

Betsy Green, The Mushroom Queen

A melodrama

By Greg Palmer

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Sweet and spunky Betsy Green takes care of her sister Gertrude as they eke out a living hunting mushrooms in the forests of the Northwest. It isn't easy, especially since Gertrude lost her vision in the terrible fireworks explosion which killed their parents in Hong Kong years earlier. Since that time, a mad scientist, apparently under the spell of a mysterious Oriental cult, has been trying to kidnap Gertrude.

When Betsy is momentarily distracted talking with Maurice, a handsome fruit vendor, Gertrude disappears! The lost Gertrude rings a bell to indicate her whereabouts but the sound energizes the mad scientist who is under its spell. He and his sidekick capture the sisters and proceed to brainwash Betsy into becoming a real estate agent. The villain hopes to "condo-ize" the green forests as he has already done in California. ("It's not for nothing I am known as the Father of modern Encino!")

Will Betsy be able to fight her brainwashing? Will Gertrude be able to untie the captured Maurice to help save them all? And why do the Irish and Norwegian policemen, who claim to be twin brothers, look so much like Fong, a life-sized mysterious statue?

This very loose adaptation of the melodrama classic "Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl" is a hilarious hoot-a-minute! Commissioned by the Snoqualmie Falls Forest Theatre in 1989.

About 50 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4-6 m, 2 w.)

***AN IRISH POLICEMAN:** A chip off the old sod.

BETSY GREEN: Sweet and spunky.

GERTRUDE GREEN: Her name means “mighty spear maiden.”

MAURICE BENTLEY: One of those “lots of potential” guys.

ELMO MUCKLESTONE, M.D., Ph.D.: He knows the meaning of the word despicable.

GORN: Your little brother’s best friend.

***A NORWEGIAN POLICEMAN:** The twin brother of the Irish policeman. The rock of the force – in every way.

***FONG:** The rest is silence.

**(These roles may be played by one actor.)*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in, near, and under a quaint but cheerful Cascade mountain logging town in the late 1800s.

Scene 1: A city park by the river.

Scene 2: A secret underground laboratory in the forest primeval. A cave-like room full of strange mechanical devices, including a huge, silver, very old-fashioned hair dryer.

Scene 3: The Underground Harbor, a cave-like underground cavern, with a dock and jetty leading to an unseen river flowing through.

Scene 4: The park by the river.

Scene 5: Before curtain. On the way to the Temple.

Scene 6: The Temple of Fong.

Scene 1

(A quaint but cheerful Cascade mountain logging town - A city park by the river. ELMO is discovered sitting on a park bench, facing the audience. He is reading a newspaper, and though he turns a page occasionally, we don't see his face until indicated. He is obviously well dressed, complete with top hat, spats, etc. A COP enters, strolling his beat, ignoring Elmo, as does everyone who follows. The Cop is very Irish.)

COP: *(Singing.)*

“When Irish eyes are smiling,
Sure and tis a lovely day,
And the lilt of Irish laughter ...”

(COP discovers audience, stares at them a moment.)

COP: *(Cont'd.)* Well, if ‘tishn’t a crowd gathered! And a fine-looking bunch you are, too. Just like all the boys over to Clancy’s t’other night for the Spittoon Tossing Contest. Were any of you there then? No? You missed a grand event. So what brings you out on this fine Sunday morning in our quaint but cheerful Cascade mountain logging town, I’d like to know? *(Aside.)* It’s sentences like that saves us thousands in painted scenery, saints be praised.

(BETSY and GERTRUDE enter. Betsy carries a picnic basket, leading Gertrude by the hand. They are both dressed in the best clothes they have, which aren’t much; Betsy in bright colors, Gertrude dark, almost funereal. COP sees them, then turns back to speak to audience.)

COP: *(Cont'd.)* Well, if it isn’t the O’Halloran sisters! Faith and Begorra! *(Calling out to them.)* Top o’the mornin’, Faith! And hello to you, Begorra!

BETSY: I beg your pardon, Officer?

COP: Aren’t you Faith O’Halloran and her sister Begorra, who live in the big mansion up on the hill now?

BETSY: No, we're Betsy Green and her sister Gertrude, who live in the little shack down by the railroad tracks now.

COP: Ah, my mistake then, and beggin' your pardon.

BETSY: Now now, that's all right.

GERTRUDE: *(Not looking at him; not even close.)* You mean you actually KNOW someone named Begorra O'Halloran?

COP: *(Moving around in front of her.)* Begorra Bridget O'Halloran, and a fine daughter of the old sod she is, too.

GERTRUDE: *(Turning so she's not talking to him again.)* Hah! I'll bet she is. A potato in every pocket.

BETSY: Gertrude, please! Forgive my sister, Officer. She was blinded in a tragic accident many years ago, and I'm afraid misfortune has obliterated her once generous spirit.

COP: I noticed she was having a wee problem with eye contact.

GERTRUDE: Let's dust this flatfoot and get on with it.

COP: I see. And she doesn't. And where might you ladies be goin' today?

GERTRUDE: What's it to ya, screw?

BETSY: This is our first day off from mushroom hunting in ten years, and to celebrate, we're going on a picnic! See!

(BETSY holds her basket out for the COP to look into. He does, and recoils immediately, crossing himself.)

COP: Mother of Mercy! What might they be?

BETSY: They're mushrooms! The elusive chantourelle! Gertrude and I find them in the forest. The good ones are shipped to far-off Germany by the big mushroom combine for which we work. But they allow us to keep these for our personal consumption. Mostly the ones were not sure about.

COP: You mean you EAT them?

GERTRUDE: *(Smiling vilely.)* Suuurre! Have a mouthful!

COP: Not just now, lass.

GERTRUDE: C'mon. What have you got to lose?

COP: I...I just had breakfast.

GERTRUDE: Well, that's what you've got to lose.

COP: *(To Betsy.)* Ah, she must be a great burden to you.

BETSY: Sometimes. But there are many who have a worse lot in life.

GERTRUDE: Name five.

BETSY: And she helps wherever she can. Like many vision-challenged people, Gertrude's other senses are extremely keen. Especially smell. So she sniffs out the mushrooms, and I pick them. Gertrude has one of the best noses for fungi in the Western United States.

COP: Don't the Frenchies do something like that with truffles? Only it's not people they use to sniff out the little devils, as I recall, it's

GERTRUDE: Don't say it, Copper. Don't even think it.

COP: Yes, well, I must be about my rounds. Farewell, lassies.

(COP doffs his hat and exits, as BETSY waves after him.)

BETSY: Goodbye, Officer. *(Turning to Gertrude.)* Now, dear sister, I've got a surprise for you!

GERTRUDE: Let me guess. You've been lying to me all these years, and YOU'RE the ugly one!

BETSY: Alas, no.

GERTRUDE: Great.

BETSY: The surprise is, I've been scrimping and saving and we have fourteen cents extra to spend on our picnic!

GERTRUDE: Boy, you're lucky this is the late 1800s when money goes a lot farther.

BETSY: So let's buy some fresh fruit to eat on our picnic!

MAURICE: *(Offstage.)* FRESH FRUIT! GET YOUR FRESH FRUIT!

BETSY: *(Looking in his direction.)* Well, speak of the mongerer!

(MAURICE, looking like ten miles of good road, enters, pushing his fruit cart. GERTRUDE stands in front of BETSY, blocking her from Maurice's view. During his spiel, Maurice wheels his cart up to Gertrude.)

End of Freeview

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