

The Committee

Charles Alverson





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FREEVIEW
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THE COMMITTEE
by
Charles Alverson

The scene is a room at the Sunset Villas retirement home. Sitting on chairs behind a table at an angle stage left front to stage right back are four women and a man. Facing them is an empty chair. There is a reasonable space between the empty chair and the table. At the center of the table is a cassette player.

BEHIND THE TABLE, SIT:

MILDRED: (center) the chair and definitely a leading light of Sunset Villas and a commanding personality, very keen on bridge, strong-fisted wielder of the gavel

SHEILA: (on Mildred's left) fading, but still juicy, beauty, resident sexpot, fond of men and not shy about it

IRIS: (far left) angular, intense, slightly gauche, a very keen ballroom dancer

PHYLLIS: (on Mildred's right) Mildred's stooge, a bit of a dope but kind and well meaning

HENRY: (far right) token man on the Committee, well-trained, military bearing, enjoys poker, golf, hierarchy

The candidate soon to be facing them is:

KEITH: A new member, cool, calm and not likely to wilt under fire or searching questions
Not present, but well-remembered, is OSCAR, the un-lamented former resident who represents everything the Committee is NOT looking for in a new member

(As the curtain goes up, the Committee members are sitting in their allotted places. Mildred is stern and silent, but the others chat quietly. A knock, confident but not showy, comes at the door stage right. Instantly, MILDRED's gavel rises, then descends like a thunderclap, and the others fall silent).

MILDRED: (*firmly*) Enter! (*The door opens and KEITH, the new resident, enters. He is a youthful 65, informally but not garishly dressed, and looking slightly confused but still confident*).

KEITH: Is this--?

MILDRED: (*crisply*) It is! Please take a seat. (*Since there is only one empty chair, KEITH sits on that and looks expectantly at the others behind the table*).

MILDRED: First, I'd like to welcome you to Sunset Villas. We are the reception committee elected by our fellow residents.

KEITH: Thank goodness for that. For a moment I thought you were a firing squad. (*The other Committee members laugh politely but MILDRED cuts them off with a sharp rap of her gavel*).

MILDRED: (*humorlessly*) Yes. Very droll. We here at Sunset Villas enjoy a good joke—now and then. But let me get to the point of this—little get-together. Sunset Villas is—in general—a happy place, and our residents are congenial and well-suited. But—occasionally—serious admission mistakes are made, and—

PHYLLIS: Yes! Oscar! (*The other Committee members begin buzzing in agreement, but MILDRED's gavel silences them*).

MILDRED: (*firmly*) Thank you, Phyllis, dear, I am sure we will get to Oscar in due time. But for the moment let us deal with our new resident—Keith. You don't mind, do you, being called Keith?

KEITH: That's my name.

MILDRED: Fine. We practice informality here at Sunset Villas. My name, for instance, is Mildred, and I hope you will feel free to address me so. But NOT as Milly. I don't—

PHYLLIS: (*blurts out*) Never Milly! I did once and (*shudders*) OOH!

MILDRED: (*silencing PHYLLIS with her gavel*) If I may proceed. I'd like to introduce my fellow Committee members. On my far left is Iris.

IRIS: Welcome, Keith.

MILDRED: Next to her, Sheila.

SHEILA: (*sultry*) Well, hello!

MILDRED: On my far right is Henry.

HENRY: (*briskly*) Now, sir, about your golf handicap—

MILDRED: (*after her gavel subdues HENRY*) I am sure, colonel, that we will get to that important consideration, but first allow me to introduce the final member of our Committee—Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: You are very welcome, Keith. You can call me Phyll if you like, but my close friends usually call me Nell. There's a funny story behind that. When I was just a little girl—

MILDRED: (*wielding that gavel*) Thank you, Phyllis. I am sure that Keith will be fascinated to hear your little story later, but just now I think we'd better get on with getting to know him a bit better. Now, who would like to start? (*the other Committee members look at each other uncertainly and MILDRED jumps in as she had clearly planned to*). Well, then, I suppose I might as well. (*looking intently at KEITH*) Now, Keith, we're certainly not snobs here at Sunset Villas, but we do like to know a bit about our residents' background and family. We have a small but very active branch of the Daughters of the American Republic here. By any remote chance, did any of your ancestors fight in the Revolutionary War?

KEITH: Well, my cousin Gladys—she's the family researcher--found that one of our great, great, many-great uncles did fight in the Revolutionary War—

HENRY: Good show! Good show!

KEITH: --on both sides

HENRY: Eh?

MILDRED: Well, I'm sure those were very confusing times. Was your uncle by any chance a general?

HENRY: Or a commissioned officer of any kind?

KEITH: I'm afraid not. He was only 18 when he was shot—

SHEILA: Shot! How sad!

KEITH: --by the British—

HENRY: That makes him a hero, by gad!

KEITH: --for stealing horses. (*silence falls over the Committee*).

MILDRED: (*jumping back in*) Well, as I say, those were confusing times, but you certainly qualify for the Sons of the American Republic. I'm impressed.

KEITH: That's a relief. (*MILDRED ignores the remark*).

HENRY: What about you, sir, did you serve in the armed services yourself?

KEITH: Well, yes, Henry. I was drafted into the Army in 1965.

HENRY: (*eagerly*) And you went to Vietnam?

KEITH: Not exactly. I spent two years as a supply clerk at Fort Ord, California.

HENRY: But you did achieve some rank, though?

KEITH: Very little. I topped out at private first class. They did want me to go to Officer's Candidate School, but...

HENRY: But...

KEITH: Just about that time I met a girl in a bar in Salinas, and I had to choose between Lola and OCS. I chose Lola.

HENRY: Oh.

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!