

# ARLENE'S BEAUTY WORLD

By Michael Soetaert

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## CHARACTERS

11-12 Players: 8 Women, 3 Men, 0-1 Either

### THE GIRLS

**GERTY POINDEXTER:** She is Chester's Grandmother. He moved her to the old folks' home because it is next door to Arlene's Beauty World, and he wanted her to be near Janis. She is doing her best to see the good in everything. She dresses like it's always a Sunday morning back in the spring of 1968.

**ABIGAIL:** She is a ditz (ditz; n. A derivative of ditzoid; adj.: ditz). 1. loopy; not dealing with a full deck. 2. whack-o-bananas; sawing without a blade; totally bonkers. 3. one who inspires euphemisms). She is rarely not enjoying the happiness that only one who is totally absent of reality can experience. However, it is possible that her total oblivion is a cover, but for what...? She dresses very nicely, wearing an expensive dress with pearls.

**BEULAH TARKINGTON:** She is bitter. She played well all her life only to have those who cheated get all the good stuff – especially her husband. She has, for the most part, given up trying to look good or be nice. She is always in her night gown and robe. I mean, what's the point of changing? You're just going to have to put it on again later.

**HELGA VON SHTOMPKEN:** A former instructor from East Germany. She would've made a good Nazi, but life often deals us cruel blows. Greta should be played by a guy, the larger the better. Classic German dress with the crossing straps. Play for the East German women's weightlifting team stereotype. You should be able to see "her" hairy legs. Greta's hair should be two, tight buns on each side of the head made from long, coiled braids; but at least one needs to be able to come off. She speaks with a heavy German accent peppered with German (you'll need to know some basic pronunciation). She has a severe temper on a pretty short fuse. Fuse? Bomb? Naw, could just be a coincidence. Helga characteristically sits, and does everything else, very un-ladylike.

**HELGA VON SHTOMPKEN: The Younger Version:** Helga, from time to time, will undergo an amazing transformation, looking quite younger. This person needs to look nothing like the Old Helga: small, petite, and pretty. Actually play her as a girl.

NEVY: She mostly just passes through on her walker, wanting to know if it is her turn to get her hair done. Not a happy person. It should be obvious that she really doesn't need the walker. She just enjoys making noise with it. Truly, the only thing she wants from life anymore, and possibly the only thing she ever wanted from life, was to get her hair done. Imagine a 14 year old girl who has never gotten over her obsession with her hair. And never realized that it looked fine to begin with. Now add 70 years. That's Nevy.

ESTHER: She was the first victim of the Fruitcake Bomber. I mean, what more do you need to know? She's not coming back. In fact, she was never there. So, never mind.

### THE COPS

DETECTIVE DIRK CANNON: 30ish. Clean cut. Dresses like a big city cop from the '60s. Speaks in a "Dragnet" staccato – clear diction, but quick and choppy and to the point, except when speaking to the audience, then he takes on a more casual street slang. He's not married. He will fall in love with O'Malley, but like everything else, when he finally realizes it, it will be "by the book."

DETECTIVE O'MALLEY: Just O'Malley. All that stuff I wrote about Dirk . . . yeah, this is the female version. They were made for each other.

### AND THE OTHERS

JANIS: She is the owner of Arlene's Beauty World, a beauty parlor that is only kept in business by the old ladies from the old folks' home next door; but business is not very good. There is a hope that someday it might be better if only she can perfect the formula for Basic Blue: The world's only hair dye that won't turn old ladies' hair blue. Oh, yeah, she also sells fruitcake from her salon. She has been engaged to Chester for 17 years, only because she can't get the ring off. She really hates Chester. No kidding. But she'll get over it. In the meantime, she is perpetually annoyed, to the point of aggravated acceptance. Mid-20s. Pretty, but haggard – not Merle. Dresses for work: a smock over slacks and a shirt.

CHESTER: He's oblivious. OK, he's down right clueless. He refuses to believe Janis when she tells him to die, or worse. Life is wonderful because he gets to be with the girl he loves. Every day. I'll be darned if I know what he actually does for a living. So will anybody else. Same age as Janis. Sport coat type, but no tie.

MAURICE: He needs to be played about as flamboyantly as possible. Go for the stereotype. Have fun. He's the hair competition. Of course, his business isn't very good, either. He desperately wants to get his hands on the Basic Blue formula.

VOICES OFF: Do I really need to describe this? You could double with the Professor or even Young Helga, or someone else as far as that goes.

### SET

Arlene's Beauty World is a throwback to a 'sixties beauty salon. Center stage is an old style chair with the attached bonnet.

To the right of the hair dryer is the waiting area: a couch – which needs to be bolted to the floor and another chair with a table set in front. There are several old magazines on the table. A dead plant or two would be appropriate.

To the left of the hair dryer is a workstation – a chair in front of a table and a mirror with all the appropriate paraphernalia . . . you know, brushes, scissors, hair dryer, circular saw . . . that sort of thing. There is also a wind-up timer that rings.

There is a door that leads to the backroom and Janis' office more or less UL behind the dryer and the workspace.

There is a glass-paneled front door DR that has one of those old time bells on it that rings when it's opened. Next to the front door is an old card table – the more beat up the better – with several fruitcakes wrapped in foil stacked on it. There is a sign taped to the table that says, "Fruitcakes for Sale. Make Offer."

*This is dedicated to my mother, Hazel. Your fruitcake was the best.*

## **ARLENE'S BEAUTY WORLD**

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### **ACT I**

#### **SCENE 1**

*When everybody's through looking for a program, bring the lights down. While dark, after a beat . . .*

VOICE OFF STAGE: Bingo!

*There is a loud explosion off stage. After another beat, open the curtains. ABIGAIL, and BEULAH are sitting in the chairs DR. ABIGAIL has a magazine that SHE is making no attempt whatsoever to read, and BEULAH has a fly swatter that, from time to time to punctuate what SHE says, SHE swats anything that may or may not be there. GERTY is sitting under the hairdryer while HELGA is impatiently standing next to GERTY, picking up and putting down the timer.*

HELGA: *(finally picks up the timer and runs it ahead until it goes off)*  
Acht! Time's up. You're through!

*(GERTY gets up and HELGA quickly parks herself under the bonnet. GERTY comes over and joins the others. SHE will have knitting in a bag that SHE will work on from time to time, but it is obviously a tangled mess.)*

BEULAH: *(noticing the mess that GERTY is working on)* Good heavens, what are you making there, Gerty?

GERTY: Well, Beulah, it's a maternity top.

ABIGAIL: Oh! How exciting! Who's it for?

GERTY: Me. I've been working on it for a while.

*(THEY're quiet for a little more.)*

BEULAH: Poor Esther. They say she was a terrorist.

ABIGAIL: Oh, no, Beulah. Esther was no terrorist. She never traveled anywhere in her entire life.

GERTY: No, Abigail, a *terrorist*. Not a tourist.

ABIGAIL: Oh. Is there a difference?

GERTY: Usually. They say she was a suicide bomber.

BEULAH: You know Gerty, that just doesn't make sense. If she were going to commit suicide, why did she spend 12 years in an old folks home before doing it?

ABIGAIL: It could've been Wednesdays. They always serve chicken patties on Wednesdays. It's the chicken patties that keep me coming back.

GERTY: Oh, I don't think it's so much the chicken patties as you're just a bit touched.

ABIGAIL: Touched? (*giggling*) Oh, no. But don't get me wrong. The boys wanted to, but I wouldn't let them.

BEULAH: No, dear. She doesn't mean touched that way. She means you're loopy.

ABIGAIL: Well, there's that too.

GERTY: The police say that she hid a bomb in a fruitcake, and then for no reason whatsoever she blew herself up, right in the middle of a perfectly good bingo game.

BEULAH: It was such a waste.

ABIGAIL: Oh, I don't think anybody was planning on eating the fruitcake, anyway.

(*NEVY, with her walker thumping the whole way, crosses DR to L. When SHE gets about C stage, SHE stops.*)

NEVY: Is it my turn to get my hair done?

GERTY: No, Nevy. After Helga gets done with the dryer, it's Beulah's turn.

NEVY: Oh! Poodle spit! (*continues off stage L*)

ABIGAIL: That nice young man who does the weather on channel 4 says there's a slight chance for rain today.

HELGA: (*pushing the bonnet back*) *Nein! Nein, Abigail. Ict nict rain today. Vhenever der rain fallen, I feel it unt meinen buns.*

BEULAH: You feel it in your hair, Helga?

HELGA: *Nein! Nict mein hairen. Meinen o-ther buns.*

GERTY: Helga! This is a family play. Besides, ladies don't say those kinds of things.

HELGA: *Dumkoff! Nict meinen o-ther buns. Meinen o-ther buns. Mein honey buns. (SHE holds up a honey bun) See? Der humidity makes der honey drippen, unt noct einen drop!*

BEULAH: Well, that's just silly. If you ask me, your buns are on too tight.

HELGA: *Mein hairen ist just finen!*

BEULAH: Not those buns, dear.

GERTY: Beulah! Be nice.

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BEULAH: (*ignoring GERTY*) Besides, that handsome weatherman on Channel 9 says that it's definitely going to rain today. And he should know. He has a poodle.

ABIGAIL: A poodle? Why, Beulah, that's just silly.

BEULAH: (*getting tiffed*) Well, if anybody should know about silly, it would be you.

GERTY: Now, girls, the weather is nothing to fight about. Besides, that pretty weathergirl on channel 5 says it's going to be sunny, and she's always right.

BEULAH: Like she was right last Sunday when you didn't take your umbrella to Meeting?

GERTY: Well, she's more right than your poodle-man.

BEULAH: Is not.

GERTY: Is too.

(*They stand and get in each other's face.*)

BEULAH: Not!

GERTY: Too!

HELGA: (*SHE has crossed to the other three*) Now schtop it! You're both be-ink ridiculous!

BEULAH: (*turning on HELGA*) More ridiculous than your honey buns?

ABIGAIL: (*standing*) I think you're all being silly.

(*All heck breaks loose, starting with general yelling -- "Shush up!" "Blow it out your buns!" "Nein!" -- you get the idea, and quickly escalates into standing and shoving, and then a "sword" fight with canes between BEULAH and ABIGAIL. But just when THEY start to spar, JANIS enters from the office and breaks it up.*)

JANIS: (*while crossing toward the LADIES and getting in-between them, more or less*) What in the world! Stop it! Sit down!

(*EVERYBODY sits.*)

BEULAH: (*while taking HER seat; pointing at ABIGAIL*) I'm sorry Janis, but, she started it!

ABIGAIL: (*somewhat menacingly, but not seriously wanting to fight anybody . . . you know . . . like high-schoolers*) And I can finish it, too!

JANIS: If you don't stop this right now, I'll make you go back to the old folks' home.

(*They ALL immediately become contrite, putting their heads down.*)

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ALL: *(more or less)* Yes, ma'am. Sorry.

JANIS: *(calming a bit herself)* Good grief. What was this all about?

GERTY: We were bored.

*(They ALL nod in agreement.)*

ABIGAIL: *(perking up)* It was more fun than TV.

BEULAH: *(still nasty)* Unless you're predicting the weather with your buns . . .

HELGA: Ach! *Ich werde Ihren Hund Kick!*

JANIS: Stop it! I'm serious. I'll make you all leave!

*(They ALL calm down; they're done. During the following lines, HELGA will return to the dryer.)*

GERTY: But if we all leave, then you won't have any customers.

JANIS: I don't have any customers anyway.

GERTY: You will when you figure out your formula.

JANIS: Yeah, good luck with that.

ABIGAIL: *(standing up)* That reminds me, that strange man, Maurice, dropped by earlier and left you a message.

JANIS: *(going over and unlocking the door and turning the sign to "Open")* How could he drop it by earlier? We weren't even open yet.

ABIGAIL: He slipped it under the door. *(takes out a small scrap of paper)*

JANIS: *(disbelief)* Maurice wrote it on a piece of paper and slipped it under the door? Maurice wrote *anything*?

ABIGAIL: No. I wrote it on the paper after he slipped it under the door. *(begins reading; During the course of the message, SHE will have to take out scraps of paper from various places on HER body -- be creative)* He says he'll . . .be back later . . .with his lawyer . . .but you can save . . .tissue, oranges, and bug bombs . . .

JANIS: I can save *tissue, oranges, and bug bombs*?

ABIGAIL: Oh, I'm sorry. That was my shopping list. *(puts it back wherever it came from and gets another)* You can save a lot of time . . . if you just turn over . . . the formula . . . and have a check ready . . . for 120 million . . . dollars . . . and don't forget to feed the dog.

JANIS: That's outrageous!

ABIGAIL: I know. I don't have a dog.

JANIS: *(ignoring ABIGAIL)* I will *never* give him the formula for Basic Blue, and I will *never* give him 120 million dollars!

ABIGAIL: I know. That's because you don't have 120 million dollars.

Maybe you could make payments. You know, eleven dollars a week.

JANIS: Eleven dollars?

ABIGAIL: Is that too much?

*(CHESTER enters, carrying a grocery sack.)*

ABIGAIL: Oh, look, if it isn't Chester.

JANIS: *(obviously annoyed at just the sight of CHESTER)* Don't encourage him. Maybe if we ignore him he'll go away.

CHESTER: *(Cheery -- as always; and oblivious -- as always)* Good morning my Little Automated Room Deodorizer.

*(During the following lines, GERTY and ABIGAIL will take out yellow legal pads and start writing notes between attentively watching JANIS and CHESTER.)*

JANIS: What? What did you call me?

CHESTER: My Little Automated Room Deodorizer.

JANIS: That's . . . that's . . . got to be the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

ABIGAIL: *(aside)* She must not get out very often.

CHESTER: Oh, no. Whenever I see you, it's like everything suddenly smells fresh . . . automatically.

JANIS: Do you make these stupid names up on the spot, or do you think about them in advance?

CHESTER: *(sets the sack on the table; takes out a small notebook)* I've got a whole book. They're even indexed for the occasion. Would you like to hear some?

JANIS: The only thing I'd like to hear from you, ever, is goodbye.

CHESTER: *(to the OTHERS)* She's such a kidder.

JANIS: *(to GERTY and ABIGAIL after noticing what they're doing -- remember? THEY have their yellow note pads . . .)* What are you doing?

GERTY: We're keeping a flow chart.

JANIS: What?

GERTY: A flow chart. It's what debate judges use.

JANIS: Why?

ABIGAIL: We thought it might be more fun for us. And when you're done, we can show you who won.

JANIS: You're all insane!

ABIGAIL: Oh, I'm not insane. At least, I don't think so. But then, I think that's part of being insane. Actually, I think I might be senile.

BEULAH: Let's not split hairs, dear.

ABIGAIL: Oh, I would never dream of doing that. I like rabbits.

CHESTER: Look, I brought coffee!

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*(CHESTER takes a coffee maker, filters, coffee cups, and coffee out of a sack.)*

JANIS: It's not made?

CHESTER: I thought it would be fresher this way. And nothing's too fresh for you my Little Lightly Scented Dryer Sheet.

JANIS: My name is Janis!

CHESTER: *(suddenly flummoxed)* Oh, golly. I forgot the water.

ABIGAIL: That's OK, we . . .

*(JANIS quickly jabs ABIGAIL with her elbow.)*

JANIS: Gee, looks like you'll have to go get some. Hey, if you hurry, you can catch the 9:05 bus.

CHESTER: I don't need to catch the bus. I drove myself.

JANIS: I wasn't thinking about riding it. I was thinking about your falling in front of it.

CHESTER: She's such a kidder! *(turning to leave)* Wait for me, my Little Dehydrated Marshmallow.

*(HE quickly leaves. JANIS suddenly bolts toward the door, throws it open, and yells out . . .)*

JANIS: And my name is Janis! *(comes back in and crosses to the office)* I'll be in my office. With a little luck, I can get a little work done before that idiot comes back. *(exits)*

ABIGAIL: Well, that was fun.

*(They ALL sit in their places.)*

BEULAH: *(sarcastically)* I suppose that's just about a day's worth for you.

*(NEVY, thumping with her walker, crosses from L to R. About mid-stage SHE stops and asks . . .)*

NEVY: Is it my turn yet?

GERTY: *(politely)* No, dear. I believe Abigail is next.

*(ABIGAIL nods in agreement.)*

NEVY: Oh, poodle spit!

*(And with that, SHE goes thumping off. Enter DETECTIVE DIRK CANNON DR. HE is dressed in a severe dark suit. While HE's talking to the audience, the GIRLS will resume their actions: GERTY knitting, BEULAH swatting, ABIGAIL fanning herself with the magazine, and HELGA still under the bonnet. DIRK will step out on the apron into a tight spot while the rest of the stage dims, eventually fading completely.)*

DIRK: 11:38 was when we got the call. That's 11:38 in the morning. It's unusual to get a call at 11:38. 11:39, sure. But 11:38 – it makes you sit up and take notice. Kind of like finding a frog in your cornflakes. I followed the fruitcake. That's what brought me to Arlene's Beauty World. I was assigned the case of the Fruitcake Bomber. My name is Cannon. Detective Cannon. Detective Dirk Cannon, Geriatrics Division. Geriatrics is a rough beat. Even on a good day. Heated game of bridge, words are cheap, and the next thing you know, two old ladies all jacked up on Geritol beating the living daylights out of each other with their walkers. And these old birds are tight lipped, even with their teeth out. They call it The Code. Yeah, you can try, but they're not talking. Sure, they'll say stuff, but it doesn't make any sense. Had one old lady try to blame everything on Hoover. The President, not the vacuum. Of course, that could be the dementia talking. But that's what makes these geezers so tough. You never can tell.

*(O'MALLEY steps out on apron. The spot shifts to HER. SHE is dressed in a severe, dark, ankle length dress.)*

O'MALLEY: My name is O'Malley. Officer O'Malley. I've been assigned to work with Detective Cannon. Sure. I've heard the stories. Who hasn't? Except you. Yeah. He was a tough one. But this was my break. My chance at making detective.

*(DIRK loudly whistles. The spot swings back to DIRK.)*

DIRK: I usually work alone. And I never work with a dame. Especially girl dames. Who can concentrate with a dame around? Maybe a hairdresser, but not me. Out here on the beat, the difference between life and death is being able to concentrate. That, and not getting shot . . . or stabbed . . . or blown up . . . or run over by a delivery van . . . or just generally not dying.

*(O'MALLEY whistles and spot shifts back to HER, but before SHE can talk, DIRK whistles, and the spot shifts back to HIM. O'MALLEY whistles*

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*again and the spot moves between them, wavers a minute, and then widens to include them BOTH.)*

DIRK: *(to O'MALLEY)* Seems we're forced to work together.

O'MALLEY: Why is that?

DIRK: Only one spotlight.

O'MALLEY: All I ask is to be treated fairly, like a cop.

DIRK: I can't help but notice you're a dame.

O'MALLEY: I can't help but notice you're not. Just remember, I'm a cop first. You keep that straight, and we'll get along just fine.

DIRK: Fine is how I like things. Most people choose not to work with me.

O'MALLEY: I'm not most people.

DIRK: I suppose you've heard stories about my last partner.

O'MALLEY: Stories are all I've heard. They say that you lost him.

DIRK: I'm not proud of it. But there you have it. *(stepping toward the audience, which he will do throughout the play)* I never wanted a partner. He knew what he was in for. I'm through with beating myself up. The way it is, is just the way it is. Life's that way. That's the way it goes. *Que sera, sera.* After all, enough is enough. *(stepping back; to O'MALLEY)* Did I leave out any clichés?

O'MALLEY: No. That's pretty much all there is. How did it happen?

DIRK: We were at the mall when I lost him. I told him not to go in. But he said he had to. How do you talk sense to someone who has to?

O'MALLEY: You don't.

DIRK: Exactly. I told him to stay in the car, but he wouldn't listen. He went inside anyway. So I left him. Yeah, I ditched him at the mall. I haven't seen him since.

O'MALLEY: You try ditching me, I'll get a cab. And then we'll see who's waiting on who back at the station.

DIRK: You must be counting on getting a quick cab.

O'MALLEY: I don't count on anything but by badge and my gun.

DIRK: I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you not to use that cliché until you make detective.

DIRK: *(stepping out)* She might've been a dame, but I could tell she had moxie. And I needed for her to have moxie. I'd left mine at the house. *(DIRK steps back)* I guess if we have to work together, O'Malley, I ought to know a little something about you. Tell me, O'Malley, why did you become a cop?

O'MALLEY: I guess it's in the blood. My grandmother was cop. She walked beat on the Lower Bottoms. She really cleaned things up.

DIRK: The Lower Bottoms? I didn't think there was anything lower than the Bottoms.

O'MALLEY: The sewer is. There was a lot to clean up. She was killed in the line of duty.

DIRK: She was killed in the sewer?

O'MALLEY: Alligators got her.

DIRK: Alligators? In the sewer? I thought that was just a myth.

O'MALLEY: Apparently, so did she. Come to find out, it was the Martini Brothers.

DIRK: The Martini Brothers were alligators?

O'MALLEY: No.

DIRK: Oh. That explains it.

O'MALLEY: They were smuggling alligator eggs into the country. Big business in alligator eggs.

DIRK: Alligator eggs? Who would want alligator eggs.

O'MALLEY: Alligators. And alligator egg smugglers. Actually, they wanted alligators -- the smugglers, that is. Baby alligators. Eggs are easier to smuggle. They eat less. You ever buy an alligator from Woolworth when you were a kid?

DIRK: No.

O'MALLEY: That's because of my grandmother. She caught the egg smugglers. She cracked the case. But not before they got her. I guess that's why my mother became a cop.

DIRK: Because her mother was killed by alligators?

O'MALLEY: Good a reason as any. She walked beat in the Upper Bottoms.

DIRK: The Upper Bottoms? I thought anything above the Bottoms just wasn't the Bottoms.

O'MALLEY: Power lines. She was on pigeon patrol. Homely pigeons.

DIRK: Don't you mean "homing" pigeons.

O'MALLEY: No, homely. These were some pretty ugly birds. That's what she was doing on the power lines. She was trying to clean up the neighborhood by shoeing them away. But they got her.

DIRK: The pigeons?

O'MALLEY: Nope. Mockingbirds. It may be a sin for humans to kill mockingbirds, but apparently they have no problems killing us. They tricked her. Got her to stand on two wires at the same time.

DIRK: How could they do that?

O'MALLEY: I don't know. I wasn't there. I hadn't been born yet.

DIRK: Excuse me?

O'MALLEY: My mother died before I was born.

DIRK: How is that possible?

O'MALLEY: I was adopted.

DIRK: Oh.

O'MALLEY: There was nothing left for me to do than become a cop.

DIRK: Why?

O'MALLEY: Why not? I already had the uniform. It's the only thing my mother left me. That, and her gun. (*holds up a gun covered in feathers*) They may have gotten my mother, but she didn't go alone.

DIRK: I never did ask you your first name, O'Malley.

O'MALLEY: O'Malley is my first name. Actually, my first name is "O."  
My middle name is Malley. I always thought they sounded better together.

DIRK: That's not a usual name for a dame.

O'MALLEY: I'm not a usual dame. O'Malley's a cop name. My mother wanted me to be a cop. So she named me after O'Malley. He was a cop that used to walk beat in the Middle Bottoms. It was my mother's way of assuring that her daughter became a cop.

DIRK: I thought you said your mother died before you were born.

O'MALLEY: I did.

DIRK: How could she name you if she were already dead.

O'MALLEY: I don't know. You'd have to ask her.

DIRK: (*writing a note to himself on his pad*) I'll do that. (*after a beat*) You know, quite frankly, Officer O'Malley, I feel uncomfortable calling a fellow cop by his first name. Especially when he's a dame. Propriety. What's your last name, O'Malley?

O'MALLEY: Kos-ca-fa-nos-ka-fa-zo-vitch-ski. (*do the best you can; you only have to say it once*)

DIRK: Let's stick with O'Malley.

O'MALLEY: So where do we start, Cannon.

DIRK: The first thing is to interview the suspects.

O'MALLEY: Suspects?

DIRK: Suspects.

ABIGAIL: (*from off stage*) Is there an echo in here?

## ACT I, SCENE 2

**Stage goes black. A tight spotlight comes up on stage left apron. On the wall is a white strip of paper -- or whatever -- marked at regular intervals with lines marking off height, like you would see in a police lineup, which is the look we're going for. ABIGAIL comes from the dark, wanders through the spotlight, and disappears off stage. There is the sound of something crashing over backstage.**

ABIGAIL: (*from off stage*) Sorry.

(*ABIGAIL wanders back on stage and back into the light, straightening out HER dress the whole while.*)

ABIGAIL: (*while squinting into the light; nervous giggle*) I got lost.

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VOICE OFF: Name, please.

ABIGAIL: *(to the VOICE)* I'm sorry, but how can I do that? I don't know who you are.

VOICE OFF: Your name.

ABIGAIL: *(giggling)* Oh. *(to audience)* My name is Abbey. Really, it's Abigail. Like Dorothy Gail, but without the tornado. All my friends call me Abbey. *(a bit down)* But I don't have many friends. Not anymore. *(back to old self)* I guess that's what happens when you don't die. You know, Methuselah must have known a lot of people who died.

*(There is the clearing of the throat from Off-Stage.)*

ABIGAIL: *(giggling)* Oh. They want me to stay on track. *(confidentially, to the audience)* I tend to drift a bit.

VOICE: Occupation.

ABIGAIL: I'm old.

VOICE: That's not an occupation. What do you do for a living?

ABIGAIL: Oh, dear. I thought being old was enough.

VOICE: What was your occupation?

ABIGAIL: I was a bookkeeper for my husband's business. He made things. A lot of things. A lot of bridges. Why, he made that big bridge that went across the river. You know, the one everybody drove on. You know, it's a wonder more people didn't get hurt when it fell down. He mostly made the pillars. Somebody else made the top. You know, the part you drive on. I guess you could walk on it, too. But I think driving would be faster.

*(There is the clearing of the throat from Off-Stage.)*

I'm sorry. At first my husband only had one truck and two other boys working for him. But then, things got better. All the other people who owned trucks in town started to have accidents. Horrible accidents. Falling off roofs. Tripping down stairs. Blowing up. One moment they were starting their car and the next thing you know – Bam!

*(There is the clearing of the throat from Off-Stage.)*

And, like I said, things got better. My husband was doing really well . . . until the police came. You know, they blamed my husband for all those people who fell down stairs and got electrocuted in their bathtubs. Like it was my husband's fault that they were making toast while taking a bath. Even I know that's not a smart thing to do.

*(There is the clearing of the throat from Off-Stage.)*

Sorry. But it didn't matter how much my husband said he was innocent. They said he wasn't. And that was that. Not only did they make him go to jail, but they took away all of his money, too. Well, except for the little bit I was able to hide away in a shoebox back in the closet, and all those unnumbered bank accounts in the Caimans and Switzerland and Costa Rica. After all, a lady needs to be able to take care of herself. I suppose I could live somewhere else, but those good men from the government said that this is probably the safest. So here I am.

VOICE OFF: Thank you.

*(ABIGAIL wanders out of the spot, leaving the spot blank for a beat.)*

Next.

*(NEVY comes thumping on with her walker.)*

Name, please.

NEVY: *(stops, squints into the light for a second, and then . . .)* Oh blow it out your buns! I haven't got time for this! I need to get my hair done! *(thumps off; after a beat . . .)*

VOICE OFF: Next!

*(HELGA comes out goose-stepping the entire way and does a precision military turn before doing the old double stomp and coming to attention.)*

HELGA: *(severely)* *Mein Name ist Helga Von Schtompken.* *(note: "Name" is pronounced nah-maa in German, more or less)*

VOICE OFF: Talk in American, please.

HELGA: *Acht!* I'm sorry. But I don't know Spanish.

VOICE OFF: Continue, please.

HELGA: My name *ist* Helga Von Schtompken. I was *der* head mistress at *der* Berlin School *fer* Untroubled Boys. *It vas en Berlin.* East Berlin. Ve took nice, untroubled boys from nice, untroubled homes, and ve made them troubled! *Ya!* My specialty vas teaching them to blow things up. Small things. Big things. They verked in a lot of aggression that vay. It vas goot life, but, *acht!* *der* Cold War ended. And they tear down *der* Wall. *Icht* vas such *unt* nice vall, too. And so von day *Mein* husband, Otto, say, "Helga, it timen to go to America!" And so he sent me here-in ver I became *unt* high school algebra teacher. But, ach! How you say? Things go kaput. They tell

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me I could not longer teachen unt algebra. (*increasing rage until SHE's screaming*) How can you teach quadratic equations if you can't blow something up! (*wait a beat while composing self; calm again*) There vas *nicht* more to do do but -- how you say -- retire. Unt everyvon knows in America, once you retire, you move to retirement home.

(*HELGA will do the old double stomp, make a precision turn, and goosestep off. After a beat . . .*)

VOICE OFF: Next.

(*BEULAH will enter. SHE is nervously clutching HER handbag to HER chest with both hands.*)

BEULAH: (*relaxing a bit*) Hello. I'm Beulah. Beulah Tarkington. Tarkington was my husband's name. Now a days, young ladies don't take their husband's names when they get married. But we would've never dreamed of doing it any differently, not in my day. Now a days, they don't even bother to get married. But marriage is good. And proper. And what you should do. And when you make your vows you should stick to them. (*getting increasingly angrier*) Not go running around with every cheap tramp that wears trashy clothes and gaudy makeup! (*calms back down*) I've had a good life. A bless-ed life. My husband, Edgar, provided for me for almost 30 years. I never did without. And he was kind, too. He never wanted to hurt my feelings. (*increasing anger*) That's why he lied about that cheap tramp he had on the side for 17 years! (*calm again*) And then, he died. They say his cigarette lighter exploded. And I didn't even know he smoked. Fortunately, my Edgar left me well provided for. (*increasing anger*) Except that cheap tramp managed to get every last cent! (*calm again*) And then, she died. They say her oven exploded. You know, that sort of thing doesn't usually happen with electric appliances. Luckily, I had my dear, sweet son, Edgar, Jr., to fall back on. We scrimped and saved and worked really hard to put him through college. Medical school's not cheap, you know. (*increasing anger*) It might've been easier had not that two-timing son of a...

(*There is a sudden, loud clearing of the throat from off-stage.*)

(*calm again*) . . . husband of mine, God rest his soul, (*increasing anger*) been spending it on that cheap tramp! (*calm again*) God rest her soul. But my son. My dear, loving boy. When I had no place to go he sent me here. (*increasing anger*) He lives in a 10,000 square

foot home, and I get an apartment the size of a bathroom! (*calm again*) But he does need the room. He may get married some day. And when he does, I have the perfect gift for him. A gas grill.

(*Beulah exits. Followed by . . .*)

VOICE OFF: Next!

GERTY: (*enters*) This is so much better than watching TV. Although, I am missing Family Feud. I just love to hear what the survey says. I find it fascinating that no matter how many people agree on something, they can still be wrong.

(*Responding to unheard voice off.*)

Pardon me? Oh! (*to audience*) My name is Gerty. Actually, it's Gertrude. But only my mother calls me Gertrude. But she hasn't done that for a long time. (*confidentially*) You know, a lot of people don't like retirement homes. But I think it's nice to settle down. Especially after moving around so much. It was my husband's job. Mr. Poindexter blew things up. Buildings and bridges, mostly. You know, where everybody gets to watch. One minute they're there, and the next, they're gone. The building. Not the people. The people are still there. Of course, there's not much point in staying around once the building is gone. Sometimes I'd get to help. One time I even got to push the button. It was crazy. No. Really. We blew up an insane asylum. They needed to make room for one of those big hotels where people stay while they gamble. You know, I often wonder where it was that all those crazy people went. (*after a beat*) Well . . . they have to go *somewhere*. I think it's so exciting. I get to be part of a murder investigation. And you do too. (*excited*) Do you want to know who did it? (*holding up the script*) I read ahead.

(*Responding to unheard voice off.*)

Pardon me? Oh. (*to audience*) They told me not to tell you. They said if I did there would be no reason for you all to stay around to intermission. And I suppose they're right. Well, enjoy the rest of the show.

**ACT I, SCENE 3**

*The lights dim completely for a beat, and then come back up on the LADIES sitting in their former places. DIRK and O'MALLEY will enter through the door, causing the bell to ring as they do so. GERTY will slowly get up and make her way toward THEM. While SHE's doing that, THEY will both be examining the fruitcake. THEY will both have their notepads at the ready, and will write in them from time to time.*

DIRK: *(taking the foil off one of the fruitcakes; HE will break off a small piece and sample it as if it were cocaine, or worse)* Yup. That's fruitcake, all right.

O'MALLEY: That's just weird.

DIRK: More than weird.

O'MALLEY: Very weird.

DIRK: Very weird.

GERTY: *(finally getting there)* Do you two have an appointment?

DIRK: No ma'am. We're here on business.

O'MALLEY: Fruitcake business.

GERTY: Oh. Well, you don't need an appointment for the fruitcake.

DIRK: Are you responsible for these fruitcakes, ma'am?

GERTY: *(thinking HE's talking about the other GIRLS)* Oh, no. They pretty much take care of themselves.

DIRK: I'm not talking about the other patrons, ma'am. I'm talking about the fruitcake on this table. Are these yours, ma'am?

GERTY: On, no. They're Arlene's fruitcakes.

O'MALLEY: *(gesturing to the other LADIES)* Which one is Arlene.

GERTY: Oh, none of them. Arlene's not here.

DIRK: Do you know when she'll return.

GERTY: Should I?

O'MALLEY: That depends.

GERTY: On what?

O'MALLEY: Whether or not you should.

GERTY: Arlene left over two years ago.

DIRK: Left?

GERTY: Right.

O'MALLEY: Left.

GERTY: No, right.

DIRK: But she left.

GERTY: That's right.

O'MALLEY: Do you know when she'll be back?

GERTY: Oh, you'd have to ask her.

O'MALLEY: So you know where she went?

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GERTY: No. Only that she's gone. She left with the maintenance man at the apartment building where they used to live. (*confidentially*) I think they had a thing between them.

DIRK: A thing?

GERTY: Sometimes it may have been less than that.

BEULAH: (*joining in from HER seat*) Didn't she leave to go play Reno in Keno?

GERTY: No, dear. I think it was Keno in Reno.

BEULAH: It could've been Stratego in Chino

ABIGAIL: Or anywhere in-between-o.

DIRK: (*stepping forward; to audience*) I could tell I was getting the runaround, like a marathon runner with a nail through one of his Nike's. (*stepping back; to GERTY*) Where did she get her fruitcakes?

GERTY: Oh, she didn't get them anywhere. She made them.

DIRK: Excuse me?

GERTY: Certainly.

DIRK: Certainly what, ma'am?

GERTY: Certainly you're excused.

DIRK: Excused from what?

GERTY: Oh, that would be up to you.

DIRK: Pardon me?

GERTY: For what?

DIRK: Let's start again.

GERTY: Certainly.

DIRK: Don't you dare?

GERTY: Dare what?

O'MALLEY: (*intervening; referring to her notepad*) You stated she made her own fruitcake.

GERTY: (*proud of herself*) I did, didn't I.

O'MALLEY: Is that possible?

GERTY: To say that? (*thinks a beat*) Apparently so.

O'MALLEY: No, ma'am, to make fruitcake.

GERTY: Oh, yes. (*confidentially*) She had a recipe.

DIRK: Why would she do that, ma'am?

GERTY: Oh, I think it would be really hard without one, don't you?

DIRK: Without what, ma'am?

GERTY: A recipe. Isn't that what we were talking about?

O'MALLEY: I'm really not sure anymore.

DIRK: Try to keep up, O'Malley. We were talking about fruitcake, ma'am. Why would anybody choose to make fruitcake?

GERTY: Oh, I wouldn't know about anybody. I can only tell you about Arlene. She's the only one I've ever known who's ever made a fruitcake. Unless you count my parents.

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DIRK: *(to O'MALLEY)* Now do you understand why we don't carry guns on this beat, O'Malley?

O'MALLEY: It would be too easy.

DIRK: Way too easy.

GERTY: What would be too easy?

DIRK: To shoot you, ma'am.

GERTY: Oh, that sounds exciting!

DIRK: My point exactly. *(to O'MALLEY)* Where were we?

O'MALLEY: *(reading from her notes)* Shooting the old lady.

DIRK: No. Before that.

O'MALLEY: *(still referring to her notes)* You wanted to know why anybody would want to make a fruitcake.

DIRK: Don't start that again.

O'MALLEY: Roger.

GERTY: Who's Roger?

DIRK: My ex-partner. He's filed an injunction. We can't use that joke. OK, lady. Why did Arlene make fruitcake?

GERTY: Oh, I'm really not sure . . .

DIRK: *(aside to O'MALLEY)* And that's why we can't carry a billyclub, either.

GERTY: . . .But I think she made fruitcakes because she was bored.

O'MALLEY: Bored?

GERTY: Oh, yes. Business is pretty slow here. And then she tried to sell them.

DIRK: *(to O'MALLEY)* Delusional.

O'MALLEY: Must be.

GERTY: And then, when she couldn't sell them, she gave them away.

O'MALLEY: Gave them away?

GERTY: Gave them away.

ABIGAIL: My hearing aid must be going bad. I keep hearing an echo.

BEULAH: Just turn it off. You're not missing a thing.

*(ABIGAIL removes a very large apparatus from under her dress – an old cassette recorder would work fine – and switches it off.)*

DIRK: *(picking up a fruitcake)* How many did she give away, ma'am?

GERTY: Oh, all of them.

DIRK: All of them?

GERTY: All of them.

ABIGAIL: *(shaking her hearing aid)* Nope, that didn't work, either.

O'MALLEY: How come there are still fruitcakes here, then?

GERTY: Oh, they came back.

ABIGAIL: Oh, I know what she means. Fruitcake always comes back on me, too.

*(NEVY, thumping with her walker, crosses from L to R. About mid-stage SHE stops and asks ABIGAIL . . .)*

NEVY: Is it my turn yet?

ABIGAIL: No, dear. I think we're going to have an intermission.

NEVY: Oh, poodle spit!

*(And with that, SHE goes thumping off.)*

GERTY: Oh, this is exciting! An intermission! *(gets a worried look on her face)* But how are we going to do that?

ABIGAIL: *(moving out on the apron; shadowing her eyes while looking for the light person)* Yoo Hoo! Young man! *(or woman; pause)* Could you please turn off the lights? We're going to have an intermission.

*(The lights go out, leaving the house completely dark. In the darkness the others can be getting off stage, including GERTY.)*

**\*Note: If you do not want to feed the audience fruitcake – please check your local ordinances before you do – then skip to Act Two.**

ABIGAIL: *(after a beat)* Oh. Not yet.

*(A spot comes up on her.)*

ABIGAIL: That's better. *(to the audience)* I hope you don't mind, but we have all this fruitcake that we just can't get rid of. You see, we had to buy it all for the show. We try to give it away, but it just keeps coming back. So we're going to try to feed it to you. Please be nice to the servers. It's not their fault. Besides, we'd like to get the deposit back. *(after a pause; to the light person)* OK. You can turn off the light now.

*(The house returns to total darkness.)*

ABIGAIL: *(after a beat; still in darkness)* Don't you think that we might ought to have some lights on in the audience?

*(Bring up houselights; drop spot; and if ABIGAIL is really fast, she can already be gone.)*

**END OF ACT I**

**INTERMISSION**

Do Not Copy

**ACT II**

**SCENE 1**

***After the intermission, with the houselights still up, ABIGAIL will come out on the apron.***

ABIGAIL: (*shouting at the light person*) Yoo Hoo! Young man! (*or woman; pause*) We're ready.

***Bring down the houselights, during which time everybody will get into position. When the stage lights come back up, the LADIES are doing what they do and DIRK and O'MALLEY are still sampling fruitcake. JANIS enters from the back room. SHE is rather harried. A harried hairdresser . . .***

JANIS: If you want to eat the fruitcake, you have to buy it first.

**\*Note: The next two lines can be omitted if you didn't serve fruitcake. Or you can leave them in and really confuse everybody.**

DIRK: (*indicating the audience*) What about them?

JANIS: Trust me. They've paid.

DIRK: (*showing her his ubiquitous badge*) We're not here on fruitcake business, ma'am.

O'MALLEY: No, ma'am. We're here on police business.

JANIS: Is there a difference?

DIRK: Sorry, ma'am. We're not allowed to use sarcasm.

O'MALLEY: Department regulations.

DIRK: (*reading from his notepad*) We're looking for the proprietor of Arlene's Beauty World.

JANIS: Well this is her.

O'MALLEY: "She," ma'am. "This is she." "Is" is a linking verb and requires the subjective case on each side of the verb.

JANIS: Well, It's me.

O'MALLEY: "It is I." Same rule, ma'am.

DIRK: Then you must be Arlene.

ABIGAIL: Oh, no. She's not Arlene.

GERTY: I don't see why she just doesn't change the sign.

BEULAH: It's because she's cheap, dear.

GERTY: I bet she could ask those nice young men who are always decorating the alley to do it for free. And they even have their own paint.

JANIS: I'm Janis. *(to O'MALLEY)* Was that OK?

O'MALLEY: Perfectly acceptable, ma'am.

JANIS: Why did you say you were here?

DIRK: Fruitcake ma'am. We're investigating the Fruitcake Bomber. And all of the clues lead here, ma'am.

O'MALLEY: The explodee frequented this shop and this shop sells fruitcake. Do the math.

HELGA: *Ya!* I told them and I told them that they would need *der* math. But would they listen? *Nein! Vell, ict* serves them right!

JANIS: You can't seriously think that one of these sweet old ladies would blow somebody up.

*(ABIGAIL and GERTY wave, HELGA gives a Nazi salute, and BEULAH gives a rude gesture.)*

DIRK: Seriously is the only way I know how to think, ma'am. And, yes, ma'am, I do think that one of these sweet old ladies could blow somebody up.

O'MALLEY: Of course, ma'am, you could be a suspect, too.

JANIS: Are you out of your minds?

DIRK: No, ma'am. Department regulations. We're not required to be logical, rational, or even compassionate, but we are required to be sane.

JANIS: What possible motive could I possibly have for blowing up anybody?

*(The perpetually happy, and perpetually clueless -- do you suppose there's a connection between the two? -- CHESTER enters. HE is carrying a bouquet of pathetic plastic flowers.)*

CHESTER: Good morning! *(offering the flowers to JANIS)* I couldn't find any water, so I brought you flowers my Little Lightly Frosted Cupcake.

JANIS: My name is Janis! *(taking the flowers and throwing them in a trashcan by the front desk)* And I don't want your stupid flowers. The only thing I want from you is a front row seat at your funeral so I don't have to spit as far.

CHESTER: *(undaunted, as always, by JANIS' hatred)* She's such a kidder. *(takes the flowers out of the trash, carefully picking off other bits of debris)*

JANIS: What are you doing?

CHESTER: Well, if you don't want them, my Little Plum Pudding Pop, I suppose I ought to take them back.

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JANIS: You can take flowers back to the florist? (*as an after thought*)  
And my name is Janis!

CHESTER: Oh, I don't know about the florist. I was going to take them  
back to the cemetery.

O'MALLEY: Excuse me, sir, but who are you?

CHESTER: My name's Chester, but you can call me Ter. (*a beat while  
O'MALLEY doesn't respond*) How about Chess?

O'MALLEY: Sorry, sir. Department regulations. We're not allowed to  
use nicknames.

DIRK: (*stepping out*) This guy was about as believable as an intelligent  
cheerleader. I needed some answers. And I needed them now.  
(*stepping back*) Tell, me, Buddy, what's your occupation?

CHESTER: I'm sorry . . . what?

DIRK: Your occupation. Your job. What is it that you do... do?

CHESTER: Nothing.

O'MALLEY: Nothing?

CHESTER: Nothing.

ABIGAIL: Is there an echo in here?

O'MALLEY: How can you do nothing?

CHESTER: It's really quite easy. It doesn't involve much planning at all.  
The only bad thing is, it's hard to know when you're done. (*after a  
pensive moment*) You know, I always remember what my dad told  
me.

DIRK: And what was that, sir?

CHESTER: He said, "Son . . ." . . . that was me . . . "Son, if you can't do  
something right, don't do it at all." So I don't.

O'MALLEY: Don't . . . what?

CHESTER: I don't do it at all.

O'MALLEY: Don't do what?

CHESTER: Everything.

DIRK: Everything?

CHESTER: Everything.

ABIGAIL: There's that echo again.

DIRK: (*stepping out*) I heard this sort of nonsense before. Mrs. Ekels,  
high school algebra teacher. And like high school algebra, his story  
made no sense. (*stepping back*) Excuse me, but what do you do for  
money?

CHESTER: I've thought about it, and I'm sticking with the American  
dollar. I know the exchange rate is lousy, but after all, this is  
America, and I am an American. (*salutes*)

DIRK: (*stepping out*) Yeah, I was getting the runaround. Like a two bit  
cab fare on a Tuesday afternoon. (*stepping back*) Tell me, sir, what  
is your business here?

CHESTER: Oh, I'm the boyfriend.

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JANIS: You are *not* my boyfriend!

CHESTER: Isn't it just adorable the way my Cherry Doodle scrunches her nose when she pretends she's angry?

JANIS: My name is Janis! And I'm not pretending!

CHESTER: See? She did it again.

DIRK: *(to GERTY)* Are they like this all the time, ma'am?

GERTY: Sometimes worse.

ABIGAIL: They're better than TV.

GERTY: She can't stand him.

ABIGAIL: They fight all the time.

CHESTER: Oh, no. We never fight.

DIRK: *(to JANIS)* Are you sure you two aren't married, ma'am?

*(JANIS screams and exits into the backroom UL.)*

CHESTER: Oh, we're not married. Not yet. My Little Moist Scented Towelette and I are engaged. We just set the date.

JANIS: *(stepping out of the back room)* My name is Janis! And I will never marry you! *(retreats back into the room, slamming the door behind her)*

CHESTER: Oh, she's such a kidder.

GERTY: *(getting up and crossing over)* How exciting! When are you two finally going to be married?

CHESTER: The first Sunday in the first June of 2058. *(just add 50 years to whatever the year happens to be)* I hope the church hasn't been reserved yet. June's such a busy month for weddings. Won't my little Whipped Crème Sugar Free Topping be beautiful in white?

JANIS: *(coming out of the backroom)* I hate you! I loathe you! Die! *(slams door, but immediately opens it back up)* And my name is Janis!

DIRK: Young love.

O'MALLEY: It's a wonderful thing.

CHESTER: Oh, yes, certainly it is. In fact, tomorrow is our anniversary, isn't it my Little Spiced Ham.

JANIS: *(comes out of office)* Spiced Ham? *(crosses to CHESTER)* Did you just call me Spiced Ham?

CHESTER: Well, I suppose I did, my little Doodle Dumplings.

JANIS: Wait a minute! Go back to Spam. My name is Janis! Not Spam! Not Spiced Ham! In fact, don't *ever* compare me to *any* processed meat product, ever! Got that straight?

CHESTER: Sure my little . . .

JANIS: Stop! Oh, no you don't! You don't get a free one. Go back to the one after Spam.

CHESTER: What? Doodle Dumpling?

JANIS: That's the one! Don't you ever call me Doodle Dumpling again.  
My name is Janis.

CHESTER: Are we caught up?

JANIS: Yes.

CHESTER: OK, then, my little Cherry Cheese Cake.

JANIS: My name is Janis!

CHESTER: She's such a kidder. *(to O'MALLEY and DIRK)* As I was saying, tomorrow is our anniversary. We will have been engaged for 17 years. I've been out shopping today for the perfect present.

JANIS: You want to give me the perfect present? Step in front of a bus.

CHESTER: She's such a kidder.

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