

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THIS PLAY IS FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of this or any play or excerpt, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

1. DO take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.
2. DO enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.
3. DO understand that this play and all plays and materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.
4. DO NOT attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform this play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.
5. DO NOT rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. **It is a crime and it is wrong!**

Product Code A0050-FC

Charlotte

A Comedy in Two Acts by Rebecca Ryland

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION
PROHIBITED**

**Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsnow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 937-902-4194**

Copyright © 2000 by Rebecca Ryland, 2008 by Heartland Plays, Inc.

Charlotte

A Comedy in Two Acts by Rebecca Ryland

SETTING: *The DeVeaux Employment Agency, Columbus, Ohio, 1999*

CHARACTERS:

Charlotte DeVeaux: *An aging businesswoman showing the signs of senility. Charlotte is the kind of woman who fails to notice she is getting old and is often coquettish in her demeanor, particularly around younger men. She is a small woman who sports too much make-up and a golden haired wig reminiscent of the 1970's when her employment agency was booming. Although she moves about in a relatively nimble manner, Charlotte always employs the use of a wheelchair outside the office.*

Mr. Louis DeVeaux: *Charlotte's husband forever and ever. A good-natured fellow, one gets the sense his success lies on the wings of his wife, that without Charlotte he would have been content to sleep naked on the backyard hammock without a penny or purpose to his name. The bespectacled Mr. D. is well over his recommended weight limit; utilizing a sturdy wooden cane to keep from falling over when moving.*

Josephine Forrester: *Charlotte's office assistant. She is a young woman in her early twenties, having just graduated from university. Josephine is the type of person who empathizes with others, often accepting the otherwise unacceptable out of an overactive sense of understanding. An otherwise intelligent person, she is a capable assistant, tending to the DeVeaux's professional and personal needs.*

Claire Rose: *An African-American woman who comes to the DeVeaux Agency on a quest to rejoin the work force after an eight-year absence nurturing her young children to school age.*

Dina Bernstein: *Josephine's roommate. A recently graduated Sociology major eager to cure the ills of society. Dina declares herself a Jewish Lesbian on her application with the Agency.*

Krystal Klear: *Whether or not she is a natural blonde is not entirely "klear" but it seems a sufficient attribute to win Charlotte's attention. Of course, Louis has eyes of his own on this "DeVeaux Girl" with a reputation that supersedes that once respectable title.*

Marvelous Marvin the Magnificent: *A master of illusion searching for the perfect assistant to turn a few tricks of her own.*

Detective Lars Peebles: *A police detective.*

Charlotte
A Comedy in Two Acts by Rebecca Ryland

ACT I, SCENE I

(AT RISE: 9:15 AM. CHARLOTTE sits at her desk down right with her husband, MR. LOUIS DEVEAUX, seated at his desk up center and her assistant, JOSEPHINE, at her desk left. A door leading to a hallway, a lavatory and an elevator is situated on the down left side of the stage; a closet door on the up left center wall. Several filing cabinets stand left of the closet. A client seating area which includes a small sofa, two chairs and a table covered with forms, magazines and scrapbooks is situated in the open center. The office appears efficient and productive with all participants engrossed in their respective tasks; CHARLOTTE talking to a client by phone, MR. DEVEAUX, with his head down, looking over some presumably important papers and JOSEPHINE, with her back to MR. DEVEAUX's desk, cutting clippings from yesterday's newspaper. CHARLOTTE insists on keeping an accurate record of all news clippings, even advertisements, pertaining to the employment business she started nearly forty years ago. CHARLOTTE keeps scrapbooks of the clippings and enjoys sharing with others her stories of those early days as one of the first successful female entrepreneurs in Columbus, Ohio.)

CHARLOTTE

(On phone.) Of course, I have the perfect receptionist for your office... Medical terminology? How important is that? She's only answering the phone. Says here on her card she attended Ohio State...Degree? Of course she has a degree... In what? English, I imagine. She speaks perfect English. If my girl weren't so wonderful I'd hire her myself. Seventy-five words per minute that girl can type— I tested her. Blond with blue eyes and her voice like an angel! I can have her there for an interview before lunch. Say, 11:00?... No, no. She won't leave when a better job comes along. I promise. And if she does I'll get you another girl... 10:30? Fine. You know Charlotte DeVeaux. My reputation stands for itself. Thanks to Charlotte, you can rest assured the job will be done right. *(Hangs up phone then rises and gingerly crosses to JOSEPHINE.)* Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

(Stopping her task.) Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

(Handing JOSEPHINE a slip of paper.) Call this girl and have her go to this address and speak with a Mr. Evans. She's to be there at 9:30.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, it's 9:15. Even if I'm lucky enough to reach her I can't imagine she can get downtown in 15 minutes let alone be ready for an interview.

CHARLOTTE

She wants a job doesn't she? I didn't get where I am not being up and ready for the day by seven. She gave us her resume' and I found her a job. Now you tell her to dress pretty and wear heels. I'll call back and try to change the appointment to 10:30 but you tell her to be there by ten.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux. (*CHARLOTTE returns to her desk while JOSEPHINE dials.*) May I speak to Ms. Thompson?... Ms. Thompson, this is Josephine Forrester at the DeVeaux Agency... The DeVeaux Agency... Right. Are you still looking for a position?... Well, we've arranged an interview for you this morning with a Mr. Evans at 218 S. High St., suite 36... Actually, I don't have that information in front of me. Mrs. DeVeaux made the arrangements, but we do have your salary requirements and goals listed on your application with us and we have your resume on file, so I'm sure it falls within the perimeters of your expectations. Mr. Evans will be the best person with whom to discuss the particulars... The appointment was at 9:30— I know, I know. We're calling to reschedule for 10:30 but be there no later than 10... Do your best. Competition is tough in your field... Good. Let us know how it goes. Goodbye.

(As JOSEPHINE rises to file the card, CHARLOTTE's phone conversation is heard.)

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte DeVeaux with the DeVeaux Agency... Mr. Evans... Mr. Evans, I have the perfect girl for your opening. Five foot two, one hundred twenty pounds, blonde hair, not dyed, and no children. She is an absolute gem. Witty, warm and dependable with excellent typing skills... No, but I can get this girl to you no later than eleven... 10:30? Wonderful. You're a dear. She'll be there by ten.

(Phone rings.)

JOSEPHINE

(Answering.) Good Morning, DeVeaux Agency... Yes... Yes... I'd be happy to look through our files for you. I have no doubt we can fill your needs... Travel? Yes, I like to travel... About 125... Well, of course I'm interested in entertainment, but at this moment, I have a job and, with all do respect, I don't know you... Perhaps you might look in the personals. Goodbye.

CHARLOTTE

(Calling.) Josephine!

JOSEPHINE

(Rising and crossing toward CHARLOTTE.) Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

Look up the file on that pretty blond girl who was in yesterday and have her go to this address and speak with Mr. Evans.

JOSEPHINE

Yesterday? (*Pause, thinking.*) Oh, you mean Ms. Thompson. I took care of that already, Mrs. DeVaux. You were going to call and change the appointment to 10:30.

CHARLOTTE

I just spoke to Mr. Evans and she's to be there by ten.

JOSEPHINE

I'll telephone to see if she's left.

CHARLOTTE

Good. (*JOSEPHINE starts for cabinet as phone rings.*) Will you get that, Josephine?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVaux. (*Answering phone.*) DeVaux Agency... Oh, hi... Sure, come in anytime you want this morning. Come by around eleven and we'll have lunch together after you meet with Mrs. D...

CHARLOTTE

(*Interrupting.*) Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Just a minute. (*To Charlotte.*) Yes, Mrs. DeVaux.

CHARLOTTE

I have a doctor's appointment today. Check my calendar and see what time.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVaux. (*Back to phone.*) I gotta go... Yeah, that's cool. See you in a bit. (*Hangs up and checks calendar.*) Mrs. DeVaux.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

(*Carrying calendar to CHARLOTTE.*) I don't see a doctor's appointment listed for today. There was the one *last* Thursday at 1:00 and another scheduled for September 12, but nothing in-between.

CHARLOTTE

I called for an appointment yesterday. I asked you to mark the time. They went to a great deal of trouble to work me into the schedule.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sorry, Mrs. DeVaux. Would you like me to call and reconfirm the appointment?

CHARLOTTE

No. I'll do it myself. You call Mr. Evans and change the interview to 11:00.

JOSEPHINE

It's probably too late to change it now. Let me call first and see if Miss Thompson has left.

CHARLOTTE

All right. (*JOSEPHINE crosses to file cabinet as CHARLOTTE dials.*) Charlotte DeVeaux calling for Mr. Evans... When do you expect him to be free?... I sent a girl there this morning and I want to know what he thinks about her... (*JOSEPHINE takes card from file cabinet and crosses to CHARLOTTE's desk.*) One O'clock? That's fine. I'll tell my girl. (*Hangs up.*)

JOSEPHINE

(*Overhearing last part only.*) Doctor's appointment at one, Mrs. DeVeaux?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

JOSEPHINE

I was thinking. Maybe we better not try to change Ms. Thompson's appointment since it's already set up. Is that okay?

CHARLOTTE

Ms. Thompson?

JOSEPHINE

The graduate student from Ohio State.

CHARLOTTE

Graduate student?

JOSEPHINE

Engineering. She came in about a month ago.

CHARLOTTE

The pretty blond girl with such impeccably good English.

JOSEPHINE

That's the one.

CHARLOTTE

Can she type?

JOSEPHINE

I remember her resume' was impressive. Excellent computer skills.

CHARLOTTE

How many children?

JOSEPHINE

No children. She just finished her degree.

CHARLOTTE

I remember. And we sent her on an interview?

JOSEPHINE

Yes. This morning.

CHARLOTTE

Good. I like your work, Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Thank you, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. DeVeaux and I both think the world of you. We never had any children.

JOSEPHINE

I know.

CHARLOTTE

This agency is *my* child. I have a niece but I haven't spoken to her in years. My sister allowed her to do anything she wanted. I used to send money so she could buy her nice things. But she was always a lazy sort of girl. Spoiled rotten brown. She got pregnant and the boy refused to marry her. I don't blame him. I haven't spoken to my niece since.

JOSEPHINE

Hmmm.

CHARLOTTE

(Pause.) I worry about my sister. Her husband had a heart attack when he was only forty-eight.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sorry.

CHARLOTTE

He smoked cigarettes but he was a pleasant enough man only he thought he wasn't old enough for life insurance. Men can be such ninnies. When he died I gave my niece work and offered to pay for her to go to college. She quit her job in the middle of the summer to get ready. Can you imagine? As if it would take her two months to get ready for school. *(Pause.)* My sister died in 1998. Just before her sixty-sixth birthday.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sorry.

CHARLOTTE

I adored her.

JOSEPHINE

I've seen photos of you and your sister in the scrapbooks. You were both very pretty.

CHARLOTTE

No, no. She was *much* prettier than I. She had the most beautiful blonde hair. Of course, some people did say I had the better figure.

JOSEPHINE

I expect you turned many a head in your day. In fact, I bet you were a knockout.

CHARLOTTE

Do you think so?

JOSEPHINE

Yes. Beautiful.

CHARLOTTE

It was rare then for a woman with beauty to go into business. I didn't have to but I could and that's what made it challenging. *(CHARLOTTE crosses to sofa and opens scrapbook on table. JOSEPHINE follows.)* We were the first to train girls on Teletype equipment. And our girls were famous for dictation. A DeVeaux girl was the best you could get. The State was our biggest client. Senators fought over our girls. Here, you see me at a luncheon with Governor DiSalle.

JOSEPHINE

What a lovely dress.

CHARLOTTE

He winked at me. Twice. Once when the Mayor introduced us and then again with desert. Oh, those colored boys wore the most handsome uniforms; starched white collars with red bow ties and matching suspenders. Served the most delicious chocolate custard over white ladyfingers. 'Your, Charlotte, sir,' his boy said. The Governor looked down from his table and winked.

JOSEPHINE

You must have felt very proud.

CHARLOTTE

I was. *(Closing the scrapbook then standing.)* I wrote my niece completely out of my will when the baby was born. I told my sister last week I simply cannot condone that kind of recklessness. I still send money but she has to promise not to spend one red cent on that no good daughter of hers.

JOSEPHINE

(Referring to scrapbook.) Do you want me to take that?

CHARLOTTE

No. *(Clutching the scrapbook.)* Her husband died last year. He smoked cigarettes but he was a pleasant enough man.

(Slightly agitated, CHARLOTTE crosses to her office with scrapbook still in hand. Phone rings.)

JOSEPHINE

I'll get it, Mrs. DeVeaux. *(JOSEPHINE crosses back to her desk and picks up receiver.)* DeVeaux Agency... Yes... Well, we act as a liaison between prospective employers and people looking for work... Yes, there is a fee for our services, this isn't the state employment agency... So, for example, if you tell us what kind of opening you have available, we'll look through our files and try to fill the position with someone that meets or exceeds your expectations... Companies that specifically request our services usually pay the fee... We're located across the street, directly behind the Capitol Building... I talked to you earlier, didn't I?... This is not an escort service. Goodbye.

ACT I, SCENE II

(Door opens. An African-American woman enters. Though slightly nervous, she is professionally dressed and carries a black leather briefcase and purse.)

THE WOMAN

Am I early?

JOSEPHINE

No, I'm sorry. Do you have an appointment?

THE WOMAN

I spoke with a Mrs. DeVeaux yesterday. She told me to be here by ten.

JOSEPHINE

(Checking calendar.) I apologize. You're not on the calendar.

THE WOMAN

If you're busy, I can come back.

JOSEPHINE

No. We are not busy. Our next appointment isn't until eleven. Besides, we accept walk-ins. Sometimes people are just out looking for work and they see our Agency listed on the directory by the elevator. Hello. (*Offers hand.*) Josephine Forrester.

THE WOMAN

Claire Rose.

JOSEPHINE

What line of work?

CLAIRE

My husband is working as an advisor on the new wing at the medical complex on Twelfth. We don't know a great deal about Columbus yet; we've been very busy with the move and getting our children registered for school. I was a medical receptionist at a health clinic in Pittsburgh. Actually, that was a number of years ago. Before the children were born. In fact, that's how I met my husband. He was a doctor at the clinic. Our youngest starts first grade next week and frankly, I'm ready to get back into the professional world. I took computer classes last year at Pittsburgh University on the days he went to kindergarten so I feel prepared to step back into the work force despite the eight years I've been home with my family. Oh, and I have a degree in communications.

JOSEPHINE

Do you have a copy of your resume'?

CLAIRE

Yes. (*CLAIRE sets her purse on the floor at the end of the table then sets her briefcase on the table. Reaching inside she pulls out a resume'.*) Here.

JOSEPHINE

Good. If you would fill out the information on this card while I show your resume' to Mrs. DeVeaux, we'll get started on finding you a job.

CLAIRE

Thanks.

(*JOSEPHINE takes the resume' to CHARLOTTE while CLAIRE completes the application card.*)

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, didn't you mention a medical receptionist position you were trying to fill?

CHARLOTTE

It's been taken.

JOSEPHINE

Oh. Too bad. This woman would be great.

CHARLOTTE

You've explained to her that she must pay our fee up front.

JOSEPHINE

No. I thought the fee was paid when we find a job.

CHARLOTTE

That's only if the employer pays the fee.

JOSEPHINE

I must have misunderstood. What is the fee?

CHARLOTTE

Usually equal to the first month's salary.

JOSEPHINE

How do we know what the first month's salary will be if we haven't found the client a job?

CHARLOTTE

We have her name and address. We'll send her a contract through the mail. If she still wants to use our services she can sign it and send it back with her check.

JOSEPHINE

Okay. I'm a little confused, but, okay. (*JOSEPHINE returns to the sitting area.*) How is it coming?

CLAIRE

Just about finished.

JOSEPHINE

Good. I spoke with Mrs. DeVeaux and we need to draw up a contract for you to sign before we begin the job search.

CLAIRE

Could you give me an idea what positions you are trying to fill at this time? Any for which I'm qualified, of course.

JOSEPHINE

We just filled a position for a medical receptionist. You would have been perfect. I really don't know what else is available. I'm relatively new here myself, at the DeVeaux Agency, I mean. Mrs. DeVeaux has that information but I promise we'll get that contract out to you right away.

CLAIRE

I'd be happy to sign it now. So you can get started.

JOSEPHINE

We draw up a specific contract for each person. But I promise I'll get it in the mail to you this afternoon.

CLAIRE

That will be fine. I appreciate your time.

JOSEPHINE

(Extending her hand.) It's been a pleasure. We'll be in touch.

(CLAIRE hesitates for a moment, looking at CHARLOTTE, who continues working at her desk without looking up, then exits, forgetting her purse. CHARLOTTE rises and crosses to center area.)

CHARLOTTE

Before you file the card, Josephine, let me see it.

JOSEPHINE

(Handing her the card.) She seemed like a very nice person, Mrs. DeVeaux. Someone who would be easy to work with and reliable. She has computer skills and a degree in communications.

CHARLOTTE

I mark a star on their cards so I remember.

JOSEPHINE

Who has a degree?

CHARLOTTE

It's illegal to discriminate.

JOSEPHINE

Would you like me to type up the contract?

CHARLOTTE

No. Later. I have to powder my nose.

(JOSEPHINE places the card on her desk as CHARLOTTE reaches down and picks up CLAIRE's purse, which closely resembles one of her own. She exits to hallway, leaving the door ajar. As if by magic, MR. DEVEAUX lifts his head. Reaching for his cane, he rises and lumbers out of his office towards JOSEPHINE who is seated at her desk. At the back of her chair he reaches over her shoulders and places his hands squarely on her breasts. JOSEPHINE grabs his hands and gently removes them from her chest.)

JOSEPHINE

Now, Mr. DeVeaux, I've told you I don't want you to do that.

MR. DEVEAUX

How are you this morning, Josephine? You're such a lovely sight to an old man.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, well...

MR. DEVEAUX

There's some fire left in these bones.

JOSEPHINE

You better hadn't let Mrs. DeVeaux catch you with me. She'll have you strung up by your big toe.

MR. DEVEAUX

My big, toe, heh?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, your toe. You go back to your desk before you get us both in trouble.

MR. DEVEAUX

You've got just about the darndest prettiest smile I've ever seen on a young lady. And, *(Placing his hands back onto her breasts.)* oh, the prettiest darn—

JOSEPHINE

(Again, grabbing his hands but this time he is more insistent on keeping them in place.)
Please, Mr. DeVeaux.

(Sound of toilet flushing. MR. DEVEAUX takes his hands away and hobbles back to his desk, sitting just as CHARLOTTE enters, her nose blotted dark brown. *Note: The sound of the toilet flushing should be slight, just enough to be heard in a quiet office setting.)*

ACT I, SCENE III

CHARLOTTE

(Entering) Josephine, put on our “to get” list some lilac air freshener.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux. *(JOSEPHINE pauses as CHARLOTTE continues towards her desk)*
Mrs. DeVeaux?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, dear.

JOSEPHINE

A friend of mine is coming in soon to fill out an application. *(Looks more intently at CHARLOTTE's face.)*

CHARLOTTE

Is she fat?

JOSEPHINE

No. No, why do you ask? Mrs. DeVeaux, I'm sorry. You must have rubbed against something in the bathroom. Perhaps some dirt on the towel.

CHARLOTTE

The light is so poor in that lavatory. Wipe it off, dear. *(JOSEPHINE gets a tissue from her desk and wipes CHARLOTTE's nose.)* What color hair?

JOSEPHINE

What?

CHARLOTTE

Your friend. What color hair?

JOSEPHINE

Dark brown. Almost black. There. That's better.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you, dear. She isn't Oriental is she?

JOSEPHINE

No, no. She's not Orien- Asian.

CHARLOTTE

Can she type?

JOSEPHINE

Oh, very well. I met her at college.

CHARLOTTE

Good. We'll send her on that medical receptionist position.

JOSEPHINE

I thought it was filled.

CHARLOTTE

Did Mr. Evans call?

JOSEPHINE

Mr. Evans? Is that the interview we sent Ms. Thompson to this morning?

CHARLOTTE

I sent a girl there at 9:30 this morning.

JOSEPHINE

We sent a Kelly Thompson there this morning. She has a Masters in Engineering.

CHARLOTTE

How well does she type?

JOSEPHINE

I don't know.

CHARLOTTE

Test her the next time. We guarantee our girls no less than 65 words per minute.

JOSEPHINE

I'll tell my friend.

CHARLOTTE

The Oriental girl?

JOSEPHINE

No, she isn't Asian. Her name is Dina. Dina Bernstein.

CHARLOTTE

Like Leonard?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, like Leonard.

CHARLOTTE

Jewish?

JOSEPHINE

I don't know. I never asked her. She and her roommate put up a Christmas tree last year.

CHARLOTTE

She's not living with a boy is she?

JOSEPHINE

No, Mrs. DeVeaux, she isn't living with a boy. *(Door opens; DINA peeks her head inside)* Hi! It's okay. Come on in.

DINA

Hello.

CHARLOTTE

Good Morning.

JOSEPHINE

Dina, we were just talking about you. Mrs. DeVeaux, this is the friend I was telling you about.

CHARLOTTE

You don't look Oriental.

DINA

I'm not. But I have a Chow Chow. The kennel called and I have to pick up Bob sooner than expected or pay a late fee. They have an 11:00 checkout time. Hope you don't mind.

JOSEPHINE

We can work you in.

CHARLOTTE

Do you like dogs?

DINA

Sometimes. They can be a lot of trouble. But I love Bob.

CHARLOTTE

Your boyfriend?

DINA

My Chow Chow. Do you have a dog?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, my no. They're too much like children. This business is my legacy. It takes all my time and attention. I raised it from infancy.

DINA

Yes, Josephine has told me all about you.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure she exaggerated.

DINA

Impossible.

CHARLOTTE

So, you're looking for work. What do you do?

DINA

I just graduated this past June and I've been working as a waitress. But my field is Sociology.

CHARLOTTE

And what do you want to do in Sociology?

DINA

Cure the ills of society.

CHARLOTTE

That's quite a large task for such a petite young lady.

DINA

A reservoir holds thousands of cubic feet of water and one drop more has the potential to break the dam.

CHARLOTTE

That's a lot of power in one tiny drop.

DINA

My point exactly.

(Phone rings.)

JOSEPHINE

I'll get it.

CHARLOTTE

Will you get that, Josephine?

JOSEPHINE

Hello... Oh, yes, sorry– The DeVeaux Agency...

CHARLOTTE

You have a boyfriend?

JOSEPHINE

I'm not in a position to answer that question...

DINA

Why do you ask?

CHARLOTTE

Any plans for marriage?

JOSEPHINE

I prefer my own name...

DINA

I'd prefer not to answer that question.

JOSEPHINE

Josephine.

CHARLOTTE

Josephine?

JOSEPHINE

(To person on phone.) One moment, please. *(To CHARLOTTE.)* Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

I'm speaking to Dina.

JOSEPHINE

I know, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps we should continue our conversation at my desk.

DINA

That would be fine.

CHARLOTTE

(CHARLOTTE and DINA begin cross to CHARLOTTE's desk) You are a lovely girl. I'm sure we can find you something.

DINA

I would like to find work in my field.

CHARLOTTE

What's that, dear?

DINA

Sociology.

JOSEPHINE

(Returning to person on phone.) Technical, clerical and professional...

CHARLOTTE

Secretaries are still much in demand.

JOSEPHINE

You're welcome to come in and meet with us. We'll look through our files and see if we can find you the right match...

DINA

(As CHARLOTTE places CLAIRE's purse on top of a filing cabinet near her desk.) If I can't find something right away in Sociology, I would consider a temporary position in anything other than food service.

CHARLOTTE

(Taking a seat at her desk.) Let's see what we can do.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sorry, I don't quite understand what you mean.

CHARLOTTE

(At desk, dialing.) Charlotte DeVaux. I wish to speak to Mr. Evans...

JOSEPHINE

No, you may not. This is not a dating service. Goodbye.

CHARLOTTE

Interrupt him. I have the girl he's looking for right here in my office.

JOSEPHINE

(Crossing to CHARLOTTE's office with application for DINA.) Mrs. DeVaux— I'm sorry, I didn't know you were on the phone.

CHARLOTTE

No girl of mine would ever have the nerve to speak to a client in that tone. I would like to talk with your superior.

JOSEPHINE

(*To DINA.*) What's going on?

DINA

She was calling someone about me. I guess setting up an interview. But the secretary won't put her through.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Evans, that's who.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, maybe we should wait until after lunch to call Mr. Evans again. We've already sent him one client this morning.

CHARLOTTE

What are you talking about? (*To person on phone.*) No, not you. I want to speak with Mr. Evans— Charlotte DeVeaux.

JOSEPHINE

Perhaps you don't remember. We sent Ms. Thompson there for an interview. It should be going on just about now.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know a Ms. Thompson. Mr. Evans called me this morning and said he was looking for a receptionist.

JOSEPHINE

Please, don't get upset, Mrs. DeVeaux. I called Ms. Thompson and sent her on the interview.

CHARLOTTE

You must clear all appointments with me. I have a reputation to uphold. Who is this Ms. Thompson?

JOSEPHINE

A young woman. An engineer.

CHARLOTTE

Trains?

JOSEPHINE

No, no. Civil engineering. You showed her the photographs of the reception at the Capitol Building. She wanted a government job.

CHARLOTTE

And you sent her on an interview for a medical receptionist.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, I did. But I didn't know.

CHARLOTTE

Of course you didn't and that's exactly why you shouldn't set up any appointments without first confirming them with me. Remember what happened last April.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, I wasn't working here last April. I've only been here six weeks.

CHARLOTTE

Take Ms. Thompson out to the sitting room and have her fill out an application. Then we'll see what job she's best suited for.

JOSEPHINE

This is my friend, Dina. She's looking for something in Social Work.

CHARLOTTE

We don't have any jobs in Social Work. Take her name and number and if anything comes up we'll call. *(To person on phone.)* No. I do not. I want to speak with Ms. Thompson.

JOSEPHINE

Dina, I think we better sit out here.

DINA

I can come back another time.

JOSEPHINE

(Retreating to outer office space.) No, that's okay, really. Just fill out an application.

CHARLOTTE

She hasn't arrived yet? The day is half over! Is that what professionalism has sunk to—strolling into work any old time one feels like it? You tell her for me I want to speak to her the moment she gets in. Charlotte DeVeaux. The DeVeaux Agency. 555-1684.

DINA

Is it always like this?

JOSEPHINE

Sometimes worse. I don't even know if it's worth you putting in your application. We've never placed a soul since I've been here.

DINA

So how can she afford the office space?

JOSEPHINE

Assets, I imagine. It's all a little bonkers in my book. No one ever calls asking for help. She checks the newspaper everyday to see who's hiring then she goes through the files and pulls out a name and tries to set up an appointment. It doesn't matter what the qualifications are as long as the person types. And she has this system of stars to denote race on the application since she can't openly discriminate. She asked me if you are Jewish.

DINA

What did you tell her?

JOSEPHINE

I told her I didn't know.

CHARLOTTE

(Crossing from her office towards Dina and Josephine.) What don't you know?

JOSEPHINE

Oh, I was just saying I don't know what positions we have available right now.

CHARLOTTE

Dina, you're a lovely girl. I have no doubt we can place you in a temporary position until something more challenging comes along in your field. Sociology, correct? It's young people like you that will make this a better world. You strike me as a bright young lady and we'll do our best to help you. I'd hire you myself if Josephine wasn't such a dream. She's like a daughter to me. I haven't any children. I have a niece but I wrote her out of my will. Paid her college tuition when her father died and she paid me back by getting knocked up the first year.

DINA

(Handing CHARLOTTE the application card.) I guess I've filled out all the information you need. There wasn't any place to mark religion or sexual preference but if you want I can write Jewish Lesbian at the top.

CHARLOTTE

That won't be necessary. Josephine, file this card. *(CHARLOTTE turns abruptly and exits to her desk.)*

JOSEPHINE

Dina, you are *wicked!*

DINA

Like I said, I want to cure the ills of Society, even if it means one virus at a time. Look, I really have to take off. I'll just make it to the kennel before eleven. Anyway, looks like we'll do lunch another time. But, I'll be back downtown around four so I'll give you a ride home. *(DINA reaches over and gives JOSEPHINE a kiss, unseen by CHARLOTTE.)* Ta ta!

JOSEPHINE

(Looking quickly to see if CHARLOTTE is watching.) Damn you, Dina, why do you insist on doing things like that?

DINA

Next time someone asks if I'm Jewish, say yes. *(Laughs and exits.)*

(JOSEPHINE crosses to cabinet and files card. She then crosses to the center table, picking up one of the scrapbooks and returns to her desk. Taking a bottle of glue from her desk drawer, she returns to pasting news clippings in the scrapbook. About this time, CHARLOTTE rises from her desk; picks up CLAIRE's purse from on top the cabinet in her office and gingerly crosses toward the hallway door.)

CHARLOTTE

(As she passes JOSEPHINE's desk.) I have to powder my nose. Listen for the phone. I'm expecting a very important call from a Ms. Thompson. She's one of our top clients. I've placed two or three girls with her firm just this past year.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

(CHARLOTTE exits, leaving the door ajar. Once again, as if a bell has rung, MR. DEVEAUX's head lifts and his eyes open. He reaches for his cane and hobbles across the floor to JOSEPHINE's chair. JOSEPHINE stiffens, preparing for the ritual. Reaching over her shoulders, MR. DEVEAUX places both hands firmly on her breasts.)

JOSEPHINE

Mr. DeVeaux, *(Trying to push his hands away.)* how many times must I tell you that your doing this isn't okay? You really make me uncomfortable.

MR. DEVEAUX

That's quite a compliment to an old man.

JOSEPHINE

I told my boyfriend about you. He's very jealous.

MR. DEVEAUX

Delightful! Imagine a man of my age making a beau jealous.

JOSEPHINE

He has a terrible temper. And he's totally unpredictable. (*Succeeding in pushing MR. DEVEAUX away.*) He's liable to storm in here anytime and I can't be responsible for his actions.

MR. DEVEAUX

Splendid. A ruckus. I haven't engaged in a ruckus in several decades. Oh, how I love your breasts. (*Squeezing her breasts once again.*)

JOSEPHINE

Please, Mr. DeVeaux, your wife will be back any minute.

MR. DEVEAUX

I never kiss and tell.

JOSEPHINE

I do.

MR. DEVEAUX

Well, then, there's nothing to worry about. (*Attempting to kiss Josephine.*) I'll do all the kissing.

(*Once again the toilet flushes. MR. DEVEAUX quickly lets go and hobbles back to his desk, sitting just as CHARLOTTE enters.*)

CHARLOTTE

(*Entering without purse.*) Josephine, I've had a terrible dream. I'm so upset. Please come and sit with me.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

(*CHARLOTTE sits center; JOSEPHINE takes chair nearby*)

CHARLOTTE

Put on our "to do" list lilac air freshener.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

(*Pause.*)

CHARLOTTE

What did you want to talk about?

JOSEPHINE

You were going to tell me about your dream.

CHARLOTTE

My dream?

JOSEPHINE

Yes.

(Pause.)

CHARLOTTE

Josephine, I need to talk to you about the dream I had last night. It was terrible. I dreamed my diamonds were gone. All my jewelry. Even the ruby earrings my mother gave me when I turned eighteen. It was during the war. They had gold clips, oh, and they dangled. I wore them out on Valentine's Day with the most dashing young gentleman.

JOSEPHINE

Mr. DeVeaux?

CHARLOTTE

Heavens no. This was before I met Louis. I had an aunt on my daddy's side who lived in Chicago and mother let me take a train to visit her. February, 1946. I remember the conductor making sure I got the best seat in the dining coach because he said I was such a pretty little thing. Jonathan lived in the same building as Aunt Martha and we met one morning when I went down to get the mail. He talked my aunt into letting me go out with him that night because I was leaving the very next day. I promised I'd never tell Daddy because Jonathan had been on a ship in the South China Sea and had only been home a few months. Daddy was a major in the First World War and he warned me never to date a sailor.

JOSEPHINE

And did you keep your promise?

CHARLOTTE

Of course. I never kiss and tell.

JOSEPHINE

I've heard that before.

CHARLOTTE

It's true. It was so cold. Seventeen degrees above zero, if my memory serves me right. Oh, and how the wind howled off Lake Michigan. But that didn't stop us, we strolled on the beach till Midnight, holding tight to one another as if, at any moment, one of us could be blown away into the icy sea. Even Mr. DeVeaux doesn't know what happened that night. A smart woman never lets on to a man that there's ever been anyone but him in her life. A smart woman gets exactly what she wants by telling only what's necessary and never the absolute truth. *(Pause.)* I dreamed my diamonds were gone. All my jewelry. The ruby earrings my mother gave me for my eighteenth birthday—

JOSEPHINE

Where do you keep your jewelry?

CHARLOTTE

In a lockbox at the bank.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sure they're perfectly safe.

CHARLOTTE

Sane men jumped out of windows when the stock market crashed. We were lucky. My daddy kept his money in gold bullion. Take me to the bank. I have to make sure my diamonds are safe.

JOSEPHINE

Now?

CHARLOTTE

Get my chair. I'll call a cab.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

(Calling from JOSEPHINE's desk as JOSEPHINE retrieves wheel chair from closet.) Operator. I would like you to connect me with State Cab Company... No, I don't know the number. Please hurry, this is an emergency.

JOSEPHINE

Would you like me to make the call?

CHARLOTTE

The operator is making the connection now— Yes. State Cab? I need a pick-up immediately at 10 East Broadway... For Charlotte DeVeaux... No, no... 10 East Broadway. My assistant will be waiting out front. Don't dawdle or you'll get no tip.

JOSEPHINE

Here, Mrs. DeVeaux. Let me help you into the chair. Easy. There. Good. Oh, Mrs. DeVeaux, you have something on your nose. Let me push you over to the mirror by your desk so you can fix it.

CHARLOTTE

Did you miss some of the dirt, dear?

JOSEPHINE

The things you remember. It never fails to amaze me.

CHARLOTTE

Bring me my bag, Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Where did you— Oh, I see it. (*Picks up CHARLOTTE's purse from floor beside desk and hands it to CHARLOTTE.*) Here.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you, dear. You're such a sweet child, the way you look out for me. We wouldn't want to embarrass ourselves in public. It might hurt the image of The DeVeaux Agency.

(As CHARLOTTE freshens her make-up, JOSEPHINE returns to her desk and quickly calls State Cab.)

JOSEPHINE

Hello. State Cab? My employer, Charlotte DeVeaux just called for a pick-up at 10 East Broadway— Oh, good, good. I thought so but just wanted to make sure... She hasn't been at that address for years. Thanks.

CHARLOTTE

(Wheeling herself back into the center area.) Talking to your boyfriend?

JOSEPHINE

No. I don't have a boyfriend.

CHARLOTTE

Lovely girl like you?

JOSEPHINE

I have other interests.

CHARLOTTE

Good for you. That's the kind of attitude that makes a successful businesswoman. Don't ever forget, though, how essential your femininity is to success.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, we better get going, the taxi will be here any minute.

CHARLOTTE

Taxi?

JOSEPHINE

We're going to the bank to check on your diamonds.

CHARLOTTE

My diamonds?

JOSEPHINE

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Does Mr. DeVeaux know?

JOSEPHINE

I don't think so.

CHARLOTTE

Push me over.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

(Shaking MR. DEVEAUX awake.) Louis, Louis.

MR. DEVEAUX

What, what? Oh, yes. Yes, Charlotte. I was just going over this investment portfolio.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Louis. I can see. Josephine has suggested we go to the bank to check on my diamonds. You'll need to keep an eye on the door and answer the phone. Don't sign any contracts while I'm gone. I'm expecting a placement with a big Medical firm but I want to examine the paperwork myself before we sign any agreements.

MR. DEVEAUX

Of course, Charlotte.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux has a doctor's appointment at 1:00. I'll take her to lunch after we go to the bank and then send her on by taxi to the doctor. Would you like me to bring you back something?

MR. DEVEAUX

You know what I like.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mr. DeVeaux, that I do.

CHARLOTTE

She's a dear.

MR. DEVEAUX

I love her like she was my own.

CHARLOTTE

Like my own daughter.

JOSEPHINE

We really must go. *(Crossing to door and opening it before going back for CHARLOTTE.)* Lock the door behind us, Mr. DeVeaux. That way you won't have to worry about people straying in. Nothing's too important that it can't wait till after lunch.

CHARLOTTE

Nonsense. Not a moment before noon. We never lock our doors for lunch until noon.

JOSEPHINE

Oh, just a moment. I forgot my backpack.

MR. DEVEAUX

(Crossing to door.) Whatever you want, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

You should find something more feminine to carry your things in, dear.

JOSEPHINE

(Slipping her back-pack over her shoulders.) Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

(As JOSEPHINE and CHARLOTTE exit.) I wrote my niece out of my will. She had a baby out of wedlock. I told my sister it would happen. She let her run wild. I gave her a job but she always came in late. And with her hair wet. She...

ACT I, SCENE IV

(MR. DEVEAUX closes the door. As he lumbers back towards his desk the phone rings. He stops at JOSEPHINE's desk to answer.)

MR. DEVEAUX

Louis DeVeaux here... Josephine? She left for lunch... No... No, she won't be back—Are you her boyfriend?... Dash it all. I was up for a fray... One of her clients? I guess that would be all right as long as you promise to help entertain an old man while you wait.

(MR. DEVEAUX hangs up the phone and once again turns towards his desk just as the door leading to the hallway opens. A voluptuous blonde woman enters. MR. DEVEAUX turns and immediately “lights up.”)

THE BLONDE WOMAN

Louis?

MR. DEVEAUX

Well, hello, there. I wasn't expecting you.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I carry a cell phone.

MR. DEVEAUX

I didn't call.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I came last Thursday.

MR. DEVEAUX

Charlotte had a doctor's appointment.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

And I'm making house calls. She set up a job interview, you know.

MR. DEVEAUX

Who?

THE BLONDE WOMAN

Your wife. Hell, filling out that application saved your butt. I don't think she was too pleased when she walked in on us.

MR. DEVEAUX

She saw nothing.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I was supposed to be there at 9:30 this morning. I don't even get up till noon.

MR. DEVEAUX

It's not quite noon.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I don't work nights on Wednesdays. Most of my clients are Baptists.

MR. DEVEAUX

And old men.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

And politicians. I appreciate the referral.

MR. DEVEAUX

Charlotte's or mine?

THE BLONDE WOMAN

Yours, of course.

MR. DEVEAUX

My pleasure.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

That's what I'm here for.

MR. DEVEAUX

We are an employment service. I'm just keeping my clients happy. How did you know Charlotte would be gone?

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I had some business across the street at the Capital and when I came out the back door I saw her getting into a cab. Too bad you never had any children. Charlotte told me the whole story. And the photos at the reception. Wouldn't it be a hoot if she knew the State was still her biggest client? *This DeVeaux girl* has quite a reputation. How long has she been a cripple?

MR. DEVEAUX

She's not.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

She uses a wheelchair.

MR. DEVEAUX

Only in public.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

The little scam artist.

MR. DEVEAUX

No scam. A woman her age has to get sympathy where she can. She means well.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

But she is sick, right? I mean, she goes to the doctor a lot.

MR. DEVEAUX

She's a delicate sort of women.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

Why, Louis, I think you have a soft spot for Charlotte. Imagine. After all these years. Men who love their wives are quite sexy.

MR. DEVEAUX

Oh, you're just teasing an old man.

THE BLONDE WOMAN

I do my best. Here. Come and join me on the sofa.

MR. DEVEAUX

Delightful! I'll lock the door.

(MR. DEVEAUX crosses towards the door, but before reaching his destination, it opens. A man enters wearing a top hat.)

THE MAN

Good afternoon. *(Tipping his hat.)* And, you, my lady.

MR. DEVEAUX

I forgot.

THE MAN

I see.

MR. DEVEAUX

(Introducing the blonde woman.) Miss Klear.

THE MAN

(Kissing her hand.) Miss Klear?

KRYSTAL

Thanks.

THE MAN

No thank you. Marvelous Marvin the Magnificent.

MISS KLEAR

The magnificent what?

MARVIN

I am an artist of illusion. Call me Marvelous.

MISS KLEAR

Why don't you try a disappearing act? We're trying to conduct business here.

MARVIN

You're the young lady I spoke with on the phone?

MR. DEVEAUX

That was Josephine. She's at lunch with my wife. That's what I said when you called. She's at lunch.

MARVIN

And I said I'd wait. *(Sitting on couch next to KRYSTAL.)* I'm looking for a girl for my act. Do you know any special tricks?

MR. DEVEAUX

Oh, oh! Yes, yes! A trick, a trick!

MARVIN

(Standing.) If you would assist me?

MR. DEVEAUX

Please, Krystal. For me?

MARVIN

Krystal Klear. Lovely name.

KRYSTAL

Goes back for generations.

MARVIN

No doubt. I'm actually quite good. Reach in my pocket. *(She hesitates.)* You won't feel anything you haven't felt before. *(She reaches in.)* Deeper. Good. Now pull it out.

(KRYSTAL pulls a silk scarf from MARVIN's pocket.)

KRYSTAL

Marvelous.

MARVIN

There's more where that came from. Now, look in my hat. Nothing here. Nothing there. Good. Now place the scarf over my hat. Good. Drum roll, please. Abbra Cadaver. *(Pulls out a bottle of Champaign.)*

MR. DEVEAUX

Delightful!

(KRYSTAL sits. MR. DEVEAUX takes a seat to one side. MARVIN looks at the two for a moment then pulls out two Champaign glasses. He sets one in front of each.)

MARVIN

Excuse me while I pop my cork.

KRYSTAL

Please yourself.

MARVIN

I often do.

(MARVIN pops the cork. There is no fizz.)

MR. DEVEAUX

No bubbles? Too bad.

MARVIN

You get what you pay for. *(MARVIN pours Champaign into each glass then pulls out a third glass and pours one for himself.)* I'm always prepared for a menagerie. Bottoms up.

(At that moment the door opens and CLAIRE enters.)

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. I should have knocked. I- I was here earlier filling out an application and I-I left my purse.

MARVIN

A DeVeaux girl, I presume.

CLAIRE

Well, I'd like to be. I haven't worked in a number of years. I've been walking the streets all morning. Do you know- Do you know if my contract is ready? Miss Forrester was going to type one up and mail it out to me. If she hasn't dropped it in the box I'll sign it now.

MR. DEVEAUX

Well, let's take a look on her desk.

MARVIN

How long were you a working girl?

CLAIRE

About four years. Until I met my husband.

MARVIN

You met your husband while you were working?

CLAIRE

Yes. We didn't fall in love right away, mind you. It took some time. But he started calling on me to do more and more, even though I was really only supposed to answer to the head nurse. I could tell he was interested in more than a working relationship and well, we had three children. The girls are twins and our youngest started first grade, or will start first grade next week, so I'm ready to get back to work. Actually, I'm *anxious* to get back out there. I love my kids but I miss the kind of communication and interaction you can only have with adults, if you know what I mean.

MARVIN

Spoken like a diplomat.

CLAIRE

I have a degree in communications. But when it came down to it, I really didn't like speaking in public. I have a great phone voice.

MARVIN

I'm sure you do. Perhaps I can call you sometime.

KRYSTAL

He's shopping for an assistant.

CLAIRE

Oh, are you an *employer* client?

MARVIN

That's why I'm here.

CLAIRE

And would you pay the service fee or would I?

MARVIN

(*Calling to MR. DEVEAUX.*) You sure do know how to run an agency. (*To Claire.*) Would you like to join us?

KRYSTAL

Look, I'm on the clock here. Can we dispense with the pleasantries?

CLAIRE

I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt.

MR. DEVEAUX

(Returning.) I don't see the contract but if Josephine said she was going to mail you one, I'm sure it's done. A wonderful girl. Like a daughter to me. *(Holds up glass.)* Fill her up. *(MARVIN fills MR. DEVEAUX's glass.)*

CLAIRE

Perhaps she can arrange an interview with Mr.—

KRYSTAL

Marvelous.

CLAIRE

Marvelous?

MARVIN

I'll drink to that.

(MARVIN raises the bottle this time and as he takes a huge slug the door opens and in walks JOSEPHINE carrying MR. DEVEAUX's lunch.)

JOSEPHINE

It's just me, Mr. De— *(Leaving door ajar.)* What the heck is going on here?

MR. DEVEAUX

Oh, Josephine! You're here! We're having a delightful time! Marvin, pour Josephine a glass.

MARVIN

(Turning bottle upside down.) Sorry, all gone.

MR. DEVEAUX

Did you bring me a coke?

JOSEPHINE

As always, Mr. DeVeaux.

MR. DEVEAUX

Good. I'll get the Jack.

JOSEPHINE

Jack Daniels?

MARVIN

Now we're talking.

MR. DEVEAUX

(As crossing to his desk to get the bottle.) Marvin— Marvin, show Josephine one of your tricks. *(To KRYSTAL.)* See what else he has in his pants.

MARVIN

Perhaps Josephine would like to see for herself.

JOSEPHINE

I certainly would not.

MARVIN

Suit yourself.

JOSEPHINE

I recognize that voice. You're the man who's been calling all morning.

MARVIN

And you are the woman who was wrong. Mr. DeVeaux is *the Man*. Isn't that right?

MR. DEVEAUX

(Returning with bottle of Jack Daniels.) Call me Louis.

MARVIN

Louis.

(MR. DEVEAUX pours some Jack Daniels into KRYSTAL's Champaign glass. KRYSTAL takes the bag from JOSEPHINE and pulls out the coke, adding some to her glass.)

JOSEPHINE

(To KRYSTAL.) Who are you?

KRYSTAL

I'm here for the Medical Receptionist position.

(MR. DEVEAUX pours Jack Daniels into MARVIN's glass.)

CLAIRE

I thought that job was filled.

JOSEPHINE

To the best of my knowledge it is.

MARVIN

(As MR. DEVEAUX attempts to add soda.) No coke for me, there, Louis.

CLAIRE

I left my purse here. I was hoping I could catch you before you mailed the contract.

KRYSTAL

Hell, you don't need a contract. Marvelous Marvin here thinks you'll make the perfect assistant. Don't you, Marv?

JOSEPHINE

An assistant for what?

MARVIN

I am a Master of Illusion. A Magician. Marvelous Marvin the Magnificent. *(Pulling a glass out of his hat and handing to CLAIRE.)* You can never be too prepared.

CLAIRE

(Refusing the glass.) I have no interest in being a Magician's Assistant. And it's quite obvious the receptionist position is still open and that you never had any intention of sending me on an interview. *(To JOSEPHINE.)* Do you have my contract?

JOSEPHINE

No.

CLAIRE

Is my contract in the mail?

JOSEPHINE

No.

CLAIRE

Then if you would kindly give me my purse I'm out of here!

(The door suddenly swings farther open and in rolls CHARLOTTE with her purse on her lap.)

MR. DEVEAUX

Charlotte!

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux!

CLAIRE

My purse! *(CLAIRE tries to grab the purse off CHARLOTTE's lap)*

CHARLOTTE

(Struggling to hold onto purse.) What do you think you're doing? Somebody get this colored girl off me!

JOSEPHINE

Claire, Claire! Please! *(Pulling CLAIRE away.)* That isn't your purse!

CLAIRE

It looks just like it.

JOSEPHINE

It isn't!

CHARLOTTE

Crazy colored girl accusing me, Charlotte DeVeaux, of stealing her handbag.

CLAIRE

What did you do with my purse?

CHARLOTTE

Your bag is on the floor in the toilet across the hall. At least I expect it's your bag. I wouldn't touch it lying there in all those germs.

CLAIRE

In the toilet?

CHARLOTTE

If I had known a colored girl had used it—

CLAIRE

Is this what the modern work place is like? I don't want any part of it! I'll take my home and my children over idiots any day! And you, Charlotte DeVeaux! Have you ever heard of a little thing called the Equal Employment Opportunity Act? *You* will hear from my attorney! Good day!

(CLAIRE exits, slamming the door behind.)

CHARLOTTE

Well, what brought that on? I'm not prejudiced against colored people. She should talk to Governor DiSalle. *(Looking in purse.)* I don't make those "Whites Only" rules.

JOSEPHINE

Oh, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

(Searching through contents of purse and realizing it is not hers.) This is not my purse!
That colored girl stole my purse!

JOSEPHINE

What?

KRYSTAL

I'll see if I can catch her. *(Grabs the purse from CHARLOTTE and quickly exits.)*

CHARLOTTE

She's a nice girl. A natural blonde. Did she fill out an application, Louis?

MR. DEVEAUX

Yes, Charlotte. You spoke to her last week.

CHARLOTTE

Of course I did. We'll send her out on that medical receptionist position. And she'll get it, I'm sure. Pretty girl like that.

JOSEPHINE

Oh, Mrs. DeVeaux.

KRYSTAL

(Returning with purse.) She didn't get very far. I caught up to her at the elevator. Good thing I acted fast, there, for you, Charlotte, or she might have gotten away. *(Starts to hand purse to CHARLOTTE.)*

MARVIN

Just a minute. Let's make sure there's nothing missing. *(MARVIN takes the purse, quickly turns in a circle with his coat flaps flowing then stops where he started, without the purse.)* Oops, what can I say? *Everything* appears to be missing.

MR. DEVEAUX

Delightful!

JOSEPHINE

Give it back, you creep. You have no idea what's in that purse.

MARVIN

Say "Abbra Cadaver."

JOSEPHINE

Absolutely not.

MARVIN

“Abbra Cadaver” if you want the purse back.

CHARLOTTE

Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux. “Abbra Cadaver.” (*To MARVIN.*) There, are you happy?

MARVIN

Immensely.

(*MARVIN produces the purse; MR. DEVEAUX applauds.*)

JOSEPHINE

(*Handing purse to CHARLOTTE.*) I’m sorry, Mrs. DeVeaux.

(*CHARLOTTE takes the purse and wheels herself toward her desk.*)

CHARLOTTE

I’m calling the police.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux. I really don’t think that’s a good idea. Please, just wait a moment. (*JOSEPHINE turns towards KRYSTAL as CHARLOTTE continues to her office.*) Do we have your resume’?

KRYSTAL

I gave it to Louis.

JOSEPHINE

I’m sure you did. So, if you don’t mind, give me some time to figure out what the hell is going on here and, I’m sorry, I’ll call you in the morning.

KRYSTAL

Not before noon.

JOSEPHINE

Fine! (*Addressing MARVIN.*) And as for you–

MARVIN

Would you like to see my disappearing act? It’s quite marvelous.

JOSEPHINE

(*Pointing towards door.*) Get out of here. Get. Before I call the police.

MARVIN

(Gesturing to KRYSTAL.) After you.

(Suddenly CHARLOTTE lets out a blood-curdling scream and literally “runs” out of her office.)

CHARLOTTE

Josephine! Josephine! My diamonds! They're gone! My diamonds are gone!
Somebody stole my jewels!

(LIGHTS OUT. END ACT I.)

INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE I

(AT RISE: Same day, approximately 2:00 PM: CHARLOTTE, still in her wheelchair. JOSEPHINE and MR. DEVEAUX are seated in the open office space with MR. DEVEAUX nodding off to sleep. The door opens. MARVELOUS MARVIN and KRYSTAL KLEAR enter followed by police detective, LARS PEEPLEW. JOSEPHINE jumps to her feet.)

MARVIN

(Entering.) I don't care what she said. I was here on business, looking for an assistant for my act. This *is* an employment agency.

JOSEPHINE

(Nudging MR. DEVEAUX.) Wake-up, Mr. D.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

What are you worried about? We're just going to talk. I've got a few questions. You answer the questions and you go back home. No problem. *(To others in office.)* Howdy folks. Good to see you again.

KRYSTAL

Yeah, thrill.

CHARLOTTE

(Wheeling herself closer and in a coquettish voice.) Detective Peeples. You're such a dear. I didn't expect you back so soon.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

This the duo that was here when the diamonds disappeared?

JOSEPHINE

Yes. That's them.

CHARLOTTE

Krystal Klear, right?

KRYSTAL

Yeah– Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Detective, this is the nice young lady I was telling you about. She ran after that colored girl to get my purse. *(To KRYSTAL.)* Did you get the job, dear?

KRYSTAL

I don't know. I'm still working on it. Thanks for asking.

CHARLOTTE

We need more polite young ladies like you around, don't we, Detective. Are you married, Detective Peeples?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Too bad. Surrounded here with all of us girls.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Now, Mrs. DeVeaux—

CHARLOTTE

Call me Charlotte. It's a southern name. My mother was from the south. Transplanted here by my daddy after the war. He met her during officer's training down in Alabama.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I see. Now, can you tell me where you had your diamonds?

CHARLOTTE

In the bank vault, of course, where they would be safe.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

But you took them out of the bank.

CHARLOTTE

Why, yes. Josephine suggested I take them out.

JOSEPHINE

Not exactly.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

And you're the DeVeaux's— grand daughter?

CHARLOTTE

My, my, no! Do I look like I could have a grand daughter that old?

JOSEPHINE

I work here. I'm Mrs. DeVeaux's assistant.

CHARLOTTE

But she's like a daughter to us. Isn't she, Louis?

LOUIS

(Vaguely stirring.) Yes, yes. Charlotte. I was just going over these investments.

MARVIN

This has been a ball but I have another engagement, so if you will excuse me—

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Sit down. (*To JOSEPHINE.*) You say Mr. Marvelous, here, had been calling you all morning?

JOSEPHINE

Yes. And when I came back with Mr. DeVeaux's lunch he was here with Miss Klear.

KRYSTAL

Hey, I never saw this guy before today. He ain't, *isn't*, my type. I met the DeVeauxs last week when I came in to apply for a *secretary* position. And Miss Charlotte set up an appointment for me at 9:30 this morning to see a Mister— a Mister—

CHARLOTTE

—Evans, dear.

JOSEPHINE

You did not have an interview this morning with Mr. Evans. I set up an interview this morning for a Kelly Thompson with Mr. Evans.

CHARLOTTE

Without my knowledge, I might add. She was over-qualified for the position. That's a good way to lose a client. But that won't happen again.

JOSEPHINE

No, Mrs. DeVeaux.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Do you feel it's your position to make decisions for Mr. and Mrs. DeVeaux?

JOSPEHINE

Only in their best interest.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

And you have a long-standing relationship with the DeVeauxs?

JOSEPHINE

Well, actually, no. But I understand their situation perhaps better than anyone else so I, well, I do my best.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Why did you suggest Mrs. DeVeaux take her jewelry out of the lock box?

JOSEPHINE

I didn't.

CHARLOTTE

It's all right, dear. You can tell the truth. No one suspects you of any crime. (*To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.*) If there's one thing I'm certain of; it's that Josephine didn't take my diamonds. We all saw what happened. That colored girl took my purse and when Krystal got it back for me the diamonds were gone.

JOSEPHINE

She didn't take the diamonds.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Who didn't take the diamonds?

JOSEPHINE

Claire. Claire Rose. She came in this morning—

CHARLOTTE

Without an appointment. Walking the streets looking for work. That's no way to find a decent job. I expect it was an excuse to come up here and scope out the place. Then she sneaked back in when we were at lunch.

JOSEPHINE

Mr. DeVaux was here.

CHARLOTTE

She had no way to know that.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(*To JOSEPHINE.*) And you say she's coming back of her own free will to talk to us?

JOSEPHINE

I called her myself. She should be here soon.

CHARLOTTE

Back here? Why? Take her down to the jailhouse and lock her up.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I'm afraid I can't do that. Obviously she isn't the only person who had contact with your purse.

CHARLOTTE

The only *colored* person.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

That may well be but that's not an issue here. (*Checking his notes, then to KRYSTAL.*) You had an interview this morning with Mr. Evans and this interview was set up by Mrs. DeVeaux. Why were you in the office when she returned from lunch?

CHARLOTTE

I wasn't returning from lunch. Josephine and I had lunch but I was returning from a doctor's appointment that I didn't have.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I don't understand.

CHARLOTTE

Josephine told me I had a doctor's appointment at 1:00 but it wasn't marked on the calendar.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, you told me you had an appointment and I checked the calendar but it wasn't marked so you called the doctor's office to see what time. When I walked over to your desk to talk to you I heard you say 1:00.

CHARLOTTE

I was speaking with Mr. Evans' secretary. She told me to call back at 1:00 to see if my girl got the job. Oh, dear, with all the excitement I forgot to make the call.

KRYSTAL

(*Suddenly assuming a southern draw.*) That's why I came by, Miss Charlotte, to tell you. I had an emergency this morning. My first grade teacher from grammar school fell off her back steps and broke her little old ankle, bless her heart. She has no family so she asked the nurse at the emergency room to call me. I went right over to that hospital. It was after ten before I could get her home and settled. I only have one bedroom in my teeny little old apartment so I gave her my bed. It could be weeks before she's up and about, but she has no one else to care for her. I tried to reschedule the appointment with Mr. Evans but his secretary said *another* girl was being sent from this office so he couldn't see me.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, you poor dear. (*To JOSEPHINE.*) See what happens when you don't verify your appointments through me? (*To KRYSTAL.*) Wheel me to my desk, dear, and we'll call now. I'll reschedule that appointment. Just you see.

KRYSTAL

(*Crossing to CHARLOTTE.*) I love helping people. (*Turns wheelchair.*) Watch your foot there, Miss Charlotte. One broke ankle today is one too many.

CHARLOTTE

(As crossing to her desk.) Is that a southern accent I'm hearing?

KRYSTAL

Oh, it slips out on occasion. My mother was from Mobile. She passed away when I was ten.

CHARLOTTE

Mobile! My mother was from Birmingham! You have the prettiest blonde hair, Krystal. My sister had hair just like that when we were girls.

KRYSTAL

Really, Miss Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

(At her desk.) Sit there, dear. *(Motioning to the chair at the desk then pointing to one of her scrapbooks.)* Hand me that book, dear. Let me show you some photographs. I swear you look just like her.

(Lights dim on CHARLOTTE's desk area. However, CHARLOTTE can be seen showing one of her scrapbooks to KRYSTAL although their conversation is not heard.)

MARVIN

(Jumping up.) Hey, this is all well and good but I've got to take a whiz.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Sit down. You're not going anywhere.

MARVIN

Nowhere but the john. And if you don't like it you can talk to my lawyer. *(MARVIN exits into hall, leaving door ajar. As if by magic, MR. DEVEAUX'S eyes open. DETECTIVE PEEPLES watches curiously as MR. DEVEAUX reaches for his cane and hobbles downstage.)*

JOSEPHINE

(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.) I need to talk to you alone.

(The toilet flushes. MR. DEVEAUX turns and hobbles back to his desk and sits. His head bobs and his eyes close just as MARVIN returns.)

MARVIN

Looks like the party is thinning out.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

So why did you take off when the diamonds turned up missing?

MARVIN

I left a magic potion boiling on the stove.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Fine, you want to be cute. We can take this to the station.

MARVIN

Look, I need a new assistant for my act. I called three times this morning but Miss Prissy here wouldn't talk turkey with me.

JOSEPHINE

You asked for a date, and not the kind nice girls go out on.

MARVIN

You're not my type. I asked for a date to come in and talk to you about your clients. You misunderstood my intentions. (*To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.*) Hey, man, I'm just a show biz sort of guy trying to make a living in a humorless world.

JOSEPHINE

You grabbed the purse and hid it under your coat tails.

MARVIN

Hid it under my coat. Really! I'm a magician! Besides, I gave it back.

JOSEPHINE

You had no right to touch that purse. (*To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.*) He, as much as anyone else, could have taken those diamonds.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(*To JOSEPHINE.*) Did you see the jewels?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, she showed them to me at the bank.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Then what?

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVaux wrapped them in a hanky and put them in her purse.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

And you thought that was in her best interest?

JOSEPHINE

What was I supposed to do? Tell her to put them back in the lock box?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

That would have been on my list.

JOSEPHINE

You don't understand.

MARVIN

What don't I understand?

JOSEPHINE

If we could talk in private.

MARVIN

Fine by me.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Look, you can go for now, but don't leave town.

MARVIN

What is this, *Gunsmove*? I'm on the road a lot. And if I want to eat I expect it'll stay that way. So, unless you have a warrant to detain me, I'm gone.

(And at that, MARVIN literally disappears in a cloud of smoke.)

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Not bad.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, I suppose he can make anything disappear.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Even diamonds?

JOSEPHINE

That's what I want to talk to you about.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Mind if I tape you?

JOSEPHINE

This isn't a confession.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Did I say it was?

JOSEPHINE

No.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

So, do you mind if I record the conversation?

JOSEPHINE

I don't know. I guess not.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Good. (*Turning on tape.*) So, I'm curious. How did you know how to reach Mr. Marvelous?

JOSEPHINE

Sounds like a good name for a pimp.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Really?

JOSEPHINE

Mr. D said he telephoned while I was at lunch. I guessed he might be the last call so I star 69'd him.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Interesting. And you had Miss Klear's contact information?

JOSEPHINE

On her application. I was as surprised as anyone that she gave her real address.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Why is that?

JOSEPHINE

Isn't that obvious?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Why are you so sure Miss... (*Checking his notes once again.*) Rose didn't take the jewels out of the purse.

JOSEPHINE

She's the only person I'm *sure* didn't take them— that is, if they were really taken at all.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

That's an interesting theory. Your employer is lying.

JOSEPHINE

No. Of course not.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Go on.

JOSEPHINE

Look, Mrs. DeVeaux isn't entirely well. She may appear okay but if you worked here you'd understand.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

What?

JOSEPHINE

(*Looking at MR. DEVEAUX who is asleep and at CHARLOTTE who is engrossed in showing her scrapbook to KRYSTAL.*) She's senile.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Senile?

JOSEPHINE

Not all the time. I mean, sometimes she makes all the sense in the world, at least in her world. But, knock, knock, trust me, there are times when *nobody's* home.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You said you didn't suggest Mrs. DeVeaux take the jewelry from the safe. Then who did?

JOSEPHINE

She did. She told me she had a terrible dream that her diamonds were missing so she called a cab and had me take her to the bank right away. When we got there she kept talking about the stock market crash and how you couldn't trust the bank to keep its doors open. To her it made perfectly good sense to take her jewelry with her. I should have kept closer tabs.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

On what?

JOSEPHINE

On what she did with the diamonds.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You told me she showed them to you then wrapped them in a "hanky" and placed them in her handbag.

JOSEPHINE

That's right. But I have absolutely no idea what happened next. We stopped for lunch. The driver waited. Then she went on by herself to the doctor's. She could have left them in the cab. She could have taken them out at the doctor's office. In her hands, *anything* could have happened to those jewels.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

How's business?

JOSEPHINE

All I can say is it's a darn good thing she has money.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

So you think she has a lot of money. Are the jewels insured?

JOSEPHINE

How would I know? Ask Mrs. DeVeaux, if she remembers. All I know is we haven't placed a soul in six weeks.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

And before that?

JOSEPHINE

I don't know. That's when I was hired. I wouldn't be surprised, though, if it's been years since anyone got work through this office.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You've only worked here six weeks?

JOSEPHINE

Yes.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You must have had enough confidence in the business to apply for work.

JOSEPHINE

I didn't apply for work here. I was placed here through a temporary staffing service. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Mrs. DeVeaux couldn't even fill a job in her own employment office!

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

That's quite an accusation.

JOSEPHINE

It's not an accusation; it's a fact.

(Lights restore to normal on CHARLOTTE's desk area. CHARLOTTE and KRYSTAL's conversation can now be heard.)

CHARLOTTE

She used to come to work with her hair wet. Can you imagine? You won't find success that way.

JOSEPHINE

Please don't say anything. I don't want to hurt her feelings.

CHARLOTTE

(Closing the scrapbook and handing it to KRYSTAL.) You don't shower in the morning, do you?

KRYSTAL

(Setting the scrapbook aside.) Only on Thursdays because, you know, Wednesday is church night and it changes my sleeping habits. But I get up earlier than normal the next day so I have plenty of time to fix my hair.

CHARLOTTE

And it is lovely, I might add. Natural blonde, just like my sister's. *(Indicating center area.)* Wheel me back over there, dear.

KRYSTAL

(Wheeling CHARLOTTE center) Why, Miss Charlotte, you're just about as sweet as a Magnolia Blossom in May.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Mrs. DeVeaux?

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Mrs. DeVeaux, I wonder if you and Miss Klear would join me at the café downstairs for a little tête-à-tête over coffee.

KRYSTAL

Sounds more like a ménage à trois to me.

CHARLOTTE

Behave yourself, Krystal, dear. Remember, Detective Peeples is a married man. *(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.)* Let me have your arm, Detective

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

What?

CHARLOTTE

Can't escort a lady in a wheelchair, now can we?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Of course.

(DETECTIVE PEEPLES helps CHARLOTTE to her feet then offers his arm which she clings to like a blushing bride.)

CHARLOTTE

Josephine, dear, put the wheelchair in the closet and listen for the phone.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, Mrs. DeVeaux. *(JOSEPHINE pushes the wheelchair upstage, opening the closet door.)*

CHARLOTTE

(As the group exits.) She's such a good girl. A little confused at times but she's punctual and has a lovely voice. I really don't know why she insisted, though, on going to the bank this morning.

ACT II, SCENE II

(CHARLOTTE, DETECTIVE PEEPLES and KRYSTAL exit down hall. MR. DEVEAUX raises his head. JOSEPHINE is bent over folding the wheelchair. He grabs his cane and hobbles towards her. Hearing his footsteps, JOSEPHINE stands upright. Suddenly she turns.)

JOSEPHINE

Mr. DeVeaux. You stop right there. I have told you this is entirely unacceptable.

MR. DEVEAUX

(Continuing towards JOSEPHINE.) I'm just a harmless old man. What difference should it make to you? Oh, Josephine, such pretty, pretty breasts.

JOSEPHINE

(Keeping the folded wheelchair between them, JOSEPHINE backs around her desk and towards the couch center.) I wear a padded bra.

MR. DEVEAUX

Nonsense. Those are real. I've felt them many times.

JOSEPHINE

Many times too many.

MR. DEVEAUX

So one more time won't hurt.

JOSEPHINE

Remember my boyfriend.

MR. DEVEAUX

(MR. DEVEAUX stops for a moment.) Your boyfriend? I forgot. I don't want to be the cause of trouble between you and your boyfriend.

JOSEPHINE

That would be bad.

MR. DEVEAUX

But if he already knows. And he's already jealous. Well, let's really give him something to fuss about!

JOSEPHINE

Mr. D, I'm warning you. I'll scream!

MR. DEVEAUX

I'd give my false teeth to make a young girl scream.

JOSEPHINE

I know Kung Fu.

MR. DEVEAUX

Just a little squeeze.

JOSEPHINE

That's it! That's it! I warned you. Age or no age. Kiss those false teeth goodbye!

(JOSEPHINE pulls back to slug MR. DEVEAUX. She swings. He ducks, teeters and starts to fall. JOSEPHINE attempts to save him but both tumble onto couch with JOSEPHINE landing on top of MR. DEVEAUX.)

MR. DEVEAUX

Oops!

JOSEPHINE

(Looking down at MR. DEVEAUX whose arms are wrapped around her.) Mr. DeVeaux. I'm very disappointed in you. *(Door from hallway opens.)*

MR. DEVEAUX

That was delightful!

(CHARLOTTE and DETECTIVE PEEPLES enter with KRYSTAL directly behind.)

CHARLOTTE

Louis DeVeaux!

MR. DEVEAUX

Charlotte!

JOSEPHINE

(JOSEPHINE scrambles to her feet as MR. DEVEAUX tumbles to the floor.) I can explain.

KRYSTAL

(Running to MR. DEVEAUX.) Sir, are you okay?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(DETECTIVE PEEPLES stepping forward, helping MR. DEVEAUX to his feet.) Steady as she goes.

MR. DEVEAUX

I wasn't expecting you.

CHARLOTTE

I don't suppose you were. But I'm here just the same. Detective Peeples brought me back upstairs to get my bag. After the events of the day I didn't think it was safe to leave my handbag behind but I never dreamed I wasn't safe leaving my *husband* behind.

JOSEPHINE

Mr. DeVeaux lost his balance. That's all. I was trying to save him. *(Quickly pushes the wheelchair over into the closet and shuts the door.)*

KRYSTAL

Looked to me you were trying a lot more than that. *(To MR. DEVEAUX.)* Has she hurt you?

MR. DEVEAUX

Oh, my, my, my, no! I'm old but not dead. *(To JOSEPHINE.)* Thank you, Josephine. You saved me from quite a bad spill.

JOSEPHINE

My pleasure.

KRYSTAL

That's what *I'm* here for.

CHARLOTTE

Louis DeVeaux, we'll discuss this further at home.

MR. DEVEAUX

Yes, Charlotte, dear.

CHARLOTTE

Josephine, call Mr. DeVeaux a cab. Never mind. You've done *enough* for Mr. DeVeaux for one day. I'll do it myself.

KRYSTAL

Let me, Miss Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you. At least I can count on someone around here.

KRYSTAL

You can always count on me. (*To JOSEPHINE.*) Where's the number?

JOSEPHINE

State Cab. By the phone.

KRYSTAL

What's the address here?

CHARLOTTE

Ten, East Broadway.

JOSEPHINE

(*To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.*) I rest my case.

CHARLOTTE

No, no, Krystal, dear. I'm wrong. Funny how your mind plays tricks on you. Must be the excitement of the day. We haven't been at that address for years.

KRYSTAL

I see the address. It's written here on this business card. (*On phone.*) Yes. A pick-up for Charlotte DeVeaux at— Oh, you have it... Ten minutes? Make it five. (*Hangs up.*)

CHARLOTTE

(*To KRYSTAL.*) That's the stuff! (*To MR. DEVEAUX.*) Get your hat, Louis. And don't trip over that tail between your legs. I wouldn't want you to lose your balance.

MR. DEVEAUX

Yes, Charlotte.

KRYSTAL

I'll get it, sir. (*Crosses to MR. DEVEAUX's desk and picks up hat.*) You need these papers?

MR. DEVEAUX

They'll keep till tomorrow.

CHARLOTTE

(*As KRYSTAL brings hat to MR. DEVEAUX.*) Krystal, dear, take Mr. DeVeaux downstairs. Better yet. See to it he gets home. Be sure he makes it inside and his suit is hung up properly. Let the cab wait. Louis will give you money for your time and trouble.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sure he will.

KRYSTAL

Whatever you want, Miss Charlotte. (*To MR. DEVEAUX.*) Here, take my arm, sire, uh-sir. There.

MR. DEVEAUX

Like a daughter.

KRYSTAL

Don't worry about a thing, Miss Charlotte. He's in good hands now.

MR. DEVEAUX

(*To CHARLOTTE as exits.*) Thank you, dear. This means more to me than you'll ever know.

KRYSTAL

(*To MR. DEVEAUX as they exit.*) Comfy?

MR. DEVEAUX

Delighted!

(*KRYSTAL and MR. DEVEAUX exit down hall.*)

JOSEPHINE

Lovely.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Seems we have a change of pace.

JOSEPHINE

I have nothing to say. He really did lose his balance and I really did try to keep him from falling.

ACT II, SCENE III

(Phone rings.)

CHARLOTTE

I'll take that. Not a moment's rest. *(Picks up phone at JOSEPHINE's desk.)* DeVeaux Agency... Yes... Yes, of course it was a mistake, but I assure you it was not mine... I know you have a Masters in Engineering... Yes... Here, you can speak directly with the girl responsible. *(CHARLOTTE slams the phone down on JOSEPHINE's desk.)* Josephine! *(CHARLOTTE exits abruptly to her desk.)*

JOSEPHINE

(Crossing to her desk and picking up phone.) Yes... Yes, I apologize for the mistake. I didn't know what the position was for... Yes, of course I work here... Of course, I understand... *(CLAIRE enters office.)* No, there is no charge. There is never a fee for our services unless you get the position... Yes, I realize you don't *want* the position... Of course...

(CHARLOTTE sees CLAIRE and crosses back into the open office space.)

CHARLOTTE

(Shouting) That's her! That's her, Detective, the colored girl who stole my diamonds!

JOSEPHINE

Nothing...

CLAIRE

I most certainly did *not* steal your diamonds. *(Looking at JOSEPHINE.)* You told me I had to pay a fee up front.

JOSEPHINE

One minute... *(To CLAIRE.)* Mrs. DeVeaux said sometimes there were exceptions...

CHARLOTTE

There are no exceptions! Contracts are signed in advanced to protect this agency. To protect it from your kind!

CLAIRE

My kind? You mean from African Americans?

CHARLOTTE

I don't care what you call yourself as long as it means "thief."

JOSEPHINE

Look, can I call you tomorrow?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I'll take it from here, Mrs. DeVeaux.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte.

JOSEPHINE

Thank you. *(Hangs up and focuses on the conversation going on in the office.)*

CHARLOTTE

Thank you.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Mrs. Rose, is it?

CLAIRE

Yes.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You stopped by this office earlier today to place an application with the DeVeaux Agency to find you work in— in what field?

CLAIRE

I had experience as a medical receptionist and there was an opening and that woman said the job was filled and then I find out it isn't and that I somehow, unlike the other clients I've met around here, have to sign a contract and pay a fee up front before this white woman will even consider looking for a job for me.

CHARLOTTE

White woman?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I understand your frustration. That would be enough to make anyone upset.

CHARLOTTE

(To CLAIRE.) I know what you're implying. Don't try to evade the real issue. This office has never discriminated on the basis of race. There is a law against it.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Of course, Mrs. DeVeaux, but sometimes we misunderstand one another and if that's the case, Mrs. Rose may have interpreted your policy towards her as prejudice and that may have made her angry enough to take reciprocal action.

CLAIRE

Like swiping the jewels from her purse? Now, I don't owe you an explanation, I know my rights—

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure you do.

CLAIRE

—but I came here on my own accord to tell you what happened. I left my purse behind. Apparently that purse closely resembles the one she carries. I got home and realized I'd forgotten my purse and immediately returned. She comes in carrying a purse and I thought it was mine.

CHARLOTTE

She left her bag lying on the floor in the lavatory next to the commode.

CLAIRE

I didn't even use the toilet when I was here.

CHARLOTTE

Well, maybe it just sprouted legs like a black widow and crawled itself in there.

CLAIRE

It wasn't mine.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

What wasn't yours?

CLAIRE

The purse in the restroom. I was so upset I didn't even look inside when I picked it up. I just wanted to go home. I'm waiting for the elevator and Krystal, I think her name was, grabs the purse from me and throws another one in my face.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

And that was your purse.

CLAIRE

Yes. So, you see, (*Pointing at CHARLOTTE*) she had my purse all along.

CHARLOTTE

And I suppose you'll be saying I stole your *thousands* of dollars you had in it. I'm not paying one red cent. I took nothing from you.

CLAIRE

That's correct, Detective. She took nothing tangible from me. There was nothing missing from my purse.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

What I'm curious about is how the purse got in the john in the first place.

JOSEPHINE

I have a theory. Claire left her purse and Mrs. DeVeaux picked it up by mistake.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

So she took it with her to the bank?

CHARLOTTE

I had my bag with me at the bank. I opened it to put my diamonds inside. I know what mine looks like. I paid for lunch with money from that bag. I doubt that girl would have had enough change in her handbag for a soda pop.

JOSEPHINE

I don't know how Mrs. DeVeaux's purse got in the lavatory but my guess is; if anyone took the jewels, it was Krystal Klear.

CHARLOTTE

If there's one thing I'm certain, it's that Krystal Klear did *not* steal my diamonds. And Josephine, I do not appreciate your implying that sweet child would do anything of the sort. It doesn't sit one bit well with me.

CLAIRE

May I go now? My husband will be home soon and he'll be wondering why the children are still with the sitter.

CHARLOTTE

(*To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.*) You're going to let her go?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(*To CLAIRE.*) We know how to reach you?

CLAIRE

Just look in the *colored folk* file. (*Exits*)

CHARLOTTE

Well!

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Charlotte, I'd like to speak to Josephine alone.

CHARLOTTE

I think that's an excellent idea. I'm beginning to wonder who's in cahoots with whom. I'll be at my desk trying to straighten out that mess with Mr. Evans. We have a long and outstanding business relationship. I'll be lucky if I can keep it from going down the tube.

JOSEPHINE

(Waiting until CHARLOTTE reaches her desk) Look, I know what you're thinking—

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Do you think Mrs. DeVeaux is a racist?

JOSEPHINE

No, no not really. I don't know. Mrs. DeVeaux spent a lot of time in Birmingham with relatives when she was growing up. She says things that aren't, well, aren't *politically* correct.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You know an awful lot about the DeVeauxs.

JOSEPHINE

I spend a lot of my time tending to their personal needs. I make sure she gets to her doctor's appointments and see to it Mr. DeVeaux gets home okay if he's too tired to make it through the day. I run errands for hairspray and pick up the dry-cleaning. We do a little bit of business, my mostly undoing whatever Mrs. DeVeaux has done, and the rest of the time we talk. They have no family to speak of. Mrs. DeVeaux loves to talk. It's amazing the how much she remembers from the past.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I thought you said she was senile.

JOSEPHINE

Go figure.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I have to ask you about the incident with Mr. DeVeaux.

JOSEPHINE

I told you. He lost his balance.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Has he ever made any advances towards you?

JOSEPHINE

No. He's an old man. And if he did, so what? It's harmless. He's going to die soon anyway.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You're sure about that?

JOSEPHINE

Yeah. Like I said. She loves to talk.

(The door opens and DINA pops in.)

DINA

Hey, what's taking so long? I've been waiting fifteen minutes. *(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.)* Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt, but it's after four and I'm standing in a no parking zone.

JOSEPHINE

I forgot all about your giving me a lift home today.

DINA

Is this business?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Unrelated to employment.

DINA

Good. *(To JOSEPHINE.)* Come on, I don't want to get towed.

(CHARLOTTE enters.)

CHARLOTTE

Josephine, was that the door? *(Seeing DINA.)* Oh, it's you.

DINA

Pleasure to see you again. Any luck setting up an interview?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Another client?

JOSEPHINE

Dina's my roommate. She came in earlier to fill out an application with us.

CHARLOTTE

Your roommate? Well, that explains everything.

DINA

Explains what?

CHARLOTTE

You know very well what it explains.

JOSEPHINE

I don't. What are we talking about here?

CHARLOTTE

No boyfriend? Other interests?

DINA

(Breaking out laughing.) Don't you get it? She thinks your gay!

JOSEPHINE

Well, I'm not!

DINA

Maybe I should give you another little kiss on the lips.

JOSEPHINE

Dina, stop it. It isn't funny. *(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.)* Look, Dina likes to wave her flag off the Capitol balcony. She thinks it's her mission. I don't have anything against gays, I just don't happen to be one. If I was it would be okay, but I'm not. Look, I just want to go home.

CHARLOTTE

Detective, I believe we've found our thief. These people planned the whole thing. Josephine talked me into taking my jewelry out of the vault. She must have hidden the colored girl's purse in her backpack. She switched it with mine when I gave it to her to pay for our lunch. I went on to the doctor's office and she came up here, took the diamonds and threw my bag in the lavatory so it would look as if someone else stole them and tried to dispose of the evidence.

JOSEPHINE

(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.) This is really absurd. Search my desk if you want. Here... *(Grabbing her backpack and dumping the contents.)* I don't have your diamonds!

CHARLOTTE

Her *girlfriend* there was supposed to meet her for lunch. She gave some silly excuse about her dog having to be picked up by eleven. I have no doubt she came back and got the diamonds from Josephine so we wouldn't find them on her.

DINA

Jo, what is she talking about?

JOSEPHINE

You don't even want to know. Mrs. DeVeaux, how did you pay the cab driver when you got back from your doctor's appointment? You took the money out of your purse, right?

CHARLOTTE

I always sign a voucher.

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, that's not true! Maybe twenty years ago but in six weeks I've never seen you sign a voucher! I'm sorry. I can't continue to work here under these circumstances. I wanted to give you two weeks notice but I can't.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

You aren't planning any trips any time soon, are you?

DINA

As a matter of fact she is.

JOSEPHINE

Thanks. *(To CHARLOTTE)* I've been putting off telling you I was going to leave. *(To DETECTIVE PEEPLES.)* It's a temporary job. Just long enough to save money for a trip to London. Kind of a graduation present to myself. *(To CHARLOTTE.)* You drive me crazy but still, I didn't want to tell you I was leaving. You treat me like family and you have no one but Mr. DeVeaux really. I worry about you and that someone will take advantage of you. You're always talking about writing your niece out of your will and—

CHARLOTTE

Out of my will? Well, you're mistaken about that little lady! If you've been hanging around thinking you're going to get my money you've been barking up the wrong tree. My Niece is going to college this fall and I'm paying for it. You wouldn't even have this job if she hadn't stopped working for me to get ready. She may be a lazy girl but my sister is a peach and when and if I die, and bless my soul, Louis goes before me, my sister and her daughter will get everything I have, including this agency and those diamonds you stole.

JOSEPHINE

Your sister died in 1998!

CHARLOTTE

Get out!

JOSEPHINE

Mrs. DeVeaux, I'm so sorry.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(To JOSEPHINE.) I think you better come down to the station with me.

JOSEPHINE

What?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

Perhaps we can get to the bottom of this better there. You're not opposed to taking a lie detector test are you?

DINA

Don't do it, Jo. It's not even admissible in court.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(To DINA.) Perhaps you should join us.

DINA

I'm not going anywhere. I know my rights. I don't have to go anywhere with you— unless you want to charge me?

JOSEPHINE

Detective Peeples, you're making a mistake. Please try to understand.

CHARLOTTE

He understands, all right.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(To JOSEPHINE.) Gather up your things.

JOSEPHINE

Fine. *(Begins to gather the contents of her backpack.)*

DINA

You're going to go with him?

JOSEPHINE

It's only for questioning.

DINA

Great, I'll get you a lawyer. You can kiss that trip to London goodbye. *(Exits.)*

CHARLOTTE

You're going to let her go?

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

I expect we'll know where to find her if we need her

CHARLOTTE

You never know with these people.

DETECTIVE PEEPLES

(Handing CHARLOTTE a card.) If you think of anything else that might help with the investigation, you can call me at this number. *(To JOSEPHINE.)* Let's go.

CHARLOTTE

(Regressing to coquettish voice.) Thank you, Detective. You have been wonderful. I hope to see you again soon. *(JOSEPHINE looks at CHARLOTTE for a moment, starts to say something, hesitates, then turns and exits. DETECTIVE PEEPLES follows, closing the door behind.)*

ACT II, SCENE IV

(CHARLOTTE crosses to her desk, picks up her purse then crosses back into the open office area. CHARLOTTE opens the purse and pulls out a small paper sack and exits into the hallway, leaving the door ajar. A few moments later the sound of the toilet flushing is heard. CHARLOTTE returns to the office, a can of lilac air-freshener in one hand and the paper sack in the other. She sprays some of the fragrance about the room. KRYSTAL enters.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes