

# A PLAY TO DIE FOR

## by Craig Sodaro

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# A PLAY TO DIE FOR

*A Full Length Murder Mystery*

**by Craig Sodaro**

**SYNOPSIS:** Vicky Barrett and George Grimm's success has come to a screeching halt after their last play flopped. To make up for it, they're working madly on a murder mystery that will hopefully be one to die for. But interruptions prevail, the stern housekeeper, Mrs. Dutton, keeps wanting to tell Vicky a secret, Vicky's ex-husband (a B-actor) appears, and Brooke Pendleton (a reality TV star) arrives desperate for an audition. If juggling the interruptions while trying to figure out how to bump off a character or two isn't enough, Mrs. Dutton gets murdered! Who carried out this vicious act and are they already in the house?! The truth turns out to be more of a shock to Vicky than she can imagine.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(5 female, 2 male)*

VICKY BARRETT (f).....30s, a playwright. *(504 lines)*  
 GEORGE GRIMM (m).....30s, Vicky's playwriting partner.  
*(406 lines)*  
 MEL LARSON (f).....30s, Vicky's personal assistant.  
*(82 lines)*  
 MRS. DUTTON (f).....60s, the housekeeper. *(34 lines)*  
 MAX MUNROE (m).....30s, an actor and Vicky's ex-husband. *(99 lines)*  
 BROOKE PENDLETON (f).....30s, an actress. *(50 lines)*  
 KAT ROGERS (f).....police detective. *(122 lines)*

**DURATION:** 80 minute.

**TIME:** A Saturday in fall.

**SETTING:** The living room of Vicky Barrett's lake house.

**SET**

The living room of Vicky Barrett's lake house. Fireplace at right (with fireplace tools and a candlestick holder with candle on the mantel), couch with coffee table in front of it at center. Two easy chairs centered. One bookcase with books upstage center. Desk and chair sits at left. Décor reflects a rustic motif, so we don't see a TV or other technology, though others use their cell phones, as indicated in the script. Wing entrance right leads to main entrance and stairs to upper floor. Wing entrance left leads to kitchen, back door, and alternate stairs to the upper level.

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES****ACT ONE**

SCENE 1: Mid-morning. A Saturday in fall.

SCENE 2: An hour later.

**ACT TWO**

SCENE 1: Several hours later.

SCENE 2: An hour later.

SCENE 3: A few minutes later.

**SOUND EFFECTS**

- phone rings
- doorbell chimes (A very funereal tone.)
- thwack!
- door slam
- crash
- police siren

**PROPS**

- scarf
- small book
- fireplace tools (poker, shovel)
- candlestick holder and candle
- two cell phones
- stack of mail
- two envelopes with letters
- tray with bagels and juice
- check
- pen
- plate of sandwiches
- notebook
- pencil
- bag
- suitcase
- tissue
- mug
- evidence bag with bloodied apron inside
- tweezers
- latex gloves
- small notepad and pencil
- bottle of water
- business card
- paper bag
- plate of doughnuts
- icepack
- tray with teapot and mugs
- ropes
- knife
- anniversary book

**ACT ONE, SCENE 1**

**AT START:** *The living room of Vicky Barrett's get away by the lake. Fireplace at right, couch with coffee table and two easy chairs, desk at left. The stage is dimly lit. GEORGE stands left while VICKY sits on couch, they are rehearsing their script.*

**GEORGE:** *(Dramatically, as Osgood.)* I've had enough!

**VICKY:** *(Dramatically, as Frostine.)* Oh, have you?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Enough of your lies, your cheating, your devious ways!

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Oh, my, are we showing a bit of spunk all of a sudden?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* You've betrayed me! You've made me a laughing stock!

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Oh, come on, you've been a laughing stock all your life.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* How dare you!

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Puh-leeze! I'm not in the mood.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* What are you in the mood for?

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Anyone but you.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Too bad I'm the only one here at this miserable cabin out in the middle of this godforsaken wilderness.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Pity, isn't it?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Of course, since there's no one around, nobody will ever know.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine. With growing apprehension.)* Ever know what?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* What I'm going to do to you.

*GEORGE has scarf and moves behind VICKY.*

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Really? And just what are you going to do to me that you haven't already done?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Nothing but plan your funeral!

*GEORGE wraps the scarf around VICKY'S neck, and she struggles wildly, with both of them ending up laughing.*

**VICKY:** Stop it! You're tickling me!

**GEORGE:** I'm strangling you!

**VICKY:** And it's not working.

*GEORGE backs off. VICKY stands.*

**GEORGE:** It felt pretty good to me.

**VICKY:** No, I don't like it. It just doesn't work, George.

**GEORGE:** Well, Osgood needs to kill Frostine somehow.

**VICKY:** I know, I know, but strangling is too... I don't know... graphic in front of an audience, you know? It's so personal and violent and ugly.

*GEORGE picks up small book and puts it on top of his head. He then walks around the room balancing it.*

**GEORGE:** And it takes a long time, too.

**VICKY:** How long?

**GEORGE:** You want to find out?

**VICKY:** Stop being funny.

**GEORGE:** Whatdaya mean? That's our stock in trade. Grimm and Barrett, mysteries filled with laughs.

**VICKY:** Or as that childish critic Wendell Wadoo said, laughable mysteries.

**GEORGE:** *(Enthusiastically.)* But this is going to be our best, Vicky! Our first serious mystery filled with true-to-life characters with considerable depth and feeling.

**VICKY:** *(Dreamily.)* A play to die for!

**GEORGE:** Which we desperately need after that last debacle.

**VICKY:** I thought "The Truth Hurts—A Lot" was great!

**GEORGE:** Too bad nobody else did.

**VICKY:** Why are you walking around with that stupid book on your head?

**GEORGE:** Working on my balance. Dr. Jenkins said that those dizzy spells I was having means I'm not balancing correctly.

**VICKY:** You were dizzy because you've got vertigo.

**GEORGE:** Nonsense!

**VICKY:** George, you get nervous in the second row of the balcony.

**GEORGE:** That's why I became a playwright. I can watch all the shows on the main floor but not have to pay orchestra seat prices.

**VICKY:** We won't be able to afford ozone seats if we don't get back to work.

**GEORGE:** Right. So, how do we kill Frostine?

**VICKY:** We need something quick but dramatic.

*GEORGE leans over VICKY. Book falls on her.*

**VICKY:** Ouch! Watch out!

**GEORGE:** That's it!

**VICKY:** Kill her with a paperback?

**GEORGE:** You can't kill anybody with a paperback.

**VICKY:** Unless it's with boredom.

**GEORGE:** How about the proverbial blunt object?

**VICKY:** Like what?

**GEORGE:** There are lots of blunt objects in this room.

**VICKY:** Aside from your head?

**GEORGE:** Hey! Partners aren't supposed to belittle one another in such crass, cruel ways, Vicky.

**VICKY:** But it's such fun.

**GEORGE:** (*Picking up poker.*) How about the fireplace poker?

**VICKY:** Ouch!

**GEORGE:** (*Taking candlestick from mantel.*) Or maybe this candlestick!

**VICKY:** Double ouch!

**GEORGE:** How about the lead pipe in the conservatory?

**VICKY:** Thank you, Colonel Mustard.

**GEORGE:** No?

**VICKY:** As the actress playing the victim, I'd be a little leery about getting bonked on the head with a fireplace poker.

**GEORGE:** We can always use a poison dart.

**VICKY:** And just where does Osgood get a poison dart?

**GEORGE:** On his trip to the Amazon.

**VICKY:** Osgood is a xenophobe who's never left Ash Hollow.

**GEORGE:** All right, his uncle brought it back as a souvenir?

**VICKY:** He's the last of his family. Besides, he murdered his uncle years before.

**GEORGE:** All right, then, he bought it online. You can get anything online these days.

*SFX: phone rings.*

**VICKY:** Hold that thought. (*Answers her phone.*) Hello, Phillip. Yes, we're ensconced at the summer cottage, working like mad dogs. I know you need a script soon. Of course, it will be completed. Well, it will be easier if you don't interrupt us. Every time you do, you stop the flow of our creative juices. Goodbye, Phillip. (*To GEORGE.*) He said drink more water and get those juices flowing like a broken water main.

**GEORGE:** He's disgusting!

**VICKY:** But his money isn't. Without our producer we're back to being rank amateurs.

**GEORGE:** Do we have to be rank?

*MRS. DUTTON, wearing a raincoat, enters right. She holds some mail.*

**VICKY:** Morning, Mrs. Dutton.

**MRS. DUTTON:** (*With a snort.*) You're up awful early for show people.

**GEORGE:** We love our work so much we just couldn't wait to get started.

**MRS. DUTTON:** That so? Here, I picked up the mail on my way in.

**VICKY:** Thanks. Anything interesting?

**MRS. DUTTON:** I got too much to do to waste time reading your mail. I suppose you want some breakfast?

**VICKY:** How about bagels?

**GEORGE:** And juice. Let's not forget juice. For Phillip's sake.

**VICKY:** Coffee's made, so help yourself.

**MRS. DUTTON:** At least something's done. (*Exits left.*)

**GEORGE:** If I didn't know better, I'd say little Miss Sunshine stubbed her toe.

**VICKY:** For her, that's sheer joy.

**GEORGE:** Why do you keep the old curmudgeon around?

**VICKY:** George, a curmudgeon is a man, like you.

**GEORGE:** I'm not a curmudgeon. Just a cur. You're a mudgeon. So why do you employ that woman?

**VICKY:** I need somebody to take care of the place when I'm not here and help out when I am. Since she's the only person living within a ten-mile radius, I either humor her or lose her.

**GEORGE:** Oh, and really, with your sense of humor....

**VICKY:** And second, Mrs. Dutton has been here since the Wisconsin glaciation. I'm not about to throw her to the wolves.

**GEORGE:** There aren't any wolves around here anymore.

**VICKY:** No, Mrs. Dutton got rid of them all, so she's very valuable. (*Picking up letter.*) Oh, dear.

**GEORGE:** Another one?

**VICKY:** Looks like it. (*Opens letter, pulls out paper, reads.*) "It isn't your fault, but you must pay." Your is spelled Y-O-U-apostrophe-R-E.

**GEORGE:** Critics are pretty dumb, but not that dumb.

**VICKY:** Critics don't send anonymous messages.

**GEORGE:** True. But I'd hardly call this a fan. Any idea what was your fault?

**VICKY:** I've racked my brain, but can't think of anything.

**GEORGE:** Did you dent anybody's fender?

**VICKY:** Absolutely not!

**GEORGE:** I dunno... the way you drive....

**VICKY:** My driving is perfect! I only got four tickets this year. That's down from five the year before.

**GEORGE:** Then I think you need to call the police.

**VICKY:** Oh, I'm sure they'll rev up every resource at their disposal to find out who's sending me poorly spelled threatening messages.

**GEORGE:** How about contacting an English teacher? Maybe she could sniff out which of her former students wrote that.

**VICKY:** How about we forget it like we've forgotten the first three?

**GEORGE:** I still think you ought to call the police.

**VICKY:** George, we don't need the publicity. At least not that kind.

**GEORGE:** What kind do we need?

**VICKY:** The kind *Hamilton* has gotten. Word of mouth.

**GEORGE:** The *Truth Hurts*—*A Lot* got plenty of word of mouth. None of which I can repeat.

**VICKY:** All right, all right... no use crying over spilt millions. Let's concentrate.

**GEORGE:** On what?

**VICKY:** Murder!

**GEORGE:** Back to Frostine.

**VICKY:** What about poison, George?

**GEORGE:** I thought you didn't like the idea of a poison dart.

**VICKY:** No, I mean poison she drinks or eats.

**GEORGE:** Then she has to drink or eat something. Actresses hate drinking or eating on stage, don't they?

**VICKY:** She could have been slipped the poison earlier, offstage.

**GEORGE:** But then she suddenly just flops over. Not very dramatic.

**VICKY:** (*Inspired.*) But it is if she takes something and dies immediately. Actresses love to die on stage.

**GEORGE:** Yeah, they get to go home early.

**VICKY:** But what kind of poisons work that fast?

*SFX: doorbell chimes.*

**GEORGE:** Maybe whoever's at the door can tell us. Who can that be all the way out here at the edge of the known world?

**VICKY:** Why don't you find out?

**GEORGE:** Me? Do I look like a butler?

**VICKY:** I'll get you a tux.

*GEORGE exits right, grumbling. MRS. DUTTON enters left as SFX: doorbell chimes, again. She holds a tray with bagels and juice. She sets it on the desk.*

**MRS. DUTTON:** Doorbell's ringing.

**VICKY:** George is getting it.

**MRS. DUTTON:** Good. Glad he's doing something.

*MRS. DUTTON exits left. GEORGE enters right followed by MAX.*

**GEORGE:** (*Desperately trying to control his anger.*) So, Vicky, look who's here.

**MAX:** Hello, darling.

**VICKY:** Darling? Max, you don't have to fake it. We've been divorced for five years.

**MAX:** I know, but I've still got a warm spot in my heart for you.

**VICKY:** Take some Pepto and you'll feel better. [Or insert other indigestion medicine.]

**MAX:** Oh, Vicky, Vicky, Vicky.

**VICKY:** Whatever possessed you to drive all the way out here?

**MAX:** It's such a beautiful morning, I didn't want it to go to waste.

**VICKY:** Did it take you the hour's drive to come up with that lame excuse?

**GEORGE:** How about you grab a bagel, Max, and then head back to the city. I'm sure your fans are waiting for you.

**MAX:** You keep out of this. (*Takes a bagel.*)

**GEORGE:** Then put the bagel back.

**MAX:** Do you have any cream cheese, Vicky?

**VICKY:** Have you forgotten already?

**MAX:** Oh, that's right... you're lactose intolerant.

**VICKY:** That's right, and you're not very good at small talk. What do you want, Max?

**GEORGE:** Aside from breakfast.

**MAX:** (*To VICKY.*) Will you shut him up?

**VICKY:** George is my partner, Max.

**GEORGE:** We're like salt and pepper.

**VICKY:** Gin and rummy.

**GEORGE:** Ham and eggs.

**MAX:** You're ham all right.

**GEORGE:** And if I said get your butt out of here, how do you spell "your", Max?

**MAX:** Are you going to be a second grade teacher in your new career, George?

**GEORGE:** Just answer the question.

**MAX:** You are! How cute!

**VICKY:** Max!

**MAX:** Y-O-U-R. Do I get a gold star?

**GEORGE:** I hate to admit it, but, yes. A big gold star.

**VICKY:** Look, Max, George and I are working hard on a new script.

**MAX:** That's what I heard. You two must have nine lives.

**VICKY:** What do you mean?

**MAX:** After *The Truth Hurts*—*A Lot* flopped, nobody thought you'd ever get another show on Broadway.

**GEORGE:** One little bump in our long, illustrious career?

**MAX:** You lost your shirts, and don't lie about it.

**VICKY:** Ridiculous. We've both got shirts on. Like mine?

**MAX:** Dazzling.

**VICKY:** Get to the point so we can get back to work!

**GEORGE:** Or to put it another way, how much?

**MAX:** You insult me, George! I didn't come here with my hand out. But since you brought it up....

**VICKY:** Not another cent, Max!

**MAX:** But, Vicky! I've got a temporary cash flow problem.

**VICKY:** Your cash flow problems are not temporary, Max. They're like the Mississippi and they just keep rolling along.

**MAX:** You're being completely unfair, Vicky. I've never even seen the Mississippi.

**GEORGE:** It's big and wet.

**VICKY:** Sorry, Max, but the bank is closed. Now, will you please exit right?

**MAX:** I'm still eating.

**GEORGE:** There's no law against eating and driving, is there?

**MAX:** If something gets caught in my teeth, I might get distracted. So, what's your new play about?

**VICKY:** As of yet it's untitled.

**GEORGE:** But it's to die for.

**MAX:** Another mystery. Classic Grimm and Barrett.

**GEORGE:** Hear that? He called us classic!

**VICKY:** Such a nice compliment.

**MAX:** It just slipped out.

**VICKY:** Since you asked, yes, our play is a mystery. The main character is Zeus Plantagenet, a world class tennis pro.

**MAX:** Love the name!

*MAX picks up the fireplace shovel and will proceed to use it as a tennis racket hitting imaginary balls.*

**VICKY:** Zeus is engaged to marry Frostine Honeywell, whose parents are recently deceased.

**GEORGE:** Frostine will inherit their fortune on her twenty-first birthday in one week, lucky girl.

**MAX:** Luckier Zeus.

**VICKY:** Unless she dies. Then the fortune will be divided among the remaining family members who are all gathering at Patience's mansion for an engagement party.

**GEORGE:** Among them are Aunt Tulia and her daughters Eden and Mauve.

**VICKY:** Uncle Osgood Honeywell will be there as well, and he's got quite a sinister past.

**GEORGE:** Let's not forget Patience, the long-lost daughter of the late Rodger Blather who is a cousin twice removed.

**MAX:** Quite a family tree. *(Hits something with the shovel.)*

**VICKY:** Max! What are you doing?

**MAX:** Just practicing my backhand.

**GEORGE:** I think he's not-so-subtly auditioning for a part in our next hit.

**VICKY:** Well, thank you for your vote of confidence. But you just won't work as Frostine.

**GEORGE:** Besides, she dies in Scene Two.

**MAX:** Very funny!

**VICKY:** We hope so.

**MAX:** But I'd be a bit interested in playing Zeus.

**VICKY:** How did we describe him, George?

**GEORGE:** Young, dashing, radiating charm with wit and panache to spare.

**VICKY:** In other words, not you, Max.

**MAX:** You cut me to the quick! I'm an actor. I'm young and can be dashing and ooze charm.

**GEORGE:** Like an old toothpaste tube.

**MAX:** *(Indignantly.)* Peasant! Well, after such an insult, Vicky, can you apologize for him by finding it in your heart to spare me a few bucks?

**VICKY:** What's "a few"?

**MAX:** Two grand.

**GEORGE:** That's outrageous!

**VICKY:** If I give it to you, will be leave us alone?

**MAX:** Cross my heart and hope to die.

**GEORGE:** I wish you would.

**MAX:** What's with him?

*VICKY goes to desk, sits, and writes check.*

**VICKY:** Nothing your exit won't cure.

**MAX:** I really, really appreciate this, Vicky.

**VICKY:** I ought to make you sign an IOU, but that would be a waste of time, right?

**MAX:** Probably. Or I could just use one of the ones I've still got in my pocket.

**VICKY:** (*Handing MAX the check.*) No, here you go, and out you go.

**MAX:** Can I have another bagel?

**GEORGE:** You want our shirts, too?

**MAX:** Puh-leeze! I have better taste than that. I'm Max Munroe, star of stage and screen and I have to dress the part.

**VICKY:** Max, you haven't been a star since we parted ways.

**MAX:** Lots you know. I've been working abroad.

**GEORGE:** And where's abroad?

**MAX:** Europe.

**VICKY:** Really? Where in Europe?

**MAX:** Estonia. They have a very vibrant film culture.

**VICKY:** Please close the door on your way out, Max.

*SFX: doorbell chimes.*

**GEORGE:** What is this? Grand Central Station?

**MAX:** (*With a flourish.*) Allow me! (*Exits right.*)

**VICKY:** I'll bet it's Mel.

**GEORGE:** About time!

**VICKY:** She's giving up her weekend to work, George.

**GEORGE:** So am I!

**VICKY:** You're not a PA.

*MEL enters right with MAX. MEL is carrying a bag.*

**MEL:** (*Star struck.*) Oh, my gosh! You're really you!

**MAX:** In the flesh.

**MEL:** I am sooooo excited!

**VICKY:** Hello, Mel.

**MEL:** I've been a fan ever since I saw you in *The Three Feathers*.

**GEORGE:** I thought it was *Four Feathers*.

**MAX:** We had to cut one of the feathers out because of the budget.

**MEL:** You were so... gallant!

**VICKY:** I take it you two have met?

**MEL:** Oh, I've seen every film Max Munroe has ever made! Most of them three times!

**VICKY:** Allow me to introduce your number one fan....

**MEL:** Mel. My name's Mel Larson. And, oh, I saw your most recent movie and loved it, even if I didn't understand a word of Estonian.

**GEORGE:** Didn't they subtitle it?

**MEL:** You didn't need subtitles. It was so... primitive and earthy.

**VICKY:** That describes Max, all right.

**MAX:** Well, I was just... leaving.

**MEL:** Oh, do you have to?

**GEORGE:** Yes!

**VICKY:** We've got work to do, Mel.

**GEORGE:** We were starting early, remember?

**MEL:** Oh, I know. I'm sorry, but I got lost. I went right at the fork in the road.

**VICKY:** That leads down to the quarry.

**MEL:** Yeah! I figured that out when I got to the edge of the cliff. Good thing I just had my brakes done. Anyway, I found you.

**GEORGE:** Obviously.

**VICKY:** And Max, you know the way back?

**MAX:** (*Feigning self-pity.*) I... I feel so... unwanted. Which way was the quarry?

**MEL:** (*Horrified.*) Oh, no!

**MAX:** Just kidding! Thanks, Vicky! You're a real pal.

**VICKY:** What happened to darling?

**MAX:** We're better friends than husband and wife, right?

**VICKY:** If you say so.

**MAX:** See you, big guy.

**GEORGE:** Big guy?

**MAX:** (*To MEL.*) And my number one fan! Don't let these two work you too hard.

**MEL:** Oh, I love working for Ms. Barrett! Watching a play come together is like watching DaVinci paint the Sistine Chapel.

**GEORGE:** I think Michelangelo helped out.

**VICKY:** So, let's get our paint brushes and climb up and lie on our backs and paint, shall we?

**MAX:** Ciao!

**MEL:** Mi amore!

*MAX exits right.*

**VICKY:** You never mentioned you speak Italian, Mel.

**MEL:** That's all I know aside from dov'è il bagno.

**GEORGE:** Pass the pizza?

**MEL:** Where's the bathroom.

**VICKY:** Okay, grab a bagel and then get ready to take a few notes.

**MEL:** Right.

*MEL takes notebook from her bag along with a pencil. She sits primly in a chair.*

**VICKY:** So, where were we?

**GEORGE:** About to kill Frostine.

**MEL:** Act One, Scene Two.

**VICKY:** Right. We've tried strangling her, but that's too cumbersome on stage.

**GEORGE:** A knife is way too disgusting.

**VICKY:** I'm not opposed to a blunt object, but whoever plays Frostine might.

**GEORGE:** Then you mentioned poison.

**VICKY:** Right! Mel, I want you to check on fast acting poisons that are readily available. I mean something that can be picked up by almost anyone. And preferably something that can't be found during an autopsy.

*MEL has made notes.*

**MEL:** That's a tall order.

**GEORGE:** That's why you get the big bucks, kiddo.

**VICKY:** George!

**GEORGE:** Well, Vicky, let's be honest! Where is Mel going to find a poison that is readily available, works fast, and can't be found during an autopsy?

**VICKY:** You're right. Maybe poison isn't the way to go.

**MEL:** What about having Frostine run outside in terror and get hit by a car? You don't even have to see it. The audience hears the screech of breaks, a scream, and a thud!

**GEORGE:** Very dramatic! The audience's imagination will make it worse than any reality!

**VICKY:** But they're at a manor home where there's no traffic.

**GEORGE:** But let's say there's a cliff behind the house, just like that two hundred foot drop you've got behind this place. Frostine could run out, chased by the killer...

**VICKY:** The audience could hear the lines from offstage. (*As Frostine.*) Get away from me! Get away!

**GEORGE:** (*As the killer.*) There's no running away this time, Frostine! You're doomed!

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) Never! I'll never let you get me!

**GEORGE:** (*As the killer.*) But the cliff!

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) What cliff? (*VICKY screams.*)

**GEORGE:** (*As the killer.*) That cliff!

*MEL claps wildly, but suddenly stops. MAX staggers on right.*

**MAX:** (*Holding his stomach, in pain.*) Vicky! Vicky! Help me!

*MAX falls to the floor. MEL screams, and VICKY rushes to MAX as the curtain closes.*

## SCENE TWO

**AT START:** *VICKY paces downstage while GEORGE paces in the opposite direction upstage. They are both playing parts in the play, Frostine and Osgood, so they say their lines with excessive expression.*

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) I don't care what you say, Uncle Osgood. I am old enough to know how to handle money.

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) The kind of money you're going to come into next week?

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) Exactly what do you mean?

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) You are about to inherit twenty million dollars... not to mention all this.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) Twenty million!

*MRS. DUTTON enters left with a plate of sandwiches. She moves to GEORGE, who takes a half of a sandwich, then to VICKY who does the same. MRS. DUTTON places plate on desk. She exits left.*

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) That's more money than the GDP of Paraguay.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) I've never been to Paraguay.

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) It's quite mountainous.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) I don't have anything against mountains. Maybe I'll buy one.

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood. Eating his sandwich, mumbling.*) That's what I mean.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) What?

**GEORGE:** (*As himself.*) I don't think that's your line.

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) I can't understand you with your mouth full.

**GEORGE:** (*Mumbling and chewing.*) I'm sorry! I'm hungry!

**VICKY:** Oh, brother!

*VICKY takes a bite of her sandwich. GEORGE swallows.*

**GEORGE:** All right, then, where were we?

**VICKY:** (*Chewing and mumbling.*) You say something about....

**GEORGE:** You shouldn't talk with your mouth full, Vicky.

**VICKY:** (*She swallows hard.*) Stuff it, George!

**GEORGE:** (*As himself.*) That's better! (*As Osgood.*) Being so young, and being a woman, you'll probably throw your inheritance away frivolously.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) Uncle Osgood, this is the twenty-first century! You're being positively insulting! Yes, I'm a woman, and I can certainly balance a checkbook!

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) It's more than a checkbook, which is why I'm offering to... manage things for you, Frostine.

**VICKY:** (*As Frostine.*) Thank you, but I'm sure Zeus and I will manage quite nicely.

**GEORGE:** (*As Osgood.*) Well, I didn't think I'd have to tell you this, but there's something you need to know about Zeus.

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) Oh, for crying out loud. What's my line?

**GEORGE:** (*As himself.*) Mel's got the notes.

**VICKY:** Where is that girl? Mel! Mel!

*MRS. DUTTON enters left.*

**VICKY:** Oh, Mrs. Dutton, do you know where Mel is?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Now where'd you think she'd be? Upstairs fluffing Mr. Max's pillows.

**VICKY:** How is he?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Sufferin' gladly.

**GEORGE:** There's nothing wrong with him! He just wants a bed for the night.

**MRS. DUTTON:** They say a storm's coming so he might just need it.

**VICKY:** A storm's coming?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Nor'easter.

**VICKY:** Well, thank you, Mrs. Dutton.

*MRS. DUTTON doesn't move.*

**VICKY:** And thank you for the sandwiches.

**GEORGE:** Very good.

*MRS. DUTTON doesn't move.*

**VICKY:** Is there anything else?

**MRS. DUTTON:** I... I need to speak to you, Ms. Barrett.

**VICKY:** Well, sure, what is it?

*MRS. DUTTON doesn't respond.*

**VICKY:** Oh, yes, of course. Time for a raise. Well, you can count on....

**MRS. DUTTON:** No, it's not that, Ms. Barrett.

*VICKY casts a withering glance at GEORGE, who takes the hint.*

**GEORGE:** *(Coughing.)* Something's caught in my throat.

**VICKY:** Probably the next line.

**GEORGE:** I'll get a drink of water and be right back.

*GEORGE exits left.*

**VICKY:** Is that better, Mrs. Dutton?

**MRS. DUTTON:** *(Nodding.)* I... I've been here a long time, Ms. Barrett, from the time your father built this place.

**VICKY:** That was what? Thirty years ago?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Thirty-two. Two years after he married your mother.

**VICKY:** They were happy here, weren't they?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Your father was.

**VICKY:** Poor Mom... she always struggled, didn't she?

**MRS. DUTTON:** Not without reason.

**VICKY:** What do you mean?

**MRS. DUTTON:** *(Looking around the room.)* These walls have heard so many voices... they've seen so many folks come and go... so they've got their secrets. Plenty of secrets.

**VICKY:** What kind of secrets?

**MRS. DUTTON:** I don't know how to say this anyway but straight out: secrets about you, Ms. Barrett.

**VICKY:** What secrets? I... I know I was adopted. Mom and Dad told me that from the time I could remember.

**MRS. DUTTON:** It was a kindness on their part, it was.

**VICKY:** They always told me other parents are stuck with what they get. But my parents got to pick me out, so I'm extra special. I know that's really stretching the issue, but it made a little girl feel very happy. It made me so proud that I was chosen.

**MRS. DUTTON:** That's only part of the secret.

**VICKY:** I... I don't understand.

*MEL enters right.*

**MRS. DUTTON:** (*Hesitantly.*) I... I need to check the roast, Mrs. Barrett.

**MEL:** Oh, excuse me. Am I interrupting?

**VICKY:** Let's talk later, Mrs. Dutton.

**MRS. DUTTON:** Yes, Ma'am, before it's too late.

*MRS. DUTTON exits left.*

**VICKY:** What could she have meant by that?

**MEL:** If you ask me, she seems kind of spooky. Like a character in one of your plays.

**VICKY:** I don't think life has been easy for her.

**MEL:** Well, I'm sorry I butted in. I was helping Max get settled.

**VICKY:** So it's Max now.

**MEL:** Oh, he's just a big old teddy bear.

**VICKY:** More like an armadillo if you ask me.

**MEL:** Gosh, you don't think much of him, do you?

*GEORGE enters left.*

**GEORGE:** (*Stepping aside graciously.*) Couldn't find... (*Sees MEL.*) Well, Mel, there you are!

**MEL:** Sorry, but Max needed an ear.

**GEORGE:** Why? There's nothing between either of his ears.

**VICKY:** Let's not get off track and start analyzing Max, all right?

**GEORGE:** Psychiatrists have been trying for years, and they haven't gotten very far, so we can hardly hope to do any better.

**MEL:** Such a brilliant actor defies true analysis.

**VICKY:** Is that how you see it?

**MEL:** Oh, gosh! Lunch! (*Grabs a sandwich.*) Of course! It's impossible to figure out a genius. I mean, look at DaVinci.

**GEORGE:** Oh, yeah, the Sistine Chapel guy.

**VICKY:** All right, let's get back to work. Mel, let's get back to notes!

**MEL:** I'm ready when you are!

*MEL sits at desk, with pencil in one hand, sandwich in the other.*

**MEL:** Shoot!

**GEORGE:** We're not using any guns in this script, Mel.

**MEL:** Oh, no, I just meant—

**VICKY:** We know. All right, where were we, George?

**GEORGE:** The last thing I remember was eating my sandwich.

**VICKY:** Oh, yes, and trying to talk with your mouth full.

**GEORGE:** Can I help it if my mother never taught me manners?

**VICKY:** Let's take it from... hmmm... there's something you need to know about Zeus.

**GEORGE:** That's my line.

**VICKY:** I know.

**GEORGE:** Oh! Yeah, sure! *(As Osgood.)* There's something you need to know about Zeus.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Uncle Osgood, I know everything I need to know about Max.

**MEL:** Max? It says Zeus here.

**VICKY:** *(As herself.)* Oh, sorry.

**GEORGE:** *(As himself.)* Freudian slip.

**VICKY:** Just a mistake, George.

**GEORGE:** That's what Freud's mother said.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine, loudly.)* I know everything I need to know about Zeus.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Really?

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Really! He's kind and ambitious and intelligent and considerate.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Add thrifty and you've got a Boy Scout.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* I don't need to know anything more than that.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* What about his past?

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* What about it? He was born in a small town in Illinois. His father was a science teacher at the local high school, his mother was a housewife. He has a brother Daniel and a sister Betty. He went to Southern Illinois University—

**MEL:** Excuse me.

**VICKY:** *(As herself.)* That's not a line, is it?

**MEL:** No, I just... well, I don't know if it's my place, but... just a comment.

**GEORGE:** *(As himself.)* Yes?

**MEL:** That speech of yours, Ms. Barrett... isn't that exposition a bit heavy-handed? I mean, it sounds like you're reading from his entry in *Who's Who*.

**GEORGE:** You're wrong. Zeus never made it into *Who's Who*.

**VICKY:** No, but Mel's right. It doesn't feel right when I say it. Maybe just one or two facts, sort of tossed off like...

**GEORGE:** Confetti?

**VICKY:** We'll call it expository confetti. Thanks, Mel. Okay, so mark that line for rewrite and let's go on. I finished with *(As Frostine.)* Southern Illinois University....

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Stop right there.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* I've got lots and lots more information.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* So, tell me... what did Zeus do during his summers while attending SIU?

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* He... he... well, I don't know. I'm sure he had a job because he was always on a really tight budget.

**MEL:** It says here "He never had much money".

**VICKY:** *(As herself.)* I like that better. *(As Frostine.)* He never had much money.

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* I think he had plenty of money.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* What do you mean?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Do I have to paint a picture for you?

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* Yes!

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Your hero, the one and only Zeus sold pirated DVDs to tourists in San Diego.

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine. Horrified.)* No!

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* Yes!

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* You're lying! You just made that up!

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* I've got photographic proof!

**VICKY:** *(As Frostine.)* From where?

**GEORGE:** *(As Osgood.)* The FBI. Selling pirated DVDs is a federal crime!

**MEL:** Excuse me, but what's a DVD?

*SFX: doorbell chimes. No one moves.*

**VICKY:** *(As herself.)* Someone's at the door.

**GEORGE:** *(As himself.)* Is that what that is?

**MEL:** I wonder who would come all this way....

*MRS. DUTTON enters left as SFX: doorbell chimes, again.*

**MRS. DUTTON:** Somebody's at the door, again.

**GEORGE:** Just what we were thinking.

**MRS. DUTTON:** What're you going to do about it?

**VICKY:** Mel's going to answer the door.

**MEL:** (*Jumping up.*) Sure! Yes! Of course!

*MEL exits right. MRS. DUTTON gives GEORGE a crusty look and exits left.*

**GEORGE:** Why does she hate me?

**VICKY:** Don't feel so privileged. She hates all men.

**GEORGE:** I wonder what Freud would think of that.

**VICKY:** She'd hate him, too.

*MEL enters right carrying a suitcase.*

**GEORGE:** Somebody dropped off a suitcase?

**VICKY:** Whose is that, Mel?

*BROOKE enters right.*

**BROOKE:** Why, honey, it's mine!

**GEORGE:** (*Shocked.*) Brooke Pendleton?

**VICKY:** (*Unenthused.*) How are you, Brooke, dear?

**BROOKE:** Just peachy now that I found y'all. Lordy, I thought I was gonna fall off the face of the earth before I got here. Almost did when I reached that quarry. How'd you ever find this place?

**VICKY:** Oh, it's been our family hideaway for years.

**GEORGE:** Hideaway... as in nobody's supposed to know it's here.

**BROOKE:** Now from the looks on your faces, I'm gonna guess Bosley forgot to text.

**VICKY:** Sorry, I haven't looked at my phone.

**GEORGE:** Your agent has something to do with this... surprise?

**BROOKE:** He said you two busy beavers were doin' the final draft of your new play 'n he told me to skedaddle right up here for the weekend.

**VICKY:** You're serious.

**BROOKE:** He said it's the only way to get ahead, honey. 'Course he told me not to tell you that, but it's true. I mean, it's not like I'm an unknown, but I'm still waitin' to make the Big Splash, you know?

**MEL:** (*Staring at her closely.*) You're Brooke Pendleton! Right here! In person!

**BROOKE:** Well, yeah, this ain't Madame Tussaud's or nothin'.

**VICKY:** This is my PA, Mel. She's a bit star struck today.

**MEL:** How can I help it with Max Barrett upstairs and Brooke Pendleton standing right in front of me!

**BROOKE:** (*Suddenly angry.*) Max Barrett is here?

**GEORGE:** 'Fraid so.

**BROOKE:** That no-good, low-down, flea-bitten poor excuse for a bad actor!

**VICKY:** And his agent didn't even bother to text.

**BROOKE:** What's he here for? An alimony payment?

**VICKY:** Something like that.

**BROOKE:** Well, I'm here professionally, (*To MEL.*) so take that suitcase to my room so I can go do what they always say in plays when they want to get you offstage fast.

**VICKY:** You're going to freshen up. Mel, I think the only available room is the one right next to Mr. Barrett.

**BROOKE:** Oh, great! I'll hear him snoring all night!

**VICKY:** Best I can do, Brooke.

**BROOKE:** (*To MEL.*) Well, then, okay, hon, I'll follow you anywhere.

**MEL:** Gosh, Brooke Pendleton, right here!

*MEL exits right, BROOKE following her off.*

**GEORGE:** Okay, Vicky, so what's up?

**VICKY:** George, I'm as surprised as you are.

**GEORGE:** Sure, and pigs fly.

**VICKY:** That's the truth!

**GEORGE:** Did Bosley text you?

**VICKY:** I don't know. (*Picks up her phone from desk and opens messages.*) Let's see... oh, dear... he did. Last night. He says "Brooke perfect for lead in new play. She'll be up this weekend to prove it". I didn't get that text last night.

**GEORGE:** I don't believe you.

**VICKY:** It's true! Sometimes text messages get delayed.

**GEORGE:** They do not!

**VICKY:** Don't you remember that time we were previewing in Connecticut and they were having a critique session after the first performance and we were supposed to be there, and they said they texted you, but we didn't know about it and missed it and the folks at the rep hated us for months and months after that.

**GEORGE:** Okay, so I didn't get one text.

**VICKY:** Well, now it's my turn.

**GEORGE:** I still don't believe you didn't know she was coming up here.

**VICKY:** Why would I keep something like that from you?

**GEORGE:** Because you want her for the lead and I don't!

**VICKY:** You've already decided?

**GEORGE:** Vicky, I can't stand all that down-home charm. Every time she opens her mouth I think of cornbread and hog jowls.

**VICKY:** You don't like cornbread?

**GEORGE:** I hate it!

**VICKY:** I can understand hating hog jowls, I mean just the name of it, but cornbread?

**GEORGE:** How is Brooke Pendleton going to play a sophisticated character like Frostine?

**VICKY:** She's an actress!

**GEORGE:** She's not that good of an actress!

**VICKY:** She's done Shakespeare.

**GEORGE:** On Sesame Street.

**VICKY:** It doesn't matter. She did the whole "The quality of mercy" speech from *Merchant*.

**GEORGE:** And I'll bet it was really strained.

**VICKY:** Oh, hardee har har.

**GEORGE:** Why can't we be looking at someone else?

**VICKY:** Anyone particular?

**GEORGE:** Well, now that you mention it....

**VICKY:** Of course, we'll give Nell an audition....

**GEORGE:** To be honest, as we've been writing... I've thought more and more that Nell would make the perfect Frostine.

**VICKY:** I said we'll audition her. As a favor. Your girlfriend deserves that much for putting up with you.

**GEORGE:** That's a rotten thing to say!

**VICKY:** I know, I know. Forgive me.

**GEORGE:** It'll be hard.

**VICKY:** We planned this so that we could be alone and get this thing done! We've driven miles and miles from any distractions.

**GEORGE:** But they found us anyway!

**VICKY:** I suppose I'll have to play the hostess.

**GEORGE:** You do that so well. Just make sure you've got plenty of your famous hot chocolate for when it gets frosty tonight.

**VICKY:** This doesn't seem like a hot chocolate crowd.

**GEORGE:** Oh, they'll behave.

**MAX:** (*Offstage right.*) What are you doing here?

**BROOKE:** (*Offstage right.*) I got the lead, honey, so I got every reason to be here.

**MAX:** (*Offstage right.*) How'd you get the lead?

**BROOKE:** (*Offstage right.*) Talent, hon, pure talent!

**MAX:** (*Offstage right.*) You got as much talent as a hamster!

**BROOKE:** (*Offstage right.*) Why you—

*SFX: thwack!*

**MAX:** (*Offstage right.*) You hit me!

**VICKY:** See what I mean?

**GEORGE:** Maybe I should call the police force.

**VICKY:** What force? I think there's one cop and a retired canine officer.

*MAX runs on right. He holds a tissue to his nose.*

**MAX:** She slugged me with her suitcase!

**VICKY:** She was just glad to see you, Max.

**MAX:** She gave me a bloody nose!

**GEORGE:** Should I call now?

**BROOKE:** (*Enters right.*) Tell him to apologize!

**VICKY:** Apologize, Max.

**MAX:** For what?

**BROOKE:** For calling me a hamster.

**MAX:** I did not call you a hamster.

**VICKY:** You did. We heard you.

**GEORGE:** Actually, he didn't. He said you have the talent of a hamster.

**MAX:** Very good! Thank you, George.

**GEORGE:** We men have to stick together. Even if we're outnumbered.

**VICKY:** All right, all right. He was referring to your talent, Brooke, not you.

**MAX:** Though now that I see you in the light—

**BROOKE:** Why you—!

*BROOKE moves to slug MAX but is stopped by GEORGE.*

**GEORGE:** Brooke. You already gave him a bloody nose.

**MAX:** And you might have broken it.

**BROOKE:** It'll be an improvement!

**VICKY:** Stop it, both of you!

**GEORGE:** What's with you two?

**BROOKE:** What isn't with us two?

**MAX:** You followed me up here, didn't you?

**BROOKE:** Honey, I wouldn't follow you into Fort Knox if they were having a two-for-one sale.

**GEORGE:** Brooke, they don't sell anything at Fort Knox.

**BROOKE:** That was a metaphor! Don't you get a metaphor when you hear one?

**MAX:** Only when they make sense.

**VICKY:** All right, the two of you stop bickering.

**GEORGE:** We're trying to work here.

**VICKY:** And to be honest, if we don't finish this script this weekend our financing is going to end up in the toilet and neither of you will have a part!

**MAX:** So it's true... she's got the lead?

**BROOKE:** And this backside of an old mule is in the show?

**MAX:** I am not old!

**VICKY:** Look, guys, you're putting the cart before the horse.

**BROOKE:** What's that supposed to mean?  
**MAX:** I thought you were good at metaphors!  
**GEORGE:** It means we don't have a script yet, so we aren't even ready to consider anybody for a part!  
**BROOKE:** Then what's he doing here?  
**MAX:** And what's she doing here?  
**VICKY:** How do we know? You just dropped in!  
**GEORGE:** You know what you two are? You're script crashers. Low down, underhanded script crashers!  
**BROOKE:** Well, my agent sent me!  
**MAX:** And my bookie sent me.  
**VICKY:** How about both of you getting in your respective cars and driving back where you belong.  
**BROOKE:** Sorry, but I belong right here. Bosley said so.  
**GEORGE:** Your turn, Max.  
**MAX:** You're not getting rid of me that easily. I know you're cooking up a part for me and I'm not going to head off leaving her to force you to cast her latest boyfriend or whatever!  
**BROOKE:** Why, hon, I'd never do such a thing!  
**MAX:** Yeah, because you don't even have a boyfriend.  
**BROOKE:** Why, bless your heart, you're not only a mule's backside, you've got the brain of one. Stupid and stubborn.

*MEL enters left.*

**MEL:** You're all set, Ms. Pendleton. I've put towels on your bed along with a toiletries basket.  
**VICKY:** Thank you, Mel.  
**GEORGE:** Okay, so now what do we do?  
**VICKY:** How about you both go to the library, pick a good book, then go up to your rooms and lock your doors.  
**BROOKE:** Read a book? What century do you think this is!  
**MAX:** Yeah, we forgot, Brooke doesn't know how to read.  
**BROOKE:** 'Course I can read! I read scripts all the time. I got a stack three feet high at home waitin' for me to get around to 'em.  
**MAX:** Sure, just like you read for *Hedda Gabler*.  
**VICKY:** Brooke, you read for *Hedda Gabler*?

**BROOKE:** I sure did, honey! I read like nobody's business! That director, why, he just hated me.

**MAX:** He hated your interpretation, kiddo.

**BROOKE:** I thought Hedda Gabler was about a gossip columnist who talked all the time.

**GEORGE:** How did you ever....

**VICKY:** Of course! Gabler, get it? That's a mistake anybody can make.

*BROOKE breaks into tears and races off right.*

**GEORGE:** (*Calling after her.*) Well, Brooke, I will say that's a fresh take on Ibsen.

**VICKY:** What do you know about this, Max?

**MAX:** What "this"?

**GEORGE:** The invasion of the barbarians.

**MAX:** Nothing... other than the fact that this barbarian got here first.

*MAX moves left.*

**VICKY:** Where are you going?

**MAX:** I'm hungry. I'm sure you've got a few crumbs you can spare for your barbaric ex.

**MEL:** I've got some homemade snickerdoodles on my dresser in my room, Max.

**MAX:** That is most generous of you, Mel. I don't want these two to think of me as a leech. (*Exits right.*)

**VICKY:** Snickerdoodles?

**MEL:** The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

**VICKY:** So that's what I've been doing wrong all this time.

**GEORGE:** So where does that leave us, Ms. Snickerdoodle?

**MEL:** (*Checking her notes.*) Act I, Scene 3.

**VICKY:** Right after Frostine's death. Okay, George, refresh my brain.

**GEORGE:** If you refresh mine.

**VICKY:** What do we want to happen in this scene?

**GEORGE:** Ahhhh....

**VICKY:** That was my thought exactly.

**MEL:** (*Checking her notes.*) Allow me. Frostine's body is gone. Aunt Tulia pours tea for Godfrey Gower, the executor of the Honeywell estate, who sits forlornly in a chair.

*GEORGE flops into chair.*

**MEL:** In the conversation that ensues, Aunt Tulia learns that Godfrey was in love with Frostine.

*VICKY picks up mug from desk and takes the candlestick from the mantel to use as a teapot. She thrusts the mug at GEORGE.*

**GEORGE:** What's this?

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) It's for your tea, Godfrey.

**GEORGE:** Wait, I'm not Godfrey yet. This mug is dirty. There's stuff dried up on the bottom.

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) Fake it, Godfrey!

**GEORGE:** What if I catch a disease or something?

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) My dear Godfrey, you look positively stricken.

**GEORGE:** I will be if I drink out of this mug.

**VICKY:** (*Forcefully, as Tulia.*) I'll freshen your tea for you. It does wonders to put a smile back on your face.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) It will take more than tea to make me smile again.

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) I didn't realize you were at all close to Frostine.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) Poor, poor Frostine!

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) Godfrey, have you been carrying a torch all these years?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) And now the flame is out. Doused by a cord around her neck.

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) Wait, wait, wait... she didn't get strangled.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) And now the flame is out. Doused by a fireplace poker.

**MEL:** Excuse me, but she isn't killed by blunt force trauma.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) And now the flame is out. Doused by a hair dryer tossed into her bath.

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) Hmm... I don't like that either.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey. Frustratedly.*) And now the flame is out.

Doused by a rabid woodpecker who thought she was a tree!

**VICKY:** George!

**GEORGE:** (*As himself.*) What?

**VICKY:** Maybe it would be best if we once and for all decide how

Frostine is going to die.

**GEORGE:** Good thinking.

**MEL:** What about a knife?

**VICKY:** Oh, we've done knives on stage and it's way too cumbersome.

**GEORGE:** And these days if you use a knife, the audience expects to see blood.

**VICKY:** Lots of it.

**MEL:** Really?

**GEORGE:** That was one of the big criticisms of *The Truth Hurts—A Lot*. The murder of Kip Strange wasn't bloody enough.

**VICKY:** One critic wrote, "You can't trust Grimm and Barrett anymore.

You don't see blood and you know they're going to bring that character back in the final scene to solve the crime."

**GEORGE:** We did no such thing. Kip Strange was dead. Period.

**MEL:** Frostine could always fall down the stairs.

**VICKY:** That's a thought.

**GEORGE:** Then we have to write stairs into the set description. The backers will hate that.

**MEL:** Why? It's soooooo dramatic.

**VICKY:** Stairs cost a lot of money.

**GEORGE:** And the insurance goes way up.

**MEL:** You're kidding!

**VICKY:** Whoever falls down the stairs might really get hurt.

**MEL:** That's true. You can't exactly put a mattress at the bottom of the stairs, can you?

**GEORGE:** We've forgotten the most logical means of disposal.

**VICKY:** Oh, no, George, not a bullet. That is so... clichéd.

**GEORGE:** So we're back to poison.

**VICKY:** That's right! In all this confusion I totally forgot we assigned Mel to research poisons.

**MEL:** I haven't had a chance yet.

**VICKY:** There's a great book on poisons in the library, Mel.

**GEORGE:** *Poisons for Dummies*. It's got a yellow cover.

**VICKY:** Ignore the village idiot. It's called *Clinical Toxicology*.

**GEORGE:** And it's got a yellow cover, too.

**VICKY:** I'm sure you'll come up with something good... and untraceable.

**MEL:** Hmmmm... this may come in useful in the future. (*Exits right.*)

**GEORGE:** Well, good, let's just go on with the scene assuming she was poisoned.

**VICKY:** Which means at this point we don't know that for sure and we probably think she just had a heart attack or something.

**GEORGE:** Right. It wouldn't be too obvious, at least to a non-professional.

**VICKY:** Non-professional what? Poisoner?

**GEORGE:** No, cop, EMT, whatever.

**VICKY:** Good point. Okay, so let's take it from... my line. (*As Tulia.*)

Don't tell me you've been carrying a torch all these years, Godfrey.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) And now the flame is out. Doused by the Grim Reaper.

**MEL:** That's great!

**VICKY:** (*As herself.*) Shhhh! (*As Tulia.*) You poor man... will it help to talk about Frostine?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) Most people found her pretty frosty, but from the moment I saw her I was taken with her wonderfully cool, appraising eye.

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) Where did you meet?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) I... I'd rather not say.

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) Oh, please. I won't laugh.

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) We met at a ballroom dancing class.

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) You? Ballroom dancing?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) It was a passing faze.

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) But that's... that's... charming! (*Begins to laugh.*)

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) You said you wouldn't laugh!

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) I know... but you... cha-cha-ing?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) Stop it, Tulia! Stop it!

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) But it's hilarious!

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) If you don't, I'll... I'll...

**VICKY:** (*As Tulia.*) What, Godfrey? Kill me like you murdered Frostine?

**GEORGE:** (*As Godfrey.*) Why you—!

**MRS. DUTTON:** (*Shouting, offstage left.*) What are you doing here?  
What do you want?

**VICKY:** (*Calling left.*) Excuse me, that's not in the script!

**MRS. DUTTON:** (*Offstage left.*) She's not here! Get out!

**MEL:** Something's wrong!

*MRS. DUTTON screams, then SFX: door slam.*

**VICKY:** Mrs. Dutton, are you all right?

*VICKY exits running off left. A moment later, we hear VICKY scream.  
Quick curtain.*

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