

Murder and Edna Redrum

murdeR andE dna redruM

a comedy in two acts by
Robert Locke
1996 version

© 1996 Robert Locke rev. and retyped April 16, 2015
also look for the 1993 revision

This 1996 version exists 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 are exactly reversed at the end of the play.

In the black comes the lovely tune "Would You?", which continues as the lights come up gradually to reveal a sunset shining through French doors into a bizarre room in the heart of Emma Murtson's mansion.

There are four walls creating odd angles. The Stage Left wall is a mural painted around a large arched doorway, reds and purples thrown together by an evident madman depicting pumping hearts and a myriad of eyes connected by spiraling ladders. Through the arched doorway is a yellow hallway which exits both upstage and down. Balancing the hearts-and-eyes mural is the Stage Right wall which is a mural of blues and purples and whites, a swirl of planets and moons in a never-ending cosmos. Upstage the connecting walls contain the French doors and a full-length mirror Up Right which stands directly opposite a beginning of a fourth wall Down Left which holds a smaller mirror, the two mirrors reflecting each other into eternity. Below the smaller mirror DL stands a stately safe.

All the furniture is handsome if old, a sofa and arm chair, a coffee table, a liquor caddy, a desk, a built-in hutch. On the table are a silver tea tray set for two and a lunch tray.

EMMA MURTSON (British accent) aged around 70, is in silhouette against the sunset shining through the French doors, seated at the desk, motionless with a teacup to her lips, as though riveted by a thought. On her lap is a thick manuscript in a box.

DENNIS (British accent) Emma's son aged around 35, is asleep on the sofa.

As the song ends and the lights come up brighter, an unseen cuckoo clock cuckoos six cuckoos from the yellow hallway, upstage of the arched door. Emma slowly lowers the teacup still rapt in her thought.

EMMA

Ah!

(A pause, then the clock cuckoos three times more.)

Ah!

(The clock cuckoos a final cuckoo. Emma sets the teacup on the desk takes the ms. out of its box and make two excited notes, one on the first page and the other on the last. Then she riffles all the pages with delight, laughing to herself.)

Silly cow.

(notices the tea cup she has just placed on the desk)

Oh, how lovely, tea!

(stands, carries teacup to the coffee table where she spoons three teaspoonsful of sugar into the cup)

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

DENNIS

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

EMMA

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

She begins making a cup of tea for Dennis, lots of sugar.

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?

(puts her finger in his teacup)

It is!

(returns to desk to collect the ms. back into its box)

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 in perfection.

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

Have I, dear?

HANNAH

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

DENNIS

...but it's driving me nuts.

The cuckoo clock begins 15 cuckoos.

EMMA

(taking the ms. in its box to the floor safe)

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

Hannah, seeing the opportunity to explore the desk, does so surreptitiously.

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?

(examines lock on the desk, Hannah moves away, watchfully)

EMMA

Of course not. And it's my desk.

DENNIS

Not any more. Where did you get the key? Have you got an extra key?

EMMA

Dozens.

Dennis unlocks a drawer and pulls out a checkbook.

DENNIS

1309. 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

(checking the lunch tray)

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. If you need money, Dennis, go to Marahall. And good luck!

DENNIS

(at same time)

And good luck!

EMMA

Now what was I looking for? Oh, yes, here it is.

(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, turning upstage in hallway.

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 quickly 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 the palindrome 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. Murtson? How innerestin'. Sir—

EMMA

What's this?

HANNAH

For your note, ma'am, liver? Sir—

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. Murrtson?

EMMA

Oh, I can't tell you, dear. It's highly secret. 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 when you consider— hmm?

HANNAH

(overlapping Dennis above)

Imagine, a whole novel readin' back and forth like that! Here's your fork now.

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— hmm?

HANNAH

Like a mirror you was sayin'?

EMMA

Yes, exactly like this house. All is symmetry.

HANNAH

And here's your fork comin' at ya, so open up like a good girl.

DENNIS

But that's what I've been trying to tell you, she IS dangerous. She walked into the kitchen last week and almost burned the house down.

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. And here comes Mr. Fork again.

EMMA

Takes all my concentration.

DENNIS

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

(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, dear, when it's published. I'll autograph it. Backwards.

DENNIS

Thank you, Doctor. Yes, I'll hold ... dickhead.

(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.

DENNIS

Yeah, doing what with 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 wasn't—

DENNIS

Yes, Lorraine, what have you got for me? The fifth? No, that's perfect, 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 fifth!

(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 fifth.

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 fifth 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 shall have to remind me. If you're not drunk.

(gets her appointment book)

Now, what's the date?

DENNIS

The fifth.

EMMA

And...

(embarrassed)

...the month is?

DENNIS

Well, it couldn't possibly be the fifth of this month again, could it, mother?

EMMA

(looking at newspaper)

We shall be scientific. Today is the twenty-sixth of June, which would make my appointment with, um...

HANNAH

Dr. Cohen, ma'am.

EMMA

Dr. Cohen, yes, don't tell me ... on the, um...

HANNAH

Fifth.

EMMA

(agitated)

Yes, dear, don't tell me, the fifth, yes...

(starts to put pencil to page)

...the fifth of July, at, um, and the time is, the time is...

HANNAH

Elev...

EMMA

(screams)

Don't tell me!

(Hannah recoils.)

Eleven, yes, good.

(finishes the note)

HANNAH

(whispers)

Thirty.

EMMA

What? Why are you whispering?

HANNAH

Thirty.

EMMA

Thirty? The thirtieth? Eleven?

HANNAH

(ever smaller)

The fifth but ...

EMMA

Somebody ... is ... taking the fifth?

HANNAH

On the fifth. But at Eleven-Thirty.

EMMA

But it says in my appointment book. Eleven. On the fifth.

HANNAH

Eleven-Thirty.

EMMA

Oh, eleven-thirty, yes, of course, I knew that. I knew that, Dennis. Eleven-thirty-July-fifth, eleven-thirty-July-fifth...

(adds to her note, but hesitates...)

DENNIS

And what happens, mother, at 11:30 on July the fifth?

Pause. Emma is blank.

HANNAH

(screams)

Dr. Cohen!

EMMA

(jubilantly writing)

Dr. Cohen! Eleven-thirty-July-fifth! Point d'exclamation! There, we have a plan. I do love a plan. If you had made it on July seventh at 7:07, I should have no trouble at all. Zero-seven-zero-seven-seven-zero-seven. Next time, try for that, Dennis.

(puts the appointment book in her sweater pocket)

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

DENNIS

I should think you could remember the fifth of July, Mother.

EMMA

And why so?

DENNIS

It's the day after—

EMMA

The fourth of July! That nasty French revolution! Those nasty French shouting and—

DENNIS

Mother, that's the fourteenth of July. The fourth of July is ... ?

(waits...)

EMMA

That nasty American revolution! A day that shall live in infamy! Foolish, foolish colonists shouting and—

DENNIS

Not so foolish, mother throwing over the ... mother ... country and—

HANNAH

Independence, yeah! Give her what's for!

DENNIS

—achieve at last a sense of dignity and—

HANNAH

Hip hip hooray!

EMMA

Shouting! We frown upon shouting, dear!

DENNIS

The fourth of July is my birthday, Mother.

EMMA

(stunned, quietly)

Oh, yes. I remember. Shouting.

DENNIS

Hannah, I want you to remind Dr. Cohen about these gun incidents when you take her in on the fifth. 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 fifth 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 in England and he—

DENNIS

Before you sent me off, before I was even seven years old to face the horrors of an English boy's school.

EMMA

Before he was even seven 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? Rough winds do shake the buds of May, isn't that better?

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 seven. 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 the red-and-purple hearts-and-eyes murals)

That is a pictorial representation of his mind, you know, dear. Father painted it himself, a self-portrait, as it were of his image and mirror image, yin and yang...

DENNIS

Mumbo and jumbo.

EMMA

...and the ladder links of DNA, as it were, connecting yin and yang to the soul. You see the rungs ascend, ascend, ascend, descend, descend, descend, ascend. 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 for yourself: Dr. Cohen, July 5, 11:30.

EMMA

Happy birthday, darling.

DENNIS

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. Oh, 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 hallway, turning upstage; 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 up the yellow hallway)

EMMA

Dear, my eyes seem to have been watering. I haven't been... ?

HANNAH

Oh, no, ma'am. It's just, Mr. Murtson told a regular funny, and you laughed so hard you cried.

EMMA

Oh! How lovely.

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.

(uneasily eying safe)

You go on. I'll be right there.

Hannah goes out with the tray, turning downstage in the hallway.

Emma goes to the safe, opens it, and takes out several boxes of checks. Leaving the safe open, she goes to the hearts-and-eyes mural, taps with several fingers in several places around one of the eyes.

Open Sesame.

She opens the eye to reveal it is a wall safe. She puts the items inside and closes the eye again. 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, turning downstage in the hallway. Hannah is about to follow when she sees that the safe is still open. She quickly checks that Emma is gone and approaches the safe. There is a knock on the French doors. Hannah, surprised, goes to the doors, peeks through 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

Watch the hall.

HANNAH

(stationing herself in the hall)

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 boxed ms. in his gloved hands)

No money, looks like old files and stuff.

(puts ms. back in carefully, leaving the safe ajar)

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

(examines the wall)

Christ, how'd she do that? She did this thing with her fingers and—

HANNAH

(throws her arms around him)

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

JOE

Keep your eye on the hall!

During this next, Joe makes himself a drink, examining everything in the room with his eyes. Seeing the open desk, he goes to it, takes out the checkbook, starts to pocket it, but replaces it in its drawer.

HANNAH

The jewels alone, you should see 'em. She's got another safe up in her room.

JOE

How d'ya know?

HANNAH

I watch through a hole I drilled in the wall of my room. Right through the left eye of one of her crazy father's self-portraits. And every night she brings out all this jewelry to play dress-up. She's got this one necklace —Joe, there must be fifty emeralds hangin' on it— and one night she left it out on her dressin' table and—

JOE

You didn't—

HANNAH

What do you take me for? I figured she was testing me, so I never touched 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 when I look through the hole in the eye, she's puttin' it in the safe. It's up there, Joe, 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 returns to the desk, continues going through the drawers.

HANNAH

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

JOE

She's a bitch!

HANNAH

No, Joe, 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. But Joe, we gotta—

JOE

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

HANNAH

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

JOE

I 'member hearin' 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?

HANNAH

But Joe, I'm thinkin', now we know where she keeps the jewels, let's just blow that safe and get out of here.

Joe slams a drawer shut. It is the drawer where Hannah put the gun.

JOE

You're gettin' nervous on me, ayuh.

HANNAH

I'm gettin' nervous, Joe.

JOE

I don't want you to get nervous on me.

HANNAH

I can't help it, Joe, she's just an old—

JOE

Hey, hey, hey. Come here.

(pulls her onto the sofa with him)

We got a good thing here. You know what? Once he's gone I'm movin' in. What kinda bed you got?

HANNAH

Soft, and big, and warm.

JOE

(putting his hand in her blouse)

Okay, then, every night it's peanut butter and jelly, huh?

HANNAH

And jelly.

JOE

And you got him his plane ticket already?

HANNAH

Yeah, he's leavin' 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, ayuh.

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, sloshed 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 enters from downstage hallway intent on fetching her diary, so she doesn't see them for a moment. They freeze.

EMMA

Oh, dear, where has it got to this time? Ah!

(sees diary on desk, and goes to it, turns, discovers them)

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

Yeah, Bob. Bob's a palderome.

JOE

Hannah and me—

EMMA

Bob? There was a Bob earlier but...

(gestures 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 turning downstage in the hallway.

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 little kid!

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, and that's where I got my good looks. 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, prolly 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! You ain't like them other guys, are you, Joe?

JOE

I ain't like nobody.

HANNAH

Say, when's your birthday? I got a birthday present I'm dyin' to give you.

JOE

Not for another four years.

HANNAH

What do you mean, not—?

JOE

Ayuh, February 29.

HANNAH

Aw, you poor kid. You only had a birthday party every four years?

JOE

I only had a birthday every four years, I ain't never had a birthday party.

HANNAH

Leap year! What's it good for anyway?

JOE

It's okay. Makes me a quarter the age you are. Older women get me hot.

HANNAH

Well, I'm gonna make every day your birthday from now on, Joe. Peanut butter and jelly. God, I'm horny! Come back later, after I put the old broad down.

JOE

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

HANNAH

It'd have to be one of them big Christmas candles to make it seem like you, Joe.

Joe laughs and exits through French doors.

Meanwhile Emma has wandered irresolutely up the hallway to a point where she is out of sight of Hannah but within sight of the audience. As Hannah enters the hallway Emma screams and recoils. So does Hannah. Alarming each other more with each scream, they keep screaming, with the cuckoo cuckooing madly, until Hannah breaks away and hugs the safe for support.

EMMA

(coming into the room)

What a fright, what a fright.

HANNAH

A regular nightmare!

EMMA

Who are you? Oh, yes, Hannah, of course. Oh 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!

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!

HANNAH

What about Edna? Was Edna 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 turning upstage in the hallway. Emma goes quickly to the safe.

EMMA

Oh, silly cow!

She takes out the boxed ms., opens the box and examines the top and bottom pages quickly, then gives a quick look over the other contents in the safe.

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, your tea is brewin' but —

Finds the room empty, which puzzles her. Sees the safe is closed again. She tries the French doors, finds them still locked from the inside. She starts for the desk, catches her reflection in the mirror, jerks with a little scream. The cuckoo cuckoos once and she screams again. She turns off the light on the desk, picks up Dennis's drink, downs it.

The cuckoo cuckoos once and Hannah glances nervously in its direction. She wipes Dennis's glass on her apron, puts it away and goes for her and Joe's unfinished drinks on the coffee table, picks up one, downs it, waits for a cuckoo and getting none, downs the other. The cuckoo cuckoos twice. Growing more and more nervous, she wipes the glasses on her apron and puts them away, picks up a liquor bottle and swigs.

The cuckoo sets up a long cuckooing which makes Hannah utter little screams and back out of the room terrified, backing away from the cuckoo down the hallway 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. 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 up the newspaper from coffee table to compare dates.)

And the date is correct!

Dennis enters, dressed for gardening. He takes up the gardening basket by the French doors and carries it to the coffee table.

DENNIS

Good morning, Mother.

EMMA

Dennis, I'm so distressed!

DENNIS

(putting on gloves from the basket)

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, 651 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 Edna?

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 upstage 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 of the hutch)

EMMA

Oh, you are a beast!

DENNIS

...and later, when you want it, ask me for it and I'll give it back. And now for those nasty roses.

Dennis takes shears out of the basket and goes out the French doors, putting on his gloves.

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.

(As she talks, Emma seats Hannah for her performance and takes a paintbrush and palette from an artist's case and begins painting little white circles as stars on the unfinished cosmos mural..)

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

My twin's maidenhead. Edna 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 in a distinctly male masturbatory direction instead of Emma's horizontal back-and-forth)

EMMA

(annoyed, gives an even more emphatic palindromic gesture)

Dear, it's "EM, you buoy ME".

HANNAH

(orgasmic)

"You buoy me!"

EMMA

Oh, nevermind, but for me, you see, it was the turning point, the moment of reversal. As I danced, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I was radiant.

HANNAH

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 an unseasonably cold and drizzly day, there came 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.

(using the upstage mirror with her own image)

There stood Edna on the stoop, 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 swaddled head to toe in grey rags. 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 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 —no an American, a brawny, brainless cowbody from Oklahoma by the name of ... something appropriate. Dik Kid! Without the C. D-I-K-K-I-D.

Dennis has started to come through the French doors but hears a bit of this and, rolling his eyes with the tedium, backs out.

HANNAH

But Edna? Edna?

EMMA

One morning Edna's body was found floating in the Thames. She had been stabbed in the the heart...

(takes a pair of lawn shears from the gardening basket)

...with a pair of lawn shears.

HANNAH

And her baby?

EMMA

Never found. The seamy Oklahoma cowboy Dik Kid ... 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. Two identical wings, joined together by this room, octagonal, off-kilter...

HANNAH

...offputtin'...

EMMA

...the two mirrors opposite each other, mirroring mirroring mirroring...

HANNAH

Forevermore.

EMMA

...that wall for Father's self-portrait, this wall for mine...

(pointing to walls beyond audience)

...that wall for Dennis's --not even begun yet-- and that blank wall for ... whoever.

HANNAH

For Edna's lost child!

EMMA

Whoever! Now you've heard the story, I ask you...
(gnashes the lawn shears)
... 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.
(advances on Hannah)
I think ...
(pauses for grand effect then deposits the shears back into the gardening basket)
... I shall retire.

Smiling, Emma goes out the downstage 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.

HANNAH

Yeah, but he might—

JOE

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, ayuh.

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? Nobody knows you? Yet?

HANNAH

Yeah.

JOE

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 Murrtson?

JOE

He's goin' to Frisco.

HANNAH

Yeah, but when he comes back.

Dennis was about to enter through the French doors, unseen by Joe and Hannah, but he now pulls back and listens.

JOE

Suppose he don't come back, ayuh.

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 two 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, two weeks.

JOE

So okay, here's the plan. We got two 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 again pumpin' beer. Who's to suspect me, I ain't got no motive.

HANNAH

Yeah, but what about little Mary Redrum? She's the heiress. 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. He steals to the desk and takes out the gun, still in its napkin.

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 911)

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

I want the police. I have burglars and—

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, the cuckoo cuckooing madly throughout.

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 lawn shears and advances on Joe, but Hannah shoots him, and Dennis sinks to the floor, still. The cuckoo stops.

JOE

Aw, Christ!

(leans over Dennis)

He's dead.

(one last cuckoo)

HANNAH

Oh, my God!

JOE

Okay, okay, so this is it.

HANNAH

What are we gonna do?

Joe, crippled with pain but thinking hard and fast, picks up the napkin where it has fallen to the floor from around the gun.

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

(using the napkin 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

Ayuh, ayuh ... 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.

(takes Dennis under the arms)

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

Joe drags Dennis out the upstage hallway. Hannah starts out after him, stops, thinks, returns for Emma's diary, whites out an entry, turns back a few pages and begins whiting out other entries.

Emma enters from the downstage 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-oh-one exactly, I was awakened by—

HANNAH

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—

HANNAH

But what was you woke up by?

EMMA

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 down the hallway, sees Emma, draws back.)

...shhh ...

JOE

Psss.

EMMA

... shhh ...

JOE

Psss.

Joe gets Hannah's attention and gestures to her to unplug and remove the phone.

EMMA

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 out to Joe)

Yeah, dead a' night.

EMMA

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

(begins searching in the regular places, on the safe, on the desk, looking up at 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.

(turning in circles)

What am I doing? Oh yes, looking for something. What? Oh yes, my diary. Where?

(begins searching 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, dear, 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

(blocks her exit into the hallway)

But Dennis is in Sahn Frahnscisco, 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

Your boyfriend?

HANNAH

Bob.

EMMA

Bob!

(turns away)

I must be keen!

HANNAH

What did you say?

EMMA

I said, "How like him." Dennis, I mean. Disconnecting the telephone, I mean.

(opens her diary to make a note)

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 back several 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. Bub.

Emma begins backing toward the yellow hallway, looking from Hannah to Joe.

EMMA

You ... are ... Bob?

In utter terror, she continues backing, up the hallway 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 their identical positions from the end of ACT I, Joe with his feet comfortably on the table, Hannah lounging on the sofa.

Emma, her hair stringy and matted and her ACT I costume now stained and unkempt, enters through the hall doorway, 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

Ayuh, ayuh, that's good. Send it to his hotel.

HANNAH

You don't think ... ?

JOE

Naw, it looks good. Mama's writin' to sonny boy, 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 arched doorway she looks up and then down the hallway, remembers her appointment book and begins to slip it out of her sweater pocket as she starts out the downstage hallway.

HANNAH

That's right, down the hall and 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 grocer, the—

HANNAH

Joe, she's not ready to go to—

JOE

You gotta 'stablish your alibi! You gotta go in town today!

HANNAH

I keep tellin' you, 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 bitch! 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.

(taps an elaborate tattoo on the cosmos mural and opens another hole in the wall behind a part of the painting that looks like Saturn; Bob and Hannah come to attention; Emma 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?

JOE

Not since old times. They must be worth double or triple—

EMMA

Is it enough then?

JOE

Hey! How many safes you got in this place?

EMMA

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

(pointing to the floor safe)

That's only the display safe, heavens!

JOE

You keep this kind of money in all of them?

HANNAH

Lemme see, Joe.

EMMA

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

JOE

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Come home to papa.

(begins counting money. Emma starts out.)

HANNAH

Lemme have some.

EMMA

And so you see, er Bob, if anything ever happened to me ... (beat)

JOE

(stops counting, thinks)

Ayuh.

EMMA

(starting out, turns back)

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 DL mirror)

I am!

HANNAH

Here, give it to me.

(takes money)

JOE

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

EMMA

Oh, dear!

(heads for the UR mirror for a better look)

HANNAH

(grabs for money)

Here, give it to me

JOE

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

JOE

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

EMMA

(into UR mirror)

Kookoo. Ookook.

HANNAH

(nervously)

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

EMMA

One of the most dreadful aspects of the cuckoo, er Hannah, er Bob, is when two cuckoo eggs are deposited in the same nest. They hatch within moments of each other, and after working in concert to dump the eggs of the rightful nestlings over the side, they then turn upon each other.

JOE

Cause the nest ain't big enough for both of them.

Emma plays to her image in the mirror as Joe and Hannah begin to circle each other.

EMMA

Exactly. They circle each other, featherless, still wet from the egg, identical in their hideous nakedness. And then they lunge! Back to back, their wings locked in their deadly, infantile embrace, thrusting each other, backwards now this way now that, to and fro across the nest, the sharp shards of their broken egg shells rending their flesh as they continue their frightful, frantic, fearful fight, until at last the stronger forces the weaker to the rim of the nest, holds there one last moment and then, with a last exhausted heave up and over the side, disposes of the weaker who falls down, down, down the long way to earth, there to flop among the leaves and litter, broken and alone, until ... death. Lost in the woods.

HANNAH

Only sometimes, 'cause they ain't careful, they both go over the side together, ain't that right ... Aunt Emma?

EMMA

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

(goes for it where Hannah has left it)

JOE

(gives Hannah back the money)

You go 'head. Count. I'll watch.

EMMA

(heading out the downstage hallway)

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 turning left to go out the upstage hallway.)

HANNAH

Not to the kitchen, Aunt Emma, go the other way and upstairs to your room. And stay there.

(Emma turns reluctantly and takes the downstage hallway.)

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?

HANNAH

Rich, rich, rich!

JOE

(inspecting Saturn)

How'd she get this open?

(catches Hannah trying to slip the money out of his hand, grabs at her money)

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, ayuh.

HANNAH

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

JOE

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—
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, only dressed western style in jeans and cowboy boots, enters through the French doors.

DENNIS

Howdy!

HANNAH

Jesus!

JOE

Christ!

DENNIS

I knocked real loud but couldn't rouse no one. Boy howdy, what a house!

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

DENNIS

Oh, beg pardon. The name's Kid, Denny Kid. Well, Redrum really, I guess, Dennis Redrum, only I just cain't seem to get the hang o' that.

(laughs, sees their nervousness, speeds on)

I was hopin' to find my Aint Emma or my cousin, Dennis Murtson.

(laughs, to Hannah)

Now I know you cain't be my aint, but...

(approaches Joe hopefully)

...could you maybe be my cousin Dennis?

JOE

Uh ... yeah, maybe.

DENNIS

(takes Joe's hand, very moved)

We've never met, but I feel as close to you as if you was my own brother. Oh, you gotta think I'm nuttier'n a peach orchard boar, showin' up here like this, but Daddy... Well, the man I thought was my daddy, Dik Kid outa Tulsa, Oklahoma, he left this envelope...

(takes an envelope from his jacket pocket)

...with our lawyer when he died with the instructions how I was to open it on my thirty-third birthday. But somehow it got lost and only just now turned up. In the envelope was a letter my mama wrote me when I was just tadpole size explainin'... well, some mighty peculiar circumstances surroundin' my, uh, conception. And my mama wrote this letter to you, Cousin Dennis, knowin' only your name, havin' seen you only once in your mama's arms standin' on a cold London stoop.

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

After writin' these letters, she killed herself.

HANNAH

Killed herself! So that's who murdered Edna Redrum!

DENNIS

Yes, ma'am. And then my daddy, brokenhearted, brought me home to Tulsa. Only it turns out now that good man wasn't my daddy after all.

HANNAH

Gee! It's all true, then.

DENNIS

You know, I gotta 'pologize for intrudin' in here like this. Your name, miss, is...

HANNAH

Miss ... Graham. Hannah Graham.

DENNIS

Hannah Graham. And you ... are... ?

HANNAH

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

The housekeeper?

DENNIS

(turning, disdainfully)

Oh, well so glad to meet you.

JOE

(looking up from the letter)

So what you're tellin us is, you're my cousin Dennis Dick—

DENNIS

Kid, Dennis Kid. My dad, my step-dad that is, was the Dik —Dik Kid, I mean, no C, D-I-K-K-I-D— outa Tulsa, Oklahoma. Yes, I am your cousin and your bubba, too, 'cuz we got the same daddy, Aint Emma's husband Dennis Murtson..

JOE

... and you're American.

DENNIS

Red blooded!

(sings)

I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy, Yankee Doodle do or die. A real life nephew of my Uncle Sam,
Born on the fourth of July!

HANNAH

You were born on the fourth!

(to Joe)

That's the day Murtson was—!

JOE

Right! The day I was born, that's right.

HANNAH

Yeah, that's right.

(nervous beat)

The day you was born,,, Mr. Murtson. And you bein' cousins ... and brothers, and all, that's ... what they call a coincidence.

JOE

Yeah.

DENNIS

Queer, ain't it?

There is a long moment, as all three take stock.

DENNIS

Cousin Dennis, bubba, is our daddy around?

HANNAH

He died of a climax. I mean a heart attack.

DENNIS

Oh, I had a bad feelin'. And Aint Emma —my poor mama's dear sister— is Aint Emma ... still alive?

JOE

Ayuh. She's takin' her nap.

(ushering Hannah to the doorway)

Maer, uh Hannah, why don't you go up and see that Ma is sleepin' peaceful.

(under his breath)

Keep her outa here.

HANNAH

Excuse me.

DENNIS

Yes ma'am, so glad, so very very glad to have met you. I'm so happy I could come.

Hannah goes out downstage hallway. Joe watches her out of sight.

JOE

Why the fuck are you here?

DENNIS

Why the fuck didn't you call me!

JOE

Shut up! You was to stay 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

You called?!? I knew you'd call. That's why I had it disconnected, you stupid shit, leavin' phone records all over the place.

DENNIS

From a pay phone! 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 that Okie shit!

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 kimono. 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 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, only the burglarette is hamburger? You inherit everything, and it's you and me just like we always said. So simple. Well, we can say goodbye to that plan now, can't we, ayuh.

(bit of a pause, Dennis looks away)

You prolly flew on your return ticket, dintya? You prolly told 'em it was an emergency, dintya?

DENNIS

(quietly)

I told them my mother was sick.

JOE

Sure, great. I know what's behind it. You got cold feet, dintya? No guts, no guts, you never had guts, you never will!

DENNIS

She's my mother.

JOE

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 Joey, I don't want to be a murderer. I don't want you to —

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

Things is different now. Look at this.

(shows Dennis the cash)

DENNIS

Where'd you get all that?

JOE

She ever tell you 'bout the safes?

DENNIS

You mean ... besides that one?

JOE

There's two more in this room alone, two that I know of, one behind that eye and one behind the planet with the rings.

DENNIS

Saturn?

JOE

I don't know what it's called, Denny! You're the one went away to school!

(Dennis is surprised, investigates Saturn.)

And at least one som'eres in her room for her jewels. How come you never told me 'bout all these safes?

DENNIS

I didn't even know about them. Grandpa was crazier than I thought.

JOE

And how come you never told me about Edna, how come it took you to get drunk?

DENNIS

Edna! She's fictional.

JOE

She's damn fictional, ayuh.

DENNIS

Joey, that means she's ... she's not real, she's a a a character, in a book!

JOE

And how 'bout that book? Must be worth what?

DENNIS

Oh, there's no book, it's all just in her head. She's been swimming around that same crazy plot as long as I can remember.

JOE

So first there's a book, then there ain't, ayuh. What would you say, Denny, if I told you I seen it? She moved it all sneaky from that safe into the eye.

DENNIS

(starts for the other mural)

Which eye?

JOE

The purple one. Seems she thinks it's worth some'n, ayuh.

DENNIS

There really is a manuscript? Wouldn't that be a kick in...

JOE

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 that book, Hannah says it's wrote backwards. Backwards book must be worth how much, Denny?

DENNIS

A six hundred sixty-six 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

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

DENNIS

(whimpering through the pain of the pinching)

I roamed under a red nude Maori. I roamed under a red nude Maori!

JOE

Tulsa slut! Rats on Saturn I'm in rut as no star, Tulsa slut!

DENNIS

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

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)

Mr. Murtson!

JOE

What's wrong?

DENNIS

(at the same time)

What's wrong?

(defers to Joe)

Oh, beg pardon, uh... bubba.

JOE

What's wrong?

HANNAH

Could I see you in the other room, please?

DENNIS

Oh, you can talk in front of me, Miss, uh...

HANNAH

Graham. Hannah Graham.

DENNIS

I'm just family, Hannah Graham. Please do include me in.

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 Aint Emma ain't ill, is she?

HANNAH

Could I please see you outside. Sir!

JOE

Yeah, okay. Would you excuse us, uh, bubba?

DENNIS

You bet, bubba.

Joe and Hannah go out the downstage hallway. Dennis immediately tiptoes to the doorway and peeks out after them. After a moment, he starts into the hallway. The clock cuckoos wildly. He recoils and would perhaps smash it, but just then the mirror opens and Emma puts her head out. Dennis pulls back into the hallway, out of Emma's sight, but under the gleeful cuckoo.

Emma steps into the study, the ms. box in her arms and the appointment book in her hand. She closes the mirror and heads purposefully for Saturn, 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! Oh, yes. Saturn, put the manuscript inside!

Emma opens Saturn, and puts the ms. inside. She consults the appointment book again.

Yes, that's right. All is right.

Emma makes a check in her appointment book, closes Saturn, starts back toward the mirror, thinks better of it, heads for the hallway --Dennis ducks farther back-- but she loses her train of thought again, sees Dennis's scarf on the couch, picks it up, smells it.

EMMA

Dennis!

Emma rushes out through the French doors. Dennis comes back in and goes directly to the mirror searching for the gadget that opens it. Joe enters from the hallway. Dennis, covering, 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 up a plan)

Okay, let's see. No one knows she's here, she ain't been in town yet—

DENNIS

What do you mean she hasn't been in town. You said that was the whole point of Mary Redrum, to get her into town and show herself!

JOE

I couldn't get her to go!

DENNIS

What kind of doublecross are you trying to pull?

JOE

Shut up! I'm working up a plan! 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, no one's gonna suspect me.

(slides open the drawer with the gun)

There's a good soft spot in the basement...

DENNIS

(growing nervous)

Uh, Joey ...

JOE

You got a leak down there, Denny, you know that? Christ, can't you fix anything?

(taking from the drawer a packet of bullets)

These the real bullets?

DENNIS

I've got a plan!

JOE

Oh, you got a plan, ayuh?

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, Dennis Murtson. 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

Ayuh? 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'll turn up again. We'll kill her.
(takes the gun back)

DENNIS

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

JOE

(considers a moment)

No.

This gives Dennis pause. Long pause.

DENNIS

Do you... care anything about me?

JOE

So, okay, we got a plan. She's prolly upstairs 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, turning downstage in the hallway. Dennis hesitates a moment, then starts out after him.

DENNIS

Joey ...

Emma, wearing Dennis's scarf, hurries through the French doors, looking behind her. Turning she sees Dennis.

EMMA

Dennis! Thank God! I thought you were dead! Then I found your scarf.
(she weeps into his chest)

DENNIS

Aw, poor thing, aw, shh, shh.

(gets her onto the sofa, 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 telephone 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

Oh, yeah, nuttier'n a peach orchard boar, ain't you, mama?

EMMA

Why are you talking like that, Dennis?

DENNIS

She thinks she's my mama.

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

That's right, mama. You're lookin' like you was rode hard and hung out wet. You mind Hannah now.

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

Well, that's mighty clever.

EMMA

I never forget a ...

HANNAH

(ushering Emma to the double doors)

Come along, Mrs. Murtson.

DENNIS

Uh, Hannah, could I pick over a bone with you a sec? Run along upstairs, mama.

EMMA

(whispering to Dennis)

I've got a plan!

DENNIS

A plan? Goodie! Run along!

(Emma exits in the downstage hallway.)

Now, little lady, I—

HANNAH

What kinda plan?

DENNIS

Well, I just couldn't say. Oh, the poor old gal, it's just gone, gone, gone, ain't it?

HANNAH

Yeah, poor old gal.

DENNIS

But I figger... Hannah, I got something ... kinda alarmin' to say to you.

HANNAH

Oh, yeah? Uh...

DENNIS

This fella claimin' he's Dennis Murtson ... he ain't.

HANNAH

You're ... puttin' me on.

DENNIS

I cain't reveal to you how I know. You gotta trust me. And what's more, I think he's a very dangerous kind.

(unconsciously rubbing his sore nipple)

He's got an underlyin' 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...

DENNIS

(at the same time as Hannah)

You gotta get outa here!

HANNAH

(at the same time as Dennis)

...you gotta get outa here!

(brought up sharply)

Huh?

DENNIS

I'm scared for you.

HANNAH

You're scared for me?

DENNIS

Yeah, you're so ...

(repulsed)

...dang 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...

(beat)

Say, can you talk English?

DENNIS

English is what I'm talkin' now.

HANNAH

No, I mean like that funny kind of English like she talks. Try sayin', "I'm going to the Cape of Good Cheer for a drink."

DENNIS

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

HANNAH

Go-ing. Cape-of-Good.

DENNIS

Go-ing. Cape-of-Good. Why ... why are we doin' this?

HANNAH

I'm-going-to-the-Cape-of-Good-Cheer-for-a-drink, say it.

DENNIS

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

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

Ringer?

HANNAH

You look just like him! On account of your mothers bein' twins and your father f... impregnatin' 'em both the same night. Now, 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 Lard!

HANNAH

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

DENNIS

That...!!! (recovers himself) ...varmint!

HANNAH

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

DENNIS

I ... I ... The varmint!

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)

You use that English accent I taught you, and you're Dennis Murtson, Emma's son...

(kisses him)

...and heir.

DENNIS

(ready to vomit)

Well, if Dennis Murtson is dead, why cain't I just go on being Dennis Kid 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've a... I've a better plan.

HANNAH

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

DENNIS

(resuming Oklahoma accent)

Oh, yeah, yes ma'am, howdy doody! Now, little lady, give this plan your considered opinion.

HANNAH

Shoot.

DENNIS

No, don't shoot! Let's you and me leave this house. Let's elope! This fella's scared of me, scared I'll catch onto his game. If you and me go off—

Joe's voice comes from far away down the hallway. It is a musical call, very innocent sounding.

JOE

Mary, oh honey, where are you?

Hannah and Dennis push each other towards the French doors.

HANNAH

Get out, quick!

DENNIS

(same time)

Get out quick! Please go, I'll handle Joey.

HANNAH

(stops, surprised)

Joey?

DENNIS

Uh, didn't you say his name was Joe? Harris--son, or something.

HANNAH

Yeah, I said Joe!

DENNIS

Well, Joe ... isn't Joey short for Joe?

HANNAH

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

JOE

(closer, still musically)

Oh, Maaaaaary?

HANNAH

Oh, God!

Hannah flees out the French doors. Dennis starts toward the hallway.

JOE

(still musically)

Dennnnnny?

DENNIS

(pulls up short)

Oh, God. Oh, God.

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

JOE

Maer!

He starts out through the French doors as Emma comes on from the upstage 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 on sofa)

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 up to down along the hallway. The clock cuckoos, which makes her scoot back up the hallway. Joe turns, too late to see her. He goes to the arched doorway to investigate, looking the wrong way first. While his back is turned, Emma quickly spoons more sugar into his cup. Joe is about to turn right and go down the hallway when Emma speaks.

And now for the CASH.

(Joe comes hotly back.)

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

(Her eye upon Joe, she goes to the safe, starts to dial, but 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. .

(sitting, offering Joe his cup of tea)

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, how handsome you are, er Bob. Just look at yourself in the mirror. Those eyes! You remind me so much of ...

JOE

Unh!

EMMA

Oh, you mustn'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 upstage 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 re-enters 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 upstage hallway)

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 upstage 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.

Hannah!

(runs to the arched doorway, looks both ways, then exits to the downstage hallway)

Joey!

In a moment, Emma re-enters from the upstage 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 fifth...

(compares the newspaper with her appointment book)

...yes, that's right. Oh, and happy birthday, darling, but let me see, there was something else. Oh, yes. "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, starts for Saturn)

DENNIS

(about to sip, puts cup down)

The novel! Where is it?

EMMA

(opening Saturn)

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

DENNIS

Let me see! But first, Mother, tell me the truth, how many of these little hiding places are there in this house?

EMMA

Thirty-three, of course. In the morning, I shall draw up a map of all of them for you, and I will note plainly the open sesame of each. They are easy to commit to memory because they are progressive and palindromic.

(hands him the novel)

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

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 on 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 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.)

EMMA

...a tight man, Joe Harris was, "tight young 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, "Emma, stop pinching him," but it was beyond me. I apologize, dear. It can't have been much fun for you.

DENNIS

Ow, oh.

EMMA

Father paid off the authorities to alter the birth certificate of your twin. As the year was leap, Father found it amusing to assign him the birthdate of February 29, which made the child four months older than he really was. Not that it mattered. That one came out of the womb old. With eyes wide open and fists clenched, he sat up and watched as you made your painful entry into the world. Such eyes! I'll never forget them.

(turns slowly to mirror)

In fact...

(approaches mirror, stares into her own eyes, loses thought)

Kookoo. Ookook.

(turns back into the room, sees Dennis lying on couch with ms. on his chest)

Dennis? Oh dear, I hope my novel doesn't put its every reader to sleep. But how lovely, to nap and dream of mother.

(takes the ms. off his chest and carries it to the desk)

Oh, how lovely, tea!

From now on Emma's actions mirror the opening of the play. She returns to the coffee table and spoons three spoonfuls of sugar into a cup, taking it to the desk where she sits, sets the teacup down, takes the last page from the bottom of the ms. and the top page of the manuscript, compares them, laughs to herself.

EMMA

Silly cow.

(writes on last page)

Page six six six, "Finis".

(writes on first page)

And page one "Sin if..."

(riffles the pages with delight, then picks up her teacup. The cuckoo cuckoos once.

Ha!

(the cuckoo cuckoos three times more)

Ha!

As the cuckoo cuckoos six more times, Emma raises the cup to her lips, sits motionless as if transfixed as "Would You?" theme plays backwards and lights dim until Emma is only a silhouette against the sunset through the French doors. Lights to black.

THE END