

MAN. Ahh.

WILLIE. Wider.

MAN. Ahh.

WILLIE. A little wider.

MAN. Ahhh!

WILLIE. Your throat is alright but you're gonna have some trouble with your stomach.

MAN. How come?

WILLIE. You just swallowed the stick. (*The curtain rises.*)

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

WILLIE'S hotel room. Two weeks later.

It is late afternoon. WILLIE is in his favorite pajamas in bed propped up on the pillows, his head hanging down, asleep. The television is droning away, another daytime serial. A Registered NURSE in uniform, a sweater draped over her shoulders and glasses hanging on a chain is sitting in chair watching the television. She is eating from a big box of chocolates. Two very large vases of flowers are on the bureau. WILLIE's head bobs a few times, then opens his eyes.

WILLIE. . . . What time is it?

NURSE. (*Turns off T.V., glances at watch.*) Ten to one.

WILLIE. Ten to one? . . . Who are you?

NURSE. Don't give me that. You know who I am.

WILLIE. You're the same nurse from yesterday?

NURSE. I'm the same nurse from everyday for two weeks now. Don't play your games with me.

WILLIE. I can't even chew a piece of bread, who's gonna play games? . . . Why'd you turn off the television?

NURSE. It's either watching that or watching you sleep, either one ain't too interesting.

WILLIE. I'm sorry. I'll try to sleep more entertaining . . . What's today, Tuesday?

NURSE. Wednesday. (*She bites into a piece.*)

WILLIE. How could this be Wednesday? I went to sleep on Monday.

NURSE. Haven't we already seen Mike Douglas twice this week?

WILLIE. Once.

NURSE. Twice.

WILLIE. (*Reluctantly.*) Awright, twice . . . I don't even remember. I was alright yesterday?

NURSE. We are doing very well.

WILLIE. We are? When did *you* get sick?

NURSE. (*Deadly serious, no smile.*) That's funny. That is really funny, Mr. Clark. Soon as I get home tonight I'm gonna bust out laughing.

WILLIE. You keep eating my candy like that you're gonna bust out a lot sooner.

NURSE. Well, *you* can't eat it and there's no sense throwing it out. I'm just storing up energy for the winter.

WILLIE. Maybe you'll find time in between the nougat and the peppermint to take my pulse.

NURSE. I took it. It's a little better today.

WILLIE. When did you take my pulse?

NURSE. When you were sleeping.

WILLIE. *Everybody's* pulse is good when they're sleeping. You take a pulse when a person is up. Thirty dollars a day, she takes a sleeping pulse . . . I'll tell you the truth, I don't think you know what you're doing . . . and I'm not a prejudiced person.

NURSE. Well, I am. I don't like sick people who tell registered nurses how to do their job. You want your tea now?

WILLIE. I don't want to interrupt your candy.

NURSE. And don't get fresh with me. You can get fresh

with your nephew but you can't get fresh with me. Maybe he has to take it but I'm not a blood relative.

WILLIE. That's for sure.

NURSE. That's even funnier than the other one . . . My *whole* evening's gonna be taken up tonight with nothing but laughing.

WILLIE. I don't even eat candy. Finish the whole box. When you're through, I hope you eat the flowers too.

NURSE. You know why I don't get angry at anything you say to me?

WILLIE. I give up. Why?

NURSE. Because I have a good sense of humor. I am *known* for my good sense of humor. That's why I can take anything you say to me.

WILLIE. If you nurse as good as your sense of humor, I won't make it to Thursday . . . Who called?

NURSE. No one.

WILLIE. I thought I heard the phone.

NURSE. (*Gets up.*) No one called. (*She crosses and puffs up his pillow.*) Did you have a nice nap?

WILLIE. It was a nap, nothing special . . . Don't puff up the pillows, please. (*He swats her hands away.*) It takes me a day and a night to get them the way I like them and then you puff them up.

NURSE. Oh, woke up a little grouchy, didn't we?

WILLIE. Stop making yourself a partner all the time. I woke up grouchy. Don't make the bed, please. I'm still sleeping in it. Don't make up a bed with a person in it.

NURSE. Can't stand to have people do things for you, can you? If you just want someone to sit here and watch you, you're better off getting a dog, Mr. Clark. I'll suggest that to your nephew.

WILLIE. Am I complaining? I'm only asking for two things. Don't take my pulse when I'm sleeping and don't make my bed when I'm in it. Do it the other way around and then we're in business.

NURSE. It doesn't bother me to do nothing as long as I'm getting paid for it. (*She sits.*)

WILLIE. . . . I'm hungry.

NURSE. You want your junket?

WILLIE. Forget it. I'm not hungry. (*She reads.*) . . .
Tell me something, how old is a woman like you?

NURSE. That is none of your business.

WILLIE. I'm not asking for business.

NURSE. I am 54 years young.

WILLIE. Is that so? . . . You're married?

NURSE. My husband passed away four years ago.

WILLIE. Oh . . . You were the nurse?

NURSE. No, I was not the nurse . . . You could use
some sleep and I could use some quiet. (*Gets up.*)

WILLIE. You know something? For a 54 year old reg-
istered widow, you're an attractive woman. (*Tries to pat
her. She swings at him.*)

NURSE. And don't try that with me!

WILLIE. Who's trying anything?

NURSE. You are. You're getting fresh in a way I don't
like.

WILLIE. What are you worried about? I can't even put
on my slippers by myself.

NURSE. I'm not worried about your slippers. And don't
play on my sympathy. I don't have any and I ain't ex-
pecting any coming in in the near future.

WILLIE. . . . Listen, how about a nice, alcohol rub?

NURSE. I just gave you one.

WILLIE. No, I'll give *you* one.

NURSE. I know you just say things like that to agitate
me. You like to agitate people, don't you? Well, I am not
an agitatable person.

WILLIE. You're right. I think I'd be better off with the
dog.

NURSE. How did your poor wife stand a man like you?

WILLIE. Who told you about my poor wife?

NURSE. Your poor nephew . . . Did you ever think of
getting married again? (*Takes his pulse.*)

WILLIE. What is this, a proposal?

NURSE. (*Laughs.*) Not from me . . . I am *not* think-

ing of getting married again . . . Besides, you're just not my type.

WILLIE. Why? It's a question of religion?

NURSE. It's a question of age. You'd wear me out in no time.

WILLIE. You think I can't support you? I've got Medicare.

NURSE. You never stop, do you?

WILLIE. When I stop, I won't be here.

NURSE. Well, that's where you're gonna be unless you learn to slow up a little.

WILLIE. Slow up? I moved two inches in three weeks, she tells me slow up.

NURSE. I mean if you're considering getting well again, you have to stop worrying about telephone calls and messages and especially when you're going back to work.

WILLIE. I'm an actor, I have to act. It's my profession.

NURSE. Your profession right now is being a sick person. And if you're gonna act anywhere, it's gonna be from a sick bed.

WILLIE. Maybe I can get a job on Marcus Welby.

NURSE. You can turn everything I say into a vaudeville routine if you want, but I'm gonna give you a piece of advice, Mr. Clark . . .

WILLIE. What?

NURSE. The world is full of sick people. And there just ain't enough doctors or nurses to go around to take care of all these sick people. And all the doctors and all the nurses can do just so much, Mr. Clark, but God, in His Infinite Wisdom has said He will help those who help themselves.

WILLIE. (*Looks at her.*) So? What's the advice?

NURSE. *Stop bugging me!!*

WILLIE. Alright, I'll stop bugging you . . . I don't know what the hell it means.

NURSE. That's better. Now you're my type again. (*The door bell rings. The NURSE crosses.*)