

TROUBLE-IN- TUMBLEWEED

**SUGGESTED BY NIKOLAI GOGOL'S
"THE INSPECTOR GENERAL"**

Book by Tim Kelly

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TROUBLE IN TUMBLEWEED

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Emoting)

	<i># of lines</i>
LAWYER MAXWELLseedy attorney	36
MIRANDA OATESmayor's wife, a culture vulture	110
GERT.....stagecoach driver	58
ELECTRAhired help	50
LILY DE LILAC.....gambling lady	53
PROFESSOR TOM BURNSMedicine show huckster down on his luck	149
JULIE OATEScharming creature, in love with Luther	79
MAYOR OATESpompous charlatan	119
SHERIFF PLUNKETTlocal law, small-time chicken rancher	52
ALMIRA SESSIONSpostmistress, enjoys reading other people's mail	42
DOC SNIPESpassing himself off as the real thing, but he's actually a horse doctor	35
GILROY CAVENDERundertaker	20
HARRY DOBBStown engineer who can look busy if he has to	34
VICTORIA DOBBSHarry's wife	58
OPAL CRABTREE.....schoolmarm, but her school has no roof	55
MRS. BAYWATERstage passenger	45
LUTHERmanly young prospector	63
OTTILLIE DOBBSyoung teenager, clumsy	21
ANTOINETTEher equally clumsy sister	18
WIDDER HASKINSstruggling merchant	17
Optional EXTRAS can be employed as CITIZENS of Tumbleweed.	



TROUBLE IN TUMBLEWEED

By TIM KELLY

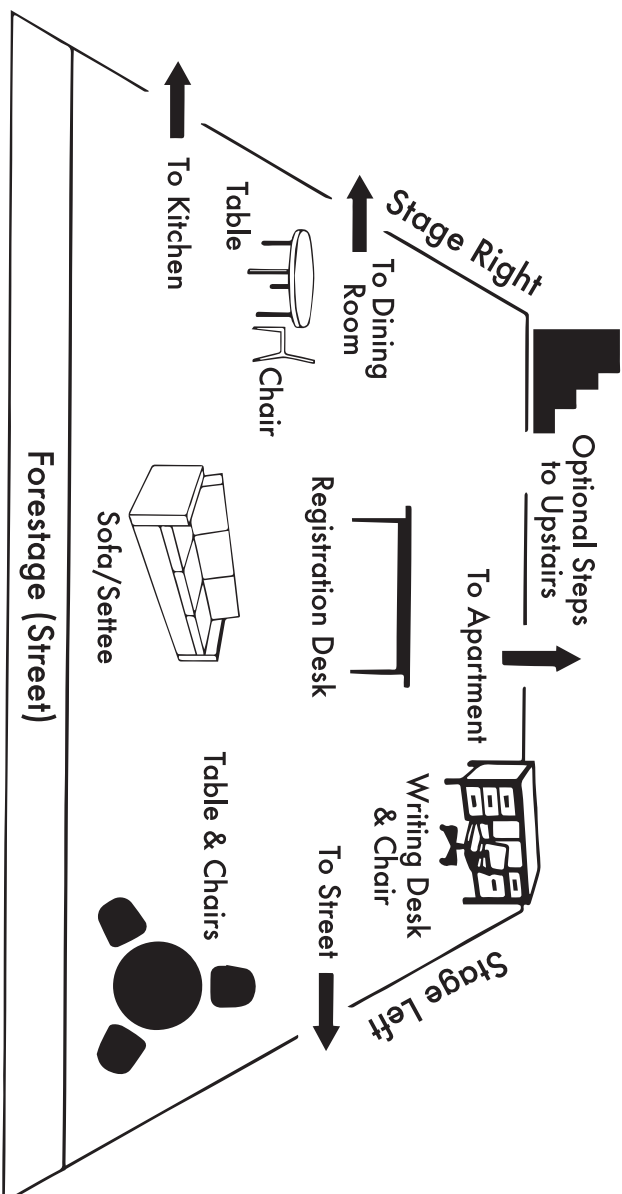
SYNOPSIS

The action takes place at the Tumbleweed Hotel in the town of Tumbleweed, the Arizona Territory.

The time is the 1880s.

There are two acts.

SET DESIGN



TRouble IN Tumbleweed

ACT ONE

Scene One

SETTING: Lobby of the Tumbleweed Hotel. DOWN RIGHT leads to the kitchen. RIGHT leads into the dining room. OPTIONAL swinging doors. Between kitchen and dining room entry there's a small table with chair. UP RIGHT there is a hallway with stairs leading to rooms above. UPSTAGE CENTER is a registration desk/table. Behind registration desk is an OPTIONAL rack for room keys and, maybe, slots for mail. A door leading into the private apartment of the Oates family is LEFT of rack. UP LEFT is a writing table with chair. LEFT leads out to the street. DOWN LEFT there's a table with three chairs. DOWN RIGHT CENTER there's a small sofa or settee. FORESTAGE represents outside street.

OPTIONAL stage dressing can be added as/if desired. If used, it should reflect the spirit of the Old West: a wooden chandelier, oil lamps, horse or Indian blanket, rug, wagon wheel as a decorative touch, a vase of desert flowers, cow skull, spittoon, etc. OPTIONAL doors for street entry. There is nothing pretentious about the view. What we're seeing is rustic and homespun. [NOTE: For suggestions on simplifying the set and various staging tips, CONSULT PRODUCTION NOTES.]

LIGHTS UP: Morning. The table is covered with playing cards and coffee mugs. LAWYER MAXWELL is sleeping on the sofa, face out to audience. He snores loudly. The snoring goes on for a few moments, and then we hear the VOICE OF MIRANDA OATES in her apartment. She is practicing musical scales. Her vocalizing sounds like a goose strangling.

MIRANDA'S VOICE: (*Ascending.*)

Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Doooooooo... (*LAWYER MAXWELL groans in his slumber, turns his back to the audience.*

MIRANDA'S VOCALIZING takes a descending pitch.)

Do-Ti-La-So-Fa-Mi-Re-Doooooooo... (*LAWYER MAXWELL groans again, turns. Continues; ascending.*)

Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti- Doooooooo... (*LAWYER MAXWELL groans, turns.*)

GERT'S VOICE: (*From street, OFF LEFT.*) Mail's in!

MIRANDA'S VOICE: (*Descending.*)

Do-Ti-La-So-Fa-Mi-Re-Dooooooooo...

GERT'S VOICE: (*OFF LEFT, closer.*) Mail! I got the mail!!

GERT: (*Bursts INTO VIEW, LEFT. She is a crusty, dusty desert character with a voice like bullets rattling down a rain spout. She's the stagecoach driver and never lets anyone forget it. Holster, pistol and battered hat. She carries a mail bag or sack and deposits it atop the registration desk. Slams the desk bell several times.*) What's the matter in here?! Everybody asleep?! I said I got the mail!!

MIRANDA'S VOICE: (*Ascending.*)

Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Dooooooooo... (*With a great groan, LAWYER MAXWELL turns and rolls off the sofa. Hits the floor with a THUD.*)

GERT: Timber!

LAWYER MAXWELL: Ooooooooooooo.

GERT: Hello! Hello! Anybody home?!

LAWYER MAXWELL: (*Picks himself up and dusts himself off. He tries hard to appear the gentleman, but the truth is he's no good at it. In fact, he's rather seedy.*) How's a gentleman expected to get any rest with such a racket?

GERT: Why ask me, Lawyer Maxwell? I drive the stagecoach. If you want to ask me a question about driving stage, I'll give you a straight answer. Otherwise, I mind my own business.

MIRANDA'S VOICE: (*Louder than before, ascending.*)

Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So- La-Ti-Dooooooooo...

GERT: (*Reacts. Alarmed, she slaps for her pistol and draws.*) Injun attack!

ELECTRA: (*A maid at the hotel, ENTERS DOWN RIGHT from the kitchen. Wears apron and dust cap. She carries a tray.*) For goodness sake, Gert. You've heard Miranda Oates practicing her singing before.

GERT: (*Dubious.*) That was singing? (*ELECTRA crosses to the table and stacks the cards and puts the mugs on the tray. GERT holsters her pistol.*)

ELECTRA: Mrs. Oates says just because she has to live in a backwater place like Tumbleweed, it's no reason she should forget about culture.

LAWYER MAXWELL: She calls that caterwauling culture?

ELECTRA: To each his own. That's what I always say. (*Holds up some cards.*) Playing cards all night again, huh?

LAWYER MAXWELL: I lost a pretty penny, I don't mind telling you. If I didn't know the mayor so well, I'd say the man cheats.

GERT: I'd say you was probably right.

LAWYER MAXWELL: (*Stretches.*) That sofa has more lumps than a camel's back. How's a man expected to sleep on it?

ELECTRA: You're not supposed to sleep on it. You're supposed to sit on it.

LAWYER MAXWELL: Very funny. Is there any coffee left?

ELECTRA: Fresh pot on the stove. You know where to find it.

LAWYER MAXWELL: Can't you serve me a cup?

ELECTRA: I've got enough to do. The upstairs rooms have to be aired.

LAWYER MAXWELL: I intend to complain to the mayor about your attitude.

ELECTRA: (*Indifferent.*) You do that.

LAWYER MAXWELL: (*Moves RIGHT toward kitchen.*) A gentleman in Tumbleweed gets no respect. (*With as much dignity as he can muster, he EXITS.*)

GERT: Lawyer Maxwell sure likes putting on airs.

ELECTRA: He ain't alone. Mrs. Oates don't like card playing in the lobby. She says it ain't refined.

GERT: I reckon that's true, but this ain't Philadelphia. It's Tumbleweed.

LILY: (*A gambling lady, ENTERS RIGHT from dining room. She's the classic frontier femme fatale, dressed in theatrical fashion, much jewelry, feather boa.*) Tumbleweed, Tumbleweed. To think that Lily De Lilac, formerly of Seattle, is stuck in this one-horse town. Ugh.

ELECTRA: We got more than one horse in this town.

LILY: I hope none of my friends find out where I am. I have a reputation to consider.

PROFESSOR: (*ENTERS down the stairs. He's a young man with considerable vitality. Wears a gaudy suit.*) 'Momin', Electra.

ELECTRA: 'Momin', Professor.

PROFESSOR: 'Momin', Miss De Lilac.

LILY: Professor.

PROFESSOR: (*Notices mail bag.*) Ah, the mail's in. Anything for me?

GERT: Ask Almira Sessions. She's the postmistress.

LILY: Almira Sessions reads other people's mail.

ELECTRA: Maybe she wouldn't read other people's mail if they built the library like they promised.

LILY: This town is full of promises. The mayor promised me I could operate a gambling concession. That was five months ago. Each month he charges me a fee for considering my request. If you ask me, he's running a racket.

PROFESSOR: (*Rubbing his hands together in anticipation.*) Think I'll go into the dining room and have my breakfast. Bacon, eggs, pancakes and syrup. (*He crosses RIGHT.*)

ELECTRA: I'm sorry, Professor Burns, you can't go in there.

PROFESSOR: (*Turns.*) Why not? I'm hungry.

ELECTRA: Guests only.

PROFESSOR: What do I look like? A thief in the night?

LILY: In this crummy town, who'd notice?

ELECTRA: The mayor says you haven't paid anything since you've been here. Says you've been eating and sleeping for free, and if you don't pay up he's going to have you arrested and tossed in jail.

PROFESSOR: Arrested?!

LILY: Broke, huh, Professor?

PROFESSOR: A temporary inconvenience, I assure you.

GERT: What about your Medicine Show? I thought Medicine Shows were moneymakers.

PROFESSOR: I had a run of sour luck. My Indian princess ran off with the piano player. If that wasn't bad enough, they took the dancing bear with them. What's a Medicine Show without a dancing bear?

GERT: I'll bite. What's a Medicine Show without a dancing bear?

PROFESSOR: Un-bear-able! (*OTHERS react.*) Maybe the mayor will let me pay him off with bottled medicine. It's also good for polishing furniture and dissolving rust.

ELECTRA: Mayor Oates likes money.

PROFESSOR: So do I.

LILY: Me, too.

GERT: How broke are you, Professor?

PROFESSOR: Let me put it this way. If a trip to the Mexican border cost ten cents, I wouldn't have enough to make it to the sidewalk.

WOMEN: That's broke.

PROFESSOR: I wrote my big brother in San Francisco and asked for a loan. He's bound to help me.

GERT: When did you scribble him?

PROFESSOR: Last week.

GERT: (*Slaps mail bag.*) His answer won't be in this mail bag. Takes a couple of months, mebbe, to get an answer from San Francisco.

PROFESSOR: Months?

ELECTRA: Why don't you sell your medicine wagon?

PROFESSOR: Who'd buy it?

ELECTRA: Gilroy Cavender might.

LILY: The undertaker?

ELECTRA: He's always complaining his hearse is falling apart.

GERT: Folks don't want to see the dearly departed riding in a Medicine Show wagon. All that red and gold paint and pictures of a dancing bear shaking a tambourine. It wouldn't be decent.

PROFESSOR: *(Rubs his tummy.)* I am hungry.

ELECTRA: Mayor says it's beans until you pay up.

PROFESSOR: Beans? For breakfast?

ELECTRA: Lunch and dinner, too. Yes or no?

PROFESSOR: Yes.

ELECTRA: That's what I figured. *(With the tray, EXITS DOWN RIGHT into kitchen.)*

PROFESSOR: *(Forlorn, sits at table.)* Beans.

GERT: *(Slams the desk bell.)* Mail's in! *(LILY sits at small table by dining room entrance, produces a deck of cards. Begins a game of solitaire.)*

JULIE: *(The mayor's daughter, ENTERS UP LEFT from the apartment. A lovely girl. Pretty, appealing, naive.)* There's no need to shout, Gert.

GERT: I figure I got to shout. Otherwise, I won't get heard.

JULIE: *(Floats CENTER.)* Good morning, Professor Burns.

PROFESSOR: Howdy, Miss Julie.

JULIE: Miss De Lilac.

LILY: If you see your father before I do, tell him I'd like a word.

JULIE: Happy to.

GERT: Here's the mail.

JULIE: Why don't you leave it with Almira Sessions?

GERT: Because the post office is locked tighter than a buffalo drum, and I can't drop mail on the porch on account of it's against regulations. *(Singing, MIRANDA OATES ENTERS from the apartment UP LEFT. She's an overdressed dragon who fancies herself something of a social lioness. She doesn't speak as much as she gushes. Given to flamboyant gestures. Despite her fluttery mannerisms, she's an iron fist in a velvet glove. As she, uh, "sings," she moves in front of the registration desk as if she were an opera singer on some famous world stage. She treats the OTHERS like an adoring audience. They're not impressed.)*

MIRANDA: *(Sings.)* Just a song at twilight,
When the lights are low,
And the flick'ring shadows come and go --

ELECTRA: *(ENTERS from kitchen with a bowl and spoon.)*
 Beans!! *(MIRANDA ignores her. ELECTRA crosses to the table and sets the bowl in front of PROFESSOR. He begins to slurp and eat in ravenous fashion. ELECTRA stands by the table, watches MIRANDA flirt here and there, convinced she's knocking 'em dead with her dreadful performance.)*

MIRANDA: *(Continuing.)* Tho' the heart be weary,
 Sad the day and long,
 Still to us at twilight comes love's old sweet song
 Comes love's old sweet song... *(She ends on a spiralling note. No applause. MIRANDA doesn't notice. In her own dream world.)* I'm in splendid voice this morning, if I do say so myself.

GERT: *(The realist.)* Might as well say so. No one else is gonna.

MIRANDA: I appreciate the pathetic ballads better than the romantic ones.

GERT: In that case you should be a happy woman, Miranda. What you sang was truly pathetic.

MIRANDA: Thank you, Gert.

JULIE: *(Notices PROFESSOR'S meager breakfast.)* Professor, is that all you're having for breakfast?

PROFESSOR: Beggars can't be choosers.

JULIE: I don't understand.

MIRANDA: Don't concern yourself with a charity case, Julie.

PROFESSOR: *(Insulted.)* Hey!

JULIE: Charity case?

LILY: The professor's broke.

PROFESSOR: I'm expecting funds from my big brother any day now.

GERT: Any day now? I won't be coming through Tumbleweed for at least another four weeks.

PROFESSOR: I'm expecting funds from my big brother any week now.

JULIE: Oh, I see.

GERT: I better git back to the stagecoach. I got a passenger and I reckon she's wondering where I am. *(Moves LEFT.)* When you see Almira Sessions, tell her I left the mail bag here. *(GERT EXITS LEFT to street.)*

MIRANDA: Here? This isn't the post office.

JULIE: The post office was locked. I'll take the mail over and wait for Almira. I don't mind.

MIRANDA: *(Crosses to the mail bag and picks it up.)* Julie.

JULIE: Yes, Mother?

MIRANDA: If you see that dreadful young prospector on the street,



I forbid you to speak with him.

JULIE: (*Innocently.*) You mean Luther?

MIRANDA: You know perfectly well who I mean. Luther, yes.

Worthless rogue. I will not have a penniless drifter casting soulful glances in my daughter's direction. I can tell he has eyes for you.

JULIE: Luther's a nice young man.

MIRANDA: Don't contradict your own mother. In good society it's considered impolite.

JULIE: Well, I haven't seen Luther in days. (*With mail bag, EXITS LEFT to street.*)

MIRANDA: If only I could believe that. (*Sighs.*) Being a mother and a concert artist is not easy.

ELECTRA: Luther may have eyes for Miss Julie, but Miss Julie's got eyes for him, too, you know.

MIRANDA: Don't be insolent, Electra. Don't you have some rooms to air?

ELECTRA: Yup.

MIRANDA: In that case... (*Sweeping gesture to the stairs.*) air them!

ELECTRA: I'm going. (*Grabs for bowl.*) You done with them beans, Professor?

PROFESSOR: (*Holds on to the bowl protectively, takes another spoonful, speaks with his mouth full.*) Not yet. (*ELECTRA EXITS up the stairs.*)

MIRANDA: (*Steps to PROFESSOR.*) That, I assure you, is the last meal you will eat in this hotel.

PROFESSOR: (*Outraged.*) Meal? You call this a meal? No salad, no beverage, no roll. This meal isn't fit for a condemned prisoner.

MIRANDA: How interesting that you should mention the word "prisoner." My husband, the mayor, intends to have you arrested for non-payment of bills. We're not running a soup kitchen here, Professor Burns. My husband and I will have no truck with deadbeats. Pay up or face the music. Ah, music. (*On "music," MIRANDA tosses up one hand and EXITS back into the apartment with a spiralling "Laaaaaaaaa." She slams the door.*)

PROFESSOR: Did she call me a deadbeat?

LILY: She called you a deadbeat.

PROFESSOR: The mayor is married to a dragon. A fire-breathing dragon.

LILY: Who sings. They're the worst kind.

PROFESSOR: They have no right to treat an honest man so shabbily.

LILY: *(Stands, sashays behind the sofa.)* Looks like we're in the same buckboard, Professor.

PROFESSOR: *(Another mouthful.)* How's that, Miss De Lilac?

LILY: Call me Lily.

PROFESSOR: I don't suppose you'd consider making me a small loan, Lily? Not much. Even a few silver dollars would help.

LILY: I'm as broke as you are. *(Steps LEFT of sofa.)*

PROFESSOR: *(Surprised.)* What? You, too? What about them jewels you're wearing?

LILY: Paste. I could make a bundle with the cards and the dice, but the mayor says I have to have a license. He keeps promising the license, but it never appears. He's managed to get a lot of money out of me with his worthless promises. This is a weird town. I can't quite put my finger on it, but something's amiss.

PROFESSOR: Gosh, Lily, if you think Tumbleweed is weird, why did you come here? I mean, I didn't have a choice. My medicine wagon broke down at the town line.

LILY: Everywhere I went I heard about this new boomtown called Tumbleweed. I figured I'd get in on the ground floor. Instead, I'm stuck in the sand.

MAYOR'S VOICE: *(From street OFF LEFT.)* Where are the others, Sheriff?!

SHERIFF'S VOICE: *(OFF LEFT.)* What's all this about, Mayor?

MAYOR'S VOICE: *(OFF LEFT.)* You'll soon find out. Miranda!

LILY: It's Mayor Oates and the sheriff.

PROFESSOR: I better make myself scarce. *(Still dipping the spoon into the bowl for any trace of remaining food, PROFESSOR hurriedly EXITS up the stairs. LILY fluffs her hair and feather boa.)*

MAYOR OATES: *(ENTERS LEFT with considerable bluster, waves a letter.)* Danger! We're all in great danger! *(MAYOR OATES is a pompous charlatan. He's usually in a nervous state about something, but he's never been as bad as this.)*

SHERIFF: *(ENTERS LEFT. A dry, placid man whose main interest is in raising chickens. Holster and pistol, tin star.)* I wish you'd stop saying that and tell me what the trouble be.

LILY: 'Morning, Mayor Oates. *(Neither man pays her any attention.)*

MAYOR OATES: *(Holding up the letter.)* Trouble! You don't know the meaning of the word trouble!

SHERIFF: What's in that letter?

LILY: 'Morning, Sheriff Plunkett.

MAYOR OATES: Letter! Letter! You call this a letter?!

SHERIFF: Yeah, I call it a letter. What would you call it?

MAYOR OATES: Disaster! Ruin! Calamity!

LILY: Nice weather we're having. (*MAYOR and SHERIFF rage on.*)

LILY shrugs, returns to her game of solitaire.)

MAYOR OATES: Miranda!

SHERIFF: I ain't never seen you like this, Mayor.

MAYOR OATES: You won't be so calm when you hear the news.
Miranda!

SHERIFF: (*Temper explodes.*) What news?!

MIRANDA: (*ENTERS from the apartment.*) What is going on out here? I don't allow loud conversation in the lobby. It's unseemly.

SHERIFF: Your husband's acting like a cuckoo clock.

MIRANDA: Cuckoo clock?

MAYOR OATES: Cuckoo clock, my foot.

MIRANDA: Calm down, husband. You're making a spectacle of yourself.

MAYOR OATES: Never mind about that. We've got more important things to worry about. (*Waves the letter.*) Disaster! Ruin! Calamity!

MIRANDA: I'll get the bicarbonate of soda. It always relaxes your nervous stomach.

MAYOR OATES: Make it a double! (*MIRANDA EXITS back into apartment. MAYOR looks at the letter, groans.*) I'm not a well man. (*He staggers to the sofa and sits, shaking his head from side to side.*) What have I done to deserve this?

SHERIFF: If you ain't going to explain what's ailin' you, I might as well get back to the jail. It's time to feed my chickens.

MAYOR OATES: You shouldn't raise chickens in the jail. I've cautioned you about that before. It doesn't look right. (*He moans.*) Oooooooooooooh. (*NOTE: During the following scene, LILY plays cards unobtrusively, but she hears every word.*)

LAWYER MAXWELL: (*ENTERS DOWN RIGHT from kitchen, yawning.*) It's impossible to sleep in this place. I finally managed to doze off at the kitchen table, but my snooze didn't last long. Why all the shouting?

SHERIFF: (*Mimicking the MAYOR.*) Disaster! Ruin! Calamity!

MAYOR OATES: (*Waves letter.*) Bad trouble is knocking at the door!

LAWYER MAXWELL: I don't hear anything.

SHERIFF: Miranda better hurry with that bicarbonate of soda.

ALMIRA: (*ENTERS LEFT. A long, thin woman. Hurries behind sofa, speaks to MAYOR.*) The others will be here any moment, cousin.

MAYOR OATES: I'll never forgive you for this, Almira. This is all your fault. Even incompetence has its limits.

ALMIRA: Please, cousin. I didn't misplace that letter on purpose. I'm an innocent victim of circumstance.

MAYOR OATES: You've always run the post office in slipshod fashion. (*Holds up the letter.*) This only proves it.

ALMIRA: Tsk, tsk.

MAYOR OATES: Tsk, tsk, yourself. (*OTHERS hurriedly ENTER from street. They are: DOC SNIPES, GILROY CAVENDER, HARRY DOBBS, VICTORIA DOBBS, MISS CRABTREE. Their dialogue overlaps.*)

DOC SNIPES: What's all the excitement --

GILROY: Almira said to drop everything and come pronto --

HARRY: Nothing serious, I hope --

VICTORIA: I walked so fast people thought I was running --

MISS CRABTREE: I dismissed the class -- (*The gathering is a rather motley-looking bunch. Each individual looks like an escapee from some long-forgotten TV western. DOC SNIPES wears a string tie. GILROY wears a long frock coat, top hat and gloves as befits his undertaker's calling. HARRY wears knee-high boots, if possible. VICTORIA is overdressed, and MISS CRABTREE is costumed like the classic schoolmarm. Long, dark dress, brooch at the throat. She carries a blackboard pointer and book. [NOTE: EXTRAS, as additional relatives, can be utilized for this scene, if desired. CONSULT PRODUCTION NOTES.] MIRANDA COMES from the apartment with a glass of "bicarbonate" bubbling and hurriedly crosses to her husband.*)

MAYOR OATES: Quiet!! (*Instant silence. OTHERS FREEZE in position.*) How can a man think with everyone jabbering?

MIRANDA: Here's your bicarbonate of soda. Drink every drop and you'll feel much better. (*MAYOR takes the glass and noisily drains it. OTHERS watch each gulp. Finished with the liquid, MAYOR smacks his lips several times and BURPS. He returns glass to MIRANDA, who puts it on the registration desk.*)

MAYOR OATES: Stop gawking at me. Sit down, sit down. Might as well make yourselves comfortable while you can. (*At this point, ACTORS should be placed for the best stage picture. Some can sit at the table, someone can sit at the writing*

desk. MAYOR stands and moves between sofa and table.
One or two can utilize the sofa. Others stand about.)

SHERIFF: *(Indicates.)* I reckon that letter came in on the stage.

MIRANDA: Where were you, Almira? Gert Dooley said the post office was closed.

MAYOR OATES: She was looking for me. With this! *(Waves the letter.)*

ALMIRA: It wasn't my fault. *(To OTHERS.)* I discovered several letters on the floor behind the file cabinet. They must have dropped there when I wasn't looking.

LAWYER MAXWELL: So what?

ALMIRA: Two months old, at least.

VICTORIA: Two months? That is a long time to be lost behind a filing cabinet.

LAWYER MAXWELL: I repeat, so what?

ALMIRA: Well, for one thing, it took me almost an hour to read the letters.

MISS CRABTREE: Almira, I don't think it's proper to read other people's mail.

ALMIRA: But I like to read. You can learn a lot by reading other people's mail. A person has to do something to amuse herself in this town. It's not exactly Paris, is it?

SHERIFF: Nope. But the climate's good for raising chickens.

ALMIRA: I think the cat must have knocked the letters behind the file cabinet.

MAYOR OATES: *(Irritated.)* Ah, shut up, Almira.

MIRANDA: *(Shocked.)* Husband!

ALMIRA: *(Shocked.)* Cousin!

MISS CRABTREE: *(Shocked.)* Mayor!

MAYOR OATES: There's no time for chitchat.

MIRANDA: There's always time for chitchat.

MAYOR OATES: Not with this letter in my hand.

MIRANDA: What's so special about that letter?

MAYOR OATES: *(Ominous tone.)* It's from Boston.

ALL: *(With hushed reverence.)* Boston.

MAYOR OATES: *(All business.)* Yes, Boston. Let me refresh your memories. Seven years ago I was hired by John Prescott of Boston, Massachusetts, to establish a town here in the Arizona desert.

VICTORIA: A town that one day could be the capital of the territory.

MAYOR OATES: I was to hire the best people available.

VICTORIA: And you did. *(Scattered applause.)*

MAYOR OATES: I didn't hire the best people available. I hired my

shirttail relatives! I hired you! (*ALL gasp.*)

MIRANDA: You've always been a generous man, Obadiah.

MAYOR OATES: Now I'm paying for it.

ALMIRA: You don't mean that, cousin.

MAYOR OATES: Do, too. I'm about to lose my dream. Another man might consider himself the "Bull of Wall Street," but I consider myself the "Bull of Tumbleweed."

HARRY: Bully for you.

OTHERS: Bully! Bully!

MAYOR OATES: On every stage there's been money for Tumbleweed that John Prescott has been sending to help develop the town. By this time, he expects a thriving community here.

DOC SNIPES: Hospital.

MISS CRABTREE: School.

SHERIFF: Jail.

MAYOR OATES: Civilization! The perfect town for the territorial capital. He doesn't know that most of the money has been squandered on your salaries and upkeep and incompetence.

MISS CRABTREE: Our salaries aren't all that much after you take a kickback.

MAYOR OATES: At least I've kept it in the family.

HARRY: John Prescott will never come to Tumbleweed. The man is over a hundred years old.

VICTORIA: The trip from Boston would kill him.

MAYOR OATES: No such luck. (*OTHERS gasp.*)

MIRANDA: Husband, that's no way to speak of our benefactor.

MAYOR OATES: This letter was written to me by cousin Horace.

VICTORIA: Ah, how nice. How is dear cousin Horace?

MAYOR OATES: Never mind about that. Listen. (*Reads from letter.*) "Dear Cousin Obadiah..." (*Aside.*) I hate that name.

MISS CRABTREE: The letter, the letter. Get on with it.

MAYOR OATES: "I want to let you know that John Prescott is sending an inspector your way --"

OTHERS: (*Horried.*) Inspector!

MAYOR OATES: (*Reading on.*) "He has instructions to investigate the progress at Tumbleweed."

DOC SNIPES: What progress?

OTHERS: (*Groaning.*) Ooooooooo.

MAYOR OATES: (*Continuing.*) "John Prescott wants to make sure his money is being well spent."

OTHERS: Ooooooooo.

MAYOR OATES: "As you know, he considers having Tumbleweed,

the territorial capital, a sound business investment."

OTHERS: Ooooooooo.

DOC SNIPES: What are we going to do, Obie?

VICTORIA: I feel faint. (*Fans herself with a hand.*)

MIRANDA: Faint at home, not here.

VICTORIA: Ooooooooo.

MAYOR OATES: (*On with the letter.*) "I must warn you that the inspector will try to pass himself off as an ordinary traveller. I suggest you take every precaution. I believe the inspector is actually an operative from the Pinkerton Detective Agency."

OTHERS: Ooooooooo.

GILROY: The Pinkerton --

ALMIRA: Detective --

MISS CRABTREE: Agency!

SHERIFF: Pinkerton agents are bloodhounds. Once they sink their teeth in, they never let go.

MAYOR OATES: This is the scary part. (*Reads.*) "He should be there any day now, unless he's already in Tumbleweed incognito." (*OTHERS exchange blank looks. They stare into audience.*)

HARRY: In what?

MAYOR OATES: Cognito.

VICTORIA: Sounds vulgar to me.

SHERIFF: It means the Pinkerton agent will come to Tumbleweed in disguise. We won't know who he is.

VICTORIA: What will happen when John Prescott gets the agent's report?

LAWYER MAXWELL: We might all end up behind bars.

OTHERS: Auuuuugh!

MAYOR OATES: We've got to make the town look as good as we can. Doc, who have you got in the hospital?

DOC SNIPES: No patients. Just some drifters and desert bums. I rent them a flop for two bits.

VICTORIA: What will happen when the agent discovers the local medical establishment is actually a horse doctor who was kicked out of Texas for incompetence?

DOC SNIPES: I resent that. I was never kicked out of Texas for incompetence. It was Arkansas.

MIRANDA: Please put clean sheets on the hospital beds. Sweep the floor. Last time I was there, the place disgusted me. It was like a kennel with all those yapping dogs running around.

DOC SNIPES: I like dogs.

MAYOR OATES: (*To SHERIFF.*) And you get rid of the chickens.

Rent some prisoners.
SHERIFF: Where will I find them?
DOC SNIPES: Use some of the tramps who've been sleeping at the hospital. They don't care where they bunk.
SHERIFF: Good idea, Doc. Thanks.
MAYOR OATES: Harry, prove you're a town planning engineer.
Get out some blueprints and scatter them over your desk.
HARRY: I know how to look busy.
MISS CRABTREE: What about the school? There's no roof and the pupils only show up when they feel like it.
VICTORIA: There's no roof because you use the money for yourself. The students only show up when they feel like it because they know you're practically illiterate.
MISS CRABTREE: You only say that because your daughters are dumbbells.
VICTORIA: How dare you?!
HARRY: You can't insult my girls!
LAWYER MAXWELL: Let's keep our eyes on the main road.
Fortunately, I've been writing up a proposal pointing out to one and all why Tumbleweed would make the ideal territorial capital. Since I don't have anything else to do, it helps to pass the time.
MAYOR OATES: Excellent. That will impress the snoop.
MIRANDA: Unless he finds out Lawyer Maxwell was disbarred from practice.
LAWYER MAXWELL: We must see that he doesn't find out.
VICTORIA: Hmmmm. I don't believe a convicted felon can legally hold the position of postmistress.
ALMIRA: (*Tenses.*) I presume you're referring to that misunderstanding with a forged check back in Ohio.
VICTORIA: Precisely.
ALMIRA: I admit I did a terrible thing. I was young and foolish and needed money. Unless someone tells him, the Pinkerton agent need never know.
MAYOR OATES: We must make a good impression on the fellow. The report he sends back to Boston must say everything in Tumbleweed is progressing nicely.
DOC SNIPES: Ha!
GILROY: Alack, alas, that won't be easy.
MAYOR OATES: Would you like to find yourself out of a job?
GILROY: There's always work for an undertaker.
MIRANDA: Husband, if that letter is two months old...
ALMIRA/MAYOR OATES: It is.



PRODUCTION NOTES

STAGE PROPERTIES: Small table with chair, optional stairs, registration desk/counter with: bell, inkwell, pen, paper, pencil. Optional rack for mail and room keys. Door to Oates' apartment, writing desk with chair, table with chairs (3), small sofa or settee. Optional swinging doors for dining room.

Additional stage dressing as/if desired: Chandelier, oil lamps, rug, wagon wheel, vase of flowers, spittoon, etc.

HAND PROPERTIES: BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One: playing cards and coffee mugs (set at LIGHTS UP); holster, pistol, battered hat, mail bag (GERT); tray, apron, dust cap, bowl with spoon (ELECTRA); jewelry, feather boa, deck of cards (LILY); letter (MAYOR OATES); holster, pistol, tin star (SHERIFF); blackboard pointer, book (MISS CRABTREE); glass of soda water (MIRANDA).

HAND PROPERTIES: BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two: strongbox (GERT); hanky (MRS. BAYWATER); list (WIDDER HASKINS); wallet with money bills (MAYOR OATES).

HAND PROPERTIES: BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One: blackboard pointer and book (MISS CRABTREE); large lollipops (OTTILLIE, ANTOINETTE).

HAND PROPERTIES: BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Two: straws (MAYOR OATES); money bills (HARRY); wallets with money bills (LAWYER MAXWELL, DOC SNIPES); hair ribbons (OTTILLIE, ANTOINETTE); money bills (ALMIRA); money bills and coins (MISS CRABTREE); dish and towel, luggage (ELECTRA); bandanna, floppy hat, pistols (LUTHER as the KANSAS CITY KID); suitcases (LILY, PROFESSOR); bandanna, hat (GILROY); blanket, pistols (SHERIFF); [optional] whistle (LUTHER).

COSTUMES: Anything special is specified in the script. Otherwise, it's the usual western comedy or melodrama wardrobe.

FLEXIBLE CASTING: Adjust to the needs of your production. For example, GERT could be switched to a male role (GUS), WIDDER HASKINS could become MR. HASKINS. Even the SHERIFF could be portrayed as a female since the town

positions are filled by relatives, not professionals. You might add a third Dobbs sister (MARIGOLD) by redistributing some of the lines. EXTRAS, if desired, can be used as more relatives and as merchants.

MISCELLANEOUS: If you don't wish to use the musical selections indicated for MIRANDA, use what you will. But nothing contemporary. If you're using stage drapes instead of scenery flats, the door to the Oates' apartment can be OFFSTAGE, UP LEFT. Some corny rinky-tink piano music would work nicely prior to each scene.

IMPORTANT: Always keep in mind that a FARCE MUST MOVE. The situations and the characters are played for broad humor. Forget about subtlety. Characters move on and off stage quickly and they speak loud and clear. No pauses between lines unless indicated.

By the end of the play, both cast and audience should feel a bit exhausted. Once the absurd premise is established (a Medicine Show huckster is mistaken for an investigator from Boston), the fast pacing never lets up.

If you have access to a bear costume, you can get a big laugh by having the bear come out at curtain call and hug the PROFESSOR. He might carry a placard identifying himself: WALLACE.



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