

THE MURDEROUS MRS. MAISEY

by Edith Weiss

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SYNOPSIS: An outstanding farcical masterpiece of female strength. Mrs. Maisey, an aspiring stand-up comedienne, hides away in her husband's childhood home after being accused of his murder. On the case are two female detectives desperate to prove themselves and solve the mystery. This sidesplitting farcical comedy is jam packed with big personalities, unexpected twists, and non-stop action—guaranteed to leave your audiences rolling in the aisles!

DURATION: 60 minutes

TIME: 1958.

SETTING: Living room in a house on the Georgia coastline.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(15 females, 2-3 males)

- MITCH DICKERS (m)..... The M.C. at Comedy Roots Club. Slick, professional delivery. *(10 lines)*
- MAXINE (f)..... Mrs. Maisey's tough, big hearted NY agent. *(42 lines)*
- MRS. MAISEY (f)..... Smart, funny woman. As a comic she is more 'real' than having the smooth delivery of Mitch Dickers. Connects with her audience. *(50 lines)*
- FIONA MALVEY (f) A very bad private detective. *(72 lines)*
- PRUDENCE GUNN (f)..... Fiona's secretary. She wants to be a detective and she's very good at it. *(47 lines)*
- MAMA JUNE (f)..... Mrs. Maisey's mother in law. An artistic woman who is tougher than she seems. *(51 lines)*
- GRANNY (f) Mama June's 88 yr. old mother, always speaks her mind. *(42 lines)*

- PHOEBE (f).....A long time maid in the household, she is no-nonsense and full of attitude. (33 lines)
- MAY BETTY (f)A young girl, intense, odd, a bit creepy. (32 lines)
- FREDERICK (m).....Roddy's brother, needy, man of weak character. Uses a very exaggerated, and bad, English accent. (56 lines)
- RODDY (m).....Mrs. Maisey's husband, expects to be the unquestioned head of his household, 1950's style. (17 lines)
- CISSY (f)Frederick's fiancée, a witty, nasty upper class British woman who is easily bored. (52 lines)
- VOICE (m/f)Offstage or pre-recorded. (1 line)
- THE BEYOND 4-H GIRLS: The girls, tweens and/or teens, are exuberant, energetic, talkative.
- SHONDA FAY (f)A natural born leader. Direct and strong. (21 lines)
- LAVERNE LOU (f)Loves working with tools, fearless. (22 lines)
- DONNA JEAN (f).....Athletic and capable. (24 lines)
- NANCY BELLE (f)Somewhat of a southern belle. A little insecure, BFF with Susie Jo. (24 lines)
- ROXANNE LEE (f)Serious and observant, she wants to be a writer. (21 lines)
- SUSIE JO (f)Quick to apologize, easily frightened, emotional. (27 lines)

OPTIONAL DOUBLING

- RODDY can double with MITCH DICKERS

SET

SCENE 1: Comedy Roots Club in New York City.

The scene is played either in front of the curtain or a space off to the side. A standing microphone. With a spotlight on it if possible.

SCENE 2: Outer lobby of Fiona’s private detective agency.

Can be played in the same stage space as the comedy club. A coat tree is set.

SCENE 3: A house on the coastline of Georgia.

The parlor of MAMA JUNE’S house. Along the walls are painted stools of every height and color. There are six exits: The front door UPSC, upstairs bedrooms UPSL, basement DSL, guest room, Mrs. Maisey’s room UPSR, and the kitchen DSR. There is a big window by the front door with drapes. A table upstage, a basket of yarn, and a small magazine/newspaper rack on the floor. At least two chairs, a settee or small couch.

PRODUCTION NOTES

There’s a lot of stage time for lots of actors, which is why I made Mama June a painter of chairs and stools partially so the actors have a place to sit, and because I thought it would present an interesting stage picture.

AUTHOR’S NOTES

The underlying theme here is the empowerment of women. In the 1950’s, it took strong women to expand opportunities for women. Whether it’s sports, the jobs women want, or what they want to wear; it took pushing back against “the way things are” to do it. And it’s working—things are so different today. I wanted to deliver this message wrapped in a lot of laughs.

PROPS

- microphone with stand
- M.C.'s notecards
- coat tree
- old looking quilt
- letters that are bills
- tray
- coffee/tea cups
- letter to Fiona
- yarn basket
- large sewing scissors
- 2 big knitting needles
- 2 suitcases
- colander
- butcher knife
- frying pan
- books
- magazines/books/newspapers
- teapot
- a basket or something to hold books & magazines
- big blanket(s)
- needle nosed pliers
- tube of almond paste
- key
- coat
- bundle of boys clothes
- diary
- pillows

SCENE 1
THE COMEDY CLUB

AT START: *The scene is played either in front of the curtain or a space off to the side. A standing microphone. With a spotlight on it if possible.*

VOICE: *(Offstage or pre-recorded.)* Ladies and gentleman, please give a big Comedy Roots welcome to our own Mitch “the Mitchman” Dickers!

Entering from SR, M.C. MITCH DICKERS runs on stage with great energy carrying his notecards.

MITCH: Thank you, thank you! What a great crowd. *(Making ‘stop the applause’ gestures. As the applause dies down he makes ‘bring up the applause’ gestures.)* Thank you. Thank you. Welcome to Comedy Roots, New York’s best comedy club. Hi I’m Mitch “the Mitchman” Dickers and I’ll be your M.C. tonight. It’s Neeeeeew Talent Night! Let’s hear it for Neeeeeew Talent Night! All the stars of tomorrow start here at Comedy Roots. If you’ve seen him on the Ed Sullivan show, he started here. If you see him here, you’ll see him before he’s famous and can say “I saw him when.”

MAXINE: *(From offstage R or in the audience.)* OR HER!

MITCH: What was that?

MAXINE: *(Entering.)* I said, “or her.” Him or her before they’re famous.

MITCH: Hey, who do you think you are? I don’t come to your job and slap the fries out of your hand! *(Laughs.)*

MAXINE: I’m Maxine Goldman, her agent.

MITCH: Whose agent?

MAXINE: Your first comic tonight.

MITCH: Is a female? *(Checks notecards.)*

MAXINE: Yeah. A female comic. And she’s marvelous.

MITCH: *(Reading card.)* “Mrs. Maisey.”

MAXINE: Yeah. So introduce her already, and don’t assume it’s automatically gonna be a guy. It’s 1958, after all.

MITCH: If you’ll get off the stage, I will.

MAXINE: Good.

MAXINE exits SR.

MITCH: But first, a take home joke. The boss of a company needed to call one of his employees about an urgent problem. He called the employee's home and Little Timmy answered: (*Stage whisper, child voice.*) "Hello?"

The boss asked, (*Deep manly voice.*) "Is your Dad home?"

(*Whisper, little kid voice.*) "Yes," said Little Timmy.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked.

(*Whisper.*) "No."

So the boss asked, "Is your mommy there?"

(*Whisper.*) "Yes," came the answer.

"May I talk with her?"

Again the small voice whispered, "No."

"Is there any one there besides you?"

"Yes," whispered the child, "a policeman."

"May I speak with the policeman?"

(*Whisper.*) "No, he's busy."

"Busy doing what?" asked the boss.

(*Whisper.*) "Talking to daddy and mommy and the fireman."

"Are there any adults there I can talk to?"

(*Whisper.*) "Yes but they're all busy."

"What are they all doing?"

(*Whisper.*) "Looking for me." (*Audience applause.*)

Thank you! What a great audience! Don't forget to tip your waitresses—they're working hard for you. And now I'm going to bring out your first act, a—girl!—please welcome Mrs. Maisey!

MRS. MAISEY enters SR, shakes MITCH'S hand, who exits SR. She starts nervously and warms up as she goes.

MRS. MAISEY: Thank you. Hi. So. My name is Edith Maisey. Maisey is my maiden name. I know, women always take their husband's name. But I married a man named Roderick Schmedith. I didn't want to be Edith Schmedith. To be honest, I'm surprised anyone even asked me to marry them. I was such an awkward teenager. Picture me in high school: sixteen, as tall as I am now, and I weighed about forty-four pounds. I looked like a baton with zits. But

I remember thinking: “this is okay.” At least I’ll never look any worse than this. I was wrong. One day my mother looks at me and says: *(In German accent.)* “Honey, you don’t haff a date for the prom”. By the way, she’s German. She didn’t talk like that just to mess with me. “You don’t haff a date for the prom,” she says. “I know what let’s do. Let’s giff you a Tony Home Perm.” I begged her not to, but she wouldn’t listen. “We’ll just use six rollers... to give your hair some body. Your hair needs some body.” So she puts my hair in these gigantic rollers, squirts some stinky stuff on them, and I sit there for about an hour. She takes those six rollers out, and all of my hair is now above my ears, sticking out three feet on either side. I look like the letter “T.” Even my mother knew it looked bad, but she couldn’t say so, so she’s thinking of something supportive to say: “Honey, you’re beautiful on the inside.” Which is great, if I wanna take a tapeworm to the prom.

So I decide, to salvage my high school career, I would have to become a cheerleader. I tried out for three years. I thought I’d be great: they’d yell “Give me a T,” and I’d stand up. But I never made the squad, because I couldn’t do a split. Apparently the ability to touch your privates to the pavement is key to motivating the team.

But I married a wonderful man anyway. He works on Wall Street. A corner office with his own secretary! She’s beautiful. The first time I visited him at the office, she comes bouncing over to me—she one of those really enthusiastic young things—and she says “Hi! I’m Jaynie with a ‘Y’.” I said, “Hi Yaynie. I’m Edith with an I.Q.” Roddy’s so supportive. He comes to my shows. He’s back there right now. He’s always in the back. *(Looks out.)* Honey? Hello? Honey are you there? Honey? Roddy?

MITCH: *(Entering SR.)* Let’s hear it for Mrs. Maisey!

MRS. MAISEY: But—I’m not done.

MITCH: You only had three minutes and you’re over it! *(Sotto voce.)*
Get off the stage!

MRS. MAISEY: Oh. Okay. *(To audience.)* Thank you! Thank you so much! *(Exits SR.)*

SCENE 2
DETECTIVE AGENCY

AT START: *Six months later. The lobby of FIONA'S detective agency. Can be played in the same stage space as the comedy club. A coat tree is set. Lights up. Enter FIONA SL. Takes off coat, puts it on coat tree.*

FIONA: Prudence! Coffee! Black, two sugars.

PRUDENCE: *(Enters SR, wrapped in a quilt and carrying letters.)*

Here's your mail. It isn't my job to get you coffee. I am your administrative assistant.

FIONA: Yes, when we have something to administer. Do I have any cases right now?

PRUDENCE: No.

FIONA: Have I paid the rent?

PRUDENCE: No. Or the heating bill, apparently: it is freezing in here!

FIONA: Quit complaining, at least you have a quilt. Looks old.

PRUDENCE: Yeah, I got it—

FIONA: I'm really not interested in "crafty" things. It would be nice if you got me a hot cup of coffee now.

PRUDENCE: It would be nice to be treated as an equal.

FIONA: Prudence, I'm the detective. You're the administrative assistant slash secretary who would have brought me a hot cup of coffee by now if she was worth what I was paying her!

PRUDENCE: You've paid me nothing in weeks!

FIONA: My point exactly.

PRUDENCE: OH! *(Exits SR.)*

FIONA opens the letter she brought in, reads. PRUDENCE enters with coffee.

PRUDENCE: Here you go.

FIONA: You're not going to believe this.

PRUDENCE: What?

FIONA: Listen. (*Reads letter.*) “Dear Miss Malvey, There will be a murder this weekend at 237 Land’s End Lane, unless you can prevent it. Enclosed is \$500. Collect another \$500 on Monday, if everyone survives. Signed, anonymous.” Look! Letters cut out of magazines and newspapers! Just like in the movies. Well I know where I’m spending the weekend.

PRUDENCE: It’s a local postmark. Interesting. Fiona, this could be a set up.

FIONA: Oh, please! Don’t try to play detective. \$500! I could pay the rent, the heat—

PRUDENCE: Me.

FIONA: —the phone bill—

PRUDENCE: Or me. A little could come my way. I’m so poor I can’t afford to pay attention.

FIONA: Maybe you shouldn’t have spent so much money on your little New York City trip.

PRUDENCE: Fiona, wait—237 Land’s End Lane—the house on the ocean—isn’t that where Mrs. Maisey is living now with her mother-in-law?

FIONA: Yeah, Mama June, who paints chairs. Living with the woman who murdered her son?

PRUDENCE: It’s never been proven that she killed her husband. His body’s never been found.

FIONA: Everyone says she did it. So, someone thinks the murderous Mrs. Maisey will kill again. Maybe this is from one of them cause they’re afraid for their lives. Who else lives in that house—Mama June’s mother—and a maid that’s been there forever, Phoebe maybe?—yeah, Phoebe. And a young girl they took in, May Betty, who is a little odd.

PRUDENCE: Fiona, there’s something fishy about this... who sends someone \$500 and doesn’t say who it is? I can’t see a maid or a young girl having \$500.

FIONA: Please don’t try to be a detective.

PRUDENCE: Just let me come with you, okay? For protection.

FIONA: But... you’re just my secretary. (*PRUDENCE gives FIONA a look.*) Administrative assistant, sorry.

PRUDENCE: Who will never get her back pay if you get murdered so I insist on coming with you.

FIONA: All right! You can take notes.

PRUDENCE: You won't be sorry, Fiona.

FIONA: Now we just have to think of a way to gain admittance into a house to which we were not invited, and stay long enough to find clues and protect everyone.

PRUDENCE: Why couldn't we just tell them why we're there?

FIONA: Don't be ridiculous, Prudence. Then there wouldn't be any murder, would there?

PRUDENCE: But isn't that the point? To prevent murder?

FIONA: No. Then this mysterious person would just have hired security guards. Our job is to let someone attempt murder, and then catch him.

PRUDENCE: Or her.

FIONA: Or her. Catch him/her. Catch someone attempting murder, stop them, and establish a reputation for my agency, Fiona Malvey's Super Sleuth Agency, and collect 500 more dollars. So that's what we're going to do.

PRUDENCE: If you say so.

SCENE 3

MAMA JUNE'S HOUSE

AT START: *The parlor of MAMA JUNE'S house. Along the walls are painted stools of every height and color. There are six exits: The front door UPSC, upstairs bedrooms UPSL, basement DSL, guest room, MRS. MAISEY'S room UPSR, and the kitchen DSR. There is a big window by the front door. A table upstage, a basket of yarn, and a small magazine/newspaper rack on the floor. At least two chairs, a settee or small couch. GRANNY, covered by a quilt, is reading the paper. MAMA JUNE is sitting next to her, reading a letter.*

MAMA JUNE: *(Calling offstage.)* Maxine! Maxine!

MAXINE: *(Entering from the kitchen DSR.)* What? I'm in the middle of making dinner.

GRANNY: Oh Lord save us. That dinner last night could've knocked a dog off a gut wagon.

MAXINE: I have no idea what that means but I'm going to assume it's not good.

GRANNY: It means it smelled bad enough to gag a maggot.

MAMA JUNE: Granny!

GRANNY: Am I lying?

MAMA JUNE: No. You just shouldn't say it in front of Maxine.

MAXINE: It's okay, I don't care. I hate cooking. I'm not a cook, I'm an agent. With just one client—Mrs. Edith Maisey. Who was a fantastic stand-up comic! Who dropped out of comedy to live in an old house on a windy cliff on the Georgia coast. And I will keep cooking until she decides to go back into comedy.

GRANNY: Or when we all die from food poisoning.

MAMA JUNE: Or malnutrition, whichever comes first.

MAXINE: I am not that bad of a cook.

GRANNY: Bless your heart.

MAXINE: Okay, I'm not from here, but I have learned that "bless your heart" basically means "you poor dimwitted thing." Doesn't it?

GRANNY: It's someone whose cornbread ain't done in the middle.

MAXINE: That's not about food, is it?

GRANNY: Not even a little bit.

MAMA JUNE: Maxine, we're expecting company for supper tonight.

MAXINE: Oh, great. How many?

MAMA JUNE: Frederick. And his fiancée, Cissy.

GRANNY: Frederick. All hat, no cattle. All buckle, no belt. No offense even if he is your son.

MAMA JUNE: And your grandson. It'll be our first time meeting Cissy—we better get Phoebe to help with the cooking. (*Calling out.*)
PHOEBE!

PHOEBE: (*Enters from UPSL.*) What is it? I was dustin'.

MAMA JUNE: Please help Maxine in the kitchen.

PHOEBE: I'll go anywhere food is. I'm just that hungry.

GRANNY: We all are.

Exit MAXINE and PHOEBE, into the kitchen DSR. Enter MAY BETTY, UPSL.

MAY BETTY: Granny it's time to take a walk.

GRANNY: Knock knock.

MAY BETTY: What?

GRANNY: Knock knock.

MAY BETTY: Come in!

MAMA JUNE: Bless your heart, May Betty. It's a knock knock joke.

MAY BETTY: Oh.

GRANNY: I'll explain as we walk. Come on. Let's go out the kitchen door.

MAMA JUNE: I'll come too. I should stay here and paint more stools, but I need to clear my head.

MAY BETTY: I love the way you paint them, Mama June. I'm saving up money so I can buy one.

MAY BETTY, GRANNY, and MAMA JUNE exit DSR. Enter MRS. MAISEY UPR. She picks up a pair of big sewing scissors on the UPS telephone table.

MRS. MAISEY: *(Fondly.)* Mama June and her sewing! I guess it's never too late in life to start something new.

In the window suddenly are six bedraggled 4-H GIRLS. MRS. MAISEY waves, forgetting she has the scissors in her hand. The 4-H GIRLS scream, then run off left.

MRS. MAISEY: *(Sighing.)* I miss New York. The only thing that would make girls scream and run like that is a sale at Macy's.

MRS. MAISEY starts to exit UPR. Knock on door, MRS. MAISEY opens it. It's FIONA and PRUDENCE, disguised.

MRS. MAISEY: Can I help you?

FIONA and PRUDENCE: *(Entering.)* Health Inspectors.

MRS. MAISEY: Health Inspectors? Isn't that just for restaurants?

FIONA: Is it?

MRS. MAISEY: Yes.

PRUDENCE: *(Sotto voce.)* I told you.

FIONA: Are you suggesting this is not, in fact, a restaurant?

MRS. MAISEY: Anyone can see that this is a residence. Wouldn't a restaurant have a sign, so people would know it's a restaurant?

FIONA: Would it?

MRS. MAISEY: Yes! And I've had enough people snooping around here, looking for the "Murderous Mrs. Maisey," to know what's going on here!

PRUDENCE: No, we're—

MRS. MAISEY: Out you go. Good day. *(Closes door.)*

MAXINE: *(Entering from the kitchen DSR.)* Who was at the door?

MRS. MAISEY: Two women pretending to be Health Inspectors. Probably reporters from a tabloid, trying to get photos. Will it never end?

MAXINE: You've got to get back on stage, that's all. Hiding out here makes you look guilty.

MRS. MAISEY: If I go back onstage, people won't listen to my act. They'll come to see a murderer.

MAXINE: I know you didn't kill him. I'm pretty sure he ran off with his secretary, Yaynie.

MRS. MAISEY: He wouldn't have done that.

MAXINE: Okay. I know you miss doing stand-up!

MRS. MAISEY: No, I don't. Case closed.

MAXINE: Fine! *(Exits into the kitchen DSR.)*

MRS. MAISEY: *(Picking up two large knitting needles she pretends to be at a comedy club, with the audience as her audience.)* Hi everybody. Thanks for coming out on Ladies Night. Last time I did a Ladies Night, I had a man in the audience shout out, "Hey! When's Men's Night?" I said "Hey, it's a man's world. You don't need your own damn night." *(Breaking out of performance mode.)* Wow. Six months and I'm going crazy—talking into knitting needles? Gosh, I miss doing stand-up.

MRS. MAISEY exits UPSR. SFX: sound of an expensive car. The door knob on the front door turns. Door opens. Enter FREDERICK and CISSY, who loudly drop their suitcases.

CISSY: So this is your childhood home. How quaint, in a really shabby way.

FREDERICK: Being right on the sea, this house is worth a lot of money. *(Absent mindedly picking up scissors.)*

PHOEBE enters from the kitchen DSR, carrying a colander and butcher knife. She sees FREDERICK with scissors and screams simultaneously with him.

PHOEBE: *(Throwing up her arms.)* AHHHHHHHHHHHH!

FREDERICK: AHHHHHHHHHH!

MAXINE: *(Entering from the kitchen DSR with frying pan, like a ninja.)*

Haaaaiiii Ya! *(Pause. ALL are frozen.)*

CISSY: Is that how introductions are done in the rural American south?
In England we shake hands.

MAXINE: Who are you?

CISSY: Me? I'm Cissy. You—two frumpy plebeians armed with cooking implements. I feel like I'm in the middle of the French revolution.

PHOEBE: Frederick, you scared me half to death!

CISSY: I think it would be more accurate to say that you scared yourself half to death. Question: Do you feel as foolish as you look?

PHOEBE: Could be.

MAXINE: And people say New Yorkers are rude.

CISSY: What is rude is not offering your guests some tea.

PHOEBE: Come on, Maxine. Let's go and make them some tea in the hopes that that woman can't talk while she's slurping.

CISSY: I do not slurp.

MAXINE and PHOEBE exit into the kitchen DSR. FREDERICK and CISSY sit on settee.

CISSY: Honestly, Frederick, why are we here?

FREDERICK: Cissy, I believe that Mrs. Maisey killed my brother Roddy. I know she kept a diary. We need to find it.

CISSY: Oh. I always assumed you killed him.

FREDERICK: You assumed I killed my brother and you stayed with me anyway?

CISSY: Yes. Somehow it made you more attractive. And why didn't you tell me this beforehand?

FREDERICK: I thought you'd think me foolish.

CISSY: Oh I do darling, very much, but it's all right. I like my men slightly stupid.

FREDERICK: I am neither foolish nor stupid. Roderick is the heir to this house. But if I can prove he's dead, the house goes to me.

CISSY: When Granny dies.

FREDERICK: Not necessarily. If we find that evidence of murder, I will tell Granny that I'll show it to the police unless she gives me the house. She doesn't want Mrs. Maisey to go to prison—think of the scandal! Plus I think she's fond of her. So she'll give me the house, then I will kick Mrs. Maisey out, send my Aunt June and Granny to a home, sell the house, and make a fortune.

CISSY: Oooooooh! How fabulous. But—if Mrs. Maisey is a killer, why wouldn't she try to kill you?

FREDERICK: Let her try. I'm not afraid. You have yet to meet the ruthless and fearless Frederick.

CISSY: Ooooh. I'm looking forward to it.

ALL 4-H GIRLS appear in the window. They see FREDERICK and CISSY, nod to each other and go to door and knock.

FREDERICK: Come in.

CISSY: No! Frederick, don't let them in, we don't know who's—

ALL 4-H GIRLS enter, shivering and full of adrenaline, they constantly and constantly interrupt each other; their lines overlap, indicated by “_”

ALL 4-H GIRLS: Hiiiiii!

FREDERICK: Hello, girls.

Enter MAXINE and PHOEBE from the kitchen DSR.

PHOEBE: What now? What's going on?

SHONDA FAY: Thank you so much for letting us in, sir. We came by earlier, but got nervous when we realized—

LAVERNE LOU: —that this is 237 Land's End Lane, and everybody knows who lives here—

DONNA JEAN: —and then we saw her through the window,

NANCY BELLE: —with SCISSORS!

DONNA JEAN: —and we SCREAMED—

LAVERNE LOU: —so loud, and ran away. And then, we were so ashamed of ourselves. We gave ourselves a little talking to.

ROXANNE LEE: Yes we did, just like Laverne Lou said. Roxane Lee, I said to myself, are you being all you can be? Runnin' through the sand like a wet and headless hen?

DONNA JEAN: This is not who we are, Shonda Fay, I said to Shonda Fay. Right there that's Shonda Fay.

SHONDA FAY: Hi.

DONNA JEAN: And I said it to myself as well. I'm Donna Jean nice to meet you.

SHONDA FAY: And we are the All Girls Beyond 4-H Club.

SUSIE JO: We love the 4-H Club, but we felt we needed more.

ALL 4-H GIRLS: (*With accompanying gestures.*) Head! Heart! Hands! And Heck Yeah We Can!

SUSIE JO: We came back to apologize to Mrs. Maisey.

NANCY BELLE: And to maybe hopefully stay long enough to pretty please dry off. I beg you—do not kick us out. Cause we're about frozen. Look at Susie shiverin' with the cold!

SUSIE JO: Thank you for noticing, Nancy Belle. I'm really really cold.

LAVERNE LOU: A wave got us when we ran from here to the shore.

CISSY: I hope that my tea is about ready. The barrage of detail here has made me almost unbearably thirsty. Actually I'm not sure if it's thirst or a crushing boredom.

SUSIE JO: Why, she's meaner than a wet panther in a mud hole.

MAXINE: Girls, come on into the kitchen, by the stove. You'll warm right up.

PHOEBE: I'll go to the basement and see if I can find some dry clothes for y'all. It'll be boys' clothes, if that's all right?

ALL 4-H GIRLS: (*Adlibbing.*) Yeah... sure... as long as they're dry (*Etc.*)

ALL 4-H GIRLS and MAXINE exit into the kitchen DSR. PHOEBE exits DSL.

FREDERICK: Alone at last. Let's start our search for evidence while we can.

FREDERICK and CISSY move towards DS—knock on front door.

FREDERICK: Come in.

CISSY: No! Frederick, stop saying “come in!”

FREDERICK: Sorry, darling.

Enter PRUDENCE and FIONA, loaded down with books.

CISSY: Who’s this, now?

FIONA and PRUDENCE: Bookmobile.

FIONA: (*Moving, with PRUDENCE, towards USL exit.*) You probably want these... that way?

CISSY: No, stop. Get back here! I see you slithering. We don’t want any books. Nobody reads anymore.

FIONA and PRUDENCE: But—

FREDERICK: But darling, I read. It’s one of my favorite things.

CISSY: (*Moving DSL.*) May I speak to you, Frederick?

FREDERICK: Of course, darling. Always. Go on. I’m listening.

CISSY: I meant over here, Frederick. For privacy.

FREDERICK: OH! Of course.

FREDERICK crosses DSL to CISSY as FIONA and PRUDENCE inch to the kitchen exit DSR.

CISSY: I don’t trust them. Let me handle this. (*Sees FIONA and PRUDENCE just about to enter the kitchen DSR.*) Where do you think you’re going? Back away to the front door. We don’t want any books. We don’t read books.

FIONA: Maybe someone read newspapers? Or magazines?

FREDERICK: I do but—

CISSY: Frederick, no! Say nothing. Give nothing away. People with books are always up to something.

FREDERICK: You’re right, as always, darling.

CISSY: Of course I am, Freddy dear.

FREDERICK: Off you go, Bookmobilers, out the door, there you go, Bob’s your uncle.

FIONA: What? Bob? Who’s Bob?

PRUDENCE: (*As FREDERICK shepherds them out the door.*) But—no—wait—they’re just books!

FREDERICK slams the door in their faces, locks door.

FREDERICK: Let me think where we should start our search for the diary.

The doorknob rattles.

FREDERICK: Someone's coming! Quickly—this way!

Exit FREDERICK and CISSY DSL. Enter JUNE, key in hand, GRANNY, and MAY BETTY UPSC front door, JUNE puts key on nail by the door.

GRANNY: All right May Betty. Listen up. Knock, knock.

MAY BETTY: (*Seriously.*) Who's there?

GRANNY: Cash.

MAY BETTY: Cash who?

GRANNY: No thanks, I like pecans better.

MAY BETTY: (*Seriously.*) Cash who. Cashwho. Cashew! (*Seriously.*) That's funny.

GRANNY: Tell your face, honey. I'm going to take a nap.

GRANNY exits UPSL. MAMA JUNE starts looking around. Enter PHOEBE DSL with a bundle of boys' clothes.

PHOEBE: Did I hear someone say cashews? I'm so hungry my belly thinks my throat's been cut.

MAMA JUNE: Phoebe have you seen my quilt?

MAY BETTY: Isn't that it on your chair?

MAMA JUNE: That's the new one. I need my old one.

PHOEBE: Oh oh.

MAMA JUNE: Oh oh?

PHOEBE: I took it to the thrift store a couple days ago. It was dirty and tattered and not fit to be in this house.

MAMA JUNE: (*Sitting in her chair, stunned.*) Oh no.

PHOEBE: Oh no? What? We had a bag ready to go to the thrift store and I just threw it on top—what's wrong? You look like you seen a ghost riding a dead donkey.

MAMA JUNE: This is bad. I need that quilt.

MAY BETTY: (*Taking PHOEBE DS.*) Phoebe! We gotta go to the thrift store and find it—fast, before someone buys it.

PHOEBE: May Betty, I don't know how to drive a car.

MAY BETTY: Nor do I. But I was taught at the orphanage that you learn best by doin'. So I'm gonna do.

MAY BETTY grabs the keys and runs out.

PHOEBE: No! Stop, May Betty! (*Throws the bundle of clothes into the kitchen DSR. We hear exclamations from ALL 4-H GIRLS.*) All right dang it I'm coming with you!

PHOEBE runs out. SFX: sound of grinding gears, peeling out.

MAMA JUNE: (*Snapping out of it, running to front door.*) Wait—where are you going? STOP!

MRS. MAISEY enters from UPSR, fast.

MRS. MAISEY: Who's driving my car?

MAMA JUNE: Either Phoebe or May Betty.

MRS. MAISEY: I didn't know they could drive.

MAMA JUNE: They can't. This is so bad.

MRS. MAISEY: We have to stop them!

MRS. MAISEY and MAMA JUNE exit front door. CISSY and FREDERICK peep out of DSL, enter.

CISSY: (*Coughing, shaking dust out of her hair.*) It is disgusting down there! All dust and cobwebs and damp.

FREDERICK: Well it's the basement—

MAMA JUNE: (*Offstage.*) She can barely see over the dashboard!

FREDERICK: They're coming in! Quickly! Into the guest room!

FREDERICK and CISSY dash off UPSR as MAMA JUNE and MRS. MAISEY enter from the front door.

MRS. MAISEY: Are they stealing my car?

Sounds of laughter come from the kitchen. MAMA JUNE and MRS. MAISEY cross to the kitchen door.

MRS. MAISEY: And who's in the kitchen?

MAMA JUNE: I don't know. I went out for a walk, came back and everything's changed.

MRS. MAISEY: I know the feeling.

Enter MAXINE from the kitchen DSR.

MAXINE: I thought I heard someone out here. Mama June, Frederick's here.

MRS. MAISEY: Ah, my brother in law. He's a bit... challenging, isn't he Mama June?

CISSY and FREDERICK, with a diary in his hand, peep out of the door, UPSR. The others, facing downstage, don't see them. They make their way across the stage, hiding in the drapes, dashing behind the sofa, as they make their way to UPSL.

MAMA JUNE: That's one way of putting it. The good thing is that this day cannot get worse.

MAXINE: You haven't met Cissy.

CISSY pops up from behind the sofa, FREDERICK pushes her back down. Ad. libs of "I love it," "You look great," etc. from the kitchen DSR.

MAMA JUNE: Who's in the kitchen?

FREDERICK and CISSY make a dash for UPSL and exit. One instant later ALL 4-H GIRLS enter from the kitchen DSR dressed in boys' mismatched clothing. They can gather the stools and sit.

SUSIE JO: I love these clothes! They're so comfortable.

NANCY BELLE: Mrs. Maisey! Hello! We want to apologize for screaming when we saw you and then running away. It was not behavior worthy of the Beyond 4-H Club.

SUSIE JO: We're gonna do better cause we're Beyond 4-H.

ALL 4-H GIRLS: Beyond 4-H! Head! Heart! Hands! And Heck Yeah We Can.

MAMA JUNE: Heck yeah you can what?

LAVERNE LOU: Heck yeah we can change things. I want to take shop class at school and learn how to fix cars and other vehicles. But the school won't let me. They say I gotta take home economics and learn how to cook and sew. But I don't want to. I won't do it.

DONNA JEAN: And I want to play sports. Only there's no place for a girl to play 'em. That's gotta change!

SHONDA FAY: I want to join the Air Force and be a pilot. But I can't, cause I'm a girl. That's gotta change.

SUSIE JO: I wanna wear this at school. Why do we have to wear dresses? I hope someday we'll be allowed to wear pants. Maybe even blue jeans!

ROXANNE LEE: And I want to be a writer. And when I tell people that, I don't want them to assume it's children's books.

NANCY BELLE: I wanna be a firefighter. Or a ballerina. Or a professional chef. I haven't decided.

DONNA JEAN: If it's okay, can we stay till our clothes are dry?

MAMA JUNE: Of course. You might as well stay for supper. That's all right, isn't it Maxine?

MAXINE: You're kidding me, right?

CISSY and FREDERICK enter UPSL.

CISSY: Oh look Frederick... it's a gathering of... let me guess... Peter Pan and the Lost Boys? *(To MRS MAISEY.)* You're Wendy perhaps?

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