

If The Good Lord's Willing and the Creek Don't Rise

By Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This zany comedy, in the spirit of Kaufman and Hart, centers on Doc, an eccentric old man whose house caters to all sorts of characters. Now a retired judge, he spends his days "enjoying life." When he's not flying around the countryside in his balloon or fishing in a nearby dry riverbed he works on his books of nonsense. This prompts his daughter, Charlotte, to decide he's lost his marbles. So, conspiring with a sly lawyer, she plans to not only become his guardian but also sell his house and property. Throw in a psychologist on her first case, love sick teenagers, an irate school bus driver and an occasional artist or two and it's a madhouse! Will Doc be committed or not? Of course he offers his own defense. "You ought to try tilting at a windmill every so often," he philosophizes. "It's great exercise and a nice breeze goes with it." When he shows up at his sanity hearing dressed as a magician, his daughter and her lawyer think they have it all sewed up. However, Doc has a few surprise rabbits to pull out of the hat. This tour de force is appropriate for schools, churches, dinner theaters and all audiences. Brought to you by the same author of "Every Little Crook and Nanny," it's anybody guess how it will turn out. Can Doc pull it off? As Leo says, "There is method to his madness." And Doc shows one and all what a little nonsense can do "If the Good Lord's Willing and the Creek Don't Rise."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

4 m, 5 w

JOE "DOC" BABCOCK: An eccentric man in his 50s.

MANDY PEMBERTON: Bright, ambitious woman, mid-20s.

STEVE RENFRO: An amiable artist and teacher, 30s.

MAXINE McALLISTER: A large woman with great anxieties.

DOREEN FURST: A rather self-absorbed teenager.

LEO JENKINS: A likeable puppy of a teenager.

CHARLOTTE DINSEL: Doc's conniving daughter, 30s.

GERALD FIRESTONE: A shyster, 40s.

ELIZABETH CLAIRBOURNE: Close friend of Doc's, 50s.

SETTING

The setting for this oddball story is the living room in Joseph "Doc" Babcock's house. It is a spacious area chock full of knickknacks and paraphernalia. The décor can be attributed to a vivid and eclectic imagination. There are three doors utilized in this floor plan. The first, or front, door is located SR and leads outside to the porch. The second, or kitchen, door, located US, leads to the kitchen, and the third door, SL, leads to library/den. There is a staircase, leading up to the bedrooms and planetarium, located just SR of the kitchen door. A fireplace is located on the SL wall. The furniture consists of a wide range of styles. The well-used sofa resides DL near the fireplace. Near the sofa is an unmatched comfy chair and side table on which, among other things, rests a telephone. A dinette complete with chairs is located USR. It is covered with several papers and one old typewriter. The rest of the room is rounded out with three more old chairs, over-flowing bookcases, plants and odd tables.

Time: The present.

Place: Doc's living room.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: As the LIGHTS come up there is no one in the room. SFX: There is a knocking at the front door. This gets no response. Another knock. Then, slowly, tentatively, MANDY opens the door and looks in.)

MANDY: Mr. Babcock? Hello? *(Reluctantly SHE enters, carrying a briefcase. SHE shuts the door behind her and puts her briefcase down.)* Mr. Babcock, are you here? *(SHE looks around the room.)* Oh, my goodness! It looks like the bottom of a river in here! Hello? *(SHE shrugs, opens her bag and gets her cell phone. SHE dials and listens.)* This is ridiculous, I know I made an appointment for one o'clock and – *(Into the receiver.)* – Hello? Mr. Firestone? Mandy Pemberton. Yes, I'm here but it seems Mr. Babcock isn't. No, I just got here. What? *(SHE looks around.)* Well, it's a bit cluttered. And that's putting it mildly. No, I wouldn't call it off per se. No, it's just that – *(Stops cold as she reaches over on the table and picks up a blood-stained dagger.)* Oh MY! Sir, you won't believe this but...but I just found...well, it looks like a knife! And it's covered with BLOOD! *(Slight pause.)* You DO believe it.

(Unseen by HER, DOC enters through the front door, carrying a kite and string. HE is wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt, cut-offs and a straw hat. HE sees MANDY and closes the door quietly, so as not to disturb her.)

MANDY: *(Cont'd.)* No, I've only seen the living room. Sir, they might've been a MURDER here! What? Check out the other rooms?! Well, there is a staircase and – *(SHE turns and see DOC, which causes her to jump and yell.)*
AAHHHAA!

DOC: *(Genially.)* Hello.

(MANDY slams the phone shut.)

MANDY: *(Nervously.)* Who...who are you?

DOC: Today I am the keeper of the kite and the garden elf.
(HE places the kite and string on the dinette table.) Like to get my hands dirty every so often. Ah, but where are my manners? *(HE shuffles through some papers on the table.)* Not here, I guess. *(HE thinks.)* Interesting phrase, that? "Where are my manners?" So genteel, so chivalrous and, alas, so archaic. Phrases are my hobby. Well, life is my hobby; that way you enjoy it more. Your mouth's open.

MANDY: And you're...I mean, who...?

DOC: Oh, I do apologize. I deal in English and other dead languages. William Joseph Babcock, citizen of nature, man of the infinite impossibilities and caretaker of all that is sublimely ridiculous.

MANDY: I'm Mandy Pemberton and *(Pointedly.)* there are people who know I'm here.

DOC: Wonderful. I can give you a whole phone book full of people who don't know I exist. There's a certain freedom in that. Would you like something to drink?

MANDY: I better not, Mr. Babcock –

DOC: Please, call me Doc. Everybody calls me Doc, even my dog, Mustard. Of course it sounds like *(HE barks several times.)* but he means Doc. You have to listen very closely.

MANDY: You talk with your dog?

DOC: *(Sits in the comfy chair.)* Well, usually I talk and he reads. Please, sit down. That couch isn't near as lethal as it looks.

MANDY: Okay. *(SHE sits, hiding the dagger at her side.)*

DOC: I never talk up to people or down to people. Hurts one's neck. Do you like snakes?

MANDY: *(Jumps up.)* What?!

DOC: Something wrong?

MANDY: Why did you just ask me if I liked snakes?

DOC: Just a conversational tidbit. Like to find out about people. That way you don't have to worry about strangers.

MANDY: *(Sits uneasily.)* Easy for you to say.

DOC: Oh, you're tense now. I am SO sorry. But my point is if everyone got to know everyone else there would be a lot less tension. And everyone would understand everyone else a bit more. And then what's normal?

MANDY: I'm starting to forget.

DOC: Because you don't know me. I assure you I am as plain as the beach and as vast. I believe in putting everyone at their ease.

(Suddenly DOREEN enters through the front door, causing MANDY to jump.)

DOREEN: *(As Juliet.)* "What's here? A cup close to my true love's hand? Poison I see hath been his timeless end!"

(SHE moves behind the couch. MANDY watches in horror while DOC only smiles.)

DOREEN: *(Cont'd. As Juliet.)* "O churl! Drink all and leave no friendly drop to help me after. I will kiss thy lips."

MANDY: *(Jumps up.)* WHAT?!

DOREEN: "Haply some poison yet doth hang on them to make me die with a restorative. Yea!" *(SHE reaches down and pulls the dagger off the couch.)* "Yea, noise! Then I'll be brief! O happy dagger!" *(SHE "stabs" herself.)*

MANDY: NOOO!

DOREEN: *(Slumping.)* "There rest... and let me die!"

(SHE falls behind the couch. MANDY stands transfixed.)

DOC: *(After a slight pause.)* You sure you won't have something to drink? I've been making sun tea all morning. Should be about ready by now.

(MANDY'S lips are moving but nothing is coming out. She is interrupted by DOREEN behind the couch.)

DOREEN: I'd like some. No lemon.

DOC: *(Jumps up.)* Wonderful! Won't be a minute.

End of Freeview

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