



Dwayne Yancey

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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AN IMPROPER EDUCATION FOR AN IMPROPER LADY first came to life in a staged reading in April 2020. Stage directions were read by Emma Newport.

ROSE: Ashlee Lambton

LILY: Bianca Heard

LORD HAVALOT: John Jennings

AUGUSTA: Katerina Yancey

CALLIOPE: Georgia Smith

SYDNEY MELBOURNE BRISBANE IV: Matthew Carcassi

AN IMPROPER EDUCATION FOR AN IMPROPER LADY

COMEDY. Deeply in debt, Lord Havalot is eager to marry off his niece, Calliope, so he can inherit his late brother's estate and go on an African safari. But, first, he must hire a governess to tame Calliope's "unique charm." Past governesses have fled in terror after just a few hours with the monstrously maniacal Calliope, who chops the heads off dolls with a guillotine and plays with explosives. So when two uneducated orphan girls posing as governesses arrive, Lord Havalot quickly hires them and tasks them with taming the "high-spirited" Calliope before an unsuspecting suitor arrives for dinner. But how does one tame a homicidal maniac? Your audiences will go crazy for this marvelously mad comedy! Perfect for high school and community theatre actors. Easy to stage with just one set.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

NOTE: Check out Dwayne Yancey's other hilarious comedies featuring Rose and Lily: *This Rose Has Thorns* and *A Dickens of a Christmas*.

CHARACTERS

(2 M, 4 F)

ROSE: A street orphan who poses as a governess so she can instruct Lord Havalot's niece on how to be a proper young lady; wears dirty, ragged clothing; female.

LILY: Rose's sister who goes along with the governess charade and poses as Rose's servant; wears dirty, ragged clothing

LORD HAVALOT, VISCOUNT OF DWEEBLY: Deeply in debt, he wants to find a suitor for his niece, Calliope, before she turns 21 so he can inherit his late brother's estate and go on an African safari; wears safari clothing; male.

CALLIOPE: Lord Havalot's niece who is feigning madness so no suitors will want to marry her; her past governesses have fled in terror; wears a fancy dress; female.

AUGUSTA: Lord Havalot's maid who yearns for romance and a peasant uprising; she is perpetually in a bad mood and alternates between dour practicality and flights of fancy; female.

SYDNEY MELBOURNE BRISBANE, IV (aka HORACE FISHTHROTTLE): A street orphan who masquerades as a nobleman so he can marry Calliope and become wealthy; well dressed and charming; male.

SETTING

London, Victorian England.

SET

Note: Sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows. All scenes may be suggested.

London street. A backdrop of a London street. There is a stoop for Lily and Rose to sit on.

Dweebly Manor, drawing room. Several trophies are displayed on the wall. There is a credenza, dining table and chairs, a divan and chairs, and other furnishing and décor suitable for an English drawing room.

Exterior of Dweebly Manor. A backdrop may be used.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: London street.

Scene 2: Dweebly Manor, drawing room.

Scene 3: Dweebly Manor, drawing room, the next morning.

Scene 4: Dweebly Manor, drawing room, a short time later.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Outside Dweebly Manor.

Scene 2: Dweebly Manor, drawing room, a short time later.

Scene 3: Dweebly Manor, drawing room, a few days later.

PROPS

Newspaper
Feather duster
Governess attire, for Lily and Rose
Farmer's work boots, for Lily
Silver candlestick
Appointment book
Parcel (size of a book)
Packet of papers
Mismatched clothing, for Lily and Rose
Scale model of the French Revolution
Miniature guillotine
3 or more severed doll heads
Doll with head that can pop off
Basket for doll heads
List
Deck of cards
Small liquor bottle (that can fit inside a boot or pocket)
Clothing covered in soot, for Lily and Rose
Fake birds singed black (a burnt pigeon, etc.)
4 Aces
Small flask
Bright red banner, for Augusta
"The Complete Works of William Shakespeare"
2 Cocktail glasses
Piece of paper for birth certificate
Letter
Manifesto, for Augusta
Wicked-looking knife

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Glowing candle
Sound of an explosion
Doorbell

"WHO WANTS TO MARRY
A CRAZY HOMICIDAL MANIAC?"

—CALLOPE

ACT I
SCENE I

(AT RISE: London, Victorian England. A London street. Lily and rose, two teen orphans, are sitting on a stoop. They are wearing dirty, ragged clothing.)

ROSE: *(To Lily.)* I didn't even know you could get kicked out of a workhouse. Seems kind of a contradiction in terms, don't you think?

LILY: I think it might have had something to do with you trying to unionize the orphans.

ROSE: I wasn't trying. I was doing a pretty good job at it.

LILY: I think that might have been the problem.

ROSE: Besides, it was a perfectly practical solution: Give the lads more gin, they'll work happily.

LILY: Happily, probably not harder.

ROSE: The lads seemed pretty happy about it.

LILY: The lads were happy because you spiked everyone's drinks at dinnertime.

ROSE: Well, that's what they get for putting me to work in the kitchen.

LILY: Yeah, well, now we're not working anywhere. We're too old to go back to the orphanage.

ROSE: We got kicked out of there, too, as I recall. Not our fault they weren't very patriotic.

LILY: You tried to set fire to the headmistress!

ROSE: It was Guy Fawkes Day! And I was seven. Sorry if I didn't have a fully formed notion of how to properly celebrate treason.

LILY: Guess we're just going to have to fend for ourselves now.

ROSE: Two orphaned sisters all alone in a cold, cruel world. No family. No connections. No marketable skills in a time

of great economic transition. I don't much like the sound of that, do you?

LILY: Which part? The noun, the verb, or the adjectives?

ROSE: You've been spending entirely too much time in the library, Lily.

LILY: You were the one who said, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Of course, now that I mention it, that was in the context of you stabbing that fellow in the neck with a quill pen.

ROSE: He was trying to steal my gin. I think I organized the lads a little too well, if you ask me.

LILY: So now what do we do?

ROSE: Two pretty, young working-class orphan girls in Victorian London with no home, no one to take us in, no way to earn an honest living. I think there's only one thing we can do...

LILY: What? (*Realizes.*) No! Not that! You don't mean that, do you?

ROSE: We pursue a life of crime!

LILY: Oh, thank goodness. I thought you meant— (*Stops.*) Wait, a life of crime?

ROSE: Maybe not a whole life. Maybe just until we make enough to retire. If we're really good at it, maybe we can get ourselves a castle.

LILY: A castle? Don't be ridiculous. Think of the upkeep!

ROSE: Oh, we'll have servants to do all that.

LILY: Servants, you say?

ROSE: I'm planning to be very successful.

LILY: You also planned to run away and join the circus.

ROSE: I would have been a very good lion-tamer, if only they'd let me practice. I tell you, that orphanage did not have a good vocational program.

LILY: You were catching alley cats and stuffing them in bird cages.

ROSE: Well, that's better than stuffing them into meat pies! Because I guarantee that's what that shop down the street was doing with them.

LILY: Just because you found a hair in yours once doesn't mean it was made of cat. Although, I'll admit the name "Nine Lives Meat Pies and Guitar Strings" did always seem a bit curious.

ROSE: So, it's settled, then. A life of crime it is.

LILY: I suppose. What kind of crime?

ROSE: Oh, I don't know. Fraud, deceit, trickery...that sort of thing.

LILY: Oh. So you mean we stand for Parliament?

ROSE: Don't be silly. You have to be a man to vote.

LILY: There is that.

ROSE: Besides, this doesn't look like a good year for the Whigs, anyway.

LILY: We're Whigs?

ROSE: Mostly we're just orphan girls down on our luck in need of a break. You know, if life were like one of those novels by Charles Dickens, some secret benefactor would come along right now, adopt us, and turn us into ladies-in-waiting.

LILY: Ladies waiting for what?

ROSE: Oh, I don't know. The theatre, the racetrack, the Henley Royal Regatta? Whatever it is ladies do.

LILY: A handsome prince on a white horse.

ROSE: We could take bets on the Royal Ascot. Five to one says that handsome prince never shows.

LILY: Two to one says if we did that, we wouldn't be considered ladies anymore, either.

ROSE: No, but we might be rich.

LILY: So how does someone get to be a lady, anyway?

ROSE: You have to be born that way.

LILY: We were born girls. Can't we become ladies?

ROSE: Somebody a long time ago had to lop off somebody's head.

LILY: That doesn't sound very ladylike.

ROSE: I don't think it was the ladies doing the lopping. Although, if I'd been around back then, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" There's the king at Bosworth Field! And then I'd have ridden in on the horse I just stole and lop this one off, lop that one off, lop off the whole lot of 'em. Next thing you know, I'd have been a lady...or a lord. However that works.

LILY: If you'd been around back then, you'd have been put to work cleaning the stables, or maybe put in the stocks for stealing the horse, or drawn and quartered for picking the wrong side.

ROSE: You're just a real font of inspiration, aren't you?

LILY: Just trying to be practical.

ROSE: And I'm just trying to keep us out of debtors' prison.

LILY: Or Australia. We definitely don't want them to send us to Australia. I hear they have 1,000 kinds of spiders there, and they all want to kill you.

ROSE: Only the big ones...the ones that are the size of crocodiles. They can stand up on their hind legs and box with the other six!

LILY: Ewww!

ROSE: Besides, I think you have to commit a crime before they send you to Australia.

LILY: You were the one who said we were going to pursue a life of crime.

ROSE: Successful crime! Big difference.

LILY: So what's the plan?

ROSE: The plan is...to come up with a plan.

LILY: So what you're saying is right now you don't have a plan.

ROSE: Right now we're in sort of the pre-planning stage.

LILY: So if it's "pre-planning," that means it's before the plan, so that means there isn't a plan, right?

ROSE: It means maybe something will come up.

LILY: Like a storm? I think I feel the wind picking up.

(A newspaper blows on.)

ROSE: Or...this newspaper... *(Picks it up and reads.)*

LILY: I don't think now is the time to be reading up on the latest dispatch from Pago Pago.

ROSE: So look at this. A housewife in North Finchley has grown a potato in the shape of— *(Realizes.)* Oh, maybe I shouldn't read that one out loud.

LILY: Hey!

ROSE: Here's another. A farmer in Upper Moldingham-On-Cheese has a three-legged pig that he claims can grunt to the tune of "Rule, Britannia!"

LILY: Why only three legs?

ROSE: He says a pig that patriotic shouldn't be eaten all at once.

LILY: What does any of that have to do with solving our little predicament?

ROSE: Nothing. It's just interesting. Oh, look, here's one that says—

(Lily grabs the newspaper from Rose.)

LILY: Give me that!

ROSE: Hey! I was reading that!

LILY: We don't need a singing pig.

ROSE: *(Correcting.)* Grunting. It was a grunting pig. And with just three legs!

LILY: And we don't need a potato shaped like, well, whatever it was...

ROSE: It says it was shaped like—

LILY: That's enough! We don't need pigs or potatoes or anything else. We need jobs.

ROSE: Jobs sound so boring.

LILY: Living on the street sounds pretty exciting, but I don't want to try that.

ROSE: True. *(Indicating newspaper.)* So what's it got?

LILY: Well, let's see. (*Reads.*) "The City of London is now taking applications for the position of..."

ROSE: Oh, that sounds good! A government job. We won't have to get our hands dirty there.

LILY: ..."professional rat catcher."

ROSE: Okay, perhaps there are a few exceptions. I wonder what they do with all the rats?

LILY: Says here you're free to sell them to gamblers who put on rat fights.

ROSE: Hmm, on the other hand—

LILY: No!

ROSE: We wouldn't just be gamblers, we'd be sports promoters!

LILY: No!

ROSE: And you probably don't have to pay the rats, so it's all profit.

LILY: I said, no!

ROSE: You're always so negative. (*Indicating newspaper.*) So what else is there?

LILY: Not much. Let's see. (*Looks at newspaper.*) Here's a doctor looking to hire some leech collectors.

ROSE: Um, probably not our thing. But I suppose it could be in a pinch. Get it? In a *pinch*? (*Laughs.*)

LILY: I got it.

ROSE: Probably not as lucrative as being a promoter of rodent wrestling.

LILY: Then there's one for a bug crank. What's a bug crank?

ROSE: They collect dead bugs from the streetlights.

LILY: Okay, no.

ROSE: Do all the jobs there involve rats and bugs and leeches?

LILY: Here's one mucking around in the sewers looking for valuables.

(*Rose and Lily look at each other.*)

ROSE/LILY: Ewwwwww.

ROSE: Nothing else?

LILY: Nothing else we're qualified for.

ROSE: Qualifications are overrated. Maybe we should look again at that standing for Parliament thing.

LILY: Otherwise, it's just butlers and handymen and some lord looking for a governess for his daughter.

ROSE: Well, we're definitely not any of those. Wait, did you say a governess?

LILY: Yeah, why?

ROSE: Let me see that.

(Rose grabs the newspaper from Lily.)

LILY: But like I said, we're not qualified.

ROSE: *(Reads.)* "Minor but respectable country nobleman seeks governess to instruct niece in the customary fields of education and social graces. Inquire Lord Havalot, Dweebly Manor."

LILY: See, what did I tell you?

ROSE: That's it!

LILY: That's what?

ROSE: That's what we do!

LILY: What's what we do? The leech thing or the rat thing? Because no way I'm going down in the sewers...or Parliament. Not that you can really tell the difference between the two.

ROSE: We become governesses!

LILY: Don't be silly. We're not governesses.

ROSE: Lord Havalot doesn't know that.

LILY: I think it'll be pretty obvious when we show up like this. *(Indicates clothing.)*

ROSE: We don't show up like this.

LILY: How do we show up, then?

ROSE: I don't know. We'll steal some better clothes.

LILY: But we don't know anything about being governesses. We don't know much about anything, actually.

ROSE: That's not true. We know how to peel potatoes. Hey, we could even peel one in the shape of—

LILY: I don't think that's what he means by "social graces."

ROSE: Well, what does he mean, then?

LILY: He means things like drawing and using a sewing needle.

ROSE: I gave somebody a tattoo once. Does that count?

LILY: And being able to carry on a conversation in polite society.

ROSE: I know 24 different swear words.

LILY: *Polite* society.

ROSE: Where we're coming from, that is polite society.

LILY: And we certainly don't know anything about the "customary fields of education."

ROSE: Sure, we do. Picking pockets is pretty customary for an orphan. It's even in "Oliver Twist." Maybe someday they'll make a musical about it. People will pay lots of money for a heartwarming tale about poverty as long as they don't have to actually live it.

LILY: Let's look again at that leech-collecting one. That sounds better than the rats.

ROSE: Nonsense. You just need to use your imagination.

LILY: I am. I'm imagining us sleeping out on the streets and going hungry.

ROSE: Not that imagination...your entrepreneurial imagination.

LILY: (*Suspiciously.*) What are you thinking?

ROSE: I'm thinking we need to find a clothesline.

LILY: Why a clothesline?

ROSE: So we can wear nice clothes when we arrive at Dweebly Manor. Come on.

(*Rose grabs Lily by the arm.*)

LILY: Hey!

(Rose and Lily rush off. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: *Dweebly Manor, drawing room. Perpetually in a bad mood, Augusta enters, dusting and tidying up.*)

AUGUSTA: *(To herself.)* Dust, dust, dust. I don't know what the point of any of this is. It's not like I'm removing the dust. I'm just moving it around. But the Master says he wants the place dusted, so I dust. I dust it off from here, and it floats up into the air, and then it all comes back down again over there. I feel like Sisyphus pushing the rock uphill, except I have thousands upon thousands of little rocks all spinning around like little snowflakes. *(Temporarily entranced by the idea, she looks up at the dust spinning in the air. Snaps back into a practical mood.)* I hate snow. Oh, well, I guess it's a guarantee of employment. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." *(Reaches a spot in the room and has her back turned to the rest of the stage.)* I wonder if it's possible to tell the difference. "Hello, Aunt Millie, you're looking rather fine today. If you were a little less fine, I could sweep you up and put you in the rubbish bin along with Uncle—"

(Lord Havalot jumps out from behind a credenza. He is dressed as if he's on safari.)

LORD HAVALOT: *(Pantomimes having a gun.)* Bang! And down goes the great elephant!

AUGUSTA: *(Startled.)* Oh! You nearly scared me to death!

LORD HAVALOT: If you'd been the great elephant, I'd have shot you completely to death! One-hundred percent mortality!

AUGUSTA: I hate it when you do that!

LORD HAVALOT: So does the great elephant, I imagine!

AUGUSTA: I am not an elephant!

LORD HAVALOT: A rhinoceros, then? Or a hippopotamus? Which is the one with the horn?

AUGUSTA: Well, it's certainly not me.

LORD HAVALOT: I have stalked the great beast all the way across the savanna, and now it is time to claim my prize.

AUGUSTA: You snuck up on me in the drawing room.

LORD HAVALOT: I think I'll put the trophy right over there.
(Points to a place on the wall.)

AUGUSTA: Lovely. One more useless thing to dust.

LORD HAVALOT: The elephant there. *(Points to a place on the wall.)* The rhino there. *(Points to a place on the wall.)* Or the hippopotamus. Whichever one has the horn. The lion over there. *(Points to a place on the wall.)* And the tiger's on that wall there. *(Points to a place on the wall.)* No, wait, the ones with the horns should be facing one another. So which one is it again that has the horns?

AUGUSTA: *(Correcting.)* Tusks.

LORD HAVALOT: I beg your pardon?

AUGUSTA: Elephants have tusks. They don't have horns.

LORD HAVALOT: Tusks?

AUGUSTA: That's right.

LORD HAVALOT: Those white pointy things?

AUGUSTA: The very same.

LORD HAVALOT: Those aren't horns?

AUGUSTA: They look like horns, but they're called tusks.

LORD HAVALOT: Do rhinos have tusks or hippos?
Whichever one of those that has a white pointy thing.

AUGUSTA: It's the rhino, and it has a horn.

LORD HAVALOT: Just like a big brass band. Africa is so mysterious.

AUGUSTA: *(Muttering.)* It's not the only thing.

LORD HAVALOT: Zebras are still the ones with the stripes?

AUGUSTA: As far as I know.

LORD HAVALOT: And giraffes are still the ones with the long necks?

AUGUSTA: Until you kill them and cut them off.

LORD HAVALOT: A capital idea! I was afraid I was going to have to raise the ceiling!

AUGUSTA: First, you'd have to raise some capital for that.

LORD HAVALOT: Yes, yes, that is the problem, now isn't it?

Things were much easier in the old days, weren't they? If the lord of the manor needed money, he'd just send out his heralds to tell the peasants, and they gave it to him.

AUGUSTA: I doubt if it was willingly.

LORD HAVALOT: Now the peasants got all these strange notions about having rights and that sort of thing. You're not even supposed to call them "peasants," either. You're supposed to call them "the working classes." I blame those Americans. Ghastly people!

AUGUSTA: Would those ghastly people be the Americans or the working classes?

LORD HAVALOT: Both! Ungrateful little snipes, if you ask me. They go on and on about their right to do this, their right to that. What about my right to live a life of luxury due to my hereditary position? Can't very well have upper classes if the lower classes go around demanding their rights, now can we? If people want rights, they should have been born into a better class.

AUGUSTA: Speaking of rights, do you think I'll be getting paid anytime soon, sir?

LORD HAVALOT: Right. Paid. About that...

AUGUSTA: Yes, about that...

LORD HAVALOT: Well, you understand the situation with my dear Calliope...

AUGUSTA: Here we go.

LORD HAVALOT: All I need to do is find some suitable bachelor to propose holy matrimony to my lovely niece before she turns 21, and then I can inherit my late brother's not-exactly-insignificant estate.

AUGUSTA: And then you can pay me?

LORD HAVALOT: Then I can go off to Africa and hunt the great wildebeest on the plains, the baboon in the jungle, the leopard, the cheetah, the water buffalo, the Thomson's gazelle—bounding gracefully through the tall grass—all the

magnificent animals that the Lord in all his glory has seen fit to put on that wild continent so that Englishmen of the proper social stratum can hunt them down for sport. That is how I shall squander away my time and my inheritance.

AUGUSTA: But you'll pay me first, right?

LORD HAVALOT: Creditors! Why are they always so single-minded?

AUGUSTA: (*Muttering.*) At least they have a mind.

LORD HAVALOT: What's that?

AUGUSTA: Oh, nothing, nothing at all. Just rearranging the dust and reflecting on the futility of life and the eternal dream of a tall dark handsome stranger who will come to take me away from all this. Either that, or the prospect of a peasant uprising, which seems decidedly more likely.

LORD HAVALOT: So, as you can see Augusta, all will soon be well. You will have your wages, and I will have my safari!

AUGUSTA: So when exactly is this mysterious Prince Charming supposed to come along and sweep Miss Calliope off her feet?

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, yes, that. I'm working on that.

AUGUSTA: Working on it? In the same way that you're working on your marksmanship by hiding behind the credenza and shouting "boo!" at the help?

LORD HAVALOT: The very same. When I put my mind to something, I move with electricity. Or is it "alacrity"? Has electricity even been invented yet?

AUGUSTA: Oh, heaven help us all! So what exactly have you done?

LORD HAVALOT: I have put an advertisement in "The Times."

AUGUSTA: You're advertising your niece for sale in the newspaper?

LORD HAVALOT: Of course not. That would be so...middle-class.

AUGUSTA: A designation to which some of us can only aspire.

LORD HAVALOT: I have advertised for a governess...someone to teach young Calliope the finer points of being a lady, instruct her in the social graces, polish her in the ways expected of someone of her social station.

AUGUSTA: Give her a makeover so you can pawn her off on some unsuspecting gentleman desperate for a bride?

LORD HAVALOT: Oh [God], yes! Do you think there's any hope at all? [*Or "goodness"*]

AUGUSTA: Considering that the last governess you hired was last spotted running down the road in her nightdress screaming like a banshee...um, very little.

LORD HAVALOT: She just didn't understand Calliope's wry sense of humor.

AUGUSTA: Calliope put a snake in her bed.

LORD HAVALOT: Merely taking to heart her instruction in the natural sciences, I'm sure. She's a quite attentive student, I hear.

AUGUSTA: The governess before that didn't even last a day.

LORD HAVALOT: She was too quick to judge. She wouldn't have worked out, anyway.

AUGUSTA: Calliope set her hair on fire.

LORD HAVALOT: It was an accident. That's what I told that nosy police inspector who came around. It was an accident. Calliope merely tripped with the candle, that's all.

AUGUSTA: The fact that the governess was tied up with a rope at the time might have been a clue to a certain pre-meditation.

LORD HAVALOT: Whose side are you on here, Augusta?

AUGUSTA: Don't look at me. I don't want to get on that girl's bad side. I rather like my hair the way it is...un-burnt.

LORD HAVALOT: I think Calliope was merely expressing her disinterest in piano lessons. She just had an unusual way of expressing her feelings.

AUGUSTA: Oh, I think she expressed her feelings pretty clearly with the governess before that when she mixed up a vat of glue and put the glue on the piano keys so the instructor's fingers would get stuck.

LORD HAVALOT: (*Sadly.*) I miss that horse, too. (*Pause.*) So music isn't her calling. We learn and we move on.

AUGUSTA: Just like all the governesses have moved on.

LORD HAVALOT: Well, perhaps "The Times" will send us a whole new crop to choose from, eh?

AUGUSTA: (*Mutters.*) Like lambs to the slaughter.

LORD HAVALOT: We just need to keep a stiff upper lip.

AUGUSTA: And a cricket bat by the door in case the girl becomes homicidal.

LORD HAVALOT: I do hope "The Times" can turn up some suitable applicants. I'd hate to be reduced to advertising in one of the other papers.

AUGUSTA: Because they're not as respectable as "The Times"?

LORD HAVALOT: Because the advertising rates are practically usurious. Can you believe they require payment in advance? In cash!

AUGUSTA: (*Muttering.*) Sounds like somebody ran a credit check.

LORD HAVALOT: Time is of the essence! The great herds won't last forever. Don't want them all thinned out by the time I finally get there.

AUGUSTA: Speaking of time, what was it you said about Calliope getting married before she's 21 and you inheriting your brother's estate?

LORD HAVALOT: Yes, poor bloke. Done in by drink.

AUGUSTA: Oh, so he drank himself to death?

LORD HAVALOT: Oh, heavens, no! Never touched a drop...until he fell into a vat of 90 proof while touring a distillery in Scotland. Who knew tourism could be so dangerous? I'll never forget his last dying words as they tried to rescue him. They tried to pull him out, but all he

could say was, “Let go of me, you fools! Let me go!” Then he took a big gulp and went under. I think he knew it was his time. That’s probably why poor Calliope is so –

AUGUSTA: Crazy?

LORD HAVALOT: Emotional.

AUGUSTA: Disturbed.

LORD HAVALOT: High-strung.

AUGUSTA: Just plain loony, if you ask me.

LORD HAVALOT: The poor girl was probably traumatized.

AUGUSTA: The only people traumatized are the ones who have to deal with her.

LORD HAVALOT: Well, yes, she can be a bit challenging.

AUGUSTA: I’m sure that’s what that lion-tamer with the circus said...moments before the lion ate him.

LORD HAVALOT: There’s a circus? Oh, I do love a good circus!

AUGUSTA: It’s a metaphor.

LORD HAVALOT: The acrobats! The trapeze! The seals that balance the balls on their noses! Do you think they were born with that talent, or did they have to learn it? I wonder what Mr. Darwin would say about that.

AUGUSTA: I think he’d say that his “survival of the fittest” theory might have some holes in it.

LORD HAVALOT: And, oh, the elephants standing up on those little platforms! First time I ever saw that—all the grace, the athleticism, the sheer intelligence of the animal—I thought, someday I must travel to Africa to see one of these fine beasts in its native habitat...and shoot it.

AUGUSTA: Remind me not to stand on a chair when you’re around, then.

LORD HAVALOT: Oh, you don’t have anything to worry about. You wouldn’t look very good on the wall, anyway.

AUGUSTA: Not sure how I should take that.

LORD HAVALOT: Sitting down, most likely. Wouldn’t want you to get hurt on the job, now would we?

AUGUSTA: You never answered my question, though.

LORD HAVALOT: What question was that?

AUGUSTA: So what happens if Calliope isn't married by age 21? What happens to your inheritance then?

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, that. Well, by 21, seeing as how she'll practically be an old maid by then...

(Pause.)

AUGUSTA: Yes?

LORD HAVALOT: In that case, it all goes to Calliope to support her during her dotage, all right?

AUGUSTA: And you are left with...?

LORD HAVALOT: Memories of my dear, departed brother. Also, all my unpaid bills.

AUGUSTA: While Calliope—

LORD HAVALOT: Probably travels the world in style inflicting her "unique charm" on everyone she meets.

AUGUSTA: All the while supported by a substantial estate.

LORD HAVALOT: Yes, substantial. Quite substantial, in fact.

AUGUSTA: So that's why you're so eager to marry her off?

LORD HAVALOT: The sooner the better. You get paid, we get the little hellion out from underfoot, and I can go off to Africa and kill large, innocent, exotic animals to put on my walls. So, you see, everyone would wind up better off.

AUGUSTA: Except perhaps the elephants.

LORD HAVALOT: I assure you, I'll employ only the finest taxidermists.

AUGUSTA: And her husband.

LORD HAVALOT: Caveat emptor. Let the buyer beware!

AUGUSTA: So does Calliope realize that if she holds out, she stands to inherit her father's estate?

LORD HAVALOT: The poor girl's mental. I doubt she realizes what day it is sometimes, which is why it's imperative that I find her—

AUGUSTA: A doctor?

LORD HAVALOT: A governess! Someone to shape her up, make her presentable...marketable.

AUGUSTA: You make her sound like livestock at the fair.

LORD HAVALOT: Oh, quite the contrary. You could get good money for a prize stallion. I'll have to pay a dowry to marry off Calliope. I just hope it's not too much. I'd hate to have to ride steerage on the steamer down the Nile.

AUGUSTA: I see. I guess Dr. Freud won't be getting a new patient, after all.

LORD HAVALOT: I do hope a governess shows up soon.

AUGUSTA: The elephants can't wait to be shot, eh?

LORD HAVALOT: A little more concerned about creditors, actually. I wish I could shoot a few of them. I wonder how they'd look up on the wall. Have I ever told you how much some of those bankers resemble a snarling hyena?

AUGUSTA: So just how long has it been since you placed this advertisement in "The Times"?

LORD HAVALOT: Five weeks.

AUGUSTA: Five weeks? And you've had no responses?

LORD HAVALOT: You don't think people missed it, do you? Not distracted by the latest horror that the press has sensationalized? "Horror on Gower Street"! "Horror in East Anglia"! "Horror in the Punjab"! Have you ever noticed that they're all horrors now?

AUGUSTA: I'm thinking people are probably getting wise to the "Horror From Dweebly Manor."

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, yes, I was afraid of that. People do tend to talk. And Calliope does give them quite a bit to talk about. I really should consider making the next governess sign a non-disclosure agreement.

AUGUSTA: I'm afraid the only governess you're going to be able to find for that creature upstairs is someone so unqualified, so preposterously naïve, so ridiculously unsuited for the position that she is unable to find honest employment elsewhere.

(Doorbell.)

AUGUSTA: I'll get the door.

LORD HAVALOT: I'll go practice tracking the great beasts.

AUGUSTA: Perhaps it's the postman delivering that new book I ordered. I told the bookseller to send me something scandalous, something forbidden, something that will stir my passions! Goodness knows that's probably as close as I'll ever get to the real thing.

(Lord Havalot heads toward the exit, practicing his hunting moves.)

LORD HAVALOT: First, I camouflage myself in the native colors of the plain. Then I secret myself in the bush beside their favorite watering hole. And then I come upon them stealthily. And when they least expect it— *(Stumbles over a piece of furniture, creating a great racket. Shouts.)* The crocodile! The crocodile has my leg! It's pulling me under! *(Realizes.)* Oh, never mind, it's just the chair.

(Lord Havalot exits. Augusta opens the door. Rose and Lily are standing there, dressed in nice clothes.)

AUGUSTA: *(To Rose and Lily.)* You're not the postman.

ROSE: Hello. We're here to apply for the position of governess.

AUGUSTA: Oh, praise the Lord!

(Rose and Lily look at each other, perplexed.)

ROSE: Oh, all right, then. If it's required. The Lord of Dweebly Manor is a really swell guy. The swellest. World-renowned for his swelliness, in fact. Isn't that right, Lily?

LILY: *(To Augusta.)* Uh, sure. He's the very Sultan of Swell.

ROSE: Oh, the Sultan of Swell. That's good. I like that. *(To Augusta.)* The Sultan of Swell! The Sheik of Swell! The

Suzerain of Swell! The most noble, generous, kind, soft-hearted Sovereign of Swell that the world has ever seen! How's that? Is that enough praise?

AUGUSTA: God help you. You may just qualify. Come on in. I'll fetch Lord Havalot. *(Exits.)*

LILY: *(To Rose.)* I don't think that's what she meant by "praise the Lord."

ROSE: You know how these noblemen are. They're a very insecure lot. They need a lot of self-validation...always trying to live up to the reputation of a medieval ancestor who was handy with a sword. *(As a knight wielding a sword in battle.)* Swish! Swish! Chop! That's how you got made a knight. Well, that and being on the winning side. Now you just have to show up. Bad for the psyche. Status anxiety.

LILY: Are you sure this is a good idea?

ROSE: Confidence, Lily, confidence.

LILY: I'm pretty confident this is a bad idea.

ROSE: Well, at least we got some new clothes out of it.

LILY: That's true. Too bad we couldn't find shoes to match.

(Lily lifts up her dress to reveal farmer's work boots. Rose looks around the room.)

ROSE: *(In wonder and awe.)* Look at all the stuff here! Think how much we could fit under these skirts when we make our getaway!

LILY: We better start now because I don't think I can run very fast in these. *(Indicating boots.)*

ROSE: Probably best to go for the silverware...small but valuable on the black market. Just make sure you don't rattle too much.

LILY: I don't think I have any pockets.

ROSE: You have to stuff them down your, you know... *(Indicates that Lily should stick the silverware down her cleavage.)*

LILY: Oh!

ROSE: Be careful with the forks. (*Inspects a candlestick with a glowing candle and blows out the "flame."*) This might come in handy. (*Sticks the candlestick holder down her dress.*) Oh! Hot! Hot! Hot!

(*Augusta enters, followed by Lord Havalot.*)

AUGUSTA: (*Clears throat.*) Ahem! (*Introducing.*) May I present, the Viscount of Dweebly, Lord Havalot.

ROSE: (*Extends her hand for a handshake.*) Hi there, Lord—

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) I think we're supposed to curtsy.

ROSE: Oh, right! Forgetting my manners. (*Gives a deep curtsy, in which the candlestick falls out.*) Sorry.

LORD HAVALOT: Is that a candlestick?

ROSE: I like to be prepared. Never know when the lights might go out and you'll need one.

LORD HAVALOT: By Jove, that's the kind of forward-thinking we need around here!

AUGUSTA: It also looks like one of ours.

LORD HAVALOT: Exquisite taste, then. We don't want to just hire some commoner off the street, now do we?

AUGUSTA: Technically, if someone isn't of the nobility, they're a commoner.

ROSE: Oh, we're not commoners.

LILY: We're not? I mean, we're not?

ROSE: We're quite rare.

LORD HAVALOT: So which one of you is it who's applying for the role of governess?

ROSE/LILY: I am. (*Look at each other.*) We both are.

LORD HAVALOT: So you are in competition, then? How rather unfortunate for one of you because I am only in need of one governess.

ROSE: (*Indicating Lily.*) This is my servant.

LILY: (*Correcting.*) Sister.

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) She's like a sister to me.

LILY: I better be.

ROSE: *(To Lord Havalot.)* But she's still my servant.

LILY: I'm not your –

(Rose elbows Lily.)

ROSE: *(To Lord Havalot.)* She's more of an associate, really.

LORD HAVALOT: So which is it...sister or servant? Because quite frankly, I've never heard of a governess with a servant. That would be like a servant with a servant, and that seems quite irregular. *(To Augusta.)* Don't you think this is irregular?

AUGUSTA: I think Miss Calliope is pretty irregular herself.

LORD HAVALOT: That's true.

AUGUSTA: Besides, it might take two of them to hold her down.

LORD HAVALOT: That's also true.

LILY: *(To Augusta.)* Excuse me, did you say, "hold down"?

ROSE: *(To Augusta.)* As in "hold down a position"?

AUGUSTA: No, I mean, "hold her down." You know, like this...

(Augusta grabs Lily and puts her in some kind of comical hold.)

LILY: Hey! What are you doing? Ouch! That hurts!

AUGUSTA: If it didn't hurt, it wouldn't be effective, now would it?

LORD HAVALOT: Calliope can be quite the little tiger sometimes. Roar! She's a high-spirited kind of girl.

AUGUSTA: *(Muttering.)* She's a holy terror, if you ask me. But let's not let on too much about that. *(Releases her hold on Lily. To Lily.)* You can go now, dearie.

LILY: *(To Rose.)* What was all that?

ROSE: I believe it's called a "half nelson" in honor of Lord Nelson, no doubt. The "full Nelson" is what he put on the French at Trafalgar.

LORD HAVALOT: So how soon can you start?

ROSE: What time is it now?

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) I think we need to talk about this.

ROSE: (*Stage whisper.*) I think we need to take their money and worry about the details later.

LILY: (*To Lord Havalot.*) I'll check our appointment book.

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) She means she'll pencil you in.

LILY: (*To Lord Havalot.*) I mean we might already be booked up.

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) But we can probably squeeze you in. (*Grabs the appointment book from Lily or tears a page out.*) Why, look, we have an opening this very afternoon, in fact.

LORD HAVALOT: (*To Augusta, stage whisper.*) I should at least go through the motions of interviewing them, don't you think? For appearance's sake?

AUGUSTA: (*Stage whisper.*) I'm thinking the fact they have appeared at all is qualification enough.

LORD HAVALOT: (*To Rose.*) So, tell me, what are your capabilities in French?

ROSE: (*Taken aback.*) I'm sorry, French?

LORD HAVALOT: Yes. French. You are familiar with the language, I trust. Care to demonstrate?

ROSE: Oh, uh, well, uh, I guess I wasn't expecting that. (*To Lily, stage whisper.*) What do I do? What do I do?

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) I don't know. I saw a frog once. Does that count? Or was it a toad? Which is the one with all the warts?

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) Oh, uh, we...

LILY: (*To Lord Havalot.*) Yeah, we...

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) Oh, mercy!

LORD HAVALOT: Oui, merci. That's good enough. Not sure why anyone needs to know French, anyway. I'm pretty sure that's why William the Conqueror crossed the channel. Horrid little people, the French. They eat snails and such. Although they do know how to make wine.

AUGUSTA: (*To Lily, mutters.*) Let's just hope they don't make it out of snails.

LORD HAVALOT: I'm sorry. I didn't catch that.

ROSE: Snails are rather slow. It's probably easy to catch them.

LILY: Probably a lot of work, though. Wouldn't they have to pluck them out of their little shells before they stomp on them?

ROSE: Nah. That's probably what gives wine flavor, don't you think?

LILY: There's flavor? That stuff at the workhouse sure didn't have any flavor.

ROSE: Oh, that stuff at the workhouse had plenty of flavor.

LILY: True. Mostly like bilge water from the Thames.

(Augusta coughs to get their attention.)

ROSE: *(Realizes. To Lord Havalot.)* Right. Sorry.

LILY: *(To Lord Havalot.)* It won't happen again.

LORD HAVALOT: I have no idea what just went on.

AUGUSTA: And not for the first time, either.

LORD HAVALOT: Perhaps I should ask them about some of the other lessons?

AUGUSTA: Perhaps you shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth.

ROSE: I've got very good teeth, see?

LILY: *(To Rose, stage whisper.)* Wait, is she calling us a horse?

ROSE: *(Stage whisper.)* Just smile and imagine you've got shoes nailed to the bottom of your feet.

LILY: *(Stage whisper.)* That sounds more like a grimace.

ROSE: *(Stage whisper.)* True, but the horse gets fed and has a warm, dry place in the barn.

LILY: *(Stage whisper.)* I don't want to be a barn animal!

ROSE: *(Stage whisper.)* And I don't want us to lose this opportunity because you're acting like a horse's—

AUGUSTA: *(Clears throat.)* Ahem! Ladies, the interview?

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, right. *(To Rose.)* So, mathematics?

ROSE: Math? You mean like adding and subtracting and all that?

LORD HAVALOT: That is the general idea, I believe.

ROSE: Oh. Yes, we can do that.

LORD HAVALOT: Would you care to demonstrate?

ROSE: Oh, you mean like actually do it?

LILY: Two plus two equals...?

ROSE: Depends on what the two are and where they are.

Two cats plus two mice in the same cellar, and you'll wind up with just two cats. Or maybe just one cat. Some are pretty mean. Although, if it's two cats and two rats, now that's more of a fair fight and the smart money is probably on the side of the rats—

AUGUSTA: I think that's enough. Miss Calliope probably doesn't need to know much math, anyway.

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, right. So what else is there? (*Thinks. To Rose.*) Literature?

ROSE: Oh, yes, we're very well read, aren't we, Lily?

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) I don't think sleeping under newspapers every night counts.

ROSE: (*Stage whisper.*) All those words are bound to seep through. I know the ink certainly does. I woke up one morning and thought I had a new tattoo.

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) A new tattoo? You mean you have old ones?

ROSE: (*Stage whisper.*) Well, I'm certainly not telling, although perhaps better to tell than show, eh?

LORD HAVALOT: (*Clears throat.*) Ahem! Literature?

ROSE: You mean like books and such?

LORD HAVALOT: The same.

LILY: Oh, that reminds me. As we were coming up the way, the postman asked us to deliver this. (*Produces a parcel the size of a book.*)

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) Said something about how he was afraid to step onto the premises ever since "the incident with that monster." Do you have any idea what he's talking about?

LILY: *(To Lord Havalot.)* He also said something about how there was a postal inquiry into a sudden uptick of “racy” literature being mailed into the country from the continent, but that didn’t seem very relevant.

LORD HAVALOT: *(Reads the address label.)* “For Miss Augusta.”

AUGUSTA: My book!

(Augusta seizes the parcel from Lord Havalot.)

LORD HAVALOT: A brown paper-wrapped parcel marked, “For adults only”?

AUGUSTA: If you must know, it’s a romance novel. I was afraid the post had confiscated it for being too risqué! Oh, that would be quite the recommendation, now wouldn’t it!

LORD HAVALOT: From Berlin?

AUGUSTA: I’ll have you know that despite all you’ve heard, the Germans are a very romantic people. Goodness knows the English aren’t. Now, if you’ll excuse me...

(Augusta retreats to a corner of the room to open her package, which she is unable to do because it’s securely bound. [Note: During the following, Augusta struggles to open the package.]

LORD HAVALOT: So, right. Enough of literature. I see no point in it, anyway. It’s made up. It’s all just fiction. I like things that are real!

AUGUSTA: Your debts are quite real, which is why I have to settle for fantasies of love and passion...and getting paid.

LORD HAVALOT: *(To Rose.)* History! Any Englishman worth his salt should know his country’s history. In these enlightened times, I suppose that should go for Englishwomen, too. So what’s your grasp of history?

AUGUSTA: If it’s anything like yours, it’s probably tenuous at best.

ROSE: *(To Lord Havalot.)* Uh, Battle of Hastings!

LILY: *(To Lord Havalot.)* Battle of Agincourt!

ROSE: *(To Lord Havalot.)* Stonehenge!

AUGUSTA: Lovely. *(To Lord Havalot.)* Well, I think that's enough history, don't you? It's all in the past, anyway.

LORD HAVALOT: But what about—?

AUGUSTA: What about the fact that you're desperate and have no other options?

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, a good point. *(To Rose.)* I'll need to check references, of course.

ROSE: Of course. I have some letters of introduction right here. *(Produces a packet of papers.)*

LILY: *(Stage whisper.)* What are those?

ROSE: Oh, those are just some old papers I pulled out of the trash. Mostly adverts for liver pills and men's undergarments and something called a "truss."

LILY: What?

ROSE: Nobody checks references, anyway.

LORD HAVALOT: Miss Augusta, will you check these out?

(Augusta is peeved because she's in the middle of trying to open her package.)

AUGUSTA: Fine. I clearly have nothing else better to do. *(Takes the packet of papers and looks through it.)*

LORD HAVALOT: I seem to have misplaced my monocle. I believe it popped out when I was in pursuit of my quarry, although I never understood why I'd want a gravel pit, anyway. Can't put a bunch of rocks up on the wall. Not much of a status symbol there.

LILY: *(To Rose, stage whisper.)* Now look what you've done. Our goose is cooked.

ROSE: *(Stage whisper.)* Well, what did you expect me to do? Take the time to forge some letters of recommendation? Besides, that would have been unethical.

LILY: *(Stage whisper.)* And this whole charade isn't?

ROSE: (*Stage whisper.*) If we have to make a break for it, I'll grab the candlestick, you grab the vase. We can at least get something out of all this.

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) Yeah, a trip to the penitentiary, or worse, a one-way ticket to New South Wales!

AUGUSTA: All perfectly in order, my lord. (*Rose and Lily look at each other in disbelief.*) Perfectly stellar recommendations all around. You might even say they provide quite a bit of, um, support.

LORD HAVALOT: Ah, very well, then. (*To Rose and Lily.*) I accept you into my employment. Miss Augusta will show you to your quarters. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a safari to prepare for. (*Pretends to take aim at an unseen animal.*) Bang! You're dead. Oh, not you, my dear, the elephant in the room. I imagine that makes quite a loud thump when he goes down. Oh dear, I hope he doesn't fall on my guide. I'd hate to have to travel back up the Zambezi on my own.

LILY: (*To Rose.*) Oh, [dear God], what have we done? [*Or "goodness"*]

ROSE: (*To Lord Havalot.*) Uh, at what point do we talk about remuneration? We do get paid, right? There's, like, money involved?

LORD HAVALOT: Oh, yes, there's definitely money involved. I can assure you of that. Quite a bit of it, too, from what I hear.

ROSE: So is there a contract we need to sign? Something I should show to our solicitor?

LILY: (*Stage whisper.*) Do we even have a solicitor? And I'm not counting the one in Leicester Square that we nicked the wallet off of that one time.

LORD HAVALOT: (*To Rose.*) The Lord truly does move in mysterious ways. Of course, so does the African warthog. I wonder if it has a horn, too? Or are they just tusks? Guess I'll find out when I— (*Backs into a chair and gets tangled up with it.*) Oh, the crocodile! It's got me again! Oh! Ow! Ow!

Where's my hunting guide? Help me! Help! Help! (*Exits, tangled up with the chair.*)

LILY: (*To Rose.*) Oh, the poor man! Does he need any help?

ROSE: He better not be poor. We're counting on him to pay us something.

AUGUSTA: I don't suppose either of you girls has a pair of scissors on your person, do you? I'm having quite the time opening my parcel.

LILY: Sorry. No scissors.

ROSE: (*To Augusta.*) But I do have a shiv. Made it myself. It was an arts-and-crafts project at the orphanage.

(*Rose produces a wicked-looking knife. Augusta takes it from her.*)

AUGUSTA: This should do.

LILY: (*To Rose.*) We, uh, taught at the orphanage, didn't we? Before we decided to become governesses...or whatever we are now.

ROSE: (*To Augusta.*) Right. We definitely taught those orphans a thing or two.

LILY: (*Muttering.*) How to pick a pocket. How to pick a lock.

(*Augusta finally gets her parcel open.*)

AUGUSTA: Oh, quit the pretending. I know you're just a bunch of con artists trying to take the man's money. Well, good luck with that, as long as I get mine first. That's how capitalism works, you know. Me, I'm just happy to have some company so I don't have to deal with you-know-who on my own.

LILY: I'm sorry. I don't think we do know who.

AUGUSTA: Now, I'd recommend a good night's sleep. You'll need it to deal with the little beast. I mean, Miss Calliope. That blade may come in handy, too. With her, you never know. Now, right this way. (*Looks at her book.*) Strange. I don't think this is the romance novel I ordered. "Das

Kapital" by Karl Marx. Oh, maybe it's a false cover! Maybe this means it's extra racy! Ohhh!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: *Dweebly Manor, drawing room, the next morning. Rose and Lily are preparing to meet Calliope. They are wearing mismatched clothes.*)

ROSE: (*To Lily.*) How do I look?

LILY: Like you fell out of a Gypsy caravan.

ROSE: I rather like it. I think I look...eccentric.

LILY: You're not old enough to be eccentric. The spinster with 57 cats...she's eccentric. You just look like you stole all those clothes from somebody's wash.

ROSE: See, it's an authentic look, then.

LILY: Of course, I probably don't look much better.

ROSE: You look...authentic.

LILY: (*Sarcastically.*) Great. Thanks for the encouragement.

ROSE: I am all about encouragement.

LILY: You realize this is an absolutely insane idea, don't you?

ROSE: It's an absolutely brilliant idea.

LILY: We have no idea what we're doing.

ROSE: Neither do they!

LILY: And what's all this talk about this girl we're supposed to be teaching, anyway? She sounds like she's a little, well, um, difficult.

(*Augusta enters.*)

AUGUSTA: Oh, that's where you're wrong.

LILY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—

AUGUSTA: She's *a lot* difficult.

LILY: Oh.

AUGUSTA: Actually, "difficult" isn't really the word that comes to mind. "Difficult" would be an improvement most days, in fact.

LILY: Just out of curiosity, what word does come to mind?

AUGUSTA: Oh, I'm just the maid. Not my place to say.
You're the governess...governesses.

ROSE: Or how about "guv'nor"? None of the "-ess" business
on the end. Just "guv'nor." I rather like the sound of that.
"Good morning, guv'nor. How are things down at the club,
guv'nor? Beastly weather we're having today, isn't it,
guv'nor?"

LILY: I think the plural is "governi." You know, like
"octopus," "octopi."

(In hushed voices, Rose and Lily continue.)

ROSE: "Octopi"? I thought that was like something you ate.
You know, one of those little meat pies cut into eight slices.

LILY: No, it's one of those squid things with eight arms.

ROSE: Oh, that's disgusting. I can't believe I ate one of those.

LILY: When did you buy an octopus pie?

ROSE: I didn't. I stole it.

LILY: You stole it?

ROSE: I thought I was getting a bargain!

LILY: You were getting some nasty underwater sea monster
that shoots ink.

ROSE: Oh. How'd it taste?

LILY: What do you mean how'd it taste?

ROSE: Oh, I didn't eat it. I gave it all to you.

LILY: Oh, yuck.

ROSE: I thought it was the sisterly thing to do.

LILY: No, it's not!

ROSE: Well, maybe big sisterly.

AUGUSTA: *(Annoyed.)* Are you two quite finished?

ROSE: Oh, right, yes. We've come to an agreement.

AUGUSTA: And that is?

ROSE: Uh, we prefer the term "governators."

LILY: *(To Augusta.)* "Governatrix." Wait, that doesn't sound
right.

AUGUSTA: Oh, I don't know all those fancy words. I just dust the books in the library. I don't have to read them.

ROSE: Oh, we know lots of fancy words. We're just not supposed to say them in polite company. Isn't that right, Lily?

LILY: Uh, well, I mean—

AUGUSTA: Dreadful tomes they are. Me, I only read romance novels. Just between you and me... (*Stage whisper.*) ...the racy French ones. Although I'll admit that last one they sent me is quite the bodice-ripper. Here, let me read you something from it. (*Reads.*) "Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains." Doesn't that just get your heart racing?

ROSE: Uh, I don't think that's about what you think it's about.

AUGUSTA: Oh, I know what it's about.

LILY: Yes?

AUGUSTA: It's about the oppression of the proletariat by the corporate masters of capitalism. What? Get your mind out of the gutter!

ROSE: Right. So when do we meet our new charge?

AUGUSTA: Well, aren't you the eager ones?! Of course, some of the others were, too. Poor girls. You'll be just like them soon enough, I'll warrant.

ROSE: Well, we're poor already, aren't we, Lily?

LILY: Poor as church mice, we are.

AUGUSTA: Maybe the church mice need to read themselves some Karl Marx. Rise up against the Cat-ipalists!

(Augusta laughs. No one else laughs.)

ROSE: Of course, the church mice wouldn't be so poor if they knew how to sneak a few bills from the collection plate.

AUGUSTA: Get it? Cat-ipalists?

(Augusta laughs. No one else laughs.)

ROSE: Did I mention that we're regular church-goers?

LILY: Probably best you didn't.

ROSE: *(To Augusta.)* Can you believe they actually pass around a plate full of money? I don't really understand their business model. But I understand ours!

AUGUSTA: Oh, never mind. You'll wind up just like all the others...scarred for life.

LILY: Oh? So may I ask just how this girl is so...whatever the word is?

AUGUSTA: Oh, you'll see. You'll see. But, first, I will give you some advice.

ROSE: What's that?

AUGUSTA: Please, God, don't fail. I'd really like to get paid sometime before I die.

ROSE: That's your advice? Don't fail?

LILY: *(To Augusta.)* That doesn't sound like advice. That's more of a plea.

AUGUSTA: I could wish for a workers' revolution to redistribute the wealth. Or I could wish for you two to succeed where all others have failed. Oh, who am I kidding? I've got a better chance waiting for the revolution. So are you ready?

ROSE: Ready, willing, and able!

LILY: Speak for yourself.

(Augusta knocks on Calliope's door and opens it.)

AUGUSTA: *(Calls.)* Oh, Calliope! Your new governess is here. And guess what? This time there are two of them!

(Calliope enters. She looks perfectly normal and acts quite sweet. She even curtsies.)

CALLIOPE: Bonjour.

ROSE: Oh, let me guess. That's French, right? *(To Lily.)* Isn't that French?

LILY: That's French.

CALLIOPE: I've been practicing my French.

ROSE: Oh, that's good. That's very good.

LILY: *(Under her breath.)* Especially since we don't know any French.

AUGUSTA: Well, I'll leave you to it. I'll be in my room if anyone needs me, reading up on how I've got nothing to lose but my chains. Oh! *(Exits.)*

CALLIOPE: Would you care to see the project I've been working on for my French lessons?

ROSE: Well, um, sure. Why not?

LILY: *(To Calliope.)* We'd love to. I'm Lily, by the way.

ROSE: *(To Calliope.)* And I'm Rose.

CALLIOPE: Oh, I don't bother learning names. Nobody ever stays long enough, anyway. No point taking up all that space in my brain. Saves me room to think about my projects.

ROSE: Your projects?

LILY: *(To Calliope.)* What kind of projects? Art projects? Science projects?

(Calliope produces a scale model of the French Revolution.)

CALLIOPE: Engineering.

ROSE: Oh. And what's this?

CALLIOPE: This is a scale model of the French Revolution.

ROSE: The whole revolution?

LILY: I'm not sure that's the French we're supposed to teach.

CALLIOPE: *(Pointing at model.)* Here we have the Bastille. *(Pointing at model.)* And here we have the mob.

ROSE: *(Pointing at guillotine model.)* And what's this thing here?

CALLIOPE: Oh, that? That's the guillotine.

ROSE: Oh.

LILY: That's definitely not the French we're supposed to teach.

ROSE: *(To Calliope, indicating guillotine model.)* So is that thing real? *(Reaches to touch the guillotine model.)*

CALLIOPE: Careful. It's sharp.

ROSE: *(Touches the blade.)* Ow!

CALLIOPE: I told you.

LILY: *(To Rose.)* She did.

CALLIOPE: *(To Rose.)* Would you like to see how it works?

ROSE: I think I just did.

CALLIOPE: How about this? *(Picks up a doll.)* You'll just have to imagine this is an enemy of the people. *(Puts the doll in the guillotine.)* Oh, dolly, you've been accused by the Committee of Public Safety of unspeakable crimes. How do you plead? Oh, never mind. It doesn't make a difference, anyway. The people have spoken: "The pen is mightier than the sword, but the blade is sharper than both." *(Activates the guillotine model. The doll's head is severed.)*

ROSE: Oh!

LILY: Uh...

CALLIOPE: Poor dolly. I'll just have to put her over here with all the others. *(Reaches into a basket and produces the severed heads of other dolls. Picks up a doll head.)* This one's King Louis XVI. *(Picks up another doll head.)* This one's Marie Antoinette. *(Picks of another doll head.)* And this one here...this one is Robespierre. *(Looks at Rose and Lily and smiles.)* So, what do you think? Do I pass French?

ROSE: Uh...sure. What do you say, Lily?

LILY: Help!

[END OF FREEVIEW]