

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Pat Cook

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CAUGHT IN THE ACT

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 MEN, 11 WOMEN, OPTIONAL EXTRAS)

MYRON.....Janitor and handyman for the theatre.
(57 lines)

LUCY.....Rather flighty assistant director.
(168 lines)

GRACIE.....Director with high blood pressure.
(232 lines)

CALI.....Darla's best friend. *(45 lines)*

CHUCKActor who's just there to do his job.
(33 lines)

HELENAn actress who jumps to conclusions.
(60 lines)

MARJORIE.....Slightly daffy. *(72 lines)*

SYLVIA.....An actress who's a bit over the top.
(49 lines)

JANLoves to eat, likes to act. *(55 lines)*

FREDDIE.....An actor who's a bit green. *(48 lines)*

ACEA rather suave, glib actor. *(59 lines)*

DENAAn actress who's seen it all. *(64 lines)*

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PAGE.....A teenage actress, not very focused.
(36 lines)

MADGE.....An older costume designer. (13 lines)

DARLA.....The new actress on the block. (54 lines)

SERGEANT HAWKE.....A police sergeant with a mustache.
Could double as a mover. (38 lines)

MR. HABERSHAWThe meek owner of the theatre, could
double as a mover. (26 lines)

MR. LATTIMERMiddle-aged businessman. Could
double as a mover. (4 lines)

MOVERS.....Extras, could be played by cast
members. (5 lines)

TIME AND PLACE

A present day theatre stage.

COSTUMES

Modern costumes with the exception of the following: ACE/FREDDIE: Top hat, gloves, and cape (of British influence); DENA: Stylish hat and woman's cape (of British influence); JAN: Loud Hawaiian shirt, pith helmet, blue jeans, and cowboy boots; SERGEANT HAWKE: Pants, shirt and tie as investigator but dresses like an English Bobby (black helmet with chin strap, high-collared tunic with insignia, straight-legged black trousers with billy club, and rubber shoes) in Act Two. (See a picture of an English Bobby at www.circlehome.com/html/bobbie.html.)

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PACING

The dialogue in this farce is quick and sarcastic. The entrances and exits are fast-paced as well. It will take a few rehearsals to master the “door slamming” scene, but the audience will thoroughly enjoy the breakneck action and hilarious mix-ups this scene offers.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: First meeting.

SCENE 2: First rehearsal.

SCENE 3: One week later.

SCENE 4: The following week.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Rehearsals, a few nights later.

SCENE 2: Rehearsals, a few nights later

SCENE 3: Opening night, a half hour before curtain.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING:

The pandemonium opens on a bare stage. Only the walls and doors of the set are in place; the first door is stage right, the second door on the upstage wall, the third door also on the upstage wall near stage left and the fourth door on the stage left wall.

At RISE:

After a slight pause, MYRON opens the stage left door and enters slowly, carrying a folding chair under each arm and moves to stage right where he laboriously opens each chair and places them beside each other. He then, equally slowly, crosses the stage to stage right and exits.

Then, LUCY enters stage left, looking out into the audience. She smiles and nods. She notices the chairs and, shaking her head, picks them up and moves them stage left. After placing them side by side, she exits stage right.

MYRON enters stage left, carrying two more chairs. He moves to stage right and places them on the stage next to where the other two previously stood. After setting them up, he notices the first two are missing. He looks around and finally sees them stage left. He scratches his head and then moves to the first two chairs and replaces them to their original positions. He then exits stage left.

LUCY enters again from stage right, this time looking at her clipboard, checking off a few items. She starts to sit where she had placed one of the chairs. Just in time, she notices the chair is gone and clumsily regains her balance. She then sees the four chairs and shakes her head. She puts her clipboard down and crosses to the chairs where she picks up two chairs and moves them stage right. As she crosses to get the other two chairs she passes MYRON, who enters from stage left with two more chairs. MYRON puts his chairs down at the same time as LUCY picks up two chairs. He looks curiously at the empty space and then crosses stage left. Again, they pass each other. MYRON picks up two chairs and moves back stage right. LUCY sees the new chairs and picks them up. They meet center stage.

LUCY: Hold it, hold it!

MYRON: What?

LUCY: What're you doing?

MYRON: Setting up the chairs for the auditions.

LUCY: So am I.

MYRON: I thought I was going crazy.

LUCY: The chairs go stage left.

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MYRON: Stage left?

LUCY: You got it.

MYRON then walks to the stage left chairs and moves the chairs stage right. LUCY picks up two chairs stage right and moves them to stage left. Again, they pass each other. They both place the chairs and meet back in the middle.

LUCY: Hold it, hold it.

MYRON: What?

LUCY: I said stage LEFT!

MYRON: Right.

LUCY: No, left.

MYRON: That's what I said.

LUCY: You said right.

MYRON: Because you said left.

LUCY: STAGE left!

MYRON: This IS left.

LUCY: Right!

MYRON: That's what I said!

LUCY: No, you're putting them right.

MYRON: Then what're you complaining about?

LUCY: STAGE right! You're putting them stage RIGHT.

MYRON: Hold it. This is the stage, right?

LUCY: (*Points stage right.*) No, that is the stage right.

MYRON: I need a map, where am I?

LUCY: Center stage.

MYRON: I know, the center where we do all the shows.

LUCY: But you're at center stage.

MYRON: And the chairs go on the left.

LUCY: No, they go on stage left!

MYRON: But I'm putting the chairs on the left of the stage.

LUCY: Yes, but the left of the stage is not stage left.

MYRON: You do it. (*He folds his arms and watches.*)

LUCY: Fine.

LUCY moves to stage right, picks up the two chairs and moves them to stage left.

MYRON: This is right?

LUCY: Left.

MYRON: (*Frustrated.*) I mean this is correct!

LUCY: Now you got it.

MYRON: But it's to the right.

LUCY: You face out, idiot! (*She turns him to face the audience.*) See? Everything in theatre, all the directions, are from the standpoint of facing the audience. So, when they say stage left . . .

MYRON: Then they go over there. (*He points stage left.*)

LUCY: 'Atta boy. Now, can we get the rest of the chairs?

MYRON: Sure. (*He crosses stage left and looks back.*) They're over here. Stage left. (*He smiles proudly and exits.*)

LUCY: What a crouton! (*She exits after him.*)

GRACIE enters from stage right and looks around. She sees the chair stage left and shakes her head. She calls off.

GRACIE: Cali? Will you help me with the chairs?

CALI enters, reading a script.

CALI: What?

GRACIE: (*Crosses to the chairs.*) Help me with these chairs. (*She picks up two and exits stage right.*)

CALI: Gotcha. (*She stuffs the book into her jacket and picks up two more chairs and follows GRACIE off stage right.*)

LUCY enters from stage left and places two chairs down. She notices some of the chairs are now missing.

LUCY: Myron, you did it again! (*She exits stage left.*)

GRACIE and CALI enter from stage right and pick up the four remaining chairs and carry them off stage right. LUCY and MYRON enter from stage left, and LUCY points to the empty space.

LUCY: I said we put the rest of the chairs right here with others. (*She notices the chairs have disappeared.*)

MYRON: What others?

LUCY: Didn't we put chairs here?

MYRON: You mean stage here?

LUCY: Oh, don't be so stupid! Where are the chairs we put up?

MYRON: This place is haunted.

LUCY: YOU'RE the one that's haunted.

MYRON: Okay, then where are the chairs?

LUCY: You're doing this on purpose just to make me look like a fool in front of all these people.

MYRON: No, that's just one of the perks.

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LUCY: *(Turns to the audience.)* We'll be with you in a minute. *(GRACIE enters from stage left with CALI, talking quietly with each other.)* We'll get the auditions started just as soon as our director arrives and . . . *(MYRON taps her on the shoulder and points to GRACIE.)* What? *(She sees GRACIE.)*

MYRON: She has arrived.

LUCY: Oh. *(She crosses to GRACIE.)* Gracie, we were just taking care of the chairs.

GRACIE: What chairs?

LUCY turns and points stage left and then shakes her head.

LUCY: You have to take my word for this, we had a flock of chairs right -

GRACIE: Don't worry about it. Let's get this thing underway.

LUCY: *(Faces the audience.)* Now, as all of you know, or some of you know, or maybe only two or three of you know, or maybe none of you know . . .

GRACIE: You don't have a social life, do you?

LUCY: Huh?

GRACIE: *(Faces out.)* Okay, our next production is "Hark, Hark, the Dumplings." I'm Gracie Klench, the person who vowed never to direct another show again but got blackmailed into directing another show again. Now, if you will all try to behave, no one will get hurt. Okay? Who wants to go first?

The four of them look out for a medium pause. Then, as GRACIE starts to speak again, all "Hades" breaks loose as a CROWD descends upon them from the audience. They could also enter from the wings if necessary. They are all talking at once.

CHUCK: Okay, I didn't know if we were supposed to bring something or just read from the scripts. I have something, but it's out in the car. And it's not really a play as far as I know. I mean, it could've been made into a play by now, but what I have isn't a play.

HELEN: *(Same time as CHUCK.)* That's the play the committee chose? Whoever heard of "Hark, Hark, the Dumplings?" That's no title for a theatre piece. It sounds like some recipe for Colonel Sanders. And please, don't tell me it's a musical. I didn't come all the way down here just to sing off key.

MARJORIE: *(Same time as HELEN.)* Can I go first? I know you're not supposed to play favorites, but I left my cat inside and she gets real mad if she's left alone for long periods of time. One time, she ate one of my sock monkeys. I mean, I'm not sure she ate it, but it was missing and she had this real funny expression on her face.

SYLVIA: (*Same time as MARJORIE.*) Are there any women's parts at all in this thing? You didn't say anything about the male-female ratio, and I will NOT play a man again. Also, I won't play anyone older than forty, which of course is a stretch for me, I just get tired of being type cast. Oh, and I'm not playing any animals again, either.

FREDDIE: (*Same time as SYLVIA, to the others.*) Where'd you park? I parked out front, is that all right? Where'd YOU park? Is parking out front okay? I don't want to get towed again. I parked next to someone, a blue Chevy. Is that yours, Sylvia? I hope not. You were the one I parked next to the LAST time I got towed. Did everybody park out front? Where'd YOU park?

JAN: (*Same time as FREDDIE.*) Did anybody bring any donuts? I didn't have time for dinner and I could use a little energy food. I don't normally eat refined sugar but in a pinch I'll make the sacrifice. Anybody? What about a candy bar? Anybody have a Snickers on them? How about a Reeses Peanut Butter Cup? Candy Kisses? Chewing gum? I'll take anything.

DENA: (*Same time as JAN.*) I thought we were going to do one of the classics this go-round. I should've known better. Do we ever do Tennessee Williams? No. Or O'Neill? No. Not even Shakespeare. Does anyone here ever read? Every time it's something like "Polly Gets A Rash" or "Not With My Armadillo, You Don't." Who CHOOSES these things?

ACE: (*Same time as DENA.*) Hey, I have a wonderful idea for the show. Let's do it as a dinner theatre. We can set up tables in the lobby and out in front of the theatre. You know, al fresco, with umbrellas over the tables and maybe smaller ones in the drinks. Then we can charge more and save money by buying cheap chickens.

PAGE: (*Same time as ACE.*) My mother said I have to be home at ten and no ifs, ands or buts. And that includes all rehearsals. I can go to ten-thirty on show nights, but that's all. I don't think she trusts me. Okay, there was that time I didn't come home for three days, but I have a life, too, you know. Anyway, that was an emergency. I thought I was getting married. Silly me.

GRACIE: (*During the m el e.*) Hey . . . HEY . . . HEY! (*EVERYONE gets quiet.*) Good, maybe I won't have to bring duct tape to rehearsals this time.

CHUCK: Where's the chairs?

LUCY: Shut up.

ACE: (*To JAN.*) Maybe they're next to the donuts.

JAN: You think?

LUCY: Will everybody settle down? Let's get this thing started.

CHUCK nudges FREDDIE, and they exit stage left.

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GRACIE: Okay, let's just get to the readings. I have several scenes ready . . . (*She looks at LUCY.*) . . . where are they?

LUCY: Oh, the scenes! They're out in my car, and I thought, hey, I'll get them!

She exits stage right.

GRACIE: Like talking to a black hole.

CHUCK and FREDDIE each bring on two chairs and set them up.

DENA: I don't like the play we're doing.

GRACIE: Okay, a show of hands. Anybody care? (*No one raises their hands. To DENA.*) You will bear with us, won't you, princess?

DENA: Just thought I'd mention it.

CHUCK and FREDDIE exit. MYRON watches this and shrugs. He then exits after them and the three of them bring on six more chairs.

PAGE: If I'm going to be late, I need you to write me a note.

GRACIE: (*Threatening.*) Hey, if you don't get in the play, then you won't be late.

PAGE: If I write it, will you sign it?

MADGE enters quietly, carrying a tape measure and note pad. She moves up behind SYLVIA and measures her back.

GRACIE: Okay, no new faces here, so I have a pretty good idea what all of you are capable of. And I also know what you'll resort to. (*She eyes DENA.*)

DENA: She retorted, staring at me only. (*She sits in a chair.*)

JAN and PAGE also sit.

SYLVIA: (*To MADGE.*) Hey, hey, hey, Madge, what're you doing?

MADGE: Just getting a jump on the costumes, do you mind, dearie? (*She writes in her pad.*) Twenty-eight. You ever play football?

SYLVIA: I wear a size ten.

MADGE: Yeah, in a shoe.

HELEN: We get any free tickets this time?

GRACIE: Only those we can't sell.

DENA: Lots of free tickets. (*She pats the chair next to her, and HELEN sits.*)

GRACIE: Does anybody know if anybody else is coming?

ACE: Operators are standing by.

MADGE moves to ACE and begins to measure the back of his pants.

MARJORIE: Is Viola here?

GRACIE: Is she coming?

MARJORIE: Is she here?

GRACIE: No.

MARJORIE: She may be coming.

GRACIE: How do you know?

MARJORIE: Well, she's not here.

ACE jumps as MADGE runs the tape measure from his heel up to the back of his pants.

ACE: Oooh, Madge, I never knew you had these feelings.

MADGE: Cool it.

MADGE takes a few more measurements.

GRACIE: Okay, you'll all notice that I started auditions on a bare stage. I don't want anybody sitting down, we're all going to be on our feet and . . . *(She turns and sees half the group sitting in chairs.)* Where'd these chairs come from?

FREDDIE looks under a chair.

CALI: I didn't have anything to do with that.

DENA: Hear the kissy noises? *(She puts a hand up to her ear.)* Hark.

FREDDIE: The South Side Baptist Church *(Put a local church name in here.)*

GRACIE: What?

FREDDIE: That's where the chairs came from.

SYLVIA: *(Appalled.)* We stole chairs from a church?

CALI: They gave them to us?

SYLVIA: We're THAT poor?

HELEN: Only in money, talent and spirit.

GRACIE: Get those chairs off the stage.

The people seated grumble and get up.

HELEN: I just sat down!

MYRON: Where do you want them? Stage right or stage left?

GRACIE: *(Menacingly.)* Move them over by the air conditioner, Myron. *(She points stage left.)*

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MYRON: People don't know what I have to put up with. *(He picks up two chairs and exits stage left. He continues to remove the chairs until they are all struck from the stage. When he gets to DENA, she "shoos" him away and refuses to get up. He shrugs and watches the others.)*

GRACIE: Okay, does anybody here have any conflicts?

PAGE: Not if you'll sign my note.

GRACIE: Enough. Anybody else?

ACE: I have an audience with the Pope on the fifth. *(GRACIE shoots him a dirty look. He smiles sheepishly.)* He'll understand. *(A few chuckles from the group.)*

LUCY enters and looks around.

MARJORIE: Can we get started? My cat doesn't see me in two hours and she goes for the tropical fish.

GRACIE: *(Sees LUCY.)* We're getting started. *(To LUCY.)* Where's the scenes?

LUCY: Just a second. *(To the others.)* Anybody know how to get into a locked car?

GRACIE: That does it, I'm moving to New Zealand.

CHUCK: Myron, can you turn down the air conditioner? It's so cold in here I can see my breath.

HELEN: Face facts, Chuck, it doesn't have to be cold to see YOUR breath.

CHUCK: I hope we have a love scene.

DARLA enters down the aisle [or from stage right] and watches for a moment.

GRACIE: Can someone go out and help Lucy get into her car?

ACE: And bring me a burger.

JAN: And some french fries.

GRACIE: Myron?

MYRON: What?

GRACIE: Can you get Lucy into her car?

MYRON: And she calls ME stupid!

LUCY: Oh, don't be so obtuse! *(She exits off stage right. MYRON blinks and stands for a minute, thinking.)*

GRACIE: Then we can get started when she gets back.

MYRON: Obtuse? *(He exits after LUCY.)*

DARLA: Excuse me?

GRACIE: Okay, this show calls for a cast of fifteen, eleven women and four men.

FREDDIE: *(Shoots a hand up.)* Ooh, I want to play a man this time, okay?

DARLA: Pardon me?

GRACIE: *(Turns to her.)* What?

DARLA: Is this where the auditions are being held? I'm new here.

EVERYONE else gasps in unison and a few draw back from her.

MARJORIE: New?

SYLVIA: She IS new.

ACE: And different.

DENA: *(Still seated, dryly.)* Let's burn her at the stake.

GRACIE: And you are?

DARLA: Darla.

GRACIE: *(Writes it down.)* Last name?

DARLA: Gundlefinger.

GRACIE: No, really.

DARLA: Really.

GRACIE: Gundlefinger?

JAN: Sounds like a candy bar.

HELEN: To you, EVERYTHING sounds like a candy bar.

CALI moves over to DARLA.

CALI: This is the place, Darla. *(She turns to the others.)* She works with me down at the soap factory.

DARLA: I'm in lather.

ACE: Me, too. *(HELEN elbows him.)* Oof!

MADGE moves to DARLA and begins measuring her.

DARLA: *(While watching MADGE.)* I . . . I've always heard about your little group here, and it always sounded like fun.

PAGE: Can you forge signatures?

CHUCK: She could always try the Carousel Community Theatre.

Three members hiss, two others boo.

DARLA: Carousel Community Theatre, who're they?

CALI: Our rivals.

HELEN: Our worst enemy.

DENA: And they do better shows than we do.

The same members who hissed and booed, turn to her and hiss and boo her.

GRACIE: Have you ever done anything before on stage?

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ACE: In front of an audience? (*HELEN elbows him again.*) What IS it with you, Helen, somebody drop a house on your sister?

GRACIE: (*To ACE and HELEN.*) Do you mind?!

DARLA: Well, I've done a few things.

CALI: A few things. She was in a tour show once and an understudy!

CHUCK: So naturally she works in a soap factory.

DARLA: It's one of the better smelling factories.

CHUCK/ACE/HELEN/MARJORIE: Ohhhh!

DARLA: I'll be glad to fill out any questionnaire, give you a resume, fingerprints, blood sample - -

GRACIE: Not necessary.

ACE: What about the fingerprints?

FREDDIE: Well, I have a question.

GRACIE: What?

FREDDIE: Do they still use horses to make soap?

DARLA: No!

DENA: You'll have to forgive him, dear. When he was born, his parents were expecting a human.

GRACIE: (*Turns to DENA.*) Dena, hush up. And GET up. Where'd you get that chair?

DENA: The Pope. (*GRACIE moves to her and glowers.*) Well, since Ace cancelled his audience . . . (*A few chuckles from the group. She shrugs and gets up. GRACIE takes the chair and moves it downstage right.*)

GRACIE: Okay. Does anyone have anything prepared?

PAGE: You said we didn't have to have anything.

GRACIE: And you don't, do you?

PAGE: (*Proudly.*) That's right.

GRACIE: Then what're you complaining about?

PAGE: I . . . (*She looks at the others.*) I think I lost my place.

GRACIE: Darla, why do you want to be in our show here?

ACE: Do you date co-actors?

HELEN: Smooth, Ace.

DARLA: I don't think so.

ACE: (*Moves DARLA downstage right.*) Well, just tell the li'l ol' director whatever yore li'l ol' heart desires.

MADGE is now measuring HELEN.

HELEN: (*As an announcer.*) Bachelor number one comes from the state of desperation. His hobbies are breathing heavily and writing his phone number on bathroom walls. He'll take a fax number if you don't want to give out your phone number.

GRACIE: (*Now seated.*) Give Darla room, folks.

ACE: (*Like a cop.*) Okay, everybody, move along, nothing more to see here, come on now. Hit 'em up, move 'em out . . .

A solo light slowly comes up on DARLA while the stage lights dim out on the others.

GRACIE: You want to be on stage because . . . ?

DARLA: Oh, uh . . . well, it's the only show in town. I mean, when you think about it . . . it's not something you have to think about. You simply want to act. Get up on some dark stage, pretend to be somebody you're not, in front of a crowd of strangers and say a bunch of lines you probably don't understand. And yet, as odd as it may sound, that makes you happy. Like I said, it's the only show in town.

Her LIGHT dims out and a solo LIGHT comes up downstage left on CALI.

CALI: Huh? Oh, me? I like belonging to the group. In high school, I was never really part of a group, part of anything. But here, well, I know everybody and they know me. Even when we get new people, I know they are a lot like me. You know, a common, what they call, bond thingie. We're ALL a part of it. The group . . . made up mostly of people who couldn't get into any other group. Wait! Can I start over? *(Her LIGHT dims.)* I guess not. *(It dims out.)*

The downstage right LIGHT comes up on FREDDIE.

FREDDIE: I'm here mainly because I once came down to pick Ace up from a rehearsal and the next thing I knew I was in the opening scene. I was really looking for the class on welding. I don't know if I'm a good actor, but I still can't weld worth a flip.

The downstage right LIGHT dims out and the downstage left LIGHT comes up on JAN.

JAN: Uhhhh, it keeps me from eating.

Her LIGHT dims out and the downstage right LIGHT comes up on PAGE.

PAGE: I read this story one time in People magazine about somebody, I don't remember who it was, and how she didn't have much self confidence? So she took a chance and joined this group, I don't remember where, and that really helped her. Now she's won all sorts of awards, I can't remember which ones, and is happily to be married to old what's-his-name. Oh, and it's really helped my memory.

Her LIGHT fades out and the downstage left LIGHT comes up on HELEN.

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HELEN: I saw an ad, you know the one, talking about auditions for a play here. I thought I'd give it a whirl, see if I had some of those creative instincts it mentioned. Find out if I had what it took to delve into my inner soul and find a spark of untapped talent, but really I auditioned to meet new friends . . . boyfriends in particular. It was either this or take that welding class.

Her LIGHT dims out and the downstage right LIGHT comes up on CHUCK. He looks out and opens his mouth.

CHUCK: Uh.

LIGHT dims out quickly. The downstage left LIGHT comes up on ACE.

ACE: The guy in front of me said everything I was going to say.

His LIGHT dims out and the downstage right LIGHT comes up on MARJORIE.

MARJORIE: It's fun. *(She looks around.)* Isn't it? It's like playing, pretending, sort of. I've always been afraid of growing up, you know? Growing up like our parents, just work day after day and nothing in between. That's what I remember most about adults when I was a kid. This is like recess. *(She looks around again.)* And I think it's a little like therapy.

Her LIGHT dims out and the downstage left LIGHT comes up on no one. Then DENA speaks from the darkness.

DENA: *(Flatly.)* I just like being in the spotlight.

Her LIGHT dims out and the downstage right LIGHT comes up on SYLVIA.

SYLVIA: It gets me out of the house. Charley won't take me anywhere, no matter how many times I ask . . . let's go somewhere, ANYwhere, I don't care where, dinner, dancing, ballgame, do you think he ever listens? No, he's got his buddies down at the garage, and that's all. I told him if he won't take me anywhere, I'll get IN a show and then he'll HAVE to come see one. I've been with this group for eight years and so far he hasn't stepped foot inside the building.

Her LIGHT dims out and the downstage left LIGHT comes up on MYRON.

MYRON: *(Scratching his rear end.)* They pay me to be here.

His LIGHT dims out and the downstage right LIGHT comes up on LUCY.

LUCY: I think I'm here because right now I can't get into my car to leave.
(She looks around.) Does anybody belong to a car club?

GRACIE walks into LUCY'S LIGHT and glares at her. She then faces out.

GRACIE: Rehearsals start Monday, everybody. Mr. William Shakespeare? Please forgive us, we're just beginners!

Her LIGHT dims out. BLACKOUT.

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CAUGHT IN THE ACT

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

First rehearsal. The LIGHTS come up to half. Two movers [they can be members of the cast] move furniture on stage. MOVER 1 brings out an end table and places it almost center stage. MOVER 2 brings out a coffee table and places it downstage left near the end table. Then, they both exit and bring out a love seat. As they near the coffee table, they begin pulling in opposite directions. Then, in quiet voices, they speak.

MOVER 1: This goes over here.

MOVER 2: No, it goes over here.

MOVER 1: She said stage left.

MOVER 2: What?

MOVER 1: Stage left!

MOVER 2: I thought that was over here?

MOVER 1: Let's just put it down right here.

They place the love seat near the coffee table and start to exit, arguing with each other.

MOVER 2: Well, you didn't have to snap at me.

MOVER 1: Get in the middle of something, carrying a ton of furniture and THAT'S when you get technical.

MOVER 2: I just asked!

They exit stage left. LIGHTS come up full. MARJORIE and JAN enter from stage right carrying scripts. However, they don't look at the scripts during the next exchange. JAN sits and looks up at MARJORIE.

MARJORIE: *(Looks out, melodramatically mournful.)* I'm afraid. I've just been given tragic news this morning. It's - -

JAN: Yes?

MARJORIE: It's - -

JAN: Yes?

MARJORIE: It's - -

JAN: Yes?

MARJORIE: *(Looks suddenly at JAN.)* It's Sir Harry. He's dead.

JAN: No!

MARJORIE: During his afternoon fox hunt. Horse fell under him. *(She tries to sit next to her, and it's a tight squeeze. They adjust clumsily and finally continue.)* It all happened so quickly. Of course, they had to shoot him.

JAN: Sir Harry?

MARJORIE: The horse. Oh, he was the pride of the whole countryside.

JAN: The horse?

MARJORIE: Sir Harry. What a game hunter he was, too.

JAN: Sir Harry?

MARJORIE: The horse. He sired quite a brood, you know.

JAN: The horse.

MARJORIE: Sir Harry. Oh, how we all loved putting him to bed at night.

JAN looks at her for a long pause.

JAN: Going to be a coin toss on this one.

GRACIE enters from stage right, waving her script.

GRACIE: It doesn't say that!

JAN: It's a little confusing.

GRACIE: It's supposed to be. That's where all the conflict comes from later.

MARJORIE: You want conflict, try to get us up out of this love seat.
(She tries to get up.)

JAN: Hey!

GRACIE: Hang on. *(Putting the script under her arm, she takes MARJORIE'S hand and, with one great yank, extracts her from the sofa.)*

MARJORIE: Thank you.

GRACIE: *(To someone off.)* Make a note. Get a bigger sofa.

JAN: But it's supposed to be confusing this early in the show?

GRACIE: We're trying to fool the audience here. And, at the same time, start the plot. You have to make a big to-do about the plot. And here is where the plot starts, and it has to sound confusing.

LUCY enters from stage right, carrying a note.

LUCY: Gracie, I just got a phone call for someone.

GRACIE: Who?

LUCY: They said I was to tell J.D. that the backer will be in the audience opening night.

MARJORIE: What?

JAN: Backer?

GRACIE: Wait a minute, there's nobody here named J.D.

LUCY: That's what I said, but they told me to post the note anyway.

GRACIE: Backer?

JAN: *(Looks at the note.)* But we're already opening here and - -

MARJORIE: Wait just a ding dong minute there, Scarlett. A backer wants to see this show?

GRACIE: It's probably a prank.

MARJORIE: That means they want to put money in the show.

JAN: And then do what?

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

GRACIE: (*Indicates JAN.*) Nothing! Forget it, it's just a note.

MARJORIE: We better get better and fast!

JAN: A producer is coming to see the show!

ACE and FREDDIE enter from stage left.

GRACIE: Now don't start this! All we need right now is a bunch of false rumors.

MARJORIE: Hey, it might be a real rumor.

GRACIE: Just drop it, okay?

ACE: What's the scene here, folks?

JAN: A producer is coming to see the show!

ACE: A producer?

FREDDIE: You mean somebody wants us to take "Hark, Hark, the Dumplings" on tour?

GRACIE: Nobody said anything about a tour!

ACE: Then why is a producer interested in the show?

GRACIE: It's just a note!

LUCY: To J.D.

FREDDIE: Who's J.D.?

GRACIE: Nobody.

FREDDIE: Nobody? Nobody gets a note here?

ACE: Nobody gets more mail than I do.

LUCY: Or she does.

FREDDIE: That's right, it could be a she!

MARJORIE: So she has a backer coming to take the show on tour?

JAN: Or maybe even further.

GRACIE: Hold it . . .

FREDDIE: What do you mean?

JAN: How about taking the show to the Great White Way?

GRACIE: (*Indicates JAN.*) This from the great white shark.

SYLVIA and DENA enter from stage right.

LUCY: Okay, what's J.D. stand for?

DENA: Juvenile delinquent?

SYLVIA: Junior development?

ACE: Jack Daniels? (*EVERYONE stares at him.*) Hey, I went to college!

LUCY: (*To DENA.*) Did you hear?

SYLVIA: What?

GRACIE: Nothing!

LUCY: We're going to Broadway!

GRACIE: Will you STOP! (*EVERYONE looks at her.*) All we have is one note from somebody nobody knows to somebody else nobody ever heard of! And look at you! Flying off in all directions! You people are the worst gossips in the world.

The GROUP sheepishly looks at each other.

JAN: (*After a slight pause.*) She started it.

MARJORIE: I did not!

GRACIE: ALL of you!

LUCY: I should've just given you the note first, shouldn't I?

GRACIE: That's right.

LUCY: I'm sorry.

GRACIE: That's okay.

LUCY: By the way, you told me to remind you when it's time to take your pill.

GRACIE: Oh, right. Go over your lines, everybody. Be right back. (*She exits stage right with LUCY.*)

MARJORIE: Pill?

JAN: She's taking pills?

MARJORIE: Wonder what for?

FREDDIE: You know she HAS been a bit pale lately.

DENA: Oh, all vampires look like that.

ACE: Probably for her blood pressure.

SYLVIA: You think?

ACE: Yeah, notice how every time she gives me a direction that vein in her neck really sticks out?

FREDDIE: Looks like the Mississippi River. Ooh! I bet that means heart problems!

JAN: She's got heart problems?!

MARJORIE: That must be it! She keeps saying that this is her last show. What if she means this is . . . her last show?

GRACIE enters from stage right, and the GROUP turns to her and gasps.

GRACIE: What, everybody give up smoking today?

SYLVIA: (*Moves to her.*) Are you all right?

MARJORIE: Had any fainting spells?

ACE: Want to lie down?

DENA: That's your answer for everything.

GRACIE: What's going on now? Oh, wait. The pills.

JAN: It's okay, we understand.

SYLVIA: Do you need someone to drive you home?

JAN: I like the chewables.

MARJORIE: There's a bulletin.

SYLVIA: I had to take pills before.

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DENA: What a revelation.

GRACIE: It's nothing! I just . . . Go back to the rumor about the backer.

MARJORIE: Oh, right. *(To the others.)* We're going to Broadway!

Three members cheer. CALI and DARLA enter stage right.

ACE: I always said we'd make it, with talent like . . . well, me, for one.

FREDDIE: You're so modest.

ACE: Sincerity, that's the key. If you can fake that, you can fake anything.

GRACIE: Can we get back to rehearsing?

CALI: What's all the rhubarb?

JAN: Rhubarb?

CALI: My dad worked in a circus.

MARJORIE: A backer's coming to take the show to New York. We got a note.

GRACIE: It didn't say anything about New York! And WE didn't get any note. It was for someone named J.D.

CALI: J.D.? Oh, that's Darla.

DARLA: Yeah.

ACE/SYLVIA/GRACIE: You're J.D.?

DENA: Now it's a Greek chorus.

DARLA: Jeanette Darla, that's my name.

CALI: We call her J.D. down at the factory.

MARJORIE: You got a note about some backer coming to opening night!

JAN: Yeah, tell us all about it!

DARLA: A backer? *(She realizes.)* Oh, wait. He probably said "packer." Max, one of the guys from packing, probably called. He's a packer.

The GROUP suddenly "deflates."

ACE/FREDDIE/SYLVIA/MARJORIE: Ohhh!

GRACIE: See? What'd I tell you?

JAN: We were so close.

DENA: *(Sarcastically.)* Yeah, just a few phone calls away.

GRACIE: Can we get back to rehearsing now? Please?

MARJORIE: What for? We're not going anywhere.

GRACIE: Oh, everybody, take a five minute break!

The GROUP mumbles to each other as they exit, leaving CALI and DARLA. CALI waits until they're off stage, then turns to DARLA.

CALI: We don't have a packing section at the factory. So how could you know a packer?

DARLA: (*Quietly.*) I don't.

CALI: Then, if that call wasn't from a packer, it really was from a . . . ? (*Her eyes widen and she starts to scream, but DARLA shoves a hand over her mouth. She nods.*)

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

It is now a week later. LUCY enters stage right and looks over her script. She then looks out as if trying to see someone in the back.

LUCY: Hey, Arthur? You have the sound working yet? (*No response.*) Arthur? Is the sound working? (*Just then a train whistle is heard.*) Okay. What about the seagulls? (*Sound of seagulls rings out.*) Fine. Just hang around and we'll run a few others when we need them. Arthur? Can you hear me? (*A foghorn sounds.*) Cute.

HELEN enters through the stage left door waving her script. As she enters, the sound of a horse galloping is heard. She stops and yells at ARTHUR.

HELEN: That's not funny! (*To LUCY.*) Can we do something about him?

LUCY: Like what?

HELEN: Have him killed?

A musical sting (a short ominous series of notes).

LUCY/HELEN: ARTHUR!

LUCY: (*Back to HELEN.*) Do you have a question, or you just airing out your mouth?

HELEN: The thing is, I've been reading this script.

LUCY: Now, I told you not to do that.

HELEN: Well, I just have one question.

LUCY: Just a second. (*She turns and looks at the stage. She yells off.*) Can we finish setting the stage? And step on it! (*She turns back to HELEN.*) What's your question?

HELEN: What kind of show is this?

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The next sequence happens in rapid-fire succession. As if on cue, **MOVER 1** [again, cast members may substitute for the **MOVERS**] enters through the upstage left door carrying a small table and places it next to the sofa. Just after **MOVER 1** enters, **MOVER 2** enters through the stage left door, carrying a chair. **MOVER 1** exits out the upstage left door, slamming it. **MOVER 2** places the chair near the love seat. **MOVER 3** enters through the stage right door, carrying a large picture and places it on the downstage right wall. **MOVER 4** enters through the upstage right door with a large vase and moves around the room putting it down and picking it up, not sure where it goes. **MOVER 2** and **MOVER 3** then exit out the doors they entered, slamming the doors. **MOVER 1** enters through the upstage left door carrying a telephone and places it on the table near the love seat. **MOVER 2** enters through the stage left door carrying an umbrella stand, places it near the upstage left door, and then exits out the door, slamming it. **MOVER 3** enters through the stage right door carrying a small empty bookcase and places it between the two upstage doors. **MOVER 1** exits out the stage right door. **MOVER 3** exits out the upstage left door. **MOVER 2** enters carrying a dinette chair and places it upstage right. **MOVER 1** enters, also carrying a dinette chair, and places it near the first dinette chair. **MOVER 1** exits out the upstage right door at the same time **MOVER 2** exits out the upstage left door, both slamming at the same time. **MOVER 4** is still trying to place the vase. **MOVER 3** enters through the upstage left door carrying nothing. **MOVER 4** looks at **MOVER 3** and hands the vase to **MOVER 3**. **MOVER 4** then exits out the upstage left door. **MOVER 3** then tries placing the vase. **MOVER 1** enters through the stage right door with another dinette chair and places it with the others at the same time **MOVER 4** enters with the fourth dinette chair and puts it along side the other three. **MOVER 1** exits out the upstage right door as **MOVER 4** exits out the stage left door, again, both doors slam. Then, **MOVER 2** enters with a card table and places it near the dinette chairs and unfolds it. **MOVER 1** enters through the upstage right with a hat rack and places it near the stage left door. **MOVER 4** enters through the stage left door, carrying a bunch of magazines, and places them on the sofa table. Now, the card table is placed and **MOVER 3** smiles and puts the vase on the card table. The four **MOVERS** look at each other, smile and then exit out the four doors, slamming them one at a time.

LUCY: (Looks at **HELEN**.) It's a farce. Okay, everybody on stage for vocal warm-ups.

CHUCK and **PAGE** enter through the stage left door.

HELEN: Vocal warm-ups? This isn't a musical.

LUCY: You always warm up your vocal chords, whether it's a musical or not. (*SYLVIA, FREDDIE and CALI enter through the upstage door.*) This is to help our pronunciation. We want to hear the words crisp and clear.

HELEN: (*Broadly pronouncing her words.*) Whatever you say, my dear.

The group lines up and LUCY stands in front of them.

LUCY: (*To PAGE.*) Okay. Me you, me you, me you.

PAGE: (*Begins her mantra.*) Me you, me you, me you . . . (*PAGE continues warming up.*)

LUCY: (*To FREDDIE.*) Hubba bubba, hubba bubba, hubba bubba . . .

FREDDIE: (*Begins his chant.*) Hubba bubba, hubba bubba . . . (*He continues.*)

CHUCK: I had an old Chrysler that used to idle like that.

LUCY: (*To CHUCK.*) You. Up a ladder, up a ladder.

CHUCK: (*Shrugs and joins the rest.*) Up a ladder, up a ladder . . .

SYLVIA: Why don't we just do "Row, Row, Row Your Boat?"

LUCY: (*To SYLVIA.*) Twenty-six stitches, twenty-six stitches . . .

SYLVIA: Oh sure, give me THAT one.

LUCY: Do it!

SYLVIA: Twenty-six stitches, twenty-six stitches . . . (*She continues and adds to the pandemonium.*)

LUCY: (*To CALI.*) Duck call, duck call, duck call.

CALI: I hope I don't make a mistake.

LUCY: Duck call, duck call!

CALI: Duck call, duck call . . .

LUCY: (*To HELEN.*) Now. Never mind the furthermore, the plea is self-defense.

HELEN: What?!

LUCY: It's a line from "Oklahoma."

HELEN: Never mind the further - -

LUCY: Furthermore, the plea is self-defense.

HELEN: Never mind the furthermore, the plea is self-defense, never mind the furthermore, the plea is self-defense . . .

The noise grows in volume. MYRON enters from stage right and looks at the group. He looks out and then back to LUCY, who's now conducting the group.

MYRON: Is this Gilbert and Sullivan?

LUCY: (*Cups an ear.*) I can't understand you.

MYRON: And I can't understand Gilbert and Sullivan. There's someone here to see you.

LUCY: Bring him out here.

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MYRON: What?

LUCY: Bring him out here!

MYRON: *(Moves stage right.)* Weirdos! *(He exits.)*

LUCY: *(Claps once and the GROUP stops yammering.)* Okay, everybody, listen up. Now, I want you to do it backwards. *(The cast looks at her and then at each other. Then, they simultaneously turn and face upstage and start again. LUCY gets a disgusted look on her face and yells at them, but they continue.)* No, wait!

MYRON enters with SERGEANT HAWKE.

MYRON: Here he is. Says it's official business.

LUCY: What?

MYRON: Says he's on an investigation.

HAWKE: Sergeant Hawke.

LUCY: You're a cop?!

The second she says this, the GROUP stops in mid-yammer.

HAWKE: That's right, ma'am. And I need to ask you a few questions. *(The entire GROUP looks slowly over their shoulders.)* I'm looking for a known criminal operating in this county.

LUCY: Okay, everybody, take five.

They all turn back around.

CHUCK: What's going on?

HAWKE: Just a routine investigation.

HELEN: We'll do whatever we can to help.

FREDDIE: Yeah, we're already in a line up.

HAWKE: *(To LUCY.)* Are you the one in charge around here?

CALI: That would be Gracie.

LUCY: Hey, she's not here right now, and I'm second in command. That's why she chose me, remember?

FREDDIE: I thought you gave her money? *(HELEN elbows him.)* Oof!

HAWKE: You're . . . ?

LUCY: Lucille Baumfasick. I can tell you anything you need to know. People ask me all sorts of questions around here.

CHUCK: Yeah. Like, "How are you?"

PAGE: "Will you move your car"?

LUCY: He understands.

SYLVIA: "Are you going to be in there all day"?

LUCY: He gets the idea!

HAWKE: (*Walks around as he talks.*) Look, we got a tip that this notorious criminal wanted by the FBI, might be pursuing her old habits. Used to be an actress. Can't seem to keep away from the stage, that kind of thing.

LUCY: And you think she's here?

HAWKE: Oh, we're checking all the theatres in the area. Her name is Phoebe Twitchell.

SYLVIA: There's no one around here by that name.

HAWKE: Don't be too sure, Missy, she's probably using an alias.

CALI: What does she look like?

HAWKE: Well, that's a problem.

ACE: That bad, huh?

HAWKE: (*Shrugs shoulders.*) We just don't have a good picture of her. (*He stops and shoots them a hard look.*) She's a master of disguises. (*He goes from one person to another, looking hard at each one.*) She's a clever devil, she is. She can make herself look very young . . . or very old. Taller, or even shorter. Sometimes she even poses as a man. Could be wearing a beard. Or walking with a limp. (*He moves out in front of the group.*) In short, she could be anybody . . . or anywhere.

CHUCK: Then how will you know when you catch her?

HAWKE: Well, she has one fault, something that should take us right to her. Whenever she gets on stage, she forgets her lines.

HELEN: Shoot, you might as well arrest us all.

LUCY: That's it? That's all you have?

HAWKE: And one more thing. One vital clue.

FREDDIE: And that is?

HAWKE: I'll tell you. (*He looks both ways and then back at the others.*) She's allergic to roses. Anybody been sneezing lately?

PAGE: But what's she wanted for?

HAWKE: Murder. (*Entire CAST except HAWKE gasps.*) She's a pretty desperate number, all right. So keep your eyes out. And your ears open. She might be under your very noses.

CHUCK: You don't need a detective, you need an ear, nose and throat man.

MARJORIE enters, carrying a bunch of roses.

MARJORIE: Hey, everybody, look what someone just sent me.

LUCY: Roses!

CHUCK: She's packing!

FREDDIE: Hit the deck! (*EVERYONE except HAWKE falls to the floor.*)

MARJORIE: Oh, no, we're not doing calisthenics again, are we?

HAWKE: Roses, eh? (*He circles her.*) And they don't bother you?

MARJORIE: (*Watching him.*) Nooo.

HAWKE: (*Holds out a hand.*) May I?

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MARJORIE: Okay, but remember where you got them. (*She hands them to HAWKE, who then moves over to the others. HAWKE holds the roses close to PAGE to get a reaction. Nothing happens.*) Who is this guy, anyway, and why does he want my flowers?

HAWKE holds the flowers up to SYLVIA. Again, no reaction.

LUCY: He's an investigator.

MARJORIE: I didn't steal those.

HAWKE holds the roses up to CALI. No reaction.

LUCY: Just a second.

HAWKE: Well, no reactions so far.

MARJORIE: What's he looking for?

LUCY: To see if someone's allergic to roses.

MARJORIE: Well, it wouldn't work with those.

HAWKE: (*Stops and turns.*) Why not?

MARJORIE: They're plastic.

HAWKE stops, looks at the flowers and roughly runs his hand through them. They spring right back. He moves back to MARJORIE.

HAWKE: Here. (*He shoves the roses back into MARJORIE'S hands.*)

MARJORIE: What's going on? We're just doing a play, right? A farce . . . not a mystery.

HAWKE: (*Dramatically.*) It may have started out as a farce, but now it's a mystery. (*The ominous musical sting sounds again. HAWKE looks around.*) What the heck was that?

ENTIRE CAST EXCEPT HAWKE: ARTHUR!

BLACKOUT.

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