

## ***In the Backyard: Act 2 Scene 1***

*“What do you want to be when you grow up, Kit?”*

Angie (age 16) and Kit (age 12) are squeezed into a makeshift fort in Angie’s back garden. Angie’s mother, Joyce, is yelling for Angie but the girls pretend not to hear until she gives up. Angie wants to go to the cinema with Kit, but has no money and doesn’t want to ask her mother for money. Angie tells Kit her mother doesn’t like her, and Kit retorts her mother doesn’t like Angie either.

The girls continue to talk about many different things: what they want to be when they grow up, hearing a dead kitten, making a picture fall off the wall, periods, and movies again. At one moment, Angie tells Kit she suspects Joyce is not her real mother. After a while Joyce comes back out and tells Angie she has to go and clean her room. Angie goes back inside and comes back wearing a dress that is too small for her. The scene ends abruptly as Kit points out that Angie missed the chance to kill her mother.

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### **Knowledge Check**

*Try to answer these questions from memory:*

**1. Which movie do Angie and Kit talk about going to see?**

- (a) Terminator
- (b) Predator
- (c) The Exterminator
- (d) Sharknado

**2. What power does Angie imagine she might have?**

- (a) Teleportation
- (b) Telepathy
- (c) Telekinesis
- (d) Telemetry

**3. What does Angie say to Kit about her mother?**

- (a) She tries her best but she just doesn’t get me
- (b) I’m going to kill my mother
- (c) I want my mum to like me
- (d) I’m planning a birthday surprise for my mum

**4. What kind of snack does Joyce offer the girls?**

- (a) Chocolate biscuits
- (b) Strawberry ice cream
- (c) Sherbet lemon
- (d) Jelly and custard

**5. Where does Kit say is the safest place in case of a nuclear war?**

- (a) Canada
- (b) Scotland
- (c) Argentina
- (d) New Zealand

**6. When is the last time Angie saw Marlene?**

- (a) Yesterday
- (b) Last month
- (c) Last year
- (d) She’s never met her

**7. What does Kit want to be when she grows up?**

- (a) Nuclear physicist
- (b) An advertising executive
- (c) Nurse
- (d) Typist

**8. What should Angie do before she can go to the cinema?**

- (a) Finish her biology IA
- (b) Eat dinner
- (c) Tidy her room
- (d) Iron her clothes

**9. What does Angie pick up in a threatening way?**

- (a) Lead piping
- (b) A knife
- (c) A brick
- (d) A tree branch

**10. What happens at the end of the scene?**

- (a) It starts to rain
- (b) The sun goes down
- (c) Lightning strikes
- (d) Nothing

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## Understanding and Interpretation

1. What can you infer about Angie's situation from this scene? For example, how is she doing at school? What kind of prospects does she have?
2. How do Kit and Angie interact? What kind of relationship do they display throughout this scene? Do they share a close bond? What are the symbols of their true relationship?
3. Joyce seems to struggle in her relationship with Angie. How does she speak to her? In what ways is she struggling to relate? Why?
4. Angie and Kit are the only children in the play, allowing Churchill to take the action out of the workplace and give us a glimpse of the future. What do you think she's saying about women's prospects through the characters of Angie and Kit?
5. The play has a somewhat confusing structure. It's written in vignettes, short scenes that seem disconnected or isolated from one another. But the scenes link thematically in important ways. What connects this scene to the opening scene?

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## Important Symbolism: *clothing (Angie's dress)*

*"What you put that on for?"*



*Caroline Dubberly and Daven Ralston play Angie and Kit in the Keegan Theatre production, 2017*

Angie's dress appears in this act, when she is sent back to clean her room by Joyce. When she re-appears she's wearing an 'old best dress' that doesn't fit her anymore. The image of Angie wearing a too-small dress suggests the poverty of her family, as they cannot afford to keep buying new clothes year on year. But this doesn't fully explain the dress's symbolism.

Angie is sixteen years old and supposedly on the cusp of maturity. The scene casts doubt on whether she already has her period; and in many

ways Angie still acts like a child. Her best friend is Kit, who is only twelve, and this scene sees them hanging out in a 'fort' that they have built in Angie's garden. She speaks in clipped sentences that are not always well-formed and her arguments can be childish and straightforward ('*Say you're a liar*' and '*I'm not telling you, it's a secret*' are two examples of this simplicity). At the start of the scene, her admission that she doesn't want to get married suggests that she isn't yet ready for the adult world.

However, being sixteen means her behaviour is challenging for others, especially Joyce. She expects Angie to act more grown-up, but Angie keeps getting it wrong. Kit reveals how others might be exasperated with or suspicious of Angie when she tells her: '*My mother says there's something wrong with you playing with someone my age.*' Her own mother reports, '*She's not going to get a job... I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her.*' When Joyce goes on to say, '*she'd better get married*' she puts herself directly at odds with Angie's stated preferences.

While Angie is not on stage to hear her mother's statements, this sounds like an old argument that the two of them have been having for a while. All this must be quite overwhelming for Angie. At one point she almost cries, '*If I don't get away from here I'm going to die*', expressing her desire to be away from expectations that she isn't yet up to fulfilling. Therefore, the image of Angie wearing a dress that's too small for her is symbolic of her inability to show the adult behaviour that others demand.

### Activity

Clothing is an important symbol in Angie's story, but also for other women in other scenes, beginning with the stories of the women who Marlene invites to her celebratory dinner in the first act.

Return to Act 1 and review the stories of the different women. In what ways does clothing play a symbolic role in their lives as well? Create a chart, mind-map – or even museum exhibition of clothing from the play, with notes and explainers on what makes each item symbolic or important?

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