

“Arsenic and Old Lace”

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Character Descriptions: Arsenic and Old Lace

Abby and Martha Brewster: Darling elderly ladies whose main recreation is poisoning elderly men. They are very close sisters aunts to Teddy, Jonathan, and Mortimer. No one would ever suspect such older ladies who possess a Victorian charm would be serial killers.

Mortimer Brewster: The main character of the play, he is nephew of Abby and Martha, Mortimer is a drama critic who is engaged to Elaine. He is a nice man who cares for his dear aunts and is extremely surprised to discover their “hobby” of disposing of old men by having Teddy bury them in the basement. Mortimer is the only Brewster who is relatively sane.

Elaine Harper: An attractive woman and Mortimer’s fiancée, Elaine is the daughter of the Rev. Dr. Harper. She is surprisingly wise in the ways of the world for a minister's daughter.

The Rev. Dr. Harper: Kindly and conservative Minister and father of Elaine, Mortimer’s bride-to-be.

Teddy Brewster: Nephew of Abby and Martha Brewster, Teddy is a mentally ill man who thinks that he is Theodore Roosevelt, working on the Panama Canal.

Jonathan Brewster: Nephew of Abby and Martha Brewster, he is a wanted murderer who is running from the law. Jonathan is a psychopath who has had botched plastic surgery and now looks like Boris Karloff.

Dr. Einstein: A failed plastic surgeon and alcoholic, Dr. Einstein has changed Jonathan's face three times, successful only in deforming his appearance. Comic, he speaks with a heavy German accent.

Officer O'Hara: A police officer, O'Hara is a would-be playwright who pesters Mortimer to read his play.

Officer Brophy and Officer Klein: Police officers who regularly visit the Brewster home for tea and cookies; of course, they have NO IDEA that these kindly old ladies are actually homicidal maniacs!

Lieutenant Rooney: A tough and dominating police officer.

Mr. Witherspoon: The superintendent of Happy Dale Sanitarium, an institution for the mentally ill.

ABBY, MARTHA , HARPER, BROPHY & KLEIN

It is late afternoon in September. As the curtain rises, ABBY BREWSTER, a plump little darling in her late sixties. At her left, in the comfortable armchair, is the REV. DR. HARPER, the elderly rector of the nearby church.

ABBY: My sister Martha and I have been talking all week about your sermon last Sunday. It's really wonderful, Dr. Harper—in only two short years you've taken on the spirit of Brooklyn.

DR. HARPER: That's very gratifying, Miss Brewster.

ABBY: You see, living here next to the church all our lives, we've seen so many ministers come and go. The spirit of Brooklyn, we always say, is friendliness—and your sermons are not so much sermons as friendly talks. Have another cup of tea, Dr. Harper?

DR. HARPER: No, thank you. I must admit, Miss Abby, that unhappiness and violence seem far removed from these surroundings.

ABBY: It is peaceful here, isn't it?

DR. HARPER: Yes—peaceful. The virtues of another day—they're all here in this house. The gentle virtues that went out with candlelight and good manners and low taxes.

ABBY: *[Glancing about her contentedly]* It's one of the oldest houses in Brooklyn. It's just as it was when Grandfather Brewster built and furnished it—except for the electricity. We use it as little as possible—it was Mortimer who persuaded us to put it in.

DR. HARPER: *[Dryly]* Yes, I can understand that. Your nephew Mortimer seems to live only for bright lights.

ABBY: The poor boy has to work so late. I understand he's taking Elaine to the theater again tonight.

START

ABBY: We're so happy Mortimer is taking Elaine to the theater with him.

DR. HARPER: Well, it's a new experience for me to wait up until three o'clock in the morning for my daughter to be brought home.

ABBY: Oh, Dr. Harper, I hope you don't disapprove of Mortimer.

DR. HARPER: Well ...

ABBY: We'd feel so guilty if you did—Sister Martha and I. I mean since it was here in our home that your daughter met Mortimer.

DR. HARPER: I must also admit that I have watched the growing intimacy between him and my daughter with some trepidation. For the reason, Miss Abby, of your nephew's unfortunate connection with the theater.

ABBY: The theater! Oh, no, Dr. Harper! Mortimer writes for a New York newspaper.

DR. HARPER: I know, I know. But a dramatic critic is constantly exposed to the theater, and I don't doubt that some of them develop an interest in it.

ABBY: Well, not Mortimer! You need have no fear at all. Why, Mortimer hates the theater.

DR. HARPER: Really?

ABBY: Oh, yes! He writes awful things about the theater. But you can't blame him, poor boy. He was so happy writing about real estate, which he really knew something about, and then they just made him take this terrible night position.

DR. HARPER: My! My!

ABBY: But as he says, the theater can't last much longer and in the meantime, it's a living. [*Complacently*] I think if we give the theater another year or two. . . . [*There is a knock. She goes to door and opens it*] Come right in, Mr. Brophy. [*Two uniformed policemen enter.* BROPHY *and* KLEIN]

BROPHY: [*To* ABBY] We've come for the toys for the Christmas Fund.

ABBY: Oh, yes! How is Mrs. Brophy today? Mrs. Brophy has been quite ill, Dr. Harper.

BROPHY: Oh, she's better now. A little weak still. . . .

ABBY: I'm going to get you some beef broth to take to her.

BROPHY: Don't bother, Miss Abby! You've done so much for her already.

ABBY: We made it this morning. Sister Martha is taking some to poor Mr. Benitzky right now. I won't be a minute. Sit down and be comfortable, all of you *[She goes into the kitchen]*

BROPHY: She shouldn't go to all that trouble.

DR. HARPER: When I moved next door, my wife wasn't well. And when she died—and for months before—well, if I know what pure kindness and absolute generosity are, it's because I've known the Brewster sisters.

MARTHA BREWSTER *enters.*

MARTHA *is also a plump, sweet, elderly woman with Victorian charm. She is dressed in the old-fashioned manner of* ABBY,

MARTHA: *[Closing the door]* Well, isn't this nice?

BROPHY: Good afternoon, Miss Brewster.

MARTHA: How do you do, Mr. Brophy?

DR. HARPER: Good afternoon, Miss Brewster.

MARTHA: How do you do, Dr. Harper, Mr. Klein?

KLEIN: How do you do, Miss Brewster? We dropped in to get the Christmas toys.

MARTHA: Oh, yes! They're all packed. I hope Mrs. Brophy's better?

BROPHY: She's doing fine, ma'am. Your sister's getting some soup for me to take to her.

MARTHA: Oh, yes, we made it this morning. I just took some to a poor man who broke ever so many bones.

ABBY: Oh, you're back, Martha. How was Mr. Benitzky?

MARTHA: It's pretty serious, I'm afraid. The doctor was there. He's going to amputate in the morning.

ABBY: *[Hopefully]* Can we be present?

MARTHA: No. I asked him, but he says it's against the rules of the hospital.

ABBY: Here's the broth, Mr. Brophy. *[She hands the pail to* BROPHY]

BROPHY: Thank you, Miss Brewster.

ABBY: Be sure it's good and hot.

KLEIN: *[hooking into the box of toys]* This is fine—it'll make a lot of kids happy. We'll run along now, ma'am, and thank you very much.

ABBY: *[Closing door]* Not at all. Good-by.

MARTHA: Good-by.

DR. HARPER: I must be getting home. **But...** Have you ever tried to persuade your Teddy that he wasn't Teddy Roosevelt?

ABBY: Oh, no!

MARTHA: He's so happy being Teddy Roosevelt.

ABBY: And we'd so much rather he'd be Mr. Roosevelt than nobody.

DR. HARPER: Well, if he's happy **Ah...** I'd better be running along. *[He leaves]*

ABBY: *[At door; calling after him]* Please don't think harshly of Mortimer because he's a dramatic critic. **Somebody** has to do those things.

ELAINE & MORTIMER

MORTIMER: Hello, Elaine. Were you going somewhere?

ELAINE: I was just going over to tell Father not to wait up for me.

MORTIMER: I didn't know that was still being done, even in Brooklyn.

ELAINE: [*moves to MORTIMER ready to be kissed*] Well, can't you take a hint?

MORTIMER: No. That was pretty obvious, I should say.

ELAINE: Yes—that's exactly what you'd say! [*She walks away, ruffled*]

MORTIMER: [*Not noticing the ruffle*] Where do you want to go for dinner?

ELAINE: I don't care. I'm not very hungry.

MORTIMER: Well, I just had breakfast. Suppose we wait until after the show?

ELAINE: But that'll make it pretty late, won't it?

MORTIMER: Not with the little stinker we're seeing tonight. From what I've heard about it, we'll be at Polly's by ten o'clock.

ELAINE: You ought to be fair to these plays.

MORTIMER: Are these plays fair to me?

ELAINE: I've never seen you walk out on a musical.

START

MORTIMER: That musical isn't opening tonight.

ELAINE: [*Disappointed*] No? I was hoping it was a musical. After a serious play we join the proletariat in the subway and I listen to a lecture on the drama. After a musical you bring me home in a taxi and you make a few passes.

MORTIMER: Now wait a minute, darling, that's a very inaccurate piece of reporting.

ELAINE: Oh, I will admit that after the Behrman play you told me I had authentic beauty—and that's a hell of a thing to say to any girl. It wasn't until after our first musical you told me I had nice legs. And I have, too.

MORTIMER: For a minister's daughter you know a lot about life. Where did you learn it?

ELAINE: [*Casually*] In the choir loft.

MORTIMER: I'll explain that to you sometime, darling—the close connection between eroticism and religion.

ELAINE: Religion never gets as high as the choir loft. Which reminds me, I'd better tell Father please not to wait up for me tonight.

MORTIMER: [*Almost to himself*] I've never been able to rationalize it.

ELAINE: What?

MORTIMER: My falling in love with a girl who lives in Brooklyn.

ELAINE: Falling in love? You're not stooping to the articulate, are you?

MORTIMER: [*Ignoring this*] The only way I can regain my self-respect is to keep you in New York.

ELAINE: Did you say *keep*?

MORTIMER: No, I've come to the conclusion you're holding out for the legalities.

ELAINE: I can afford to be a good girl for quite a few years yet.

MORTIMER: And I can't wait that long. Where could we be married in a hurry—say tonight?

ELAINE: I'm afraid Father will insist on officiating.

MORTIMER: Oh, God! I'll bet your father could make even the marriage service sound pedestrian.

ELAINE: Are you, by any chance, writing a review of it?

MORTIMER: Forgive me, darling. It's an occupational disease. [*She smiles and they forget themselves for a moment in a sentimental embrace and kiss.*]
I may give that show tonight a good notice!

ELAINE: Now, darling, don't pretend you love me *that* much.

MORTIMER: [*with polite lechery*] Be sure to tell your father not to wait up tonight.

ELAINE: [*Aware that she can't trust either of them*] I think tonight I'd better tell him to wait up. Darling, I'm going to run over to speak to Father. Before I go out with you, he likes to pray over me a little. I'll be right back—I'll cut through the cemetery.

MORTIMER: Well, if the prayer isn't too long, I'll have time to lead you beside distilled waters.

[ELAINE *laughs and exits*]

STOP
START

ELAINE: I'm sorry I took so long, dear. [*As she approaches he looks in her direction and as her presence dawns on him he speaks*]

MORTIMER: Oh, it's you!

ELAINE: Don't be cross, darling! Father saw I was excited—so I told him about, us and that made it hard for me to get away. [*She goes to him and puts her arm around him*] But, listen, darling—he's not going to wait up for me tonight.

MORTIMER: Elaine—you run on back home and I'll call you up tomorrow.

ELAINE: Tomorrow!

MORTIMER: [*Irritated*] You know I always call you up every day or two.

ELAINE: But we're going to the theater tonight.

MORTIMER: No—no, we're not.

ELAINE: Well, why not?

MORTIMER: Elaine, something's come up.

ELAINE: What, darling? Mortimer—you've lost your job!

MORTIMER: No—no! I haven't lost my job! I'm just not covering the play tonight. Now, you run along home, Elaine.

ELAINE: But I've got to know what's happened. Certainly, you can tell me.

MORTIMER: No, I can't, dear.

ELAINE: But if we're going to be married. . . .

MORTIMER: Married?

ELAINE: Have you forgotten that not fifteen minutes ago you proposed to me?

MORTIMER: I did? Oh—yes! Well, as far as I know, that's still on. But you go home now. I've got to do something.

ELAINE: Listen, you can't propose to me one minute and throw me out of the house the next.

MORTIMER: I'm not throwing you out of the house, darling. Will you get out of here?

ELAINE: No, I won't get out of here. Not until I've had some kind of explanation!

[She stalks across the room and almost sits on the window seat. He intercepts her]

MORTIMER: Elaine, you're a sweet girl and I love you. But I have something on my mind now and I want you to go home and wait until I call you.

STOP

ELAINE: Don't try to be masterful!

MORTIMER: *[Annoyed]* When we're married and I have problems to face I hope you'll be less tedious and uninspired!

ELAINE: And when we're married, *if* we're married, I hope I find you adequate! *[She exits]*

MORTIMER: Elaine! *[He runs out on the porch after her, calling]* Elaine! *[He rushes back in, slams the door, and runs across to call to her out of the window.]*

MORTIMER, ABBY & MARTHA

MORTIMER: [*He looks about the room*] By the way, I left a large envelope around here last week. It's one of the chapters of my book on Thoreau. Have you seen it? [MORTIMER *starts searching the room, cupboards, desk, etc.*]

MARTHA: What, Mortimer?

MORTIMER: My chapter on Thoreau!

MORTIMER: Now, where could I have put that . . . ?

ABBY: I do hope the play tonight will be something you can enjoy for once. It may be something romantic. What's the name of it?

MORTIMER: [HE *is still searching for the envelope*] Murder Will Out!

ABBY: Oh, dear!

MORTIMER: When the curtain goes up the first thing you see will be a dead body. . . . [*He lifts the window seat and sees one. Not believing it, he drops the window seat again and turns away. He looks back quickly toward the window seat, opens it again, stares in. He goes slightly mad for a moment. He drops the window seat again and sits on it, as if to hold it down,*

When MORTIMER [*in a strained voice*] Aunt Abby!

ABBY: Yes, dear?

MORTIMER: You were going to make plans for Teddy to go to that sanitarium—Happy Dale.

ABBY: Yes, dear, it's all arranged. Dr. Harper was here today and brought the things for Teddy to sign. Here they are.

MORTIMER: He's got to sign them right away!

ABBY: That's what Dr. Harper thinks. . . . Then there won't be any legal difficulties after we pass on.

MORTIMER: [*Glancing through the papers*] He's got to sign them this minute! He's down in the cellar—get him up here right away.

MARTHA: There's no such hurry as that.

ABBY: When he starts working on the Canal you can't get his mind on anything else.

MORTIMER: Teddy's got to go to Happy Dale *now—tonight!*

MARTHA: Oh, no, Mortimer! That's not until after we're gone!

MORTIMER: : Right away, I tell you!—right away!

ABBY: Mortimer, how can you say such a thing? Why, as long as we live we won't be separated from Teddy.

START

MORTIMER: [*Trying to be calm*] Listen, darlings, I'm frightfully sorry, but I've got some shocking news for you. Now, we've all got to try to keep our heads. You know, we've sort of humored Teddy because we thought he was harmless.

MARTHA: Why, he *is* harmless!

MORTIMER: He *was* harmless. That's why he has to go to Happy Dale—why he has to be confined.

ABBY: Mortimer, why have you suddenly turned against Teddy?—your own brother!

MORTIMER: You've got to know sometime. It might as well be now. Teddy's killed a man!

MARTHA: Nonsense, dear.

MORTIMER: [*points to the window seat*] There's a body in the window seat!

ABBY: [*Not at all surprised*] Yes, dear, we know.

MORTIMER: You *know?*

MARTHA: Of course, dear, but it has nothing to do with Teddy.

ABBY: Now, Mortimer, just forget about it—forget you ever saw the gentleman.

MORTIMER: *Forget?*

ABBY: We never dreamed you'd peek.

MORTIMER: But who is he?

ABBY: His name's Hoskins—Adam Hoskins. That's really all I know about him—except that he's a Methodist.

MORTIMER: That's all you know about him? "Well, what's he doing here? What happened to him?"

MARTHA: He died.

MORTIMER: Aunt Martha, men don't just get into window seats and die.

ABBY: No, he died first.

MORTIMER: But how?

ABBY: Mortimer, don't be so inquisitive! The gentleman died because he drank some wine with poison in it.

MORTIMER: How did the poison get in the wine?

MARTHA: We put it in wine because it's less noticeable. When it's in tea it has a distinct odor.

MORTIMER: *You* put it in the wine?

ABBY: Yes. And I put Mr. Hoskins in the window seat because Dr. Harper was coming.

MORTIMER: So you knew what you'd done! You didn't want Dr. Harper to see the body!

ABBY: Not at tea! That wouldn't have been very nice! All right, you know about it and you can forget about it. I do think we have the right to our own little secrets.

MARTHA: MORTIMER *stands looking at his aunts, stunned*, MARTHA *turns to* ABBY] Oh, Abby, while I was out I dropped in on Mrs. Schultz. She's much better, but she would like to have us take Junior to the movies again.

ABBY: We must do that tomorrow or the next day.

STOP

MARTHA: This time we'll go where *we* want to go, Junior's not going to drag me into another one of those scary pictures.

ABBY: They shouldn't be allowed to make pictures just to frighten People.

[They exit into the kitchen. MORTIMER, dazed, looks around the room, goes to the telephone and dials a number]

MORTIMER: *[Into telephone]* City desk. . . . Hello, Al. Do you know who this *is?* *[Pause]* That's right. Say, Al, when I left the office, I told you where I was going, remember? *[Pause]* Well, where did I say? *[Pause]* Uh-huh. Well, it would take me about half an hour to get to Brooklyn. What time have you got? *[He looks at his watch]* That's right. I must be here. *[He hangs up, then suddenly leaps out of the chair toward the kitchen]* Aunt Martha! Aunt Abby! Come in here! *[The two sisters bustle in]* What are we going to do? What are we going to do?

MARTHA: What are we going to do about what, dear?

MORTIMER: There's a body in there!

ABBY: Yes, Mr. Hoskins'.

START

MORTIMER: Good God, I can't turn you over to the police. But what am I going to do?

MARTHA: Well, for one thing, stop being so excited.

ABBY: And for pity's sake stop worrying. We told you to forget about it.

MORTIMER: *Forget about it?* My dear Aunt Abby, can't I make you realize that something has to be done!

ABBY: *[A little sharply]* Mortimer, you behave yourself! You're too old to be flying off the handle like this!

MORTIMER: But Mr. Hotchkiss . . .

ABBY: Hoskins, dear.

MORTIMER: Well, whatever his name is, you can't leave him there!

MARTHA: We don't intend to, dear.

ABBY: Teddy's down in the cellar now digging a lock.

MORTIMER: You mean you're going to bury Mr. Hotchkiss in the cellar?

MARTHA: Why, of course, dear. That's what we did with the others.

MORTIMER: Aunt Martha, you can't bury Mr. . . . *Others?*

ABBY: The other gentlemen.

MORTIMER: When you say others—do you mean—others? More than one others?

MARTHA: Oh, yes, dear. Let me see, this is eleven, isn't it, Abby?

ABBY: No, dear, this makes twelve.

[MORTIMER *backs up and sinks stunned on the stool beside the desk*]

MARTHA: Oh, I think you're wrong, Abby. This is only eleven, you really shouldn't count the first one.

ABBY: Oh, I was counting the first one. So that makes it twelve.

[*The telephone rings.* MORTIMER, *picks up the receiver*]

MORTIMER: Hello! Hello. Oh, hello, Al. My, it's good to hear your voice! Oh, no, Al, I'm as sober as a lark. No, I just called you because I was feeling a little Pirandello. Pirandel. . . . You wouldn't know, Al. Look, I'm glad you called. Get hold of George right away. He's got to review the play tonight. I can't make it. No, you're wrong, Al. I'll tell you about it tomorrow. . . . No—Well, George has got to cover the play tonight! This is my department and I'm running it! You get hold of George! [*He hangs up and sits for a moment, trying to collect himself*] Now, let's see, where were we? [*suddenly*] *Twelve!*

STOP

MARTHA: Yes, Abby says we should count the first one and that makes twelve.

ABBY: Yes, Mortimer. Oh dear, **it's getting late**, I'll have to get things started in the kitchen. [*To* MORTIMER] I wish you could stay to dinner, dear.

MORTIMER: I couldn't eat a thing.

MORTIMER *stands dazed and then summons his courage and goes to the window seat, opens it and peeks in, then closes it and backs away.*

TEDDY, ABBY, MARTHA, MORTIMER, JONATHAN, EINSTEIN

TEDDY, *in a frock coat, and wearing pince-nez attached to a black Ribbon.*

TEDDY *is in his forties and has a large mustache.*

ABBY: Living here all our lives, we've seen so many ministers come and go.—But your sermons are not so much sermons as friendly talks.

TEDDY: Personally, I've always enjoyed my talks with Cardinal Gibbons—or have I met him yet?

ABBY: No, dear, not yet. *[Changing the subject]* Are the biscuits good?

TEDDY: Bully!

KLEIN: This one is fine—it'll make a lot of kids happy. *[Holding up a toy soldier]* That O'Malley boy is nuts about soldiers.

TEDDY: That's General Miles. I've retired him, and **you can't have that ship! It's the Oregon!** *[He takes the ship from KLEIN]*

MARTHA: Put it back, dear.

TEDDY: But the *Oregon* goes to Australia.

ABBY: Now, Teddy. . . .

TEDDY: No, I've given my word to Fighting Bob Evans.

MARTHA: But, Teddy . . .

KLEIN: What's the difference what kid gets it? We'll run along, ma'am, and thank you very much.

START

ABBY: Teddy! *[He stops halfway downstairs]* Good news for you! You're going to Panama and dig another lock for the canal.

TEDDY: Dee-lighted! Bully! Bully, bully! I shall prepare at once for the journey. *[He turns to go back upstairs and cries]* charge!

[TEDDY enters from above and comes down the stairs carrying his bugle and dressed in tropical clothes and a pith helmet. He sees MORTIMER]

TEDDY: Hello, Mortimer! *[He goes to MORTIMER and they shake hands]*

MORTIMER: [*Gravely*] How are you, Mr. President?

TEDDY: Bully, thank you. Just bully. What news have you brought me?

MORTIMER: Just this, Mr. President—the country is squarely behind you.

TEDDY: [*Beaming*] Yes, I know. Isn't it wonderful? [*He shakes MORTIMER'S hand again*] Well, good-by

MORTIMER: Where are you off to, Teddy?

TEDDY: Panama. [*He exits through the cellar door,]*
[TEDDY *at the head of the stairs*]

STOP
START

TEDDY: I found it! I found it!

JONATHAN: What did you find, Teddy?

TEDDY: The story of my life—my biography. [*He goes to EINSTEIN*] Here's the picture I was telling you about, General. Here we are, both of us. [*He shows the open book to EINSTEIN*] "President Roosevelt and General Goethals at Culebra Cut." That's me, General, and that's you.

EINSTEIN: [*He looks at the picture*] My, how I've changed!

TEDDY: [*TEDDY looks at EINSTEIN, a little puzzled*] Well, you see that picture hasn't been taken yet. We haven't even started work on Culebra Cut. We're still digging locks. And now, General, we will go to Panama and inspect the new lock.

EINSTEIN: We go some other time. Panama's a long way off.

TEDDY: Nonsense, it's just down in the cellar.

MARTHA: We let him dig the Panama Canal in the cellar.

TEDDY: General Goethals, as President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, and the man who gave you this job, I demand that you accompany me on the inspection of the new lock.

JONATHAN: Teddy! I think it's time for you to go to bed.

TEDDY: I beg your pardon. Who are you?

JONATHAN: I'm Woodrow Wilson. [*to EINSTEIN*] General Goethals, go. Inspect the Canal.

TEDDY: No—you're not Wilson. But your face is familiar. Let me see. You're not anyone I know now. Perhaps later—on my hunting trip to Africa—yes, you look like someone I might meet in the jungle.

EINSTEIN: All right, Mr. President. We go to Panama.

TEDDY: Bully! Bully! [EINSTEIN *follows him*. TEDDY *opens the cellar door*]
Follow, me, General. It's down south, you know.

EINSTEIN: Well—bon voyage.

[TEDDY *enters from the cellar*]

STOP
START

TEDDY: General Goethals was very pleased. He said the Canal was just the right size.

ABBY: Teddy, there's been another yellow fever victim.

TEDDY: Dear me—that will be a shock to the General.

MARTHA: Then we mustn't tell him about it.

TEDDY: But it's his department.

ABBY: No, we mustn't tell him about it. It would just spoil his visit, Teddy.

TEDDY: I'm sorry, Aunt Abby. It's out of my hands—he'll have to be told. Army regulations, you know.

ABBY: No, Teddy, we'll have to keep it a secret.

MARTHA: Yes!

TEDDY: A state secret?

ABBY: Yes, a state secret.

MARTHA: Promise?

TEDDY: You have the word of the President of the United States. Cross my heart and hope to die. [*Following the childish formula, he crosses his heart and spits*] Now let's see—how are we going to keep it a secret?

ABBY: Well, Teddy, you go back down in the cellar and when I turn out the lights you come up and take the poor man down to the Canal.

TEDDY: You may announce the President will say a few words. [*He starts to the cellar door, then stops*] Where is the poor devil?

MARTHA: In the window seat.

TEDDY: It seems to be spreading. We've never had yellow fever *there* before. [*He exits into the cellar*]

JONATHAN, EINSTEIN, ABBY & MARTHA

He walks in with assurance and ease as though the room were familiar to him. There is something sinister about the man— It his strange resemblance to Boris Karloff. He addresses someone outside the front door

JONATHAN: Come in, Doctor, This is the home of my youth, [DR. EINSTEIN *looks about him timidly*] As a boy, I couldn't wait to escape from this house. And now I'm glad to escape back into it.

EINSTEIN: [DR. EINSTEIN *enters. He is somewhat ratty in his appearance. His There is something about him that suggests the unfrocked priest.*] Yah, Chonny, it's a good hideout.

JONATHAN: The family must still live here. There's something so unmistakably Brewster about the Brewsters. I hope there's a fatted calf awaiting the return of the prodigal.

EINSTEIN: Yah, I'm hungry. Look, Chonny! Drinks!

JONATHAN: As if we were expected! A good omen.

ABBY: Who are you? What are you doing here?
[EINSTEIN *and* JONATHAN *turn and see the two sisters*]

JONATHAN: Aunt Abby! Aunt Martha! It's Jonathan.

MARTHA: You get out of here!

JONATHAN: I'm Jonathan! Your nephew, Jonathan!

ABBY: Oh, no, you're not! You're nothing like Jonathan, so don't pretend you are! You just get out of here.

JONATHAN: Yes, Aunt Abby. I *am* Jonathan. And this is Dr. Einstein.

ABBY: And he's not Dr. Einstein either.

JONATHAN: Not Dr. Albert Einstein—Dr. Herman Einstein.

ABBY: Who are you? You're not our nephew, Jonathan!

JONATHAN: I see you're still wearing the lovely garnet ring that grandma Brewster bought in England, And you, Aunt Martha, still the high collar—to hide the scar where Grandfather's acid burned you.

MARTHA: His voice is like Jonathan's.

ABBY: Have you been in an accident?

JONATHAN: No. . . My face. . . . [*He clouds*] Dr. Einstein is responsible for that. He's a plastic surgeon. [*Flatly*] He changes people's faces.

MARTHA: But I've seen that face before when we took the little Schultz boy to the movies—and I was so frightened. It was that face!

[JONATHAN *grows tense and looks toward* EINSTEIN]

EINSTEIN: Chonny—easy! Don't worry! The last five years I give Chonny three faces. I give him another one right away. The last face—I saw that picture, too—just before I operate. And I was intoxicated.

JONATHAN: You see, Doctor— what you've done to me. Even my own family.

EINSTEIN: [*To calm him*] Chonny—you're home!—in this lovely house! [*To the aunts*] How many times he tells me about Brooklyn—about this house—about his aunts that he loves so much! [*To JONATHAN*] They know you, Chonny. [*To the aunts*] You know it's Jonathan. Speak to him! Tell him so!

STOP

ABBY: Well—Jonathan—it's been a long time—what have you been doing all these years?

MARTHA: Yes, Jonathan, where have you been?

JONATHAN: [*Recovering his composure*] England, South Africa, Australia—the last five years, Chicago. Dr. Einstein and I have been in business together there.

ABBY: Oh! We were in Chicago for the World's Fair. We found it awfully warm.

EINSTEIN: Yah—it got hot for us, too.

JONATHAN: [*Turning on the charm*] It's wonderful to be in, Brooklyn again. And you—Abby—Martha—you don't look a day older. Just as I remembered you—sweet, charming, hospitable. And dear Teddy? [*He indicates with his hand a lad of eight or ten*] Did he go into politics? [*Turns to* EINSTEIN] My little brother, Doctor, was determined to become President.

ABBY: Oh, Teddy's fine! Just fine. Mortimer's well, too.

O'HARA & MORTIMER

[There is a knock at the door; it opens and OFFICER O'HARA sticks his head in]

O'HARA: Oh, hello. . . .

ABBY: Hello, Officer O'Hara. Is there anything we can do for you?

O'HARA: Saw your lights on—thought there might be sickness in the house. Oh, you got company. Sorry I disturbed you.

MORTIMER: *[HE pulls him through the door into the room]* No! Come in!

ABBY: Yes, come in! Officer O'Hara. These are our nephews, Mortimer and Jonathon.

O'HARA: Pleased to make your acquaintance. Well, it must be nice having your nephews visiting you. Are they going to stay for a bit?

MORTIMER: I'm staying. My brother Jonathan is just leaving.

O'HARA: *[TO JONATHAN]* I've met you here before, haven't I?

ABBY: I'm afraid not. Jonathan hasn't been home for years.

O'HARA: *[To JONATHAN]* Your face looks familiar to me. Perhaps I've seen a picture of you somewhere.

JONATHAN: I don't think so. *[He hurries up the stairs]*

O'HARA: Well, you'll be wanting to say your good-bys. I'll be running along. *[He starts for the door]*

MORTIMER: *[Stopping him]* What's the rush? I'd like to have you stick around until my brother goes.

O'HARA: I just dropped in to make sure everything was all right.

MORTIMER: We're going to have some coffee in a minute. Won't you join us?

ABBY: Oh, I forgot the coffee. *[She hurries out]*

O'HARA: Don't bother. I'm due to ring in in a few minutes.

MORTIMER: You can have a cup of coffee with us. My brother will be going soon.

**STOP
START**

O'HARA: Haven't I seen a photograph of your brother around here some place?

MORTIMER: I don't think so.

O'HARA: He certainly reminds me of somebody.

MORTIMER: He looks like somebody you've probably seen in the movies.

O'HARA: I never go to the movies. I hate 'em. My mother says the movies is a bastard art.

MORTIMER: Yes. It's full of them. Your mother said that?

O'HARA: Yeah. My mother was an actress—a stage actress. Perhaps you've heard of her—Peaches Latour.

MORTIMER: Sounds like a name I've seen on a program. What did she play?

O'HARA: Her big hit was *Mutt and Jeff*. Played it for three years. I was born on tour—the third season.

MORTIMER: You were?

O'HARA: Yeah. Sioux City, Iowa. I was born in the dressing-room at the end of the second act and mother made the finale.

MORTIMER: Sounds interesting. You know, I write about the theater.

O'HARA: You do? Say, you're not Mortimer Brewster, the dramatic critic? Say, I'm glad to meet you. We're in the same line of business.

MORTIMER: We are?

O'HARA: Yes, I'm a playwright. Being on the police force is just temporary.

MORTIMER: How long have you been on the force?

O'HARA: Twelve years. I'm collecting material for a play.

MORTIMER: I'll bet it's a honey.

O'HARA: Well, it ought to be. With all the drama I see being a cop. Mr. Brewster, you got no idea what goes on in Brooklyn.

MORTIMER: I think I have!

O'HARA: What time you got? Gee, I got to go.

MORTIMER: *[Stopping him]* Wait a minute! On that play of yours—you know, I might be able to help you.

O'HARA: You would? Say, it was fate my walking in here tonight. Look, I'll tell you the plot.

MORTIMER: *[To O'HARA]* Not now, but it was nice meeting you. I'll see you again—we'll talk about your play.

O'HARA: Oh, I'm not leaving now, Mr. Brewster.

MORTIMER: Why not?

O'HARA: Well, you just offered to help me with my play, didn't you? You and me are going to write my play together.

MORTIMER: No, O'Hara, I can't do that. You see, I'm not a creative writer.

O'HARA: I'll do the creating. You just put the words to it.

MORTIMER: But, O'Hara . . .

O'HARA: No, sir, Mr. Brewster, I ain't going to leave this house till I tell you the plot, *[O'HARA sits on the window seat]*

MORTIMER: Look, O'Hara, you run along now. My brother's just going and. . .

O'HARA: I can wait. I've been waiting twelve years.

MORTIMER: O'Hara, would you join us for a bite in the kitchen? You don't mind eating in the kitchen?

O'HARA: Where else would you eat?*[He exits to the kitchen]*

ROONEY, O'HARA, TEDDY, MORTIMER

[There is a knock at the door]

O'HARA: Come in!

[LIEUTENANT ROONEY *bursts in. He is a very tough, driving, dominating police officer*]

ROONEY: What the hell are you men doing here? I told you I was going to handle this.

KLEIN: Well, sir, we was just. . . . [KLEIN'S *eyes go to the prostrate* JONATHAN *and* ROONEY *sees him*]

ROONEY: What happened? Did he put up a fight?

BROPHY: This ain't the guy that blows the bugle. This is his brother. He tried to kill Klein. We kinda think he's wanted somewhere.

ROONEY: Oh, you kinda *think* he's wanted somewhere? If you guys don't look at the circulars we hang up in the station, at least you could read *True Detective*. Certainly he's wanted! In Indiana! Escaped from the Prison for the Criminal Insane—he's a lifer. For God's sake, that's how he was described—he looked like *Karloff!*

KLEIN: Was there a reward mentioned?

ROONEY: Yeah—and *I'm* claiming it.

BROPHY: He was trying to get us down in the cellar.

KLEIN: He said there was thirteen bodies buried down there.

START

ROONEY: Thirteen bodies buried in the cellar? And that didn't tip you off he came out of a nut house?

O'HARA: I thought all along he talked kinda crazy. [ROONEY *sees O'HARA for the first time*]

ROONEY: Oh—it's Shakespeare! Where have you been all night—and you needn't bother to tell me!

O'HARA: I've been right here, sir, writing a play with Mortimer Brewster.

ROONEY: Yeah? Well, you're going to have plenty of time to write that play. You're suspended!

O'HARA: Can I come over some time and use the station typewriter?

ROONEY: No! Get out! Take that guy somewhere else and bring him to. See what you can find out about his accomplice—the guy that helped him escape. He's wanted, too.

[KLEIN *and* BROPHY *are bending over* JONATHAN]

No wonder Brooklyn's in the shape it's in. With the police force full of flatheads like you. Falling for that kind of a story—thirteen bodies buried in the cellar!

TEDDY: But there are thirteen bodies in the cellar.

ROONEY: [*Turning on him*] Who are you?

TEDDY: I'm President Roosevelt. [ROONEY *goes slightly crazy*]

ROONEY: What the hell is this?

BROPHY: He's the fellow that blows the bugle.

ROONEY: Well, Colonel, you've blown your last bugle!

[TEDDY'S *attention has been attracted to the body on the floor*]

TEDDY: Dear me, another yellow fever victim! All the bodies in the cellar are yellow fever victims.

ROONEY: What?

O'HARA: No, Colonel, this is a spy we caught in the White House.

ROONEY: [*Pointing to* JONATHAN] Will you get that guy out of here.

TEDDY: If there's any questioning of spies—that's my department!

ROONEY: Hey, you—keep out of that!

TEDDY: You're forgetting! As President, I'm also head of the Secret Service. [*He exits into the kitchen, MORTIMER has come down*]

MORTIMER: Captain—I'm Mortimer Brewster.

ROONEY: [*Dizzy by this time*] Are you sure?

MORTIMER: I'd like to talk to you about my brother Teddy—the one who blew the bugle.

ROONEY: Mr. Brewster, we ain't going to talk about that—he's got to be put away.

MORTIMER: I quite agree with you, Captain. In fact, it's all arranged for. I had these commitment papers signed by Dr. Gilchrist last night.

ROONEY: Where's he going?

MORTIMER: Happy Dale. . . .

ROONEY: All right. I don't care where he goes as long as he goes!

MORTIMER: Oh, he's going all right. But I want you to understand that everything that's happened around here Teddy's responsible for. Now, those thirteen bodies in the cellar. . . .

ROONEY: Yeah—those thirteen bodies in the cellar! It ain't enough that the neighbors are afraid of him and his disturbing the peace with that bugle—but can you imagine what would happen if that cockeyed story about thirteen bodies in the cellar got around? And now he's starting a yellow fever scare. Cute, ain't it?

MORTIMER: *[with an embarrassed laugh]* Thirteen bodies! Do you think anybody would believe that story?

ROONEY: You can't tell. Some people are just dumb enough. You don't know what to believe sometimes. A year ago, a crazy guy started a murder rumor over in Irvine and I had to dig up a half-acre lot, just to prove . . .

[There is a knock at the door]

STOP

WITHERSPOON: I'M Mr. Witherspoon, the Superintendent of Happy Dale.

ROONEY: Lieutenant Rooney. I'm glad you're here, Super, because you're taking him back with you today!

WITHERSPOON: Today! I didn't realize it was this immediate.

ROONEY: The papers are all signed. He goes today. *[TEDDY enters from the kitchen]*

TEDDY: It's insubordination! When the President of the United States is treated that way, what's this country coming to?

ROONEY: There's your man, Super.

**WITHERSPOON , MORTIMER, ROONEY,
TEDDY, ABBY & MARTHA**

[Upon a door knock, Mortimer admits Mr. WITHERSPOON, an elderly, tight-lipped disciplinarian. He is carrying a briefcase]

MORTIMER: *[Eagerly]* Oh, come right in! I'm glad you're here, Super, because you're taking him back with you today!

WITHERSPOON: Today! I had no idea. I didn't realize it was this immediate.

ROONEY: The papers are all signed. He goes today. *[TEDDY enters]*

TEDDY: It's insubordination! I'm no mollycoddle. When the President of the United States is treated that way, what's this country coming to?

ROONEY: There's your man, Super. I'm sorry, Miss Brewster, but the papers are all signed and he's going along with the Superintendent.

ABBY: We won't permit it! If he goes, we're going too!

MARTHA: Yes, you'll have to take us with him!

WITHERSPOON: It's sweet of you to want to, but it's impossible. You see, we can't take *sane* people at Happy Dale.

MARTHA: Mr. Witherspoon, if you'll let us live there with Teddy, we'll see that Happy Dale is in our will and for a very generous amount.

WITHERSPOON: The Lord knows we could use the money, but I'm afraid . . .

ROONEY: Now, let's be sensible about this. Here I am wasting my morning when I've got serious work to do. You know there are still *murders* to be solved in Brooklyn. Superintendent—don't you think you can find room for these ladies?

WITHERSPOON: Well, I . . .

ROONEY: I'm a busy man. How about it, Super?

WITHERSPOON: They'd have to be committed.

MORTIMER: Teddy committed himself. Can't they do that? Can't they sign the papers?

WITHERSPOON: Certainly.

MARTHA: Oh, if we can go with Teddy we'll sign the papers. Where are they?

ABBY: Yes, where are they?

WITHERSPOON: [*produces the papers from his briefcase*] If you'll sign right here, Miss Martha. And you here, Miss Abby.

WITHERSPOON: Oh—we're overlooking something.

MARTHA: What?

WITHERSPOON: Well, we're going to need the signature of a physician.

MORTIMER: [*sees* EINSTEIN *slipping out the door*] Oh, Dr. Einstein! Will you come over here and sign some papers?

[ROONEY WATCHES EINSTEIN *sign the papers*]

WITHERSPOON: It's all right now, Lieutenant. The doctor here has just completed the signatures.

WITHERSPOON: [*To* MORTIMER] Mr. Brewster, you sign now as next of kin.

MORTIMER: Oh, yes, of course. Right here? [*He signs the papers*]

WITHERSPOON: Yes. . . . That's fine.

MORTIMER: That makes everything complete? Everything legal?

WITHERSPOON: Oh, yes. [*To the aunts*] When do you think you'll be ready to start?

ABBY: [*Nervously*] Well, Mr. Witherspoon, why don't you go up and tell Teddy what he can take along?

WITHERSPOON: Upstairs?

MORTIMER: Just up the stairs and turn left.

ABBY: Ah... Mr. Witherspoon, does your family live with you at Happy Dale?

WITHERSPOON: I have no family.

ABBY: Oh. . . .

MARTHA: Well, I suppose you consider everyone at Happy Dale your family?

WITHERSPOON: I'm afraid you don't understand. As head of the institution, I have to keep quite aloof.

ABBY: That must make it very lonely for you.

WITHERSPOON: It does. But my duty is my duty.

ABBY: Well, Martha. . . If Mr. Witherspoon won't have breakfast with us, I think at least we should offer him a glass of elderberry wine.

WITHERSPOON: Elderberry wine?

MARTHA: We make it ourselves. *[She uncorks the fresh bottle]*

WITHERSPOON: Why, yes! Of course, at Happy Dale our relationship will be more formal, but here... Well, you don't see much elderberry wine nowadays. I thought I'd had my last glass of it.

ABBY: *[Handing it to him]* Here it is!

Witherspoon *bows to the ladies and lifts the glass to his lips...*