

Mysterious Figure

(Nick exits, pushing his desk before him. His spotlight goes out and the music changes to something very mysterious. Another spot comes up on another part of the stage. We see a Mysterious Figure dressed in a black robe with a black hood/mask. It's impossible to tell who it is. He is surrounded by the missing items — a small spinning wheel, a spindle, a basket, a pot, bowls of porridge, a glass slipper, some bread crumbs, a rose, some beans, a mirror.)

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE. *(In an odd voice.)* Look at all this wonderful loot! Stupid old bear, hiding it in a stump. What an obvious place to look. *(He picks up the spinning wheel.)* No more gold from this spinning wheel, Rumpelstiltskin, boo hoo hoo. *(Picks up the spindle.)* Just what exactly is a spindle, anyway? *(He pokes his finger.)* Ow! It's painful, whatever it is. *(Picks up the rose.)* Ah, a rose by any other name would smell just as stinky. *(Looking in the mirror.)* Mirror, mirror in my hand, who's the cleverest criminal in the land? Why look, it's me! I can't believe I've gotten away with it so easily! That fool detective doesn't have a clue! Hell never suspect me! Everyone always writes me off as some stupid, little nobody, well, not any more. They're going to sit up and take notice. They'll be sorry they treated me so poorly.

(Enter Bob the Wolf, who's been sneaking around. He may bear a certain resemblance to Peter Lorre, especially the way he talks. He is carrying some shoes. Bob crosses to the Mysterious Figure and drops the shoes in the pile. The Mysterious Figure gives Bob a kick in the leg.)

BOB. Ow!

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE. It's about time you got back. Did you get them all, you good for nothing?

BOB. Every last one, master. No one will be able to tell the story of the elves and the shoemaker now that there are no shoes to mend.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE. Excellent! Now get your sorry carcass in gear and steal that Pinocchio puppet before it turns into a real boy. And hurry! If you fail to return before midnight, I'll do something very nasty and painful to you.

BOB. I'm sorry I ever got mixed up in this.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE. Don't forget I saved your life. If I hadn't stolen Red Ridinghood's basket of goodies, you'd be a trophy on some woodsman's wall by now. I saved your flea-bitten hide. You owe me. Have you been keeping an eye on Tickle?

BOB. Yes, he's running around in circles. He has no idea who you are.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE. Excellent! Now go and get that puppet. *(He kicks Bob again. Bob limps off with a snarl.)* What a useless creature. You just can't get good evil minions these days. No matter. It's so wonderful not to have to act out that stupid story over and over again. It gets so tiring having to do the same old things every time somebody tells my tale. I'll bet all the others are feeling the same. No more being stuck in a rut. We can have different adventures, different lives from now on. *(Notices audience.)* Oh. What are you doing here? Spying around, eh? Trying to help your pathetic friend Nick, I suppose. Well, why don't you give him a little message for me. *(Mysterious Figure takes a note from his pocket and hands it to a child in the audience.)* Make sure he gets this, all right? I've got to be going now. Got to get ready to burn all these things at midnight! Soon, it will be too late and even if Tickle does stumble on to who I am, he won't be able to save any fairy tales at all! I'm afraid

Nick won't be in the nick of time this time!

(The Mysterious Figure gives an evil laugh as the lights fade out on him. He exits with his loot in the dark.

The music changes back to what we by now know as "Nick's Theme." Spotlight up on Nick, entering with his desk.)

NICK: I've never liked the police and they've never been too fond of me, either. It seems like they're always getting in my way. They claim it's the other way around. What do they know? They've cleared Miss Locks and that's good but I'm still baffled. Maybe it's all for the best. If I do solve this case and return the goods, Miss Locks will have to start up her usual walks through the forest again and I won't get a chance to see her. Every time we try to have a little fun, she'll have to leave to go to the Bears' house. Darn! I can only be with her if I don't solve this mystery. But if I don't solve it, children everywhere are going to be sad. What's more important, my happiness or the happiness of everybody else? I guess my problems don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. It's a tough choice. So, did anything happen while I was away? *(Hopefully, the kid will come forward with the note. Taking the note.)* What's this? A note? Who gave it to you? *(He waits for the answer.)* Hmmm. Well, let's see what it says. *(Reading the note.)* "It looks like you're not quite as clever as you think you are. I'm going to spoil all the fairy tales by burning everything at midnight and you can't stop me. There's only one thing I'm afraid of and I'm afraid it isn't you. I must say I've enjoyed watching you look for me. At first, you were quite close, very hot I would say, almost too hot, but now you're too cold. I guess things will never be just right again."

(While Nick is busy reading, Bob creeps in, maybe through the audience, and hides, listening. He is limping and is carrying a wooden puppet. Nick notices this but says nothing. If the kids try to point this out, Nick should put a finger to his lips - "shhh!")

That's an odd way of putting things: Too hot, too cold, just right. Sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? You know, I'm beginning to think I might know who this thief really is. *(Nick begins to cross toward where Bob is hiding.)* And they might be closer than we think! *(Nick suddenly grabs Bob, who has not seen Nick coming.)* Got ya!

BOB: Don't hurt me, Mr. Tickle. I've come to help you! NICK: I'll be the judge of that.

BOB: I can prove it. Look. *(He holds up the puppet.)* I've brought you Pinocchio. My master sent me out to steal it so his story couldn't be told again but I'm giving it to you instead as a gesture of good faith.

NICK: Wait a minute. I know you. You're the big, bad wolf.

BOB: My friends call me Bob.

NICK: Aren't you the one who bothers those three pig brothers?

BOB: No, that's my cousin Steve. I'm the one who scares Little Red Riding Hood.

NICK: Oh, yeah, sorry.

BOB: S'all right. Everybody gets us confused.

NICK: So why are you coming to see me?

BOB: I'm employed by a certain person, I can't say who exactly because I don't know his true identity. He's been collecting certain important items that I'd like to see returned to their rightful owners.

NICK: Is that so? So you're doing this for purely philanthropic, selfless reasons.