

NITHE NICOLE

## LEGEND OF SARAH

### PROLOGUE

**THE SCENE:** The small bedroom of a two-room Greenwich Village apartment in a converted brownstone. Upstage R. an archway opens into a small foyer, in the foyer a door leads to an outside hall. Upstage C. is a studio couch with a red corduroy cover and pillows, above the couch is a hanging bookcase in which there are books, magazines, a lamp, a small radio and a lighted candle in a saucer. Upstage L. a window looks out on to a neighboring roof and fire-escape, through the window the glow of a neon sign flickers on and off. Downstage L. is a battered bureau on which there is another lighted candle. This third point of light helps shed sufficient illumination to indicate that the apartment is far from elegant, and at the moment in a state of hectic disarray. The studio couch is littered with clothes, the bureau drawers are all open and overflowing.

**AT RISE:** MINERVA PINNEY is angrily and hurriedly packing a suitcase which lies open on the floor. MINERVA is twenty-six, slender, attractive, half-packed, she also is only half-dressed in blouse, shoes, and gay panties. ADAM HARWICK enters from the hall and stands watching her. ADAM is somewhat older than MINERVA, perhaps thirty-five, and not in the least handsome, fortunately. He has a bottle of beer in one hand, a pickle in the other, he puts them on the shelf above the bed.

ADAM. What in God's name do you think you're doing?

MINERVA. I'm packing! Don't you have any eyes in your head? I'm packing!

ADAM. (*Crosses to her, takes skirt from her.*) Well, you can stop packing! Stop it right now!

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MINERVA. (*Crosses R. to bed for more clothes, giving ADAM a rude push.*) Out of my way! (*ADAM throws skirt U. L.*) ADAM. (*Crosses U. to window.*) You're being ridiculous! It's late, and hotels are expensive.

MINERVA. (*Folding dressing gown.*) I'm not going to a hotel. I'm going home.

ADAM. Good grief! Home to mother! Minerva Pinney returns to mama and the ancestral homestead! (*MINERVA crosses L. with pajamas, puts them in suitcase.*) You disappoint me, darling. This started off as a good honest row—but now you're being commonplace.

MINERVA. (*Kneeling above suitcase.*) I'm not your darling and I never want to see you again and please go in the other room! (*She starts to cry.*)

ADAM. (*Crosses R. to R. chair.*) And don't ~~be the name of~~ heaven, don't cry! ~~Tears will go on nowhere. You merely look~~ ~~pretty~~

MINERVA. (*Ceasing momentarily to pack, tremulously.*) Adam, why didn't you pay the light bill? I gave you the money.

ADAM. How many times do I have to tell you? I forgot! I completely forgot!

MINERVA. But you spent the money.

ADAM. Of course I spent the money. If I find ten dollars in my pocket and I need books, I buy the books. What's wrong with that? Besides, I can take them off my income tax. (*MINERVA rises, starts R. to dresser.*)

MINERVA. (*Stops. Sarcastically.*) What income? You can't even get an advance from your publisher any more. They printed three thousand copies of your last book, and two thousand are being remaindered in the drug stores.

ADAM. Don't be a snob. I write for the people; and where do you find the people? In the drug stores.

MINERVA. (*Crosses R. to C. of bed for more clothes.*) Adam Harwick, the great historian. "A lipstick, a tube of toothpaste, and a forty-nine-cent biography of Aaron Burr. Will there be anything else, Madame?" (*Crosses L. to R. of suitcase, bends over.*)

ADAM. (*With deceptive calm.*) I should cut you up and put you into that suitcase, limb by limb. (*Deliberately puts his foot against her rear and pushes, sending her L. to dresser. She immediately starts taking things from drawer and putting them in suit*

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case.) But I won't. I'll give you another chance. When I have finished my new book, perhaps you'll have the grace to revise your superficial opinion of my work. (Crosses, gets beer and pickle.)

MINERVA. Sorry, Adam. I'm not waiting for the new book. (Crosses toward end of bed.) Which, at the rate you've been working, will be finished about 1973. (Suddenly she gasps.) Cockroach! (And she points. There is a momentary truce as she grabs the lighted candle from dresser and he goes after the cockroach with his foot.)

ADAM. I got him! (He sits on bed. She puts candle back, gets Kleenex from drawer, crosses, picks up cockroach, puts it in waste-basket.)

MINERVA. (Shuddering.) I've had enough. I'm sick of New York, I'm sick of this apartment, and I think I'm beginning to be sick of you.

ADAM. Now, Minnie —

MINERVA. On second thought, I know I'm sick of you. And if you can bear to hear the absolute truth, I'm tired of supporting you.

ADAM. (Rise, crossing R.) Sure you've supported me! Why not? If I had money, and you didn't have any, I'd support you. And I don't think I'd be so ill-mannered as to whine about it. (Crosses L. to C. of bed.)

MINERVA. (Crosses R. to him.) Whine? I've never whined!!

ADAM. (Very quietly.) Minnie, stop shouting!

MINERVA. And I'm not shouting!

ADAM. I'd hate to think that vulgar tone you're now using is your natural voice. (She slaps him across the face. The beer bottle flies out of his hand on to bed, and he grabs her hair. She starts L. but is jerked back. She tries to free her hair. ADAM bellows.) You struck me! Remember that—you struck me! (Looking heavenward.) Shall I strike her back? (Threatens to strike her with pickle.) No, never! Obviously I must try to reason with her. . . . Now, Minnie, my dear — (She kicks his shin.) Ouch! (ADAM sits on bed.)

MINERVA. (Crosses L., adjusting panties.) Right now, I want some peace and some quiet. Some tranquility. A little order in my life, pray God. (Gets shoes from under dresser.)

ADAM. Do you think in Pinneyfield you'll find all that?

MINERVA. (Sits on chair by window, puts shoes on.) In Pinneyfield people behave like human beings. They get married, and

have children, and go to church on Sundays. And live in clean houses.

ADAM. Yes, I know, and pay their bills. . . . But that's not really why you want to go home. Why don't you come right out with it? Your pride is hurt. You got fired from your job last week and you can't take it. You're ~~driven~~

MINERVA. (Looks at wrist-watch.) There's a train at nine-thirty. (Puts ballet slippers in suitcase.) I'll just make it. (Crosses to dresser.)

ADAM. I'm surprised at you, Minnie. I thought you had guts. What happened to that girl who was going to set the publishing business on its ear? Who was going to discover tomorrow's Walt Whitman, tomorrow's Mark Twain?

MINERVA. (Crosses to suitcase.) I'm taking the toe-nail scissors.

ADAM. Sure, let's say you can recognize talent and your boss can't. But did you *have* to call him a "spineless nincompoop"? Was that exactly diplomatic?

MINERVA. (Turning from her packing.) But I was right! You know damn well I was right!

ADAM. (Hits pickle on edge of drawer, throws rest over his shoulder.) How childish! Even you should know that when you're right is when the boss hates you most. It gives him an inferiority complex. He has to fire you.

MINERVA. But he was paying me to tell him the truth! (MINERVA crosses R., gets coat from chair, looks for clothesbrush, finds it by bed, brushes coat.)

ADAM. (Smiling indulgently.) Ah, the truth! Haven't you learned by now that nobody wants to be told the truth unless he's already discovered it for himself? . . . And anyway, you've got to abandon this superior attitude. Can't you realize that neither I, nor your boss, nor anybody else in New York gives a hoot in hell that you're the direct descendant of Sarah Pinney? (Crosses to bed.) Nevertheless, you're my girl, Minnie, and I love you. (Taking a handful of things out of her suitcase, puts them on bed.) Now let's unpack your things—very calmly —

MINERVA. Put those things back! (Throws coat and brush on floor, crosses L., takes things from him.)

ADAM. —then we'll go out and have dinner —

MINERVA. (Throws clothes back into suitcase. Lifts mattress, gets skirt from under it.) You know my address. I don't care to hear

from you, but if there's any mail, I'd appreciate your forwarding it.

ADAM. —I think we'll have a couple of drinks before dinner—and after dinner we'll come back here and —

MINERVA. (Putting on skirt.) And then you'll make love to me and everything will be just dandy. No, thanks. Definitely no, thanks. (He unzips her skirt, it falls.)

ADAM. (Trying to put his arms around her.) Ah, baby —

MINERVA. Stay away! . . . (Picks up skirt, zips it.) Good Lord, the sublime ego of the male who thinks he can cure any woman's unhappiness by going to bed with her. (She picks up coat, crosses L. to window, dusts it by hand.)

ADAM. (Looking at her thoughtfully.) An idea occurs to me. Suppose we get married?

MINERVA. Married!? (Throws coat on floor.)

ADAM. (Crosses R.) Of course, it wasn't part of our bargain— (MINERVA crosses L. to dresser.) but I'm perfectly willing—if it would bring into your life any of that tranquility—that serenity — (MINERVA, furious, picks up a book.)

MINERVA. Get out of here! I'm warning you, get out of here!

ADAM. Get out of here? I thought you were going!

MINERVA. I am!

ADAM. (Dodging.) And you'll come back! (She throws book.) You can't live without me! You'll come back!

MINERVA. (Gets pocket books from drawer.) Not if I live to be eighty and die a spinster! (She throws.)

ADAM. (He is ducking the flying objects.) Oh, yes, you will! You love me!

MINERVA. Don't I though! I love you! (Throws hat.) I love you! (Throws cup.) I love you! (Throws sugar.)

CURTAIN