

SIDES: YOUNG RUBY/MILLIE

RUBY (*female/7-11 years old*) A spirited girl, appointed leader of the apartment building victory garden. She grows anxious as she realizes disease has struck her vegetables, the war may not be won after all, and her father may never return home.

MILLIE (*female/late teens-early 20s*) Jaded by the losses she has experienced during the war, and the increase of her responsibilities taking care of the household. At the same time, relishing in the world of dancing, boys, being young and alive. She may be annoyed with her little sister at times, but also protects and comforts her.

Summer of 1943, on an apartment building rooftop. Night time. There are crates of dirt with vegetables, small fruits and herbs growing. RUBY, a girl of about 9 years old, tends to the garden. MILLIE, Ruby's older sister, has been looking for her and finally found her on the rooftop.

RUBY

You shouldn't yell around the vegetables.

MILLIE

You shouldn't be up here with the vegetables at this hour!

RUBY

They don't like loud voices.

MILLIE

They're not alive, Ruby.

RUBY

They are alive! Don't you understand Science?

MILLIE

You get my drift. They don't have feelings.

RUBY

Papa wrote me that you have to talk to them every night. Treat them nice. Or they won't grow.

MILLIE

Well, Papa wrote me you should go to bed when it gets dark.

RUBY

He did not!

MILLIE

Look, you've talked to them enough. I have to get up early for work tomorrow and can't have circles under my eyes on your account!

(grabs Ruby's arm)

RUBY

Don't pull me!

MILLIE

Then stop fighting me!

RUBY

If you make me drop my cucumber before Papa sees it, I'll hate you forever!

MILLIE

So dramatic, Ruby. You're the next Bette Davis.

RUBY

Go without me! I can come back on my own! I know how to go down the stairs.

MILLIE

I'm not leaving you on the rooftop! It's late! Mama would—

RUBY

Mama is still awake.

MILLIE

Mama is working. That's different.

(MILLIE pulls her. RUBY still holds the cucumber plant in the pot.)

RUBY

Well, I'm working too! Giving the plants company helps them breathe! Papa said so! Didn't you read his letter today? "I'm sure you have the best Victory Garden in all of the United States of America, my Ruby!" he wrote to me. Didn't you read?

MILLIE

I read it.

RUBY

Papa said my garden is feeding us in the city, so we can save the rest of the food to send to the soldiers!

MILLIE

(stops pulling her)

It is a good thing you're doing, with the garden, but—

RUBY

So how are the soldiers gonna have enough food to give them strength if my plants all wilt because I don't talk to them tonight? And how are the soldiers gonna set Papa free if they don't have their strength?

MILLIE

Ruby...

RUBY

This is my job. I'm gonna do this every night now. I gotta help with the war.

(she shakes Millie's grip off her arm)

Until Papa comes back.

(she takes a step backwards away from Millie and stares her down)

MILLIE

Five more minutes. Then to bed.

(MILLIE takes off her gloves and leans a bit against a crate. RUBY beams and dashes to a crate.)

RUBY

I'll be quick!

(gently touches some growth in the crate)

Swell job, little lettuce! Really swell! Papa's gonna eat you up when he comes back! Oh—maybe I shouldn't have said that! Pretend I didn't say that. Swell job anyway, Lettuce!

(walks to next crate)

And such brave carrots! Yes, you're brave! Brave!

(walks to next crate)

Oh, this one! This is—you'll never believe it, Millie. But this is—can you believe we're growing watermelon in White Plains? I told Margaret that—she's in 44-C. You know her?

MILLIE

I know her mother.

RUBY

She's just a little kid. Maybe five or six. She's so sick of that spinach her mother buys. Her mother doesn't wash it right, even though if she listened to Mrs. Gannon on the radio, she'd know how! But Margaret says they don't have a radio, so there's sand in the spinach every time. I told her just imagine she's on vacation at Coney Island, but she's never been there, so she doesn't know rides like that. So then I said, well, pretend you're at Playland but can you believe it, she's never been to Rye! So then I finally said, well, can you just play like you're a prisoner of war over in Germany, and maybe you have to eat food that's been sitting in the dirt for a while?

MILLIE

That's a horrid thing to say, Ruby.

RUBY

Well, she liked that idea an awful lot. And when I saw her skipping rope tonight, she said she played that for dinner, and it made the spinach taste a whole lot more exciting.

MILLIE

Do you know her father, like Papa, is a prisoner of war too?

RUBY

(shrugs)

Got her to eat it, didn't I?