

A GREEN UMBRELLA

Book & Lyrics by Loren Lester

Music by Jeffrey Silverman

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c 2019

OVERTURE.

(A ghost light illuminates a blank stage and a chair. Simple set pieces will be used to suggest various hotel rooms, apartments, and the Wisconsin home of The Lunts. Everything should feel like we're in the middle of rehearsals for a new show.)

(During the Overture, NOEL COWARD - yes, *that* Noel Coward - enters and sits on the chair next to the ghost light. He looks troubled and there's a cloud of melancholy. He takes out a cigarette, puts it into a cigarette holder and lights it. After he takes a couple of puffs, the OVERTURE ends and the STAGE LIGHTS come up revealing a piano. NOEL announces:)

NOEL

All right, everyone - we're back. Let's run the Act I rewrites. Can we please have someone remove this?

(He points at the ghost light. No response from anywhere so he sighs and removes the ghost light himself. He crosses to the piano where he has a script, pencils, pens and loose sheets of music paper.)

NOEL

Places, please!

(ALFRED LUNT, fifty-something but still matinee-idol handsome, pokes his head in from one of the wings. He looks ridiculous in a WWI 'doughboy' soldier's uniform, and helmet.)

ALFRED

Where are we starting?

NOEL

(announcing for everyone) We'll begin with her entrance!

ALFRED

Ah-hah.

*(ALFRED crosses to center stage as NOEL sits at his piano and starts making notes in his script. LYNN FONTANNE - older than Alfred but you'd never know it because she is constantly so poised and elegant - suddenly runs in from one of the wings, dressed as "Kate" from *The Taming of the Shrew*.)*

LYNN

(as "Kate" - sweeping dramatically toward Alfred)

Fie, fie, unknit that threat'ning unkind brow

And dart not scornful glances from those eyes...

(she suddenly becomes aware of ALFRED's WWI costume)

What the hell are you wearing?!

ALFRED

Darling, I was about to ask you the same thing.

LYNN

Aren't we doing the scene from *Taming of the Shrew*?

ALFRED

No, darling, we're doing the scene where we first meet.

LYNN

I distinctly heard my cue: 'begin with her.'

ALFRED

Noelie said 'begin with her'...*entrance*.

LYNN

(weary) Oh, Alfred, why must we go in chronological order?

ALFRED

Because it's less confusing to the audience if we do.

LYNN

We should start in the present and go backwards in time. That would be more interesting.

ALFRED

That might be interesting in a play but it will never work in a musical.

NOEL

Please just make a quick change, and do the scene where you first met!

(THE LUNTS overlap one another, almost talking to themselves rather than each other, a hallmark of the their' onstage comic genius.)

LYNN

Act One is a mess, you know that -

ALFRED

Noelie will fix it - that's his job.

LYNN

But...

ALFRED

He'll fix it. Now hurry up and change your costume.

LYNN

Just like summer stock, you never know which show you're doing, until you're practically onstage...

ALFRED

Darling, please...

LYNN

And why must we do a *musical*?

ALFRED

(gently ushering her offstage) We've never done a musical, that's why.

LYNN

(muttering as she exits) I don't even want my private life discussed, let alone set to a song and dance....

ALFRED

(calling after her) Nothing sells like musical-comedy!

(He calls out to the light booth above the audience.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

And speaking of comedy, I really need more light. Comedy isn't funny in the dark.

(Another bank of LIGHTS comes on, much too bright.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(blinded, stumbling backwards) Agh! Go back!

(The LIGHTS split the difference)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(pauses to adjust his eyesight) That's better.

(LYNN re-enters having done a miraculous quick change. She's now wearing an elegant art deco gown, all silk and glitter, carrying a tray with two martinis. She offers the tray to ALFRED. They stare at each other. Silence.)

LYNN

(calling out) Line!

ALFRED

It isn't your line, darling.

(ALFRED gives her "the once over", looking at her gown.)

LYNN

What? You don't like the dress?

ALFRED

No...I like the dress. But you're wearing the wrong dress.

LYNN

What?! Aren't we doing the scene when our characters first meet?

ALFRED

No, we're doing the scene where Alfred meets Lynn for the first time. Act 1? Scene 1?

LYNN

(annoyed) Ohhhh....

NOEL

Lynn, please hurry along and change...

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER3 takes the tray away from LYNN who grabs one of the 'martinis' and drinks the whole thing as if it were a shot glass.)

LYNN

G-d, I wish that was real.

(ALFRED again ushers her toward the wings and they overlap as they speak.

ALFRED

Now hurry along and change...

LYNN

But you like the dress?

ALFRED

Yes, yes...

LYNN

Is it lovely?

ALFRED

(with growing annoyance) Yes, yes...

LYNN

Does it look lovely in the light?

ALFRED

It's perfect.

LYNN

The dress or the lights?

(ALFRED practically pushes her offstage and then shouts after her:)

ALFRED

The dress *and* the LIGHTS!

(Someone up in the lightbooth thinks that this is a cue and the LIGHTS come on full again, blinding ALFRED.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(points at the light booth and yells:) Agh! Not you!

(The bright bank of LIGHTS goes out again, restoring the stage to the correct setting. Even faster than before, LYNN re-enters having undergone another amazing quick change. She's shed the art deco gown and wears a simple dress circa 1919. ALFRED is silent as he stares at her.)

LYNN

Oh, no, please don't tell me it's the wrong costume.

ALFRED

No, it's the right one.

LYNN

Line!

ALFRED

It isn't your line.

LYNN

So why are you staring at me?

ALFRED

Because you look exactly like the girl I fell in love with. On the day I first saw you.

(We hear the intro vamp to I LOVE THE THEATRE.)

LYNN

Is that our cue to sing the first song?

NOEL

(frustrated) Yes!

LYNN

Noelie, it's just a "silly little ditty," don't you think?

ALFRED

It's not bad.

LYNN

The lyrics you've written are too simple.

ALFRED
Not very deep.

NOEL
I'm still working on it!

LYNN
I like the music.

ALFRED
Me, too.

NOEL
(getting angry) Since this a *rehearsal*, could you please try and *rehearse*?!

I LOVE THE THEATRE

ALFRED
(emphasizing each "Sh")
I LOVE SHAKESPEARE,
I LOVE SHERWOOD,
I LOVE SHAW -

LYNN
"YESH" YOU DO...

ALFRED
I LOVE THE THEATRE...
BUT I LOVE YOU MORE.

LYNN
(spoken) Are you sure? *(sings:)*
I LOVE HALF HOUR,
I LOVE "PLACES"...

ALFRED
I LOVE REHEARSALS.

LYNN
(spoken) G-d, you do...

ALFRED

I LOVE THE THEATRE -
BUT I LOVE YOU MORE.

LYNN

*(spoken)*You do? *(sings:)*
YOU LOVE APPLAUSE,
AND CROWDS,
AND TOUR-R-R-ING.

ALFRED

BUT WITHOUT YOU -
IT WOULD BE “BOORING”.

LYNN

*(spoken)*That doesn't rhyme...*(sings:)*
YOU LOVE...

ALFRED

YOU -

LYNN

YOU LOVE YOU.

ALFRED

NO, I MEAN YOU.

LYNN

I THINK YOU DO.

ALFRED

(moving closer to LYNN) I LOVE THE THEATRE!

LYNN

(moving closer to ALFRED) I LOVE THE THEATRE!

(The music stops and they sing a cappella)

ALFRED

(erotic) I SPELL IT WITH AN ‘ER’...

LYNN

(more erotic) I SPELL IT WITH AN ‘RE’...

(They enjoy a passionate kiss.)

ALFRED & LYNN

I LOVE THE THEATRE -
BUT I LOVE...YOU...MORE!

(They kiss again. NOEL has had enough of this.)

NOEL

Going on?

(ALFRED and LYNN stare into each other's eyes.)

NOEL (CONT')

Going on?!!

ALFRED

(pause) Yes.

LYNN

(pause) Yes.

ALFRED

(pause) If we must.

NOEL

Places!!!

(NOEL breaks their trance. ALFRED exits into the wings as LYNN and all six members of the ENSEMBLE take their positions for ALFRED's entrance. They are dressed in high 1920's fashion - F. Scott Fitzgerald would be proud.)

NOEL

We'll take it from the line, "Lynn Fontanne, I'd like you to meet Alfred Lunt."

ENSEMBLE MEMBER 2

Lynn Fontanne, I'd like you to meet Alfred Lunt.

(ALFRED enters, and attempts to bow while he's in the middle of walking and trips.)

The helmet falls off his head and when he tries to catch it before it clangs to the floor, he does a huge pratfall and slides across the freshly waxed stage, ending up at LYNN's feet. After a moment, and still flat on his back, he offers a handshake to LYNN. After a pause she takes his hand and says:)

LYNN

(very proper and British) How d'do?

NOEL

Good lord, did it really happen like that?

ALFRED & LYNN

Yes!

NOEL

No one is going to believe it.

LYNN

Oh, Noe!ie, our entire life has been unbelievable.

NOEL

That's what I'm afraid of -

(BLACKOUT. In the BLACKOUT WE HEAR NOEL:)

NOEL (CONT'D)

Wait, wait, lights up!

(LIGHTS COME UP.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

I'm inserting the scene right here where the two of you fell in love.

LYNN

Why?

NOEL

Sex is naturally and always will be the fundamental root of good drama. Can I get the sides, please?

(ENSEMBLE3 enters with two sets of “sides” cut from the main script. He hands them to ALFRED & LYNN and exits. This is the first time they’ve seen this song.)

ALFRED

What’s the scene about?

NOEL

I told you - sex! And summer stock. And the two almost always go together.

LYNN

It’s a wonderful place to fall in love.

NOEL

Yes, we’re going back to the very *moment* you fell in love.

LYNN

Those warm, romantic summer nights..

ALFRED

As I recall, it was a blistering heat wave.

LYNN

That’s true. They had to cut the season short because it was too hot for the audience.

ALFRED

Nothing like the humidity in Washington, D.C.

(Pause.)

NOEL

And?

ALFRED

And...what?

NOEL

Are you going to read the scene or give me a weather report?

ALFRED

Ah...yes.

(He looks down at the sides but only for a moment, then he turns to LYNN:)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

What were the plays we did that summer?

LYNN

Let's see - there was one called *A Young Man's Fancy*...

NOEL

No, no, no! I don't want to hear about the plays you did forty years ago! Can't you two do anything other than talk about the theatre?!

ALFRED

(looks down at the sides) Of course we can...

LYNN

(looks at her own sides) Don't be silly.

(Pause.)

NOEL

Well?

LYNN

Well, what?

ALFRED

It wasn't a very good play.

ALFRED

No.

LYNN

About a boy who falls in love with a mannequin.

NOEL

Stop it! Stop it at once!

(Pause. Then:)

ALFRED

A few good laugh lines.

LYNN

Not many.

NOEL

I...give...up!

ALFRED

We can't help it, Noelle! Theatre is the reason we fell in love. But we talked about other things...

LYNN

A million other things.

(NOEL starts to write this all down.)

ALFRED

In between all those kisses.

LYNN

Ahhh - those long carriage rides through the city.

ALFRED

Past the White House and the Capitol Building...

LYNN

That you mistook for the White House...

ALFRED

(chuckles) I was just a boy from Milwaukee - what did I know?

LYNN

You were a young, innocent boy - but you certainly knew what it took to put on a good play.

ALFRED

I should have directed that year.

(Frustrated, NOEL slams down his pencil.)

NOEL

Stop!!

LYNN

Oh, sorry, Noemie. There we go again.

ALFRED

Here's the thing, Noemie. The *moment* we fell in love...well, you're not going to like it.

LYNN

We were running lines.

THAT'S YOUR CUE

(The intro vamp begins. They don't sing. They stare at each other. Palpable passion. The music stops, and they are vaguely aware of this. They break their reverie and look down at the script pages in their hands.)

ALFRED

THAT'S YOUR CUE

LYNN

(spoken) Oh, sorry.

ALFRED

IT'S ALL RIGHT, DEAR LYNN, BEGIN AGAIN.

LYNN

(spoken) What's my line?

ALFRED

I WISH I KNEW.

LYNN

(looks at her script) I THINK IT'S YOUR LINE.

ALFRED

(looks at his script) NO IT'S NOT.

LYNN

THAT WAS YOUR CUE.

ALFRED

YOU KNOW I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LINES.

LYNN

WELL I CAN'T EITHER.

ALFRED

THAT'S FINE.

LYNN

(wipes her forehead) I GUESS IT'S JUST THE WEATHER.

ALFRED

(offers her a handkerchief) YES, I SEEM TO HAVE A BLOCK.

LYNN

TWICE AS HARD TO DO IN SUMMER.

ALFRED

APROPOS - IT'S SUMMER STOCK.

(The music gets a little faster - they try to concentrate on their work.)

LYNN

THAT'S YOUR CUE.

ALFRED

(looks at his script) Are you sure?

LYNN

WISH I WERE, BUT NOW I'M NOT.

ALFRED

(points at her script) THAT'S YOUR CUE.

LYNN

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT.

ALFRED
SO FROM THE TOP...

LYNN
WHAT WAS MY CUE?

ALFRED
LET'S START ANEW.

LYNN
I'M OVERCOME BY THE HEAT.

(She feels faint, he catches her.)

ALFRED
YOU NEED SOME REST - TAKE A SEAT.

LYNN
THAT'S YOUR CUE TO COME AND KISS ME.

ALFRED
NO, THAT'S NOT HERE IN THE SCRIPT.

LYNN
SO YOUR CHARACTER WON'T KISS ME?

ALFRED
OH - I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

(The music gets very fast and they're both so nervous
that they overlap each other with the lyrics:)

ALFRED
THAT'S YOUR CUE, I FEEL QUITE
CERTAIN.

LYNN
NO, IT'S YOURS I AM QUITE SURE.

ALFRED
IT'S YOUR CUE.

LYNN
NO, IT'S ON YOU.

ALFRED
OH, NO IT'S NOT.

LYNN
TO COME AND KISS ME.

ALFRED
OH, I SEE - YES I FORGOT

LYNN
THAT WAS YOUR CUE.

ALFRED
I JUST KEEP MISSING THE CLUES.

(They toss aside their scripts.)

LYNN
WE SHOULD TRY TO JUST IM-PRO-
VISE...

ALFRED
STOP THE TALK AND START THE
ACTION.

LYNN
YOU KNOW THAT LINE SHOULD BE
MINE -

ALFRED
IN THE SCRIPT THERE IS NO
PASSION.

ALFRED
THE SHOW WILL SOON BE OPEN

LYNN
WE SHOULD TRY AND MEM-OR-IZE

ALFRED
BUT I'D RATHER KISS YOUR LIPS -

LYNN
AND LOOK DEEP INTO YOUR EYES.

(They kiss. The music slows down.)

ALFRED
REHEARSAL'S THROUGH.

LYNN
IT LOOKS LIKE I'M IN LOVE.

ALFRED
AND SO NOW - WHAT SHOULD I
DO?

LYNN
YOU SAY YOUR LINE - THAT
YOU'RE IN LOVE.

ALFRED
OH, I SEE - I LOVE YOU TOO.
THAT WAS MY CUE.

LYNN
WILL THIS LAST THE WHOLE SUMMER LONG?

ALFRED
LET'S TRY TO FINISH THIS SONG.

LYNN

WHEN THE SUMMER'S OVER,
WE'LL BOTH TAKE STOCK.

ALFRED & LYNN

APROPOS - IT'S SUMMER STOCK.

LYNN

BUT FOR NOW -

ALFRED

I LOVE YOU.

LYNN

I LOVE YOU, TOO.

ALFRED & LYNN

THAT'S...OUR...CUE.

NOEL

Blackout!

(BLACKOUT. In the dark WE HEAR HATTIE:)

HATTIE

Not yet!!

(LIGHTS UP, revealing Alfred's mother HATTIE,
wearing an outrageously large hat.)

ALFRED

Lynn, this is my mother, Hattie.

LYNN

(very friendly) Oh, I'm so pleased to finally meet you. Alfred has told me so much...

*(slows down as she notices HATTIE's cold,
expressionless face.)*

...about....you.

HATTIE

What?

ALFRED

(to LYNN) She's quite deaf...at times.

LYNN

Oh! (then shouting:) I'M SO PLEASED TO FINALLY MEET YOU!

(Nothing from HATTIE.)

LYNN (CONT'D)

ALFRED HAS TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT YOU!

HATTIE

He's mine.

(HATTIE pulls ALFRED offstage.)

NOEL

And....BLACKOUT!

(BLACKOUT. In the dark WE HEAR NOEL:)

NOEL (CONT'D)

All right. Let's go to the rooming house owned by Mrs. Rounds. Spotlight on Mrs. Rounds.

(A SPOTLIGHT comes up revealing MRS. ROUNDS.)

ROUNDS

Mr. Coward, Alfred and Lynn are all - how should I put it? *Very* close friends. The three of them live here but in *separate* rooms. I love actors but I run a respectable boarding house.

(SPOTLIGHT OUT. LIGHTS UP to reveal that NOEL and his piano have been moved to center. He is tinkering at the piano with a song idea.)

RECITATIVE

NOEL

BOYS IN LOVE WITH MOTHER
SIMPLY CAN'T LOVE ANOTHER -
YOU WILL ALWAYS BE THE OTHER
THEY ADORE.

(LYNN enters.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

BOYS IN LOVE WITH MOTHER
SIMPLY MAKE LOUSY LOVERS -
I HAVE MY DRUTHERS -
I'LL CHASE OTHERS -
NOT BORES.

LYNN

(she knows the answer) And what, pray tell, inspired *that* lyric?

NOEL

(pause) Hamlet.

LYNN

Oh, Noelie...

NOEL

Really, Lynnie darling...what are you going to do?

LYNN

About Alfred?

NOEL

No, your rival - Alfred's *mother*.

LYNN

(trying to convince herself) Alfred is trapped. He has to support his mother, his little sisters, and his little brother.

NOEL

His little half-sisters and his half brother.

LYNN

So are you suggesting that he should only play half?

NOEL

Hattie isn't paying anything at all.

LYNN

Yes. And there's no money left over for a potential wife.

NOEL

It's an unnatural triangle, Lynn. In order to marry you, he must first divorce his mother.

LYNN

And if he doesn't?

NOEL

(spoken in rhythm) What will you do, I ask you Lynn? With this strange menage a trois you're in?

A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS

NOEL

THE TRIANGLE THAT I LIKE BEST -
IS THE ONE THEY CALL SCALENE.
IT'S BETTER THAN ALL THE REST,
BECAUSE IT RHYMES WITH THE WORD OBSCENE.
BUT YOURS MY DEAR'S NO FUN,
WITH ONE SIDE SO UNEQUAL.
WHEN A BOY'S CONTROLLED BY MUM
THERE'S NO ROMANTIC SEQUEL.
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS,
WHERE THREE SLEEP IN THREE SEPARATE BEDS.
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS,
WHERE THE BOY AND GIRL NEVER WED.
YOUR PAIN IS ACUTE, NOT OBTUSE,
AND DAHLING IT'S REALLY NO USE.
I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT YOU MUST GET AWAY,
FROM THIS STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS!

(NOEL & LYNN begin waltzing. ALFRED ENTERS and he cuts in to waltz with LYNN.)

But soon HATTIE comes on and she forces her way in between them. ALFRED begins dancing with HATTIE. ALFRED desperately tries to catch glimpses of LYNN, showing her how helpless and unhappy he is. NOEL stands by smugly, feeling his point has been proven.)

(Defiantly, LYNN cuts in to reclaim ALFRED and after only a moment of dancing, HATTIE taps LYNN on the shoulder . LYNN, trying to make peace, holds up her arms, offering to be HATTIE's dance partner. HATTIE looks at her as if to say "Are you kidding?!", then waltzes away with ALFRED.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

AND HERE IS MY LEARNED HYPOTHESES:

(indicates HATTIE)

YOU WILL ALWAYS BE FIGHTING ISOCELES.

I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT YOU MUST GET AWAY
FROM THIS STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS.

(ALFRED and HATTIE waltz offstage, though it's clear ALFRED wants to stay. LYNN begins crying and NOEL dances with her again as he sings:)

NOEL (CONT'D)

HOW I HAVE A STRANGE PROPOSITION
AND IT MIGHT COME AS QUITE A SURPRISE.
BUT I OFFER WITH NO PRE-CONDITIONS -

(NOEL stops dancing and drops down to one knee. He takes LYNN's hand as if to propose marriage. She laughs but he remains quite serious.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

Oh, Linnie...

LYNN

(playing along) Oh, Noelle...

NOEL

(with ardor) Oh, Linnie..

LYNN

(pulling her hand away) Oh, NO!
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS.

(She pulls away from him but he follows her, still on one knee.)

NOEL

Oh, Linnie!

LYNN

(shocked) Oh, Noelle...

NOEL

Oh, Linnie!

LYNN

Oh, NO!!
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS.

(NOEL gets up and starts laughing. LYNN sees that it was all a joke and starts laughing, too.)

NOEL

There now - I've stopped you from crying.

LYNN

For a moment I thought you were serious.

NOEL

It's all in the delivery, my dear. It's all in the t-t-t-timing.

(They resume dancing and singing.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

YOU'LL BE MARRIED TO YOUR
DEAREST FRIENDS.

LYNN

WE'D BE SLEEPING IN SEPARATE BEDS.

NOEL

ALFRED COULD VISIT
AND I'D LEAVE YOU ALONE.

LYNN

HATTIE WOULD THINK HE'S OUR GUEST.

NOEL

FOR ALL OF YOUR SINS YOU CAN LATER ATONE.

LYNN

OH NO, WHAT A TERRIBLE MESS!

(MRS. ROUNDS enters.)

ROUNDS

Menage a trois?! No French sex allowed!

(NOEL begins dancing with MRS. ROUNDS who
doesn't realize it at first.)

ROUNDS (CONT'D)

I love actors but I run a respectable boarding house!

NOEL

(sings)
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS -

ROUNDS

Oh, dear..

LYNN

(sings)
WHERE THREE SLEEP IN THREE SEPARATE BEDS.

ROUNDS

That sounds better.

(LYNN now dances with MRS. ROUNDS.)

LYNN
WHAT A STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS -

NOEL
WHERE THE BOY AND GIRL NEVER WED.

ROUNDS
How sad!

NOEL
YOUR PAIN IS ACUTE, NOT OBTUSE.
AND DAHLING IT'S REALLY NO USE.

ROUNDS
I' SORRY TO SAY THAT YOU MUST GET AWAY

NOEL
FROM THIS STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS.

LYNN
MY PAIN IS ACUTE, NOT OBTUSE.

NOEL
AND DAHLING IT'S REALLY NO USE.

NOEL & ROUNDS
I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT YOU MUST GET AWAY.

LYNN
Must I?

NOEL & ROUNDS
You must!

ALL
FROM THIS STRANGE MENAGE A TROIS!

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP. The stage is empty except for Hattie who has her back turned to us. Alfred enters wearing muddy overalls and tall rubber boots, pulling the feathers out of a dead chicken.)

ALFRED

Mother, I must speak to you at once.

HATTIE

(selectively deaf) What?

ALFRED

(louder) Mother, I must speak to you at once!

HATTIE

Just a minute, darling.

(HATTIE turns around and puts an expensive and outlandish hat on her head that's been concealed from the audience and ALFRED.)

ALFRED

Where did you get that hat?

HATTIE

Lord and Taylor. Do you like it?

ALFRED

Mother! Did you use the grocery money...?

HATTIE

What?

ALFRED

(louder) Did you use the grocery money?!

HATTIE

There's some pate left. We can get by on that.

ALFRED

Pate?! *(then, sarcastic:)* What...no caviar?!

HATTIE

No, darling, that's all gone.

ALFRED

Mother!

HATTIE

Don't worry, I'm budgeting in other areas.

ALFRED

Such as?

HATTIE

(loading her long, elegant cigarette holder) For one thing, I've switched to American cigarettes.

ALFRED

Mother...listen to me. There's going to be an actors strike. That means I'm not going to be paid at all which, as you know, isn't very far from what I'm being paid now.

HATTIE

What did you say?

ALFRED

(louder) A strike, mother, a strike!

HATTIE

(lighting the cigarette) Bolsheviks. Actors on strike, how ridiculous. As though you were slaving away in a cotton mill...

ALFRED

We have a union now...

HATTIE

(not listening, adjusting her hat)...or a coal mine...

ALFRED

Our demands are very reasonable: we want to be paid for rehearsals, and not be forced to do more than eight performances per week. Wouldn't you say that's fair?

HATTIE

Alfred! You're about to star on Broadway for the first time in your life. It's your big break. Do you really want to jeopardize all that?

ALFRED

(torn) It's hard mother...it is...but Lynn says....

HATTIE

Oh, *Lynn* says....

ALFRED

Mother, there's going to be a strike. It can't be helped. And while it's going, I've invited Lynn to come stay with us...

HATTIE

What?!

ALFRED

(louder) I SAID I'VE INVITED LYNN...

HATTIE

Stop shouting at me, I heard you!

ALFRED

I love her, Mother... beyond....beyond... anything you can name.

HATTIE

Beyond....me?

ALFRED

No, no, no, of course not. As much as I love you. But of course in a different way.

(LYNN enters, exhausted, lugging a large suitcase and dragging a trunk. Note: ALFRED is blocking her view of HATTIE.)

LYNN

(shocked at ALFRED's appearance) Alfred?!

ALFRED

(startled, he drops the chicken, the feathers go flying) Lynn! I was expecting you on a later train.

LYNN

And I was expecting to be picked up on time.

ALFRED

Oh, my darling, I'm so sorry...

(He goes to embrace her but stops, realizing he's filthy.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I...uh...(indicates his clothes)...look at me. I'm so sorry.

LYNN

(a pause, then:) You may kiss me.

ALFRED

What? Really?

LYNN

I won't say it again.

(She closes her eyes and offers her cheek. ALFRED feels awkward in front of HATTIE but leans in to kiss LYNN's cheek. At the last moment, LYNN turns her head and gives him a huge kiss on the lips.)

HATTIE

Disgraceful!

LYNN

(looking past ALFRED) Oh, I didn't see you - hello, Hattie. (to ALFRED) You smell dreadful.

ALFRED

Lucky you didn't arrive later. I was about to make compost.

HATTIE

(a long pause, then:) I'm about to lose you, Alfred. The way I've lost everything else in my life.

ALFRED

Oh, mother, don't....

HATTIE

Do you remember the first time I took you to the theatre? When you were five years old?

ALFRED

How could I forget?

HATTIE

What was the name of that darling troupe of little actors?

ALFRED

(nostalgic) The Royal Lilliputian company of German Midgets.

HATTIE

They were adorable. It's gone, Alfred. The show is gone. For all I know the midgets are gone. Every show you've ever seen. All gone. The joys of theatre - like the joys of life - are all so temporary. So... ephemeral.

ALFRED

Oh, mother, don't sing...

EPHEMERAL

HATTIE

THERE WAS A HOUSE WITH MANY ROOMS
 THERE WAS A HUSBAND...MAYBE TWO...
 THERE WAS MONEY, THERE WAS LOVE, THERE WAS SONG.
 BUT ALL OF THAT IS GONE...
 IT DIDN'T LAST VERY LONG -
 EPHEMERAL...EPHEMERAL...
 IT'S THE SADDEST WORD I KNOW.
 OHHH.. WHERE DID EVERYTHING GO?
 AND NOW YOU'RE LEAVING TOO -
 I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO -
 EPHEMERAL...EPHEMERAL...

(Small musical interlude, then:)

ALFRED

Mother, don't sing it again...

HATTIE

OHHH... WHERE DID EVERYTHING GO?
AND NOW YOU'RE LEAVING TOO -
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO -
EPHEMERAL....EPHEMERAL...

LYNN

Perhaps I should leave.

HATTIE

How long were you planning to stay?

LYNN

For as long as I'm welcome.

HATTIE

There's a train leaving for New York this evening.

ALFRED

Mother!

LYNN

Hattie...isn't there a way for us to come to some sort of truce?

HATTIE

A what?

LYNN

(louder) A truce!

HATTIE

A what?

LYNN

(shouting) A TRUCE!

HATTIE

You mean a kind of armistice?

LYNN

Yes.

HATTIE

Armistice Day isn't until next year.

(She turns to leave.)

ALFRED

Mother!

(She turns back, and is overly polite.)

HATTIE

But do stay for lunch.

(HATTIE exits, singing "EPHEMERAL")

LYNN

Well she doesn't appear to be *tone* deaf.

(ALFRED remains silent - seems stunned.)

NOEL

Alfred...that's your cue.

LYNN

Darling...are you all right?

ALFRED

I don't...I'm sorry, Noelle...but I don't like this.

(Taking his time, NOEL takes out a cigarette, puts it in the holder and lights it. Only then does he say, in a brittle voice:)

NOEL

Exactly *what*...don't you like?

ALFRED

Maybe it's just me...

LYNN

Well, it's certainly not me.

ALFRED

I just can't seem to find my way into this role.

(LYNN bursts out laughing.)

ALFRED

What is so funny?

LYNN

(trying to suppress her laughter) You mean...you can't...find your way into...yourself?

(That's just too funny and too ridiculous for LYNN and she bursts out laughing again. Now ALFRED is angry. NOEL starts writing it all down.)

NOEL

Oh, this is very good.

ALFRED

I'm going to quit!

LYNN

Oh, don't worry, darling, you'll find your green umbrella. You always do.

NOEL

(stops writing) "Your green..."...what did you say?

LYNN

Umbrella.

ALFRED

(to NOEL) It's a long story. *(changes the subject)* I feel that I'm coming off very badly. When do you show me growing a pair of balls?

LYNN

I wouldn't put it quite so crudely but you have to admit - so far the show is exactly how things happened.

ALFRED

The audience will not like me one bit.

NOEL

I won't let that happen. Please leave the writing to me. Must I remind you that I've written two of your biggest hits...

ALFRED

And our biggest bomb.

LYNN

Our only bomb.

ALFRED

Point Valaine.

(The orchestra plays an ominous sting and will play this exact same ominous sting every time someone says the dreaded words "Point Valaine")

NOEL (CONT'D)

(crossing down to the orchestra pit) What the devil was that?

LYNN

Alfred said *Point Valaine.*

(Ominous sting from the orchestra.)

ALFRED

Ah...I see...it's a running joke. Every time someone says *Point Valaine*...

(Ominous sting from the orchestra.)

NOEL

(to the orchestra) Stop that! Stop it at once! I will not have my work reduced to a running joke.

LYNN

Our only complete failure.

NOEL

Not a *complete* failure. *Point Valaine*....

(Ominous orchestral sting.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

(*to orchestra*) One more and I'm on the next boat to Jamaica.

ALFRED

The audience didn't like the fact that we were playing a bitch and a bastard.

LYNN

(*agreeing*) A bastard and a bitch.

(The orchestra begins to softly reprise *Ephemeral*.)

ALFRED

I haven't told you, Noelle - Lynn knows. I'm thinking of retiring.

LYNN

He says that after every show these days, Noelle...

ALFRED

It's different this time.

LYNN

And he says *that* before every show...

ALFRED

That song *Ephemeral* you wrote for Hattie - it was...it was so painful.

(HATTIE steps in from the wings.)

HATTIE

I can hear you! I'm not deaf you know!

ALFRED

No, no, no not the performance...

HATTIE

Oh...ok then.

(She EXITS.)

ALFRED

(*to NOEL*) It's the melody...and the lyrics...

NOEL

(sarcastic) Oh...other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the song?

ALFRED

It's not that I didn't like it. It's beautiful. But painful. This musical might be my final show, Noelle. I don't want to be remembered like this.

NOEL

Unless you let me finish it, you might not be remembered at all!

(He throws down a few pages and storms off the stage.

ALFRED and LYNN don't react. Pause. Then:)

ALFRED

Should we...?

LYNN

No, he'll be back.

ALFRED

Right.

LYNN

Now that we're alone - tell me what is *really* bothering you.

ALFRED

(he picks up the pages fromt he floor) Ephemeral. That's what it all is, isn't it?

LYNN

Some people sell their souls to the devil. We sold ours to Dionysis.

(A pause and she lovingly takes ALFRED by the arm.)

LYNN (CONT'D)

Whatever you decide, I'm with you. I don't want to retire, I really don't. But I would never, never go on stage again unless you're there with me.

ALFRED

Don't say that...

LYNN

It's the truth. And if I have to sacrifice a few silly plays for your happiness, it's what I will do. It's what I *must* do.

(NOEL re-enters, smoking.)

NOEL

I'm sorry for what I said. It's just that I don't want the world to forget you - the way that it seems to have forgotten me.

ALFRED & LYNN

No, that's not true! What are you talking about?

NOEL

You know it's true - I can't get my plays produced anymore and the only place in the world that wants *me* on stage is...(with disdain)...Las...Vegas.

ALFRED & LYNN

No!...but Noe!ie...

NOEL

I'm not going to debate the point. In the end I might not be able to write a show for the two of you, but this may be my last chance at relevance...

ALFRED & LYNN

No, no, no that's not true...don't get carried away...

NOEL

...and so I'm not ready to give up. But it can't just be good - it has to be great. If it isn't, then the future - I mean the long, long future - might be without a trace of any of us.

ALFRED

(*looking at the page in his hand*) Ephemeral.

(LYNN takes the pages from him and gives them back to NOEL.)

LYNN

Then we better get back to work.

NOEL

All right..We were on the farm - Lynn has brought important news about the actors' strike -

(NOEL goes back to his piano, ALFRED and LYNN jump back into the musical-within-the-musical.)

ALFRED

What news on the Rialto?

LYNN

Well, management has come up with a devious plan. They've started another actors' union to compete with ours.

ALFRED

Clever bastards. Who's joining?

LYNN

All the actor managers - George M. Cohan, etc. And your dreadful little girlfriend, Helen Hayes.

ALFRED

She IS NOT my girlfriend.

LYNN

She seems to think she is. Every time I feel a sharp dagger between my shoulder blades I know she's standing right behind me.

ALFRED

She has a crush and it's a ONE WAY STREET.

LYNN

I simply must know, Alfred, if we're going to be together or not.

ALFRED

We *are* together. I'm in love with you, and only you. I just can't be married right now. You know I have to send every penny to my family here. I simply can't afford to support a wife, too.

LYNN

Alfred, do we or do we not have a future together? You can answer truthfully and then I can get on that evening train.

ALFRED

What do you propose I should do?

LYNN

"Propose"? That's a strange choice of words.

ALFRED

Oh, Lynn...

LYNN

Here's how I "propose" we stop Miss Helen Hayes!

A UNION

(Note: the song starts of slowly, like a love ballad, then grows into a rousing "union" march.)

LYNN

I PROPOSE A UNION
TOGETHER WE WILL WIN.

ALFRED

I'D LOVE TO FORM A UNION -
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHEN.

LYNN

WE'RE STRONGER AS ONE
WE CAN GET THE JOB DONE -

ALFRED

YOU MUST KNOW THAT I'M TEMPTED -
BUT ALAS, I'M PRE-EMPTED -

LYNN

FROM A UNION?

ALFRED

A UNION -

LYNN

A UNION?
WE'RE STRONGER IN NUMBERS -
OUR VOICES LIKE THUNDER -

(The ENSEMBLE appears, marching downstage toward ALFRED & LYNN.)

ENSEMBLE

WE'RE STRONGER AS ONE
WE CAN GET THE JOB DONE -

(ALFRED looks at the ENSEMBLE then back at LYNN, confused.)

ALFRED

(spoken) I don't think we're talking about the same thing.

ENSEMBLE

STRONGER IN NUMBERS -
OUR VOICES LIKE THUNDER -

LYNN

WITH A UNION.

ENSEMBLE

WITH A UNION!

ALFRED

A UNION?

ALL

A UNION!

(ALFRED gets down on one knee.)

ALFRED

(spoken) I propose a union...

LYNN

Oh, Alfred. Are you asking me to marry you?

ALFRED

Please say yes...and please...don't tell mother.

LYNN

(spoken) Yes...and no...I won't. *(sings:)*

WE'RE STRONGER AS ONE

WE CAN GET THE JOB DONE -

ALL

STRONGER IN NUMBERS -

OUR VOICES LIKE THUNDER -

A UNION!! A UNION!! A UNION!!

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP on NOEL, turning pages in his script.)

NOEL

All right - we'll keep that number. Let's see...Alfred and Lynn become the biggest stars on Broadway...*(turns more pages)*...blah, blah, blah..let's skip ahead to the early 1920's. And those balls you mentioned, Alfred? They're about to descend.

(LIGHTS UP on ALFRED and LYNN who have changed into street clothes and are making out.)

ALFRED

Oh, darling I've missed you.

(more kissing -they really should find a room.)

LYNN

No more separate tours - never again!

ALFRED

Never! I mean, after this next one...

LYNN

Oh, Alfred, let's get married first.

ALFRED

(he reluctantly pulls away) You know that's not possible. I just need a little more time.

LYNN

(*pause*) Goodbye, Alfred.

ALFRED

What? When is your train?

LYNN

I mean goodbye...for good.

(He tries to embrace her, she backs away.)

ALFRED

You don't meant that.

LYNN

I'm afraid I do. A year ago you asked for 'a little more time.' That was *a year ago*.

ALFRED

I know, I know but I haven't saved enough to...

LYNN

Damn the money!

ALFRED

Lynn, you don't understand. When we get married, I want everything to be just right. I keep dreaming about a little apartment where we can be together and get started on our lives. But a real start. I can't - and won't - subject you to poverty. At least not *abject* poverty. There'll be a small kitchen - just big enough for a stove - and maybe a bathtub. (*They both laugh.*) Every morning I'll make you breakfast. In my dream I picture us sitting in front of a little window watching the snow - but it's warm inside. Maybe too warm because the radiator is broken and it never shuts off. And the floors are never bare.

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR

ALFRED

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR
 WALL TO WALL -
 DOOR TO DOOR -
 IT WARMS THE ROOM LIKE THE SUN -
 AND IT MEANS - YOU'VE BEGUN.
 YOUR LIFE HAS FINALLY STARTED -

ALFRED (CONT'D)

IT'S A START THAT'S NOT HALF-HEARTED.
IN A COUPLE OF LITTLE ROOMS

LYNN

WE CAN'T AFFORD MUCH MORE -

ALFRED

WE'LL STAY IN BED UNTIL NOON -
WITH A CARPET ON THE FLOOR!

LYNN

(spoken) Oh, Alfred, I don't need that - just you -

ALFRED

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR -
WALL TO WALL - DOOR TO DOOR.
IN A COUPLE OF LITTLE ROOMS
THE BEST WE CAN AFFORD -
AND THERE WE'LL NEVER BE PARTED -
NOT AGAIN...NEVER MORE...

(They waltz as The ENSEMBLE enters and sings:)

ENSEMBLE

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR
WALL TO WALL - DOOR TO DOOR.
IT WARMS THE ROOM LIKE THE SUN -
AND IT MEANS - YOU'VE BEGUN.
YOUR LIFE HAS FINALLY STARTED -
IT'S A START THAT'S NOT HALF-HEARTED.

ENSEMBLE (CONT'D)

IN A COUPLE OF LITTLE ROOMS -
THE BEST YOU CAN AFFORD -
AND THERE WE'LL NEVER EVER BE PARTED -
NOT AGAIN, NEVER MORE.

ALFRED & LYNN

AT LEAST UNTIL THE NEXT TOUR -

ALL

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR!

ALFRED

Oh, dammit all, let's get married.

NOEL

Finally! *(he writes in his script)*

LYNN

When?

ALFRED

Now - at once - let's go down to City Hall...

LYNN

But Alfred...why now?

ALFRED

It's our only day off!

LYNN

(pause) And...?

ALFRED

And, uh...we can't do it tomorrow- we both have a show!

LYNN

(not getting the answer she wants) And...?

ALFRED

(looks at his pocket watch) And they're going to close the courthouse soon... and..

LYNN

And...?

ALFRED

And I love you madly and...I can't stop thinking about that damn carpet!

(ALFRED and LYNN run across the stage to stand before a JUDGE. A WASHERWOMAN is mopping the floor nearby. ALFRED frantically looks in his pockets.)

ALFRED

There's a five dollar fee - I haven't brought any money.

LYNN

Oh, Alfred- I haven't any money either.

WASHERWOMAN

(with a NY accent) I have two dollahs. *(gives him the money)* Here.

ALFRED

Oh, no, I couldn't.

WASHERWOMAN

You'll pay me back. I can tell youse kids are in love and I wantcha to get married. Take it!

ALFRED

(to the JUDGE) Will you take two dollars and I'll bring you three tomorrow when I come back to repay this angel of mercy?

JUDGE

All right - I'll make an exception because I like your work. But let's make it quick. We're about to close.

ALFRED

(to the WASHERWOMAN) Bless you!

WASHERWOMAN

Don't mention it.

JUDGE

(to the WASHERWOMAN, annoyed) Why don't you make yourself useful and go clean the jury room?

WASHERWOMAN

I'm not going any where.

JUDGE

What?!

WASHERWOMAN

They need a witness!

JUDGE

(to ALFRED) You don't have a witness?

WASHERWOMAN

You see anyone else here?

ALFRED

We left in such a hurry -

JUDGE

No fee, no witness - do you have a ring?

ALFRED

Oh, yes, I have a ring...

(ALFRED frantically searches his pockets, but nothing is there.)

JUDGE

Oh the hell with it, you are now one. I pronounce you man and wife! You may kiss the bride.

(ALFRED and LYNN kiss. The WASHERWOMAN wipes her eyes and blows her nose into a handkerchief. The ENSEMBLE enters and everyone begins waltzing to the reprise:)

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR (Reprise)

ENSEMBLE

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR
WALL TO WALL - DOOR TO DOOR.
IT WARMS THE ROOM LIKE THE SUN -
AND IT MEANS - YOU'VE BEGUN.
YOUR LIFE HAS FINALLY STARTED -
IT'S A START THAT'S NOT HALF-HEARTED

ENSEMBLE (CONT'D)

IN A COUPLE OF LITTLE ROOMS -
 THE BEST YOU CAN AFFORD -
 AND THERE YOU'LL NEVER EVER BE PARTED -
 NOT AGAIN, NOT AGAIN, NOT AGAIN...
 NEVER MORE.

ALFRED & LYNN

AT LEAST UNTIL THE NEXT TOUR -

ALL

A CARPET ON THE FLOOR!

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP on ALFRED, LYNN and NOEL.)

ALFRED

So is that it, then? The end of Act I?

NOEL

Good lord, no.

(ALFRED sighs and sits down. LYNN jumps in to try and save things from falling apart again.)

LYNN

Maybe you should just leave it there - write it as a one-act, Noemie. Happy ending, and all that rot. That's what people expect at the end of a musical comedy.

(NOEL stares at both of them.)

LYNN (CONT'D)

What are you thinking, Noemie?

(NOEL takes out another cigarette and places it in the cigarette holder)

NOEL

I'm thinking that collaboration is something that can only be enjoyed by the French.

LYNN

So what comes next?

(Long pause.)

NOEL

I want to go back to the moment when the two of you became an inseparable force on the stage.

LYNN

Well, that wasn't easy...

NOEL

No, you had to go up against the Theatre Guild...

(ALFRED doesn't move.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

(yells) Balls, Alfred!

(ALFRED jumps up and exits. LIGHTS UP on the five members of the THEATRE GUILD BOARD OF DIRECTORS who are revealed seated at a long table facing the audience. They write with pencils on yellow legal pads.)

MEMBER1

We've made Lunt & Fontanne the biggest stars on Broadway.

MEMBER5

Don't you have that a bit backwards?

MEMBER2

Who were they before they joined The Theatre Guild?

MEMBER5

The biggest stars on Broadway.

MEMBER3

Well...they're very talented *comedians*...

MEMBER4

But too awkward and gawky for romantic roles.

MEMBER3

Agreed.

MEMBER5

I think they're quite brilliant.

MEMBER1

(angry pause, then:) Vote! Do I hear a motion?

MEMBER2

I'd like to make a motion that the Lunts are talented but not brilliant.

MEMBER1

Do I hear a second?

MEMBER3

Second!

MEMBER1

All who think they're talented but not brilliant, say 'aye'.

MEMBERS 1-4

Aye!

MEMBER1

All opposed?

MEMBER5

Nay.

MEMBER1

The motion is carried by a vote of four to one - the Lunts are very talented but not brilliant.

MEMBER2

Point of order.

MEMBER1

Yes, what is your point?

MEMBER2

The motion was that they are talented - not *very* talented.

MEMBER1

Let the minutes show that the vote was four to one that the Lunts are talented - not *very* talented - and not brilliant.

(The Board members write on their pads. ALFRED enters dressed as the character he played in the mega hit play *The Guardsman*.)

ALFRED

We're ready to do our run-through. But I really must insist that we do it in front of an audience.

MEMBER1

You have one. (*indicates the Board*) Us.

ALFRED

Yes, but it's a comedy, and we must have an audience that doesn't already know the punch lines.

MEMBER1

We shall go into executive session to discuss it.

(LIGHTS DIM on THE MEMBERS as they murmur while hurriedly writing on their pads. LYNN enters in a beautiful gown. ALFRED pulls her away from THE BOARD.)

ALFRED

God how I hate this! We won't get a single laugh and then we'll get pages of notes with suggestions for rewrites.

LYNN

Aren't you used to this by now?

ALFRED

It's not a run-through it's a deathwatch! Witches and warlocks with pads and pencils...

LYNN

...and a vision. They pick good plays.

ALFRED

We could be making a fortune on Broadway right now...

LYNN

But we're not in it for the money.

ALFRED

That's the problem - neither are they. To them the plays in this theatre are a kind of noble hobby - a cause - they don't care if anyone comes to see them or not - and here we are, playing to sold-out houses. They should at least not force us to pay for our own costumes! They have us performing in two different shows each week while rehearsing a third...

LYNN

Stop complaining - you love repertory!

ALFRED

Yes, but I don't love slavery! This isn't a theatre - it's a sweatshop!

(LIGHTS FULL AGAIN on the MEMBERS.)

MEMBER1

After much debate and discussion we still insist that you do a run-through of the play for us.

ALFRED

You can't have art by committee!

MEMBER1

What did you say?

ALFRED

(surrendering) I said - I offer my heart...to the committee.

ART BY COMMITTEE

MEMBER1

PENCILS READY?

ENTIRE BOARD

A YE!

MEMBER1

PAPER READY?

ENTIRE BOARD

A YE!

MEMBER1

WE'RE READY TO CHANGE THIS PLAY FROM PATHETIC TO AESTHETIC!

ENTIRE BOARD

YES, IT'S ART BY COMMITTEE.

ALFRED

G-D PLEASE HAVE PITY -

ENTIRE BOARD

YES, WE MUST ALL HAVE OUR SAY -

YES, IT'S ART BY COMMITTEE

ALFRED

THE RESULT WILL BE SHITTY -

ENTIRE BOARD

WE WILL VOTE ON EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR PLAY.

(a capella)

TO BE DEMOCRATIC,

WE MUST ALL HAVE AT IT

OR THERE WILL BE HELL TO PAY -

ENTIRE BOARD

YES, IT'S ART BY COMMITTEE -

ALFRED

THEIR NOTES WILL BE SO PETTY -

ENTIRE BOARD

WE WILL VOTE ON EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR PLAY.

(The BOARD MEMBERS read from their notes:)

MEMBER1

The lines aren't funny!

ALFRED

(to Lynn) I saw *that* coming...

MEMBER2

We need to recast one of the leads.

ALFRED

Over my dead body!

MEMBER3

That would make it easier.

MEMBER4

I just don't see you and Lynn in those roles - they need a kind of...a kind of...

MEMBER3

Sophistication!

(MEMBERS 1-4 all murmur in agreement and hurriedly make notes on their pads.)

MEMBER2

The costumes are too expensive!

ALFRED

We paid for them!

MEMBER2

In that case, they're lovely.

MEMBER1
Rewrite!

MEMBER2
Rewrite!

MEMBER3
Rewrite!

MEMBER4
Rewrite!

MEMBER5
I think it's perfect.

MEMBER1
Vote! Do I hear a motion?

MEMBER2
I move that it's not perfect.

MEMBER3
Second!

MEMBER1
All those who don't think it's perfect -

MEMBERS 1-4
Aye!

MEMBER1
Opposed?

MEMBER5
Nay!

MEMBER1
By a vote of four to one...

MEMBER4
Wait! I abstain.

MEMBER1

(seething) By a vote of *three* to one...with one *abstention*...

MEMBERS1-3

Rewrite!

MEMBERS 1-5

(singing - a capella:)

TO BE DEMOCRATIC,
WE MUST ALL HAVE AT IT
OR THERE WILL BE HELL TO PAY -
YES, IT'S ART BY COMMITTEE -

ALFRED

(as he exits with Lynn:) GOOD G-D HAVE PITY!

MEMBERS 1-5

WE WILL VOTE ON EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR PLAY.

(BLACKOUT on the BOARD OF DIRECTORS.
LIGHTS UP on ALFRED who is crying. He tries to hide
this fact from LYNN.)

LYNN

Alfred...are you...crying? *(pause)* I've never seen you cry...*offstage*.

ALFRED

They're ruining it...ruining it!

LYNN

I agree, darling, and there's only one thing to do.

ALFRED

Quit?

LYNN

No - agree to everything they want.

ALFRED

What?!

LYNN

Yes - listen to all their wretched notes and nod your head like a good little boy. But when we go into previews we'll do this show exactly as *we* want.

ALFRED

And if they fire us?

LYNN

There are two hundred plays opening this year on Broadway and we'll have our pick of the lot!

ALFRED

Oh darling...I love you so much. I'm completely lost without you.

LYNN

I know. (*pause - quickly adds:*) And, of course I'm lost without *you*. Together, we're too powerful for them. It's our union...

(Suddenly LIGHTS COME UP on the BOARD MEMBERS who stand up and sing:)

MEMBERS1-5

WE'RE STRONGER AS ONE
WE CAN GET THE JOB DONE -
STRONGER IN NUMBERS -
OUR VOICES LIKE THUNDER -
A UNION!...

(NOEL crosses down to the pit and waves his hands to stop the orchestra.)

NOEL

No, no, no - (*turning to THE BOARD MEMBERS:*) That wasn't a song cue - for G-d's sake - you're playing the Board of Directors in this scene!

(THE BOARD MEMBERS sit, confusedly whispering about "the wrong cue." BLACKOUT on the BOARD MEMBERS.)

ALFRED

I will never...ever...ever...go on stage without you again.

LYNN

And we will never...ever...ever let any one put us in this position again.

(sings:)

THERE IS NO ART BY COMMITTEE

THE RESULT IS ALWAYS SHITTY -

THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE CAPTAIN AT THE WHEEL -

ALFRED

THERE IS NO ART BY COMMITTEE

LET'S GET DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY

ALFRED & LYNN

AND TELL THEM THEY CAN ALL JUST GO - TO - HELL!

(They kiss. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP on THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS at their table.)

MEMBER1

Twenty curtain calls! Congratulations on incorporating all of our notes.

MEMBERS1-5

Congratulations...yes, congratulations...bravo...etc.

MEMBER1

We have selected two new plays. One for you Alfred, and one for you Lynn.

ALFRED

Unacceptable.

MEMBER2

What did you say?

LYNN

He said "unacceptable."

ALFRED

We will no longer work in separate theatres.

LYNN

We have to be precise, Alfred. They're lawyers.

ALFRED

Yes - that includes theatres that are uh...attached to..uh... one another.

MEMBER3

You cannot dictate the terms of your contract.

MEMBER2

We may choose not to offer you a contract at all.

(MEMBERS1-4 mumble in agreement.)

ALFRED

(screams) AND WE MAY NOT CHOOSE TO ACCEPT ONE!

(This is so loud and clear, everyone is startled, including ALFRED himself. The BOARD looks scared.)

MEMBER2

Let's take a vote!

MEMBER1

We need a motion -

MEMBER3

I move that Alfred and Lynn...

ALFRED

Excuse me...

MEMBER1

The vote can only be interrupted by a point of order.

ALFRED

Very well - "point of order."

(THE BOARD MEMBERS are stunned that ALFRED is so aggressive.)

MEMBER1

Uh...yes...what is your point of order?

(There is a crash of timpani and an anthem-like song begins:)

JUST THE LUNTS

ALFRED

MY NAME IS ALFRED AND THE LADY IS LYNN
THOUGH MOST CALL HER LYNNIE

LYNN

- OR MISS FONTANNE -

ALFRED

BUT FROM HERE ON OUT
STARTING NOW AND AT ONCE -
WE'RE NOT MISTER -

LYNN

WE'RE NOT MRS. -

ALFRED & LYNN

JUST THE LUNTS

ALFRED

And if you do not agree to our conditions, we will never....ever...ever work with you again.

(THE BOARD MEMBERS are startled - they look at one another in fear.)

MEMBER1

Restate the motion.

MEMBER3

I...uh...move that from now on the Lunts...will be considered...just the Lunts?

LYNN

Point of order.

MEMBER1

(pause - then:) What is your point of order?

LYNN

We wish to be reimbursed for our costumes.

MEMBER1

That's out of order! All in favor of the motion that the Lunts...will be considered...just the Lunts?

MEMBERS 1-5

Aye!

MEMBER 4

Wait! I abstain!

MEMBER1

Meeting adjourned!

(BLACKOUT on THE BOARD MEMBERS)

ALFRED

(sings:)

HALF OF ME WAS MISSING -
WELL, IT WAS MORE THAN JUST HALF.

LYNN

AND I WAS FOREVER WISHING
FOR A MAN WHO COULD HOLD FOR A LAUGH.

ALFRED

WITH YOU THERE'S A SENSE OF COMPLETION
MY SOUL HAS MET ITS MATE.

LYNN

NOT TO MENTION A SENSE OF ELATION -
IT'S CLICHE BUT SO IS FATE.

ALFRED

AND FROM HERE ON OUT.

LYNN
STARTING NOW AND AT ONCE -

ALFRED
WE'RE NOT MISTER -

LYNN
WE'RE NOT MRS. -

ALFRED & LYNN
JUST THE LUNTS.

LYNN
WE'RE NOT MISTER.

ALFRED
WE'RE NOT MRS.

ALFRED & LYNN
JUST...THE...LUNTS.

(They kiss. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP immediately.)

ALFRED
Let's run that number again.

NOEL
No!

ALFRED
The more we run it, the more it all might make sense to me.

NOEL
Every time we work together - the incessant rehearsing. Over and over again. The constant search for "new, deeper meaning" - not this time!

LYNN
(to ALFRED) You'll find your green umbrella, darling, you always do.

(ALFRED and LYNN smile at each other, sharing a moment. NOEL pauses, waits for an explanation. Then:)

NOEL

Want to let me in on the private joke?

LYNN

Oh, it's not a joke.

NOEL

"A green umbrella" sounds like a marvelous punch line.

ALFRED

It's a long story.

LYNN

Too long.

ALFRED

But it might make a marvelous song.

NOEL

Perhaps in the musical *you're* writing, but not in mine!

(ENSEMBLE4 enters, holding pages, and stands behind NOEL. NOEL doesn't know he's there, and when NOEL turns around, he lets out a startled cry.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

Ahhh! (*a pause as he recovers, then:*) What do you want?!

ENSEMBLE4

I'm in the next scene, Mr. Coward.

(NOEL angrily grabs the pages from ENSEMBLE4 and looks at them.)

NOEL

Are you playing Irving Thalberg?

ENSEMBLE4

Yes, Mr. Coward.

(NOEL hands the pages back to him.)

Are you off book?
NOEL

Yes, Mr. Coward.
ENSEMBLE4

(NOEL grabs the pages back from him and crosses to the piano.)

Places for the Thalberg scene!
NOEL

(ALFRED & LYNN exit. Two door flats appear on either side of the stage with a sofa in between, indicating a hotel suite. One door leads to an unseen bedroom and one door leads into an unseen hallway. ENSEMBLE4 exits through the “hallway” door just as ALFRED & LYNN enter through the “bedroom” door having done a quick change into dressing gowns. Just as they sit on the sofa, ENSEMBLE4, now playing THALBERG, knocks on the hallway door.)

ALFRED
(to LYNN) Are you expecting someone?

LYNN
No! Never on a two-show day.

ALFRED
Who is it?

THALBERG
(behind the door) Irving Thalberg.

(ALFRED and LYNN look at each other, startled.)

LYNN
Oh dear, I’m not dressed.

(LYNN hurriedly exits. ALFRED reluctantly opens the door to reveal THALBERG.)

ALFRED

Mr. Thalberg! What are you doing in Pittsburgh?

THALBERG

What does anyone do in Pittsburgh.

(He enters uninvited and, after a pause, ALFRED remarks:)

ALFRED

Do come in.

(ALFRED accepts the intrusion and closes the door.)

THALBERG

Alfred, I've come all the way across the country to see you and I'm not leaving until you sign a contract.

ALFRED

Then I'm afraid you've come all the way across the country for nothing.

(THALBERG sits on the couch and takes a contract and pen out of his coat pocket.)

THALBERG

I know you've turned me down several times, but wait until you see my latest offer.

(LYNN re-enters. In her mind, she is now properly dressed: she is wearing a turban that matches her gown.)

LYNN

Mr. Thalberg.

THALBERG

(jumping up) Oh, Lynn, I hope you'll excuse the intrusion.

LYNN

And *I hope*, Mr. Thalberg, you understand that we never see anyone between shows.

ALFRED

And we were about to run lines.

THALBERG

(chuckles) You two! You've been touring in this show for months and you're still rehearsing.

LYNN

One can never be too young, too thin, or have too much rehearsal.

THALBERG

I won't keep you long - I just need to have you sign this movie contract and take a couple of publicity pictures with Leo, the MGM Lion.

ALFRED

Excuse me?

THALBERG

He's outside in the hallway with the photographer. And his trainer, of course.

(ALFRED goes over to the hall door, opens it, and is met with a LOUD ROAR. ALFRED slams the door and places his back against it to insure that the lion can't get in.)

ALFRED

There's a lion out there!

THALBERG

Not just any lion - it's Leo, the MGM lion.

LYNN

They let you into the hotel with a lion?!

THALBERG

Not just any lion. It's Leo...

ALL

...the MGM lion.

ALFRED

Yes.

LYNN

Right.

THALBERG

He's been here before. He once stayed in the Presidential suite. Now...back to business...

(THALBERG taps the contract.)

LYNN

I'm sorry, Mr. Thalberg, but our answer is still the same: no.

ALFRED

We aren't interested in making movies.

THALBERG

I'm prepared to offer you \$900,000.

(ALFRED and LYNN remain silent.)

THALBERG

That's an awful lot of money.

(Silence)

THALBERG

That's almost a million dollars.

(ALFRED and LYNN are like stone.)

THALBERG

Haven't you heard?! There's a a Depression going on out there!

ALFRED

First of all, Mr. Thalberg, we don't like living in Los Angeles. There is too much avocado in the food and not enough garlic.

THALBERG

With this kind of money, you could hire your own chef!

ALFRED

We also don't like how things work in Hollywood. The constant meddling from your studio - we have no say over our scripts, our directors...

LYNN

(adjusting her turban) Our costumes!

THALBERG

Those things are my job. Trust me, I'll take very good care of you.

ALFRED

In the theatre we're in charge of our own destiny.

THALBERG

That's a dangerous position for an actor.

LYNN

"Dangerous"...for whom?

THALBERG

Don't you two realize what an impact you've had? You only did one film and now everyone is imitating you. If it wasn't for *The Lunts*, there'd be no screwball comedy.

LYNN

(appalled) Screwball?

ALFRED

Did you hear that, darling? We're considered screwballs.

THALBERG

You must be! You're turning down a million bucks!

LYNN

Mr. Thalberg. Perhaps we can be bought - but we cannot be bored. Now, if you'll excuse us...

ALFRED

Again, I'm sorry you came all this way.

(ALFRED opens the hallway door and is met with a LOUD ROAR. He slams it again quickly.)

THALBERG

You both have given great performances. But if they aren't preserved on film, no one will remember. It will be as if you never have lived.

(ALFRED and LYNN look over at NOEL who throws up his hands as if to say "I told you so." ALFRED crumples onto the sofa. LYNN comes over and puts her arm around him.)

LYNN

You don't understand, Mr. Thalberg. We're troupers. Do you know what a trouper is?

THALBERG

Yes, it's someone who puts up with a lot of crap and doesn't complain.

LYNN

True! But it refers to actors - like us - who love nothing more than to take a show to small towns and cities all over the country.

THALBERG

Not much profit in that.

LYNN

Oh, but there is! How can I explain to you how rewarding it is to shake the tiny hands of hundred school children who've just seen their first professional production...

(LYNN's words are reinvigorating ALFRED who says, almost to himself:.)

ALFRED

...to perform in front of an audience so elated to see their first Broadway show that throw their cowboy hats onto the stage during the curtain call.

THALBERG

I'll put it in your contract: you get every summer off to go and do your little plays.

ALFRED

Oh, but that's the point. They aren't little. For us there is nothing bigger - not even the MGM lion.

(WE HEAR one last LION'S ROAR as ALFRED and LYNN remove their dressing gowns to reveal traveling clothes. The doors and sofa are removed, leaving a blank stage. WE HEAR TRAIN WHISTLES, BELLS and the ENSEMBLE OFF-STAGE:)

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ALFRED

TO SEE ALL THOSE EYES FILLED WITH AWE
AS THEY WITNESS THEIR FIRST SHAKESPEARE AND SHAW.

(THE ENSEMBLE enters. Note: The actress who played HATTIE is now ENSEMBLE6 for the rest of the show. The ENSEMBLE huddles with ALFRED, LYNN and THALBERG then move as a group in unison to another part of the stage, as though on a cross-country train trip. THALBERG tries to escape but they pull him back in.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ENSEMBLE1

AMARILLO

ENSEMBLE2

CHATTANOOGA

ALL

LITTLE ROCK!

ENSEMBLE3

FORT WORTH

ENSEMBLE4

WICHITA

ENSEMBLE5

MEMPHIS

ALL

AUSTIN!

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

(They huddle then move as a group in unison to another part of the stage. Again, THALBERG tries to escape but they pull him back in.)

ENSEMBLE1

BOSTON!

(They break the huddle position. ALFRED and LYNN look out at the audience.)

LYNN

Good lord, what's happened to Boston?

ALFRED

There used to be EIGHT theatres. Now there are only THREE!

ENSEMBLE1

TWENTY Curtain Calls!

(Everyone - except THALBERG - bows, then huddles to move to another part of the stage. THALBERG tries to escape again but ALFRED grabs him.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.
CHICAGO!

(They break the huddle position. ALFRED and LYNN look out at the audience.)

ALFRED

What on earth has happened to Chicago?

LYNN

There used to be SIXTEEN theatres - now there are only THREE.

ENSEMBLE1

TWENTY-FIVE curtain calls!

(Everyone - except THALBERG - bows, then huddles to move to another part of the stage. THALBERG tries to one last time to escape but he's foiled.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ENSEMBLE2

TULSA

ENSEMBLE3

DALLAS

ENSEMBLE4

HOUSTON

ENSEMBLE5

NASHVILLE

THALBERG

(caught up in the enthusiasm) WACO!

(Everyone stops and looks at him. Then they all CHEER and pat him on the back. He is referred to as ENSEMBLE4 for the rest of the number. ALFRED and LYNN look out at the audience.)

ENSEMBLE6

Waco, Texas.

ALFRED

Wait...this isn't a theatre.

LYNN

It's an outrage.

ALFRED

No, it's an arena and it looks like they just had a rodeo.

(Everyone covers their noses.)

LYNN

And no one's bothered to clean up.

ALFRED

Watch your step, Lynn.

LYNN

Don't tell me how to behave!

ALFRED

No, I mean literally watch your step.

(He points at a cowpie.)

LYNN

Oh...

(Everyone huddles to move to another part of the stage.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ENSEMBLE1

YOUNGSTOWN

ENSEMBLE2

TULSA

ENSEMBLE3

BIRMINGHAM

ALL

CLEVELAND!

(They break the huddle position. They are now in
Cleveland.)

ALFRED

Where is the critic?

ENSEMBLE4

He's sick. He can't review the show.

ALFRED

Find out where he lives.

ENSEMBLE4

Why?

ALFRED

We'll do a run-through for him in his goddamn livingroom!

(Everyone huddles to move to another part of the stage.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ENSEMBLE5

DAVENPORT

ENSEMBLE6

ST. PAUL

ENSEMBLE1

CEDAR RAPIDS

ENSEMBLE2

CINCINNATI

ENSEMBLE3

PITTSBURGH

ALL

NO, NOT PITTSBURGH!

(They break the huddle position. They are now in
Pittsburgh.)

ALFRED

The city of the jinx! Last time it was thirty feet of snow. What could go wrong this time?

(SOUNDS OF A THUNDERSTORM.)

LYNN

The worst flood in history.

ALFRED

Evacuate the actors from the hotel.

ENSEMBLE4

Where are we going?

ALFRED

The theatre!

ENSEMBLE5

How will we get there?

ALFRED

Rowboats!

ENSEMBLE5

And how will the audience get there?

ALFRED

Rowboats! All right everyone, listen: there's still power at the theatre but if the lights go out in the middle of the show you all know what to do.

(BLACKOUT. Everyone takes out a cigarette lighter and lights it. They peer out at the audience.)

ENSEMBLE5

There's only a handful of people out there.

ENSEMBLE6

Maybe we should cancel.

ALFRED

If there is even ONE audience member remaining in the house, the show will go on!

(The lighters go out and the LIGHTS go UP. Everyone huddles to move to another part of the stage.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

ENSEMBLE1

(spoken) 34,000 miles, 60 cities, 500 thousands people!

ENSEMBLE2

MADISON

ENSEMBLE3

KANSAS CITY

ENSEMBLE4

WASHINGTON

ALL

DC!

ENSEMBLE5

L.A.

ALL

OMAHA!

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN,
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN.

(They move to another party of stage - the cadence slows down a little.)

ALL

DES MOINES
NEW ORLEANS
MILWAUKEE
TORONTO
SEATTLE
COLUMBUS

ENSEMBLE1

(spoken) 34,000 miles, 60 cities, 500,000 people!

(The Ensemble closes around ALFRED & LYNN.)

ENSEMBLE2

MADISON

ENSEMBLE3

KANSAS CITY

ENSEMBLE4

WASHINGTON

ENSEMBLE5

DC

ENSEMBLE6

LA

ALL

OMAHA!

(The Ensemble parts, revealing Lynn's arm is now in a sling)

LYNN

I'm quite sure it's broken. My hand looks like a foot.

ALFRED

We better get you in a cast before the matinee.

LYNN

There's no time.

ALFRED

Then we have to get you some painkillers.

LYNN

No! It will ruin my timing. There is only one thing I need.

ALFRED

What's that?

LYNN

A sling that will match my dress!

(The Ensemble very quickly closes around them, hiding them from view and they move to another part of the stage.)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN!

(When the ensemble opens for the next vignette, Lynn is now wearing a sling that matches her dress. She indicates the stage with her good arm.)

LYNN

It looks like a gymnasium.

ALFRED

That's because it *is* a gymnasium. All right! Hang the curtain from the basketball hoops and let's get started!

(The Ensemble moves to another part of the stage as chant:)

ENSEMBLE

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN!

(Slowing down:)

ENSEMBLE 1
DES MOINES.

ENSEMBLE 2
NEW ORLEANS

ENSEMBLE 3
MILWAUKEE

ENSEMBLE 4
TORONTO

ENSEMBLE 5
SEATTLE

ALL
COLUMBUS!

ENSEMBLE 6
ATLANTA

ENSEMBLE 1
SACRAMENTO

ALL
SAN FRANCISCO!

ENSEMBLE 3
(*to ALFRED, spoken*) The scenery and costumes haven't arrived.

(ENSEMBLE 3 exits in a panic. ALFRED steels himself then steps forward to make a curtain speech to the audience that grows more and more dramatic:)

ALFRED
Ladies and gentlemen. There will be a performance tonight. But I'm sorry to say that the train which carries our scenery and costumes hasn't arrived on time. Where is Mr. Mussolini when you need him? We will be happy to refund your money if you wish, but if *you're* willing - *we're* willing to demonstrate that the theatre is a miraculous place. And we will attempt to create a miracle, standing in front of only a simple black curtain wearing our simple street clothes. We are the stuff such as dreams are made on -

(ENSEMBLE 3 re-enters and taps ALFRED on the shoulder. Annoyed, ALFRED tries to ignore him.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

...and we will attempt to make those dreams a reality with no props - propped up only by the inner fire burning inside...

(ENSEMBLE 3 taps him again.)

ALFRED

*(annoyed by the interruption)...*yes what is it?!

ENSEMBLE 3

Scenery and costumes are here!

ALFRED

(pause - then, disappointed:) Shit.

(Everyone moves to another part of the stage as they chant:)

ALL

TROUPERS ON A TRAIN, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN
TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A, TROUPERS ON A TRAIN!

(With each city they name, their pace gets slower and slower as though the train were slowing down for a final stop)

ENSEMBLE

OK-LA-HOM-A CITY
SALT LAKE CITY

ALFRED

(spoken) I could use a drink.

ENSEMBLE

(reminding him:) SALT LAKE CITY!

ALFRED

(spoken) Oh, I forgot.

ENSEMBLE1

(spoken) 8,000 performances - over a million people!

ALL

(slower and slower) MONT-GOM-ER-Y
 INDIAN-A-POL-IS
 SAN-ANTON-IO
 PHIL-A-DEL-PHI-A

LYNN

Of all places to finish - Philadelphia.

ALFRED

It could be worse - it could be Pittsburgh.

LYNN AND ENSEMBLE

NO! NOT PITTSBURGH!

BLACKOUT.

(LIGHTS UP. ALFRED, LYNN & NOEL are alone again.)

ALFRED

And what the hell was all that for...in the end I mean?

LYNN

Oh, Alfred, dear, that was a nice up tempo song. Don't spoil it.

NOEL

You changed American theatre forever - and probably saved it.

ALFRED & LYNN

No, no, that's not true. That's a bit much.

NOEL

I will not argue the point! Every actor who ever saw you - they all owe you a debt. Now Lee Strasberg is getting all the credit -

ALFRED

He used to watch us like a hawk when he was with The Theatre Guild.

LYNN

And take notes - on yellow legal pads!

(Troubled, NOEL lights a cigarette. Thinks.)

NOEL

The problem is, I can state the facts. But I don't know how to explain what it was like to see you on the stage. The different mosaic you created at every performance - the beautiful jigsaw puzzle of details.

LYNN

What a lovely thing to say.

ALFRED

Almost forty years of eight shows a week. Has it been worth it?

LYNN

Yes! (*then:*) I think so...

ALFRED

What do we have to show for all those shows? We never stopped to do all the important things in life. We never had children.

LYNN

What are you talking about? There's our son in London.

ALFRED

Oh, not now, Linnie.

LYNN

You forgot about him.

NOEL

You have a son?! And you forgot about him?!

LYNN

Albert. Albert Putnam Lunt.

ALFRED

Linnie...

LYNN

And he looks just like you.

ALFRED

(a pause, then a slight smile) No, I think it's a girl. And I think she looks just like you.

NOEL

(growing more horrified) You don't know?!

LYNN

We should go and visit him...her.

ALFRED

Her. Our daughter Winnie.

LYNN

I hope he...she...wasn't killed in the war.

ALFRED

Next time we're in London, we should find out.

NOEL

You two are monsters!

(Silence. Then ALFRED & LYNN burst out laughing. NOEL slowly realizes it's not true:)

NOEL

I see...so there is no child.

(ALFRED's laugh contains tears as he says:)

ALFRED

No.

(LYNN comes over and takes ALFRED's hand.)

LYNN

What do you want to do, Alfred?

ALFRED

I don't know if I have another show in me. But if I do, it's just one.

NOEL

So let me finish it!

LYNN

(picks up a script) Have you reconsidered *The Visit*?

ALFRED

No, Lynn, I've read it twice. You know how I feel...

LYNN

But darling, think about it.. The play is wonderful - equal parts for you and me - and beautifully structured, filled with all kinds of interesting supporting characters.

ALFRED

I don't want to do *The Visit*. The audience won't like it. He rapes her, abandons her and then she comes back and pays for his murder.

NOEL

(smoking) That would make a wonderful musical.

ALFRED

Horrible people. A bitch and a bastard.

LYNN

But...

ALFRED

I don't want to be remembered like that.

LYNN

I understand. You want to go out on your own terms. And you deserve it. You're the greatest actor I've ever known. So what will it be - *King Lear*? That's the usual ending.

ALFRED

I had a dream that when actors die, they wake up in the third act of *Our Town*.

NOEL

Dream? Nightmare.

LYNN

You pick the play. Anything you want.

ALFRED

(thinks, then:) Death of a Salesman.

LYNN

They turned us down for that one.

ALFRED

They didn't turn us down - they never asked.

(Music. LYNN crosses away as ENSEMBLE1 enters, carrying two sample cases, a worn hat and coat. ALFRED puts on the hat and coat and takes the sample cases. ENSEMBLE1 exits.)

ALFRED

(to himself) They never asked. How I would have loved to play that part. A *modern* King Lear. Only he never lost a kingdom - he never had one.

IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY

ALFRED

HE STILL WENT MAD -
ABOUT TO LOSE THE LITTLE HE HAD.

(ALFRED puts down the sample cases.)

HE ENTERS, THERE'S A PAUSE,
HIS HANDS AND FEET ARE SORE.
HIS SHOES ARE BRIGHTLY POLISHED,
THOUGH THEY DON'T FIT ANYMORE.
THE SHADOWS HIDE HIS HOME,
IN THE GARDEN, NOTHING'S GROWN.

BUT IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY.
IT'S NOT HELL, IT'S JUST PURGATORY,
AND ALL HE ASKS IN THE END

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(HIS REQUEST IS SO POLITE)
ALL HE ASKS IN THE END:
JUST TO BE WELL-LIKED.

THE ACTOR EXITS AT THE END,
SOAKED WITH SWEAT FROM HEAD TO TOE,
IT WAS JUST A MATINEE,
SO ANOTHER SHOW TO GO.
ONCE MORE THROUGH THE PLAY -
THE AUDIENCE HAS PAID -

BUT IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY.
IT'S NOT HELL, IT'S JUST PURGATORY,
AND ALL HE ASKS IN THE END
(HIS REQUEST IS SO POLITE)
ALL HE ASKS IN THE END:
JUST TO BE WELL-LIKED.

IS THIS THE ENDING?
OR IS TIME MERELY BENDING?
YOU MIGHT NOT BE THROUGH,
THIS MIGHT BE A TEST -
COULD THERE STILL BE HOPE?
OR IS IT HOPELESS?

THE ACTOR HEARS A VOICE,
LINES FROM PLAYS GONE PAST,
THEY STAY WITH HIM FOREVER,
THEY'RE THE ONLY THINGS THAT LAST.
HAVE I STARTED? AM I DONE?
IN THE END, IT'S ALL JUST ONE.
THAT'S WHAT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY.
IT'S NOT HELL, IT'S JUST PURGATORY,
AND ALL HE ASKS IN THE END
(HIS REQUEST IS SO POLITE)
ALL HE ASKS IN THE END:
JUST TO BE WELL-LIKED.

(LYNN comes up and puts her head on his shoulder.
They both look out at the audience.)

ALFRED

Look, Linnie - they have no idea who we are.

LYNN

Or who we were.

NOEL

They'll never forget you - I'll see to it.

BLACKOUT.

End of Act I

ACT II

(LIGHTS UP. There is a fireplace flat and a rolling cart with a tea set. There is a table with stacks of unpublished play scripts, some opened and half-read. ALFRED, LYNN and NOEL enter in the midst of an argument.)

ALFRED

What a dreadful opening to the second act! I was terrible - terrible!

LYNN

No, Alfred, I was the one who was terrible.

ALFRED

I was awful.

LYNN

No, I was awful.

ALFRED

I was cursed.

LYNN

I was worse.

NOEL

(lighting a cigarette) Well, I thought I was wonderful.

ALFRED

You were, Noelie. I was the one who was all over the place.

LYNN

You only missed one laugh.

ALFRED

(a little testy) Oh, you were counting? Which one?

LYNN

(indicates the tea cart) The line where you asked for the tea.

ALFRED

Yes...I noticed that...

LYNN

It's because you asked for the laugh. Next time ask for the tea.

ALFRED

(petulant) Well, at least I didn't forget any of my lines!

LYNN

Yes, I did go "up" for a moment but it was your fault.

ALFRED

My fault?!

LYNN

Yes, you put your tea cup on the mantle - you never did that before.

ALFRED

I most certainly did not - I put it on the tea cart like I always do.

LYNN

You put it on the mantle and I was so afraid that it would come crashing down, I forgot my line.

ALFRED

I put my cup on the tea cart!

LYNN

You put it on the mantle!

(ALFRED picks up the tea cup from the tea cart.)

ALFRED

I put it on the tea cart!

(He hurls it against the fireplace flat and it shatters.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Now it's on the mantle!

LYNN

No, *now* it's all over the floor!

(They stop and look at one another, breathing heavily like two prizefighters. Then they notice that NOEL has been writing it all down.)

ALFRED

Are you writing this as a *scene* for your musical?!

NOEL

I'm not the one making a scene.

ALFRED

(angrily turns back to LYNN) "Get out of my light, get out of my light!" If I have to hear you say that one more time...

LYNN

Why don't you just get out of my light and you'll never hear it again!

NOEL

It's the main event! The Battling Lunts!

ALFRED

And those damn gowns of yours - always tripping on your train!

LYNN

I only trip when you're standing on it!

NOEL

Stop it! The both of you! Stop it at once!

(Silence.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

You're not really upset with each other. You're upset with me.

ALFRED

Well...Noelie...there are problems with the show. And we have no idea where you're going with it in Act Two.

LYNN

We're both afraid of another *Point Valaine*.

(Ominous orchestral sting. NOEL starts to pack up his pencils and papers.)

NOEL

I will not stay here and be continually insulted by you and the orchestra.

LYNN

Oh, Noe!ie, it's just soooo difficult to do a musical. We tried it once with....(to ALFRED)...what was the name of that *vile* composer?

ALFRED

Weill. (*pronounced "vile"*)

LYNN

Yes, he was, but what was his name?

ALFRED

Weill!

LYNN

(*sarcastic*) All right, don't tell me!

ALFRED

His name was Weill! Kurt Weill!

NOEL

The two of you are insufferable when you're not working and you're even worse when you are! Here is my biggest fear - if I actually manage to finish this, then it means we'll actually have to rehearse and that means we'll actually have to open. And you know what *that* means?

LYNN

(*realizing*) Oh, no...

ALFRED

(*catching on*) G-d help us...

ALL

Opening night!

OPENING NIGHT

NOEL

THE FLATS ARE FRESHLY PAINTED
AND IN PLACES THEY'RE STILL WET -
SOME COSTUMES STILL HAVE PINNING,
AND THE MONEY'S ALL BEEN SPENT.
AS SEATS ALL FILL WITH BUTTOCKS,
ALL THE ACTORS FILL WITH FRIGHT.
WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

(ENSEMBLE enters, playing "critics", holding notepads
and pens. One has a flash camera.)

ALFRED

AND THE CRITICS ALL ARE COMING -
THEY'VE ALL SHARPENED UP THEIR KNIVES.
AND EVERYONE IS THINKING,
"IT'S THE END OF ALL OUR LIVES!"
THE CURTAIN SLOWLY RISES,
AND WE'RE BLINDED BY THE LIGHTS -
WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

(ENSEMBLE exits.)

LYNN

IT WOULD ALL BE SO MUCH BETTER
IF THEY'D ONLY WAIT A WEEK -
THEY WOULD SEE SUCH FINE PERFORMANCES,
THE SHOW IS AT ITS PEAK.
THE BUTTERFLIES AND NERVES ARE GONE -
AND EVERYONE'S ALL RIGHT -
WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

(ENSEMBLE re-enters dressed in formal wear, as if attending “opening night.”)

NOEL

THE AUDIENCE JUST CHATTERS,
 ALL ABOUT WHERE THEY’VE JUST BEEN (*pronounced “bean”*)
 THEY HAVEN’T COME TO SEE THE PLAY,
 BUT RATHER TO BE SEEN.
 AND THE CROWD HAS ALL BEEN DRINKING,
 THEY’RE THE ONLY THING THAT’S TIGHT.
 WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

(Two ENSEMBLE members exit.)

ALFRED

AND THEY’RE DRESSED IN ALL THEIR FINEST,
 IT’S A SEA OF JEWELS AND FUR,
 THEY’RE NOT LOOKING AT THEIR PROGRAMS,
 NO, THEY’RE SAYING “LOOK AT *HER*.”
 THEY CAN’T WAIT UNTIL IT’S OVER,
 DRINK CHAMPAGNE AND GET A BIT.
 WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

(The two members of the ENSEMBLE who exited, dance back on stage, dressed as waiters. They’re holding trays of cocktails and hors d’oeuvres.)

LYNN

AND THEN THE AFTER PARTY,
 AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE.
 THE LAUGHS ARE FAR TOO HEARTY,
 THEY’RE PRETENDING IT’S “SUCH FUN.”
 APPLAUSE IS FAR TOO TEPID,

LYNN (CONT'D)

AND REMARKS ARE TOO POLITE.
WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

ALL

WHY, OH WHY MUST THERE BE AN OPENING NIGHT?

NOEL

THE IRONY WE ALL CAN SEE:
THERE'S NOTHING TO BE DONE.

ALFRED

YOU CAN'T KEEP HAVING PREVIEWS -
YOU HAVE TO START YOUR RUN.

LYNN

AN AIRPLANE'S JUST A TAXI,
IF IT NEVER TAKES A FLIGHT.

ALL

AND THAT'S WHY THERE MUST BE AN OPENING NIGHT!
AND THAT'S WHY THERE MUST...

NOEL

...BE AN OPENING...

ALFRED

...BE AN OPENING...

LYNN

...BE AN OPENING...

ALL

...OPENING, OPENING, OPENING,
OPENING, OPENING, OPENING, NIGHT!
OPENING NIGHT!
OPENING NIGHT!

BLACKOUT.

(LIGHTS UP. ENSEMBLE is gone.)

LYNN

That was fun! What happens next?

NOEL

Next I'm off to the rooftop for a bit of nude sunbathing.

ALFRED

Oh, Noe!ie, not now.

LYNN

Not when you're so inspired. That last song was vintage Noel Coward.

NOEL

I need to clear my head before we go on.

ALFRED

Stay inside and clear your head with a couple of martinis.

NOEL

Not to worry - I shall return.

(He exits.)

ALFRED

He's never going to finish.

LYNN

Perhaps not. So we need a plan "B".

ALFRED

I have one - it's called retirement.

LYNN

Nonsense, Alfred. You're not old enough to retire and neither am I.

ALFRED

But I'm 65 and you're...

LYNN

(cutting him off)...60...

ALFRED

(without missing a beat)...60...

(ALFRED goes over to one the piles of play scripts and idly thumbs through the one on top.)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Any luck with this pile?

LYNN

Yes, those are all the scripts with good roles for me.

ALFRED

And for me?

LYNN

The pile next to it.

ALFRED

But no pile for the both of us?

LYNN

(with double meaning) Oh, there's a *pile* all right.

(ALFRED picks up a script from another pile and reads the cover letter:)

ALFRED

"Here is a new play that's the perfect 'vehicle' for The Lunts" - I hate that term 'vehicle.'

LYNN

As if we were two Volkswagons.

ALFRED

Or just a couple of old, used trucks. They used to write such wonderful 'vehicles' for us. Now it's all just empty comedies.

LYNN

There's nothing wrong with making people laugh.

ALFRED

Of course - but my god, if I have to listen one more time to someone say that we're doing light comedy in order to avoid the great plays and the classics.

LYNN

They don't remember the thousands of Shakespeare, Shaw and Chekhov performances we did.

ALFRED

Ahhhh...the Chekhov. Hardest thing we ever did. And we never got to the very bottom of the complex meanings...unspoken emotions. So delicate and elusive.

LYNN

We would have gotten there if it wasn't for the horrible little Uta Hagen - quitting right in the middle of our tour!

ALFRED

She left to attend her own wedding.

LYNN

No excuse!

(LYNN gingerly picks up one of the manuscripts - this is a source of some tension with ALFRED.)

LYNN

Of course - there's *The Visit*.

ALFRED

No, Lynn.

LYNN

But...

ALFRED

A bitch and a bastard.

LYNN

(*nods*) A bastard and a bitch. (*She puts the script down.*) I hope Noelle will be okay out there in the noon day sun.

ALFRED

He'll be coming back at any moment, dressed in nothing but a cigarette holder.

(And as if on cue, NOEL enters, completely naked except for a cigarette holder. Perhaps the naughty bits are hidden behind the piano.)

NOEL

A cigarette holder...*(puts a cigarette into the holder)*...and a cigarette. Were you talking about me? My ears were burning.

ALFRED

You're lucky you didn't burn more than that.

NOEL

I've figured out the next song. Just let me take off my birthday suit and put on my working clothes and I'll be right back.

(He exits again.)

LYNN

You know he's been very hurt by what the critics have been saying about him lately. But he has a thick skin.

ALFRED

Yes - though it does appear to be sagging in places.

(Quick change gag as NOEL re-enters, dressed in a tux. He's brandishing the handwritten pages of the second act of the musical. He also has a tin box covered with the Union Jack flag. He crosses to the piano and refers to his notes:)

NOEL

Act II begins with me narrating: "It was 1939 - England was being bombed by the Nazis into oblivion. Americans were isolationists and stood by watching...overwhelmingly neutral."

(He holds up the tin box and shakes it. We hear coins rattling inside. ALFRED and LYNN look at one another then simultaneously burst into smiles. Lynn takes the box.)

ALFRED

(to NOEL) I see where you're going with this.

(LYNN crosses down to the lip of the stage and shakes the tin box at the audience, declaiming:)

LYNN

Save England and you save the USA! Save England and you save the USA! (to the audience) You sir, spare a coin to save England? You sir? Spare a coin to save the world? (frustrated) How about a coin to save yourself?!

(LYNN looks defeated, turns to ALFRED:)

LYNN

Oh, Alfred, they're not listening.

ALFRED

We're just actors, Linnie. We don't really belong in politics.

LYNN

Politics?! Alfred, it's so much more than that. You don't know what it's like over there.

ALFRED

But we must think of our reputation - *here*.

LYNN

Alfred - I'm going to tell you something I never told you before. It's about someone - a man I knew before I met you.

ALFRED

You mean the one with the...(crosses his eyes)

LYNN

No, not that one.

ALFRED

So you mean the one with the tiny little...

LYNN

No, not that one either. I was...I was engaged once.

ALFRED & NOEL

What?!

LYNN

I was engaged to a handsome young lawyer during The Great War. I supposed they'll have to call it World War One now since we're onto the second. We were very much in love.

ALFRED

I don't know if I want to hear this.

LYNN

You must. I was already an actress when we met but I wasn't making much money. So to earn a few extra quid I was an artist's model - for some very famous painters, I might add. There was one painter who lived near a bridge. My fiance would walk me to the painter's house and wait for me on the bridge - sometimes for two hours. When I would emerge from the house - there he'd be. Waiting. He was quite wealthy and I'm sure his family would not have allowed him to marry someone who worked in the theatre. In fact, he hadn't yet gotten up the courage to tell them about when when...when...

ALFRED

"When" what?

LYNN

When he was killed in the trenches in France. So his family never knew, until they read his will and discovered that he'd left all his money to me. We weren't married so it wasn't right for me to keep it. I told his solicitor to put all the money in an envelope and give it back to his mother.

ALFRED

That's one of the saddest stories I've ever heard.

LYNN

It's all water under the bridge. Yes, the bridge - the one where he used to wait for me. It was destroyed by the Germans. It's completely gone - and soon everything will be gone if we don't do something.

ALFRED

All right, Lynn. I'm with you.

LYNN

I never had any doubt. You always make the right decision.

ALFRED

Like my decision to marry you?

LYNN

That was your greatest decision of all.

(They kiss. A drum beat begins. The ENSEMBLE enters, dressed in the high Depression fashion of 1939.)

ALFRED

So here's what we'll do - we'll do an anti-Fascist play. We'll take it all over the country and convince Americans that they must join the war effort. The Nazis may have bombs and bullets but we have the most powerful weapon of all: the theatre!

TAKE IT UP!

LYNN

THERE'S A GLOBAL CAUSE
SAVE THE WORLD FROM GOING DOWN.
TAKE IT UP, TAKE IT UP, TAKE IT UP!

ALFRED

JOIN THIS NOBLE CAUSE
OR IN FASCISM WE'LL DROWN.
TAKE IT UP, TAKE IT UP, TAKE IT UP!

(LYNN & ALFRED try to convince the ENSEMBLE but they peel off and exit, one by one.)

LYNN

YOU MAY BE PLEASED WITH ISO-LA-TION.

ALFRED

BUT YOU ARE DOOMING OUR NATION -

LYNN

SAVE ENGLAND FIRST
THEN YOU SAVE THE USA -

ALFRED
TAKE IT UP!

LYNN
TAKE IT UP

ALFRED & LYNN
TAKE IT UP!

(WE HEAR the ENSEMBLE offstage, chanting like an
army on the march:)

ENSEMBLE
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four

(The ENSEMBLE marches back onto the stage carrying
signs that say “The Lunts are Commies!”, “War-
Mongers!”, “Jew Lovers!” “What did Hitler ever do to
YOU?”)

ENSEMBLE 1
They just want to save Russia!

ENSEMBLE 2
Commies!

ENSEMBLE 3
They just want to save the Jews!

ENSEMBLE 4
War-mongers!

ENSEMBLE 5
America First!

ENSEMBLE 1
Stay out of it!

ENSEMBLE 2
It’s Europe’s problem!

(The ENSEMBLE marches offstage, chanting:)

ENSEMBLE

TAKE IT UP, two-three-four
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four

ALFRED

YOU MAY BE PLEASED WITH IS-O-LA-TION.
BUT YOU ARE DOOMING OUR NA-TION.

LYNN

SAVE EUROPE FIRST -
THEN YOU SAVE THE USA!
TAKE IT UP!

ALFRED

TAKE IT UP!

ALFRED & LYNN

TAKE IT UP!

(The ENSEMBLE re-enters carrying American flags.)

ENSEMBLE 1

We don't need another war!

ENSEMBLE 2

G-d bless America!

ENSEMBLE 3

My son died in the trenches!

ENSEMBLE 4

Commies!

ENSEMBLE 5

War-Mongers!

ENSEMBLE

Jew-lovers!

(The ENSEMBLE exits, chanting:)

ENSEMBLE

TAKE IT UP, two-three-four
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four

LYNN

Oh, Alfred, I think we've done every thing we can here.

ALFRED

I've been thinking the same thing - so lets take our play to London.

LYNN

(inspired) Yes! And we'll do eight shows a week with the bombs falling all around us.

(The ENSEMBLE enters carrying Union Jack flags. \

ENSEMBLE

TAKE IT UP, two-three-four
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four

(The ENSEMBLE continues underneath as WE HEAR
NOEL's voice delivering a radio broadcast:)

NOEL

We are being bombed on a nightly basis. Women and children are dying in the rubble. No building is being spared - not even the churches. Hitler has taken over all of Europe except for England - this other Eden, this demi-paradise, This fortress built by Nature for herself Against infection and the hand of war, This happy breed of men, this little world, This precious stone set in the silver sea.

LYNN

SO BEFORE THE BRITISH FLAG
LAYS TRAMPLED ON THE GROUND -

ALFRED

TAKE IT UP!

LYNN

TAKE IT UP!

ALFRED & LYNN

TAKE IT UP!

LYNN

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE ANOTHER WAR -
THE LAST ONE SCORCHED THE WORLD -

ENSEMBLE

TAKE IT UP, two-three-four
TAKE IT UP, two-three-four

LYNN

BUT A BRAND NEW SCOURGE,
FORCES FLAGS TO BE UNFURLED,
TAKE IT UP!

ALL

TAKE IT UP! TAKE IT UP! TAKE IT UP!

(WE HEAR the whistle of bombs falling then exploding,
first in the near distance - then getting closer and closer.
Soon panic starts to show on the faces of the flag-bearers.
Their singing becomes more tenuous.)

ENSEMBLE

TAKE...TAKE IT...TAKE IT...UP!

(One ENSEMBLE member drops the flag he/she is
holding and runs offstage. The song is falling apart as the
bombs get louder and closer. The fireplace flat shakes
with each explosion.)

ENSEMBLE

(trying to be brave) TAKE IT...TAKE IT...UP...UP

(SCREAMS of terror as the company drops their flags
and runs away. LYNN and ALFRED are standing on the
stage alone.)

LYNN & ALFRED

TAKE IT UP! TAKE IT UP!

(LYNN picks up one of the fallen flags and waves it.)

LYNN

TAKE IT UP!

(Bombs continue to explode, the fireplace flat shakes violently and suddenly starts to fall right onto The Lunts. LYNN crumples in fright but ALFRED stops the flat from hitting her just in the nick of time. He pushes it back up to its standing position. The curtain slowly starts to fall. ALFRED commands the backstage crew:)

ALFRED

STOP!!

(The curtain stops its descent.)

ALFRED

AS LONG AS I'M BREATHING,
NO CURTAIN WILL COME DOWN -
TAKE IT UP!

(The curtain starts to rise again. ALFRED & LYNN embrace.)

ALFRED & LYNN

AS LONG AS WE'RE BREATHING,
NO CURTAIN WILL COME DOWN -
TAKE IT UP!
TAKE IT UP!
TAKE...IT...UP!

(The curtain finishes rising and suddenly there is complete silence. ALFRED and LYNN look heavenward - is the bombing over? Suddenly, there is one last, enormous explosion. BLACKOUT.)

(LIGHTS UP. NOEL is very animated.)

NOEL

You see, my dears? In Act One you saved the American theatre and in Act Two you helped save the world.

(ALFRED and LYNN ponder this then react with their usual protestations of humility.)

ALFRED & LYNN

No, no, that's not true. That's a bit much.

LYNN

Noelie, you did far more for the war effort than we did.

NOEL

This isn't a contest.

ALFRED

You were so brave -

LYNN

Do they give knighthoods for espionage? They should.

NOEL

So on to the next scene - we pick up fourteen years after the war has ended.

ALFRED

Fourteen?!

LYNN

That's an awful lot to skip over.

ALFRED

What about all the tours - are we going to mention the tours?

NOEL

We did that in Act One - don't you remember? (*recites slowly, deadpan:*) "Troupers on a Train...Troupers on a Train...(*lights a cigarette*)..."Troupers on a, Troupers on a...Troupers on a..."

ALFRED

Stop! We remember.

LYNN

(takes out a deck of cards, shuffles) But that was about our tours in the 1930's - what about our tours in the 1940's and 50's?

NOEL

Another touring number? That would break the first rule of show business.

LYNN

Which is?

NOEL

Never follow a banjo act with a banjo act.

(LYNN deals out a game of solitaire and starts to play.)

ALFRED

Please continue.

NOEL

It's been fourteen years but during that time you only did four plays. Thousands of performances, but only *four* plays. Then, I say, "During that time, it was the golden age of the American stage: *Long Day's Journey Into Night, The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Crucible...*

ALFRED

...Death of a Salesman...

NOEL

(continues reading) "Theatre was changing forever - and leaving The Lunts behind."

(ALFRED and LYNN look at one another. Then ALFRED says sadly:)

ALFRED

Well - I suppose that's true. Isn't it, Linnie?

LYNN

(continues her card game) Yes, I suppose it is.

ALFRED

(to NOEL) Those plays you mentioned. They only offer them to so-called “method” actors.

LYNN

Oh! Please don't mention them.

(ALFRED & LYNN begin overlapping, trying to top one another.)

ALFRED

“Being honest and real” - of course! We invented that almost forty years ago!

LYNN

The only difference is that now when “method” actors do it, you can't hear them past the first row.

NOEL

Can we please get back to...

LYNN

And forget about comedy - they can't do it.

ALFRED

And when it comes to drama - before they make their entrance they have to work themselves up in the wings until they're ready to puke.

NOEL

Let me know when you two are finished.

LYNN

An actor who is worth anything should be able to summon up a flood of tears like *that!*

(LYNN snaps her fingers.)

ALFRED

Before they were called “method actors” we had a different name for them.

ALFRED & LYNN

Amateurs!

NOEL

Enough!

(ALFRED & LYNN fall silent, but after a pause, LYNN has one more zinger.)

LYNN

The method that leads to madness.

NOEL

Enough! The less said about them the better.

ALFRED

We're simply no longer part of this world - it's been overtaken by method actors, rock 'n' roll and television.

LYNN

And we shall never do another television show.

ALFRED

One was enough. My performance was revolting.

LYNN

No, darling you were wonderful. I was the one who was terrible.

NOEL

Oh, not again!

ALFRED

When I watched that broadcast I wondered how I ever made it as an actor.

LYNN

My dreadful acting - preserved forever.

ALFRED

Yes, if you have a bad night in the theatre, it's only one night...

LYNN

But videotape is forever.

NOEL

Say what you like about television, but do you ninnies realize that more people saw you on that one show than *all* those who ever saw you on the stage - combined?

(ALFRED & LYNN look at each other, then moan in unison.)

ALFRED

Thank you, Noemie, you've managed to make us feel worse.

NOEL

Anyway, it was television, and television is supposed to be bad.

(NOEL watches ALFRED & LYNN for a moment or two.)

NOEL (CONT'D)

You know my darlings, I must confess I'm having writer's bloc. I'm thinking that perhaps I can't write this show after all.

LYNN

Why?

NOEL

I don't think I really know you.

ALFRED & LYNN

Oh, no! That's not true!

NOEL

The only things you've ever cared about - really cared about - is the theatre and each other.

ALFRED & LYNN

And you!

NOEL

I come in a distant third. Yes, we've all spent a lot of time together and we have a long history. But no - I don't really know you.

LYNN

That hurts, Noemie.

NOEL

I don't mean to hurt you. I love you both. But I'm trying to scratch the surface and I'm only finding more surface.

LYNN

What a terrible thing to say.

NOEL

That's a bit harsh and I'm sorry. But it seems that your lives are filled with secrets that you're unwilling to share. That green umbrella business, for example.

LYNN

Alfred, you have to find it. You must.

ALFRED

I can't. I don't think I ever will again.

(ALFRED exits.)

LYNN

Alfred! Come back! (*he's gone*) Oh, Noelle. I'm so frightened that he's going to die.

NOEL

(*gasps*) I didn't even know he was sick.

LYNN

He's not. Not yet. But once he retires...I won't be able to save him.

NOEL

Your lives seem to only exist inside of a proscenium arch.

LYNN

That's not true! We've done shows in the round!

NOEL

That's not what I...oh, never mind. Back to the green umbrella. What does it mean?

LYNN

All right, I'll tell you. Then you'll never be able to say that I'm keeping secrets from you. A green umbrella - it's a code -

NOEL

As you know, I was a spy on Her Majesty's Secret Service during the war, but this is one code I can't break.

LYNN

It's not an umbrella. Not really. It's more like a key.

NOEL

An umbrella that's a key. I see. Now I understand.

LYNN

You do?

NOEL

Not really, no.

LYNN

When we were doing *Pygmalion*, we were rehearsing the first scene - the scene in the rain in front of St. Paul's Cathedral. Alfred was miserable. He couldn't find his way into Henry Higgins. He'd take long, frustrated walks. Then one day he walked by a junk shop and found a green umbrella. The key that unlocked the shuttered door.

NOEL

(after a pause) The umbrella that's a key that opens a door. Now I understand.

LYNN

You do?

NOEL

Not really, no.

LYNN

All right, then. Let me put it like this.

A GREEN UMBRELLA

LYNN

WHEN PROFESSOR HIGGINS MEETS ELIZA
IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS

(The ENSEMBLE enters carrying black umbrellas. They huddle in a group as if sheltering from the rain. They open their umbrellas outward, and are now hidden from our view.)

LYNN (CONT'D)

(in a Cockney accent)

“BUY A FLOWER FROM A POOR GIRL?”, ASKS ELIZA
NO ONE CAN SEE HER IN THE FOG.
BUT SOMEONE IS DIFFERENT IN THE SEA OF BLACK
A MAN WHO KNOWS HE’S BETTER THAN THE REST

(A green umbrella is unfurled in the middle of the black umbrellas.)

LYNN (CONT'D)

AND OF COURSE HE WOULD HAVE A GREEN UMBRELLA
‘ENRY ‘IGGINS WOULD HAVE NOTHING LESS.

(The ENSEMBLE parts and we now see that it’s ALFRED who is holding the green umbrella. ALFRED and the ENSEMBLE dance as LYNN continues:)

LYNN (CONT'D)

A GREEN UMBRELLA - A LIGHT GOING ON IN YOUR EYES.
YOU MUST FIND YOUR GREEN UMBRELLA -
A RAY THROUGH THE CLOUDS IN THE SKIES.
YOUNG ACTORS MAY LOOK FOR WORK,
OLD ACTORS MAY LOOK FOR THEIR YOUTH,
BUT WE LOOK FOR ONLY ONE THING -
WE ONLY LOOK FOR THE TRUTH.

ALFRED

DON’T LOOK TOO CLOSE, IT’S ALL A FACADE.
THE ROOM IS CANVAS, IT’S ALL A CHAR-ADE. (*pronounced "AHD"*)
THE HORIZON’S A FAKE, UPSTAGE THERE’S A WALL,
AND TOO FAR DOWNSTAGE, YOU’RE CERTAIN TO FALL.

(She grabs him and almost shakes him as she sings:)

LYNN

SO - YOU MUST FIND YOUR GREEN UMBRELLA,
A LIGHT GOING ON IN YOUR EYES.
YOU MUST FIND YOUR GREEN UMBRELLA,
A RAY THROUGH THE CLOUDS IN THE SKIES -

(ENSEMBLE1 hands ALFRD an accordion. He
reluctantly straps it on.)

ALFRED

IF THE CHARACTER PLAYS THE ACCORDION,
THEN THE ACTOR MUST LEARN HOW TO PLAY.

LYNN

THERE'S NO PLACE FOR A LIE IN THE THEATRE -
THE TRUTH WILL GET IN THE WAY.

(ALFRED hits a couple of sour notes. The orchestra
stops playing while he tries - and fails - to find the song
again. Finally he gives up.)

ALFRED

(spoken) Shit.

(He takes off the accordion.)

ALFRED

YOU CAN'T EAT THE FRUIT, IT'S MADE OF WAX
THE SUN'S MADE OF LIGHTS,
TURN THEM OFF, THE WORLD'S BLACK.

(He starts to exit, she blocks his way. During the next
part of the song, she finally gets through to him.)

LYNN

SO YOU SEEK OUT THE TRUTH, NO MATTER THE COST.
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE, YOUR TOTALLY LOST.
A GREEN UMBRELLA - A LIGHT GOING ON IN YOUR EYES.
YOU MUST FIND YOUR GREEN UMBRELLA -
A RAY THROUGH THE CLOUDS IN THE SKIES.

LYNN (CONT'D)

YOUNG ACTORS MAY LOOK FOR WORK,
OLD ACTORS MAY LOOK FOR THEIR YOUTH -

ALFRED

(smiles - she's won him back)

BUT WE LOOK FOR ONLY ONE THING -

ALFRED & LYNN

WE ONLY LOOK FOR THE TRUTH.

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP. Only LYNN and NOEL are on stage. NOEL is writing and LYNN has just finished her card game.)

LYNN

I wasn't being truthful with you, Noelie. I'm sorry.

NOEL

What about?

LYNN

I told you that I was frightened for Alfred. I am. But I think I'm even more frightened for myself.

NOEL

(grabbing his pen and paper) Yes?

LYNN

No, Noelie, put down your pen and paper.

NOEL

But...

LYNN

What I'm going to say you must NOT put it into a song. I must have your promise.

NOEL

But...

LYNN

Promise me.

(NOEL reluctantly puts down his pen.)

NOEL

Oh, very well...

(LYNN gathers up her cards and shuffles them. This is difficult to say:)

LYNN

There were these two beautiful red birds - cardinals I believe - that lived in a tree in our backyard. Beautiful, vibrant red cardinals. I'm not sure how long birds live, but it seemed like they were there a long time. Then one terrible day, I found one of them had drowned in the pool - the male - and we took him away. His mate circled the pool for a week, because it was the last place she'd seen him. I think of those birds whenever Alfred leaves the room. Mostly when he's gone to bed and I'm sitting alone. It's so strange when he's asleep - and I'm awake.

SOLITAIRE

LYNN

LONG AGO WE BECAME ONE PERSON.
 OUR FORMER SELVES DISAPPEARED.
 YOU CAN'T BECOME TWO PEOPLE AGAIN.
 NOT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.
 EVEN WHEN I PLAY SOLITAIRE,
 I KNOW HE'S SOMEWHERE AT HOME.
 HOW CAN I PLAY SOLITAIRE?
 WHEN I AM TRULY ALONE?
 I'LL CALL HIS NAME AND SAY "ALFRED"
 BUT HE WON'T RESPOND -
 I'LL RAISE MY VOICE AND CALL "ALFRED"
 BUT ALAS, HE'LL BE GONE.
 YOU KNOW THAT I LIKE SOLITAIRE
 BUT ONLY WHEN HE'S AT HOME.
 I'LL NEVER PLAY SOLITAIRE -
 WHEN AT LAST I'M ALL ALONE.
 NO, I WON'T PLAY SOLITAIRE -
 WHEN AT LAST I'M TRULY ALONE.

NOEL

Thank you for sharing that with me, my darling.

(ALFRED enters wearing his overalls and a straw hat.)

ALFRED

So, Noeie, you said you don't really know me. Well allow me to introduce myself.

NOEL

Well, you're finally out of the closet. Too bad you left your good clothes in there.

ALFRED

I'm dressed accordingly. I'm a farmer!

NOEL

Yes, yes, I already know about your hobbies.

ALFRED

It's more than that! It's my passion. And it's what I want to do with the rest of my life. Alfred the actor is dead - from now on I want to be known as Old Farmer Lunt!

(Music starts. The ENSEMBLE enters dressed in clothes similar to ALFRED - overalls, boots, straw hats etc.)

(The ensemble enters dressed in farming clothes - overalls, boots, straw hats, etc.)

NOEL

What the bloody hell?! I didn't write this!

OLD FARMER LUNT

ENSEMBLE

IF YOUR CORNFIELD HAS A BLIGHT
IF YOUR LITTER HAS A RUNT,
IT'S OK HE'S ON HIS WAY -
HE'S OLD FARMER LUNT.

ALFRED

UP IN THE MORNIN' AT FIVE A.M.
GONNA FIX A FENCE OR TWO -
GONNA MILK SOME COWS
THEN GRAB MY PLOW.

ENSEMBLE

HE'S OLD FARMER LU-LU-LU-LUNT

ALFRED

WELL I HAVE MORE HENS THAN I CAN COUNT
I CAN GIVE AWAY EGGS FOR FREEEE -

(An ENSEMBLE member tosses him a rifle)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I CAN SHOOT THE CHIPMUNKS WITH MY GUN
HOW I LOVE JUST BEING ME!

ENSEMBLE

HE'S OLD FARMER....

LYNN

STOP! THERE WILL BE NO SHOTS AT CHIPMUNKS,
YOU WILL PUT AWAY THAT GUN -

ALFRED

BUT THEY'RE EATING HALF MY GARDEN -
YOU SHOULD LET ME HAVE SOME FUN.

(An ENSEMBLE member gives LYNN a ball of yarn and
some knitting needles)

LYNN

(knits)

JUST LIKE THE SQUIRRELS I'LL MAKE THEM PETS -
THEY'LL BE EATING FROM MY HAND.

ALFRED

BUT THEY'LL EAT MY LETTUCE AND MY GREENS -
LYNN YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND.

ENSEMBLE
YES THEY'LL EAT HIS GREENS AND LETTUCE -

ALFRED
(to LYNN) Listen to them!

ENSEMBLE
CHOMP, CHOMP, CHOMP, CHOMP, CHOMP
THE EGGPLANT AND CUCUMBERS -
THE POTATOES, SQUASH AND KALE -

ALFRED
HEY WE NEED A SQUARE DANCE NUMBER -
EVERY FEMALE GRAB A MALE!

(A short SQUARE DANCE, with ALFRED “calling out”
names of vegetable as if calling out dance moves. NOEL is
appalled at how ridiculous this all is.)

ALFRED
PLANT YOUR TURNIPS AND YOUR BEETS

ENSEMBLE
YOUR TOMATOES AND YOUR CORN -

ALFRED
ASPARAGUS AND CARROTS SWEET -

ENSEMBLE
AND THE OKRA AND MUCH MORE -

ALFRED
CAULIFLOWER, NO STRING BEANS -

ENSEMBLE
NO STRING BEANS? WHY NOT?

LYNN
(yells in rhythm) Because he can't figure out how to grow string beans!

ALFRED

(yells in rhythm) Damn you for bringing that up!

ENSEMBLE

HE'S OLD FARMER LUNT!

HE'S OLD FARMER LUNT!

ALFRED

PETUNIAS AND PEPPERS AND PARSLEY AND DILL
COMING UP AT THE SAME TIME.

YES THAT IS WHAT I REALLY WANT -

I WANT TO HAVE MORE THYME!

I'LL MAKE MY ESCAPE FROM BROADWAY,

AND RETURN TO MY BUTTER CHURN -

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS AND ALL THOSE TOURS

IT'S RETIREMENT THAT I'VE EARNED.

LYNN

(knitting, dismissing what he said) YOU NEED RE-JU-VEN-A-TION,
YOU'RE NOT READY TO RETIRE -

ALFRED

JUST POINT ME TO A FIELD OF WEEDS

AND I'M SUDDENLY ON FIRE!

ENSEMBLE

ON FIRE!

(Throws down her knitting, runs to ALFRED)

LYNN

BUT IN THE FALL YOU'LL WANT TO LEAVE

AND TROD THE BOARDS A-GAIN - *(pronounced "A-Gane")*

ALFRED

THIS TIME, DEAR, I'LL STAY RIGHT HERE,

I JUST CAN'T STAND THE PAIN -

ENSEMBLE

HE'S OLD FARMER LUNT!

HE'S OLD FARMER LUNT!

HE'S OLD, OLD, OLD, OLD -

LYNN

(spoken) He's only middle-aged -

ENSEMBLE

OLD...FARMER....LU-LU-LU-LUNT!

(ALFRED and LYNN collapse onto the sofa at the end of the song. NOEL slowly places a cigarette in his cigarette holder and lights it.)

NOEL

Time for me to go.

ALFRED & LYNN

No, no! Noe!ie you mustn't!

NOEL

I'm sorry but that hillbilly number really did me in.

LYNN

Noe!ie, please finish Act Two. Otherwise we'll have no play to do in the fall and I'll be trapped on the farm!

ALFRED

You're free to leave and do a show, Lynn!ie.

LYNN

Alfred, I've told you. I will never go on stage without you.

ALFRED

Stop saying that...

(NOEL begins slowly tearing up all the pages he has written for the musical.)

LYNN

Noe!ie! Stop! Stop!

ALFRED

I'm sorry you did all that work for nothing.

NOEL

I was mad to think that I could write a believable ending for the two of you. I think you're perfectly capable of writing it yourselves.

(ALFRED and LYNN know he's right.)

ALFRED

So are you off on a trip to Jamaica?

NOEL

No, no, no. After this experience I need a trip around the world.

LYNN

You're our dearest friend. No matter what has happened, please believe that.

NOEL

I do.

(Group hug.)

ALFRED

Won't you stay for dinner?

NOEL

No. You're a fantastic cook, Alfred, but I'm still suffering with the violent wind explosions you gave me from the last meal.

LYNN

Bon Voyage.

ALFRED

Yes, Bon Voyage.

(He exits.)

LYNN

We're idiots to let him go. He was so close to finishing.

ALFRED

You never answered me before - was it all worth it? To leave nothing of real importance behind.

LYNN

By now perhaps we'd even have a grandchild.

ALFRED

And he would call us "nana" and "papa". And one day he would tell *his* children about us.

LYNN

Who says it would be a boy? It could be a girl named Winnie.

(They smile.)

ALFRED

So there it is - years from now, there will be no one who will recall that we even existed.

LYNN

But how is that possible? All those books and magazines they've written about us.

ALFRED

Yes, accompanied by a lot of still photos. And what can you get from a still photograph - other than...stillness?

(LYNN once again picks up *The Visit* script.)

LYNN

All we can do is do what we've always done - move on to what's next.

ALFRED

I'm sorry. But no.

(LYNN puts down the script and exits. ALFRED can't help himself. After a couple of moments he goes over and picks it up. He thumbs through it.)

ALFRED

(to himself) A bitch and a bastard.

(LYNN re-enters, wearing a beautiful sequined gown. She has sparkles everywhere, including her necklace and earrings.)

LYNN
A bastard and a bitch.

(When ALFRED turns to see her, his breath is taken away.)

ALFRED
Oh, Linnie. Are you seducing me?

LYNN
Perhaps.

(Intro music to **IS IT LOVELY?**)

LYNN (CONT'D)
I love it when we do it together on stage.

ALFRED
What are you talking about? We've only done it backstage.

LYNN
I meant the lighting.

ALFRED
Oh, the lighting. What was I thinking?

LYNN
We all know what you were thinking.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT except for a FOLLOW SPOT that stays on LYNN as she walks about the stage, glittering. ALFRED remains in the dark, watching her.)

IS IT LOVELY?

LYNN
WON'T YOU JOIN ME IN A POOL OF LIGHT?

ALFRED
YOU KNOW I LOVE FOR THAT.

LYNN

I'LL ONLY WALK THROUGH THE LIGHT -
IF YOU'RE WITH ME IN IT.
IS IT LOVELY?

ALFRED

YES, IT IS.

LYNN

ARE YOU SURE?

ALFRED

OH, YES....

LYNN

THEN TELL ME -
WHAT ABOUT THIS?

(LYNN leaves the SPOTLIGHT and crosses to a dark
section of the stage where A POOL OF LIGHT COMES
UP.)

LYNN

IS IT LOVELY?

ALFRED

(passionately) YES, IT IS.

LYNN

ARE YOU SURE?

ALFRED

(intense passion) OH, YES...

LYNN

THEN TELL ME -
WHAT ABOUT THIS?

(LYNN crosses to another dark part of the stage. This time A POOL OF LIGHT COMES UP that's big enough for two, and ALFRED steps into it. The music changes to a reprise of **EPHEMERAL**.)

EPHEMERAL

ALFRED

A POOL OF LIGHT - THE WORDS ARE SAID -
THE STAGE IS EMPTY - NOTHING LEFT -
ALL THE MOMENTS, DISAPPEAR, IN THE DARK.

LYNN

AND ALL THE PARTS WE PLAY
ARE ONLY MEM'RIES THAT FADE
E-PHEMERAL...

ALFRED

E-PHEMERAL
IT'S THE SADDEST WORD I KNOW -
OH WHERE DID EVERYTHING GO?
MY DEAR, WE CAN'T PRETEND -
THIS, TOO, WILL HAVE AN END.

LYNN

E-PHEMERAL...

ALFRED

E-PHEMERAL

(**IS IT LOVELY?** and **EPHEMERAL** now become intertwined.)

LYNN

(*spoken*) Focus, Alfred! (*sings:*)
IS IT LOVELY?

ALFRED

Yes, you're lovely.

LYNN

No, the lighting!

ALFRED

(calls up to catwalk) We could use a pink gel!

(The color of the light becomes warmer.)

LYNN

IS IT LOVELY?

ALFRED

YES, IT IS...

LYNN

ARE YOU SURE?

ALFRED

LYNN

MY DEAR, I WON'T PRETEND -
I KNOW THIS TOO MUST END -

ALFRED

E-PHEMERAL.

LYNN

E-PHMERAL.

(Medley ends.)

LYNN

We have a good play. We have the lighting. Most importantly, we still have each other. And no matter what you decide. I couldn't possibly love you more than I do at this very moment.

ALFRED

(picks up *The Visit* script) So..after forty years, *this* is how we'll be remembered.

LYNN

Oh, Alfred. I think Noelle was right. We won't be remembered at all.

(LIGHTS FADE to BLACK as a SPOTLIGHT comes up on NOEL at the piano. He is playing a few chords from **EPHEMERAL**.)

NOEL

A brief epilogue, if I may. On May 5th, 1958, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne opened to rave reviews and sold-out houses in *The Visit* - the theatre was renamed The Lunt-Fontanne theater and it's still there - to this very day - on West 46th Street. Millions walk by that marquee every year - and even if they bother to glance up at the name - they probably just keep on walking. *(pause)* The Lunts retired from the stage after *The Visit*. They would both live for a number of years afterward. They even managed to work again one more time. On television. Much to their dismay, they both won an Emmy.

(NOEL starts playing the vamp to I LOVE THE THEATRE. SPOTLIGHT OUT on NOEL, LIGHTS COME UP on stage, revealing ALFRED and LYNN standing in front of a flat containing two sliding doors.)

ALFRED

Oh, there's that song again.

LYNN

It's grown on me a bit.

ALFRED

Me, too.

LYNN

Maybe someday someone *will* write a musical about us.

ALFRED

Oh, I hope not.

I LOVE(D) THE THEATRE (Reprise)

LYNN

YOU LOVED APPLAUSE
AND CROWDS AND TOURING.

ALFRED

BUT THANKS TO YOU -
IT WASN'T "BOORING" -

LYNN

(spoken) That rhyme is still awful. *(sings:)*
YOU LOVED -

- YOU. ALFRED

YOU LOVED YOU. LYNN

NO I MEAN *YOU*. ALFRED

I LOVED YOU TOO. LYNN

I LOVED THE THEATRE. ALFRED

I LOVED THE THEATRE. LYNN

BUT I LOVED...YOU...MORE. ALFRED & LYNN

(They kiss then walk arm-in-arm upstage toward the set of sliding doors. They separate for a moment to slide the doors and we expect to see another room there - instead we see a set of footlights. They join arms again, and stand in the doorway facing the footlights with their backs to us.)

LIGHTS FADE OUT.

THE END.