

Good

Helping the Poor Lady

Scene—Ordinary living room.
Characters—Herb and John, Julie—Herb's older sister.

Extra Costumes—Wig and clothes to dress John up as an old lady. As curtain opens, Herb and John are looking at a catalogue page filled with toys, etc.

HERB: Gee, look at this electric train. Everything on it. All the attachments and detachments. Just plug it into an outlet and—whew! Boy, would I love it. But look, twenty dollars. Where would I get that amount of money?

JOHN: How much do you have right now?

HERB: Let's see (looks into wallet.) Here's a dollar. (Looks into change compartment.) and 68 cents (searches pockets.) a nickel and two pennies. That's a dollar and seventy-five cents (subtracts on paper) eighteen twenty-five more.

JOHN (searching his wallet): I have two dollars. That makes it three seventy-five and (subtracts on paper) sixteen twenty-five to go.

HERB: Still, that's a lot to go.

JOHN: Well, what can we do for money? If you and I go out working, how much can we earn?

HERB: But where will we work? And who will pay us?

JOHN: Maybe we could borrow—

HERB: Borrow! Hah! Who would lend us any money?

JOHN: Doesn't your older sister have a good job in the city? Maybe we can get some money from her.

HERB: Not from her. She'd want to know all about what for, and so on. And she'd never approve of so much money just for a toy. She grew up while the family was quite poor and her only toys were an empty baking powder tin and a home-made rag doll. She'd tell you that first thing. That's all she ever says (in imitation of a girl's voice) "When I was your age . . ."

I sure wasn't as lucky as you.

- ⓐ paper, pencil
- ⓑ table
- ⓒ mail (envelope letter)
- ⓓ 20 bill
- ⓔ old woman costume
- ⓕ wig
- ⓖ wallet
- ⓗ suitcase

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JOHN: Maybe you could tell her that you know somebody who is very poor and has no food or money, and she'd let you have money to give to that person.

HERB: Say! That sounds like the beginning of a good idea! But who will we say is so poor?

JOHN: Just make something up. Say an old woman you met on the road and you'd like to give her twenty dollars.

HERB: There's something we can build upon. We'll write her a letter; here's what we'll say: I met her on the road and she was very thin . . .

JOHN: Say that she was so thin that she had deep wrinkles all over her skin.

HERB: And she had no teeth so she couldn't eat the hard crusts she found in garbage piles!

JOHN: And she was bow-legged and pigeon-toed because she didn't have enough calcium in her bones.

HERB: Her shoulders were stooped and her elbows were bent and . . .

JOHN: Enough! enough! We don't want to make her sound too impossible.

HERB: That's right. Okay, I'll start the letter now. Electric train—here we come.

Curtain.

SCENE II

Herb seated at table reading, John comes in in outdoor clothes, bringing "mail" with him.

JOHN: Here, I brought your mail from town. Isn't this a letter from your sister?

HERB: Yes, yes (*tears open and holds up a twenty dollar bill.*) Let's see what she wrote. (*Reading softly but getting louder*)—very glad that you have taken an interest in this old lady. I'll be coming home next week-end and I certainly want to meet her. (*Sits down hard.*) Holy Cow! What do we do now?

JOHN: Send the money back and say the lady died.

HERB (*scornfully*): Yeah! Another idea from you.

JOHN: What's wrong with my ideas? You were glad enough to do as I suggested to get the twenty dollars.

(*Silence for a while.*)

HERB: I've got it! You're going to be her.

JOHN: I'm going to be who?

HERB: The old lady.

JOHN: No, sir! Never! I won't do it.

HERB: You've got to do it. It was your idea in the first place.

JOHN: I should have known better than to start up anything with you.

HERB: Well, you did start it, and now you've got to finish it. We'll just rig you up as an old woman and teach you what to say.

Curtain.

SCENE III

Living room. Johnny dressed up, very awkwardly, as an old woman. As curtain opens, Herb gives John's costume a few finishing touches.

HERB: There! Now, remember, when Julie asks you questions, you're just sick and old, and so on.

JOHN: Yes, but that's just what I've been wondering about. Just what do I say?

HERB: Oh, don't worry, say anything. The bus is due any time now, and she'll be here. Go outside and hide, and come in about five minutes after her.

(John groans and exits—Enter Julie, carrying a week-end case.)

JULIE: Hello, Herb. And how are you, brother dear.

HERB (taking her coat): I'm glad to see you, Julie, and—

and—
JULIE: Well, I'm certainly proud of you, Herb, taking such an interest in a neglected old lady. I'm going to try to get some facts about this case. Perhaps the Department of Health and Public Welfare should look into this.

HERB (aside): "Health and Public Welfare!" Now I'm really in trouble! (To Julie) Do you really want to see her? Don't bother. Let's just spend a nice family week-end.

JULIE: Now, now, I'm sure you're very modest, but this case really has me interested. Did this lady have any children?

HERB: Yes, yes, she had lots of them, about fifteen or more.

JULIE: Fifteen or more! Then why doesn't someone look after her?

HERB (scratching head and beginning to make nervous motions.) They all died.

JULIE: Died! All of them! From what!

HERB: From—from—a disease—it has a long name—from

~~measles~~ *pneumonia* *pneumonia*
JULIE (trying not to laugh): ~~measles~~, eh? That's an awful disease. Did all them die of ~~measles~~ *pneumonia* *smallpox*

HERB: No, no. Some of them died of—from—of—~~measles~~

JULIE: Oh, I see. How bad it must have been for the poor old lady. How long has she lived in our town?

HERB: About ten years.

JULIE: And where did she live before?

HERB: In Winnipeg.

JULIE: For how long?

HERB: For sixty years.

JULIE: Oh, well, if she was born in Canada, the Health Dept. will easily trace her record.

HERB: She was born in Europe.

JULIE: In Europe. Then the poor woman must have gone through two world wars. Did she come here before or after the first world war?

HERB (now hopelessly muddled): No, she was there in both wars, the first and the second. She was nursing the wounded soldiers in the first world war. That's where two sons were killed.

JULIE: I thought they died of ~~measles~~ *pneumonia* and ~~measles~~ *smallpox*

HERB: I thought so, too.

JULIE: Dear me. She must be a very old woman. If she had two sons in the first world war, that's say, in 1914, she must have been about thirty-eight years old then—Then she came to Canada, lived sixty years in Winnipeg, and ten years here, then she is, let's see, one hundred and nine years old. And she can still walk!

HERB: Not only can she walk, but hop and run and ju— (holds mouth.)

JULIE: Indeed! What an interesting case. I hope she comes soon.

HERB (muttering): I hope not.

(Knock, knock.)

HERB (goes to door.) Well, come in. (Leads John in.) Mrs. Mrs. (whispers) Did I give you a name?

JULIE: Why are you whispering?

HERB: Because she's deaf.

JULIE: How silly. If she's deaf, you shout.

HERB: That's right (shouts) Did I give you a name?

JOHN (angrily at first, then realizing what's going on): Why should you give me a name? (Goes to Julie.) Well, hello, my dear (talks in falsetto) I'm so glad to see you. You have such a dear, kind brother.

JULIE: Yes, yes, I know I have a very dear, kind brother. He's been telling me something of your life story. Do tell me, weren't you afraid at the war front when you were nursing the soldiers?

(Herb goes behind Julie so that he can signal to John.)

JOHN (confused) Soldiers? War? Oh, yes, my father was a soldier in the last war.

JULIE: Yes, that's what I would think. And your children are not with you, any more, are they?

(Herb motions "no.")

JOHN: No, they're all married, bless their little hearts.

JULIE: Married? I suppose they married ~~measles~~ ^{measles} and ~~scarlet fever~~ ^{pneumonia} ~~small pox~~ ^{small pox}

JOHN: Yes, all of them.

(Herbie makes despairing motions.)

JULIE: And is it true that you are a hundred and nine years old?

(Herb nods "yes," John says "yes.")

JULIE (walks up to John): Let me shake hands with you and congratulate you on living so long. (Does so, then pretends to look at his hair): Dear old lady, I think I see, yes, I do think I see something on your head. I believe it's a frog!

JOHN (snatching off wig): A frog! Oh my! A frog! Where? (hops around with his hand on his head, then realises what he has done. Both boys look at each other, then at Julie.)

JULIE: Boys, boys, did you really think you'd fool me with that story? Now, tell me, what did you want the twenty dollars for?

HERB: For an electric train.

JULIE: Well, I haven't had so much fun in year. It's worth every penny of the twenty dollars to have seen you try to juggle the dates of the wars in your head, Herb. And John, your soprano voice didn't quite make it, did it? Well, it's certainly worth the price!

HERB: You mean you're not angry and you'll let us keep the money.

JULIE: Oh you poor sillies! Do I look so old and crabby that I won't remember what it feels like to want a toy? It seems only a year ago that I was playing with that hated old rag doll and a baking powder tin. (Taking coat and suitcase.) Buy your toy, boys, and I hope you enjoy it. Now, where's Mother? (Goes out.)

JOHN: Say, she's not such a bad old hen after all.

HERB: See how smart I was!

JOHN: Smart! You! Why, it was my idea.

HERB: Your idea! Who dressed you up?

JOHN: Oh look, we got the money, let's get the train, and for goodness sake, let's not argue. Curtain.