

THE CLUE IN THE OLD BIRDBATH

A Musical Play in Two Acts

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For Nancy Drew lovers everywhere

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Tansy True

Joe Payne

Bets Marvine

Rex

Anne Hargrove

Nat Nickelson

Bob Edderson

Steve Andrews

Kent Claque/Carlson True

Susan

Hedda Bruen

AUTHORS' NOTES:

The Clue in the Old Bird Bath is a two act musical comedy running about an hour and forty minutes. It requires a maximum of eleven actors or a minimum of seven with some triple castings. The casting for seven actors is as follows: Tansy, Joe, Bets, Anne/Susan/Steve, Hedda/Bob/Rex, Claue (Carlson), Nat. The actor playing Nat could also appear briefly as Rowena Smythley in Anne's daydream sequence where she might dance with Anne, but Rowena is not crucial to the play.

The Clue in the Old Bird Bath must be performed by an all woman cast. Audiences love it, the women actors enjoy doing it and it means more roles for women. You don't have to body-type Tansy, Bets, and Joe in casting. Tansy does not have to be "blonde, blue-eyed, with a trim figure." If you have someone short and stout or tall and lanky with a crew cut who wants to play the part---cast her. Why not? Tansy and Bets need not be femme stereotypes and Joe doesn't have to look butch, regardless of how they are described in the narration. In the Actors' Sorority production we chose to develop Tansy as a serious, singleminded individual (to the point of being a bit humorless) , Bets as an enthusiastic, cheerful person, and Joe as action-oriented. The options are unlimited, without having to resort to stereotypes. There should be no visual or verbal fat jokes. Avoid any sense of Bets and Joe pitted against Tansy. Even lines such as: "Tansy, on the other hand, is the perfect WASP female" should be delivered with affection. These three love each other and work as a team.

SCENE ONE

STAGE IS DARK. LIGHTS COME UP HALFWAY ON TANSY, BETS AND JOE IN THE GREEN ROADSTER, DOWN CENTER. THEY ARE IN A FREEZE. A SIGNBOARD DOWN LEFT READS,"THE CLUE IN THE OLD BIRDBATH." AS OPENING MUSIC DIES DOWN, THE SIGN IS CHANGED TO READ "CHAPTER ONE: A NOSTALGIC JOURNEY." JOE UNFREEZES

JOE

Chapter 1: A Nostalgic Journey. It was a brilliant, sunshiny day when Tansy True and her chums (she gestures to Bets, who does a take) Bets--

BETS

And Joe-- (indicating Joe and then freezing again)

JOE

Set forth on a carefree excursion in Tansy's green roadster.

(TB&J all unfreeze)

TB&J

(Singing, to the tune of "Halleluja, I'm a Bum")When springtime does come, oh won't we have fun. We'll throw up our--

(T&J freeze)

BETS

We were headed for Loon Lake, the picturesque village where Tansy had spent the first four years of her childhood. Blonde, with a trim figure and sparkling blue eyes, Tansy had already achieved distinction at the age of sixteen. In addition to her skill and cleverness in solving mysteries, she enjoyed lending a helping hand to anyone in trouble. (She freezes again.)

JOE

These admirable qualities led her into one adventure after another, beginning with a thrilling plunge into the sinister world of obstetrics gynecology in--

B&J

(A beat, while they try to remember the name of the book)
The Secret of the Old Doc!

BETS

The most recent test of her sleuthing abilities was The Clue in the Girls' Gymnasium, in which you may remember she was rewarded for her work with a handsome silver hockey stick. (Joe pulls out hockey stick from back of car).

TB&J

(Singing)--jobs and we'll go on the--

(They freeze)

JOE

Tansy was an only child, but that fact had never made her selfish. She was generous to a fault and probably the most popular young person in River Hills. (Tansy does a take--modest, embarrassed) Bets and I were proud of our chum and liked to share in her exciting exploits.

BETS

Joe Payne (Joe does a take), an attractive girl with a boy's name, always lent a jolly air to our adventures. (Pinches Joe's cheek.)

JOE

My cousin, plump and dimpled Bets Marvine (Bets does a take) could be relied upon to stick by her friends even in those tight moments when she would much prefer to be safe at home. (Joe affectionately punches Bets on the shoulder.)

TB&J

(singing) --bum. Halleluja, I'm a bum. Halleluja--

(They freeze)

B&J

Stepping on the clutch, Tansy deftly shifted gears and the green roadster fairly leaped forward, as if it too were eager for an outing.

TB&J

(singing)--bum again. Halleluja, give us a hand out and revive us again.

JOE

Why are we singing that song? We've never had to work a day in our lives. We don't even make our own beds.

TANSY

With so many people out of work, it does appear to be rather insensitive--

BETS

(Enthusiastically) I know, but it makes me feel nostalgic, as if I were in a '30's musical.

TANSY

What do you mean "nostalgic"? This is the '30's. It's 1936, the depths of the Great Depression, in case you've forgotten.

BETS

Yes, carefree 1936--prices low, the war not in sight for another few fun-filled years (they sigh happily) and here we are, out for a jaunt in your speedy green roadster! Oh, Tansy, do you think we'll meet up with an adventure?

(Tansy and Bets freeze. Joe hops up on back of seat and speaks directly to the audience)

JOE

It'll be very odd if we don't. The whole time we've been sixteen years old we've had 32 adventures. That averages out to..(she pulls out pocket calculator and figures)..2.7 per month--as regular as my menstrual cycle. Another one should be due any minute. It usually makes its appearance when the estrogen is at high tide.

(Joe sits down. T & B unfreeze)

TANSY

Joe, you reduce everything to biology. Aren't you excited by the prospect of a new mystery to solve?

BETS

I am! I can't wait to try out my karate on a villain. You know, there are villains all around you, but it's a trick to catch one in the act of carrying out a heinous deed.

(Joe and Bets freeze as Tansy hops up on the back seat and speaks directly to audience)

TANSY

That was an uncharacteristic speech for Bets. You see, we're all divided up into types of females. She's supposed to be giddy and excitable and say golly and gosh all the time. Joe here... (Joe hops up on the back of the seat with Tansy) ..is the tomboy--likes to play sports, go for tramps in the woods, that sort of thing. She says "jeepers" frequently.

JOE

Tansy, on the other hand, is the perfect WASP female--blonde, blue eyes, slim figure, the works. She speaks correct English and never uses slang.

BETS

(Joining them on the back seat) In these early Tansy True mystery stories, only the villains are dark-skinned, fat, say "ain't" or speak with foreign accents.

(All three sit back down simultaneously)

JOE

(To Tansy) It sure was a keen idea to drive to your old home town, Tansy. Have you really never been back since the death of your mother when you were four?

TANSY

That's correct, Joe. I'm afraid I don't remember much about the town. Soon after my mother's death, Father--that is, Carlson True, the famous criminal lawyer--

(Joe and Bets turn to each other and mouth the words "Carlson True, the famous criminal lawyer" as Tansy says them)

--took me to River Hills where we had relatives. I've often yearned to see the old home town again. Hedda Bruen, our housekeeper--

(Joe and Bets turn to each other and mouth the words "our housekeeper" as Tansy says them) --suggested the excursion, and a grand idea it was, too.

BETS

(Cheerfully) Well, I'm glad you asked us to come along. We always enjoy being your side-kicks on these adventures, even if you do get all the glory and we never get any credit or mention in the press.

(On the word "press", Bets and Joe turn to each other, mouth the word "press" as if an idea has

just hit them, and whip out hats with press cards and take out large notebooks and pencils. They circle the car aggressively on the next lines, as reporters out to get a story.)

JOE

Ms True, is it true that you single-handedly captured a gang of slum landlords who evicted poverty-stricken flood victims--

TANSY

Well, I--

BETS

That was pretty cool work, Miss True. How did you manage it?

TANSY

Well, you see, I wasn't exactly singlehanded. My friends, Joe and Bets--

JOE

Miss True, how much of an influence has your father been on your work as a detective?

TANSY

My father?

J & B

(Stop and turn to audience) Carlson True, the famous criminal lawyer!

TANSY

Well, you see, my friends Joe and Bets, are really the--

BETS

I understand you knew to handle a gun at the age of three.

TANSY

Oh, well, we don't often use a gun, you see Bets has been studying karate for several--

JOE

You know, it's not often a girl--and especially a girl of your age--shows so much ingenuity and courage. How did you get to be so exceptional?

TANSY

Oh I'm not the only one who--

JOE

(Turning out front and writing in notebook) "GIRL SLEUTH MODEST ABOUT HEROISM"

BETS

(Turning out front and writing in notebook) "DAUGHTER OF FAMOUS CRIMINAL LAWYER NABS CULPRITS WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT."

(J & B shut notebooks with a snap and remove hats. They quickly return to car and resume characters)

JOE

I enjoy these adventures and it's swell having an excuse to cut class.

BETS

You bet!

JOE

(Hopping up onto back of seat and speaking to audience. T & B freeze)

JOE

(to audience) You thought we solved all our mysteries while we were on school vacations, didn't you?

BETS

(Hopping up on to back of seat. To audience) Could you squeeze 32 adventures into a year's worth of school vacations?

TANSY

I think we're coming to Loon Lake. What does the sign say?

(B&J sit back down.)

BETS

Loon Lake. Population 1,672. This is it! Gee, what a sweet little town!

(In unison, all turn to look right)

JOE

(Whistles) There's a swell place. I wonder what that is.

BETS

Golly! That's the biggest estate I've ever seen. All hidden away among the trees! Slow down, Tansy. Look, there's the front gate. "Claque Manor." Do you suppose that's a private home?

TANSY

We'll be staying at the Claque View Arms. It must be somewhere nearby.

(In unison, all turn to look left)

JOE

(Pointing) There it is--right across the street!

BETS

It's lovely!

TANSY

(Thoughtful) I agree, Bets, it is lovely... and strangely familiar, too, but I can't put my finger on why.

(Tansy mimes stopping the car. All get out of car and go behind it to collect their suitcases. Hargrove has come on from left, having watched their approach through opera glasses which she now puts away as she hurries forward to greet them.)

HARGROVE

At last! I've been watching for you all afternoon. I'm Anne Hargrove, the owner of the Claque View Arms. And you (going over to Joe and embracing her) must be Tansy True, girl sleuth and daughter of Carlson True the famous criminal lawyer. I hope you don't mind my embracing you. It's such an honor to have you and your friends as guests at my hotel.

JOE

(Suavely) Think nothing of it.

TANSY

(Stepping forward) I am Tansy True, Ms. Hargrove. And these are my dear friends, plump Bets and mannish Joe.

HARGROVE

(Embarrassed) Oh, I'm so sorry. Forgive me. I thought-- That is-- You're Tansy True? I would have thought--

(Hargrove and Tansy freeze. Joe and Bets come downstage. Joe is imitating Tansy True and Bets is imitating Hargrove)

JOE

(Sweetly, to Bets) That the femmier one couldn't be the Girl-Sleuth? Tut, tut Ms. Hargrove. See how these stereotypes can get you into trouble?

BETS

(As Hargrove) Oh mercy no! That's not what I meant at all!

HARGROVE

Please come in. You'll want to unpack, of course, and I have a lovely room for you with a view of the Claque Manor grounds across the way. Then I hope you'll come downstairs and join me for a cup of tea.(TB&J pick up suitcases and all four go off left.)

SPOT COMES UP ON SIGN BOARD WHICH IS CHANGED TO READ "CHAPTER 2: THE MYSTERIOUS ESTATE." LIGHTS UP ON TB&J IN THEIR ROOM. TANSY AND JOE ARE AT THE WINDOW. BETS IS STARTING TO UNPACK. TANSY TURNS AND SPEAKS TO AUDIENCE.

TANSY

"Chapter 2: The Mysterious Estate. It was not long before the intriguing estate across the road again drew our curiosity. Scarcely had we begun to unpack than we discovered an excellent vantage point for viewing the mysterious Claque Manor grounds.

BETS

(To audience) Tansy True was not, by nature, meddlesome, but she possessed a healthy curiosity that made her the remarkable detective she had so often proved herself to be.

JOE

From up here you can see the whole estate. Look, Tansy, there's another house on the grounds, all tucked away among those trees. You see it?

TANSY

A wonderful old Victorian monstrosity. Look, there's a light in an attic window.

JOE

So there is. I wish we had some binoculars.

TANSY

I brought some. (She goes to suitcase and opens it. Attached to inside of the lid are a sawed off shotgun, pistol, knife, handcuffs. Tansy paws through contents, pulling out a heavy rope, crowbar, flashlight, horrible rubber mask, kotexes, vibrator, baseball glove and mitt. Bets picks up vibrator, turns it on, examines it.)

JOE

Tansy, you do come prepared.

TANSY

(Preoccupied) Well, when you go on a trip, you never know what personal items you might need. (She had crossed back to window and is looking out through binoculars)

BETS

(Putting vibrator back and looking at the other two. Teasing) My, my, my. And they call themselves detectives. Nothing but voyeurs, if you ask me. Have people no right to their privacy?

JOE

Bets, you've absolutely no curiosity. Let me see, Tansy. (Tansy hands her the binoculars) There's a figure in that window. Someone standing and looking out.

BETS

With a pair of binoculars aimed right at us, I'll bet. (She brightens) Let's give them something to look at! (She grabs Tansy and leans her back in a passionate kiss. Tansy seems not to notice, but turns her head back toward the window, binoculars to her eyes)

TANSY

(Ignoring Bets) The person is holding something.

JOE

What is it? (Bets, still holding Tansy, becomes interested too)

TANSY

Something fluttering. A scarf? No, a bird! And now whoever is standing there has let the bird out the window.

BETS

Let me see. (Takes binoculars from Tansy.) I don't see a thing. They must have gone in.

(They freeze. Tansy moves downstage as spot comes up on her)

TANSY

Baffled by the odd occurrence, I was eager to learn more about the old estate. Even though there was nothing about the appearance of someone in the window to suggest a mystery, I had a strange feeling about it. It was this intuition that had sent me following up important clues...

BETS

(Light out on Tansy and up on Bets) Just at that moment, Anne Hargrove, whose kind greeting only a short while earlier had made us feel so welcome, entered with a tray of hot tea.

(Spotlight off, stage lights up full. Hargrove enters from left with a tray. Bets tries to hide binoculars)

HARGROVE

I hope you don't mind, but I was getting lonely--(TB&J look embarrassed at being caught snooping: Joe is still at the window)--so I just brought your tea up here. May...may I join you? (She sets tray on table, stares at binoculars)

JOE

It's all right. We were...just...watching your neighbors take their baths...(nervous laughter).

HARGROVE

Oh!...well, of course! (She pulls out her opera glasses and looks out window. Bets shrugs and puts binoculars to her eyes. She and Hargrove smile at each other and then put binoculars down. Hargrove goes to sit in a chair left, Bets center, and Tansy and Joe begin to sit down on the other chair simultaneously. Joe gallantly gestures for Tansy to take the chair. Tansy sits.)

TANSY

(To Hargrove) We were curious about the estate across the way. It's very beautiful. Who owns it?

HARGROVE

Oh, that place. Well, for years it was a very exclusive private mental hospital. But when the director retired, he removed the patients and turned it into his private residence. It's quite a showplace.

TANSY

So it's a private home now?

HARGROVE

Yes, although Dr. Kent Claque, the owner, is often away. Caretakers keep it up. You can tour the house if you like. On weekends it's open to the public.

JOE

Jeepers, that's a keen idea. Let's go there tomorrow.

TANSY

Yes, that would be a lark. (To Hargrove) And the other house? The old Victorian mansion that's set back among those trees? Who lives there?

HARGROVE

Oh, you mean Hill haven. Well, no one is quite clear about it. But I've heard it said that Dr. Claque houses one mental patient there, left over from the old days. They say that the doctor agreed to keep him as a personal favor to a friend.

JOE

(Standing by window) What's the matter with him?

HARGROVE

Oh, I couldn't say exactly. Only that he's supposed to be violent and dangerous. There are signs posted all over, saying to keep away from the house. (Bets crosses to window to look) An attendant guards him round the clock, they say.

BETS

(At the window) Goodness, doesn't he ever get to go outside?