

MY PHONY Valentine

Written by Brian Sylvia

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ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Psychologist Dr. Henry Valentine is unexplainably late for an open house demonstration of his innovative group therapy ideas. Anna-Lee Silverstein, a temp stepping in due to Dr. Valentine's secretary's maternity leave, has never met the doctor. Learning this, a would-be patient, Elliot Noodleman, decides to impersonate the psychologist. As other potential patients arrive, Elliot creates his own "innovative" ideas for emotional therapy. Add in Lydia Bedford, a woman suffering from sinistrophobia (the fear of objects to her left); a community theatre director, Armand Charbonneau, who fears mimes (and feels compelled to constantly "direct" the sessions); Becky Webster, a mild-mannered librarian who has a mysterious disorder (where she can only communicate through puns when nervous); and Mona McVee who suffers from xanthophobia (a fear of all things yellow), and you've got the makings for a hilarious therapy session. When a masked intruder invades looking to repair his relationship, the antics move to another level! Not until the real Dr. Valentine arrives do we realize that maybe the phony Valentine knew more than anticipated.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 or 5 m, 4 w)

JOHNNY ALMEIDA: (M) the building custodian (may double with Dr. Henry Valentine).

ANNA-LEE SILVERSTEIN: (W) a secretary sent by the employment agency to fill in for Dr. Valentine's secretary.

ELLIOT NOODLEMAN: (M) would-be patient who decides to impersonate Dr. Valentine.

LYDIA BEDFORD: (W) suffers from sinistrophobia (the fear of objects to her left).

ARMAND CHARBONNEAU: (M) community theatre director who cannot resist "directing" everything around him.

BECKY WEBSTER: (W) shy librarian who, when nervous, can only communicate through puns.

MONA MCVEE: (W) suffers from xanthophobia (the fear of the color yellow). Her fear causes her to shriek loudly while covering her eyes to avoid seeing the color yellow.

ROGER JONES: (M) masked intruder threatening a "holdup."

DR. HENRY VALENTINE: (M) psychologist (may double with Johnny).

SETTING

The office of Dr. Henry Valentine. There is a desk, trash can, bookcase, couch, and giant poster on an easel (advertising his free group therapy session). Folding chairs are stacked against the wall. Suggestion: Put an easel with the same poster in the lobby/near the box office as audience members arrive.

Come One - Come All

FREE

**Innovative
One-Hour Group
Therapy Session
with
Dr. Henry Valentine**

*Specializing in Social
Interaction Disorders*

This Saturday the 12th at 10 am
Suite 404 of the Park City Tower

You will NOT be disappointed!

Prologue

(AT RISE: ELLIOT enters wearing a yellow or bright or mustard-colored sweater.)

ELLIOT: *(Singing a self-written tune and repeating the one line several times.)* Talking to myself is so much fun. *(Speaking.)* Hello! Anybody here. *(Looks at watch/phone.)* I guess I'm a little early. *(Walks over to poster on easel and reads.)* "Free Innovative One-Hour Group Therapy Session. Specializing in Social Interaction Disorders." That's why I'm here. They had me at "free." *(Reading.)* "Suite 404 of the Park City Tower." Check! Well, there's nothing fancy about Dr. Valentine's office, that's for sure. But everyone is raving about his creative new group therapy techniques. I've tried other groups to help with my low self-esteem that drives me to control social situations. Add in my Hyper-Impersonator Syndrome and I really need this session. And... I probably need help with how much I talk to myself as well. Maybe it's time for me, Elliot Noodleman, to conquer my social quirks and stop trying to be someone I'm not. I guess maybe I'll go down to the coffee shop in the lobby and grab a java. White chocolate mocha, here I come. Yeah, Elliot, today could be your lucky day. *(Singing his self-written tune.)* Talking to myself is so much fun.

(HE exits. LIGHTS out.)

ACT I
Scene 1

(LIGHTS up. It is just a few minutes later. JOHNNY is on stage cleaning, emptying trash, and generally straightening. He has music playing or is dancing with ear buds in. ANNA-LEE enters. She waves or taps Johnny to get his attention. He stops the music.)

ANNA: Oh, my goodness, am I late?

JOHNNY: It depends. Who are you and what are you potentially late for?

ANNA: Oh, I'm sorry, my name is Anna-Lee Silverstein. The "Just-Do-It Employment Agency" sent me here. Said Dr. Henry Valentine needs a temp secretary. Are you Dr. Valentine?

JOHNNY: Do I look like a psychologist who makes seven figures?

ANNA: Not at all.

JOHNNY: Well, it was rhetorical, but thank you for the clear and prompt attack on what little positive self-image I had remaining. I'm Johnny, the custodian. Dr. Valentine should be here before long.

ANNA: Oh, I'm sorry. Do you know if the agency was correct in sending me here?

JOHNNY: I believe so. Vivian, that's Dr. Valentine's secretary, was due to have a baby at any time. I guess she did. She would've been here by now.

ANNA: *(Pacing around the room.)* I just got the call this morning, so I feel a bit rushed.

JOHNNY: Well, miss, uh, what as it again?

ANNA: Just call me Anna-Lee.

JOHNNY: Well, Anna-Lee, I'm not sure what you know about Dr. Valentine.

ANNA: Actually, nothing at all. The agency just told me that he was a psychologist and that he needed a temp secretary for a few weeks.

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JOHNNY: I've not actually sat in on one of his group sessions, though I have been tempted to peek in on occasion. From what I hear, he's not your average psychologist. He specializes in, shall we say, *(Uses fingers to make quotation mark sign.)* "creative" therapy for those suffering from various social anxieties.

ANNA: Sounds interesting.

JOHNNY: If by "interesting" you mean "crazy," then you're right. He just released a book entitled *Five Steps to Quieting the Social Anxiety Mind Monsters*.

ANNA: Pretty ominous title.

JOHNNY: And from what I hear, pretty unusual therapy ideas. Actually, today he was featuring a free group therapy session for potential patients. *(Motions to poster on easel.)* It's this event right here.

ANNA: So, this is happening on my first day?

JOHNNY: If today is Saturday the 12th. *(Or use whatever the date is.)*

ANNA: What a great gig for me. I'm sure I'll meet all sorts of fascinating personalities.

JOHNNY: And the doctor should be here any minute. I've got to get going. I clean the offices on four floors of this building. Nice meeting you, Anna-Lee. And good luck on your first day here in the Park City Tower.

ANNA: Thanks, Johnny.

(JOHNNY exits.)

ANNA: *(Cont'd. To herself.)* This should be fun. A psychologist with creative group therapy ideas.

(ELLIOT enters with a carryout cup of coffee.)

ANNA: *(Cont'd.)* Maybe I should buy a copy of Dr. Valentine's book.

ELLIOT: You've not read the book?

ANNA: *(Startled.)* Oh my, are you Dr. Valentine?

ELLIOT: Uh, nuh, um... why? *(Pause.)* Do you work here?

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ANNA: I'm the temp secretary. The regular secretary is out on maternity leave.

ELLIOT: Temp secretary? As in temporary? Substitute?

ANNA: Correct.

ELLIOT: So, you never met the doctor?

ANNA: No. Not even seen a picture. I'm so sorry. It's a last-minute assignment for me. *(Pause.)* And obviously you are Dr. Valentine.

ELLIOT: *(Devising a plan.)* Well, uh, *(Announcing proudly.)* yes. Yes, I am. Dr. *(Slight pause.)* Valentine, psychologist. Pleased to meet you. And your name is?

ANNA: Anna-Lee Silverstein.

ELLIOT: Nice to meet you, Anna-Lee.

(THEY shake hands.)

ANNA: Same here. And I understand that today is a free group therapy trial.

ELLIOT: Yes, that's why I'm here. I mean, as the doctor -- obviously. Not as a patient or anything. Clearly as the doctor.

ANNA: *(A bit confused.)* Yes, of course.

ELLIOT: I wouldn't want to be confused with one of the loonies.

ANNA: I beg your pardon?

ELLIOT: Oh, that may seem, uh, insensitive. And you say you haven't read the book?

ANNA: No, I haven't. But I'll order a copy today.

ELLIOT: No need. Why buy the book when you get to experience it all first-hand. Anyway, when I say the word "loonies," it's just part of my innovative therapy.

ANNA: Really?

ELLIOT: It's called *(Searching.)* uh, in, out, uh, Insult Shock. Yeah, that's it -- Insult Shock Therapy. That's my own idea, you know.

ANNA: Well, that's certainly innovative.

ELLIOT: Yep, call those lunatics unhinged, deranged, unstable, or even insane, and it just shocks them into, well...

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ANNA: Into being well?

ELLIOT: Being well? Sure, let's go with that. (*Motions to poster.*) And this poster says that it's a free sixty-minute group therapy session today. For people with awkward social interactions or whatever. You know, like maybe some random guy who has such low self-esteem that he talks to himself 'cuz he's his own best friend and secretly seeks power by impersonating a person of importance. (*Nervously laughs.*) Weird, huh?

ANNA: Thought-provoking.

ELLIOT: Yeah, thought-provoking. (*Turns and whispers.*) That's one way to describe it.

ANNA: So, what can I do to get ready for the folks arriving?

ELLIOT: Well, according to Dr. Valentine's poster, they should be here at any moment.

ANNA: "Dr. Valentine's" poster? Why did you say it that way?

ELLIOT: Oh, it's just my, um, uh, way of detaching myself from the psychologist in me and presenting myself as the, well, as the everyman.

ANNA: The everyman. Interesting. These really are intriguing practices.

ELLIOT: Yeah -- thanks. That's me, intriguing.

(*LYDIA enters.*)

LYDIA: Am I in the right place?

ELLIOT: It depends. Are you here for the regional bingo tournament?

LYDIA: No, I'm here for the free group therapy session.

ELLIOT: Then you're in the right place. Have a seat.

LYDIA: Where is Dr. Valentine?

ELLIOT: He'll be here soon.

ANNA: (*To LYDIA.*) Actually, he *is* Dr. Valentine. Denying it is part of his technique.

LYDIA: How strangely brilliant.

ELLIOT: Oh yeah, I'm Dr. Valentine. I like to act confused, so you nut cases don't feel alone.

LYDIA: What was that? Did you say, "nut cases"?

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ANNA: That's part of his technique too. It's called Insult Shock Therapy. He is so avant-garde.

LYDIA: Obviously.

ELLIOT: So, what's your name and malfunction?

LYDIA: Mal...?

ANNA: *(To LYDIA.)* Insult Shock.

LYDIA: Oh, I'm Lydia Bedford and I suffer from sinistrophobia.

ELLIOT: What in the world is that?

LYDIA: You don't know?

ELLIOT: Um, of course I do. Just getting you to voice your own, um, affliction.

LYDIA: Oh. Sinistrophobia is the fear of anything on my left.

ELLIOT: Seriously? Anything on your left? *(HE moves to HER left as she tries to spin and avoid him. This goes on for about fifteen seconds.)* This is exhausting.

LYDIA: I know.

ELLIOT: Wow. You are one nutty lady.

ANNA: *(To LYDIA.)* Insult Shock.

LYDIA: I'm here for your help, Doctor.

ELLIOT: Well, good luck with that!

(ARMAND enters with a flair. He is wearing a very long scarf.)

ARMAND: I have arrived. We may get this session going. Places, everyone! *(Claps.)* Everyone to their marks.

ANNA: Places, everyone?

LYDIA: Marks?

ARMAND: Apparently you don't understand. My name is Armand Charbonneau, and I am the director-in-residence at the Parkside Theatre downtown. Let's get this rehearsal moving already.

ELLIOT: Hey, guy with the excessively long scarf, this isn't a rehearsal. It's therapy.

ARMAND: And who is this brash individual?

LYDIA: That is Dr. Valentine.

ARMAND: *(Surprised.)* Dr. Valentine? *(Confused.)* Dr. Valentine? *(More confused.)* Dr. Valentine?

End of Freeview

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