

Murder and Edna Redrum

murdeR andE dna redruM

a comedy in two acts by
Robert Locke

© 1993 Robert Locke rev. and retyped April 15, 2015
also look for the 1996 revision which I rewrote because I cast a man with an
English accent as Dennis

I used to write on my title pages something like: “All Rights Reserved: Nobody can use this unless they contact me or my agent in writing.” But I just turned 70; so screw that. This is a good play. If you want to do some scenes from it, go ahead and be my guest. But I hope that you will at least tell me about it, and give me the writing credit for it. If I am still alive—and that’s growing more and more doubtful—contact me at boblocke@csus.edu

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ACT I

N.B. The staging during these first lines must be exactly reversed at the end of the play.

In the black comes the sound of an offstage cuckoo clock which cuckoos erratically, stopping, re-cuckooing many more than twelve as lights come up to reveal a study in Emma Murtson's mansion at sunset. Double doors hang upstage center opening onto a hallway which exits left and right. (It is from the stage-right hallway that the unseen clock cuckoos.)

Except for a full-length mirror on the stage-left wall facing French doors on the stage-right wall, the room's design is absolutely symmetrical. Shelves of books line the walls, broken by rich art work and small treasures. The furniture is handsome and elegant, a sofa and arm chairs, a coffee table, a liquor caddy, an oaken library table, a large floor safe.

EMMA MURTSON, aged around 70, British accent, is discovered at the library table with her diary before her. Also on the table are a silver tea tray set for two, a lunch tray, and a very thick loose-leaf manuscript. A tea cup raised to her lips, Emma sits motionless, riveted by a thought.

DENNIS, Emma's American son aged around 35, is asleep on the sofa.

EMMA

Ah! Ah!

She sets the cup down and makes a note in the manuscript on the first page, and an identical note on the last page. She laughs and riffles the pages with delight.

Silly cow.

She mumbles to herself as she makes notes on the manuscript, then notices the tea tray.

EMMA

Oh, how lovely. Tea.

(stands, carries tea tray to the coffee table)

Wake up, dear, it's Mother and tea.

DENNIS

Oh, hello, Mother. I was dreaming about you.

EMMA

Isn't that lovely, to nap and dream of mother. How delicious.

During this next, Emma will pour tea for Dennis and herself, return to the library table for the manuscript, and lock it into the safe.

DENNIS

I was a child, and you were young again, and I...

EMMA

Isn't that lovely.

DENNIS

...was on that rope swing above Little Pearl, and you kept pushing me out over the water, and I was...

EMMA

Oh, yes, I remember, dear.

DENNIS

...afraid to drop because the water was deep and cold, but you wouldn't let me back on the bank.

EMMA

Isn't that just like you, strong arms, no leg to stand on, and not a speck of courage.

DENNIS

But then suddenly it was all reversed, and you were on the rope and I was pushing you.

EMMA

I always did love a good swing.

DENNIS

Mother, this tea is cold!

EMMA

Is it? Why, it is.

DENNIS

When was it brewed? You didn't brew... you didn't go into the kitchen, did you?

EMMA

Yes, I— no, wait, I tell a lie, there was a girl. I don't know just—

Hannah enters.

—Oh, here she is. Hannah, am I right?

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

(hands mail to Dennis)

Mail came.

EMMA

Faces occasionally, names always, but palindromes, I never forget a palindrome!

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

EMMA

Did you know that you were a palindrome, dear? Hannah, H-A-N-N-A-H spelled backwards is H-A-N-N-A-H.

Now and whenever Emma demonstrates a palindrome, she makes a palindromic gesture with her hand, as though drawing a headline through the air then reversing it, smiling with perfect pleasure.

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

EMMA

Palindromically speaking, dear, you are perfect. I don't suppose anyone has pointed that out to you before, have they?

DENNIS

(opening mail)

Yes, Mother. You have.

EMMA

Have I?

DENNIS

Every time she walks into the room. By my count alone, hundreds upon hundreds of times. I don't know how Hannah feels...

EMMA

(overlapping)

Have I, dear?

HANNAH

(overlapping)

It don't matter, ma'am. Much.

DENNIS

...but it's driving me nuts.

The cuckoo clock begins cuckooing.

EMMA

Well, we can't have that, dear, can we? Both of us loony? Who will manage the fortune?

DENNIS

Damn that clock!

EMMA

Dennis, that's Father's cuckoo; I won't have you maligning it.

DENNIS

(perusing a letter)

It loses thirty-three minutes every hour, it goes off whenever and howmanyever it damn well pleases, it doesn't make any sense—

EMMA

It's a little cuckoo.

DENNIS

—Mother, what is this! "Thank you for your check for ... one hundred thousand dollars!"

EMMA

Who's it from, dear?

DENNIS

Who's it from!

EMMA

Is that for me! Are you opening my mail now! Did you give him my mail! Who are you, oh, Hannah, of course.

DENNIS

It's from the Lupus Foundation.

EMMA

Lupus, Lupus, what is that, a society of wolves? Werewolves? But they're fictional, aren't they? There aren't really werewolves, are there?

HANNAH

No, ma'am, don't you worry, I'm sure there ain't no werewolves, not on the cape anyways, but up in Boston, I ran into my fair share.

DENNIS

It's some kind of disease, it looks like.

EMMA

Oh, yes, Lupus, I remember. Terrible.

DENNIS

Where did you get the check? Have you been into my desk?

(unlocks a built-in desk, takes a checkbook from a drawer)

EMMA

Of course not. And it's my desk.

DENNIS

Not any more.

HANNAH

(checking under the lid of the lunch tray)

Mrs. Murtson...

DENNIS

No, no checks are missing.

(consults letter again)

Oh, I see. "Unfortunately, the check is drawn on a closed account. If you would forward another check..." Well, they can go whistle for that. Mother, I told you to throw away all your old checkbooks.

EMMA

Well, I wouldn't do that. Then I wouldn't have any cheques at all.

DENNIS

Those accounts are all closed now. When you want to write a check anymore, you must come to me.

EMMA

All right, dear, I'd like to write a cheque to the Lupus people. They're very nice, I'm sure.

DENNIS

Absolutely not.

EMMA

You see the good of that. I won't stand for it, Dennis.

HANNAH

Excuse me, sir. I brought up her lunch hours ago. I figured you'd see that she ate it. She missed her breakfast again.

EMMA

Oh, no, I had breakfast. It's in my diary.

(gets her diary)

DENNIS

(making himself a drink)

I was sleeping.

EMMA

Come and see, dear, it's right here. Let's see...

DENNIS

Now, if only you'd give me power of attorney, Mother, I could—

EMMA

Power of attorney, you? I may be a touch senile, but I'm not demented.

HANNAH

You're not senile, ma'am. You're just a little confused.

EMMA

My ... memory is not as keen as it once was. But I've decided that as long as I can still SAY "Alzheimer's", I can't possibly have it. Marshall Adams has my power of attorney, Dennis; I trust Marshall. Now what was I looking for?

(reads from diary)

"Lovely morning, worked on novel. Hannah fixed a lovely omelette, but there is too much butter, I fear."

HANNAH

You see, you didn't eat it.

EMMA

Now here's something queer... Have we today's paper? Ah!

(takes newspaper from tray as Hannah lifts it)

DENNIS

(going for bottle of white-out)

Oh, here we go!

HANNAH

I have her dinner tray ready. You want me to bring it in here?

DENNIS

Yes.

Hannah exits with the lunch tray.

EMMA

No, this is yesterday's paper. Haven't we today's—

DENNIS

No, Mother, this is today's paper.

(whiting out a few lines of her diary)

You wrote into tomorrow again. You're supposed to stop at the double line.

EMMA

You're painting out my words!

DENNIS

I'm just straightening out the days because it confuses you. Now no more writing today, Mother, there's no more room. Look, I'll...

EMMA

But those are my words, that's my diary, how will I...

DENNIS

(puts it on a high shelf)

... put it right up here, and tomorrow you can write again.

EMMA

But I may need to consult it.

DENNIS

To find out whether or not it's a lovely day? Just look out the window. Now, mother, I want you to give me those old checks. Where are they, in the safe?

EMMA

(goes to safe)

It was only a joke, you know. I wanted to see your face, and now I have. Turn your back.

DENNIS

Why don't you give me the combination. You know, when you die—

EMMA

IF I die.

DENNIS

If you EVER die, I'll just have to blow the lock.

(turns his back; she dials combination)

EMMA

I doubt I shall care then.

DENNIS

You can go to jail for writing bum checks, you know.

EMMA

Oh, I don't think so, dear. A senile old lady? Who would take me seriously?

(hands him a box of checks)

DENNIS

Is this all of them? What else is in there?

(She closes the safe and whirls the dial.)

DENNIS

I saw the combination.

EMMA

You did not.

DENNIS

I counted the clicks. I got all the numbers.

EMMA

That's two lies, they cancel each other. You nasty thing, I know you. You're just waiting for me to pop off, slinking around like a greasy little hyena, panting after—

Hannah enters quietly with the dinner tray.

DENNIS

I'd have put you out of your misery long ago except—

EMMA

Except everyone would know that you did it. They'd put you in prison, you know, they'd gas you, and—

DENNIS

Oh, shut up. The girl's back.

HANNAH

(putting the tray down, distastefully removing an object wrapped in a napkin)

Sir, could I please speak to—

EMMA

Oh, how lovely! What is it, dear?

HANNAH

Liver, Ma'am. Sir

EMMA

Oh, I revile liver, Hannah. Ah, there's a palindrome there!

HANNAH

Sorry?

EMMA

Revile liver, R-E-V-I-L---E---L-I-V-E-R, the "e" swings you see, and "Hannah" makes it all the more delicious. Revile liver, Hannah, revile liver! Of course the message is not an altogether profound one, but it is a nearly universal one, I believe. I must enter it in my diary. Where has it got to?

DENNIS

(dialing the phone)

I put it away. No more writing today, there's no room!

HANNAH

Sir—

EMMA

But I have a palindromic note for the novel.

DENNIS

Put it someplace else. Give her some paper.

EMMA

But I keep my notes for the novel in my diary.

HANNAH

(humoring Emma, giving her a sheet of paper)

Oh, you're writin' a novel, Mrs. Murdson? How innerestin'. Sir—

EMMA

What's this?

HANNAH

For your note, liver.

EMMA

Liver? Deliver!

DENNIS

Drivel, Mother, drivel.

EMMA

Deliver drivel, yes! Oh no, that's all wrong.

(writing)

Devil...! Evil...! Live!!! Point d'exclamation!

HANNAH

(reading over Emma's shoulder)

Gee!

DENNIS

(into phone)

Hello, Lorraine, is he in? It's Dennis Murtson.

EMMA

(alarmed)

Lorraine! Who is that?

DENNIS

Oh, God yes, I'll hold, but let him know it's serious.

HANNAH

Deliver evil, Hannah...

EMMA

Dennis, who are you holding for, dear?

HANNAH

...live reviled!

EMMA

Yes, a caveat for you, dear. Deliver evil, Hannah, live reviled! Dennis, dear, who is that?

(pause, Dennis doesn't answer.)

Dennis?

Seeing Emma's nervousness, Hannah sets the dinner tray before her, moving the offending object in the napkin out of Emma's reach.

HANNAH

Uh, what's your novel about, Mrs. Murtson?

EMMA

Oh, I can't tell you. It's highly secret, you know. It's my father's novel, really, and I'm merely—
(to Dennis)

Dear?

HANNAH

(trying to get her to take a fork)

Your father began your novel?

EMMA

(her concentration never leaving Dennis)

Yes, it's a palindrome, you see. That's why it's special, you see, and secret. Imagine, an entire novel, and it reads backwards the same as forwards...

DENNIS

Yes, Dr. Cohen, thank you. I'm afraid she's getting worse. Could you see her again, please?

EMMA

...beginning and end exactly reversed.

HANNAH

Oh, like one of your palderomes?

DENNIS

Well, I just found out she's writing checks on defunct accounts, six figures!

EMMA

It was a joke!

DENNIS

(overlapping Hannah below)

I guess that's where all that money went before I consolidated the accounts. I'm surprised there's anything left at all.

HANNAH

(overlapping Dennis above)

Imagine, a whole novel readin' back and forth like that! Must be awful hard to write.

EMMA

Yes, umhmm. The center is like a mirror, you see; you must begin in the center and write to both ends.

DENNIS

No, she's clear as a bell on certain things, she just wrote a fucking palindrome! But as a rule, she can't even boil water, she almost set the house on fire last week.

EMMA

I didn't!

(to Hannah)

Did I?

DENNIS

Well, I tried that but it didn't work, but then I cut a picture out of a National Geographic of a couple of big, vicious looking rats, and pasted it on the kitchen door. That keeps her out.

EMMA

Rats? In the kitchen? Surely not!

HANNAH

(trying to distract Emma)

Boy, that would be hard, all right, writin' that novel.

EMMA

Takes all my concentration.

DENNIS

Exactly. She can't remember what's real or fiction; she can't remember to eat; she.—

(beat)

Yes, that too. Have to change her bed every day.

EMMA

Takes all my concentration.

HANNAH

I'd sure like to read it.

EMMA

Yes, when it's published. I'm almost finished.

DENNIS

Thank you, Doctor.

(on hold, to Emma)

Do you want morning or afternoon? Mother? Oh, nevermind.

HANNAH

You know you could've made that call from another room.

DENNIS

She won't remember. She can't even— She wandered into the woods yesterday! Where were you?

HANNAH

I was here. I was doin' the silver.

EMMA

Most likely I was going into town, dear.

DENNIS

I found her on the driveway, she didn't know uphill from down, you can't leave her alone outside, she—

HANNAH

She was in the rose garden. Speakin' of which—

Hannah picks up the napkin; a gun falls out.

DENNIS

Not even in the rose garden, she—

(sees the gun)

What's that?

HANNAH

That's what I been tryin' to tell you. It's that gun again.

EMMA

Father's Luger! How I used to love to shoot!

DENNIS

Mother, don't touch it!

(to Hannah)

What's it doing here?

HANNAH

This time I found it in the rose garden layin' in the crook of Cupid's arm.

DENNIS

Why is it wrapped up?

HANNAH

I told you before I don't like guns, I don't like touchin' 'em.

EMMA

I always did love a gun.

DENNIS

Mother, I said hands off. You are not to touch that gun again.

EMMA

Well, I—

DENNIS

(into phone)

Lorraine, yes, what have you got for me?

HANNAH

No, ma'am, he's right. It ain't safe.

DENNIS

Good, well make it 11:30 then. And Lorraine, tell him that I found that gun out again. (beat)
Well, who else could have been messing with it, the girl says it wasn't her. Lorraine, just tell the
doctor about the gun! And I'll see she comes in on the thirteenth!

(hangs up; to Hannah as he gets Emma's diary)

Put the gun away.

HANNAH

Oh, sir—

EMMA

What are you doing with my diary?

DENNIS

I'll put your appointment on the thirteenth.

EMMA

Not in my diary. It hasn't happened yet.

(to Hannah)

It hasn't happened yet, has it?

DENNIS

I'll write it in the past tense, "Went to see Dr. Cohen", and when the thirteenth comes, you'll ask about it and—

EMMA

(snatches away the diary)

You most certainly will not. I'll put it in in my appointment book, where it SHOULD go, and—

DENNIS

And you'll forget to look at it—

EMMA

Well then, you'll have to remind me. If you're not drunk.

(gets her appointment book)

Now, what's the date?

DENNIS

The thirteenth.

EMMA

And...

(embarrassed)

...what's the month?

Dennis snorts.

HANNAH

September, ma'am.

EMMA

I knew that. Of course I knew that. I meant what's the time.

DENNIS

11:30.

EMMA

And the date again was ...

DENNIS

September 13.

EMMA

Yes, September 13, 11:30. September 13, 11:30.

(finds the correct page and writes it)

If he had made it on September 9th at 9:09 I'd have no trouble at all. Zero-nine-zero-nine-nine-zero-nine. Next time, try for that, Dennis. Now, we have a plan, yes.

(puts the appointment book in her sweater pocket)

And I shall keep it right here, where I shall be sure to find it.

DENNIS

Hannah, I want you to remind Dr. Cohen about these gun incidents when you take her in on the thirteenth. I said put the gun away now.

HANNAH

But sir—

EMMA

But you'll drive me, Dennis, won't you?

DENNIS

Mother, I'll be in San Francisco, remember, of course you don't.

EMMA

San Francisco. Oh, how jolly, am I going, too?

DENNIS

You couldn't very well be seeing Dr. Cohen on the thirteenth then, could you? That's why we hired Hannah, so she could take care of you while I'm on the West Coast. And you like Hannah, don't you?

EMMA

Yes, but— it would be lovely to see San Francisco again. They have bridges there, I believe, lots of lovely bridges.

HANNAH

Sir—

DENNIS

Mother, I am speaking at the Ornithological Institute about...

EMMA

A recitation? How lovely!

(to Hannah)

How Dennis could recite. All those years of theatrical training—

DENNIS

Not a recitation mother, an address on the egg-laying habits of the Cape Cod Cuckoo, and I certainly—

EMMA

Cuckoo!

(to Hannah)

Fabulously interesting, bird, my dear, the cuckoo hen lays her egg in the nest of an altogether different species, and the foster parents—

DENNIS

At the Ornithological Institute, Mother, I'll be the one speaking, not—

EMMA

A recitation? How lovely!

(to Hannah)

How Dennis could recite! All those years of theatrical training. He could never do another thing, but he **COULD** recite. I taught him all of Shakespeare's sonnets before he went off to school and he—

DENNIS

Before you sent me off, before I was even eight.

EMMA

Before he was even eight years old, had them all by heart, all one hundred and fifty-four, and each night as I tucked him into bed— Do you remember, old chum? He would...

DENNIS

Yes, old chum.

EMMA

...choose one to recite to me. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds do shake the buds of May—

DENNIS

(overlapping Emma)

Hannah, I told you to put that gun where it belongs.

HANNAH

(overlapping Emma)

And I told you I don't like touchin' it.

DENNIS

(hearing the last bit of Emma's recitation)

The darling buds of May...

EMMA

The darling buds of May? Oh, dear.

DENNIS

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May...

EMMA

But it's better my way, isn't it, dear?

DENNIS

Yes, Mother, I do like it better, but it's not pentameter.

EMMA

Oh, well, that's all right, Sir Laurence Olivier never honors pentameter, and he's at least as good an actor as you.

DENNIS

Some would agree, but unfortunately Sir Laurence is—

EMMA

Rough winds do shake the buds of May...

EMMA/DENNIS

...And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

DENNIS

(playing with her hair)

But thy eternal summer shall not fade...

EMMA

Wasn't he clever? One hundred and fifty-four sonnets by the age of eight. And all for me. How he loved me! Too much, I fear.

HANNAH

Oh, no ma'am, you can never love your mother too much.

EMMA

Dennis could. You were a regular mama's boy, weren't you, dear?

DENNIS

You're driveling again, Mother.

HANNAH

Oh, no sir, she can't be. I just changed her diaper an hour ago.

DENNIS

Not dribbling! Driveling, you idiot! And put that damn gun in its drawer or you're fired!

Hannah does finally pick up the gun, very angry, and puts it away in a drawer in Dennis's desk, dropping the napkin in with it. Meanwhile Emma goes on.

EMMA

(patting him affectionately)

How Father despised you. Father despised him, you know. From the day he was born. "He's a prig! The boy's a prig, with his arse cheeks clamped tight on a halfpenny!" In actuality, Father feared Dennis would replace him in my affection, but you could never do that, could you, dear?

DENNIS

No matter how I tried, Mother...

EMMA

(smiling sweetly into memory)

No.

DENNIS

...I could never replace Grandfather in what you call your affection.

EMMA

And then Father died.

DENNIS

The king must die. Long live the queen.

HANNAH

Sir, I wish to register a—

EMMA

(pointing to a painting of mazelike staircases)

That is a pictorial representation of his mind, you know, dear. Father painted it himself, a self-portrait, as it were. You see, the steps descend, descend, descend, ascend, ascend, ascend, descend. Never ending...

DENNIS

Never even beginning.

EMMA

...never even begin— That was MY thought, Dennis.

DENNIS

Your thoughts, my thoughts, never ending...

DENNIS/EMMA

...never even beginning.

(Emma and Dennis kiss.)

HANNAH

(under her breath)

A regular loop.

DENNIS

In any case, Hannah, make a note: Dr. Cohen, Sept. 13, 11:30. I'll call you that morning from San Francisco to remind you.

EMMA

San Francisco?

HANNAH

Yes, sir, but first I wish to register a complaint. Pickin' up guns ain't in my job description.

EMMA

Oh, yes, I recollect. You're going to San Francisco and I'm not.

DENNIS

Now, old chum—

EMMA

Don't old chum me! Who's paying for this trip?

DENNIS

You are, Mother. All the arrangements are made and prepaid, thank you very much.

EMMA

(picks up phone)

Well then, I'll ring Gabriella and cancel them. Or she'll make them for two, but you're certainly not going to—

DENNIS

Gabriella's dead, Mother.

Emma stops, stunned; Hannah comes to her.

A year ago June.

EMMA

You're ... serious?

DENNIS

You wore purple to the funeral. Everyone admired your fortitude.

EMMA

(sits, weeping)

Gabriella!

DENNIS

(displaces Hannah, puts his arm around Emma gently)

Don't cry, Mother, shhh. It's long ago. Gabriella's out of her pain now.

EMMA

I don't believe you.

(begins to dial phone; thinks hard)

739-1321!

(dials again, gets to last digit, hesitates)

739-132...

DENNIS

Two.

EMMA

It is not, it's a one. 7 plus 3 minus 9 equals 1, 3 minus two equals 1. You are so nasty!

(into phone, puzzled)

Hello, who did you say? Bob? Bob?

DENNIS

"Faces occasionally, names always, but palindromes, I never forget a palindrome. Palindromically speaking, Bob, you are perfect!"

EMMA

Oh, Bobby, yes, the Merry-Time Travel Agency, yes, I know that...

(to Hannah)

...I knew that.

(into phone)

Yes, this is Emma. You recognized my voice? How kind of you. (beat) Er, yes, Bobby, I was just checking on Dennis's trip to San Francisco; everything's as it should be? (beat) Good, glad to hear it. And, er, Bobby, the last time ... I saw Gabriella ... we had such a good time together. Er, how do you feel about that? (beat) Oh, yes, it was ... so sad for me, too. Well, thank you. Goodbye.

She hangs up and sinks into a seat. Dennis comes to her, puts his hand on her shoulder with some sympathy.

DENNIS

(to Hannah, embarrassed)

She used to be ... very sharp, very beautiful.

HANNAH

She still is. Aren't you, Mrs. Murtson. Come on now, why don't you just try to eat a little something?

(to Dennis)

If you ate with her—

DENNIS

I'm going to Cape of Good Cheer for a drink.

HANNAH

But if you just—

DENNIS

I'm going out!

HANNAH

What time should I expect you back? Sir.

DENNIS

Don't expect me.

(kisses Emma on the cheek, tenderly)

Goodnight, Mother. See you in the morning light.

(starts out stage-right hallway; cuckoo in his ear)

Damn this clock!!!

EMMA

Dennis, it is in my will, and Marshall Adams will see to it, Father's cuckoo is to be buried with me!

DENNIS

With pleasure!

(storms off)

HANNAH

Your liv— steak is getting cold. Why don't you—

EMMA

I'm feeling a little tired, dear. I think I'll have a bit of a lie-down.

HANNAH

Why don't I take your dinner tray to your room then? And it'll be waitin' for you.

EMMA

Yes, dear. You go on. I'll be right there.

Hannah goes out with the tray, taking the stage-left hallway.

Emma thinks a moment, clears her mind, thinks again. She goes to the safe, opens it, and takes out several boxes of checks.

Leaving the safe open, she goes to the back wall and opens a secret panel, revealing a wall safe. She dials the combination, opens the wall safe, puts the items inside, closes the safe and closes the secret panel. Hannah returns.

HANNAH

I turned back the bed for you, and turned on the electric blanket.

EMMA

Thank you, dear. Good night. See you in the morning light.

Emma goes out, taking the stage-left hallway. Hannah is about to follow when she sees that the safe is still open. She looks out after Emma, sees that she is gone, then closes the double doors and approaches the safe.

There is a knock on the French doors. Hannah, surprised, goes to the doors, opens the sheers, then excitedly opens the doors.

JOE HARRIS enters. Joe is a goodlooking rogue with a quite large, noticeable bulge in the crotch of his pants. He is wearing gloves. They whisper.

JOE

Don't touch it. Might be a trap.

HANNAH

Oh, I don't think so, Joe. I don't think she's got the brains for it.

JOE

Check the hall.

Hannah opens the double doors and checks the hallway. She comes back in, closing the doors behind her.

HANNAH

She forgets everything. Is he gone?

JOE

Yeah, he drove off. He'll be at Cape a' Good Cheer all night.

(looks in the safe, takes out the loose-leaf ms. in his gloved hands)

No money, looks like old files and stuff.

(puts ms. back carefully, and closes the safe)

There's another safe back here som'eres she put som'n' in.

(examines the wall)

Christ, how'd she do that? She slid a panel or som'n'.

HANNAH

(throws her arms around him)

Joe, we're gonna be rich! She's got so much!

(While she hangs on him, Joe makes himself a drink, examining the wall all the while.)

JOE

Yeah, din' I tell ya.

HANNAH

The jewels alone, you should see 'em, Joe. She's got a safe or something up in her room, but I ain't been able to find it yet, and she brings out all this jewelry to play dress-up every night. She's got this one necklace— Joe, there must be fifty diamonds hangin' on it— and one night she left it out on her dressin' table. I figured she was testing me, so I didn't touch it, but it stayed out there three nights, just layin' there. Finally I says to her, "Ma'am, don't you want to put this away?" She says, oh yeah. She waits for me to go out of the room, and the next time I go in, it's gone. But it's up there, Joe, somewhere, just waitin' for us.

JOE

Mary, Mary, shh, just hang tight, girl, we'll get it, we'll get it. Glad you come down?
Joe kisses her roughly then turns to the desk, starts going through the drawers.

HANNAH

Oh, yeah. Beats waitin' tables in Dorchester. And she's kinda sweet, you know.

JOE

She's a bitch!

HANNAH

But, you know, if you can't remember nothin', you can't hold any grudges. It's just like she's ... swimmin' in a big warm lake in the dark, you know, and maybe the moon comes out every once in a while. It's sweet.

JOE

Watch out for her, Maer, I tell you; she's sharp as a meat-axe.

HANNAH

Used to be, yeah. Jeez, she can write backwards. Hey, how'd you know 'bout that, 'bout usin' Hannah.

JOE

I 'member her old man was always playin' that spellin' shit.

HANNAH

Worked like a charm. There musta been fifty girls applyin' for the job, and when I says to him my name's Hannah, she pipes up and says, "Her! I want Hannah!" So he had to give me the job.

JOE

Din' I tell ya?

He comes back to where she has plumped herself on the sofa and starts to feel up her breasts under her blouse.

JOE

You know what? Once he's gone I'm movin' in. What kinda bed you got?

HANNAH

Soft, and big, and warm.

JOE

He got his plane ticket yet?

HANNAH

Yeah, Thursday.

(pulls his hand out of her blouse)

Hey, Joe, I told you that hurts!

JOE

Aw, you love it and you know it. Thursday, huh? Listen, I'm workin' on a new angle.

HANNAH

What kinda angle? Joe, it's good like it is, don't start messin'.

JOE

Now listen, he was at Cape a' Good Cheer again last night, hangin' all over the bar, slosed to the gills and he was—

HANNAH

Yeah, you should'a heard him comin' in.

(pulls his hand out of her blouse again)

Joe, cut it out. It ain't made of steel, you know.

JOE

He was talkin' about som'n' I never heard of before, and it started me thinkin'.

HANNAH

What?

(sensual response, his hand back in her blouse)

Ooh!

JOE

She's got a sister som'eres. You heard her talkin 'bout a sister?

HANNAH

No.

(more sensual)

Aow ooh!

JOE

Yeah, Murtson was sayin' 'bout this Edna. Emma's sister Edna. She ever talk 'bout a sister? Edna?

HANNAH

Edna, I don't think— ooh!

JOE

And this Edna had a kid. So I started thinkin'—

HANNAH

Joe, couldn't you shut up!

She kisses him passionately. Emma wanders in, but doesn't see them for a moment as she fetches her diary. They freeze, but she turns and sees them.

EMMA

Oh, hello, dear, I was just coming for my diary— Harris! Joe Harris!

HANNAH

(after a startled pause)

This is my boyfriend, Mrs. Murtson, I—

EMMA

Joe Harris! What are you doing in this house? Father paid you to—

JOE

You got me wrong, Mrs. Murtson, my name's Bob. Hannah and me—

EMMA

Bob? There was a Bob earlier but...

(points to phone, breaks off, confused)

HANNAH

Bob's my boyfriend, Mrs. Murtson. I know it's wrong of me to have him here, but he come all the way down from Boston, and we ain't seen each other for such a long time.

EMMA

You look so much like— ! But—

HANNAH

Bob, whyncha take off now. My day off, I'll drive up to Boston and—

EMMA

I have a picture somewhere, I must have. You wait right there.

Emma goes off with determination. Hannah runs and closes the doors after her.

HANNAH

How come you never told me she knew you!

JOE

She don't!

HANNAH

What'd her father pay you for?

JOE

Her father's been dead thirty year! I was a baby!

HANNAH

She knew your face, she knew your name!

JOE

She must be mixin' me up with my old man, his name was Joe, too. Started out as her father's chauffeur, but that was over thirty fuckin' year ago! You said she couldn't 'member nothin'.

HANNAH

She can 'member old stuff, she just can't 'member what happened two minutes ago.

JOE

She gonna 'member she seen me?

HANNAH

Maybe not, proolly not. Get out, go, go.

JOE

Don't forget. Edna and the kid. Get her to talk. Find out if the kid was a girl or boy.

HANNAH

Yeah, yeah. Gimme a kiss.

(pulls him to her)

JOE

It's important, Maer. I got a plan.

(kisses her passionately)

HANNAH

God, I miss you! Oh, God! Come back later.

JOE

Can't, gotta tend bar tonight. Take a candle to bed.

HANNAH

I'll need one of them big Christmas candles to make it seem like you, Joe.

Joe laughs, and she nudges him out the French doors, giving him a pinch on the rear.

She locks the French doors and closes the sheers, then opens the double doors to reveal Emma wandering irresolutely in the hallway.

EMMA

Oh, hello, dear, I was looking for something, but I don't know just now...

HANNAH

Your diary?

EMMA

Yes, of course.

HANNAH

It's in your hand.

EMMA

Oh! Silly cow!

(coming into the study)

HANNAH

Yeah, I'll say. I mean—

EMMA

Well, perhaps I'll just have a nightcap as long as I'm up and haunting the house. Would you care to join me?

HANNAH

Thank you. I'd like that. I thought I heard a noise, so I come down to check the doors. You ain't seen no one, have you?

EMMA

(going to the liquor caddy and making drinks)

Let's see, there was a girl here earlier ... but of course, that was you, wasn't it, dear? Hannah, am I right?

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

EMMA

Faces occasionally, names always, but a..

HANNAH

It's a palderome, you know.

EMMA

(annoyed)

Er, yes, I was just about to tell you. Faces occasionally, names always, but a palindrome— palindrome, dear, palindrome— I never forget a palindrome. "A man, a plan, a canal, Panama!" One of the great palindromes, about Teddy Roosevelt, you know.

HANNAH

A man, a p-lan...

EMMA

Trust me, dear, it IS the same backwards. Father was a great palindromist, the greatest! He...

HANNAH

What about Edna? Was she a pal-and-deromist, too?

EMMA

(stunned)

Who?

HANNAH

Edna. Your sister.

EMMA

My sister? Edna?

HANNAH

Yes. Edna?

EMMA

Who ... told you about Edna?

HANNAH

You did. You mentioned her to me this morning, don't you 'member? At breakfast.

EMMA

I didn't have breakfast this morning. Did I?

HANNAH

No, you were very bad, you didn't eat. All you wanted to do was talk. 'Bout Edna. And her child. It was real innerestin'.

EMMA

I told you about Edna's child?

HANNAH

Yeah, but I forgot, was it a girl or a boy?

EMMA

(writing quickly in her diary)

I must speak to Dennis! Where is he?

HANNAH

He's gone out. Whatcha writin' in your diary?

EMMA

I'll wait for him. In my room.

HANNAH

He said he'll be real late.

EMMA

I'll wait!

(marches to the hallway, stops, glances at safe, turns)

Would you ... brew me up a pot of tea, dear?

HANNAH

There's tea on your dinner tray in your room, ma'am.

EMMA

I prefer fresh.

HANNAH

Okay, sure.

Emma moves aside cautiously to let Hannah pass. Hannah exits down the stage-right hallway. Emma closes the double doors, goes quickly to the safe.

EMMA

Oh, silly cow!

She takes out the ms., examines it quickly, then examines the other contents of the safe.

Oh, yes, it's all here!

Keeping the ms. tightly in her arms, she locks the safe, goes quickly to the mirror, pushes a lever, and the mirror opens to reveal a passageway behind it. Emma goes through the mirror, closing it behind her.

In a moment, Hannah enters.

HANNAH

Mrs. Murtson, I thought maybe—

She stops when she finds the room empty. She tries the French doors, finds them still locked from the inside. She sees the safe is now closed, gasps, backs away looking perplexed. The clock cuckoos; she gives a little scream. She picks up Joe's drink, drinks it down.

She picks up Dennis's drink, drinks it down. She goes to the bar with the two glasses, pulls down a bottle of scotch and swigs deeply from it, all the while looking about her in consternation as

the clock cuckoos insanely scaring her out of her wits and off the stage as ...

...the lights dim out.

END OF ACT I, SCENE I

ACT I, SCENE II

Late morning. The French doors are open and sunlight spills in. A breakfast tray is on the table. A rubberbanded newspaper is on it.

Diary in hand, Emma enters agitatedly, evidently looking for something. She hesitates, frowning, goes to the safe, shakes her head. She opens her diary.

EMMA

Edna! Oh, dear, yes!

(takes her appointment book from her sweater pocket, opens it, hesitates, consults the diary, then turns pages in the appointment book to compare dates, then picks up the newspaper to compare dates.)

And the date is correct!

Dennis enters, dressed for gardening, shears in hand.

DENNIS

Good morning, Mother.

EMMA

Dennis, I'm so distressed!

DENNIS

(putting on gardening gloves)

No violence, please, mother. I'm trimming those damned unruly roses on the south lattice this morning and I don't want your bad karma to upset them.

EMMA

Read my diary.

DENNIS

I'm going to burn that diary! What have you done now?

(goes for white out)

EMMA

We have a girl named Hannah working for us, and listen—

DENNIS

Yes, Mother, I know, she's been here three weeks, how could I not know, let me have the diary.

EMMA

(reads from diary)

"Speak to Dennis. Hannah has asked about Edna."

DENNIS

Edna?

EMMA

Edna Redrum, what other Edna do you know?

DENNIS

Edna Redrum?

EMMA

The central character of Father's novel, "Murder and Edna Redrum"! Don't pretend innocence with me, you nasty thing.

DENNIS

What did you tell Hannah?

EMMA

Not a word! I knew I should never have trusted you. I told you the plot and now you've gone and told this wretched Hannah and she's trying to steal the idea before I can finish Father's life work.

DENNIS

Mother, she can hardly steal a 600 page palindrome.

EMMA

Oh, it's much longer than that now, dear. I believe.

(consults diary)

Yes, "Worked on Edna, 631 pages." I hope to end it on page six-six-six exactly. Won't that be clever of me? Father would have laughed.

DENNIS

In any case, Mother, I think your novel is safe.

EMMA

But how did this Hannah find out about it?

DENNIS

(removing a glove to white out the diary behind her back)

Yes, Mother, that's very strange, and no I can't account for it. Maybe she's just a garden variety snoop sneaking into your diary!

EMMA

She'd better not!

DENNIS

I'll tell you what. Next time Hannah asks you about Edna, you draw her out, hoist her with her own petard. Doesn't that sound like fun?

(blows on white out)

EMMA

You know what I might do... Oh, mightn't it be jolly! And I daresay I could turn it to novelistic advantage. Oh, I do feel keen!

DENNIS

You are keen, Mother.

EMMA

Hand me my diary, dear. What are you doing with it?

Hannah starts to enter from hallway but draws back to eavesdrop.

DENNIS

Now Mother, your diary is distressing you. Let's put it away for right now...

(standing on a chair and putting the diary on the topmost shelf)

EMMA

Oh, you are a beast!

DENNIS

...and later, when you want it, ask me for it and I'll give it back.

(imitating Emma's accent)

And now for those nasty roses.

Dennis goes out the French doors, putting on his gloves and taking the shears with him.

Emma stands on a chair and tries to reach the diary, but can't quite. Hannah enters.

HANNAH

Did you want me, ma'am.

EMMA

Oh, yes, dear. Hannah, am I right?

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am, it's a pal-and-derome.

EMMA

Faces occas— Oh, you are fast! Now, let me see, where was I?

(Hannah points up at the diary.)

Oh, yes, that nasty Dennis has put my diary on that shelf. Could you reach it down for me?

HANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

EMMA

Oh, I do feel keen!

During this next, Hannah gets on the chair and reaches up toward the diary.

You are too kind. Er, Hannah, er, I used to be taller, you know. Quite tall for a girl. My sister—EDNA— and I were the same height exactly. We were twins, you know, and quite tall.

HANNAH

Oh, I didn't know you and Edna was twins.

EMMA

Yes, identical to the last detail. Father, Lord Redrum, was a very droll Lord...

(makes palindromic gesture)

...he named us almost identically, Edna and Emma.

HANNAH

Where is she now? Edna.

EMMA

Dead.

HANNAH

Oh!

EMMA

Murdered.

HANNAH

Oh!! Jeez! Who did it?

EMMA

I'll tell you the facts of the case ... then YOU tell ME who murdered Edna Redrum.

(Hannah, having retrieved Emma's diary, now sits attentively.)

Edna and I were thirty-three years old to the day when we met Dennis Murtson. Not my son Dennis, of course, my husband Dennis. Emma and Edna, we were the closest of twins. Old maids, yes, but happy old maids, we were devoted to each other. The only problem was she couldn't keep her hands off me.

HANNAH

You mean ... ?

EMMA

Yes.

HANNAH

A pervert!

EMMA

An ... invert. Perhaps ... a revert. No wonder then that when Dennis came along, I fell in love so immediately and so completely. He wasn't much of a man, but he was a man. Father didn't approve, of course. Neither did Edna. She was insane with jealousy.

HANNAH

It's like a movie or something!

EMMA

Truth is always stranger than fiction. On my wedding night, I had the usual bridal anxiety, anticipation. I dressed myself in an alluring white negligee. I brushed my hair long and carefully. And my teeth. Singing to myself snatches of that old song ... do you know, "Would you?"

HANNAH

(breathlessly)

No.

EMMA

(sings sweetly)

He holds her in his arms, would you?

(clock cuckoos; Emma responds with a smile)

Would you? *(cuckoo)* He tells her of her charms, Would you? *(cuckoo)* Would you? *(cuckoo)*
They met as you and I—

(breaks off, speaks)

I was so romantic.

HANNAH

Yeah, me too.

EMMA

When I opened the door and came at last to my nuptial bed, I found my groom lying there ...
still ... the white sheets red with fresh blood.

HANNAH

Oh no!

EMMA

I opened my mouth to scream. Dennis ... snored. "My love," I whispered, reaching for him. He
awoke, he turned, he reared back, he said... I'll never forget his words... "God, what are you, a
nymphomaniac?"

HANNAH

Don't tell me.

EMMA

Yes.

HANNAH

The fresh blood on the white sheets ... ?

EMMA

Edna's maidenhead. She had been a virgin, of course, technically. Posing as me, she took her
revenge by seducing my groom. My only thought, screaming through my head, was: Dennis
and Edna sinned!

*(gives palindromic gesture, looks for comprehension, sees none,
smiles)*

But I forgave him.

HANNAH

(a sigh)

Aw!

EMMA

However, I would not be denied my wedding night.

HANNAH

Good for you!

EMMA

Never was siren more seductive. I danced, how I danced, like Salome I danced!

HANNAH

(another sigh)

Oh!

EMMA

Soon, my husband's arousal was visibly evident.

HANNAH

Yeah, I got the picture!

EMMA

"Em..." he said to me. He always called me Em. Never Emma, Em. "Em, you buoy me!"

(gives a nostalgic palindromic gesture)

HANNAH

"You buoy me!"

EMMA

"EM ... you ... buoy me."

(more emphatic palindromic gesture)

HANNAH

Buoy, like a buoy, like out in the bay! Aw yeah, ain't it romantic! Like you got him up, floatin' on the stormy sea of sensuality! "You buoy me!"

(imitates palindromic gesture, only up-and-down as in masturbation instead of back-and-forth)

EMMA

(annoyed, gives an even more emphatic palindromic gesture)

Dear, it's "EM, you buoy ME". The turning point, you see ... for me. As I danced, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I was radiant.

HANNAH

(a moan of ecstasy, really)

Ooh!

EMMA

And we consummated our marriage in my sister's virginal blood.

HANNAH

Unh!

EMMA

It was too much for poor Dennis, two virgins in double-quick succession. They called it a heart attack, but what a climax!

HANNAH

You don't mean ... ?

EMMA

Yes. Wed, betrayed, deflowered, and widowed in a single night.

HANNAH

You poor thing!

EMMA

Nine months later, Dennis was born.

HANNAH

Aw, how sweet!

EMMA

Do you really think so?

HANNAH

Well yeah, except he grew up into Mr. Murtson.

EMMA

Yes.

HANNAH

What about Edna?

EMMA

Edna? Edna. Edna had disappeared. Father set Scotland Yard searching for her, but without success. On Christmas Day, there was a knock upon the door. I remember I had Dennis in my arms; he was just over a month old, 33 days, to be exact. I opened the door. There stood Edna, ragged and dreadful. In her arms was a baby, the exact duplicate of the one in my arms.

HANNAH

(gasps)

Because ... ?

EMMA

Yes, the same exact genetic makeup, conceived within moments of each other by the same father.

HANNAH

Was it a boy or a girl?

EMMA

I haven't decided. ... I mean, I never knew. The child was in winter garb and a blanket. I've often imagined it was a girl, and that one day Dennis and she would meet, they would not know each other, they would fall in love and—

HANNAH

No, don't say it. That would be ... ?

EMMA

Incest, yes. The most pernicious sort. Can you imagine the offspring of that union?

HANNAH

Oh, unh!

EMMA

Exactly. I sent Edna away. I turned my back on my twin...

(in front of the mirror, turns with palindromic emphasis)

...and she on me.

HANNAH

Where did she go? Where could she go?

EMMA

Downhill. She went from woman to woman, man to man, she was quite indiscriminate. The name Redrum was dragged through the mud. At the last, she was with ... a busdriver, a seamy Irishman by the name of ... something appropriate. One morning Edna's body was found floating in the Thames. She had been shot in the the heart.

HANNAH

And her baby?

EMMA

Never found. The seamy Irish busdriver ... never found. The proud Lord Redrum, now disgraced, gathered up his remaining daughter, and her fatherless child and they sailed to America to make a new life. Father built this house, and then died of a broken heart. Only I and my son live on. Now I ask you, who murdered Edna Redrum?

HANNAH

(very nervous)

Uh, gee! It's hard to say. The only person with a real motive, like jealousy or revenge or ... was ... ?

(backs away a bit, points to Emma)

EMMA

Yes. I think... I shall retire.

Enjoying her performance, Emma goes off up the stage-left hallway, leaving a quaking Hannah. Joe enters through the French doors.

JOE

Christ!

HANNAH

Joe, watch out, Murtson's out there!

JOE

Yeah, yeah, I seen him.

HANNAH

He see you?

JOE

Naw, he's got his back to the house, workin' on the roses. Christ, what a family, huh?

HANNAH

You heard that story? 'Bout Edna?

JOE

Yeah, Christ!

HANNAH

No wonder she's nutty!

JOE

So Murtson was right. There was another kid.

HANNAH

Aw, the poor thing!

JOE

I got a plan.

HANNAH

What, I don't want to hear it.

JOE

You're gonna be that kid.

HANNAH

What are you talkin' 'bout?

JOE

She don't know if it was a boy or a girl, so we forge you up some papers—

HANNAH

I ain't forgin' nothin' no more, Joe!

JOE

Nobody's seen you in town, right? Little Mary Redrum, come to visit old Auntie Em. Huh?

HANNAH

Huh?

JOE

Who's to say? She can't 'member nothin' from day to day, and she ain't seen you since you was a baby.

HANNAH

What about Murtson?

JOE

He's goin' to Frisco.

HANNAH

Yeah, but when he comes back.

JOE

Suppose he don't come back.

HANNAH

Shut up, Joe!

JOE

Now listen to me. Little Mary Redrum, loving niece and heir to the Redrum fortune.

HANNAH

Heiress.

JOE

We can have it all.

HANNAH

No, Joe, we take what we can walk out with.

JOE

And be on the run for the rest of our lives! I'm tired of it, Maer! Now listen, I'm talkin'! We don't do nothin' till he goes to Frisco. Then we start in on the old lady. You're Mary Redrum, got it?

HANNAH

Yeah, but you dope, you got me comin' in here as Hannah. She never forgets a palderome!

JOE

She will if you give her enough time. We got three weeks alone with her before he's s'posed to come back, right? Am I right? You got his itiniery, don't you?

HANNAH

Yeah, three weeks.

JOE

So okay, here's the plan. We got three weeks to get Hannah out of the old lady's head and Mary Redrum into it, then I fly to Frisco -- I tell everyone at Cape a' Good Cheer I'm goin' fishin' down Provincetown, right? --and I fly out and ... DO it.

HANNAH

I don't want to hear it.

JOE

I rent a boat, drop him in the ocean, by the time he washes up, a week, maybe a month later, I'm at Cape a' Good Cheer pumpin' beer. Who's to suspect me, I ain't got no motive.

HANNAH

Yeah, but what about little Mary Redrum? She sure as hell's got a motive.

JOE

We give you a alibi. Everyday you're takin' the old lady out and 'bout and she's sayin' to everyone, "Oh, this is my niece Mary, ain't she lovely?" How can you murder a guy on the west coast when you're on the east coast? Huh? Huh?

HANNAH

You're crazy, Joe.

Meanwhile Dennis has entered through the French doors, still in his gloves and holding the shears. He steals to the desk and takes out the gun.

DENNIS

Yes, you're crazy. Turn around.

(Joe turns to face Dennis.)

I know you. Where do I.— ? You're the bartender.

HANNAH

He was just talkin' crazy, Mr. Murtson. You—

DENNIS

My mother told me about you, Hannah, or should I say Mary, but I didn't take her seriously. I see I was wrong.

(picking up the phone, dialing operator)

The police will—

HANNAH

Oh, please don't call the police, Mr. Murtson. I got a record in Boston.

JOE

Shut up, Maer!

HANNAH

If they pick me up—

DENNIS

Police Department, please.

HANNAH

(starts toward Dennis)

Oh, please, Mr. Murtson!

DENNIS

I'll shoot! I will!

Dennis is distracted long enough by Hannah for Joe to jump him. They struggle over the gun.

JOE

Get the phone!

Hannah grabs the phone away from Dennis and hangs it up while Dennis and Joe struggle. The gun is thrown across the floor. Joe wrestles Dennis to the floor. Dennis crawls toward the gun, Joe on top of him.

JOE

Get the gun!

Hannah grabs the gun before Dennis can get to it. The ensuing fight is long and hard-fought.

JOE

Shoot him! Maer! Shoot him!

But Hannah can't. Dennis grabs the big bulge in Joe's crotch and squeezes hard; Joe screams in pain and is utterly disabled. Dennis grabs the shears and advances on Joe, but Hannah shoots him, and Dennis sinks to the floor, still. Hannah recoils

and the clock sets up an insane cuckooing while Joe gets to his feet, contorted with pain.

JOE

Aw, Christ!

(leans over Dennis)

He's dead.

HANNAH

Oh, my God!

JOE

Okay, okay, so this is it.

HANNAH

What are we gonna do?

Joe, in pain but thinking hard and fast, straightens up the room after the fight.

JOE

We just make a few changes, that's all, it's okay, babe, I got a plan. The plane ticket's set for Thursday, right? Okay, I'm him now.

HANNAH

What?

JOE

(taking the napkin and using it to pick up the gun)

Who's to know? I get on the plane, get off in Frisco—

HANNAH

(as Joe puts the gun back in its drawer)

Wipe it off.

JOE

Yeah, yeah ... get off the plane, right, check in at his hotel ...

HANNAH

What about him, I mean, what's left, the body?

JOE

You got a walk-in freezer in the kitchen, right?

HANNAH

Oh, Joe!

JOE

We put him in a trunk. We freeze him. In Frisco I claim him as baggage.

HANNAH

Aw, Joe, what are we into!

JOE

Check in at the hotel, rent a boat ... No, rent the boat first, leave the trunk, check in at the hotel...

HANNAH

No, don't leave the trunk, you dope!

JOE

No, I don't want to leave the trunk, I'll— Oh, I'll plan that stuff out later. Check the hall for the old lady.

(starts dragging Dennis's body to the double doors)

You go find a trunk. I'll meet you in the kitchen.

Joe drags Dennis's body out the double doors, takes the stage-right hallway. Hannah starts out after him, turns back, thinks a moment, picks up Emma's diary, whites out an entry, turns back a few pages and begins whiting out other entries.

Emma enters from the stage-left hallway, preoccupied. Hannah hides the diary behind her back.

EMMA

Now, let's see, let's see. Oh, yes!

(picks up phone; sees Hannah)

Oh, hello, dear, just in time, how does one dial the police?

HANNAH

The police!

EMMA

Yes, rather peculiar, I was taking my midmorning nap, as is my custom, when suddenly at ten-one exactly, I was awakened by...

HANNAH

(looks at her watch)

Oh my God!

EMMA

...but that's what's so peculiar, I can't quite remember just what. I remember the time, of course, because it was palindromic...

(makes palindromic gesture)

...ten-oh-one ten-oh-one ten-oh-one, but it seems like—

HANNAH

The alarm!

EMMA

No, it wasn't an "A" word, it was an "S-H" word. I remember because I awoke saying, "shhh!", and remarked upon the significance.

(Joe returns, sees Emma, backs out of sight.)

...shhh ... shhh ... concentrate you silly cow ... shhh-ot. Shot! Or was it a shout? Shot, shout. Perhaps a shit. No, no, pondering this last, I'm certain I would remember that more distinctly. And that wouldn't require police interference, would it?

(hangs up)

So it was a shot or a shout. But wait, this was ten-oh-one in the a.m.; shots are heard only in the dead of night, I believe.

HANNAH

(unplugging the phone and handing it through the door to Joe)

Yeah, that's right, dead a' night.

EMMA

So it was a shout. Point d'exclamation! Where's my diary!

(begins searching in the regular places, on the table, in the safe, on the high shelves; meanwhile, Hannah writes madly in Emma's diary)

But who could have been shouting? You haven't been shouting, dear, have you, I frown upon shouting. Father was a shouter. Shouted everything, every breath he drew, how the man could shout. Until he died, of course. After that he stopped shouting. What am I doing? Oh yes, looking for something. What? Oh yes, my diary. Where?

(begins looking again, pauses)

Now, what again?

HANNAH

(finishes writing in the diary and, with a dreadful attempt at an English accent)

Your diary, Aunt Emma. Here it is. You left it on the sofa, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

Oh, thank you, I keep—

(stops)

What ... what did you call me, dear?

HANNAH

I called you Aunt Emma, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

And your name again was ... ?

HANNAH

Oh, Aunt Emma, have you forgot again already. I'm Mary, Aunt Emma, all the way from England, Edna's child, Mary Redrum.

EMMA

Redrum!

(terror dawns; she turns to leave)

I must speak to Dennis.

HANNAH

But Dennis is in Sahn Frahnccisco, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

San Francisco! Oh, yes.

HANNAH

He flew off last night. Aw, you really miss him, don't you, Aunt Emma?

EMMA

More than I can say. Perhaps ... perhaps I'll just give him a ring. Do you have the number, dear?
(sees the phone has been removed; terror higher)

Didn't ... there used to be a telephone here?

HANNAH

Don't you 'member, Aunt Emma? Dennis had it disconnected 'cause I was callin' my boyfriend too much, runnin' up a bill.

EMMA

I must be keen!

HANNAH

What did you say?

EMMA

I said, "How like him."

(opens her diary to make a note, to take charge)

And ... how long have you been here ... ? Er, what was your little name again, dear?

HANNAH

Mary.

EMMA

Oh, yes, Mary...

(makes significant note)

...Redrum.

HANNAH

Oh, I've been here about three weeks now. Well, it must be in your diary, Aunt Emma.

(takes the diary from Emma, turns pages)

Yes, here we are. "Mary came today. Lovely girl ..."

EMMA

Let me see that!

(takes diary back)

There's something wrong, though; there's white paint here. "Mary came today. Lovely girl, and such a good cook."

HANNAH

(turning pages)

Good cook! But look what you wrote just yesterday, today, yesterday.

EMMA

"Mary fixed a lovely omelette, but there is too much butter, I fear." Oh yes, I seem to remember that. And when it got cold, it was very unappetizing. Here's more of that white paint. A regular palimpsest.

HANNAH

Read what's next.

EMMA

Er, no, thank you, dear. I think I'll just go for a little walk, down to the village, perhaps.

HANNAH

(closing and locking the French doors)

No, Aunt Emma, you might get lost in the woods again.

EMMA

Lost in the woods?

HANNAH

(thrusts the diary back into Emma's hands)

Read what's next in your diary, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

(terror higher still)

Good Lord, I won the Hanover Penmanship Medal four years running; this is the hand of a sloven!

HANNAH

Read!

EMMA

"Dennis-is-gone-to-San-Francisco-but-I-won't-be-lonely-because-Mary's-young-man-has-finally ... ?"

(puzzles over the next word)

HANNAH

"Arrived."

EMMA

With this spelling?

(Hannah advances threateningly.)

Arrived! "...arrived-who's-ever-so-nice-as-ever-can-be-and-his-name's-even-a-pal—

(puzzles again)

—” a pal ...”

HANNAH

“Pal-and-derome. Bob.”

EMMA

Bob? I never forget a palindrome.

Joe enters.

HANNAH

And speak of the devil, here's Bob now.

JOE

Hiya, Auntie Em.

EMMA

(terror at its zenith)

Joe Harris!

JOE

(sitting, putting his feet on the table)

Nice place you got.

HANNAH

(easing herself luxuriously into the couch)

Not Joe, Aunt Emma; his name is Bob, 'member?

(trying to get the accent right)

Bahb. Bawb. Bowb.

Emma begins backing toward the double doors, looking from Hannah to Joe.

EMMA

You ... are ... Bob?

In utter terror, she continues backing, beginning to slip her appointment book out of her sweater pocket as ...

... the lights dim out.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Eleven days later. The lights come up to reveal the same setting, the French doors closed to the late afternoon light. (By the end of the act it will be sunset again.)

Hannah and Joe, in clothes clearly belonging to Emma and Dennis, are in the identical positions from the end of ACT I, Joe with his feet comfortably on the table, Hannah lounging on the couch.

Emma, her hair stringy and matted and her ACT I costume now stained and unkempt, enters through the double doors, exactly reversing her exit at the end of ACT I, looking from Hannah to Joe, slipping her appointment book into her sweater pocket as she advances tentatively toward Joe.

EMMA

Bob ... are ... you ... going into town today?

JOE

Course I'm goin' into town today! Don't I go into town every day, you old bat!

HANNAH

Stop it, J... uh, Bob, be nice, hon.

The clock cuckoos.

JOE

Damn that clock!

EMMA

Then would you pick up some rat poison, please?

JOE

Rat poison? What for?

EMMA

It seems we have rats. Rats in Father's house! I can't think how.

HANNAH

Where did you see the rahts, Aunt Emma?

EMMA

I can't just remember, dear. But I found this letter I began to Dennis... Where is Dennis, dear?

JOE

Frisco! Frisco! How many times you gotta be told, you stupid old—

HANNAH

Leave her alone!

EMMA

My, what a temper. I frown upon shouting, young man, er, Bob.

HANNAH

Don't you 'member, Aunt Emma? Cousin Dennis is in Sahn Frahnscisco talkin' at that horny logical place.

EMMA

Horny ... logical?

HANNAH

'Member? 'Bout the cuckoo?

EMMA

Cuckoo!

JOE

She's the one's cuckoo.

EMMA

Fabulously interesting bird, my dear, the cuckoo hen lays her egg in the nest of an altogether different species, and the foster parents hatch it. The cuckoo chick, by a miracle of nature, hatching a day earlier than the nest's original tenants...

HANNAH

Let's see your letter, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

(continuing without stop as Hannah takes the letter)

...with a fiendish sense for survival, usurps the nest entirely by hoisting the other eggs on its shoulders and dumping them over the side, thereby disinheriting the rightful—

(stops, recognizing the aptness)

Oh dear!

HANNAH

Listen to this, Joe. "Dear Dennis, come home at once. Two large rats have invaded the house."

EMMA

Rats! Oh yes.

(pats the pocket of her sweater)

You can see it's dated several days ago...

(picking up her diary from the table and offering it to Hannah)

...yet I make no mention of these rats in my diary.

HANNAH

You probably dreamed it, Aunt Emma.

JOE

Maybe the rats'll eat the cuckoo.

EMMA

(to Hannah)

Oh, yes, that must be it, dear. Dreams can be so insidious.

HANNAH

Why don't I mail this for you, Aunt Emma?

EMMA

How kind of you. I'll make a note in my diary.

JOE

Yeah, yeah, that's good. Send it to his hotel.

HANNAH

You don't think ... ?

JOE

Naw, it looks good. Mama's writin' to sonny, right, everything's all normal, hunky dory.

EMMA

(writing in diary)

"Hannah will post letter to Dennis."

JOE

Mary! Mary! Mary Redrum! How many times you gotta—

HANNAH

Shut up, for God's sake!

EMMA

Shouting!

HANNAH

'Member, Aunt Emma, my name is Mary.

EMMA

But it says here, "Hannah will post letter..."

HANNAH

(gets white out)

Don't bother 'bout that, Aunt Emma, I'll fix it.

EMMA

But—

HANNAH

I'll fix it, Aunt Emma!

JOE

She's drivin' me nuts! Go take a walk.

HANNAH

No, she'll get lost in the woods again. Go to your room, Aunt Emma.

EMMA

Lost in the woods?

Emma, cowed, starts out hesitantly. At the double doors she looks left and then right, remembers her appointment book and begins to slip it out of her sweater pocket as she starts out the stage-left hallway.

HANNAH

That's right, up the stairs.

(whiting out Emma's diary)

I told you, she's never gonna get Hannah out of her head.

JOE

If you'd do like I tell you, take her to town, get her to introduce you as Mary Redrum to the butcher, the baker, the—

HANNAH

Joe, she's not ready to go to town, I keep tellin' you that, she'll blow the whole thing. "Have you met my palderome?" she'll say to them, "Hannah?"

JOE

Maer, you just smile at 'em, you just wink, they know she's nuts. You just give 'em your cute little accent, you're great, you sound like Greta Garble. What're they gonna think? Oh, you poor sweet thing, you got this auntie that's cuckoo. But the thing is you gotta get 'stablished as Mary Redrum 'fore his body washes up.

HANNAH

But what if his body don't wash up!

JOE

What're you talkin' about, 'course it's gonna wash up.

HANNAH

It's been over a week! How far out did you drop him?

JOE

Way out.

HANNAH

How far out?

JOE

I don't know. Three mile, four mile. Five mile, I don't know, it was dark.

HANNAH

Well, could you still see the lights of Frisco?

JOE

Naw, I was farther out than that. So what's that, ten mile, I don't know, it was way out.

HANNAH

That's what I mean, what if you dropped him too far out, what if he never washes up, what if the sharks get him and— he's supposed to give his big talk tonight at the horny logical place, what if they call here, what if they say where is he?

JOE

You say you don't know, you stupid cunt! You say, oh I'm just his cousin, Mary Redrum from England, and oh how dreadful, and all like that!

HANNAH

You called me stupid.

JOE

What is with you! We done a hundred jobs together take more talent than this, you're makin' me nervous! Hold onto yourself, get—

(breaks off as Emma enters, consulting her appointment book)

Aw, Christ!

EMMA

Oh, there you are, er, Bob.

(pockets her appointment book)

When you go into town for the rat poison you'll...

JOE

If there're any rats around, I'll—

EMMA

...need some MONEY.

(slides a panel in the wall, revealing a third safe; Bob and Hannah come to attention)

Now let's see. Oh, yes.

(She dials the combination, hiding it with her hand; she takes out a stack of bills and hands them to Joe.)

Here you are.

HANNAH

How much is there?

JOE

(beginning to count)

Christ, there's thousand dollar bills in here!

HANNAH

They make them?

EMMA

Is it enough then?

JOE

How many safes you got in this place?

EMMA

Oh, lots. Father planned for the burglars, you see.

(pointing to the floor safe)

That's only the display safe, heavens!

JOE

You keep money in all of them?

HANNAH

Lemme see, Joe.

EMMA

Well, heavens, why have a safe and not fill it?

(Joe begins counting money. Emma starts out.)

Now let's see, dear, do I have to go to school today?

JOE

You don't go to school anymore! You're an old woman!

EMMA

Am I?

HANNAH

Stop yelling at her! She's just an old woman.

JOE

Shit, she made me lose count.

EMMA

(looking in mirror)

I am!

HANNAH

Here, give it to me.

(takes money)

JOE

Don't grab. I don't like grabbin'.

EMMA

(looking closer)

Oh, dear!

JOE

Kid I used to know was always grabbin'. Know what I did, I cut off his hands with a hatchet.

EMMA

Ah, here's my diary. How it does get about!

(goes for it where Hannah has left it)

HANNAH

(fearfully)

Sorry, Joe, It's just, my fingers are smaller, so I can fan 'em faster. Here.

JOE

No, you go 'head. Count. I'll watch.

EMMA

(heading out)

Now don't forget the rat poison, er, Bob.

HANNAH

(intent on counting)

We have rat poison.

EMMA

Oh? Where, dear?

HANNAH

Under the sink, in the kitchen.

(looks up from money)

But don't you touch it. If you see any more rats, you just let me know...

(back into accent)

... uh, Aunt Emma. Aw, shit, now she made me lose count.

JOE

Here give it back. You can't even—

Emma puts down her diary, pulls her appointment book out of her sweater pocket, and makes a note in it.

HANNAH

I can do it.

JOE

Give me half.

They split the money and both count.

EMMA

Under ... sink.

(finishes her note, gives them a look, smiles, goes out.)

HANNAH

Fifteen ... sixteen ... seventeen thousand.

JOE

Sixteen thousands, three hundreds, a twenty, a ten, and three ones.

HANNAH

Thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three.

JOE

Christ, how much money you s'pose is layin' 'round in these walls?

(inspecting the panel)

How'd she get this open?

(Hannah tries to slip Joe's share of the money out of his hand; he turns and grabs hers.)

Here, I'll keep this.

HANNAH

Hey!

(pulls away; he twists her wrists violently)

Ow, leggo, leggo!

JOE

Leggo!

(she drops the money; he picks it up)

God, God, what do I got here! You know what I can do with all this money.

HANNAH

WE, Joe. What WE'RE gonna do with it.

JOE

Yeah, yeah. All my life I lived in a trailer house, no chance, no breaks. "Home, Joseph!" That's the way they talked to my old man, nothin' but a ignorant chauffeur, grease monkey. Tightfisted, tightmouthed, tighthearted old yank, God save him. Put away a little money, what's all he can think to do, buys himself a fuckin' taxi cab. Home, Joseph. Well, Joseph IS home now!

HANNAH

(rubbing her wrists in pain)

You gotta be careful, you know, how you live, what happens to you. You go along, people poundin' on you, you get to be hamburger. Then you end up a hamburger sandwich, and someone comes along and eats you. *(snorts)* You know what you get to be next?

(slipping her arm cautiously about his waist)

Not us, Joe. No one's gonna take this away from us now, right Joe? Just like in the movies, huh?

(but he's deep in his own dreams; she sings)

He holds her in his arms, Would you, cuckoo? Would you, cuckoo? He tells her of her charms,

(speaks)

Would you, Joe?

JOE

Would I what?

HANNAH

You know... love... ?

JOE

Love? My old man taught me everything there is to know about love, Maer. Love is what you do in the backseat of the boss's car. And you do it to them before they can do it to you.

HANNAH

Aw, Joe, I wish you could just look at me without—

*A man looking just like Dennis enters through the French doors.
Very English. Thick accent.*

DENNIS

Hallo?

HANNAH

Jesus!

JOE

Christ!

DENNIS

I knocked, quite loudly, but no one answered, so I came round. I say, jolly house! Jolly rose garden!

Hannah pulls away from Joe. They stand staring as Dennis extends his hand.

DENNIS

So sorry. Denny O'Tool. Well, Redrum, actually, Denny Redrum. Dennis ... Redrum.

(sees their nervousness, speeds on)

I was looking for my aunt Emma or my cousin, Dennis Murtson.

(laughs, to Hannah)

Now I know you can't be my aunt, but...

(approaches Joe hopefully)

...might you be my cousin Dennis.

JOE

Uh ... yeah.

DENNIS

(takes Joe's hand, very moved)

We've never met. But I feel so close to you. Oh, you must think I'm daft; you probably haven't any idea who I am, even.

(takes an envelope from his jacket pocket)

Father ... Well, the man I thought was my father, Tim O'Tool, left this envelope with our family solicitor when he died. It was to be given to me upon my thirty-third birthday, but it got mislaid and was only recently uncovered. In the envelope was a letter from my mother, written when I was a baby, explaining ... certain rather peculiar circumstances surrounding my ... conception. And my mother wrote this letter to you, knowing only your name, having seen you only once, in your mother's arms as she stood in a cold London doorway.

(takes from the envelope a smaller envelope and hands it to Joe)

She committed suicide after having written it.

HANNAH

Suicide? So that's who murdered Edna Redrum!

DENNIS

I'm so frightfully sorry, barging in like this. You are ... ?

HANNAH

Miss ... Graham. Hannah Graham.

DENNIS

Hannah Graham, yes. And you ... are... ?

HANNAH

(looks to Joe for help, but he is intent on the letter)

The housekeeper?

DENNIS

(turning away, disdainfully)

Oh, so good to have met you.

(to Joe)

Cousin Dennis, is Aunt Emma ... still alive?

JOE

(looking up from the letter)

Uh, yeah. She's fine. She's takin' her nap.

(pushing Hannah towards the double doors)

Uh, Maer ... Hannah. Why don't you go up and see that, uh, Mom is sleepin' peaceful.

(under his breath)

Keep her outa here.

HANNAH

Excuse me.

DENNIS

Yes, so good to have met you.

HANNAH

Yeah, I'm sure.

Hannah exits. Joe watches her out of sight up the stage-left hallway, then closes the door.

DENNIS

Why the fuck didn't you call me!

JOE

Shut up! Why ain't you in Frisco?

DENNIS

I called Cape of Good Cheer, they said you haven't been in all week; I called your place, the phone's disconnected.

JOE

I forgot to pay the bill.

DENNIS

I called your piggy manager at the trailer court, what's-his-name, Huey ...

JOE

Herbie, he recognize your voice?

DENNIS

Herbie, of course, the pig. No I did an accent.

JOE

Not the English thing!

DENNIS

No, it was more Peter Lorre.

JOE

Huh?

DENNIS

Forget it, he didn't recognize me! The Pig! He said you haven't been coming home nights.

JOE

I been sleepin' here.

DENNIS

With that cow? What are you up to with her?

JOE

I been thinkin'.

DENNIS

That's a laugh. And what are you doing in my clothes, you look ridiculous.

JOE

Any more cracks like that you'll be pickin' your head up outa the roses.

DENNIS

And get that slut out of my mother's dress. You're planning something with her, aren't you?

JOE

(embracing him)

Hey, hey, baby. You're my baby, ain't you?

They embrace. Dennis responds passionately.

DENNIS

God, I've missed you!

JOE

Din'tya do like I toldja? Din'tya take that Christmas candle to bed witch'a?

DENNIS

Why didn't you call, Joey? I was afraid you—

JOE

You didn't mess with any of them Frisco queers with that clap out there!

DENNIS

AIDS! It's called AIDS, and it's not the clap, you—

JOE

You yellin' at me?

DENNIS

Well, why do you have to be so—

JOE

(quiet, menacing)

Denny, you yellin' at me?

DENNIS

I'm sorry, Joey, I've just been—

JOE

And hey, my nuts been achin' all this time from you grabbin' em like that!

DENNIS

Well, now you know how it feels.

JOE

You stick to what we rehearse, you hear me? Look how you messed us up now, comin' back here!

DENNIS

Why didn't you call? All kinds of things have been going through my mind. You and that cow! Or maybe the pig, or maybe—

JOE

You're too nervous! What's to call for? Din't we have a plan? Wasn't it workin'? We got her fingerprints all over the gun. Tonight you was s'posed to be doin' your cuckoo thing at the whatchacallit. I get Mary drunk, at 9:00 I put a bullet in your old lady's head...

DENNIS

Oh my God!

JOE

...put some necklaces in the car and drive Maer off the cliff, a simple case of burglary, right? And you inherit everything, so simple, right? Well, we can say goodbye to that plan now, can't we.

(bit of a pause, Dennis looks away)

You prolly flew on your return ticket, didn't you? Yeah, what a dope. I know what's behind it. You got cold feet, din'tya? No guts, no guts, you never had guts, you never will!

DENNIS

(quietly)

She's my mother.

JOE

Hunh, some mother! You used to come cryin' down to the trailer, "Joey, she called me a sissy! She pinched me! She burned me!"

DENNIS

It was a mustard plaster, I was sick.

JOE

"She stuck something up my butt!"

DENNIS

It was an enema, I was constipated!

JOE

(snorts, extends his hand tenderly)

Come here.

DENNIS

No, the cow might come back in.

JOE

Din't I 'splain this, Denny, all good and clear? Your old lady's better off. You're doin' her a favor. Smart woman like she was. You think if she still had her brain, she wouldn't do it herself?

DENNIS

She was a proud woman.

JOE

Ain't that what I'm tellin' you?

DENNIS

I've been thinking, Joey. When that gun went off, when I heard that shot—

JOE

It was a goddam blank.

DENNIS

Yes, but for just a second I thought maybe you put a real bullet in the chamber, and I had a vision of—

JOE

Would I do that? Hey, ain't you my buddy, ain't you always was?

DENNIS

You're different since you went up to Boston. Since you met her.

JOE

Hey—

DENNIS

I want it to be like when we were kids again, down at the cove, down at Little Pearl, remember? And I don't want my mother to die. People should die when they're supposed to die. We can't just—

JOE

I don't want to hear that kinda talk, Denny. Her eatin' up your money, what's gonna happen when she goes in the hospital, that money's s'posed to come to us.

DENNIS

But—

JOE

Shh, shh, stop poutin', we ain't gonna do nothin' to your mommy.

(fondles him)

And I'm glad you come back.

DENNIS

Are you?

JOE

Yeah, things is different now. Look at this.

(shows Dennis the cash)

DENNIS

Where'd you get all that?

JOE

She ever tell you about the safes?

DENNIS

You mean ... besides that one?

JOE

There's two more in this room alone, two that I know of.

(Dennis is surprised, looks at walls.)

Yeah, pretty classy job, huh? And at least one som'eres in her room for her jewels. That grandfather of yours was crazier'n I thought. And her, she can't remember what day it is, but she's got the combinations of four different safes —that I KNOW of— locked in her brain. How is that?

DENNIS

I don't know. It's how she is with numbers.

JOE

And what about that backwards book? How's she do that?

DENNIS

That's just in her head. She's been swimming around that same crazy plot as long as I can remember.

JOE

No, I seen it! I think. She moved it from that safe to this one.

DENNIS

You actually— there actually IS a manuscript? Wouldn't that be a kick in the ... !

JOE

Where the hell is it?

DENNIS

I don't know.

JOE

How much you think we could get for it, that kind of book?

DENNIS

A 666 page palindromic novel, it'd make a fortune! Even if it's terrible, and I'm sure it is.

JOE

So we gotta find it. So ... we can't kill her.

DENNIS

God!

JOE

Yet.

DENNIS

Oh God!

JOE

Hey, how many of them pandomes you s'pose she's still got left in her head?

DENNIS

I don't know.

JOE

And hey, can you do that, write pandomes?

DENNIS

Well, it's hardly passed down in the DNA.

JOE

(checking out the hallway)

But how come is it her crazy old man can do it and crazy her can do it and crazy you can't?

DENNIS

I don't know.

JOE

There's a lot you don't know.

DENNIS

Her head's a labyrinth.

JOE

A what?

DENNIS

A labyrinth ... like a maze, like a rat's maze? Jesus, you're dumb.

JOE

(smacking him on the head)

Dumb, huh? How 'bout you?

(slips his hand under Dennis's shirt, pinching his nipple.)

DENNIS

Hey, hey, Joey, ow!

JOE

You love it. Hey, what's that name again, that love stuff that those ancient Greek fags did to each other?

DENNIS

Eros! Ow! Stop!

JOE

Eros.

(pinch)

Sore eros. That's a pandome, dummy, s-o-r-e-e-r-o-s. Sore eros! Hah? I should go into the pandome business with your ma, how 'bout that?

Joe plays gently with Dennis's hair, takes off Dennis's scarf and smells it.

DENNIS

(loving the gentleness)

Oh, Joey, Joey!

JOE

Tulsa slut!

(pinch)

DENNIS

No, no, ooh!

JOE

I roamed under a red nude Maori, Tulsa slut, I roamed under a red nude Maori!!!

DENNIS

Please, Joey, please stop that. You're just like my mother!

JOE

A Toyota's not a racecar; a ton's a Toyota!!!!

DENNIS

(pushes Joe away)

Stop pinching it, Jesus!

JOE

You yellin' at me, Denny?

DENNIS

(faces him off for a second, then backs down)

You're too rough.

Hannah enters with some urgency.

HANNAH

(trying to cover the urgency)

Uh, Mr. Murtson. Could I see you a moment please?

JOE

What's wrong?

DENNIS

(at the same time)

What's wrong?

(defers to Joe)

Oh, sorry.

JOE

What's wrong?

HANNAH

Could I see you in the other room, please?

DENNIS

Oh, you may speak freely in front of me, Miss, uh ...

HANNAH

Graham. Hannah Graham.

DENNIS

Oh, yes, Hannah Graham. But you see, Hannah Graham, I'm part of Dennis's family now. Please do include me.

JOE

(sizing up Dennis's paranoia)

Yeah, I think you better.

HANNAH

I don't think so. Sir. It's about your mother.

DENNIS

Is she all right? I mean, dear dear Auntie isn't ill, is she?

HANNAH

Could I please see you outside. Sir!

JOE

Yeah, okay. Would you excuse us, Mr. uh ... Cousin Dennis?

DENNIS

Of course.

Joe and Hannah exit into the hallway, closing the double doors behind them. Dennis immediately goes to the doors, puts his ear to the crack. After a moment, he opens one of the doors gingerly and goes into the hallway. The clock cuckoos at him, and he would smash it, but just then the mirror opens and Emma puts her head out. Dennis pulls back into the hallway, out of sight.

Emma steps into the study, the loose-leaf ms. in her arms and the appointment book in her hand. She closes the mirror and heads purposefully for Safe #3, but the purposefulness fades halfway across the floor and she comes to a halt, confused. She sees the appointment book, reads a few lines, gasps.

EMMA

Trying to kill me! Oh, dear!

(reads on)

Oh, yes. Safe number three, put the manuscript inside!

(goes to safe #3, opens it, and puts the ms. inside, consults the appointment book again.)

Yes, that's right. All is right.

(checks an item off a list, closes the safe, starts back toward the mirror; thinks better of it, heads for the double doors —Dennis ducks farther back— loses her train of thought again, sees Dennis's sweater where he has left it on the sofa. She picks it up, smells it, looks about urgently, then rushes out through the French doors.)

Dennis!

Dennis comes back into the study and examines the sliding panel in front of safe #3 first, then goes to the mirror. As he searches for a secret lever, Joe enters through the hallway doors. Dennis, covering, checks a blemish up close in the mirror, combs his hair with his fingers.

JOE

You know of any secret passages in this house?

DENNIS

Uh, no. Why?

JOE

Your old lady keeps disappearin' on us. This time Maer left her in her dressin' room. No way out but the door, where'd she go?

DENNIS

I don't know.

JOE

Denny, Denny, we're so rich, if we can only find it! This place's got hidden safes, secret passageways, proolly stacked to the ceilings with money and jewels!

DENNIS

That sneaky, stingy old ... hag!

JOE

Now... what about Maer?

DENNIS

What about her? If you think we're cutting her in, you can—

JOE

(oblivious to Dennis, working a plan up)

Naw, naw, she'd be wise to that. *(beat)* Naw, forget it.

DENNIS

(growing nervous)

Uh, Joey ...

JOE

Naw. *(beat)* Yeah, I think maybe ...

(slides open the drawer with the gun)

DENNIS

I've got a plan!

JOE

Oh, you got a plan, huh?

DENNIS

(urgently, slipping the gun away from Joe)

Listen Joey, she's scared now because she thinks I'm Dennis Redrum and I'm going to find out that she killed my cousin. So tonight, you two do your burglary like you planned before, drive the hell out of here. Go to Alaska or someplace, go to Mexico.

JOE

Yeah? And then ... ?

DENNIS

And then one night, you disappear, just leave her, Joey, just leave her running, and you come right back here to me. Happily ever after. We've committed no crime, and—

JOE

Too risky. She might turn up again. We'll kill her.
(takes the gun back)

DENNIS

Joey, Christ! Don't you care anything about her?

JOE

(thinks a moment)

No.

This gives Dennis pause. Long pause.

DENNIS

Do you... care anything about me?

JOE

So, okay, let's see. No one knows she's here, and as far as anyone in Boston knows, I ain't been with her in more than a year, and it was a peaceful split up anyway, no one's gonna suspect me. There's a good soft spot in the basement— you got a leak down there, Denny, you know that? Christ, can't you fix anything?

DENNIS

Joey, I think—

JOE

So, okay, we got a plan. She's prolly up packin' already. If she comes down here—

DENNIS

Wait ... Joey ...

JOE

Denny, I know this girl, she'll turn up! Don't get nervous on me. Can I trust you or not? If she comes down here, hold her. You don't have to do nothin', I'll do it all.

Joe goes out, taking the stage-left hallway. Dennis hesitates a moment, then starts out after him.

DENNIS

Joey ...

Emma hurries through the French doors, looking behind her. Turning she sees Dennis.

EMMA

Dennis!

(rushes to him, embraces him)

Thank God! I thought you were dead!

(she weeps into his chest)

DENNIS

Aw, poor thing, aw, shh, shh.

(rocks her in his arms, sings)

He holds her in his arms... (breaks off) Remember, mother? Shhh.

(sings)

But before the story ends, She'll kiss him with a sigh, would you?

EMMA

(only a whisper)

Would you?

DENNIS

Would you? If the boy were I? Would you...

(breaks off)

Oh, mother, haven't you been bathing?

EMMA

Haven't I?

DENNIS

Oh, mother! And your hair! My God! Hasn't she helped you with your hair, that little bitch! I'll kill her! I mean...

EMMA

Yes, Dennis, there's a girl!

DENNIS

...forget I said that, mother. Oh, you can't remember a thing anyway.

EMMA

A palindrome! A Hannah! And another palindrome, a Bob! Two dreadful ratty people. Look, look, Dennis, I've been so keen.

(pulls the appointment book out of her sweater pocket)

I've kept it all down here in my appointment book so that I could remember. They've ruined my diary, and I keep going to sleep and forgetting, but then I read my notes, here, you see, and I remember. She says her name is something else...

(consults appointment book)

...Mary, yes, but it's not. It's Hannah. I never forget a palindrome. Faces occasionally—

DENNIS

Mother, you're being hysterical.

EMMA

No, and here's proof.

(takes a folded paper from her sweater pocket)

"Deliver evil, Hannah, live reviled!" I remember it distinctly. I NEVER forget a palindrome. I was here, she was there, you were there on the phone being perfectly horrid, you nasty thing! And her name was Hannah. And there's a Bob, but he's not Bob, either. He's someone else, but I can't—

DENNIS

Mother, this is only your appointment book. It can't be right. Let's consult your diary, shall we?

EMMA

They paint my diary! Look. "Can't trust diary; they paint it and write things that are not true." You see. Haven't I been keen?

DENNIS

Yes, you've been very keen, Mother. And I'm proud of you. Now perhaps I'd better keep your appointment book for you, and—

EMMA

Oh, no dear, because then you see I would forget.

DENNIS

But that's exactly the point, Mother. You know how forgetful you are. And if you were to forget your appointment book, we might never find it again. I'll keep it safe for you.

EMMA

The safe, yes.

Emma starts for the floor safe as Hannah comes through the French doors.

HANNAH

Oh, there you are.

(nervously to Dennis)

Oh, I guess you two met, huh? You prolly noticed that her mind ain't all there. What's she been sayin'?

DENNIS

(assuming his English accent)

Oh, yes, she is rather dotty. Aren't you, Mother?

EMMA

Why are you talking like that, Dennis?

DENNIS

She thinks she's my mother.

EMMA

Dennis?

HANNAH

Yeah, she does get confused, don't you Mrs. Murtson? I didn't want her to bother you, I was keepin' her upstairs, but somehow she got out in the rose garden, then she lost me in the woods.

EMMA

Lost in the woods?

HANNAH

Now, come on, Mrs. Murtson. Let's go back upstairs now, and lay down.

EMMA

Dennis?

DENNIS

Yes, Mother, Hannah's right. You're probably a bit tired.

EMMA

Hannah? I thought her name was ... something else.

HANNAH

Oh, no, it's Hannah, ma'am. Don't you 'member? Aw, poor thing, her mind's goin' so fast. She always prided herself on never forgettin' a palderome, you know, spelled the same backwards.

DENNIS

Oh, yes, jolly clever.

EMMA

I never forget a ...

HANNAH

(ushering Emma to the double doors)

Come along, Mrs. Murtson.

DENNIS

Oh, Hannah, might I have a word with you? Run along upstairs, Mother. And if you see ... a young man up there, do chat him up, a nice long chat.

EMMA

(whispering to Dennis)

I've got a plan!

DENNIS

A plan? Jolly! Run along!

(Emma exits; Dennis closes doors)

Now, Hannah, I have—

HANNAH

What kinda plan?

DENNIS

I can't think! Oh, the poor old dear, it's just gone, gone, gone, isn't it?

HANNAH

Yeah, poor old dear.

DENNIS

But I think it might have to do with— Hannah, I have something ... rather distressing to say to you.

HANNAH

Oh, yeah? Uh...

DENNIS

This bloke ... he's not my cousin.

HANNAH

You're ... puttin' me on.

DENNIS

I can't reveal to you how I know. You must trust me. Furthermore, I think he's a very dangerous sort.

(unconsciously rubbing his sore nipple)

He seems to have an underlying violence that...

HANNAH

(unconsciously rubbing her wrist)

Violent, yeah. I mean, yeah, I kinda noticed that, too. And if he's not the real Dennis Murtson, then ... You gotta get out of here!

DENNIS

(at the same time as Hannah)

You must leave at once!

Hannah is brought up sharply.

HANNAH

Huh?

DENNIS

I'm afraid for you.

HANNAH

You're afraid for me?

DENNIS

Yes, you're so...

(repulsed)

...lovely, and he's so violent ...

HANNAH

But you're the one he's gotta get rid of. You're the heir. And there's no one's gonna doubt it 'cause you look just like—

(breaks off; beat)

Say, can you talk American?

DENNIS

I ... don't know. I've never tried.

HANNAH

Try sayin', "I'm goin' to Cape a' Good Cheer fer a drink."

DENNIS

I'm going to Cape of Good Cheer for a drink.

HANNAH

Goin'. Cape a' Good.

DENNIS

Goin'. Cape a' Good. Why ... why ... why are we doing this?

HANNAH

I'm goin' to Cape a' Good Cheer fer a drink, say it.

DENNIS

I'm goin' to Cape a' Good Cheer fer a drink. Hannah...?

HANNAH

I got a plan.

DENNIS

(still repeating)

I got a plan.

HANNAH

No, I mean I really do got a plan.

DENNIS

Oh. What is it?

HANNAH

You're a ringer for Dennis Murtson.

DENNIS

A ringer?

HANNAH

You look just like him! On account o' your mothers was twins and your father f... impregnated 'em both the same night.

DENNIS

You know ... about—?

HANNAH

Yeah, Emma was tellin' me. Jesus, you Redrums got one family history! Now, this is what's up, you're right about this guy, his real name's Joe Harris and he's a bartender in town at a place called Cape a' Good Cheer. He murdered Dennis Murtson!

DENNIS

My God, cousin Dennis!

HANNAH

Yeah, and he's been keepin' me prisoner here. He's been rapin' me every night!

DENNIS

The ...!!! (recovers himself) ...cad!

HANNAH

That ain't the half of it. You should see what he's packin' down there!

DENNIS

I ... I ... The cad!

HANNAH

So all we gotta do is ... kill him.

DENNIS

Huh?

HANNAH

Then it's just you and me, see?

(insinuating herself into his arms)

See? You lose the English accent and you're Dennis Murtson, Emma's son...

(kisses him)

...and heir.

DENNIS

(ready to vomit)

Well, if Dennis Murtson is dead, why can't I just go on being Dennis Redrum, her NEPHEW and heir.

HANNAH

I don't want 'em investigatin' what happened to Murtson! I mean, I didn't do nothin', but I don't wanna get involved in a murder! ...that, uh, Joe done.

DENNIS

What about Joe's murder!

HANNAH

Nobody's gonna miss him in town, and besides no one's gonna connect him to this house. Where's our motive, we don't even know him, right? You and me?
(starts to kiss him again)

DENNIS

I got a— I got a better plan.

HANNAH

Hey, you're gettin' that American accent good.

DENNIS

(resuming accent)

Oh, yes, yes, quite! Rather! Now, Hannah, give this plan your considered opinion.

HANNAH

Shoot.

DENNIS

No, don't shoot!

(urgently)

Let's you and I leave this house. We'll leave together. This bloke is afraid of me, afraid I'll catch onto his game. If you and I go off—

Joe's voice comes from far away down the hallway. It is a musical call, trying to sound innocent.

JOE

Mary, oh honey, where are you?

Hannah and Dennis push each other towards the French doors.

HANNAH/DENNIS

Get out, quick!

JOE

Oh, Maer???

DENNIS

Please go, I'll handle Joey.

HANNAH

Joey?

DENNIS

Uh, didn't you say his name was Joe? Harrison, or something.

HANNAH

Yeah, I said Joe!

DENNIS

Well, Joe ... Joey. Isn't that short for Joe?

HANNAH

Oh, God! You two, together, are ... Unh!

JOE

Oh, Maaaaaary?

HANNAH

Oh, God!

Hannah turns and flees out the French doors. Dennis goes to open the double doors.

JOE

(still musically)

Dennnnnny?

Dennis pulls up short, backs away from the doors.

DENNIS

Oh, God. Oh, God.

Dennis turns and flees out the French doors. In a moment, Joe enters from the stage-left hallway, gun in hand.

JOE

Maer!

He starts out through the French doors as Emma comes on from the stage-right hallway, carrying a tea tray.

EMMA

Oh, young man, er, Bob, won't you have some tea?

JOE

You seen Mary or ... anyone else?

(starts out through the French doors)

Oh, how would you know!

EMMA

Oh, Bob, I'd like you to go to the store again, you'll need MONEY, won't you?

He comes back hotly.

JOE

Sure, I'll go to the store for you, Auntie Em. Where's the cash?

EMMA

Let's see, before we go to the safe to get the cash, I'll have to make a list. Why don't you have some tea, er, Bob, while I make the list? I'll pour.

JOE

(sits at table, pushes paper at her)

Here, I'll pour. You make your list.

(puts the gun in the tray as he pours)

EMMA

Father's luger! How I used to love—

JOE

Make your list!

EMMA

(small beat)

—to shoot. Now let's see, eggs, sugar ... Do put sugar in, Bob, lots of lovely sugar, because without sugar tea is—

JOE

Make your fuckin' list!

EMMA

Let's see, I can't ...

(consults appointment book)

Ah, yes, eggs, sugar ...

Hannah tiptoes from right to left along the hallway. The clock cuckoos, which makes her scoot. Joe turns, too late to see her. He goes to the double doors to investigate, looking the wrong way first. While his back is turned, Emma quickly spoons more sugar into his cup. Joe is about to go up the stage-left hallway when Emma speaks.

EMMA

And now for the CASH.

(Joe comes hotly back.)

Sit, Bob, sit. Have your tea. Let's see.

(Her eye upon Joe, she opens a third panel to reveal yet a fourth safe. Joe jumps up. Emma starts to dial the combination, stops.)

Oh, let's see, what is the combination, what is it? Perhaps some tea will help. Yes, I'll just sit here and have a spot of tea with my good friend, er, Bob. .

(pouring herself a cup)

Oh, do sit, Bob. I think better with company, over a spot of tea.

JOE

Come on, come on.

EMMA

Don't rush me! I'll never remember if you rush me! Do you want me to remember or don't you!

Joe sits, downs most of the cup.

JOE

Christ, what the ... !

EMMA

Chamomile, isn't it delicious? And so relaxing. Do finish all of it, Bob.

JOE

(finishing off the cup of tea)

Christ! It's kinda ...

EMMA

Dennis always said it tasted just like a bee's butt.

JOE

Yeah, it tastes just like a bee's butt.

EMMA

Won't you have some more?

JOE

Hey!

(grabs her wrist, starts twisting)

EMMA

Oh!

JOE

What about the money?

EMMA

Money?

JOE

From the safe.

EMMA

(looks where he points)

Oh, there's no money in that safe, er, er, er, Bob.

JOE

What are you talkin' about?

EMMA

That's the Stocks-and-Bonds safe. Ow! The cash is kept in the big safe.

JOE

The big safe?

(releases his grip)

EMMA

Yes. The Vault. My, what a pinch you have!

JOE

Where's ... the Vault? I been all over this house, I ain't seen no vault.

EMMA

(opens the mirror)

Just through here.

JOE

Wow! Yeah! Unh!

(holds his stomach)

Wow!

(leans weakly against the mirror frame)

EMMA

Oh, don't stop here, Bob. Onward! Onward!

JOE

I don't know. I'm feeling kinda ...

EMMA

Oh, yes, it's the thrill. I felt it too the first time Father showed me the family treasure.

JOE

Family treasure!

EMMA

Yes, move along.

Joe stumbles through the mirror, with Emma following him, She closes the mirror behind them.

Dennis enters stealthily through the French doors.

DENNIS

(calls in a tiny voice)

Joey?

(goes to the double doors)

Hannah?

(goes to mirror, waves arm at his reflection)

Mother?

He hears a violent noise from the hallway, escapes quickly out the French doors.

Hannah rushes in from the stage-left hallway, carrying a suitcase, bumping it into the doorframe in her hurry. Trying to be quiet, she opens it and begins throwing into it treasures from the shelves and walls. One of the treasures needs unfastening. As Hannah works on the fastening, Emma reenters through the mirror, closing it behind her. She is reading her appointment book intently

EMMA

(makes a check)

Point d'exclamation!

Hannah screams. So does Emma.

HANNAH

Shhh! You scared the shit out of me!

EMMA

And you me. Quite!

(recovers as Hannah goes back to treasures)

Oh, I'm so terribly sorry, dear, for having scared ... the shit ... out of you. Do have some tea, it will soothe you.

HANNAH

No, I—

(returns to dreadful English accent)

...uh, Aunt Emma...

EMMA

(pouring tea, heaping the sugar in)

Yes, dear? Oh, it's you again, the niece.

HANNAH

Do you 'member that necklace I admired on you the other night, Aunt Emma?

EMMA

Diamonds, emeralds, or pearls?

HANNAH

Uh, diamonds!

EMMA

Yes, dear, isn't it lovely. Your tea.

Emma gives her the cup, but Hannah puts it down.

HANNAH

No, thanks. Do you know, Aunt Emma, I'm afraid you've lost that necklace.

EMMA

Oh, surely not, dear, it's too valuable to lose. Father would be very angry.

(hands her the cup again)

Do have some tea, dear, you look peak-ed.

HANNAH

(again puts cup down)

Naw, naw, you lost it, I'm pretty sure. Maybe we better go look for it, just to be sure.

(pulls Emma to her feet)

Where do you keep your jewelry, Aunt Emma?

EMMA

But the tea will—

HANNAH

(squeezing Emma's wrist)

Where is it, you old ...!

EMMA

You're hurting me, dear!

HANNAH

Where!

EMMA

Ah!

HANNAH

Where is that necklace?

EMMA

In the cellar!

HANNAH

(releasing her)

The cellar?

EMMA

Such fingers on so delicate a girl! What a pinch, and what a terrific sensation of *deja vu*!

HANNAH

Where in the cellar?

EMMA

Father built a secret underground vault, you see, concealed by a panel ... do excuse my breathlessness, dear, I am quite beside myself ... and it is in this vault that we keep the jewelry ... and bullion.

HANNAH

Bullion?

EMMA

Yes.

HANNAH

Chicken soup?

EMMA

No, the other kind. Gold bullion. Would you like me to show it to you?

HANNAH

Yeah, wouldn't mind!

(they start out the double doors)

EMMA

(returning)

Oh, I'll be right with you, dear, I've got to get the key.

She goes to the table, picks up the gun from where Joe has left it, and pockets it. Hannah comes back to the door.

HANNAH

Hey, you comin'?

EMMA

Not even warmed up yet, dear.

They go out the stage-right hallway. In a moment, Dennis enters again tentatively through the French doors.

DENNIS

Joey? Mother?

He sees the suitcase. He goes to it to investigate, but hears a gunshot.

DENNIS

Hannah!

(runs to the double doors, looks both ways, then takes the stage-left hallway)

Joey!

In a moment, Emma re-enters from the stage-right hallway, consulting her appointment book.

EMMA

(makes a check)

There, that's done. And tomorrow I have an appointment with Dr. Cohen.

She picks up the tea tray and starts out, but is stopped when Dennis, rushing through the hallway, sees her and comes in.

DENNIS

Mother, are you all right?

EMMA

(putting the tea tray back down)

Yes, dear, I'm so glad you're here. I've so much to tell you. Never have I felt more keen!

DENNIS

Have you seen ... a man?

EMMA

I'm going to see Dr. Cohen tomorrow, dear. That is, I believe I am. Let me see...

DENNIS

(makes a sound of impatience, paces, reverses, throws himself down on the sofa)

Oh, screw him! I'll wait in here, I'll just wait, calm, calm.

EMMA

(continuing, setting down tea tray)

...I believe tomorrow is the thirteenth...

(compares the newspaper with her appointment book)

...yes, that's right. All is well. Let's see, "Tell Dennis all." Oh, yes, Dennis, I must tell you...

(makes a check)

...I've been feeling waves of mortality these last days, and there is so much...

DENNIS

(picks up Hannah's cup of tea)

Is this fresh?

EMMA

(riding over, does not hear him)

...to set straight. First there is the novel ...

(makes a check, rises)

DENNIS

(about to sip, puts cup down)

The novel! Where is it?

EMMA

(opening safe #3)

I've had an inspirational burst these past days, and I have finished Father's novel!

DENNIS

Let me see!

EMMA

Won't Father be pleased! Six hundred sixty-six pages, exactly.

DENNIS

(taking the manuscript, checking front to back, back to front)

Is it really a palindrome, all the way through, really?

EMMA

Of course, dear. Did you think I was telling a story all this time? I have just three more words to write on page six six six and page one. You already know most of the plot but... --Dennis, dear I must tell you all--

(makes a check)

...what you don't know is that much of this book is autobiographical...

DENNIS

What, you really do have a twin sister named Edna?

EMMA

No, there is no Edna Redrum. She was an invention of Father's: "Emma and Edna am me".
(regretful palindromic gesture)

DENNIS

(figuring it out backwards)

Emma and Edna am me. Emma and Edna am me.

EMMA

One of Father's lesser palindromes, yes, but one must be allowed a bit of palindromic license in six hundred and sixty-six pages. And without an Edna, you will understand, my wedding night was somewhat different than as described in the novel. You see, your father ... dear, your father wasn't much of a man.

DENNIS

Yes, mother, you've told me.

EMMA

(pats his head)

You are so like him!

(tidying away the treasures while Dennis stirs sugar into the tea and drinks it)

On our wedding night we had ... a brief encounter, satisfying for him it would appear, but rather more ANTI-climactic for me. When after a few moments, during one of his lighter snores, I ... reached for seconds, he awoke, he turned, he reared back, he said, "God, what are you a nymphomaniac!" I will never forget his words -- they were the central hurt of my life, the point of reversal-- but I couldn't use his words in the novel, of course, because backwards they read, "Cain am ohp myna uo yerat ahw, dog!", which makes no sense no matter how you break it up.

DENNIS

This tastes just like a bee's butt.

EMMA

"Em, you buoy me!"

(laughs)

DENNIS

It reminds me of when ... Oh, mother, do you remember when you used to make me chamomile tea in the afternoons? And we played together. Ah!

(happy memory)

EMMA

Oh, why couldn't Dennis have taken me softly in his arms and whispered, "Em, you buoy me!"? How different life might have been. Balanced. Perfect.

DENNIS

Ah!

(first pain)

EMMA

And so, art and life ... diverge.

(looks into the mirror, shields her eyes)

Oh, dear! I was young then, and hurt. I ran to the coach house, shut the door behind me, and started up the Benson, intent upon suicide by fumes. Father's chauffeur, a handsome rogue by the name Joe Harris...

(Dennis sits up straighter.)

...a tight man, Joe Harris was, "tight old yank", Father used to say of him. Tight as a coiled spring. Tight as a snake, coiled to spring. Tight as—

DENNIS

Tight, mother, yes tight. What about Joe Harris?

EMMA

He must have heard the engine from his rooms above. I was nearly unconscious when he found me, and in my nightgown very alluring, I imagine. Joe Harris took advantage of my confusion...

DENNIS

My God!

EMMA

...and my unsated nuptial arousal.

DENNIS

Mother, you didn't let him—

EMMA

I couldn't stop him. I couldn't stop myself. What a springing of an uncoiled snake!

DENNIS

Unnnh!

EMMA

Nine months later, I gave birth to twins. You were the image of your father, poor dear. Your twin was the image of his.

DENNIS

(holds his stomach)

Unnnnnh!

EMMA

Joe Harris threatened blackmail, made demands. Father set him up with a small annuity and a trailerhouse in town --fortunately the man was a chauffeur by nature as well as trade and hadn't much concept of the high life. He demanded the child, as well. I, of course, gladly gave it to him. I wouldn't have minded his taking you too...

(Dennis begins to writhe on the sofa)

...Oh, I know, it's a dreadful thing for a mother to tell her child. Don't cry, dear, but it can't come as much of a surprise that you were not well loved. I used to tell myself, "Stop pinching him, Emma," but it was beyond me. I apologize, dear. It can't have been much fun for you. In the autumn of one's life, when the waves of mortality lap upon the shore of time, one should make peace with the world. And so, all is tidy.

(the last treasure in its place, she makes a last check in the appointment book)

In the morning, I shall draw up a map of all the safes in the house --there are thirty-three of them-- and I will note plainly the combination of each. They are easy to commit to memory because they are progressive and palindromic. Behind this mirror is a passage which—

(notices Dennis is still)

Dennis? Oh, dear, I hope my novel doesn't put every reader to sleep.

(takes the ms. from him and carries it to the table. Then she returns for the tea tray. From now on Emma's actions mirror the opening of the play. She sits at the table with the tea tray, and she writes.)

Page six-six-six, "Finis". And page one "Sin if..."

(laughs)

Silly cow.

(compares first page to last and riffles the pages with delight. She stirs three spoonfuls of sugar into a cup of tea and raises the cup to her lips but is suddenly riveted by a new thought.)

Ha! Ha!

(sits motionless with the cup before her lips as the clock begins to cuckoo and...)

...the lights dim out.

THE END