# THE RECLUSE OF HERALD SQUARE

## A musical

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#### CHARACTERS

IDA 1, a lively 12 year old, everyone calls her Ellen IDA 2, ages 19-29, charming and resourceful IDA 3, ages 50s-60s, anxious and practical IDA 4, ages 93-94, lost in the past and losing her grip MARY 1, a shy 10 year old who worships her sister MARY 2, ages 17-27, a woman trying to find her place MARY 3, ages 50s-60s, clear eyed and can still pack a punch EMMA 1, ages 8-10, extremely frail and small EMMA 2, ages 30s-40s, she looks and acts like a girl in her 20s BEN WOOD, ages 40s-70s, Ida's partner, a gambling charmer ANNE WALSH, mother to Ida and Mary, a steadying presence JOSEPH COX, a kind, curious man and court appointed researcher FLOOR MAID, an established maid at the Herald Square Hotel MARGARET, a newly hired maid WILLIAM, the elevator operator DR. BABCOCK, the hotel doctor STANLEY, the hotel clerk WENTWORTH, a lawyer OTIS WOOD, Ida's relative on her late husband's side FORTUNE TELLER, a middle aged woman with a stall in Malden, MA MRS. JOHNSON, a rich, haughty woman HARVEY JOHNSON, her sincere, thoughtful son ISABEL, one of Ida's hired nurses PEGGY, one of Ida's hired nurses ENSEMBLE, hotel guests, guard, psychiatrist, townspeople, Johnson's maid

### DOUBLING SUGGESTIONS

#### PRODUCTION NOTES

This show consists of one magnificent, slowly-dissolving set. It begins as a hotel hallway that shortly reveals a labyrinthine hoard. Every moment, character, and item from the past emerges from that towering mess, either uncovered as items are cleared away, or entering from hidden crags. The hoard is the play's central conceit, containing that which no longer holds meaning along with hidden treasures. It is beautiful and terrifying, a physical manifestation of Ida's mind and Joseph's search for the truth. It is not cleared until the last moments of the play leave the stage empty.

#### ACT I

#### SCENE 1

NEW YORK CITY. THE HERALD SQUARE HOTEL. 1931.

As the lights rise we are in the hallway of the Herald Square Hotel in New York City. It is 1931. Two maids emerge from a door at the end of the hall, with cleaning carts. The FLOOR MAID is training MARGARET. WILLIAM stands at the elevator.

#### "THE HERALD SQUARE"

FLOOR MAID

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE

MARGARET

I'M JUST SO GRATEFUL FOR THE JOB

FLOOR MAID

YOU'LL BE FINE, JUST YOU MIND TO CLEAN PROPERLY AND WELL

FLOOR MAID (CONT'D)

Alright then, Mary -

MARGARET

Margaret.

WILLIAM

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE, MARGARET

FLOOR MAID

JUST MIND THE DOOR THERE, MR. GRANT WHEN YOU'RE MEANT TO BE A MAID YOU CAN JOIN US OVER HERE

WILLIAM

AND YOU'LL BE CHARMED I'M SURE

FLOOR MAID

BEFORE YOU GO ALONE, MARY

WILLIAM AND MARGARET

MARGARET

FLOOR MAID

SHOW ME THAT I'VE TAUGHT YOU WELL

FLOOR MAID AND MARGARET

WE START WITH THE FIREPLACE

MARGARET

TIDY THE ASH
THE TOWELS AND SHEETS ARE REPLACED
THE DUSTING COMES NEXT
A NEW SOAP BY THE SINK
AND BE SURE TO NEVER BE SEEN

ALL

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE THE FINEST THIS PART OF TOWN AND WE MAKE THE WHOLE THING TICK INVISIBLE HANDS TURNING IT DOWN FLOOR MAID

I'll have you finish up this floor by yourself. Just mind you skip room 552.

MARGARET

Is it empty?

WILLIAM

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE AND THE MYSTERY OF 552 IT'S THE BEST STORY WE'VE GOT LET ME PLAY IT OUT FOR YOU THERE ARE TWO GUESTS IN THE ROOM BUT THEY'RE ALMOST NEVER SEEN

FLOOR MAID

NOT FOR TWENTY YEARS I'VE HEARD

WILLIAM

THERE USED TO BE THREE BUT ONE DIED

FLOOR MAID

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE INDEED

MARGARET

So I won't get in trouble for skipping a room?

FLOOR MAID

Believe me, they don't want you there.

WILLIAM

ONCE A WEEK THEY PEEK OUT THE DOOR AND HAND ME A LITTLE CASH "IT'S MY LAST MONEY" SHE'LL SAY AND LIKE A MOUSE, SCAMPER AWAY

FLOOR MAID

THEY USED TO BE RICH BELLES OF SOCIETY BUT NOT ANYMORE NOW THEY'RE JUST LORE

ALL

WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE THE FINEST THIS PART OF TOWN A MYSTERY MAKES IT TICK A MYSTERY HOLDS IT DOWN

MARGARET

That's the saddest story I've ever heard.

Margaret is now working alone in the hall. She's startled by the sound of the bolt opening on room 552. She panics and hides. The door creaks open, IDA 4 is barely visible in the crack.

IDA 4

Maid!

MARGARET

(a frenzied whisper)

Mr. Grant? Mr. Grant!

IDA 4

Maid! Come here!

(Margaret reluctantly approaches the crack in the
door)
 (MORE)

IDA 4 (CONT'D)

Come here! My sister is sick. Get a doctor. I think she's going to die.

(The door slams and the bolt locks. Margaret runs off to get help, bring back DR. BABCOCK and STANLEY, who are the hotel doctor and clerk. Ida comes to the door. She is thin and small, with matted hair and wearing a dressing gown)

It's my sister Mary.

(Dr. Babcock tries to enter, but she blocks the way)

How much are you going to charge?

DR. BABCOCK

If you can't pay, I certainly won't charge you anything.

She moves back to allow him in. Feeling for the light, he illuminates the overhead fixture and the <u>full hoard</u> is revealed: floor to ceiling, wall to wall. They stand in a tiny clearing in the middle of the mess. The only available chair is a dilapidated rocker. Ida sits in it and points Dr. Babcock to an adjoining room. He re-enters a moment later.

DR. BABCOCK (CONT'D)

I'M SORRY MRS. WOOD, YOUR SISTER IS DEAD IS THERE ANYONE I CAN CALL?

IDA 4

SHE'LL HAVE TO BE BURIED THE MONEY MUST BE SPENT

DR. BABCOCK

MAY I HAVE YOUR FULL NAME FOR MY RECORDS, DEAR?

IDA 4

I'M IDA WOOD

MY HUSBAND WAS BENJAMIN

DR. BABCOCK

IDA WOOD

YES I SEE

IDA 4

HIS BROTHER WAS THE MAYOR OF NEW YORK

DR. BABCOCK

THE MAYOR

IDA 4

HER NAME IS MARY MAYFIELD

SHE NEVER MARRIED

SHE JUST LIVED HERE WITH ME

DR. BABCOCK

How long have you lived in this hotel?

IDA 4

TWENTY FOUR YEARS
TWENTY FOUR YEARS
WE JUST LIVED HERE ALONE
SAFE WITHIN THESE SIMPLE WALLS
WITH NO PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED

ENSEMBLE

TWENTY FOUR YEARS
WELCOME TO THE HERALD SQUARE
THE FINEST THIS PART OF TOWN
AND DOWN DEEP IN ITS WALLS
A HEAP OF MYSTERIES TO BE SOLVED

Stanley and Dr. Babcock bring WENTWORTH, a lawyer, to her door.

WENTWORTH

(knocking)

I'm Harold Wentworth, Mrs. Wood, here to see you regarding your estate.

Ida opens the door, suspicious and unsteady. Babcock taps his ear subtly to Wentworth, reminding him.

WENTWORTH (CONT'D)

(yelling)

Mrs. Wood. I'm Harold Wentworth, I'm a lawyer with -

IDA 4

(She pulls a battered shoebox from under the rocker, crammed with disintegrating paper)
If you think I'm resourceless you're wrong. I've got plenty here to sustain me. You won't get me out of this room.

She holds out the box without letting go. Wentworth peeks in and reports to the others.

WENTWORTH

Bonds and dividend checks.

IDA 4

I'll bet that interests you, what a secret! A treasure! But you young men, you'd have to have sharper eyes and more patience than I know you have.

STANLEY

To do what, Mrs. Wood?

IDA 4

TO FIND THE MONEY RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSES!

A wide gesture to the room, then stuffing the papers back in the shoebox and clutching it to her chest.

WENTWORTH

Do you have a bank account?

IDA 4

YOU HAVE TO GET OUT I DON'T WANT YOU HERE

WENTWORTH

And are there any relatives, Mrs. Wood, who we could -

She flips a switch, becoming irate and hysterical.

TDA 4

YOU'RE ALL VULTURES I KNOW IT I DON'T HAVE FRIENDS LEFT GET OUT! IMPOSTER! YOU JUST WANT MY MONEY LIKE EVERYONE ELSE I DON'T LIKE YOUR FACE I DON'T LIKE YOUR VOICE GET OUT!

She stands up, forcing them back out to the hallway. We can still see her in the room, fussing over the box.

WENTWORTH

I did a preliminary investigation before I came. Union Pacific reported to me that the sisters together own about \$175,000 worth of stock, and dividend checks haven't been cashed for a dozen years. It appears Ida's late husband, Benjamin Wood, had run the Daily News which she then owned after his death, and sold to Frank Munsey of the NY Sun for something near \$250,000 at least. An officer at the Guaranty Trust Company tells me he remembers her visit to the Morton Trust in 1907 and claims she left with nearly a million dollars in cash. He states that at the same time she sold nearly all the valuable possessions she owned as the widow of Benjamin Wood, as well as other stocks and bonds. She checked in here that year.

DR. BABCOCK

Whatever the case, it's clear we must protect her interests.

Music, transition as orders are given.

WENTWORTH

I want guards posted by her door, and we must find a private detective. I will try to persuade her to agree to the arrangements for her sister's removal and funeral. And above all find her will.

DR. BABCOCK

She's irrational -

STANLEY

Do what you must. We'll proceed with the funeral immediately, whether she agrees or not. The poor sister cannot simply lay there.

Music, transition. Whirlwind, Mary removed. Stanley and Babcock are gone, a GUARD sits by her door. Wentworth arrives with an armful of red roses. Nods at the guard as he is admitted to the room. Ida is in her rocker. She observes him warily. He presents her with the flowers.

IDA 4

You again?

WENTWORTH

If I may, Mrs. Wood.

(She takes the flowers, smiles, smells them, nods to him. He finds something to sit on, very gingerly)

I'm very glad you like them.

TDA /

I like flowers. I used to have lots of flowers. I like them very much.

As she puts them in a tin with water.

WENTWORTH

I was sorry for Miss. Mayfield but the funeral was lovely. Simple. (beat, ever so gently)

Had Mary left a will?

IDA 4

She did. And so did my daughter Emma.

WENTWORTH

Was Emma's will ever taken to court, so that her estate could be distributed?

IDA 4

No, it wasn't. No need for it. She left everything to me. So did my sister Mary.

WENTWORTH

Do you have these wills here?

IDA 4

(nodding towards the other room)

In there. That's where I keep them, and that's where they'll stay. We'll talk about them another time.

WENTWORTH

There are many treasures in this room, aren't there Ida?

IDA 4

No! You'll find nothing. You are the devil sir, everyone, oh everyone at your firm, lawyers, leeches in the river, asking about treasure -

WENTWORTH

I only meant your securities and cash are not fully safe in these rooms.

IDA 4

Rubbish.

In frustration he gets up, nearly falling and a tiny hoard landslide slips by him.

WENTWORTH

Good heavens!

IDA 4

(wryly)

Watch for that pile, sir.

Music, transition of a few weeks. Wentworth is on the phone with OTIS F. WOOD, son of Fernando Wood, nephew of Ben (and Ida by marriage). We can still see Ida in her chair throughout all of this, rocking back and forth and fretting over her hoard.

WENTWORTH

Mr. Wood, as Ida's nephew you are, from what we can tell, one of her closest living relatives.

OTIS

Not by blood.

WENTWORTH

No, but we have reached an impasse with Mrs. Wood. Her sister has been gone some two months and many days she will not even speak with us. We feel involving a relative is the best way to look after Ida's interests.

OTIS

To be blunt, I thought she was dead. I haven't thought of her at all, in fact, for a good many years. There was never any association between our families.

WENTWORTH

Do you know of any other relatives of hers?

OTIS

I think my Uncle Benjamin and Ida had a daughter, Emma? But I cannot recall any other relatives on her side.

WENTWORTH

I would suggest that you meet Ida along with me. You may be able to discover much more helpful information.

Music, transition, Wentworth and Otis stand before Ida in her rocking chair throne. The guard still sleeps by the door.

OTIS

Was Emma your only child?

IDA 4

My only one, my daughter by Benjamin Wood.

OTIS

Didn't Uncle Ben have some other children?

IDA 4

Yes, but they were illegitimate.

OTIS

Did you ever get to know them?

IDA 4

No, they weren't any relation of mine. We never had anything to do with them.

Without much warning, she gets up and locks herself in the inner bedroom. Otis and Wentworth talk in the hallway.

OTIS

My brothers and I will offer ourselves, as a faction of Woods relatives, to establish what to do about Ida. We should consider a psychiatric evaluation next, I think.

#### SCENE 2

NEW YORK CITY. THE HERALD SQUARE HOTEL. 1931.

Transition, Ida is now face to face with a PSYCHIATRIST. Otis, Wentworth, Babcock, and maybe Stanley are all waiting anxiously in the hallway. The Floor Maid, Margaret, and William pass by, trying to overhear what they can.

IDA 4

What kind of doctor are you?

**PSYCHIATRIST** 

I'm a psychiatrist -

#### "FOOL THEM ALL"

IDA 4

I'M NOT THE YOUNG GIRL
I ONCE WAS BEFORE
MY EYESIGHT IS FAILING
MY HEARING IS POOR
MY EARS WON'T STOP RINGING
LIKE SOMEONE'S AT THE DOOR

PSYCHIATRIST

WHY HAVEN'T YOU CALLED A DOCTOR BEFORE?

IDA 4

DOCTORS ARE HEATHENS AND LAWYERS AS WELL THEY'RE OUT FOR THEIR OWN WHILE THEY SELL YOU TO HELL I'M NOW NINETY THREE AND THERE'S NO ONE LEFT I'VE GUARDED MY LIFE FOR SO LONG AND SO WELL FOOL THEM ALL LEAVE THEM NO CRUMBS I MAY BE OLD BUT I'M NOT DUMB FOOL THEM ALL **EVERYDAY** TILL YOUR HAIR TURNS GRAY AND WHEN YOU'RE GONE THE MYSTERY GOES ON FOOL THEM ONCE FOOL THEM ALL

PSYCHIATRIST

WHAT MORE CAN YOU TELL ME, MRS. WOOD?

IDA 4

WHEN I MARRIED BEN
WE WERE TOP OF THE WORLD
HE OWNED A PAPER
THROUGH MARRIAGE WE WHIRLED
AND THEN BEN WAS GONE
AND BANKS CAN'T BE TRUSTED
DAMN THEM ALL,
I WON'T BE FOOLED
AS THEY LUSTED MY MONEY,
A SILK ROBE, A TRINKET
A GIFT A RING

**PSYCHIATRIST** 

Were Ben's critics against you?

IDA 4

FOOL THEM ALL LEAVE THEM NO CRUMBS I MAY BE OLD BUT I'M NOT DUMB FOOL THEM ALL HOLD YOUR CARDS OR YOU MIGHT JUST FOLD AND WHEN YOUR GONE THE MYSTERY GOES ON FOOL THEM ONCE FOOL THEM ALL EVERY SQUARE INCH HAS MEANING OR ELSE WHY WOULD I KEEP IT? YOU THINK THAT I'M CRAZY I'M NOT! NOT A BIT! IT JUST NEEDS SOME CLEANING SO GET IT TO SHINE I WON'T LET YOU RESIGN MY MIND

**PSYCHIATRIST** 

Ida-

IDA 4

FOOL THEM ALL
LEAVE NO TRACE
FIND THE TRUTHS
YOU MUST ERASE
FOOL THEM ALL
WITH WORDS UNSAID
THEY'LL BE MINE
TILL I AM DEAD!
AND WHEN YOU'RE GONE
THE MYSTERY GOES ON
FOOL THEM ONCE
FOOL THEM ALL

**PSYCHIATRIST** 

Who? Ida -

IDA 4

(Panicked, she can't keep a hold of reality)
They stole a diamond necklace - and my husband's watch. You cannot understand. Priceless treasures, my memories - Some things, some things even I cannot remember where they are.

**PSYCHIATRIST** 

She's obviously incapable of taking care of herself and her possessions. There is a danger she may be robbed, or she might do harm to herself.

The legal and medical people deciding her fate emerge from the hoard like a stream of ants.

WENTWORTH

Judge, I am moving to institute proceedings in the New York State Supreme Court to have Mrs. Ida Mayfield Wood declared legally incompetent to handle her own affairs.

CORCORAN

Mrs. Wood, I must inform you that I am now your legal guardian. Do you understand what that means?

IDA 4

Of course I do, you imbecile! You're just trying to get my money, and you never will!

Everything fades away except IDA and her hoard.

FOOL THEM ALL
LEAVE THEM NO CRUMBS
I MAY BE OLD BUT I'M NOT DUMB
FOOL THEM ALL EVERYDAY
TILL YOUR HAIR TURNS GRAY
AND WHEN YOU'RE GONE
THE MYSTERY GOES ON
FOOL THEM ONCE
FOOL THEM ALL

#### SCENE 3

MASSACHUSETTS. 1850.

At the end of the song, Ida pulls an item from the folds of the hoard, a sheer scarf with tassels. As she holds it, and hears the voices of two young girls.

As this happens, elements of the hoard fly into the air, either disappearing into the fly space or hanging above like a ceiling. Now a downstage area of the hoard has cleared away, widening the available playing space.

MARY 1

Wait for me!

IDA 1

You go faster!

A FORTUNE TELLER emerges from the hoard and pulls the scarf from Ida's hands and begins setting up her shop. Young girls IDA 1 and MARY 1 run on stage.

IDA 1 (CONT'D)

It's not every day we get to go into town without Mama, we have to make it good.

MARY 1

Isn't it already?

IDA 1

I want to show you something.

MARY 1

"Your Future and Fortune Told" - oh, Ellen, we can't! It's a gypsy - we can't go in. It costs money!

IDA 1

I've got money.

MARY 1

Do you listen to anything Mama says? Do you remember a single story she's told us?

IDA 1

Money is for food. Money is for saving.

MARY 1

So you do listen.

IDA 1

Proverbs 21:5, the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty. But it isn't like it was for them, in Ireland. We're not desperate for food, are we? Mama and Papa are always afraid.

MARY 1

I suppose it's only a little bit. We can save it up again, can't we?

IDA 1

I promise we will.

The girls enter the little caravan. They hand over the money, suddenly shy.

FORTUNE TELLER

Girls, welcome, sit. Don't be afraid.

IDA 1

I'm not afraid. Neither is my sister.

FORTUNE TELLER

You are brave, curious girls.

MARY 1

What do we do?

## "GIVE ME YOUR PALM"

FORTUNE TELLER

GIVE ME YOUR PALM
I HAVE SEEN CENTURIES
INTO THE FUTURE
I HAVE SEEN THINGS
THAT MAKE GROWN MEN STUPOR
THESE SIGHTS I TELL
DO NOT COME CHEAP
FOR YOU MY DEARS
IT'S FREE
GO ON AND TAKE A SEAT
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.

Ida holds out her palm.

IDA 1

I know what the near future will hold, but I want to know about what will happen after.

FORTUNE TELLER

Are you a fortune-teller too?

IDA 1

I have to move into a big house in another town. And be a servant.

MARY 1

Mama says it's a good position for a girl from our family.

FORTUNE TELLER

I see.

IDA 1

But it can't be forever, can it?

WITH SOMEONE YOU LOVE

FORTUNE TELLER

MY DEAR YOU'LL BE LUCKY
AND YOU'LL MARRY WELL
AND HE WILL LOVE YOU
UNTIL HIS FAREWELL
BUT DON'T FIND THIS SAD
WHAT EVER YOU DO.
YOU'LL HAVE ALL YOU'VE WANTED
THATS ALL I'VE FOR YOU
YOURS IS QUITE DIFFERENT
BUT TRUTHS STILL HOLD FIRM
YOU'LL NEVER BE RICH
BUT LIFE WILL HOLD FIRM
WHEN LIFE WAINS
WITH THE PAINS OF OLD AGE
YOU'LL END YOUR DAYS

What do you think? Is that what you imagined for yourself?

MARY 1

I'm not sure, but having someone to love sounds pretty nice.

FORTUNE TELLER

Good luck to you!

The Fortune Teller doesn't see this, but Ida sneaks the small scarf away with her.

#### SCENE 4

MASSACHUSETTS. 1850.

MARY 1

What's wrong? I thought your fortune was amazing.

IDA 1

Maybe I will marry rich, maybe I will get all I want, like she said.

MARY 1

But?

IDA 1

She said to you...she said your life will hold firm.

MARY 1

Can't you be happy with just one fortune?

IDA 1

I do want to marry rich, but I don't want to be silly either. I want it to last.

MARY 1

Your marriage?

IDA 1

My money. If I get it, I won't let anything go.

MARY 1

Maybe you will get all that.

IDA 1

What about you? If we could dream it all into being, what kind of world would you want?

## "ENDLESS"

MARY 1

I WOULD WEAR RIBBONS IN MY HAIR ON A TUESDAY AFTERNOON I WANT TO DANCE THROUGH THE STREETS NO SHOES ON MY FEET AND JUMP IN A PUDDLE OR TWO

IDA 1

I WILL BE FAMOUS AND WELL LIKED AND I'LL WEAR PANTS TO A BAR AND I WON'T WONT CARE IF THE MEN STARE, CAUSE I'M RIGHT WHERE I BELONG I DON'T KNOW WHAT LIES AHEAD OR WHERE THE ROAD MY TAKE US

MARY 1

HOW CAN I KNOW WHAT I WANT WHEN I DON'T? WHERE THE OPTIONS DO NOT END?

BOTH

AND IT'S MORE THAN PRETEND.
ENDLESS
PAST THE MOON AROUND THE SUN
ENDLESS
WE'LL BLAZE THE TRAIL
THAT WE'VE BEGUN
UNENDING UNSTOPPABLE
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN'T DO!
ME AND YOU

IDA 1

I'LL BE SINGLE!

MARY 1

WHAT?

IDA 1

YES, SINGLE!
AND END UP A WIFE?
THAT IS JUST NOT MY LIFE
WE SAW WHAT MOTHER WENT THROUGH
I CAN'T LIMIT MYSELF
WHEN I'VE SO MUCH TO DO
IT'S NOT ENOUGH JUST TO DO WHAT I WANT

BOTH

I WANT TO DO WHAT I PLEASE
TO WALK FREE IN THIS WORLD
OR STAND TALL WITH NO PRETENSE OR A CARE
WITH NO ONE TO APPEASE
NEVER FAILING TO EXCEL
ENDLESS
LET'S CHASE THE STARS

IDA 1

OR RAISE SOME HELL

BOTH

ENDLESS
UNENDING UNSTOPPABLE
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN'T DO
WE WILL BE ENDLESS
ME AND YOU

IDA 1

THIS ALL SOUNDS SO SILLY JUST A GAME OF MAKE BELIEVE EVEN STILL, I'LL DREAM IT I'LL SCHEME IT

BOTH

HAPPY TO PROCLAIM
WE ARE ENDLESS
PAST THE MOON AROUND THE SUN
ENDLESS
I WON'T STOP UNTIL WE'RE DONE
UNENDING UNSTOPPABLE
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN'T DO

IDA 1

WE CAN BE ENDLESS ME AND -

MARY 1

SISTER WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE TAKE THE STEP AND SCREAM OUT THE NEWS

BOTH

THAT ELLEN AND MARY WILL TAKE THE WORLD BY STORM

WE ARE ENDLESS

WE ARE ENDLESS

WE ARE ENDLESS

ME AND YOU