

TRY PSYCHOLOGY

(A Comedy in Two Acts)

by

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TRY PSYCHOLOGY

THE CHARACTERS

MARGERY, Proprietress of 'The Castle' Inn, big and buxom, 40s

PERCY, Her husband, pencil thin, a bowler eternally atop his head, 40s

STANLEY, Their tenant, 30

LOLA, The maid, Stanley's estranged fiancée, 20s

BERT GOLDBRICK, An Entrepreneur, vacationing in the area, 40s

MCCORKLE, Goldbrick's Assistant, 40s

RHODA, Bert's wife, 'stage-crazy', 20s

THE PLACE

The "Castle" Inn: a once elegant Inn in a rustic setting,
Now a room and board establishment

THE TIME

Yesterday

TRY PSYCHOLOGY

ACT ONE

(The All-purpose room of ‘The Castle’ Inn. At right are a dining table and door to the kitchen. An entrance door is center, rear. At left, down, is a piano and up from it doors, presumably to rooms. There is a sofa by the piano. PERCY enters from the left. He walks to the table)

PERCY

(Hollers) I’m ready fer breakfast, Ma.

MARGERY

(Off) No need to holler, Pa. I ain’t deaf!

PERCY

(Still hollering) I never said you was, Ma. What’s fer breakfast?

MARGERY

What’s fer breakfast is whatever I’m servin’ ya.

PERCY

I guess that’s so, Ma. (He sits) Well, bring it on. I ain’t got all day.

MARGERY

No need to get perky, Pa. You’ll get yer breakfast when I bring it, unless you want to get it over at Aunt Sara’s diner.

PERCY

I don’t want ptomaine. I’ll jest sit here and wait—patient-like.

MARGERY

(Entering with a plate, which she places before him) Here it be.

PERCY

(Looking suspiciously at the food) It looks mighty good, Ma.

It is good!

MARGERY

What is it?

PERCY

It's bacon and eggs, you ninnycompoop!

MARGERY

(He chuckles) I knew that, Ma!

PERCY

Well go ahead and eat it then.

MARGERY

(He pushes the bacon around on his plate) Ain't you gonna have any?

PERCY

You know I'm on a diet.

MARGERY

Why, that's plumb silly. Besides, I hate to eat in front of you.

PERCY

(Gives him a shove on the shoulder) Oh go ahead and eat in front of me. I like to see you happy.

MARGERY

But shouldn't we say grace, Ma?

PERCY

Grace! (She shoves him on the shoulder again) Now go ahead and eat! I still got to fix something fer Stanley.

MARGERY

Stanley not up yet, Ma?
PERCY

Does it look like he's up?
MARGERY

(He looks around the room) I don't see him.
PERCY

That's 'cause he ain't up.
MARGERY

Sometimes you're a hard woman.
PERCY

Sometimes I got to be!
MARGERY

Listen here, Ma, since you bring it up about Stanley—
PERCY

What is it?
MARGERY

(He looks around again) You sure he ain't up yet, Ma?
PERCY

I told you he ain't.
MARGERY

I'm a mite worried about that boy.
PERCY

Why's that?
MARGERY

I think something's upsetting him.
PERCY

What do you suppose that could be?
MARGERY

PERCY

I wish I knew 'cause I'm mighty fond of him.

MARGERY

What's this about Stanley?

PERCY

You think he's still in bed, do ya, Ma?

MARGERY

I do, but before I get anything outa you he'll be up, shaved, fed and back in bed again!
(She whacks him on the shoulder, nearly knocking him out of his chair).

PERCY

(Reseating himself) I wish you wouldn't do that, Ma.

MARGERY

(Truly remorseful) I'm sorry. But sometimes you can be just a mite aggravating.

PERCY

I been working on that, Ma. Jest like when we was in school and we did something wrong and the teacher made us write on the blackboard a hundred times how we ain't gonna do that any more, so I just tell myself—cause, you know, I ain't actually got a blackboard, Ma—

MARGERY

(Forced control of herself) Pa—

PERCY

What is it, Ma?

MARGERY

(Bursts out) Tell me what you was worried about!

(STANLEY now appears at the left. He smiles, but he appears to be troubled and gloomy)

PERCY

You mean tell you what was worrying me about Stanley?

MARGERY

(Reaching the end of her rope once more) Ye-es—

PERCY

Well, I was just gonna say—(He looks around, sees STANLEY, smiles)—I was jest gonna say that I hope Stanley stays here forever, Ma, ‘cause he’s such a pleasant, considerate sort of a cuss— (MARGERY’S eyes pop out, but then—)

STANLEY

(Enters, a bit gloomy) Thank you, Percy. My ears were burning. I *thought* someone was talking about me. I’m glad it was something nice.

PA

Good mornin’, Stanley.

STANLEY

I’m sorry I interrupted you, Percy. If I didn’t, I might have heard the compliment you were going to give me, wouldn’t I, Margery? (He smiles at her).

MARGERY

(Chuckles) You might if you had all day to wait! How would you like a nice cup of coffee before you have your breakfast, Stanley?

STANLEY

(Gloomy attempt at humor) I guess I would like a cup of your coffee, Margery, because, my car battery is a little low on acid.

PERCY

(Laughing) That’s a good one, Ma.

MARGERY

Ain’t it? (Glaring at him) And I’ll bring a nice cup for you, too, Pa. (MARGERY exits to the kitchen).

PERCY

Now Stanley, you oughtn’t to tease Ma like that.

STANLEY

I guess it was a little nasty.

PERCY

(Looks around, chuckles) Even if it was true.

STANLEY

I guess Margery's a bit sensitive.

PERCY

(Shrugs) She is—about some things. (He rubs his shoulder where she whacked him). But you know wimmen.

STANLEY

(Gloomy again) I guess I know women.

PERCY

(Shakes his head) Then you'll have t' tell me about 'em sometime.

STANLEY

(Shakes his head ruefully) You wouldn't want to hear it.

PERCY

Well, I got to run right now, anyway.

STANLEY

But I do *like* Margery.

PERCY

That's to yer credit, Stanley.

STANLEY

She's a wonderful woman—not like some others I could name!

PERCY

Maybe so, but you better not name 'em.

STANLEY

Yeah, they're sneaky, aren't they?

PERCY

(Raised eyebrows, looks around) Don't git me astarted.

STANLEY

(With absolute sincerity) But Margery's not that way, is she.

PERCY

(Raised eyebrows) Well, I'm sure glad t' hear it.

STANLEY

Oh yes, she's a fine little woman.

PERCY

She ain't so little, Stanley.

STANLEY

Oh, I know sometimes she can become a bit bossy. But she means well, doesn't she?

PERCY

Oh sure she does. Well now, I got to be running along to set up my hotdog stand.

STANLEY

One moment—before you go, Percy, can I tell you something? But it's a bit personal—

PERCY

(Nervous) I really ought to git a move on.

STANLEY

(Suddenly becoming maudlin) I just hope you appreciate Margery, because there are other women, as I am sure you're aware, who don't have that understanding nature. And I'm sure you understand what I mean, don't you, Percy?

PERCY

(Stares at STANLEY, in disbelief) I'll think it over.

STANLEY

Treasure her, Percy. That's my advice.

PERCY

(As he exits, muttering) I *knew* there was something upsetting that boy!

(Then, as PERCY stumbles off, MARGERY returns, carrying two cups of coffee)

MARGERY

Now where's he gone?

STANLEY

He is off to set up shop. (Sighs) The hunter goes to his hill, the sailor to his sea and the hotdog man to his hotdog stand.

MARGERY

But I got his dern coffee right here!

STANLEY

I get the feeling he didn't want it.

MARGERY

Hunh! Well, whether he wants it or not, he's gonna *get* it!

STANLEY

(Chuckling) Now that's the ticket! Force it down his throat!

MARGERY

(Taken aback) Well now, I wasn't gonna *force* it—

STANLEY

(Shakes his head ruefully) Margery, do you know the trouble with Percy?

MARGERY

Where you want me to start?

STANLEY

(Shakes his head sadly) I hate to say it. I don't think he appreciates you.

MARGERY

Now that's a fact!

STANLEY

For instance, he doesn't appreciate your cooking.

MARGERY

You noticed that, didja?

STANLEY

He doesn't appreciate the way you employ your spices.

MARGERY

It's jest salt and pepper, but I always say you got to know how much—

STANLEY

And let us consider the touch you have with gravy. Of course I have to admit those lumps are a bit large sometimes.

MARGERY

(Uncertainly, scratching her head) I ain't at my best with gravies. I don't rightly know why.

STANLEY

(Sincerely) You want to know what I think?

MARGERY

(Not sure now if she does) What?

STANLEY

You should be the chef in a five-star restaurant.

MARGERY

(Chuckling) Oh, go on with you!

STANLEY

I mean it. I think you should be named the head chef in a famous, five-star restaurant.

MARGERY

(Now looking skeptically at him) Which one?

STANLEY

But something terrible would happen. You wouldn't be making any more of this wonderful food right here! So Margery, I know I'm being selfish, but if you are offered that job, don't take it. Think of the many people right here who love you and cherish your superb cooking.

MARGERY

(Looking at the empty room) There ain't that many.

STANLEY

All I can say is, theirs is the loss.

MARGERY

(Looks at him, scratching her head) I still think you're foolin' me.

STANLEY

But tell me, Margery.

MARGERY

(Wary again) What?

STANLEY

Do you know what it really *means* to be famous?

MARGERY

What do you think?

STANLEY

Do you have any idea of the thrill of fame, the adulation of the crowd? Do you know what it means, let's say, to hold an audience spellbound, as they eagerly await your arrival to perform for them?

MARGERY

As a cook?

STANLEY

Just think of a thousand people eagerly waiting just for you. They are in such a state they can barely breathe. Their excitement is almost palpable. Then when they are about to burst you appear, and they gasp—

MARGERY

(Gasping) I'd say so!

STANLEY

You draw out the tension like a bowstring. And then, at the ultimate moment, you begin your performance—

MARGERY

Well, it's about time!

STANLEY

But you're really doing it for only *one* person, Margery, *one* special person that you hope will appreciate it because it is all for her.

MARGERY

(Shakes her head) And I guess I know who ya mean, don't I?

STANLEY

(Sadly) But it is not to be.

MARGERY

Lola didn't appreciate it, huh?

STANLEY

(Shakes his head) She never actually had the chance. I was simply imagining what it might be like.

MARGERY

Well, maybe some day, Stanley—

STANLEY

(He chuckles) No, I never even finished my piano lessons. But Margery, you are truly a phenomenon.

MARGERY

I am? And I don't even know what that is!

STANLEY

I hope I didn't hurt your feelings.

MARGERY

(Matter-of-fact) If you did, I never noticed.

STANLEY

I guess that's to be my fate! No one ever notices.

MARGERY

Now Stanley, none of your pity parties on my watch!

STANLEY

(Chuckles) You're right. I'm sorry.

MARGERY

(Dubiously) Well—

STANLEY

Really Margery, I wouldn't hurt your feelings for all the tea in China!

MARGERY

(She shakes her head) I bet that's a heap o' tea.

STANLEY

(He laughs) So then I'm forgiven? (He takes her hand and kisses it).

MARGERY

(Giggling) Oh go on with your foolin'!

STANLEY

I do believe I've been forgiven. Now haven't I? Come on! Tell me I'm forgiven! (He suddenly grabs her and begins to tickle her).

MARGERY

(Giggling as he continues to tickle her) Oh, now stop that! Stop it!

(And then PERCY walks in on this scene. He watches them noncommittally, then coughs)

PERCY

'Scuse me, Ma.

MARGERY

(Chuckling) Hello, Pa—That dern Stanley was tickling me.

PERCY

I figured that's what he was doing.

STANLEY

(Laughing) Actually I do it for exercise, Percy. It is very good for one's health. You'll really have to try it. (PERCY does not look as if he will).

MARGERY

Well now, what you want, Pa?

PA

I got a mite hungry, Ma. I thought you could maybe pack up my breakfast.

MARGERY

Sure I can, Pa. (She picks up his plate, starts to the kitchen, turns back) Now see you eat it, understand!

PERCY

I will, Ma. (MARGERY is gone. He turns to STANLEY) Ma gets a bit ornery sometimes.

STANLEY

Perhaps the tickling got to her.

PERCY

(He thinks on that) Nope, I'd say it was jest in her nature.

STANLEY

(Sighs) Well, I'm afraid we must learn to take the bitter with the sweet.

PERCY

You got that right.

MARGERY

(Now returning with a bag, dripping with grease) Here's yer breakfast, Pa.

PERCY

Thank you, Ma. (He takes the bag) Er, what you gonna do now?

MARGERY

I'm gonna do my breakfast dishes. What you think?

PERCY

Jest askin'. G'bye, Stanley—(He exits).

MARGERY

I swear I don't know what I'm going to do with that man! (She shakes her head, then exits into the kitchen).

STANLEY

I wonder if *I'll* get any breakfast?

(Then RHODA enters. A 'Drama Queen' she stands in the rear doorway for a few moments, looking suitably emotional. She sighs)

RHODA

Stanley!

STANLEY

Why, Rhoda—my love—

RHODA

You say that, but do you really mean it?

STANLEY

Do I mean what?

RHODA

That I'm 'your love', nincompoop!

STANLEY

Nincompoop!

RHODA

Oh, Stanley, I didn't mean that.

STANLEY

What you did mean.

RHODA

I'm so unhappy I don't know *what* I mean!

STANLEY

Apparently you doubt me.

RHODA

I don't *want* to doubt you.

STANLEY

Well, maybe you have good reason.

RHODA

That's right! You sure haven't proved you love me.

STANLEY

But you have my word on it!

RHODA

Oh yes—your *word!* Words, words, words and more words! But after all, what are they?

STANLEY

They're words, and words are the mirrors of the soul—

RHODA

(As if she'd caught him in a trap) Exactly!

STANLEY

But Rhoda, what words they are! Think of the words Romeo spoke to Juliet on that moonlit night. Think of the words that Troilus spoke to Cressida by the walls of Troy! Think of the words that, um, Pyramis spoke to Thisbee— or vice versa, by that *other* wall. I mean for heaven's sake, what more could you want than words?

RHODA

I want some *action!*

STANLEY

Oh.

RHODA

You act like you've never heard *that* word!

STANLEY

But Rhoda, you're married. We'd never forgive ourselves, if we did something—

RHODA

I think I could forgive myself.

STANLEY

Well—but you could never forgive *me!*

RHODA

You'd be surprised.

STANLEY

Rhoda, you could never violate your sacred marriage vows!

RHODA

Says who?

STANLEY

Rhoda, don't you see our love we must remain as pure as Gawain and er, Esmeralda. Our love should exist on that high spiritual plane, and because of that it will always remain true and—

RHODA

Horse feathers!

STANLEY

But you'll always have the satisfaction of knowing—

RHODA

(All business) I'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're a phony! Now what about that show, huh?

STANLEY

What show?

RHODA

You told me you were going to put me in a show, remember?

STANLEY

I know I *said* that.

RHODA

I know it, too and *I* haven't forgotten.

STANLEY

But if you haven't, then you'll recall I said I would put you in a show—

That's what *I'm* telling you!

RHODA

If I had the money to back a show!

STANLEY

If—

RHODA

You remember now?

STANLEY

(She stares at him) You mean you don't have the money?

RHODA

(He shakes his head disconsolately) I had to spend a lot of money—for something else.

STANLEY

But it's not fair! You told me. You led me to believe—Why, I don't think you ever meant to!

RHODA

Now hold on. Let's be serious for one minute. Why don't you get your husband to back a show? He'd do it. He's crazy about you. He'd do anything you asked him to do. You're a very persuasive girl you know. And he has plenty of money.

STANLEY

I know that. I *married* him for it.

RHODA

Well, there you are. He has it. You use it.

STANLEY

You don't understand. (Dramatic gesture)

RHODA

Try me.

STANLEY

My husband! Oh, my husband, my husband!

RHODA

What about your husband—

STANLEY

What do you think?

RHODA

(Aghast) He hasn't left you, has he!

STANLEY

(Outraged at the suggestion) Of course not! It's just that he doesn't understand me!

Oh.

STANLEY

'Oh'? How can you say that?

RHODA

Well—you're very complicated.

STANLEY

RHODA
That's my artistic nature! He doesn't understand that! He only understands money! (She gets worked up, stamps her foot) He doesn't understand my need to express myself! He doesn't understand my creative impulses! (Now suddenly seems near tears) He doesn't understand the *sensitive* side of me!

STANLEY
You're telling me he doesn't understand your creative *needs*.

RHODA
He sure don't! (She now plays up to him) Not the way you do.

STANLEY
You think I do?

RHODA
(Toying with his hair, ear, etc and pushing him into a nearby chair) I think you do.

STANLEY

(A mischievous gleam) Yes, Rhoda. I think that maybe I *do* understand you.

RHODA

(Now sitting on his lap) Sure you do, honey.

STANLEY

I think I know what you *really* want.

RHODA

(Blowing in his ear) Uh-huh.

STANLEY

(Puts her off his lap, standing) You want a good *thrashing*.

RHODA

Hunh!

STANLEY

That's what you'd really like, isn't it?

RHODA

What are you talking about?

STANLEY

(He takes off his belt) Come here, you little minx!

RHODA

(Staring at him, eyes popping) What the—

STANLEY

Come on, let's play! (He whacks his belt against the table).

RHODA

What? You're crazy!

STANLEY

Don't be shy. Come and get it! (He whacks the table again).

RHODA

What's come over you? Help! (She runs from the room).

STANLEY

(Chuckles, somewhat pleased with himself) I did that pretty well.

(LOLA now enters. STANLEY perks up, but it appears that LOLA is going to walk right into the kitchen, and ignore STANLEY)

STANLEY

Lola!

LOLA

I'm sorry. I'm busy at the moment.

STANLEY

Now wait just a minute!

LOLA

(She looks at him scornfully) Are you addressing *me* in the rude manner?

STANLEY

I'm not talking to myself!

LOLA

Well, if you were, you might at least be talking to someone who was willing to listen to you.

STANLEY

That was nasty.

LOLA

Of course it was. It was meant to be!

STANLEY

Well, I can be nasty, too. Did you make my bed?

LOLA

No.

I want my bed made. STANLEY

I'll get you some sheets. LOLA

What? STANLEY

Who do you think you're talking to? LOLA

I'm talking to the maid of this establishment. STANLEY

Does that give you the right to be rude? LOLA

(Awkwardly) Well, but—but—but— STANLEY

(Laughs) You sound like a motorboat. LOLA

But Lola—you're supposed to be my fiancée. STANLEY

I'm *was* your fiancée. LOLA

Lola, for heaven's sake! What have I done? STANLEY

If I took time to go into all that, I'd be in a nursing home before I was finished! LOLA

Then name *one* thing. STANLEY

You've chased other women. LOLA

STANLEY

I swear I have not!

LOLA

And now you're lying. That's *two* things.

STANLEY

Lola, listen to me. That was all a front. You told me I wasn't being assertive enough, so I put on an act hoping to impress you—

LOLA

Philandering is not impressive.

STANLEY

So I made a mistake. But you made me feel insecure. I wanted to make you jealous just to see if you really loved me.

LOLA

You wanted to find out how much I loved you by chasing other women?

STANLEY

Put like that it does sound pretty stupid. But don't you see? I'm in love with you! I'm not thinking straight! Lola, listen to me. You are the only girl I've ever loved! (He gets on his knees)

LOLA

(Shakes her head disgustedly) You look really stupid.

STANLEY

I'm willing to look stupid for you, Lola. Doesn't that prove something?

LOLA

(Shakes her head, holding back her laugh) Don't make me say it.

STANLEY

(Getting up) I wouldn't make myself stupid for any other woman!

LOLA

What about Rhoda?

STANLEY

Rhoda? Don't be silly. I told you. I was only trying to win you back by flirting with Rhoda!

LOLA

Oh. So you're only *toying* with Rhoda?

STANLEY

That's right!

LOLA

That is so nasty! Why, that poor girl—

STANLEY

Poor *Rhoda*? Believe me, Rhoda can take care of herself. Anyway, she started it. Rhoda's only using me for her own reasons.

LOLA

And what about Margery?

STANLEY

Margery!

LOLA

Ever since you've arrived, you've bossed that poor woman around—

STANLEY

(A look of amazement) Are we talking about the same Margery?

LOLA

You've bossed her around like you owned the place!

STANLEY

(Blurts out) Listen, Rhoda, I *do* own it.

LOLA

What?

STANLEY

I didn't want to tell you. I found out they were way behind on their mortgage, so I took it over.

LOLA

Are you serious, Stanley?

STANLEY

(He beams happily) So I hope that shows you—

LOLA

Now that is the lowest, the sneakiest—I just might have been able to forgive you for Rhoda, the hussy probably does deserve it. But this is real treachery! Going behind those poor folks' back—

STANLEY

But Lola—

(And now MARGERY enters from the kitchen. She's carrying STANLEY's bacon and eggs)

MARGERY

Here's yer breakfast, Stanley.

LOLA

Don't give it to him! He doesn't deserve any breakfast!

MARGERY

He don't? (She looks at him, scratching her head). Why is that?

LOLA

I can't talk about it! (She rushes off, near tears).

MARGERY

(She watches LOLA run off) Must be her time o' the month.

STANLEY

It's *always* her time of the month!

MARGERY

Stanley, have you been teasin' that poor girl again?

STANLEY

Me teasing her!

MARGERY

Sometimes you get a mite extreperous. And I'm sorry I got to say this, seein' s as how you're our one paying guest. (She shakes her head) But sometimes I jest got to speak up and say what's on my mind. Of course I don't mind, if'n it's for a good purpose. O' course some people might not think it was a good purpose, but I jest don't care about that

—

STANLEY

(The end of his rope) Margery, please say what you have to say!

MARGERY

What?

STANLEY

You know there is one thing I really like about you.

MARGERY

(Smiling, her hands instinctively to her hair) What is that?

STANLEY

I like the way you *mind your own business!*

MARGERY

I'm only tryin' t' be helpful!

STANLEY

You're as helpful as a bull in a china shop!

MARGERY

I know I ain't too smart, Stanley, but that does sound like an insult to me. And it sounds like an awful clee-shay, too!

STANLEY

Cliches only become clichés, Margery, when they're *true!*

MARGERY

(Shakes her head, in some awe) Now ain't it amazing' the things you know!

STANLEY

Thank you for breakfast, Margery.

MARGERY

Humph! (She exits).

STANLEY

(He sighs) Well, maybe I can at least *eat* in peace. (He takes a forkful of food, when...)

(BERT GOLBRICK then enters the room. He looks like an angry bull, glaring at STANLEY. MCCORKLE follows him into the room.)

GOLDBRICK

(In a commanding tone) You there!

STANLEY

(Stares at him) Are you referring to me?

GOLDBRICK

I don't see anybody else in here.

STANLEY

There's someone behind you.

GOLDBRICK

Huh? (He looks at MCCORKLE) I don't mean him!

STANLEY

Then you must mean me. What can I do for you?

GOLDBRICK

What's your name?

STANLEY

(Thinks it over) What's yours?

GOLDBRICK

Say, are you trying to be smart with me?

STANLEY

(He looks him over) I'm beginning to think that would be a waste of time.

GOLDBRICK

Huh? (He scratches his head, then turns to MCCORKLE) What's he mean by that?

MCCORKLE

(Very British accent) I believe it was meant to be sarcastic, sir.

GOLDBRICK

Oh yeah? (To STANLEY) Now listen here, I got a good mind—

STANLEY

I doubt it.

GOLDBRICK

(Looks at MCCORKLE) Is that more sarcasm? (MCCORKLE nods, then GOLDBRICK turns back to STANLEY, threatening) Say, how would you like a punch in the nose?

STANLEY

How would *you* like one?

GOLDBRICK

Who's gonna give it to me?

STANLEY

(He appears to think it over) Well, *I'm* thinking about it.

GOLDBRICK

Now look here, my good man.

STANLEY

I'm not your good man! (He suddenly rises and advances on GOLDBRICK, who quickly takes refuge behind MCCORKLE) Isn't *he* your good man?

GOLDBRICK

Let me tell you. He's plenty tough!

STANLEY

I can see that.

MCCORKLE

(It is uncertain whether this is directed at GOLDBRICK or STANLEY) I do try, sir.

GOLDBRICK

Now look here, you!

STANLEY

You look here! Who do you think you are?

GOLDBRICK

(Somewhat bolder but still from behind MCCORKLE) I'm Bert Goldbrick, and—

STANLEY

(Threatening) And what!

GOLDBRICK

(Retreats again) And I don't see any cause to get riled up.

STANLEY

Well, that suits me.

GOLDBRICK

(To MCCORKLE) He says that suits him.

MCCORKLE

I am suited also, sir.

BERT

Is your name Stanley?

STANLEY

That's right.

GOLDBRICK

(More aggressive once again, emerging from behind MCCORKLE) Then I got a bone to pick with you.

STANLEY

(Makes a face, chuckling) That sounds delightful.

GOLDBRICK

I think you been upsetting my wife!

STANLEY

I have?

GOLDBRICK

Yes, you have!

STANLEY

(He thinks, then shakes his head regretfully) It's possible. These days I seem to upset a lot of people.

GOLDBRICK
(Scratching his head, to MCCORKLE) Is he playing dumb?

MCCORKLE
Indubitably, sir.

STANLEY
Now hold on a minute. (GOLDBRICK retreat a bit) What makes you think *I've* been upsetting this wife of yours?

GOLDBRICK
Well—because she's upset.

STANLEY
Brilliant! And from such a paucity of evidence you therefore deduce—

GOLDBRICK
(To MCCORKLE) Huh?

MCCORKLE
You may have drawn this hasty conclusion, sir—

GOLDBRICK
(Getting befuddled) Stop! This is getting harder than I thought it'd be!

STANLEY
By the way, who *is* your wife?

GOLDBRICK
Now stop playing dumb with me!

STANLEY
I will if you will.

GOLDBRICK
(To MCCORKLE) Was that an insult?

MCCORKLE
It had that ring.

GOLDBRICK
(To STANLEY) Now listen, I've taken just about all I'm going to—

STANLEY

Ah! I see now! I think you're talking about *Rhoda*.

GOLDBRICK

That's right! And I want to know—

STANLEY

You're just the man I've been looking for!

GOLDBRICK

You've been looking for me? (Surprised, to MCCORKLE) What do you think about that?

MCCORKLE

(Shrugs) I'm slightly baffled, sir.

STANLEY

(Advancing again) Now listen, I'm going to tell *you* a few things!

GOLDBRICK

But I want to tell you—

STANLEY

No! You listen to me!

GOLDBRICK

(Gets behind MCCORKLE again) Now you watch out!

STANLEY

You tell me your wife is upset.

GOLDBRICK

(Shaking his head) She's fit to be tied.

STANLEY

You say she's upset. How do you know *you* haven't upset her?

GOLDBRICK

Me! (He is about to step out at STANLEY again).

STANLEY

(He advances. GOLDBRICK again retreats) Yes, you! When you married her, didn't you promise to give her everything she asked for?

GOLDBRICK

How'd you know that?

STANLEY

A man always does. And have you done it? (GOLDBRICK hesitates) Well, have you?

GOLDBRICK

I don't think that's your—

STANLEY

Of course you haven't! Now listen, do you know what's wrong with your wife?

GOLDBRICK

Now watch out—

STANLEY

Your wife has caught a bug.

GOLDBRICK

A bug! Are you a doctor?

STANLEY

She's got the *stage* bug.

GOLDBRICK

I never heard of it. (To MCCORKLE) Is he putting me on again?

MCCORKLE

I surmise he is in earnest.

GOLDBRICK

(To MCCORKLE) You *what?* Now *you're* doing it!

STANLEY

I'm simply telling you that your wife has a passion for the theatre! She has an overwhelming desire to be in a show!

GOLDBRICK

(Dismayed) I know, but she can't act worth a—(He turns to MCCORKLE).

MCCORKLE

Worth a farthing, sir—

GOLDBRICK

Whatever it means, that'll do.

STANLEY

You know that and I know that. But does *she* know it?

GOLDBRICK

Of course not, but she'd make a fool of herself.

STANLEY

(He smiles, nodding insinuatingly) Yes—and then?

GOLDBRICK

I don't follow you.

STANLEY

Initially, of course, she'd be crestfallen.

GOLDBRICK

(Shakes his head) The poor kid—I couldn't let that happen—

STANLEY

But don't you see? Then she would be cured. She might even be *humbled*.

GOLDBRICK

(To MCCORKLE, a light bulb over his head) Do I see where he's going?

MCCORKLE

I do, sir.

STANLEY

And cured of that bug, she just might turn her attention to something else.

GOLDBRICK

You mean like being my wife!

STANLEY

(Mutters) Of course she might not—

(MARGERY has now entered, presumably to collect STANLEY's breakfast dishes. However, she listens to their conversation)

GOLDBRICK

(To MCCORKLE) You know, I think he's given me an idea!

MCCORKLE

Well now, that *is* amazing, sir.

GOLDBRICK

Yeah. (He does a double take at MCCORKLE) But where am I gonna get a theatre?

MARGERY

Do you say 'theatre? 'Scuse me for buttin' in, but did I hear you say you're wanting a theatre?

GOLDBRICK

Who're you?

MARGERY

Why, I'm the owner of this here establishment. Maybe you didn't notice, but we got a theatre out back. This place used to be a dinner theatre. Now I think we could fix you up at a mighty good price. It does need a little fixin', but Pa can take care of that in no time.

(PERCY now enters in time to hear that said)

PERCY

(Nervously) What can I fix up, Ma?

MARGERY

That ol' theatre out back, Pa. It don't need much doin'.

PERCY

I could that.

MARGERY

That's what I'm telling them.

PERCY

Sure I could. (Bends over, rubbing his back) I could if my dern back weren't so blasted bad.

MARGERY

Yer back? What's wrong with yer back?

PERCY

Now, Ma, you know my back ain't been right since Jed Morgan's horse kicked me when I was helping him—

(And now LOLA re-enters, listening to them)

MARGERY

Now you listen to me, Percy Gibbs, you are gonna fix up that theatre fer these people and then maybe we kin git ourselves out a debt!

LOLA

Debt! But Margery—(She looks at STANLEY)

GOLDBRICK

Now hold on here! I haven't said I'm renting any blasted theatre yet!

PERCY

(Holding his back, bent over) It was hurtin' something awful jest today, Ma.

MARGERY

If you don't git to work on that barn, you'll think that pain in your back was a blessin'!

PERCY

You know some day you're gonna be sorry for the way you talk to me, Ma.

MARGERY

Maybe so, Pa, but when I'm finished brin' sorry, you'll be even sorrier! (She starts to hit PA with whatever is handy).

LOLA

(Despair) Oh, Margery, it doesn't matter!

MARGERY

Huh?

LOLA

I think Stanley has something to tell you! (She glares at him) Don't you, Stanley. (He shrugs and walks away) *Stanley!* (Then everyone looks at one another in confusion).

ACT ONE IS OVER

