

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

The Sunshine Boys

A Comedy in Two Acts

by Neil Simon

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *THE SUNSHINE BOYS* is subject to a Licensing Fee. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *THE SUNSHINE BOYS* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and licensing arrangements and performance licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur Licensing Fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a licensing quotation and a performance license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Licensing Fees are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Licensing Fee of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock licensing fees quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: International Authors Society, C/O Gary Dasilva, 111 Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 250, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.
No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.
Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.
No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

THE SUNSHINE BOYS was first presented on December 20, 1972, by Emanuel Azenberg and Eugene V. Wolsk at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York City, with the following cast:

(In Order of Appearance)

WILLIE CLARK *Jack Albertson*
BEN SILVERMAN *Lewis J. Stadlen*
AL LEWIS *Sam Levene*
PATIENT *Joe Young*
EDDIE *John Batiste*
NURSE *Lee Meredith*
REGISTERED NURSE *Minnie Gentry*

Directed by Alan Arkin

Scenery by Kert Lundell

Costume by Albert Wolsky

Lighting by Tharon Musser

A tape recording of "The Lipton Tea" commercial is available upon receipt of a refundable \$10.00 deposit, a \$10.00 rental fee, and \$2.00 to cover postage and handling.

The Sunshine Boys

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

A two-room apartment in an old hotel on upper Broadway in the mid-eighties. It's rather a depressing place. There is a bed, a bureau, a small dining table with two chairs, an old leather chair that faces a TV set on a cheap, metal stand. There is a small kitchen to one side, a small bathroom on the other. A window looks out over Broadway. It is early afternoon, mid-winter.

At rise, the TV is on, the banal dialogue of a soap opera drones on. In the leather chair sits WILLIE CLARK, in slippers, pajamas and an old bathrobe. WILLIE is in his 70's. He watches the program but is constantly dozing off, then catching himself and watching for a few more minutes at a time. The set drones on and WILLIE dozes off. The tea kettle on the stove in the kitchen comes to a boil and whistles. WILLIE'S head perks up at the sound, reaches over and picks up the phone.

WILLIE. (*Into phone.*) Hello? . . . Who's this? (*The whistle continues from the kettle and WILLIE looks over in that direction. He hangs up the phone and does not seem embarrassed or even aware of his own absent-mindedness. He simply crosses into kitchen and turns off the flame under the kettle.*)

VOICE FROM TV. . . . We'll be back with "Storm Warning" after this brief message from Lipton Tea.

WILLIE. . . . Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. (*He puts a tea ball into a mug and pours the boiling water in . . . Then he crosses into living room to the dining table. He takes a spoon and dips into a jar of honey and pours it into his tea . . . he glances over at the TV set which has just played the Lipton Tea commercial.*)

VOICE FROM TV. And now for Part Three of today's "Storm Warning" . . .

WILLIE. What happened to Part Two? I missed Part Two? (*He drinks his tea as Part Three continues and the banal dialogue drones on. WILLIE listens as he shuffles towards chair. The TV set, which is away from the wall, has an electric plug running from it, along the ground and into the wall. WILLIE, who never seems to look where he's going, comes up against the cord with his foot. Inadvertently he pulls the cord with his foot out of its socket in the wall. The TV set immediately dies. WILLIE sits, then looks at the set. Obviously, no picture. He gets up and fiddles with dials. How could his best friend desert him at a time like this? He hits the set on the top with his hand.*) What's the matter with you? (*He hits set again. He twists knobs futilely, never thinking for a moment it might be something as simple as the plug. He slaps the picture tube.*) . . . Come on, for Pete's sakes, what are you doing there? (*He stares at it in disbelief. He kicks the stand on which it rests. Then he crosses to phone, and picks it up.*) . . . Hello? . . . Sandy? . . . Let me have Sandy . . . Sandy? My television's dead . . . My television . . . Is this Sandy? . . . My television died . . . No, not Willie. Mr. Clark to you, please . . . Never mind the jokes, wise guy, it's not funny . . . Send up somebody to fix my dead television . . . I didn't touch nothing . . . Nothing, I'm telling you . . . It's a crappy set . . . You live in a crappy hotel, you get a crappy television . . . The what? . . . The plug? . . . What plug? . . . Wait a minute. (*He lays phone down, crosses to behind set, bends down, picks up plug, looks at*

it. He crosses back to the telephone. Into phone:) . . . Hello? . . . It's not the plug. It's something else. I'll fix it myself. *(He hangs up, crosses to wall plug and plugs it in. The set goes back on.)* He tells me the plug . . . When he calls me Mr. Clark then I'll tell him it was the plug . . . *(He sits and picks up his cup of tea.)* The hell with all of 'em. *(There is a knock on the door . . . WILLIE looks at the wall on opposite side.)* Bang all you want, I'm not turning it off. I'm lucky it works. *(Pause . . . Then knock on front door again, this time accompanied by a MALE VOICE.)*

VOICE. Uncle Willie? It's me. Ben. *(WILLIE turns and looks at front door, not acknowledging that he was mistaken about the knocking on the other wall.)*

WILLIE. Who's that?

BEN'S VOICE. Ben.

WILLIE. Ben? Is that you?

BEN'S VOICE. Yes, Uncle Willie, it's Ben. Open the door.

WILLIE. Wait a minute. *(Rises, crosses to door, tripping over TV cord again, disconnecting set. He starts to unlatch the door, but has difficulty manipulating it. His fingers are not too manipulative.)* Wait a minute . . . *(He is having great difficulty with it.)* . . . Wait a minute.

BEN'S VOICE. Is anything wrong?

WILLIE. *(Still trying.)* Wait a minute. *(He tries forcing it.)*

BEN'S VOICE. What's the matter?

WILLIE. I'm locked in . . . The lock is broken, I'm locked in . . . Go down and tell the boy. Sandy. Tell Sandy that Mr. Clark is locked in.

BEN'S VOICE. What is it, the latch?

WILLIE. It's the latch. It's broken, I'm locked in. Go tell the boy Sandy, they'll get somebody.

BEN'S VOICE. That happened last week. Don't try to force it. Just slide it out. *(WILLIE stares at the latch.)* Uncle Willie, do you hear me? Don't force it. Slide it out.

WILLIE. (*Hands up to the latch.*) Wait a minute. (*Carefully, he slides it out. It comes open.*) It's open. Never mind, I did it myself. (*He opens the door. BEN SILVERMAN, a well-dressed man in his early thirties, enters, wearing a topcoat and carrying a shopping bag from Bloomingdale's, filled to the brim with assorted foodstuffs and a copy of the weekly Variety. BEN looks at WILLIE as he enters.*)

BEN. You probably have to oil it.

WILLIE. I don't have to oil nothing. The hell with 'em. (*BEN hangs up his coat in closet.*)

BEN. (*Crosses to table with shopping bag.*) You feeling alright?

WILLIE. What is this, Wednesday?

BEN. (*Puzzled.*) Certainly. Don't I always come on Wednesdays?

WILLIE. But this is Wednesday today?

BEN. (*Puts bag down.*) Yes, of course. Haven't you been out?

WILLIE. When?

BEN. Today. Yesterday. This week. You haven't been out all week?

WILLIE. (*Crosses to him.*) Sunday. I was out Sunday. I went to the park Sunday. (*BEN hands WILLIE the Variety. WILLIE tucks it under his arm and starts to look through the shopping bag.*)

BEN. What are you looking for?

WILLIE. (*Going through bag.*) My *Variety*.

BEN. I just gave it to you. It's under your arm.

WILLIE. (*Looks under his arm.*) Why do you put it there? He puts it under my arm.

BEN. (*Starts taking items out of bag.*) Have you been eating properly? No corned beef sandwiches, I hope.

WILLIE. (*Opens to back section.*) Is this today's?

BEN. Certainly it's today's. *Variety* comes out on Wednesday, doesn't it? And today is Wednesday.

WILLIE. I'm just asking, don't get so excited. (*BEN*

shakes head in consternation.) . . . Because I already read last Wednesdays.

BEN. (*Takes more items out.*) I got you six different kinds of soups. All low-sodium, salt-free. All very good for you . . . Are you listening?

WILLIE. (*Head in paper.*) I'm listening. You got six lousy tasting soups . . . Did you see this?

BEN. What?

WILLIE. What I'm looking at. Did you see this?

BEN. How do I know what you're looking at?

WILLIE. Two new musicals went into rehearsals today and I didn't even get an audition . . . Why didn't I get an audition?

BEN. Because there were no parts for you. One of them is a young Rock musical and the other show is all black.

WILLIE. What's the matter, I can't do black? I did black in 1928. And when I did black, you understood the words, not like today.

BEN. I'm sorry, you're not the kind of black they're looking for. (*He shivers.*) Geez, it's cold in here. You know it's freezing in here? Don't they ever send up any heat?

WILLIE. (*Has turned page.*) How do you like that? Sol Burton died.

BEN. Who?

WILLIE. Sol Burton. The songwriter. 89 years old, went like that, from nothing.

BEN. Why didn't you put on a sweater?

WILLIE. . . . I knew him very well A terrible person. Mean, mean. He should rest in peace but he was a mean person. His best friends didn't like him.

BEN. (*Goes to bureau for sweater.*) Why is it so cold in here?

WILLIE. You know what kind of songs he wrote? . . . The worst. The worst songs ever written were written by Sol Burton. (*He sings.*) "Lady, Lady, be my baby" . . . Did you ever hear anything so rotten? Baby he rhymes with lady . . . No wonder he's dead. (*He turns page.*)

BEN. This radiator is ice cold. Look, Uncle Willie, I'm not going to let you live here anymore. You've got to let me find you another place . . . I've been asking you for seven years now. You're going to get sick.

WILLIE. (*Still looking at Variety.*) Tom Jones is gonna get a hundred thousand dollars a week in Las Vegas. When Lewis and I were headlining at the Palace, the *Palace* didn't cost a hundred thousand dollars.

BEN. That was forty years ago. And forty years ago this hotel was twenty years old. They should tear it down. They take advantage of all you people in here because they know you don't want to move. (*WILLIE crosses to table and looks in shopping bag.*)

WILLIE. No cigars?

BEN. (*Making notes on his memo pad.*) You're not supposed to have cigars.

WILLIE. Where's the cigars?

BEN. You know the doctor told you you're not supposed to smoke cigars anymore. I didn't bring any.

WILLIE. Gimmie the cigars.

BEN. What cigars? I just said I don't have them. Will you forget the cigars?

WILLIE. Where are they, in the bag?

BEN. On the bottom. I just brought three. It's the last time I'm doing it.

WILLIE. (*Takes out a bag with three cigars.*) How's your family? The children's alright? (*Removes one cigar.*)

BEN. Suddenly you're interested in my family? It's not gonna work, Uncle Willie. I'm not bringing you anymore cigars.

WILLIE. I just want to know how the children are.

BEN. The children are fine. They're wonderful, thank you.

WILLIE. Good. Next time bring the big cigars. (*He puts two cigars in his breast pocket of bathrobe and the other one in his mouth. He crosses into kitchen looking for a light.*)

BEN. You don't even know their names. What are the names of my children?

WILLIE. Millie and Sidney.

BEN. Amanda and Michael.

WILLIE. You didn't like Millie and Sidney?

BEN. I was *never* going to name them Millie and Sidney. You forgot so you made something up. You forget everything. I'll bet you didn't drink the milk from last week. I'll bet it's still in the refrigerator. (*Crosses quickly and looks in.*) There's the milk from last week.

WILLIE. (*Comes out of kitchen, still looking for a light.*) Do they know who I am?

BEN. (*Looking through refrigerator.*) Who?

WILLIE. Amanda and Sidney.

BEN. Amanda and Michael. That you were a big star in vaudeville? They're three years old, Uncle Willie, you think they remember vaudeville? *I* never saw vaudeville . . . This refrigerator won't last another two days.

WILLIE. Did you tell them six times on the Ed Sullivan show? (*He sits, tries cigarette lighter. It's broken.*)

BEN. They never heard of Ed Sullivan. Uncle Willie, they're three years old. They don't follow show business. (*Comes back into living room, sees WILLIE with cigar in mouth.*) What are you doing? You're not going to smoke that now. You promised me you'd only smoke one after dinner.

WILLIE. Am I smoking it? Do you see smoke coming from the cigar?

BEN. But you've got it in your mouth.

WILLIE. I'm rehearsing . . . After dinner I'll do the show.

BEN. (*Crossing back into kitchen.*) I'm in the most aggravating business in the whole world and I never get aggravated until I come here. (*He opens cupboards and looks in.*)

WILLIE. (*Looking around.*) . . . So don't come. I got Social Security.

BEN. You think that's funny? I don't think that's funny, Uncle Willie.

WILLIE. (*Turns pages.*) If you had a sense of humor, you'd think it was funny.

BEN. (*Angrily, through gritted teeth.*) I have a *terrific* sense of humor.

WILLIE. Like your father, he laughed once in 1932.

BEN. I can't talk to you.

WILLIE. Why, they're funny today? Tell me who you think is funny today and I'll show you where he's not funny.

BEN. Let's not get into that, huh? I've got to get back to the office. Just promise me you'll have a decent lunch today.

WILLIE. If I were to tell a joke and got a laugh from you, I'd throw it out.

BEN. How can I laugh when I see you like this, Uncle Willie? You sit in your pajamas all day in a freezing apartment watching soap operas on a 35 dollar television set that doesn't have a horizontal hold. The picture just keeps rolling from top to bottom, pretty soon your eyes are gonna roll around your head . . . You never eat anything, you never go out because you don't know how to work the lock on the door . . . Remember when you locked yourself in the bathroom overnight . . . It's a lucky thing you keep bread in there, you would have starved . . . And you wonder why I worry.

WILLIE. . . . Calvin Coolidge, that's your kind of humor.

BEN. Look, Uncle Willie, promise me you'll eat decently.

WILLIE. I'll eat decently. I'll wear a blue suit, a white shirt and black shoes.

BEN. And if you're waiting for a laugh, you're not going to get one from me.

WILLIE. Who could live that long? Get me a job instead of a laugh.

BEN. (*Sighs, exasperatedly.*) You know I've been try-

ing, Uncle Willie. It's not easy. There's not much in town. Most of the work is commercials . . . and, well, you know, we've had a little trouble in that area.

WILLIE. The potato chips? The potato chips wasn't my fault.

BEN. Forget the potato chips.

WILLIE. What about the Shick Injector? Didn't I audition funny on the Shick Injector?

BEN. You were very funny but your hand was shaking. And you can't show a man shaving with a shaky hand.

WILLIE. Why couldn't you get me on the Alka-Seltzer? That's my kind of comedy. I got a terrific face for an upset stomach.

BEN. I've submitted you twenty times.

WILLIE. What's the matter with twenty one?

BEN. Because the word is out in the business that you can't remember the lines and they're simply not interested.

WILLIE. (*That hurt.*) I couldn't remember the lines? I COULDN'T REMEMBER THE LINES? I don't remember that.

BEN. For the Frito-Lays potato chips. I sent you over to the studio, you couldn't even remember the address.

WILLIE. Don't tell me I didn't remember the lines. The lines I remembered beautifully. The name of the potato chip I couldn't remember . . . What was it?

BEN. Frito-Lays.

WILLIE. Say it again.

BEN. Frito-Lays.

WILLIE. I still can't remember it . . . Because it's not funny. If it's funny, I remember it. Alka-Seltzer is funny. You say 'Alka-Seltzer', you get a laugh . . . The other word is not funny. What is it?

BEN. Frito-Lays.

WILLIE. Maybe in *Mexico* that's funny, not here . . . 57 years I'm in this business, you learn a few things. You know what makes an audience laugh. Do you know which words are funny and which words are *not* funny?

BEN. You told me a hundred times, Uncle Willie. Words with a 'K' in it are funny.

WILLIE. Words with a 'K' in it are funny. You didn't know that, did you? If it doesn't have a 'K' it's not funny . . . I'll tell you which words always get a laugh. (*About to count on fingers.*)

BEN. Chicken.

WILLIE. Chicken is funny.

BEN. Pickle.

WILLIE. Pickle is funny.

BEN. Cup cake.

WILLIE. Cup cake is funny . . . Tomato is *not* funny. Roast beef is *not* funny.

BEN. But cookie is funny.

WILLIE. But cookie is funny.

BEN. Uncle Willie, you've explained that to me ever since I was a little boy.

WILLIE. Cucumber is funny.

BEN. (*Falling in again.*) Car keys.

WILLIE. Car keys is funny.

BEN. Cleveland.

WILLIE. Cleveland is funny . . . Maryland is *not* funny.

BEN. Listen, I have to get back to the office, Uncle Willie, but there's something I'd like to talk to you about first. I got a call yesterday from C.B.S.

WILLIE. Casey Stengel, that's a funny name; Robert Taylor is not funny.

BEN. (*Sighs exasperatedly.*) Why don't you listen to me?

WILLIE. I heard. You got a call from N.B.C.

BEN. C.B.S.

WILLIE. Whatever.

BEN. C.B.S. is doing a big special next month. An hour and a half variety show. They're going to have some of the biggest names in the history of show business. They're trying to get Flip Wilson to host the show.

WILLIE. Him I like. He gives me a laugh. With the

dress and the little giggle and the red wig . . . That's a funny boy . . . What's the boy's name again?

BEN. Flip Wilson. And it doesn't have a K.

WILLIE. But he's *black*, with a K. You see what I mean?

BEN. (*Looks to heaven for help. It doesn't come.*) . . . I do. I do . . . The theme of this Variety show—

WILLIE. What's the theme of the show?

BEN. *The theme of the show* is the history of comedy dating from the early Greek times, through the days of Vaudeville right up to today's stars.

WILLIE. Why couldn't you get me on this show?

BEN. I *got* you on the show.

WILLIE. Alone?

BEN. With Lewis.

WILLIE. (*Turns away.*) You ain't got me on the show.

BEN. Let me finish.

WILLIE. You're finished. It's no.

BEN. Can't you wait until I'm through before you say 'No'? Can't we discuss it for a minute?

WILLIE. I'm busy.

BEN. Doing what?

WILLIE. Saying 'no'.

BEN. You can have the courtesy of hearing me out. They begged me at C.B.S. *Begged* me.

WILLIE. Talk faster because you're coming up to another 'No'.

BEN. They said to me the history of comedy in the United States would not be complete unless they included one of the greatest teams ever to come out of Vaudeville, Lewis and Clark, the Sunshine Boys. The Vice-President of C.B.S. said this to me on the phone.

WILLIE. The Vice-President said this?

BEN. Yes. He is the greatest Lewis and Clark fan in this country. He knows by heart every one of your old routines.

WILLIE. Then let *him* go on with that bastard.

BEN. It's one shot. You would just have to do it **one**

night, one of the old sketches. They'll pay ten thousand dollars for the team. That's top money for these shows, I promise you. Five thousand apiece. And that's more money than you've earned in two years.

WILLIE. I don't need money. I live alone. I got two nice suits, I don't have a pussycat, I'm very happy.

BEN. You're *not* happy. You're miserable.

WILLIE. *I'm happy!* I just *look* miserable!

BEN. You're dying to go to work again. You call me six times a day in the office. I can't see over my desk for all your messages.

WILLIE. Call me back sometime, you won't get so many messages.

BEN. I call you every day of the week. I'm up here every Wednesday, rain or shine, winter or summer, flu or diphtheria.

WILLIE. What are you, a mailman? You're a nephew. I don't ask you to come. You're my brother's son, you've been very nice to me, I appreciate it but I've never asked you for anything . . . Except for a job. You're a good boy but a stinking agent.

BEN. I'M A GOOD AGENT! . . . Damn it, don't say that to me, Uncle Willie, I'm a *God damn good agent!*

WILLIE. What are you screaming for? What is it, such a wonderful thing to be a good agent?

BEN. (*Holds chest.*) I'm getting chest pains . . . You give me chest pains, Uncle Willie.

WILLIE. It's *my* fault you get excited.

BEN. Yes, it's *your* fault! I only get chest pains on Wednesdays.

WILLIE. So come on Tuesdays.

BEN. (*Starts for door.*) I'm going . . . I don't even want to discuss this with you anymore. You're impossible to talk to. FORGET THE VARIETY SHOW! (*He starts for door.*)

WILLIE. I forgot it.

BEN. (*Stops.*) I'm not coming back anymore . . . I'm not bringing you your *Variety* or your cigars or your low-

sodium soups, do you understand, Uncle Willie? . . . I'm not bringing you anything anymore.

WILLIE. Good. Take care of yourself. Say hello to Millie and Phyllis.

BEN. (*Breathing heavily.*) Why won't you do this for me? I'm not asking you to be partners again. If you two don't get along, alright. But this is just for one night. One last show. Once you get an exposure like that, Alka-Seltzer will come begging to *me* to sign you up . . . Jesus, how is it going to look if I go back to the office and tell them I couldn't make a deal with my own uncle?

WILLIE. My personal opinion? Lousy!

BEN. (*Falls into chair, exhausted.*) . . . Do you really hate Al Lewis that much?

WILLIE. (*Looks away.*) I don't discuss Al Lewis anymore.

BEN. (*Gets up.*) We *have* to discuss him because C.B.S. is waiting for an answer today and if we turn them down, I want to have a pretty good reason why . . . You haven't seen him in, what, ten years now.

WILLIE. (*Takes a long time before answering.*) . . . Eleven years!

BEN. (*Amazed.*) You mean to tell me you haven't spoken to him in eleven years?

WILLIE. I haven't *seen* him in eleven years. I haven't *spoken* to him in twelve years.

BEN. You mean you saw him for a whole year that you didn't speak to him?

WILLIE. It wasn't easy. I had to sneak around backstage a lot.

BEN. But you spoke to him on stage.

WILLIE. Not to *him*. If he played a gypsy, I spoke to the gypsy. If he played a lunatic, I spoke to the lunatic. But that bastard I didn't speak to.

BEN. I can't believe that.

WILLIE. You don't believe it? I can show you witnesses who *saw* me never speaking to him.

BEN. It's been eleven years, Uncle Willie. Hasn't time changed anything for you?

WILLIE. Yes. I hate him eleven years more.

BEN. Why?

WILLIE. Why? . . . You never met him?

BEN. Sure I met him. I was fifteen years old. I met him once at that benefit at Madison Square Garden and once backstage at some television show. He seemed nice enough to me.

WILLIE. That's only twice. You had to meet him three times to hate him.

BEN. Uncle Willie, could I make a suggestion?

WILLIE. He used to give me the finger.

BEN. The what?

WILLIE. The finger! The finger! . . . He would poke me in the chest with the finger. (*He crosses to BEN and demonstrates on him by poking a finger in BEN's chest every time he makes a point.*) He would say, "Listen, Doctor." (*Pokes finger.*) "I'm telling you, Doctor." (*Pokes finger.*) "You know what I mean, Doctor." (*Pokes finger. BEN rubs his chest painfully.*) Hurts, doesn't it? . . . How'd you like it for 43 years? . . . I got a black and blue hole in my chest . . . My wife to her dying day thought it was a tattoo . . . I haven't worked with him in eleven years, it's just beginning to fade away . . . The man had the sharpest finger in show business.

BEN. If you work with him again, I promise you I'll buy you a thick padded undershirt.

WILLIE. You think I never did that? One night I put a steel plate under my shirt, he gave me the finger, he had it in a splint for a month.

BEN. Something else must have happened you're not telling me about. You don't work with a person for 43 years without some bond of affection remaining.

WILLIE. . . . You wanna hear other things? He used to spit in my face. On stage the-man-would-spit-in-my-face!

BEN. Not on purpose.

WILLIE. (*Turns away.*) He tells me 'not on purpose' . . . If there was some way I could have saved the spit, I would show it to you.

BEN. You mean he would just stand there and spit in your face?

WILLIE. What do you think, he's stupid? He worked it into the act. He would stand with his nose on top of my nose and purposely only say words that began with a 'T'. (*As he demonstrates, he spits.*) . . . "Tootsie Roll." (*Spit.*) . . . "Tinker Toy." (*Spit.*) . . . "Typing on the typewriter." (*Spits, BEN wipes his face.*) . . . Some nights I thought I would drown! . . . I don't know where he got it all from . . . I think he would drink all day and save it up for the night.

BEN. I'll put it in the contract. If he spits at you, he won't get paid.

WILLIE. If he can get another chance to spit at me, he wouldn't *want* to get paid.

BEN. Then will you answer me one question? If it was all that bad, why did you stick together for forty-three years?

WILLIE. (*Turns, looks at him.*) . . . Because he was terrific . . . There'll never be another one like him . . . Nobody could time a joke the way he could time a joke . . . Nobody could say a line the way he said it . . . I knew what he was thinking, he knew what I was thinking . . . One person, that's what we were . . . No, no. Al Lewis was the best. The *best!* . . . You understand?

BEN. I understand.

WILLIE. As an actor, no one could touch him . . . As a human being, no one *wanted* to touch him.

BEN. (*Sighs.*) . . . So what do I tell C.B.S.? No deal because Al Lewis spits?

WILLIE. You know when the last time was we worked together?

BEN. Eleven years ago on the Ed Sullivan Show.

WILLIE. Eleven years ago on the Ed Sullivan Show . . . July 27th . . . He wouldn't put us on in the winter

when people were watching, but never mind . . . We did the Doctor and the Tax Examination . . . You never saw that, did you?

BEN. No, but I heard it's wonderful.

WILLIE. What about a 'classic'? A *classic!* . . . A *dead* person watching that sketch would laugh . . . We did it maybe eight thousand times, it never missed . . . *That* night it missed . . . *Something was wrong* with him, he was rushing, his timing was off, his mind was someplace else . . . I thought he was sick . . . Still we got terrific applause . . . Five times Ed Sullivan said, 'How about that?' . . . We got back into the dressing room, he took off his make-up, put on his clothes and said to me, "Willie, if it's all the same to you, I'm retiring" . . . I said, "What do you mean, retiring? It's not even nine o'clock. Let's have something to eat" . . . He said, "I'm not retiring for the night. I'm retiring for what's left of my life" . . . And he puts on his hat, walks out of the theater, becomes a stockbroker and I'm left with an act where I ask questions and there's no one there to answer . . . Never saw the man again to this day . . . Oh, he called me, I wouldn't answer . . . He wrote me, I tore it up . . . He sent me telegrams, they're probably still under the door.

BEN. Well, Uncle Willie, with all due respect, you really weren't getting that much work anymore. Maybe he was getting tired of doing the same thing for 43 years . . . I mean a man has a right to retire when he wants, doesn't he?

WILLIE. Not him. Don't forget, when he retired himself, he retired me too . . . And God damn it, I wasn't ready yet . . . Now suddenly maybe he needs five thousand dollars and he wants to come crawling back, the hell with him. I'm a single now . . .

BEN. I spoke to Al Lewis on the phone last night. He doesn't even care about the money. He just wants to do the show for old times' sake. For his grandchildren who never saw him.

WILLIE. Sure. He probably retired broke from the stock market. I guarantee you *those* high class people never got a spit in the face once.

BEN. Did you know his wife died two years ago? He's living with his daughter now, somewhere in New Jersey . . . He doesn't do anything anymore. He's got very bad arthritis, he's got asthma, he's got poor blood circulation—

WILLIE. I'll send him a pump . . . He'll outlive *you*, believe me.

BEN. He wants very much to do this show, Willie.

WILLIE. With arthritis? Forget it. Instead of a finger, he'll poke me with a cane.

BEN. C.B.S. wants you to do the Doctor sketch. Lewis told me he could get on a stage tonight and do that sketch letter perfect. He doesn't even have to rehearse it.

WILLIE. I don't even want to discuss it . . . And in the second place, I would definitely not do it without a rehearsal.

BEN. Alright, then will you agree to this? Just rehearse with him one day. If it doesn't work out, we'll call it off.

WILLIE. I don't trust him. I think he's been planning this for eleven years. We rehearse all week and then he walks out on me just before the show.

BEN. Let me call him on the phone. (*Crossing to phone.*) Let me set up a rehearsal time for Monday.

WILLIE. WAIT A MINUTE! I got to think about this.

BEN. We don't have that much time. C.B.S. is waiting to hear.

WILLIE. What's their rush? What are they, going out of business?

BEN. (*Picks up phone.*) I'm dialing. I'm dialing him, Uncle Willie, okay?

WILLIE. 60-40 . . . I get six thousand, he gets four thousand . . . What the hell can he buy in New Jersey anyway?

BEN. (*Holding phone.*) I can't do that, Uncle Willie . . . God, I hope this works out.

WILLIE. Tell him I'm against it. I want him to know. I'll do it with an 'against it'.

BEN. It's ringing.

WILLIE. And he's got to come here. I'm not going there, you understand?

BEN. He's got to be home. I told him I would call about one.

WILLIE. Sure. You know what he's doing? He's practising spitting.

BEN. (*Into phone.*) Hello? . . . Mr. Lewis? . . . Ben Silverman . . . Yes, fine, thanks . . . I'm here with him now.

WILLIE. Willie Clark. The one he left on the Ed Sullivan Show. Ask him if he remembers.

BEN. It's okay, Mr. Lewis . . . Uncle Willie said yes.

WILLIE. With an 'against it'. Don't forget the 'against it'.

BEN. No, he's very anxious to do it.

WILLIE. (*Jumping up in anger.*) WHO'S ANXIOUS?? . . . I'M AGAINST IT! . . . TELL HIM, you lousy nephew.

BEN. Can you come here for rehearsal on Monday? . . . Oh, that'll be swell . . . In the morning. (*To WILLIE.*) About eleven o'clock? How long is the drive. About two hours?

WILLIE. Make it nine o'clock.

BEN. Be reasonable, Willie. (*Into phone.*) Eleven o'clock is fine, Mr. Lewis . . . Can you give me your address, please, so I can send you the contracts. (*He takes pen out of pocket and writes on his notebook.*) One one nine, South Pleasant Drive . . .

WILLIE. Tell him if he starts with the spitting or poking, I'm taking him to court. I'll have a man on the show watching. Tell him.

BEN. West Davenport, New Jersey . . . Oh nine seven oh four . . .

WILLIE. I don't want any— (*Spitting.*) —"Toy tele-

phones tapping on tin turtles" . . . tell him . . . Tell him.

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

The following Monday. A few minutes before eleven.

The stage is empty. Suddenly the bathroom door opens and WILLIE emerges. He is still wearing his slippers and the same pajamas, but instead of his bathrobe, he has made a concession to the occasion. He is wearing a double-breasted blue suit jacket, buttoned, and he is putting a handkerchief in his pocket. He looks in the mirror, brushes back his hair. He shuffles over to the window and looks out. There is a knock on the door. WILLIE turns and stares at it. He doesn't move. There is another knock and then we hear BEN'S voice.

BEN'S VOICE. Uncle Willie. It's Ben.

WILLIE. Ben? Is that you?

BEN'S VOICE. Yes. Open up. (WILLIE starts to door, then stops.)

WILLIE. . . . You're alone or he's with you?

BEN. I'm alone.

WILLIE. (Nods.) Wait a minute. (The latch is locked again and again he has trouble getting it open.) Wait a minute.

BEN. Slide it, don't push it.

WILLIE. Wait a minute. I'll push it.

BEN. DON'T PUSH IT! SLIDE IT!

WILLIE. Wait a minute. (He gets it open and opens door. BEN walks in.) You're supposed to slide it.

BEN. I rushed like crazy. I didn't want him getting here before me. Did he call or anything?

WILLIE. Where's the *Variety*?

BEN. (*Taking off his coat.*) It's Monday, not Wednesday . . . Didn't you know it was Monday?

WILLIE. I remembered but I forgot.

BEN. What are you wearing? What is that? You look half-dressed.

WILLIE. Why, for him I should get *all* dressed?

BEN. Are you alright? Are you nervous or anything?

WILLIE. Why should *I* be nervous? *He* should be nervous. I don't get nervous.

BEN. Good.

WILLIE. Listen, I changed my mind. I'm not doing it.

BEN. *What?*

WILLIE. Don't get so upset. Everything is the same as before except I'm not doing it.

BEN. When did you decide this?

WILLIE. I decided it when you asked me.

BEN. No, you didn't. You told me you *would* do it.

WILLIE. Well, it was a bad decision. This time I made a good one.

BEN. Well, I'm sorry, you have to do it. I've already told C.B.S. that you would be rehearsing this week and more important, that man is on his way over here now and I'm not going to tell him that you called it off.

WILLIE. We'll leave him a note outside the door.

BEN. We're not leaving any notes . . . That's why I came here this morning, I was afraid you would try something like this . . . I'm going to stay until I think you're both acting like civilized human beings . . . and then when you're ready to rehearse, I'm going to leave you alone. Is that understood?

WILLIE. I'm sick. I woke up sick today.

BEN. No, you're not.

WILLIE. What are you, a doctor? You're an agent. I'm telling you I'm sick.

BEN. What's wrong?

WILLIE. I think I got hepatitis.

BEN. You don't even know what hepatitis is.

WILLIE. If you got it, what's the difference?

BEN. There's nothing wrong with you except a good case of the nerves. You're not backing out, Willie. I don't care what kind of excuse you make, you're going to go through with this. You promised me you would give it at least one day.

WILLIE. I'll pick another day.

BEN. TODAY! You're going to meet with him and rehearse with him TODAY. Now *stop* and just behave yourself.

WILLIE. What do you mean, behave yourself? Who do you think you're talking to, Susan and Jackie?

BEN. *Amanda* and Jackie! . . . Michael! I wish I were. I can reason with them . . . And now I'm getting chest pains on Monday.

WILLIE. Anyway, he's late. He's purposely coming late to aggravate me.

BEN. (*Looking out window.*) He's not late. It's two minutes after eleven.

WILLIE. So what is he, early? He's *late!*

BEN. You're *looking* to start trouble, I can tell.

WILLIE. I was up and dressed at eight o'clock, don't tell me.

BEN. Why didn't you shave?

WILLIE. Get me the Shick commercial, I'll shave. (*He looks in mirror.*) I really think I got hepatitis. Look how green I look.

BEN. You don't get green from hepatitis. You get yellow.

WILLIE. Maybe I got a very bad case.

BEN. (*Looks at his watch.*) Now you got me nervous. I wonder if I should call him? Maybe he's sick.

WILLIE. (*Glares at him.*) You believe *he's* sick, but me you won't believe . . . why don't you become *his* nephew? (*Suddenly there is a knock on the door. WILLIE freezes and stares at it.*)

BEN. That's him. You want me to get it?

WILLIE. Get what? I didn't hear anything.

BEN. (*Starts towards door.*) Alright, now take it easy . . . Please just behave yourself and give this a chance. Promise me you'll give it a chance.

WILLIE. (*Starts for kitchen.*) I'll give it every possible chance in the world . . . But it's not gonna work.

BEN. Where are you going?

WILLIE. To make tea. I feel like some hot tea. (*He crosses into kitchen and closes curtain. He starts to fill up kettle with water.*)

BEN. (*Panicky.*) Now?? Now?? (*BEN looks at him exasperated, a knock on the door again and BEN crosses to it and opens it. AL LEWIS stands there. He is also about 70 years old and is dressed in his best blue suit, hat, scarf and carries a walking stick. He was probably quite a gay blade in his day but time has slowed him down somewhat . . . Our first impression is that he is soft-spoken and pleasant . . . and a little nervous.*) Mr. Lewis, how do you do, I'm Ben Silverman. (*BEN, nervous, extends hand.*)

AL. How are you. Hello. It's nice to see you. (*His eyes dart around looking for WILLIE. He doesn't see him yet.*) How do you do? . . . Hello . . . Hello . . . How are you?

BEN. We met before, a long time ago. My father took me backstage, I forget the theater . . . It must have been fifteen, twenty years ago.

AL. I remember . . . Certainly . . . It was backstage . . . Maybe fifteen, twenty years ago . . . I forget the theater.

BEN. That's right.

AL. Sure, I remember. (*He has walked into the room and shoots a glance towards the kitchen. WILLIE doesn't look up from his tea-making.*)

BEN. Please sit down. Uncle Willie's making some tea.

AL. Thank you very much. (*He sits on the edge of the table.*)

BEN. (*Trying hard to make conversation.*) Er . . . did you have any trouble getting in from Jersey?

AL. My daughter drove me in. She has a car.

BEN. Oh. That's nice.

AL. A 1972 Chrysler . . . Black . . .

BEN. Yes, the Chrysler's a wonderful car.

AL. The big one . . . The Imperial.

BEN. I know. I drove it.

AL. My daughter's car?

BEN. No. The big Chrysler Imperial . . . I rented one in California.

AL. (*Nods.*) No, she owns.

BEN. I understand . . . Do you come into New York often?

AL. Today's the first time in two years.

BEN. Really? Well, how did you find it?

AL. My daughter drove.

BEN. No, I mean, do you find the city different in the two years since you've been here?

AL. It's not my New York.

BEN. No, I suppose it's not. (*He shoots a glance towards the kitchen . . . WILLIE still hasn't looked in.*) Hey, listen, I'm really very excited about all this . . . Well, for that matter, everyone in the industry is.

AL. (*Nods, noncommittally.*) Well, we'll see. (*He looks around the room, scrutinizing it.*)

BEN. (*He calls out towards kitchen.*) Uncle Willie, how we doing? (*No answer . . . Embarrassed, to AL.*) I guess it's not boiling yet . . . Oh, listen, I'd like to arrange to have a car pick you up and take you home after you're through rehearsing.

AL. My daughter's going to pick me up.

BEN. Oh, I see . . . What time did you say? Four? Five?

AL. She's going to call me every hour.

BEN. Right . . . (*Suddenly WILLIE sticks his head out of kitchen, but looks at BEN and not at AL.*)

WILLIE. One tea or two teas.

BEN. Oh, here he is. Well, Uncle Willie, I guess it's been a long time since you two—

WILLIE. One tea or two teas?

BEN. Oh. Er, nothing for me, thanks. I'm just about leaving . . . Mr. Lewis? Some tea?

AL. (*Doesn't look towards WILLIE.*) Tea would be nice, thank you.

BEN. (*To WILLIE.*) Just the one, Uncle Willie.

WILLIE. You're sure? I got two tea balls. I could dunk again.

BEN. (*Looks at watch.*) No, I've got to get back to the office. Honestly.

WILLIE. (*Nods.*) Mm hmm. One tea. (*On his way back in, he darts a look at LEWIS, then goes back into kitchen. He pulls curtain shut.*)

BEN. (*To LEWIS.*) Well, er . . . do you have any questions you want to ask about the show? About the studio or rehearsals or the air date? Is there anything on your mind that I could help you with?

AL. Like what?

BEN. Like er, the studio? Or rehearsals? Or air date? Things like that?

AL. . . . You got the props?

BEN. Which props are those?

AL. The props. For the doctor sketch. You gotta have props.

BEN. Oh, props. Certainly. What do you need? I'll tell them. (*Takes out pad, writes.*)

AL. You need a desk. A telephone. A pointer. A blackboard. A piece of white chalk, a piece of red chalk . . . A skeleton, not too tall, a stethoscope, a thermometer, an 'ahh' stick . . .

BEN. What's an ah stick?

AL. To put in your mouth to say 'ahh.'

BEN. Oh. Right, an 'ahh' stick.

AL. A look stick, a bottle of pills—

BEN. A look stick? What's a look stick?

AL. A stick to look in the ears. With cotton on the end . . .

BEN. Right. A look stick.

AL. A bottle of pills. Big ones, like for a horse.

BEN. (*Makes circle with his two fingers.*) About this big?

AL. That's for a pony. (*Makes circle using fingers on both hands.*) For a horse is like this . . . Some bandages, cotton, an eye chart—

BEN. Wait a minute, you're going too fast.

AL. (*Slowly.*) A-desk . . . a-telephone . . . a-pointer . . .

BEN. No, I got all that . . . after the cotton and eye chart.

AL. A man's suit. Size 40. Like the one I'm wearing.

BEN. Also in blue?

AL. What do I need two blue suits? Get me a brown.

BEN. A brown suit . . . Is that all?

AL. That's all.

WILLIE. (*In kitchen, without looking in.*) A piece of liver.

AL. That's all plus a piece of liver.

BEN. What kind of liver?

AL. Regular calves liver. From the butcher . . .

BEN. Like how much? A pound?

AL. A little laugh is a pound. A big laugh is two pounds . . . Three pounds with a lot of blood'll bring the house down.

BEN. Is that it?

AL. That's it. And a blonde.

BEN. You mean a woman?

AL. You know a blonde nurse that's a man? . . . Big! As big as you can find. With a big chest, a forty, a forty-five . . . and a nice bottom . . .

BEN. You mean a sexy girl with a full, round, rear end?

AL. (*Spreads hand apart.*) About like this . . . (*Makes smaller behind with hands.*) This is too small . . .

(*Makes bigger one.*) And this is too big. (*Goes back to original one.*) Like this is perfect . . .

BEN. I know what you mean.

AL. If you can bring me pictures, I'll pick out one.

BEN. There's a million girls like that around.

AL. The one we had was the best . . . I would call her but she's maybe 55, 60.

BEN. No, no. I'll get a girl . . . Anything else?

AL. Not for me.

BEN. Uncle Willie?

WILLIE. (*From kitchen.*) I wasn't listening.

BEN. Well, if either of you think of anything, just call me. (*Looks at watch again.*) Eleven fifteen, I've got to go. (*He gets up.*) Uncle Willie, I'm going. (*He crosses to LEWIS and extends hand.*) Mr. Lewis, I can't express to you enough how happy I am and speaking for the millions of young people in this country who never had the opportunity of seeing Lewis and Clark work, I just want to say 'thank you'. To both of you. (*Calls out.*) To both of you, Uncle Willie.

AL. (*Nods in his seat.*) I hope they won't be disappointed.

BEN. Oh, they won't.

AL. I know they won't. I'm just saying it.

BEN. (*Crosses to kitchen.*) Goodbye, Uncle Willie. I'm going.

WILLIE. I'll show you the elevator.

BEN. I know where it is . . . I'll call you tonight . . . I just want to say that this is a very happy moment for me. To see you both together again, reunited . . . The two kings of comedy . . . (*Big smile.*) I'm sure it must be very exciting for the both of you, isn't it? (*No answer. They both just stare at him.*) Well, it looks like we're off to a great start. I'll call you later. . . . Goodbye. (*He leaves and closes door. They are alone. WILLIE carries two teas to dining table, where the sugar jar is. He pours himself a teaspoonful of sugar . . . Without looking in AL's direction, he asks him:*)

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.