

WITCH HOUSE
by Marie Kohler

Scene Sample (pgs. 9-20)

Note: Some action in the play should be presented in a style of magical realism. Italics are used to indicate which dialogue and stage directions take place in this surreal realm.

JIM

I for one am grateful to the Village.

TERESA

Oh?

JIM

For giving our Neighborhood Association some control. Who knows how long this could have dragged on?

HANK

Yep.

JIM

Now we've got a deadline.

DORIS

(anxious) Oh, that word.

JIM

No worries, it'll be a breeze.

BOB

We've got to decide on this tonight, correct?

HANK

If we don't decide, they'll decide for us.

DORIS

That's not very friendly.

JIM

They're just tired of it is all.

DORIS

Well, we're tired of it, too!

JIM

Maybe so, but they've given us this chance. We make our recommendation tonight and we pass it on – tomorrow night the Village Board confirms. Then we're done with it forever.

HANK

Finally.

BOB

What if they don't confirm?

JIM

They will.

ARTIST

I had to be at the meeting tonight. (pause) It's about me!

(ARTIST climbs down from her perch.)

I make things.

BOB

Hank, you've got the floor.

ARTIST

It all starts with collecting.

(ARTIST starts inspecting her statues.)

HANK

Okay. It all started in the spring of '65...

ARTIST

I rescue cigar bands from the gutters. When they're in reasonable condition, they're bright gold or red. (pause) I catalogue objects alphabetically by color –

HANK

I walked past her yard, like I still do every morning.

ARTIST

I return from my walks with a variety of souvenirs! Balls thrown from cars, boomerangs, car tools, pliers, wrenches, bits of flotsam from the lake. It defies the imagination!

HANK

Her dad had just passed, I recall.

ARTIST

(not pleased) Father said, "No art in the yard."

HANK

Pretty big businessman in his day. He'd been *real* successful.

ARTIST

*Brought back three hundred bricks from the town dump. Mother said, "No more bricks." (pause)
So I hid them in the bushes.*

HANK

Right after that, her mother passed. Then she was on her own.

ARTIST

Then I was president here!

HANK

She was always kind of strange.

TERESA

"Strange?"

BOB

(helping avoid conflict) In what way, Hank? I never met her.

HANK

I meant no disrespect. Bit of a loner, maybe?

TERESA

I see no relevance to this.

HANK

Well, that was the first time I noticed any oddball – sorry – any different-looking stuff in her yard.

BOB

All right...

ARTIST

*Most important thing: to see.
Eyes: the gateway to the world.*

HANK

I saw some kind of head stuck on her gatepost – some gargoyle kind of thing.

ARTIST

Carved a sculpture from a bowling ball.

HANK

Before that, everything had been pretty average in the yard --

ARTIST

Painted it Rockabye Blue.

HANK

— gate, lawn, house. Tended-to. Regular. But that day the whole thing took off.

BOB

In what way “took off,” Hank?

ARTIST

Painted two hundred coat hangers red to cover up the rust.

HANK

Saw new things appearing every time I passed her yard –

ARTIST

Constructed sixteen windchimes.

HANK

– all kinds of things.

BOB

What was her inspiration, do we think?

ARTIST

Fun!

HANK

I don’t know, but that’s when it started.

ARTIST

I ripped metal springs from Mother's old mattress.

HANK

The “building-things” bug.

ARTIST

Made a sculpture. More fun!

HANK

First thing you know, statues were popping up everywhere.

ARTIST

Popping up like mushrooms.

HANK

“Critters,” that’s what I call them.

TERESA

“Critters?”

ARTIST

Making some cement fish. I’ll paint one blue and the other red. I’ll stick bottlecaps and fossils on them.

TERESA

“Sculptures” might be a better term.

HANK

Anyway, about a dozen of ‘em.

ARTIST

Going to make three papier mache’ musicians out of flour and sawdust. They’ll be eight feet tall. I’ll cover them with fur!

JIM

And what did the neighbors think of those “critters,” Hank? That’s what’s relevant.

ARTIST

They’ll be sensational! (Grins like Cheshire Cat.) Inspirational creation!

HANK

Oh, mixed, I’d have to say.

JIM

Really? Mixed?

(ARTIST assembles tools for creation: string, etc.)

ARTIST

Sculpture is the art of the intelligent.

TERESA

Not everyone is going to appreciate serious art.

ARTIST

(brightly) I make miniature horses with covered wagons, hundreds of tiny teacups, bells, a square vase with three chorus line nudes, wallpaper out of comic strips, and boxes topped with fish. (pause) I make extremely useful objects.

DORIS

She gave me a vase she made once.

BOB

Is that right?

DORIS

She said it was a vase, anyway. It was shaped like a mermaid. Never did hold water.

HANK

Wasn't art more of a hobby sort of thing with her?

BOB

Do you mean was her art "professional?"

HANK

That's the term.

JIM

Did she have an agent? A gallery? Did her stuff ever sell? I don't think so.

TERESA

I don't think that's relevant. Her interest was never in commercial sales.

ARTIST

Ha!

TERESA

She focused on meaningful creations.

ARTIST

On fun! Been splashing my legs while walking in wet weather. Made some celluloid mudguards. Thumbtacked them to my shoes.

DORIS

Well, "professional" or whatever, it's all still here. Isn't that the problem? It's been ten years since she died, you know.

HANK

Has it really?

JIM

(dry) It has, yes. Ten, long...

ARTIST

Art is one more way to keep a diary.

DORIS

All those meetings –

(ARTIST starts creating on large scale – using string.)

JIM

How many times did we think we had it solved? Lord.

HANK

Cripes. All the articles, the editorials...

DORIS

And blogs!

JIM

And blogs, yes.

DORIS

I don't like those blogs.

BOB

OK, let's start with Option One on the agenda. "Maintain."

ARTIST

I make my own skis! And snowshoes!

BOB

Can someone tell me exactly what we mean by "Maintain?"

HANK

Limbo, in other words. Limbo-land. Same statues, same gawkers, same drive-by traffic.

TERESA

No, it wouldn't be the same at all.

ARTIST

I snowshoe down the road in a suit box cover – with poles made from yardsticks!

(demonstrates)

TERESA

The Village offered us a maintenance provision.

HANK

A maintenance provision?

ARTIST

I look like a surrealist moving picture! Fun!

TERESA

Yes, they said they'll add a line item in the budget, for the upkeep of her yard.

DORIS

So her property wouldn't be so messy? That'd be good.

HANK

But that line item would be peanuts! And they'd cut the money when they felt like it.

ARTIST

Acorns make the best bracelets.

JIM

Meanwhile, they would still park along our road, and meander and annoy us.

ARTIST

For necklaces, I use silver!

HANK

We need a more permanent solution. Safer, too.

JIM

You're right. Not enough would change.

TERESA

In your opinion.

JIM

And Hank's – guessing yours, too, Doris.

ARTIST

I melt down Mother's silverware!

DORIS

Yes.

ARTIST

It's only fair to warn people to check their silver when I visit. I hunt it up and melt it down!

JIM

Bob, you would get to weigh in if there's a tie.

BOB

Oh?

JIM

I suggest we move to Option Two.

ARTIST

There's an affinity between me and silver!

TERESA

Let's just table Option One for now. We might need to return to it.

JIM

No, we mustn't table it. Then we'd have to "un-table" it later when we needed.

DORIS

"Un-table it?"

TERESA

I've never heard of that.

JIM

That would require a four-out-of-five vote – check out Robert's Rules of Order. (pause) The American, not the British version.

TERESA

But the Wassermans may still be coming.

BOB

So maybe we just start exploring Option Two? That way if --

DORIS

(eager to share) She stole things from the dump – did you know that?

BOB

The dump?

ARTIST

People love to talk about me.

DORIS

She'd just put them in her car and drive them home.

ARTIST

I do things other people only dream of!

DORIS

The next day, I'd see she'd stuck them in her critters!

ARTIST

Found a red coaster wagon at the Village Dump. Not too proud to put it in the trunk of my old blue Thunderbird.

DORIS

Like a bowling ball or something.

ARTIST

My cement animals wouldn't have eyes without telephone insulators -- beautiful green glass!

DORIS

She'd take anything!

ARTIST

I've rescued hundreds of them – sensational! It's too wonderful what I find out there!

DORIS

I'd see her out there in those old pants she'd painted polka dots on – remember? And the coat she drizzled swirls all over?

JIM

(ironic) How could I forget?

ARTIST

Lime green and red – my favorite color combination.

JIM

(ironic) Now that was art.