

"GEM"

Written by
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GEM

FADE IN:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS AREA - DAY

An aging street in an American city; movie theater, drug store, tavern, barbershop, florist, new fast-food place, a half-dozen other buildings, some vacant. Cars go by, none of them stop.

The theater: marquee paint peeling, signboard blank and soot-stained, grimy neon tubes unlit.

We look around the entrance. The "Now Playing" and "Coming Attractions" poster frames are empty. Some graffiti is sprayed on the walls, other areas show where it's been painted over.

There's a fresh sheet of paper tacked up on the door, handwritten with a felt-tip:

AUDITIONS HERE
IF LOCKED PHONE 555-0109
TINA MILLER AND ANN SORENSEN,
MANAGERS

The ticket booth glass is covered with old boards. As we look at it we hear:

AUDIO CLIP #1 (10 seconds, mono): A nervous-sounding young man, traffic noise and people talking in the background:

"What seats have you got?"

Young woman:

"Just [inaudible] in about two minutes the show starts..."

Young man:

"All right"

Sound of coins hitting metal.

We look at a "Coming Attractions" frame, nothing in it but the bare wall behind it, and in one corner there's a torn scrap of an old poster, showing the night sky with stars.

The paper gets closer and closer until it fills the screen, then turns into:

STARLIT SKY (Stock footage)

Just the night sky, silent stars in the distance, little circles of light, some yellow, or white, a few winking on and off.

AUDIO CLIP #2 (1 1/2 minutes long, mono): Music similar to Dixieland, drums and trumpet with a theater organ in the

background, and sometimes a clarinet. It's a combination of martial, garish, and whimsical. We hear a hand-clap now and then, and once or twice the sound of a woman's voice saying, "Okay!" or "Hi-hi-hi-hi!"

TITLE and CREDITS (on starlit sky) as Audio Clip #2 plays.

Several times during the credits there's a fleeting glimpse of the dancing superimposed on the stars, very faint. When credits conclude, go to:

FILM CLIP #1

(2 minutes long, untitled, B&W): A 9-member dance chorus performs an energetic number on a small theater stage. The music is the same type as in the preceding music clip, the stage and dancers look like the ones we saw in the stars. The men are wearing tuxedos, the women are in short skirts and bra's decorated with puffs of feathers. They're often out-of-step, but they're enthusiastic and smiling, and fun to watch. At conclusion, there's a dull CLICK from a VCR.

INT. THEATER - DAY

ANN and TINA are watching a small TV/VCR. It's chest-high for the women, because they're standing in front of the theater stage and the VCR is up on the stage floor, the movie screen looming behind it. The place looks old and run-down and dusty, like it's been closed for a long time.

Both women are around 70, Tina a few years younger than Ann. Each wears casual clothing; Ann's is plain and worn, Tina's is elegant. Ann rarely smiles. Tina smiles a lot, like she's a saleswoman.

ANN

And that is what a good chorus can do.

TINA

(frowns)

Did you hear one of them say caca? She said "Aw --"
(mouths the word: "shit")

ANN

All shift. Or Now shift. That's the line captain, she's cuing 'em to face sideways or whatever. Ah, she's showboating actually, but-- Point is, you could hear her talking. You could hear 'em clap their hands. This has the actual sound.

TINA

The other movies don't have that?

ANN

Not for the strippers. I've only watched a few so far, but most of 'em dub the music. Or they use phonograph records. It's just terrible.

TINA

I didn't know the music was important.

ANN

Oh yeah. A live band makes all the difference in the world. Especially the drummer.

(gestures to a box)

Everybody had their own music. We bought the orchestration, we gave it to the band, they played it for us. We developed our dance for it. Take that away and put something else in there, and it makes us look like dorks, like we couldn't even follow a beat. But you liked 'em, huh?

TINA

(an instant to remember who)

Oh they were precious. I can just see our girls doing that. When we get girls, that is.

ANN

(sardonic)

Yeah, well...

Ann presses a button on the VCR and it goes CLICK, then WHIRR indicating high speed.

ANN

Chorus boys were unique to that theater, far as I know. See, this is not your average show. They did a lot of production numbers and stuff.

Ann consults a scrap of paper, then alternates looking at Tina and at the VCR counter.

TINA

And those were the actual performers, not actors.

ANN

Oh yeah. It's the real thing. These films were adults-only. This was hot stuff back then.

TINA

You weren't in there, were you?

ANN

Nah. This is 1948. I was still a little child.

(holds hand waist high,
drops it lower)

And now for your viewing pleasure, if I got the numbers right...

Ann presses a button and the whirr SLOWS to nothing, and there's a CLICK indicating videotape has been stopped. She turns to Tina.

ANN

Okay. Joy Damon is not a feature. But they filmed her the best, and she makes a good example. Watch how the drummer follows her, especially how he catches her bumps.

Tina's smile dies on that last word.

ANN

Hon. Bumping is part of the business. And hers are to die for. I mean, world class.

Tina nods reluctantly.

Ann presses another button and there's a CLICK again.

FILM CLIP #2

(3 1/2 minutes long, untitled, B&W): This begins with a comedy routine in process. That ends in 30 seconds, then the video goes to black. While the comedy routine is playing, the two women continue to talk.

ANN (O.S.)

Well hell. Ah, they're just winding up. You're gonna love her introduction.

Comedy act concludes with one comic saying, "I've got twenty two," and then giving the other a dollar bill.

ANN (O.S.)

See, he meant twenty also --

Fanfare plays for next act.

TINA (O.S.)

Shhhhhhhh.

A smiling young woman steps on stage as we hear the emcee say, "Presenting the happy little lassie with the classy chassis, Miss Joy Damon."

TINA (O.S.)

(smothers laughter)

Joy strides around the stage for a minute, then removes her jacket and outer skirt, leaving panel skirt and pasties. Her breasts are not large, and she does not wear tassels. She is not at all lewd. She bumps her pelvis to rimshot emphasis, then arches her back and rolls her hips. The music changes to a pounding kettledrum and she runs out to the center of the runway, skidding to a halt right in front of us. She shakes her ass until it's a blur, then wheels around and slams bumps with a grin, the drum and cymbal emphasizing every move she makes. Joy steps offstage to applause, then briefly reappears without pasties and waves to the audience. At no time have any shouts or whistles from the audience been audible. At conclusion, there's a CLICK from a VCR.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Ann looks at Tina inquiringly.

TINA

(dismayed, a bit numb)

The paint was peeling off the columns -- that woman -- it was like something in a waterfront dive.

ANN

Same place you saw the chorus. Hollywood Theatre. It was on "F" Street in San Diego and believe me, it was no dive.

TINA

(realizing)

You did that. In public.

ANN

Nah, it was on stage, that's not public. They hadda buy tickets. So whadja think of her?

TINA

It certainly wasn't what I expected.

ANN

Such as...?

TINA

She didn't tease. I thought that was the whole idea. But she just walked around for awhile, then she tossed off her clothes.

ANN

Well, the walking around was the tease. Plus she fooled with her jacket there, and her skirt. That was about as much tease as you got normally. Stripping was an opener. It was like foreplay. You were there to dance.

TINA

Gypsy Rose Lee teased.

Exasperation flashes across Ann's face, turning to resignation.

ANN

So I've heard.

TINA

Didn't you ever see her?

ANN

Oh yeah. She was great on "Hollywood Squares."

TINA

No, I meant when she was --

ANN

I know. Nah, when I started she was still working, I think, but not in burlesque theaters, so... Back to Joy Damon.

TINA

(mimes breasts)

Her -- endowments weren't very large.

ANN

It didn't matter really. And she's got a pretty good build on her, anyway. But I mean what she did. Her bumps. See how the drummer works with the dancer?

TINA

(deliberate)

I was very impressed with the drums.

(level look)

Did you notice how great she looked when she shook her booty?

ANN

Yeah, that was real good.

Tina is pleasantly surprised at that answer.

ANN

No, I agree. And the rest of her dance?

TINA

Well, she didn't really dance. Anybody could do that --
(mimics hip roll)

Ann gestures to the stage.

ANN

You wanna try it?

Tina looks away from Ann with sudden hurt. Ann draws in her breath, then affects a nonchalant attitude.

ANN

Oh come on. You know you want to, "Bubbles."

Tina smiles tentatively, then simpers.

TINA

"Bubbles." At my age.

ANN

Yeah right. Wonder if Walter's still alive. Not that you helped any.

TINA

Oh that.
(giggles)

ANN

Uh-huh. Yeah, you have a good time there, we'll get back to Joy Damon. Don't rush. "Bubbles."

TINA

(a few more giggles)
You silly... Maybe she could have stayed on longer. She cut it off so quickly that it was jarring.

ANN

A little longer. But not much. Most of the audience are men. And men have short attention spans. You're a woman, you want something that builds. Men want a smooth knothole.

Tina is tilting her head doubtfully.

ANN

No it's true. I used to sit in the audience sometimes, check the other acts, and the boys get fidgety if it goes on too long. Figure four minutes is about right. Don't go longer unless it's a star or a big production.

Tina is thinking.

ANN

More?

TINA

Just doing the numbers. For a two-hour show we'd need thirty performers.

Ann smiles to herself and presses buttons on the VCR again. There's a CLICK and a WHIRR.

ANN

Got another one for you.

TINA

You are in there, aren't you?

ANN
 Sometimes I think you don't
 believe me...

Ann is peering at the scrap of paper, she presses buttons
 -- whirr STOPS, another CLICK and we go to:

FILM CLIP #3

(3 minutes long, untitled, B&W): This is the same stage as
 the previous two clips. This begins with a comedy routine
 in process, featuring one of the men from the skit that
 preceded Joy Damon's strip.

TINA (O.S.)
 Noooo...

ANN (O.S.)
 Oh, he's okay. This one gets cut
 off short.

The skit ends in 1 minute, the video goes to black.

ANN (O.S.)
 Now watch.

The video fades in on a scantily-clad young woman with
 chalky-white skin, twirling a gossamer veil to organ music.
 It lasts a minute, and after 10 or 15 seconds we hear:

TINA (O.S.)
 Nice, but out of place. Probably
 the owner's daughter or somebody,
 trying to add some class to the
 joint.

ANN (O.S.)
 As opposed to the sassy chassis.

TINA (O.S.)
 Mm-hm. She's starting to grow on
 me, though.

ANN (O.S.)
 Good. Hon, that is the sassy
 chassis.

TINA (O.S.)
 What? Oh, the hair, in back...

ANN (O.S.)
 Also I've seen this -- they bring
 everybody out at the end and she's
 in this veil costume. Joy Damon.
 They got too much light on her.

The woman concludes her dance by exiting to our left, and a heavy-set man in a tuxedo walks up to the microphone and begins singing, "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen."

ANN (O.S.)

That first comedy routine, the
guy in the white jacket...

TINA (O.S.)

Him? But he's a singer.

ANN (O.S.)

He's also a straight man.

They listen to some more of the song in silence. Then we hear a dull CLICK from the VCR.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Ann's hand is on the VCR and she's looking at Tina.

TINA

(soberly)

You know, that guy is good.

ANN

A lot of 'em were. Now, for five
bonus points. You've just seen
the classy lassie, and you recall
her strip act. Tell me where you
saw her before that.

TINA

Uh, is she on T-V, you mean? Or
the movies?

ANN

"Now shift."

TINA

The chorus girl?

ANN

Yup. Joy Damon. Chorus, strip,
and specialty. She was also
in two production numbers, and
she was probably in at least
one comedy routine, that they
didn't film or they cut out.

Ann hits rewind on VCR and turns to Tina. (There's a WHIRR for a minute or so, followed by a CLICK from the machine when it's done.)

ANN

See, this is what we can do.
 You say thirty acts, well, we
 only need six or seven girls.
 All in the chorus line, all of
 'em can do strips. Somebody
 that can sing. Others can do
 comedy. Any kind of act --
 juggling, acrobatics, you name
 it. Me as the emcee.

TINA

You won't be able to get all that
 on this stage.

ANN

It won't be this stage. It gets
 back to, you're going to have
 to spend money to make money.
 We can't do anything here until
 the stage is built out and we get
 the curtains and the lighting.

TINA

But then I'm stuck with it.

ANN

You're stuck with it now.

TINA

(bitter-sad, looks
 around theater)
 No supermarket, no buyers.
 And there never will be. My
 great investment.

ANN

Put it to work for you.

TINA

We'll see.

Ann ejects the video cassette and places it in its plastic carrier. Two paper coffee containers sit by the TV/VCR. Tina picks up one (marked "Decaf") and moseys over to the front row of seats, sits down to sip her coffee and think.

We see that nearby is a small beat-up metal bookcase holding a CD/tape deck, connected to the same extension cord as the TV/VCR. RCA cables lead to a microphone jack at front center stage. To one side of the stage is a small drum set -- just the snare, cymbal on a stand, and a floor tom (on which are a half-dozen sticks, and a couple of mallets). Several old

cardboard boxes sit at one end of the movie screen, a couple more by the bookcase, and one in a seat. Two sawhorses and a toolbox are near the wall, along with a big rubber garbage can and a vacuum cleaner. Leaning against the opposite wall is an old wooden easel. Two purses nest in the bookcase.

Ann takes the TV/VCR off the stage and puts it on the bookcase, but she stays by it while she talks.

ANN

I came up with another thing. We could get one of those cargo containers, you know, the kind that 18-wheelers carry. You can buy 'em cheap, surplus. Set it by the side entrance, put in those partitions they use for office cubicles, and you got dressing rooms. Dressing cubicles I guess they'd be.

TINA

That's something to think about... I know where I'd put the first one.

ANN

Where?

TINA

On stage. It would fit perfectly with my story dance.

ANN

Aw, we been though that already.

TINA

But I want to contribute. I was thinking of a secretary, but -- All those offices downtown. They even call them "Cubicle Rats." They'd love it.

ANN

It's a sex show.

TINA

That's what sells. And it would be done tastefully.

ANN

("Oh sure" look)

We can't compete at that level. There's Internet porn, there's strip clubs. What we can do, is what we were doing fifty years ago. It's called entertainment.

Tina looks exasperated, but doesn't pursue the point. She sets her coffee cup on the floor, stands up and looks out over the auditorium.

TINA

You want to do some seats?

ANN

No... But --

Tina picks up a roll of masking tape from a cardboard box sitting in the front row. Ann takes her coffee cup to the garbage can, then comes over and finds a roll of tape for herself and joins Tina. They go back to the third or fourth row of seats and down separate rows, checking seats for damage and seeing if they swivel up and down. Sometimes they sit down in one to see if it will hold their weight. They put strips of masking tape on areas that need mending. Two seats in the front rows have a big "X" made out of tape, one having the seat down rather than folded -- apparently badly damaged. Most seats are pretty worn in general, some with strips of old silver duct tape visible at the top of the backs. The women work with no enthusiasm or hurry, mostly just to kill time. Their conversation is sometimes shouted when they're far apart or one is bent down out of sight.

TINA

I know what it was. Nobody yelled, "Take it off."

ANN

You mean during the strip?

TINA

Yes. Nobody yelled anything, as far as I could tell. Apparently she didn't excite them.

ANN

No audience. They dubbed in the applause. All of these were filmed between shows -- you can tell by the camera, it's out in the seats. And the comics don't get any laughs.

Tina starts to say something, Ann overrides her.

ANN

Yeah I know, they weren't so hot. Well, it's 'cause they made 'em use the clean stuff. The good stuff was raunchy. I mean, it was.

(MORE)

ANN (cont'd)

But there'd still be laughs,
you'd hear people coughing...
Nah, this was an empty theater.
Like rehearsal.

(thinks)

There actually wasn't that much
noise when you were dancing.
They'd yell stuff when you
unzipped your dress or... you
provoked 'em, I guess you'd say.

(vamps, bats eyes)

When you came on, there'd be
whistles and stuff, and at the
end. "Oh, baby," things like
that. Guys letting you know
they liked you. Joy would have
gotten a lot of that.

Brief interlude while they work. Ann stares at the bottom
of one seat (it's folded up) mottled with gobs of gum.

ANN

I can't believe the gum on some
of these.

TINA

I never put my gum under the
chair. It's so unsanitary.

ANN

You chewed gum?

TINA

Oh yes. Everybody did.

Brief interlude.

TINA

But my dance. From what you said
about strip clubs --

ANN

You don't want this to be like
a strip club. Lap-dancing? The
word is "slut." Let's not do
slut stuff.

TINA

My story dance is not slut stuff.

ANN

It's not a dance even. It's a
skit. Let's take a rain check
until we actually get somebody
to do it.

TINA

(accepts truce)

When is our "candidate" supposed to get here?

ANN

(glances at watch)

Around nine. Pretty soon.

TINA

I hope this one at least shows up. That's so irritating.

ANN

Yeah. I keep thinking that some of the girls from the clubs would apply. Guess not.

TINA

You'd hire them?

ANN

Sure.

TINA

But you said they were -- sluts.

ANN

Nah, they're just regular people. It's what they're doing is slutty. Some of them are really good dancers. At least the place I went to they were.

TINA

There'd be a big difference in style.

ANN

Oh yeah. But talent is talent. It's the attitude they'd have to change. They need to get some self-respect. In that club they were crawling. Literally, on the floor, crawling. Wriggling around on their stomach... big smile on their face like they really enjoyed it. Plus their idea of being sexy is to show their ass. It's my idea of being disgusting.

TINA

Let's not.

ANN

Ah jeez. Look.
 (points to her crotch)
 This is the beginning of life.
 (points to her butt)
 This is the end of last night's
 dinner.

TINA

Ann, I won't. We just go round
 and round in circles.

Tina pointedly concentrates on a seat, Ann lets it go.

TINA

(muttering to herself)
 Everybody on the planet likes
 tooshies... perfectly normal...

Ann hears, and ignores it, smiling to herself. After a brief
 interlude:

TINA

Did you think it was wrong when
 you started?

ANN

Think what was wrong?

TINA

Stripping.

ANN

I didn't think of it in any way,
 I thought of it as something I
 did to earn a living.

TINA

But there had to be some kind of --

ANN

Nah. You were thinking... You
 wanted stuff to work. Will this
 zipper work? Is the band going
 to play my music right? That's
 what you were thinking. Will it
 work. Most of all you wanted
 your act to work. It was none
 of this foo-foo jazz they talk
 about, you know, morality and
 stuff. It just wasn't that way.

Ann feels over a seat cushion and makes a face. She puts
 tape over an area, then tapes a big "X" across the seat back.

ANN
 (thinking out loud)
 It wasn't like people think it
 was.

Tina looks up for the voice, sees the "X" and asks:

TINA
 That one looks all right.

ANN
 It's got a spring sticking out.
 You sure we couldn't unbolt the
 bad ones and stack 'em someplace?
 Alvin could do that. He said
 he'd be happy to help.

TINA
 No, let's leave them for now,
 and we'll see what we wind up
 with. If there's a lot we'll
 have to repair them.
 (looking around)
 Do you still want to keep the
 easel?

Ann glances over to the wall where the easel leans.

ANN
 Yeah, it could come in handy --
 that's how it started.

TINA
 What started?

ANN
 My dream. Last night. I was
 trying to remember.

TINA
 You're dreaming about this place
 now?

ANN
 More like a nightmare.

TINA
 (resuming work)
 I would think so.

Ann leans toward another seat, lowers and raises it. She stops, looks at the stage, then at the seat again, thinking. She looks at the stage again, then beyond it...

FADE OUT.

We hear Ann's voice from afar, then becoming near:

ANN (V.O. filtered)
 So you wanna learn about burlesque,
 huh? Pause for applause. I hope.
 What if I can't teach. What if
 I just stand there... Oh God
 please don't let me bomb.

FADE IN:

INT. THEATER - DAY

Same as before, except the signs of activity are gone: no bookcase, boxes, garbage can, etc, no masking tape on seats.

Ann is dressed up and wearing makeup, alone on stage. The easel stands at one side of the movie screen, and holds a movie poster titled "Everybody's Girl" that shows several young women in skimpy costumes. Other sheets are visible beneath this one, evidently a presentation series.

Ann puts on The World's Warmest Smile, gestures with a pointer and addresses the empty auditorium.

ANN
 Now we get to the Nineteen
 Fifties. You've heard that
 a candle burns brightest just
 before it goes out. Uh... It...

Her smile fades, and we realize she can't remember her line. She puts the smile on again and tries another swing with the pointer, then frowns. She doesn't like the setup.

ANN
 Try it back more...

She tries to move the easel, but it won't budge. She kneels down, picks up one of the easel's legs and pulls. The easel falls over with a CRASH, Ann grabbing for it futilely.

ANN
 Damn it.

Something hurt her elbow, she rubs it with her hand for a moment. She stands up and forlornly looks down at the fallen easel.

ANN
 I can't even do that.

Ann hears a voice from behind her:

GHOST (O.S.)
Chins up, honey!

Ann wheels around and stares at:

GHOST -- a lively old lady dressed like a Barbary Coast madam who's fallen on hard times; gray hair done up grandly, floor-length red velvet gown worn smooth in places, bustle and large bosom, mangy-looking fur boa, and way too much rouge and lipstick. She wears gold-framed octagonal glasses and uses a walking cane that she sometimes waves. We recognize her as the same actress who is playing Ann.

GHOST
It's always darkest before the
dawn!

A paralysis creeps over Ann, leaving her dazed; her face is devoid of any emotion and she speaks in a monotone, and will do so throughout this scene until she makes a brief appearance at the very end.

Ghost walks up to Ann with a winning smile.

GHOST
No, see, that's a wise saying.
It's darkest... It means it's
gloomiest... See, if...

Ghost gives up, gesturing helplessly.

ANN
Who are you?

GHOST
I'm a spirit! You know,
Hooooooooooooooooooooo.

Ghost helpfully stands on tiptoes and holds arms out at sides to suggest white sheets.

ANN
Who?

GHOST
First base! I keep up with all
the new material.
(looks around avidly)
The roar of the greasepaint, the
smell of the crowd, it gets ya
right here.
(taps stomach, looks down,
changes to heart area)

ANN

What is your name?

GHOST

I'm the Ghost of Burlesque Past.
Made that up myself, but it's
close enough... Like in that
book, "A Christmas Carol." When
you care enough, steal the very
best.

Ghost looks at Ann with happy expectancy, then examines her quizzically, then turns to the auditorium (past the camera) as if giving an audience a confidential aside:

GHOST

The motor's running, but the
wheels aren't turning.

ANN

Are you sure you should be here?

Ghost does a double-take, then, looking put-upon, hands Ann her cane. Ann's hand comes up automatically and takes it, but she never breaks her frozen stare at Ghost. Able to use both hands now, Ghost digs out a 3 x 5 card from the folds of cloth over her bosom and consults it (we never see the side she's reading).

GHOST

Let's see... victim of progress...
uh-huh... yeah, materialize on
stage, uh-huh, uh-huh, comfort
victim, give her a bromide, mm-hmm
-- yeah, it's the right place.
(files card back
in bosom, muttering)
As if I would ever get the wrong
engagement. After a century and a
half in the business...

ANN

Are you real?

GHOST

The only thing you do is ask
questions! Why do you expect
me to explain everything? Now
I suppose you think I'm going
to magically transform myself
into a beautiful young woman and
do some kind of modern burlesque
number. Land's sakes! Only a
complete fool would dream up
something like that. Only an
idiot... a total... dummy...

Ghost stops, considering Ann, and resignedly holds out her hand. Ann (still deadpan) gives her back her cane. Ghost, looking generally disgusted, walks over to center stage. Ann is no longer in the picture and does not reappear in this scene until the very end.

GHOST
(muttering)

There won't be a dry seat in
the house... Have to remember
not to raise my knees too high,
knock my pasties off...

Ghost reaches center stage and looks up at the projection booth, then shakes her cane at it.

GHOST
Hey up there! Can't you pay
attention to anything? Light me!

PROJECTION BOOTH - SPOTLIGHT LENS

We're looking into the lens of a follower spotlight and we hear a switch CLICK and it turns the screen blinding WHITE. A filter slides into place with a THUNK and the light changes to PURPLE TINT.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SPOTLIGHT THEATER - NIGHT

The glare RECEDES and SINGER becomes visible, standing alone on stage in the spotlight. We're looking up at her from behind and to the side. The spotlight is a bright dot in the distance and the beam itself faintly visible.

Ghost has vanished, and will not be seen again. Her cane will reappear at the end of this scene. The easel is gone.

This appears to be the same theater that we've been in, though the stage seems deeper (it is -- built out a few feet and an apron and footlight trough added). The house lights are off. Dim blue footlights mark the edge of the deck.

Note: I have no knowledge of stage lighting. I believe my choices of filters for the follower spotlight are correct, but had to guess at how the footlights would be set.

The auditorium is blackness to us, but we hear the sounds of a large AUDIENCE; general rustling, occasional coughs or clearing of throats, the creaking of seats. This will continue until almost the end of the scene; several times voices will speak from the audience, but there will be no applause or laughter, or any other change in this background noise. It is unmoved by anything Singer can do.

Even without us fully seeing her face, everything about Singer -- the easy way she stands, her erect carriage -- conveys self-confidence and accomplishment.

Singer is wearing a black sequin sheath evening gown (it suggests a smallish bust), black opera gloves (visible under one is the outline of a wristwatch), diamond bracelet, earrings and necklace, dark stockings, black ankle-strap shoes (dressy, lightweight). Over her shoulders is a silver-gray fur wrap. And crowning her head is an elaborate headdress of silver feathers.

Now Singer speaks to the auditorium, and we see her face. We recognize her as the actress who plays Tina, but her face is weathered and lines are starkly visible; she is handsome, but not glamorous. Her hair is dull black, streaked with gray, worn in an early 1950's style. High on one cheek is a faint outline of a beauty spot, what once was a star. She will rarely smile.

SINGER

(with quiet dignity)

I am Burlesque Present.

Singer thinks for a moment, looks at the floor, then looks up and sings à cappella. She has no microphone and does not contort her face or hold her hands out dramatically when she sings this song. During the following she stands naturally, relaxed, not posing, a couple of times absently brushing back hair from her temple, shifting her weight or changing position as she feels the need.

Need SONG #1 ("Where Did You Go") along these lines (like "It Had To Be You" in style, but its own melody):

SINGER

(singing)

Where did you go,
the people I know.

There were
grinning young sailors,
and shy little tailors,
the bald-headed men
who filled the front row.

Where... did... you... go...

Five-piece BAND JOINS, right now mostly piano, and snare being lightly brushed. (full band: piano, drum set, trumpet, saxophone/clarinet, trombone)

SINGER

(singing)

I stood here for you.
No one but us two.
You paid to get in,
the price was a sin,
my dear.

And when I was bad,
you never would boo,
you stood for me too.

Now everyone's gone,
but I'm hangin' on.
I'm not saying goodbye,
or threatening to cry,
I just want to know...

Where... did all of you... go...?

Band STOPS playing.

Singer looks out at the auditorium. We hear the crowd noise but see only blackness.

SINGER

(pointing)

You in the three-piece suit. Yes,
you. Why aren't you here tonight?

MAN #1 (O.S.)

(businessman)

I don't like to go anywhere after
dark. And this is a bad part of
town.

SINGER

Bring some friends and start
making it a better part. If you
think I'm worth fighting for.

Singer stares a challenge at him for a moment, then looks at a different area of the auditorium, toward the back.

SINGER

I see you ducking your head down.
Sit back up. I won't bite. Just
tell me why you're not here.

MAN #2 (O.S.)

(nerd -- voice breaks)

My wife won't let me. There's
plenty on T-V.

SINGER
 Bring your wife with you. And
 screw the damn T-V. Or...? Do
 the best you can.

Singer looks around, then points to another area.

SINGER
 There's a man with his true
 love -- a computer. Too busy
 downloading pornography to be
 here?

MAN #3 (O.S.)
 (blue collar)
 Hey, I filled up two hard drives
 now -- what do I need you for?

Singer just stares at him for a moment, then fills with
 wrathful pride.

SINGER
 You need me because I can hear
 you.

MAN #3 (O.S.)
 Are you kidding?

SINGER
 Can the women on your hard drives
 hear you?

MAN #3 (O.S.)
 No...?

SINGER
 (calmly now)
 Do you wish they could?

MAN #3 (O.S.)
 (after a pause)
 Yeah.

SINGER
 (gently)
 Well, you know what? Women
 with some of the greatest ears
 on earth perform on this stage
 nightly. They'll be listening
 for you. You could whistle,
 maybe...?

Sound of a WOLF WHISTLE.

SINGER

I'll take that as a yes.

Singer calmly surveys rest of auditorium (blackness to us).
PIANO begins playing random notes and chords, doodling.

Singer wafts her hands, trying to think of a song, then walks a step or two to the edge of the stage. The spotlight follows her (and will do so throughout the scene). Singer talks to the invisible pianist in the center of the non-existent orchestra pit.

SINGER

I can't find anything that rhymes
with burlesque. Desk. Grotesque.
I had a desk, it was grotesque,
unlike burlesque...

Singer makes a face, piano agrees with discordant CHORD.
Singer looks out at the auditorium.

SINGER

Anybody. Help me out here, okay?
Speak right up.

The sounds of the audience continue unchanged; coughs, creaking of seats, etc. After a few seconds go by, Singer compresses her lips sadly, worried that nobody will respond.

WOMAN (O.S.)

(1940's Brooklyn)

Eh, get ouff the stage. You can't
show me nuttin' I ain't already
seen.

The worry leaves Singer's face. She looks out at the voice with something like gratitude, she even smiles. Her smile is not entirely pleasant. She accepts the challenge.

SINGER

Thanks for the advice. I'll
take it.

Singer begins walking to the end of the stage. When she's to the end of the movie screen she says to the audience:

SINGER

"Show me," huh?

Singer wheels and points at movie screen as the drummer hits a CYMBAL CRASH with BASS BEAT and a second LIGHT BEAM shoots from the back of the theater and the SCREEN comes to life.

Screen displays PHOTO #1 Four chorus girls on stage, scantily clad, each with a large hand muff, smiling out at the audience as if receiving applause at the end of a routine.

Spotlight OFF, footlights DIM, Singer lit only by screen.

SINGER

(to the auditorium)

I am interactive, you know.

(looks at screen)

This photograph was taken in the fall of 1950. It's a publicity shot for a movie called "Everybody's Girl." This is the chorus line of the Follies Theater in Los Angeles, at Third and Main.

PHOTO #1a

Screen becomes our screen and photo becomes OPAQUE except for one dancer, highlighting her, a tall brunette with a wide smile and perfectly-posed legs.

SINGER (V.O.)

And this woman is a very great stripper, back when she first started in burlesque. I'm hazy on what name she used then. I think it was Roselle Landis. The movie just says "Rochelle." Anyway, after that I'm on solid ground. In Fifty-One she was Icel Condon.

PHOTO #2

A young woman wearing next to nothing and looking down at the ground in concern, apparently in the middle of dancing (a man's head is in front of the camera).

SINGER (V.O.)

Those huge pasties look like they were drawn on the photograph, over the ones she was actually wearing. This was in a magazine, and they used to do that to get around the law. In Fifty-Two she went blond and became Exotic Lily.

PHOTO #3

A blond woman in a chiffon party dress, leaning against a piano and giving an appraising smile to the male piano player.

SINGER (V.O.)

She was also billed as Lily, just the one name. You'll see this scene again in a minute. After that she switched to Lorali.

PHOTO #4

A lobby poster showing a woman in bra and panties, captioned "Lorali" and "Now Playing." A sign below it reads, "The Burbank and Follies Theatres have merged into one theatre ~ the New Follies."

SINGER (V.O.)

You'll see the New Follies again too. And finally, in 1955, she found a name that she stuck with, and so will we: Lily Ayers.

Drummer begins DRUM ROLL, starting very light.

Singer continues talking as the following display:

PHOTO #5

Cover of "Modern Man" magazine -- a blond woman (Lily) on one knee, scantily clad, facing the camera defiantly, as if taunting us.

PHOTO #6

Cover of "Peep Show" magazine -- same photo.

PHOTO #7

Cover of "Cabaret" quarterly -- same photo, in color.

PHOTO #8

Cover of "Cabaret" magazine -- similar pose, in color, but the woman is wearing a fur.

PHOTO #9

Centerfold with crease and staples -- color photo of Lily in a gauzy black negligee, pasties and G-string underneath, headed, "Look out Hollywood" -- to one side are some film stills.

SINGER (V.O.)

That's spelled A-Y-E-R-S. Lily Ayers. Most of you never heard of her. That's okay. Being great and being famous are not the same thing.

(MORE)

SINGER (V.O. cont'd)

Lily, if you're out there, or you hear about this, I know we didn't ask you. But I'm going to tell these people that you're our best. If you want to argue and say that you weren't, you go right ahead. But dear, if you weren't the best, there wasn't anyone who was better. Ever.

Drummer SNAPS a shot (don't know term: drum roll doesn't stop, but spikes up for a moment, quick di-di-da-boom).

PHOTO #10

Lily Ayers in dressing room. It shows a pensive young woman with a dimple in her chin, platinum blond hair, wearing a black corselet with the top of one pasty visible, adjusting her fishnet stockings in front of a dressing table. During the following dialogue we go to a close shot of a segment of the photo, then cut from one shot to another, each a different part of the photo, concluding with a close-up of her wristwatch.

SINGER (V.O.)

This is Lily Ayers in her dressing room, getting ready to go onstage in 1952. The good news is, they filmed the show. The bad news is, it got censored. Probably a fourth of the original movie has been removed. Even the comic's punch lines have been taken out. Clips from other films have been spliced in, and -- it's just a mess. The second half of Lily's act is completely gone. That's when you get down to bare skin. All that's left are parts of the first half. And they're not in very good shape. The film is worn, the sound is bad and it's probably been re-dubbed. But it's got Lily Ayers. So, there's a lot of nice crisp film available of good dancers -- instead, here's a few minutes of totally crummy film, of a great dancer.

Drummer ends roll with a BANG!

FILM CLIP #4 (no audio yet, but we see theater curtain waving slightly)

SINGER (V.O.)
(matter-of-factly)

Ladies and gentlemen -- starring
in her own creation, "The B-Girl
Ballet," here is -- Lily Ayers.

(3 1/2 minutes long, untitled, B&W): A brassy pit band begins playing and the theater curtain opens to reveal a saloon setting. Lily is leaning against a piano, wearing a chiffon party dress. She sashays around the stage, giving the audience a blowsy smile, and pours herself a drink or two. ****splice**** She's ethereal in black corselet and stockings, sitting on the piano. She gracefully slides off and toe-steps to center stage. ****splice**** She's reclining on the deck doing a ballet exercise, her face intent. She rises and rotates in a circle while grinding, concluding with a fast burst that she stops -- boom! just like that. She prances across the stage, then faces the audience, insouciant, grinding smoothly, perfectly. ****splice**** She goes behind the bar and pours herself another drink. The music is coming to a boozy finish, and she reaches down with both hands and ****end****

INT. SPOTLIGHT THEATER - NIGHT

The image of Lily stays on the screen.

Singer, lit only by the screen, turns to the audience, not expecting a reaction, though she'd have liked one.

SINGER

That's all we got. You can see
her reaching down. She's probably
going to pull off the corselet,
and then she'll step around the
bar, or they'll close and open
the curtains, then the second
half starts. And this is how
she'd have looked.

PHOTO #11

A provocative Lily posing on the table, wearing only pasties and G-string and stockings. The photo has written across it in large letters, "SEE LIFE in the RAW ON SIN STREET."

SINGER (V.O.)

At the end of it anyhow. Which is why it got censored. This is from a preview of the movie. They tried to get around the law by selling it as an exposé on crime. Here's another one.

PHOTO #12

Same table, but the stockings are gone now, and Lily is sulky and sultry. Written across it, "POSING and EXPOSING."

SINGER (V.O.)

Nice try, guys. There's no drama or any kind of message, it's just a burlesque show. Here's another picture from that set.

PHOTO #13

Lily on the table, but laying on her back, feet up against a wall, looking at us upside-down.

SINGER (V.O.)

This was in "Modern Man," which was a big men's magazine back then. And finally, the classic portrait of Lily Ayers. It's in the same magazine.

PHOTO #14

A beautiful, dreamy Lily, kneeling on the table and gazing into the distance. We ZOOM IN on her face as Singer speaks, eventually going out of focus and fuzzing into white.

SINGER (V.O.)

They just say the photographer was "Bernard." I don't know if that's Keith Bernard or Bruno Bernard or who. Wish I did know. I'd like to see if there's more pictures.

PHOTO #15

Exterior of theater overlaid with "The End" in lettering. The marquee is headed "Burlesk," and on the signboard is "Exotic Lily ~ B-Girl Ballet."

SINGER (V.O.)

Here's the theater on the outside.
We took this from the movie. The
New Follies, at Fifth and Main
in Los Angeles. Originally the
Burbank Theater.

INT. SPOTLIGHT THEATER - NIGHT

The theater shot remains on the movie screen. Singer
contemplates the floor for a moment, then her face hardens.

SINGER

That's how it was. Now fast-
forward 20 years. This doesn't
have a date, but probably it's
late 1960's.

PHOTO #16

The theater viewed from across a city street; the same
"Burlesk" sign, but now the marquee is headed with "Burbank"
and advertises "Wild Wooly Beaver." To the right of the
theater is a fried-chicken restaurant. In the background is
a building with an advertisement for a barber college. Not
impressive.

SINGER (V.O.)

Showing porno movies now. Oh, it
could be a nature study, y'know,
the little animals that build
dams... Yeah, probably not.

PHOTO #17

Burbank Theater viewed from across street, a different
angle. There is now a wooden scaffold covering the sidewalk
in front of the entire building.

SINGER (V.O.)

This one I know the date --
the spring of 1974. You can see
there's scaffolding that's been
put up. That's 'cause they were
getting ready to demolish the
building.

(chokes up)

Just a second. Okay. That's the
Dreamland Ballroom on the second
floor. It was a taxi-dance place,
where the men bought tickets.
Dime a dance, way back when...

PHOTO #18

Burbank marquee shot from on top of the scaffolding, with the signboard reading: "Now playing... ~ the 'Biggest bust of all' ~ by the nation's greatest stripper ~ the Cleveland Wrecking Co."

SINGER (V.O.)

(voice flat)

A little humor there. Very little. See, by 1974, almost all the theaters were gone.

INT. SPOTLIGHT THEATER - NIGHT

Screen still displays Photo #18, but it gradually begins to fade out as Singer continues, until the screen is unlit again. It will remain unlit for the rest of the movie.

Spotlight UNFILTERED, footlights AMBER and BLUE (greenish tint on Singer). AMBER will DIM to leave only BLUE.

SINGER

Times change. Some changes are for the better. Others are not. A lot of people came here as much for the stage show as they did for the strippers. When television arrived in the 1950's, they began staying home. They had Ed Sullivan now. Ticket sales went down. So burlesque gradually cut the chorus lines and the specialty numbers and they concentrated on stripping. Until it was mostly a skin show.

(a beat)

Bad idea. Because the audience turned into people who just wanted to see skin. And along came The Sixties. The New Morality. Porno movies went big-time. Total nudity and raw sex, right up there on the silver screen. Strippers couldn't compete. It was the ultimate skin show. Our audience left in droves. Burlesque theaters were almost empty sometimes.

(MORE)

SINGER (cont'd)

Well, they could either shut down,
or they could switch to movies.

(makes quote marks
with fingers)

Movie's in quotes. "Wild Wooly"
and -- like that. That usually
didn't last long. Eventually the
theater would be sold. The buyers
didn't want the theater, they'd
just tear it down. It wasn't a
money-maker. They wanted the
land. Put up an office building,
or a shopping mall. A parking
lot. Parking lot's a good money-
maker. It happened all over the
country, theater after theater.
They tore down my home.

Singer pauses for a moment, bringing herself back to the
present.

Spotlight changes to BABY BLUE. Footlights now only BLUE.

Singer's voice is tinged with that of a little girl
whistling in the dark.

SINGER

They said I was dead. I didn't
die. I just didn't have any place
to live anymore. But I never
stopped hoping.

Band plays chords to SONG #2 ("Hoping") "Old Man River" with
a touch of "If I Were A Rich Man." Singer does the
following song à la Judy Garland; beginning with Dorothy's
little-girl voice, then building until she's right on the
edge, using her face and body in every word.

SINGER

(singing)

I can come back,
you just wait and see.
Plenty of people
will want to watch me.

Practice each day,
come spring or fall.
Gotta stay ready
for when... they... call...

Band STOPS and Singer speaks into white 1920's telephone à
la "Hollywood Burlesque" skit (it came from nowhere).

Spotlight changes to UNFILTERED. Side FLOODS come on, prism when camera pans across them. Footlights stay BLUE.

SINGER

(speaking)

Operator, get me Milton Schuster
in Chicago. Main 4-4-4-4.
Whaddya mean, invalid number?
He's been booking me for years, I
ought to know -- Oh, I get it --
Milt's dodging me again. Well
you tell -- hello? Hello?
Awww...

She angrily hangs up and lowers the telephone out of picture (it disappears to nowhere).

Band RESUMES playing.

Spotlight changes to RED. Floods OFF. Footlights to RED and BLUE.

SINGER

(singing)

Glamour and glitter,
sticky with sweat.
Sewing on sequins,
in a room-to-let.

Rouge that cheek!
Curl that lash!
Be a little daring
and get... the... cash.

Band starts rising to dramatic crescendo, Singer readies to belt out her next verse, and we

CUT TO:

Ann, dressed as she was at the beginning of the scene, alone on stage at the side, in a spotlight of her own, exultantly rocking back and punching the air, eyes closed, and yelling:

ANN

Take it on home!!

Band STOPS abruptly as we

CUT TO:

Singer on stage. Audience sounds have STOPPED, there is only silence in the auditorium.

Spotlight PURPLE, footlights BLUE (as when scene began).

SINGER
 (speaking, confused)
 Home...? Is this home? No...
 Not yet...

Singer stares at nothing for a moment, then (à capella)
 tries hopefully:

SINGER
 (singing)
 It's glamorous...

Pause, then à la "Old Man River":

SINGER
 (singing)
 Hoping they'll call, hoping...

Pause, then she smiles, because she's found it -- sung very
 sweet à la "It Had To Be You":

SINGER
 (singing)
 Hoping...
 you'll come back
 to...
 me...

Singer's eyes close on the final notes.

Spotlight and footlights go OFF as HOUSE LIGHTS come on.

Singer opens her eyes, ready to receive her applause.

INT. THEATER - DAY

We see (theater as when scene began):

empty, worn seats

projection booth, dark and dirty

peeling paint on wall

worn carpet (looking up aisle to entrance)

the old empty stage, a walking cane laying near the front.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. THEATER - DAY

Back to the present. At least a few minutes have elapsed, because Ann is now standing down in front of the stage. She's staring at where her dream took place, looking a bit dazed, absently rubbing her elbow. Tina is in the back-ground, raising and lowering a seat.

ANN

(to herself)

I got the theater. It doesn't--
And she wore pearls. Not
diamonds... It's crazy...

Ann frowns, calls to Tina:

ANN

Hey? Have you seen a cane
anywhere around here?

TINA

No...? Do you feel like you need
one?

ANN

Just wondering. You never know...

TINA

Are you all right?

ANN

Yeah...

Ann wobbles, and reaches for the stage to steady herself.

TINA

You've had another stroke!

Tina rushes down to Ann and looks her over.

ANN

It wasn't a stroke. It was a
mini-stroke, the doctor called it.
I didn't have one.

TINA

If you'd take your blood-pressure
medicine --

ANN

I know -- I do take it. I'm okay.

TINA

You really are all right?

ANN

Yeah I'm fine. No I'm not.

Ann is facing the auditorium and sees something in the back. Something surprising, maybe even a bit scary. She freezes. She blinks. Her face is deadpan as she says slowly under her breath:

ANN

Don't turn around. I think she's here.

LIZ (O.S.)

Hello?

Tina turns around. And can't quite believe she's seeing what she's seeing.

TINA

Caca.

LIZ stands just inside the entrance to the auditorium. She is in her early 20's. She looks Retro-Punk. Or something. Mostly she looks outrageous. Her head is topped by a narrow peak of red and black streaks -- her hair, combed up from the sides and somehow frozen into a crest, like a Roman helmet ornamentation. Her face has signs of beauty, but hidden with black lipstick and eye makeup. A metal ring dangles from one nostril. And then the rest registers -- torso clad in baggy plaid cotton shirt, a beat-up Army pack on her back, and faded black jeans over scuffed work boots. We might notice that while all of this is low-priced and worn, it's also clean.

Liz waves tentatively. Tina whirls back to Ann: what are we going to do!?

ANN

I'm on.

Ann changes her face from deadpan to World's Warmest Smile.

ANN

Oh hi! Won't you come in?

Liz smiles agreement and begins walking down the aisle. Her pace is steady and not fast. After a few steps she trips slightly, and glances back at the floor -- must be a hole in the carpet. She looks perturbed for a moment, then continues on.

Tina pulls at Ann and they duck down and exchange a frantic volley of whispers.

TINA
Get rid of her!

ANN
We have to interview her, she
can sue us. You said --

TINA
Yes-yes, but just pro forma,
so sorry, goodbye.

ANN
Trust me...

Liz has almost reached them. Ann taps her watch, holds her hand with all fingers outstretched, mouthing, "five minutes" and then slices her hands across each other in an "X" sign.

Ann and Tina stand up. Ann turns to meet Liz, putting on the World's Warmest Smile again, and extending her hand.

ANN
You must be Liz...

LIZ
Ms. Miller?

Liz and Ann shake hands. Liz's voice counters her appearance; the two words we hear are clear, well-modulated, polite, in fact they suggest intelligence. Ann reacts to this, her smile becoming less artificial.

ANN
No, I'm Mrs. Sorensen. I mean
I'm Ann, just call me Ann. Ms.
Miller is my partner -- associate?
What are we actually?

Liz turns to Tina, expecting to be greeted.

TINA
(staring at Liz, not
moving to shake hands)
Humans.

Liz's face turns to stone, and she looks away from Tina.

Ann starts to snap a warning look at Tina, stops, and never drops her smile at Liz.

ANN

Now, like our ad said, there's no pay at all to start. Just long hard hours learning to do something that nobody does much anymore. Not much chance of ever making a living at it. In fact I probably shouldn't even have run the stupid ad, I was just kinda curious to see what the response would be.

LIZ

That's okay.

ANN

(smile diminishing)

Yeah... well, that's good, that's good. Um, it's... If we select you for training, that is if we select anybody, and you do okay there, you have to understand there's no guarantee we'll have a job for you.

TINA

(flinty-eyed)

There are no promises, either expressed or implied, and there is no form of contract implicit in this conversation --

LIZ

But --

TINA (cont'd)

-- nor in any other communication you may have with us unless specifically stated to be such in writing.

Liz stares at Tina, eyelids dropping a bit: you want it, bitch, you're gonna get it.

Tina stares back truculently for a moment, then watches Ann.

Ann smoothly continues on, dropping the smile and taking an attitude of somber reflection.

ANN

Yeah. What she said. But even if you were to be hired as a dancer... somewhere... it's not much to write home about.

(MORE)

ANN (cont'd)

Your audience will be mainly guys who can't get a date. I mean, we're talking green teeth and fungus here. Being kind of blunt, some of them may have their hands inside their pants. You know, sitting there, rocking back and forth, staring at you... Smiling, with those green teeth...
(mimics smile)

LIZ

I'll give it a try.

Tina stares at Liz in frustration, then at Ann. On the sly, Ann confidently taps her watch and displays four fingers.

ANN

Well, okay, I guess that's what we'll do then... Follow me. Watch your step.

Tina shoves open a seat in the front row and flounces herself down, sourly curious about what will happen.

Ann and Liz walk up a short set of steps to the stage.

LIZ

I've only got until noon though.

ANN

That won't be a problem...

LIZ

I've got an off-day class this afternoon. Out at the voc-tech. Diesel mechanics.

Tina places her fingertips to her forehead as if fighting off a sudden headache.

ANN

No, it won't take that long...

Ann leads the way to center stage and points to the deck.

ANN

Just stand right there. Okay.

Liz looks at her for instructions, and Ann's face hardens.

ANN

Let's see what'cha got.

Liz doesn't get it, looks at Ann inquiringly.

ANN
Take your clothes off.

LIZ
(glances around)
Here?

Ann fixes her eyes on a distant horizon, and doesn't reply.
Liz realizes what the job description is.

LIZ
Oh yeah...

Ann signals two fingers in a "V" sign at Tina.

Tina laughs, not trying very hard to conceal it.

Liz's eyes dart toward the sound, then back. She clenches her jaw, then slides out of her backpack and looks around for someplace to put her things. She sets it on the deck and begins unbuttoning her shirt.

Tina mouths: Damn it!

Ann didn't expect this to happen.

ANN
I just realized. You're wearing
panties and a bra, I hope.

TINA
(muttered)
Drawers...

Liz hears it -- her head starts to turn, then she ignores it and concentrates on Ann.

LIZ
Oh yeah. I put on my sexy
underwear. But this shirt isn't
what I'd wear to strip in.

Ann doesn't believe Liz could have anything sexy. But she doesn't sneer.

ANN
This isn't a strip. I just gotta
check you out. Your body is a
big part of this.

Liz leaves her shirt as-is, then sits down on the deck and methodically unlaces one boot and pulls it off, then the other. She wears no socks.

Ann unobtrusively turns to Tina and mimes being very impressed at this great strip act the kid is putting on, getting a laugh and a smirking smile from Tina.

Liz's eyes turn toward Tina's laugh.

TINA'S SMILE -- CLOSEUP

Liz's face works with rage and her hands tremble.

Liz stands up. She swallows, but hesitates only for an instant, then unzips her jeans. Self-conscious, fearing ridicule by Tina, she looks away when she raises one leg to step out of her jeans. Her foot wedges against the cloth, trapping her leg with the knee up high, and she loses her balance. She overcompensates, first in one direction, then the other, hopping on one foot in a jerky circle.

LIZ

(scared)

Whoa. Whoa! Whooooa!

In the background, Tina stares in disbelief. Ann realizes Liz is about to go down and rushes over to her, and they grab hold of each other.

Liz kicks her way out of the jeans, then relaxes and they separate. She looks at Ann with gratitude.

LIZ

I'm kind of uncoordinated,
sometimes.

ANN

(shaken, and guilty)

You don't have to be coordinated.
I should've gotten you a chair
or something.

Liz waves off the apology. With no embarrassment now, she easily undoes the last buttons on her shirt and pulls it off, then drops it on top of her jeans. She looks Ann in the eye. Or rather, in the face, because Ann's eyes are staring at Liz's body.

Liz is beautiful.

Her body is slender and girlish, clean smooth lines and curves of supple skin radiant with youth and health. And her underwear actually is sexy -- simple black nylon bikini with a touch of red embroidery that jibes perfectly with her hair and lips.

Liz stands there, a half-smile on her face, and then rotates slowly for inspection.

ANN

You know... Actually... Um,
do you want to dance like that,
or put something on or -- ?
You pass the physical.

LIZ

(smiles briefly)

I brought a costume -- sort of.

Liz digs in the backpack and extracts a giant Ziploc bag. Inside is a folded mass of maroon cloth, with a cord wrapped around it.

LIZ

This I can wear like a toga, see?
Wrapped around and then tied.
And it comes off real easy.

Ann looks at her steadily for a moment, with respect.

LIZ

It's a curtain liner.

ANN

What we're aiming for is old-time burlesque, and that usually means a fancy party dress, or evening gown. But there aren't any rules. You come up with an idea, give it a try. And that's a great one.

(points to toga)

But let's not put that on just yet. I was thinking of tights or something.

Liz shakes her head.

ANN

Do you have some shoes there in the pack? 'Cause you need to wear something, this floor has got rough areas all over, splinters sticking up, and...

LIZ

Yeah...

Liz again digs in the backpack.

Tina has stood up and walks a bit toward stage. Ann braces for an explosion, but Tina shrugs her shoulders to say "why not," and Ann nods agreement.

Liz is sitting on the stage, unwrapping a pair of red high-heeled shoes from a protecting towel. She smiles at Ann.

LIZ

I borrowed these from my sister.
They look kind of showy.

Ann comes over and kneels down to look at them, then picks one up as Liz is putting on the other and buckling the ankle strap. The shoe is ornate, but built very strong, with thick heels. Ann tries pushing and pulling the heel while holding onto the shoe -- it doesn't twist or flex.

ANN

Good and sturdy. It's very close to what we used to wear. No offense, but are you used to wearing heels?

LIZ

I've worn them. Not very much, though.

ANN

Take it very easy at first. Don't try anything fancy and twist your ankle.

Liz finishes buckling the shoes and stands up. She tries a few tentative steps, and the empty theater magnifies the sound of her heels on the deck. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. She does not wobble. Her breath comes in even pulses. Her eyes are steady, lids slightly lowered. Ann stares at her for a moment. Liz dominates the theater just standing there.

ANN

In fact... let me give you the spiel.

(then to Tina)

Sorry hon -- you're going to have to hear it again.

Tina waves acceptance and sits down again. She's looking at Liz speculatively. She's now seeing a fixer-upper.

ANN

There was an expression that was popular, "no pain, no gain"? Wrong. If you feel pain while you're dancing -- back off.

(MORE)

ANN (cont'd)

You're gonna have some soreness at first, but it shouldn't be bad. I'm gonna show you some simple warm-up exercises. You don't ever want to have a pulled muscle. Trust me.

LIZ

I already did some stretching.

ANN

Why don't ya show me.

Liz does some basic leg stretches.

ANN

Good. You got the hamstring.

Liz extends arms and twists torso.

LIZ

Is that okay? I'd have to go to a wall to show you the rest.

ANN

Nah, I'll take your word. Whaddya do, go to a gym?

LIZ

Exercise video.

ANN

I can't do some of that stuff anymore.

LIZ

(shrugs)

You're not missing much.

Liz and Ann look at each other. They're becoming peers.

ANN

(wry smile)

Probably not... Well, let's crank it up here.

Ann pulls out 3 x 5 card from shirt pocket, with block-letter handwriting on it (we don't see it clearly enough to read it), and consults it, then puts it back.

ANN

Okay. Who I am. In the ad I said "Old-Time Burlesque Dancer." Exotic dancer, stripper, whatever you like. My stage name was Gem. G-E-M. Like a diamond? I thought it meant a pearl.

(smiles at herself,
then a puzzled look
for an instant)

Anyway, it was catchy. I danced from 1954 to 1966, when I left to get married. And 'cause the business was getting rough. I was never a star, highest I ever got was co-feature. So, this is up front, it's not like I have some big genius knowledge to pass on. See, my selling point was not dancing. I was a very good talking woman. That's a female who reads lines in comedy skits. I'd tie in with some comics and they'd book us as a package, and I'd do the strip number and -- You look lost.

LIZ

Comedy?

ANN

Perfect setup. Thank you.

Definition of burlesque.

(starts to pull out card,
then puts it back)

That word has been hijacked.

Burlesque. They're using it now for anything involving nudity, or sex, or risqué stuff. What it actually is, is a musical-comedy variety show for adults.

LIZ

I thought it meant stripping.

ANN

No. Stripping is just one type of act in a burlesque show. It's the big draw, but it isn't the show. I came up with an example. You been to a circus, right?

LIZ

No...?

ANN

Oh hell. No, see, you're supposed to say "Oh sure," and then I go on. You actually haven't been to a circus?

LIZ

No. I don't think there's ever been one around where I lived. Not when I was young, anyway.

ANN

Hm. Amazing.

LIZ

I've seen it on T-V, though.

ANN

Okay. You still ought to see a real one though, but... Anyway, you know a circus is a big show, it's in a tent or an arena, it's got high-wire acts, and a lion-tamer, and clowns and a ringmaster and a lady on a horse, and so on. That's a circus. Okay. Find a vacant lot. Get a big steel cage. Put some lions in it, and a guy with a whip. Is that a circus?

Liz doesn't realize she should reply at first, then:

LIZ

No.

ANN

No. It's a lion-taming act in a vacant lot. Well, when somebody strips in a club, that's not burlesque. It's someone stripping in a club. In order to have a burlesque show, you need comics, and a singer, a live band, some different kinds of specialties, and striptease. And mostly, you gotta have a theater.

(consults card)

Which brings us to -- The Stage. What I want you to do is see a big red sign, stretched right across it, saying, "Caution, hazardous work environment." Always know where you are and what's around you.

Ann goes over to the edge of the stage and taps the lip with her foot. Liz follows, a bit apprehensive.

ANN

You're up here to perform. You can't perform for the ground. So you try to keep your eyes up. You look at the crowd, or an imaginary horizon, something. That leaves you operating on side vision and guesswork. You work too close to the edge, and forget where you are, or something distracts you -- bang! you go over sideways, or maybe front first. It's not far down, but the chances are you're going to land on your face. You land here, on your cheekbone, it literally shatters. Or your nose, it goes to the other side of your face. So. Stay away from the edge. Be scared of it.

LIZ

I will.

ANN

Now I'm going to assume that you're not too hep on theaters. So that you know --
 (extends arms to
 encompass stage)
 This is a joke.

TINA

(mostly kidding)

Hey!

Tina rises from her seat and walks up to the stage.

ANN

(to Tina)

Well it is. It's not a stage. It's just a raised area in front of a movie screen.

(to Liz)

They built it so they had a place to sell war bonds, or announce contest winners, that kinda noise. It's not meant to perform on. The good news is, the price is right.

(looks at Tina)

And now a word from our sponsor.

TINA

(to Liz)

You know, we didn't really
introduce ourselves -- I'm Tina
Miller.

LIZ

Uh-huh.

Liz doesn't move toward Tina. Tina registers the rebuff but only dimly: someone she'll have to win over. Ann tries to clue Liz in to Tina's importance.

ANN

She's the owner.

Liz has no reaction.

TINA

I wound up with this funky old
theater, and I just had to find
something to do with it, so Ann
and I pooled our talents and
decided to try and bring back
burlesque.

ANN

This town hasn't seen that for
forty years.

TINA

You seem so self-assured up there.
Have you performed on stage
before?

LIZ

(cold look)

No.

Liz looks out at the auditorium, then speaks to Ann:

LIZ

This is nice, not having an
audience.

ANN

Well... Nice for now anyway.

TINA

(to Liz)

I get stage fright. Even in an
empty theater. It's like being
defenseless, offering yourself up.

LIZ
(near sarcastic)
Oh yeah?

ANN
(to Tina)
Wait 'till you hear applause.

Tina shakes her head.

Ann looks over at the toga in its Ziploc.

ANN
I'm thinking of panels for that.

Liz doesn't comprehend.

ANN
Like a skirt. I got some stuff
here, I'll show you.

Ann kneels down by a large box at one side of the stage, rummages, then draws out a folded length of black material. She stands up and shakes it out; it looks like two lightweight window curtains on a belt.

ANN
Panels.

LIZ
Those look like curtains too.

ANN
Uh, yeah, kinda, that's just the way I made it. I had the belt already. See, with the pocket here at the top, you can adjust them on the belt, then tack 'em. You can sew it directly on if you want to.

Ann wraps the panel around her and closes the snap at the side.

ANN
The panels go on top of your G-string. Your panties, in this case. The idea is to cover up your backside and emphasize your hips, and free up your legs. It also emphasizes your moves, especially your bumps.

LIZ
 (puzzled, looks down
 at her own midsection)
 Which bumps?

ANN
 Ah. We are now ready for the
 first dance lesson. You know
 the term, bump and grind?

LIZ
 Yeah, but --

ANN
 The bump.

Ann rocks her pelvis back, then rocks it forward abruptly,
 and the panel ripples out. Tina winces. Liz is startled.

ANN
 Wanna see it again?

LIZ
 (smiling, bemused)
 No, I think I've got it...

ANN
 Are you offended?

LIZ
 No...

ANN
 Good. 'Cause if you were, the
 training would be over right now.
 That movement is part of being
 a burlesque dancer. Some people
 are completely repelled by that.
 They will not do it.

Ann looks over at Tina, who looks back at her steadily.

TINA
 It's obscene.

ANN
 (to Liz)
 We got kind of a thing here.
 There was a song, something, "Your
 Mama Don't Dance and Your Daddy
 Won't Rock and Roll?"

LIZ
 Sounds kind of familiar...

ANN

Well we got our own version.
Burlesque is bump-and-grind.
Tina won't bump and I won't
grind. Actually I will --

TINA

It's what you won't let others do.

ANN

(to Tina)

No it's what they wear -- Truce.
Point is, if you and I were each
other's bosses we'd starve.

(to Liz)

So if you see Tina making faces,
it isn't at you.

Tina starts to smile at Liz, then it fades as she realizes
that Liz is ignoring the cue to look over at her.

ANN

You wanna try one?

Liz smiles likes it's a joke and bumps -- like Ann, she pulls
back and snaps forward. Tina looks away.

ANN

Good. You got it right. You
draw back and you slam it.
Like it means something.

Ann unsnaps the panel skirt and hands it to Liz.

ANN

Now try it with this. Watch
what happens.

Liz puts on the panel skirt, and this time she watches her
crotch attentively when she bumps, and is gratified when the
panel ripples. Tina watches reluctantly.

ANN

Again.

Liz slams another one, and another, this time looking at Ann.

ANN

You got it. One bit of warning.
A very famous dancer once threw
a bump so hard that she sprained
her back. So don't go overboard.
Tomorrow morning you'll probably
have some aches right here --

(MORE)

Ann taps the crease where her thigh becomes groin.

ANN (cont'd)

-- but it shouldn't be too bad.
That one you don't worry about,
it'll go away.

LIZ

So that's bump-and-grind.

ANN

No. That's just the bump.

LIZ

So... what's the grind?

ANN

Ever use a Hula Hoop?
(mimes hula)

LIZ

Yeah, it was years ago.

ANN

That's the grind.

LIZ

That's all it is?

ANN

Yup. You can use it in your act,
and it also works as a filler.
You ever get lost, you can't think
of your next step, you can grind
while you get it back together.
Key point -- don't ever stop
moving. You ever stop moving
while the music's playing, you
just stand there, it kills the
whole performance. They may as
well draw the curtain right then.
That's where the grind comes in.
It doesn't depend much on beat
or anything. But that kind of
"parking," don't ever use bumps
for that. Bumps are not used
casually. Each one should be
an exclamation mark. So -- why
don't you put on an imaginary
Hula Hoop and start grinding.

Liz gives it a try.

ANN

Bend your knees a little.

Liz looks down at her waist and is gratified to see her hips rotating around in a circle. She looks up at Ann questioningly: yes?

ANN

That's the grind. Now watch me and I'll show you the effect.

Liz stops and watches. Ann grinds.

ANN

From the front or back, I'm rolling my hips.

(turns sideways)

From the side, I'm slow-bumping. I can rotate around in a circle so they can see both. Or I can forget the Hula Hoop and

(changes movement)

I ease off on the front-and-back and mostly roll my hips.

(she stops)

That's hard work, by the way, you do it very long. Basic rule -- you face the audience when you grind, or face away, so they see your hips roll.

When you bump, turn to the side, at least a little bit, so they see your pelvis rocking. Now I gotta explain what I was saying before.

(to Tina)

Hon, I'm not starting up, honest.

Tina shrugs her shoulders: we'll see.

ANN

(to Liz)

When I say hips, I mean hips. These things here at the side.

(taps pelvic tips)

I do not mean the butt. Butts are gonna be covered. In simple terms, no thongs. You're gonna wear panties, or a bikini bottom. You wanna put sequins on 'em, make 'em look like a G-string in front, that's fine.

Tina's gaze stays level, but she doesn't protest.

ANN

You wanna shake your ass, shake
away. Roll it in a circle if you
want. But it stays covered.

(to Tina:)

Anything I should say differently?

Tina mouths: no. She has no desire to pursue the topic.

ANN

(grins)

If Joy Damon walks in, she's
hired.

(thinks, then to Liz:)

You know, here's another rule:
don't... ridicule strippers.
There's people out there are
still alive... who did it for
real.

Liz is uncomprehending.

ANN

I mean in your act. Don't camp
it up, like it's a joke.

(thinks)

Well, you wouldn't anyway.

Liz shakes her head: no.

Ann checks the 3 x 5 card again.

ANN

(muttering)

I gotta add that someplace.

(puts card back)

Wardrobe. On top of everything
is your gown. You're gonna be
using the toga right now, but
if you start dancing you're
gonna need a variety of costumes.
You got a sewing machine?

LIZ

A mending machine.

ANN

Nah. You need a full-sized one.
I don't mean now, but I mean if
this thing gets going. You never
ever want to pay somebody to make
wardrobe for you. Always do it
yourself.

Ann goes over to the box, and rummages while she talks.

ANN

Except stockings, you buy those, and garter belts... Panties and bra's you can buy 'em, or make 'em or... What you can do is start with a party dress, maybe the old-fashioned kind with decorations and bows and stuff, and then alter it. Check out the thrift shops when you get a chance. Just don't pay much.

Ann pulls out a tissue-wrapped bundle, and unwraps the tissue to reveal red satin cloth. She shakes it out and holds it up and we see that it's a dress with sequined bodice, and there's also a matching panel skirt on a belt.

TINA

I thought you weren't going to bring in your gowns.

ANN

This isn't mine. It's from somebody I knew. I wanted it for an example. All of mine seem to have shrunk, I can't understand it.

(looking it over)

May have been made from scratch... Okay. I'm going to be a model here. This is a specialized gown for striptease referred to as a Breakaway. You open the zipper, the whole thing drops off.

Ann puts on the panel skirt, which uses a snap fastener on one side. The back panel is wide, the front narrow.

ANN

The panels are the same material. It makes the back look like one piece.

Ann drapes the front of the dress over her bosom.

ANN

Okay. And if you'd zip me up.

Liz zips her up (the zipper is only 10" or 12" long).

ANN

Notice that the zipper is very sturdy. That's the way you want to make stuff. It's gotta work. Remember that line, "Failure is not an option"? If you have to choose between pretty but fragile and strong but clunky, take the clunky one.

(inspects herself)

The shirt and pants really set it off, don't they. Adds that touch of elegance...

Ann turns and walks down to the opposite end of the stage. Her walk, even wearing running shoes, becomes a lazy sashay. She does not swing her arms. She holds her head up, relaxed, facing straight ahead.

Ann turns around and walks back. There's a calm half-smile on her face and she keeps her eyes focused on a distant point ahead of her, not at Liz and Tina. She's totally in control.

At center stage Ann looks at the two women levelly -- without breaking her pace -- and says:

ANN

Here's what you do with the Breakaway.

Ann -- still looking at the women -- places one hand across her bosom and reaches behind her back with the other hand. We hear the ZIPPER open, and she uses the hand across her bosom to simply pull the dress off to one side.

Liz grins, impressed. Tina looks slightly alarmed.

ANN

Now you see it, now you don't.

Ann is nearly up to the women now, and she stops and holds the gown up with one hand. Then she presses it to her bosom.

ANN

And you can tease with it, too. Take your time unzipping it, or a little peek-a-boo.

Ann smiles at an imaginary audience as she slowly lowers the gown. Her face is not at all coy or coquettish.

ANN

You can put the zipper on the side, if you want to. It's easier to reach it there. But it shows a lotta leg, so you can't play a debutante or something.

Ann loosely folds the gown and lays it in the box, then does the same with the panel.

ANN

You don't have to use a breakaway. You can strip from anything. But it's smooth, you can take it off while you're walking, and you don't have to stand there on one high-heeled shoe trying not to tip over while you step out of a regular dress.

Liz is embarrassed, thinking of her episode of hopping. Ann sees this.

ANN

(shaking head)

Nah, we get this thing running, you're going to see everybody doing stuff like that. Don't let it get to you. Every show you got a new crowd.

Liz doesn't quite understand the last, since there's no crowd now, but doesn't dwell on it.

LIZ

You kept your eyes focused away from us. Should I do that too?

ANN

Uh, no. It's important to keep your eyes up. Like I said, don't look at the floor. But generally you want to look out at the audience. I did it in my parade 'cause it helped my act. I was the girl next door. Which is odd, 'cause I was not a nice person particularly. In my private life. I wasn't innocent, or wholesome...

(wry smile)

(MORE)

ANN (cont'd)

But put me on stage and that's what people saw. And a theater owner told me, look off in the distance. And I did it and it seemed to work. The idea is the girl next door wouldn't be stripping if she thought there was people looking at her, so she couldn't look at them, or she'd see them, and it would spoil everything. See?

Liz gets it, Tina doesn't.

Ann is a bit embarrassed at going on like that, and glances at her watch.

ANN

Everybody has their own act, I guess is the point. We better get to your act here.

Ann looks over at the drums and cymbal, without enthusiasm, then walks over to the steps, and down.

The floor tom hasn't had much use, the snare has a discolored portion in the center and a small dark patch to the side. Ann looks them over, picks up a stick, then stops, looking sad.

TINA

What's the matter?

ANN

Oh, just -- adjusting. I been practicing, but, by myself. This makes it official.

(tries to explain)

It used to be, I'd arrive at the theater, and I had my makeup case and -- I was the show. All I needed was me.

(looks at drum and stick)

It's finally over.

TINA

Sentimental?

ANN

Nah. Ego.
 (wry smile)
 Self-pity. Forget sentimental.
 It was a business. Dog eat dog.
 It was just a way to make money.

Tina doesn't believe her, Liz does.

ANN

Here we go.

Ann picks up a stick, rests the shaft on the hoop of the snare drum, considers it, then raises it and strikes a RIMSHOT (the stick hits the hoop and the drum head at the same time). Then another, concentrating on where the stick is landing on the drum.

ANN

(dryly, to herself)
 Gene Krupa lives...
 (to Liz, gestures
 to drums)
 Sixteen bucks at a thrift shop.
 Plus what I can remember of things
 that drummers showed me. This is
 just for now, we'll get a real
 band.

Ann glances at her hand to make sure she's holding the stick correctly (between thumb and forefinger, the other three fingers curled and only serving to keep the stick in her palm). She hits another RIMSHOT.

TINA

That doesn't sound like a drum
 at all.

ANN

Rimshot. See, the stick hits
 the rim and the drum head at
 the same time.

Ann hits another RIMSHOT, then she taps cymbal CRASHES a couple of times, then takes the sticks off the floor tom and places them on the bookcase. She selects a mallet and uses it to give the tom a BOOM. Then she checks the 3 x 5 card.

ANN

I need a volunteer from the
 audience.
 (points at Tina)
 You.

Tina isn't expecting this.

TINA

You mean -- up there?

ANN

Yup. You and her trade places.
Liz, whyn't ya bring your things
over here to the side.

Tina reluctantly makes her way up to the stage. Liz picks up her pack and clothes and sets them by the boxes, then walks down the steps. As they pass, Tina smiles hopefully, Liz looks past her.

TINA

You haven't done this before.

ANN

We haven't had anybody get this
far before. This is new to me
too.

Tina reaches the stage and looks around at this nearly-foreign territory, then tells Liz:

TINA

I have kind of a mental thing
about the stage. Something that
happened when I was a little girl.
A long time ago. Everybody
laughed at me.

Liz acts as if she didn't hear her.

ANN

I know. Nobody's gonna laugh
at you. But same thing as
I told her. Don't fall off.

TINA

I won't.

Tina looks at Ann expectantly, a bit apprehensively.

ANN

Okay. You stay there. Liz, uh,
come over here by me. Get up
there on the steps. I want you
to watch Tina, not me.

Liz dutifully walks up a few steps, near Ann, then hunkers down.

ANN

Okay, let's try something here.

Ann tries a few more practice BOOMS on the tom, is satisfied with the result.

ANN

Tina, if you would, go walking away to the other side, and swing your hips as wide as you can. This is just for fun.

Tina walks away, and we see her with Ann out of the picture. And what we see are Tina's hips suddenly come to life: with each step there's a loud BOOM. Tina's getting into it, a hint of a grin flickering around her mouth. Liz is staring in amazement. When Tina gets nearly to the end of the stage she looks over her shoulder and gives a playful rapid-fire side-to-side-to-side movement with her butt, and we hear a matching BOOM-BOOM-BOOM. Then there's a muffled CRASH and we see Ann looking at the still-vibrating cymbal, having struck it with the mallet.

ANN

Need the stick for that. Not too darn shabby though, if I do say so myself.

(then to Tina:)

Now. I won't ask you to bump.

TINA

Please. It's just...

ANN

Be that as it may -- she is gonna bump, and I need to show her the snare and cymbal, so let's do this -- walk toward me and use your hands. Point at things. Any kind of gesture. Just make sure I can see it. Kick if you want to.

TINA

Okay...?

ANN

I need some practice swings here.

Ann lays the mallets on the tom, picks up a stick, and tries another couple of RIMSHOTS, then some cymbal CRASHES.

Tina looks politely interested, as if there isn't anything to practice.

ANN

It takes awhile before you know
where the drum is. Okay, go
ahead.

Again we see Tina but not Ann. Tina strides toward us,
across the stage, doing a little dance step now and then.

She raises her arms and flips her hands open (as did Joy
Damon).

RIMSHOT from the snare.

Tina back-kicks one leg (as did Joy Damon finishing her act).

CRASH from the cymbal.

Tina looks at Ann (at us) puckishly, then holds her hands
over her head like a flamenco dancer and claps.

CRASH -- CRASH -- CRASH from the cymbal.

Tina turns sideways and does a tiny, dainty bump.

RIMSHOT from the snare.

Tina's POV -- Ann mock-leering at her.

ANN

Yeah Baby!

Tina kicks, a sort-of attempt at a high-kick.

We see Ann striking the cymbal and hear its CRASH, and Ann
then reaches out with thumb and forefinger and mutes it.

ANN

(to Liz)

Behold Magic Woman! She commands
thunder and lightning with every
move of her body!

Liz stares enraptured. Tina floats along dreamily, happy to
be the center of attention. She makes some more movements
and Ann accompanies each (cymbal for feet, rimshot for hips,
either for hands).

ANN

(to Liz)

You're the one in charge. The
band is playing for you, you're
not dancing for them.

Tina stands on stage, happy for a moment, then realizes it's over and everyone's looking at her. She cringes and hastily walks over to Ann and down the steps, past Liz (whose frost is momentarily thawed by wonder at what she's just seen).

ANN

(to Liz)

Let's have you get out there.

Liz rises and walks up the steps and on stage. She looks at Ann to find out what happens next.

Ann checks the 3 x 5 card again, then rummages around in a small box of audio cassettes and CD's on the bookshelf.

ANN

I'm gonna skip ahead here. This is the best way to learn things anyway. We're gonna throw you in the water and let you drown a little bit.

(holds up cassette,
puts it into deck)

This is the music from a strip act, done a long time ago. The sound is terrible, but we can use it. I recorded it off my V-C-R, which didn't help any. I just thought of something. Have you ever danced at all, I mean, socially or anything, school prom...?

LIZ

Not really. I don't party.
(thinks)

My exercise videos. It's all set to music. But...

ANN

Okay, that helps a little. See, you and me are from different worlds. Back when I was your age, dancing was the big social activity. Everybody knew how to move to music. Not any more.

(a beat for past times)

I'm not going to give you a whole bunch a different things at first, we'll just use a couple here. Then we'll build on that.

LIZ

Okay.

ANN

Now, just go walk across the stage and then come back. I wanna see how you look.

Liz strides matter-of-factly away. Before she gets to center stage Ann calls out:

ANN

You're walking like you're going somewhere.

Liz stops, looks back at Ann. She doesn't get it.

ANN

The objective is not to get across the stage, the objective is to look good. Don't swing your arms. Hold them up. Just bend your elbows there. Yeah. See, you're going to be using your hands when you dance. Each time you take a step, pause for just a second. You're wearing heels -- point your toes.

(gestures at auditorium)

Imagine those seats are filled. Everyone out there paid money to see you. They're looking at each step you take, so make each one count. Now, try again.

Liz does, holding her arms still and pushing her foot forward rather than raising the toe.

ANN

Don't look down.

Liz gives an "Aw shit" grimace.

ANN

No strain. And you'll wind up with your own walk. That's true with all of this. It's not like school, where there's just one right answer. There's a lotta ways to do stuff. We'll try different ones and see what works best. But this is what worked for me, so that's how I'm gonna start you out. So. Give it another shot.

Liz tries again.

ANN

Better. Now. Go back a ways again and walk toward me, and this time swivel just a bit with each step. First step you swivel left, next one you go right and so on. You're turning on the ball of your foot, the one in back.

Liz does.

ANN

Not quite so much. Just a touch.

Liz complies.

ANN

That is good. Very good. Now, let's recap. Go to center stage.

Liz walks to the middle of the stage and points at the spot: Here?

ANN

Yeah. Not so close to the front though. And bump.

Liz steps back, then bumps, but not at a hundred-percent.

ANN

Snap the bump out. Slam it. If you do it half-way you're missing the whole thing.

Grinning, Liz slams another bump, then another.

ANN

Yes ma'am, I think you can.

Liz smiles confidently. But that sense of dominating the theater we saw earlier is not there; Liz is a pupil and she's done well, but she is not controlling the action.

ANN

Now do a grind.

Liz grinds, the Hula Hoop rotation. Then she holds up her hand to indicate an idea, and backs off on the bump portion, emphasizing her hip rolling.

Ann smiles approvingly.

ANN

Yup. So now you know bump and grind. And you know what the drum and cymbal are going to do when you kick or clap your hands or whatever. Plus you've seen people dance in the movies and stuff. You're going to use all this to make up an act right now.

Liz's eyes get big.

ANN

Ain't I horrible?

Feeble smile from Liz.

ANN

This music is going to last just under four minutes and it's in two halves. Here's what you're gonna do: The first half, you parade back and forth on stage, and get out of your clothes. That's the toga. You want to do that by the wing -- one end of the stage --

(points to other end)

so you can just toss it there. The second half, you get out of your panels and you dance as hot as you can. Ah, leave it on, there's no need to take it off here.

LIZ

The skirt?

ANN

Yeah. Just leave it on. One less thing for you to remember. And it makes life easier for another person too.

Ann smiles at Tina. Tina nods, embarrassed. Liz ignores her, stony-faced.

ANN

I'll call out to you when the half is ready to end. You cannot check your watch. You ever look at your watch on stage and you lose that audience forever.

TINA

Why not just take it off?

ANN

Where you gonna put it? Leave
it in the dressing room? Bye
bye watch.

Tina mouths: oh.

ANN

Dog eat dog.
(to Liz:)
Welcome to show business.

Liz has her hand in the air with a question.

LIZ

Yeah. What do I do when I parade?

ANN

You walk. You walk around the
stage, let everybody see you.
On a real stage you make a circle
or a figure-eight. On this one --
just walk from end to end. Do a
little hand and arm stuff, tease
with your toga. What you're doing
is breaking the ice. Letting 'em
get to know you a little bit.
Build up anticipation.

LIZ

So I should put on the toga, then?

ANN

Yup. That's why you put stuff
on. To give you something to
take off.

Liz throws the toga over her shoulder, pulls it around her
self and drapes it, and then ties the cord around her waist
with a bow knot.

ANN

That is gorgeous.

TINA

Oh I adore it! It's so classical.

Liz smiles happily, for a moment even forgetting that she
hates Tina. We sense she doesn't often get compliments.

ANN

Well, it's a fashion hit. Now you find out if it actually works. Why don't you take a dry run here. Practice untying the cord.

Liz looks down and unties the cord.

ANN

Unh-uh. You're not going to look down while you're dancing. Do it the way you're going to do it then. In fact, try it while you're walking.

Liz looks exasperated for a moment, then sucks it up and reties the cord, starts walking, and reaches for the cord. She can't find the knot at first. She keeps her eyes up and feels around, then finds it and pulls it open.

ANN

You want to do it again?

Liz smiles this time, nodding her head. She ties the cord, and then practices dropping her arm so she knows her hand will hit the knot. She tries again, walking, and this time finds the cord with her first try.

ANN

You're ready to go.

Liz smiles uncertainly.

ANN

Relax. I know you haven't even heard the music before. This is gonna be a fiasco. It's gonna be terrible. But, what's gonna happen is, inside your brain you're gonna start trying to figure things out. That's what we want to happen. Now, when the music starts, you gotta do something. I'll hit rimshots and cymbals, but they won't happen without you. You don't do anything, I don't do anything.

Liz would like to ask more questions but she can't think of them. And it wouldn't make any difference because Ann is looking at her watch and starts the tape, ready or not.

AUDIO CLIP #3 (3 3/4 minutes, mono): Music fills the theater. The audio quality is much lower than we heard in the dream scene. It sounds like a jazzed-up pop tune but we can't put a name on it. Brassy to the point of being tinny; maybe two saxophones and a trumpet, a drum set, and now and then the tinkle of a piano. It begins with a man's voice saying: "And now for a touch of sophistication, may we present the tantalizing Amber Dawn."

And those of us watching who thought it must be very easy to walk around in a circle and throw your clothes off, realize very quickly just how hard it actually is. Put plainly, Liz sucks. Her movements come after the music (naturally, since she's never rehearsed), she has no ability, no plan, no actual dance, and she doesn't know what she's doing.

Note: The following is a very, very rough dance guide. The time would vary according to the actress's step and how wide the stage was. All moves listed here can be altered as desired; the only thing that must remain is the parade at the beginning, and the walking-bump sequence at the end. Time listed at left (minutes:seconds).

0:00 (melody)

Liz near center stage. She does nothing for a second, then turns clumsily and walks -- trying to be poised -- to the far end of the stage, then turns back. She looks at Ann, then catches herself and looks at the horizon, then in Ann's direction, though not right at her.

0:20

Liz is doing what she's supposed to do, parading, and starting to do pretty well at walking in time to the music. She reaches Ann's end of the stage and turns, and returns to center stage. When she gets back to her starting point she stands there motionless, trying to think of what to do.

ANN

Move!

LIZ

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

Liz winces and grinds for a few seconds, then

0:40 (saxophone solo, heavy drums)

Liz walks again, this time holding her arms up in front of her, and she swings them from side to side in time with the music as she walks, opening the hands with each swing. She looks pleased with herself for having thought of this. Each time she opens her hands, Ann hits a cymbal CRASH.

Once she stops and walks backwards in step with the beat, this time pushing with her upheld arms. She then swings them to the left and pushes, then to the right and pushes, and each time Ann hits a cymbal CRASH.

Liz holds her arms out at the side and rotates in a circle -- nice idea, but her movements are clumsy and stiff, and it doesn't quite come off. When she completes the circle, she raises her arms and Ann hits a cymbal CRASH.

Liz looks at her to see how she's doing, Ann gives a distracted nod (she's watching for another move).

Something isn't right. It's not just that Liz is awkward and doesn't know what to do, the star in her isn't there now -- she's just someone trying to please. Tina sees it more than does the preoccupied Ann, and is baffled and frowning.

1:05 (melody)

Liz absently checks her watch.

ANN

No watch!

LIZ

Sorreee...

Liz begins grinding, apparently trying to think of what to do next, then walks again, swinging her hips with the beat -- not quite like Tina did, more a bump to one side than the other. Each time Ann hits a RIMSHOT. Liz looks good here.

1:25 (saxophone solo, heavy drums)

Liz at center stage faces the auditorium and teases with the toga, but not the way Ann did. Liz tries to be coquettish. She plays with the cloth over her chest, then does the same with the side opening, and lifts the hem up. Her face looks like a school nurse trying to con a kid into taking cough syrup. She's so bad it hurts to watch.

Ann winces and whistles under her breath, then goes deadpan.

1:50 (melody)

Ann checks her own watch, calls out:

ANN

Ten seconds!

Liz is caught at center stage. She has to look around before she remembers the end where Ann told her to toss her toga. She clumsily wheels and strides over there (sashay forgotten), and whips off the toga as the music winds up. She raises both arms helplessly: I don't know what to do.

Ann hits a cymbal CRASH when Liz's hands open.

2:00 (crescendo, applause)

Tina applauds and gives Liz an encouraging smile, a sincere one. Ann is only interested in the act.

Liz doesn't really see them. She's worried; she knows it's not working. She's got to come up with something.

2:05 (new music, bouncy jazz)

Liz hears the beat and gets an inspiration. She comes out smokin' -- she slides one foot forward and stops, then brings the other one up to it, stops, and then slides that one forward, and so on. With each step she thrusts her arms out ahead of her and pulls them back, one at a time, as if pulling herself forward.

Note: the above is copied from Amber Dawn's dance, but without the hand-twists and bumps at each step.

Ann hits a RIMSHOT each time Liz pulls her arm back.

ANN

Beautiful!

Liz throws Ann a grin, then stops at center stage and slams a bump, the panel rippling out. Ann hits a RIMSHOT.

2:20 (bouncy jazz repeat)

Liz raises her arms over her head and grinds -- and then does it in a circle, slowly rotating around while her hips continue to revolve. It isn't smooth, but it's interesting. Ann has her mouth open in concentration and admiration, lightly TAPPING cymbal.

2:35 (saxophone solo, rising up to plateau)

Liz looks like she's borrowing from her exercise tape: she extends her arms, then twists so her hands point toward her toes, first one side then the other. Ann, deadpan, hits a cymbal CRASH each time Liz's hand points.

ANN

(muttered)

Choreographed by Jack La Lanne...

2:55 (bouncy jazz repeat)

Liz extends one leg and pushes downward with her hands, then does the same with the other leg. Dorky. Ann, her deadpan frayed, hits cymbal CRASH each time Liz's arms reach down.

Liz does this a couple of times, then backs up and almost loses her balance. She windmills her arms and doesn't fall.

Tina tenses, and clenches her hands in empathy until Liz recovers, then smiles encouragement when she sees Liz looking over at them.

TINA'S SMILE -- CLOSEUP

Liz is enraged, taking Tina's smile as derision.

Ann misreads Liz's expression.

ANN

That's the floor, not you --
don't worry about it.

Liz faces out to the auditorium and angrily kicks a couple of times, first one leg then the other, not a high kick, more like she was kicking a soccer ball (or Tina's head). Ann hits CYMBAL each time.

Liz does a hard, angry bump to the auditorium and Ann hits a RIMSHOT. Tina winces.

Liz looks over at Ann to check on how she's doing, sees Tina's revulsion and turns toward her.

3:10 (bouncy jazz repeat)

LIZ'S FACE, not giving a damn about pleasing anyone now, just seeing her enemy and knowing how she can hurt her.

LIZ'S HANDS unsnapping the belt and throwing off the panels.

LIZ'S CROTCH slamming a bump.

TINA'S FACE recoiling in horror.

Liz begins walking toward Tina (and Ann), bumping as she goes. She slides one foot forward and stops it as she bumps, then does the same with the other foot (so she's actually turned a bit each time she bumps, first left then right). Each time she bumps she thrusts her hand out with the finger pointed at Tina, gun-like. She changes hands from bump to bump. Liz's teeth are bared. She is killing Tina with each slam of her crotch.

3:25 (bouncy jazz repeat)

Liz owns the stage.

Tina staring in frozen horror, to the side Ann wide-eyed and mouthing: "Yes!" as she hits a RIMSHOT for each bump.

Tina's POV: Attack By the Twenty-Foot Stripper from Hell!

Liz dropping to a partial squat in front of Tina.

Liz's crotch slamming forward, right toward Tina's petrified face.

3:45 (ending crescendo -- note: dubbed, actual recording starts another saxophone solo and ends at 4:10)

Ann throws her drumstick at the ceiling in jubilation (it lands with a CLATTER a few seconds later). The tape deck continues running, the blank remainder of the tape HISSING.

ANN

Yes!

Liz looks down at Ann in a moment of surprise, and slowly stands up. She wasn't thinking of being entertaining. But the look of approval warms her, and she warms to it in return, smiling tentatively, then doing a Jolson-esque bow (she extends one leg toward Ann with knee bent, hands outstretched toward her with the palms up).

Ann claps loudly for a few moments. Tina stares at Liz in awe, not hearing the drumstick land, makes a few dazed clapping motions.

TINA

You can do that. You actually can do that...

(turns to Ann)

She can do that...

Ann and Tina look at each other. Eyes get big. Ann turns to Liz and puts on the World's Warmest Smile -- as she fumbles for the tape deck's Stop button -- and tells her:

ANN

We'll be in conference here...

Liz graciously waves and Ann pulls Tina over to the wall of the auditorium. Ann glances back at Liz and makes shoo-ing motions, and Liz, smiling, walks over to gather up the panel skirt and her toga. As Ann and Tina talk, Liz collects her toga, stows it and her shoes in the backpack, lays the panel skirt on the pack, and then begins dressing.

Ann and Tina huddle and speak in whispers:

TINA

Don't let her get away!

ANN

Aw, she's hooked.

TINA

What if she doesn't come back?
Oh why didn't I have contracts
ready?

ANN

We don't have anything to contract
her to. You said --

TINA

I could've invented something,
company to be named later, I don't
know...

ANN

(shrugs shoulders)

If she's happy she'll stay.

TINA

She isn't happy with me. Have you
seen the way she looks at me?

ANN

(lying)

No...?

Tina makes a face of great suffering.

ANN

Make nice to her.

TINA

She won't give me a chance.

ANN

Well, maybe you got off on the
wrong foot -- we can probably
come up with something here.

(thinks)

We'll do a little scene. You've
seen good cop-bad cop, right?
Let's try it like that. Just
take her side when I start in
on her, it'll work. C'mon.

Ann and Tina walk back to the stage, where Liz is pulling on her shirt and pants. Ann is alarmed, thinking of Liz falling again, and starts to say something. Liz shakes her head and carefully puts both feet into the pants before pulling them up. Ann smiles to herself, then:

ANN

You're in.

Ann's smile softens to wistfulness, then to sober respect.

ANN

We're gonna make you a present
of the panels there. It's like
a signing bonus.

Liz again is happy, and now we guess that she doesn't get many gifts.

LIZ

I can take it home?

ANN

Oh yeah. It's yours. Plus I
got a whole bunch a music here.
We'll give you first shot.
These arrangements are like
a time capsule...

Liz carefully folds the panels and stows them in the backpack. Ann pulls open the top box by the bookcase, and we see some yellowed sheet music. It's the only other gift she has to offer, and she realizes that it must seem pathetic.

ANN

Well. You can't hear 'em 'till
we get a band. You don't happen
to know a little three or four-
piece band, do you? Drums and
a trumpet and a piano, maybe
a saxophone? Sounds kinda
Dixieland? That'll maybe work
for free?

LIZ

No. I don't know bands though.

ANN

Oh well. I got some more stuff on
tape. It isn't so hot, but we can
use it. Tomorrow, or whenever you
can get in next we'll start
working on them.

Tina smiles at Liz encouragingly.

Liz looks at the cardboard box with interest. She speaks to Ann, not looking at Tina.

LIZ

That's great. Tomorrow I've got full classes. Day after?

ANN

Yeah, that's fine.

Liz sits down to put on her boots.

Tina frowns at the box, wondering what they can do with dusty old sheet music, and goes over and picks up the top one, actually a packet. We see the title, "A Kiss To Build A Dream On," tattered paper, torn corner, a cigarette burn, a circle from a coffee cup.

TINA

1935? You are well-preserved.

ANN

(smiling)

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

(takes music from Tina)

That's the copyright date. I got it used anyway. Oh, the sticker's gone. Oh...

(digs around in box)

Al's Swingtime was the store. This was my first music. Seventy-two cents. I just told him, something for striptease, and a fairly slow tempo. He had no idea. And I knew I needed two trailers, so he threw in...

(gives up)

Well.

TINA

(gently mocking)

But you're not sentimental...

ANN

Nah. It just bothers me when I lose things. I carted this stuff all over the country.

Tina doesn't quite believe her and neither do we.

Liz is kneeling down to see the sheet music, and when Ann rises she's face-to-face with the ring in Liz's nostril.

ANN

Look, uh...

Ann points at the ring, wincing.

LIZ

(touching ring)

Too much?

ANN

Yeah, maybe a little bit...

Ann nudges Tina. Tina is taken aback, then gets it, and looks at Ann with imitation disapproval.

Liz pops off the ring, a clip-on rather than a piercing. Ann gasps, then realizes it hadn't been attached.

ANN

Oh jeez. You scared me there.
Yeah, I like that better. Is
that an age thing? I mean, men
your age would like it?

Liz is clipping the ring on her bra front.

LIZ

Some of them. Uh, maybe on a
nipple?

Ann goes deadpan.

ANN

Not on my stage.

Liz and Ann exchange looks; not confrontational, but each finding out if the other will back down. Neither does, really, though Liz says:

LIZ

Okay.

ANN

I know there's fashions. But --
Nothing that harms us. It...
Nothing that says it's all right
for us to be harmed, is what I
mean.

Liz is chastened. Tina is on her side if only Liz would notice her.

LIZ

I didn't think about that.

ANN

Nobody's gonna be showing their nipples anyway. That's one thing we don't have to bring back.

Liz bobs her head in appreciation: Thank you.

Tina misses this, because she's got Ann in her sights.

TINA

The only legal requirement is that no one can see her thingie.

Liz looks at her in disbelief, Tina sees this and tells her:

TINA

(with deep meaning)
Down there. You know.

Ann tries to help:

ANN

Well, you're the expert.

Tina goggles at this insinuation and Liz actually smirks at her for a moment. Ann hastily adds:

ANN

About the law. Keeping us all out of trouble.

Tina is mollified. Ann -- looking a bit desperate -- sees a way to change the subject, albeit clumsily:

ANN

Now what about that hair?

Liz starts to reply, when Tina goes for it.

TINA

She has a right to express herself.

ANN

(split-second to put
on her fielder's mitt)
Ah, it seems pretty far-out.

Liz ignores Tina. Ann gives Tina a look: try harder.

TINA

I don't mean to argue. But this is America!

ANN

I didn't think of it like that.

LIZ

(to Ann)

It's supposed to glow under black light, if you use that.

Tina looks like she's fascinated by this information. Ann looks dryly amused, then stops and thinks.

ANN

You mean, fluorescent?

LIZ

Something. That's what it says on the bottle.

ANN

Ya know...

(glances at ceiling
over movie screen)

That wouldn't be that hard to do... Hmmmm...

Tina is helpless. Ann sees it and plows ahead.

ANN

Well. Tina's convinced me -- your hair is your own business. Say, that reminds me. Tina has come up with an idea for a story dance, and you might have some ideas on it.

Tina stares at Ann in disbelief, then quickly recovers and smiles enthusiastically. The smile quavers for a moment when she hears Ann say:

ANN

Let's get up there and have you sketch it out.

Tina nods doubtfully, and walks up the steps behind Ann.

ANN

(to Liz)

She and I've been going round and around on this one. We'll see what you think. I'll stay out of it.

Ann moseys off a bit, and watches Tina begin her spiel. She scuffs the deck with her foot, checking for rough areas, then carefully lowers herself down and sits.

Liz holds in her antipathy for Tina, with the result that she looks blank-faced and stupid.

Tina is finally in her element: selling. She surveys Liz for an instant, puts on a self-confident face, and plunges in.

TINA

This is different. We'll put a character on stage that everyone can recognize -- the office girl -- the girl that all the men are fantasizing about. I even made up a name for her -- Gloria Fantasia. We'll have a desk -- a cubicle, with a chair and a real computer. Now follow me. Gloria comes on stage, and sits down, and begins working. She teases a bit, but always naturally -- she extends her leg, say, and smoothes her stocking.

Tina gives Ann a mildly defiant look with the last comment. Ann smiles indifferently, seeming to be thinking of something else.

TINA

To the audience she's not a stripper, she's the girl in the next cubicle, clicking the keys on her computer. Then -- disaster strikes! When she takes a drink from her sports bottle, the lid's not on and it spills all over her. What's a girl to do? Well, naturally she has to remove her blouse, then her skirt --

Ann has her legs drawn up and hugs her knees, still with a trace of a smile, thinking of something very far away.

We hear CRYING (CHORINE O.S. -- just a high-pitched "Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee, uh," at first), and after few seconds,

FADE OUT.

Crying continues (bridge) joined by:

AUDIO CLIP #4 (13 minutes long, mono): This plays in the background (it sounds close, but a bit muffled, as if 25 or 30 feet away and a closed door was between us); slow and bluesy music, almost mournful, just drums and trumpet for first 40 seconds, then a small band joins. Faint audience noise. This clip will play throughout the scene.

[00:00]

Note: Audio Clip #4 is an extract from the 1954 Emory Cook record of a show at the Minsky-Adams theater. Rough timing of screenplay dialogue in brackets on right side of page, beginning above when clip starts playing. Notes on left side of page (like this one) will show the approximate point in the taped show. This is FYI only; synchronization is only required at the end, when Star speaks to Patti Waggin. Extract can be shortened or lengthened slightly as required.

FADE IN:

INT. BURLESQUE THEATER STOREROOM

A small windowless room around 20' square that looks like something in the back of an old abandoned factory; rough red brick walls, concrete or wood floor, empty except for some old boards, clumps of dust and debris, a few cigarette butts. Dim light from a single ceiling bulb.

CHORINE is sitting on the floor by the door, hugging her knees and crying, cheeks wet and nose running, makeup smeared. We recognize her as the actress who is playing Liz, but now she has honey-blond hair in early 1950's style, as is her makeup (red lipstick, etc). We're never told this outright, but we guess she's a very young Ann.

She wears an outfit of white fluffy sleeves, sequin-trimmed white panties and bra, gauzy panel skirt, silver ankle-strap shoes (sturdy), and no stockings. She wears a small wrist-watch. A feather headdress is lying on her lap (the same worn by Singer in the dream scene, but white). Just visible in the shot is part of a door.

Chorine interrupts her sobs once to hit her knee with a fist and snarl:

CHORINE
Stupid! Stupid!

After another 10 seconds or so, the door latch CLICKS and the door begins OPENING. Sound of music and crowd RISES.

Chorine sees that the door is opening. In rapid sequence, she (1) stops crying, afraid of being caught in her misery,

even makes instinctive brushing motions at her headdress as if readying for inspection, (2) starts to rise, then stops, (3) looks up at whoever's coming through the door, (4) stares in open-mouthed amazement.

We hear FOOTSTEPS of high heels on concrete: "click -- scrape -- click -- click."

The door CLOSES with a dull "thunk." Sound of music and crowd RETURNS to normal.

STAR stands in front of the door. We recognize her as the actress who is playing Tina. She wears the same black costume Singer did, sequin sheath evening gown, opera gloves, stockings, ankle-strap shoes.

But now she's younger. She wears no headdress. Her hair is jet black, and so is the star-shaped beauty spot. Her face is a work of art: heavy makeup, false eyelashes, lips a deep red. Her wrap is a rich golden-brown mink. She carries a small black handbag, and instead of diamonds she wears a looped pearl necklace, pearl earrings and multi-strand pearl bracelet.

Star is calmly imperious, royalty. She looks at Chorine with no visible emotion. Then she walks the one or two steps to the girl and looks down at her.

Chorine stares up at Star with wide eyes.

Note: All speech in this scene is in normal voice levels, or a bit lower, but never raised (except for Chorine at the beginning, and Star's lines to Patti Waggin at the end).

STAR
You're crying too loud.

Chorine dies. She stares at nothing for a moment, then her head slumps down and she looks at her lap.

Star shakes her head slightly.

STAR
I was trying to be funny. You know, yuk yuk. Cheer you up.

It dimly registers on Chorine. She snuffles nasally and gulps snot.

Star glances at the headdress, then at Chorine's smeared makeup, and frowns.

STAR

Chorus line... What happened?

Chorine looks up at Star and tries to tell her.

[01:00]

CHORINE

I -- felllll...

Chorine is on the verge of crying again.

CHORINE

Ann... everyone... saw me...

Chorine struggles for control, ducking her chin, twisting her head from side to side, until there's just a snuffle or two.

Star's gloved hand enters the picture, held out to Chorine, pearl bracelet shimmering.

Chorine sees the hand. She wipes her palm on her thigh, then slowly reaches out. Chorine's fingernails are ragged, bitten.

Their hands meet and clasp, and Star pulls her up.

STAR

Your face is a mess.

Chorine reaches toward her face, Star stops her with:

STAR

Wait.

Star unsnaps her purse and frowns at the contents, muttering:

STAR

Everything I've got is a goddamn prop... Ah.

Star hands her purse to Chorine, and takes the headdress from the girl.

STAR

Here. There's a bunch of Kleenex.
No, give me the cap... Yeah...
These gloves'd turn white...

Chorine finds tissues and blows her nose. She looks around for a wastebasket until Star tells her:

STAR

Oh hell, just throw 'em on the floor. You won't hurt it any.

Chorine gets her face cleaned up a bit, seeming to forget her misery in the effort. Star touches her own face to indicate spots needing more work, mimicking wetting her finger to instruct Chorine:

STAR

Above your lip... smooth your cheek a bit, blend it in...

[02:00]

Finally:

STAR

That'll get you by until you can put your face on again.

After purse and headdress are swapped back again, Chorine remembers who she's with, and she gawks at Star admiringly.

Star poses a bit, but then we see with Chorine the lined skin under the thick makeup, the glossy hair has gray roots, some of the sequins are missing from the gown.

Star ducks her head, embarrassed, then she comes back up with a flat look.

STAR

I'll be here all week. Don't wear your eyes out too soon.

Audio Clip #4 (2:20): Music begins rising in dramatic chord progression, over half-minute, to plateau.

Chorine realizes her offense and tries to think of an alibi. She spots the necklace and points, her voice eager to be believed:

CHORINE

I was looking at the pearls.
We're not allowed to wear them.
Or beads. In case the string
breaks.

Star doesn't buy it, but thinks it was nice of Chorine to try.

STAR

Yeah. The stage would turn
into a skating rink. Little
ball bearings all over.

(touches necklace)

It's part of the legend. I
finally stand there... covered
only... with a strand... of
priceless pearls...

Star strikes a classical pose with her arms in the air,
holding a loop of the necklace as if offering it to heaven,
for a moment as enthralled with the legend as is her public.

Audio Clip #4 (2:50): Music reaches plateau and will stay
there for another half-minute.

Chorine is gawking at her again, and now it's outright hero-
worship. Star glances over, misinterprets the look, and
keeps the pose for a moment while speaking with a collegial
tone:

STAR

The real thing. Got 'em insured
by Lloyds of London.

CHORINE

(a bit whispery
with awe)

You're in the papers and
everything.

[03:00]

Star's face lights up.

STAR

Oh...?

Star hopefully waits a moment for Chorine to elaborate.

STAR

You mean the, uh...?

Star makes circular motion with hand, inviting Chorine to
finish the sentence.

CHORINE

The car racer?

Star uses a bright tone, but is disappointed that this is
all Chorine meant.

STAR

The car racer...

(thinks)

Bobby! The great romance of my
lifetime... et cetera. There
wasn't anything new, then?

CHORINE

Maybe I missed it.

Star is tired and defeated for a moment, then rallies.

STAR

Ah, it's my press agent.
Heads are going to roll in
that department.

(then businesslike)

No matter. You fell on stage.
Not here.

CHORINE

Yes.

Audio Clip #4 (3:30): Dance music reaches dramatic finale,
ends with applause, happy fast-tempo transition music
begins.

STAR

Where on the stage were you when
you fell?

CHORINE

In the back. Up, I mean. And a
little right.

STAR

Could there be something on the
deck?

CHORINE

Maybe... No.

STAR

I'm going to be out there in a
few minutes.

Audio Clip #4 (3:50): Comedy routine begins, the voices of
two men and a woman over theater speakers, doing a not-real-
funny skit, with sounds of audience laughter.

CHORINE

It was me. In this routine we
walk up and down these steps, and
I stepped out but -- God...

Chorine is near tears of rage at herself, but doesn't cry.

STAR

Licking your wounds, huh.

[04:00]

CHORINE

When we were coming off, the
captain told me she'd never...

STAR

(shakes head)

Did Alice say anything?

CHORINE

(looking up, hopeful)

No. Maybe she didn't notice.

Star raises her eyebrows at Chorine: You have to be joking.

Chorine's eyes drop again.

STAR

You just do a good job in my
opening, it'll all be forgotten.
Right now you need to get to your
dressing room and fix yourself up.

Chorine doesn't look up.

Star realizes.

STAR

Oh. Oh, Kid...

Chorine continues to look at the floor.

STAR

Look. When you walk in, everyone
is going to stop talking and stare
at you.

Chorine presses her lips together tightly.

STAR

It's going to be a very bad
moment. But it's just a moment.
It'll be over with. Nothing near
as bad as if you stay here and --
hide.

Chorine makes no response.

Star considers Chorine, trying to figure her out.

STAR

How long you been working?

Chorine draws back, suddenly wary.

CHORINE

I was a waitress for over a year,
different places. I clerked at a
dime store for awhile.

[05:00]

Star -- face showing nothing -- shakes her head, about to correct her.

CHORINE

Oh, you mean here?

STAR

Yeah.

CHORINE

This is my third week. Well, I
spent most the first week just
watching and practicing.

Star pauses for a moment, thinking, then moves away, looking around. She sways her hips and raises hands in a pose, then rubs the front of her dress where something binds, looks around for another moment, then casually asks:

STAR

You're about, sixteen, seventeen?

CHORINE

I'm twenty-two.

STAR

(flash of patronizing
smile)

Of course. That's what your birth
certificate says?

CHORINE

Uh-huh.

STAR

The one that you showed Alice.
And she held it up to the light
and rubbed the printing, and...?

Chorine smiles and nods in agreement.

STAR
It's a good job, then. Any
ideas for a specialty?

CHORINE
You mean a strip?

STAR
Mm-hm.

CHORINE
How could I have my own act? I
can't even do the chorus routines.

STAR
Neither could I.

Chorine frowns in disbelief.

[06:00]

STAR
Everybody would turn left, and
I'd turn right.
(rueful wince)
Right now you're trying to do
what everybody else is doing.
Your own act you make up to suit
what you do well.

CHORINE
I don't do anything well.

Star actually smiles for a moment.

STAR
Sure you do.

CHORINE
I don't even know how to dance,
not real dancing.

STAR
You'll learn. Enough to get you
by, that's all you need. Anything
to stop you from traveling?

CHORINE
No.

STAR
No kids?

CHORINE
I never been married.

STAR
Does your family know you're here?

CHORINE
(wary)
My mom does.

STAR
Your father?

Chorine shakes her head: no, a subject she doesn't want to talk about.

CHORINE
It doesn't matter. I couldn't do anything like that, anyway. A dummy like me.

Star's face shows no reaction, other than to look away, and she thinks for a moment.

STAR
Definition of burlesque.

CHORINE
(by rote)
The word is dee-rived from the Eye-talian burr-laire, and means to mock or lam-poon through egg -- egg-zagger--
(can't get word)

[07:00]

STAR
(waving her down)
"Exaggerated imitation." They still give you that little booklet, huh. That's very good. No, I was setting up a line. Burlesque is honest. Women are not delicate and shy, and men are not rock-jawed heroes. Most all of them are on the make. That's how we show them. Without the lies.
(then gently, even a bit ill-at-ease)
Well, that's how you should look at yourself. Without any lies. You're not a dummy. Why do you want to lie and say that you are?

Chorine looks down at the floor, her face sets.

STAR
Everybody falls. I even walked
into the orchestra pit one time.

Chorine looks up at Star and a tiny bit of the defeat washes
away.

CHORINE
You did?

STAR
Yes. That was before I was
a legend. I survived, and so
will you. Now, you've got to
get to your dressing room.

Chorine looks down again.

Audio Clip #4 (8:00): Comedy routine ends without much
laughter, orchestra begins playing upbeat traveling music
for a minute and a half.

[08:00]

STAR
Is something going on?

Chorine shakes her head, trying to think how to say it.

STAR
What?

CHORINE
They didn't like me anyway.

STAR
Oh?

CHORINE
This is what they were hoping for.
Now they're gonna lean on me.
It's what always happens. Nobody
likes me. Sometimes they do at
first --

Chorine looks at Star, acknowledging her liking her.

CHORINE (cont'd)
but after awhile they change.
Every time.

STAR

Oh come on.

CHORINE

They do.

STAR

(ill-at-ease again)

Uh... I think maybe, you don't like you?

Chorine shrugs: Why should I?

STAR

That was in the Reader's Digest.
It was... an article...

Helpless and sad, Star gives up. She glances at the door.

STAR

They'll be dragging the river for me in a minute.

Chorine looks at Star, deciding something.

CHORINE

You didn't hear me out there, did you?

Star's face falls for a moment: found me out.

STAR

I was coming down the stairs.
I saw you go by...

(makes walking gesture
with two fingers)

You can't just leave a person.

[9:00]

Chorine glances toward door: they left me.

CHORINE

(whispered)

Yeah.

STAR

I know. Listen to me. Stick it out in the chorus. It's not gonna be here much longer.

Chorine doesn't understand, frowns.

STAR

Television. It's killing us.
Everything's down -- movie houses,
clubs, restaurants. They gotta
cut something, so -- chorus ist
kaput. But while it lasts it
gives you an opportunity. Between
shows, Alice is usually on stage
teaching.

CHORINE

Yeah, that's how she gives us
our new routines.

STAR

I mean striptease. That's Alice's
forté. They send girls here from
all over so she can get them
started, help them develop acts.
You come in and watch.

CHORINE

Watch someone else?

Audio Clip #4 (9:45): Introduction of Patti Waggin and then
music begins for her act, a soft, slow tune.

STAR

Watch Alice. Listen to Alice.
While she's teaching the girl
on stage, she's going to be
teaching you too, if you got
your ears open. And she will
notice that you're interested.
(rotates her hand)
Events... could ensue...

Chorine is faintly buoyed by that last, though also puzzled.

STAR

(to door, loud:)
Break a leg, ya over-educated
runt!

[10:00]

Chorine is open-mouthed.

STAR

(glances at Chorine,
then to door:)
Work upstage! A little right!

With happy anticipation Star cocks an ear, then after a moment gives up in disgust.

STAR

She's still moving. That Power of Positive Thinking doesn't work...

CHORINE

You don't like Miss Waggin?

STAR

I don't like competition. She's brunette. And she's good.

Chorine drops her eyes, stung.

STAR

That's right. You won't be competition. Think that's a fair estimate?

Chorine nods, not looking up.

STAR

I'm glad you value my opinion. My opinion is also that you could have a pretty good career in burlesque. Might be a better life than slinging hash, huh? Or hoping for a ten-dollar bill on the dresser.

Chorine's face loses all expression for a moment.

STAR

But in order for that to happen, you need a place to start. You have that right here. It's on the other side of that door. But you've got to get out there now.

Chorine looks up, at the door, afraid of the door, and replies almost inaudibly:

CHORINE

Nobody likes me...

[11:00]

Audio Clip #4 (11:05): first music ends with brief applause and music changes to upbeat and bouncy.

Star considers Chorine for a moment.

Star compresses her lips, acknowledging defeat. She turns and walks away from Chorine, toward the door, tucking her purse under one armpit to leave both hands free.

Her back is to Chorine and only we see the following: She reaches for her pearl bracelet. We see her gloved hand break one string. The pearls slide into her palm, and she closes her hand around them. She uses her index finger to push the string under another loop. Then she turns back to Chorine.

Star stares at something behind the girl, suddenly horrified.

STAR

Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh!

Chorine wheels around, scared, and looks for whatever it is.

In that same moment, Star bends her knees so there won't be much of a drop, and lets the pearls fall onto the floor by the wall, where Chorine had been sitting.

CHORINE

What is it?

STAR

Oh nothing I guess. Just the light. It looked like a bat up there in the corner.

(shudders)

Horrible things.

Star opens the door (the sound of music RISES), looks down, composes herself. When she raises her head she has the same commanding aura she wore when she first entered the room. She is royalty again.

Star walks out the door.

The door stays open. We don't see much of what's outside, since the light there is greenish and dim (sometimes brightening slightly from reflections of the spotlight moving across the stage), but apparently this is in a corridor, because there's a faintly-visible wall not far away, with the end of a rolled curtain on the floor.

Chorine stares at the open door for a moment, then down at her feet. Her face works, feeling sorry for herself, and she snuffles. She isn't going anywhere. She scuffs at the

floor, then heads over to the wall where she sat before. She sees something shiny. She bends down and looks.

A pearl.

[12:00]

Chorine kneels down. A second pearl. A third, fourth, fifth, must be two dozen.

Audio Clip #4 (12:05): second music ends with brief applause and music changes to drum solo, the beats slamming the air.

CHORINE

Oh God... her necklace...

(to the door,
waves free hand:)

Miss Bright. Come back, Miss.

(loud)

Star?

Chorine looks at the pearls again, then frantically gathers them up. The precious headdress slides onto the floor, momentarily forgotten. When the last pearl is in her hand, she starts to stand up, then sees the headdress and grabs it in her other hand. She stands up and beseeches the doorway, almost a whisper:

CHORINE

Miss Bright? Please.

She looks around desperately for something that would help her. There's nothing. She faces the door.

Her mouth is open, we hear fear-whimpers with her breaths, rising up suddenly to almost a SHRIEK.

[12:40]

We see her shoes as she raises one foot and STOMPS the heel down hard, the impact sounding like a gunshot in the small room. Her feet stride away from us to the door.

APPLAUSE (stock soundtrack) erupts, loud and cascading, with whistles. Audio Clip #4 ENDS (before drums are joined by rest of band -- Chorine exits before this, and we do not hear it, just the beating of the drums being drowned out by the waves of applause).

FADE OUT.

Applause continues (bridge)

FADE IN:

INT. THEATER - DAY

The same setting that we left when this scene began. Ann sits hugging her knees. The applause RECEDES and we hear Tina finishing her pitch to Liz:

TINA

The audience can only see the back of the chair. But they keep getting these glimpses when she turns from side to side, and it finally dawns on them -- she's not wearing one stitch of clothing! Gloria Fantasia, the girl in the next cubicle, is in -- her birthday suit!

(MORE)

Ann watches them for a moment, then rises with some difficulty. Tina and Liz are preoccupied with each other and don't notice her struggle. Ann walks over to them.

TINA (cont'd)

You see how I've targeted this? This is every man's fantasy come true in front of them! It drives them crazy! If she'd just turn a little bit further, or stand up a little --

Tina stops talking when she realizes Ann is beside her.

ANN

It'll work.

TINA

It will?

ANN

I missed it before.

(to Liz)

Tina's a genius.

Tina smiles, then looks doubtful. Liz is jarred by this accolade, tries to look impassive.

ANN

(to Tina)

What you did was, you invented a new comedy scene.

TINA

But it isn't comedy.

ANN

Yes it is. It just needs one more thing. You've got Gloria as a solo. Give her somebody on the other side of the partition. A guy. Like you say, it's his wet dream here.

(MORE)

Tina winces.

ANN (cont'd)

But he doesn't even notice her because he's working on his computer. So you end the routine... she dances off the stage and her bra and panties come sailing out from the wings and land on the guy's desk. He never notices.

(thinks)

He looks at his watch, he sighs, he shuts down his computer. He looks at the partition, he even starts to walk around it, then he stops and says, "Nah, why bother. She doesn't even know I exist." Blackout.

TINA

That's not funny.

ANN

(mock tiredness)

You know, I have worked before entire audiences that had that attitude. I said comedy. I didn't say funny, necessarily. Comedy can be funny, yes, but it can also just be honesty. Like holding up a mirror in front of the audience. Gloria Fantasia is going to show them something. And you, are wonderful.

Tina preens a bit.

Liz looks away, hurt, and hating her enemy for being praised.

ANN

In fact... You don't happen to be allergic to spirit gum, do you?

TINA

I don't even know what it is.

ANN

It's kind of a glue. You use it to hold fake mustaches on. Also for pasties, but never mind that. I wanna draft you to play Gloria's cubicle partner.

Tina stares in disbelief.

ANN

(heavy wink to Tina)

I'm gonna get as much mileage as I can out of everybody in here. So maybe you can't do it. But you could try. Be a trouper, y'know. Join the girls.

(rolls eyes toward Liz)

Think you could drop your voice an octave or so?

TINA

(gets it)

Uh, you mean,
(attempted basso)
Way down deep?

ANN

A star is born.

(to Liz:)

Whaddya say? You in one cubicle, next to Tina with a big old bushy mustache and some five o'clock shadow.

(runs hand over jaws)

Can you see her like that, all uglier up?

Tina looks to Liz, hoping for approval finally.

LIZ

I see it right now.

Time hangs for a moment, nobody quite believing what they heard. Tina's face works, trying to keep her smile intact and not being able to do it.

Liz LAUGHS.

Tina's face collapses. We hear what she hears, a ROARING of laughter in her ears. She turns away as if slapped, not seeing clearly, wanting to escape. Everything is spinning around her, and she veers toward the edge of the stage.

Liz makes no move to help Tina, knowing she will fall, wanting her to fall, executing her.

Ann reaches out for Tina, stops her in time. Ann is frightened by what almost happened,

Tina doesn't even realize how close she was. She looks blindly around, and shakes off Ann's hand as if it's her enemy. The roaring gradually STOPS.

ANN

Hon... Hon...

Tina swallows a few times. Then she does the best she can to act normal. Her voice is a bit warbley, and she can't make eye contact. She talks with her eyes roaming around down toward the deck or off to one side of the other women.

TINA

I'm fine. I just had some stage fright. I do that, I... Well, it's getting on to lunch time, isn't it? My day to make the sandwich run, and I'll just... I'll be shoving off now.

ANN

Yeah... Well... Hurry back...

Tina walks down the steps without tripping, somehow, grabs up her purse from the bookcase, then quickly walks up the aisle and out the exit.

Ann considers Liz for a moment, trying to comprehend. Liz looks back, unashamed. It's very quiet in the theater.

ANN

What in the hell did you do that for?

Liz thinks of how to say it.

LIZ

When she has to pee, does she say,
(mimicking Tina)
I have to use the sandbox. Or,
Where's the little girl's room?

A sympathetic smile flickers across Ann's face, then vanishes.

ANN

Nah, that's not it. She gave you a hard time there at first, but -- you hate her.

Liz just looks at her: You wouldn't understand.

ANN

Why?

LIZ

(smoldering)

Nobody treats me like shit.

ANN

People do that?

Liz's eyelids drop half-down: I live in a world you don't know.

ANN

She's the owner. She can fire you.

Liz shrugs: I don't care. Ann considers Liz again.

ANN

Why did you come here?

LIZ

To learn to dance.

Ann starts to bristle, Liz adds hastily:

LIZ

So I could get a job...
(gestures toward exit)

ANN

(a moment to get it)

In a strip club?

LIZ

Yeah.

ANN

Ah jeez. I thought we could get people away from the clubs. Nah, we're gonna be a farm team here. This is Triple-A. Thanks.

Liz looks at the floor, shame-faced.

ANN

(considers Liz)

School not going so good?

LIZ

Aw, it's okay.

ANN

Really?

LIZ

It takes me more time than it's supposed to. It's like, they said I had an aptitude for mechanics. Well, I may have an aptitude for doing it, but I don't have an aptitude for learning it. So I thought if I could make a lot of money without much hours... If I could learn how to dance...

ANN

You learn there. In the strip club. It's not like this kind of dancing at all. I went to one, to see what they were. They thought I was asking for myself.

(wry smile)

No. But they have amateur contests, and you go on from there.

LIZ

(shakes her head)

I'm not -- beautiful. Or graceful, or athletic. You saw a demonstration of that. I needed something I could bring with me, a skill. I sure don't have boobs.

ANN

It doesn't take boobs. The only thing you gotta have is nerve. The courage to do it. And some style. Which you have. I think that'd translate into big tips at a club. If that's what you want to do, we can say goodbye now. You don't need this.

Something goes out of Liz at being written off so easily. Ann doesn't seem to notice, but adds:

ANN

I wouldn't like to think of you at one of those places, but...

LIZ

Well, that's what I was going to do. But I didn't like the idea of working nude. This looks a lot better.

ANN

(considers Liz)

Come on down here, I got something you might wanna see.

Ann leads off down the steps, and Liz follows, dangling her pack. Ann goes over to the bookcase, picks up the VHS box and hands it to Liz.

ANN

This is a whole different world here. Long time ago. Most of the strippers are kinda low-keyed, but you can get the idea. Just take a look at 'em when you get a chance. Pick up some ideas.

Liz gestures to the pack.

ANN

Oh sure, take it home.

(smiles)

Exercise with the chorus. You'll get a workout there.

LIZ

Thanks. I can bring it back, um...

ANN

(agreeing)

There's no money here. Not yet anyway. But you got spare time you could spend, that would be great.

LIZ

Summer break's only a couple of weeks off. I could get a day job and come here in the evenings.

(looks out at auditorium)

I like this place.

ANN

Yeah. It's a dump right now, but... We'll have to practically rebuild the thing. But... what it can be...

(far-off look, then self-conscious smile)

I like the place too. And you better like Tina too. 'Cause without her, there won't be any theater. Now we gotta get you back in with her.

Liz is disbelieving, then immovably opposed.

ANN

(thinking)

There's a funny thing with Tina. For all her prissiness -- and she is prissy, I know that -- but she loves to be teased. She gets giggly. Like it was flattery. So if you played it right, she just might believe you were trying to kid her there. Just got a little heavy-handed. If you could tease her about something...

Liz: no.

ANN

Oh she'll come back. And we'll have lunch. And she'll pretend nothing happened. She can't deal with stuff like that. After you leave, she'll tell me to get rid of you. Unless...

Liz: no.

ANN

It's up to you. This theater
can come back to life. But it
needs performers. You're the
only one we got. If you don't
stay, this place will die.
Tina doesn't care about show
business. She's money. She'll
take any offer she can get.
You know who's gonna buy it?
Some guy wants to build a parking
lot.

Liz: that's a shame, but...

Then Liz sees something in the auditorium. Her face goes
flat.

Ann turns to look.

Tina is in the entrance, holding three fast-food bags.

TINA

(stiffly)

Chicken was the special today.
It's such a nice day, we could
eat outside.

ANN

(overbright)

Oh great! Be right there.

Tina awkwardly steps back into the lobby, eyes downcast.

ANN

(to Liz, whispered)

She didn't hear me, did she?

LIZ

I don't think so.

ANN

(whispered)

Potato chips! They throw in
those little bags of chips.
Which she's not supposed to have,
by the way... Take some of her
chips. Tease her with them,
say they're yours. It'll work.

Liz shakes her head reluctantly: she just can't do it.

Ann suddenly is much older, pale and stooped. Then her face hardens with resolve. She isn't pretending.

ANN

(whispered)

Okay. Stay here. I'll take care of it.

Ann determinedly walks away, up the aisle. Liz watches her, helpless and trapped, then after a moment she grabs her pack and whirls off after her. When she catches up, Ann glances over at her as if it's no big deal.

ANN

(full voice)

We got an old card table we can use.

We stay down near the stage. We watch Ann and Liz walk away from us, through the exit. For a moment the light from the lobby blurs them together, as if they were one. Then they turn, out of our view.

ANN (O.S.)

Let's each take an end.

LIZ (O.S.)

I've got it.

We hear a brief BUMP of the table hitting something, and metal chairs RATTLING together. The women's voices RECEDE:

LIZ (O.S.)

Over there?

ANN (O.S.)

Right here.

Silence for a moment.

AUDIO CLIP #5 (1 1/2 minutes long, mono): This is the audio for Film Clip #5 (5 1/4 minutes total). The volume is low, but we clearly hear the emcee introduce Hillary Dawn, then the theater organ begins an unidentified song, a slow, sweet tune. It's what "A Pretty Girl Is Like A Melody" should sound like, but doesn't. It might be syrupy to some ears -- to others it will be wonderfully evocative, sunsets in the Pacific, the era of Home Front USA. The drums and cymbal punctuate the melody, telling us of Hillary's movements.

We look around the theater; the seats, movie screen, stage planking, the walls, box of sheet music, the TV/VCR, Tina's coffee cup sitting on the floor. The TV is off, the movie screen is unlit. Everybody's gone.

We look at the exit again. Then we begin TRUCKING up the aisle, at a slow walking pace. We reach the exit and turn, into the lobby area.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Music clip sound INCREASES a notch; we're closer to Hillary. We might notice an old concession stand, bare and grimy, or a broom propped against the wall. But the main thing in our view is the open door of the outside entrance, something we haven't seen for a while: sunlight. It's so bright that it's all we see in the doorway. We hear the voices of the women from outside, but nearby. There's a bit of TRAFFIC NOISE from the street.

TINA (O.S.)

But could only six women hold an audience for a whole two-hour show?

ANN (O.S.)

Oh yeah. If we can find 'em. And if we can give 'em a good stage to perform on.

TINA (O.S.)

We'll see.

We go through the doorway. Music clip sound INCREASES another notch, but it's still below what the full volume will be.

EXT. UNDER MARQUEE - DAY

There's too much light out here; it's scary, an alien world. The camera isn't pointed directly at them, but we can see Ann and Tina and Liz sitting on folding metal chairs at a flimsy old card table, their own little sidewalk café, shaded by the marquee. Before them are paper soft-drink cups with straws, paper sacks, little bags of potato chips dumped onto sandwich wrappers (Ann's are marked "No salt"), and opened Hoagie sandwiches at which the women are occupied in adding mustard and mayo and generally rearranging.

ANN

(to Tina)

Something we need to talk about.

Liz looks at Ann apprehensively.

A CAR goes by with the driver leaning on the HORN. The women turn to look, and Ann mimes yelling after the car, cupping her hand for a megaphone, but speaks at a normal level:

ANN

Hey, what else d' ya blow?

Liz quickly darts her hand over to Tina's sandwich. Although Ann is looking at the street, she sees Liz from the corner of her eye.

ANN

You took her potato chips.

LIZ

What, me?

Now the camera slowly begins TILTING upwards until it's centered on the sky, and then slowly begins to ZOOM until eventually all we see is blue sky. The volume of the film clip audio begins RISING.

ANN

You took them right off her wrapper. I saw you do it.

TINA

Oh. There's almost -- You did take them.

LIZ

These?

TINA

Well -- yes.

LIZ

Want them?

TINA

Of course I want them!

LIZ

Which are yours? Is it this chip? Could it be this chip here?

TINA

Oh silly, how would I know.

We're looking up at the sky now, blue, without a single cloud. The volume of the film clip audio has reached normal level and the women's voices now begin to RECEDE.

SLOWLY DISSOLVE TO:

FILM CLIP #5

LIZ (O.S.)

In which direction? clockwise or
counterclockwise?

TINA (O.S.)

(giggling)

Make her stop.

ANN (O.S.)

You should give her samples to
test, but definitely clockwise.

TINA (O.S.)

How -- mmmmpghhhh!

CRUNCH of potato chip being eaten.

LIZ (O.S.)

Now this one... Or is it this
one...

Film Clip #5 is now fully on screen, and concludes the movie, lasting another 3 3/4 minutes. We see a tall blond woman walking around the stage and sometimes swinging her hips or dipping down in a knee-bend, and each time there's a beat from the drummer for emphasis. She isn't beautiful, and her expression suggests smugness, but she does have presence. She's a star, and she knows it, and we sense it. She unzips her dress, leaving panel skirt and bra top. She continues the walking and dipping, throwing in a bump here and there and swaying her hips. She grins as she slams a bump, a woman who's happy in her work. She removes her bra, then her skirt, finishes with a brief session in G-string, then steps off stage to applause. She returns for a moment to show herself bare-breasted, and then steps off forever to applause.

FREEZE-FRAME and applause RECEDES as we

DISSOLVE TO:

STARLIT SKY (stock footage)

Acknowledge film clips, cooperation and sources (note that some of the music we heard in the storeroom is not on the current CD). Include the following (with photo backdrop) from the San Diego Historical Society's oral history interview of stripper Jan Cafara (1:10:00):

AUDIO CLIP #6 (25 seconds, mono):

"The old theaters, there's something about them, you walk through them when there's nobody else there... It's quiet, the other actors, all those dead ones, are sitting around the wings waiting to help you... Nah. And the Hollywood -- the Hollywood was a little jewel box of show business."

If possible, include a 3- or 4-minute "Added Attraction" of brief clips of several top strippers. Dub some elevator music on one set and show these first. Explain to the audience that much of the film available today uses music that was dubbed, or not the dancer's own, and it ruins her performance. Then show the same clips with the original music. Like night and day. They could dance.

AUDIO CLIP #7 (1 3/4 minutes, mono): A band, sounding much like the one we heard in the storeroom scene (it is the same one), plays a smooth, Manhattan-y end-of-the-show piece.

Display final credits.

THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have no background in burlesque. I've never attended a show, couldn't actually, because I didn't turn 21 until 1970, when old-time burlesque was just about extinct. I've familiarized myself with the subject, but have not done primary research, things such as visiting Dixie Evans' Exotic World museum or interviewing retired dancers and comics. Mostly I've watched videos of early-1950's burlesque shows and read books and magazine articles. It makes me knowledgeable but not an authority.

This screenplay does not attempt to be an insider's look at the business. Ann has her memories and her opinions, but she doesn't engage in name-dropping or use much burlesque jargon. Normal English avoids foot-in-mouth mishaps, and it may actually be more realistic. There's a story about band-leader Benny Goodman sitting at a table in a nightclub and enjoying the floorshow, probably in the 1940's. A man joined the group, and seeing Goodman, tried to speak in "hep" style; he pointed to the band and said, "The cat sure can wail on that licorice stick!" Goodman replied, "Well, I don't know about that, but the man who's playing the clarinet is pretty good."

Detailed author's notes and bibliography/filmography are available upon request. I also have 16 pages that normally would accompany the screenplay, but which I have left off for this online version. In them I describe the use of the outside media and give as much information on them as I can. Then I have a list of questions that need to be answered, places where I may have made errors. I could have sought advice beforehand, but it seemed likely that any company making the film would want the screenplay "vetted" by an expert, so I've left it the way it is and can rewrite as necessary.

Your burlesque expert should be a retired performer from the 1950's. This is what Ann knows, and what she's trying to bring back. It is a world apart from today's strippers. You could try Jane Briggeman's Golden Days of Burlesque Historical Society for a referral, or Dixie Evans herself. Almost as good as a performer would be a chorus producer or a theater operator. You need someone who actually worked in burlesque theaters, not someone (like me) who can only guess at how it was by what others have said.

I have no knowledge of songwriting, so the music will have to be written by someone else.

Liz's dance doesn't seem to require a choreographer; we want her to be clumsy and new.

My lighting combinations in the dream scene are approximations, so need guidance by a stage lighting expert.

OUTSIDE MEDIA

This screenplay uses clips from two movies and an LP record:
Hollywood Burlesque (1948) movie
B-Girl Rhapsody (1952) movie
Burlesque Uncensored (1954) LP record or tape
 There are also 19 photographs used in Singer's presentation.

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1) Movies. I do not have either film. Both seem to be in the public domain. The maker of the VHS/DVD is Something Weird Video. They probably got them from David F. Friedman, old-time exploitation producer, or the Sonney Collection at the UCLA Film and Television Archive (Dan Sonney was David Friedman's partner).

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Hollywood Burlesque (1948)

AUDIO CLIP #2 - Demuxed sound track

FILM CLIP #1 - chorus routine in which Joy Damon is prominent.

FILM CLIP #2 - Joy Damon's striptease, preceded by a half-minute of a comedy skit.

FILM CLIP #3 - Joy Damon's second solo performance, preceded by a minute of comedy, and followed by a half-minute of singing.

AUDIO CLIP #5 - Sound track from Hillary Dawn's dance (Film Clip #5).

FILM CLIP #5 - Hillary Dawn's dance.

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B-Girl Rhapsody (1952)

FILM CLIP #4 - Lily Ayers' dance.

AUDIO CLIP #3 - Amber Dawn's dance, demuxed.

FYI, Amber Dawn's clip actually comes from another 1952 movie called Strip Tease Girl (only half her performance survives there, in the SWV version), and has been spliced into B-Girl Rhapsody.

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2) Burlesque Uncensored LP record -- I have several of the original 1954 LP's in usable condition. Need a copyright expert to determine if copyright exists. The Smithsonian's Folkways Records currently sells Burlesque Uncensored on CD, but it omits several of the clips we want, so we should stick with the LP.

AUDIO CLIP #1 - Ticket booth at Minsky-Adams Theatre.

AUDIO CLIP #4 - Burlesque Show extract.

AUDIO CLIP #6 - "Music for Strip Tease"

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3) Photographs

In addition to the film clips and recorded audio, the screenplay uses 18 photographs during Singer's presentation, and a lobby card for Ann's. I have 3 photos (need license) and the Everybody's Girl lobby card. I have 14 magazine covers/photos, but I do not have the photos themselves. Most magazine photos look sharp enough to be used as-is. I don't know what rules apply to gaining permissions.

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