

HELSA. (*Exiting with tray of Ovaltine.*) A shovel.
ELSA. Oh, shovel, of course! Well, it's right outside the door. (*Introducing others.*) This is Miss Nikki . . . ahh . . .
NIKKI. Crandall.
ELSA. And this is Ken De La Maize, your director.
O'REILLY. Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. And now, I'll be after gettin' that shivel. (*He crosses to door.*)
ELSA. I'll go with you.
O'REILLY. It's after bein' down to the bottom of the hill, Miss. And the snow is as steep as the cliffs of Killarney.
ELSA. I am of solid Bavarian stock, Mr. O'Reilly. Snow is in my blood.
KEN. But not in your heart, dear Elsa. (*To Nikki.*) This lady is the most generous patron of our art alive today.
ELSA. Am I, Ken?
KEN. Without you Elsa, there wouldn't be more than thirty or forty shows on the Great White Way. She backed twelve last season. (*Helsa enters with the condiments and goes to the bar.*)
ELSA. Well, I do like to dabble. Now Ken, suppose you mix you and Miss Crandall a drink. Helsa will take your luggage to your room. Northwest guest room, Helsa. (*Helsa exits.*) Roger and Bernice will be down as soon as they thaw out. Marjorie is trudging up the hill. Soon we'll all be together once more, won't we, Ken?
KEN. Yes. It'll be good to see Roger and Bernice again.
ELSA. All . . . together, right, Ken?
KEN. (*A bit bewildered by her attitude.*) Yes.
ELSA. (*Mood changing.*) And when I come back, I want to hear all about Hollywood. What it's like.
KEN. Just dump the garment district in the middle of an orange grove. That's Hollywood.
ELSA. (*As she goes.*) How picturesque! (*O'Reilly follows her out.*)
KEN. Of course there is an ocean somewhere.
NIKKI. You never saw the ocean?
KEN. Certainly I saw the ocean. I was at a party in Santa Monica one night and someone pulled open the drapes. Drink?

NIKKI. No, thank you.
KEN. You were about to tell me in the cab which show you were with in Washington.
NIKKI. "Dubarry."
KEN. You know Bob, then.
NIKKI. Bob?
KEN. Bob Alton. The choreographer.
NIKKI. This was the road company. Jimmy Arnemann staged it.
KEN. Oh. And you closed in Washington?
NIKKI. No, I left the show in Washington.
KEN. Not to come up here for a backer's audition, I hope?
NIKKI. Oh no, I've got . . . other things on the fire.
KEN. And you're a singer/dancer?
NIKKI. Dancer mostly.
KEN. Yes, I kind of thought that when I watched you get off the train.
NIKKI. I walk like a duck, you mean?
KEN. No, you tripped over your suitcase.
NIKKI. Sure sign.
KEN. And with whom did you study dance?
NIKKI. Well, see, I'm from Chicago . . .
KEN. I know Chicago quite well.
NIKKI. Actually south of there. You know Kankakee?
KEN. I'm afraid not.
NIKKI. I studied there with Natasha Dubrovitska.
KEN. I see.
NIKKI. (*Changing subject.*) Jeepers, this is a swell house, isn't it?
KEN. Yes.
NIKKI. I'll bet they have some swell houses in Hollywood.
KEN. Ostentatious, but . . . "swell," yes.
NIKKI. You live out there?
KEN. I'm hoping this enterprise will bring me back to New York.
NIKKI. You're not working on any movies now?
KEN. I've just finished a picture. "Moonlight in Rio."
NIKKI. "Moonlight in Rio"? You shot a movie in Brazil?
KEN. No, I shot it in Culver City. Except for the beach. The beach I shot in Oxnard.

NIKKI. Who's in it?

KEN. Alice Faye, Dick Powell, Phil Silvers, Ann Miller, Patsy Kelly, George Brent, Lauritz Melchior, Jascha Heifetz, and Borah Minnevitich.

NIKKI. Oh sure, I saw that.

KEN. You probably did; but this one hasn't been released yet.

NIKKI. Oh.

KEN. Ahhhh, it's good . . . good to be back.

NIKKI. New York?

KEN. The theater. That event as ancient as man and as mysterious and inspiring as the nature man once sought to imitate or appease in his earliest rituals . . . rituals we now call—the theater. Not moving pictures, but life. Life distilled to a pure clear ring of truth. Never forget that. It is your heritage.

NIKKI. I guess. But I've only done musical comedy.

KEN. Yes. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take my sherry upstairs and into the bathtub. Get rid of some of the Union Pacific Railroad I've brought with me.

NIKKI. Sure, go ahead. I want to look over the lead sheets anyway. *(She drops her purse on piano. It makes a very loud thud. She smiles at Ken.)*

KEN. See you later. *(He exits c. Nikki takes lead sheets from envelope. A Man appears outside the French doors and raps "Shave and a Haircut-Two Bits" on the glass. He is Eddie McCuen, a young, energetic man in his late twenties. Nikki crosses and opens the door. Mid swirling snow, Eddie steps in.)*

EDDIE. Hi. I'm Admiral Byrd. Am I lost? This is the North Pole? Boy, what a blizzard! I passed four penguins on my way up here. One of them was wearing a polar bear. *(He snaps fingers, a la rim shot.)* Only kidding. I'm Eddie McCuen. This your place?

NIKKI. No, I'm Nikki Crandall. Miss Von Grossenknueten just went down the hill to help some people who are stuck.

EDDIE. That's us. And a taxi ahead of us and a car behind us. They'll never make it up the hill. I decided to hoof it. *(He crosses c.)*

NIKKI. Your boots! The Oriental.

EDDIE. *(Jumps off carpet.)* Oh, yeah . . . sorry. *(Sits on*

piano bench to remove galoshes.) You here for the audition?

NIKKI. Yes.

EDDIE. You write it or . . . ?

NIKKI. I'm an actress.

EDDIE. Great. Guess we'll be working together.

NIKKI. You're an actor?

EDDIE. Well, I'm a comedian, actually, You see "Hellzapoppin' "?

NIKKI. Are you in it?

EDDIE. I hadda' couple of bits, yeah. I just left it a month ago. Doin' some radio. *(Picking up his coat, hat, and galoshes, he crosses stage toward c. door. Sees closet.)* This the closet? *(Eddie opens the closet door which swings onstage and toward R. Just as he does this, Nikki speaks so that Eddie turns back to her. He therefore is not looking into closet and Nikki is looking down at lead sheets, which is a good thing, because in the closet stiffly stands a dead Helsa Wenzel, clothed only in bra and panties. She begins falling forward.)*

NIKKI. The coat closet is outside in the hall.

EDDIE. Oh. *(He closes the door stopping Helsa's fall. There is a thud on the door, which they don't hear.)* Out here? *(Pointing to U. door.)*

NIKKI. Yes. *(Eddie exits. Nikki is looking at sheet music.)*

"Pardon me is that my heart,
On my sleeve while we're apart."

(After a moment Eddie returns and crosses to her.)

EDDIE. Oh, you've got music.

NIKKI. Yeah, didn't they send you some?

EDDIE. I only got the gig yesterday. Some other guy got sick. My agent asked me, can I sing. Sure, I say . . . always say "yes," one of my rules. No matter what they ask, yes. This morning a limo picks me up, parks me in front with the chauffeur. Then we pick up a dame and a mug in Yorkville. What a trip! Driving in a snowstorm. I can't see a thing so I don't know how the driver can. And on top of that he's deaf.

NIKKI. Deaf?

EDDIE. Had to be. I did forty minutes of my best stuff . . . he don't crack a smile. *(Looking at music.)* "White House Merry-Go-Round."

NIKKI. Nice tune.