

### Cast of Characters

MARTHA MAE THOMPSON, Jessie's aging sister. Sixty or older.

JESSIE MAE THOMPSON, Martha's aging sister. Sixty or older.

### The Place

A peeling (supremely) rural front porch.

### The Time

This morning at about eleven-fifteen.

### Production Notes

Set requirements include two rocking chairs and two paper fans.

### Acknowledgments

*Porch Revival* was first produced at the Universal Theatre Festival (Provincetown, MA), featuring and co-directed by Jane Macdonald (Martha Mae) and Myra Slotnick (Jessie Mae).

## PORCH REVIVAL by Mark Rigney

*(Lights up on the peeling front porch of an aging tucked-in-a-hollow farmhouse. Two aging sisters [JESSIE and MARTHA] tuck themselves into two aging rockers. They fan constantly with stiff antique fans, spade-shaped. They rock. They fan. Amazingly, they manage to fan and rock in tandem. At first.)*

JESSIE. Hot again.

MARTHA. Yes.

JESSIE. Hot tomorrow.

MARTHA. 'Spect so.

JESSIE. Hot last night.

MARTHA. It were a good show all the same. Heat and all, quite the show.

JESSIE. 'Spect it was.

MARTHA. Outdid himself, you ask me.

JESSIE. 'Spect he did, yes.

MARTHA. Course, we ain't seen him 'long this way in...when was Brother Kendall here last?

JESSIE. Ten, twelve years now, I'd say.

MARTHA. Ten, twelve years. I don't think he handled the woman with the walker very well.

JESSIE. Began well enough.

MARTHA. 'Spect it did.

JESSIE. Her comin' up and askin' for healin' and all.

MARTHA. Takes some courage to ask for healin'.

JESSIE. Reckon so.

MARTHA. Holdin' up her arms the way she did, 'bout took my breath away.

JESSIE. And Brother Kendall right there the whole time. That mane of snowy hair, that big warm voice.

MARTHA. But she had to keep raisin' up her arms—

JESSIE. —like arms alone'll work you miracles.

**MARTHA.** It did start well.

**JESSIE.** But then her fallin' down there at the end, well.

**MARTHA.** And what with that platform bein' so high.

**JESSIE.** How high you reckon Brother Kendall's platforms got set at?

**MARTHA.** Oh, must be near t'eight feet. Maybe nine.

**JESSIE.** 'S a long way to fall with a walker.

**MARTHA.** And that war vet in the wheelchair.

**JESSIE.** Eight, maybe nine foot down.

**MARTHA.** Like watchin' Evel Knievel. Wham.

**JESSIE.** Frankly, I'd have to say Brother Kendall's powers of healing are not what they once were.

**MARTHA.** 'Spect not.

**JESSIE.** Gives you faith in doctors.

**MARTHA.** It may give *you* faith in doctors.

*(JESSIE's rocker slips out of tandem. A subtle but unmistakable shift.)*

**JESSIE.** It were a long way to fall.

**MARTHA.** Lucky they had the ambulance standin' by. To take the folks off to the doctor, I mean.

**JESSIE.** Martha.

**MARTHA.** If you'd gone up and fallen off that eight-foot platform, they could've taken you off to see the doctor.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect I don't like the direction you're takin'.

**MARTHA.** Course, you're not one to fall off platforms.

**JESSIE.** I am absolutely not.

**MARTHA.** Women of our advanced years don't fall so easy off a platform.

**JESSIE.** I am still younger than you by eighteen months and two days, thank you kindly.

**MARTHA.** Course, they probably took them folks to the County Hospital 'stead of over to Doctor Kiplin.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect that's so.

**MARTHA.** It's a nice hospital.

**JESSIE.** Spic and span.

**MARTHA.** Reminds me of a Wal-Mart. Same look to the lighting.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect it's made of something similar.

**MARTHA.** Jessie, I'm thinkin'.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect I wish you wouldn't.

**MARTHA.** The more I think on it, the more outlandish it gets.

**JESSIE.** Well, Lord love a duck.

**MARTHA.** It should've been you up on that platform of Brother Kendall's!

**JESSIE.** I beg your pardon?

**MARTHA.** Eight foot high and fallin' right off!

**JESSIE.** Am I to understand you want me to fall off a great high platform?

**MARTHA.** Oh, only so you'd get taken in the ambulance.

**JESSIE.** Now that's clear as mud.

**MARTHA.** Jessie. If you were in the ambulance, you'd have been able to ask — very sweetly of course, and lyin' on your back in tremendous pain — "Could we possibly turn right round and instead of goin' to Washington Hospital, could we maybe go on over to that nice Doctor Kiplin's instead?"

*(JESSIE's rocker freezes.)*

**JESSIE.** Martha Mae, I don't know what you're driving at.

**MARTHA.** Well, I would explain, but then I'm not the one sweet on the town doctor.

**JESSIE.** I am not sweet on him!

**MARTHA.** You'd let Doctor Kiplin use you as a footstool six days a week and twice on Sundays.

**JESSIE.** Well, I 'spect I wouldn't.

**MARTHA.** He's not married.

**JESSIE.** I know that.

**MARTHA.** And today is Saturday.

**JESSIE.** And yesterday was Friday. So what?

**MARTHA.** I think you should mix up a batch of fresh lemonade, set it on a tray, walk on into town and up to Doctor Kiplin's big white house and you should rap on his knocker and when he opens up you should

hand him that lemonade and say, "Doctor Kiplin, I love you and you are welcome as of now to use me forever as your God-given footstool."

*(JESSIE leaps out of her rocker.)*

**JESSIE.** Martha Mae Thompson, if you can't put a decent thought in your head I shall leave this porch!

**MARTHA.** Oh, now don't do that. Come on, I didn't mean nothin' by it. Jessie. Sit down. Please.

**JESSIE.** That tent revival—you went late to bed!

**MARTHA.** 'Spect I did a little, yes.

*(JESSIE sits. They resume fanning and rocking, once again in tandem.)*

**JESSIE.** I'd appreciate it if we get back to talkin' about our more usual topics.

**MARTHA.** 'Spect you would.

**JESSIE.** I'll begin, then.

**MARTHA.** 'Spect you will.

**JESSIE.** It's hot.

**MARTHA.** It's July.

**JESSIE.** Need more gravel on the drive.

**MARTHA.** 'Spect I'll call John Tatum on that.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect you will. Martha. This is where you talk about the flagpole.

**MARTHA.** 'Spect it is.

**JESSIE.** You're being difficult.

**MARTHA.** "Oh, Jessie. Hard to believe that flagpole's still standin'."

**JESSIE.** Don't mock.

**MARTHA.** Seventy years since daddy stripped that pine, run a pulley, put it in the ground. Still standin'.

**JESSIE.** A yard needs a flagpole.

**MARTHA.** Remember when Tommy Dennis climbed that flagpole?

**JESSIE.** Like it was yesterday.

**MARTHA.** Which it wasn't.

**JESSIE.** Martha!

**MARTHA.** Tommy Dennis climbed that flagpole forty-six years ago.

**JESSIE.** Well I 'spect that's so, but you don't need to be bringing it up. What matters is, he did it to impress you.

**MARTHA.** Yes. He did.

**JESSIE.** I think you're sweet on him.

**MARTHA.** I was in love with him.

*(Once again, JESSIE's rocker slams on the brakes.)*

**JESSIE.** What?

**MARTHA.** I was head-over-heels about Tommy. I am still.

**JESSIE.** Martha!

**MARTHA.** But Lord above, I am tired of remembering him climbing that stupid flagpole.

**JESSIE.** No, you're not. You remember that once a day, right here on the porch, and you have done for forty-however-many-it-is years.

**MARTHA.** I know it. Right here on the porch.

**JESSIE.** And when it's cold or too windy, you remember him inside!

**MARTHA.** He's a boy I can remember pretty much anyplace.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect that's so.

**MARTHA.** I 'specially like rememberin' him when I'm layin' in my bed.

**JESSIE.** Martha Mae!

**MARTHA.** Jessie, listen. How many times we gone out, you and me, like we did last night?

**JESSIE.** I'm sure I don't know.

**MARTHA.** I can count 'em on my ten fingers, Jessie. And I won't even need all ten.

**JESSIE.** 'Spect not.

**MARTHA.** Jessie, remember when we saw that movie, the one with the alien that looked like a little brown potato squash?

**JESSIE.** That'd be *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* directed by Steven Spielberg and starring that nice young Lionel Barrymore.

**MARTHA.** Do you remember how you felt when you walked out of that?

JESSIE. Martha, that must've been thirty years ago.

MARTHA. I had a lot of energy walkin' out of that theater.

JESSIE. I 'spose maybe you did.

MARTHA. Energetic and happy. Like the one makes the other.

JESSIE. I sure wish we were back to talkin' about the flag pole.

MARTHA. I got the energy, Jessie. Got that E.T. energy.

JESSIE. Well, go fix the barn, then, if you're so full of juice! The poor thing's leaning like a tree on a cut-bank and Lord knows it could use a spot of paint.

*(This time, it's MARTHA's rocker that stops.)*

MARTHA. Tommy Dennis' wife been dead three years now.

JESSIE. 'Spect I don't know why you'd want to mention a thing like that.

MARTHA. Jessie, how many lemons we got in the 'fridge?

JESSIE. Enough for what you're plannin' on, I 'spect.

MARTHA. I'll still sit on the porch with you. But not every day. Not anymore. Say something.

JESSIE. Tommy Dennis might still be in mournin'.

MARTHA. 'Spect that's a possibility.

JESSIE. You don't even know if he likes lemonade.

MARTHA. He used to. Long time ago.

JESSIE. 'Spect just about everyone liked lemonade a long time ago.

*(Both rockers have stopped now. MARTHA rises.)*

MARTHA. Well. I'll be in the kitchen, then.

*(She walks away.)*

JESSIE. Martha?

MARTHA. Yes?

JESSIE. Exactly how many lemons you think we got?

*(MARTHA smiles. So does JESSIE. JESSIE rises. Lights out.)*

*End of Play*

## THE SCARY QUESTION

by Wayne S. Rawley