

CAVERS
By Mark Rigney

CAVERS

Copyright © 2022 by Mark Rigney

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **CAVERS** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **CAVERS** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to licensing@nextstagepress.net

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **CAVERS** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

CAVERS

For the many University of Evansville performance majors who have helped me read, workshop, and develop plays over the years. Y'all rock.

CAVERS

Cavers was first presented at The Shop (Washington D.C.) by Nu Sass Productions as part of the 2010 Capital Fringe Festival. It was re-staged later that same year for Capital Fringe's "Best of the Festival" showcase.

Director: Hannah Todd

Producer: Emily Todd

Scenic Designers: Aubri O'Connor, Emily Todd, Hannah Todd

Costume Designer: Alaina Venditti

Stage Manager: Matt Holmes

Original Dramaturg: Diane Brewer

Gertie Stovall

George Gruder

Charlie Tuggle

Samantha Dean

Dr. Polly Edelweiss

Raven Bonniwell

Tom Eisman

Vanita Kalra

Molly Coyle

Aubri O'Connor

In the "Best of" re-staging, the role of Charlie Tuggle was played by Luke Cieslewicz, and the role of Samantha Dean was played by Samantha Bales.

CAVERS

CAST: 2M, 3W

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| GERTIE STOVALL | Female, forty or older. Cantankerous. Determined to get her share of the American pie. |
| GEORGE GRUDER | Male, forty or older. Gertie's half-brother. The driving force behind the new town sewage project. |
| CHARLIE TUGGLE | Male, mid to late twenties. A starry-eyed grad student and cave geologist. |
| SAMANTHA DEAN | Female, thirties. A loan officer and amateur thespian. |
| DR. POLLYANNA EDELWEISS | Female, thirties. A world-famous cave biologist. |
| (CAVING TEAM MEMBERS) | Played by the five actors listed above. (Inclusion is optional; see end notes.) |

TIME & PLACE: The present. Gertie Stovall's farmhouse living room, which transitions to and from a cave beneath.

CAVERS

CAVERS

ACT 1

The Stovall farmhouse living room. All furniture has been draped in protective coverings, suggesting disuse. Curtains or sheets form baffles that mask the upstage playing space. GERTIE STOVALL paces around half-brother GEORGE GRUDER. Gertie clutches a decidedly antique rifle.

GERTIE. The answer is no.

GEORGE. Gertie...

GERTIE. I aim t'get my fair shake. Don't think no one's gonna take that away.

GEORGE. You can't keep up with what you've already got.

GERTIE. That ain't true.

GEORGE. Gertie, these footers—

GERTIE. —I got it propped.

GEORGE. It's sagging sideways right off the foundation!

GERTIE. I got timbers, I got bolts—

GEORGE. —Timbers, bolts, Gertie!—

GERTIE. —You find me some half-decent tenants, I'll meet the mortgage payments, and then you and the town and Uncle Sam, you'll all get your damn taxes.

GEORGE. Be realistic.

GERTIE. I've tuck-pointed this bastard myself. You know I have. Below freezing, after dark, down on my belly with trowel and mortar. I ain't lettin' it go.

GEORGE. I have always looked out for you. Always.

GERTIE. Y'broke my trike.

GEORGE. I was seven!

GERTIE. Got the poor thing in the garage. It's still broke.

GEORGE. Which one, the trike or the garage?

GERTIE. Ha ha. Listen to the funnies from Mr. Sewage.

CAVERS

GEORGE. Gertie, as a responsible adult, I have never done you a bad turn, and I never will. Now, I have a meeting at ten, another at eleven with Mert, and I'm doing my best to give you sound advice, so get that Civil War antique out of my face and listen to reason. For a minute. Please.

GERTIE. One minute, Mr. Sewage.

GEORGE. If either one of us had gotten so much as a dime in actual ready cash—but all you really got out of Dad's estate is more code violations than his will had words, and Gertie, if you don't let the place go, they're gonna run you into the poor house and maybe right on into jail.

GERTIE. Yer jealous. You got nothin', so yer jealous.

GEORGE. I knew from the age of five the only thing I'd get out of him was the evil eye and a wad of spit.

GERTIE. I got to live somewhere.

GEORGE. So, sell!

GERTIE. Can't. It's fallin' off the foundation.

GEORGE. Gertie!

GERTIE. Timbers ain't gonna hold it, not long.

GEORGE. The land's worth plenty, you don't need the house. Look, I know it's precious—

GERTIE. —It's an heirloom!—

GEORGE. —but you can't take it with you! Sell while you can.

GERTIE. Nope. Can't do it.

GEORGE. You have almost no income—and the property taxes, on ten acres, in this state? A collapsing farmhouse with no working farm to back it up?

GERTIE. Don't need no farm.

GEORGE. I am wasting my time.

GERTIE. Y'never used to be a clock watcher.

GEORGE. The county is looking to me to see this thing through.

GERTIE. It's Saturday.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, it is—which should give you some idea of how busy I am.

GERTIE. Clocks'll get ya' migraines and a pain t'yer stomach.

CAVERS

GEORGE. Gertie, if you won't listen to reason, you'll wind up with nothing inside of three years.

GERTIE. I'll have the cave.

GEORGE. What cave?

GERTIE. The one under here.

GEORGE. There are no caves on this property.

GERTIE. A few years back, this town didn't have no sewage problem. Then along comes you, pokin' and plannin'...

GEORGE. Apples. Oranges. There is no possible relation.

GERTIE. How 'bout I take you on the tour?

GEORGE. I have no time for whatever game—. (*Gertie whips the covering off the nearest table. Underneath, it's a stalagmite, growing straight up out of the floor.*) What in God's name is that?

GERTIE. Stalagmite. And here's more. (*Gertie sets about removing every covering and curtain. By the time she's done, they aren't in her living room at all, but in a wonderland of a cavern. Additional scenery might descend from above, rise from the ground, or sidle on from the wings. As the shift occurs, Gertie puts on a caving helmet and switches on the headlamp.*)

GEORGE. All right, I admit it, you're really startin' to scare me.

GERTIE. George. (*She hands a second helmet to George.*) Put this on. There. (*Gertie imitates a tour guide.*) Now, then. Havin' walked outta the house and across the meadow and under what used to be a big ol' tree, but ain't nothin' now but a big sorta door in the ground, and then down a passage or two...we're here, standin' in what I call the Breezeway, the first real crossroads of a great big limestone cave system. Discovered just two weeks back by yours truly. You'll note the steady year-round temperature of sixty-four degrees, the humid air, and the three bats holdin' up the wall there.

GEORGE. Whoa, don't shine that light, they might wake up. No, I'm not kidding, stop. Let 'em rest.

GERTIE. C'mon. Stuck t'yer hair, they're downright cuddly.

GEORGE. Gertie, I had no idea, this place...

GERTIE. Y'saw that oak where I'd set the chainsaw? It come down off the hill two weeks ago Thursday. Always had been a depression there,

CAVERS

and whenever the roots tore up the soil, bam! Cave. I dug it out a patch with Howie's Bobcat so we could walk in, but even that first day, you could see a gap and feel the wind comin' out like somethin' big were breathin'.

GEORGE. Is something breathing?

GERTIE. I don't care if I'm living up top of Godzilla's big brother. I ain't lettin' this farm go for all the gold in Christendom.

GEORGE. (*Gazing upward.*) I guess not.

GERTIE. Yeah, the ceiling's the best part. Shine a light on 'em, they look like stars. Go by the name of helictites. (*Off George's disbelief.*) Don't gimme that look. I can manage a little research. Even got me a library card.

GEORGE. Does this place keep going?

GERTIE. Splits off all kinds of ways.

GEORGE. And you want to open it up. A commercial venture.

GERTIE. I'm gonna get my share, George. And no more small-scale, two-bit stuff, neither.

GEORGE. Two words, Gertie.

GERTIE. Don't head there.

GEORGE. Toothpaste. Homemade.

GERTIE. It cleaned yer teeth!

GEORGE. It sent people to the hospital.

GERTIE. They got better.

GEORGE. It sent *me* to the hospital. And no, whatever excuse you're about to throw out, don't. Every scheme you ever came up with, I've come out on the losing end in ways you can't even imagine.

GERTIE. I admit, the detective agency didn't work out so good.

GEORGE. And the cats?

GERTIE. You can train a cat. Just not those cats.

GEORGE. If there were any money in cat training, d'you really think you'd have been the first to dream it up?

GERTIE. George, y'kin feel it, I know y'kin feel it. This time, it's different.

GEORGE. Look, I've got to get back. Am I allowed to talk about this? Or is this all secret?

CAVERS

GERTIE. Goin' down t'the bank this afternoon. Get me some kind of development loan.

GEORGE. That's good. A good idea. To tide you over, though...
(*George presses several bills into Gertie's hands.*)

GERTIE. Now, George. Y'know I've never taken charity.

GEORGE. Neither one of us both.

GERTIE. Whatever I've got, I earned every penny.

GEORGE. The bank'll want some proof, pictures or something.

GERTIE. Long as they do me fair, show some respect for once, I got no complaints about proof. (*Off George's hesitation.*) George. Little brother. Don't make me beg.

GEORGE. When you get there, ask for Samantha Dean. You drop my name, she won't monkey around.

GERTIE. Oh, I'll drop yer name. 'Cos I bet you've never once let slip that you and me happen t'be related.

GEORGE. I've got to get back. (*George turns to leave and smacks his head on the nearest stalactite. He lets out a pained yelp.*)

GERTIE. Good thing yer wearin' that brain bucket.

GEORGE. No foolin'.

GERTIE. Don't go breakin' that lamp. Them batteries suck power like you wouldn't believe, and they don't come cheap.

GEORGE. If they're so expensive...

GERTIE. All right, I'll tell the truth. I sent the bill t'you.

GEORGE. If you need to, order more. Just keep me in the loop, y'hear?
(*George exits, leaving Gertie to shine her helmet beam around the cave. Once again, she takes on her tour guide persona.*)

GERTIE. Now folks, ain't nobody alive 'til after they been born. And when I first found this place, I was alive, yeah. Breathin'. But barely. Now, here in this quiet, I feel born. I mean, look around. Look at these. Sorta like miniature Christmas trees, the real fake kind. Spikes and crystals goin' in all directions. Aragonite's the name. Please don't touch. Very delicate. Oil from yer fingers, it can really screw up the natural processes. What's that? Yer askin' how they get this way? Well, God's one heck of a sculptor, that's certain, but if yer wantin' the details, we'll turn to our team of experts—and here they are a-comin' now.

CAVERS

(CHARLIE TUGGLE and SAMANTHA DEAN enter (preferably clambering up and out from a trap), both of them fantastically grimy. Charlie is properly dressed for wild cave exploration, Samantha for a day at the bank. Both wear caving helmets.)

CHARLIE. Wow. I mean, man! Do you want the good news or the good news?

SAMANTHA. There is no good news.

GERTIE. I warned you, this weren't no house.

SAMANTHA. You said I could walk in!

GERTIE. You can, you did.

SAMANTHA. And from this room on, you crawl!

CHARLIE. Sure, if you go the way we just went—

SAMANTHA. —I bought these shoes in Knoxville!

GERTIE. Did y'keep the receipt?

CHARLIE. Okay, listen, forget the shoes. This is a going cave.

GERTIE. A what?

CHARLIE. Going. Continuing. Which is why it wouldn't be ethical or probably even safe for me to go any further than the next series of rooms. We need like a whole team, not just me—and you should have someone in charge with more experience.

SAMANTHA. You told me you were a cave expert.

CHARLIE. By local standards, sure—

SAMANTHA. —They said, if you got a cave, call Little Charlie Tuggle, he's all grown up and gone to graduate school. He knows all about caves.

CHARLIE. A place like this, you should be talking to my advisor.

SAMANTHA. What's that, up there?

CHARLIE. Draperies. Officially, flowstone.

SAMANTHA. And the stuff in that really gross room?

CHARLIE. Soda straws. But Ms. Stovall, naming a few basic speleothems is like saying, "This is a cow," when what you really want to know is what sort of gunk it ate six days ago for breakfast.

GERTIE. It didn't eat gunk, it ate grass.

CAVERS

CHARLIE. Okay, obviously. Bad example. All I mean is, you've got formations down here where I'd have to do some pretty elaborate tests to be one hundred percent sure I really know what I'm dealing with.

GERTIE. Is that the good news?

CHARLIE. If you intend to go commercial, make it a tourist cave, then yes. That's the good news.

GERTIE. But you got more.

CHARLIE. It keeps branching and forking. We've got pits and shafts. You add in the formational variety, well—just on its geologic merits, this looks major. Maybe even major major.

SAMANTHA. What else is there besides “geological merits”?

CHARLIE. Bio. You know, fauna. Microbes, at least, but the odds are good we're going to find some really incredible big stuff, too.

SAMANTHA. Big stuff like what?

CHARLIE. Bugs. But not just bugs, we're talking animals so incredibly specialized they make everything above ground look like clones.

GERTIE. Charlie, I'm surprised at you.

CHARLIE. What? What'd I say?

GERTIE. Sam. Do I get the loan?

SAMANTHA. No.

GERTIE. Whaddya mean, no?

SAMANTHA. No, you don't get the loan, because Charlie is wrong, there is very definitely bad news.

GERTIE. Sam, I'll buy you new shoes.

SAMANTHA. Stop calling me Sam.

GERTIE. It's yer name.

SAMANTHA. I wear skirts, I like lipstick, my name is Samantha.

GERTIE. Oh, for the love of Pete...

SAMANTHA. Look, I don't want to say what you don't want to hear, but I checked the title before we came over, and Gertie, it doesn't matter if you've got straws or soapstone and it doesn't matter if they're “going” or staying put, because you don't own a single square inch.

GERTIE. It's on my property. Daddy's will left it all to me.

SAMANTHA. But when he bought the place, subsurface rights were excluded. Water, mineral, everything.

CAVERS

GERTIE. Excluded.

SAMANTHA. It didn't change hands.

CHARLIE. Who'd he buy it from?

SAMANTHA. Abraham Klonskey.

GERTIE. What kinda name is Klonskey?

SAMANTHA. The kind I don't have records on.

GERTIE. Charlie, you know any Klonskeys?

CHARLIE. No, ma'am.

SAMANTHA. I can try to trace him, locate his descendants, but for now, the basic facts are clear. This cave isn't yours.

GERTIE. I don't accept that. This here's my share!

SAMANTHA. Normally, for a full title work-up, we have a one-week turnaround time. For this?

GERTIE. I'll give ya' thirty-six hours.

SAMANTHA. We have to establish the entire chain of ownership, contact who knows how many interested parties, and living God knows where.

CHARLIE. What about eminent domain?

GERTIE. Yeah! What about "I got here first, it's mine"?

SAMANTHA. I am going home to change my clothes. And when I know something, I will call you.

GERTIE. Thirty-six hours!

SAMANTHA. When I know something. (*Samantha exits.*)

CHARLIE. Listen, Ms. Stovall, I know you maybe want to develop and all, but I hope, if it's big enough, maybe you could leave part of the cave wild. The crawling parts, maybe.

GERTIE. I got plans, Charlie. Big plans.

CHARLIE. How big?

GERTIE. Let me put it to ya' this way: everybody knows Yucca Mountain ain't gonna fly. I know, nuclear waste, it's bad for the land and all that. But you said it yerself, look at the size of this place! It's plenty of cave t'go 'round.

CHARLIE. Ms. Stovall, this is a wet cave.

CAVERS

GERTIE. I'm thinkin' I should do it like an auction, high bidder wins. Uranium's uranium, right? Chinese, Indian, French—I'll take all comers.

CHARLIE. You cannot store radioactive waste in a wet cave.

GERTIE. That end's dry. You said so.

CHARLIE. Limestone caves are formed by water. And if it isn't wet this century, it might be the next.

GERTIE. But you ain't an expert. You said that, too.

CHARLIE. You can't get around this, it's basic speleology. And besides, you'd have to have handling permits, training, government clearance. I know how much you love the government.

GERTIE. Government makes laws, that's the truth. Bad people don't obey 'em and good people don't need 'em.

CHARLIE. You're teasing me, aren't you.

GERTIE. I told ya', I got plans.

CHARLIE. Sure, but you're not stockpiling waste any more than I am.

GERTIE. 'Cos only a crazy person would try, right?

CHARLIE. And you're not really crazy.

GERTIE. Get yerself a team, Charlie. Get yer grad school buddies, I don't care who-all. Map this place top to bottom. Are ya' expert enough for that?

CHARLIE. A cave can't change its stripes to suit what you want to do with it.

GERTIE. Let's start with a map and not worry 'bout whose stripes we're paintin' over.

CHARLIE. Okay. And this is an extraordinary opportunity, don't think I don't know it—but if you expect me to recruit people, they'll want to be paid.

GERTIE. Talk t'George. He'll take care of y'all.

CHARLIE. A contract might be a very good idea.

GERTIE. Charlie. Talk t'George. (*Charlie exits. Gertie reverts to her tour guide self and replaces the furniture drapes. The stage contracts to the farmhouse living room.*) So, here we are, just about sunny side up. I want t'thank y'all for walkin' the cave with me. Shows a lot of respect—and I gotta admit, that feels nice. Real nice. But hey, now, before ya' go,

CAVERS

take a gander at the gift shop. We got all sorts of gemstones, rocks, bumper stickers. And local apple butter from my half-brother George. Well, his wife, really, June. I call her Junebug. Anyway, looks like I got company back at the house, so thank y'all, and tell yer friends what a good time ya' had. (*DR. POLLY EDELWEISS enters. She brings a bulky army duffel.*)

POLLY. Shall we get down to business?

GERTIE. The answer's no.

POLLY. I haven't said what I want.

GERTIE. Well, I'll tell ya', I could use me a set of encyclopedias, a fresh new Bible, or maybe even a vacuum cleaner—provided it's got a light on the front. I'm partial to the ones with lights. But I knew the second your perfect little knuckles rapped on my good front door that you weren't set with none of them things, so whatever else yer peddlin', the answer is definitely no.

POLLY. Then why did you invite me in?

GERTIE. I always have a cup about this time. Nice to share it on occasion.

POLLY. That's very kind. Oh—milk and sugar, thank you.

GERTIE. Never stock neither one.

POLLY. Well, then. Black.

GERTIE. It'll grow hair on yer chest. Ah, relax. Just somethin' my daddy used to say. What'd yer daddy say?

POLLY. "Turn up the lamp, I'm afraid to go home in the dark."

GERTIE. What'd you say yer name was?

POLLY. Edelweiss. Dr. Polly Edelweiss.

GERTIE. Doctor.

POLLY. I'm a cave biologist attached to M.I.T., and I am here to examine your cave on behalf of the Blue Sky Energy Consortium.

GERTIE. The Blue Sky who?

POLLY. Blue Sky Energy is the current owner of all land under Jefferson Knob. They're curious to know if what's down there is of any direct benefit to their production demands.

GERTIE. Yer a caver?

POLLY. I am.

CAVERS

GERTIE. I already got Little Charlie Tuggle.

POLLY. Yes, I know.

GERTIE. He's got him a team already, and he didn't say nothin' about askin' for any unrelated help.

POLLY. My presence isn't actually up to him.

GERTIE. All right. I know enemy action when I see it. Thanks for stoppin' in, time t'go.

POLLY. I don't think so.

GERTIE. As of now, yer trespassin'.

POLLY. As stipulated by state law, Blue Sky and its representatives—including but not limited to myself—shall have ready surface access to any and all underground resources.

GERTIE. If by that y'mean my cave—

POLLY. —Now, I will be happy to exit your house and abandon your truly vile coffee, but I will not leave this property, and you cannot force me to do so, now or in the future. I have a cavern to explore, and that is exactly what I am going to do. (*Gertie sets down her coffee and picks up her rifle.*)

GERTIE. I want yer ass in yer car and I wanta hear that engine turnin' over inside of thirty seconds.

POLLY. Does that thing even work?

GERTIE. One. Two. Three—

POLLY. —Twenty-nine, thirty. Where's the entrance?

GERTIE. Goddamn it, woman, I'm tryin' t'threaten you!

POLLY. Ms. Stovall, this doesn't have to be so difficult.

GERTIE. How'm I t'know yer really from this Blue Sky Energy thing?

POLLY. The entrance, please.

GERTIE. Y'got I.D.?

POLLY. Plenty. But none that will impress you.

GERTIE. Y'ain't dressed for cavin'.

POLLY. I will be. (*Polly begins to undress.*)

GERTIE. Whoa, hang on! What are you doing?

POLLY. My job. What are you doing?

GERTIE. Put yer things back on.

POLLY. Time is precious.

CAVERS

GERTIE. Okay, fine, if yer so hell-bent on changing, the bathroom's right down the hall.

POLLY. No need, thank you.

GERTIE. Woman, I don't want t'see any more of yer goodies!

POLLY. My what? (*With Polly down to her underwear, Charlie enters, freshly muddy, carrying his shoes.*)

CHARLIE. Oh, golly. I am so sorry.

GERTIE. Charlie! Charlie, you get back here!

CHARLIE. Yes, ma'am.

GERTIE. Y'got one of them cell phone things?

CHARLIE. Yes, ma'am.

GERTIE. Call the police. Tell 'em I got a crazy woman in my living room.

POLLY. And tell them her name is Gertrude Stovall. (*Polly extracts Polypropylene long johns from her duffel and begins hauling them on.*)

GERTIE. Yer goin' into the cave in them things?

POLLY. Underneath, yes. And so will the rest of my team.

GERTIE. Yer team.

POLLY. Yes, just like Little Charlie, I have a team. We heard you'd be difficult, so I had them wait on the highway. (*Charlie summons up enough courage to peek at the surprise guest.*)

CHARLIE. Holy moley.

POLLY. Ah. You've pried the cat off your tongue.

CHARLIE. You're—you're—

POLLY. —Somewhat more decent?

CHARLIE. Oh, wow. I mean, gosh. It's an honor. Really.

GERTIE. You know her?

CHARLIE. Ms. Stovall, this—this is Polly Edelweiss! She's like one of the top wild cavers on the planet! I mean, the Moonbear Cave in Cambodia, the Aztec Sump in Mexico—Ms. Stovall, she's the one who discovered the *Ambystoma xenopus*! And you've got her standing right here in your living room!

GERTIE. Darn near got her buck naked, too. Not that I asked for it. (*Polly has her cell phone out. Charlie hands her his.*)

CHARLIE. Please, here, use mine.

CAVERS

POLLY. I have the number bookmarked, not memorized.

CHARLIE. Oh, right. Sure. Hey, I'm Charlie Tuggle.

POLLY. Yes. Graham had very good things to say.

CHARLIE. You know my advisor?

POLLY. Once upon a time, Graham was part of my thesis committee.

CHARLIE. Gee. I don't know what to say.

POLLY. Then best not to say anything. Now, if you don't mind?

CHARLIE. Right. We'll just leave you in peace. Ms. Stovall?

GERTIE. Charlie! This is my living room!

CHARLIE. She needs to make a call.

GERTIE. (*Brandishing the rifle.*) And you need a hole in the head, let in some light and sense.

CHARLIE. We both know that thing doesn't work.

GERTIE. Who says?

CHARLIE. My folks, your brother, everybody. Why do you think the sheriff lets you lug it all over town?

GERTIE. Sam did this.

CHARLIE. Sam meaning Samantha?

GERTIE. A crafty little banker, that's what she is. "Contacting all interested parties." And look what I get! (*Gertie exits, rifle in hand.*)

POLLY. (*Into her phone.*) Brian, listen up. There's parking up by the house. No, she didn't exactly say where to go—but I believe I have that hurdle solved. Don't I, Charlie?

CHARLIE. You want me to show you the entrance?

POLLY. Graham did say you were quick on the draw.

CHARLIE. Dr. Edelweiss, I'm working for Ms. Stovall. And I get the impression that maybe you aren't.

POLLY. (*Into the phone.*) I'll call you back. (*To Charlie.*) It's good cave, isn't it?

CHARLIE. I don't think I'm supposed to be talking about it. And I think you know that, and if you do know that, then this is a very confusing situation.

POLLY. Is it good cave?

CHARLIE. Is it good? Dr. Edelweiss, there are multiple levels—like, the stream that made the first level ate through to a new one, and

CAVERS

probably one below that. We've got a couple real deep shafts. But the first level, the one we open into, it's almost flat, and it just goes on and on, and there're all kinds of invertebrates. It's right up your alley.

POLLY. Where's your team?

CHARLIE. About a half-mile in, setting up a base camp.

POLLY. Charlie. You aren't going to make me wander over this entire property, searching for what I suppose must be a smallish sort of gap, wasting my day, wasting valuable research time, when you could take me right to what I need. Are you?

CHARLIE. What is it you need?

POLLY. The photos you sent Graham are very compelling. For those alone, you should be proud.

CHARLIE. But if you're here just to look, how come Ms. Stovall doesn't want you around?

POLLY. Because I did my homework and figured out who really owns her precious cave.

CHARLIE. And the owner is...?

POLLY. Blue Sky Energy. Mostly a coal producer, but they dabble in natural gas, geothermal, turbine blades, anything they think will make a profit.

CHARLIE. You're working for an energy company?

POLLY. Charlie, in the sciences, it's corporate America that cuts the checks.

CHARLIE. I've kind of got my eye on the Parks Service.

POLLY. Circumstances change, Charlie. Shifting all the time. Right now, for example.

CHARLIE. What do you mean?

POLLY. We should be working together.

CHARLIE. I'd love to, but—

POLLY. —You don't realize your position. You aren't the owner or the discoverer, but you were the first map-maker, and if this cave proves to be as jaw-dropping as you say, then you stand to get a vast chunk of the credit, the kind on which you can build a career.

CHARLIE. Like I said, I'm workin' for Ms. Stovall, her and her brother.

CAVERS

POLLY. It's not who pays you that matters. It's what you do with their time.

CHARLIE. That really doesn't sound, you know—do you honestly believe that?

POLLY. You have a chance to scrawl your name across the history of caving.

CHARLIE. Oh, I don't know about that.

POLLY. Just don't put the cart before the horse.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry, what?

POLLY. You're putting the cave first. But you have needs, human needs, and they deserve to be met.

CHARLIE. Okay, maybe, but isn't the idea—I mean, all I want is what's best for the cave.

POLLY. You will be an intriguing nut to crack.

CHARLIE. Excuse me?

POLLY. Charlie, I can help you, in many ways.

CHARLIE. Given who you are and all, sure, obviously.

POLLY. If things start getting seriously technical, I could get us a NICOLA radio.

CHARLIE. No way.

POLLY. Five, six days, tops. A new one, straight from the U.K.

CHARLIE. That would be awesome.

POLLY. So, you see, I can be an ally. Provided I know how to get in.

CHARLIE. It's not like I want to hog the cave or anything.

POLLY. If we don't have a working relationship right from the beginning, it will never happen at all. And that would be...tragic, I think. For all concerned.

CHARLIE. Well, okay. For the cave...

POLLY. Yes. For the sake of the cave. (*Charlie and Polly begin stripping the furniture coverings.*)

CHARLIE. Well, first off, forget about whatever photos Graham showed you. Wait'll you see what we found further down.

POLLY. Tell me you've got bacterium, obvious colonies, something we can harvest.

CHARLIE. Oh, sure, tons. But there's more.

CAVERS

POLLY. What, isopods? The world's first non-phallic stalagmite?

CHARLIE. Eels. At first, I figured they were just salamanders, but in this one pool...

POLLY. They're blind?

CHARLIE. There must be a couple dozen, easy.

POLLY. Show me. *(Charlie and Polly exit upstage, taking all the furniture drapes with them, along with Polly's duffel, and leaving behind...the cave. It's the Breezeway again, but more elaborate, with more of the gaps filled in. Gertie enters, with George and Samantha, all wearing street clothes and lit caving helmets.)*

GEORGE. Gertie, slow down! Trust me, you want to hear what Sam's got to say.

SAMANTHA. Please, it's Samantha.

GERTIE. *(To George)* She's threatening to foreclose! House and farm both! I can't believe y'even brought her down here.

GEORGE. I tried not to, but you keep running away!

GERTIE. When I see me a traitor, I turn my back.

SAMANTHA. There are bank policies, whole systems, it wasn't up to me.

GERTIE. It's yer name on the dotted line, ain't it?

SAMANTHA. If it weren't mine, it would've been somebody else's.

GERTIE. One big happy ant-hill. One name's just as good as the next.

SAMANTHA. Gertie, I'm sorry, but George has an idea.

GERTIE. Oh, please, let's hear it. Sam.

GEORGE. Well, it's predicated on the idea that you can no longer keep up with the payments. But if you can—or if Sam can...

GERTIE. Sam's gonna pay off my mortgage?

GEORGE. Not pay off, nothing like that—

SAMANTHA. —I'll make a couple payments, yes.

GERTIE. Why? In return for what?

SAMANTHA. Use of the big room—whatever you call it, the one with the flat floor and the high ceiling.

GEORGE. Sam's directing the next show for the County Playhouse. And she wants to have it down here.

GERTIE. You want t'do plays in a cave?

CAVERS

SAMANTHA. In that one huge chamber, really dry, really flat.

GEORGE. The Meeting Hall.

SAMANTHA. That's the one. The atmosphere would be electric.

GERTIE. Not unless yer the one runnin' the power.

SAMANTHA. Which we would, and the way that would look? This play, see, it's totally bizarre, there's a giant stuffed ape, crazy people wall-to-wall, a janitor who like totally hates *It's a Wonderful Life*—a play like this, it demands a bizarre setting, and down here is perfect.

GERTIE. Ain't y'got a husband, somebody t'keep you occupied?

SAMANTHA. My boyfriend is very supportive.

GERTIE. So, you'd pay me rent, kinda.

SAMANTHA. We need six weeks to rehearse. I'll pay you two months' worth of "rent." Maybe that'll be enough to get your house in order, and do something about your current situation.

GERTIE. What makes y'think folks in this town are gonna want t'see a big to-do about bizarre, hateful janitors?

SAMANTHA. Oh, not a problem. We're doing my all-time favorite next: *Godspell*.

GERTIE. What's that about?

SAMANTHA. The life of Our Savior, Jesus Christ. You should try out.

GERTIE. Y'cast me as Jesus, I'll consider it.

GEORGE. Gertie, I don't have all day.

GERTIE. Mr. Sewage, I'm surprised. Took this here lumpy lil' stalagmite eight million of God's good years t'form, and yer frettin' over a couple measly minutes.

GEORGE. It's not my fault that humanity runs a tighter ship than some subterranean rock.

GERTIE. (*To Samantha.*) How many people gonna be in this play?

SAMANTHA. Well, it's got a cast of six. No, seven. Add a stage manager, people to build a stage, set up a generator, set lights—we do need some lights—

GERTIE. —An army.

SAMANTHA. Oh, hardly an army.

GERTIE. And then it's gonna be an audience. How many people you reckon'd fit in there?

CAVERS

SAMANTHA. Two hundred, maybe.

GEORGE. Four hundred, at least.

GERTIE. Write me up a contract.

GEORGE. Good girl.

GERTIE. Don't you "good girl" me. God created me a woman, not a dog—and I got no plans to switch.

GEORGE. I apologize, that obviously wasn't what I meant.

GERTIE. You want t'pay me, pay me cash. 'Cos if Blue Sky gets their mitts on my cave, I don't want no lawyers lookin' t'bleed me outta whatever I put by along the way.

SAMANTHA. It'll take months to get everything sorted out, I'm sure they won't care—

GERTIE. —Cash, George. Put it in the contract. We both know which side she's been workin' for.

SAMANTHA. I resent that.

GERTIE. You should.

SAMANTHA. I am a loan officer, professionally neutral. Wait—do you hear that?

GEORGE. I do hear something.

GERTIE. Weren't me.

SAMANTHA. (*As the noises continue.*) A generator. Very bright lights. That'll be the first thing I do.

GERTIE. Oh, relax. I got two teams of fearless cave explorers runnin' around in here. The way sound bounces off these walls, they can be a mile off and you can still hear 'em gruntin' and squirmin' and givin' orders. (*Another noise, scraping or squishing. Much closer.*)

SAMANTHA. A large generator. Lots of lights. (*As the noises continue and rise, Gertie readies her rifle.*)

GEORGE. Gertie, you be careful now.

SAMANTHA. That's it. I'm leaving. (*Samantha exits—fast. More scraping and bumping—and then Charlie bursts in, bounding around in pursuit of a very erratic, fast-moving insect.*)

CHARLIE. Come on, get back here...

GERTIE. Charlie Tuggle, what the hell d'ya think yer playin' at?

CAVERS

CHARLIE. Chasing this bug—or whatever it is— (*Charlie leap-frogs across the floor, bug-like himself.*)

GERTIE. —Yer scarin' people half to death!

CHARLIE. I am?

GERTIE. Back in them tunnels, y'do what ya' want. But here in the Breezeway, y'got to behave a little.

CHARLIE. I'll be out of your way in a sec, hang on.

GERTIE. I don't hang for nobody. (*Gertie stomps on the unseen bug. Charlie shrieks.*) There. Now y'kin get a better look at it.

CHARLIE. (*Distraught.*) At what?

GEORGE. Weird lookin' thing.

CHARLIE. Oh, my God.

GEORGE. I'd have to say I've never seen anything like it.

CHARLIE. Exactly! And I don't think anyone else has, either!

GERTIE. And how would you know? Mr. Expert.

CHARLIE. I have logged over three hundred hours in caves. I've done Huautla, Wakulla Springs, Neversink, the Grim Crawl of Death. I've been end-to-end through the Most Horrible Thing Ever!

GERTIE. That I doubt.

CHARLIE. It's a cave! And this insect, this gooey mess, I've never seen anything like it! And Ms. Stovall, I have seen more endangered species than every TV nature show put together.

GEORGE. (*Incredulous.*) What, in caves?

CHARLIE. Mr. Gruder, each cave is a unique environment. The creatures inside evolve independently of those in other caves. It's like Darwin's Galapagos, but contained, very dark, and we're only just scratching the surface, and along comes this little multi-legged something, and I've spent the last half-hour trying to catch it, and now, oh, man...

GEORGE. Where there's one, there's more.

CHARLIE. There'd better be.

GERTIE. Yer sayin' that critter don't live no-place else in the world?

CHARLIE. According to evolutionary theory, it can't.

GERTIE. Horse feathers.

CHARLIE. Excuse me?

CAVERS

GERTIE. God's been good to me, Charlie. Want t'know how I know that?

CHARLIE. I'm honestly not sure.

GERTIE. He gave me a brain, see? And it don't take some certifiable genius to figure that if we're set up in His image, then we sure as hellfire better not be evolving.

GEORGE. And on that happy note...

GERTIE. George here's the perfect example. Him and me got the same father, different mothers—but look, neither one of us fell far from the tree. He got all the breaks, sure, he's a County Commissioner, a real honcho, but what's he got to show for it? Bein' in charge of the town sewage plant ain't exac'ly somethin' to crow about.

CHARLIE. None of which has anything to do with natural selection.

GERTIE. Sure, it does. George's gotta do what George's gotta do, and that's helpin' people get rid of dirty water. He ain't risin' up or gettin' ahead. He's stuck right down here with the rest of us.

CHARLIE. Evolution is a very long-term scenario.

GERTIE. So's a sewer plant. Took 'em what, five years?

GEORGE. Seven, if you count planning.

GERTIE. I got no dress clothes left, you know that.

CHARLIE. What are you talking about?

GERTIE. He wants me at the ribbon-cutting, fer the new plant. What I want t'know is, is it gonna smell bad?

GEORGE. I've told you, we have odor control. Top-notch technology.

GERTIE. You truly want me there?

GEORGE. Besides June, you're the only family I got.

GERTIE. All right, then. Might even pick a flower from the garden, put it in my hair.

GEORGE. The change of pace'd do you good.

GERTIE. Charlie, you keep a garden?

CHARLIE. Only in the basement.

GEORGE. What do you grow in a basement?

CHARLIE. Mushrooms.

GERTIE. Started my first garden whenever I was nine. Daddy showed me where t'dig. Planted mango peppers. And every year, I'd save me a

CAVERS

few of them peppers and plant ‘em right back in the ground. Every year come spring, guess what come up?

CHARLIE. Mango peppers.

GERTIE. Which proves my point.

CHARLIE. What point was that?

GERTIE. I didn’t get no squash or squid or somethin’ unholy t’ain’t never been thought of.

CHARLIE. Did you think you would?

GERTIE. Mango peppers make mango peppers and that’s the end of the evolution story.

CHARLIE. The time frame’s too short, and you clearly weren’t doing any kind of selective breeding.

GERTIE. Charlie. I won’t set any store by a theory.

CHARLIE. Electricity is a theory!

GERTIE. Yer gettin’ excited, so I’m gonna remind you: it ain’t right t’argue with a woman older than yerself.

GEORGE. Gertie.

GERTIE. I knew yer momma.

CHARLIE. So did I.

GERTIE. She raised you better.

CHARLIE. Yes, ma’am.

GERTIE. And y’got to trust that God’s got a plan, just the way He does fer me.

GEORGE. Leave the boy alone.

GERTIE. Oh, for Heaven’s sake. You agree with every word I done said.

GEORGE. Well. I mean, when you put it that way...

GERTIE. Tell him. The boy’s all ears.

GEORGE. I... Gertie, I just...

GERTIE. What?

GEORGE. You’re making me very uncomfortable.

GERTIE. Useless. (*To Charlie.*) And him on the board at Holy Crossroads Baptist Church. But I’ll tell the truth. I don’t have a trouble in the world with bein’ descended from apes.

GEORGE. You don’t?

CAVERS

GERTIE. I like monkeys just fine. Old Mrs. Hayes had a pet monkey. I liked it just fine. Had near perfect table manners, went to bed on time—and Mrs. Hayes a Sunday school teacher! No, monkey-apes ain't my problem. What I can't hardly stand is bein' told my great-great honored forbears were a bunch of speck-small germs.

CHARLIE. Really, we can drop this.

GERTIE. Anyone starts comparin' me and the common cold, we're gonna have words.

GEORGE. Now, Charlie never said a word about you being a cold and you know it.

GERTIE. Everything up to now's been a test. One test after another, t'see if I'd fold.

GEORGE. Here we go again.

GERTIE. But I didn't fold!

GEORGE. As if your life's been so awful.

GERTIE. This here cave is my reward.

CHARLIE. Ms. Stovall, I think there's something you should know. It's about Dr. Edelweiss.

GERTIE. This time, I'm gonna get my share.

GEORGE. Look, I have to meet Mert in less than an hour.

GERTIE. Write me up a contract. For Sam and them actors.

GEORGE. In my infinite spare time.

GERTIE. Charlie. Make sure y'get up t'see the sunlight now and again. Wouldn't want ya' evolvin' into some kinda cave critter. (*George and Gertie exit.*)

CHARLIE. Ha ha, very funny. Evolving. You want to see evolving, Darwin in action? Oh, no. Look out. Here it comes. (*As Charlie sets about "evolving" into a cave monster, Polly enters from behind him and watches, bemused.*) Bone expanding, skin stretching, bigger fangs, sharper talons, longer claws—

POLLY. —Smaller brain?

CHARLIE. (*After yelping in fright.*) Don't do that to me!

POLLY. I didn't realize I could frighten such a big, terrifying monster.

CHARLIE. What are you doing back here?

POLLY. Mostly looking for you.

CAVERS

CHARLIE. Where's your team?

POLLY. About a quarter mile in. You were right. This is some real fun cave. Great passage.

CHARLIE. It branches again?

POLLY. Like a tree. (*Indicating the squashed insect.*) Have you considered a move delicate collection technique?

CHARLIE. I'll look into it.

POLLY. You have collection gear.

CHARLIE. Look, I'm mostly a geologist.

POLLY. You've got jars, I saw them. What about plankton nets? What about Limburger?

CHARLIE. What, Limburger cheese?

POLLY. You've got to bait those jars with something. We have clearly got to coordinate better. Look here. I've roughed out a new map, expanded on yours. Here's the Breezeway, here's the Meeting Hall—

CHARLIE. —We need a name for the room with all the soda straws.

POLLY. I suppose, yes, but nothing too obvious.

CHARLIE. Right, no tacky "Crystal Palace" stuff. I assume you saw all the slime down in there.

POLLY. It's a bacterial museum, and yes, I saw, and yes, I'm excited. Now. My team's here...and your team...

CHARLIE. Here. You think it'll loop back and connect.

POLLY. That's why I came back. Let's work toward each other.

CHARLIE. I'd like nothing better.

POLLY. Did I hear that inflection correctly?

CHARLIE. I'm sorry. That wasn't—I shouldn't have said—

POLLY. —You find me attractive.

CHARLIE. Dr. Edelweiss, I think we should take a huge step backward.

POLLY. You think I'm pretty.

CHARLIE. All I meant was, you seem like a nice person and we have some common interests.

POLLY. Such as?

CHARLIE. Well, caves, obviously.

POLLY. You're not the first, you know. To respond to me this way.

CAVERS

CHARLIE. Okay.

POLLY. Men find me attractive.

CHARLIE. Very natural.

POLLY. I don't mix business and pleasure.

CHARLIE. Good plan.

POLLY. Although you are kind of cute. In a grad student sort of way.

CHARLIE. I think I should go.

POLLY. You realize that sex in a cave is not in any way comfortable.

CHARLIE. Excuse me?

POLLY. Rocks are a definite problem.

CHARLIE. Whoa, slow down, okay?

POLLY. The floor is frequently damp.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry I even opened my mouth.

POLLY. You can forget about privacy. Your team's never far away, and sound carries in ways you never quite expect.

CHARLIE. Okay, your team. Let's get back to your team, my team.

POLLY. I make you uncomfortable.

CHARLIE. I'm kind of thinking you make everyone uncomfortable.

POLLY. I'm very forward. Also, I have a tendency to lie.

CHARLIE. Hey, everybody tells a little fib now and then.

POLLY. I am not employed by Blue Sky.

CHARLIE. You're not?

POLLY. I need this cave, Charlie. And I needed a way in.

CHARLIE. Why?

POLLY. It's been over fifteen months.

CHARLIE. I have trouble believing that.

POLLY. No, jackass. Since I found a new cave. Fifteen very dry months.

CHARLIE. Okay.

POLLY. Success, Charlie, is a drug. And I am addicted.

CHARLIE. Addicted.

POLLY. You don't even notice, at first, how you've constructed your entire self around the next big strike, the next published paper, the news new twist on an old extremophile, or even the ever-popular blind cave fish.

CAVERS

CHARLIE. So, fifteen months...

POLLY. It's a lifetime, Charlie. A kind of death. I would've chased you off if I could have. If you weren't Graham's student. There, I said it. Do you hate me?

CHARLIE. You see that bug there?

POLLY. The one that isn't a bug anymore?

CHARLIE. Assuming it's got a brother or a sister or a mother, your dry spell is over in a big way—and my boss up there has a serious problem.

POLLY. Actually, that bug of yours is the least of her concerns.

CHARLIE. This place is going to be pulled right out from under her.

POLLY. And from Blue Sky.

CHARLIE. I think so.

POLLY. Geologically, protected status is pretty much a guarantee.

CHARLIE. Throw in a couple new species...

POLLY. In my estimation, we're talking about the next National Monument.

CHARLIE. Everybody's gonna be in on this. The Nature Conservancy, the Department of the Interior—

POLLY. —The NSS—

CHARLIE. —everybody.

POLLY. Your Ms. Stovall is not going to be happy.

CHARLIE. Like I care.

POLLY. Do I detect...hostility?

CHARLIE. She told me yesterday she wants to sell popcorn down here—to make popcorn right here in the Breezeway.

POLLY. No.

CHARLIE. Can you imagine the smell?

POLLY. The oils...

CHARLIE. What we need is a second entrance. A back door. (*Polly, who has been perusing the various formations, produces Q-tips and collection vials. As she and Charlie converse, Polly takes swab samples from the available cave formations and adds them, one by one, to the vials.*)

POLLY. How do you mean, "need"?

CHARLIE. It would really muddy the claim.

CAVERS

POLLY. Ah.

CHARLIE. And you know what? There definitely is a second entrance.

POLLY. Why? (*Referring to a vial.*) Here, hold this.

CHARLIE. When Gertie first came in, there were bats, three of them.

POLLY. And her entrance was sealed for years, maybe centuries.

CHARLIE. They must have had another way in.

POLLY. It might be all of four inches across.

CHARLIE. But it might be bigger.

POLLY. And with state and national forest in every direction...

CHARLIE. If nothing else, property rights down here will be very, very sticky for a very, very long time.

POLLY. This is your first new cave.

CHARLIE. My first big one, yeah.

POLLY. Are you going to be able to live with yourself?

CHARLIE. I'm sorry, I don't follow.

POLLY. Says Charlie, our self-appointed Voice of the Cave: "We need to muddy the claim."

CHARLIE. Yes! Because the cave would have been better off without us. So, it's our duty to, you know. Preserve what we can.

POLLY. Which means taking every dream Gertie Stovall ever had and flushing them down a sinkhole.

CHARLIE. I guess, if you want to look at it that way.

POLLY. Every serious caver confronts this eventually. In the name of preservation, we trample local and personal rights.

CHARLIE. Okay, sure, but we kind of have to.

POLLY. Believing that doesn't mean I sleep well.

CHARLIE. It's not my fault if property rights in this country are a mess.

POLLY. Laws require someone to enforce them, a whistle-blower.

CHARLIE. Hey, if I weren't down here, someone else would be.

POLLY. It seems that way now. But when you look back, you'll always know that even if events would have progressed to an identical end, it was you who pressed the button. You who made the active choice. Have I mentioned, I have a private lab?

CHARLIE. No.

CAVERS

POLLY. Nothing outrageous, but perfect for growing bacteria, maybe tweaking their genes. Resequencing a nucleotide or two.

CHARLIE. That's how you get funding? You sell...?

POLLY. Biotech is a huge business, Charlie. For the right samples, patented in advance, of course—by me—I can make a fortune.

CHARLIE. But whether it's Gertie or the government, these aren't samples you can just walk off with. (*Polly pockets the various vials she's sealed.*)

POLLY. Why not? Who's going to blow the whistle?

CHARLIE. Hey. No fair.

POLLY. Gertie just wants to give tours. She thinks small and she has no idea, no idea at all of what she's sitting on, what the stakes are. But if you and I start harvesting now...

CHARLIE. Y'know, every time I talk to you, I feel like I'm getting backed into a corner.

POLLY. But you still think I'm pretty.

CHARLIE. I'm starting to think you're dangerous.

POLLY. Wait. Someone's coming. (*We hear it, too. A noise like rusty wheels.*)

CHARLIE. Get behind me.

POLLY. Oh, please. (*Gertie enters, pushing a desperately corroded bicycle.*) Just when I think there's nothing new left under the sun.

GERTIE. You watch. Maybe I'll stage me one of them French bike races. Gertie's Tour of the Underworld!

CHARLIE. What are you doing?

GERTIE. You'll recall the bike co-op. They finally filled out the Methodist Church basement, so...

POLLY. You can't.

GERTIE. I need the money, so, yes, I can.

POLLY. Caves are not extra closet space!

GERTIE. Why not?

POLLY. I—I cannot begin to list the ways...

GERTIE. Good, 'cos the Lord knows the world don't need another list. Now, if ya' don't mind? (*Charlie defers as Gertie wheels the bicycle past him and farther into the cave. Gertie exits.*)

CAVERS

CHARLIE. Amazing. For a minute there, you actually sounded upset. Acting as if the cave, you know, mattered.

POLLY. I'm a complicated woman.

CHARLIE. Gertie keeps a garden, did you know?

POLLY. I really hadn't giving it any thought.

CHARLIE. She's partial to mango peppers.

POLLY. Charlie, I'm trying to have a conversation about your soul.

CHARLIE. And I'm trying to have a conversation about *her* soul.

(Gertie re-enters, sans bicycle.)

GERTIE. Don't you have explorin' to do?

CHARLIE. Oh, that's why we're here. We've got two teams, sure, but the idea is one map. One accurate map.

POLLY. And since phone service underground remains notoriously unreliable...

GERTIE. Charlie, she starts in t'removing her clothes, y'take my advice and run.

CHARLIE. Yes, ma'am. But she's right about the bike. I know you've got a lot of plans, but...

GERTIE. But what?

CHARLIE. If you want this place to be jaw-dropping, a real show cave, then you can't turn it into a storage shed.

GERTIE. It's prob'ly true that I wouldn't feel real born in a storage shed.

CHARLIE. "Born"?

GERTIE. Ain't that how you felt, whenever caves got under yer skin? Made y'feel small and special all at once?

POLLY. Charlie might not believe me, but I still feel that way. Right now, this moment.

GERTIE. I tell ya' what. I'll take that bike back up. Think on it a bit. Who knows? Y'might be right.

CHARLIE. Hey. Thank you.

GERTIE. All I said was, I'd think on it. You get on t'work. Idle hands is the Devil's playground. *(Gertie exits.)*

CHARLIE. You know, we've got twenty-five thousand people in this town, and every last one knows Gertie Stovall, at least by sight. Most of

CAVERS

‘em think she’s crazy, but my folks always defended her. Wouldn’t let me or my sisters say a word against her. A free spirit, they said—and don’t worry about the gun. Sure, she totes it around like a stuffed animal, but it’s always the same one, and the fact is, Gertie’s father only gave it to her after he had the barrel welded shut. So...

POLLY. She’s “good people.”

CHARLIE. Yes! And it kills me, ‘cos if we let “good people” dictate what happens to the world, above ground or anyplace else, we’ll have nothing but a junk-heap inside of twenty years.

POLLY. I bet it feels good to get that out of your system.

CHARLIE. Makes me feel sick, more like. “Good people” are my neighbors, my friends.

POLLY. Charlie, you don’t have to get into bed with me on this, literally or otherwise, but there is a lot of money to be made here, and in the process, we can protect your cave.

CHARLIE. But according to you, whatever I do here will follow me around for the rest of my life.

POLLY. Decisions are like ghosts. They haunt you, creep along in your wake. The number of ghosts I have in tow is beyond counting—but it’s that first big compromise that’s always right there, glaring at me, pointing. And that’s where you are now.

CHARLIE. Well. That’s so comforting.

POLLY. Maybe we should get back to caving.

CHARLIE. Two teams. One map.

POLLY. We meet in the middle.

CHARLIE. We find the real front door.

POLLY. And then we’ll see about your soul.

CHARLIE. Last one back’s a rotten egg.

POLLY. On your mark, get set—

CHARLIE. —Go. (*Charlie and Polly scuttle into different passages. Lights down.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***