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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Pride's Crossing

by Tina Howe

World premiere at the Old Globe Theatre
San Diego, California, January 1997

New York premiere at
Lincoln Center Theater
December 1997

"Best American Play"
New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, 1998

SAMUEL FRENCH

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The world premiere of *Pride's Crossing* was presented by the Old Globe Theatre in January 1997. It was directed by Jack O'Brien. Sets were designed by Ralph Funicello, costumes by Robert Morgan, lights by Michael Gilliam and music and sound by Jeff Ladman. The cast was as follows:

Mabel Tidings Bigelow .....Cherry Jones

Vita Bright, Pru O'Neill,
Kitty Lowell .....Marceline Hugot

Chandler Coffin, Phineas Tidings,
Mary O'Neill .....Jeffrey Hayenga

West Bright, Frazier Tidings, Pinky
Wheelock, David Bloom .....Robert Knepper

Gus Tidings, Anton Gurevitch, Porter
Bigelow, Wheels Wheelock, ...William Anton

Maud Tidings, Julia Renoir .....Monique Fowler

Minty Renoir,
Emma Bigelow .....Hilary Elizabeth Clarke, Nichole Danielle Givans

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Originally produced by the Old Globe Theatre in 1997,
San Diego, California
Produced by Lincoln Center Theater in 1997-98,
New York City

The New York premiere of *Pride's Crossing* was presented by the Lincoln Center Theater in December 1997. It was directed by Jack O'Brien. Sets were designed by Ralph Funicello, costumes by Robert Morgan, lighting by Kenneth Posner, music and sound by Mark Bennett and projections by Jan Hartley. The cast was as follows:

Mabel Tidings Bigelow .....Cherry Jones

Vita Bright, Phineas Tidings, Pru O'Neill,
Kitty Lowell .....Angie Phillips

Chandler Coffin, Mary O'Neill,
Dr. Peabody .....Dylan Baker

West Bright, Frazier Tidings, Pinky
Wheelock, David Bloom .....David Lansbury

Gus Tidings, Anton Gurevitch, Porter
Bigelow, Wheels Wheelock .....Casey Biggs

Maud Tidings, Julia Renoir .....Kandis Chappell

Minty Renoir, Emma Bigelow .....Julia McIlvaine

INTRODUCTION

Ah, the lure of playwriting ...

We get to spread our fantasies all over the stage and then invite an audience in to share them. The power, the ecstasy ...

Think of it—you're one of two sisters, the ugly one who lives under the porch with the field mice. All your life you've dreamed of being someone—a pilot, a healer, a fabulous beauty ... So you create a dazzling alter ego, hire the most radiant actress in the land and put her on stage. She breaks hearts and the sound barrier with a toss of her head. Everyone swoons, but no one more than you because *you* know your place is under the porch. With the field mice.

Or maybe you transform someone else—a friend who's languishing in the hospital, or an aging relative. You wrap a turban around their head and drop them in the middle of the desert to found a new religion. It's no wonder we call these labors "plays."

I'm always surprised when people ask if my plays are true. The joy of the theater comes from knowing you're being tricked and surrendering to the deceit. In real life, Nora wouldn't have the nerve to walk out on Torvald, just as Mary Tyrone wouldn't have the presence of mind to come down the stairs, trailing her wedding dress. Characters on stage make entrances and exits we'd never attempt.

There *was* a young woman who swam the English Channel in 1926. A New Yorker named Gertrude Ederle. She was only 19 and she beat every record on the books. Her time was an astonishing 14 hours and 39 minutes. This play is not about her, but is inspired by my 90 year old Aunt Maddy who never left home, never married and never swam a stroke. So, where's the truth?

For some time now I've wanted to write about the passion of old ladies. When men age, they just get older, but women become very powerful. It's the female thing: that we bear the

children and nurture the family. As we get older, the membranes between what we *should* do and what we *want* to do get thinner and thinner. There's no rage like old lady rage, just as there's no tenderness like old lady tenderness.

As this century comes to a close, I wanted to celebrate the life of a woman who lived through most of it. I chose my Aunt Maddy because she grew up in a household where women were expected to live under the porch. It was a grand porch, but her place was definitely beneath it. With the field mice. Some women managed to scramble free, but most didn't, so, this is replay for my beloved aunt. This time she rises like a phoenix above the porch, house, shoreline and all.

Tina Howe
New York City, 1998

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The settings of the scenes are described in considerable detail to give the reader a feeling for the world of the play. This does not mean one has to be a slave to reality, however. Interpretation is all in the theatre, particularly with a memory play. When the director, Jack O'Brien, and the set designer, Ralph Funicello, began discussing the set for the play's premiere at the Old Globe Theatre in January 1997, they came up with a dreamscape of gauze panels and floating windows. There was a minimum of clutter. A Westminster clock hung in midair and that was about it. The presence of food was mimed and there were no croquet balls or broken teacups, just sound effects.

The changes of time and place were accomplished largely through lighting and sound. The projectionist, Jan Hartley, added images of clouds and water when the play was restaged at Lincoln Center Theater. The fluidity of the production was further enhanced by Cherry Jones doing many of her costume changes on stage, in full view of the audience.

The play ends with Mabel wading into the Channel to begin her swim. Miss Jones would have none of it: "I want to *dive*!" she said. "I want to *dive* into the arms of my fellow actors!"

Because of her daring and Jack's artistry, a thrilling moment of theater was created. I trust that future readers will indulge in similar flights of fancy as they reenact Mabel's journey.

One more thing—back in the old days when children from these families called their parents "m*a*m*a*" and "p*a*p*a*" the accent was always on the second syllable creating an aristocratic flourish.

CHARACTERS

MABEL TIDINGS BIGELOW - *A swimmer*
VITA BRIGHT - *Mabel's housekeeper*
CHANDLER COFFIN - *An old friend of Mabel's*
WEST BRIGHT - *Vita's son*
GUS TIDINGS - *Mabel's father*
MAUD TIDINGS - *Mabel's mother*
FRAZIER TIDINGS - *Mabel's brother*
PHINEAS TIDINGS - *Mabel's brother*
JULIA RENOIR - *Mabel's granddaughter*
MINTY RENOIR - *Julia's daughter*
MARY O'NEILL - *The Tidings's cook*
PRU O'NEILL-*The Tidings's serving girl and Mary's daughter*
ANTON GUREVITCH - *Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra*
PORTER BIGELOW - *Mabel's husband*
EMMA BIGELOW - *Mabel's daughter*
KITTY LOWELL - *An old friend of Mabel's*
PINKY WHEELOCK - *An old friend of Mabel's*
WHEELS WHEELOCK - *Pinky's husband*
DR. PEABODY - *A Unitarian minister*
DAVID BLOOM - *A doctor and swimmer*

For Madeline B. Post
1907 - 1998

ACT I

Scene 1

(The present. A darkened bedroom in the coach house of the former Tidings estate in Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts. Two twin beds dominate the room. One is piled high with dirty laundry, books, assorted mail and a breakfast tray. Ninety-year-old Mabel Bigelow, wearing a mismatched skirt and blouse, shuffles toward the other bed with the aid of a walker. She collapses onto it with a sigh. It's ten in the morning on a Saturday in the last week of June. Mabel stares into space, then suddenly comes to life.)

MABEL. I'm giving a Fourth of July croquet party no matter what anyone says! One has to pass these things down. I was quite the player in my day. Minty has probably never laid eyes on a croquet mallet. Poor child... Growing up half way around the world in Paris. I don't approve. I don't approve at all.

(VITA BRIGHT, a hippie-type woman dressed as Paul Revere come galloping in as if on horseback. She's in her thirties.)

VITA. "The British are coming, the British are coming!"

MABEL. Help, hellllllp ...

VITA. "One if by land and two if by sea,
And I on the opposite shore will be."

MABEL. *(Reaching for her phone and dialing:)* 911? This is Mabel Bigelow on Hale Street. A maniac has just broken into my house!

VITA. It's me, your housekeeper, Vita Bright!

MABEL. *(With a laugh:)* Vita, Vita ... I knew it was you all along!

(Silence as MABEL takes her in.)

MABEL. And what are you doing in that extraordinary outfit, if I may ask?

VITA. I'm going to be Paul Revere in the Fourth of July parade.

MABEL. Speak up, speak up!

VITA. I said: I'M GOING TO LEAD THE PARADE AS PAUL REVERE ON THE FOURTH OF JULY!

MABEL. But you're a *woman.*

VITA. So?

MABEL. You should go as Betsy Ross or Martha Washington.

VITA. But they're so boring.

MABEL. They are boring!

VITA. Men have all the fun.

MABEL. Men do have all the fun, it's not fair! I often wish I'd been a man.

VITA. I get to ride a horse.

(Silence as MABEL gazes at VITA.)

MABEL. I love your hat!

VITA. Would you like to try it on?

MABEL. *Could* I?

VITA. *(Handing it to her:)* Be my guest.

MABEL. *(Putting it on and striking a pose:)*
"A horse, a horse!
My kingdom for a horse!"
VITA. Go, Mrs. B.!
MABEL. "Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes!"
VITA. We should be allowed to switch genders once in a while.
MABEL. I always wanted to be Charlemagne. Soldier, emperor, scholar ... There was a life.
VITA. *(Picking it up:)* Here, let me get rid of your breakfast tray.
MABEL. Darling Vita, what would I do without you?
VITA. *(Exiting:)* I shudder to think.

(MABEL gazes into space for several moments and then surveys the mountain of stuff on the other bed. She picks up a bill.)

MABEL. A hundred and eight dollars? How could my phone bill be a hundred and eight dollars? I never talk to a soul. What's this? A dividend form State Street! *(She kisses it.)* God bless State Street and my piddling income. I shudder to think where I'd be without it. In the street, in the street. *(She picks up another bill.)* The Beverly Visiting Nurse Service? Eight hundred and thirty-three dollars? What next? *(She stuffs it at the bottom of the pile and sinks back onto the pillows, exhausted. A moment passes.)* VIIIIITAAA? OH, VIIIIIITAAA?
VITA. *(From offstage:)* You called?
MABEL. Could I trouble you for a glass of water, please? I'm parched.
VITA. Coming right up.
MABEL. DARLING VITA ... YOU'RE MY GUARDIAN ANGEL, MY KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR, MY FLORENCE ... *(Struggling to remember:)* FLORENCE ... *(She starts singing:)* "You are my lucky star ... something something, my heart's desire ..."

VITA. *(Returning with a glass of water:)* Here you go.

MABEL. Thank you, thank you.

(MABEL drinks deeply and then makes a lurid kissing sound.)

VITA. *(Picking up a bottle of pills:)* Did you take your pills?

MABEL. Pay my bills?

VITA. NO, TAKE YOUR PILLS!

MABEL. You have such lovely skin.

VITA. Don't change the subject. Where's your ear?

MABEL. If I'd had skin like that, just think what I could have accomplished.

VITA. I SAID, "WHERE'S YOUR EAR?"

MABEL. I don't know.

VITA. *You don't know*?

MABEL. Don't scold me, I can't stand being scolded.

VITA. HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU? YOU SHOULD PUT IT ON YOUR BEDSIDE TABLE ...

MABEL	VITA.
(Covering her ears:)	
Ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba,	THAT WAY YOU KNOW
ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba,	WHERE IT IS WHEN YOU
ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba,	NEED IT AGAIN!

(Silence.)

MABEL. Wait till you're ninety!

VITA. If you just took more responsibility for yourself, it would make life so much easier. You swam the English Channel, after all.

MABEL. Any fool can swim the English Channel, all it takes is endurance.

VITA. Plus a few other attributes like talent and skill.

MABEL. *(Rummaging around the other bed:)* Damn ear ... God, I hate this!

VITA. *(Finding it:)* Your audiological device, madame!

(MABEL pops it in her ear. It makes a loud whine.)

VITA. Turn it down, turn it down!

(The front doorbell rings, VITA exits to answer it.)

MABEL. Where are you going?
VITA. Someone's at the door.
MABEL. Then go answer it.
VITA. *(Offstage:)* Mr. Coffin ...
MABEL. WHO IS IT?
VITA. *(To Mabel:)* MR. COFFIN!
MABEL *(Calling out:)* HI. CHAN!
CHANDLER. HI, M.T.! *(To VITA.)* Mrs. Bigelow said she wanted to see me. That it was urgent.
MABEL. *(To CHANDLER.)* WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
CHANDLER. *(To VITA:)* How is she?
VITA. Impossible! Come in, come in ...

(VITA ushers in CHANDLER COFFIN. He's several years older than MABEL and walks with a severe limp. He's the picture of old-world elegance, dressed in a cream-colored suit and jaunty Panama hat from the twenties.)

MABEL. Look at you! You're a vision, a vision!
CHANDLER.
"An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick."
Yeats.
(A pause as he takes MABEL in:) What an extraordinary hat!
MABEL. Isn't it divine?
CHANDLER. You look like Paul Revere.
VITA. You *knew,* you *knew*!

MABEL. It's part of Vita's Fourth of July costume.

CHANDLER. "Listen my children, and you shall hear ..."

CHANDLER and VITA. "Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere ..."

CHANDLER. Longfellow.

MABEL. Nicely done. *(To CHANDLER.)* And to what do I owe the pleasure?

CHANDLER. You called and insisted I come over right away.

MABEL. I did?

CHANDLER. You said it was urgent. Something about a croquet party.

VITA. A croquet party?

MABEL. *(Glancing at VITA.)* Shhh, not so loud.

VITA. What's all this about a croquet party?

MABEL. Alright, Vita, you may go now.

VITA. You know what the doctor said. No entertaining or you could bring on another stroke.

MABEL. *I said, that will be all!*

VITA. Remember what happened at last year's party. The fire department had to rush you to the Beverly hospital.

MABEL. *(Whacking the bed with her cane.)* You heard me. Out, out, out!

(VITA scurries out of the room. Silence.)

CHANDLER. I've never seen that woman in a pair of shoes.

MABEL Affordable live-ins are as scarce as hen's teeth, I'm lucky to have her.

CHANDLER. But she's got that awful son, West. I heard he almost went to jail.

MABEL. He's not so bad.

CHANDLER. You're more tolerant than I am.

MABEL. Well, I had children and you didn't. Though my daughter Emma hasn't spoken to me in years.

CHANDLER. How *is* Emma?

MABEL. I have no idea! Poor thing ... She was doomed from the start. Always seeking her reflection in the bottom of a glass ... Just like her father. I practically raised her daughter, Julia. *(Pointing to a chaise strewn with undergarments:)* Sit down, sit down, take a load off your feet.

(CHANDLER heads for the chaise, but stops seeing her underthings.)

MABEL. It's just my darning. Shove it to one side, it won't bite.

(CHANDLER gingerly moves a ratty bra.)

MABEL. *(Laughing.)* Poor Chan ...

CHANDLER. *(Sitting down:)* You sound just like my mother. *(In her voice:)* "Poor Chan ..." She always said my name as if I had a terminal illness. Now what's all this about a croquet party?

MABEL. Julia's coming tomorrow. My favorite grandchild, my *only* grandchild who deigns to visit me. She only comes once a year, if that.

CHANDLER. She lives in Paris.

MABEL. Oh well, beggars can't be choosers.

CHANDLER. Julia's devoted to you, and you know it.

MABEL. She'll be staying through the Fourth of July.

CHANDLER. How nice.

MABEL. So I'm planning a croquet party like Mama and Papa used to have in the old days.

CHANDLER. Not so fast ...

MABEL. I stumbled across some of Grandmother's heavenly old lawn dresses the ladies can wear for the occasion.

CHANDLER. And where will you have this grand croquet party, pray tell?

MABEL. In the backyard, of course.

CHANDLER. But it's a wilderness out there.

MABEL. That's why I asked you over. To discuss hiring Isobel Sargent's yard man to spruce it up.

CHANDLER. M.T., M.T. ...

MABEL. She's wild about him!

CHANDLER. It would take more than Isobel's yard man to fix up that yard.

MABEL. He's strong as an ox and has lovely manners.

CHANDLER. We're talking a level playing field, a hundred and five by eighty-four feet.

MABEL. That's why I need him so badly!

CHANDLER. I thought you were having money problems.

MABEL. *(Angry:)* OH, STOP BEING SUCH AN OLD MAID, FOR GOD'S SAKE! IT'S NO WONDER YOU'RE ALL ALONE IN THE WORLD!

(An awful silence.)

MABEL. I'm sorry, that was cruel.

CHANDLER. But why a *croquet* party? No one plays croquet anymore.

MABEL. Well, they should, it's great fun.

CHANDLER. It was fun in your parents' day because they had the grounds for it.

MABEL. We could use a little fun around here.

CHANDLER. Times have changed. You're living in the chauffeur's cottage.

MABEL. So?

CHANDLER. There's no room!

MABEL. I've already drawn up the guest list, so there!

CHANDLER. I'm not listening to this!

MABEL. *(Miraculously producing it:)* You, Kitty Lowell, Isobel Sargent, Gabby Ames and the doddering Wheelocks ... if they're still alive.

CHANDLER. You are not, I repeat, not giving a Fourth of July party or any other party. End of discussion!

(WEST BRIGHT, VITA's son, charges into the room. He's around fifteen and has just been in a fight. His clothes are torn and his hands and face are bleeding.)

WEST. *Mom, Mom! Where's Mom*?
MABEL. CHANDLER.
Good grief! West!
WEST. *(Near tears:)* STUPID ASSHOLES!
VITA. *(Rushing into the room:)* Not again ...
WEST. SONS OF BITCHES!
VITA. *(Grabbing him by the shoulders:)* What happened?
WEST. *(Wrenching away from her:)* I'M GOING TO KILL THEM, I'M GOING TO KILL THEM!
CHANDLER. Easy, son, easy ...
MABEL. He's bleeding, call a doctor!
VITA. Westie, Westie, why are you always fighting?
WEST. Like *I* start it ...
VITA. Well, you usually do.
WEST. That's right, take their side.
CHANDLER. Calm down, son.
WEST. Mind your own business and stop calling me "son"!
VITA. *(Reaching for WEST:)* Honey ...
WEST. *(Whirling away from her:)* Don't touch me!
VITA. But you're bleeding.
WEST. I said, *don't touch me*!
CHANDLER. I don't like the look of that hand.
WEST. *(To CHANDLER:)* Fuck off, asshole!
CHANDLER. *(Reeling as if struck:)* I beg your pardon?
WEST. I said, outta my face, *asshole*!
VITA. Apologize to Mr. Coffin right this minute.
WEST. Make me!
VITA. I don't believe this!

MABEL. *(Whacking her cane on the bottom of her bed:)* THAT'S IT, EVERYBODY OUT! I'M TRYING TO PLAN A PARTY HERE AND AM GETTING NO COOPERATION! YOU CAN'T COME CHARGING IN HERE LIKE YOU OWN THE PLACE! *(No one moves.)* YOU HEARD ME ... OUT, OUT! AND THAT INCLUDES YOU, CHAN! YOU'RE TREATING ME LIKE A CHILD AND I WON'T HAVE IT, I TELL YOU, I WON'T!

(Fragments of their angry words dovetail into another argument MABEL witnessed some eighty years before.)

Scene 2

(The dining room of the TIDINGS's spacious summer house that perches above the Atlantic. The year is 1917. It's shortly before nine on a Saturday morning in June and the family is gathered around the table having breakfast. The room is formal and imposing. Family portraits and paintings of sailing ships adorn the walls. GUS TIDINGS, mid-forties, sits at the head of the table. He's dressed in natty sailing clothes and is in a towering rage. He's flanked by his sons: Phineas, eighteen; and Frazier, sixteen. They're also dressed for sailing. GUS's wife MAUD sits across from him, her hair swept up in an elegant Gibson knot. She's in her mid-thirties and is fighting a migraine. She wears an austere high-necked, long-sleeved dress. MABEL, ten, wears a starched pinafore. She sits next to FRAZIER who's very red in the face.)

FRAZIER. I just drove it around the driveway.
GUS. You know the rules ...

MAUD. Someone could have gotten hurt.

GUS. *No one drives my car!*

FRAZIER. Except Phineas.

GUS. Oh, really?

MAUD. You're only sixteen.

FRAZIER. You let Phinney drive it when he was thirteen.

(PHINNEY guiltily looks down at his plate.)

GUS. Do tell.

MAUD. You could have lost control and plunged into the ocean.

FRAZIER. You encouraged him.

GUS. I thought I just said no one drives my car.

MAUD. I can see the headlines now: "AUGUSTUS TIDINGS'S CAR PULLED OUT OF THE ATLANTIC. HIS SON, FRAZIER, FOUND DEAD AT THE WHEEL."

FRAZIER. You waved at him from the porch.

GUS. I waved at him from the porch?

MABEL. *(Trying to restrain him.)* Frazier, don't...

FRAZIER. I remember it as clear as day.

GUS. This is getting better and better.

FRAZIER. You took off your hat and waved.

MABEL. *(Pulling at FRAZIER.)* Stop it, you're making Papa angry.

FRAZIER. But I *saw* you!

GUS. It's bad enough you drove the car, now you're contradicting me!

FRAZIER. Every time he circled the driveway, you waved him on, shouting, "*That's* my boy!" *(He stands, mimicking it.)* "That's *my* boy, that's my *boy*..."

(FRAZIER keeps it up.)

MAUD.*(Passing her hands over her eyes.)* Frazier, please!

GUS. *(Rising from his chair:)* ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, GO TO YOUR ROOM!

MAUD. He's impossible.

GUS. *(Banging the table with his fist:)* NOW!

FRAZIER. *(With rising intensity:)* "*That's* my boy, that's *my* boy, that's my *boy*, that's my ...

MAUD. Just like my father. It's in the blood.

GUS. I said *GO*!

(GUS hurls a glass across the room. It shatters. Silence.)

MAUD. *(Wincing in pain:) Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

FRAZIER. *(Bowing deeply, doffing an imaginary hat:)* Sir, madame, Phineas, Mabel ... I take my leave.

GUS. AND THERE'LL BE NO COMMODORE'S RACE FOR YOU TODAY!

FRAZIER. Who said I wanted to go? I'd rather drink blood than go sailing with you.

MABEL. *(Near tears:)* He doesn't mean it, he doesn't mean it.

FRAZIER. *(Exiting.)* I hope the boat capsizes and you both drown.

MAUD. Apologize to your father right this minute.

FRAZIER. *(Pausing at the door:)* Slowly. Very. Slowly.

(FRAZIER exits. Silence. The Westminster mantel clock starts striking nine.)

MAUD. *(With forced good cheer:)* Alright children, eat up, eat up. Your eggs are getting cold.

(No one moves.)

GUS. Well, Phinney, it looks like it'll be just you and me.

PHINNEY. Aye, aye, sir.

GUS. That's my boy. We're going to win this race.

PHINNEY. Here, here.

MAUD. Mary's packing you a lunch.

GUS. Nothing too fancy, I trust. *(Winking.)* A little caviar, some cold lobster, a few bottles of champagne ...

MAUD. Now, now ...

PHINNEY. Sounds good to me.

MAUD. You want to cross the finish line, not sink underneath it.

GUS. And who's *won* the Challenger's Cup for the past five years?

MAUD. I don't like you drinking when you sail.

GUS. My dear Maud, are you insinuating ...

MAUD. Remember what happened last week.

(MAUD passes her hand over her eyes again.)

MABEL. Are you alright, Mama?

MAUD. It's just one of my headaches.

MABEL. I'm sorry.

MAUD. Where were we? Oh yes, the Commodore's Race.

GUS. We should push off soon, the harbor's going to be jammed. Every Tom, Dick and Harry will be there.

MABEL. May I come?

GUS. *You?*

MABEL Why not?

MAUD. Good grief, what next?

PHINNEY. It would be good for her.

GUS. This is a serious race, it's no place for children.

MAUD. Especially little girls.

MABEL. I could help.

GUS. What on earth would you *do?*

PHINNEY. Swab the deck, man the bilge ...

MABEL. Phinney!

PHINNEY. I'm only kidding. You can be the copilot.

MABEL. *(Imitating once:)* Hard-a-lee. Coming about, coming about ...

MAUD. Girls don't sail, it's just not done.
MABEL. Why not?
MAUD. It's not becoming.
MABEL. I can swim.
MAUD. Anybody can swim.
GUS. Boxer can swim.

(MAUD and GUS bark and emit hoots of laughter.)

MAUD. Girls belong indoors.
MABEL. Yesterday I made it to Little Misery and back.
GUS. *(Patronizing:) Little Misery?* I don't believe it!
MABEL. And I wasn't even tired.
PHINNEY. It's true, I was with her. She was like a machine. A paddle wheel or locomotive ...
MAUD. Don't encourage her!
PHINNEY. She has incredible determination. Remember the time she held her breath for over three minutes?
MAUD. *(World-weary:)* Mabel, Mabel ...
MABEL. I'll do it again. Watch ...
PHINNEY. She passed out before she gave up.
MABEL. Time me, Phin.

(MABEL takes a huge gulp of air.)

PHINNEY. I could never do that.
MAUD. *No playing at the table!*
PHINNEY. For all our daring, divers can't lose control.
GUS. A real swim is crossing the English Channel. A distant relative of mine did it in 1875.
MABEL. Someone *swam* the English Channel?
GUS. Don't they teach you any history at that school?
MAUD. Of course they do. She just doesn't pay attention. She's like you ... Head in the clouds.
MABEL. How far across is it?
GUS. Twenty-one miles. It's not the distance that's daunt-

ing, but the weather. I've never experienced such rough waters. I know, I've sailed them. My father took me the summer I turned fifteen. I've never been so seasick in my life.

GUS, MAUD and PHINNEY. The entire crew was hanging over the edge of the boat.

MAUD. What possessed you to go?

GUS. It's one of those challenges like climbing Mount Everest. You do it because it's there.

MAUD. The Sahara Desert is there too, but that doesn't mean you have to walk across it.

GUS. I beg to differ.

MAUD. Augustus Tilden Tidings, I'll never understand you as long as I live.

GUS. I don't ask for understanding, just a little tolerance.

(Silence.)

MAUD. I'm parched. Who'd like more orange juice?

(MAUD raises the pitcher. No one responds.)

GUS. How old were you when you started to dive, Phin?

MABEL. Ten.

MAUD. How would you know? You weren't even born yet.

MABEL. Yes, I was. I remember watching him dive off the rocks from the nursery.

GUS. Who would have thought our Phineas would end up an Olympic diver?

MAUD. It's not surprising in the least, look what he comes from.

MABEL. He'd stand up so straight and tall. Like an Indian chief. Then he'd lift up on the smalls of his feet ...

GUS. *Balls* of his feet.

MAUD. Honestly, Mabel!

MABEL. Spread out his arms and leap. I was so surprised when he dropped down, I always expected him to fly.

PHINNEY. Come on, you're embarrassing me.

MABEL. I remember one time, he arched so high I thought ...

MAUD. *(Reaching for PHINNEY's hand:)* It's true. Watching you dive is like poetry.

GUS. Accept it, Phin, you're the best there is.

MABEL. Better than the best!

(Silence as everyone gazes at PHINEAS. FRAZIER suddenly enters smeared with fake blood. He sports a loincloth and halo and has several trick arrows stuck in his chest.)

FRAZIER. I'm back!

GUS.	MAUD.	MABEL.	PHINNEY.
Good God!	Frazier!	Fray!	What next?

FRAZIER. *(Slouching against the door, mimicking the famous Mantegna painting:)* Saint Sebastian, early Christian martyr.

GUS. What is this?

FRAZIER. *(Grabbing GUS's hand and sinking to his knees:)* Have mercy! Let me sail!

(Silence as everyone looks at GUS, waiting for his response.)

GUS. *(Finally bursts out laughing:)* Frazier, Frazier ... You know what I admire about you? You're an original.

MAUD. Just like my father.

GUS. It will either make or destroy you.

MAUD. The most brilliant architect of his day. Statesman, Harvard professor, trustee of the Boston Symphony ...,

ALL. Two minutes before his forty-fifth birthday, he put on a tux, walked into the reading room of the Atheneum, pulled out a revolver and *shot* himself through the heart!

MAUD. The blood had gone bad. Poor Mama never got over it. Widowed at forty-two with three small children.

FRAZIER. *(Dropping to his knees:)* Let me sail, I implore you!

GUS. On one condition.

FRAZIER. Anything, anything!

GUS. That you put on some clothes.

FRAZIER. What, you don't like this? *(He strikes outrageous poses, then pulls out the arrows, wipes off the fake blood and offers his halo to MABEL.)* Mabel Tidings, step forward please.

MABEL. Who, me?

FRAZIER. Yes, *you*!

(MABEL advances.)

FRAZIER. On your knees.

(MABEL kneels before him.)

FRAZIER. On behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and all the God-fearing citizens of Pride's Crossing, I hereby give you Saint Sebastian's halo. *(He places it on MABEL's head.)* Tell me your heart's desire and it will be yours.

MAUD. *(World-weary:)* Frazier, Frazier ...

GUS. He's *your* son, not mine.

MABEL. Anything?

FRAZIER. *Anything*.

GUS. *(Looking at his watch:)* Good God, look at the time! *(Heading for the door.)* Come on boys, we've got a race to win!

MAUD. I think I'll head back to bed, I'm not feeling well.

PHINNEY. *(Tagging FRAZIER:)* Last one out's a rotten egg!

FRAZIER. *(Chasing after him:)* Oh no you don't.

(PHINNEY and FRAZIER race for the door, knocking over chairs.)

MAUD. Boys, boys ...

MABEL. Wait! My wish.

MAUD. You're acting like savages!
PHINNEY. *(Scuffling in the hall:)* I won, I won!
FRAZIER. Did not.
PHINNEY. Did so!
FRAZIER. Did not.
PHINNEY. Did so!
MAUD. *(To MABEL as she exits:)* Wait till *you're* a mother!
MABEL. What about my wish? Doesn't anybody want to hear my wish? *(Shutting her eyes. With great solemnity.)* Someday I'm going to swim the English Channel and be famous like Phinney!

(Light emanates from her halo. It shines brighter and brighter and then snaps out.)

Scene 3

(The present, MABEL's living room, around 2:30 the next afternoon. JULIA RENOIR [MABEL's granddaughter] and MINTY RENOIR [JULIA's daughter] have just arrived. They face her like soldiers on a reviewing stand.)

MABEL. Well, finally!
JULIA. Hi, Grand.
MABEL. Don't just stand there. Come give your doddering old grandmother a kiss.
JULIA. *(Kissing her cheek:)* Maa!
MABEL. God, you look awful!
JULIA. Thanks a lot.
MABEL. You look a hundred years old.
JULIA. How nice of you to mention it.
MABEL. *(Pointing at MINTY:)* And who's *that* mysteri-

ous creature trying to disappear under the floorboards?

JULIA. *(Softly to MINTY.)* Give Great Grand a kiss.

MABEL. Don't tell me it's Minty!

JULIA. Go on...

MABEL. The last time I saw you, you were in diapers.

JULIA. It hasn't been *that* long. *(Pushing MINTY toward MABEL.)* Kiss Mou-Mou...

(MABEL makes her lurid kissing sound. MINTY doesn't move.)

JULIA. We're waiting.

(MINTY hastily kisses MABEL on both cheeks.)

MABEL. Oh, I love that European style of kissing! Do it again, do it again!

(MABEL makes scary throat-clearing noises. MINTY doesn't move.)

JULIA. *(Softly to MINTY.)* You heard her.

MABEL. Her being able to kiss like that almost makes up for your living so far away.

(MINTY doesn't move.)

JULIA. *Vas y, Mignone, ne sois pas si timide!*

(MABEL spits into a tissue. MINTY is frozen to the spot.)

JULIA. *Vas y, vas y...!*

MABEL. It's alright, let her be.

JULIA. *(Getting angrier and angrier.) Qu' est-ce-que tu fais, Mignone? Ce n' est pas gentil.*

MABEL. It's alright, let her be.

(MINTY hastily kisses her again.)

MABEL. Thank you Minty, that was very brave. *(Pause.)* How old are you these days?

MINTY. Ten.

MABEL. *Ten?* I thought you were seventeen!

JULIA. Spare me!

MABEL. Do you remember the last time you were here?

MINTY. Sort of.

JULIA. She was only six.

MINTY. I slept in a funny little room upstairs.

MABEL. The hayloft. This used to be the chauffeur's cottage. And before that it was a stable, if you can believe it. The place was crawling with mice!

MINTY. Ewww, I hate mice!

MABEL. You *do?*

MINTY. They give me the creeps!

MABEL. But they're so cunning.

MINTY. "Cunning"?

JULIA. *(To MINTY:)* Cute.

MABEL. There's a darling family that lives in the upstairs bathroom. They've built the most charming nest under the sink. It's made out of rags and bits of toilet paper.

MINTY. Ewwww! Ewwww!

MABEL. Wait till you see it ... It even has a little swing set for the babies ...

MINTY. *(Covering her ears:)* Stop stop ...

MABEL. I'm just kidding ... But we do have bats.

MINTY. *(Terrified:)* Bats?

JULIA. *(Heading for the door:)* I'm leaving!

MINTY. *(Running after her:)* Wait for me!

MABEL. *(Laughing:)* I've never seen such a gullible pair! You'd believe anything!

JULIA. *(World-weary:)* Grand, Grand ...

MABEL. I just love how you call me "Grand"! It makes

me sound like an Oriental potentate.

MINTY. *(Gazing at MABEL out of shining eyes:)* That was neat!

MABEL. *(To JULIA:)* I want you to meet Vita, darling. The woman's a saint. I don't know how she puts up with me. *(Calling:)* Vita ... Oh, Vita ...

VITA. *(From offstage:)* Yes?

MABEL. *(To MINTY, conspiratorially:)* Come on, let's have a little fun. *(To VITA.)* Come quick, there's a gorilla in the parlor!

VITA. *(From the kitchen:)* A gorilla in the parlor?

MABEL. *(Nudging MINTY, making little gorilla noises:)* Go on ... *(MINTY lopes around like a gorilla.)* Atta girl ...

JULIA. *(Laughing:)* You two ...

VITA. *(Entering, feigning surprise:)* HELLLLLP, A GORILLA!

(MINTY gets more and more into it, grunting and beating her chest.)

JULIA: Alright, Minty, that's enough.

MABEL. *(Clapping:)* Nicely done, nicely done!

JULIA. I'd forgotten how strenuous these visits are.

MABEL. *(To VITA:) That* is my great-grandchild, Minty!

VITA. So I gathered.

(VITA does a quick gorilla turn.)

MINTY. More, more! ...

(MINTY tries to outdo VITA.)

JULIA. *Ça suffit, petite! S'il te plais!*

(MINTY retreats to a chair.)

MABEL. *(To VITA:)* And *this* is my granddaughter Julia. *(Introducing them.)* Vita Bright ... Julia Renoir.

JULIA. *(Shaking her hand:)* I've heard so much about you.

VITA. Is that *Renoir*, as in the painter?

MABEL. Her husband's a distant relative. How is Jean-Jacques, by the way?

JULIA. Jean-*Paul!*

MABEL. Whatever. Still working like a Trojan?

JULIA. Still working like a Trojan.

MABEL. She's married to the finest heart specialist in Paris.

JULIA. Now, now ...

MABEL. Well, he is. He's also as handsome as the day is long. I don't trust that man around the corner.

JULIA. Here we go ...

MABEL. They all have mistresses over there. I have a dim view of good-looking men, in case you haven't noticed.

JULIA. Just because your husband was an alcoholic, doesn't mean—

MABEL. You can't let them out of your sight for a minute, particularly if they're French. *Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? (She makes her lurid kissing noise.)* I've had my adventures with handsome foreign men.

JULIA. The infamous David Bloom.

VITA. *David Bloom*? I've never heard you mention any ...

JULIA. The dashing Englishman who wanted to run away with her after her swim.

MABEL. Alright Julia, that's enough.

JULIA. Well, he did.

VITA. Go, Mrs. B!

JULIA. She met him over there while she was training.

MABEL. *(Wistful:) Porpoise oil!*

VITA. Porpoise oil?

MABEL. He covered me with porpoise oil before I went in. He had the most beautiful hands ...

JULIA. He was a doctor.

MABEL. Drawn from the water.

VITA. Drawn from the water?

MABEL. That's what Moses means.

JULIA. *(Sotto voce to VITA:)* He was Jewish.

VITA. *(Pleased:)* Like West's father!

JULIA. And wildly handsome. He did the swim the year before her.

VITA. So, why didn't you go off with him?

MABEL. I don't want to talk about it.

JULIA. Just think, you'd be living in London or Oxford. *(Putting on an accent.)* Pip pip and cheerio ...

MABEL. I SAID I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!

(Silence.)

JULIA. When Jean-Paul asked me to marry him I didn't think twice. Of course he was *French*, and French men are much sexier than English men.

MABEL. Well, Minty, I hope you brought your bathing suit. We're expecting some beautiful weather.

JULIA. The way he looked at me ... It was as if his eyes had tongues. Of course, that was years ago. Now he barely notices me.

(Silence.)

MABEL. *(To VITA:)* Julia's an architect, if you can believe it. She just designed some frightfully important museum of arts and crafts behind the Louvre.

JULIA. It's nowhere near the Louvre, it's in Neuilly. And I didn't design it, I'm part of a firm.

MABEL. My grandfather was an architect, you know. He designed half the buildings in Boston. He was a remarkable man.

MABEL and JULIA. Two minutes before his forty-fifth

birthday, he put on a tux, walked into the reading room of the Atheneum, pulled out a revolver and *shot* himself through the heart.

MABEL. The blood had gone bad. Too blue, too thin ... spent. A condition that plagues most of the old families around here, in case you haven't noticed.

(Silence. The Westminster clock chimes three.)

MINTY. Can I go upstairs and see if there are any mice in my room?

MABEL. You mean, "*May* I go upstairs and see if there are any mice in my room?" Yes, you may. And no there aren't. West already checked. That's *his* department.

(MINTY scampers off.)

MABEL. *(To JULIA:)* She's divine, divine ... *(To VITA:)* Well, don't just stand there, let's get lunch under way before we all keel over with hunger. Vita prepared a veritable feast. All your favorites.

VITA. *(Exiting:)* It's hardly a feast. Just shepherd's pie, corn on the cob and apple brown Betty for dessert.

(Silence.)

JULIA. *(Pulling up close to MABEL:)* So, how are you?

MABEL. Still breathing.

JULIA. How's your walking?

MABEL. I don't want to talk about it.

JULIA. Do you get outside at all?

MABEL. Julia, Julia, it's so good to see you. How's your wretched mother?

JULIA. Miserable.

MABEL. Poor Emma, what number husband is she on now?

JULIA. Five and don't change the subject.

MABEL. Good God!

JULIA. He's not bad. Dull, but very rich. *(Pause.)* Do you get to the beach?

MABEL. Rarely.

JULIA. What about gardening?

MABEL. I haven't pulled up a weed in I don't know how long.

JULIA. It's important to move around.

MABEL. I said, *I don't want to talk about it!* How are things in Paris?

JULIA. In the words of a distant relative of mine, "I don't want to talk about it!"

(Silence.)

MABEL. Well, I hope you're up for some excitement. I'm having a Fourth of July croquet party.

JULIA. Grand, *no!*

MABEL. We could use a little gaiety around here.

JULIA. Why do you always insist on having a party when I come?

MABEL. Because I like them. You never know what's going to happen next. What would you think if your ancient grandmother disappeared into the bushes with Mr. Wheelock or Chandler Coffin?

JULIA. *Grand*!

MABEL. Or better yet, did a spirited jig with the attractive young man who's mowing the lawn?

JULIA. Remember what happened last year? Chandler Coffin told me you had to be rushed to the hospital in a fire truck.

MABEL. And it was great fun.

(MABEL imitates the siren.)

JULIA. For *you!*

MABEL. I love parties, I've always loved parties. They bring out the best in people.

JULIA. Not when they're as frail as you are.

MABEL. That, my love, is when you need them the most. I want to exit with a flourish.

JULIA. *Exit*?

(VITA enters ringing a bell.)

VITA. LUNCH IS READY, LUUUUUNCH!

(MINTY lets out a series of piercing screams from upstairs. VITA screams.)

MABEL. Good God!

JULIA. Minty, Minty ...

(MINTY runs in hiding something behind her back.)

MINTY. Eww, eww, ewww ...

JULIA. *(Rushing over to her:)* What happened?

MINTY. LOOK!

(MINTY whips out a dead mouse caught in a trap. VITA and JULIA scream.)

MINTY. Yuk, yuk!!!

(She drops the mouse in front of MABEL.)

MABEL. Is *that* all?

JULIA. Minty, you nearly gave us a heart attack!

MABEL. *(Reaching for it:)* The poor thing is dead. It can't hurt you.

VITA. JULIA. MINTY.
Mrs. B.! ... *Don't touch it!* EWWWWWWW!

MABEL *(Picking it up:)* What's dead is dead. There's no coming back.

(She releases the mouse from the trap and drops it into a vase. JULIA, VITA and MINTY shudder, clutching onto each other.)

MABEL. Chop, chop, it's time for lunch. I've never seen such a bunch of scaredy-cats! Lunch, lunch ...

(MABEL reaches for her walker and starts to rise. She loses her balance and sways on her feet.)

JULIA. *(Rushing to her, grabbing her arm:) Grand*!

MABEL. *(Whirling away from her:)* DON'T TOUCH ME! IF YOU TOUCH ME, I'LL FALL!

VITA. *(Softly to JULIA:)* Leave her alone. It's best if she does it herself.

MABEL. *(Starts making her way across the room:)*
"Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream ..."

JULIA. *(To VITA:)* She's so much worse.

MABEL.
"Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream."

VITA. It's the arthritis.

JULIA. She can hardly move.

VITA. What are you talking about? This is a good day, ISN'T IT, MRS. B?

MABEL. Hmmm?

VITA. I SAID: "THIS IS A GOOD DAY"!

(MABEL turns toward VITA and loses her balance again. She paddles the air.)

JULIA. *(Grabbing her arm:)* I've got you!

MABEL. *(Wrenching out of her grasp, wild:)* I SAID, DON'T TOUCH ME! WHAT'S THE MATTER ARE YOU DEAF?! *(She takes several wobbly steps.)* Mmmmm, smell that shepherd's pie ...

(JULIA can't watch and turns away.)

VITA. Atta girl, you're doing fine ...

MABEL. Mary made the most heavenly shepherd's pie in the old days. I lived in that kitchen!

(MABEL inches toward the dining room, recalling a summer day more than seventy years earlier.)

Scene 4

(The sprawling kitchen in the TIDINGS's summer house. The year is 1922. It's mid-July, around two in the afternoon. MARY O'NEILL, the Irish cook, is grinding chunks of cooked lamb in the meat grinder. She's in her mid-forties and wears a billowing white apron. PRU, her daughter, eighteen, is mashing potatoes. MABEL, fifteen, sits at MARY's feet shelling peas. She's at that awkward stage, wearing a fussy dress that doesn't fit right.)

MABEL. And ...?

MARY. He tipped his hat, walked out the door and was never seen again.

MABEL. No!

PRU. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

MARY. My only sister. Seduced and abandoned at six-

teen. *(Lowering her voice meaningfully.)* A year older than you.

MABEL. I'd die!

MARY. She almost did, poor thing.

PRU. Look on the bright side, Bridget wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for him.

MARY. He wed forty-three times before the constable finally caught up with him. Bridget has more half brothers and sisters than the daughter of an Arab sheik!

MARY and PRU. *(Chanting:)*

"Patrick McCann, Patrick McCann,
forty-three rings on forty-three hands."

MABEL. Awful, awful!

MARY. I don't want you blabbing this all over town, now. My niece Bridget is a good girl. The Lowells are very happy with her.

MABEL. I won't say a word, I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.

MARY. It's just between us. Our secret.

MABEL. My lips are sealed.

PRU. *(To MARY:)* Too bad your sister's weren't back when it counted.

MARY. *(Swatting her with a towel:)* Prudence Patricia O'Neill!

PRU. *(Trying to defend herself:)* Help ... help!

(They tussle with each other, laughing and squealing.)

MABEL. *(To MARY:)* How long have you been married to Norton?

MARY. Let me see ...

PRU. Well, I'm eighteen.

MARY. It's eighteen years, then.

PRU. Just under the wire.

MABEL. Mama says Norton is the best chauffeur we've ever had.

MARY. Any fool can drive a car.
MABEL. I can't.

(MABEL eats a handful of raw peas.)

PRU. You could if someone taught you how. I've driven a train.
MARY. She's driven a train, she says.
PRU. Well, I have!
MARY. And I've walked on water. How are those potatoes coming?
PRU. *(Bearing them aloft.)* Done!
MARY. And when, pray tell, did you drive this train?
PRU. Last week.
MARY. Last week, she says.
PRU. From Revere to Boston.
MARY. From Revere to Boston, is it? *(Handing her a bowl of apples.)* Well, I hope you're not too above us all to peel these apples.

(MABEL eats more peas.)

PRU. Buddy let me take the controls.
MARY. That good for nothing! I thought I told you I don't want you seeing him.
PRU. He's a good man, a sweet man, he gives me my way.

(PRU mimics blasting a train whistle.)

MARY. Men! They're either devils or fools.
PRU. *(Peeling an apple:)* Better marry a fool than share a devil with forty-two wives.

(MABEL eats more peas.)

MARY. There, the lamb's ground. I've never seen a family with such a craving for shepherd's pie, to say nothing of its passion for entertaining. Fifteen for dinner every night. Not that I'm complaining, mind you, a full house is a happy house. *(Swatting MABEL with the dish towel.)* Stop eating those peas, child! There'll be none left for your guests.

MABEL. I love them raw.

MARY. What will your mother say when Pru passes her an empty vegetable dish?

PRU. *(As MAUD.) "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!"*

MARY. It's bad enough you spend so much time down here.

MABEL. But I like being with you. It's so much more fun than upstairs.

PRU. I'd trade places in a minute.

MARY. Where did this uppity girl come from?

PRU. The fairies brought me, I was switched at birth.

MARY. You mean, the devil brought you, you're no daughter of mine. Hurry along now, those apples aren't going to peel themselves.

MABEL. I'll do them.

MARY. That's all we need. For you to eat half the dessert as well!

PRU. Look at my hands! *(Thrusting them out.)* they're covered with moss.

MARY. That's not moss. It's the freckled skin of a lazy girl.

PRU. I can breathe under water and cast spells.

MARY. It's girls like you that give the Irish a bad name.

PRU. *(Incanting over MABEl.)*

"River run, moonbeam glow,
Ask me what you want to know.
Love, adventure, riches, fame,
A glance at your palm,
And I'll see it plain."

MAUD. *(Calling from offstage:)* MABEL ... MABEL ... NORTON'S WAITING.

MARY. Run along, your mother's calling.

PRU. *(Picking up MABEL's hand:)*

"Eye of sheep, lip of hare,
All my prophesies I will share."

MAUD. PHINNEY'S MATCH STARTS IN FORTY-FIVE MINUTES!

MARY. Go on, do as she says.

MABEL But I want to stay here. *(To MAUD.)* GO WITHOUT ME.

MARY. *(Swatting the towel at her:)* Go, go ...

MAUD. IT'S THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME. ALL OF ESSEX COUNTY WILL BE THERE!

MABEL. I'M SICK OF POLO!

MARY. *(To PRU.)* Do you believe this girl?

MAUD. GUS ... MABEL SAYS SHE ISN'T COMING.

PRU. *(Examining MABEL's palm:)* Look at this love line...

MABEL What does it say, what does it say?

GUS. *(Striding into the kitchen, furious:)* What's this I hear about you're not coming to Phinney's match?

(GUS is dressed in fabulous polo-watching attire. Everyone snaps to attention.)

GUS. *(Oozing charm:)* Good afternoon, Mary, good afternoon, Pru ...

MARY. Good afternoon, Mr. Tidings.

PRU. *(Curtsying:)* Mr. Tidings.

GUS. Are you both well?

MARY. Very well, thank you.

GUS. Forgive my sudden entrance, but Mrs. Tidings just informed me Mabel doesn't want to go to Phinney's match.

(MAUD materializes at his side, looking equally stylish.)

MAUD. She says she's sick of polo ... Good afternoon Mary, Pru ...

MARY. Good day, Mrs. Tidings.

PRU. *(Curtsying:)* Mrs. Tidings.

MAUD. Are you both well?

MARY. Very well, thank you.

(FRAZIER bounds into the room. He's now twenty-one and a natty dresser.)

FRAZIER. Porter Bigelow will be there!

MAUD. I can't stand that boy, he drinks too much!

FRAZIER. But he sure is handsome, isn't he Mabel?

MAUD. The whole family drinks too much.

FRAZIER. But Mabel doesn't mind because she's got a crush on him.

MABEL. I do not.

FRAZIER. Do so.

MABEL. Do not!

FRAZIER. Mabel, Mabel, your blushes give you away. *(He bows to MARY and PRU, doffing an imaginary hat.)* Mary, Pru ... sorceresses of the kitchen, purveyors of gastronomic delights, I salute you.

MARY. *(Trying not to laugh:)* Master Tidings ...

(PRU is overcome with the giggles.)

FRAZIER. What are you preparing for tonight's repast?

MARY. Shepherd's pie, sir.

FRAZIER. *Good choice*!

GUS. The *only* choice as far as I'm concerned.

MAUD. *(To MARY:)* I hope Mabel isn't getting in your way.

MARY. Not at all, ma'am, we enjoy her company.

GUS. Time's a wasting. Mabel?

(Offering MABEL his arm.)

MABEL. I don't feel well, Papa.
MAUD. Darling ...
MABEL. I think I'm coming down with something.
FRAZIER. Porter will be heartbroken.

(MABEL starts coughing.)

MAUD. It's the dampness in the air. I've had a headache all summer.
GUS. Alright, alright, you can stay home.
FRAZIER. Ohh to be a woman.
GUS and MAUD. *Frazier!*
FRAZIER. I've never cared for polo. Parlor games are more to my taste.
GUS. Who *is* this boy?
FRAZIER. Your black sheep.

(FRAZIER baas.)

GUS. *(Taking MAUD's arm.)* Come along Maud, we don't want to miss the match.

(FRAZIER emits a cavalcade of baas. MARY and PRU exchange amused glances.)

GUS. Alright, Frazier ...
MAUD. That will do.

(A brief silence. FRAZIER emits a poignant baa.)

GUS. *(With blood in his voice:)* ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
FRAZIER. Easy for you to say.
GUS. *(Pulling MAUD toward the door:)* Maud ...
MAUD. I'm coming, I'm coming. Now Mabel, I don't want you getting in Mary's hair.

GUS. *(Exiting.)* And keep an eye on Freddy. The croquet party's Saturday. I want that lawn as smooth as glass. Remember what happened to Chandler Coffin last summer. He sprained his ankle on a tuft of weeds.

MAUD. Well, what do you expect? It's amazing the boy can play at all, given that pathetic club foot of his.

MABEL. *(Stung.) Mama! ...*

(NORTON beeps the horn.)

GUS. Norton's honking, we've got to go.

FRAZIER. *(Exiting.:)* If I see Porter, I'll give him a kiss for you.

(He emits a final baa.)

MAUD. *(Halfway down the hall:)* I'm just as glad she's not coming, she's so moody these days.

(Doors slam, the car starts up and drives away. Silence.)

MABEL. Well ...

PRU. So ...

(The silence deepens.)

MARY. *(Surveying the room:)* What am I forgetting?

MABEL. *(Pulling at her bodice:)* I've got to get out of this dress, I can't breathe.

MARY. *The brandy sauce!* Come on, Pru, help me!

PRU. *(To MABEL:)* See what I have to put up with? I'm not only the serving girl, I'm also her slave.

MARY. I gave you life and don't you forget it!

MABEL. *(Heading toward the door:)* I'm going to change into my bathing suit.

MARY. I should have known it was a plot to go swimming. I've never seen anyone spend so much time in the water. What on earth do you think about, hour after hour?

MABEL. Nothing, really. I count my strokes and sing songs.

MARY. *(Working on the brandy sauce:)* Songs? What kind of songs?

MABEL. Nursery rhymes, mostly. "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," "The Farmer in the Dell." I sing each one two hundred times and then move on to another.

PRU. I'd go mad.

MABEL. It's relaxing, actually.

MARY. The girl is daft. She paddles through the freezing ocean, singing nursery rhymes. *(She starts singing:)*

"Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream ..."

MARY.
"Merrily, merrily,
merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream."

PRU.
"Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream."

(Silence.)

MABEL. I'd swim around the world if I could.

PRU. What if a whale comes along?

MABEL. They're miles away, out in the open sea.

PRU. Or an octopus?

MARY. *(Waving her arms, taunting PRU:)* Or a squid!

PRU. *(Squirming:)* Uuugh, stop!

MARY. *(Making lurid gestures:)* Or the Loch Ness Monster!

PRU. No, no!

MARY. My mother saw Nessie on her tenth birthday. She said it was the size of Buckingham Palace.

(More menacing gestures.)

PRU. *(Shrinking from MARY:)* Noooo!

MARY. *(Rushing at PRU like the Lock Ness Monster:)* I'm going to get you ...

PRU. *(Throwing her arms around MABEL in a panic:)* SAVE ME, SAVE ME ...

MARY. *(Putting on a Scottish accent as she chases them:)* Dinna think you can get away from *me*, me lassies ... Lunch, lunch ... it's time for me lunch!

MABEL and PRU: HELP, HELP, HELP, HELLLLLLLLP!

(The chase becomes more frantic as MABEL and PRU shriek in terror. MARY finally catches them and they fall into a squealing heap.)

PRU. Stop, stop I'm going to wet my knickers!

MABEL. Help, murder police ...

MARY. *(Back to herself:)* There, there, I'd never hurt my precious girls.

(They gradually calm down. MARY pats their cheeks and straightens their hair.)

MARY. You're going to be the death of me with your foolish games.

PRU. *Our* foolish games? *You* were the one that started it.

MABEL *(Pulling away:)* I've got to get going, I only have a few hours.

MARY. Be careful now, don't tire yourself out.

MABEL. Don't forget to wave when I go past.

MARY. Do we ever?

MABEL. It keeps me going.

PRU. You should see yourself. You're no bigger than a pea, bobbing up and down.

MARY. On to China, then.
MABEL. On to China!

(She pauses a moment and then dashes out of the room. MARY and PRU gaze after her as the lights slowly dim.)

Scene 5

(The present. Later that afternoon. MABEL's sitting in her darkened bedroom by the phone. She's going over the guest list for her party. A light rain falls. The foghorn moans in the distance.)

MABEL. Chandler, Kitty Lowell, Isobel Sargent, Gabby Ames and the doddering Wheelocks, if they're still alive. Damned guest list ... I'd better get a wiggle on before they all drop dead. *(Flipping through her address book.)* Lowell, Lowell ... here we go ... 822-0551 ... *(She dials, waits and then speaks very loud.)* KITTY, IT'S M.T. JULIA'S IN TOWN. SHE JUST GOT IN FROM PARIS, IF YOU PLEASE, SO I'M PLANNING A LITTLE CROQUET PARTY OVER THE FOURTH AND WAS HOPING YOU COULD COME. I FOUND SOME OF GRANDMOTHER'S HEAVENLY OLD LAWN DRESSES SO WE CAN REALLY LOOK LIKE SOMETHING ... *(Listening.)* HMMMM? I CAN'T HEAR YOU, YOU'LL HAVE TO SPEAK UP. *(Listening.)* WHAT'S THAT? OH, I'M SORRY, I MUST HAVE DIALED THE WRONG NUMBER. *(She hangs up.)* How embarrassing! I'd better look this up again. *(Flipping through her address book.)* Lowell, Lowell ... 822-0557. That sounds more like it. *(Reciting as she dials.)* 822-0557 ... KITTY, JULIA'S IN TOWN, SO I'M GIVING A LITTLE CROQUET PARTY OVER THE

FOURTH. Oh no, it's one of those dreadful answering machines. God, I hate those things! *(Listening.)* Why do they always have to play music? *(Singing along.)* "And in foggy London town the sun is shining..." *(Then giving her message very fast.)* I'M GIVING A CROQUET PARTY ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, GOOD-BYE! *(She hangs up.)* Well done, if I do say so myself. *(Pause.)* Oh, no, I think I forgot to say who I was, I'll have to call back... *(The phone suddenly rings. MABEL jumps and then picks up the receiver.)* HELLO? *(Listening.)* WELL, *FINALLY!* I'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU FOR HOURS!...WHAT'S THAT? *(Listening.)* MRS. McCLOUD FROM THE VISITING NURSE SERVICE? I THOUGHT YOU WERE KITTY LOW-ELL. *(Listening.) MY TESTS CAME BACK FROM THE LAB!* WHAT TESTS? *(Listening.)* OH YES, MY BLOOD TESTS, I REMEMBER THOSE...SLOW DOWN, SLOW DOWN... *(Listening.)* THE DOCTOR'S CONCERNED? HE WANTS TO SEE ME AGAIN? TOO MANY BRIGHT FLOOD SWELLS? *(Listening.) WHITE BLOOD CELLS! (Listening.)* THERE'S AN UPROAR IN THE FIRMAMENT? YOU'LL HAVE TO CALL BACK WHEN VITA'S HERE, I CAN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD YOU'RE SAYING! *(She slams the receiver down, but misses the cradle.)* Damn phone! Go where you belong! *(Slamming it down again and again.)* Nothing ever works when you want it to! *(She finally hits the cradle.)* That's more like it! *(Pause. She sighs and looks around.)* Where was I? Oh yes, my guest list... I don't remember giving parties being this strenuous... *(Gazing around the room.)* God, it's dark in here, no wonder I can't see anything. Damn lamp! Why is Vita always moving you? I've told her I want you next to my chair, not halfway across the room! *(She gropes for it, just missing.)* Uuu-ugh...ugggh! *(She lunges for it and it falls with a crash.)* HELP, I JUST KNOCKED OVER THE LAMP! HELP! HELLLP! ... *(Pause.)* HELLLLOOOO? ... ANYBODY

HOME? Where is everybody? VIIIIIITAAAAA? *(Silence.)* I must have sent her to the market. *(Pause.)* JULIA, OH JUUUULIAAAA? That's right, she and Minty wanted to swim in the rain. I'm on my own for a couple of hours. Nothing wrong with that, I could use a little peace and quiet for a change. I just can't see anything ... I can't walk, I can't hear, my white blood cells are all out of whack ... We all know what *that* means. Good old cancer. No fun, that. No fun at all. It got both Porter and David Bloom. Dead at fifty-one. Who would have thought ... ? God, I miss him! Those hands, that voice, the kisses ... *(She starts to break down.)* Stop it, Mabel, stop it right this minute! *(She begins to sing:)*

"Row, row, row, your boat,
Gently down the stream ..."

(WEST suddenly enters.)

WEST. Anybody home?
MABEL. *(Startled:)* Who's that?
WEST. MOM?
MABEL. *David?*
WEST. Mrs. B?
MABEL. West?
WEST. Are you alright?
MABEL. Where am I?
WEST. In your bedroom.
MABEL. I thought I heard gulls.
WEST. What happened to the lamp?
MABEL. What lamp?
WEST. There's glass all over the floor.
MABEL. *(Taking deep gulps of air:)* God, God, God ...
WEST. *(Walking over to her:)* Are you OK?
MABEL. For a minute there I thought you were ...
WEST. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you.
MABEL. I have to catch my breath.

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