

***Mary & Anna's Adventures in Dirty, Wicked Omaha!***, a fictional romp about real people in 1890s North America, is a combination parlour drama and large-scale spectacle in two acts that has fun exploring the frontier roots of present-day capitalism, sexual exploitation, misogyny, political corruption, and class divisions-- a spaghetti western from the viewpoint of two powerful 60-something women. Photos of the characters and their historical locations are available for design reference.

### Synopsis

Mary Kimball, Puritan Abolitionist and Union Pacific Railroad executive wife, is well respected as the founder/director of Omaha's first charity. Southern belle Anna Wilson is Omaha's wealthiest and most notorious madam. What could unite these seeming opposites in a friendship lasting beyond death? In a socio-political context that feels shockingly contemporary, *Mary & Anna's Adventures in Dirty, Wicked Omaha!* imagines how these women team up to outwit Omaha's rising crime boss Tom Dennison. Along the way, they rescue a young girl from sex work in the city's horrendous Cribs, make an erotic film, join forces with Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley, and kibosh their own kidnapping from the Dante's Inferno Room at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. After transforming one another's worlds, Mary and Anna change Omaha's history for good.

### Casting Breakdown

Minimum 6 actors + stagehand; 13 characters (in order of appearance)

ANNA WILSON [born May 1835]: Southern belle\*, early 60s, but looks younger. Fashionable. Wears a diamond necklace.

THE CRIB GIRL/ (later) GRACE: age 12-13ish. Presents as female. Any gender or ethnicity. Dancer. Lives on the streets.

(TOM) DENNISON [born Oct. 1858]: Irish American\*, 40ish. Physically imposing (historically over 6'). Wears a bowler hat.

MARY (or MOLLY) KIMBALL [born June 1832]: Puritan New Englander\*, mid-60s. Dowdy clothes and out-of-date hairstyle.

THOMAS KIMBALL [born Oct. 1831]: Mary's husband, Puritan New Englander\*, mid-60s. Could double as Henchman, Bert, Buffalo Bill Cody, and/or Guard.

ADA DENNISON [born Aug. 1867]: Dennison's wife, 30ish; 6 months pregnant at first. Could double as Louisa, Phoebe Butler, and/or Guard.

LOUISA: female, any age or ethnicity. Could double as Ada, Phoebe, Guard.

HENCHMAN: male, any age or ethnicity.

BERT MILLER: male, any age or ethnicity.

BUFFALO BILL CODY: [born Feb. 26, 1846] early 50s; the famous Wild West showman; he wears long hair, a beard, a ten gallon hat and a fringed leather jacket.

PHOEBE BUTLER/ANNIE OAKLEY: [born Aug. 13, 1860] late 30s; tiny, fierce sharpshooter in Cody's Wild West Congress.

CHARLIE: Buffalo Bill's photographer; any age, gender, or ethnicity. Doesn't speak; appears only in one scene; could be played by a stagehand.

GUARD: any age, gender, or ethnicity.

\*CASTING NOTE: I encourage BIPOC/various-gendered/differently-abled casting whenever possible; the designated characteristics here are historic and help with the story's examination of stereotyping/racism.

### Script Development

I began my extensive research in August 2020, and this draft is the 9th major revision, dramaturged by the Manitoba Association of Playwrights' Brian Drader. I've also received editorial guidance from US screenwriter/theatre director Craig Victor, while Theatre Projects Manitoba's artistic director Suzie Martin has offered further valuable critique. *Mary & Anna's Adventures in Dirty, Wicked Omaha!* has not yet been workshopped, but I'm eager to work with an interested director to develop it for production, including more rewrites if necessary. In July 2022, my short play *Houses*, about Mary and Anna's first meeting (a variation of Scene 5), was a well-received staged public reading by the Little Lion Theatre at the Drayton Arms Pub Theatre in London, UK.

### Script Sample

#### SCENE ONE—YELLOW ROSES

Prospect Hill Cemetery, Omaha, Nebraska, Memorial Day 1897. There is a large monument that looks like a four-poster bed in the foreground to one side.

*THE CRIB GIRL enters in rags; caresses the monument; hides when Anna enters but watches her with adoration. ANNA WILSON enters carrying a single yellow rose. Dressed in the latest fashion but all in black – widow's weeds – she approaches the monument but stops to confront some townswomen (the audience).*

ANNA: What are you staring at? ... Mind your own business. ... Can't a woman grieve in peace? ... What? You think I'm afraid to show my face? *(She lifts her veil.)*  
There. Now you've seen the devil. Satisfied?

*ANNA stares them down, turns away, and stretches out along the edge of the monument. She caresses it, lays the rose on it and bends down to kiss the stone. Pulling her veil over her face again, she exits with great dignity, though she flips the bird at the audience, taking care not to let anyone else in the cemetery see.*

*Alone, the CRIB GIRL mimics ANNA's earlier behaviour at the monument. Then she lifts the rose, kisses it, and dances it lovingly away.*

#### SCENE TWO—DENNISON COURTS ANNA

The street and front porch of Anna's brothel, a hot afternoon in June 1897. A shrub stands next to a step that Anna will sit on.

*The CRIB GIRL loiters out front, smoking, but she hides behind the shrub when ANNA and DENNISON enter along the street. He's wearing a bowler hat.*

ANNA: I'm sorry, Mr. Dennison. I'm not interested.

DENNISON: It'll be mine sooner or later.

ANNA: But I have plans.

DENNISON: Who doesn't?

*DENNISON stands very close to Anna, looking down her dress and forcing her to look up at him, like the cover of a bodice-ripper romance novel.*

Do you know I've never seen inside?

ANNA: Would you like to?

DENNISON: Are you selling?

ANNA: Not the house.

DENNISON: You're no spring chicken, Anna.

ANNA: I still have all my ... faculties ...

DENNISON: They're certainly well-preserved.

ANNA: And I still have my girls to look after.

DENNISON: Your girls. A bunch of two-bit floozies.

ANNA: And that's supposed to convince me?

DENNISON: They won't thank you for hanging on.

ANNA: Yes. They will. Because I intend to help them move on to better things.

DENNISON: I thought you were a business woman.

ANNA: I'm not selling, Dennison. I'm turning this house into a hospital.

DENNISON: How will you manage that?

ANNA: Donate it. To the City.

DENNISON: They'll never accept it from you. But perhaps I could help.

*ANNA laughs.*

If the title was in my name ...

ANNA: Not a chance. You'll keep it as a brothel.

DENNISON: Your lack of trust wounds me, Anna.

ANNA: Where? Here? (*puts her hand over his heart*) Here? (*puts her hand on his wallet pocket*)  
Or here? (*cups his crotch*)

DENNISON: (*not moving*) You know I'm a happily married man.

ANNA: (*removes her hand*) Oh yes. Your wife the philanthropist. I'm sure Ada and I could persuade the City Fathers/

DENNISON: (*his steel unsheathed, his voice quiet and even*) Now you listen to me, Madam Wilson. My wife will never have dealings with you, so don't even consider it.

ANNA: (*taking a deep breath*) Good day, Mr. Dennison.

DENNISON: We're not finished.

ANNA: Oh, I think we are. ... Bye now. Thank you for your concern. Enjoy your day.

*ANNA turns away humming "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean."*

*DENNISON stalks out. Seeing a passerby (in the audience), he smiles and tips his hat, his genteel persona back in place.*

*Meanwhile, ANNA takes out her keys, but her hands are shaking; she drops them.*

*THE CRIB GIRL's hand emerges and grabs the keys, startling ANNA.*

*ANNA grabs THE CRIB GIRL, takes the keys, and pulls her out. The CRIB GIRL sits ANNA down on the bottom step and pulls out a flask. ANNA reaches for it.*

ANNA: Thank you, Darlin.?

*The Crib Girl pulls the flask away, takes a swig, and then hands it to ANNA, who laughs.*

Lord have mercy.

*ANNA takes a long swig and pats the step beside her. CRIB GIRL sits.*

### SCENE THREE—THE KIMBALLS' DINNER PARTY

The Kimball home, a few days later. In the Kimball dining room.

*THOMAS, DENNISON, and ADA sit at the finely-appointed table finishing dinner. No alcohol is served. ADA is five months pregnant. MARY serves.*

MARY: More potatoes, anyone? Carrots?

ADA: No thank you. That aspic is delicious, but I'm quite full.

MARY: I hope you have room for pie! (*She clears the dinner plates, serves the pie as the conversation continues.*)

ADA: Why are you serving us, Mrs. Kimball? I should think the 3rd Vice President of Union Pacific could afford a maid.

MARY: It's Louisa's night off.

THOMAS: My mistake. I forgot the schedule.

DENNISON: Aren't you the boss, Kimball?

MARY: Louisa's children need her.

ADA: Can't they go to your Crèche Home? That's a wonderful charity! It's so good to finally meet the woman who founded it!

MARY: Thank you. But it's not open in the evenings.

ADA: I've never thought about my girls needing a night off. Just Sundays.

DENNISON: We pay them to work. When we need them. *(to Thomas)* Tell me about this son of yours. Is he really designing the whole Exposition?

THOMAS: Indeed he is.

ADA: Thomas Rogers Kimball. His buildings are brilliant!

MARY: Thank you. We think so.

DENNISON: *(to Mary)* Rogers? That's your family name?

THOMAS: Her father was Nathaniel Peabody Rogers.

DENNISON: Never heard of him.

MARY: He ran a newspaper—the *Herald of Freedom*. In New Hampshire.

THOMAS: Abolitionist. Frederick Douglass was one of her father's closest friends. Once we moved to Cincinnati, Mary helped with the Underground Railroad.

DENNISON: A train? Underground? You know, we could do that here. This city already has so many tunnels and vaults.

MARY: This wasn't a train. It was the escape route for emancipation. We hid hundreds of people. All ages, whole families sometimes. I sewed disguises for them. Then they went north to Canada. It was exciting! And so rewarding.

DENNISON: I fail to see the profit in it.

MARY: I'm curious, Mr. Dennison—what's your interest in the Temperance League?

DENNISON: I don't drink myself. I like to keep a clear head. It's in everyone's best interest to control the sale of alcohol in this town, don't you think? It's just good business. ...