

# HARVEY

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## ACT I

### Scene 1

**TIME:** *Mid-afternoon of a spring day. The present.*

**SCENE:** *The library of the old Dowd family mansion—a room lined with books and set with heavy, old-fashioned furniture of a faded grandeur. The most conspicuous item in the room is an oil painting over a black marble Victorian mantelpiece at the lower part of the wall at stage L. This is the portrait of a lantern-jawed older woman. There are double doors at R. These doors now pulled apart, lead to the hallway and across to the parlor, which is not seen. Telephone is on small table L. This afternoon there is a festive look to the room—silver bowls with spring flowers set about. From the parlor R. comes the sound of a bad female voice singing, "I'm Called Little Buttercup."*

**AT RISE:** *MYRTLE MAE is discovered coming through door R. and as telephone rings, she goes to it.*

**MYRTLE.** *Mrs. Simmons? Mrs. Simmons is my mother, but she has guests this afternoon. Who wants her? (Respectful change in tone after she hears who it is.) Oh—wait just a minute. Hang on just a minute. (Goes to doorway R. and calls.) Psst—Mother! (Cranes her neck more.) Psst—Mother! (Crooks her finger insistently several times. Singing continues.)*

**VEVA.** *(Enters R., humming "Buttercup.")* Yes, dear?

**MYRTLE.** Telephone.

**VEVA.** *(Turning to go out again.)* Oh, no, dear. Not with all of them in there. Say I'm busy.

**MYRTLE.** But, Mother. It's the Society Editor of the Evening News Bee—

VETA. (*Turning.*) Oh—the Society Editor. She's very important. (*She fixes her hair and goes to phone. Her voice is very sweet. She throws out chest and assumes dignified pose.*) Good afternoon, Miss Ellerbe. This is Veta Simmons. Yes—a tea and reception for the members of the Wednesday Forum. You might say—program tea. My mother, you know—(*Waves hand toward portrait.*) the late Marcella Pinney Dowd, pioneer cultural leader she came here by ox-team as a child and she founded the Wednesday Forum. (*MYRTLE is watching out door.*) Myrtle—how many would you say?

MYRTLE. Seventy-five, at least. Say a hundred.

VETA. (*On phone.*) Seventy-five. Miss Tewksbury is the soloist, accompanied by Wilda McCurdy, accompanist.

MYRTLE. Come on! Miss Tewksbury is almost finished with her number.

VETA. She'll do an encore.

MYRTLE. What if they don't give her a lot of applause?

VETA. I've known her for years. She'll do an encore. (*MYRTLE again starts to leave.*) You might say that I am entertaining, assisted by my daughter, Miss Myrtle Mae Simmons. (*To Myrtle—indicates her dress. MYRTLE MAE crosses to c.*) What color would you call that?

MYRTLE. Rancho Rose, they told me.

VETA. (*Into phone.*) Miss Myrtle Mae Simmons looked charming in a modish Rancho Rose toned crepe, picked up at the girdle with a touch of magenta on emerald. I wish you could see her, Miss Ellerbe.

MYRTLE. (*Crossing up r. Looks through door.*) Mother—please—she's almost finished and where's the cateress?

VETA. (*To Myrtle.*) Everything's ready. The minute she's finished singing we open the dining-room doors and we begin pouring. (*Into phone.*) The parlors and halls are festooned with smilax. Yes, festooned. (*Makes motion in air with finger.*) That's right. Yes, Miss Ellerbe, this is the first party we've had in years. There's a reason but I don't want it in the papers. We all have our troubles, Miss Ellerbe. The guest list? Oh, yes—

MYRTLE. Mother—come.

VETA. If you'll excuse me now, Miss Ellerbe. I'll call you later. (*Hangs up.*)

MYRTLE. Mother—Mrs. Chauvenet just came in!

VETA. (*Arranging flowers on phone table.*) Mrs. Eugene Chauvenet. Senior! Her father was a scout with Buffalo Bill.

MYRTLE. So that's where she got that hat!

VETA. (*As she and MYRTLE start to exit.*) Myrtle, you must be nice to Mrs. Chauvenet. She has a grandson about your age.

MYRTLE. But what difference will it make, with Uncle Elwood?

VETA. Myrtle Mae! — remember! We agreed not to talk about that this afternoon. The point of this whole party is to get you started. We work through those older women to the younger group.

MYRTLE. We can't have anyone here in the evenings, and that's when men come to see you — in the evenings. The only reason we can even have a party this afternoon is because Uncle Elwood is playing pinochle at the Fourth Avenue Firehouse. Thank God for the firehouse!

VETA. I know—but they'll just have to invite you out and it won't hurt them one bit. Oh, Myrtle—you've got so much to offer. I don't care what anyone says, there's something sweet about every young girl. And a man takes that sweetness, and look what he does with it! (*Crosses to mantel with flowers.*) But you've got to met somebody, Myrtle. That's all there is to it.

MYRTLE. If I do they say, That's Myrtle Mae Simmons! Her uncle is Elwood P. Dowd — the biggest screwball in town. Elwood P. Dowd and his pal—

VETA. (*Puts hand on her mouth.*) You promised.

MYRTLE. (*Crossing above table, sighs.*) All right—let's get them into the dining-room.

VETA. Now when the members come in here and you make your little welcome speech on behalf of your grandmother—be sure to do this. (*Gestures toward portraits on mantle.*)

MYRTLE. (*In fine disgust—business with flowers.*) And then after that, I mention my Uncle Elwood and say a few words about his pal Harvey. Damn Harvey! (*In front of table, as she squats.*)

VETA. (*The effect on her is electric. She runs over and closes doors. Crosses behind table to c.*) Myrtle Mae—that's right! Let everybody in the Wednesday Forum hear you. You said that name. You promised you wouldn't say that name and you said it.

MYRTLE. (*Rising, starting to cross L.*) I'm sorry, Mother. But how do you know Uncle Elwood won't come in and introduce Harvey to everybody? (*To mantel. Places flowers on it.*)

VETA. This is unkind of you, Myrtle Mae. Elwood is the biggest heartache I have. Even if people do call him peculiar he's still my brother, and he won't be home this afternoon.

MYRTLE. Are you sure?

VETA. Of course I'm sure.

MYRTLE. But Mother, why can't we live like other people?

VETA. Must I remind you again? Elwood is not living with us—we are living with him.

MYRTLE. Living with him and Harvey! Did Grandmother know about Harvey?

VETA. I've wondered and wondered about that. She never wrote me if she did.

MYRTLE. Why did she have to leave all her property to Uncle Elwood?

VETA. Well, I suppose it was because she died in his arms. People are sentimental about things like that.

MYRTLE. You always say that and it doesn't make sense. She couldn't make out her will after she died, could she?

VETA. Don't be didactic, Myrtle Mae. It's not becoming in a young girl, and men loathe it. Now don't forget to wave your hand.

MYRTLE. I'll do my best. (*Opens door.*)

VETA. Oh, dear—Miss Tewksbury's voice is certainly fading!

MYRTLE. But not fast enough. (*She exits.*)

VETA. (*Exits through door, clapping hands, pulling down girdle.*) Lovely, Miss Tewksbury—perfectly lovely. I loved it.

~~(Through door U.L. enters ELWOOD P. DOWD. He is a man about 47 years old with a dignified bearing, and yet a dreamy expression in his eyes. His expression is benign, yet serious to the point of gravity. He wears an overcoat and a battered old hat. This hat, reminiscent of the Joe College era, sits on the top of his head. Over his arm he carries another hat and coat. As he enters, although he is alone, he seems to be ushering and bowing someone else in with him. He bows the invisible person over to a chair. His step is light, his movements quiet and his voice low-pitched.)~~

~~ELWOOD. (*To invisible person.*) Excuse me a moment. I have to answer the phone. Make yourself comfortable, Harvey. (*Phone rings.*) Hello. Oh, you've got the wrong number. But~~