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# The Sunset Club

*A Full-length Play by*

Mary W. Schaller

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# **The Sunset Club**

by Mary W. Schaller

## **CHARACTERS**

### **10W / 2M**

LILLIAN LAWRENCE; *about forty-five, a widow, Resident Director of the Sunset Club.*

ESTELLE MARLOWE; *in her sixties, former child movie star in the OUR GANG series who never grew up.*

CORAL BROWN; *in her sixties, a string musician who plays for studio orchestras as well as gigs. She plays a string instrument, whichever one that the actress can play.*

EMILY ARMBRUSTER; *oldest resident, seventy-nine, loves the movies and ran away to Hollywood when she was seventy-five.*

VERA CRUZ; *in her sixties, a working extra and bit part actress.*

FLORENCE GRIFFITH; *in her sixties, retired secretary from the office of MGM boss L.B. Mayer. Now works as an extra from time to time.*

LUCILLE BLISS; *in her sixties, former seamstress in the MGM Wardrobe Dept.*

GINGER WEBB; *“Queen of the B-Pictures” & one-time mistress of producer Mike Todd. She is still actively employed; her age is undisclosed, but over sixty.*

MIRANDA STERLING; *around sixty, famous leading lady in films for the past 35 years; has many acting awards including an Oscar nomination. She is a benefactor of the Sunset Club and lives there for the company.*

LANCE LOGAN; *in his fifties, a former movie cowboy star and heart throb. He is the estranged husband of MIRANDA and a no-good bum.*

OFFICER CARTER; *a policeman.*

OFFICER BLAKE; *a policewoman.*

## **SETTING**

*1970; the living room of the Sunset Club, a retirement home for single women over the age of fifty-five who have been, and perhaps still are, employed in the Motion Picture Industry.*

## ORIGINAL CAST

THE SUNSET CLUB was presented by the Greenspring Players at the Greenspring Retirement Community, Springfield, Virginia on September 12, 2019 with the following cast:

LILLIAN LAWRENCE .....	Kathleen Henry
ESTELLE MARLOWE .....	Marge Tipton
CORAL BROWN .....	Cindy DiNardo
EMILY ARMBRUSTER .....	Elizabeth Belmonte
VERA CRUZ .....	Fran Duvall
FLORENCE GRIFFITH .....	Janet Newlove
LUCILLE BLISS .....	Sheila Moses
GINGER WEBB .....	Anne Doherty
MIRANDA STERLING .....	Ruth Tomasko
LANCE LOGAN .....	Joe Ambrose
OFFICER CARTER .....	Fred Sachs
OFFICER BLAKE .....	Caroline Boubin

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

*MARY W. SCHALLER is the award-winning author of ten Harlequin romance novels, written under the pen name of Tori Phillips, three non-fiction histories published by the University of South Carolina Press and five published plays. Her plays have sold over ten thousand copies to date and have been performed in over twelve hundred productions in the United States, Canada, England and Australia. Prior to her marriage to Martin Schaller, Mary was employed at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Culver City, CA and she lived at the Hollywood Studio Club, a boarding residence for single young women employed in the motion picture industry. The Studio Club is the model for the Sunset Club.*

## The Sunset Club

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### ACT ONE

#### Scene 1

SETTING:

*March 1970, around five o'clock in the afternoon; the living room of the Sunset Club, a retirement home for single women over the age of fifty-five who have been, and perhaps still are, employed in the Motion Picture Industry. The Club is located in one of the oldest residential sections of Hollywood, California, on a quiet side street in between Vine St. on the west and Gower St. on the east and a few blocks below Sunset Boulevard. It is within walking distance of the old Columbia, RKO and Paramount Studios, the Hollywood Brown Derby Restaurant and the Hollywood Memorial Cemetery. The house was built in 1926 with funds raised by some of the silent pictures' most famous stars. It is a tan, stucco building in the Mediterranean style that was popular in the 1920s. The Living Room is decorated in a pistachio green, coral pink and tan color scheme. At the center rear of the room is the front hall that leads offstage to the front door on the right and the stairs to the upper floors on the left. A beautiful arched full-length window is in the center of the entryway and through the window, one can see a cheery garden with blooming bushes and palm trees. The Living Room itself is welcoming. The Club's reception desk, mailboxes, telephone and announcement bulletin board are to the upstage right of the center entryway. Left of the entryway is a long sideboard, in Spanish style, on which are the day's newspapers as well as copies of the Hollywood trade magazines. An attractive brass lamp and a vase of flowers are also on the table. A Spanish-*

*style fireplace with a decorative clock on its mantel is on stage left. Two side chairs flank the fireplace. Over the mantelpiece is a portrait of young, glamorous Gloria Swanson, who was a prime benefactor of the Sunset Club. Downstage right are a cozy sofa, an end table with a brass lamp and a wing back chair. Behind the sofa is another arched window that overlooks the front street. Far right, downstage is the doorway into the unseen dining room. On the downstage left side are an armchair, a sofa and another small side table with a lamp. The doorway down left leads into the Club's library, also unseen. At the extreme downstage corners on each side are small potted palms. The walls are decorated with a few framed black and white photographs of screen stars from yesteryears. The room's atmosphere is one of sunshine and comfort.*

AT RISE:

*EMILY ARMBRUSTER, the Club's eldest resident, is sitting in the wing chair knitting. CORAL BROWN is seated on one of the side chairs next to the fireplace practicing her cello. ESTELLE MARLOWE is seated in the armchair downstage center, dozing over her romance novel. MRS. LILLIAN LAWRENCE, enters from the downstage left doorway with the drinks tray. She crosses to up left and puts the tray on the upstage side table.*

LILLIAN

Here we are, ladies! Five o'clock! Drinkie time!

*CORAL stops playing and looks over at the tray. EMILY looks up from her knitting with a smile, while ESTELLE jerks herself awake.*

EMILY

Bless you, my dear. You do spoil us so.

*LILLIAN moves upstage right to the reception desk and sorts through the mail that was left in a pile by the postman. CORAL puts aside her cello and helps herself to a sherry.*

CORAL

She should. The Board of Directors pays her enough.

ESTELLE

What are we sipping today?

CORAL

*(Looking at the bottles)*

A smooth little sherry and . . . an indifferent white wine from Gallo. *(Pours herself a glass of the sherry)* Also pretzels.

*SFX: The telephone rings. LILLIAN crosses to the desk and answers it. The OTHERS enjoy their drinks while eavesdropping on the conversation.*

LILLIAN

Good afternoon! The Sunset Club. *(Listens)* No, Mr. Logan, Miranda's not back yet. *(Listens again)* No, I don't know where she is. *(Listens again and sighs)* Yes, I'll tell her that you called. I have all your earlier messages in her mailbox. *(Listens with growing impatience)* Yes, Mr. Logan, I understand that it is important. I will tell her the moment I see her. Good bye, Mr. Logan. *(Hangs up the phone again)*

CORAL

*(Looking up from her music)*

Was that Miranda's ex?

*LILLIAN writes a note and puts it in one of the pigeonholes behind the desk.*

LILLIAN

Yes and no.

ESTELLE

*(Perked up)*

Really? How so?

LILLIAN

Miranda married Lance Logan after a tornado of a courtship about thirty years ago. Two years later, she realized that she had made a mistake, but by then, she knew she couldn't divorce him.

ESTELLE

(*Prompting*)  
She couldn't?

CORAL

I'll bet it's all about money.

ESTELLE

It always is, isn't it?

LILLIAN

No, she's the one who wouldn't grant him a divorce, and she's used a lot of lawyers to stay legally married to him.

CORAL

Miranda's got the house, the cars and a fortune – and he wants it all. But Miranda's not playing his tune. No divorce. But now he's living the good life up in the Hills in her mansion. Logan is a lot younger than Miranda, and I think he's waiting for her to die.

ESTELLE

That's positively ghoulish!

EMILY

(*Looking up from her knitting*)  
Unfortunately, I believe Coral is right, Estelle. Miranda comes from a very wealthy family in Kentucky, who made their money last century in bourbon. Miranda is the only heiress.

ESTELLE

Then what is she doing living here with us?

LILLIAN

Miranda is one of the Club's chief benefactors and she has every right to live here, if she wants to – which she does.

ESTELLE

I didn't know that! How on earth did that happen? I have always thought that Miranda was very smart.

CORAL

She usually is, but in the case of Lance Logan, she fell for him like a ton of bricks. He was young and knock-out gorgeous. She was rich and famous, but most of all, she wanted children. Same old story: the bloom disappeared after the kids were born. He developed a roving eye, roaming hands and a real loose zipper.

*Enter VERA CRUZ AND FLORENCE GRIFFITH upstage right. They are returning from a long day at a studio.*

*VERA squints at the clock on the mantle. She is nearsighted but too vain to wear her glasses most of the time. Meanwhile, CORAL has returned to her seat and softly plays her cello.*

VERA

Is it dinnertime yet?

CORAL

Nope. Drinkie time. My advice — stick to the sherry. (*Sorts through her music on her portable music stand*)

EMILY

Vera says the wine is indifferent.

*FLORENCE comes down stage right to the sofa and throws herself across it in dramatic fashion. Meanwhile, VERA pours herself a glass of sherry and offers one to ESTELLE who nods. VERA pours one, gives it to ESTELLE, then she sits on the sofa.*

FLORENCE

*(With a dramatic flair)*

Oh, I am dead! Just dead! (*Kicks off her heels*)

EMILY

You poor dear! Has it been a long day?

FLORENCE

*(Sits up with a grin)*

No, I'm dead, really dead — as in a morgue.

*She now has everyone's attention, which is just what she wants.*

FLORENCE, *Continued*

I'm in this television movie shoot that Columbia is doing. I'm the body. I think it's a murder mystery, but I can't be sure. I had to lie on this cold gurney — perfectly still — for hours while they filmed the morgue scene over and over again. The actor playing the doctor couldn't remember all his lines. He kept confusing his medical terminology. So unprofessional!

*FLORENCE gets up and crosses to the table and pours a large glass of wine.*

ESTELLE

Oh! What's the name of the movie?

FLORENCE

*(After taking a long sip)*

It's a detective thing. It's had a number of titles so far. Right now, they're calling it "The Rooster Crowed at Midnight."

CORAL

Well, they'll change that one soon enough, I'm sure.

EMILY

How lucky you are! A real part!

FLORENCE

*(Collapsing back onto the sofa)*

Yes, and I get to do the whole thing all over again tomorrow. I'm tempted to paint my toenails red, just to see if anyone's paying attention.

*LUCILLE BLISS enters down the stairs. She is dressed in a suit for traveling and she is lugging two suitcases and carrying a coat. LILLIAN sees her first and goes to help her with the luggage.*

LUCILLE

*(Looking brave)*

Well, my dears, it's time I was off.

VERA

So you're really going to flee the coop?

LUCILLE

Yes, the train leaves Union Station at eight o'clock tonight.

LILLIAN

We're all going to miss you, Lucille. Are you sure this is the right thing for you to do? You've been here in Hollywood for so many years.

LUCILLE

Yes, I know, but my only daughter wants me to come live with her in Pennsylvania. She's been having a bad time of it.

FLORENCE

Is that the one with the five kids?

LUCILLE

Yes, and that rat of a husband of hers walked out on all of them. My daughter needs me for moral support.

VERA

*(Aside to FLORENCE)*

I'll just bet she does. She needs a built-in babysitter. *(Then to LUCILLE)* Just keep your pension checks close to your wallet, Lucille. You worked in Metro's Wardrobe Department for nearly forty years and you earned every penny of it.

ESTELLE

Yes, indeedy.

LILLIAN

*(Picks up a small, wrapped package from the desk)*

Before you leave us, Lucille, we have a little gift for you. Something to remember us by.

*OTHERS gather around LUCILLE to see her open the gift.*

LUCILLE

Oh, you shouldn't have! How lovely!

ESTELLE

*(Still seated and can't see)*

What is it, Lucille? Hold it up, please so we can all see it.

LUCILLE

*(Holding up a golden compact)*

It's a beautiful golden compact from Max Factor's salon! Oh! It's perfect. Thank you so much, Lillian! *(Hugs LILLIAN)*

VERA

Now, every time you powder your nose, you can think of us.

LUCILLE

Oh, yes! So thoughtful! *(Puts the compact in her purse; wipes her eyes)*

FLORENCE

*(Looking out the window)*

Did you call a taxi, Lucille? There's one sitting out in front.

LUCILLE

Yes, that must be mine, so I had better hurry. *(Picks up her suitcases)* It's going to be so different now, living in Pennsylvania.

VERA

Yeah, with coal mines and groundhogs just everywhere. And ice-cold snow seven months of the year. You'll love it!

LUCILLE

*(Looking even more brave)*

So this is it! Oh, dear, I think I'm going to cry.

VERA

You'll cry alright if that taxi has got his meter running.

LUCILLE

*(Hugs as many of the women as she can reach)*

Good bye, ladies! I'll write to you when I get there. Please send me all your news. Tootle-loo! *(Starts to exit with her suitcases; pauses and looks at the portrait over the mantelpiece)*  
Good bye, Gloria!

*LUCILLE exits as OTHERS wave their farewells.*

VERA

*(To FLORENCE)*

She'll be back. You'll see. I give her five months in Pennsylvania. Six at the most.

FLORENCE

*(To VERA)*

No, she won't. She's gone for good. Think of all those grandchildren.

VERA

Believe me, I am. *(Holds out her hand to FLORENCE)* Dinner at the Brown Derby says she'll return to Hollywood.

FLORENCE

*(Thinking quickly)*

The Derby? With grapefruit cake for dessert?

VERA

Of course.

FLORENCE

*(Shakes VERA's hand firmly)*

You're on. And everybody here is a witness.

VERA

*(To EMILY)*

Easy bet.

LILLIAN

*(Comes to stage center with an envelope)*

I've sorted the mail now, ladies. *(Hands EMILY a letter while the OTHERS go to the desk to check their boxes)* Here's a letter for you, Emily.

EMILY

*(Looks at the envelope with distaste)*

It isn't another one from my brother Horace, is it?

LILLIAN

I don't think so, Emily, unless he's moved from Rhode Island to Hollywood.

EMILY

*(Excited)*

It's postmarked Hollywood! Oh, my! I can't think of anyone here who would send me a letter. It isn't my birthday.

*EMILY takes the letter, opens it with her knitting needle and begins to read it quietly while the others continue to talk. LILLIAN returns to her desk. VERA sits next to FLORENCE on the sofa.*

FLORENCE

*(Dramatically)*

Remind me never to stay out past four o'clock. The rush hour traffic has gotten much worse than I remember it. Took me forever to make that left hand turn off Vine Street to get here. They should put a light there.

*FLORENCE picks up the copy of the "Daily Variety" magazine from the table and settles down to read the latest news of the entertainment world.*

CORAL

That's highly unlikely. We're on a small side street, not big enough for a light. Anyway, I hope the traffic clears out before six. I have to be out of here by then.

ESTELLE

*(Very interested)*

You have a gig?

CORAL

You could call it that. I'm playing for a memorial service in Forest Lawn Cemetery at seven.

ESTELLE

Oh! Who died? Anyone we know? Anyone famous?

CORAL

Haven't the slightest idea. I'll tell you when I get back. All I know is that they want me to play "Happy Days Are Here Again" on the cello. Now I've got to locate something red to wear.

*She picks up her music stand, music and cello and starts to exit through the library door.*

FLORENCE

Red? You're going to wear red at a funeral?

CORAL

That's what they told me. Red clothes.

ESTELLE

Maybe the deceased was a Communist. They like red, don't they?

*CORAL just shakes her head and exits.  
SFX: The telephone rings again.  
LILLIAN answers it. Everyone pretends they are not listening, but they are.*

LILLIAN

Good afternoon. The Sunset Club. *(Listens)* Oh, hello! How are you? *(OTHERS strain to hear)* Oh, I see. Yes, well, these things tend to happen when they are least expected, especially in this town. So, it's tonight? *(Pause)* I see. Just a minute please, I'll ask. *(Covers the phone's mouthpiece with her hand)* Would anyone here like to babysit for Sean Connery's little boy tonight?

ESTELLE

Ooh! Sean Connery! You mean, the actor who plays James Bond?

VERA

*(Interested; always in need of money)*

How old is the kid?

LILLIAN

I'll ask. *(Speaks into the phone)* How old is little Jason, Mrs. Connery? Ah, thank you. *(Covers the mouthpiece again)* He's seven and all you need to do is read him a story and get him into bed.

VERA

*(Wickedly)*

There's no chance of getting Sean Connery into bed, is there?

ESTELLE

Vera!

VERA

A seven-year-old little boy who thinks he's James Bond junior? I've had a couple of nephews like that. *(To LILLIAN)* How much will she pay?

LILLIAN

*(Speaks into the phone)*

Oh, Mrs. Connery? Yes, how much do you pay your sitters? Oh, yes, I see. Yes, I do understand. How very annoying! Let me ask her. Just a moment please. *(Covers the mouthpiece)* Two dollars an hour for approximately four hours while they go to a dinner party in Benedict Canyon. Their regular sitter caught the chicken pox from one of her other clients. Mrs. Connery says that their chauffeur will pick you up and will bring you back home later. You can have your supper there. Well, Vera, are you game?

VERA

A chauffeur, a dinner at Sean Connery's house, plus two bucks an hour? Hell, yes!

LILLIAN

*(Speaks into the phone)*

Yes, Mrs. Connery? One of our ladies, Vera Griffith, will be delighted to take care of little Jason. Oh! The car is already on its way here? She'll be ready. And thank you. I do hope you and Mr. Connery have a lovely evening. Good-bye. *(Hangs up the phone and talks to VERA)* The car will be here in ten minutes. You'd better hurry and change now.

VERA

Oh, goody! I'll just pack up my whip and handcuffs for young Master Jason and I'll be ready to go.

*VERA downs the rest of her sherry in one gulp and exits upstage center, humming the iconic James Bond Theme.*

FLORENCE

Oh, no! It can't be! *(Everyone looks; FLORENCE is shaking the magazine)* I don't believe it!

LILLIAN

What is it?

ESTELLE

*(Hoping for some interesting gossip)*

What can it be? Tell us!

FLORENCE

It's on Variety's front page! Listen to this. (*Reads*) "Starting Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1970, the David Weisz Company presents a Public Auction of the countless treasures acquired from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio!"

*Everyone, including LILLIAN is aghast at this news.*

ESTELLE

An auction at MGM? They can't do that, can they? Oh, I'm so glad that Lucille didn't hear this. It would have just killed her.

LILLIAN

Are you sure you read that correctly, Florence?

FLORENCE

Yes! Right here in black and white. It goes on to say that (*Reads*) "Daily exhibitions will be from Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup> through Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at the MGM Studio, Washington Boulevard in Culver City. The auction sessions will commence on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and will continue until everything is sold!" (*Looks up at the others*) Good lord! That's two buildings stuffed full of furniture and bric-a-brac. And all those costumes? There must be thousands of them!

EMILY

Why would such a prestigious studio as MGM want to sell off all its wonderful things? That doesn't make any sense.

FLORENCE

It's the studio's new owner. He's not a motion picture man; he owns hotels in Las Vegas. Word is out that he wants to build the world's largest hotel there and that's why he bought Metro. He wants the MGM brand name for his new business venture. He doesn't care two hoots for the studio. I'm guessing he needs more money for this hotel and he's selling everything he can to raise the funds. This is an outrage! This is Hollywood! This is our history that he's putting on the block!

EMILY

Poor Mr. Mayer must be rolling in his grave.

ESTELLE

*(Fanning herself)*

Oooh! I'm having heart palpitations!

LILLIAN

No, you're not. Just breathe deeply, Estelle. (*To FLORENCE*) What else does Variety have to say? Any other details?

FLORENCE

*(Returns to reading)*

“Because of limited space, there will be no admittance without a catalog. Your ten-dollar donation for this catalogue will include admission for two persons for any and all exhibition and auction sessions.” *(Looking up at the others)* We need to go to this thing. Most of us here have worked at Metro one time or another.

ESTELLE

*(Remembering)*

Oh, yes, I was there in the Thirties. I was a star in the OUR GANG series when it was filmed there. What tricks we used to play all over the lot! And I started school at MGM’s Little Red School House. Right in the same room with Judy Garland and Elizabeth Taylor for classmates. Of course, they were “the big kids” to us in the Gang. *(Sighs)* And every afternoon, we could take a break and go over to the studio Commissary. They had an ice cream soda fountain, just for us kids. Oh, those were the days!

*ESTELLE is lost in her memories.*

EMILY

You were so lucky to have had such wonderful experiences.

FLORENCE

I was a secretary there for over twenty years in the Thalberg building. We were like a family. *(Looks at the Variety magazine)* But ten dollars seems to be a lot of money for a catalogue!

EMILY

But you can’t get into the auction without it.

ESTELLE

That’s true, and we owe it to Mr. Mayer to go. We need to try to save some of those things that he cherished. Maybe we could club together. You know, everyone put in a dollar and we’d all take turns going down there each day of the exhibition. The article did say that two people at a time could get in with one catalogue.

EMILY

It sounds a bit like picking over the bones of the dead.

FLORENCE

Don’t be morbid! Let’s go for it!

LILLIAN

It would be a shame if we let this opportunity slip by. Perhaps we could get a memento for the Club from that great studio. I feel like history is flowing through our fingers like sand in an hourglass.

FLORENCE

Okay, then we'll do it. Could we put up a notice on the board, asking for donations? I can start off with a dollar. Would you hold our money for us, Lillian?

LILLIAN

Of course, Florence, and I think that the Club could add four dollars to the pot.

FLORENCE

Then we're halfway there already! Estelle? What about you?

ESTELLE

*(Doesn't have much spending money)*

I'll have to check my bankbook, Florence. I'm not sure how much I will have until the end of the month. Would fifty cents do? I mean, do for a start?

LILLIAN

That's very generous, Estelle. Fifty cents will be just fine.

EMILY

Lillian, if no one objects, I would like to make a donation, even though I've never been to MGM. I have always loved their pictures. Please allow me to add five dollars. That should cover the cost, don't you think? Then Estelle can save her money for the auction.

ESTELLE

*(Relieved)*

You're too kind, Emily. Thank you!

LILLIAN

Are you sure you can afford this, Emily?

EMILY

It is my pleasure, and my way of saying thank you to the Sunset Club for taking me in and providing me with so many good friends and happy times. Five dollars? That is cheap at the price.

FLORENCE

Then we're in! I'll fill out this form here and send it off for the catalogue. When it comes, we'll all have a great time squabbling over what we want to bid on.

EMILY

Oh! I can hardly wait to see what they have. So much history! Do you suppose they will be offering Scarlett O'Hara's green dress? The one she made out of the curtains? Oh, I loved that dress!

LILLIAN

Who knows? In any case, the catalogue will make very interesting reading, no matter what. Florence, I will make out a check for ten dollars. You and Emily can pay me back. That way, you can send off for it immediately. The auction is just six weeks from now.

FLORENCE

*(Getting up from the sofa)*

Only six weeks? The vultures are probably circling the studio already, picking through our history. *(Goes up to the sideboard; pours herself another large glass of wine)* I'm going to wallow in Gallo and take a hot bath before dinner. And I could just wring that hotel guy's neck! Imagine selling off MGM piece by piece!

*FLORENCE starts to go up the stairs. Meanwhile, EMILY has been reading her letter. Now she gasps. FLORENCE stops and turns back. She is very concerned for EMILY's health.*

EMILY

*(Looking up from her letter)*

Oh, my goodness! Good gracious me!

ESTELLE

Bad news, Emily? Are you feeling all right, my dear? *(FLORENCE and LILLIAN draw closer to her)* You've gone quite pale. What is it?

EMILY

It's . . . a letter from Mr. Mark Laine of the Laine Talent Agency. He's Miranda's agent. Miranda knew that I had always wanted to be in a real movie, and so she asked Mr. Laine to keep me in mind, if there was something for a woman of my age. Of course, I thought that Miranda was just being kind since I've had no experience, but no. She really did tell Mr. Laine. And now he's asking me if I would be interested in having a small role in a Western that Paramount will be filming in May. Oh, my!

*EVERYONE is very excited for her.*

LILLIAN

*(Looks over the letter)*

It's really true! Oh, you lucky thing! A real part! *(To ESTELLE & FLORENCE)* Mr. Laine is offering a contract to represent Emily. He wants Emily to come down to his office on Wiltshire next Monday!

EMILY

*(A little dazed)*

Oh, my! Oh, my! Never, never in my wildest dreams did I expect . . . an acting contract! Oh! Look at me! I'm shaking!

*ESTELLE pours a glass of sherry for  
EMILY.*

LILLIAN

*(Concerned)*

Are you feeling faint, Emily? Don't get yourself too excited. Just breathe through your nose. Gently now.

ESTELLE

Here, my dear. Sip this. It will fortify you. *(Gives her the sherry)*

EMILY

*(Taking the drink and sipping it)*

Oh, thank you, Estelle. Oh, I don't know how I'm going to be able to sleep tonight. I am so excited.

LILLIAN

Well, the first thing you should do is eat a good meal, and it's almost dinnertime now.

FLORENCE

What's on the menu tonight? *(Squints at the announcement board where the daily menu is posted)* Can someone read it for me?

*VERA re-appears with a light coat and  
purse. She glances at the board.*

VERA

Looks like it's Aunt Millie's Meat Loaf, which is usually good, mashed potatoes, which are okay, and . . . oh, the usual chorus of boiled weeds.

ESTELLE

Boiled what?

VERA

Weeds, you know those limp green things: Collards, Spinach, Chard and Kale?

ESTELLE

*(Giggles)*

Sounds like a law firm.

VERA

Yes, and there ought to be a law against those plants. Just drown them in vinegar to put them out of their misery.

FLORENCE

And dessert?

VERA

It's chocolate Revenge cake . . . and I'm going to miss it. Save me a piece for later, someone.

ESTELLE

Does anyone know why it's called Revenge Cake?

VERA

It's so rich, it will do you in. Death by Chocolate!

LILLIAN

*(Looking at EMILY)*

You know, my dear, with all your excitement, I think you should have a little lie-down before dinner. There's plenty of time and I can come get you when the dining room is opened.

EMILY

*(Winds up her knitting, then gets up)*

Yes, I believe you are quite right, Lillian. I do feel a little shaky.

FLORENCE

I'm on my way upstairs as well. I'll give you a hand.

EMILY

*(Smiling)*

You are so very kind, Florence.

FLORENCE

Kindness has never been one of my virtues, Emily. I'm just hoping that you'll introduce me to your new agent, Mr. Laine.

*They start up center toward the exit and encounter CORAL on her way out. She is dressed in a red jacket and black skirt and she is carrying her cello in its case.*

CORAL

Well, I'm off to play for the dead!

FLORENCE

Just don't wake them! *(Laughs; CORAL gives her an arched look and begins to exit but then turns back and says to LILLIAN)* Say, there's a big black limo sitting out there at the curb. Did anyone call for an Easy Street taxi?

VERA

*(Goes upstage toward the front door)*

That must be my ride into the third circle of hell. Goodbye, everyone! I'm out of here! *(Exits with a flourish)*

FLORENCE

*(To EMILY)*

Some people have all the luck.

*As soon as everyone has left, ESTELLE looks at LILLIAN.*

ESTELLE

*(Loves to know all the gossip)*

Lillian? *(Looks about to make sure no one else is listening)* I was just wondering . . . I mean, seeing how dear Emily was so worried about getting a letter from her brother . . . I mean, one would think that getting a letter from home would be so nice, wouldn't it?

LILLIAN

*(Sighs)*

You mean you want to know why Emily doesn't want to hear from her family?

ESTELLE

Well, now that you have put it that way, yes.

*LILLIAN sighs. ESTELLE can be a bit of a pain as she is one of the Club's few "Stars."*

LILLIAN

In answer to your question, Emily comes from a very wealthy family who live in Newport, Rhode Island. She told me that she had been a virtual prisoner inside the family's dreary old mansion. Her older brother, Horace, had never allowed her to leave except to go to church on Sundays, because he was afraid of Emily being subject to "evil influences." *(Makes quotation marks with her fingers)*

ESTELLE

Oh, dear! I had no idea! *(Relishing this news)*

LILLIAN

Emily said Horace was a life-long bachelor, and a miser to boot. He kept her at home to look after him. Then, one day, Emily managed to get out while her brother was gone, and the first place she went was the ice cream parlor that she had seen every Sunday. Then, after enjoying a banana split, she went across the street to the movie theater.

ESTELLE

*(Shocked)*

You mean to tell me that she had never seen a movie before?

LILLIAN

Exactly. And the movie she saw happened to be a re-release of GONE WITH THE WIND. She told me that she fell in love not only with the movie, but also with Clark Gable and she began to follow his career in the newspapers. She bribed their house maid to buy issues of PHOTOPLAY for her so that she could keep track of him.

ESTELLE

Imagine that!

LILLIAN

Of course, Horace found out about it. He fired the housemaid and he forbade Emily from ever going to the movies again.

ESTELLE

I think I would have cheerfully poisoned that man.

LILLIAN

Emily is quite a strong woman behind her knitting needles. She started withdrawing her money from a trust fund that her father had set up, one that Horace couldn't get his hands on.

ESTELLE

*(Enjoying the story)*

Her father must have known what Horace was like.

LILLIAN

No, doubt. The upshot is that once Emily had safely withdrawn the bulk of her money, she packed a small bag, crawled out a window and took the first ferry out of Newport, Rhode Island. She boarded a train in Providence and headed west to the only other place she knew – Hollywood.

ESTELLE

You mean Emily ran away from home at the age of . . . what? Seventy?

LILLIAN

*(With a smile)*

That's exactly what she did. When she got here, she stayed at one of those expensive hotels on Sunset Boulevard, but you know what the Boulevard is like – not very safe for elderly women. Then she heard about the Sunset Club and she came here and asked me if she could visit here during the day since we were a safe haven and filled with real studio people, as she put it to me. She loved to sit here in the lounge and listen to all the studio news. At first, she paid for her lunch here, then she started taking early morning walks at the nearby Hollywood Memorial Park and then coming to the Club afterward.

ESTELLE

She still takes morning walks there. She tried to get me to go with her. She says it's very peaceful in the cemetery and it's filled with wonderful people like Rudolph Valentino. Emily just adores Valentino. You know, she talks to those graves. I mean, just like they were real people lying around there.

LILLIAN

Well, they are, aren't they?

ESTELLE

I suppose so. But why did you let her move in here? She's not really a movie person, is she?

LILLIAN

No, but Emily is probably the most devoted fan anyone ever had, and she loves each and every one of you. We are her first and only real friends. And also, she pays her rent in full, on time, every month. A wonderful example to the rest of you.

ESTELLE

*(Feeling a little twitchy)*

Oh, yes, well, I do see. Very charitable. *(Glances out the window; relieved to change the subject)* Oh, look! I just saw Miranda's car turn into the driveway! Goody! I can't wait to hear how the fundraiser did at Schwab's Pharmacy.

LILLIAN

Miranda's been there since eleven this morning, so I imagine that she'll be dead tired by now, Estelle.

*GINGER WEBB enters. She is dressed in a flashy, eye-catching dress with low cleavage and high heels. She limps downstage and collapses onto the sofa.*

GINGER

Oh! Oh! Oh! My feet are killing me! *(Kicks off her shoes and wiggles her toes)* Breathe, children, breathe! Whoever invented high heels should have been boiled!

ESTELLE

You poor dear! How was it?

GINGER

I cannot speak a sensible word until I have had something to drink. What have we got?

LILLIAN

Just sherry and white wine.

GINGER

Well, I was thinking of a dry martini with three olives, but the wine will have to do. Would some kind soul please pour me a half-gallon? I can't move another step.

*ESTELLE idolizes GINGER who is still a working actress. She crosses to the side table and pours GINGER a glass full of wine.*

ESTELLE

You just relax, my dear. I'll get it for you.

LILLIAN

Did you have a good crowd at Schwab's for the fundraiser?

ESTELLE

*(Taking the wine to GINGER)*

Anyone we know there? Besides you and Miranda, I mean?

*GINGER takes a deep drink before answering. ESTELLE waits with bated breath. LILLIAN has gone up to the reception desk and is sorting through the rest of the mail. She listens while she works.*

GINGER

Yes, the place was packed. Of course, Schwab's Pharmacy is always packed, but today, people were lined up outside, just waiting to get in to be served. Stars behind the Counters Day! I'm sure the fire marshal was tearing his hair out.

ESTELLE

Who was there? The stars, I mean?

GINGER

Let me think. Kim Novak was selling lavender lipstick at the Cosmetics counter. That gossip columnist, Sid Skolsky, was hanging out in his usual booth. He was having a great time, talking to the fans and getting a lot of fodder for his gossip column. And Rock Hudson was working behind the photo counter, not that he was selling much film, mind you. Everyone wanted to take his picture instead. He did nothing but show his teeth all afternoon.

ESTELLE

Oh, Rock Hudson. If I had known he was going to be there, I would have gone down myself.

GINGER

You would have been trampled. It was a zoo in there.

LILLIAN

So what did they have you doing, Ginger?

GINGER

I was behind the Tobacco counter most of the day. Chatted up a lot of men; most of them wanted to look down my blouse.

ESTELLE

How awful!

GINGER

Not at all. That's why they asked me to sell the cigarettes. I pack the right equipment. (*Juts out her bosom.*) The Motion Picture Relief Fund must have made a packet by the looks of things. Twenty percent of all sales today went to the Fund.

ESTELLE

*(A little miffed that she hadn't been asked to take part in the fundraiser)*

Did anybody know who you were?

GINGER

*(Chuckles)*

More than you'd think. Especially since there were copies of my memoir in the paperback rack. I even signed a few autographs.

LILLIAN

Really? That's wonderful!

ESTELLE

*(Even more miffed)*

I thought your memoir was out of print.

GINGER

It is, but Mr. Schwab managed to dig up a dozen copies of I WAS IN THE WIND, and people recognized me from the Barbecue scenes at Twelve Oaks Plantation. And then, of course, there was my brief, but unforgettable cameo in AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS.

ESTELLE

*(Sounding superior)*

You only got that part because you were Mike Todd's "special friend." (*Uses her fingers to illustrate quotation marks*)

*MIRANDA STERLING enters upstage center. She is wearing a stylish dress and pearls. She is also exhausted.*

GINGER

*(Growing a little tired of ESTELLE)*

Exactly, and it paid off when Mike jilted me for Liz Taylor. He felt so guilty, he not only gave me a good part in the movie, but he paid me with a percentage of the movie's profits. That has set me up for life. Of course, Miranda was the big draw there. *(Spies MIRANDA)* There she is! Grab a drink, sweetheart! The wine is fine.

ESTELLE

*(Sees MIRANDA and immediately begins gushing)*

Oh, Miranda, darling! You were a success, as always?

*MIRANDA sinks down in the sofa.  
LILLIAN pours her a glass of wine and  
brings it to her.*

MIRANDA

*(To LILLIAN)*

Thank you. *(To OTHERS)* I'm not sure about being a success, but we did sell a lot of ice cream today. I worked at the soda fountain counter and now I can make a hot fudge sundae, with a cherry on top, in two minutes. I think everyone in town wanted a hot fudge sundae. I'm exhausted. Please tell me that we're not having ice cream for dessert tonight.

ESTELLE

It's Chocolate Revenge Cake.

MIRANDA

Perfect. *(Puts her head back and closes her eyes)* That rich chocolate will give me just enough energy to crawl up the stairs to bed. So, anything new? Did Lucille really leave?

ESTELLE

Oh, yes, and she loved the gold compact you got her.

MIRANDA

Good, I'm glad. She needed a little keepsake from Hollywood.

ESTELLE

Vera thinks Lucille will come back. She's made a bet with Florence on it.

MIRANDA

Vera might just win that bet.

LILLIAN

Did you hear the news about the auction that's going to be at MGM?

GINGER

Yes! Everyone was talking about it at Schwab's. Most people were furious, but some of the older movie folk said it was only a sign of things to come. They said old Hollywood was in for a shake up when all the new kids hit their stride. The word is out that the old studio system is on its last legs.

ESTELLE

*(Shocked to the core)*

Never!

*GINGER goes to the side table and pours another glass of wine.*

GINGER

Take some advice from an old broad, Estelle: never say never in Hollywood. *(To LILLIAN)* What's for dinner?

ESTELLE

*(Quickly)*

Meat loaf, potatoes and limp greens.

GINGER

*(Sighs dramatically)*

And I was hoping for filet mignon.

*As GINGER returns to the sofa, SFX:  
The Telephone rings. LILLIAN answers.*

LILLIAN

Good evening. Sunset Club. *(Listens, then sighs)* I'm not sure, Mr. Logan. I'll check and see if she's returned. Just a minute, please. *(Covers the mouthpiece and gestures to MIRANDA, who shakes her head. The OTHERS remain quiet, watching intently.)* No, Mr. Logan, Miranda hasn't returned yet. Her message box is still full. *(Listens, holding earpiece away indicating Mr. Logan is speaking furiously)* Yes, Mr. Logan, I'll tell her when I see her. Now I am dreadfully busy as our dinner hour will be starting very soon, so good-bye. *(Hangs up on him)*

MIRANDA

You are a dear, Lillian. I am in no frame of mind to deal with Lance just now.

ESTELLE

*(Trying to be helpful)*

He's called a number of times today.

MIRANDA

I'm not surprised. (*Laughs to herself*) Our twins, Teri and Tony, turned twenty-five last Monday. And without telling me, they went down to the central courthouse in Los Angeles and legally changed their last names from Logan to Sterling, my name.

GINGER

(*Lifting her wine glass*)

Hurray for Teri and Tony! Always knew your kids were smart! (*Drinks*)

MIRANDA

That's not the half of it. Under my blessed grandfather's will, any children of mine will now receive their trust funds on the occasions of their twenty-fifth birthdays.

GINGER

(*Raises her glass again*)

Here's to your far-sighted grandpa! (*Drinks again*)

MIRANDA

They have just inherited a million dollars — each.

*GINGER whistles, while ESTELLE gasps and sinks into the nearest chair.*

LILLIAN

Good gracious!

GINGER

What exactly did your grandfather do for a living?

MIRANDA

My family owns and operates Ravenscall Bourbon Distillery in Bardstown, Kentucky and has been in business for nearly a hundred years.

ESTELLE

(*Dazed*)

I didn't know that.

GINGER

(*To ESTELLE*)

There's a great deal in this world that you don't know, my dear. But we'll overlook it.

MIRANDA

My estranged husband doesn't know about that part. I imagine he is anxious to get a hold of me, because he is about to be evicted from my house in Beverly Hills.

ESTELLE

*(Shocked)*  
What?

GINGER

*(With a grin)*  
How is that? Tell us all!

MIRANDA

*(Sipping her drink)*  
It's a story that's a bit complicated.

GINGER

*(Curling up on the sofa)*  
We have plenty of time. The cooks haven't finished boiling the vegetables yet. They're still only limp.

MIRANDA

*(Stands and walks downstage center)*  
At the ripe age of nearly thirty-four, I realized that if I was ever going to have a baby, I had to marry soon. It was now or never. And that's when I met Lance Logan. At the time, Lance was a mere child himself at twenty-four. He was one of the handsomest young men in Hollywood.

ESTELLE

*(Sighs)*  
Oh, yes. His pictures were in all the magazines. He set many hearts a-flutter.

MIRANDA

Yes, including mine. I should have known better. But I was blinded by his looks, his oily charm and by the fact that he was a very healthy man, prime fatherhood material. In the space of a month or so, we met, dated, mated and then ran off to Las Vegas and got married at midnight in the Little White Chapel there. I thought that it was so romantic.

GINGER

And the gossip hags had a field day with that trick, as I recall. Lolly Parsons and Hedda Hopper had their poison pens loaded and aimed at you.

ESTELLE

Go on, go on, Miranda. So you had the twins?

MIRANDA

Not right away. Two years went by and I had just about given up hope, when I finally got pregnant. I was ecstatic and I stopped working immediately.

LILLIAN

That was very wise.

MIRANDA

I agree, however, that was when Lance's true colors began to appear. By that time, his good looks had started to fade, no thanks to a lot of drinking, and he got fewer and fewer jobs. To keep himself happy, he started spending a lot of money on himself – my money – the money that I had earned. And he was furious at me for “wasting” my paychecks on a nursery.

GINGER

Hollywood Rat, first class. And I'll bet that he was mad at you for sleeping all day and not out working and making more money.

MIRANDA

Exactly. I also discovered that he was a secret, compulsive gambler, and we were getting deeper into debt, so I used some of my family money to pay it off. That's when Lance really went crazy. You see, he had no idea that he had married an heiress. He started badgering me to let him “manage” my accounts.

ESTELLE

I hope you didn't.

MIRANDA

Of course not. Those accounts are well-guarded by an army of lawyers and accountants that my grandfather had set up in Kentucky. He didn't trust any family in-law, not a one.

GINGER

Smart man.

MIRANDA

Of course, Lance thought I was holding back just to spite him. And I quickly gave up trying to make him see reason. Then the twins were born, exactly twenty-five years ago last Monday. I was overjoyed. Lance was not. He took one look at them in the hospital's nursery, said they were a pair of drowned rats, and he went out on a binge in Vegas for over a month.

GINGER

There is a name for a guy like that, but modesty forbids me to mention it in polite company. So what did you do?

MIRANDA

I just made sure that Lance could never access my funds, other than our joint checking account. I put all my love and energies into raising Teri and Tony. I made sure that they were happy, healthy and well-cared for. I worked very little so that I could spend most of my time with them.

ESTELLE

Pictures of you and the twins seemed to be in all the movie magazines.

MIRANDA

In the early years, yes, but when they got to be kindergarten age, I shut down the publicity. I wanted our kids to grow up as human beings, not like a couple of spoiled Hollywood brats. And it worked. They were never in trouble with the police – unlike many of their schoolmates at Hollywood High.

GINGER

And where was lover-boy during all this child-rearing?

MIRANDA

Mostly in Las Vegas bars or with the bimbo of the week at the beach house. But he never wanted a divorce.

LILLIAN

Yes, I've often wondered about that. He certainly never seemed interested in his family.

MIRANDA

If we lived in any other state in the Union, he probably would have wanted a divorce years ago. But California has a Community Property law and he would only get half my earnings. As for me, I was more concerned over possible custody battles. I was afraid that he would use the kids to force me to give him more money.

LILLIAN

And, I take it, you were supporting him all during this time?

MIRANDA

Oh, yes, and still am, so to speak.

GINGER

How's that?

MIRANDA

He's still living in Sterling Mansion. When the kids went off to college, I packed up and moved in here. I couldn't stand being in the same house with that man and his drinking buddies and his call girls for another minute.

LILLIAN

But you are still paying the mortgage?

MIRANDA

*(Sipping her wine)*

No, it's all paid up.

LILLIAN

Then why don't you sell it?

MIRANDA

That's where my revenge comes in. Lance has been living the good life up there for the past two decades. But – *(Pauses and smiles)*

GINGER

Ah-ha! The plot thickens and the chickens are coming home to roost?

MIRANDA

Exactly. I have been planning this for quite some time. Neither of the children is at home any more. Tony has been living in the beach house since he graduated from college. Teri has elected to move to Kentucky and she is taking over the family bourbon business. My brother is guiding her and he tells me that she is a natural businesswoman.

ESTELLE

So, are you are evicting your husband? Won't he still get half the proceeds from the sale?

MIRANDA

Oh, no! Last Monday, I deeded over the beach house to Tony, and I gave the mansion to Teri. She is planning to sell the place as soon as possible. By the end of May, Lance will be out of a house, out of the beach house, out of free meals, free booze, laundry service, and all the money he has skimmed off the housekeeping budget over the years. I believe his car is paid for, but now he'll have to buy his own gas from a commercial gas station. And just wait until he discovers how much gasoline costs these days. *(Laughs)*

ESTELLE

Gracious!

GINGER

Good for you! Serves him right!

MIRANDA

And, since I have been living on my own pre-marriage trust funds, I will initiate divorce proceedings next week. Lance spent all my movie earnings years ago. He can't touch a penny of mine now. *(Finishes her drink)* And I'm sure that's why he's suddenly calling.

LILLIAN

*(Looks at the mantle clock)*

Oh my goodness, it's nearly six. Let me see if dinner is ready. *(Exits)*

MIRANDA

*(Yawns and stretches)*

I'm almost too tired to eat.

GINGER

Oh, come on to dinner. We need to put those poor soggy greens out of their misery.

*LILLIAN opens the dining room door.*

LILLIAN

Come on in, ladies. Dinner is served.

MIRANDA

*(As exiting into the Dining Room with ESTELLE)*

Mmmm. Something smells delicious.

GINGER

I'll call the troops. *(Goes upstage calls up the stairs)* Hey, girls! It's dinnertime! The meatloaf is great! The potatoes are mashed. And the vegetables are dead on arrival!

*LIGHTS DOWN. END ACT ONE,  
SCENE ONE.*

## ACT ONE

### Scene 2

SETTING:

*The Living Room of the Sunset Club; mid-April around 5 pm in the afternoon. A different arrangement of flowers is in the vase of the sideboard. There is a large pile of mail on the reception desk and a few more notices on the bulletin board. Note: Characters are in different attire.*

AT RISE:

*ESTELLE is again on the sofa, napping over her newest romance book. CORAL is again practicing her cello; she is seated in the side chair upstage left by the fireplace. FLORENCE and VERA are playing cards at the small table downstage right.*

VERA

*(Slaps down a card from her hand)*

Gin!

FLORENCE

*(Frowning at the card on the table)*

How did you do that?

VERA

*(Gathering up the cards to shuffle the deck)*

Really, Florence, if you're going to play cards seriously, you have to keep your mind on the game.

FLORENCE

*(Sighs)*

Sorry, it's just that I'm wondering how Emily is doing today on her first movie shoot.

VERA

She'll be just fine. Miranda is there with her, so things will go smoothly. Miranda won't let anyone rattle Emily. Want to play another hand?

*CORAL happens to look up and sees the pile of mail on the reception desk.*

CORAL

Is that the mail? It's come early.

*FLORENCE and VERA make a general rush at the desk. ESTELLE jerks awake.*

ESTELLE

*(Confused)*

Is something the matter? Did I miss something?

CORAL

*(Over her shoulder)*

It's the mail.

ESTELLE

Anything for me?

*CORAL stops playing and looks up at the others. Meanwhile, GINGER comes down stairs and enters upstage left. She checks through the mail.*

ESTELLE

*(Sees her favorite magazine in the pile)*

Oh, is that the new issue of PHOTOPLAY? That's mine!

*FLORENCE hands it to her. ESTELLE starts to look through it. FLORENCE takes a copy of DAILY VARIETY and sits on the stage right sofa.*

FLORENCE

Will you look at this VARIETY? The front page is ripped and bent at the corners again. You would think that here in Hollywood, the mailmen would at least be respectful of our industry newsmagazine and not try to cram it through a narrow mail slot. VARIETY and the Hollywood REPORTER should both be treated like first editions of the Bible.

CORAL

*(Ignores VERA)*

Did the REPORTER come as well? Ginger? Could you pass it over here?

FLORENCE

Looking for another job, Coral?

CORAL

*(Flipping through the pages)*

Always.

*LILLIAN enters through the dining room door. She is carrying the drinks tray with glasses and a bottle of sherry and a bottle of Rosé.*

LILLIAN

*(Cheerful)*

Hello, ladies! Drinkie time! *(Places the tray on the sideboard)*

CORAL

What have we got tonight?

LILLIAN

The usual sherry, of course, and a very nice Rosé, compliments of Mr. James Stewart.

ESTELLE

*(Giggles)*

Oh that darling man! I hope he lives to be a hundred. He never forgets us. *(Returns to her magazine)*

GINGER

That's because we remind him of his youth. He's one of the last real gentlemen in Hollywood.

ESTELLE

*(Flipping through the pages of PHOTOPLAY)*

Look at all these new young faces; each one of them hoping to become the next big star. All of them are called "hot, hot, hot."

GINGER

*(Crossing downstage)*

Yes, that's for now. But most of those poor kids will sizzle in the spotlight for only a moment, and then they'll burn up or just evaporate. Five years from now, no one will remember their names. There will be a new bunch in the fry pan.

LILLIAN

*(Thoughtfully)*

Yes, but each of those young people has been able to live their Hollywood dreams, if only for a moment. And that is more than most of us can say.

*SFX: The front door bell rings. LILLIAN exits upstage center to answer it. FLORENCE leans over the back of the stage right sofa and looks out the window.*

ESTELLE

Who is it? Can you see?

FLORENCE

It's the mail truck. I think someone here is getting a package.

*LILLIAN enters upstage center. She has a big smile on her face and is holding a very large package about the size of a phone book.*

LILLIAN

Good news, ladies. It's finally arrived and it weighs a ton.

ESTELLE

Oohh! What is it?

LILLIAN

*(Puts the package on the reception desk and slits it open)*

Goodness gracious!

GINGER

Don't hold us in suspense, Lillian. What is it?

LILLIAN

*(Holds up the first of five thick catalogues)*

It's what you all have been waiting for – the MGM auction catalogues. In fact, there are five volumes of catalogues.

ESTELLE

Oh, my!

*THEY rush to the desk to grab a copy.*

LILLIAN

*(Tries to keep the rush civilized)*

Patience, ladies. Look, there are five volumes here and five of you. If you keep your voices down so that the others upstairs don't hear you, you can each look through a catalogue before anyone else comes downstairs.

ESTELLE

*(Pouts)*

But it will take us hours before we can all see everything.

VERA

Pipe down, Estelle. *(Takes one)* Here, take one. Let's see what's going on the block.

LILLIAN

*(Feeling like a kindergarten teacher instead of the director of a retirement home)*

Please be careful with the catalogues, ladies. Remember, you have to present them at the studio in order to get into the exhibition. And, after all, these books belong to the whole Club, not just to you five.

*LILLIAN hands out a catalogue to each woman. They take their books, and seat themselves around the room. There is silence as they flip through their books. LILLIAN pours herself a small sherry then leans against the sideboard looking over CORAL's shoulder.*

ESTELLE

*(Squeals, holding up "Treasures from the MGM Property Department")*

Oh, oh! Look at this! *(Waves catalogue in the air)* They are auctioning off the silver punchbowl and eleven silver punch cups from the movie HIGH SOCIETY!

CORAL

I played in the studio orchestra for that one. Great music.

ESTELLE

That was Grace Kelly's very last movie before she ran off and married Prince Rainier of Monaco. Just think! Grace Kelly probably drank out of those very cups.

LILLIAN

*(Enjoying the excitement)*

Perhaps we should bid on those. The Club could use a nice punchbowl and cups.

FLORENCE

*(Holding Book #2: Star Wardrobe)*

Here's something I'd love to have: Marlene Dietrich's black chiffon gown that she wore in KISMET. Can't you just see me wearing it? *(Preens)*

VERA

Not exactly, darling. You'd need to lose a few pounds first.

*(FLORENCE glares at VERA and then turns the page.)*

GINGER

*(Referencing Book #4 – Storage Sheds on Lots 3 & 4)*

Lookie here! How about a slave whip and the Roman whipper's uniform from BEN HUR? A short-pleated skirt and lots of leather belts. How deliciously naughty! Gives me the chills! I should bid on this.

CORAL

*(Arches an eyebrow at GINGER)*

Please! That thought would give me nightmares.

GINGER

Pooh! You have no imagination!

CORAL

*(Holding book #5: Transportation)*

Okay, here's something. Who would want to buy a full-sized, fully operational Sherman tank? Now, where could anyone use it?

VERA

That's easy – on the Freeway at rush hour. All you'd have to do is swivel the gun a bit and the highway would instantly open up.

CORAL

Be serious, Vera.

VERA

I am. *(Looking through Book #3 – Items from the Storage Sheds on Lot 2)* Now here's just what we really need. Do we have enough room for a couple of golden elephants?

GINGER

We don't even have room for one.

VERA

*(Pretends to be hurt)*

But they would look so darling on either side of our driveway.

LILLIAN

I think not, Vera. The neighbors would surely object.

CORAL

How about this – they’re selling off Glenn Ford’s dressing room trailer?

GINGER

*(With a grin)*

Are they selling off Glenn Ford inside of it?

ESTELLE

Anyone interested in a pair of poodle lamps from PLEASE DON’T EAT THE DAISIES? Doris Day was the star of that one. Lillian, what do you think? Wouldn’t those lamps look adorable in the library?

LILLIAN

*(Trying not to laugh as ESTELLE is serious)*

Somehow, I have trouble picturing poodles on our bookshelves.

GINGER

Okay, here’s one better. How about the loincloth that Johnny Weissmuller wore as Tarzan? Just picture that!

VERA

Be serious.

ESTELLE

Are they really selling his loincloth?

GINGER

*(Tapping the catalogue)*

It’s right here in black and white on page 73.

ESTELLE

Are there any pictures? He was so handsome when he was young.

GINGER

No such luck.

*SFX: A car horn is heard.*

LILLIAN

Now, who can that be?

FLORENCE

*(Looking out the window again)*

It's Miranda and Emily! She's just turned into the parking lot. They're back from the studio in one piece!

*General upheaval as THE WOMEN get put down their catalogues and rise in anticipation. LILLIAN collects the books and puts them on the registration desk as GINGER goes over to look out the window.*

ESTELLE

I hope she had fun. I remember how much fun I had when I was acting before the cameras.

VERA

*(Aside to FLORENCE)*

When it was long ago and far away.

*MIRANDA enters with EMILY just behind her.*

MIRANDA

All hail the newest star in the Hollywood Heavens – Miss Emily Armbruster!

*The OTHERS clap and cheer good-naturedly. EMILY is everyone's favorite grandmother. She crosses downstage and sits in the wingchair, tired, but happy.*

CORAL

How did it go, Emily? I hope it wasn't too hot out there. Those Western town sets can be beastly in the sun.

EMILY

*(A little flustered, but quite happy)*

Well, no, not really, that is to say –

ESTELLE

*(Interrupts)*

Did you have any trouble with your lines? I hope you didn't have to do too many takes. So exhausting.

FLORENCE

Did they give you a good lunch?

EMILY

Oh, yes, it was –

FLORENCE

Sometimes those box lunches taste more like cardboard than food.

GINGER

*(With a grin)*

Tell me, Emily, did the director behave himself? He didn't try to kiss you, did he?

EMILY

*(Triumphant)*

No, he didn't, but John Wayne did.

*If the OTHERS weren't already excited,  
now they become even more captivated.*

VERA

What?

FLORENCE

You're kidding!

MIRANDA

*(Laughing)*

No, she's not. I was there. I saw it. *(To EMILY)* Now you sit back, my dear, and tell everyone what happened. I'll get the champagne. *(Exits into the dining room)*

GINGER

Champagne? Did John Wayne send over some bubbly as well?

LILLIAN

*(Laughing)*

No, Miranda bought two bottles yesterday and we stowed them in the fridge. She wanted it to be a surprise.

*LILLIAN opens the sideboard and gets  
out eight glasses.*

VERA

Champagne and John Wayne. I'll take that combination any time.

FLORENCE

So tell us, Emily, what was it like?

EMILY

*(Finds she enjoys being the center of attention)*

Today was probably the very best day of my life. I didn't mind getting up at six this morning. And when we arrived at the studio, people were so nice to us. Of course, they all knew Miranda, but they greeted me as if I were a star too.

FLORENCE

You are, Emily.

EMILY

*(Smiles at the compliment)*

We were taken right over to the Wardrobe Department and they picked out a lovely blue dress and very sweet straw bonnet for me – you know, very Western of the 1890s. It's what people were wearing about the time I was born.

*The women exchange surprised glances.  
They didn't realize how old EMILY is.*

GINGER

Please go on, Emily.

EMILY

Then Miranda took me to Make-up. The ladies in there were just wonderful. They reset and curled my hair, and they powdered my face. You know, I was afraid that they would put on too much paint. You see, I was never allowed to paint my face. Papa was dead set against it. He said all painted women were sinners.

GINGER

Well, that idea went out the window decades ago.

EMILY

Yes, I know, but the whole experience of lipstick was very exciting. You see, I've never worn lipstick before. I found it to be quite a thrill.

FLORENCE

*(Squints at EMILY's lips)*

Well, first thing tomorrow morning, I'll take you down to Schwab's Pharmacy and you can choose what color you'd like to wear. Schwab's always has a good selection at their cosmetic counter. After all, you're a movie star now, Emily.

*As EMILY continues to tell her story,  
MIRANDA reappears with two open  
bottles of champagne. She circles  
around the group, goes upstage where  
she and LILLIAN fill the glasses.*

EMILY

Then one of the studio cars drove us over to the back lot where the main street of the “Frontier Town” set was laid out. It was so interesting! From the front, it looked like real buildings, but if you looked out back behind the doors and windows, it was just large wooden walls, propped up with thick braces. I never knew that! I always thought that movie sets were real buildings.

VERA

Welcome to the Dream Factory, Emily. We’re nothing but a bunch of overgrown kids playing Pretend.

ESTELLE

*(A little annoyed)*

Speak for yourself, Vera. We are all talented actors and what we do, both in front of the camera as well as behind it, is true art.

LILLIAN

*(Forestalling a growing argument)*

And so you are, all true artists! *(She and MIRANDA pass around the filled glasses.)* So drink up, ladies. *(Raises her glass)* Here’s to Emily, the newest artiste in Tinseltown!

*THEY lift their glasses in a toast.*

OTHERS

To Emily!

*They drink.*

EMILY

*(Overwhelmed)*

Thank you! Thank you all so much! My, this has been such an exciting day.

CORAL

Well don’t stop now, Emily. Tell us about John Wayne. Is he really as tall as he looks?

EMILY

*(Sighs)*

Oh my, yes indeed, especially since he was wearing those cowboy boots and that ten-gallon hat. I was seated in a buckboard wagon next to the driver whose name was Brad. He was another extra like me and he was so very nice. He kept me in the shade of a tree as much as possible in between set-ups.

GINGER

*(With a grin)*

Listen to her. She’s picked up the movie lingo already.

FLORENCE

Stop interrupting, Ginger. Go on, Emily.

CORAL

What exactly did you do? What was your part?

EMILY

I was supposed to be the mother of the man that the Sheriff, that's Mr. Wayne, was going to hang in the morning. And I was driven into town to beg for my poor boy's life. We must have done that part about four or five times.

ESTELLE

*(Quite envious)*

So you had a one-on-one scene with John Wayne?

MIRANDA

*(Enjoying EMILY's moment in the sun)*

She certainly did! And a close-up as well.

EMILY

The director told me I had beautiful eyes.

ESTELLE

*(Patting her heart)*

Oh, I'm having palpitations!

GINGER

No, you're not, Estelle. Just have some more champagne. It will do you a world of good.

FLORENCE

Go on, Emily. So when did John Wayne kiss you?

EMILY

*(After a small sip of champagne)*

As I said, we did the scene several times when we were driving into town, and again when I did my little speech begging for my son's life.

MIRANDA

That's when she had her close-up.

EMILY

And each time I did my lines, Mr. Wayne would answer, but he changed his lines a little each time so I never knew what to expect. Finally, the director called "Cut!" and that's when it happened.

*The OTHERS are now perched on the edge of their seats.*

FLORENCE

Go on, please.

EMILY

When the director called “Cut!” Mr. Wayne smiled down at me and said something like, “Well, little lady, if I was the real sheriff, I would have let your son go, seeing how he has such a nice Mama like you.” And then, he kissed my hand. I think my heart stopped for a moment. Then he told Brad to get me out of the infernal sun. Brad wheeled the horse around and we went back under the tree, and then we waited to see if the director wanted us to do the scene again, but he didn’t. So we had lunch.

ESTELLE

Oh, it’s just too sweet. I think I’m going to cry.

VERA

Well, don’t, Estelle. You’ve got so much mascara on today, your face would look like a landslide in slow motion.

*ESTELLE starts to say something but  
LILLIAN quickly asks another question  
to deflect any possible flare up.*

LILLIAN

Please tell us more, Emily. Did you do another scene in the afternoon after lunch? You were gone all day.

EMILY

Yes, but only a short one. I was supposed to be crying as they hung my son.

MIRANDA

*(Aside)*

Another close-up.

EMILY

We did that a couple of times, but it was hard to get emotional over it, seeing that they were only hanging up a stuffed dummy.

GINGER

That’s called acting, Emily.

EMILY

*(Sighs)*

So it is. Then I was excused and Miranda took me back to Wardrobe, and I changed out of the dress and bonnet, but I’ve kept my make up on, although it’s probably all worn off by now.

FLORENCE

*(Looking at EMILY's face)*

No, I can see it's still there. Somebody did a good job. It looks natural.

EMILY

*(With a smile)*

And not like a painted lady?

GINGER

No way.

EMILY

*(Putting down her glass on the side table)*

Dear me, I suddenly feel so very tired. Is there time for me to take a little nap before dinner?

LILLIAN

*(Helps EMILY)*

It's almost six o'clock now, but I'll tell you what. Let's go upstairs and you have a nice lie down. I'll come up around seven and bring your dinner on a tray. *(Puts her arm around EMILY's shoulder)* Shall we?

EMILY

That would be lovely. You are so kind. Miranda, I cannot thank you enough for today. It was everything I ever dreamed of – and more.

MIRANDA

It was my pleasure. I had fun too. It gave me the chance to visit with some old friends. Now let's get you into bed. You have a nice rest – and dream of John Wayne, *(Imitates John Wayne's drawl)* little lady.

EMILY

*(As THEY exit)*

I shall never forget this day – never!

GINGER

*(Crosses to center)*

I can see it now. Next thing we know, Emily will be posing for headshots, working up a resumé and making personal appearances in department stores.

CORAL

And I'll bet her brother Horace will just lose it when he sees her up there on the silver screen in her close-up.

VERA

No, he won't. He probably never goes to the movies. Costs too much money. Emily is safe from him.

FLORENCE

*(Squinting at the clock on the mantle)*

Is it really six? Should we take a peek in the dining room and see if dinner is ready for us?

VERA

*(Picking up the half-full champagne bottle)*

Let's go in and find out what they're serving tonight.

*FLORENCE, VERA & CORAL exit downstage right through the dining room door. GINGER sits in the wing chair, stage left, finishing her champagne. SFX: The doorbell rings. GINGER looks around, but there is only ESTELLE. Then someone starts banging on the door. ESTELLE and GINGER freeze and look at each other.*

ESTELLE

*(Loud whisper)*

Who do you think that is?

GINGER

*(Moves to the window and looks out)*

There's an antique red Porsche convertible at the curb.

ESTELLE

Oh, lordy! I bet that's Lance Logan.

*SFX: More bell ringing and banging on the door. LILLIAN and MIRANDA rush into the room from the upstage stairs.*

LILLIAN

What's that? Who is making all that racket at the front door?

MIRANDA

*(Looking out the window)*

I'm afraid it's Lance. Oh, dear, I am so sorry, Lillian. I just cannot face him now. I've had such a tiring day.

GINGER

*(Grins, relishing this opportunity)*

Miranda, you go back upstairs and lock yourself in the bathroom.

ESTELLE

*(Hurrying toward the stairs)*

I think that is a very good idea. I'm going to do the same. Excuse me.

*ESTELLE exits upstage left. SFX: The loud knocking continues.*

GINGER

*(Calls after her)*

Chicken! *(To MIRANDA)* Don't just stand there, get going before he beats the door down. And tell everyone else up there to stay in their rooms. We don't want anyone injured by flying shrapnel.

*MIRANDA exits up the stairs.*

LILLIAN

I should call the police.

GINGER

Not just yet. Why don't you go into the dining room and keep everyone quiet in there? If you hear gunshots, then call the police.

LILLIAN

Gun . . . gunshots?

*GINGER pushes her through the downstage right doorway.*

GINGER

Figure of speech. Don't worry. I can take care of this guy. I've had plenty of practice taming gorillas.

*LILLIAN exits into the dining room and closes the door behind her. GINGER then turns up stage to answer the door.*

GINGER, *Continued*

*(Calls out in a false, sing-song voice)*

Com-ming!

*GINGER answers the door. LANCE charges in and pushes her out of the way as he bounds into the empty living room. He looks around.*

LANCE

Okay. No more ignoring the phone. So where is she?

GINGER

*Perches on the arm of the sofa; gives him a very sweet smile)*

May I enquire who is calling?

LANCE

*(Looks at GINGER as if she were a spider)*

Who the hell are you? I want my wife, Miranda Sterling, and I want her down here now!

GINGER

Miranda? Dear me, I believe she . . .

LANCE

*(Furious)*

Cut the act, lady. I know Miranda is here. I saw her car in the parking lot. Now run along and get her.

GINGER

*(Not moving)*

Have you got a thousand dollars? In cash? In small bills?

LANCE

*(Looks at her as if she were insane)*

What?

GINGER

A thousand dollars. That's my fee for fetching missing wives. *(Holds out her hand)* In small bills please.

LANCE

Get out of my way.

*He starts to go to the stairs. GINGER stands upstage center, barring his way.*

GINGER

Dear me, I don't believe that you know the Sunset Club's House Rules: no gentlemen callers are allowed upstairs.

LANCE

Who the hell are you, anyway?

GINGER

*(Voice drips with false sweetness)*

Oh, I am so-o glad you asked that. The name's Ginger, Ginger Webb. Perhaps you've heard of me? I've appeared in practically every "B" picture filmed in the past thirty years. As a matter of fact, I remember you, when you were in short pants. So don't mess with me, kid. I've taken nastiness lessons from the biggest bully in Hollywood.

LANCE

Yeah, who's that?

GINGER

*(Playing her ace card)*

The late, great Mike Todd. Oh, yes, and his pal, Bugsy Siegel, the mobster. But what's a little crime between friends?

*While she has been talking, MIRANDA enters quietly from upstage center left.*

LANCE

*(Staring at GINGER)*

You're joking.

MIRANDA

No, she isn't, Lance. It's okay, Ginger. I agree it's time my husband and I had a little chat. Why don't you go upstairs and keep Emily company? All the noise down here has frightened her.

GINGER

*(Looks from MIRANDA to LANCE and back to MIRANDA again)*

Okay, but just yell if he tries anything. I'll get out my pearl-handled pistol just in case. Fair warning, buster, I was born and raised in Texas, and my daddy taught me how to shoot before I ever learned my ABC's. If you give Miranda any grief, I'll plug you right between your beady little eyes — and call it self-defense.

*Leaving both of them surprised, GINGER makes a grand exit center and goes up the stairs.*

LANCE

Is she joking?

MIRANDA

I don't think so. Ginger is a tough lady. *(Assuming the upper hand)* Very well, Lance, now that you are here, let's act civilized and sit down.

LANCE

*(Doesn't move)*

I'll make this short and sweet. That daughter of yours says I have until the end of the month to clear out of my house. She's threatened to call the cops. I want you to tell her to back off.

MIRANDA

First of all, Teri is your daughter too, or had you forgotten? Of course, you haven't seen her for at least six years. Did you make it to the twins' high school graduation? I can't remember.

LANCE

What's that got to do with this house eviction notice? She can't do that! It's my house. Has been since before she was born.

MIRANDA

Not exactly.

LANCE

What do you mean?

MIRANDA

*(Crosses over to the wingback chair, but does not sit)*

The house belonged to me before we were married. My name, and my name only, is on the deed. For nearly thirty years since then, I alone have paid for the taxes, utilities and maintenance of the property. My accountant will be glad to show you the receipts and tax forms.

LANCE

*(Growing a little uncomfortable)*

So what gives Teri the right to evict me? She's barely out of diapers.

MIRANDA

My, my, you have let things slip by, haven't you? No birthday cards? No Christmas gifts? And you didn't even show up for the Father/Daughter dance at her debut.

LANCE

What debut? She had a movie come out?

MIRANDA

*(Sighs)*

No, Lance. Teri has been living in Bardstown, Kentucky for the past five years while she learned the family business. Three years ago, at Christmas time, she was a debutante, like all good Kentucky young ladies, and she made her debut at the Holly & Ivy Ball in Louisville. That's a bang-up, fancy dance party, in case you're wondering. I did invite you at the time – or, at least I tried. I gave your invitation to your agent, since you were off to Vegas again. He promised to give it to you personally. As it turned out, Tony escorted his sister down the red carpet since he was the only man in the family to show up for her.

LANCE

*(Trying to gain the upper hand)*

So, now she's trying to get back at me just because I forgot to come to that party?

MIRANDA

*(Trying to keep her temper under control)*

No, she's now the owner of Sterling Mansion and she wants to put it on the market as soon as possible, since she has no intention of making her home in California.

LANCE

But you just said that the house was yours.

MIRANDA

It was, until last Monday, when I deeded it over to Teri as a birthday gift. She now owns the house, the pool, the gardens, the four-car garage – everything, lock, stock and barrel.

LANCE

*(Doesn't understand)*

Teri's not old enough to own anything more than a dollhouse.

MIRANDA

You were never the father of the year, were you? For your information, the twins turned twenty-five on Monday. You still have time to send them cards, if you want to.

LANCE

Okay, I see your little game. You did this just to get out of the Community Property law if we got divorced. Okay, I'll move into the beach house.

MIRANDA

I'm afraid you can't do that, either. Last month, Tony moved in there and he has already made a few renovations. The master bedroom is now a recording studio, or something like that.

LANCE

That beach house is mine!

MIRANDA

*(Shakes her head)*

Never was, I'm afraid. On the advice of my lawyer, I never signed over the property to you. It has always been mine legally, since before we married. And now, it's Tony's. I deeded it to him on Monday as well.

LANCE

*(Snarling)*

Another generous birthday gift from Mommy?

MIRANDA

Exactly, and I believe he has sworn out an injunction against you. You are legally barred from coming within five hundred feet of the property line from any direction, including the ocean.

LANCE

*(Pacing like a caged tiger)*

You're really enjoying this, aren't you?

MIRANDA

I thought I would, but now that we are actually having this conversation, I just feel sorry for you.

LANCE

Sorry?

*SFX: A car horn is heard off.*

MIRANDA

I'm thinking of all the lost years you squandered with booze, and gambling and other women, when you could have learned what wonderful, gifted, brainy children you have. Now it's too late, Lance. You shut them so completely out of your life, you are a stranger to them now. So much a stranger that they legally changed their names to mine last Monday. They are now Tony and Teri Sterling,

*SFX: The car horn honks again.*

LANCE

They can't! I'll sue! They can't cut me off like this!

*Enter LILLIAN from the dining room, with a supper tray in her hands.*

LILLIAN

Excuse me for interrupting you, Miranda, but someone is outside in a red car blowing the horn. (*To LANCE*) The neighbors don't like noise like that, you know.

LANCE

That's Gina – or Tina. (*Shakes his head*) I can't remember which.

MIRANDA

I'm sure that's a great comfort to her, whoever she is.

*SFX: Car horn honks again.*

LANCE

*(Turning toward the front door)*

Okay, okay, I'm going, but you haven't heard the last of me yet, Miranda. I'm still your husband and we've got bills to pay.

MIRANDA

Not for long, Lance. I filed for divorce yesterday. Don't look so surprised. Isn't that what you always wanted? To divorce me and get half of all my money? Except, now I own no property and I haven't had a pay check in over a year, and I have been sending you monthly checks for the house upkeep. My accountant has the exact total of all the money I have given to you

MIRANDA, *Continued*

for the past twenty-seven years. So go ahead and sue. I think any judge in the state would rule that you, in fact, owe me money. Good night, Lance.

*LANCE tries to say something in return, but he can't find the words. He turns on his heel, stomps out and exits right. After he is gone, MIRANDA sinks onto the sofa with a deep sigh.*

LILLIAN

Are you all right now, Miranda?

MIRANDA

That was much harder than I expected, but yes, I do feel oddly...free.

*GINGER runs into the room from upstage left. She looks stricken. She keeps her voice down so the OTHERS in the dining room won't hear.*

GINGER

You'd better call an ambulance, Lillian. It's Emily. I went in to check on her and she . . . she looked peaceful, too peaceful. And I touched her arm. She didn't move. *(Pause)* I think . . . I think she's dead.

*LILLIAN & MIRANDA register their shock as LIGHTS FADE OUT.*

END OF ACT ONE

— INTERMISSION —

ACT TWO  
Scene 1

SETTING: *The living room of the Sunset Club; May 12, 1970 around 5 PM. Again, a new arrangement of flowers in the vase, but this time, fewer notices on the bulletin board.*

AT RISE: *ESTELLE is sitting on her usual spot on the sofa. She is reading another romance novel, but every so often she glances up at the mantle clock and looks out the window. She is waiting for FLORENCE and VERA to return from the MGM Auction. As always, CORAL is sitting in the side chair playing her cello. She too seems to be waiting. GINGER yawns as she enters from the stairs upstage left.*

GINGER

Has the mail come yet?

*CORAL shakes her head and keeps playing softly.*

ESTELLE

*(Not looking up from her book.)*

No.

GINGER

*(Wanders over to the bulletin board and scans the announcements)*

Any new productions shooting? Anyone casting?

CORAL

*(Stops playing)*

No, and you make us sound like a school of fly-starved trout – just waiting for a bite.

GINGER

Don't laugh. Sometimes I feel that way – just flopping around, waiting for a juicy tidbit. Speaking of food . . . *(Continues to read the announcements)* No menu posted yet. Anyone know what's for dinner?

CORAL

No idea.

*ESTELLE perks up; she has something to brag about.*

ESTELLE

Well, I'm too full for dinner tonight. (*Looks around to make sure that she has the attention of both CORAL and GINGER*) I ate lunch at the Brown Derby today with my nephew, Bill.

GINGER

(*Flops down on the sofa stage right*)

Did he pay for it this time? (*To CORAL*) Nothing is cheap at the Derby, except possibly the water. Ice, of course, is extra.

ESTELLE

(*Looking a bit deflated*)

Well, no, he didn't. You see, he's saving to move into a better apartment at Century City.

GINGER

(*Clearly bored*)

Of course. So how was the dear old Derby today?

ESTELLE

(*Pleased to have the center of the floor, for once; sighs for effect*)

Well, it's not like it used to be. Ever since Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper both died, the place has lost its buzz, so to speak. (*Perks up.*) But the Grapefruit Cake is still delicious.

CORAL

And how many pieces did you eat this time?

*Everyone at the Club knows ESTELLE loves sweets.*

ESTELLE

Only two . . . and some of Bill's, as well. After all, you can't get that cake anywhere else, and who knows how long the Brown Derby will last, now that all the studios are selling their backlots for condos?

GINGER

(*Archly*)

Like Century City?

ESTELLE

Exactly.

*LILLIAN enters from the library carrying the drinks tray: a bottle of sherry and a bottle of Rosé.*

LILLIAN

Any word from Vera or Florence?

*LILLIAN places the tray on the  
sideboard.*

GINGER

They're not back yet. It must be crazy at the Metro lot. The girls left for the auction shortly after nine this morning.

CORAL

I wonder if they've managed to get anything.

GINGER

By now, they're probably caught in the rush hour traffic.

ESTELLE

Maybe they bought those golden elephants and they have to drive slowly back with them.

LILLIAN

Dear Lord, I hope not. (*Checks her watch*) It's the cocktail hour, ladies. I thought our new resident would have arrived by now. She said she'd be here by dinner.

*During the following dialogue, LILLIAN  
take out glasses from inside the  
sideboard. Then she opens the sherry  
and the rosé. She sets them on the  
sideboard beside the tray.*

CORAL

It's a little sad that somebody new is moving into Emily's room. Yes, I know Emily is gone, but still . . .

LILLIAN

I miss her too, Coral.

GINGER

She never talked a lot, but when she did, she always had something nice to say. Soothed the nerves.

LILLIAN

I know exactly how you feel, Ginger. I think we all feel that way.

GINGER

*(Hates for anyone to suspect she has a soft spot in her heart)*  
So, did you ever get an answer back from her Scrooge of a brother?

LILLIAN

Not yet, but it's only been a few weeks since her funeral and I shouldn't think that he would mind that we buried her here instead of shipping her body back to Rhode Island.

GINGER

I think that old miser would be grateful that you saved him the cost of a funeral.

CORAL

Emily once told me that she felt sorry for her brother. She said that whenever Horace looked at a dollar bill, all he saw was the number in the corner; never the face in the center.

GINGER

*(Nods)*

That sounds like something Emily would say. *(To LILLIAN)* I think you did the right thing to bury her in the Hollywood Memorial Cemetery. After all, she took a walk there almost every day.

LILLIAN

That was Miranda's idea. She said that Emily had many dear friends "asleep" there.

GINGER

Yeah, I went with her one time, and when we got to Valentino's grave, she introduced me to the stone slab, just as if the old Sheik himself was sitting on his tombstone. It was a little creepy. By the way, Lillian, how did you manage to convince the Motion Picture Fund people to pay for Emily's send off? That must have cost a pretty penny.

*LILLIAN lowers her voice and looks at the stairs to make sure no one upstairs can hear her.*

LILLIAN

The Fund didn't pay a cent. It was Miranda. She covered all the expenses.

CORAL

She even paid me for the music, although I had planned to play for free.

ESTELLE

It was a beautiful service, Coral. What was that final piece you did? It sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it.

CORAL

"Beautiful Dreamer" by Stephen Foster. Emily heard me practicing it and she told me that she once had a music box that played that song when she was a little girl.

ESTELLE

*(Sighs)*

How sweet!

*MIRANDA enters down the stairs.*

MIRANDA

Aren't Florence and Vera back yet? It's almost dinnertime.

GINGER

Not yet. They're busy buying elephants and can't fit them inside the trunk. *(Grins at her pun)*

LILLIAN

Please, Ginger. Don't even suggest that. I don't know what we'd do with a pair of golden elephants.

*SFX: Car honking. GINGER runs to look out the window.*

GINGER

There they are now! They're just pulling into the driveway.

LILLIAN

Please tell me that they are not pulling a carload of elephants.

GINGER

*(Chuckles)*

No, they're not, but Florence is waving madly out the window, so I'm guessing that they must have snagged something.

*ESTELLE gets up from her sofa and tries to look out the window over GINGER's shoulder.*

ESTELLE

Is she carrying anything?

GINGER

*(With a grin)*

Maybe they have sent the elephants C.O.D.

LILLIAN

*(Groans)*

Don't even joke like that.

MIRANDA

*(Also looking out the window)*

They're getting out of the car. I think Florence is carrying something, but I can't see what it is. Something brown.

GINGER

Oh, goody, she bought Johnny Weissmuller's loincloth.

CORAL

No, it's not. It's a paper bag. Here they come!

ESTELLE

*(Clasping her hands together like a little girl at a birthday party)*

Is it a big bag or a little one?

CORAL

Looks like the size of a loaf of bread.

ESTELLE

*(Her hearing isn't too good)*

Bread? What would we want with a loaf of old, stale bread?

*VERA and FLORENCE enter through the front door.*

VERA

Ta-da! We made it back alive and in once piece. Get me a bottle of wine and let me drown in it. What a day!

*VERA flops down on the sofa and kicks off her shoes. FLORENCE follows behind her, cradling a paper bag with something inside.*

LILLIAN

*(Pouring several glasses of wine and passing them around)*

So, how was the auction? Crowded, I gather.

GINGER

Let's cut to the chase. What did you get?

FLORENCE

*(Enjoying her moment in the spotlight)*

Patience, darling. you'll know soon enough.

*FLORENCE sits down next to VERA and takes a deep drink of wine.*

VERA

That auction was the worst crush of humanity that you can possibly imagine.

ESTELLE

*(Sits on sofa opposite VERA)*

Tell us all! Everything!

FLORENCE

*(Hugging the paper bag; sips her wine)*

The Metro lot was a madhouse! People were everywhere. It was kind of exciting, and yet very sad as well. There was a carnival atmosphere that you wouldn't have believed was possible in the old studio.

VERA

Just parking the car was hell. I had to go three blocks away before I could find a spot.

FLORENCE

They had put all the furniture and hand props in sound stages #15 and #30 – and you know how big stage #15 is. Things were lined up on long shelves that were four levels high. It looked like a fire sale.

GINGER

How about the costumes?

*VERA stands stage center and acts out the scene of the auction, while FLORENCE remains seated.*

VERA

They had them in stage #27. The costumes were packed together on long rods, and some were hanging down from the ceiling. A few of the more elaborate dresses were on manikins, but most of the others were just crushed together.

ESTELLE

Did you see Scarlett O'Hara's green curtain dress?

VERA

*(Shaking her head)*

No, but I did hear that all the GONE WITH THE WIND clothes had been sent to some college in Texas. Nothing from that movie was offered; not even one of Ashley's hankies. *(Takes a sip of wine)*

FLORENCE

The actual auction was also in stage #27. They had three thousand white, folding chairs set up in long rows in front of a huge screen. A picture of each item was flashed on the screen when it was up for auction.

VERA

Meanwhile, there were catering wagons set up around all the stages. They sold sandwiches, hot dogs, sodas and the like.

MIRANDA

*(Shaking her head)*

Poor old Louis B. Mayer! He must have been twirling in his grave as all his beloved treasures were sold and carted away.

ESTELLE

Did any of the stars come? Did you see anyone famous?

FLORENCE

Some, but not as many as I had expected. Rock Hudson was there, and so were Shirley Jones and Nanette Fabray. But I think most of the big stars just stayed home. Too many memories.

VERA

Except for Debbie Reynolds. She was there front and center the whole day long, bidding for just about everything in sight. She spent a fortune while we were there. And she looked like she was going to cry at any moment. After all, she practically grew up on the MGM lot. It must have felt like they were selling her home.

LILLIAN

Were things very expensive?

VERA

Through the roof! You wouldn't believe what people were paying for all that stuff!

FLORENCE

The auction company was pretty high pressure. Not only did you need to have a catalogue to get in, but in order to bid on anything, you had to have a paddle with a number on it.

VERA

And you couldn't get one of those unless you put down a hundred-dollar deposit.

ESTELLE

Good gracious!

MIRANDA

Did you have enough money?

FLORENCE

*(Nods; takes another sip of wine)*

Yes, thanks to you.

MIRANDA

I thought so. I had heard that the auction house was going to do that.

VERA

Well, the amount was refundable if you didn't buy anything, or was applicable to your purchase, if you did buy something.

GINGER

*(Eyeing the paper bag in FLORENCE'S hands)*

And obviously you got something.

FLORENCE

Yes, but at first, we thought we weren't going to be able to afford anything. The prices were sky high. And you wouldn't believe what people were paying.

CORAL

Like what?

VERA

Well, the first item sold was a crystal decanter. Nothing special about it. Didn't come from any particular movie. Flo and I thought that would be just perfect for our cocktail hour.

ESTELLE

Is that what you bought?

VERA

Hell, no! Before I could even get our bidding paddle up in the air, the price went out of reach. It sold for \$90 in the first two minutes of the action.

FLORENCE

We were left gasping. And it only got worse.

VERA

Debbie Reynolds bought a four-piece Louis XVI salon set from the movie MARIE ANTOINETTE for a whopping twelve hundred dollars. And she was just getting started.

FLORENCE

She also bought one of Charlie Chaplin's bowler hats, Audrey Hepburn's Ascot race dress from MY FAIR LADY, and the show stopper — Marilyn Monroe's white sun dress from the SEVEN YEAR ITCH. That's the one Marilyn wore when she stood over a windy subway grate.

ESTELLE

Oh, my goodness!

GINGER

How about Tarzan's loincloth? Did she get that too?

VERA

I knew you'd ask that. No, someone else in the back row bought it for six hundred dollars.

MIRANDA

*(Agog)*

Someone paid six hundred dollars for a scrap of used suede leather?

VERA

Exactly! The auction was like that all day long.

LILLIAN

*(Pointing to the paper bag)*

So, what did you manage to get for the Club?

VERA

I am coming to that, but we should let Florence tell you, because she knew exactly what it was when it came up for bidding.

*VERA sits down while FLORENCE stands and takes center stage.*

FLORENCE

Well, as most of you know, I was one of Louis B. Mayer's assistant secretaries for over thirty years at MGM. *(Everyone nods)* I was in and out of his private office every day. Even though L. B. was a studio mogul, he was also a very sentimental man at heart.

MIRANDA

Yes, he was. He made sure that every employee at the studio could afford at least a bowl of his mother's chicken soup and a piece of her apple pie. He gave her recipes to the studio's Commissary kitchen with the orders to have them on the menu every day for thirty-five cents each. Everyone from the kids in the Messengers' office to the executives in the Thalberg building could afford to have a good, hot lunch for under a dollar.

GINGER

And the minute Mayer was kicked out for being too old fashioned, and Dore Schary took over as Studio Head, the prices in the Commissary doubled.

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**

*Continue to next page for properties list*

## PROPERTIES LIST

*Tray with white wine and sherry bottles*

*A half dozen wine glasses are on the sideboard*

*Telephone on the reception desk*

*Pile of mail with some magazines on the reception desk*

*Vase of flowers on the sideboard. Flower arrangement changes in each scene*

*Portrait of Gloria Swanson over the mantle*

*Knitting needles, yarn & knitting bag – EMILY*

*2 Romance paperback books – ESTELLE*

*A string instrument like a cello, violin, guitar, banjo – CORAL*

*2 suitcases and a coat – LUCILLE*

*Gold compact, wrapped in gift paper and ribbon – LUCILLE*

*Jacket and purse – Vera*

*Copy of Daily VARIETY trade news magazine*

*2 bottles of champagne*

*5 MGM Auction catalogues*

*Gold lion statuette*