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SHARED ASSETS

A Full-length Comedy

by

Julie Cullings

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SETTING:

A SMALL DINER IN A FICTIOUS MID-WESTERN CITY, HOME OF “MARTIN INDUSTRIES”. THE ACTION BEGINS JUST BEFORE 11:00 A.M. ON A TYPICAL WEEKDAY.

CHARACTERS:

ANN; *the owner of the diner. A former Martin Industries Vice President, Ann was once married to Martin Industries executive, Drew. Ann, about 35, wants nothing more than to succeed in her new business and forget about her cheating ex-husband.*

SUSIE; *a rather addled-brained waitress in her early twenties that works at the diner. Susie is obsessed with her appearance and any beauty products or practices that might come her way to enhance it.*

NATALIE; *a little over 30, a current Vice President of Martin Industries. A self-absorbed, social climber turned arrogant corporate elitist, Natalie is engaged to Drew.*

DORIS; *Natalie’s boorish mother. Doris presently acts as Natalie’s Personal Assistant since no one else wants the job.*

HELEN; *about 20. Natalie’s former Personal Assistant obsessed with unicorns. Natalie fired Helen due to her fear of the magical beasts. The awkward, self-conscious Helen has become a talented, creative florist who Natalie is set on having do the flowers for her wedding.*

SHARED ASSETS

by Julie Cullings

ACT I

(AT RISE: A quaint diner about 11:00 in the morning. SUSIE, an enthusiastic waitress, is sitting on a small barstool behind the counter doing her makeup. The counter is so cluttered with beauty products that it resembles a beauty salon more than a restaurant. SUSIE appears extremely focused on her current task, yet simple-minded and flighty in her mannerisms. SUSIE applies her mascara; contorting her face into many unnatural positions. SHE checks her appearance in a hand mirror, fluffing her hair flirtatiously. Noticing it is still a little damp, SUSIE pulls out a hair dryer from underneath the counter, faces the adjacent mirror, and begins styling. ANN, the owner of the diner, can be heard entering through the rear door OFF. She enters from the kitchen holding a purse and keys. An oblivious SUSIE hums along as SHE continues styling her hair. Irritated, ANN crosses behind the counter and stops directly behind SUSIE.)

ANN

Susie! *(No response)* Susie! *(Still no response then speaking directly into SUSIE'S ear while tapping her on the shoulder. SUSIE shrieks, spins around and holds the hair dryer outward, blowing hot air directly into ANN'S face.)* Turn it off!

SUSIE

What?

ANN

Turn it off!

SUSIE

Wear it up? *(Holding the dryer in one hand and sweeping her hair up in the other)* How? Like this?

ANN

No! *(Grabbing the hair dryer and turning it off)* Turn it off. Turn the hair dryer off.

SUSIE

Oh...

ANN

Susie, what are you doing? I know we've discussed the makeup, but now I've got to deal with hair dryers too? Listen, I know you want to look your best, but I really need the counter clear for customers.

SUSIE

I know, I know. I'm really sorry, Ann. It's just that, well, I have this really important date right after lunch and I just have to look perfect.

ANN

Another date? Let me guess...Mike from the gas station?

SUSIE

Eeuw! Too stinky.

ANN

Truck wash Mike?

SUSIE

Too sleazy.

ANN

Mike, the construction worker?

SUSIE

Too many tattoos.

ANN

Miguel from the burrito stand?

SUSIE

Too much indigestion.

ANN

You're not dating the Easter bunny from the mall again, are you?

SUSIE

Let me just tell you that after I went through my fourth Mike, I knew something was very wrong. I kept asking myself, "Gee, Suzie, why won't any of your relationships last past the first date?" And then it hit me. I want more out of a relationship than just companionship, love, or Easter baskets.

ANN

Like what?

SUSIE

Money and diamonds, of course! I'm not going to get rich by dating a burrito chef.

ANN

At least you're being honest. Shallow, but honest. Though I have to tell you, I was hoping things with you and Miguel would work out. I'm really gonna miss that 9 AM burrito fix.

SUSIE

Yeah, but my new boyfriend's got something even better.

ANN

A clean record?

SUSIE

A company credit card!

ANN

Company credit card, huh? Talk about a nice perk. You know, when I used to work at Martin Industries, they gave all of us company credit cards. Nobody thought twice about spending a dime. Wanna go out to lunch? I'll mention something about the project at hand and now it's a "business lunch." And the company went for it, can you believe that? Bunch of idiots working there, I'm telling you.

SUSIE

My honey is always buying me lunch on the company. Says he's the boss so he can do whatever he wants. I love a man in charge!

ANN

Wait a minute, Susie—this guy you're dating—he doesn't work at Martin Industries, does he?

SUSIE

Well, the truth is, I don't know for sure! We never got that far talking. One thing just always led to another and—

ANN

Susie, you need to listen to me. Believe me when I tell you that those guys from Martin are trash. How did this loser get into your head? Did he sweet-talk you? Did he tell you about all his assets and big shot corporate responsibilities? Or no, wait, I bet he filled you up with booze, didn't he?

SUSIE

I actually met him here at work. He comes in for breakfast before he goes into the office, but that's before you get here.

ANN

Martin is just three blocks away. I'll bet dollars to donuts this guy is just another one of those clowns I dealt with everyday when I worked there.

SUSIE

I even have his favorite dish memorized; sausage, scrambled eggs, and two pieces of toast.

ANN

Let me guess—rye toast?

SUSIE

How'd you know?

ANN

Those corporate idiots, they're all the same! Damn that rye toast!

SUSIE

I don't know what you're getting so upset about. Andy's not using me. I'm using him.

ANN

That's what they want you to think. Before you know it, you're in love. You think he really cares about you, because by then, you really care about him.

SUSIE

I only care about business trips to Bermuda.

ANN

Susie, I know you're just looking to have a good time. And why wouldn't you? You're young, beautiful, intelli... *(Correcting herself)* ...beautiful, charming. I could go on, but Susie, the truth is, men like that aren't looking for interesting character traits.

SUSIE

What do you mean?

ANN

You know, haughty corporate big wigs with lots of money, fancy cars, and expensive homes. That kind of man isn't looking for someone to go to the movies with or take home to meet mom. Men like that are only interested in one thing.

SUSIE

Lunch?

ANN

C'mon Susie, you know what I mean. If I were you, I'd be very careful about this guy. I used to be a sweet, innocent girl like you until I got caught up with my ex. Drew was a promising corporate upstart and I was his lowly personal secretary. We fell in love, he paid my way through business school, and soon we were the reigning king and queen of Martin Industries.

SUSIE

That actually sounds kind of romantic.

ANN

Sure it does. Until your Prince Charming leaves you for a former Miss Idaho who just happens to work in the sales department.

SUSIE

Miss Idaho? Like how hard can that be?

ANN

Of course Natalie was pretty, and she was really friendly at first. It seemed like we had a lot in common, and after a few months, we sort of became friends. Little did I know she was just using me to get to Drew. There was no way I could compete with that perfect hair, the perfect smile, the perfect body.

SUSIE

We're an elite club.

ANN

Why should I have even tried? The girl could pass for one of Malibu Barbie's long lost sisters. Of course, it doesn't hurt that she's got these really big—

SUSIE

(Assuming the obvious) Yeah, those always help—

ANN

—glasses.

SUSIE

Huh?

ANN

Drew always had a thing for girls with glasses and hers are huge. They take up her whole face. Can you believe that? Drew likes glasses and I have perfect vision. I should have known we were a wrong fit from the start.

SUSIE

Don't be ridiculous, Ann. Those silly details can't predict a failed marriage. Only bad sex and reductions in income can do that.

ANN

Drew was working a lot of late hours and early mornings. He kept saying business had picked up so much, but I hadn't noticed the slightest increase in my department. Something just seemed off.

SUSIE

So what'd you do?

ANN

I didn't have to do anything. I caught the two of them schmoozing at the Martin Industries Management Appreciation Costume Ball. I guess I made a bit of a scene. I tell you, these days you throw a couple of meat and cheese trays and all of a sudden you're a real threat to society. Next thing I know, I'm being escorted out of the grand ballroom by big, burly men in black suits.

SUSIE

Were they cute?

ANN

Yes, but you're missing the point. I'm only telling you this because I want you to be careful. This guy you're dating may seem genuine, but he'll just take advantage of you in the long run. You don't need a *man* to be happy.

SUSIE

Yes, but I need a man's *expense account* to be happy!

ANN

I just don't want you to end up like me. Believe me, no one wants to date a girl who smells like an overcooked hamburger.

SUSIE

It's more like stale hot dog buns, to be honest.

ANN

You know what, though? I'm happy here. And quite frankly, I'm glad I was fired from Martin Industries. I know I've learned more by opening my own diner than I ever did by working at Martin.

SUSIE

You know, now that I think about it, I've learned a lot by working here too. Let's see...I learned how to wash dishes with only one hand, thanks to that freak accident at the nail salon. Oh, and I've mastered one of the most traditional crafts of all time!

ANN

Basket weaving?

SUSIE

No, silly! Napkin folding! Did you know there are at least 26 different ways to fold a napkin? My favorite is the bunny rabbit fold. So cute! But there's also the candlestick fold, the clown's hat, the ice cream fold—

ANN

That reminds me— we've got some silverware to prep. I'll grab the stuff from the kitchen and when I come back, the only makeup I want to see should be on your face.

(ANN exits into the kitchen. SUSIE continues her beauty regimen by applying lipstick. NATALIE, wearing a business suit and an unusually large pair of glasses, enters through the front door to the diner. SHE appears uncomfortable in the casual-style diner. After waiting a few moments, NATALIE tries to get SUSIE'S attention. After several attempts with no success, NATALIE speaks up.)

NATALIE

Excuse me. What are you doing?

SUSIE

See, I'm putting the lipstick on first and then I put the gloss on over that—

NATALIE

I'm not talking about your makeup. Shouldn't you be working? I've been standing here for the past 30 seconds trying to get your attention.

SUSIE

(Holding up the lipstick) What do you think of this color? Is it too dark?

NATALIE

Miss, I am here for a business lunch, not to give beauty advice.

SUSIE

It's too dark, isn't it? I knew it! *(Rubbing off her lipstick with a nearby napkin)* Well what should I do? Should I go with a pink? Or maybe I should just use a gloss...

NATALIE

(To herself) I'd be more concerned about your eye shadow than your lipstick.

SUSIE

What? What was that? Is there something wrong with my eye shadow?

NATALIE

Could you please seat me? I'm meeting someone here for lunch and I need to—

SUSIE

If something is wrong, I need to know! I have a very important date right after lunch and I have to look beautiful! Please, my summer vacation in a tropical island depends on this!

NATALIE

Fine! *(Holding a mirror up to SUSIE)* Look here. What do you see?

SUSIE

Blue eye shadow?

NATALIE

Exactly.

SUSIE

Well what's wrong with that?

NATALIE

Sweetie, blue eye shadow went kaput along with spandex, leg warmers, and Bananarama.

SUSIE

But I always wear blue eye shadow on Thursdays!

NATALIE

Okay, so how does this work? Are you going to seat me or should I eat my lunch standing up?

(SUSIE starts frantically searching through the assortment of makeup already on the counter.)

SUSIE

Mascara, lip liner, blush, concealer...where's all my eye shadow?

(NATALIE sits at a stool at the counter with her back towards SUSIE and begins leafing through her briefcase.)

NATALIE

Check your purse. I know I always keep a few essentials in mine.

SUSIE

My purse, of course! Maybe there's something in there that can help!

(SUSIE pulls out her purse and dumps out its contents. The purse is full of makeup; the wide spread of supplies comes crashing out onto the counter. In a frenzy, SUSIE searches through the pile. ANN, wearing an apron, enters carrying a tray of silverware and napkins.)

ANN

Susie! I told you to pick this stuff up! What are you doing?

SUSIE

(Searching through the pile) Lavender...daffodil...cocoa...emerald...

ANN

What's the matter? Your makeup looks fine.

NATALIE

Sure, if you're spending the afternoon with RuPaul.

SUSIE

(To ANN) I've got to fix this! Please, tell me what I should use. *(Holding shadows up to her eyes)* Cotton candy pink? Butternut? Or maybe avocado?

ANN

Susie, you don't need any of that. You look great. Just leave it the way it is.

NATALIE

Only if you want to fit in with a crowd of five-year-olds playing dress up.

ANN

(Turning to face NATALIE'S backside, with attitude) Miss, can I get you something?

NATALIE

Well, I've been waiting here unassisted for over a minute now. Do I finally look hungry?

ANN

I can't tell from here but I'd like to get something in your mouth so you'll shut up.

(NATALIE rotates her stool so she faces ANN.)

NATALIE

Annabelle Terb, shame on you. That temper of yours is still getting you into trouble.

ANN

(Disgusted) Oh, not you.

NATALIE

I would have thought you'd try a little harder to curb that attitude after it cost you your job. But no, you haven't changed a bit.

ANN

Natalie, what are you doing here?

NATALIE

I think I should be asking you the same. I mean, who knew that the former Senior Vice President of Martin Industries could flip such a mean burger?

ANN

Are you actually here to eat or are you just here to be a pain in my—

NATALIE

Ah, ah! There you go again. You know, professionalism and common courtesy will take you far in this world. Just look at me, I'm living proof. In fact, those qualities were the key factor in my recent promotion to the Senior Vice President position.

ANN

Yeah, either that or sleeping with my husband.

NATALIE

Oh Ann, must we go over that again? Surely it must be painful for you.

ANN

Well lucky for me, Ann's Diner doesn't serve backstabbing mistresses here, so you're free to go. *(To SUSIE)* Come on, get this cleaned up. We're gonna get busy any minute.

SUSIE

(To ANN, desperately) Now what do I do with my extensive collection of blue eye shadows? I mean, are all values of blue out of the question? What about periwinkle? That's kind of a blue and violet mix. Does that count? Or take powder blue for example. Powder blue is typically light in color. Does it matter that the tone is light and sparkly or does this rule only apply to the dark, smoky shades?

ANN

What's the matter with you?

SUSIE

(Freaking out) I know it seems like no big deal. But it is! It's a huge deal! Gray or silver? Silver or gray? Gray or silver? Silver or gray?

ANN

(Taking hold of SUSIE) Snap out of it!

SUSIE

(To NATALIE) Gray or silver? What should I do?

ANN

(To NATALIE) What did you do to her?

NATALIE

Nothing! I hardly said a word.

ANN

Well you obviously said something. Look at her! She's a mess!

NATALIE

I didn't think she'd spaz out! All I did was make one harmless comment about blue eye shadow.

(SUSIE shrieks at the mere mention of the eye shadow.)

ANN

(Placing her hands over SUSIE'S ears) Can't you see she's sensitive about that kind of stuff?

SUSIE

What about mauve? Mauve's pretty. Or there's burgundy—maybe burgundy's prettier. Mauve or burgundy? Burgundy or mauve? Mauve or burgundy...

(SUSIE continues to repeat "Mauve or burgundy? Burgundy or Mauve?" throughout the following dialogue.)

ANN

Would you do something?

NATALIE

Like what? I'm not a shrink!

(SUSIE'S volume and craziness increase with dialogue, sending both ANN and NATALIE over the edge.)

ANN

I don't know!

NATALIE

I don't know either!

ANN

Say something! Anything!

NATALIE

(Stopping the chaos) Taupe!

(Silence. SUSIE looks frazzled, as ANN and NATALIE take a moment to enjoy the dead air.)

NATALIE

Your eyes are blue, so you need an earth tone to frame them. You know, to make your eyes stand out.

SUSIE

(Softly) Taupe? Like what kind?

NATALIE

Whatever.

SUSIE

Taupe. Sure. Why didn't I think of that?

(SUSIE goes back over to her pile, searching for a taupe eye shadow. ANN is overwhelmed and dumbfounded.)

ANN

Taupe? Who made you Estee Lauder?

NATALIE

Image is equally as important as know-how in today's business world. You of all people should know that, Ann. Of course, I've been knowledgeable about makeup and beauty since my pageant days. On top of that, I hired a professional stylist after I was promoted to Senior Vice President.

ANN

Oh, and she tells you that blue eye shadow is a sin?

NATALIE

No, Ann. That's just common sense.

(SUSIE runs over to ANN in a frenzy once again.)

SUSIE

Ann! I'm out of taupe! Please, I have to make a run to the drug store!

ANN

Susie—

SUSIE

It'll be quick. I promise!

ANN

I really need you here for the lunch rush.

SUSIE

Please please please please please—

NATALIE

Ugh, get out of here and stop whining!

SUSIE

(Grabbing her purse) I'll be so quick you won't even know I'm gone!

NATALIE

Doubt that.

(SUSIE exits.)

ANN

(Cleaning up the makeup mess) All that fuss over makeup. I just don't get it.

NATALIE

Maybe you should be taking notes.

ANN

What's that supposed to mean?

NATALIE

It's obvious that you've been the one to experience the ill effects of an unrefined appearance. After losing your husband and your career as a result, it would be normal to assume that you'd make at least some small effort to enhance your look. Developing a personal makeup routine is just one part of the process. Even the ditzzy waitress knows that. Your little Susie Q may be a dim-wit, but she knows the significance of a polished demeanor.

ANN

She only wants to look good so she can keep her idiot boyfriend and the corporate lifestyle that goes along with him.

NATALIE

It's all part of the game. Just look at the two of us. I would say you're almost as good looking as me. But guess what? I wear sophisticated suits and comb my hair in the morning, whereas you wear little or no makeup and forever live in a pair of jeans and a tee

shirt. Your whole appearance just screams ill-mannered and unaccomplished. No wonder Drew came running to me.

ANN

For your information, Drew and I split up because he couldn't keep his hands to himself, not because I wear blue eye shadow.

NATALIE

Oh, not you too. I swear, before today, the last person I saw wearing blue eye shadow was my great Aunt Millie on my mother's side. Of course anyone who would wear blue eye shadow in this day and age has to be as senile as that old bat.

ANN

(Getting irritated) Oh, what, so now I need beauty tips from the almighty pageant queen of Iowa?

NATALIE

Idaho.

ANN

Whatever. *(Pause)* Are you gonna tell my why you're really here, or am I going to have to beat it out of you?

NATALIE

Well, let's see here...I'm in a diner, it's just after 11 AM...call me crazy, but I think most would assume that I'm here for lunch.

ANN

Sure you are.

NATALIE

Is that so hard to believe?

ANN

You tell me. Why is it that the Senior Vice President of Martin Industries, who dines strictly at five-star restaurants, would venture outside her comfort zone and schedule a business lunch at a diner? And this isn't just any diner; it's my diner, the diner that just happens to be owned by the ex-wife of your current boyfriend. Don't you think there's anything strange about this situation?

NATALIE

The suspense is just killing you, isn't it? Oh, I knew this would be too easy. You're much too predictable, Ann. The truth of the matter is that I have invited Helen out to lunch. We have a few business matters to discuss, some of which I think you may find particularly interesting.

ANN

You invited my personal assistant out to lunch—

NATALIE

Please don't forget that Helen is no longer your personal assistant. Surely you don't need a sidekick to scrub spitballs off of cheap restaurant furniture.

ANN

Okay, you invited your personal assistant out to lunch and you couldn't even give her a ride? The girl rides a bike to work for crying out loud.

NATALIE

Well, I suppose technically she's not my personal assistant anymore either.

ANN

What?

NATALIE

I fired her.

ANN

You fired Helen? Why? When?

NATALIE

Oh, it was months ago. You know, I really tried to be a team player. I tried to focus on all of her good qualities—her positive effort, prompt response, and clear communication skills. I wanted to be fair and just, fully giving Helen the benefit of the doubt. I wanted to give her a chance to grow on me, so I could get used to her...quirks. Finally, after a complete evaluation of Helen's attributes, I decided to kick her freakish little butt to the curb.

ANN

Why would you do that? Helen is one of the most responsible young adults I've ever met. She's smart, polite—

NATALIE

The girl is freaking weird, Ann.

ANN

Why? Because she likes—

NATALIE

Don't say it.

ANN

Don't say it? Why not? You're not afraid of a few—

NATALIE

Ann, I mean it.

ANN

Aww, isn't that precious? Prissy pageant diva Natalie is afraid of unicorns.

NATALIE

(Cringing) I'm not afraid of them. They're just...weird.

ANN

You have issues.

NATALIE

No, Helen has issues. It's absurd for an otherwise normal twenty year-old woman to be obsessed with a bunch of mythical ponies. Honestly, I'm embarrassed for her. It's so immature.

ANN

And fearing imaginary creatures at age 33 isn't?

NATALIE

Be realistic, Ann. You know as well as I do that Helen's fixation is out of control. You saw those things all over her desk. Unicorn pens, unicorn erasers, even unicorn paper clips. Who the hell makes unicorn-shaped paper clips?

ANN

You didn't tell her that you were firing her because of the unicorn thing, did you?

NATALIE

Oh, please. Unlike you, I actually look out for my professional reputation. Therefore, I cited Helen's grounds for termination as "a poor work ethic and a consistently negative attitude." I figured that'd be enough to get those creepy unicorn dolls out of my sight.

ANN

I talked to Helen not too long ago. She didn't say anything about being fired from Martin.

NATALIE

She was probably embarrassed. Surely you were embarrassed after being fired from the company. Although somehow I think throwing numerous platters of vegetables might have had something to do with that.

ANN

For your information, they were meat and cheese trays. And no, I wasn't embarrassed in the least and I don't know why Helen would be either.

NATALIE

Oh, I don't know...prestigious position in a multi-million dollar company, nice salary, adequate room for advancement. Yeah, I'd be mortified.

ANN

I would have sworn she'd tell me that kind of thing. If anyone could understand, it would be me. I mean, come on. I flung bologna and mozzarella at a bunch of drunks in costume.

(DORIS, a short woman of about 65, barges in through the diner's main door. Wearing a brightly colored wind suit and gaudy jewelry, DORIS'S outfit reflects her boisterous and bold personality. Considering both character traits and physical appearance, DORIS is the complete opposite of NATALIE.)

DORIS

Is the dang unicorn girl here yet?

NATALIE

(Caught off guard) Mother, what are you doing here? I thought I told you to stay at the office.

ANN

Hi, Mrs. Courtland.

DORIS

Oh hi, Ann. Where's the unicorn girl? I wanted to catch a glimpse of this nutjob for myself.

NATALIE

Mother, seriously, who let you out of the broom closet?

ANN

You keep your mother in a broom closet?

NATALIE

(Defensive) We're out of offices. Mother came to work for me as my Personal Assistant until I could find a, uh, *suitable* replacement.

DORIS

Nobody else will work for her haughty a—

NATALIE

—As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, I put a desk in there for her. She has a nice little telephone, a day planner—

DORIS

—and all the turpentine and urinal cakes I can eat.

NATALIE

All right, Mother. It's time to go. Brent has plenty of envelopes for you to stuff back at the office.

DORIS

Hey, I didn't walk three stinkin' blocks just for my health.

NATALIE

Really? From the looks of things, I'd say you could use a good walk or two.

DORIS

You see the kind of treatment I get from my own flesh and blood? I think I deserve a tad more respect, missy.

NATALIE

Respect? With what you're wearing, mother, I should have locked you in that broom closet and thrown away the key!

DORIS

I got this on sale!

NATALIE

I don't doubt that. However, if you're going to fill in as my personal assistant, you need to start dressing accordingly. I'm talking business suits, and more importantly, some type of dress shoe. (*DORIS starts to speak up but NATALIE immediately cuts her off.*) And no, that doesn't include Keds.

DORIS

Well I needed my trusty Keds today to walk three blocks down to this stinkin' diner. And don't go thinkin' I just shuffled on down here to get out of stuffing those dang envelopes. The fact of the matter is that your new business cards came in, still hot off the press. And I thought, well heck, I'll take 'em down to that hateful daughter of mine and get another chance at seeing this unicorn loon while I'm at it.

ANN

Yes, when shall we be expecting the unicorn girl, Natalie?

NATALIE

Well obviously she's running late. (*To DORIS*) You hear that, Mother? Helen's not here, so unfortunately you'll just have to give me the business cards and be on your way.

DORIS

Are you sure you don't want me to stay and protect you? I wouldn't want one of them voodoo unicorns to peck out your eyeballs or something spooky like that.

(DORIS and ANN chuckle.)

NATALIE

Mother, please, just give me the cards and get going. Those contract proposals aren't going to mail themselves.

DORIS

What if that little weirdo brings a whole family of those unicorn buggers along? Then they might hiss at you or spit in your coffee.

NATALIE

That's enough, Mother. Do you want me to sit you with the interns again this afternoon?

DORIS

Heck, no! I hate those hoity-toity college pukers.

NATALIE

(To ANN) Mother thinks they're out to get her.

DORIS

Why is that so hard to believe? They've been shooting rubber bands at me for Pete's sake! Can you believe that? Beating up on a poor, defenseless, middle-aged woman like myself...

NATALIE

If you're middle-aged, then I'm a fetus.

ANN

Natalie, can we please get back to the main issue? I think it's about time that I start getting some answers around here.

NATALIE

(Smugly) What is it that you want to know, Ann?

ANN

Don't play stupid.

DORIS

Play stupid? Don't let her fool you, Ann. She's as dense as a London fog.

ANN

(To NATALIE) What are you plotting now?

NATALIE

I don't think it's what I'm plotting that you'll be concerned with. Drew's plans, however—that might send you into a tizzy.

ANN

What are you talking about? Drew doesn't have anything to do with Helen.

NATALIE

Mother, hand her the business cards.

ANN

For what?

DORIS

Yeah, for what?

NATALIE

(To ANN) Just take a look at them. You'll get the picture. Mother, hand Ann the business cards.

DORIS

Maybe I don't wanna.

NATALIE

(Latching onto the box of cards in DORIS'S hands) Don't bite the hand that feeds you, Mother. Someone has to drive you to bingo tonight.

DORIS

I'll walk!

(THEY struggle for a moment over the box of business cards. NATALIE gives the box one last tug, knocking DORIS onto the floor. As a result, DORIS lets go.)

NATALIE

(Handing the box to ANN) Thank you, Mother. You can be on your way now.

DORIS

What if I don't wanna go back to the office? You know, I oughta quit this stinkin' job and leave your ungrateful tush in a lurch.

NATALIE

(Ignoring her mother, then to ANN) Go ahead. Take a look at the cards. I bet you won't like what you see.

DORIS

It makes me sick to think of all the Maury Show episodes I've missed because of you.

NATALIE

Mother, get lost! (*DORIS picks herself up off the floor and slowly shuffles toward the door. NATALIE focuses her attention on ANN.*) Read it aloud. I want to really enjoy hearing my new name come out of your mouth.

ANN

Natalie B. Terd, Senior Vice President, Martin Industries.
(*DORIS freezes after hearing the name, recognizing something is amiss.*)

NATALIE

Yes, that's right! Drew and I are going to be married and I'll finally be known as the real Mrs. Drew Terb. So how does it feel to be a distant memory in the eyes of your ex husband?

ANN

I said Terd, not Terb.

NATALIE

Excuse me?

ANN

This business card, it says Terd. With a D.

NATALIE

(*Scrambling to look at the cards*) What?

ANN

T – E – R – D. According to this, you're marrying a Terd, not a Terb.

NATALIE

(*Turning slowly towards DORIS*) Mother!

DORIS

(*Trying to hustle out the door*) I think I hear those envelopes calling my name.

NATALIE

Mother, what have you done?

DORIS

I don't know what you're talking about.

NATALIE

(*Crossing to DORIS, holding up a card*) What does this say?

DORIS

Natalie B. Terd.

NATALIE

You see that? The last name should be Terb. T – E – R – B. B, mother, B, not D! This says Natalie Terd. Do I look like a Terd to you?

DORIS

Well, that depends...

(ANN and DORIS chuckle for a moment.)

NATALIE

I'm glad you both think this is funny. Now I have to spend more of my valuable time fixing your giant mistake, Mother.

DORIS

My mistake? How do you know I screwed it up?

NATALIE

Don't try to push the blame on someone else. I had everything spelled out for you on the purchase requisition. You just weren't paying attention!

DORIS

Hey, I can't help it that my eyesight ain't what it used to be. B's look like D's, red lights look like green lights. It's all the same to me.

NATALIE

Well, it's not all the same to me. I didn't screw this up. You did and you're going to be the one to fix it. *(Pulling a piece of paper from her purse)* Here. Take this number and call Ellen at Pronto Press. Tell her I need replacements immediately. I want the new cards by Monday at the latest. *(To ANN)* Do you have a phone she can use?

ANN

(Pointing to the counter) There's one right there.

NATALIE

How about one out of my sight so I don't kill her?

ANN

There's a phone in the supply room, but it's kind of small and dark back there.

NATALIE

Oh good, you'll feel right at home then, Mother.

DORIS

(Hardly enthused) Yippee. I bet you don't have urinal cakes in there though, do you, Ann?

NATALIE

Get moving! (*DORIS reluctantly grabs the box of business cards and shuffles toward the kitchen door.*) Mother, I want some answers on this fiasco within fifteen minutes.

DORIS

(*As SHE exits off*) Kiss my wrinkled butt!

(*NATALIE rolls her eyes, collects herself, and focuses her attention back onto ANN.*)

NATALIE

So?

ANN

So what?

NATALIE

So, Drew and I are getting married. Aren't you jealous?

ANN

Why would I be jealous? I've been there before, had him before. With Drew, it always ends the same. Don't go thinking you'll be an exception to that rule.

NATALIE

Why wouldn't I?

ANN

Well, let's see. Ten years ago, Drew, being the monogamous gentleman that he is, left his fiancée, Beth, for me. Then he leaves me for you just this past year. Are you seeing the trend?

NATALIE

First of all, if Drew went looking elsewhere during your relationship, it's only a reflection on your poor...*abilities* as a wife. Secondly, don't even try to put you and me in the same category. When it comes to Drew, you and I are worlds apart on our ideas of what he needs.

ANN

What he needs is a good kick in the—

NATALIE

Again with the vulgarity, Ann? You keep that crass attitude up and you can forget about getting an invitation to the wedding.

ANN

Boo hoo.

NATALIE

Why don't you tell me how you really feel?

ANN

Why don't you tell me what any of this has to do with Helen?

NATALIE

I'm sure you're aware of Helen's newfound career as a floral designer.

ANN

Well, no. Up until five minutes ago I thought she still worked for you. All she ever talks about on the phone is unicorns.

NATALIE

(Cringing) Could you please refrain from mentioning those...things?

ANN

She arranges flowers now?

NATALIE

Turns out that shortly after I fired her, Helen landed an apprenticeship with Wanda's Florals on 13th Street. She even sent me a complimentary bouquet about a month ago, just to show that there were no hard feelings— you know, with the termination and all. Now, you and I both know that the girl couldn't type her way out of a paper bag, but she sure can throw some flowers together.

ANN

Helen...a florist?

NATALIE

I couldn't hardly believe it either, but Ann, you should have seen the bouquet. It was downright gorgeous. Perfect shape, perfect size, perfect colors. I can honestly say that to this day, I've not seen a prettier arrangement.

ANN

Well that's great. I'm happy for her. It's about time she found something that she's really good at doing.

NATALIE

Uh huh.

ANN

Uh huh, what? What's that stupid grin for? What do you want with her?

NATALIE

Well, it's all quite simple really. Since I'm getting married, I need flowers. But I can't just have any flowers, Ann. Drew and I are corporate royalty. We require the best quality of living, so we shall get the best quality of flowers for our wedding. And from what I've seen, Helen's the best.

ANN

So ask her to do your flowers. Who cares?

NATALIE

I think you underestimate the great undertaking this will be for Helen. Not only do I need beautiful flowers, but I also need consistency. I must have that common thread running through the flowers for the wedding, the engagement party, the rehearsal dinner, and any other function that may come along during the process. And let's not forget that I am the Senior Vice President of Martin Industries.

ANN

And that means what exactly?

NATALIE

If I'm going to have the best flowers, no one else will. At least not until my wedding is done and over with. Therefore, I'm going to ask Helen to accept a full-time position as my personal floral designer.

ANN

Are you crazy? You think she's going to help you after you fired her?

NATALIE

Come on, Ann. You know as well as I do that Helen is far too nice to reject an employment offer out of spite.

ANN

What about after the wedding? What is she supposed to do then?

NATALIE

I don't care. I'm certainly not going to give her a permanent position.

ANN

Are you going to tell her that up front?

NATALIE

Please, Ann. Don't be silly. I initially got rid of Helen because she's just plain weird. I can handle the unicorns in small doses, but not indefinitely.

ANN

Small doses? You practically have a seizure any time someone mentions the word.

NATALIE

Unlike before, Helen will be under my payroll, not the company's. Therefore, I am free to set my own rules and conditions. In exchange for a unicorn-free work environment, I will happily provide your beloved ingénue with a considerable salary.

ANN

What are you going to do? Tell her she can't talk about unicorns?

NATALIE

Precisely. There are a few more stipulations, but I'll go over those in more detail when she arrives.

ANN

If Helen quits her job to work for you, there's no guarantee that she'll be able to regain the kind of opportunity that she has at Wanda's right now. And then where will she be? She'll have to start all over.

NATALIE

Oh well. That's the breaks.

ANN

I'm not going to let you ruin her life again. Helen is a sweet girl with good intentions.

NATALIE

Ann, I'd rather you not get involved. It'd be a shame for me to have to put you back in your place for the second time this year.

ANN

This is my diner! How can I possibly stay uninvolved?

NATALIE

I didn't even know it was your diner until Trudy from purchasing came in here two weeks ago.

ANN

I thought she looked familiar.

NATALIE

Yeah, she came back to the office swearing up and down that she saw you working at a diner three blocks away. I couldn't believe that the former Senior VP would sink to the level of working in the food service industry. I had to get proof for myself.

ANN

You were spying on me?

NATALIE

No. Mother was spying on you. I sent her down here to scope the place out. Sure enough, the old bag confirmed Trudy's story. The location just seemed too good to be true. By using your diner, I could combine business with pleasure; business in recruiting Helen to design my flowers and pleasure in seeing you foam at the mouth in response to my marriage news. Quite frankly, I'd have thought you'd be a bit more upset about Drew and I getting married, but that's okay. I still got that kind of cheese-throwing anger out of you. Who'd have thought it'd be over some four-eyed unicorn freak.

ANN

Four-eyed freak? Helen is the four-eyed freak? Have you looked in the mirror lately?

NATALIE

My glasses are designer, thank you very much.

ANN

(Grabbing the glasses from NATALIE'S face) Does it matter? I mean, seriously, they're ridiculous.

(NATALIE tries to grab the glasses back from Ann who pulls away. NATALIE begins chasing ANN around the diner, trying to regain possession of her glasses.)

NATALIE

Ann, give me those back!

ANN

You can probably see through walls with these things.

NATALIE

Stop fooling around! Those glasses are worth more than your life!

ANN

Well, sure they are. *(Putting on the glasses, mimicking NATALIE)* After all, I'm no longer the Senior Vice President of Martin Industries.

NATALIE

Don't you dare mock me! I will not be ridiculed by some low-life executive has-been.

ANN

Oh yes! Isn't it just dreadful for a former Senior VP to be working a commoner's job?

NATALIE

Ann, this isn't funny.

ANN

Ugh! And in the food service industry of all places!

NATALIE

Will you give me my glasses back or am I going to have to knock them off your face?

ANN

Well I don't know. I'll have to check with my personal stylist first—

NATALIE

That is it!

(NATALIE catches up to ANN in the chase. THEY struggle for a moment, shoving one another while ANN tries to keep the glasses out of NATALIE'S reach. Meanwhile, both ad lib dialogue. HELEN, a physically self-conscious twenty year-old, enters the diner. Sporting a white tee shirt displaying a large picture of a unicorn, HELEN wears an outfit that seems awkward and includes pieces that do not match. SHE enters the diner cautiously, somewhat alarmed by the ongoing scuffle.)

HELEN

Natalie? Ann? Is something wrong?

(NATALIE and ANN freeze in the last pose of the struggle upon hearing HELEN'S voice. Still hanging on to one another and the pair of glasses, they turn to look at HELEN.)

ANN AND NATALIE

Helen!

(THEY separate, ANN holding the pair of glasses)

HELEN

Is something wrong?

NATALIE

No, everything's fine. We were just...

ANN

Silly Natalie managed to get her glasses stuck in her hair again. Of course, it's kind of easy to do when you've got a rat's nest on top of your head like our girl here. *(To NATALIE)* Look at that, your hair's a mess now. Let me just fix it a little for you.

NATALIE

(Biting her tongue as ANN messes with her hair) I think that's quite enough, Ann, thank you.

ANN

(Holding out NATALIE'S glasses, as if to drop them) They're all yours, dear friend.

NATALIE

Don't you dare—

(ANN drops the pair of glasses, which NATALIE catches in mid-air.)

ANN

(To HELEN) But enough about that—how are you doing?

NATALIE

Yes, Helen my dear girl, how are you? It sure is lovely to see you again!

(As NATALIE puts on her glasses she sees the unicorn on HELEN'S shirt and becomes transfixed.)

ANN

Miss Thing brought me up to speed on your new career. I couldn't be happier for you, Helen.

HELEN

I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I guess I was still a little embarrassed about being fired.

ANN

Well, we can blame Natalie for that. Isn't that right, Nat?

NATALIE

(Her trance interrupted) Huh? What?

ANN

I'm just so glad that everything has worked out for you, Helen. I hear you're quite the florist.

HELEN

Wanda's is just so busy right now. They've got me working six days a week to keep up with all the special requests. Everyone just loves my unicorn-themed bouquets.

NATALIE

(Wincing at HELEN'S shirt and the word "unicorn") How lovely.

ANN

No wonder I haven't talked to you in a few weeks. You must be exhausted.

HELEN

I get tired from time to time. But when I'm feeling really low, all I have to do is think of my unicorn friends and the many spiritual journeys they complete each and every day.

That's when I know I can do more. I really love my job. It just doesn't leave much time for anything else— (*Giggling in a childish way*) especially my new boyfriend.

ANN

New boyfriend? Oh Helen, that's great news!

NATALIE

(*Still cringing from all the "unicorn" talk*) Yes...terrific news.

ANN

You'll have to tell us all about him.

NATALIE

(*Nervously*) Yes, please. You know I would love to hear all about this gentleman. But first, uh...does anyone else think it's cold in here?

ANN

I'm fine.

NATALIE

Look at you, Helen, with those short sleeves. Surely you must be freezing.

HELEN

I feel okay.

NATALIE

Are those goosebumps on your arms? Here, take my jacket.

(*NATALIE tries to put her jacket on HELEN.*)

HELEN

Really, I'm fine. Thank you, though.

NATALIE

Please, I insist.

ANN

Natalie, Helen says she's fine.

HELEN

Thanks, but I...

NATALIE

Just put it on for my sake!

(ANN and HELEN look at her. HELEN is puzzled, while ANN chuckles at NATALIE'S insecurity.)

HELEN

Okay, if it'll make you feel better.

NATALIE

It's...it's just that I hate to see anyone cold.

(SHE puts the jacket on HELEN, fastening each button, strategically covering the unicorn on HELEN'S shirt.)

NATALIE

There. That's better. So, tell me about your boyfriend, Helen. What's his name?

HELEN

(Giddy) Irwin.

NATALIE

Irwin, okay, and how long have you and Irwin been together?

HELEN

Three weeks. Well, I like to say three weeks, but that really means it's been three weeks since we first started chatting. Our first virtual date was two weeks ago.

NATALIE

Virtual date? I'm not sure I'm familiar with that terminology.

HELEN

Well, it's kind of hard to go out to dinner with someone who lives in Canada.

NATALIE

I'm sorry, I guess I'm having a hard time following you. How exactly did you meet this Irwin character?

HELEN

Irwin was looking for information for his college research paper entitled, "The Elusive Unicorn: Friend or Foe?" He found my personal website, which lists all kinds of statistics and basic unicorn theory. You see, poor Irwin was confused about the unicorn and its true purpose. Naturally I steered his paper in the right direction by encouraging him to see the mystical and amicable nature of the unicorn. After seeing all the facts, anyone would be a fool to believe that the unicorn could possibly be an enemy. Ever since Irwin realized that unicorns are our friends, the emails have been coming non-stop.

NATALIE

So you two have never been on a real date?

HELEN

Well, no, not yet.

ANN

Don't feel bad about that, Helen. Just look at Natalie. She never went on a real date with my husband either – just private meetings and confidential phone conversations.

HELEN

We're planning on getting together soon. Irwin wants me to visit him in Canada. That's why I've been working so many hours at the flower shop. I'm trying to save enough money for the plane ride, a hotel room, and a life-sized unicorn replica for Irwin. There are just so many expenses to consider.

ANN

Don't push yourself too hard, Helen. Everything will come in time.

NATALIE

But then again, you should try to earn all the money you can now. I mean, poor Irwin is just waiting all by his lonesome self in cold, snowy Canada.

ANN

Well if Irwin really cares for her, he'll wait as long as it takes, Natalie.

NATALIE

But the only way to see if a relationship will really last is to be together. I can tell you that from experience, Ann.

HELEN

You're both right. To tell you the truth, I'm still not sure how to handle the situation with Irwin. I suppose I've been focusing on my work to take my mind off of things.

NATALIE

Yes, focus on your work! That's a very wise decision, Helen. It's important for successful women of today to have a realistic career path. I obviously have one, you seem to be exploring yours and Ann...well, she's working on it, now isn't she?

ANN

That's true, Natalie. I am rebuilding my career. Much like you had to do, Helen. But Natalie? She's never really had to work for anything. See, I'm building a career by relying on just myself, standing on my own two feet. Natalie, on the other hand, built her career *off* her feet.

NATALIE

Ann, I'm going to need you to relocate. I have a business matter to discuss with Helen.

ANN

Why don't you just put me in the supply room with your mother?

HELEN

Maybe I should go. Natalie, we could do this another time.

NATALIE

No, absolutely not.

ANN

(To HELEN) I'm sorry. I'm not trying to make you feel uncomfortable.

HELEN

It's okay. You don't have to apologize. I understand that the circumstances between you two are somewhat peculiar.

ANN

That's a nice way of putting it.

HELEN

I can imagine how difficult this must be for you, Ann. I think any normal woman would find it hard to be polite to her ex-husband's mistress. Myself, I'd probably ask my unicorn friends to avenge such a wrongdoing by inflicting meaningful punishment upon the perpetrators.

(NATALIE becomes visibly uncomfortable.)

ANN

I think that would be appropriate.

HELEN

(To ANN) I think it's great that you've moved on. All that really matters is that you're happy. Surely you must be happier now than you were with Mr. Terb. Even though he was a jerk to you, I can see how Mr. Terb would be a good match for Natalie.

(HELEN means her words innocently, but NATALIE has a hard time not taking offense.)

NATALIE

Oh really? How do you mean, Helen?

HELEN

No, wait, that didn't come out right.

ANN

I think it sounded just fine.

NATALIE

What exactly are you trying to say?

HELEN

It's just that, well, you seem like the type of person who likes a challenge. And Mr. Terb, well...

ANN

—He's like the Rubik's cube of men.

NATALIE

In that case, I am pleased to report that Drew and I have exceeded both of your expectations. This is why I've asked you here today, Helen. It's official. Drew and I are going to be married.

HELEN

(Surprised) Oh. Oh, dear. That's...that's...

NATALIE

You could start by saying you're happy for me.

ANN

Maybe she's not.

HELEN

No, I am. Believe me, Natalie, I really am. It's just...

NATALIE

It's just what?

HELEN

This might sound a little silly, but...

NATALIE

What?

HELEN

My unicorns don't like him.

NATALIE

(Under her breath) Not again.

ANN

Is that so?

NATALIE

What do you mean they don't like him?

HELEN

It all started one day at the office. Mr. Terb was passing through— and quickly, too. He must have been on his way to an important meeting or something. He had lots of papers in his hands and he kept looking at his watch, like he was running late or something. He was running into people and bumping desks along the way, but it didn't bother him. He just kept right on going, fumbling through his papers and stumbling into bystanders. As he got closer and closer to my desk, I became concerned with his irregular traffic patterns. Mr. Terb was like a wayward pinball, bouncing into desk after desk, knocking down pictures and bobbling computer monitors. It was a frightening sight. After all, my desk was arranged with a purpose. Each unicorn had its own unique positioning, specific to its individual needs and strengths. To disrupt this positioning would thereby compromise the integrity of the unicorn. Such an occurrence and its increased likelihood worried not just me, but my unicorn friends too. I could see the fear in their eyes as Mr.

HELEN, *Continued*

Terb came barreling down the cluttered corridor. We all had good reason to be afraid because sure enough, when Mr. Terb passed by my desk, it happened.

ANN AND NATALIE

What happened?

HELEN

Mr. Terb bumped into Trudy from purchasing, which sent his backside flying into my unicorn arrangement. It was his scrawny posterior that knocked my Ki-Rin onto the floor.

(DORIS starts to enter from the kitchen. Upon seeing HELEN, DORIS quickly pulls herself back into the doorway to eavesdrop. We see her reactions to HELEN'S story as it unfolds. Meanwhile, the OTHERS are unaware of her presence.)

NATALIE

Ki-what?

HELEN

Ki-Rin. The Ki-Rin is a relative of the unicorn, but it's much more uncommon.

ANN

With that bony butt, I'm surprised Drew didn't take out your whole unicorn crew.

HELEN

It's just that Mr. Terb didn't bother to pick him up or even apologize at the very least.

NATALIE

Maybe Drew didn't realize he had moved the...thing.

HELEN

But I saw him look down at my fallen Ki-Rin figurine. He just kept walking, like nothing had happened. Then I heard it.

NATALIE

(Uneasy) Heard what?

ANN

Yeah, what'd you hear?

HELEN

A mystical voice from deep down within my soul. It was the Ki-Rin. He told me that Mr. Terb should not be trusted, for he cares only about himself.

ANN

I'll second that.

HELEN

He also said that Mr. Terb's awful cologne is cheap and that he smells like a used-car salesman.

DORIS

(Jumping out from the doorway, in NATALIE'S face) Oh no! Don't make the unicorns mad! Never disobey the Ki-Rin or he'll spear you with his pointy horn!

NATALIE

Mother, what are you doing out here?

DORIS

Your new cards will be here in a week. *(To HELEN)* Well hello there. You must be the uni—

NATALIE

Helen, Mother, this is Helen.

DORIS

The name's Doris. I'm Natalie's personal slave. But I'm for hire, as long as you pay me more than six dollars an hour and give me free rides to bingo.

NATALIE

No one here is interested in your services, Mother.

HELEN

Pleased to meet you, Doris.

DORIS

I've heard a lot about you and your...friends.

NATALIE

There. You've met everyone, Mother. Now head back to the office and finish those mailings.

ANN

Doris, can I get you something to drink?

DORIS

You got any rum?

ANN

(Crossing to the counter) How about a root beer?

DORIS

(Plopping down in a chair) Well, give me some kind of beer. I need something to take the edge off after the kind of day I'm havin'.

HELEN

Natalie, I don't want you to think I'm trying to dissuade you from marrying Mr. Terb. I think it's great that he wants to make a lifelong commitment to you.

ANN

(Handing DORIS a drink) Let's just hope he doesn't cross his fingers during the vows this time.

NATALIE

I appreciate that, Helen. Unlike Ann here, I've never been married before. As you can imagine, I want my wedding to be absolutely perfect. Drew and I are the figureheads of Martin Industries. Everything that we do reflects upon the corporation. This wedding will be no exception. That's why I need your help.

HELEN

I'd be happy to help with flowers for your wedding, if that's what you're asking.

ANN

Helen, wouldn't that be a lot to take on? Your popularity is growing at Wanda's. You're already working six days a week. You don't want to spread yourself too thin.

HELEN

I suppose it might be a stretch...

NATALIE

I'm glad you brought that up, Ann. There's no doubt the responsibility will be extremely time consuming. The floral scheme must be exquisite yet consistent, from the arrangements at the engagement party down to those used in decorating the actual reception. I need to have elegance and uniformity across the board, all the way from bouquets to boutonnieres.

DORIS

I'm sure glad you've got cash flyin' out your wazoo, because there ain't no way in heck I'd be paying for all this stinkin' frou frou crap.

NATALIE

No need to worry your delusional little head, Mother. I know that my tastes are costly, but as the Senior Vice President of Martin Industries, I'm quite prepared for the expense. Specifically, I'm prepared to pay my floral designer a substantial salary throughout the duration of the venture.

DORIS

How much are you talking? Heck, I'll do it if the price is right!

NATALIE

\$1400 per week.

ANN

What?

DORIS

1400 bucks a week for flowers and you're paying me minimum wage? Heck I'd eat dog biscuits for that kind of money if I weren't already eatin' them on the salary you pay me.

HELEN

This is a full-time position?

NATALIE

Yes. That rate is based upon the agreement that you would work on my projects for eight hours a day, five days a week.

HELEN

It sure is a lot of money.

ANN

Money's not everything though.

NATALIE

I'll even throw in a starting bonus, equivalent to the total of one month's pay. I'll give you a two week break upon making a verbal commitment, so you can go to Canada or Unicornland, or wherever you choose. At the end of two weeks, however, I expect you to be at the Martin Industries building at 8 AM sharp, ready to work.

HELEN

Two whole weeks with Irwin? That's more than enough time for us to summon a real unicorn by singing the enchanted hymns of the solitary horn.

ANN

Can't you summon a unicorn from here in town?

NATALIE

Don't you see, Ann? Obviously performing the uh – u – uh – hymn is a special event for Helen and Irwin to share. You should really be a little more sensitive to Helen's interests.

DORIS

Now I don't know about the rest of y'all, but if I was meeting my boy toy for the first time, I'd be thinking less about unicorns and a little more about gettin' busy.

NATALIE

Mother!

DORIS

Hey, maybe this Irwin's got a cute butt.

ANN

Helen, what about all your work at Wanda's? I'm sure you have projects scheduled for at least the next month. Are you going to cancel all those appointments? That wouldn't be very responsible.

HELEN

I guess I didn't think about that...

ANN

And what about after the wedding is over, huh? What will you do then? Wanda's will have long since replaced you. Natalie certainly won't give you a full-time position.

NATALIE

That's not necessarily true. I believe I could find a permanent position within the corporation for Helen. (*To HELEN*) I'm sure your immeasurable talent with flowers would make you a natural at events planning. I could easily set you up with the events coordinator. You would become a major contributor to the success of all Martin Industries' events. There's no doubt you would give our corporate affairs a fresh new look.

HELEN

That sounds like fun.

NATALIE

And of course, the pay would be comparable to the salary you'll receive as my personal floral designer.

HELEN

It almost sounds too good to be true.

ANN

It is.

NATALIE

Ann, you really need to mind your own business and let Helen make her own decisions. You've been treating her like a five year-old ever since she arrived. She is an adult after all.

DORIS

You could have fooled me. I couldn't fit her teeny-weeny tee shirt over my left arm flab.

NATALIE

(To HELEN) If you're wise, you'll give this opportunity some real thought. I'm offering you the chance of a lifetime.

ANN

Helen, you'll have plenty of great opportunities at Wanda's. Building a successful career takes time.

NATALIE

More so than time, success takes luck. Here I am, offering you a highly compensated position working on what will surely be one of the year's most talked about events. You'd be a complete fool to pass on such a prospect.

ANN

Not everyone can be bought, Natalie.

DORIS

I can!

ANN

(To HELEN) Your choice should be based on what is going to make you happy, not how much money will be in your pocket.

NATALIE

Oh, isn't that touching?

ANN

(To HELEN) Don't be too hasty with this decision. It's a very important choice that could affect the rest of your life.

HELEN

Maybe I do need a little time to think things over.

NATALIE

Unfortunately that's not possible. I have meetings scheduled tomorrow with three of the top florists in town. You know you're my first choice Helen, but I do need to be prepared in the event that you would imprudently reject my offer. I must have a florist employed by the end of the week.

HELEN

I really love working at Wanda's, but this just sounds like such a great opportunity. I'm not sure I can say no.

NATALIE

Wonderful, just wonderful!

ANN

Helen, please take a while to consider everything at stake. Don't do something you're going to regret.

NATALIE

Ann, that's enough. The girl has made her decision. I think you should respect her opinion and—

HELEN

I don't know – maybe I should think it over a bit.

NATALIE

What?

HELEN

Ann's right. This is a huge decision. I need to consult my unicorns before I go any further.

ANN

Just take a few hours or so—

NATALIE

I don't have a few hours to give her, Ann. I have back to back meetings starting at 3:00 and I need an answer by tomorrow.

HELEN

Could you meet me for dinner?

DORIS

As long as I still get to bingo on time.

NATALIE

I'd like to finish this up now if we could. I have a very busy afternoon ahead—

HELEN

I'm sorry to make you wait. I suddenly feel a strong need to connect with my unicorn friends. They've always been an invaluable resource, guiding me through life's pivotal moments.

NATALIE

I'd rather not wait several hours to resolve this issue.

ANN

Well, I'm sure Helen could communicate with her unicorns right here in front of all of us if that would suit you better.

NATALIE

(To HELEN) What time tonight? 6:00?

HELEN

That'd be great!

NATALIE

Fine, I'll meet you at that new cafe around the block. The atmosphere is much more pleasant there. That should give you plenty of time to do...whatever it is that you do.

HELEN

(Gathering her things) I must get going while the connection is still strong. That's the only way that I can get an accurate unicorn reading. I promise I won't be late! *(Hugging ANN)* It was great to see you again!

ANN

Keep in touch, okay? Don't agree to anything that doesn't feel right.

HELEN

(Shouting to NATALIE as SHE heads toward the door) See you at six!

(HELEN exits.)

NATALIE

Isn't it just lovely that I always seem to get what I want?

ANN

This isn't over. There's no way Helen will take that job.

NATALIE

The only thing standing between me and my perfect wedding is those damn unicorns. I'll just have to lay out some ground rules with Helen, that's all.

DORIS

Heck, I kinda like the unicorns.

NATALIE

You would.

ANN

There is no "events planning" position, is there?

NATALIE

Heavens no! You know as well as I do that all of our events planning is outsourced to a professional company independent of Martin Industries.

DORIS

You tricked the unicorn girl?

(NATALIE'S cell phone rings.)

NATALIE

Mother, gather our things. After I take this call, we're leaving. Ann, please don't encourage my mother's erratic behavior while I'm gone. I'm already going to have to muzzle the crackpot for the rest of the day.

(NATALIE exits outside for privacy, cell phone in hand.)

ANN

How do you put up with her?

DORIS

One word...Bingo.

ANN

She's cold, she's selfish—

DORIS

She's got some ugly lookin' glasses.

ANN

She'll lie to get what she wants. She won't even consider how it might affect someone else.

DORIS

(Holding something back) You don't even know the half of it.

ANN

What? You mean there's more?

DORIS

(Chuckling) If you only knew...

ANN

Doris, what else is going on?

DORIS

Not what's going on, it's what isn't going on.

ANN

I'm not following you.

DORIS

Oh no, my big fat mouth has already gotten me into enough trouble. She'll probably stick me with those hateful interns again as it is. I can't take another afternoon with those no-good university punks. I'm thinking about taking out my rage on 'em with the blunt side of my bingo bag!

ANN

If Natalie's up to something, I've got to know. Does it involve Helen?

DORIS

I've said too much. We gotta quit talkin' and pretend like nothing happened. I didn't say nothin'!

ANN

I promise I won't say anything!

DORIS

You don't understand. I've got a knack for slipping up when it comes to secrets. Once I get 'em in my head and I start flappin' my gums about 'em, it's no good I tell ya. I can't keep my pie hole shut and everything just sorta comes flyin' out. Now we gotta quit yappin'. I gotta focus before the demon spawn gets back in here or I'm gonna lose it!

ANN

But Doris—

DORIS

No, no, I've gotta focus! It must...be...quiet.

(DORIS goes into some kind of meditative trance, making strange noises and facial expressions. ANN observes DORIS for a moment. NATALIE enters hurriedly with purpose.)

NATALIE

(To ANN) Do you have Helen's phone number?

ANN

I don't know. Why?

NATALIE

(Excited) Some things have come up. Drew has informed me that we have important plans for dinner tonight, so our little florist is going to have to make a decision right here and now.

DORIS

Dinner tonight, huh? You think it's gonna be THE dinner?

NATALIE

Mother, don't say another word.

ANN

I thought you told Helen that she had till 6:00.

NATALIE

Well, she's going to have to get her unicorn-loving butt back down here because I need an answer now. *(Ready to write)* What's her number?

ANN

I don't have it on me.

DORIS

(To NATALIE) You think tonight he's finally gonna do it?

NATALIE

Mother, we are not about to discuss this. I need you to call the company and get Helen's phone number. It should still be in her personnel file.

ANN

What is this all about?

NATALIE

That's none of your business. (*Digging through her briefcase*) I could have sworn I kept her number in here somewhere.

ANN

Natalie, what's going on here? What are you lying about?

NATALIE

Who said I was lying about anything, Mother?

DORIS

I'm innocent! Please still take me to bingo!

NATALIE

(*To DORIS*) Get that phone number!

DORIS

I don't know the dang phone number for fartin' Martin Industries!

ANN

Somebody tell me what's going on!

NATALIE

You want to know what's going on? I'll tell you what's going on. Drew and I are getting married and Helen is going to design the flowers for my wedding and I'm going to live happily ever after!

DORIS

Not if Drew don't ever propose to your stinkin' butt!

NATALIE

Mother...

ANN

What?

DORIS

That dip's been hidin' the dang ring for two weeks now and nothin's happened. (*To NATALIE*) You're just plain loony to be makin' all these fancy plans with nothin' on your dang finger, you know that?

NATALIE

Mother!

DORIS

(*Oblivious*) What?

ANN

(To NATALIE) You mean he hasn't even asked you yet?

(DORIS'S hand flies up to her mouth instantly. SHE has slipped yet again.)

NATALIE

(To DORIS) You're going to pay for this. You know that, right?

DORIS

Dang it!

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(AT RISE: An hour later; the lunch rush over. ANN is sweeping the floor, while NATALIE is on the diner telephone with a phone book at her side.)

NATALIE

(On the phone) Yes, is this the Bindleoffer residence? (Pause) Wonderful. Could I please speak with Helen? (Pause) No Helen? (Pause) Okay, do you know anyone by the name of Helen Bindleoffer? (Pause) I'm sorry to inconvenience you but all I'm looking for is a phone number. You see, you're the fifth Bindleoffer I've called—(Pause) There's no need to get upset. (Pause) Sir, profanity is really not necessary—(Pause) Oh yeah? Well, up yours too!

(NATALIE slams down the phone.)

ANN

So you're profane and deceptive? You're just an all around peach, aren't you?

NATALIE

I'm not deceptive. Everything I've said was basically true.

ANN

Sure, everything except the huge part about Drew having proposed.

NATALIE

That was just a small technicality. I knew he was going to propose in the near future and I was right. Why else would he invite me to an impromptu dinner tonight?

ANN

You are something else, you know that? Who else would plan an entire wedding based on a ring found in a sock drawer?

NATALIE

It's not just any ring. It's an engagement ring, my engagement ring. I knew it would just be a matter of time before he'd ask me. There's absolutely nothing wrong with being prepared.

ANN

Do you know how long my ring sat in Drew's glove compartment before he proposed? Six months. For six months, I checked that little cubby every time he turned his back. It was six months until the thing finally ended up on my finger. Just because he invited you out to some emergency dinner tonight doesn't mean that he's going to propose.

NATALIE

For your information, Drew specifically told me on the phone, and I quote, "There's something important I've been meaning to say to you, but I just haven't had the courage until today."

ANN

Maybe he's breaking up with you.

NATALIE

You wish.

ANN

Maybe he's gay.

NATALIE

Oh, please. Quit trying to make yourself feel better about the fact that you blew it with one of this city's most successful men.

ANN

Success. That's what it's always been about to you.

NATALIE

Drew's more than just successful. He's intelligent, handsome, compassionate to all...

ANN

Yeah, all women. I wonder why that is...

NATALIE

You know, this is exactly the reason why Mother wasn't supposed to open her fat mouth.

ANN

Hey, I didn't need your mother to tell me that Drew's a cheater. I lived it.

NATALIE

That's not what I meant.

ANN

Let me take a stab at this. You didn't want me to know that Drew really hadn't proposed because then, there's doubt. And we're not just talking about my doubts. Believe me, I couldn't care less about whether you two ride off into the sunset together. No, no, this is about your doubts.

NATALIE

I have no doubts about Drew's intentions.

ANN

Well, you should. I know Drew and I know that you know him, too. You put up a tough front, but deep down, you have doubts. And these aren't just any doubts. These are the really scary, humiliating, I made a whole bunch of plans and he may not even marry me kind of doubts.

NATALIE

Sure, Drew has a past, all of us do. Don't you realize that people can change? Sometimes all it takes is the right influence. In Drew's earlier years, he obviously didn't have the right woman encouraging him to be a better man.

ANN

So I guess it's safe to assume that Drew hasn't been putting in any late hours or early mornings at the office. I mean, if he's dedicated to your relationship.

NATALIE

You know that Martin Industries is very busy this time of year—

ANN

Eleven o'clock?

NATALIE

What?

ANN

Drew. He's home around eleven o'clock?

NATALIE

Only on—

ANN AND NATALIE, *Together*

Wednesdays.

(ANN chuckles while NATALIE becomes uneasy with ANN'S accuracy.)

ANN

Sorry, but your ring won't be leaving that sock drawer any time soon.

NATALIE

Well, we'll just see about that. Once Mother waddles her jolly old self back down here, she'll tell you that my ring is gone. You can say whatever you want, but I know that Drew has my diamond with him for tonight's proposal.

ANN

And that's another thing—the way you treat your mother is appalling.

NATALIE

Well, when your mother drives you to school in just a robe sans her false teeth, you can talk to me about respecting our elders.

ANN

You sent her fifteen blocks uptown, on foot just to check Drew's sock drawer.

NATALIE

I gave her a key to his apartment. It's not like she has to scale walls or anything. She's just lucky that it's on the first floor. The woman can barely make it up a flight of stairs.

(DORIS enters. SHE is breathing heavily, as if SHE has been hustling to get to the diner.)

DORIS

(Handing a key to NATALIE) Here's your stinkin' key. That's the last time I do your greedy butt any favors. I think I'm gonna have me a heart attack!

NATALIE

Quit complaining and tell us what you found, or what you didn't find I should say.

(There is a slight pause. DORIS has a disappointed look on her face.)

ANN

Don't say it's true, Doris.

DORIS

I'm afraid so, raggedy Ann.

NATALIE

(Elated) It's gone?

ANN

I don't believe it.

DORIS

The dang ring's gone.

NATALIE

I knew it! Drew's going to propose tonight and everything will finally be perfect. Mother, start calling these Bindleoffers from the phone book. I'm tired of speaking to the undignified middle class.

DORIS

Heck, no! I'm done doing your dirty work! I don't wanna play another stinkin' part in this evil scheme to trick the unicorn girl.

NATALIE

As long as you're working for me, you'll do as I say.

DORIS

The heck I will!

NATALIE

I want to remind you that your beloved bingo bag is currently in the back seat of my BMW. I'm sure you'd just love to see all its contents spilled across the length of Highway 17.

DORIS

No!

NATALIE

Yes!

DORIS

You wouldn't!

NATALIE

Oh, but I would!

ANN

Would you stop being so nasty? You've probably scared away all of my customers. I haven't had a day this slow since the time that Susie forgot to unlock the doors.

(Looking at her watch) Where the hell is she anyway? It's a good thing we were slow—she left for the drug store over an hour ago.

NATALIE

Oh, she's probably wandering the city as we speak. I'll bet that girl couldn't find her way home if she left a trail of bread crumbs.

DORIS

(Looking at the phone book) Which one of these dang Bindlehoffers am I supposed to call? I don't even know what the heck I'm doin'!

NATALIE

How about you start with the one right next to the big red print that says "START HERE."

DORIS

What the...I don't see a dang thing! Quit messin' with my head!

(ANN assists DORIS.)

ANN

I don't know why you're going to all this trouble just for flowers.

NATALIE

Now that Drew will officially be proposing tonight, Helen's commitment is more important than ever.

ANN

She's not going to work for you after she finds out about all the lying you've been doing.

NATALIE

That's funny, because I don't plan on telling her any of that.

ANN

Really? That's a shame, because I do.

NATALIE

Why do you have to make things so difficult?

ANN

Hey, I didn't ask you to have your little planning party at my diner. I'm certainly not going to stand aside and let you take advantage of Helen.

DORIS

I'd throw you to the wolves, too. I got nothin' to lose!

NATALIE

You know what? That's fine.

DORIS

Say what?

NATALIE

Yes, that's perfectly fine, even if Helen knows that I...that I may have...

ANN

Lied?

NATALIE

Exaggerated the truth a bit. Even if Helen knows that, she'll still come to work for me.

ANN

We'll see about that.

(SUSIE, carrying six medium-sized shopping bags, enters the diner. SHE runs straight to the table, anxious to consult with NATALIE on her new look.)

SUSIE

I got it! I got it!

DORIS

What's all the dang commotion for?

ANN

Susie, where have you been?

SUSIE

Shopping, of course!

ANN

I thought all you needed was one eye shadow.

SUSIE

Taupe! Yes, I think I found the perfect shade!

(SHE starts digging through her bags.)

NATALIE

Well then, shouldn't there be just one bag as opposed to six?

SUSIE

Oh, wait! I have a good explanation for this. You see, as I was riding in the cab, I—

ANN

—Whoa, whoa, whoa. You took a cab to the drug store?

NATALIE

Ugh! Who would ride in one of those filthy germ farms?

DORIS

Hey! I used to drive one of those things.

NATALIE

You did not.

DORIS

Yes I did.

NATALIE

Mother, you did not! You drove a station wagon.

DORIS

Well it felt like a taxi cab, carting your selfish butt everywhere. Too bad the only tip I ever got was when you told me to go to hell.

ANN

Susie, the drug store is only two blocks away. Couldn't you walk?

SUSIE

Me? Walk? In these heels?

DORIS

What you need is a good 'ol pair of Keds.

NATALIE

Oh please.

SUSIE

Let me just tell you that wearing a socially unacceptable shade of eye shadow has made me reevaluate my position as a self-proclaimed beauty expert.

NATALIE

Is that so?

SUSIE

How could I have been so wrong? I mean, I watch all the makeover shows on TV. I read all the fashion magazines, even the ones that are filled with spelling errors and sentences that don't make any sense. Even when it all seems to be written in a secret code, I still get beauty tips from the pictures. Seriously, how do they expect me to know their own little secret code?

NATALIE

It's called learning the French language.

SUSIE

But it's not that easy. With makeup, one slip-up just leads to another. If my eye shadow is wrong, then my lipstick is probably wrong too. And it doesn't stop there. That sets off a chain reaction of makeup mistakes in desperate need of repair. It's not just eye shadow or lipstick, it's blush, powder, eyeliner, mascara—

ANN

You didn't buy all that, did you?

SUSIE

Of course I did!

(SHE dumps her bags onto the table. At least ten different pieces of makeup come out of each bag.)

ANN

Susie, we're kind of in the middle of something here.

SUSIE

I know it looks like a lot. I just didn't know what to get, so I got a little of everything.

NATALIE

I'd love to help but we really have more pressing matters at hand.

SUSIE

I can do it myself, I just need you to make sure that my color choices and techniques are appropriate. I promise it won't take long.

ANN

Susie, can't you just take this stuff in the back and give it a try, you know, by yourself?

NATALIE

We really have a lot going on here.

SUSIE

This date is really important to me. I have to look perfect, Ann. I need a professional's opinion.

DORIS

You can use me as your guinea pig! Heck, I'll look great for singles night at Bingo!

NATALIE

Mother, I thought I told you to get on the horn and start calling those numbers. (*To SUSIE*) Fine. I'll give you a few quick instructions and then you have got to leave us alone.

DORIS

Hey, what's wrong with me gettin' a new look?

NATALIE

The only thing that can save your twisted mug is plastic surgery!

DORIS

Plastic surgery, huh? Well I think you've had enough for the both of us.

SUSIE

Enough, please! Focus on me. I only have twenty minutes until my date. I have an idea of what I want to do, but I really should practice on someone else first.

DORIS

Don't look at me. I'm a lost cause, remember?

SUSIE

Well who then?

(*HELEN enters.*)

HELEN

Natalie! I was hoping you'd still be here.

ANN AND NATALIE, *Together*

Helen!

SUSIE

(*Grabbing HELEN*) You'll do. She's not as pretty as me, but you'll still get the general idea.

HELEN

What? What's happening?

DORIS

Oh c'mon! I need the makeover more than she does!

HELEN

Makeover? What makeover?

ANN

(To HELEN as SUSIE physically seats HELEN on a stool at the counter.) You decided against the job, didn't you?

HELEN

Well, I...

NATALIE

Please, Ann. It's obvious that she's here to make an early acceptance. Isn't that right, Helen?

HELEN

(Protesting SUSIE'S attention) Is all of this really necessary?

SUSIE

Please sit back and relax. I'm not here to scare you. I'm just trying to get the ugly out.

NATALIE

Hold on just a minute, Susie Q. Helen and I need to discuss business, so this makeover of yours is going to have to wait.

SUSIE

Oh, pooh!

HELEN

Actually, I really just came over here to return your jacket. (SHE starts to remove the jacket, exposing the unicorn.) I know you said that you have meetings this afternoon and—

NATALIE

(Throwing a linen from the counter over HELEN'S chest) On second thought, this makeover really can't wait. After all, Susie does have a date to get to in less than 20 minutes. Take it away, Suze!

SUSIE

Yay!

HELEN

Natalie, I did want to tell you that I was able to contact my unicorn friends.

SUSIE

I'll start out by using an intense bronzer. (SHE applies the bronzer to HELEN'S face heavily. In contrast with HELEN'S fair skin, the thick, orange bronzer looks ridiculous as applied.) I'll want to make my complexion look more vibrant and really capture that natural tone. And everyone knows that the more makeup you put on, the more natural you look!

(Throughout the scene, SUSIE applies make-up to HELEN'S face.)

NATALIE

Oh you did, did you? And what did those interesting creatures have to say?

SUSIE

(Turning HELEN'S face towards NATALIE) Look at that healthy glow! I hope I can do such a good job on myself!

ANN

They wanted you to steer clear, didn't they?

SUSIE

Now the taupe eye shadow.

HELEN

My friends believe in your promise of a worthwhile employment prospect.

DORIS

Are you sure those 'corns haven't been drinking?

HELEN

They were unanimous in supporting the pursuit of new vocational opportunities. It was amazing. I've never seen such a positive response from the unicorn council of elders.

NATALIE

(Glowing) How about that?

ANN

Are you sure you weren't getting any kind of static feedback during this conversation?

HELEN

Everything was perfect. It's a clear cut sign from above. Therefore, I must agree with the wisdom of my spiritual advisors and accept your offer, Natalie.

NATALIE

Did you hear that, Ann? She's going to accept!

HELEN

You see, the unicorns spoke of many changes to unfold within the coming days. This has to be one of them because—

SUSIE

Please stop moving your face! You're compromising the prettiness of this makeover!

DORIS

Prettiness? Her face looks like a dang pumpkin!

SUSIE

I will require silence from the peanut gallery.

DORIS

Who you callin' a peanut? You look like the freakin' nut to me!

SUSIE

(To NATALIE) How about this shade of taupe? Is that what you meant?

NATALIE

Yeah, whatever. It's fine. Now Helen, you can begin moving in all your belongings and supplies immediately. I want you to get your workstation organized so you're ready to work as soon as possible.

HELEN

I still get the time off and the bonus, right?

(SUSIE clears her throat in disapproval of HELEN'S continuous talking.)

NATALIE

Yes, the bonus. I'll take care of that right now.

(NATALIE takes out her checkbook and begins writing, barely feigning interest in SUSIE'S ongoing makeover.)

SUSIE

I'm going to apply the eye shadow so that it is easily visible. This means putting on a lot of layers.

(SUSIE begins caking the eye shadow onto HELEN, sometimes a little too rough and careless. Meanwhile, HELEN winces through the experience.)

ANN

Natalie, isn't there something else you need to tell Helen about?

NATALIE

Nope, I believe I've covered just about everything.

DORIS

(To SUSIE) No, no, no! That's all wrong!

NATALIE

What now, Mother?

DORIS

Taupe is for sissies. You know what woulda looked really fancy? Blue eye shadow! (*SUSIE tenses. ANN rolls her eyes. NATALIE looks dumbfounded.*) What? I wear it all the time!

NATALIE

Well that's par. (*To SUSIE*) Are we done here?

SUSIE

I just need to apply the lipstick. I bought six shades of red, pink, and violet each, but I think fuchsia is the perfect pick!

(*SUSIE applies the lipstick to HELEN'S lips, carelessly marking her mouth and teeth as well.*)

ANN

(*To NATALIE*) Are you sure you're not forgetting something? Say, something about Drew...the proposal?

NATALIE

I don't know what you're talking about.

HELEN

Is this almost over?

SUSIE

Hold still! You're messing me up!

HELEN

Sorry.

DORIS

Hey, makeup girl! Those cheeks are looking a little pale. I think you better put some blush on her, too.

HELEN

What?

SUSIE

You know, you're right! Why didn't I think of that? (*SHE grabs a bright purple blush and generously applies it to HELEN'S cheeks.*) There. That will give you some color. (*As SHE rotates HELEN'S stool revealing a horrendous make-up job*) What do you think?

NATALIE

Gorgeous. Now take all your stuff and clear out of here. We have some business to finish up.

SUSIE

(Kissing NATALIE on the cheek) Thanks for everything! I just hope I can do half as good a job on myself!

(SUSIE gathers up all her makeup and exits through the kitchen.)

DORIS

And I thought the unicorn girl was wacky!

NATALIE

(To HELEN) Sorry you had to go through that. Hopefully this will make you feel a little better.

(NATALIE rips her completed check from the checkbook and hands it to HELEN.)

HELEN

(Staring at the check) Wow. I don't know what to say...

ANN

Say that you've changed your mind.

NATALIE

Ann, how many times must we go through this? Helen is working for me and that's that. She does not need you squawking in her ear.

DORIS

Hey girlie, maybe you should reconsider. Take it from me, working for Satan ain't all it's cracked up to be.

ANN

If you're not going to tell her, then I will.

HELEN

Tell me what?

NATALIE

It's nothing, really.

ANN

Natalie's been lying to you.

HELEN
Lying? How?

DORIS
About gettin' hitched!

NATALIE
That's enough, Mother!

ANN
Drew hasn't even asked her to marry him.

NATALIE
Yet! He's asking tonight!

DORIS
So you think!

ANN
She found a ring.

HELEN
A what?

NATALIE
A ring. An engagement ring.

ANN
Just like I did. And I waited six months for mine.

DORIS
She'll be waitin' longer than that.

NATALIE
But we're going out to dinner tonight. He has the ring with him!

ANN
If it's even for you.

NATALIE
Oh, what? You think it's for you? Please, Drew'd be better off marrying that decrepit old bag!

DORIS
Euw! Like I'd want that stink bomb hangin' around.

ANN

(*To NATALIE*) Well he's certainly not staying with you!

DORIS

His cheap spritz reeks of a pimple-poppin' Poindexter on prom night!

NATALIE

(*To ANN*) Says who? The queen of failed relationships and eternal disappointment?

ANN

Are you seeing this, Helen? This is the real Natalie Courtland, minus the broomstick, of course.

HELEN

I knew it! I knew something was not as it seemed!

DORIS

The unicorn girl could see right through your lyin' butt!

NATALIE

Please don't jump to any conclusions, Helen. Drew and I are still going to be married.

HELEN

I knew there was more to this story!

DORIS

Ha! The jig is up. You're toast, little lady!

NATALIE

Please! Everything is going to happen as planned. He's going to propose tonight!

HELEN

I know! I know all about it! The unicorns told me!

ANN AND NATALIE, *Together*

What?

DORIS

What the heck?

HELEN

My unicorn friends believed in your job offer because they sensed an impending proposal. I thought it was strange at the time, seeing as how I was originally told that you were already engaged.

ANN

You see, Natalie's lies have made this so much more complicated.

DORIS

Yeah, good job, butthead!

HELEN

But I knew deep down in my heart that the unicorns are always truthful and wise. A unicorn's judgment must always be trusted.

DORIS

Not this time!

HELEN

That's how I knew you were lying. But, I can't say I blame you.

ANN

What?

DORIS

Oh, c' mon!

NATALIE

Well, it is a rather difficult situation.

HELEN

Indeed. I would think the suspense would just be killing you.

NATALIE

It has been tough.

ANN

Oh, please.

HELEN

To know that the love of your life is going to propose and all you can do is wait. That must be torture.

DORIS

Yeah, it's killin' me too, lemme tell ya.

HELEN

I can just imagine what you've been going through.

NATALIE

It's been a daily struggle. I won't lie.

ANN

I think I'm gonna be sick.

HELEN

Believe me, it's flattering to know that you'd go so far as to lie about being engaged just to secure my services as a florist. I couldn't possibly say no to you.

NATALIE

I can't tell you how happy it makes me to hear you say that.

ANN

I'm sorry to interrupt your Kodak moment here, but somebody has to intervene.

NATALIE

Ann, everything has been settled. Please stop trying to make an issue out of nothing. If you're bored, why don't you go make me a cup of tea?

ANN

I would, but you know, I'm all out of arsenic.

HELEN

I hope I haven't caused any trouble.

DORIS

You're the one who's gonna be in trouble if you take that stinkin' job!

ANN

Helen, I really don't think you've thought this through completely.

NATALIE

Ann, I said that's enough.

ANN

Okay, so maybe your unicorns are right. Maybe there is an impending proposal. But when?

NATALIE

This is ridiculous.

ANN

Even if Drew proposes, there's no way that relationship is going to make it through to the wedding. Drew puts up a nice front, but this wedding is not going to happen. If it does, I give the marriage two months before he finds someone else.

NATALIE

Your opinion means nothing to me and it certainly means nothing to Helen. Isn't that right?

HELEN

(Doubtful) Umm...yeah...I guess.

(SUSIE enters from the kitchen. SHE has changed her clothes and now wears a cute, yet somewhat revealing, dress. SUSIE'S hair is neatly fixed and her makeup looks surprisingly sophisticated. ALL flock to SUSIE, while HELEN lags behind, visibly perturbed by ANN'S story.)

SUSIE

I'm all finished! How do I look?

DORIS

Whoa, baby!

ANN

Wow, Susie. You look...

NATALIE

—Normal. I didn't see that coming.

ANN

You do look great, Suze. See, I told you there was nothing to worry about.

DORIS

You know, I used to be that thin. Before I gave birth to that wicked imp, I looked like a million bucks.

NATALIE

People like you should be sterilized at birth.

ANN

(To NATALIE) You do know that would mean— Oh, never mind. *(To SUSIE)* How are you feeling? Are you nervous?

SUSIE

Oh, a little. There's just so much riding on this date— a new Mercedes, trips to the Caribbean...

ANN

Don't worry yourself sick over some corporate pencil pusher. If this guy doesn't work out, I'm sure there'll be plenty of other loaded schmucks looking to tag along with a cute girl in a short skirt.

SUSIE

Oh, I hope so!

(NATALIE'S cell phone rings.)

NATALIE

Oh, that's me! Excuse me for just a moment, Helen. When I come back, I'll have a few quick rules for us to go over. You know, about the position. Mother, behave yourself.

DORIS

What'd I do?

NATALIE

Don't talk! Just sit there quietly. I think you've said quite enough for today.

(NATALIE exits through the street door as DORIS, like a child, mimics her mannerisms.)

SUSIE

I'd better get going! I'm supposed to be meeting Andy at that new place around the block in five minutes and I still have to catch a cab!

ANN

Just be careful. Don't let this guy talk you into anything fishy. If you don't feel comfortable, just walk away. I can pick you up if you need—

SUSIE

Don't worry about me. Remember, I'm the use-er, not the use-ee. *(Pointing to her head)* I've got it all up here.

ANN

That's what I'm worried about.

SUSIE

I'll just head out the back. It's easier to catch a cab on the side street. Wish me luck!

(SUSIE exits through the kitchen.)

ANN

Helen, listen to me. This whole deal with Natalie is no good. You've got to get out while you still can.

HELEN

I hate to say it but I can't help but feel like maybe this was all a bad idea. I can feel the unicorns trying to communicate something and it's not positive, it's a warning.

DORIS

Hey, I know the zeros in that check look mighty pretty, but you've got to wake up and smell the roses. This florist job might be for real, but nothing from my daughter comes without a catch. Take it from me, I've got snot-nosed honor students using me for target practice just so I can hitch a ride to bingo.

ANN

Natalie told me before you got here. She's just trying to rope you in so she can be the only person in town to have your wedding flowers. There's no events planning position waiting for you afterwards.

HELEN

I just don't understand. The unicorns seemed so sure about the opportunity. Now I feel awful about it. I don't know.

ANN

Drew is notorious for being a womanizer and Natalie knows it too. Don't let her fool you. She's just as worried as you are about Drew's intentions.

DORIS

He has no intentions! This guy's a snake, I tell ya!

ANN

Something is wrong with these emergency dinner plans. The whole thing sounds too familiar to me. I just don't want you to get caught in the middle of this mess.

HELEN

I know, I know, but I've already taken her check. I've made a commitment. I'd feel bad to back out on her now.

DORIS

Oh yeah? Well it's the unicorns that you'll be feelin' bad for if you take this stinkin' job!

HELEN

The unicorns? What about them? What do you mean?

ANN

Haven't you noticed that Natalie absolutely hates unicorns? She can't even stand to look at them.

HELEN

Natalie hates unicorns? Who could hate unicorns?

DORIS

Devil woman is gonna outlaw all unicorn talk and pictures in the workplace!

ANN

It's the only way she can stand to work with you. Don't you see? It's always gonna be on her terms.

DORIS

For you, unicorns are gonna have to take a hike for eight hours every day.

HELEN

Wait, I don't understand. I had unicorns everywhere when she was my boss at Martin Industries.

ANN

Why do you think you were fired in the first place?

HELEN

I saw the write-up. It was performance based.

(NATALIE enters excitedly.)

ANN

(To HELEN) Are you sure about that?

NATALIE

That was Drew! Our dinner reservation is for 6 PM sharp, so that means I only have a limited time to get my hair styled, do my makeup, and select my attire. I need to meet with my personal stylist within the next hour to assemble my look for the evening. Therefore, we have got to get down to business. Now, I have just three quick rules to go over, so Helen, you need to pay close attention. Ann, I'll need you to mind your own business for the next few minutes, and Mother, you're going to have to shut up or get out.

DORIS

I didn't say anything!

NATALIE

No, but you were going to. You're old and you can't help yourself. Like you, your opinions just won't die.

HELEN

Natalie, I'm not so sure that—

NATALIE

Okay, for the first rule. While I am a devoted advocate of the First Amendment and the universal right to free speech in everyday society, it really has no place in my work environment.

ANN

Excuse me?

NATALIE

No talking, Ann. *(To HELEN)* Mind you, discussion related to the wedding, floral designs, or Martin Industries is appropriate and highly encouraged. I'm just trying to get away from discourse related to...hobbies.

HELEN

Hobbies?

NATALIE

Hobbies and personal interests, I should say. For example, when Mother is at work, she is absolutely forbidden from speaking about bingo or any other simple-minded function that she frequents in an effort to win money. Why? Because it's a purely extracurricular interest that only serves as a distraction when mentioned in the workplace. The introduction of these topics impedes professional performance and should be recognized as such.

DORIS

I think it's all a bunch of crap!

HELEN

Are you trying to say that, in my case, unicorn discussion would be prohibited?

NATALIE

Oh, unicorns...well, to be honest, I really hadn't thought about those wonderful, little...things.

DORIS

Get your boots on, Annie!

NATALIE

Normally I wouldn't see that kind of harmless discussion as a problem, but to protect the integrity of the rules, you should probably keep a tight lip on the subject. All my personal employees must be measured with the same stick. After all, it wouldn't be fair to restrict Mother's discussion topics without limiting yours.

DORIS

I don't care. Let her talk about the dang unicorns. I like 'em!

NATALIE

Mother, didn't I specifically tell you not to speak?

ANN

Okay, so rule number one is no unicorn discussion. Are you getting all this, Helen?

NATALIE

Ann, what are you doing?

ANN

I'm simply restating your rules.

NATALIE

Well I'd rather you didn't. Your loose interpretation of my rules is a poor attempt to dissuade Helen and I don't appreciate it. Not to mention that the sound of your voice is giving me a headache.

DORIS

A head like yours should ache.

HELEN

I can't possibly cease communication with or about the unicorns. It goes against the oath of the solitary horn.

NATALIE

Moving on to rule number two! As you can probably tell, I believe in efficiency and productivity in the workplace. Like I said before, hobbies and personal interests only inhibit the achievement of professional success. Therefore, in addition to rule number one, rule number two aims to protect the same administrative ideals.

ANN

What? No bathroom breaks?

DORIS

Yeah, she probably wouldn't even let you whiz outside in the bushes either.

NATALIE

Sorry to disappoint you, ladies, but rule number two provides for the complete prohibition of any personal items on one's desk. Let me just reiterate that bathroom breaks are permitted and encouraged for that matter. Yes, the only person in Depends will be my mother.

DORIS

Oh, I oughta smack you!

(SHE moves as if to pounce at NATALIE, but ANN restrains DORIS.)

HELEN

No personal items? So that means photographs, calendars, radios...that kind of stuff?

NATALIE

Yes, you know—figurines, animal statuettes...that sort of thing.

HELEN

(Becoming angry) Figurines?

ANN

Any particular kind of animal statuette that you had in mind, Natalie?

HELEN

You don't understand. My unicorns need to be with me every day, all day. We communicate telepathically. Those figurines enhance the strength of our mental connection. Without them, I feel detached and hopeless. The spirit of the unicorn is what keeps me productive. I can show you— I even brought some along.

(HELEN reaches into her bag to pull out a figurine.)

NATALIE

No, no. That's quite all right. Please don't go to the trouble.

HELEN

It's really no trouble.

ANN

What's the matter, Natalie?

DORIS

You're not scared, are ya?

NATALIE

I know the figurines are important to you, Helen. Believe me, I do. You're just not seeing the importance of this very necessary rule.

DORIS

We're waiting...

HELEN

Yes, I'm listening.

NATALIE

Personal items on one's desk only create clutter and confusion. A clear desk is like a clean slate, prepped for success and possibility. I'm only trying to cut back on the potential for mishaps and distractions. You said it yourself, Helen. That Ki-Ron thing, a personal item of yours, was in the way that day at the office.

HELEN

(Irritated) Ki-Rin.

NATALIE

Yeah, whatever. That silly figurine interfered with the natural motions of the Martin Industries work environment and it paid the price.

DORIS

I'll say. I wouldn't want Drew's bony butt pushed into my face.

ANN

Agreed.

NATALIE

In the long run, I'm really protecting your...friends. They'd constantly be pushed around, beat up, held down. Now what kind of life would that be for these so-called friends of yours?

DORIS

Ask me. I live it everyday!

ANN

Okay, so rule number one is no unicorn discussion. Rule number two is no unicorn figurines.

DORIS

I might be an old kook, but I think I'm seeing a pattern here.

NATALIE

There's no pattern here. All of these rules are exactly the same for each of my personal employees.

HELEN

Natalie, I'm not sure that this is going to work—

NATALIE

Onto rule three! As I mentioned to Ann earlier, a professional image is a major ingredient to success in this industry. Likewise, I will require that all my personal employees dress appropriately. Don't look to my mother for an example. Her rebellious actions and tasteless outfits are going to land her out on the street if she's not careful.

DORIS

Bring it on!

NATALIE

Suits, skirts, blouses, heels, and blazers are all sufficient. The biggest thing to stay away from would be...tee shirts.

HELEN

(Looking down at the unicorn shirt) Tee shirts, huh?

ANN

Any type of tee shirt you had in mind?

NATALIE

No! All tee shirts are inappropriate for the workplace. Even you should know that, Ann.

ANN

Okay, well, let's suppose that Helen had a blouse with a pin affixed to it.

NATALIE

Ann, what are you doing?

ANN

And let's say that this pin was a particular shape or image. Would there be any specific figure that would be inappropriate by your standards?

NATALIE

Well...I wouldn't think so.

DORIS

I wear reindeer pins around Christmas-time every year. I guess that means that all creature pins would be hunky-dory.

NATALIE

That's not necessarily true.

ANN

Well why not? You just said yourself that not one particular symbol struck you as unacceptable. Why do you keep changing your rules?

NATALIE

I'm not changing my rules! I can't be expected to dream up every possibility.

DORIS

You just said that all pins were created equal and now you're turning your back on a select few. Shame on you, evil daughter of mine, shame on you!

HELEN

What about unicorn pins?

NATALIE

Unicorns? On pins? Does such a piece of jewelry even exist?

HELEN

I happen to own several unicorn pins.

NATALIE

Well, I don't know. In your specific situation, I would think that wearing a unicorn pin might stimulate discussion on the topic. As we all know, that would be a violation of rule number one. So no, I would have to say that those are prohibited as well.

DORIS

Big freakin' shock.

HELEN

You know, Natalie, it does seem that your rules will affect me in a pretty big way.

NATALIE

Are you accusing me of something? Because if you are—

HELEN

It's just that the whole thing seems rather...coincidental.

ANN

A coincidence. Hmm...

DORIS

A big fat coincidence!

ANN

Don't you think that's interesting?

DORIS

You bet your bottom, I do!

NATALIE

This is absurd. How dare all of you paint me as some kind of unicorn bigot, especially you, Helen. I thought you'd be a little less judgmental. Just because I don't openly display my respect for the unicorn species, I'm all of a sudden a target for criticism.

DORIS

Oh yeah? Prove it!

NATALIE

I don't have time for these silly games. (*SHE begins gathering her things.*) Helen, you have two weeks. On the following Monday, I want you at the Martin Industries building at 8 AM sharp.

ANN

Doris, do you think it's cold in here?

DORIS

Heck, no! I think it's rather toasty, if I do say so myself.

ANN

I agree. I'm quite warm actually. Helen, you must be sweating bullets with that jacket on.

DORIS

You got that thing buttoned up so tight, that poor little unicorn is being smothered to death.

HELEN

Now that you say it like that, I guess I am a little warm.

NATALIE

What is going on here?

ANN

Since Natalie's leaving, you probably should return the jacket anyway. Let's not forget that she has meetings all afternoon and of course, we all know how important a professional appearance is in the corporate world.

NATALIE

It's not really that important.

ANN

Sure it is! You said so yourself.

NATALIE

I don't think that's such a good idea.

HELEN

Why not?

DORIS

Yeah, why not?

NATALIE

It just isn't, okay?

HELEN

I really can't keep the jacket. It just wouldn't be right.

NATALIE

That's true. It is my jacket and as part of your first official duty as my floral designer, I say you wear the jacket for as long as you're in my presence today...or until you get a chance to change clothing.

HELEN
Why?

NATALIE
Well...it's just that...

HELEN
You know, I'm not so sure this wedding florist gig is a good idea after all.

NATALIE
Now let's not overreact, Helen.

DORIS
Go ahead, take the dang jacket off!

NATALIE
Mother, don't you dare try to negate my orders. Helen, I'll see you in two weeks.

(NATALIE picks up her briefcase and turns to leave as DORIS throws herself in front of the door. Meanwhile, ANN reaches into HELEN'S bag and pulls out a unicorn figurine. HELEN realizes ANN'S intentions and lets her proceed.)

DORIS
Unicorn hater!

NATALIE
Get away from the door.

DORIS
Fat chance, prissy pants.

NATALIE
Mother, don't make me hurt you.

ANN
(In a strange voice, holding the unicorn figurine directly over NATALIE'S shoulder) Oh, Natalie!

(NATALIE slowly turns around with a look of fear on her face. Upon seeing the unicorn, NATALIE drops her briefcase and begins shrieking. SHE bats the unicorn to the floor and runs around the diner, trying to find a place to hide. HELEN retrieves her fallen figurine and removes NATALIE'S jacket, exposing her unicorn tee shirt. Meanwhile, DORIS and ANN corner a panicked NATALIE, keeping her from fleeing the presence of unicorns. ALL close in on NATALIE.)

HELEN
How could you hit Mr. Winks? He's an old soul with a good heart!

NATALIE

Get that thing away from me! Mother, let me go!

DORIS

Heck no! I'm done being your personal doormat. It's time for you to face the 'corns!

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