

BAD MANNERS AT THE MANOR
By Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

10 Females; 4 Males; 2 Either

<u>LORD HENNING:</u>	The owner of Cedar Manor.
<u>LEAH:</u>	Henning's niece.
<u>RACHEL DALLAND:</u>	Henning's lawyer.
<u>FLORIN:</u>	Henning's gardener.
<u>MISS GRUTSCH:</u>	Henning's secretary.
<u>PAULA:</u>	Henning's cook.
<u>MISS CULHANE:</u>	Henning's housekeeper.
<u>SOFIA:</u>	An aspiring actress and the 7 th fiancée of Lord Henning.
<u>MRS. LEISENHEIMER:</u>	The librarian, who is retiring.
<u>ALLISON:</u>	An aspiring librarian.
<u>C.Z.:</u>	Gossip columnist for a major newspaper.
<u>MRS. STATZ:</u>	The nosy neighbor, who lives 5 miles away.
<u>ANN BALSTER:</u>	Long lost twin of Leah.
<u>OFFICER WALSH:</u>	A policeman.
<u>OFFICER WALSH:</u>	Another policeman.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I – Parlor at Cedar Manor

ACT II – Parlor at Cedar Manor

Approximate Length

90 Minutes

Time

A purposely ambiguous time period. Quasi-modern

Place

Cedar Manor, the Estate of Lord Henning

ACT I

Setting: A well-appointed room in Cedar Manor, the Estate of Lord Henning. There are three doors to the room, one stage left, one stage right and French doors upstage.

At Rise: Enter LEISENHEIMER and ALLISON.

LEISENHEIMER

(Carrying an armful of books and setting them down on a table)

Now, you understand Allison, that his Lordship has one of the largest private libraries in the country.

ALLISON

Yes, Mrs. Leisenheimer. That's why I'm so interested in the job. The collection is world famous. You must be very sad about retiring and leaving all those wonderful volumes behind.

LEISENHEIMER

It's just a lot of books, if you ask me.

ALLISON

Has anyone else applied for the job?

LEISENHEIMER

Yes, there is one other applicant.

ALLISON

Only one? But it's such a wonderful library.

LEISENHEIMER

It's just a lot of books, if you ask me.

ALLISON

Did Lord Henning inherit the collection?

LEISENHEIMER

No, no, his Lordship has purchased everything he owns. Including...his Lordship.

ALLISON

How did he make all his money?

LEISENHEIMER

You don't know?

ALLISON

Um...no.

LEISENHEIMER

What kind of a librarian are you? Don't you do your research?

ALLISON

(Flustered)

Oh...I...

(Enter FLORIN, carrying a large potted plant. He sets it down and scowls at it.)

LEISENHEIMER

Oh, Florin, the rhododendron in the library appears to be dead.

FLORIN

That's probably on account of the fact that it *is* dead.

LEISENHEIMER

What do you intend to do about it?

FLORIN

Give it a proper burial, I suppose.

LEISENHEIMER

Why is it, Florin, that all the plants in the house do so poorly? You're obviously a good gardener. The grounds are superb and the outdoor plants thrive.

FLORIN

That's because plants were made to be outside. They weren't made to be inside. They go inside to die.

(Enter LORD HENNING)

HENNING

I intend to die inside, Florin, but hopefully I'll last longer than one of your plants.

LEISENHEIMER

Good morning, Lord Henning. This is Allison Schuth. She's applying for the position of Librarian.

HENNING

(Ignoring Allison)

Mrs. Leisenheimer, are you sure you want to retire?

LEISENHEIMER

Yes, Lord Henning, quite sure.

HENNING

But why do you want to retire? Give me one good reason.

LEISENHEIMER

I can give you two good reasons. I really don't like books and you don't pay me enough.

HENNING

That's only one reason. If I paid you more, you'd love books.

(To Allison)

I hope you care more about books than you do about money.

ALLISON

(Flustered)

Oh... I...

HENNING

Do you have references?

ALLISON

(Flustered)

Oh... I...

HENNING

(To himself)

Ha. I just asked a librarian for references. What a wit I am. Miss Grutsch!

(Enter GRUTSCH)

GRUTSCH

Yes, Lord Henning?

HENNING

Miss Grutch...

(Notices Florin leaving)

Wait, Florin! Where are you going?

FLORIN

Back outside.

HENNING

Florin, the plants in the master chambers look parched.

FLORIN

The master chambers? You mean your bedroom?

HENNING

(Gives him a look)

Parched.

FLORIN

They're cacti. That's plural for cactus. Parched is part of the look. They don't need to be watered for another three years.

HENNING

(Pointing to the potted plant)

What's that?

FLORIN

You wanted a plant in here. That's a plant.

HENNING

But what is it?

FLORIN

A creeping anema-toad.

HENNING

What?

FLORIN

It's a gladiator.

HENNING

What are you talking about?

FLORIN

(Putting his ear to the plant)

"We who are about to die salute you."

HENNING

Go back outside.

FLORIN

That's just where I was going.

(Exit FLORIN)

GRUTSCH

Did you want me, Lord Henning?

HENNING

Miss Grutsch, did I have an appointment this morning for...something?

GRUTSCH

Yes.

HENNING

Well?

GRUTSCH

An interview with a reporter.

HENNING

(Squints with distaste)

That's right. Not a reporter. A gossip columnist. Is it too late to cancel?

GRUTSCH

She's already here.

HENNING

Go keep her occupied for a while.

GRUTSCH

Occupied?

HENNING

Yes, occupied! Talk to her! But don't tell her anything.

GRUTSCH

Talk to her and don't tell her anything.

HENNING

Or just show her something interesting. Keep her busy.

GRUTSCH

Something interesting...

HENNING

Oh, never mind! I need to talk to Rachel Dalland. She's here, right?

GRUTSCH

Rachel Dalland?

HENNING

My attorney!

GRUTSCH

Yes, I know. What about her?

HENNING

Is she here?

(GRUTSCH looks around)

No, I mean, have you seen her this morning?

GRUTSCH

No.

HENNING

She should be here by now. When you see her, send her up to my study. And tell Leah to come and join us for an important meeting.

GRUTSCH

Leah?

HENNING

Leah! My niece! What's the matter with you?! Tell her to come to my study right away.

GRUTSCH

Yes, Lord Henning.

HENNING

And tell Leah not to talk to that reporter.

GRUTSCH

And not say anything.

HENNING

No, not even talk to her. Got it?

GRUTSCH

Got it.

HENNING

Rachel Dalland can talk to her, because she won't say anything.

GRUTSCH

So should I send Rachel Dalland to talk to the reporter?

HENNING

No, send Rachel Dalland up to the study!

GRUTSCH
Got it. Anything else?

HENNING
Have you seen Sofia yet this morning?

GRUTSCH
Sofia.

HENNING
My fiancée.

GRUTSCH
Yes, your fiancée. No, I haven't seen her. I imagine she's still sleeping. Do you want me to wake her up and have her come to the meeting, too?

HENNING
No! I should be able to sneak up to my study without her seeing me.

GRUTSCH
Anything else, Lord Henning?

HENNING
No, you've got all that, right?

GRUTSCH
All what?

HENNING
Just take care of those few things I told you to do.

GRUTSCH
That's what I was going to do.

(Exit GRUTSCH)

HENNING
(To LEISENHEIMER)
So, when are you leaving,
(To ALLISON)
and when do you start?

ALLISON
(Flustered)
Oh...I...

LEISENHEIMER

Actually, Lord Henning, there is one other applicant for the job.

HENNING

Oh bother! Take care of it then. Get someone who can get started right away. We've got to finish cataloging that library. I can't find anything in there. What's the point of having a library? What's the point of having a librarian?

(Exit HENNING)

LEISENHEIMER

It doesn't look like I'll be getting a retirement party with a gold watch and a cake. So, do you still want the job?

ALLISON

Oh, yes. Yes, I do! But I don't think I made a very good impression on Lord Henning.

LEISENHEIMER

I don't think Lord Henning made a very good impression, either. But then, he never does. Come, let's go see the library.

ALLISON

Oh thank you, Mrs. Leisenheimer. I can't wait!

LEISENHEIMER

It's just a lot of books, if you ask me.

(Both exit, LEISENHEIMER forgetting the books she had set down. Enter RACHEL DALLAND and LEAH.)

LEAH

So what's this all about, Rachel Dalland?

RACHEL

Your uncle has rewritten his will, Leah. Or rather, he intends to rewrite it, and he wishes to discuss the matter with you.

LEAH

Why would he re-write his will? I'm his only relative in the entire world.

RACHEL

Of course you are.

LEAH

His only sister, my dear late mother, practically raised him. He practically owed everything to her.

RACHEL

Practically.

LEAH

So why wouldn't he leave everything to me?

RACHEL

Why indeed, Leah? I'm sure you have nothing to fear. You're on good terms with your uncle, after all?

LEAH

Speaking terms. That counts for something, certainly.

RACHEL

Certainly.

LEAH

And I wish him no harm. Which certainly sets me apart from the rest of humanity. Wouldn't you agree?

RACHEL

Well, as Lord Henning's attorney, I can only speak on behalf of Lord Henning. I cannot speak on behalf of the rest of humanity.

LEAH

I certainly hope nothing happens to my dear uncle that would seem untimely.

RACHEL

Tragedy is always untimely. And yet, if it didn't happen at just the right time, it wouldn't be tragic.

LEAH

Like luck, I suppose.

RACHEL

Timing is everything.

LEAH

What do you hope to get out of this, Rachel Dalland, other than your fees?

RACHEL

Leah, I'm just an attorney. I have no greater aspiration than my fees.

(LEAH sits down and starts paging through a magazine)

RACHEL

Leah, we're supposed to go meet your uncle up in his study right now.

LEAH

(Not looking up)

I'll be there.

(Exit RACHEL. Enter GRUTSCH.)

GRUTSCH

Leah, you're supposed to have a meeting with your uncle and Rachel Dalland up in the study.

LEAH

I know.

GRUTSCH

Well, then what are you doing here?

LEAH

(Sighs, gets up)

Sometimes I wish there were two of me so I could send the other to do the unpleasant things.

GRUTSCH

(Considering this remark)

But... how would you know which one is really you?

LEAH

Never mind, Miss Grutsch.

(Both exit. Enter ANN, through the French doors. She looks exactly like LEAH. She enters very tentatively, looking around the room, taking it all in. It's obviously her first time here. She sets down her purse on a table. Enter LEISENHEIMER.)

LEISENHEIMER

(Making a beeline to the books that she had forgotten)

There they are! And right where I left them!

(Sees ANN)

ANN

Hello.

LEISENHEIMER

Oh! Weren't you supposed to go up to the study?

ANN

I...I didn't know that.

LEISENHEIMER

I suppose Miss Grutsch didn't tell you.

ANN

I...haven't seen Miss Grutsch.

LEISENHEIMER

Well, you're supposed to go to the study and talk to the lawyer this morning.

ANN

I...I didn't realize that was the first person I was supposed to talk to.

LEISENHEIMER

The *first* person? You haven't talked to anybody all morning?

ANN

Why no, I just came in right now.

LEISENHEIMER

Oh. Well. Rachel Dalland is probably waiting for you up in the study. But nobody tells me anything. And why should they?

ANN

Well, thank you, very much.

LEISENHEIMER

(Puzzled, pleased)

Why, you're welcome, my dear.

ANN

Do you need any help with those books?

LEISENHEIMER

No, but thank you! It's nice to see you show such...politeness. To me, even. I certainly didn't think you even cared about the library.

ANN

The library! Why, of course I care about the library!

LEISENHEIMER

What a surprise, coming from you.

ANN

It's certainly one of the most important features of Cedar Manor. Everyone knows that.

LEISENHEIMER

It's just a lot of books, if you ask me.

(Exit LEISENHEIMER)

ANN

It sounds like *you* don't care about the library.

(She looks around a bit more and then exits, forgetting her purse. Enter SOFIA and HENNING, obviously in the middle of a conversation that HENNING would rather not be having.)

SOFIA

Did you at least get an audition for me?

HENNING

Not yet.

SOFIA

What about my career? You said you were going to get me a part in a movie.

HENNING

The right part hasn't come along.

SOFIA

But nothing is going to come along *here*. You have to go and get it.

HENNING

Sofia, I think you got up too early. Why don't you go back to bed?

SOFIA

It's the only place I *can* go. I can't go anywhere else. I'm practically a prisoner here!

HENNING

Look, I've asked you to marry me. What more do you want?

SOFIA

To get actually married.

HENNING

Although that was not a split infinitive, there was still something wrong with that sentence.

SOFIA

I can do good sentences! Get me a good script! With a movie attached to it.

HENNING

I haven't seen any good scripts.

SOFIA

Why can't you hire someone to write a good script?

HENNING

Because that costs money.

SOFIA

But you have money.

HENNING

But I won't have it if I keep spending it.

SOFIA

You're going to spend money on our wedding, aren't you?

HENNING

Sofia...

SOFIA

Soon?

HENNING

Sofia...

SOFIA

I'm tired of being just...engaged.

HENNING

Well, maybe we should disengage.

SOFIA

Henny Penny!

HENNING

Don't call me that!

SOFIA

How could you even say something like that!?

HENNING

Sofia...

SOFIA

The only way to end actually an engagement is with a wedding!

HENNING

(Distracted)

Yes, yes, we'll get married...

SOFIA

You've carried me off to your castle. Now I'm ready to begin happily the ever after.

HENNING

We will, we will..

SOFIA

When?

HENNING

As soon as I...work out a few... matters.

SOFIA

Matters?

HENNING

Matters that don't matter to you. Now why don't you run along. Go look at some magazines or something. I've got a meeting with Rachel Dalland.

(Exit HENNING. SOFIA plops down and picks up a magazine. Enter LEAH.)

LEAH

(Seeing SOFIA, not pleased. Coldly.)

Oh.

SOFIA

(Not exactly pleased either)

Oh.

LEAH

Good morning, Sofia.

No it isn't. SOFIA

See? LEAH

What do you mean by that? SOFIA

My uncle is never going to marry you. LEAH

That's not true! SOFIA

Denial. LEAH

Is not. SOFIA

More denial. LEAH

Is not! SOFIA

And you know it. LEAH

I don't. SOFIA

Wake up, Sofia. LEAH

I am awake. You just said so yourself. SOFIA

You're still dreaming. LEAH

You're just jealous. SOFIA

Of what? LEAH

That he loves me. SOFIA

He doesn't love you. LEAH

Are you saying that what you're calling him is a liar? SOFIA

LEAH
(Has to think about that, recovers)
Has he told you he loves you?

He asked me to marry him, didn't he? SOFIA

So he's never told you he loves you. LEAH

I know what he told me, and I know what I'm saying. SOFIA

What *are* you saying? LEAH

I'm saying that I'm going to tell him that you called him a liar. SOFIA

I wouldn't do that if I were you...but then again, if I were you, I probably would. LEAH

(SOFIA storms out. LEAH, satisfied with herself, waltzes out through a different exit. Enter ANN. SOFIA storms back in.)

You're the person who's worst in the world! SOFIA

(SOFIA storms back out. ANN stands there in shock. SOFIA storms back in.)

Worse than he is! That's what I mean by worst! SOFIA

