

PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE PEANUT BUTTER

A comedy in two acts by Marsha L. Grant

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CAST (7 women, 5 men, 1 large dog)

GLADYS - the irascible church secretary, age 35 or older
PASTOR RALPH DETAMORE - a widower, age 40 or older
FLORA BOOKER - age 40 or older; not well educated but full of good
common sense.
ED BOOKER - Flora's husband, a retired carpenter and river rat
VERNON - age 25 or older, friend of the Pastor's
DALE - age 25 or older, friend of the Pastor's
SOL ABRAMS - a knowledgeable building contractor
AGNES]
WILMA] - the ladies of the church choir
IRMA]
DORLEEN ADAMS - a single girl, early twenties
MISS CARTWRIGHT - matriarch of the town and Pastor's contemporary
SAM - a large dog

Single unit set: Pastor's outer office of the church sanctuary. The time is present. Running time 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I - Scene 1: Thursday before Palm Sunday
Scene 2: Noon the same day
Scene 3: A couple of hours later
Scene 4: Later that afternoon
Scene 5: Late afternoon
Scene 6: Friday morning
Scene 7: Early afternoon of the same day
Scene 8: Saturday morning

ACT II - Scene 1: The following Monday
Scene 2: Later that day
Scene 3: Tuesday morning
Scene 4: Later that day
Scene 5: Thursday morning
Scene 6: Good Friday

ACT I, Scene 1

[Single unit set--the pastor's outer office in the sanctuary. Three exits--one to the office SR, one into a hallway that leads to the basement rec room and sanctuary SL, one to the outside UC. There is a secretary's desk & chair ULR 3 visitor's chairs--UL & DL on either side of the door to the sanctuary, and one R of desk. A coat rack is in the UL corner. There is a typewriter, date book, and other sundry items on the desk, an opt. bookcase against the wall DL, and appropriate wall decor. At rise GLADYS enters UC, lays a stack of mail on the corner of her desk, hangs her raincoat on the coat rack, and then seats herself at the desk. PASTOR enters from outside UC.]

PASTOR: *(Throws his rain coat on a chair, picks up the mail, and with good humor.)* GOOD morning, Gladys.

GLADYS: *(Sourly)* It's raining.

PASTOR: *(Sits in chair DL & sorts thru the mail.)* April showers bring May flowers.

GLADYS: And dandelions, muddy feet, mosquitoes, influenza, allergies, and the river's already at flood stage.

PASTOR: Gladys, you always make my day. Any casualties?

GLADYS: *(Sneezing)* I'm getting there.

PASTOR: Bless you. I was referring to the flood.

GLADYS: River rats are jumping ship.

PASTOR: Translation?

GLADYS: *(Hangs up the Pastor's coat on coat rack.)* Folks who live along the riverbanks are moving to higher ground.

PASTOR: Call the Red Cross. We could accommodate a couple of families in the rec room downstairs.

GLADYS: Sure. They can empty the buckets. *(Returns to her desk.)*

PASTOR: What buckets?

GLADYS: This place leaks like a sieve every time it rains. When are you going to do something about it?

PASTOR: The Lord's working on it, Gladys.

GLADYS: Wouldn't hurt to call a contractor.

PASTOR: I did. He's supposed to get back to me today.

GLADYS: And?

PASTOR: And give me an estimate for a new roof.

GLADYS: Just the roof? The whole building is about to collapse. Every day there's a new crack in the ceiling, paint chips on the floor. . .

PASTOR: It's stood for 75 years. Have faith, Gladys.

GLADYS: I GOT faith. What we DON'T got is money.

PASTOR: The Lord's working on that, too.

GLADYS: Praise the Lord and pass the peanut butter.

PASTOR: Peanut butter?

GLADYS: Silly expression, isn't it? Something my mother used to say when times got tough.

PASTOR: Mine used to say, when times get tough, the tough get going, and she'd send us all out to look for work.

GLADYS: How old were you?

PASTOR: Three or four.

GLADYS: And you got a job?

PASTOR: The Cartwright's paid me a nickel for taking out their trash.

GLAYDS: Hooray for child labor laws.

PASTOR: In those days a nickel bought a loaf of bread.

GLADYS: And twenty cents bought a jar of peanut butter. For five dollars you could feed the family for a week.

PASTOR: That you could. *(Crosses to desk.)* Any calls?

GLADYS: One from Clara Lewis. Wants to know if you're coming Saturday night.

PASTOR: Please call her back and make up some excuse.

GLADYS: I will not lie for you, Pastor.

PASTOR: And I will not attend another of Clara's soirees so she can parade eligible widows in front of me.

GLADYS: Get married and you won't have that problem.

PASTOR: In the Lord's and my own good time, Gladys.

GLADYS: Then have the Lord call her.

PASTOR: Gladys, one of these days . . .

GLADYS: You'll fire me. And then where will you be? Nobody else would put up with your abuse.

PASTOR: What abuse? I'm always the perfect gentleman--- say please and thank you, make my own coffee. . .

GLADYS: If you'd buy a new coffee maker, I'd do it for you.

PASTOR: What's wrong with the old one?

GLADYS: It's hazardous to our health. When you plug it in, the lights flicker. You're going to burn the place down if it doesn't fall on it's own first. *(Gives him an exasperated look and returns to her typing as Pastor crosses to his office.)*

PASTOR: Let me know if Sol Abrams calls. *(Exits to inner office, then sticks his head back out the door.)* And don't forget to call the Red Cross. If there are folks in need, we want to do our part. Can't let the Baptists get all the glory. *(Gladys nods and reaches for the phone as AGNES, WILMA, DORLEEN, and IRMA enter from outside.)*

AGNES: Is the pastor in, Gladys?

GLADYS: He just got here. If you'll have a seat I'll get him for you in a few minutes.

WILMA: This is very important.

IRMA: It's an emergency.

DORLEEN: Mother had a hissy-fit last night.

GLADYS: Even so, Pastor likes a few minutes alone when he first gets here. . . to commune with his boss, so to speak. *(the ladies sit in chairs)*

AGNES: Oh, you mean he's in prayer.

GLADYS: They're discussing shingles.

WILMA: Discussing what?

GLADYS: A new roof.

LADIES: Oh. *(phone rings & GLADYS answers)*

GLADYS: Church of the Savior, Pastor Detamore's office.This afternoon? *(checks the date book)* How about 3 o'clock?..... Great! He's anxious to talk to you, too. Bye.

PASTOR: *(entering from his office)* Gladys, was that Abrams on the phone?

GLADYS: He'll be here at 3 o'clock. *(points skyward)* Fast work.

PASTOR: Good morning, ladies. You want to see me. *(the ladies rise and cluster around him)*

WILMA: Pastor, I know we've been desperate for an organist since Doris Apple fell and broke her hip, but that young fellow you hired is impossible.

PASTOR: Oh?

IRMA: When is Doris coming back?

PASTOR: Not for another two months. She's still in rehab.

WILMA: *(to Agnes)* Hip replacement. Bones like eggshells, poor thing.

IRMA: Well, unless you want a rebellion on your hands, you've got to find another organist and choir director.

PASTOR: That young man has a master's degree in music. We should feel honored that he accepted the job on a temporary basis. What seems to be the problem?

AGNES: Have you seen the music he wants us to sing?

PASTOR: No.

AGNES: It sounds like everybody's singing the wrong notes.

PASTOR: Maybe they are.

IRMA: Really, Pastor! It's some modern thing. Not at all what we're accustomed to singing.

PASTOR: Enlightenment is good for the soul.

AGNES: It doesn't even sound like church music.

DORLEEN: No harmony, minor key. . .

PASTOR: Who's the composer?

WILMA: Somebody strange... Bartok, I think.....I don't know....just strange.

PASTOR: Well, I'll have a talk with the young man. I'm sure we can reach a compromise--something that both he and the choir feel comfortable with. Don't want the fellow to go away mad right before Holy Week. Wouldn't do at all, now would it?

WILMA: Well, don't be surprised if the congregation walks out before your sermon.

PASTOR: I'll pray on it. In the meantime, I'd appreciate it if you ladies would give Bartok your best effort.

IRMA: While you're at it, ask Him to send us a new choir director.

PASTOR: His will be done. Now, if you ladies will excuse me. . .(*exits to office*)

AGNES: Talk to him, Gladys. The choir is ready to go on strike.

DORLEEN: Mama, you forgot to tell him about the mouse.

GLADYS: What mouse?

AGNES: I think there's a whole family of them.

GLADYS: Where?

WILMA: In the choir loft.

IRMA: Scooted right across my toes, it did. Nearly gave me a heart attack.

GLADYS: We'll set out some traps.

AGNES: Only thing worse than a live mouse is a dead one.

IRMA: Don't expect me to pick it up.

AGNES: The sexton will dispose of it.

GLADYS: The sexton retired last year.

WILMA: I wondered why I hadn't seen him around.

AGNES: We'll have the new choir director do it. *(they laugh)*

GLADYS: *(picks up the newspaper)* Well, look at this. Martha's Boutique is having a pre-Easter sale. Better check it out before all the good buys are snatched up.

WILMA: If I didn't know better, Gladys, I'd think you were trying to get rid of us.

GLADYS: Sorry ladies, but I've got work to do.

IRMA: Well then, we won't keep you. Come along, girls. I want a red blouse to go with my new purple suit.

DORLEEN: I need some new shoes.

WILMA: I'll drive. *(they exit ad libbing about their wardrobes)*

PASTOR: *(sticking his head out of the door)* Have they gone?

GLADYS: It's safe to come out now. Agnes says there are mice in the choir loft.

PASTOR: Been there for years. Seventy-five generations of them.

GLADYS: Want me to set out some traps?

PASTOR: No, I'll do it before I make my sick visits. Hold down the fort, Gladys. *(exits)*

GLADYS: Bartok, a leaky roof, 75 generations of mice. *(beat)* I'd better call the National Guard. *(reaches for the phone)*

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 2

[Later the same day. Gladys is at her desk as Ed and Flora enter from outside. They appear in bedraggled attire, carrying a plastic trash bag of clothes, and a small TV.]

ED: Excuse me, M'am.

GLADYS: Yes, can I help you?

ED: I'm Ed Booker. This is m' wife, Flora. They told us to come here.

GLADYS: Who told you?

ED: The Red Cross.

GLADYS: Oh, the flood.

FLORA: Our house is gone. . . down the river.

GLADYS: That's terrible. Have a seat and I'll get the Pastor. *(she exits into inner office, returns with the PASTOR)*

PASTOR: Hello. I'm Ralph Detamore.

GLADYS: Pastor, this is Ed and Flora Booker. They lost their home. . . flooded out.

FLORA: River took it all 'cept what we brung with us.

PASTOR: I'm sorry to hear that. Understand it's pretty bad down in the valley.

FLORA: Worse 'n bad. Place is crawlin' with snakes.

ED: Water moccasins.

FLORA: Hundreds of 'm.

GLADYS: How revolting! Have a lot of people lost their homes?

ED: All us river rats. Water kept risin' and risin', so we grabbed what we could and headed uphill. Next thing you know, the whole place got swallowed up.

FLORA: Then the truck got stuck in the mud, and we hadda walk to the highway.

ED: But some nice folks picked us up and brung us to town.

PASTOR: Is the Red Cross helping out?

FLORA: Yep. They was at the high school gym with eats and dry clothes.

PASTOR: Well, I'm sure they'll find you a place to stay.

GLADYS: Pastor, remember you said we could accommodate a couple of families. . . Baptists? . . . Glory?

PASTOR: Oh, yes, of course.

FLORA: We're awful worried about Sam.

PASTOR: Sam?

ED: Yep, he jumped out of the truck and took off runnin'.

FLORA: Scared of snakes.

ED: Scared of water, too. Durndest thing!

PASTOR: I don't understand. Who, exactly, is Sam?

ED: Our hound dog. Ain't no good at all fer duck huntin'.

FLORA: But right spry at catchin' rabbits and squirrels.

PASTOR: Well, I wouldn't worry. He'll turn up. Hounds have good homing instincts.

FLORA: 'Cept he ain't got no home to come to now.

PASTOR: I see your point.. . . Gladys?

GLADYS: Why don't I get you folks settled in, and then we'll check on Sam. We're going to put you in the rec room downstairs. It's not fancy, but there's a kitchenette, restroom--sorry, no shower. . .

FLORA: No shower? How 'm I gonna take m' bath?

PASTOR: Well, that is a problem. . .

GLADYS; They could use parsonage.

PASTOR: I suppose so, but it would be rather inconvenient, having to walk back and forth . . .

ED: We don't mind. Only need it once a week.

GLADYS: You only take a bath once a week?

FLORA: When it's hot. Come winter, once a month is plenty.

PASTOR: I trust you won't be inconvenienced that long.

ED: Hard to tell. We ain't got no flood insurance.

GLADYS: What will you do?

ED: Dunno. M' brothers helped me build the place back when Flora 'n me got hitched, but they done passed on now.

PASTOR: I'll talk to the folks at FEMA.

FLORA: Ed, I told ya I ain't goin' back there fer love nor money.

ED: Flora's plumb tired of moppin' up ever time the river rises.

GLADYS: I don't blame her.

FLORA: Ed ain't been fishing since the boys left home. And the last time he was duck huntin', he shot the door off the privy and sunk the scow.

GLADYS: Really?

FLORA: Yep. His eyes ain't what they used to be. Probably a blessin' the shotgun's gone with the rest of our bits and pieces.

PASTOR: Do you have kinfolk living near by?

ED: Got two boys, all grown up.

PASTOR: Have you called them?

FLORA: Don't know where they be.

GLADYS: When was the last time you talked to them?

FLORA: Don't recall exactly. . .maybe eight, nine years?

ED: Sounds about right, Flora.

PASTOR: We'll try to locate them for you.

GLADYS: Meantime, I'll go look for cots and blankets.

PASTOR: Try the storage room. . . behind the stack of folding chairs. I'll get clean sheets and pillows from the parsonage.

FLORA: Got any eats in the larder?

PASTOR: Well, now, I'm not sure. . .

ED: We feel awful bad about puttin' you out, Pastor.

PASTOR: Don't worry, it's not a problem.

GLADYS: We have funds to cover emergencies such as this. *(sotto voice to the Pastor)* Ask FEMA about reimbursement when you talk to them. *(to the Bookers)* Mr. and Mrs. Booker, if you'll come with me, I'll show you where to put your things. Then we'll go shopping for groceries.

ED: And find Sam. *(they exit into hallway to sanctuary)*

PASTOR: And find Sam. *(looking heavenward)* Sorry to bother you again.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 3

[A short while later. ED is seated in the chair DR holding onto a big dog while GLADYS feeds him doggie treats. Pastor enters from outside.]

PASTOR: Well, well. What do we have here?

GLADYS: Pastor, meet Sam.

PASTOR: *(pets the dog)* How do you do, Sam. How did he find his way here?

GLADYS: Couple of guys found him wandering in the woods, took him to town, and the Red Cross directed them here. Seems the Booker's made quite a fuss about this handsome fellow. You missed the reunion-- lots of tail-wagging, sloppy kisses, and mud everywhere. But you're all nice and clean now, aren't you Sam? *(to Pastor)* What are we going to do with him?

PASTOR: Good question.

GLADYS: He can't stay here.

PASTOR: No, I suppose not. What about the humane society?

GLADYS: Already checked. They're full up.

PASTOR: Is Flora downstairs?

GLADYS: Fixing something to eat. Can't you smell it?

PASTOR: Thought it was wet dog.

GLADYS: How about the parsonage?

PASTOR: What about it?

GLADYS: Sam. How about he stays with you?

PASTOR: No way. Ernest and Phoebe are not canine friendly.

GLADYS: How do you know? You've never had a dog before.

PASTOR: A toy poodle came visiting once, and I rescued it two bites short of sushi. No dog, and that's final. Call the pound.

GLADYS: I will not! They'd quarantine Sam for rabies and then put him to sleep.

PASTOR: They'd kill a flood refugee?

GLADYS: Without a moment's hesitation.

PASTOR: Do we know anybody who'd take him. . . temporarily?

GLADYS: *(Pulls PASTOR away from Ed and the dog and speaks sotto voice)* From the way the Booker's talk, it could be months before we lose our houseguests.

PASTOR: The folks at FEMA said they'd arrange something. Put them up in a motel, if necessary.

GLADYS: Which probably doesn't take pets. Few of them do.

PASTOR: Don't be so pessimistic, Gladys. Something will turn up. Prayer. . .that's the answer. *(exits to inner office)*

GLADYS: *(gives Sam a hug)* I hope God's not partial to cats.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 4

[Later that afternoon. GLADYS is at her desk; SOL ABRAMS and PASTOR enter from the sanctuary.]

SOL: I'm afraid that's the best I can do, Pastor. Gotta pay my men even if I take a bath on materials.

PASTOR: I understand, Sol. *(hands estimate to Gladys, who reacts)* You really feel it's necessary to replace the struts and eye beam?

SOL: No sense putting a new roof on rotted timbers. You'd just have to do it all over again in a few months--year or two at the most.

PASTOR: That bad, huh?

SOL: It's just the tip of the iceberg. The whole building needs renovation. Nothing but prayer holding it up now.

PASTOR: Got plenty of that around here.

GLADYS: Just a deficit of cash, Mr. Abrams.

SOL: No building fund?

GLADYS: Started one a few years ago, but somebody kept robbing it.

SOL: I'm sorry to hear that.

PASTOR: What Gladys means is that the money was channeled to other things.

SOL: More important than keeping a roof over your heads?

PASTOR: At the time, yes.

SOL: Anyone you could tap for a donation?

GLADYS: Miss Cartwright.

PASTOR: Absolutely not.

SOL: Rich parishioner?

PASTOR: Not exactly a parishioner, but rich. . .

GLADYS: She's got money, but Pastor won't ask. Considers it begging for alms.

SOL: Who better to ask. . .

GLADYS: Pastor doesn't see it that way.

PASTOR: Gladys, would you mind letting me speak for myself? (*she shrugs*)

SOL: What about your Bishop?

PASTOR: I already asked, but he's got his own problems.

SOL: More pressing than yours?

PASTOR: He's in the middle of a fund drive for a new children's hospital. Figures we can make do until whenever.

SOL: Okay, tell you what. You come up with half and I'll put my men to work.

PASTOR: Half a roof?

SOL: I'll trust you to find the money.

GLADYS: Put your trust in the Lord. . .

SOL: Works for us Jews.

PASTOR: Good point. Thank you, Sol. I'll get back to you.

SOL: Better make it soon. Have a good day, folks. *(exits)*

GLADYS: What are you going to do?

PASTOR: I wish I knew.

GLADYS: Want me to call Miss Cartwright?

PASTOR: Don't even think it.

GLADYS: Even as a last resort? We're getting desperate.

PASTOR: No!

[VERNON and DALE enter from outside]

GLADYS: Well, look who the cats dragged in--Chip 'n Dale.

VERNON: Afternoon, Pastor. Missed you at lunch today.

DALE: Special was liverwurst on rye. Your favorite.

PASTOR: It's been busy around here. Couldn't get away.

VERNON: Billy Joe dropped by. Said it was time for your annual hair cut. *(laughs)*

PASTOR: Just what I need, a funny barber.

DALE: A unisex hair stylist, he calls himself now.

PASTOR: Liked him better when he was just a barber.

VERNON: Wife doesn't cotton to a co-ed barbershop, so she cuts mine herself, now.

DALE: You can tell.

PASTOR: How is your wife, Vernon? Missed her in church Sunday.

VERNON: She drove over to Spencer on Saturday to see her mother. Poor woman was sicker 'n a dog, so she stayed overnight to help out.

PASTOR: Speaking of dogs, do either of you know the Booker's? Ed and Flora--lived down by the river until last night.

DALE: Nope. Got flooded out, did they?

PASTOR: Lost everything.

GLADYS: Except Sam.

VERNON: Who's Sam?

PASTOR: Their dog. We need to find him a temporary home.

DALE: Can't help you, Pastor. The missus would kill me if I brought in another stray. Got two already.

PASTOR: He's not a stray. . .

DALE: Homeless mutt. Same thing.

PASTOR: What about you, Vernon?

VERNON: I'll ask Betty. See what she says.

PASTOR: Thanks, I'd appreciate it.

DALE: Coming in we saw Abrams going out. Gonna get a new roof on this place?

PASTOR: Someday, God willing.

DALE: What the holdup?

PASTOR: Ten big ones.

GLADYS: As things stand now, ten dollars would be too much.

VERNON: Did he break the estimate down into materials and labor?

GLADYS: Nope, just a big round number. Let me count those zeros again.

PASTOR: Forget it Gladys. We can't afford it.

DALE: You can't afford NOT to do it. Next big storm that comes through here, you're going to be a pastor without a church to preach in.

PASTOR: The congregation is the church, Dale, not the building.

VERNON: Even so, we don't want to lose it to dry rot. It's been a landmark in this town for 75 years.

PASTOR: Vernon you got ten thousand idle dollars lying around?

VERNON: No, but I bet Miss Cartwright does.

GLADYS: Been down that road already. Pastor won't beg.

DALE: Suppose, just suppose, we could come up with enough money for the materials--you know, with bake sales and such. Then the men in the congregation could all pitch in. . .

GLADYS: The blind leading the blind?

VERNON: Dale, I wouldn't trust you to put the roof on a birdhouse. You'd staple it to the cat.

DALE: Look who's talking--a man who bought a carpenter's router to unplug his drains.

PASTOR: Gentlemen, your hearts are in the right place, but we've got to be practical.

GLADYS: Let's see. A dollar and a half for a dozen cookies, two dollars for a pie, three for a two-layer cake, times 120—that's a conservative estimate--divided into ten thousand (*does the calculations*) . . . My goodness! We only need to hold seven thousand, three hundred and twenty-five bake sales. No problem.

DALE: Keep the doctors in business.

VERNON: How come?

DALE: I've eaten your wife's rhubarb pie.

VERNON: You think your wife's a better cook?

DALE: I don't spend half my life holed up in the bathroom.

VERNON: It's not my wife's cooking. Got other problems.

DALE: Such as?

VERNON: None of your business. How about the Bishop, Pastor?

GLADYS: Been down that road. . .

PASTOR: Appreciate your input, gentlemen, but I think it's time I consulted my boss. If you'll excuse me. *(exits into inner office)*

VERNON: Does that mean he's going to call the Bishop?

GLADYS: Nope. *(points skyward)* His other boss.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 5

[Late afternoon of the same day. GLADYS stands at the door to Pastor's inner office]

GLADYS: Pastor, it's getting late, and I want to type your sermon before I go.

PASTOR: *(entering from his office with a waste basket full of paper)* It's all there, Gladys. Take your pick.

GLADYS: Not a good day, huh?

PASTOR: Can't get my mind around what I want to say.

GLADYS: Pull something from the file.

PASTOR: It's for Palm Sunday, Gladys. Wouldn't be fair to the listeners.

GLADYS: Well, if the choir ladies are correct, no one is going to stick around to hear it anyway. Who's Bartok?

PASTOR: An early twentieth century composer.

GLADYS: How come I never heard of him?

PASTOR: He wasn't into rock and roll.

GLADYS: Very funny! Come to think of it, I don't know who wrote half of the hymns we sing in church.

PASTOR: Neither does the rest of the congregation.

GLADYS: Does that make us bad people?

PASTOR: He forgives you.

[There is a loud crash offstage; FLORA enters with a skillet in her hand]

FLORA: Did that S-O-B come through here? I swear. . . Oh, sorry, Pastor.

PASTOR: If you're referring to Sam, that nails him right on the nose.

ED: *(appearing at the door looking frazzled)* Anybody see where he got to?

PASTOR: Didn't come this way.

GLADYS: Oh my! He must be in the sanctuary. *(Pushes the Bookers aside and dashes thru the door to the sanctuary.)*

ED: There goes our supper, Flora.

FLORA: *(furious)* Ed, I told you to keep him leashed.

ED: He was sleepin' in the corner, Flora, not botherin' a soul.

FLORA: That dog's the most worthless, good-for-nothing... he'll be the death of us, yet. Scared of water, guns. . . runt of the litter. Never did earn his keep. . .

ED: Now that ain't so, Flora. He brung ya a rabbit once.

FLORA: Never could figure what you ever saw in him.

ED: Chemistry. It was love at first sight.

FLORA: You watch too much TV.

ED: What're we gonna do for eats tonight, Flora?

FLORA: Serve you right to go without. You're the dog-lover.

PASTOR: Tell you what. After we round up the culprit, you'll join me for supper at the parsonage.

FLORA: Oh, we couldn't do that, Pastor. You've been so charitable. . . taking in strangers 'n all.

PASTOR: Please, I insist. This being Thursday, it'll be leftovers-- probably hash.

FLORA: Your wife won't mind us droppin' in. . . unexpected like?

PASTOR: I'm a widower, Mrs. Booker. I have a devoted housekeeper who keeps me in clean underwear, and puts food on the table. She used to cook for a family of eight, so there's always enough for unexpected guests.

ED: Awful nice of you, Pastor. When we get back on our feet again, you gotta come sup with us. Flora's got a way with possum stew that'll make your mouth water.

PASTOR: I can hardly wait. (*GLADYS enters*)

GLADYS: Got Sam locked in the utility room. What did you feed him, Mrs. Booker? Looks like chicken feathers stuck to his muzzle.

FLORA: Didn't dress no chicken for supper. Must've come from the pillows he was lyin' on.

GLADYS: That's a relief. You want me to order take-out, Pastor?

PASTOR: Ed and Flora are going to sup with me at the parsonage this evening. Let's call it a day, Gladys.

GLADYS: Are you going to sit in on choir rehearsal tonight?

PASTOR: Think I should?

GLADYS: Wouldn't hurt. Give the ladies some encouragement, and you might find the inspiration you need for Sunday's sermon.

PASTOR: Right now I could find a lot more to say about hound dogs, than palm trees and Bartok.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 6

[Friday morning. GLADYS is at her desk as PASTOR enters from outside. He is holding his clerical collar and a sweater which Gladys helps him put on during the following dialogue.]

PASTOR: *(Visibly upset)* Gladys, why is there a mud-caked wreck blocking my driveway?

GLADYS: Good morning to you, too, Pastor. Sleep well last night?

PASTOR: Don't change the subject.

GLADYS: Ah, you must be referring to the Booker's truck.

PASTOR: It may have been a truck in its former life. But any resemblance to a motorized vehicle is stretching the imagination. How did it get here?

GLADYS: It was hauled up and dropped off about an hour ago.

PASTOR: Why is it blocking my driveway?

GLADYS: Guess they didn't want to block the street.

PASTOR: Why didn't they put it in the church parking lot?

GLADYS: Maybe they were reluctant to defame sacred ground.

PASTOR: That's not funny. Does it run?

GLADYS: *(shrugs)* Ask the Booker's.

PASTOR: Do they know it's here?

GLADYS: I didn't want to wake Sam.

PASTOR: Gladys, go downstairs and wake them up. I need to get my car out.

GLADYS: I hope they have the keys.

PASTOR: Don't tell me they abandoned the truck with the keys still in it?

GLADYS: Folks who dropped it off said they didn't find any.

PASTOR: Gladys. . .

GLADYS: I'm going, I'm going. (*exits to sanctuary*) (*phone rings*)

PASTOR: (*answering it*) Hullo?Oh, good morning, Clara. Didn't Gladys call you?.....Well, I may have a conflict Saturday night. Something just came up.....You see, well, uh, let me get back to you this afternoon, I promise. You know, I always look forward..... Thank you, Clara. I knew you'd understand. (*GLADYS enters*) Well?

GLADYS: No keys.

PASTOR: What do you mean, no keys?

GLADYS: Ed said he lost them years ago.

PASTOR: Then how do they get the blasted thing started?

GLADYS: "Don't need 'em," he says. "Got it hotwired."

PASTOR: Isn't that illegal? (*GLADYS shrugs*) Well, are they going to come up and move it? I've got to get my car out.

GLADYS: Ed says that since you've been so nice to him and Flora, he insists on being your chauffeur today.

PASTOR: My what?

GLADYS: You know, drive you where you want to go.

PASTOR: I KNOW what chauffeur means. There's a founder's day meeting in half an hour. Do you really expect me to arrive there in that.....thing?.

GLADYS: My, my! Isn't 'vanity' one of the seven deadly no-no's?

PASTOR: (*gives her a threatening look & crosses to inner office*) Let me know when my chauffeur is ready to go.

GLADYS: Wait! Before you have your morning conference with the boss, what should I tell Clara if she calls?

PASTOR: She already did.

GLADYS: And?

PASTOR: That's on the agenda this morning.

GLADYS: I hate to ruin your good mood, but how did choir rehearsal go last night?

PASTOR: That's the second item on the agenda.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 7

[Early afternoon of the same day. The office is buzzing with the angry voices of the AGNES, WILMA, IRMA, VERNON, DALE & ABRAMS, who are having heated discussions as PASTOR enters from outside. FLORA is seated at the desk, face hidden by a magazine.]

PASTOR: Hey there! Hello everybody! *(shouting to make himself heard)*
Ladies! Gentlemen! One at a time, please! Ladies first.

AGNES: Pastor, you have to talk to the organist!

WILMA: There's no way we're going to learn that music by Sunday!

IRMA: We're set in our ways...too old to change.

PASTOR: Ladies, I understand what you're saying. And I feel totally responsible. It appears that I've put you in an impossible situation, but I'm not sure how to rectify it. . . without hurting someone's feelings, if you know what I mean.

AGNES: In other words, you won't fire the organist.

PASTOR: It's a little late to find someone else before Sunday services.

WILMA: Pastor, you heard us struggling last night. It was pathetic.

PASTOR: Well, it wasn't that bad.

IRMA: Be honest, Pastor. It was agonizing.

PASTOR: Not the exact word I'd have chosen.

AGNES: But close.

PASTOR: Yes.

WILMA: So, what are we going to do?

PASTOR: Are you rehearsing again tonight?

IRMA: At 7 o'clock.

PASTOR: I'll be there, and we'll all sit down and discuss the problem together. I'm sure something can be worked out.

AGNES: What's wrong with "Christ the Lord is Risen Today?" Everybody knows it by heart. Nobody's ever heard of Bartok.

WILMA: That's the hymn we sing on Easter, Agnes, not Palm Sunday.

IRMA: What about, "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds?"

WILMA: That's for weddings.

AGNES: "We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing?"

WILMA: Thanksgiving.

IRMA: Then what do we sing on Palm Sunday?

AGNES: I don't remember.

WILMA: Gladys will know.

PASTOR: Where is Gladys?

FLORA: Took Sam and went home. Said she had a splittin' headache. Told me to get the phone while she's gone.

PASTOR: Did she say when she'd be back?

FLORA: Later, maybe.

PASTOR: All right, ladies, I'll see you tonight. *(The ladies thank him profusely and exit all talking at once)* Now, gentlemen, what can I do for YOU?

SOL: Pastor, these fellows asked me to meet them here today, because they think they've come up with a way to put a new roof on the

sanctuary--practically for free they claim. I'm sure they're sincere, but it's a waste of time to even discuss it.

DALE: How do you know? You haven't heard all my idea yet.

SOL: I got the gist of it

VERNON: Maybe Dale didn't explain it good enough.

SOL: So, explain. I've got to get back to work.

DALE: We figured that Mr. Abrams, here, could teach us all how to nail on shingles, and we'd do it for free, naturally.

PASTOR: How many volunteers have you lined up?

DALE: Well, just Vernon and me, so far.

SOL: Pastor, I know your friends want to help, but roofing is not a job for amateurs. I'm a bonded contractor and only work with skilled, licensed carpenters.

PASTOR: Sorry fellows, that lets us out.

FLORA: Ed's a carpenter. *(All heads turn in her direction)*

PASTOR: What did you say, Flora?

FLORA: *(ED enters from sanctuary)* He's retired now, but Ed used to do all sorts of construction work. Him and his brothers built our house, didn't you Ed?

ED: *(Crossing to Flora)* Now, Flora, that was a long time ago, before arthritis done me in. Couldn't hold onto a hammer now if my life depended on it.

FLORA: But you could teach the fellows how to do it.

ED: I ain't no teacher, Flora.

FLORA: How do you know till you try?

PASTOR: Good point, but we don't want Ed to feel obligated.

FLORA: But it's okay for us to be obligated to you.

ED: She's right, Pastor. Tit for tat.

SOL: I know you mean well. Mr. Booker, but I can't take the responsibility.

PASTOR: Even so, gentlemen, we don't have the funds right now.

VERNON: What about the lottery?

DALE: The state lottery?

VERNON: Yup. If we all bought a bunch of tickets, maybe one of us would get lucky.

DALE: You ever win anything, Vernon?

VERNON: Won fifty dollars once.

DALE: From the lottery?

VERNON: Bingo game.

DALE: Where?

VERNON: St. Patrick's

DALE: When did you become a mackerel snapper?

VERNON: I'm not. Went with some friends of the wife's. Father O'Malley is a gourmet cook--makes great chili.

DALE: Just so long as you don't start counting beads.

VERNON: I wouldn't desert Pastor in his hour of need. Father O'Malley says we're all headed in the same direction--just taking different roads.

PASTOR: Amen to that.

SOL: I knew this was a waste of time.

DALE; Hold on, Mr. Abrams. We got some other ideas.

SOL: That's what I'm afraid of. You guys work it out and call me when you do. I've got a real job waiting. Catch you later, Pastor. *(exits)*

DALE: Kind of snooty, wouldn't you say? "I've got a real job. . ."

PASTOR: He is a busy man, Dale, and it's not fair to waste his time discussing probabilities.

VERNON: That's cause you're thinking my ideas PROBABLY won't work. What if I say they PROBABLY will?

DALE: How do you know?

VERNON: Now, if I could prove it, we'd be talking facts, not probabilities. Don't you know anything, Dale?

DALE: Vernon, what we need is money--moola, cash, credit, currency, financial solvency--not philosophy.

VERNON: Now, who's being snooty. Just because you work in a bank...

DALE: Head of the loan department.

VERNON: . . .you think you know everything.

DALE: And since when did you appoint yourself head philosopher of the liverwurst lunch club?

VERNON: All great writers expound on philosophy.

DALE: So now you're a great writer as well.

VERNON: Cover spot news and the financial beat...

DALE: Car crashes and pork-belly futures for the weekly Sun News. Don't recall you ever getting nominated for a Pulitzer.

PASTOR: Now, gentlemen. . .

FLORA: We got some money. *(All heads turn in her direction)*

PASTOR: What did you say, Flora?

FLORA: Ed and me, we got lots of money--at least we did.

ED: River took it like everything else.

DALE: What are you talking about?

FLORA: Money--It was all in a little metal box.

VERNON: You kept your money at home? In a box?

ED: A metal one. Never did trust them banks. Kept hearing how folks was always getting cheated.

FLORA: On TV. You know how're they're always talking about how the CIA's are making off with millions, while us little folks get left with nuthin'.

DALE: CEO's.

FLORA: Yep, that's what they're called.

VERNON: Those are investment companies, not banks.

ED: Same thing. They take your money, promise to give it back when you want it, and when you do, it's all gone.

DALE: If you don't mind me asking, how much money are you talking about?

ED: Don't recall exactly. Ten or twenty--that sound about right to you, Flora?

FLORA: Last time I counted, it come close to seventeen.

VERNON: Dollars?

FLORA: Thousand.

DALE: DOLLARS?

FLORA: And some change I got for selling eggs.

ED: But it's all down the river now. Even the rooster.

VERNON: Down the river. . . down the river. . . Dale are you thinking what I'm thinking?

DALE: You still got that Bass boat, Vernon?

VERNON: Yep! And I know where we can get a grappling hook and some nets.

DALE: Wadda ya know, Pastor. The Lord works in mysterious ways. Come on, Vernon. We got ourselves a real job to do.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 8

[The next day. GLADYS is at her desk as PASTOR enters from outside.]

PASTOR: How's your headache, Gladys?

GLADYS: Mercifully, it's gone. Sam kept me company last night. Think I'll adopt him.

PASTOR: What will the Booker's say?

GLADYS: Dunno. Haven't asked them yet.

PASTOR: They're awfully fond of that hound.

GLADYS: Ed is. I don't think Flora cares one way or the other.

PASTOR: I had a long talk with the Bishop last night.

GLADYS: So, you called him after all.

PASTOR: No, he called me. We've got big trouble, Gladys.

GLADYS: He turned you down, again.

PASTOR: Didn't get the chance to ask. When Abrams applied for a work permit to fix the roof, they found some old papers in a file that everyone had forgotten about.

GLADYS: What kind of papers?

PASTOR: They date back 20 years. When my predecessor applied for a permit to update the plumbing and wiring, building inspectors went over the sanctuary with a fine tooth comb, and pronounced it unsafe for occupancy.

GLADYS: But it was fixed, right?

PASTOR: No. Structural damage due to settling and seismic land shifts called for a major renovation. Since there wasn't enough money in the church treasury to undertake the project, nothing was done about it.

GLADYS: Not ever?

PASTOR: The problem was referred to the Bishop who dumped it into the lap of the church conference and that's the last anyone heard of it.

GLADYS: I just got my headache back.

PASTOR: It's going to take more than a couple of aspirin to fix the trouble we're in.

GLADYS: Before the walls cave in, could you be more specific?

PASTOR: The church conference doesn't think we're worth it.

GLADYS: What does that mean?

PASTOR: We're just small potatoes, Gladys. Expendable.

GLADYS: You mean they're going to shut us down?

PASTOR: Unless there's a miracle out there, we're history.

GLADYS: A lot of people are going to be upset.

PASTOR: Tell me about it.

GLADYS: What about the parishioners?

PASTOR: They'll have to go to the church in Spencer, or convert to Episcopalians.

GLADYS: When do you plan to tell them?

PASTOR: No rush. Sometime after Easter, I guess.

GLADYS: What about you?

PASTOR: What about me?

GLADYS: If we lose the church, where will you go?

PASTOR: Haven't really thought about it. I'm no spring chicken--too old to start over--so I'll probably call it quits.

GLADYS: Well, I'm not giving up. Miracles do happen. If you don't believe me, just ask Sam.

PASTOR: Your logic escapes me.

GLADYS: By all rights Sam should be dead--drowned in the flood, road kill, or poisoned by a water moccasin. But by some miracle he survived and found his way home to us.

PASTOR: I'd chalk that up to animal instinct.

GLADYS: You're just partial to cats.

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 1

[The following Monday morning. FLORA is seated at Gladys' desk. DORLEEN enters.]

FLORA: Hi, there.

DORLEEN: Is Pastor in?

FLORA: Not yet. I'm Flora. What's your name, dear?

DORLEEN: Dorleen Adams.

FLORA: Somethin' I can do for you?

DORLEEN: I don't know. Pastor said he wanted to talk to me and Donald.

FLORA: Donald?

DORLEEN: My fiancé. We're gettin' married.

FLORA: Congratulations. You and Donald set the date yet?

DORLEEN: That's one of the things we gotta talk about. I wish he'd get here?

FLORA: Pastor?

DORLEEN: No, Donald. He's comin' from work.

FLORA: What's he do?

DORLEEN: He drives a truck--delivering produce.

FLORA: Tomatoes, cabbages, and such?

DORLEEN: Yeah, but it's only temporary. Until he can get somethin' steady and make more money.

FLORA: I understand. When a fella's got a wife to support, he likes to know there's a regular check comin' in. . . . to pay the bills and such.

DORLEEN: Pastor said he'd try to find Donald a better-paying job--otherwise we might never get hitched.

FLORA: Pastor's a good man. If he promised to help, he'll do it. But, honey, if you young'uns wanna get married, don't let some ole job stand in the way.

DORLEEN: That's what I told Donald, but he's stubborn as his Pa's old mule. Won't tie the knot till he can support a wife properly, he says.

FLORA: Well, I can see his point. And you're just a couple of kids. Wouldn't hurt to wait a bit--unless. . .

DORLEEN: No, ma'am. I'm not in the family way, if that's what you mean.

FLORA: Well, it's none of my business; don't mean to pry.

DORLEEN: That's okay. Trouble is, it's not just the job. . .

FLORA: Somethin' else troublin' you?

DORLEEN: Sort of.

FLORA: Wanna talk about it?

DORLEEN: I don't know. It's kind of embarrassing.

FLORA: *(looking around)* Just us girls here, if you know what I mean.

DORLEEN: Well. . .

FLORA: Yes?

DORLEEN: You promise not tell anybody?

FLORA: Promise. Won't say a word less'n you tell me I can.

DORLEEN: Still. . . I don't know. . .

FLORA: Honey, I'm just tryin' to help. But if it's too embarrassin'...

DORLEEN: Donald's been acting kind of weird..

FLORA: Weird, how?

DORLEEN: Ever since we got engaged. Like all of sudden he's scared of me.

FLORA: Scared, how?

DORLEEN: He acts like he don't want to be alone with me-- hold my hand or kiss me like he used to.

FLORA: I see. Maybe he's scared he'll get carried away. . .you know. . .

DORLEEN: No, it's not that. He was raised inside the gate, goes to church regular. We've done nothing to be ashamed of.

FLORA: Then what's his problem, do you think?

DORLEEN: I'm afraid. . . well. . . I'm afraid he doesn't love me anymore.

FLORA: How long you two knowed each other?

DORLEEN: Most all our lives. We both grew up here.

FLORA: More 'n likely then, he's just gotten cold feet.

DORLEEN: You mean he doesn't want to get married now?

FLORA: Well, I expect he does. . . and he don't. Fellas are funny that way.

DORLEEN: Really?

FLORA: Marriage is a big step. Fellas start thinkin' about how it's gonna change their life, new responsibilities and such, and it scares them. Let me tell you, most fellas don't cotton to change. Folks are always sayin' how women are the home-bodies, but I knowed from experience, a man's just as much a home-body as a woman. Maybe more so. And they can be real stubborn when it comes to change.

DORLEEN: How so?

FLORA: Well, ever time I moved a stick of furniture to a different spot, my Ed acted like I'd turned his whole world upside down. . . carried on somethin' awful. And gettin' married is about the biggest change a fella, or a girl, is likely to make.

DORLEEN: We've been going steady ever since high school. It isn't like he hasn't had plenty of time to think about it.

FLORA: Thinkin's one thing. Doin's another.

DORLEEN: Yeah, he's probably gotten cold feet, like you said. What do you think I should do?

FLORA: Well, he's gotta work it out hisself. And you just gotta go along with him like it's no big deal whether you get married or not. But don't bug him. Let him come to it in his own good time. If you kids love each other, it won't take him more 'n a month of Sunday's to see the light.
(beat) You got a job?

DORLEEN: I'm helping out part time in a flower shop. Don't get paid much, but I like the work. And the lady I work for is teaching me all about flower arranging. I wouldn't mind doing it full time if I get the chance.

FLORA: That's good. A woman oughtta have something important she can do, married or not.

DORLEEN: You married?

FLORA: Yep! Forty years come June.

DORLEEN: Wow! My mom's on her third husband. Donald's folks are still married, but they haven't said a civil word to each another in years. How come you got so lucky?

FLORA: Luck ain't got nuthin' to do with it. It's commitment and hard work. Ya figure when ya get married it's gonna be all sweetness and lovey-dovey. But it don't turn out that way. There's gonna be some good times, but some really awful ones, too. Kids come along and that's the second biggest change in a person's life. More often 'n not, it causes a man and wife to lose touch with one another. Kids always have to come first, no matter what. But sooner 'n you think, the kids is grown and gone, and it's back to just you and him, only you don't know each other no more. You're not the same people you was when you first got married, and you gotta get acquainted all over again. Some folks don't

like what they see, so they split. But Ed and me, we figured we was too old and ugly to start over again, and besides, we got a history together.

DORLEEN: Like what you read in a book?

FLORA: Yep, only it ain't wrote down nowhere. It's all personal stuff, and all in your head. But it's just as important as what you read in the books. Cause it's yer personal history that makes you what you are.

DORLEEN: You make it sound special.

FLORA: It is special. Choosin' right is the secret, but it ain't easy to know what's gonna turn out right, and what's gonna turn out wrong. You just do your best, and hope yer on the right track.

DORLEEN: Pastor says, you gotta have faith.

FLORA: A little common sense don't hurt neither. *[PASTOR enters]*

PASTOR: Hi, there, Dorleen. Where's that handsome fiancé of yours?

DORLEEN: Running' late on deliveries, I expect.

PASTOR: Well, I have good news for him. Sol Abrams is looking for qualified electricians. He'll supply the tools and teach a responsible young person everything he or she needs to know in order to get a license...providing that responsible young person promises to stay with him for a few years.

DORLEEN: It's not like we were planning to leave town anytime soon, and Donald's real smart. He can learn things faster than anybody. Oh, I can't wait to tell him. Thank you so much, Pastor. *(to Flora)* He doesn't have any more excuses, now does he? *(FLORA gives her a thumbs up)*

PASTOR: Let me know when you're ready to set the date, so I can put it on the calendar.

DORLEEN: What day were you married, Flora?

FLORA: June 25th, a Sunday. There I was in my fancy store-bought dress, holdin' tight to the posies Ma picked from the garden, and Ed in his brand-new suit. . . but just as we was startin' out, the heavens let loose by the bucket full. We got to the church lookin' like warmed over chicken soup. Ed's shoes went squish, squish, and there was mud splattered all over my skirt. But we said our "I do's" just as pretty as you please, and stayed hitched ever since. Good times and bad.

DORLEEN: *(laughing)* Then Donald and I are gonna get hitched on June 25th and pray for sunshine. Put it on your calendar, Pastor. Thanks, Flora. See you all later. *(exits)*

PASTOR: Dorleen seemed kind of worried when I spoke to her after services yesterday. I was afraid that she and Donald might be having second thoughts. . . but I guess not.

FLORA: We had a nice chat while you was gone.

PASTOR: What did you talk about?

FLORA: Oh, this and that?

PASTOR: Flora, I hope you weren't trying to do my job. Counseling parishioners can be tricky.

FLORA: Well, I wasn't counselin' exactly, just givin' my opinion about certain things.

PASTOR: What things, exactly?

FLORA: Mmmm, fellas, and the funny ideas they get sometimes.

PASTOR: You didn't throw a monkey wrench into the lives of those two young people, did you?

FLORA: Nope. Just advised Dorleen on which way to turn it.

PASTOR: I see. Where's Gladys?

FLORA: Dunno. She took off a few minutes ago. Didn't say where to.

PASTOR: I hope she isn't sick. Any messages for me?

FLORA: Here. *(hands him a slip of paper)*

PASTOR: Flora, I can't read this.

FLORA: Some lady, name of Miz Evans.

PASTOR: She want me to call her back?

FLORA: Guess so.

PASTOR: Did you get a phone number?

FLORA: Forgot to ask. Important church business?

PASTOR: Personal. *(crosses to his office)* Let me know when Gladys gets back.

FLORA: Affirmative. *(PASTOR exits as ED enters)*

ED: You seen Sam this morning, Flora?

FLORA: Ed, I got more important things to do then keep an eye on that hound dog of yours.

ED: Maybe he's at the parsonage.

FLORA: Not likely.

ED: Him and the Pastor's kitty cats get along jus' fine now.

FLORA: Not so you'd notice. How's his nose?

ED: Swellin's gone down. The fur will grow back in no time, you'll see.

FLORA: Well, you'd better go look for him. Pastor's in a good mood, so if you find a cat carcass, keep it to yourself.

ED: Pastor preaches a good sermon, don't he?

FLORA: Yep, but he oughta do somethin' about the singin'. Didn't sound like no church music to me. More like your pa tryin' to tune his old fiddle.

ED: Well, we was raised Lutherans. Maybe Methodists do things different.

FLORA: You check those mouse traps yet?

ED: On my way. *(DALE & VERNON enter each carrying a tool box, dressed for work.)*

DALE: Hey there, Ed, Flora. Nice day isn't it?

FLORA: It's done raining.

ED: Any luck findin' m' money box?

VERNON: River's still too high. Might swamp the bass boat.

ED: Probably in the Gulf of Mexico by now.

DALE: More 'n likely caught up in some weeds down river a piece.

VERNON: We'll find it if some fisherman doesn't beat us to it.

ED: Don't put yourself to no bother. I'm resigned.

DALE: If you don't mind my asking, where did you get all that money?

ED: Oh, here and there, doing odd jobs for folks.

FLORA: It's mostly oil money.

VERNON: You got an oil well?

FLORA: Part of one.

VERNON: Really?

DALE: How did that happen?

ED: Well, it seems my grandpa and some of his buddies bought stakes in a Texas oil well back in the 30's. Thing played out after a couple of years, and they forgot all about it. Then, a few years ago, I get this letter from some oil company lawyer about us bein' heir's and all. . .

FLORA: . . . and the next thing we know. . .

ED: . . . we're getting these big checks from 'em every month.

FLORA: Ed was lookin' to retire, anyway. . .

ED: , , , so I did.

DALE: You mean the well started producing again?

FLORA: 'Spect so.

VERNON: Wow! Talk about luck!

FLORA: Ed, you oughta put it in the bank now.

ED: Naw, shoebox'll do just fine.

DALE: Then you still got money coming in. . . it's not like you're destitute?

FLORA: Nope. We kin pay our way. 'Cept we wanted to give it to Pastor...

ED:to fix up his church. Whatcha doin' with all them tools?

VERNON: Hoped you'd give us a shingling lesson, if you're not too busy.

ED: Jus' gotta find Sam and bury some mice. Have a seat. I'll be back quicker 'n that hound dog after a rabbit. *(exits into sanctuary)*

DALE: Settling in, okay, Flora?

FLORA: Movin' to the parsonage this afternoon.

VERNON: How come?

FLORA: Couldn't find no place where Sam was welcome, so Pastor's going to put us up at his'n. Won't have to walk so far fer m' bath now

VERNON: Pastor's a good man.

DALE: Yep, that he is. Remember the time when he looked after those three bratty young'uns for a whole month? Their pa was laid up in the hospital, their ma down with the flu. Afterwards, he gave a rousing good sermon on the joys of parenting.

(AGNES, WILMA and IRMA enter all talking at once)

AGNES: Morning Flora. Is Pastor in?

WILMA: Well, if it isn't the liverwurst lunch crowd. How're you doing, boys?

VERNON: Can't complain.

IRMA: Planning on building something?

DALE: Ed's gonna to teach us how to shingle.

AGNES: What? The church roof?

DALE: Yep.

AGNES: Lord, help us!

WILMA: Agnes! Watch your language!

AGNES: That was a prayer, Wilma, not profanity.

FLORA: You ladies want to see the Pastor?

IRMA: That's why we're here, Flora. Is he busy?

FLORA: I'll go see. *(exits into his office)*

WILMA: You fellows make it to church yesterday?

VERNON: You betcha. Pastor gave a good sermon, don't you think?

AGNES: It was inspiring. "Open your heart to new pathways to glorify the Lord."

DALE: Sounded good, but I'm not sure what he was talking about. Who's this Bartok fellow?

IRMA: A composer.

VERNON: What did he compose?

WILMA: The choral work we sang. Didn't you recognize it?

VERNON: Were we supposed to?

AGNES: Well, I don't expect someone of your limited cultural experience . . .

DALE: I thought everybody was singing the wrong notes.

PASTOR: *(enters followed by FLORA)* Morning everybody. Nice day, isn't it?

VERNON: It's quit raining.

PASTOR: What can I do for you all? Ladies first. . .

AGNES: Pastor, we just dropped by to say that you were right about the choir director.

PASTOR: Ah. . .

WILMA: Such a nice young fellow, and so knowledgeable.

IRMA: For Easter services we plan to sing an oratorio by Bach.

PASTOR: I'm looking forward to it.

AGNES: Going to rehearse every night this week.

PASTOR: Good for you.

IRMA: Just thought you'd like to know.

PASTOR: I'm delighted to hear it.

AGNES: Come along, ladies. We have a lot of work to do.

WILMA: That alto reprise after the coda is a bear.

IRMA: It would help if the sopranos hit the right notes.
[Ladies exit.]

PASTOR: Whadda you know. Miracles do happen. Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?

DALE: Ed's going to teach us how to shingle the roof.

PASTOR: Good for him, but I'm afraid it's a moot point now.

VERNON: Whadda you mean?

DALE: It's still leaking, isn't it?

PASTOR: Yes, but. . . . *(GLADYS enters)*

GLADYS: Hey, everybody. Sorry to leave you in the lurch, Pastor, but I had to run a couple of errands.

PASTOR: No problem. Flora filled in admirably.

FLORA: Well, now that you're back, I'd better get our stuff ready to move.

GLADYS: Thanks, Flora. *(FLORA exits)* You fellows here to see the Pastor?

VERNON: Nope. Just waiting for Ed. Come on, Dale. Let's see where he got to. *(they exit)*

GLADYS: You didn't tell them, did you?

PASTOR: I didn't have the heart.

GLADYS: Well, maybe you won't have to.

PASTOR: What do you mean?

GLADYS: I went down to the assayer's office and read through all the papers regarding the church. Then it occurred to me. . .well, I don't want to get your hopes up, but there's an angle nobody's considered. So I made a couple of phone calls, and you'll have a visitor tomorrow.

PASTOR: I don't understand.

GLADYS: Well, it occurred to me that this church has been here for so long, the historical society might be able to save it for you.

PASTOR: You mean. . .like an historic monument.

GLADYS: Could be.

PASTOR: Appreciate your efforts, Gladys, but I doubt it. There are lots of old churches around here. Nothing special about this one.

GLADYS: You never know till you ask. Anyway, after I talked to the folks at the historical society, I called your old nemesis.

PASTOR: Gladys, I told you. . .

GLADYS: I know I should have asked you first. . .

PASTOR: I don't want anything to do with that woman.

GLADYS: That's not a very charitable attitude for a preacher.

PASTOR: Gladys, you don't understand. It goes back a long way.

GLADYS: What happened?

PASTOR: I don't want to discuss it.

GLADYS: What did she do to you?

PASTOR: It's what her family did to the whole town.

GLADYS: You've lost me.

PASTOR: Suffice to say, it was unforgivable. What did you say to her?

GLADYS: Nothing. She wasn't in.

PASTOR: Then forget it. I don't want anything to do with that woman.

GLADYS: You said that already.

PASTOR: I mean it! Do you understand me, Gladys?

GLADYS: Whatever happened to "please," and "thank you?"

PASTOR: Don't push, or one of these days. . .

GLADYS: Sorry, but unless we do something soon, the Bishop will beat you to it.

BLACKOUT

ACT II - Scene 2

[Later that day. GLADYS stands at the door of Pastor's office.]

GLADYS: What do you mean you won't be home tonight?

PASTOR: *(offstage)* Just what I said. I won't be home tonight.

GLADYS: What if somebody needs to reach you?

PASTOR: *(offstage)* Then they're out of luck.

GLADYS: I don't like it when you act this way. *(crosses back to her desk)*

PASTOR: *(entering)* Act what way, Gladys?

GLADYS: You know. . .

PASTOR: No, I don't know. *(beat)* Talk to me, Gladys.

GLADYS: Well. . . you know. . . mysterious.

PASTOR: Since when do I have to account for every minute of my day?

GLADYS: Since you became a pastor. People depend on you.

PASTOR: Well, they'll soon have a new pastor to depend on-- the one in Spencer.

GLADYS: I can't believe you're giving up without a fight.

PASTOR: Who said I was? For your information, I have a date tonight.

GLADYS: A date? I don't believe it. With whom?

PASTOR: Rosemary Evans.

GLADYS: Never heard of her.

PASTOR: She's in town visiting her cousin, Clara Lewis.

GLADYS: So, you went to her soiree after all.

PASTOR: Yes, I did.

GLADYS: And had a good time?

PASTOR: Yes.

GLADYS: What's she like?

PASTOR: Rosemary?

GLADYS: I know what Clara's like.

PASTOR: Let's see. Rosemary has pretty blue eyes, curly ash blond hair, so tall (*gestures*), and she likes 50's jazz, the Four Freshman, Benny Goodman, cherry phosphates. . .

GLADYS: Well, that answers my second question.

PASTOR: Which is?

GLADYS: How old she is.

PASTOR: Gladys, I'm not robbing the cradle. Rosemary and I are of the same generation, although I wouldn't be so rude as to come right out and ask her age.

GLADYS: Why not? You seem to know everything else about her.

PASTOR: If I didn't know better, I'd think you were jealous.

GLADYS: Don't be ridiculous.

PASTOR: Then quit acting like a mother hen. I can take care of myself.
(Crosses back to his office)

GLADYS: I hope so. When am I going to meet her?

PASTOR: I'll let you know. By the way, do you know where I can get a nice bouquet of flowers?

GLADYS: Try the flower shop.

PASTOR: Where is it?

GLADYS: You've lived here all your life and you don't know where the flower shop is?

PASTOR: Sinful, isn't it? Bouquets appear on the altar every Sunday, and I've never thought to ask where they came from.

GLADYS: The altar committee. That's their job. But it's never too late to learn. Tell you what. Since you're such a novice at this sort of thing, I'll call in an order for you. How much do you want to spend?

PASTOR: I don't know. How much do you think I should?

GLADYS: Well, you don't want to overdo it on the first date. Might give the wrong impression--like you're too easy. I'll see what they have in season--that'll keep the cost down. You taking her out to dinner?

PASTOR: Planned on it.

GLADYS: Some place nice?

PASTOR: I hope so.

GLADYS: Good. She might not share your addiction to liverwurst on rye.

PASTOR: One of these days, Gladys. . .

GLADYS: Don't wear your collar.

PASTOR: Hadn't planned to, but why? Rosemary knows what I do for a living.

GLADYS: It's not romantic. . .

PASTOR: Oh.

GLADYS: . . . and it might be intimidating.

PASTOR: Since when have I ever intimidated anybody?

GLADYS: Probably never. But only those of us who know you well, know that you're really a wuss.

PASTOR: A what?

GLADYS: An adorable puppy. Go on now; get yourself spruced up. I'll order the flowers. *(Pushes him to outside door)*

PASTOR: Thanks, mother. *(exits to outside)*

BLACKOUT

ACT II - Scene 3

[The next day. DALE & VERNON are standing next to GLADYS who is seated at her desk.]

DALE: Where is he?

VERNON: We're ready to start work.

GLADYS: Patience, gentlemen. Pastor is showing a man from the historic society our historic church.

VERNON: What for?

DALE: Get your head out of the sand, Vernon. If this church qualifies as an historic monument, the society will help us fix it up.

VERNON: No kidding? *(PASTOR enters)*

GLADYS: Well? What did he say?

PASTOR: Too soon to tell. But it doesn't look encouraging. Like I said, there are a lot of old churches around here. The society needs something

more significant than 75-year-old kiln-fired bricks to designate a building as historic. Now, if George Washington had slept here. . .

VERNON: Do you think he did?

DALE: Not unless it was his ghost. This town wasn't even on the map in 1776.

VERNON: I know that. Wasn't even a state then, either.

GLADYS: Has he gone, Pastor?

PASTOR: He wanted to look around the attic some more, so I told him to meet me here when he was finished. *(ED enters)*

ED: Pastor, who's messin' around in the belfry? I've got mouse traps up there.

PASTOR: Oh, my Lord. . .*(he runs out)*

ED: You guys ready to start work?

DALE: Ready and willing.

ED: Well, I scrounged some tarpaper from a house they're building outside of town. We can start by ripping up the broken shingles and fix the leaks. Can't do much else till we get some supplies. *(FLORA enters)*

FLORA: Ed, you seen Sam today?

ED: Thought he was with you. It's gettin' on his dinner time.

FLORA: Haven't seen him all morning. Is Pastor joining you fellows for lunch?

VERNON: Nope. Fred's diner is closed. His cook walked out last night.

FLORA: Thought his wife was the cook.

DALE: She is. Said she was going to visit her mother and left Fred high and dry.

GLADYS: Permanently?

DALE: Nah. Ever so often she gets tired of listening to the old boys carry on about fishin' and politics, gritchin' about her hot chili. . . so she takes a vacation. She'll be back in week or two.

FLORA: Then tell Pastor we'll have soup and sandwiches for him at the parsonage.

VERNON: Are Dale and me invited?

FLORA: In your dreams, boys! *(exits)*

VERNON: What's she got against us?

DALE: Dunno. Never could figure out how a woman thinks.

ED: Flora's a good cook. Got a way with possum stew. . .

VERNON: I don't think so. Fred's kind of particular about who does the cooking.

DALE: Fred don't care who slaps a hamburger on the grill. It's his wife who runs the place. She'd throw him out with the bacon grease if he let anybody mess with her kitchen. *(PASTOR enters carrying a small paper bag)*

GLADYS: That was quick. Should I call 9-1-1?

PASTOR: Here Ed--two more to dispose of.

ED: That makes it an even dozen. Think we got 'em all, Pastor?

PASTOR: Hopefully, the rest took a hint and moved to safer quarters.

ED: Well, let's get a leg up, fellows, before it starts raining again. *(A man bellows offstage)*

PASTOR: That came from the basement.

ED: Forgot to mention I set traps in the storage room. *(PASTOR exits into sanctuary; ED, VERNON, & DALE exit the outside door)*

GLADYS: It's going to be one of those days. . . . now where did I put the aspirin. *(phone rings)*. Church of the Savoir. Pastor Detamore's office.....Good morning, Mrs. Evans..... Well, he's kind of busy right now.....Oh, you did? I'm so glad

you liked them. Pastor has such good taste in flowers.....I'll have him return your call just as soon as he gets back. Shouldn't be too long, now..... Bye.

GLADYS: *(Crosses to exit leading into the sanctuary)* Everything all right down there?

PASTOR: *(offstage)* Do we have any Band-Aids Gladys?

GLADYS: Look in the kitchen, second drawer to the right of the sink. *(Returns to her desk and takes a couple of aspirin. PASTOR enters)* Well?

PASTOR: He won't need stitches, but we can kiss the historic society goodbye.

GLADYS: Are we going to get sued?

PASTOR: Let's hope not.

GLADYS: Rosemary called.

PASTOR: Ah....

GLADYS: She loved the flowers you picked out for her.

PASTOR: Well. . .

GLADYS: I didn't squeal on you.

PASTOR: Thanks. *(crosses to his office and turns back)* In case you're wondering, we had a lovely time last night. She's extending her visit so that we can do it again soon.

GLADYS: Pastor, are you sure you're ready for a romantic relationship?

PASTOR: What relationship? We just met.

GLADYS: Nevermind--cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck. Go call her. *(he exits into office)*

FLORA: *(Running in holding a large gray bone)* Where's Pastor?

GLADYS: In his office. Why? What have you got there?

FLORA: It's Sam. . .

GLADYS: *(Reacts)* Oh, my God!

FLORA: Sam dug it up.

GLADYS: Oh, thank goodness! Where was it?

FLORA: By the front door. . . in the rose garden. I'm gonna whip the beejeesus out of that hound dog.

PASTOR: *(entering)* What's going on? What have you got there, Flora?

FLORA: Sam. . .

PASTOR: Heaven help us! Was it Ernest and Phoebe? *(He takes the bone from her)* This is a human bone, Flora. Where did you find it?

FLORA: Sam found it. . . buried in your rose garden.

PASTOR: By the front door?

FLORA: *(Nods)* We're awful sorry. Ed's out there sweeping up the dirt.

PASTOR: Go stop him, Gladys. I'll call the police.

GLADYS: What?

FLORA: *(crying)* He didn't mean it, Pastor. Please don't turn him in. I'd just die if Sam got arrested.

PASTOR: Quiet, Flora. Nobody's going to arrest a dog. *(Reaching for the phone)* Don't stand there gaping, Gladys. Go tell Ed to stop--right now. He's polluting a crime scene.

BLACKOUT

ACT II - Scene 4

[Later that day. AGNES, WILMA, IRMA, DORLEEN, ED, FLORA, VERNON, & DALE are milling around the office all talking at once. GLADYS is on the phone.]

GLADYS: What's that?.....I can't hear you.....Just a minute. *(covering the receiver)* Would everybody please sit down and shut up. It's the Bishop. *(they settle on various chairs and quit talking)* Thank you! *(back on the phone)* As you were saying.....

Yes, sir, you heard right. They found a human bone buried next to the church.....the front door.....under the roses.....
No, we don't know who it belongs to, Bishop. Pastor's outside talking to the police now..... Of course, we'll let you know as soon as WE know something.....Yes, sir, I'll tell him you called.
(She hangs up as PASTOR enters. Everybody jumps up and starts talking)

PASTOR: Hey, I can't hear everybody at once. Ladies, first. . .

AGNES: This is terrible, Pastor. To think that somebody got murdered...

PASTOR: Whoa! We don't know that anybody got murdered.

WILMA: Then why would he be buried under the roses?

PASTOR: We don't know yet if it's a he or a she.

IRMA: I can't believe I planted a rose bush on top of a dead body.

AGNES: Seems rather appropriate.

PASTOR: Ladies, why don't you all go home and let the investigators do their job. We'll let you know what happens.

IRMA: There's a killer loose in town!

VERNON: Pastor already said that they don't know how the person died. Probably won't till they find the rest of the skeleton.

DALE: If it's still all there.

WILMA: I think I'm going to faint.

DORLEEN: No, you're not, Mama.

ED: The bones could be scattered hither and yon, what with squirrels and coons. . . *(WILMA faints. GLADYS crosses to her)*

GLADYS: Dorleen, help your mama to the car. She needs some fresh air. *(the ladies pull the struggling Wilma to her feet and push her towards the door).*

AGNES: Now, you promise to call us, Gladys. Right away. Just as soon as you know something. . .anything.

GLADYS: I promise.

IRMA: To think of all the times I've walked right by that--that dead person, never realizing...

AGNES: ...that it might reach up and grab you? (*IRMA screams, AGNES laughs and ladies exit*)

ED: What now, Pastor?

PASTOR: Nothing to do but sit and wait until the police have finished digging.

ED: Gonna be a mess to clean up.

FLORA: They didn't arrest Sam, did they?

PASTOR: No, Flora. He's at the parsonage happily gnawing away on a . .

FLORA: Don't say it!

PASTOR: A ham hoc. (*SOL enters*)

SOL: They found a skull and part of the rib cage. Definitely a male.

GLADYS: Do they know who it is. . .I mean, was?

SOL: No, Ma'am. The forensic team from Spencer thinks it's pretty old. They'll carbon date it to find out exactly when the poor fellow met his maker.

PASTOR: Are we talking ten, twenty years, or what?

SOL: More 'n likely a hundred years or more.

GLADYS: That's a relief. Then it's nobody we know.

SOL: I wouldn't think so, Ma'am, unless your family's been around here a long time, in which case it could an ancestor.

FLORA: Could be a Booker. I recall Ed's grandpa saying something about his grandpa helping settle the town. Now, my folks was gypsies--don't know where they come from.

SOL: Pastor, I'll be outside if you want me. (*exits*)

GLADYS: One of the founding fathers was a Cartwright. Most of the land around here belonged to them at one time.

PASTOR: Most of the money, too, but let's not speculate, Gladys.

GLADYS: I recall one of my teachers saying that an Edmund Cartwright was in the Civil War--one of John Brown's raiders, I believe.

PASTOR: The Cartwright's are buried in the cemetery at top of the hill--where they can keep an eye on us common folk.

GLADYS: Pastor, why are you so down on the Cartwright's?

PASTOR: It's a long story.

VERNON: I'm not going anywhere.

DALE: Me, neither.

PASTOR: I'd rather not talk about it.

GLADYS: And disappoint your captive audience?

PASTOR: It's not a love story, Gladys. It's something I should have come to grips with by now. As a pastor of this community, I'm ashamed that I can't forgive and let go of the past.

VERNON: Let's see--there's the Cartwright Bank...

GLADYS: The Cartwright Mercantile Exchange. . .

DALE: The Cartwright Tool and Dye Company,,,

FLORA: The Cartwright Funeral Home. . .

SOL: *(entering)* They found another skull, Pastor. Call the historical society. We may have discovered an old burial ground.

ED Cartwright Murder, Incorporated!!!!

GLADYS: Were they related to Jesse James?

BLACKOUT

ACT II - Scene 5

[Two days later. GLADYS is at her desk talking on the phone.]

GLADYS: Yes, sir, I know, but Pastor has been snowed under this week, what with the police, the historic society, forensics, the news media, and today we have an anthropology team from the university.....I gave him your message, and he'll get back to as soon as he can.....Today, I promise. *(Hangs up just as PASTOR enters from the sanctuary)* That was the Bishop again, Pastor. You'd better call him before he bursts a blood vessel.

PASTOR: When I needed his help, he dumped us into the lap of the church conference, and their solution was to write us off. Now, that we're making headlines, he wants to be in the middle of the action. Well, he can just sit and stew awhile. Besides, I can't tell him anything that he hasn't already read in the newspaper. Are they still at it out there?

GLADYS: Still turning up more bones. They've got that yellow tape strung from pillar to post, like you see on TV crime shows. People will think we're harboring a serial killer.

PASTOR: We're not off the hook, yet. They want all the church records dating back to its beginnings: architectural drawings, survey plat, original property owner . . .

GLADYS: That stuff is filed away at the courthouse. All we have here are the personnel and financial records.

PASTOR: Where are they?

GLADYS: In marked boxes down in the storeroom. *(ED enters)*

ED: Pastor, I tried to clean the dirt piles off the sidewalk, but the police run me off. They dug up all your roses, that little crabapple tree, and most of the front lawn. It's a mess out there. How're people gonna get into the church come Sunday?

PASTOR: Maybe they'll be finished by then.

ED: Appears to me like they're settled in for the long haul. Flora wants to know if you're gonna lunch out with the boys, or eat at the parsonage today.

PASTOR: Haven't thought that far ahead.

ED: Well, she's fixing stew, so if you're eating out, we can have it for supper.

PASTOR: What kind of stew?

ED: Don't worry, it ain't possum. Well, I'd better get back to work. Plan to mow the grass, what left of it. *(exits)*

GLADYS: Ed's taken over the Sexton's job, hasn't he? I don't think he wants to leave.

PASTOR: I've noticed. Flora and my housekeeper are in cahoots to keep me the best-fed, best-dressed pastor in town, and the parsonage so slicked up I'm afraid to put a dent in the cushions. Even Ernest and Phoebe are part of the conspiracy. They follow Sam around like he's the Pied Piper of Hamlin.

GLADYS: It appears to me that your temporary houseguests have settled in for the long haul, as well.

PASTOR: Trouble is, there's no money in the budget to pay them.

GLADYS: Flora says she "don't need your money. Got an oil well to keep 'em in style."

PASTOR: Amen to that. *(crosses to his office)* Gladys, see if you can locate those files, and I'll return the Bishop's call.

GLADYS: If you'd get me a computer, all those files could be stored on CD's in a shoebox. . . along side the one Ed uses for his royalty checks.

PASTOR: I refuse to have one of those things in my office. They're addictive.

GLADYS: Even auto mechanics use them, and I don't know of one who attends our 12-step meetings.

PASTOR: That's because they haven't discovered chat rooms.

GLADYS: How do you know about chat rooms?

PASTOR: Privileged information.

GLADYS: I see. Well, suit yourself.

PASTOR: I intend to. *(GLADYS exits into sanctuary and PASTOR into his office)*

[VANESSA CARTWRIGHT enters, looks around the office, looks down the hall to the sanctuary, and knocks on the inner office door.]

CARTWRIGHT: Hello. Is there anyone here?

PASTOR: (*entering*) Well, this is a surprise. How are you, Miss Cartwright?

CARTWRIGHT: I hope I'm not disturbing you. Had to maneuver around that awful mess out on the sidewalk. It's a shame they had to ruin your rose garden.

PASTOR: Yes, it is. What can I do for you, Miss Cartwright?

CARTWRIGHT: So formal. Please. . . call me Vanessa. After all, we've known each other for almost half a century.

PASTOR: Yes, we have. How have you been?

CARTWRIGHT: Can't complain. So, this is your inner sanctum.

PASTOR: It's my outer office. Would you like to see the sanctuary?

CARTWRIGHT: Not particularly.

PASTOR: Then, what can I do for you?

CARTWRIGHT: To start with, you can get that chip off your shoulder. After all, we're neighbors.

PASTOR: But not what you'd call neighborly.

CARTWRIGHT: No, I suppose not, but whose fault is that?

PASTOR: I confess, it's all mine.

CARTWRIGHT: Well, perhaps I can change that. This little discovery beside the church has caused quite a stir in town.

PASTOR: It's gone far beyond the town. Didn't you notice, TV crews from a hundred miles away are camped on our doorstep.

CARTWRIGHT: What is it they hope to find?

PASTOR: So far, just human bones. Old ones. Over a hundred years old, they suspect.

CARTWRIGHT: Interesting. How do you suppose they got there?

PASTOR: They theorize that it's an old graveyard. Established before the church was built.

CARTWRIGHT: No headstones?

PASTOR: Haven't found any.

CARTWRIGHT: Wonder why?

PASTOR: It could have been a family burial plot with wooden markers that have long since rotted away. But I doubt it.

CARTWRIGHT: Why do you say that?

PASTOR: No children's bones.

CARTWRIGHT: Well, it so happens you're correct.

PASTOR: Oh?

CARTWRIGHT: That's why I came to see you. Here (*hands him a Bible*). This is one of our family Bibles. It also includes a diary of sorts. I think you'll find it interesting.

PASTOR: How so?

CARTWRIGHT: Did you know that this church was built on the site of the original Cartwright homestead?

PASTOR: I had no idea. But I'm sure the deed was free and clear...

CARTWRIGHT: I didn't come here to debate that point. I'm just trying to help you solve the mystery.

PASTOR: Are those the bones of your ancestors?

CARTWRIGHT: Possibly. But it's more likely that they're Union soldiers. According to this Bible, the homestead was put into service as a field hospital in the waning years of the Civil War. I believe my ancestor was a medical doctor.

PASTOR: If the remains were Civil War soldiers, wouldn't there be an official record?

CARTWRIGHT: One would think so, but perhaps not all of them could be identified.

PASTOR: Miss Cartwright, I think you should give this to the authorities.

CARTWRIGHT: Not until you have read it. There are references to your family in it.

PASTOR: Such as?

CARTWRIGHT: Such as my grandfather's personal recollections of the depression and war years.

PASTOR: Not the best of times as I recall.

CARTWRIGHT: No, I suppose not. Do you remember coming by the house and asking for work? You were just a little tyke, dressed in hand-me-downs, and Mother thought you were so pathetic and brave.

PASTOR: I was not pathetic.

CARTWRIGHT: She would have just handed you the money, but you insisted on working for it.

PASTOR: So, out of the goodness of her heart, she let me carry out the trash. How charitable of her. And what was her lovely daughter doing while the Detamore's were struggling to stay alive?

CARTWRIGHT: My goodness! It was hardly so melodramatic.

PASTOR: No, it was more of a tragedy.

CARTWRIGHT: Was I the villain? Is that why you've avoided me all these years?

PASTOR: I'm not sure how to answer that.

CARTWRIGHT: If I've done something to offend you, please accept my apology. Whatever wrongs you imagine, it was never intentional.

PASTOR: They were not imagined.

CARTWRIGHT: Then please enlighten me.

PASTOR: Quite simply, you were rich, and we were poor.

CARTWRIGHT: Is that a sin? Don't blame me for an accident of birth.

PASTOR: I don't. I blame your family.

CARTWRIGHT: My family wasn't responsible for the times we lived in...war, economic depression...

PASTOR: Perhaps not. But your grandfather, the Honorable Judge Cartwright, held the fate of this town in his hands: the Tool and Dye Company that laid off its workers when times got tough, the bank that foreclosed on their mortgages when they couldn't make payment, and the law that evicted them from their homes.

CARTWRIGHT: If you recall, it was no different here than in towns all across America.

PASTOR: What I recall is my father, out of work and depressed, chewing on a pipe he could no longer fill with tobacco. My mother stopped singing as she diluted the soup so that it would last one more day, and cut the bread into thinner and thinner slices as the days crept into months. Mealtime was no longer an occasion for laughter and sharing. We ate our measured portions in silence, then trudged up to icy bedrooms, bundling together to stay warm. We kids survived, but our parents. . . we buried them next to each other one month apart.

CARTWRIGHT: I'm sorry.

PASTOR: So am I. Did your grandfather note in his diary the boarded-up houses, the homeless families...? Did he feel any remorse, accept any responsibility?

CARTWRIGHT: I don't know. He died a week before my tenth birthday.

PASTOR: And your father?

CARTWRIGHT: My father was not a good businessman, but he did what he could to rebuild our remaining enterprises. Fortunately, the family trusts remained intact.

PASTOR: Fortunate for YOUR family...

CARTWRIGHT: We were not insensitive to the needs of others. We helped organize soup kitchens, distributed clothes to the needy, founded scholarships, endowed the hospital. . .

PASTOR: An admirable legacy, considering.

CARTWRIGHT: And I have worked to continue it.

PASTOR: So you have. Hardly a week goes by that I don't read something in the paper about the benevolent Miss Cartwright opening another food pantry, attending a fund-raising gala, or soliciting donations for the homeless shelter. You've certainly been busy.

CARTWRIGHT: I didn't come here to discuss my personal life. Don't you think it's time you forgave the sins of my family so that we can move on to more immediate concerns?

PASTOR: You were merely a child of circumstance.

CARTWRIGHT: As were you. The question now is, are you ready to let go of the past and let me help you keep this church alive and well?

PASTOR: You know about that?

CARTWRIGHT: Very little happens in this town that I don't know about.

PASTOR: A finger in every pie, eh?

CARTWRIGHT: I try. And I'd hate to see the demise of one of our town's cherished institutions if there's something I can do to prevent it.

PASTOR: What do you have in mind?

CARTWRIGHT: Well, I could offer you the money outright--a gift--but I can still see that proud little boy telling my mother, he only takes money that he's rightfully earned.

PASTOR: The entire structure needs to be rehabbed, from the stone foundation up. We're looking at a cool half mil, probably more. How can a country parson raise that kind of money?

CARTWRIGHT: By filling in the right forms.

PASTOR: Pardon me?

CARTWRIGHT: This Bible verifies that your church was built on sacred ground.

PASTOR: Really.

CARTWRIGHT: Pastor, you're sitting on a gold mine--historically speaking. And I'm president of the State Historical Society. While you settle things with your church elders, I'll take care of the paper work, which is no mean feat, believe me. By the time those gravediggers have

finished sifting through a century of dirt, we can have the architectural blueprints ready for the building contractor.

PASTOR: God willing. By the way, what happened to the Lieutenant?

CARTWRIGHT: What Lieutenant?

PASTOR: The young man you were engaged to. Even pastors occasionally read the society page. We call it nuptial chasing.

CARTWRIGHT: He's still listed as missing in action.

PASTOR: Korean Conflict?

CARTWRIGHT: Vietnam.

PASTOR: I'm sorry.

CARTWRIGHT: So am I.

PASTOR: It was a long time ago.

CARTWRIGHT: Seems like yesterday to me.

PASTOR: Memories don't keep your feet warm at night.

CARTWRIGHT: *(smiling)* I have an electric blanket.

PASTOR: Still, it's never too late. I'll pray for you.

CARTWRIGHT: Thank you, but I can take care of myself.

GLADYS: *(enters carrying boxes)* Pastor, I carted up what I could carry. There's still about a dozen more. . . Oh! Hello, Miss Cartwright.

PASTOR: I don't think we'll need them after all, Gladys.

GLADYS: Really? Why not?

PASTOR: I'm putting my trust in the Lord. . . and Vanessa Cartwright.

BLACKOUT

ACT II - Scene 6

{Good Friday. GLADYS is at her desk as the PASTOR enters from outside. The choir is heard singing offstage.}

PASTOR: Gladys, I told you to take the day off. It's Good Friday.

GLADYS: Listen. . . isn't that beautiful? Is that our choir, or did Miss Cartwright hire the Mormons?

PASTOR: Don't change the subject. You're not supposed to be here today.

GLADYS: I needed to put the finishing touches on Sunday's sermon and type up a clean copy.

PASTOR: You didn't change anything, did you?

GLADYS: Just a couple of grammatical errors--subject and verb agreement.

PASTOR: *(looking over her shoulder)* Where?

GLADYS: It should read, "the town is," not "the town are."

PASTOR: I meant to say, "the townspeople are."

GLADYS: *(erasing it)* Then why didn't you?

PASTOR: Picky, picky. . .

GLADYS: Rosemary Evans, Miss Cartwright, the Bishop, and our state representative will be in the congregation on Sunday. I don't want them to think you're ignorant.

PASTOR: One of these days, Gladys. . .

GLADYS: . . .you're going to fire me. I know. But Flora can't type and who else would put up with your out-of-date filing system. By the way, Dorleen and Donald wanted to know if they can use the rec room for their wedding reception. I told them it was okay.

PASTOR: What else did you promise them?

GLADYS: That Flora would do the flowers, and your housekeeper would provide the cake and punch. I checked, and they said it was fine with them. Miss Cartwright said she'd cover the expense.

PASTOR: Gladys, I could die tomorrow and you'd carry on like it was nothing but a minor inconvenience.

GLADYS: Well, after all the years I've been managing your office, I could probably write a sermon if I had to, but folks are kind of used to you delivering them. Wouldn't want to disappoint them.

PASTOR: Does that mean you're renewing my contract?

GLADYS: Haven't discussed it with the Bishop, but I figure you're good for another year. *(ED & FLORA who holds a small metal money box enter, followed by VERNON & DALE.)*

ED: Got the front walk cleaned off, Pastor. Too bad about the rose garden. Would have been so pretty, all them flowers in bloom for Easter.

VERNON: But the good news is, we found Ed's money box. It's not leak proof so the bills are a little soggy...

FLORA: And we want to give it to you, Pastor. *(She hands him the box.)*

ED: To fix up the church.

PASTOR: I don't know what to say.

ED: Don't gotta say nuthin', 'cept tell Flora if you're gonna be home fer lunch today.

PASTOR: Flora, do you have enough for all of us?

FLORA: 'Spect so. It's my special Easter stew. *(PASTOR reacts)* Don't worry, it's squirrel, not possum. *(they all react)* Jes' kiddin' folks. *(exits laughing)*

GLADYS: Praise the Lord and pass the peanut butter.

PASTOR: Here, Gladys. *(hands her the metal box)* See what you can do in the drying department. Be sure to count it carefully.

GLADYS: Don't I always?

VERNON: Oh, I almost forgot. *(Pulls a metal belt buckle out of his pocket and hands it to Pastor)*

PASTOR: What's that?

DALE: It's a belt buckle--belonged to one of the Union soldiers buried out there.

PASTOR: Shouldn't you turn this over to the authorities?

VERNON: They found plenty more.

PASTOR: Still. . .

ED: We want to put it on Sam's collar. You know, like the badges them police dogs wear. Make it official. After all, he's the one . . .

PASTOR: Good instincts--that hound.

GLADYS: Just a small miracle. Am I right, Pastor?

PASTOR: That you are, Gladys. Praise the Lord!

BLACKOUT