

ACT 1SCENE 1 - O'Toole House, Morning

(Black velvet darkness. A light snaps on, a pale blue shaft illuminates a male form, a mannequin dressed in sparkling glitz and wearing a black pompadour wig-Elvis. He is set up in a closet with the door open, and a mirror close by.)

VANGIE

(Enters carrying a scarf. Enthusiastically to Elvis:) Look what I got for you! *(Adjusts mannequin's outfit as she speaks, and reveals where he's been patched.)* This scarf was on sale, the color's just right, the fit perfect...to cover up your patch.

ELVIS

Love Me Tender

VANGIE

Still and all, it was incredible luck, you falling off the truck like that.

ELVIS

I Tripped I Stumbled I Fell

VANGIE

Dennis said you were damaged-but I don't think of you that way.

ELVIS

Devil in Disguise

VANGIE

In any case, Dennis said since you fell off the truck, I could take you. Well, at least I got something out of Dennis.

ELVIS

A Little Less Conversation

VANGIE

I'm just keeping my fingers crossed that Dennis shows up on time today-or shows up at all.

ELVIS

Double Trouble

(CONTINUED)

VANGIE

(Puts a Kmart smock on herself and checks herself in mirror.) You said it, and with the big sale today, customers will be battling over carts, bullying through the aisles, and arguing at the checkout.

ELVIS

Jailhouse Rock

VANGIE

If Dennis doesn't show up, then it's all on me to cover for him...again. (Finishes dressing Elvis and holds mirror for mannequin.) There, what'd you think?

ELVIS

Viva Las Vegas!

VANGIE

Handsome as always!

ELVIS

What about you, Vangie?

VANGIE

What? What do you mean?

ELVIS

Is this how you're going to live the rest of your life?

VANGIE

What choice do I have? Between work, school, and Mama, I'm full-time taking care of business.

ELVIS

Hey, my personal motto: T-C-B, taking care of business.

VANGIE

That's what I'm doing. That's all I'm doing.

ELVIS

T-C-B, that's what's written on my tomb, you know. What will they write on yours, Vangie?

(Stage lights fade up, revealing a tidy, drab working-class kitchen adjacent to the Elvis shrine. MAMA enters with the newspaper, and rearranges chairs around the kitchen table.)

VANGIE

(To Elvis:) She's rearranging things again. That's a bad sign.

MAMA

What's a bad sign?

VANGIE

Nothing, Mama. (*Closes shrine door*)

MAMA

What? You'll have to speak up. I can't hear you over all this racket!

VANGIE

What's going on?

MAMA

Did you hear them?

VANGIE

No, Mama. I heard you.

MAMA

They've been at it again. I wasn't gone but a minute out to get the newspaper and they come in and moved the furniture.

VANGIE

It's all the same, Mama. Nothing's missing or moved.

MAMA

Oncet Gypsies broke in and stole all the plumbing pipes, replaced them with smaller ones. I could tell all right. The faucets haven't flowed the same since.

VANGIE

Have you had your coffee yet, Mama?

MAMA

Oh those Gypsies are sharp, they are. There's hardly a piece your father brought home, God rest his soul, that the Gypsies haven't carried off.

VANGIE

Mama, please listen to me, Gypsies haven't taken anything.

MAMA

My stuff was safe when your father was alive. He was a man in uniform!

VANGIE

Daddy was a garbage collector.

MAMA

That's right. Had his name embroidered right above the pocket on his uniform: Hap O'Toole, Sanitary Engineer. Yes siree, Gypsies were scared to death at the sight of a man in uniform.

(CONTINUED)

VANGIE

Have your coffee, Mama. (*Escorts MAMA to the kitchen table.*)

MAMA

My only hope is that Floyd will get here before they come to carry me off.

VANGIE

Floyd!

MAMA

He was on his way to Miami when he left, real important business.

VANGIE

What makes you think he's coming back?

MAMA

Floyd said he'd have a big surprise for me.

VANGIE

Mama, it's been over three years since we've laid eyes on Floyd. It's not likely that brother of mine will show up in Dundalk now.

MAMA

He's on his way home. I feel it plain as anything.
(*Fireworks outside*) What was that?

VANGIE

It was just kids, Mama.

MAMA

It was Gypsies.

VANGIE

It's kids setting off fireworks, like Floyd and I used to do. They're getting ready for Independence Day. You remember, Mama, when Daddy took us to Patterson Park every Fourth of July? People sprawled on blankets across the hillsides, little kids rolling on the grass, ooh-ing and aaah-ing with each ka-pow!

MAMA

Yeah, I remember. I wish we could do that again.

VANGIE

Me too, but things change, Mama, it's just a part of life.

MAMA

Change isn't good, just look at India Marlowe. A big movie star like her must be scared to wake up in the morning for fear she's got some new disease.

VANGIE
Mama, I'm going to work.

MAMA
You're leaving me?

VANGIE
I gotta catch the bus.

MAMA
I knew it. First Hap-

VANGIE
Daddy died, Mama.

MAMA
Then your brother, and now you.

VANGIE
I'll see you tonight. I've got class after work, and then I'm going to stop by the children's ward at the hospital, and don't forget, the girls are coming over tonight for a fan club meeting. Bye, Mama. (*Exits*)

MAMA
Don't worry about me; Floyd will be here soon-I see it clear as anything! (*Dials telephone, speaks:*) Hello, Mabel, you gonna be home for a while? Good. I want you to watch my house real close. Make sure no Gypsies get in while I run up to the store. (*Takes purse and exits*)

(FLOYD appears at the window and hastily climbs in with a suitcase.)

FLOYD
Mama? Vangie? Well ain't that a fine welcome? Nobody home. Good. (*Opens door for HERB*) Hey Herb, in here.

HERB
(*Enters*) Did you just break into this house?

FLOYD
I had a key (*aside:*) at one time. What took you so long, anyway? I thought you were right behind me. (*Starts rifling through kitchen, opens cans of tuna and they eat as they talk.*)

HERB
Had to let her majesty stretch, relieve her royal self.

FLOYD
You mean Konstanze? (*Sniffles*) Fine, so long as you don't leave her with me.

(CONTINUED)

HERB

What's wrong with her company?

FLOYD

I'm allergic to cats.

HERB

So whose place is this? You got a hot chick here in Dundalk?

FLOYD

It's where I grew up. Ma and my sister live here.

HERB

You got a sister, huh?

FLOYD

Don't you get any ideas.

HERB

Relax. You get back to see them much?

FLOYD

Heck no! When my old man got his, my sister, Vangie, she tried to talk me into sticking around to help out with Ma, but I told her, 'No way, I'm cuttin' out of here toot de damn sweet. If you got good sense you'll do the same.'

HERB

But she didn't take your advice?

FLOYD

Nope. That's what separates me from Vangie. She stayed right here and never left. (*Sneezes*)

HERB

What are you gonna tell her about your visit?

FLOYD

Vangie-Evangeline-tell her anything and she'll believe it. It's not that she's dumb, just that she thinks because she tells the truth, everybody else does, which, when you come to think of it, is pretty stupid in itself.

HERB

You know, you had it pretty good working for Cenicero. Cruising around Miami in the boss's Testarossa.

FLOYD

Look, I been Cenicero's errand boy three years now, and what've I got to show for it? I'm through playing the flunky. (*Sniffles*)

(CONTINUED)

HERB

You coulda come back to your job with me.

FLOYD

Loading trucks up there in Jersey? Don't get me wrong, man, you treated me decent, but in a lifetime I couldn't've pulled down the kind of cash I got now.

I wish you coulda seen it, man. I had it all planned from the start. The cops took down Cenicerero's gang, and then the boys in blue got to keep the coke for themselves.

HERB

While you walked away with Cenicerero's money.

FLOYD

I'm on my way to buy my own Testarossa. Leather seats.

HERB

You ask me, you shoulda just taken your regular split, let it go at that. They don't call Cenicerero "The Ashtray" for nothing.

FLOYD

Cenicerero ain't never gonna get wise. (*Sniffles*) Say, let me pay you for the ride.

HERB

No thanks. If I'd known what kind of double-cross you were pulling, I mighta reconsidered about signing on as your transportation.

FLOYD

Look, all I gotta do is lay low here for a coupla days. You pick me up on your way back to Jersey, then we'll do the Big Apple, my treat.

HERB

If you live that long.

FLOYD

Till then, it'll be nice to give my ears a rest from that caterwauling you listen to.

HERB

It's called opera.

FLOYD

It's called awful.

HERB

Good-bye, Floyd. (*Exits*)

(CONTINUED)

FLOYD

See you later, Herb. Would you look at that, I'm rich as...rich as Elvis, (*Looks in refrigerator*) but not a beer in the house. (*Sneezes*) I gotta get a six-pack. (*Opens shrine door and jumps back*) Cripes-there's a big sucker, staring straight at me! Holy crackers, it's nothing but a store dummy.

(*To ELVIS:*) I guess you're man of the house now, huh? Yeah, well, you can have it. (*Stows suitcase in shrine.*)

Hang on, I go out looking like this, someone could recognize me, but nobody'd know me as Elvis. (*Removes ELVIS' jacket*) Jeez, there's a hole in his chest. You know, this dummy is the perfect place to stash the cash in case old Herb comes nosing around. (*Stuffs ELVIS with wads of cash. Selects for himself different jacket from closet, and re-clothes mannequin in costume from start of scene. Looks in mirror*) Thank you very much! (*Closes shrine door and exits*)

(JOSE and GECKO appear at the window.)

JOSE

(*Sniffs*) Es the right casa. You smell that?

GECKO

(*Sniffs*) Si, senior. Es tuna fish.

JOSE

Floyd O'Toole, he leaves a trail of tuna fish a mile wide. Just follow the fishy smell, we'll find O'Toole. (*Enters through window, followed by GECKO. Starts rummaging through things.*)

GECKO

What about the money?

JOSE

Gecko, es like I told you: we find O'Toole, we find the money. We find the money, we don't need O'Toole. We don't find O'Toole or the money, then you better start counting your cojones.

GECKO

Uno, dos...

JOSE

Gecko, you stupid sonvabitch! Es bad enough you steal a Yugo. What kind of Hispanic steals a Yugo? Where'd you even find one in Miami?

(CONTINUED)

GECKO

The Yugo was the only car in the lot.

JOSE

And now you know why.

GECKO

I ain't no fortuneteller!

JOSE

You don' have to be a palm reader to know if you screw up working for Cenicero you're gonna have a short lifeline.

(KONSTANZE meows)

GECKO

Do you hear something, amigo?

JOSE

Only you, idiota!

(KONSTANZE meows)

GECKO

What was that?

JOSE

El gato.

GECKO

I don' like the way that cat keep yeowling.

JOSE

That cat's in heat.

GECKO

Mi abuela, she say when a gato es yeowling, she's putting on you the, how you say, the ojo malo, the curse of the tiger.

JOSE

Get back to work. This darned casa, she's so full of junk the dinero and O'Toole both could be anywhere.

GECKO

(*Opens shrine door*) Santa Maria! Es a holy shrine. Ain't no way I gonna mess aroun' with no santo.

JOSE

That's no saint I ever seen before.

GECKO

So how much you know about American saints, hah? You think somebody set up all this jus' for fun? I'm telling you, hombre, I don' mess with no santo.

(CONTINUED)

JOSE

Gecko, look out!

(KONSTANZE meows louder. Lights blink on and off and JOSE and GECKO knock things around. The cat yeowls with an ungodly screech.)

GECKO

Curse of the tiger! *(Jumps out the window followed by JOSE.)*

(At each scene change, STAGE HAND, dressed in coveralls, sweeps the stage as if he is part of the stage crew.)

SCENE 2 - KMART

(Office/Stock room, DARLA reads a newspaper)

VANGIE

(Enters) Hi, Darla, I've got news for you!

DARLA

And I've got news for you too, hon. Says here India Marlowe is getting married again-that's five trips to the altar!

VANGIE

Who's the lucky groom this time?

DARLA

Mr. Daniel Dulaney Stowell of the horsey set in Coldspring Valley.

VANGIE

Any sign of Dennis?

DARLA

(Hoists a booze bottle from box) Oh he's definitely been here. Dennis is like that White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland that's always in a hurry, only he never gets anywhere, and you're like Alice, stuck in Kmart's aisles where you've lost your way!

VANGIE

Dennis can't help it. Ever since he and Fran split up, he's been hitting the bottle pretty hard.

DARLA

(Mocking VANGIE:) Poor Dennis, he's a slob, a drunk, and a bad manager. Cripes, Vangie, when are you gonna quit knocking yourself out to cover for him?

(CONTINUED)

VANGIE

It's what separates me from the customers.

DARLA

You stick up for him so much, he must be your type.

VANGIE

Believe me, Dennis is not my type.

DARLA

Why's that?

VANGIE

For one thing, there's everything you just said about him, not to mention he's still married.

DARLA

That never stopped me and Charlie.

VANGIE

Never got you anywhere either.

DARLA

Since you're here, can you give me a hand with the inventory? Dennis has it all messed up...as usual.

VANGIE

Let me see. This was the lingerie missing off last month's report.

DARLA

How'd you catch that?

VANGIE

It's simple math of debits and credits.

DARLA

Might as well be squirrels and rabbits.

VANGIE

Accounting's easy really. It's just a matter of checks and balances.

DARLA

If it's so easy, how come Dennis never does it?

VANGIE

You see, if one number appears in column A, then its value should be in column B.

DARLA

And if it doesn't?

VANGIE

It's a balancing act.

DARLA

Like how you're the Assistant Manager and the Manager at the same time.

VANGIE

Dennis is probably held up in traffic.

DARLA

Or hung over. Seriously, Hon, you're almost twenty-eight, you still want to be Assistant Manager when you're thirty-eight?...forty-eight?

VANGIE

I've got something else in mind.

DARLA

Yeah, yeah, you've got those night classes so one day you can wake up in that dream job. In the meantime, year-in year-out it's the same thing.

VANGIE

This year is different.

DARLA

How's that?

VANGIE

It's 1987, Darla, the tenth anniversary of Elvis' death.

DARLA

So tragic.

VANGIE

This year, anybody's who's a real fan will be at Graceland.

DARLA

You mean the Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee?

VANGIE

Can't you picture it, Darla, just the way it is?

DARLA

With the iron gates decorated with music notes.

VANGIE

And the white-columned mansion perched upon a gentle rise.

DARLA

The home of Elvis Aaron Presley.

(CONTINUED)

VANGIE

We'll go up the hill, over the threshold, and walk the very rooms where Elvis walked, and see the piano where he played.

DARLA

That does sound neat.

VANGIE

Then late at night with the moon shining down, we'll hold a candlelight vigil in the little garden where Elvis and his mother are laid to rest. The girls say that's when you truly know you've been to Graceland.

DARLA

Ooo, gives me shivers to hear you talk about it!

VANGIE

We're going, Darla.

DARLA

What are you saying?

VANGIE

I'm saying that this year, Darla Wisnewski and Vangie O'Toole are going on the Graceland Express.

DARLA

You mean on the Graceland Express charter bus with the Elvis-4-Ever Fan Club? But how?

VANGIE

It's a matter of checks and balances. We only have so much of our lives to live. It's time to cash in on a little savings.

DARLA

But I can't afford that.

VANGIE

Don't worry. I've put enough checks in my balance to pay for both our tickets.

DARLA

Gee thanks, Vangie, but how will I repay you?

VANGIE

Come on this trip with me. We'll sit together on the bus, and no matter what else happens, we'll know this year is different because this year we're bound for Graceland.

(VANGIE and DARLA Sing, to the tune of "This Train Is Bound for Glory":)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VANGIE (cont'd)

This year we're bound for Graceland

This year!

This year we're bound for Graceland

This year!

This year we're bound for Graceland

There ain't nothin' to slow our pace and

This year we're bound for Graceland

This year!

(Telephone rings)

DARLA

(Answers:) Kmart, Darla. (Listens. To VANGIE:) For you.

VANGIE

Who is it?

DARLA

Soft voice, heaving breathing-could be Dennis.

VANGIE

(Into the telephone:) Assistant Manager Vangie O'Toole.
(Listens) Mama? Mama, is that you? (Listens) No Mama, the
lampshade with the gold fringe is the same one, right down
to the fringe that's missing on the back. (Listens) I assure
you, nothing's changed.

SCENE 3 - BATHTUB

(Same day, INDIA Marlowe's
bathroom: INDIA in the bathtub
behind a newspaper. STAGE HAND is
finishing sweeping.)

INDIA

(Behind newspaper) Not so fast. You missed a spot.

STAGE HAND

Ma'am?

INDIA

(Puts down newspaper) There. Right there. (Points to chair)
Sit down.

(CONTINUED)

STAGE HAND

(Sits) Ma'am, I think somebody's looking for me backstage.

INDIA

Sit. Nobody's looking for you. Nobody's looking for me either, onstage or off. I've been soaking in this lousy Baltimore backwater for weeks. I'm barely covered in print.

STAGE HAND

Would you like a towel?

INDIA

You're probably wondering, aren't you, how a day in the paddocks here compares to Spanish bullfights and dancing the night away in a Greek bistro.

STAGE HAND

Well, I figure a lady's got to have her secrets.

INDIA

It stinks. I miss memorizing lines, real lines. Instead I'm learning breeding lines of horses and senators and senators' horses. Keep your seat!

STAGE HAND

Yes, Ma'am.

INDIA

Why didn't anyone warn me these old-line Maryland families would be an endless, bloody bore?

STAGE HAND

Maybe you could join a club.

INDIA

What kind of club?

STAGE HAND

Uh well, did you see the newspaper article about the Elvis fan club that spends time with children in the cancer ward? They're having a fund-raiser--

INDIA

What? (*Looks at paper*)

STAGE HAND

Sure, it says right there, there, the fundraising chairperson, Vangie--

INDIA

What if I were to meet this woman, this...ah...Angel....

(CONTINUED)

STAGE HAND

Vangie O'Toole--

INDIA

Think of the publicity--for the fund-raiser, of course--if
Ah were to present Miss O'Toole with an awahd.

STAGE HAND

I'm sure that would make for a great story.

INDIA

Ah've just taken the greatest interest in those dahling
little children at St. Ignatius. Ah feel it is mah civic
duty to stand up (*stands as STAGE HAND holds up newspaper to
shield her body from the audience's view*) for this worthiest
of causes!

SCENE 4 - BUS STOP

(Later that day, VANGIE sits alone
at the bus stop reading a
textbook.)

DARLA

(*Enters*) Hey Vangie, where you going?

VANGIE

I've got class.

DARLA

You sure do, hon!

VANGIE

I've got Accounting Procedures Three.

DARLA

Well, you got more guts than I do if you can hit the books
after working all day.

VANGIE

Got to. If I let the assignments pile up two days in a row
it takes two weeks to catch up. Where are you off to?

DARLA

To see Charlie. We're going for a ride out in the country
this afternoon.

VANGIE

Isn't Charlie the guy that you said was as worthless as a
slug in a Coke machine?

(CONTINUED)

DARLA

Yeah, well, Charlie's got a hot new car. A red Cadillac Allante Roadster.

VANGIE

A roadster, huh?

DARLA

You know the rules: Guys who drive convertibles expect too much on the first date, guys with Chevys can't afford nice places, and any guy who drives a van is sure to be married, but a red Cadillac Roadster-Rrrahrrr!

VANGIE

If you're going for a drive with Charlie, why are you taking the bus?

DARLA

Oh, I thought I'd stretch my legs a bit, go up a few blocks to meet him.

VANGIE

Save him the trouble of seeing where you work and live?

DARLA

You know how it is, Vangie, you and me are from here, but other people just don't know Dundalk the way we do. Didn't I see you getting dropped off from a date the other night? A guy driving a Ford coupe?

VANGIE

Danny Smith.

DARLA

Where's he from?

VANGIE

Mergers and acquisitions.

DARLA

You don't have to talk dirty, just tell me what happened with this guy.

VANGIE

We went for a cup of coffee after class.

DARLA

Oh yeah? Then what?

VANGIE

We just talked. Danny said, "I don't care how long these night classes take, when we're finished we'll have a chance for real careers." I liked the way he said "we."

(CONTINUED)

DARLA

So what happened after that?

VANGIE

I had to go, and he offered to drive me home.

DARLA

That's where you made your mistake, hon.

VANGIE

No, he wasn't like that.

DARLA

But he's not from Dundalk, is he?

VANGIE

He's from a nicer section-Towson.

DARLA

Let me guess, you crossed the Key Bridge, left the lights of Baltimore behind. Then he gets a whiff of the steel mills and that sewage treatment plant, and he starts to look at you different.

VANGIE

No, it wasn't Dundalk; it was Mama. All the houses on Shirley Street were dark, all except my house, lights blazing in every window. I raced inside and there was Mama holding Floyd's old baseball bat and crying that the Gypsies were after her.

DARLA

Does she really believe that?

VANGIE

Who knows? Once she gets an idea in her head it's hard to change it.

DARLA

You ever talked to a doctor about her?

VANGIE

I took her to a psychiatrist once. He said that she had Capgras Syndrome.

DARLA

Crabgrass?

VANGIE

Capgras Syndrome is when you believe that people or objects are stolen away and replaced with others.

DARLA

Is there any cure?

VANGIE

The doctor said if she came for therapy each week it might improve her condition, but Mama said that was the exact time the Gypsies would come and take her things.

DARLA

That kinda makes sense.

VANGIE

That's what makes it so difficult. She almost has me believing in Gypsies!

DARLA

How's your mama doing now?

VANGIE

All right, I guess. Just this morning, though, she talked about Floyd coming home.

DARLA

Floyd? You mean Floyd your brother? Funny, I never hear you mention him.

VANGIE

I guess his name just doesn't come up, at least not in polite conversation.

DARLA

Where is Floyd, anyway?

VANGIE

If there were any chance of Floyd showing up I'd go put up a billboard somewhere down Interstate 95-FLOYD GO BACK, DUNDALK IS CLOSED.

DARLA

Do you really mean that?

VANGIE

He only makes things hard on me, and worse on Mama.

DARLA

You haven't told her yet about the trip to Graceland?

VANGIE

Not yet. I've got to lead up to it. With Mama it's like leaping off a high dive, only there's no way of knowing whether the water below is six feet deep or six inches. So I'm waiting for the right moment to tell her. I'm waiting to know when that moment will be.

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DARLA

Well don't wait on a bus that ain't coming.

SCENE 5- FAN CLUB MEETING

(Evening the same day, the O'Toole kitchen. FLOYD, drunk, climbs in the kitchen window with a partial six-pack. KONSTANZE meows.)

FLOYD

Konstanze? Konstanze, is that you? (*Sneezes*) Where are you? Where's Herb? (*KONSTANZE meows*) What a mess you've made. (*Sneezes*)

JOSE

(*Offstage*) I tol' you that car's a heap of junk.

GECKO

(*Offstage*) Cenicero tell me to steal a car. He don' say I should steal no flippin' Rolls Royce.

JOSE

(*Offstage*) He don' say to steal no flippin' Yugo either!

FLOYD

Jose and Gecko! (*Hides under table*)

(JOSE and GECKO climb in the kitchen window. GECKO goes around the room mumbling and shaking a small effigy doll.)

JOSE

(*To GECKO:*) Will you cut that out!

GECKO

Got to make peace with the spirits, amigo, or the deal goes bad.

(FLOYD starts to sneeze, holds it back.)

JOSE

This deal gonna go bad if we don't find the money. (*Takes out gun*) Soy un hombre muerte. Better I should take this gun right now, shoot myself through the heart.

GECKO

Don't say that, amigo.

(FLOYD sneezes. JOSE and GECKO look under the table.)

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