

Scene from *Miracles on Maple Hill*

Suitable for Staged Readings

adapted by Michael Hall

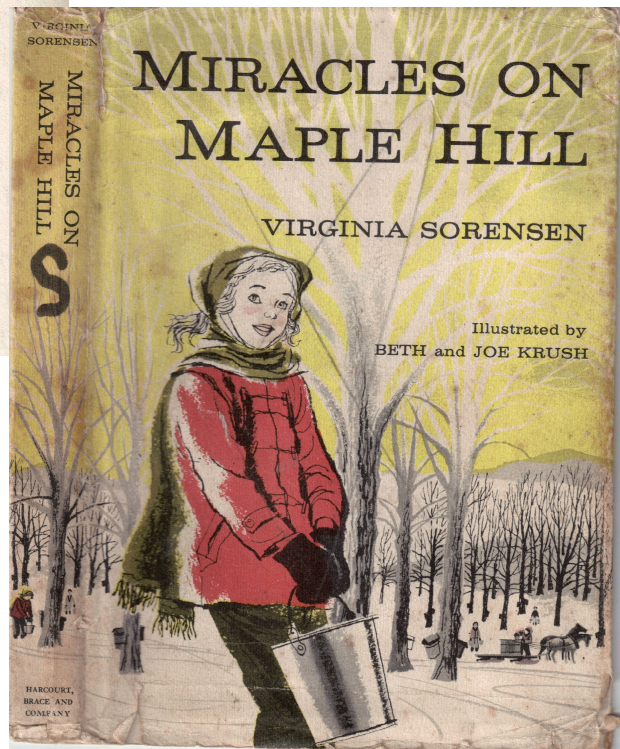
from the Newbery Medal award-winning book by Virginia Sorensen



This staged reading requires a character actress who can memorize MISS BEHLER's first speech. The dialog afterwards can be read from scripts.

Miss Behler (pronounced bee-lur) wears 1950's glasses, a winter coat and hat, and a long scarf wrapped around her neck. She looks like the picture in the book. She comes across (at first) like a battle-axe!

Mother, Marly and Joe dress as much like this illustration as possible.



MISS BEHLER

(To the audience in a gruff, commanding voice)

I'd appreciate it if you'd all be quiet! Mr. Parker and Mrs. Rouse asked me to say a few words.

(Looking into the crowd)

Yes, Mr. Parker, the principal!

(Spots a "talker" in the crowd)

You! Over there! I told you to be quiet!

(Answers an unheard question)

Yes, Mr. Parker, the school principal. And Mrs. Rouse, the English teacher!

(Adjusting her glasses)

Now listen to me. If you happen to be new here, I'm Miss Behler, Miss *Ann* Behler. School nurse.

(Hears somebody ask a question, looks into the crowd)

I beg your pardon? What? No, I did *not* bring tongue depressors. I'm not here to check for ringworm or lice!

(Pauses)

Why? Do you think you *have* ringworm? I'll see *you* later!

(Clears her throat, nervous about talking in a microphone)

Folks from Edinboro – or wherever you're from. I'm here because – well, I'm here because of this book.

(Holds up a copy of *Miracles on Maple Hill* – or her script, which is bound with an enlarged cover of *Miracles*)

I'm a character in it. Yes, me, Ann Behler. That Sorensen woman who wrote it says I'm the school nurse – *and* a truant officer! I catch kids who skip school. I *like* that part! In her book I'm called Miss Annie. Miss Annie *Nelson*!

(Puts the book down)

Anyway. Mrs. Rouse says I need to read things that Miss Annie says in the book. Others will join me as Mother, Joe and Marly.

(Looking into the audience where the actors are waiting)

Are the actors ready?

ACTORS

(MOTHER, JOE and MARLY ad lib)

Yes! We're ready! Yes, Miss Behler!

MISS BEHLER

(To the audience)

At first we're outside in the snow. Brr! You *know* how cold it gets in Edinboro!

(Starts to move away, but stops)

I'm not an actor, you know. I'm a nurse. And this is what Mrs. Rouse calls a *script*!!

(MOTHER comes forward with JOE. MARLY is nearby. If necessary in the performance space, MISS BEHLER shoos away people to make room for the ACTORS.)

(2)

MOTHER

(To JOE as they look toward MISS ANNIE)
Who on earth is that?

JOE

Golly! She's the nurse from school. Miss Annie. She helped with the vaccinations.

MOTHER

Marly! Come here! Joe says that it's Miss Annie, the county truant officer!

MARLY

(Appears, and she's worried)
Mother, are we in trouble?

MOTHER

I certainly hope not!

MISS BEHLER as MISS ANNIE

(Comes forward. At first, she plays the role gruff and mean)
I came to see whether you two were sick.
(JOE and MARLY look down)

Look at me, children!

(JOE and MARLY look at her, their eyes full of fear)
Hmph! You two are about the healthiest-looking specimens I've seen in a long time! Now tell me something. Have they told you what they call me downtown at the school?

MOTHER

Joe, answer her.

JOE

(Uncomfortably, but crossing towards her)
No, Miss Annie. I never heard.

MISS BEHLER

They call me Annie-Get-Your-Gun! Nobody gets away with playing hooky from *my* schools. And it looks to me like you children are guilty of missing school for several days. *And on purpose!*

MOTHER

I'm sure Joe wouldn't – I mean, he didn't – I mean, well, it's all about the sugarhouse.

MISS BEHLER

(Who's a little deaf)
Sugar what???

JOE

(Pointing)

That place over there. The sugarhouse.

MISS BEHLER

(Testy)

I'm freezing stiff. Maybe we could go in that place – that *sugarhouse*. Talk things over. I might get warm!

MOTHER

Joe, Marly, show Miss Annie the way.

(Sound Q: Someone strikes a note on a toy keyboard to indicate the change of place.)

MISS BEHLER

(Changing the tone and speaking directly to the audience)

Now, folks, pretend we've moved into that rustic sort of building.

(Starts unwrapping her scarf, and says to the audience)

Brr! I'm one big icicle.

(Sound Q: Someone strikes another note on the toy xylophone. Joe crosses toward a cup and dipper or ladle. Others move to indicate a change of time and place.)

MISS BEHLER

(Looks around as if she's in the sugarhouse)

Well I declare! I've lived around these parts all my life, and I've never actually been inside one of these places. I've seen plenty of them from the road, all that smoke and steam. Heard they were Syrup Places!

JOE

Sugar camps!

MISS BEHLER

(Asking JOE a question)

I guess you know all about it, young man?

JOE

(Shy)

Sort of.

MISS BEHLER

Tell me Joe, what is that big tank-thing called?

(4)

JOE

(Proudly)

That's the evaporator! It reduces the sap--

MISS BEHLER

(Interrupting him)

How much sap does it take to make a gallon of syrup?

(No one answers)

How much wood does it take to keep the fire going?

(No one answers. She sniffs the cooking syrup)

More important, what's that smell?

(Sniffs again, becomes pleasant, happy!)

Hmm! Smells like sweet corn cooking. Only better. It smells like –

MARLY

(Quietly, almost to herself)

It smells like spring!

MISS BEHLER

What did you say?

MARLY

(Very loud for poor deaf Miss Behler)

It smells like spring!

MISS BEHLER

Yes! Of course it does.

(To MARLY)

And your name is?

MARLY

Marly!

MISS BEHLER

Yes, Marly. It smells just like a spring morning.

(Takes a deep breath)

After a rain maybe!

JOE

(Holding up a cup with syrup in it)

Here, Miss Annie. Have a taste. This has been sitting in the snow. Cooling off.

MISS BEHLER

(Tastes)

I declare! I never tasted anything so grand in my life! My grandfather used to say “Anything but first-run syrup is an insult to my appetite.” I think people have forgotten how good these things can be.

MOTHER

Especially things they make themselves. We came from Pittsburgh a year ago, and we’ve said that over and over.

MISS BEHLER

(Her eyes sparkling)

Children ought to learn about that! Why, every child ought to come out here and have a taste.

MARLY

Sometimes teachers bring their classes here. Mr. Chris told me.

JOE

Field trips.

MISS BEHLER

What?

JOE

(Louder)

Field trips!

MISS BEHLER

Well, I’m glad to hear it.

(Very nicely, speaking to MOTHER)

Now, Mrs. --

MOTHER

Call me Lee, Miss Annie. That’s my first name. My husband Dale is helping Mr. Chris. He’ll be here in a few --

MISS BEHLER

(Interrupting)

Now, Lee, you and your husband don’t worry about the children missing school for a few days. If Joe and Marly had measles, they’d be excused – and come back afterwards and get along just fine. They’re getting an education right here in this sugarbush!

MOTHER

Thank you, Miss Annie.

MISS BEHLER

Every child in our school ought to see a place like this. It's part of their American heritage, that's what it is! And they don't even know it.

MOTHER

Joe, Marly, say Thank You to Miss Annie!

MARLY and JOE

(Simultaneously)

Thank you, Miss Annie!

MISS BEHLER

Now I'm off to the principal's office to report exactly what I think!

I'm going to speak to the superintendent, too. *And* to Joe's teacher!

(Closes her script)

Don't you worry children. And, Mrs. – I mean, Lee – thank you for everything.

(Moves away, as if to leave, staying with her back to them)

MOTHER

Goodbye, Miss Annie! (Pause) Well, children, I guess we converted *her*!!!

MARLY

I think it's a miracle! A miracle right here on Maple Hill!

JOE

(In a happy, loud voice)

It might be a miracle, Marly, but you know what I think?

MOTHER

What do you think, Joe?

JOE

(Proudly, ending the scene)

I think the *syrup* did it!!

(SQ: Several notes ring, signifying The End.)