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Rally Round the Flag, Boys!

a full-length comedy by

DAVID ROGERS

adapted from the novel by

MAX SHULMAN



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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Based upon the work, *Rally Round the Flag, Boys!*
©MCMLIV and MCMLVII by Max Shulman
Chapter Two appeared, in altered form, in *Good Housekeeping*
magazine, ©MCMLVI by the Hearst Corporation

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(RALLY ROUND THE FLAG, BOYS!)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-114-7

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**For Dulcy Dru,
with love**

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RALLY 'ROUND THE FLAG, BOYS!

A Comedy in Two Acts

For Fifteen Men, Eleven Women, Extras if desired

CHARACTERS

ISAAC GOODPASTURE *First Selectman of
Putnam's Landing*

GRACE BANNERMAN
HARRY BANNERMAN
MAGGIE LARKIN
BETTY O'SHEEL
PRUDENCE MELVIN
CLEMENT METCALF
AGNES CULP
MILDRED EVANS
DELLA WATERFORD

} . . . *citizens of Putnam's
Landing*

COMFORT GOODPASTURE
GLORIA COLEMAN
MARY ANN STONE
GINA LEONE

} . . . *girls of Putnam's
Landing*

GRADY METCALF
CHARLIE MELVIN
ED
FRED

} *boys of Putnam's
Landing*

DANNY BANNERMAN . . . *a small boy of Putnam's
Landing*

COLONEL THORWALD
CAPTAIN HOXIE
LIEUTENANT GUIDO DI MAGGIO
CORPORAL OPIE DALRYMPLE
PRIVATE WILLIAM O. WAMBESS
PRIVATE ROGER LITWHILER
PRIVATE GUSTAVE MORRISSETTE

} *of the
U. S.
Army*

PLACE: *Putnam's Landing, a small town in Connecticut.*

TIME: *Spring through July the Fourth.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE, Scene One: *The Town Meeting Hall of Putnam's Landing, an evening in spring.*

Scene Two: *Putnam's Landing, several weeks later.*

Scene Three: *The Town Hall, immediately after.*

ACT TWO, Scene One: *The Town Hall, late afternoon, July the Fourth.*

Scene Two: *The Town Hall, a little while later.*

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: The Town Hall of Putnam's Landing, an evening in spring. [For details of stage setting, see pages 165-166.]

AT RISE: The Hall is quite full, the people buzzing with conversation. Seated on the downstage side of the first row of benches are GRACE and HARRY BANNERMAN, a suburban couple in their thirties. GRACE is attractive but a determined committee-woman, which gives HARRY a rather tired, careworn look. In the second row, downstage, sits BETTY O'SHEEL, a suburban housewife, slightly younger than Grace and attractive though perhaps a bit plump. Behind her sits PRUDENCE MELVIN, a gushy lady in a flowered hat. Next to Prudence sits AGNES CULP, a taciturn New England lady. Beside Agnes, on the center aisle, sits DELLA WATERFORD, a rather loud young matron. Across the aisle, on the downstage side of the second row, sits CLEMENT METCALF, a pompous businessman in his forties. Behind him is MILDRED EVANS, another suburban type. If extras are available, they can be scattered through the rest of the seats. There is an air of expectation and chatter as the curtain rises. Just as the curtain gets all

the way up, GUIDO DI MAGGIO, a good-looking young second lieutenant, enters from R, looks at the meeting, then turns to the audience.

GUIDO

(To audience)

I guess you could call this a little bit of Americana. It's an old-fashioned Town Meeting. They still have them in Putnam's Landing. That's a little town in Connecticut in commuting distance of New York City. I'm a Lieutenant in the Army now but I grew up here. Oh! My name is Guido Di Maggio . . . Lieutenant . . . Second. . . . It's a beautiful old New England town, Putnam's Landing is--and as a kid who was born and raised in this typical, warm, friendly American community, I can truthfully say that every citizen in town hates me.

(The entire meeting looks at him, hisses, then looks away)

Y'see? It's not my fault. I mean I'm not in charge of the Army . . . really! It's because of my work --and--well----

(Pointing to PRUDENCE)

Like Prudence Melvin. She's the town real estate agent. She hates me.

PRUDENCE

(Turns to audience, smiles charmingly)

How do you do? I loathe him. I mean, if it weren't for him, we wouldn't have to be having this special town meeting--and this whole crisis may spell disaster for my new real estate development, Johnny-cake Hill. It will be ready to show next week. The perfect time. Spring, when the buds are in bloom and the New Yorkers come up here ready to buy.

AGNES

Where is this Johnnycake Hill, Prudence?

PRUDENCE

You know it, Agnes. Behind the old road to Bridgeport. It used to be called Blodgett's Swamp.

AGNES

(Confused)

Blodgett's Swamp? Johnnycake Hill?

PRUDENCE

(Defensive)

Well, we've been filling it in with the town garbage for the last two years. Unless this terrible thing happens, it could be the most successful development I've had since I turned the old gravel pit into Flintlock Ridge.

BETTY

(In front of her, turning, icily)

Flintlock Ridge is hardly successful. My house has been sinking fourteen inches a year since I bought it.

PRUDENCE

Well, it's not my fault, Mrs. O'Sheel. It's probably due to all this unnatural rain--and that's probably caused by the atom bomb--and you can't blame me for the atom bomb!

BETTY

No, but I can blame you for dumping the garbage on Johnnycake Hill! A most inefficient method of garbage disposal.

(She turns away)

PRUDENCE

(To audience)

That woman is insane on the subject of garbage.
(She turns back to AGNES and talks quietly to her)

GUIDO

(Pointing them out)

And that's Grace and Harry Bannerman.

(The BANNERMANS nod to the audience)

He works in New York and Mrs. Bannerman has a real community spirit. That means she's on every committee in town but she hasn't seen the inside of her own kitchen in years. They hate me.

GRACE and HARRY

(Together)

We hate him.

GRACE

Well, why not? You've upset poor Betty O'Sheel by interfering with her report on garbage disposal and now you're interfering with my pageant.

HARRY

And because of you and this crisis, she's on another committee.

(To GRACE)

It wasn't enough you had the PTA, the League of Women Voters, the Women's Club, the Red Cross, Nurses Aid, The School Board, the Mental Health Society, the Town Planning Commission, the Pageant--and now this!

GRACE

Isn't it wonderful to live in a town with a real community spirit?

HARRY

It would be wonderful not to live on cold cuts from

Sammy's delicatessen. Our oldest son, Danny, has never seen a hot meal.

GRACE

You're exaggerating. I cook all the time.

HARRY

(Crossing to small bench D L C and placing it face front)

The night the crisis began, Grace was waiting for me in the car, as I crawled, exhausted, off the train at 6:32.

(Indicating the bench)

Grace?

GRACE

(Embarrassed)

Not in front of everybody!

HARRY

(Firmly)

Grace, you were waiting for me at 6:32.

(GRACE rises, crosses and sits on bench.

HARRY sits beside her, giving her a peck)

Sure good to get home, dear. I had a terrible day at the office. How was your day?

GRACE

(Pantomimes starting car and driving)

The sump pump is broken.

HARRY

What's the sump pump?

GRACE

The pump that pumps sump.

HARRY

Oh. I was thinking, Grace, it would be wonderful if we could get away for a few days--up to the mountains--just the two of us--like the old days.

GRACE

Oh, grow up, Harry! Who'd take care of the children?

HARRY

Your mother could come over.

GRACE

Mother's running her flower show in Pound Ridge this week.

HARRY

(A touch of anger)

Obviously, being a committeewoman runs in your family.

GRACE

I am proud to say that Mother and I have a highly developed sense of civic duty--and I couldn't get away anyway. I have to finish writing my historical pageant. Maybe we could slip away for a day or two in August.

HARRY

Not August! Now! Tonight! Just the two of us--like old times.

GRACE

Town Meeting tonight.

HARRY

How about tomorrow? Go up to the mountains--

relax . . .

GRACE

I'm on the Bloodmobile tomorrow.

HARRY

(Furious)

Next week!

GRACE

Open School Week. I'm on the committee.

HARRY

(Livid)

Next month!

GRACE

I'll be rehearsing the pageant. Oh, incidentally, I want you to play the Town Crier.

HARRY

Grace, this is ridiculous!

GRACE

It's a very good part.

HARRY

I don't care about the part! I never see you any more. Remember when we were first married? We would go to a drive-in movie and sit in the dark and eat popcorn. Why don't we ever do that any more?

GRACE

Because we're grown up.

HARRY

We're not decrepit! I still love you. I wanna sit

in the dark and eat popcorn.

GRACE

Popcorn! You've simply got to get rid of these romantic fancies. We are parents--citizens . . .

HARRY

Can't we still be in love?

GRACE

Of course. Our love is the rock everything else is built on.

HARRY

Well, we're overbuilt. I can't even see the rock any more.

GRACE

(Pantomimes stopping the car)

Here we are.

(She leans over and kisses him)

I do love you, sweetheart, but at our age popcorn is fattening. We'll try to make the mountains in the summer.

(She rises)

Oh--and the dentist called about Bud.

HARRY

(Horror-stricken)

No!

GRACE

Braces.

HARRY

But we just finished paying for Peter's braces.

GRACE

Can I help it if your family has hereditary overbite?

HARRY

(To audience)

And on top of all that, this new thing. That's why I hate him.

(GRACE and HARRY replace bench and return to original seats. As they do, MAGGIE LARKIN, a really stunning-looking girl of about twenty, enters D L, crosses into the meeting hall and looks about for a seat)

GUIDO

(Seeing MAGGIE, smiling)

Oh--there she is! Maggie Larkin! She's my girl. Of all the people here, she's the only one . . .

MAGGIE

(Crossing to him)

Guido! What are you doing here? No. Don't answer that! I'm not speaking to you.

(She crosses up to center aisle, looking for a seat)

GUIDO

(To the audience)

Well, on the other hand, why should Maggie be different from everyone else?

(Following her, to her)

I tried to phone you--and you hung up on me. Eighteen times in one night!

MAGGIE

Wasn't that enough of a hint? Why aren't you back

at your army base where you belong? No. Don't answer that! I'm simply not speaking to you.

(She goes to first bench, upstage side of aisle)

GUIDO

Maggie--honey--please give me a chance to explain.

MAGGIE

There's no need to explain. To me, you simply do not exist. I am standing here talking to a great big vacuum. I have given you back your engagement ring for the last time.

(She sits)

GUIDO

But, Maggie . . .

MAGGIE

(Rising)

I hate you.

(She sits)

(GUIDO turns to the audience and makes a "You see?" gesture. ISAAC GOODPASTURE enters from door D L, walks past the rows of seats and goes to the lectern. He is a Yankee type, about fifty. As he goes:)

GUIDO

(To audience, as he returns to his original position)

That's Isaac Goodpasture. He's the First Selectman of Putnam's Landing. That means "Mayor," but they call him First Selectman 'cause it sounds Early American and the commuters like it.

PRUDENCE

(Aside to audience)

Good for real estate values.

GUIDO

As First Selectman, Isaac hates me, too.

ISAAC

Naturally.

(He crosses to the screen L and removes it as he speaks)

I'm against any kind of change, young man, and you represent change. Also, I had to drop the bombshell that night and I knew it would make the meeting last longer and I wanted to get home to my daughter. And she's another reason I hate you.

GUIDO

I don't even know your daughter!

ISAAC

But this crisis is bound to affect her and I have enough trouble as it is, raising a teen-ager all by myself. Just look at her.

(By this time he has removed the screen, revealing the sitting room and his daughter, COMFORT, an extremely attractive sixteen-year-old, sitting on the settee, a pad and pencil in her lap, composing a letter)

ISAAC

If she gets any rounder, I'll have to post guards.
(He stands at left watching her)

[NOTE: In the following speech, references to Elvis Presley may be changed to any other popular record star if desired. However, be sure to make similar changes in later references to Elvis Presley in Act One, Scene Three.]

COMFORT

(Writing her letter)

Dear Elvis, I suppose you're wondering what happened at the last fan club meeting. Elvis, it was great! Instead of playing all your albums from beginning to end, we just played our old favorite thirty-eight times and everybody simply screamed until my father came in and tore the arm off the phonograph. Then we had an election to see who was the greatest American of all time, and, Elvis, you nosed out Lincoln, 14 to 7. There were also scattered votes for George Washington, Ben Franklin and Paul Anka. Then Gloria Coleman read this poem she wrote and there wasn't a dry eye in the house, so we passed a resolution for me to send you the poem, which hereinafter follows.

I used to wander lonely as a cloud
Depressed and bugged down to my soul.
Then, I found Elvis, now he is my rock,
And now I'm happy with my rock--and roll.

It doesn't exactly scan but Gloria's had a terrible life. Well, Elvis, I know how you must feel after reading this, so I will close now, wishing you many more golden platters in your trek to eternal fame. Your fan, Comfort Goodpasture.

ISAAC

That's why I hate you. Would you want to leave a nut kid like that alone? Or worse, with one of those mealy-mouthed boys that hangs around?

METCALF

(Rising, angry)

Are you referring to my son, Grady?

ISAAC

Is he the one with the long sideburns?

METCALF

All the boys have long sideburns. He's the sensitive one.

ISAAC

Maybe I do mean him.

(He crosses toward COMFORT)

That night, just as I was leaving . . .

(To COMFORT)

I'm going to the town meeting, Comfort.

COMFORT

Oh. I wanted to talk to you.

ISAAC

(Surprised)

You do? It's the first time since a year ago Thanksgiving. Something about your homework?

COMFORT

No. I can't talk about homework. I have a delicate stomach.

ISAAC

Is there something else wrong?

COMFORT

In a way. . . . You know how I used to feel about boys?

ISAAC

(Sitting, nervous)

Yes?

COMFORT

I mean I used to enjoy giving them a bloody nose or

a kick in the shins.

ISAAC

How many times I thanked God for your right hook.

COMFORT

Yeah. . . . Well, all of a sudden, I like them. Boys, I mean. I mean, I think about them literally day and night.

ISAAC

(Nervous)

How long has this been going on?

COMFORT

I don't know. Three, four weeks. I first noticed it the night Grady Metcalf came around with his motorcycle. You see, his fossils promised him a motorcycle on his eighteenth birthday if he passed math, and . . .

ISAAC

By fossils, I presume you mean parents?

COMFORT

What else?

ISAAC

(With a look at METCALF)

I can see your point. And am I to understand Grady Metcalf passed math?

COMFORT

Science fiction, ain't it?

ISAAC

It is indeed.

COMFORT

Yeah. Well, anyhow, Grady Metcalf, who is one of the really big men of our generation, and I hate him like poison, he took me out riding on the motorcycle and you know what? All of a sudden he looked okay. And when I saw him in school the next day, he looked even better.

ISAAC

(Solemnly)

Science fiction.

COMFORT

But that's not the worst of it. All the boys suddenly looked good to me. In fact, lately, there's not more than fifteen or twenty boys in the whole school that I can't stand.

ISAAC

Tell me, has this new outlook of yours made you--ah--has it diminished your right hook?

COMFORT

No. The boys still call me One-Punch Goodpasture. But I tell you the truth, Father, mine, when I cope these days, my heart isn't really in it.

ISAAC

(Hopefully)

You do, however, continue to cope?

COMFORT

I do, but the problem is, why don't I enjoy coping any more?

ISAAC

Comfort, if the good Lord, in his wisdom, had not

seen fit to take your mother, perhaps she could answer you. All I can say is, no matter how bewildering it seems, it is quite natural and soon everything will be in order again.

COMFORT

Grand. What do I do in the meantime?

ISAAC

In the meantime, you've got three hundred years of Puritan blood in your veins. Listen to it.

(There is the sound of a motorcycle pulling up outside)

Grady Metcalf?

COMFORT

(Nodding)

Neanderthal man returns!

(The doorbell rings)

ISAAC

I have to go. Shall I let him in?

COMFORT

Why not? You broke the hi fi. I gotta do something for noise.

(ISAAC crosses to door U L, admitting GRADY METCALF, with sideburns, dressed in black chinos and black motorcycle jacket)

ISAAC

Good evening, Grady. I have to go, Comfort. Listen to your blood.

(He exits U L)

GRADY

What's he mean by that?

COMFORT

You know fossils.

GRADY

Yeah. I thought me and you could do a little homework together.

COMFORT

Math?

GRADY

That's not homework--that's slavery.

COMFORT

Grady, I forgot myself once and kissed you. You try it again, I'll put you in the hospital.

GRADY

What have you got against kissing?

COMFORT

Nothing. I like it. Kissing is wonderful. It's you I can't stand.

GRADY

Thanks a lot.

COMFORT

You better go home.

GRADY

(Offering his hand)

Well, it's been a lotta laughs.

COMFORT

(Shyly)

Do you want to kiss me good night?

GRADY

You think I'm nuts?

COMFORT

I won't hit you.

GRADY

Well, I don't know . . .

COMFORT

Grady. . .

(She kisses him)

That was ginchy!

GRADY

I don't get it.

COMFORT

I don't get it myself.

GRADY

Want another kiss?

COMFORT

Better not. I might hit you this time.

GRADY

Well, good night.

COMFORT

Good night.

GRADY

You wanna go out with me Saturday?

COMFORT

No.

GRADY

Why not?

COMFORT

That's what they call the feminine mystique.

GRADY

Maybe I'll come around Saturday. Okay?

COMFORT

Suit yourself.

GRADY

You're really from out there!

COMFORT

Yeah.

(GRADY exits U L. COMFORT exits D L,
ISAAC re-enters U L, replaces the screen
as he talks, then returns to the lectern)

ISAAC

So, naturally, I wanted to get home early that night,
but the O'Sheel woman was determined to make her
garbage report . . .

BETTY

(Rises with a sheaf of papers in her hand
and reads)

Garbage. By Betty O'Sheel.

(GRACE, MILDRED, MAGGIE and DELLA
loyally applaud)

Garbage disposal can be divided into three broad

classifications. The land fill method currently in use in Putnam's Landing, which is not satisfactory due to the malodorous odors it causes and---

(Shooting a look at PRUDENCE)

--and due to the fact it makes the houses sink!

PRUDENCE

(Leaping to her own defense)

Mr. First Selectman!

BETTY

Grace, if that horrible woman wrecks my garbage report, I'll just die! Do something, Grace!

GRACE

Don't worry, Betty, dear, I'll fix her.

(Leaping up)

Mr. First Selectman, Mrs. O'Sheel has the floor!

ISAAC

Tonight we have something to discuss that must take precedence over everything--even garbage!

BETTY

Nothing takes precedence over garbage! I have an offer from the Garba-Crunch Corporation of Great Neck, Long Island, to take our garbage and turn it into fertilizer for only \$3.00 a ton.

GRACE

(Now concerned with her own problem)

And we're supposed to discuss my folk drama tonight, too . . .

BETTY

(Injured by her defection from the cause of garbage)

Grace!

ISAAC

Mrs. Bannerman!

GRACE

The battle of Putnam's Landing--one of the most vital skirmishes of the Revolutionary War, took place right here in the Town Hall and the town has never done anything to commemorate it.

ISAAC

Ladies, there is something more important . . .

BETTY

Garba-Crunch will build their own converting plant at no cost to us. All we have to do is give them the land and I move the town buy the old Yarbro place and give it to Garba-Crunch. . . .

PRUDENCE

(Leaping up)

The Yarbro place ! I'm turning that into my Pilot's Knob development!

AGNES

Prudence, that land is under water half the time!

PRUDENCE

(Creating a sales pitch)

The waters of romantic old Long Island Sound lapping gently at your door--relaxing you with the sharp scent of the sea . . .

ISAAC

(Pounding gavel)

Ladies! Ladies!

GRACE

Think what a pageant like this did for Roanoke, Virginia!

BETTY

I have to give them an immediate answer. Lots of other communities want their services, and how much garbage can a Garba-Crunch crunch?

PRUDENCE

I won't have that magnificent parcel of land converted into . . .

(All three women talk at once)

ISAAC

(Pounding gavel, yelling)

Ladies.

(The women stop talking. To audience)

It was then I dropped the bomb.

(To townspeople)

Ladies and gentlemen, while I appreciate the importance of real estate, pageants and garbage, we are faced with a real crisis. The United States Army is buying a hundred acres of land in Putnam's Landing. They're planning to build a guided missile base!

(There is an appalled silence. The three women, the wind knocked out of them, plop down in their seats. There is an excited buzz of conversation, accompanied by excited gestures, as the townfolk excitedly discuss the announcement)

DELLA

Did I understand you, Mr. Goodpasture? They're going to put a guided missile base right in the middle of our town?

ISAAC

Exactly.

MILDRED

Why? We're a small town. We have no shipping, no industry, no targets of any military value.

ISAAC

Bridgeport. They're putting bases in Westport and Fairfield, too. They call it a ring around Bridgeport.

HARRY

(Disgusted)

Ring around a Bridgeport, all fall down!

GRACE

Shut up, Harry.

PRUDENCE

(Rising, dramatically)

Where? Where are they buying these one hundred acres?

ISAAC

Brace yourself, Prudence. Johnnycake Hill.

PRUDENCE

No-o-o! If they buy a hundred, who'll buy the other hundred to put up houses, with rockets all around?

BETTY

Can't they find some place else? Why do they have to put rockets and gasoline and high explosives and maybe even atomic warheads right smack in the middle of our town?

METCALF

Why, Johnnycake Hill's hardly a two-minute walk from the town hall!

GRACE

(Leaping up)

The children! Listen to me, all of you, we may have our differences, but on one thing we're all agreed. We love our children. Are we going to sit by and let them be scorched and blasted and scared out of their wits by rockets zooming all over Main Street? We must close ranks and protect our children!

(The others applaud her and nod emphatic approval to each other)

HARRY

(Looking at her in newfound awe)

Grace, you're like Joan of Arc! Can't we go up to the mountains together tomorrow?

GRACE

Oh, Harry, for heaven's sake!

MILDRED

And what about our daughters? What of our innocent daughters when the town is full of----

(Pauses, glares)

--soldiers?

PRUDENCE

(Impatiently)

Never mind that! What happens to property values in a town that may be wiped out any minute?

METCALF

Mr. Goodpasture, who's in charge of this missile

base and where do we find him?

ISAAC

It's a Colonel Thorwald over on Long Island at Fort Totten.

DELLA

I move we appoint a representative to visit Colonel Thorwald and tell him in the strongest possible terms that he can't put his rockets here.

PRUDENCE

I second. Let's pick someone with a flair for words --like a writer.

GRACE

My husband's a writer! A good one! Harry, you'll draft the protest, won't you?

HARRY

(Astonished)

Me? I learned not to volunteer when I was in the Army!

BETTY

Marvelous, Harry! How soon can you finish it?

GRACE

Sunday! He'll deliver it to Fort Totten Monday.
(The citizens all sit, ISAAC behind lectern,
and freeze. GUIDO turns to the audience)

GUIDO

So that's why they all hate me. Except Maggie.
She's my girl.

MAGGIE

(Rising)

I hate you, too.

GUIDO

Yes. But for a different reason.

MAGGIE

(Sitting)

Oh. That's right.

GUIDO

See, Colonel Thorwald is my colonel.

(Two privates, WAMBESS and LITWHILER, remove the screen from the right area of stage, revealing the Army office and COLONEL THORWALD, a middle-aged, stuffy colonel type, seated at the desk. The two privates take the screen out of the door U R)

GUIDO

One day, the Colonel called me to him.

COLONEL

(Howling)

Di Maggio . . .

GUIDO

(Crossing into set and saluting)

Yes, sir? Did you bellow, sir?

COLONEL

Di Maggio, you've been lolling around Fort Totten long enough waiting for an assignment. You haven't done a lick of work for--it must be two days. Well, I've got your new assignment, Lieutenant. It's a little missile base two days' travel north of Moose Jaw, Alaska.

GUIDO

Oh, no!

COLONEL

The Exec up there got frostbite on Midsummer Eve and they've asked for a replacement. You'll fly out on the first available aircraft which ought to be . . .

GUIDO

(Trying to interrupt)

But--but--I can't go, Colonel. I just can't go.

COLONEL

(Can't believe his ears)

I beg your pardon?

GUIDO

Listen, Colonel, you've got to get me an assignment in the States. In fact, it has to be right around New York.

COLONEL

(Falsely sweet)

May one ask why?

GUIDO

I've got a girl--wonderful girl--pretty--sweet. Educated. Plumpish. Not fat, you understand. Plumpish. About a hundred twenty pounds.

COLONEL

How tall?

GUIDO

Five four.

COLONEL

Not a bit fat.

GUIDO

Plumpish. But stubborn. You know how they get.

COLONEL

I vaguely remember from my youth.

GUIDO

Three days ago we had this little--misunderstanding . . .

COLONEL

Please tell me why.

GUIDO

It was about child psychology.

COLONEL

Child psychology----

GUIDO

And I haven't been able to square it. She hangs up whenever I call. You ship me out of here, and I'll lose her forever.

COLONEL

(Still falsely sweet)

Do tell me what happened. I'm always interested in the problems of my men.

GUIDO

Well, sir, you see, on my way here from New Mexico, I sort of stopped off for a few minutes in Putnam's Landing--that's my home town--and Maggie came down to the station to pick me up in her car. . . .

(He walks to the bench D L C and starts pulling it to face front. To HARRY)

Mind if I borrow the car?

HARRY

(Sarcastic)

But get home early. You have school tomorrow.

GUIDO

(Deadpan)

Very funny.

HARRY

(Deadpan)

Thank you very much.

GUIDO

(Asking MAGGIE to join him)

Maggie?

(She won't move)

Maggie, the Colonel is waiting . . .

MAGGIE

(Rising and crossing to him)

All right--but remember, this was before I started hating you--just before.

(She sits in the car)

GUIDO

(Standing)

Maggie . . . honey!

MAGGIE

Oh, Guido, darling, you're home!

(He sits beside her and they kiss)

GUIDO

I missed you so. But I'm not really here, I'm on my way to Fort Totten.

MAGGIE

Why?

GUIDO

That's where they sent me.

MAGGIE

Oh.

GUIDO

But it's only two hours away. I can see you every week end. Maybe even every night.

MAGGIE

Oh, Guido, that'll be wonderful. Maybe, maybe we can even get married.

GUIDO

Not till I'm out of the service. It wouldn't be fair to you. They could ship me heaven knows where . . .

MAGGIE

Then I'll go with you--to the ends of the earth . . .

GUIDO

Oh, darling, you and me alone on the end of the earth . . . wouldn't that be marvelous! No distractions--no other people--just you and me . . .

MAGGIE

That's all I want. Oh, Guido, I need your strong arm to lean on. You and I were meant for each other and somehow--somehow I knew you'd be here now--just when I need you--to fight this terrible thing.

GUIDO

What terrible thing? I been on a train for four days.

MAGGIE

You see? You didn't even know and yet you came

--hurtling through the night to defend me. I've been fired from my job.

GUIDO

Fired? From the school? Of course I'll defend you. What did you do?

MAGGIE

I taught the way I believe! I tried to let a little light into the darkness. Tried to clean out the ignorance and sickness of centuries. Do you love children?

GUIDO

I love children. I love you.

MAGGIE

And I love you.

(They kiss)

Those innocent little children, so full of trust and affection, so capable of perfect happiness. Why can't they have it?

GUIDO

I'll get it for them! Why can't they?

MAGGIE

Because of emotional insecurity. How can we hope to solve our political and economic problems when all our children are growing up with deep psychological disturbances?

GUIDO

Are they?

MAGGIE

Certainly. Didn't I? Didn't you?

GUIDO

Well, I . . .

MAGGIE

We weren't born with these frightful insecurities.
Where'd we get 'em?

GUIDO

I don't know. Where?

MAGGIE

From our parents!

GUIDO

I don't know about your parents, but mine were a
couple of dolls.

MAGGIE

(Dismissing these contributions)

Oh, mine fed me and clothed me and sent me to col-
lege.

GUIDO

Wasn't that enough?

MAGGIE

No! Because they also filled me with insecurities!

GUIDO

You don't look so insecure to me.

MAGGIE

No? Then why do I still have nightmares? Why am
I afraid of snakes? Why does eating shrimp make
me sick? I've got all these fears I was not born with.

GUIDO

You've also got teeth you weren't born with.

MAGGIE

They came naturally. The fears were forced on me.
Because I was curbed.

GUIDO

Curbed? Is that like toilet training?

MAGGIE

No. My natural inquisitiveness was stifled. They
never let me throw rocks or mudpies.

GUIDO

(Embracing her)

I don't quite understand, Maggie, but you can throw
a rock at me if you want to--or even a mudpie.

MAGGIE

That's why I love you. Your instincts are good.
But it's also why I let my pupils have the mud.

GUIDO

They were inquisitive about mud?

MAGGIE

During recess, naturally.

GUIDO

Yes.

MAGGIE

So when the bell rang, I let them bring the mud into
the classroom. Then those clever little minds re-
alized they could make little balls with the mud--and
then they discovered--they could throw them!

GUIDO

For Pete's sake! You let them throw mud in class?

MAGGIE

They were expressing themselves--and everything would have been all right if Mr. Vandenberg, the principal, hadn't come in and decided to repress them.

GUIDO

Why did he decide to repress them?

MAGGIE

Because of his own neurotic problems. He got a mud ball in the eye.

GUIDO

But--Maggie . . .

(Carefully)

Mudpies? In class?

MAGGIE

(Defensive)

Don't you see?

GUIDO

Well--not exactly, honey. It's okay to express yourself--it's even good to. . . . But--there are limits . . .

MAGGIE

You're not on my side at all! You're as benighted and ignorant as the rest of them!

GUIDO

Sweetheart, I didn't come all this way to talk about mudpies and repression . . . I've got to go back to the Army right away. Just--just tell me that you love me . . .

MAGGIE

But--but--how can I love you? You're acting like

Mr. Vandenberg! You've led me on--pretending you cared about child psychology . . .

GUIDO

I cared about you . . .

MAGGIE

Out of your own basic insecurity . . .

GUIDO

For whatever reason. I care. I care!

MAGGIE

And I cared for you. You probably have the cutest dimple in all New England. But what's a dimple compared to basic psychological differences?

GUIDO

(Desperate)

Dimples count! Psychology doesn't!

MAGGIE

You see! You see! That's what you really think. You lied to me. Probably laughed at my theories behind my back! How could you? Laughing at me! Get out of my car!

(Taking ring from finger)

Take this with you and never come back! You've made a fool of me.

(She pushes him off the bench)

I hate you!

GUIDO

(To audience)

See?

(He crosses back to the COLONEL, as MAGGIE replaces bench and returns to her original seat)

COLONEL

I would say you're well rid of her.

GUIDO

That's what I thought--for an hour or so. . . . But then I thought about her eyes--her hair--and her teeth. They're gorgeous. A woman like that wouldn't cost you a dime in dental bills. And apart from this hang-up on child psychology, she's really a wonderful girl. If I don't stay here and square it, Colonel, I'll lose her.

COLONEL

I see.

GUIDO

I knew you'd understand.

COLONEL

I do. Do you?

GUIDO

Understand what?

COLONEL

(Slamming down his hand)

That you will leave from Mitchell Field on the first available military aircraft and report to the 998th Anti-aircraft battery outside Moose Jaw, Alaska.

(PRIVATE WAMBESS enters UR)

WAMBESS

Mr. Bannerman to see you, Colonel.

COLONEL

Bannerman? Who's he?

WAMBESS

Civilian, sir, Putnam's Landing. Has an appointment.

GUIDO

Bannerman! I know a Bannerman in Putnam's Landing.

COLONEL

That will be all, Lieutenant. You may go.

GUIDO

But what's somebody from Putnam's Landing doing here?

COLONEL

(Pointing UR)

Pack, Lieutenant.

GUIDO

Yes, sir.

(He salutes and exits UR)

COLONEL

Show Mr. Bannerman in and ask Captain Hoxie to join us.

WAMBESS

Yes, sir.

(He exits UR)

GRACE

Now, Harry!

HARRY

(Not wanting to)

Oh, Grace . . .

GRACE

(Firmly)

Harry, now!

(HARRY crosses to the COLONEL)

HARRY

Colonel Thorwald, Harry Bannerman.

COLONEL

(Rising and shaking hands)

How do you do, sir?

(GUIDO'S head pops up in window behind the COLONEL)

GUIDO

Harry Bannerman! Sure, I know him!

(The COLONEL turns to see what the noise was and GUIDO ducks his head in time.

CAPTAIN HOXIE, a grim, hard-bitten type in his late thirties, all spit and polish, enters UR)

COLONEL

And this is Captain Hoxie, Mr. Bannerman.

(The two men nod and sit)

I've asked the Captain to join us because he will be in charge at Putnam's Landing when we build the base. Now, then, Mr. Bannerman, we are delighted that you are here, aren't we, Captain?

HOXIE

(Growling, very un-delighted)

Yeah.

(GUIDO'S head pops up again in the window

and he observes the rest of this scene from there)

COLONEL

Because the only way we will get our little differences settled is by honest, friendly discussion. Tell us what's on your mind.

HARRY

(Embarrassed)

Well--uh--my wife--that is, my wife and her friends . . .

GRACE

(Whispering)

Harry . . .

(He looks at her; she gestures to the whole meeting)

HARRY

That is, the town meeting of Putnam's Landing feels the Army should--reconsider putting an Army base in our quiet, little residential town. I mean, actually, it's a threat to life.

HOXIE

(Angry)

You fight in the last war, Bannerman?

HARRY

(Quickly)

Yes!

(Again embarrassed)

What I mean is, an Army base will upset everything in our happy little community--social equilibrium. . .

PRUDENCE

(Gesturing)

Real estate values . . .

HARRY

Real estate values--things like that. So--so--so--now you see our side of it, I feel sure you will look a little harder and find some other place.

COLONEL

Thank you, Mr. Bannerman. What you say is interesting and, of course, we quite see your point, don't we, Captain Hoxie?

HOXIE

(Exploding)

Yeah, we see the point all right. The point is that Putnam's Landing is full of yellow bellies and, if I had my way, I'd line 'em up against the wall and shoot the whole sickening lot of 'em.

COLONEL

Oh! Oh! You see, Mr. Bannerman, the Captain tends to be a bit over-emotional about his rockets. Devotion to duty . . . finest American traditions.

HOXIE

(Rising in his wrath)

And what's all this about real estate values? Your country is in danger! Are you an American or some kind of traitor?

HARRY

(Also rising)

Just a minute. I'm not going to stand here and have my patriotism questioned! I did my bit in the last war! I ran the best PX in Missouri.

HOXIE

A draftee, I bet. And would you re-enlist? No. No,

defending America isn't good enough for guys like you! Well, all right, mister, we'll save your bacon for you, we always have. But don't tell me where I can put my rockets. . . .

HARRY

(Enraged)

I'd like to . . .

COLONEL

(Conciliating)

What the Captain means is . . .

HARRY

I know what the Captain means and I don't like it! I've got friends in the Pentagon----

COLONEL

We have made a careful study of defense requirements . . .

HARRY

Well, you haven't made a study of public relations or of common courtesy, either! You send a man like that to Putnam's Landing, you're asking for trouble!

(He stalks out of the office back to his seat at the meeting)

COLONEL

(Undone)

Captain--oh, Captain--you're a marvelous technician but what you don't know about handling the public would fill volumes.

GUIDO

(Leaping in the window)

But, Colonel, sir, I know about public relations-- and I know about Putnam's Landing. I was born and raised there. Everybody loves me. You send me up there, Colonel, sir, and I guarantee you, I will put on a public relations campaign that will have the whole town clasping us to their bosoms.

HOXIE

(Grabbing GUIDO)

Shall I throw this lunatic in the brig?

COLONEL

(Thoughtfully)

Wait a minute . . . let's think this through----

GUIDO

Colonel, sir, make me his exec. Don't send me to Alaska! The Eskimos love us already!

HOXIE

You gonna listen to him?

COLONEL

(A light breaking)

Yes, I am. Captain, I'm afraid my course is clear. I admit I have reservations about an officer who comes leaping through my window, but with you in command at Putnam's Landing we'll need someone with some kind of public relations program. I'm sending him along as your Exec and P.R.O.

HOXIE

Now, wait a minute . . . a madman like this is not . . .

COLONEL

That's an order.

HOXIE

Yes, sir!

GUIDO

Oh, thank you, Colonel, you'll never regret it.

COLONEL

See that I don't. Him I can't replace, you I can. And you better deliver, Di Maggio! The first hint of trouble in Putnam's Landing and you will be on your way to Alaska and you will be there so long that when you return your 120-pound tootsie will be an old lady weighing 180 and probably unable to recognize you. Is that clear?

GUIDO

Yes, sir.

COLONEL

Now, tell me about your public relations program.

GUIDO

Well, sir, I'd do a lot of work with kids, 'cause kids are Putnam's Landing's main industry. I'll set up a Little League team . . .

HOXIE

For crying out loud . . .

COLONEL

Quiet, Hoxie, this is music to my ears. . . .

HOXIE

That isn't music, sir, it's taps.

COLONEL

(To GUIDO)

Go on--go on----

GUIDO

(As he talks, he rises and moves toward rostrum, stands before it and blends into addressing citizens)

I'd station soldiers at school crossings. I'll give camping lessons to the Boy Scouts. The Army will become an object lesson in contemporary democracy for your kids. And having my boys around will be good for your business. Restaurants will be jammed every night, and the movie theatre will stop looking like a haunted house. It'll be good for the stores--and, Mrs. Melvin, a lot of the guys are married and they'll be needing housing off the post.

PRUDENCE

(Eagerly)

I have a lovely two and a half with shower and hot plate over the Owl Garage! I'll let it go for \$175.00 a month.

METCALF

But what about the danger of putting a missile, possibly with a nuclear warhead, right in the middle of a residential community? Suppose one should go off by accident?

GUIDO

I swear to you, sir, that is impossible. It would be impossible for a missile to go off unless it was fired at the enemy.

COLONEL

(Yelling from his office)

Any missile goes off when it's not wartime, Di Maggio, it'll take you right to Alaska.

MILDRED

(Rising)

I must be blunt, Lieutenant. This is a quiet, homey village. Our daughters have been gently reared. What will happen to these pure, innocent girls when the town is full of----

(Pauses and glares)

--soldiers?

GUIDO

Ma'am, are you under the impression that a nice American boy turns into a fiend the moment he puts on a uniform? The kids who are coming here will be sweet American youngsters--just like your own sons. You don't have anything to worry about on that score.

COLONEL

(Yelling again)

Any fraternizing with the town girls and you'll go straight to Alaska!

GUIDO

And, Mrs. Bannerman, my boys'll be glad to help you with your amateur theatricals. Any men you need for actors or scenery movers, we'll gladly volunteer them.

GRACE

Isn't that sweet? It might solve some problems . . .

GUIDO

So, what do you say, folks? Will you make these good American kids welcome? I'm sure you're going to open up your hearts and your homes . . .

COLONEL

Not your homes!

GUIDO

Not your homes!--to these lonesome American boys far away from their loved ones. Thank you.

(He smiles sweetly, and slowly a tide of applause begins and builds to an ovation from the townspeople)

GRACE

(Rising)

Lieutenant, I'd like to thank you for opening our eyes. We've been fools--all of us--selfish, inconsiderate fools, and I want to assure you, we'll do our best to make the soldiers feel a real part of our community.

DELLA

And I move we give a welcoming party to the men of the missile base.

(Cries of "Second, second!")

MILDRED

And let's make Grace Bannerman chairman!

(Cheers and applause)

GRACE

Oh, I have so much to do already, my husband would kill me . . .

HARRY

I'll kill you.

GRACE

But thank you for your confidence in me--and--oh, well, I accept.

(Applause: cries of "Good for you, Grace!" "That's swell!")

PRUDENCE

I move we adjourn.

AGNES

Second.

BETTY

(To GRACE)

But what about my garbage disposal?

GRACE

Some other time, Betty . . .

BETTY

(Almost in tears)

But I've worked so hard . . .

GRACE

There, there, dear. You can be clearing-up chairman of the welcome party.

ISAAC

(Rapping gavel)

The meeting's adjourned.

(Townspople rise, whisper among themselves)

COLONEL

(To HOXIE)

I think that boy will do splendidly.

HOXIE

Those civilians start out all right, but the first sign of trouble, you can't trust 'em. You know where I think that young lunatic will end up?

COLONEL

Where?

HOXIE

Alaska.

(HOXIE rises and walks D C. GUIDO goes to join him, remonstrating in pantomime. As they meet D C, the curtain falls and we are in the next scene)

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

Scene Two

Before the curtain.

GUIDO and HOXIE pick up their scene as though they were in the middle of a conversation that has been going on for some time.

GUIDO

Sir, I can see why you don't want to come to the welcome party this afternoon . . .

HOXIE

I'd rather dive into a tankful of barracuda.

GUIDO

But, sir, they've gone to a lot of trouble and the town won't take it kindly if the commanding officer doesn't show up. Remember what Colonel Thorwald said about the importance of public relations. Now the men are cooperating splendidly . . .

HOXIE

(Suspicious)

THE SETTING

The Town Hall of Putnam's Landing, Connecticut. It is an old building, pre-revolutionary. Indeed, a battle of the Revolution was fought right in the Town Hall.

This set can be as simple or elaborate as you wish. It may be done entirely in drapes, on the assumption that the Town Hall is draped, or may be done with more realistic scenery.

The stage is divided into three areas. The center area is the meeting room of the Town Hall and should cover more than half the stage. On the right of this area, there is a platform, angled toward the front, with a lectern on it. Behind the lectern are a few chairs for speakers, an American Flag and perhaps a picture of George Washington. Facing the platform, but also angled front, are several rows of chairs or benches; if there is enough room on your stage, two groups of chairs split by a center aisle. Each bank of seats or benches should be about three rows, each row seating at least three people. If you have a large stage and wish to enlarge the cast, you may use a larger number of seats. On the up-stage wall of this area is a display of tattered flags, American (thirteen stars, thirteen stripes) and British, and a large frame seemingly surrounding nothing. Over the whole display a sign reads: "Relics of the Battle of Putnam's Landing Town Hall--1777." Over the picture frame a sign reads: "British Musket Balls Embedded in Wall." Down-stage on the left of the center area is a little bench large enough for two people.

There is a small area on either side of the center, divided from the main area by a curtain or screen coming just a little way downstage and suggesting the division. For the first scene, the stage right area is set as an Army office. There is a window in the right wall, center, a door up right, above it. Before the window are a desk, chair and visitors' chairs, with perhaps a flag somewhere about. When the curtain rises, this area has a screen in front of it, blocking it from sight. The left area, for the first scene, is set as a small sitting room: nothing more than a little settee and maybe a table, chair and lamp, these preferably looking Early American antique. There is a door on the upstage wall left. Downstage on the left wall is a large double door, the entrance to the Town Hall. When the curtain rises, this entrance door is visible and above it a screen is set to mask off the little sitting room and give the effect of a corridor from front door to meeting room.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Center area: Platform, lectern, gavel on lectern, chairs, American flag, picture of George Washington. Display of flags, picture frame, signs. Benches or chairs. Small bench. Right area: Desk and chairs, flag, screen. Left area: Settee, table, chair, lamp, screen. (For detailed description of setting, see notes on pages 165-166.) For Act One, Scene Three: Extra table, tablecloths, dishes, napkins, etc. for Right area. Party decorations and welcome signs (optional). Waiting room type of furniture for Left area (optional).

ACT ONE:

COMFORT: Pad and pencil.

BETTY: Sheaf of papers; tray of party food (sandwiches, potato chips, etc.)

MAGGIE: Ring on finger; cleansing tissue in purse.

WAMBESS: Necktie.

LITWHILER: Necktie.

MILDRED: Tray of party food.

GUIDO: Ring (which Maggie wore earlier), handkerchief.

HARRY: Large relish plate of piccalilli.

WOMEN: Purses and other accessories as desired.

ACT TWO:

GRADY: Musket, pistol.

CHARLIE, FRED, and ED: Muskets.

WAMBESS: Drum, British flag.

MAGGIE: Clipboard; paper plate containing lobster, potato, roll, etc.

GRACE: Clipboard.

OPIE: Guitar (optional).

COMFORT: Chain with medal, worn around neck.

DANNY: Lantern, four little red flags.

BETTY: Purse.

WOMEN: Purses and other accessories as desired.

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

ISAAC GOODPASTURE: Isaac is the First Selectman (i. e., mayor) of Putnam's Landing. He is a Yankee type and wears a suit.

GRACE and HARRY BANNERMAN: They are a suburban couple in their thirties. Grace is attractive but a determined committeewoman, which gives Harry a rather tired look. They wear good, suburban type clothing.

MAGGIE LARKIN: Maggie is Guido's fiancée, a really stunning-looking young lady. She is a teacher at the local school, and rather intense on the subject of child psychology. She wears attractive clothes.

BETTY, PRUDENCE, AGNES, DELLA and MILDRED: The women of Putnam's Landing are of a suburban type. Betty O'Sheel is slightly younger than Grace Bannerman, and attractive though perhaps a bit plump. Prudence Melvin, the town real estate agent, is a gushy woman who wears a flowered hat. Agnes Culp is a taciturn New England type. Della Waterford is a rather loud young matron. Mildred Evans is another suburban type. Despite personal variations, all the women wear rather similar good quality clothes. They carry bags and other accessories when appropriate.

CLEMENT METCALF: He is a pompous businessman in his forties. He wears a conservative suit.

COMFORT GOODPASTURE: Comfort is Isaac's daughter, an extremely attractive sixteen-year-old. Up to now her method of dealing with boys has been to punch them in the nose, as a result of which she

is known among them as One-Punch Goodpasture. Usually, she wears casual teen-age clothes. In Act One, Scene Three she wears a pretty party dress. In Act Two, Scene One for the pageant she wears a simple black floor-length dress, or a blouse and long skirt.

GLORIA, MARY ANN and GINA: They are Comfort's friends. In Act One, Scene Three they wear pretty party dresses. In Act Two, Scene One, they dress for the pageant in black floor-length dresses or long skirts with simple blouses. In Act Two, Scene Two they are back in the usual teen-age clothes.

GRADY METCALF: Grady is eighteen and the leader of the boys. He wears long sideburns, black chinos and a black motorcycle jacket, except in Act Two, Scene One when he is dressed as a minuteman for the pageant.

CHARLIE, ED and FRED: The boys are followers of Grady Metcalf, and as his disciples also sport long sideburns, black chinos and black motorcycle jackets. In the pageant scene, they wear minuteman costumes.

DANNY: Danny is a small boy, the son of Grace and Harry Bannerman. In Act One he wears the usual clothes for a boy his age and is perhaps a bit slicked up for the party. In Act Two, Scene One he appears first in a Little League uniform, later changing into a much-too-large town crier costume for the pageant. In Act Two, Scene Two, he is back in everyday clothes.

COLONEL THORWALD: Thorwald is a middle-aged, stuffy colonel type. He wears a uniform.

CAPTAIN HOXIE: The captain is a grim, hard-bitten type, in his late thirties. He is a career Army man, with no use for civilians. He is in uniform.

LIEUTENANT GUIDO DI MAGGIO: Guido is a second lieutenant in the Army, young, good-looking

and engaged (off and on) to Maggie. Putnam's Landing is his home town. He wears a uniform.

CORPORAL OPIE DALRYMPLE: Opie is large, impressive, a country boy who is a born leader of men. He has a shrewd mind, an amiable look, a charming smile, and a Southwestern accent. He wears Army suntans, necktie, cap, and in Act One, Scene Three, all his medals. In Act Two, Scene One, for the pageant, he appears as a British general of the Revolutionary War in red coat, white breeches and stockings, and (optional) powdered wig and hat.

PRIVATES WAMBESS, LITWHILER and MORRISSETTE: William O. Wambess is a nervous young man, eighteen years old. Roger Litwhiler is more whiny. Gustave Morrissette is a more determined type. All wear suntans, adding their medals for Act One, Scene Three. In Act Two, Scene One they appear as British privates in the pageant, in red coats, white breeches and stockings.