

Suckow, Ruth

Miss Warrington's Burger

MSC706

MISS WARRINGTON'S BURGLAR

CHARACTERS:

Miss Agnes Warrington, an intellectual lady.

Rose, her niece.

Nanny, her servant.

Jack Brown.

Mr. Simmons, a light-fingered gentleman.

Harry Lane

Nick Porter

Frat boys

} Beta Fraternity boys.

Scene:

It is dusk of a rainy, autumn day. The old-fashioned library of the late Prof. Warrington is lighted only by the coals in the fireplace. An old fashioned grand piano, tightly closed, stands at Lower Left. All the furniture is old and fine; books are everywhere; the walls are hung with staring, ancestral portraits. Near the piano, on a small tea table, is a rare old Japanese tea service. Beside the work table sits Miss Warrington. She is a very severe-looking old lady with aristocratic eyebrows, and sits bolt upright in her chair. On a footstool by the fire sits Rose, a pretty girl of twenty, looking somewhat disconsolate. She is playing with a small Japanese idol, which she has taken from the mantel.

Rose (turning the idol in her hand)—What a nice, jolly old face he has.

Miss W.—He ought to have, Rose. He is Yuit San, the god of jollity.

Rose (to the idol)—Poor old Yuit San, you've come to the wrong place. I don't see what the god of jollity can have to do with Aunt Agnes. (To her

aunt.) Did Uncle Rolf bring him from Japan, Aunt Agnes, when he brought the Japanese tea set?

Miss W. (shortly)—Yes.

Rose—I've heard mother tell about the beautiful tea set, and how the college boys were simply green for fear they'd drop the cups when grandmother had them to tea. Mother said you and she used to pour, and made eyes at the boys while grandfather was discussing Napoleon. Do you remember, Aunt Agnes?

Miss W.—I should hardly describe it so, I believe.

Rose—Do you ever have the college boys now, Aunt Agnes, and are they still afraid of the cups?

Miss W.—I have nothing whatever to do with the college, Rose, and the Japanese tea set will not be used again. (Rises and crosses to bookcase at Upper Right.)

Rose (to herself).—Why, she really cares! Mother was right—there has been some trouble between her and the college. (To idol.) O, Yuit San, where have all my fraternity dances and good times gone? Poor little idol, you're the only man who dares come to this house. Even the grocery boy is a twelve-year-old and pigeon-toed at that°

Miss W.—You have been sitting quite long enough by the fire, niece. I fear you are getting into a somewhat romantic mood. (Sarcastically). Suppose we turn from heathen gods now, and devote our minds to something a trifle more elevating.

Rose (still to idol)—There, I knew it! I'll have to read some more of that everlasting Dr. Johnson! O, Yuit San, I can't even talk to you, let alone a real man, and I'm homesick, homesick!

Miss W.—You will find Johnson's Essays in the book-case where you left it, Rose. (Seats herself by work table and takes up knitting.)

Rose (carefully putting idol on mantel)—Wouldn't you rather have me play to you, Aunt Agnes? It's such a cosy, rainy night, and the essays seem a little too—elevating.

Miss W.—We do not use the piano, niece. You will find the book where you left it.

(As Rose crosses to bookcase—reluctantly — the door slams and Nanny rushes in. She is a limp, pathetic-looking old creature, with a face which Rose describes as "wishy washy." Just now her weak features are enlivened with excitement, her eyes almost popping out of her head.)

Miss W.—Why, Nanny, what do you mean by rushing in in this fashion?

Rose—Good gracious, Nanny, did you meet a man? There's nothing else to account for such excitement.

Nanny (panting and holding side)—O, Miss Agnes—I've run every step of the way. I don't think I'll ever catch my breath again and my heart—palpitates—(presses hand to heart).

Rose (going to her.)—Why, Nanny, you poor old thing, what's happened?

Miss W.—Nanny, take your hand from your heart and answer me. You are too old for such absurdity.

Nanny (hysterically)—Burglars!

Miss W.—Nonsense!

Rose—Then I'm sure they're lady burglars, Nanny, or they wouldn't

trouble us. Stop crying, there's a dear.

Nan—O, but it isn't nonsense. I had it from Mrs. Parks herself, while she was pouring out the milk.

Miss W.—Poor authority! That woman's tongue is the greater part of her.

Nan—Indeed, Miss Agnes, it's as true as life. They enter houses in disguises and are as bold as if they had no hearts. One came to Mis' Riverses as an agent selling some fine, religious books—"The Devil of Today," with colored pictures—and while Mis' Rivers went upstairs after her purse, he stole all the silver from the sideboard and went out through the window.

Rose—Perhaps he was giving a practical illustration of his books.

Nan.—And that isn't all! Another one dressed himself in a long coat like a minister and went to call on Rev. Banks in broad daylight with a revolver hid in his pocket. Mis' Parks says they didn't see it, but they knew it was there. He stole Mis' Banks' wedding spoons, and I know he'll come here and get your Jap'nese tea set, Miss Agnes. (Sobs hysterically.)

Miss W.—Nannie, this is ridiculous. I think that I would be able to discern a burglar no matter how disguised he might be. Sit down and listen to Rose while she reads. No doubt that will compose you. Come, Rose—why, what's the matter?

Rose, who has been looking out of the window, turns sharply and laughs nervously.

R.—Why—nothing—only—I had the queerest impression of—

Nan.—A man?

Rose—Why, of—eyes!

Miss W.—Absurd!

Rose—(recovering herself)—Well, it is absurd that anyone should make eyes at—listen! wasn't that a laugh?

(Nanny sobs and clings to Rose, while Miss W. walks boldly to the window and looks out.)

Miss W.—There is absolutely nothing there. Since you seem to be infected with Nanny's absurdity, Rose, perhaps you would like a police patrol?

Rose—No, but I do wish we had something masculine about the premises. Haven't you some old rubbers of grandfather's to put on the front porch, or a cane, or a—silk hat?

Miss W. (majestically)—I would not desecrate even your grandfather's rubbers by making them act a lie. (Sits down again and takes up knitting.) We have waited quite long enough for the essays, niece.

(As Rose, sighing, takes up book, a faint knock is heard at the door. Nanny screams, Rose jumps, and even Miss W. turns color.)

Nan.—I knew they'd come! I won't open the door° O, Miss Agnes, don't ask me to open the door!

Rose—Aunt Agnes, let's go up to your room and lock the door. I know I saw those eyes!

Miss W. Nonsense! It is merely Johnny Brown with the buttermilk. If you are both afraid to open that door, I will do so myself. (Stalks majestically toward door, when knock is heard again, somewhat bolder than before. Nanny shrieks again.) —Perhaps, however, it is just as well to be prepared in case—although of course nothing will happen. (Seizes poker).

Rose—seizes coal shovel and speaks unflinchingly)—I'll stand by you, Aunt Agnes.

(Nannie cowers behind table, hands over her ears. Miss W. opens door, and a strange-looking individual, preceded by an odor as of a whole drug store, enters. He is clad in overalls, one black and one tan shoe, and a very old velveteen coat. His ragged hat is pulled down over his eyes and a very evidently false red beard conceals the lower part of his face. All three women are horrified. He shambles in and speaks in a rather shamed voice, as if reciting a lesson)—Madam, my name is Brown and I am an honest man. Have you a cooky, or some bit o' food that you can give a starving man?

Rose (to Miss W.)—O, Auntie, give him a cooky. Don't refuse him.

Brown (taking in situation and speaking with more assurance) — Ladies, there is no cause for—er, don't git scared, mum. I'm only a poor honest man out of work and starvin' for a bit o' food.

Miss W.—Do honest men beg?

Brown—Please, mum, a cooky's all I ask.

Rose—O, give it to him!

Brown (bowing)—Thank you, Miss. I could see you had a kind heart by those pretty—

Miss W.—That will do! (Face suddenly brightens and she seems to be thinking.) You say you want a cooky?

Brown—Only a little cooky, mum.

Miss W. (pointing to door)—That door leads to the pantry. On the shelf you will find all the cookies that you can eat. Go and get them. (As Brown springs toward door with an air of relief, Miss W. goes to book case and takes a bag from which she extracts a key, surreptitiously. As Brown opens door, she runs, slams it behind him, and

turns key in lock).

Miss W. (leans against door and suddenly becomes hysterical)—Ha! ha! ha! I've locked him in the sewing room! (Brown rattles door knob.)

Rose—Aunt Agnes, how can you be so brave? O, are you sure he's safe? (Takes a chair and drags it to door. Nanny follows with piano stool, and soon half the furniture in the room is piled against the door.)

Rose—(laughing wildly and hurling book at door)—There's Dr. Johnson—it's the heaviest think I know.

Brown (from within)—Here, I've got to get out of here. (Terrified silence).—Madam, I assure you that you are mistaken. Let me go quickly and no harm will be done.

Rose—O, I never saw such a horrible-looking creature! If anyone ever came with blood in his eyes—

Miss W.—(in sepulchral whisper)—Rose, that beard is false

Rose—And his shoes were different colors! O, Aunt Agnes, there isn't an open window in the sewing room, is there?

Brown (savagely) — No, madam, there is not.

Nan.—What an awful voice! Miss Agnes, I'm fainting. I know I am! (Drops limply on footstool, but as no one pays any attention to her, soon recovers.)

Rose—We must telephone for the police at once.

Brown—Good heavens, don't do that! I can explain—that is, not just now, but—

Miss W. (sternly, as she wipes away tears)—Do you think we will consult you as to what we will do? But Rose! we haven't a telephone! Your grandfather never approved of them.

Rose—No telephone!

Miss W. (while ominous sounds came from behind the door.) There is but one thing to do. Nanny, you must run to Mrs. Parks' next door, and telephone from there.

Nan.—Go outdoors alone! I'd die first. (subsides on footstool, groaning.)

Miss W.—Rose, will you go?

Rose—O, I wouldn't leave you here alone, Aunt Agnes.

Miss W.—And I couldn't leave this house in care of such incapables as you and Nanny.

Brown—Please, don't any of you go. It's all right, I swear it's all right.

Rose—Don't you think he speaks in sort of an educated voice, Aunt Agnes? When he first came in, it was awful.

Miss W.—Then he was acting a part. He is a crafty villain.

Brown—Won't you believe me, Miss—Miss Rose?

Rose—How can I?

Miss W.—We must call for help. Let us all call—now! (All three weakly call "help," in different keys. Chuckle heard from behind door.)

Brown—Ladies, won't you let me out? I hate to see you frightened for nothing. (desperately). You know I could kick in this door, if I weren't a gentleman.

Rose (shrieks hysterically)—A gentleman!

Brown—I'm in a false position—

Miss W.—You're in a very good position and you'll stay there. Rose, go to the door and call for help.

(Exit Rose. Frantic sounds issue from sewing room. Miss W. and Nannie converse in frightened whispers. Suddenly Rose's voice is heard calling.)

Rose—O, please, please come in!

Masculine Voice—Why—with pleasure!

Miss W.—She's found someone. (suddenly becomes limp and drops on ruins before door. Enter Rose and Mr. Simmons. He is a fat, bland-faced person in evening clothes. His air is a mixture of alarm and daring.)

Rose—I knew someone would come to help us. There's a burglar behind that door. (Sees Miss W.). O, Aunt Agnes! She's fainted!

Simmons—The dickens she has—er, yes, yes! Too bad! (Stoops and raises her. She opens her eyes.)

Miss W.—Sir, let me go! Even if I am faint, it is no cause for insolence!

Rose—O, Aunt Agnes, this gentleman has come in to help us.

Sim.—Yes, I was passing and this young lady called to me. I will do anything for you, ladies. Bring on your burglar!

Nan.—He's behind that door.

(More sounds within.)

Sim.—Yes, he seems to be. By the way, what sort of a looking fellow is he?

Miss W. (faintly)—Horrible! Ragged clothes, false beard—

Sim.—O, then he isn't—er, in that case, ladies, I will certainly do all I can to help you. Now, I think it would be very unwise to telephone to the police. You see—the—the telephone wires are probably cut!

Rose—We have no telephone. That's the awful part of it!

Sim. (brightens)—Ah, indeed! Then, I'll just run over next door and telephone from there. I must hurry. You see I'm on my way to a dinner—

Rose—But if the wires are cut!

Sim.—O, it will do no harm to try! It will do no harm to try! It will take

but a moment.

Nannie (clings frantically to him)—O, don't go! Don't go!

Miss W.—Nannie! Is that the way to treat a gentleman?

Sim. (leering at Rose)—It might be a very good way if it carried farther. However, I must be off. Your burglar must have dropped off to sleep.

Brown—Madam, I won't attempt to do anything more. Bring on your policemen!

Sim.—Just what I will do. Thank you, sir, for the suggestion! Ladies—I will be back in a moment. No fear! (Looks fearfully at Nanny and rushes away.)

Miss W.—O, I hope he comes back soon. This has shaken my nerves. A man really is a comfort.—Listen—did you hear something upstairs!

Rose—(trembling)—No, no, auntie, you're only nervous. O, I don't like Mr. Simmons! What shifty eyes he has. But he was very kind, and in such a hurry to help us.

Nan.—I heard something upstairs.

Rose—O, no! O, this is awful! I can't stand it alone another minute! He might shoot us through that door! I'm going outdoors,, I'm—

(The tramping of feet is heard outside, and boyish voices singing. A joyful exclamation from Brown. All three listen as if turned to stone. The voices draw nearer, until one can hear that they are singing the Beta song.)

Rose—O, they are college boys! Listen, the Beta song° O, isn't it beautiful?

Miss W.—Hark, I believe they are coming here! Mr. Simmons must have sent them.

(The tramping of many feet and shouts of laughter are heard outside the

door. Door bell rings. Nannie goes. Enter Harry Lane, Nick Porter, and several other boys, their Frat colors much in evidence.)

Rose—O, I'm so glad you've come! I'm so glad!

Lane—(bowing, hand on heart)—We thank you.

Miss W.—He is in the sewing room. Have you chains?

Lane—Chains?

Miss W.—You are not going to overpower him by main force! He may have a revolver.

All—A revolver!

Rose—Why, what do you think a burglar is? A gentle lady?

All—A burglar!

Porter—Miss Warrington, there is evidently some mistake here. We came here to—to—(nudging Lane). Here, Harry, you said you'd make the speech.

Lane—(suddenly seeing debris before the door.)—Did you say you had a burglar behind that door? Say, what did he look like?

Rose—The awfulest looking man. One black shoe, one tan, a red beard!

All Boys—A red beard! (Burst into shouts of laughter. Mad sounds heard behind door and furious voice calls:

Brown—Hey, you fellows! I've had enough of this! I've kept mum! Now you explain, or your old Frat can go to — for all I care!"

Lane (choking with laughter)—Miss Warrington I'm sorry that you've been frightened, but if that isn't a good one on Jack! Ha! ha! ha!

Miss W. (majestically) — Perhaps you will explain!

Lane—We're the Beta Fraternity. You see, we were initiating Brown and we thought it would be a good joke to make him beg for cookies. It was only

fun, you know. We had no idea you'd think he was a burglar. Excuse me—ha! ha! ha!—

Brown—Fellows, let me out!

Miss W.—Then he isn't a burglar! But a Fraternity man—I am inclined to think that that's just as bad!

Brown—Please, please unlock this door!

(Miss W. stalks to door and unlocks it. Brown steps out, shame-faced, fury in his eye.)

Brown—Fellows, if you've made enough of a fool of me—(throws off hat and tears off beard. Boys try to control laughter.)

Nan.—Why, he's a real pretty boy! (Boys are convulsed with laughter.)

Brown (turning to Rose)—Miss Warrington, I don't know how I can erase the awful impression that I've made tonight. You see—that is—good Lord, you fellows have got to apologize.

Miss W. (After looking searchingly at Brown)—Is your name Jack Brown, and do you live in Syracuse? Then you are Alice Warren's son. She was the best friend I ever had. I would never have thought to see her son in such company. (Looks scornfully at boys.)

Lane (eagerly)—Indeed, Miss Warrington, we are not so bad as we seem. You see—we—we—we'd heard so much about Professor Warrington's home — and—that is, Jack had, and so — he thought, if he must beg, he'd come here. We've heard so much about Professor Warrington.

Porter—Indeed we have. We honor him more than you know.

Miss W. (evidently mollified) — My father's memory has been shown little respect since the affair of the will.

Porter—The student body will never

forgive the faculty for that affair, Miss Warrington.

Miss W.—The Student Body? I had never thought of that. And you honor my father, you say?

All—More than we can say!

Miss W. (suddenly gracious)—What a wet night it is and how cold you look! Come close to the fire and get warm. This used to be the students' home, you know.

(Boys gratefully draw up to fire. Porter slaps Brown on back and whispers, "See, what I did for you, old chap?" Brown nods).

Miss W.—Nanny, go upstairs and bring me the picture of Alice Warren. (to Brown). It's something that I prize. Now, I know how cold you are, and I am going to make you some tea in the Japanese cups which my mother always used for the college boys. (Sets to work.)

Rose — The Japanese cups. (To Brown) You don't know what a concession that is.

Brown—Will you ever forgive me for frightening you so? Gee, I wish I could doff these rags!

Rose (looking about living room). I don't think it will be hard to forgive.

Brown—Do you know the real reason the boys sent me here? They'd seen you and they knew Miss Warrington would give them no chance—

Nannie (rushing in) — Miss Agnes, your jewel box is gone and everything is topsy turvy upstairs!

Rose—Simmons! He was the real burglar! What did I say about his eyes!

Boys—You needn't be afraid. We're here!

Miss W.—It doesn't matter, Nannie. (Looking at Alice's picture and at her son)—I think I have found more than I have lost. Boys, I want this to be just like old times. Let us gather around the piano and sing the old songs that my father loved.

Rose—I will play.

Miss W.—I will play, myself. I think I have not forgotten the old songs. Nanny, attend to the tea.

(All gather around piano and sing "Auld Lang Syne.") Brown finds intervals to talk to Rose, Porter to Miss W. As song ends, Miss W. rises and Rose comes close to her.)

Rose—Aunt Agnes, Mr. Brown has asked me to attend a Beta dance. You don't care if I go, do you?

Miss W (dreamily)—Rose, is my gray silk very shabby? I am going to chap-erone!

(Nannie comes up with Japanese cups.)

(Curtain.)