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A Dog's Life
by Diane Grant

WOMEN

Hildy	the stage manager
Margo	the business manager
Pookie	the musician
Rowena	the new girl
Mimi	the angel's daughter

MEN

George	the director
Tom	the playwright
Arnie	the angel
Brian Boffin	the artist
Billy	the Method actor
Yevgeni Platov	the landlord

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: HILDY is up a ladder, whistling.

(She comes down, still whistling, and looks up at the lights. She spots a brown lunch bag on the stage, opens it up, takes out a salami sandwich, throws away the lettuce, and eats the rest. GEORGE, in plaid bedroom slippers, comes in.)

GEORGE

Morning, Hildy.

(looking up)

Good lights. Are those new Fresnels?

(Hildy nods.)

Where did'ya get them?

HILDY

I swapped 'em for my car radio.

GEORGE

Your Telefunken?

HILDY

Blaupunkt. Mein blaupunkt ist kaput.
(places the tree on stage.)
Would've been stolen anyway.

(Hildy picks up the ladder and leaves. Tom rushes in, waving script pages.)

TOM

George, George, I finished the Act One finale for *A Dog's Life*! Scene Five. It builds and builds and builds to BOOM, the Big Surprise, and then Blackout. Intermission.

(George takes the pages.)

GEORGE

Let me see them.
(reads, while Tom, in an agony of expectation, watches him.)
Occupy Wall Street. Brilliant. It's now. The crowd in the square, the full throated protests, the protest signs...

TOM

...the food vendors...

GEORGE

(chuckling)
...the food vendors. You've really got something here, Tom. This is the one. *A Dog's Life* – the Mercer Theatre breakthrough. Our signature piece.

TOM

Awesome! I'm glad you like it.

GEORGE

We'll work on it this afternoon.
(Hildy reenters with a prop tree, which she puts on the stage. She looks up at the lights.)
Let's begin. Where is everybody?
(He blows his whistle, shouts)
Dogs. Do I have dogs?

(Hildy throws a switch at the back and the stage goes to BLACK.)

HILDY

(in black)
Rats!

GEORGE

(in black)
What happened to the lights? Hildy?!

HILDY

Keep your shirt on.

(In black, we barking and howling. The lights come up. TOM, BILLY and POOKIE, in dog hats, are grouped together, center stage.)

GEORGE

Where is Christy?

TOM

She hasn't come in yet.

GEORGE

Punctuality is a Cardinal Rule of the theater.
(sighs)
I'll fill in. Pookie!

(Pookie strikes a chord, then Billy, Pookie, Tom and George sing the *Kennel Quartet*, a barbershop quartet made up of dog sounds. The factory door opens. PLATOV, the Russian born landlord, rushes on to the platform, waving a check.)

PLATOV

Aaaaah!

GEORGE

Platov, we're rehearsing here.

PLATOV

(comes down the stairs)
You bloody guy.

GEORGE

Nobody interrupts rehearsal. That's a Cardinal Rule.

PLATOV

I don't care your Cardinal's rules. You be Pope for all it is to me.

(waves the check in George's face)
What is this?

GEORGE
I don't care what it is, you Philistine.

PLATOV
I am not Philistine. I am Russian. Now, you explain to me what is this.

GEORGE
I don't care what it is. I'm rehearsing here.

PLATOV
I tell you what is it. Is bum check.

(He races up the stairs to the office.)

GEORGE
You're the bum, Platov.

PLATOV
We see who's bum.
(He takes out a paper, which he waves at George, races into the office, re-enters. To George)
You in big trouble, now.

(He exits.)

MARGO
(offstage)
Aaaaah!
(Margo comes out of the office, waving the paper.)
George!!!

GEORGE
I am trying to rehearse here.

(Margo comes down the stairs.)

MARGO
If you don't listen to me, you may never rehearse again.

GEORGE
Save your theatrics for the stage, madam.

MARGO

That's it.

(She starts up the aisle.)

GEORGE

Where are you going?

MARGO

I'm leaving you, George.

GEORGE

Margo!

(She exits, still carrying the paper.)

Will you be back for lunch?

(An offstage door slams.)

O.K., everybody. Take a break.

(Billy stays in his dog character. He stands beside George and barks. He absent-mindedly sniffs at George's armpit.)

What is it?

BILLY

Can I get you something?

GEORGE

A coffee and a blueberry Danish. Glazed.

(Billy waits, doggedly.)

Fetch!

(Billy barks, then exits. Pookie pulls the lettuce out of her lunch bag.)

POOKIE

Who took my salami sandwich? I was saving that.

(Pookie throws the bag down. Hildy comes in, adjusts the prop tree.)

HILDY

Is that paper bag yours?

POOKIE

Yeah.

HILDY

No litter on the stage.

(She exits. Pookie picks up the bag and leaves. George begins to read the pages, laughs, marks up the paper.)

GEORGE

Good, good...the kid is good.

(...continues reading as the...)

LIGHTS GO DOWN

SCENE TWO

Fifteen minutes later.

The counter and the four stools at stage left, are now The Lone Star Saloon. Ideally, behind the counter, a sign would light up that says *Lone Star Saloon*. Country music could play softly as scene begins.

Margo sits on one stool, nursing a pink drink. She looks at the paper in her hand, in despair. BRIAN BOFFIN sits on another stool, also nursing a pink drink. He's about fifty, wearing a suit that's good but old. He speaks with a posh English accent and has an impressive manner.

BRIAN

Aha. Another fan of the delectable Cosmo.

MARGO

What's that?

BRIAN

Your Cosmopolitan, dear lady. Vodka, triple sec, and just a touch of cranberry.

MARGO

Afraid not. This is plain old cranberry juice.

BRIAN

What a waste of a glass.

MARGO

It is...

(looks at her phone)

...only 10:35 in the morning.

BRIAN

(chuckles)

Somewhere in the world, the sun is over the yard arm.

Excuse me? MARGO

A nautical term. Do you sail? BRIAN

No. MARGO

Neither do I. BRIAN
(lifts his glass in a toast)
Chin, chin.

Chin, chin. MARGO
(lifting her glass)

BRIAN
(offering his hand)
Brian Boffin, of the Royal Theatre, London.

MARGO
(in further despair, shakes his hand)
You're an actor.

BRIAN
One of the finest. Perhaps you saw my Baron Braggadocio?
(Margo shakes her head.)
The Baron's Revenge?

I'm sorry....I... MARGO

BRIAN
It was an execrable production but I was superb.

MARGO
(laughing)
I'm sure you were.

(Brian's phone rings. He lifts a finger to Margo and answers it.)

BRIAN
No, darling, no.
(turning away from Margo)

I said I was good for it. How many times do I have to repeat myself? I'll have it for you Monday. Not this Monday, Monday next. Patience, dear heart, please, and do stop calling me at work.

(He hangs up, slumps, recovers, and then raises his glass to Margo.)

To better days.

MARGO

(lifting her glass)

I'll drink to that.

(They drink.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON THE SALOON AREA. LIGHTS UP ON CENTER STAGE.

(ROWENA enters through the back door. She is wearing high-heeled boots and is carrying a script. She trips and holds on to the tree to steady herself.)

ROWENA

(behind tree)

Whoops!

(George looks up from his pages and Rowena timidly peers around the tree. Margo reenters angrily and Rowena retreats again.)

MARGO

Next time you're a dead man.

GEORGE

Honey bear.

MARGO

(waving the paper at him)

Do you know what this is?

GEORGE

If it's another review by that moron, Melvin Bernheimer, I don't want to see it. Have I ever had anything but a pan from that pompous parasite? Do you know what he said about *Corporate Cowboys*? I'll tell you what he said. "Mercer is so untalented and lacking in theatrical technique, he couldn't even pull off a failsafe crowd pleaser like *The Baron's Revenge*. What did he say?"

(grabs the paper)

This is an eviction notice.

MARGO

We have to pay the rent.

GEORGE

Didn't we just pay it?

MARGO

We paid it three months ago, George. Platov is throwing us out of here.

GEORGE

He can't do that!

MARGO

He can.

GEORGE

We can't afford to go anywhere else. It would be the death of our company. Margo, don't let the dream die.

MARGO

George, there's a way. I want to call Arnie Rabbitt.

GEORGE

Arnie who?

MARGO

Cousin Emily's uncle. Arnie Rabbitt. He's an investor and he's hooked on the romance of the theatre.

GEORGE

Never!

MARGO

He's looking for a company!

GEORGE

An outside investor is a man with money and a man with money has ideas. He wants to tell you his ideas and he wants you to use his ideas and then he gets more ideas and his ideas stink and before you know it, you are up to your armpits in stinking ideas.

MARGO

Put this in your armpit! We have three days to pay or quit.

GEORGE

There you are. We have three days. You'll come up with something.

MARGO

Don't you love me anymore?

GEORGE

I always love you. Maybe, you mean you don't love me.

MARGO

I do love you. I just hate my life.

GEORGE

Sweetie pie.

MARGO

I've been living on the brink too long. I'm worn out.

GEORGE

You look fresh as a spring flower.

MARGO

I'm no spring chicken, George. And I don't want to spend the rest of my life trying to make the rent.

GEORGE

Ah, my little duck.

MARGO

Don't you want health insurance, George?

GEORGE

I feel fine.

MARGO

I don't. I'm afraid to open the mail. I'm afraid of the first of the month. I pee my pants going into the bank.

GEORGE

Pigeon.

MARGO

Nobody drives a Cadillac anymore. The only time we went on vacation, the engine fell out.

GEORGE

We had fun, didn't we?

MARGO

Would you just talk to him?

GEORGE

That's all? Just talk to him?

MARGO

Could you do this one little thing for me? Just this once?

GEORGE

If I say, "Yes," will you let me rehearse in peace?

(The tree falls and reveals Rowena.)

ROWENA

Hello.

GEORGE

You're wearing boots! Nobody wears boots on my stage. That's a Cardinal Rule!

(Rowena begins to struggle out of her boots.)

MARGO

You don't have to be so rude. What do you want?

ROWENA

I want to audition.

MARGO

Come back later.

GEORGE

Why should she? I need another actor. I don't need another actress.

MARGO

Oh, yes, you do.

GEORGE

I've got Christy.

(looks at Margo)

I don't have Christy?

MARGO

She got a bit in *Fatal Secrets IV*.

GEORGE

That bimbo! I made her what she is today.

MARGO

Broke.

GEORGE

This is terrible. Who's going on tonight in *Doctors of Shame*?

MARGO

I am.

GEORGE

(weakly)

Good.

MARGO

I thought you'd be pleased.

GEORGE

Do you think the costume'll fit, honey bunny?

(Margo and George exit. Tom and Billy enter. Rowena is kneeling with her boots in her hand. Tom falls in love at first sight.)

TOM

Doth an actress bootless kneel?

(The heel of Rowena's boot comes off in her hand.)

ROWENA

Hath an actress heel-less boot?

(Tom gives Rowena a pair of dance slippers and she puts them on.)

TOM

What's your name?

ROWENA

Rowena.

TOM

Mine's Tom. I like your feet.

(George enters.)

GEORGE

(to Rowena)

That's better.

(Pookie and Billy enter. Billy has George's coffee and his blueberry Danish in a bag in his mouth. George takes it and pats Billy's head.)
So, you want to be an actress.

ROWENA

Oh, yes.

GEORGE

Well. We're a revolutionary troupe, here, Rowena, dedicated to new pieces about the exploitation of the little man.

ROWENA

I've seen *Doctors of Shame* four times. I know every word by heart. I don't care what that Melvin Bernheimer said. It has guts, it has balls. Oh, excuse me.

GEORGE

That's all right. What did he say?

ROWENA

Well...

GEORGE

Don't tell me. He's a moron. Let me tell you about us. We're caring, we're committed and we work for the minimum wage. How do you feel about that?

ROWENA

I think that's splendid.

GEORGE

Some of us invest some of our salary in the company and become a living part of the project. Although, we don't require that. It's entirely voluntary.

ROWENA

Fine.

GEORGE

(quickly)
And we work sixty hours a week.

ROWENA

Fine.

GEORGE

Hildy! Lights!

(Hildy hits Rowena with a spotlight.)

ROWENA

Oh. Oh. Oh.

(rushing it out)

I know you don't do the classics but this is my best piece. Actually, it's my only piece. I shall perform the balcony scene from *The Baron's Revenge* by Farquhar and Mellors.

TOM

(taking the script from her hand)

Go for it!

LADY TERESA (ROWENA)

It will soon be noon.

The bells will toll

And the brave, the bold

The dearest...

(almost breaks down)

My dearest

...doomed Delvecchio will die.

Oh, Dio, I faint with fear.

I would rather endure

The rapacious embrace of

Brutal soldiers,

The snarling attack of curs,

Rather lie babbling in

The abode of all demons,

Rather die banished, cursed and alone

Than bring my body to this beast.

My soul recoils at the thought

Of the Baron's kiss.

(Rowena has played Lady Teresa brilliantly, giving life to Farquhar and Mellors's tired, old words. Tom, Pookie and Billy applaud.)

GEORGE

What did you say your name was?

ROWENA

Rowena.

GEORGE

Rowena, we don't want you to waste your time.

(to the company)

What is the historical drama?

History!

ALL

What does he mean?

ROWENA

He means that *The Baron's Revenge* is old-fashioned, conservative crap.

BILLY

But it's a classic.

ROWENA

Exactly.

BILLY

(Margo enters, wearing a very tight nurse's outfit.)

MARGO

I look pretty good, don't you think?

(George looks at her, appalled.)

GEORGE

Let's show Rowena what we do here, shall we?
(blows his whistle)
A Dog's Life. Act One, Scene Two.

BILLY

We can't do that, George. We need another guy for the Attack Dog scene.

GEORGE

Pookie can double.

POOKIE

Man, I hate playing the human. I want to be a dog.

BILLY

Why can't we get another actor?

GEORGE

I'm still fighting Equity on that, Billy.

BILLY

What?

GEORGE

Randy filed a complaint and we can't hire some one else until it's cleared up.

BILLY

He filed a complaint?

GEORGE

Right after he got out of the hospital.

BILLY

And he calls himself an actor.

(A THUMP, THUMP from the machinery up above starts. Paper flowers float from the ceiling. Rowena catches the flowers as they fall.)

GEORGE

Platov!

(thump, thump, thump)

Platov!

(Platov enters from the factory.)

PLATOV

I can't talk to you now. Something is wrong with machines.

GEORGE

You promised to put a screen on that vent.

PLATOV

I put screen on vent.

GEORGE

Then where are the paper flowers coming from?

PLATOV

There's hole in screen.

GEORGE

You can't do this to me.

PLATOV

I do anything I want. Three days I throw you out on ear.

GEORGE

You're hard and unfeeling, Platov.

PLATOV

Business is business, buster.

(He exits.)

GEORGE

Business?! This is my life's blood!

(George starts up the stairs. The thumping continues.)

TOM

George, what about Rowena?

GEORGE

Who?

TOM

Rowena. Can she stay?

GEORGE

What?

TOM

Can she stay?

(George and Tom look at Margo.)

MARGO

(sings and dances)

We're dressed in white,
We're fly by night,
We're *Doctors of Shame*.

GEORGE

Can she go on tonight in *Doctors of Shame*?

TOM

Yes.

GEORGE

Fine!

(Spotlight on Margo dancing.)

TO BLACK

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP

TIME: A few days later.

AT RISE: Hildy enters from the back door, wearing a quilted jacket and a fox mask, and carrying two swords and a prop rifle.

HILDY

Keep moving, keep moving. Breathe out!

(Tom, Pookie, Billy and Rowena enter, carrying an old sofa. They put the sofa on stage. Hildy puts the swords, rifle, and fox mask into the prop box. Billy, Tom, Rowena and Pookie change into slippers. Rowena is wearing a wreath of paper flowers.)

TOM

I like your hat.

(Rowena takes off the wreath, puts on her dog hat. Tom puts on his.)
She's got beautiful eyes, hasn't she, Pook?

POOKIE

They're OK, I guess.

TOM

And she's talented, too. I'm glad you're here, Rowena.

ROWENA

So am I, Tom.

(They exit. Pookie puts her hands over Billy's eyes.)

POOKIE

What color are my eyes, Billy?

BILLY

Blue? Brown? Hazel? Green? Red?

POOKIE

Aaargh!

(Pookie picks up a rifle and shoots it in the air.)
Got one.

(Billy howls like a dog. Pookie hits a key on the keyboard. Sound of something falling from the sky.)

Let's go get it, boy.

(In character as hunter and dog, they race off. Hildy pulls a rope and lowers a large cardboard moon. She takes a banana out of Pookie's lunch bag, and exits, peeling it. Margo enters through the backdoor with ARNIE RABBITT, a man of fifty-five or so. He is dressed in expensive slacks and a cashmere sweater.)

MARGO

This is it. The "Stage".

ARNIE

The "Stage". Very nice, very nice. Hoo boy, it kinda makes you want to do something dramatic, doesn't it?

MARGO

Go ahead.

ARNIE

I couldn't.

MARGO

I bet you could.

ARNIE

Hasta la vista, baby.

MARGO

You're a natural, Arnie.

(Margo and Arnie sit on the sofa.)

It's kind of magic, isn't it? All empty and hushed.

(George enters and blows his whistle.)

GEORGE

Dogs. Do I have dogs?

(Tom, Rowena, Pookie, and Billy rush on. Billy has a rubber chicken in his mouth.)

A Dog's Life. Act One, Scene Two.

POOKIE

Hot Dog!

GEORGE

Hildy! Lights!

(Hildy hits the LIGHTS, and the stage changes into night. The moon is illuminated. The actors grab dog collars from the prop box. Pookie changes hats and turns into a dog. SFX: sirens and an eerie recorded voice over saying, "*Private Property, Private Property, Trespassers Will Be Eaten.*")

MARGO

George!

(As the announcement begins to die down, Tom howls and the rest follow him vocally. They bay and howl, lifting their heads to the moon. Tom pulls at Arnie's pant leg, growling.)

ARNIE

Get away! Get off!

MARGO

Stop that. Stop that.

(Arnie beats Tom off with his loafer. Tom comes at him and Arnie leaps up and stands on the sofa, still flailing away.)

ARNIE

Back, back. Get away from me!

(Tom barks. George pulls a prop marked *The Electronic Trainer* from the propbox. It has a big dial on it. George turns it up to FULL. It BUZZES. Tom's collar LIGHTS UP. He grabs at his throat, whirls and screams, backflips and writhes on the floor.)

MARGO

(to George)

What do you think you're doing?

(Billy follows her, growling.)

GEORGE

I'm rehearsing the Attack Dog scene. Get off the stage!

(Billy paws at Margo. Pookie suddenly leaps at Arnie, who falls over the back of the sofa and disappears.)

MARGO

Oh, oh, oh.

(George blows his whistle. Everything stops. Pookie and Tom and Rowena transform back into actors and help Arnie up.)

This man is my guest.

GEORGE

No visitors at rehearsals. It's a Cardinal Rule!

POOKIE

You were great, man. Handy with your shoe.

ARNIE

Hoo boy, you really had me fooled. I thought I was a goner.

(Pookie gives him back his loafer.)

TOM

Terrific. I hope you're going to join us.

MARGO

Are you all right?

ARNIE

Fine, fine.

MARGO

George lives in the moment.

(Billy, still in character, pulls at Margo's pant leg. To Billy)

Get away from me, you sicko.

(to everybody)

This is a very shabby way to treat an angel.

ALL

An angel?

(Billy howls with delight. He offers Arnie his paw.)

TOM

Pat his head.

(Arnie pats his head. Billy pants.)

He's Method.

MARGO

(to the company)

Mr. Rabbitt is a developer and he's developing a building complex downtown and he has indicated an interest in installing our company - our company! - as its resident theater.

POOKIE

Dude.

BILLY

Our company?

TOM

Downtown?

ROWENA

I adore downtown.

GEORGE

Downtown!!!?

(blows his whistle)

Break!

BILLY

(to Arnie)

Can I get you something, sir?

(George glares at Billy. Billy, Tom and Rowena exit.)

POOKIE

(looks in his bag)

Has anybody seen my banana?

GEORGE

Out!

(Pookie exits, leaving the backdoor open.)

And close that door!

(Pookie closes the door.)

I can't stand natural light.

MARGO

He's an artist.

ARNIE

A genius. Hoo boy, this is fun! I was swept away.

MARGO

I'd like you to meet Arnie Rabbitt.

GEORGE

Mr. Rabbitt.

ARNIE

Arnie...

GEORGE

Arnie, I promised my wife we'd talk, so let's talk.

ARNIE

George, here it is in a nutshell - a simple partnership - your talent, my money.

GEORGE

There's always a catch, isn't there, Arnie?

ARNIE

Always. But I'd never try to put one past you, George. You're too fast. No, here it is - when my theatre's built, your company moves in, rent free.

GEORGE

Downtown?

ARNIE

Downtown.

GEORGE

There it is, the catch. Arnie, our little company is dedicated to alerting John Q. Public to the dangers of the corporate world and downtown is the hub of that world.

MARGO

George.

GEORGE

You see, Arnie, the struggle of the twenty first century is not between capitalism and communism. It's between corporatism and democracy.

MARGO

George, not now.

GEORGE

Corporations have corrupted and co-opted the democratic system. Duped us with their propaganda. Sold us their guns and their tobacco and their men's cologne. Destroyed our ideals and divided the country into "us" and "them". Bought all our politicians and put

them in the pockets of their CEO's. All in the name of money and power! In this humble place, this basement, if you will, we're poor but pure, unsung but unsullied.

ARNIE

Hoo boy, that was beautiful.

GEORGE

It was?

ARNIE

You betcha. I'm no corporation, George. Just one small businessman with a dream, a dream I'd like to share with you.

GEORGE

I'm touched, Arn. But no can do.

(Margo bursts into tears.)

Tears will not move me this time, Madam.

(Margo continues to cry. Platov enters through the backdoor, carrying large chains and a padlock.)

PLATOV

I have rent money by five o'clock or... I put chains on doors.

GEORGE

You can't do that.

PLATOV

That's what happens to dudbeats.

MARGO

Deadbeats.

GEORGE

How dare you talk to me like that? I am an artist.

ARNIE

A genius.

(Platov turns on Arnie.)

PLATOV

Who cares for genius? Does genius pay the rent?

GEORGE

I'll tell you who pays the rent.

(a sudden inspiration)

My partner, Mr. Arnie Rabbitt, pays the rent.

ARNIE

He does?

GEORGE

This time and this time only. *Doctors of Shame* is going to sell out.

PLATOV

Is Arnie Rabbitt? I am looking at Arnie Rabbitt, celebrated oligarch?

GEORGE

Oligarch?

PLATOV

Mr. Rabbitt, you are hero of mine. My card.

ARNIE

(reading)

Bowers of flowers. Ask us discounts?

PLATOV

I am Yevgeni Platov, maker of the paper flowers and slum landlord. What you doing with this dudbeat?

GEORGE

Deadbeat.

ARNIE

How much do you need, Mr. Platov?

PLATOV

Four thousand, five hundred big ones.

ARNIE

Done!

(He takes out his checkbook and pen.)

GEORGE

Done? Just like that?

(He grabs Arnie's hand.)

ARNIE

Well, you're right. We should keep it businesslike, shouldn't we? I think I brought a contract.

(Arnie pats himself. Takes a legal document from his jacket. George takes it.)

GEORGE

Where do I sign?

ARNIE

Shouldn't you read it first?

GEORGE

Screw that.

(signs)

What's the worst that can happen?

(gives the paper to Arnie)

We're leaving you, Platov.

(George gives Arnie the signed contract. Arnie writes a check.)

PLATOV

Da-svi-da-niya (Dasvidania)

ARNIE

I thought you had an accent.

PLATOV

I am Russian.

ARNIE

Gee, were you a communist?

PLATOV

Is old hat, communism. I am entrepreneur.

ARNIE

Aha.

PLATOV

Is saying, "Communism is exploitation of man by man." Capitalism is just the opposite.

(Arnie gives Platov the check. Platov goes up the stairs and exits.)

GEORGE

(to Arnie)
How do you feel about a coffee and a danish?

ARNIE

It's on me. I insist.

MARGO

Arnie, you are a prince.

(Margo exits.)

GEORGE

Partner, I owe you one.

ARNIE

Don't even think about it.
(Arnie exits, then reenters.)
There is just one small thing.

GEORGE

Oh?

ARNIE

(calling off)
Come on in, sweetheart.
(MIMI enters, wearing a leather jacket, and very high heels, carrying a
cellphone and an Evian bottle.)
This is my daughter, Mimi. She's a really talented little gal.

MIMI

This is a terrible neighborhood isn't it?

GEORGE

What kind of talent do you have, Mimi?

MIMI

I'm an actress.

ARNIE

Isn't that swell?

TO BLACK.

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE: Tom and Pookie are on the stage alone. Pookie is listening to her earphones. Tom is reading a book. They're wearing their dog hats and have added tails.

TOM

What are you listening to?

POOKIE

(taking off her earphones)

I'm working on the last song. It's not bad.

TOM

What are you calling it?

POOKIE

A Dog's Life. What ya reading?

TOM

Thrilling Stories About Dogs.

(Tom reads, Pookie puts on earphones, sings a few bars of the song she's writing.)

Wow. Bassets have been known to hold a permanent grudge.

POOKIE

Like drummers.

(She plays a soft and romantic piece on the guitar.)

TOM

Oh, Pook, she smells so good.

POOKIE

Bassets smell good?

TOM

Rowena! Have you ever smelled her, Pookie?

POOKIE

Nope.

TOM

Have you listened to her voice?

POOKIE

Nope.

TOM

Have you looked at her legs?

POOKIE

Tom, have you ever looked at me? I'm a girl.

TOM

I know that, Pook. You look great.

POOKIE

Right.

TOM

I want to talk with her and laugh with her. I want to wake up with her. I want to hold her hand and walk through the morning fog.

POOKIE

So, tell her.

TOM

I don't know what to say.

POOKIE

Why don't you sing it?

TOM

Yes! I'll write the lyrics. You'll write the music.

POOKIE

I will?

TOM

Thanks, Pook. You the man.

(He hugs Pookie. George enters and blows his whistle.)

GEORGE

Dogs! Do I have dogs?

(Rowena, and Billy run on, also in dog hats.)

Colleagues, I have Great News. Today...

(a drum roll from Pookie)

The Mercer theatre is expanding its operation to incorporate its first and only intern.

ALL
Wow! Great. Wonderful.

BILLY
Woof.

GEORGE
She starts today.

BILLY
We don't need an actress.

TOM
We need an actor.

GEORGE
Tom, write a part for her. Bring in some new pages.

TOM
I can't write a new part just like that!

GEORGE
You can do anything, Tom.

(Tom swells with pride. George points at Pookie. A drum roll. Mimi enters through the backdoor.)

MIMI
Thank you. Thank you so much. Am I late?

(Margo and Arnie enter.)

MARGO
This is Mimi, everybody. George.

GEORGE
I'd like all of you to welcome Mimi, our first student. She will be simply a member of the team with no special privileges or favors, only the very best instruction and advice we can offer. She understands that we are all equals here.

(Arnie takes a picture of George and Mimi with his phone.)

As everybody knows, Mimi, I expect nothing short of a lifetime commitment to the work.

MIMI
I am committed and I feel so humble and so proud to be here. I even bought the right shoes.

(She is wearing new slippers in gold lame. Billy sniffs her. Arnie takes another picture. George blows the whistle.)

GEORGE

Just a word about this play, Mimi. This is a simple allegory told in an amusing and skillful fashion by our resident playwright, Tom Cameron, about how the rich and powerful few at the top of the heap silence the protests of the many despairing poor at the bottom with ever more cruel and sophisticated electronic instruments. It ends, of course, with rioting in the streets. Is that about right, Tom?

TOM

You could call it, *Us and Them*, I suppose, because of the ever widening gap between the...

MIMI

Oh, how deep.

(George blows his whistle.)

GEORGE

Dogs! Do I have dogs?

(The actors gather around, ready to work.)

ARNIE

(whispering to Mimi)

This is much more fun than sitting around at home, isn't it?

(He takes another picture.)

MIMI

Dadd-ee.

TOM

Daddy?

(George blows his whistle. Margo and Arnie exit.)

GEORGE

A Dog's Life. Act One, Scene Three. *Dance of the Dogs Who Meet In the Park*.

(LIGHT change. MUSIC from Pookie on the keyboard. Billy blows on a bird whistle.)

MIMI

Goodie.

(Rowena leans away from Tom, poised on one foot. They dance sensually together. Then, music from Puccini's *Tosca* suddenly blares from the factory. Pookie stops playing.)

GEORGE

Platov! Turn that down!

(Rowena loses her balance and falls. Platov opens the factory door.)

What is that!?

PLATOV

Is *Tosca*.

POOKIE

What's *Tosca*?

PLATOV

You don't know *Tosca*, Mr. Musician? It's most beautiful opera in the world. By Puccini.

GEORGE

I'll give you Puccini.

(turns to the actors)

Break!

(He exits into the factory. There is some more yelling and some thumping and then an abrupt silence.)

MIMI

Ooo. I'm having so much fun already. This is just magical.

ROWENA

I can't believe I fell down.

MIMI

Do you fall down a lot?

TOM

Everybody falls down at first.

(Hildy enters. She looks at Mimi's jacket.)

HILDY

Leather?

MIMI

What else?

HILDY

Feel this. It's pure down. I got it off a dumpster at Sixth and Georgina.

ROWENA

That's where we got the sofa.

MIMI

You wear trash?

HILDY

Who steals my coat, steals trash; 'Tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his and has been Slave to thousands...

(A rimshot from Pookie. Hildy exits.)

MIMI

She wears trash?

(Tom turns into a dog and chases Rowena off. Pookie plays *Old Dog Blue* on her guitar. Mimi sits on the sofa. Billy jumps up beside her.)

BILLY

I'm Billy. I'm Method.

MIMI

Ooh, how deep.

BILLY

I can teach it to you.

MIMI

Cool.

BILLY

Would you like me to cry for you?

MIMI

Why?

BILLY

It's Method.

MIMI

Golly, I'd love it.

BILLY

O.K. I reach back into my memory and I remember something so sad, like when my grandma died.

MIMI

Your grandma died?

BILLY

I feel that sadness all over again and I cry.

(He weeps and Mimi, moved, weeps with him.)

MIMI

This is even better than therapy. You must be the best actor in the whole company.

BILLY

We're all equally talented.

(look around, lowers his voice)

But I'm the most dedicated.

MIMI

And the best! You can't fool me.

BILLY

Thanks....Mimsi.

(He covers his face with his paws.)

MIMI

Are you getting something for break....Billsy?

BILLY

Do you want something?

MIMI

I'd love a Rocky Road sundae and a chai latte.

BILLY

The diner only takes cash.

MIMI

(shocked)

Cash?

(pats her pockets)
Who has cash?

(Rowena and Tom enter, still in costume. Rowena, carrying her purse.)
Can you lend me a couple of bucks?

ROWENA
(taking her money out of her purse)
I've got only five dollars to my name.

MIMI
Terrific. Thanks.

(Mimi takes the five dollars.)

TOM
Hey!
(Billy and Mimi exit.)

ROWENA
Tom?

TOM
Yes?

ROWENA
I'm not sure what my dog feels about your dog. It is a class thing? Are they fighting because she's the thoroughbred and he's the mutt?

TOM
A dog doesn't know about class differences. Or racial or ethnic. Things that people worry about don't bother dogs at all. They're just dogs.

ROWENA
You can't just be a dog, Tom. You can be a Lab or a Pit Bull or a Pomeranian. They're all different.

TOM
I never thought of that.

ROWENA
I had a collie and he always knew what I was feeling. When I was happy, he'd jump up and kiss me. When I was sad, he'd peer into my face with big, round eyes.

(She peers into Tom's face. Tom peers back.)

TOM

(breathless)
Like this?

(Rowena, laughing, breaks away.)

ROWENA

Uh huh.

TOM

I wanted a dog more than anything else in the world.

ROWENA

You never had a dog?

TOM

My mom loved her off-white velour sleeper sofa more than she loved me.

ROWENA

That's awful.

TOM

I had an imaginary dog named *Benny*. He loved me but he was afraid to come inside.

ROWENA

You've suffered.

TOM

I have.

ROWENA

That's why you're a great artist.

TOM

I wouldn't say *great*.

ROWENA

I would. You're a wonderful writer.

(Tom pulls two apples from his pocket.)

TOM

Like one?

ROWENA

Thanks.

(Rowena and Tom take bites from their apples. Look at each other with longing. Pookie looks into her brown paper bag.)

TOM

Rowena?

ROWENA

Tom?

(They move together and might have kissed but Pookie stops them with a scream.)

POOKIE

AAAArgh! Has anybody seen my banana?

TO BLACK

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE: Rowena, Billy, and Pookie are in their hats and tails as in Scene Three. George picks up a hoop and Rowena somersaults through it.

GEORGE

Good girl. Good girl.

(George throws Rowena a biscuit.)

Keep that silky feel. We want more wiggle in that pup, Billy.

(Tom enters with a sheaf of papers, which he gives to the actors and to George.)

TOM

The rewrite!

GEORGE

Good man!

(Hildy enters.)

HILDY

Actors! New props. Come and get 'em.

(Hildy, Rowena, Billy, and Pookie exit.)

TOM

(as George reads)

What do you think of the Protest March?

(Rowena, Billy, and Pookie enter, carrying sticks with placards on them.
They say, BARK. WOOF. GROWL.)

GEORGE

(looks at them)

Good. Good.

(reading)

We've added a human? Who's going to play him?

MARGO

(entering)

I am.

(She's carrying a sign that says, FAT CATS DROOL, DOGS RULE.)

TOM

Isn't that great?

GEORGE

(faintly)

Great.

(looks around)

Where's Mimi?

TOM

Getting ready.

GEORGE

Does she have the rewrite?

TOM

Yep.

(Mimi enters, wearing a large paper lampshade collar around her neck.)

MIMI

Why do I have to wear this horrible thing?

BILLY

(looking at his papers)

So you won't bite your back.

(looks at Tom)
She was wounded in the police raid? Fantastic.

MIMI
I feel so stupid.

BILLY
You'll be all right. Just reach back into your past, way back. Remember your favorite doggie.

MIMI
I didn't have a doggie. I had a grandma.

GEORGE
May we begin, please!
(to Mimi)
Watch what the others do and follow their lead.

MIMI
I can't see.

GEORGE
Sit!

(Billy, Tom and Rowena get down on all fours. Tom pulls Mimi down with them.)

MIMI
(to Tom)
You're hurting my knees!
(Billy growls at him.)
This floor is so filthy!

(George blows his whistle.)

GEORGE
Helicopters overhead. Hide.

(Tom, Pookie, and Rowena scatter and hide in various places on the stage, where they remain whimpering. Billy goes behind the tree. Mimi sits center stage, frozen.)

MIMI
Hello? Hello?

(Billy looks around the tree and whispers to her.)

BILLY
Mimi, I'm over here behind the tree. Come on.

MIMI
(wails)
No, no, no. I'm not going to do it!

GEORGE
Get moving, Missy.

MIMI
I won't, I won't, I won't!
(stamps her feet. George blows his whistle.)
I hate this doggie thing!

GEORGE
Break!

MIMI
Oh, goodie.

GEORGE
Everybody out.
(Tom, Pookie, Billy and Rowena exit. To Margo)
You, too, Madam.
(Margo exits. To Mimi)
Not you.

MIMI
Mr. Mercer, I'm supposed to be in a real play and have a real part, not a dog or anything animal like that.

GEORGE
You're in the company and you'll play the part you're given.

MIMI
I'm going to tell Daddy. He'll find me another company that's not hazardous to my health.

GEORGE
Your Daddy doesn't scare me. I'm Top Dog here.

MIMI
What do you know about anything? You work in a basement.

GEORGE
(George exits, calling)

Margo!

MIMI
(takes out her cell, calls, into phone)

Daddy! Daddy! Where were you? No, I am not having a good time. I hate this play! I want a real one, like the one we saw at the La Mirada Dinner Theater. How do I know what it was called? Find out!!! O.K. then. I'm not going to be an actress. I'll just stay home. With you!

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

LIGHTS UP

SETTING: The Lone Star Saloon.

TIME: The next day. Morning – 11:30

Margo and Arnie sit at the bar, sipping. Margo has her cranberry juice. Arnie has a scotch.

MARGO
Does it have to be *The Baron's Revenge*?

ARNIE
Mimi saw it at the La Mirada Dinner Theater and it was swell. Have you had their prime rib?

MARGO
The thing is...the thing is...*The Baron's Revenge* isn't something that our company could do really well. It's wonderful but it has....
(searches for the words)
It has...so many words.
(in pain)
Especially the Baron. He just talks and talks.

ARNIE
I wouldn't have asked you if it wasn't really important. I mean she loves this acting stuff. You could get addicted to it, couldn't you, and work at it twenty-four hours a day?

MARGO
I'm addicted.

ARNIE

I hope she will be, too. It would be so good for both of us. The only thing she ever really liked was just staying home. I mean it isn't that she isn't busy.

MARGO

Swell.

ARNIE

Dr. Frankel thinks she's very special. It's just that I've been a parent for twenty-seven years. I'd like to try something else.

MARGO

George is adamant.

ARNIE

Well then, I'm going to have to withdraw my offer.

MARGO

Don't say that yet! I have one little idea.

(Platov enters, carrying a big beautiful bouquet of paper flowers.)

PLATOV

(sees her)

Mrs. Mercer!

MARGO

Ah. Here he is.

(Platov sees Arnie.)

PLATOV

Mr. Rabbit.

(shakes his hand)

So good to see you.

(gives the flowers to Margo)

For you.

MARGO

Thank you. They're gorgeous.

PLATOV

Mr. Rabbit....

Arnie...
ARNIE

Yevgeni.
PLATOV

Yevgeni.
ARNIE

Mrs. Mercer says to me that you are very big in Special Events industry.
PLATOV

Pretty big.
ARNIE

Is doing well?
PLATOV

I can't complain.
ARNIE

I make it better. I make for you bunting, banners, table dresses...
PLATOV

Skirts.
MARGO

Skirts, flags, paper flowers...
PLATOV
(points to bouquet)

Is beautiful, no?
ARNIE
(nods)

Do you have a price list?
PLATOV
(pulls a paper out of his pocket)

I show you.
(He gives it to Arnie, who looks at it.)

We could talk.
ARNIE

MARGO

Mr. Platov, I'd like to talk first. If Arnie does something for you, can you do something for us?

PLATOV

I do everything you want.

MARGO

I want you to raise the rent.

PLATOV

What?

MARGO

A lot.

PLATOV

But you are leaving.

MARGO

I'd like to go, but Mr. Mercer would like to stay.

PLATOV

That bloody guy. I raise it to sky.

MARGO

Thank you.

PLATOV

You want more?

MARGO

No.

PLATOV

(expansive, to Arnie)

Then, I buy you lunch.

(as they exit)

How do you feel about Prime Rib?

(Margo sips her drink, still in despair.)

MARGO

(shaking her head, to herself)

Oh my God. *The Baron's Revenge?*

(Brian Boffin enters.)

BRIAN

What ho? The Lady with the Juice.

(looks at his cellphone)

At 11:45 in the morning.

MARGO

(delighted, pats the seat beside her)

I think that somewhere, the sun just went over the yardarm.

(He sits beside her as we go to...)

BLACKOUT.

TIME: a bit later

SETTING: The stage

SCENE SIX

AT RISE: Billy, in costume, is alone onstage. He spots George's slippers, grabs one in his mouth and plays with it. He flings it with his mouth and it goes under the sofa. He sniffs under the sofa, then reaches under and pulls. He hears a RIP, brings the slipper out. The upper is ripped away from the lower. He jumps up on the sofa and buries the slipper under a pillow. He exits.

George enters from the backdoor, takes off his shoes and puts the one slipper on. Margo enters, putting her cell phone in her pocket.)

GEORGE

Where have you been?

MARGO

Out.

GEORGE

(Arnie enters.)

What's he doing here?

MARGO

He's hoping you've reconsidered.

GEORGE

Hope away. I will never do *The Baron's Revenge*.

MARGO

It's a tiny change in the program, that's all.

GEORGE

"Aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?"

MARGO

Nobody's being assassinated here, George.

GEORGE

What about the death of artistic integrity?

ARNIE

Hoo boy, "death".

MARGO

It's just for the opening, Georgie. We'll do *A Dog's Life* later in the season.

GEORGE

(looking)

Where's my other slipper?

(Platov enters from the front door and steps on the stage.)

Platov, keep off my stage.

PLATOV

You are leaving. Is my stage.

MARGO

Mr. Platov. We're not moving downtown. We're staying here.

PLATOV

You don't move. I raise the rent.

GEORGE

What?

PLATOV

Next month. Three hundred more.

(Margo gives him a signal. More.)

GEORGE

Extortionist!

PLATOV

For that, five hundred.

(looks at Margo)

Six.

GEORGE

I'm not paying one more penny for this rat hole.

PLATOV

Then I throw you out. Everybody in world of stage knows I have rat hole. Already *Vagabonds* telephone. I ask twice what you pay.

GEORGE

You are beyond contempt.

PLATOV

You are so low you are on floor.

GEORGE

You unprincipled pissant!

PLATOV

I spit on that.

(George rushes at Platov, with a menacing shoe. Arnie holds him back. Platov rushes at George. Margo holds him back.)

GEORGE

I don't need you.

PLATOV

You need stage!

GEORGE

You can take your stage and shove it.

ARNIE

Do you meant that?

GEORGE

You'd have to kill me to keep me here.

ARNIE

You'll move the company downtown?

GEORGE
Whatever it takes!

ARNIE
You'll do *The Baron's Revenge*?

GEORGE
Anything!

ARNIE
Do I have your word on that?

GEORGE
Yes!
(Arnie lets go of Platov. Margo lets George go.)

PLATOV
(to George)
Dasvidania again.
(to Arnie)
Come up. I show you factory.
(Platov exits.)

ARNIE
Hoo boy, isn't this great?
(Arnie follows Platov out.)

GEORGE
What have I done?

MARGO
You've made the right decision. I'm so proud of you.

GEORGE
We can't do *The Baron's Revenge*. None of my guys has the technique to play the Baron.

MARGO
Georgie, I met a wonderful English actor named Brian Boffin, from the Royal Theatre, in London.

GEORGE
(wincing)
You mean he's classically trained?

MARGO

He's played the Baron a dozen times. Shall I call him?

GEORGE

I can't do this to the kid. What am I going to tell him?

MARGO

Why don't you tell him the truth?

GEORGE

Tell him I'm throwing out his play because the daughter of the angel doesn't want to do it?

MARGO

You can't tell him that.

GEORGE

He'd kill himself.

(Tom enters from the dressing room, in his dog costume.)

MARGO

(taking out her phone)

I'll call Brian.

(She exits.)

GEORGE

Tom!

TOM

Is something wrong?

GEORGE

I'd like to talk about the play a bit.

TOM

Great. Shoot.

GEORGE

It's not ready.

TOM

You said it was a beautiful piece.

GEORGE

And it is. But...

TOM

But...?

GEORGE

I can't quite put my finger on it...there's something...it's the dialogue.

TOM

It doesn't have dialogue.

GEORGE

That's it.

TOM

Dogs don't talk. That's the point.

GEORGE

That's the problem!

TOM

But I thought, I thought you thought, I thought we thought, I mean, we've been working on this for months and you've smiled and laughed and encouraged me and now, you rip the arm off my baby and drive this dagger through my heart. I'll kill myself.

GEORGE

Tom, listen to me, it's *passee*.

TOM

It was your idea!

GEORGE

It was?

TOM

(suddenly seeing)

I get it. You're throwing it out because of her!

GEORGE

Her? What her? Why would I do a thing like that?

TOM

You know why.

Why?
GEORGE

Because she's no good as a dog!
TOM

That's it!
GEORGE

She's awful.
TOM

She stinks.
GEORGE

She'd ruin it.
TOM

I won't let her do that!
GEORGE

Thank you! Oh, God. You are so good. Thank you.
TOM

We'll break her in with something less demanding and special. Then, she'll be ready for the dogs.
GEORGE

Right. Right. Thank you.
TOM

(George sits on the sofa pillow, jumps up, reaches under it and finds the slipper.)

Aaaaah!
GEORGE
(He blows his whistle. Billy and Pookie enter. Pookie's carrying a score.

(to Pookie)
BILLY
What are you reading?

Puccini.
POOKIE

(Billy gives her the thumbs up, then sees the slipper in George's hand and covers his face with his paws in shame. George raises the slipper as if to hit him. Billy peeks.)

GEORGE

Shame!

(Billy crouches on the floor in shame. He whimpers. George takes off the other slipper and is in stocking feet.)

Bad boy.

(Billy puts a paw on his knee.)

GEORGE (con't)

All right, I forgive you.

(Billy yelps with pleasure and grabs the other slipper.)

Give me that.

(Billy runs away with the slipper.)

I'm not acting, now. I mean it. Give me that.

(Billy crouches over the slipper, growling.)

Will you give me that?!

(He tries to take the slipper from Billy, who hangs on to it. The upper comes away from the lower. Billy howls.)

Sit!

(Billy sits.)

Where is Rowena?

TOM

Hildy sent her out for props.

GEORGE

And Mimi?

(Tom shrugs.)

What does she do every morning? We won't wait. I have some Good News and some Bad News. First, the Bad. Tom and I have talked it over and we've decided that *A Dog's Life* won't be ready to open the new Mercer Theater.

(Billy whines in pain. Tom pats his head.)

POOKIE

What are we going to do?

(George takes a sword out of the prop box and throws it to Tom.)

GEORGE

How's your Italian dialect?

TOM

It'sa good.

(George throws Billy a sword.)

GEORGE

How's the footwork? Is it good enough to play the swift and flamboyant Giorgio?

(Tom and Billy square off. Touch swords.)

TOM

Guido Sarducci!

BILLY

Emilio Pucci!!

(They fight, not an easy thing to do in dog suits. Pookie follows them, refereeing. Tom touches Billy on the chest with his sword. Billy shows his throat.)

POOKIE

Touche. Tom wins.

GEORGE

Tom! Giorgio!

BILLY

What about me?

GEORGE

You'll get something.

POOKIE

In what? What are we going to do?

GEORGE

I almost forgot the Good News. I've found that extra actor you've been looking for.

BILLY

At last! Someone for the Attack Dog scene.

TOM

What's his name?

GEORGE

Mr. Brian Boffin of The Royal Theater, London, England.

BILLY

An English actor? English actors have no heart, no inner fire. And they think they're so smart.

GEORGE

He's a quick study and he'll be ready for the opening.

BILLY

I can be ready. No problem.

GEORGE

It isn't easy for you to slide from one character to another. You know that.

BILLY

Never! What show? When?

POOKIE

Boffin. I know that guy. I met him at the Lone Star Saloon a while back. He could talk real good, even after two triple vodkas.

(Brian enters through the backdoor.)

GEORGE

Mr. Boffin. Right on time. George Mercer.

BRIAN

Charmed.

POOKIE

Boff! How goes it?

BRIAN

Have we met?

POOKIE

At the Lone Star Saloon, man. Remember?

BRIAN

Surely, you jest.

(Pookie hands Brian a pair of slippers. Brian holds them from his nose.)

How many feet have preceded mine?

(He puts the slippers on.)

BILLY

But he's so old. He must be forty!

BRIAN

What, you insolent puppy, is forty? It is a *soupccon* of character, an acquired reputation, rooms in the gentlemen's club of one's choice and a shot at tea with the Queen.

BILLY

But...

BRIAN

And what is twenty? An unfortunate, jejune, callow, pimply-faced, bumptious, boring, though thank God, brief state of being.

BILLY

All I meant was, well, we're on the cutting edge of hip here, and forty is part of the past.

BRIAN

The cutting edge of hip"? How mysterious, dear boy. What is that? Is the cutting edge like the slice of Sheffield steel? Is "hip" what the cutting edge cuts into? Painful, I should think. And when it cuts away with its hip, or indeed, cuts away at this "hip", what does it have when it's finished? Something present?

I present it to you. Am I not present? You call, "Boffin, Boffin", and do I not reply, "Present?" Is this flesh I pinch not present flesh? Is this air I breathe not present air? Fetid, without doubt, but present? Doesn't anybody in this wretched place smoke?

(George blows his whistle.)

GEORGE

The Grand Tour for Mr. Boffin.

BRIAN

Too kind.

(Brian, Pookie, Billy and Tom start offstage.)

Who plays the leads in this company?

BILLY

There are no leads. We're all equal, here.

BRIAN

How devastatingly American of you.

(They exit.)

GEORGE

Margo!

(Margo enters.)

What kind of actor is that?

MARGO

He's here?

GEORGE

He's as stiff as a board.

MARGO

He's wearing a back brace.

GEORGE

You want me to hire an actor who's incapacitated?

MARGO

It's temporary. He was playing Cyrano and he tripped over his sword.

GEORGE

You want me to hire an incapacitated actor who's accident prone!

MARGO

His diction is terrific. Authentic British diction.

(Tom enters.)

TOM

How can this guy do the Attack Dog scene? He's as stiff as a board.

MARGO

He's wearing a back brace.

TOM

Can we try him out?

(George smiles at him.)

MARGO

George!

(Brian, Pookie and Billy enter.)

POOKIE
You sure you've never been to the Lone Star?

(George blows his whistle.)

GEORGE
Sniff the wind. What do you smell?

TOM
Feline?

GEORGE
No.

ROWENA
Ferret?

GEORGE
No.

BILLY
Pheasant?

GEORGE
No! Fox!

ALL THE ACTORS
Yes!

MARGO
No!

(The actors, as dogs, advance on Brian, growling.)

BRIAN
No, no, no.

(Brian hides behind Margo, then races to the backdoor. He can't get it open. The dogs chase him into corner, where he huddles, panting and terrified.)

GEORGE

Good start, Mr. Boffin. Break!

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

TIME: the same as the end of Act One

SETTING: the main stage

AT RISE:

Margo and George are offstage. All the other actors are as they were at the end of Act One. Brian hobbles to the sofa, where he sits, in shock.

POOKIE

Not bad, Bof. That looked like real terror.

BILLY

Come on. Simulated real terror. It was all external.

TOM

But convincing. Welcome to the company, Bri.

(sotto voce)

How're you doing?

BRIAN

Dazed, dear boy, but delighted to be here.

TOM

Great.

BRIAN

I say, when are the paychecks cut? Fridays?

TOM

Every other Monday, most of time.

BRIAN

To whom would I speak about an advance?

TOM

Advance?

(Rowena enters, carrying a stack of doggie bowls.)

ROWENA

Hello, doggies. Come get your goodie bowls.

(Tom takes the bowls.)

TOM

Row! I've missed you.

ROWENA

I missed you, too.

TOM

Row, something terrible....

ROWENA

Brian Boffin. Is it really you? I saw your Baron Bragodoccio at the La Mirada Dinner Theater and I was transported and touched. Your voice is a magnificent instrument.

BRIAN

It is, isn't it?

ROWENA

Could you do possibly do some of the Baron for us?

BRIAN

Darling.

(slight pause)

Of course not.

(Margo enters, carrying an armload of scripts. George enters behind her.)

GEORGE

What do you mean, you just happened to have a few copies on hand?

TOM

Is that the new play? What's it about?

GEORGE

It's passionate, it's political, it's now.

Let me paint the opening scene for you. In prison, the leader of a band of revolutionaries has resisted the sexual advances of the state's brutal dictator and in retaliation, the despot has ordered the execution of the fiery chief's lover.

To the beat of military drums, the condemned man is led out to die. Then, in a thrilling moment, the brilliant rebel leader diverts the attention of the firing squad, and the lover jumps over the wall to freedom. He liberates his beloved, they escape, and together, set off a small civil war.

TOM

Is the leader of the rebels a man or a woman?

GEORGE

A woman.

TOM

That's a scene from *The Baron's Revenge*.

BILLY AND ROWENA AND HOOVER

The Baron's Revenge!!

BILLY

We can't do that romantic crap.

GEORGE

That's what Melvin Bernheimer thinks.

ALL

What?

GEORGE

He says we don't have the technique. Or the talent.

ALL

Never!

TOM

We could do this with one hand tied behind our backs.

GEORGE

And we will.

MARGO

Giorgio.

(hands Tom a script.)

Braggodocio.

(hands Brian a script.)

BILLY

How comes he gets Braggodocio?

MARGO

Delvecchio.

(Margo hands Billy a script.)

BILLY

Aw.

GEORGE

He's hunted down like a dog.

BILLY

All right!

MARGO

The militia.

(She hands Pookie a script.)

POOKIE

The entire militia?

(George takes a script from Margo, hands it to Rowena.)

GEORGE

Lady Teresa.

MARGO

Oh.

ROWENA

I can't believe it. I've been dying to do this for years and years. It's my favorite play and my favorite part in the whole world.

(to Brian)

And I'll be playing opposite my favorite actor.

What!!!?
TOM

What?
ROWENA

(imitating her)
It's my favorite play and my favorite part in the whole world!
TOM

Well, it is.
ROWENA

What about *A Dog's Life*?
TOM

I love *A Dog's Life*, too.
ROWENA

You don't have to pretend, Lady Benedict Arnold Teresa.
TOM

I'm not pretending.
ROWENA

(imitating her)
"Oh, Tom, you're such a wonderful writer."
(his own voice)
But I'm no Arthur Mellors or Fanny Farquhar, right?
TOM

Well, you're not. They're established. And famous.
ROWENA

Traitor!
TOM

What's going on?
ROWENA

We're opening with *The Baron's Revenge* because George says *A Dog's Life* isn't ready.
POOKIE

I didn't know. Oh, Tom, I'm sorry.
ROWENA

TOM

Sorry we're throwing out a dog? How could I have bared my soul to someone so fickle and shallow?

ROWENA

That's cruel, Tom Cameron. And immature!

TOM

But it's honest. Unlike some people I know.

ROWENA

Fine. I'll never speak to you again.

(She grabs the bowls from him and exits. Hildy enters.)

HILDY

That's life. "The heart-ache and the thousand natural knocks that flesh is heir to."

BRIAN

The thousand natural shocks, not knocks.

HILDY

What's the diff.?

(Hildy looks inside Pookie's lunch bag. Pookie looks up from her script and *sees her leaving with the bag.*)

POOKIE

(to herself)

Whoa.

GEORGE

Where is Mimi?

(Mimi enters, through the backdoor.)

MIMI

Am I late?

GEORGE

Punctuality is...

MIMI

I know it is. Sorry. I guess Daddy forgot to mention that I had all these appointments in the mornings. I mean they were set up before I came here and Dr. Frankel charges even if you don't get there so I couldn't just not go, could I?

GEORGE
And who pray tell, is Dr. Frankel?

MIMI
She's...

GEORGE
Don't tell me. I don't want to know.
(hands her a copy of the script.)
Laurinda.

MIMI
The Baron's Revenge. Oh, goodie. I saw that at the La Mirada Dinner Theatre.
(innocently)
Who's playing Lady Teresa?

GEORGE
Rowena.
(blows his whistle)
We'll read through.

BRIAN
Mwaaa. Mwaaa.
(loudly, with flair)
Theophilus Thistle, the successful thistle-sifter, in sifting a sieveful of unsifted thistles
thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumbs.

(Rowena enters.)

GEORGE
Mr. Boffin.

BRIAN
Does this shop stock short socks with spots?

GEORGE
Will you just start?

MIMI
Laurinda's the maid.

GEORGE
That's right.

MIMI

How come Rowena is playing the Lady and I'm playing the maid?

GEORGE

This is an ensemble. Everybody is equal here.

MIMI

You mean that Rowena and I are equal, even though I'm playing the maid and she's playing Lady Teresa?

GEORGE

You are.

MIMI

Oh, good.

(pause)

But isn't Lady Teresa the biggest part?

GEORGE

It is.

MIMI

Then, the parts aren't equal.

GEORGE

Some parts are bigger than others but they are all equally important.

MIMI

That's marvelous! Rowena will love playing my part because it's so much smaller. She'll be equally important and she won't have to work half as hard.

GEORGE

You are not going to play Lady Teresa.

MIMI

I'm not?

GEORGE

You're not.

MIMI

Never?

GEORGE

Never, never, never.

MIMI

Have you read your contract?

TO BLACK

SCENE TWO

AT RISE:

Billy, Rowena, Tom, Pookie, Brian and George are onstage. Arnie and Margo enter.

ARNIE

(to Margo)

Hoo boy! A rehearsal.

(to George)

Gee, I'm sorry you didn't study that contract. It's the details that get you. I always go over mine with a lawyer.

GEORGE

The Baron's Revenge. We will begin with the balcony scene with everybody off book. Remember the super objective, please.

ARNIE

What is the super objective?

BRIAN

To die with dignity, I believe.

GEORGE

Mr. Boffin? Could you try adding a little movement this time through?

BRIAN

I could but I suspect the immobility works as a rather menacing contrast, don't you?

(He exits.)

MIMI

(to Billy)

I hope I don't rush my lines again. He gets so upset.

BILLY

Just relax and you'll be fine.

MIMI

I am relaxed. Dr. Frankel says I never have to be nervous again.

(She takes a vial out of her pocket.)
Check it out. Percocet. I took two already and my feet feel dreamy.

(George blows his whistle.)

GEORGE

Places!

(Billy and Mimi exit.)

Pookie!

(Pookie beats the drum in a military fashion. Brian, who has added a large moustache, enters, leading Billy by a rope.)

BILLY

(dejectedly)

Would that my dove would appear
And drop one pearly tear
That I might catch and hold.
An amulet against the coming of the hour.

(Billy turns upstage and we see his dogtail protruding from his costume.)

Alas, she is gone.....

GEORGE

Signor Delvecchio?

BILLY

Sir?

GEORGE

Haven't you forgotten something?

(Billy sees the tail.)

BILLY

This?

GEORGE

Take off the tail!! And don't come back until you come back as Signor Delvecchio.

BRIAN

(to Billy)

Heel!

(Billy heels.)

How fortunate for Farquhar and Mellors to be moldering in their grave. This production would kill them.

GEORGE

We will move on.

(Pookie picks up the bugle and plays a FANFARE. Mimi sweeps open the dressing room curtain and takes a position on the balcony. Rowena appears and stands beside her.)

MIMI

I say my line, right?

GEORGE

Yes!!!

(Platov comes through the factory door.)

ARNIE

Mr. Platov! How are you doing?

PLATOV

Today, I am bee-ooo-ti-ful.

MIMI

Daddeee! Please. I'm acting up here.

ARNIE

You're working on the order?

PLATOV

We are making big order for the biggest and best event on biggest and best day of year in biggest and best country in the world. Thank you.

ARNIE

You're a go-getter, Platov.

(Platov exits, into the factory.)

MIMI

I'm all nervous again.

(She reaches behind the curtain and takes out her Evian bottle and washes down two more pills.)

GEORGE

May we begin again, please?

(Pookie plays a fanfare, taken from *Tosca*.)

What kind of fanfare is that?

POOKIE

It's Italian.

GEORGE

Good start.

(The Percocet really kicks in. Mimi's arms relax at her sides, her eyes lose their focus. She speaks slowly in a low voice with just the hint of a slur. George points to Pookie.)

Again.

(Pookie plays the fanfare again.)

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

Laurinda, it will soon be noon.

LAURINDA (ROWENA)

Yes, Milady.

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

Dio, I faint with fear.

LAURINDA (ROWENA)

Courage, Milady.

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

I will not submit.
I would rather endure
The rapacious embrace of
Brutal soldiers
The snarling attack of curs
Rather lie babbling in
The abode of all demons,
Die banished, cursed and alone.
My soul recoils at the thought of
The Baron's kiss.

(Arnie applauds.)

ARNIE

Beautiful, sweetheart.

(to George)

You've done wonders! I'm overjoyed. She's a great surprise to me.

GEORGE

To us all.

MIMI

Daddeee, I haven't finished yet.

(Arnie brings out his phone.)

GEORGE

Will you do that somewhere else?

ARNIE

You betcha.

(He exits.)

MIMI

Now, I've forgotten where I was.

GEORGE

Would you like a moment to gather your thoughts, Lady Teresa?

MIMI

Yes.

GEORGE

Good. So would I.

(He exits.)

ROWENA

(to Mimi)

Have you got my five dollars by any chance? I sure could use it.

MIMI

Not now, Rowena. Can't you see I'm exhausted?

(Mimi exits.)

BRIAN

(to Rowena)

How are you?

ROWENA

I'm sad but I'm O.K.

BRIAN

Dear heart, you are a trouper. You were a first rate Lady Teresa.

ROWENA

Thanks, Brian. That means a lot to me.

BRIAN

I shall miss ravishing you.

ROWENA

I adored working with you. I always fall half way in love with the leading man.

BRIAN

So do I.

(Rowena picks up her crossword book.)

I don't know why you bother with crossword puzzles. I abhor them.

ROWENA

It keeps my mind off things.

(Billy enters.)

BRIAN

(sotto voce but Billy hears)

I do need that forty for the rent but I'll have it back to you by the end of the week. I'm expecting quite a large sum from the dear old aunt in Shepherd's Bush.

ROWENA

No hurry. I just got a residual. Whoo hoo.

(looks at the book)

What's an eight letter word for *pretentious*?

BILLY

Boffin.

ROWENA

(counting)

That's only six.

BRIAN

If you don't mind, old boy, but about Delvecchio's entrance...

BILLY

What about it?

BRIAN

You're skulking in, talking to your socks. You look like a whipped dog.

BILLY

I'm going to be shot!

BRIAN

I know that and you know that but we should let the audience in our little secret, shouldn't we?

BILLY

Meaning...

BRIAN

They can't hear you past the first row. This is the stage, love. There's no camera, no microphone.

BILLY

Are you telling me how to act?

BRIAN

(pause)

Yes.

(sighs)

No one has presence anymore.

BILLY

What makes you think you know everything?

BRIAN

I've paid my dues.

BILLY

I've paid my rent.

BRIAN

A hit, a hit, a palpable hit.

BILLY

Is that Hamlet or Ham?

BRIAN

You insufferable whelp. My Hamlet is one of the finest ever seen on the stage.

BILLY

What did you call me?

ROWENA

(looking at her crossword)

Wow. I'm almost finished. What's the sunflower state?

BRIAN

(automatically in an American accent)

Kansas.

(Brian is in momentary shock. Billy looks at him, alert.)

ROWENA

(writing)

It fits. How did you know that?

BILLY

Yeah. How did you know that?

(Tom, Pookie and Hildy enter, carrying a prop stone wall.)

HILDY

"Oh, kiss me through the hole of this wobbly wall".

BRIAN

It is not wobbly.

(Tom and Pookie exit.)

HILDY

Sure it is. 'Course, it won't be when I'm finished.

BRIAN

It is vile....vile!

HILDY

Are you criticizing my work?

BRIAN

"O, kiss me through the hole of this vile wall."

HILDY

I didn't know you cared.

(Pookie and Tom enter, carrying a trampoline, which they place behind the wall.)

O.K. Delvecchio. Let's try your escape.

(Billy walks to the wall. Tom grabs a rifle from the prop box and trains it on Billy. Pookie starts a drum roll.)

Give him his line, Baron.

BRIAN

The correct one or a rough approximation? Ready, aim...

MIMI

Wait, wait, wait. I have to faint.

BRIAN (BARON)

Ready, aim...

MIMI (LADY TERESA)

Ooooooh!

(Mimi faints. As everybody looks at her, Billy vaults over the wall.

BRIAN (BARON)

FIRE!

(Pookie hits a key on keyboard. SOUND OF GUNFIRE. They all look at the wall.) Billy has gone.

Sound the alarm.

(Pookie SOUNDS THE ALARM.)

Surround the stockade. The bird has flown.

(Billy walks out from behind wall. Brian, in his own voice)

'Twas a cuckoo bird, I believe.

(Arnie enters.)

ARNIE

Kids! I've got a surprise!

(Margo and George enter.)

I've asked the Board to a special performance.

GEORGE and MARGO

What??!!

ARNIE

It's all set! It's a small group but elite. The members of the Board, a couple of New York producers and their significant others, the Mayor, Platov, of course, and Melvin Bernheimer....

GEORGE

Melvin Bernheimer?

ARNIE

Isn't that exciting? A week from now. The eighteenth!

MIMI

My birthday?

ARNIE

Happy Birthday, sweetheart!

MIMI

Oh, Daddy!

ARNIE

Won't this be best birthday party you've ever had?

MIMI

(to everybody)

Don't you just love, love, love him?

(She sinks onto the sofa and passes out. George puts his head in his hands. Hildy, Tom, Pookie and Billy exit, carrying the sofa.)

QUICK BLACK

SCENE THREE

TIME: The night of the special preview performance.

AT RISE: Pookie, in costume as a soldier, enters and deliberately places a brown lunch bag next to her keyboard, then exits. Tom and Hildy appear on separate balconies, let down the painted canvasses at the railings, transforming the dressing room and office into medieval stone towers. They exit.

Margo enters, carrying a shoebox. George enters, opposite.

MARGO

For you.

(George opens the box and takes out a pair of plaid slippers.)

Do you like them?

GEORGE

They're exactly like my old ones. They're perfect.

MARGO

All the big guns in the country are out there, Georgie.

GEORGE

You made it happen, honey bear. Don't think I haven't noticed.

MARGO

Sweetie. That makes everything worthwhile.

(George kisses Margo. She exits. George sits on the stairs and puts on the slippers. MUSIC - *Vissi d'Arte*, softly. Hildy enters.)

HILDY

How's your belly for spots?

GEORGE

Hildy. I think I've been seduced.

HILDY

Does Margo know?

GEORGE

Sex is small potatoes, Hildy. It's dreaming that does you in. You know, for years, when I woke up in the morning, I was already here in my mind, on this stage, working. I listened for the voices in my head...waited to see what I saw when I was dreaming. Who should move. Who should speak. What should go where.

Now, I wake up with the brand new Mercer Theater. I can see myself downtown, driving by, looking up at my name in lights. There are crowds outside and people whispering, "Here he comes. It's George. George Mercer, the wacky genius." But I'm not called George. I'm called "Gadge" or "Lee" or maybe, The Old Man. I'd like that, The Old Man.

I am getting on, Hildy and I'm nobody. When you're old and you're nobody, people aren't interested in who you were and what you did or what you have to say.

You've suffered and you've laughed and you've built things and you've made things happen and nobody wants to know. You sit in the old age home and that's it. You have no past and no future and the present stinks. You stink.

HILDY

Yep.

GEORGE

When you're somebody, people want to know everything about you. They research. They write unauthorized biographies and when you're very, very old, PBS does a retrospective of your work and the world marvels at how amusing and sprightly you are.

HILDY

I hope I still have all my teeth.

(Platov suddenly sings along with the music.)

GEORGE

Platov! Platov!

(The MUSIC fades. Platov opens the factory door.)

We have a performance tonight. Have you no respect?

(Platov hits a note, holds it, finishes the note, sticks his tongue out at George, and exits. The music stops.)

HILDY

You know what I'm looking forward to? Buying a new Blaupunkt. I saw a beaut for \$69.95 at Leo's Car Radios.

GEORGE

\$69.95?

HILDY

It was a loss leader.

(They exit. Brian enters through the backdoor, costume in hand. Billy, in costume as the cavalier, Delvecchio, steps in from the shadows.)

BRIAN

Ah, dear boy, our first performance. If I were home, I'd have had tea for luck at the National Theater. Larry's old place. Lord Olivier to you. Rest his soul.

BILLY

Faker. You're not English!

(waves his phone in Brian's face.)

You're from Iola, Kansas.

BRIAN

(American accent)

Oh, yeah?

BILLY

I googled you! And look what I found. A little something from the Times, the Iolan Times!

(reads from phone)

“All of us who attended the *Footlight Players* production of Hamlet will never forget our own Brian Boffin as the tortured Dane.” It's got a picture, too.

BRIAN

Give me that.

(Billy dances away.)

BILLY

You're on Facebook and Twitter and I've emailed everybody in the world, including Melvin Bernheimer. You talk about tea. I'm talking about phony. You'll be laughed out of town.

BRIAN

Aaaah.

(carrying his costume, he exits.)

BILLY

Where'rya going, Toto?

(George enters.)

Look at this. You are going to die.

(George looks at the phone and then hands it back to Billy.)

GEORGE

My first company played in Kansas one year. We followed the mud circus.

BILLY

Whatdy'a think?

GEORGE

About what?

BILLY

About Brian. He's a phony.

GEORGE

We're all phonies. How else could we get along?

BILLY

You don't care?

GEORGE
Have you ever seen a mud circus?

BILLY
No.

GEORGE
It's filthy.

BILLY
Is he going to be in *A Dog's Life*?

GEORGE
I haven't crossed that bridge yet, Billy.

BILLY
Are we ever going to do it?

GEORGE
(patting his shoulder)
I'll get back to you on that.

(He exits.)

BILLY
(faintly)
Yip.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

TIME: A few minutes later.

SETTING: THE LONE STAR SALOON

Brian sits at the counter, a bottle of vodka and a shot glass in front of him.

(The Lone Star sign flickers and country music softly plays.)

LIGHTS SLOWING DOWN

LIGHTS UP ON

SETTING: The Main Stage

TIME: an hour later

(Rowena, who enters, dressed as Laurinda. Tom enters, costumed as the swashbuckler, Giorgio.)

Rowena. TOM

Tom. I'm so sorry we quarreled. ROWENA

So am I. You look so beautiful. TOM

You look so handsome. Are you ready? ROWENA

I guess so. Everything is relative. TOM

Absolutely. ROWENA

(in a burst) TOM
Except my love for you, which is unbounded, unblemished, never-ending and true.

Oh, Tom. ROWENA

TOM
I've loved you for so long. When you first walked through the door, the lights went on all around you and I knew you were my soulmate, my swan, my joy, for life. It was a bolt from the sky.

(They kiss.)
Love is all.

Positively. ROWENA

(Tom kisses Rowena again.)
He loves me.

(Pookie enters, guitar in hand.)

POOKIE

Hey, Tom.

(sees Tom and Rowena and stops.)

You won't need this, now!

TOM

What?

POOKIE

I finished the song.

ROWENA

It's never too late for a song.

POOKIE

(to Rowena)

It's for you.

ROWENA

You look so pretty, Pookie. That costume brings out the color of your eyes.

POOKIE

Really?

ROWENA

(reading)

Will you sign this?

POOKIE

Nah.

ROWENA

Please?

POOKIE

(signing the manuscript, to Tom and Rowena)

Tell anybody my real name and you die.

ROWENA

Promise.

TOM

What is it?

(Pookie hands the manuscript to Tom.)

POOKIE

Prunella.

(Tom kisses her on the cheek. Pookie plays the introduction on the guitar.)

TOM

(sings)

"When I crawl into bed
At the end of the day
I lie there and think
Of the things I would say
To you, Row
If you, Row

TOM (con't.)

Were with me.

We'd lie close together
Our clothes on the chair
And look at each other
Surprised to be there
And you, Row
And you, Row
Would kiss me.

Rowena, Rowena, Rowena
You'd kiss me.

When we'd wake in the morning
At seven or ten
I'd whisper, "I love you,"
And hold you again
And say, Row
Please stay, Row
Stay with me.

Rowena, Rowena, Rowena, Rowena
I love you
Stay with me.

TOM, ROWENA AND POOKIE

(sing together)

Rowena, Rowena, Rowena, Rowena
I love you.
Stay with me. Stay with me.

(Mimi, in costume, enters.)

MIMI

You are so loud and you're getting on my nerves and I'm out of Percocet and Dr. Frankel's at the beach and she isn't wearing her beeper. Why is she on vacation now? It's not even August. She knows I have the lead in this play!

(She grabs the manuscript, reads)

Prunella? That's so stupid. Your name is Prunella?

(to Rowena)

Is that your costume? Nothing personal or anything but you look like a turnip.

TOM

You won't be a lead for long, Mimi Rabbitt. When we do *A Dog's Life*, you'll be a dog. Period.

MIMI

Oh, we're never going to do *A Dog's Life*.

TOM AND ROWENA AND POOKIE

What?

MIMI

I hate that stupid play. My Daddy's going to get George to throw it out for good.

ROWENA

George would never do that.

MIMI

You dummy. My Daddy does anything I want and George has to do anything my Daddy says.

(Mimi exits.)

TOM

I'll kill myself.

ROWENA AND POOKIE

Tom!

(They exit. Brian enters. He's in costume but the coat is buttoned up wrong. George enters.)

GEORGE

Mr. Boffin, you're not in makeup!

BRIAN

I must explain. I am at heart, English. Kansas was an accident of birth. I was bred for condescension.

(Margo enters.)

MARGO

Mr. Boffin. You're drunk.

BRIAN

I have been renewing my fitful love affair with the triple vodka. I drink one and then another and then another and I wait for the click in my head. When I hear the click, so long, I'm gone. I'm back but I'm gone.

(Billy enters, buckling on his sword)

Aha! The snake in the grass.

GEORGE

(to Billy)

Get him into makeup.

BILLY

But, George...

GEORGE

(to Brian)

Don't move.

BRIAN

But you like people to move. And I can. Tonight, I'm a whirling top, an eagle, a lambent flame.

(He whirls and leaps and throws his back out. He falls to the stage, screaming in pain. As George leans over Brian, *his whistle drops onto the stage.*)

My back! My back!

MARGO

Is his costume torn? It's all new material.

(Pookie, Tom, Rowena and Mimi enter and stare.)

GEORGE

Just a back twinge.

(Brian screams. Hildy enters, carrying a stretcher and Billy helps him lift Brian onto it.)

Back to work, everybody. Now!

(Pookie, Tom, Rowena and Mimi exit.)
Don't forget, Mr. Boffin. You're our leading man.

BILLY

Leading man?

(Hildy and Billy exit, carrying Brian on the stretcher.)

GEORGE

(to Margo)

This is disastrous. If we don't go on, Arnie'll take his theater back and I'll be stuck in a factory forever with a loony landlord and a binge boozier from the boonies. What are we going to do?

MARGO

You figure it out. I'm going to put a gun to my head.

(Tom and Rowena enter.)

GEORGE

What, now?

(As Tom and Rowena talk to George and Margo, Brian screams.
We don't hear the dialogue.)

Do whatever you want. I don't care anymore.

(Margo, Tom and Rowena exit. Hildy enters.)

HILDY

He'll be OK.

GEORGE

He's screaming with pain.

HILDY

He's an actor. That lighting board's bothering me. If I didn't know better, I'd swear Platov was siphoning off some of the juice. His guys aren't working up there, are they?

GEORGE

He knows we have a performance.

(George exits.)

HILDY

Yeh.

(Hildy picks up the brown lunch bag and looks in. It explodes with a whoosh of red powder, which covers Hildy's face. Pookie enters.)

POOKIE

Gotcha, turkey!

(Hildy chases Pookie off. The back curtains are pulled, revealing a cyclorama that transforms the entire back wall into a town square. Billy and Tom enter and place a tower in front of the backdoor. *Tom sees George's whistle on the stage, picks it up, and exits.*

The door of the tower opens and Arnie, wearing a tuxedo, enters. Pookie enters and takes her place at the keyboard.)

ARNIE

Pook. Are we all set for the surprise?

POOKIE

Sure are.

ARNIE

What's the signal?

POOKIE

How about this?

(He presses a key on the keyboard. A climatic chord from *Tosca* .)

ARNIE

Got it.

(shouts up)

Platov! Come on down.

(Platov's enters, wearing a tuxedo. He yells back into his factory.)

PLATOV

Get back to work.

(to Arnie)

You like this toox? I rent but when I am big tycoon, I buy.

ARNIE

I got that Bernheimer fella the best seat in the house. Hoo boy, we'd better get to our seats. Have fun, Pook.

THE LIGHTS START TO GO SLOWLY DOWN.

PLATOV

Break arm, Pook.

(Arnie leads Platov to the stairs and off the stage into the audience, where they sit in the front row.)

TO BLACK

ARNIE

Here we go!

SCENE FOUR

IN BLACK, the OVERTURE starts. Pookie's version of melodies from Tosca.

LIGHTS SLOWLY UP

(The balcony curtains part to reveal Mimi as Lady Teresa and Margo, poured into Rowena's costume, as Laurinda, the maid.)

The MUSIC fades.

(Mimi looks out, sees the house and freezes. Margo nudges her and she starts. Her delivery is flawless but at top speed.)

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

Laurinda it soon will be noon.
The bells will toll
And the gallant, the brave, the bold
The dearest...
My dearest...
(almost breaks down)
...doomed Delvecchio will die.

LAURINDA (MARGO)

Courage, Milady.

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

I will not submit.
I would rather endure
The rapacious embrace of
Brutal soldiers,
The snarling attack of curs,
Rather lie babbling in
The abode of all demons,
Rather die banished, cursed and alone.

Than bring my body to this beast.
My soul recoils at the thought of
The Baron's Kiss.

(Rowena enters, in the character of Baron Braggadocio, wearing
Brian's costume and moustache.

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

Soft sentiments, dear lady,
In an adamantine breast.
Would you destroy your love
To save your soul?

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

Death before dishonor!

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

Very well. At the stroke
Of twelve, the dog
Delvecchio, dies.
Bring in the prisoner.

(SLOW MILITARY DRUMS. THE BELL BEGINS TO TOLL
the hour. Tom enters with Billy, as Delvecchio. He leads him to the
wall. Mimi rushes down the stairs.)

LADY TERESA (MIMI)

Take me. Take me.

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

All in good time, my dear.
First, Signor Delvecchio.
Speak your good-byes, traitor!
Your first words will be your last.

(Billy whimpers.)

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

(improvising)
Louder, oh faint-hearted one.

DELVECCHIO (BILLY)

Hee..huhee...who...who..who..

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

Speak, you dog!

(The dog takes over and Billy goes into a frenzy of barking and howling and yelping. He clutches at his throat, trying to stop himself. Finally he makes a strangled noise and stops. He pants.)

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

Sergeant! Ready, aim.....

(Tom takes aim.)

BILLY

(as himself)

Mom!

BARON BRAGGADOCIO (ROWENA)

Your Mom won't help you now. Ready, aim.....

(laughs villainously. Mimi swoons and faints.)

FIRE!

(GUNFIRE from the keyboard. Tom shoots Billy with the prop gun. Billy barks over the sound of the guns and charges at Tom, who shoots again. Billy yelps, then, falls to the stage in a swoon. Mimi springs to her feet.)

MIMI

You shot him. He's supposed to escape.

(to Billy)

Billsy, get up. You're supposed to go over the wall.

(Billy doesn't stir.)

Now the play's over, you stupid turnip. You're not supposed to be the Baron.

(She rips off Rowena's moustache.)

ROWENA

Ow!

(Tom blows George's whistle.)

TOM

Dogs! Do I have dogs?

(Pookie sounds a CHARGE on the bugle. Tom and Rowena exit.)

POOKIE

Cry havoc...

(SOUND EFFECTS from keyboard: dogs barking.)

Brian, in boxer shorts, enters. He has blotches of red on each cheek, his eyebrows are arched in surprise and his mouth is a slash. His wig is askew.)

BRIAN

And let slip the dogs of war!

POOKIE

Dig it, Bof!

(Brian puts his foot on Billy's prone body.)

BRIAN

Neddie Noodle nipped his Neighbor's Nutmegs
Did Neddie Noodle nip his Neighbor's Nutmegs?
If Neddie Noodle nipped his Neighbor's Nutmegs,
Where are the Neighbor's Nutmegs Neddie Noodle nipp'd?

MIMI

Get off, get off. You don't have anything on.

(Brian snatches the moustache from Mimi and puts it on.)

BRIAN

How's this?

(Billy comes to and bites Brian's ankle.)

Aaaah!

THE LIGHTS GO CRAZY AND FLASH IN STROBE FASHION.

(George enters.)

GEORGE

Lights. Lights.

(Hildy enters.)

HILDY

I'll fix them!

(She goes into the factory. Platov jumps up on the stage.)

PLATOV

I'll fix you!

(Platov goes into the factory.)

MARGO

Georgie, Georgie, do something.

GEORGE

I don't want to do something.

(Sounds of a melee in the factory.)

MARGO

What's wrong with you?

THE LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL.

GEORGE

I don't want to go downtown! I don't want to be somebody. I am somebody. I'm me!
I'm me!

MARGO

I'll tell you who you are. You're the big truck I've been following on the highway of life. I took my foot off the gas and for years, I've been traveling in your exhaust. Now I'm putting my foot down! It's pedal to the metal, buster.

BRIAN

Four frantic flies furiously fought forty fearful fleas.

MARGO

(to Brian)

Will you shut up?

(Brian makes a mock bow and then screams. George takes off his slippers.)

GEORGE

I'm sorry I ever said I liked these. You can take them back.

(He raises one slipper to throw it at Margo. Billy snatches it out of George's hand. He runs away with the slipper in his mouth.)

MARGO

That's brand new.

GEORGE

Here boy, here boy.

(Margo and George race after Billy. George passes the prop box (now marked MUNITIONS) and ducks inside it. Billy feints with Margo. Barks.)

George pops up with the *Electronic Trainer* in his hand. Turns the dial up to FULL. Billy yelps in pain and flips over backwards. He on the floor on his back out of breath.)

MARGO

Give me that.

(takes the slipper from Billy and throws it at George.)

Take that.

(George hides behind the propbox. Billy grabs the bottom of Margo's dress and growling, pulls at it. There's a RIP and Margo's skirt falls away from the bodice.)

You little sicko.

(She exits. The skirt comes off and Billy falls back to the floor with the skirt in his mouth. George, in fox head, lobs a bone at Margo. Brian catches it. Billy tries to get up but Brian puts his foot on his stomach. Billy lies back and pulls the skirt over his head. Brian looks at the bone.)

BRIAN

"Alas, poor Yorick! - I knew him Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times..."

(Rowena and Tom race on, in dog costumes, barking. They advance on Mimi.)

ROWENA

The turnip turns!

MIMI

No, no, no.

BRIAN

...and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it.

(Pookie plays the signal. Billy takes the skirt off his head and looks up.)

ARNIE

That's the signal. So soon?

BRIAN

...Here hung those lips that I have kist I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now?
Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a
roar?

(Billy exits. Arnie scrambles onto the stage.)

ARNIE

Yevgeni, Yevgeni. The signal!

(Platov appears at the factory door. His tie is askew and one arm is
missing from his jacket. Hildy, disheveled, appears behind him.)

PLATOV

So soon?

(He runs downstairs to join Arnie. The dogs chase Mimi to the wall.)

MIMI

No, no, no.

(She climbs to the top.)

I'm afraid of heights.

BRIAN

...Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chop faln?

MIMI

Aaaah.

(Hildy hits the wall area with light.)

Help.

ROWENA

I want my five bucks back.

MIMI

Sue me.

BRIAN

...Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour
she must come; make her laugh at that. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

(Pookie plays TAPS on the bugle. Billy, in costume as a dog, enters.)

BILLY

Rin Tin Tin to the rescue.

(Billy jumps up and helps Mimi down.)

MIMI

My hero!

BRIAN

...Dost thou think Alexander lookt o' this fashion i'th'earth. And smelt so?
(Brian sniffs the bone and throws it down.)

...Pah!"

(Offstage, Margo and Arnie sing, *Happy Birthday To You*. Pookie takes it up on the keyboard. The machines start thumping and red and white and blue flowers fall from the ceiling. Margo, Platov and Arnie wheel in a big birthday cake that says, "Happy Birthday, Mimi".)

ARNIE

Surprise, sweetheart.

MIMI

Oh, Daddee.

(Mimi runs toward him, then trips on Billy's sword. She falls, face first, into the cake.)

BLACKOUT

(In the blackout, we hear THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE, BRAVOES AND HUZZAHS. Platov and Arnie exit in the blackout. Offstage, the audience shouts, "AUTHOR, AUTHOR.")

LIGHTS UP

(Arnie and Platov enter.)

ARNIE

They loved it. Everyone! All the producers from Broadway to Toronto.

PLATOV

We are smashing them.

ARNIE

Melvin Bernheimer wants to do a profile of you for the Buzz.com.

GEORGE

Isn't the Buzz *passe*?

How did you do it?
ARNIE

He's a genius. Isn't that right, Tom?
MARGO

Absolutely.
TOM

Hoo, boy. I'm sorry you don't want the New Mercer theatre.
ARNIE

I'll be happier here in the basement.
GEORGE

Gee, you can't keep working here, George.
ARNIE

Why not?
GEORGE

It's not for rent.
ARNIE

What?
GEORGE

My partner, Arnie Rabbitt and I, soon have soda pop bottling plant in basement. We sell by case. Then we franchise.
PLATOV

Saboteur!
(to Platov)
GEORGE

If I go, I've gotta be Top Dog!
(to Arnie)

Of course, you do.
ARNIE

I'll have my lawyers call you in the morning.
GEORGE

You'd bring lawyers into this, George?
ARNIE

GEORGE

You betcha!

(Hildy enters.)

MARGO

Hildy! We're going to the New Mercer Theatre!

HILDY

Good. This lighting system is shot.

GEORGE

We'll open with....what do we call this, Tom?

TOM

A Dog's Life.

GEORGE

We'll open with *A Dog's Life.*

(The actors howl and bark in approval.)

PLATOV

Is there part for me?

THE END

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *A Dog's Life* information page (click on your browser's Back button, or visit <http://proplay.ws/a-dogs-life>)