You Can’t Be Too Careful

By CAROLYN LANE

© Copyright 1992, by Pioneer Drama Service, Inc.

PERFORMANCE LICENSE

The amateur acting rights to this play are controlled exclusively by PIONEER DRAMA SERVICE, INC., P.O. Box 4267, Englewood, Colorado 80155, without whose permission no performance, reading or presentation of any kind may be given. On all programs and advertising this notice must appear: “Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., Englewood, Colorado.”

COPYING OR REPRODUCING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK IN ANY MANNER IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW.

All other rights in this play, including those of professional production, radio broadcasting and motion picture rights, are controlled by Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., to whom all inquiries should be addressed.
YOU CAN’T BE TOO CAREFUL
A Comedy in One Act

By
CAROLYN LANE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene One—Early afternoon
Scene Two—Half an hour later

The action takes place in the living room of a small suburban home.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The Bridge Club:

EDNA
MADGE
ALICE
HARRIET

The Visitors:

CHARLIE
JONESIE
FRANCINE
METER READER*
LOUIE*
POLICE OFFICER*

Offstage Voice:

RADIO ANNOUNCER*

* If desired, these four roles can all be played by a single actor.
YOU CAN’T BE TOO CAREFUL

Scene One

SETTING: The traditionally decorated living room of a small suburban home. UPSTAGE CENTER is a bay window, cluttered with plants, some hanging, some standing on the sill. Built in, beneath the window, is a window seat. To the right of the bay window is the front door; to the left, in a corner, a large standing plant. Along the wall at LEFT: UPSTAGE a television set, CENTER STAGE a door or opening which leads into the dining room and kitchen, DOWNSTAGE a small chair and end table with drawers, or small closed cabinet. STAGE RIGHT is a sofa and coffee table. CENTER STAGE is a card table and four chairs.

AT RISE: EDNA, MADGE and ALICE are seated at the card table, MADGE facing the audience, EDNA in the chair at RIGHT, opposite ALICE at LEFT. HARRIET, the hostess, peeks in from the dining room.

HARRIET: Did we make it?

MADGE: (Triumphantly laying down last card in her hand, gathering up last trick.) Made it! Alice and Edna didn’t have a thing! (Busily works over score pad.)

HARRIET: Good for you, Madge. Just let me get the leftovers into the refrigerator and I’ll be right there. Go ahead and deal. (Disappears.)

MADGE: Take your time, Harriet. I, for one, could use a bit of a stretch after that marvelous lunch. Oh, wasn’t that chocolate chiffon cake a real splurge? (Rises, begins to stretch as she paces about.) One two, three, and—stretch! One, two, three and — (Reaches bay window, peers out through the plants.) —who’s that, I wonder? (Calling toward dining room.) Harriet! Are you expecting someone? There’s this man out front looking up at the house. He’s sort of lurking behind a bush.

ALICE: Lurking? Oh dear, lurking is not good. Check to see that the door is locked, Madge. You can’t be too careful these days, that’s what I always say.

HARRIET: (Hurries in from the dining room.) Don’t be silly, Alice. It’s just the television man. I really apologize for having him on bridge day, girls, but it’s a real emergency. The fool
thing just suddenly went blank last night, and I haven't been able to get another thing out of it.

MADGE: Oh, that is an emergency, Harriet. I'll absolutely die if I can't find out what happens next on “Search for Happiness.”

EDNA: Oh, me too! Today is the day that cute young doctor is going to remove the bandages, and I can't wait to find out if Laura is ever going to see again. And right after that comes “World of Shadows.”

HARRIET: Don’t I know it! And those awful crooks have that poor girl locked up in a closet. What do you suppose they're going to do to her?

MADGE: We'll never know if you don't let the man in.

ALICE: Wait, Harriet! Just be sure it really is the television man. “Streets of crime are everywhere!” Isn't that what they say on the show?

EDNA: That’s what they say. But for goodness sake, Alice, they don’t mean nice streets, like this one. I mean, what sort of criminal would bother with little old Maple Avenue? Real criminals like spooky streets with dark alleys and mysterious shadows and things. Anybody knows that. And anyway, they always work at night, don’t they?

ALICE: Just be sure, Harriet. Take a peek out the window before you open the door. You just never know. After all, television repairmen don’t lurk. They just come right up to the door.

HARRIET: All right, Alice, if it will make you feel better. (Moves to window, beside MADGE, peers out.) Looks perfectly decent to me. And he’s not lurking anymore. He’s coming right up the walk. Funny, though. I don’t see a truck.

ALICE: Is he carrying a tool kit?

MADGE: Looks more like a sample case to me. And what’s that thing around his neck?

HARRIET: A camera, I’d say. What on earth—?

ALICE: Maybe it’s a gun!

EDNA: Oh, Alice, that's plain silly. If he had a gun, he’d be hiding it in his pocket, not dangling it around his neck! Probably it’s a salesman—those aluminum siding people never give up—
and he wants to take pictures of the house in case he makes a sale.

HARRIET: Well, he won’t make any sale here, I’ll tell you that. Go ahead and deal, girls. I’ll be rid of him in no time.

MADGE: (Moves back to the table.) Good. We’re way ahead, Harriet. I can’t wait to get on with the game.

EDNA: Oh, I wish it were the television man! I can’t tell you how worried I am about Laura. She looked just awful yesterday. She could even die! They do that sometimes when they want to start a new story.

HARRIET: I’ll give the man another call, Edna, don’t you worry about a thing. Ace TV is very reliable, never failed me yet. I’ll just get rid of this pest first. (Opens the door to reveal CHARLIE, a neatly dressed young man with a beard.) Yes?

CHARLIE: Beg your pardon, ma’am. I’m with “Charming Homes Magazine,” and—

HARRIET: (Firmly, beginning to close the door.) Sorry. We already have that one.

CHARLIE: (Puts a foot in the door.) Oh, hey listen, ma’am, I’m no salesman, no sirree, nothing like that. See this here camera? I’m a photographer, that’s what I am, just out doing a job. Just wanted permission to take a few shots of this here nifty garden of yours, that’s all.

HARRIET: What for?

CHARLIE: Well, for the magazine, if it would be okay.

HARRIET: (Stunned.) For “Charming Homes”?

CHARLIE: You got it. The thing is, ma’am, you don’t hardly find gardens like this no more, not the real old-fashioned kind with rosebushes and stuff. We just happened to spot it from the road, and—

HARRIET: Oh! “Charming Homes!” Did you hear that, girls? My garden in a real magazine! Imagine! Wouldn’t Arthur be thrilled?

MADGE: Oh Harriet, I always said your garden was the nicest one in town!
EDNA: Will there be an interview? Oh, I’d love to listen in on a real interview for a real magazine!

CHARLIE: Sure thing. Gotta be a story to go along with the pictures, don’t there? But of course I don’t do that stuff myself. There’s this here writer fella along with me, out in the car, and he’s—

HARRIET: I don’t see any car.

CHARLIE: Well, it’s way down the block, see. My friend Jonesie—er... Mr. Jones—wanted to get a sort of feel for the neighborhood generally. Maybe line up a few distance shots. Just wanted me to stop in for permission while he’s scouting around. Can I tell him it’s okay?

HARRIET: *(Without hesitation.)* Yes! Oh, yes!

ALICE: But, Harriet, shouldn’t you... um... ask for some sort of identification or something?

CHARLIE: *(Moves inside.)* You’re absolutely right, lady, absolutely. Women alone can’t be too careful these days, that’s what I always say. I’ve got all the identification you need right in this here case. *(Holds up case for all to see, then balances it awkwardly on his knee, appears to struggle with the catch.)* If you’ll just let me—

HARRIET: Oh, don’t bother with that, young man. I can see that your case says “Charming Homes, Inc.” right on the outside. I’m sure everything is in order. Just get your associate, and then we’ll—

ALICE: Harriet!

HARRIET: And then we’ll get started. *(To CHARLIE.)* Oh, just wait till I call Arthur! He’s my husband, you see, and—

CHARLIE: *(Suddenly looking worried.)* He here?

HARRIET: No. He’s at the office. But I’m sure he’d drop everything and come right home if—

CHARLIE: No, no. Geez, don’t bother him at work. This won’t take long at all, and I’m sure you can give us all the stuff we need. I’ll just give Mr. Jones a yell, and then we’ll get right to it. Okay?

HARRIET: *(Gives a friendly little wave as CHARLIE EXITS.)*
Wonderful! Just give me a minute or two to tidy things up. Oh, I do wish Arthur had finished weeding the perennial bed last weekend. If he’d only known! (Closes the door.) Oh, girls, isn’t this exciting? (Immediately, HARRIET begins bustling about, fussing with the plants, straightening the room. ALICE rises to help. EDNA and MADGE remain at the table, picking up pocketbooks at the sides of their chairs, hastily fixing their faces, tidying their hair.)

ALICE: I don’t know, Harriet. There’s something fishy about that young man, if you ask me. I mean, does somebody who talks about “rosebushes and stuff” sound like a representative of “Charming Homes”? I ask you!

HARRIET: Well, for goodness sake, Alice, he’s a photographer, not a botanist! He doesn’t have to know anything about gardens. After all, he’s not going to write the story. He said so.

ALICE: I know. He’s brought along (With emphasis.) “this here writer fella.”

MADGE: (Paces aimlessly about the room, taking an occasional peek out of the window.) Maybe you ought to call up the magazine, Harriet. Just to be sure. You could ask—

HARRIET: I could ask what? I don’t know his name.

MADGE: But he called his associate Mr. Jones. You could ask about him.

ALICE: (Ominously.) Jones! A made up name if I ever heard one! Why can’t they ever think up anything more interesting? And I’ll bet the photographer’s name is Smith!

HARRIET: Oh, Alice, you’re such a worrier! Lots of people are named Jones, and you know it.

ALICE: (Sits down once more at the table.) Bet his first name is John!

HARRIET: Alice!

ALICE: Well, I just can’t help it, Harriet. I keep thinking about that poor girl in the closet. If only she hadn’t opened the door —

EDNA: Oh, she’ll be all right, I’m sure of it. Those crooks are pretty cute, if you ask me, and I’ll bet you anything she falls in love with the tall one. That’s the one I’d pick. And then she’ll reform him. Don’t you think so, Madge?
MADGE: Well, he’ll have to serve his time, of course, but she’ll make him turn himself in, and then—

EDNA: She’ll wait for him! They always do.

ALICE: Edna, “World of Shadows” is television. This is real life. And in real life, crooks are not cute. They’re plain mean.

EDNA: Only because people are mean to them. They have terrible childhoods, that’s the thing, but a little kindness in later life can do wonders, that’s what they say. You just—

ALICE: Well, I for one, have no intention of being kind to any crooks, cute or otherwise, and I really think Harriet ought to —

HARRIET: (Exasperated.) Will you all stop talking about crooks? This nice, polite young man is from “Charming Homes” magazine. It said so right on that case. And I’m going to be interviewed, not locked in a closet! If you all want to sneak out the back door and run for the police, go right ahead, but I’m—

EDNA: Oh, not me! I wouldn’t miss this for anything. A real interview!

ALICE: (Darkly.) Or a real robbery!

HARRIET: (Firmly.) Interview! And oh, I’ve got a million things to do. (Continuing to fuss over her plants.) Do you suppose they’d be interested in the African violets I’ve got in the dining room? Not everybody can get those to bloom, you know, and mine are—

ALICE: You mean you’re going to let them in?

HARRIET: Well, they can’t very well conduct an interview through a closed door, can they? And maybe they would like to see my African violets. Maybe they’ll even photograph me! I’ll just dash upstairs and fix my hair. It’s an absolute mess, and— (Doorbell RINGS.) Oh, oh, they’re here! (Peeks out window.)

EDNA: Oh, I can’t wait! What does the other one look like?

MADGE: Like a writer?

HARRIET: I don’t know. What are writers supposed to look like?

EDNA: Oh, sort of tweedy and rumpled, I think, with elbow patches and horn-rimmed glasses. Like that reporter on “World of Shadows.” You know, the one who wants to write a
novel? Definitely cute, but intellectual looking. Maybe with a pipe. Is this one smoking a pipe?

HARRIET: No. And I wouldn’t say he looks exactly intellectual, either. Come take a look, Madge.

MADGE: *(Hurries to window, peeks out.)* Well... he’s rumpled, I’ll say that.

EDNA: Good. Writers are like that. You know, everything for art. They don’t care what they look like. Rumpled is good.

ALICE: *(Again darkly.)* How rumpled?

HARRIET: *(Exasperated.)* Well, he doesn’t look as though he’s just been in a gunfight, if that’s what you mean. Just looks as though he got dressed in a hurry, put on any old thing. And he’s got this beard, longish hair—

EDNA: Perfect! Sounds like that struggling young playwright Laura used to go around with before she met the doctor. Oh, I can’t wait to meet a real writer! I wonder if he’s working on a novel? Wouldn’t that be exciting? Let them in, Harriet, let them in.

HARRIET: Just see how they’re studying all my hanging plants, Madge! Oh, I just know they’ll love my African violets! *(Eagerly opens the door to CHARLIE and JONESIE.)* Well, hello again, Mr... uh...

CHARLIE: Smith. Charlie Smith. And this here is my associate, John Jones.

ALICE: I knew it! Did I tell you, Harriet, did I tell you?

HARRIET: *(Ignoring her.)* Well, come right in, Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones. I see you’ve been admiring my window arrangement. I do hope you noticed my striped peperomia? Quite unusual, I think.

CHARLIE: Oh yes, ma’am, that was the very first thing we spotted, wasn’t it, Mr. Jones?

JONESIE: *(With enthusiasm.)* Yeah. Sure was, boss. Really a nifty one.

HARRIET: Well then, just wait till you see my dieffenbachia! Or would you prefer to photograph the outside first? I’ll be glad to come out and --
CHARLIE: No, no. I really think them there plants in the window would be the best place to start. We do inside stuff too, you know. Right, Mr. Jones?

JONESIE: Right. Matter of fact, inside stuff is our best thing.

HARRIET: Then do come in, gentlemen. My friends and I were just playing a little bridge, so please excuse the clutter. We’d be glad to put away the table if you’d like to photograph the rooms generally.

CHARLIE: (As he and JONESIE ENTER.) Don’t move nothing, ma’am, not a muscle.

HARRIET: Not a what?

CHARLIE: (Closes and locks the door.) Muscle. Don’t move nothing, lady. (Suddenly fumbles in camera case, withdraws a gun, points it at HARRIET and MADGE.) Just sit. The both of yez.

ALICE: (As MADGE hurriedly returns to her place at the table, HARRIET sinks to the window seat, looks frantically out the window, apparently searching for help.) I told you! Harriet, I told you it was a gun! I’ve watched “World of Shadows” for ten years. I know these things!

EDNA: (Dazed, but interested.) Oh, I think that’s clever, hiding a gun in a camera case. How did you ever guess, Alice?

JONESIE: (Proudly.) That was my idea. (Moves about the room, looking about appreciatively.) Say, this is a real nice dump. We really picked a good one.

HARRIET: (Scared to pieces.) A good—what?

JONESIE: A good dump. Like I said.

CHARLIE: (Waggles the gun at HARRIET.) Back to the table, lady. I want yez all to start playing and pretend like we’re not here.

HARRIET: (Not wanting to leave the window.) Well, but—I happen to be dummy right now.

CHARLIE: Then smarten up. Back to the table, and make it snappy.

HARRIET: Well, dummy means that you sit out while the others play. It means—
EDNA: (Innocently.) But we finished that hand, dear. Did you forget?

CHARLIE: Boy, talk about dummies! Get the game going, girls, and your friend can sit here until you let her back in. (Waggles gun fiercely at HARRIET.) But no funny stuff, lady, and I ain't fooling!

EDNA: (Finally comprehending the situation.) They... they really are crooks!

CHARLIE: No insults, lady, no insults! I got an itchy trigger finger.

EDNA: I haven't heard anybody say that since Humphrey Bogart, not even on "World of Shadows"! (Really scared.) Oh dear! I'm awfully sorry, sir. I didn't mean—I just meant—well, you certainly look like nice crooks.

JONESIE: (Pleased.) Thank you. Nice as they come. Wouldn't hurt a flea.

CHARLIE: That's a dumb thing to say, Jonesie! I just told those broads I got an itchy trigger finger, didn't I?

JONESIE: (Realizes his mistake.) Oh. Sure, boss, sure. Me too. (Pats his pocket.) Itchiest you ever saw.

EDNA: But you have such a kind face. I'm sure you'd rather be in some other... uh... line of work, wouldn't you?

CHARLIE: We like this here line, lady, we like it fine.

HARRIET: (Dazed, unbelieving.) But your sample case said "Charming Homes, Inc." right on it!

JONESIE: Sure it did. "Charming Bank Robbers, Inc." wouldn't have got us in the door, would it? (Proudly.) That was my idea, too. What we did was, we lifted this here classy looking attaché case out of a luggage store, and then we swiped a copy of the magazine, cut out all them fancy letters and stuck 'em on. I did all the work. I was always good with my hands, if I do say so. Charlie here is all thumbs.

CHARLIE: Jonesie!

JONESIE: Oh. Sorry, boss. I mean -- except with a gun. Old Charlie's about the best in the business. Right, boss?
CHARLIE: Right. And you dames better remember that. *(Backs toward the door.)* Now get yourself out of sight, Jonesie.

JONESIE: Want me to close the curtains first?

CHARLIE: Of course not, dum dum. What I want people outside to see is four old bats playing bridge, that’s what. Not a closed curtain in the middle of the day.

JONESIE: Good thinking, boss. A closed curtain always means there’s nobody home -- and geez, some punk might want to come in and rob the joint or something. You can’t be too careful these days, that’s what I always say.

CHARLIE: *(As JONESIE seats himself on sofa, idly begins leafing through a magazine.)* Okay now, I want everything to look natural. Don’t nobody move a muscle. Just go on with the game.

MADGE: How can we, if we don’t move a muscle?

CHARLIE: I just mean don’t get up from the table, that’s what I mean. Now just pick up them cards and deal.

EDNA: It’s not her deal. It’s mine.

CHARLIE: Then you deal! Just get that there game going, ladies, and be quick about it.

HARRIET: And then what? Are you going to rob us?

ALICE: Of course they are, Harriet. Didn’t I tell you? If I said it once, I said it a dozen times. “Just be careful,” I said, “Just—

MADGE: Deal, Edna, deal. You have to do what they say. *(One slow card at a time, paying no attention, EDNA does so.)*

HARRIET: You can take anything at all, anything. Just do it quickly, and leave us alone. Anything at all.

EDNA: Oh, not the television! Don’t let them take the television, Harriet. Then we’d never know about poor Laura.

CHARLIE: Who’s she? You expecting some other dame? Or anybody?

HARRIET: I’m expecting a television repairman, if you must know.

JONESIE: Then there ain’t a thing to worry about, boss. Anybody knows they never come when they say they’re going to. One
time I missed my Monday night football three weeks in a row. Boy, those guys never— (Doorbell RINGS. HARRIET starts, looks hopeful.)

CHARLIE: Oh yeah? Then who’s that? Answer it, lady, answer it. And don’t open the door more than a crack. Tell the guy your husband fixed it or something. Get rid of him. We’re gonna be here for a long time, and we don’t want no company.

HARRIET: A long time? Why are you going to be here a long time? Aren’t you just going to take what you want and go?

CHARLIE: Only thing we want, lady, is a place to hide out for a coupla hours, just till things cool off. We already took what we wanted from someplace else.

JONESIE: Namely the bank. Pretty clever the way we did it, too. What we did is --

CHARLIE: (As doorbell RINGS again.) Never mind! Just get the door, lady, will ya? Get rid of the guy, and make it snappy. And you, Jonesie, get down some place.

JONESIE: Right, boss. (CHARLIE moves left to flatten himself against the wall, hiding behind the plant. JONESIE moves DOWN RIGHT, crouches behind arm of sofa. EDNA, MADGE and ALICE sit frozen at table, casting hopeful glances at each other, while HARRIET rises and moves toward the door. She opens it widely enough to reveal FRANCINE, a bouncy, smiling young woman carrying a large sample case and a notebook.)

FRANCINE: Hi there, Harriet! Did you think I was never coming? I was a wee bit delayed in the traffic this morning—I think there was some sort of robbery downtown, or some other sort of commotion—police cars going just every which way—but at least I made it on the right day!

HARRIET: (Stunned.) Oh. But I thought our appointment was next week. I thought—

FRANCINE: Oh no, no, no, dear. I’ve got it right here in my book, see? (Holds up notebook.) You know very well we always come exactly when we say we will. That’s the policy at Sweetheart Beauty Products. And guess what? That new pink frosted blusher we’ve been waiting for finally came in, and oh, I can hardly wait to see how it looks on you. I just know it’s going to bring you right out.
HARRIET: (Noting agitated motion of gun behind plant.) But... but I've got company today, you see, and I really did think it was next week, and—

FRANCINE: (Pokes her head curiously through the door.) Madge! Hi there! Oh, aren't I in luck? Would you believe I got your moisturizer just this very morning? And I've got something brand new, something you'd all like to see. I've got the darlingest little cakes of company soap you ever saw, all in the shapes of different flowers. You'll just love them!

HARRIET: (Not knowing what to do.) Well, the thing is, Francine, we're right in the middle of a hand, and—

FRANCINE: Oh, I wouldn't mind waiting, not a bit. Goodness, I wouldn't interrupt your game for anything. I'll just be quiet as a little mouse until you're finished, really I will. (Pushes herself briskly in as HARRIET stands helplessly by, moves to sofa.) I'll just set down my things, right here, and maybe I can get a little paperwork done while you're—oh! (Glimpses JONESIE, who peeps curiously up over the arm of the sofa.) Well, Harriet, you didn't tell me your husband was going to be home! What a pleasure! (Extends her hand.) Harriet has told me so much about you, Arthur, I just feel I know you already. How do you do? (Not knowing what else to do, JONESIE shakes FRANCINE’S hand.)

JONESIE: Pleased to meetcha.

HARRIET: This is... uh... this is not Arthur, dear. This is Mr. Jones. He’s just here to... um... to...

FRANCINE: Oh, are you going to get new upholstery? But I always thought this particular print was so darling, and goodness, it doesn't show a bit of wear. But if Mr. Jones is measuring the sofa, I'll just put my things someplace else. I'll just—

CHARLIE: (Comes out from behind plant, pointing gun at FRANCINE.) Leave 'em where they're at, lady, leave 'em there. Then sit.

FRANCINE: (Whirls.) Oh! Oh my!

JONESIE: This must be that there Laura they was expecting.

FRANCINE: (Bewildered, fluttery.) No. My name is Francine. You
must have me confused with somebody. *(Staring at the gun.)* I just ran in for a second, just to drop off a few things, and I have another appointment in about two minutes, and, *(Glancing at watch.)* oh, I really must dash! Next week would be better after all, Harriet, so I’ll just—

CHARLIE: *(As FRANCINE makes for the door.)* Oh, no you don’t, lady, no you don’t.

JONESIE: *(Holds up FRANCINE’S sample case.)* Say, you got any stuff in here for me, Francine?

FRANCINE: You mean, money? Oh, no. Most of my customers pay by check, you see, or credit card, so I rarely have any need for cash. I have a few dollars here in my bag, if that’s what you want, and if you’ll just let me go—

CHARLIE: You’re not going nowhere, sister.

FRANCINE: But I have appointments. I have—

JONESIE: I ain’t after your money, lady. Just some fancy after-shave or something. *(Shyly.)* I like to smell nice.

EDNA: That’s a good sign! Just sprucing up can change a man’s life, that’s what I think. Remember that awful fellow who mugged Laura the week before she went blind and had to go to the hospital? Remember how touched he was when she took him downtown and bought him a new suit of clothes? And when he walked out of the store, giving Laura that cute little wave, you just knew he was going to go straight. You just knew!

MADGE: It might be a start. A man who likes to smell nice can’t be all bad. Show him something, Francine.

FRANCINE: Well, if you really think—I mean, we do carry a complete line of gift items for men. I suppose—

CHARLIE: *(Disgusted.)* Whadda you doin’? Gettin’ ready for the junior prom?

JONESIE: Aw, hey, boss, a little after-shave never hurt nobody. Doesn’t hurt a guy to get spiffed up once in a while—and you gotta admit I was right about the bank job. Boy, if it hadn’t been for me, you’d a gone in wearing a crummy leather jacket and a stocking over your face. And then how far do you think we’d a got?
CHARLIE: Yeah, but after-shave?

FRANCINE: I rather wondered about that myself, Mr. Jones. I mean, if you'll forgive my asking, why would a man with a beard need after-shave lotion?

JONESIE: Oh, that. (Carelessly peels off beard.) I just wear that for work. Now let's see what ya got in there, sister, and make it snappy. (Obediently, FRANCINE moves to sofa, opens case, which JONESIE inspects with pleasure. Rummaging about, he takes out a bottle, opens it and sniffs happily.)

FRANCINE: That's one of our most popular items, Mr. Jones. Isn't it lovely?

JONESIE: Not bad, not bad. But do you have anything spicier? I like to be real manly.

FRANCINE: (Gives him another bottle.) Well, you might like this. It's called "Commando," and it happens to be on special sale right now. I can let you have it for $9.95.

JONESIE: Commando, huh? (Sniffs appreciatively.) Yeah! Wow! This is the stuff for me. (Begins happily slathering it on his face.) $9.95 you say?

FRANCINE: That's our special bargain price, for this month only. You're really in luck, Mr. Jones. (Brightly.) Will that be check or charge?

JONESIE: Cash, lady, I always pay cash. (Rises, moves to bridge table, casually picks up MADGE'S pocketbook, rummages around in it, pulls out a bill.) There. Got change for a twenty?

FRANCINE: Yes, I think so. I always carry a bit of change just in case. (Counts change from her own pocketbook, gives it to JONESIE.)

JONESIE: Thanks. (Counts to see that change is correct, then returns to table and puts it into MADGE'S pocketbook.) How's the game going, ladies? Who's winning?

ALICE: Do you really think, Mr. Jones, that we could actually be going on with the game at a time like this? With a man pointing a gun at our very heads?

JONESIE: Oh, don't worry about him, ma'am. Old Charlie here wouldn't harm a flea.
CHARLIE: Will you stop saying dumb things like that, Jonesie? Boy, this is the last time I fool around with a beginner, that’s all I have to say. Boy!

MADGE: (Hopeful.) Beginner? You mean—

JONESIE: Hey, but I’m the one with the ideas, boss, you gotta admit that. I even thought up the beards, which we put on AFTER we heisted the bank. We even changed our clothes. Pretty smart, if you ask me. And then we ditched the first car and swiped another one, and then—

CHARLIE: And then you had to go and take that beard off so they all know exactly what you look like! Smart! Hah!

JONESIE: Well, it itched. But I’ll slap it right back on again when we leave, boss, don’t you worry. (Doorbell suddenly RINGS.)

CHARLIE: Slap it on now, Jonesie, and be quick about it! And then get down behind that couch!

JONESIE: (Hastily replaces beard.) Okay. And after that, I sure would like the name of that there TV repairman. Imagine, a guy who really comes! (Ducks down behind arm of sofa.)

ALICE: What do you want us to do?

CHARLIE: Pick up them cards and get on with the game, lady. And act natural.

FRANCINE: What about me?

CHARLIE: You can watch. Or better still, show them all that stuff you brought. You can all keep busy while this here lady (Indicates HARRIET.) gets rid of the guy at the door. And I don’t wanna see so much as one funny look in that direction. Got it?

ALICE: Got it.

CHARLIE: (As all women sit motionless, in frozen silence.) And liven up some, will ya? You, sweetheart lady, get the stuff. And then start talking about it. Give ‘em a real sales pitch. I wanna hear some chatter. Everything’s gotta be natural. Okay? Now chatter!

FRANCINE: (Rushes to sofa for her sample case, returns to table.) Yes, sir. Well now, Madge, we’ll just start with your new moisturizer. It’s pink. Were you expecting it to be pink? (Opens jar.) Isn’t that a heavenly color?
CHARLIE: Good. Keep it up.

HARRIET: (Peeks out window.) Shall I open the door now?

CHARLIE: Yup. And remember what I said. The television is fixed.

HARRIET: (Moves to door, as CHARLIE once again flattens himself behind the plant.) Yes, fixed. I'll tell him.

EDNA: (Disappointed.) Oh, I did so want to know how Laura's doing!

CHARLIE: (To HARRIET.) If that's who it is, get rid of her, too. And fast!

HARRIET: (Opens the door a crack.) Ace TV?

METER READER: Nope. Central Electric, ma'am. Just here to read the meter, that's all.

HARRIET: Oh! (Casts a bewildered look toward CHARLIE.) Well, I have company today... and I'd really rather not...

METER READER: Won't be a second. Just point me to the basement stairs. I'll be in and out in no time. (HARRIET glances questioningly at CHARLIE, who indicates by motioning with his gun that HARRIET may let the METER READER in. He then keeps the gun pointed at HARRIET. At the table, ALICE begins making frantic gestures to HARRIET, mouthing the words “Tell him! Tell him!” HARRIET receives the message, looks helpless. Valiantly she tries jerking her head toward CHARLIE, looking stricken, as the METER READER ENTERS.)

HARRIET: Right over that way, sir. (Continuing to jerk her head at CHARLIE as she points a shaky finger toward the dining room.) Right through the dining room and into the kitchen. First door on your left. The meter is—

METER READER: (Moves straight toward dining room, not noticing either CHARLIE or HARRIET'S obvious distress.) Right by the furnace, they told me down at the office. I'll find it. No problem. (For a moment there is silence as the METER READER walks across the room, into the dining room and OUT, apparently into the kitchen. Then his footsteps can be heard clumping down the basement stairs.)

HARRIET: (To CHARLIE.) Oh dear, I forgot to tell him where the light switch is. I'll just dash—
CHARLIE: You're going nowhere.

HARRIET: But he's a new man. He doesn't know. I'll just—

CHARLIE: Sit. Go back to that there table and sit. (To FRANCINE.) And you, sister, go on with your spiel. Make it a good one.

FRANCINE: (As HARRIET moves to her place at the table, opposite MADGE.) Yes sir. Well now... um... what you do, Madge, is make sure all your pores are open. Put a hot washcloth on your face for a minute or two, and then... (At this point the METER READER can be heard clumping back up the stairs, and all eyes are turned hopefully toward the dining room.)... then... um... let me see. Oh, yes. And then comes the moisturizer. You just sort of pat it on, and... (Her voice trails off as the METER READER reappears in doorway, begins marching, eyes straight ahead, to front door.)

HARRIET: (Still hoping to get her message through.) Did you... did you... find it?

METER READER: (Continuing his march.) Yup.

HARRIET: (Desperately tries to keep the conversation going.) Have we—have we—used a great deal of electricity this month?

METER READER: Like always.

HARRIET: (Rises, moves timidly toward METER READER, still trying to stop him.) It’s been such a chilly spring, we’ve had the furnace running almost constantly, and I was afraid our bill might be higher than usual. Do you think it might be?

METER READER: Nope. Just like always. (Marches directly OUT front door, without noticing CHARLIE.) Thanks a lot, lady. S’long.

ALICE: (Discouraged.) Oh! Harriet, you blew it. You absolutely blew it!

HARRIET: Well, I tried, Alice, goodness knows I tried!

CHARLIE: (Stomps furiously out from behind plant.) You sure did, lady! You did everything but invite the guy to stay for tea and cookies! Now I don’t want no more of that funny stuff. Ya hear?

HARRIET: (As JONESIE comes up to sit on sofa, again removing
his beard and laying it on the coffee table.) I'm sorry, Mr. Smith. I really did want to know about our electric bill, you see, and—

EDNA: (Admiringly.) You were brave, Harriet, that's what I think. I mean, one of these punks might have—bumped you off. You were really—

HARRIET: Edna, I wish you wouldn't talk like that. You sound like one of them.

EDNA: I can't help it, Harriet. This is all so much like “World of Shadows,” I can't believe it's real life!

CHARLIE: Well it is, lady, and you’d better remember that real life can be pretty tough.

EDNA: (Taking a stab at sympathy.) Oh, I know. Probably you’ve had a terrible childhood. What you need right now is a little kindness and understanding.

CHARLIE: What I need right now, lady, is some food. Jonesie and me, we ain’t had no lunch.

MADGE: Why not? With that bag of yours all full of money, I should think you could have eaten at the best restaurant in town.

JONESIE: Well, we was in kind of a rush, that was the thing. And anyway, we like home cooking.

ALICE: Harriet, you’re not going to cook for a pair of crooks, are you?

HARRIET: (Sinks to the edge of the chair DOWNSTAGE LEFT.) Well, I—

JONESIE: We don’t want nothing fancy, lady. Just whatever’s around.

HARRIET: Well, there is a bit of salad left, if you’d like, and—

MADGE: Oh, Harriet, you’re not going to waste that marvelous deviled avocado aspic on them, are you?

JONESIE: Deviled what?

HARRIET: Avocado aspic. It's for weight watchers, but of course we splurge on dessert—

CHARLIE: We ain’t watching no weight but what’s in our bag,
lady. Food, that’s what we’re after. Real food. Maybe a coupla burgers and some fries.

**JONESIE:** Make mine with mustard. Lots of mustard, maybe some relish. But hold the mayo. I’m on kind of a diet myself.

**EDNA:** Then you’ll love the salad. Harriet is absolutely famous for her deviled avocado. And not a one of us has ever been able to steal the recipe.

**JONESIE:** *(Helpful.*) I’ll steal it for ya, lady. Where’s it at?

**CHARLIE:** If you’re gonna steal anything, dum dum, you might just start on them pocketbooks. I’ll be in the kitchen with Harriet here, just to see that she don’t pull no funny business.

**JONESIE:** Like what? Like put rat poison in the burgers? Listen, these are nice old broads, boss. They wouldn’t do nothing like that.

**CHARLIE:** Maybe not. But there’s a phone in there, chances are, and—

**JONESIE:** Why don’t we yank out the cords? Just like they do in the movies?

**CHARLIE:** Because, dum dum, we want everything to be natural, that’s why. Besides that, I want every one of these dames to call their families and say they’re not comin’ home. They can say Harriet is sick and they can’t leave her.

**JONESIE:** Good idea, boss.

**EDNA:** But what about Harriet’s husband? He comes home.

**CHARLIE:** Oh, yeah. Hey, thanks for the reminder. Let’s see now—

**JONESIE:** How about if she sends him out to the airport to meet somebody? You know, unexpected company, like a relative or something? Hey, how about that?

**CHARLIE:** Not bad, not bad. Okay. She can make the first call. Then, when I give the high sign, you can send another dame in. We’ll do them one by one. And you stay in here and keep an eye on things. Okay?

**JONESIE:** Right, boss.

**MADGE:** What should we do?
CHARLIE: Play. Just sit there and play bridge. The sweetheart lady can sit in.

FRANCINE: I can’t. I don’t know how.

CHARLIE: Well, you can learn, can’t you? Boy, dames are dumb!

EDNA: (Outraged.) They are not dumb! Bridge is a very difficult game, if you want to know, and not everybody has the knack for it. It takes real brains.

JONESIE: (Sits down in HARRIET’S chair.) Good. Deal me in, ladies. Just give me a rough idea, and I’ll bet I can beat the lot of yez.

EDNA: You can’t play bridge with five people. Anybody knows that.

JONESIE: Then Francine here can watch. Maybe she’ll learn a thing or two. Just deal. (EDNA does so.) Anything wild? (Reaches for ALICE’S pocketbook.) How much do we put up?

ALICE: (Angrily snatches her pocketbook back.) You don’t put up anything. This is bridge, Mr. Jones, not poker.

EDNA: You know, I’ve always wanted to learn poker. Do you suppose—

ALICE: Edna, this is not the time. We are at the mercy of these terrible men, and I, for one, couldn’t begin to concentrate on a new game. Just deal. We’ll do the best we can. Now then, Mr. Jones, you’re partners with Madge, and when you pick up your cards you arrange them according to suit. And then—(Doorbell RINGS.)

EDNA: That must be the TV man. About time.

CHARLIE: Well, it won’t do you a bit of good, sister, because he ain’t comin’ in. And neither is nobody else. Down, Jonesie, down. (To HARRIET.) And you, lady, go answer it. And remember what I said. If it’s the TV guy, you don’t need him anymore. The set is fixed.

HARRIET: Fixed. Yes, fixed. I’ll tell him. (JONESIE slaps down his cards, rises, hides himself behind arm of sofa. FRANCINE takes his chair. CHARLIE disappears once more behind the plant. HARRIET rises, moves to front door, opens it a mere crack. Voice of METER READER can be heard.)
METER READER: Hey, I'm really sorry, ma'am, but I left my flashlight. Dumbest thing I ever did. Guess it's just not my day.

HARRIET: Oh. Well, I'll just run down and get it for you. I'll—(A glance at CHARLIE'S suddenly waving gun shows her that she will do no such thing.) Well, I do hate to interrupt our game, I'm sure you understand. Suppose I mail it to you in the morning?

METER READER: Oh, no, ma'am, the thing is I need it today. I've still got six houses to do. Really sorry to bother you, but I'll just be a minute.

HARRIET: (Looks to CHARLIE for instructions and receives a yes.) Well then, of course. Come in. (All women immediately look hopeful as HARRIET opens the door and the METER READER once again ENTERS. As before, he strides purposefully toward the dining room, without looking right or left, and OUT. As before, the women frantically signal HARRIET. She glances at CHARLIE, who indicates that she can do nothing. Once again the METER READER'S footsteps can be heard clumping down the basement stairs, then up again. He RE-ENTERS, carrying a flashlight, and moves toward front door.)

ALICE: (In a high, frantic voice.) My, that is a very fine flashlight you have there. Must be good for all sorts of—emergencies! I mean, if anyone ever needed—help! —in some sort of disaster, it would be a real—help!

METER READER: (Unconcerned.) Yup. Wouldn't be without it. (To HARRIET.) Sorry to bother you, ma'am. Thanks a lot. (Disappears immediately OUT front door, which HARRIET sadly closes behind him.)

CHARLIE: (Comes out from behind plant, as JONESIE again rises.) Boy, talk about dumb! I coulda bashed that guy over the head and it wouldn’t have made a dent! (To ALICE.) And as for you, lady, one more peep like that, and—well, just watch it, that's all!

ALICE: (Tries to be calm.) Well, I certainly meant no harm, Mr. Smith. To tell the truth—ha ha!—I just forgot all about you, and that's the plain truth. The thing is, that was just the kind of flashlight my husband and I have been looking for—you know, the kind with a high beam that you can use if you get a
flat tire at night? They’re really very useful in times of emergency, and I just thought he might tell me where he got it, that’s all. I just thought—

CHARLIE: Well, don’t think! Just play that there game, and if anybody else shows up in this crazy place, you just keep your trap shut. Hear?

ALICE: Yes, sir. Shut. You can count on me, absolutely.

CHARLIE: Okay, Harriet, let’s go. You got a phone call to make, and after that, Jonesie and me need some food. And just remember, ladies, I’m not the only one with a gun. Right, Jonesie?

JONESIE: (As CHARLIE and HARRIET EXIT into dining room.) Right, boss. Got it right here in my pocket, just like always. There won’t be no funny business in here, no sir! (Importantly pats his pocket, as FRANCINE hastily rises to give JONESIE back his chair. JONESIE settles himself comfortably, picks up his cards.) Okay now, girls. Once I got my cards all in order of suits, then what? Hey, are aces high?

ALICE: (Nervously eyes JONESIE’S pocket.) Yes. Aces are high. Now the proper order of suits is clubs, diamonds, hearts then spades. Clubs are the lowest, spades are the highest. Then, of course, there’s no-trump, but I’ll explain that later. Now what we do first is, we bid. You decide which one of your suits is the strongest, and then the person to the left of the dealer goes first, and then the next, and so on and so on...

(The CURTAIN FALLS.)

End of Scene One

Scene Two

SETTING: The same. Half an hour later.

AT RISE: CHARLIE, HARRIET and MADGE are OFFSTAGE, presumably in the kitchen. The OTHERS are playing cards. JONESIE has switched to MADGE’S place, facing the audience. EDNA and ALICE remain in their original seats, EDNA on JONESIE’S right, ALICE on his left. Catty-corner to the table, DOWNSTAGE RIGHT, sits FRANCINE. The extra chair from the wall at LEFT has been pulled up to the other DOWNSTAGE
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES: sofa; end table; coffee table; large standing plant; television set; card table with four chairs; extra chair; small cabinet or table with drawers; lamps; pictures; numerous plants; both hanging and standing; stack of magazines; telephone; two packs of cards; score pads and pencils; camera case; three guns; attache case with letters stuck on, spelling out “Charming Homes, Inc.”; Sweetheart Beauty Products sample case containing assorted cosmetics, two bottles after-shave, gift package, hairstyle kit, manicure scissors, large scissors, compacts, lipsticks, various creams, hair rinse; notebook; five pocketbooks, two containing make-up, two containing money; flashlight; clipboard; transistor radio; piece of cake; Scrabble set; Chinese Checkers set; TV repair tool kit; handcuffs; two false beards.

SOUND: doorbell, telephone, radio announcement

COSTUMES: Edna, Madge, Alice, Harriet wear attractive dresses or suits, suitable for bridge/luncheon party; Charlie and Jonesie wear cheap suits, shirts, ties; Francine wears a bright suit, business-like but feminine; Meter Reader wears coveralls; Louie wears coveralls, with “Louie” lettered on front, “Ace TV” on back; Police Officer wears a belted trenchcoat, grey fedora.

NOTE: If the roles of Meter Reader, Louie and Police Officer are played by the same actor, suggest changes such as glasses, moustache, different colored wigs, so that they will not appear to be the same man. The same actor can also provide the Radio Announcer’s voice.
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!