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# STAGES

**A Theatre Piece**

**in one act**

**by**

**JEROME McDONOUGH**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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(STAGES)

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### DEDICATION

**From one reluctant survivor to another:**

**to**

**June Legacy**

**who kept on believing even in the face of astonishing evidence to  
the contrary**

**and to**

**the original windsingers**

**Charis White, Charles Mixon, Mike Altendorf, Kristy Melton, George  
Yancey, Becky Lookingbill, Tim Harris, Janet Duke, Tim Purviance,  
James Wooten, Danny Oliver, and Rick Durmon**

**with special thanks to**

**Maurice Berger, Lynn Murray, and Dr. B. J. Stamps**

# STAGES

## *Cast of Characters*

FIGURE – the man in charge. For lack of a better term, the Playwright

DIRECTOR (D. T.) – a weary, cynical theatre worker

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ANGIE) – a young theatre idealist, ideals currently intact

STAGE MANAGER (THRASHER) – a theatre craftsman who has been pushed nearly to the end of his wits

## **The Ensemble**

CORRIE – the actress, devoted to her work. She has little, if any other life. Her role is the thread of the script. She acts various roles within the play, including the REJECTED GREEK DAUGHTER and all the GEORGIA roles (Shakespearean girl, inept young lady, Southern belle, bride, mother, and avenger)

TY – a tired, embittered actor. Alleges to want out, but one wonders why he remains. Plays the GREEK SON, ROMEO, and SON

WILLIE – an actress, a girl who purports to be in the theatre business for the money. Plays bit parts and FELICITY and MINSTREL

KIM – the “pretty girl” of the ensemble. Plays the BEAUTIFUL GREEK DAUGHTER and DAUGHTER

TED – the “mature man,” character role player. Plays the GREEK FATHER and EMERY BEAUCHAMP

LAURA – the “mature woman,” character role player. Plays the GREEK MOTHER and MRS. MANNERISM

KURT – the “comedian.” Plays the TINY SPARROW, the BOOKSELLER, and other parts

*The ensemble roles listed above are by no means comprehensive. As with most of Jerome McDonough's plays, chorus members are called upon to portray a variety of characters and even an occasional inanimate object. Larger ensembles and, perhaps, smaller ensembles are possible. However, some double-castings are intentional, following a pattern of lineage (Corrie marries a man who looks like her father, for instance, through Ted's casting. Other levels of meaning arise through such associations.) A cast of eleven seems ideal.*

**Time: Today**

**Place: A Theatre**

Production notes are available at the back of the book.

## STAGES

*[As the audience enters, no stage lights are on, but the set can be vaguely seen by the spill from the house lights. The act curtain is open. When it is time for the play to begin, house lights come down and no other lights replace them. In the dark, the ENSEMBLE moves onstage and takes places as three piles of bodies, Down Left, Down Right, and downstage of the platform (where practicable, it would be better if these piles of bodies could be in place as the audience arrives). No feet, jeans, or body features are visible. The effect is three abstract multi-colored lumps, like great strips of a Rothko painting, crumpled and thrown in a heap. The CHORUS (Ensemble) begins a wind sound—the echoes of the empty theatre, its ancient voice. Rather than just being wind, though, key words symbolizing the various scenes are spoken in a wind voice: "Ritual," "Masks," "Balconies," "Gentility," "Lovers," "Houses," "Pain," and "Fear." Each chorus member is assigned a word. The first time through, each word is said in turn against the wind background, so that it can be heard and understood (though vaguely, as one recognizes a familiar figure in a dense fog). From there on, the words are said randomly against the swirling windsong. This haunting effect sets the mood for one metaphor of the play (i.e., the chronological sequence of dramatic styles). Wind voices stop as a door at the rear of the house is heard opening. A FIGURE carrying a flashlight and a large notebook moves down the aisle toward the stage. He mounts the stage at Left. His flashlight plays upon the piles of bodies. He studies the three mounds, briefly moving among them. His light searches the flies, the stage area, and the house above the audience. He dismounts the stage, moves to a table and chair in the left aisle (visible to as much of the audience as possible), sits, spreads out his notebook and pencil and extinguishes his flashlight. As the Figure moved up the aisle away from the stage, the DIRECTOR moved on stage from Down Right]*

DIRECTOR (D. T.). *[Calling back into wing]* Hit some lights, will you, Angie? The crew's late, as always.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ANGIE). *[From off, all cooperation]* Right, D. T.

*[Lights come up. We can see that the DIRECTOR carries a notebook. His attitude is not enthusiastic. He is the worn-out cynic. He looks across the stage and out into the house as the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR joins him]*

DIRECTOR. A grim prospect, isn't it?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR. *[The young idealist. Also looking out front]* It's exciting to me. The empty house — echoes.

DIRECTOR. *[Dismissing the poetic view]* Dying ricochets. *[Moving*

*his director's chair far Down Right*] The lines bounce around up there awhile, then snag in the rigging.

ASSISTANT. [*Looking up into loft*] But those words—they're still up there.

DIRECTOR. Rat bait. You'll hear the nibbling in a few years.

ASSISTANT. So why do you direct?

DIRECTOR. I prefer it to starving — generally. [*Referring to Figure, pointedly not looking in his direction*] Is he here?

ASSISTANT. [*Squinting into darkness*] Yeah. Shall I call him down?

DIRECTOR. No, no. Just let the battle develop naturally. [*ASSISTANT DIRECTOR sits. Calling off Left*] Stage Manager! Thrasher?

[*STAGE MANAGER steps on from opposite wing, holding multi-colored book of the show*]

STAGE MANAGER (THRASHER). Yeah?

DIRECTOR. You have all the current revisions?

STAGE MANAGER. [*Holding up book*] Got 'em. [*Disgusted*] It's a paper rainbow in here. [*Tapping book*] I never saw so many rewrites.

DIRECTOR. I wouldn't bind it yet. [*With a half-nod in Figure's direction*] It'll be different in ten minutes. [*STAGE MANAGER exits, assuming that doom is approaching*]

DIRECTOR. [*Sitting wearily*] No use postponing this any longer. [*Calling toward mainstage*] Take it!

[*The lumps instantly animate. Each ensemble member rises partially, one arm raised high above the head, fingers spread, the other arm supporting the body. Left and Right lumps face out, and the Center lump faces upstage, all facing away from the audience. All begin to rise, moving backward, that is, toward Stage Center. Both hands are now involved, pushing some unseen threat away. The feeling is that all chorus members are backing away from some threatening, frightening presence, like a primeval retreat from dark spirits*]

FIGURE. [*During above (cue: "Take it") he snaps on his flashlight and plays it upon a page he holds. The reflected light illuminates his face a bit. To audience:*] You mustn't hear me. The distance is wrong. The house, the chairs are still empty. And my struggle rages—half-poet and half-thief, searching the wellspring — Ritual. [*Flashlight out*]

[*THRASHER slides a placard reading "Ritual" onto the easel. He is not seen—just the card sliding on. Just then, though, the very formal ritualistic primeval chorus backs into itself, causing the dropping of all character. There is mass confusion onstage*]

DIRECTOR. [*Sarcastically*] Very nice.

CORRIE. Are we missing a revision?

DIRECTOR. Thrasher!

STAGE MANAGER. *[Tapping book]* Pages one through five – pale green paper. *[Hubbub as cast pulls scripts from jeans pockets, checking page colors. STAGE MANAGER is exiting for pages. To Director:]* The new sheets were distributed at cast call.

*[ENSEMBLE MEMBERS speak each of the following lines clearly but with partial overlaps—a hubbub:]*

KIM. One through five's red in mine.

KURT. Is this the shade of green?

WILLIE. No—that's revision seven aqua.

LAURA. Here's an extra "one."

TED. Two three's here.

TY. Five one's for a five.

DIRECTOR. *[Still seated]* Hold it. *[Nobody does]*

STAGE MANAGER. *[Returning with stack of green pages]* Pale green. Throw away *all* other colors. *[Pages start flying everywhere]* Not on the floor! *[Some pick them back up]*

CORRIE. I just need a two.

STAGE MANAGER. Two for Corrie. *[Distributing and picking up discards at the same time. CHORUS MEMBERS mob Thrasher, getting pages, handing him old ones]*

KURT. Six and seven.

TY. Hold the pickles.

STAGE MANAGER. Six and seven are still orange!

DIRECTOR. *[Trying again]* Cut!

*[Hubbub from CHORUS MEMBERS increases]*

KIM. This orange?

TED. That's red, you jerk.

KIM. Red-orange,

STAGE MANAGER. Not red! Orange!

DIRECTOR. *[Screeching]* Hold it!

*[All action stops. All look toward him]*

STAGE MANAGER. *[Trying to justify, juggling and tapping the script]* This guy's beginnings are always a little chaotic, D. T.

DIRECTOR. Chaos I can handle. This is . . .

ASSISTANT. *[Looking at script, moving past Director to Stage Manager]* Hey, part of mine isn't green, either. *[DIRECTOR despairs]*

STAGE MANAGER. Need all five?

*[Action drops to miming, pages being exchanged, colors checked, bickering over who's right, reading scripts, walking familiarization, etc., as DIRECTOR speaks, somewhat paranoiacly, to himself. A sort of soliloquy, but not really played to the audience since the audience of the play-within-a-play has yet to arrive]*

DIRECTOR. There's this nightmare I have all the time. I'm in a theatre and some mad show is going on. My show. And it's all happening at

once. Not like out of sequence, but every line, every action, every train wreck happening every instant. Drapes are stuck, lighting instruments come loose. An electrician falls out of heaven and smashes on the stage. I jerk awake in bed, but I'm still in that theatre and it all happens again and I can't tell if I'm awake or not. I really can't tell.

*[The FIGURE rips a page from his notebook as STAGE MANAGER speaks. (NOTE: "Pages" might be made of canvas to increase the ripping volume.)]*

STAGE MANAGER. All set, D. T. *[As if called from off Left]* What? *[To Director, as he exits]* Just a second.

DIRECTOR. *[Sitting]* Places. *[ASSISTANT DIRECTOR heads back]* Sit down, will you, Angie?

ANGIE. *[Sitting, still checking page order]* Right, right. *[CHORUS has been moving back to lump positions]*

STAGE MANAGER. *[Re-entering, calling to all]* Are you ready for this? Cut pages 1 through 5. *[Indignant reactions all around. STAGE MANAGER gestures toward Figure]* It's from him. *[Exits, grumbling]*

DIRECTOR. *[Jumping up, protesting vehemently, to Figure]* We spent six rehearsals working that schmaltzy opening. *[As always, no response]*

ANGIE. Maybe we're better off, D. T.

DIRECTOR. Assistant Director's opinions give me gas.

ANGIE. *[Sinking]* Right, right.

DIRECTOR. *[Accepting with great bitterness]* Page six! *[Sugary]* Costume the nice Greek scene.

*[Costume adjustments begin, robes rearranged to suggest Greek hi-mations. Cast chatter]*

TY. I thought all obscenities were four-letter.

LAURA. What do you mean?

TY. "Rewrite" has seven letters.

WILLIE. Rewrites or no rewrites, the paychecks keep coming.

KURT. Come on, Willie. You're in this business for the money?

WILLIE. I worked forty-three weeks last year! That's almost twenty times the average. Somebody's casting a maid, a paper hanger, they say, "Let's call Willie. She doesn't rock the boat." Little stuff does it.

TY. Like your parts?

*[Two sets of lines almost overlap:]*

WILLIE. There's the difference, Ty. You insist on featured billing.	}	TED. <i>[Laboring with robe]</i> Does this go through here?
TY. So?	}	CORRIE. No. No. Across the back. <i>[TED nods, getting it right]</i>

WILLIE. So how many weeks did you work last year?

TY. *[Overplaying, feigning awe of her]* You've convinced me, Willie.

When can I sign up for mediocrity school? *[Some laughter, some disdain. WILLIE just lets it go, content that she has made her point, but perhaps a little hurt]*

DIRECTOR. Places!

FIGURE. *[As ENSEMBLE settles in places, FIGURE turns his flashlight on, face reflected as before; standing]* I struggle for a style, scratch for a voice, search for myself in ancient words. *[Toward stage]* Play the chorus. Play the masks.

*[STAGE MANAGER inserts card, "Masks." The CHORUS has split, half to each side of the platform. TED stands on the top step, Right, LAURA on the top step, Left. Both face upstage. KURT crouches behind the set. All other chorus members become the GREEK CHORUS; they will move and gesture together in this segment]*

DIRECTOR. Let's go!

CHORUS MEMBER. *[At far Right, gesturing toward Ted]* Behold!

FULL CHORUS. *[Joining gesture]* The man. *[Gesture holds. TED turns from full back to profile, facing Center]*

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER. *[At far Left; gestures toward Laura with other arm]* Behold!

FULL CHORUS. *[Joining gesture]* The woman. *[LAURA turns to Center, facing profile. CHORUS takes a step toward Center, dropping gesture]* Eventide. *[TED and LAURA start to move toward each other. Two more steps by CHORUS]* The encounter. *[TED and LAURA's hands touch. CHORUS sweeps hands upward]* From Olympus' crest, *[hands sweeping toward Center]* the gods smile upon the union. *[The previously crouched KURT pops up from behind the set, rests his face on his chin, smiles a ridiculous jackass grin, and pops down again. CHORUS speaks with hands-spreading gesture]* Fruition. *[CHORUS drops formal character and beckons to Laura with index fingers as if to say, "Come on, honey." LAURA sinks behind the set as does the CHORUS as TED moves formally, manfully to Down Right. The CHORUS pops up from behind the set, gesturing toward Right (the chorus will be constantly diminishing in size as members take other parts). Behold! A son. [CHORUS pops down. TY steps to Right, draws an "arrow" from a "quiver" and fires it high off Left, then boldly strides to TED, who welcomes him with a classical hand-to-wrist handshake and shoulder grasp. CHORUS pops up again, gestures to Right]* Behold! A daughter! *[CHORUS drops out of sight. KIM steps to Right. She projects a regal bearing, the Helen of Troy type, head high, beauty taken for granted. She moves to her father, who welcomes her and places his arm about her shoulder. CHORUS pops up]* Behold! A . . . *[CHORUS does a "take" back at Corrie (who is still hidden behind the platform), signals "just a minute," sinks again for a beat, comes back up, shrugs its collective shoulders and sinks again as CORRIE is hurled (or jumps) onto the set. She is all exuberance and physical activity. She scurries down off the platform, steps over the bench and runs toward Down Center*

where she finds a "ball" on the floor. She defines the shape of the ball, examining it. She tosses it up and catches it. She sees someone off Left and throws the ball to him. The ball comes back, too high for her, though she leaps for it; her FATHER catches it disapprovingly. CORRIE moves toward her Father (Ted) to retrieve the ball. He looks disdainfully at the ball and then at Corrie. TY is unimpressed; KIM is appalled. CORRIE hesitantly extends her hand for the ball. The FATHER looks at her, opens his hands and lets the ball fall to the ground. TED, TY, and KIM turn and leave, deserting Corrie. CORRIE picks up ball and looks after family, hurt. The remaining CHORUS people rise and move toward Left and R, saying:] From the hallowed pallet of life-bringing, [stopping, gesturing back to Center] the mother rises. [A beat. Playing for comedy, a hand comes slowly up, falls and slaps the top of the platform. The mother (LAURA) starts to slowly drag herself up, both arms appearing first, then a shock of horribly tousled hair above a completely desolate face, eyes bleary and mouth agape. Child-birth has taken its toll of her nobility. As CORRIE still looks off, LAURA crawls laboriously onto platform]

DIRECTOR. Starving looks better every second. [LAURA lets out a little sigh and CORRIE turns to her]

CORRIE. Mom, I . . .

MOTHER. [Looking wildly about, not seeing the source of the sound] Huh?

CORRIE. [Crossing to her] Daddy wouldn't have anything to . . .

MOTHER. Don't mention that name! [Starts slowly to roll off the platform, preparatory to leaving stage]

CORRIE. But, Mom, there's so much I haven't . . .

MOTHER. [Exiting, leaving as best she can physically, toward Left] We'll talk later. When you're twenty-one, let's say.

CORRIE. [Pleading] But . . .

MOTHER. Shhh. I've got to get some rest now. Play nice. [CORRIE watches her leave, saddened again, rejected once more]

[FIGURE rips a page. Flashlight goes on; FIGURE speaks, animating as he feels his emotion]

FIGURE. Repair it. Search. My reason slips as headlights wash the parking lot. [To stage:] Echo the Globe. Play balconies.

[Placard—"Balconies"—slides into place. During the above, four CHORUS members have moved to the left edge of the platform. Two kneel atop the platform and two stand downstage of it, arms joined up and across, all forming the superstructure of a balcony. While moving into position, they arrange their robes over their heads and arms as overlapping draperies, masking themselves and suggesting the balcony. CORRIE, still Down Left, arranges her robe as an Elizabethan cloak]

DIRECTOR. Corrie, dress it up. Elizabethan, if you please, Miss Superstar.

CORRIE. Sorry, D. T. I'll get it.

*[TY approaches from Right, portraying Romeo. He has arranged his robe as a cape, the belt tied at the neck, securing the cape. He moves on, glancing about furtively, fearing detection in the well-revered Elizabethan style. He whispers hoarsely toward the balcony]*

TY (ROMEO). My Juliet? *[Nothing. CORRIE looks at him, likes what she sees, and scoots up the stairs into the balcony as ROMEO speaks again:]* Grace mine eye, fair one.

CORRIE. Hi!

TY. *[Squinting]* My nightingale?

CORRIE. No, no. You remember me. Georgia? Geoffrey Chaucer Middle School?

TY. Where is my lady?

CORRIE. They shipped her off to summer camp.

TY. *[All exaggerated Elizabethan style]* I die!

CORRIE. Hey, don't do that. It's a great camp. They got Kosher cooking lessons, Israeli dancing every Friday night. You'd love it.

DIRECTOR. *[To Assistant]* Show me that line.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR. I don't seem to have it.

DIRECTOR. Thrasher!

STAGE MANAGER. *[Poking head in, waving script]* It's all here. Powder pink.

DIRECTOR. *[Turning to Figure]* My contract stipulates line approval. I did not initial any Elizabethan Hebrew outings. *[No response from Figure. To Assistant:]* I'm going to get blamed for all this, you know. *[To actors:]* Go ahead, campers.

CORRIE. *[Back in character]* There used to be a lake, but a dairy herd drank it.

TY. *[Playing fully open]* My life, swept beyond stormy seas . . .

CORRIE. *[Leaning casually on balcony, line overlapping]* My folks sent me up there last year. My teeth were still crooked then. Broccoli'd get hung between 'em sometimes. *[If you hadn't noticed, two very different scenes are going on here]*

TY. *[Speaking to Right wing]* Tiny sparrow, hover near. *[The largest available male chorus member rushes on, flapping his robe like wings]* Carry my song . . . *[Places "song" in sparrow's mouth. SPARROW flaps out]*

CORRIE. *[Overlapping end of sparrow business]* My braces worked like crazy, though. I'm not even wearing a retainer any more.

TY. *[Dropping character, fed up with scene. To Director:]* D. T., this is ridiculous.

DIRECTOR. *[Gesturing toward Figure]* Don't blame me.

STAGE MANAGER. *[Script only appearing from wing]* Every word right here. Canary.

TY. Script or not, it's demeaning.

CORRIE. *[As herself, the actress fighting for the show]* It'll be fixed.

TY. It makes me feel fixed. Pick somebody else. I'll do Chorus.

*[Starts to exit]*

D. T. *[Jumping up]* You're already blocked in.

TY. *[From off]* So block me out.

CORRIE. *[Concerned for the show]* Ty . . .

DIRECTOR. *[Looks bitterly after him, then drops it, giving it up. Turns to Stage Manager]* Who's available, Thrasher? *[BALCONY drops character and peeks at action]*

STAGE MANAGER. *[Entering]* Everybody's assigned.

DIRECTOR. We'll switch then. Ty, do Balcony.

TY. *[Re-entering]* Balcony! Where does that go on my resume?

DIRECTOR. You picked your job.

TY. *[Crossing downstage of him, back into the action]* OK, OK, I'm back in for the Romeo bit.

DIRECTOR. You're wearing me very thin.

TY. *[Sarcastic baby talk]* B'ess him.

DIRECTOR. *[Sitting back down as Ty checks script for lines. To Assistant:]* That list of people I never work with again? *[Gesturing toward Ty]* His name goes directly under the playwright's. *[To Actors:]* Take it, Corrie.

CORRIE. No use wasting the week-end, though. We could maybe take in a Renaissance fair?

TY. *[Denying her]* My heart cherishes where it must remain.

CORRIE. Just a grog date? *[Rejection approaches. She can sense it]*

TY. *[Starting to exit, as he came]* Farewell, dread messenger. A darkened mood thrusts me onward. *[She slumps as the familiar moment arrives. He is gone. CORRIE shrugs her sadness off and comes out of the balcony to sit angrily on the Down Right edge of the platform as she speaks to herself, huffy bravado covering despair]*

CORRIE. Dread messenger. Darkened mood. *[Gives a razzberry in Romeo's direction]*

*[The BALCONY breaks and the CHORUS MEMBERS become a troupe of wandering minstrels. The top half of the balcony skips across the platform to end up above and right of Corrie. The bottom half, including WILLIE, the singer, makes a small circle to Left, then comes back to Corrie, one sitting on the platform left of her, WILLIE kneeling at her feet. Robes are worn as capes and the cloth belts become accompanying instruments—a balled-up belt a tambourine, a stretched-out one a block flute, a doubled-back one a fiddle and bow, and a diagonally stretched one a lute or guitar. As all skip toward Corrie, the MINSTREL (Willie) sings an improvised minstrel tune or a perverted version of "Greensleeves":]*

MINSTREL. Hark, weary maids who do aspire

To kindle love's heart-yearning fire.

At the sign of the boar, at the top of a flight,

Gentility classes go on day and night.

*[Speaking, now at Corrie's knee]* New classes forming now. Mrs. Mannerism's training approved by the Virgin's Administration. *[Alternate line: "Maiden's Administration." CORRIE reads the flyer handed her by the MINSTREL as all male minstrels exit, one pausing to do a "plug":.]*

BOY MINSTREL. Call on the "Out-of-Period Players" to advertise your goods and services. Contact Transparent Theatrical Devices, Inc.

*[Female CHORUS MEMBERS prepare for next section by adjusting robes so that the sleeves are held in the crooks of the elbows and the balance of the robe hangs behind, an attempt at suggesting the elegance of 18th century garb. MRS. MANNERISM and CORRIE will adjust similarly, CORRIE not very successfully. All hold belts in hand, suggesting a kerchief. At close of Minstrel section above, the FIGURE ripped another page. He speaks during above action. He moves as words motivate him, flashlight on]*

FIGURE. The circus tickets sell while I pace, peering out through the bars, fearing you. *[To stage:]* Play elegance. Play gentility.

*[Placard—"Gentility"—slides on. During above, CORRIE has mounted the Right stairs, crossed the platform, found the address, moved down the Left stairs and now stands left of an affected young lady (KIM), trying to be friendly. The YOUNG LADY has no interest and turns away, toward Right. The room is filled with similar snobs, all posing in the accepted 18th century upper class mold. The classiest and moldiest of them all is about to enter from Right, MRS. MANNERISM (LAURA). She is the faded gentlewoman type, now reduced to teaching gentility, but still maintaining ALL airs. As she enters, she is speaking over her shoulder to some ghost gentleman]*

MRS. MANNERISM. Of course, Lord Adderbreath. Until tea time, then?

GIRLS. Good morning, Mrs. Mannerism.

MRS. MANNERISM. *[Moves up the stairs to Center and addresses the girls. All her lines are accompanied by flamboyant kerchief gestures]* Today's lesson will deal with a most valuable appearance accessory. *[Flipping her kerchief (belt) toward girls]* Who will guess what it might be?

KIM. Her coiffure?

MRS. MANNERISM. Vital, but that's not it.

WILLIE. Her beauty mark?

MRS. MANNERISM. The keystone of natural appearance, but no.

CORRIE. Money?

*[GIRLS turn to her as if she had smallpox — maybe large pox. MRS. MANNERISM is huffy and appalled]*

MRS. MANNERISM. Money does not become a young woman, young woman. *[GIRLS snub Corrie quite totally and turn back to Mrs. Mannerism, who addresses all but Corrie]* The genteel weapon of which

I speak is [*flaunting it*] her kerchief. [*Mumbles of "Of course," "I should have known," "Her kerchief, of course!"*] *CORRIE* just flips her kerchief rather meaninglessly] The kerchief punctuates every witticism, every flirtation, every social nuance. Observe. [*Presenting her hand to an invisible gentleman, the kerchief flowing with it*] "Charmed, Sir Gatortusk." Now, you try it, my dears. [*All young ladies accurately imitate her moves and say, "Charmed, Sir Gatortusk."*] All, naturally, except *CORRIE*, who gets behind and is heard to say, "Charmed, Sir Gatorface," just before flipping her wrist too hard and draping her kerchief across her head. She pulls it off rapidly, but all have seen her]

*CORRIE*. Pardon me, Mrs. Mannerism.

*MRS. MANNERISM*. Ummmm, yes. [*Sigh*] Now – the kerchief in presentation situations. [*Flourishing the kerchief toward some phantom dignitary and bringing it back as she curtsies*] "The pleasure is mine, Lord Garish." [*Rising*] Young ladies? [*All do very well except CORRIE, who flourishes her kerchief a bit too much, brings it back too fast and "pops" the girl in front of her (KIM) squarely on the rump. While everyone else is saying the phrase correctly, KIM is saying, "The pleasure is mine, Lord AAAAAAAA!" KIM loses all stately decorum, snapping upward, but her character is back at once and she sweeps to the other side of the stage, giving Corrie a brief but hateful look. CORRIE shrinks, mumbling a kind of apology*]

*MRS. MANNERISM*. Young woman, this class is obviously no place for you. I suggest you pursue your "studies" through those vulgar etiquette books which presume to teach "gentility." They are intended for the lower classes.

*CORRIE*. But, Mrs. Mannerism, I'll impr—

*MRS. MANNERISM*. It is quite impossible. Turn in your beauty mark. [*CORRIE sadly removes the mark from her upstage cheek and hands it to MRS. MANNERISM, who gestures "Go!" toward off Right. CORRIE moves toward Right, touching her cheek wistfully. More rejection*]

*MRS. MANNERISM*. [*To other girls*] The kerchief may also create an elegant glide. [*Moving off Left, requesting that the girls follow, as she says:*] Do as I do.

[*MRS. MANNERISM and GIRLS move off as KURT steps on by the Down Right arch. He looks furtively about, then comes out a few steps toward CORRIE, who is longingly watching the Mannerism crowd. He calls to Corrie in the "dirty postcard seller" style*]

*KURT*. Pssst! [*CORRIE points to herself*] Yeah, you. Come here. [*He looks about cautiously as she moves dubiously to him. He opens the left side of his robe, gestures to "books" inside robe*] Look here, etiquette books – gentilities of all nations. [*CORRIE looks away, embarrassed*] Listen, these aren't your standard sleazy gentility books. Some are even illuminated. Look. [*Pointing. CORRIE looks back at books*] High British, French, Deep South Aristocrat. [*Closes the left*

*side and opens the right. Pointing again]* Tanzanian. Half price on that one. Whattaya say?

CORRIE. Hmm. Deep south. [*He pulls it from his cloak and hands it to her as she gives him money*]

SELLER. Best buy of your life, sweetie. [*He exits. CORRIE starts to exit Left, reading, as the next scene hits. DIRECTOR rises*]

DIRECTOR. I'm asleep. I have to be. I'd pinch myself but I don't think I want to know.

ASSISTANT. It's still following the book.

DIRECTOR. Every time I look at this thing, it's totally different. [*Looking off into darkness toward the Figure*] Where's that playwright?

STAGE MANAGER. [*Entering, holding the book and some notes*] He's here.

DIRECTOR. Where, backstage?

STAGE MANAGER. No. [*Holding up notes*] Right here. It says, "Stage Manager reads playwright's response."

DIRECTOR. To what? I haven't said anything yet.

STAGE MANAGER. I just read 'em. [*Say "read" (present tense)*]

DIRECTOR. All right, author, we'll do that game. Will you please tell me where in hell this thing is going?

STAGE MANAGER. [*Reading, not quite in playwright's character*] "I don't owe you any explanations."

DIRECTOR. Oh, you don't? Then how am I supposed to direct this alleged play?

STAGE MANAGER. "With more talent than you've shown so far."

DIRECTOR. Talent! How could anyone control this? Rewrites are rewritten every two minutes. Forget approval, I don't even get notified. It's like loading mercury with a pitchfork.

STAGE MANAGER. "I can still direct it myself."

DIRECTOR. Good. Bring in an amateur. How about starting now?

STAGE MANAGER. "I have better things to do. Just hold up your end."

DIRECTOR. Why don't you take your end and . . .

STAGE MANAGER. [*Holding up note*] That's all of it. [*DIRECTOR starts to respond, but sees it is heading nowhere. As he sits, to Assistant:*]

DIRECTOR. Write this down. "At liberty. Widely experienced director. Will take any job anywhere. Credits include . . ."

*[FIGURE rips a page and speaks again, drawing the focus. Flashlight on. As he speaks, four CHORUS MEMBERS move to the right of the set unit. They kneel facing Right, heads covered, belts held in downstage hands, prepared for the next scene. TED is upstage of the set, preparing to come on. He wears his robe like a Southern aristocrat's over-the-shoulder cape. FIGURE speaks on cue: "Credits include"]*

FIGURE. The lobby hums, buzzes, but my fingers still fly. [*Toward*