

ME. CORA

ME. ALICE

ME. RUTH

ME. GLORIA

BOH-DOH-DEE-OH. RITA

NOT FOR THE LIFE OF,  
NOT FOR THE LIFE OF ME! ALL

RUTH

*(In a nasal, abrasive, decidedly un-Juilliard School speaking voice.)*

Can you believe old man Harris wouldn't even audition me for the latest Kaufman play?

GLORIA

*(The old-timer: SHE's been there almost a month!)*

It's all about the office boy. Read him right, and you read for the role.

RITA

Oh, Gloria, I long to be like you.

ALICE

Me, too. A little lived in.

*(ETHEL PEAS enters in a panic, waving a tabloid newspaper that boasts a huge headline: "White Slavery." SHE speaks with a southern drawl.)*

ETHEL

Girls, have y'all seen the *Daily Graphic*?

ALICE

*(Zeroing in on a tiny item at the top corner of the front page.)*

"Manhattan's Most Eligible Bachelors!"

ETHEL

*(As the GIRLS "Oooh" and "Aaah" regarding the bachelor item.)*

No, y'all. The headline! "White Slavery!"

RITA

*(Reading from the newspaper.)*

"Innocent girls forced into lives of licentiousness and degradation!"

GLORIA

So they're actresses?

ETHEL

It's no joke. They're shipped to the Orient where they're sold as streetwalkers!

ALICE

That's one way to meet a man!

ETHEL

*(A Southern expression, as in "Good grief!")*

Good night!

CORA

Ethel's right. This is creepy. Listen:

*(Reading from the newspaper.)*

"Dozens are believed to be missing, mostly orphans, whose sudden disappearance often goes unnoticed."

*(MRS. MEERS enters from her office, carrying a stack of mail. A former actress-turned-criminal, SHE utilizes her acting skills by adopting the disguise of a kindly Chinese proprietress of the hotel to mask her real profession: White Slavery. Her disguise extends to her clothes, her wig, her make-up, even her dialect. It's not important that MRS. MEERS' "Chinese" act be good, but it's essential that SHE think it brilliant. The actress portraying MRS. MEERS should be encouraged to embrace the offensiveness of her politically incorrect rendering of Asian, confident in the knowledge that, when contrasted with the actual Asian characters we meet later on, her depiction of a hateful stereotype will be busted as inauthentic and absurd.)*

*(Note that, for the sake of clarity, whenever MRS. MEERS' dialogue is intended to be spoken in a "Chinese" accent, it will appear in bold print. Thus her first line might sound something like "Sad to be awe arone in da whirld. Dough none of you need wolly, not with your beeg, warm, famiries." The foregoing example is intended as a suggestion only: there have been as many MRS. MEERS' "Chinese" dialects as there have been actresses who have played MRS. MEERS. A word of caution: no matter how extreme her "Chinese" accent, it must be easily intelligible to the audience.)*

MRS. MEERS

**Sad to be all alone in the world. Though none of you need worry, what with your big, warm families.**

## ETHEL

*(Indicating the newspaper.)*

But Mrs. Meers, you gotta read this.

## MRS. MEERS

*(Snatching the newspaper away from ETHEL.)*

**No! You gotta read this: it's a telegram. For you, Ethel! Maybe you landed a role!**

*(ETHEL crosses to the front desk as GIRLS "Oooh" and "Aaah" regarding her telegram. MRS. MEERS distributes mail to GIRLS.)*

**Ruthie, emergency fund from home. Alice, Gloria, Rita, Cora, Lucille, Millie... Millie Dillmount? Where is she?**

## ALICE

Pounding the pavement.

## RITA

With her head, poor kid.

## RUTH

Who knew an office job was harder to land than a part in a show?

## GLORIA

She's played the early bird every day this week.

## LUCILLE

But no worm to show for it.

## MRS. MEERS

**And the rest of you? Why, I still recall how a then unknown Helen Hayes rose with the rooster—**

*(THEY've heard it before.)*

## LUCILLE

That's our cue, girls.

## RITA

*(As GIRLS, minus ETHEL, cross to the door.)*

Don't fuss, Meersie. We'll make you proud.

## GLORIA

If we're not shanghaied to Hong Kong!

*(GIRLS, minus ETHEL, exit U.S.R., giggling, ETHEL remains at the front desk, seemingly in a state of shock.)*

## MRS. MEERS

**What is it Ethel? Not bad news?**

**ETHEL**

*(Barely able to speak.)*

Good night! My uncle.....

*(SHE hands MRS. MEERS the telegram. MRS. MEERS reads it.)*

**MRS. MEERS**

**“Miss Ethel Peas. Hotel Priscilla. Regret to inform you. Stop. Great uncle Cyrus killed. Stop. In freak threshing accident—” Stop!**

*(Picturing the image of bloody Uncle Cy.)*

**What a way to go!**

*(Offering mere lip service as SHE starts to exit into her office,)*

**Well, my condolences to your family.**

**ETHEL**

What family? My parents died when I was a baby.

*#4a – Little Orphan Ethel*

**MRS. MEERS**

*(Stops in her tracks.)*

**I had no idea.**

**ETHEL**

No brothers, no sisters.

**MRS. MEERS**

**Cousins? Aunts? Anyone to keep tab on you?**

**ETHEL**

Just Uncle Cy and me, on a farm in the middle of nowhere.

**MRS. MEERS**

*(Barely containing her excitement.)*

**Sad to be all alone in the world. But step into my office and enjoy a soothing cup of green tea. One of the mysteries of the Orient! By the time you finish, you be calm and quiet and ready for a very long nap.**

*(ETHEL exits into MRS. MEERS' office. MRS. MEERS grabs the phone and dials. SHE drops the “Chinese” accent, revealing a tough businesswoman with an unmistakably American accent.)*

Hello, Buddha? Butterfly here. I got one for you. A southern belle your customers will wanna ring! Four hundred bucks, cash only. What's there to think about? This offer good for a limited time only, so order *now!* ‘Attaboy, Buddha!

**ETHEL**

*(From inside MRS. MEERS' office as MRS. MEERS hangs up.)*

Meersie?