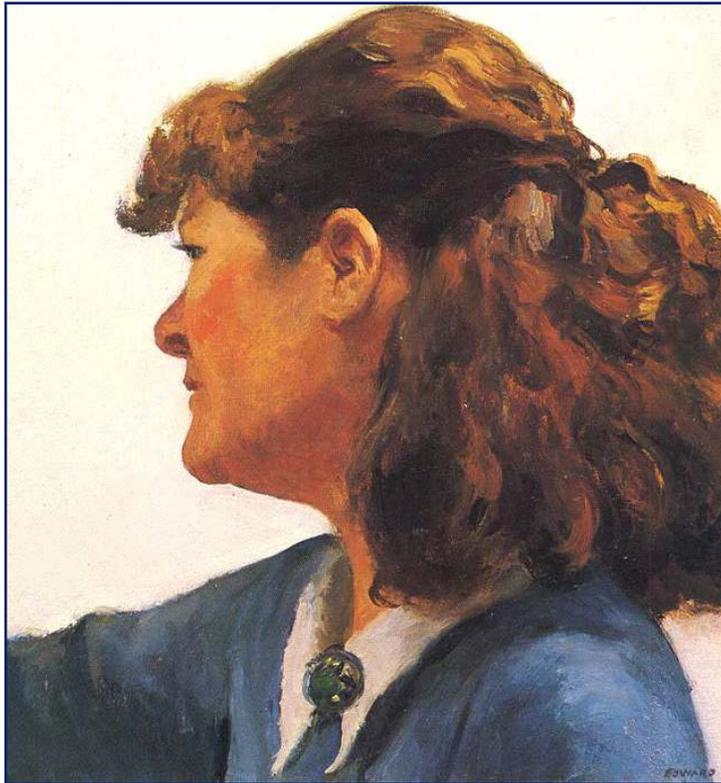


HOPPER'S WIFE



NEW YORK CITY OPERA



HOPPER'S WIFE

MUSIC
STEWART WALLACE

LIBRETTO
MICHAEL KORIE

Revised February 22, 2016

Music © Stewart Wallace and SidMar Music (ASCAP)

Libretto © Michael Korie & Korie Music (ASCAP)

CHARACTERS



HOPPER, a painter



MRS. HOPPER, his wife



AVA, his new model

SCENES

Truro, Cape Cod, off season, and Hollywood. Action spans the early 1940s to the mid-1950s.

SCENE ONE: SOIR BLEU

Outside Hopper's house

SCENE TWO: HAT TRUNK

The attic, later that night

SCENE THREE: CATFISH

Inside the house, one month later.

SCENE FOUR: HOLLYWOOD

A movie theater; a radio studio; the ocean's edge

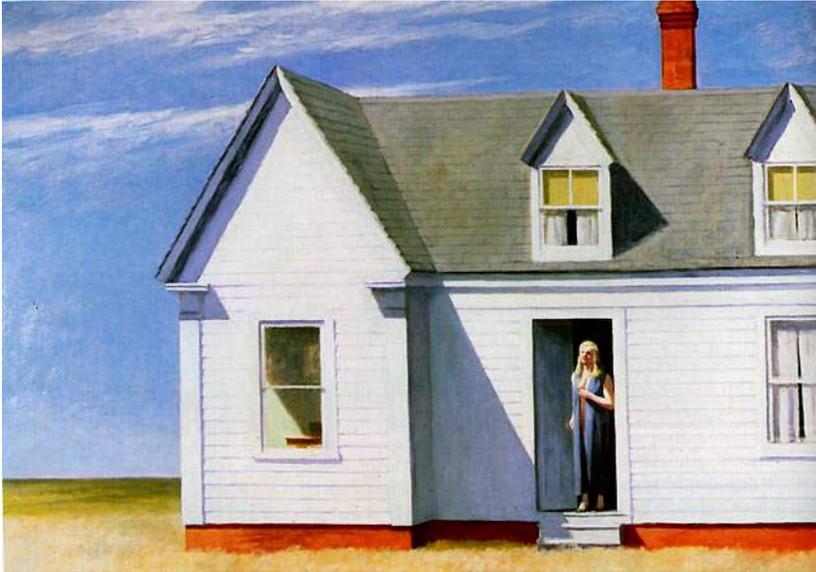
SCENE FIVE: HERE'S TO THE MOVIES

Outside Hopper's house

HOPPER'S WIFE is 90 minutes long with no intermission.

HOPPER'S WIFE

Scene 1: Soir Bleu



Hopper's house. Truro, Cape Cod. Late afternoon, early May, 1941. Hopper sits outside on a chair in the tall beach grass, a sketch pad in his lap. He wears a rumpled hat and smokes a pipe. His gaze falls upon Ava, a nearly nude young woman in the doorway of his house. She fidgets with a sheer sleeveless peignoir, trying to make it cover more than it was intended to.

HOPPER The crickets. The crickets.
 The crickets are singing.
 The crickets are singing early this season.
 Listen. Listen. A loon.
 It's a crime to kill a cricket.
 Rest your hand on the doorway.

AVA Am I waiting for someone?

HOPPER Watch the horizon and listen.
 Wind in the beach-grass.
 Waves lapping the shore.
 A Gray's woodpecker. I'm impressed.
 We don't see them here much anymore.
 Rest your hand on the doorway.
 Leave the peignoir open exposing a breast.

AVA I don't know...
 I jes' don' know about this.

HOPPER A Cooper's hawk in the meadow.
 A doe in the pines.
 A moth trapped in a window-screen.
 Watch the horizon, *watch* ... and listen.

AVA I jes' don' know about this...

HOPPER *(Firmly)* Miss. Leave the peignoir open.

AVA *(Defiantly)* No.

HOPPER There is a vine that grows inside us.
 A vine that grows from a seed of sorts,
 Quite small, colorless, and tightly curled.
 In some, it lays dormant.
 In others, it coils into the limbs,
 The lungs, the throat,
 The brains, the colon and the eyes
 Till one can breathe nothing but this vine.

HOPPER'S WIFE

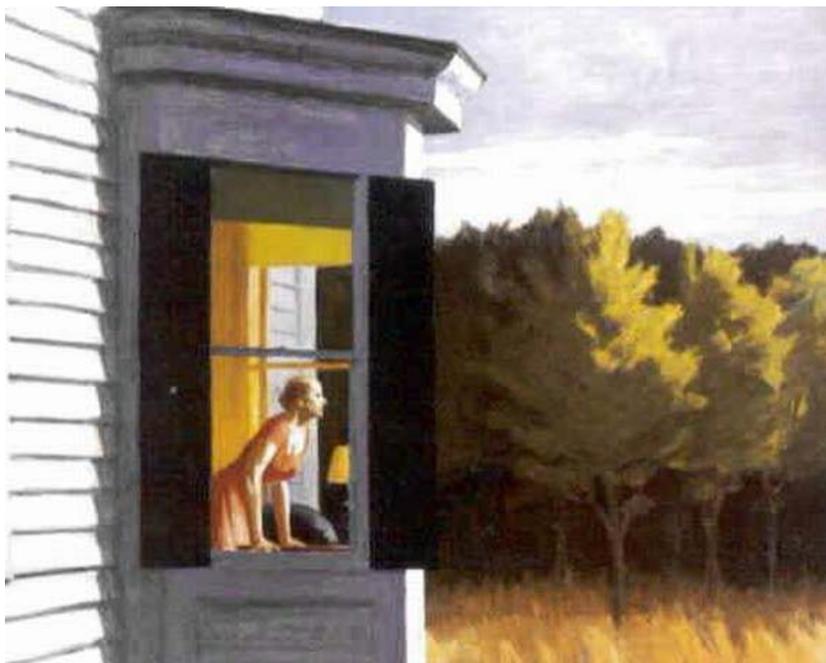
HOPPER: Feel nothing but this vine.
Think nothing but this vine, this vine.
This vine has thorns which cut places that never heal.
But through the pain the vine grows
Until, one day, it shows its roses to the world.

AVA These roses... they grow in me?

Hopper nods yes.

Oh. Oh.

Ava lets the peignoir slip off and stands naked and serene as Hopper sketches.



Mrs. Hopper bustles down the aisle of the theater with a hatbox and a tube of paint. She enters the house by the side door, hollers out the window to Hopper. She does not see Ava.

MRS. HOPPER Hop!
I'm home, Hop!
How's that lighthouse painting?
How's that lighthouse coming along?
Think you'll finish soon, Hop?
Show's coming up at the Corcoran,
And tourist season starts June first, you know!
Gotta sell 'em something besides lonely people...
So depressing.
Hop!
Found that paint you wanted: "Flesh Tint 68."
God, it took hours -- driving, parking, fussing,
Fussing, parking, driving, parking, fussing.
"Why not Flesh Tint 42?"
They're all the same," he told me.
"Take 53."
I told him: "Sir. My husband ordered Flesh Tint 68
Because it matches *my* flesh -- he paints me."
"Ya mean he paints you nude?" he says.
I say: "Let's not be prudish, Mister.
Ever hear of Rubens? Renoir? Caravaggio?
This is art."
(To herself) Truth is, I found his paint in fifteen minutes.
(Hollers) Traffic was horrible, Hop, just horrible!
Must have been an accident!

HOPPER'S WIFE

MRS. HOPPER *(To herself)* Olivia DeHavilland...
(Hollers) Backed up clear to the cape!
(To herself) In *Hold Back the Dawn*.
Ho hum.
The treat was the hat store next door to the Orpheum!
She opens the hat box and puts on a new hat.
Ah, Mrs. Hopper!
Modelling her new hat, she steps outside with the paint tube.
Close your eyes, Hop, no peeking!
I have a surprise! Oh, what a surprise!
I have a surprise! Oh, what a surprise!
Surprise, surprise, surprise for...
Suddenly seeing Ava, Mrs. Hopper's jaw drops. In a state of shock, she squeezes the paint tube so hard that the top pops off. Paint dribbles out on her shoe.

MRS HOPPER Who...? Who...? Who is *this*?

AVA This your wife?
She squeezin' "Flesh Tint 68" all over her shoe.

HOPPER Wife!
Wife, watch what you're doing!
You've squandered half the tube!
Pre-mixed paint's expensive!
Damned expensive!

MRS. HOPPER My new... my new blue peignoir.
Goes with my blue negligee.

MRS. HOPPER Is today April fool's day?
No... no... no, it's May. It's May, isn't it?
Hop...? Who is this person in the doorway?
Who is this nudist in blue?

AVA Ava.
The name's Ava, and I ain't no nudist!

HOPPER Ava will stay the summer.
She'll sleep in the tool shed.
(Introducing) Wife, Ava.
Ava, this is Mrs. Hopper.

Ignoring his wife's crushed silence, Hopper looks up at the sky.

The sky of early May at twilight is so... French.
So wrong for Massachusetts.
The winter thaw turns the salt air
To smooth shellac on a rare old Master.
It's so ridiculous, ridiculous,
It's so ridiculously rich,
That tinge of gold on the blue
Rimbaud calls *Les soirs bleus d'été*.
I've seen it only by the sea at Bordeaux,
And here in Truro
In early, early May.
Ava will pose.
When do we eat?

Devastated, Mrs. Hopper says nothing.

HOPPER'S WIFE

HOPPER: The crickets. The crickets.
The crickets are singing.
The crickets are singing early this season.

AVA The sun and moon are feuding for the sky.

HOPPER It's a crime... it's a crime...
It's a crime to kill a cricket.

AVA *(Regards sky curiously)* How unusual.

HOPPER I predict a gibbous moon tonight.

*As Hopper as Ava look at the sky, Mrs.
Hopper stands speechless and numb.*



Scene 2: Hat Trunk

The attic, that night. Dressed in only her slip, Mrs. Hopper opens a dusty steamer trunk filled with old hats and a couple of wigs.

They are the hats and wigs she posed in for all of Hopper's paintings and drawings, over the years, until this afternoon when Ava displaced her as Hopper's new model..

Throughout the scene, she tries on different hats from each era of their marriage, hats he painted her in. As time goes backwards in her mind, Hopper reappears in each era as well, as she remembers him, sketching her in a dispassionate manner. The scene begins as she takes out a cloche hat from the roaring '20s, the one she posed in for Hopper's painting "Automat."



MRS. HOPPER: Bee-stung lips. Flapper hips.
Scraping up my pennies from waitress tips
For art school.
I'm a New York City "it" girl
With a hip flask and a spit curl
and a hat like Clara Bow.
I'm the life of life class
At the Art League studio.
Sketchin' prize fights with Georgie Bellows.
Slums, with Communist Jewish fellows.
Sailors, with Charles Demuth.
Mmm, sailors -- the mistakes of youth.
Smoking reefer with Georgia O'Keefe and Alfred.
Let's go to Harlem!
Grab a cab and... who's him?

Notices Hopper, their first meeting.

"Hopper"? Hey, "Hop." Ya like jazz?

(Dances) Boop-boop! Bop-bop!

Do "The Black Bottom."

My motto: shake 'em if ya' got 'em!

Pose? You want me to pose?

You mean with no clothes?

You wanna see these? Tease!

Save it for art school.

Eat? Yeah... I could go eat.

You want *me* to treat? Jeez!

Another starving artist, I'll eat my hat...

(Shrugs) Best macaroni and cheese

Only costs a nickel at the New York Automat.

HOPPER'S WIFE



The lights change. Hopper turns a page in his sketch pad and begins a new sketch, one that will become the painting "Summertime." Mrs. Hopper puts the cloche hat back into the steamer trunk, and takes out another hat, a straw sunhat from the 1930s, and poses in it. A few years later, the Hoppers are broke, living in a New York tenement. It is a sweltering summer. Both of them are a little drunk, and she is a little pregnant.

MRS. HOPPER I'm hot. Bored. Hungry.
I'm nauseous. Hungry.
I'm hot. Hungry. Pregnant.
You're cruel.
Take me to the Frick.
It's free up at the Frick, and so cool...
You can look at art. I can stick my feet in the pool.
Ooo-ooo! I smell a sweet street sausage,
Fat green pickles in brine.
Nothing to eat but cream of wheat and dogfood.
Dry dogfood -- and wine. Wine. Lotsa wine.
No more wine, Hop, you paint better sober.
Tanked, you ain't worth a damn.
I'm putting on my sun-hat!
I'm leaving this apartment!
I'm putting on my skirt, I am!

Hopper drunkenly takes her from behind. She is unwilling. They struggle. He overpowers her.

No, you sick bastard! Let my big fat ass go!

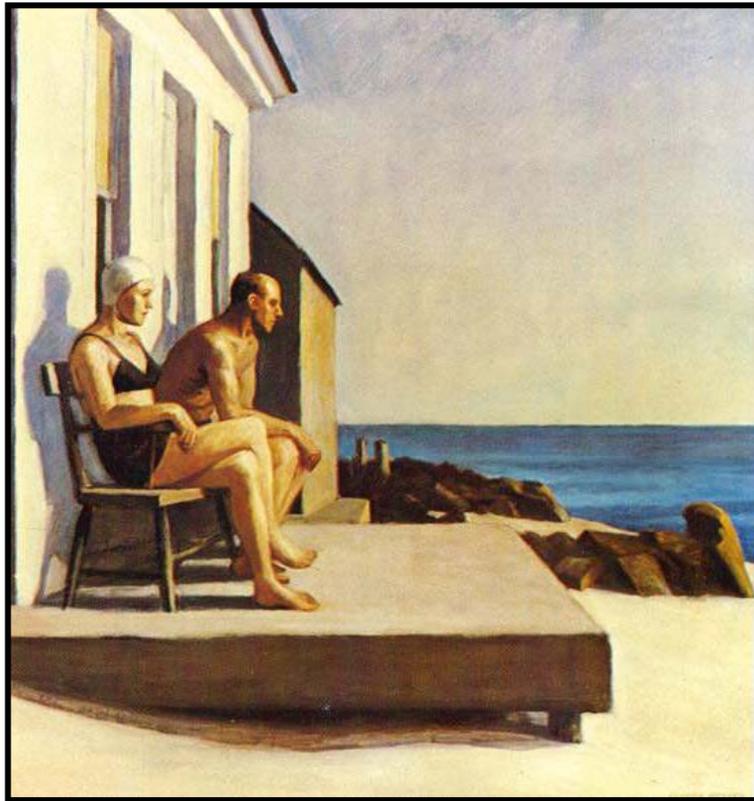
*Done with her, he pushes her away.
She falls, lays on the floor demoralized.*

I die, oh my God, I just... die.
(Resigned) All right... we'll stay.
We're flat broke, anyway.
Perhaps later on when it cools
We can ride on the ferry,
Drink cheap Wop Chianti
And laugh, laugh, laugh
Like a couple of fools.

HOPPER'S WIFE

The lights change. Hopper starts a new sketch, one that will become his painting "The Sea Watchers.". Mrs. Hopper puts the sunhat back into the steamer trunk, and takes out a bathing cap and puts it on, tucking her hair into it.

It is several years later. The Hoppers have left Manhattan, gone on the wagon, and moved to Truro, Cape Cod, near the ocean. Mrs. Hopper stands on the beach where the sand meets the surf, staring out blankly at the ocean. Behind her, Hopper sketches her. They have grown increasingly estranged from one another.



MRS. HOPPER Watching... Watching... Watching...
Watching the sea.
Watching the sea.
Very relaxing, smacking at sand fleas,
Stepping on clamshells and staying...
Dry.
Just smelling the breeze,
Smacking at sand fleas.
Watching the sea.
Watching the sea.
Watching the seagulls peck at garbage.
Thinking of whiskey.
Thinking of...

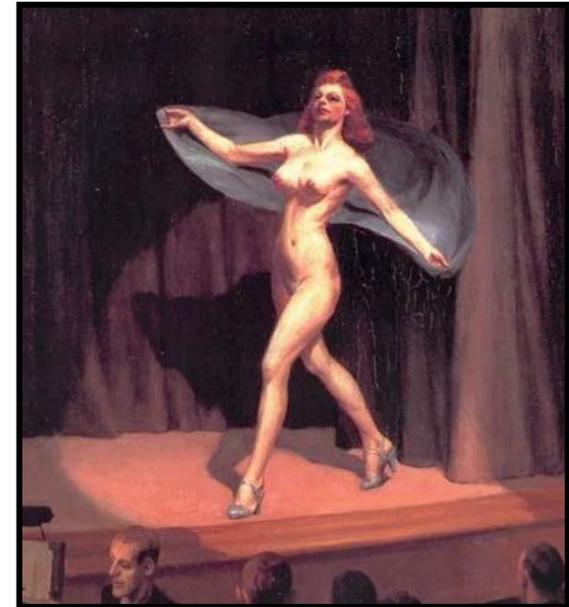
I'm so glad we left Manhattan.
I'd lose my mind if it wasn't occupied
Ironing laundry.
Shucking quahogs.
Shaking the sand out of the bedspread.
Chat-chat-chat-chatting with farmers.
Filleting perch.
Going to A.A. meetings
In the Church basement.
Watching the sea.
Watching the sea.
Watching the sea.
Watching it grind me
Into a smooth white shell
of who I used to be.

HOPPER'S WIFE

The lights change. Mrs. Hopper puts the bathing cap back into the steamer trunk and puts on a garish red wig, posing now as the burlesque stripper of Hopper's painting "Girlie Show." Hopper begins a new sketch.

MRS. HOPPER And now, the star attraction!
The pearl of the girlie show!
Grab a gander
At two good reasons why Boston banned her,
Right here in your studio.
(Faces Hopper) Hello!
Lady of Burlesque!
Hot tuna, I'm a Lady of Burlesque!
Here's your worn out stripper twirling tit.
That's how you see me, ain't it?
Paint it!
Paint a Lady of Burlesque
Worn ragged by the bumps and grinds of life.
Why pay to paint some battered cooch girl?
Paint your battered wife!
I got sags.
Bags.
I got varicose veins.
Hang me on a picture hook and view my remains.
Lady of Burlesque!
Observe the stretch-marks stretched in vain.
Certain things in life get lost.
Other things you gain.
Lost a baby son. Gained about a ton.

MRS. HOPPER Now my Hoppy-papa finds mama so grotesque,
He paints her as a beached white whale of a
Lady of Burlesque! Lady of Burlesque!
Paint it! Paint it! Paint it!!
Lady of Burlesque! Lady of Burlesque!
Lady of Burlesque!
Paint it! Paint it! Paint it!
Paint it! Paint it! Paint it!
Paint it!



Mrs. Hopper stares at the audience, raw, then takes off the red wig, throws it back into the hat trunk and slams the lid shut. Blackout.

HOPPER'S WIFE

Scene 3: Catfish

One month later. Inside the house, Mrs. Hopper has taken up her paintbrush again, and is painting at Hopper's easel. She wears an artist's smock over her dress, and holds a painter's palette. Her subject is Ava, naked in a bathtub covered with bubbles. Ava looks dubious about it. As Ava muses, Mrs. Hopper grows increasingly irritated.

AVA
I don' know... I jes' don' know about this.
I jes' don' know about this *one bit*.
Now, Mister Hopper -- he's an artist.
He say there's a rosebush inside of me.
He say one day soon my rosebuds'll pop.
Any day now, ping! I'll be Springtime.
He's a *real* artist... you, I don' know.
I don' know 'bout you -- or this bathtub.
Reminds me of stuff I'd sooner forget.
Riffraff. R.K.O. pond scum -- that Howard Hughes?
He dislocates my jaw and sends *me* to a psychiatrist?
I said: "No thanks, boy, call Columbia!
Make me Susan in *Susan and God*.
You ain't seein' my face till I'm Susan."
Then I smashed a vase right on his head.
I run away!
Said: "So long, Sunset. You stink like South Carolina,"
where my daddy's table was makin' me heave.
Them tree rats he trap in a swamp.
Possum. Coon, with lice on 'em yet.
But they ain't the worst thing I et...



AVA
Catfish... is the most *disgustin'* fish.
It lays in muddy water eatin' dead things!
And when it's real hungry, it eats its own waste.
I hate them filthy catfish!
Said I'mo go to Hollywood, get famous and get steak!
Said I'mo be in pictures, and be a big star!
Well, I been gettin' lotsa steak,
But not one goddamn movie so far.

HOPPER'S WIFE

AVA Agents... they the catfish of L.A.
 Them slimy whiskers twitchin' for a blow job.
 They make you sign papers and promise you fine things,
 Then sell your ass for cheesecake some faggot calls "art".
 I hate them filthy blow jobs!
 That scum you swallow raw!
 Them squirmy little tadpoles
 That slither down your craw.
 To make some stupid movie I gotta do that?
 Makes T-bone taste like catfish!
 Catfish, what ate what it shat!

MRS. HOPPER *(Exploding)* Shut up! Shut up!

AVA *You* shut up!

BOTH No, *you* shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!

MRS. HOPPER You've been whining for one whole month!
 I can't bear to hear
 one more horrible "truth" about Hollywood!

AVA Raymond Massey.

MRS. HOPPER Raymond Massey?
 Raymond Massey from *Things to Come*?

AVA Yup, that's right, and they came all night.
 Howard Strickling, Benny Thau, Adolph Menjou.
 Jack Warner, ooo, he's a fat, oily catfish.
 Puny Mickey Rooney -- his stunt double, too.
 Harry Cohn in polo jodhpurs and no underpants sayin':
 "The other girls do me this favor -- how 'bout you?"

AVA Boys, too, they do favors.
 George Raft, he's the mob's.
 Clark Gable, he's a former hustler.
 George Cukor's "friend" discovered him.
 Discovered him, but not at Schwabb's.
 Not at Schwabb's. Not at Schwabb's.

MRS. HOPPER *(Competitively)* Leonardo da Vinci was a pederast.

AVA *Who?*

MRS. HOPPER John Singer Sargeant smoked opium.

AVA *Who?*

MRS. HOPPER Gauguin and Van Gogh debauched in Tahiti.
 And Hopper's no "rose" garden, sweetie.
 Hop's a tit man, always was.
 Nipples, knockers, boobs, maracas.
 Any kinda bust, he goes barmy.
 I'm on to his tricks.
 I watched him watching you, smoking his pipe,
 talkin' 'bout crickets... with a hard-on.

AVA I don't feel good... I don't feel at all good.
 Got a bad taste in my mouth. Catfish.
 Catfish. Catfish.
 I do believe I'm gonna heave...!

Ava leans over and throws up in the bathtub.

MRS. HOPPER Poor dear.
 You're all full of poison.

HOPPER'S WIFE

Hopper enters. He sees his wife's painting on his easel, and his wife using his good paint brushes . He is enraged.

HOPPER What is this thing?
Why are you wasting canvas, wife!
Good linen canvas is expensive!

MRS. HOPPER I know! I saved for it, I ordered it!
Drove eight hours to pick it up and haul it home,
Just like everything else I do...

HOPPER And look, my best Chinese bristle brushes — ruined!

MRS. HOPPER Writing dealers, stamping postcards,
Typing correspondence,
Cataloging every stupid doodle for posterity!
Hell -- I practically invented you!

HOPPER This looks like a Bonnard.
A piss-poor Bonnard.

Hopper puts his wife's painting on the floor and walks on it, back and forth, destroying it. Busily expounding, Mrs. Hopper does not take notice.

MRS. HOPPER Bonnard was lovely.
He painted lovely things.
Not explicit, suggestive, with a festive palette
That goes with every style but Colonial.

Ava notices what Hopper is doing, and calls to Mrs. Hopper.

AVA Woman -- he's *walking* on your painting!

Mrs. Hopper turns to see, devastated.

MRS. HOPPER No, Hop! Don't! I love it!

HOPPER Bastards!
For twenty years, ever since the Armory Show!
Bastards!
For twenty years, they wouldn't hang
My work wasn't cubist!
My work wasn't abstract!
With my talent, my training,
My command of the American Scene,
I was a hack for *Ladies Home Journal*.
So you could go to the movies!
So you could get pregnant!
So you could blow smoke with your friends!
(Grabs her roughly) I'll tell you this, Miss Popularity.
You were the joke of the Art League!
You were a quick boff,
A fast loan, a free breakfast!
No one took you seriously!
I'm telling you as gently as I can, dear:
You can't paint!
You never could paint!
You paint like a girl!
You paint like a girl!
You paint what you think will sell!
You paint like a girl!
(Shoves her down) You paint like a *girl student!*

HOPPER'S WIFE

Mrs. Hopper cries out and falls.

MRS. HOPPER You couldn't say "Nice try"?
"Needs work"?
"Interesting"?
Excuse me, it's just one lousy painting.
Excuse me!
Nineteen years with this pillar of integrity,
Sittin' there with one hand on a paintbrush
And one in his holey pocket thinking of poontang!

HOPPER What the hell's the difference what I "think" about?
What counts is what I *paint*.

*Disillusioned by the spousal abuse she has just
overseen, Ava has gotten out of the bathtub and
begun to get dressed in her street clothes.
All three overlap as they sing.*

AVA *(Dressing)* You lied, Mister Hopper. You lied!
I smell catfish New England style, disguised as scrod.
I'm goin' back to L.A. and be Susan in *Susan and God*
If I gotta blow the Pope!
L.A! L.A!

MRS. HOPPER Scrape your own bluefish!
Stamp your own postcards!
Stretch your own canvas!
Buy your own paint!
Sweep your own floor! I'm leaving!

Mrs. Hopper puts on her travel hat, and picks up a suitcase.

L.A.? Ava -- need a ride?

*Taking Ava by the elbow, Mrs. Hopper walks
towards the door – then turns back to look at
Hopper one final time before leaving him.*

MRS. HOPPER Don't forget to shut the attic window when it rains.

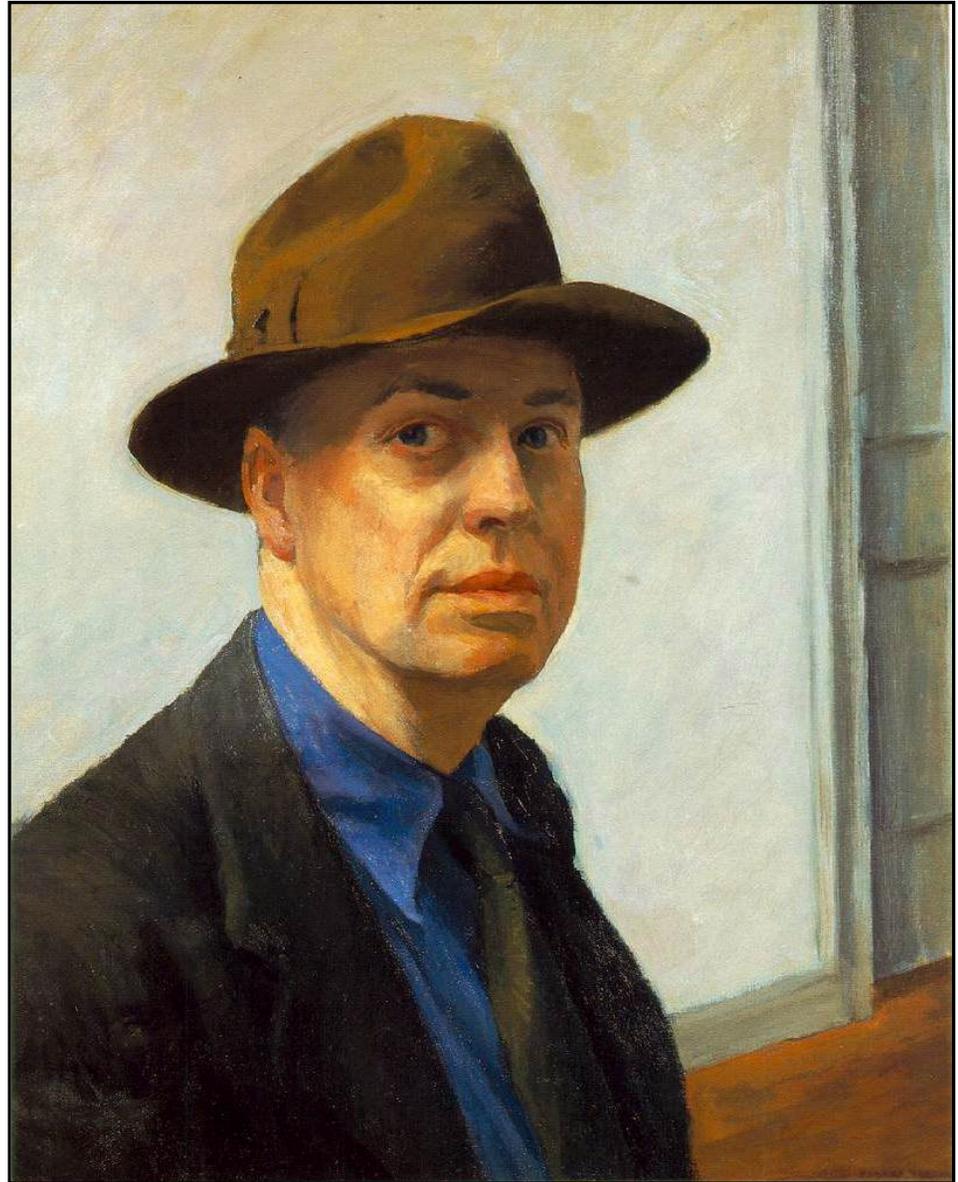
*Mrs. Hopper and Ava exit. Perhaps there is the
sound of a car driving off. Hopper does not react
with any outward emotion to the departure of
the two women. Instead, muses to himself.*

HOPPER Today I saw a dazed raccoon on the beach.
Today, a dazed raccoon.
It was bleeding.
It must have been hit by a car on the highway
And hobbled off. On the beach. It was bleeding.
It was so thirsty, it was lapping up saltwater.
Looking back, I saw it was dead.
I saw it was dead.
I saw... a movie. A very fine film.
The very finest porn film perhaps ever made.
Just a twenty-five cent little porn film in a rat hole
And it was pure inspiration.
There are these two men: one black, one white.
These two men are humping this woman,
One from the front and one from behind.
Only you don't know she's got her period.
They're humping away like mad when we start to see
The white guy's shaft is all colored red
And the other guy, this black guy,
He's got the biggest...the most enormous...

HOPPER'S WIFE

HOPPER

And he's humping her
And the white guy's humping her.
Then they both pull out and start to come at once,
And man, you never saw so much *white* in your life
Coming at the camera.
All the thick white paint
On the black flesh and the white flesh
And the deep scarlet red...
And then, all of a sudden,
This woman starts to relieve herself.
It was overwhelming!
Now it's all happening at once!
The colors... leap off the screen at me!
The textures... leap off the screen at me!
The movement, the light and shadow
Leap right off the screen at me
Like spin art at Coney Island.
It's like art, I think... it's like art!



Scene 4: Hollywood



Several months later, across the continent, Mrs. Hopper has arrived in Los Angeles, having driven there from Truro together with Ava after both women left Hopper. Mrs. Hopper enters a movie theater and spies an empty seat facing the screen. She looks around, impressed, as if she's finally made it, taking in a deep breath of Hollywood air.

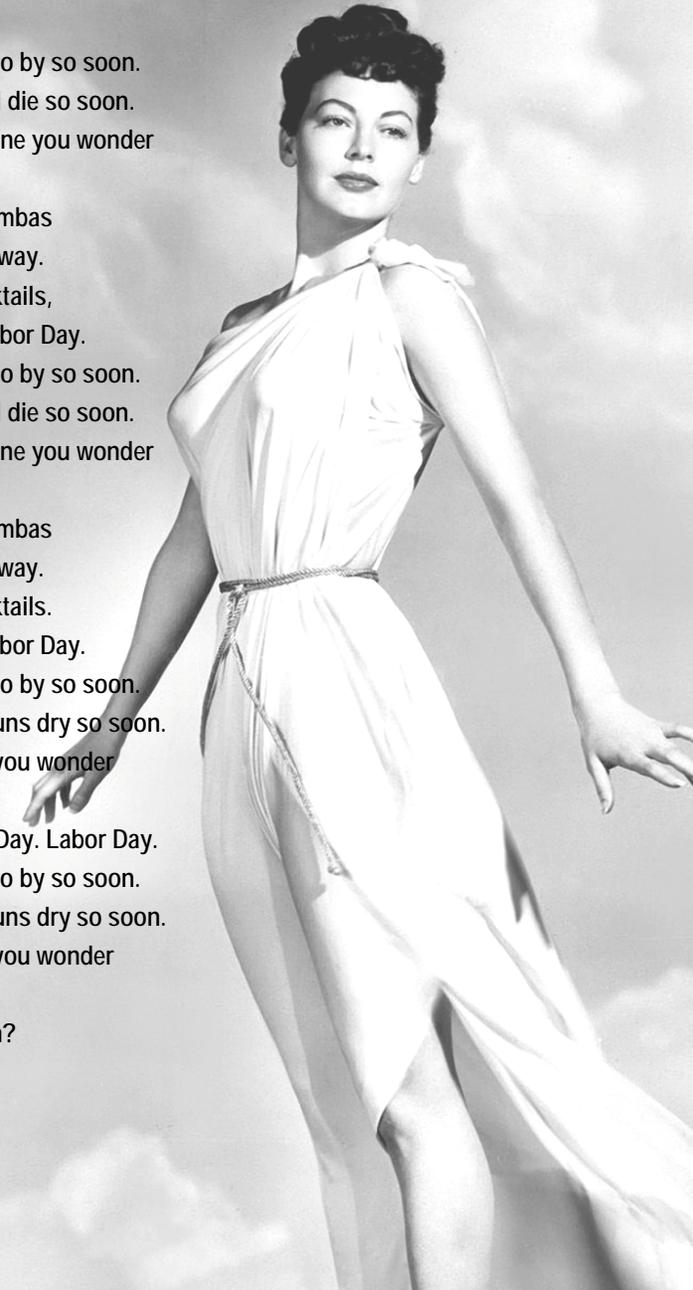
MRS. HOPPER Grauman's Chinese! Hollywood, USA!

She sits in the empty seat and watches the screen. To a movie fanfare, the roaring MGM lion appears on the screen and then dissolves to Ava, onscreen, now a glamour goddess of the movies, the studio's latest assert. Mrs. Hopper is flabbergasted.

Excuse me?! Excuse me?!

Backed by a visible orchestra as if in one of those MGM song compilation films like "Words and Music," Ava sings wistfully as autumn leaves cascade gracefully down around her on screen.

AVA: Lazy summer days go by so soon.
The roses droop and die so soon.
And when they're gone you wonder
Where was I?
A few too many Rhumbas
To pass the nights away.
A few too many cocktails,
And suddenly it's Labor Day.
Lazy summer days go by so soon.
The roses droop and die so soon.
And when they're gone you wonder
Why so soon?
A few too many Rhumbas
To pass the nights away.
A few too many cocktails.
And suddenly it's Labor Day.
Lazy summer days go by so soon.
The fount of youth runs dry so soon.
And when it's gone you wonder
Why so soon?
Suddenly it's Labor Day. Labor Day.
Lazy summer days go by so soon.
The fount of youth runs dry so soon.
And when it's gone you wonder
Why?
Why oh why so soon?



HOPPER'S WIFE

The screen goes blank. Ava vanishes. Mrs. Hopper rises from her movie theater seat, shaking with envy and resentment.

MRS. HOPPER Knock me down with a feather.
Scrape me up with a spoon.
She's a goddess of the screen,
And I can't crack the scene-painters union.
After I drove her here in my LaSalle!
Excuse me! Excuse me!

Making a decision, she walks tentatively forward towards...

A Corridor

A long corridor of light opens before Mrs. Hopper, leading towards some important unseen personage -- a movie studio Chieftan, perhaps, or a newspaper tycoon. She approaches with caution.

MRS. HOPPER (Spoken) Excuse me.... Mr. Hearst?

She takes a deep breath and begins to repeat some of the trashy Hollywood gossip she learned from Ava.

Sources say George Raft may be the mob's...?
Former hustler Clark Gable...?
George Cukor's "friend" discovered him....
But not at Schwabb's.

As if to reward her nasty insinuations, a stylish new hat flutters down from above. Thrilled, Mrs. Hopper puts it on, and begins her transformation.



MRS. HOPPER Loretta Young is cast in *Call of the Wild*:
A man, a woman, and a dog in the frozen Klondike.
Loretta plays the woman.

An even nicer hat flutters down from above. She puts it on. Then, to her growing delight, a 1940s radio microphone appears. Stepping to it, she gossips over the airwaves with growing confidence as it begins to rain hats, one more over-the-top than the next. Hopper's wife has re-made herself into a new Mrs. Hopper: Hedda Hopper, the red-baiting, scandal-mongering gossip personality.

MRS. HOPPER I'm shouting for joy!
Certain overactive starlets
Learned their craft as porno harlots.
One of them, a young Joan Crawford.
Ask sophisticated Peter Lawford,
Pimp of the Kennedys.

HOPPER'S WIFE



Her hats grow more outrageous as she does. Behind her, grainy projected blow-ups from scandal tabloids show Hollywood stars drunk and disorderly, mangled in car wrecks, dead in the bathroom, bound in straightjackets being led off to the "funny farm" for rehab.

MRS. HOPPER In the back seat of his car,
 Chaplin boffed a child star.
 Knocked her up then had his chauffeur
 Dump her back in the school yard
 With liquor on her breath.
 The same Charlie Chaplin never pays taxes!
 The same Charlie Chaplin never joined the army!
 The same Charlie Chaplin supports Joe Stalin!
 Next week:
 Who Jean Harlow may or may not have shot.
 Speaking of death...



HOPPER'S WIFE

MRS. HOPPER Life caught up with Lupe Velez.
Spectacularly gowned,
Some sixty pills she downed,
Then went to bed to croak, instead,
She woke up sick and drowned – yes!
Found by the maid in a trail of booze and vomit,
Her head jammed straight down the john!
Moving on...

She puts on another hat.



MRS. HOPPER James Dean is no marine, and unapologetic.
I asked him how he skipped the draft.
Said he: "I kissed the medic."
Scum like that deserves
To be crushed in a mangled Porschel

And another hat...and another...



MRS. HOPPER For shame, Lana Turner.
You and Ava Gardner?

HOPPER'S WIFE

Now at the height of her red-baiting power, she puts on her famed American Eagle hat, a grotesque monstrosity topped by the stuffed national bird.

MRS. HOPPER I urge all patriots and haters of Communism:
Boycott any film with Anne Revere!
Boycott any film with John Garfield!
Boycott any film with Gale Sondergaard!
And a doff of my hat to friendly witnesses
Elia Kazan and Jerry Robbins,
Those brilliant boys from Broadway!

She pauses in her radio recitation of infamy, refreshing her lipstick as Hopper appears on the other side of the stage...



Truro Light



Winter on Cape Cod. Truro Light appears. Sounds of stormy surf. A disoriented, disheveled, and confused Hopper appears at the ocean's edge in Truro, drinking from a liquor bottle in a paper bag. As he sings, he, too, transforms himself, stripping down to his undershorts, putting on his wife's garish red stripper wig, and smearing his nipples and lips with bright red lipstick – as if to recreate her out of his extreme solitude.

HOPPER

Unexpected quiet jostles my brush.
What day is this?
How old am I?
Is this Truro?
The Bowery?
The south of France?
I panic -- is this my house?
Without her beacon of guiding chatter
Hop! Caterwauling Hop!
How's that lighthouse?
How's that lighthouse coming along?
Rats in the tool-shed...
Geese fleeing the fall...
Horny night-croakers humping all night.
Trucks rolling them flat on the highway.
Who can sleep?
Just can't seem to paint much,
If at all...

The light-beam of Truro Lighthouse revolves crazily around and around as the sounds of the surf grow louder, and Hopper walks into the ocean, impersonating the voice of his estranged wife.

Hop! I'm home, Hop!
How's that lighthouse?

The lighthouse beam spins faster. And faster as Hopper drowns himself, vanishing into the ocean.

HOPPER'S WIFE

Radio Studio

Vaguely aware of Hopper's suicide, but taking no notice of it, Mrs. Hopper finishes freshening her lipstick as her radio broadcast goes back onto the air. She wears a formidable hat of fluffy black egret feathers. With a saccharine smile, she speaks into the radio microphone to her listeners.

MRS. HOPPER People always ask me:
 "Dear Mrs. Hopper:
 Where do you get such beautiful, beautiful hats?"
 Like this black one of dyed egret.
 Why, if I told you that,
 Gentle listeners,
 It wouldn't be a secret,
 And a lady has to have *some* secrets.
 But I will tell you one thing:
 My recipe for chocolate cake.
 Instead of using layer tins,
 I bake the cake in one big sheet, then cut it,
 Spreading frosting between three layers,
 And frosting an inch thick on top.
 Caramel frosting at that!



HOPPER'S WIFE

Scene 5: Here's to the Movies!

Hopper's house, Truro, Cape Cod. Late Autumn, 1954. Following Hopper's death, Mrs. Hopper returns to Cape Cod to settle the estate and close the house. She leans in the doorway reading a handful of letters and unpaid liquor store bills.

MRS. HOPPER Wellfleet Electric... \$14.83.
Surfside Liquor... \$92.50
Town and Country Liquors... \$186.26.

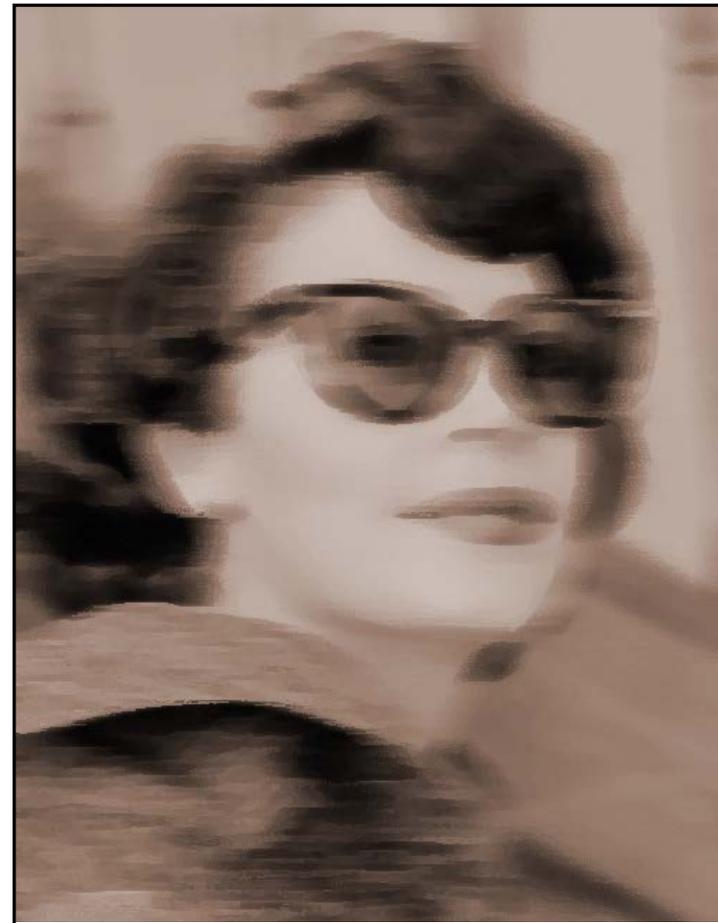
Mrs. Hopper opens an official looking envelope.

"Dear Mrs. Hopper, belated condolences...
Tragic demise of your husband.
In overdue homage to Hopper's achievement,
Planning *major retrospective.*"
(To herself, shocked) What's this?
"Need your assistance finding, cataloguing
Streetscapes, landscapes, nautical scenes and..."
Good Lord, the nudes!
The Whitney Museum of Art wants the nudes!
I can see *Variety* now:
"Mrs. Movie Morality Posed Like a Two Bit Stripper."
If this breaks, I'm finished!

Ava enters dressed in dark sunglasses, blue jeans under a car coat, and a kerchief over her unwashed hair. Mrs. Hopper greets her with a withering smile.

MRS. HOPPER Well, if it ain't "the barefoot contessa."
Who let you off the funny farm?

MRS. HOPPER Slobbering around in Levi's, eh?
Studio approve?
What brings you to humble Truro
All the way from Happydale?
Your plastic surgeon move?



HOPPER'S WIFE

AVA
Wind in the beach grass.
Waves lapping the shore.
A moth trapped in a window-screen.
And roses that bloomed once in a doorway
And scattered before I knew better.

MRS. HOPPER All the roses *here* died months ago.

AVA
These roses died way before that.
This bouquet withered on the vine...
Sunset and Vine.
But Hopper saw roses inside me.
Hopper sensed their wild spirit,
The whiff of something unusual.
"Watch the horizon," he said, "and listen."
"Listen. Listen."
But I, damn fool, had my eye on an Oscar.

MRS. HOPPER *(Laughs)* Oscar!
Like *you* could ever act.

AVA
Listen, honey.
I was never really an actress.
None of us kids who came from MGM were.
We were just good to look at.

MRS. HOPPER Until you hit the sauce.

AVA
Show me my portrait!
That young nude in the doorway.

MRS. HOPPER *(Bluffing)* "Nude"?
No nudes here.
Hop never painted nudes, dear.
Streetscapes, landscapes, nautical scenes.
But nudes?
They just didn't int'rest him. He was so... cerebral.

AVA
Hey, this is *me*, babe.
Save the lies for your column.
I posed.
So did you, and you know it.
I'll just go inside and see for myself.

Mrs. Hopper blocks the doorway.

MRS. HOPPER They're trash, Ava.
Think of your image.

AVA
Show me my portrait!
That young nude in the doorway!

MRS. HOPPER You'll see it, all right.
Ev'ryone will!
The Whitney Museum wants to put your roses on exhibit!

AVA *(Thrilled, giddy)* No...

MRS. HOPPER Oh, the irony. Mine, too.

AVA
The Whitney thinks I'm a piece of art?

MRS. HOPPER The Whitney thinks you're a master piece of art!

HOPPER'S WIFE

Mrs. Hopper marches into the house. A Hopper nude painting comes flying out the door. Another Hopper nude comes flying out the door. Then another. And another. Mrs. Hopper comes back outside holding a giant can of flammable turpentine.

AVA Put down that turpentine!

MRS. HOPPER They've all got to burn by inferno!

AVA Spare mine at least, mine can't hurt you!

MRS. HOPPER Fool!
If there's *one*, they'll know there were others!

*Mrs. Hopper pours turpentine all over the Hopper nudes.
Mrs. Hopper strikes a match. Ava blows it out.*

AVA Dirt-monger!
Thing from a swamp!
Bottom-feeder!
Catfish! Catfish! Catfish!
What thing of beauty did you ever make?
What words of truth did you ever print?
What right have you to destroy true genius
To preserve the garbage you are!

MRS. HOPPER I am *not* garbage!
I'm *entertainment!*
I'm an American one-of-a-kind!
I made me, and I love me,
And I'm popular as Hell!

Mrs. Hopper pulls a pistol out of her purse and shoots Ava dead. With one foot on Ava's corpse, Mrs. Hopper begins to create a torch by wrapping rags around Hopper's paintbrushes. Then she douses it with turpentine.

MRS. HOPPER Here's to the movies!
To the *ultimate* canvas, the screen!
To those grand romances,
Those toe-tapping dances!
The songs of Comden and Green!
Here's to the movies!
To the Martians invading the globe!
To the Disney fairy,
The Bells of Saint Mary,
And Christ of Nazareth's robe!
Here's to frontiers full of cowboys in battle
With savage Indian braves!
Here's to the fat Dixie mummies who prattle:
"Lawd, we all so glad to be slaves!"
Slaves to the MOVIES!
To those gods of glamour and sleaze.
I lick the street
Where they stick their feet in concrete
At Grauman's Chinese!
Here's to a place with no trace of confusion,
No words no worse than gosh darn.
Here's to the kiss and the happy conclusion.
Hey! Let's do a show in the barn!

Mrs. Hopper flicks a cigarette lighter and holds it to the turpentine-soaked torch. It bursts into flames. She touches the torch to the paintings which begin to smoke and burn.

HOPPER'S WIFE

Like the Columbia Pictures Lady of Liberty, Mrs. Hopper thrusts her smoking torch aloft in the flames of burning art.

MRS. HOPPER Pure entertainment:
I lift my torch to you!
To the movies!
To the movies!
To the movies!
To our favorite killers
In Action thrillers!
Japs, Chinks, Lesbos, Commies, and Queers!
Here's to the movies!

Mrs. Hopper stands in triumph as the stage fills with white smoke. Through the smoke comes the singing of the crickets. End of opera.

