

The Wise Gardener

Ten Short Plays

A Studio Editions Drama Publication

Plays by Martha Keltz, Copyright © 1994



The Wise Gardener * The Painter * The Guided Lesson
The Blue Night Theater * The Conductor * Iveson and Earnest
The Red Horse * The Attorney * The Lamb * The Clearing

These ten plays reveal life-changing mysteries working in the interactions of the characters, in chance or seemingly insignificant situations. The cast requirements for each play range from two to four characters. The plays are appropriate for ages ranging from early teens through adults. For a full-length evening of theater, a minimal or abstract stage design can allow for rapid changes in settings and props, while the plays can also be presented singly, or with three or four produced together. The running time for each of the plays is approximately ten to fifteen minutes in length.

Most of these very short plays were originally produced as longer one-act plays, in the early 1970's, in "little" or semi-professional theaters: the Upstage Theater, the Player's Theater, the Barry College Little Theater, the Tunnel Theater, and the Corner Theater. The theaters were located in Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and in Baltimore, Maryland. The plays were re-written and published in 1994, and, in addition, two new plays were added to the collection to bring the number to an even ten.

THE WISE GARDENER

Characters:

Elise, a student

Stephen, a student (plays the recorder)

Time: Afternoon, the late 1960's

Place: Rehearsal room in the library of a junior college.

Scene: A small, soundproof rehearsal room, sparsely furnished with a table, two chairs and a music stand.

At Rise: Elise enters. She is dressed casually and has long hair. She appears younger than her age of twenty-one. She carries a book and a notebook and pen. She puts the book on the table and makes herself comfortable in the chair. She opens the notebook and begins musing, reciting and writing.

ELISE

Title... How Like A Prodigy

In early spring,
Two flower seeds were planted
Near the grey, stone garden wall.
That... (*crossing this out*)
So their blossoms might adorn
At varying seasons
The gloomy barrier...

Soon two plants were seen
Nodding in the gentle wind,
Searching... (*crossing this out*)
Touched by the sun
Arching overhead;
Filling the grey shadows
Of the facing wall
With light and warmth....

(She turns several pages ahead in the notebook, reads and appears disturbed, tears out a page, folds it and places it inside the book on the table. She returns to her notebook.)

How like a prodigy?....

(Stephen enters. He has full, almost long dark hair and dark eyes which at times want to hide shyly behind his glasses, peeping out as though normally deeply hidden. He is also dressed casually, but with a corduroy jacket with sleeves too short, showing the white cuffs of his shirt. He carries a battered attaché case.)

STEPHEN

Someone tell me why I agreed to this... How many rehearsals will we need?

ELISE

Oh, I think one or two will be enough. Perhaps we could even rehearse twice today.

STEPHEN

I hope so!... poetry!

ELISE

What's wrong with poetry? If only there was more poetry in the world.

STEPHEN

And less people who think they're poets.

ELISE

Do you mean me?

STEPHEN

No, you're... intuitive. By the way, as I was climbing up the stairs today, what should I see ahead of me but a brilliant white light, like a flash! And suddenly... it's as though I just knew, simply knew!

ELISE

I'm not sure you're serious, but what did you know?

STEPHEN

All of my problems were solved.

ELISE

Intuition does exist!

STEPHEN

(Smiling) Intuition does not exist.

ELISE

Intuition, poetic feeling, feminine intuition, musical feeling... these are realities you should not deny.

STEPHEN

Why does she call them realities?...

ELISE

They are not immature or subjective.

STEPHEN

Why has she brought up the subject?

ELISE

You brought up the subject.

STEPHEN

I most certainly did not. You're the one who introduces remote topics from nowhere.

ELISE

Obscurity is not depth.

STEPHEN

Precisely what I mean.

ELISE

If only you had seen a white light on the stairway!

STEPHEN

Then I would be deceived. But we've discussed these moot points time and time again, for all the good it's done.

ELISE

Perhaps we should just begin our rehearsal.

(Stephen removes a recorder and sheet music from his attaché case, puts the music on the music stand, then plays a Mozart piece very skillfully.)

You play so beautifully for someone who denies feeling in music.

STEPHEN

Music is purely mathematical; it has nothing to do with feeling.

ELISE

Music is almost purely feeling; it has little to do with mathematics.

STEPHEN

Oh, no? Then what is count, measure, duration of tone?

ELISE

I'm not certain Mozart would be best for my poem.

STEPHEN

I've no intention of playing Mozart for your poem. I merely begin practice with Mozart. By the way, what are you reading?

He picks up the book from the table.

The Count of Monte Cristo!

ELISE

(Jumping up) Give me the book!

She snatches it from him and sets it back down on the table, out of his reach.

STEPHEN

There's something in the book you don't want me to see – a note. Why not?

ELISE

Only fragments, ideas I won't be using.

STEPHEN

The Count of Monte Cristo! Dark and stormy nights, capes and carriages, inns and ale and fireplaces; men who kiss ladies' hands. Romantic nonsense.

ELISE

Recommended for you.

Stephen plays a few discordant notes on the recorder.

Let's rehearse!

He nods affably. She recites and he improvises on the recorder.

I'm not certain about the title.

In early spring,

Two flower seeds were planted

Near the grey, stone garden wall.

So their blossoms might adorn

At varying seasons
The gloomy barrier...

Soon two plants were seen
Nodding in the gentle wind,
Touched by the sun
Arching overhead;
Filling the grey shadows
Of the facing wall
With light and warmth....

What's wrong with kissing ladies' hands?

Discordant notes.

The days lengthened
And the plants grew
Through dawn's radiant gold
And evening's cool magenta.
But suddenly it seemed –

STEPHEN

Don't use suddenly.

ELISE

Then there appeared, all of an hour it seemed,
A bud on one of the plants.
How early it opened!
The petals glowed firm and proud –
It was the only flower in the garden
To be seen....
But one eve came a summer storm,
Filling the air with grey-green clouds.
The storm opened cruelly
Upon the single blossom;
The wall gave no protection.
Indeed, the flower was dashed
Against the rocky surface.
On the morrow
The flower was torn and wilted,
While the nearby plant,
Months from budding,
Full of life and potential,

Nodded a greeting to the new day....

That's as far as I've gone.

STEPHEN

There's more?

ELISE

The second flower is a late bloomer. The two appear at varying seasons, you see.

STEPHEN

Then you'll need to describe the change of seasons -

ELISE

There's a gardener.

STEPHEN

The entire season through autumn!... Temperatures were ninety-five one day in September, and dropped to sixty the next. There was concern over early frost, and so forth and so forth.

ELISE

No, the gardener – but – well, it's not long enough, is it?

STEPHEN

Of course, it's just short of boring.

ELISE

The music was nice, but if you don't like the poem –

STEPHEN

I don't like it or dislike it.

ELISE

There simply must be a gardener.

STEPHEN

We've rehearsed enough today. If you want to add a gardener... all right, we'll meet here one more time. Then we perform, then it's over. Someone tell me why I agreed to this....

ELISE

Our friendship is hopeless, true enough.

STEPHEN

Friendship? Think how we met – you accosted me!

ELISE

I did not! I merely approached you and began talking. I'd heard about you, and –

STEPHEN

What did you hear about me?

ELISE

You know what everyone says. You were a prodigy.

STEPHEN

On the worthless I.Q. test, yes; in mathematics, yes; in linguistics, yes; in music, fair-to-middling, but that should suit your poetry.

ELISE

You were at Harvard; something went wrong so you came here, to the junior college, to the second-chance college. I wanted to meet you and –

STEPHEN

You wanted to meet a prodigy.

ELISE

Why do you perceive me as threatening?

STEPHEN

I don't.

ELISE

You must! Why else would you be so difficult, so cautious, so... unpleasant. I admire you, but only in a friendly, perhaps somewhat curious way. You see, I'm the opposite of you. I'm an underachiever. I wouldn't score high on the I.Q. test, but sometimes I can know, just know, and that's threatening to you, Stephen.

Stephen puts the sheet music and recorder back into the attaché case.

Feeling is threatening to you, you deny feeling; instead of admitting this, you ridicule me, and feminine intuition, and romance and adventure and –

STEPHEN

Would you stop this nonsense? I don't know what you're talking about.

ELISE

Just slink away as always. Hide away; avoid any confrontation, any emotion, any feeling.

Stephen grabs the book from the table and takes out the note.

ELISE

Don't! Give me that paper!

STEPHEN

No, I want to read what it says. It's about me.

ELISE

Give it to me!

STEPHEN

You don't see me slinking away now, do you? (*He reads*) "The flower who blooms too early is like Stephen, the prodigy. With wonderful intellectual achievements, he wills himself to an advanced position in an elite college, only to break down the frail blossom of feeling between intellect and will, and so to fail... The second flower is a late bloomer, who, unlike the flower who fades early, will adorn advancing autumn with a single, lovely radiance."

He slowly folds the note and puts it into his pocket.

Well, it's true. I was at Cambridge, three years ahead of my age group. I was doing well, yes, my parents, my teachers were pleased. They had pushed me into this! My parents could boast of their offspring. But, as you write, there came summer storms... dark emotions... everything collapsed, I had a breakdown... Two years later, here I am, in the second-chance college, being friendly with females who write poetry and read *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

ELISE

I'll be happy to loan you the book.

STEPHEN

And you're the other flower, I suppose? The late bloomer?

ELISE

Not necessarily...

STEPHEN

Yet you want recognition now, the kind of recognition I've always had; that's your real interest in me. Well, your poetry is unexceptional; it's forgettable. Maybe someday... But what a hopeless muddle we're all in! UFO's!

ELISE

UFO's?

STEPHEN

Don't you remember, that was one of your topics from nowhere. You do talk about the oddest things. Did I believe in UFO's you asked me. Well, if there are UFO's, I hope they come down here and take me out of this world!

ELISE

You're forgetting the gardener.

STEPHEN

The gardener again! One more rehearsal.

ELISE

Thanks.

He starts to exit.

Stephen?... The flower's a perennial.

STEPHEN

(Darkly) I don't know....

He shrugs and smiles, then impulsively he takes Elise's hand and with an elegant bow, kisses it.

Au revoir, mademoiselle!

He exits with gestures as though removing a hat and flourishing it about.

After a pause, Elise returns to the chair and picks up the pen and notebook.

ELISE

(Again crossing out on the paper) Change title to... The Wise Gardener.

End of Drama

THE PAINTER

Characters:

The Painter

Henry Thomas

Julianna

Time: Afternoon, the 1970's

Place: A city park

Scene: A city park. At left is a bench. Down right, the Painter is seen concentrating intently on his watercolor painting (which is never seen by the audience), with a small portable chair and easel. In dress, he appears to be from an earlier time, with coarse brown trousers and vest, a muslin shirt and a hat. He has a full, light mustache, and has intense eyes and a gentle countenance.

At Rise: Henry Thomas and Julie enter. They are both in their early twenties and are dressed casually. Henry is clearly tense and agitated.

JULIE

Henry, let's sit here in the park for a while, you need to calm down.

HENRY

And somehow take my mind from the exhibit, from art... yet, there's a painter.

JULIE

We won't disturb him. He seems intent on his work, he won't even notice us.

They sit on the bench.

Had I known Jerry's exhibit would upset you like this....

HENRY

My feelings surprise even me. I'm happy for Jerry's success, and patrons are buying.

JULIE

What is it then? You were nearly ill.

HENRY

His work. So negative, so ugly. He's been influenced by de Kooning, I believe, and yet he's taken the entire... morbidity of it even further. In a word, it was not uplifting.

JULIE

Modern art is not uplifting, no. But neither is the twentieth century. Jerry says his paintings reflect the alienation, the anxiety, the illness of our time.

HENRY

And his paintings are selling for thousands of dollars. Yet, look at mine... landscapes reminiscent of the great nineteenth century American painters – I've been compared to Thomas Cole. Yet I've had no success.

JULIE

Realism is out.

HENRY

But my paintings are not precisely realistic, are they? They suggest a spiritual quality as well. No one seems to care for ethereal touches. It depresses me. Instead, whatever offends is sensational.

JULIE

At least Jerry is struggling toward the future, however strangely, whereas you... listen, Henry Thomas, the nineteenth century can never be repeated. The tranquil landscapes have vanished, the Hudson River Valley is prime real estate.

HENRY

Henry Thomas, R.I.P.

JULIE

Don't despair; find a way into the present, and the future.

HENRY

Jerry's way? Defiling human nature and our surroundings the way he does? I'll quit first.

JULIE

He doesn't –

HENRY

Yes he does! However you both might rationalize his motives or goals, his paintings are obscene.

JULIE

(Turning towards the Painter) I wonder what the man is painting?

HENRY

Obscene!...

JULIE

Let's change the subject. We don't agree, we'll only go around in circles. Henry... doesn't that man seem as though from another time?

HENRY

I hadn't noticed.

JULIE

Look at his clothes. They could be modern, and yet, he looks rather like a sepia photograph. What do you suppose he's painting?

HENRY

An abstract cityscape.

JULIE

No, the park is a natural surrounding. Besides, he hasn't been observing his surroundings.

HENRY

Some people do give the impression of being from another time; it's always very interesting.

JULIE

Do you suppose he'd mind if we looked at his work?

HENRY

When I paint outdoors, I always enjoy having a watcher or two, especially if they comment.

JULIE

I'm very curious. Let's see....

They cross to the Painter and appear awestruck by his work. After a lengthy pause, the Painter addresses them.

PAINTER

Ahhh, I turn to see a very charming couple observing my work.

HENRY

(Unable to take his eyes from the painting) Are we disturbing you....

PAINTER

Not at all.

The Painter turns back to his work. There is another pause.

I would be very obliged if you would offer comments.

JULIE

You paint outdoors, yet....

PAINTER

Oh, yes, the sun and the air are most stimulating. I prefer the country, of course, but today I find it necessary to be here.

HENRY

However, you don't paint from life.

PAINTER

Not in the usual sense.

HENRY

I've never seen anything like this picture! We thought... well, to be honest, you have rather the aura of the past about you. I expected to see a realistic rendition of the park. This....

PAINTER

Forgive me, I could not help but overhear fragments of your conversation. Julianna is correct, certainly –

JULIE

Julianna? No one has called Julianna since childhood.

PAINTER

I believe you'll prefer the name later. She is correct, Henry Thomas, the tranquil landscapes have vanished. The nineteenth century and earlier times can never be repeated. But how embarrassed she'll be – even ashamed – that she ever supported this Jerry. Better no path to the future, not yet at least, than a wayward road of such rocky precipice as to cause the most tragic plunge. Think of the time it will take him to crawl back up!... Henry Thomas, on the other hand, were it not for a fairly mild intercession, would quit.

HENRY

Please tell me how you arrived at this method of painting.

PAINTER

I have no method.

HENRY

How could it be?

PAINTER

I have worked at becoming what “I am.” The further I travel on this journey of becoming, the more the true landscape is revealed to me, and this is, myself. This is the landscape of the future, you see?

HENRY

I believe so.

PAINTER

Above, we have dynamic light and color, and beauty. Below, here in the corner, we have a bit of darkness. A balance between the two must be found, or something goes amiss, as with Jerry.

HENRY

Would you be willing to give me lessons?

PAINTER

Not possible. Even during these few moments, I’ve trespassed certain boundaries, and I’ll be held accountable. Indeed, it’s time for me to be packing my things.

He begins to pack his chair, papers, paints, etc. into the folding easel.

HENRY

So short a time to have seen your work!

PAINTER

What is time and place in eternity?

JULIE

What’s your name? Are you known?

PAINTER

I’m afraid Jerry and his like have stirred up a miasma. When will it clear?

JULIE

Well, have you a card?

PAINTER

(After a thoughtful pause) Yes...

He takes a card from his vest pocket and gives it to Julie.

HENRY

No hope for instruction?

PAINTER

I can give you a piece of advice.

HENRY

Please.

PAINTER

Never lose sight of the natural laws. Never lose sight of nature.

HENRY

No... And I won't quit!

PAINTER

I'm glad to hear so.

HENRY

Thank you so much! We hardly know how to thank you.

PAINTER

Only take my advice to heart.

HENRY

I will.

PAINTER

(Tipping his hat) Good day....

He exits. Henry and Julie return to the bench and sit in silence for a time.

JULIE

What a painting! And he's not even known.

HENRY

He didn't consider being "known" important. Maybe it's not.

JULIE

You want to earn your living, don't you?

HENRY

It may not be possible.

There is a pause as Henry and Julie are again thoughtful.

JULIE

I can't remember the exhibit.

HENRY

What exhibit?

JULIE

Jerry's exhibit.

HENRY

Neither can I!

JULIE

He said I would be ashamed for ever supporting Jerry.

HENRY

Are you?

JULIE

Yes, even now.

HENRY

Imagine someone like that man just slipping away!

JULIE

We let him slip away.

HENRY

We don't even know his name.

JULIE

Oh, wait! He gave me a card!

HENRY

He did?

Julie removes the card from her pocket.

HENRY

What does it say? What's his name?

Without answering, she gives the card to Henry.

HENRY

(Reads) Henry Thomas.

They stare silently at one another.

End of Drama

THE GUIDED LESSON

Characters:

Mr. Morris, a tutor

Rosie, a fourteen year old child

Time: Evening, the 1980's

Place: Room in the home of Mr. Morris

Scene: A pleasant room in the home of Mr. Morris, with two wicker chairs, a table, a bookcase filled with books, notebooks, papers, etc.

At Rise: Mr. Morris is seen engrossed in a book. He is a very young man, intensely energetic, even when still. He looks up suddenly from his reading.

MORRIS

Oh, wait!... I do have a student scheduled this evening, another new one.

He rises and crosses to the bookcase, picks up his appointment book and flips quickly through the pages.

Here it is... Rosie... due... now.

(He is in the process of collecting books and the lesson plan from the bookcase when Rosie enters from the left. She is a self-conscious, awkward girl with withdrawn, almost forlorn gestures. She is wearing a corduroy jumper of a pale rose color. She stands silently at left, reluctant to enter the room.)

Ahhh, it's my new pupil, Rosie.

Puzzled, the girl looks at her jumper.

Come in, dear, don't be shy. My task is only to help you. Sit down, please.

Looking about to cry, the girl sits down.

Let me introduce myself. I am Mr. Morris, tutor, and I love to teach. All too rare are those moments when teaching comes to life within the student, but such moments are always a great inspiration. I have my lesson plan here, but tell me in your own words: with what subject are you having difficulty?

ROSIE

I don't know... a lot.

MORRIS

A lot? Well, one in particular. An elective, I understand.

ROSIE

Elective?

MORRIS

How could anyone have trouble with such a wonderful subject! And an elective! Well, let us begin, shall we?

Rosie shrugs.

By the way, have you had any geometry at all? How is your math?

She grimaces.

Science?

She shrugs.

Can you tell me anything about your progress?

ROSIE

No... except, I'm not progressing, not in anything.

MORRIS

And why not?

ROSIE

I don't know. Everything is boring. I don't care.

MORRIS

Do you care about the ground you walk on?

ROSIE

What do you mean?

MORRIS

Your elective.

He opens a book in front of her on the table.

Now tell me, what is this?

ROSIE

A circle.

MORRIS

And this?

ROSIE

A square.

MORRIS

This?

Rosie frowns in puzzlement.

A rectangle.

ROSIE

Rectangle.

MORRIS

(Turning the page) Now we move ahead a bit. What is this?

ROSIE

I don't know.

MORRIS

This is basic.

ROSIE

Basic.

MORRIS

No, no, it's not called basic. Basic means fundamental. This is a rhomboid.

ROSIE

I've never seen one before. Rhomboid.

MORRIS

You see, in nature, minerals never assume perfect forms. Now the rhomboid is a form in itself, we cannot say it's a rectangle gone askew. But most minerals are variations of certain basic geometric shapes which cannot express perfect forms due to hindrances in the environment. Let's look at some more... *(turning the pages)* You see, the forms become more complex as we move along... Cube, cube with octahedral corners, triangle, pyramid, and finally, octahedron, related to the same axes as the cube. All of these minerals exist in nature, in the very ground under your feet. What could be more fascinating than to dig in the ground and find....

He opens another book before her.

Look – pyrite cubes, cubes piled on top of one another, but not able to be perfect cubes. Why not? Well, in this case it appears there are too many in too small a space.

ROSIE

What is pyrite?

MORRIS

Rosie, pyrite is basic. Have you been sleeping through your class? Pyrite is a form of iron.

ROSIE

It doesn't look like iron.

MORRIS

It's a different form of iron. Shiny...

He rises and crosses to the bookcase.

In fact, I have a specimen of pyrite I'll show you. I also have...

He places the pyrite and the other specimen on the table.

Pick it up and observe it closely.

Rosie picks up the pyrite and examines it.

It's often mistaken for gold and is called "fool's gold."

Rosie turns the pyrite over and over in her hands.

As for the other specimen... Let's find a picture first. We'll go back in the book. What is this?

ROSIE

(Studying the picture) You said... triangle.

MORRIS

Correct. *(Turning the page)* And this?

ROSIE

I've forgotten what you said.

MORRIS

You have been sleeping through your class! This is a pyramid. How many sides do you suppose it has?

ROSIE

Three.

MORRIS

No. Look closely; count.

ROSIE

(Carefully studying the picture) Four!

MORRIS

Correct. Now, look at the other specimen.

Rosie puts the pyrite down and picks up the other specimen.

What do you see?

ROSIE

A pyramid on top of a pyramid, as though they're stuck to one another. If I hold it like this, the pyramid on the bottom is upside-down.

MORRIS

How many sides?

ROSIE

Four.

MORRIS

No. Count.

Rosie counts slowly.

ROSIE

Eight!

MORRIS

Exactly. That's called an octahedron; it's a fluorite octahedron.

ROSIE

(Smiling) Octahedron. Did you carve this?

MORRIS

Certainly not.

ROSIE

Who did?

MORRIS

I suppose the Creator did.

ROSIE

The Creator?

MORRIS

Octahedrons are found in the ground, looking... well, just as it does.

ROSIE

(Astonished) Like this? The Creator carved this? Did he carve the pyrite? Did he carve all the stones in the pictures? Can we look at more pictures? *(She turns the pages in the book rapidly)* What's this? Oh, look! An emerald! And look at this! It's a cross, a perfect cross! How could it be? How could such things be in the ground? Would I find them in my backyard?

MORRIS

Well, they're to be found in different areas of the country.

ROSIE

(Again turning the pages) All different colors, all different shapes. Please let me borrow this book!

MORRIS

(Thoughtfully pausing; frowning) Something's wrong... I think I've made a mistake.

He crosses to the bookcase and looks through the appointment book.

I have made a mistake! You're Ellen, not Rosie! Both new students, and I've turned to the wrong date in my book. You're Ellen! Why did you let me call you Rosie?

ROSIE

I thought you meant my jumper.

MORRIS

Young lady, you haven't tried to deceive me, have you? Because if you have –

ROSIE

No, my jumper! Please, I want to learn about minerals. Please teach me!....

Morris retrieves a notebook from the bookcase, turns the pages and reads.

MORRIS

“Rosie, age 17. Has chosen mineralogy as an elective and needs the credits for graduation. She takes no interest in the subject, but there is no time to choose another elective...” *(Turns a page)*

“Ellen... age 14...” *(Slaps his forehead)* How could I!

ROSIE

I want to learn about cubes and triangles, the Creator's carvings in the ground.

MORRIS

Ellen –

ROSIE

(Crying) I want to be called Rosie!... I hate Ellen! She's nothing! I don't like her, nobody likes her! I hate her, I hate myself! I want to be Rosie and learn mineralogy!

She begins sobbing uncontrollably.

MORRIS

Calm down, dear, calm down. It's all my fault, I've made a simple mistake, a simple mistake.

There is a pause as she tries to control her sobbing. Morris observes her with growing insight, then crosses to her.

I believe there's a remedy, but you'll have to stop crying.

She chokes back a sob.

There's no reason why you shouldn't learn mineralogy... Let's see... *(Reading in the notebook)* "Ellen, age 14, is a child who is not doing well in any of her subjects. She consistently refuses to do homework and there seems to be no encouragement from her parents. She certainly seems headed for a troubled and withdrawn adolescence. Math problems and grammar drills are especially recommended." Would you agree, Rosie?

ROSIE

I agree I should learn mineralogy. I love it! Aren't these forms a part of math? Aren't there many new words in this book? Many...um... compound sentences? Oh, please, nothing has ever inspired me like these beautiful stones. I want to be a mineralogist!

MORRIS

A totally misguided lesson! Or is it?...

After a pause, he is decisive.

To begin, you'll need to improve in the homework sphere. Do this for me tomorrow: search in your backyard. What do you suppose you'll find?

ROSIE

Emeralds.

MORRIS

Well, no, emeralds are rare gems often found in the southern hemisphere. In your backyard you'll most likely find common rocks: granite, sandstone, limestone. They're in the book, too. Bring whatever you find with you tomorrow evening, same time. We'll start our first lesson over again, we'll start fresh. All right with you?

ROSIE

Oh, yes! I can take the book home then?

MORRIS

Yes, indeed. And tomorrow evening, we'll have a ceremony.

ROSIE

Ceremony?

MORRIS

Ellen... troubled, withdrawn Ellen... will officially become Rose Ellen, scientist, mineralogist! Agreed?

ROSIE

Rose Ellen – I love that name! I'll study this book all night and all day tomorrow! You'll see!...

She exits.

MORRIS

The guided lesson... yes, rare are those moments when teaching comes to life within the student, but such moments are always a great inspiration....

End of Drama

THE BLUE NIGHT THEATER

Characters:

Sarah, a cleaning lady

Larry Blue, a comedy actor, theater manager and producer

Time: Early evening, the 1970's

Place: A small office, Larry Blue Enterprises

Scene: A small office. There are two lounge chairs, a desk and chair; on the desk is a telephone, files, folders, letters, bills, etc. At upstage right is a large, glittery poster board on a display easel which reads: "The Blue Night Theater – Larry Blue Enterprises."

At Rise: Sarah enters with a dust mop and various cleaning materials in a plastic bucket. She is a woman in her mid-fifties, plain in dress and appearance, but with a benign expression. She begins cleaning with the dust mop and shortly the phone rings. Larry Blue rushes in to answer the phone. He is a tall, well-dressed man in his late thirties, with light hair and a sunny, good-natured countenance, difficult to imagine without a smile. He listens on the phone for a few moments, then hangs up, hesitates, and exits. Sarah continues cleaning. Larry re-enters with a cardboard box which he sets on top of the desk. He then begins to pack letters, folders, etc. into the box.

SARAH

Why, Mr. Blue, you're not moving, are you?

LARRY

Seems like I am, Sarah

SARAH

I thought the theater was a success, with all those musical comedies.

LARRY

Well, the rent's paid and we're a few months ahead. This might be called success in our business.

SARAH

Then why are you moving?

LARRY

Time to play games. Like a play we once produced. Picture, if you will, a game board on this entire floor. I'm standing on square five: success, maybe. Depending on how the dice land, I can either jump ahead to square six, or fall back to square four. If that was the only problem, fine! But in my case, who's throwing the dice? And guess what? The game's crooked.

SARAH

I don't understand you....

LARRY

Give me the mop.

Sarah gives Larry the mop and he pretends to be dusting the game board.

Square one... two... three... four... A clean-up! Square five, not even dirty. But look at this!

He shakes dust from the mop over the poster board.

All wrong from the beginning for the Blue Night Theater!

He does a clever dance with the mop and sings:

You were an OK gal for me!
Your shining eyes were all I'd see!
And yet beneath the surface wear,
An empty head was only there!....

He collapses into a lounge chair, laughing deeply.

I just made that up from nothing! In other words, from and for the Blue Night Theater!....

SARAH

Well, it can't hurt to laugh. Seems a shame, though. I watched you in a few shows, Mr. Blue, and I have to admire someone with your talent, especially for comedy.

LARRY

I've never been able to do a serious role; my face wasn't made for drama.

SARAH

And the way you play the piano! The musical wasn't very good – if you'll excuse my saying so – though I only watched a bit of it from the back. Still, your piano was worth the price of the tickets and then some! I thought, how can a man play the piano so well, along with all his other talents? The Lord has been good to you, Mr. Blue.

LARRY

The Lord has been good to you, Mr. Blue. It rhymes, Sarah. You could write lyrics.

SARAH

Me?

LARRY

True, a lot will rhyme with Blue. Of cue, not a few.

SARAH

I could never write lyrics. I have no talent.

LARRY

Well, I'd better finish packing.

He rises and crosses back to the desk. They both work silently for a time.

SARAH

What really happened, Mr. Blue?

LARRY

You can call me Larry.

SARAH

Larry... Why are you leaving?

LARRY

In order for you to understand, we have to go back, back before square one. This was about ten years ago, in New York City. I was involved in an off-Broadway production. This play had all the ingredients for success, and, Sarah, it should have been a hit! We were too caught up in it, I guess, and couldn't be objective. Anyway, we ran out of money two weeks before opening; no bank would look at us; we were desperate. Well, I got a loan, a big loan, and it wasn't from the bank. It wasn't legitimate. The mob.

SARAH

The mob? Do you mean, organized crime?

LARRY

I'm afraid so. Then a worse scenario than the play itself followed: it bombed. The show closed in less than two weeks. Every single critic in every single paper destroyed us.

SARAH

Now, why would they do an unkind thing like that?

LARRY

How could I pay back the money? Quote, “I ran, and I’ve been running ever since,” unquote. Sounds like a Grade B movie, doesn’t it? And I knew... I knew if I ever had a success, they’d be after me for money. I’ve had modest success here, not nearly enough to pay back the loan. And they’ve found me again; they want all the money I do have. What can I say? I can keep moving from square to square, but there’s no way up. But enough about me. Tell me about yourself.

SARAH

Me?

LARRY

You’ve been cleaning this theater since before square one, and I know nothing about you.

SARAH

There’s not much to tell. I was married, but after our fourth child, my husband left me. I didn’t know how I could raise four children by myself: I’d never worked. I could do cleaning, yes; it was either that or welfare. I never wanted to take welfare. One night I went down on my knees and told the Lord I didn’t have enough strength to raise four children as a cleaning lady. I asked Him why He wanted me to bear so much. And do you know, He gave me a vision of Himself. And Larry, He was just like you – other than being God, of course. He had a sunny, beautiful smile, just like you. And those many years ago, He seemed to have a mop, but to Him, the mop was not a burden, but a source of great joy – just as it was for you when you danced with it – joy in service, joy in bringing sunshine into the darkness, into the deep blue night, when we’re so tired from our labors. Maybe now I understand what He meant so long ago: by the time I saw a man dancing with a mop, everything would be behind me. God knows everything, and He knows the future. After I understood joy in service, He said –

The phone rings.

LARRY

Answer it, Sarah.

Sarah picks up the phone receiver, listens, frowns deeply and anxiously, then relaxes slowly and smiles.

And the Lord said: I am with you always.

She hangs up the receiver.

I knew then, Larry, we’re not in this world alone; God is working right along beside us. So I raised my four children, and yes... now it’s behind me. All of my children have been successful in life; one is a doctor. And God knows all about you, too, Larry, otherwise He would not have looked just like you so many years ago, with the mop. That was for your benefit, as well as mine.

Larry is silent. There is a long pause.

SARAH

(Somewhat embarrassed) Well, I'd better get back to my work....

She picks up the mop and bucket.

The hallway, the rest rooms, the theater, more offices....

She pauses.

You don't have to keep moving from square to square, there is a way up. Till then, may the Lord bless and keep you, Larry, His sunny, wonderful talent.

She exits.

After another pause, Larry, exhausted, leans against the desk. Tears pour from his eyes and his face is as though transformed into a tragic mask.

End of Drama



THE CONDUCTOR

Characters:

The Conductor

Marjorie Dobbs

Laura Stafford, a social worker

Lafayette Dobbs, Marjorie's uncle

Time: Eternity, and summer, late morning, the 1960's

Place: Eternity, and Petersburg, Virginia; the backyard patio of Marjorie's home

Scene: A backyard patio with wicker chairs and a table. On the table are two glasses. In the background is a trellis with flowering vines.

At Rise: The lights dim on the set and fade up on the Conductor, who enters slowly and stands at right. He is a lean, distinguished-looking black man with gray hair and mustache. His Conductor's uniform is a three-piece black suit with matching cap. He slowly removes a watch from his vest pocket and looks at it.

CONDUCTOR

We're makin' good time this mornin'. Reckon we'll be into Richmond in another twenty minutes. Been a long trip. Can't count the times I've made it – wouldn't want to – but seems to me this night was eternal. Yet, by the watch, good time. (*He slips the watch back into his pocket*) Problem is, been worryin' bout my daughter all night. Said she'd be at the station to meet me; maybe have her new husband with her. Nice lookin' fella, she says, though somethin' of a dreamer; wants to act on the stage. Just so he supports my girl!... Reckon she'll be proud of me. Been with the railroad all my life; due to retire now with a good pension. Maybe I can enjoy my grandchildren. (*Listening*) There's the whistle for the junction crossing. Better get on over to the Pullman car an' make sure the Richmond passengers are up. (*Hesitating, thoughtful, then shaking his head*) An eternal night....

(He exits right slowly. The lights fade up on the set and Marjorie Dobbs enters from the left. She is a light-haired lady dressed in a flower-print dress. She carries a pitcher of lemonade which she places on the table. Worried, she looks toward the right. The voice of Lafayette Dobbs is heard off-stage, from inside the house at left.)

LAFAYETTE

I have requested replacements, but General Lee will not acknowledge the strategic importance of Petersburg.

MARJORIE

Oh, dear....

LAFAYETTE

Petersburg is rightly called the jugular vein of Richmond. All rail lines serving that vital city converge here. Yet Lee doesn't respond to my pleas!

MARJORIE

(Calling towards left) Do be quiet now, Lafayette, we're expecting a visitor. Don't embarrass us.

(Laura Stafford, a delicate, conservatively dressed woman with dark hair, enters from the right. She carries a small black notebook with attached pen.)

LAURA

You must be Miss Marjorie Dobbs?

MARJORIE

Yes, Ma'am.

LAURA

I'm Laura Stafford, social worker, here in regard to your uncle.

MARJORIE

Pleased to meet you, Ma'am. Please sit down. Would you like some lemonade?

LAURA

Why yes, thank you. I'm afraid it's turning into a rather hot day.

Marjorie gives her a glass of lemonade, which she sips.

However, your patio is a delightful place to meet, cool and pleasant, and the lemonade is delicious.

MARJORIE

Thank you, Ma'am.

LAURA

Well now... *(opening her notebook)* you're assisting your uncle with his application for disability benefits; his name is Lafayette Dobbs?

MARJORIE

His real name is Arnold Dobbs, but he's been Lafayette for so many years... After some Confederate general, I believe. But none of his ancestors were in the Civil War.

LAURA

I gather from our phone conversation that the absence of Civil War ancestors has been shattering to him?

MARJORIE

Only after his wife left him... It's been about ten years now. He was always a Confederate history buff, and of course, extremely proud of the fact that his wife was the granddaughter of a Confederate officer.

LAURA

An officer known in history?

MARJORIE

Not well known: a major who served under Pierre Beauregard in the Battle of Petersburg.

LAURA

So his children at least would have been direct descendants?

MARJORIE

Yes, but they had no children.

LAURA

And your uncle by way of compensation is delusional and believes he is this major?

MARJORIE

No – he believes he's General Pierre Beauregard.

LAURA

Goodness!

MARJORIE

At times he has what are called "lucid episodes" and is merely Lafayette.

LAURA

So he's never been gainfully employed?

MARJORIE

He did some acting, but was paid very little. At one time, he wanted to be a railroad conductor, but this never materialized. After his marriage, his sense of worth rested fully on his wife's connection to the "Lost Cause," and he feels she left him because he had no important ancestors. He must have loved her deeply because since then, he's not only taken on an ancestor of importance – Beauregard – he's become Beauregard; he's become the very person he believes his wife would have idolized.

LAURA

How very sad... I shall have to meet him, and then a psychiatrist must be appointed for an evaluation... *(A thoughtful pause)* Strange... I had a sister who was in a similar situation. Her husband, something of a dreamer, had so identified with the "Lost Cause" that she found it intolerable. She ran away from the marriage, for she had very personal reasons for regarding the Confederate cause as abhorrent. As a matter of fact, our -

(Lafayette enters from the left. He wears a gold-buttoned, gray Confederate coat with general's insignia on the collar and sleeves, a broad-rimmed hat with flouncing feathers, and a belt with an attached sword in its sheath. His hair is brushed forward over his temples, in the style of Beauregard, and he likewise has a large mustache. His worn pants and shoes, however, are clearly out of uniform.)

LAFAYETTE

I've warned Lee, for Grant's forces are moving towards Petersburg from the direction of the James River. The fate of Richmond rests in my hands! Until Lee responds with reinforcements, we're no more than a token force. I've a chain of artillery emplacements, but only 3000 men!

MARJORIE

(Rising and crossing to her uncle) Lafayette, please! There's a visitor here to see you!

LAFAYETTE

Surely he's aware that the loss of Petersburg means the loss of all supplies to Richmond by railroad. As soon as General Lee sees the seriousness of our situation, we'll plan the counterattack.

MARJORIE

Miss Stafford is here to help you with your income.

LAFAYETTE

Who?

MARJORIE

Miss Stafford, the social worker.

LAFAYETTE

Child, Pierre Beauregard cannot now concern himself with unimportant matters.

MARJORIE

You know we need this income! We've discussed it – you've agreed –

LAFAYETTE

Because Petersburg will never fall by direct assault, I foresee that Grant will undertake siege operations. This area could be deadlocked for months, deadlocked until the end of the war! In whose favor? At what cost in casualties?

He draws out the sword from its sheath and waves it about in the air. Alarmed, Laura Stafford rises.

Pierre Beauregard stands by his men! If surrounded, he'll draw the sword; he'll die fighting for the cause. Lost cause, yes, lost soul, no. Never!

Marjorie grabs the handle of the sword and grapples with Lafayette.

MARJORIE

You'll hurt somebody with this thing! Put it away! Lafayette, it's me! – it's Marjorie!

LAFAYETTE

Marjorie?... *(Lafayette relaxes and returns the sword to its sheath)*

MARJORIE

And Miss Stafford is visiting us about your disability benefits.

LAFAYETTE

Stafford?...

LAURA

(With sudden recognition) Arnold Dobbs!

All three pause, stunned, then Laura crosses to Lafayette.

Arnold Dobbs!

MARJORIE

What is it, Ma'am?

LAURA

(To Lafayette) And you recognized my name, didn't you? Stafford.

LAFAYETTE

Your name....

LAURA

Yes, I'm the sister of your former wife – I'm Laura Stafford. I'm sure your wife spoke of me many times. *(To Marjorie)* As you revealed your uncle's past, and especially his real name, memories stirred. I remarked to you I had a sister in a similar position.

MARJORIE

Yes...

LAURA

I recall the many letters she wrote about Arnold, or Arnie as she called him. Yes, she was the very one! My sister was his wife!

Lafayette's pompous bearing becomes sadly deflated. Sinking into a visible depression, he crosses to a chair and sits down.

MARJORIE

Unbelievable....

LAURA

He recognizes my name. But I was about to reveal something else to you before we were interrupted, something very important, and I believe Lafayette should listen very carefully. Our father... my sister never told Arnie, she was afraid to tell him... However, she arranged for Arnie to meet our father one morning – they were to meet him at the train station in Richmond. He was a train conductor, you see, close to retirement. But the night before their meeting, she ran away. It was because... well, it was not because Arnie had no important ancestors in the Civil War, no... You see, our father was black. She felt Arnie would never accept him. And father, he was heartbroken, simply heartbroken... Indeed, he didn't live long after that; he was never able to enjoy the retirement he had earned and so deserved.

Lafayette's eyes, fixed on Laura, have become larger and larger.

MARJORIE

Where is your sister now?

LAURA

We never saw her again; never knew what became of her... This was what hurt father so badly. He was never able to talk with her; never able to work things out....

Lafayette's eyes glaze over and he stands and throws his hat down on the ground.

LAFAYETTE

When the war was lost, when Petersburg and Richmond fell, why, what did Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard do then? Why – why... he became a civilian in the United States of America! He was... he became the president of two railroads!

He exits left.

MARJORIE

Could your visit be a coincidence? – it seems something of a miracle. He referred to the fall of Petersburg and Richmond... he referred to Beauregard as another person outside of himself... he referred to the United States of America! These are firsts for my uncle – he could be on his way to healing.

LAURA

He may be on his way, but I suspect it's a long road. I suppose we had better go and try to complete the interview. It won't be easy....

They exit left.

(Lights dim on the set and come up at right as the Conductor slowly enters, removing the watch from his vest pocket.)

CONDUCTOR

Pullin' out this watch is still a habit of mine. Don't matter here, maybe it does there... not as much as folks like to think. Why, the case is worn smooth from all the years... yet, seems like there's no time on a movin' train, an' no place, except brief stops. Everything is suspended. Life is like a train ride. We're suspended briefly from eternity. Reckon my life wasn't so bad... would've liked a longer retirement, but my youngest girl disappointed me. Maybe I took it too hard. Well, I'm keepin' an eye on all of 'em, and that beau – that beau fella, too. He sure can use some guidance. Pretty soon, accordin' to this watch – which is runnin' slower here – we'll all be meetin' at the final stop.

He slowly returns the watch to his vest pocket and exits right.

End of Drama

IVESON AND EARNEST

Characters:

Iveson, an elderly man

Penny, Iveson's granddaughter

Earnest, Iveson's cat (never seen)

Time: Late Saturday afternoon, the 1980's

Place: Combined living and dining room of Iveson's small apartment

Scene: A small but orderly living and dining room. At right is a stuffed chair and lamp, and at left a table and chair. On the table, which is covered with a plastic cloth, are two small bowls, a spoon, a bag of dry cat food and cat toys – a ball and a rubber mouse.

At Rise: Iveson enters. He is a frail, white-haired elderly man, somewhat stooped over, and walks with a cane. He is very neat in appearance, with a sweater and well-polished shoes. He carries a quart of milk.

IVESON

Well, well, my boy, it's four-thirty, and it's cat feeding time, cat feeding time for Earnest. I wouldn't forget my Earnest, oh, no....

(He crosses to the table, sets down his cane and prepares a meal for Earnest, pouring milk in one bowl and mixing milk and dry food in the other.)

He always has an appetite, not like some folks we know, eh? He always wants a hearty meal. But before he eats – no, no! You know better than to jump on the table. My wife would never allow cats on the furniture. Now... *(he picks up the rubber mouse, and slowly sits down in the chair at the table)* I'll distract him. I know he likes to play cat and mouse before he eats. Catch the mousey! Catch the mousey! *(He dangles the mouse by its tail over Earnest)* Catch the mousey! Mousey's too fast, too fast for Earnest...

He bends over and moves the mouse around on the floor.

Catch him now, if you can. Uh-oh! He almost caught mousey. Mousey's safer in the air, like the birds. *(Again dangling the mouse by its tail)* Mousey, mousey, mousey! Mousey, mousey, mousey! So! He's got him – snatched him right out of the air! I've misjudged him – Earnest only pretended he couldn't catch the mouse on the floor – for he's caught him right out of the air! *(He appears to be grappling with Earnest for the mouse)* Ahhh! He's lost interest... After all, it's

only a toy, it's only a game, eh? Earnest has had enough play; he wants real, nourishing food. Yes....

He rises, places the mouse back on the table, picks up the two bowls, crosses down front and places the bowls on the floor. He watches Earnest eat and with some difficulty stoops to pet him.

Good boy, that's a good boy... After your meal, you'll be sleepy and so well-behaved, and that's splendid because we're to have a visitor. Ah, he turns and looks at me. His eyes ask, who? Penny. My granddaughter, Penny. So, he approves, does he?

He crosses back to the table and picks up his cane and the ball. He crosses to the stuffed chair and slowly sits down.

True, she doesn't come by often, but we're always glad for an occasional visit, aren't we, my friend? There now, he makes himself comfortable in my lap....

He doses off.

(Penny enters. She is a wholesome-appearing teenager with thick red hair worn in a single braid. She is dressed casually. Noticing the bowls, she crosses and stands over them, folding her arms. Iveson wakens with a start.)

Ah, Penny!

He starts to rise from his chair.

PENNY

Please don't get up for my sake.

IVESON

Well, I don't mind, but Earnest... you know how a cat loves to sleep after eating.

PENNY

Oh? The bowls are full; the food is untouched.

IVESON

That's because I always give him more than he can eat. Besides, he doesn't like to see the bowls empty.

PENNY

Really?

IVESON

Sit down. Tell me about school. You've grown. Every time I see you, you're taller, though you couldn't be prettier.

Penny sits in the chair by the table.

Is science still your favorite subject?

PENNY

I like it about as well as anything, I guess. It's a straight-A subject for me, same as history and English.

IVESON

We're proud of you, Penny. You'll be able to take your pick of the best colleges.

PENNY

Several are offering scholarships.

IVESON

Girls have more opportunities nowadays.

PENNY

Not many girls excel in both mathematics and English.

IVESON

No, indeed.

PENNY

And next year I'm taking chemistry and physics.

IVESON

Newton's apple, eh? Oh, look, Earnest is awake. Did you hear, Earnest? My granddaughter's taking physics next year. One day – so the story goes – Newton was sitting under an apple tree, thinking about gravity and the nature of... yes, reality. The nature of reality. Then...

He holds the ball high up above Earnest.

An apple dropped and hit him on the head!

He drops the ball on Earnest.

Eureka! – he exclaimed. And he knew... what did he know, Penny?

Penny rises and begins pacing back and forth.

PENNY

Something to do with the gravity of earth attracting objects.

IVESON

Or holding the moon in place... Is something wrong?

PENNY

Well, since you're the one who brought up the subject of reality...

IVESON

Did I?

PENNY

Mom and I worry about you, Gran'pop. She thinks you ought to come and live with us. You spend too much time alone.

IVESON

I'm not alone.

PENNY

That's just it, you are!

IVESON

This small apartment is perfect for Earnest and me. Someone comes by every so often, and I also keep it clean myself. My wife was a stickler for cleanliness – she drilled it into me. She would never have approved of Earnest. When she died – not many years ago now – I don't know how I would've survived, but for Earnest. He came just in time. He was only a stray kitten then, a skinny gray waif with a white nose, white socks and a bit of white on his tail. He's been my faithful companion ever since, though he does wander about the streets some nights... I've never deprived him of his freedom. Still he always comes back; he knows he has a good home with me.

PENNY

Well, you could bring him.

IVESON

He's king of the alley in this neighborhood.

PENNY

Look, Gran'pop, I don't know how to tell you this, but –

IVESON

(Rising from the chair) Earnest has jumped off my lap. Look! He's running away, running away with his tail and ears down, his fur all bristled on the back. Whatever has possessed him?

PENNY

Gran'pop, there is no cat.

IVESON

What?

PENNY

There is no cat! There never has been a cat!

IVESON

Penny, what are you saying? What do you mean, there's no cat?

PENNY

You're only imagining this cat! Mom and I have never seen him, no one's ever seen him, no one but you! Earnest doesn't exist!

IVESON

Doesn't exist?... How could you say such a thing? Why would I – how could I... Earnest doesn't exist?

Visibly weakening, he begins to tremble and seems to sink into himself. He looks about the room with great fear, then collapses back into the chair.

Earnest?... He's run away! He's gone... We've drive him away. And he was afraid of you... Why? You said he didn't exist! Earnest! Earnest!

Clasping his hands, he sinks lower into the chair. Tears begin pouring from his eyes.

PENNY

Gran'pop, please!

IVESON

I can't live without Earnest!...

PENNY

We didn't drive him away!

IVESON

Yes, we did, he's gone. Earnest is gone...

He buries his face in his hands.

Greatly alarmed, Penny again paces, then hits upon an idea. She begins searching around the room.

PENNY

He's not gone, he's only hiding.

IVESON

Hiding?

PENNY

He hasn't run away, you see, he's only taken offense. Yet, I only meant it as a sort of joke... that is, his absence – I mean, before he left, or...

IVESON

A joke?

PENNY

He always reminds me of the Cheshire cat. You know, the cat in *Alice in Wonderland*? The cat who vanishes and re-appears, except for his smile, which is always seen.

IVESON

The Cheshire cat? Well, perhaps, though Earnest has large, luminous green eyes. Indeed, his eyes are his best feature; he has rarely smiled.

PENNY

(Pointing) Here he comes now! See him? He's coming back!

IVESON

(Starting to rise) Earnest!

PENNY

No, don't get up, Gramps. I'll bring him to you. But first let me apologize to Earnest.

She stoops and pets Earnest across his back.

I'm sorry, Earnest. Would you forgive me? You know how young people are nowadays, they think they know it all. What I deserve is to be hit on the head with an apple. Eureka! – Earnest exists!

She picks up Earnest and carries him over to Iveson's lap.

And he's the perfect companion to share Gran'pop's humble – and free – home.

IVESON

Here's my boy, here he is!... Well now, I think he's forgiven you and is quite content to continue his peaceful nap, for he's purring.

PENNY

Shhh! And no more about science and physics.

IVESON

When he gazes out at the moon each night with his luminous eyes, he has no need for books, like we humans; he knows that he himself keeps the moon in place!

Lights fade out.

End of Drama



THE RED HORSE

Characters:

Brother Anthony

Brother Timothy

Time: Early evening, late twentieth century

Place: A monastery; a recess room near the chapel

Scene: A small recess room where the monks meet for conversation and counsel prior to vespers in the chapel. There are two chairs and a small cloth-covered table. On the table is a Bible. There is a stained-glass window in the background through which streams light and color.

At Rise: Brother Anthony enters from the right. In his late twenties, he wears monk's robes and sandals and is lean and dark-haired, with chiselled, masculine features. He picks up and opens the Bible, sits down and studies a certain passage.

ANTHONY

“Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come!’ And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When he opened the second seal...”

He looks up thoughtfully.

(Brother Timothy, also in robes, gray-haired and bespectacled, enters from the right and Brother Anthony rises to greet him.)

TIMOTHY

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Brother Anthony.

ANTHONY

The honor in mine, Brother Timothy.

TIMOTHY

We have only a brief time before vespers, but of course we are men of few words.

ANTHONY

And few words do not come easily in a life of silence.

TIMOTHY

Most of our new brothers do not hesitate to meet their elders for counsel here in the recess room. You are an exception. We have had to request a meeting with you.

ANTHONY

If I have offended –

TIMOTHY

Oh, no indeed. Our abbot has reminded me that you have been with us... how long?

ANTHONY

Almost three years.

TIMOTHY

Yes... therefore, the moment has come to ordain you as a full and permanent member of our order.

ANTHONY

A moment I have joyfully anticipated these three years.

TIMOTHY

Your conduct and adjustment are exemplary. Would we hesitate to accept one who has not only found a place among us, but is an energetic and productive worker? Moreover, you are the outstanding bass in our choir. Our fervent wish is to accept you fully into our order.

ANTHONY

Your words affirm my own wishes. I have no desire but to remain within these hallowed walls, living a life of silent devotion to the ideals of our holy order.

TIMOTHY

Hallowed walls... holy order... perhaps. But we have no saints here.

ANTHONY

You have aspiring saints.

TIMOTHY

Hmmm... Let us sit down for a moment, for I have some important questions to ask you.

ANTHONY

Most surely.

They sit down at the table.

TIMOTHY

You express your heartfelt desire to remain with us, but every man, every candidate is complex. Could there be a shadow of doubt anywhere within you? Have you ever woken in the night with a question on your lips; a longing for the worldly life in the forefront of your mind?

ANTHONY

Ah, never!

TIMOTHY

Never?

ANTHONY

I have woken in the early morning hours and known only joy at the serenity of my surroundings; known only happiness for the privilege of such a life.

TIMOTHY

Be absolutely honest with yourself, and with me.

ANTHONY

I have no doubts, Brother Timothy.

TIMOTHY

You do seem to be perfect, yet... I am rarely so direct with our candidates. Those who appear to be far less suitable than yourself pass without question. Yet you... Something disturbs me about you.

ANTHONY

Whatever could it be? I am at pains to correct every flaw within myself.

TIMOTHY

Ah, well, I am perhaps somewhat jealous.

ANTHONY

Jealous? You?

TIMOTHY

My own adjustment was not nearly so placid as yours. I was in this room for counsel at least once a month.

ANTHONY

I turn to the Bible for counsel.

TIMOTHY

(After a pause) Very well then....

He starts to stand, smiling.

ANTHONY

(Gazing at the Bible) I do have one concern...

TIMOTHY

Oh?

ANTHONY

A recurring dream. I believe it relates to *Revelation*.

TIMOTHY

You've been reading *Revelation*? I personally would not recommend too much *Revelation*.

ANTHONY

One passage is of special interest to me, because of my dream.

TIMOTHY

And which passage is that?

ANTHONY

The red horse.

TIMOTHY

Red horse?

Brother Anthony opens the Bible and reads.

When the Lamb "opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say..." If you'll recall, Brother Timothy, this second creature round the throne of God was like an ox. The second living creature said, "Come! And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword." I began studying this chapter after my dream of the red horse had recurred for about two years.

TIMOTHY

Two years?

ANTHONY

Yes, though for a long time I was hardly conscious of it... then the vision became so real and so powerful it was impossible to forget.

TIMOTHY

Describe this dream, this horse to me. Is it red, or chestnut?

ANTHONY

Chestnut, I believe. A reddish-brown, yet surrounded by red, or in a red atmosphere.

He rises.

The horse is always first realized from a very great distance away, then begins galloping toward me, closer and closer, louder and louder, until I glimpse its very hooves on the ground. Up upon its hind legs it rears, sweating and snorting, steam rising from its body. Its brown eyes roll downwards to stare at me. There is no question in the eye, but an exclamation, an ultimatum.

TIMOTHY

What is the ultimatum?

ANTHONY

It would not harm me, no. Its fate is clearly in my hands, and its fate is the unthinkable: its own destruction... at my mercy.

TIMOTHY

(Rising) At the risk of sounding redundant, I do wish you had sought counsel for this dream, and not from *Revelation*, but from one of us.

ANTHONY

It appears from my studies this dream is not entirely good. I was reluctant... How would you interpret this dream, and passage, from my circumstance?

TIMOTHY

My dear Brother Anthony, just when matters were seeming so perfect – too perfect – and I on the verge of visiting our abbot with glad tidings –

ANTHONY

What are you saying? I'm anxious –

TIMOTHY

There is no need to be alarmed, for it may be that God has spoken to us in these few moments before vespers; He has certainly spoken to you in your dream for two years.

ANTHONY

What could it mean? It must be bad.

TIMOTHY

Neither good nor bad, but inclining more to the good, I would say. The dream is a clear warning: you have manly qualities which cannot be suppressed, but must find expression, most likely in the world outside our walls.

ANTHONY

Oh, no!

TIMOTHY

God has blessed you with an abundance of fire and passion for reasons known only to Him.

ANTHONY

Does this mean I cannot stay here?

TIMOTHY

We'll make no quick decisions; the abbot will allow you all the time you need. Who knows, the outcome may surprise us. You're remarkably devout.

ANTHONY

So there is still hope?

TIMOTHY

Brother Anthony, the next time you meet this red horse, ask him what he has to do with hope. You'll find he doesn't comprehend hope. What has fire to do with hope?

ANTHONY

Fire?... I don't understand.

TIMOTHY

You will. Come, let us go to chapel for vespers, where we must also give special thanks to God for bestowing a portion of His infinite grace, love and wisdom upon us, and in so timely a manner.

They cross left to exit, and Brother Timothy stops.

TIMOTHY

It occurs to me... our choir may lose the most wonderful bass we have ever had. Well... the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away....

They exit left.

End of Drama

THE ATTORNEY

Characters:

Russell Danneman, a prosecuting attorney

Beth Danneman, Russell's wife

Time: The 1980's, 2:00 a.m. on a Thursday morning

Place: Russell's study in the Danneman home

Scene: Russell's comfortable study, with a chair, side table and lamp, bookcase and table. On the table is an open attaché case and reading glasses.

At Rise: The study is dimly lit and shadowy. Attorney Danneman enters and stands very still, deep in thought. Ice is heard tinkling in a glass which he lifts to his lips. In a few moments, he crosses to the lamp and turns it on, and a middle-aged man is revealed, wearing a robe, pajamas and slippers. He has gray hair and refined, distinguished features. He crosses to the table, puts on his glasses, removes a folder from the attaché case and looks through it. Then, shaking his head in disbelief, he puts the folder back in the case, removes his glasses, crosses to the chair and sits down. Shortly, his wife, Beth, enters. She is an attractive, middle-aged lady wearing a robe, gown and slippers.

RUSSELL

Did I wake you?

BETH

I didn't hear you get up, yet when I opened my eyes you weren't there. I looked at the clock and, sure enough, it was a few minutes past two. I realized... how many times have I woken around two, and discovered you had gone to your study? I usually go back to sleep, but this time... Russ, is something wrong? You're not drinking, are you?

RUSSELL

No, Beth, you know I gave up drinking a long time ago. This is plain tonic water, which I found in the back of the cupboard. I'd forgotten how soothing tonic water could be this time of night.

BETH

Something's troubling you. Can you tell me?

RUSSELL

I dislike bringing work problems home.

BETH

But these restless nights... they effect me, too, don't they?

RUSSELL

Yes, and I'm sorry.

BETH

I'll forgive you if you'll share your concerns with me this one time.

RUSSELL

This one time? I recall quite a few candle-lit dinners when I was preoccupied with sordid details of cases.

BETH

I only recall the dinners.

RUSSELL

Very well, you win, again. The Schroder case is troubling me.

BETH

Your most sterling success!

RUSSELL

So it appears. My popularity has never been greater. Not only did we get Schroder convicted on circumstantial evidence, he was, as you know from the papers, sentenced to death by Judge Lewis. To date, all appeals have failed and he's scheduled to be executed next week.

BETH

And this disturbs you? This is why you've been getting up at two so often?

Russell rises from the chair and paces.

RUSSELL

Not precisely. I'm not certain when it was I first began waking up at two, but it was some months ago. It took months before I was aware of what I was hearing.

BETH

Hearing?

RUSSELL

More like a whispered thought, part dream, part real. Have you ever had such an experience?

BETH

Not over a long period of time.

RUSSELL

Eventually I made a note of it, and then it seemed to stop. But these last few weeks...

BETH

How does this relate to the Schroder case?

RUSSELL

For the longest time it didn't, it made no sense at all to me. Then, after Schroder was sentenced, both I and the defense attorney received a series of letters from a prisoner.

He puts on his glasses, removes the folder from the case, opens it and shows the letters to Beth.

RUSSELL

As you can see, there are four rather crudely written letters, with poor spelling and smudges. At first, we placed no credence in them. It's not uncommon to receive such letters in sensational cases, especially one involving a politician.

BETH

I see he claims to have met someone in prison.

RUSSELL

Yes, someone who told him that Schroder was framed – framed by a member of the victim's family.

BETH

Oh....

RUSSELL

A few facts do ring true, but I would have dismissed the letters, except...

BETH

You had these dreams.

RUSSELL

Which prompted me to examine the letters over and over. I even took them to a graphologist, who felt they were sincere despite the smudges. We looked up the man's record: nothing remarkable. Obviously, he'll want a deal before giving us any more information.

BETH

Your most successful case will now come into question?

RUSSELL

And what about my promotion?

BETH

(Half-heartedly) Why not ignore the letters? What's a dream? Didn't Schroder have a fair trial?

RUSSELL

Tempting, isn't it? But it's a man's life, Beth, and it will be on my hands.

BETH

Thank god the death sentence is rare.

RUSSELL

Not so rare from Judge Lewis.

Russell puts the folder back into the attaché case.

What I haven't told you is that Schroder's execution is scheduled for next Thursday at two in the morning. Almost exactly a week from now.

BETH

At two?...

RUSSELL

Amazing how everyone who knew Schroder was shocked. True, he had a robbery record, but hadn't he been straight for years? He was overjoyed when he got the contract for carpentry work – at great odds, by the way – he loved the mansion; he loved working around a lot of famous people.

BETH

If he was framed, it's the perfect crime.

RUSSELL

Almost, yes.

BETH

You'll take the letters to Judge Lewis?

RUSSELL

Tomorrow.

BETH

Will the dreams stop then?

RUSSELL

I hope so. Probably they will....

BETH

Well, you're facing a rough day tomorrow, perhaps we'd better go back to bed and try to get some sleep.

RUSSELL

Perhaps so.

He removes his glasses and finishes the tonic water.

You know, it's better without gin.

BETH

I don't believe you.

They prepare to exit.

But you haven't told me – what is this whispered thought that keeps waking you up?

RUSSELL

First, I have a clear vision of the night sky full of stars, then I hear: "All is one," or "You and this man are one."

BETH

It gives me the chills.

RUSSELL

I know, it's positively religious.

BETH

And from you, surprising.

RUSSELL

It's true, I'm often felt to be on the devil's side.

BETH

Well, put your pitchfork away, and let's get some sleep. When this case is finally over, we'll celebrate with a candle-lit dinner.

RUSSELL

Agreed, and we won't discuss it over our meal.

BETH

Agreed.

Russell crosses to turn the light off and stops.

RUSSELL

But seriously, Beth, there's something awesome about such an experience. It's giving me second thoughts about being irreligious. Listen, if I hear this thought again, don't be surprised when I sit up in bed and say: "God bless Schroder, and God bless me!"

BETH

Amen.

Russell turns off the light and they exit.

End of Drama



THE LAMB

Characters:

Amy Robinson, a young playwright

Desiree, a character in the Marat play

Claude, a character in the Marat play

Jason Hilliard, the owner and manager of the Merry-Go-Round Theater

Time: Early Tuesday evening, the 1980's

Place: Lobby of the Merry-Go-Round Theater

Scene: In the lobby of the theater are several folding chairs and two small children's chairs. Glittery cut-out letters hang suspended in the background and read: Merry-Go-Round Theater. Upstage right is a corkboard on a display easel, and tacked to the board is a small sign with an arrow pointing to right which reads: Box Office.

At Rise: Amy Robinson enters from the left and looks timidly around. She is a shy, delicate-appearing girl around eighteen years old, and is dressed casually though neatly. She looks toward the right, turns and waits uneasily, then sits down in one of the chairs. Shortly, a frightening scream is heard off-stage right and Amy, alarmed, jumps up. A teenaged boy and girl enter violently at right. They are in tattered eighteenth-century costume and are heavily made-up, the girl with realistic bruises on her face and arms. The boy carries a rolled-up poster under one arm and manhandles the girl with the other. He flings the girl across the lobby. She falls and rolls cleverly in front of Amy, and, at left, crawls onto her knees and clasps her hands in a pleading gesture.

DESIREE

Oh, Claude! Why do you treat me so cruelly? You know how I love you! Have pity!

CLAUDE

Love? Bah! Prove it exists! Pity? If pity exists, it could never penetrate the walls of this madhouse!

DESIREE

(*To Amy*) Either he spurns his devoted Desiree or he maltreats her! His mother hated him.

AMY

You're acting, of course?

CLAUDE

You're a parasite! Everyone confined here is a parasite – except me! I am not confined, I am imprisoned here against my will. They threw me in with mad men and women, thinking I would go mad. It's Marat's fault. I should never have fallen in with his lot – I'd be a free man today.

AMY

Is this a rehearsal?

DESIREE

Ha, ha ha! With what wicked merriment will we perform our play! It is Claude's idea!

CLAUDE

A play which does not pretend, as you will see in the end.

DESIREE

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

(Claude tacks a poster onto the corkboard, and the Box Office sign onto the poster. The poster reads: The Assassination of Jean Paul Marat, by James Correll, Opening Friday at 8:00 p.m. The poster depicts a man lying dead in a tub, a stab wound in his chest.)

AMY

Hey, come on, you can stop rehearsing now. Can you tell me where Mr. Jason Hilliard is? He said he would meet me in the lobby tonight.

CLAUDE

Hilliard runs this madhouse. Who are you?

DESIREE

Why would he want to see you?

AMY

I'm a playwright. I sent him a script a few months ago. As I didn't hear from him, I called him, and he said he wanted to talk to me.

DESIREE

The pig!

AMY

Pardon?

CLAUDE

The pig runs this madhouse!

AMY

Still in character, are you?

DESIREE

There's method in our madness!

AMY

Method acting?

CLAUDE

That's right, wench!

AMY

I'm tempted to call you a name, too, except I'm from the old school.

DESIREE

You're not up with the times.

AMY

(Glancing at the poster) Isn't this play a bit... heavy for this theater? I thought this was a children's theater?

DESIREE

Ha, ha!

Rock-a-bye, baby, in the tree top,
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock.
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall –

CLAUDE

And down will come baby, cradle and all –

Claude shoves Desiree and she stumbles and falls on the floor.

DESIREE

Where's our baby? What have you done with our child? Inhuman monster!

CLAUDE

(Slipping out of character) Are you sure that nursery rhyme would be sung in eighteenth-century France? Isn't it English?

DESIREE

(Jumping up) Maybe it's universal. We'll ask Hilliard. Wouldn't it be a nice touch? We had a baby, but now it's gone.

CLAUDE

Just so it's gone.

(Jason Hilliard enters from the right. He is a stout man in late middle-age, with dark, obviously dyed hair. His expression is arrogant. He dresses casually, with pretentious, artistic touches, such as a scarf around his neck. He carries a manuscript.)

HILLIARD

All right, back on the stage! We have a run-through in a few minutes.

DESIREE

We've got a great idea! We had a baby, but it's disappeared.

HILLIARD

(Shrugs) Maybe. Now, go on.

Claude and Desiree exit.

Here's your play. *(Gives the script to Amy)* What was it called?

AMY

The title's on the cover: The Lamb.

HILLIARD

Oh, yeah. Well, we can't use it. Sorry.

He turns to exit.

AMY

Wait a minute! Could you offer some comment? Could it be changed or improved in some way?

HILLIARD

What's it about?

AMY

It's a kind of allegory.

HILLIARD

Mother Goose stuff?

AMY

Not really. The lamb, you see, refers to the ingénue. Her fate, very early in life, is to encounter three evils, which are represented by three characters, although their evil is disguised with various costumes. Masks would be nice, too.

HILLIARD

O.K.

AMY

The first character urges the ingénue to grow up too quickly. He forces her to face unpleasant realities, such as ugliness and cruelty, at a very tender age. Somehow, she overcomes this. The second character offers work that she enjoys, but he exploits her, and she is far too naïve to perceive how he profits from her labors. She overcomes this experience, too. Soon, because she has suffered, she is able to weave some lovely, original stories out of her own soul. But the third character tries to destroy her hopes of success by asserting that she is impractical and unrealistic. When she overcomes this third goal, the angels rejoice.

There is a pause, and Hilliard sneers.

HILLIARD

Who wants allegory? Who needs Mother Goose?

AMY

Isn't the Merry-Go-Round a children's theater?

HILLIARD

Look, kid, nobody would have interest in your play. We couldn't attract any audiences with a play like that – we'd go broke.

AMY

If you could suggest some –

HILLIARD

Three evils? It's awful. Talk about unrealistic – you're unrealistic! Your play is totally unbelievable; totally out of touch with reality. So, we're a kid's theater? So what? We want mature plays that make a social statement. Your play can't be changed – it's hopeless. Throw it out. Try to catch our opening Friday. If you can get a seat, you'll see some real theater! Now if you don't mind, you've wasted enough of my time.

He exits right.

(Amy stands in stunned silence for a few moments, then touches her script gently. She sits down on one of the chairs, turns the pages of the script; looks up in thoughtful disbelief, shaking her head. She turns and looks at the Merry-Go-Round sign behind her, clearly puzzled. Soon, intending to leave, she rises and takes a few steps, then stops, deep in thought.)

Claude and Desiree appear at right.

CLAUDE

Pffsst!

DESIREE

How did it go? What did the pig say?

AMY

(Confidently) The pig has taught me a valuable lesson. A work of art can be prophetic; it can be about the destiny of the artist; it can warn and guide. Before the artist is quite mature, it will perhaps be a very unconscious thing...

DESIREE

Isn't he the most amazing man!

AMY

All the same, I think I'll get off this merry-go-round.

Heard off stage:

HILLIARD

(Snarling) Get in here, you two! Keep me waiting any longer and you'll be outta this show!

DESIREE

Ha, ha, ha!

CLAUDE

You're lucky!

AMY

I agree.

CLAUDE

Bye!

(They exit, Claude shoving Desiree. Amy appears bemused for a few moments, then crosses to the poster, turns it upside-down and exits.)

End of Drama



THE CLEARING

Characters:

Ellen

Glenda

Mamie

Time: September, the 1980's

Place: A clearing in the woods

Scene: The stage is bare except for a few large rocks at left. Lighting suggests the moving shadows of overhead pines, and sound effects suggest birds, autumn crickets and the whispering pines.

At Rest: Ellen enters, followed by Glenda. Both are dressed for hiking, and Ellen, the younger of the two, wears a backpack. Glenda is middle-aged. They both look around the clearing, Glenda with awe.

ELLEN

This is it, Glenda, this is the clearing.

GLENDA

Yes! The open, grassy space I remember, surrounded by lovely pines. And look! – the rocks.

ELLEN

Just as you described.

GLENDA

Nothing has changed, except the pines are taller.

ELLEN

This is the clearing you know from childhood, and the clearing I know from hiking along these trails.

GLENDA

Had you not guided me here, I never would have found it.

ELLEN

Lucky we met at the bookstore, you looking at that card of the pine trees, a dreamy expression on your face.

GLEENDA

Lucky we both had time for coffee, so I could share my dream... Seems this clearing has been calling me. How else could I phrase it? Calling me... and I don't know why. In memories, and yes, in dreams. In the sound of murmuring pines as I suddenly woke from the deepest sleep; in the picture of the gently curling branches raised against the starry sky. I woke my husband once to describe the picture, and he thought I was crazy!

ELLEN

Well, I'm truly intrigued, so here we are.

GLEENDA

Why, Ellen?

ELLEN

Why? The wind, the stars, the pines, the sun... they have their own reasons, but they can only speak to our hearts. Perhaps if we stay here long enough, we'll understand. Let's sit on these rocks and have some lunch.

Ellen removes the backpack and the two sit down on the rocks.

You were only here once?

GLEENDA

Only once. My family came to these woods on an outing one day and I wandered off by myself. I sat on these rocks for about an hour, till my mother came looking for me, worried.

ELLEN

You were certainly deeply impressed.

GLEENDA

This is a special place.

ELLEN

(Removing lunch from the pack) We must have thought the two-mile hike from the car would leave us famished. Look at the food we've packed: two huge sandwiches, apples, coffee, salad, juice and cookies. One-half a sandwich and some juice will be enough for me.

GLEENDA

I'm not hungry at all.

ELLEN

(Looking up) Did you hear something?

GLENDA

I'm not sure...

ELLEN

Another hiker. Good, we can share our food.

(A girl enters from the right. She is around twenty years old and appears thin and pale. She wears a faded dress with large pockets, and socks and old ankle boots. She carries a small plastic bucket. She is startled to encounter Ellen and Glenda, and her hand flies to her heart.)

MAMIE

Oh! –

ELLEN

No need to be alarmed, we're friendly. My name is Ellen and this is Glenda.

GLENDA

Hi.

MAMIE

Hi, I'm Mamie. I was just gathering some crab apples.

ELLEN

There's no shortage of crab apple trees around here.

GLENDA

Something tells us you thought to rest on these rocks.

MAMIE

Well, I don't own them.

Mamie looks at the food with longing and Ellen and Glenda exchange glances.

GLENDA

Here, have a sandwich.

Mamie approaches and takes the proffered sandwich from Glenda, then quickly puts it into her pocket.

MAMIE

Thank you, I'll save it for later, if you don't mind.

ELLEN

Of course we don't mind.

MAMIE

Would you like some crab apples?

GLENDA

Oh, we may collect some on the way home.

MAMIE

I was going to have a few for lunch, though they're bitter.

GLENDA

You also have lunch in the clearing?

MAMIE

The clearin'?... Sometimes.

GLENDA

Do you live around here?

MAMIE

I live in a cabin about a mile up the hill. My mom owns a half-acre of land.

ELLEN

(Rising) Why don't you visit with us for a while, Mamie? Sit down.

GLENDA

You don't often meet anyone here, do you?

MAMIE

Not often. But I really must go home. My mom – *(she swallows)* thanks anyway.

Mamie turns and starts to exit, then stumbles and falls.

How stupid of me!

Ellen and Glenda cross to help her.

ELLEN

Are you all right?

GLENDA

Did you hurt your knees?

MAMIE

I'm fine.

With help, Mamie starts to stand, but shaky, she falls again.

What's the matter with me? I'm weak.

She stands on her second attempt, then covers her face to hide tears.

I'm – sorry –

GLEND A

What's wrong, dear?

MAMIE

I'm weak, that's all.

ELLEN

That's all, she says! Why are you so weak?

GLEND A

Would you like some juice?

MAMIE

Maybe so.

Glenda pours juice into a paper cup and gives it to Mamie, who drinks it down.

ELLEN

Now, sit down over here and tell us what's troubling you.

GLEND A

Perhaps we can help.

They guide her to the rocks and she sits down.

MAMIE

It's not me, it's my mom and my daughter. My mom's been sick. For a long time, we got by on her savings and my husband's support payments. But her savings are gone and my husband hasn't send any money for months. We don't even know where he is... My daughter – Sophie – she'll need to be in first grade soon, but how can I get her to school? It's miles away. We could move, but like mom always says, it takes money to move. At least mom owns the land and the cabin. How could we afford to pay rent? Mom's in pain, and all the worry isn't helpin' her.

She touches the crab apples in the bucket.

Food's low, so I've been gatherin' whatever fruits and berries I could find in the woods. I plan to make a pie with these... we still have some lard and flour and sugar. Your sandwich... I'll take it to mom and Sophie for lunch. It'll be a nice surprise.

ELLEN

We're glad you told us this.

MAMIE

Why?

ELLEN

(Glancing at Glenda, who nods affirmatively) I believe we can help you.

MAMIE

I've thought of lookin' for work in town, but I can't leave mom alone too long. She's in pain.

ELLEN

Has she seen a doctor?

MAMIE

I called the doctor again the last time I was in town, but he never comes up. I told him we couldn't pay.

GLEENDA

Sounds to us like your situation's desperate, and getting worse.

MAMIE

All I ever do, every day and all day long, is try to think of a way we can get by, but it's as though I'm movin' around in circles in a shadowy place. There are doors, but either they don't open or when they do open they lead nowhere... I might've given up if it hadn't been for this place you call the clearin'.

She rises, steadier.

I come here often, and yes, I do rest on these rocks. I love this place; I love to hear the wind whistlin' through the pines. Sophie has begged me to bring her here, but I need to be alone, for I imagine the trees are speakin' to me and it takes so much concentration to listen. After a rain, the branches are full of water drops and the sun beams down and the drops glimmer with rainbow colors. It's so beautiful here; the trees so tall and glorious. Could a cathedral be lovelier? Some pray in cathedrals, but I pray here in the clearin'. I pray for a way we can get by....

There is a pause, then Glenda crosses to Mamie.

GLEND A

Let me tell you something, dear. For a long time, I've been dreaming and thinking about these pine trees, then I happened to tell Ellen.

ELLEN

That's right.

GLEND A

She knew the place and we came here, but we didn't know why.

ELLEN

Not until we met you.

GLEND A

It's as though the pines you've befriended have answered your prayers and called us here.

ELLEN

Let us help you.

GLEND A

We have the means. We have a car. We'll get food into your cabin.

ELLEN

We'll get that doctor up here!

GLEND A

We'll open all those doors, and they'll lead somewhere – for sure! When you're strong again, we'll help you move, if need be. My husband and I have a garage apartment; most of the time it stands empty. We'll help you find work, and get Sophie into school.

ELLEN

We'll make sure your mom gets all the care she needs.

GLEND A

We can bring Sophie here to the clearing.

ELLEN

Will you let us help?

There is a pause while Mamie overcomes her surprise and disbelief.

MAMIE

Yes! You can help us! You can! Only in the beginning – only until we're back on our feet.

ELLEN

Can you handle a mile uphill, Glenda?

GLENDA

See if I can't!

ELLEN

Mamie?

MAMIE

Every day.

ELLEN

(Putting the food back into the pack) Let's not lose any time then. I'll need to get back to the car and drive into town this afternoon.

GLENDA

Take us to your mom and Sophie.

ELLEN

You can eat the sandwich on the way. There's plenty more here!

Eagerly, Mamie takes the sandwich from her pocket and starts to unwrap it.

MAMIE

You'll love my crab apple pie, hot from the oven.

GLENDA

And we have coffee.

MAMIE

Thank you – thank you both so much! You're – yes – the answer to my prayers.

There is a pause. Mamie looks at her sandwich, then up at the pine trees.

It was the clearin'.

There is a time of reverent silence while she, with deep feeling, gives thanks to the trees. She turns back and the three exit. Shadows are seen stirring on the set and rocks; the wind is heard whistling through the pine trees.

End of Drama ~ End of The Wise Gardener