

SCENE 1

Mutta is standing at the top of the ladder or platform with a basket of items that she periodically throws down onto the stage from the heavens. At the foot of the ladder sits Madge, a person of 16 with ribbons for hair, they move like a jellyfish.

There are large colorful quilts hanging from the ceiling, sucking the sound out of the space. The floor is cold grey cement that has been swept, but whoever did it must have lost the dustpan because it seems all the grime just gotten shoved into the corners. There is a thick round wooden table with four chairs center stage, it looks 100 years old and unbreakable. All the way upstage right, on the threshold of the fourth wall is the frame of a window that is on a portable stand. On stage left there are two doors, one is the portal from offstage to on stage and the second is four feet in front of the first creating an in between space known as The Mudroom. The prop table is arranged here. On stage right there is a comfy love seat that fits only two and above it is a bible quote that reads "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." On the back wall of the stage there is a small blue box that lights up when the television is turned on. Below the screen there is a small collection of potted plants.

Tennis enters through The Mudroom. He is a man in his early 60s. Built like a linebacker, his shoulders tower over his knees and his skin is as rough and as smooth as tanned leather. He is covered in dried mud that seems to shake off him every step that he takes. Anne, his wife who is shaped like and dressed in the colors of a jellybean, is sweeping up the dirt that falls off Tennis and dumping it into a giant vase that's the center piece the table. Tennis crosses to the window on the stand and looks out.

Tennis: It's still raining.

Anne: Yes, I can see.

Anne is running back and forth from the back of the house to the table, bringing never ending plates of different kinds of bread.

Tennis: The soybeans will drown.

Anne: At least it will wash away all the grime on the pavement.

Tennis: Nothing can do a better cover up job than a down pour.

Anne: Well, If you'd sit down for supper, we could say a prayer and maybe God would stop the rain for you.

Tennis: I hope God has bigger things to worry about himself with.

Anne: Bigger things than the weather?

Tennis: Like you said, the yard needs a good rinse.

Madge rises from their place at the bottom of the ladder and walks across the stage, smacks Tennis in the back of the head, and then returns. The smack carries Tennis into his seat.

Anne finishes bringing food to the table.

Anne: Alright, that's it.

Tennis: That's it?

Anne: Mhmm, That's it.

She finally sits down and the two bow their heads in prayer.

Tennis: Dear Heavenly Father,

The dialogue dissolves into the sound of pouring rain on a tin roof. Tennis picks up each piece of bread and tears them in half like it takes all his strength to do so. Crumbs rain down onto the floor, and Anne gathers them up rubbing them into Tennis's feet. Once Tennis has ripped all the bread, he bends down and does the same for Anne. Their actions are rough a desperate, maybe this time the bread will stick. The remaining crumbs are gathered and put into the center piece with the dirt. Tennis and Anne each put a finger on the vase and start to walk circles around it, slowly growing in tempo, until they spin out too dizzy to continue. The two place their hands on each other's shoulders to steady themselves, but they both look straight to the heavens. They both sing, in the harmonies that can be found in the back of the script.

Tennis and Anne: Harmony, Unity, Wholeness, and Justice. Peace and Salvation, all are my home.

To sign the end of the ritual Tennis slams his glass onto the table twice and Anne immediately scampers to the back of the house to pour a bag of sugar into a pitcher of water. She comes back to the stage and pours it into Tennis' cup. Tennis chugs as much of the glass as he can. The two begin eating. They lather the crumbles of bread with butter, dip it in sugar, and eat. The amount of butter and sugar on each piece increases throughout the scene until they are just dumping piles of sugar onto their plates.

Between bites ...

Tennis: Did you get the chance to send out those bills?

Anne: As you know, I spent the day making all this bread.

Tennis: No desert and no paid bills?

Anne: We've been buying seed from the same people for a generation.

If we don't pay it early this one time, I doubt Gerry is going to come down here and throw a tantrum.

Tennis: But he'll will notice. And not only will he notice, but he'll wonder.

Anne: I tell ya, I worry how you can care about what God thinks and what everyone else things so hard at the same time.

Tennis continues as if Anne asked him to.

Tennis: They'll wonder if we are short on money or if we've become alcoholics or even worse gone senile and forgotten. Or maybe if letting my wife run our finances pushed it a hair too far.

Anne: I'm confused, suddenly its they, not just him?

Tennis: People talk to people.

Anne: My mother told you before we were married that I'm a crummy cook, I do the bills because I'm at least decent at it.

Tennis: If you had tried to listen to my mother's advice a little more, I'm sure you would have gotten better. But you didn't.

Anne: My mother was always the best cook of the family.

They share a long stone faced look and then without warning burst out into hysterical laughter. This is a ritual that Anne and Tennis perform many times throughout the play. As the stone-faced stare goes on, the two get closer and closer to each other's faces until their noes almost touch. That is when the laughter comes, laughter till it hurts to keep laughing. It pushes them further away from each other until they have returned to their original positions. Then they go back to whatever they were doing. Whenever this happens the stage gets foggy, and you can hear dozens of sprinklers spraying outside and the loud generators powering them.

Mutta drops a daisy onto the stage

Madge reenters and picks up the daisy. They look at their grandparents. Neither of them looks up. Madge walks over to the window and looks out at the rain pouring down.

Madge: It's still raining. Why hasn't it stopped raining?

Tennis is still staring down at his plate, Madge is staring out the window, they don't look at each other at all during the following exchange.

Tennis: I wish it would stop too.

Madge: The creek must have flooded the driveway three times over already.

Tennis: Nothing the tractor can't handle. You'll just have to let me know when you want to leave and come back again.

Mutta starts meowing.

Anne: I'm sure, I can drive the tractor when your grandfather is out at the pastures. I have to run to the bank anyway.

Tennis: Try and let me know when you do.

Madge turns back to the window.

Madge: The barn cats always hated the rain so mom would let them into the mud room when it rained real hard like this.

Madge looks at Anne.

Anne looks at Tennis.

Tennis: All the cats have gone Madge.

Madge goes back to looking out the window, searching for the cats.

Madge: But I can hear them now.

Tennis: That must be the howling of the wind.

Madge: Why would you think they are gone?

Anne: You see, with your mother away/from us.

Madge:/Away?

Anne: Okay, gone, with your mother gone.

A bird caws and you hear the flapping of wings. The meows coming from the woman on the ladder evolve to cries of distress and then dissipate.

Madge: I just saw a bird fly down from the sky and pick one of the cats out of the hay!

Anne: Don't be ridiculous, it must have been a kite bird getting a mouse. No one has been feeding those cats, so they moved onto the next barn.

Madge: It wasn't just mom who fed them.

Tennis: Yes, well neither of them are there anymore.

Madge: No.

Finally looking up from his plate.

Tennis: That's the biggest agriculture lesson I could ever teach you. God's creation waits for no man. If I don't wake up every day at 5am to chore and feed the cattle

Madge to audience: My Grandpa is one of the few remaining small business full time family farmers left. No one comes to the Sunset Silo Farm for a hayride or to pet the animals. This is a farm where every puddle is filled with oil and every penny is held in the vengeful hands of the clouds.

Every day of my Grandfather's life he wakes up at 5 am to ask God for the forgiveness to keep going. Then to feed the cattle, and check the fences, and plant in the right field, and harvest the right crop, and fix the combines, and to feed the cattle again.

Tennis: The beef do the same thing your cats did. Or they'd at least try, I like to think they're a little less nimble.

Tennis chuckles to himself. He chugs what is of the sugar water in his glass. Madge resumes her lesson to the audience.

Madge: Nestled in between the growing is the consuming. 6:30 breakfast, something with sausage and powdered sugar. 10:30 midmorning break, brownies with butter and Pepsi. Noon dinner, bologna sandwich, more brownies with butter, and instant iced tea. 6:00 supper, a light meal with lots of bread.

Tennis bangs his cup twice on the table again. Anne makes another trip to the back of the house to fetch more sugar water.

Madge continues to stare out the window.

Madge: All the cats are gone? Not even one left hiding in between the shovel rack and old chimney?

Anne crosses to Madge and stands a few feet behind them.

Anne: Here's an idea, Why don't we turn on the weather channel and see when this rain is supposed to let up.

Anne guides Madge to their seat, holding their head up like an infant.

Anne: Tennis?

Tennis looks around for a remote.

Tennis: Where has the remote gotten to now?

Anne: I'm sure you just left it in the kitchen again while getting another pop.

Tennis: Would you go and get it for me, since you're so sure?

Another span of silent prolonged eye contact followed by intense laughter.

Anne: You silly goose, I'll be right back.

Anne walks to the back of the house and retrieves the remote. She hands the remote to Tennis and he turns on the TV.

When the TV is turned on Tennis, Anne, and Madge freeze in their seats at the table. The light shifts to something near sepia.

Groosvoda and Groosmutta enter. They are dressed in 1870's garb but only in tones of brown, like an old photo. They speak in old German accents.

Groosvoda: It's still raining.

Groosmutta: The rain here feels heavier than back home.

Groosvoda: That place was never really home, just necessity.

Groosmutta: Does that make England home? I never knew you thought so fondly of a place that slaughtered our people so lovingly.

Groosvoda: Heaven is our home.

Groosmutta: So we are homeless?

Groosvoda turns out to speak directly to the audience.

Groosvoda: We should be speaking Plattdeutsch, low German, but only our ancestors know what it means anymore, and they already know how this story goes.

Returning his attention to Groosmutta.

Groosvoda: What will I ever do with my wife who has more fire than that of our beloved martyrs.

Groosmutta: Just be thankful I'm also as peaceful as they were.

Groosvoda: I thank God every day for giving me a peaceful woman.

Groosmutta: I will say something has me losing my peace. I can't believe you men, our leaders, scoured the entire world for a place exactly like the one we lived in before.

Groosvoda: Our only concern was similarity of the soil for bountiful harvests.

Groosmutta: You have recited that line so many times you might as well get it branded on your ass. Come on now, you built the same house. If I close all the windows I'm back in Prussia. It even has the same musk.

Groosvoda: Don't you like it?

Groosmutta: It feels as if everything is the same but with sharper edges.

Groosvoda: I have faith this country will prove even more softer than you my dear.

Groosmutta: Seeing the way these brash young men have trampled through this land like a baby searching for its mother's breast, I very much doubt it.

Groosvoda: At least these men seem to be our siblings in persecution.

Groosmutta: Their persecution seems to have driven them mad with attempted compensation. There are just so many unknowns here.

Groosvoda: We will know them all soon, whether we want to or not.

Groosmutta: I miss being in a place where I already knew the truth. At least there I knew how to survive it.

Groosvoda: The truth back in Prussia would have seen me go to war.

Groosmutta: And how horrible it would have been for you to fight for the safety of your family? To belong to a place and refuse to leave it.

Groosvoda: The thousands of Anabaptists who had their tongues torn out so that we could be holy, are rolling in their mass grave.

Groosmutta: They wouldn't have agreed with the war, but they also would never have signed loyalties to any country! Their allegiance was to God and the congregation, they stood for something. When did we stop being Anabaptists and start being Mennonites? When we did our allegiance change from righteousness to prosperity?

Groosvoda: Is it still raining?

Groosmutta: Yes.

Tennis turns off the TV, the lighting returns to normal, Anne and Madge move again, and Groosmutta and Groosvoda freeze.
Tennis: It seems the rain is only going to get worse.

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

A lone cicada chirps intermittently outside. As the scene continues the frequency of the chirps increases and the number of cicadas increases until it is an overpowering choir of rubbing wings. Anne enters with the supplies to make zwieback. The window has been moved to downstage of the comfy chair stage right. All the remaining bread has been piled up in the center of the table.

Anne: Madge! Come help me make the zwieback!

Madge enters with their hair even more knotted than before.

Madge: It smells horrible everywhere.

Anne: Oh hush, That's just the manure. I'm shocked you even notice it anymore.

Madge: I usually don't but it's so much stronger than usual, look my eyes are watering.

Anne: Tsk tsk, What do I keep telling you about fibbing like that.

Madge: I'm not lying Anne look, and even if my eyes weren't watering that would have only been hyperbole, not a lie.

Anne: Silly girl, the smell is not that bad, your eyes perfect, even a silly lie is still a lie, and could you please just come help me. I still have to get dinner set up before your grandfather comes in to wash up.

Madge: Dinner is still out from last night Grandma.

They gesture at the piles of bread on the table.

Anne: I know, I always like to leave it for the puppy and then I use whatever he doesn't eat I give to the plants.

Anne starts to scoop up handfuls of the bread and crumble it into the pots of the plants on the back wall. Madge is shocked at how well the plants really are thriving.

Anne: The grains that we grow do make the entire world go round.

Madge: You are always talking about this puppy, but I've never actually seen the mutt.

Anne: No, no, Braum's is not a mutt; he's a pure bred shiatzu from an orange farm in Florida. And it's a farm dog, they aren't supposed to be seen around the house.

Madge: You bought a tiny dog from Florida and then made it live outside?

Anne: You don't understand, I wanted something exotic.

Madge: I would never have thought Grandpa would have let you spend that kind of money on a dog.

Anne: He was a freebee from a seed company.

Madge: Like the cruises you and grandpa go on sometimes?

Anne: Oh yes, I'd never even left the state before they started giving us perks for being such dedicated farmers. And now I've seen the grand canyon and I have a Floridian living on my farm.

Madge looks around expecting the dog to come trotting around the corner, but nothing comes. They remember how bad it smells.

Anne has organized all the ingredients onto the cleared table and begins to crack eggs into the bowl, glancing over at Madge, waiting.

Anne: What's the matter? You do wet ingredients, and I can do the dry.

Madge walks over to the table and begins to shuffle through all the ingredients.

Madge: Is there a recipe around here somewhere?

Anne: I'm sure I could dig out the original from all of grandma's stuff in the cedar chest in the attic but that's why we girls keep it all up in here.

Anne bounces one finger on her temple.

Madge stops moving and walks over to stare blankly out the window.

Anne: I guess I'll ask again, what's the matter child?

Madge: I don't know it.

Anne: I can't believe, A 16 year old girl no, nearly woman, who doesn't know the recipe to zwieback of all things. Didn't baking it every Saturday make it impossible not to memorize?

Madge: I never felt very girly, maybe that's why I've only made it once before. I think with you actually. Also, mom always hated baking, I'm not sure she had the patience for it.

Anne: Funny, I always wondered what the three of you did over there just across the road. We never really saw you at family gatherings or church. It felt like I had a granddaughter living in a different state even though you were always only a field away.

There is silence. Then, for better or worse, Anne keeps talking.

Anne: Truth be told I always felt a little sorry for you over there all /alone.

Madge: /Do I need to go upstairs and find the antique recipe, or should I just google it or...?

Anne: You do have bristles like she did, that's for sure. I thought zwieback would help us both get closer to normal.

Beat.

Madge: We sang a lot. I thought you could hear us.

Anne: Now that you say it, I think I did some nights.

Madge: The cicadas always drove dad crazy so he would turn up the music and we would yell our heads off.

Beat.

Anne: How about let's go through the steps together. No recipe needed.

Anne starts to explain how to combine the ingredients to Madge but her voice sinks into the sound of cicadas chirping outside. Madge covers their ears and closes their eyes. The stage goes dark.

The cicadas' chirps fade to a pleasant waltz and Madge reopens their eyes, discovering that Anne has gone. Voda has entered with one of the Ensemble Members both dressed as large, shelled, cicadas.

Voda and Ensemble Member line up and waltz with Madge together. The three float around the room, Ensemble member on the outside, Voda in the middle, and Madge on the other edge.

As they waltz, Voda becomes distracted by audience members and starts to fumble steps of the dance. The Ensemble Member is annoyed by this, and the two cicadas begin to fight amongst themselves.

Madge separates the two, putting the Ensemble Member in front of them and Voda behind them. They resume their waltz.

The Ensemble Member has begun to lead the waltz aggressively, sharply dragging the three around the space. Voda smacks at Ensemble Member to slow down. The two begin fighting across Madge now. They inadvertently shove, and multiple blows accidentally fall on Madge.

Madge pulls themselves out from between the two and takes cover in the baking supplies. Voda pushes Ensemble Member away from them and storms off towards the audience. Ensemble Member goes to look for Madge.

When Ensemble Member coaxes Madge out of their hiding place, the two turn to see Voda sitting in the audience happily chit chatting. Ensemble Member storms into the audience and drags Voda back in by his wing.

Voda breaks free and the two pace the circumference of the stage sizing each other up. Madge is standing in the center of the circle rotating quickly trying to keep both bugs in their sight.

The organized waltzing chirps have cascaded back into natural intermittent chirping. The two cicadas leap at each other, and Madge dives out of the way. Voda and Ensemble Member grab the other's wing in the same moment and tear them off.

Without their wings the cicadas seem to lose all fine motor skills, they cease to be personified characters, they are now just bugs. Anne re-enters from the back of the house with the finished dough. When the cicadas see Anne coming, they skitter scatter off the stage.

On her way to the dining table Anne trips over one of the wings. Madge scramble to reorient themselves.

Anne: Your grandfather's right, I am always tripping over nothing. I went ahead and finished up the dough since you were we busy daydreaming in here.

Madge: Do you think the cicadas are louder than usual?

Anne: Probably just the church bells ringing in you hear. Right, now we let the dough rise for 15 minutes or so.

Throughout this bit of dialogue, the cicadas have been peeling themselves out of their external shells. Once the time has been set, Anne exits to the back of the house to prepare more sugar water while Tennis enters through the mud room and takes off his layers outside.

Madge throws themselves into the love seat and buries themselves in it. The cicadas re-enter and scamper all over the set, trying to escape their outer shell.

Anne and Tennis exchange the following in yells over cicadas chirping and scampering.

Tennis: So how is out grandchild today?

Anne: Far away from us, I'm afraid.

Tennis: Who failed her do you think?

Anne: Who failed us do you think?

Tennis: We must have failed God more like.

Anne: If only I'd been born a better cook.

END OF SCENE 2