

DEADLY ERNEST

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By Donald Payton

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ISBN: 978-1-61588-026-3

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DEADLY ERNEST

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 Men, 8 Women)

HENRY GILCREST *(238 lines)*

Our Hero. He's twenty-eight, meek, mild and even timid. He's wearing a suit that's perhaps a bit too small for him, a wrinkled white shirt and a tie hanging askew. He's small in stature—but that's in direct contrast to his "big" heart.

AUNT ETHEL *(123 lines)*

The head of Aunt Ethel's boarding house. Forty-five, has graying hair. She's attractive, understanding, and very lovable, but is gradually losing patience with her nephew, Henry. She's wearing a housedress in first act—changes to something nicer in ACT TWO.

MARGIE *(82 lines)*

Her daughter of twenty-three. She's plain, but not unattractive. Wearing jeans in first act, later changing to dress.

PUMPKIN *(117 lines)*

Daughter, fourteen, cute and peppy, and is one of Henry's most loyal followers. Wears jeans throughout play.

JILL *(23 lines)*

Pumpkin's pal, is fourteen. She's cute, peppy and wearing jeans.

GLADYS *(84 lines)*

Henry's girlfriend. She's twenty-four, pretty, sweet and understanding. She dresses as desires.

AUNT STELLA *(39 lines)*

Aunt Ethel's sister. She's tall, slender, fifty-ish. She's critical of most people, especially Henry. She dresses as desires, but should be attired in something dark.

CLARISSA *(36 lines)*

ERNESTINE *(30 lines)*

Two little old maids, about sixty. They dress old-fashioned. Both are always together.

ERNIE (41 lines)

A tall ambling chap in his late twenties. He's wearing a suit, cowboy hat and cowboy boots. He talks with a deep voice—a drawl—and likes to laugh and slap people on the back. He comes from Texas.

MR. BUMPUS (118 lines)

A pathetic looking little man of doubtful age. He's wearing a dark hat and coat—much too large for him—and his shirt is wrinkled and soiled. He has a bow tie, heavy shoes, spats, a plaid vest and a very long key chain. He's from the East and talks with a heavy Brooklyn accent.

SLEEPY (48 lines)

Bumpus' buddy. Sleepy's a dense little chap of about thirty-five, wearing a sweatshirt, a cap pulled low over his ears and baggy trousers and tennis shoes. He has droopy eyelids—is also from the East.

C. E. GRIMM (19 lines)

Aunt Ethel's gentleman friend. He's about fifty, tall, wears glasses. Dresses immaculately.

DR. EARNEST (6 lines)

Middle-aged. Wears glasses. Carries a doctor's kit. Wears business suit.

HAND PROPERTIES

ACT ONE

HENRY: Suitcase, money, newspaper, sack of peanuts

AUNT ETHEL: Newspaper

STELLA: Baseball

MARGIE: Two men's socks

CLARISSA: Box of candy

ERNESTINE: Box of candy

MR. BUMPUS: Red bandana

ACT TWO

PUMPKIN: Magazine, cough drops, sack of candy

MARGIE: Vase of flowers

GLADYS: Picnic basket, apple

ERNESTINE: Magazine, glass of milk

MR. BUMPUS: Newspaper

DR. EARNEST: Medicine bag.

ACT THREE

DR. EARNEST: Bottle of pills

GLADYS: Glass of water

ERNESTINE: Book, small box

CLARISSA: Small box

MR. BUMPUS: Money

SLEEPY: Money

STAGE PROPERTIES

Davenport

Magazine rack

2 Easy chairs

Floor lamp

2 Table lamps

2 Tables

DO NOT COPY

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING:

Early evening at the comfortable, but not pretentious, living room of the Terwilligers. At down left is the opening leading to the front hall and may be either curtained or open. At up left-center is the door leading into the dining room and kitchen, and the remainder of the house is reached via the stairs, right of center. A window is in the wall right, with curtains, blinds, etc. A small table and lamp are in front of the window, and below is a chair. A sofa is at up right, and down left is a table with lamp, vase of flowers, telephone and chair. A chair with magazine rack is above door left, backed by floor lamp. Other furniture and decorations may be added as desired.

AT RISE:

Margie, twenty-three, plain but not unattractive, is stretched out on sofa, breathing deeply and orally. She's wearing a man's shirt, jeans, loafers and no socks. Her tones—if you could call them that—are gradually getting louder, and continue to do so, even though the phone starts ringing. Presently, Aunt Ethel enters left-center, drying her hands on her apron. She's the head of the house, forty-five, hair graying just a little. For the past few years she's been endeavoring to support her "brood" by operating a boarding house. She's wearing a housedress. She crosses to phone after entering.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Into phone.)* Hello, Aunt Ethel's Boarding House.

Aunt Ethel speaking. Who? (Louder.) Who? (She turns to Margie, putting hand over mouthpiece.) Margie.

MARGIE: *(Breathes twice orally, then speaks without looking up.)* Yes, Mother?

AUNT ETHEL: I'm talking on the phone. Stop breathing.

MARGIE: Mother! *(She sits up.)* Are you asking me to drop dead?

AUNT ETHEL: *(Into phone again.)* Who? Yes, Henry Gilcrest lives here. He's my nephew. *(Hand over mouthpiece again.)* Is Henry here, Margie?

MARGIE: *(Flat on her back again.)* I haven't seen him, Mums. *(She starts in again, louder than ever.)*

AUNT ETHEL: He isn't here. You're welcome. *(She hangs up.)* Someone for Henry. They'll call back later. *(She arranges flowers in vase.)* Margie, what in heaven's name are you doing?

MARGIE: I'm improving my tones, Mums.

AUNT ETHEL: Improving them? They're getting worse by the second.

MARGIE: I'm preparing to launch into a new career.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Arms akimbo.)* Not again!

MARGIE: (*Propping herself up.*) Don't discourage me. At last I think I've found my calling.

AUNT ETHEL: And if you're not careful every hog in the county will be here.

MARGIE: (*Rising.*) Mums! You'll think differently when I stand in Carnegie Hall... (*She enfolds hands, looks upward and out front.*) The vast theater crammed to capacity, all attention focused on me, your daughter, Margie Terwilliger—only I'll be known as Margie DuBouis then.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Brightening.*) You mean you're getting married, dear?

MARGIE: Oh no. That will be my stage name. You see, great exponents of the arts always change their names.

She stretches out on sofa, breathes loudly again.

AUNT ETHEL: If they make noises like that I can see why.

MARGIE: (*Pushes herself up, dreamily.*) And they'll applaud when I finish my aria, and it will go on and on, and he will meet me at the stage door.

AUNT ETHEL: He?

MARGIE: And we'll dine and dance and it will be heavenly in his arms and he'll ask me to marry him immediately—and I'll refuse.

AUNT ETHEL: Now I know you're losing your mind.

MARGIE: But don't you see, Mums? There'll be hundreds of them.

AUNT ETHEL: There will? I haven't even seen one around her lately.

MARGIE: (*Slumping.*) Mums. You've snapped the spell.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Arms akimbo.*) So it's a singer you're going to be now, is it? Last month it was an actress...last year a scientist...the year before that a teacher. And no telling what it'll be next month. You'll probably be a rocket pilot flying to the moon.

MARGIE: (*Pushing herself up.*) Mums, what a terrific idea.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Starting left-center.*) Oh, for heaven's sake.

MARGIE: (*Bouncing up.*) I need a hundred dollars for singing lessons, Mums.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Shaking her finger at her.*) You need a husband, that's what.

MARGIE: But don't you see, Mums, that's what this is leading to. There are jillions of available bachelors in show business.

AUNT ETHEL: I don't like this singing nonsense, the same as I didn't like that other stuff you've dreamed up. You were going to be a great scientist and meet lots of dashing young men with great ambitions and high ideals. Why don't you just concentrate on one of the fellows around here and be done with it?

MARGIE: But Mums, the cheese has to be put where there are mice. You can't stuff it in a steel vault and expect the mice to find it. Anyway... *(She sniffs.)* they're all rats around here.

AUNT ETHEL: That isn't the way you used to feel about Fred Gray and Clyde Clinchmore and Loren Landworth. What changed your mind?

MARGIE: *(Sinking onto sofa, chin in hands.)* I guess it was their wives. I'm sorta basic trainin' for husbands, Mums. They all go with me and then marry someone else.

AUNT ETHEL: Now, now, dear. *(Sitting beside her, puts arms around her and pats her shoulder.)* You're just twenty-three. One of these days you'll meet some handsome young captain on the good boat Romance and off you'll go—floating down the river of love.

MARGIE: Yeah. But if I wait much longer I'll be sunk, Mums. I think I'm up the creek without a paddle—or whatever they say in France.

Phone rings.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Answering it.)* Hello. Yes, Henry Gilcrest lives here. Who? *(Astonished.)* The police? *(Quickly.)* I never saw Henry Gilcrest in my life. *(She hangs up.)*

MARGIE: *(Rising.)* The police are after Henry, Mother. What's he done now?

AUNT ETHEL: *(Grabbing paper and scanning it hurriedly.)* Daring hold-up man robs bank of \$5,000. Surely Henry wouldn't... *(Her voice trails off.)*

MARGIE: I don't think so, Mums. He never struck me as being particularly daring.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Turning a page.)* The Southside Drugstore was broken into. Thieves made off with several items, including thirty-five comic books.

MARGIE: *(Peering over her mother's shoulder.)* Uh-oh. **That's** Henry.

AUNT ETHEL: Access was gained by climbing up on the roof, sawing their way through the air-conditioning unit, leaping down to the floor fifteen feet below and—*(She looks up.)* No, it couldn't be Henry. He's never worked that hard in his life. *(Phone rings again.)*

AUNT ETHEL: *(Into phone.)* Hello. The Happy Day Loan Company? I'm sorry, Henry Gilcrest isn't here. *(She hangs up.)* My, my, a loan company now. That Henry. He's a shining example of a dim bulb if ever one existed. He's worthless...just plain no good. And that's typical of the male animal, Margie. They're all alike. Look at your father. He just pulled out high and dry ten years ago and left me to shift for myself. If it weren't for men this would be a happy world.

Margie drops onto sofa again, chin in hands.

AUNT ETHEL: Who heaps all the burdens onto the shoulders of us women? Men! Who causes all the tears and heartaches and grief? Men! Who's responsible for the wars and unrest and misery in this world? Men. So why should we women even give them a second thought.

MARGIE: I agree completely, Mums.

AUNT ETHEL: It's just a bunch of nonsense. *(Sits by table, down left.)* Humph. Men. *(Phone rings.)* Hello. *(She stands bolt upright, hand over receiver, excitedly.)* Margie, it's a man.

MARGIE: *(Running to phone.)* A man? *(Excitedly.)* Hello. *(Melting.)* Oh, hello, Angus. *(Hand over phone.)* It's Angus Jones—from the office.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Triumphantly.)* There you are. And you wanted to take the cheese somewhere else. *(She starts humming as she busies herself about the room.)*

MARGIE: *(Excitedly.)* Yes, Angus. You're what? *(Her manner changes abruptly.)* Oh, Oh. *(Sadly.)* Yes, Angus. The papers on Brown and Brown are in the file under B. *(Hotly.)* B as in Brown. Where did you think they'd be, in the water cooler? *(She slams down the receiver, wails.)* He has a date tonight at seven and is in a hurry and he called me to see where the papers are.

AUNT ETHEL: My goodness, dear. I just noticed. Your tones are very good at that. *(Margie wails and runs upstairs.)* I mean—oh my. *(Phone rings again. She crosses to sit.)* Aunt Ethel's Boarding House.

Stella, Aunt Ethel's sister, enters left. She's a tall, slender, very straight woman of perhaps fifty. She's very stern and critical of most people—especially Henry. Dressed as desired, but should wear something dark.

AUNT ETHEL: *(Into phone.)* Yes, Henry Gilcrest lives here, and no, he isn't home now. May I take a message? Meyer's Clothing Store? All right. Yes, I'll inform him his bill's due and if you see him first, tell him he owes me three month's rent. *(Slams phone on hook.)*

STELLA: *(Arms folded.)* Three months, huh? It's probably more than that.

AUNT ETHEL: Good evening, Stella.

STELLA: Let's see. If memory serves, he came here about the time the Fairchilds got their new car. I distinctly remember, because

Henry smacked into it—head-on—with his bicycle. And he was here when Mr. Farnsworth was in the hospital. In fact, that's the reason Mr. Farnsworth was in the hospital. Henry fell on him, remember? He was helping the kids build a tree house and fell out on Mr. Farnsworth. Why in the world do you take it, Ethel? I don't care if he is your nephew. No human being in his right mind could stay that way fifteen minutes around Henry. He's a jinx.

AUNT ETHEL: The boy's endeavoring whole-heartedly to turn over a new leaf, Stella.

STELLA: The only time he ever turned over a leaf was when he fell out of that tree. (*Crosses to Aunt Ethel, who is once again tidying up the room.*) How old is Henry, Ethel?

AUNT ETHEL: I think he's in the neighborhood of twenty-five.

STELLA: Are you kidding? He moved out of that neighborhood five years ago. He's thirty if he's a day. And what's he doing now? This minute?

AUNT ETHEL: He's at work—at the warehouse.

STELLA: Warehouse my eye! He's out playing ball with Pumpkin and Jill.

AUNT ETHEL: He couldn't be. He was coming right home and help me carry in my cupboard.

STELLA: I saw it on the front porch. And I also saw Henry with my own eyes, playing ball.

A loud crash of glass is heard out center.

STELLA: See?

AUNT ETHEL: Looks like you win again, Stella, as usual.

STELLA: As usual is right, especially when we're on the subject of Henry.

A baseball rolls through the door left-center. Stella picks it up.

STELLA: Humph! (*She tosses ball in air a few times.*) A grown man at that!

Pumpkin, fourteen, enters left, with her friend Jill, also fourteen. They're cute and full of life. Wearing jeans, sweatshirts and tennis shoes.

PUMPKIN: (*Stepping in left.*) Hi.

JILL: Hi.

STELLA: So the dog's sending in the lambs for it, is he?

AUNT ETHEL: What happened, Pumpkin?

PUMPKIN: Well Mums, I was up to the plate with the bases loaded, see, and we was three runs behind and the pitcher wound up and threw it... (*She strikes a batter's pose.*) and it was a fast ball, see, and I kept a steady head on it, see, and then I swung... (*She does.*) and boy... (*Turning.*) I guess you'd say it landed in the bleachers.

AUNT ETHEL: Especially if you mean the dining room.

STELLA: (*Firmly.*) Pumpkin?

PUMPKIN: (*Uneasily.*) Yes, Ma'am?

STELLA: What happened?

PUMPKIN: Like I says, the bases were loaded and—

STELLA: (*Breaking in.*) Pumpkin...

PUMPKIN: Well, maybe there was just two on base and—

STELLA: (*Breaking in again.*) Pumpkin...

PUMPKIN: I distinctly remember I was batting...

STELLA: Pumpkin...

PUMPKIN: (*Sitting.*) Henry threw wild to second...

STELLA: (*Triumphantly.*) Just as I suspected. He's done it again. A grown man. In a kid's game. When he should be working. There's your receipt, Ethel. The sooner you get rid of him the better off you'll be.

PUMPKIN: But Aunt Stella. (*She rises.*)

STELLA: He owes you rent, Ethel. It's practically like the national debt. And your lend-lease policy just can't go on. And he's in trouble all the time and can't do anything around the house. Fact is, he can't do anything period.

PUMPKIN: Oh yeah? You oughta see him hook-slid into second.

JILL: And he's the best shortstop we've got. He can go either way and—

PUMPKIN: (*Breaking in.*) He's a great clutch hitter, Mums, and—

JILL: (*Breaking in.*) And he's a terrific leader for hikes and—

STELLA: (*Breaking in, bluntly.*) He's a grown man, girls.

JILL: (*Dreamily, sitting.*) I'll say he is.

STELLA: Who was that last call from? One of the stores? His bill's due, isn't it?

AUNT ETHEL: And the loan company called, too. And the police. They want to talk to him.

STELLA: The police? He'll disgrace you sure if you don't throw him out? (*Both girls are sitting, chins in hands.*) Look, Ethel, I don't care if he is your own sister's son. He's my sister's son, too, and I haven't taken it upon myself to provide him a—a stall, complete with hay, a feedbag and all the trimmings. Let him get out and rustle for himself.

AUNT ETHEL: The boy tries, Stella.

STELLA: He just tries to get into trouble, if you ask me. He owes you over three months' rent and you're running a boarding house. It's your livelihood—your bread and butter. He's literally eating you out of house and home. (*Aunt Ethel walks right, thinking, with Stella following her.*) All of his creditors are howling and he's in debt all over town. The police are after him. And what does he do? He plays ball and knocks out windows.

PUMPKIN: Well you might say Henry's just unlucky, Aunt Stella.

STELLA: You might say that, yes. You might! I wouldn't! He's do-less, thoughtless, hopeless, helpless, spineless, brainless, and every other less you can think of. Ethel, the boy's just got to go.

AUNT ETHEL: I know you're right, Stella. I know I should just tell him he'd better move somewhere else. But when it comes right down to it. (*Her voice trails off.*)

STELLA: Well, I'll help you. The D day, H hour, M minute has arrived. Tonight Henry Gilcrest gets the big shoe.

AUNT ETHEL: All right, Stella. I know in my heart it's the right thing. I'll start dinner. (*She heads left-center.*)

STELLA: (*Following her.*) I'll stay right here. I wouldn't miss this for the world and I'm personally going to throw out his suitcase—if he has one. And don't forget to call the newspaper.

AUNT ETHEL: The newspaper?

STELLA: Of course. Tell them you have a room for rent. It'll come out in the classifieds tomorrow and that way you'll have to throw Henry out.

PUMPKIN: But Mums, Henry's too nice a guy to be booted out.

JILL: He wouldn't do nobody any harm and wouldn't even hurt a flea—even if it was bitin' him, I betcha and—

She stops when Aunt Ethel and Stella exit into dining room.

PUMPKIN: Gee. (*She drops onto sofa.*)

JILL: Yeah, me too. (*They sit, chins in hands.*)

Henry Gilcrest sticks his head in left, looks all around. He's about twenty-eight, is meek, mild, even timid. He's wearing a suit that's a little too small for him, a wrinkled white shirt and a tie hanging askew. He has mud on his trousers and on his face.

HENRY: (*In stage whisper.*) Is the coast clear?

PUMPKIN: Yeah. Come on in, Henry.

JILL: (*Sadly.*) Hi, Henry.

HENRY: Where's the ball?

PUMPKIN: Aunt Stella's got it.

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HENRY: Anything broken—besides the window?

PUMPKIN: Just our hearts, Henry.

HENRY: You mean she's gonna keep it?

PUMPKIN: It's worse than that. You're getting' the gate, Henry. It's awful. They're throwin' you out—tonight. Right out of the house. Mom's puttin' an ad in the paper... (*Sniffing.*) to rent your room. I think she's been upset with you lately, Henry.

HENRY: Yeah—I sorta suspicioned that, bein' as how she hadn't talked to me for five days.

PUMPKIN: And some loan company called today, Henry.

JILL: And the store, too.

PUMPKIN: And the police.

HENRY: Gee whiz, I forgot. I had to go down to the police station today. I committed a crime.

JILL: (*Wide-eyed.*) A crime?

HENRY: Yeah. I parked over-time—with my bicycle.

PUMPKIN: Gee, we sure would miss you, Henry. (*With finality.*) You aren't leavin'. No matter what Mums says, you aren't leavin'. I'll go on strike. I'll rebel, I'll—

HENRY: (*Breaking in.*) Nope. Your Mom's right. I shoulda gone a long time ago, Pumpkin. I'm nothin' but a bother. Don't cause nothin' but trouble. (*He sits, dejectedly.*)

JILL: No you don't, Henry. I don't think so. Pumpkin don't think so. None of the rest of the gang thinks so. And my dog Wig-Wag thinks you're about it.

PUMPKIN: And what about my cat, Mouse-trap? He'd probably commit cat-slaughter or whatever cats commit.

HENRY: Sure, the dogs, cats and kids'll miss me. And I'll miss them. But—

Doorbell rings.

PUMPKIN: The cops. They're after you, Henry.

JILL: You better hide. We'll get rid of 'em.

HENRY: (*As they pull him up.*) But---

PUMPKIN: Behind the sofa, Henry.

HENRY: (*As they hustle him toward sofa.*) But—

PUMPKIN: Now, over the top, Henry. (*And they push him over, then cross to door, open it.*)

Gladys, Henry's girlfriend, enters left. She's twenty-four, pretty, sweet and understanding. She's dressed as desired.

PUMPKIN: (*As Gladys enters.*) Oh, hi, Gladys. Come on in. We thought you were the police.

GLADYS: The police? What's Henry done now?

PUMPKIN: Jill, this is Gladys, Henry's girlfriend.

JILL: Hi.

PUMPKIN: She's really his finance.

GLADYS: What she means is, I'm his fiance'. (*Smiling.*) Only she probably had it right the first time. Is Henry here?

PUMPKIN: Yeah, he's... (*She motions toward sofa, then catches herself.*) I mean—that is—well—

HENRY: (*Sticking head over back of sofa, timidly.*) Hi.

GLADYS: Don't tell me. You're playing hide and go seek and you're it again.

HENRY: Well, I—that is—(*He looks at the girls.*)

PUMPKIN: Come on, Jill, they probably want to be alone.

JILL: (*Hesitantly.*) Yeah—sure. (*She looks at Henry, then turns and follows Pumpkin upstairs. Henry comes around sofa.*)

HENRY: (*Brushing himself off.*) Hi.

GLADYS: Henry, you've got mud all over your trousers.

HENRY: (*Looking down.*) Well whadaya know.

GLADYS: I suppose you got the sliding into second?

HENRY: I most certainly didn't. (*Pause. She looks at him.*) It was third. (*He sits on sofa.*)

GLADYS: Well? (*She crosses to him, sits.*)

HENRY: Well what?

GLADYS: What did your boss say?

HENRY: Oh, he said he thought it looked like rain and it would help the crops and—

GLADYS: (*Breaking in.*) I mean about the raise, Henry. Your raise. The one you were going to ask him for.

HENRY: Oh, you mean my ten dollar raise. Yeah.

GLADYS: Did you talk to him?

HENRY: Sure I talked to him.

GLADYS: What did you say?

HENRY: Oh, that I thought it might rain, all right, and it definitely would help the crops and—(*He looks at her. Stops. She's glaring.*)

GLADYS: Henry Gilcrest. (*She rises, arms akimbo.*) Did you even ask him for a raise?

HENRY: Mr. Dingle and I had a long talk, Gladys. (*He rises, sinks hands in pockets.*) I was workin' in the warehouse and he sent word that he wanted to see me, and well, I knocked on his door and—but you aren't interested in any boring details.

GLADYS: Go on, Henry.

HENRY: (*Fidgeting with his hands.*) Well, just as I was ready to ask him for a raise he said that I'd been with the company for about two years and never in his life had he beheld an employee like me. He said I bungled everything I did and he said I wasted a lot of time and he said—

GLADYS: (*Breaking in.*) Henry, you're a fool.

HENRY: (*Sitting.*) Yeah. He said that, too. Gee, I try, Gladys, but I just don't seem to be able to do anything right.

GLADYS: Look Henry...you've simply got to get a raise. Just go in and tell him what the score is.

HENRY: I don't think he cares. He never liked sports.

GLADYS: That isn't what I mean. He's just a big bully. You've got to stand up for your rights. You can't let people just push and shove you around. Ask him for that raise. We've been engaged for five years and you haven't even given me a ring.

HENRY: (*Rising.*) I spent my last dime giving you one last night.

GLADYS: The only ring you've ever given me has been on the phone.

HENRY: (*Sitting again.*) Yeah—that's the one I'm talking about.

GLADYS: (*Pleadingly.*) Henry, five years ago you asked me to wait for you. I can't wait until I'm an old lady. I want a home and family and well...well Henry, you're about the finest person I've ever known. You're good and sweet and decent and you never have had a single evil thought in your head. But I'm beginning to wonder if you ever even had a thought, period. I've waited until I'm tired of waiting. (*She folds her arms, turns away.*) The rest is up to you.

HENRY: (*Chin in hands.*) I'm a failure.

GLADYS: (*Turning to him.*) You aren't a failure. You've worked hard for Mr. Dingle. Now march right over to the phone and call him and demand a raise.

HENRY: Now?

GLADYS: (*Firmly.*) Now.

HENRY: But Gladys, I—

GLADYS: (*Breaking in, louder, pointing to phone.*) Now! Are you going to call him or do I have to?

HENRY: Well, okay, but—well, okay. (*He thrusts hands deep in pockets, crosses to phone, turns to her, then to phone again, picks it up without dialing.*) Hello. Mr. Dingle, please. (*He hangs up.*) He isn't there.

GLADYS: Dial the phone, Henry.

HENRY: (*Sheepishly.*) Oh, yeah. (*He returns to phone, reaches for it just as it rings. He jumps back.*)

GLADYS: For heaven's sake. (*Answering it.*) Hello. Yes. Henry Gilcrest is right here. (*Holds it toward him.*) It's for you.

HENRY: (*Taking it.*) Who is it?

GLADYS: Mr. Dingle.

HENRY: Oh, Mr. Dingle. *(As it registers he freezes, tosses her the phone.)* Mr. Dingle, I—what Mr. Dingle? Now just a minute, Mr. Dingle. The wrong shipment? But Mr. Dingle, I—yes, Mr. Dingle—but Mr. Dingle.

GLADYS: Slip in a word salary-wise, Henry.

HENRY: I can't even get a word edge-wise. *(Into phone.)* But Mr. Dingle. Ooooooh, what you said. But—*(He cringes, blinks, looks at phone, blinks again, puts hand over phone, then puts it under his arm, then under his coat, looks at Gladys, gestures helplessly. He takes it out, puts it under coat again.)*

GLADYS: Go on, Henry. Tell him.

HENRY: *(Taking it out from under coat.)* Boss, I—*(He stops, opens mouth again, then closes it, looks around, then puts phone on table.)* Yes, boss. *(He goes away, leaving phone on table. Gladys follows him.)*

GLADYS: Henry Gilcrest, a man has to hold up for his rights. If you don't toot your whistle, no one's going to do it for you. A man's just as big as he things he is. You can do anything if you set your mind to it.

HENRY: *(Crossing and picking up phone again.)* Yes, Mr. Dingle. *(Then he puts it on table again., paces.)*

GLADYS: *(Following him.)* You have to have confidence. You can't get anywhere if you keep getting pushed and shoved around. You've got to act.

HENRY: I'm afraid I'm not much of an actor, Gladys. *(He sits.)* When I was in school, they even threw me out of the class play. *(He crosses to phone again.)* Yes, Mr. Dingle. *(Lays phone down again.)*

GLADYS: That isn't what I mean. What I'm driving at, Henry, is that you've got to set your ship for a definite course and take the reins and guide it in, see?

HENRY: *(With finality.)* You're right, Gladys. I'll tell him right now. *(He crosses to phone, listens.)* Gee, is he mad. He hasn't been like this since I put boric acid in the water cooler. *(Into phone.)* Yes, Mr. Dingle, I—I— *(He listens, frowns, blinks, takes phone and looks at it.)* He's decided I'm a man, Gladys.

GLADYS: Really?

HENRY: Yeah—he surely wouldn't say things like that in front of me if I wasn't. *(Into phone again.)* But Mr. Dingle, I— *(He blinks, looks at phone again, then tosses it in the waste basket, crosses right.)*

GLADYS: March right over to him and tell him you—you deserve a big raise. Tell him you want to get married—immediately. That you're

in love, Henry. Tell him—and then we'll go out to the Silver Platter for dinner.

HENRY: Oh. (*Hands in pockets.*) That reminds me, Gladys. I'm broke.

GLADYS: You were broke last Saturday and all last week. Are you broke again?

HENRY: Well I wouldn't say again. This is the same broke. Only I'm sorta pulverized now. All I've got to my name is seventeen dollars and eight-three cents and well, I can't splurge that. This day and time you just never know when you'll need some ready cash. (*He crosses to waste basket, takes out phone.*) Yes, Mr. Dingle. (*Then he throws it back in.*)

GLADYS: (*Sniffing.*) Henry Gilcrest, I—I've tried to be understanding. I've swallowed my pride on a hundred occasions and I've put up with you just as long as I can. (*Gradually getting louder.*) A girl can stand just so much and as for standing anymore with you, my feet are hurting something terrible.

HENRY: I didn't know your feet were hurting, Gladys. Here. (*He starts to lead her to a chair.*)

GLADYS: Take your hands off me, Henry Gilcrest, and keep them off. You're lazy, shiftless... (*He blinks on each one as she backs him left.*) no good, hopeless, and the biggest sucker this world has ever seen. And besides that, you'll never amount to a thing and I'm through with you. I'm tossing you overboard like an empty bottle and if you ever float up to someone else and they make the same fatal mistake, I did—heaven help'em. (*He trips over the waste basket and falls flat.*)

HENRY: (*On floor, picking up phone.*) Yes, Mr. Dingle. By the way, Mr. Dingle I've been wanting to talk to you about a raise and—what? (*He freezes eyes wide.*) I'm fired?

GLADYS: (*Tearfully.*) Goodbye, Henry. (*She runs out left.*)

HENRY: But Gladys... (*Into phone.*) But Mr. Dingle. (*He scrambles up, gets foot entangled in phone cord and waste basket, starts left and pulls vase of flowers and phone base off table.*) Oh gee.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Calling, sharply.*) Henry Gilcrest. (*She appears at door, left-center, arms akimbo.*) That's the last straw, Henry. (*Pointing.*) Out the door.

HENRY: (*Backing out left, frantically.*) I'm on my way now, Aunt Ethel, I—

AUNT ETHEL: (*As he exits.*) Watch out for my new cupboard, Henry. Watch—

She's interrupted by another loud splintering of glass, banging and crashing.

AUNT ETHEL: (*Slumping.*) Never mind, Henry, never mind.

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE, SCENCE 2

SETTING:

A park that night. Played in front of curtain. A lone bench is seen.

AT RISE:

Henry, attired as he was in ACT ONE, SCENE 1, enters left in front of curtains. He's carrying a rolled up newspaper. He crosses sadly, drops onto bench wearily.

HENRY: Gee. What a sad kettle of kraut. (*He digs into pocket, fishes out a sack, takes a peanut from it and shells it, flips hulls out, eats peanut and sits with chin in hands as he chomps on it.*) Go away, pigeon. Shoo! Scat! A man can't even get any peace in the park. Stop pesterin' me. It's enough that the whole world's turned against me without you pigeons startin' in, too. Go away. Go to Capistrano or wherever pigeons go. Go on. Beat it. (*Glaring.*) What do you want, a peanut? You wouldn't take a man's last peanut would you? All right. You win. (*He shells peanut, flips it to imaginary pigeon.*) My last one. Take it. (*He watches.*) Well, what's wrong now? That's all I've got. Honest Injun. Cross my heart. (*He does.*) Well don't glare that way. You look almost human. I'm sorry little pigeon—I apologize. (*A little fellow carrying a cane enters right in front of curtain. It's Mr. Bumpus. He's a pathetic looking little fellow. His age? It's doubtful if he'd know, himself. He's wearing a dark hat and coat—much too large for him—and his shirt is wrinkled and soiled. He has a bow tie, heavy shoes, spats, a plaid vest and very long key chain. He's from the East and talks with a heavy Brooklyn accent. He stops when he sees Henry, takes another step, stops again.*)

HENRY: (*Still talking to pigeon.*) Look at you. Not a worry in the world. You can fly off to some roof-top and sleep and then come back here tomorrow and people feed you peanuts. You probably got a girl pigeon that wouldn't turn against you for the world. The world. (*Chin in hands again.*) What a lousy world. It's for the birds. (*Glaring.*) Now go on. Beat it.

Mr. Bumpus sidles up to him.

HENRY: I couldn't help it if I broke Aunt Ethel's window. Gee. Out of a job. Kicked out of my room. My girl's turned against me. Gee.

MR. BUMPUS: (*Sitting beside him on bench.*) It's a terrible woild.

HENRY: It's worse than that. It's plumb lousy. (*He opens paper.*)

MR. BUMPUS: Did I hears ya say your goil friend had toined agin ya?

HENRY: (*Dismally.*) Yeah, she turned all right. And she didn't signal or nothin'. She just turned.

MR. BUMPUS: You know how to keep from havin' trouble wit females?

HENRY: How?

MR. BUMPUS: Don't have nuttin' to do wit 'em. Just abnor 'em. And you know how to keep from bein' fired?

HENRY: How?

MR. BUMPUS: Just don't go to woik in da foist place. What'll it gitcha? Gallosed hands...bloodshot eyeballs...ulsters in da stomach. It ain't woith it. None of these here delicacies is woith it. (*Takes Henry's paper.*) Let me give youse a fer instance. (*He opens paper.*) What does dis say...right here by da pitcher?

HENRY: (*Looking at it, glumly.*) Taxes goin' up.

MR. BUMPUS: (*Pointing.*) And what does dat say?

HENRY: (*Same tone of voice.*) European leader predicts war.

MR. BUMPUS: And dis here?

HENRY: Airplaine accident snuffs seven.

MR. BUMPUS: Dere's your fer instance, pal. See, nuttin' but worry and grief and pain. Now, if we couldn't read we wouldn't worry about it. Right? Right? It's as simple as two and two's tree. What's your name, friend.

HENRY: Henry Gilcrest—only we aren't friends. I don't have any friends.

MR. BUMPUS: I begs your humbled parding, friend, but accrodin' to an old pervoib, a friend what's needy is a friend indeedy and youse is as needy as anybody I knows. I'm Mr. Bumpus, friend. (*He extends hand.*)

HENRY: (*Extending hand, without looking, they shake.*) Hi.

MR. BUMPUS: So da woild has toined agin you, has it?

HENRY: Yeah.

MR. BUMPUS: Mother Oith has given you da cold shoulder, huh?

HENRY: I'll say. I'm washed up. Nothin' to live for.

MR. BUMPUS: Henry, da radar of Providence has guided me to ya. I believe I has access to da very poison you wants to see. How much money you got?

HENRY: (*Miserably.*) Seventeen dollars and eighty-three cents.

MR. BUMPUS: Seventeen eighty-tree? Well whadaya know! What a quencequence. You is in luck.

HENRY: (*Turning.*) Me?

MR. BUMPUS: Why dat's just what Oinest charges.

HENRY: Oinest?

MR. BUMPUS: Yeah—E-R-N-E-S-T, Oinest. I happens to know fer a certunty dat \$17.83 is Oinest's usual fee.

HENRY: For what?

MR. BUMPUS: Fer geggin' people like you otta deir miseries. Life's horrible, ain't it? (*Henry nods.*) It ain't worth livin', is it? (*He shakes head negatively.*) Everybody's got it in fer ya, ain't dey? (*He nods again.*) You're just jinxed, Henry. (*Bumpus rises.*) Why you're liable to hoit someone. Dey might run over you and ruin deir car—you might fall outta deir window and squash deir petunias—one o' deir pedalgreed pooches might put da bit on you and die o' ptomaine poisonin'. I've heard o' poor downtrodden huming beans like you. You're a menace to mankind, Henry.

HENRY: You're right, Mr. Bumpus.

MR. BUMPUS: Henry, since you're a friend o' mine, and I'm a friend o' yours, I'll tell ya what I'm gonna do. I'll give dat==dat everteen eighty-tree to Oinest and he'll get youse out o' your miseries. You won't know when it'll happen—or how—and you won't have nuttin' to worry about.

HENRY: (*Rising.*) You mean I pay this earnest to exterminate me? I don't believe I like that.

MR. BUMPUS: (*Crossing to him.*) But don'tcha see, Henry. Like I says, you're liable to hoit someone, boy. Some innocent speckletator...some rosy-checked little juvenile delinquent...some harmless little old lady. Why da way things happen you might even sneeze and give her pewmonia. (*Hand on Henry's shoulder.*) It's for da good o' mankind, Henry. Don't you see, fer a change, you'll actually do somethin' good fer people. You'll be a hero.

HENRY: Yeah--you're right. (*Digs into pocket.*) Here it is.

MR. BUMPUS: (*As Henry plunks it into his open hand.*) You're a man wit' a head on his shoulders, Henry. And don't worry about Oinest. He'll carry out his part o' da bargain. You'll never know who it is. Why it could be anybody. I'm proud o' ya, Henry. (*He looks into space as they shake.*) You've made a great conterbution to mankind. You'll stand beside Thomas Eddleson...Levi Whitney...(Henry swells up.) And—and Luther Bloodbank. (*He blows nose on a red bandana.*) I wants youse to know dat I recognizes you fer da man dat you are. Inside of dat tattered shoit dere's a heart as big as da woild and it beats like a domino. G'bye, Henry.

HENRY: (*Visibly moved.*) Gee whiz, Mr. Bumpus, I—I don't know what to say.

MR. BUMPUS: (*Holding up hand.*) Don't say a woid, Henry. Just—let me remember you as ya now stand. (*He crosses left, turns, blows nose. Henry waves to him and Bumpus exit left.*)

HENRY: Gee. Just think. Me. Henry Gilcrest, standin' beside Thomas Edison and Eli Whitney. (*Proudly swelling up.*) Gee!

LIGHT ARE BLACKED OUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

SETTING:

An hour later in the Terwilliger's living room.

AT RISE:

Pumpkin and Jill, attired as they were in Scene One, are sitting on sofa, chins in hands, gazing into space.

PUMPKIN: Poor Henry.

JILL: Yeah—poor Henry. Where's he goin'?

PUMPKIN: He didn't say.

JILL: What's he gonna do?

PUMPKIN: He didn't say.

JILL: Didn't he have anything to say?

PUMPKIN: I don't know. He didn't say.

Margie enters left-center, holding a man's sock in each hand—and far in front of her. Each sock is tattered.

PUMPKIN: Is Henry really leaving, Margie? (*She rises.*)

MARGIE: He is. He's upstairs packing now. I had to fish two of his socks out of the hamper. (*Holding them away from her.*) And I do mean fish.

PUMPKIN: Poor Henry. Thrown right out of the house like a bum.

MARGIE: Well?

PUMPKIN: Well, Henry certainly isn't a bum. It's just that nobody around here understands him...besides me and Jill. And Clarissa and Ernestine.

MARGIE: Clarissa and Ernestine are old maids. They appreciate anything with trousers.

JILL: (*Slumping.*) I'm gonna miss him.

PUMPKIN: And I'm gonna miss him, too. I don't care what you say, Henry's real George, he's always been real George, he always will be real George, and he's real Georger than anyone else I've ever known—by George.

MARGIE: Pumpkin, that's no way for a little girl to talk.

PUMPKIN: And throwin' Henry out is no way for adult grown-up people to act, either.

MARGIE: (*Sitting.*) Yeah, that's true. It isn't right. You know something? (*Chin in hands.*) I'm gonna miss him too.

Clarissa and Ernestine, two little old maids of about sixty, come down, the stairs, each with a small box, and stop on landing. They dress old fashioned; are always together.

CLARISSA: We came down to say goodbye to Henry.

ERNESTINE: Yes. We came to say goodbye to Henry.

PUMPKIN: (*Dismally.*) Hi Clarissa—Hi Ernestine.

MARGIE: He's leaving as soon as he gets his things together.

CLARISSA: We've got something to give him.

ERNESTINE: Yes, we've got something to give him.

CLARISSA: (*Venturing down a step.*) We're gonna miss Henry.

(*Ernestine nods.*) Well, we'll go back to our room and wait. (*She starts back upstairs, followed by Ernestine. She stops, turns.*) Poor Henry. (*Exits.*)

ERNESTINE: (*Turning at top of stairs.*) Poor Henry. (*She goes out.*)

AUNT ETHEL: (*As she and Stella enter left-center.*) But perhaps I should pack him a lunch.

STELLA: Now don't start giving in to him. You know Henry—let him lick the frosting and he takes the whole cake.

PUMPKIN: Kicked right out on his ear.

MARGIE: Like a dog. (*Pumpkin crosses to window, peers out.*)

AUNT ETHEL: Surely a boiled egg and ham sandwich wouldn't hurt.

PUMPKIN: It ain't right.

AUNT ETHEL: Pumpkin, don't say it ain't right.

PUMPKIN: Well it ain't. If I say anything else I'd be tellin' a lie.

STELLA: I know it was a difficult decision to make but a year from now you'll thank your stars, Ethel.

PUMPKIN: (*Peering out window.*) I don't even see any stars tonight.

Ge e it's dark out. A person couldn't even see where he was goin'—especially if he didn't know where he was goin' in the first place.

STELLA: It's high time he learned something in this world. This'll do him good. Why he's the most do-less creature I've ever laid eyes on. (*She looks from one to the other. Margie turns away. So does Jill. Pumpkin's attention is focused on the window.*)

Henry starts down stairs, carrying a small beat-up suitcase.

STELLA: (*Rambling right on.*) Bungles everything—steps on everyone's toes—eats you out of house and home and—(*She sees*

Henry descending the stairs.) and—and—(The others turn to Henry.) Hello, Henry.

HENRY: Hi. Aunt Ethel. Margie. *(He sniffs.)* Pumpkin. And Jill. *(Silence.)* Well, I packed my duds. Guess I'll be hittin' the road. *(All is silent. Pumpkin takes handkerchief, blows nose loudly.)* Well, thanks for everything and—well, I guess I'll be off. *(He starts backing left.)*

Clarissa and Ernestine come downstairs, holding packages behind them.

CLARISSA: Henry, we've got something for you.

ERNESTINE: Yes, we've got something for you. *(They scurry downstairs and across to Henry.)*

CLARISSA: Henry...*(She looks around, Ernestine nods, nudges her.)* Henry, we've just been here at your aunt's a few weeks, but in that time, well, I guess you've come to mean a lot to us. *(Ernestine nods. Pumpkin blows her nose louder than before.)*

AUNT ETHEL: *(Sharply.)* Pumpkin, stop that.

PUMPKIN: I can't help it, Mums. If you gotta blow you gotta blow.

CLARISSA: You've always been kinder to us than anyone and no matter what came along you had a smile and kind word and—well—*(She takes the box from behind her back.)* We wanta give you something in appreciation.

ERNESTINE: *(Handing hers over, too.)* Yes, something in appreciation.

CLARISSA: It isn't much. Just some fudge. *(Ernestine nods.)*

HENRY: *(Overwhelmed.)* Well, whadaya know. *(Aunt Ethel blows nose loudly, then look around.)*

AUNT ETHEL: Excuse me.

HENRY: Well, guess I'll be shovin' off. 'Bye everybody. *(He starts for door.)* Guess I'll be off. *(They all watch him silently as he edges away.)*

AUNT ETHEL: *(As he reaches door.)* Henry. *(He turns.)* Henry, wait a minute. We need a man around the house, Henry.

PUMPKIN: *(Running to her, throwing arms around her neck.)* Oh mums, I knew you couldn't let him go.

AUNT ETHEL: The garden needs to be plowed and the fence mended and—I guess we'd just be lost without you.

PUMPKIN: I think I'm going to cry.

JILL: So am I.

Stella blows nose loudly. They all turn to her.

STELLA: Excuse me.

Gladys bursts in left.

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