

A BAD YEAR FOR TOMATOES
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A Bad Year for Tomatoes was first produced November 15, 1974 at the John Patrick Dinner Theater, North Royalton, Ohio, William Allman, director, with the following cast:

MYRA MARLOWE Rhoda Rosen
TOM LAMONT James Buerkel
CORR GUMP Mary Anne Sheboy
REBA HARPER Irma Lange
PINEY Rich Grinnell
WILLA MAE WILCOX Helen Graydon
SHERIFF Gary Haberman

ACT ONE

Scene 1 Living room in a small New England village
Scene 2 The same, a few hours later
Scene 3 The same, a couple of months later

ACT TWO

Scene 1 The same, next day
Scene 2 The same, half hour later

A Bad Year for Tomatoes

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

PLACE: *A village in Vermont*

TIME: *The present*

AT RISE: *We are first introduced to the empty living room of a small New England home in the village of Beaver Haven. The furnishings are early Sears Roebuck.*

A Dutch door Upstage Center opens onto a front porch. Stairs next to this door lead upstairs. There is a second door Stage Right leading into a kitchen.

The famous TV actress Myra Marlowe enters. She has reached her middle years with great grace and still exudes good looks, good health and good will. She is followed by her agent of many years, Tom Lamont. He is a handsome man, greying at the temples.

He puts her suitcases down and surveys the room.

MYRA. (*Beams proudly.*) This is it. Do you like it?

TOM. How'd you find it?

MYRA. I was on my way up to Maine last year and had a flat tire. What do you think of it?

TOM. (*Sbrugs.*) It's the kind of place you find when you have a flat tire.

MYRA. Well, I've taken a year's lease to write my autobiography. And what a beguiling name. Beaver Haven! (*She puts tape recorder on table.*)

TOM. Oh, don't misunderstand. It's a perfectly charming dump. If you were only going to spend a week. (*Adds.*) In sin.

MYRA. Well, it's perfect. And it has a garden. Do you know—all my life I've wanted to raise tomatoes.

TOM. It's your frustrated maternal instinct. (Sits.)

MYRA. And it's already furnished.

TOM. That's what you say of a hotel room.

MYRA. You can't raise tomatoes in a hotel room. And I won't have to change a thing. (She proceeds to change pictures and chairs, however.) The trouble with you, Tom, is you've no affinity with the earth. You forget I was born on a farm.

TOM. You forget that you were hustled off to Hollywood when you were two. And the nearest you've been to a farm since is Farmer's Market.

MYRA. And your other trouble is—you're a cynic. Instead of an agent, you should have been a mortician.

TOM. I feel like a mortician—letting you bury yourself way off here in the sticks.

MYRA. Well, Beaver Haven is going to be the birthplace of my autobiography. I don't want to die with people thinking I'm the kind of idiot I've always played. (Unpacks briefcase.)

TOM. What if somebody recognizes you here? You won't have a moment's peace.

MYRA. How can they? No one knows what I really look like. I've never played myself as I really am. Do you know, when I was three I played a boy? Baby John. Like that "Lassie" series. It was really a male dog playing Lassie. Or was that Rin-Tin-Tin?

TOM. I wasn't born.

MYRA. And in my teens I was that buck-toothed idiot girl in that moronic Smithers Family. And you know what the past twelve years have been. That damn toothless Granny Gurton in that damn witless "Moonlight Mountain" series. And that's my trouble. I don't know who I really am. So don't say I can't grow tomatoes. I've been exposed to manure long enough.

TOM. Do you realize how much you've made playing Grandma Gurton? (Follows her as she disposes of articles.)

MYRA. No, but I'm sure the government does.

TOM. And to think of the fortune I could get you for a new series. Got any aspirin?

MYRA. Never again. I've brought all my old costumes with me and I'm going to bury them. For the first time in my life, I'm going to be a real person. (She takes some plastic flowers out of her suitcase and jams them into a vase.)

TOM. You don't have to come three thousand miles to be a real person. (Takes suitcases to stairs.)

MYRA. In Hollywood? Do you know why I decided to get away from the Coast? There's something in the sun out there that saps people's sanity. Calling the Old Ladies Home "Lotusland." Signs saying "Free Psychoanalysis with Every Hamburger." Bug exterminators advertising "We kill our Customers." Do you know I saw a parked truck that said "A Blind Man Drives This Car." I stood half an hour waiting for the driver to come out. Do you know what it was? A firm that sells Venetian blinds. (Sits.)

TOM. Oh, come on, Myra. It isn't any worse than any place else.

MYRA. And don't call me Myra anymore. Myra Marlowe is dead. From now on I'm using the name I was born with.

TOM. Good Lord, I'd forgotten you had a real name.

MYRA. (Rises.) You see? I'm just merchandise. You've been my agent for twenty years and to you I'm nobody but Myra Marlowe—a name invented one day at lunch over a pizza pie.

TOM. All I remember is it's the kind of name you forget. Myrtle-something-or-other-horrible.

MYRA. Myrtle Durdle. And don't say anything! It's the only thing about me that was ever real. (He retreats.)

TOM. My God, your mother must have been phonetically deaf.

MYRA. (Archly.) My mother happened to love flowers.

TOM. My mother loved sweet peas but she didn't name me one.

MYRA. Myrtle Marigold Durdle. Someone who was really born. Not someone conceived in the mental womb of a retarded TV mongoloid.

TOM. Murt. Rhymes with "dirt." (Sbrugs.) Well, you ought to be able to grow tomatoes.

MYRA. I will. And for the next year I'm little Myrtle Durdle again. No one is going to know who I am or where I am or what I'm doing. And I'll be free to write about my life in the boob tube. You forget that Myrtle also rhymes with "fertile." (Sits again.)

TOM. When I'm back on the Coast, I'll think of you fondly as Fertile Myrtle Durdle.

MYRA. Oh, stop being a wit. I'm going to live with honest people for a change.

TOM. Oh, Myra—I mean Myrt, I know you, sweetheart. You get these compulsions. I've seen you take up everything from Yoga

to yogurt. Remember when you were going to adopt a Navajo baby?

MYRA. (*Flaring up.*) Yes! Yes! My whole life has been a search for something real. That's my problem. And now I'm going to find the real me. Besides, I'd have made a lousy Navajo mother.

TOM. (*Sits beside her.*) All right! So you're going to be a writer. Where have I heard that before?

MYRA. (*Rises.*) Yes, I am. I'm going to sit faithfully down every morning and dictate the story of my life into that little Japanese thing-a-ma-bob.

TOM. That I've got to see. Wasn't it Yeats who said "There are a thousand things to tempt me from this craft of writing"?

MYRA. I know. So I've taped a little dialogue with myself. A sort of self-conducted catechism. (*She turns on the recorder.*) Listen. (*After a moment her own voice is heard.*)

VOICE. Good morning, dear.

MYRA. That's the other me. (*Answers herself.*) Good morning. (*To Tom.*) I thought I'd start on a cheerful note.

VOICE. What is your name, dear?

MYRA. Myrtle Marigold Durdle. (*To Tom.*) That's so I'll get used to it again.

TOM. You should live so long.

VOICE. And what are we here for, Myrtle dear?

MYRA. We are here to lead a normal healthy life, work hard, and find inner happiness.

TOM. And raise tomatoes.

VOICE. Just what kind of work are you going to do, dear?

MYRA. (*Proudly.*) We are going to write a book!

VOICE. Not "we," dear—you.

TOM. Do you go on calling yourself "dear"?

MYRA. Makes me feel someone cares.

VOICE. What kind of a book are you writing, dear?

MYRA. The story of Myrtle Durdle. Or "So Far—So Good."

VOICE. Are you going to let anything distract you?

MYRA. Only death.

TOM. You forgot to call yourself "dear."

MYRA. I know—so I corrected it.

VOICE. Sorry about that. Dear.

MYRA. Carry on.

VOICE. Are you sorry to have given up Hollywood? Dear?

MYRA. Are you crazy?

TOM. Someone is.

VOICE. Are we going to work faithfully every day, dear?

MYRA. Six-thirty every morning.

VOICE. Myrtle, dear, you know very well that you haven't been up at six-thirty since the morning you were born—and that was seven-thirty.

MYRA. All right. Eight o'clock. (*To Tom.*) I put that bit in to show you can't fool yourself.

TOM. You fooled me.

VOICE. How many hours, dear?

MYRA. Oh, say four.

VOICE. Say eight.

MYRA. No. Four. (*To Tom.*) You can't let your alter ego run your life.

VOICE. Well, good-bye and good luck. Nice talking to you, dear.

MYRA. You, too.

TOM. You know, I think you were right to hide out up here. It's time you got out of circulation.

MYRA. Well, when you look back on your life, you need a sense of humor.

TOM. Why don't you tape three more voices? Then you could play bridge.

MYRA. (*Crosses to him.*) Do you know what you could do for me now?

TOM. Call a good psychiatrist.

MYRA. Drive into the village—it's just a few blocks—and get me basic things I'll need. Sugar, salt, coffee, eggs, bread, and butter. And *The Reader's Digest*.

TOM. I doubt if I could ever get your basic needs at a grocery store.

MYRA. No cream. I'm going to lose weight, too.

TOM. Why not? You've lost everything else—including your sanity. (*He goes out. Myra looks around happily and sings to herself.*)

MYRA. Stay sweet as you are—don't let a thing ever change you—(*She stops as she sees her recorder. She rewinds it and turns it on again.*)

VOICE. Good morning, dear.

MYRA. (*Gaily.*) Oh, shut up.

VOICE. What is your name, dear?
MYRA. Lassie. What's yours?
VOICE. What are we here for, Myrtle dear?
MYRA. (*Leering.*) We just may open a house of ill-repute. I've always wanted to be a madam.
VOICE. Not "we," dear. *You.* (*Behind her, two village women enter and stand watching her. They are neighbors, Mrs. Cora Gump and Mrs. Reba Harper, both carrying baskets. They look at each other, puzzled, as they listen to Myra.*) What kind of book are you writing, dear?
MYRA. (*Leering.*) Pornographic.
VOICE. Are you going to let anything distract you?
MYRA. (*Flippantly.*) Oh, just the usual everyday preoccupations. Sex—dope—liquor—incest. You name it, I'll try it. (*Mrs. Harper turns and raps on the door. Myra whirls and stares at them.*)
REBA. We rang but no one answered.
CORA. But we heard voices.
VOICE. Sorry about that—dear.
MYRA. Oh. Oh, I was practicing my Spanish lesson. (*Shuts off set.*) *Buenos dias.*
REBA. We're the Hospitality Ladies.
CORA. I'm Cora Gump. I live catty-cornered from you on Pussy-willow.
REBA. And I'm Reba Harper. I'm behind you. On Coolidge.
CORA. Clara Thrupp was coming, too, but she ate a bad oyster.
MYRA. Well, won't you come in? (*They shake hands.*) I'm Mrs. —wait a minute—Mrs. Durdle. Myrtle.
REBA. (*Stares at Myra. Then to Cora.*) Cora—who does her voice remind you of?
CORA. Not only that—they look alike.
REBA. They could be sisters.
CORA. It's uncanny.
REBA. Mrs. Durdle, do you know who you look like?
MYRA. Everybody.
REBA. My daughter's music teacher.
MYRA. A woman, I hope.
CORA. Oh, a lovely person. Tone deaf.
REBA. We've brought you a Hospitality basket.
CORA. Just some basic things.

REBA. Sugar, salt, eggs, bread and butter, and a copy of *The Reader's Digest*.
CORA. (*Takes jar from basket.*) And a jar of tomatoes I put-up last summer.
MYRA. Oh, I adore tomatoes. (*Repeats "tuh-may-toes" as they pronounced it.*) I can't wait to grow my own.
CORA. It was a bad year for tomatoes. You know—cut worms—mealy bugs—aphids—white fly—black spot and blossom rot. I cut out the rotten parts. (*Sits.*)
MYRA. I know I'll enjoy them.
CORA. Just something to welcome you and your husband to Beaver Haven.
MYRA. (*Indicates door.*) Oh, that isn't my husband. He's an old friend from California helping me to get settled.
REBA. But you're married, aren't you?
MYRA. Divorced.
REBA. Any children?
MYRA. No. (*Proudly.*) Though I almost adopted one once.
REBA. Well, we certainly hope you like Beaver Haven. It's a lovely place. No crime. No scandal. (*Sits.*)
CORA. Except for the Becker boy.
REBA. Cora—we don't talk about that.
MYRA. Who's the Becker boy? (*Sits.*)
REBA. Oh, a farmer's son. (*To Cora.*) Cora, why did you mention that? Mrs. Durdle will get the wrong impression of our morals.
MYRA. What did the Becker boy do?
REBA. Oh, you know how little boys are.
MYRA. No. I don't. How are they?
REBA. Well, being raised on a farm—you can guess.
CORA. (*Whispers.*) With an animal.
REBA. Cora!
CORA. Well, he *tried* to!
MYRA. You mean? . . .
REBA. The whole family are atheists. What could you expect?
MYRA. (*Beams.*) What kind of an animal?
CORA. A turkey.
REBA. Cora! It was not a turkey. I went to the trial.
CORA. Willa Mae Wilcox said it was a turkey.
REBA. They didn't even raise turkeys.
CORA. Well, if it wasn't a turkey, what was it then?

REBA. I am not going to say. The Beckers have suffered enough.
MYRA. (*Apprehensively.*) Does the Becker boy live close to me?
REBA. Not anymore. He grew up and joined the navy.
MYRA. And a good thing.
REBA. It's a decent community. You don't even have to lock your door. Unless you walk in your sleep.
CORA. Pity the Beckers didn't lock their chicken coop.
REBA. Cora!
CORA. Well, why would Willa Mae Wilcox lie to me?
REBA. You know how Willa Mae is!
MYRA. Who is Willa Mae Wilcox?
CORA. Lovely woman. Color-blind.
REBA. Mad as a hatter. Did you notice the first house on the left as you turned off Coolidge? With the purple shutters? And geraniums in milkcans?
MYRA. With a plaster dwarf in the front yard on a toadstool?
CORA. That's Willa Mae.
REBA. I wouldn't be too friendly with her, if I were you.
CORA. You can say that again.
MYRA. Why not?
REBA. Well, I don't like to gossip.
CORA. She'll find out anyhow.
REBA. Oh, well. Are you Pisces?
MYRA. Why? Oh, No, I'm Gemini. Why?
REBA. She hates anyone who's Pisces. It's an obsession with her.
MYRA. Why?
CORA. Her husband was Pisces.
MYRA. What'd he do to her?
REBA. Well, I don't like to gossip.
CORA. It's what she did to *him*!
MYRA. What'd she do?
REBA. Do you believe in such things as witches?
MYRA. I'm one myself.
REBA. I mean real witches. The kind that cast evil spells.
CORA. And stick pins in their enemies to make them die.
REBA. They don't stick pins in their enemies, Cora! They stick pins in their enemies' picture or dolls that look like them.
CORA. Doesn't make any difference. They die anyhow.
MYRA. Is she that kind of witch?

REBA. Well, we can't prove it. And we certainly don't have witch trials anymore.
CORA. More's the pity. (*Confidentially.*) But when her husband died, they found his picture full of pins and needles.
MYRA. Didn't she like him?
REBA. They didn't speak for ten years.
CORA. Slept together, tho'.
MYRA. Why didn't they speak?
REBA. Oh, he did something spiteful. I don't like to talk about these things.
MYRA. What'd he do?
CORA. Flushed her goldfish down the toilet.
MYRA. Why?
REBA. Said he couldn't stand them staring at him.
CORA. I'd hate to be on the wrong side of her.
REBA. You can say that again.
CORA. I'd hate to be on the wrong side of her.
MYRA. Well, I must say you have interesting people here. How far is it to the dam?
REBA. What dam?
MYRA. Where the beavers are.
REBA. There are no beavers here.
MYRA. Then why is it called Beaver Haven?
REBA. It was named after an Indian.
CORA. Chief Big Beaver.
MYRA. (*Disappointed.*) And there aren't any little beavers?
CORA. There aren't even any Indians. Just a few skunk.
MYRA. Well, I wouldn't want to live in a place called Skunk Haven.
REBA. I just know you're going to love it here. And don't worry about Willa Mae.
CORA. Unless you give her your picture and some pins and needles.
REBA. (*Rises.*) Well, I know you want to get settled, so we'll leave.
CORA. Willa Mae not only has a bad temper, she has a bad dog. So don't walk past her place without a stick. (*Rises.*)
MYRA. I won't walk past her place at all. (*Rises.*)
CORA. Remember, if you need anything, I'm catty-cornered on Pussywillow.

REBA. And I'm right behind you. (*Stops at the door.*) Oh. One thing more. If a man knocks at your door—a man about six and a half feet, with stooped shoulders and a black beard and carrying an ax—don't let him in.

MYRA. I'm not bloody-well likely to.

CORA. That's Mister Piney.

REBA. He's an awful bore. Chops wood and sells manure.

CORA. Smells bad, too.

REBA. Let him in and you'll never get rid of him.

CORA. It's even harder to get rid of his smell. He traps skunks.

MYRA. Well, it's very kind of you to warn me about these things.

REBA. We're the Hospitality Ladies! (*They go out. Myra closes the door and stands for a moment blinking, as if to cast off the encounter. She crosses back and looks down at her recorder.*)

MYRA. You know, dear, I think you and I ought to have another talk. (*She turns on the recorder.*)

VOICE. Good morning, dear.

MYRA. It started out that way.

VOICE. What is your name, dear?

MYRA. Mudd.

VOICE. What are we here for, Myrtle dear?

MYRA. Dog dodging, witch hunting, and needlework.

VOICE. Just what kind of work are you going to do, dear?

MYRA. We just may write a book about the universality of insanity.

VOICE. Not "we," dear. You.

MYRA. No, we. I'm going to need help. (*She turns the machine off. Tom comes in carrying paper bags. He crosses to put groceries on table.*)

TOM. Who were the two biddies that just left?

MYRA. The Happiness Girls. They do a community commercial.

TOM. No—really?

MYRA. Neighbors. One's catty-cornered on Pussywillow and the other one's behind me.

TOM. You're in a bad spot.

MYRA. (*Crosses to him.*) You won't believe the people here. Do you know I've got a witch on my block?

TOM. I was married to one.

MYRA. Guess who Beaver Haven was named after?

TOM. Gloria DeHaven.

MYRA. An Indian. Chief Big Beaver. And talk about scandal! Guess what happened here?

TOM. Someone seduced the church organist with an apple. (*Sits.*)

MYRA. Would you believe a turkey and a nasty little boy?

TOM. Heaven help us! Isn't Thanksgiving sacred anymore?

MYRA. And you remember that house we passed on the corner with a plaster dwarf sitting on a toadstool?

TOM. You want one for Christmas?

MYRA. No! The woman who lives there stuck pins in her husband and killed him.

TOM. My ex-wife was always doing that. Only she used nails.

MYRA. You don't seem impressed.

TOM. I've been in television too long. (*Takes her hands.*) Sweetie, why don't you kick this compulsion and come back to the Coast with me? I don't have to pay alimony anymore. Let me make an honest woman of you.

MYRA. (*Puts her arms around his neck.*) Oh, Tom—we know each other too well. One marriage was enough for me, too. You want some advice? Never marry a man who looks at himself in the mirror before he says good morning or who gargles when you're putting on your eyelashes.

TOM. Thanks. If I ever marry a man, I'll make sure he doesn't gargle while I'm putting on my eyelashes.

MYRA. (*Kisses him on the forehead.*) You're a pussycat, Tom. And if I ever decided to make some man unhappy again, you'd be my first choice.

TOM. Well, you better hurry. I'm crowding the halfway mark. By the way—how old are you?

MYRA. Oh, let's just say I'm past puberty but this side of senility.

TOM. Well, if you won't work for me and you won't marry me, I might as well go. Can I drop in on you sometime when I'm East?

MYRA. Of course, sweetie. But remember, you're the only one who knows where I am. I've told everybody I've gone on a trip around the world.

TOM. Nobody goes around the world. Everybody's trying to get off. (*Kisses her.*) Well, take care and good luck.

MYRA. Drive carefully. (*She stands in the doorway, watching him go. She closes the door and crosses back to the table. She puts in a new cassette and sits down to record. She speaks into the hand microphone.*) Chapter One. "So Far—So Good." By Myra Mar-

lowe. I was born on a little farm in Iowa one lovely May morning in the year 1930. (*She pauses a moment.*) Change that. Make it 1932. (*Pauses again.*) On second thought, make it 1935. (*Behind her, the top part of the Dutch door opens suddenly and Cora sticks her head in.*)

CORA. Oh, Mrs. Durdle—I want you to know that I just talked to Willa Mae Wilcox. And it was a turkey. (*She closes the door just as quickly, as Myra sits blinking, the microphone in her hand.*)

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

PLACE: *The same*

TIME: *The next day*

AT RISE: *There is no one in the room as the curtain rises. The suitcases have been removed.*

The front doorbell chimes are heard to ring. When no one answers, the chimes are repeated.

The front door opens slowly and a tall, bearded man, in overalls and carrying an ax, enters. He looks around. He crosses to the kitchen door and peers in, dragging his ax across floor.

Myra comes down the stairs in a fresh house dress. She sees him suddenly and screams.

MYRA. Eeeek!

PINEY. Mornin', ma'am.

MYRA. Who are you?

PINEY. I'm Piney.

MYRA. Oh.

PINEY. I rang.

MYRA. I didn't hear you.

PINEY. Figured you didn't.

MYRA. I was upstairs.

PINEY. Figured you was.

MYRA. What can I do for you?

PINEY. (*Holds up ax.*) See this?

MYRA. (*Recoils.*) It's—it's an ax, isn't it.

PINEY. I chop wood.

MYRA. How nice. Out in the open air. And all that.

PINEY. Chop more'n any man in Bat Cave.

MYRA. Oh. Is that where you live?

PINEY. This side.

MYRA. Must be a lovely place. Well. So you chop wood.

PINEY. (*Raises ax.*) Need any?

MYRA. (*Backs off.*) Actually, I hadn't given it any thought. Yet. You see I only arrived yesterday.

PINEY. Don't see none.

MYRA. Neither do I. I suppose that's because it's spring and one doesn't burn wood until fall, does one?

PINEY. Costs more.

MYRA. Well, if you happen to have some with you, I'll take a few sticks.

PINEY. Ten bucks a cord.

MYRA. That seems reasonable enough. It isn't as if I were burning money. (*False laugh.*)

PINEY. Fifteen, come winter.

MYRA. Then I'd be prudent to buy it now, wouldn't you say? A penny saved, you know. I'll take ten dollars' worth.

PINEY. Dumped or stacked?

MYRA. Oh. Do I have to make a decision now?

PINEY. It's yore wood.

MYRA. Well, I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble. Whichever is easiest.

PINEY. You say.

MYRA. Stacked, then.

PINEY. Costs more.

MYRA. I thought it might. How much more?

PINEY. Two bits.

MYRA. I think I can swing it. We have a deal.

PINEY. And breakfast.

MYRA. Oh. Breakfast, too? Why is that?

PINEY. I come early.

MYRA. You do? All the way from Bat Cave? How early?

PINEY. Six.

MYRA. That's early. Couldn't you make it eight?

PINEY. Kill hogs at eight. (*Lifts ax.*)

MYRA. Afternoon is perfectly all right.
PINEY. Not fer me.
MYRA. Why not?
PINEY. I trap skunk.
MYRA. Anytime, then. Well, now that I've placed my order, I won't detain you. I have work to do. *(Sits at table.)*
PINEY. You work?
MYRA. I'm a writer.
PINEY. Horseback?
MYRA. Not a rider. A *writer*. I write.
PINEY. What?
MYRA. I'm writing a book. You've read a book, haven't you?
PINEY. *(Thinks.)* The Bible.
MYRA. Well, mine's historical, too. An autobiography.
PINEY. Auto-what?
MYRA. The story of my life.
PINEY. That's a story?
MYRA. It's rapidly getting to be. I'm afraid I can't talk to you any longer, Mister Piney.
PINEY. Why, you afraid?
MYRA. My arteries are hardening and time is running out. I'm sure you have someplace to go.
PINEY. Already went.
MYRA. Oh. I know. You're waiting to be paid! *(Rises.)*
PINEY. Wood ain't here yet.
MYRA. It doesn't matter. I'll pay you now so you can go. How do you want your money?
PINEY. *(Thinks.)* In my hand.
MYRA. I mean cash or check. *(Gets purse. Waits.)* You know what a check is, don't you?
PINEY. Shore. I'll check yore chimney. *(He goes to peer up fireplace.)*
MYRA. No—wait! Look, please don't bother.
PINEY. Needs cleaning.
MYRA. I'll call you.
PINEY. When?
MYRA. Next winter.
PINEY. Costs more.
MYRA. No matter. *(Extends bills.)* Here's your money.
PINEY. Cheaper now.

MYRA. It isn't that. I'm going to be very busy. And I'm sure it's time to kill your hogs. But you can bring the wood anytime.
(Crosses to open door.)
PINEY. Pine or spruce?
MYRA. Whichever is handy.
PINEY. Oak's good.
MYRA. Good. You can bring me oak.
PINEY. Dogwood's better.
MYRA. *(Crosses back to Piney.)* Mister Piney, it really doesn't matter.
PINEY. Shore does.
MYRA. Why! As long as it's wood, I couldn't care less.
PINEY. Dogwood dries, spruce sparks, oak smokes, and pine pops.
MYRA. *(Wearily.)* I'll take a little of each.
PINEY. Locust's better.
MYRA. Good. Then just bring me a cord of locust.
PINEY. Don't grow here.
MYRA. Really, Mister Piney, I've never been fussy about wood—pussywillow or dogwood. Just bring something that burns.
PINEY. All burn.
MYRA. Mister Piney, I'm sure they are worried sick about you back in Bat Cave—you've been gone so long. Now, I'm not going to be blamed for keeping you. *(Goes to door and opens it.)* I could talk to you all day, but I refuse to monopolize your time. You must leave now, before the pigs miss you. *(Shakes hands.)* It's been a pleasure to have met you. Good-bye.
PINEY. My pleasure. *(He goes out. Myra closes the door and leans against it with a sigh of relief. She crosses down to the table to dictate. She turns on the machine and speaks into the microphone.)*
MYRA. Now, where did I leave off. Oh, yes. I got born. *(Clears her throat.)* When I was still a baby, my mother took me to Hollywood . . . *(The top of the Dutch door pops open and Piney sticks his head in.)*
PINEY. Need manure?
MYRA. No!
PINEY. Got a garden?
MYRA. Later!
PINEY. Cheaper now.

MYRA. (*Punches off recorder.*) All right—all right. Bring me some manure.

PINEY. How much?

MYRA. A couple of pounds. I really don't care. (*Tries to close door.*)

PINEY. Six bucks a yard.

MYRA. Fine. Bring me a yard and a half of manure.

PINEY. Horse or cow?

MYRA. Reindeer—buffalo—it doesn't matter.

PINEY. Matters what you plant.

MYRA. Mister Piney. I'm a very nervous woman. If you don't close that door by the time I count three, they're going to hear me screaming all the way to Bat Cave. Do you want that?

PINEY. (*Thinks.*) Nope. (*He closes the door. Myra resumes her dictation.*)

MYRA. Until I was nine I played Baby John with a talking horse who was five years older than I was. When I could no longer play a boy, I was cast as Sis Sadie in "The Smithers Family." I sincerely pray that none of you are old enough to remember. I wore yellow pigtails, thick glasses, and a look of gleeful idiocy. There was even a Sis Sadie doll. You wound it up and its drawers fell off, which gives you a rough idea of the high level of comedy we provided. (*The front door chimes are heard. Myra sits without moving. They ring again. Then the bottom of the Dutch door opens and Willa Mae Wilcox, a furtive, birdlike, little woman enters uninvited.*)

WILLA. Mrs. Durdle?

MYRA. (*Rises.*) Who? Oh, yes?

WILLA. I'm Willa Mae Wilcox. (*Crosses to Myra.*)

MYRA. Oh. You must be the neighbor with the purple shutters.

WILLA. Am I interrupting anything?

MYRA. Well, as a matter of fact . . .

WILLA. (*Crosses to table and sits.*) I won't stay long.

MYRA. (*Shuts door.*) It's quite all right. Do come in. (*Joins her.*)

WILLA. I'd have come over sooner but the signs were wrong.

MYRA. The signs?

WILLA. Are you Pisces?

MYRA. Gemini.

WILLA. That's good. That's very, very good. We can become very

good friends. Very good. (*Crosses to door to listen.*) I think I was followed. No one likes me in this town.

MYRA. Oh, I'm sure you're wrong. (*There is an awkward moment of silence as Willa examines the room. Myra clears her throat as Willa sits again.*) That's a lovely dwarf in your front yard. Did you make it yourself?

WILLA. (*Rises.*) What dwarf?

MYRA. The one sitting on a toadstool.

WILLA. *That's a statue of my husband.*

MYRA. (*Rises.*) Oh. Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. That's the last thing in the world I'd want to do.

WILLA. You didn't offend me. My husband was a mental dwarf. Everything about him was little. I put the statue there to spite him. (*Sits on sofa.*)

MYRA. Mrs. Harper and Mrs. Gump mentioned something about him.

WILLA. What'd they say? (*Quickly rises again.*)

MYRA. Oh, only the nicest things. Would you like some tea?

WILLA. Never touch it except to tell fortunes.

MYRA. They mentioned that you were gifted, too.

WILLA. I'm not gifted. I'm occult. (*Sits again.*)

MYRA. That's what I meant.

WILLA. (*Truculently.*) I suppose you think that's foolish nonsense?

MYRA. Not at all! Some of my best friends are occult.

WILLA. What'd you think of Reba Harper?

MYRA. She seemed very pleasant.

WILLA. Did you trust her?

MYRA. Is there any reason not to?

WILLA. She's Scorpio. That's a scorpion. Would you trust a scorpion?

MYRA. She spoke very highly of you.

WILLA. (*Brightens.*) Did she? What'd she say? (*Moves closer to Myra.*)

MYRA. Oh. (*Flounders.*) Nice things. Very nice things. Very.

WILLA. *What things?*

MYRA. (*Still floundering.*) Oh, how much she admired you and how much she liked you.

WILLA. That's funny. (*Rises and paces.*)

MYRA. Why?

WILLA. We don't speak.

MYRA. Well, it wasn't anything specific. She gave that impression. But she did speak very highly of your needlework.

WILLA. May I see your hands?

MYRA. My hands?

WILLA. Your hands! Those things hanging at your sides. (*Crosses to Myra.*)

MYRA. Oh. These? Of course.

WILLA. I'd like to see them. Palms up.

MYRA. (*Extends her hands.*) Do you read palms?

WILLA. (*Pulls Myra to her feet.*) I read palms—tea leaves—fortunes—dreams—cards—coffee grounds—the past—the future—and spider webs.

MYRA. Must keep you busy.

WILLA. (*Almost touching Myra's palms with her nose.*) Ah ha!

MYRA. What do you see?

WILLA. I thought so.

MYRA. What?

WILLA. How old are you?

MYRA. Well, I voted for Dewey.

WILLA. Spread your fingers.

MYRA. (*She does.*) Are you on to something?

WILLA. Were you near death in 1959?

MYRA. No. Why?

WILLA. That's where your lifeline stops. According to your hand, you should be dead. Let's see your other hand.

MYRA. I'm left handed. Does it matter?

WILLA. Not to me. Oh. Here it is. Your lifeline picks up in this hand. (*Puts her nose into Myra's other palm and clucks.*) Tch.

Tch. Tch!

MYRA. Something bad?

WILLA. Do you know Macbeth?

MYRA. Macbeth who?

WILLA.

"Here's the smell of blood still:

And all the perfumes of Arabia

Will not sweeten this little hand."

MYRA. (*Takes her hand away and peers into it.*) Where do you see blood? Is someone going to be murdered?

WILLA. (*Abruptly.*) What time is it?

MYRA. Pacific, Standard, or Mountain?

WILLA. It doesn't matter. I've a clock in my head. (*Jumps up.*) It's time for my seance. I'm calling my husband back.

MYRA. I thought you didn't speak.

WILLA. We didn't. But he forgot to tell me where he hid the deed to the house.

MYRA. (*Rises.*) But you're leaving me with a murder on my hands!

WILLA. I'll be back after I talk to my husband. (*Goes to kitchen door.*) I'll just sneak out the back door. Too many people around here are nose-y. "Out! Damned spot." (*Explains.*) That's Shakespeare. (*Waves.*) *Auf Wiedersehen.* That's German. (*Disappears.*)

MYRA. She's crazy. Right out of Bat Cave. (*She looks at her hands*

and then dismisses the encounter with a shrug.) This part of my life just might prove the most interesting. (*Picks up the microphone and starts dictating again.*)

After playing that silly Sister Sadie for several centuries—that's a time lapse, not a studio—I was cast . . . (*The doorbell chimes ring.*)

Oh, come on, now. This has to come to a screaming halt! (*Calls.*) Come in! (*Cora enters in an aura of doom. She has obviously been crying.*)

CORA. Could I see you for a moment? (*Stifles a sob.*)

MYRA. Of course. (*Rises.*) Is something wrong?

CORA. (*Crosses and sits.*) Do you have a handkerchief?

MYRA. (*Reaches across table.*) Will Kleenex do?

CORA. Thank you. (*Blows her nose loudly.*)

MYRA. What's happened? (*At the first sign of sympathy, Cora breaks down completely. She buries her head on the table and sobs. Myra looks around helplessly.*)

Would you like a drink?

CORA. (*Looks up eagerly.*) Got any Scotch?

MYRA. Well, you're lucky. I just happen to have a bottle. (*Gets bottle from cabinet.*)

Keep it around for snakes. Makes 'em sicker'n a dog. (*Hands her bottle and glass.*) Want water?

CORA. Never touch it. (*Downs jiggerful in one gulp.*)

MYRA. You're so right. Water is fine if you're a goldfish.

CORA. (*Holds up bottle.*) May I?

MYRA. The bottle's full. (*Sits.*)

CORA. I'm really a teetotaler. (*Downs another.*)

MYRA. I can see.

CORA. I hope you don't mind my bothering you, but I had to talk to someone and you're just catty-cornered.

MYRA. On Pussywillow. I remember. What seems to be wrong?

CORA. (*Holds up bottle again.*) May I?

MYRA. It's your stomach.

CORA. (*Helps herself.*) Do you know I have no close friends? No one I can really talk to?

MYRA. Oh, I'm sure you have lots of friends. Your neighbor, Willa Mae Wilcox, said some very, very nice things about you.

CORA. *What things?*

MYRA. Oh—your flower bed. What happened?

CORA. You won't believe me.

MYRA. I promise you I will. I believe anything.

CORA. You won't tell Reba Harper, will you?

MYRA. Scout's honor.

CORA. Oh, I'm just too humiliated to talk about it. (*Rises and walks away.*)

MYRA. Have another drink.

CORA. (*Returns quickly.*) Well, if you insist. (*Obliges.*) I knew you were real the moment I met you. (*Sits beside Myra.*)

MYRA. A real what?

CORA. A real human being. Understanding.

MYRA. Well, I can't be understanding until you give me something to understand.

CORA. My husband hit me! (*Breaks into sobs again.*)

MYRA. (*Waits a sympathetic moment.*) Hard?

CORA. (*Nods.*) Right in the mouth. (*Purses her lips.*) Are my lips swollen?

MYRA. Not yet. Did he use his fist?

CORA. Oh, Wentworth would never use his fist!

MYRA. What'd he use? A frying pan?

CORA. His newspaper. The Beaver Haven *Herald*. Can you imagine?!

MYRA. Yes. It could have been the *Sunday Times*. That could knock your brains out.

CORA. And I didn't do a thing!

MYRA. Well, you must have *said* something.

CORA. I didn't say a word. I just threw a cup of coffee in his face.

MYRA. Before or after?

CORA. Before.

MYRA. Why?

CORA. He called me a name.

MYRA. What?

CORA. (*Rises.*) I don't know you well enough. (*Walks away.*)

MYRA. Have a drink. (*Myra crosses to her with bottle.*)

CORA. Just a splash. (*Helps herself.*) I think my bridge is broken. (*Sits again.*)

MYRA. (*Follows.*) Now. What'd he call you?

CORA. Oh, I just couldn't say it.

MYRA. Try. I've heard everything.

CORA. I'll write it on a piece of paper. (*Crosses to table and writes note.*) Don't say I didn't warn you.

MYRA. Do you think I should lock the doors?

CORA. I hope you can read my handwriting? (*Hands slip of paper over.*)

MYRA. (*Reads it.*) Oh, *that*. Well, it's true of all females. At least anthropologically.

CORA. But I'm his wife!

MYRA. What did you do to provoke him?

CORA. Not a thing. When he refused to eat my soup, I called him a name.

MYRA. What?

CORA. Oh, I don't know you well enough. (*Rises and walks away again.*)

MYRA. (*Follows with pencil and paper.*) Write it.

CORA. I'm not sure of the spelling. (*Writes.*) I heard a man call another man this in the movies. They say anything nowadays. (*Hands over paper.*) Don't look at me while you read it.

MYRA. (*Turns head away to read it.*) I think it should be hyphenated.

CORA. But you know what it means, don't you?

MYRA. Oh, I go to the movies, too. (*Leans forward.*) Is he?

CORA. When you're mad it doesn't matter. (*Sits.*)

MYRA. Well, now we're getting down to the real nitty-gritty. What started it? (*Sits beside her again.*)

CORA. He lost his temper because there was a fly in his soup.

MYRA. What'd he want? A butterfly?

CORA. If he'd put up the screens like I asked, there wouldn't be flies in the house. What can I do?!

MYRA. Strain the soup and give it to him again.

CORA. No. I'm never going back. (*Rises and paces.*)

MYRA. Where will you go?
CORA. Could I stay here with you a few days?
MYRA. You mean—*move in*? (Rises.)
CORA. I won't be in the way. (Begins to feel effect of Scotch.)
MYRA. But—but you didn't bring your toothbrush.
CORA. I'll use my finger. (Her little finger brushes her teeth.)
MYRA. Well, I really don't think it would work out, Mrs. Gump.
CORA. Why not?
MYRA. Well, for one thing—I don't have any room.
CORA. You've got an extra bedroom by the back stairs.
MYRA. Oh, that. Well, that's being used.
CORA. For what? (Takes another drink.)
MYRA. My—my sister is using that.
CORA. You've got a sister?
MYRA. Ever since she was born. (Crosses to Cora.)
CORA. Where'd she come from?
MYRA. Oh, now, Mrs. Gump—surely you know where little babies come from.
CORA. (Laughs.) Why haven't we seen her?
MYRA. She never leaves her room.
CORA. Oh. Is she an invalid?
MYRA. Well, yes and no.
CORA. Why can't she leave her room?
MYRA. (Leads Cora to sofa.) Well, it's hard to explain. But I'll try. You see, when she was about ten, a horse threw her on her head. She stayed a little girl in the body of a woman.
CORA. Is she violent?
MYRA. Only to strangers.
CORA. (Pats Myra's hand.) Why, you poor woman. I thought there was something odd about you. I said to myself the minute I met you—there's something odd about her—there's something very odd about her.
MYRA. You can say that again.
CORA. I just did. What's her name?
MYRA. My sister? Oh. Sadie. Sis Sadie.
CORA. Could I meet her?
MYRA. Oh, I wouldn't dare.
CORA. Does she go out?
MYRA. I couldn't risk it.
CORA. What does she do all day?

MYRA. Oh, she has a pair of scissors. I give her the newspaper and she enjoys cutting people's heads off.
CORA. Oh, good heavens. I can see why you'd want to be alone. (Rises.) Well, I certainly wouldn't dream of imposing on you. (Sees Scotch.) May I have one more for the road?
MYRA. (Rises.) Take the bottle. (Hands it to her.)
CORA. Just a trickle to oil the tonsils. (Downs a jigger.) You're a saint. A living saint. I like you.
MYRA. That's nice.
CORA. Very much. (Comes back.)
MYRA. Thank you. (Leads Cora toward door.)
CORA. Very, very, very much. (She weaves slightly.)
MYRA. You'll understand now if I don't seem very sociable.
CORA. Don't you say that! Don't you put yourself down. You know what you are?
MYRA. I sometimes wonder.
CORA. A living saint. (She starts up the stairs.)
MYRA. No—no. This way out. (Holds door open.)
CORA. Good-bye, dear. Thank you for the tea. (She goes out and Myra closes the door and crosses back down to the table.)
MYRA. Oh, boy, now I've done it. (Sighs.) Well, maybe I'll get some privacy. (Sits down to dictate again. Picks up microphone.) The next role I was asked to play was— (The telephone rings beside her.) Now what?! (Picks up receiver.) Obscene Answering Service. Who? Oh. Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Harper, I didn't know anyone knew my number. Yes, I like pie. Why? Oh, now, please—I couldn't let you do that. I'll come over and get it later. Well, if you insist. Bring it over while it's hot. No, that's my trouble—I'm not doing a thing. All right—just come on in. (Hangs up.) Damn it! I've got to put a stop to this. (Looks at her receiver.) Well, I've stuck my toe in the water—I might as well dive. (She puts in the new cassette and starts it. She times herself by her wrist watch. After a moment she stands back and calls in a loud voice.) SISTER! SISTER MYRTLE! (She mouths an answer silently, then shouts again.) I GOT MY DOOR UNLOCKED! I GOT OUT! (Again she mouths something silently before she speaks again.) YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE DOWN THERE THAT'S COME TO PUT ME AWAY. (Counts silently.) IF ANYONE'S DOWN THERE, I'LL KILL THEM, I'LL CUT THEIR EARS OFF! I'VE GOT MY SCISSORS! (Smiling smugly,

Myra turns off the machine. She rewinds the tape. She then turns to a chest and takes out a blonde braided wig, a pair of glasses, a set of buckteeth, and a gingham apron. She takes these upstairs. After a moment, the front door opens and Reba enters, carrying a pie and knitting bag.)

REBA. Yoo-hoo! It's me. *(Goes to foot of stairs.)* Oh, Mrs. Durdle? Where are you?

MYRA. *(Off stage.)* I'll be right down. Make yourself at home. *(Reba puts her pie on the table. She opens her knitting bag and begins to knit. Myra comes down the stairs.)* Sorry, but I had to take care of my sister.

REBA. You've got a sister visiting you?

MYRA. My sister Sadie. Oh. Is this the pie?

REBA. Gooseberry. You never mentioned a sister.

MYRA. I don't—usually. It's still warm, isn't it?

REBA. Does she live with you?

MYRA. Oh, you wrote "Myrtle" in the crust!

REBA. Is she upstairs?

MYRA. *(Nods.)* No one ever wrote my name in dough before!

REBA. Why don't you invite her down to have a piece of pie?

MYRA. She'd eat the whole thing. Are they your own gooseberries? Do you peel them?

REBA. *(Laughs mirthlessly.)* Oh, nobody peels a gooseberry.

MYRA. My sister does.

REBA. That's odd behavior. Is she pregnant?

MYRA. Heavens no. She still plays with dolls.

REBA. How old is she?

MYRA. My age.

REBA. And she plays with dolls? That's unusual.

MYRA. Not for her. You see, the poor dear fell off a horse when we were children. After that, she only grew physically. You know, I think I'll eat a piece of that pie right now!

REBA. *(Rises.)* I knew there was something tragic in your life. I said to myself the moment I met you—there's something tragic in that woman's life.

MYRA. Oh, it's not too bad. As long as I keep strangers out of sight. She only got out once. We had to move. Do you bake your own bread?

REBA. Oh, you don't fool me, Mrs. Durdle.

MYRA. I must be a lousy actress.

REBA. You're hiding from the world. Tied hand and foot. And you didn't want us to discover the truth about you!

MYRA. Mrs. Harper, you've put your finger on something.

REBA. No one to talk to. Your life destroyed by a horse. Well, dear, you can pour out your heart to me. I've brought my knitting and me and you are going to spend the whole day here talking about your problem.

MYRA. Oh, it's really no problem. It's like being the keeper of a beautiful tiger. As long as it's caged, there's no problem.

REBA. I know my Christian duty. *(Gets out her knitting again and pats Myra's hand.)* Cry if you feel like it.

MYRA. I do. *(Stares at her helplessly.)* Will you excuse me a moment? *(Picks up her recorder.)* I'll just put the pie in the kitchen. *(Picks up pie also.)* I won't be a minute.

REBA. Take your time. *(Myra goes into the kitchen. Reba talks to the kitchen door.)* You shouldn't ought to feel badly, Mrs. Durdle. This sort of thing happens in the best of families. Particularly around Boston. We had a case just like yours right here in Beaver Haven in 1946. No—it was 1947, because that was a bad year for tomatoes. A family named Plank moved here from Duck Pond. Sabrina Plank—that was Leslie's wife—she was a Pepper before she was a Plank—she had this boy they called Splinter. Anyhow, he fell out of this butternut tree—and landed right on his head. Doctor Greenleaf—he's dead now—he put a steel plate in the boy's head. Electricity gave him a headache. But he developed the loveliest complexion. That happens sometimes. I think I'd trade what brains I've got for a good complexion, any day. *(She looks up from her knitting as Myra returns rather breathlessly from upstairs.)* Oh. I thought you were in the kitchen.

MYRA. I took my sister a piece of pie. *(She glances toward the stairs and then at her wrist watch.)*

REBA. I've got our whole day planned. I'll fix your lunch and your dinner, too. I do wonderful things with beans. *(Before Myra can answer, the Voice is heard from the recorder upstairs.)*

VOICE. SISTER? SISTER MYRTLE!

MYRA. *(Rises.)* Oh, I must have forgotten to latch the door!

VOICE. I GOT MY DOOR UNLOCKED. I GOT OUT.

MYRA. Oh, good heavens! I'll have to catch her before she gets to us.

VOICE. YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE DOWN THERE THAT'S COME TO PUT ME AWAY.

MYRA. There's no one down here, dear. (*Warns Reba to be silent.*)

VOICE. IF ANYONE'S DOWN THERE, I'LL KILL THEM. I'LL CUT THEIR EARS OFF! I'VE GOT MY SCISSORS!

MYRA. (*To Reba.*) And she will, too. (*Calls up.*) I'm coming up, dear. Don't you run down the back steps. (*To Reba.*) Fortunately, I studied judo. (*Starts for stairs.*) Just make yourself at home. I'll only be a few minutes. With luck. (*She goes up the stairs. Reba rises and goes to the foot of the stairs to listen. She hears a scream from above. She crosses D. to the table and starts putting her knitting away. She picks up the scrap of paper on which Cora had written the words she couldn't say. She reads them and gasps, shocked. She hastens to the telephone and dials. While she waits, she dashes to bottom of stairs to look up and then back to telephone.*)

REBA. Hello, Cora. Are you sitting down? Then sit. I've got something terrible to tell you. I'm over at Mrs. Durdle's. When you met her, did you think there was something odd about her? Oh, you did. Well, I know why. Do you know she has a crazy sister she hides up in the attic?! Oh, you do? Well, do you remember those murders up in Boston the police could never solve? Wait a minute. (*Goes to stairs, listens and returns.*) Those murders were committed with a pair of scissors! Wait a minute. (*Listens at stairs and returns.*) It wouldn't surprise me if this crazy sister did it, and Mrs. Durdle is hiding her here. I said to myself the moment I met her—she's hiding something. Oh, you did, too? But listen—that's not all. Wait a minute. (*Listens at foot of stairs and returns to phone.*) Cora—you won't believe what I found here. Dirty words written on pieces of paper! For heaven's sake, Cora, you don't think I'm going to repeat them over a party line, do you?! Willa Mae Wilcox may be listening in. (*Shouts.*) If you're listening in, Willa Mae, you might as well hang up. It's not about you. Did you hear a click? I did, too. Well, the words are—wait a minute. (*To stairs and back.*) The first word is— (*Whispers inaudibly.*) I'm not going to shout it—it's too embarrassing. Look—I'll bring them over to your house. I just hope I'm not run over and have them found on my body. Stay there. (*Hangs up. Paces for a moment. And then when her back is turned, the "phantom sister"*

leaps out of the kitchen with a blood-curdling shriek, brandishing her scissors. Reba screams and gets behind a chair. Myra [*Sadie*] is dressed in the fright wig, glasses, buck teeth and gingham, looking rather wild-eyed.)

MYRA [*SADIE*]. I caught you!

REBA. Oh, (*Backs away.*) you must be the pretty little sister I've heard so much about.

MYRA [*SADIE*]. What are you doing here?

REBA. I'm a friend of your sister. Mrs. Durdle. Mrs. Myrtle Durdle.

MYRA [*SADIE*]. No, you're not!

REBA. Yes, I am. I brought her a gooseberry pie. (*Keeps the table between them.*)

MYRA [*SADIE*]. I hate gooseberry pie.

REBA. I didn't know. I'm sorry.

MYRA [*SADIE*]. I know who you are! (*Stalks her.*)

REBA. I'm Reba Harper. I'm a den mother.

MYRA [*SADIE*]. You've come to take me away.

REBA. To a picnic! Would you like to go on a picnic, sweetheart? (*Calls.*) Mrs. Durdle!

MYRA [*SADIE*]. I locked her in the bathroom.

REBA. Now, that wasn't very nice. And you're a nice girl. Would you like to play tiddledywinks?

MYRA [*SADIE*]. (*Holds up scissors.*) Know what I'm going to do with these?

REBA. Nothing bad, I'm sure. You're too sweet and pretty to do anything bad. Do you like pumpkin pie?

MYRA [*SADIE*]. I'm going to cut your ears off.

REBA. Mrs. Durdle! (*Backs toward door.*) Don't you come near me!

MYRA [*SADIE*]. Snip! Snip! (*Waves her scissors.*) No use running. I can run faster than you can.

REBA. (*Backs up to the door.*) Oh, no you can't. You keep away from me, you nasty, crazy girl! (*Myra [*Sadie*] lunges at her.*)

HELP! HELP! MURDER! FIRE! FIRE! HELP! (*She gets the door open and escapes. Myra [*Sadie*] pulls her wig off and faces audience.*)

MYRA. Sister Sadie rides again! Best damn performance I ever gave. Snip! Snip!

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

TIME: *A couple of months later*

PLACE: *The same*

AT RISE: *The living room is empty. The door chimes ring. After a second ring. Tom Lamont enters. Gay music is heard from the radio. He turns it off.*

TOM. Anybody home? (*Waits.*) Star of stage, screen, television and Beaver Haven? (*Waits.*) Myra? Myrtle Durdle? It's lover boy. (*Waits.*) Come out—come out—wherever you are! (*Waits.*) Your house is on fire. (*Looks in kitchen.*) Where the hell is she? (*Looks at pile of cassettes on table.*) At least she's been working. (*Looks around furtively and inserts one in the machine.*)

VOICE. SISTER! SISTER MYRTLE!

TOM. I'll join you. (*Cups his hand and calls upstairs.*) Oh, Sister Myrtle!

VOICE. I GOT MY DOOR UNLOCKED. I GOT OUT.

TOM. Then come on down. I'm waiting.

VOICE. YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE DOWN THERE THAT'S COME TO PUT ME AWAY.

TOM. Sure. *Me.* In a TV series.

VOICE. IF ANYONE'S DOWN THERE, I'LL KILL THEM. I'LL CUT THEIR EARS OFF. I'VE GOT MY SCISSORS.

TOM. What the hell's going on here? (*Myra enters from the kitchen. She has been gardening and is dressed for the occasion. She carries a trowel in her white gloves. She wears a picture hat and is also carrying a basket.*)

MYRA. Tom! (*She quickly turns off the tape machine.*) What are you doing here?

TOM. (*Points to recorder.*) Would you mind explaining what that is all about?

MYRA. It's too complicated. Where'd you come from?

TOM. New York. I called at least twenty times. No answer.

MYRA. Oh, I don't answer the phone anymore.

TOM. Then why have you got it?

MYRA. Someone might call. (*Sits.*) What brought you East?

TOM. You. (*Points to recorder.*) Will you please explain that?

MYRA. Oh, the first month I was here people kept bothering me, so I invented a dangerous, half-witted sister. When anyone barges in, I turn it on upstairs and answer it down here, and it scares away visitors.

TOM. It almost scared me away. Getting any work done?

MYRA. Every morning. I'm up to my wedding night.

TOM. What are you made up for? Little Bo-Peep?

MYRA. (*Archly, takes hat off.*) I was gardening. Ten-thirty is my tomato break. (*Sits on sofa.*)

TOM. I knew you weren't Joan of Arc. She didn't wear a hat.

MYRA. You wouldn't expect me to dig in a Dior, would you?

TOM. You—I would. And with a flashlight. At night.

MYRA. Oh, Tom, it's so wonderful to plant a seed and see it grow. Pushing its little head up through the earth and reaching out its arms to the sun. And then one morning at dawn, with stars still shining, you go out to spray and there is a little baby tomato.

TOM. You make it sound like the nativity.

MYRA. I can't tell you how rewarding it is to grow things. And tonight, I'm eating my first tomato out of my very own garden. (*She lifts a very small pink tomato out of her large gardening basket.*) If you want to stay for dinner, I'll share it with you.

TOM. That's your entire crop?

MYRA. I put in too much manure. The plants all went to leaves. But I'm learning.

TOM. I'll bet it cost you at least fifteen dollars to grow that one tomato.

MYRA. Eighteen. But what's money? You can't eat it. And you can't buy the joy I get in looking at my beautiful green tomato plants even if there aren't any tomatoes on them.

TOM. (*Rises and paces.*) Oh, Myra, why are you wasting your time and talent here when you could be doing something really important?

MYRA. (*Looking at tomato.*) I wish I had *two*. I could put up some catsup!

TOM. And that's why I'm here. CBS wants you for a terrific new series.

MYRA. Did you know about rotenone? It's non-chemical but bugs just hate it.

TOM. It's a sensational idea. There's never been anything like it before on television.

MYRA. There's nothing like rotenone on bugs. It's sensational. Kills aphids—beetles—white fly—cutworm—you name it and it's dead. (*Pats her tomato.*)

TOM. CBS thinks so much of this new idea that they're putting fifteen writers on it. That's two more than the President has.

MYRA. Now, you take manure. I thought it would be better if it were fresh. Everything else is. But, no! It burns the tender little sprouts. I murdered my poor little beans.

TOM. (*Confronts her.*) To hell with your beans! Listen to what they've come up with. Every actress in Hollywood is going to want to cut her throat when they hear you've got the role!

MYRA. Well, that makes it tempting.

TOM. This is a character you believe. She's real. You love her. You identify with her. (*Sits besides her.*)

MYRA. Mary Magdalene?

TOM. Naw—the Bible is dead as box office. This is *today*. And what today is all about. It's *now*.

MYRA. Animal, vegetable, or mineral?

TOM. Crime. It's everywhere. So you start off with a built-in audience. But it's a male audience. So you know how we hook a female audience? Guess what our protagonist is? Think *big*.

MYRA. (*Thinks.*) A lady gorilla?

TOM. You're a *detective*. The first female detective we've had on television.

MYRA. That came out of fifteen writers? It only took twelve to write the Bible.

TOM. Oh, but you haven't heard the best part.

MYRA. Go ahead. I've heard the worst.

TOM. You're blind!

MYRA. You're kidding.

TOM. (*Paces.*) It's a fantastic idea! Dig this! (*He acts "blind."*) You've been blind since childhood. So you've had to develop your sense of touch—your sense of smell and your sense of hearing. You see things that escape other people. You're an inspiration to the handicapped and Women's Lib. And we start but with built-in sympathy. Who could hate a blind woman detective?

MYRA. I could.

TOM. They'll give you Fort Knox.

MYRA. They should.

TOM. Nothing will be spared!

MYRA. Except me.

TOM. It's got universal appeal. It doesn't offend *anyone*.

MYRA. Except the blind.

TOM. It's got to be a winner! It doesn't alienate—it's not controversial—it shuns touchy subjects and skirts involvement.

MYRA. Who'd sponser a program like that? United Nations?

TOM. We've already got a sponsor. Hallmark.

MYRA. Hallmark! I'm giving up wrapping paper.

TOM. They're no fools. It opens up another market. Christmas cards in Braille.

MYRA. I'm giving up Christmas cards.

TOM. In other words, it doesn't grab you.

MYRA. That's the understatement of the year.

TOM. Stinks, doesn't it?

MYRA. You know it does.

TOM. I agree. It's the lousiest idea anyone ever had.

MYRA. Then why did you bother to tell me?

TOM. (*Sits and takes her hand.*) Myra, I'd do anything to get you back on the Coast. I miss you like hell. I knew you wouldn't go for it but I thought, at least, I'd try.

MYRA. Tom, you dear, sweet nut—I'm touched and flattered. But I'm out of that weird world of insanity. I have everything I want here.

TOM. Spurned for a tomato.

MYRA. I'm through with show business once and for all. Do you know what I did yesterday? (*Rises.*)

TOM. Sprayed your garden for cut-worms.

MYRA. I took all of my old costumes and wigs—and buried them out in the backyard.

TOM. Always the actress!

MYRA. I know but I wanted it to be symbolic. That part of my life is over. Buried. May it rest in peace.

TOM. Did you give your own eulogy?

MYRA. I would have but it started to rain. Now, tell me about yourself. Are you still seeing that horrible blonde with the lisp? (*She lisps.*)

TOM. (*Annoyed.*) She does not have a lisp! (*Pause.*) It's just a slight whistle.

MYRA. You ought to grab her. Comes in handy for calling waiters, dogs and taxis.

TOM. *(Rises and moves away from her.)* Why are you always so bitchy about the women who find me irresistible!

MYRA. Because you always throw yourself away on such vacuous little nitwits. You're too good for that.

TOM. I agree with you. But I'm a sexy Boy Scout.

MYRA. The pity is I didn't meet you when I was nineteen. I could have made something out of you.

TOM. Yeah—an alcoholic. Well, since you won't be my wife or a blind detective, I might as well get back to my whistling blonde.

MYRA. Are you sure you don't want to stay for dinner and share my tomato?

TOM. Share your life with me and you've got a deal.

MYRA. Oh, Tom, I'm not nineteen, I'm not blonde and I can't whistle.

TOM. Are you really happy here?

MYRA. Absolutely.

TOM. No problems?

MYRA. When your life is simple, your problems are simple.

TOM. And you couldn't use a man around the house?

MYRA. Not a Tom-cat.

TOM. In that case, I'll leave you to your rural paradise. May you stagnate in grace and beauty.

MYRA. I'll walk you to the car so the neighbors will see you haven't left me in bed. *(They go out. After a moment, a knock is heard from the kitchen. Another moment passes and Piney enters from the kitchen with a gunny sack.)*

PINEY. You in? *(Goes to foot of stairs.)* You out? *(Looks around.)* You here? *(He goes back into the kitchen. Myra returns. She crosses down to the table and stands for a moment smiling to herself.)*

MYRA. *(Derisively.)* A blind female detective! *(She closes her eyes and assumes the role.)* Don't anybody leave this room! I'll know at once. I can hear a pin drop. Somebody drop a pin. *(Extends her arms blindly and staggers left.)* The weapon was a thirty-two bazooka! *(Sniffs.)* I know the smell of a bazooka. *(Piney re-enters and stands watching.)* One of you is guilty. I will detect the criminal by his body temperature. I'll examine you first, sir. *(Runs her hands carefully over the arms and back of a chair.)* You are a chair. But beware! *(Moves near Piney—eyes closed.)* My famous nose will smell you out! *(Sniffs toward Piney.)*

Did someone bring a horse in here? *(Opens her eyes and sees Piney.)* Oh!

PINEY. Play-actin'?

MYRA. Yes. No. What are you doing here?

PINEY. Watchin' you.

MYRA. What do you want?

PINEY. Nothin'.

MYRA. Then why are you here?

PINEY. You like nuts?

MYRA. Some of my best friends— *(Doesn't finish.)* What kind?

PINEY. Hickory.

MYRA. Where'd you get them?

PINEY. Hickory tree. *(Holds up sack.)*

MYRA. Well, I really don't know what I'd do with that many nuts.

PINEY. Stuff a turkey.

MYRA. Somehow, I wish you hadn't said that.

PINEY. Want 'em?

MYRA. Well, I couldn't take them for nothing. You must let me give you something. *(Moves to get purse.)*

PINEY. What?

MYRA. Would you consider a dollar insulting?

PINEY. Shore would.

MYRA. Too little?

PINEY. Too much.

MYRA. Well, give me a rough estimate of their worth.

PINEY. Two bits.

MYRA. I believe, with the jet set, that's a quarter. *(Hands him coin.)* Is that enough?

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA. But didn't you say that was all they were worth?

PINEY. Yep.

MYRA. Then what do I owe you more money for?

PINEY. *(Points.)* Gunny sack.

MYRA. Oh. I thought there'd be fringe benefits. What do I owe you for the gunny sack?

PINEY. Dime.

MYRA. *(Peers into purse.)* I don't seem to have a dime in change. Would you take an air-mail stamp?

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA. You could write someone.
PINEY. Can't write.
MYRA. Well, why don't you empty your nuts into the dishwasher and keep your gunny sack? Now, you'll have to excuse me. I have to get to work. *(She works on papers at desk until she notices Piney hasn't moved.)* Now, what?!

PINEY. Need manure?
MYRA. No—I think I have a couple of handfuls left.
PINEY. Got a hammer?
MYRA. A hammer? What do I need a hammer for?
PINEY. Crack nuts.
MYRA. I'll find a rock.
PINEY. Want my ax?
MYRA. Really, Mister Piney—I'll find some way of cracking them.
PINEY. I'll help. *(Sits. Starts cracking nuts with his teeth. Note: Partly cracked nuts should be used.)*
MYRA. Mister Piney, you'll ruin your teeth!
PINEY. Haven't yet.
MYRA. *(Crosses to him.)* Mister Piney, I appreciate getting all this service for two bits but I've more important things to do. *(Holds up a sheet of paper.)*
PINEY. Go ahead.
MYRA. I can't be creative with you sitting next to me, grinding your molars.
PINEY. Why not?
MYRA. Mister Piney, you haven't met my sister, have you?
PINEY. Can't say.
MYRA. You'd remember. She lives with me. I keep her locked up. Do you wonder why?
PINEY. Nope.
MYRA. Then I'll tell you. She had an accident when she was a girl and she's never been quite the same. Do you know what I mean?
PINEY. Nope.
MYRA. Well, she's dangerous. To strangers. She cut a man's ear off once.
PINEY. *(Pause.)* Which one?
MYRA. I hate to think what would happen if she got loose. *(Looks at recorder.)* Excuse me. I'll go up and make sure she's asleep.
PINEY. *(Rises.)* Need help?

MYRA. No. You'd frighten her. You stay here with your nuts. *(She picks up the recorder and a cassette and goes upstairs. Piney watches her go up the stairs, smiling back at him. He goes to her table and picks up a sheet of her written notes. He stands for a long time scrutinizing it—then turns it upside down—obviously he cannot read either. He puts it back as he hears Myra returning.)*
Oh, are you still here?
PINEY. Ain't went.
MYRA. How's the hog-killing job?
PINEY. Lousy.
MYRA. And the skunk trapping?
PINEY. Stinks. *(Piney gives a loud "haw" at his own wit.)*
MYRA. I wish I'd said that. *(From above, the recorded voice is heard.)*
VOICE. SISTER? SISTER MYRTLE!
MYRA. That's me. *(Points upstairs.)* And that's my sister.
VOICE. I GOT MY DOOR UNLOCKED. I GOT OUT.
MYRA. Oh, my heavens! Did you hear that? She got out.
VOICE. YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE DOWN THERE THAT'S COME TO PUT ME AWAY.
MYRA. She must have heard you cracking nuts.
VOICE. IF ANYONE'S DOWN THERE, I'LL KILL THEM. I'LL CUT THEIR EARS OFF. I'VE GOT MY SCISSORS.
MYRA. Thank heavens I have some *Band-Aids*. *(Calls up.)* Stay where you are, dear, I'll be right up. *(To Piney.)* You better go while you can, Mister Piney. *(Starts for stairs.)* I'll try to catch her. *(Starts up.)* If she comes out of the kitchen—run out the front door. *(She opens door for him and goes upstairs. Piney sits, instead, and cracks a few more nuts with his teeth. He tires of this and looks around for an implement. He picks up a flower vase and decides against it. He goes into the kitchen and returns with his ax. He lines some nuts up on the table, not unlike an assembly line, and proceeds to crack them with his ax. He discovers he has scarred the table and puts papers over the telltale marks. He cuts his finger on the ax and wipes the blood on the blade. He shrugs and notices the rocker. He sits down and, placing nuts under the rocker, he rocks back and forth, breaking nuts until Myra [Sadie] enters stealthily behind him, dressed as her unfortunate sister.)*
MYRA [SADIE]. *(Shouts.)* Ah ha!
PINEY. *(Looks up.)* Hi.

MYRA [SADIE] What are you doing here?!

PINEY. Crackin' nuts.

MYRA [SADIE]. Get out of here!

PINEY. Why?

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Raises scissors.*) I'll cut your ears off.

PINEY. Reckon not. (*Rocks.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. What's going to stop me?

PINEY. Me.

MYRA [SADIE]. Aren't you afraid of me?

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA [SADIE]. You better be. (*She advances on him, waving her scissors as he continues to rock. Piney reaches out quickly and grabs her wrist. He takes the scissors away from her and pushes her down into the rocker.*) Give me back my scissors!

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA [SADIE]. I'll bite you.

PINEY. I'll bite back. (*She starts to rise. Piney pushes her down.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. You stop that!

PINEY. You stop.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Considers.*) Look—I've changed my mind. I'll go back up to my room and tell my sister to come down.

PINEY. Nope. (*Stands guard over her.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. You going to hold me here?

PINEY. Yep.

MYRA [SADIE]. My sister may not come back.

PINEY. Why not?

MYRA [SADIE]. Oh, lots of reasons. I'll go find her for you. (*Rises.*)

PINEY. Nope. (*Pushes her back.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. Please. (*Adds.*) Sir.

PINEY. We'll wait.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Waits.*) I think I'm going to throw up.

PINEY. Go ahead.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Waits a moment.*) Could I have a glass of water?

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Glares at him.*) What would you do if I kicked you in the shins and ran?

PINEY. Whup you.

MYRA [SADIE]. You wouldn't dare!

PINEY. Try me. (*Myra [Sadie] rises and kicks him in the shins. He promptly pulls her over his knees and spanks her.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. HELP! HELP! MRS. HARPER! MRS. GUMP! HELP! WILLA MAE! ANYONE! I'M BEING KILLED!

PINEY. (*Shoves her to her feet.*) Said I would.

MYRA [SADIE]. My sister will have you arrested for daring to lay a finger on my—my person.

PINEY. Tell her.

MYRA [SADIE]. I will. You just wait. (*He blocks her escape.*)

PINEY. (*Points to chair.*) Set!

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Sits gingerly. Waits.*) You can't treat me this way. I'm crazy.

PINEY. Who ain't?

MYRA [SADIE]. My sister has probably gone to get the police now.

PINEY. We'll see. (*After a moment, Myra [Sadie] starts rocking.*)

MYRA [SADIE]. I have to go to the bathroom.

PINEY. Hold it.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Pause.*) I'm very delicate and high-strung.

PINEY. Yore spoiled.

MYRA [SADIE]. My sister probably didn't mention it but I have a very weak heart.

PINEY. Weak head, too.

MYRA [SADIE]. I'm getting dizzy! Where is everybody! (*Stands.*)

PINEY. Here.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Clutches her heart.*) My heart! I'm going to faint!

PINEY. Go ahead.

MYRA [SADIE]. (*Sinks to her knees gracefully.*) Water! Water! (*She collapses on the floor, inert. Piney continues to rock. He cracks a nut. But when Myra [Sadie] fails to move, his curiosity wins. He stands over her a moment, watching uncertainly.*)

PINEY. Hey—you. (*When she fails to answer, he takes flowers out of vase to pour water on her. But the flowers are plastic and there is no water. He hesitates, then goes into the kitchen to get water. Myra [Sadie] rises quickly and snatches off her wig and glasses. She hides her disguise, together with the apron, behind the curtains. She is just going up the stairs as Piney returns with the vase full of water. She pivots, pretending to be just coming down.*)

MYRA. Hello, Piney.

PINEY. You cotch her?
MYRA. I "cotch" her.
PINEY. She hurt you?
MYRA. Nope.
PINEY. You all right?
MYRA. Yep.
PINEY. Yore outta breath.
MYRA. Well, you weren't here to see how fast I had to move.
PINEY. Where's she now?
MYRA. Locked in her room. This won't happen again. I promise.
PINEY. (*Extends vase.*) Want water? (*Moves toward her.*)
MYRA. Why, heavens to Betsy! You're limping.
PINEY. Got kicked.
MYRA. Hard?
PINEY. Hard enough.
MYRA. She's like that when she's crossed. (*Opens front door.*)
So sorry you have to leave.
PINEY. (*Points to kitchen.*) Come in the back.
MYRA. It's all right. You can go out the front.
PINEY. Left my boots. (*Goes to kitchen door.*) Know what?
MYRA. Not much.
PINEY. (*Grins.*) I like her. She's purdy. (*He goes out. Myra sighs with relief and goes to the mirror to straighten her hair.*)
MYRA. Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the greatest fool of all?
Don't answer. (*The front door flies open and Willa Mae dashes in, wild-eyed, under the lower part of the Dutch door.*)
WILLA. Mrs. Durdle! Are you all right?
MYRA. Of course. Why not?
WILLA. I heard someone screaming for help. I thought someone was being murdered!
MYRA. Oh, that. Well, you see, I can explain that.
WILLA. You can?
MYRA. Yes. It takes a little time. But I can explain. (*Brightly.*)
You see—I was listening to TV.
WILLA. That's funny.
MYRA. Why?
WILLA. You don't have a TV.
MYRA. That makes it harder, doesn't it? What I meant was—the radio.

WILLA. I'd have been here quicker to save you but I couldn't find my hatpin.
MYRA. Your what?
WILLA. There's no better weapon than a hatpin.
MYRA. You were going to rescue me with a hatpin?
WILLA. Saved my grandmother from rape more than once.
MYRA. You mean saved her more than once or raped more than once?
WILLA. Lived in deadly fear of being raped. Also carried chili powder to throw in their eyes. You got any chili powder?
MYRA. No, but I've got a can of chili.
WILLA. I'll lend you a hatpin. How's your sister?
MYRA. Exhausted.
WILLA. Cora Gump told me all about her. You're making a grave mistake.
MYRA. You know, I'm inclined to agree with you.
WILLA. I'd like to see her.
MYRA. Well, she's had a bad day. And that's the God's truth.
WILLA. I could cure her for you.
MYRA. Oh, I've been to the very best doctors.
WILLA. Quacks!
MYRA. Science is helpless in a case like this.
WILLA. Do you love her?
MYRA. We're very close.
WILLA. Then I'll cure her for you. I cured a mad dog. But I'll have to wait till the moon is right.
MYRA. So? When will that be?
WILLA. When those men stop walking on it!
MYRA. Well, I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble. Or the government.
WILLA. No trouble. When was she born?
MYRA. Gemini. We're twins.
WILLA. Good. They respond better. I'll need a hank of her hair. And some mugwort. Does mugwort make her sick?
MYRA. The very sound makes me sick.
WILLA. I know where it grows wild. I'll pick some.
MYRA. I don't think she would eat it.
WILLA. You don't eat it. You rub it on.
MYRA. I really don't think it would work.
WILLA. You want her to be normal, don't you?

MYRA. Well, Mrs. Wilcox, I often ask myself—does the normal girl want to be rubbed with mugwort?

WILLA. Call me Willa.

MYRA. Willa.

WILLA. Now. Does *she* cut her nails or do you?

MYRA. Both. I do her fingers—she does her toes.

WILLA. I need some clippings.

MYRA. Oh, I think we threw them all away.

WILLA. Cut some more. (*Rises.*) Thursday's a good day. There's an eclipse. (*Goes to door.*) I'll come back for the hank of hair.

Don't wash it. That's important. (*Sees Piney's ax on the table.*)

What are you doing with the ax?

MYRA. Cracking nuts.

WILLA. Cut yourself?

MYRA. Why?

WILLA. There's blood on it. Save a smear for the mugwort. Works miracles. I'll be back. (*Willa dashes out under the lower part of the door.*)

MYRA. Oh, no, you're not. You're not coming back—or anyone else. (*She braces a chair across the front door. She then crosses to the kitchen door and braces a chair there.*) I wonder if I could dig a moat with a trowel? (*There is the persistent sound of the door chimes.*) Oh, good Lord, she must have forgotten her hatpin! (*Crosses to door to take chair away.*) Well, she knows I'm here. (*Calls.*) Just a minute! (*Takes chair away and stands back holding it.*) Come in. (*Cora and Reba enter promptly.*)

CORA. We just met Willa Mae.

REBA. She told us. That is—she told Cora. She doesn't speak to me.

MYRA. Told you what?

CORA. Don't let her do it!

REBA. Did she tell you she cured a mad dog?

CORA. Bet she didn't tell you about the others that all died.

REBA. Did she mention juniper berries?

MYRA. Just mugwort.

CORA. She's always experimenting with weeds.

REBA. Don't let her *touch* your sister.

CORA. Because *we* know the only person who can cure her. (*Sits.*)

MYRA. Who?

REBA. Brother Leviticus. You wouldn't believe the people he's cured by faith alone. Miracles! (*Sits.*)

CORA. You can say that again.

REBA. Miracles. And he'll be here next week for a big tent revival meeting. Right in Beaver Haven.

CORA. He's the Lord's right hand.

REBA. No medicine—no pills—no nothing. Just faith. And prayer.

CORA. And a small contribution.

MYRA. Ladies, I'm touched by your concern. But my sister is happy as she is. Hers is a better world than ours.

REBA. Well, we've taken the bull by the horns, dear. We wrote to Brother Leviticus about your sister.

CORA. It's all arranged.

REBA. (*Proudly.*) Your sister is to sit up on the platform and be healed before everybody in Beaver Haven.

CORA. And Bat Cave.

MYRA. Oh, no. I couldn't let her do that. In front of people!

CORA. Why not?

MYRA. (*Hesitates.*) She's got a cold.

REBA. He'll cure that, too. I've seen him cure appendicitis—phlebitis—peritonitis—tonsillitis—meningitis—laryngitis—arthritis—hepatitis—bronchitis—and gastritis.

CORA. And flatulence.

MYRA. Believe me, it would take more than a miracle.

CORA. Well, we're not going to let you sacrifice yourself any longer.

REBA. So you'll both just have to show up Saturday night.

CORA. Maybe *you've* got something he could cure, too.

MYRA. You better believe it.

REBA. It's the most inspiring thing I've ever seen when Brother Leviticus stands up over the lame and the halt—a Bible in one hand—a snake in the other, and . . .

MYRA. A SNAKE!

CORA. Like it says in the Bible!

MYRA. Where does it say that?!

REBA. "They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing—it shall not hurt them."

CORA. Luke.

MYRA. It doesn't say that in *my* Bible!

REBA. The proof is in the pudding, dear.

MYRA. Pudding, I'll go for. Snakes—no.

REBA. It's a very exciting spiritual experience. You'll find yourself trembling all over.

MYRA. You can bet on it. What kind of snake?

REBA. (*Turns to Cora.*) Was it a rattler or a copperhead last year that cured my hiccups?

CORA. Water moccasin.

MYRA. I think I'll go for mugwort.

REBA. You haven't a thing to worry about, dear. It's settled. (*Goes to door.*)

CORA. (*At door.*) Unless Willa Mae gets mad at you.

REBA. Bye. We'll pick you and your sister up Saturday. (*They go out.*)

MYRA. (*Looks at herself in the mirror.*) Well, Mrs. Frankenstein, you've created a monster. And you bloody-well better destroy it before it destroys you. (*Goes to collect "Sadie" disguise.*) Oh, what tangled webs we weave when first we practice to deceive. Luke. (*She holds up the wig and apron.*) Well, Sister Sadie, I'm afraid it's the end for you. I'm going to take you out in the backyard and bury you. And nothing will ever grow there again. Even tomatoes.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

PLACE: *The same*

TIME: *The next day*

AT RISE: *No one is on stage when the curtain rises. After a moment the front door chimes are heard. After another moment, the sound is repeated. When there is no answer, the door opens and Mr. Piney enters.*

He is wearing his very best suit. The coat fits him tightly and the pants are a little short. He is shorn of his beard and wears a bright-red bowtie. A hat sits awkwardly on his head. He carries a bouquet in his hand and a box of candy under his arm.

PINEY. Lady? (*When there is no answer, he goes to the foot of the stairs and gives a loud hog call.*) WHO-EEEEEEEE! (*Myra comes dashing out of the kitchen.*)

MYRA. What is it?! (*Stares at Piney.*) Who are you?

PINEY. Piney.

MYRA. Oh. I didn't recognize you. (*Crosses to him and looks him over.*) Is somebody dead?

PINEY. Nope.

MYRA. Well, where are you going?—all dressed up.

PINEY. Here.

MYRA. But I've still got plenty of manure.

PINEY. I come sparkin'.

MYRA. Sounded just like you said you "come sparkin'."

PINEY. Sister Sadie here?

MYRA. You can't mean—oh, good Lord—you can't mean you're calling on my—my sister?

PINEY. Shore am.

MYRA. And those flowers are for her?

PINEY. Swamp lilies.

MYRA. And that's why you're all gussied up and smelling of—by the way—what is it?