

Dear Anne, From Nina (all rights reserved)

CAST: 7 (5f, 2m)

Nina Jensen (female, 11-13 (16 end scene) student, sister of Jeannie; wants out of the farm life

Jeannie Jensen (female 14-16 (19-20 end scene), student, sister of Nina; content wherever she is

Alice Jensen (female, mid 30's) teacher, mother to Nina and Jeannie; the farm is all she knows

Charlie Miller (male, 16-18) (24 end scene) friend/neighbor of the Jensens; initially content to live his life in Danville

Anne Frank (female, 11-13) a young girl in Amsterdam; her cup runneth over

Margot Frank (female, 14-16), Anne's sister; inward, she is stronger than you know

Otto Frank (male, 40's) Anne and Margot's father; protector of his children

TIME:

1940-1942; end scene 1945

PLACES:

Parlor in the Jensen's farmhouse

Living room in Frank's Amsterdam flat

RUNNING TIME: 75-85 minutes

SYNOPSIS: In February 1940, a young girl in Iowa pulled the name of a pen pal out of a hat. The name was Anne Frank. They had a brief correspondence before the Nazis invaded The Netherlands. The play is a coming-of-age reflection of that time from 1940-1942. While Nina and Jeannie strive to be "citizens of the world" in their tiny town of Danville, Anne and Margot try to live their lives in a world that doesn't them.

Approved by the Anne Frank Foundation in Basel, Switzerland.

NOTES: The play is episodic and all changes should be done with lights and music. Projections and music may underscore time and place.

Dear Anne, From Nina

PROLOGUE – February 1940

Opening Image: Danville, Iowa farmhouse.

AT RISE thee is a split stage. JEANNIE is doing her current events homework. She is reading aloud the newspaper or a clipping of the paper.

MARGOT is writing in her diary.

JEANNIE

February 10, 1940.

“FARM BOY, PONY TAKE TRIP

Arlo Terry, 15, farm boy, living near Lenox, Iowa loves his pony. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Terry had hinted it might be sold before they move to Washington state this spring. But Arlo didn't want to part with him.

Wednesday night, Arlo wrote a note which read, “Don't look for me. I'm going away.” He then saddled his pony, hung his travelling equipment on the saddle and galloped out of the barnyard.

Midday Thursday, the sheriff found Arlo, cold and hungry but still astride his mount on a lonely, country road. The boy and pony were back at the Terry Farm Thursday night. When the Terrys go to Washington, the boy's father said, “The pony will go to Washington.”

MARGOT

February 10, 1940

Dear Diary,

In six days I shall turn fourteen. That means that I will have had you for one year. It also means that I will be quite spoiled with sweets and presents (I am hoping for some books!). Pim and Mummy outdo themselves with birthday celebrations.

It is wonderfully crisp here. Letty and I skate almost every day. We love getting outside directly after school. It's usually for just an hour because we do have the school work to do.

This year has marked a turning point in my life. For the first time, I am learning more about my religion and the beautiful history and tenets of my faith. I took it for

MARGOT (cont'd)

granted which I suppose most children do. I don't anymore. There is much beauty in the rituals. The history is a bit daunting but all of history is. Anne and Pim are not as interested in it and do not go to Temple. But we do celebrate the holidays. Mummy is devout and we have many conversations about our place in the world as Jewish woman.

I am grateful for this space to write down my feelings. I do not exclaim them to the world. But they are there and they are intense and I love having a private place to be exactly who I am.

Margot Frank

SCENE 1 – February 10, 1940

DANVILLE

(ALICE JENSEN enters from work.)

ALICE

Hi, Sweetie. What a day I had! How was yours? Are you done with your homework?

JEANNIE

I just finished my current events.

ALICE

I hope you found something positive. Lately, you've just been clipping crimes and stories of war. There's more to the world than robberies and war.

JEANNIE

Give me *Murder on the Orient Express* over *The Call of the Wild* any day. You'll like this one. It's about a boy who doesn't want to be separated from his pony.

ALICE

Heartwarming. I approve. Is dinner started?

JEANNIE

Yes. I am a wonderful daughter.

ALICE

You are. I'm going to finish up preparing work for the students and will be down in a little bit. Nina home?

JEANNIE

She had something special after school. I don't know what it is.

ALICE

I'm sure she'll tell us all about it.

(ALICE exits. JEANNIE puts away her school work and takes out some dishes to set the table. NINA bursts in.)

NINA

Jeannie! Jeannie! I have a pen pal!

JEANNIE

Calm down! I'm not hard of hearing.

NINA

It is/

JEANNIE

/Shh.

NINA

/the most wonderful thing! Her name is Anne and Miss Birdie says she is probably in the fifth grade – just like me. She lives in Amsterdam which is in Holland/

JEANNIE

/The Netherlands.

NINA

Right. And it has all those rivers running through it/

JEANNIE

/Canals. Help me set the table.

NINA

That's right! Canals! I wonder if she ice skates like Hans Brinker and if she uses wooden skates like he did or if she uses the same kind we have but more old fashioned because maybe Amsterdam is more old fashioned/

JEANNIE

Nina! Breathe!

(NINA takes a deep breath.)

NINA

Do you think she's poor like Hans Brinker. I mean that would be all right – because we're poor/

JEANNIE

/We're not poor. We have food.

NINA

I'm going to write her tonight only I don't know what to say because I don't really know her. Maybe she'll think farm stuff is boring. I wouldn't want her to think I'm boring. I want us to become great friends and learn about her world/

JEANNIE

/Breathe!

(NINA breathes.)

NINA

Miss Birdie says having an international pen pal helps us to be citizens of the world! She thinks we need to know things outside of Iowa. And I agree – there has to be something more in life besides corn! And look – on my slip of paper it also has another name: Margot Frank. Age 14. Which means Anne has a sister your age. Which means you should/

JEANNIE

Neeny! Come up for air/

NINA

/Write her.

JEANNIE

Maybe. I'm pretty busy helping Mom these days.

NINA

You should! Maybe we can learn about things – like tulips! I think Holland/

JEANNIE

/The Netherlands/

NINA

/is famous for tulips. Do you think she likes to read? She must like to write or she wouldn't sign up to be a pen pal, right?

JEANNIE

Right.

NINA

Oh phew.

JEANNIE

The knife goes on the right.

NINA

Right. What do you think?

JEANNIE

I think it is just peachy that you have a pen pal. Now, feed the chickens while I get dinner ready. Mom's upstairs working.

NINA

Should I tell Anne about the chickens?

JEANNIE

Absolutely. Everyone should know about our chickens.

NINA

You're making fun of me.

JEANNIE

Just a little. GO!

(CHARLIE enters.)

CHARLIE

Tractor's fixed!

NINA

Hi Charlie. Bye Charlie.

CHARLIE

Hey Neenie-meeny-miney-mo -

NINA

Catch a Charlie by the toe!

CHARLIE

If he hollers, let him go -

NINA and CHARLIE

Neenie-meeny-miney-mo!

(NINA exits.)

JEANNIE

You two are so strange.

CHARLIE

Been saying that to her since forever. Anyways, I changed the filters on the tractor, checked the radiator, replaced the thermostat and I think she's good to go come planting season.

JEANNIE

Thank-you. You are such a help to us. I told your Mom I'd have a plate of cookies ready for her. Small pickings for so much help. They're cooling now. The cookies are for your parents. To thank them for helping us all winter. Don't eat them on the way home.

CHARLIE

If they're chocolate chip, I will eat them! If they're oatmeal – they're safe.

JEANNIE

Oatmeal-raisin.

CHARLIE

Yuck.

JEANNIE

Help me finish setting the table. We can clear Nina's books.

CHARLIE

What's this? Anne, 10. Margot, 14.

JEANNIE

Anne is Nina's new pen pal. She has a sister named Margot and Nina being Nina thinks I should write her. They live in Amsterdam.

CHARLIE

That's a ways away.

JEANNIE

I know. It could be exciting – writing someone in another country.

CHARLIE

But – they don't speak English. So how can you write them?

JEANNIE

Someone somewhere must translate. Anywhos, could be fun, don't you think?

CHARLIE

I don't know. I'd write someone in – Florida or something. Not sure about overseas.

JEANNIE

Miss Birdie told Nina, this would make her a citizen of the world.

CHARLIE

I like being a citizen of America.

(NINA enters.)

JEANNIE

You fed those chickens awfully fast.

NINA

Threw the feed up in the air and then escaped before they could peck at me! Plus it's starting to snow. I don't want to melt.

CHARLIE

Melt?

NINA

Like the Wicked Witch of the West.

JEANNIE

Ever since she saw *The Wizard of Oz* last week, she keeps finding ways to bring it up.

NINA

Look, Charlie – I have a pen pal in Amsterdam.

(NINA takes out a map or a globe.)

NINA (cont'd)

She lives all the way – here. It's going to be so much fun. It's night-time there, now. She's probably sleeping. I wonder if Anne is dreaming. I wonder what kids dream about in Amsterdam.

JEANNIE

She probably dreams the same things you dream about. She's just a kid – like you.

NINA

She's not like me! I dream about chickens and corn and chores. She probably dreams about ice-skating in those funny canals. I have to work on my letter to her. That's my homework.

CHARLIE

No fair! My homework's eight pages of algebra. Which I don't like.

JEANNIE

How're you going to run the farm one day if you can't figure out what things cost
and how to properly read and write?

CHARLIE

You could do it for me!

JEANNIE

But – I may not always be here. Who knows? Maybe I'll be in Amsterdam! It's almost
dinner-time. Run home! And make sure those cookies make it home.

CHARLIE

I told you – I don't like oatmeal cookies.

JEANNIE

You lie like a dog. I know how many are in there. Skedaddle.

CHARLIE

See you tomorrow!

(JEANNIE goes into the kitchen. CHARLIE exits.
NINA sits down to write.)

NINA

Oh pen pal! Pen pal! Pen pal! I love you.

Dear Anne: Hello. I'm Nina Jensen. I live on a farm in Danville, Iowa. We have
chickens and pigs and a few cows.

This is drippy. *Jeannie!*

JEANNIE (O.S.)

Neenie!

NINA

I don't know what to write!

JEANNIE (O.S.)

Tell her about your charming older sister!

NINA

No. You're bossy!

JEANNIE (appearing)

But in the nicest way.

NINA

Jeannie! What if she thinks I'm a "nothing" – I'm just this kid from a tiny farm in a teeny town/

JEANNIE

She's just a kid – like you. Write about what you love. Maybe she loves the same things.

NINA

What if she doesn't?

JEANNIE

Then you get to learn from each other. I need to finish dinner if we want to eat before midnight.

(JEANNIE exits.)

NINA

Dear Anne:

My name is Nina Jensen.

(The lights change to ANNE'S living room.
Projection: Amsterdam. ANNE is reading NINA'S letter to MARGOT. It is now April 1940.)

ANNE

"I live in Danville, Iowa. It's right in the middle of America. We live on a small farm and sometimes my sister Jeannie (who is a lot bossy and a little nice) takes me on tractor rides.

Margot! Tractor rides! That sounds like fun. And her sister is bossy. Just like you.

MARGOT

I am not bossy!

ANNE

Shh. Listen.

"I am in fifth grade in school."

Just like me!!

ANNE (cont'd)

"Right now we are learning our multiplication tables. It's hard but my mother who is a teacher helps. We have to do a lot of work on the farm. I am in charge of feeding and cleaning up after the chickens. Sometimes when I get their eggs in the morning, they peck at me."

Chickens! I wish we had chickens!

MARGOT

I bet you wouldn't like getting pecked by them.

ANNE

"I know this is all boring stuff. I live in a cornfield and in the summer all I see is corn. I hope to travel the world someday like my teacher, Miss Birdie. Sometimes, in the winter when there isn't much farm work, we go to Burlington and see a movie. I saw the *Wizard of Oz*. I loved it a lot. I'd like to go to Oz. Sometimes I think your home is a lot like Oz – it's over the rainbow and filled with castles. I'd like to go over the rainbow. My sister loved the Scarecrow but we see too many scarecrows in Iowa. My favorite character was the Cowardly Lion. Have you seen it?

Margot! She thinks we live over the rainbow! I must see that movie!

I love to read. Do you know the *Betsy-Tacy* books? It's about a friendship between two girls. Maybe one day one of us will write a friendship book about us.

I live with my mother, and my older sister, Jeannie, who is fourteen. She wrote your sister a letter. My father died when I was little in an accident. I miss having a dad.

It is snowing out. It snows a lot here in the winter. Does it snow where you live? I want to know all about you. My teacher, Miss Birdie, visited Amsterdam and has showed us some very pretty pictures. It looks like a fairy-tale city. Do you ice-skate like Hans Brinker? I hope we will become good friends and meet someday.

From,
Nina Jensen, February 10, 1940"

Where's your letter?

MARGOT

Pim's still translating it.

ANNE

Aren't you just dying to know what it says? You should tell him to hurry up! I would.

MARGOT

I can wait a little longer.

ANNE

Look at the date - February. It's April! It took two months for the letters to get here.

MARGOT

If it takes that long for the mail to come from America, you should write her right away. Before you're grown up!

ANNE

I can't do that! I must think about what I want to tell her. I think she likes castles. There are no castles in America. We do have castles not far from here. Maybe she wants to know about them? And I should tell her about my best friends. And what I study in school. Or do I write about my family first? Ha! I could tell her about you and how bossy you are. Look! Pim left us a map so we can look up Iowa.

(They set up a map or a globe.)

MARGOT

There's Iowa.

ANNE

That was fast.

MARGOT

She did say it was in the middle of the country.

ANNE

Do you see Danville?

MARGOT

Give me a minute.

ANNE

Let me look!

MARGOT

We both can look. It's faster that way. You take the north and I'll take the south part.

ANNE

It's not anywhere! But the letter came from *somewhere!*

MARGOT

Wait! Here's Burlington. Didn't she mention Burlington?

ANNE

Her town must be teeny-tiny if it's not on the map. I wonder if all of The Netherlands can fit into her state of Iowa?

MARGOT

Ask her.

ANNE

I will. And you should stop writing in your diary and write to a real person.

MARGOT

I write to myself. I'm a real person.

ANNE

What do you tell yourself?

MARGOT

I write about things that make me wonder. And I write down the books I read – to remind myself. I loved *Amsterdam Stories*. I will save it for you.

ANNE

Is it a mystery? Or a love story?

MARGOT

Neither. Just observations on artists, writers - that sort of thing.

ANNE

But – what's it *about*?

MARGOT

I'm not sure it's *about* anything. It's mainly little pieces of life. Essays.

ANNE

That sounds too much like school. I like stories that make you laugh and cry. That's what you should write in your diary.

MARGOT

I like to write about the world. The changes. Some of the hard times. How we can no longer travel to see Grandma in Switzerland because the Germans won't give us a visa to travel in their country. So sometimes I use it to air my frustrations.

ANNE

I don't know if I would write about the sad stuff. If I had a diary, I would write about playing with my friends and my favorite ice cream – not all that boring stuff.

MARGOT

Perhaps one day you'll keep a diary.

ANNE

Maybe. But for now, I will write *Nina in America!* I love America! They make wonderful dancing movies. Like this!

(ANNE does some of the dancing moves from the 1930's movies.)

And they have a Statue of Liberty that welcomes people from all over the world. And ... they speak English! I should study English!

MARGOT

It's tricky. When I know more, I'll try to teach you.

ANNE

Should we see if Pim is finished translating your letter?

MARGOT

Yes. But don't nag him if he's not.

ANNE

Race you!

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 2

It is April 10, 1940 at the JENSEN farm. JEANNIE is clipping her current events. NINA is folding laundry.

JEANNIE

"April 10, 1940. Donald C. Regan, Iowa City reported "missing in action" at the Battle of Corregidor in the Philippines."

NINA

Are we at war?

JEANNIE

No.

NINA

Then how can someone be missing-in-action if we're at peace?

JEANNIE

I think there are little wars all the time.

NINA

I don't understand the world.

JEANNIE

Be grateful you're eleven. You don't have to understand that stuff.

NINA

But/

JEANNIE

/Shhhh! I'm working.

(ALICE enters.)

NINA

Mama!

ALICE

No, Nina. Sorry

NINA

It's been forever! Why won't she respond?

ALICE

The letters have a long way to go. They need to cross an ocean just to get to her. That can take a month. Then they need to cross the ocean again to back to you. That's another month.

NINA

But it's been two months!

JEANNIE

Pipe down! I'm trying to work!

NINA

Kathleen's already heard from her pen pal. She probably wrote a more interesting letter. She probably wrote about her new red bicycle and everything. Her life is better.

ALICE

Your life is perfectly fine. You're loved. You have food and shelter. You're go to school.

NINA

A new bicycle would be better.

ALICE

You have a perfectly good bicycle.

NINA

A boy's bicycle! And only because Charlie outgrew it.

ALICE

It works.

NINA

There will never be a letter. *Never ever ever.*

JEANNIE

That's it! I'll work in the barn – it has to be quieter than here.

(JEANNIE exits.)

NINA

Anne probably thinks I'm as boring as a rusty nail... And here I am folding laundry which is boring. I am so unbelievably boring!

(NINA takes two of the socks from her laundry and uses them as sock puppets.)

NINA as first puppet

Socker, am I boring?

NINA as second puppet

Yes, Sockette. As boring as an old shoe.

NINA as first puppet

Don't be a heel! If you can't say something nice, don't say anything.

NINA as second puppet

Honesty is the best policy.

NINA as first puppet

Someone needs to teach you to toe the line!

NINA as second puppet

Stuff a sock in it!

ALICE

Nina!

NINA

Darn! Caught red-handed! Or would that be red-footed?

ALICE

You are anything but boring.

NINA

You're just saying that because you're my mother.

ALICE

True.

NINA

Should I write another letter? And make it really interesting? *I don't know what to do!*

ALICE

Run around the barn three times. It's beautiful out.

NINA

Jeannie went to work in the barn. She'll go crazy if she sees me running around.

ALICE

Run around the corn field.

NINA

What do you think Anne does when she needs to run around? I don't think they have a corn field.

ALICE

Ask her. I'm sure she does something when she drives her mother cuckoo. Like you are doing to me.

NINA

I don't try to drive you crazy. I'm just talking.

ALICE

I need to finish my work.

NINA

You're always working. I'm always working. Jeannie's always working. No wonder we're boring.

ALICE

Get rid of your excess energy – go!

(NINA runs out and the lights turn to ANNE and MARGOT. MARGOT has finished her letter to JEANNIE. It is April 28, 1940. ANNE and MARGOT are both writing.)

ANNE

Are you writing your letter?

MARGOT

I finished my letter. I am now doing my diary entry.

ANNE

What does it say?

MARGOT

"April 28, 1940. It looks like the Germans are winning the war in Norway. In happier news, Queen Margrethe II was born in Copenhagen, Denmark."

Don't you love the name "Margrethe." It's like my name but prettier.

ANNE

I like that name also. I hope the newspaper have photos of her. I wonder if she has a baby crown. I'd like a little crown. I'd walk the streets being all princessey and kindly/

MARGOT

/Are you almost done?

ANNE

Not yet.

(MARGOT sees many, many papers. At least ten.)

MARGOT

Goodness, Anne! It's just supposed to be a letter – not a book.

ANNE

I want her to get to know me. How can she do that if I don't tell her everything?

MARGOT

It looks like a biography.

ANNE

It is. First, I told her about you and Mummy and Pim and Grandmother. Then Hanne and Sanne because they're my best friends. Then there's school. Then there's how we used to live in Germany but moved to Amsterdam. And she wanted to know about ice-skating. And I had to tell her that I don't know the *Wizard of Oz* but I hope the movie comes here because I'd like to know more about a cowardly lion. And she loves to read but I don't know her books so I told her about my favorites. *Then*, I needed to tell her about where we get ice cream – I don't know if they have ice cream shops in her town. I think that would interest her. Ice cream is always interesting.

MARGOT

Did you want to list every flavor they sell in our ice cream shops!

ANNE

That's a good idea! I'll start with Dutch chocolate/

MARGOT

/Anne! I was kidding.

ANNE

Maybe I'll just list Butter Brickle and Dutch Chocolate. Of course the strawberry's awfully good.

MARGOT

You might want to start shorter and then expand as you get to know each other.

ANNE

But that's not what I do with friends! When you find a friend you just talk and talk and talk and/

MARGOT

/that's a lot for Father to translate. And then you need to rewrite it all again in English.

ANNE

I forgot about that.

MARGOT

Make it shorter. There will be lots of time to get to know one another.

(The lights switch to IOWA. NINA and JEANNIE are “papering” a wall with newspapers. NINA

sports a "Dutch" hat made out of newspaper. It is April 28, 1940.)

NINA

Look, Jeannie! I am a citizen of the world!

JEANNIE

More like a citizen of the Netherlands.

NINA

The Netherlands: Population 800,954. Only 800,000 more people than us!

JEANNIE

You are becoming worldly.

NINA

Miss Birdie says we need to find out about the countries of our pen pals. Amsterdam has tulips and windmills and you never see pictures of corn!

(Showing her a newspaper page.)

What about this?

JEANNIE

"Man Robs Liquor Stores. Shoots up the Windows." Hmm.... Robbery and liquor. I don't think Mom wants to look at that during dinner.

NINA

These all have war headlines: "Britain Strikes Back at Italy." "Bombs Rain on Warsaw." I don't want to look at that during dinner. It's scary. I don't understand why people want to hurt each other.

JEANNIE

I don't either. Maybe we can change that. Maybe we'll be the "peaceful generation."

NINA

I like that. How about the comics?

JEANNIE

After five days of rain, we need some funnies.

NINA

April showers bring May flowers.

JEANNIE

And weeds.

NINA

And corn. And mud. And mosquitoes.

JEANNIE

Aren't we a couple of Negative Nellies? Rain brings rainbows.

NINA

And one day we'll go over the rainbow and land in Amsterdam. If we ever hear from our friends. Maybe Anne didn't want to hear about farm life. Did you tell Margot about the farm?

JEANNIE

Absolutely. I told her about Humpty and Dumpty/

NINA

/You told her about our pigs? No wonder we haven't heard from them.

JEANNIE

Good things come to those who wait.

NINA

Unless you're a bird. Early birds get the worms. Good thing we don't eat worms.
(Beat.) This won't stick. I think the paste is too thin.

JEANNIE

Add flour. Stick with me, Neenie, I have all the answers.

(NINA starts to add flour to the pail.)

NINA

You really want me to stick with you?

(NINA rubs some paste on JEANNIE and sticks herself to her.)

JEANNIE

Neenie!

NINA

You told me to stick to you!

(They splatter each other with paste and flour as ALICE enters. NINA and JEANNIE freeze.)

NINA and JEANNIE

Hi, Mom.

ALICE

I am not sure I am liking what I am seeing.

NINA

You said we could paper the walls! We needed a fun project.

ALICE

Your bedroom walls. I'm going to go upstairs and finish grading papers. When I am done, I expect that all will be clean and dinner will be ready. Good evening.

(ALICE exits as NINA and JEANNIE clean up and the lights switch to AMSTERDAM. OTTO is getting ready to go to work. ANNE is jumping rope. It is early April 29, 1940.)

OTTO

Anneliese! Not in the house!

ANNE

Mother told me to get my energy out so I behave in school and don't chatter so much.

OTTO

Does that work?

ANNE

Not yet. You're absolutely, positively going to mail the letters today.

OTTO

Of course.

ANNE

You won't forget.

OTTO

Never.

ANNE

Thank-you for translating it for us. Do you think I should study English? Like Margot?

OTTO

You seem to have enough to study right now. I recall a daughter who refuses to do her multiplication tables.

ANNE

I know. I only like the ten times table. And the nine. Because of the pattern. I think if I go to America, they wouldn't ask me to do multiplication tables. But they probably want me to speak English.

OTTO

Are you off to America now?

ANNE

Someday. And I can't bring you everywhere to translate. It would be helpful when I visit Nina.

OTTO

So, you will be visiting Iowa.

ANNE

I checked on the map. It is on the way for when I go to Hollywood.

OTTO

Hollywood?

ANNE

Wouldn't that be the greatest fun? To see movie stars? Maybe I could find Ginger Rogers!

OTTO

Maybe you should find your books for school.

ANNE

All ready to go!

OTTO

I could walk you part way.

ANNE

Pim! I'm hardly a baby. I'll meet up with Hanne.

OTTO

Very well. I'll see you tonight. Be good. Don't talk so much.

ANNE

I'm trying

(She jumps rope.)

OTTO

Faster, faster, faster!

(As ANNE jumps faster, OTTO takes the jump rope and shows her how it's done. He's quite good at it.)

OTTO

Now, I won't chatter so much at work!

(They hug as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

It is late May, 1940. We are in the JENSEN's home. JEANNIE enters.

JEANNIE

Nina! NINA!

NINA

Goodness, Jeannie! You'll scare the chickens!

JEANNIE

They're here! They're finally here!

NINA

The letters?

JEANNIE

From Amsterdam!

(They squeal and hug and NINA grabs them.)

NINA

Oh look at the stamp. This is a true-blue, cross my heart, actual stamp from over the rainbow. It sailed the sea and fought off high waves and sharks and pirates/

JEANNIE

Neenie! Open it.

NINA

I don't want to break the seal. You open yours first.

JEANNIE

No, you.

NINA

At the same time.

JEANNIE

One ... two ... two-and-a-half, two-and-three-quarters...

NINA

Jeannie!

JEANNIE

Three!

(They tear them open and read. Photos and a postcard fall out.)

NINA

Look! I got a photo! She's so pretty. And look at the postcard – it's like from a different world. She is so lucky to live in such a beautiful place.

JEANNIE

It does look magical.

NINA

What does your letter say?

JEANNE

Give me a minute. What does yours say?

NINA

It's private.

JEANNIE

Nina!

NINA

Jeannie! Amsterdam is even prettier than the Emerald City. I wish I could click my heels and go there. Look at that little bridge. We don't have anything like it.

JEANNIE

It is special.

NINA

It's the most special thing ever.

(They read their letters.)

NINA and JEANNIE

Dear Nina ...

Dear Jeannie...

NINA

Thank you for the letter. I am in my fifth year just like you at a Montessori School.

JEANNIE

We moved to Amsterdam in 1933 from Germany. It's hard to visit with our family in Switzerland anymore because of the war. We cannot get visas to go through France or Germany. But happily, Amsterdam is neutral and we are not at war.

(The lights change to the FRANK'S parlor. OTTO is on a couch holding his daughters on either side. It is late in the evening, May 10, 1940.)

ANNE

Will the bombs come here?

OTTO

They're only bombing Rotterdam. I wish you hadn't listened to the radio.

MARGOT

We have to know.

OTTO

I wish there was a world where no child ever needed to know these things.

(Gestapo sirens are heard as the lights also focus on NINA and JEANNIE.)

NINA

Hoping to hear from you, I remain your Dutch friend, Anneliese Marie Frank

JEANNIE

Your friend, Margot Betti Frank.

NINA

"Your Dutch friend." So special.

(The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 4

(It is mid-May, 1940 at the JENSEN home.
CHARLIE is visiting. CHARLIE is shelling peas.
NINA is reading from a book on Amsterdam.)

NINA

Amsterdam got its name from the Amstel River. It has one hundred-and-sixty-canals. It has more bridges than Venice.

CHARLIE

I don't know about Venice but this postcard is pretty keen.

NINA

I know. Everything about Amsterdam is so special. And best of all, it's so different than here.

CHARLIE

I like it here.

NINA

It's – fine and all of that. I wish we had a canal. Or a bridge. Or a river. One day, I shall travel the world and see the canals in Amsterdam and the ones in Venice and then decide for myself which are prettier.

(JEANNIE enters. She is a wee bit dirty.)

JEANNIE

Nina! I love you! Hug me!

NINA

What are you/

(JEANNIE embraces NINA.)

NINA (cont'd)

Euhhhh! You stink.

JEANNIE

I know. I cleaned out the pens. I even cleaned out the coop – which *you* were supposed to do.

NINA

I'm very busy.

JEANNIE

... watching Charlie do your work.

CHARLIE

I don't mind. It's better than doing homework.

NINA

If you must know, I am studying Amsterdam.

JEANNIE

You are becoming the Mistress-of-getting-out-of-work.

(ALICE enters.)

ALICE

Good evening, all. Oh my, Jeannie. Take a bath.

JEANNIE

I've been busy. Doing my work – and Nina's.

NINA

I'm working! I'm studying Amsterdam.

ALIVE

Yes, Amsterdam... that's good to do. Yes.

JEANNIE

Mom? Are you all right?

ALICE

Yes. Of course.

NINA

You have that "it's something face" on, Mom.

CHARLIE

Just like my mom. You always know when something's up.

ALICE

(Beat.) Sit. (To JEANNIE) Not next to me. You need to bathe.

NINA

Tell us!

ALICE

The German's invaded The Netherlands. They've taken over the country.

NINA

Anne!

JEANNIE

Are Anne and Margot at war?

ALICE

Goodness, no. The Germans have taken over which means they have to live under German law. But they're just young girls – hardly soldiers – so they should be fine. Did you answer their letters?

NINA

Right away.

CHARLIE

I hope you wrote some cheery stuff.

NINA

I explained the plot of *The Wizard of Oz* and sent pictures of us.

ALICE

They'll like that.

JEANNIE

I wouldn't like being taken over by a foreign country. I wish there was something we could do.

ALICE

Pray? Yes, this would be a good time for prayers.

(The lights change to the FRANK home. OTTO is going over some work. MARGOT is writing in her diary. It is May 15, 1940)

MARGOT

"Dear Diary. It is May 15, 1940. The Germans invaded The Netherlands a few days ago. It's been a frightening time."

Papa, are things going to change? Now that the Germans are here?

OTTO

I hope not.

MARGOT

Are we going to move again?

OTTO

I'd like to have things continue as is. You and Anne are doing well in school. Your mother would not like another move. She still hopes to return to Germany. That will never happen. I am thinking of becoming a Dutch citizen. I like it here. The business is successful. I should be a very content man.

MARGOT

But we left Germany. Because we are Jewish. And the Germans hate us.

OTTO

It's complicated but yes, unfortunately it is true.

MARGOT

Why do they hate us?

OTTO

I don't think they even know.

MARGOT

You look tired.

OTTO

I spend too much time thinking instead of sleeping.

MARGOT

We all do – even Anne.

OTTO

I want her carefree. I want the same for you.

MARGOT

I'm too old for that.

OTTO

Fourteen is hardly old.

MARGOT

Mummy says I am an "old fourteen."

OTTO

You are a deep thinker.

MARGOT

I'm not the only one.

OTTO

Your mother does, too.

MARGOT

I was thinking of Anne.

OTTO

Miss Quack-Quack?

MARGOT

She chatters but is quiet when she thinks. (Beat.) Don't stay up too late. You need to work hard to support us. I grew a lot. I'm going to need a new rowing outfit this year!

OTTO

It's the best reason I know of to get up in the morning.

(MARGOT exits as OTTO continues to work.)

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 5

It is late August. It's steamy in Iowa and steamier in the Iowa farmhouse. As the lights go up, NINA is dramatically perched in the dining room – utterly exhausted. ALICE enters with a cold wash-cloth on her arm.

ALICE

Aren't you the pretty picture of misery!

NINA

It's so hot! I hate August!

ALICE

Don't say "hate," sweetie. It's such a nasty word.

NINA

Sorry. How's the burn?

ALICE

It's fine. I've been canning since I was knee-high and I always get a steam burn.

NINA

When I am a grown-up, I will get all my vegetables from the grocery store and never, ever, can a vegetable again. I wish we could can in winter when it's cold.

ALICE

I know it's on your list of your least favorite things to do.

NINA

Do you like it?

ALICE

(Beat.) No.

NINA

Do you like farming?

ALICE

It's – what I signed up for. I remember how excited your father was when we bought this place. I just - never intended to do it alone.

NINA

I wish I remembered him better. Sometimes I'm not sure if I remember him or the photos of him.

ALICE

You're so like him. Your father had a thirst for the world. He wanted to be – as Miss Birdie says – a citizen of the world.

NINA

It's hard to do in Danville. Miss Birdie says when we grow up, we can be anything we want to be. But that's not true, is it?

ALICE

If you work hard, anything is possible.

NINA

But if I wanted to be a ballerina, I couldn't. Because there are no dance schools here. And If I wanted to be a violinist, I couldn't because we couldn't pay for lessons. Or the violin.

ALICE

Do you want to dance and play the violin?

NINA

No. But I'm just realizing that maybe I cannot be anything I want to be. I know one thing for sure – I don't want to be farmer.

ALICE

Then don't marry one!

NINA

I won't! Do you think Anne and Margot can be anything they want to be? They live in a big city so there's a lot more ways to learn new things.

ALICE

I can't say. Often opportunities arise because you have money.

NIINA

I think Anne's family has more money than us. She does a lot more things than I do. Do you think I'll ever visit Anne?

ALICE

If Miss Birdie can make it to Amsterdam, so can my daughter.

NINA

Doesn't it look like a magical place? Anne is so lucky to live there. I hope they don't bomb all the magic.

ALICE

The bombing's stopped. For now.

NINA

It's so strange – she wrote that beautiful letter and asked all those questions and then – nothing.

ALICE

Things will change – after the war in Europe.

NINA

Margot wrote Jeannie that she wasn't allowed to visit her grandmother in Switzerland. It made me think about not being able to go to Illinois to visit Grandma. I wouldn't like that.

ALICE

So you do have reasons to be grateful you live in Danville. That can't happen here.

NINA

Cross your heart and hope to fly?

ALICE

Cross my heart – and flying would be fun!

(The lights change to AMSTERDAM. ANNE is piling up checkers into a tower. It is late August. Anne is now eleven and Margot is fifteen. MARGOT enters – a bit perturbed which is rare for MARGOT. MARGOT enters with purpose and sits – with purpose.)

ANNE

What's wrong?

MARGOT

Nothing.

ANNE

Are you angry?

MARGOT

Of course not. It's just – well this is the craziest, silliest, most wrong-headed world/

ANNE

What happened?

MARGOT

I can't row. Jews are now forbidden to be on rowing teams. Didn't I knock myself out playing tennis all summer so that my arms would be strong for rowing?

ANNE

Margot is mad. *Margot is actually mad!*

MARGOT

I'm not mad! Just – frustrated. Didn't I help the team win the championship?

ANNE

They'll never win without you.

MARGOT

They disbanded. When they heard I wasn't allowed to be on the team, they decided to not compete this year.

ANNE

I'm sorry.

MARGOT

This will change. Someday all these laws will be overturned and things will get back to normal. Someday. (Beat.) What are you doing?

ANNE

Multiplication tables.

MARGOT

That doesn't look like multiplication tables.

ANNE

No. This is much more fun. Don't tell.

MARGOT

Just zipped my lips. Can I play?

ANNE

I'll be black. Red suits your mad face.

MARGOT

I'm not mad!

(The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 6

It is late October. We are in the JENSEN home.
NINA has on a homespun Halloween costume.
CHARLIE is pinning it so he can hem.

CHARLIE

Stand still! You're like a fish out of water.

NINA

It's itchy!

CHARLIE

If you don't stop moving, the hem will not be uneven and you could trip.

NINA

I really wanted to be Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* but of course, there's no money for fabric and Mom wouldn't have time to sew a new dress. So here I am in Jeannie's old costume. Which is too big and *itchy!*

CHARLIE

Don't complain. It makes you move too much! Tell me about the letter. The one from Amsterdam. Happy news. That will make you stay still.

NINA

Anne sounds so wonderful. She collects postcards from all over – she has 800 of them and she wanted me to send her one.

CHARLIE

Did you?

NINA

Of course. Of the Danville Train Station. And all of her friends have names that rhyme with each other. Hanne, Sanne and Anne. And she goes to this school that sounds very fun. It's called Montessori and they let you do whatever you want whenever you want. So if you don't feel like doing sums, you could read. Or draw. I'd like that.

CHARLIE

It sounds as if you don't learn anything.

NINA

She sounds pretty smart in her letter. She hates – dislikes – multiplication tables. That sounds pretty smart to me. I wish we would get another letter. Miss Birdie thinks the Nazis stopped the mail. Nobody's getting letters anymore.

(JEANNIE enters.)

JEANNIE

Are you almost done? Because I need to get some work out of that girl.

CHARLIE

I'd be done if she would stand still.

JEANNIE

It's amazing how good you are at this.

CHARLIE

Do you not remember the disaster years ago that was my costume for the Christmas pageant?

JEANNIE

You did look like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

CHARLIE

I was a scary looking sheep. John's little sister cried when she saw me. I vowed to never let my mother sew anything of mine again.

NINA

I wonder if children have Halloween parties in Amsterdam. I should write Anne again and tell her about pumpkins and ghosts and bobbing for apples. Maybe I can cheer her up if she's sad. I wonder if they bob for apples. I wonder if they ever/

JEANNIE

Breathe, Nina.

NINA

When we visit Amsterdam, I am going to show her how to bob for apples because I am the best at it. Mama says I have razor-sharp teeth!

(NINA bares her teeth and makes a scary sound.)

CHARLIE

Not scary enough.

NINA

I should have your mom make my costume. Then, I'd be scary!

CHARLIE

Stop fidgeting!

(The lights change to the FRANK home. It is still late October. MARGOT is writing in her diary.)

MARGOT

"October 29, 1940.

All the news is centered on Germany bombing Britain. They are destroying London. Papa says they are trying to destroy the morale of the British so that they will surrender. I hope that never happens. We would lose all hope."

(ANNE enters dressed in some of her mother's clothes – nothing matches. All looks improbable.)

ANNE

Gooood evening,, my dahling daughter.

MARGOT

Mummy's going to scream.

ANNE

Mummy gave these to me. So I could learn to be more ladylike. More like Margot.

MARGOT

You're a goose.

ANNE

No, I'm you.

MARGOT

I would never dress like that.

ANNE

I'm Mummy then. "Why don't you stop twitching?" "Why must you chatter so?"
"Why do you ask so many questions all the time?"

(She approaches MARGOT and gently rubs her neck and maybe does a little squeeze.)

"Why can't you act like Margot?"

MARGOT

She doesn't really say that, does she?

ANNE

Every day.

MARGOT

How you must despise me.

(ANNE drops into MARGOT'S lap.)

ANNE

Don't *you* be a goose! You're my older sister. I adore you!

(And they hug as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 7

It is December 1940 in the JENSEN household. Christmas decorations may be seen – a small tree or wreath, stockings, a nativity, etc. ALICE, JEANNIE and NINA are putting the finishing touches on the decorating or baking cookies. Anything that would be traditional in America in 1940 could be used here. Maybe one starts a traditional Christmas carol and the others join in.

NINA

I love everything about Christmas! The way the house smells, the stockings, the candles, the cookies, the breads, the jingle bells, the/

JEANNIE

Neenie!

NINA

I'm breathing. I'm breathing cinnamon and oranges and vanilla. I love – everything. Even church. But only in December.

ALICE

Nina!

NINA

Well it does get sort of boring. But then there's all the pretty singing to jazz things up. (Beat.) Do you think they sing Christmas carols in Amsterdam? Maybe Anne sings in church. And maybe Anne goes to church and thinks it's boring, too – but then she loves singing the carols just like me! (Beat.) I wish I'd hear from her.

ALICE

You will. And you'll have so much to tell her..

NINA

There are the new barn cats and what I am studying in sixth grade and the cookies that we baked... (Beat.) I hope she's having a merry Christmas.

ALICE

She's probably all nestled and snug with her family just like you are tonight.

NINA

Do you still get presents when a foreign country takes you over?

ALICE

Of course. Life goes on.

NINA

I don't think they're as poor as we are.

JEANNIE

My Land, Neenie, we're not that poor!

NINA

I think of us as the family in *Little Women* and the year that there wouldn't be any presents for them. But they were brave and tried to make the best of it and they were missing their father only their father wasn't gone forever/

JEANNIE

Breathe, Nina.

ALICE

We are luckier than a lot of people. We have food and clothes/

NINA

/Jeannie's clothes that don't fit right.

ALICE

I'll make them fit.

JEANNIE

I'll help. Maybe for Christmas this year, we can redo all our clothes.

NINA

Could we add a sash to my dress?

ALICE

I'm sure there are enough scraps to add sashes to everything – even your socks and pajamas!

NINA

You're having a silly attack, Mama.

ALICE

'tis the season.

NINA and JEANNIE

(Singing)

"To be silly! Fa la la la, la, la, la."

(The lights switch to the FRANK home. There is a lit menorah. MARGOT is with ANNE and the server candle is lit as is the first candle.)

MARGOT

I can't wait for all the candles to be lit. It's so beautiful

ANNE

It is. And I was surprised about all the presents and treats.

MARGOT

Why?

ANNE

With Pim having to give his business to our friends, I thought there'd be no money for anything.

MARGOT

You shouldn't worry.

ANNE

I don't understand why we can't run businesses. Working is supposed to be a good thing.

MARGOT

Father's working. He just can't own the business.

ANNE

I know. And that's good that he can work. Mummy says to look for the good. But then my mind turns around and asks why we're not allowed in restaurants anymore. Why can't we go skating at the rink? I don't even understand what being Jewish is! I don't go to services.

MARGOT

You should come with Mother and me. You might like it.

ANNE

I find it – confusing. Like everything else these days. Is this why we left Germany?

MARGOT

It is.

ANNE

Are we going to have to leave Amsterdam?

MARGOT

I hope not.

ANNE

I think about our friends in Iowa. They are free to do what they please. They way it used to be here. I love Amsterdam. But I would also love to go ice-skating again. Eva goes! With her blonde hair, everyone thinks she's Christian so nobody questions her. I should just go.

MARGOT

It's against the rules.

ANNE

How would they know? Lies is Christian but her hair is as dark as mine and nobody asks her if she is Jewish. If anyone asks me, I'll just say "no."

MARGOT

We have to be careful.

ANNE

It's not fair!

MARGOT

No.

ANNE

Mother cries. She thinks I don't know, but I hear her.

MARGOT

I do, too.

ANNE

I think she's scared. Should we be scared?

MARGOT

No. We have mother and father and they will do everything to keep us safe.

ANNE

Then we will be safe. Let's not snuff out the candles yet. They're so pretty.

(MARGOT and ANNE draw close and watch the candles.)

(Optional: from both homes we hear a song. A Hanukkah song from the FRANK home and a Christmas song from the JENSEN home - interspersed. Sung by the children.)

(As MARGOT and ANNE dance we also see JEANNIE and NINA)