

# SHOWTIME FOR OSCAR

By Ray Sheers

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**SYNOPSIS:** Loosely based on Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," scrooge-like Oscar DeWilder is a scathing theatre critic whose reviews are feared throughout the theatre world. He is just as cruel to his housekeeping staff and Claire, his lovely niece. They decide to teach him a lesson, a la Dickens. Claire is engaged to one of the Piccadilly Players, an acting troupe recently lambasted by DeWilder so they need little encouragement to lend their somewhat dubious talents to this worthy cause. Davidson Harley (the modern Jacob Marley) appears and warns DeWilder that he'll be visited by three spirits, each with attitude! The Spirits of Valentines Present, Past and Future appear and revive a few ghosts from DeWilder's past to teach him a lesson he'll never forget. Set, lighting, and costume requirements are minimal. Violence and weapon-free.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(10 females, 8 males)*

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.  
*(97 lines)*

MISS BIGELOW (f).....DeWilder's housekeeper. *(10 lines)*

CLAIRE (f).....The Director's cousin who is working as a temporary secretary for DeWilder.  
*(8 lines)*

SOPHIE'S GHOST (f).....DeWilder's dead sister's ghost.  
*(12 lines)*

**THE PICCADILLY PLAYERS:** 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 seances. (32 lines)
- MACNIECE (m) ..... Costume designer and set designer. He takes great pride in his work which often goes unappreciated or is even ridiculed by the others. (50 lines)
- COLIN (m).....An actor (2 lines)
- MURRAY (m).....A naysayer who finds the worst in everybody and everything. (13 lines)
- SAM (m) ..... Plays Young DeWilder. (21 line)
- NED (m)..... Plays Marley, but in this version he is Davidson Harley. (53 lines)
- LARRY (m)..... Plays Tiny Tim (against the Director's orders). (20 lines)
- DIRECTOR (m) ..... He tries desperately to maintain control of this actors and this show, but, of course, he is not in control at all. He takes his role very seriously though. (99 lines)

**THE ACTRESSES:** They feel they've been unfairly cheated out of doing a musical, something they've wanted to do for some time. The Director has been putting them off—wisely, as it turns out, for they can neither sing nor dance, but they are determined to do a musical.

- KATIE (f).....Plays Kate, Young DeWilder's fiancé.  
(25 lines)
- DORA (f).....Plays Spirit of Valentines Past: SPIRIT  
1. (70 lines)
- AMANDA (f).....Plays Spirit of Valentines Future:  
SPIRIT 3 (22 lines)
- BRIDGET (f).....Plays Spirit of Valentines Present:  
SPIRIT 2. (28 lines)
- TINA (f) .....Plays Tiny Cyn. (15 lines)
- SAMANTHA (f) .....Also plays the goat, Connie. (26 lines)

*NOTE: Additional Actresses or Actors may be added, if desired.*

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE 1: The Piccadilly Theater

SCENE 2: DeWilder's apartment

### PRODUCTION NOTES

**SET REQUIREMENTS:** The Theater Scene requires no furniture; a few chairs are optional. This scene can be played in front of the curtain or on a bare stage. DeWilder's apartment needs only a few pieces of furniture covered with fabric or sheets (except for DeWilder's chair). Several long pieces of fabric might be suspended for effect. An alternative set for DeWilder's apartment would be to 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 panel that can be opened from behind might be used for some of the entrances, but aren't necessary.

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 may be simple or 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. Brightly covered boas are strung over him at one point. Several lengths of chains draped over him later 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. MacNiece's clothes should be flamboyant. The special glasses are easy to construct using a very large pair of novelty sunglasses with decorated frames. If Tiny Cyn wears a long trench coat and comes in with crutches and one leg raised behind her, the missing leg is easily suggested.

**PROPS**

- Cane
- Feather boas
- Living room chair (Other furniture is optional, though it will be covered with sheets of fabric)
- Scripts for Director to distribute
- Kazoos
- Director's chair
- Flashlights
- Special glasses
- Sheets or other fabric
- Nightshirt and night cap
- Goat costume
- Chains
- Bottle of pills
- Blanket
- Ring
- Tombstone
- Coffee can with dirt
- Wooden crutches
- Picnic basket
- Teddy bear
- Drum (Optional)

## SCENE 1

*The Piccadilly Theater. Actors are stage right, talking amongst themselves. ELAINE, the only woman present, is stage left. DIRECTOR Rushes in with great flourish, accompanied by CLAIRE and MISS BIGELOW.*

**DIRECTOR:** All right, everybody, let's get started. *(Looking around.)*

Where are the actresses?

**ELAINE:** I'm here.

**DIRECTOR:** So you are, Elaine. But where are the others?

**ELAINE:** I don't know. Perhaps something tragic has happened to them all.

**MACNIECE:** Tragic?

**ELAINE:** Tragedy does happen, you know. Theaters are full of it.

**DIRECTOR:** Right. Well, anyway, I'm sure they'll turn up.

**ELAINE:** In unexpected places. A body here, another there.

**BIGELOW:** Bodies?

**ELAINE:** Perhaps dismembered.

**CLAIRE/BIGELOW:** **Dismembered!**

**MACNIECE:** Elaine!

**NED:** Elaine, have you taken your medicine today?

**CLAIRE:** Medicine?

**BIGELOW:** *(Moving away.)* Is she sick?

**ELAINE:** I'm going to meditate on their whereabouts. *(Sits and closes her eyes.)*

**DIRECTOR:** Good idea, Elaine.

*ACTRESSES enter.*

There you are. All right now. Let's get started. First, let me introduce you to my cousin Claire and Miss Bigelow. They just happen to work for... Oscar DeWilder.

**ACTORS:** *(In unison.)* What? DeWilder? The critic? You're kidding! How can you stand it? You poor thing!

**DIRECTOR:** Miss Bigelow is his housekeeper and my cousin Claire is his temporary secretary.

**DORA:** I can't imagine anyone working for that man!

**CLAIRE:** He's a despicable in person as he is in the newspaper.

Poor Bigelow has been with him for over twenty years.

**AMANDA:** Twenty years?

**CLAIRE:** And she's never had a vacation.

**BIGELOW:** Well, none I got paid for.

**DORA:** That's terrible. Is that legal?

**BIGELOW:** Mr. DeWilder lives by his own laws.

**MURRAY:** Don't we know it!

**DIRECTOR:** Now, you all read the review he wrote of our last performance.

**KATIE:** Ripping us to shreds!

**MACNIECE:** The man's a monster!

**DORA:** He was especially nasty about your costumes.

**MURRAY:** Called them products of a particularly sick mind, if I recall.

**MACNIECE:** OH, MONSTER'S TOO GOOD FOR HIM!

**DIRECTOR:** Claire and Miss Bigelow are going to help us get our revenge.

**MACNIECE:** Revenge?

**DIRECTOR:** We're going to give Mr. DeWilder a private performance, though he won't realize it's just a performance.

**DORA:** A performance?

**DIRECTOR:** But he won't know it's a performance.

**CLAIRE:** He needs to be taught a lesson.

**MURRAY:** You mean we're going to trick him into believing it's really happening?

**DIRECTOR:** That's the plan.

**LARRY:** Are you sure this is going to work?

**AMANDA:** Won't he know that we're just- - well, acting?

**DIRECTOR:** Not if you're good enough. Acting is our profession. All we're doing different this time is moving the actors and the stage into real life. Besides, we're counting on the pain killers he's taking to help us out a bit. To fog him up a bit.

**ELAINE:** (*Opening her eyes.*) Pain killers?

**CLAIRE:** He hurt his foot, so he's taking medication for the pain. It makes him a bit groggy.

*ELAINE returns to her meditation.*

**MACNIECE:** And the glasses! Don't forget the glasses.

**CONNIE:** What glasses?

**DIRECTOR:** We're going to replace DeWilder's glasses with a pair specially designed by our Costume Designer, MacNiece.

**MACNIECE:** He'll see a whole new world when he looks through my special glasses. They're a work of art, if I do say so myself.

**ELAINE:** (*Opening her eyes.*) Why don't we just give him a real overdose of pain killers and be done with him permanently?

**MACNIECE:** In the real world, Elaine, that's called murder. You go to prison for that.

**NED:** Sometimes they execute you.

**ELAINE:** The real world?

**NED:** Yes, you should visit it some time.

**TINA:** And where are we performing this little show?

**DIRECTOR:** Right in his own apartment! That's the beauty of it.

*In unison.*

**LARRY:** What?

**BRIDGET:** His own apartment?

**KATIE:** How are we going to manage that?

**CONNIE:** Are you crazy?

**LARRY:** We can't pull this off!

**LARRY:** No way!

**DORA:** This is too much!

**MURRAY:** It's preposterous!

**NED:** You've got to be kidding.

**AMANDA:** This is nuts!

**DIRECTOR:** Silence!

**BRIDGET:** Why can't we perform it here in the theater?

**DIRECTOR:** Because it will be more effective if we do it in his own apartment. It'll seem more real to him. A theater is, well, a fantasy world. One expects illusions in a theater. One doesn't expect it in one's home. And we've got to make him believe it's real.

**LARRY:** How the heck are we going to do all this right in his own apartment?

**DIRECTOR:** Trust me. We can do it. Don't forget, we'll have some inside help. (*Indicating CLAIRE and MISS BIGELOW.*)

**DORA:** Wait a minute. If we agree to this DeWilder thing, will you promise our next real show will be a musical?

**DIRECTOR:** What?

**TINA:** You promised us ages ago we would do a musical. We haven't done one yet.

**DIRECTOR:** But musicals are so much work. The dancing, the songs, the musicians...

**MACNIECE:** Come on, we're up to a musical. They're right. We need a change of pace. A musical will be fun. Besides, we need them for this.

**DIRECTOR:** Oh, all right.

**DORA:** Promise?

**TINA:** We're all witnesses.

**DIRECTOR:** I promise.

**ELAINE:** (*Ominously.*) Make him cross his heart and hope to die.

**DORA:** Well?

**DIRECTOR:** All right. I cross my heart and hope to die. (*Crosses her heart.*) Happy, Elaine? Now, can we get back to the play at hand? (*To others.*) Now, you're all familiar with the basic plot of the play we're going to do for DeWilder. In fact, most of you have performed this play before, at least a version of it.

**MURRAY:** We have?

**DORA:** So what is this play?

**DIRECTOR:** Most of you were with us last year when we did Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." That's the basic play with some new twists and turns written in just for Mr. DeWilder.

**AMANDA:** I'm sure someone made a musical out of that.

**CONNIE:** You're right!

**DIRECTOR:** No musical! Now, I've outlined what we're going to do. (*Starts handing out scripts.*) Keep in mind this is just a bare bones outline. You'll have to fill in the rest.

**MACNIECE:** I played Ebenezer Scrooge last time around.

**TINA:** Don't remind us.

**NED:** I was Jacob Marley.

**MURRAY:** I was Bob Cratchit.

**DORA:** I was Cratchit's wife.

**LARRY:** Who's playing Tiny Tim? I've always wanted to play Tiny Tim. I can use a very tiny voice and be very adorable. "God bless us, everyone!"

**DIRECTOR:** There is no Tiny Tim.

**LARRY:** What? How can there be no Tiny Tim?

**DIRECTOR:** I told you, we've had to change the story to fit DeWilder's life.

**LARRY:** I can walk with a crutch and look extremely pathetic. (*He limps about.*) The audience will cry its eyes out!

**DIRECTOR:** No!

**LARRY:** It won't be the without Tiny Tim. Can't we write him in?

**DIRECTOR:** No! I just wrote him out! You'll just have to adjust.

**TINA:** I could be a very convincing Tiny Tim. God Bless Us, Every One!

**LARRY:** I did it better.

**DIRECTOR:** Listen to me! There is no Tiny Tim in this play! Is that perfectly clear? No Tiny Tim!

**LARRY:** That's what he thinks.

**DIRECTOR:** Did you say something?

**LARRY:** No.

**DIRECTOR:** Now, as for Scrooge, DeWilder will play that part admirably, I'm sure, though he won't know he's the star of our little play. Not if we do this thing right.

**LARRY:** Well, if I can't be Tiny Tim, who am I to play?

**DIRECTOR:** You're to be the young DeWilder. Now, the part of Marley goes to Ned because, as you mentioned, you played it just last year.

**NED:** (*Dramatically.*) "I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and year by year. I am here tonight to warn you that you may yet have a chance of escaping my fate. You will be haunted by three spirits!"

*None of the actors is impressed.*

**CLAIRE:** (*Applauding with BIGELOW.*) Oh, he's good.

*NED bows.*

**DORA:** Don't encourage him.

**DIRECTOR:** Except this time, you're not Jacob Marley, you're Davidson Harley.

**NED:** Who's Davidson Harley?

**AMANDA:** Wasn't he the critic who died several years back?

**LARRY:** Seven years to be exact.

**ELAINE:** He was murdered.

**CLAIRE:** Murdered?

**ELAINE:** That's right. They never found out who did it.

**NED:** Where were you on the night of the murder, Elaine?

**ELAINE:** I have an alibi. I was conducting a séance. Do you have an alibi, Ned?

**LARRY:** Didn't they call Davidson Harley "The Butcher"?

**DIRECTOR:** That's right.

**AMANDA:** Why'd they call him "The Butcher"?

**SAMANTHA:** Because he butchered just about every performance he reviewed.

**AMANDA:** Oh.

**MACNIECE:** Another monster!

**MURRAY:** Why are we putting him in the play?

**DIRECTOR:** He and DeWilder were old pals. Harley will come back to haunt DeWilder to try to get him to change his ways before it's too late.

**CONNIE:** Just like Marley did for Old Scrooge.

**DIRECTOR:** Exactly.

**NED:** Well, won't he notice I'm not this Harley. After all, I never met DeWilder or this "Butcher." I don't even know what Harley looked like or how he talked, or...

**DIRECTOR:** It doesn't matter! Harley's been dead for years.

**ELAINE:** There's not much of him left anymore, and what there is wouldn't be pretty to look at, if you know what I mean. So you're made for the part.

**NED:** What's that supposed to mean?

*ELAINE shrugs.*

**DIRECTOR:** Besides, you're an actor, man! Don't worry; we'll use make-up to disguise you.

**ELAINE:** The more the better.

**MACNIECE:** And we've got my designer glasses.

**DIRECTOR:** Right, we've got the glasses.

**ELAINE:** And don't forget the pain killers.

**NED:** All right, I'll take the part of Harley.

**DIRECTOR:** Good!

**MACNIECE:** And I've got a great idea for a costume for you!

**NED:** Why can't I wear what I wore the last time?

**MACNIECE:** Oh, that would never do. This is a modern version.  
You'll just love what I have in mind for you.

**NED:** I can't wait.

**MACNIECE:** Do I detect a note of sarcasm in your voice?

**DIRECTOR:** We don't have time for bickering! Now, stop it, both of you! Ned, your main job is to frighten DeWilder into believing you are Davidson Harley. And don't forget you've got the element of surprise on your side.

**ELAINE:** And the pain killers.

**MACNIECE:** And the costumes!

**DIRECTOR:** Just don't get carried away.

**MACNIECE:** I never get carried away.

**DIRECTOR:** Oh? Remember "Macbeth"?

**MACNIECE:** Lady Macbeth made the show in that costume.

**DORA:** I'm still coughing up feathers – and that was two years ago.

**MACNIECE:** Well, you were supposed to wear the costume, not eat it!

**DORA:** Every time I inhaled, I got a mouth full of ostrich feathers. I never sneezed so much in my life.

**MACNIECE:** I always wanted to use ostrich feathers. That costume was a dream come true.

**CONNIE:** Not for the ostrich.

**DORA:** And it was a nightmare for me.

**MURRAY:** Who's going to play The Spirits of Christmas Present, Christmas Past, and Christmas Yet to Come?

**DIRECTOR:** I had Dora, Amanda, and Bridget in mind for those parts. But in this version, you're the Ghosts of Valentines Past, Present and Future.

**ELAINE:** Valentines?

**COLIN:** Why Valentines?

**DIRECTOR:** DeWilder has some secrets in his past that Miss Bigelow has been kind enough to share with me.

**MACNIECE:** Valentines! Oh, you didn't tell me we were using a Valentine motif! Now, I've got to think red. Red changes everything. I wish you'd told me.

**DIRECTOR:** Well, I couldn't think of everything. Everything happened so fast.

**ELAINE:** I still say it'd be easier to just poison him.

**NED:** You want to fry in the electric chair, Elaine? (*NED pretends bolts of electricity are going through his body.*)

**SAM:** Sounds like a ridiculous plan to me!

**KATIE:** And what about this housekeeper? What are we going to do about her?

**DIRECTOR:** Don't worry, that's all been arranged.

**MURRAY:** This is nuts.

**MACNIECE:** Oh, don't be so negative!

**MURRAY:** Negative? (*Shaking his fist and approaching him threateningly.*)

*MACNIECE cowers behind another actor.*

You want to see negative? Huh? You want to see negative? I'll show you negative!

**MACNIECE:** (*Still hiding.*) Violence never solved anything!

**ELAINE:** Of course, it has. Go ahead, hit him.

**DIRECTOR:** (*Getting between them.*) All right, everybody! That's enough. Let's put our differences aside and work together. We've got to start rehearsing. Now, I'm going to assign the rest of you parts while you're looking over the script. (*Starts distributing scripts.*) Oh, by the way, I'll be on the set during the whole show if you should run into any trouble, so don't worry about a thing.

**CONNIE:** What do you mean you'll be on the set.

**ELAINE:** How can you be on the set and DeWilder not know it?

**DIRECTOR:** Don't worry. I've got a plan. I'll be concealed, but I'll be there if you need me. I've got it all worked out.

**MURRAY:** This is the craziest thing I ever heard of.

**MACNIECE:** So what's wrong with crazy? (*Cowers again as MURRAY approaches him.*)

**DIRECTOR:** Any more questions?

**MACNIECE:** (*Raising hand.*) I have one little question. What's my budget for this show?

**DIRECTOR:** You have no budget!

**MACNIECE:** What?! No budget? Well, don't expect miracles. No time and no money to do the job right and he expects a first-rate show. I don't think so! (*CURTAIN.*)

## SCENE 2

*DEWILDER'S apartment. MACNIECE, and several other actors are finishing up the set. CLAIRE and MISS BIGELOW are helping. Quiet knocking, obviously a signal, is heard. MISS BIGELOW goes to the door.*

**DIRECTOR:** (*Peeking in.*) Is the coast clear?

**BIGELOW:** He's still asleep. He took his pain pills a few hours ago, so he won't be out too much longer. You'll have to work fast.

*DIRECTOR signals the others to enter.*

**MACNIECE:** (*Turns around wearing his large special glasses.*) Tah dah!

**COLIN:** (*Sarcastically.*) Now, that'll be a hot item.

**CONNIE:** What are the glasses for?

**MACNIECE:** They just distort his vision a bit.

**DIRECTOR:** Now, we're going to be waking DeWilder up about every hour so we can get everything into one night. Is everybody ready? All right! Places everybody. You all know what to do. Let's get to work.

**DIRECTOR:** Miss Bigelow, it's time for you and Claire to disappear for the time being

**MACNIECE:** (*Handing BIGELOW the glasses.*) Here, put these on DeWilder while he's still asleep.

**DIRECTOR:** Places everybody! It's showtime!

*Lights dim so that the stage is barely visible.*

**AMANDA:** Wait! You said you'd be on the set. Where will you be?

**DIRECTOR:** (*Lifting sheet off chair.*) I'll be right here with script in hand. Don't worry! Everybody, break a leg!

*All except DIRECTOR exit. He sits on chair and covers himself with sheet and turns on flashlight; it should appear as if he's following along in the script. Drum roll from offstage as KATIE, DORA, AMANDA, TINA, DORA, and CONNIE appear from center panels. Panels close after they're on stage.*

**KATIE:** Ladies and Gentlemen, we bid you welcome.

**DORA:** The actors are at hand and by their simple show...

**AMANDA:** ...a most familiar tale they'll spin

**CONNIE:** ...to unravel all ye need to know about this grisly beast of a man,

**TINA:** ...this insect, this despicable bug of a man,

**CONNIE:** ...this slimy worm of a man.

**SAMANTHA:** You'll watch him twist and squirm

**CONNIE:** ...'til in the end all is turned right.

**BRIDGET:** If we offend, dear friends, tonight, it is with good will.

**CONNIE:** ...but to demonstrate that even clever words may maim and kill.

**SAMANTHA:** And if perchance you see a bit of yourselves in our little play, blame us not,

**CONNIE:** ...rather, before you yourself sleep with the worms and rot—

**BRIDGET:** —consider the time is ripe to change your ways...

**DORA:** ...were you, too, are visited by Spirits Three

**TINA:** ...who'll spin the tale of your life just as mercilessly?

**CONNIE:** And so, without further delay -

**AMANDA:** - let us begin our humble play.

*ACTRESSES begin to exit as DIRECTOR angrily comes out from under sheet.*

**DIRECTOR:** (*Furious.*) What was that supposed to be!

**DORA:** Some of us thought we needed a little introduction to the show.

**DIRECTOR:** Oh really! An introduction? Now look, who's directing this show, you or me?! We do not need an introduction! Is that understood?

**DEWILDER:** (*From offstage.*) Blast it, what is that infernal racket?

*ACTRESSES exit quickly and DIRECTOR hides under sheet.*

Bigelow! Where are you? (*Enters in his nightshirt and night cap.*)

Bigelow! What is all this noise! You woke me up, blast you! What's wrong with the lights?

*Looking around. NED enters wearing many colorful feather boas strung over him instead of chains.*

Who the devil are you? (*DEWILDER backs away from him.*)

What are you doing in here! Who are you? Answer me! Bigelow!

Call the police! Bigelow! We've got... intruders!

**NED:** She can't hear you.

**DEWILDER:** What do you mean she can't hear me. (*Shouting.*)

Bigelow! (*Softly and desperately.*) Miss Bigelow? (*To NED, frightened, as he looks around.*) Where's my phone? Where's my furniture?

**NED:** Gone.

**DEWILDER:** You stole my furniture? What do you want with me?

**NED:** Much.

**DEWILDER:** Who are you?

**NED:** Ask me who I **was**.

**DEWILDER:** Who **were** you then?

**NED:** In life, I was Davidson Harley.

**DEWILDER:** Davidson Harley! But...

**NED:** That's right, I'm dead. You don't believe in me, do you?

**DEWILDER:** No.

**NED:** Why do you not believe in me?

**DEWILDER:** This is a case of indigestion. This is just a nightmare.

**NED:** (*Furiously.*) You think I'm the product of indigestion? A nightmare! I'll give you a nightmare! (*Shaking DEWILDER.*)

**DEWILDER:** Stop! Stop! (*Cowering.*)

**NED:** Do you believe in me or not?

**DEWILDER:** I do! I believe in you. But why are you here? Is it... my time?

**NED:** Not yet.

**DEWILDER:** Are those feathers?

*DEWILDER touches the boas tentatively; NED slaps his hand away.*

**NED:** (*Dramatically.*) I wear the chain I forged in life.

*THREE ACTRESSES appear and sing. DIRECTOR peeks out his head, shocked, mouthing and motioning for them to stop. They ignore him. NED is just as confused.*

**ACTRESSES:** (*Singing.*) He wears the chains he forged in life. He wears it like a wife.

**NED:** (*Trying to maintain control.*) I made it link by link.

**ACTRESSES:** Link by link he made it. Hear it go chink, chink, chink, chink.

**NED:** And yard by yard.

**ACTRESSES:** He made it yard by yard. Link by link and yard by yard! Chink, chink, chink, chink!

**NED:** (*Motioning for them to leave.*) I put it on of my own free will.

**ACTRESSES:** He put it on of his own free will and he wears it still, he wears it still! Chink, chink, chink, chink! Clang, clang, clang, clang!

**NED:** And of my own free will I wore it.

**ACTRESS:** Of his own free will he wore it. And he wears it still! He wears it still! Chink, chink, chink, chink! Clang, clang, clang, clang! (*They curtsy and exit.*)

**NED:** My time is short! I come tonight to warn you that you may yet have a chance of escaping my fate.

**DEWILDER:** You were always a good friend to me, Davidson.

**NED:** Your only friend.

**DEWILDER:** What? No!

**NED:** Yes. You will be haunted by Three Spirits.

**DEWILDER:** Spirits? Oh, no, I think I'd rather not.

**NED:** You have no choice! Without their visits you will to walk the earth as I do, Oscar DeWilder, with no rest, and no hope of peace, carrying the chains you forged in life. Expect the first Spirit tomorrow when the clock strikes one. (*One drum beat.*)

**DEWILDER:** If I must have Spirits, can't I have them all at once and get it over with?

**NED:** Look, pal, you're not calling the shots here. Understand!

**DIRECTOR:** Psst! Psst!

**NED:** Excuse me a minute. I, uh, have to tie my shoe. (*Edges over to DIRECTOR and pretends to tie his shoe.*) What is it?

**DIRECTOR:** Let him have all three at once. It'll save time.

**NED:** I wish you'd make up your mind.

**DEWILDER:** Who were you talking to?

**NED:** No one. I was tying my shoe.

**DEWILDER:** But I distinctly heard . . .

**NED:** On second thought, maybe I will let you have them all three Spirits at once. We've got a lot more stops to make, so, it'll save us all some time.

**MACNIECE:** (*From offstage.*) No!

**DEWILDER:** Who was that?

**MACNIECE:** I didn't hear anything.

**DEWILDER:** Is there someone else here?

**NED:** No, well, maybe. I don't know. Sometimes stray ghosts wander in and out. That's probably what it was. Somebody probably left a window open. Don't worry. You'll get used to it.

**DEWILDER:** I don't want to get used to it.

*MACNIECE, covered with sheet, hops over to DIRECTOR. He, too, has a flashlight under the sheet.*

**DEWILDER:** What's that?

**NED:** What?

**DEWILDER:** That!

**NED:** You know what I think? I think you have a poltergeist.

**DEWILDER:** A poltergeist? Balderdash!

**MACNIECE:** We can't send all the spirits in at once!

**DIRECTOR:** Why not?

**MACNIECE:** Those costumes aren't done yet. We'll send the Spirits in one at a time like we planned or they'll be out here in their underwear.

**DEWILDER:** Who's in their underwear?

**NED:** Nobody. Well, you aren't exactly dressed for the ball, Cinderella.

**DIRECTOR:** *(To Ned.)* Psst!

**NED:** *(To DEWILDER.)* I, uh, have to tie my other shoe.

*ACTRESSES enter and pull a few of the boas off NED as he crosses to DIRECTOR. They tease DEWILDER with the boas; he sneezes.*

**DIRECTOR:** Back to Plan A.

**NED:** What's Plan A?

**MACNIECE:** They come in one at a time.

**NED:** Will you two make up your mind!

**DEWILDER:** How many ghosts are here?

**NED:** Too many. *(To ACTRESSES.)* Get! *(They leave after draping the boas onto DEWILDER.)* We're going to do it like I said before.

**DEWILDER:** What'd you say before?

**NED:** They'll visit you one at a time. Just like I said at first. You can expect the first Spirit tomorrow when the clock strikes one. *(One drum beat.)* Expect the second when the clock strikes two. *(Two drum beats.)* The third will arrive upon the stroke of midnight. *(Eleven drumbeats; NED counts along silently; both look around, waiting for the last drum beat. Drum beat.)* Here. Take your medicine.

*DEWILDER takes his pills, and NED takes back his boas.*

Farewell!

*He backs out and DEWILDER drops into the chair, asleep.*

**DIRECTOR:** *(Emerging from sheet.)* Now look, I don't know what you people think you're doing, but I don't want any more surprises.

**CONNIE:** *(Innocently.)* What do you mean?

**DIRECTOR:** What do I mean? I mean no more song and dance routines, no more cutesy introductions...

**MACNIECE:** Well, don't you go changing the script at the last minute either. Sending all three Spirits in at once. That wasn't in the script.

**DIRECTOR:** Oh, all right. I was just trying to save us some time. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

**MACNIECE:** Well, it wasn't.

**DIRECTOR:** (*Picking a boa off NED.*) And what's this all about? Where are the chains?

**MACNIECE:** I couldn't find them. We had to improvise with what we had.

**DIRECTOR:** (*Disgusted.*) Lovely.

**MACNIECE:** I thought so, too.

**DIRECTOR:** Find those blasted chains!

*MACNIECE scurries offstage.*

All right, places everybody. It's showtime for Oscar!

**SPIRIT 1:** Oscar! Oscar DeWilder. Hey! Oscar, baby! Rise and shine!

*SPIRIT 1 shakes him; DEWILDER bolts awake, jumping up from the chair.*

Nice jammies.

**DEWILDER:** What? Now, you stay away from me.

**SPIRIT 1:** Stay away from you? Hey, I'm a guest. Is that any way to treat a guest? Especially one who's here to do you a favor?

**DEWILDER:** A favor?

**SPIRIT 1:** Remember the chains, pal? You want to spend your afterlife lugging a hundred pounds of chains around?

**DEWILDER:** What chains?

*MACNIECE throws the chains across the stage floor from offstage or enters with sheet over him, wearing them.*

**SPIRIT 1:** Those chains!

**DEWILDER:** They weigh a hundred pounds?

**SPIRIT 1:** How do I know what they weigh! They weigh a lot. OK? You're missing the point here, Oscar, baby. This is your afterlife we're talking about. You got a problem with your short term memory? Do I have to bring back the dancing ladies? (*DIRECTOR peeks out and mouthing "No!"*) Clang, clang, clang, chink, chink, chink! Remember?

*ACTRESSES enter, ready to sing. SPIRIT 1 signals actresses to leave; they do, disappointed.*

**DEWILDER:** All right, all right! I remember. Can we get on with this?

**SPIRIT 1:** Oh, so now you're going to get testy with me? (*Crosses her arms and taps her foot.*)

**DEWILDER:** No, it's just that...I'm so tired. I never get any sleep—

*SPIRIT 1 doesn't respond.*

Well?

**SPIRIT 1:** I'm waiting for an apology,

**DEWILDER:** All right. I'm sorry.

**SPIRIT 1:** I accept your apology. (*Business-like.*) Now, I'm the Ghost of Valentines Past. And I've been looking into your past, Oscar. Pretty grim stuff.

**DEWILDER:** What do you mean?

**SPIRIT 1:** Let's not play games, Oscar. I don't have all night. Speaking of games, I got a poker game after I finish up here so don't waste my time.

**DEWILDER:** Poker?

**SPIRIT 1:** Yeah, poker!

*Panels open and YOUNG DEWILDER and KATE appear; they stand motionless; panels close.*

Oh! (*Pointing.*) Look over there. You see that? That's you! Little Oscar! When you were a lot younger. Recognize the girl?

**DEWILDER:** Kate? (*Starting to approach her.*) Kate!

**SPIRIT 1:** (*Holding him back.*) Whoa! She can't hear you. This is the past, remember? I must warn you this gets pretty ugly, in case you forgot.

**KATE:** Oh, Oscar, you're just being silly.

**OSCAR:** Silly! I saw that kiss you gave him. The whole audience saw it.

**KATE:** It's a play. That was a stage kiss.

**OSCAR:** Yeah? Well, you never kiss me that way.

**KATE:** I was acting.

**OSCAR:** Well, maybe you should try acting with me!

**KATE:** Look, it's Romeo and Juliet. What do you expect Romeo and Juliet to do? Shake hands? Blow kisses? They're passionately in love.

**OSCAR:** Now I know why you had so many late rehearsals.

**KATE:** What's that supposed to mean?

**OSCAR:** It must have taken a lot of practice to get that kiss just right.

You know, passion takes practice and practice makes perfect.

**KATE:** Oscar, what are you implying?

**OSCAR:** I'm not **implying** anything.

**KATE:** Now look, there's nothing between Ben and me. We're actors. We're just playing roles. Okay?

**OSCAR:** No! Not okay! That kiss was no act. Not to me, it wasn't.

Maybe it's time you made a choice, Kate.

**KATE:** What kind of choice?

**OSCAR:** You know what I mean.

**KATE:** I don't know what you mean.

**OSCAR:** I think it's time you choose between this acting career of yours and me, because you're not going to have both.

**KATE:** What?

**OSCAR:** You heard me.

**KATE:** You're asking me to give up my career, when it's finally taking off? You know how much acting means to me.

**OSCAR:** Apparently it means more to you than I do.

**KATE:** This is my career we're talking about.

**OSCAR:** Where do you think your **career** is going to get you?

**KATE:** It's what I love.

**OSCAR:** I thought you loved me.

**KATE:** And if you loved me, you wouldn't ask me to do this.

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