

THE PRETENDERS

Written by

Linseigh Green

770-557-6259  
Linseigh@outlook.com

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

DELILAH, late 40's - early 50's.

PEPPY, 17.

VERA, 20.

## SETTING

1933. A film studio dressing room on a May afternoon.

A dressing room clad in a soft pink. Sunlight streams through two large, draped windows, filling the room. A vanity faces downstage. On it, we see a vase of pink chrysanthemums, a tiny silver box, and a black porcelain doll. DELILAH sits on a plush sofa, examining some paperwork.

PEPPY

(Popping her head in.)

Ve--er, Miss Vaughn?

DELILAH

Still on set.

PEPPY

Oh! I see...

DELILAH

Mhm.

(She returns to the paperwork.)

(Beat.)

Can I help you?

PEPPY

Hm? Oh, no. No. Thanks.

DELILAH

Mm.

(Beat.)

PEPPY

S'pose I outta sit here for a spell and wait for her then.

DELILAH

S'pose you better wait and come back. Miss Vaughn'll be back soon, but in the meantime...

PEPPY

(Entering.)

Oh, she'll understand, I'm sure.

DELILAH

Did I not just...

PEPPY

(Settling herself onto the vanity stool.)

Oh, and some water, if you don't mind. So hot out there you'd figure it was July!

DELILAH

Hey, now I don't think I've heard my d--See I can't let just anyone waltz on in, it's Miss Vaughn's *dressing room*...

PEPPY

Is that a contract?

DELILAH

Excuse me?

PEPPY

Why've you got Vera's contract?

DELILAH

I...Well, because I--

PEPPY

(Crossing to DELILAH.)

I think I outta hold onto this. Until she gets back. Don't you?

VERA

(Bursting through the door.)

God, all I wanna do is ju--

PEPPY

Oh gosh! You're--

VERA

Who is this? Who are you?

PEPPY

You're Vera Vaughn!

DELILAH

Now I figured, I told her Miss Vaughn, but she just...

PEPPY

(Crossing to VERA)

Vera, you outta know, about your *maid*...

VERA

Delilah, who is this person?

PEPPY

--I found her with... Well, I thought it was your contract, least it looks like a contract...

DELILAH

Want me to fetch security, Miss Vaughn?

PEPPY

Now I'd be more than happy to help you find a new girl...

DELILAH

"*Girl*"?

PEPPY

...One with less sticky fingers...

DELILAH

Thinks she's slick.

VERA

*Delilah.*

PEPPY

...and maybe not so much mouth.

DELILAH

(Rising.)

In the name of--

VERA

*Delilah!* Please...don't.

PEPPY

And you know I'm such a fan of yours--*such* a fan--I'd do anything to help you find the--

VERA

My maid is my business. Delilah, please show--er, this *fan* to the door.

(She crosses to the sofa and lies down.)

And tell Mayer I'd like more security.

PEPPY

(Dodging DELILAH.)

Well isn't this funny!

VERA

I can't possibly see what.

PEPPY

See, I'm not just a fan--I mean, I *am* a fan, I just think you're such a *fantastic* actress--but see, I'm also one, just like you. Name's Peppy.

VERA

Well you can be an actress outside my dressing room.

PEPPY

See I'm your kid sister.

VERA

My *what?*

PEPPY

In the picture?

VERA

Launa's my kid sister. Delilah, please--

PEPPY

Well she was, except Anne told Pauline who told Cathy who said to me like this, she said, “Launa got herself hooked on those pills, you know, and apparently she took a whole bunch of them and her mom found her on her bedroom floor, half dead.” Studio sent her to rehab and here I am!

VERA

What in the...

PEPPY

Mind telling your maid to quit hovering like that?

DELILAH

Ve--

VERA

Look...

PEPPY

(She wanders over to the vanity, closely examining each item.)

Peppy.

VERA

...Peppy. I’ve only got...

(She glances at the clock above her head.)

...Three hours and forty-seven minutes till I’ve gotta be back on set, and I haven’t gotten a wink of sleep in the past thirty-one hours, so if you’d please...

PEPPY

(Picking up the doll.)

Huh--you’ve got a Negro doll.

(DELILAH and VERA start. DELILAH moves to grab the doll, but VERA beats her to it.)

VERA

Can you not...?

PEPPY

(Pulling the doll out of reach.)  
You know, I've still got my golliwog at home!

DELILAH

Oh Lord...

PEPPY

Aren't we so alike!

PEPPY

Mother's always saying I'm too old for dolls, it's not as if I play with them or anything. Just wait until I tell her you have one, too! And you're *twenty*, gosh!

VERA

(Taking the doll and carefully setting it back on the vanity.)

Just don't touch...

PEPPY

Oo...Mind if I have one of these candies, I've been dying for something sweet!

VERA

What--No! No, don't take those!

(She lunges for the silver box, but DELILAH beats her to it.)

M--Let me explain...

DELILAH

What is this?

VERA

I--

DELILAH

Thought we got you off of these.

PEPPY

Wh--You let her talk to you like that?



VERA

You tell me how else I'm supposed to keep going for seventy-two hours straight!

DELILAH

Vera, these Pep pills...they can ruin you... Mayer says...

VERA

DELILAH

Is Mayer your mother?

PEPPY

*Mother?*

DELILAH

They may boost these drugs, Vera, but once they ruin you, once you end up like that...that Launa girl?

VERA

I've got more smarts than Launa.

DELILAH

Do you know how hard I've worked, how much I've *tried* to...And I've gotta act like your maid so you won't have to be one in real life!

PEPPY

Vera, what on Earth is she going on about?

DELILAH

I did all of this to protect you...Hell, your existence is *illegal* in half the country! You ever remember those times you cried, asking why you couldn't go to the library? Or maybe you remember your uncle's crippled leg. How he tripped one day and a truck driver thought it would be a hoot to back up over his limb. Want to know what I was doing at your age? Cleaning some old white woman's house as a *real* maid! And every time she offered me lunch, the dog kept barking at me. Turned out she'd been giving me the dog's dish. This place wasn't made for us, Vera. I can't help you escape if you keep on with this...this...Know what?

(She empties the pep pills into the vase.)

VERA

Ma, what the hell?!

(She tries to pull the pills out of the vase, but her hand can't fit down its neck. She begins to tilt the vase over, but DELILAH smacks her hand out of the way.)

DELILAH

Why are you doing this?

PEPPY

What on *Earth* is going on?

(VERA crosses to her wardrobe and rakes through her clothes. She retrieves a violet gown and lays it across the sofa. She rips part of the skirt. Pills come spilling out.)

PEPPY

Oh *gosh!*

DELILAH

Stop it! Please, just stop it!

(VERA fumbles with a pill and starts to pop it in her mouth. DELILAH crosses to her and slaps her across the cheek. PEPPY screams.)

(Beat.)

DELILAH

Acting like a fool!

(VERA doesn't respond.)

Why are you doing this to me? You know I worry greatly for you, and yet...

VERA

You act as if I asked for this! I was eight years old, Ma. *Eight*. And they locked me in a sound room, no lights, nothing to sit on but a block of ice...And where were *you*?

DELILAH

Giving you a future.

VERA

*Where were you?*

PEPPY

Will somebody tell me what is going on?!

(DELILAH and VERA suddenly remember  
her presence.)

VERA

Shit.

PEPPY

Is she supposed to be your Mammy, or... No, anybody can see...

(She picks up the doll again.)

You're colored, aren't you?

(Beat.)

DELILAH

Oh Lord...

VERA

Peppy...You can't...please don't tell anyone. I will lose *everything*.

PEPPY

(Backing up towards the door.)

Does Mayer know about this?

VERA

No. God, no. And he can't know about this. Not Mayer, not the press...

PEPPY

I can't very well start keeping secrets from my own uncle. He got me this role, and...

VERA

Uncle?

DELILAH

Mayer's you're...? Oh Lord! Lord Lord  
Lord Lord....

PEPPY

And what about Mickey? If it's right what they say about you in *True Story*...He can't marry a *Negro*! Haven't you heard of Alice and Leonard Rhineland? And...

VERA

Peppy, if you even say a word, my career will be...I will be...

PEPPY

Gosh, I wish I never knew any of this.

VERA

Hey, you say you're a fan of mine...That right?

PEPPY

...Don't know anymore--I s'pose?

VERA

Then--then you can be my only fan that knows my biggest secret. Nobody else but you!

PEPPY

Not so fond of secrets...

VERA

Know what? I can tell you anything: My right name, my right birthday...I can dish on any cast member you want, you just say which. And then you can tell all your friends.

PEPPY

(Under her breath.)

...If I had any.

(Beat.)

VERA

Is that what you want? A friend?

DELILAH

Vera, it's not...Don't bother with that.

VERA

Because if you need someone to talk to...

PEPPY

What...That's not what I need anymore--once I'm an actress...

VERA

I can help you with your acting...

PEPPY

No, just...

VERA

I'll do whatever you want, anything--

PEPPY

I don't want anything from you!

DELILAH

How could she possibly understand, Vera? How could she? She doesn't even know the beginning of...

PEPPY

S'pose I just can't figure why you need to lie. These people have given you so much...And all those people out there who admire you...And you...you...Well, it's selfish.

(Beat.)

I should go.

DELILAH

What did I say, Vera? You'll never be able to trust them, no matter how...Well, look what happened with your father.

VERA

Please, don't tell! Please, Peppy, *please*, I'd...

(PEPPY begins to walk out the door.)

...You're going to. Aren't you?

PEPPY

(She looks at the doll.)

...I...don't know yet.

(She exits. VERA and DELILAH stare at each other. Fade out.)

