CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In Order of Appearance)

WIDOW ROOTSTOCK ..................widowed landowner 57
VIOLET ROOTSTOCK ..................her eldest daughter 65
SHIRLEY ROOTSTOCK ................her middle daughter 32
PENELOPE “PENNY” ROOTSTOCK ..........her youngest daughter 7
BIDDY .....................................her accident-prone maid 18
DEWEY DAUNTLEY .....................distracted deputy 36
FOURBERIE BLACKGUARD ..........dastardly scoundrel 56
SIDNEY LARK .......................Blackguard’s sidekick 28

TIME
Three days in summer sometime between 1865 and 1873.

PLACE
The home of the Widow Rootstock and her daughters, a nearby small town and the surrounding mountainous countryside in western Arizona.

SCENE SYNOPSIS
Scene One:  The parlor of the Rootstock home, late one evening.
Scene Two:  The Rootstock home, the next morning.
Scene Three:  The surrounding mountains, the same morning.
Scene Four:  The Rootstock home, the same morning.
Scene Five:  The nearby town, the following morning.
Scene Six:  A different spot in the surrounding mountains, later that day.
Scene Seven:  The nearby town, later that day.
Scene Eight:  The Rootstock home, later that day.
SET DESIGN
The main stage is the parlor of the Rootstock home. It has a painted backdrop UP CENTER which should include a fireplace with a mantle. The only required furnishings are two hardback chairs. The RIGHT EXIT leads to the front door, and the LEFT EXIT leads to bedrooms and the back door. The room may also have windows, lamps, shelves, tables, etc. as desired.

The mountain and town scenes can be played in front of the curtain or arranged DOWNSTAGE of the Rootstock home.

The mountain setting in Scene Three requires at least three large “rocks.” (These can be foam, papier-mâché, etc. since they do not have to be weight bearing.) A tree stump is needed for Scene Six. A painted mountain backdrop would be a nice added touch for these outdoor scenes.

The town setting can be as simple as a painted backdrop showing the main street and a few stores.
A PENNY SAVED

Scene One

LIGHTS UP: The parlor of the Rootstock home, late one evening. A sewing basket sits near the fireplace UP CENTER. WIDOW and VIOLET sit in the two hardback chairs CENTER, sewing. PENNY is stretched out on the floor with a slate and chalk, doing math problems. SHIRLEY sits nearby and reads.

VIOLET: Mother, this Mr. Blackguard who is coming tomorrow. What did his letter say again?

WIDOW: (Takes a letter from her apron pocket and hands it to VIOLET.) Here, my dear. You read it. My eyes are not so good in this dim light.

VIOLET: (Reads as SHIRLEY moves to look over her shoulder.) “My dear Mrs. Rootstock. Although we have never met, I was well acquainted with your husband, the late Joskin Rootstock. You have my sincere condolences on your loss. Although the timing may seem inappropriate to you, unfortunate circumstances force my hand. I must come to see you on matters of business that were arranged with your husband. I shall be arriving at eleven o’clock on, etcetera, etcetera.” (Looks up.) I don’t see what his purpose is in coming here.

SHIRLEY: What matters of business did Father ever have besides this ranch?

WIDOW: (Puts her sewing in the basket and takes the letter from VIOLET.) I don’t know, girls, but we’ll find out tomorrow. (To PENNY.) Have you finished your sums, Penny?

PENNY: (Takes the slate to WIDOW, who checks it.) Yes, Mama.

WIDOW: Very good, dear. You run along to bed now. Shirley, will you take her, please?

SHIRLEY: Yes, ma’am. I’ll be turning in myself. Goodnight. (PENNY and SHIRLEY kiss WIDOW. PENNY EXITS LEFT with the slate and chalk, followed by SHIRLEY with her book. WIDOW rises and moves DOWN LEFT, sighing deeply.)

VIOLET: (Puts her sewing in the basket, rises and moves DOWN CENTER.) What’s wrong, Mother?

WIDOW: Violet, I’m worried. I don’t like the sound of this letter.

VIOLET: But it doesn’t say anything.

WIDOW: That’s what bothers me. If I had some clue to what Mr. Blackguard was after, I’d be prepared to deal with him. It’s not knowing that makes me uneasy.

BIDDY: (ENTERS RIGHT. To WIDOW.) Pardon me, ma’am. (To VIOLET.) Miss, that nice young man, Mr. Dauntley, is here.
VIOLET: Not now, Biddy.

WIDOW: You send him on in, Biddy. (BIDDY EXITS RIGHT.)

VIOLET: Mother!

WIDOW: Don’t you fret. (Puts the letter in her pocket.) I’ll just say hello and then I’ll say goodnight. (DEWEY ENTERS RIGHT followed by BIDDY. BIDDY makes eyes at DEWEY and nearly swoons, but DEWEY doesn’t notice.)

DEWEY: (Tips his hat.) Howdy, ma’am. Miss Violet. I know it’s a might bit late but I was on my way back from town and I saw the light on. I hope nothing’s wrong.

WIDOW: No, Dewey. Everything is fine. It was very kind of you to stop. But it is getting late for older folks like me, so I’ll just say goodnight. You young’uns stay up as long as you like.

VIOLET: (Kisses WIDOW.) Goodnight, Mother. (WIDOW pushes VIOLET CENTER, closer to DEWEY.)

DEWEY: Goodnight, Mrs. Rootstock.

WIDOW: Say goodnight, Biddy.

BIDDY: (Dreamy as she thinks of DEWEY.) Goodnight, Biddy.

WIDOW: Biddy!

BIDDY: (Startled and a bit embarrassed.) I mean, goodnight, Mrs. Rootstock.

WIDOW: Biddy, it’s time for you to go to bed.

BIDDY: (Surprised.) But I ain’t an older folk, like you. I’m a young’un.

WIDOW: (Sharp.) Biddy!

BIDDY: (Dejected.) Yes, ma’am. Goodnight, Miss Violet. (Bright, sweet.) Goodnight, Mr. Dauntley. (EXITS LEFT, watching DEWEY all the way. He is surprised but gazes back as she goes. WIDOW EXITS LEFT with one last sharp glance at DEWEY and VIOLET.)

DEWEY: (Recovers his attention.) Miss Violet, your mother looked mighty worried in spite of what she said. (Sincere.) You know I’d do anything to help.

VIOLET: She is worried. She received a letter from a Mr. Blackguard about some business he had with Father. He’s coming here tomorrow.

DEWEY: Then I shall be here tomorrow as well. Goodnight, Miss Violet. (Tips his hat and EXITS RIGHT. VIOLET sighs heavily, then EXITS LEFT with the sewing basket.)

End of Scene One
Scene Two

1 LIGHTS UP: The parlor of the Rootstock home the next morning. VIOLET paces RIGHT. WIDOW sits in one of the chairs and SHIRLEY stands behind her. PENNY sits on the floor CENTER.

VIOLET: Where is Dewey? He said he’d come by.

SHIRLEY: Maybe there’s trouble in town. (Aside.) He is the hero after all.

VIOLET: He’s supposed to be here, saving us.

SHIRLEY: He will. You just wait. You’ll see.

VIOLET: For all our sakes, I hope so. (SOUND EFFECT: KNOCK AT THE DOOR.)

SHIRLEY: It must be him.

VIOLET: Shall I let him in?

WIDOW: Please, dear. (VIOLET EXITS RIGHT. BLACKGUARD ENTERS RIGHT, followed by VIOLET. BLACKGUARD moves CENTER to WIDOW, who rises.)

BLACKGUARD: (Bows.) Good morning, madam. I am Fourberie Blackguard. You are Mrs. Rootstock, I believe.

WIDOW: Yes. (BLACKGUARD takes her offered hand.)

BLACKGUARD: (Points to the girls.) And these lovely ladies?

WIDOW: Are my daughters. (BLACKGUARD bows to each one as they are introduced.) Violet. Shirley. And Penelope. (PENNY makes a face at her name. WIDOW laughs.) Or Penny, as she is more commonly called.

BLACKGUARD: Ah, but there is nothing common about her, I’ll wager. Like her namesake, she’s bright and shiny. (Tries to pinch PENNY’S cheek. She growls and snaps at him. He jumps back startled, then angry.)

VIOLET: (Aside.) And like a penny, worth a lot more than people give her credit for.

BLACKGUARD: That brings me to the reason for my visit, Mrs. Rootstock. Several years ago, Mr. Joskin Rootstock, your late husband, (Plous.) God rest his soul, (Businesslike again.) signed a contract with me in which I was to loan him a sum of money for no longer than a period of five years. By the end of those five years, he promised to pay back the loan along with a small interest charge. If he failed to do so, he would forfeit certain property to me. The five years are up today, madam. (Hands WIDOW the contract. She reads it, then sinks into the LEFT chair, fanning herself.)

VIOLET: (Anxious.) How much is it, Mother? (WIDOW, unable to speak, hands the contract to SHIRLEY.)

SHIRLEY: (Incredulous.) Five thousand six hundred thirty seven dollars?!
BLACKGUARD: And nineteen cents.

WIDOW: We don’t have that much money. (SHIRLEY hands the contract back to WIDOW.) We’re poor folk, struggling just to put food on our table. (Aside to the girls.) Look skinny and pitiful, girls.

BLACKGUARD: You have my sympathy, madam. You also, at this moment, have my money and I want it back! Paid in full, down to the last penny.

VIOLET: We can’t give you five thousand dollars today.

SHIRLEY: Or any other day.

BLACKGUARD: Then you must hand over the deed to certain property put up as collateral.

WIDOW: We don’t have any property except this ranch.

BLACKGUARD: Exactly.

WIDOW: You mean…?

BLACKGUARD: Precisely. Now, you will go get the deed to this ranch and sign it over to me.

SHIRLEY: (Kneels by WIDOW’S RIGHT.) Mother, you can’t do that!

VIOLET: Mother, this is all Father left us!

WIDOW: Where are we to go once you’ve taken our home?

BLACKGUARD: Fortunately, that is not my concern.

SHIRLEY: Where have you no pity? Consider the children.

BLACKGUARD: (Points to PENNY.) That child tried to bite me! The deed, please, ma’am. (WIDOW gets up, looks at the girls sadly, then EXITS LEFT. BLACKGUARD moves DOWN CENTER, pleased with himself.

VIOLET motions to SHIRLEY and PENNY. They huddle UPSTAGE, obviously planning something. Aside.) That poor old widow has no idea what she’s giving up. My plan to take the property is finally complete. It’s as good as mine!

WIDOW: (ENTERS LEFT carrying a box. She opens it, places the contract in the box and slowly removes the deed, then turns to face BLACKGUARD, who has moved UP CENTER.) Here it is, Mr. Blackguard. (Hands the deed toward BLACKGUARD. As he is about to take it, SHIRLEY steps between them, grabs the deed and tosses it to VIOLET, who is moving DOWN LEFT.)

VIOLET: (Gives the deed to PENNY and shoves her toward the LEFT EXIT.) Run, Penny! Take this to the secret place and stay there until Shirley or I come for you! (WIDOW faints while SHIRLEY blocks BLACKGUARD, who is trying to get to PENNY and VIOLET.)

BLACKGUARD: (Shoves SHIRLEY out of the way as PENNY dashes OUT.) Come back here with that! (Lunges for PENNY, but stumbles over WIDOW.) Ooof!
WIDOW:  (Faint, from the floor.) Water. I think I need some water. (Faints again. SHIRLEY EXITS LEFT to get water. BLACKGUARD picks himself up and straightens his suit, then angrily advances on VIOLET.)

BLACKGUARD:  Where did she go with that deed?

VIOLET:  You’ll never find her, and you'll never get that deed!

BLACKGUARD:  (Menacing.) If you don’t give me the deed to this ranch, I’ll tie you to the railroad tracks!

VIOLET:  (Covers her face with her hands.) You wouldn’t!

BLACKGUARD:  I would!

VIOLET:  Oh, where is Dewey? (BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene Two

Scene Three

LIGHTS UP:  In the surrounding mountains near the Rootstock home. At least three large rocks are DOWN CENTER. BIDDY sits with her foot caught between two rocks. A snake is poised on top of another rock, ready to strike. (SEE PRODUCTION NOTES.) A full berry basket sits on the ground to the RIGHT of the rocks.

BIDDY:  (Frantically struggles to free her foot.) Help! Oh, help! (To the snake.) You stay back now, you hear. I don’t want you coming any closer. (Screams.) Oh, he-e-e-elp! HELP!

DEWEY:  (ENTERS RIGHT.) Good day, Miss Biddy. I thought I heard a familiar scream up here. I see you've been out berry picking. (Takes a few berries from the basket and eats as BIDDY motions wildly toward the snake.) They're mighty sweet this year. Ought to make some good jam. I hear that nobody gets into jams the way you do. Tell me, Miss Biddy, what makes your jam so good?

BIDDY:  Snake!

DEWEY:  (Hurt.) Aw, Miss Biddy. That ain’t a very nice thing to call a feller. I wasn’t trying to steal your recipe.

BIDDY:  There’s a snake!

DEWEY:  Oh, yeah. I heard about that Mr. Blackguard. I’m on my way down to the ranch now. Are you heading in that direction pretty soon?

BIDDY:  (Frantic.) I’m not going anywhere with this rock on my foot! And both of us will be buried under a pile of rocks if that snake gets any closer!

DEWEY:  (Looks around, finally sees the snake, slowly and calmly pulls his gun and shoots the snake, then throws it OFF RIGHT. He removes the rock from BIDDY’S foot, helps her to her feet and picks up the basket.) Miss Biddy, I think I’d better take you home. (BIDDY sighs happily as she and DEWEY EXIT LEFT. FADE to BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene Three
Scene Four

LIGHTS UP: The Rootstock home, continuing the action from the end of Scene Two. BLACKGUARD, VIOLET and WIDOW resume their positions.

BLACKGUARD: Now where was I?

VIOLET: Railroad tracks.

5 BLACKGUARD: Ah, yes. Thank you. (Menacing.) If you don’t give me the deed to this ranch, I’ll tie you to the railroad tracks. A train will start coming. (VIOLET covers her eyes and begins to shake.) That’s right. Quiver in those size… Just how big are your feet? (VIOLET kicks up a heel to show him.) Shake in your shoes. Think of that speeding steam engine. Feel the vibrating rails. Hear that mournful whistle. (VIOLET laughs.) What’s so funny?

VIOLET: (Moves CENTER.) The nearest railroad track is fifty miles from here! And if you think I’m going to take a three day journey through some of the toughest terrain this side of the Rockies and willingly throw myself across those rails, you’d better think again.

BLACKGUARD: (Stutters.) Uh. Ummm.

VIOLET: (Moves UPSTAGE and takes the contract out of the deed box.) And besides, the next train through these parts isn’t due until a week from Thursday. So you’d best just pack up your papers and head out! (Shoves the contract into BLACKGUARD’S chest.)

BLACKGUARD: (ReCOVERS.) You haven’t heard the last from me. (EXITS RIGHT. SHIRLEY ENTERS LEFT with a glass of water.)

SHIRLEY: Where is he?

VIOLET: He’s gone. At least for now. I wish I knew how to stop him.

SHIRLEY: (Aside.) I thought that was the hero’s job. (To VIOLET.) Where is Dewey anyway?

DEWEY: (ENTERS LEFT as BIDDY hobbles IN behind him. He helps her to a chair.) Sorry I’m late, Miss Violet. I was coming down the pass when I heard someone holler. I reined in my horse and jumped down. (Shades his eyes with his hand and looks in each direction, starting RIGHT. VIOLET, SHIRLEY and BIDDY imitate each of DEWEY’S actions.) I looked off to the west. Nothing. I looked off to the east. Nothing. I looked off to the north. Nothing. I looked off to the south. (FREEZES.)

SHIRLEY: (Sarcastic.) Let me guess. Nothing.

DEWEY: (ReACTS with surprise.) Oh, no. There was Miss Biddy with her foot caught under a rock. And a rattlesnake ready to strike. But I took care of that ol’ snake and brought Miss Biddy home.

BIDDY: He was wonderful.

SHIRLEY: It’s good to know your talents as a hero aren’t being wasted. (Aside.) Even though they haven’t done us any good.
DEWEY: Say, where is that Blackguard fellow anyway?
VIOLET: He’s gone.
DEWEY: Then there is nothing to worry about?
SHIRLEY: Oh, there is plenty to worry about.
VIOLET: He claims Father owed him over five thousand dollars. Five thousand six hundred thirty seven dollars to be exact.
BLACKGUARD: (Peeks ON from RIGHT. Aside.) And nineteen cents to be exactly exact! (OFF again.)
VIOLET: And if we can’t pay it today, he demands the deed to this ranch.
BIDDY: (Frantic.) The deed to the ranch? Where will we go? What will we do? How will we live? Ohhhhh.
DEWEY: (Pats her shoulder.) Be strong, Miss Biddy. All is not lost yet. I hope?
VIOLET: He doesn’t have the deed. Penny has it hidden in a secret place.
DEWEY: Then all is well.
WIDOW: (Suddenly wakes. Aside.) Except for their mother. (To SHIRLEY.) Water! (EVERYONE jumps, startled. DEWEY and VIOLET help WIDOW to her feet. SHIRLEY gives her the water, then VIOLET and SHIRLEY help WIDOW OFF LEFT as DEWEY follows, helping BIDDY. FADE to BLACKOUT.)
End of Scene Four

Scene Five
LIGHTS UP: The nearby town the following morning. BLACKGUARD and SIDNEY ENTER RIGHT and cross DOWN CENTER.
SIDNEY: So your little scheme didn’t work?
BLACKGUARD: It would have if it hadn’t been for that confounded girl.
SIDNEY: The little one?
BLACKGUARD: Her too, but I meant Miss Violet.
SIDNEY: (Aside.) Nothing shrinking about her, is there? (To BLACKGUARD.) What are you going to do now?
BLACKGUARD: I’ve got to get her to tell me where that brat is hiding with the deed.
SIDNEY: Why don’t you just ask the Widow to tell her daughters to bring it back. They’re good girls. They’ll do what she tells them to do.
BLACKGUARD: No, no. That’s too… too...
SIDNEY: Too honest?
BLACKGUARD: Too direct. This calls for some flanking maneuvers. Come along, Sidney. I’ll need your help with this. (EXITS LEFT.)

End of Script Sample
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE, Scene One: two hardback chairs, sewing basket.

BROUGHT ON, Scene One:
  Sewing materials (WIDOW, VIOLET)
  Slate, chalk (PENNY)
  Book (SHIRLEY)
  Letter (WIDOW)

BROUGHT ON, Scene Two:
  Contract (BLACKGUARD)
  Box with deed (WIDOW)

ONSTAGE, Scene Three: Three or more rocks (can be foam, papier-mâché, etc. since they do not have to be weight bearing), snake, basket of berries.

BROUGHT ON, Scene Three:
  Gun (DEWEY)

ONSTAGE, Scene Four: Same as Scene One with the addition of the box with deed.

BROUGHT ON, Scene Four:
  Glass of water (SHIRLEY)

BROUGHT ON, Scene Five:
  Covered shopping basket (BIDDY)
  Stick or cutout horse (CREW)
  Covered basket (SHIRLEY)

ONSTAGE, Scene Six: tree stump.

BROUGHT ON, Scene Seven:
  Full shopping basket (WIDOW)
  Crosscut saw, gun (DEWEY)

BROUGHT ON, Scene Eight:
  Bomb with fuse, rope, matches (BLACKGUARD)
  Rag, two bottles, two pickaxes (VIOLET)
  Gun, gold nugget (DEWEY)
  Gold nugget (PENNY, SIDNEY, BIDDY)
  Judge’s robe (SHIRLEY)

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

WIDOW ROOTSTOCK is in mourning and wears a black or dark dress with no ornamentation except a sheriff’s badge hidden under a collar or in a pocket in Scene Eight. She wears an apron in Scene One. She wears a bonnet in town and carries a handbag. She wears a judge’s robe in Scene Eight.
VIOLET, SHIRLEY and PENNY wear bright, printed dresses. VIOLET and SHIRLEY may wear bonnets (and shawls, if desired) in town and in the mountains. PENNY wears a ribbon or bow in her hair.

BIDDY wears a plain dress or plain skirt and white blouse with an apron. When she goes to town, the apron is replaced by a bonnet and shawl.

SIDNEY wears a stylish dress and matching hat, possibly with a cape. DEWEY wears jeans, a work (possibly flannel) shirt, a vest if desired and a hat that is too small. He carries a gun in a holster and wears a badge.

BLACKGUARD wears black tails with a vest and bow tie, a fancy shirt and top hat. He should have a mustache and may carry a cane.

NOTES ON THE SNAKE AND THE HORSE
The snake can be a simple rubber snake positioned on a rock so that it appears to be threatening to strike. As Biddy's foot is stuck beneath the fallen rock, she could be positioned down low on the ground and the snake up higher, peeking over from the back side of the rock menacingly. Alternatively, the snake could be on a stick, controlled from below or behind by a crew member hidden behind a rock.

Besides a dramatic sound effect of an out-of-control horse, have fun creating this charging stallion. Don't be afraid to have a crew member race across the stage on a stick horse or slide a cutout horse across a clothesline stretched across the stage.

SOUND EFFECTS
Door knock, horse's hooves at full speed, explosion, chicken squawks.
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

We encourage you to read the entire script before making your final decision.

You may order a paper preview copy or gain instant access to the complete script online through our E-view program. We invite you to learn more and create an account at www.pioneerdrama.com/E-view.

Thank you for your interest in our plays and musicals. If you’d like advice on other plays or musicals to read, our customer service representatives are happy to assist you when you call 800.333.7262 during normal business hours.

www.pioneerdrama.com
800.333.7262
Outside of North America 303.779.4035
Fax 303.779.4315
PO Box 4267
Englewood, CO 80155-4267

We’re here to help!