

ACT I

SETTING/AT RISE: As lights rise, MURIEL, Stage Center, dances slightly as "JUST AS THOUGH YOU WERE HERE" or a similar song plays through a radio. Stage Center, beside Muriel, is a small table with two chairs. Stage Left has a typical kitchen table, small section of kitchen cabinets and a window, along with the radio. Stage Right has a folded cot, footlocker and a small folding chair. These areas are now darkened. The backdrop is a map of the Pacific Theatre of WWII, which can be backlighted to reveal song titles. ARLEN approaches.

ARLEN

I located a couple maps today.

(MURIEL doesn't hear him over the radio.)

I said I located...

ARLEN turns off the radio.

MURIEL

Oh...I love that song.

ARLEN

But you love me more, right? Right?

MURIEL

I don't know...it's a really good song.

ARLEN

I located these two Esso maps of the Pacific.

MURIEL

So you don't think this could be a slip of the lip?

ARLEN

What's there? Songs. Unless the Japs make their way to Lanesboro and kidnap you, it's pure obfuscation.

MURIEL

Obfuscation? My goodness, where did you learn such language?

ARLEN

I'm a college graduate and a US Marine, my dear. On course to find myself in a position of leadership. You follow?

MURIEL

Oh, I follow.

ARLEN

You seem very sure of yourself, my girl. Perhaps you're a spy. I think I should conduct an interrogation.

MURIEL

I didn't realize you were trained in interrogations.

ARLEN

Konichiwa.

MURIEL

What?

ARLEN

Did you ever travel to Hawaii prior to 7 December, 1941?

MURIEL

Oh, for heaven's sake.

ARLEN

Answer the question.

MURIEL

I'm putting the radio back on.

ARLEN

What do you know about the location of the Japanese forces?

MURIEL

Arlen, we don't have time...

ARLEN

Are you receiving coded messages from Tokyo?

MURIEL

You got me. My uncle's the emperor.

ARLEN

I knew it! It is time for torture.

ARLEN tickles MURIEL. The next two
lines are overlapping.

MURIEL

Stop that. Arlen. Stop it.

ARLEN

Admit it! You are a spy!

MURIEL

That's enough.

ARLEN

You do have beautiful eyes. Maybe you're telling the truth,
but I don't think I can let you go just yet.

MURIEL

Show me those maps. I want to know where you are once you're
gone.

ARLEN

Trying to get rid of me?

MURIEL

Not on your life. But by this time tomorrow...

ARLEN

You're right. Shall we start with the obvious? Hawaii?

MURIEL

Fine. Give me an example of your obfuscation skills.

ARLEN

Well, I would write something like...

MURIEL

With that beat up old pen?

ARLEN

I've had this pen since high school.

MURIEL

It'll leave big globs of ink all over.

ARLEN

Well, I haven't any money left after buying this ring. So with my beat up old pen, I'll write letters with obfuscations like...My Dearest, most picturesque wife whom I love more than anything in the whole wide world...

MURIEL

We don't have the time to fool around.

ARLEN

I'll write something like... "I'll be listening to 'White Christmas' soon."

MURIEL

So if you write "White Christmas" it means you're in Hawaii.

ARLEN

Exactly.

MURIEL

I like that.

ARLEN

And if I say something like... "Our radio station hasn't played 'White Christmas' at all this week," it would mean there's no news about going to Hawaii.

MURIEL

Don't write things like that. Don't even mention "White Christmas" until you're on your way. So write it down - "White Christmas." Hawaii. Write it down.

ARLEN

I've got it.

MURIEL

Take your beat up old high school pen and write it down. There are so many islands. Do we name them all?

ARLEN

Let's do the major chains at least.

MURIEL

Don't you have any idea where you'll be?

ARLEN

It depends on how the war goes. Let's see...Japan should be "Deep Purple."

MURIEL

You think you'll be in Japan?

ARLEN

That's the goal isn't it?

MURIEL

We should use "String of Pearls."

ARLEN

How about the Philippine Islands?

MURIEL

Australia should be "Alice Blue Gown."

ARLEN

And Guadalcanal can be "Red Sails in the Sunset."

MURIEL

Guadalcanal?

ARLEN

It makes sense to name it. Plenty of Marines there already.

MURIEL

Guadalcanal. "Red Sails." What do you think these islands look like? Sandy beaches and palm trees?

ARLEN

And volcanic rock. Most of these islands were formed by volcanoes.

MURIEL

What's this name? It's awfully small print.

ARLEN

Those are the Marshall Islands.

MURIEL

For those, let's use "Over the Rainbow."

ARLEN

And the Mariana Islands can be "Night and" - [Day]

MURIEL

Wait. What about me? Don't I get to use any code words?

ARLEN

You can use "In the Mood" when you write about our time here in San Francisco.

MURIEL

Oh, is that right? I was thinking about what I should use for Lanesboro. "Walking by the River?"

ARLEN

I was thinking "My Devotion."

MURIEL

Perfect.

"MY DEVOTION" plays. MURIEL removes the tablecloth, and ARLEN takes his duffle bag and the table and crosses to Stage Right. MURIEL takes the chairs and crosses to Stage Left.

MURIEL (CONT'D)

Dear Mr. Aldridge, I'll be hearing "My Devotion" soon. I've booked a Pullman that will get me to LaCrosse, then Dad will take me...I was going to say "home," but it doesn't seem like home now. Not without you. You're in my prayers. Faithfully, your loving wife, Mrs. Aldridge.

ARLEN

(Overlapping.)

Mrs. Aldridge, does "My Devotion" seem like a simple tune after hearing "In the Mood" so much? Were you able to see the flotilla departing that day? Our ship passed under the bridge exactly at noon. Did you see me wave? I was the one in the Marine uniform and the funny looking guy next to me was Morley. His quirky sense of humor makes this all seem like freshman year at St. Olaf. We should be listening to "White Christmas" for a couple weeks.

MURIEL

Good.

ARLEN

You might want to write a short note to Bev, as you know what a homebody she is and how little Morley likes to write.

(MORE)

ARLEN (CONT'D)

Talk, yes; write, no. And unlike me, he didn't have a fine pen hidden in his pack.

MURIEL

Glad you found it.

ARLEN

Tell your parents hello and tell your little sister I said to say hey to "Angelina." Yours truly, Lieutenant Aldridge.

MURIEL

Dear Mr. Aldridge. I'm sorry, Lieutenant Aldridge, we had quite a bit of news today. Dad got a job offer from a firm who wants him there as soon as possible, so they'll be moving to Minneapolis soon. I'm contemplating going with them.

ARLEN

We'll need another song - maybe "Don't Sit Under the Minneapple Tree With Anyone Else But Me."

MURIEL

I would be able to see Linda Jane more that way. She said she might be able to get me an interview at her school.

ARLEN

That would be good. Since her husband travels to D.C. so much, I could rely on her to keep you out of trouble.

MURIEL

We'll see what happens. Please let me know what I can send you.

ARLEN

Since you offered, I'll get a list together.

MURIEL - ANGELA

Hey jar head - it's me, Angela. The young, cute and single one in your wife's family.

ARLEN

Single. I wonder why that is.

MURIEL - ANGELA

Not so fast with the snide remarks about that! I think Frank is starting to think about the big M word. I'll keep Murry on the straight and narrow for you - that's what little sisters are for. Keep your head down! Ang.

ARLEN

God help you, Frank.

MURIEL

I hope you don't mind I let Angela write a few lines. I think she's right about Frank, though.

ARLEN - MORLEY

Hey pretty face! Arl is off getting drunk, so I thought I'd say hi.

MURIEL

Morley, your handwriting is atrocious.

ARLEN - MORLEY

Wish we could stay here the whole war - almost as much fun as college, and the golfing is tons better! Oops. Better sign off. Nice pen, by the way!

MURIEL

An absolute nut.

ARLEN

Dearest, I'm here at the O-Club with Morley. We were just chatting with a couple guys who've heard "Red Sails" enough to last a lifetime.

MURIEL

Guadalcanal.

ARLEN

Looks like Morley and I will be heading for the same general place, but in different platoons - that's the preliminary dope anyway.

MURIEL

Does that mean you're going to Guadalcanal with Morley or just that you and Morley are going to the same place?

ARLEN

Morley and I will be heading for the same general place...

MURIEL

I can't tell what that means.

ARLEN

Talking with the guys tonight makes me realize more clearly what lies ahead. No matter what happens, though, I'm certain I am walking the path God has prepared for me. PS: Could I trouble you for some of your chocolate drop cookies?

MURIEL

Mom and Dad are going to look at houses in Minneapolis. I've decided to join them. I spent the morning baking, then mailed you a package, which I hope you've already received.

ARLEN

Morley. "Oh no, Arl. Bev sent these."

MURIEL

After giving Pastor Garrison your mailing information, I took our usual walk. The river's up, and they fixed the shutters on that house on Filmore Avenue. When I returned, I found the parcel you sent containing the "White Christmas" sheet music - I didn't even know it was out yet. I wouldn't mind if that were the only song you heard this entire war.

ARLEN

My beautiful bride, the best partner and friend a man could ask for, I think it is safe to say that we are on the water.

MURIEL

Don't give up too much there, Marine.

ARLEN

I practically grew up on fishing boats, but traveling by ship is another matter altogether.

MURIEL

My handsome husband, I'll keep the letters coming. Have you noticed how our letters seem to criss-cross each other?

ARLEN

Wish I had some dope on what lies ahead, but the radio isn't working right now. Wish I could hear "My...

MURIEL

...Devotion" is the only song I listen to. Have you heard any good music lately? I'm helping Mom pack up some of the summer things.

ARLEN

I'm bunking with a guy, Fred Harris - he goes by Fritz. Actually, he just stepped in, so let me introduce a new good buddy of mine.

MURIEL

I thought I'd mention that I think I may have come down with the flu, as I've been under the weather this week.

ARLEN - FRITZ

Nice to meet you Muriel...Mrs. Aldridge. I'm really glad to have met your husband. We were at Quantico together...I mean, I was at Quantico while he was there...our paths didn't cross at training is what I mean to say.

MURIEL

It could be moving all these boxes from the warm house out into the cold. Maybe I'll go see Doc Jensen just to be safe.

ARLEN - FRITZ

We discovered...Arlen did at first...we were - Ginger and I, that is - got married at the same church as you and Arlen. That Lutheran church at Thomas Circle in DC. And it was the same day as you. Four July.

MURIEL

Linda Jane said Douglas will be home the week we're moving, so she's volunteered his muscles. Once we get settled, I thought to look for a secretarial job or something along those lines, just to get out of the house.

ARLEN - FRITZ

Arlen thinks...rather says he remembers saying hello to me, but honestly, I was so amazed...Ginger is quite a beautiful woman and I'm...I don't remember too much of that day. Not that...another time, perhaps...I'd better return this beautiful pen. It was surely nice to meet you.

MURIEL

I wrote to invite Bev up to Minneapolis when we get situated, but she said she doesn't like trains and doesn't have a car.

ARLEN

You may want to send a note to his wife, Ginger - Fred and Ginger, did you catch that? She's in Chicago and Fritz worries about her getting lonesome on her own. And you may want to use V-mail, as Fritz says that should be faster than regular mail.

MURIEL

It's snowing here this morning. I've been waking up early lately - maybe I just don't have any reason to stay in bed.

ARLEN

Also, if you were to have some magazines to send along, that would be swell.