I can't imagine why you'd want to spend your time with someone like that, so I suggest you leave. In fact, that's the prize that *I'd* extra love. For you to get out of my life!

CLAIRE

C'mon, Marie.

MARIE

I mean it. I won't be taken advantage of again. I'll give you a day to pack your things.

CLAIRE

But—

MARIE

Get out! Now!

(A shocked Claire runs from the room. After a moment, Marie looks at the audience: SONG: MARIE WILL BE ALL RIGHT – MARIE)

MARIE

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.  
I'VE BEEN BETRAYED!  
AND AFTER ALL THE WORDS OF LOVE AND PROMISES WE MADE!  
I CAN'T CONCEIVE IT!  
I'VE BEEN A FOOL.  
I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT OR DREAMT  
THAT CLAIRE WOULD TREAT ME WITH CONTEMPT,  
BY BEING SO DUPLICITOUS AND CRUEL.

GOODBYE. GOOD RIDDANCE!  
JOIN THE QUEUE  
OF THOSE WHO HAVE ABANDONED ME  
AND FAILED TO SHOW YOUR LOYALTY.  
IT'S TIME TO SAY ADIEU!

SO NOW, BEGONE!  
I'M MOVING ON!  
I'M MOVING ON!

I CAN'T ABIDE IT.  
SHE'S JUST LIKE JIM.  
I NEVER GUESSED THAT SHE'D TURN OUT UNSCRUPULOUS LIKE  
HIM!  
SO IT'S DECIDED.  
SHE'S BEEN ERASED.  
I GRANTED HER MY LOVE AND TRUST,  
AND NOW IT'S TRAMPLED IN THE DUST.  
ONE THING IS CERTAIN: SHE'LL NOT BE REPLACED!

NO, I'M PERFECTLY FINE ON MY OWN  
CONTENTED TO GO IT ALONE  
I'M FINISHED WITH LOVERS PRETENDING TO CARE  
PROFESSING DEVOTION BEYOND ALL COMPARE  
WHEN TRULY THEIR PURPOSE IS WANTING TO SHARE  
IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF MY ACCLAIM AND THE FRUITS OF MY  
WEALTH AND FAME.

NEVER MIND.  
NEVER MIND!

NO, I'M PERFECTLY FINE ON MY OWN  
CONTENTED TO GO IT ALONE  
I'M HAPPY TO SAY MY CAREER IS ON FIRE  
WITH YEARS STILL REMAINING TO CLIMB EVEN HIGHER  
WHAT MORE COULD A FORTUNATE WOMAN DESIRE?  
THE FUTURE LOOKS BOUNDLESS AND BRIGHT,  
SO MARIE WILL BE ALL RIGHT.

MARIE WILL BE ALL RIGHT.  
MARIE WILL BE ALL RIGHT!!!!

(Blackout. End of scene)

Scene 10

(1934: As in Act One, scene 1, Marie's birthday fete at MGM studios. Scene picks up where ACT I, scene 1 ends...)

ENSEMBLE

The biggest star...  
The biggest star...  
The biggest star of all!

(Loud applause. Louis and his assistant confer. Louis goes to mic again.)

LOUIS B.

Just another couple minutes and we're good to go. Why don't we take a very short break for another glass of bubbly.

(Louis B. goes to Marie, as do Mamie and Jerry)

LOUIS B.

Sorry about the delay. But I trust you're enjoying yourself.

MARIE

Is water wet?

(Frances and Nella join the group, as do Mamie and Jerry.)

FRANCES

(To Nella) She's giving the stars above a run for their money tonight, isn't she Nella?

NELLA

I've never seen her shine quite so brightly, it's true. "And so it is that the stellia converge in the ephemeris!"

JERRY

You need anything, Marie? More champagne?

MARIE

If I have any more, I'll float away.

MAMIE

We just want this to be the best birthday you ever had.

MARIE

I can assure you that it is. My very best birthday ever. And my last.

(The others are shocked into silence for a moment, then *simultaneously* begin contesting what Marie has just said.)

MAMIE

What are you talking about, Marie?

FRANCES

Don't be silly, sweetheart!

JERRY

C'mon, now, Marie.

NELLA

The stars say no such thing.

LOUIS B.

I think she *has* had too much champagne!

MARIE

My body may be giving out, but my brain is working fine, thank you very much. You've all played your roles beautifully, but, as I've always said, "Marie knows all."

(Before the others can react, Louis's assistant enters.)

ASSISTANT

We're all set. On in 30 seconds.

(Louis makes a helpless gesture to the others, goes to microphone.)

LOUIS B.

Greetings, America! It's Louis B. Mayer coming to you from our MGM sound stage in Hollywood. You're here to take part in this wonderful event, as we celebrate the birthday of everyone's favorite star – the hugely talented, hugely beloved Miss Marie Dressler! (SONG: BIGGEST STAR OF ALL/LIVING LARGE – LOUIS B. and COMPANY)

COMPANY

WE'VE GATHERED HERE IN DAZZLING ARRAY  
TO TOAST OUR DEAR MARIE ON HER SPECIAL DAY  
ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND HERE IN THIS HALL  
WE SALUTE THE BIGGEST STAR OF ALL!

THAT IS WHY WE'VE THROWN THIS CELEBRATION FOR YOU  
YOU'RE ADMIRER AND BELOVED AS CAN BE  
YOU'VE GOT AUDIENCES CLAMORING FOR MORE YOU  
THEY ALL ADORE YOU – AND SO DO WE, AND SO DO WE!

SO NOW WE RAISE A GLASS TO MARIE  
WHOSE FAMOUS NAME WILL LIVE ON IN HISTORY  
FANS IN THE FUTURE WILL BE IN YOUR THRALL  
LIKE ROYALTY, ETERNALLY  
YOU WILL ALWAYS BE THE BIGGEST STAR OF ALL!

(“Living Large”)

WHY THINK SMALL, WHEN THE WORLD IS SO BIG AND GRAND  
HAVE A BALL, AND ENJOY EVERY JOY AT HAND  
YOU’RE NOT CONTENT BEING PENT-UP AND TENTATIVE  
LIVING LARGE IS THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE

HERE’S TO MARIE AND TO YOUR GENEROSITY  
HELPING US SEE LIFE’S MORE FUN LIVED ABUNDANTLY  
ABUNDANTLY

EVERY DAY LOOK FOR SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE  
THAT’S THE WAY YOU’VE MADE GLADNESS YOUR NORMAL STATE  
WHEN LIFE’S PLEASURES CAN BE SO AMPLE  
YOU’RE NOT SATISFIED WITH JUST A SAMPLE  
THAT’S THE EXAMPLE YOU’VE GIVEN US OF LIVING LARGE!

(The song ends to much applause and shouts from those present of “Bravo” and “Speech!” “Speech!” Louis, bows to Marie and gestures for her to go to the mic, which she does. During her speech, and especially when she’s thanking people, those in question are attempting to hold back tears.)

MARIE

Thanks heaps and bounds, everyone. You sure know how to make a girl feel special. But I’ll be brief now, ‘cause I might cry and then my mascara will run and I’ll look like a zebra. (Beat) Can’t thank everyone, of course, ‘cause then I *wouldn’t* be brief, so I’ll just thank Louis here, ‘cause even though he’s my boss and a taskmaster, at that, I love him to smithereens and owe him, well... everything. And Frances Marion. You know who she is, right? Brilliant screenwriter, wrote most of my scripts. Give her a round of applause, okay, ‘cause she gives me the most wonderful lines to speak, makes me come across much better than I deserve.

(Marie leads the group in applauding Frances, who waves.)

MARIE

(Looks at Nella) Gotta thank Nella Webb, too, my astrologer. And before you roll your eyes, just humor me, okay, ‘cause I’m the birthday girl and I’m here to tell you that if it weren’t for Nella predicting I’d make out okay here in Hollywood, I’d probably be a bag lady back in New York. And I need to give gargantuan thanks to my unsung heroes, Mamie and Jerry Cox. (Looks at Mamie and Jerry) They’ve propped me up when I’ve been down and celebrated with me in the

good times, like now. Nobody knows me better than Mamie, actually, and still she's put up with me all these years. (Beat) Last but not least, I'm grateful beyond measure to everyone in the whole wide world who's supported my career. I love you all. (Beat) Okay, okay. Maybe I haven't been as brief as I'd promised, but, as everyone knows, I'm never at a loss for words. Just be assured that I can't wait to start work on my next movie, and all the movies to come. Gonna sink my teeth into all the juicy parts I get offered – hear that, Louis? --and try to keep you wanting more Marie Dressler for years to come. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

(At the end of Marie's speech, there's thunderous applause. Marie stands at the microphone, drinking it in. The lights fade gradually, the applause fades, and all those on stage, except for Marie exit. Marie stands in a spotlight, alone. She performs one of her signature curtsies, knocking over the microphone and a potted plant. She winks at the audience. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY