

FASHIONABLY LATE

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Gary Ray Stapp

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SYNOPSIS: It's a get-it-while-you-can attitude in the world of fashion and no one knows that better than the staff of New York City fashion designer, Wade Haywood. So what do Charmaine, Meredith, and Harry do when the boss fails to show up for work? Not what you think! There's no time for loafing when opportunity is knocking at the agency door, especially when one stranger shows up with the disturbing announcement that she's been hired as a replacement, followed by the appearance of another stranger with a big wallet and a penchant for oversized models. Suddenly, what started out as an ordinary day, becomes an afternoon of high jinx as brains, beauty, and brawn mix it up in a cross-dressing masquerade designed to fool a fashion industry guru, an IRS agent, and a Texas oil millionaire. But when the fooled wise-up to the foolish, good fortune quickly unravels at the seams and catastrophe looms on the edge of the fashion runway. And when secrets collide with good intentions, everyone learns that being fashionably late is better than never being fashionable at all.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 MEN, 8-10 WOMEN)

WADE HAYWOOD (M)..... A fashion designer and business entrepreneur who has a secret he's not quite ready to share. (98 lines)

MEREDITH (F)..... Wade's business associate/Co-designer. She's intelligent and professional. (293 lines)

CHARMAINE (F)..... The office receptionist. She's blonde, but don't let the hair color fool you. (405 lines)

HARRY (M)..... The epitome of the womanizer. He knows he's not God's gift to women, but would never admit it. He has a desk, but no one seems to know what he does. (368 lines)

IRIS (F)..... Resident seamstress. A grouch. Intimidates her co-workers. (63 lines)

ROXANNE (F)..... Iris's assistant. (Can double as either Mrs. Haywood or Myrtle) (6 lines)

MIKE (F)..... The building maintenance engineer. Gruff, loner type. (43 lines)

JOE (M)..... Chinese restaurant owner/delivery man. A little high-strung. (100 lines)

FLORIDA (F)..... The new girl in the office. As sharp as a bowling ball. (70 lines)

EUGENIA VANEDDERHORN (F)..... An IRS auditor. (29 lines)

EDWARD EIRESS (M).....A fashion show coordinator. Considered to be among the top in his profession. (70 lines)
NATALIE HAWT (F).....An artist/fabric designer. (Can double as either Mrs. Haywood or Myrtle) (6 lines)
JAY RON BODEENA (M)Texas oil tycoon. (74 lines)
MRS. HAYWOOD (F).....Wade’s wife. A dignified, classy lady. (21 lines)
MYRTLE (F).....Wade’s mother-in-law. (4 lines)

Setting:

The 7th floor business office of Wade Haywood Originals, downtown New York City.

Time:

The present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene 1 – Late afternoon/early evening

Scene 2 – The next morning, nearly noon

ACT TWO

Scene 1 – An hour or so later

Scene 2* – One month later

(*Optional scene)

SETTING

The outer office of the fashion designing firm of Wade Haywood Originals. At stage right is a frosted glass door with the lettering W.H.O. designating the main entrance. Center stage right is a doorway that opens to a hallway that leads to the break room and bathrooms. Up stage right is a door that opens into Meredith’s office and up stage left is a door that opens into Wade’s office. Center stage left is a door that opens into a conference room, and at stage left is a set of swinging doors that lead to the production and storage areas of the design firm.

At center stage is Charmaine’s desk and chair, appropriately equipped with a telephone, rolodexes, misc. folders and books, a laptop computer, etc. Stage left of her desk is Harry’s desk, similarly equipped. At center stage right is a waiting area with two comfortable chairs and a small table. On the walls are large, framed posters of models wearing W.H.O. designs. On the Up Stage Center wall hangs a large strip-cut “runway” curtain with the W.H.O. logo behind which is a hidden “entrance” for the fashion show finale. On the up stage left wall that fronts Wade’s office is a clock and a bulletin board.

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING:

Late afternoon/early evening.

AT RISE:

CHARMAINE is tending to a plant at the table at stage right while talking on the handset of a cordless phone. She is an energetic and enthusiastic blonde with her own unique sense of chic style. Seemingly the lowest in the office hierarchy, she is smart, likable and exudes confidence and competence. The clock on the wall is broken and displays the time of 10:37.

CHARMAINE: Yes, I know! Can you believe it?! This has to be a first for the fashion industry here in New York City. Models going on strike! Who would have guessed they had it so rough? Let me tell you, Marie, a strike will make for a serious pinch around here! And what with OUR new line scheduled for unveiling next month! I could just die! I swear on my best pair of Gucci loafers, I could just die!

WADE ENTERS up stage left from his office. He looks frazzled, but still has some spring in his step. He wears a pair of designer slacks and long-sleeved designer shirt.

WADE: Charmaine! Do you know where I put my sketches for the Edward Eireess Exposition?

CHARMAINE: They're in the blue portfolio on your desk, Mr. Haywood.

WADE: I looked there.

CHARMAINE: Look again.

WADE: But -

CHARMAINE: Mr. Haywood, am I ever wrong?

WADE quickly EXITS upstage left back into his office.

CHARMAINE: *(Returning to her phone call.)* I'm telling you, I could just die. And it's got Mr. Haywood poised for a nervous breakdown. His stomach has been doing cartwheels, poor man. And he's so anxious to get the photo shoot completed before the strike becomes a reality. Oh, Marie, I almost forgot! Today, I spoke with none other than Natalie Hawt!

WADE ENTERS up stage left from his office and crosses toward Meredith's office upstage right.

WADE: Charmaine, I found it! *(HE EXITS upstage right.)*

CHARMAINE: *(Over her shoulder.)* Of course you did, Mr. Haywood. *(Back to phone.)* Yes, Marie, one and the same stage Natalie Hawt of Hawt Fabrics! She's recently moved into our building . . . 10th floor. I met her on the elevator. Showered her with compliments on her outfit. It was gorgeous! Absolutely luscious fabric. And get this, she is looking for a designer to exclusively carry her newest series of chenilles. Yes! Of course I dropped our name! I may be a dumb blonde, but I'm not as dumb they think! Wade Haywood Originals, I said, would be a perfect fit! *(Laughs.)* Of course, she then asked "Who?" and I said EXACTLY! Don't you just love our initials?! W-H-O! *(Laughs.)*

WADE ENTERS upstage right and quickly crosses to Charmaine.

WADE: Charmaine, I'm needing the Neiman Marcus contracts A.S.A.P. Do we have them from Dave yet?

CHARMAINE: *(Without missing a beat, retrieves a folder from her desk and hands it over her shoulder.)* Arrived by messenger from Mr. Freeport's office a half hour ago and he called to express his apologies for the delay.

WADE: Always business at his leisure! The bum! Charmaine, do not become an attorney.

CHARMAINE: No, sir, Mr. Haywood, I don't intend to.

WADE: Good! *(Crosses upstage left toward his office.)* Oh, Jack Sebastian didn't happen to return my call while I was on the phone, did he?

CHARMAINE: No, sir, Mr. Haywood.

WADE: I knew better than to even ask.

CHARMAINE: Yes, sir, you did.

WADE: You're always on top of things around here.

CHARMAINE: Yes, sir, I am.

WADE: What would I do without you?

CHARMAINE: You don't want to know, Mr. Haywood.

WADE EXITS into his office as MEREDITH ENTERS upstage right from her office, thumbing through a catalog. She wears a simple, conservative, but chic pant suit. SHE crosses stage left and EXITS to conference room center stage left.

CHARMAINE: No, sir, Mr. Haywood.

Phone rings.

CHARMAINE: Hold on Marie, I've got a call on line two. *(Pushes a button.)* Wade Haywood Originals. Oh, hello Mrs. Haywood . . . You did? . . . It didn't? . . . I can . . . No problem *(Punches a phone button)* . . . Mr. Haywood, Mrs. Haywood is on line two . . . Yes sir, she said she did . . . No sir, she said it didn't . . . Yes, sir, of course I can . . . You're welcome. *(Punches a phone button and returns to her call without missing a beat.)* Marie, honestly is was soooooo couteur! *(Laughs)* I invited her to drop by anytime and meet Mr. Haywood! I promised her she'd love his designs . . . Don't I know it! Clinching the new Hawt fabric exclusively would be big shot in the arm for us, not to mention the pleasure we would enjoy knowing the news would cause Donna Karan to come loose at the seams! *(Laugh.)* . . . Yes, I heard about that. I read about it in Women's Wear Daily!

MEREDITH ENTERS from conference room, center stage left and quickly crosses to Charmaine.

MEREDITH: Charmaine, I need the Leo D'Anaire accessories catalog from the files please.

CHARMAINE: *(SHE hands her the catalog and file from her desk.)* Here you are, Meredith.

MEREDITH: Why is that on your desk? Has Wade already looked at it?

CHARMAINE: No, I had a feeling you might need it.

MEREDITH: Charmaine, I don't know how you know or guess these things, but you are marvelous at it!

CHARMAINE: I know.

MEREDITH: *(Gestures to phone.)* Marie?

CHARMAINE: Yes. *(Places hand over phone.)*

MEREDITH: Any inside leads on the Edward Eiress show?

CHARMAINE: Not yet, Meredith, but I'm getting there. *(Wink.)*

MEREDITH: It's almost more than I can stand! We just have to be included. We just have to.

CHARMAINE: I know, I know. And I'll let you know as soon as I know something.

MEREDITH: I know.

CHARMAINE: Meredith, we're starting to echo.

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MEREDITH: Sorry. *(Begins to cross to her office upstage right.)* Remember, Edward Eiress - immediately. And where is Iris?

CHARMAINE: There's that echo again.

MEREDITH: I sent Harry to the production room 15 minutes ago to get Iris. Where is he?

CHARMAINE: He went. But he hasn't come back. You know Harry, he probably got distracted by a bug on the floor. Iris probably won't answer her phone, but I'll call her, Meredith.

MEREDITH: Call her Meredith? Her name is Iris, why would you call her Meredith?

CHARMAINE: No, what I meant was, Meredith, I will give Iris a call. *(Pause for a beat.)* And yet, all the jokes are about blondes.

MEREDITH: Oh . . . of course that's what you meant. Oiety-boiety, I'm way too stressed-out today. *(Crosses to upstage right.)*

CHARMAINE: Oiety-boiety?! That's more like it! Now isn't that better than saying you-know-what?

MEREDITH: Yes! I guess! Though I'd rather say "you-know-what"! But your jar methodology does have a reputation for stressing out bank accounts.

CHARMAINE: *(Patting a jar on her desk marked "CUSS MONEY.")* Call me quirky, but it works! And besides, it drives Harry nuts!

MEREDITH: And THAT I thoroughly enjoy! *(SHE EXITS upstage right to her office.)*

CHARMAINE: *(Returns to her phone call.)* Okay honey, I'm back . . . Un-huh . . . that's the way I hear it too. According to Women's Wear Daily . . . who would have thought! Listen, Marie, I need to run . . . By the way, any word about your boss's show - Who's Who, Who's In? . . . Of course I'm asking about Wade Haywood Originals . . . Of course that was why I called! You know I can't stand talking to you. Besides, I don't make personal calls. *(Laughs.)* . . . Oh? . . . Really? He's making final decisions tomorrow? . . . Cross your fingers for us, Marie . . . What?! . . . WHO, that's who! Listen, let's just leave the jokes to me . . . Alrighty then. We'll talk tomorrow . . . Bye-bye. *(She hangs up, then punches a series of numbers from memory and waits a beat.)* Iris, Charmaine, here. I'm shocked you answered your phone! Meredith needs you A.S.A.P. Harry was supposed to give you the message fifteen minutes ago . . . Hey, don't blame me for sending him in there. You're the one who won't answer your phone! *(Punches a button and enters a phone number.)* Jack Sebastian, please. This is Charmaine, I'm calling for Wade Haywood . . . Thank you . . . Good afternoon, Mr. Sebastian, Mr. Haywood is anxious to speak with you . . . Thank you. Please hold. *(Then punches a connection button on her phone.)* Mr. Haywood, I have Jack Sebastian on line one . . . you're welcome, Mr. Haywood. *(SHE punches a button and hangs up her phone.)*

A loud slap is heard offstage left.

HARRY: *(Off stage.)* Owwwwwww! . . . Wait, Roxanne! I was taught to always turn the other cheek.

A loud slap is heard offstage left.

HARRY: *(Off stage.)* Owwwwwwwwwww!

ROXANNE suddenly ENTERS stage left carrying her purse in one hand and a jacket in the other. IRIS ENTERS behind her. Both are dressed comfortably in jeans and t-shirts, though Iris wears the additions of a seamstress's apron and a bandana over her hair.

ROXANNE: I quit!

CHARMAINE: Roxanne! You just started working here this morning! What's the problem?

ROXANNE: How can you stand working with that . . . that . . . Neanderthal?!

IRIS: I was going to say Jackass. But Neanderthal's good.

CHARMAINE: Harry?

IRIS: Who else?

ROXANNE: That man is a sexist pig!

CHARMAINE: True.

ROXANNE: A - a SCUMBAG!

CHARMAINE: Right, again.

ROXANNE: I have half a mind to file harassment charges!

CHARMAINE: You have my blessing.

IRIS: That's what I told her.

ROXANNE: I'm sorry, but I can't work with someone who makes me convulse with nausea!

HARRY enters stage left holding his hands to his stinging cheeks. He wears his usual slacks, white short sleeve shirt, and loose fitting tie. He leans over his desk.

HARRY: I think I deserve a spanking! *(Winks at Roxanne.)*

ROXANNE covers her mouth and hurriedly EXITS stage right.

HARRY: I think she likes me.

IRIS: Nobody likes you, Harry.

CHARMAINE: That has to be a record. Roxanne worked here all of seven hours and 45 minutes.

Harry, you're going to get into big harassment troubles if you don't watch your mouth!

IRIS: And your hands. If I thought I could get away with it, I'd slug ya in the face too . . . with a sewing machine.

HARRY: Rarrrrrrrr! Iris, how did you know I like it rough?!

IRIS: Harry, you don't want to go there.

CHARMAINE: Harry, one of these days you're really going to get what's coming to you.

IRIS: Yeah, I was hoping for that a few minutes ago. I handed Roxanne the sharpest pair of scissors I own.

HARRY: Hell, I'm just playin'.

CHARMAINE: Ching-Ching. Make your donation, potty mouth. *(SHE taps on the big jar labeled "CUSS MONEY.")*

HARRY: I don't care! I'm in a good mood. Hell, I'll put in two. *(HE stuffs a couple of dollars into the jar.)* Now ladies, if you don't mind, I'll just sit over here at my desk and cruise 'til quittin' time.

CHARMAINE: Mind? Why should we mind? You've been loafing all day. What's another 15 minutes?

IRIS: Wish I had your job! But then, I don't know how to be a bum.

HARRY: It's pretty easy really.

IRIS: Have you no self-respect as a man? I mean, seriously?

HARRY: I used to have self-respect. But my last ex-wife got that in the divorce settlement.

IRIS: She didn't get much, did she? *(Crosses upstage right toward Meredith's office.)*

CHARMAINE: Iris, why is it everyone except Mr. Haywood has Harry's number?

IRIS: Who knows?!

HARRY: I have a number, huh? What, like "10"?

IRIS: No, it's 6-6-6.

IRIS knocks on Meredith's office door, then EXITS as MIKE ENTERS stage left, wearing a cap, baggy coveralls, and a tool belt, and carrying a short ladder. NOTE: Mike is female, but the other characters have mistaken her true gender. Mike does NOT try to talk or act masculine, she's only trying to "play down" her femininity.

CHARMAINE: Mike! Please tell me you're here to fix the clock.

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MIKE: I dunno. You tell me. I'm weighted down with a tool belt, I'm carrying a ladder here, and I'm wondering why this so-called emergency can't wait until tomorrow. *(SHE crosses upstage center and sets up her ladder.)*

CHARMAINE: Sorry I asked. But the clock hasn't worked all day.

MIKE: What? So you don't wear a watch? Jeez!

CHARMAINE: Bad day, huh?

MIKE: Aren't they all? *(SHE steps up on the ladder and begins repairing the clock.)*

CHARMAINE: Whatever you do Mike, don't lose that smile. *(With sarcasm.)* It's like sunshine around here.

MIKE: Yeah, whatever.

HARRY: Hey, Mike, you didn't happen to see that "hottie" in the hallway just now did ya? You should hurry up and catch her and say hi and check her out. You never know, she might just dig you in that uniform.

MIKE: Great.

HARRY: I'm telling ya, she is hot! H-O-T!

MIKE: Yeah, whatever. *(Rolls her eyes at him.)*

HARRY: Let me tell you, she's got a nice set of - -

CHARMAINE: *(Looks over at Harry as she clears her throat.)* Uh-hmm.

HARRY: Hands. She's got a nice set of hands, if you know what I mean. *(Snickers.)*

MIKE: Uh-huh. *(Patronizing.)* I know what you mean.

HARRY: Char, I gotta go drain my radiator. Take my messages for me, 'k?

CHARMAINE: I don't want to hear about your radiator, and who are you kidding? Nobody calls for you. And don't call me Char. That name is reserved for people I like, of whom you do not qualify.

HARRY: I love you too, Char. *(HE EXITS center stage right to hallway.)*

WADE ENTERS from his office holding his stomach.

WADE: Charmaine, could you get me a glass of milk?

CHARMAINE: Mr. Haywood, you don't look well.

WADE: Myrtle is killing me today!

CHARMAINE: Your ulcer has really been acting up here lately. There's too much stress in this business. I'm telling you Mr. Haywood, you should see a doctor.

WADE: I have.

CHARMAINE: It's about time. So, who did you see? That drop-dead gorgeous doctor friend of yours?

WADE: Yes.

CHARMAINE: Rodney . . . that's his name, right?

WADE: Yes.

CHARMAINE: He's still single, right?

WADE: Yes! Charmaine - - the milk!

CHARMAINE: Oh, sorry. I'll get it right away, Mr. Haywood.

WADE EXITS to his office as CHARMAINE EXITS to hallway center stage right. MEREDITH ENTERS from her office followed by IRIS.

MEREDITH: Iris, at least you have some of the garments finished. But we still have a deadline! I am so sorry I have to put this kind of pressure on you! I wish I could do something to make it up to you.

HARRY ENTERS from hallway center stage right.

IRIS: You could NEUTER him . . . right now . . . with a dull knife and no anesthesia. I'll even hold him down for you.

HARRY: *(Pauses to see THEM looking at him.)* Why are you looking at me like that?

IRIS: Wishful thinking.

MEREDITH: Wade should fire you!

HARRY: What'd I do?

MEREDITH: Harry, Roxanne has quit because of you and now Iris has to work overtime to make our deadline.

HARRY: What's a little over-time?

IRIS: Oh, sure. What's a few dozen of hours of over-time. I'm already worked to death as it is. No time for a real life anyway. I haven't had time for a date in six months. I can't even remember what a man looks like without any clothes on.

HARRY: I can help you out there, Iris. *(HE puffs up like a rooster and starts to unbutton his shirt.)*

IRIS: Don't make me laugh.

MEREDITH: Harry, don't you dare undress in this office!

IRIS: Don't worry, he wouldn't dare. He knows he couldn't handle my biting sarcasm.

HARRY: You're probably right. But, I bet I could handle your "biting."

MEREDITH: Harry, you are so juvenile!

HARRY: Thank you!

CHARMAINE ENTERS from hallway center stage right with glass of milk.

MEREDITH: That wasn't a compliment. Now, Iris, I'll try to find you a new assistant first thing in the morning.

IRIS: Pick an ugly one this time. Then maybe that Romeo-wanna-be will leave her alone!

HARRY: Iris, beauty is only skin deep. What's important is that they tell me "yes!"

CHARMAINE: *(As she crosses to CENTER STAGE LEFT.)* Iris, how about Harry?

IRIS: How about Harry what?

CHARMAINE: Helping you in production. He hasn't had anything todo all day. Helping you might help keep him out of trouble.

IRIS: *(To Charmaine.)* What did I ever do to you?

HARRY: Me? Work in the sweat shop? I don't think so.

CHARMAINE: *(Lets herself get pulled into conversation and begins to take sips of the milk.)* Trust me, it wouldn't hurt you to sweat a little.

MEREDITH: Harry, why don't you help Iris?

HARRY: I happen to be very busy.

CHARMAINE: Uh-huh.

MEREDITH: Harry, do you know how to sew?

HARRY: Sew? I don't think so. What do I look like, a man or a mouse?

CHARMAINE: Oh - Oh - Oh, please let me answer that one. *(Takes a sip of milk, then realizes what she's done. Quickly wipes her mouth and EXITS to Wade's office.)*

IRIS: Whoa, whoa, whoa here. No way is he working with me. I'm on the edge already. Do you want me to go postal? *(Threatens Meredith.)*

MEREDITH: NO! No . . . no problem . . . I was just kidding . . . Ha, ha - ha.

IRIS: A real stand-up comedienne! I've gotta go count my spools of lavender thread, and then rub a little polish on my sewing machine and see if the fashion fairy shows up to grant me my three freakin' wishes.

MEREDITH: Are you serious?

IRIS: What? You think you're the only one with a sense of humor?! *(EXITS stage left.)*

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CHARMAINE enters.

MEREDITH: I don't mind telling you, she makes me nervous.

HARRY: That's because you're easily intimidated. You need to act more like a man.

CHARMAINE: Shut up, Harry. Iris is no Miss Congeniality.

MEREDITH: That's just it . . . she was Miss Congeniality . . . in a prominent beauty pageant.

HARRY: Iris? In a beauty pageant? What was it? The Miss Understood Old Maids of America?

MEREDITH: Miss Long Island. I don't remember the year though.

CHARMAINE: Iris . . . Miss Congeniality? I wouldn't buy that one if it were half price at Saks Fifth Avenue!

MEREDITH: It's a part of her personnel file.

CHARMAINE: Spill what you know, girlfriend!

MEREDITH: I can't say anything right now—Mike may be listening.

MIKE: I'm listening, but trust me, I don't care. *(Then eavesdrops.)*

HARRY: He doesn't care! Now what's the dirt?

MEREDITH: Okay. Apparently within seconds after losing the pageant's fifth runner-up, she promptly went into a tirade and hammered the judges with a slew of uncongenial profanity followed by a very un-lady like exposure of her backside. But you didn't hear it from me.

HARRY: What? Iris mooned the judges?!

CHARMAINE: I don't believe it!

MEREDITH: It's true . . . I'm telling you, you don't want to make her mad.

HARRY: I'm impressed! She's got stones, ya gotta give her that! *(Looks at his watch.)* And speakin' of stones, I've got to rock and roll. Your office stud here has a date with a hottie I met online. *(Winks.)*

MEREDITH: A date? On a Thursday night?

HARRY: Yeah. So?

CHARMAINE: So she must be desperate.

HARRY: One does not have to be desperate to date on a Thursday night.

CHARMAINE: No, I meant she must be desperate to date you.

HARRY: Jealous?

CHARMAINE: Hardly. In fact, I have a date tonight too. *(SHE gathers her purse from her desk.)*

MEREDITH: Charmaine! Now, I'm jealous!

CHARMAINE: Well, I'm nervous.

HARRY: Nothing to be nervous about. You'll have a great time.

CHARMAINE: Thank you, Ann Landers.

MEREDITH: So, Charmaine, how'd you meet him?

CHARMAINE: Don't laugh - I meet him on an internet dating website.

MEREDITH: On the internet?

CHARMAINE: I know, I know. Call me crazy.

MEREDITH: So, Crazy, what's he look like? Is he cute?

CHARMAINE: I don't know. This website doesn't allow pictures. Its purpose is to promote connectivity based on personality not physical appearance.

MEREDITH: You are crazy. No wonder you're nervous!

CHARMAINE: I'm looking at this as an adventure. I'm meeting him at a nice, public restaurant, that way if he's more adventure than I can handle, I can sneak out when I go to the ladies room.

HARRY: That's rude.

CHARMAINE: Who asked you?

MEREDITH: What's his name?

HARRY: William.

CHARMAINE: *(Looks at Harry suspiciously.)* How do you know that?

HARRY: Harrison William Beckwith at your disposal.

CHARMAINE: *(Realizing he's her blind date, SHE is horrified.)* EEEEEWWWWE! *(SHE quickly grabs her purse and EXITS stage right with Harry right behind her.)*

HARRY: Hey, Char, if you want, I could pick you up around seven-thirty and we could split the cab fare? *(HE EXITS stage right and speaks offstage.)* What do you think, Char? *(An offstage slap is heard.)* Owwww! Eight o'clock then? *(Another slap.)* Owwww!

MEREDITH: Poor Charmaine. Meeting Harry on an internet dating service! How awful is that?!

MIKE: *(Pointing a screwdriver.)* He makes me want to puke, let me tell ya.

MEREDITH: Mike, have you ever dated anyone from online?

MIKE: I don't date anybody. *(Stuffs screwdriver back into her tool belt and without paying attention, pulls out a gun.)* Too many whackos out there, take my word for it.

MEREDITH: Not everyone online is whacko, Mike. My sister - *(She doesn't notice the gun.)*

MIKE: *(Suddenly realizes what she's holding.)* Ooops! *(SHE quickly tries to return the gun to her tool belt, but losing her balance she drops the gun.)*

MEREDITH: Here, let me get that for you. *(SHE crosses to pick up the "tool" for Mike.)*

MIKE: Uh - -

MEREDITH: Like I was saying, my sister met her husband online. They've been happily married for three years. *(Picks up the gun, but is oblivious to what she is holding.)* I may have to give it a shot sometime. *(SHE'S waving the gun around.)* It can't be any worse than meeting someone at a club. I mean, there are crazy people everywhere - *(Hands Mike the gun.)* - right?

MIKE: Right.

MIKE gingerly takes the gun from MEREDITH just as the phone rings.

MEREDITH: Excuse me.

MEREDITH lets go of the gun and steps to Charmaine's desk, while MIKE stares in disbelief, then hides the gun in her tool belt and begins to pull yard after yard of wire through a hole in the wall while eavesdropping on Meredith.

MEREDITH: Hello? . . . Yes, he's in. May I ask who's calling? . . . Thank you, just a moment please . . . *(SHE punches a phone button.)* . . . Wade, a George Bush is on the line and wishes to speak with you . . . that's what he said . . . George Bush . . . no W. *(SHE hangs up phone and looks up at Mike.)* You don't think the president would actually call Mr. Haywood, do you?

MIKE: I don't know . . . weirder things have happened. *(SHE begins to pull a lot of wire from the wall.)*

MEREDITH: I agree with you there. *(SHE crosses toward her office.)* Besides, there's probably a hundred George Bush's living in New York. *(SHE EXITS.)*

MIKE curiously looks at the exceedingly long length of wire then with a shrug she takes out his cutters and cuts the wire. In a beat, WADE ENTERS and pauses just outside his door, as MEREDITH ENTERS carrying her purse.

WADE: I just got cut off. And now my phone is not working at all!

MIKE looks sheepishly at the cut wires in her hand and starts feeding them back into the wall.

MEREDITH: That's odd. *(SHE steps down to Charmaine's desk and picks up the phone.)* Dial tone here.

WADE: Well, not on my phone. *(HE crosses to Harry's desk and picks up the phone.)* Hmm . . . dial tone here too. Weird. Let me check my phone again. *(HE turns to cross back toward his office.)* Hi, Mike. How are you today?

FASHIONABLY LATE

MIKE: *(Smiles innocently.)* Great.

WADE EXITS as MEREDITH punches a phone button.

MEREDITH: Interesting . . . a busy signal. I wonder what's wrong?

MIKE: You got me.

WADE enters.

WADE: Completely dead. *(HE is exasperated, and begins to anxiously unbutton the cuffs of his shirt sleeves and another button of his shirt.)*

MEREDITH: Wade, you're not looking well.

WADE: I'm fine. I'm just having a little anxiety attack, that's all.

MEREDITH: Okay, relax, I'll have Charmaine call the phone company first thing in the morning. And unless you need me for anything else this evening, I really need to run.

WADE: No, I think I'm going to call it an early day myself. Myrtle is making me nauseous again.

MIKE: Who's Myrtle? Forget it, none of my business.

WADE: That's okay, Mike. Myrtle is what I call my ulcer. So named in honor of my mother-in-law.

MIKE: Ah. That bad, huh?

WADE: *(Nods.)* That bad! Isn't that right, Meredith?

MEREDITH: I refuse to say anything negative about my boss's relatives. But, Mr. Haywood's wife is very nice. Nothing like her mother. Good night, Wade. Hope you get to feeling better.

WADE: Thanks. Good night.

MEREDITH: Night, Mike. *(EXITS stage right.)*

MIKE: Whatever. *(SHE steps down from the ladder and looks at Wade.)* Ran into a bit of a snag. I'll be back later.

WADE: Sure, but don't work too late.

MIKE: Like I have a choice. *(EXITS stage right.)*

WADE waits until Mike exits, then picks up the phone and dials a number

WADE: It's me . . . sorry, I'm also having phone problems here. So, what are my options again? . . . otherwise? Or else? . . . In other words, you're not giving me an option . . . No, kidding! I know I picked the wrong horse, "George" . . . you know what I mean . . . It's just that I - I - I'm just not ready to cash it all in, you know?! . . . I don't know, she'll probably scream, then cry, then scream a little more, then go shopping . . . Okay, okay, I'll have it for you by tomorrow. You can wait that long, can't you? *(He hangs up. Sighs. Turns toward his office.)*

Phone rings. WADE answers.

WADE: Wade Haywood speaking . . . Jack! You've heard something?! . . . You're kidding me! Models are actually going on strike?! I've spent a fortune reserving ad space in three major fashion magazines! This could be my last chance, dammit! . . . Nothing . . . I know, I know . . . If you only knew . . . What? . . . Florida? Oh, yeah . . . No, no, tomorrow's fine. How about two o'clock? . . . I know, I know, I owe you . . . You won't let me forget! *(WADE hangs up and starts pulling at his shirt, then suddenly he anxiously takes off his watch and clutches his stomach and starts for his office. Phone rings. He returns and picks up phone.)* Wade Haywood speaking . . . Who? Did you say I.R.S.? . . . I was afraid of that . . . You are kidding? . . . Listen, Ms. VanEdderhorn, now is not a good time . . . I suppose you have heard that before . . . Oh, why not? . . . Sure, tomorrow is perfect . . . That would be perfect . . . Your call couldn't have come at a more perfect time! . . . Perfect! *(WADE hangs up the phone and rips his shirttails from his waistband. He starts for his office then turns, looks around and sighs. Then returns to phone, picks up and dials.)* Hi . . . it's me . . . Well, I've been thinking about you, an early dinner, and Bermuda. What do you think? . . . How fast can you pack? . . . She doesn't have to know . . . I'll be there in half an hour . . . love you too.

WADE hangs up the phone. He takes a piece of paper from the desk and scribbles a note then crosses center stage left and pins note to the bulletin board on wall behind Harry's desk, then crosses to stage right, flips off the lights and EXITS into a lighted hallway.

WADE: *(Offstage.)* Mike?

Offstage a gunshot is fired. Blackout. End of ACT ONE, SCENE 1.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING:

The next morning, nearly noon.

AT RISE:

The room is the same except for a mug shot photo of Harry pinned to the bulletin board on the wall behind his desk. CHARMAINE sits at her desk with a sketch pad and pencil. HARRY sits at his desk playing solitaire on the pc. The clock shows the time of 11:45.

HARRY: *(Clicking away at the pc mouse.)* Yes . . . Yes . . . YES! HA! I got you now! Come on....come on...just one more card . . . Crap! *(Frantically clicking the mouse.)* Crap! CRAP! Stupid game anyway! Rigged, that's what it is! Rigged, I tell ya!

CHARMAINE: Harry, watch the language.

HARRY: Crap is not a cuss word, thank you very much.

CHARMAINE: Depends on who you ask. If my mother were here, you would be stuffing three George Washingtons into that jar.

HARRY: Well, your mommy ain't here.

CHARMAINE: She'd have a bar of soap working up a lather on that filthy tongue of yours too!

HARRY: The hell she would!

CHARMAINE: That one counts. *(Taps the jar with her pencil.)*

HARRY: Shi - harrmaine! That was cheap! You set me up! *(SHE taps the jar. HE jumps up and digs a buck from his wallet.)* This is crap! *(HE marches to jar and stuffs the bill inside.)*

CHARMAINE: Watch the language. *(Taps at the jar.)* You've donated a lot to the cause already this week. It looks like lunch is on you again! We could probably even have lobster.

HARRY: You could've had lobster last night, but you stood me up.

CHARMAINE: *(Points pencil at him.)* I will not talk to you about last night. My stomach is still queasy.

FASHIONABLY LATE

HARRY: Are you trying to hurt my feelings?

CHARMAINE: You have feelings?

HARRY sticks his tongue at CHARMAINE, she reciprocates. MEREDITH ENTERS from her office.

MEREDITH: Harry, that tongue had better not be for me.

HARRY: Play your cards right -

CHARMAINE: Harry, if I've said it once I've said it a thousand times. YOU disgust me!

HARRY: Shut up! (*HE sticks his tongue out at her again, SHE reciprocates.*)

MEREDITH: (*Rolls up her eyes as SHE marches to DSC.*) Kids, kids, kids! Can't you act like adults . . . especially today?!!

CHARMAINE: Sorry, Meredith.

MEREDITH: (*Sees CHARMAINE'S sketches.*) Charmaine! Did you draw these?!

CHARMAINE: Oh, yeah . . . sorry, just doodling a little. (*Tries to cover up sketches.*)

MEREDITH: Doodling? Charmaine, these are wonderful sketches. I love this one with the fluted collar. I didn't know you had a talent for fashion design.

CHARMAINE: Well, I don't know about that - -

MEREDITH: Well, I do. You should show these to Wade. (*SHE turns toward Wade's office door.*) Speaking of whom, have you heard from him yet?

CHARMAINE: Nope.

MEREDITH: No phone call?

CHARMAINE: Nope.

MEREDITH: No email?

CHARMAINE: Nope.

MEREDITH: No telegram?

CHARMAINE: No. Nothing. Zip.

MEREDITH: And no note! (*Looks at bulletin board again, then sighs with annoyance.*) Harry, why is that picture of you still pinned up there on the bulletin board?!

HARRY: I told you before. I'm looking for a date. Obviously, I bombed out on the internet. So I'm advertising.

MEREDITH: Advertising what?

CHARMAINE: Uglier-R-U's.

HARRY: Okay, so I'm not exactly Mark Walburg, but you don't have to be so mean about it.

CHARMAINE: I apologize. But, Harry, if you were Mark Walburg, I would have had dinner with you last night . . . and breakfast this morning.

HARRY: Yeah, like he'd date you! Ha!

MEREDITH: You two, quit your fussing. We have a serious situation here! Where's he at?!

HARRY: Who?

MEREDITH: Who do you think I mean? Mr. Haywood, of course! Are you an idiot?

HARRY: Are you calling me an idiot?

CHARMAINE: Hey, hey, hey! Settle down you two! Meredith, you're beginning to sound like . . . like ME and Harry!

MEREDITH: I can't believe he's this late!

CHARMAINE: I can't believe he's late at all. He's never been late.

MEREDITH: Where could he be?!!!

CHARMAINE: I haven't got a clue. I even left a message with his home answering service. Mrs. Haywood didn't even answer, and neither has she called.

MEREDITH: Now that is weird.

CHARMAINE: Tell me about it. By this time of day, she would have called at least five times.

HARRY: He probably just took the day off. Give the guy a break.

MEREDITH: We're talking about Wade. He never takes any time off.

CHARMAINE: Which probably explains his ulcer.

MEREDITH: And those anxiety attacks. He seems to be having those more often, as well.

HARRY: Okay, then, let's call the morgue.

MEREDITH/CHARMAINE: Harry!

CHARMAINE: That's a terrible thing to say! You put a buck in the jar for that one! (*Taps jar.*)

HARRY: Kiss my as - - sparagus.

MEREDITH: Harry, that is a terrible thing to joke about.

HARRY: Who's joking?

MEREDITH/CHARMAINE: Harry!

HARRY: We live in New York City! I'm being a realist! I'm not saying I want the ole guy bumped off. I mean, he signs my paychecks, it's not like I'm ungrateful. I'm just saying this city has its share of homicides - it wouldn't be the first!

CHARMAINE: You are so compassionate. I can't understand why you're still single.

HARRY: Hey, that's a personal choice. After four ex-wives, I can't afford to re-marry.

MEREDITH: (*SHE has picked up Charmaine's phone and dialed.*) City Coroner's office, please.

CHARMAINE: Meredith! You're not serious?!

MEREDITH: Harry has a point . . . now shssssss!

HARRY: See, I have a point!

CHARMAINE: You have a point alright - about two inches past your receding hairline.

MEREDITH: Hello? . . . Yes, I'm calling to find out if you have a
a . . . a - (*Looks to others to help find the right word.*)

HARRY: A stiff.

CHARMAINE: A guest?

HARRY: A reservation?

CHARMAINE: A resident?

HARRY: A table for two, somewhere in the back -

CHARMAINE: A body - that's it!

HARRY: Anybody . . . somebody . . . everybody, loves somebody, sometime (*He sings as if Dean Martin.*)

MEREDITH: Would you shut up! . . . No, no, not you, I'm sorry, I'm just very distraught . . . you see my boss is missing, and I, I mean, we, my co-workers and I, thought our employer might be there with you. NOT that we want him to be, but . . . what? Oh, his name is Wade . . . Wade Haywood. You don't? . . . Oh, thank goodness, thank you so - What? He could be a John Doe? (*Turns to others.*) He could be a John Doe!

CHARMAINE: No, he can't. His name is Wade Haywood . . . I'm pretty sure about that!

HARRY: You're naturally blonde, aren't you?

CHARMAINE: Don't you start with the blonde jokes, or come tomorrow, you'll be missing and someone who cares about you will be making the phone call to the morgue. (*SHE thinks about that for a second, then laughs.*) Who are we kidding! Who would miss you?

MEREDITH: Well, he's about 50 years old - (*Looks at Charmaine, who hold up three fingers.*) Uh, 53, to be exact. (*CHARMAINE gives her the "OK."*) He's got medium brown hair, cut and styled very professionally. He has a standing appointment at his salon every two weeks. You should see his nails - perfect cuticles . . . pardon me? Oh, I'm sorry, that was more than you needed to know . . . His height and weight? Let's see . . . (*Looks to others.*)

CHARMAINE: (*SHE stands next to Harry and measures him against herself.*) How tall are you?

HARRY: Five feet, ten inches.

CHARMAINE: (*To Meredith.*) Five-nine.

MEREDITH: Five-nine

CHARMAINE: How much do you weigh?

HARRY: Now, you're getting personal.

CHARMAINE: How much?!

HARRY: You tell me your weight first!

CHARMAINE *pinches him on the stomach testing for body fat.*

HARRY: Owwww!

CHARMAINE: *(To Harry.)* One-ninety?

HARRY: One-eighty-nine and a half!

CHARMAINE: One sixty-five.

MEREDITH: He weighs approximately 165. Yes, fit, lean . . . average build. . . Identifying marks?
(Turns to others.) Birthmarks? Scars? Tattoos?

CHARMAINE: Don't look at me. I have only seen his body parts that stick out his shirt sleeves and above his collar!

MEREDITH: Not true, what about last week?

CHARMAINE: Oh, yeah, I forgot. But I only saw him for a second.

HARRY: What about last week? What do you mean, you "saw" him?

CHARMAINE: I am not telling you anything.

HARRY: You saw him naked, didn't you? In his office, right?

CHARMAINE: How did you know?

MEREDITH: Heellooo?! BIRTHMARKS? SCARS? Or TATTOOS?!

CHARMAINE/HARRY: NO!

MEREDITH: No, sir. No identifying marks that I'm aware of. . . What? Oh, no!

CHARMAINE: *(SHE rushes to Meredith.)* What is it?

MEREDITH: They have someone there who fits his description! *(CHARMAINE gasps and clasps her hands over her mouth.)* What? . . . Oh - oh, I see. *(To Charmaine.)* They have seventeen corpses that fit his description.

HARRY: Man, this is like playing the lottery!

MEREDITH: *(Into phone.)* Pardon me? . . . Just a moment, please. *(To others.)* He wants to know if we want to examine any of the matches?

HARRY: Matches? As in corpses? No way, I've got way too much work to do.

CHARMAINE: Huh-uh . . . NOT ME. It's almost my lunch break.

MEREDITH: No, sir, I'm sorry, I'm sure he's not there. He's probably just late. Thank you. Bye.
(Hangs up phone.) Any more bright ideas, Harry?

CHARMAINE: This is ridiculous. There's a logical explanation for Mr. Haywood's absence, I'm sure of it.

HARRY: Hey, we should probably file a missing persons report.

CHARMAINE: Not yet, we can't. It's only been three hours. The standard is 24 - I think.

MEREDITH: This just isn't like him. Not to leave a note, a message, anything! What are we going to do?

HARRY: Not my problem. I've got my own work to worry about.

MEREDITH: What work? You don't do anything!

HARRY: The hell if I don't!

CHARMAINE: That will be one dollar please. *(SHE taps the jar, but HARRY challenges her with a glare.)* But, Meredith, I do have to speak in Harry's defense. He's been working very diligently at his pc this morning - on his solitaire skills. He only had a "three - crap" loss at the card game.
(SHE gladly takes a bill from her purse and stuffs it in the jar.)

MEREDITH: Harry, this is not a retirement home! Quit playing games on the computer. We are a fashion designing business. One of the few small-label designer firms managing to get some attention in the fashion industry. We can't continue that successful climb if you spend your work-time playing cards!

CHARMAINE: We can't continue that climb without the boss, either.

HARRY: Yeah, at least, I show up for work.

MEREDITH: Where is he? What are we going to do?!

JOE ENTERS stage right. He is small-stature oriental man with the bounce of a toy poodle. He's dressed in simple black slacks and white shirt, but wearing a traditional Chinese hat. He wears his hair in a long braid in back, and has a braided oriental moustache.

JOE: Here I am!

HARRY: I'm going to eat. That's what I'm going to do.

MEREDITH: I don't know that I can deal with Joe today.

JOE: Hawo everybody! I've got you orda!

MEREDITH: Ten bucks says you don't.

JOE: Misa Meredith, I don't make bets no more.

MEREDITH: With your track record, who could blame you?

HARRY: Hey Joe, I'm starvin' here. Come on, bring it over!

JOE: Okie dokie! Here you go, Messer Hawee. Mandarin shrimp ova fried rice!

HARRY: Sounds great, Joe.

MEREDITH: Great? That's not what you ordered!

HARRY: So?

MEREDITH: So? Joe, why is it your restaurant finds it difficult - no, make that impossible - to get our lunch orders correct?

JOE: They not correct?

MEREDITH: Harry's isn't. I doubt that mine is.

JOE: What you orda?

MEREDITH: Egg drop soup and a spring roll.

JOE: *(Peeks in sack and pulls out container.)* For you, beef and bracowwi! Best of the house! No extra charge!

MEREDITH: No extra charge? I shouldn't pay you anything! See, you never get it right!

JOE: Not my fauw. I don't take the ordas. I jus dewiver them. Maybe you ordad wrong.

CHARMAINE: Hold it right there, mister stir-fry. I placed the order for all three of us. Don't insinuate that I made a mistake.

JOE: No! No, no, Misa Charmay. No insuwnt intended. It probabwy new girw at tewephone . . . She no hear too good.

MEREDITH: Then give her another job, like cook.

JOE: No, no . . . she no wike to cook.

MEREDITH: Dish-washer, then.

JOE: No, no . . . she no wike to get hands wet.

CHARMAINE: Maybe she could do your job with the delivery?

JOE: NO, no . . . She move much too swow. Ordars never get on time.

MEREDITH: Well, that would be a novelty . . . beef and bracowwi two hours late!

CHARMAINE: Joe, why don't you fire her? It's important to have a productive staff. *(Glances at Harry.)*

JOE: No, no . . . couwd never fire grandmother. Wouwd be dishonorabuwa.

CHARMAINE: I can see that. Okay, so what is my lunch surprise for the day?

JOE: What you orda?

CHARMAINE: Whatever's left in the bag.

JOE: Perfect! *(HE reaches into the sack and pulls out a container.)* Chicken chow mein!

CHARMAINE: Close!

MEREDITH: Really?

CHARMAINE: Please!

JOE: See, Grandmother working good! That be nineteen ninety-five pwus tip for good service, if you wike.

FASHIONABLY LATE

CHARMAINE: *(Takes the lid off the "cuss jar" and pays Joe.)* You don't want to know what I would "wike."

JOE: So, why not Meeser Haywood eat again today? He not orda wunch from Joe for eight days in a row! Messer Haywood not stepping out on Joe with other restaurant is he?

MEREDITH: Meeser - Mister Haywood . . . is not here today.

JOE: Oh, he taking vacation? *(MEREDITH and CHARMAINE exchange looks.)* Meeser Haywood not sick is he? *(MEREDITH and CHARMAINE exchange looks again.)* What? What you not taowwng Joe? *(HE scampers from one to the other.)* Meeser Haywood not die? Pwease say he not die!

MEREDITH: No, Joe, Mr. Haywood is not dead.

HARRY: *(Who has been eating without much interest in the conversation.)* Not that we know of. We called the morgue.

JOE: What? You caw the morgue! What is going on?!

CHARMAINE: Mr. Haywood is just . . . missing.

MEREDITH: What Charmaine means is Mr. Haywood is running late.

CHARMAINE: That's what I meant.

JOE: It wunch time! That way more than wate. This not a good sign. I hope Meeser Haywood okay.

MEREDITH: I'm sure he's fine. I'm a little surprised by your concern, Joe. I didn't know you were so fond of Mr. Haywood.

JOE: He onwy one of you I wike! *(Pause.)* Just make joke. Ha-Ha. Meeser Haywood show up, you see. No worry. I go now. Time for my wunch.

MEREDITH: Hope you're hungry for something you didn't order.

JOE: Ha. That funny. I tewl grandmother that one!

CHARMAINE: Joe, do you ever get tired of eating Chinese food?

JOE: Yes. Severaw years ago, year of the rat, I quit - code turkey.

CHARMAINE: You don't eat Chinese food?

JOE: *(Shakes head.)* No.

HARRY: Ever?

JOE: Never. Soy sauce give me gas.

HARRY: Weird. Where do you eat?

JOE: McDonawd's! Big Mac and super size fril. Goo-by! *(EXITS stage right.)*

MEREDITH: *(To Charmaine.)* Remind me, why don't we use a different lunch vendor?

JOE ENTERS stage right.

JOE: Oh! Awmos forgot! Fortune Cookies! *(HE holds several wrapped cookies up in his hands.)*

CHARMAINE: That's why.

MEREDITH: Oh, yes, THE fortune cookie, how could I forget? You really need to find a new vice, Charmaine. Like smoking or Russian Roulette.

HARRY: *(With food in his mouth.)* Or you could have a wild love affair with me. Make you forget all about your ex.

CHARMAINE: *(SHE rolls her eyes.)* I'll stick with the fortune cookies. But thanks, anyway.

HARRY: Your loss.

CHARMAINE: I'll have you know, because of a cookie, I came into an unexpected \$1100. Just in time to help my mother pay the deductible on her hip replacement surgery.

HARRY: One time!

MEREDITH: Harry's right.

CHARMAINE: Meredith! Did you just say Harry's right?!

MEREDITH: I - I couldn't possibly have said that.

HARRY: See Char, you're the only one who buys into those stupid fortune cookies.

JOE: *(Impatiently ending his wait.)* Does anybody want these STUPID fortune cookies or not?!

ALL: I do!

CHARMAINE: (*Looks at Meredith.*) Umm-hum.

JOE: (*HE passes out the fortune cookies.*) You designer peopoe drive me crazy. Here, one for Messer Haywood, my treat. Joe got to go . . . see everybody tomorrow. (*EXITS as OTHERS open their fortune cookies.*)

HARRY: (*Reading.*) Visit your feminine side - you will learn something valuable about yourself. (*HE pauses for a moment.*) I don't think so. (*HE crumples note and tosses in trash.*)

MEREDITH: (*Reading.*) Your strong voice will echo success. (*Pauses and glances at Charmaine.*) Strong voice? A lame one . . . again. What's yours say, Charmaine?

CHARMAINE: Nothing.

MEREDITH: Oh, it can't be that bad.

CHARMAINE: Okay . . . here goes. (*Reading.*) A man will soon bring change to your career . . . embrace them both.

HARRY: You wanna embrace me?

CHARMAINE: You want to walk funny?

HARRY: Just a suggestion. See, if I visit your feminine side, then parts of both of our fortunes will come true.

CHARMAINE: I'd rather quit and work for Joe.

HARRY: Whatever floats your boat. He's one funky monkey.

CHARMAINE: You're telling me. A man who won't eat his own cooking is something to worry about. (*Sighs.*) I just lost my appetite. (*Pushes food away.*)

HARRY: If you don't want it . . . ?

CHARMAINE: It's yours! Besides, you paid for it!

MEREDITH: Well, I can't eat either. I'm just too worried about Wade.

HARRY: If you don't want it . . . ?

MEREDITH: Bon appetite. I'm going to look his desk over again . . . see if I missed a note or memo or anything that would explain his absence. (*SHE EXITS USL into Wade's Office.*)

Phone rings.

CHARMAINE: Wade Haywood Originals, Charmaine speaking. How may I help you? . . . Oh, hi Marie . . . I wish I could say fine . . . no, just a minor staffing problem today . . . You've got news to cheer me up? . . . Just a moment. (*SHE puts her hand over the phone, rushes to Wade's office and excitedly pounds on the door.*) Meredith! Marie is on the line! She has news! (*Returns to her chair and phone conversation with composure.*)

MEREDITH ENTERS upstage left.

CHARMAINE: Sorry, Marie, and what's the news? . . . of course you know what I hope it is! . . . It is?! You're not kidding me are you? . . . yes . . . uh-huh . . . yes . . . Can you hold for a moment? (*SHE puts her hand over the phone, and shouts with glee.*) We're in the Edward Eiress Show!!

MEREDITH: No!

CHARMAINE: Apparently! Mr. Eiress wants to have a meeting with Mr. Haywood! Marie says that's his M.O. when he plans to invite designers to participate in his show! (*Returns to phone with composure.*) I'm back Marie! . . . Of course, we're all excited! This is the best news ever! . . . Of course, of course! . . . Anytime! . . . Today would be fantastic! Two o'clock! Perfect! Bye, Marie! Thanks for crossing those fingers!

CHARMAINE hangs up the phone and jumps to her feet. She and MEREDITH embrace and jump up and down.

MEREDITH/CHARMAINE: We're in the Edward Eiress Show! We're in the Edward Eiress Show!

CHARMAINE: Wait till Mr. Haywood hears the news!

MEREDITH: Wade will be thrilled!

CHARMAINE: (*SHE immediately melts.*) Uh-oh.

MEREDITH: Uh-oh what?

CHARMAINE: Well, at the moment, we're missing Mr. Haywood, remember?

MEREDITH: Oh, yeah. Is that a problem?

CHARMAINE: Other than the obvious, yes. I just arranged a meeting with Edward Eiress for two o'clock today.

MEREDITH: Uh-oh. Well, call Marie back and reschedule!

CHARMAINE: Reschedule with Edward Eiress? I don't think so.

MEREDITH: Charmaine, Edward Eiress can't have a meeting with Wade Haywood if Wade Haywood isn't here.

CHARMAINE: Oh, now why didn't I think of that? And exactly what time should I reschedule the appointment for?

MEREDITH: For . . . for . . . oh - oh - -OIETY-BOIETY, we have no idea when Wade will be back!

CHARMAINE: Now you're seeing it from my point of view!

HARRY: Oiety-Boiety?

MEREDITH: Shut up, Harry. Charmaine, what are we going to do?

CHARMAINE: Well . . . I have an idea. But you're not going to like it.

MEREDITH: What's your idea?

CHARMAINE: First, a few of facts. Number one, the Edward Eiress Exposition could be the single biggest break this company has ever had.

MEREDITH: I agree.

CHARMAINE: Number two, Mr. Haywood is Lord knows where.

MEREDITH: I agree.

CHARMAINE: Number three, I know for a fact that Edward Eiress and Mr. Haywood have never met.

MEREDITH: I'll take your word for that. So?

CHARMAINE: So . . . we have someone else . . . pose as Mr. Haywood.

MEREDITH is speechless as THEY stare at each other for several beats.

CHARMAINE: What happened to I agree?

MEREDITH: I - I can't be following you?!

HARRY: I am! I hate to admit it, but I think it's a great idea. While the boss is out playing hooky somewhere, his business could go down the crapper. We gotta cover for him. Our paychecks may just depend on it.

CHARMAINE: Harry's paycheck aside, he's right. That's how I see it. We have to cover for the boss. Someone has to pretend to be Mr. Haywood.

MEREDITH: Pretend to be Mr. Haywood?!

CHARMAINE: Have you got a better idea?

MEREDITH: But, Edward Eiress is expecting to meet with Mr. Haywood. We can't use an imposter! Besides, who could convincingly pretend to be Wade?

HARRY: Ahheemmm. Harrison William Beckwith at your service - actor extraordinaire.

CHARMAINE: Oh, please, don't start with that acting story again.

HARRY: Who else ya got? Besides, I'm a great actor. How do you think I got my four ex-wives to marry me?

CHARMAINE: Anyway, Meredith, as I was going to say, if we get someone who knows the company, knows fashion, knows - -

HARRY: Ahheemmm . . . Harrison William Beckwith at your service - again.

CHARMAINE: Someone who knows the industry, knows -

HARRY: What? You don't think I know anything?

MEREDITH: Harry, you DON'T know anything. Now be quiet.

CHARMAINE: Someone like you, Meredith.

MEREDITH: Me?

HARRY: Her?

CHARMAINE: Yes!

MEREDITH: Why me?

CHARMAINE: Because I'm too gifted (*Indicates her large bosom*) to dress up like a man, and Harry's too dumb. Besides, you're smart and talented. Clean off the mascara and put on a man's suit and add a little mustache, and there you are . . . Mr. Wade Haywood.

HARRY: That's crazy. No one would ever believe her as a man. I am obviously the best choice here. At least I've got the right plumbing.

CHARMAINE: I don't want to know about your plumbing, Harry.

HARRY: Well, I'll tell you one thing -

CHARMAINE: Tell me this, Harry. What's the difference between chiffon and noil?

HARRY: I - I don't know.

CHARMAINE: Meredith?

MEREDITH: Chiffon is a light-weight sheer and elegant silk with a very slightly rough feel to it. Silk noil has a nubby feel and a low sheen.

CHARMAINE: Harry, where on dress would you most likely find a key-hole?

HARRY: Keyhole? Dresses don't have doors. I know a trick question when I hear one.

CHARMAINE: Meredith?

MEREDITH: Usually designed at or below the neck line on either the back or front of a garment.

HARRY: Oh! That keyhole! I knew that.

CHARMAINE: Harry, Vera Wang is best known for what?

HARRY: Who's Vera Wang? Is that Joe's sister?

CHARMAINE: Meredith?

MEREDITH: Vera Wang is an outstanding fashion designer best known for her bridal gowns.

CHARMAINE: Like I said, Harry, you don't know anything about the fashion industry.

HARRY: I know I'd still make a better imposter for Mr. Haywood than her.

CHARMAINE: If Edward Eiress asked you to show him a handkerchief, what would you do?

HARRY: That's easy. I'd reach into my pocket and show him this (*He pulls a hanky from his pocket.*)

CHARMAINE: Meredith?

MEREDITH: I'd show him a dress. In fact, just yesterday, Iris finished our handkerchief dress we presented in the Edward Eiress portfolio. It's on the mannequin in her office.

CHARMAINE: I rest my case. I've always said the best man for the job is a woman. Besides, Edward Eiress is interested in Wade Haywood Originals. He's not going to care what Wade Haywood looks like.

MEREDITH: You know, it might just work.

CHARMAINE: What have we got to lose?

MEREDITH: Our jobs if this backfires on us.

CHARMAINE: Mr. Haywood, where ever he might be, will thank the three of us.

HARRY: Huh-uh, you can count me out. If I'm not good enough to play the boss, the two of you can just play this little charade without me. (*Crosses to his desk and sits. THEY follow.*)

CHARMAINE: Harry, as much as I hate to admit it, we need your participation too. This will only work if we're all in this together.

HARRY: Oh, so now you need me!

FASHIONABLY LATE

MEREDITH: Come on, Harry. Our jobs may be on the line here. If we do nothing and Wade returns to find out we let Edward Eiress get away, he'll probably fire all three of us!

CHARMAINE: Trust me, Mr. Haywood will appreciate our creativity and initiative. . . . I hope. Let's show Mr. Haywood we care about his company. Let's show him we can be creative in the toughest of circumstances. Let's show him what the T in team stands for.

HARRY: Okay! Let's show him!

CHARMAINE: That's the spirit, Harry! Now, give me your pants!

HARRY: What?

CHARMAINE: Meredith has to have something to wear, and we've got less than two hours to get ready.

MEREDITH: Wait a minute - I draw the line here. I am not getting into Harry's pants.

CHARMAINE: Okay, we'll send someone out for a suit. In the meantime, we've got 15 other things to take care of. . . . including that walk of yours.

MEREDITH: What's wrong with my walk?

CHARMAINE: It's too "womanly." Now, watch Harry. Harry show her.

HARRY: What? You want me to walk?

CHARMAINE: Yes. You do know how don't you?

HARRY: Funny. *(HE starts to walk, but becomes suddenly self-conscious about his gait and overdoes it "manly-style.")* Now, listen ladies, try to remain calm and please keep your hands to yourself.

MEREDITH: Harry - what are you doing? You never walk like that.

CHARMAINE: Harry, you are moving around like you are on a beach wearing a Speedo three sizes too small.

HARRY: Thank you.

CHARMAINE: That wasn't a compliment. Now walk normal.

HARRY shifts to a Neanderthal like gait.

MEREDITH: Harry, now you're walking like a gorilla on steroids.

CHARMAINE: Forget it Harry! What was I thinking?

HARRY: Well, I'm nervous.

CHARMAINE: Next thing you know he'll be doing a ballet. *(SHE crosses USL to Wade's office.)* Come on Meredith, let's get the Edward Eiress portfolio out for you to brush up on, and we'll look and see if Mr. Haywood happens to have an extra suit in his office closet. If not, we'll see if Iris can come up with something for you to wear.

MEREDITH: I'm not so sure we should involve anyone else in this charade.

CHARMAINE: We don't we have a choice. We're already short on time. Relax, it's just Iris.

MEREDITH: Relax around Iris? You're kidding, right?

MEREDITH and CHARMAINE EXIT into Wade's office.

HARRY: Ballet? *(HE tosses them a snarl, then turns away and does a little ballet step or two and a pirouette into center stage.)*

NATALIE ENTERS stage right. She is poised, sophisticated, but could let her hair down at the drop of a hat. Her smile is radiant.

HARRY: *(HE looks up to discover Natalie watching him.)* Hi . . . uh - this isn't what you think. I'm . . . I'm . . . just working out some creativity overload.

NATALIE: *(SHE smiles at him.)* No explanation necessary. I do a little Saturday Night Fever when I'm stressed out. *(SHE suddenly does the Saturday Night Fever dance.)*

HARRY: Go girl!

NATALIE: I'm sorry. I could tell you were embarrassed, so I acted impulsively to even things up. Besides, we artists have to have our eccentricities. That's what makes us successful, don't you think?

HARRY: Absolutely.

NATALIE: *(SHE laughs.)* You must Mr. Haywood? *(Offers him her hand.)*

HARRY: *(HE looks back behind him toward Wade's office, then back to Natalie.)* Yes! Yes, I'm Wade Haywood. And you are?

NATALIE: Natalie Hawt.

HARRY: Yes, you are!

NATALIE: Excuse me?

HARRY: Uh . . . did you say you were hot? It is kinda warm in here.

NATALIE: Oh! *(Laughs.)* No, my name is Hawt. H-A-W-T, of Hawt Fabrics. I spoke with your assistant, Charmaine, just yesterday. She said to drop by anytime. She seems to think you and I have the potential to mesh a wonderful relationship in the fashion industry. I was impressed by her confidence.

HARRY: Oh . . . well . . . *(HE glances toward Wade's office, then back to Natalie.)* Please step into my office so we can discuss this relationship.

HARRY escorts NATALIE upstage right and they EXIT into Meredith's office. A beat later CHARMAINE and MEREDITH ENTER and cross to DCS. Meredith carries the Edward Eiress portfolio.)

CHARMAINE: Okay, now, I'm going to go work out the details with Iris, and then run down to the costume shop on the corner and get you a moustache.

MEREDITH: Moustache?

CHARMAINE: You'll need it, trust me. Now, you go do your homework for your meeting with Edward Eiress.

MEREDITH: I sure hope we're doing the right thing!

CHARMAINE: Me too! *(EXITS stage left.)*

Offstage from Meredith's office a slap is heard.

HARRY: *(Offstage.)* Owww!

NATALIE ENTERS from Meredith's office, storms downstage right and EXITS. HARRY ENTERS from Meredith's office rubbing his cheek.

HARRY: I wonder if I can get workman's comp?

MEREDITH: Harry? Who was that?!

HARRY: Meredith! Uh, hi. That - that was nobody . . . an old girlfriend of mine. We're thinking about dating again.

MEREDITH: What were you doing in my office?

HARRY: Privacy. What else?

MEREDITH: Why did I even ask? *(SHE steps past him and EXITS into her office.)*

HARRY crosses to his desk, rubbing his cheek as FLORIDA ENTERS stage right. She is attractive, but overdoes it with big hair, too much make up, and a lot of costume jewelry. She dresses over-the-top without any sense of good taste. She's annoyingly likable, a little low on I.Q., clumsy, and "punches" the "ohs" of her speech. She pauses for a moment, looks around and then focuses on Harry.

FASHIONABLY LATE

FLORIDA: Oh, hello.

HARRY: *(HE turns and is instantly infatuated.)* Hellooo, Dolly!

FLORIDA: Oh, you must be Mr. Haywood?

HARRY: *(HE thinks for a moment.)* Well, why not? I'm willing to give it another try. Wade Haywood here. What's your name . . . and phone number?

FLORIDA: *(SHE starts for him and trips over her own feet and falls into his arms. She looks up at him.)* Oh, I'm Florida - Florida Lawrence. *(Pulling herself away from him.)* I'm sorry - I am so clumsy.

HARRY: Not a problem. Believe me!

FLORIDA: Oh, I'm so embarrassed. And first impressions are so important.

HARRY: Trust me, Gorgeous, you passed with flying colors!

FLORIDA: Oh, you are a sweet talker aren't you, Mr. Haywood?

HARRY: Well, today I am! I'd ask you into my office, but my face already hurts.

FLORIDA: Oh - -Huh?

HARRY: Nothing. You say "oh" a lot, don't you?

FLORIDA: Oh, I don't know. I haven't noticed. You're younger than I expected.

HARRY: Oh? I mean - I am?

FLORIDA: Oh, yes. I assumed that since you were a friend of my uncle you would be closer to his age.

HARRY: Uncle?

FLORIDA: Oh, yes, Uncle Jack.

HARRY: Ah . . . Uncle Jack. *(HE has no idea.)* So, how is Uncle Jack?

FLORIDA: Oh, he's fine. He said to remind you that no matter what I said, you owe him. Whatever that means. Mr. Haywood, thank you so much for this opportunity. I promise you won't regret hiring me.

HARRY: Hiring you?

FLORIDA: Oh, here's my resume. *(SHE pulls an envelope from her purse.)* Uncle Jack said you might want it for your personal file.

HARRY: Personal file? You must mean personNEL file.

FLORIDA: Oh, that's the one. So, tell me, Mr. Haywood, what kind of work will I be doing for you?

HARRY: That's a good question.

FLORIDA: Oh, you are soooo funny. Now don't pretend you and Uncle Jack have not discussed any of the details.

HARRY: Uncle Jack . . . and me . . . of course, we discussed the details . . . *(HE's grasping.)*

FLORIDA: Oh, I just can't wait to be groomed!

HARRY: Excuse me?

FLORIDA: Oh, yes, . . . groomed as a replacement. It sounds so exciting!

HARRY: A replacement? You're replacing somebody?

FLORIDA: Oh, I forgot. It's supposed to be a secret. *(SHE puts a finger over her lips.)* Uncle Jack said that I didn't have to start work until two o'clock, but . . . I wanted to get acquainted with you first on a personal level before you become my boss.

HARRY: Good idea.

FLORIDA: Oh, I can't wait. Again, thank you so much! I better go. I have some shopping to do. I have to buy a briefcase. I've never worked in an office before.

FLORIDA crosses to stage right as CHARMAINE ENTERS stage left.

FLORIDA: *(Speaks over her shoulder.)* Bye-bye, Mr. Haywood. *(EXITS stage right.)*

CHARMAINE: *(Looks at Harry.)* Mr. Haywood?

HARRY: *(Laughs weakly.)* Yeah . . . call me crazy!

CHARMAINE: Who was that woman? And why did she call you Mr. Haywood?

HARRY: Something Lawrence - I forget. It was kinda weird. Anyway, see she threw herself at me when she was introducing herself. And my brain doesn't work well with a woman in my arms.

CHARMAINE: I didn't know it ever worked. Now, cough it up - why did she call you Mr. Haywood?

HARRY: Well, you see, she came in and mistook me for the boss, and since the boss is AWOL, I thought I'd play along.

CHARMAINE: And you would do this because . . . ?

HARRY: I don't know. Probably something to do with her long legs and those big blue eyes.

CHARMAINE: Are you an idiot?

HARRY: Sometimes I wonder. But, did you know that Haywood has hired a replacement?

CHARMAINE: A replacement?

HARRY: Yeah, as in replacing one of us.

CHARMAINE: No. First I heard of it.

HARRY: Honestly?

CHARMAINE: Yes! Now, why do you think one of us is being replaced?

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