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FRANK B. GILBRETH, JR.
AND
ERNESTINE GILBRETH CAREY'S

Belles on Their Toes

DRAMATIZED BY
WILLIAM ROOS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(BELLES ON THEIR TOES)

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Belles on Their Toes

A Comedy in Three Acts

FOR TWELVE MEN AND SIX WOMEN

CHARACTERS

MRS. GILBRETH.....	<i>Mother</i>
ANNE	} <i>ten of her children</i>
ERNESTINE	
MARTHA	
FRANK	
BILL	
LILLIAN	
FRED	
DAN	
JACK	
BOB	
TOM.....	<i>the handyman</i>
MR. HATHAWAY.....	<i>the roomer</i>
LEORA.....	<i>a distant relation</i>
DR. BOB.....	<i>the new family doctor</i>
AL LYNCH.....	<i>the Nantucket hot dog</i>
DAVID LORING.....	<i>an unexpected visitor</i>
MR. CRAWFORD.....	<i>a policeman</i>

PLACE: *The living-room of the Gilbreth home, Montclair, New Jersey.*

TIME: 1924.

SYNOPSIS

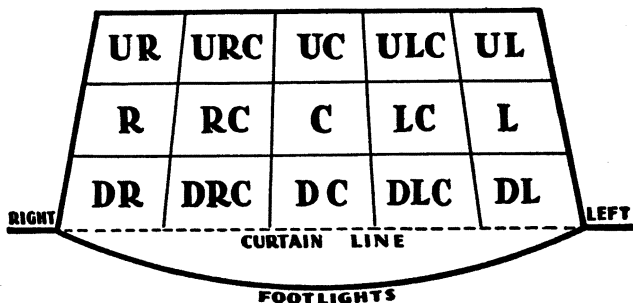
ACT I: *The Gilbreth living-room. A day in spring.*

ACT II: *Scene One: The same. Two weeks later.*

Scene Two: The same. One month later.

ACT III: *The same. A few minutes later.*

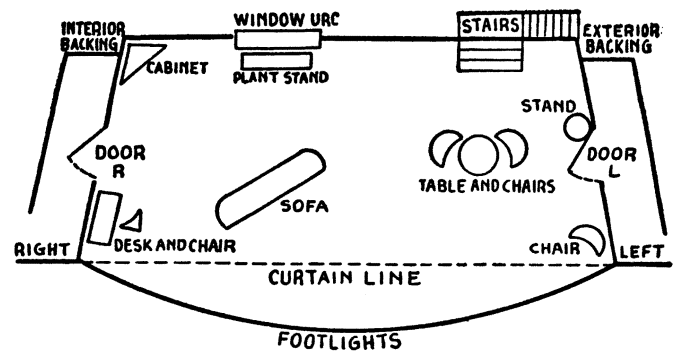
CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combinations, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.



STAGE CHART

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Sofa, pillows on sofa, round table and two comfortable chairs, large easy chair, umbrella stand, plants in plant stand, desk and chair, draperies on window, telephone and telephone book on desk, tall corner cabinet or whatnot, rugs, lamps, pictures, various knickknacks, newspaper on table L C (Act One), collar box on table L C (Act Two, Scene Two).

MOTHER: Purse and gloves.

TOM: Small bottle and spoon, glass of orange-colored medicine, two more glasses of same medicine, roasting pan and pot holders, glass of orange juice.

ERNESTINE: List and pencil, fraternity pin.

MARTHA: Paper money.

MR. HATHAWAY: Newspaper, suitcase and topcoat.

LILLIAN: Feather duster, three letters, paper money, Mother's purse and gloves.

FRANK: Mr. Hathaway's suitcase, feather duster, Mother's suitcases (one of which contains two dolls, six blue berets and three one-piece bathing suits), collar box.

DAN: Cloth and bottle of polish, three baseball bats, Mother's hatbox.

BILL: Carpet sweeper, Mother's suitcases.

JACK: Feather duster.

BOB: Cloth and bottle of polish, armload of old golf clubs.

FRED: Dry mop, old vinegar bottle of root beer.

LEORA: Hatbox, gloves and purse, old-fashioned tennis racket.

DR. BOB: Watch, doctor's bag.

AL: Ukulele.

POLICEMAN: Pad and pencil.

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

THE GILBRETH CHILDREN: The children range in age from seventeen on downward. Anne is the oldest; then come Ernestine, Martha, Frank, Bill, Lillian, Fred, Dan, Jack, and Bob. The actual ages of the children can be left to the discretion of the director, depending on the availability of casting material. For the effective use of stage business, it is suggested that the children's sizes be graduated from the tallest on down in height to Bob, the shortest. The boys wear costumes of the 1920's: knickers, shirts, sweaters, and long stockings. The girls, likewise, dress conservatively in simple jumper dresses, middy blouses, and skirts, with long cotton stockings. Anne and Ernestine, being the oldest, can dress a little less conservatively.

MOTHER: She is a gracious, attractive woman, quiet in manner but firm of purpose. She dresses neatly in the prevailing fashion of the period.

TOM: He is in his late forties, the handyman around the Gilbreth home, and as much a part of the family as one of the children. He grumbles a lot, but the children adore him—and he, in turn, thinks the world of each and every one of them. He wears nondescript clothes, topped off now and then by a butcher's apron and a chef's cap.

LEORA: Leora is a meddling busybody. She is inclined to be fat, and over-dresses. Her false sweetness doesn't fool anyone.

MR. HATHAWAY: He is a pleasant, mild-mannered, soft-spoken elderly little man. He dresses conservatively throughout.

DR. BOB: He is tall, handsome and likable. His manner is easy-going and natural. He wears suits throughout the play.

AL: He is the typical "shiek" of the period, loud, full of wisecracks and corny jokes. He wears a raccoon coat over knickers that hang to his ankles, and a loud sweater with a huge "S" on it.

His hair is slicked back; he wears a pork pie hat and carries a ukulele.

DAVID: He is a very good-looking young chap, not in the least forward, but with a very engaging manner. He wears a suit and carries his hat.

POLICEMAN: He is an easy-going man in his middle forties, dressed in a policeman's uniform of the period.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living-room of the Gilbreth home is large, comfortable, with a well-lived-in appearance, and furnished in the style of the period. The door to the outside is L, while a door R leads to the study, dining-room and kitchen. In the rear wall, U L C, three steps lead to a landing, and then a flight of stairs turns left and continues on up to the second floor of the house. There is a large draped window in the rear wall, U R C. In front of it is a stand for potted plants. Below the door R, are a desk and chair. On the desk is a telephone. At an angle at R C is a sofa, while at L C stage are a round table and two comfortable chairs. There is another large easy chair D L. Above the door L is a stand for umbrellas. A tall corner cabinet or whatnot is in the U R corner of the room. Rugs, lamps, pictures and knickknacks complete the setting.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is a day in spring. The stage is empty. ANNE enters from the stairs. She stands for a moment, then seems to shake herself and straighten up. She raises her fingers to her lips, tries to whistle and fails.]*

ANNE [*calling*]. Frank—oh, Frank!

[*ERNESTINE enters L.*]

ANNE. Ernestine, where's Frank?

ERNESTINE [*pausing above table L C*]. He's coming. He's been putting Mother's suitcases in the taxicab.

[*FRANK enters L.*]

FRANK [*furiously, to himself*]. Why can't he shut up? Why can't he just shut up? [*Stands left of table L C.*]

ERNESTINE. Who, Frank?

FRANK [*threateningly*]. If he says anything like that to Mother——

ERNESTINE. *Who*, Frank?

FRANK. That taxi driver.

ANNE [*who has paused at c*]. What did he say?

FRANK. He knows a fellow that was in the railroad station and saw it happen. Dad was talking and laughing into the telephone and all of a sudden . . .

ANNE [*genily*]. We know, Frank.

FRANK [*bitterly*]. It was nice, the driver says, that Dad could be talking to Mother when he died.

ERNESTINE. Frank . . .

ANNE [*quickly*]. Frank, whistle assembly call.

FRANK [*looking at ANNE for a moment, then quietly*]. Sure, Anne. [*Gives a loud, distinctive whistle.*] How was that?

ERNESTINE. Just like Dad. Maybe even a little bit louder.

ANNE. You'll whistle assembly call from now on, Frank.

[*MARTHA, BILL, LILLIAN, JACKIE, DAN and BOB come pouring into the room from both doors and down the stairs. FRED comes in the window. They all line up at an angle in front of the sofa. ANNE, FRANK and ERNESTINE take their places with the others. Starting with the smallest, who is farthest downstage, the line builds in height to the tallest at the other end of the line, upstage.*]

ALL [*as they line up*]. Get out of my way! You're in my place! Hurry up, Jackie! Stop pushing!

ANNE Quiet! Dress right! [*Line straightens.*]

FRED. How long did it take us?

ANNE [*stepping out of line to face them*]. Frank, we forgot to time it. I'd guess twelve seconds—not a new record.

DAN. Dad never forgot to time us.

ANNE. And we won't again, Dan.

JACK. Is Mother going away now? Right now?

ANNE. Yes, Jack. She's saying good-bye to Janie.

BOB. Janie's big enough to be in line!

LILLIAN. She can't even walk yet!

BOB. She can stand!

ANNE. Now, listen, everybody—no crying. [*Then angrily, to cover her own emotion.*] The first one who cries when Mother leaves, I'm going to murder!

MARTHA. Nobody's going to cry.

LILLIAN. But I wish Mother didn't have to go to Europe.

ANNE. Mother wishes that, too. But she has to take Dad's place at the meetings. And make his speeches.

BILL. You should be proud of what Mother's doing.

JACK. Sure! When I told the milkman this morning he could hardly believe it.

ANNE [*smiling*]. Exactly what did you tell the milkman?

JACK. I read it to him out of the Newark Sun. [*Grabs paper from table L C and reads proudly.*] "Mrs. Frank Gilbreth, of Montclair, will substitute for her late husband at the London Power Conference and at the World Congress of Scientific Management at the Mas—Mas——"

MARTHA. Masaryk.

JACK. "—Masaryk Academy, in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Mr. Gilbreth, the creator of motion study, was a consulting engineer and efficiency expert, specializing in big industry." And there's a lot more! [*Tosses paper back on table.*] Boy, was our milkman impressed! He thinks Mother is a humdinger!

LILLIAN. I just wish she could stay home.

MARTHA. Mother has to earn the money now that Dad's gone.

ERNESTINE. And she'll only be away six weeks.

ANNE [*quickly, glancing toward stairs*]. Dress right! [*All line up as before, at attention.*]

[*MOTHER enters from the stairs. She is dressed in black, with purse and gloves, ready to leave. She pauses a moment at the foot of the stairs, seeing all the children in line. Then she comes forward and looks up the line, her eyes touching each child.*]

MOTHER [*smiling*]. Remember when your father used to leave

on his trips—how he always used to say: [*Booms out heartily, imitating Dad.*] “Those long faces don’t fool me any! Just as soon as I’m out of sight—[*Her voice breaks to a whisper.*]—you’ll start building bonfires to celebrate.” [*Children break ranks and crowd around MOTHER. She embraces them, two and three at a time.*] Bob—Jack, I won’t be gone so long. Fred, Dan, Lillian—I’ll bring you all the nicest surprises—for you, too, Bill, and you, Frank, for everybody. Martha, Ernestine, I’ll write every day. Anne, I’m sure you can manage . . .

[*TOM has entered R. He wears a butcher’s apron and a chef’s hat. He stands quietly D R until after MOTHER has embraced ANNE.*]

TOM. Mrs. Gilbreth.

MOTHER [*crossing to him*]. Tom—I wasn’t going to forget to say good-bye to you.

TOM. Now, there’s no reason for you to worry while you’re gone. It was a smart thing you done—firin’ Mrs. Fitzgerald and keepin’ me.

MOTHER. We didn’t exactly fire Mrs. Fitzgerald—that was an economy measure.

TOM. Well, keepin’ me was smart of you. You still got a first-class, high-grade handyman, and I can cook as good as Mrs. Fitzgerald any day.

MOTHER [*doubtfully*]. I’m sure you can, Tom.

TOM. Never followed a “reseat” in my life. Don’t believe in ’em. Mrs. Gilbreth, I got a lamb “rangoon” in the oven right now.

MOTHER. A ragout, Tom.

TOM. No, this is a “rangoon.” [*Automobile horn blows offstage L.*]

FRANK. There’s your taxi, Mother.

TOM [*quickly*]. Mrs. Gilbreth, I want you to take this with you. [*Fishes a bottle out of his pocket and gives it to MOTHER.*] My special Quinine Remedy. It’s never failed me, and it won’t

fail you. Anytime you feel somethin' comin' on, take a spoonful. [*Takes spoon from pocket and extends it to MOTHER.*]

MOTHER. I'm sure they have spoons in Europe, Tom—but thank you. I'll always keep your remedy in my purse. [*She puts it in her purse.*]

TOM. Well, Mrs. Gilbreth . . . [*Abruptly.*] I got a "rangoon" in the oven. [*Stamps out noisily, R. Auto horn blows again.*]

ANNE [*loudly*]. Dress right, everybody! [*Line forms again.*] You've got to go now, Mother.

MOTHER [*still D R*]. Yes . . . [*Quietly, crossing in front of line of children.*] I'll always be grateful that your father and I planned to have twelve children. It was the smartest of all our plans. And I wouldn't leave you now if it didn't seem the best thing to do. You know that, don't you? This is my chance to prove that I can do your father's work—not as well as he, of course, but that I *can* do it. And if I succeed—well, then we can all stay together—here at home. You do understand that, don't you? [*Auto horn blows loudly, impatiently.*] While I'm gone—I know you'll manage. I won't worry about you, not a bit. Good-bye, I love you all so . . . [*Goes out quickly, L. There is silence for a moment. LILLIAN puts her hands over her face, but she doesn't make a sound.*]

FRED. Lil's crying.

LILLIAN [*sobbing out loud now*]. I am not—I am not crying!

ANNE [*a little choked up herself*]. Of course you aren't, honey!

LILLIAN [*stops crying*]. See, I'm not!

ANNE. Everybody did fine. I think Mother was proud of us.

FRANK. You know, maybe she really won't worry about us—very much.

MARTHA. We'll soon have things running like clockwork around here.

ANNE [*gaily now*]. Yes! For the first time I think we might make a go of it. I could kiss you all!

BILL. I knew it! The minute Mother leaves, you start making threats!

ANNE. That's right! You come here. [*Grabs BILL and tries to*

kiss him. BILL yells and squirms. All the children shout, scream, laugh. It is pure noise, a release after their tension. ERNESTINE and MARTHA grab BILL's arms and hold him while ANNE kisses him soundly on forehead. Children cheer. ANNE speaks through the din. Frank, the assembly call! *[FRANK whistles and children quiet down immediately and fall into line.]* All right, everybody, take your seats for a family council. *[The children quickly arrange themselves. LILLIAN, JACKIE, BILL and MARTHA squeeze together on sofa. DAN perches on right arm of sofa, while FRED perches on left arm. ERNESTINE sits right of table L C, and FRANK sits in chair left of same table. BOB sits in chair by desk D R. ANNE stands at C stage. These positions are taken with split-second timing. Each one knows his or her place in these family meetings.]*

FRED *[jumping up]*. I want to be chairman! I bet Dad would want *me* to be chairman!

ERNESTINE. Anne's chairman. It's all decided.

BILL *[jumping up]*. Who decided? Not me! Dad always said our council was supposed to be democratic.

ERNESTINE. Anne's the oldest. She's chairman. Go ahead, Anne. *[FRED and BILL sit again.]*

ANNE *[crossing behind table L C]*. Well—I don't have to tell you how much depends on how things go the next few months. We don't want to be scattered all over the United States with different relatives.

FRED. I don't want anybody to adopt me! Do you, Dan?

DAN. Heck, no! I wouldn't *let* anybody adopt me! Would you, Fred?

FRED. Heck, no!

ERNESTINE. Where did you get an idea like that?

ANNE *[a pep talk]*. Nobody's going to be adopted. We're all going to stay together. I'm *sure* we can do it—if we remember all the things Dad taught us—if we live more efficiently than ever.

LILLIAN. And if Mother can make enough money.

ANNE. Money. That's the main point of this meeting. Martha is Director of the Budget. All right, Martha.

MARTHA [*rising, stepping toward c*]. Well—Mother left us three hundred dollars——

JACK. Three hundred! Boy!

MARTHA. Mother hopes that will last us six weeks, until she comes home. But I'd like to surprise her and spend only—well, say two hundred.

DAN. *One* hundred!

MARTHA [*laughing*]. We can't do that. But if we economize like crazy, we can do it on two hundred. Now, I have some ideas. I've been looking at the checkbook and the bills. For instance—our milk bill. Thirteen quarts a day.

FRANK. Thirteen! More than three gallons.

BILL. Do we drink that much?

MARTHA. Yes, and it amounts to more than fifty dollars a month. That's just milk.

FRANK. How did Dad pay for everything!

ERNESTINE. Cheaper by the dozen, nothing!

MARTHA. On account of health, maybe we shouldn't cut down on milk. But there are other ways. We'll only have roasts and steaks on special occasions and——

ANNE. Say! We could cut everybody's allowance.

FRANK. Let's vote on that. Should we cut our allowances?

ALL [*except ANNE, loudly, emphatically*]. No!

FRANK. This is democracy at its best.

MARTHA. Well, here's one way we can save—and you'll all be fined if you don't. Leaving lights on or letting cold water run—the fine is two cents. Hot water, four cents.

FRED. I'll give up taking a bath altogether.

ANNE [*quickly*]. No, you won't!

DAN. I'll give up haircuts!

ANNE and ERNESTINE [*simultaneously*]. No, you won't!

MARTHA. I'm going to see the barber and try to make a deal. If all six of you boys go at once, you should get your haircuts wholesale. Another thing—you know how much we spend

on soda pop. Let's get a bottle capper and make our own root beer.

FRED. Hey, yeah!

LILLIAN. Tom loves root beer. He'll help us.

DAN. Sure! We'll fill the whole cellar with root beer!

ANNE. You see how well we can do, if we all put our minds to it and coöperate? But it's going to take a lot of work and concentration. Especially from us older ones. So I suggest that Martha and Ernestine and I—in the interest of greater efficiency—swear off having any dates till Mother comes home.

MARTHA [*stunned*]. What? No boys! . . .

ERNESTINE [*stunned, too*]. No dates—at all? For six long, long weeks?

ANNE. Six weeks is only a month and a half.

ERNESTINE. It will turn those six weeks into six years—*six centuries!*

FRANK. That's a great idea! No dates! No shieks cluttering up the house!

BILL. It's a wonderful idea! Vote! Vote! All in favor say—

ALL [*except MARTHA and ERNESTINE, shouting*]. Yes!

BILL. Motion carried!

FRANK. Next business! [*MARTHA crosses heavily to sofa and sits again.*]

ERNESTINE [*rising*]. Just a moment! There's such a thing as carrying efficiency too far! It can stultify the soul!

ANNE [*slyly*]. Ern, it won't be hard for you. You're in love with Al Lynch—and Al lives two hundred miles away. So if you're true to Al—

BILL [*horrified*]. Al Lynch! That shiek you met last summer? The Nantucket hot dog? Ern, you're not in love with him?

ANNE. Of course she is, and she's proud of it. Aren't you, Ern? So it won't be any sacrifice for you not having dates with Montclair boys, will it?

ERNESTINE [*bravely*]. No! All right—I promise. No dates. [*Sits again.*]

FRANK. Do you swear, Ern, on your honor?

ERNESTINE. I swear—no dates for Ernestine. [*Younger children cheer and clap.*]

ANNE. How about you, Martha?

MARTHA [*stalling*]. Anne—I'm so young—boys are so unimportant in my life—it just seems silly to bother giving them up.

BILL. Martha, swear!

FRANK. It's for the good of the family!

MARTHA [*giving in*]. All right—I swear. [*Younger children cheer and clap again.*]

FRANK [*joking, but solemnly*]. Now I know what a sacrifice you girls are making and what strength it will take for you to keep your pledges. So Bill and I will do all we can to help you.

BILL. Sure! We'll be a committee of two to keep the shieks of Montclair from pitching their tents on the premises.

FRANK. I think that Bill or I should answer all telephone calls.

MARTHA. No! That won't be necessary. I'll turn down my own dates.

ANNE. All three of us will. Wait! . . . [*Holds up a hand for silence.*] I thought I heard Janie calling. Whose turn is it to play with her this afternoon?

LILLIAN. Jack's and mine. C'mon, Jack. [*Rises.*]

JACK. No. Seems like it's always our turn. It isn't fair.

LILLIAN. It is fair! Dad made out the schedule. I looked on the chart and it's our turn today. [*Pulls him up from sofa.*]

JACK. Okay. [*He and LILLIAN go upstairs.*]

ERNESTINE [*rising*]. Suppose the rest of you boys go out doors. I have some business with Anne and Martha.

DAN [*rising*]. Frank, you promised to teach me how to pitch a curve!

FRANK [*rising*]. Sure, Christy Mathewson. Get the gloves and ball.

DAN. Martha, we need a *new* ball.

MARTHA. No. Tape the old one.

DAN. It's been taped three times.

MARTHA. Tape it again.

FRED [*rising*]. Aw, Martha! . . .

MARTHA [*like iron*]. I am Director of the Budget and I say, *tape it again*.

DAN [*meekly*]. Yes, sir, Martha. [DAN, FRANK FRED, BILL and BOB go out L.]

MARTHA [*calling after them*]. And go easy on the tape.

ERNESTINE. Anne, Martha, as Chairman of the Purchasing Committee, I've been checking the family clothes situation. [*Takes a list from her pocket and moves to C. ANNE sits left of table L C.*] I've pared down the list of what we need to get through the summer to a minimum, and we really have to buy very little—much less than usual. [*Reads from list.*] Five pairs of pants, eight shirts, four blouses, only one cotton skirt because I can wear Anne's last year's, Martha can wear mine, Lillian can wear Martha's with the hem taken up, and we'll put Lil's away for Janie some day—six pairs of shoes, two male, four female, twenty-two suits of underwear—and here's a coincidence—*eleven* male underwear and *eleven* female underwear—thirty-four pairs of socks and two collar buttons. Frank lost his.

MARTHA. As Director of the Budget, it sounds all right to me. Except those collar buttons. Aren't there any around?

ANNE. There must be some in Dad's collar box.

MARTHA. Yes, and I want that box—to keep the money I save in.

ERNESTINE. It must be on Dad's dresser. I'll cross out—two collar buttons. [*Scratches out item on list with pencil.*] Now there's something else. We should do a lot of swimming this summer—it's the cheapest form of entertainment. But I'm not sure about our three bathing suits.

ANNE [*rising*]. Let's try them on and see.

ERNESTINE. I think we should. C'mon, Martha.

MARTHA [*rising, crossing D R*]. I'll be up in a minute. I want to telephone the barber about wholesale haircuts. [*Picks up telephone book, as ANNE and ERNESTINE go upstairs. MARTHA looks up number and says it aloud.*] Montclair—742. [*Reaches for telephone; it rings. She jumps. Then she answers*

it.] Hello . . . This *is* Martha . . . Oh, I don't know that it's so lucky. It's one chance in eleven, including Tom, that it'll be me. Janie doesn't get any calls. Who is this? . . . No, I'm sorry, I don't have the time to guess—guessing is inefficient. Who is it? . . . [*Delighted.*] Rodney. Rodney Kramer! Well, how are you, Rodney? . . . Me, too . . . No, I can't guess what you were wondering, Rodney. What were you wondering? . . . Why, Rodney, I have no idea what I'm going to be doing three weeks from tonight. . . .

[FRANK and BILL appear in the doorway L and listen to MARTHA'S joy.]

MARTHA. A dance, Rodney! You want me to go to a dance with you! Oh, how—[FRANK and BILL advance upon her, their arms crossed. One stands on each side of her, staring at her sternly. MARTHA'S voice trails off into a low wail.]—how lovely . . . A dinner dance, Rodney? . . . Oh, no, not a dinner dance! . . . Oh, no—not a formal dinner dance, complete with corsages . . . No, no—no, Rodney, you *can't* get your father's brand new five-passenger, four-door Chandler! . . . Stop, Rodney, stop! There isn't going to be a full moon—there just can't be! Rodney, hold on a minute. [*She is choked up.*] I can't talk for a minute—I am simply unable to speak. . . . [*Holds her hand over mouthpiece and looks pitifully up at FRANK and BILL.*] You wouldn't call this a date, would you? A miserable little old thing like this?

FRANK [*sternly*]. Your pledge, Martha.

MARTHA. I promise not to have a good time.

BILL [*relentlessly*]. Martha, your pledge.

MARTHA. Oh, dear—what excuse will I make to him?

FRANK. Tell him about the pledge.

MARTHA. He'll never believe that. [*Takes a deep breath, steels herself and then speaks into telephone.*] Rodney, I'm terribly sorry, but I'm busy three weeks from tonight. [*Hangs up abruptly, stares straight ahead, her hands clenched at her sides.*]