

CORNFIELD of DREAMS

By Rachel Davidson

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CORNFIELD OF DREAMS

or... The Villain Was a Laughing Stalk

The corniest play this side of the Mississippi
(whichever side you're on)

By RACHEL DAVIDSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Speaking)

	<i># of lines</i>
MASTER OF CEREMONIES.....besides the normal MC duties, this is our rimshot guy or gal	12
POP KORNWELLowns Corn Café with Ma	27
MA KORNWELL.....owns Corn Café with Pop	30
LITTLE SWEET PEAsweet as corn syrup	68
IRA FUSEdoesn't come from good stalk... err, stock	74
RHODA HOARSE.....her intelligence is not very stable	31
LOUISE TENANTruns the orphanage; you can call her "Lou"	14
GENERAL GENERALonce in the military, now the proud owner of the local general store	32
BEN THAR.....cornhand for Colonel Kernal	9
DAWN THAT.....another cornhand	9
COLONEL KERNALlike General General, an ex-military man	16
MAJOR MAX MAJOR.....our husky hero	47
APRIL MAY JUNEdelightful orphan	7
JAN HEWARY.....another	7
DEE SEMBER.....another	7
MINER MYRA MINORpoor lady has corns	18

SETTING

Place: The Corn Café, in the middle of the Midwest, where the corn is as high as an elephant's eye.

Time: An August in the 1880s, when farmers and villains just couldn't be friends.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene One: One August morning in the Corn Café.

Scene Two: The next morning.

Scene Three: A few hours later.

Scene Four: The next day.

SET DESIGN

Inside the Corn Café. A counter is UP LEFT CENTER. An easel is placed at an angle beside it UP LEFT. Three tables with chairs are DOWN RIGHT. The tables have checkered tablecloths. There are two EXITS: a door UP CENTER leads to the kitchen and a door LEFT leads outside. A stool and a snare drum with a couple corn cobs (or whatever is used for the “rimshot”—see PRODUCTION NOTES) are set EXTREME DOWN RIGHT. Additional stage properties can give the café a “corny” atmosphere—pictures of corn or cornfields, a barrel reading “Corn,” a blue ribbon for the best cornbread, etc. Be creative and have fun!

CORNFIELD OF DREAMS

Scene One

1 LIGHTS UP: After the MC has finished his traditional job of warming up the audience and coaching them in the proper reactions to the various characters, he should segue into these opening lines. (Of course, he can improvise to continue his presentation in his own style. [NOTE:

5 Alternatively, the MC could introduce a new person who will be the “rimshot guy.” See PRODUCTION NOTES.]

MC: (To AUDIENCE.) Now, folks, I have to be fair and warn ya that this here mellerdrammer yer about to see is about the corniest play
10 of the union they’re cracking so many bad jokes and puns up here. Some are so bad they might even slip by ya, so I’m gonna help ya. Every time they say one of those puns, I’m gonna take these corncobs here and do a little rimshot. Like this. (*Demonstrates.*)
15 And you need to roll your eyes and groan, like this. (*Demonstrates and coaches AUDIENCE.*) Okee-dokey, you got it, so let’s get on with the show! Ladies and gentlemen, we present, for your side-splitting enjoyment, the corniest play in more ways than one—“Cornfield of Dreams”! (*CURTAIN UP to reveal the Corn Café.*)

POP: (*ENTERS UP CENTER. Calls out.*) C’mon, Ma Kornwell. Let’s get the
20 sign up and open the doors. Don’t want our breakfast customers waitin’ outside. Even though Cornville hasn’t gotten any water in 28 days and we’re in this bizarre and unexplainable drought, we’ve still got a business to run.

MA: (*ENTERS UP CENTER.*) Pop Kornwell! Your age is gettin’ to you. We
25 still have five minutes. (*Takes her watch out of her apron pocket.*) Look at my watch.

POP: It’s broken!

MA: I stomped on it so we would have time to kill. (*Rimshot. MA puts her watch back in her pocket. LITTLE SWEET PEA ENTERS UP*
30 *CENTER with a large sign saying “Special Today! Corn!”*) Thank you, Little Sweet Pea. I don’t know how we’d get along without you.

SWEET PEA: (*Places sign on easel.*) You know I would do anything for
35 the both of you. I owe you so much ever since you adopted me from the orphanage. It must have been so difficult raising me as a baby.

MA: I admit that when a new baby comes into a family, many changes are necessary. (*Rimshot.*)

MC: (To AUDIENCE. [NOTE: All of MC’s lines, unless specified, are directed
40 toward the AUDIENCE. Whenever MC cuts in like this, the action on stage FREEZES briefly.]) See what I mean? They’re bad, huh?

- 1 **MA:** But you know we'd do anything for you. Then and now.
- SWEET PEA:** But you were so patient. I would always wake you up in the wee-wee hours of the morning. (*Rimshot.*) I know that many people who must change diapers often act rashly. (*Rimshot.*)
- 5 **MC:** Are you getting these?
- POP:** I feel terrible that you have to be burdened by our problems paying the mortgage.
- MA:** We're just lucky that the banker, Mr. Snodgrass, loves our corn mush.
- 10 **SWEET PEA:** We know that Pop makes the best corn mush in Cornville. (*Aside.*) Actually, he's the only person who makes corn mush in Cornville, but he deserves an ego boost every now and then.
- POP:** Aw, shucks, Little Sweet Pea (*Rimshot.*), you're embarrassing me. Let's just get the front doors open before this face of mine turns
- 15 red. You know I don't like bein' in the red when a customer walks in. (*Rimshot. IRA and RHODA ENTER LEFT. IRA is as dangerous as a hungry grasshopper in a cornfield. RHODA is a few kernels short of a full ear.*)
- IRA:** Good morning. (*Sees SWEET PEA. Aside.*) Egads! Look at her. Until
- 20 this moment, I have never seen anything as beautiful as money!
- SWEET PEA:** Hello. Can we help you?
- MA:** Perhaps get you a menu?
- POP:** Just made a few corn muffins yesterday. Ain't stale yet. Can get them to you in a matter of seconds. (*Aside.*) Unfortunately, thanks
- 25 to this drought, we don't have enough to give him seconds.
- IRA:** I appreciate your hospitality. However, my assistant and I are not here for fast food. Let me introduce myself. I am Ira Fuse. And this is my secretary, Rhoda Hoarse.
- RHODA:** Pleased to make your acquaintance.
- 30 **POP:** How do you do? I'm Pop Kornwell.
- MA:** And I'm Ma Kornwell.
- IRA:** (*Indicating SWEET PEA.*) And who would this lovely young lady be?
- SWEET PEA:** I'm Little Sweet Pea.
- 35 **IRA:** The pleasure is all mine. However, today I am here on business. I am here to collect on your delinquent mortgage.
- SWEET PEA:** I don't understand.
- IRA:** I'm the new banker in town.
- POP:** You must be mistaken. Mr. Snodgrass is the head of the bank.
- 40 **IRA:** I guess you hadn't heard yet. Mr. Snodgrass has left town.



1 **POP:** Left town? But I just saw him yesterday!
IRA: Yes, it was just this morning that he made his sudden departure.

SWEET PEA: He could have at least come by to say good-bye!

5 **MA:** Why would he leave without telling anyone?
IRA: I guess some bankers just lose interest. (*Rimshot. Aside.*) But not me. I shall never lose interest in this lovely Little Sweet Pea. (*To RHODA.*) Rhoda, for everyone's sake, please read the document signed by Mr. Snodgrass this morning.

10 **RHODA:** (*Pulls out a sheet of paper with handwriting on it and stares at it silently. After a few seconds.*) Okay, I'm done.
IRA: Read it!
RHODA: I just did!

IRA: (*Aside.*) Egad! She's so dumb her favorite color is clear! (*To RHODA.*) Just give them the document. (*RHODA hands the paper to POP as MA and SWEET PEA look over his shoulder.*)

15 **SWEET PEA:** (*Incredulous.*) He gave you the power to be banker?
MA: I don't believe it!
POP: It's his handwriting all right. But it's so hard to read. It's as if he

20 was trembling.
IRA: When we made the agreement I said, "Let's shake on that." (*Rimshot.*) What's done is done. As Cornville's banker, I have looked into your loan. You owe me a significant amount of money.

SWEET PEA: We are aware of that, Mr. Fuse. Mr. Snodgrass told us

25 that he would give us time to get back on our feet. As you probably have heard, our little town of Cornville is having problems.
IRA: (*Takes paper back. Gives it back to RHODA.*) That does not concern me. I am a businessman, and I demand your past due mortgage payment by August 4, or I will exercise my power to evict you.

30 (*Aside.*) Everyone knows that bankers have their own interest at heart when talking a-loan with you. (*Rimshot times two!*)
MC: Ooh! That's a double-whammy! Get it? Banker... interest... a loan?
IRA: (*To MC.*) Yes, but I also have an interest in lovely Little Sweet

35 Pea.
MA: (*Chokes up.*) What are we going to do?
SWEET PEA: Please, Ma. Don't cry about the loan.
MA: It's just everything. The loan... the corn...
SWEET PEA: You're going to give Pop another "my grain" headache.

40 (*Rimshot.*)

- 1 **IRA:** *(To MC.)* Oh, come on! You're not going to let her get away with that one, are you? She might be beautiful and all, but corn isn't even a grain! *(MC shrugs as SWEET PEA glares at IRA.)*
- POP:** *(Putting hand to head.)* It's too late. I already have a headache.
- 5 **SWEET PEA:** Mr. Fuse, I am taken aback.
- POP:** Please take me a-back so I can rest! *(Rimshot.)*
- SWEET PEA:** We'll have to deal with this later, Mr. Fuse. Dear Pop needs our attention first. *(She and MA lead POP OUT UP CENTER.)*
- IRA:** Ah, Rhoda, look at this miserable Corn Café. This disgraceful,
10 deplorable and pathetic town of Cornville is turning into an absolute dustbowl! I am brilliant. Diverting all of their water was dazzling, talented and inspiring... I love it. This is so corrupt, fraudulent and mendacious! *(Aside.)* If you don't know the word, look it up!
- RHODA:** But isn't diverting the water against the law?
- 15 **IRA:** Of course it's against the law! That's the reason I love it. I'm single-handedly turning this measly town into a pitiful, parched place. *(Aside.)* I just love how alliteration rolls off my tongue. *(To RHODA.)* Once I've succeeded in killing Cornville's corn crop, I'll be able to complete my scheme. *(Aside.)* And the lovely Little Sweet Pea and I shall walk down the aisle. That's right! She'll have a new
20 name and a dress. *(Rimshot. To RHODA.)* Yes, Rhoda, diverting the water is just the first step in my malicious money-making mission! *(Aside.)* I just hope Rhoda isn't like a tattle-tailin' pig. *(Beat.)* A squealer. *(Rimshot.)*
- 25 **LOU:** *(From OFF LEFT.)* Kids, are you in here? *(LOU ENTERS LEFT.)* Have you seen three orphans?
- RHODA:** No.
- IRA:** And you are?
- LOU:** Louise Tenant. I run the orphanage in town. You can call me
30 "Lou." Everyone does.
- IRA:** Pleasure to meet you, Lou Tenant.
- RHODA:** Why do you think they would be in here?
- LOU:** They were supposed to ask for a crumb or two for the orphanage. I expected they would have come back by now.
- 35 **RHODA:** We haven't seen any children.
- LOU:** They are probably playing hide and seek in the cornfields. They're always doing that. I'm sure they'll show up.
- IRA:** Those urchins don't play by the river, do they?
- LOU:** Not lately. There isn't enough river to play in. I just hope they
40 wash their hands before they eat. If they don't, it will be a grime. *(Rimshot.)*

- 1 **IRA:** If we see them, we'll tell them to go back to the orphanage.
LOU: Thank you. I'm sure they'll show up. Good day. (*EXITS LEFT.*)
RHODA: Oh, no. They might discover your plan!
IRA: I'm not worried.
- 5 **RHODA:** But what if someone finds out you're diverting the water?
IRA: I'll go from one ex-stream to another. (*Rimshot.*)
MC: Hey, that was actually a good one!
RHODA: But there's so little water around here, even the poor crows may die.
- 10 **IRA:** Who cares! The imbeciles in this town will never know their caws of death. (*Rimshot.*)
MC: (*To IRA.*) Don't push your luck!
RHODA: Where do we go from here?
IRA: (*Aside.*) This is the tenth time I've told her about my plot. She's
- 15 so dumb, the closest she'll come to a brainstorm is a slow drizzle. (*Rimshot. To RHODA.*) After we get rid of the café, I'll foreclose on the general store. Then more and more and more! Once I get rid of all the local moral-minded jokers of this town, I'll own enough land to construct my colossal Corn Casino and Emporium.
- 20 **RHODA:** The folks of Cornville really love their corn.
IRA: That's right. They're corn nuts. (*Rimshot.*) But Rhoda, I'll seize everything in this town. You know what I've always said, "What you seize, is what you get!" (*Rimshot. BLACKOUT.*)

End of Scene One

Scene Two

- LIGHTS UP: The café has just opened the next morning. SWEET PEA,
25 POP and MA are waiting for customers.
SWEET PEA: Oh, my! There must be something wrong! Generally, General Gene General of General General's General Store is always here promptly at nine o'clock. (*GENERAL ENTERS.*)
POP: General General. We were beginning to get worried.
- 30 **MA:** Oh my, you don't look like yourself today.
GENERAL: I'm awfully worried. You know how business has been down so much for all of us. I can't concentrate.
SWEET PEA: Being a retired military man, that must feel very strange.
GENERAL: You're right, Little Sweet Pea. A military man must never
- 35 lose his attention. (*Rimshot.*) But you know something unusual is going on around here. Something just isn't right with the river drying up.

- 1 **POP:** There's more you can worry about.
GENERAL: What can be worse than everyone having little or no water?
- POP:** Mr. Snodgrass has suddenly left town with no explanation.
- 5 **GENERAL:** What?!
- SWEET PEA:** And the new banker, Ira Fuse, plans to foreclose on us. We only have until August 4th to pay.
- GENERAL:** Why, that's tomorrow! That makes me even more worried! I could be next! (*To MA.*) I could really use that special today.
- 10 **MA:** Just boiled up the last of the corn on the cobs.
GENERAL: The last ones?
- SWEET PEA:** We're expecting a fresh delivery from Colonel Kernal this morning. He should be here anytime now.
- POP:** Don't worry about payin'. We'll make them on the house.
- 15 **GENERAL:** You don't have to do that. Just make them in the kitchen. (*Rimshot. MA EXITS UP CENTER.*)
- SWEET PEA:** Pop has told me so many stories about how you have helped us over these many years.
- GENERAL:** I haven't done much.
- 20 **SWEET PEA:** That's not what I've heard.
POP: I'll never forget the time I was sick and you removed all them husks.
GENERAL: (*Modest.*) Ah, shucks. (*Rimshot.*)
- MA:** (*ENTERS with an ear of corn on a plate.*) Here you go, General.
- 25 **GENERAL:** (*Munches on corn. As a military man, he eats his corn in an orderly, "typewriter" fashion.*) Mmm, mmm. This certainly eases the pain. (*To MA.*) Any chance I can have some of your corn soup for lunch?
- MA:** I could never serve that to you.
- 30 **GENERAL:** Why is that?
MA: It's nine days old, and I wouldn't want you to get bad broth. (*Rimshot.*) In fact, it's so bad, it could be considered gruel and unusual punishment. (*Rimshot. BENTHAR, DAWN THAT and COLONEL KERNAL ENTER from LEFT. BEN carries a small box.*) Hello, Colonel
- 35 Kernel. (*Aside.*) Like General General, he, too, is a retired from the cavalry. He's now the best corn farmer in the county.
- GENERAL:** (*To BEN THAR and DAWN THAT.*) Hello, Ben and Dawn. (*Aside.*) Ben Thar and Dawn That work on his farm.
- ALL:** (*Ad-lib.*) Howdy, how are you today? How are things on the farm, Colonel Kernal? How was the ride in? Sure is hot, isn't it? etc.
- 40



1 **SWEET PEA:** *(To BEN.)* What do you have in that small box?
BEN: We brought your corn.
POP: *(Places the box on the table and pulls out two small ears of corn.)*
There are only two corncobs! We can't even make a dozen corn
5 muffins with this! *(Places corn back in box.)*
DAWN: Sorry. Those are the only two we found to harvest.
COLONEL: Something strange is going on.
GENERAL: That's what I say!
BEN: All of the corn is dying.
10 **POP:** Yes, we know.
COLONEL: My fields just aren't getting enough water.
SWEET PEA: Memories of that drought five years ago are flooding
back. *(Rimshot.)*
DAWN: We used to joke about the drought, too.
15 **BEN:** But now's not the time for dry humor. *(Rimshot.)*
POP: We need corn for this town to survive.
SWEET PEA: And don't forget all the other farmers around Cornville.
They're also in trouble without water.
COLONEL: You're right.
20 **BEN:** What about Mrs. Smith and her apple farm?
DAWN: Maybe she'll be the one to get to the core of the problem.
(Rimshot.)
GENERAL: She is outstanding in her field. *(Rimshot.)*
MC: Oh, great! Just when they've used up most all the corn puns, they
25 start on apples!
SWEET PEA: Oh, my. What's Mr. Jones going to do with all of those
milk cows?
COLONEL: Probably have to skim the herd and then condense it.
(Rimshot.)
30 **MA:** He'll milk the idea for all it's worth. *(Rimshot.)*
MC: *(To ACTORS.)* Come on, folks, this is supposed to be the CORNIEST
play this side of the Mississippi. Let's not lose our focus! *(ACTORS*
all ignore him.)
POP: And Mr. Barry's hogs?
35 **DAWN:** He's the one who brings home the bacon for his family.
(Rimshot.)
MC: *(To ACTORS.)* I'm warnin' ya! Get back to the play!
BEN: And we've got to watch out with Mrs. Bork when she has
problems with the chickens.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Three tables with checkered tablecloths, chairs, counter, easel, two holsters with belts (behind counter).

BROUGHT ON, Scene One:

Two corncobs (MC)

Watch (MA)

Sign (SWEET PEA)

Sheet of paper with handwriting on it (RHODA)

BROUGHT ON: Scene Two:

Ear of corn on plate (MA)

Small box with two ears of corn (BEN)

Two ears of corn on plate (SWEET PEA)

Map (MAJOR)

Gold pan (MINOR)

BROUGHT ON: Scene Four:

Paper, pen (IRA)

Watch (MA)

COSTUMES

All characters wear standard melodrama costuming of the late 1800s. For instance, IRA should have a black hat and cape. MAJOR, if possible, should be dressed in traditional cavalry garb or can be dressed in white. SWEET PEA, of course, has a lovely white dress. (Sigh.) RHODA should wear a somewhat tasteless dress. BEN, DAWN and COLONEL are dressed for farm work, MINOR for mining. The ORPHANS should be dressed as little children, with bonnets, collars, lace, etc. If the orphans are played by adults, the costumes become quite humorous!

FLEXIBLE CASTING

Several of the characters can be played male or female with just a name change: MC, Rhoda (Ryder), Louise (Lewis), Ben (Bonita or Bon for short), Dawn (Don), April May, Jan, Dee (any punny names will do) and Myra (Myron).

ABOUT THE RIMSHOTS AND MC

The role of the MC throughout the play is strictly optional, as are the rimshots. Feel free to substitute whatever sound, instrument or beat you feel would work best for your production. (A two-toned bike horn also works well, as does a woodblock or any number of other percussion instruments.) Any person on or offstage can make the sound if you're not using an MC. The point is simply to interrupt the dialogue enough



to help the audience notice all the puns and have time to react to them. All lines for the MC are suggestions—feel free to ad-lib and make up your own comments as desired. The corny humor is at the heart of this melodrama, so however much you decide to play up the puns, have fun with this!

PACING

The dialogue must be fast-paced and delivered with high energy. At the same time, however, actors shouldn't be afraid to interrupt the dialogue to speak directly to the audience if they are not reacting properly for melodrama. Remember, there is no fourth wall. As mentioned above, while not losing momentum, the actors must give the audience time to react to the puns. If the audience doesn't "get it," an actor might want to point it out to them and deliver the line again.

ABOUT THE CORN DUEL

The humor of the corn duel, of course, comes with the absurdity of using the ears of corn as weapons, along with the formality surrounding settling this point of honor. Think *High Noon*. The tension is thick as the other characters remain on stage completely silent, some hiding behind chairs or the counter, making sure they are out of danger. The moment should be filled with melodramatic sincerity. The time allotted for eating is critical—too long and it gets monotonous, too short and the humor is lost. As the timekeeper, MA should gauge the time based on the audience's reaction.

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