

SPOILER ALERT

By Bradley Hayward

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CHARACTERS
(2 males, 3 females)

JILL.....impatient fictional character, teenager
JACK dimwitted fictional character, teenager
GLADYS..... bored audience member, old lady
SHIRLEYeager audience member, any age
LOU gruff fictional character, any age

SET

A blank stage.

PROPS

Empty bucket
Bandage
Purse
Bottle of water
Cigar

COSTUMES

JILL: From a small village; sun dress, apron, braided pig tails
JACK: From a small village; shorts, knee high socks, suspenders
GLADYS: Old lady attire; frumpy dress, big purse, sensible shoes
SHIRLEY: Gussied up for the theater; fancy pant suit, high heels
LOU: From a small village; dirty overalls, trucker's hat

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AT RISE: JILL paces furiously back and forth with an empty bucket. SHE checks her watch. Taps her foot. Checks her watch again.

JILL: (*angry*) Jack! Where are you?! (*SHE resumes pacing.*) When a person says two o'clock, they should show up at two o'clock. Not two fifteen. Not two thirty. And certainly not ten bloody pm! Jack! I don't know if I can wait much longer! I'm thirsty!

(*JACK enters, casually. HE has a bandage wrapped around his head.*)

JACK: Hey, Jill.

JILL: There you are! What took you so long?!

JACK: What's going on?

JILL: What do you mean, "what's going on?" You're late!

JACK: I am?

JILL: Don't tell me you forgot.

JACK: Forgot what?

JILL: You and I are supposed to fetch a pail of water. Remember?

JACK: Hey, Jill. What's going on?

JILL: You already said that.

JACK: I did?

JILL: What's gotten into you?

JACK: I'm not sure. But I woke up with this wicked headache.

JILL: Is that why you're late?

JACK: I guess. I slept for, like, twenty four hours. It probably has something to do with this bandage on my head, but I don't remember a thing.

JILL: Well, you're here now. So let's fetch that pail of water.

JACK: I don't really feel like it.

JILL: But those were our instructions.

JACK: What instructions?

JILL: "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water."

JACK: That seems like an awful lot of work. Let's skip it.

JILL: We can't just "skip it." Besides, skipping is Lou's specialty.

JACK: Lou? Lou who?

JILL: You know. (*SHE sings*) "Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou. Lou, Lou, skip to my –" Oh, never mind!

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JACK: Hey, Jill. What's going on?

JILL: Just come with me!

(All of a sudden, a LADY in the audience pipes up.)

LADY: Don't do it, Jill!

(JILL looks around, confused, trying to figure out where the voice came from. SHE shrugs her shoulders and grabs JACK's arm.)

JILL: Come on. Let's go.

JACK: Why?

JILL: I'm thirsty.

JACK: So have a Coke or something.

JILL: Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of Coke?

JACK: Coke. It does a body good.

JILL: That's milk.

JACK: So have milk, then. Whatever you want. But if you're going, make mine a chocolate milk.

JILL: You are going up the hill with me right now, whether you like it or not!

JACK: Huh?

JILL: Are you okay?

JACK: What?

JILL: Oh, just come up the hill with me.

JACK: Fine.

JILL: Or else!

JACK: I heard you.

LADY: Don't do it, Jack!

(JILL looks around, even more confused than before.)

JILL: Did you hear that?

JACK: *(mimics JILL)* "Come up the hill with me. Or else!" I heard.

JILL: Not that, stupid.

JACK: Jeez. Take a chill pill, Jill.

JILL: Fine. I'll go by myself.

LADY: Don't say I didn't warn you!

(JILL storms to the front of the stage and looks into the audience.)

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JILL: Okay, who said that? Because you're really starting to get on my nerves.

JACK: Uh, Jill...

JILL: *(turns and snaps at him)* What now?!

JACK: Have you been taking your medication?

JILL: Why?

JACK: Because you're talking to the air again.

JILL: I heard a voice.

JACK: I know you did. That's why you're taking medication.

JILL: It's different this time. I actually heard a voice. I know I did. And it came from out there.

JACK: Out where?

JILL: The void.

JACK: The void?

JILL: *(indicates the audience)* Don't you see the void?

JACK: I prefer to avoid voids.

JILL: Look how dark it is out there. Pitch black. Anything could be out there. Anything!

JACK: Now you're scaring me.

LADY: Don't be scared. It's just me.

JILL: There it goes again!

JACK: *(trembling)* Okay, that was spooky.

JILL: So you heard it?

JACK: I heard it.

JILL: Who's out there?

LADY: I told you. It's just me. Gladys.

JACK: *(shrieks)* Gladys! Even its name is spooky!

JILL: Let's get the heck out of here.

JACK: Hurry! To the top of the hill!

(THEY run upstage as fast as THEY possibly can.)

GLADYS: You'll be sorry!

(JACK and JILL stop dead in their tracks. THEY turn around, very slowly.)

JACK: What did she say?

JILL: "You'll be sorry."

JACK: How does she know?

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GLADYS: Everybody knows.

JILL: (*creeps toward the audience*) Knows what?

GLADYS: This is a very old story.

JILL: What is?

GLADYS: The one you're stuck in.

JILL: I don't understand what you mean.

JACK: Come on, Jill. Let's go.

JILL: Maybe we should listen to her.

JACK: Nuh uh! I'm too scared!

JILL: Then go on without me. I want to know what Gladys has to say.

JACK: I can't.

JILL: Why not?

JACK: There's a void back here now. It's even darker than the one out there.

JILL: Since when are you afraid of the dark?

JACK: Since I started hearing voices in it.

GLADYS: I'm not a voice. I'm a person. I'm a nice person. I'm Gladys.

(*JACK shrieks.*)

JILL: What now, Jack?

JACK: I just peed a little.

JILL: (*to GLADYS*) What do you mean, we're stuck in a story?

GLADYS: This is a very old story. Everybody here knows how it's going to turn out.

JILL: Everybody where?

GLADYS: In the audience. We all know the ending.

(*Another AUDIENCE MEMBER chimes in.*)

WOMAN: I don't.

JACK: Oh my gosh! Another voice! They're multiplying!

GLADYS: Really?

WOMAN: I find this story fresh and original and extremely entertaining.

I, for one, have no idea how it's going to end. As a matter of fact, I'm perilously close to the edge of my seat.

GLADYS: You must be joking.

WOMAN: I'm completely absorbed in Jill's plight for water. And this subplot of Jack turning into a total wuss has taken me entirely by surprise.

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GLADYS: I admit that's an interesting twist, but it's hardly going to change the structure of the story. It's still going to end the same way.

WOMAN: Don't ruin it for me!

GLADYS: Do you honestly mean to say that you've never heard the old nursery rhyme about Jack and Jill?

WOMAN: What rhyme?

JILL: Yeah. I'd like to know, too.

JACK: Stop talking to them!

GLADYS: "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water."

JILL: That's exactly what I'm trying to do, but stupid here doesn't want to come with me.

GLADYS: I'm not finished yet.

JILL / WOMAN: There's more?

GLADYS: "Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after."

WOMAN: Just great. Go ahead and ruin it for the rest of us, why don't ya?

GLADYS: Surely you've heard this before.

WOMAN: No, I haven't. And how do you know my name?

GLADYS: I don't know your name.

WOMAN: You just called me by it.

GLADYS: I did?

WOMAN: "Shirley, you've heard this before." That's what you said. Don't deny it.

GLADYS: I'm not denying anything.

WOMAN: How did you know my name was Shirley?

GLADYS: I didn't.

SHIRLEY: What are you, a mind reader?

GLADYS: Surely you're joking.

SHIRLEY: Stop using my name. I don't even know you!

JACK: (*crying*) Now the voices in my head are arguing with each other!

JILL: Jack, get a hold of yourself!

JACK: And her name is Shirley. That's even scarier than Gladys!

SHIRLEY: You could have at least had the decency to tell us to plug our ears.

GLADYS: When?

SHIRLEY: Before you blabbed about the unexpected twists and turns in their story.

GLADYS: I thought for sure you knew it already.

SHIRLEY: (*mimics GLADYS*) "Spoiler alert! I'm going to give away the shocking conclusion now."

GLADYS: I apologize.

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SHIRLEY: Now that you've ruined everything, I might as well just go home, curl up in bed and finish reading the last chapter of *Murder on the Orient Express*.

GLADYS: Ah, that's a good one. They all did it.

SHIRLEY: There she goes again!

GLADYS: Everybody knows that.

SHIRLEY: I didn't! Why must you insist on spoiling things?

JILL: Excuse me, ladies, but might I interrupt for a second?

SHIRLEY: Not yet. I have a mole on my arm and I want to ask Miss Know-It-All if it's going to kill me.

GLADYS: Don't be ridiculous. I don't know things like that.

SHIRLEY: Why not? You seem to know everything else!

JILL: *(shouts)* Ladies!

(GLADYS and SHIRLEY stop bickering. Once it is silent, JACK starts to whimper loudly from upstage.)

Jack, is that you?

JACK: Tell them to stop.

JILL: I just did.

JACK: Then why can I still hear them?!

JILL: Get down here, you big boob.

(JACK slowly creeps downstage, contorting his body in all directions to keep an eye out for danger.)

JACK: Stay away! I've got my eye on you!

JILL: You can't have your eye on voices.

JACK: Then I've got my ear on them!

JILL: They're not going to hurt you. Isn't that right, Gladys?

GLADYS: Exactly.

JILL: In fact, why don't you come up here and join us?

GLADYS: Really?

JILL: I'd like to talk to you. *(SHE motions for GLADYS to come up on stage.)*

GLADYS: I'll be right up.

JACK: What do you think you're doing?

JILL: I want to know what she has to say.

JACK: Stop beckoning the voices!

JILL: "Beckon?" Since when do we "beckon" things?

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JACK: (*grabs her arms and holds them behind her back*) I mean it! I'll go up the hill! I'll fetch a pail of water! Whatever you want! Just don't penetrate the void!

JILL: Too late. She's already been beckoned, I reckon.

(*GLADYS has made her way up to the edge of the stage. SHE is an older woman, with sensible shoes and a large purse. SHE reaches up toward JACK.*)

GLADYS: Could you help me up, young man?

JACK: Get away from me!

GLADYS: I need a little assistance getting on the stage. My hip isn't quite what it used to be since they put all those pins in it.

JACK: You're an evil voice that has materialized in the form of an old woman. I don't believe that hip story for a second!

GLADYS: Believe it, dearie. I set off the alarm at Wal-Mart every time.

JILL: (*reaches down and grabs her hand*) I'll help you.

GLADYS: Thank you, sweetheart.

JACK: It's a trap! She's going to pull you into the void.

GLADYS: Oh, please. I can barely pull myself out of the bathtub.

(*SHE is now onstage.*)

JILL: See, Jack. She's perfectly harmless.

GLADYS: I was just trying to save you both from a heap of trouble.

JILL: Really?

GLADYS: I could have sat back with a box of Milk Duds and watched the two of you tumble down the hill. But that would have been rude.

JILL: That's what I want to talk to you about. How do you know what happens when we go up the hill?

GLADYS: I told you. You're a fictional character in a very old story.

JILL: That's not true. I'm real.

GLADYS: No you're not.

JILL: I'm not?

JACK: Told ya, Jill? A trap!

JILL: What do you mean, I'm not real?

SHIRLEY: Wait a second. Have I been duped? Is Gladys actually a part of this story?

GLADYS: (*toward the audience*) I assure you, I'm not a part of the story. I'm just interrupting it for a moment to prevent the main characters from calamity.

SHIRLEY: But I want to see calamity. That's why I paid for my seat.

JACK: And just who are you calling "characters?"

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GLADYS: You mean to say that you'd like to see the two of them split their heads open?

SHIRLEY: Not now that I know it's going to happen. But before you spoiled the surprise, I think it would be have been rather thrilling.

GLADYS: That's sick. I bet you also like a good car accident.

SHIRLEY: If there are severed limbs, you bet I do.

GLADYS: Why don't you come up here? I want to have a word with you.

SHIRLEY: You do?

GLADYS: Sure do, Shirley.

SHIRLEY: Gladly, Gladys.

(SHE gets up out of her seat and makes her way to the stage.)

JACK: Now look what you've done. The voices are beckoning each other!

JILL: Listen. All I wanted was a drink of water. I didn't mean to cause such an uproar. And I certainly didn't mean to become part of this weird thing you call a "story."

GLADYS: You've been stuck in this story for generations.

JILL: So you said. What, may I ask, is a story?

GLADYS: You mean you don't know?

JILL: This is the first I've heard of such a thing.

GLADYS: Surely Jack must have told you.

(SHIRLEY climbs on the stage. SHE is younger than GLADYS, but not by much.)

SHIRLEY: Told me what?

GLADYS: Not you. Jill.

JILL: How would Jack know what a story is?

JACK: That's right. How would I know?

GLADYS: Come on, Jack. Don't lie.

JACK: I'm not lying.

GLADYS: Really?

JACK: I have no idea what you're talking about.

GLADYS: I guess I know more than I think I do.

JILL: Know more about what? I'm confused.

JACK: Me too.

SHIRLEY: Yeah, Gladys. What's the deal? How do you know so much about Jack and Jill?

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GLADYS: I'm the kind of person who reads the last page of a book first.

I never see a play without looking at the script beforehand. And I love movie trailers because they give everything away.

SHIRLEY: Do you also digest your food before you eat it?

GLADYS: I just like to know what I'm in for.

SHIRLEY: But why?

GLADYS: Then I don't run the risk of being disappointed.

SHIRLEY: But you run the risk of never being surprised.

GLADYS: I don't like surprises.

SHIRLEY: I love them! Once my husband threw a surprise party for me.

I opened the door and everyone jumped out at me and shouted "surprise!" Once I recovered from the triple bypass, I was grateful to have such wonderful friends.

JILL: Will the two of you shut-up?!

GLADYS: Goodness, you are thirsty. *(SHE fishes in her purse and pulls out a bottle of water.)* Here, have some Evian.

JILL: What's Evian?

JACK: Don't take it, Jill. It's poison.

GLADYS: It's water.

JACK: Poison!

GLADYS: Water!

JILL: Which is it? Poison or water?

SHIRLEY: Drink it and find out.

JACK: You are sick, lady.

GLADYS: Fine. Don't drink it. I'm just trying to save you a trip up that menacing hill.

JILL: I don't care about water right now!

GLADYS: Sure you do. Every single day you and Jack go up that hill to fetch a pail of water. And every single day the two of you come tumbling down it.

JILL: I don't know what you're talking about. This is the first I've ever fetched a pail of water.

GLADYS: That's not true. You went yesterday. And the day before that. And the day before that. You really don't remember?

JACK: Stop listening to her. She's a kook!

JILL: I've never been up that hill before!

GLADYS: Yes you have.

JILL: No I haven't!

GLADYS: And so has Jack. "Jack fell down and broke his crown."
That's why he's wearing a bandage.

JACK: Stop the madness!

SHIRLEY: Okay, now it's getting good again.

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(LOU enters. HE's a grouchy man with a thick Brooklyn accent. HE has a big pot belly and a cigar dangling from his lips. Despite his appearance, HE skips everywhere HE goes. HE skips over to JILL.)

LOU: Yo, Jill. Are these ladies bothering you?

SHIRLEY: Who's this?

GLADYS: Lou, of course.

SHIRLEY: Lou who?

LOU: *(to GLADYS)* Hey, toots. Have we met?

GLADYS: No. But I know your story.

LOU: You do?

SHIRLEY: She knows everything, apparently.

LOU: That's right. I'm Lou. *(HE skips in a circle.)* See. I'm Lou and I'm skipping to myself.

JILL: Hey, Lou.

LOU: Yeah, girlie?

JILL: Do you know what happens when Jack and I go up that hill?

LOU: Sure do, babe. Splat!

GLADYS: *(to SHIRLEY)* See! I told you everyone knows.

SHIRLEY: What do you want, a medal?

JILL: You mean we've gone up that hill before?

LOU: Every day.

JILL: Then why don't we remember?

LOU: You done whacked your head real good.

GLADYS: Head trauma! That's it!

LOU: Explains why she don't remember none and why he's so stupid.

JILL: If you know what happens after we fetch the pail of water, why didn't you warn us?

LOU: I don't give a rat's patootie, that's why.

JILL: Well, I don't want to do the same thing day in and day out. Even if I can't remember it. That's sad.

JACK: And pathetic.

SHIRLEY: And boring. Seriously, this story has gone entirely off the rails.

GLADYS: That's why I stopped it. It's high time we inject new life into it.

SHIRLEY: But why? You said yourself you like to know how things end.

GLADYS: I like to know how they end, yes. But that doesn't mean I like the endings.

SHIRLEY: Really?

GLADYS: I've always fancied myself quite the writer. So let's rescue this story, along with some others that are in dire need of better twists.

SHIRLEY: What do you propose?

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GLADYS: There's one story that I think Jack would be perfect for. He could give it just the sort of spice it needs to become more interesting.

JACK: Really? What's the story?

GLADYS: It's called *Susan and the Beanstalk*.

JILL: Who's Susan?

JACK: And what's a beanstalk?

GLADYS: Gee whiz, let me finish. For fictional characters, you have no patience whatsoever.

JILL: Sorry.

LOU: Hey, I know Susan.

SHIRLEY: You do?

LOU: She's a total drag.

GLADYS: You got that right.

JILL: How so?

GLADYS: A magic beanstalk grows outside her window.

SHIRLEY: Stop! I haven't seen that story yet.

GLADYS: You haven't missed much. Spoiler alert. And all she does is eat the beans.

SHIRLEY: That's the whole story?

LOU: It's a big snooze.

JILL: How would Jack make it more interesting?

GLADYS: For starters, he could climb the beanstalk.

JILL: Yeah right. He can barely climb a ladder without peeing his pants.

JACK: Why would I want to climb a beanstalk anyway?

GLADYS: For adventure. Anything could be way up there!

JACK: But I don't like adventure. And I sure as heck don't like "way up there."

JILL: Come on, Jack. She's just trying to help.

LOU: So grow a pair, why don't ya?

GLADYS: *Jack and the Beanstalk*. It has a better ring to it already.

JILL: But what about Susan?

GLADYS: Who cares about Susan? She's boring.

JILL: But so am I. Are you just going to throw me out of my own story?

GLADYS: Fine. She can help Mary find her little lamb or something.

JACK: I can't even climb a hill without breaking my neck. What makes you think I could handle a beanstalk?

GLADYS: Okay, let's try a different story. Have you ever heard of Brenda Spratt?

LOU: I forgot about Brenda. How is the old fatty?

GLADYS: Dead.

LOU: Dead?

GLADYS: Heart attack.

SHIRLEY: Who's Brenda?

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GLADYS: Spoiler alert. Her husband, Bill Spratt, could eat no fat.

LOU: And Brenda could eat no lean.

GLADYS: So she pigged out on cheeseburgers until her aorta blew.

SHIRLEY: That's horrible.

GLADYS: Horribly dull. I caught a matinee performance of her story once and all she did was eat Cheetos for three hours.

SHIRLEY: What was Bill doing?

GLADYS: Nothing. She ate him.

JILL: No!

GLADYS: Before the curtain even came up.

JACK: So where do I come into all this?

GLADYS: "Jack Spratt could eat no fat. His wife could eat no lean."

Take it from there and see what happens. Anything is possible if you have an imagination.

SHIRLEY: But he's fictional.

GLADYS: So?

SHIRLEY: So he has no imagination. Imagination is imposed upon him. Not the other way around.

JILL: Besides, I don't want him running around with another woman. He's my boyfriend.

JACK: Wait. I'm your what?

JILL: Boyfriend.

JACK: I'm not your boyfriend. I'm your brother.

SHIRLEY: Twist!

JILL: Do you honestly think I'd want to fetch a pail of water with my brother? I may be boring, but I'm not that boring.

JACK: You're telling me that you're not my sister?

JILL: That's right.

JACK: So this whole time I could have been putting the moves on you?

JILL: Yep.

JACK: What a rip-off!

LOU: Tough break, man.

JILL: So that explains why you never tried to kiss me. For a while there, I thought you played for the other team.

GLADYS: Okay, forget about Jack Spratt. You could replace Sharon Be Nimble.

SHIRLEY: Who's Sharon?

GLADYS: Spoiler alert. She jumps over candlesticks.

SHIRLEY: And?

LOU: That's it, babe.

GLADYS: You could boot Connie Horner from her story, but I'm afraid that one is beyond saving.

JILL: Connie Horner?

GLADYS: Spoiler alert. She sits in a corner.

SHIRLEY: That's all?

GLADYS: She sticks her thumb in a pie and pulls out plum. Where's the conflict? Oh, that's right. There isn't any. That's why I almost didn't mention it. Even changing it to Jack Horner wouldn't improve things.

JILL: Hold on just a bloody second.

GLADYS: Yes, dear?

JILL: How come you keep cooking up all these stories for Jack to be in? I'm a person too, remember?!

GLADYS: No you're not. You're a character.

JILL: But I'd like to know what adventure tastes like!

GLADYS: Face it, Jill. Nobody wants to see you star in your own story.

JILL: Why not?

GLADYS: Because you're a female.

JILL: So?

GLADYS: So history shows that male protagonists are far more interesting than female ones.

JILL: That's not true!

GLADYS: Pish. Why do you think they sent you up the hill with Jack?

JILL: Because the pail of water is heavy and I need his help carrying it back.

GLADYS: Nonsense. The audience would fall asleep if Jack wasn't there to give the story a masculine edge. Isn't that right, Shirley?

SHIRLEY: I hate to admit it, but he does make the story worth watching.

GLADYS: See.

JILL: But why?

SHIRLEY: Have you checked out his pipes? Hoo doggies!

JACK: (*flexes his muscles*) I have been working out.

SHIRLEY: I can tell.

JILL: If I had known when I beckoned you from the void that you would turn out to be so sexist, I never would have done it. Go back to your seat at once!

LOU: Relax, Jack.

JACK: What did I do?

LOU: I was talkin' to Jill.

JACK: Then why did you say, "Relax, Jack?"

LOU: It's a saying.

JACK: That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard!

LOU: Relax, Jack.

JACK: Yeah, Jill. Relax.

JILL: (*to GLADYS*) Is that why you want to replace all the females in these other stories with Jack? Because a man makes them more exciting?

GLADYS: Of course. Jack and the Beanstalk. Jack Spratt. Jack Be Nimble. These stories would sell out in minutes. Even Jack Horner

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would attract a larger audience than Susan and Brenda and Sharon and Connie combined.

JILL: You're nuts, lady!

GLADYS: No I'm not. Old Yeller was supposed to be a girl, but they realized it made a much stronger ending if they had to shoot a male dog.

SHIRLEY: They shoot Old Yeller?

GLADYS: Spoiler alert.

SHIRLEY: It's a bit late for that!

JILL: There are plenty of great stories with female protagonists.

GLADYS: Name one.

JILL: *Snow White*.

GLADYS: And the seven dwarves. Try again.

JILL: *Little Women*.

GLADYS: Followed by the sequels *Good Wives*, *Little Men*, and *Jo's Boys*.

JILL: *Thelma and Louise*.

SHIRLEY: Brad Pitt!

JILL: Come on, Jack. Help me out here.

JACK: I would, but I think she may be right.

GLADYS: Of course I am. All the great writers knew that women were insufficient protagonists. Like Shakespeare, for instance. He wrote many plays with manly titles like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Not *Cindy* and *Myrtle* and *Pam*.

JILL: So I'm just supposed to go up and down the same stupid hill forever and ever?

GLADYS: I'm afraid so.

JILL: Meanwhile, Jack gets to have all the fun? Sitting in corners and jumping over candlesticks and climbing beanstalks and eating with other women?

GLADYS: Just one other woman.

SHIRLEY: And she'd be his wife, so there'd be no hanky panky going on.

JILL: I can't believe I'm hearing this. And from another woman, no less.

LOU: Believe it, sugar pie. The original Lou was a woman until I stepped in. And it's a good thing, too. Her skipping had nothing on my skipping.

SHIRLEY: Is that so?

(LOU imitates the "original Lou," singing in a high pitched voice and skipping lightly.)

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LOU: "Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou. Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou. Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou. Skip to my Lou, my darling." It was pathetic.

SHIRLEY: Dreadful!

JILL: Come on, Jack. You don't buy all this garbage, do you?

JACK: I hate to say it, but she makes an interesting case.

JILL: A head case, maybe.

GLADYS: If memory serves, you're the head case.

JILL: What's that supposed to mean?

GLADYS: You're taking medication, right?

JILL: How do you know I'm taking medication?

SHIRLEY: Jack mentioned it early in the exposition.

JILL: That's none of your business.

GLADYS: It wasn't until Jack introduced it into the story. Exposition is fair game for audiences.

JILL: (*smacks JACK in the head*) Way to go, Jack!

JACK: Hey, Jill. What's going on?

JILL: I just want to fetch a pail of water. That's all!

GLADYS: If that's the way you want it, fine. Go on, dear.

JILL: Thank you. Come on, Jack.

JACK: No way. I want to meet up with these other chicks.

JILL: What other chicks?

JACK: Susan and Brenda and Sharon and Connie. Maybe they won't play so hard to get.

LOU: I'll go with you.

JACK: Sweet.

LOU: But first, let me get my jump rope.

(*THEY high five.*)

JILL: Pigs! The both of you! Very well. I'll just go up the hill and fetch a pail of water all by myself.

SHIRLEY: You can't go now.

GLADYS: Why not?

SHIRLEY: That would be an unsatisfactory ending.

JILL: No it wouldn't. If it's surprises you want, I've got plenty of them! I'll prove to you that a female protagonist is just as interesting as a male protagonist. I'll climb that hill! I'll fetch that pail of water! Only this time I won't tumble down the hill. I'll come marching proudly down it!

SHIRLEY: Then what?

JILL: What do you mean, "then what?" That's it. It would be a story about one female taking charge of her own destiny! Women's liberation! Girl power!

SHIRLEY: Girl power? I'm half asleep already.

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GLADYS: See. What did I tell you?

JILL: I thought you didn't want to know how stories ended anyway.

SHIRLEY: Only exciting ones. Boring stories I'd rather skip all together.

JILL: Spoiler alert! Real life is boring. This story will be exciting!

GLADYS: Then prove it.

JILL: You asked for it!

LOU: Uh oh.

JILL: See you later, suckers!

(SHE marches proudly up the hill and off the stage.)

LOU: This ain't good. Ain't good at all.

SHIRLEY: Why not?

LOU: This ain't the first time she's challenged the void.

SHIRLEY: Really?

LOU: It was a long time ago. Some playwright named William from Tennessee or something claimed that her character was unnecessary. When he threatened to cut her out of the story, she went ballistic and vowed to prove she was vital to the plot.

GLADYS: What happened?

LOU: Same old, same old. She and Jack went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.

JACK: Why don't I remember any of this?

LOU: Duh. You fell down and broke your crown.

GLADYS: And Jill came tumbling after?

LOU: No. She disappeared.

SHIRLEY: She did?!

LOU: For days and days. It wasn't long before the whole town was parched. They sent Jack up the hill by himself, but he forgot where he was going and filled the pail with sea shells.

SHIRLEY: Sea shells?

LOU: Sea shells she sells by the sea shore.

SHIRLEY: *(indicates JACK)* He sells sea shells by the sea shore?

GLADYS: No. She sells sea shells by the sea shore.

SHIRLEY: She sells sea shells by the sea shore?

LOU: *(nods)* She sells sea shells by the sea shore.

SHIRLEY: Who's "she?"

GLADYS / LOU: Margaret.

SHIRLEY: Who cares?! What happened to Jill?

LOU: She finally turned up on a desert island. Thank goodness those three men came along in their tub.

SHIRLEY: So that's why she's on medication?

LOU: Darn tootin'. It takes away her imagination.

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SHIRLEY: That must have been awful having a fictional character with an imagination of her own.

LOU: It was. Thank goodness for Jill's pills. The town has been sufficiently quenched ever since. But now it looks like she's stopped taking them.

JACK: Then we better stop her!

GLADYS: Why bother? She's boring. Wouldn't you rather meet those "chicks" I was telling you about?

JACK: I never realized how much we needed her. I'm already feeling thirsty!

LOU: Me too. It's like I got a wad of cotton in my mouth.

JACK: Quick, then! To the top of the hill!

(THEY rush up the hill, LOU skipping the entire way with purpose.)

LOU: Lou, Lou, skip to the hill. Lou, Lou, skip to the hill. Lou, Lou, skip to the hill.

JACK / LOU: Skip to the hill, my darling!

(THEY exit.)

SHIRLEY: Now what?

GLADYS: I have no idea. I've never been in this predicament before.

SHIRLEY: Really?

GLADYS: Fictional characters never listen to me. I usually get the brush off and end up going back to my seat. Then I have to watch them repeat the same mistakes over and over.

SHIRLEY: Do you think Jill will come tumbling back down the hill?

GLADYS: Probably. But without Jack, I just don't care.

SHIRLEY: Me neither. That Jill is a drag.

GLADYS: Come on, Shirley. Let's go.

(THEY walk to the foot of the stage. But instead of climbing off, THEY both bump into an imaginary wall.)

SHIRLEY: Ow!

GLADYS: Ow!

(THEY push their hands against the imaginary wall.)

SHIRLEY: Hey, what's the meaning of this?

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GLADYS: Why can't I get off the stage?

SHIRLEY: There's a wall. I can't see it, but there's a wall!

GLADYS: What's going on?

(A voice comes from somewhere in the audience. It's JILL.)

JILL: Spoiler alert. You're stuck.

SHIRLEY: I heard a voice. Did you hear a voice?

GLADYS: I heard a voice!

SHIRLEY: Where did it come from?

GLADYS: The audience, I think.

SHIRLEY: *(looks toward the audience)* All I see is a void.

GLADYS: Me too.

SHIRLEY: *(scared)* It's awfully dark out there!

JILL: It sure is.

GLADYS: Who's out there?

JILL: It's me.

SHIRLEY: Me who?

JILL: Jill.

GLADYS: What are you doing out there?

JILL: The question is, what are you doing up there?

GLADYS: You're in my seat!

JILL: You're on my hill!

(SHIRLEY squeals.)

GLADYS: What's wrong?

SHIRLEY: I just peed a little.

GLADYS: Look what you've done, Jill!

JILL: I told you I had a surprise or two up my sleeve.

GLADYS: I don't like this one bit.

SHIRLEY: *(starts to cry)* I'm scared! Remove this fourth wall at one and let me back into the void!

JILL: I thought you liked surprises.

SHIRLEY: Not these kind of surprises!

JILL: What's the difference? A surprise is a surprise is a surprise.

GLADYS: Why are you doing this?

JILL: I'm free. You're stuck.

GLADYS: Stuck?

JILL: In the story.

GLADYS: In what story?

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JILL: Your story.

GLADYS: What are we supposed to do?

JILL: Figure it out.

GLADYS: I don't want to figure it out! I want to be let out!

JILL: That would be far too predictable.

GLADYS: Let us out!

JILL: Why should I?

GLADYS: If you don't, the audience will turn on you!

JILL: No they won't.

GLADYS: Why not?

JILL: You're the one who said audiences don't care about female protagonists.

(SHE laughs.)

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