

## A YOUNG LADY OF PROPERTY

by Horton Foote

Wilma (15) - Arabella (15)

**The Play:** As with most of Horton Foote's plays, *A Young Lady of Property* is set in the fictitious town of Harrison, Texas. The year is 1925. The young lady of the title is Miss Wilma Thompson, a strong girl with vision and a zest for life. Since the death of her mother, Wilma has had to live with her Aunt Gertrude. Wilma's father is unable to be responsible for his own life, let alone raise a daughter. Before dying, Wilma's mother saw to it that the house and the property would go to her daughter. When she comes of age, this will all be hers; in the meantime she must live with Aunt Gert. The loneliness she feels comes from the loss of her mother at an early age and her troubled relationship with her father. Life has made unexpected turns, and the only constant in this life, which has turned complicated and painful, is her property. At one point, Wilma decides to seek an appointment with a Hollywood director for a screen test. If she can become a "star" perhaps her life can be exciting and have meaning. But in her heart, Wilma really wants a traditional life with a loving husband and family. When her father threatens to sell the house and property, marry Mrs. Leighton (whom Wilma despises), and move to Houston, Wilma becomes desperate and does everything she can to prevent this from happening. If the property goes, so does everything Wilma treasures. In the end, Wilma's father is stopped by Mrs. Leighton, who turns out to be on Wilma's side after all. Wilma is now able to reconcile her problems with her father, and has remained not only "a young lady of property" but has discovered the true destiny of her life.

**The Scene:** Wilma's best friend is Arabella Cookenboo. Foote describes Arabella as, "...Wilma's shadow and obviously her adoring slave." As the scene begins, Wilma is sitting in the swing on the front porch of her vacant house. She has been awaiting a letter of response to her request for a screen test. Arabella enters, concealing letters to both girls granting them the screen test. Arabella is terrified about the prospects of leaving Harrison, and equally fearful that she might lose her best friend.

## A YOUNG LADY OF PROPERTY

WILMA: Heh, Arabella. Come sit and swing.

ARABELLA: All right. Your letter came.

WILMA: Whoopee. Where is it?

ARABELLA: Here. *(She gives it to her. Wilma tears it open. She reads.)*

WILMA: *(Reading)* Dear Miss Thompson: Mr. Delafonte will be glad to see you any time next week about your contemplated screen test. We suggest you call the office when you arrive in the city and we will set an exact time. Yours truly, Adele Murray. Well... Did you get yours?

ARABELLA: Yes.

WILMA: What did it say?

ARABELLA: The same.

WILMA: Exactly the same?

ARABELLA: Yes.

WILMA: Well, let's pack out bags. Hollywood, here we come.

ARABELLA: Wilma...

WILMA: Yes?

ARABELLA: I have to tell you something... Well... I...

WILMA: What is it?

ARABELLA: Well...promise me you won't hate me, or stop being my friend. I never had a friend, Wilma, until you began being nice to me, and I couldn't stand it if you weren't my friend any longer...

WILMA: Oh, my cow. Stop talking like that. I'll never stop being your friend. What do you want to tell me?

ARABELLA: Well...I don't want to go to see Mr. Delafonte, Wilma...

WILMA: You don't?

ARABELLA: No. I don't want to be a movie star. I don't want to leave Harrison or my mother or father... I just want to stay here the rest of my life and get married and settle down and have children.

WILMA: Arabella...

ARABELLA: I just pretended like I wanted to go to Hollywood because I knew you wanted me to, and I wanted you to like me...

WILMA: Oh, Arabella...

ARABELLA: Don't hate me, Wilma. You see, I'd be afraid... I'd die if I had to go to see Mr. Delafonte. Why, I even get faint when I

## A YOUNG LADY OF PROPERTY

have to recite before the class. I'm not like you. You're not scared of anything.

WILMA: Why do you say that?

ARABELLA: Because you're not. I know.

WILMA: Oh, yes, I am. I'm scared of lots of things.

ARABELLA: What?

WILMA: Getting lost in a city. Being bitten by dogs. Old lady Leighton taking my daddy away... *(A pause.)*

ARABELLA: Will you still be my friend?

WILMA: Sure. I'll always be your friend.

ARABELLA: I'm glad. Oh, I almost forgot. Your Aunt Gert said for you to come on home.

WILMA: I'll go in a little. I love to swing in my front yard. Aunt Gert has a swing in her front yard, but it's not the same. Mama and I used to come out here and swing together. Some nights when Daddy was out all night gambling, I used to wake up and hear her out here swinging away. Sometimes she'd let me come and sit beside her. We'd swing until three or four in the morning. *(A pause. She looks out into the yard.)* The pear tree looks sickly, doesn't it? The fig trees are doing nicely though. I was out in back and the weeds are near knee high, but fig trees just seem to thrive in the weeds. The freeze must have killed off the banana trees... *(A pause. Wilma stops swinging—she walks around the yard.)* Maybe I won't leave either. Maybe I won't go to Hollywood after all.

ARABELLA: You won't?

WILMA: No. Maybe I shouldn't. That just comes to me now. You know sometimes my old house looks so lonesome it tears at my heart. I used to think it looks lonesome just whenever it had no tenants, but now it comes to me it has looked lonesome ever since Mama died and we moved away, and it will look lonesome until some of us move back here. Of course, Mama can't, and Daddy won't. So it's up to me.

ARABELLA: Are you gonna live here all by yourself?

WILMA: No. I talk big about living here by myself, but I'm too much of a coward to do that. But maybe I'll finish school and live with Aunt Gert and keep on renting the house until I meet some nice boy with good habits and steady ways, and marry him. Then we'll move here

## A YOUNG LADY OF PROPERTY

and have children and I bet this old house won't be lonely any more. I'll get Mama's old croquet set and put it out under the pecan trees and play croquet with my children, or sit in this yard and swing and wave to people as they pass by.

ARABELLA: Oh, I wish you would. Mama says that's a normal life for a girl, marrying and having children. She says being an actress is all right, but the other's better.

WILMA: Maybe I've come to agree with your mama. Maybe I was going to Hollywood out of pure lonesomeness. I felt so alone with Mrs. Leighton getting my daddy and my mama having left the world. Daddy could have taken away my lonesomeness, but he didn't want to or couldn't. Aunt Gert says nobody is lonesome with a house full of children, so maybe that's what I just ought to stay here and have...

ARABELLA: Have you decided on a husband yet?

WILMA: No.

ARABELLA: Mama says that's the bad feature of being a girl, you have to wait for the boy to ask you and just pray that the one you want wants you. Tommy Murray is nice, isn't he?

WILMA: I think so.

ARABELLA: Jay Godfrey told me once he wanted to ask you for a date, but he didn't dare because he was afraid you'd turn him down.

WILMA: Why did he think that?

ARABELLA: He said the way you talked he didn't think you would go out with anything less than a movie star.

WILMA: Maybe you'd tell him different...

ARABELLA: All right. I think Jay Godfrey is very nice. Don't you?

WILMA: Yes, I think he's very nice and Tommy is nice...

ARABELLA: Maybe we could double-date sometimes.

WILMA: That might be fun.

ARABELLA: Oh, Wilma. Don't go to Hollywood. Stay here in Harrison and let's be friends forever....

WILMA: All right. I will.

ARABELLA: You will?

WILMA: Sure, why not? I'll stay here. I'll stay and marry and live in my house.

ARABELLA: Oh, Wilma. I'm so glad. I'm so very glad.