SIDE 1 — Cloisters Residents

THE CURIOUS SAVAGE by John Patrick

Fairy May • Hannibal • Florence • Jeffrey • Mrs. Paddy + Mrs. Savage

Focus: Comedic timing • Listening & reacting • Chosen family warmth

(After the family has left and Miss Willie has gone. The Guests enter and meet Mrs. Savage for the first time.)

HANNIBAL

Hello.

FLORENCE

Miss Willie says the bars are only there to keep the world outside.

FAIRY

Corny—isn't it?

(She sees the teddy bear and halts.)

Oh. It's alive!

FLORENCE

Now, Fairy—you must stop frightening yourself!

MRS. SAVAGE

The poor thing's quite harmless. It won't shed, lay eggs or bark. And—to the best of my knowledge—it's unvexed by sex. It couldn't be less trouble.

FAIRY

In that case any friend of yours is a friend of mine.

FLORENCE

Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. You must be Mrs. Savage. I'm Florence Williams.

(Offers her hand.)

MRS. SAVAGE

How do you do?

FLORENCE

We have been expecting you all afternoon. We're so glad to have you with us. May I introduce Fairy May?

FAIRY

(Fervently)

Say you love me.

MRS. SAVAGE

But—we've just met.

FAIRY

You don't have to mean it. I feel wonderful when people say they love me.

MRS. SAVAGE

Well, I'm sure everyone loves you.

FAIRY

(Gaily, to the others)

You see—I told you she wouldn't be spoiled.

(To Mrs. Savage)

Welcome to The Cloisters. Climate best by government test.

FLORENCE

And this is Hannibal.

(He bows.)

And this is our Mrs. Paddy.

MRS. SAVAGE

How do you do, Mrs. Paddy?

(Extends her hand. Mrs. Paddy stares at it without expression.)

MRS. PADDY

I hate everything in the world but most of all I hate lightning, skunk cabbage, custard, mustard, spiders, blisters, girdles, mice, bees, keys, ragweed, chloroform, rhubarb, barnacles, bats, broken glass, eels, crumbs, drunks, tombstones, gallstones, salt and thunder.

MRS. SAVAGE

(Blinks)

Why don't you like rhubarb?

HANNIBAL

Mrs. Paddy won't answer you, Mrs. Savage. She'll only recite the things she hates.

FAIRY

Sweet but stubborn.

FLORENCE

Mrs. Paddy stopped talking about twenty years ago.

MRS. SAVAGE

Why?

FAIRY

She got mad. Her husband told her to shut up. And she did.

HANNIBAL

She gave up conversation for life.

FAIRY

But she is only giving up electricity for Lent.

MRS. SAVAGE

(Takes Mrs. Paddy's hand and pats it.)

You're a woman of wisdom, Mrs. Paddy. There is only one thing wiser than saying very little and that's saying nothing at all.

(Mrs. Paddy takes the teddy bear and hugs it.)

FAIRY

She likes you.

MRS. SAVAGE

I like her.

FLORENCE

Oh—you haven't met Jeff. Come here, Jeff.

JEFF

(Puts his hand to the side of his face.)

Please excuse my left hand.

MRS. SAVAGE

Certainly. Is it a toothache?

FLORENCE

(Placing her arm around Jeff.)

Jeff's face is scarred and he likes to spare people.

MRS. SAVAGE

Well, you don't need to spare me. I have to look at myself every morning.

JEFF

Doctor Emmett refuses to let me wear a bandage.

MRS. SAVAGE

Well, we have to humor our doctors once in a while.

HANNIBAL

And now you have met everyone. We are a small group in this wing and we hope you find us comfortable to be with.

FAIRY

But Mrs. Savage hasn't met everyone. She hasn't met the Holy Terror.

FLORENCE

(Calling)

John Thomas!

(She picks up a doll dressed in a denim romper.)

Mrs. Savage—this is my son.

FAIRY

(Quickly)

You like children, don't you?

MRS. SAVAGE

Everyone's but my own.

(Looking slowly from one to the other.)

How—old is he?

FLORENCE

Five.

MRS. SAVAGE

He's big for five months.

FLORENCE

No. No. Five years.

MRS. SAVAGE

I meant years.

FLORENCE

Will you excuse me now? I have to put him to bed. He has measles—I do hope you won't catch them.

(Goes out.)

JEFF

That was exceedingly kind of you, Mrs. Savage—not to notice anything wrong.

FAIRY

There wasn't time to explain. But you were like lightning.

HANNIBAL

Poor Florence isn't well. We pretend for her sake. We hope you will, too.

MRS. SAVAGE

Oh—I will.

HANNIBAL

I think you should understand right away, Mrs. Savage, that, except for Florence, the rest of us are free to leave here any time we want to.

JEFF

But we don't go—because there's no better place to go.

FAIRY

You're a very lucky woman to be accepted, Mrs. Savage, if I do say it myself. And I do.

End of Side