

Escape by Stagecoach, A Hidden Villa Story/ Reader's Theater
Adapted from a story by Josephine Duveneck

Time:	Sometime during the 1850's
Characters:	
Josephine:	Josephine Duveneck
Mr. O'Connor:	Ira O'Connor, land owner
Margaret:	Margaret O'Connor, his daughter
Tim:	Stagecoach driver
Jane:	Guesthouse hostess at Hidden Villa
Dr. Bruce:	Passenger in stagecoach
(Mrs. Bruce)	Passenger in stagecoach
Narrator 1 & 2	

Scene 1: Introduction by Josephine Duveneck. Time 1935

Josephine: An old man whom I met in the 1930's told me to look for evidence of a now vanished road in one of the Hidden Villa canyons. Exploring the direction he indicated, I actually found traces of a thoroughfare grown over with weeds and brush but showing unmistakable signs of long ago travel. When I saw him again, I asked him where the road went. He said it was the old stage road to the coast that ran for a short period from San Jose to Pescadero and that folks stopped overnight at the white ranch house. He said that the wooden barn was built to take care of the horses.

None of the county records mentioned this route, but since he was the oldest inhabitant in the area and since the evidence of the old road confirmed his story, I accept it. Old timers sometimes have longer and more detailed memories than history books.

Today when you make a trip to Pescadero from San Jose you will reach your destination in a little more than two hours. A hundred years ago you would have spent two days covering the same distance.

According to our modern standards, travel by stagecoach was indeed slow, but a team of horses, pulling a heavy load could not make more than twenty miles a day. By the end of the day the passengers were as exhausted as the horses. Jolting over rough roads that were sticky with mud in the winter and choking with brown dust in the summer was no rocking-chair experience. Like the horses, the people looked forward eagerly to food and drink and a long sleep for their tired muscles.

Josephine: My friend told me the following story of Margaret O'Connor who eloped by way of this stagecoach route.

Scene 2: Margaret O'Connor's problem

Narrator 1: Margaret was the only daughter of one of the early Irish families who migrated to California by covered wagon even before gold was discovered in 1848. Her father, Ira O' Conner, was a hard worker and a good businessman. Land was cheap and the cattle business was profitable, providing fresh meat for the local markets and hides for eastern markets. Before many years passed, Ira O'Conner acquired a sizeable ranch and built an impressive home. Soon after they moved into the new house his wife died, leaving him the responsibility of bringing up their only child.

Narrator 2: Ira had many plans for his daughter. He sent her to Notre Dame College in San Jose to study religion. He hoped that when she graduated she would marry Michael Murphy, the oldest son of his neighbor. It was Mr. O'Connor's dream that the two large ranches should be welded together by the marriage of Margaret and Michael. One day he talked to his daughter about Michael.

Mr. O'Connor: A likely lad, that Michael Murphy, and he has a good head on his shoulder. Maybe you could be interested in him, do you think, Margaret?

Margaret: Oh no, not Michael. All he can talk about is cows. No. I could never be interested in him!

Mr. O'Connor: Well, we'll see. I think it would be a good marriage for you.

Narrator 1: Her father dropped the subject, but she knew from the set of his jaw that he would not abandon the idea. She knew that he was used to having his own way. Mr. O'Connor also knew that his daughter was a strong-willed young woman. What he did not know, however, was that she already had fallen in love with a young cowboy named Luis Castro.

Scene 3: Margaret's Plan

Narrator 2: Sensing danger ahead, Margaret managed to send a letter to Luis, letting him know her father's intentions and her fears that she would have to marry Michael. After Mr. O'Connor had retired to bed the next night and was safely snoring, Margaret crept quietly out of the house and met Luis. They agreed to get married in Pescadero as soon as Margaret could arrange to meet him there.

Narrator 1: Luis had been told to pick up bundles of cowhides in Pescadero the following Friday and take them to San Francisco by boat. If Margaret could catch the stagecoach from San Jose and meet him on the dock in Pescadero, they would continue the journey together by boat to Sacramento where his uncle lived. Her main worry was getting to the stage office in downtown San Jose.

Narrator 2: On Thursday of that same week, she told her father that she planned to visit the Sisters at Notre Dame College.

Margaret: Father, today I'm going to bring the Sisters at Notre Dame College an altar cloth I have made. I am sure that they will be most pleased with it.

Mr. O'Connor: They certainly will like it. You have truly made a beautiful cloth for them.

Narrator 2: Her father was pleased with her good works and watched her leave with a cloth bag, little suspecting the real reason of her departure.

Scene 4: Margaret Runs Away

Narrator 1: Late that same afternoon when the stagecoach from San Jose pulled up outside the guesthouse at Hidden Villa, three passengers emerged: Dr. Bruce and his wife on their way to the coast for a few days vacation and a young woman in a white dress covered by a long, gray coat, traveling alone. It was Margaret O'Connor. Jane, the hostess of the guesthouse, came out to welcome her guests. Tim, the stage driver, called her over to speak with him.

Tim: Believe it or not, Jane, but that young woman over there who came with me is Margaret O'Connor, the daughter of Ira O'Connor, the big rancher in San Jose. She told the couple traveling with us that she's running away from home because her pa wants to marry her to a lad whose father owns a big ranch next to O'Connor. The old man wants to put his land together with the Murphy's by fixing up this marriage between the two kids.

Jane: What's so bad about that?

Tim: Well, trouble is she don't want to have nothing to do with the young fellow. She's got a young Mexican vaquero waiting for her in Pescadero.

Jane: What's she planning to do when she gets to Pescadero?

Tim: She plans to marry this vaquero and go off to San Francisco before her father catches up with them. By rights I ought to take her back to her dad. Dr. Bruce says I'm unreasonable and young love should be encouraged. What do you think?

Jane: Do you think there's a chance her father would guess where she's gone?

Tim: I don't think so.

Narrator 2: Dr. Bruce walked over to join them and heard the question.

Dr. Bruce: Yes, there is a chance. She's scared to death someone might have seen her going to the stage depot and reported it to her father. If he should come, is there any place where we could hide her? I'd hate to see her dragged back home.

Jane: Not in the house, none of the doors have locks. They all open out on the porch. He could poke through every one.

Tim: Maybe in the barn.

Dr. Bruce: He'd be sure to comb that over, too. Let's call Margaret over here and see if she has any ideas. Margaret, come over here. Where could we hide you if your pa comes?

Margaret: (Walks over from the stagecoach) How about the cellar?

Jane: Couple of rattlesnakes living down there. I wouldn't recommend it.

Dr. Bruce: How about the woods? (pointing over toward the path leading to the woods.)

Margaret: Oh, I'd be frightened there. They say there are grizzlies around here.

Tim: Sure are, but they wouldn't bother you. (He places a finger on his lips.) Listen! I think I hear hoof beats.

Narrator 1: In the distance they could all hear the hoof beats of a horse trotting at a fast pace coming up from the gate a half-mile away. Tim did not waste any time.

Tim: Jane, Doctor! Hurry into the house. Pretend you're making supper. Margaret, take off that gray cloak, give it to Mrs. Bruce to drop behind the sofa. Come with me, Margaret. Quick!

Margaret: Oh, no! He can't find me here!

Narrator 2: As the others disappeared into the house, Tim grasped Margaret by the hand and pulled her into a stall in the barn where old Clara was munching her oats.

Tim: Stand close to Clara. She won't hurt you. (He pushes her under the mare's nose close against the horse's chest.) Stay there and don't move till I come after you.

Scene 5: Ira O'Connor Arrives at Hidden Villa

Narrator 1: Tim hurried out to the open part of the barn and started sweeping out the floor of the stagecoach. Soon he heard a loud "whoa" and out of the corner of his eye he saw a black buggy pull up behind the stage. He walked over to the horse who was breathing hard and whose sides were covered with lather. As the driver jumped out of his seat, Tim recognized Ira O'Connor.

Tim: You seem to be in an awful hurry.

Mr. O'Connor: I'll say I'm in a hurry. I want my daughter!

Tim: Your daughter? You mean Miss Margaret?

Mr. O'Connor: Sure I mean Margaret. Now, boy, you lead me to where she is. Quick, Pronto! (Shakes his fist at Tim.)

Tim: But I haven't seen her around here.

Mr. O'Connor: Fiddlesticks. She came up here on your stage, didn't she? Sadie Brown saw her go into the depot early this morning. Stupid woman waited until noon to tell me.

Tim: She wasn't on my stagecoach and I didn't see her before I left. She's a mighty pretty girl, and I sure would have noticed her.

Mr. O'Connor: You're lying! I'll go find her myself.

Narrator 2: Mr. O'Connor strode to the guesthouse and stamped through the door without knocking. The three inside pretended to be surprised.

Jane: Why, Mr. O'Connor, do come in and rest yourself. You look dead tired.

Mr. O'Connor: Rest! I'm not here to rest. I want my daughter that you're hiding. You better get her for me or I'll smash your doors down (shakes his fist again.)

Jane: Mr. O'Connor, you can go ahead and look in every room and every closet but you won't find your daughter because she isn't here.

Mr. O'Connor: I'll see about that!

Narrator 1: Mr. O'Connor stormed out onto the porch and into each room, looking in all the closets and under all the beds.

Mr. O'Connor: She's not here so she must be in the barn, or in the cellar.

Narrator 2: He started down the basement stairs but almost under his feet there came the buzz of a startled rattlesnake. Mr. O'Connor drew back.

Mr. O'Connor: She won't be there, I know. She hates snakes. She must be in the hayloft.

Narrator 2: He rushed over to the barn. Tim was busy oiling the brakes of the stage.

Tim: Did you find your daughter?

Mr. O'Connor: No, but I'm going up those stairs to the hayloft. I'm going to look around every bale and every corner till I find her. Where's that door lead? (points to a wide door.)

Tim: Oh, that's where I keep the horses. Go in if you want to. Be careful you don't trip on the buckets in there.

Narrator 1: Mr. O'Connor walked behind the stalls while Tim held his breath and Margaret trembled under Clara's neck. Tim followed Mr. O'Connor outside.

Tim: Mr. O'Connor, what makes you so sure Miss Margaret is here?

Mr. O'Connor: Someone saw her going in the stage office early this morning. Margaret told me she was going to her college. When I went there she wasn't there. They told me she's gone crazy for that Castro cowboy. I figured she planned to meet him over in Pescadero tomorrow. Can you swear to me she isn't here?

Tim: Mr. O'Connor, you know there are other stages leaving the same depot in San Jose. Seems like there's one that leaves just after we did.

Mr. O'Connor: There is? Where does that one go?

Tim: Oh, I think it goes to Alviso. Isn't there a boat from there to San Francisco?

Mr. O'Connor: By golly, yes there is and that's a shorter route to the city than this here one, isn't it, Tim?

Tim: Sure is, a whole lot quicker. I bet that must be the way she went! Maybe you could catch her in Alviso if the boat doesn't sail till morning.

Mr. O'Connor: By golly, perhaps you're right. You're sure she's not here? (Tim shakes his head vigorously.) But I can't make it with that horse of mine. He's plum tuckered out.

Narrator 2: Tim had an inspiration. He knew he had to get rid of Mr. O'Connor in a hurry. Margaret couldn't hide in the stall much longer.

Tim: I'd like to help you out. I'll tell you what I'll do. You can take Firecracker. He's a real fast. I'll harness him up to your buggy and I'll keep your tired horse here. The stage doesn't run on Sunday and I'll drive your horse down on my day off and bring back Firecracker. I'll be glad to help you out.

Mr. O'Connor: Why thank you, Tim. It's worth a try. It's the last chance I have to save that crazy girl.

Narrator 1: Tim took care of the tired horse and brought out Firecracker, gave him a drink of water and harnessed him to Ira's buggy.

Tim: He's a fast horse. You ought to get there in three or four hours.

Mr. O'Connor: Thank you, Tim. I won't push him too hard. Maybe I'll be there in time.

Scene 6: The Plan Works

Narrator 1: Tim waited until he couldn't hear the sound of Firecracker's hoof beats. Then he put his head inside the door of the stall.

Tim: Coast's clear! You can come out now.

Margaret: Is he really gone?

Tim: He's really gone and hot on your trail to Alviso.

Narrator 2: They went into the white house to share the good news with the others.

Dr. Bruce: How in the world did you think up that hiding place, Tim?

Tim: Well, when I saw that Margaret had on a white dress I thought of Old Clara in the stall - she's as gentle as a kitten. I just had time to shove this young lady under Clara's nose and told her to stay put and keep still.

Margaret: I was terrified he would see me.

Tim: But when Mr. O'Connor walked past the horse stalls, all he saw was a big white mare and he wasn't in the mood to check her out.

Margaret: That was an awful moment when he walked behind Clara, I almost screamed.

Tim: You did your part well,

Narrator 1: After Jane served dinner, they all retired for the night. Margaret woke up several times, disturbed by dreams of being pursued by all manner of terrible beasts, all of which bore the features of her father.

Narrator 2: The next day's journey over the mountains to Pescadero passed uneventfully and Luis Castro was waiting at the dock for the arrival of the stagecoach just as the two had planned. When Tim saw the pair safely over the gangplank of the boat he heaved a sigh of relief.

Margaret: Oh, Tim! (yelling over the noise of the wharf) Thank you a hundred times over for saving me! If we ever have a child and it's a boy, I'll name him for you and if it's a girl, she will be called Clara. (Waves as the boat is leaving the dock).