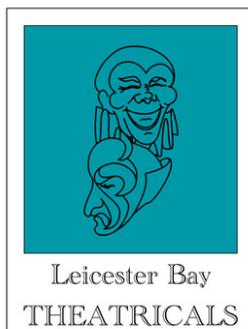


PRODUCTION SCRIPT

A String of Pearls

by Elizabeth Hansen



Salt Lake City

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A STRING OF PEARLS

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Cast Of Characters -- 5W

JANET: Nye Osterlough -- late 20s

MAXINE: Chase Morovian -- mid 30s

Mary Louise Chase -- right around 20

Harriet Sue Price -- mid 30s

Elizabeth Barlow Nye -- early 30s

Recorded/Offstage Voices:

Grant Nye -- a voice over the radio

Telegram Boy's Voice -- (unseen)

SETTING

Single Location: several rooms of a New York Brownstone

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 -- December 10, 1941

SCENE 2 -- May 6, 1942

SCENE 3 -- May 20, 1942

SCENE 4 -- January 20, 1943

ACT TWO

SCENE 1 -- May 19, 1943

SCENE 2 -- June 7, 1944

SCENE 3 -- November 8, 1944

SCENE 4 -- June 13, 1945

A STRING OF PEARLS by Elizabeth Hansen. 5W. About two hours. One interior. *War does funny things to a man, but what does it do to a woman?* With their loved ones off to war, the five women in "A String of Pearls" have battles of their own to face while waiting out World War II on the home front. They must learn to live on hope, wit and courage, and as the war touches them in different ways, they discover their own and each others strengths and frailties--sometimes painfully, often humorously. The setting of the play is a modest but warm New York Brownstone. Here the women meet each week for their game of bridge that provides a momentary escape from the fears and uncertainties of war. Far from the front lines, they survive their own battles of anger, betrayal, fear and weakness with the bravery and faith of soldiers and the tolerance and compassion of friends. They are strong women from different backgrounds who endure on the home front as best they can and find a new and mature courage as they take charge of their own lives, finally, emerging not as victims of war, but victors of life. The play is a valentine to the women of the era. Audiences at every performance have unanimously loved it. The theme of this play could be: War wives endure on the home front as best as they can. This play allows the audience a few glimpses into the lives of these women as they meet over the course of several years to play bridge as well as to laugh and weep together over the events that life and war bring to them. It is a depiction of women who do the best they can to deal with the disappointments thrown in their paths. This is a play about adults who each come to have a claim on our attention.

ELIZABETH HANSEN is a Writers Guild Award winner and an EMMY-nominated screenwriter and consultant who has had a varied writing, directing, and acting career, that has taken her from the bright lights of Broadway working with the likes of Tommy Tune and Harold Prince, to the newsrooms of the Los Angeles Times where she had her own "Byline," to the classrooms of Brigham Young University where she taught screenwriting and playwriting from 1994-2000 as well as helped focus their Screenwriting Program.

After graduating with honors from the University of Utah, Ms. Hansen journeyed to Los Angeles to study musical theatre performance at the highly regarded Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Musical Theatre Workshop as well as acting technique with Charles Nelson-Reilly. From Los Angeles she moved to New York where she studied with the famed acting teacher Uta Hagen. Over the next few years she was seen on Broadway in *A Day In Hollywood/A Night In The Ukraine* and *Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up*. In her acting career she has starred opposite Milton Berle in *Guys and Dolls*, James Mason in *A Partridge in a Pear Tree*, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Rudolf Nureyev in *The King and I*, as well as numerous musicals Off-Broadway and in regional theatre.

In the late 80s, Ms. Hansen decided to focus on her writing and was accepted into the prestigious American Film Institute Center for Advanced Film and Television studies, one of the top five film programs in the U.S., where she received an MFA in screenwriting. Since then, she has written for nearly every film and video venue in the business: feature film, short film, television (long and short form), corporate video, documentary, as well as musicals and straight plays for the legitimate theatre.

She has spent numerous years as a script consultant, first with the Pasadena Playhouse, where she reviewed new and established scripts which were under consideration, as well as with Entertainment Business Group, an entertainment consulting company where she worked on "Campaign Breakdowns" and "Comparative Picture Analyses"

Also a film and stage director, she has directed a handful of short films and completed directing *Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for Sundance Summer Theatre, *La Traviata* and *La Boheme* for Utah Lyric Opera.

In addition to her Writer's Guild Award and her Emmy nomination, Ms. Hansen was a finalist for the esteemed Humanitas Prize for excellence in children's television programming, a Telly Award for her work with the Foundation for a Better Life and has been awarded two Crystal Awards for excellence in corporate video writing as well as numerous screenwriting competitions.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 -- December 10, 1941 -- As the house lights fade the voice of F.D.R. is heard as he gives his "Day that will live in infamy" speech. After a moment the speech cross-fades with big band Christmas music. The lights come up on a modest, warm, inviting and unsophisticated set of rooms, filled with knickknacks, doilies and more Christmas decorations than good taste would allow. JANET NYE OSTERLOUGH enters from the kitchen carrying a tray of sandwiches. She is a housewife in her late 20's, reasonably pretty, but not beautiful and is the walking counterpart of her apartment. She is married to Robert Osterlough, an up and coming attorney. She is followed closely by MAXINE CHASE MOROVIAN, a socialite in her mid-30s and married to Chandler [Chan] Morovian, a career Army Air Corps officer. They have one daughter, Robina. MAXINE is amused by life when it doesn't bore her to tears. She is stately, svelte and well-bred. Chic {thanks to Chanel}; attractive {thanks to Elizabeth Arden}; and rich {thanks to her parents}. Draped over the radio is MARY LOUISE CHASE, MAXINE'S half sister. She's an attractive, spoiled young woman of 20. A young collegiate, who couldn't look bad if she tried. Which she doesn't.

MAXINE: Now, I understand she doesn't know much about bridge, but beggars can't be choosers.

JANET: I'm sure she'll be fine.

MAXINE: She'll probably be nervous so why don't you let me be her partner.

JANET: Fine.

MAXINE: That way I can show her the ropes.

JANET: Fine by me.

MAXINE: If you want to be her partner that's okay, but I think that I might be able to help her more since you're still a novice at bridge yourself.

(JANET stops her.)

JANET: Maxine...It's fine.

MAXINE: She's twenty minutes late. I hope nothing's happened.

JANET: She's probably caught in traffic. I sure hope she stays. I'm tired of scrambling to find a fourth every week.

MAXINE: A—

(Knock.)

—Men.

JANET: There she is, now be nice.

MAXINE: I'm always nice.

JANET opens the door. There stands HARRIET SUE PRICE. She is in her mid-30s, though she would argue that. Medium height, not pretty, not plain. Not plump, not thin. She is the woman born in-between.

HARRIET: Merry Christmas!

JANET: Merry Christmas. Come in.

HARRIET: Why, thank you.

MAXINE: *(To MARY LOUISE.)* Good heavens, she's a hillbilly.

JANET: I'm Janet Osterlough.

HARRIET: Harriet Sue Price.

(They shake hands.)

JANET: Nice meeting you.

HARRIET: Likewise.

(To MAXINE.)

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You must be Mrs. Morovian. I could tell from Robina's description... sort of.

MAXINE: How do you do?

HARRIET: Very well, thank you.

JANET: And this is Mary Louise Chase, Maxine's sister.

MARY LOUISE: Hi, there.

HARRIET: Hi, yourself.

MARY LOUISE: You're friends with Robina?

HARRIET: I like to think so. I am her seventh grade English, Algebra and Physical Education teacher at the school. I really apologize for being late, but a wreckin' ball nearly hit my bus. I had to walk the last three blocks...the long ones and it is colder than a Mother-in-Law's kiss out there. I thought you might be a little peeved at my tardiness so I stopped off and bought some bubbly to conciliate you.

(JANET looks at MAXINE.)

JANET: Maxine...

MAXINE: Ah...Miss Price. I'm afraid alcoholic beverages aren't brought into Janet's home.

HARRIET: Hell, it's not booze. It's Hires.

MAXINE: Domestic.

JANET: Well... thank you.

MAXINE: So...if we're going to play, let's play.

HARRIET: I'm "able Mabel." Boy, my "dogs is froze."

JANET: Help yourself to the food.

HARRIET: No thanks, I'll wait. Well, maybe not.

(She shoves a cookie into her mouth. JANET sits opposite HARRIET.)

MAXINE: Oh, no, no, Janet. Remember?

JANET: Oh, yes. Sorry.

(MAXINE sits across from HARRIET.)

HARRIET: You have a lovely home, Mrs. Osterlough. And it's so festive. I just love the holiday season. Have you seen the windows down at Lord and Taylor's?

JANET: Aren't they charming?

HARRIET: Just makes you want to chime out "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" doesn't it Mrs. Morovian?

MAXINE: Repeatedly.

JANET: Now, one thing that's understood is that we're on a first name basis here. Janet, Mary Louise and Maxine.

HARRIET: Okay, Janet. You all can call me Harry. You want to keep the tally?

JANET: No, thank you. Too many numbers for me.

HARRIET: Okay, I'll do it. Cut.

(JANET cuts the deck.)

You deal, Maxie.

MAXINE: The name's Maxine, Miss Price. Not Maxie. Maxine.

(HARRIET parrots MAXINE.)

HARRIET: Maxine. You know Robina doesn't look a thing like you. You're husband...what's his name again?

MAXINE: Chan.

HARRIET: Oh, yeah...well, he must be tall, dark and handsome. Oh, I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

JANET: Oh, I don't know. I think Robina looks a lot like Maxine. I hear you used to teach second grade. I taught second grade. Do you miss it?

HARRIET: Like a train. They are so cute at that age. And not smart-alecky like they are in the seventh grade.

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Most of them are spoiled rotten. Oh, not yours, Maxine, of course.

MAXINE: Of course.

(Pause. Then to MARY LOUISE.)

Mary Louise, would you turn that thing down. I can't hear myself think.

MARY LOUISE: But they're going to play "Moonlight Serenade"—

MAXINE: Just-turn-it-down.

MARY LOUISE: jeez, what's eatin' you?

(MARY LOUISE crams a sandwich in her mouth.)

MAXINE: Mary Louise, don't stuff yourself.

JANET: Maxine...

MARY LOUISE: I wouldn't worry about me if I were you, "porky."

JANET: Mary Louise...

MAXINE: How dare you speak to me like that.

MARY LOUISE: Like what?

(MAXINE and MARY LOUISE speak simultaneously.)

MAXINE: Mary Louise, I know you haven't been taught the social graces but I demand a little respect!

MARY LOUISE: Oh, jeez, here we go again.

(As quickly as it started they are silent. HARRIET stares at them. Long pause. JANET turns to HARRIET.)

JANET: So...Harriet, do you play much bridge?

MAXINE: Isn't it just awful about Shirley Stringham?

JANET: It is sad.

MARY LOUISE: Come on, she's a witch.

MAXINE: She is not.

(To HARRIET.)

Her husband's divorcing her.

HARRIET: Men are heels. Just heels.

JANET: Are you married, Harriet?

HARRIET: Nope. Never found a heel could fit my shoe.

(They arrange their cards.)

JANET: Now, Harriet, you arrange your cards according to suits. A suit is—

MAXINE: Janet, I'm sure she knows what a suit is.

JANET: Oh, sorry. Now to bid, you—

MAXINE: Janet—

HARRIET: Thank you for your help, Janet, but I was bridge champion three years in a row at A.S.U.

JANET: *(Beat. To MAXINE.)* You didn't tell me that.

MAXINE: *(To HARRIET.)* You didn't tell me that.

HARRIET: I told you when you called.

(MAXINE smiles feebly.)

MAXINE: Surprise.

MARY LOUISE: *(Mimics.)* Surprise.

MAXINE: Sit up and shut up, Mary Louise.

MARY LOUISE: Oooo, social graces, Maxine.

(MARY LOUISE sits up then slumps back down.)

JANET: I can't believe you did that.

MAXINE: So sue me for wanting to win one hand. One no-trump.

JANET: You could have just told us.

MAXINE: No, I couldn't.

JANET: Mary Louise, your bid.

MARY LOUISE: I hate bidding, can't I just be the dummy?

MAXINE: Oh, the temptation to speak.

(Pause.)

Mary Louise.

MARY LOUISE: Just a second. "I can't hear myself think."

(Beat.)

JANET: I don't care if I win.

MAXINE: Well, I do. Now, let's drop it and play...

(Pointedly to MARY LOUISE.)

Mary Louise...

(Beat.)

MAXINE: Oh, for heaven's sake save us the agony and you the embarrassment and just "pass."

MARY LOUISE: Maxine, I can do this myself...Pass.

HARRIET: Two hearts.

JANET: Pass.

MAXINE: Three hearts.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

HARRIET: *(Pointedly to MAXINE.)* Four no-trump.

MAXINE: Four n— Is this...dare I hope...is this, Blackwood?

HARRIET: It ain't wormwood.

MAXINE: Oh, goody.

JANET: Pass. What's Blackwood?

MAXINE: It's the way we beat your pants off.

JANET: Oh, lovely...

MAXINE: I thought you didn't care about winning.

JANET: I don't.

MARY LOUISE: I hate this game.

MAXINE: Let's see...five spades.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

JANET: I don't get it, you were bidding hearts. Let me see what you've got.

MAXINE: Jan-et!

JANET: Oh, Maxine. Let me see.

MAXINE: Jan-et!

HARRIET: Seven hearts.

JANET: Pass.

MAXINE: Pass.

(MARY LOUISE opens her mouth to speak MAXINE cuts her off.)

She passes.

(HARRIET lays down her cards.)

HARRIET: Ladies, this is called a "Lay Down."

MAXINE: We did it, Harry!

HARRIET: We sure as hell did, Maxie!

JANET: You mean it's over?

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HARRIET: Ain't that “slicker n’ snot.”

JANET: I've never seen anything like that!

(MAXINE gathers the cards for the next game.)

MARY LOUISE: Is this game ever supposed to be fun?

(MARY LOUISE exits to the bathroom, turning the radio up as she goes.)

MAXINE: That girl.

(MAXINE turns off the radio.)

HARRIET: You sure can tell you're sisters.

MAXINE: Half-sisters.

HARRIET: Well, now it “jibes.” You don't look a thing alike. Same mama?

MAXINE: Same daddy.

HARRIET: I always wanted a little sister.

MAXINE: You can have mine.

JANET: How many brothers and sisters do you have, Harriet?

HARRIET: Just ten. Six sisters, three brothers and me. Daddy worked for the railroad and Grand-mama said that mama turned out expecting every time daddy hung up his pants.

(MARY LOUISE re-enters.)

JANET: I love big families. I'm the seventh of eight.

MAXINE: I'm the first of one.

MARY LOUISE: A-hemm.

MAXINE: And a half.

HARRIET: Have any kids yet, Janet?

JANET: No...no.

(She and MAX exchange glances. Pause.)

HARRIET: So how'd the two of you get together? You don't look like you'd run in the same circles...No offense intended.

MAXINE: None taken. We met at a Kappa luncheon.

JANET: We're Kappa Kappa Gamma alumnae. Maxine invited me to sub for her foursome one day and I stuck. Were you in a sorority, Harriet?

HARRIET: Sort of. I was Phi Beta Kappa.

JANET: No kidding!

MAXINE: Well, at least we've got the “Kappa” in common.

HARRIET: I can't thank you enough for inviting me here.

MAXINE: My pleasure.

HARRIET: Don't know a lot of people and this is real...fun.

JANET: Oh, I know how you feel. I was in shock when I moved here. New York is just a little bigger than Payson, Utah.

MAXINE: Honey, my closet is bigger than Payson, Utah. Now, let's play.

HARRIET: Shoooot! Janet. Who is this devastatingly handsome young man? This Rob?

JANET: Uh-uh. That's my brother, Grant. He's a reporter for N.B.C. Here's a picture of my whole family. There's Grant, he's 18 months younger than me. And—

HARRIET: Would you take a gander at those shoulders. Hot damn. Break the news to me gently, Janet. Is he married?

JANET: No.

HARRIET: There is a God after all. I would give my eye teeth to meet him, Janet. Hint, hint.

JANET: Why not? He always likes meeting nice girls.

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HARRIET: Thanks for the compliment, Janet, but I am far from being a girl.

JANET: Nonsense.

MAXINE: We're all girls until we die.

JANET: Besides you're so lucky, you have that translucent skin that never ages.

HARRIET: Well, thank you. You know, Helena Rubenstein has this wonderful night cream for skin over 30.

You'd love it Maxine. Now, my skin isn't quite 30, I'm 29, just, but I thought, what the hell. After all the summit of 30 is in sight. So getting back to this brother of yours, how big of a bribe would it take?

JANET: Oh, don't be silly. I'll invite him over some night and we'll have a nice little evening. But he's been reassigned to London so it has to be soon.

HARRIET: Okay...how's twenty minutes?

Pause as they shuffle the cards and situate themselves.

MARY LOUISE: Janet, I need you to come to "Bundles for Britain" with me and Maxine Monday. I'm under my recruiting quota.

JANET: No, I can't. I have primary and my own Relief Society...

MAXINE: But you need to get out and do something.

JANET: I do do something. I look after Rob.

MARY LOUISE: She means about the—

JANET: I know what she means. I...can't. Now I'd really rather not discuss anything more serious than should we only wear one string of pearls with basic black.

HARRIET: Don't you ever talk about the war?

JANET: Not if we can help it...

(Beat.)

So...any more news from your folks?

MAXINE: Yes, Mary Louise got a telegram night before last from her mother. We all rejoiced to discover Blanche could spell.

MARY LOUISE: Max-ine!

MAXINE: And you know, my dear sweet sister couldn't find the time in her busy collegiate schedule to call and let me know.

MARY LOUISE: I tried.

HARRIET: Know what?

MAXINE: My father is a commodore in the Navy and was on board his ship during the attack at Pearl Harbor. His hands and arms were badly burned.

(To MARY LOUISE.)

Thank heavens for the War Department or I might never have heard.

MARY LOUISE: I told you as soon as I could. Jeez, don't have a fit.

MAXINE: A fit! He's almost killed and I'm not supposed to have "a fit?" What was he doing on board in the first place? He and Blanche must've had a fight.

MARY LOUISE: Cut it out. It wasn't her fault.

MAXINE: Everything's her fault.

JANET: Let's hear what's on the radio, shall we, and just talk about something fun.

MARY LOUISE: What is your gripe with her?

MAXINE: *(Beat. Then to HARRIET.)* You see, Harriet, Blanche is one of those women who thinks that "Chanel" is a river that leads to Lake Erie. 'Nuff said? Where's my purse. I need a cigarette.

(She grabs her purse and heads out.)

MARY LOUISE: At least my mother wasn't some loony who blew her brains out.

(Beat.)

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No snappy comeback, Maxine?

MAXINE: Not here, Mary Louise.

MARY LOUISE: The truth hurts, huh?

MAXINE: The truth? Oh, you want the truth. Well, the truth is that your mother had a seedy little affair with my father...then my mother shot herself.

MARY LOUISE: Your mother shot herself after they were divorced. After I was born.

MAXINE: After you were born. Not after the divorce.

(Beat.)

No snappy comeback, Mary Louise?

(Beat.)

Now I really need a cigarette.

(Stunned silence.)

HARRIET: I can't understand why y'all have trouble keeping a fourth.

(MARY LOUISE grabs her coat and heads for the door. JANET stops her.)

JANET: Please...It's Christmas.

(They look at one another for a moment, then MARY LOUISE throws her coat down and sits.)

JANET: Maxine...please.

(MAXINE appears at the door, snuffs her cigarette, regains her composure and crosses to the table.)

MAXINE: Mary.

MARY LOUISE: The name's "Mary Louise."

(She grabs a newspaper, crosses to her place and sits.)

MAXINE: Mary Louise. It's your deal.

MARY LOUISE: I pass to Harriet.

MAXINE: You can't do that.

JANET: Of course she can.

(JANET holds her hand out for the cards.)

MAXINE: But she—

(MARY LOUISE hands them to her. JANET places them in front of HARRIET who is preoccupied by an article in the newspaper. MAXINE picks up the cards deals.)

HARRIET: Now if that don't just make you bawl. Would you listen to this "Hawaii blitz laid to Nazi advisors. Behind Japan's every military move...has been the hardly hidden hand of key Nazi agents taking an increasing part in directing the correlation of Japanese...total war efforts."

JANET: What?

HARRIET: It all but says the Germans were behind the attack at Pearl Harbor. Those German sons-a--- First they blitz London, then they blitz us. Dammit all to hell!

JANET: Harriet! How can you possibly teach children with the kind of language you use?

HARRIET: Oh, I edit a lot. Like this.

(She hesitates at each blank.)

"You _____ girls come down off that _____ jungle gym this _____ instant or I'll have your _____ little fannies." Ain't it awful. Kind of like bad radio reception. I'm trying to improve, but it's so damned ingrained. Pass.

JANET: One spade.

MAXINE: Two hearts.

(Pause.)

Mary Louise.

MARY LOUISE: What!

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JANET: It's your bid, dear.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

MAXINE: You didn't even look at your cards.

MARY LOUISE: (*Picks up her cards, glances at them and slams them back down.*) Pass.

MAXINE: Mary Louise, straighten up and play.

MARY LOUISE: Jeez.

(Shows her cards to all.)

See, pass.

(She slams them down and returns to her paper.)

HARRIET: You could haul my hand away with a garbage truck. Pass.

JANET: Pass.

HARRIET: That makes me the dummy. What da-ya-say we play for blood?

JANET: We never gamble.

HARRIET: It's not really gambling...

JANET: We never gamble.

(They play silently for a few moments as the radio plays, softly.)

MAXINE: How's Rob?

JANET: Oh, he's happy as a clam. He's at his poker game.

HARRIET: I love poker. I find that a friendly little wager—

JANET: So, Harriet, where are you from?

HARRIET: Arkansas. Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

JANET: Sorry, I'm not much on geography, I'm afraid I've never heard of it.

HARRIET: You're not alone. It's about two hours east south east of Little Rock as the crow flies.

MARY LOUISE: Hey, I got 14 cards.

MAXINE: Misdeal.

HARRIET: You're lucky, Janet. If I had my way you'da lost 30¢.

(To JANET.)

Your deal.

(MARY LOUISE grabs some food and the others situate themselves. Pause.)

MAXINE: Chan left today.

HARRIET: Pardon me, I don't mean to be rude or nothin'. But...are you married to a Chinaman?

(MARY LOUISE laughs. MAXINE bristles.)

MAXINE: His name is Chandler.

HARRIET: Oh...sorry.

JANET: Where'd he go?

MAXINE: England.

JANET: One diamond. What for?

MAXINE: To fly, what else? One no-trump.

(Pause.)

It's your bid, Mary Louise.

JANET: Maxine, he didn't.

MAXINE: Yep. I have the note to prove it. Seems like blitzing's in the air.

MARY LOUISE: Gee, Maxine.

MAXINE: Bid.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

MAXINE: A note.

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JANET: I thought he wasn't leaving until after the holidays.

MAXINE: So did I. Damn. I was out getting my hair done. While my husband was going off to war, I was getting my hair done. Apropos don't you think?

MARY LOUISE: Gosh, you must be proud.

MAXINE: Oh, yes, Mary Louise. I am. I am so very proud. Will somebody please bid.

HARRIET: Two hearts.

JANET: Three diamonds. Don't worry. He'll be all right. He'll be just fine, you'll see.

MARY LOUISE: Are you kidding? The way that guy flies a plane, I pity the "krauts."

HARRIET: Heck...you'll notice I said heck...at least you've got somebody that can go.

MAXINE: Pass.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

HARRIET: Pass.

(They lay their cards down in silence.)

You know...Robina's been looking a little peek-ed lately. So if you want to keep her home tomorrow, it's okay, Maxine.

MAXINE: Maxie.

HARRIET: Maxie.

(Pause.)

MARY LOUISE: Oh, we missed Glen Miller! Ooooo rats! I haven't missed Glen Miller since I was 16. The week's shot, just shot!

JANET: Maxine...

(MAXINE looks at her a moment.)

MAXINE: What?

JANET: Can I get you anything?

MAXINE: No, I'm fine...Really, I'm fine.

JANET: Maxine, where do you get your equilibrium?

MAXINE: From Elizabeth Arden, dear...By the quart.

JANET: Excuse me a minute.

(She rises and hands her cards to MARY LOUISE.)

Play my hand.

(She takes the phone into the kitchen, dialing as she walks. The ladies continue to play.)

Hi, it's Janet, is Rob there? Thanks.

(Pause.)

Hi, sweetheart. No, nothing's wrong. I just wanted to tell you...Oh, this is silly.

(Pause.)

Yes, I'm here...just get home safely, okay?

(She hangs up.)

LIGHTS BLACKOUT

SCENE 2 -- May 6, 1942 -- As the lights come up on the apartment, JANET, MAXINE and HARRIET are in the middle of a hand.

HARRIET: And then one of those ladies, I use the term advisedly, told me that I had to treat her little darlin' with kid gloves because she was artistic and sensitive. I came this close to telling her the swamp bottom

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truth that her daughter was not artistic and sensitive but narcissistic and stupid. Parent teacher consultations.

Boy, I hate those things.

MAXINE: Janet. Play something!

(JANET lays down a card.)

You trumped my ace!

JANET: What? Oh, no, no, no, I meant to play hearts.

(She reaches to retrieve the card. HARRIET stops her.)

HARRIET: Sorry, that ain't according to "Hoyle."

(She throws down a card and takes the trick.)

This is. Thank you.

MAXINE: Oh, phooey.

HARRIET: There you have the classic example of not communicating with your partner. Maxine, you must always remember...

MAXINE: Harriet, if you come up with another one of your barnyard colloquialisms, I'm going to bop you.

HARRIET: Fine, fine. Be that way. Just remember you now owe me 20¢ and the tally is rising.

MAXINE: Ahh! Where the devil is Mary Louise?

HARRIET: She probably got delayed.

MAXINE: Oh, hell, she can walk here in 20 minutes. I hope she's all right. I'm going to call her again. Janet take over my hand. Janet.

JANET: Huh?

MAXINE: I give up. Harry, are you and I the only ones here tonight?

JANET: I'm sorry. I'm with it now. Where are we?

MAXINE: Losing. Play my hand.

HARRIET: That's okay, I'll get it.

(HARRIET now plays three hands. MAXINE crosses to the phone and dials as the game continues.)

MAXINE: Wait, this is Wednesday, it's the staff's night off.

(MAXINE returns to the table and takes her cards.)

She has no respect for anyone but herself. She's the most selfish child I know.

HARRIET: Oh, you're just sore because you're lousy at bridge.

MAXINE: I am not.

(She lays down a card. HARRIET stares at it.)

HARRIET: You are too. Where have you been for the past six months? Haven't you heard a word I've said?

Maxine, at this point in the game, never lead this sort of card. 40¢.

MAXINE: The least she could do is call.

HARRIET: Grant's going to call me. On the phone. From overseas.

JANET: What?

HARRIET: Yep. Told me in his last letter that he has something very important to discuss with me.

JANET: Like what?

HARRIET: Well, he wasn't specific, but I can guess.

(JANET and MAXINE look at one another puzzled.)

I think I'll look very nice in white, don't you?

JANET: Harriet, I don't think you should count your chickens before they hatch.

HARRIET: Oh, I'm not, honey, I'm not. But "if the rooster's a-crowin', the hen be a-knowin'."

(MAXINE looks at her, unbelievably. They play out the hand.)

And that gives me book and three.

MAXINE: The "Hen be a-knowin'?"

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HARRIET: Ladies, you both owe me 60¢.

(She whistles "Dixie" as the ladies pay up.)

MAXINE: Oh, hush.

(They disperse from the table as MARY LOUISE bursts in and plops herself down in HARRIET'S chair. She wears her W.A.F.S. uniform and beams from ear to ear.)

MARY LOUISE: Sorry I'm late. Let's play.

MAXINE: Well, look what the cat dragged in.

MARY LOUISE: I said I was sorry.

(She hops up and turns on the radio.)

Now let's play.

MAXINE: Not so fast, young lady, I have a bone to pick with you.

JANET: Maxine...

MARY LOUISE: You're sure crabby, lose again?

HARRIET: Hah...she can call a spade a spade.

MAXINE: This is the very reason we brought Harry in if you'll remember.

HARRIET: So's you could lose?

MAXINE: Harry. We got fed up with girls being late and not showing. So... Where have you been?

MARY LOUISE: With Jack.

MAXINE: I should have known. Aren't the two of you are getting a little thick?

JANET: Maxine...

MARY LOUISE: It's really none of your beeswax, Max—

(She controls herself.)

Look, why don't we just sit down and play.

MAXINE: You could have called...Janet was very worried.

(MARY LOUISE looks at JANET who points at Maxine.)

HARRIET: Grant would know to call me here wouldn't he? I mean if there was no answer at my place, he'd know to call here don't ya think?

JANET: Oh...yes, I'm sure.

HARRIET: I'm so excited I could...well, I don't know what, but I could.

JANET: Harry, don't rush blindly into anything.

HARRIET: Blindly? Heck, my eyes are wide open. And at my age, you don't rush into anything. It's a dead run, I mean a beeline.

MARY LOUISE: Beeline to what?

HARRIET: Grant B. Nye.

MARY LOUISE: You and Grant! Harry, that's great.

HARRIET: Well, now he hasn't actually proposed, but that's what my feminine intuition tells me.

MARY LOUISE: We could make it a double wedding.

MAXINE: A what?

MARY LOUISE: We set the date!

(MARY LOUISE and HARRIET squeal and embrace.)

JANET: When?

MARY LOUISE: June 4th.

HARRIET: June 4th? That's less than a month away.

MARY LOUISE: No kidding.

HARRIET: Why the rush?

MARY LOUISE: 'Cause his orders just came through and he's flying the new B-17s. Not many guys get to do

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that. He leaves for England June 7th. Doesn't that just stink?

JANET: Three days after your wedding?

MAXINE: One heart.

(The ladies sit. MARY LOUISE is U.S. MAXINE is L. JANET is D.S. and HARRIET is R.)

JANET: That's un-American.

HARRIET: Un-American? Hell, it's unnatural.

MARY LOUISE: No sweat, I'll just hop a plane and fly over anytime.

JANET: One spade.

HARRIET: Two spades.

MARY LOUISE: Anyway, it can't be too soon for me. I'm chompin' at the bit.

MAXINE: Mary Louise, don't be crude.

MARY LOUISE: Jeez, he's so steamy.

MAXINE: Will someone hose her down so she can bid?

MARY LOUISE: Passaroo.

MAXINE: Three hearts. Don't you think you're being rash?

HARRIET: Hell, no. She's gettin' a rash.

JANET: I'm sorry, what's the bid?

HARRIET: I bid two spades and Maxine said three hearts.

JANET: Then three...ah, spades. Three spades.

MAXINE: You're not even 21.

MARY LOUISE: We all know what you think, Maxine.

MAXINE: I just don't want you to be sorry later.

(MAXINE and MARY LOUISE speak the next two lines simultaneously.)

MARY LOUISE: You just don't want me to be happy later. You just can't stand the thought of me being happy, can you?

MAXINE: I knew you'd take that attitude. Why do you twist everything I say?

HARRIET: That's enough! Both of you.

(They're silent.)

Whew.

MAXINE: I just think—

(HARRIET points her finger and MAXINE shuts up. Then when HARRIET isn't looking she continues.)

—You'd be wiser to wait.

HARRIET: This reminds me of a girl I knew once last name of Samuels...or was it Samuelson. Nice girl...not too bright. She thought it'd be "wiser to wait" so when her fiancé joined the army and went to England or some such place, danged if she doesn't get a "Dear Jane" letter. "Dear Florence..."

MAXINE: Har-ry...

HARRIET: In a minute. I'm relatin' a story... "Dear Florence," her name's Florence, not Jane. "Sorry to have to tell you, but I've met a girl over here and we're getting..."

MAXINE: Harriet....

HARRIET: I am trying to tell a very poignant story, Maxine, thank you very much. Anyway, he says, "I've met a girl over here and we're getting married next week. Love, so and so", I forgot his name. Pass.

(To MAXINE.)

Satisfied?

MAXINE: Thank you.

MARY LOUISE: Pass.

HARRIET: Sure threw ol' Flo for a loop. They were dating since high school. It was a real shame too. She'll

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prob'ly never get married now. She wasn't real lucky with men. Ug-ly. Her Mama used to have to hang meat around her neck to get the dogs to play with her.

(She and MARY LOUISE crack up.)

MAXINE: I have a hand like a foot. Three no-trump. Janet...?

HARRIET: You know, that's what's going to happen, now that we're in this war. All the boys will go over there, and we'll have nothing left but women. How would that make you feel?

MAXINE: Who cares? Will someone please bid, Jan-et!

JANET: *(Returns to reality.)* Oh, ah... Seven spades.

HARRIET: Double.

JANET: Oh, no, no, no, no. I mean, pass.

MAXINE: No, no, no, no, no. You said "seven spades."

MAXINE AND HARRIET: "A bid made, is a bid played."

MARY LOUISE: And that makes me the dummy.

JANET: Mary, I'm sorry. I don't know where my mind is.

MARY LOUISE: It doesn't matter to me.

HARRIET: Don't worry, I'll help you.

MAXINE: No, you can't. I hate it when you play everybody's hand.

HARRIET: Oh, relax.

(JANET leads and MARY is the dummy.)

What time is it Janet?

JANET: Huh?

HARRIET: The time?

JANET: Oh...Oh! It's five of.

HARRIET: O-kay....Are you sure Grant would know to call me here?

MAXINE: Yes! He would know to call you here.

HARRIET: Well, excuse me for breathing.

(Refers to Janet's hand.)

No, play that one. So...how would you like me for a sister-in-law, Janet?

JANET: That'd be nice.

(Then to MARY LOUISE.)

Mary, have you chosen your colors?

MARY LOUISE: Oh, Jan, I can't tell you what Mother wants. "Sunshine yellow" and "magic magenta."

HARRIET: *(Her favorite colors.)* Oooo!

MARY LOUISE: And I want you all in the wedding party.

(Excitement from all.)

Except for Maxine.

(MAXINE glances at her then back to her cards.)

I...ah...don't know how to say this. I...I would like you to be my Matron of Honor.

(MAXINE is dumbfounded.)

HARRIET: Well, this is the first time I've ever seen Maxine at a loss for words.

MARY LOUISE: You will won't you?

MAXINE: I would be honored.

MARY LOUISE: Thanks.

JANET: This is going to be such fun. You can use my pearl earrings for something borrowed.

HARRIET: And I have a blue garter I bought for an emergency.

MARY LOUISE: And my dress is new.

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MAXINE: And something old...something old...Oh, of course...Blanche. You're all set.

(They finish the hand.)

MARY LOUISE: Well, I gotta take off.

HARRIET: No, you can't leave yet. Sit down.

(Pulls MARY down.)

Janet.

(She pulls JANET up.)

I'll get the Hires.

JANET: No, I'll get it.

HARRIET: No, I'll get it.

JANET: No, I'll get it.

HARRIET: I'll get it! Now, go on.

JANET: *(Tunes in the radio.)* You know.... Every Wednesday it's the same old thing.

HARRIET: Same old thing.

JANET: But tonight, we're going to have a treat.

MAXINE: Oooo, I hope it's popcorn balls.

JANET: We're going to listen to the news.

MAXINE: Oooo, that's better than popcorn balls.

HARRIET: *(The familiar three NBC chimes are heard.)* This is it!

JANET: Shhh.

(GRANT'S voice comes over the box.)

GRANT'S VOICE: This is Grant Nye. Your voice in London.....

MARY LOUISE: That's Grant!

GRANT'S VOICE: As my first broadcast, this should be an evening of excitement for me, but it would be inappropriate as the English mourn.

(Ad lib between JANET, HARRIET, & MARY LOUISE.)

JANET: Girls! Hush!

(They settle down.)

GRANT'S VOICE: Though the city lies quiet and peaceful now, the Nazi threat is as real as ever. Enemy planes penetrated British air defenses earlier today heading for Military Objectives. This Military Objective turned out to be a schoolhouse in a small village in southeast England. The German communiqué bragged, "low-level attacks with good success on military objectives." This bomb's "success" killed 29 boys under 12 and three adults. One boy who was carried out hurt, but alive said, "Hello, Dad. Is my bike all right?" This is Grant Nye in London, signing off.

(JANET turns the radio off. Pause.)

MARY LOUISE: Wow...

JANET: Well...I thought Grant was very professional.

HARRIET: Professional? Shoot fire, poetry on the air waves. It is something to know Grant's over there tellin' us he's doing well. And I don't give a tinker's damn about this stupid war, or anything else. I just want him home. I don't know why we got involved in the first place.

MARY LOUISE: That doesn't sound like you.

HARRIET: We should have kept our noses out of their business. Let them fight their own damn war.

MARY LOUISE: And let them do to England what they did to Poland and Czechoslovakia and Austria?

HARRIET: What the hell do those places have to do with us?

MARY LOUISE: They're not places, they're people!

HARRIET: They're not our people!

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MARY LOUISE: That's isolationist talk!

HARRIET: Honey, if you'll check in the recesses of that mind of yours, you'll recall two of my brothers died in France 'cause of this war. So pardon me all to hell if I don't twirl a baton and tap dance "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Two brothers are all the war effort I care to expend.

MARY LOUISE: That's the price of freedom.

(HARRIET grabs her purse, exits into the kitchen and listens to the others.)

JANET: Rob enlisted.

(Pause. HARRIET takes a swig from a flask. Another long awkward pause.)

MARY LOUISE: Congratulations, Jan. Now all three of us will be war widows.

MAXINE: Mary Louise, shut up.

(MARY LOUISE starts to protest.)

Shut-up.

MARY LOUISE: Oh, groan. I gotta go. I'm meeting Jack under the clock at ten.

(MARY LOUISE exits.)

MAXINE: You okay?

(JANET nods. HARRIET enters from the kitchen.)

HARRIET: Janet, I'm sorry about all that.

JANET: Forget it.

HARRIET: There's nothing like our bridge nights...and that was nothing like our bridge nights.

MAXINE: Well...I'll be in the hall.

(She grabs her cigarettes and exits.)

HARRIET: I better scram, too. Anything I can do for you before I go?

JANET: No, thanks.

(Beat.)

HARRIET: Janet...I'm taking my little darlings on a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art Friday. Why don't you come?

JANET: I'll think about it.

(HARRIET gets her purse and starts for the door.)

HARRIET: Oh, shoot. I wanted to show you Grant's letter.

JANET: What's he say?

HARRIET: Just that he and a friend were scooting off up to Marlborough or Chesterfield or some dang place.

They all sound like cigarettes to me.

JANET: You really like him a lot don't you?

HARRIET: No, honey, I don't like him. I like Potatoes Au Gratin. I think Grant would be under the category of love. And there aren't many things still listed under that headin'. He's up there with God, Country and my Osh-Kosh luggage. You know everything I've ever listed there has usually gotten erased. But I got a good feeling about this one. I'm writing him down in ink.

(Beat.)

I hope we have a little boy, looks just like him. And a little girl...looks just like him, too. Heck, I even want the house to look like him. We'll get a dog looks like me. See you later.

(She heads for the door.)

JANET: Harriet...

HARRIET: Hmm?

JANET: I would love you for a sister-in-law.

HARRIET: Thanks, honey. Mutual.

(They embrace. Again she starts for the door.)

Oh, when is Grant's friend due?

JANET: What?

HARRIET: Grant's friend that's staying with you.

JANET: What are you talking about?

(HARRIET gets the letter.)

HARRIET: See, he says that his friend was coming to New York and staying with you.

JANET: Let me see that.

(Grabs the letter.)

Oh, why would he do that? Without even asking me. The big bum.

HARRIET: You didn't know? Isn't that just like Grant? Well, "a tout á l'heure." Night, Max.

(HARRIET snatches the letter from JANET'S hands and exits.)

MAXINE: 'Night. Be careful going home. There's a lot of crazy sailors out there.

HARRIET: I'm hopin'.

MAXINE: Get out, "white trash."

(MAXINE enters.)

JANET: Grant makes me so darn mad!

MAXINE: There are hotels, you know.

JANET: I couldn't do that. Oh, well. If it's not three things, it's four.

(JANET points to MAXINE'S smoldering cigarette.)

Maxine...

MAXINE: Oops, sorry, sorry.

(She returns to the hall and snuffs it.)

JANET: I thought you told me you quit.

MAXINE: No, I told you I "quilt." Easy mistake.

(JANET starts cleaning up.)

Sit down, I can do that.

(JANET ignores her.)

Then I'll sit down.

(Beat.)

When do you expect Rob?

JANET: I don't. He had to go to Philadelphia for a couple of days for some dumb legal thing.

MAXINE: When did he tell you he'd enlisted?

JANET: He'd been threatening to do it for a couple of weeks. But he went down to the induction office yesterday. Men! I don't understand them. He didn't have to go. He's blind as a bat...Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

MAXINE: I never wonder about men...I just think they're stupid. Does he know when he ships out?

(JANET shakes her head. She pauses, wearily.)

Would you sit down?

(MAXINE pulls JANET down next to her on the couch. Pause.)

Chan's been called to the South Pacific. He should be coming through here within the month.

JANET: Oh, I'm so glad. I told you he'd be all right.

MAXINE: That you did.

(Pause.)

JANET: What's it like? Life without Chan?

MAXINE: Honey, I've never had anything else to compare it with.

JANET: How do you manage?

MAXINE: I don't know, I never thought about it. You just...do.

JANET: I guess we'll never have a baby now.

MAXINE: Oh, honey.

JANET: I think he's relieved. It's pretty sad when your husband goes to war to get away from you.

MAXINE: Janet, stop this kind of talk.

JANET: But it's true.

MAXINE: No, it's not.

JANET: I don't think he even wants children.

MAXINE: What man does, really?

JANET: He says he wants them raised Catholic and I want them Mormon. The two most pigheaded religions, I might add. And until we agree on that, no kids.

MAXINE: So have one and raise it Presbyterian...they don't take a stand on anything.

(JANET chuckles.)

JANET: I'll have to remember that one. He's been so strange lately. If it's not religion, it's money. He sounds like a broken record. "Babies, cost a lot. Babies, cost a lot. Babies, cost a lot." They don't cost a lot. No more than that precious car of his. I've been trying to figure it out all night, then it hit me. He knows he might not come back.

MAXINE: Oh, honey, don't put yourself through this. Rob is going to be fine. And not having children isn't the end of the world.

JANET: Isn't it?

MAXINE: No.

JANET: What would you have without Robina?

MAXINE: Better nails.

JANET: You big fake...And he'd make such a great dad, don't you think?

(MAXINE nods.)

MAXINE: Come one. Let's go wash your face

(They cross to the hall.)

JANET: How do I join Bundles for Britain?

MAXINE: Be sponsored by someone with taste, class and influence.

JANET: But could you do it anyway?

MAXINE: You stinker!

(They exit to the bathroom. We hear a faint knock at the front door...and then again. The door opens.

ELIZABETH BARLOW NYE, a pretty woman in her early thirties, tentatively enters carrying a suitcase. She is the classic English woman, not high British, but good solid stock.)

ELIZABETH: Hello?

(She checks the apartment number on her slip of paper.)

Hello?

(JANET and MAXINE enter.)

JANET: May I help you?

ELIZABETH: I'm looking for Janet Osterlough.

JANET: Yes. That's me.

ELIZABETH: That's a relief. I thought I was in the wrong place. I'm sorry to just burst in on you like this. But I had to get out as soon as possible and as you know there's not a ship in sight, but he was lucky enough to squeeze me on a plane over or I would have been there for who knows how long. Here's a letter explaining it all. We figured I'd probably beat it here, so it's a hand delivery.

JANET: Thank you, Miss...?

ELIZABETH: Oh, I am sorry. Where is my mind? I'm Elizabeth Nye.

JANET: Nye?

ELIZABETH: Yes. I'm Grant's wife.

LIGHTS BLACKOUT

SCENE 3 -- *May 20, 1942 -- Two weeks later. The light rises on the radio.*

GRANT'S VOICE: May 20th, 1942. Paris. German authorities announced yesterday that five Jews had been shot as a reprisal for two attacks on German soldiers and more Jews will be shot if the authors of the two attacks are not found within eight days. Back home, freedom rang in New York City in celebration of "I am an American Day." A million and a quarter persons gathered in Central Park. No shouts, no vicious threats, just these simple words repeated by all, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the Republic for which it stands. One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." I only wish I could have been there. From an American in London, this is Grant Nye signing off. It's about 530 p.m., overcast and raining, heavily. The radio plays softly as JANET sits in an overstuffed chair writing in her journal.

(After a beat, the door opens and ELIZABETH enters drenched and dejected.)

JANET: What are you doing home? I didn't expect you till six.

ELIZABETH: I fell asleep on the subway and missed my last interview. Thought I'd better pack it in. Rob home?

JANET: Uh-uh. Any luck?

ELIZABETH: Nope, and I've checked everywhere on my job list twice. I'm down to street sweeper and sewer worker. But it seems I'm a security risk. Though how a sewer worker can be a security risk is beyond me. I suppose they're afraid I'll sabotage the city one latrine at a time. I feel awful. Do you have any saltines?

JANET: Over the ice box.

(ELIZABETH gets the crackers.)

ELIZABETH: May I use your room. I'd like to have a lie down.

JANET: *(ELIZABETH heads for the bedroom.)* Elizabeth, can I talk to you?

ELIZABETH: Sure.

JANET: No, it can wait.

(ELIZABETH again starts for the bedroom.)

No, it can't.

ELIZABETH: What?

JANET: Well...in Grant's letter he asked me to explain things to you.

ELIZABETH: Things?

JANET: Yes. So I'm going to explain things to you.

(Long pause.)

ELIZABETH: Janet, before I beat you quite severely...what?

JANET: Well, as you know every Wednesday night we have bridge, and tonight it's here——

ELIZABETH: Don't worry, I'll stay out of your way.

JANET: Oh, no, no, no, no. I want you to meet the girls. One in particular.

ELIZABETH: Who?

JANET: Harriet Sue Price.

ELIZABETH: ...And?

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JANET: And...before Grant went to England, he and Harriet were seeing one another.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

JANET: That's all. So you go lie down.

ELIZABETH: Janet! You can't leave me hanging like that. Tell me about her?

JANET: Oh...Grant should have taken care of this.

ELIZABETH: But he didn't, so help me out. Was he in love with her?

JANET: No. He wasn't.

ELIZABETH: Was she with him?

JANET: Yes.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

JANET: I think she expected to marry him.

ELIZABETH: Oh, dear. It must be difficult for her to be here tonight.

JANET: Well, no, not really. You see, Grant didn't tell her either.

ELIZABETH: What? This is absurd.

JANET: I'm sure he just didn't want to hurt her.

ELIZABETH: Oh, yes, well, that makes perfect sense. And she's not supposed to be hurt when I tell her?

JANET: No, now you let me handle it. He's my brother.

ELIZABETH: He's my husband.

JANET: But Harriet's my friend, and I'd appreciate it if you'd let me tell her.

ELIZABETH: All right. Have it your way.

JANET: Thank you. Now you go in and rest.

ELIZABETH: (*ELIZABETH exits into the bedroom.*) The twit.

(*JANET goes to the kitchen and pulls some food out of the fridge as a knock comes to the door.*)

MAXINE: Knock, knock. C'est moi.

JANET: Oh, Maxine, thank you for coming early. Lock the door.

MAXINE: Why? What is it?

JANET: I feel just awful. I called Harry half a dozen times, and I drove her home from bridge twice, but every time she was talking so fast that I couldn't get a word in edgewise, and you know how I get in these circumstances, I get all tongue tied and I can't—

MAXINE: Janet! Heel! What is it?

JANET: (*Pause*) Harry doesn't know about Grant and Elizabeth.

MAXINE: What! Janet Rosetta Osterlough, you big fat coward! You said you'd take care of it.

JANET: I know, I know. But what with everything...I just couldn't stand what she would...to break her heart.

(*Beat.*)

Maxine.....?

MAXINE: Ohhhh, no. Don't look at me.

JANET: But she's your friend, too.

MAXINE: No she's not.

JANET: Maxine—!

MAXINE: Janet, do it. You're a big girl now.

ELIZABETH: (*Enters.*) Janet, do you think we might— Oh, hello, Maxine. I'm sorry, I didn't know it was time yet—

HARRIET'S VOICE: Call for Phil-ip Morriss!

JANET: It's Harry! What's she doing here so early?

HARRIET'S VOICE: Hey, it's locked.

JANET: Maxine...

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MAXINE: It's not my affair.

HARRIET'S VOICE: Open up in there. I hate this wallpaper.

JANET: Please...

MAXINE: No.

JANET: Lunch at the Plaza?

MAXINE: *(Slight pause)* And Maxine springs into action. Elizabeth, dear, why don't you go and change into something—

ELIZABETH: What?

MAXINE: Else.

(ELIZABETH exits.)

JANET: Now what?

HARRIET'S VOICE: Hey!

(MAXINE opens the door.)

HARRIET: *(Enters, vigorously shaking her umbrella on MAXINE...and she has a bad cold.)* Jeez, you need an ark out there. How's every little thing?

MAXINE: Damp now.

(HARRIET sneezes.)

MAXINE: Ugh, you sound awful.

HARRIET: Thank you, it's nice to see you, too. Has Grant called here?

JANET: Hasn't he called you yet?

HARRIET: Well, I think he might have called early this morning when I was in the shower. By the time I got to the phone, they hung up. So I think he'll call today.

JANET: Really.

HARRIET: Yeah. I took a cab just in case 'cause I'd die if I was stuck in the rain and he called. Do I look okay?

MAXINE: Yes. You definitely look...okay.

HARRIET: I feel like a drowned rat. I hate talking to him when I look like this.

MAXINE: He's phoning you.

HARRIET: I know, I know. But I just feel that if I look better, I sound better.

MAXINE: Well, maybe the overseas static will save you.

HARRIET: Maxine, one of these days I'm gonna haul off and hit you.

MAXINE: My aren't we pleasant today.

HARRIET: I'm just pissed off! Oh, Janet, I'm sorry. Extremely agitated. I gave a test today and three girls failed. And when somebody fails that usually means I slipped up somewhere. I'm so mad, I could stomp bunnies.

MAXINE: Harry, what is that smell?

HARRIET: Perfume.

MAXINE: Can't be. Perfume smells good.

HARRIET: It's by HEW-BEE-GAWNT. It's called "Quelque Fleurs." It means a whole bunch of flowers.

MAXINE: That awful stuff? It absolutely stinks on me.

HARRIET: Well, I think it absolutely stinks on me, too. But it was a present from Grant.

JANET: Grant?

HARRIET: Surprise of my life. I usually faint over a letter, let alone a gift. I swear to Buddha, I was so excited I couldn't breathe for three minutes. You know, I went to Wannamaker's to see if they carried it. Do you know this stuff is nearly eight dollars a bottle?

(Shoves her wrist under JANET'S nose.)

JANET: *(Sourly.)* You're kidding.

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HARRIET: Nope. I'll never call him cheap again. There was a very peculiar note, though. "To Harry. A dear understanding," underlined, "friend."

MAXINE: You know...Maybe this isn't a good night to play bridge after all.

HARRIET: Why?

JANET: Uh....we don't have a fourth.

HARRIET: Jan-et. You were supposed to take care of this. Don't conk out on me. I've been looking forward to this game all day. Hey, wait. How about Grant's friend? Maybe he knows how to play bridge.

JANET: I doubt it.

HARRIET: Where is he anyway?

MAXINE: He's in changing his dress.

HARRIET: He's what?

JANET: Maxine!

MAXINE: Janet, what can we do? Harry, he is a she.

HARRIET: You mean Grant's friend is a woman?

MAXINE: You are Phi Beta Kappa, aren't you?

JANET: Just shoot me.

ELIZABETH: (*Entering*) Excuse me?

JANET: Elizabeth. Please come in and meet everybody. This is——

HARRIET: Harriet Sue Price.

ELIZABETH: Oh, yes. Nice meeting you.

HARRIET: Likewise. I'm sorry I didn't catch your last name?

(*ELIZABETH is about to speak, then...*)

JANET: Oh, look Harry you've got a run in your stocking.

HARRIET: Oh, dang it all to heck and ring hell's bells. This is my last pair. Well, I refuse to paint my legs. That stuff gets all over my dress.

MARY LOUISE: (*Entering*) Hey, Joe. What-da-ya-know?

JANET: Mary Louise! What are you doing here?

MARY LOUISE: I had to get out of the house. My mother is driving me crazy.

MAXINE: Elizabeth, this is my half sister, Mary Louise Chase. Mary Louise, this is Elizabeth. Grant's...ah...friend.

MARY LOUISE: Oh? Nice to meet you.

ELIZABETH: A pleasure.

JANET: (*To MAXINE*) See, it's not so easy is it.

(*To ELIZABETH.*)

Mary Louise is a pilot in the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Service.

ELIZABETH: Oh?

JANET: And she's getting married in a few days.

ELIZABETH: Really?

MARY LOUISE: If I don't kill my mother first.

HARRIET: Are you married, Elizabeth?

(*Simultaneously.*)

ELIZABETH: Yes.

JANET & MAXINE: No.

(*The three look at each other, then two lines simultaneously:*)

ELIZABETH: Yes.

MARY LOUISE: So, how do you like America?

HARRIET: So how do you know Grant?

(They laugh politely.)

ELIZABETH: I'm afraid I'm not a fair judge of your country. I've only seen the inside of Janet's "loo."

HARRIET: Inside her what?

MAXINE: La toilette.

HARRIET: Oh, yeah? What's wrong? You sick?

ELIZABETH: Well...Really, this is a bit embarrassing...

HARRIET: Honey, if you're going to stick with us, you've got to get used to baring all.

ELIZABETH: Well...of late, I've been very sick to my stomach. Especially in the morning...

MAXINE: In the morning? Like...In the morning?

(ELIZABETH nods.)

HARRIET: Sounds like Montezuma's revenge.

MAXINE: Montezuma's? Hell, it's Mother Nature's revenge. Elizabeth. Are you going to have a baby?

ELIZABETH: Well, I do have that feeling...

(All the women chime in simultaneously.)

JANET: Elizabeth, that's wonderful!

MAXINE: Really...?

MARY LOUISE: Gosh, that's really great!

HARRIET: Well, good for you!

ELIZABETH: Now, now, now, I want to go to hospital first. Besides, we've hardly been married ten weeks.

MAXINE: Well, my dear, as you know all it takes is—

HARRIET: Maxine, let's not get tacky. Does your husband know?

ELIZABETH: I don't want to call him until I'm sure. Grant will be so excited!

HARRIET: Don't you think you ought-ta tell your husband first?

(ELIZABETH looks at JANET, who looks at MAXINE who looks at ELIZABETH. HARRIET'S smile disappears.)

What's going on here? Who are you anyway?

(Pause.)

JANET: Harry, we wanted to break it to you...

(Beat.)

HARRIET: Yes, Janet...? Maxine?

JANET: You see the...what happened...was...ah...

ELIZABETH: Miss Price. They wanted to spare you. But I don't see how they could have. Grant is my husband.

HARRIET: *(Pause)* Thank you, Mrs. Nye...

(Chuckles.)

Well, do I feel like an utter ass? I do hope that you and your husband will be very happy.

(Crosses to the closet and gets her things.)

I'm sure you will. He's a wonderful...

(Pause.)

ELIZABETH: Thank you, Miss Price.

HARRIET: Please, call me, Harry. We're all friends here. Mary Louise, would you care to join me for an evening of fun and amusement?

MARY LOUISE: You bet!

HARRIET: And with any luck we'll be polluted within the hour.

JANET: Harriet. Please, don't do something you'll regret.

HARRIET: I have never regretted anything. Except playin' bridge. Ladies.

(She leaves. MARY LOUISE, at the door.)

MARY LOUISE: Why didn't you tell her?

(She exits.)

JANET: I could kick myself!

MAXINE: She'll get over it.

ELIZABETH: Good God! She will not "get over it." And why should she? Because it's uncomfortable for you?

(The other women remain motionless.)

MAXINE: I'll pick you up for "Bundles" tomorrow.

(She exits, leaving JANET alone to face ELIZABETH.)

LIGHTS BLACKOUT

SCENE 4 -- January 20, 1943 -- *The light rises on the radio.*

GRANT'S VOICE: Five days ago 400 fighter planes and bombers including our own "Flying Fortresses" attacked a wide area of Northern France. Five of the mighty German F.W. 190's were downed in just two minutes of fighting. Six escorting fighters are missing, but none of the bombers were lost. A number of the B-17's were badly damaged and several experienced landing difficulties, causing some injuries. The war in Europe rages on and we continue to pray and support them. Remember to buy bonds. From an American in London, this is Grant Nye signing off.

(JANET'S apartment. The doilies are gone. So are the frilly kitchen curtains. There are a few new pictures, the most predominant is a picture of ROB in his uniform on the bureau. JANET and a very pregnant ELIZABETH are alone, readying the place for bridge. ELIZABETH is in the kitchen standing over a bowl of green punch.)

ELIZABETH: How do you get it green?

JANET: Relief Society secret.

ELIZABETH: Why do you want it green?

JANET: It's prettier. Besides it hides whatever shouldn't be in there.

ELIZABETH: Oh, yum. I found a couple more topcoats for "Bundles for Britain."

JANET: Great. You're awful good at finding things.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I suppose scrounging around is going to be my lot in life.

(Beat.)

Janet...I'm going to ask Maxine if I can work for her.

JANET: Elizabeth, we've discussed this before.

ELIZABETH: Just errands and secretarial work.

JANET: No.

ELIZABETH: We need the money.

JANET: I will not impose on my friends.

ELIZABETH: You're not doing it.

JANET: You're right, I'm not. And I'm not going to. They're hiring down at Westinghouse where they make

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plane instruments and things and I'm applying on Friday.

ELIZABETH: For a job? You're going to work?

JANET: Well, don't act so surprised, stranger things have happened.

ELIZABETH: No, that's not what I meant at all. I think it's wonderful. You've got guts.

JANET: No, I don't. I'm broke. When I stop and think about working at a place like that, my stomach does somersaults.

ELIZABETH: I know how that feels.

JANET: And I made up a list of all the things we need, and all the bills we owe next to how much we have. Even if I get the job we can't keep our heads above water. So I've decided to sell Rob's car.

ELIZABETH: Oh, Janet, no. Not the Packard. He loves that car.

JANET: He loves me more.

ELIZABETH: He won't after you sell his car.

JANET: Then he'll have to understand that we can't live on what he left us. A man has no idea how much it costs to run a household. What with rent and food and heat. And then there's all the things we have to get for the baby. Look at all this. Boy, babies cost a lot.

(JANET realizes what she said.)

ELIZABETH: Please, don't sell Rob's car to buy a crib. The baby won't know the difference. I'll stick him in a drawer...Janet?

JANET: Babies cost a lot...Only he could make his point all the way from Tunisia.

ELIZABETH: Well...I think I'll have a lie down before the gang shows, hmm?

(ELIZABETH exits to the bedroom. JANET walks to ROB'S picture.)

JANET: Oh, hush up.

(She turns it around.)

MAXINE: *(Offstage)* Janet!

JANET: Give me strength.

MAXINE: *(Entering)* Eatings-Gray!

JANET: *(Pastes a smile on her face.)* Hi, Maxine!

MAXINE: Hello.

(Stares at JANET.)

I haven't seen a smile like that since Chan's Mother saw me get a tooth pulled.

JANET: What are you doing here?

MAXINE: Isn't this Wednesday? Yes, I know it is. I see green food.

(Beat.)

Where's Elizabeth?

JANET: She's napping.

MAXINE: Oh, shhh. Sorry.

JANET: It isn't even five. Is everything all right?

MAXINE: Sure.

JANET: Good.

(She sets up the card table.)

MAXINE: Actually there is something on my mind.

JANET: Thought so.

MAXINE: Now, I don't want your advice. I just need a sounding board.

JANET: Naturally.

MAXINE: What do you think of adultery?

JANET: What?

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MAXINE: Nothing serious, just the diversionary kind.

JANET: Maxine, what have you done?

MAXINE: Oh, Janet, don't be silly. I haven't done anything...

JANET: Good.

MAXINE: Yet.

JANET: Maxine! How could you even think of it?

MAXINE: Well, I didn't. He did. The would-be home wrecker.

JANET: Who is he?

MAXINE: Oh, Janet. I would never be so indiscreet. Besides Harvey Blaine's one of Chan's best friends. Oops.

Ah, well, there it's out.

JANET: Maxine...Elizabeth might hear.

MAXINE: Have you ever thought of cheating on Rob?

JANET: Don't be ridiculous.

MAXINE: Why not?

JANET: Because it's wrong.

MAXINE: Have you ever had the opportunity?

JANET: I don't believe we're talking about this.

MAXINE: Well, have you?

JANET: No!

MAXINE: Has Rob ever cheated on you?

JANET: Absolutely not!

MAXINE: How do you know?

JANET: Because I trust him.

MAXINE: That must be nice.

JANET: Don't you trust Chan?

MAXINE: Honey, not as far as I could throw him.

(Pause.)

You see, I know there's someone else.

JANET: What? Maxine, Chan would never do anything like that.

MAXINE: Honey, Chan does what he wants, when he wants, with whom he wants.

JANET: I can't believe this.

MAXINE: Just stop and think about it. After all, it makes perfect sense to me that when he shipped out for

Hawaii, he left fifteen hours before he was due to report.

JANET: Well, maybe he had to get there early to check his plane.

MAXINE: Jan-et. What do you think he was doing all that time? Sharpening his propeller?

JANET: Maxine. I am so sorry.

MAXINE: Damn...That dirty dog. I don't know what to do.

JANET: Don't do anything.

MAXINE: But it's so nice to feel attractive again. Before he left, Chan and I hadn't, well...you know...for months. Damn, I wish he were here...

(Pulls herself together.)

After all, what good is an affair if no one's there to catch you...Of course, there's always Mother Chandler.

She's moving in next week. You know, I think I'll kill Chan.

JANET: Maxine, it's wrong. Don't do something you'll regret.

MAXINE: I never do.

(Pause. MARY LOUISE knocks and enters. She wears a flight suit and bomber jacket.)

MARY LOUISE: Guess what? I just saw Harry.

JANET: Where?

MARY LOUISE: Across the street in O'Hanley's.

JANET: She was sitting in a bar?

(JANET and MARY LOUISE cross to the window.)

MARY LOUISE: She was sitting by the— there she is, there. Get back, get back, get back, she's looking up here.

(JANET grabs a coat.)

MAXINE: Janet, what are you doing?

JANET: I'm going down to get her.

MAXINE: You're doing nothing of the kind.

(JANET and MAXINE speak simultaneously.)

JANET: Maxine, let go, I don't want to miss her! I've been trying to get a-hold of her for months.

MAXINE: Janet, you're always rushing into places where you have no business.

(JANET is out the door.)

MAXINE: I'm wasting my breath. Ah, well...“where angels fear to tread.”

MARY LOUISE: Listen, Maxine, I have, through my own sheer genius, finagled myself a week's leave and got me a lift on a “Gooney Bird” to England.

MAXINE: What?

MARY LOUISE: Eng-land. I need you to drive me out to the field.

MAXINE: Mary Louise, I'm not in the mood.

MARY LOUISE: Please...I never ask anything.

MAXINE: You ask everything.

MARY LOUISE: But you never give it to me. So just this once. Drive me out to Hempstead.

MAXINE: Are you uts-nay? That's hours from here.

MARY LOUISE: It's not even two hours.

MAXINE: That's still hours.

MARY LOUISE: So?

MAXINE: So. I only have three gas ration tickets left, and I need them to get my hair done.

MARY LOUISE: The hell with your hair.

MAXINE: Bite-your-tongue.

MARY LOUISE: I'll never ask anything again. Look we can use my car the tank's full...and...you can have my spare tire.

(She waits for a response.)

Okay, okay. Then here.

(She pulls out a new ration book.)

MAXINE: A ration book? Where did you get that?

MARY LOUISE: Well, let's just say that bridge isn't my only game. Here.

(Puts the book in her hand.)

With that you can get your hair done till 1948. Now will you drive me?

MAXINE: To London if you want.

MARY LOUISE: Jack, I hope you're in shape 'cause this is going to be one exhausting week.

(Slaps MAXINE on the back.)

Thanks, sis.

MAXINE: *(Slapping her harder)* Sure, sis.

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH: What's all the commotion?

MARY LOUISE: Liz. I'm flying to England tonight!

ELIZABETH: You are? That's terrific. You'll see Jack.

MARY LOUISE: That's the idea.

MAXINE: I thought you were asleep.

ELIZABETH: No, I wasn't.

MARY LOUISE: A week with Jack. Gosh!

MAXINE: So...you were awake?

(ELIZABETH nods.)

Great.

JANET: *(Entering)* Darnit! I lost her in the alley behind the bar. She sure is agile.

MARY LOUISE: Janet...

JANET: Why is she out there? It's freezing.

MAXINE: I suspect she's keeping warm at O'Hanley's.

MARY LOUISE: Janet.

MAXINE: Especially with so much time on her hands.

JANET: What?

MARY LOUISE: Janet...!

JANET: Mary Louise, will you hold your horses.

(To MAXINE.)

What do you mean?

MAXINE: Robina told me she got fired over a month ago. Seems she took O'Hanley's warmth into the classroom.

JANET: Oh, no.

MARY LOUISE: Well, I'm flying to England.

JANET: You're what?

MAXINE: You heard right. And the little brat has roped me into driving her out to "Mitchell." Do you two wanna come?

JANET: No, I've got to try to find Harry.

MAXINE: Honey, there is nothing you can do. You've called, Mary's called. Hell, even I've called. I don't know about you but I'm sick and tired of her hanging up on me. Just leave well enough alone. Now, come on and go with. We could get a malted on the way back. Golly, what fun.

JANET: I can't—

MAXINE: Janet, please. Let it rest...! Now let's go.

JANET: I...better not leave Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Don't be silly, go on and go.

JANET: Well...

ELIZABETH: Please go.

JANET: Well...okay. If you're sure....I bet we won't be back 'til way after midnight. Oh, boy.

MARY LOUISE: C'mon, guys, hurry. We've only got four hours.

MAXINE: We could walk there in four hours.

MARY LOUISE: Here are the keys to the dog sled.

JANET: Your Chevy? Oh, more fun.

MAXINE: I hate your car.

JANET: You hush.

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ELIZABETH: *(Grabbing her stomach and sitting)* Ah...! My...that was a good one. Oooo, he's getting restless.

JANET: I don't like leaving you here alone.

MAXINE: Oh, Janet you're just a worry wart. I was way overdue with Robina, too. It's very common.

JANET: Well...All the emergency numbers are by the phone. Don't clean up. I'll do it when I get home.

ELIZABETH: Good-bye, Janet.

(The LADIES exit then the phone rings.)

MARY LOUISE'S VOICE: Let it ring.

JANET: Simmer down.

(JANET enters. To ELIZABETH, who has no intention of answering it.)

I'll get it.

MARY LOUISE: Let-it-ring!

JANET: *(picking up the handset)* Hello....Yes, operator. Mrs. Rookledge...? Yes, she is, who's calling? My gosh, yes. Mary Louise, it's Jack.

MARY LOUISE'S VOICE: What?

JANET: It's Jack!

MARY LOUISE: *(running in to grab the phone)* Hello? Yes, this is Mrs. Rookledge. Jack! Where are you? I can't hear you very well. No kidding? How did you find me...? Smart boy. Guess what, guess what, guess what? Hold on to your drawers. I'm getting a plane out of here at twentythree-thirty for "Chelveston." I pulled yards of string! Gosh, I miss you...You did?

(To the others.)

He just came back from his 10th mission!

(Back in the phone.)

You lucky dog.

(Pause.)

No, kidding, so what happened...?

(Calm and controlled.)

Jack, what happened...?

(She is silent for a moment, her countenance changes.)

Don't be dumb, I'll bring you back...Jack, I'm as stubborn as you are. I'll be there sometime Friday.

(Beat.)

Get some rest. I love you.

(She hangs up.)

MAXINE: Mary Louise...?

MARY LOUISE: As they were coming in the landing gear gave out. Jack was trapped in the "belly turret." Broke his back. C'mon we better hit the road.

(MARY LOUISE exits past the women. MAXINE heads out after her as JANET and ELIZABETH share a glance, then JANET exits. ELIZABETH sits motionless until a kick from the baby brings her back to reality.)

ELIZABETH: Please, love, settle down....

(ELIZABETH rises, moves to the front door and locks it. She sees Janet's keys hanging by the door and calls down the hall.)

Janet! Janet, your keys! Janet..?!

(She sighs, disappointedly, closes the door and locks it. Then she thinks better of it and unlocks the door, turns off the light and shuffles into the bedroom. The hall light clicks on as the front door opens and a FIGURE slips in. It pauses a moment then walks to the card table and picks up the deck, reverently. Then the FIGURE goes to the mantle and takes down a picture. ELIZABETH enters the darkness in her

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robe and slippers and shuffles to the kitchen. She flips on the light and pours herself a glass of milk. The FIGURE studies her closely. ELIZABETH turns off the kitchen light, grabs her baby book and heads for the bedroom. Just then, a light comes on. ELIZABETH gasps as she and HARRIET stand face to face.)

HARRIET: Surprise.

ELIZABETH: Harriet!

HARRIET: How the hell are you? My gosh, you really are pregnant aren't you?

ELIZABETH: Why are you—?

HARRIET: Well, you are. Or haven't you noticed? It looks like more than just putting on a little weight. Now mine on the other hand is putting on a little weight. But I think it's distributed well, don't you? Scotch here, Bourbon here and it wouldn't be lady-like to mention where the Vodka is.

ELIZABETH: What the devil are you doing here?

HARRIET: I wanted to have a little talk with you. See how you were doing...

(Regards the photo.)

This is touching. The happy couple. This your wedding day?

ELIZABETH: Honeymoon.

HARRIET: Yeah? Where?

ELIZABETH: Marlborough.

HARRIET: That's right. The cigarette place.

(The picture falls to the floor.)

Oh, damn. Oh, I'm sorry.

(ELIZABETH reaches for it.)

I'll get it.

ELIZABETH: No, I'll get it.

HARRIET: I can get it.

ELIZABETH: I'll get it.

(HARRIET watches as ELIZABETH picks up the picture and holds onto it.)

Where have you been all this time? You're friends have been worried sick.

HARRIET: Isn't that sweet... Well... I keep busy. I collect bottle tops. I find most of them down in O'Hanley's Bar on Wednesday nights. You know this is the first time in eight months they've left you alone. Janet watches you like a trainer and his brood-mare.

ELIZABETH: You've been watching us all these months?

HARRIET: Every Janet night. And some Maxine nights, but almost never a Mary Louise night. I didn't want to become a fanatic about it.

ELIZABETH: Why didn't you come up?

HARRIET: Because I didn't want to see them.

(Beat. HARRIET steadies herself.)

ELIZABETH: You need some sleep.

HARRIET: Ah, yes... sleep. I vaguely seem to remember what that is.

ELIZABETH: I'll call a cab to take you home.

HARRIET: Don't-do-that.

(Beat.)

I can see what Grant sees in you. You're so tidy and so neat and so pretty.

(The women look at one another for a moment.)

Grant should-a told me that's what he wanted. I would-a changed. I could-a changed. I thought we had no secrets. We didn't. I told him everything and he told me nothin'!

ELIZABETH: Harriet, what is it you want?

HARRIET: I don't know. I knew when I dragged myself up those stairs.

(Beat.)

What's wrong with me? Why'd he stop liking me?

ELIZABETH: *(Wearily)* He hasn't stopped liking you.

HARRIET: 'Course, what man could resist. I'm so pretty and so neat and so...pretty.

ELIZABETH: Harriet...

HARRIET: He didn't have to marry me. Just be my friend so's I could talk to him.

ELIZABETH: Please, I'm not feeling well.

HARRIET: Tell me why?

ELIZABETH: I don't have to tell you anything!

(She feels a contraction, but bears it and goes on.)

You don't deserve any explanations from Grant, me or anyone. Your self-pity is pathetic.

(Another pain.)

He's my husband. I didn't steal him from you. We fell in love. And if that's too hard for you to accept, then you can just leave. I think you'd better leave.

(She opens the door. Then:)

Oh, God.

(She nearly doubles over in pain.)

Now I've done it.

HARRIET: What?

ELIZABETH: Harriet. It's time.

HARRIET: You're absolutely right. I certainly don't want to wear out my welcome.

(She starts to leave.)

ELIZABETH: I'm going to have the baby.

HARRIET: I know. That's why I'm going.

ELIZABETH: Right now!

HARRIET: I know, I know. I'm goin'. I'm goin'.

ELIZABETH: Listen to me! I'm going to have the baby right now!

(Beat.)

HARRIET: I beg your pardon.

ELIZABETH: I need your help.

HARRIET: You're just funnin' aren't ya. Just getting back at me.

(ELIZABETH screams at another contraction.)

Oh, no! You're not kiddin'. Judas Priest, what have I done?

ELIZABETH: You haven't done anything.

HARRIET: Elizabeth, I'm sorry. This wasn't supposed to happen.

ELIZABETH: Harriet, shut-up and listen! Call an ambulance!

HARRIET: Okay, that's a very good idea.

(On the phone.)

Hello, operator? There's a baby here that's having a woman...I mean there's a woman with a baby having...Just a second. There's a—hello? Hello?

ELIZABETH: Harriet, help!

HARRIET: Keep calm. Oooo, nothing'll sober ya like birth. Elizabeth, I better go get somebody.

ELIZABETH: Harriet, don't leave me. You have to deliver this baby.

HARRIET: I don't think that's a real good idea, Liz'beth.

ELIZABETH: Please.

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HARRIET: No! No, I can't. In this condition I couldn't even deliver a telegram.

(ELIZABETH groans.)

ELIZABETH: Get some towels, and you'll find some scissors and string in the top middle drawer in the kitchen.

(She bears the pain and breathes rapidly. HARRIET stand blubbing.)

Harriet, I don't care what you think about me. But I can't lose this baby, please, dear God, I can't!

HARRIET: *(The thought pulls her back to reality.)* Lose it? You just put that thought right out of your mind. Grant Jr. is "A-O-kay."

(She enters the kitchen.)

Dear Lord. I'd consider it a big favor if you'd guide my hands and let this baby be all right. I promise, I'll never touch another drop. Cross my heart, hope to die.

ELIZABETH: Harriet!

HARRIET: I'm comin', I'm comin'.

(Up to heaven.)

Please.

(She frantically grabs a towel, string and scissors then hurries to ELIZABETH.)

Don't worry, I'm here.

(She sits next to ELIZABETH and takes her hand.)

Go ahead and scream. Scream all you want. Because I'll have you know, you're talkin' to the expert "puppy midwife" of Arkadelphia, Arkansas. And Honey, you're gonna have the cutest little Cocker Spaniel you ever saw.

LIGHTS BLACKOUT

END ACT I

19 more pages in ACT TWO

A FEW SCRIPT CHANGES WOULD STRING 'PEARLS' WITH CLARITY

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A STRING OF PEARLS by Elizabeth Hansen; Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Film; Margetts Theatre; continues at 7:30 p.m. through Aug. 10 (\$6 students, faculty and staff, \$7 senior citizens and alumni, \$8 general admission); tickets available at the BYU theater box office, 378-4322; running time, two and a half hours.

PROVO - The difficulties of war, marriage, love and death are explored in BYU's latest offering "A String of Pearls." The play allows the audience a few glimpses into the lives of five women as they meet over the course of several years to play bridge as well as to laugh and weep together over the events that life and war bring to them.

Overall, this play is an interesting, entertaining and at times moving depiction of women who do the best they can to deal with the disappointments thrown in their paths. A few modifications in the production and its script to clear up some vagueness regarding some events and characters would elevate it to an even higher degree of achievement.

Set in the early 1940s, the play begins as Harriet Sue Price (Colleen Baum) is invited to the apartment of Janet Nye Osterlough (Carolyn Gifford) to become the fourth in a regular game of bridge. The other two players are half-sisters Maxine Chase Morovin (Eleah Boyd) and Mary Louise Chase (Jennifer Buster). The two sisters are antagonistic from the start, the basis of their conflict lying in the past infidelity of their father. Later joining the group is Elizabeth Barlow Nye (Ashley Wilkinson), who arrives from England after marrying Janet's brother.

Gifford is excellent in her portrayal of a meek and forgiving woman who has been transplanted from her home in Payson, Utah, to New York City. Janet is a calming influence on the group of women as they lash out against one another and the apparent hopelessness of their situations. Gifford gives her character a sweetness and shyness as well as an understated strength that allows her to suffer on without news of her husband who is fighting in the war.

The truly outstanding character in this company, however, is Baum as Harriet Sue Price. It is hard to imagine a more perfect casting choice as one watches Baum perform the country mannerisms and vocal drawl of a woman from Arkansas who is outgoing and joyful and yet aware of her shortcomings.

Baum has an excellent sense of timing and delivers her lines and actions in a manner that allows the audience full enjoyment of them. In fact, Harriet is fortunate in that she gets many of the best lines of the play. There is a lot of clever humor included in this play, with Harriet often skillfully delivering a funny comment to relieve the tension after a dramatic scene.

Some aspects of the play could be improved with clarification either through the script or through production aspects. For example, it was unclear until quite late in the play exactly how wealthy and influential in society Maxine's character was. The audience would benefit by having this information earlier; this could be achieved through the script, more expensive-looking costuming and a more sophisticated air on the part of the actress.

Another question involves Mary Louise's decision to have an affair after once being totally devoted to her husband. One assumes that it has something to do with her husband's injury during the war, but it remains unclear. Some subtle dialogue changes could clear this up.

At times, Mary Louise and her sister seem so angry at and insulting to each other that one wonders why they spend time together at all. The play's dialogue reveals the source of their dispute quite well; perhaps it could also provide a few more moments of tenderness to provide a larger basis for their continuing relationship. Also, some lines could be delivered without quite so much animosity.

In general, "A String of Pearls," directed by Dixie Smith, is an enjoyable production worthy of an audience. Those planning on attending should be aware that there is some language that may not be appropriate for young children.

STAGE REVIEW : 'Pearls' Captures World War II Home Front

January 12, 1989 -- ROBERT KOEHLER, LA Times

For many, the finest World War II movie is the one about what happened when the boys came back: "The Best Years of Our Lives." Elizabeth Hansen's play, "A String of Pearls," is in many ways a kind of "Best Years" harbinger: War brides endure on the home front as best as they can.

A String of Pearls Promotional Material by Elizabeth Hansen

Hansen, in the best humanist tradition, gives her women a lot of slack. At the Gypsy Playhouse, director Jill Andre's cast has listened closely to the script--on and between the lines. In Hansen's and Andre's hands, there's conflict, there are even minor outrages committed that make you want to scold the guilty party. But there are no easy targets here; this is an adult play (in spirit, not in X rating) about adults who each have a claim to our attention.

This is especially true of Mary Louise (Dina Murray), the kid half-sister of Maxine (Laurel Adams). Mary Louise's adolescent brattiness develops into full-fledged narcissism over the play's course of time from 1941 to 1945. Cheating on her husband isn't condoned, but we can see how this is partly a declaration of independence from her overbearing sister.

Cheating isn't in Maxine's vocabulary, even at cards, for which she and her friends get together every Wednesday night at Janet's New York apartment. If there is a truly nagging flaw in the play, it's the unlikelihood that Maxine would have these friends in the first place. Their tastes tend to run to Macy's, while Maxine's lean to Cartier's. She's one of those people who would get on anyone's nerves, even those of her tolerant companions.

Ultimately, though, tolerance and understanding are what "String of Pearls" is about. The real test of this is when Harriet (Carolyn Mignini), a sweet corn-pone type with her eyes on an NBC radio correspondent, finds out that he married while on assignment in London. On top of it, she's the last one in her card circle to hear about it.

It does send Harriet into a tailspin, but since Hansen writes with a kind of caring, Capra-esque hand, Harriet bounces back. A later, post-funeral scene almost reduces the play to accusatory exchanges; yet, in the end, these women remember who their friends are.

The center of gravity is Janet, and Nancy Chris Evans gives her some added color while making sure she plays the perfect hostess and patient war bride. Adams and Murray spar with plenty of bad blood, but without the slightest hint of vulgar cattiness. Ruth Cordell, as the British bride with whom Harriet must learn to live, has a stunning monologue about surviving the bombing of Coventry that momentarily puts this home-front story on the front lines.

Mignini's Harriet is the most charming and most-felt creation, a performance that reveals how a woman running out of available male candidates is able to live with the cards life deals her. You tend to admire this Harriet all the more when you think what men in the same situation would do.

This is not great literature, but all elements here combine to reveal a very good example of what small theater in this town (in the shadows of NBC, Disney and Burbank Studios, no less) can do with few funds. Listen to sound designer James Doede's radio effects, or observe Greg Parry's meticulous costumes (especially Mary Louise's teen-age-to-military service-to high-style changes). When you hear people using that ubiquitous phrase "dedication to craft", the work in "String of Pearls" is what they're talking about.

Daily New -- WWII waged on homefront with verbal missiles in "Pearls"

by Lawrence Enscoe, Daily News Writer, November 22, 1988

BURBANK - World War II did not just rage across Europe. To the audience of Elizabeth Hansen's play, "A String of Pearls," it feels like it also was fought in the front room of Rob and Janet Osterlough's New York apartment.

Here four women meet every Wednesday night for a game of bridge while their husbands or boyfriends are involved in the war effort. But it does not matter that the ladies are far away from the Allied front; there is enough drama, anger, betrayal and battling going on here to fill the beach at Normandy.

In fact, Hansen does not even let the audience in the door before the missiles are flying, as unbridled writing lets off some heavy expositional artillery, that should be saved for later use.

But, thankfully, just as the viewer is about to get shell shocked, the playwright's hand puffs away from the trigger and the play settles into a fine psycho-melodrama about the effect of war on the women who stayed at home, and how everyone grew up in the four years that changed the United States forever.

A String of Pearls Promotional Material by Elizabeth Hansen

"A String of Pearls," which is having its West Coast premiere at the intimate Gypsy Theater in Burbank, is a wonderful addition to the women-who-stayed-behind canon of war tales superbly acted by an ensemble that slides into Hansen's sharply drawn characters like a well-worn glove.

The play opens just after Pearl Harbor with the dowdy and conservative Janet (Nancy Chris Evans), the snobbish married-into-money Maxine (Laurel Adams) and her petulant half-sister, Mary Louise (Dina Murray). The three are waiting for a fourth player, Harriet (Carolyn Magnini) whom no one really knows, but a much-needed fourth is hard to find. Harriet turns out to be a hoot. A down-home gal with a penchant for barnyard anecdotes, calling things like they are, and generally shaking up some pretty stale existences.

The four settle into a rocky though consistent game over the next few years, with a lot more emotional bluffing and calling than actual card-playing. The only real encounters they have with the war raging on in the outside world is a disembodied newscaster's voice over the radio. That is until Janet gets a surprise guest from Britain named Elizabeth (Ruth Cordell), who brings the confrontation much closer to home.

Hansen's structure is unwieldy, and much too long, with some red pencilling in order to pare scenes down and pull some of the maudlin elements out. Hansen is also too quick to show her hand, with emotional turns and plot mechanizations in the New York apartment that can be spotted back in Des Moines.

Where Hansen shines is in her crystal clear characterizations and her amazing ear for capturing dialogue. She is also a master at the one-liner, filling this show with some absolute gems of repartee. And the cast the Gypsy has assembled does the writing great justice. They are a string of pearls in their own right with Director Jill Andre keeping everything tight and shiny.

Magnini is very engaging, with a smile that would make a pig give up its slop. Her role is filled with a careful mix of strength and weakness - someone who appears to be able to stand up against anything but has a vulnerable, almost child-like quality beneath that can turn things around at any moment.

Adams gives an outstanding performance as she turns an icy stare, or flips an ascerbic barb - all the while an easy target for wounds herself. She has the best one-liners in the show, delivered with a razor-sharp sense of timing.

Murray has the longest way to go in the show, moving from pouty teen, to vibrant young bride, to an angry, embittered much-older woman. The war does its greatest damage to her, a symbol of a young, isolationist country that has found out the world hurts. Murray does all of the above with striking clarity - from first spoiled face to last angry flare.

Evans offers the perfect bland performance for a complacent domestic woman, scared of the whole world. She also grows up, finding an inner strength she never had before. It is a marvelous bit of understated acting.

Cordell is also very good, particularly in the scene where she cuts through the cool British veneer and tells Janet what life is really like in jolly old England. Although the written monologue is a little overfraught with melodrama, Cordell delivers it with dignity and depth.

The designers of the show have really captured a sense of the '40s in the small Gypsy space. Bryan Godwin's detailed and well-worn set is endlessly watchable. However, the director needs to add a few people to the stage crew or cut some of the stage dressing in the blackouts. The scene changes are excruciatingly long.

Greg Parry's costume design is smart and colorful, particularly on Adams and Magnini. It's great fun watching their dueling get-ups.

A String Of Pearls

L.A. Review / January 25-February 9, 1989 / By Randi Lesser

The power of the new play *String Of Pearls*, directed by Jill Andre, lies in the striking characterizations and performances of the women Involved.

On the home front during World War II, the play's women struggle to keep their composure and high spirits. Conflicts arise between two half-sisters: the innocent and beautiful Mary Louise (Dina Murray) and her much older, more make-up perfect sister Maxine (Laurel Adams). Proper and prudish Janet (Nancy Chris Evans) holds the play together with her maternal instincts and continued concern. Especially memorable is Harriet (Carolyn Mignini), who is 32, husband-less, and waiting (her boyfriend is at war). Mignini brings a humorous and lovable wit to these proceedings while still possessing an undercurrent of war-time worry. Also, the radio sounds and stage design cater perfectly to the years 1941-45.

One might expect to see a play of this quality at a much larger theater. Therefore, It was a pleasure to see *A String Of Pearls* at a place so intimate as The Gypsy Playhouse. Although I would not recommend this play for young children, other family members will find it humorous, sensitive and extremely entertaining. *A String Of Pearls* runs indefinitely.