

OUR KIND III: A NIGHTMARE ON LAUREL STREET

by

Goldwyn of Britain

characters
(in order of appearance)

Prologue
Mistress Laurel Seamchecker
Ghost of Mistress Mentor
Ghost of Annos Past
Young Laurel
Mistress Mentor
The Cost Plus Fairy
The Pier One Fairy
Ghost of Annos Present
Queen Cupcake
Don Swishpiffle
Stick Jane
Master Good Ol' Bob
Ghost of Annos Yet to Come
Lady Snide
Officer #1
Officer #2
Old Laurel

(A bedroom, with a bed at UC. Prologue enters with a large scroll.)

PROLOGUE:

(reads) Hear ye! Hear ye! The characters in this play are fictitious, and are not intended to represent anyone living, dead, or otherwise. If you know someone who resembles any of these characters, that's your tough luck.

(Prologue exits. Laurel enters R, wearing chemise and huge laurel medallion.)

LAUREL:

What a day! Just a few more letters to answer, then to bed. *(explaining to the audience)* I'm writing a column in the Kingdom newsletter, now - Advice to the Unfashionable. But, of course, anyone who actually reads the newsletter would know that.

(sits on the bed, picks up the notebook, pen, and a letter; reads the letter to herself, then writes her answer)

"Dear Confused: I don't care how much your lord likes the way you look in your new sideless surcote - wear an undertunic."

(picks up another letter, reads aloud)

"Dear Mistress Laurel: What does a properly-dressed Scotsman wear under his kilt?"

(writes her answer)

"Shoes."

(picks up another one)

"Dear Mistress Laurel: I is *(she winces)* a f- ... f- ... stick-jock ... and I wants to axe you *(turns the letter over)* a question. For training, should I wear full chain mail for swimming laps?"

(writes her answer)

"Yes."

(Mentor enters R. Her outfit is slashed and tattered.)

MENTOR: Mistress Laurel.

(Laurel looks up for a moment, shakes her head, goes back to her work)

Laurel!

(Laurel looks around, shrugs, returns to her work)

Apprentice!

(Laurel instantly leaps up and faces Mentor.)

LAUREL: *(indignant)* Apprentice?! No-one calls me that and lives!

(joyfully) Mistress Mentor!

(She runs to embrace her, but somehow Mentor slips past her.)

I haven't seen you in ages! How have you been?

MENTOR: dead.

LAUREL: That's nice.

MENTOR: I am a ghost.

LAUREL: *(humoring her)* Well, you always did look good in white.

MENTOR: No, really. I'm a ghost.

LAUREL: Nonsense. You could be anything. For example, this evening I judged a cooking contest, which included a dish documented as "made with authentic period ingredients."

(her stomach rolls)

I should have eaten the documentation, instead!

MENTOR: Apprentice! Shut up and listen!

LAUREL: Yes, ma'am. But, why are you here?

MENTOR: I am here to help you mend your ways.

LAUREL: Mend? Nothing of mine needs mending. Which is more than I can say for you.

(indicates Mentor's tatters)

MENTOR: This is my punishment for being unkind and conceited. But you! You have been arrogant and obnoxious.

LAUREL: Thank you.

MENTOR: If you think this is bad, you should see what they have in store for you!

LAUREL: What? *(Mentor gestures.)*

voice
(offstage): "Attention, K-Mart shoppers ..."

LAUREL: *(recoiling in horror)* Noooooo!!!

MENTOR: Tonight, you will be visited by three spirits. Heed them well. Remember, this is your last chance. And now, I must leave you.

(She starts to exit L.)

LAUREL: Why? Your time on this mortal plane is limited?

MENTOR: No.

LAUREL: Hot date in the underworld?

MENTOR: Uh-uh.

LAUREL: What, then?

MENTOR: Costume change.

(She starts to exit L.)

LAUREL: Wait! Before you go, there is one very important question I must ask you!

MENTOR: What?

LAUREL: Is there Laurelhood after death?

(Mentor comes back, fingers Laurel's oversize Laurel medallion, chuckles knowingly, and exits L.)

"Three spirits." Bah! Humbug.

(She gets into bed and sleeps - snoring optional. Past enters R and nudges Laurel.)

PAST: Hey.

LAUREL: *(in her sleep)* Just give me five more minutes ...

PAST: Uh-uh, kid. Wake up. Reveille!

(He shakes her. She sits up.)

LAUREL: Wha- Who are you?

PAST: I am the first of the three spirits. I am the Ghost of Annos Past.

LAUREL: I had a feeling.

PAST: Let's go.

LAUREL: Where?

PAST: Not "where" - when.

LAUREL: Why?

PAST: What?

LAUREL: Not "what" - why?

PAST: Why what?

LAUREL: Why is it "when" instead of "where"?

PAST: I think you lost me.

LAUREL: Good. Good night. *(lies back down)*

PAST: Oh, no you don't. You're coming with me.

(He hauls her up and out of bed.)

LAUREL: Where?

PAST: Not where -- Never mind. We're going forward into the past.

LAUREL: Why?

PAST: Because you have forgotten what it was like to be new to the Society.

LAUREL: So?

PAST: So, I'm going to remind you.

(He waves his hand. Young Laurel enters R. She is dressed in fantasy medievals, complete with zipper and hennin and veil.)

LAUREL: The Society should have immigration laws.

YOUNG LAUREL: Gee! My first S.C.A. event! I feel so wonderful. Everything's so new, so exciting ...

(Mentor enters L. Her garb is immaculate. Young Laurel curtsies to her.)

Are you the Queen?

MENTOR: No ...but I should be. She wouldn't know good fabric from bad if it gave her a rash!

YOUNG LAUREL: *(looking around)* Then, who is the Queen?

MENTOR: *(pointing)* See the lady in the blue dress?

YOUNG LAUREL: The one scratching?

MENTOR: *(smiling)* I made that dress. Especially for her.

YOUNG LAUREL: Well, it's still beautiful.

MENTOR: Thank you.

YOUNG LAUREL: And you are ...?

MENTOR: Better than you'll ever be. Look at you! *(examines her)* Polyester. Zipper. Hennin. Tell you what. You go home, burn this ... thing ... and start over. Take your time. A decade or two.

YOUNG LAUREL: But, I did my best. This is only my first day.

MENTOR: That's no excuse.

(She exits R, nose in the air.)

PAST: What an awful thing to do!

LAUREL: Not really.

PAST: What?

LAUREL: She didn't mention the shoes, hairstyle, jewelry ...

PAST: But, to do something like that to someone on her first day!

LAUREL: She deserves it! That girl is a disgrace. An eyesore. A clothes horse with a capital "W."

PAST: That girl is you.

LAUREL: I never looked like that.

PAST: Relax. It gets worse.

(Cost Plus enters R and Pier One enters L. Each is dressed in a collection of everything, with labels and price tags still on.)

COST PLUS: *(to young Laurel)* Not to worry, darling. I'll help you.

YOUNG LAUREL: Who are you?

COST PLUS: I am the Cost Plus Fairy. I will help you outfit yourself for very little money. I know where all the best bargains are.

PIER ONE: You do not! I can get it for less! Why, my whole outfit cost less than ten dollars!

YOUNG LAUREL: It looks like it.

PIER ONE: I'm the Pier One Fairy!

COST PLUS: Don't pay any attention to her. She's kind of stuck up. You know how Piers are.

YOUNG LAUREL: What's a Peer?

COST PLUS: A high muck-e-muck in the Kingdom.

YOUNG LAUREL: Hmm. I think I'd like that. What do I have to do to be a Peer?

PIER ONE: Well, that depends on the kind of Peer you want to be.

YOUNG LAUREL: There's more than one kind?

COST PLUS: In theory.

PIER ONE: First, there are the Knights.

YOUNG LAUREL: That sounds interesting.

PIER ONE: You haven't met any Knight.

YOUNG LAUREL: What do I have to do to be a Knight?

COST PLUS: First, you have to be a squire.

YOUNG LAUREL: What's a squire?

PIER ONE: Slave labor.

COST PLUS: You have to put on armour, go out into the field, and get bruised ...

YOUNG LAUREL: That doesn't sound so bad.

COST PLUS: ... and sweaty.

YOUNG LAUREL: What? I'd rather dress like you!

PIER ONE: These blouses are on sale ...

COST PLUS: (*interrupting*) Next, there are the Pelicans.

YOUNG LAUREL: Pelicans? Isn't that an ugly, dirty, smelly bird with a big mouth?

both Fairies: (*exchanging looks*) Close enough.

YOUNG LAUREL: I didn't know they gave awards to birds.

PIER ONE: Oh, you'd be amazed at what they'll give an award to. A dog, a van, the sun and moon ...

YOUNG LAUREL: What do I have to do to be a Pelican?

COST PLUS: First you have to be a seneschal.

YOUNG LAUREL: What's a seneschal?

PIER ONE: Executive slave labor.

COST PLUS: You have to work long and hard for the good of all.

(*pause; the three of them exchange looks*)

YOUNG LAUREL: (*sotto voce*) Next.

COST PLUS: Finally, there are the Laurels.

LAUREL: Well, it's about time!

YOUNG LAUREL: Laurels? What's a Laurel?

COST PLUS: Oh, they're the artsy types.

YOUNG LAUREL: That's for me!

PIER ONE: Their motto is "Too much is never enough."

LAUREL: Amen!

YOUNG LAUREL: What do I have to do to be a Laurel?

COST PLUS: First, you have to be an apprentice.

YOUNG LAUREL: More slave labor?

PIER ONE: More like a grad student.

COST PLUS: Majoring in chutzpah.

YOUNG LAUREL: How do I get to be an apprentice?

PIER ONE: Get a Laurel to take you on.

YOUNG LAUREL: How do I do that?

COST PLUS: Attract their attention.

PIER ONE: Prove that you're their type.

YOUNG LAUREL: How?

PIER ONE: Be snide.

COST PLUS: Look down your nose at others.

PIER ONE: Correct others when they do something wrong.

COST PLUS: Or when they don't.

YOUNG LAUREL: I can handle that.

PAST: Somehow, I don't doubt it.

YOUNG LAUREL: Then, how do I get promoted from apprentice to Laurel?

COST PLUS: The Laurel Council makes a recommendation to the Crown, and after that ...

PIER ONE: ... you're history.

YOUNG LAUREL: But, how do they know when you're ready?

COST PLUS: Who knows?

PIER ONE: Who knows what dark secrets are spoken in the depths of a Laurel council?

LAUREL: I do.

YOUNG LAUREL: Where can I find a Laurel?

COST PLUS: That's no problem. They're all over the place. Why, you can't even spit without hitting one.

(Cost Plus spits over her shoulder. Laurel recoils, hit. She wipes it off, then steps forward, her fist raised. Past stops her, so she wipes the spit on him.)

PIER ONE: They're easy to recognize. Just look for the ego-sized Laurel medallion.

YOUNG LAUREL: A Laurel medallion!

(glances thoughtfully off R, after Mentor)

The next outfit I make ...

PIER ONE: Make!

COST PLUS: Nonsense! Why go to all the trouble of learning how to do it ...

PIER ONE: ... then looking for the right fabrics ...

COST PLUS: ... and spending all that time and effort sewing ...

PIER ONE: ... when you can buy something shoddy right away?

(to Cost Plus) Can you get a Laurel for shopping?

YOUNG LAUREL: But, isn't it a bit tacky?

PIER ONE: Of course! That's the fun of it! *(to Cost Plus)* I love your hat.

COST PLUS: What, this old thing? It cost me next to nothing.

PIER ONE: *(to young Laurel)* Wouldn't you like a hat like that?

YOUNG LAUREL: I don't think that's the look I want. In fact, I'm sure of it.

COST PLUS: I can get you a great deal on sequins ...

LAUREL: Sequins? How gauche.

YOUNG LAUREL: Sequins? How gauche.

LAUREL: Good girl.

PIER ONE: How about some wooden beads?

YOUNG LAUREL: No.

COST PLUS: A basket to carry your junk in?

YOUNG LAUREL: I don't have any "junk."

COST PLUS: That's why I'm here!

PIER ONE: I saw her first!

COST PLUS: You did not!

(to young Laurel) Listen, honey, how about some cheap brass candlesticks?

YOUNG LAUREL: No, thank you.

PIER ONE: Straw hat?

YOUNG LAUREL: No.

COST PLUS: Director's chair!

YOUNG LAUREL: No.

PIER ONE: Tableware that doesn't quite match!

YOUNG LAUREL: No!

COST PLUS: *(a last-ditch effort)* Tiki torches!

YOUNG LAUREL: No! No! A thousand times - no!

(She pushes the Fairies off L. Mentor enters R.)

MENTOR: Good for you.

YOUNG LAUREL: Have you reloaded? Ready to take a few more shots at me?

MENTOR: I don't bother with the easy targets.

YOUNG LAUREL: Well, you won't get another chance. I've decided I want to be perfect.

LAUREL: You will be.

MENTOR: Perfect? That's quite an ambition ... for someone who has so far to go.

YOUNG LAUREL: Well, I'll find someone to teach me.

MENTOR: I hope you're not thinking of me.

YOUNG LAUREL: I'd rather learn from someone who has taste.

MENTOR: Did I mention your shoes, hairstyle, jewelry ...

YOUNG LAUREL: Do you know why I came to the Society? I want to be part of a group that believes in gentility and honour, with kind, courteous people willing to help. So I try my best to fit right in, and on my first day, I run into a frustrated old harridan who makes me feel unwelcome. You are self-righteous, cruel, and thoughtless. You don't care about anyone's feelings!

MENTOR: And you, little girl, are brassy, pushy, and obnoxious. A vicious, sharp-tongued, malicious little harpy. *(pause)* Of course I'll take you on as my apprentice. You're perfect Laurel material.

(Mentor holds up her Laurel medallion. Young Laurel reverently bows her head and kisses it. Laurel, misty-eyed, hugs her own Laurel medallion. Mentor and young Laurel head R, then stop.)

By the way, are there any fabrics you're allergic to?

YOUNG LAUREL: Try it, and I'll take all your seams in six inches.

MENTOR: That's my girl!

(They exit R.)

LAUREL: *(sniffing)* Dear Mistress Mentor. She taught me so much. And she was so good to me. Once she got over her attitude, that is.

PAST: Her attitude?!

LAUREL: And I proved her wrong.

PAST: About what?

LAUREL: *(smug)* I'm better than she ever was.

PAST: I give up. You're hopeless.

LAUREL: Good. Your hindsight needs glasses. I'm going back to bed.

(She gets back into bed and sleeps. Past heads R. Present enters R.)

PRESENT: How is she?

PAST: Tough. The "nostalgia" bit didn't work.

PRESENT: Hmm. In that case, I'm going to try something stronger.

PAST: Good luck.

PRESENT: Thanks.

(They slap hands, giving each other the high sign. Past exits R. Present goes to the bed and gently slaps Laurel's face.)

Wake up! Time for round two!

LAUREL: *(talking in her sleep)* Yes, whip me again, Indy!

(Present grins and smacks her on the behind. She sits bolt upright.)

Yeowch! Don't you ghosts ever knock?

PRESENT: Yeah, but that was more fun.

(Laurel gets out of bed.)

LAUREL: Let me guess. You're the second spirit, right?

PRESENT: The Ghost of Annos Present.

LAUREL: And you're going to show me how things are in the present, right?

PRESENT: Wrong. I'm going to show you your worst nightmare.

(waves his hand)

voice

(offstage): Make way for the Queen!

(Laurel comes downstage, ready to reverence to the Queen.)

Make way for the Queen!

(Laurel begins to reverence.)

LAUREL: Your ...

(Cupcake enters L, wearing a bunny-fur bikini and a crown. Laurel halts in mid-reverance.)

... kidding.

(Cupcake freezes; to Present)

Queen Cupcake? The last of the Vestigial Virgins? When did this happen?

PRESENT: Anyone who actually reads the newsletter would know that.

(Laurel grits her teeth, turns to Cupcake, and completes her reverence.)

LAUREL: Your Majesty.

CUPCAKE: Isn't it neat?

LAUREL: *(through clenched teeth)* Just ducky. I'm so happy for you.

CUPCAKE: *(oblivious)* I knew you would be.

LAUREL: Your Majesty, if you are the Queen ... who is the King?

CUPCAKE: *(thinks for a few moments)* I forget his name. But he's tall.

(Laurel simply shakes her head in disbelief.)

The only thing is, this crown doesn't quite fit.

LAUREL: I'm not surprised.

CUPCAKE: Maybe this will help.

(She takes the crown off and bangs it against the floor several times. Laurel nearly has a coronary. Cupcake tries the crown on.)

No, that still isn't right. Here. See what you can do with it.

(She hands the crown to Laurel. Laurel looks at it for a few moments, then slowly starts to raise the crown to her own head. As she closes her eyes in anticipation, Cupcake plucks the crown from her hands.)

Oh, never mind. I'll just have a knight beat on it with his sword.

LAUREL: Never! Even a ... one of them ... would never do anything like that!

CUPCAKE: Oh, you'd be surprised at what men would do for me.

LAUREL: I've heard stories.

CUPCAKE: Well, I hope you haven't repeated them to others.

LAUREL: Dream on.

CUPCAKE: What about my reputation?

LAUREL: Be thankful I'm giving you one.

CUPCAKE: But, I don't know if that's the kind of reputation I want.

LAUREL: Well, then you shouldn't indulge in such degrading activities.

CUPCAKE: *(full of helpful advice)* But, it's fun! You should try it.

LAUREL: *(stiffly)* No, thank you.

PRESENT: "Whip me again, Indy!"

(Laurel shoots him a dirty look.)

LAUREL: Why do I even bother? Men only want one thing from a girl like you.

CUPCAKE: *(giggling)* I know. And I'm so lucky to have it.

LAUREL: Queen or no, Cupcake, you are a disgrace to your gender.

CUPCAKE: Oh, who cares about *my* gender? I prefer the members of the *other*.

LAUREL: So I've heard.

CUPCAKE: You should see my Queen's Guard.

LAUREL: U.S.D.A. choice.

CUPCAKE: And all of them sworn to guard my body.

LAUREL: Mostly from each other.

CUPCAKE: *(sudden understanding)* That explains why they can't get along!

LAUREL: The light dawns! True, it's only a 15-watt bulb ...

CUPCAKE: The nice thing about being as beautiful as I am is that I attract all sorts of men. *(sighs)* The bad part is that I attract all sorts of men.

(Swishpiffle enters L. He is Cavalier to the hilt - lace, ruffles, plumes, etc.)

SWISHPIFFLE: Your Majesty. *(He sweeps his hat off in an elegant bow.)* How perfectly splendid you look.

CUPCAKE: I know.

SWISHPIFFLE: Some people can wear anything and get away with it!

LAUREL: Some people should get far away with it. And what is this gentleman trying to be?

CUPCAKE: Mistress Laurel, this is Don Swishpiffle.

SWISHPIFFLE: Chawmed, I'm sure.

LAUREL: Don't bet on it. A "Don," eh? I've heard of them, but I've never seen one up close.

SWISHPIFFLE: And your opinion?

LAUREL: Ignorance is bliss.

CUPCAKE: I'm so happy.

(Laurel looks at her.)

Well, I don't hide my opinions.

LAUREL: Or much else.

SWISHPIFFLE: Your Majesty has a good heart. I know. I've been staring.

LAUREL: I can't believe that he's a f- ... f- ...

CUPCAKE: (*guessing*) Flirt?

SWISHPIFFLE: (*guessing*) Fine fewwow?

CUPCAKE: Figment?

SWISHPIFFLE: Fashion pwate?

CUPCAKE: Frenchman?

SWISHPIFFLE: Who? Moi?

CUPCAKE: Friar?

SWISHPIFFLE: Ha! Be sewious!

CUPCAKE: Flaming ...

SWISHPIFFLE: (*quickly*) ... fop?

CUPCAKE: I know! Fighter!

LAUREL: Fool.

CUPCAKE: (*disappointed*) Aww. I was going to say that.

LAUREL: I just can't picture ... this ... on the field.

SWISHPIFFLE: But it's twue! At wong wast, we have combined civiwization with manwiness.

LAUREL: (*mocking him*) Weawwy?

SWISHPIFFLE: Certainwy. We don't use heavy awmouw ow wattan. We fight with wapiews. Aww the fightews awe doing it.

LAUREL: Surely not all.

SWISHPIFFLE: Weww, mostwy aww. It's the vewwy watest thing.

LAUREL: You know, Cavaliers aren't period.

SWISHPIFFLE: Now see hewe, Mistwess Wauwew! Ewewybody woves a good swashbuckle! Besides, being Cavawiew is its own excuse.

CUPCAKE: He's very dashing.

LAUREL: I can't wait to see him start.

CUPCAKE: *(bouncing and clapping her hands)* Oh, please do!

SWISHPIFFLE: Anything to pwease Youw Majesty. Whewe shouwd I dash?

CUPCAKE: That way.

(She points off L. He obligingly dashes off L.)

See? They do anything for me.

(She exits R. Swishpiffle tiptoes back in L.)

LAUREL: *(not exactly overjoyed to see him)* Back? So soon?

SWISHPIFFLE: Sh-h-h-h. Be vewy quiet. I'm hunting wabbit fuw.

(He exits R.)

LAUREL: Oh, what has happened? Are there no macho hunks left?

(Jane enters R, wearing full armour and a helmet, so we can't tell gender.)

Thank goodness! A real man!

(Jane removes her helmet; we see she is female.)

JANE: Excuse me?

LAUREL: Oh no!

(She glares at Present. He plays innocent, looking skyward, twiddling his thumbs and whistling.)

JANE: *(pumping Laurel's hand)* Stick Jane's the name, and fighting's what I do.

LAUREL: This can't be happening.

JANE: Hey, lady, is anything wrong?

LAUREL: Yes! A woman - f- ... f- ...

JANE: Hey, don't tell me you're one of those old fashioned types who don't think women should fight!

LAUREL: Well, I ...

JANE: We got just as much right to get sweaty and bruised as men!

LAUREL: All we lack is the stupidity.

JANE: Look, lady ...

LAUREL: Mistress! Mistress Laurel Seamchecker!

(showing her Laurel medallion) See this? I insist you give it the respect it deserves!

JANE: Oh, who cares about non-fighting titles?

LAUREL: Anyone with a brain! Women should not fight! Oh, God. I said it.

(it leaves a bad taste in her mouth)

JANE: Mistress or not, you're a disgrace to your gender.

LAUREL: It's your gender, too! How could you do this to yourself?

JANE: It's fun!

LAUREL: Aren't you the least bit ashamed of what you're doing?

JANE: I'll say. My Barony's fighting unit calls itself the Teenage Mutant Norman Turtles.

LAUREL: *(moaning)* Oh, no!

JANE: "Heroes in a hauberk." Sheesh!

LAUREL: But, doesn't your Lord object?

JANE: He's the one who taught me how to fight! I dumped him, though.

LAUREL: Why?

JANE: Had to. I broke him.

LAUREL: Damaged his poor male ego, eh?

JANE: No I hit him South of there.

LAUREL: And you're proud of that?

JANE: Sure am. It's my favorite shot. Hey, maybe I should give it a name. What do you think of "Poetic Justice"?

LAUREL: I'm hardly the one to ask.

JANE: Or "Revenge is sweet."

LAUREL: Please.

JANE: Or "Do Unto Others."

LAUREL: Oh, let me be!

*(Bob enters L. He wears a tabard emblazoned with ***1/2, a kaffiyeh, and a rubber chicken.)*

JANE: Well, maybe you'd prefer talking to him.

LAUREL: A Pelican! But, I don't recognize him.

JANE: He's visiting our Kingdom. Mistress Laurel, this is Master Robert the Good.

(Laurel and Bob reverence.)

I'm sure you two have lots to talk about. Stuff that would be way over my unworthy head.

LAUREL: Doubtless.

JANE: So, I'll just be on my way.

LAUREL: You have my leave.

JANE: Oh, thank you.

LAUREL: So leave.

(Jane heads R.)

JANE: Or "This is for last Saturday night, you creep, when I caught you with that hussy ..."

(Jane exits R.)

LAUREL: Master Robert the Good, it is indeed an honour to welcome you to this land. I assure you that all possible courtesies will be extended to one as noble and dignified as your esteemed self. As for me, it shall be a delight to speak to someone of great culture and refinement, instead of the boors and clods I normally have to put up with. Indeed, I eagerly await our discussions of things wise and wonderful. You shall share with me the culture of your Kingdom, and I shall share with you the rich cultural heritage of which I am the epitome. Therefore, I say again unto you, ten thousand welcomes, Master Robert the Good!

(Laurel reverances deeply.)

BOB: *(thick Texas drawl)* Shoot, y'awl c'n call me Good ol' Bob.

(Laurel collapses. Bob rushes over and helps her back up.)

LAUREL: Thank you. For a moment, I thought ...

BOB: You awl raht thar, li'l filly?

(Laurel staggers. Bob has to hold her upright.)

Say thar, y'awl don't look so good.

LAUREL: I'm all right. I had a nasty shock, that's all.

(throws Present another dirty look)

It won't happen again.

PRESENT: Patience.

BOB: Wa'l, thass mighty nice t'jear, 'cause I'm lookin' right fo'ward t' those talks you was thinkin' o' havin'. We c'n have us a nice long jaw session.

LAUREL: Actually, my appointment calendar is rather full ...

BOB: 'Course, y'awl got some mighty strange customs, out hyar.

(Laurel's spine immediately stiffens.)

LAUREL: Indeed?

BOB: Ah don' rightly know that Ah'd really want t' pick any of 'em up.

LAUREL: And what is wrong with the way we do things? Pray, tell.

BOB: Wa'l, now, don't git yer dander in a uproar. Ah never said they was wrong, precisely; jus' different.

LAUREL: For instance?

BOB: Wa'l, y'awl treat yer Peers as tho' they wuz somethin' special. Heck, we're just plain folks.

LAUREL: Bite your face!

BOB: Whoa, thar! Remember, Ah'm a Peer, too.

- LAUREL:** I wondered about that. Why did they give you a Pelican?
- BOB:** Ah don't rightly know. 'Cept, o' course, Ah travel an' leave mah Kingdom a lot. Mebbe they gave me this here a-ward ...
- LAUREL:** ... hoping you'd stay away.
- BOB:** See here, Mistress High-an'Mighty, Ah earned this here bird, and Ah'm just as proud o' it as y'awl are o' that overgrown weed hangin' 'round yore own neck!
- LAUREL:** I know why they gave it to you. It was a consolation prize, because you couldn't rate four stars! The Laurels have much higher standards.
- (Bob gestures to the audience. Laurel looks out into the audience, [hopefully] spots a couple of Laurels, and screams. She collapses, writhing. Bob exits L. The Ghost of Annos Present exits R. The Ghost of Annos Yet to Come, dressed all in black, enters L, and stands over Laurel. She sees him and slowly rises to her knees.)*
- (fearful)* A- am I in the presence of the Ghost of Annos Yet to Come?
- FUTURE:** You got it, babe.
- LAUREL:** Spirit of the Future, I fear you more then ...
- FUTURE:** Oh, get up.
- (He helps her to her feet.)*
- Expecting something different, weren't you?
- LAUREL:** Frankly, yes.
- FUTURE:** Good. I like to keep 'em off balance. Ready?
- LAUREL:** You're going to show me what will happen in the future if I don't change my ways, right?
- FUTURE:** Uh ... yeah.
- LAUREL:** I like to keep 'em off balance, too.
- FUTURE:** Then, hang on, 'cause here we go! *(waves his hand)* Welcome to Anno Societatis 100. Here at H.Y.C., members of the 82 Kingdoms have gathered for a celebration of fun, fighting, and casual pick-ups.
- LAUREL:** Some things never change.
- FUTURE:** As though in honour of the Society, it has stopped raining for the first time in 57 years.
- (Snide enters R. Her garb is exquisite.)*

SNIDE: Rats! And I made all that rainproof garb for nothing!

LAUREL: Lovely!

FUTURE: You approve?

LAUREL: Naturally! The workmanship is exquisite! The design flawless! A superb example! Who wouldn't approve?

(A whistle blows from off L. Immediately, Officers 1 and 2 enter. They wear tabards emblazoned with the words "COSTUME POLICE," badges, billy clubs, etc..)

ONE: You, there! Halt in the name of the Costume Police!

(They rush to Snide and grab her arms.)

SNIDE: Who, me? Why?

TWO: Lady Snide, you are under arrest for violation of Article 6, Paragraph 27, Subsection C, of the Sumptuary Laws.

SNIDE: The what?

ONE: Ignorance of the law is no excuse!

TWO: She must be tried and sentenced immediately!

ONE: Fetch the Chief.

(Two exits L.)

SNIDE: Tried and sentenced? I might be acquitted.

ONE: Ha! You don't know the Chief. No-one has ever been acquitted.

SNIDE: No-one could be that mean. Just who is this Chief of yours?

ONE: She's the oldest living Laurel.

SNIDE: Oh, no! Not her! *(struggles to get loose)*

ONE: It's no use. No-one escapes the clutches of the Costume Police.

(Two returns, supporting Old Laurel, who hobbles in on a cane. Her garb makes Snide's look like trash. She also wears a huge coronet, with real strawberries hanging from it, and a Laurel medallion larger than Laurel's, including flashing lights, etc.)

OLD LAUREL: Off with her head!

TWO: But, the trial hasn't started, yet.

OLD LAUREL: That's all right. I'm just practicing.

TWO: Yes, Your Grace.

LAUREL: "Your Grace?!" I'm a Duchess? Wait 'til I get my hands on Cupcake ...

OLD LAUREL: Well, what have my cats dragged in?

ONE: We caught this one, Your Grace.

OLD LAUREL: And the charges?

ONE: A 6-27-C, Your Grace.

OLD LAUREL: That's all? Just one charge?

TWO: It's all we saw.

(One prostrates himself and salaams. Two follows his example.)

ONE: *(quickly)* Forgive us!

OLD LAUREL: Silence! You're both on report. Twenty thousand demerits each!

(One and Two stand and return to Snide.)

FUTURE: Boy, is she strict!

LAUREL: She's wonderful.

OLD LAUREL: Well, youngster? How do you plead?

SNIDE: Plead? I never plead!

ONE: She means, how do you answer the charge?

SNIDE: I don't even know what the charge is! Just a bunch of numbers.

TWO: *(pointing to the hem of her skirt)* See that!

SNIDE: What? One thread?

ONE: That's a 6-27-C; loose thread.

SNIDE: But, that happened when I brushed up against a rose bush, not ten feet back.

OLD LAUREL: No excuse! Guilty!

ONE and TWO: (*quickly, conversationally*) Guilty! Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!

OLD LAUREL: She must be punished!

ONE and TWO: (*same thing*) Punished! Punished! Punished! Punished!

(*They take out cotton wads and put them in their ears.*)

SNIDE: No! No!

(*She tries to cover her ears, but One and Two pull her hands away.*)

OLD LAUREL: Back in A.S. two-digits, you young people had more respect for your eld-- betters. No-one ever talked back to a Peer, let alone to a Laurel!

FUTURE: How quickly they forget.

LAUREL: Quiet! I'm talking.

OLD LAUREL: You young people have it so easy. Computerized sewing machines. Hologram scrolls. Armour with impact meters. Time travel, to check whether Eleanor really did use a zipper. (*menacing*) Someday I'll find out which of you gave it to her. We never had such modern conveniences. Why, I remember having to walk from my car to my pavilion! Yes, you young people don't know how lucky you are.

SNIDE: (*screams*) Aaaaauuuuuggggghhhh! No! No! I can't take any more! I'll be good. I swear. I'll never let it happen again! Please!

(*Old Laurel motions to the two Officers. They release Snide, who sinks to the ground.*)

Thank you, Mistress Laurel. Thank you.

OLD LAUREL: You may kiss the hem of my skirt.

LAUREL: Now, that's class!

(*Snide crawls to Old Laurel, kisses the hem of her skirt, then tears some trim loose. Old Laurel doesn't notice. One and Two stare at it, then look at each other, not knowing what to do. Two opens his mouth but One clamps his hand over it and shakes his head.*)

Why, that little ... Nice move, though.

(*Snide gets to her feet, all smiles.*)

OLD LAUREL: There, there, my dear. Now, that wasn't so bad, was it?

(motions to the two Officers)

Leave.

(They exit L, One still covering Two's mouth.)

I think we should get better acquainted.

SNIDE: I'd rather not. I've decided I want to be perfect.

OLD LAUREL: That's quite an ambition, for someone who has so far to go.

SNIDE: Well, I'll find someone to teach me.

OLD LAUREL: I hope you'll think of me.

SNIDE: Certainly not.

OLD LAUREL: But, there's so much I could teach you.

SNIDE: I'd rather learn from someone who has taste.

LAUREL: What a little monster.

FUTURE: Yep. Some things never change.

OLD LAUREL: You impudent young whippersnapper! Why, when I was your age, ...

SNIDE: *(trying to interrupt)* I know. "Things were different, back then." I've heard it before.

OLD LAUREL: *(continuing)* ... we used to do things differently. We believed in the honour system. We may not have practiced it, much, but we believed in it! Lists Officers didn't give odds. Knights' councils lasted less than eight hours. And as far as the eye could see - no Samurai. *(tearfully)* Yes, those were the Good Old Days ...

SNIDE: Quit living in the past! No-one wants to hear your stories about how you used to do things! This is A.S. 100! We've outgrown you! You're out of date! A relic! An anachronism! You have no concept of how the Society functions today! I'm not even sure you knew what was going on back then! Your head is so full of yourself that nothing gets past your ego!

OLD LAUREL: Why that ... that's almost slander!

SNIDE: So don't lecture me about the Good Old Days. They're your Good Old Days. Me, I'm going out to make some Good Old Days of my own!

(She exits R.)

OLD LAUREL: *(with tears in her eyes)* I know you will, sweetheart. You just keep on the way you're going, and ... My skirt! My skirt! Look what she did to my skirt! Costume Police! Emergency repair! Quick! Costume Police!

(She hobbles out L.)

FUTURE: Well? Did you learn anything?

LAUREL: Oh, yes.

FUTURE: What?

LAUREL: That you Ghosts don't know what you're doing.

FUTURE: What?!

LAUREL: *(calls)* I want to see all you Ghosts right now! Front and center! Hurry it up!

(Past and Present enter L.)

You too, Mistress Mentor.

(Mentor enters R.)

MENTOR: What's going on?

LAUREL: First things first. You have no right to come in here, disturb my slumber, put me through all this nonsense under the pretext of making me mend my ways. Not only is it an invasion of privacy, it's unbelievably rude! Just who put this idea into your heads?

(The Ghosts look at each other, then point to Mentor.)

FUTURE: She did. She said it would be good for you.

PAST: Yeah. It was all her idea.

LAUREL: So it was you, my old teacher. Well, I am the Mistress, now. More than that, I am Mistress Laurel Seamchecker, and it's about time I showed you exactly what that means.

(The Ghosts begin to edge away from her.)

Get back here!

(They return. Laurel examines them.)

Who made these robes?

(She drags the Ghost to the front of the stage and shows his garb to the audience)

Look at this! Uneven seams. No lining. Cheap fabric! And I'll bet you're not even wearing period undergarments!

(He pulls loose of her before she can check and runs back to the other ghosts, who are cowering.)

As for you, my dear Mistress Mentor, I believe your punishment is thoroughly justified. You deserve to be in rags. *(softening)* On the other hand, you do look cold.

MENTOR: I am.

LAUREL: Then, just to show you that, despite your belief, I am not totally without compassion ...

(Laurel picks up a shawl from her bed and drapes it around Mentor's shoulders.)

Here. It took me weeks to knit this shawl. I want you to have it. Keep it as a reminder of our first meeting.

MENTOR: Keep it? Really? But it's so lovely.

LAUREL: I insist.

MENTOR: Then, you have learned!

LAUREL: *(sincere)* Of course. I'm not stupid. And, when you wear it, think of me.

MENTOR: I will.

LAUREL: Good. Of course, that doesn't let you off the hook.

MENTOR: I know.

LAUREL: That was a rotten idea you had.

MENTOR: I'm beginning to realize that.

LAUREL: *(prompting)* And ...

MENTOR: I apologize.

LAUREL: What about the rest of you?

PAST: Me, too.

PRESENT: Ditto.

FUTURE: And me.

LAUREL: Are any of you going to bother me again?

PAST: Not me!

PRESENT: Never!

FUTURE: No way!

LAUREL: Good. *(suddenly)* Boo!

(The Ghosts recoil. Laurel laughs, heads R, then stops, and turns slowly.)

One final point. Who came up with this moth-eaten plot?

PRESENT: Charles Dickens.

LAUREL: When?

PAST: *(hesitant)* Uh ... 1843.

LAUREL: *(triumphant)* Not period!!! *(to herself)* "Duchess," eh? Hmm.

(She exits R, whistling [or humming, etc.] "My awards go jingle, jangle, jingle ...")

PRESENT: Well?

FUTURE: Well what?

PRESENT: What about her punishment?

PAST: Punishment? You heard what she said!

PRESENT: Are we going let her bully us?

PAST: Yes.

(Mentor twitches.)

PRESENT: She needs to be punished.

FUTURE: The man has a point. We have to pick out a suitable punishment.

PRESENT: Something she won't enjoy.

(Mentor twitches again.)

PAST: I thought the punishment was already picked out.

PRESENT: Nah. That was only for what she did up to now.

FUTURE: Yeah. She's going to be a lot worse in the future. I know.

PRESENT: So we have to come up with something even worse. Anybody got any ideas?
(Mentor begins to scratch.)

FUTURE: Not me.

PAST: I can't think of anything, either.

MENTOR: Aaaaauuggghhh!

PRESENT: What is it?

PAST: What's wrong?

MENTOR: *(scratching furiously)* That rat! It's this shawl! It itches!

PRESENT: That does it!

FUTURE: The final straw!

PAST: Now we have no choice.

MENTOR: *(still scratching)* What are you going to do?

PRESENT: We're going to sentence her to the worst punishment on the books. Agreed?

PAST: Agreed.

FUTURE: Agreed.

MENTOR: What is it?

PRESENT: Mistress Laurel Seamchecker ...

PAST: ... for your behavior in the Past ...

PRESENT: ... the Present ...

FUTURE: ... and in the Time to Come ...

PAST: ... until and unless you mend your ways ...

FUTURE: ... this tribunal sentences you ...

all 3 Ghosts: ... to appear in Goldwyn's plays!

PAST: And God help us.

MENTOR: God help us, every one.

(They exeunt, Mentor still scratching.)

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