

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Main Street

by Barbara Field

Based on the book by Sinclair Lewis

The license issued in connection with PNA perusal scripts is a limited license and is issued for the sole purpose of reviewing the script for a potential future performance. All other rights regarding perusal scripts are expressly reserved by Plays for New Audiences, including, but not limited to, the rights to distribute, perform, copy, or alter scripts. This limited license does not convey any performance rights of any kind with this material. By accepting any perusal script(s), Licensee agrees to and is bound by these terms.

Time: 1910-1919

Place: Gopher Prairie, MN

WOMEN:

Carol Milford Kennicott

Vida Sherwin

Maud Dyer (also plays Béa Swenson's cousin Tina)

Juanita Haydock (also plays Mrs. Dawson)

Béa Swenson

Mrs. Bogart (also plays Frau Kempen, Mrs. Stowbody)

MEN:

Dr. Will Kennicott

Ramie Wutherspoon (also plays Chet Dashaway)

Sam Clark

Dave Dyer

Jack Elder (also plays Erik's father)

Harry Haydock

Nels Bjornstam

Erik Valborg (also plays Cyrus Bogart, Franz Kempen)

NOTE: Blodgett College graduates played by available actors, 3 F, 2 M

Principle character descriptions:

Carol Kennicott: self-possessed, self-directed, forthright. Not particularly soft or alluring, but pretty and very bright. At start of play she's 20.

Doctor Will Kennicott, 30-ish, is educated, but eager to blend in and be "one of the boys". A sweet, stubborn nature. Women find him attractive.

Juanita Haydock is what we'd now call a "trophy wife". A score of years younger than her husband, smartly turned out, extroverted, fun-loving.

Harry Haydock owns the Bon Ton department store. Benevolent and conservative.

Vida Sherwin: the school teacher. A contradictory personality: warm and sincere, but also somewhat sphinctered and judgmental.

Raymond Wutherspoon works for Haydock in haberdashery. He is better read than the others, a straight-laced spinster of a man. He sings.

Dave Dyer is the local druggist. Amiable.

Maud Dyer, his wife, is a bit depressed, sexually discontent.

Sam Clark owns the hardware store. Will's closest friend, a really nice guy, but a bit of a lecher.

Béa Swenson, a beautiful young fresh-off-the-boat girl from Sweden. Natural, kind, she becomes Carol's best friend.

Nels Bjornstam: a strong, attractive Swede. Very well-read, very left-wing, verbal. He's Sinclair Lewis's Ideal Man.

Erik Valborg. Poetic, handsome kid from the farm who works as a tailor. A romantic, with ambitions.

Mrs. Bogart, the town gossip, in her 50's. Well-meaning but bitter.

Jack Elder, the meanest (and richest) of the businessmen.

Cyrus Bogart, the widow's son. A bully.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

CAROL STANDS IN SILHOUETTE ON TOP OF A HILL
OVERLOOKING ST. PAUL. SHE IS TWENTY.

CAROL

My name is Carol Milford and I'm going to change the world! I will be a liberator. An innovator. I'll make the world beautiful. I'll teach. Or run a library. Or I'll get my hands on a squalid little town and make it beautiful. With public gardens and a town square, like New England. Or maybe France.

SHE STARTS DOWN THE HILL.

I plan to do something magnificent with my life! Change the world!
Oh, damn!—I'm going to be late for graduation!

SHE DESCENDS TO JOIN A GROUP OF GRADUATES
IN CAPS AND GOWNS. THEY ALL SING:

GRADUATES

*Hail to Thee, oh Blodgett College,
And your ivied Halls,
Cradle of our new-found knowledge,
We leave these hallowed walls.
Arts and science, Christian morals,
Memories that shine
Hail to thee, oh Blodgett College,
Academic shrine.*

THEY TOSS THEIR HATS IN THE AIR, CHEER,
BREAK FORMATION AND SCATTER AS THEY START
TO GO. VERY FAST:

LUCY

I'll be getting married in July...the fifteenth. To Calvin Bates.

MABEL

Isn't he kind of old for you?

LUCY

Want to be a bridesmaid?

MABEL

Sure.

PETER

I'm leaving for Africa in September.

CAROL

You're going to be a missionary? (HE NODS) Where?

PETER

Rhodesia, I think it's called.

CAROL

What denomination?

PETER

Lutheran.

CAROL

Be careful, and write us all about it.

ANNE

I can't marry Joe till next year. Mother says I've got to learn culinary arts first.

LUCY

I'm going to have a girl for all that.

ANNE

A girl?

LUCY

A maid. What about you, Carol?

CAROL

I'm going to school in Chicago this fall, library school.

TOM

No, stay here and marry me, Carol. I love you madly.

CAROL

You're sweet, but no thank you. Marriage isn't in my future.

TOM

You're breakin' my heart.

LUCY (WHISPERS TO ANNE)

She's so ambitious. Chicago!

ANNE

What does she think *is* her future?

CAROL

I'm planning to change the world....

THE SCENE DISSOLVES.

TEA DANCE AT THE PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO: 1910

A BAND PLAYS SOMETHING FROM "THE MERRY WIDOW".
A WALTZ. CAROL IS DANCING WITH DR. WILL KENNICOTT.

WILL

It's a small world, isn't it?

CAROL

Is it?

WILL

I mean, both of us coming from Minnesota, Miss Milford.

CAROL

That's true. I'm from the eastern part of the state, though. St. Paul.

WILL

The capitol. I went to school at the University.

CAROL SMILES POLITELY.

So, what brings you to Chicago, Miss Milford?

CAROL

I'm finishing up a course in Library Science. But I have a job waiting for me back in St. Paul.

WILL

I am a strong believer in education for women, Miss—

CAROL

You may call me Carol. And I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten your name.

WILL

Doctor Will Kennicott. I'm in Chicago for a meeting.

CAROL

That's nice.

THEY DANCE FOR A BEAT.

WILL

I'm a doctor.

CAROL

That's a fine profession, Doctor.

WILL

Don't you think the Palmer House is a swell hotel....?

CAROL

Swell. It reminds me of the grand hotels of Europe. Not that I've ever been to Europe.

THEY DANCE.

Where do you practice, Doctor Kennicott?

WILL

Oh, I live in a little town way west of the Twin Cities. You've never heard of it.
Gopher Prairie.

CAROL

Gopher Prairie? Quaint.

WILL

For a big city girl like you. But it's a nice town. When you move up to St. Paul, I'll invite you for a visit.

THEY DANCE ON FOR A MOMENT.
HE PULLS HER CLOSER.

CAROL

Dr. Kennicott? What on earth is a gopher?

LIGHTS BLACK OUT. ON THEM.

A WOMAN WHOM WE HAVEN'T MET OPENS A
NEWSPAPER AND READS:

VIDA

Gopher Prairie Weekly Dauntless ITEM:

The Dauntless has learned that our own beloved Doctor Will Kennicott was married last week. The bride is Miss Carol Milford of St. Paul. The happy couple met in Chicago, where Miss Milford was studying Library Science. They were married by the Reverend Marcus Elliot of the Redeemer Methodist Church in Saint Paul, and have been honeymooning in the mountains of Colorado for the past two weeks. We look forward to welcoming Mrs. Will Kennicott to Gopher Prairie.

VIDA GIVES A BODY-SHAKING SIGH, WIPES A TEAR.
AS WE HEAR CARUSO SING THE FINAL NOTES OF HIS
TRAGIC ARIA FROM *I PAGLIACCI*, THE 1904 RECORDING.
LIGHTS FADE OUT ON THE STRICKEN VIDA, AS THE
PIERCING SOB OF CARUSO'S VOICE CROSS-FADES
TO THE SOUND OF A RAILROAD WHISTLE.

GOPHER PRAIRIE

LIGHTS UP. A RAILWAY STATION SIGN, "GOPHER
PRAIRIE. SOUND OF A TRAIN COMING TO A HALT.
WILL AND CAROL ENTER WITH LUGGAGE. THEY LOOK
AROUND. [WINTER CLOTHING?]

WILL

Don't worry, the train's fifteen minutes early. They'll come. Relax. You're going to love this town, honey! Welcome to Gopher Prairie! Welcome home!

CAROL

SHE LOOKS AROUND.

"Home"...the word terrifies me. It's awfully flat, here, Will.

WILL

Just wait, we've done a lot with lawns and gardens; and it's...homey.

CAROL

After Colorado, it seems...flat.

WILL

All the big elms and maples. And the best people on earth. I bet Luke Dawson has more money than most of the swells on Summit Avenue; and Miss Sherwin in the high school is a regular wonder—reads Latin like I do English; and Sam Clark, the hardware man, he's a corker—not a better man in the state to go hunting with; and if you want more culture, there's Reverend Warren, the Congregational preacher, and Professor Mott, the superintendent of schools; and Ramie Wutherspoon, he's not such an awful boob when you get to know him, and he sings swell; and plenty of others, all ready for you to come boss us around—

THE TRAIN WHISTLE SOUNDS, FARTHER AWAY.

CAROL

Boss you—?

AN AUTO HORN HONKS.

WILL

(SPOTS SOMEONE, WAVES) There's Sam. Sam Clark—and Harry Haydock—this *is* a welcoming committee!

SAM AND HARRY RUSH IN.

SAM

I brought my new motor to take you home!

WILL

Showin' off again? (TO CAROL) He's got a brand new Paige—it's as big as a boat. Sam, this is Carol. And Harry Haydock, he owns the Bon Ton—

SAM

Not so fast—or she won't get us straight—

WILL

'Course she will. My little bride's smart as a whip!

HARRY

Pretty *and* smart? How you gonna keep her in line, Will?

CAROL

Matter of fact, I haven't got anyone straight, Mr. Clark.

HARRY

I'm Haydock. Give her a chance, Doc, she's barely landed.

SAM

Take a deep breath, young lady. The air's pure, here, not like Chicago. I'm Sam Clark, dealer in hardware, sporting goods, cream separation, and almost any kind of junk you can think of. Call me Sam, and I'm gonna call you a fool, seein' you've married this poor bum of a medic.

WILL

Now hold on—

SAM

He can't take a joke! The missus and me, we're throwing a little party for you tonight. Meet the folks.

CAROL

That's so kind—*tonight*?

SAM

Seven-thirty.

HARRY

So why are we still standing here, gabbing? Climb in the motor. We'll take you home, Mrs. Kennicott.

THEY ESCORT WILL AND THE BEWILDERED CAROL OFF, LUGGAGE AND ALL. BUT NOT BEFORE SHE NOTICES A SWEET-FACED GIRL, BÉA SWENSON, FRESH OFF THE BOAT FROM MALMO. THE TWO WOMEN SMILE IN PASSING UNTIL BÉA'S SISTER TINA RUSHES IN.

TINA

Béa, Béa, Jag är här—

BÉA

Jag trodde inte att du skulle komma—

TINA

På Engelska. Du måste lära –you must learn English.

BÉA

English. I like... here. I get yob.

TINA

Ya, we get you job. Come now...

THEY PICK UP HER BUNDLE AND EXIT.
THE TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS AND THE TRAIN
PULLS OUT AS THE LIGHTS DIM.

WILL AND CAROL STAND WITH THEIR LUGGAGE
IN FRONT OF KENNICOTT'S HOUSE.
SAM AND HARRY WATCH FROM A DISTANCE.

CAROL

Why are they watching us?

HARRY

(TO SAM) So, let's get going.

SAM

Hold your horses, Harry, we've gotta see him carry her over the threshold.

WILL

Those two jokers! They want to see me lift you up and haul you inside like a cave man.
Ready?

BUT HE'S NOT QUITE READY.

Carol, I hope the house doesn't disappoint you. I was born upstairs.
It's got all my folks' old furniture. Kind of shabby—

CAROL

I'll like it.

WILL

We'll build a new house, soon as I get the scratch.

CAROL

I'll love it.

WILL

Well...Ally-oop!

AS HE LIFTS HER, SAM AND HARRY CHEER
IN THE DISTANCE.
LIGHTS BLACK OUT.

AT THE CLARKS'

IN THE DARK WE HEAR THEM APPROACH THE CLARKS'.

CAROL

Do we have to go? Meeting all those people, all at once, I just can't, Will...it's too soon, and I'm scared.

WILL

You have to face it, sooner or later. Carol, honey, they're all gonna love you! The Clarks invited everyone specially.

CAROL

That's very nice, he's a kind man, but—

WILL

Look, we're here, calm down, honey....
SOUND OF A DOORBELL.

LIGHTS UP ON A CIRCLE OF CHAIRS, THE WOMEN SIT
SEPARATED FROM THE MEN, THEIR CHATTERING TURNS TO
SILENCE, AS SAM PULLS CAROL FORWARD.

SAM

Welcome, little lady, the keys of the city are yours!

CAROL (WHISPERS TO SAM CLARK)

Mister Clark, they look like they'll swallow me in one mouthful!

SAM

Call me Sam—call me anything—just don't call me late to supper!

HE GUFFAWS, SHE SMILES, WEAKLY.

You just cuddle under Sam's wing, and if anyone scares you, I'll shoo 'em off!

HE LEADS HER INTO THE CIRCLE.

Ladies and worse halves...the Bride! Mrs. Carol Kennicott!

POLITE APPLAUSE.

HARRY HAYDOCK

We've already met. Welcome to Gopher Prairie, again, Mrs. K.

DAVE

Dave Dyer. How was the honeymoon?

CAROL

I loved Colorado—the mountains!

SAM

She's a big city girl. Grew up in St. Paul. Lived in Chicago.

DAVE

Chicago! (HE WHISTLES)

WILL

But don't worry. Boys, we'll turn her into hunter and fisherman! (TO CAROL)
Come on, I'll introduce you to them, one at a time. Harry's dad owns the Bon Ton
Department Store, but Harry runs it, now. And Dave Dyer, the druggist—he's a pretty
good shot at duck hunting.

DAVE WAVES.

And this geezer's Jack Elder. He owns the Minniemashie Hotel, and the lumber mill
factory, and quite a share of the Farmers' National Bank—

DAVE

He owns us all—

WILL

And this old fellow's Chet Dashaway. Furniture and undertaking.

CAROL

Builds the coffins, and then—clever. Does he do the actual embalming? With his own
hands?

DASHAWAY

With my bare hands. I have a funeral license.

WILL

Come on, Carrie, you'd be proud to shake hands with a surgeon who puts his hands
inside you while you're still alive.

CAROL

You're right, of course. (SHE SHAKES DASHAWAY'S HAND.)

WILL

Ramie Wutherspoon's hanging out in the kitchen, and Luke Dawson and—did you know that Percy Bresnahan comes from here?

CAROL

Who?

HARRY

Percy Bresnahan! Born and raised here.

SAM

You know—president of the Velvet Motor Company of Boston, Mass. Maker of the Velvet Twelve—biggest automobile factory in New England?

CAROL

Well, I—

DAVE

Sure you have. He's a millionaire several times over. But old Percy comes back here every summer for the black bass fishing; and he says he'd rather live here than Boston or New York or anywhere else...if he could.

WILL LEADS HER TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CIRCLE.

WILL

And now the ladies: meet Maud Dyer, Dave's better half.

MAUD

I hope you like small towns. I mean, coming from the Big City...

CAROL

I don't really know yet....

MAUD

Well, I guess you're going to find out. You haven't much choice, do you?

CAROL

I'm sure I'm going to love it.

WILL

And Juanita Haydock, Harry's wife.

JUANITA

Welcome, Carol. May I call you Carol?

CAROL

Oh, please, everyone—call me Carol—

JUANITA

Adore your hat. Chicago?

CAROL

No, Minneapolis. Dayton's.

MAUD

It's *different*, I guess.

JUANITA

Trés chic! You'll love our parties, Carol. We go sledding in the winter, and there's the lake in the summer and....

CAROL

It sounds like fun.

JUANITA

And we have a fine class of people in town. Friendly and open-hearted—

MAUD

Except for the farmers. Swedes. They don't want to pay school taxes, and they hardly spend a cent in town.

JUANITA

But mostly a fine class of people. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan came from here?

CAROL

Yes, I heard that.

MAUD

And come meet our educator, Vida Sherwin.

VIDA

Welcome, Mrs. Kennicott—

CAROL

Carol. I'm so eager to talk with you, Mrs. Sherwin—

VIDA

Miss.

CAROL

I'd like to learn more about the schools.

VIDA

I suspect we'll have a lot to talk about, Mrs. Kennicott—

CAROL

Have you had a chance to explore any new educational theories—?

MAUD

Oh, those? Most of those would-be reformers are notoriety-seekers. They probably advocate knitting and ear-wiggling.

CAROL SMILES.

VIDA

Never mind her, Mrs. Kennicott, you and I will have a good discussion about schools and...well, everything.

CAROL

Once I've unpacked.

JUANITA HEADS TOWARD CAROL WITH A PLATE
BRIMMING WITH ANGEL FOOD CAKE, HANDS IT TO HER.

JUANITA

Ethel Clark's started serving dessert. Her angel food cake's the best—

MAUD

So she thinks.

JUANITA

Do you play bridge, Carol? We have a bridge party once a month, with supper—

CAROL

No, I don't...

JUANITA

Really? You're from St. Paul?

CAROL

I was kind of a book worm.

JUANITA

We'll teach you. Bridge is half the fun of life! And we'll shop!

CAROL

Shop? That sounds nice.

MAUD

We have two groups you'll want to join. The Jolly Seventeen—

VIDA

That's just for amusement. The other one might appeal to you more, the Thanatopsis Society

CAROL

Thanatopsis...? Sounds like it's about death.

MAUD

(VAGUELY) It's just a name. Greek.

CAROL

I'm sure I'll love it.

SHE OBLIGES THEM BY TAKING A FORKFUL OF CAKE. THEY WATCH. SHE NODS. SWALLOWS. SHE HEARS SOME CONVERSATION FROM THE MEN, WHICH INTERESTS HER MORE, AND SHE LEAVES THE LADIES.

WILL

No, I guess I was honeymooning during that business. Then what happened?

DAVE

The next thing I hear, they're having a meeting.

WILL

Who?

DAVE

Those farmers.

WILL
Where?

DAVE
At the Lutheran Church. That damned Pastor Lundquist invites them into *his* church—

JACK ELDER
I bet he had to sweep the hay out of the vestry after they left. Union filth!

CAROL
Has there been much labor activity around here?

DAVE
No, thank God. But it's coming. Trouble enough with the farm hands—

JACK
They come over here and turn Socialist or Populist in a minute. 'Course, if they have a loan at my bank, I'm able to make 'em listen to reason.
HE GRINS.
Get it?

CAROL
Well....

SAM
Carol, I don't mind them being Democrats, but *Socialists*—

CAROL
So I guess you don't approve of union labor?
DEAD SILENCE FOR A MOMENT. THEY STARE.
How do you feel about farm co-operatives?
WILL SIGNALS TO CAROL TO SHUT UP.

JACK
Come down off your cloud, Mrs. K. All this welfare work and insurance and old-age pension talk is poppycock! These half-baked thinkers and suffragettes and buttinskis, trying to tell a man how to run his own business—

DAVE
College professors, too, attacking American industry to the last ditch. Yes, Sir!! They ought to hang those agitators, right, Doc?

WILL
Well...sure.

CAROL
Really, Will?

WILL
Gee, Carrie, you know I'm not interested in that stuff.

HARRY
Come on, boys, politics bore the ladies to death, right, Juanita?

JUANITA
If you say so, dear.

HARRY
Tell me, Carol, do you like our fair city? Best people on earth, here. Great hustlers, too.

CAROL
Well, I—

HARRY
Let me tell you, I've had plenty of chance to move to Minneapolis, but I like it here. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan came from here?

CAROL
So I'm told.

SAM
Come on, Dave; we need some entertainment, here! Tell us that story about the Norwegian catching the hen.

WILL
Carrie, you'll love this!
DAVE RISES, CLEARS HIS THROAT.

DAVE
Well, Ole Olson had this farm and one fine day he comes across a hen...
THE LIGHTS BLACK OUT.

IN DARKNESS, WILL AND CAROL WALK HOME.

WILL

Did you like them?

CAROL

They were terribly sweet to me. Mrs. Clark's angel food cake was splendid, if a little sweet.

WILL

There's a regular angel food competition among the ladies. (BEAT) Uh, Carrie, I ought to warn you—you ought to be more careful about shocking people. Talking about unions and education experiments—

CAROL

I was trying to join in, Will.

WILL

No, I didn't mean...look, you were the only up-and-coming person in the bunch.

CAROL

It's the twentieth century, and they're...I don't know... from another world.

WILL

Pretty conservative bunch, I guess, from your point of view. I just meant...they were crazy about you! Know what Sam said? "That little lady of yours is the slickest thing that ever came to Gopher Prairie." And old Mrs. Dawson said, "Doc Kennicott, your little bride's gonna wake up this town!"

SHE KISSES HIM.

CAROL

Do you care if they think I'm flighty, Will?

WILL

I don't give a damn what they think.

CAROL

I'll try to be careful about my views. (BEAT) Does Dave Dyer always tell that story about the Norwegian catching the hen?

WILL

More times than I can count.

CAROL

And Ella Stowsbody?

WILL

She had professional training in dramatic art and oratory in Milwaukee—

CAROL

Impressive. I enjoyed her version of Mark Antony's funeral oration. She gave a particularly comic reading—

WILL

You hated every minute of this evening, didn't you?
THEY KISS AGAIN, MORE ARDENTLY.

CAROL

Of course not. They were so sweet to me—what are you doing?!
HE IS, IN FACT, REACHING INSIDE HER COAT,
TO UNBUTTON HER BLOUSE.

WILL

What do you think I'm doing?

CAROL

In the middle of Main Street? What will Maud Dyer think?

WILL

They bored you.

CAROL

They frightened me...a little. No, I'm being silly. Let me get to know them.

WILL

I don't give a damn what anyone thinks of you, because I love you. Carol, you're my soul.

HE LIFTS HER UP AND CARRIES HER OFF. THE LIGHTS FADE OUT.

CAROL (READS ALOUD)

Gopher Prairie Weekly Dauntless: Item

The Sam Clarks held one of the most charming affairs of the season Tuesday, where many of our most prominent citizens gathered to greet the lovely new bride of our popular local physician, Dr. Will Kennicott. The charming Mrs. Kennicott, née Miss Carol Milford, is a lady of manifold graces and has for the past year been prominently employed with the Chicago Public Library, in which city Dr. Will had the good fortune meet her, We welcome her into our midst, witC prophesies for her many happy years in our city....