

UTSC Drama Society's Summer Reading Series

Episode 4: Schoolhouse by Leanna Brodie

JOANNA

Welcome to the UTSC Drama Society's Summer Reading Series. On this episode we'll be hearing an excerpt from Schoolhouse, by Leanna Brodie. Miss Linton, now in her thirties, is recounting to us the story of how she taught in a one room schoolhouse in rural Ontario. As she reflects on the students she met along the way, Ewart Rokosh is one particular student who had been transferred from a nearby training school, a type of juvenile detention centre, to work and study after he was released. This is Schoolhouse.

Act 1, Scene 3

March, 1938. FLOSSIE and BERYL are at the front of the class. MISS LINTON pulls down a map of North America and indicates the Great Lakes with her pointer. As the rest of the children are immersed in their own activities, the girls try to best each other in a fast-paced drill.

MISS MELITA LINTON

The Great Lakes from west to east?

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

(jumping in)

Uh, "Su--

BERYL BAPTIE

(cutting her off)

--"Susan Mitchell Has Eight Oranges": Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario.

MISS MELITA LINTON

The Great Lakes in order of size?

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Uh, "Sam--

BERYL BAPTIE

--"Sam's Horse Must Eat Oats": Superior, Huron, Michigan, Erie, Ontario.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Oceans of the world?

BERYL BAPTIE

"I Am A Person": Indian, Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Very good, Beryl. Flossie, you must brush up your geography if you want to get into high school. Right now, though, is your history lesson. Quick: royal houses of England?

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

(*without hesitation*)

"No Plan Like Yours To Study History Wisely": Norman, Plantagenet, Lancaster, York, Tudor, Stuart, Hanover, Windsor.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Good girl. Junior fourth: please use your book to answer these questions on the reign of Queen Victoria. Senior third: please solve the sums on the board. Effa and Milton: time for your reading. Effa, will you begin with the poem on page fifteen?

EFFA BAPTIE

(*haltingly, as BERYL feeds her the words*)

"Th-r-ee li-tt-l-e, little, k-it, kit, kittens, Lost, th-th-e-rrrr ... their ... mittens!

(*by now, EFFA is simply reading BERYL's lips*)

And they ... began ... to cry ...

BERYL

Very good, Effa.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Now, Beryl: it's wonderful that you taught your sister to read, all by yourself. But it's her job to read now, and my job to help her.

(*beat: to EFFA*)

I still find it hard to believe that in all that time at school, you never once got a lesson from your teacher.

BERYL BAPTIE

It's the truth, Miss Linton. Effa's always been too little to count for much. The last one said teachers aren't judged by the progress of the little ones. They're judged by how the Seniors do in their entrance exams.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

And how good's the Christmas concert.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Russell.

(*pointing to the stove*)

Wood.

RUSSELL goes out.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Effa: you've made really big strides in the last three months. We'll have a look at this poem together, and I'm confident you'll have mastered it by the end of the week. Milton: where did we get to last time with "The Golden Touch"?

MILTON COYTE

(*declaiming quite beautifully without reference to his reader*)

"You are wiser than you were, King Midas! ... you appear to be still capable of understanding that the commonest things, such as lie within everybody's grasp, are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and struggle after--"

MISS MELITA LINTON

--Milton: that is lovely, quite lovely. But you're missing one significant part of your reading lesson:

Beat.

Reading. It is generally aided by looking at the page.

MILTON COYTE

(*sheepishly*)

Oh. Yes, Teacher. Sorry.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(*to the audience*)

And so on and so forth, till before you knew it, my three-ring, four-ring, six-ring circus had muddled through to Easter.

Act 1, Scene 4

Jericho School, just after Easter, 1938.

BERYL BAPTIE

Matthew, Chapter 28: "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay--"

MISS MELITA LINTON

(*to the audience*)

--And that's when Mr` Yellowlees decided Vern was old enough to come to school.

An unholy sound--a sort of aria of protest--begins at a great distance and builds relentlessly as it gets closer and closer. Just at its unendurable crescendo, MR` YELLOWLEES appears on the doorstep of the classroom, carrying his screaming, squirming son, VERN` The moment VERN pauses for breath, MR YELLOWLEES holds him out to MISS LINTON by the scruff of the neck.

CALLUM YELLOWLEES

He's yours now.

Then he deposits VERN like a bucket of slops, turns on his heel, and is gone. MISS LINTON blinks at the tantrum-riddled VERN for a moment, and looks around the classroom for inspiration. Finding it, she goes over to the desk; fetches a medicinal-looking bottle; lifts VERN firmly upright; pinches his nostrils closed so that his mouth pops open; and pours a liberal quantity directly into his mouth. He shuts up immediately, aside from a bit of spluttering.

MISS MELITA LINTON

You must be Vern` Good morning, Vern` I am Miss Linton, and *that* was cod liver oil. If you do your lessons like a Christian, you will have one spoonful of it once a day. If you fuss and fight like a savage, you will have dollops of it morning, noon, and night for the rest of your miserable little life. Do we understand each other?

(*VERN nods, wide-eyed*)

Good boy.

(*to the audience*)

And that was pretty much that.

Beat.

You see, the children in a country school were kind of like the actors in the Christmas play: there were only so many roles to be had, and you were a Mary or a Joseph or a

Wise Man or a sheep. By this time, I thought I could handle them all. The trustees thought so, too, and by Arbour Day they'd already engaged me for another year. Then in September, just as school was about to begin, they told me I'd be getting a new pupil--a transfer--from the Battenville Training School for Boys.

Act 1, Scene 5

Jericho School, September 1938. First day of school. The children are huddled together. The bell is ringing.

THE CHILDREN

A training school boy!

BERYL BAPTIE

Ewart Rokosh.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Rokosh? What kind of a name is that!

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Wha'd'e get sent away for?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Prob'ly killed his parents.

DWIGHT VARNUM

My dad said--

VERN YELLOWLEES

--Russell, why are the Souches taking him in?

BERYL BAPTIE

Because the Souches are good Christian people, Vern.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Besides, their mule died.

MILTON COYTE

Mother says a training school boy killed his teacher.

Pause.

BERYL BAPTIE

That was years ago, way over in Cork County.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Happens all the time. I heard about this one boy, when the family was sleeping--

VERN starts whimpering.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Aw, Vern, don't you Worry about some old Battenville boy. If he tries anything, me an' Dwight'll--

BERYL BAPTIE

--My cousin says last year they tried him at Bonner's School. But he beat the tar out of Wendell Sharpe.

EFFA BAPTIE

Wendell Sharpe's the meanest kid in Catlow County! He weighs eight hundred pounds!

The bell stops ringing. MISS LINTON appears.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Alright, class: it's time to start our lessons. Has anyone seen our new boy?

EFFA BAPTIE

(*staring offstage*)

--SNAKE!

In a trice, EWART appears, right in front of MISS LINTON--or rather, towering over her like an overalled harbinger of doom-holding a large and wriggly snake. Children scramble away, the little ones shrieking in fear. MISS LINTON, however, holds her ground. There is a slight pause.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(valiantly struggling to appear to be calm)

You must be Ewart. Well, Ewart, aren't you a brave boy to have found this snake and taken it out of the playground for us. Now, you just carry it out back and throw it across the creek so we won't need to worry about it any longer.

(to the rest of the class)

Would everyone please say "thank you" to Ewart for being such a responsible, helpful boy and getting rid of this snake for us all?

THE CHILDREN

(reluctantly)

Thank you, Ewart.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well done, class. And on your way, Ewart, you might as well take the bucket with you and get our water for the day. Class, will you please thank Ewart for fetching our water like a good, considerate boy?

THE CHILDREN

(same business)

Thank you, Ewart.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Alright then: run along, now, Ewart. And when you come back, we'll all have a special lesson on herpetology: the study of snakes.

EWART takes the snake and goes to leave with it, then swivels back, grabs the water bucket from the classroom, and heads off.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(to the audience)

My first test in the study of Ewart--and I seemed to have passed. For the second test, I only had to wait until recess.

Act 1, Scene 6

The schoolyard, the same day at recess. On one side of the stage, RUSSELL, FLOSSIE, and DWIGHT are tossing a ball with VERN as monkey-in-the-middle. On the other, BERYL and EFFA are playing jump-rope with MILTON as ever-ender.

EFFA AND BERYL

"I'm a little Dutch girl dressed in blue.

Here are the things that I like to do:

Salute to the captain, bow to the Queen

Touch the bottom of the submarine.

I can do the tap dance, I can do the splits.

I can do the hokey pokey--"

Meanwhile, EWART comes in, holding a book under his arm. RUSSELL comes and stands directly in his way. They do a little hesitation dance. Everyone else stops what they're doing to watch. RUSSELL halts.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

We don't want you here. Battenville boy.

DWIGHT VARNUM

Jailbird.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Polak.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

So why don't you take your big ugly face and go back to jail.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Yeah. 'Cause your mother doesn't want you.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

No. 'Cause his mother's in jail, too. So go see your mother, you big ugly ape.

EWART puts the book into his pocket and takes a defensive stance. He waits. Suddenly, EFFA rockets off towards the classroom. With a war cry, RUSSELL launches himself at EWART. EWART neatly trips RUSSELL so that he goes flying into the dust hard enough to knock the wind out of him. DWIGHT and FLOSSIE, seeing that RUSSELL is down for the count, go for EWART. He puts them down, too-effortlessly and bloodlessly. MISS LINTON's whistle is heard: everyone except EWART scrambles into a line; and EFFA comes back on, followed by MISS LINTON.

MISS MELITA LINTON

What happened here?

Pause.

Have you been fighting?

Pause.

I want the truth.

Beat.

EWART ROKOSH

Yes, Miss, the truth. I was comin' back from a walk to the creek. These kids were playin' ball. The girls were doin' jump-rope. I stopped for a rest. We had a little talk.

MILTON COYTE

I'm not a girl!

BERYL BAPTIE

Hush, Milton.

MISS MELITA LINTON

And is that what really happened?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Yes, Teacher. That's what happened alright.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Cross my heart. Hope to die.

DWIGHT VARNUM

No fightin', that's for sure.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well. Ewart, I'm glad you remember that it is your Christian duty to show patience and forbearance with those who are not as big and strong as you are. And speaking of our Christian duty, I'm also glad that everyone is making Ewart feel welcome on his first day in a new school. Now: I believe recess is over.

(as they file past her into the school)

I think I have our Bible reading picked out for tomorrow. Hebrews 13:2, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares ..."

Act 1, Scene 7

Jericho School, September 1938.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Junior Fourth: come to the front, please.

RUSSELL and EWART shuffle forward.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(to the audience)

A couple of weeks later, it was time to take up Russell and Ewart's recitations. Russell, of course, chose the kind of piece that has been beloved of schoolboys for a thousand years.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

"... Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them,

Cannon in front of them

Volley'd and thundered,

Stormed at the ... Stormed at with ..."

Uh...

He is lost.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Russell, I'm sure Tennyson himself would applaud your patriotic spirit--and excellent phrasing. However, just like the Light Brigade itself, you need to make it to the end of the Charge. Please look over the poem and we'll try again.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Yes, Teacher.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Now: Ewart?

EWART shifts uncomfortably.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart, did you not prepare a recitation?

EWART ROKOSH

Yes, Miss' I was wonderin', Miss' Do I hafta say it out loud?

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well, Ewart, that is generally the point of a recitation.

The class laughs.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Quiet, everyone. Go ahead, Ewart. Please.

After another pause, he begins.

EWART ROKOSH

"What if I say I shall not wait?

What if I burst the fleshly gate

And pass, escaped, to thee? ..."

He hesitates.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Well, that's some fleshy gate he's got there. If he bursts that, it'll be one heck of a mess.

The class laughs.

MISS MELITA LINTON

CLASS! That's enough!

Go on, Ewart.

EWART ROKOSH

(*uncomfortable*)

Please, Miss, I'd rather not ...

MISS MELITA LINTON

But I'd rather you did. I would really like to hear the rest of that poem.

EWART ROKOSH

(*after a moment*)

"What if I say I shall not wait?

What if I burst the fleshy gate

And pass, escaped, to thee?

What if I file this mortal off,

See where it hurt me,--that's enough,-

And wade in liberty?

They cannot take me any more ..."

"They cannot take me any more ..."

I'm sorry, Miss. I ... I can't.

Pause.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart, that was ... that was very good, as far as it went. But you, too, must be prepared to do the whole poem next time.

EWART ROKOSH

Yes, Miss.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(to the audience)

All that day, I was haunted by Ewart's recitation. And the day came to an end.

Class dismissed!

The class heads out to the cloakroom.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart ...

EWART turns back.

MISS MELITA LINTON

That poem. It's not from your reader. It's not in our little bookshelf.

What is it?

EWART ROKOSH

It's by ... Emily Dickinson. It was in this book from ... from Battenville School.

He fishes a small bound volume from his pocket.

I still read it a lot.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Huh. Ewart, what do you think the poem is about?

EWART ROKOSH

It's about ... hurtin', I guess. Bein' ... so lonely you could ...

He trails off.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Yes.

EWART ROKOSH

Is that it, Miss? They'll be wantin' me for the chores.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Of course. No, Ewart, you go on home.

EWART leaves.

MISS MELITA LINTON

... wherever that may be.

Act 1, Scene 8

The schoolyard. The children are playing Anti-I-Over around the woodshed or outhouse. One team consists of RUSSELL, FLOSSIE, MILTON, and VERN.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

ANTI-I-OVER!

She throws the ball over the roof. Seconds later, the opposing team--BERYL, EFFA, and DWIGHT--springs a classic Anti-I-Over attack, hurtling around both sides of the building at once, and screaming like banshees all the while. BERYL, who is "it", manages to tag MILTON before the others disappear to the other side of the building.

As she is about to throw the ball over the roof, BERYL stops herself and hands it to MILTON.

BERYL BAPTIE

Go on, Milton, you throw it. Need some help?

MILTON COYTE

(looking off into the distance)

Where's Ewart?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

(offstage voice)

Hey! Get the lead out over there!

EFFA BAPTIE

C'mon, Milton. They're waiting.

MILTON COYTE

Everyone's mean to him.

BERYL BAPTIE

Nobody's mean to Ewart, Milton. We just leave him alone.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

(offstage voice)

What's going on over there? You didn't give the ball to Milton, did you?

DWIGHT VARNUM

C'mon, Milton.

MILTON COYTE

ANTI-LOVER!

He throws the ball over the roof: seconds later, RUSSELL, FLOSSIE, and VERN appear; but they are doing the casual, who's-got-that-ball variation of Anti-I-Over strategy, until RUSSELL springs the attack ... and snags MILTON. BERYL, DWIGHT, and EFFA, meanwhile, peel back around the building to safety.

BERYL BAPTIE

Aw. He got Milton. Again.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

ANTI-I-OVER!

He whips the ball over the roof ... and there is the sound of breaking glass. FLOSSIE, VERN, and RUSSELL run off in the direction of the noise. After a moment, RUSSELL runs back onstage, and the other children come and crowd around him.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Boy, you're in for it now.

MILTON reappears and goes tearing off toward the school.

VERN YELLOWLEES

Russell, that man's gonna be mad you broke his truck. We should go hide.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

I'm not scared. You go hide. Me and Dwight'll--

OFFSTAGE VOICE

WHO THREW THAT BALL?

The children look at each other.

BERYL BAPTIE

Don't worry, Russell, we'll stand by you. We'll--

EFFA BAPTIE

IT WAS RUSSELL YELLOWLEES.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Shut up, simp.

OFFSTAGE VOICE

COME HERE, RUSS.

Nobody moves.

OFFSTAGE VOICE

ALRIGHT: I'M COMING THERE. I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU.

CLINTON COCHRANE enters from upstage. He is an impressive looking figure in his twenties, with great charm and a certain natural authority, dressed in rubber boots and overalls, and carrying a dirty old ball.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Now, which one of you little hooligans is Russ?

He looks sternly at all the children in turn. EFFA manages to convey RUSSELL's whereabouts to CLINTON without getting caught.

CLINTON COCHRANE

I believe this is yours?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

I ... I ... yeah.

CLINTON COCHRANE

"Yeah"? "Yeah"?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Yeah--I mean, yes.

CLINTON COCHRANE

"Yes" what?

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Oh. Yes, sir.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Yes, sir. That is correct. Now, do you hooligans have a teacher?

MISS LINTON enters rapidly with MILTON in tow.

MISS MELITA LINTON

What seems to be the problem, sir.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Oh, nothing much. Just the two dollars I'm going to extract from Russ's hide to pay for my broken side window.

MISS MELITA LINTON

The young man does not have two dollars, but I'm sure we can work something out that will satisfy you. He did not mean to damage your truck, after all: they were only playing Anti-I-Over.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Anti-I-Over?

MISS MELITA LINTON

You must have played it. Alley-Alley-Over ... Olly-Olly-Over ... Auntie-Over-Shanty ...

CLINTON COCHRANE

I know what it is. I just don't know how it's going to fix my truck.

MISS MELITA LINTON

And I'm very sorry about that, sir ... however, you will not need to take anything out of Russell's hide. I do not allow corporal punishment in my school.

CLINTON COCHRANE

YOUR school? You mean they let a little girl like you run a school, all by yourself? Well, that explains why grown men like these are running amok in a schoolyard these days, instead of helping out with the harvest like every useful man in this country. These boys must be sweet on you.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(*to the children*)

Lunchtime is over, children. Go inside.

The children head off.

BERYL BAPTIE

Come on, everyone. It's almost time for music class. Vern, don't wipe your nose on your sleeve when I know very well you've got a hankie in your pocket.

They are gone.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Mister ...? I am sorry, I have not had the pleasure of an introduction.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Clinton Cochrane.

MISS MELITA LINTON

... And now, I have still not had the *pleasure* of an introduction. Whoever you are, you have no call to speak to me in front of the children like that. It is widely considered that I am one of the best teachers in the history of Jericho School. And no hayseed bully in his rusty jalopy has the right to come in here and sneer at that, not for five dozen side windows.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Hayseed bully?!

He takes a step or two toward MISS LINTON ... when EWART appears, replacing his book in his pocket, and stubbing out a cigarette.

EWART ROKOSH

Wouldn't go no further, if I was you.

(to MISS LINTON)

Sorry, Miss. Went down to the creek to smoke my cigarette. Out of respect.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well, I appreciate your delicacy, Ewart, but we are going to have a little talk about the effects of tobacco on hygiene. Now run along inside and get ready for your music lesson.

(EWART hesitates)

Run along.

He leaves. CLINTON looks after him in awe.

CLINTON COCHRANE

You mean to tell me THAT is your pupil?

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart is not a "that." He is a bright and sensitive boy.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Well whatever you call him, you seem to manage him pretty well. And no strap?

(shakes his head)

There's more to you than meets the eye. Not that there's anything wrong with what meets the eye. But you are a firecracker. 'Course, the Hoopers that you're boarding with, they're my second cousins, and the Hooper boys say you're too stuck-up to date the local fellows. Shame about that.

MISS MELITA LINTON

The Hooper boys--

(*realising*)

If you were driving down the road, how did Russell manage to break your ... Mister Cochrane. Were you by any chance *parked* outside this school at the time you got hit? Were you, in fact, stopping by just to have a look at the new teacher?

CLINTON COCHRANE

Oh, you're not new, Miss Linton. With the turnaround on this school, you're a grizzled veteran. Good afternoon.

He goes out.

MISS MELITA LINTON

(*after a moment*)

FINE, THEN! THAT'S FINE! ... AND YOU CAN FIX YOUR OWN BLESSED TRUCK!

Act 1, Scene 9

Jericho School, October 1938. A piano plays a wicked jazz lick, segueing into the introduction to "The Maple Leaf Forever," and a choir of children joins in. MISS LINTON listens for a moment.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ah, Boyd Lebeau. Best music teacher in Cork, Catlow, or any county at all. Best jazz musician west of Montreal, they say. Best drinker, too, unfortunately. Though of course not in front of the children. They loved him, naturally. He always said: "Melita, with

music, you can get the little ones to do almost anything for you." Of course, it didn't hurt that he could also pull out his medals and his shell casings and get them all saucer-eyed with tales of Vimy Ridge.

Boyd does a little ragtime riff

Oh, Boyd.

(to the audience)

I loved that old piano. Of course, you couldn't teach a classroom full of kids how to play the one piano, so Boyd made them all get Attaboy mouth organs, twenty-five cents a go. They sure made a splash at the school fair.

Act 1, Scene 10

Baker's Creek Fairgrounds, October 1938. To the boom-boom-boom of a drum, the whole student body of Jericho School--in drill formation--comes marching into sight. They are all adorned with a sash in the school colours. BERYL looks proud as punch as she holds the school flag. RUSSELL courts deafness with a big bass drum. All the others are playing a verse of the school song on their mouth organs. As they reach the centre, MISS LINTON blows her whistle and they begin to march on the spot, singing the school yell:

THE CHILDREN OF JERICHO

Well we don't have trumpets but we make a sound, And all the other schools come tumbling down, O Jericho, Jericho, S`S` #1! We are the best, put us to the test, Always number one--what fun!

MISS MELITA LINTON

Very good, class!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE

Attention, students. The Catlow County Parade of Schools will begin by the bleachers at eleven o'clock. That's fifteen minutes to the Parade.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Alright: that gives us time to go look at the entries for the garden competition. But you must all be back here ready to go when that big clock shows eleven: is that understood?

THE CHILDREN OF JERICHO

Yes, Miss Linton.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Good. Colonel Burnett does not brook lateness: and neither do I.

(*looking off*)

Well, speak of the devil ... CLASS! Atten-TION!

Enter COLONEL BURNETT, a small man in a large helmet, sporting full military dress, with an impressive display of medals on his chest.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Class, what do we say to the Inspector of Schools?

THE CHILDREN OF JERICHO

Good morning, Colonel Burnett.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Troops! Hands out front!

MISS MELITA LINTON

Oh, Colonel, I had just told the children they could go and look at the--

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

HANDS OUT FRONT! Can't see your company's hair and fingernails from the reviewing stand, can I? Not going to give the prize to a troop that marches well but can't clean its weapons, am I?

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well ... children, let's just take a minute then.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

(*inspecting the proffered fingernails*)

Good. Good. Good. Good.

(*he comes to EWART*)

Good Lord. What in the Sam Hill is this?

MISS MELITA LINTON

This is Ewart. He is one of my best students.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

I should say so, at his age. Young man, why are you not in uniform?

EWART ROKOSH

There isn't a war on. Sir.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Well we'll just see about that.

MISS MELITA LINTON

He's fourteen, Colonel.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Good gravy boats! Fourteen. I always said the most impressive soldiers are farmboys.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Begging your pardon, Colonel, Ewart is not really a--

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

--Oh, yes: this is your training school boy, isn't it? Sent down for farm work after you'd served your time in the brig, were you, boy? So what did you do, anyway?

EWART doesn't answer.

No matter, no matter: there's nothing like the discipline of the plough to straighten out those youthful high spirits. I'm sure the Souch farm will make a man out of you--and if not, there's always the Army, eh, boy?

EWART ROKOSH

The Army? The Army's the last thing--

MISS MELITA LINTON

--Colonel. I was wondering if you had a moment, because, I've, been reading that book on school management you left me at last year's inspection, and there's a passage on which I could use your elucidation.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Elucidation, Miss Linton! I'd be delighted.

(to the children)

COMPANY! Fall out!

They disappear gratefully to the four winds.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Now, let me just see if--I'm almost sure I brought it with me, just in case ...

She fumbles for it in her satchel, as CLINTON COCHRANE appears. This time, he is dressed in a suit, with neat hair and a clipboard.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Ah, Clinton my lad! How goes it with the field-crops of battle?

CLINTON COCHRANE

Tom, Hello. Fine, thanks. It's actually kind of embarrassing the way people treat me like a war hero just because I went away and got a piece of paper. And I don't see how it makes me qualified to judge some school kid's pumpkins.

(*seeing MISS LINTON*)

Oh. Hello.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Come on, lad. It's not every day a Baker's Creek boy gets his engineer's degree. They're proud of you.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Hello.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Say--you two already know each other? My, you college boys move fast.

MISS MELITA LINTON

I thought you were a farmer, Mr' Cochrane.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Never said I was, Miss Linton.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

Fine farming family, the Cochranes. Clinton the first one to be a suit-and-tie man, aren't you, lad?

MISS MELITA LINTON

If you gentlemen will excuse me, I should go and keep an eye on my children.

CLINTON COCHRANE

I can give you a hand, if you'd like.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Oh, no, Mr. Cochrane. I'd never ask you to do my job for me. You see, even a little girl like me can sometimes run a school all by herself. Especially when she's a grizzled veteran. Good day.

She moves off.

COLONEL TOM BURNETT

My lad, I didn't understand a word of that, but I would say that you have just been sassed.

CLINTON COCHRANE

Yes, Uncle: I have.

They leave.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE

Attention students: the Public Speaking Contest will begin at three o'clock in the big tent. That's five minutes to the Public Speaking Contest.

MISS MELITA LINTON

For those of us who taught in little country schools, the best thing about the school fair was the chance to see our fellow teachers. And after a long hot afternoon, no one could liven up your day like my Normal School chum, Evie Bothwell.

EVIE, a stylish teenager, appears with a cigarette.

EVIE BOTHWELL

Hide me.

MISS MELITA LINTON

EVIE! There are people everywhere!

EVIE BOTHWELL

That's the point of saying "hide me."

MISS MELITA LINTON

I can't believe you kept up that filthy habit. What a poor example for the children.

EVIE BOTHWELL

Knock it off, Lita. I was your roommate, see. You may come over all holy in the daylight, but you fart in your sleep like the rest of us.

MISS MELITA LINTON

I'm going to smell like smoke.

EVIE BOTHWELL

Then stay upwind.

(*she smokes*)

It's either this or my flask. It'll soon be time to gather up the little bastards, and I'm not doing that without a wee pick-me-up.

MISS MELITA LINTON

You don't sound very grateful to have a job at a time like this.

EVIE BOTHWELL

Oh, save it, sister. I work like a mutt for these ungrateful kids, and I make less than spit for it. I go months without seeing the inside of a picture-show. I don't see anyone except snot-nosed brats, scowling parents, prying landlords--and the whole gang of them smells like cow. Honestly, doesn't it ever make you want to ... kick over the traces a little?

MISS MELITA LINTON

That's the difference between you and me, Evie. I don't notice the traces.

EVIE smokes in silence for a moment.

EVIE BOTHWELL

So I heard you just got stuck with a training school boy. Hard luck. What'd he do, anyway? Knife his mother? Or maybe he was a rum-runner!

MISS MELITA LINTON

I don't know.

EVIE BOTHWELL

You don't know? How can you not know?

MISS MELITA LINTON

Oh, come on, Evie, he didn't murder his mother. You know very well they only put the good ones on the farms, the ones that deserve a chance, because ... well, because some people, unlike you, think that country life builds character. Anyway, I don't want to look at him every day and see--whatever he did. I just want to see a boy and teach him.

...And he's a little young to have been a rum-runner.

EVIE BOTHWELL

Okay: live in ignorance, then. But you do think about it, all the same. I know you. Oh, well. You just watch out for him, anyway. They've got an anger in them, those kids, and if they didn't have it when they went to training school, they sure have it after. You know what everyone says about those places, don't you?

(a stage whisper)

Don't drop your soap in the showers.

She laughs. MISS LINTON looks bewildered.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Why ever not?

EVIE BOTHWELL

Oh, Lita. You really are a country girl! Look at that: four o'clock. Time to round up my little buggers. Those stupid green sashes should help. See you, Melita.

MISS MELITA LINTON

See you, Evie.

... And she is gone.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE

Attention students: it is now four o'clock. Please retrieve your exhibits and meet your teachers for your ride home. Would Beryl Baptie and Lorne Howson please report to the big tent.

Meanwhile, the children troop in, carrying their various exhibits: DWIGHT has a dairy calf, and a handmade milk stool; RUSSELL has a barley sheaf and mangels; they have various ribbons between them. RUSSELL is counting his prize money.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Forty-two ... forty-five ... fifty. Hey, Teacher! I won fifty cents for my barley sheaf and mangels!

MISS MELITA LINTON

Good for you, Russell.

DWIGHT VARNUM

Hey, Russell. Give you two cents if my calf can eat your mangels.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

... That's fifty-two cents! Holy jumpin', I wish I'd gotten into this racket sooner. I would've had a BB gun by now.

They gather round MISS LINTON and begin to show her their winnings. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the stage, MILTON comes in purposefully, with a tall, lovely

flowering plant; a beautiful new book tied in a ribbon; and FLOSSIE and EFFA buzzing around him.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Aw, come on, Milton.

EFFA BAPTIE

Please, Milton.

MILTON COYTE

No. I am not going to share my prize book with you, and do you know why? When Teacher gave out the flower seeds for the school fair, you two picked zinnias and asters, just like everyone else. Asters and zinnias, zinnias and asters. I was the only one who picked salpiglossis, and you all made fun. All I ever heard was, "Salpiglossis, salpiglossis, Milton with his salpiglossis. Hey, Milton got his tonsils out: he has salpiglossis!" Well, comes the school fair, and guess what? Your zinnias and asters are up against umpteen dozen from all around the township, and they're all better than yours because you never did fertilise the roots, did you?

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Lookit, brown-nose, we got better things to--

MILTON COYTE

--And meanwhile I have the nicest salpiglossis in Catlow County, and I have a brand-new Gene Stratton-Porter book, and you have goose eggs and raspberry.

... And he blows one at them.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

Aw, Milton, your mother's got all kinds of books. We never get nothin' new to read. I read every book in that darn bookcase twice already, and Gene Stratton-Porter is my favourite.

EFFA BAPTIE

Pretty-please with sugar on top, Milton. Miss Linton says you're supposed to share.

MILTON COYTE

Oh yeah? What about when I had the mumps and I begged someone to water my salpiglossis and nobody would?

Pause.

Well, remember what the Little Red Hen said? "You would not help me sow the grain. You would not help me water the grain. You would not help me reap the grain. So I will eat it myself." Now leave me alone.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Flossie! Effa! Milton! Come and gather round! Mr` Yellowlees is going to be coming any minute, and we don't want to keep him waiting!

EWART comes in empty-handed.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart! Where's your drawing?

EWART ROKOSH

Oh, I didn't bother about that, Miss`

MISS MELITA LINTON

Well, go and get it--hurry. Our ride will be here.

EWART ROKOSH

It's alright, Miss. I'm not much of a drawer. I only did it 'cause I didn't have time to grow nothin' or build nothin'. I didn't win a prize, anyway.

MISS MELITA LINTON

The point is, Ewart, you did your best. That's what this fair is about, class. It's not about the winning and losing, it's about the--

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

--Holy Queen of Sheba.

... And BERYL comes in. She is a sight to behold, arms full of ribbons, trundling a little wagon full of her entries in every conceivable class. She is carrying a book tied up in a ribbon like MILTON's, and a large silver cup. VERN is helping her.

BERYL BAPTIE

Sorry I'm late.

The children crowd around to inspect her haul.

FLOSSIE NEEDLER

I wish they didn't have classes that are just for boys. It's no fair. I could make a better milking stool than Dwight.

RUSSELL YELLOWLEES

Why--because you're such a cow?

FLOSSIE goes for RUSSELL. MISS LINTON intervenes.

MISS MELITA LINTON

CLASS! I am certain we are all proud of Beryl's accomplishments--

A farm truck is heard honking.

RUSSELL AND VERN

There's Dad!

MISS MELITA LINTON

Off we go, children.

They are already heading out toward the truck, EWART lagging behind.

MISS MELITA LINTON

Ewart, I want to put up your drawing at the front of the class this month. I think it's beautiful. So run along and get it, Ewart. Go.

EWART ROKOSH

(*his face brightening*)

Yes, Miss`

MISS LINTON follows the children toward the truck, and EWART runs back to the fair.

Outro

JOANNA

Thank you for tuning in for this episode of UTSC Drama Society's Summer Reading Series. Thank you again to all our amazing readers and don't forget to check out our instagram to vote on which show you'd like to see us produce for the beginning of the season. Catch ya next time.