



Jigger

Jerry Berning

Norman Maine Publishing

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*The enthusiasm, knowledge and support of Cecilia Fannon
of South Coast Repertory Theatre
provided the impetus to make this play a reality.*

*The inspiration for the play was my paternal grandfather,
Conrad Berning,
whom I only fully appreciated after his passing.*

*The play is dedicated to
grandfathers and grandchildren all over the world.*

And finally to my amusing muse, my lovely Ellen.

Jigger

COMEDY/MURDER MYSTERY. The WWII era comes alive in this hilarious down-home murder-mystery. It's 1943, and with most of the able-bodied men drafted and the women working in factories, there aren't many people left to run the town. There's just one elderly doctor who must do double duty as the town's coroner. And the only police officer around is a retired police chief. When a wealthy resident is murdered, Jigger, a feisty factory foreman and fan of radio murder-mysteries, volunteers to help the police chief solve the crime. The only problem is that Jigger has just suffered a heart attack and has been ordered to stay in bed while he recuperates. Confined to his bedroom, Jigger elicits the help of his grandson, Butch, to gather clues. With a murderer running free about town, the horror only intensifies when Jigger finds out his wife, Maggie, has taken a job at the factory and that his bossy, overbearing mother-in-law has arrived to serve as his personal nursemaid. This character-driven mystery will delight audiences with its loveable, quirky cast.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

Characters

(11 m, 8 f)

(With doubling 5 m, 4 f)

JIGGER: 60s, feisty but loveable factory foreman and fan of radio murder mysteries.

MAGGIE: 50s, Jigger's no-nonsense wife; housewife.

MOTHER: 75, Jigger's bossy mother-in-law, who insists on feeding him her "roughage surprise."

BUTCH: 12, Jigger's grandson and sidekick.

DOC SIMMS: 60s, friendly town doctor/coroner.

POLICE CHIEF: 60s, called back from retirement to fill in because all of the town's police officers are serving in the war; elicits Jigger's help to solve Jack Ball's murder.

MRS. BALL: 50s, widow of the murdered man; Jigger's old girlfriend and wealthy neighbor.

SIDNEY DRAPER: 60s, slimy lawyer and acquaintance of murdered man; AKA "Sidney Kidney."

MAID: 20s, French maid who works for the Balls.

ANNOUNCER: Narrates radio shows and commercials; radio actor.

REGINALD LANCE: Dilettante detective and searcher of truth; radio star of "The Case of the Mangled Millionaire."

HELEN HOUSTON: 35, widow living on a houseboat; radio soap opera star of "The True Romance of Helen Houston."

DAUGHTER: kills husband, pawns children; radio actor.

CEDRIC HARDTACK: Sleazy lawyer; radio actor.

LADY AGATHA HOLDEN: Widow, radio actor.

PINKY MAUVE: Lecherous bail bondsman; radio actor.

SERGEANT: Elicits Reginald's help with murder; radio actor.

SECRETARY: Attractive, French; radio actor.

COP: Radio actor.

Note: Lines for radio actors may be pre-recorded or played by cast members who step up to mics.

Setting

1943. A small town in Indiana. All action takes place in Jigger's home, a modest Midwestern 2-story frame house. All rooms are visible to the audience except the bathroom. Upstairs there is a bedroom and bathroom door. Downstairs there is a living room, kitchen, and front porch. Jigger's upstairs bedroom is accessible by a staircase located in the living room. The kitchen is off the living room. There is a sidewalk that leads to the front porch and there is a fireplug in front of the house.

The house has a 1930s-style décor: flowered wallpaper, linoleum floors, lace curtains, and the like. Jigger's bedroom has a bed, rocking chair, dresser, and window. The kitchen has a table and chairs. The living room has suitable furniture.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Jigger's living room.

Scene 2: Later that same day.

Scene 3: The next morning.

Scene 4: Later, same day.

Scene 5: Next day.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: A few hours later.

Scene 2: The next day.

Scene 3: Later, that same day.

Scene 4: Later, that same day.

Props

Bottle of beer	Pencil
Old Hoover vacuum	Two books
Men's shirt, for Jigger	Vase with straw flowers
Bathrobe, for Jigger	Pile of horse manure (mud)
Undershirt, for Jigger	Coveralls, for Maggie
Newspaper	Black metal lunch box
2 Radios	Enema bag
Medical bag	Arm sling
Bicycle	Peanut butter and jelly sandwich
Phone	Paper grocery bag
Plates	Box of Kotex
Glasses of milk	2 Bottles of elixir
Slices of apple pie	Serving tray
Forks	Plate of creamed tuna on toast with peas
Bottle	Flower bouquet
Pill bottle	Spoon
Cup	Plate with a toasted cheese sandwich
Stethoscope	Briefcase
Blood pressure cuff	Betting slip
Soup bowl	Pistol
Jar	Large suitcase
Armband that reads, "Civil Defense"	Handcuffs
Binoculars	Police baton
Oversized white helmet, for Butch	
Pad of paper	

Sound Effects

Gunshot	Sound of door opening and closing
Horse hooves	Knocking on door
Radio soap-opera theme music	Crashing sounds
Dramatic radio program theme music	Footsteps
Water running from faucet	Sound of fighting
Pounding fists on a door	Guards yelling
Creaking door opening	Downbeat music
Door slamming shut	Tin cups against jail bars
Police sirens	Swing music
Gunshots	Footsteps approaching
Bullhorns	Toilet flushing
Men shouting	Smoke
	Car backfiring
	Car horn

“I hid it.
An’ ya know how old people is,
I got no idea where.”

—Jigger

ACT I Scene 1

(Jigger's living room. The stage is dark. Pause. Sound of horse hooves. Long pause. Bang! Bang! Lights slowly come up. Radio plays soap opera theme. Maggie vacuums with an ancient Hoover.)

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Once again it is time for the "True Romance of Helen Houston," which asks the question, "Can love find a 35-year-old widow living on a houseboat in the Galveston ship canal?" But first, a word about that washday miracle, Amazing White Soap Flakes —

MAGGIE: Mother always says cleanliness is next to godliness.

(Jigger enters wearing an undershirt. He turns off the radio and flops down on a chair. Maggie attacks his feet with the vacuum cleaner.)

JIGGER: Tarnation! Where the dickens is my newspaper?

MAGGIE: My mother always says —

JIGGER: She always has a word for it...or two, or three.

MAGGIE: The early bird catches the worm. It's eleven o'clock. The paper's in the trashcan.

(Jigger exits the living room and returns with a Berghoff beer and crumpled newspaper. He smooths out the paper with his hands.)

JIGGER: Is this any way to treat President Roosevelt? Usin' his picture to gift wrap the garbage?

MAGGIE: I'll send him a penny postcard and apologize.

JIGGER: Hey, looky here! The Journal-Gazette says we skunked them Krauts and Eyetalians in North Africa real good. Yessir, won't be long now. *(Jigger folds the paper and steps to the doorway.)*

MAGGIE: And don't sit out front dressed like that. Mother always says –

JIGGER: Wear a damn shirt.

MAGGIE: Excuse your French. Here. *(Hands him a shirt.)* It's fresh ironed.

(She kneels by a wall and begins wiping the baseboards as he dons the shirt.)

JIGGER: Why are you down on your hands and knees?

MAGGIE: Mother always says, "Clean baseboards are the key to keeping a man."

JIGGER: No wonder her late lamented husband spent his reclinin' years in the garage. Sandin' the same piece o' lumber year after year, while sippin' rye whiskey and coffee. He'd start out making a barstool, an' by the time he got the legs even, you could use it to milk a cow.

MAGGIE: And don't make fun of my father, neither.

(Jigger exits the bedroom and goes to the porch. He sits on the steps and drinks his beer.)

JIGGER: *(Sotto voce.)* Maggie, you should get a job. Yeah, it's your turn, I done my time. A lot of women workin' 'cause of the war. Ha, ha. Naw. Without her behind me, I wouldn't be the man behind the man with the gun. Yessirree, that's my job, makin' guns for the Army.

(Sidney, wearing a suit, approaches.)

SIDNEY: Talking to yourself or to the sidewalk? I think you're losing your grip.

JIGGER: Happy Saturday to ya too, Sid. Dressed mighty serious fer a day off.

SIDNEY: No time to chit chat, business calls. Drinking beer on the front steps? It's not even noon. What is this neighborhood coming to? *(Sidney hurries off.)*

JIGGER: *(Yells.)* Thanks fer stoppin' by, ol' buddy. *(Doc approaches wearing a three-piece suit and carrying a black medical bag.)* Hey, Doc, come on and sit a spell. Have a cold one. In your getup, you'd look okay even to Maggie's mother drinkin' beer on this swell stoop.

DOC: Can't stop. Going up to the Ball Mansion.

JIGGER: Ain't that three stories of ugly? Looks down on this little house like an evil eye.

DOC: It's those gargoyles that scare you. Jack's dad got them in France.

(Butch rides up on his bicycle.)

BUTCH: Hey, Grandpa, see ya tomorrow! Hi, Doctor Simms.

(Jigger and Doc wave as Butch rides by and exits.)

JIGGER: Whatja' goin' up the street for? Old lady having hot flashes?

DOC: Got to go see Jack Ball. Got himself shot, somehow.

JIGGER: Why are you goin' shanks mare on official business?

DOC: Got to walk. Used up all my gas ration going to the Somer's place. She had a girl. Pretty little thing. I was just lucky to get home before that old Model A coughed and died.

JIGGER: Damned gas rationing.

DOC: What do you care for? You haven't got a car.

JIGGER: Yeah, but what if I did? *(Doc begins to walk away. Jigger jumps up, stuffs the beer bottle in his pocket.)* Wait up, I'm comin' along. Gotta get out of Mrs. Clean's way before she sweeps me into the trash.

DOC: Kinda late for spring cleaning. Maggie's ma comin' to call?

JIGGER: Holy Jesus, I hope her broom's not headed this way.
So what the heck's the story? About time something
happened around here. Too bad for Jack, I guess. Shot,
huh? I thought I heard a backfire last night. Jack hurt bad?

DOC: Think so. The maid was hysterical.

JIGGER: And has that foreign way of talkin'.

DOC: She is a foreigner. From France just like the gargoyles,
but better looking. You okay?

(Jigger stops, bends over.)

JIGGER: Go ahead, Doc, I'll catch up. Just outta breath.

DOC: Time for you to start doing something for exercise
besides lifting beer bottles. I'll tell you about it later. You
get on home.

*(Jigger sits on a fireplug. Doc exits. Jigger feels his pulse, rises,
takes several steps, then crumples to the ground. Blackout.)*

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Later, same day. Jigger lies in bed. Radio plays.)

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Now, we present Reginald Lance in "The Case of the Mangled Millionaire." It happened like this.

(Followed by 1940s dramatic theme music. Maggie enters and turns down the radio.)

JIGGER: What happened? What's going on? I must've fainted.

MAGGIE: You just took a little nap, on the sidewalk. *(Maggie holds up Jigger's pants.)* Like a brewery. You smell like a brewery!

JIGGER: Good.

MAGGIE: Good?

JIGGER: At my age, it might have been...sumpin' else. Them pants coulda looked mighty yellow.

MAGGIE: Oh, Jigger. Tch, tch.

(She tosses the pants out the doorway. Doc enters, holding the pants.)

DOC: You lose a pair of pants, Jigger?

JIGGER: Hey, Doc, you bring me home?

MAGGIE: The hearse dropped you off, but kept Jack Ball. I guess I'll never get me a rich husband, dead or alive.

JIGGER: So, Doc, I ain't dead, or dying?

DOC: Nope. Jack Ball, he's for sure, dead. But you, just a little heart attack. I told Maggie what to do. You listen to her, you'll last a couple more years.

JIGGER: Wait a minute! Jack?

MAGGIE: He is sure enough dead. Two holes in his head from his own gun. Might have been an accident according to Doc, here.

JIGGER: A two shot whoops?

DOC: A fancy Belgian repeating rifle, second shot fires before his brain knows the first bullet hit. The Chief's going to check it out. I'll see you. I got lives to save. *(Doc exits.)*

MAGGIE: Doc says you have to stay in bed a spell. No up and down the stairs. Only leave this room when you got to, you know.

JIGGER: Gotta what?

MAGGIE: Wash your hands.

JIGGER: You mean I can walk down the hall to take a piss? Or squat awhile? Thank heaven for small favors. No bedpans for Jigger, not yet. A heart attack? I'm too young for that kind of stuff. Heart attacks...they're for guys in their sixties. Hell, Maggie, what happened? I'm an old fart and you're comin' up behind me, slowly o' course. I missed everything. Had T.B. and got turned down in the Big War.

MAGGIE: I know, dear.

JIGGER: Too old to kick Hitler's or Tojo's ass in this one. But I'm doin' my part for sure, down at the factory makin' sure we hit our quotas. I can't take no time off. I gotta get goin'.

MAGGIE: They'll have to get along without you for a little bit.

JIGGER: Jack dead and Jigger still kickin'. Always figgered a rich guy like him could buy a few extra years. I feel mighty tired.

MAGGIE: Good night, husband.

(Maggie exits. Jigger turns up the radio.)

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* Unsavory type, horseplayer I think.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* Lord Holdon, unsavory?

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* You can't tell a book by its cover, Sergeant, nor the worth of a man by his title.

JIGGER: Ain't that the truth.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* You think he got bumped off for being unsavory?

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* It wasn't an earthquake that deposited a bookcase of rare volumes upon his head.

(Maggie stomps back into the room and flicks the radio off.)

MAGGIE: No excitement. You go to sleep. *(Maggie exits.)*

JIGGER: A mangled millionaire, hmmm. The late Jack Ball sure loved the ponies, but books, I don't know, he wasn't no genius.

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: The next morning. Jigger stands at the bedroom window. Maggie enters with Mother.)

JIGGER: Ma?!

MOTHER: Bertram.

(Jigger stays by the window. Mother stays by the door. Maggie brings Jigger a robe, which he dons.)

JIGGER: What a surprise.

MOTHER: My intuition, you know how I am, my intuition said, Bertram's in trouble, catch the next train.

JIGGER: Shoulda just used the phone and warned me not to go gallivantin'. Saved us both a passel of trouble.

MAGGIE: Mother offered to help nurse you back to health. Isn't that nice of her?

JIGGER: Ain't my first choice of a word. Thanks, Ma, but I'm okay. Don't need no looking after, just need a little rest and I'm fine.

MOTHER: Don't be silly, Bertram. Someone must cook and clean for you when Maggie's away.

(Jigger flops down in a rocking chair.)

JIGGER: Maggie? Away?

MAGGIE: I got a job, Jigger, I got a job! Inspecting, finding flaws.

JIGGER: You inherited that there nit-pickin' talent.

MOTHER: Bertram!

MAGGIE: I waited to tell you, so I could give you two surprises at once.

JIGGER: Thanks for the presents, but it ain't my birthday. Ma ain't here 'cause I'm down fer a spell. You told her 'bout the job 'fore you even asked me if it was okay. Anyway, you

don't need a job. We're doing swell. I'm the man of the house.

MOTHER: Margaret is not a chattel, Bertram. She is a free woman in a free world. Look at Eleanor Roosevelt. She travels the world as she wishes to help the refugees and the like. That husband of hers would be nothing without Eleanor's strength. Just like you and Maggie. The matter is settled. Now, Bertram, we shall do our grocery shopping. Do not leave this room until our return.

(They exit. Jigger peers out the window.)

JIGGER: Doc locks me in jail and Maggie brings in her ma to be the warden. Damnation!

(Jigger returns to bed. The door flies open. Butch enters.)

BUTCH: Grandpa, time to go! Remember, Grandpa?

JIGGER: Jigger, not "grandpa." That's for old guys.

BUTCH: Fishin', we're supposed to go fishin' down at the gravel pit.

JIGGER: Did Grandma say anything to you?

BUTCH: Nope. I didn't see her.

JIGGER: Say, how 'bout a slice of pie for breakfast?

BUTCH: Sure. Pie's better'n cereal any old day.

JIGGER: Come on. Follow me. *(Jigger leads the way down the stairs.)* You get the food. I gotta make a phone call. *(Butch puts the food on the table while Jigger grabs the phone.)* Martha, I need Central 326. *(Pause.)* Yeah, I mean Doc Simms. I'm fine, Martha. *(Pause.)* Just make the connection, okay? Thank you. *(Pause.)* Hi, Miz Simms, Doc there? *(Pause.)* Just tell him to come and see Jigger Bascomb right away. I'm fading fast. Gasp.

(Jigger grabs a plate with a piece of pie on it and a glass of milk. Butch follows suit. They sneak back upstairs. Both sit on the bed and eat.)

BUTCH: Grandma makes the best apple pie in the world. Are you okay?

JIGGER: I ain't feelin' so good, Butch. Doc's got me confined to this here room except when I can sneak out.

BUTCH: You're never sick.

JIGGER: I'm gonna be fine. It's just gonna take a little while. Here's the deal. Jack Ball up the hill got hisself murdered, and we gotta find out who done it. You and me, shoot, we've listened to about a zillion radio mysteries. So we oughta know enough stuff to solve most any case. But how can I dig up clues trapped in here?

BUTCH: I don't know.

JIGGER: I got me an idea. You have to be my leg man, out there with the murderers and other bad guys. With two of us on the case, the villain ain't got a chance. Whaddya say, partner?

BUTCH: How about the cops?

JIGGER: The real ones are all in the Army. The Chief got called back from his retirement in Florida and his men are boys, not much older'n you. It's up to us, Butch. It's all up to us.

BUTCH: Jeepers, if this guy killed Mr. Ball, wouldn't he wanta kill anybody trying to catch him?

JIGGER: You ain't afraid, Butch? Not my buddy?

BUTCH: Gosh, no. I was just thinking.

(Maggie and Mother return. Mother turns on the radio in the living room.)

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* And now we return to "The True Romance of Helen Houston," which asks the question, "Can love find a 35-year-old widow living on a houseboat in a

barge canal?" Come with us to Galveston as Helen is awakened by...

(Loud knocking is heard.)

HELEN: *(Radio.)* All right, all right, I'm comin'. Don't break down the poor door, which my late husband built and I brought here from Kentucky. I'm comin'.

JIGGER: *(To Butch.)* Shhh. The enemy has come back. Your great grandma has landed. She's got me.

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* The knocking continues as Helen wraps a pink chenille robe around her lush body. She pulls the latch and the door flies open.

HELEN: *(Radio.)* You!

(Soap-opera theme music crescendos and then fades out.)

BUTCH: *(To Jigger.)* Gosh, are you a prisoner, like in a castle?

JIGGER: Kinda. But I got it figgered. There's a ladder leanin' agin' the roof from when I was gonna fix some shingles last fall. If you gotta, you can report to me secret-like so's nobody knows but us about your comings an' goings. Okay?

(The door bursts open and Mother pops in.)

MOTHER: Butch! Your grandfather is quite ill. Visitors must sign in with me. Butch, go see your grandmother.

(Butch runs out and goes to the kitchen.)

JIGGER: You scared that poor boy half to death, tellin' him I'm a dyin' man. Good grief, woman.

MOTHER: Everything I do is for the good of others. Perhaps, I was abrupt with him. You take a nap. Lunch will be at noon.

JIGGER: You servin' breakfast?

(She grabs the plates off the table.)

MOTHER: Is pie on your list of acceptable breakfast foods?

JIGGER: My favorite. And maybe a little cold leftover steak.

Although that's gettin' hard to come by.

MOTHER: Lunch at noon. We shall be friends, shan't we?

JIGGER: Sure. But I gotta have my friends visiting me.

MOTHER: Aren't I enough?

JIGGER: Well, you're actually a relation. Ain't the same. Ain't no choice in the matter.

(Mother takes the milk glasses and pie plates and exits. Butch sits at the kitchen table eating pie. Maggie is standing by him. Mother stomps in and sets the dishes on the table.)

MOTHER: Chaos!

MAGGIE: What's the matter? You have a fight with Jigger, already?

MOTHER: Look at these plates. Pie crumbs! No understanding of nutrition.

MAGGIE: Butch. Did you get your grandpa breakfast?

BUTCH: Yeah, I guess.

MOTHER: Did your grandfather leave his room?

BUTCH: I didn't see nothin'.

MAGGIE: Butch is just trying to help. Aren't ya, baby? My apple pie is as good as food can get. Real butter!

MOTHER: Perhaps I shouldn't even unpack. If I am not wanted...

MAGGIE: We need you. My new job.

MOTHER: Very well, but just for you. Not for that man you married.

MAGGIE: C'mon, Jigger's okay.

MOTHER: You're a good girl. You just made a grievous error in your matrimonial selection. *(Butch rises and slips toward*

freedom.) Butch! Stop! Please visit your grandfather whenever you wish, if I am at home. Do you understand?

BUTCH: Yes, Grandma Porter. Bye, Grandma. *(Butch exits, running.)*

MOTHER: I shall stay. I am obviously needed. Bertram's well-being is so important to me. Roughage, what do you know of roughage?

MAGGIE: Not much.

MOTHER: I do. At my age, roughage is crucial to one's normal functioning. I have spent the last ten years using my body as a laboratory as I searched for the perfect stool. Bertram must have oats. He must have wheat germ.

MAGGIE: Jigger hates oatmeal. Never tried any germ wheat. Is that healthy?

MOTHER: Germ is the beginning of the verb "germinate." Nothing to do with bacteria. I shall prepare him a special lunch.

MAGGIE: He won't eat it.

MOTHER: Remember your dislike of canned peas?

MAGGIE: They sat on the plate remindin' me of rabbit pellets left out in the rain.

MOTHER: But you ate them for me, and Bertram will eat all of his "roughage surprise" and like it. I shall sit at his bedside as long as I must.

MAGGIE: I didn't eat 'em that night we sat up till midnight at the dining room table, just you and me. You had a call of nature, and I poured 'em in my shoe and limped to bed after you got back.

MOTHER: And you told me you twisted your ankle in gym class. My, my. Fortunately, Bertram does not wear shoes to bed.

(Maggie walks out on the porch. Doc enters and comes up the porch steps.)

DOC: Hey, Maggie, how's your patient?

MAGGIE: Ornerly as ever.

DOC: That Jigger's favorite mother-in-law singing in the kitchen?

(They sit together on the porch steps. In the background, Mother heads upstairs with her "roughage surprise.")

MAGGIE: Can I go to work and leave Jigger—

DOC: In the clutches of your mother?

MAGGIE: I just wanta make sure that he's okay without me.

DOC: Alone, I wouldn't fret. With your ma, one of them is in danger. I'll go check him out and give him a few pills, then we'll see. You wait here. *(Doc enters the house and heads toward the bedroom.)*

MOTHER: *(To Jigger.)* Take just one little bite. This is for your own good.

JIGGER: No. Go away.

MOTHER: This is vital for your bowels' well-being. Eat.

(Doc pauses at the door listening, then steps into the bedroom.)

DOC: Mrs. Porter, such a pleasure. Taking care of our boy, I see. Swell, that is swell. But I gotta examine this hulk, so if you'll excuse us...

MOTHER: I was once a student nurse. I shall assist. But of course, you are in charge.

DOC: A generous offer. Have you seen Jigger naked?

MOTHER: Never. Nor desired to.

JIGGER: This ain't gonna be yer first time. I'll die first.

MOTHER: You shan't escape me so easily.

(Doc opens his bag, pulls out a bottle, stethoscope and blood pressure paraphernalia.)

DOC: Miz Porter, Jigger is in need of a diuretic. Could you mix up a potion for me? Two teaspoons in one cup of boiling water, stir until clear. Any questions?

MOTHER: I am glad to be of service.

(Mother takes the bottle proffered by Doc and exits to the kitchen.)

JIGGER: Thanks, Doc. You probably saved my life. Sumpin' stinks in this room and it ain't me.

DOC: It's not *only* you. What did that woman want to stuff in your gullet? *(Doc smells the bowl. He then opens his bag, pulls out a jar, and empties the bowl into it.)* This sample goes to the lab, if they'll take it. Now unbutton that shirt, I got work to do.

(Doc taps on Jigger's chest.)

JIGGER: Forget that crap. Jack Ball. What's the deal with Jack?

DOC: Dead. Turn around.

JIGGER: Hell, I know he ain't livin' no more. How, why, who, and like that?

DOC: The ticker is still ticking. Don't sound too awful. Gimme your arm.

JIGGER: This ain't fair. We made yellow tracks in the snow together when we were kids, and now I'm just a damn patient?

DOC: Calm down. Hmmm. Blood pressure's a little high, but okay for a guy of your age and pathetic physical condition, I guess.

JIGGER: I knew I was alive. Tell me about the dead guy.

DOC: Hell's bells, but you are a pain in the posterior. After all those years of listening to those radio mysteries, now you're smack dab in the middle of the real thing. Somebody shot him. Weren't no accident. Chief says the trigger and stuff were clean as a whistle. If Jack shot himself, the Chief

figgered he couldn't clean up before he croaked. Murder, he says.

JIGGER: Damn good guess for the Chief. But he's still gonna need old Jigger's help.

DOC: You're not going nowhere. I'm putting your ma-in-law outside your door with a shotgun. You're sick. Got to go slow.

JIGGER: It ain't fair. Can't let all o' that there detectin' skill I got from listenin' to Reginald Lance and them other guys go to waste.

DOC: One more thing. Here's some pills. *(Hands him a bottle. Jigger takes it.)* Nitroglycerine.

JIGGER: Thanks, Doc. Just the thing, little hand grenades to keep Ma at bay.

DOC: Take one if your chest starts hurting.

(Mother enters with the diuretic mixed in a cup.)

MOTHER: Bertram...?

(She hands the cup to Jigger. He takes the cup.)

DOC: *(To Mother.)* Don't worry yourself. Jigger will be okay. Just keep him from cutting loose.

MOTHER: The lunch. Did he eat it all?

DOC: All gone, Mrs. Porter, all gone.

(Mother and Doc exit. Doc heads to the porch, where he sits beside Maggie.)

DOC: *(To Maggie.)* Don't seem to be too serious, just needs some rest. *(Pulls out the sample jar.)* Better sneak him something to eat. This is too powerful for a sick man. *(Doc exits.)*

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Doctor Matthew McGillicuddy's Amazing Discovery, the World-Renowned Elixir Ponce de

Leon is beneficial to all of us, especially oldsters over 35 with 35% alcohol and secret South American Jungle Herbs to rejuvenate the bloodstream and enhance cranial functions is proud to present –

MOTHER: Just what Bertram needs. Margaret, I must go to the pharmacy.

(Mother exits. Mrs. Ball enters.)

MAGGIE: My goodness, what are you doing here?

MRS. BALL: Maggie, I've come to cheer up your ailing husband. *(Looks around.)* Your house is so...quaint.

MAGGIE: We invited you to our housewarming but instead you dragged Jack off to Paris. You haven't set foot in the house till today.

MRS. BALL: Oh, I've just been busy.

MAGGIE: For 30 years?

MRS. BALL: May I see Berty? *(Maggie takes a deep breath, then nods yes.)* Thank you. Might I surprise him?

MAGGIE: I'm sure you will! Right up those stairs.

(Maggie points, and Mrs. Ball walks up the stairs and enters the bedroom.)

MRS. BALL: Dear Bertram Bascomb, my dear friend from times past. I am so sorry that I have been unable to visit you until now to check on your well-being.

JIGGER: That's okay, Shirley, I survived anyway. I ain't had no chance to tell ya how sad I feel about old Jack. Sure musta been awful for ya, Jack gettin' shot like that. Musta cried yer eyes out. Poor Shirley.

(Mrs. Ball dabs at her eyes.)

MRS. BALL: Quite heart-rending, seeing my husband swimming in a sea of his own blood. The remembering still causes tears to seep. I fear that your illness is all my fault.

JIGGER: Nah. You broke my heart a long time ago. It got healed by Maggie.

MRS. BALL: No, you silly, I mean my husband's dreadful misfortune. If things had been different, perhaps you and I might have married.

JIGGER: Like if I'd had the rich daddy instead o' Jack.

MRS. BALL: Not really. Just my father thought I deserved the finer things in life from my husband and –

JIGGER: And a factory stiff just weren't good enough.

(Mrs. Ball kisses Jigger on the cheek.)

MRS. BALL: Not good enough for my father, perhaps. I wonder if I might inquire as to your recollections of the night our poor Jack breathed his last...as you are our closest neighbors?

JIGGER: Sumpin' woke me up. Some kind of bang!

MRS. BALL: My maid heard the sound of hoof beats sometime after midnight.

JIGGER: Nary a man is now alive who remembers that famous ride. Musta been Paul Revere, although it ain't the Redcoats comin' this time. You think maybe the killer rode a horse?

MRS. BALL: I don't know anything. Jack and I were living a simple, happy life, then bang-bang, and he's gone. Now it's just me in that big house. Berty, if anything ever happens to Maggie, God forbid.... Forgive me. I'm thinking out loud thoughts best kept hidden. Can I bring you something, perhaps a book? Jack has...*had*...a lovely library.

JIGGER: I don't need nothin'. I just need to get outta this room.

MRS. BALL: You were such a ballplayer in our youth, made Jack look like a girl. You're a strong man. You'll be up and about quite soon. I must be on my way. Goodbye, Berty.

(Mrs. Ball squeezes his fingers and exits the bedroom and heads to the porch.)

MAGGIE: *(To Mrs. Ball.)* You and Jigger have a nice little reunion?

MRS. BALL: Yes, Maggie, we talked about the past and the future. Ta-ta.

(Mrs. Ball exits. Butch enters, running. He is wearing a Civil Defense armband and has a pair of binoculars hanging around his neck. An oversized white helmet sits askew on his head.)

MAGGIE: Well, well, what have we got here? A little soldier boy? *(She stands and gives him a hug.)* Civil Defense. Wow! What's your job, mister?

BUTCH: These field glasses are so's I can spot enemy airplanes flying over.

MAGGIE: Flying over what?

BUTCH: Here. Town. Got to be ready. I gotta show Grandpa!

(Maggie sags on the porch step as Butch bangs into the house and heads to the bedroom.)

MAGGIE: First my Jigger has a heart attack, now we're gonna get bombed. And soon my little Butchy's gonna be marching off to war. Me working sure better help get this war over quick.

(Butch enters the bedroom.)

BUTCH: Look at this outfit! Civil Defense.

JIGGER: Jeepers, you are sumpin' special. C'mere and gimme a hug. This don't mean you ain't gonna have time for our secret? 'Cause Doc came by and the Chief says murder for sure, so we got our job cut out for us. You can still help, can'tcha?

BUTCH: Golly, yeah. These here bin-oc-u-lars, they'll let me see what's goin' on without me getting so close I'll get killed.

JIGGER: Good thinking. What's the plan?

BUTCH: You were gonna be the thinker.

JIGGER: O' course. Just wondered what kinda ideas you mighta had. Hmmm. Yessir, a plan. Inside job, maybe. Take them glasses and check out all those people in the Ball mansion.

BUTCH: There's just two ladies. Mrs. Ball an' the, uh, maid.

JIGGER: Visitin' folks. Keep an eye out for strangers goin' in the house. Hold on, almost missed Reggie Lance.

(Jigger turns on the radio.)

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* I'm tired. Sick and tired of the lies and deceptions of our fellow man. Petty little creatures without an honest bone in their bodies.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* And the women, too.

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* So true, Sergeant. Yet bringing the evildoers to justice is work that can never stop. Let's call on that sleazy lawyer.

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Tomorrow we'll see how that visit goes, but now a message from our sponsor, Primo—

(Jigger turns off the radio.)

JIGGER: We gotta go to work, too. *(Butch exits. Jigger walks to the window.)* What the heck has happened to me? Locked in my own bedroom by a couple of old biddies. Sorry, Maggie. Just one old biddie. I ain't never been scared for me. But I sure am now. Getting old shouldn't be so bad. Gray hair,

maybe even choppers in a glass, but still moving and doing. I ain't got enough hair to care about the color, but I still got most of my real teeth. But, the power ain't here no more. I clench my fist and it ain't got no nothing. Like my hand was made of cornmeal mush. Hell, if I was on my death bed, Doc wouldn't clue me in. "Doing okay, Jigger. Noisy breathing is a good sign." Need a young doc. Of course there ain't none. But if there was...he'd say, "Mr. Bascomb your days is numbered on one hand." I'd say, "Thanks." He'd leave. Maggie'd cry. Me, I'd stand strong, maybe. At least till Maggie left. Then I just might cry, and I couldn't help but scream for my mother. (*Screams.*) Jesus that was an awful sound. Get a grip, you old fart. I don't hurt. I can't be too bad off. Besides I got a job to do. Butch and me, we're gonna find the guy who shot my pal, Jack, and put him in the old electrical chair. Yessir, I got work to do. (*Jigger falls into his bed. Blackout.*)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: Same day. Doc and the Police Chief stand in front of the house.)

DOC: I'm not so sure that I'm s'posed to be present when you're asking Miz Ball serious questions like who could of done it.

CHIEF: So what? I needed your clear thinkin'. Isn't that French maid a wowzer? Hard to remember why we were there. How is Jigger doin'? His heart, you said?

DOC: Yup. He worries me. Gonna be tough to keep an antsy guy like Jigger nailed to the bed.

CHIEF: Shame he doesn't build model airplanes—

DOC: Or collect used postage stamps—

CHIEF: I used to know a guy in Florida who knitted his own socks.

DOC: But not Jigger. Listening to radio mysteries all these years has convinced him he's ready to do some detecting on his own.

CHIEF: How? When he's stuck in bed with his mother-in-law!

(The Chief starts laughing and can't stop until tears run down his cheeks.)

DOC: You're sure enough disgusting. I just was wondering, maybe you could kinda keep him involved in your search for the killer.

CHIEF: My investigation is confidential.

DOC: You let me tag along.

CHIEF: You're official. You're the coroner. But Jigger, gee whiz. I got a job to do. The radio? He thinks you learn detectin' listenin' to the radio? Jesus.

DOC: And where'd you get your extensive training? Right here tagging after your uncle. Hell, he just might have learned something from those radio dicks. Come on.
(Doc and Chief walk up the steps and meet Maggie.)

CHIEF: Hello, Maggie. I just wanted to check on old Jigger, try to cheer him up.
MAGGIE: Thanks for comin' by. The old man is a little down. And convince him that detectin' isn't for sick people.
CHIEF: Sure, Maggie. He in bed?
MAGGIE: He better be.

(Doc and Chief enter the house and go to Jigger's bedroom. Maggie sits on the porch step.)

JIGGER: Dammit Chief, how'd you know I blew ol' Jack's brains out, and twice, at that?
CHIEF: Lucky guess.
JIGGER: Nah, I didn't kill him. I knew one bullet was enough for a brain his size. Take a load off and explain why you're interruptin' my beauty sleep.
DOC: Me and the Chief were talking, and I told him you wanted to help. The Chief jumped at the chance of working with a radio-trained detective.
CHIEF: Yeah, something like that. I got a shortage of boys with homicide experience. Got a pencil, so you can take some notes?

(Jigger frantically searches in a drawer and pulls out a pad and pencil. He sits in the rocking chair and then licks the tip of his pencil.)

JIGGER: Ready.
CHIEF: Write down the victim's name...and date of death. Now, all the rest me or Doc tells you is secret. Okay?
JIGGER: I swear.

CHIEF: The maid—

JIGGER: Hold on. (*Jigger scratches on his pad.*) The maid, what's her name?

CHIEF: E-m-i-l-i-e. Emilie. What's—

JIGGER: She found poor Jack first?

CHIEF: Yeah.

JIGGER: Got it. Keep goin'!

CHIEF: The maid gets worried when Jack don't come down for breakfast and Missus Ball ain't around to boot.

JIGGER: Rich folks eat bacon and eggs every day like we do?

DOC: Just let the Chief tell the story. Good grief, you oughta be a lawyer.

CHIEF: She knocks on the door and then calls out but don't get no answer. The door's locked, so this Emilie had to get a key from Miz Ball to open Jack's door. All right? When she unlocks the door and sees Jack spread out on the rug in a mess of blood, she grabs up the phone in the study and calls Doc.

JIGGER: Why'd she call you, Doc? Why not the coppers?

DOC: She's French. They must figure you're alive until proven otherwise.

CHIEF: Doc gets there, leaving you in his dust, and finds Jack deader than a doornail and phones me, suspecting foul play with them two bullet holes in Jack's eyebrows.

JIGGER: The maid, she was there. How about Jack's missus? She crying her eyes out over this here tragedy?

CHIEF: A good question. I get there...Missus Ball is sitting in the Rolls Royce, head down on the steering wheel. You know the thing's on the wrong side. Them British is weird. I knocks on the window, she rolls it down. I asks her if she's okay. She shakes her head. I says, "You know about your husband?" She nods her head yes. I says, "Want to come in?" She says, "If I stay here, everything stays as it was. If I enter the house—"

JIGGER: Sittin' in the car? While her hubby is a-bleedin' to death?

CHIEF: I leave her and go into the house. The maid is carryin' on like it was her husband, crying and lamentin' and all. Doc is trying to calm her down, but she's havin' none of it. Doc sees me and we leave the woman screamin', and he shows me the late Jack Ball. Messy.

DOC: You heard the shots, right, Jigger?

JIGGER: Yeah. Thought it was that damn Ford truck of Ollie's down the way, but I guess not. Woke me up. One or two bangs, I ain't sure.

CHIEF: You look at the clock?

JIGGER: Yeah, but I couldn't see it without my glasses on. It was still black as a hunk of licorice.

CHIEF: Doc touched the late Jack Ball and declared him dead, so I went huntin' for clues. Found a French book.

JIGGER: The maid could read it. Hmmm.

(The Chief pulls a book out from under his coat.)

CHIEF: Not parlee voo fransay. Wrote in American. With pictures, you know like those French postcards. Not real clear but ooh-la-la. Look at this! *(Shows Doc a page.)* So I figured I'd better read a little to find out about the victim's bad habits.

DOC: Mighty nosy. Those books have nothing to do with him dying.

CHIEF: So the story is about this guy in the French Foreign Legion who stumbles into this virgin's backyard and performs the deed wearing his kepi all the while.

JIGGER: A kepi?

CHIEF: Like a hat. You've seen 'em in the movies. Like in "Beau Geste."

JIGGER: In the backyard? An' the soldier kept his hat on?

DOC: That's to show that he did it quick.

JIGGER: Why not say quick? He done it quick.

CHIEF: Then the Legion guy stumbles off and the girl's mother comes and notices she's walking funny. The girl says she's been shinnying up a tree.

JIGGER: That there woman believes her?

CHIEF: That's the story.

JIGGER: He kept his kepi on?

(Mother enters the room.)

MOTHER: What is going on here?! *(Chief drops the book and Jigger slips it under the covers.)* Bertram is ill. *(She points at the Chief.)* I assume you are a police person in that getup. Why are you disturbing Bertram?

CHIEF: I'm just here in case Doc needed a siren to race ol' Jigger to the hospital. But our boy seems to be okay.

MOTHER: Hah! Doctor, I may be forced to take charge of this patient myself. I was once a student nurse, you know –

JIGGER: With Florence Nightingale in the Crimea.

MOTHER: Do not make a joke of such a brave and noble woman. She was older than I. *(Mother stands with arms folded, staring down the two men. Then points to the door.)* Out, out, out. Visiting hours are over. Bertram return to bed. *(Doc and Chief wave and exit. Jigger shuffles over to the bed.)* Sleepy?

JIGGER: Nope.

MOTHER: I have an idea. The New York Times is in my bag. I shall get you the Sunday crossword puzzle. That will improve your mind.

JIGGER: I already got a headache. Don't need no more. *(Mother shakes her head and exits to the bathroom.)* Ah-ha! The maid's crying and the missus ain't. One misses Jack and the other don't. Or maybe the money goes to the one not carrying on. Crossword puzzles...that woman is daft. My thinkin' cap is on for the real thing. The Chief wants my help. Don't that beat all? Wait'll I see Butch. He's in Civil Defense, but I'm a cop! *(Jigger moves to the window and looks*

out, then turns and heads to the bathroom. He tries the knob. Locked.) Maggie.

MAGGIE: Yes, dear?

JIGGER: Never mind. *(Jigger returns to the bedroom carrying a vase. He sits on the bed with legs tightly crossed.)* Ma'll be in there an hour. That woman loves sitting on the toilet. I gotta go. She oughta bring her own damn bathroom with her. That stuff Doc gave me, whoo. Doc shoulda left me a sample bottle.

(Jigger surveys the room. He closes his bedroom door and pulls the flowers from the vase and turns away from the audience. Sound of toilet flushing. Sound of running water from faucet. Door opens. Mother enters.)

MOTHER: Bertram, perhaps I could get you a book.

(Jigger keeps back to Mother and the audience.)

JIGGER: I'd like a book.

MOTHER: Wonderful. *(She turns to leave, then sniffs, shrugs, and hurries out. Jigger puts the vase back on the dresser and stuffs the flowers back in. He hops into bed. Mother returns holding aloft a book.)* Oh, Bertram, this book is quite wonderful. About a woman who surmounted overwhelming odds to achieve—

JIGGER: Please. Don't tell all the good stuff.

(Mother hands Jigger the book. He takes it and smiles. She sniffs again.)

MOTHER: Odd smell.

JIGGER: *(Begins to read.)* "Lady Melinda Higginbottom lay sprawled face down on the ivory lace coverlet, her burgundy velvet gown contrastin' with the ivory of the

beddin' and the selfsame ivory sheen o' her impeccably smooth complexion."

MOTHER: Wonderful, isn't it?

(Jigger nods, head in book. Mother exits. Jigger jumps up, grabs the vase, and runs to the bathroom. Maggie enters the bedroom. Jigger exits into the bathroom.)

MAGGIE: Those are dead flowers.

JIGGER: That's why I was addin' water.

MAGGIE: They're straw flowers. Dried on purpose.

JIGGER: If they were already dead, I guess I couldnta hurt 'em much. I'll just stick 'em on the sill to dry. You hear that backfire the other night?

MAGGIE: Bang, bang.

JIGGER: Sure it was two bangs?

MAGGIE: I was awake, worrying about you getting your dander up with my mother comin' unannounced. My stars! So it wasn't Ollie waking us up one more time?

JIGGER: What'd the clock say?

MAGGIE: Quarter past four.

JIGGER: Ah-ha! The exact time Jack Ball caught two bullets in the head. I gotta call the Chief.

MAGGIE: You're stayin' up here.

JIGGER: Then I gotta have a telephone. Up here!

MAGGIE: We got one phone, and it isn't moving. Whoever heard of a house with two telephones?

(Maggie exits. Jigger slumps, arms folded. Mumbles to himself. A knock on the sill. Butch enters through the window.)

JIGGER: Didja hear that? Gunshots heard at four fifteen.

BUTCH: Jigger! I got news! I saw —

JIGGER: Saw? What?

BUTCH: The French maid.

JIGGER: And?

BUTCH: Her chest was naked as a jaybird.

JIGGER: *(Stifles a laugh.)* Oh?

BUTCH: I didn't mean to. I was just watching like you said...and then she walks in front of the upstairs window. I wouldn't of looked but—

JIGGER: It's okay. But you, yer a detective, you gotta give me the details. Ain't nothin' ta be 'shamed of. They big ones?

BUTCH: I dunno.

JIGGER: Like this? *(Jigger cups his hands before his chest.)*

BUTCH: Bigger, I think.

JIGGER: More like this, huh? *(His hands expand.)*

BUTCH: Yeah, about like that.

JIGGER: Ohhh. Them's good-sized. Got the details, good. Any of them distinguishin' marks, like Reggie Lance is always talking about?

BUTCH: The spots on her chest. Real big an' round, bright like glowy pink, know what I mean?

JIGGER: I useta, once. I gotta get out an' help ya on this job. Oh well, then what'd she do?

BUTCH: She grabbed a robe, covered herself, and yelled at somebody.

JIGGER: That there is a bona fide clue. Who'd she see?

BUTCH: I dunno. The other guy...I never seen him.

JIGGER: Guy?

BUTCH: Maybe a guy. I just said that. Anyways, the maid disappeared and that's it.

JIGGER: Can I ask my ace detective a question?

BUTCH: Sure, Grandpa.

JIGGER: *(Corrects him.)* Jigger. You ever seen a female person without a stitch of clothing on 'fore today? Adult-like?

BUTCH: Nnnooo.

JIGGER: Look like a murderer to you? The maid I mean.

BUTCH: Gosh, no.

JIGGER: Let's keep the maid our little secret, okay? No need to alarm the women folks. Anythin' else, detective?

BUTCH: A car sat in the driveway, behind Miz Ball's Rolls.

JIGGER: Wow! What's the license number?

BUTCH: Jeepers! I dunno! Reginald Lance never forgets.

JIGGER: It's all right. What kinda car?

BUTCH: Black.

JIGGER: Color, black. Good. What kinda car?

BUTCH: Started with a P.

JIGGER: Geez, you are a detective! Could be a Packard. Or maybe a Plymouth. A Pierce Arrow?

BUTCH: A big car, not real old.

JIGGER: Packard, for sure. A big black Packard. Sidney Draper, I'll bet. A doggone mouthpiece, that's all he is.

BUTCH: Mr. Draper's a lawyer? Like on the radio? Trying to keep the crooks outta jail?

JIGGER: Yup. Mostly keepin' himself outta the big house. He and Jack always hung out together, since grammar school. Sidney scrapes through law school, somehow, while Jack just sits and gets rich when his old man croaks. *(Jigger breathes heavily.)*

BUTCH: You okay? You're sure breathing funny.

JIGGER: Don't fret. Just gotta catch my breath. So old buddy Sid became Jack's lawyer...guess him being at the Ball house ain't unusual.

BUTCH: Should I shadow him?

JIGGER: Yeah. But keep your distance. Use them binoculars. And keep a sharp eye on that maid. I reckon I ain't gotta tell you that. And, Maggie ain't letting me go downstairs to use the phone, so you gotta get word to the Chief about our clues.

BUTCH: Yes, sir. *(Butch salutes and starts out the window.)*

JIGGER: Gimme a hug, first. You ain't just a detective. You're still my grandson.

(They hug and Butch starts to exit through the window. Mother enters and sees Butch.)

MOTHER: Butch! *(Butch zips away. Mother shakes her head and pulls a chair close to Jigger, who is sitting in bed.)* Boys! You're

all the same, never listen. But that is not why I'm here. Bertram, I have never wished you ill or wished you to be ill. (*Jigger raises his hand to signal "stop."*) Please let me talk. You would not be surprised if I said Margaret's father strongly disapproved of your union with his beloved only daughter.

JIGGER: He never once said my name.

MOTHER: Still, he did not drive you away with his shotgun. He attended the sad event and reluctantly, so reluctantly, passed dear Margaret's fingers from his hand to yours and permitted the ceremony to reach its climax.

JIGGER: Ha, ha, ha –

MOTHER: I was not discussing the wedding night.

JIGGER: No, o' course not.

MOTHER: Before he passed on to a better world, Father admitted to me that Margaret did not seem totally unhappy, so perhaps you were not quite the bounder that he took you for.

JIGGER: Now that there is a compliment.

MOTHER: As close as Father could come when discussing the man who stole his daughter. You are better than my first impression also, thank God.

JIGGER: Thanks, Ma. Ya know, you ain't bad yerself. I bet you been lonely since the old guy passed on.

MOTHER: I have my crosswords, the Women's Club theatricals, the Westchester Ladies Wednesday afternoon Book Review Circle.

JIGGER: But you got no family.

MOTHER: I do miss watching Butch grow up. He's changing so fast and needs the sort of training and discipline that are my forte.

JIGGER: Ever figure on movin' back to Indiana?

MOTHER: Perhaps, one of these days. (*Mother stands and moves her chair away from the bed. Steps to the door.*) Yes, Bertram, you have exceeded my expectations, but, if I could turn back the clock, there were a few better choices for Margaret: John Pelkington, Blackie Towery, Bobbie

McDermott... *(As she exits.)* ...Buddy Jeanette, Bill Henry,
Curly Armstrong... *(Exits to living room.)*

JIGGER: A bunch o' losers. Maggie chose me. And we been
livin' happily ever after. Should I ask Maggie about that
ever-after stuff? Nah. She's happy. Ma moving back here?
I ain't issued an invitation, have I?

*(Mother is hunched before the radio in the living room. Butch and
the Chief enter stage and stop in front of the house.)*

CHIEF: The dragon lady's on watch, Butch, how we gonna see
Jigger?

BUTCH: Follow me.

CHIEF: Where you goin'?

BUTCH: We got a secret way. There's a ladder—

CHIEF: No, no, no. Not for me. Retirement fattened me up
just a mite. Gotta be another way.

(Butch steps onto the porch and peeks into the living room.)

BUTCH: We can sneak right by her. Great grandma's got her
head in the radio. Come on.

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* ...brought to you by G-E-L-O, the
delightful dessert with more bounce to the bowl. Helen
Houston's second daughter by her third husband has just
arrived in town. She pounds on the rickety door of Helen's
houseboat.

(Sound of pounding fists on a door.)

DAUGHTER: *(Radio.)* Mommy, mommy. Let me in. The
police...

*(Sound of sirens, men shouting. Sound of creaking door opening
then slamming shut.)*

HELEN: *(Radio.)* Oh my God, what dreadful tragedy has befallen you now? The police after you? Oh dear, come here.

DAUGHTER: *(Radio.)* Mommy, hold me tight. Don't let them get me.

HELEN: *(Radio.)* Where is that no-good husband Ralph?

DAUGHTER: *(Radio.)* Gone. Forever.

HELEN: *(Radio.)* And the children?

DAUGHTER: *(Radio.)* I had to pawn them to get here.

(Sirens get louder, bullhorns are heard, and then a few random shots. The music rises to a crescendo and slowly tapers off. Butch and the Chief enter Jigger's bedroom. Jigger dozes.)

BUTCH: Jigger, wake up! I brought the Chief.

JIGGER: Just restin' my eyes, not sleeping. I see my ace gumshoe's done his job. Hi, Chief.

(The Chief closes the door and signals Jigger to talk softly.)

CHIEF: Yeah, Butch is the best. Except he wanted to see me bust my butt trying to climb up here. Kids.

JIGGER: Heck, even you was a kid, once. You ain't caught the killer yet, have ya?

CHIEF: Nope.

JIGGER: Good.

CHIEF: You're happy some loony's still running loose?

JIGGER: We got clues, Butch and me. He done a fine job with his civil defense glasses.

CHIEF: He's not supposed to use them except for official business.

BUTCH: Am I in trouble?

JIGGER: Ain't murder official enough? Good grief! Looky here, Chief, Butch seen the maid arguing with some guy. You tell 'im Butch.

BUTCH: Just like Grandpa said, I kept my binoculars aimed at the Ball house, looking for suspicious stuff. And I saw...aw shucks—

CHIEF: This is important! What'd you see?

BUTCH: *(To Jigger.)* Should I tell him everything?

JIGGER: He's the law, Butch. Can't hold nothing back.

(Butch shuffles feet and stares at the floor.)

BUTCH: I saw the maid. She—

CHIEF: It's all right, Butch. She in her underwear?

BUTCH: No. Not exactly. She wasn't wearing no underwear.

CHIEF: Ohhh. Hmmm. Naked, huh? There was a guy with her?

BUTCH: I don't know. Never saw him, just guessed. She yelled at somebody and wrapped up real quick in a purpley thing. I kept watching for a long time, but never saw her no more.

CHIEF: I'll bet you kept an eye out for a spell. Good. But who got her all het up? That's the question. You got any ideas, Butch?

(Butch shakes his head no.)

MOTHER: *(Shouts.)* Bertram, are you alone up there?

(Jigger quickly turns on the radio. He opens the bedroom door.)

JIGGER: *(Shouts.)* Just the radio, Ma, just the radio. *(He closes the door and puts his finger to his lips.)*

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Primo Wine, the internationally renowned premium wine from the Primo Vineyards on the shores of Lake Erie, presents Reginald Lance in another episode of "The Case of The Mangled Millionaire." But first—

JIGGER: *(Turns down the volume.)* Did Doc figger out when ol' Jack bit the bullets?

CHIEF: A while before he got the phone call.

JIGGER: Four fifteen, that's the time. Maggie heard the shots.

(They hear footsteps on the stairs.)

MOTHER: *(Calls up.)* Bertram, that sounds like that Chief person.

(Jigger turns up the volume on the radio. The Chief and Butch dive behind the bed. Mother enters.)

JIGGER: It ain't good for a woman of your years to be a-runnin' up and down the stairs like that.

MOTHER: Now, you know I must watch over you. *(Jigger turns away from her and closes his eyes.)* Of course, you rest. I'll just turn off this silly program.

JIGGER: It ain't silly. It's Reginald Lance. Don't touch that dial.

MOTHER: Really! If it were Helen Houston, I would understand, but silly stories about murder and such things, no thank you.

(Mother exits. Butch and Chief raise their heads but remain behind the bed.)

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Previously, Sergeant Kevin Killarney found Lord Holdon crushed to death beneath a fallen bookcase in the study at Wimplewood Manor. He called in his friend, dilettante detective Reginald Lance for assistance. We join the two searchers of truth as they reach the office of Lord Holdon's solicitor.

(Dramatic radio theme music. Sound of door opening and closing.)

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* Empty. Criminies.

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* A light is on in Cedric Hardtack's private office. Try the door.

(Sound of knocking. Sound of door creaking open.)

CEDRIC: *(Radio.)* Just barging in like any flatfoot. I'm surprised at you, Lance.

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* Your secretary seems to be missing. We, the Sergeant and I, need information.

CEDRIC: *(Radio.)* Talk to my attorney.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* You want to go downtown?

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* Only Cedric's concept of a humorous riposte. Cedric always cooperates with the authorities.

CEDRIC: *(Radio.)* You aren't official, Lance. I don't have to tell you anything.

(A door slams. Footsteps.)

SECRETARY: *(Radio.)* Mon ami...ooh, you have zee company.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* Wow, what a looker.

(Jigger turns off the radio.)

CHIEF: That Sarge is pretty sharp. A Frenchy and a lawyer.

BUTCH: Yessir! Just like the maid and Mr. Sidney.

CHIEF: Suspicious, huh?

JIGGER: Butch seen a black Packard out front o' the Ball place. Tell 'im Butch.

BUTCH: A real big car.

CHIEF: Hell, yes, that's gotta be Slimy Sid. Always wanted to nail him. Gotta go, see what everybody was up to at four fifteen of Jack's last night. Thanks, Jigger. *(The Chief shakes Jigger's hand and opens the door. He listens for the downstairs radio but there is silence. The Chief closes the door gently. To Butch.)* Now what? That soap opera's over.

(Butch points to the window, gives Jigger a salute, and crawls halfway out.)

JIGGER: Don't be chicken, Chief.

CHIEF: *(To Butch.)* Lead the way, buddy boy. You gotta catch me when I fall.

(Butch starts to exit out the window. The Chief watches him and attempts to follow ever so slowly, carefully. Jigger reaches over and turns on the radio.)

REGINALD: *(Radio.)* Before we go, Cedric, do you read much?

CEDRIC: *(Radio.)* Do I look like that kind a guy? Get outta here.

SERGEANT: *(Radio.)* Funny, Lord Holdon had a book stuck in his head.

(Dramatic music swells.)

ANNOUNCER: *(Radio.)* Tune in tomorrow, same time, same station, for the adventures of Reginald Lance, dilettante detective, brought to you by Primo, the only winery on the shores of Lake Erie, maker of your old favorites, Primo Red, and Primo White. And now Primo proudly presents its exciting new Primo Pink. When about fine wine you think, just remember Primo Pink.

(Musical ending. Crashing sounds come from the side yard, interrupting the music. Chief's voice is heard from a distance.)

CHIEF: *(Offstage.)* Ohhh, damn.

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: Next day. The sound of horses' hooves. Doc walks up, whistling. Mother is on the porch. A pile of horse manure is dead ahead. Doc steps in it.)

DOC: Oh, shit. *(He scrapes his shoe on the walk to remove the manure.)* Oops. Morning, ma'am.

MOTHER: "Manure," Doctor. That stuff on your shoes is called "manure" in polite society.

DOC: Still using horse-drawn carts to deliver milk. That dairy is living in the past and ruinin' my footwear. *(Doc sits on the steps and removes his shoes.)* Your rugs is safe now. How's my patient?

MOTHER: Bertram seems fine, but his hearing concerns me. He plays his radio loud enough for the entire town to be bored with the adventures of his silly detectives.

DOC: I'll test him.

(Doc enters the house sock-footed. Maggie, wearing coveralls, meets him holding her black metal lunch bucket.)

MAGGIE: Wish me luck, Doc, Maggie is going off to war.

DOC: Good luck, and be careful 'round that confounded machinery.

(Mother enters and hugs Maggie. Maggie marches off.)

MOTHER: A job. Humph. I never worked. Never needed to. Father provided for me handsomely. And now my poor daughter...she's too old to start something new.

DOC: Maggie's bored with housekeeping. She's going to have fun in a brave new world. *(Doc heads for Jigger's room, followed by Mother.)* Big day today. Like seein' your first-born off to school.

JIGGER: What in tarnation are you talking about?

MOTHER: Maggie's first day at that despicably filthy factory.

JIGGER: It ain't that bad.

MOTHER: Such an environment suits you. Not my little Margaret. *(Her voice trails off as she exits.)*

JIGGER: That woman is always gonna hate me for sumpin'. I ain't to blame for Maggie workin'. Heck, I want her home.

DOC: Maggie's ma says besides bein' daft, you're also goin' deaf. That so?

JIGGER: Maggie...she left me...for the factory.

DOC: You done it to her every day for 40 years. Cut your complaining. I'm going to turn around and you tell me what I say, okay? *(Doc turns his back to Jigger and faces the audience.)* Berghoff.

JIGGER: Berghoff. This ain't much of a test.

DOC: *(Whispers.)* Berghoff.

JIGGER: That the only word you know? Berghoff.

DOC: *(Stage whisper.)* Vagina.

(Pause.)

JIGGER: Jesus Christ, Doc. Vagina?

(Doc turns to face Jigger.)

DOC: You're okay. Your pal says the radio's so loud it sounds like her Helen Houston is talking to your Reginald Lance.

JIGGER: *(Laughs.)* Oh that. Shoot. Butch and the Chief came a-visiting. Had to cover up the noise. We're gettin' someplace.

(Doc pulls out blood pressure apparatus from his medical bag and wraps the cuff around Jigger's arm.)

DOC: Unh-huh. Stay calm a minute and breathe deep. And again. One more time. It's still ticking.

JIGGER: Don'ja wanna know?

DOC: Okay, Mr. Detective, I'm all ears.

JIGGER: My ace assistant, meanin' Butch, been keepin' an eye on the Ball estate. He seen more'n he shoulda of that French maid's chest. More'n we've seen.

DOC: Don't forget I'm a doctor.

JIGGER: She your patient? Don't matter. It's different fer you. More'n I'll ever get a peek of. Besides gettin' a gander at some flesh, he seen sump'in else.

DOC: So tell me, I'm a busy man. *(Doc hefts his case and takes a step toward the door.)*

JIGGER: Lemme ask you a question. Who's got a big black Packard in town?

DOC: Old lady Podge.

JIGGER: Really?

DOC: She's a suspect? Her with her house so full of junk the kids call it Hodgepodge Manor? You must be kidding?

JIGGER: She a friend of Miz Ball's?

DOC: You're the gumshoe. I got to go. *(As Doc opens the door, Mother enters with her hands behind her back.)* I got to go. Bye, ma'am.

(Doc exits. Mother stands over Jigger.)

MOTHER: I am concerned.

JIGGER: Me too. What about?

(Mother's hands fall to her sides. A red rubber enema bag is in one hand.)

MOTHER: B.M.'s. Your B.M.'s.

JIGGER: You mean—

MOTHER: Bowel movements. You know. Firm, but not harsh. Soft, but not runny. Are you happy with your stool?

JIGGER: My gosh, woman, ain't you got no control over that mouth o' yours?

MOTHER: From my days as a nurse, I know the importance of proper elimination. Are you regular?

JIGGER: I always been a regular guy. Ask anybody down at the mill.

MOTHER: Did you have a movement yesterday? This morning? If not...

(She displays the enema bag. Jigger leaps out of bed and backs away from her.)

JIGGER: Hold on. Ya can set your clock by me. If ya want, I can save it for ya.

MOTHER: That makes me so happy. Then this is unnecessary, for now. *(Holds aloft the enema bag.)* Where is the book?

(Jigger pats the side of the bed remembering the book the Chief left.)

JIGGER: Book?

MOTHER: Oh, here it is behind the radio. So wonderful. That poor woman who overcame such adversity in China and Africa...I've told you too much. You probably are as yet unaware of her travails in the Transvaal.

(Jigger takes the book from her hand.)

JIGGER: All them places, wow. I gotta get to reading. *(Jigger sits in the rocking chair, head in book.)*

MOTHER: A lovely picture. A man and a book. Reminds me so of Father. *(Mother wraps the hose around the enema bag and exits to the kitchen.)*

JIGGER: Maggie, I need ya. A woman working and a man staying home. That there is a strange notion. The world ain't changin' for the better. And that woman and her machine. Ugh. *(Jigger picks up his pad of paper and flips the*

pages.) Hmmm. Miz Podge, a Packard too. My gosh, I already figgered Sidney for the chair.

(He begins to whistle tunelessly. Mother sits at the table holding a bottle of elixir and a glass.)

MOTHER: Maybe I should test Doctor McGillicuddy's nostrum before I dose my patient. *(She pours half a glass and sniffs.)* With that aroma, it must be extremely good for you. *(She takes a small sip.)* Oh, my. *(She finishes off the glass and refills.)* A trifle strong, yet gives me such a good warm feeling. At my age, I seem to be always chilled. *(She pours a full glass and drinks it down. She turns her chair to face the audience, slumps in the chair, her legs splayed. Slurs her words.)* I must go shopping. Need a bottle for Jigger... and another one for me...

(Her head falls forward on her chest. Butch enters the bedroom through the window. His arm is in a sling.)

JIGGER: What happened? You fall off the roof, too?

BUTCH: Noo. I'm just kiddin'. *(Pulls his arm from the sling.)*
See?

JIGGER: That like first-aid? Boy Scout stuff?

BUTCH: Civil Defense, Grandpa. Serious business.

JIGGER: Sure is. Looks like a mighty fine piece o' work. Why ain't you in school?

BUTCH: Going back now. Came home for lunch.

JIGGER: Lunch? You got anything left?

(Butch pulls a peanut butter and jelly sandwich from his sling.)

BUTCH: You can have half.

(Butch gives Jigger half.)

JIGGER: Ya saved my life. We guys gotta stick together or we ain't got a chance protecting ourselves from women like your grandma's ma. Don't get sick near her. Arghh. *(Pause. Takes a bite.)* Gosh that's good. What else ya got?

BUTCH: A stick of Black Jack gum?

JIGGER: Thanks, but licorice gum just don't seem right to me. My mouth don't expect it. Turns your tongue black. Ma 'ould think I had a new disease, and she'd whip up another gosh awful concoction like that "roughage surprise."

BUTCH: Gotta go.

JIGGER: Hold on. We got a problem.

BUTCH: I can't be late. Miss Jones—

JIGGER: Doc says Miz Podge has got one o' them Packards, too.

BUTCH: I'll be on duty soon's I get outta school, with my binoculars.

JIGGER: We're needing a license number, not no more of that other, you know.

BUTCH: Yessir. *(Butch salutes and slips his arm into the sling.)*

JIGGER: Say hello to Miss Jones for me. I took her dancin' one time. O' course before your grandma and me... *(Butch laughs and exits through the window. Jigger struts around the room.)* Old Jigger may not seem like much. But young Bert, he sure wowed them ladies. An' that Abbie Jones, what a kisser for a girl goin' to Indiana Normal College. *(Jigger hums "When You Wore a Tulip, a Bright Yellow Tulip, and I Wore A Big Red Rose" Jigger dances, holding an invisible Miss Jones. He pirouettes, spinning faster and faster. He stops suddenly and collapses heavily onto the rocking chair. He puts his hand over his heart, breathes heavily.)* Yeah, we useta dance all night. Now I can't last more'n a minute or two. Maggie and me...when? The last time...the Eagles Lodge...the bowling tournament...my last trophy...my last dance. Gettin' old just seems like it's all about last. Last, last, last. *(Jigger lets his head rest on his chest, then snaps to attention. He stands, stalks, hands behind his back. Lights begin to slowly fade.)* But I still

remember all them firsts...5 years old, my first job selling veggies with Vinnie—whatever became o' that boy?—me going on the ladies porches 'cause Vinnie looked all swarthy, and the ladies wuz all scared like he was a foreigner or sumpin', but Doc's dad delivered him right in his house over on Dayton Avenue, so I knew that weren't true, but you can't tell no scared biddy nothing. An' Hilda in the garage in the back seat of her poppa's Stanley Steamer...boy wuz we doin' the steamin'. She married Eddie—don't know why, she wuz way too tall for him. She musta told him sumpin', 'cause he never liked me much after they got hitched... (*Blackout. Intermission.*)

[End of Freeview]