

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

A Dark Comedy

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

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THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

Winner of seven Metropolitan Atlanta Theatre Awards for Best Overall Performance of a Play, Best Ensemble Acting, Best Director (Scott Rousseau), Best Lead Actor (Tyler Buckingham), Best Lead Actress (Kate Guyton), Best Sound Design (Amy Levin) & Best Costume Design (Nancye Quarles), 2018

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

Play by Daniel Guyton

Story Idea by L. Marcus Williams

Dedicated to Scott Rousseau – a brilliant director and friend.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON premiered at Onion Man Productions (James Beck, Managing Director) in Chamblee, GA, in October 2017. It was directed by Scott Rousseau. The stage manager and props master was Chris Franken. The sound designer was Amy Levin. The costume designer was Nancye Quarles. The set designer was Scott Rousseau. The lighting designer was James Beck. The cast was as follows:

HENRIETTA – Kate Guyton

ELENORE – Sadye Elizabeth

MAUDE – Lisa Gordon

MR. BABCOCK – Tyler Buckingham

MR. FENNIMORE – John Courtney

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON was subsequently produced by Cone Man Productions (Christine Weems, Artistic Director) in Houston, TX, in January 2018. It was directed by Cheramie Hopper. The board operators were Sundi Lee and Milo Michel. The set designer was Clinton Hopper. The lighting designer was Kacie Adams. The cast was as follows:

HENRIETTA – Esme LeJeune

ELENORE – Annie Wild

MAUDE – Sylvia Armendáriz

MR. BABCOCK – Ian Lewis

MR. FENNIMORE – Luke Hal

CHARACTERS:

MAUDE – Elderly, dressed in black mourning attire

HENRIETTA – Middle-aged, wears white with a hint of black

ELENORE – 16, wears brightly colored clothing

MR. BABCOCK – 22, handsome, wears a top hat and coattails

MR. FENNIMORE – Undertaker, brooding, thick Cockney accent

SETTING:

The town of ORPINGTON – a suburb of LONDON, known for its poultry of the same name. It is the Victorian Era (circa 1882), and the costumes should reflect this. However, the set may be as elaborate or as minimalistic as desired.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

ACT I
SCENE 1

Three ladies of varying ages, dressed in varying degrees of hen-like feathering. The oldest woman, MAUDE, is dressed in black. The middle woman, HENRIETTA, is dressed in white with black spotting, and the youngest woman, ELENORE, is dressed in a white frock with yellow trim. The two younger ladies are drinking tea. Maude stares solemnly at the ground. Elenore stares nervously at her cup. Henrietta stares pleasantly at both of them.

HENRIETTA. Mumsy, are you sure you wouldn't like some tea? *(Maude does not acknowledge her)* You must eat something, you know. *(Beat)* Elenore? *(Elenore stares at her, blankly. After an excruciating, painfully long silence, Henrietta finally coughs and looks away)* You mustn't slouch, dear. *(Elenore looks back at her tea)* Mumsy, I wish you would have some tea. Father's been dead for six weeks now and you mustn't mope about.

ELENORE. *(Whispering)* Mother.

HENRIETTA. Well, she mustn't! When your father died, I certainly didn't mope about the house for six weeks. There was work to be done! Between the gardening, the housekeeping, and managing Papa's affairs. There was no time at all to be giving in to such humours. *(To Maude)* It's all well and good for you, isn't it, Mother? To sit around idly by while the rest of us go and do your handiwork? *(Maude does not reply. Henrietta stands haughtily and crosses to the mantel. She wipes dust off it with*

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

her gloved finger) My goodness. This place is a pig sty. Is that how you'd like to live, Mama? In a pig sty? Well, I'll be more than happy to oblige you, if you wish. Elenore, go be a dear and fetch me two sows from outside. Perhaps the fat one who sleeps near the woodshed? Perhaps they can keep Mama company. *(Maude looks at Henrietta for the first time. It is a look of disgust)* Oh good. We have some recognition. *(Henrietta touches Maude, and talks very loudly)* Welcome back to the sitting room, Mama. Would you like a spot of tea?

MAUDE. *(Brushing her off)* Blechh.

HENRIETTA. Hmm... Perhaps I have used too much water. *(Quickly)* Elenore? Come. We shall leave Mama to her humours. *(Henrietta starts to exit)* Elenore?

ELENORE. *(Meekly)* I'd like to stay with Grandmama, please. *(Maude and Elenore share a glance)*

HENRIETTA. *(Hurt)* I see. In her pig sty. *(Henrietta reenters)* Well then, perhaps we'll all just sit around and sip from Grandma's trough. *(Henrietta picks up her tea and chugs it)* Mmm, yes. It's not quite as good as the housemaids used to make it, I suppose. *(She sits)* I am sorry, Mama. I've said some terrible things just now. And I... Well, it's just that I have been trying. So hard. To keep things going in this household. After Edgar's death, and now... Papa's... We're all alone here, aren't we? Three women. And poor Elenore isn't married. *(Looking at her)* Lord knows with her complexion, she may never have that privilege.

ELENORE. *(Whispering)* Mama!

HENRIETTA. Well, it's true! You can't help it, dear. *(She pats her daughter's knee)* And we all love you very much. But the good Lord hath blessed you with the gravest assurance of chastity this town has ever seen. *(She stands)* So where does that leave us? A mother who refuses to clean an inch. A daughter incapable of marriage. And I, poor I, like a ship caught at port beneath a raging tempest – pulling hard against the tethered riggings, thrashing violently against the sturdy moor, yearning

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

desperately to sail out into the open ocean, yet halted brusquely by the sturdy clove knot of some bastard yeoman who strung us to the pier. Yield too far in one direction, and I'll split apart. List too far into the other, and there's no telling what uncertainties might await. There's so much darkness in the world today. So many vast and unimaginable abstractions. How on Earth can we go on, if not together? How can we survive, dear Mother, if not by strapping ourselves in unison to the mast? *(She takes both of their hands)* This tempest threatens to engulf us, Elenore. If we do not engage together, then we're not likely to survive! Come, if you do not wish to see us go asunder, then you must join with me, my loves! My daughter and my mother! And we must pull with all our might against these riggings! *(Pause)*

ELENORE. How do you know so much of sailing, Mother? You speak as if you've gone a hundred times.

HENRIETTA. *(Sitting, depressed)* Oh, I used to read your father's novels. While he lived. I read one once of a giant whale, and a sea captain who chased after him unto the farthest reaches of the ocean. It was quite romantic, in a way. And I remember one by a Mr. Verne, an- another American, I believe. This one told of a giant squid with many arms who attacked their steel submersible. I must say, the oceans are filled with giant *things*, aren't they? It's a wonder so many ships can make it home at all, with those conditions. *(To herself)* Perhaps staying at the port is healthier, now that I consider it. *(Small pause)* Well then, come now, we're all done with the afternoon tea. Let us withdraw ourselves to the kitchen to begin our supper preparations. Mama, will you be staying inert for the rest of the evening? *(Small pause)* Good then. Carry on. *(She starts towards the door)*

ELENORE. Mama?

HENRIETTA. Hm? Yes, dear?

ELENORE. *(Nervously)* I'm... not certain how to prepare the supper. Mrs. Edmund always did that for us.

HENRIETTA. I know, dear. But Papa died without telling us where he hid the money. And... Mama's not helping in that

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

regard, so I couldn't possibly ask Mrs. Edmund to work for free, now could I? The poor dear stayed an extra two weeks for us as it was. Now, I did what I had to do, my darling. Mrs. Edmund understood. And so should you. Now, please. I will require your assistance in the kitchen. *(Reluctantly, Elenore stands)*

MAUDE. *(Faintly)* Marvin... *(They turn to look at her)*

HENRIETTA. Hmm? Yes mother? *(Pause)* Well, all right. Will you be fine by yourself for a few moments? *(They start to exit)*

MAUDE. Marvin... *(The two ladies turn around again)*

HENRIETTA. Are you starving, Mother? I offered you some tea.

MAUDE. *(Bitterly)* Marvin! *(Small pause)*

HENRIETTA. Marbles?

ELENORE. No, I believe she's saying Marvin, Mother.

HENRIETTA. Marvin? But what on Earth is Marvin?

ELENORE. No, I think it's a name.

HENRIETTA. A name? I've never heard of such a name.

MAUDE. Marvin.

HENRIETTA. Yes, I hear you, Mother. But who or what is Marvin?

MAUDE. Marvin.

HENRIETTA. I see, but... *(To Elenore)* Is she saying marmalade, perhaps? I think she's hungry.

ELENORE. No, it's Marvin, Mother. She's clearly saying...

MAUDE. Marvin.

ELENORE. Yes.

MAUDE. Marvin... Marvin... Marvin...

ELENORE. *(To Henrietta)* See?

HENRIETTA. But who on Earth is Marvin? Papa's name was Benedict, Mother. Not Marv—

MAUDE. Marvin!

HENRIETTA. *(Offended)* Well, there's no need to shout about it.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MAUDE. *(Shouting louder)* MARVIN!!! *(Elenore tries to soothe her, but Maude grows increasingly agitated and louder until she's nearly hysterical)*

ELENORE. Grandmama, please...

MAUDE. MARVIN! MARVIN! MARVIN!

HENRIETTA. I don't understand why you're behaving this way, mother.

MAUDE. *(Starting to sob)* MARVIN!! MARVIN!!

HENRIETTA. My word, Mumsy, what has gotten into you?

ELENORE. Grandmama, please... It's ok...

MAUDE. *(Starting to shriek between her tears)* MARVIN!!! MARVIN!!! MARVIN!!! *(She falls to the ground sobbing and wailing his name. Elenore backs away from her, concerned)*

HENRIETTA. I swear, she can be a spoiled brat sometimes. *(She leans over Maude, overly enunciating)* I cannot assist you, Mother, if I don't know what it is you want. *(Maude grabs Henrietta violently and pulls their faces close together. She whispers, angrily)*

MAUDE. Marvin. *(A pane of glass shatters in the next room. They all gasp and look. Even Maude is terrified)* Marvin? *(A heavy door creaks open in the next room. A gust of wind and the sound of rain. We hear footsteps on broken glass. Then, a strange thump of a walking stick intermingled with the footsteps. They are soft at first, then get louder as they approach the room. They also get quicker paced, as if someone is running to get to them from a tremendous distance. The ladies look terrified. Suddenly, the running stops. An eerie silence befalls the room. Then, with an air of casual acquaintance, a well-dressed man in a top hat and cane appears)*

MR. BABCOCK. Oh. Forgive me, ladies. I did not mean to startle you. I was merely intending to rap ever-so-gently upon yonder exterior window pane of yours when... *(He shoves the head of the cane through his fingertips which are shaped like an 'o'. He makes a clicking sound with his tongue when he does this)* my clumsy staff went right on through. I'll pay for the window,

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

of course. *(He removes his wallet)* Such troublesome apertures. Always breaking when you least expect it. How much would you say? Ten shilling? Six crown? Fourteen guinea? *(He holds out the money. No one moves)* I've never paid for a window before, so I'm afraid I have no idea what one might...

HENRIETTA. Who are you?

MR. BABCOCK. Oh. Forgive me, ladies. *(He removes his hat. Rain water drips from it. He bows)* My name is Marvin. *(Maude faints. Lights out)*

SCENE 2

Lights up. The furniture has moved 1/4 clockwise.

MR. BABCOCK. I say. Will she be all right?

HENRIETTA. She's fine. Marvin who?

MR. BABCOCK. *(Returning from his bow)* Oh. Babcock, my lady. At your pleasure.

HENRIETTA. Babcock? As in... Sir Chesterfield Babcock?

MR. BABCOCK. Why yes, Madam. Sir Chesterfield Babcock was my grandfather.

HENRIETTA. Grandfath-? But, Chesterfield's younger than I am. He... *(She catches herself)* Well, that is, I... believed him to be. I...

MR. BABCOCK. *(Laughing gaily)* Oh, good heavens, no, my lady! You're thinking of my uncle, Sir Chesterfield Babcock the Younger. The current Lord of Barnstaple. Sir Chesterfield Babcock the *Elder* was... my grandfather. Former Lord of Barnstaple. He's been dead for seven years now, though. God rest his soul.

HENRIETTA. *(Pleased)* Oh. *(Catching herself, then resuming politeness)* I am very sorry for your loss. *(She brightens instantly)* Speaking of which... Have you met my mother, Lady Maude Bantam of the Rosecomb line? Her great-great-great

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

grandfather Henry Rosecomb was a direct descendent of King Richard the Third! *(He looks at Maude, lying prostrate on the ground)*

MR. BABCOCK. Well, I'm... not quite certain I'd recognize her from this position.

HENRIETTA. Oh, of course! Of course! I do apologize. *(Henrietta rushes to Maude's side)* Mumsy, please get up. You're embarrassing me. *(To Mr. Babcock)* I swear, old age and laziness do not go hand in hand. *(She pats Maude's face)* Mother, please wake up now.

MAUDE. Hmm? What? Where am I?

HENRIETTA. You're in the sitting room, mother. And we have company. *(Whispering urgently)* Very handsome company. *(Maude looks around, confused)*

MAUDE. Hmm? What am I doing in the sitting room?

HENRIETTA. You're lying down, Mother. *(Maude struggles to get up. Henrietta helps her)*

MAUDE. Oh, don't be absurd! I... Why should I be lying down in the sitting room?!? I have no business to be – *(She sees Mr. Babcock, and trails off)* lying down.

HENRIETTA. Mother, this is Marvin. *(Long pause)*

MAUDE. Yes. I see. *(She walks to her chair)* But what on God's green Earth is Marvin?

HENRIETTA. It's his name, Mother. Marvin Babcock. Grandson of Sir Chesterfield Babcock. The Elder. Former Lord of Barnstaple.

MR. BABCOCK. *(Bowing)* How do you do, Ma'am?

MAUDE. *(Disdainfully)* I am quite well, thank you. *(Whispering to Henrietta)* What kind of name is Marvin?

HENRIETTA. I don't know, Mother. But, you were shouting it several moments ago.

MAUDE. *(Shouting)* Shouting! And why should I be shouting? And surely not a name I've never heard before! Don't be ridiculous! *(To Mr. Babcock, irritated)* Welcome, Lord Marvin.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

And please do excuse my daughter's exaggerations. She has much of her father in her, I'm afraid. (*Mr. Babcock nods*)

MR. BABCOCK. The name is Welch, my lady.

MAUDE. Hm?

MR. BABCOCK. The name Marvin comes from Wales. My *mother* comes from Wales.

HENRIETTA. Oh, yes. I do recall now that Chet would often visit his Aunt Louisa out in Wales from time to... (*They all turn to look at her*) time.

MR. BABCOCK. Hm?

ELENORE. Mother?

HENRIETTA. (*Embarrassed*) I meant... Sir Chesterfield. Babcock. The Younger. Current Lord of Barnstaple, of course.

MR. BABCOCK. (*Smiling*) Of course.

HENRIETTA. (*Changing the subject*) Marvin, have you met my daughter Elenore? She'll be seventeen this April. (*Whispering, to him*) And as yet, unpromised.

ELENORE. (*Whispering, to her*) Mama! (*Henrietta shrugs at her. Mr. Babcock bows and kisses Elenore's hand*)

MR. BABCOCK. My dear Lady Elenore. (*Elenore blushes and curtsies*)

ELENORE. Good sir.

MR. BABCOCK. I must say, you're even more beautiful in person, than in all the tales I've heard about you.

ELENORE. You've heard tales about m—? (*Henrietta quickly takes Mr. Babcock by the arm and leads him away from her*)

HENRIETTA. You've heard tales about my daughter?

MR. BABCOCK. Why yes, I've... (*Loud enough so Elenore can hear*) heard it said that Elenore Dumpy is the fairest, sweetest, and the loveliest creature in all the town of Orpington.

MAUDE. Pah! The only person telling tales in here is *you*! (*They all look at her*)

HENRIETTA. Mother? What are you saying?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MAUDE. Hm? What? I haven't said a word, dear. I'm merely minding my own business. *(Maude fiddles with something in her lap. Henrietta and Elenore share a glance)*

HENRIETTA. You must forgive her sudden outbursts, Mr. Babcock. She's a tad bit feeble-minded and elderly, you know how that is.

MAUDE. Feeble-minded? You dare to call *me* feeble-minded! *(She stands)* I've half a mind to show you just how feeble-minded I am!

HENRIETTA. Please. Do pay no attention to her, Marvin. *(Maude stands on the chair and begins to jump)*

MAUDE. FEEBLE-MINDED! FEEBLE-MINDED!

HENRIETTA. Come now, tell me more about these tales you've heard.

MAUDE. FEEBLE! MINDED! FEEBLE! MINDED! FEEBLE! MINDED!

ELENORE. *(Wistfully)* They told you I was lovely?

MR. BABCOCK. I...

MAUDE. *(Still bouncing)* YOU'RE ALL FEEBLE-MINDED! EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU IS FEEBLE-MINDED!

HENRIETTA. Did they say anything about me? *(Maude stops jumping for a moment)*

MAUDE. Yes. They said you were feeble-minded!

MR. BABCOCK. Now, listen here, I don't... *(Maude resumes jumping)*

MAUDE. FEEBLE! MIND— *(Maude stops jumping and makes a choking noise. She struggles for a moment, her eyes roll to the back of her head, and she passes out)*

ELENORE. Grandmama! *(Elenore rushes to catch her just in time. Mr. Babcock moves to help, but Henrietta grabs him)*

HENRIETTA. Mr. Babcock, please! For the love of God, I must know! *(He stares at her, angrily)* Did they say anything about me? *(Mr. Babcock eyes her up and down)*

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MR. BABCOCK. Yes. They said you were adopted. (*Henrietta releases his arm. Mr. Babcock turns to help Elenore, who is tending to Maude. Lights out*)

SCENE 3

Lights up. The furniture has been moved another 1/4 clockwise. A fire burns in the fireplace. Mr. Babcock warms his fingers by it. Maude and Henrietta are not on stage. Elenore enters. She watches him for a moment, until he feels her presence and turns. She pretends not to have been watching him.

ELENORE. Mother wants to know if you'll stay for supper.

MR. BABCOCK. Yes, I would like that very much. (*Elenore nods and starts to exit*) Elenore? (*She turns back to him*) May I call you Elenore? (*She nods*) I meant what I said before. About you being lovely. (*Elenore smiles and blushes*)

ELENORE. You're lovely too. (*Mr. Babcock smiles. She looks away, embarrassed*) My mother says that I'm poor-complexioned. That I have... facial warts and acne and that I'll never meet a man. (*Mr. Babcock touches her face with one hand*)

MR. BABCOCK. You've met me, haven't you? (*She touches his hand, hopefully*)

ELENORE. My skin... does not repulse you? (*He touches her face with both hands*)

MR. BABCOCK. On the contrary. I find your beauty marks compelling. (*She blushes*)

ELENORE. Oh. No one's ever called them beauty marks before. (*He kisses her on the beauty marks – each and every one of them – slowly, sensuously. She gulps*) Good sir, I... (*She pulls back slightly*) I feel like I should know you better. (*He stares into her eyes*)

MR. BABCOCK. Ask me anything.

ELENORE. I... (*Hopefully*) Did you show up just for me? (*He turns away, remorsefully*)

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MR. BABCOCK. No, I'm afraid. I had other business to attend to.

ELENORE. With Mama?

MR. BABCOCK. Hm?

ELENORE. With Mama? You... had other business to attend to with... Mama?

MR. BABCOCK. Oh no, I... Other business here in town. But... while I was here, I... heard about your grandfather. Passing. So, I figured I'd stop in. Deliver my condolences. And... accidentally break your window in. I do apologize for that, again.

ELENORE. I understand. But... how did you come to hear tales about me?

MR. BABCOCK. From the villagers, of course. In town. They said you were a handsome woman. Kissed by a god, they told me. Or... perhaps afflicted by a god, I... couldn't really hear their words. But, it sounded like a fondness they were speaking of you, and... I see that they were correct.

ELENORE. Would you take me with you?

MR. BABCOCK. Hm?

ELENORE. Back to Wales. Or... wherever it is you're going. After this. *(Pause)*

MR. BABCOCK. I'm really... very hungry, actually. *(He smiles and rubs her shoulders)* Why don't we discuss this after supper? *(She nods)*

ELENORE. Yes. Of course, my lord. *(She starts to exit)*

MR. BABCOCK. Elenore. *(She turns back)* Please. Call me Marvin. *(Pause. She nods and exits)* Hmm, kissed by a frog, more like it. *(He removes a napkin and wipes his lips and tongue off, and turns back to the fire. Lights out)*

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

SCENE 4

Lights up. Stage has rotated another 1/4 clockwise. The fireplace is gone, and Mr. Babcock warms himself while facing the audience. Henrietta enters behind him, with a tray of tea and biscuits.

HENRIETTA. I trust supper was to your liking?

MR. BABCOCK. Hm? Oh, yes. If you like burnt sausages, that is. *(He resumes warming himself. Henrietta is taken aback)* Do you have any more coals, by the way? The fire's going out.

HENRIETTA. Oh. We have some more kindling out by the wood shed. I'll have... Elenore go and fetch some for you, if...

MR. BABCOCK. Bah. Nonsense. What's the point of having a big strong man around the house if I can't do some of the heavy lifting for you from time to time? *(He smiles as he dons his coat and hat)*

HENRIETTA. But you're our guest.

MR. BABCOCK. *(Smiling)* Am I?

HENRIETTA. I... *(After a pause, she sets the tray down)* I brought some tea for you. And... biscuits. For when you return. Normally, Papa would offer you a cigar at this point, but I'm... afraid we haven't any in the household. And as you're the only gentleman here tonight, I... daresay I'm not entirely certain what the proper protocol is for such an occasion. That is... you see... He's... left things in a terrible disarray. Papa. He's passed away in such a hurry.

MR. BABCOCK. I see. And all your servants? Where are they?

HENRIETTA. It's... *(Small pause)* It's been a very difficult time, Mr. Babcock. Now, please. Go out to the wood pile, and then enjoy your biscuits. *(She starts to exit)*

MR. BABCOCK. And?

HENRIETTA. *(Turning back)* Hm?

MR. BABCOCK. Aren't you going to invite me to spend the evening?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. I... Of course. If... you wish to?

MR. BABCOCK. (*Tipping his hat*) Most indeed. For you see, it will be a great many miles until my next sojourn. And I would hate to start off on such a journey at this dreadful hour of the evening. I would very much like to stay, Miss Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. Of... of course. I'll... Well, I'll go and make up the servants' quarters. They've been vacant for quite some time now. And... while I'm certain they're not as lofty as you're used to, they'll...

MR. BABCOCK. What about in your bed? (*He steps close to her*)

HENRIETTA. I... beg your pardon?

MR. BABCOCK. I said, why don't I sleep in your bed? It's the largest in the county, from what I've been told. (*He plays with the feathers on her collar*)

HENRIETTA. Oh! Mr. Babcock! This is highly... (*She gulps*) inappropriate. (*He releases her feathers*)

MR. BABCOCK. Oh. No. I... believe you've misunderstood me, Madam. I meant, why don't I sleep in your bed? And you can go and sleep in the servants' quarters? It is customary after all to treat your guests to the finest that your household has to offer, is it not?

HENRIETTA. I dare say, it is not... how I would... prefer...

MR. BABCOCK. (*Bowing politely*) Please. Allow me to rephrase my question. You see, I was brought up in a tiny cottage just outside of Barnstaple. For eleven years of my life, I was raised to believe that I was the simple son of a lowly goat-herd. The man who cared for me was a lovely chap whom I used to call my da. His hands were rough and calloused, like the skin of a dead rhinoceros. Now, up until my 11th birthday, I believed... nay, I knew it in my soul, that I was worthless. A goat farmer's lowly offspring. Worth little more than the quart and a half of milk I routinely squeezed out of our nannie's wretched teat. But on that fateful morning, at a quarter past 11... It was actually 11 past 11, if my memory serves... On the date of my 11th

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

birthday... In the eleventh month of the year, no less, I discovered something marvelous. You see, our landlord, Sir Chesterfield Babcock... The Elder, that is... came down to survey his land. He rode up in a horse-drawn carriage, gleaming brilliantly in the tardy morning sun. The golden wreaths of Caesar were embossed upon his doorknobs, and his rails were solid brass. When he stepped celestially from that chariot, it was as though I'd seen the face of God. No man could be that heavenly, and yet... here was the Almighty, standing here before me. He called out to me in a basso profundo voice. "You! Dear boy! Come hither!" He asked me what my name was.

"Marvin." I replied. "Marvin Penburie, my lord. At your service."

"Marvin Penburie", he repeated, in a tone that one could only describe as jovial. The wretch whom I used to call my da approached. He bowed profusely before this goliath and offered his sincere apologies. For you see, it had rained a tempest on the eve before, and the farm was in a shambles. "Nonsense," said Lord Babcock. "For I have come on happy tidings. For you see, it is my grandson's 11th birthday."

"But, my lord!" the calloused man protested.

(As Sir Chesterfield) "Tut tut. You knew this day would come." He placed a gentle hand upon my shoulder. "My boy." He leaned in close to me. So close that I could smell the apple brandy on his breath. "You look just like your father. He was a difficult lad. But I dare say that I loved him. I wish I could tell you a delightful tale of a Prodigal Son, who'd returned home after a lifetime of debauchery and sin into his loving father's open arms. But, alas, your father died almost a year ago, traveling upon a merchant vessel that was capsized heading out to sea. But, before he passed away – slightly more than 11 years before he passed away – he had a dalliance with your mother..." *(Pause)* I recall him here looking at the shattered remnants of the goat-herd whom I used to call my da, with an air of pity, and of scorn. "A slattern. A low-born, pathetic woman, who seduced your father, and gave

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

birth to you, dear Marvin. But she did not survive the process. Ashamed, terrified of what my wrath might be, your father, my son, begged this here goat-herd to be your father, and to raise you as his own. He paid him forty shillings...”

“Twenty.” The wretch who used to call himself my father interrupted. *(Pause)*

“Twenty.” Sir Chesterfield repeated. “And then he fled to Scotland. Out there, he turned to gambling, and to drink, and eventually joined the Royal Navy. But had I known... Oh, my dear lad, if only I had known, I would have raised you as my own precious son. I swear this to you with all my heart. Alas, I’ve only just now discovered you through his letters, tucked away inside your father’s trunk. Letters that I surely never would have opened, save for grief which transported me to madness upon his death. It was in those letters that I’ve discovered your existence, and that, my boy, is why I’m here today. I wish to raise you as my grandson, and not some... lowly goat-herd.” *(To the Goat-herd)* “No offense, good man.” *(To Marvin)* “For surely, you’re a Babcock, my dear boy, and not a Penburie at all.”

HENRIETTA. Good sir, why on Earth are you telling me all of...?

MR. BABCOCK. *(Cutting her off)* Now, my grandfather took me in immediately. He raised me in a palatial estate, treated me with figs. I had servants waiting on me endlessly. To feed me, bathe me, tend to my every whim and base desire. He sent me on safari on my thirteenth birthday. To sub-Saharan Africa. I shot a dozen elephants, a lion, two rhinoceri, and 17 giraffes. I say, you’ve never lived a day until you’ve stood upon the carcass of a dead giraffe. He raised me as a nobleman from that day forward, despite my bastard roots. He gave me a taste for the finer things in life. I’ve eaten caviar for breakfast. I’ve played cricket with the Prince of Wales. And, ever since that fateful day 11 years ago... no matter how I try, no matter what I do, I simply cannot fall asleep upon a servant’s bed. Therefore, I will sleep in yours or I shall not sleep at all. I hope you understand.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. I... *(He puts both hands upon her shoulders)*

MR. BABCOCK. My dear Miss Henrietta, I will say again. You will make your bed for me. And you will make the servant's bed for you. And I shall hear no more about it. Understood? *(Small pause)*

HENRIETTA. I... Yes, my lord. *(She starts to exit)*

MR. BABCOCK. Oh, and Henrietta?

HENRIETTA. Hm? *(He removes his coat and hat)*

MR. BABCOCK. Would you be a dear and fetch some wood for me outside? It's far too cold for me out there. *(He pours some tea)*

HENRIETTA. As... as you wish, my lord. *(She exits. He picks up a biscuit and attempts to eat it. It is hard as a rock. Lights out)*

SCENE 5

The stage has rotated another 1/4 clockwise – back to where it began. A rooster crows as sunlight trickles in. Maude and Elenore are seated as they were in Scene 1, although wearing different outfits. Maude is still in mourning, but with a bit more color than before. Elenore is in a yellow dress, but a bit more drab than earlier.

MAUDE. *(Irritated)* Humph. I don't know what to make of it.

ELENORE. Hmm?

MAUDE. A strange man sleeping in our home. Your mother not awake in time for breakfast. It's turning into cobwebs, if you ask me. This whole estate will turn to dust if we're not careful.

ELENORE. I don't know, Grandmama. I... sort of like it.

MAUDE. What? Destruction?

ELENORE. No. Excitement. The house feels brighter now. It's...

MAUDE. Disturbing. Who will feed the chickens now? The pigs?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

ELENORE. I'll take care of it. As... as I always do.

MAUDE. Puh. You'll take care of the flower petals and the dandelions, from the look within your eyes.

ELENORE. I think he fancies me.

MAUDE. Who? The dandelion?

ELENORE. No. The... *(She points upwards)* The man upstairs.
(Maude looks up)

MAUDE. Hmm. Yes. Well. Blessèd are the meek, the Bible says.

ELENORE. No. I mean... directly upstairs. Mr. Babcock.
(Maude rolls her eyes)

MAUDE. Puh. I wouldn't trust him. He isn't who he says he is.

ELENORE. I think he's nice.

MAUDE. Yes, well I think you're a fool, is what I think.

ELENORE. *(Brazenly)* He kissed me, you know.

MAUDE. Oh, I'll bet he did.

ELENORE. He told me I was lovely.

MAUDE. I think he's lied to you.

ELENORE. *(Hurt)* Well... if you must know, he was a perfect gentleman.

MAUDE. Your grandfather was a perfect gentleman, and I certainly never made eyes at *him*, the way you've made eyes at Mr. Babcock. Oh no, my dear, I don't believe he's been a gentleman at all. In fact, I'd say it's a rather rare thing for a woman to get all dewy eyed and sentimental over a *perfect* gentlemen now, isn't it? Surely, there must be something *scandalous* about him, or else why would he elicit such emotion?

ELENORE. Well, I don't think you're correct, Grandmama. I think he is a gentleman. And I think he's very much in love with me.

MAUDE. And your mother calls *me* the loony one. Which reminds me, where is your mother? I feel as though I haven't eaten in days.

ELENORE. You haven't.

MAUDE. Hm? Oh, nonsense. I ate just yesterday. I'm sure of it.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

ELENORE. No, Grandmama, we tried. But...

MAUDE. No, I'm certain of it. I remember. Chicken soup, with a... biscuit on the side. And I distinctly remember the biscuit because I chipped a tooth on it. One of my side ones...

ELENORE. No, that was Sunday. We haven't had chicken soup since Sunday. Today is Wednesday. *(Maude waves her away)*

MAUDE. Puh. Go and find your mother. *(Elenore nods and exits)* Marvin. What kind of name is Marvin? *(Henrietta enters, still in her nightgown)*

HENRIETTA. *(Yawning)* Oh, goodness. What time is it, Mother?

MAUDE. Time enough for you to be dressed and ready for the day, I'd say. What in the world has gotten into you?

HENRIETTA. I don't know. I... feel as though I haven't slept in years. My body aches, my neck is stiff. I don't know how the servants ever managed it.

MAUDE. The servants? What in heaven's name are you on about?

HENRIETTA. I... *(Elenore screams from off-stage)*

ELENORE. *(O.S.)* MR. BABCOCK! *(Sound of heels running across the floor. Elenore enters, and slams the door behind her)*

ELENORE. Mother! Why is Mr. Babcock in your bed?!?

HENRIETTA. I... *(Maude gapes at Henrietta)* It isn't what it looks like. I can assure you. *(Mr. Babcock runs in, completely naked)*

MR. BABCOCK. Elenore, I... *(He notices the women)* Oh. Forgive me, ladies.

HENRIETTA. Mr. Babcock, your... *(She points to it)* namesake is showing. *(He looks down and realizes. He grabs a tea tray and covers himself with it)*

MR. BABCOCK. I am very sorry, ladies. It appears that I may have given Miss Elenore here a little fright.

ELENORE. It wasn't little! *(They all look at her)* I mean, the fright. It was a... terrible fright. It wasn't little at all.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. I see. (*She turns to Mr. Babcock*) Mr. Babcock, I have given you permission to sleep in my bed last evening. (*The other women gasp*) Whilst *I* slept in the other room, of course. (*To Mr. Babcock*) But I feel you're beginning to take advantage now. I don't know how you do things back in Wales, good sir, but here in Orpington, we prefer to sleep with our clothing on.

MR. BABCOCK. Of course. I am terribly sorry, madam. (*He starts to exit*)

MAUDE. Mr. Babcock? (*He stops in the doorway*) You look awfully familiar to me.

MR. BABCOCK. Do I?

HENRIETTA. But, of course, Mother. You saw him just last evening, when he arrived.

MAUDE. Yes. But... there's something familiar about all of this...

HENRIETTA. Familiar?!? About a naked man in our sitting room?

MR. BABCOCK. My dear ladies. With your permission...

HENRIETTA. Yes, yes. Please. Go on. (*To Maude*) Now Mother... (*Mr. Babcock starts to exit*)

MAUDE. Wait! Mr. Babcock? (*He stops and turns around again*)

MR. BABCOCK. Hmm? Yes?

MAUDE. I must know. What are your intentions here? With us?

MR. BABCOCK. Well, for the time being, my lady, I intend to be less undressed. Good day. (*He hands Elenore the tea tray, and exits. Maude smirks knowingly at Elenore*)

MAUDE. Not hiding something, hmm? No, I daresay he had it all laid out in front of us. Rather awkwardly, in my opinion. (*To Henrietta*) And what other room were you sleeping in, pray tell?

HENRIETTA. The... (*She lowers her head*) The servant's quarters. Mrs. Edmund's old... bedroom.

MAUDE. (*Shaking her head and chuckling*) Puh. You're all feeble-minded. Every last one of you. (*Maude stands, with Elenore's help, and exits. Lights out*)

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

SCENE 6

Lights up on the kitchen. Elenore and Henrietta prepare breakfast.

ELENORE. Mother, do you believe Mr. Babcock and I would make a decent match?

HENRIETTA. Well, I daresay, he's very well endowed. *(Beat)* Er... I mean, in fortune, from what I gather. Sir Chesterfield the Elder was a very wealthy man.

ELENORE. Whatever happened with...? *(She stops herself)*

HENRIETTA. Hm?

ELENORE. Nevermind.

HENRIETTA. Sir Chesterfield the Younger? Oh, he was an old... acquaintance of mine. Back in the glory days. A very fond acquaintance. But, he was betrothed to the Earl of Cambridge's daughter – her lady Mariah Eldervine. Alas, poor Chesterfield never had a chance.

ELENORE. *(Sadly)* Nor did you, it sounds like.

HENRIETTA. No, I suppose I didn't. But I met your father, and he was very good to me. Even after he died. He... left us a beautiful estate. I had furs, linens. Nearly everything a woman could desire. Of course, I... never really learned to manage it, the way he could. Something about the female brain. It's... Well, you know what your father always said. "Women are made for dainties and tarts..."

HENRIETTA & ELENORE. "And the men are made for smarts." *(Henrietta giggles)*

HENRIETTA. Yes, it's true. So, then Papa agreed to help, of course. Your... grandpapa. But we all know what happened there. *(She sighs)* Alas, I have no idea what he did with anything, apparently. He might have spent it all on drink, for all I can figure.

ELENORE. Grandpapa didn't drink!

HENRIETTA. No, but your grandmama sure did.

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

ELENORE. (*Scandalized*) Oh my. She did?!

HENRIETTA. Yes, and still does, for all I can figure. Though, Lord knows where she gets it from, since we haven't any money! But I suppose it was all just Papa's way of preparing his soul for Heaven, in a way. For it's like the Bible always tells us – it's easier by far to stick a needle in a camel's eye than for a rich man to get into Heaven. I suppose Papa's soul was in no danger by the end, according to that standard. And nor are either of ours, from the looks of it.

ELENORE. Well, that's... certainly one way to view our situation, Mama. (*Henrietta throws a dish to the ground, and it shatters*)

HENRIETTA. Oh, I'd rather go to hell than make another boiled omelet! Where on Earth is Mrs. Edmund?!?! And where the hell is Edgar's money?!? (*She grabs Elenore by the shoulders and shakes her*) Where on God's green Earth did Papa leave it?! (*Mr. Babcock enters, fully dressed*)

MR. BABCOCK. Oh. Good day, sweet ladies. Am I interrupting something? (*Henrietta releases Elenore, and turns away from them, embarrassed. Elenore cleans the broken dish*)

ELENORE. No. Mama and I were just preparing breakfast. (*Henrietta pretends to bake, sulkily*)

MR. BABCOCK. How delightful! Would you mind boiling me up an omelet before I leave? I have some dreadfully boring errands to attend to, up in town today, and I'd hate to do them on an empty stomach.

HENRIETTA. (*Laced with bitterness*) Of course. (*He tips his hat and starts to exit*)

ELENORE. Mr. Babcock? (*He turns back in*) Will you... be leaving us for good this afternoon? Or...? (*He takes her hand in his*)

MR. BABCOCK. Why, that decision lies entirely with you, my dear. (*He kisses her hand*) Would you like me to leave this afternoon?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

ELENORE. Oh no. I... *(She turns to Henrietta)* Mama? Can Mr. Babcock stay another evening? *(Henrietta feigns a smile)*

HENRIETTA. How nice. Yes, that would be most lovely, darling. Most... lovely, indeed. *(Mr. Babcock bows to Henrietta, then pulls Elenore's hand to his chest)*

MR. BABCOCK. Until this afternoon, my dear sweet Ms. Elenore. I shall count the hours like a rooster counts its hens. *(He kisses Elenore on the cheek, and exits. Elenore beams. Henrietta gapes)*

ELENORE. I think he loves me.

HENRIETTA. I think he'd better. Or I'll be boiling him up next. *(She takes a pot off the counter and crosses to the stove. Lights out)*

SCENE 7

The sitting room. The setup is nearly identical to Scene 1, except all three women are sipping tea now. They do so in an almost choreographed and comedic fashion. One sipping on the off-beat, the other two sipping on the on-beat, glasses clinking on saucers, etc. This carries on for a moment.

MAUDE. Ahem.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Yes, Mama?

MAUDE. I know you blame me, dear, but I had nothing to do with it.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Of course. *(They resume sipping tea for a moment. Henrietta stops)* Nothing to do with what, Mama?

MAUDE. With losing your father's money. I know you all think of me as feeble-minded, but I'm as sound as the day I was born. I assure you, I'd remember if I had lost it.

HENRIETTA. Of course you would, Mama. *(Whispering, to Elenore)* Unless you've spent it all on drink. *(Elenore rolls her eyes)*

MAUDE. Hmm? What?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. Nothing, Mama. Would you like some more tea to drink?

MAUDE. No. Have you tried the dresser drawers?

HENRIETTA. I'm sorry?

MAUDE. The dresser drawers. In Papa's room. Perhaps he's left the money there.

HENRIETTA. Well, yes, I checked the dresser drawers, Mama. I checked them three times just to be certain. It's nowhere to be found.

MAUDE. Because he often carried money inside his trousers, if I recall correctly. Did you check inside his trous—?

HENRIETTA. Yes, I checked inside his trousers, Mama. Every single... *(A thought crosses her mind)* pair. *(She turns to Elenore)* Elenore. Was Papa wearing trousers when he died?

MAUDE. *(Offended)* Well, I daresay that he was! He wasn't like some of these young men these days, running around all naked as a jaybird. No, Papa was a respectable man. A decent...

HENRIETTA. Yes, I know, Mama! Papa was a respectable man. Of course. But I need to know *which* trousers he was wearing, so I can determine if I've searched in them or not! *(Small pause)*

MAUDE. Oh.

ELENORE. They were grey, Mama. With frayed edges near the heel. I remember... because I found him face down near the woodshed on that dreadful morning. His legs were sticking out, and I thought, "How odd. The edges near his heels are frayed. I wonder why Mrs. Edmund hadn't taken the pains to mend them yet?" *(Both women look at her)*

HENRIETTA. That was the first thing you thought of when you saw my father lying dead?!

ELENORE. Oh no, Mama. The *first* thing I thought of was, "It's not even twelve o'clock. I wonder why grandpapa is sleeping near the woodshed." But then I saw his trousers, and I thought, "How odd. The edges near his heels are frayed. I wonder why Mrs. Edmund hadn't taken the..."

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. Yes, fine. But are those the pants we buried him in, or did we bury him in his blue ones?

ELENORE. I... can't remember.

HENRIETTA. Hmm.

MAUDE. What are you on about now?

HENRIETTA. (*Loudly, as to an invalid*) Was Papa buried in his blue trousers or his grey ones?

MAUDE. (*Offended*) Well, of course he was buried in his trousers! What do you think he was buried in, his pantaloons?!?

HENRIETTA. No Mama, he... (*She puts her teacup down*) Listen, I'll need to venture into town today, and visit Mr. Fennimore.

ELENORE. The undertaker?

HENRIETTA. Yes. If Papa left any money in his trousers, surely Mr. Fennimore would have found it.

ELENORE. But... wouldn't he have mentioned it by now?

HENRIETTA. (*Standing*) Perhaps. But, it doesn't hurt to make an inquiry, now does it?

ELENORE. But, perhaps he... considered that a part of his fee?

HENRIETTA. (*Annoyed*) Well, perhaps he considered wrongly then, now hasn't he? (*She straightens her dress*) I will be most polite, of course, but I will be watching his face for any sign of dissimulation. If he gives off even the slightest twitch, I'll know...

MAUDE. Know what?

HENRIETTA. Are you even listening, Mother? Or have you grown deaf as well as daft? (*Maude glares at her, bitterly*)

MAUDE. Lord knows I wish the cholera had taken you instead of your brother.

HENRIETTA. Yes, well... it didn't. So, you're left with me, I'm afraid. And I'm about to have a word with the undertaker.

MAUDE. (*Horried*) What?!? About what exactly?!?

HENRIETTA. About Papa's bloody trousers, that's what!! (*Maude shakes her head*)

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MAUDE. Puh. You young people and your trousers. In my day, we just kept them on, no matter what.

HENRIETTA. When did *you* ever wear trousers, Mama?
(*Maude spits on the ground and stares off into the distance*)

ELENORE. (*To Henrietta*) But Mama, suppose you find that... Mr. Fennimore *did* pilfer Grandpapa's money...

HENRIETTA. Our money!

ELENORE. Well, yes, but... whatever could you do about it? Surely, he wouldn't just hand it back to you, now would he?

HENRIETTA. Oh, you'd be very surprised, my dear. The mind of a thief is a multi-faceted thing. Perhaps he'd be so plagued with guilt upon hearing of our despair that he would say, "Oh, my dear Ms. Henrietta, my darling Ms. Henrietta, why haven't you come to me sooner? Of course I found your papa's money. But, finding neither the time nor proper moment to come and deliver it to you in person, I have instead secured it in a private safe for you, for the very moment you've returned."

And I would say, "Good Mr. Fennimore. My dear Mr. Fennimore. You have no inkling how indebted to you my family and I truly are." And I would curtsy to him with my fan, and invite him to our home for supper, and you, my pet, could play him an omaggio dolcissimo on the pianoforte, and he and I could dance the night away in a Varsouvienne. (*She dances with an imaginary Mr. Fennimore*)

MAUDE. And she calls *me* feeble-minded.

ELENORE. You wish to dance the night away with the undertaker?

HENRIETTA. And why not? He's a very well-established man. And he's never hurting for customers, that's for certain. And surely, he's a much better match than that... creature you've been ogling. (*A glass shatters in the next room*) Oh! What in the world? (*Another glass shatters. And another one. And another one. Each one getting closer and closer, and louder and louder*) Mr. Babcock? (*Silence. Then, the slow sound of trickling water. The women all look at each other, terrified. After a long moment,*

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

the door opens and Mr. Babcock enters, soaking wet, but casual as can be)

MR. BABCOCK. Oh, goodness me. Please accept my apologies, dear ladies. It appears that I've gone and shattered another one of your window panes. *(He holds up a bloody shard of glass)* Six of them, in fact. Dear me, I've been ever so clumsy lately. I shall pay for them, of course.

MAUDE. Nonsense Mr. Babcock! You're a guest of our household! You'll pay for no such thing. *(Henrietta gapes at Maude, who scowls back at her. Mr. Babcock nods at Maude)*

HENRIETTA. *(To Mr. Babcock)* But, if you're handy with a trowel and some putty, perhaps... *(He points the shard at her)*

MR. BABCOCK. Hmm?

HENRIETTA. I... Nevermind.

MR. BABCOCK. *(Pleasantly)* My dear Ms. Elenore. Might I have a word with you, perhaps? *(With a hint of menace)* Alone.

ELENORE. Of... of course, my lord. *(She looks back at her mother, then exits. Mr. Babcock starts to follow)*

HENRIETTA. Mr. Babcock?

MR. BABCOCK. Yes?

HENRIETTA. Is it... raining out? *(He shakes the water off his hat)*

MR. BABCOCK. Why no, Miss Henrietta. It's a perfectly pleasant day. *(He smiles and exits, holding the shard behind his back)*

HENRIETTA. I think there's something wrong with him.

MAUDE. *(Confused, as if she's only just now met him)* Oh? He seems like a perfect gentleman to me.

HENRIETTA. He's very clumsy.

MAUDE. Hmm. I hadn't noticed.

HENRIETTA. He's not at all like his uncle. Chesterfield was a gallant man. A... regular lothario. I daresay that charm was not passed down through his brother's lineage.

MAUDE. Are we absolutely certain that Chesterfield *had* a brother?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. Hmm?

MAUDE. I remember your engagement distinctly. You could not have married Lord Babcock, due to his betrothal, so we found you Edgar Dumpy, the milliner's son instead. Why didn't Chet's *brother* seek you out, if he was...?

HENRIETTA. Oh no, no, I'm sure of it. He was... in the Navy for a time. I... believe. While Chet and I were... friends. His name was Thomas. Sir Thomas Winnifred Babcock. Captain of the Royal Navy. I... never had the chance to meet him, of course, but... Chet would tell me tales of his adventures rather often. According to Marvin, though, he's... never met his father neither.

MAUDE. And don't you find that odd?

HENRIETTA. What? No. Lots of men die off before their children get to meet them. I think it's tragic, of course, but... certainly not odd. (*Elenore re-enters, with a confused look on her face*) Well? What did Mr. Babcock say?

ELENORE. He... asked me for my hand in marriage.

HENRIETTA. Oh? (*She and Maude share a knowing glance*) Well, then? Why do you look so troubled?

ELENORE. Because it wasn't to him. It was... to Mr. Fennimore, up in town.

HENRIETTA. (*Standing*) Mr. Fen—? The undertaker?!?

ELENORE. Yes. Apparently he's desired me for quite some time now. And... so he's asked Mr. Babcock to be the go-between.

HENRIETTA. (*Disgusted*) Mr. Fennimore desires *you*?

ELENORE. Well, that's... what he's told me anyway.

HENRIETTA. But why on Earth would Mr. Babcock...? (*Mr. Babcock enters*)

MR. BABCOCK. Yes?

HENRIETTA. Why on Earth are you proposing marriage to my daughter on another man's behalf? (*Mr. Babcock bows*)

MR. BABCOCK. It's what I do, madam.

HENRIETTA. It's... What do you *mean* it's what you do?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

MR. BABCOCK. And it wasn't a proposal, actually. As much as it was a sacred vow. *(The women all look at each other)*

HENRIETTA. And what on Earth do you mean by that?

MR. BABCOCK. I mean that I have sworn an oath to give your daughter's hand in marriage to Mr. Fennimore.

HENRIETTA. What?

ELENORE. Mama?

HENRIETTA. But why on Earth would...? *(Mr. Babcock steps menacingly close to her, with the shard of glass in his hand. She sits)*

MR. BABCOCK. Hm?

HENRIETTA. What... gives you the right to make decisions for our family, Mr. Babcock? When you are but a guest?

MR. BABCOCK. Am I? You see, you keep using this word "guest", madam, as if it meant something. But, in truth, I find it quite insulting.

HENRIETTA. In... In what way?

MR. BABCOCK. In what way?

ELENORE. In what way is that insulting? Are you not our guest?

MR. BABCOCK. A guest must be invited, Lady Elenore. A guest must be welcomed in with open arms. But, if I recall correctly, I had to force my way inside. I had to break your bloody window, if I'm not mistaken. Oh no, I am an intruder, Mistress Dumpy. I daresay, I am not your guest at all.

ELENORE. But, we gave you our permission...

MR. BABCOCK. Did you? No, I seem to recall you gave me acquiescence. But did you really have a choice? Two widows and a spinster. Whose face is all mangled with the devil's poxy? No, what choice had you at all? Your men had squandered their abundance, and left you desperate and absurd. You saw a handsome chap in your twilight hour of despair, and you became enamored. Not that I can blame you. I am rather stunning, after all. But, was it my appearance, or my charms, or merely my pretense of money that drew you in? And, after all, what could

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

you have done? Could you have asked me to depart? Escorted me outside? Or would that be impolite? And surely you can't imagine I would leave – not without a show of force? But, you haven't any servants. Not a weapon on the grounds. And what good are those weak, pathetic arms of yours against a virile, brutish man like me?

ELENORE. (*Threateningly*) We have a hatchet in the woodshed!

MR. BABCOCK. Oh? Well, do you now? I thank you, Lady Elenore. I shall procure it instantly. (*He starts to exit. Henrietta shoots Elenore a look. Maude rolls her eyes*) Oh, but one more thing before I leave – please don't bar the door against me while I'm gone. I shall only shatter more windows to regain my entrance. And the house is getting rather drafty, don't you think? (*He exits. Henrietta touches her chest in worry*)

HENRIETTA. Oh. Well, I never!

MAUDE. Puh. I told you he was up to no good.

HENRIETTA. No, you told him not to pay for the windows that he's shattered! Now, how on Earth will we repair the damage that he's inflicted?

ELENORE. (*Panicked*) Mother?

HENRIETTA. Hmm? Yes, dear?

ELENORE. Do I really have to marry Mr. Fennimore?

HENRIETTA. Oh. No, dear. Mr. Babcock is surely playing a jape of some kind, some... unfunny lark at our expense, and we'll sort everything out, I'm certain of it. (*She looks around*) But in the meantime, why is everything *wet*?

ELENORE. I don't believe he's playing a game, Mama. I believe he means it.

HENRIETTA. Oh, nonsense, Elenore. Mr. Babcock has no jurisdiction over our family's... (*The door kicks open violently, as Mr. Babcock enters with the hatchet*)

ALL THREE LADIES. Oh! Oh dear! Oh my! (Etc)

MR. BABCOCK. What are you three blathering on about now?

THREE LADIES OF ORPINGTON

HENRIETTA. I... *(To Elenore)* Well... Mr. Fennimore's a handsome man, really. When you get right down to it. I... suppose there are worse men that you could marry. *(She smiles)* Isn't that right, Mr. Babcock? *(He sneers.)*

END OF ACT 1

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