

WILLARD & IMOGENE

It's shortly after 8 a.m. Only IMOGENE, the hypochondriac office manager, is at work. Enter WILLARD, a newspaper carrier. He sports a long beard, oversized glasses and a stench worthy of a rendering plant. IMOGENE tries valiantly to carry on a civilized conversation despite the overwhelming smell. It's as if she's chatting while dicing onions.

WILLARD

(Approaching IMOGENE at front counter) Mornin,' Imogene. How are ya?

IMOGENE

(Shielding her nose from the smell with her hand) Good morning, Willard. I'm OK, but I think my sciatica is flaring up.

WILLARD

You always seem to be afflicted with something.

IMOGENE

It's my cross to bear. Any returns today? (She gasps for air. Subtly unleashes a blast of air freshener.)

WILLARD

Thirty-seven. The Independent doesn't sell out at the grocery stores anymore. Rack sales are way down.

IMOGENE

(Comes up for air, then speaks.) Everybody's buying their food at the Mega Mart, and corporate stores won't carry local papers like the Independent. So, you're ready to call it a day, then?

WILLARD

Nah, I'm headin' to the back to wrap up some bundles. Then to the bar.

IMOGENE

(Under her breath, while doing busywork.) The only bar you need is a bar of soap.

WILLARD

Whassat?

IMOGENE

Hmmm? Oh my stars, dope. I'm such a dope – can't seem to get these figures to add up. You have a good day, now, Willard. Go get yourself some rest. (WILLARD exits.) And a bath. (She thoroughly sprays air freshener).

WILLARD & IMOGENE

(It's the Monday morning after the fundraiser. IMOGENE is typing and filing as WILLARD enters. STEVE is sleeping at his desk.)

WILLARD

Good mornin,' Sunshine.

IMOGENE

Willard.

WILLARD

How's tricks?

IMOGENE

I'm finally getting over this cold, but now I think I did something to my knee. I feel some tightness right near...

WILLARD

(Interrupting.) Yeah, it always seems to be something, doesn't it? Say, the fellas down at the bar say you folks threw quite the hootenanny the other night. Bring in big bucks?

IMOGENE

By golly, I think we did OK. Turns out Charles can really cut a rug.

WILLARD

I also heard Steve tied one on pretty good. He and Judge Watson were bellowin' Irish pub songs?

IMOGENE

We all had a good time, Willard. I had to behave, because I volunteered to DD.

STEVE

(Waking briefly.) That's why I volunteered to OD.

WILLARD

Here are today's returns (stacking papers on counter). Rack sales were down a couple, as usual.

IMOGENE

Ok, Willard, thanks. See you tomorrow.

WILLARD

(With a smile.) Not if I see you first. (Exits.)

IMOGENE

(Under her breath.) I think I'll smell you coming.

STEVE

We should've gone with a "Charlie Brown" costume theme and cast Willard as Pigpen. (Yawns, goes back to sleep).

WILLARD, IMOGENE & JUDY

(IMOGENE is working alone in the newsroom. WILLARD enters, placing a stack of papers on the front counter.)

WILLARD

Howdy! Here are today's returns. I have something else for you, too.

IMOGENE

Oh? (Sarcastically) I can only hope it's a big, sloppy kiss.

WILLARD

Ha! I have a news tip for you folks. Where's Judy?

IMOGENE

Should be in any minute.

WILLARD

(Brightening, ready to make a move) So it's just US?

IMOGENE

(Uncomfortable but pleasant) For the moment. (She is saved by the bell as JUDY enters.)

WILLARD

(Thrown off his game) Oh, um, hello. Hey, I have some inside baseball for you.

JUDY

Go ahead and shoot.

WILLARD

The word at coffee is that Lester is right. The scuttlebutt is that the sheriff and the DNR really are framing him. Gunderson's still mad about the dope festival. He figures if the DNR levies a huge fine, Lester won't be able to pay, and his property will get foreclosed on.

JUDY

Thus depriving the cannabis crew of its playground. Ok, but how did Gunderson get the DNR in on it?

WILLARD

This is what I heard down to the bar yesterday: You know how Lester is about trespassers. He shoots first and asks questions second.

JUDY

So I've heard. But what's the DNR's beef with Lester?

WILLARD

Every time they send a warden out there, Lester refuses access to the land. He threatens a lawsuit and, if necessary, brandishes a gun. Life would be easier at the DNR if Lester lost his farm.

JUDY

Hardly seems worth framing a man over. But it's an interesting bit of scoop, nonetheless.

Thanks, Willard. Anything else?

(STEVE enters and digs through the landfill that is his desk.)

WILLARD

That's about it. (Pointing to the small stack on the counter) Fewer returns every day. You guys must be doing something right.

JUDY

We think shutting down the website is encouraging more people to buy the paper.

WILLARD

Looks that way. I couldn't read my news on a computer. Besides, the paper comes in handy after you're done reading it. I use it to wrap day-old fish guts. (Exits)