

# **Listen To This**

A comedy in one 15-minute scene.

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### Synopsis

A man attending a variety show is mistaken for a celebrity and gets pulled onstage where the hosts try to force him to perform.

### Cast of Characters

- Deshaun Hooldorf: Male, African-American. 30-45 years old. Fit and handsome, but not intimidatingly so.
- Barry, emcee #1: Male. Any race except African-American. 25-40 years old. Attractive and self-confident.
- Corella, emcee #2: Female. Any race except African-American. 25-40 years old. Attractive and self-confident.
- Stage hand: Appears and leaves immediately on page 8.

*Note:* Barry and Corella are standard, polished, **always** cheerful masters of ceremony. They are dressed to host an evening show with lots of top-line performers. They have magnetic smiles that are always there. They have worked with each other many times, and know each other's ways, and frequently play with each other like a comedy duo. They are always in control of everything, including the audience. Most important: They are **always** genuine, **always** sincere, **never** sarcastic, except when they joke with each other.

### Place

A bare stage.

### Time

The present.

### Props

A saxophone, a trumpet, a flute, a clarinet, or an acoustic guitar—or, if none of those is available, any other hand-held musical instrument. A violin with bow would work. The stage directions about the saxophone should be changed to reflect the instrument used.

Three head-sets with earpiece and microphone, for BARRY, CORELLA, and STAGE HAND.

### Sound Effects

Sound Recordings of (1) audience applauding and cheering, (2) booing, (3) laughing. Those are played as indicated in stage directions.

*Note:* If the director wishes, **the sound effects could be replaced with audience participation, with STAGE HAND holding up signs to indicate the desired reaction.** If that is done, there should be a short speech before the performance to tell the audience what they are supposed to do.

Scene

*Before lights-up, DESHAUN is seated in the house, as an audience member. This could happen before the house lights are dimmed.*

*Lights up on bare stage with **sound of audience applause**. Barry and Corella stand downstage. They could be side by side any place downstage, or one could be stage left and the other, right. The latter set up would give them more space to work with each other, but whatever the director wants is fine. They speak in appreciation of a performance (song, monologue, whatever) that has just finished.*

BARRY

*(To audience, referring to previous act)* They were great, weren't they?

*Audience applause.*

BARRY

So, how's everyone doing, so far? Having a good time?

*Audience applause.*

BARRY

Alright. We have lots more great entertainment for you. What's next, Corella?

CORELLA

Well, Barry, I'm afraid we have to depart from our plans a little bit because it seems we have a special surprise guest.

BARRY

*(Genuinely surprised)* Really? Did I know about this?

CORELLA

*(Glad to tease him)* I don't think so. They only tell the people who need to know. Actually, I just found out a few minutes ago. Wait. *(She puts her hand to her earpiece and listens. She starts to smile. She looks at Barry as her smile broadens.)*

BARRY

*(Looking mystified, he puts one hand to his earpiece like Corella did. His face goes from perplexed to astonished to delighted)* Wow. I can't believe this.

CORELLA

*(To audience)* Folks, you are in for a treat.

BARRY

True that. *(Looks at CORELLA.)* Wait. Are we sure this is okay?

CORELLA

Okay? With who?

BARRY

Well, you know.

CORELLA

*(Coyly.)* Oh, I think so.

BARRY

If it's not, it's on you, Corella.

CORELLA

*(Mock-thinks about it.)* Mm. Alright. I'll take full responsibility.

BARRY

Then . . . *(He gestures for her to do the speech.)*

CORELLA

*(With mock-feminine shyness)* No. I think the man should do the intro.

*BARRY gives the audience a "yeah-right-women" look and points his thumb at Corella. CORELLA and BARRY laugh together at their own joke.*

BARRY

Okay, okay, the *man* will take care of it. People, you've had a good time, so far, right?

*Audience applause.*

BARRY

Oh, come on, folks, I know you've had a good time.

*Louder audience applause.*

BARRY

Okay, then. You're about to have an even better time, and that's even before the rest of the program, because we have a special person in our audience, who's not on the program, but we think we can persuade him to do a little something for us. And whether or not he does could depend on how big a welcome you give him. Okay? So. Let's have a nice, warm, enthusiastic welcome for . . . wait for it . . . ladies and gentlemen, Deshaun *(saying the "hool" in the last name so it rhymes with "pool")* Hooldorf! Deshaun Hooldorf, ladies and gentlemen.

*BARRY and CORELLA applaud toward the house.*

*Audience applause.*

*Houselights on. Somewhere in the audience, in a middle row, DESHAUN sits, mystified. He is dressed business casual, having just come from work.*

DESHAUN

*(Gestures at himself to indicate, “who, me?”.)*

CORELLA

Come on, Deshaun. Be a sport. Stand up.

DESHAUN

*(Stands up. Shrugs and spreads his hands, looks around, totally baffled.)*

BARRY

Deshaun, my man. Don't you know me? *(Gives a “hello” wave.)*

DESHAUN

*(Stares at Barry. Tries to make out who he is. Shakes his head. Shrugs.)*

BARRY

You don't remember?

DESHAUN

*(Looks harder at BARRY. Shakes his head no.)*

BARRY

Sure you do! That party?

CORELLA

You know, Barry, this is not really about you. Come on, Deshaun, come on down.

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

*(Clearly mystified and reluctant. Looks around for a way out.)*

*Audience applause.*

CORELLA

*(Mock sternly).* Don't make me come down there and get you.

*Audience applause continues as DESHAUN shrugs, walks down the aisle, looking around at the audience. As DESHAUN walks onto the stage, the houselights dim out.*

BARRY

*(Moves to meet Deshaun at the edge of the stage. Grabs his right hand and pulls him into a hug.)* Deshaun, my friend.

DESHAUN

*(Startled, not hugging back.)* Whoa!

*BARRY releases the hug, but not the hand, which he continues to shake. DESHAUN tries to pull his hand away, but Barry won't let go.*

CORELLA

Uh, Barry. You can't have him all to yourself.

*CORELLA comes downstage with a flirty smile and takes DESHAUN's left arm. BARRY finally lets go of the right one. She leads DESHAUN to one side of the stage as she speaks. BARRY goes back to his spot.*

CORELLA

Well, Mr. Hooldorf (*rhyming the first syllable with "pool"*). It's a great honor to meet you.

DESHAUN

*(Pleasantly.)* It's Hole-dorf.

CORELLA

I'm sorry?

DESHAUN

The first syllable of my last name. It's hole. Rhymes with pole.

CORELLA

Really? I'd always heard . . .

DESHAUN

Really. That's my name. It's Dutch.

CORELLA

Dutch.

DESHAUN

Yeah.

BARRY

*(With a big smile.)* It's his name, Corella. Back off.

CORELLA

*(To BARRY)* You knew it was pronounced Hole-dorf?

BARRY

Of course. *(With a knowing look at DESHAUN.)* Some of us are educated.

CORELLA

Well excuse me, professor. Wait, you pronounced it the same way I did. *(She and BARRY do their laugh with each other.)*

*In the rest of the play, BARRY and CORELLA pronounce Hooldorf properly, as Hole-dorf, though from time to time they might over-emphasize the first syllable.*

CORELLA

Okay, Mr. Hooldorf. *(Still holding his arm.)* We're all dying to hear about your next project.

DESHAUN

My next what?

CORELLA

Don't be coy—may I call you Deshaun?

DESHAUN

Sure. And . . .

CORELLA

Oh, I'm sorry. That doofus on the other side of the stage never introduced us, did he. I'm Corella Makinen, but you can forget the last name because *(coming on in mock sexiness)* I want you to call me Corella.

DESHAUN

Okay.

CORELLA

And you know bumbling Barry Ivanov over there.

BARRY

*(Taking it all in good fun, speaking with mock rue, as if he and DESHAUN had once shared a bad experience.)* Oh, yes, Deshaun knows all about me, unfortunately.

DESHAUN

I do?

CORELLA

But enough about Barry. Come on, Deshaun, we want to hear about that mysterious project you're working on.

DESHAUN

You do?

BARRY

Forget about escaping, Deshaun. Nobody gets away from Corella without talking.

DESHAUN

Why?

BARRY

Because she's . . .

DESHAUN

No. Why do you want to hear about my next project?

BARRY

Excuse me, Deshaun. That's not a serious question.

CORELLA

Come now, Deshaun. (*With mock evil*) I have ways of making you talk.

DESHAUN

(*Shrugs*) Well, I'm doing some investment research, but I can't really talk about it because it's private.

*CORELLA and BARRY look at each other.*

BARRY

Okay, Deshaun. We get it. Don't we, people?

*Audience boos.*

BARRY

Okay, folks, come on, go easy on Deshaun.

DESHAUN

Is this, like, king for a day, or something? Have I won something?

BARRY

(*To audience*) Listen to this, folks. Has he won something.

*Audience laughter.*

CORELLA

Wait a minute. (*Reaching again for her earpiece*) What's that? All right, then. (*To Deshaun.*) Well, Mr. Hooldorf, I mean, Deshaun. I've just been told that the crew has gotten the piano ready in the back and they're about to roll it onto the stage.

BARRY

(*Applauds.*) That's what I'm talking about.

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

Why?



CORELLA

Deshaun, did you think we'd let you get away without playing one of your latest songs?

DESHAUN

My latest what?

BARRY

Listen to the man. My latest what. Yikes.

DESHAUN

Really, I can't.

BARRY

*(To audience)* Seriously, have you ever heard such humility?

DESHAUN

It's not humility. I can't.

BARRY

Come on, now.

DESHAUN

*(Pleading a little.)* Really, I just can't. I'm sorry.

CORELLA

This is so sweet and so sad at the same time.

BARRY

Come on, Deshaun. We promise not to tell.

DESHAUN

Honestly, I don't—

CORELLA

Alright. Is it some contractual thing?

DESHAUN

Contractual? What . . .

BARRY

Well, of course, that has to be it. Good thinking, Corella.

CORELLA

Deshaun, we understand. Really we do. People, we certainly don't want this man ending up in court because of anything that happens here, do we.

*Audience applause.*

BARRY

Besides, folks, getting the piano out here might involve contractual stuff for the crew—and believe me, we don't want to get in trouble with them. *(Puts his hand to his earpiece.)* What's that? Oh, right. Okay. *(To Corella.)* I think we have a solution. *(He motions Corella to come to him.)*

*CORELLA joins BARRY, who puts his hand up to shield them from the audience as they whisper, briefly, to each other. DESHAUN is left across the stage watching. He glances nervously at the audience but is afraid to engage completely.*

CORELLA

*(To BARRY, but loud enough for both DESHAUN and the audience to hear)* Oh, I see. *(She sidles to DESHAUN.)* Well, Deshaun, we do have another instrument, a little smaller than a piano. According to what they just told me, you can't get out of this one.

*STAGE HAND enters from backstage carrying a saxophone, which s/he gives to BARRY. S/he leaves immediately.*

BARRY

*(Holding the saxophone towards DESHAUN)* Well, Deshaun. Lots of people don't know you're a master at this too. *(Still holding the instrument, he advances toward DESHAUN.)*

DESHAUN

*(Puts his hands up as if in self-defense, and steps backwards)* Whoa!

BARRY

Come on, Deshaun.

*BARRY, holding the instrument before him, stalks DESHAUN, who keeps retreating. They circle the stage that way. The following two lines are spoken as they move.*

CORELLA

Oh, will you look at this. Deshaun, he's not trying to hurt you.

DESHAUN

*(Stops walking, put keeps his hands in front of him to ward BARRY off.)* You don't understand. I don't.

BARRY

*(Lowers instrument and stops walking.)* Okay, Deshaun, we won't force you to play. *(To audience)* It must be hard being a star, huh?

CORELLA

*(Leaning into DESHAUN, flirtatiously)* Well, okay. You won't play for us, but maybe you'd like to sing a little. A capella? Just one little verse? Please? Please, please, please?

DESHAUN

*(Still holding his hands up defensively.)* My wife always tells me I can't sing worth a damn. At Christmas she makes me lip-synch with the carolers.

CORELLA

She's teasing you, Deshaun. It's what wives do. You know that, don't you?

DESHAUN

*(As if he's had enough, with his hands still out as if he fears an attack)* Look, I don't know who you think I am. Is there another Deshaun Hooldorf? I mean, I've looked and I haven't found one, but maybe.

BARRY

*(An epigram)* There is only one Deshaun Hooldorf. *(Turns to audience for confirmation.)*

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

*(Dropping his hands)* Exactly my point.

CORELLA

And we all love him, don't we, people?

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

Well, thanks, I mean, I guess it's nice that you love me, but—

CORELLA

We can't help it, Deshaun. *(To audience.)* He's so sweet.

DESHAUN

*(As if he's losing hope)* Oh, god, I'm trying to explain—

BARRY

*(With absolute sincerity)* It must be tough being Deshaun Hooldorf.

DESHAUN

Tough? No, not really.

BARRY

Not really?

DESHAUN

Well, my life is pretty good.

BARRY

Pretty good. Listen to this, will ya. Well, I guess so.

CORELLA

Come on, Deshaun. Just a little smidge for your fans, for us?

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

*(During this speech, he looks wildly from BARRY to CORELLA to the audience.)* What's the matter with you people? I don't know who you think I am. *(Trying to keep his anger in check)* I'm Deshaun Hooldorf. I was in the army and then I graduated from UCLA in economics. I work for an investment bank and I make pretty good money. Yeah, my life is good. It's not tough being Deshaun Hooldorf.

CORELLA

Wow.

DESHAUN

But I don't play any musical instruments and my wife is right—I can't sing at all and I couldn't write a song if you put a gun to my head and I've never been in front of a big audience like this before.

BARRY

I didn't know about all this. Did you, Corella?

CORELLA

*(In awe)* No. In addition to everything else, investment banking? Unbelievable. A renaissance man.

*Audience applause.*

DESHAUN

*(Exploding)* Did you hear what I just said? I'm not musical, not at all. I'm not this superstar that you seem to think I am.

BARRY

Were you in combat?

DESHAUN

*(Deflated)* No, I wasn't in combat. I was mainly in New Jersey. A little in Germany. I did I-T stuff.

BARRY

*(To audience)* How many stars have such a life, ladies and gentlemen?

CORELLA

And the modesty is, well, just over-whelming.

*Audience applause.*

BARRY

A great, great man—but we’ll let you go, and we apologize for imposing on you.

CORELLA

*(Putting both hands on DESHAUN’s arm)* We know you’ll understand. Won’t you?

DESHAUN

Sure. *(Not sure at all)* I guess so.

CORELLA

Just one more thing.

DESHAUN

I told you—

CORELLA

No, I promise it’s not about performing.

DESHAUN

*(Suspiciously)* What now?

CORELLA

Tell us about your mother.

DESHAUN

My mother?

BARRY

The woman who gave you life.

DESHAUN

Everybody’s mother—

CORELLA

That single mom who did everything for you, who worked so hard—

DESHAUN

She wasn’t—

CORELLA

—working herself into exhaustion, alone so much, but still always—

DESHAUN

*(Exploding again)* My mother was not single! And was not alone.

BARRY

Of course, the other kids—

DESHAUN

No. My father was always there.

CORELLA

But after he left, she was the one—

DESHAUN

Left? He never—he went to work every damn morning and came home every damn night for his entire life.

BARRY

But when they were fighting—

DESHAUN

They didn't fight. I mean, no more than any other couple. (*Hurls this directly at BARRY*) Don't you and your wife fight?

BARRY

We used to, but now—

CORELLA

But that special woman who nurtured—

DESHAUN

Alright! That's enough! I love my mother, of course I do. Everyone's mother is special. I guess. But I don't have a special woman in my life, I have special women—my mother and my wife. And my wife's mother too. And I had two great parents. They were always there for me, and for my brother and sister. They still are.

BARRY

There's no need to get defensive.

DESHAUN

(*Defensively*) I am not getting defensive. What's wrong with you? You drag me up on stage, you try to force me to do things I can't do, you tell me I'm a superstar, and you won't listen to one damn thing I say.

CORELLA

But you *are* a superstar.

DESHAUN

Okay. You know something. I've had it. I came here for some entertainment—and my wife couldn't make it, so don't start on that. Anyway, I came here for a diversion, and instead I got—well, I'm not sure what the hell I got, but whatever it is, I'm not having any more. I'm leaving. I'd ask for my money back, but I'm so pissed off I just want out of here. *(Stalks off through the house and out.)*

*BARRY and CORELLA watch him go. They take a moment.*

BARRY

*(Sorrowfully)* Too bad about him and his wife.

CORELLA

*(Sorrowfully)* Yeah.

BARRY

*(In awe)* But a very great man.

CORELLA

*(In awe)* Truly.

*The two of them start applauding. The audience joins in.*

*Blackout*