

SHOWTIME FOR OSCAR

By Ray Sheers

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(11 MEN, 10 WOMEN, VERY FLEXIBLE)

OSCAR DEWILDER (m).....An Ebenezer Scrooge type, though the emphasis is on his nastiness toward everyone rather than just his miserliness. He belittles everyone with his ruthless wit and cruel controlling temperament. By profession, he is a critic and his scathing reviews of plays are feared by theater companies everywhere. He uses a cane and hobbles about because he's recently hurt his foot, which is bandaged. He wears glasses and is about sixty.

(210 lines)

MISS BIGELOW (f).....DeWilder's housekeeper. She's about the same age as DeWilder. She has learned to put up with DeWilder and can even match his wit (but not his cruelty) at times. *(69 line)*

HENRIETTA PYMM (f).....The latest in a long line of DeWilder's personal secretaries. She's the last one the agency has to send; all the others have quit. She, too, can at times return DeWilder's barbs with some of her own in self defense. *(72 lines)*

CLAIRE (f).....DeWilder's niece. Financially, she's under DeWilder's thumb because he controls her inheritance. She is far from meek herself though. *(41 lines)*

SID (m) Claire's fiancé and an actor DeWilder's
has nothing but contempt for actors. (25
lines)

SOPHIE (f) DeWilder's dead sister's ghost. She can
be as nasty as DeWilder. (15 lines)

PICCADILLY PLAYERS (m/f) This is an acting company which has
been lambasted by DeWilder in one of
his reviews. Though they aren't the
most talented troupe, they are earnest
about what they do. There are the
typical rivalries, jealousies, and
contentiousness that are evident in many
acting companies. They put their
differences aside (more or less) to teach
DeWilder a lesson in their version of
Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," retold to
fit DeWilder's life.

ELAINE (f) An actress right out of the Addams
family; she wears black and speaks with
an unnerving flat (but not
expressionless) voice. She has an
unearthly quality about her, and the rest
of the troupe is slightly intimidated by
her macabre nature. When she's not
acting, she conducts séances. (40 lines)

MACNIECE (m) Costume designer and set designer. He
takes great pride in his work which often
goes unappreciated, even ridiculed by
others. (71 lines)

SHOWTIME FOR OSCAR

MURRAY (m)	A naysayer who finds the worst in everybody and everything (17 lines)
SAM (m)	Plays young DeWilder. (11 lines)
NED (m)	Plays Marley, but in this version he is Davidson Harley. (57 lines)
LARRY (m)	Plays Tiny Tim (against the Director's orders). (14 lines)
COLIN (m)	Plays the Spirit of Valentines Past. (4 lines)
TOM (m)	Plays the Spirit of Valentines Future (3 lines)
JULES (m)	Plays the Spirit of Valentines Present. (11 lines)
DIRECTOR (m)	He tries desperately to maintain control of the actors and this show, but, of course, he is not in control at all. He takes his role very seriously though. (113 lines)
DORA* (f)	(29 lines)
AMANDA* (f)	(13 lines)
CONNIE* (f)	(23 lines)
TINA* (f)	(15 lines)
SAMANTHA* (f)	(11 lines)

**Actresses who feel they've unfairly been cheated out of doing a musical, something they've wanted to do for some time, but the Director has been putting them off, wisely as it turns out. They neither sing nor dance very well, but they are determined to do a musical.*

NOTE: Additional actresses may be added, if desired.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPS:

- ☐ Cane
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Tea service
- ☐ Vase with roses
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Small phone book
- ☐ Decorative sofa pillow
- ☐ Living room furniture (*Sofa, chairs, end tables, etc.*)
- ☐ Knitting needle and knitting
- ☐ Scripts for Director to distribute
- ☐ Folding chairs
- ☐ Kazoos
- ☐ Director's chair
- ☐ Flashlights
- ☐ Special glasses
- ☐ Sheets or other fabric
- ☐ Nightshirt and nightcap
- ☐ Clown suit
- ☐ Goat costume
- ☐ Chains
- ☐ Bottle of pills
- ☐ Blanket
- ☐ Measuring tape
- ☐ Ring
- ☐ Tombstone
- ☐ Coffee can with dirt
- ☐ Wooden crutches
- ☐ Picnic basket
- ☐ Teddy bear

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE: DeWilder's Apartment

ACT TWO: The Piccadilly Theater (can be played in front of curtain or on bare stage)

ACT THREE: DeWilder's apartment

SET REQUIREMENTS

There are minimal requirements:

DeWilder's apartment needs only a few pieces of furniture, but the set can be as elaborate as desired. The Theater Scene only requires some chairs. For the second DeWilder set, whatever furniture that was in Act One can be left on stage and covered with sheets or other fabric. Several long panels of fabric might also be suspended for effect. An alternative set for the third act would be to remove the furniture and have white flats in staggered positions throughout the stage. The play of lights on the staggered flats creates a stunning visual effect. Two flats or other type of panels that can be opened from behind might be used for some of the entrances in Act Three. A tombstone can easily be constructed using pieces of packing-type Styrofoam that have been painted. For the weeds, several artificial leaves can be affixed to the base.

COSTUMES

Like the set, costumes do not need to be elaborate. The Director could have a cape and beret, but they aren't essential. The three Spirits should be dressed primarily in red. They might wear matching glittery hats. Harley should be dressed in motorcycle garb or leather. Several lengths of chain draped over him complete his costume. Elaine should wear primarily black. For the Graveyard Scene, a hat and veil might be added. When the actresses perform their song and dance routines, they should wear typical showgirl costumes. For the goat costume, any furry costume with the addition of a goat mask will do. Sophie's ghost appears eerie if covered with layers of scrim. If she holds a flashlight vertical to her face, the ghostlike effect is further heightened. Tiny Tim might wear knickers. A wooden crutch is more effective than metal. MacNiece's clothes should be flamboyant. The special glasses are easy to construct using a very large pair of novelty sunglasses with their frames decorated. If Miss Pymm wears a long trench coat and comes in with crutches and one leg raised behind her, the missing leg is easily suggested.

ACT ONE

DeWilder is in his sitting room, finishing up his coffee and reading the newspaper. His foot is wrapped in a bandage and propped on several pillows or an ottoman. Beside him is a cane, which he uses to get around throughout the play. The room shows he is a man of good taste, but it doesn't need to be elaborate. Beside DeWilder's chair, there is an end table or two and a sofa or other living room chairs. On one of the chairs or sofa is Bigelow's knitting. On the table nearest DeWilder is a telephone. Miss Bigelow enters. DeWilder doesn't look up.

BIGELOW: Was breakfast satisfactory, Mr. DeWilder?

DEWILDER: *(Still reading.)* Hmm?

BIGELOW: I asked if you enjoyed your breakfast.

DEWILDER: *(Still reading.)* I was able to ingest it without serious side effects, if that's what you're asking, Miss Bigelow.

BIGELOW: I was asking if you liked it.

DEWILDER: *(Matter-of-factly.)* And I answered you.

BIGELOW: *(Clearing away the dishes.)* It was a new recipe.

DEWILDER: *(Paying no attention.)* Hmm.

BIGELOW: I only asked because I substituted dog food for sausage.

DEWILDER: *(Throwing down the newspaper.)* You did what?!

Grabbing his cup of coffee and gulping it.

BIGELOW: I didn't think you'd notice.

DEWILDER: Dog food! Have you lost your mind, woman?!

BIGELOW: I was right. You didn't notice.

DEWILDER: Whatever would possess you to . . .

BIGELOW: Money, Mr. DeWilder. Money. You told me to watch the household expenses. Dog food is so much cheaper than the imported sausage the recipe called for. I figured in an omelet, you wouldn't notice.

DEWILDER: You put dog food in the omelet to save a few pennies!

BIGELOW: And you never noticed. It was in the meatloaf last night, too.

DEWILDER: You've been serving me dog food?! Are you trying to kill me?!

BIGELOW: The thought never crossed my mind. (*With a bit of sarcasm.*) You're so lucky that you only have to **ingest** food and don't care what it tastes like—or, God forbid, admit the fact that it was enjoyable when somebody goes to the trouble of making something special for you.

DEWILDER: I do not find your paltry attempt at humor the least bit amusing, Miss Bigelow.

BIGELOW: Did you ever think of giving anyone a kind word, Mr. DeWilder?

DEWILDER: I seem to recall giving you two kind words, Miss Bigelow. "You're hired." Remember? I said those words to you twenty-five years ago and they were probably the kindest words anyone has ever spoken to you. Those two words have kept you off the streets and put clothes on your back all these years. (*Noticing her dress.*) Where on earth did you get that eyesore you're wearing?

BIGELOW: Does that mean you don't care for it?

DEWILDER: Don't care for it? It's giving me heartburn.

BIGELOW: No, that's probably the dog food. (*Exits.*)

DEWILDER: (*Shouting after her.*) How'd you like to hear two **unkind** words that rhyme with "you're hired"? Don't think I couldn't replace you in the blink of an eye, Miss Bigelow! In the blink on an eye! (*To himself as he rubs his stomach.*) Dog food? No, she wouldn't dare. That sausage did leave a strange aftertaste. (*Drinks some coffee.*) No, she wouldn't. (*Goes back to reading his paper; doorbell rings several times; finally, he shouts.*) Blast it, Bigelow! Someone's at the door! Are you deaf, woman?!

BIGELOW: (*Entering with a vase of roses.*) That's probably the new secretary from the agency. (*Sets the flowers on the table nearest DeWilder.*)

DEWILDER: What happened to the old one?

BIGELOW: She quit.

DEWILDER: (*Pushing the vase away from him with disgust.*) She was only here one day. How can she quit?

BIGELOW: They all quit. The agency doesn't have anyone else willing to come here. This is the last one. You might try being nice to this one.

DEWILDER: (*Shouting.*) Balderdash! I'm always nice! And put these weeds somewhere else if you must bring them into my home. (*She takes them to the door with her.*)

BIGELOW: Ah, Miss Pymm, is it? Come in.

DEWILDER: (*To himself, with disdain.*) Her name is **Pymm**?

PYMM: Oh, what lovely roses!

BIGELOW: Aren't they. A friend of mine grew them in her greenhouse. It's a new hybrid called "Be My Valentine." (*Sets the vase on a table away from DeWilder, then sits and begins to knit.*)

DEWILDER: (*Roaring.*) Blood Clot would be more appropriate.

PYMM: (*Approaching him.*) Blood Clot? Oh, no, "Be My Valentine" is just perfect for a rose. So romantic. (*DeWilder grunts.*) Blood Clot, is rather—well, disgusting, if you don't mind my saying so.

DEWILDER: (*Not getting up.*) I do mind you're saying so. **Miss Pymm**, is it?

PYMM: (*Approaching and extending her hand.*) Yes, how do you do. You must be Mr. DeWilder. I'm from the . . .

DEWILDER: (*Looking at his watch.*) Are you aware that you are late.

PYMM: Oh, am I? Traffic was just terrible, and I got a little lost. Then I couldn't find a place to park and . . .

DEWILDER: Two minutes late!

PYMM: Two minutes? Is that all?

DEWILDER: Is that all! Let me make something perfectly clear. I do not tolerate tardiness. Do you understand me? The clock doesn't stop for you, Miss Pymm, or anyone else for that matter. Those two minutes are gone forever. Are you aware of that?

PYMM: I would have been on time, but the elevator, it just took forever and . . .

DEWILDER: Then you should have hoofed it, Miss Pymm.

PYMM: Hoofed it?

DEWILDER: You heard me! Hoofed it! There are stairs. If you found the elevator uncooperative, you should have taken the stairs. It doesn't take much brain power to figure out there are alternatives to an elevator, Miss Pymm. A chimpanzee would have had the sense to take the stairs. Two at a time, if necessary to arrive at work on time first day on the job.

PYMM: But this is the fourteenth floor!

DEWILDER: Irrelevant. Entirely irrelevant.

PYMM: But . . .

DEWILDER: You have two legs which I presume are in working order. Would you be so kind as to lift your right leg, Miss Pymm. *(She hesitantly does.)* Fine. Now you're left. *(She does.)* See? They seem to be fully functional. You should have used them, woman! That's what they're for!

PYMM: *(To Bigelow.)* Is he pulling my leg?

DEWILDER: I do not pull people's appendages, Miss Pymm, and I wouldn't be caught dead pulling yours, I might add.

PYMM: What happened to your foot?

BIGELOW: He got it stuck in his mouth.

DEWILDER: Did you say something, Miss Bigelow? Your hoof and mouth acting up again?

PYMM: Did you fall?

DEWILDER: As a matter of fact, I fell while leaving a taxi. I was on my way to see a play I was supposed to review.

PYMM: Are you a critic?

DEWILDER: I'm what's known as a critic at large.

BIGELOW: Otherwise known as a large critic.

DEWILDER: I review plays and concerts, and occasionally a film. Didn't they tell you that at the agency?

PYMM: No, they just said you a writer. So you were on your way to a play and you fell?

DEWILDER: Isn't that what I said? Fortunately, I fell on the way **into** the theater so I was spared having to sit through an agonizing two hours of what I'm certain was an absolutely horrendous production of one of the worst plays ever penned by a mediocre English writer.

PYMM: What was the play you missed?

DEWILDER: (*With disdain.*) Romeo and Juliet.

PYMM: What?

DEWILDER: You've not heard of it? A fellow named Shakespeare contrived it.

PYMM: Of course, I've heard of it. Why, Romeo and Juliet is the greatest love story ever told. Everybody knows that.

DEWILDER: Balderdash!! I'll bet you heard that in school. It's pure drivel. A most ridiculous play! Star-crossed lovers! Imbeciles without a brain between them! That's what they are! And we're supposed to feel pity for such idiotic creatures!

PYMM: But Shakespeare—

DEWILDER: Was a hack!

PYMM: You can't be serious.

DEWILDER: Of course, I'm serious. About important matters, I am never serious; about unimportant matters, I am always serious. Now, in the future, I think you should make a habit of using the stairs. It will be good exercise for you, add years to your life, for what that's worth. I will inform the management you are not, under any circumstances, to use the elevator.

PYMM: What?! Why, I can't walk...

DEWILDER: What do you mean you "can't"? Of course, you can—and you shall!

PYMM: Fourteen floors!

DEWILDER: Sit down, Miss Pymm. I must tell you that we've had several fires in this building. A convicted arsonist resides on the thirteenth floor.

BIGELOW: (*Stands.*) An arsenist?

DEWILDER: Yes, a pyromaniac lives on the floor below us! A very sick man. Sit down. (*She sits.*) I want you to consider this. What if there is a fire and you're taking a leisurely ride in the elevator? Think, woman! You'll go up in flames. You'll be burnt to a crisp! And all that will be left of our poor Miss Pymm is a putrid pile of ashes! I want you to ponder that un pretty picture, Miss Pymm. You may rise. (*She stands.*) So that settles it. In the future, you'll take the stairs. I certainly will not be responsible for your fiery demise. Now go! There's work to be done!

MISS BIGELOW: (*Rising.*) I'll show you to the study, Miss Pymm.

DEWILDER: One more thing. This name of yours. I'm afraid it'll have to go. It sounds like something out of a Dickens novel. Have you a first name?

PYMM: Henrietta.

DEWILDER: Oh, good grief! That's even worse! What fiendish and heartless parents you must have had to saddle you with a name like Henrietta Pymm. Did they beat you, too, and chain you in the cellar with the rats?

PYMM: What?!

DEWILDER: Feed you moldy crusts of bread?

PYMM: Certainly not!

DEWILDER: You've probably just repressed the memory. No one with a name like yours could have had a normal childhood.

PYMM: I was a perfectly happy child.

DEWILDER: Nonsense. You were miserable, Henrietta. I'll bet at recess your classmates tied you to a tree and stuck worms up your nostrils.

PYMM: What?!

DEWILDER: And when the teacher found out, you were whipped mercilessly.

BIGELOW: Me. DeWilder has some correspondence he'd like you to work on. *(They start to leave and then Pymm turns to face DeWilder.)*

PYMM: By the way, do **you** have a first name, Mr. DeWilder?

DEWILDER: Of course, I do. Everybody has a first name.

PYMM: And what might that be, if I may ask.

DEWILDER: You may not. I am Mr. DeWilder to all of my employees.

PYMM: And I am Miss Pymm to all my employers. Besides, you don't have to tell me. I already know. Your name is Oscar. Oscar DeWilder.

DEWILDER: My name is hardly a secret. In fact, it's a household name. My reviews are syndicated in newspapers all over the world. Is there a reason your parents named you Henrietta? Were you named after a lunatic aunt who was an ax murderess?

PYMM: I was named after my grandmother.

DEWILDER: A thoroughly loathsome woman, I'm sure. I've never known anyone named Henrietta who wasn't thoroughly loathsome. I doubt you'll prove to be the exception.

PYMM: On the contrary, she was a perfectly wonderful woman; Kind and generous and loving. And I'm proud to be named after her.

DEWILDER: Go on deluding yourself, Miss Pymm, but I know better.

PYMM: I was wondering; Mr. DeWilder, did your parents name you after the wiener.

DEWILDER: What?!

PYMM: You know The Oscar Mayer Weiner?

DEWILDER: For your information, I was named after a great Irish playwright.

PYMM: Oh, him.

DEWILDER: Yes, him! Miss Bigelow, if you would be so kind as to show our little Miss Pymm to the study so she can begin her Herculean labors. She's already wasted ten minutes of my valuable time and hers with her pointless prattle. Ten minutes for which I presume I am paying through the nose. Oh, and Miss Pymm.

PYMM: Yes, Mr. DeWilder?

DEWILDER: (*Motioning her to come close.*) If Miss Bigelow should offer you anything to eat or drink, I advise you not to accept. Just this morning she tried to poison me.

PYMM: That doesn't surprise me in the least!

BIGELOW: Would you care for a cup of tea? I've just made a pot.

PYMM: Tea would be wonderful, Miss Bigelow. I take it with sugar, if you don't mind.

BIGELOW: Perfect. That's how I take mine. The study's at the end of the hall. I'll get the tea and be right in to help you get started. (*Pymm exits.*)

DEWILDER: (*Shouting after them.*) Sure, give her tea and she'll spend half the day in the bathroom! More wasted time! (*Picks up small phone book on table and dials a number.*) Dr. Wilson, please. I don't care where he is. I must speak to him. It's an emergency. You heard me, life and death.

BIGELOW: (*Enters with tray of teapot and cups.*) Do you want some tea?

DEWILDER: What did you lace it with, arsenic?

BIGELOW: You'd better be nice to Miss Pymm. She was ready to walk out.

DEWILDER: Let her walk out. But I forbid her to take the elevator.

BIGELOW: Remember, the agency has no one else to send. She's the last one on their list.

DEWILDER: Then find another agency! *(Into phone.)* Wilson! DeWilder, here. I need some stronger pain pills. The ones you prescribed aren't strong enough. I said it was a matter of life and death because it is. If the pain gets much worse, I may be driven to kill somebody. They'll find poor Miss Bigelow's mutilated body stuffed up the chimney. And you'll be responsible. Now, look, I don't care what you say, I tell you those pills don't work. I need something stronger. The pain was so bad I was awake all night. All right, call it in to the pharmacy. *(Hangs up.)* You old butcher. *(To Bigelow.)* There'll be a prescription for me at that new pharmacy around the corner. You'll need to pick it up. *(Doorbell rings.)* Now what? You can't have a moment's peace in this house.

BIGELOW: *(Sid and Claire enter.)* Oh, Claire, hello. *(To DeWilder.)* It's Claire.

DEWILDER: *(Imitating her under his breath.)* It's Claire!

CLAIRE: This is Sid, Sid Bouchard. This is Miss Bigelow, my uncle's housekeeper.

SID: *(They shake hands.)* A pleasure to meet you, Miss Bigelow.

CLAIRE: How is he?

BIGELOW: Oh, he's in fine form!

CLAIRE: Great.

BIGELOW: Talk to you later. *(Exits.)*

SID: Maybe we should come back later—

DEWILDER: It's Claire, is it? Come to see how your poor uncle is faring after his brush with death? It's about time.

CLAIRE: *(Kissing him.)* Hello, Uncle Oscar. Miss Bigelow called and told me about your fall. Are you in much pain? *(Sets her purse on table.)*

DEWILDER: Nothing a little morphine wouldn't help. I regret to inform you, but the doctor says I'll probably pull through, so you can stop drooling over my will. Who'd you drag with you, the undertaker?

CLAIRE: This is Sid Bouchard. Sid, my uncle, Oscar DeWilder. (*Sid extends his hand, but DeWilder ignores it.*)

SID: It's an honor to meet you, sir. I've been reading your reviews for years.

DEWILDER: Really? Sit down, Mr. Bouchard. (*Sid and Claire sit.*) So, you've read my work, eh?

SID: Religiously. Though I don't always agree with what you say.

DEWILDER: What do you mean you don't always agree with what I say! Get up! You're sitting on my pillow! (*Pulls pillow out from behind Bouchard.*) What line of work are you in? Or are you unemployed?

SID: (*Hesitantly.*) I'm an actor.

DEWILDER: I was right. You're unemployed. Tell me, Claire, why have you brought an actor into my house?

CLAIRE: I wanted you to meet Sid because he's asked me to marry him.

DEWILDER: Marry him!

CLAIRE: Sid proposed to me last night. To be proposed to on Valentine's Day was so romantic.

DEWILDER: A most ridiculous holiday.

SID: How can you say that?

DEWILDER: Simply a feeble excuse for candy companies and florists to make money.

SID: I don't think so.

CLAIRE: Oh, Uncle Oscar, don't be such an old Scrooge!

DEWILDER: There ought to be a law that all marriage proposals be allowed on only one day of the year: (*Poking Sid in the chest with his cane.*) April Fool's Day.

CLAIRE: I don't care what you say. It was a Valentine's Day I'll never forget as long as I live.

DEWILDER: The St. Valentine's Day Massacre was a memorable day as well.

CLAIRE: Oh! You're impossible!

DEWILDER: You turned him down, of course.

CLAIRE: I did not turn him down! (*Showing the ring on her hand.*)
See, we're engaged.

DEWILDER: That's preposterous. Remove that silly trinket this instant before your finger turns green!

CLAIRE: I will not! Sid and I are going to get married.

DEWILDER: Not with my consent, you won't! No niece of mine is going to marry an actor.

CLAIRE: I don't need your consent. I was hoping for your blessing.

DEWILDER: My blessing! You want to marry an actor and expect to get my blessing?

SID: What's wrong with being an actor?

DEWILDER: You stay out of this! (*To Claire.*) Young lady, your mother left all her money in trust for you until I saw fit to give it to you or until you reached the age of thirty. You will not touch a cent of that money until your thirtieth birthday if you marry this—this actor!

CLAIRE: I didn't come here for money. I came because...Oh, why did I come here? I should have known better. Come on, Sid, let's get out of here.

SID: Wait. (*To DeWilder.*) What's wrong with being an actor? It's an honorable profession.

DEWILDER: An honorable profession? Let me ask you something, Sidney. Do you have a hundred dollars in your wallet?

SID: No.

DEWILDER: You probably don't even have a wallet. Do you have five hundred dollars in the bank?

SID: Well...

DEWILDER: Now, you know what's wrong with being an actor.

SID: Well, let me tell you something, Mr. DeWilder, I may not have much money in the bank, but I enjoy my work and I love your niece, and we intend to get married.

DEWILDER: Get married then! Just don't come crawling to me when you need money!

CLAIRE: (*Sobbing.*) Let's go, darling! (*As they're leaving, Bigelow enters.*)

BIGELOW: Claire, what's wrong?

CLAIRE: Ask him!

Breaks into tears as they exit; DeWilder has gone back to his newspaper as Bigelow slowly approaches.

BIGELOW: What's wrong with Claire?

DEWILDER: *(Pretending to be reading.)* Hmm?

BIGELOW: I asked you what's wrong with Claire. She was crying.

DEWILDER: She's got allergies. Probably those darned weeds you brought in here.

BIGELOW: It is not allergies. She was so upset she couldn't even talk.

DEWILDER: I wish you were so upset **you** couldn't talk. Did you get the pain killer?

BIGELOW: Yes, you're to take one every four hours. The pharmacist said they might make you drowsy, though. *(Sets them on the table.)*

DEWILDER: Good, I'll start out with two. I didn't sleep a wink all night. You might check on our little Miss Pymm. I haven't heard a peep out of her since you gave her that tea. Maybe you accidentally switched the cups and inadvertently poisoned her instead of me.

BIGELOW: Oh, I'd never make a mistake like that. *(Pymm enters with letters.)*

DEWILDER: Ah, she's alive after all, unless it is the Spirit of Miss Pymm come to haunt us.

PYMM: I've finished those letters if you want to sign them.

DEWILDER: Later, I'm taking a nap, so keep your rowdiness down. *(He exits, forgetting the pills.)*

PYMM: *(Sits on sofa.)* Is he always this miserable?

BIGELOW: No, sometimes he's worse.

PYMM: How do you put up with it?

BIGELOW: I've been with him twenty-five years. We've learned to...co-exist. Did you hear what happened between him and his niece?

PYMM: Well, I don't want you to think I was snooping...

BIGELOW: *(Sitting next to her.)* Nonsense. What did you hear?

PYMM: Well, they were awfully loud...

BIGELOW: Yes?

PYMM: She's gotten engaged to an actor.

BIGELOW: Oh no!

PYMM: Uh, huh. Mr. DeWilder hit the roof and told her he'd keep her from getting her inheritance if she married him.

BIGELOW: Just like him to pull a nasty trick like that. He'll do it, too.

(Claire and Sid slip back in.) Claire!

CLAIRE: Sssh!

BIGELOW: Oh, you poor dear!

CLAIRE: Where is he?

BIGELOW: He's gone to take a nap. I'll see if he's still awake though if you want.

CLAIRE: No, I just came back for my purse. *(Looking around.)* Here it is. *(Hands it to her.)*

PYMM: You poor thing. He was just a beast to you and your fiancé.

BIGELOW: This is Henrietta Pymm, your uncle's secretary of the day.

CLAIRE: I'm Claire Randolph. Nice to meet you.

PYMM: I couldn't help but overhear. I was working in the study.

CLAIRE: Don't worry about it.

PYMM: No offense, but your uncle is the nastiest person I've ever met.

CLAIRE: If he ever had a kind bone in his body...

DEWILDER: *(Entering.)* I'd have it surgically removed!

CLAIRE: Uncle Oscar!

DEWILDER: *(Imitating her.)* Uncle Oscar!

BIGELOW: I thought you were napping!

DEWILDER: Did you! I forgot the pills, and when I heard all this racket I came to investigate. And a good thing I did, too! *(Takes two of the pills.)* The actor has snuck back into my house intending to slit my throat while I slept.

CLAIRE: Uncle Oscar, don't be ridiculous! I came back for my purse.

DEWILDER: Miss Pymm, in the top drawer of my desk is a loaded revolver.

SID: *(Obviously alarmed.)* Revolver?!

DEWILDER: Bring it to me this instant. We have an intruder! *(She looks to Bigelow who nods to her; she reluctantly leaves.)*

SID: *(Nervously.)* Claire, maybe we should leave.

DEWILDER: Maybe you should. But you'll miss the fireworks!

CLAIRE: All right, you win again, but when I do something desperate, my blood will be on your hands. Remember that, Uncle Oscar! Come on, Sid!

DEWILDER: Oh, don't be so dramatic. That's what comes from hanging around actors. You start to think all the world's a stage—and you're in the center of it! Whom do you think you are that half-wit Juliet? *(To Sid, mockingly.)* "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?" *(Becoming obviously drowsy, dropping into the chair.)* Why, I've...half a...half a...mind to...mind to Miss Pymm, where...where...is...my...

BIGELOW: ...ted-dy bear? *(Pymm enters.)*

DEWILDER: Yes...mommy...where...is...my...ted-dy bear... *(Falls asleep and starts snoring.)*

PYMM: I looked in all the drawers and I couldn't find...teddy bear? I thought he said to get his revolver. I didn't know he had a teddy bear.

BIGELOW: He doesn't, at least not that I know of. And he doesn't have a revolver either. I disposed of that years ago.

SID: Well, that's a relief.

PYMM: *(Looking at DeWilder.)* Is he all right?

BIGELOW: It seems those new pain pills are awfully strong sedatives. He's out like a light.

CLAIRE: Oh, Sid, what are we going to do? We can't survive on an actor's salary. I was counting on my small inheritance to get us on our feet.

SID: We'll manage, darling.

CLAIRE: Miss Bigelow. Can you talk some sense into him?

BIGELOW: About actors, I'm afraid not.

CLAIRE: If only my mother were alive. She'd never stand in the way of my happiness.

BIGELOW: Yes, if only your mother— *(Bigelow is distracted by her thoughts.)*

CLAIRE: I just don't understand why he hates actors so much.

BIGELOW: There are a lot of things you don't know about your uncle. I just might be able to help you two.

CLAIRE: Really?

BIGELOW: Sid, do you have some actor friends who'd be willing to help us out?

SID: Sure. We've got all the Piccadilly Players at our disposal.

BIGELOW: Good. I think it's time for the Piccadilly Players to make a house call.

CLAIRE: Make a house call?

SID: You mean here?

BIGELOW: That's right. They make house calls, don't they?

SID: Under the circumstances, I think they will. You see, DeWilder wrote a particularly scathing review of our last show.

CLAIRE: It was brutal.

SID: So the Piccadilly Players have good reason to put Oscar DeWilder in his place.

BIGELOW: Good. The Piccadilly Players are about to deliver a very bitter pill to Oscar DeWilder and cut one critic-at-large down to size once and for all. (CURTAIN.)

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