

Needles

By: Megan E. Tripaldi

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

Ideally the person playing PEARL can knit a simple scarf throughout the entire show. If someone is cast who is not experienced with knitting, make sure that they can fake it really well. This show should not only appeal to knitters, but to people who get stressed around the holidays. By that logic this show should appeal to everyone.

****This can also be done as a video or audio-play.****

CHARACTERS:

PEARL (f/nb) - A very frustrated knitter

DEMON and Literally Everyone Else (f/m/nb) - Every holiday irritant.

****If staging, you can use voiceover if you deem it necessary.****

Needles

SETTING: A disjointed apartment. Preferably covered in knit and crocheted items and drapery. Think yarn-bombing.

AT RISE: PEARL is feverishly knitting. A representation of THE INTERNET stands behind her, attempting to be intimidating.

THE INTERNET:

Dear PearlyKnits -

PEARL:

This is the story of how I made a mistake.

THE INTERNET:

I find it *extremely* disappointing -

PEARL:

I don't like to admit that, but it's true.

THE INTERNET:

That my custom-made -

PEARL:

I tried to make my life easier, but as all things made "easy" there were some drawbacks.

THE INTERNET:

One-of-a-kind -

PEARL:

You ready?

THE INTERNET:

HAND-MADE SOCKS -

PEARL:

Ok, get comfortable.

THE INTERNET:
AREN'T FINISHED AFTER TWO DAYS.

PEARL:
It's gonna get weird.

(A shift. THE INTERNET disappears.)

Ok. I'm a knitter. Obviously. And I love doing it. It's just sometimes it gets to be a bit much around the holidays. That's when people start asking for things. Come November 1st the madness begins with my friends.

(Enter NAGGING FRIEND.)

NAGGING FRIEND:
Can I have a scarf for Christmas!?

PEARL:
I can do a scarf, sure.

NAGGING FRIEND:
Will you make my mom a hat!?

PEARL:
A hat and a scarf, ok that seems doable, but it's going to take a bit long -

NAGGING FRIEND:
MAKE MY WHOLE FAMILY MATCHING SWEATERS!!

(PEARL stares at them.)

So is that a yes, or...?

(PEARL swipes them away.)

PEARL:

I am normally happy to make people things, but this time, after years of chaos...I wasn't.

Every knitter experiences The Stress: heartburn, speed knitting until your carpal tunnel activates, and crying into your tea during the holiday season.

For me it all came to a head on Thanksgiving. My family had come up to visit for the holiday weekend. I was excited; I never got to see them, so I gained the kind of amnesia that happens with distance.

For the first time I was publicizing my knitting; I've always done it, but now it was on the internet. I had an online shopping page, an Instagram, a special email account with my shop name. I thought I was doing the right thing. No. This was a mistake. It turns out that doing this right before the holidays leads you down the dark, winding path of overcommitment.

My online orders *skyrocketed* in the course of a week. Normally I'd find this amazing and wonderful, and an opportunity to supplement my income while doing something I love and normally use for anxiety management, but not when people do the equivalent of screaming at you via email and *reviews*. You know the "all caps" ones? I got a ton of those. For example...

(Enter JUDITH MOON, angrily writing a letter which is projected [if possible] behind her.)

JUDITH MOON:

DEAR PEARLYKNITS...

PEARL:

Cute name, right?

JUDITH MOON:

I ORDERED THE CABLED SOCKS LAST WEEK. WHY ARE THEY NOT DONE!?!? I NEED THEM ASAP!!! PLEASE KNIT THEM FASTER.

- JUDITH MOON

(Exit JUDITH MOON.)

PEARL:

Yup. "Knit faster." These are the kinds of people I was dealing with.

(Enter CINDY B.)

CINDY B.:

Dear PearlyKnits,

PEARL:

It's so great, I can't get over it.

CINDY B.:

Can I finish?

PEARL:

Sorry...

CINDY B.:

Dear PearlyKnits, I find it -

CINDY B. & PEARL:

EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTING

CINDY B.:

- that you have taken over a week to fulfill my order. I request a refund promptly, and that does NOT mean in a week. Again I'm EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED.

Thank you,
Cindy B.

(Exit CINDY B.)

PEARL:

See, I'm beginning to think these people don't understand the concept of knitting. It's an ancient skill that takes TIME. TIME, PEOPLE! If you order a custom pair of intricate socks I'm not going to get it done in a day! What does she think I sneeze and they magically appear?

(She waits for a sneeze.)

Well, bad example because I don't have to -

(She sneezes.)

...Anyway.

(Enter MARION.)

Oh, this one. THIS one is my favorite. I decided to be smart for once and I told her there was a waiting list and this was the response I got. Word for word. It's brilliant.

MARION:

Dear PearlyKnits,
You suck.

Sincerely,
MARION

(Exit MARION.)

PEARL:

Honestly, you can't get much more poignant than that.

So on top of these lovely, poetic emails I was bogged down with the usual amount of sympathy projects for my poor and desperate friends. I was just looking forward to a peaceful, food-filled holiday with people I cared enough about to see twice a year. But, no. I mean I had to keep working, so I did what any unsuspecting person would do; I pulled out a project. Almost immediately after I did this there were "oohs" and "oh my gods" and touching. They always have to touch it, not realizing that they could ruin it by doing that. No. They do it anyway. Guys, it's rude. Don't do it. But they're family so I had to grin and bear it. And soon came the subtle hints.

SUBTLE FAMILY MEMBER:

Wow, that's so good, I wish I could do that.

PEARL:

Or, my personal favorite -

NOT-SO-SUBTLE FAMILY MEMBER:

I wish I knew someone cool enough back home that could make that for me!

PEARL:

Pathetic. Yet after much more of this runaround I - and I'm not proud of this - I caved. You can only hang on for so long when it comes to family. Or at least *my* family. I blame the ex-Catholic guilt.

This started some sort of chain reaction amongst my relatives. By the end of the night I was making five sweaters, two shrugs, three hats, a cowl, and a pair of intricate mittens. I could have kicked myself. Hard. I would have given myself a limp. *Twelve* things, plus my other projects from my site and I had less than a month to do them. I was totaling close to thirty projects to do by the week before Christmas. I was doomed.

After that I shut myself off from the world. I went off the grid. I knew I couldn't accept any more projects. Which caused more "all-caps emails" that I ignored at first.

(JUDITH MOON enters and shakes her fist then exits.)

But the more I ignored them the more they started getting more pushy and mean. Lots of swearing, asking for money back, threatening lawsuits. Over knitting! Something that's supposed to be so peaceful and, well, grandma-ish. I know some pretty badass grandmas, but none of them scare me. Well, that *one* does, but that's not the point and we don't talk about her...

And it's not like I was stealing from these people. The money wasn't even in my account; the site I used kept it until the product was received by the buyer. Totally fair and legit! But nobody seemed to understand that.

So, instead of handling this in a calm rational way I started doing...silly things. I mean, we've all done silly things we should know won't work; there are so many tricks that all knitters use to try and make things go faster and sure, some of them work, but...my method was much more complicated.

I started going to local "magic" shops and trying random herbs, but the most they made me do was smell funny for a few days and make my hair shiny. And sadly my hands were still incredibly slow.

Finally I was a week away with five projects left. By some miracle. Two of them were sweaters. (Obviously I saved the biggest for last.) If I knit at my peak speed for the whole week I could only get one and a half done. The word of the week was Panic.

I was in my fifth so-called magic shop when I saw something out of the corner of my eye. There was a book in the back of the store, hidden from the others, but not put away. It had one of those upside down pentagrams on it. I rifled through it, and almost as if the book wanted me to, I stopped at the page that read, "WISHES." My heart rate increased dangerously. It was marked "Display Only", and I asked the clerk if there was another copy and she said no, so I calmly, politely left the store and -

Ok, fine I stole it. I'm not proud. It was a dark time.

(She runs to center stage, opens the book, and clears a space on the floor. She follows the instructions in the book.)

First step: make a circle of sand. Thank goodness I don't have carpets...

Next, place five candles evenly spaced throughout the edge of the circle. Can they be mismatched? Hmm, doesn't say. I'm sure it's fine...

So, circle, candles, do, do, dooo -

Ok, chanting. That...whatever. Nobody can see me.

Oh, lord, it's in Latin? Crap. Looks like two years of French really paid off.

Ok, ok, ok...Here we go.

*Egredere o princeps tenebrarum
Salvum me fac ab mortale labore
Veni, omnipotens tenebris unum.
Da mihi multam aetatem venerit.*

Surgite!

Surgite!

Surgite!

(Beat. She looks around.)

Well that was a waste of -

(Music plays, sounds of rumbling, flashing lights: And here comes a DEMON in a nice suit, doing some sort of bananas dance routine. An epic flourish. PEARL screams and hides behind something that doesn't conceal her.)

DEMON:

Well, hi there.

PEARL:

(At a normal volume.)

Aaaahh...

DEMON:

(Coughing.)

Bit of a shaky entry. Usually the candles match...

PEARL:

So - you're actually - I'm not hallucinating?

(A sequence of poking herself.)

DEMON:

Real as your desperation! And you. Are. Desperate. Ugh! Mm. You absolutely reek of it.

PEARL:

I...*reek* of it.

DEMON:

Pardon the term. I just get a little excited around desperation. It's kinda my thing.

(Beat.)

...I'm a Wish Demon if that wasn't clear.

PEARL:

Yeah, no I - that is the reason I called you here.

DEMON:

Well, great! Let's get started, shall we?

(She pulls out a legal pad, reading glasses, and pen and takes notes.)

What made you summon the Forces of Darkness today?

PEARL:

Uh, ok we're doing this - I am a knitter and I overdid it on presents for my family and friends and online orders and I don't want to get sued and people are email-yelling in all caps and -

DEMON:

So, faster hands?

(PEARL nods.)

I can work with that.

(To her look.)

Believe it or not this is very common.

PEARL:

Really? For like...knitters specifically, or - ?

DEMON:

Are you kidding? Around this time of year knitters begin losing their minds. It's wonderful. I love you people. I can't tell you how many sweaters I have from grateful knitters. Needless to say, they're useless back home, but it's really the thoughtfulness of it, you know?

PEARL:

Wow, I didn't realize we were so familiar with this territory.

DEMON:

Kind of a right of passage if you're going to do it for money. So! I like to find out a bit more about who I give my services to before any business transactions begin.

PEARL:

That seems fair.

DEMON:

Let's start with your name.

(They pull out a legal pad and reading glasses and take notes.)

PEARL:

Pearl.

(DEMON gives her a look.)

It's, uh...actually it's a nomenclature? I have an internet presence, so -

DEMON:

Right.

PEARL:

Lots of people yell at me -

DEMON:

I mean I know your real name anyway.

PEARL:

I figured.

(Awkward beat.)

DEMON:

Moving on. So you've been knitting for how long?

PEARL:

I learned when I was a kid. Eleven.

DEMON:

And you'd say you have plenty of experience?

PEARL:

Oh, yeah.

DEMON:

So this isn't an issue of improving skills?

PEARL:

No, I'm good. I mean, not the *best* in the world, but you know. I'm good.

DEMON:

Excellent.

PEARL:

But, you know, I'm on the verge of reactivating my carpal tunnel. I need help.

DEMON:

Well, we can fix this. May I see your hands?

PEARL:

Are you going to give me new ones?

DEMON:

Oh, honey no. It doesn't work that way. Your hands go as fast as they can and even if you took them away and replaced them, your new hands would be almost exactly the same.

DEMON (contd.):

Muscle memory, right? That's a totally different department. I usually reserve that for desperate bodybuilders or nerdy teenagers.

PEARL:

Oh...

DEMON:

But I can make you faster.

PEARL:

Oh! What do I have to do?

DEMON:

Just keep knitting.

PEARL:

Ok?

DEMON:

Knit with these and you will never miss a deadline again.

(She pulls out a pair of golden knitting needles. PEARL moves to take them, but DEMON retracts.)

There is one more thing we have to do, however.

PEARL:

I have to sign a contract?

DEMON:

You have to sign a contract.

PEARL:

Ok, but I have to make one thing very clear to you, and I realize that this may be a deal breaker, but -

DEMON:

But you'd rather not give me your soul?

PEARL:

I - yeah...

DEMON:

It's a common concern. Eternal damnation is not for everybody, I get that. Being a higher-up in this department means I can determine my own terms so that not all contracts have to be soul-binding.

PEARL:

...Well, ok.

DEMON:

I am going to need to take something else, though. I can't just give my services away.

PEARL:

But what could you possibly take from me? I don't have a first born or a goat.

DEMON:

Oy, you do it once - no. We have evolved past that. I just need a drop of your blood from your dominant hand.

PEARL:

That's all?

DEMON:

That's all.

PEARL:

So all I need to do is - ?

DEMON:

Yup.

PEARL:

Are you sure?

DEMON:

Listen, I do this all the time and have been for an eternity, so at this point I don't need much more than I have. I need some sort of sacrifice because that's how capitalism works, but I realize that a soul is a lot for some people; not all, but some. So, since I have so many already and my contractor doesn't come by to talk about building an addition for about, oh, two hundred sixty three more years I'm giving you the option of giving me a prick of blood from your dominant hand. That's all.

PEARL:

Wow. Hell has really streamlined the process.

DEMON:

Things were so complicated before. This saves a lot of time. Brings the Underworld into the 21st Century.

PEARL:

Good for you.

DEMON:

It's all good business. And it saves me some precious space; damnéd souls are very clingy.

(PEARL stares.)

What?

PEARL:

You're just...a lot nicer than I thought you'd be.

DEMON:

I get that a lot. So, let's get this show on the road, huh?

(Pulls out a fountain pen and a long piece of paper.)

Just sign at the bottom and we'll be all set.

(PEARL skims.)

PEARL:

So, I just - ?

(She mimes pricking her finger with the pen.)

DEMON:

Yup! And then just sign -

PEARL:

Right, right - just here?

DEMON:

Yup, just where that X is -

PEARL:

Got it. No need to date, or - ?

DEMON:

Oh, yeah no just right on the other side there -

PEARL:

Oh, I see it. Ok.

(She pricks her finger with the pen and signs.)

DEMON:

Wonderful.

PEARL:

I guess that's it.

DEMON:

Indeed it is!

(She takes the contract and hands her the golden knitting needles.)

PEARL:

Am I supposed to do anything special with them?

DEMON:

Nope.

PEARL:

Does the size adjust, or - ?

DEMON:

No, that should be fine.

PEARL:

Ok, but they're kind of huge, it won't work for every -

DEMON:

Just cast on. You'll see.

PEARL:

(Casting on as she talks.)

What happens if they don't work?

DEMON:

They'll work. Those needles have gotten many a knitter out of a bind.

(She laughs at this.)

Bind. Get it?

(PEARL raises her eyebrow at this. The DEMON coughs and continues.)

But if they should somehow malfunction here's my card.

(She hands her a business card.)

PEARL:

There's no number on this.

DEMON:

This is more like a direct line - less chance of some random person getting my contact information. If you need me just press down over my name with the finger you pricked. Then I'll come back.

PEARL:

Oh... But what if -

(POOF! The DEMON is gone.)

Ok then.

(PEARL takes a deep breath and knits a row. Soon the lights change and flash. Ethereal music plays. The light returns to normal and she produces a sweater. She pinches herself and, realizing that this actually happened, dances around. She speaks to the audience.)

PEARL:

In a matter of ten minutes I had made this gorgeous sweater. Not a stitch dropped, not an arm uneven; I had made a sweater in ten minutes. Ten minutes. I could only do work like this if I had at least a week. Minimum. I pinched myself several times to make sure that it actually happened. So I cast on again, and I only got faster.

(She pulls out items as she names them.)

Before I knew it I had a shrug. Next a hat. Then another hat. And finally I was finished. In one day all of my troubles were gone. I had gone to bed desperately hoping that I wasn't dreaming. Yet, when I woke up the next morning I realized that this had all actually happened. An actual Wish Demon, who was a lot nicer than I expected came in person to me and made my problems vanish without the price of my soul. For the first time in four months I could breathe. I was free. But after my boxes were shipped and things calmed down, well, it started to get even weirder than before. Cue music. (I mean, obviously, it's a montage.)

(PEARL acts out the montage, unless this is an audio play. In that case she doesn't need to, unless the actor feels like it's *absolutely* necessary. I'm not here to step on anyone's process.)

The Montage as read by Marion

MARION:

I'm not happy about this, but I wanted a bigger part, so. AHEM.

Pearl, calmly and unsuspecting puts down the needles and goes about cleaning her space. But she is troubled. Something is off. She keeps looking over her shoulder at the needles. They're still just there.

Suddenly she can't resist and grabs the needles, casting on and producing three more items. (Yeah, good luck staging that!) As soon as that's over, she puts the needles down, waits, then grabs them again. No self control, this kid.

Soon knitted items start appearing out of thin air! Or more likely they're thrown on from off stage by underpaid stage hands, until Pearl is surrounded. Pearl keeps knitting so feverishly that eventually she stabs herself. Serves her right...

She drops the needles, shaking the pain from her hand, and snaps out of it, noticing that her hand is bleeding. Oof. Ok, I don't do so well with blood. Can you just, y'know turn away with that? Yes, I'm serious! Ok. Thank you. Where was I? Oh right!

So soon after calming down she grabs all the knit items and puts them into a bag, sealing it tightly. She then puts the needles in a lockbox and hides them under something out of her line of sight. She breathes a sigh and pulls out a book.

You think everything is all right now, right? WRONG. We start to hear a buzzing like a vibrating phone coming from the box. She arms herself with some kitchen utensil, I dunno what you have there, a slotted spoon? Armed with her spoon or something she slowly makes her way to where the needles are. The buzzing becomes a banging which becomes louder and louder as she gets closer. When she is close enough to reach under where she hid the box it makes a terrifying noise and pulls her under. She wrestles and fights her way out to find that her left hand has been replaced with one of the needles.

She panics, (obviously, her hand just turned into a needle), then eventually passes out. Brief blackout. This, I believe is to simulate her passing out. The lights come up and PEARL is still unconscious, but knitting! Didn't see that coming, didja!? Somehow the other needle made it into her other hand, though it hasn't disappeared like the first one did. She wakes up fully, screams, almost passes out again, then calms herself. Soon she remembers the card. Right? Hey, the card! Get the card! Get - ! Ok she's got it. Oh she's almost got it, the needles are in the way. Ok she's got it! And then...she -

(PEARL touches the card.)

Touches the card with the finger she pricked! Just like the demon said! Flashes, bangs, and music, y'know all that fanfare. A puff of smoke and the Demon is back! Thank you. This has been Marion. Friend me on Facebook!

(MARION turns into the DEMON as the noise dies off.)

PEARL:

We have to talk.

DEMON:

Look at you, still going! You must be cranking out sweaters for the next few -

(She notices her missing hand.)

Oh, dear.

PEARL:

Yeah.

(She holds up the needle-hand for emphasis.)

DEMON:

This is a predicament.

PEARL:

Yeah!

DEMON:

But, this has happened before so we should be able to -

PEARL:

You're telling me that this has happened before *and you neglected to mention it in the contract!?*

DEMON:

...Yes.

(She lunges for her.)

Whoa, whoa! Can't kill the un-killable, Cupcake -

PEARL:

No. But I can severely maim you.

(She jabs at The DEMON with her needle-hand.)

DEMON:

Well fine, but I can't help you if I'm temporarily crippled.

(Beat. PEARL considers this for a moment, then backs off.)

You may not like this, but the best way to get these things to stop is to just let them run out of juice on their own.

PEARL:

How long?

DEMON:

How long, what?

PEARL:

How long does it take?

DEMON:

Oh, you know. Two...

PEARL:

Two...? Two hours? Two Days? Two Weeks?

DEMON:

Two...months...

(PEARL makes some kind of angry raptor noise.)

Ok! Ok, calm down! There may be another way. I'm almost positive that it will work.

PEARL:

OH my god...

DEMON:

Did you notice the section on reneging the contract?

PEARL:

It only said that any non-soul-binding deal can be broken by a significant sacrifice.

DEMON:

Correct.

PEARL:

There's nothing in my life that is significant enough to sacrifice!

DEMON:

Well, what about friends and fam –

PEARL:

NOPE.

DEMON:

Even though they - ?

PEARL:

Not going to happen.

(Beat.)

DEMON:

Catholic Guilt?

PEARL:

Catholic Guilt.

DEMON:

Well then.

PEARL:

Ok, what about my hands? Can't you just take them?

DEMON:

Mm...it's good, but not good enough. It has to be something pretty big.

PEARL:

But they're my *hands*!

DEMON:

I can get hands anytime I want. I have a wall of them strung up for the holidays.

PEARL:

Gross!

DEMON:

I cover them in twinkly lights!

PEARL:

I just - !

DEMON:

What? I'm festive!

PEARL:

Ok! Ok... So, what then?

DEMON:

Well, it's pretty obvious, right? In order to free yourself from these needles you need to give up your soul.

PEARL:

Of course I do...

DEMON:

The contract *did* say it had to be something significant.

PEARL:

You're a bastard.

DEMON:

Well, my dad did disown me and literally have all of my siblings push me out of my home. Thank you for poking open that wound.

PEARL:

...Wasn't that Lucifer?

DEMON:

A lot of us got pushed, ok!? Just because Lucifer was first -

PEARL:

Ok! Ok. I'm - wow.

DEMON:

...not the only important fallen angel -

PEARL:

I'm sorry! Ok? I don't - Paradise Lost was very long and weirdly worded.

(The DEMON sniffs.)

Sooo anyway...you're sure this, uh, is the only way? To get - ?

DEMON:

This is the *best* way, yes.

PEARL:

The best way...

(An agonizing pause underscored with some intense music.)

DEMON:

What do you say, Pearl? Ready to be free?

(She stares at her hands, looks at the DEMON, then turns to the audience.)

PEARL:

And that's how I got here. I guess I needed you all to know this because I'm not quite sure what my next move is and I have a feeling I'm about to make a terrible mistake. No matter what, please know that I - well, it's just been really nice to get this off my chest. I was hoping to find a better solution for this, but -

DEMON:

What are you doing?

(She turns to the DEMON.)

PEARL:

What? I - nothing. What are you doing?

DEMON:

It feels like you've been staring off into space for a half an hour.

PEARL:

Don't worry about it.

DEMON:

Kay...

(Beat.)

So? What's the verdict; am I taking your soul or not?

(The music builds. She takes a deep breath, looks at the audience one last time - PEARL inhales to speak - and the lights go out.)