

RETURN TO SENDER

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Matt Thompson

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SYNOPSIS: Wilbur is the post office's latest employee-of-the-month, but the strain of the holidays begins to take its toll when a customer hits Wilbur's last nerve and he takes out his frustration in a very unique way.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(TWO MEN)

WILBUR
DEWEY

SETTING:

A post office. Christmas time.

AT RISE:

WILBUR stands behind the counter. He is literally wrapped up in a red, white, and blue postal uniform. There is a counter with some ledges underneath that WILBUR can pull items from. He hums a little tune to himself as he writes on a piece of paper standing behind the counter. He looks off stage to some imaginary customers and smiles. Beat. He speaks crisp and curt.

WILBUR: I'm not open.

He looks down again, writes something on a piece of paper for a while. Beat. He looks up, smiles, and puts out his hand as if to stop an imaginary customer.

WILBUR: I'm not open.

Another smile as he puts away what he was writing and pulls out something new to write. He scribbles a few notes and then puts it away. Without looking up, he yells:

WILBUR: Next!

DEWEY, an average type of fellow, enters with an envelope and waits at the counter. WILBUR continues writing on the same piece of paper.

DEWEY: Hi, I'd like to -

WILBUR puts up his hand in the "stop" motion as he continues to write.

DEWEY: Sure.

WILBUR continues writing. After a while he finishes his writing and puts it under the counter.

WILBUR: *(With incredible chipperness.)* Happy Holidays, and welcome to the U.S. Postal service branch number 5578641. Espresso?

WILBUR places a small espresso cup on the counter.

DEWEY: Uh . . . no thanks.

WILBUR: *(Pulling up a baguette from behind the counter.)* Baguette?

DEWEY: Okay. *(He takes the bread.)* Look, I seem to have a problem. This letter was sent back to me.

WILBUR: You have the sender's address?

DEWEY: Yes.

WILBUR: You have a return address?

DEWEY: Yes.

WILBUR: *(Putting out his hand.)* May I?

DEWEY: Uh . . . Sure.

WILBUR snatches the letter from DEWEY's hand. He examines it closely and for quite some time. He sniffs it, scrutinizes it.

WILBUR: You need a stamp.

DEWEY: No, I don't.

WILBUR: Yes, you do.

DEWEY: No, I don't.

WILBUR: Of course you do. This letter has not a stamp. So, in order to mail it, it needs a stamp. Would you like to buy a single stamp or a book? This month is *McDonald's* Month. Our Grimace stamps are neat!

DEWEY: Look, I don't want to buy a stamp.

WILBUR: Then this conversation is over.

WILBUR grabs the baguette from DEWEY and puts the espresso cup behind the counter.

WILBUR: Next!

DEWEY: Now, wait a minute. Look, buddy I put a Christmas card in my neighbor's mailbox, who's out of town, and someone keeps putting it back in my mailbox.

WILBUR: *(With reproach.)* You put the letter in *his* mailbox?

DEWEY: Yes.

WILBUR: *(Aghast.)* You can't do that.

DEWEY: Why not?

WILBUR: Because that's our job.

DEWEY: He lives right next door. I was helping you out.

WILBUR: Were you? Were you "helping us out"? Do you know where we would be without the United States Postal Service?

DEWEY: I don't know.

WILBUR: We would all be at U.P.S! And do you know what that would mean? We would have to wear brown! Imitating a postal worker is a federal offense Section 39-X, Paragraph H.

DEWEY: I wasn't imitating a postal worker I was mailing a letter.

WILBUR: Well, why didn't you put a stamp on it like everyone else!

DEWEY: Because he lives right next door.

WILBUR: Are you too cheap to buy a stamp?

DEWEY: No, look, I told you before, I just want to drop off the letter and -

WILBUR: You cannot put anything in someone else's mailbox!

DEWEY: Why not?

WILBUR: Because we own your mail!

DEWEY: You don't own my Christmas cards!

WILBUR: No, but we have exclusive rights to mail your Christmas cards!

DEWEY: What are you saying? That you own my mailbox as well?

WILBUR: No, that would be silly. We just own the space inside it.

DEWEY: You can't own the air!

WILBUR: We can and we do. We're the United States Postal Service!

DEWEY: Well, what if you deliver the mail through a slot in the door?

WILBUR: We own the drop zone.

DEWEY: Drop zone?

WILBUR: We own the space from where the letters enter the slot to where they fall on the ground. Now, give me that letter. I'm going to put a stamp on it once and for all.

WILBUR grabs one end of the letter as the two start a tug of war.

WILBUR: Come on now, nice and slow. We don't want any trouble.

DEWEY: Let go!

WILBUR: Ahhh!

DEWEY: Let go! Let go!

DEWEY finally wins. He is out of breath.

DEWEY: This is ridiculous! I'm outta here!

WILBUR: Good, and remember we know where you live!

DEWEY takes his letter and exits.

WILBUR: NEXT!

The lights fade as music plays. The next day. Lights up. WILBUR is now a little frazzled-looking, not so together. He is looking down at the counter, writing something whistling a holiday tune. Without his knowledge, DEWEY has entered, with a beat-up mailbox.

WILBUR: Happy Holiday and welcome to the – (*Recognizing DEWEY.*) Oh, it's you.

DEWEY: Aren't you going to offer me a holiday treat?

WILBUR: Sure. (*Pulling out a hamburger bun.*) Hamburger bun?

DEWEY: No thanks.

WILBUR: What can I do for you, sir?

DEWEY: I want you to buy me a new mailbox.

WILBUR: And why's that?

DEWEY: Well, last night some wiseacre smashed my mailbox with a baseball bat -

WILBUR: Softball.

DEWEY: *Softball* bat. And you said yesterday that the post office owned the space inside the mailbox. So, you can't own the space

inside the mailbox without owning the mailbox itself so I figure you owe me a mailbox and a very special one. I'd like the one that looks like a humpback whale where you raise the fins to signal it's time for collection.

WILBUR: I'll bet you'd like that, wouldn't you?

DEWEY: I'd like to bust your face open!

WILBUR: Customer service is to your left!

DEWEY: (*Very agitated.*) I'm gonna give you my left in just a minute!

What's your name? (*Reading his name tag.*) Wilbur? Wilbur. Okay, Wilbur -

WILBUR: I'll tell you what sir, why don't you just wait here and I'll get my office manager. How does that sound?

DEWEY: That's the first reasonable thing you've said.

WILBUR: Wonderful. Just a minute. (*Gesturing to the hamburger bun.*) Please, help yourself.

WILBUR smiles, curtly and exits. DEWEY waits. He looks at the hamburger bun, picks it up and takes a bite. WILBUR returns as "The Manager." He is dressed exactly the same. He simply has taken off his name tag and put on a hat and possibly a fake mustache.

WILBUR: Happy Holidays sir, and welcome to the U.S. Postal service branch number 5578641. I'm the manager, how can I help you?

DEWEY just stares at WILBUR for a second.

DEWEY: What's your name?

WILBUR: (*Beat.*) Ed - wardo.

DEWEY: Edwardo?

WILBUR: Yes, sir. Now as you can see we have quite a line, so how can I help you?

DEWEY: You're the same guy.

WILBUR: Excuse me?

DEWEY: You're the same guy I was just talking to. Wilbur. You're Wilbur.

WILBUR: Wilbur? Wilbur? Hmmmm? I'm sorry I don't know any Wilbur. Having trouble with your mailbox?

DEWEY: No, you're the same guy. You're Wilbur.

WILBUR: No, I'm not.

DEWEY: Yes, you are you. You are Wilbur. You're the guy I was just talking to a minute ago. You just took off your name tag and put on a funny hat.

WILBUR: This hat was a gift from my Aunt Isabella.

DEWEY: Did she mail it to you?

WILBUR: (*Stumbling a little.*) Of course. With my employee - manager discount.

DEWEY: No! You *are* the same guy! You are Wilbur!

WILBUR: No, I'm not! I'm not Wilbur!

DEWEY: I need to talk to the manager.

WILBUR: I am . . . the - uh - manager.

DEWEY: No, you're not! You're Wilbur, the post office employee!

WILBUR: (*Losing it.*) Oh, all right! I'm just Wilbur, the post office employee! I can't take it anymore! This place is enough to make you nuts!

DEWEY: There, there buddy, it's okay.

WILBUR: No, it's not! I've been working for the post office for fifteen years, and it's always give, give, give!

DEWEY: Hey, calm down, it's alright.

WILBUR: (*He goes in front of the counter and starts pacing.*) "Hey Wilbur, why does it take so long? What is this, the Pony Express!" Or, "Hey Wilbur, can you airmail this for me? What do you want me to do lady, fly the plane myself?"

DEWEY: Are you okay?

WILBUR: NO! No, I am not okay! I can't take it anymore! I can't think! I've been working for 26 straight days! The bureau of investigations recently called and told me I was the victim of identity theft! All my credit cards are past their limits! My wife just divorced me! And I've got some sort of rash! I . . . I . . . don't know if I . . . I -

WILBUR makes a sound like a cow being tipped and then freezes, like a statue.

DEWEY: Hello? Hey, buddy? Wilbur, are you alright? Wilbur?
(*Yelling.*) WILBUR!

DEWEY snaps his fingers, waves his hand in front of his face, trying to awaken him.

DEWEY: Oh my gosh. I killed him. (*Yelling at a still frozen WILBUR.*) Hey, Wilbur, can you hear me? Look, if you can hear me, uh, it's no big deal about the mailbox. I can get another. Oh, boy. (*Trying to unfreeze him.*) Come on buddy, I'll buy some stamps. I'll mail anything you want. I'll donate my free time to the Post Office Youth Auxiliary Fund! I'll never complain about the Postal Service again!

WILBUR unfreezes.

WILBUR: What . . . what happened?

DEWEY: I think you've just had a rough couple of days. Uh, look, I'm sorry I upset you.

WILBUR: No, I am the one that should apologize. I'm sorry about your mailbox. I'll buy you a new one.

DEWEY: (*Looking at it.*) Aw, forget about it. It was rusty anyhow. (*Looking at the mailbox.*) That was quite a swing you took. You ever play ball?

WILBUR: I wasn't good enough. I got cut in T-ball.

DEWEY: (*Laughing.*) Well, you sure hit a home run with my mailbox.

WILBUR: (*Joining in the laughter.*) Yeah, I guess you're right. Home run! My first home run!

DEWEY is still laughing, trying to calm WILBUR down.

DEWEY: (*Putting his arm around WILBUR.*) That's the spirit. Say, what are you doing for Christmas?

WILBUR: I didn't have anything planned. I was just going to fill out some LTQ package forms.

DEWEY: Sounds like fun, but why don't you come over to our place for Christmas?

WILBUR: Are you serious?

DEWEY: Sure, why not. My wife makes a nice big ham -

WILBUR: (*Sudden.*) I like ham.

DEWEY: (*Evenly.*) Who doesn't?

WILBUR: Pigs.

Beat.

DEWEY: Well, you should just come on over.

WILBUR: Really?

DEWEY: Sure. I mean, you already know where I live.

WILBUR: That's true.

DEWEY: We'll introduce you to the neighbors and you can just relax and unwind. How does that sound?

WILBUR: You know. That would be great. That would be really great. I'd really appreciate that. Thank you. Thank you very much.

DEWEY: Hey, no problem. That's what the holidays are for and besides, we wouldn't want you to go postal.

DEWEY puts his arm around WILBUR and they exit as music plays.

THE END

NOTES

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