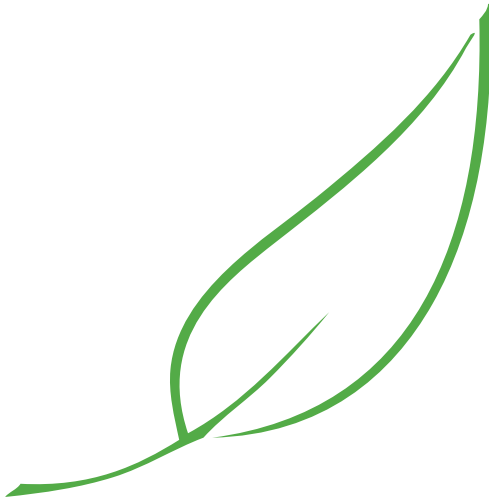


Danger Lurks In Music Alley

By Eddie Cope and Carl L. Williams



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DANGER LURKS IN MUSIC ALLEY

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SYNOPSIS: A villainous music publisher conspires to come up with a prize-winning song for the St. Louis Exposition by taking advantage of an honest young songwriter and a poor young woman searching for her long-lost father. The villain's scheme entangles a crooked commissioner and his eccentric family, a dance hall girl with big dreams, a suspicious riverboat captain, and a mystery man before dark secrets come to light and justice triumphs.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 female, 4 male)

MORTON WILBURSECOND III (m).....A rich young aspiring
songwriter. *(96 lines)*

ALLEGRA HUMMINGWELL (f).....A beautiful young lady on a
quest. *(78 lines)*

VICTOR VOMITUS (m).....A dastardly, devious song
publisher. *(164 lines)*

DELTA BADHAND (f).....A dancehall girl with big
dreams. *(113 lines)*

COMMISSIONER (m)A politician with a dark past.
(56 lines)

GERTRUDE (f)A pretentious social-climber
The Commissioner's Wife. *(30 lines)*

HERMINIE (f).....A giggling man-chaser. The
Commissioner's Daughter. *(40 lines)*

RIVERBOAT BESSIE (f) A suspicious riverboat captain.
(47 lines)

A MAN (m)..... A mystery figure. (16 lines)

DURATION: 75 minutes

SETTING

Victor's shabby office in St. Louis. Door R leads to apartment; Door ULC leads to cellar; DL is the front door. Desk and chairs in UR corner; piano UC; sofa and coffee table in UL corner. Note: back of piano faces audience.

TIME: 1899

PROP LIST

Feather duster	Sheets of paper and pencil
Song sheets	Serving tray and two coffee cups
Small handbag	Broom
Whip	Chains
Plate of food	Two prop guns
Two whiskey glasses	Two lengths of cord
Suitcase	

PRODUCTION NOTES

Victor is dressed in black. Commissioner, Gertrude, and Herminie are dressed in gray. Gertrude mispronounces all foreign words and phrases.

Any time a door is used, directors may substitute doors with curtains, or simply suggest a "door" with set pieces or frames.

The guns used in the play may appear to be obviously, even comically, phony if directors prefer.

The play is designed for "olios" in between acts. Olios are Vaudeville-style short acts with singing, dancing, jokes, and sketches. The makeup of the olios depends on the strengths of the producing company.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Premiere production October 10-26, 2003, at Pasadena Little Theatre
(Pasadena, TX)

Original Cast

Morton Wilbursecond III	Richard Moore
Allegra Hummingwell.....	Jennifer Land
Victor Vomitus.....	Don Reddell
Delta Badhand.....	RoseMarie Green
Commissioner	Richard Sims
Gertrude	Georgia Pearson
Herminie	Vanessa Pearson
Riverboat Bessie	Jada August
A Man	Carl Henderson
Director	Mal Morley
Assistant to the Director.....	Kathy Morley
Music Director	Phyllis Harris

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING: *Run-down music publishing office. Monday morning. Sound of boat horns before curtain.*

AT RISE: *VICTOR VOMITUS is working at his desk. RIVERBOAT BESSIE enters from front door without knocking and looks around the office.*

VICTOR: Egad! What a miserable mess of a woman. *(Rises and confronts her.)* What is the meaning of this? Busting in this way.

BESSIE: Jes' bein' neighborly.

VICTOR: Who are you?

BESSIE: Riverboat Bessie, that's who. Jes' arrived in St. Louie.

VICTOR: Why are your feet so wet?

BESSIE: 'Cause I'm wearing pumps! *(Cackles.)*

VICTOR: Whatever you're selling, I don't want any.

BESSIE: I ain't selling nothing. What kinda place is this anyway?

VICTOR: It's a music publishing office. Now git!

BESSIE: The tide ain't right.

VICTOR: What's that got to do with anything?

BESSIE: Got my boat moored right outside yer office.

VICTOR: That ain't no public dock.

BESSIE: I'll shove off, jes' as soon as the tide comes in.

VICTOR: Don't like strangers snooping around. Get moving or I'll call the law.

BESSIE: What you gonna call 'em? Nothing good, by the looks of you.

VICTOR: Did you hear what I told you?

BESSIE: My hearin's jes' fine. Matter of fact, when I was tyin' up my boat, I heerd the rattle of chains coming from somewheres around here.

VICTOR: You must be dreaming, old lady. Now, get out before my assistant throws you out.

BESSIE: I don't see no assistant.

VICTOR: *(Shouting.)* Delta!

DELTA: *(Offstage.)* Coming, Professor!

DELTA, sexy dancehall girl, enters from the apartment with a feather duster.

VICTOR: That's my assistant.

BESSIE: *(Looking her over.)* I ain't gonna ask what she assists you with.

DELTA: I clean and cook.

BESSIE: You're a looker, not a cooker.

VICTOR: Go on your way now, or the next time you hear chains, they'll be wrapped around your legs when I throw you in the river!

BESSIE: I know when I ain't wanted somewheres. I can take a hint.

BESSIE exits. VICTOR slams the door behind her and locks it.

DELTA: Who was that?

VICTOR: Just something the river washed up.

DELTA: What did she want?

VICTOR: Don't let her come back.

DELTA: What did she do?

VICTOR: *(Shouting.)* She asked too many stupid questions! *(DELTA turns to leave.)* Where do you think you're going?

DELTA: To finish cleaning up the apartment.

VICTOR: See that you do--or I'll fire you and cast you out in the street.

DELTA: Please don't send me away, Professor. *(Aside.)* I'll have no place to go but back to that wretched dancehall.

VICTOR: Then get to work and keep outta my sight.

DELTA: Yes, sir. *(Exits to the apartment.)*

VICTOR: *(Aside.)* You just can't find good help these days. *(He picks up sheets of paper and a pencil, crosses to the cellar door, unlocks it, and throws in the items.)* Hey, you lazy bum! Get to work down there or you'll rue the day you ever set foot in my office. *(Aside.)* As if he doesn't already. *(He slams the door shut, locks it again. Knocking on the front door. He crosses to it.)* What does that river rat want this time? *(VICTOR opens the front door. In walks the COMMISSIONER with a dignified air, his wife GERTRUDE with a lorgnette, and daughter HERMINIE with a tendency to giggle.)* Commissioner! What a surprise, after all these long years. *(Shakes hands with COMMISSIONER.)*

COMMISSIONER: Hello, Victor. I see you've kept yourself informed on politics.

VICTOR: I've followed your career with interest.

COMMISSIONER: And I yours.

VICTOR: Who are these lovely ladies in your company?

COMMISSIONER: Victor Vomitus, may I present my beautiful wife Gertrude and my gorgeous daughter Herminie.

VICTOR: (*Bowing.*) I am honored.

HERMINIE giggles, gets a look from GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE: Herminie, dear, giggling is so declassie.

HERMINIE: Sorry, Mater.

GERTRUDE: Mr. Vomitus, I confess I've not heard my husband speak of you before.

VICTOR: The Commissioner and I met many years ago.

COMMISSIONER: (*Whispers to VICTOR.*) xnay on the axfay.

VICTOR: (*Shakes his hand again secretly, whispers.*) Not a word, not a word.

GERTRUDE: What's going on here? All this sotto voce conversation.

COMMISSIONER: Not a thing, dear. Just two old buddies reminiscing.

VICTOR: Commissioner, what can I do to you. . . er, for you?

COMMISSIONER: I heard you the first time.

VICTOR: Mere slip of the tongue.

HERMINIE: (*Giggling.*) If tongues have slips, do they also have corsets?

GERTRUDE: Herminie! Don't be risqué. (*Pronounces it "riskew".*)

COMMISSIONER: I've known many a tongue that could use a corset to contain itself.

VICTOR: My apology if I offended.

COMMISSIONER: Apology accepted. Now, is there some place we can talk business? In private?

VICTOR: Of course. Ladies, make yourselves comfortable. . . (*Indicates the sofa in UL corner of room.*). . . while the Commissioner and I confer in my office. You'll find some sheet music there to amuse you in our absence.

HERMINIE: If sheets make music, do pillowcases sing? (*Giggles.*)

GERTRUDE: That's enough of that, Herminie.

VICTOR leads him to UR corner as the women sit and look at the song sheets. COMMISSIONER sits in a chair facing the desk where VICTOR sits.

COMMISSIONER: This is fine. And now I have a matter of great import to impart.

VICTOR: Fire away, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER: As you know, the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition is looking for a site.

VICTOR: *(Aside.)* This is where we get the exposition about the Exposition.

COMMISSIONER: There's a lot of money to be made. My Commission believes we have the ideal location here in St. Louie, with all its many assets.

VICTOR: Fine, fine.

COMMISSIONER: But New Orleans and Memphis are nibbling at our...assets, along with every other town from Natchez to Mobile.

VICTOR: *(Sings to tune of "Blues in the Night".)* From Natchez to Mobile, from Memphis to New O, wherever the—

COMMISSIONER: What are you doing?

VICTOR: Coming up with a song.

COMMISSIONER: That's exactly why I'm here! I came all the way from upstate Missouri because you have the best music publishing house on Music Alley.

VICTOR: I have the only publishing house on Music Alley.

COMMISSIONER: Exactly!

VICTOR: But what does this have to do with bringing the Exposition to St. Louie?

COMMISSIONER: Your company is famous for creating songs. . . very popular songs.

VICTOR: True, true.

COMMISSIONER: That's why our Commission will pay you for a song that advertises our city. . . tells people if they can make it here, they can make it anywhere. Something that will put us on the map, so to speak.

VICTOR: What's the hurry, 1904 is five years off.

COMMISSIONER: Oh, but you don't know what it means to be outdone by New Orleans!

VICTOR: (*Aside.*) "Means" and "New Orleans." There's another idea for a song!

COMMISSIONER: And if you can't come up with a song yourself, you better find someone who can. We're paying \$10,000.

VICTOR: Consider it done! (*Pause.*) When do I get the money?

COMMISSIONER: (*Annoyed.*) When you earn it! (*Aside.*) Despite his record for turning out hits, can I trust him?

VICTOR: No offense, Commissioner. I'm just trying to get my ducks on the water, so I don't end up with a goose egg. (*Aside.*) I know what a swindler he's been in the past.

COMMISSIONER: I brought along the contract that spells everything out. (*He spreads the contract on the desk. They concentrate on it and pantomime discussing it.*)

Knocking on the front door. HERMINIE jumps up and runs to the door while GERTRUDE remains preoccupied with the sheet music.

HERMINIE: I'll get it! (*She opens the door and in walks MORTON WILBURSECONDD III, a handsome young man in a white linen suit and stylish straw hat.*)

MORTON: Thank you very much.

HERMINIE: You're very welcome. . . and very good looking! (*pats his cheek*)

MORTON: My dear young lady, please do not handle me in such a manner without my permission.

HERMINIE: Ooooooh, I bet you shave every day.

MORTON: You are very forward.

HERMINIE: Of course I'm forward, or else I'd be backward.

MORTON: That very nearly makes sense. But I'm here to see the proprietor of this. . . (*Looks around the office.*) . . . this shoddy establishment. I want to sell him a song I wrote.

GERTRUDE begins to pay attention.

HERMINIE: You write songs? I sing songs! You want to hear? (*Takes a stance and opens her mouth.*)

MORTON: Some other time. If you please, I want to see the owner.

VICTOR: (*Shouting.*) Delta! Bring us two coffees.

DELTA: (*Offstage.*) Coming right up, Professor!

VICTOR: (*To COMMISSIONER.*) When I train 'em, I really train 'em.

HERMINIE: The Professor is busy talking to my pater, the Commissioner.

MORTON: The Commissioner is your pater?

GERTRUDE: (*Moving in.*) Yes, and I'm her mater.

MORTON: In truth, you're her father's mater, or else you'd have no daughter.

GERTRUDE: You have some wit, sir. Do you also have a name?

MORTON: My name is Morton Wilbursecond the Third.

GERTRUDE reacts favorably to the name.

HERMINIE: You mean there are two more like you?

GERTRUDE: Now, Herminie. The Wilburseconds are a socially prominent family in St. Louie. (*Pause, then to MORTON.*) Are you et ux?

HERMINIE: She wants to know if you're married.

MORTON: (*Annoyed.*) I know what "et ux" means. I graduated from the Berlitz University of Languages of New York, dear old B-U-L-O-N-Y.

HERMINIE: That's baloney.

MORTON: No, honestly I did.

DELTA enters from apartment with two cups of coffee on a tray and carries it to the two men.

DELTA: Would you like sugar with your coffee?

COMMISSIONER: Only if your name is Sugar.

DELTA ignores COMMISSIONER, sets the tray on the desk.

DELTA: Here you go.

VICTOR: And there you go. Out.

DELTA turns to leave, then notices MORTON.

DELTA: (*Aside.*) Who do we have here? (*Advances.*) Are you being taken care of? Or could I help take care of you?

MORTON: That depends on who you are.

DELTA: They call me Delta. Delta Badhand. I'm the Professor's office manager, housekeeper, chef, and woman of all work.

GERTRUDE: Fah! You look more like a dancehall floozy.

DELTA: I prefer to be called a chanteuse.

GERTRUDE: (*Aside.*) What a choosy floozy. (*To DELTA.*) Clearly you came from the demimonde.

DELTA: No, I'm from Texas.

HERMINIE: What part?

DELTA: All of me.

HERMINIE: (*Aside.*) Take away her face and figure and she's just like me.

MORTON: Miss Badhand, I am Morton Wilbursecond the Third. I am a man of wealth and high moral standing and I write songs.

DELTA: You've come to the right place.

MORTON: This is my first visit to Music Alley. Is it safe?

DELTA: Does "June" rhyme with "moon?"

MORTON: What an inspiration for a song! (*Half-sings.*) He kissed her in the moonlight, they married on a June night, la la la la. . . something, something. . .

The women shake their heads in disapproval. GERTRUDE holds her nose.

DELTA: Did you bring a finished song with you?

MORTON: Most certainly. (*Whips a manuscript out of his inside coat pocket.*) Here it is.

DELTA: (*Takes the song.*) I'll see the Professor gets it.

MORTON: Thank you. (*turns to exit*)

HERMINIE: Do you have to leave?

GERTRUDE: Why don't you and I and Herminie go out for some Danish?

MORTON: I didn't learn Danish at Berlitz.

HERMINIE: A Danish is a very sweet roll. (*Giggles.*) Wouldn't you like to have a roll with me?

ALLEGRA: (*Offstage screaming.*) Help me! Help me!

ALLEGRA bursts in through the street door, weak with fear, and collapses into MORTON's arms. She is young and beautiful, educated and well-mannered, and carries a small handbag.

MORTON: Are you all right, Miss?

ALLEGRA: I am now, thanks to your strong, sheltering arms.

MORTON takes a body-builder's pose.

MORTON: I owe my strength to attending the Physical Education College of Saskatchewan, dear old P-E-C-S.

ALLEGRA: (*Politely stepping away.*) Please excuse my impetuosity. Some street ruffian was chasing me in that dreadful alley.

GERTRUDE: That's what happens when young girls go out by themselves.

HERMINIE: (*Eager.*) Really? I wonder if he's still out there.

ALLEGRA: Then I ran to this shanty. . . (*Aside.*). . . whose roof is so slanty, it touches the ground.

DELTA: Can I get you a glass of water?

ALLEGRA: No, thank you. I feel much better now.

DELTA: Let me know if you need anything.

DELTA goes to straighten up the song sheets that GERTRUDE and HERMINIE left scattered.

GERTRUDE: You still haven't told us who you are and what brings you to this moules a tartes neighborhood.

ALLEGRA: My name is Allegra Hummingwell, and I'm looking for my dear father, who wrote songs. But when Mother died. . . (*Aside.*) -- dear Mother, I miss her so--(*to others*). . . when Mother died, Father fell victim to amnesia and dropped out of sight.

MORTON: (*Patting ALLEGRA's hand.*) I'll help you find your father. . . even if I have to search the farthest reaches of the world.

ALLEGRA: That would take thousands of dollars, and francs, and lire.

MORTON: Money is no worry. I have stacks and stacks of money. . . I have piles.

In the office, the COMMISSIONER rises and shakes hands with VICTOR.

COMMISSIONER: We must have that promotional song as soon as possible.

VICTOR: I'll get right to work on it. Come back tomorrow morning.

The COMMISSIONER rejoins his wife and daughter.

COMMISSIONER: I'm through here, ladies. Let us repair to the hotel.

HERMINIE: I don't wanna go! I wanna stay here with him. *(Points to MORTON.)*

GERTRUDE: *(Whispers to HERMINIE.)* Don't be an infant terrible.

The COMMISSIONER stops and gives MORTON a disdainful looking-over.

MORTON: Is there something wrong with my appearance?

COMMISSIONER: Yes. You look so. . . respectable. We don't know each other, do we?

MORTON: No sir, we do not.

COMMISSIONER: Good. Let's keep it that way. *(Starts to exit.)*

GERTRUDE: *(To HERMINIE.)* Come along, dear. We don't want to wear out our welcome, though everything else in this room is already worn out.

HERMINIE: *(Making eyes at MORTON.)* Not everything.

COMMISSIONER and the ladies exit through the front door.

VICTOR: Now then, Delta, who do I have the pleasure of meeting?
(Paying special attention to ALLEGRA.)

DELTA: A distraught young woman named Allegra who is searching for her father.

MORTON: *(Aside.)* If only it were I she was searching for.

DELTA: And Mr. Wilbursecond the Third, a man of wealth and high moral standing.

VICTOR: (*Turns to MORTON, rubbing his hands together.*) Sooo. . . do you want to invest in my song publishing business?

MORTON: No sir, I want to sell you a song.

VICTOR: (*Disappointed.*) Oh, one of them guys.

MORTON: It's a song about St. Louie.

VICTOR: (*Suddenly interested.*) St. Louie?

MORTON: I gave it to your assistant. If I may? (*Takes the song back from DELTA.*)

VICTOR: Well, now, let's hear it.

MORTON: Unfortunately, sir, I do not sing.

DELTA: (*Aside.*) And he's honest, too!

VICTOR: Can't carry a tune in a carpetbag, eh? (*Laughs at his own joke.*) We'll find someone who can do the job. Delta?

DELTA: My pipes are rusty.

VICTOR: Always some excuse. (*To ALLEGRA.*) How about you, kid? How's your plumbing?

ALLEGRA: It's been a long time since I sang my father's songs. He was such a dear, sweet man. I searched for him on Tin Pan Alley in New York--eastside, westside, all around the town.

MORTON: A young girl like you, alone in the big, wicked city!

ALLEGRA: I know, but I had to persevere. I talked to Victor Herbert and Romberg and Hammerstein, but no one knew of him.

MORTON: Dash the luck.

ALLEGRA: Then I went to Florida, way down upon the Suwanee river, far far away, but he wasn't there, either. And now here I am in Music Alley, at the end of the line. . . the bottom of the barrel. . . the lowest of the low. . .

VICTOR: Enough with the compliments, and never mind the long, sad story.

ALLEGRA: But that's why I came. I really must know. . . have you seen my father, Osgood Hummingwell?

VICTOR: No! Never heard of him.

ALLEGRA: Alas! Then my search has been in vain.

VICTOR: Look, can you sing this dandy's song or not?

ALLEGRA: (*Drying her tears.*) I'll do my best.

MORTON: (*Hands her the music.*) There's a four-bar intro, then take it low-down bluesy.

MORTON goes to the piano and plays the introduction. ALLEGRA hums tentatively.

VICTOR: *(Shouting.)* Sing out, Allegra!

ALLEGRA: *(Sings "St. Louis Blues".)*

ST. LOUIE WOMAN WITH HER DIAMOND RINGS
PULLS THAT MAN AROUND
BY HER APRON STRINGS.
'TWEREN'T FOR POWDER
AND FOR STORE-BOUGHT HAIR,
THE MAN I LOVE
WOULDN'T HAVE GONE NOWHERE,
NOWHERE.

At the end of the song, MORTON rushes over and hugs ALLEGRA. DELTA applauds.

DELTA: You could go on stage!

MORTON: That was wonderful, darling!

ALLEGRA: *(aside)* He called me darling! *(To MORTON.)* Was it really?

MORTON: We make a terrific team. *(To VICTOR.)* What's your opinion, sir?

VICTOR: The little lady's great! The song stinks.

MORTON: I know I can come up with something you'd like.

VICTOR: I'd like a song about St. Louie that people want to sing. If you can get it to me by tomorrow morning, maybe I'll use it.

MORTON: My kind of town, St. Louie is. I'll do my best.

VICTOR: Come on, Delta. It's time to take dictation. *(Turns toward the apartment.)*

DELTA: You're always trying to dictate to me.

VICTOR exits to the apartment. DELTA reluctantly follows.

MORTON: I guess you heard what the man said.

ALLEGRA: He said I was great.

MORTON: I mean about my song.

ALLEGRA: That's just his opinion.

MORTON: Yes, but he's the only music publisher in town.

ALLEGRA: Maybe I didn't sing it right.

MORTON: Don't say that. Your singing is superb, and so are you.

ALLEGRA: You are very kind. (*Aside.*) His words put music in my heart!

MORTON: Now let me escort you safely back to your hotel.

ALLEGRA: My hotel, sir? (*Aside.*) Dare I go with him?

MORTON: Do not fear. I am a man of high moral standing. (*Aside.*) Despite the passion I feel in her presence, I have no intention of having my way with this creature of loveliness.

ALLEGRA: Very well. I put myself in your hands.

She takes his arm as they begin to exit to the front door.

MORTON: Perhaps I could take you out for a Danish. That's a very sweet roll, you know.

CURTAIN

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

SETTING: *The same, Tuesday morning.*

AT RISE: *VICTOR watches DELTA sullenly sweeping the floor.*

VICTOR: You ain't smiling this fine Tuesday morning.

DELTA: It may be Tuesday, and it may be morning, but it isn't fine.

VICTOR: It's fine for me, because I stand to be quite a bit richer before the morning's over. And it could be fine for you if you loosened up a little. *(Tries to slip an arm around her.)*

DELTA: *(Pulling away.)* Loose I may have been in the past, much to my shame, but now loose from here is what I wish to be!

VICTOR: You could at least smile for me.

DELTA: I have no reason.

VICTOR: *(Half singing.)* "When you're smiling, oh, when you're smiling, the whole world smiles with you--"

DELTA: *(Ignoring him, still sweeping.)* Sometimes I think I'd be better off back at the dancehall. . . or maybe running my own restaurant.

VICTOR: Don't tell me you're thinking of leaving my employ. . . because you ain't.

DELTA: *(Throwing down the broom.)* What kind of a life is this? You promised to teach me how to write great songs.

VICTOR: True.

DELTA: You promised to let me be a song plugger.

VICTOR: That's right.

DELTA: You promised to show me the way to easy street.

VICTOR: I was always known as a man of promise.

DELTA: You haven't kept any of your promises. And Music Alley doesn't go anywhere near easy street.

VICTOR: *(Picks up the broom.)* It all takes time, my dear. Think of the skills you're learning—cooking. . . sweeping. . . housekeeping. . . sewing. . .

DELTA: You think I should smile and be happy because I get to darn your socks? Well. . . darn your socks!

VICTOR: Such hard words from such tender lips.

DELTA: A tender heart is what I have, beneath this painted shell.

VICTOR: A heart of gold?

DELTA: No, or else by now you would've plucked it out and sold it.

VICTOR: I wouldn't trade you for all the gold in St. Louie. (*Aside.*)
Unless I could get my hands on it.

DELTA: There's sure no gold to be made in the music business.

VICTOR: Stick with me, kid, and I'll put your name in candles.

DELTA: That's a load of earwax!

VICTOR: Can't you see I'm swept away by your charms? (*Gesturing with the broom.*)

DELTA: Why don't you sweep yourself out the door?

VICTOR: I've had enough of your bad disposition. If things ain't pleasing enough for you here, then go on back to your terpsichorean emporium.

DELTA: Maybe I will. And another thing. . .

VICTOR: Go ahead. . . get it off your heaving bosom.

DELTA: You give me a heaving stomach. Every time a young woman walks into the office, you start giving her the eye. Both eyes!

VICTOR: Case in point?

DELTA: That Allegra person.

VICTOR: A mere child. (*Going into a distracted rhapsody, hugging the broom.*) A mere vision of exquisite loveliness with a purity that inflames my imagination!

DELTA: You're a vicious vile villain, Victor Vomitus.

VICTOR: Finally you're beginning to appreciate me.

DELTA: You can't possibly imagine that Allegra will "appreciate" you.

VICTOR: Unfortunately, she's apparently smitten with that dandy songwriter.

DELTA: You mean he writes dandy songs?

VICTOR: He's a dandy who writes lousy songs. But if he were out of the picture. . .

DELTA: She still wouldn't have anything to do with your type. Not that you would let that stop you.

VICTOR: Now you're getting into my personal life. (*Shouting.*) So shut up and go fix breakfast for you-know-who! (*Indicating the cellar door.*)

DELTA: You're always yelling at me! Someday you'll be sorry.

VICTOR: Bah! Take your broom and fly. (*He flings the broom at her. She catches it and exits angrily to the apartment.*) What an ingrate! After all I've done to her. . . for her. I know what the rebellious hellion needs. (*He grabs a whip and pops it a few times.*) Yes! I'll teach her a lesson or two.

BESSIE enters through front door without knocking.

BESSIE: What're you doin' with that there whip?

VICTOR: None of your business, you old ragbag.

BESSIE: Don't you know horse-whippin' is illegal in the state of Missouri?

VICTOR: I wasn't going to whip a horse. And who sent for you anyway?

BESSIE: Nobody. I come on my own.

VICTOR: Then you can go on your own.

BESSIE: Can't leave. My boat is stuck out yonder, and I can't rock her loose. I been beatin' my feet on the Mississippi mud. (*Aside.*) If he wasn't such an idiot, he could make a song out of that.

VICTOR: I'm warning you. Don't hang around. I got a lot on my mind.

BESSIE: Yeah? It must'a caved in from the weight.

VICTOR: You wouldn't know a big business deal from a catfish in the river.

BESSIE: Maybe yes, maybe no. Wouldn't have anything to do with a \$10,000 song for the Exposition, would it?

VICTOR: How did you know about that?

BESSIE: Riverboat Bessie, she knows a lotta things, and all the catfish by their names. (*Cackling, exits through front door.*)

VICTOR: Crazy old rumrunner. (*Shouting.*) Delta! What's holding up that breakfast plate?

DELTA: (*Offstage.*) The stove!

VICTOR: Take it off the stove and get it in here!

DELTA: (*Offstage.*) Don't rush me. I'm on my way.

VICTOR unlocks the cellar door, calls down.

VICTOR: Come on up, you filthy bum. Let's see if you've earned your daily meal. *(He cracks the whip. MAN enters from the cellar, looking old, emaciated, dirty, dressed in rags, and dragging chains.)* Well? Have you got it done yet?

DELTA enters from apartment with a plate of food.

DELTA: Yes, yes, I've got it done.

VICTOR: I wasn't talking to you! *(MAN hurries to meet her, takes the plate and begins wolfing down the food.)* Hey! Would you look at that? He gulps it down like he ain't been fed since yesterday. *(Realizing.)* Oh, that's right.

DELTA: Poor old man.

VICTOR: Don't feel sorry for this decaying bum. Haven't I given him a place to stay and food to eat?

DELTA: And chains and rags. Show a little pity.

VICTOR: If you want to feel sorry for somebody, feel sorry for me.

DELTA: For you!

VICTOR: Yeah. Here I give out all this charity, and what do I get in return? *(Takes the nearly empty plate from MAN.)* You've had enough.

MAN: It was very good.

DELTA: Thank you, sir.

VICTOR: I'm the only sir around here. *(To MAN.)* So, how about it? I told you what I wanted.

MAN: A song about St. Louie. I've been working on it.

MAN goes to the piano, starts playing beautiful music.

VICTOR: You'll have to do better than that, you dumb hack.

VICTOR whips the ground near the MAN.

DELTA: Stop it! Isn't a tongue-lashing good enough? I can't bear to watch.

DELTA runs out through the apartment door.



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