

THE ENVELOPE PLEASE

By Timothy Pechey

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

14 MEN, 14 WOMEN, PLUS COMMERCIAL EXTRAS

AUDIO TECHNICIAN

Possesses a big voice (thanks to the wonders of electronic amplification) which allows him to capture everyone's attention in an instant. When s/he does make an appearance, he is dressed in a white shirt with rolled up sleeves, a vest, baggy slacks, and running shoes. He wears a headset around his neck. (21 lines)

LANCE LUSTRE

As his name suggests, he is lustrous and suave. Every detail about him suggests that hours have been spent buffing a glittering image which hides the real Lance from the eyes of the world. The light glares on a perfectly coifed jet-black toupee and sparkling white dentures. His dark suit is immaculately tailored to suggest a flawless physique and his shoes are polished to a glossy sheen. The ever-popular host of Tonight's Entertainment who speaks to his fans through a radiant, plastic smile. His best friend and constant companion is his mirror which he frequently uses to admire himself. Beneath his sleek exterior, he wears a tattered white t-shirt with the words "I Love Lance" emblazoned on the front, and a pair of boxer shorts with red hearts. (180 lines)

DR. ZIEGFELD FOLLY

This fraudulent Freudian psychiatrist sports a goatee and glasses to go with his outdated suit, white shirt and tie. He fancies himself as something of a "Casanova." (65 lines)

COSMETIC TECHNICIAN

Her red, waist-length smock bears the evidence of many hours of making up the stars. Beneath it and concealed from our view, she wears a blue shirt inscribed with "Winterville's Finest." She carries a makeup case and wields her powder puff with reckless abandon. A "worry-wart" on the surface, she successfully distracts everyone's attention from her true identity. (6 lines)

BREATH TECHNICIAN

She wears a blue smock, similar to that of her coworkers, which is crisp and cool, just like the Blast-O'-Mint Mouthwash she sprays from the bottle she carries. She, too, is one of "Winterville's Finest" and wears a blue shirt beneath her smock to confirm the fact. She is calmer than her fellow technicians, but this serves as a front for an otherwise intense disposition. (5 lines)

HAIRSTYLE TECHNICIAN

Her rat's nest hairdo, outlandish yellow smock and ditzy behavior are diversions from her real "take charge" personality. Underneath her smock, she wears the blue shirt which identifies her as the third of "Winterville's Finest." (5 lines)

SAVANNAH SULTRY

A female replica of Lance Lustre, stunning on the surface, an apparently steamy embodiment of her surname. Her blonde wig is impeccably styled, her makeup is flawlessly applied, and her permanent smile reveals a set of brilliant white teeth. Dressed in a long silver gown, she glitters as she glides along the stage. Her glamorous image conceals an interesting past before her days as the ravishing roving reporter for Tonight's Entertainment. (23 lines)

INVESTMENT ANALYST

His horn-rimmed glasses suggest intelligence, but his disheveled suit and stooped shoulders confirm our suspicions that this man is badly henpecked. He shuffles when he walks and stammers when he speaks, suggesting that he could use some confidence. (4 lines)

STOCK BROKER

There is an air of superiority about this efficient young woman. She wears her hair in a bun through which she has thrust a sharpened pencil. Her black pumps complement a well-tailored suit and blouse, and her black briefcase gives her a look of authority. (2 lines)

BETTY BLATHER

This middle-aged humanitarian has a tendency to run on at the mouth. She makes a valiant effort at being sincere, but the toothy grin which she so frequently flashes is really just an attempt to cover her insecurity. She is dressed in a white nurse's uniform, with white pumps to match, and a stethoscope dangles from her neck. Her navy sweater is pinned at the throat with a Rhinestone brooch and thrown over her shoulders. Her nurse's cap sits atop a bouffant hairdo. She wears cat's eye glasses behind which she constantly squints. Her makeup is too liberally applied. She is a classic case of overstatement. Still, she means well. (36 lines)

HOWARD HUNK

On the silver screen, this Prince Charming of Icon Studios is a sweltering stud. In real life, he is rather different. He makes several heroic but unsuccessful attempts to conceal the truth that he is well beyond his prime. His gray hair is shoved rather carelessly under a ragged white toupee. He wears a white body suit with a sequin-studded white jacket and on his feet he wears white cowboy boots which clomp when he walks. The total effect makes him look like an odd conglomeration of The Lone Ranger, Elvis, and the Man from Glad. It's also apparent that he is having some trouble with his vision, but refuses to surrender to the middle-aged curse of bifocals. None of this is obvious, however, during his performance in Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon. An immaculate white lab coat and a skilled makeup artist can do wonders for a man who is "over the hill!" (16 lines)

SUZY STARLET

She is stunning, even as a medical patient near death. Her hair and her makeup are flawless, and her alluring white negligee is pristine, reinforcing the impression that she is the consummate star. (2 lines)

ANGELICA BAMBOOZLE

She is dressed impeccably in a black pant suit with a white blouse and tie, and a red carnation in the lapel. Her hair is very stylish. Her appearance and her aggressive, confident demeanor give every indication that she is truly a businesswoman of the modern age. She uses her slick smile to advantage and, when she speaks, it's obvious that she's an expert in "bafflegabbing." (36 lines)

VLADIMIR KIKOV

This rather robust young man from Koolbasa, bearded and dressed in a traditional Ukrainian costume, fancies himself an expert in dancing the kolomeyka. A large #1 is pinned prominently to his outfit. (11 lines)

INGE SVENSON

She is a young vibrant yodeller who hails from her native Strandinavia. She wears a feathered cap, brown knickers and knee socks, and a large #2 is pinned to her white blouse. (7 lines)

LINGUINE VERMICELLI

Veteran star of the Tortellini Opera Company, he is tall, dark, and somewhat weathered looking because of his advancing years. A large #3 is pinned to his tattered orange open-throated shirt, the buttons of which are straining to contain a good-sized paunch. He is stuffed into his lime green slacks which are quite worn at the knees and strained in the

hips and the rear, and his brown shoes are very scuffed. On his head he wears a red bandana which always seems to be soaked with perspiration. (6 lines)

WENDY WHITE

This middle-aged concert violinist is poised and confident. Eminently gracious and sincere, she gives everyone the benefit of the doubt, even her step-daughter, Snow Storm. It's obvious that her tastes are simple: her hair is stylish without being overstated and she wears a minimum of makeup. For her contest performance, she dresses in an elegant black evening gown with modest accessories, including a #4 which is pinned to her chest. During her appearances in the community, she wears a comfortable ensemble of blouse, slacks, and sweater. (72 lines)

SNOW STORM

The "queen" of Coverup Cosmetics is an animated and forbidding reflection of her surname. Her hair flies in every direction. Her makeup and nail polish, applied rather carelessly in harsh blacks and reds, gives her a rabid, untamed look. Her long flowing gown looks more like a nightmare run wild than the elegant evening dress she imagines it to be. This outfit is accented with numerous silver chains which she wears around her neck, and with a wildly-drawn #5 which is pinned on her chest. On her feet she wears very high heels which make her movements chaotic and frenzied. She carries an ornate hand mirror which she frequently consults in self-admiration. She doesn't speak; she thunders and screeches and is seldom in the habit of listening to anyone but herself. (120 lines)

R. SENIC

A stellar employee of Godmothers, Inc., he wears a grubby white coat which is badly stained. His gray hair flies in every direction making him look rather like a mad professor. He carries a very large jar, labeled with unreadable hieroglyphics, which is half-filled with a powdery white substance we suspect might be arsenic. (3 lines)

C. MENT

This "Jacques Cousteau of the underworld" is another Godmothers employee. He wears a snorkel, mask, and flippers. He carries a large paper bag with an undecipherable label, but its gritty gray contents suggest that it probably contains cement. (4 lines)

STRAD E. VARIOUS

He is the third member of the Godmothers trio. He wears a trench coat with collar upturned and a brown Fedora on his head. He carries a black violin case which contains, not an automatic machine gun as expected, but a rare violin which he plays very poorly. Plagued by a rash of bad luck, he claims to need just a bit more time to fine tune his operation. (24 lines)

THE SEVEN DAZE

This up-and-coming rock group has trouble with harmony in every sense of the word. Each member has a personality as unique and distinctive as his/her frazzled hair and cool sunglasses. They wear blue jeans with white t-shirts, each with his/her name emblazoned on the chest. They are essentially "the kids from next door" as their motley collection of homespun instruments suggests. (2 lines)

SATURDAY

As leader of the group, he is apt to be frustrated and tense trying to pull the group together while thumping a ladle on a washtub. (15 lines)

SUNDAY

She is rather ethereal and angelic as she scratches a wooden spoon on an old-fashioned washboard as if it were a harp. (13 lines)

MONDAY

Mostly filled with hot air, he nonetheless tries to be supportive and helpful as he blows on a kazoo. (9 lines)

TUESDAY

Innocently ringing a cowbell, this ding-a-ling tends to be rather bewildered, not just by the group's recent success, but by the music, himself, and everyone else. (8 lines)

WEDNESDAY

She is as abrasive and sharp as the sound she creates by banging together two metal garbage can lids. (6 lines)

THURSDAY

He frequently implies that all the groups members should give their heads a shake in the same way he plays the maracas. (7 lines)

FRIDAY

A cooperative sort, she tries to play along with everyone else while strumming on a battered old guitar. (9 lines)

EXTRAS

Need extras (at least three, as many as six) for commercial clips and optional extras for "plants" used during LANCE and SAVANNAH'S audience interaction bits.

- Commercial Clip #1: BLAST-O'-MINT MOUTHWASH Man/Woman
- Commercial Clip #2: SHIMMER SHAMPOO Man/Woman
- Commercial Clip #3: CONCEAL SKIN CREAM Woman #1/Woman #2

Please Note:

All characters in this play are fictional, products of a zany imagination. Any resemblance to individuals in the original tale of "Snow White" or to glittering and glamorous famous personalities in the real world is utterly unintentional!

PRODUCTION SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are included to help the production of the play run more smoothly:

- Audience Gizmos: Upon entering, each member of the audience must be given a "gizmo," a contraption something like a remote television channel changer with buttons numbered one through five. This can be as simple as asking the audience to imagine such a device, or including an illustrated version on the back cover of the program. Ambitious companies may want to design an original "gizmo" of their own.
- Audio Commercials: Act One contains a number of audio commercials. These are only suggestions. Performing companies are encouraged to use their imaginations to produce their own amusing commercials. As a creative option, companies with access to video technology may want to run a video version of the commercial on "studio monitors" placed strategically throughout the audience.
- Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon "Film Clip": This brief piece of melodrama is scripted to be presented live in the area down center. However, companies with access to sophisticated recording and playback technology, may want to present the scene as an actual film clip.

- T.W.I.T.S. Performances: VLADIMIR KIKOV dances the kolomeyka to any appropriate selection of music. This is, of course, a live performance, though any other traditional Ukrainian or Russian dance would be equally appropriate. SNOW STORM'S recitation is also a live performance. The three remaining competitors may give live performances as well if cast members possess the necessary talents. Equally suitable, however, are "lip sync" versions with appropriate background music. INGE SVENSON could yodel to "The Lonely Goat Herd" from *The Sound of Music* or any other selection of yodeling music, while LINGUINE VERMICELLI might sing to the music of "La Donna e Mobile" from the popular Italian opera, *Rigoletto*, or another equally well-known selection. WENDY WHITE could perform to the music of *The Flight of the Bumblebee* or another familiar piece.
- Act Two Scene Changes: Act Two has been written so that each scene follows immediately upon the previous one. It is critical that scene changes flow smoothly with minimal interruption. This is best achieved by adjustments in lighting and by cast members who make minor set rearrangements themselves.
- Violin Solo: During her visit to Godmother's, Incorporated, WENDY plays a violin solo. Music for this solo might come from the opening two minutes of the first movement of "Spring" from *Vivaldi's Four Seasons*, or any other suitable and well-known violin selection.
- The **SEVEN DAZE**: The script calls for this up-and-coming rock group to play a collection of "homespun" instruments. Substitutions can be made, of course, but do keep in mind that each member's instrument is a reflection of his/her personality. Most important of all, the group's new hit recording "Mirror, Mirror" should be sung live. Feel free to play around with the rhythm and pace, but keep the tune an uncomplicated version of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: On the set of "Tonight's Entertainment."

• INTERMISSION •

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: The office of Godmother's, Inc.

SCENE 2: Dr. Ziegfeld Folly's office.

SCENE 3: Back on the set of "Tonight's Entertainment."

SCENE 4: The home recording studio of The Seven Daze, somewhere in the forest.

SCENE 5: On the set of "Tonight's Entertainment."

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

Setting:

We are on the set of *Tonight's Entertainment*, the most popular talk show on Glamour Television Network. Center stage, the set is arranged with a desk and chair for host, LANCE LUSTRE, with a sofa to the left and four comfortable chairs to the right of the desk. On the desk sits a pitcher of water and several drinking glasses, and beside the desk stands a wastepaper basket. In front of the chairs there is a low coffee table on which there sits a box of tissues. (Optional: The backdrop should be lit with a set of white running lights which can be turned on and off.) Upstage center there is an oversized horizontal window, covered by an attached sign bearing the words "TONIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT." The sign should be easily removable. There are doors up left and up right and wings to the left and right allowing easy access from both sides of the stage. Down left and down right on the floor of the stage there are identical signs labeled "APPLAUSE" to cue the audience to clap. These signs can be handheld and portable; better yet, they could be electronic so they can be turned on and off. These are supported by a "recorded applause" which is played every time the "APPLAUSE SIGNS" are used. Downstage center there is an open area suitable for performing. If possible, there should be a set of steps downstage center leading into the audience making it possible for characters to exit and enter into the theatre auditorium. The stage is dark.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: (Offstage amplified voice.) Okay, places everybody. We're live to air in five, four, three, two, one

Full lights. If backdrop lights are used, they should come on whenever the program is in progress. Instrumental version of "That's Entertainment" crescendos for a few seconds, holds, then decrescendos as AUDIO TECHNICIAN'S voice begins.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: (Offstage amplified voice.) Tonight, live, from beautiful downtown Winterville, the Glamour Television Network is proud to present everyone's favorite talk show, *Tonight's Entertainment*, with your host, Lance Lustre!

Music crescendos as LANCE trots in from the wings stage right and stands down center. "Applause" signs and recorded applause cue the audience to clap enthusiastically. The music stops as LANCE cuts it off on its final beat, but the applause continues as HE basks in its glow.

LANCE: (The light glints off his radiant plastic smile.) Good evening, everyone. Hello to our two hundred and twenty-two million viewers. (HE waves and points as if into a camera.) It's wonderful people like you who help to keep us number one in the ratings! And a special welcome to our studio audience. I'm glad you're able to join us tonight. (Calls to the lighting technicians offstage.) Can we bring up the house lights on these marvelous people? (House lights up full.)

LANCE: That's better. Now I can see you. (HE recognizes someone in the audience.) Ah . . . I notice that we have a prominent personality in our midst this evening. (HE gestures in the direction of DR. FOLLY who is seated in the audience.) An eminent psychiatrist who spends tireless hours helping the glamorous maintain a glittering image Dr. Ziegfield Folly, ladies and gentlemen.

DR. FOLLY: (*HE stands and waves to the audience around him.*) A pleasure, Mr. Lustre, a pleasure. Just doing my job. (*HE blows kisses in every direction before sitting down.*)

Audience applause.

LANCE: (*HE surveys the rest of the audience.*) So, where have you come from to see our show tonight? (*HE “plays” the studio audience, moving from side to side, interacting with people in a silky smooth manner, ad-libbing an interest in their home towns and street names, their occupations, and hobbies. The encounter could be “real” with actual audience members or well-rehearsed “plants” could be used. The entire routine lasts only a couple of minutes, just long enough for LANCE to make a personal connection with his fans.*) Well, we have an exciting show for you this evening. What am I saying? All our shows are exciting . . . right?

Audience applause.

LANCE: Of course! We'll have our usual Tinseltown exclusive from Tonight Entertainment's most illustrious investigative reporter, the stunning Savannah Sultry. We'll have an interview with local film sensation, Betty Blather, along with a clip from her recent appearance on the silver screen. And, finally, we'll be bringing you T.W.I.T.S. The Winterville International Talent Search.

Audience applause.

LANCE: Thank you, thank you . . . so stay tuned for sixty minutes of spectacular entertainment. But first, this message from our sensational sponsor, Coverup Cosmetics. (*HE walks back to his desk and sits as the lights fade. HE reaches in the top drawer and pulls out his mirror. Admiring his reflection, HE freezes in position.*)

House lights fade to black. Stage lights dim. Backdrop lights off.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: (*Offstage amplified voice.*) And we're away. (*There is a short pause before HE launches into the promotion for Coverup Cosmetics.*) Tonight's Entertainment is brought to you by Coverup Cosmetics, vanity products for the glittering and glamorous. "Let Coverup help you hide your true self from the world."

We hear the following audio track of a commercial for Blast-O'-Mint Mouthwash or actual commercial could be performed down stage.

COMMERCIAL CLIP #1: BLAST-O'-MINT MOUTHWASH

We hear wind howling.

Woman: (*Seductively.*) Are your friends keeping their distance? Man: (*Not much more than a grunt.*) Huh?

Woman: Did your boss turn you down for that lifetime promotion?

Man: (*A disappointed grunt.*) Ahem.

Woman: Is your breath public enemy #1.

Man: Yuk.

Woman: If you've answered yes to one or more of these questions, your image may be in serious danger.

Man: Oh, no!

Woman: (*In a cheerleading style.*) But never fear, help is here!

Man: Yeah?

Woman: When your mouth tastes like yesterday's dirty socks, reach for Blast-O'-Mint Mouthwash.

Man: *(Sound of loud gargling.)*

Woman: One gargle with Blast-O'-Mint freshness and your bad breath will be covered up for ever.

Man: *(Sound of fresh breath exhaling.)*

Woman: So reach for Blast-O'-Mint Mouthwash and blow your breath problems away.

We hear kissing followed by howling wind.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: *(Offstage amplified voice.)* Ready for your live endorsement, Mr. Lustre.

Spotlight on LANCE at desk center stage.

LANCE: *(HE quickly puts the mirror on top of the desk. HE flashes a toothy smile at the audience.)* Hello, friends. This is Lance Lustre for Blast-O'-Mint Mouthwash. One swish with Blast-O'-Mint and I became the lustrous television personality you see before you tonight. Buy Blast-O'Mint today and breathe a blast of fresh air into your life today.

Spotlight off, stage lights dim. End of commercial clip.

LANCE: *(His glittering image disintegrates. HE looks up right and shouts.)* Where's my Cosmetic Technician?

COSMETIC TECHNICIAN: *(SHE bursts through the door up left carrying a makeup kit.)* Coming, Mr. Lustre.

LANCE: I'm perspiring! Do something, for heaven's sake.

COSMETIC TECHNICIAN: *(SHE pats his forehead with a cloth.)* Is that satisfactory, sir?

LANCE: *(HE picks up the mirror, examines himself, then sweeps the COSMETIC TECHNICIAN away.)* Yes, fine.

COSMETIC TECHNICIAN slinks away through the door up right.

LANCE: *(HE breathes into his hand to smell his breath.)* Oh, gross! Where's my Breath Technician?

BREATH TECHNICIAN: *(SHE sweeps through the door up left carrying a spray bottle.)* On my way, Mr. Lustre.

LANCE: My breath smells like last week's moldy enchiladas. Do something! *(HE opens his mouth.)*

BREATH TECHNICIAN: *(SHE sprays LANCE'S mouth.)* How's that, Mr. Lustre?

LANCE: *(HE does another test by breathing into his hand once again.)* It'll do. *(HE dismisses the BREATH TECHNICIAN with a wave of his hand.)*

BREATH TECHNICIAN slides meekly out the door up left.

LANCE: *(Shouting again.)* Where's my ear piece? I need my ear piece for the report from Savannah.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN dashes in up right. HE tries to fit LANCE with an ear piece.

LANCE: Wait a minute! Has that ear piece been disinfected?

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: Yes, Mr. Lustre. *(HE stands immobilized.)*

LANCE: *(Shouting.)* Well then, what are you waiting for?

AUDIO TECHNICIAN tries to put the ear piece in LANCE'S ear, but makes the fatal mistake of touching his hair.

LANCE: *(HE grabs the ear piece impatiently from the AUDIO TECHNICIAN and puts it in his ear.)* Good grief. You've ruined my hair. Where's my Hairstyle Technician?

AUDIO TECHNICIAN slinks out up right. HAIRSTYLE TECHNICIAN flounces out of the door up left carrying a brush and a can of hairspray and scurries to LANCE'S side.

LANCE: Do something, hurry!

HAIRSTYLE TECHNICIAN: *(SHE coiffs and sprays LANCE'S wig.)* How's that, sir?

LANCE: *(HE grabs his mirror and readjusts his hair.)* Really, do I have to do everything myself?

Humiliated, HAIRSTYLE TECHNICIAN slinks out up left.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: *(Offstage amplified voice.)* We're back in five, four, three, two, one.

Stage lights full. We hear the final few bars from the show's theme song, "That's Entertainment." Audience applause.

LANCE: *(Recovering his glittering image instantaneously.)* Hello again, everyone. Welcome back. As promised, our first feature this evening will be the breaking news in Tinseltown with our ravishing roving reporter, Savannah Sultry.

Lights, spotlight follows SAVANNAH as she makes her way to the stage. SAVANNAH glides, rather than walks, down the center aisle of the theatre auditorium, stopping on the steps down center to report her story. SHE looks out over the audience as if talking into a camera. Before SHE begins, she removes a small makeup compact from a pocket in her gown and does a final check of her appearance in the mirror. In one hand, she holds a set of notes; in the other, a handheld portable microphone.

LANCE: *(HE puts his hand to his ear piece.)* Come in, Savannah.

SAVANNAH: *(Without making eye contact with LANCE, SAVANNAH speaks in her sensual, liquid voice.)* Hello, Lance.

LANCE: *(Speaking as if HE is looking into a camera.)* Savannah, what news do you have for us tonight about the studs and starlets of Tinseltown?

SAVANNAH: Well, Lance. Tinseltown is buzzing this hour about the sizzling Snow Storm. You'll remember, of course, that I reported yesterday about the death of Snow's father, Sand Storm, trillionaire tycoon of Coverup Cosmetics, and famous film directing giant at ICON Studios here in Tinseltown. He left a will which apparently provided for equal division of assets between his daughter, Snow Storm, and his second wife, Wendy White. But Snow has contested that will, claiming that her father was not of sound mind and body when he drafted it. In a sworn affidavit, Snow Storm insists that her stepmother, Wendy White, and I quote *(SHE reads from her notes.)* "Exerted undue influence in forcing my father to divide his fortune between us. Snow goes on to say that Wendy White coerced her father into marrying her only thirteen years after his first wife, Snow's mother, Rayne Storm, drowned in a typhoon while sailing on their yacht.

LANCE: Yes, Savannah, we've been keeping an eye on that story all day. Have

there been any new developments?

SAVANNAH: Yes, Lance. I'm standing here on the steps of the Superior Court where only moments ago, Judge Quinella Q. Questionable handed down a landmark decision upholding the protest and awarding the entire Coverup Cosmetics fortune to Snow Storm.

LANCE: *(HE whistles and raises his eyebrows.)* That must make Snow Storm one of the wealthiest young women in the world, I'd imagine. Have you managed to speak to Snow Storm?

SAVANNAH: No, Lance. Neither Snow nor her stepmother, Wendy White, have been available for comment. But a reliable source, whose identity only money could force me to reveal, has told me that they're headed for some kind of showdown later tonight.

LANCE: That's an electrifying development.

SAVANNAH: Yes, Lance, and it's made the stock market go crazy. Apparently Coverup Cosmetics dividends are skyrocketing.

LANCE: The shareholders must be ecstatic.

SAVANNAH: Yes, Lance. As a matter of fact, I'm sure some of them are here in the crowd gathered outside the Superior Courthouse. Let's see what they have to say. *(SHE walks down the steps and wanders into the audience, stopping to conduct ad-lib interviews with a cross-section of people. SHE is particularly interested in getting public reaction to SNOW STORM'S victory and the resulting good fortune for stockholders. LANCE should be free to ask an ad-lib question or two during these impromptu interviews. The entire process should not last longer than a couple of minutes and, once again, interviewees could be "real" audience members or well-rehearsed plants.)*

SAVANNAH: *(As SHE glides back on to the steps down center, SHE prepares to wrap up.)* So there you are, Lance. That's the hottest news for this hour. This is SAVANNAH SULTRY reporting, live, from the steps of the Superior Courthouse in Tinseltown.

Spotlight off. SAVANNAH pulls out her makeup compact and gazes at herself adoringly in the mirror.

LANCE: Thank you, Savannah, for that sensational story. *(HE looks in the direction of a different "camera.")* Coming up, a visit with Betty Blather. But first, another word from Coverup Cosmetics.

Stage lights fade.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: *(Offstage amplified voice.)* And we're away.

LANCE and SAVANNAH freeze in position. We hear the audio track of another commercial, this one for "Shimmer Shampoo."

COMMERCIAL CLIP #2: SHIMMER SHAMPOO

We hear a shimmering glissando being played on chimes or a harp.

Man: What kind of story does your hair tell about you? Are you smart 'n sassy?

Trumpets with mutes.

Man: Glittering and glamorous?

Violins.

Man: Or dull 'n dowdy?

Cellos or basses.

Man: No big, hairy deal, you say? Who cares about hair with a will of its own?
Well, think again! You have an image to maintain!

Trumpet fanfare.

Man: When your mood is drooping because your hair is lifeless, wash away your worries with Shimmer Shampoo.

Sound of shower running: WOMAN'S voice humming "Singin' in The Rain."

Man: New from Coverup Cosmetics, Shimmer Shampoo contains a unique concoction of illusions and dyes. This secret formula gives Shimmer the strength of two, count them -

Woman: *(Perky tone.)* One, two.

Man: Two shampoos in one. Its thick, radiant lather helps you take control of lackluster hair.

WOMAN grunts and groans as if in a struggle.

Man: While its amazing coloring action disguises those streaks of gray so no one will ever know how *(With special intensity.)* old you really are.

WOMAN lets out a desperate shriek followed by a relieved sigh.

Man: So when you have a secret to hide, you know you can rely on Shimmer Shampoo to maintain your image. For undeniable proof, here's SAVANNAH SULTRY of Tonight's Entertainment.

Lights, spotlight on SAVANNAH.

SAVANNAH: *(SHE quickly recovers her sleek, sultry image.)* Hello. This is Savannah Sultry reminding you to buy Shimmer Shampoo. I do *(SHE runs her hand along the surface of her hair, careful not to touch it.)* And look where I am today. You're no one without Shimmer Shampoo.

Sound, a final shimmering glissando, played on chimes or a harp, ends the commercial clip. Spotlight off. Stage is still dim.

SAVANNAH: *(Still standing on the steps down center, SHE sheds her glamorous facade and yells.)* Where's my investment analyst? Where's my stockbroker?

INVESTMENT ANALYST: *(Shuffling up center aisle from the back of the theatre auditorium. HE speaks in a nasal, henpecked tone.)* C-c-coming, Ms. S-Sultry, c-coming.

STOCKBROKER: *(SHE makes her appearance only seconds later, strutting along quite confidently and pushing past the INVESTMENT ANALYST in mid-aisle.)* Out of my way! *(SHE sprints to SAVANNAH'S side, pulling a pencil out of the bun in her hair and a notepad out of her briefcase.)* Yes, Ms. Sultry. How may I be of service?

SAVANNAH: *(Shrieks.)* Am I invested in Coverup Cosmetics?

STOCKBROKER: *(Flipping madly through her notepad, then looking up fearfully.)* Uh, no, ma'am. You currently hold no stock in Coverup Cosmetics.

SAVANNAH: *(Still shrieking.)* What? What do you mean I don't have stock in Coverup Cosmetics?

STOCKBROKER: *(Looking for a scapegoat, SHE points to the INVESTMENT ANALYST who is just managing to make it to the steps down center.)* I'm

sure it's his fault. He probably advised you against it.

SAVANNAH: *(Now turning her wrath on the INVESTMENT ANALYST.)* You advised me against it? How could you do such a thing?

INVESTMENT ANALYST: B-but Ms. S-Sultry, ma'am. Y-you told me yesterday to t- tell your s-stock broker to s-sell all your stock in C-Coverup C-Cosmetics.

SAVANNAH: *(Still shrieking.)* What? You idiot! Surely you knew I was joking.

INVESTMENT ANALYST: *(Confused.)* J-Joking? No, ma'am. I th-thought you were s-serious, Ms. S-Sultry.

SAVANNAH: Serious? How could you think I was serious? How could either of you think I was serious? I stood to make a small fortune.

INVESTMENT ANALYST and STOCKBROKER look at each other and shrug their shoulders.

SAVANNAH: Now I'm ruined. *(SHE reaches to pull at her hair, but catches herself at the last minute and decides not to destroy her glitzy image.)* I could have become even more rich and famous. But no . . . you had to stand in my way. *(She turns on them.)* Well, you haven't heard the last from me, I assure you.

INVESTMENT ANALYST AND STOCKBROKER beat a hasty retreat down the center aisle, perhaps ducking into an auditorium seat.

SAVANNAH: You can run, but you can't hide. I'll find you and when I do . . . *(SHE chases them awkwardly down the center aisle.)*

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: *(Offstage amplified voice.)* We're back in five, four, three, two, one.

Stage lights full. We hear the final few bars from the show's theme song "That's Entertainment." Audience applause.

LANCE: *(Looking at an imaginary camera straight ahead.)* Thank you, thank you. Welcome back to Tonight's Entertainment, the show where you get a chance to see inside the lives of the glittering and glamorous . . . the pillars of our society. What happens when a person gets a chance to fulfill the dream of a lifetime? Well, my first guest of the evening can answer that question. Last year she was just an ordinary citizen of Winterville; now she's known to millions as an icon of the silver screen. Please help me welcome, Betty Blather!

Audience applause.

BETTY: *(SHE walks through the door and breezes past LANCE to stand down center where she waves and bows to the audience.)* Oh hi there, everyone. Thank you. You're so wonderful. Oh, thank you so much.

Audience applause.

LANCE: *(HE sits at his desk and calls gently to his guest.)* Betty. *(BETTY ignores him, basking in the audience's applause.)*

LANCE: *(HE calls again, somewhat more loudly.)* Betty.

BETTY: *(SHE turns and looks wistfully, almost hopefully in LANCE'S direction.)* Yes, Lance.

LANCE: *(Firmly, though not unkindly)* Betty, sit down.

BETTY, trying to hide her embarrassment, moves quickly to sit on the sofa to LANCE'S left.

LANCE: Tell us, Betty, how did you become one of the rising stars of today?

BETTY: Well, Lance, it all started when I won last year's TWITS Contest. That's an acronym, you know. That's where you take the first letter of every word and make a special name. T.W.I.T.S. stands for The Winterville International Talent Search Contest. Well, the word "contest" isn't really part of the acronym because then it would be TWITSC (*SHE pronounces the word dramatically as "twits-kuh."*) which would be silly, really, wouldn't it?

LANCE: (*HE has some trouble staying interested in her rambling explanation.*) Yes, I see. Well, Betty, how would you describe the experience of being the TWIT of the year?

BETTY: In a word, Lance, it was wonderful.

LANCE: Ye- (*HE is about to speak, when it becomes obvious that BETTY'S definition of "in a word" differs from his own.*)

BETTY: . . . magnificent, spectacular, superb, glorious . . .

LANCE: Thank you, Betty.

BETTY: . . . marvelous, remarkable, tremendous . . .

LANCE: (*HE interrupts her as kindly as possible.*) Yes, Betty, I think we get the picture.

BETTY sighs and smiles sweetly.

LANCE: Now, I understand you had the chance to perform with Icon Studio's sweltering star, Howard Hunk.

BETTY: (*SHE gushes adoringly.*) Oh, yes. He was wond -

LANCE: (*HE cuts her off intentionally.*) No doubt, an inspiring experience. And the film was -

BETTY: (*SHE cuts him off as she gushes wistfully.*) Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon.

LANCE: Yes, Howard Hunk's most impressive performance. Well, Betty, we've managed to get our hands on a clip of your big scene in that very fine film and I thought we'd show it now so that everyone can see for themselves why you were chosen to be yet another of Icon Studio's glamorous goddesses.

BETTY: (*SHE can hardly contain her excitement.*) Oh, Lance, that would be -

LANCE: Yes, I know -

BETTY/LANCE: (*In unison.*) - wonderful.

LANCE: (*Speaks to technicians offstage.*) Can we roll the film now please?

*Stage lights cut to black. Spotlight down center. We are about to watch the final melodramatic scene from **Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon** starring HOWARD HUNK and SUZY STARLET with a tiny part for BETTY BLATHER playing the role of a nurse. The entire scene should be played with intense melodrama.*

FILM CLIP: DOCTOR SLASH, WONDER SURGEON

Final Scene "The Kiss of Life"

HOWARD enters from the stage right wings pushing a hospital gurney stopping down center. HE is sizzling as Doctor Slash. Not a hair is out of place. His immaculate white lab coat and gleaming black patent leather shoes create an aura of perfection around him. SUZY is stunning even as a patient near death, lying on the gurney which HOWARD is pushing.

HOWARD: (*HE hovers over his patient. Then lifting his head, he calls his trusty nurse.*) Nurse.

BETTY enters from the center stage shadows to stand behind the gurney.

SUZY: *(SHE holds her hand on her forehead.)* Oh, Doctor, I know I have only hours to live-but-but-if you would just tell me that you love me, I'll be able to meet my Maker with a smile on my face.

HOWARD: *(HE leans over her.)* You know I love you. I've always loved you. *(HE picks up her hand and kisses it passionately.)*

BETTY: *(SHE uses her stethoscope to listen to SUZY'S breathing and picks up SUZY'S other hand to take her pulse. SHE speaks awkwardly in a flat tone, with no obvious talent for acting.)* The patient's pulse is up to 120. Blood pressure and respiration are normal. Doctor Slash, you've done it again.

SUZY: *(Breathlessly grateful.)* The kiss of life. Oh thank you, Doctor.

HOWARD: It was nothing. *(HE holds his hand over his heart.)* I was just doing my duty.

Dramatic music plays on a Hammond organ to end the scene. Spotlight off. In the darkness, BETTY slips back into place on the sofa center stage and HOWARD wheels SUZY off stage right. Stage lights up full. Audience applause.

LANCE: *(HE wipes a tear from the corner of his eye.)* There you have it, ladies and gentlemen. The scene which launched Betty Blather's career into the stratosphere. Doesn't it make you proud to know that Betty had her start right here on Tonight's Entertainment?

Audience applause. BETTY stands and moves toward down center, bowing and waving. LANCE calls to BETTY and motions to her to sit down again on the sofa. BETTY takes a final bow and then walks back and sits on the sofa.

LANCE: Betty, that was a sterling performance. Such talent, such poise.

BETTY: Thank you, Lance. I can't tell you what a thrill it was to stand beside Howard Hunk and Suzy Starlet. I was so nervous at first, but they reassured me. They even helped me learn my one big line. *(SHE recreates the line exactly as she has just done it in the previous scene.)* The patient's pulse is up to 120, Doctor. Blood pressure and respiration are normal. You've done it again. *(SHE laughs.)* You know, I say that line every night before I go to bed just to remind myself that even a little person like me can be a star. *(SHE sighs.)*

LANCE: Did you manage to work in any other films during the year, Betty?

BETTY: No, the director, Mr. Sand Storm, God rest his soul. *(SHE sheds a sincere, but melodramatic tear.)* You know, he was so nice to me. He told me the scene would be retained forever in the annals *(BETTY pronounces this word as "ay-nals.")* of Tinseltown history. He said if I auditioned for any more films, it would be a grave and tragic mistake. I guess he meant that it would ruin my chances of being remembered for my one memorable performance in *(SHE sighs again.)* Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon. *(SHE is lost in memory and self-congratulation.)*

LANCE: *(HE almost echoes BETTY'S sigh.)* Yes, I'm sure that's what he meant. *(HE looks at BETTY in silence for a long five seconds, then decides to bring his guest back to the present and carry on with the interview.)* Well, Betty, tell us about the rest of your year.

BETTY: Oh, Lance, it's been really wonderful, you know what I mean.

LANCE: Yes, yes, I'm beginning to catch on. I understand you decided to become a nurse during the year, Betty.

BETTY: Why, yes, Lance. My role as a nurse on Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon was so inspiring. I just knew I could be a great help to people so I've become a nurse in the office of *(SHE says the name as if catapulted*

into some kind of rapture.) Dr. Ziegfield Folly, the famous psychiatrist.

LANCE: Oh Betty, that's (*HE hesitates for a moment, then decides to say the word anyway.*) wonderful.

Audience applause.

BETTY: (*SHE is still enraptured.*) Thank you, Lance. (*SHE stands, bows, and throws kisses at DR. FOLLY, seated in the studio audience.*) Thank you, Dr. Folly. Thank you, everyone.

DR. FOLLY stands from out in the audience and throws kisses in BETTY'S direction.

LANCE: Betty.

BETTY looks back at LANCE, grins sheepishly, and sits down again.

LANCE: Betty, as you know we'll be hosting this year's version of TWITS right here on Tonight's Entertainment in just a few moments. As last year's winner and one of this year's judges, do you have any words of advice for the competitors?

BETTY: (*Quite serious.*) Why, yes, Lance. Keep a smile on your face . . . rain or shine, sleet or snow, ice or fog, clouds or sunshine, blizzards or thunderstorms.

LANCE: Thank you, Betty -

BETTY: (*SHE continues relentlessly.*) - light or dark, always, always, always (*SHE stands and goes into an awkward song and dance routine.*)

Gray skies are gonna clear up,

Put on a happy face.

Strike up the band and cheer up,

Put on a happy face,

Spread sunshine all over the place,

And put on a happy face!

SHE concludes her song and dance routine down center. Audience applause.

BETTY bows and throws kisses to the audience until LANCE moves from behind the desk to join her down center.

LANCE: Ah, yes, the song and dance routine that stole the show last year and sent Betty Blather jetting off to Tinseltown and on to the silver screen with Howard Hunk. Well, thank you, Betty. (*BETTY continues bowing and throwing kisses.*)

Audience applause. LANCE makes a valiant attempt to contain his guest by putting his arm around her and holding her tight. BETTY finally stops, but stands beside LANCE with a very large smile on her face.

LANCE: And now, ladies and gentlemen, a chance to see history in the making. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Coverup Cosmetics, Tonight's Entertainment is pleased to bring you this year's version of the TWITS, The Winterville International Talent Search. Contestants have been arriving from all over the world to compete for a chance to star with Howard Hunk in his new movie, Doctor Slash: The Sequel. Our competitors are waiting in the wings, but first a word about how the winner will be selected. To explain the procedure, I'd like to call on Ms. Angelica Bamboozle, computer wizard of Godmothers, Incorporated, the accounting and investment company known the world over for making your financial problems disappear like magic.

LANCE guides BETTY back to her seat on the sofa and HE resumes his position at the desk. Audience applause.

ANGELICA: *(SHE enters stage right, pushing a computer on a wheeled table. Her smile is as slick as her "bafflegab.")* Thank you, Mr. Lustre. In keeping with the unique and equivocal tradition of the TWITS, the viewing audience of Tonight's Entertainment will select this evening's single most proficient performing participant whose life will be irrevocably transfigured. Coverup Cosmetics, patronizing proponents of the TWITS competition, makes the proud presumption that the sophisticated spectators of Tonight's Entertainment have the savvy to ably ascertain which of the competent contestants should be launched into the stratosphere of stardom. *(SHE clears her throat to attract attention.)* Now, if I might have your most careful cognizance, I will elucidate the technological methodology which you will utilize to execute your preference. Each member of our studio audience acquired, upon entering this evening, a portable gizmo something like this. *(SHE holds one up for everyone to see.)* If you'd be so considerate as to glance at this piece of electronic gadgetry now, you'll notice that numerous numerals are displayed on your gizmo. Each of these numerous numerals is connected, by the wonders of cyberspace, to a microchip on the circuit board of my special HOCUS-POCUS Computer Model # 94160935. *(SHE holds up a circuit board from the computer.)* For example, if you believed that Contestant #1 should receive your vote, you would press #1 on your electronic gizmo, sending a message to this circuit here *(SHE points to the circuit board while waving her fingers in the air. SHE does this so deftly that we could almost imagine she was using a sleight of hand.)* which will automatically activate that microchip there *(SHE points to one while executing the same kind of hocus pocus with her fingers.)* thus registering your vote. Similar wonders will take place should you decide to select other numbers on your electronic gizmos.

LANCE: What about our viewers at home, Ms. Bamboozle?

ANGELICA: Yes, I'm so glad you asked, Mr. Lustre. *(SHE looks in the direction of an imaginary studio camera.)* You people will cast your votes by dialing 1-800-COVERUP, you'll be connected to the electronic wizardry in this technological marvel. *(SHE pats the computer.)* Let us suppose that you select Contestant #2 to be the winner. When you press #2 on your touch-tone phone, the information will automatically activate this circuit here *(Her fingers fly once again.)* which will electronically transmit a message to that microchip there *(SHE uses her fingers magically.)* registering your vote. Other marvelous things will happen should you decide to select other numbers on your telephone transmitters.

LANCE: Perhaps you could tell us how the final results will be tabulated and announced.

ANGELICA: Certainly. Once the circuits and microchips have stored all the pertinent information here *(SHE points to the circuit board.)* they will then relay that information to the processing center of the HOCUS-POCUS Computer here *(SHE points to the back of the computer.)* which in turn

performs permutations and combinations there (*SHE points to the computer screen.*) and provides a precise printout of the popular preferences here (*SHE points to the printer.*) which I then hand to Mr. Lustre there (*With a flourish, she points down center.*) who will make the prestigious proclamation. Any questions? Good.

LANCE: Thank you, Ms. Bamboozle. I'm sure our studio audience and our viewers at home appreciated your enlightening explanation.

Audience applause. ANGELICA retires to the wings stage right with her trusty computer.

LANCE: And now, ladies and gentlemen, the moment we've all been waiting for . . . the time has come for the contestants to perform. First on the T.W.I.T.S. list is a dancer who has traveled all the way from Koolbasa to be with us this evening. Please help me welcome Vladimir Kikov.

Audience applause. VLADIMIR bursts out of the wings stage left and dances his way down center to the music of "The Kolomeyka." While he is a spirited competitor who has quite a high opinion of his ability, his dancing skills are hampered by an unfortunate lack of coordination. His performance, which lasts a total of thirty seconds at most, should not be a total fiasco. But neither should it be terribly refined. Rather, it should be just unpolished enough to produce some chuckles and laughter in the audience.

When the music and his legs give out, HE gets up from his pratfall with just enough energy to take a bow in front of the audience. Audience applause.

LANCE: Vladimir Kikov, ladies and gentlemen. (*HE stands and waves VLADIMIR back toward center stage.*)

VLADIMIR moves back to center stage and sits in the chair closest to LANCE'S desk.

LANCE: That was -

BETTY: Wonderful.

LANCE: Yes, Betty, I couldn't have said it better myself. That was quite a performance.

VLADIMIR: (*Breathlessly, in a heavy accent.*) Thank you, yes?

LANCE: Tell us, Vladimir. How did you learn to dance The Kolomeyka with such precision and grace?

VLADIMIR: (*HE has recovered his breathing somewhat.*) I - I learned - how you say? - at a very young age. My father - he was boss man at the - how should I put it? - at the Koolbasa Kikov Kolomeyka Dancing Academy. He teaching - no, no, he taught me everything he knows. Yes?

LANCE: I see. Well, thank you for being the first of this year's TWITS, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR: (*Expectantly.*) I win, yes?

LANCE: We'll have to wait until the end of the competition to see what our viewers think. (*HE turns back to the imaginary camera.*) And now, ladies and gentlemen, our second contestant of the evening. This young lady comes from the cool climes of Strandinavia. Let's have a big hand for Inge Svenson!

Audience applause. INGE begins with a series of yodels offstage, then waltzes out from the wings stage right. As she reaches down stage, her thirty-second yodeling performance begins. At the midpoint of her short performance, INGE backs up to LANCE'S desk and grabs his glass of water. She demonstrates

great dexterity in being able to yodel and gargle at the same time. When her performance is over, she gives a curtsy, refills LANCE'S water glass, and sits in a chair beside VLADIMIR.

VLADIMIR: (HE shakes her hand.) 'Tis good-yes?

INGE: (SHE speaks with a Swedish accent.) Ya, 'tis good. Tank you wery much.

VLADIMIR expects her to congratulate him, HE is crushed when she doesn't.

LANCE: (HE picks up his water glass.) How do you do that?

INGE: Oh, it's simple really. (SHE goes to his desk, pours water into another glass and hands it to LANCE. LANCE looks confused.)

INGE: (Finally catches on.) Ohhh, you mean this. (SHE picks up the glass and gargles and yodels again.)

LANCE: That was -

BETTY: (Effusively.) - wonderful!

LANCE: Thank you, Betty. Yes, you showed such dexterity.

INGE: Tank you. I learned that - ya - from my mudder who was the tour director on the S.S. Strandinavia. She used to yodel when there was fog in the fjords. One night, God rest her poor departed soul, she fell off the ship, but we could still hear her yodeling as she sank to the bottom of the sea. (SHE sheds a dramatic tear.)

VLADIMIR blows his nose loudly into a large white handkerchief.

LANCE: And you've carried on the tradition, being true to her fine example. (HE sighs.)

INGE: (SHE smiles proudly.) My mudder would be proud, ya?

LANCE/VLADIMIR: (THEY nod in unison.) Ya.

LANCE: Thank you again, Inge. (Looking at another imaginary camera.)

Moving right along, then, to our third contestant of the evening. This man is a veteran of the Tortellini Opera Company where he is currently performing in Rotini's Canneloni. Introducing Linguine Vermacelli.

Audience applause. LINGUINE makes a dramatic entrance from the wings stage left. HE takes his place down center and bows deeply to the audience at which time his shirt and slacks appear to be in imminent danger of popping. HE clears his throat loudly and begins to sing. Approximately half-way through his overly dramatic thirty-second performance, HE makes a grand gesture and sweeps the bandana off his head. HE mops his brow and his chest and, while continuing to sing, repeatedly wrings out the bandana on stage. As his performance comes to an end, HE tosses the bandana into the audience with a great flourish, and sinks to his knees in a theatrical bow. Audience applause. LINGUINE continues to bow deeply, even after the audience has stopped applauding.

LANCE: Linguine Vermicelli, ladies and gentlemen.

LINGUINE continues to bow as HE backs up toward center stage. HE shakes hands with BETTY, LANCE, VLADIMIR, and INGE. As HE sits in a chair beside INGE, HE grabs VLADIMIR'S handkerchief and wipes his own brow.

VLADIMIR: (HE shakes LINGUINE'S hand.) 'Tis good-yes?

LINGUINE: (Definitively.) Si, but of course.

VLADIMIR, still hoping for congratulations of his own performance or even thanks for lending LINGUINE his handkerchief, is crushed, again.

LANCE: Linguine, that was -

BETTY: (*SHE cuts LANCE off.*) - wonderful!

LANCE: Betty, you took the words right out of my mouth. Brilliant performance, Linguine, just brilliant!

LINGUINE: (*HE speaks with an Italian accent.*) Grazias, Mr. Lustre, grazias. It was magnifico, si?

LANCE: (*LANCE nods.*) Si! When did you break into opera, Linguine?

LINGUINE: It was like this, see. One day, I was working backstage at the Tortellini Opera Company. I was in charge of raising and dropping the curtain. Just as the prima donna, Guiseppi Lasagne, was taking his bows at the end of Act One, I dropped the curtain by accident. I tried to save him, you see, by rushing out on to the stage. (*HE wipes his brow again with VLADIMIR'S handkerchief.*) The curtain fell on my leg and broke it in seven places (*HE puts his wrist to his forehead remembering the pain.*) and I yelled at the top of my lungs. Alas, Guiseppi Lasagne was killed. (*HE sheds a theatrical tear, then recovers himself very quickly.*) But the show must go on, si? I put a my leg in a cast and told the director that I would sing the second act. He agreed and the rest, as they say, is history.

LANCE: That's - how you say it - Linguine? Magnifico?

LINGUINE: Si, Mr. Lustre. (*There is no question in his mind.*) I am magnifico, si.

LANCE: Thank you, Linguine. And now for our fourth and final contestant in the TWITS competition, teacher by day, concert violinist by night, please help me welcome Wendy White.

WENDY WHITE makes a dignified entrance from the wings stage right and walks down center, bowing rather graciously to the audience. SHE lifts her violin to her shoulder and begins to play. Her thirty-second performance is serious and brilliant throughout. As it concludes, Wendy gives a simple bow to the audience, returns to center stage, and sits in the last chair beside LINGUINE. Sound, audience applause.

LANCE: Wendy White, ladies and gentlemen.

VLADIMIR: (*HE shakes WENDY'S hand.*) 'Tis good, yes?

WENDY: (*SHE speaks sincerely.*) Why, thank you, Mr. Kikov. I enjoyed your performance as well.

VLADIMIR: (*HE is beaming.*) Thank you, madam.

LINGUINE and INGE look rather threatened by WENDY'S confident style.

LANCE: That performance was -

BETTY: (*Gushy.*) Wonderful, just wonderful.

LANCE: Yes, thank you, Betty. You took the words right out of my mouth, again. A magnificent performance, Wendy.

WENDY: Thank you, Mr. Lustre.

LANCE: Tell us about yourself, Wendy?

WENDY: Certainly, Mr. Lustre. I grew up here in Winterville and took lessons from my grandfather, Sforzando Sonata. When I married my husband, Sand Storm, he encouraged me to continue my violin playing in concerts with the Winterville Symphony which he organized to raise money for charity. My husband died just a short time ago, as you've no doubt heard, but I'm hoping that my stepdaughter, Snow Storm, will follow in her father's generous footsteps and join me in supporting humanitarian work here in Winterville. Apart from that, I've spent most of my life teaching music to young people at the Winterville High School and I find that it is a very rewarding experience.

LANCE: Thank you, Wendy. *(HE looks into another imaginary studio camera.)*
And now that we've seen all our contestants, ladies and gentlemen, it's your turn to -

SNOW STORM: *(SHE shrieks from the dark recesses of the theatre.)* Hey, Lustre, wait just a minute! *(SHE sweeps wildly down the center aisle. SHE stomps up the steps down center and storms on to the stage, stopping beside LANCE'S desk.)*

BETTY, VLADIMIR, INGE, AND LINGUINE display various horrified reactions to SNOW STORM'S intrusion. Only WENDY appears to know what is going on. LANCE is fumbling through the notes on his desk and looking around for assistance from the technical crew offstage. HE is timid when he speaks.

LANCE: Excuse me, is there some kind of problem?

SNOW: *(SHE sputters.)* Problem? I'll say there's a problem. You do know who I am, don't you?

BETTY: *(Raising her hand excitedly.)* Ooo, ooo, I know, I know. You're . . . ah . . . hmm.

WENDY: *(Calmly.)* Mr. Lustre, this is my stepdaughter, Snow Storm.

SNOW: *(To WENDY.)* You keep out of this. You've caused me enough trouble already. *(WENDY shakes her head and looks away.)*

LANCE: *(HE is rather nervous.)* Why, Ms. Storm I hardly recognized you -

SNOW: *(Threateningly.)* Yes, it could well be a fatal error, Mr. Lustre . . . considering I pay your salary. *(SHE sweeps around the desk.)* As the one and only *(SHE gives this word a sinister twist.)* queen of Coverup Cosmetics, the multi-trillion dollar conglomerate which just happens to sponsor this program, I may do whatever I please, Mr. Lustre.

LANCE: *(The tone in his voice suggests that he is bowing and scraping.)* Yes, yes, of course, Ms. Storm.

SNOW: And, in keeping with the spirit of rivalry and competition, I have unilaterally decided that I will be entering the TWITS competition.

LANCE: *(HE protests.)* B-but, Ms. Storm.

SNOW: *(SHE gives Lance a withering glare.)* Yes, Mr. Lustre?

LANCE: *(HE withers.)* I was just going to say, uh, that's a splendid idea!

SNOW: Of course. All my ideas are splendid. Well, let's get on with it. You're wasting my precious time.

LANCE: Certainly, Ms. Storm. Perhaps you'd be so kind as to tell us what you'll be doing for the talent search competition?

SNOW: Please, Mr. Lustre. I am never kind. But since you asked, I'll be reciting a monologue which I composed myself, and I'll be doing it while looking at myself in my mirror.

LANCE: Ladies and gentleman, the reigning queen of Coverup Cosmetics, Ms. Snow Storm.

Audience applause. SNOW struts down center and positions her mirror at a reasonable distance from her face.

SNOW: Hark, what light from yonder mirror breaks
Why it's me, myself, for goodness sakes
(SHE preens herself as SHE gazes into her mirror.)
Mirror, mirror, in my hand,
Who's the fairest in the land?
No wait - don't say I know the truth,

It's me, myself, so full of youth.

SNOW stands in silence, waiting for the audience to respond. When they fail to do so, SHE storms over to one of the "Applause" signs and gives it a kick. Audience applause.

SNOW: That's better. And by the way (*SHE speaks in a sinister tone.*) you will, of course, remember that as queen of Coverup Cosmetics, proud patron of this TWITS competition, I always get my way. (*SHE turns on her heel, storms past LANCE who has come out from behind his desk to greet her, and sits down at the far end of the sofa away from BETTY.*)

LANCE: Ms. Storm that was -

BETTY: - wonderful.

SNOW: (*Arrogantly.*) Well, what did you expect? Surely it's obvious that they saved the best for last.

VLADIMIR: (*HE crosses in front of the desk and attempts to shake SNOW'S hand.*) 'Tis good, yes?

SNOW: (*SHE bats his hand out of the way.*) Get lost! I have to fix my hair. (*SHE runs a hand through her hair as SHE looks in her mirror.*)

VLADIMIR, crushed again, returns to his seat.

LANCE: (*HE seats himself behind the desk and looks into the imaginary camera. Nervously, HE attempts to recover his stride.*) There you have it, ladies and gentlemen, our five - not four - but five finalists for the TWITS competition. Let's give them one more round of applause. Sound, audience applause.

Each of the contestants ad-libs a reaction consistent with his/her personality.

LANCE: And now it's time for you, ladies and gentlemen, to make your decision. I'll call Ms. Bamboozle out here once again with her trusty HOCUS-POCUS Computer Model #94160935.

ANGELICA reenters from the wings stage right pushing the computer to a position down right.

LANCE: Just to review the procedures, our studio audience will use their electronic gizmos (*HE holds up a gizmo.*) while our viewers at home will call 1-800-COVERUP. (*HE points ahead.*) You'll see the number displayed on your screen. Just press the number on the gizmo or touch-tone telephone that corresponds to the contestant that gets your vote. Perhaps we should ask our contestants to stand so that everyone can see their numbers clearly.

Each contestant stands, displaying their numbers prominently. Naturally, SNOW STORM stands in front of the rest so that the audience can get a good look at #5.

LANCE: There you are, ladies and gentlemen, Vladimir Kikov #1, Inge Svenson #2, Linguine Vermicelli #3, Wendy White #4, and Snow Storm #5.

The CONTESTANTS are seated once again. Optional: ANGELICA could roll the computer offstage and reenter with results or stay onstage.

LANCE: So, go ahead, press a number and leave the rest to us. Your choices will be fed into the computer and in just a few minutes, we'll know which one of these talented people will be joining Howard Hunk in Tinseltown on the set of his new movie, Doctor Slash: The Sequel.

If ANGELICA remains onstage, SHE stands behind the computer looking quite shifty. Almost immediately, we hear the sound of computer technology at work. This sound continues until ANGELICA produces the final results. If ANGELICA exited earlier, SHE should reenter here. All of the CONTESTANTS, with the exception of WENDY WHITE, strain to get a look at the results as they are being calculated by the computer or as ANGELICA reenters. When LANCE speaks, they resume their original positions.

LANCE: And now, as we wait for the final results, let's meet our very special guest this evening. Known to millions as Prince Charming of the silver screen, Howard Hunk.

Audience applause. We hear the opening bars of HOWARD'S theme song: Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender." HOWARD enters up the center aisle of the theatre, waving to the audience as he walks up the steps down center. HE stops at the top of the steps. From a pocket in his jacket, HE pulls a small mirror. HE looks at his reflection, adjusting his hair and running moistened fingers over his eyebrows. Then HE bows to the audience and nearly loses his balance as he does. As he turns to walk across the stage to his seat on the sofa, it becomes apparent that HE is having some trouble with his vision. SNOW leaps up and rushes down center to guide HOWARD to a seat beside her on the sofa.

HOWARD: (*Sounds like Elvis when he speaks.*) Thank you, thank you very much.

BETTY: (*In a coy tone.*) Hello, Howard. Remember me?

HOWARD: (*HE squints at her and then puts his hand to his head.*) Can't say that I do. (*Apologetically.*) You'll have to forgive me. I'm having some trouble with my memory.

SNOW: (*SHE speaks icily to Betty.*) How can you possibly expect an idol like Howard Hunk to remember a nobody like you.

BETTY is temporarily crushed.

LANCE: (*HE tries to rescue everyone from the situation.*) Yes, well, moving right along welcome to our show, Howard.

HOWARD: Thank you. Thank you very much.

LANCE: Howard, you've met Betty Blather, last year's TWITS winner and your co-star in Doctor Slash, Wonder Surgeon.

HOWARD: (*HE turns to Betty.*) No kidding? I thought you looked vaguely familiar.

BETTY nods and smiles, her faith in HOWARD restored.

LANCE: And you've met Snow Storm, one of the contestants in this year's TWITS competition.

SNOW: If he's going to remember anyone, it's likely to be me. (*SHE puts her hand under his chin and wrenches his face toward hers.*)

HOWARD: (*HE squints at her.*) Glad to make your acquaintance, I'm sure.

LANCE: And our other contestants, Howard -

As LANCE introduces the other contestants, SNOW repeatedly tries to distract HOWARD and keep his attention focused on her.

LANCE: Vladimir Kikov -

VLADIMIR: (*HE stands to shake hands.*) 'Tis good, yes? (*HE sits.*)

HOWARD: (*HE struggles to make eye contact with anyone but SNOW.*) Huh?

Oh, yes.

LANCE: Inge Svenson -

INGE: *(SHE stands to yodel a greeting.)* Helloooo. *(SHE sits.)*

HOWARD: *(HE chuckles nervously.)* Hi.

LANCE: Linguine Vermicelli -

LINGUINE: *(HE stands and takes a deep bow.)* It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Hunka. *(HE sits.)*

HOWARD: Uh, that's Hunk, Howard Hunk.

LANCE: . . . and Wendy White.

WENDY: *(SHE stands graciously.)* Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hunk.

HOWARD: *(HE finally manages to extract himself from SNOW'S grasp.)* Thank you, thank you very much.

LANCE: Howard, as you sit here, can't you just feel the excitement mounting.

HOWARD: *(HE realizes this is his cue to say something profound. HE squints as HE looks around, attempting to locate the imaginary cue cards which will give him his dialogue for this segment of the show. HE grins when he finds them. When he speaks, it's obvious that HE'S reading.)* Yes - I can - Lance. It - is - indeed - a most - *(Impatiently.)* hold that cue card straight will you! *(Embarrassed and apologetic.)* oh, sorry - a most au-auspicious - auspicious event.

LANCE: Thank you, Howard.

We hear the sound of a gong. The CONTESTANTS turn in unison to look at the computer.

ANGELICA: *(SHE tears off a very long printout of paper from her trusty computer.)* The moment of truth!

LANCE: This is the moment we've all been waiting for, ladies and gentlemen.

The sound of the gong signifies that we have a final decision. *(HE steps out from behind the desk and walks down center.)*

The CONTESTANTS, except WENDY WHITE, follow LANCE down center trying to get a look at the final results, LANCE turns and orders them back to their original seats.

ANGELICA: *(SHE walks down center and hands LANCE the entire printout.)* Here are the results, Mr. Lustre.

LANCE: Thank you. Somewhere on this printout are the final results of tonight's contest. *(HE drops the papers and they scatter. HE gets down on his hands and starts picking up the papers.)* Remember, ladies and gentlemen, the winner tonight receives an all expenses paid trip to Tinseltown to star along side Howard Hunk in Doctor Slash: The Sequel. *(HE finds the paper he needs and leaps to his feet.)* May I ask Howard and Betty and our contestants to join me?

The CONTESTANTS, HOWARD, and BETTY stand behind LANCE in a semicircular arrangement down center. Each character ad-libs his/her unique reaction to the mounting suspense.

LANCE: *(Concealing the results.)* May I have a drum roll please?

Sound, we hear the sound of a drum roll.

LANCE: Our fourth runner up is . . . Vladimir Kikov!

Sound, audience applause.

VLADIMIR: *(Initially, HE is disappointed. Then HE shrugs his shoulders.)* 'Tis good, yes? *(HE bows and shakes hands with HOWARD and BETTY and the other competitors.)*

LANCE: Our third runner up is . . .

We hear the sound of a drum roll.

LANCE: Inge Svenson!

Audience applause.

INGE: *(Initially crestfallen, but recovers with a yodel.)* Thank youoooo. *(SHE bows and shakes hands with HOWARD and BETTY and the other competitors.)*

LANCE: Our second runner up is . . .

Another drum roll.

LANCE: Linguine Vermicelli!

Audience applause.

LINGUINE: *(HE sobs into another handkerchief which he pulls from a pocket in his slacks, then recovering himself bows deeply to the audience and throws kisses in their direction.)* Grazias! Magnifico! Si? *(HE bows and shakes hands with HOWARD and BETTY and the other competitors.)*

LANCE: *(HE is breathless with excitement.)* There are just two contestants remaining. One of these people will be this year's TWITS winner and will be destined for stardom. The other will be our first runner up.

WENDY remains quite composed. SNOW preens herself for certain stardom.

LANCE: May I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that should anything happen to tonight's winner, the first runner up would take her place beside Howard Hunk. And now the name of the first runner up is

We hear the sound of another drum roll.

LANCE: . . . Snow Storm! That means our winner is Wendy White!

Audience applause.

SNOW STORM: *(Shrieks with disbelief.)* What? There's got to be a mistake. *(SHE grabs the paper out of LANCE'S hand. SHE reads the results and tears the paper to shreds.)* No, no this can't be true! *(SHE is furiously out of control.)* I always get what I want!

WENDY: *(SHE expresses surprise, covers her face, then bows graciously to the audience.)* Thank you, thank you everyone.

SNOW: *(SHE stomps over to ANGELICA.)* Your trusty computer seems to have made a fatal mistake.

ANGELICA: *(SHE appears to be surprised by the results as well, but tries to cover her amazement by hunting nervously through the mound of paper discarded by LANCE. SHE then punches several keys of the computer.)* My computer doesn't lie, Ms. Storm. I'm sure there's a logical explanation.

SNOW screams as she chases ANGELICA and her computer into the wings stage right.

BETTY: *(While WENDY is bowing and SNOW is storming, BETTY walks to the wings stage left, retrieves a presentation bouquet of red roses and returns down center and sheds a theatrical tear before hugging WENDY, giving her the flowers, and gushing profusely.)* Congratulations, Wendy White. May your star rise high in the skies of Tinseltown!

HOWARD: *(HE removes the mirror from his pocket to check his appearance again. HE slicks down his toupee with his hand.)* Madam, may I have the privilege of escorting you home in my white limousine?

WENDY: *(SHE is genuinely touched.)* Why, thank you, Howard, that would be lovely.

HOWARD takes WENDY'S hand and they walk together down the steps down center waving as they exit via the center aisle of the theatre.

LANCE: There she goes, ladies and gentlemen, Wendy White, tonight the winner of the TWITS competition; tomorrow a starlet of Tinseltown. Good bye, Wendy White. Good bye, Howard Hunk.

All characters on stage wave goodbye to WENDY and HOWARD. Audience applause.

LANCE: And good night to you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for watching Tonight's Entertainment. This is Lance Lustre reminding you to tune in again tomorrow night as we gaze at the stars.

Sound, we hear the final bars of the theme song "That's Entertainment." Stage lights dim.

AUDIO TECHNICIAN: *(Offstage amplified voice.)* And we're away.

All characters on stage freeze in position.

SNOW: *(SHE bursts through the door up right and storms the length of the stage to stand at the top of the down center steps. SHE speaks quietly and intensely with a sinister edge to her voice.)* Should anything happen to tonight's winner, the first runner up will take her place beside Howard Hunk *(SHE grins malevolently at the audience, before she bolts down the steps and exits via the center aisle of the theatre.)*

Lights, quick cut to black. CURTAIN. Intermission.

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