

MARTINE OUT OF TIME

a play in two acts

by

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MARTINE OUT OF TIME

Characters:

MARTINE SMALL, a young woman plagued by Big Thoughts in a little town.

LOUISA SMALL, her mother, a widow who loved her husband and counted on him to do great things.

EMMA MCGILL, her Grandmother, a sturdy egg farmer; well-suited to the life.

IDA SWEET, an aunt; called home as a young bride to care for her mother.

HENRY SWEET, dismissed husband to IDA.

GREAT AUNT T., took to her couch at age forty.

GREAT UNCLE VICTOR, perhaps one of the reasons Aunt T. took to her couch.

JULIA LAWS, childhood friend of MARTINE's.

PEARL and RUBY, sisters, childhood friends.

CHARITY, RUTHIE and IMOGENE, other friends.

MRS. TRILBY, the post mistress.

MR. PERKINS, a suiter.

MURIEL, an old school friend of LOUISA's

PROFESSOR DR. JOSIAH T. ODDWEILLER, a once prominent speaker on the Lyceum circuit.

WINLOCK'S FOUNDERS, BOOSTERS and other TOWNSFOLK

The Scene:

Various scenes in the town of Winlock, Washington, the "Egg Capital of the World." This is a unit set capable of representing many locales. What is important is that we see both the veneer of late Victorian show and the underlying dirt and hard work of everyday life in the west. Between polite tea parties and behind the fancy gingerbread, we see

...the messy chicken yard and out houses of a working farm, as neglected and utilitarian as any other. Most scenes take place in and around Martine's home, kitchen, parlor and front yard, though the action will move easily to other locales throughout the play. Characters are seen, not as they necessarily are, but as MARTINE sees them.

The Time:

1909

A Note on the Casting:

Flexible casting is possible and gender roles can be fluid and changeable. One suggestion for a cast of ten is to create a supporting company of seven actors. MARTINE, LOUISA and EMMA should not take on other roles. In this case, character changes are quick, so costumes can be broadly suggestive and signatory, rather than realistic and detailed.

A suggestion for casting:

ACTOR 1: LEWIS (of LEWIS & CLARK), FOUNDER (Mr. Tilly), BOOSTER 1, MR. PERKINS, RUTHIE and MR. KIRBY.

ACTOR 2: HENRY, FOUNDER, (Mr. Haakonsen), BOOSTER 2 and IMOGENE.

ACTOR 3: CLARK (of LEWIS & CLARK), FOUNDER, (Mr. Clark), BOOSTER 3 and RUBY.

ACTOR 4, FOUNDER (Mr. Sneller), BOOSTER 4, and CHARITY.

ACTOR 5: GREAT UNCLE VICTOR, JULIA, MURIEL and MRS. AVERY

ACTOR 6: GREAT AUNT T, PEARL and PROFESSOR ODDWEILLER.

ACTOR 7: IDA, MRS. TRILBY and VICTORIA WRIGHT

ACT I

At Rise: MARTINE, dressed in a cotton shirtwaist and straw hat, fends off imaginary chickens, ducks and a gaggle of geese as she makes her way to her front gate.

MARTINE

Shoo! Shoo! Go away!

(She kicks at a sea of chickens as she picks her way through a muddy yard).

Get away. Shoo. I must reach the post box before night fall.

(She shakes her foot to be free of a duck firmly attached to the toe of her boot).

Augh! I cannot be expected to deal with fowl.

(to the birds).

Don't you know? I was put on this earth to do great things!

(She flies against the flock, scattering them to the four winds, amid the sounds of loud squawking and scrambling. MARTINE addresses the audience).

MARTINE (continued).

This going from the house to the road. A simple thing. To post a letter. A short walk. Why is this so difficult? Why does this little thing, this simple act, this walking to the road and back take on such monumental proportions? It's chickens, you see. It's ducks. It's this gaggle of geese nipping at my heels. Soiling the hem of my dress. It's this vision of my future! – Which everyone else seems to think is just mighty fine! – How can I be great person, a personage of note, amidst this din, this clamor?? This picture is all wrong.

(MARTINE finally makes it to her gate; takes a moment to smooth her skirts and straighten her hat).

MARTINE (continued).

Let me stroll light-footed and with dignity down the rolling lawn. A lawn? You call this a lawn? This is not a lawn, a verdant greensward sending our tribal memories back to pastoral ecstasy. Back to the days of the manor house in old Europe; hours of leisure for poetry writing and archery. Tennis on the green. No. This is – Well, this is my great, great Grandmother on my mother's side. She married beneath her – for love, of course – And this act in 1816 stole my lawn and has cursed my existence.

(beat).

I think about these things. This letter for the post. Not significant. Not a significant letter. Not my best hand or my best thoughts, truth be told. To my childhood friend, Julia. Julia Laws.

MARTINE (continued).

Coming. Coming for a visit. “I’m delighted” I say, “By all means, come,” I say. “Come, stay the summer. It will be delightful. A delightful summer’s visit. No burden. No burden at all. Absolutely not. Bring your mother. Bring your nine brothers and sisters. No problem.” Polite. Well spelled. And I walk through four inches of chicken ~~shit~~ poo to make my way to the road. Of course, she will not bring her nine brothers and sisters. Or her mother. This is merely for show. A gesture. An extension of polite decorum. A tentacle of politeness, this inviting of one’s extended family – Well, she might bring her mother. For a week. Her mother for a week. Her mother is sweet. Her mother is a sweet distraction. Better her mother chuntering on than the squawking of a yard full of chickens. The year is 1909, the Modern Age! And where am I? Stuck in the mud with backward fowl!

(We hear the chickens again as EMMA appears from around the side of the house with an apron full of feed).

EMMA

Here, chick, chick, chick. Here, chick...

(We hear the clucking sounds of eager, happy chickens).

MARTINE

Gran! Thank goodness.

(to the fowl).

Now go away! Shoo!

EMMA

They know you don’t like them. Come on, girls, let’s leave the mighty one to her big thoughts.

(She exits with her chickens).

MARTINE

(calling after her Grandmother).

I cannot be slowed down by chickens. And I do have big thoughts! I am a big personality!!

(MARTINE starts off. LOUISA leans out a 2nd story window – Two ACTORS carry out a sash window with LOUISA stands on a chair and leans out).

LOUISA

Yoo hoo! Martine!...Yoo hoo! Hoo hoo!...

MARTINE

My mother. There, in the second story window. Arms flailing about. She probably wants to ask me to bring home some fig tarts from Mrs. Swenson’s shop.

LOUISA

Martine! Would you stop by Mrs. Swenson's shop and bring home some of her delicious fig tarts?

MARTINE

(She looks at the audience).

I was not made to bring home fig tarts.

LOUISA

That nice Mr. Perkins is coming to supper tonight.

MARTINE

I was not made for supping with Mr. Perkins.

LOUISA

Hurry home, Martine. You can make the biscuits. He'll be so impressed.

MARTINE

And I was not made for the manufacture of biscuits.

(MARTINE continues on her way to the post office. The shadow of a woman flits past).

MARTINE

Did you see that shadow? There!

(she points).

It's my Aunt. Ida. Ada? There. See? And if we just look over – there!

(points in another direction).

We can get a glimpse of her late husband. Not late, as in dead. Late, as in no longer required. Late, as in dismissed.

(She waves at a retreating figure).

Hello, Henry!

(HENRY looks at her, then disappears).

MARTINE (continued).

Aunt – Ina? – Ona? – Well, my aunt on my mother's side – her cousin? – Well, anyway, charged to take care of her mother, my Great Aunt Tabitha, who has taken to her couch. Great Aunt T. comes from a long line of women who have taken to their couch – should that be couches? – Anyway, they have decided not to bear up. My great, great Grandmother, my great aunt. I think my mother may be teetering.

(beat).

But back to bear. Back to Great Aunt T. When, at the age of forty, she unceremoniously took to her couch, she took her daughter with her. Ida, was it? Ima? Recently married. Irma? Anyway, she was sent for by Great Uncle Victor to come home and take care of her mother.

MARTINE (continued).

...And him. Mostly him, I'll warrant, since his wife would no longer be taking care of him. Oma? Una? Ina? I wonder how he said it? "Your mother has taken to her bed. You're to come home and take care of me – ahem, her." But what of Oona's husband? He disappears in the annals of history. A single line in the family Bible crossed out. And Ida becomes an old woman before our eyes. She is barely forty now. I know her as an old lady in wrinkled lisle stockings. A long face in spectacles glimpsed between Irish lace curtains.

(A second window appears, and a gaunt face appears between lace curtains and then disappears).

MARTINE (continued).

Is it Ida? – I can never remember. She's paper thin. When she comes into a room, there is a brief shadow as she covers the doorway, but no discernable presence.

(As MARTINE continues on her walk to town, she comes to the city park. ACTORS 1 and 3 enter and become a statue honoring Lewis and Clark).

MARTINE (continued).

(points to the statue; to the audience).

Lewis and Clark, of course. Every park in this neck of the woods has one.

(to the statue).

Where's Sacajawea? Where's loyal York, who you never paid a penny? Where's Seaman, your ever-faithful hound?

(to the statue).

Arrogant!

(LEWIS and CLARK look at each other, shrug their dismissal and then freeze back into their poses. GREAT AUNT T, out for an airing and looking a bit like Cleopatra on her royal barge, enters, reclining on her couch. She is pushed across the stage by GREAT UNCLE VICTOR and IDA. HENRY reappears and lurks in the shadows; he runs to the statue of LEWIS and CLARK as the cortege passes by).

MARTINE (continued).

(sees HENRY).

Ah. Henry, the dismissed husband. See? There, behind the statue. This is his dream. To get a glimpse of his beloved. It can only happen on the rare occasion when Great Aunt T. decides she needs an airing.

GREAT UNCLE VICTOR

Morning, Niece.

GREAT AUNT T.

(regally; waving a handkerchief).

Child.

IDA

(quietly).

Hello, Martine.

GREAT AUNT T.

(as the barge passes).

Tell your mother she needs to add more lime to her mulch.

(As they cross the park, HENRY comes out from the shadows. IDA and HENRY momentarily lock eyes; perhaps their fingers brush momentarily. HENRY follows at a safe distant as they exit. LEWIS and CLARK dissolve as MARTINE continues on her walk. Four FOUNDING FATHERS enter and become the statue that honors them in the park).

MARTINE (continued).

Oh. Let me introduce you to our founding fathers – They're all dead, of course, but their ghosts linger.

(She studies the statue).

And they've been cleaned up a bit. Now, Mr. Tilly here burned down Mr. Haakansen's hatchery in 1882.

(MR. TILLY gives MR. HAAKONSEN a sly, sidelong glance).

MARTINE (continued).

Mr. Haakansen poisoned Mr. Clark's well, thinking it was him.

(MR. HAAKONSEN turns on MR. CLARK, who looks shocked and dismayed).

MARTINE (continued).

Mr. Sneller came to town with a lot of money and bought out both Mr. Clark and Mr. Haakonson, and then drove Mr. Tilly out of business.

(MR. SNELLER looks self-satisfied. MR HAAKONSEN and MR. CLARK shrug good naturedly. It is MR. TILLY's turn to look devastated).

MARTINE (continued).

Now, in the town square, the four men stand side by side in bronzed glory looking proud and smug, arms casually draped around each other's shoulders in a friendly show of camaraderie.

(THE FOUNDING FATHERS drop their animus and embrace, becoming, once again the statue that MARTINE has described).

MARTINE (continued).

Time smooths all wrinkles – Except if you're a living human being, of course. This is an example of irony. History is all about irony. The Egg Capital of the World is full of history. Ergo, the Egg Capital of the World is all about irony. Are we a lost civilization? We will be once the new highway goes through and the new bridge goes up.

TOWN FOUNDERS

(all turn their heads toward MARTINE).

Nonsense!

(The statue figures return to their pose and freeze once again).

MARTINE

Mmm. We'll see.

(to the audience).

Oh, speaking of which, here come the current swells of our town.

(The statue dissolves and THE FOUNDERS morph into the present BOOSTERS of Winlock).

MARTINE (continued).

Walk on the Sunny Side of the Street. These are the gents who think they pull the strings of this generation. I can give you the scuttlebutt later, after we've played the polite game.

(THE TOWN BOOSTERS all greet MARTINE).

BOOSTER 1

How 'do Miss Martine.

BOOSTER 2

Miss Martine.

BOOSTER 3

Fine morning, Miss Martine.

Indeed. Fine morning.

BOOSTER 4

Yes. Good Morning.

MARTINE

Have you heard, Miss Martine?

BOOSTER 1

Have you heard?

BOOSTER 3

Have you heard?

BOOSTER 2

Yes, have you heard?

BOOSTER 4

(BOOSTER 4 looks at BOOSTER 1, who is obviously the leader).

BOOSTER 1

(the indulgent parent).
Go on.

BOOSTER 4

Our egg is going to open the parade!

MARTINE

Your egg?

BOOSTER 1

Our Egg.

BOOSTER 2

Yes, Our Egg! The town's egg!

BOOSTER 3

It's almost finished!...

BOOSTER 1

The "Largest Egg in the World!"

BOOSTER 2

It's being built in Mr. Haakenson's barn as we speak.

BOOSTER 4

We are The Egg Capital of the World, you know!

BOOSTER 2

Yes, sir! The Egg Capital of the world!

BOOSTER 3

And now we have something that'll really put us on the map.

MARTINE

Didn't I hear of another place that claims to be the Egg Capital of the World? In California...

BOOSTER 4

(with distaste).
Petaluma.

(THE BOOSTERS are temporarily defeated).

BOOSTER 1

Yes, but they call themselves the Egg *Basket* of the World. Not the same thing.

BOOSTER 2

Not the same thing at all.

MARTINE

And then there's that gentleman inventor there – What's his name? – From Canada, I believe.

BOOSTER 4

Lyman Byce.

BOOSTER 1

That upstart quack...

MARTINE

Who, I understand, has perfected an incubator that can keep the eggs at a constant temperature for twenty-one days. Four-hundred eggs at a time.

BOOSTER 4

Hmmph...

MARTINE

He's certainly put Petaluma on the map. And don't they have an Egg Day Parade?

BOOSTER 1

Yes, but we have Egg *Days*. Plural. Not the same thing.

Not the same thing at all. BOOSTER 2

And are they building a giant egg? BOOSTER 4

A Gigantic Egg!... BOOSTER 3

Lathe and Plaster... BOOSTER 2

Eight-hundred pounds! BOOSTER 1

A family of six could picnic inside! BOOSTER 4

Eight!... BOOSTER 2

Well... BOOSTER 1

If they're small... BOOSTER 2

Yes. Ahem. Anyway, we're building it for the opening of the new Pacific Highway Bridge. BOOSTER 1

Across the Great Columbia! BOOSTER 2

It'll connect Washington and Oregon. BOOSTER 3

And we've been invited! BOOSTER 4

Yes! We've been invited!! BOOSTER 2

Lester'll have a much easier time visiting Ethel... BOOSTER 3

That's for sure...

BOOSTER 1

A wedding, do'ya think?...

BOOSTER 4

Could be...

BOOSTER 3

MARTINE

(to the audience).
They do get off track so easily.
(to BOOSTERS).
The egg? You were saying?

It'll be in the parade.

BOOSTER 1

It'll lead the parade!

BOOSTER 3

That's right.

BOOSTER 2

Mounted on Jack Avery's new hay wagon.

BOOSTER 4

(sadly).
Mine wasn't big enough.

BOOSTER 3

But you'll be there, sittin' right up next to Jack.

BOOSTER 1

That's right. Me 'n Jack. We will open the bridge.

BOOSTER 3

MARTINE

Have you thought at all about the fact that this new Interstate will bypass Winlock?

(A beat. The BOOSTERS look at each other).

Uhhh – Uhhh – Ahhh...

BOOSTERS

Well, there'll be the Giant Egg.

BOOSTER 1

Yes!...

BOOSTERS

Yes, yes. The Giant Egg.

BOOSTER 2

We're going to mount it right here in the park.

BOOSTER 4

Right here!

BOOSTER 3

Folks'll want to come to see that. A nice little side trip.

BOOSTER 1

(to the audience).
Do you think?

MARTINE

(to THE BOOSTERS).
We've already lost the railroad hub.

(Another uneasy look among THE BOOSTERS).

Well. We must be off.

BOOSTER 1

Yes, yes. Must be off.

BOOSTER 2

Business to attend to.

BOOSTER 4

Business...?

BOOSTER 3

That's right, business.

BOOSTER 4

(catching on).
Oh, yes! Business!

BOOSTER 3

BOOSTER 4

Yes, yes, must go.

BOOSTER 1

(ever the gentleman).

Adieu, Miss Martine. Greetings to you mother.

BOOSTER 3

And to your grandmother, of course.

BOOSTER 2

Yes, yes, greetings to – Well, greetings to everybody!

BOOSTER 4

Ta ta, Martine!

BOOSTER 2

Ta ta! Toodle loo!...

BOOSTERS

Good bye / Must rush! / Good bye! / Good bye!...

(And they are gone).

MARTINE

(waves).

Good bye!

(to the audience, as she proceeds on her way).

Now, where was I? Oh, yes. I was about to give you the scuttlebutt, wasn't I? Scuttlebutt. What a great word. Well! – Let's just say, I know all the things most people are careful not to learn and don't want to know. Most people want to believe the founders, and the boosters and their third grade Sunday School teachers. I am an historian, you see. Oh, not the official one; she's much too trusting. And way too cheery – It's very irritating!

(beat).

Ah! Finally. The Post Office is just a block away. Now, strategic maneuvering to avoid any more obstacles, and –

(PEARL and RUBY enter, followed by CHARITY).

MARTINE (continued).

Oh, no! Run away. Run away! Here comes Pearl and Ruby. Ruby and Pearl. They're sisters, of course. Of course, they're sisters. Augh! To be a cliché from the very beginning, starting with their names. I can't imagine the torment. Oh! And that simpering, simple-minded Charity is with them!

RUBY and PEARL

Good morning, Martine.

CHARITY

Hello, Martine!
(she giggles).

RUBY

So, Martine Small, where are you off to?

CHARITY

Yes, where are you going on this lovely, lovely day?

(RUBY and PEARL share a knowing look. CHARITY giggles and blushes).

MARTINE

I am off to the *lovely, lovely* Post Office, if you must know. And to fetch some fig tarts for my mother.

RUBY, PEARL and CHARITY

Ohhhh!...

(CHARITY gasps, and then giggles).

PEARL

And is Mr. Perkins coming to supper again tonight?

RUBY

Martine Small might not be Small much longer.

PEARL

I'll warrant you'll be ready to give up that name, won't you Martine?

RUBY

(sotto voce).
She's so tall...

MARTINE

Yes, Ruby Booby, I am tall. And the tragedy of my life is that I live in a town that is small. A small town, with small people who wallow in very small ideas.

RUBY

What?

MARTINE

I agreed that I am tall, and that you are small.

RUBY

Oh. Well, my mother says I'm dainty...

MARTINE

(to the audience).

Yes. With a dainty little brain to go with it.

CHARITY

I like your tall, Martine. I think it's lovely. Lovely, like a statue...

MARTINE

Maybe that's why it's called statuesque. Good day to you, insipid Charity. Booby. Pearl.

(CHARITY, RUBY and PEARL pass; MRS. TRILBY, the very efficient post mistress bustles in. She wears the oversleeves and visor of her profession).

MARTINE

Ah, I make it to the post office at last. Good morning Mrs. Trilby.

MRS. TRILBY

Good morning, Martine!

(MARTINE hands MRS. TRILBY the letter. She looks at the letter; weighs it in her hand).

MRS. TRILBY

That'll take a penny-stamp.

(MARTINE hands her a penny).

Thank you.

(with meaning).

And, is your next stop Fig tarts at Mrs. Swenson's?

MARTINE

Not you too! I thought you were my friend.

MRS. TRILBY

I am your friend. But I can't help being informed. Oh, and here is a letter for your mother. From New York!

(The scene moves back to the kitchen. LOUISA fusses around a flower arrangement; EMMA sits contentedly with her chickens at the kitchen table).

MARTINE

Fig Tarts. And a letter. From New York.

(reads).

“Lyceum Circuit of Buffalo.”

LOUISA

Eagerly taking the letter).

Already??...

MARTINE

Mother, I was not made to stump around a chicken farm.

LOUISA

(reading her letter).

Yes, dear – I mean, No, dear...

EMMA

Egg farm. No nasty roosters here to make trouble. Just my girls.

(We hear the gentle clucking of chickens around EMMA’s feet).

MARTINE

(to EMMA and her chickens).

I could be such a genius if only I had a little peace and quiet.

(to the chickens).

Silence! Silence, I say! Or I will have you all for dinner tonight. I will stuff Mr. Perkins with each and every one of you!

EMMA

(to her chickens)

Pay her no mind. She’s all talk.

LOUISA

I do know how you feel, Martine...

MARTINE

How can you? I was made for something altogether finer. I was made for something big. For life with a big L, Mother. I could be so many things!

EMMA

Oh, here we go...

MARTINE

No one in Winlock understands...

EMMA

The full concert...

MARTINE

How could they? Winlock, Washington, The Egg Capital of the World? – Are you kidding?? For maybe twenty miles around – And I bet you are all for the city boobsters and their feeble attempt to get us on the map with this latest ridiculous nom de commerce.

LOUISA

(reading her letter).

This what?...

MARTINE

The Egg. That eight-hundred pound egg they're building. Somehow, they've finagled their way into the parade that's going to open the new bridge across the river.

LOUISA

Oh, yes. Well, I do wish we could become known for something a little more sophisticated. The ladies did try to insert some refinement into the discussion, but – Oh! Listen to this!

(reading).

Professor Josiah T. Oddweiller, late of Yale University says he “will be delighted” to come and speak!

EMMA

I wonder what that “Late” means?...

MARTINE

When?

LOUISA

(eagerly perusing her letter).

In June. He's going to open our Lyceum!

EMMA

Your What??

LOUISA

Lyceum. You know. It's the new room we have dedicated for lectures at the library.

EMMA

Oh, the rumpus room in the basement. Why didn't you say so?

MARTINE

But back to serious things. Back to me, mother. For example, why would God have put this music in my fingers and great thoughts in my brain if He didn't intend me to use them?!?

LOUISA

Oh, that reminds me! Mrs. Pellegrine says she'll pay two bits a month if you'd like to start giving Tommy lessons again.

MARTINE

Tommy is a beetle who should be squashed.

LOUISA

Martine!

(EMMA chuckles).

LOUISA (continued).

(to EMMA).

And you're no help...

MARTINE

Tommy has no talent. His fingers are fat stubs of clay.

LOUISA

He's a little boy...

MARTINE

No, sausages. That's a better image.

LOUISA

Oh, Martine...

MARTINE

Some days I just want to breakfast on his pudgy little fingers.

LOUISA

Martine!

MARTINE

I'm sorry, Mother. It's just that sometimes I feel like my head's going to explode.

LOUISA

I see.

(she doesn't see).

MARTINE

Mother, I'm too big for Winlock!

LOUISA

Your father was big.

MARTINE

I was speaking metaphorically.

LOUISA

Yes, funny, with a name like Small.

MARTINE

(to the audience).

How do I live with this? You may well ask. I can barely hold in my rage at any given moment of the day.

(beat).

Since we're stopped, I need to tell you something about my family. Now, you've met my mother. She's not usually quite so obtuse. And this is my Gran. Mother and my Uncle Matthew have just finished building Gran a splendid new house. But Gran says she won't live in it. So, she stays out back in the old bunk house next to the chicken run. And I thought my mother knew – Well – Maybe not, but –

(She re-enters the scene).

Well, she's done it. She's moved her entire brood in.

LOUISA

What? Where?

MARTINE

Gran's chickens. The new house.

EMMA

(quietly, to MARTINE).

I haven't exactly told her highness yet...

MARTINE

It's actually quite amusing...

EMMA

Teeny...

MARTINE

She won't live in it, but her chickens will live out their days in style!

LOUISA

What are you talking about?

MARTINE

The new house. Gran. Her chickens. She's moved them into the house.

LOUISA

What? You've moved your chickens into the new house? Oh, Mother, how could you??

EMMA

Now, Louisa...

LOUISA

Please, tell me you're not serious.

EMMA

I'm comfortable where I am...

LOUISA

I thought you must be joking.

EMMA

I'm sorry, Louisa, but I know I could never appreciate that house as you'd like me to. And my girls are thrilled with their new residence. Warm. No leaking roof. Plenty of room to settle. And they like all those fancy frills and furbelows.

LOUISA

Oh, Mother...

EMMA

Didn't ask you to build me that gin palace.

LOUISA

A nice house.

EMMA

Looks like a gin palace. All that fancywork; filigree and falderall...

LOUISA

Just something nice.

EMMA

I am a little worried about those cupolas up on the roof though. Sure, an' they'll want to nest there – especially my broody ones, like Millicent and Daisy – Won't you girls? Just the right size for a comfy nest, a nice cozy place to get all broody?

(We hear the comfortable sounds of happy chickens).

LOUISA

Oh, Mother...

EMMA

It'll be hard for me to get up there to get the eggs.

MARTINE

You think your chickens are so smart. Just put up signs: "No nesting."

EMMA

Yes, they are smart. But they're also stubborn, like you. They'll ignore the signs.

MARTINE

Very funny.

EMMA

Thank you.

LOUISA

I work so hard.

(to EMMA)

I know you lounge with your precious chickens just to annoy me. You know you do. And Martine – Can't you help? You encourage her.

MARTINE

I'm right here, you know...

LOUISA

(to EMMA)

You applaud her antics and resistance. All my overtures to make her a lady.

MARTINE

I can hear you...

LOUISA

(to EMMA)

You relish this, don't you? We have to do something about Martine!

MARTINE

Right here. Me. In this room...

EMMA

I'll admit, she doesn't seem perfectly content.

MARTINE

(to the audience).

A brilliant deduction by my grandmother. Do you see what I'm up against? Nobody understands. Nobody listens!

LOUISA

And my Annual Tea just around the corner! I'm caught between your sloth and her – stubbornness! Your – Your ruin and her rebellion!

(She runs out in tears, exiting to the porch).

MARTINE

(after a time).

Will she be all right?

EMMA

We do give her a run, Teeny.

MARTINE

I know. I'm sorry.

EMMA

Are you?

MARTINE

(beat).

Well – No.

(CHARITY approaches the porch where LOUISA sits trying to compose herself).

CHARITY

Good afternoon, Mrs. Small.

LOUISA

(valiantly trying to recover).

Charity!

CHARITY

Oh! Are you all right, Mrs. Small?

LOUISA

I'm fine! It must be the heat.

CHARITY

Can I get you anything? Lemonade? A glass of water?...

LOUISA

No! Thank you, Charity. I'm fine.

CHARITY

Oh. Well, I've finished those cozies you asked me to make for the bazaar.

LOUISA

Thank you, Charity! Oh! Such fine work!

(CHARITY blushes and giggles).

LOUISA

(after a time).

You know, when I was young, I had a teacher – Miss Sullivan – She thought it was very important that every young woman should master all the stitches of embroidery...

MARTINE

Who's mother talking to?

(She peers out the window).

Oh. doodle duncce Charity Thyme...

(MARTINE starts to turn away and then stops to listen).

LOUISA

I practiced every day. All the most intricate stitches – Every day, the stitches smaller and smaller until I rivaled Miss Sullivan's. I learned all the fancy stitches. I was so proud of myself! Of course, my mother didn't quite understand my obsession. She would say, "Do those fancy stitches make your seams any stronger?"

(a rueful laugh).

I know it's useless, but...

CHARITY

But beautiful.

LOUISA

As are yours, Charity. These are really lovely.

CHARITY

Thank you, Mrs. Small.

MARTINE

I knew it! Dim duncce Charity Thyme and Mother!...

LOUISA

I can always count on you. You always put forth such great effort. Such tiny, even stitches!

MARTINE

(mimicking her mother).

“Such great effort. Such tiny stitches” – Who cares how big the stitches are!

LOUISA

When Martine’s father left us – We had planned to open a hotel, you know, but well, when he – when he died, and I knew I’d have to make a living – Well, I went back to my stitches and set up my little school for young ladies. You were my best pupil, Charity.

CHARITY

(giggles).

Oh, Mrs. Small!...

LOUISA

Yes you were! And you may be proud of it.

CHARITY

Thank you, Mrs. Small.

MARTINE

“Thank you, Mrs. Small.” Oh!

re-enters the kitchen).

Why does mother never tell me about when she was young? She’ll talk to just any old person who walks by, but not her own daughter!

EMMA

Are you interested?

MARTINE

Well – not really. And who cares if nothing of mine ever sells at the bazaar?! – unless you buy it, of course, Gran. No, when Cornelius Vanderbilt, or President Roosevelt care about the size of stitches, I’ll consider it.

EMMA

Oh, Teeny, between your high ideas and my low...

MARTINE

All right. I’ll try to be nice. It will be excruciatingly difficult, but I’ll try.

EMMA

A worthy goal.

(The Scene moves the front parlor. A sunny afternoon.
MARTINE takes off her hat and places a large bow in her
hair).

MARTINE

Ah. And now, it's finally come. Mother's Annual Autumn Tea. The glorious launch of
Thursdays, at home. Tea party politeness. Corsets a little tighter.

(she squirms under her constrictive underpinnings)

Curls a little tighter.

(she tries to stretch out her hair).

Smiles a little tighter.

(she smiles; a sort of pained grimace).

(LOUISA enters with a vase of flowers).

LOUISA

Oh, there you are darling. My! Don't you look –

MARTINE

Don't say it, Mother. LOUISA

LOUISA

No.

(beat).

Well! Beautiful day for it.

MARTINE

Yes.

LOUISA

Do you have your gloves?

MARTINE

One pair, new kid, slightly small.

LOUISA

You want them snug. It makes your hands look smaller. Now, you won't say anything hateful
will you? This is a party.

MARTINE

I'll be the model of decorum and politeness as long as I can stand it, Mother.

LOUISA

Please try, Martine.

MARTINE

The gloved hand extended, thus. “How do you do? Won’t you please sit down? – Oh! Do you think it really is? – Yes, please do tell me all about the weather. Your minute observations, please. – My! Do you really like them? Oh, yes, genuine kid. Kids gave their lives for these gloves.”

LOUISA

Oh, here they come. Now, Martine, please. Please! – And smile!!

(LOUISA hands MARTINE a tray and then ushers in a flock of proper young ladies, including RUBY, PEARL, CHARITY, IMOGENE and JULIA. They giggle and chat excitedly. IDA has also, but hangs back and greets LOUISA. She seems to be waiting for something, or someone. MARTINE ungraciously hands around refreshments).

JULIA

Fig tarts? They look delicious.

CHARITY

Oh, they are! Delicious!

MARTINE

(barely holding it together).
Mrs. Swenson, you know.

CHARITY

(to JULIA).
Oh, but you must know about Mrs. Swenson’s delicious fig tarts. Of course, you know!

JULIA

Thank you.
(she takes a tart).

(MARTINE offers the tray to IDA).

IDA

Thank you.

(IDA takes two and immediately squirrels them away in her reticule. Before MARTINE can make a comment, JULIA draws back her attention).

JULIA

Mrs. Swenson you say? How delicious.

MARTINE

(to audience)

This is Julia. She did come, but without her sweet mother. You've met Ruby Booby, Pearl and insipid Charity. And this is Imogene and Ruthie, more miniscule minds.

(She offers the plate to IMOGENE).

Fig tart?

IMOGENE

Oh, delicious.

MARTINE

Ruthie?

RUTHIE

Delicious!

PEARL

Yes, Delicious!

MARTINE

Ruby?

(offers RUBY a tart).

RUBY

Fig tarts?

MARTINE

Y E S, still fig tarts.

(watches her take a bite).

Delicious?

RUBY

Oh, yes! Quite, quite delicious!

MARTINE

Only two quites? Can you manage one more? No?

(RUBY looks confused).

CHARITY

Mr. Perkins adores fig tarts, doesn't he?

MARTINE

Mr. Perkins, again! I can't stand it. I shall truly go mad.

IMOGENE

Have you seen any more of Mr. Perkins? Mother said he dined here Tuesday last.

MARTINE

(stands, announces to the group).

Is there anyone here present who does not know that Mr. Perkins dined here last Tuesday?

(there is a stunned silence as all small talk in other quarters stops).

We had pot roast and fig tarts.

LOUISA

(an urgent whisper).

Martine...

MARTINE

We spoke of the unseasonably warm weather and admired Mrs. Jensen's dahlias. I expressed regret that they did not have a pleasant smell and Mr. Perkins gently reprimanded me with a reverie upon their great variety.

(MR. PERKINS appears in the doorway).

LOUISA

Martine?? Darling?...

MARTINE

His exact words were, I believe, "But what great variety!"

(MR. PERKINS enters).

MARTINE (continued).

Do I have that right, Mr. Perkins? Did I do justice to your little speech?

MR. PERKINS

Uhhhh – Uhhhhh...

LOUISA

(laughs, apologetically)

Our Martine is a little – high strung. Is she not Mr. Perkins?

(MR. PERKINS looks lovingly, longingly at LOUISA).

LOUISA (continued)

(to a suspended MR. PERKINS).

Martine. A little high-strung.

MR. PERKINS

Uhhh, yes. You're a little high-strung –
 (looks to LOUISA for encouragement).
 – darling.

(LOUISA nods her approval).

MARTINE

I know I'm a little high-strung. And a little mad. And a little angry. And don't call me darling.

(There is a collective gasp from the young ladies.
 MARTINE grabs JULIA by the hand and marches her out
 to the front porch. LOUISA escorts MR. PERKINS away
 to introduce him to the other ladies. HENRY appears, and
 IDA quietly slips out as the tea party fades back and action
 moves to the porch).

MARTINE

Why does everyone assume I'm going to marry Mr. Perkins?

JULIA

Aren't you?

MARTINE

No.

JULIA

Don't you want to get married?

MARTINE

No.

JULIA

Yes, you do.

MARTINE

I don't.

JULIA

You do. You must!

MARTINE

Boil me in oil first. I'm never getting married.

JULIA

You don't want to be seen as one of those "New Women," do you?

MARTINE

(to audience).

I love Julia. She is my life-long friend. Some days I want to take my father's boot jack and bash her brains in.

(to JULIA).

If by New Woman you mean someone who uses her brain, then yes, I am a "New Woman."

JULIA

Well, don't you want to get along better in life?

MARTINE

The only way I can turn around my tragic circumstances is to plan this year's Egg Festival. And that's not going to happen as long as Mr. Avery draws breath.

JULIA

Martine!

MARTINE

What?

JULIA

Well – Is Mrs. Avery going to sing?

MARTINE

Need you ask? It's the same every year with Mr. Avery in charge. An Avery in every part.

JULIA

I know...

MARTINE

And he always opens with that *L O N G* speech that nobody can hear and nobody would want to listen to anyway.

JULIA

Martine!...

MARTINE

Then, his beautiful wife, Grim Griselda sings off-key for six-and-a-half minutes.

(She sings a few bars of a tortured aria gloriously off-key).

JULIA

(laughing).

Oh, Martine you shouldn't!...

MARTINE

The woman is a screech owl. You know she is.

JULIA

Well –

MARTINE

And then there's the badly composed tableau featuring the entire extended Avery family. And then! – Then, Mrs. Avery sings again, thinking she has been such a glorious success because the audience was stunned into a googly-eyed silence the first time she shrieked. And then, *then*, there is the deadly dull EGG PLAY – More Averys, Pearl and Ruby in the leads, of course. It's the Avery Follies! And then we have the chicken dance – Pearl and Ruby again. Have I missed anything?

JULIA

Maybe only Mr. Bone's magic show.

MARTINE

Augh! Mr. Bone! How could I forget? Mr. Bone is a terrible magician.

JULIA

I know. But it's tradition. And he would be hurt if he couldn't do it.

MARTINE

But aren't you tired of the same old thing? I know I could give a much better speech than old Mr. Avery.

JULIA

Well, I have to admit, you always have something to say. And you are a good planner. Maybe Mr. Avery could use some help.

MARTINE

No, I'd murder him. Oh, not intentionally, but my tolerance of stupid people is low.

JULIA

Yes. I – You – You're – so strong! You have such big ideas. You can get people to do the most amazingly absurd things.

MARTINE

Yes, I know! But, who am I kidding? Even if I could plan it, we are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody will come who could really appreciate it, and no one will appreciate it who comes...

JULIA

I will appreciate it.

MARTINE

You will?

JULIA

Of course. And there are skills you can learn – politeness, decorum, the niceties of gentle discourse and cooperation.

(MARTINE looks at JULIA).

MARTINE

(beat).

When did we stop being alike?

JULIA

We were never alike.

MARTINE

We were. We both liked Beethoven and Swift...

JULIA

Yes.

MARTINE

And we both decried the excesses of current architectural design...

JULIA

Yes.

MARTINE

And we both thought Henry Purdo was a little stinker.

(JULIA is silent).

MARTINE (continued).

You Liked Henry Purdo?!? Oh, I don't know anything anymore!

JULIA

Oh, Martine. I think all those things – some of them – well, not many really – none at all, actually – but, well – Well, even if I did, I couldn't say them out loud!

MARTINE

How can you not say what you think?

JULIA

Mrs. Pinkerton's Little Blue Book. *Complete Etiquette for Young Ladies*, revised, 1904. Here, Martine, it has everything. Oh, Martine, we want the same things! It's just –

MARTINE

What?

JULIA

I am going to become refined enough to be swept out of town by a rich and cultured man.

MARTINE

Who?

JULIA

I don't know. Somebody who comes to town.

MARTINE

The Fuller Brush man, no doubt.

(JULIA bursts into tears).

MARTINE (continued).

Oh, I'm sorry. Elroy. Your sister. I forgot.

JULIA

Of course. We shall not speak of it.

MARTINE

No.

JULIA

No.

MARTINE

(to the audience)

How much more of this can I stand??

JULIA

I wish you could be more content, Martine. You're so clever, and smart.

MARTINE

It's just that these hands were not made to clean out the chicken coop. I was made for bigger things than church bazaars, ice cream socials and Sunday School Verse contests!

JULIA

Reverend Winters says God doesn't make mistakes.

MARTINE

No. Only Mounds of obstacles. Only Mountains of Trouble and Multitudes of Disappointments. Only Madness, Melee and Gross Misunderstandings.

JULIA

And you always use such big words.

(MARTINE groans. CHARITY joins them on the porch).

JULIA (continued).

Hello, Charity.

CHARITY

Hello, Julia. Come for a visit?

MARTINE

(surly).
As you see.

(CHARITY giggles).

CHARITY

(to JULIA).
Are you staying with us long?

MARTINE

With me. *me*, through Labor Day.

JULIA

Martine!...

MARTINE

Well!...

CHARITY

Oh, that's lovely! Isn't that lovely?

(MARTINE stomps off, through the tea party and escapes into the kitchen where EMMA sits working).

MARTINE

Why can't I be happy, like that soft-headed Charity Thyme? Charity's always happy.

EMMA

Yes. Charity always has a kind word...

MARTINE

“...for man and beast.” Yes, I know. It makes me sick to think of it. A steady diet of corn syrup and apple pie. How can you live on such treacle?

(pacing the kitchen).

It makes me mad, even to think about Charity and her goodness.

EMMA

Is that why you deliberately go out of your way to be rude to her?

MARTINE

I'm not rude! A trifle impatient, on occasion – Sometimes, maybe a little short...

EMMA

I'd say surly.

MARTINE

A little sharp, perhaps, when she goes on and on and on about how lovely everybody and everything is. I have never heard her say a bad word about anybody. It's so annoying! I've tried to educate her...

EMMA

Is that what you call it?...

MARTINE

I've snubbed her, cut her off in conversation, publicly crossed the street in front of all her friends to avoid her and endlessly made fun of her. Nothing works! Charity is as sweet as ever, as forgiving as ever. It's absolutely maddening!

(she slumps down in a kitchen chair; totally defeated).

And Mother likes her. Charity loves Mother and Mother loves Charity. Charity is obviously the daughter Mother had really wanted.

EMMA

Oh, Teeny...

MARTINE

(truly miserable).

Pretty, petite, amiable and eager to please, Charity Thyme.

EMMA

Ah. Well, you could work your way a little more toward that direction...

MARTINE

Smirking and simple-minded!...

EMMA

Come help me with the laundry. You can take some of your mighty wrath out on the wringer.

MARTINE

Oh, Gran! What do you think it's like to have ambitions that cannot be accommodated by the world you find yourself living in??

EMMA

I can't imagine.

MARTINE

I'm too big for Winlock!

EMMA

And I'm too small. Always have been. This town was built on farming. Chicken and egg farming. We're good farmers.

MARTINE

Oh, Gran.

EMMA

I come west to be free 'a society, not swallowed whole by it.

MARTINE

Time is running out, Gran. I can't wait 'til I'm *TWENTY* to be discovered!

EMMA

I guess you're just a Martine out of time.

MARTINE

Well, I want to be a Martine out of Winlock!

(LOUISA enters).

LOUISA

Here you both are!

(sees EMMA's brood; we hear them gently clucking).

Oh, Mother! Must you bring them in here?

EMMA

I've kept them out of your precious parlor.

LOUISA

Yes, and all my guests know you're in here, and wonder why you don't come out to greet them.

EMMA

Well, they can come in here. We've no objections.
(to her chickens).

Do we girls?

(We hear more gentle clucking from the chickens).

LOUISA

All the girls from the most prominent families – Oh! Why do I even try? Why didn't I leave Winlock when I had the chance?

(EMMA laughs).

LOUISA (continued).

What?

EMMA

Two peas in a pod.

LOUISA

Who?

EMMA

You two.

LOUISA and MARTINE

(together).

Martine and...? /// Mother and me...?

(MARTINE and LOUISA look at each other).

LOUISA

Mother, you must be joking.

MARTINE

Gran, you can't be serious. Mother and Me??...

EMMA

Two peas in a pod.

LOUISA

Ridiculous...

EMMA

Martine with her big ideas...

MARTINE

I do have big ideas!...

EMMA

And Louisa here, with her tea parties and her improvement societies...

LOUISA

I've tried to insert a little civilization...

EMMA

Culture committees, garden committees...

MARTINE

None of which I share...

EMMA

Oh, so grand speakers coming to the library basement....

LOUISA

A bit of refinement...

EMMA

Louisa, you want to be a big fish in a little pond. While Teeny here wants to be a little fish in a big pond.

MARTINE

No, I want to be a BIG fish in a BIG pond. I want to be a GIANT SHARK in the ocean!

EMMA

Oh, beg pardon. Did I underestimate your ambition?

LOUISA

Can we move on? Martine, Mr. Perkins is leaving...

MARTINE

Thank goodness!...

LOUISA

Don't you want to say good bye?

(JULIA enters).

JULIA

Martine! Come on and say good bye to Mr. Perkins.

(MARTINE is pulled out of the kitchen by JULIA.
LOUISA follows them to the porch where MR. PERKINS
awaits).

LOUISA

(giving him her hand).

Thank you so much for coming Mr. Perkins.

MR. PERKINS

Mrs....

LOUISA

Louisa, please.

MR. PERKINS

(holding her hand)

Louisa – It has been a pleasure. I’m honored to have been included in this – splendid – day, err –
gathering – err – um –

(MR. PERKINS trails off. He holds on to LOUISA’s hand).

LOUISA

(gently extricating her hand).

Yes, well, I’ll leave you so you can say good bye to Martine.

(Both MARTINE and MR. PERKINS look petrified).

LOUISA (continued).

Come along, Julia.

JULIA

Yes! Well, goodbye Mr. Perkins.

(shakes his hand; with a meaningful look at MARTINE).

I’ll be in the parlor, Martine.

(LOUISA starts back into the house. JULIA follows, giving
MARTINE a long, last meaning-filled look. MR.
PERKINS follows LOUISA’s retreating figure with his
gaze until he can see her no longer. There is an awful
silence as MARTINE and MR. PERKINS stare at each
other).

MR. PERKINS

Well –

Yes?
MARTINE

Well –
MR. PERKINS

(not willing to help him).
A deep hole.
MARTINE

(MR. PERKINS laughs a little hysterically).
MR. PERKINS

You're so –
MARTINE

Yes?
MR. PERKINS

Witty. So witty – And smart –
MARTINE

Are you trying to say something to me, Mr. Perkins? I think I know what it is, and I'd really rather you didn't.
MR. PERKINS

Good bye? You don't want me to say good bye?
MARTINE

Mr. Perkins, why are you here? Why are we here? Why do you come to supper every single night?
MR. PERKINS

I don't! – I...
MARTINE

Hyperbole, Mr. Perkins. I'm just making a point. Asking a question. Fishing for answers. Pleading for clarification.
MR. PERKINS

Oh. Yes. Yes. I see.
(There is another long uncomfortable silence).
MARTINE

Well?

MR. PERKINS
Well, to be honest...

MARTINE
I wish for nothing else, Mr. Perkins.

MR. PERKINS
To be perfectly honest – I'm a little afraid of you.

MARTINE
Oh, that's just ridiculous.

MR. PERKINS
It's not.

MARTINE
It is. And you are just being a big baby.

MR. PERKINS
Yes.

MARTINE
So, what are you going to do about it?

MR. PERKINS
I – I don't know.

MARTINE
I sort of like you, Mr. Perkins. I mean, under your timidity and cowardice, I'm sure there is a rather nice person who will make somebody – not me! – very happy.

MR. PERKINS
Really?

MARTINE
Yes, really.

MR. PERKINS
Well –

MARTINE
Well, what?

MR. PERKINS

Well – You’re not the only one who feels a little out of place here, you know.

MARTINE

Who ever said I felt out of place?

(beat).

All right. I have aspirations. I have Dreams. Is that a crime?

MR. PERKINS

No! No, it’s not. I have dreams too – Longings –

(He looks wistfully into the house).

MARTINE

Can we say good bye now?

MR. PERKINS

Yes! Yes. Good bye, Miss Martine. Give my best to your mother.

(MR. PERKINS runs off).

MARTINE

(calling after him).

You just saw her!

(to the Audience).

Mr. Perkins. Dreams. Who would have thought?

(She starts to leave the porch).

And now to the inevitable critique of the day, the papal brief of how my decorum measured up to correct tea party standards. I will fail utterly, of course.

(The scene returns to the kitchen. We hear the chickens around EMMA’s feet. LOUISA enters).

LOUISA

You could help me.

EMMA

I do. I stay out of your way on your Big Do days.

LOUISA

I mean, Martine.

EMMA

Martine doesn’t enjoy these parties of yours.

LOUISA

You think I do? I work so hard. To cover for you. To give Martine opportunities. And with the two of you working against me – Do I even have a chance?

EMMA

Well – With that face...

LOUISA

What's wrong with my face?

EMMA

Nothing. Except when that curled lip comes out. The sure sign of your displeasure. Got it from your father's side, not mine.

LOUISA

Oh, Mother...

(MARTINE enters and stops to listen. All of MARTINE's commentary will be delivered from outside the scene and be addressed to the audience).

EMMA

Well, I know that face. I know what it means. And so does Martine. It just spurs her on to resist.

MARTINE

(to the audience).

Ah.

LOUISA

Can't you be on my side for once? I have tried to give Martine the opportunities I never had.

MARTINE

(to the audience).

A favorite topic.

EMMA

Maybe she doesn't want your opportunities.

LOUISA

Martine is just – Bigger than I can handle. I know she doesn't belong on a farm, but – Well, she doesn't help herself. Mr. Barker, that Jones boy, Walter, Mr. Perkins...

EMMA

Are you sure it's Martine, Will Perkins has in his sights?...

LOUISA

Any of them could take her away from all this and she chases them all away. All the young men I coax in.

EMMA

But Martine isn't you.

LOUISA

Don't you want Martine to have opportunities?

EMMA

Opportunities, for what?

LOUISA

You know, culture, education...

EMMA

Marriage.

LOUISA

Well, it wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen to her, would it?

(EMMA is silent).

MARTINE

(beat; to the audience).

They're going to talk about my father now.

LOUISA

Oh! I knew it was only a matter of time before you would bring up Martin.

MARTINE

(to the audience).

I was named after him.

EMMA

I didn't say anything.

LOUISA

You didn't have to.

EMMA

Well, since you've brought it up – Martine doesn't want the life you do. The life you had with your too handsome, too, too charming husband.

LOUISA

I know you never liked him.

EMMA

Now, that's not true. I liked him fine. All I said was he was a bit of a bright peacock, and couldn't you be settin' aside a bit of that ready for the future? And he left you too soon, that's all. I guess I do blame him for that.

LOUISA

For dying?

EMMA

For dying so young and for leaving you with an impossible dream. If only he could have grown old and bald; developed a little paunch...

LOUISA

Mother!...

EMMA

...died a drunkard, or run away with some floozie.

LOUISA

Oh, Mother...

EMMA

I know you thought he was your answer to this small town. He filled every space of the dissatisfaction you felt about growing up in this out of the way place. I do understand some things.

LOUISA

We were talking about Martine.

EMMA

There were other men willing to take his place, but you'd have none of them. Some of 'em even willing to love Martine. That Mr. Perkins, now. I don't know as he's looking at Martine...

LOUISA

Of course, he is. He accepts every invitation...

EMMA

Uh huh...

LOUISA

I don't...

EMMA

Remember, before Martin Small came to town, you were going to move away with your friend Muriel?

MARTINE

(to the audience).
Oh! This is new...

EMMA

Is she still working as a steno-girl in Vancouver? Is her life any better? I notice she hasn't been back for a couple of years. She used to come home every Fourth of July.

LOUISA

Yes. Every year, hanging on the arm of a new man. Every year with a new outfit. And did you notice the shoes?

EMMA

Her shoes...?

LOUISA

Every visit, a new pair. Very expensive – But, can we get back to Martine?

MARTINE

No! I want to hear more about Vancouver!...

EMMA

You were just too happy, that's all. I knew there'd be a fall, and that I'd somehow be blamed for it. Five years...

LOUISA and MARTINE

(together).
Five years and two months.

EMMA

Five years and two months of happiness and hope and believing in his dream. Long enough to fall in love. Long enough to make plans. Long enough to have a child...

LOUISA

And then he died...

EMMA

And then he died. And along with him went everything except your child. Martine.

LOUISA

(beat).
I know I don't love her as I should.

EMMA

Don't torture yourself with should.

LOUISA

He loved her. Martin was the one to love Martine as she was.

MARTINE

I wish I could remember him better...

EMMA

And you were left to try to make something of her. I know it isn't fair.

LOUISA

I'm not a shrew, not in my heart.

EMMA

I know dearie...

LOUISA

But life here – in this out of the way place, this dab of a town...

EMMA

Oh, now...

LOUISA

At least that's how she sees it.

MARTINE

I don't! – Well – Maybe...

EMMA

Enough now.

LOUISA

I try. Honestly, I do. I don't know how to help her. Goodness knows, she doesn't help herself. She laughs at all the suitors I invite for supper. She alienates all her friends...

MARTINE

Yes, I think we've heard enough of that, don't you? Besides, I have important things to talk to her about.

(MARTINE moves as if to slam a door. We hear a loud door slam and MARTINE enters the scene).

LOUISA

(the spell is broken).
And she's always slamming doors! She does it on purpose.

MARTINE

Good afternoon dear parent. Have you got to how I slurp my tea yet?

LOUISA

If you would only try, Martine...

MARTINE

Yes, yes, I'll try. But, first, can we talk about something else? I've been thinking about that Oddfellow coming to speak in the church basement.

LOUISA

Oddweiller. Professor Dr. Josiah T. Oddweiller...

MARTINE

Yes, well, he could be my ticket out of here.

LOUISA

Well – You're certainly invited, but...

MARTINE

It's the day before The Egg Festival.

LOUISA

And...

MARTINE

And, if I can help plan Egg Days, and Dr. Oddbelly sees it...

LOUISA

Oddweiller. But Mr. Avery is always in charge. He always plans it.

MARTINE

Yes. That's the rub. If only he could get hit by a truck, or something.

LOUISA

Martine!

MARTINE

Oh, not killed, or anything. Just inconvenienced a little. In need of help. I must think!...

LOUISA

Oh, please, don't think too hard, Martine!...

MARTINE

I must think!

(LOUISA looks helplessly at EMMA. EMMA smiles. The lights fade).

End of ACT I.

ACT II

At Rise: MARTINE enters, and addresses the audience.

MARTINE

The plot thickens, as they say! Now, the most important thing to say is, you mustn't listen to gossip in a small town. Especially, this small town. As if I had anything to do with it. An opportunity for my talents to emerge has materialized, that's all. How do these rumors get started??

(MARTINE enters the kitchen. EMMA is in her usual spot. LOUISA reads the paper).

MARTINE

Isn't it wonderful?? Both legs and an arm! He'll be laid up for months.

LOUISA

What...?

MARTINE

Mr. Avery. He fell off the egg when they were painting it. Isn't that wonderful?

LOUISA

Martine!

MARTINE

Well, of course, I don't mean it's wonderful that Mr. Avery got hurt, but an opportunity has arisen for my genius to be recognized.

LOUISA

You didn't have anything to do with...?

MARTINE

How could you even think such a thing? But, The egg festival. Who will plan it now? Mother! This is perfect!

LOUISA

Oh, Martine, I'm not sure...

MARTINE

Oh, don't you see? This is my chance. Yes. I see it clearly. And with your Odd Professor coming...

LOUISA

Oddweiller...

MARTINE

I can turn around my tragic circumstances – Oh, and I'll put Winlock back on the map for you too, dear mother.

LOUISA

(holds out a newspaper she's been reading).

Oh! Speaking of which...

(reading).

"Winlock is the Egg Capital of the World," The Vancouver Voice! What about that? We made it; we finally made it."

MARTINE

(with begrudging admiration).

I know. People are stopping to get their picture taken with the giant egg. I hear Mr. Simmons is working on a big chicken to go with it.

EMMA

(to MARTINE).

You're in a good mood. Planning more nefarious torture for little Miss Charity?

MARTINE

Well, she can't help it if she's a simpleton.

LOUISA

Oh, Martine, you need to leave that poor girl alone. She doesn't hurt anyone. She's just naturally sweet. That's how she is.

MARTINE

I know. She just gets on my nerves. Well, I'm off to volunteer. Wish me luck!

LOUISA

But!...

(MRS. TRILBY enters and MARTINE joins her in the Post Office).

MARTINE

Good morning, Mrs. Trilby. Beautiful morning, isn't it?

MRS. TRILBY

I gather you've heard the news about Mr. Avery.

MARTINE

Yes. Isn't it marvelous?! – Well, sad, of course – But rather convenient, don't you think?

MRS. TRILBY

And you, perhaps have a plan?

MARTINE

I very well might, Mrs. Trilby.

MRS. TRILBY

And you need me to tell you where you might find the Egg Committee at this moment.

MARTINE

Is there anything you don't know, Mrs. Trilby?

MRS. TRILBY

(smiles).

Mmn. I'll have to think about that. Now, not *if*, but exactly *how* will you bamboozle our worthy boosters into letting you take over the festival?

MARTINE

Mrs. Trilby! I only seek them out to offer my assistance. In case they find themselves short-handed with the unfortunate loss of their leader.

MRS. TRILBY

Uh huh.

MARTINE

So?

MRS. TRILBY

Last seen approaching Mrs. Carter's Boarding house. Corned beef and cabbage today.

MARTINE

Thank you, Mrs. Trilby! I'll dedicate the tableau to you!

(MRS. TRILBY exits, and THE BOOSTERS enter arguing.
MARTINE stays off to one side, listening).

BOOSTER 1

No, no, no, and no! I couldn't possibly...

BOOSTER 3

But you're the best speaker.

BOOSTER 1

Not that kind of La-di-da speechifying that Jack Avery likes to put over on us. No, I think you should do it. People like you.

BOOSTER 3

But I have the egg to finish.

BOOSTER 4

And I'm helping him!

MARTINE

(to the audience).
Well, this looks promising!...

BOOSTER 2

Should we just cancel?

BOOSTER 1, 3 and 4

No!

MARTINE

(to the audience).
The Boobsters never let us down...

BOOSTER 4

Well, we do still have Mrs. Avery.

BOOSTER 2

Yes, yes. There's always Mrs. Avery.

BOOSTER 4

Maybe she could sing more. Three times instead of –

BOOSTER 1, 2 and 3

No!!

BOOSTER 1

I mean, let's not tax poor Mrs. Avery at this difficult time.

BOOSTER 2

Yes, yes – I mean, No. No. Not at this difficult time.

BOOSTER 1

Right.

So, who is going to take this on?
BOOSTER 3

Not me!
BOOSTER 4

Not me!
BOOSTER 1

Not me!
BOOSTER 2

Not me!
BOOSTER 3

(to the audience).
MARTINE
No, Me! This is going so well!...

BOOSTER 1
All right. Nose goes. On three. One – Two – Three!
(He quickly puts his finger on his nose).

(BOOSTERS 3 and 4 quickly follow suit and put their fingers on their noses. They all point to BOOSTER 2).

Well, Junius, I guess it's you.
BOOSTER 1

What? Wait! No!!...
BOOSTER 2

(to the audience).
MARTINE
Oh, an excellent choice! The boobiest of the boobsters.

(MARTINE enters the scene).

Good morning, gentlemen!
MARTINE

Good morning, Miss Martine.
BOOSTERS 1, 3 and 4

(glum).
Morning, Miss.
BOOSTER 2

MARTINE

Did I hear you gentlemen discussing our upcoming Egg Festival?

BOOSTER 1

You heard what happened to Mr. Avery.

MARTINE

(trying to hide her glee).

Yes. So sad.

BOOSTERS 3 and 4

Yes, yes. So sad.

BOOSTER 2

So, so Sad!

MARTINE

Yes. And – Any plans?

BOOSTER 1

Well, Mr. Philpot here has graciously agreed to take the reins.

MARTINE

Congratulations, Mr. Philpot!

BOOSTER 2

But I don't know anything about putting on a pageant...

MARTINE

Perhaps, I might be of assistance.

BOOSTER 2

Really?

BOOSTER 1

Well, that's all right, then, isn't it, Junius?

BOOSTER 2

Well...

BOOSTER 1

Yes, you run along with Miss Small here. And we'll go see how the chicken is coming along.

BOOSTER 3

Yes. The chicken.

BOOSTER 4

The chicken?

BOOSTER 3

(meaningfully).
The chicken.

BOOSTER 1

The chicken. To go with the egg. The one Harry Simmons is building.

BOOSTER 4

Oh, right! Must see how the chicken is coming along.

(BOOSTERS 1, 3 and 4 quickly exit, leaving BOOSTER 2 with MARTINE).

MARTINE

(As she ushers the overwhelmed new director out).
As it happens, Mr. Philpot, I do have a few ideas...

BOOSTER 2

Yes?...

MARTINE

(to the audience as she moves off).
Mr. Philpot. The perfect choice, don't you think? A superior boobster.
(to MR. PHILPOT).
Yes, I've sketched out a *few* ideas...

(MARTINE ushers a bewildered Mr. Philpot out as action moves to the kitchen. EMMA sits at the kitchen plucking an imaginary chicken. MARTINE enters, carrying a sheaf of papers and a book).

MARTINE

Gran, I've been working on my speech. You want to hear it?

EMMA

Since I'm stuck here with all these feathers, I guess I'm captive...

MARTINE

Women's suffrage.

EMMA

You could help? – All those beans there need snapping...
(This goes nowhere).

MARTINE

We had the vote when we were a territory, you know.

EMMA

Heady times, in the Territory.

MARTINE

I know!

EMMA

Do you?

MARTINE

Yes, that's my first point!

(reads)

Two score and sixteen years ago...

EMMA

Oh, Dearie Dear...

MARTINE

An eager young land north of the mighty Columbia River was freed from the Great Oregon Territory to go forth and seek its fortune. And thus, the Washington Territory was born – Born to be ruled by a new law, women's law! And then, with the dark days of 1889, when the holy fathers bestowed statehood upon us, poof, it's gone!

(looks eagerly at her Grandmother for encouragement).

We were doing fine when the women ran this town, right Gran?

EMMA

Well, I'm not sure we ran it, but it was nice having a say. You know, Teeny, you're usually full of such high-fallutin' ideas, I can't follow 'em – Well, usually I don't really want to follow 'em, if I'm honest. But I will say, Amen to the women.

MARTINE

Thanks, Gran. Now, to my second point...

EMMA

Oh, there's more?...

MARTINE

Has it ever occurred to you that the symbols of all the great countries are women, but it's the men who get all the credit and get to have all the fun?

(Gives EMMA an eager, intent look, waiting for a response).

EMMA

(beat).
Guess I never thought about it.

MARTINE

It's true! Just think, Lady Liberty, Britannia, Marianne – She's in France...

EMMA

What about Uncle Sam?

MARTINE

Oh, he only comes out when they want us to go to war. Boadicea. Now, she was a real person but they've squished her down to a myth.

(reads from a book).

“The glance of her eye was most fierce. Her voice, harsh. A great mass of the reddest hair fell down to her hips. Her appearance was terrifying!”

EMMA

Who?

MARTINE

Boadicea.

(thrusts out the book).

Gibbon. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He's Quoting Tacitus. 61 AD. Queen Boadicea of the Iceni, or Bodicca, which is probably closer to the original pronunciation, or Buddug, as she's known to the Welsh, or...

EMMA

You lost me now, Teeny.

MARTINE

I'm planning our Tableau Vivant, and I realize that women are supposed to represent countries, but they don't get to do anything. I want them to *do* something!

EMMA

I see. You want them to move, is that it? Would it still be a Tableau then?

MARTINE

Oh, Gran! Art is innovation. You've got to move with the times!

EMMA

I see.

MARTINE

Oh, you're not even interested. If you're not interested, how am I going to reach all the people who don't even know me??

EMMA

I'm interested, but I guess I'll wait for the show. I don't need to understand how the magic is done. Such big ideas, Teeny.

MARTINE

I'm just like my father.

EMMA

No, you're not.

MARTINE

He was a great dreamer.

EMMA

Schemer, maybe...

MARTINE

Dreamer. And I'm named after him.

EMMA

I'm named after a queen. Doesn't make me royal.

MARTINE

I've never heard of a Queen Emma.

EMMA

No?

MARTINE

No.

EMMA

Queen Emma of Lambstewvia.

MARTINE

You're making that up.

EMMA

Just like you're making up your Dad.

(EMMA continues to calmly pluck the feathers of her imaginary chicken. MARTINE watches her Grandmother for some time).

MARTINE

Gran, how can you sit there so calmly and pluck that chicken?

EMMA

It's Sunday. Your Mr. Perkins is coming to supper.

MARTINE

Don't remind me. And he's not my Mr. Perkins. No, I mean you knew her. You love your chickens.

EMMA

Much easier to get along with than people, that's sure. Now, this was Hattie. Too old to be a good roaster, but she'll make a nice broth for dumplings to swim around in.

MARTINE

How can you bear to eat something you've named?

EMMA

She had a good life. She was embarrassed 'cause she hadn't been laying for a while. All the others said goodbye; wished her a fond farewell.

MARTINE

Chickens, wishing her well?

EMMA

They had a party.

MARTINE

Gran.

EMMA

Haven't you ever heard of a hen party?
(she laughs).

MARTINE

Oh, gran.

EMMA

Teeny, you can't be sentimental about life. Leastways not this life. I love my girls, I do. But we live on a farm. They know they're here to do a job.

MARTINE

You sure give your chickens a lot of credit.

EMMA

It'd be a much better world if more folks listened to their beasts.

MARTINE

(after a time).
Gran?

EMMA

Still right here, Teeny.

MARTINE

Gran, why do you always stay out here in the kitchen when you come to visit us? I never see you in any other rooms of the house.

EMMA

I like this room. It's cozy. Comfortable. A good place to work. Can you see me doing this in your mother's fine front parlor?

MARTINE

But this was your house. Mother grew up here. Didn't Grandpa build this house for you?

EMMA

He did. Your Grandpa began building this house the year after we were married. Trouble is, he was a bit of a perfectionist. Everything had to be the best; everything had to be done right, and since we were dirt broke most of the time, and anyway, had no time for fussing with anything as frivolous as perfection, nothing ever got finished. But when he died, we had a good foundation, the outside walls, a bare bones roof and the studs for the inside. No plaster; no ceilings, but a good footing to start with.

MARTINE

So, you lived in an empty house?

EMMA

It was a roof over our heads. I have to credit your mother for bullying the boys through to finishing the inside. But by the time she was finished with it, it just wasn't home anymore – Well, it wasn't my home. She gussied it up as if she'd been a Nob Hill society miss, not a daughter of egg farmers. Except for the kitchen here. The kitchen she left to me.

MARTINE

Are you ever going to live in your new house?

EMMA
 You know I'm a plain woman.
 (she laughs).
 Fit to be tied, isn't she?

MARTINE
 Yes.

EMMA
 'Spose I'll have to someday.

MARTINE
 You should hold out, if you want my opinion.

EMMA
 Glad you approve.

MARTINE
 Of course. It wouldn't be nearly as convenient for me to visit you there.

EMMA
 Yes. I see.

MARTINE
 Well, I'm off.

EMMA
 Off to torture your subjects?

MARTINE
 Very funny, Gran.

(MARTINE leaves the kitchen and addresses the audience as the scene moves to a rehearsal of the Egg Days pageant).

MARTINE
 It isn't as easy as you think to be a great director. Especially if your clay is just swampy sludge who can't think of anything but what they get to wear and who gets to say the most words.

(RUBY, IMOGENE, PEARL, CHARITY and IDA enter. They are rehearsing the tableau. IDA carries the script and takes notes).

MARTINE
 All right, Pearl, you're Boadicea...

(CHARITY giggles).

MARTINE

And your gesture is –
 (she consults a booklet).
 “Imprecation.”

RUBY and IMOGENE

“Imprecation!”

MARTINE

No, your gesture is –
 (consults booklet).
 “Resigned Appeal to Heaven.”
 (shows them a picture).
 See? – You are Boadicea’s innocent, defenseless daughters.

(IMOGENE and RUBY study the picture).

IMOGENE

Oh, right.

(They strike a second pose).

IMOGENE and RUBY

“Resigned Appeal to Heaven!”

MARTINE

Now, Boadicea, you’re about to...

(CHARITY giggles).

MARTINE

What is so funny?

CHARITY

Pearl’s name. Booh-ha – Boa...
 (she giggles).

MARTINE

Boadicea, queen of the Iceni Tribe of East Anglia.

CHARITY

Whoever heard a name like that? Boadah...
 (She giggles).

MARTINE
Can we please try this again?

CHARITY
It's just funny, that's all.

MARTINE
So, Boadicea –
(Pointedly; to CHARITY, before she can get another word in).
Pearl – you are driving the chariot, your brave daughters by your side.

(RUBY and IMOGENE move to PEARL's side).

PEARL
Where is Mr. Philpot? – Shouldn't Mr. Philpot be here?...

MARTINE
Now, Boadicea, you're about to...

PEARL
Martine, what happened to Mr. Philpot?

MARTINE
Imprecation. Remember? Left arm...

PEARL
(arms akimbo)
Mr. Philpot??

IMOGENE
(aside, to RUBY).
That's not Imprecation.

RUBY
(whispers back to IMOGENE).
That's my mother when she's mad.

PEARL
Where is he? Where is Mr. Philpot?

MARTINE
Mr. Philpot, Mr. Philpot, Mr. Philpot! – Mr. Philpot is no longer with us.

PEARL
You bamboozled him, didn't you, Martine? What did you do to him?

MARTINE

Mr. Philpot had more important matters to attend to and so graciously turned the grave responsibility for this pageant over to *moi*. Now, may we proceed?...

PEARL

Intimidated him...

MARTINE

So, Pearl, you are driving the chariot, and Charity, you enter with your sword held high, leading the Roman marauders.

PEARL

(sotto voce).
Martine the Martinet...

RUBY

Why does Charity get to carry the sword?...

(CHARITY drags the sword along the ground).

MARTINE

No, hold it up!

CHARITY

It's heavy...

MARTINE

You are a ruthless warrior general.

RUBY

I could be a ruthless warrior general!

MARTINE

No, you are Boadicea's brave daughter about to be ravished.

RUBY

I don't want to be ravished. I want to maraud. Let me carry the sword, please?!...

MARTINE

(Cueing CHARITY).
"Give me your beautiful daughters. You cannot defy the Roman Emperor Nero." Now, come on!

CHARITY

Yes, Martine. "Give me..." – I forgot.

RUBY

I could do it!...

MARTINE

(prompting).

“...your beautiful daughters. You cannot defy...”

(beat; waits for CHARITY to remember).

“...the Roman Emperor Nero.”

PEARL

(aside, to RUBY).

You cannot defy the Winlock Emperor Martinus Tyranticus...

RUBY

I could really do it. Charity didn't even want to be in it.

MARTINE

All right. Let's try it again.

(RUTHIE runs in).

RUTHIE

Ruby! Pearl! Imogene! The new Easter bonnets are in at Mr. McGregor's!

RUBY

Really??

RUTHIE

Yes! Come on!

MARTINE

You can't leave! We have to finish this! The pageant is tomorrow!

PEARL

We have to go. That stupid Addie Boots will clear the shelves!

RUTHIE

(to IMOGENE)

Come on! Come on!

(IMOGENE looks at MARTINE).

IMOGENE

Well...

RUTHIE

Come on!

(PEARL, RUBY, IMOGENE and RUTHIE run out).

MARTINE

(Turns to CHARITY and IDA).

Well, at least I know who my friends are.

PEARL

(runs back in).

Charity, are you coming?

(CHARITY looks miserable).

CHARITY

Oh – I am so Sorry, Martine!

(CHARITY follows PEARL out. MARTINE is left with IDA).

MARTINE

(turns to IDA).

Well, don't you want a new Easter bonnet, Aunt Ima?

IDA

It's Ida. But no, nobody'd notice.

MARTINE

(to herself).

Ida! Ida! Right...

IDA

But I should be getting back. Mother will want her tea.

MARTINE

What about your poem? We could practice that.

IDA

I've been thinking about that. I'm not sure...

MARTINE

Oh, you have to do it! It will be the climax of the festival. Such an ironic take on vapid sentiment. A caustic antidote to Mrs. Avery's sugary sweet, mad arias.

(IDA leaves and MARTINE is left alone. She enters the kitchen).

EMMA

You're back early. How did rehearsal go?

MARTINE

Need you ask? I am up against the tragedy of tiny minds.

EMMA

Tell me. Do you want some cocoa?

MARTINE

I want to not care so much.

(MARTINE sits and sulks).

EMMA

Oh, Teeny, when you're done sulking, Mrs. Trilby sent over a note. The new chicks are in. You could go fetch 'em. That'll cheer you up.

MARTINE

No, it won't – But I'll go.

(MRS. TRILBY bustles in as MARTINE enters the Post Office).

MRS. TRILBY

Oh, good, you got my note. I've got them over by the stove to keep them warm.

MARTINE

Thanks, Mrs. Trilby.

(MRS. TRILBY exits and returns immediately with a long low covered box. A few tiny cheeps are heard).

MRS. TRILBY

Some of them have started to hatch, so I'd suggest no stops for sermons on the way home.

MARTINE

Very funny.

MRS. TRILBY

So, I see that professor fellow has arrived. Will I see you tonight?

MARTINE

Why?

MRS. TRILBY

The Lyceum! Your Mother is opening it tonight. With the Professor.

MARTINE

Oh, right. Professor Odd – Odd – Odd-whats-his-name.

MRS. TRILBY

Your mother must be thrilled. She has worked so hard.

MARTINE

I suppose.

MRS. TRILBY

And, of course, they're starting to arrive for the Egg Festival.

MARTINE

Really?!

MRS. TRILBY

Mrs. Carter's near full up – I heard about the run on Easter Bonnets.

MARTINE

Yes, well. Organizing a festival with inexperienced labor is not for the faint of heart.

MRS. TRILBY

No. Well, I'm sure it's going to be an event! All right, you best get these home. Your Gran will be wondering. Now, put one hand on the bottom to support it. They don't make boxes like they used to. This new cardboard. Flimsy stuff.

MARTINE

Thanks, Mrs. Trilby.

(MARTINE exits and makes her way home through the park. RUBY, IMOGENE and CHARITY run in wearing new bonnets).

RUBY

Are those the new chicks?!...

IMOGENE

Can we see 'em??...

MARTINE

Certainly not. They can't be exposed to the cold.

RUBY

Oh, Martine, please?...

CHARITY and IMOGENE

Please?...

IMOGENE

Just a quick peek...

MARTINE

And then I suppose I'm supposed to compliment you on your new hats.

CHARITY

Do you like them?

MARTINE

No. And now if you traitors will excuse me, I must get home with this fragile cargo.

CHARITY

Oh, yes, hurry home, Martine! – Oh, just listen! You can hear them. So sweet!...

RUBY

Come on, let's go sashay in front of Mrs. Carter's. She's put out all the rocking chairs on the porch!

IMOGENE

Yes. We'll find *somebody* who will appreciate our new bonnets.

CHARITY

Bye, Martine! Bye!

(The girls run out. MARTINE continues on through the park. The statues of FOUNDERS and LEWIS and CLARK reassemble, and as she passes by, the FOUNDERS put their hands to their ears, hang onto their lapels and look smug).

FOUNDERS

Egg Capital of the World!

(FOUNDERS return to their original pose as GREAT AUNT T, out for her daily constitutional, is rolled in on her couch by IDA and GREAT UNCLE VICTOR. IDA hears the peeps and runs over).

The new hatchlings??

IDA

(HENRY materializes on the other side of the box and IDA and HENRY find themselves staring at each other over the box of hatchlings. MARTINE, standing between them with her box, looks at IDA; looks at HENRY).

MARTINE

Oh, very well. You two deserve some sort of happiness.

(MARTINE opens the box).

GREAT AUNT T

(gestures toward MARTINE).

What is it? – Oh. Chickens. So glad we are beyond that!

(LEWIS and CLARK lean precariously over to look in the box before returning to their pose).

IDA

Look at how tiny!...

(IDA and HENRY look longingly at the peeping chicks and then longingly at each other. MARTINE smiles as the author of their happiness).

GREAT AUNT T

Onward! – Silly Man! Don't try to push it all by yourself! Where's Ida? – I-d-a-a!

(The spell is broken).

IDA

Yes, mother. Coming.

(IDA and HENRY give each other one more longing glance over the chicks and IDA runs back to help convey her mother out. HENRY follows at a discreet distance. MARTINE returns the lid and, leaving the park, enters the kitchen).

MARTINE

They're already hatching.

EMMA

Oh, good. Let's have a look.

(MARTINE places the box on the table and removes the lid. The sound of the peeps increases. EMMA and MARTINE peer into the box. LOUISA enters. She is dressed in her best, though her shoes seem a bit small).

LOUISA

What's this? Oh, Mother! Your Chicks? Have they come?

(LOUISA joins EMMA and MARTINE peering into the box of new life. It is an echo of the previous picture of HENRY and IDA; this time with EMMA in the center looking on at her daughter and granddaughter. LOUISA and MARTINE look at each other; smile. EMMA looks on at the two).

LOUISA

Ohhh! Aren't they sweet? Martine, look. Look at that one; she's just coming out...

MARTINE

Yes. So small...

(There is a long, sweet moment of connection, and then EMMA breaks the spell).

EMMA

Well, better get them out of the cold. Teeny, go put them by the stove.

(MARTINE exits with the chicks).

EMMA

Why so gussied up? It's only Wednesday.

LOUISA

The Professor is opening the Lyceum today with a lecture on Chopin's musicology.

EMMA

Oh. Right. The library basement.

MARTINE

(returns).

Oh, yes. Mrs. Trilby was saying something about that. I guess I'll go too.

LOUISA

(as they leave).
I wish you wouldn't call him that...

(LOUISA and MARTINE exit. The lights shift to late evening. EMMA sits in the kitchen with her brood. She has been waiting up. LOUISA and MARTINE enter).

LOUISA

It was a disaster!

MARTINE

It was. An absolute disaster.

LOUISA

(hurt).
Really? Do you really think so?

MARTINE

He's going to be of no help to me.

LOUISA

Mother, why didn't you tell me Muriel had come back??

EMMA

Must have forgotten. Never did make much of an impression.

LOUISA

I didn't recognize her at first. I'm afraid I was rather rude.

MARTINE

I thought she was the most interesting person there...

(During the following, as LOUISA narrates her story, MURIEL, VICTORIA, and other attendees enter. A podium is brought in and set in a prominent position).

LOUISA

And that Victoria Wright was watching the whole time.

MARTINE

At least she wasn't afraid to express an opinion...

LOUISA

I thought, who is that woman, squealing and bounding across the room on those slippery Cuban heels?

MURIEL

Yoh hoo! Wheezy! Wheezy, over here!

LOUISA

(to EMMA).

The patent leather all cracked. Too much rouge. She looked somehow familiar, but...
(She is drawn into the scene).

MURIEL

(swats her with her raggedy fox stole).

Wheezy! It's me! Don't you even know your best friend?

MARTINE

(to her mother).

"Wheezy?..."

LOUISA

(to herself).

Muriel? Muriel Waters? Oh, not tonight. No, not tonight, of all nights.

(to MURIEL)

Muriel! Is that you?

MURIEL

Wheezy McGill, don't kid.

MARTINE

(to the audience; the wonder of it).

"Wheezy." My mother.

MURIEL

I know, I know. It's Small, now, o'course.

LOUISA

(trying to be polite).

And nobody's called me Wheezy since...

MURIEL

Me! I came up with it. Sixth grade, remember?

(she laughs).

LOUISA

Yes.

MURIEL

And I'm still Waters. A couple of close calls.

(she laughs).

LOUISA

It's been so long. What – nine, ten years?

MURIEL

I know, life in the big city.

(sees MARTINE).

And is this little Martini? Hi, sweetheart. My but you've grown!

MARTINE

(to the audience).

So, this is the famous stenographer...

LOUISA

(to EMMA).

And then I saw that the Kirbys had joined Victoria and were just standing there, watching.

(back to MURIEL).

Well! What brings you back here?

MURIEL

I came home for the Egg Festival, o'course. Feeling nostalgic you know.

(to MARTINE).

You don't remember Aunt Muriel from the big city? Your Auntie Muriel from Vancouver?

LOUISA

(to EMMA).

I didn't know what to do – Those cracks in the patent leather shoes. The careful mends in her chiffon...

MARTINE

You notice the strangest things...

LOUISA

And that poor fox stole. Moth-eaten...

MARTINE

Oh, I did notice that – One eye missing.

EMMA

So, little Miss Muriel is back. You envied her once. She got out, you said. Made it to the big city.

LOUISA

I know.

(MURIEL draws LOUISA back into the scene).

MURIEL

Shall we find a seat? Pretty swank, huh? Little old Winlock with a – what'd you call it? – a Lyceum! – My golly! What's that when it's at home?

(She laughs).

LOUISA

I'm actually waiting for our guest of honor...

MURIEL

You're in charge? You organized all this?

LOUISA

(to EMMA).

I could feel all eyes on me.

(to MURIEL).

How long is your stay, Muriel?

MURIEL

Didn't your mother tell you?

LOUISA

No.

MURIEL

Silly! I'm back!

LOUISA

Oh.

(to EMMA).

You could have told me. I tried to look gracious...

MARTINE

But you could feel your garden club status slowly sinking away...

LOUISA

(to MARTINE).

Well, you were no help.

MARTINE

(to MURIEL)

Is that because you're broke?...

LOUISA

(to MURIEL)

How unkind of mother not to warn me! – tell me – I could have met you. Where are you staying?

I bet Gran asked her to stay...

MARTINE

(to EMMA)
You didn't!

LOUISA

No, I didn't.

EMMA

At Mrs. Carter's for now. Just 'til I get settled.

MURIEL

Probably could'a put her up at the palace, if I'd thought about it.

EMMA

Well, the lecture was boring.

MARTINE

Uneventful anyway.

LOUISA

The great man not up to your expectations?

EMMA

(PROFESSOR ODDWEILLER enters),

(to EMMA).
Not you too.

LOUISA

(LOUISA greets PROFESSOR ODDWEILLER and leads him to the podium; leads a polite applause as she introduces the speaker).

Professor Dr. Josiah T. Oddweiller!
(beat; back to EMMA).
No. Rather shabby actually. He was properly dressed, of course...

LOUISA

(In a dumb show, The PROFESSOR begins his speech during the following).

Of course...

EMMA

LOUISA

Formal evening dress, and I could tell it had been finely tailored. But it had been made for a larger man. For the man he had once been, I suppose.

MARTINE

You could see all the shiny spots where it was worn out and he'd tried to cover it up with shoe polish.

LOUISA

Yes, Martine.

EMMA

I'm sorry, Wheezy.

MARTINE

(laughs).
"Wheezy."

LOUISA

Oh, why did I put so much stock in this night? What was I hoping for?

MARTINE

Well, I know what I was hoping for. I was hoping he'd be my ticket out of here. I was hoping he'd see my genius and be swept away.

LOUISA

(sighs).
Oh, Martine...

MARTINE

But he was just old.

(LOUISA re-enters the scene and watches in horror as the audience begins to show their boredom and restlessness. Heads bob and fall back; mouths gape. The Lyceum event dissolves as LOUISA returns to the kitchen).

LOUISA

I had depended on this day to – to what? – I don't know.

EMMA

I know...

LOUISA

Of course, he was old! Had he been in his prime would he ever have consented to come here to this backwater town?

EMMA

Oh, daughter...

LOUISA

Would he have bothered if he hadn't been desperate for the few precious dollars the committee managed to squirrel away from the endless bake sales and raffles and undignified carnival games at the Harvest Festival? I could just hear the gossip as the shabby professor droned on...

MARTINE

(to herself_
And on, and on, and on...

LOUISA

Yes, Martine. On and on and on.

EMMA

This isn't like you...

LOUISA

Oh, don't mind me. I'm just tired. My corset's too tight, and these shoes are killing me.
(kicks off her shoes).

EMMA

I don't know why you had to wear those shoes. Your wedding shoes. Surely your feet have grown a bit since then.

LOUISA

Yes, mother. And my waist has expanded too, which is why these stays are jabbing into my ribs.

EMMA

You try so hard...

LOUISA

Yes, I do! I do try. And I deserved this, I did! I was so determined that nothing was going to spoil tonight. And then Muriel comes back. Tonight, of all nights. And I suddenly saw the evening for what it was – Through your cold, clear eyes.

EMMA

Now, Louisa...

LOUISA

And Martine's – Even Worse.

MARTINE

I didn't invite him!...

LOUISA

Oh, what did I expect? This was just a silly, empty exercise of – what? – What would you call it, Martine? – Superficial polite society? I looked down at what I was wearing...

EMMA

Your best frock...

LOUISA

My oldest frock. What's left of my trousseau. And I looked down at my beautiful shoes. The shoes I was married in. The shoes I had so coveted...

EMMA

I remember. You took on extra pupils to afford 'em. The two-step, was it? Gave my girls a thrill.

LOUISA

Yes. And a little French. Fifteen cents a week...

MARTINE

Well, all I know, is that it looks like I'm on my own now.

LOUISA

(the dam breaks).

Oh, Martine, can you never think of anyone but yourself?!?

MARTINE

(surprised, but matter of fact).

No one can.

LOUISA

I have worked *so hard* to bring a little refinement, a little culture to this town. And nobody – nobody! – appreciates it. Least of all my family!

(LOUISA runs off, crying).

MARTINE

Well, I didn't mean –

EMMA

What? What didn't you mean?

MARTINE

Oh, I don't know! – Aren't you going to go after her?

EMMA

Cyrus could have – Your Grandpa could have. He loved his girls. And they loved him. Your Mama and little Mary.

MARTINE

She's never talked about her – I know she died.

EMMA

Mm. Just shy of seven.

MARTINE

What happened?

EMMA

Scarlet Fever. Swept through Winlock in the fall of '82. And then Cyrus followed her right into the grave with the new year. Didn't see the territory become a state. He was so soft, your grandpa, and he didn't have enough grit or sense to know that your Mama needed him just as much our little Mary had. Maybe it was then that I lost her too.

MARTINE

Mother?

EMMA

Oh, she became a proper little miss, sorry to say. Closed off most of her heart and got through by following rules and copying all the swells in town. And called that life. Now, I don't mean to criticize your mother. She's had a lot to contend with.

MARTINE

You mean me.

EMMA

I mean you, and I mean me, and this town, and the loss of your daddy when she was so young and hopeful.

MARTINE

She loved him.

EMMA

Yes. And he loved you. Just like your Grandpa Cyrus loved his girls.
(beat).

Menfolk can do that. They have that privilege.

MARTINE

To love their children?

EMMA

Aye. To dote on their little shadows.

MARTINE

Why is that?

EMMA

Oh, I don't know. We don't have the time, I guess. Men work a twelve, fourteen-hour day and come home. Women –

MARTINE

“A woman's work is never done.”

EMMA

Something like that. Now, take Cyrus and me. No great romance. But we got on. Gave each other a place to stay and something to do. It'd be stretching it to say we gave each other a home – But Cyrus loved his girls, and they loved him, and I guess that was enough. They had me to give 'em structure and discipline, and they had Cyrus to fuss over 'em. To love 'em.

MARTINE

But you must have loved them. They were your children...

EMMA

Oh, I suppose. I loved them in the way that I wouldn't let them do anything foolish. I loved them in the way of making sure they were fed and had on clean clothes when they started off for school. I loved them by beating some “Yes, ma'ams” and “No ma'ams” into 'em at an early age. But Cyrus – He gave them his whole heart. And because he did, it broke right in two when our little Mary left us.

MARTINE

And mother?

EMMA

Cried for two weeks. And then she was done. She closed that door to her heart and became a proper little so and so. Her mouth took on that prim little pucker she gets sometimes when she's re-assessing me and you and her home and her life.

MARTINE

Oh, I know that look...

EMMA

It was your mother made us move into this unfinished house. And she bullied my brother and his two boys to come all the way down from Tacoma to finish it. Ans she made it her own. Except for this room. Is it any wonder I choose to stay in here with my girls? There isn't room for me in the rest of this house; only room for prim, proper thoughts and buttoned-down feelings.

(LOUISA enters and listens in the shadows).

EMMA (continued).

And that's how it was until a handsome gambler from New York came to town. When she took a chance, and opened her heart up again.

MARTINE

My father.

EMMA

My, oh my! That Martin Small was going to do great things for this little town! And he was exotic. An easterner, with a college education. Your mother never asked him why he had come all the way out here. I don't think she wanted to know. And this seemed just fine with Martin Small.

MARTINE

But when he died –

EMMA

When he died, he took your mama's dreams with him. And she crawled back into that shell of good manners and proper behavior.

(beat).

All I'm saying, I guess, is we all get through difficult times each in our own way.

(beat).

I did my best. But of course, it wasn't enough. It never is when you're the mother.

(LOUISA emerges from the shadows).

LOUISA

No, it's never enough.

(There is a long silence EMMA decides not to fill).

LOUISA (continued).

I had dreams. What's wrong with that?

EMMA

Nothing at all, daughter. But if Martin hadn't died a saint...

LOUISA

He wasn't a saint!...

EMMA

No. And I know why you liked him. Handsome. Educated. His hands and nails always so clean!...

LOUISA

I liked that about him.

EMMA

Even with all the work on the farm. A vest and tie every day. Never saw him out of a suit...

LOUISA

He had bigger things to think about than just this farm.

EMMA

Oh, wasn't that the truth...

LOUISA

He brought things to this little town...

EMMA

Oh, yes. Pipe dreams and promises for everybody!

LOUISA

You don't know what he could have accomplished – What *We* could have accomplished.

EMMA

No. You're right.

(beat).

I just wish you could let go, that's all.

LOUISA

It seems to me you're the one who can't let go – Always bringing him up.

EMMA

Yes! Because you won't! You keep everything in – everything all bottled up! Buttoned down!

LOUISA

Oh, and you've set such a fine example!...

EMMA

All right, don't let it out. Stay unhappy!

(A stand-off. There is a silence).

MARTINE

I'm sorry the Great Man – I mean, Professor Odd – whatever – Wasn't so great. – I mean, I'm sorry he didn't live up to your expectations.

LOUISA

It was foolish to pin so many of my hopes there.

(tries again).
It was understandable...

MARTINE

It's done.

LOUISA

(quietly).
Buttoned up. Buttoned down.

MARTINE

Teeny...

EMMA

I beg your pardon?

LOUISA

Nothing. I –

MARTINE

EMMA
Tomorrow's Teeny's festival. We'll all feel better if we get some sleep.

(Lights fade. After a moment, we hear the excited buzz of a crowd and lights come up on the Egg Festival. The scene opens with the last falling notes of MRS. AVERY's aria. MRS. AVERY makes a deep gracious curtsy to tepid applause and exits with a dramatic flourish. PEARL, RUBY, IMOGENE and CHARITY, in bedsheet togas and carrying shields enter as Boadicea, her daughters and a Roman General and strike a dramatic pose. There is applause, and then the figures move, to a gasp and more applause. The figures break the frozen tableau once again, and begin to move across the stage. The COMPANY, *en masse*, look out toward the audience. Another collective gasp. MARTINE, the Great Director is thrilled. She stands off to one side where she can watch both the stage and the audience. CHARITY lifts her sword, starts to speak; freezes).

MARTINE
(cueing CHARITY).
"Give me..."

CHARITY

Give me...

MARTINE

“Give me your beautiful daughters.” Hold up the sword! – Turn around!!

CHARITY

Give me your beautiful daughters. Hold up the sword! Turn around!

MARTINE

No! You hold up the sword!...

CHARITY

No, you hold up the...

MARTINE

“You cannot defy the Roman Emperor Nero...”

CHARITY

What?...

MARTINE

(sotto voce).
“You cannot” – Pearl! Just go!

(PEARL, who carries a long spear, strikes a new pose and holds it. During the following, PEARL’s speech will be punctuated by several classic “Delsarte” gestures).

PEARL as Boadicea

“You see before you one whom our enemies scorn as only a weak and useless creature, a woman. But you know, people of Britain that your women have never been weaklings. You have fought many a battle under her leadership. But, it is not as a woman descended from noble ancestry, but as one of the people that I avenge my lost freedom, my scourged body, the outraged chastity of my daughters...”

(Another collective gasp from the festival audience).

PEARL (continued).

“This is a woman’s resolve – Win the battle, or perish. As for you men, live and be slaves if that is what you choose.”

(She raises her spear in triumph).

“Heaven is on the side of righteous vengeance!”

RUBY

(sotto voce; to MARTINE).
Now??

MARTINE

(Whispering).
Now!

(RUBY, IMOGENE and PEARL flip their shields. “Votes for Women!” is scrawled across each shield in a patriotic red, white and blue design. THE COMPANY turns toward the audience, and gasps).

RUBY, IMOGENE and PEARL

Votes for Women!

CHARITY

(belatedly flips her shield).
Votes for women!

(PEARL, RUBY, IMOGENE and CHARITY run out. There is a scatter of applause. During the following, and much to the interest of the audience, GREAT AUNT T. is brought in on her couch and set down in a place of honor to watch the pageant. GREAT UNCLE VICTOR sits beside her and takes her hand; she gently, but firmly brushes him off).

MARTINE

(to EMMA)
What did you think of Pearl’s speech? I was thinking of you when I planned that part.

EMMA

Thank you, Teeny. I’ll know what to say if I ever have to avenge your honor.

MARTINE

Oh, Shhh! Here comes the next part. You’ll love this, Gran...

(RUBY, now dressed as a Victorian gentleman in a luxurious handlebar mustache and pillow potbelly enters and sits at the table).

RUBY as THE VICTORIAN GENTLEMAN

Bring me my wife!

(CHARITY and IMOGENE struggle under the weight of a huge covered platter and place it on the table in front of

THE VICTORIAN GENTELMAN. RUBY twirls her mustachios as CHARITY removes the cover to reveal IDA, dressed in a turn of the last century woolen bathing costume with rolled down stockings, or some other inappropriate costume. She wears a broad sash that reads, "Votes for Women." THE COMPANY once again, looks out at the audience and, as one, gasp, when they see her. IMOGENE and CHARITY exit. THE VICTORIAN GENTLEMAN produces a large cigar. IDA lays on the table and pretends to light it. After a moment, IDA pushes THE VICTORIAN GENTLEMAN off his chair and stands triumphantly on top of the table).

IDA

Votes for women!

(THE VICTORIAN GENTLEMAN quickly exits with a melodramatic flourish. When IDA looks out over the audience, her bravado quickly dissolves and she looks at MARTINE for support. During the following, HENRY will enter and watch from the edge of the crowd).

IDA

(whispers).
I don't think I can do it.

MARTINE

You can! You can!
(to the audience; taking on the role of the Master of Ceremonies).
And now a dramatic reading by Mrs. Henry Sweet.

IDA

I can't!

MARTINE

Come out of the shadows, Aunt Ida!
(as the MC).
An original poem, "Never Let Love Go."
(gestures an introduction).
Mrs. Henry Sweet.

(MARTINE begins an enthusiastic applause. IDA haltingly begins her recitation. It is barely audible).

Oh, never let Love go,
 Love go,
 Love go.

IDA

(IDA looks over at MARTINE, who gives her an encouraging wave. IDA's voice will gain strength and volume as the poem goes on).

IDA (continued).

No, Never let Love go.
 The Way of the World
 The Hard World
 The Cruel World
 Down that Path
 Now o'ergrown
 The Rutts o'er run
 With weeds
 With rocks
 With ancient dust.

Never Let your Heart
 Be Claimed
 By Duties
 Not Earned
 By What ifs
 How To's

(HENRY comes out of the shadows and as IDA sees him, her confidence and courage swells).

IDA (continued).

That Cautionary Tale
 Was Written by a Fool
 Who never Loved
 Never Lived
 And Never Wanted to
 (beat).
 Or Never Wanted You to

Say instead to Love
 Why Not Me?
 Why Not us?
 To Hell with Mother...

(echoing IDA).
 “To hell with mother!...

HENRY

(The COMPANY gasps and all look at AUNT T. on her couch. GREAT UNCLE VICTOR tries to take his wife’s hand; she angrily slaps it away. As IDA becomes more confident and involved in her recitation, MARTINE, the great director, beams).

To Hell with Dad

IDA (continued).

To hell with Dad!...

HENRY

To Hell with Thee and Thou!
 Never Let Love Go
 No Matter What the Cost
 It stays with You
 It must be Fed
 It must be given
 It’s Bread.

IDA

Oh, Never Let Love Go
 No Matter What the Price
 For the Price You Pay
 To Let it Go
 Is Dearer
 At Best
 Than All the Rest

If You Let Love Go –
 If you –
 If You Let Your Love Go –

(There is an awful silence. IDA looks at HENRY. He stands and begins clapping. Tears are running down his face. As he starts for her, IDA runs to him, grabs him by the hand, leading him off through the stunned COMPANY. An inspired MR. PERKINS breaks the spell and impulsively turns toward LOUISA and kisses her).

MARTINE

It's Ironic! Doesn't anyone understand?? It's ironic!!...

(Stunned, LOUISA raises her hand to slap MR. PERKINS).

MARTINE (continued).

Mr. Perkins! Unhand my...

(LOUISA stops mid-slap; smiles at MR. PERKINS).

MARTINE (continued).

Mother?

(LOUISA pats his hand. GREAT UNCLE VICTOR looks hopefully at GREAT AUNT T. who gives him a steely "Don't-even-think-about-it" glare. MR. PERKINS looks mortified. LOUISA continues to pat his hand in a motherly way).

LOUISA

Oh, Mr. Perkins! You're overcome. You must have thought I was your dear Martine...

MARTINE (continued).

Doesn't anybody see? It's – Ironic! –

(MR. PERKINS looks helplessly, longingly, lovingly at LOUISA. MARTINE studies MR. PERKINS' long look at her mother, and GREAT UNCLE VICTOR's toward GREAT AUNT T.).

MARTINE (continued).

Oh! – Oh, I give up!

(MARTINE, disgusted by the display of romantic excess glares at the spectators, and then stalks off. GREAT AUNT T. is carried off and the crowd disperses discussing the event with gleeful disapproval. The scene returns to the kitchen. EMMA, MARTINE and LOUISA enter in silence. There is a long pause).

MARTINE

(after a time).

Tell me it wasn't a complete disaster!

EMMA

Well – It was an event, Teeny, that’s sure. You got their attention.

MARTINE

It was a complete disaster! Nobody understood it!

LOUISA

(after a time; trying to be helpful).

Griselda Avery was in better voice today, don’t you think?

MARTINE

Et tu, Brute? Even my own mother! Nobody understood it.

(MARTINE slumps down in a chair).

LOUISA

Well – I’m sorry darling. Your pageant, my Lyceum...

MARTINE

How can you compare the two??

(LOUISA sighs and turns to her flowers).

EMMA

Well, never mind. Better luck next time.

MARTINE

Are you making fun?

EMMA

No, dearie. I’m sorry it didn’t go the way you wanted it to.

MARTINE

Well, if there is a next time, No Averys! And no Charity Thyme –

(turns on LOUISA).

No matter how much better you like her than me!

(MARTINE runs out).

LOUISA

What is she talking about? I don’t – Should I – ?

EMMA

Leave her be.

(There is a light shift to late evening. We see the Small family kitchen, center, and parts of the surrounding town. A full moon. MARTINE, seated at the kitchen table is staring out, her focus fixed on something. EMMA enters; studies her for a moment).

EMMA

Teeny, what are you doing?

MARTINE

Watching that stupid fly trying to get out. Stupid fly.

EMMA

You couldn't help him I suppose.

(beat. MARTINE has not moved her gaze).

But maybe you'd rather just watch him struggle.

MARTINE

I tried to help him. I opened the door – twice – but he wouldn't leave. He just keeps buzzing and buzzing and beating against the screen. Stupid fly.

EMMA

(studying MARTINE).

Uh huh. Some creatures never learn, I guess.

MARTINE

I guess.

(MARTINE gets up from the table; begins to pace).

EMMA

Still lost in your pageant?

MARTINE

It could have been so great. It should have been great!

(LOUISA enters during the following).

EMMA

Your genius wasted.

MARTINE

Don't make fun.

EMMA

No.

MR. PERKINS

No! Maybe not everyone understood everything. But –

MARTINE

But, what?? You need to speak up, Mr. Perkins.

MR. PERKINS

Well – Well, I thought your choice of Boadicea and the tyranny of the Roman Empire as a parallel for our time – Well, I thought that was very apt.

(MARTINE, for once, is struck dumb).

MARTINE

You liked it?

MR. PERKINS

Very much.

MARTINE

Really?

(studies him).

Well – You weren't exactly in the top tier of my intended audience – But – Thank you.

MR. PERKINS

Oh, Martine! You've given me courage! Do you think I have a chance?

MARTINE

For what?

MR. PERKINS

The highest calling. Love!

MARTINE

Not with me!...

(MR. PERKINS looks horrified).

MR. PERKINS

No! Louisa.

MARTINE

My mother?? – Oh.

MR. PERKINS

Yes, your mother. Your beautiful mother. Your generous mother. Your angelic...

MARTINE

Yes, yes.

(beat).

Well, I suppose I should have noticed.

(beat).

You really care for her?

MR. PERKINS

I do. I do.

MARTINE

Well, *that*, you'll have to save that for Reverend Winters, But, all right.

MR. PERKINS

You'll help?!

MARTINE

Yes. Mother really does need a life. But you need to buck up.

MR. PERKINS

Yes. Yes, I'll buck up! – How?

MARTINE

Well, for one thing, you need to stop being such a shillyshally scaredy-cat.

MR. PERKINS

Yes. Yes. Oh – I know, I know!

MARTINE

And you need to tell her how you feel. Mother needs a direct assault. She doesn't pick up on subtle hints. Goodness knows, I've tried...

MR. PERKINS

Direct assault. Right. No subtlety.

(LOUISA enters with the flowers in a vase).

LOUISA

These are beautiful flowers, Mr. Perkins. Aren't they, Martine?

(There is a long silence. MR. PERKINS is fixed and frozen).

MARTINE

Oh! Must I do everything?? Mother!

(MARTINE takes LOUISA by the shoulders and guides her to face MR. PERKINS).

MARTINE (continued).

Mr. Perkins has something to say to you.

LOUISA

Oh, Martine! Did you say yes? Oh, I'm so happy for you both!...

MARTINE

(to the audience).

Oh, we're back to obtuse.

(to LOUISA).

No, dear Mother, *you* need to say, "Yes."

(prompting a still stunned MR. PERKINS).

Mr. Perkins, will you speak?

MR. PERKINS

Yes. Uhhh – I mean – Uhhh, uhhh...

MARTINE

Oh, this is ridiculous! Mother, Mr. Perkins wants to ask you to go out and enjoy the full moon with him. He has brought these flowers for *you*. He comes to supper to see *you*. He wants to marry *you*.

LOUISA

Me?!

EMMA

You, darling girl.

(MR. PERKINS looks hopeful).

LOUISA

It must be Martine...

EMMA

He's too old for Martine, Right, Mr. Perkins?

(MR. PERKINS looks stunned).

LOUISA

A few years – I mean –
(confidentially).

He's so much younger than I am.

EMMA

A few years. You can die together. What do you think, Will?

(MR. PERKINS nods and grins).

LOUISA

Mother!

MARTINE

It's a known fact, women live longer than men.

(hands LOUISA her hat).

All right. Here you are. Off you go.

(MARTINE takes one of LOUISA's hands and one of MR. PERKINS' and joins them together, and then gently pushes them out the back door).

EMMA

Nicely done, Teeny.

MARTINE

Well, I guess I hope they're happy. But I have to do everything around here!

EMMA

A woman's lot, Teeny, a woman's lot.

(beat).

Teeny –

MARTINE

What?

EMMA

You don't – fancy Mr. Perkins, do you?

MARTINE

Mr. Perkins?? No! He's old!

(beat).

And not very brave.

EMMA

But today...

MARTINE

You mean mother.

(beat).

I think he really likes her. Do you think she likes him?

EMMA
 Would it be so bad if she did?

MARTINE
 (suddenly the little girl).
 Oh, Gran!

EMMA
 Yes.

MARTINE
 What's going to become of me??

EMMA
 Oh, Teeny. Come here.

(We hear the gentle clucking of EMMA's chickens.
 MARTINE joins the flock around EMMA's knees, leans
 against her and puts her head in her grandmother's lap.)

MARTINE
 What could I have done? – There's nothing I could have done!

EMMA
 Oh, Teeny. You buzz and you buzz and just get all tired out.

MARTINE
 I'm not a fly.

EMMA
 No.

MARTINE
 Well, what would you have me do??

EMMA
 Just rest a bit, before you fly against that screen again.

MARTINE
 Oh, Gran.

EMMA
 I know, Teeny. I know.

(MARTINE rests in EMMA's lap. Outside, under the full moon, MR. PERKINS and LOUISA stand in the moonlight. IDA and HENRY enter DR. GREAT UNCLE VICTOR wheels in GREAT AUNT T. on her couch. MR. PERKINS takes LOUISA's hand and kisses her. HENRY takes IDA's hands; kisses her. GREAT UNCLE VICTOR tries to take GREAT AUNT T's hand. She smiles and slaps at him playfully. He smiles back. He leans in – a moment of hesitation – and kisses her on the cheek. He offers her his hand and helps her rise from the couch. They dance in the privacy of their parlor. MARTINE suddenly sits up).

MARTINE

You know, I may be able to use that doodle sop, Charity Thyme next year. I just have to work it into the plot; make sure she doesn't open her mouth. At least she tries to do what I tell her. And I have to admit, that Ruby, however booby-ish, is enthusiastic. Pearl's not half-foolish, but she needs to be controlled. She could be a rival. Now, Aunt Ida, Aunt Ida is a real find. And now that I've freed her from captivity – Yes! This might work.

(She gets up. We hear the chickens protest as she does so).

Chickens! Always chickens! Silence, you fowl, if you don't want to be floating in dumplings! Shoo! Go away!

EMMA

Well, stop bobbing about; they think you're going to feed them.

MARTINE

I have nothing for you!

(She opens her hands. The chickens cluck).

Stupid hens!

(begins pacing; after a time).

Gran.

EMMA

Right here, as always, Teeny.

MARTINE

What do you think about a war on corsets for next year? "Freeing the Female Form." Or – "The Corset: Constricted Bodies, Constricted Lives!"

EMMA

(stands).

Whatever the title, I'm sure, you'll make it interesting.

(The noise of the chickens escalates during the following).

MARTINE

Yes –

(runs into a chicken or two).

Chickens! Is there never a moment's escape?? I must plan. I must think! I must think!!!...

(MARTINE hugs her grandmother and the lights fade amid the escalating din of the chickens).

end of play.