

# **VILLAINY IN RIVER OAKS**

(or Will True Love Overcome All?)

**A Victorian Soap-Opera with Music & Song**  
*(if there are such things!)*

*that was*

*Inspired by the following Great Masterworks:*

*Plautus' "The Menaechmi"*

*"The Comedy of Errors" by William Shakespeare*

*"HMS Pinafore (or the Lass That Loved a Sailor)" by*

*W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan*

*Nineteenth Century Melodramas in the style of Francois Del Sarte  
and other such Beloved Works!*

*The story also includes*

*Sweet Ballads, Stirring Patriotic Songs and*

*Popular Ditties to be Soulfully Rendered*

*by the Cast!*

*This convoluted but gripping tale was penned by*

*Madame Elaine Edstrom*

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VILLAINY IN RIVER OAKS was first produced as a staged reading at Country Playhouse, Houston, Texas, as part of their New Plays Series in February 2005 to great acclaim with the following cast:

Prudence Van Castle.....	MORGAN MAYES
Daphne Calhoun.....	BRIDGET KEMP
Paul Montrose.....	JOE E. WHITE
Mary Calhoun.....	LISA MATHER
Billy Bob Bowman.....	KEITH VINSON
Beauregard Sneed.....	TED PFISTER
Sairy Ann.....	CLARA MCVILLE
Mean Old Minnie Sneed.....	JERE PFISTER
Judge Beaumont.....	PAUL SIDELLO
Maestro Moriarty on Keyboard.....	GLENN SHARP

Director: ELAINE EDSTROM  
Music Director: GLENN SHARP

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

PRUDENCE VAN CASTLE	Houston Society's Grand Dame--and its self-appointed Voice
DAPHNE CALHOUN	Pretty, but with no Heart
PAUL MONTROSE	Within his veins flows some of Houston's Bluest Blood
MARY CALHOUN	A Belle of Houston Society and Daphne's beloved Cousin
BILLY BOB BOWMAN	A returned Veteran, working as a Messenger, but open to Anything--Wages no Objection
BEAUREGARD SNEED	The Law is always Reaching for him, but he usually can Slither Away
SAIRY ANN	A Good Girl who has escaped Villainy's Wicked Clutches
MEAN OLD MINNIE	A really Wicked Mother of a Person
JUDGE BEAUMONT	He follows the Letter of the Law

*-and-*

*Last But Not Least*

MAESTRO MORIARTY (whose (or MADAME-- depending upon sex of the pianist)	This Sterling Company's Wizard of the Pianoforte's Stirring & Heartfelt renditions of Favorites have been heard from Coast-to-Coast)
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# THE SCENARIO

## ACT I

- Scene 1: The Calhoun Mansion in River Oaks, a Saturday evening in January  
*(LADIES AT HOME)*
- Scene 2: Foyer of the Grand Ballroom in the Texas Hotel, Houston, the following Saturday evening  
*(BEFORE THE BALL)*
- Scene 3: A dingy shack on Wallisville Road, early April  
*(DIRE POVERTY)*

## ACT II

- Scene 1: Houston Police Court, Morning, a week later  
*(IS JUSTICE BLIND?)*
- Scene 2: Smith and Prairie Streets, Houston, a few hours later  
*(THE SEARCH BEGINS)*
- Scene 3: A pier on Buffalo Bayou, early that evening  
*(DASTARDLY DEEDS AFOOT)*
- Scene 4: The Calhoun Mansion, an afternoon one month later  
*(IS SHE SAFE NOW?)*
- Scene 5: A wooded area near River Oaks that evening  
*(THE PLOT THICKENS)*
- Scene 6: The Houston & Piney Woods Railroad Depot, an hour later  
*(HEINOUS VILLAINY)*
- Scene 7: The Calhoun Mansion, later that night  
*(WILL VIRTUE TRIUMPH?)*

# THE MUSICAL NUMBERS

## *Act I*

HOME ON THE RANGE	Prudence
THE BAND PLAYED ON	Daphne, Paul, Mary
UP IN A BALLOON	Sairy Ann
THE SHABBY GENTEEL	Mary
KISSING ON THE SLY	Paul and Mary

## *Act II*

BE KIND TO YOUR FATHER	Judge Beaumont
THE LITTLE BROWN JUG	Sneed & Mean Old Minnie
OYSTERS & WINE AT TWO	Daphne
WITH ALL HER FAULTS, I LOVE HER STILL	Paul
WE WILL LAY 'EM LOW (to the tune "I've Been Workin' On The Railroad)	Billy Bob
IN THE GOOD OLD SUMMERTIME	Mary, Paul, Daphne, Billy Bob, Sairy Ann

## A WORD ABOUT THE SET AND THE MUSIC

The set can be as lavish or as inexpensive as desired. It can consist of full sets on a revolve stage or it can be done with large backdrops or backdrops as simple as painted sheets that can flipped back and forth over a frame. It can have portable flats of any size carried on for scenes. Or it can have a simple unit style set with only lighting changes and set pieces used. It is up to the set designer, the director and the theatre's budget, just how innovative the set can be.

In keeping with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century style of melodramas, Set changes should be in costume, choreographed to music and actually seen by the audience. It is preferred that the cast (again in keeping with the 19<sup>th</sup> century dictates) not do the changes. There should be a "sign girl" who walks the front of the stage showing the audience a sign on which is painted the topic of the upcoming scene, which she places on an easel. The titles for these signs are found on the Scenario page in parentheses after the scene description

Because the music used in the production is actual 19<sup>th</sup> century (and earlier) music—which is in public domain; the score is not included with the script but is available. Most of the lyrics used in the script are actual lyrics from these songs—but in many cases, have had some changes to reflect the script. In addition to the songs indicated in the script, there should, of course, be the usual background piano "villain's music", the exciting "fight and struggle" music, etc. In all cases, the Pianist SHOULD be seen and SHOULD be part of the ensemble. In fact, the Pianist for VILLAINY IN RIVER OAKS could also act as the MC (Master or Mistress of Ceremonies).

# VILLAINY IN RIVER OAKS

## ACT I--Scene 1

(THE PARLOR OF THE CALHOUN MANSION. A SATURDAY EVENING IN JANUARY. PAUL IS AT THE DOOR LEADING INTO THE KITCHEN HALLWAY, LOOKING OUT; PRUDENCE & DAPHNE ARE SEATED ACROSS FROM ONE ANOTHER TALKING)

PRUDENCE

And, Daphne dear, you and Mary will be attending my Wednesday afternoon Musicale won't you?

DAPHNE

Wouldn't miss it, Prudence--and since you're hostessing this shindig, I take it you WON'T be singing???

PRUDENCE

Shindig! La! What language! My Musicales are quite the social event here in River Oaks--as you well know--and are not by any stretch of the imagination a "shindig!" And, yes, I WILL be singing a small solo...by request.

DAPHNE

Whose request?

PRUDENCE

Millicent Mayflower prevailed upon me to do so at luncheon last week

DAPHNE (TO PAUL)

Did you hear that Paul?

PAUL (DISTRACTEDLY TURNING TO DAPHNE)

Hear what?

DAPHNE

The Madam Mayflower has asked Prudence to sing at her own Musicale!

PAUL (TURNING BACK)

That's nice,

PRUDENCE

I have decided to support Millicent for President of our Chapter of the Daughters of the Alamo when I step down.

DAPHNE



Did you decide that before or after she “prevailed” upon you to sing?

PRUDENCE

Why afterwards, you silly girl! Why I hardly knew the woman before our luncheon. I thought I’d sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

DAPHNE

Uh, Prudence, do you think that a wise choice...what with your husband being an undertaker and all?

PRUDENCE

You’re right! I shall do my poodle, Fifi’s, favorite: “Home on the Range” instead. For some silly reason, she sings right along with me  
(*STANDING...GRANDLY!*) Would you like to hear my song?

DAPHNE (*HASTILY*)

Oh, we wouldn’t think of imposing.....

PRUDENCE

Nonsense! It’s no imposition. (*SHE SINGS “HOME ON THE RANGE” [BADLY OPERATIC!] DURING WHICH PAUL CROSSES TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW*)

*O GIVE ME A HOME  
WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM,  
WHERE THE DEER AND THE ANTELOPE PLAY; (DOG BARKS OUTSIDE)  
WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD  
A DISCOURAGING WORD  
AND THE SKIES ARE NOT CLOUDY ALL DAY. (ANOTHER DOG BARK & A HOWL)*

*HOME, HOME ON THE RANGE (MORE BARKS & HOWLS THAT  
WHERE THE DEER AND THE ANTELOPE PLAY; GROW TO A CRECENDO AT  
WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD END OF THE SONG)  
A DISCOURAGING WORD  
AND THE SKIES ARE NOT CLOUDY ALL DAY.*

(*DAPHNE QUICKLY APPLAUDS BEFORE SHE CAN BEGIN ANOTHER VERSE.*)

DAPHNE

Well now.....THAT was.....different! (*PAUL TURNS FROM THE WINDOW AND SAYS: )*

PAUL

Strange, it looks like all the dogs in the neighborhood are outside. Your carriage has arrived, Prudence, and it looks like your husband, himself has the reins!

PRUDENCE

Oh my, then I must be going, Horace so hates to be kept waiting. Tell Mary goodnight for me and I'm sorry she missed my song.

DAPHNE (*ASIDE*)

Lucky her!

PRUDENCE

Goodnight Paul. I suppose I will be seeing you and Mary at next week's Cattle Barons' Ball?

PAUL

Mary and I will be there. Goodnight. Give my regards to Horace

PRUDENCE

Good night! Good night! (*SHE EXITS OUT FRONT DOOR*)

DAPHNE (*CALLING AFTER HER AS SHE CLOSSES THE DOOR*)

Goodnight! Whew! THAT was a long hour! I was beginning to think she would stay all night!

PAUL

What is taking Mary so long? I had to suffer through that God-awful rendition of Prudence's alone!

DAPHNE

I beg your pardon...what was I? A doorstep?

PAUL (*CHUCKLING*)

Forgive me, Daffy, it's just that.....

DAPHNE (*INTERRUPTING HIM*)

Oh, forget her for a second, can't you? She'll be back in soon--she's simply seeing to our late supper.

PAUL (*LAUGHING & CROSSING TO HER*)

I'll admit, Daffy, if anyone in the world could make me forget Mary, it would be you! But be honest, if you had a fiancé wouldn't you want him to miss YOU?

DAPHNE (*FLIRTING*)

That, sir, is quite another thing! Have some coffee while you wait--or a cookie.

PAUL

No thanks.

DAPHNE

Ain't you hungry?

PAUL

No, Daffy, you tease. And don't say "ain't!"

DAPHNE

Don't call me Daffy! I hate that nickname! I suppose you AIN'T hungry because you and Mary are going to be married soon. I swear, if there is one time in his life when a man loses his appetite and is stupid to his friends, it's when he's engaged to be married! *(TO PAUL, WHO HAS BEEN PACING RESTLESSLY)* Oh relax! Stop being so twitchy! Come sit by me and tell me something funny before I fall asleep out of sheer boredom!

PAUL *(SMILING AND SITTING BESIDE HER)*

You witch! Why didn't I fall in love with you instead of your cousin?

DAPHNE *(FLIRTING)*

I don't know.....why DIDN'T you?

MARY *(ENTERING WITH A TRAY OF COVERED DISHES WHICH SHE SETS ON A TABLE)*

Here we are, supper at last! Sorry, but I had to have everything warmed up *(TO PAUL)* We waited supper until eight o'clock for you, Paul, and then you and Prudence simply had to arrive simultaneously. *(LOOKS AROUND)* Where IS Prudence, by the way?

DAPHNE

Gone! Thank God!

MARY

Daphne!

DAPHNE

Well, you didn't have to listen to her murder "Home on the Range!" It was bad enough to stampede those Roaming Buffaloes.

PAUL *(TAKING HER HANDS)*

I'm sorry I was late, my pet, but I was held up by business until late in the evening!

MARY

Well, it's only ten o'clock, so you have lots of time to chat with us as we all eat. I hope you're hungry!

PAUL

Famished!

DAPHNE

Oh my! Just listen to you! Did your appetite enter the room with Mary?

MARY *(FLIRTING)*

Well.....as long as long as his "appetite" is just for ME!

PAUL

THAT I can promise!

DAPHNE

Well now! Would you two like me to leave?

MARY (*LAUGHING*)

Of course not, you silly goose!

DAPHNE

Good! The two of you will have plenty of time to be alone after you're married! For now, lets gossip a bit! Oh Paul, wait till you see Mary's new pink ball gown...it's gorgeous!

MARY

I wanted something pretty to wear--after all, it's the first Ball of the Season!

PAUL

And our last as singles! By the next Ball we'll be husband and wife!

DAPHNE

Well listen to the two of you! You remind me of that song about Casey and his Strawberry Blonde!

MARY

What do you mean, Daphne?

DAPHNE

You two have been kootchy-kooing ever since LAST year's Batchelor and Maiden Ball!

*(SHE STARTS SINGING "CASEY WOULD WALTZ"; JOINED IN BY MARY AND PAUL AS THEY WALTZ)*

*PAULIE DID WALTZ WITH MISS MARY CALHOUN  
AND THE BAND PLAYED ON  
HE DANCED CROSS THE FLOOR, WITH THE GIRL HE ADORED,  
AND THE BAND PLAYED ON.  
HIS BRAIN WAS SO LOADED  
IT NEARLY EXPLODED;  
AND MARY WOULD SHAKE WITH ALARM.  
HE'LL MARRY THE GIRL WITH THE HEAD FULL OF CURLS  
WHILE THE BAND PLAYS ON*

*(WALTZ THRU 4 PHRASES)*

**PAUL:** *MY BRAIN WAS SO LOADED IT NEARLY EXPLODED*

**MARY:** *AND YES, I DID SHAKE WITH ALARM.*

**ALL:** *HE'LL(I'LL) MARRY MY(THIS) GIRL WITH THE HEAD FULL OF CURLS  
WHILE THE BAND PLAYS ON*

*(PAUL BOWS TO MARY; MARY CURTSYS; DAPHNE APPLAUDS & LAUGHS. THE*

*APPLAUSE AND THEIR LAUGHTER IS INTERRUPTED BY A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. DAPHNE CROSSED TO WINDOW AND LOOKS OUT AND SAYS: )*

DAPHNE

There's someone outside carrying a bunch of flowers!

MARY *(TO PAUL ENCHANTEDLY)*

Oh Paul!

PAUL

It's none of my doing, Mary!

DAPHNE

He looks like some sort of messenger.

MARY

Well, let him in!

DAPHNE *(CROSSING TO DO SO)*

How romantic! And so late! I'll bet it's a rival in disguise Paul! *(SHE OPENS THE DOOR AS MARY & PAUL LAUGH. BILLY BOB ENTERS CARRYING A HUGE BOUQUET. HIS HAT IS UNDER THE SAME ARM, AS HIS OTHER ARM IS MISSING)*  
Can we help you?

BILLY BOB

Miss Mary Calhoun?

MARY

Yes.

BILLY BOB

Ah was told t' give ya this.

MARY

By whom?

BILLY BOB

Ah don't rightly know that m'self! Y'see while sittin on the steps of the Texas Hotel down on Main Street, takin' a light supper offn' a small toothpick, this big fella all dressed in black comes up and asks me if Ah wanted to earn a quarter. Well, that bein' my very frame o' mind, Ah hopped into his carriage with him and we came here. "Jes' take these up there" he says, pointing' t' yer door, "ask for Miss Mary Calhoun and give 'em t' her 'n' nobody else."

DAPHNE

Hmmmm, It could have come from Horace and Prudence Van Castle, Mary. Horace is big and dresses in black like all undertakers do. *(TO BILLY BOB)* What happened to your arm?

MARY *(SHOCKED)*

Daphne! Really!

BILLY BOB

Oh that's all right, Miss. Ah got relieved o m' arm by a carpet bagger over in Memphis after the recent conflict. Bein' a soldier, Ah wasn't much use t' the Army after that, so Ah came back home to Texas with m' empty sleeve as m' character reference, and set up fer handy-man, light porter and messenger duty fer anyone with the coins t' hire me! All orders executed with neatness and dispatch!

MARY

You poor man! Would you care for a glass of wine before you go?

BILLY BOB

Much obliged, Miss, but Ah don't think it'd be good fer me on an empty stomach after fastin' all day!

DAPHNE

That is wise of you!

MARY

At least have a piece of cake.

BILLY BOB *(HELPING HIMSELF TO HER OFFERING)*

Don't mind if'n Ah do. Thank ya Miss.

PAUL *(GIVING HIM A PENCILLED ADDRESS)*

Tomorrow come to this address and I'll see that you are rewarded. I was a Captain with the Texas Volunteer Unit at the Battle of Sabine Pass and I would like to help out an ex-fighting man.

BILLY BOB *(SNAPPING TO ATTENTION)*

Yes sir, Cap'n sir! Ah ain't forgot the Army rules about punctuality 'n' promotion. *(CROSSES TO DOOR WITH MARY, WHO HANDS FLOWERS TO DAPHNE AS SHE OPENS THE DOOR FOR BILLY BOB)* Ladies, if either o'ya should need a handy-man, light porter, or messenger, think o' Billy Bob Bowman. Wages no objection! *(HE EXITS)*

DAPHNE *(WHO HAS BEEN EXAMINING THE BOUQUET)*

Look Mary! There's a note inside!

PAUL *(CROSSES TO HER TO LOOK)*

Nonsense silly girl! Who would dare? *(PEERS INTO BOUQUET)* Well! There IS a note. *(HE TAKES IT FROM THE BOUQUET)*

MARY

What's it say, Paul?

PAUL

The envelope says "For Miss Mary Calhoun. Confidential".

MARY *(LAUGHING)*

From some person who is playing a joke! Read it Paul!

PAUL *(OPENS ENVELOPE & STARTS TO READ)*

"My dear Mary....." No! *(HANDS MARY NOTE)* It's your note to read--not me!

*(MARY READS IT TO HERSELF THEN HER WHOLE EXPRESSION CHANGES. SHE LOOKS AT PAUL & DAPHNE; THEN READS THE LETTER SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY)*

MARY

"I respectfully beg you to grant me the favor of an interview tonight. I have waited until your company left and am now waiting across the street...."

DAPHNE *(RUNS TO WINDOW)*

There's a strange man in black standing under the gaslight and watching the house.

MARY *(CONTINUES READING)*

...if you will open the door as soon as you read this, I will come over; if you don't, I will ring; under all circumstances I WILL get in. There is no need to sign my name; you will remember me as the strange man you once saw talking with your mother...and who frightened you so much." *(SHE LOOKS UP)* Oh, Daphne!

PAUL

Mary, what is this about?

MARY

Don't ask me now. I'll tell you later. *(KNOCK ON DOOR)* Don't let anyone in!

PAUL

I'll kick the bum out! *(ANOTHER KNOCK ON THE DOOR--THIS TIME LOUDER)* This has gone far enough. I'll find out what this means. *(CROSSES TO & OPENS DOOR; SNEED IS STANDING IN DOORWAY)* Who are you to come bothering God-fearing people so late in the evening? How dare you!

SNEED

Don't, I beg you. Don't speak so crossly; I might answer back and then you'd kick me out and you'd never forgive yourself for it as long as I lived!

PAUL

You business? Speak up quickly, man, and then leave!

SNEED (*OILY PURR*)

Business? Oh no, I came for pleasure...to see Miss Calhoun, my little pupil...all grown up! Only think, sir, I knew her when she was a little child; I taught her music--she was so musical--and so beautiful. I adored her and her mother told me I needn't come again. But I did, and her mother was glad to see me, wasn't she, little pupil? (*THIS TO MARY WHO IS PALE WITH TERROR AND CLINGING TO DAPHNE, WHO IS ALSO SHAKING*) She was so glad to see me she convinced me to receive any trifling contribution the family might give me each time I came! (*CROSSES SUDDENLY TO MARY*) Won't you at least shake hands with an old friend of the family my dear? (*PAUL GRABS HIM BY THE COLLAR. SNEED GLARES AT PAUL A MOMENT THEN QUICKLY REVERTS TO HIS OILY PURRING*) Don't! Please don't! The jacket is old and I have no other!

PAUL (*RELEASING HIM*)

You are drunk! Leave this house before I toss you through the window!

SNEED

What? After that touching bouquet I sent?

MARY (*TREMBLING*)

Please, sir.....

SNEED

You see! She knows me! Ah, memory! How it blossoms when reawakened!

MARY (*PLEADING*)

Leave this house! Please

SNEED

Not until I have spoken to you. Alone!

PAUL (*SEIZING HIM AGAIN*)

You, sir, are not welcome here!

SNEED (*DANGEROUSLY ANGRY*)

Don't touch me! (*RECOVERING HIMSELF & BACK TO HIS OILY PURR*) Pray...don't. If you attempt to throw me about you'll only strain yourself...and me.

MARY (*WEAKLY & TREMBLING*)

Please go. I'll see you tomorrow morning. At ten thirty.

SNEED

Thank you, dear child, for your forbearance. (*TO PAUL*) I am also obliged to you, sir, for not tossing me through the window. (*OILY SMILE*) I am indeed. I wish you all a good night and (*STRAIGHT TO MARY*) pleasant dreams...hmmmmmm? (*SNEED BOWS & EXITS—EVILLY LAUGHING*) ha ha ha ha ha!



PAUL (*RUSHING TO MARY, WHO IS PALE AND AGITATED*)

Are you all right?

MARY

Yes, thank you. Please see that he REALLY goes, Paul. (*PAUL EXITS & MARY CROSSES TO DAPHNE, TAKING BOTH HER HANDS*) Daphne, Paul must be told everything about me.

DAPHNE

Oh dear! This is dreadful. You know how I hate scenes!

MARY

Please Daphne, you must tell him everything. He will have questions but make sure he knows everything. EVERYTHING!

DAPHNE

If you REALLY wish me to, Mary, but.....

MARY

I DO wish it. Say what you want about me, but tell him the truth. (*TO PAUL WHO IS RETURNING FROM OUTSIDE*) Stay with Daphne, Paul, she has something to tell you. (*SHE EXITS*)

PAUL

Daphne, what in the name of all that is sane is going on?

DAPHNE (*AIRILY*)

Oh, it's only a little cloud that I want to clear up for you!

PAUL

Cloud? How? What? Where?

DAPHNE

Now didn't I just tell you I was going to tell you? Sit down here by me (*PAUL STARES AT HER*) Please. (*PAUL STARTS PACING*)

PAUL

He said he knew her. That...that drunken wretch said he KNEW her! And they are going to meet tomorrow morning!

DAPHNE

DO sit DOWN, Paul. I can't talk to you when you pace around the room like a caged tiger! Come! Sit! I have something dreadfully serious to tell you.

PAUL (*SITTING*)

You? SERIOUS? I'd sooner expect to see a Gulf hurricane tamed!

DAPHNE

What I have to tell you is going to be a teensy bit disturbing for you and you'll have to settle it with your own heart. You do love Mary, don't you?

PAUL

Love her? Daphne, I adore her. I'd never be happy without her.

DAPHNE

Mary is nineteen now. How do you think she looked when she first arrived here?

PAUL

Well, like all babies, I suppose she looked very small and very pink and very cuddly!

DAPHNE

She was covered with rags, barefoot, dirty, crying and, like me, six years old.

PAUL (*SHOCKED*)

What? I can't believe that, You had better explain, Daphne.

DAPHNE

One night thirteen years ago, mama and papa were going to attend an opera down at the Galveston Opera House. When they got out of their carriage, the usual crowd of poor children crowded around them asking for pennies. As mama felt in her pocket for change, her fingers touched a cold and trembling hand which had clutched her purse.

PAUL (*IMPATIENT*)

A pickpocket...well?????

DAPHNE

Mama looked down and there beside her was a ragged little girl.

PAUL

The thief.

DAPHNE

Yes, but a thief barely six years old and with a face like an angel's. "Stop!" said mama, "what are you doing?" "Trying to steal" said the child. "Don't you know it's wicked to steal?" asked papa. "Yes" said the girl, "but it's dreadful to be hungry?" "Who told you to steal?" asked mama. "She did" said the child, pointing to a squalid woman in a doorway opposite, who suddenly fled down the street. "That's Mean Old Minnie!" said the girl.

PAUL

Mean Old Minnie! What a name! But what's your point, Daphne?

DAPHNE

I'm getting to that. Papa was about to let the child go unharmed but mama said "No, Ezekial! Look at this poor child, she needs our help." and, acting on sudden impulse, they brought her to our home. When she was questioned later, the child could

DAPHNE (*CONTINUED*)

remember nothing but misery and beatings. Mama persuaded papa to keep her and raise her so she could have a better life. They named her Mary and sent her to the convent school in San Antone where she remained for several years.

PAUL

Daphne, surely you are joking!

DAPHNE

In beauty, dignity and accomplishments, Mary exceeded every girl in the school. In gratitude she was all that my parents could have wished. She was introduced into society as my cousin and no-one dreams of her origin.

PAUL (*STANDING*)

Mary...an outcast...a THIEF!

DAPHNE (*STANDING*)

No! That is what she MIGHT have been.

PAUL

And this man tonight?

DAPHNE

All I know about him is that four years ago, when papa died, this man came with a cruel-looking woman to see mama. There was a fearful scene between them and Mary and I sat trembling on the stairs and overheard some awful words. As they went away, the man put money in his pocket.

PAUL

But who were they?

DAPHNE

Mary never told me and mama would not. But, of course, they must have been Mary's father and mother. (*PAUL SINKS ONTO CHAIR, OVERCOME*) Mama made me promise on her deathbed last year to never tell anybody this...and you wouldn't have known anything if Mary hadn't made me tell YOU. You see, she wouldn't keep anything from you. (*PAUL GROANS*) Why don't you say something, Paul? Mary is a beautiful and accomplished young woman now. (*ANOTHER GROAN, LOUDER, FROM PAUL*) You must always remember that things are never what they seem and that skim milk often masquerades as cream. (*A THIRD AND EVEN LOUDER GROAN FROM PAUL*) Oh, for Heaven's sake, Paul, quit that awful noise! I'll go find Mary and tell her you want to see her. I'll send her right in to you so don't go away. (*SHE EXITS TO GET MARY*)

PAUL (*PACING ABOUT*)

I can't believe it! Mary Calhoun a thief! And she has a drunken bum and squalid beggar woman for parents...who could announce to the world at any time that she is their daughter! And I'm engaged to her. Yes, I love her...but what would my mother think? My friends? Omigod! What will Society think? No! There's no way in Hades that I can marry such a person. But then, I am sure she must know that a wedding between us is impossible now! Oh, how can I face her? I know! I'll write her a note stating the obvious and leave it here. *(CROSSES TO DESK)* There must be some paper here somewhere. Ah! Here's some. *(SITS)* I owe it to Society to do my duty and break this engagement. *(WRITES)* "Mary: Daphne has told me everything. I know that you know I love you but my mother will demand that my wife be above reproach and who would not blush to acknowledge her own parents. That my wife be honest and pure and not a daughter of obscurity and crime. Because of what we once were to each other, I will keep your secret of the tie that binds you to a drunken wretch and his sordid wife. Please try to understand that I wish you well and hope you will not be forced to return to what you once were--an outcast and a thief. I wish you well." *(FOLDS LETTER & ADDRESSES IT. PUTS ON OVERCOAT)* I'll leave it on the hall table for her. *(MARY APPEARS AT THE DOOR)* Too late! *(HE CRAMS LETTER INTO POCKET OF HIS OVERCOAT)*

MARY *(GENTLY & TENTATIVELY)*

Paul? You sent for me?

PAUL *(STIFFLY)*

Miss...Miss Calhoun. I...uh....*(MARY LOOKS AT HIM A MOMENT AS HE STUTTERS, SMILES, TURNS & CROSSES TO SIT ON SOFA WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIM AGAIN)* Oh God! What have I said? What SHOULD I have said? *(HE TAKES A STEP TOWARDS HER; SHE RISES AND CROSSES WINDOW & LOOKS OUT)* Mary! I.....

MARY *(RISING & CROSSING AWAY)*

I wonder where I left that book.

PAUL

Oh how stupid I've been. What a fool! There's no way I can let her go. *(CROSSES TO BEHIND HER & PUTS HIS ARMS ON HER SHOULDERS)* Mary, dear, please look at me. *(SHE TURNS, STEPS BACK, AND LOOKS AT HIM WITH NO EXPRESSION)* No! No! Not that way! You're looking at me like I was a stranger!

MARY

Only strangers call me "Miss Calhoun".

PAUL

I'm sorry, Mary, I've been a fool. Please forgive me. It's just that it was so sudden...that miserable story.....*(HE DRAWS HIMSELF UP)* But I don't care what Society may say about you! *(SHE WALKS AWAY)* Oh, please listen to me! We're going to be married...regardless of your wretched and sordid past! I love you, Mary.

MARY

I'm sorry, but I don't believe in love any more. I hate the very word.

PAUL

You didn't used to think so.

MARY

I wish I had. It wouldn't hurt so much now. Goodnight. (*CROSSES TO DOOR. TURNS*) Goodnight, Mr. Montrose. (*SHE EXITS*)

PAUL

I will NOT give her up! (*TAKES LETTER FROM POCKET*) No-one knows of this. We'll keep it that way! (*RETURNS LETTER TO POCKET*) Mary and I'll be married as planned, go to Europe--maybe Paris or Madrid--and we'll live there a few years until this all blows over. I'll come back tomorrow after Mary meets with that reprehensible man and tell her how we'll work everything out. I've made up my mind and NOTHING will sway me!

**BLACKOUT** (*Music: Casey Would Waltz...segue into Scene 2 as Curtain is drawn & sign is changed*)

End of scene 1

Perusal  
Only FOR  
NOT FOR  
PRODUCTION

**Scene 2**

*(FOYER OF THE GRAND BALLROOM OF THE TEXAS HOTEL THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY EVENING--MUSIC IS HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND)*

PRUDENCE

I DO WISH Paul would get here. Horace is an old dud tonight and simply sitting on the sidelines while this glorious music plays. I want to dance!

DAPHNE

But Prudence, your Horace is on crutches because of his gout and you know Paul will dance every dance with Mary.

PRUDENCE *(SLYLY)*

Not if he gets here ahead of her! For then I shall capture him!

DAPHNE *(LAUGHING)*

Oh Prudence, you are a schemer!

PRUDENCE *(LOFTILY)*

Aren't I though? Come, Daphne, let's find some refreshments while we wait. *(THEY EXIT ONE DOOR AS PAUL COMES IN ANOTHER)*

PAUL

Looks like I'm late--as usual--and after I'd made up with Mary on Sunday, I promised that I'd meet her on time. I wonder where she is? *(TAKES OFF COAT & LETTER FALLS OUT)* What the.....damn! It's that stupid letter I wrote last Saturday. *(HE PICKS IT UP & PUTS IT BACK IN POCKET)* I forgot all about it. When I get home I'll burn the blasted thing. *(DAPHNE & PRUDENCE ENTER)*

DAPHNE

It's about time you got here. Where HAVE you been?

PRUDENCE

You're going to waltz with me, Paul. I need a partner since Horace is laid up with the gout again!

PAUL

Later, Prudence, my first dance is with Mary.

PRUDENCE

Oh Pooh! You're an old meanie!

PAUL

Where's Mary, Daphne? Not dancing with some stranger I hope!

DAPHNE

She wasn't quite ready when I was, so I came with the Kleins.

PRUDENCE (*AGHAST*)

Not in their grocery delivery wagon I hope!

DAPHNE (*SMILING SWEETLY...BUT CATTILY!*)

No dear, in their new surrey! AND! I understand they are thinking of going into the funeral business also in the very near future! Horace will have some competition then!

PRUDENCE (*SNIFFS*)

Peasants!

PAUL

Ladies! Ladies!

PRUDENCE (*SIDLING UP TO PAUL*)

I understand you and Mary had a little tiff last week!

PAUL (*GLARING AT DAPHNE*)

Just a lover's misunderstanding, Prudence but we've made up now and it's all water under the bridge!

DAPHNE (*QUICKLY & TAKING PAUL'S ARM*)

And I am SO glad!

PAUL

And so am I! (*HE TAKES DAPHNE A STEP AWAY AND WORRIEDLY SAYS:*)  
You should have stayed and come with her, Daphne. I worry about her constantly—I'm afraid of what that terrible man and his secret could do to us

PRUDENCE (*COMING UP TO THEM*)

What's the matter, Paul? You look worried for some reason.

PAUL

I was just thinking that I'd go fetch Mary.

PRUDENCE

Nonsense! She'll be here as soon as she's all primped up and pretty for you! You young lovers are always afraid someone will come along and snatch your girls away!  
(*SHE LAUGHS*)

PAUL (*UNEASY*)

I? I'm not afraid.

DAPHNE (*WORRIEDLY JUMPING IN*)

Of course he ain't. (*PAUL LOOKS AT HER*) Isn't.

PRUDENCE

I was joking for Heaven's sake! Will the two of you relax? You are acting really strange tonight! (*SHE TAKES PAUL'S COAT*) Here, I'll take your coat and I promise you that if Mary isn't here after you have one dance with me, you can go after her! Now go get us some refreshments while I see about checking this coat. Take him away Daphne!

PAUL (*CHUCKLING*)

You strike a hard bargain, Prudence, but I agree. Come on Daphne, let's see if they have any of those poppy seed cakes I like so much. (*THEY EXIT. PRUDENCE TOSSES COAT OVER HER ARM & THE LETTER FALLS OUT*)

PRUDENCE

Well now! What's this? A love letter from Mary? I'll bet it's saturated with perfume! (*SHE PICKS IT UP AND SMELLS--DISAPPOINTED*) Oh well! (*LOOKS AT IT*) Oh! It's FOR Mary! Hmmmmm, and it's unsealed and undelivered. (*LOOKS AROUND*) Should I? It's a fair prize from a lovesick Lothario! Let's see it! (*SHE OPENS THE LETTER*) "Mary:" Well THAT'S a bit unromantic, I must say! "Daphne has told me everything. I know that you know I love you but my mother will demand that my wife be above reproach .... not blush to acknowledge her own parents.....daughter of obscurity and crime.....tie which binds you to a drunken wretch and his sordid wife.....an outcast and a thief...." (*SHE LOOKS UP*) And he signed it simply "P. Montrose!" So! The rumors of ten years ago are true! Well! I always suspected that Mable Calhoun had foisted an imposter upon Society...claiming she was her niece! Ha! Those rumors may have died out but here is the proof! Mary Calhoun is nothing but a beggar's child...and a thief to boot! Well, I must say, the best blood of all Texas Society is insulted by her very presence!

PAUL (*RETURNING WITH DAPHNE*)

Here, Prudence, Daphne has a poppy seed cake for you! (*PRUDENCE TURNS TO FACE THEM*) Good Lord, what's wrong? You look like you've been slapped!

PRUDENCE (*GIVING DAPHNE THE LETTER*)

Look at this, Daphne...and Paul, YOU explain what it means!

PAUL (*AS DAPHNE READS LETTER & GASPS*)

Where did you get that?

PRUDENCE

Not so fast, bucko, you're the one that has to answer...and Society the one that will question! So! Mary is not really a Calhoun! And you still plan to marry this (*TAKES LETTER*) Creature?

PAUL (*STAUNCHLY*)

Yes!

PRUDENCE

You cannot! Our Social Strata will not allow it!



PAUL (*FIRM*)

This is none of your business. Give me that letter

PRUDENCE (*HANDING IT OVER*)

Here, take it! But I know what it says and when I am through informing our peers what I know, every tongue in Houston will question you about this secret; every eye in Texas shall inquire!

PAUL

Please Prudence, I beg you, don't breathe a word of this--not for my sake but for hers.

PRUDENCE (*SCORNFULLY TURNING AWAY*)

The secret's not mine to keep. I must do my duty for Houston Society.

DAPHNE

What are you going to do?

PRUDENCE

I intend to expose her...to expel her from a society in which she is an imposter. I will start by informing your mother, Paul. She will back me in everything.

PAUL

You wouldn't!

PRUDENCE

Just watch me!

DAPHNE

Oh Paul, what will happen to Mary? (*MARY APPEARS IN DOORWAY BUT IS NOT SEEN BY THE OTHERS. SHE SHRINKS BACK AND LISTENS*)

PAUL (*BITTERLY*)

Society is a monstrous retaliator. They're like the Siberian wolves in that if one of the pack is weak or an intruder, the rest of the pack destroys it. Mary has joined Society as a pretender and Society, which is made up of pretenses, will bitterly resent what they consider her mockery and do all it can to destroy her--just like the wild Siberian wolves.

PRUDENCE (*APPLAUDING*)

Bravo Paul! I see the little thief has stolen your breeding as well as your brains!

PAUL

If you tell anyone about this I will call you a liar.

PRUDENCE

Do what you want...but who will they believe--a besotted fool? Or me, a leader and pillar of Society?

DAPHNE

Paul, you must go find Mary and keep her from coming here.

PAUL

You're right. *(HE TURNS TO EXIT AND SEES MARY)* Too late! *(HE STEPS BACK)*

PRUDENCE *(POINTEDLY)*

I see that I'd better look after my valuables. They're no longer safe when an accomplished thief is around. *(STARTS INTO BALLROOM. TURNS TO PAUL)* And Paul, the first person I plan to speak with inside will be your mother.

DAPHNE *(CROSSING TO PAUL WHO IS ROOTED)*

Paul! Go to Mary!

PRUDENCE

Are you coming Mr. Montrose? Or do I make your mother my first stop?

DAPHNE *(CROSSING TO MARY)*

Mary, let's you and me go home.

MARY *(BRAVE AND BITTER)*

No! Stay with HIM! *(POINTING TO PAUL WHO IS STILL ROOTED & STARING AT MARY)* I am sure he won't suffer any disgrace now that I will be out of his life! Forever! *(SHE STARTS TO FAINT. PAUL RUNS TO HER BUT SHE WAVES HIM AWAY AS SHE SINKS INTO DAPHNE'S ARMS)* It is my fate in life! It is my destiny!

**End of Scene 2**

**FADE OUT** *(Music: chords & trills as Curtain is drawn, sign is changed & lights come up on Wallisville...then segue into song.)*

**Scene 3**

*(A DINGY SHACK ON WALLISVILLE ROAD. EARLY APRIL. SAIRY ANN IS CLEANING THE PLACE AND SINGING "UP IN A BALLOON")*

SAIRY

*I AM, AS YOU KNOW, A POOR HOUSTON BELLE  
WHO DID CAPTIVATE ONCE A MAGNIFICENT SWELL.  
HE WAS ENVOY, AMBASSADOR, OR SOMETHING RARE  
TO KING-WHAT'S-HIS-NAME OF I-DON'T-KNOW-WHERE.  
'T WAS AT FT. WORTH, I BELIEVE, A YEAR COME NEXT JUNE.  
WE WALK'D AND WE TALK'D BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON;  
THERE WAS SQUEEZIN' OF HANDS, FOLLOW'D UP BY A KISS,  
AND AS FAR'S I REMEMBER, I FELT JUST LIKE THIS:*

*AHHHHHHHHHHH*

*UP IN A BALLOON, BOYS, UP IN A BALLOON--  
ALL AMONG THE LITTLE STARS, SAILING 'ROUND THE MOON.  
UP IN A BALLOON BOYS; UP IN A BALLOON--  
I FELT SO VERY HAPPY TO BE UP IN THAT BALLOON.*

*THE WEDDING WAS FIXED; THE PRESENTS WERE BROUGHT,  
I HAD ON A WHITE VEIL AND HIS RING I HAD BOUGHT;  
AND THE PARSON WAS READY, LIKEWISE THE CHAMPAGNE,  
BUT AH! MY FALSE LOVER I NE'ER SAW AGAIN!  
INSTEAD OF MY DARLING, MY HOPE AND MY JOY,  
THERE CAME TO THE ALTAR A TELEGRAPH BOY,  
I SAW THAT HE KNEW, AND I GASP'D OUT "O WHERE  
IS HE GONE?" AND HE POINTED RIGHT UP IN THE AIR!*

*AHHHHHHHHHHHH*

*UP IN A BALLOON BOYS, UP IN A BALLOON--  
ALL AMONG THE LITTLE STARS, SAILING 'ROUND THE MOON.  
UP IN A BALLOON BOYS; UP IN A BALLOON--  
HE LEFT ME AT THE ALTAR TO BE UP IN HIS BALLOON.*

*(SHE FINISHES AND SAYS: )* Miss Kitty sings that song all the time. I wonder why Miss Kitty ain't got no friends but me. She's the onliest friend I got since I run away from that crooked ol' man Sneed's Haven for Orphans down in Galveston. An' Miss Kitty tells me not to let any strangers see her. It's almost like she was hidin' or afraid of someone. I thought only bad girls like me had to hide. Golly, if'n I was as good an' pretty as Miss Kitty, I wouldn't hide from no-one. I'm so glad she begged me off'n that policeman. If'n I'd gone down to the station house, Mean Old Minnie'd 'a found me for sure. But she cain't find me here!

*(MINNIE APPEARS IN OPEN WINDOW; SHE SEES SAIRY ANN'S BACK; SHE GIVES AN OILY SMILE AND PURRS TO SAIRY ANN: )*

MINNIE

Is your Ma in, m' dear?

SAIRY ANN (ASIDE)

Oh! It's Mean Old Minnie! She's found me--but doesn't recognize me or she'd have me by the hair like she always done before. (*TIES DUST CLOTH OVER HEAD, HIDING HER FACE. MINNIE ENTERS & SAIRY ANN KEEPS HER BACK TO HER UNTIL MINNIE GRABS HER AND RECOGNIZES HER, ALL THE WHILE SHAKING HER HEAD IN ANSWER TO MINNIE'S QUESTIONS AND AFRAID TO SPEAK FOR FEAR SHE'D BE RECOGNIZED BY HER VOICE*)

MINNIE (*SPEAKING AS SHE ENTERS & CIRCLES SAIRY ANN*)

Y'got any old clothes to trade, m' dear? Any o' yer Ma's old skirts and shawls, m' pet? Get 'em quick afore Mama comes back and I'll give ya a beautiful chiney thunder mug or a nice tea pot for 'em. Come on, Sweet Pea, see this here pretty....(*SHE RECOGNIZES SAIRY ANN*) Ah ha! It's you! What're ya doin' here, ya little jailbird? Are ya' back at sneakin' out Sneed's 'n my swag again? (*SHE GRABS SAIRY ANN BY THE HAIR*) Answer me ya little tramp or I'll knock yer head again' the wall!

SAIRY ANN

You leave me be you ol' hag! I'm honest and I'm good, I am!

MINNIE

Yer good, are ya? Let me get m' shoe off and I'll take the goodness outta ya!

SAIRY ANN

OK! OK! So I AIN'T good...I'm only tryin' to be!

MINNIE (*MOCKING HER*)

"Only tryin' t' be!" (*ANGRY*) Tryin' t' be good while Sneed an' me was sorrowin' and weepin' every night acuz we thought ya'd been sent up t' Huntsville fer six or eight months! And here yer all nice 'n' cozy 'n' playin' house with someone!

SAIRY ANN

I'm living here with Miss Kitty.

MINNIE

Miss Kitty? Who's she? Sounds like some Dodge City saloon gal.

SAIRY ANN

She's no saloon gal, Miss Kitty's a lady.

MINNIE

A lady, huh? Livin' in this shack an' keeping' baggage like you around? Yer lyin'. Tell me the truth or I'll beat it outta ya!

SAIRY ANN

I don't rightly know WHAT she is but she's been good to me. She begged me off'n the policeman who took me up for loafin' down on Main Street.

MINNIE

Has she got any money?

SAIRY ANN

Naw! She's poor. She's looking' fer work as a tutor 'n she's a good one. She's been teachin' me proper-like English!

MINNIE

She got any nice clothes?

SAIRY ANN

Oh yes, she's got good clothes and pretty ones too!

MINNIE

Well get 'em fer me ya little brat--afore I lose m' patience.

SAIRY ANN

They're locked up an' she's got the key!

MINNIE

Liar! Yer' lyin' t' me--I sees it in yer face. Ya never could lie an' not turn all shame-faced an' now yer as bold as brass! I'll fix you! *(SHE LUNGES FOR SAIRY ANN WHO SKIPS AWAY THEN STOPS & POINTS AT THE DOOR BEHIND MINNIE)*

SAIRY ANN

There's Miss Kitty now! *(SHE DOES A PRETTY CURTSY AS IF TO SOMEONE BEHIND MINNIE)* Good morning Miss Kitty!

MINNIE *(BACK TO OILY PURR)*

And what a nice lady she is to take you in and give you a home! *(SHE TURNS & DISCOVERS DECEPTION. ROARS AND ADVANCES AS SAIRY ANN RETREATS)* Ya little hussy, ya stupid brat! Let me get my hands on ya and I'll fix ya good! *(SHE GRABS FOR SAIRY ANN AT THE OPPOSITE END OF ROOM FROM THE DOOR; SAIRY ANN DUCKS UNDER HER ARMS & RUNS OUT DOOR. MINNIE TURNS AND STARTS AFTER HER AS MARY APPEARS IN DOORWAY. COMPLETE CHANGE IN HER DEMEANOR WHEN SHE SEES MARY & STOPS COLD & TURNS AWAY TO PICK UP HER PACK. SHE KEEPS HER BACK TO MARY UNTIL SHE EXITS)* Oh hello Miss, I beg yer pardon but I just called at see if'n ya had any old clothes ya'd like ta trade.

MARY *(TO SAIRY ANN, WHO IS BEHIND HER)*

Come along Sairy Ann, there's no need to dust the porch railing! *(TO MINNIE)* I'm sorry Madam, I'm afraid I don't have anything to trade. *(SHE & SAIRY ANN ENTER. THEY CROSS TO TABLE WHERE MARY SETS DOWN PACKAGE. MINNIE REACHES DOOR, WHERE SHE TURNS AND SAYS:)*

MINNIE

Well then, good day ta ya, too, Miss. *(ASIDE)* I'd better let Sneed know I've found the brat! *(MINNIE EXITS)*

MARY

You've worked hard this morning, Sairy Ann. This Bohemian style environment looks as nice as I could hope for!

SAIRY ANN

I shore tried, ma'am--cuz yer so good at me! I just gotta sweep down the walk outside.  
(SHE TAKES BROOM & EXITS)

MARY (TAKING PHOTOS FROM PACKAGE)

The photographer liked the way I tinted his tintypes. He said I was the best colorer he ever had and that next week he will pay me. (SHE LOOKS THROUGH CIRCULARS ON TABLE) I see no letters yet in answer to my newspaper advertisement for employment. I guess I am destined to remain one of the shabby genteel. (SHE SINGS "THE SHABBY GENTEEL")

WE HAVE HEARD IT ASSERTED A DOZEN TIMES O'ER  
THAT A GIRL MAY BE HAPPY IN RAGS,  
THAT A QUEEN IS NO MORE IN HER CARRIAGE AND FOUR  
THAN A PAUPER WHO TRAMPS ON THE FLAGS.  
AS I CHANCE TO BE NEITHER, I CANNOT DESCRIBE  
HOW A QUEEN OR A PAUPER MAY FEEL,  
I BELONG TO THAT HIGHLY RESPECTABLE TRIBE  
WHICH IS KNOWN AS THE SHABBY GENTEEL.

TO PROUD TO BEG, TOO HONEST TO STEAL,  
I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE WANTING A MEAL.  
MY TATTERS AND RAGS I TRY TO CONCEAL;  
I'M ONE OF THE SHABBY GENTEEL.

STILL I STRIVE TO BE CHEERFUL IN ALL MY DISTRESS,  
AND I BEAR MY BAD LUCK AS I CAN.  
IF I CAN'T HAVE MY WAY AS TO EATING OR DRESS  
I MUST STILL DO THE BEST THAT I CAN.  
AND REMEMBER, GOOD PEOPLE, THAT FORTUNE SOME DAY,  
BY THE TURN OF HER TREACHEROUS WHEEL,  
MAY REDUCE ONE OF YOU IN THE VERY SAME WAY  
TO THE LEVEL OF SHABBY GENTEEL.

TO PROUD TO BEG, TOO HONEST TO STEAL,  
I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE WANTING A MEAL.  
MY TATTERS AND RAGS I TRY TO CONCEAL;  
I'M ONE OF THE SHABBY GENTEEL.

(MARY FINISHES SONG. HEARS A NOISE, STARTS & CROSSES TO THE DOOR)

MARY

What was that I heard? (*LOOKS OUT*) Oh! Only Sairy Ann sweeping. Every time I hear a strange noise I worry that it will be someone who knows me. Which I know is silly! No-one from River Oaks would ever come here! They would never believe I have descended to this! But then, I sprang from poverty...and now I have returned to it. I do worry about Daphne though. I left everyone so suddenly that I imagine they must have wondered and worried about me. But it's been three months since I left and dear Cousin Daphne will have forgotten all about me. She has Paul to console her and to cheer her! Enough of that gloom and doom "Miss Kitty"! I must think of what to fix for supper! Look at me: an artist in the morning and a cook at night! (*SHE LAUGHS*)

BILLY BOB (*APPEARING IN WINDOW*)

"Scuse me but Ah'm lookin' fer someone who is called Kitty Karson. Ah got a letter fer her,

MARY

Oh! It must be an answer to my newspaper advertisement. I am she.

BILLY BOB (*ASIDE*)

Oooee! If'n ah ain't wrong, Ah'd say ah'd seen that face in a differnt sort o' place from this!

MARY (*CROSSING TO WINDOW*)

Is there anything to pay? (*SHE TAKES LETTER*)

BILLY BOB

No, Miss. Ah've already been re-kum-pen-sipated fer the delivery. (*ASIDE*) Ah know Ah seen her before. Ah gotta get m' giant intellect a' percolatin'. (*HE DISAPPEARS FROM WINDOW*)

MARY (*THOUGHTFULLY*)

Hmmmm, that messenger looked familiar. (*OPENS LETTER*) Yes! An answer! At last! (*READS*) "To Kitty Karson: Your advertisement shows a fine command of the English language and you say you can teach children of any age. I have two daughters for whom I wish to engage your services while we are on a family tour of Europe. Call at seven o'clock this evening at 1601 H Street. Rupert Simpkins" Oh! Hope at last! And in another land soon where no-one from my past will find me! (*KISSES LETTER*)

BILLY BOB (*BACK IN THE OPEN WINDOW*)

Miss! Oh Miss! (*MARY STARTS*) Shhhhhhhhhhh!

MARY

What do you want?

BILLY BOB

Only t' give ya a word of warning. Ah'd do anythin' ta help ya.

MARY

Why would you want to help me?

BILLY BOB

Because ya was once so good to me.

MARY

I?

BILLY BOB

Ain't ya the lady Ah brought a bouquet to over in River Oaks? And didn't ya give a poor ex-soldier a piece of cake t' eat?

MARY (*FAINT BUT LEANING AGAINST TABLE*)

You! I thought I recognized you! Please!! Promise you won't tell anyone you saw me...and where you saw me!

BILLY BOB

Don't worry, Miss. Cross m'heart 'n' hope ta die. (*HE DOES SO*).

MARY

On your honor?

BILLY BOB

Honor bright! Ah don't wanna tell on ya, Miss--Ah wanna tell on someone else.

MARY

What do you mean?

BILLY BOB

There a-looking' for ya.

MARY

Who?

BILLY BOB

Sneed first of all. (*MARY UTTERS A CRY & SINKS ONTO CHAIR*) Don't move, Miss, don't move! (*HE ENTERS ON THE RUN AND ANXIOUSLY ASKS:* ) Are ya all right?

MARY (*NODDING*)

Please go on.

BILLY BOB

O! Sneed's been sniffin' on yer trail day 'n' night! His money's in m' pocket now...an' that's his letter in yer hand.

MARY (*DROPPING LETTER LIKE A HOT POTATO*)

This?



BILLY BOB

Yup! Rupert Simmons is Beauregard Sneed...see? "R.S."? That there fancy writin' is his! Lord, the snuff that man's been up ta would make a person sneeze his head off. He figured ya'd gone aground somewhere, lyin' low till ya got a job, so every day he reads the want ads in the Houston Star and Chronicle 'n' he picks out a dozen or so t' read. He sez t' me "Billy Bob, this one sounds like my little pet" an' then he sets down and answers 'em and gets the advertisers t' make appointments with him...which he reg'lrly keeps and just as reg'lr he comes back cussin' at his luck!

MARY

For Heaven's sake, don't betray me to him! I don't have very much money, but take what I have and keep my secret.

BILLY BOB

No, Miss, ah don't want a cent of it! Even tho' Sneed's a devil and would kick me hard if'n he thought Ah'd held out on him.

MARY

I don't want you to suffer for my sake. Please accept the money.

BILLY BOB

No! Ah stood up t' be shot at fer five dollars a month in the Army (*SALUTES*) and Ah reckon ah can take my chances of a kickin' fer nothing'. But Sneed ain't the only one looking' fer ya.

MARY

Another? Who?

BILLY BOB

Cap'n. Montrose. He's been looking' all over fer ya too. Ah seen him over at the Chataqua thee-a-ter tent when ah was doin' an errand and he sez at me: "Billy Bob, help me search for m' young lady and when ya find her come tell me."

MARY (*REALLY AFRAID*)

No! no! no! Not even he must know. Do you hear me? Not him...not ANYONE.

BILLY BOB

Just as you please, Miss, but Ah shore hate puttin' yer friends off'n the track. It don't seem natural. Sneed Ah don't mind...but the Cap'n wouldn't do ya no harm. Just let me give him a bit of a hint. (*MARY SHAKES HEAD VEHEMENTLY*) Not the teeniest li'l bit of a hint?

MARY (*TURNING AWAY*)

No!

BILLY BOB (*"LOCKING" HIS LIPS GESTURE*)

Okay Miss, Ah promise—m' lips're sealed. Not one hint. Ah'll leave now. (*AT DOOR. AN ASIDE*) They say that when a woman sez "no" she prob'ly means "yes". Ah wonder if'n Ah dare tell her that Cap'n Montrose is right around the corner. P'raps not....but Ah can tell HIM! TELLIN' ain't the same as HINTIN' now, is it? (*HE EXITS*)

MARY

Will I ever escape that dreadful man? And Paul searching for me too. I guess it IS true that friends do remember us--as well as our enemies.

SAIRY ANN (*ENTERING*)

Oh, Miss Kitty, whatever is into people these days? There's a strange man comin' down the walkway; I seen him 'n' that messenger fella talkin' together,

MARY (*TERRIFIED*)

It must be Sneed! We can't let him in here. Quickly, Sairy Ann, fasten the door! (*DOOR STARTS TO OPEN; SAIRY ANN PUSHES AGAINST IT*)

SAIRY ANN

Oh my! He's powerful strong. I cain't keep it shut. Go away, you polecat! Oh! (*DOOR IS FORCED OPEN & PAUL ENTERS. MARY SHRINKS AWAY FROM HIM*)

PAUL

MARY! It's Paul. I have found you at last!

MARY

Paul!

PAUL (*ADVANCING TOWARDS MARY*)

Dear Mary, I.....(*STOPS AS SAIRY ANN PLANTS HERSELF IN FRONT OF HIM WITH BROOM RAISED, READY TO BRAIN HIM. HE TAKES HOLD OF BROOM*) Whoa there, my girl. Haven't you some business somewhere else to attend to?

SAIRY ANN

No siree bob, sir! I've swept the sidewalk and now I'm indoors and I mean to stay here and perfect Miss Kitty.

PAUL (*LOOKING AT MARY*)

Miss Kitty? (*MARY NODS*) Well, I have no intention of harming "Miss Kitty" my girl. I promise you. (*SAIRY ANN STANDS FIRM*) I know, would you oblige me by going to that store on the corner for a sheet of paper and an envelope? Here's a dollar...try to see how slow you can be.

SAIRY ANN

You cain't sheet of paper me, mister! I'm protectin' Miss Kitty and I ain't t' be en-vuh-losed!

MARY (*DETERMINED TO HAVE IT OUT WITH PAUL*)

All right, Paul. We do need to talk. Please go and do as the gentleman asks you, Sairy Ann. He'll not harm me.

SAIRY ANN (*TAKING MONEY*)

Well! I declare! First it's "keep the man out" and now it's "let him stay in alone with me". (*CROSSES TO DOOR & LOOKS AT PAUL AND MARY, WHO ARE STARING AT EACH OTHER*) But I s'pose she's like all of us--it makes a great big difference WHO the man it is! (*SHE EXITS*)

PAUL

Why don't you want to see me Mary?

MARY

Look around you and find your answer! This is not your center of River Oaks Society.

PAUL (*SHUDDERING AT THE SURROUNDINGS*)

Oh, Mary! My poor darling! How you must have suffered. I am so sorry.

MARY

When I said to look around, I thought you understood that here I am no longer Mary Calhoun, nor anything I used to be. I did not ask for...nor do I want...your pity.

PAUL

How can you not be miserable here? Alone! Unprotected! Without money or friends!

MARY

Oh, it's not as bad as that!

PAUL

Mary, don't be ridiculous. You can't have traded all that made you happy for this squalid poverty and not feel it deeply.

MARY

I don't have TIME to feel anything deeply. I work from sunrise till night and then sleep so soundly that I don't even have dreams about the past. Why, just as you arrived, I was about to cook our supper. Imagine that! I'm cooking hog liver and grits!

PAUL (*HORRIFIED*)

Hog liver and grits! Just the thought of it makes me shudder!

MARY

Does it? Then wait till I get the griddle on the fire and you'll really shiver! And if you want to be truly transfixed with horror, stay for supper!

PAUL

I won't listen to you talk like this, Mary. Believe me when I tell you that in this self-banishment you've acted foolishly. Come home, Mary. Let me take you home.

MARY

Sorry, Paul, I have no home other than this. So, you see, I AM home!

PAUL

Mary, your home is in River Oaks and you still have friends there.

MARY

River Oaks! Where even the servants would whisper and point? Friends who would be ashamed to even admit they know me, thanks to Prudence's big mouth? You're wrong, Paul, that's neither home nor friendship. Besides, by now I'm nothing more than an unfortunate memory to everyone back there.

PAUL

You're wrong, Mary. I have not--could not--ever forget you.

MARY

Maybe not, but I wish you would. Please, Paul, leave me and forget me.

PAUL (*PLEADING*)

Mary, by the love that once bound us.....

MARY

Yes, ONCE! It IS a long time ago.

PAUL

What have I said? By the love which still.....

MARY (*SHARPLY*)

MISTER Montrose! Must I remind you of that night when Prudence arrayed herself so pitilessly against me, when a gesture from you might have saved me? No! you made your choice then--the Society World without me. I make that choice now--the wide Free World without YOU!

PAUL

But I love you, Mary. I have never stopped loving you!

MARY

Oh, Paul, I know about the kind of love which you deny in the face of Society but offer to me behind it's back! I am not and will not be the kind of woman who will accept THAT kind of love.

PAUL (*GROANING*)

You are driving me crazy! I tell you, Mary, your misery, your solitude is nothing to the anguish and guilt I have suffered night and day for not taking your side. Please, darling girl, forgive me...have pity on me.

MARY (*MOVED*)

I do forgive you, Paul. And yes, I pity you. And so, goodbye forever. It is over between us.

PAUL

Very well, I realize I may mean nothing to you now, but think of Daphne. She asks for you. For her, too, I've searched all over Houston for you. To beg you to return to us.

MARY (SMILING)

Dear Daphne. How I have missed her. What wonderful times we had...ah, many wonderful memories there!

PAUL (PRESSING AS HE SENSES HER WEAKENING)

WE had memories too, Mary. Wonderful memories. Remember how we met--at the Cattle Baron's Ball? Remember our drives and our walks? Remember how we would go off by ourselves and steal kisses on the sly? (THEY SING "KISSING ON THE SLY")

**PAUL:** MY MANLY MUSTACHE SWEPT YOUR CHEEK,  
YOU UTTERED NO REPLY;  
HOW COULD YOU PART YOUR LIPS TO SPEAK  
WHILE KISSING ON THE SLY?  
THERE'S SUCH A SUM OF SMACKING BLISS  
THAT CROESUS COULD NOT BUY,  
THE HONEY'D WORTH OF ONE SWEET KISS  
THAT'S TAKEN ON THE SLY.  
OH, THIS KISSING ON THE SLY,  
THIS KISSING ON THE SLY,  
THIS WOONG, WINNING STYLE OF SINNING,  
KISSING ON THE SLY.

**BOTH:** KISSING, KISSING, KISSING ON THE SLY!

**MARY:** THIS MAIDEN MEEK ONE KISS RECEIVED,  
DEMURELY WINKED MY EYE;  
AGAIN YOUR WAYWARD MUSTACHE PRESSED  
MY CHEEK, I BREATHED...OH MY!  
HOW GRATEFUL TO THE LOVESICK BREAST  
THIS KISSING ON THE SLY!  
OH, THIS KISSING ON THE SLY!  
THIS KISSING ON THE SLY!  
DOWNRIGHT DELICIOUS, E'EN MALICIOUS,  
KISSING ON THE SLY

**BOTH:** KISSING, KISSING, KISSING ON THE SLY

**PAUL:** THOUGH RIGID RULE DECLARE THE DEED  
TO BE A CRIME SO SLY  
NO LOVER DARE DENY THE NEED  
OF KISSING ON THE SLY

**MARY:** *THOUGH PA'S AND MA'S BERATE AND PRATE  
TILL DULCINEAS DO CRY,  
THIS CUSTOM DON'T A BIT ABATE  
OF KISSING ON THE SLY,*

**BOTH:**  
*OH! THIS KISSING ON THE SLY,  
THIS KISSING ON THE SLY,  
INTENSELY THRILLING, TROUBLE KILLING,  
KISSING ON THE SLY.  
KISSING, KISSING, KISSING ON THE SLY.*

*(THEY KISS. MARY DRAWS AWAY)*

PAUL

Mary?

MARY

If I go with you-- just to visit dear Daphne --will you promise not to detain me against my wishes and permit me to come back here and to bother me and my life no more?

PAUL

Gladly! But I know you won't hold me to that promise once you are back where you belong.

MARY

That remains to be seen.

PAUL

I'll bring my carriage around. Wait for me. I won't be long.

*(SAIRY ANN ENTERS WITH PAPER AND ENVELOPES. CROSSES TO PAUL AND  
SULLENLY HANDS THEM TO HIM)*

SAIRY ANN

Here they are.

PAUL *(PATTING HER ON THE HEAD)*

That's a good girl. Keep them till I come back. In half an hour, Mary, be ready.  
*(EXITS)*

SAIRY ANN *(SUSPICIOUS)*

What's he gonna do in half an hour?

MARY

He's going to take me for a short ride, Sairy Ann, and while I'm gone, please be a good girl and watch the house and take care of it till I return.

SAIRY ANN

I don't believe it! You won't return. *(CRYING)* My friend Peggy Sue said the same thing when she went off with her young man 'n' she got married 'n' never came back a'tall. You cain't go! I hate him! He ain't takin' you away. *(HYSTERICALLY GRABS MARY)* If'n you go away, I wanta go with ya. *(FIERCELY)* I'll bite 'n' scratch him if he comes back. *(TEARS UP PAPER & ENVELOPES)* Let him come back! Just let him DARE come back!

MARY *(SCOLDING)*

Sairy Ann! Enough! You are being very silly, you know, and I don't like it a bit!

SAIRY ANN *(AT MARY'S FEET)*

Oh, please, Miss Kitty, let me go with you. I'll be good and not say a word to no-one. Let me go with you. Let me ask him to let me go with you. *(SOUND HEARD OUTSIDE)* I hear him comin' now!

*(SHE RUNS TO DOOR, OPENS IT & SEES SNEED. BOTH GIRLS SCREAM. SAIRY ANN TRIES TO SHUT DOOR BUT SNEED FORCES IT OPEN & ENTERS) SAYING: )*

SNEED

Ah! My little runaway! Found you at last and just going out. How lucky! *(TO MARY)* And you, too, my dear. How I have searched for YOU!

MARY *(FAINT BUT BRAVE)*

Leave this place instantly!

SNEED

How very singular you are! You are always ordering me out and I am always coming in. We need a change--I will go out and you will come with me!

MARY *(TO SAIRY ANN WHO IS TRYING TO BITE SNEED'S ARM)*

Sairy Ann, go find a policeman. Tell him this wretch is insulting us.

SNEED *(GRASPING SAIRY ANN)*

Sairy Ann? Ah, yes! Here you are Minnie! *(MINNIE ENTERS)*

SAIRY ANN

Oh, no! Mean Old Minnie!

MINNIE *(MOCKINGLY)*

"Oh, no! Mean Old Minnie!!" *(MENACINGLY)* I'll "Mean Old Minnie", you brat!

*(SNEED THROWS SAIRY ANN TO MINNIE)*

SNEED

Take care of that baggage. As for you, daughter, come with me!

MARY

Daughter!!!!

SNEED

Yes! It is time to declare myself. Legally! Paternal feeling has been too long smothered in my breast. Come to my arms, my child...my long-lost child!

MARY

Heaven above! Is there no help? *(SHE ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE; SNEED SEIZES HER)*

SNEED

What an unfilial girl; you take advantage of a father's weakness and try to run away once again! *(HE PUTS A HAMMERLOCK ON HER)* Come along, daughter dear, come with me . I need you to cheer my old age. Ain't I good to take you back after all these years? *(EVIL LAUGH AND MINNIE CACKLES AS LIGHTS FADE AND THE GIRLS STRUGGLE)*

**MUSIC: (Chords & final arpeggio as lights go down on)**

**CURTAIN**

**END OF ACT I**

**Perusal  
Only FOR  
NOT FOR  
PRODUCTION**