

The Ushers
by
Dave Osmundsen

2016

The Ushers

Character Breakdown

Velma - Early sixties. Small, quiet, the new usher to the Rhinestone at the start of the play.

Ellen - Early seventies. Brash, straightforward, and blunt, but an excellent usher who has been ushering at the Rhinestone for a long time.

Mary - Mid-sixties. Warm, caring, was "Usher of the Year" the previous season. Has a distinct Minnesota accent.

Rhoda - Late sixties. Eager to help, but doesn't know her boundaries.

John - Mid-Sixties. In the autumn of his life. Attractive, passionate about his work, and perhaps a bit too bossy. The house manager of the Rhinestone Community Theatre.

Eileen - The new usher at the end of the play. Played by the same actress who plays ELLEN.

Time

September 2015-September 2016.

Place

The lobby of the Rhinestone Community Theatre, a community theatre on the west coast of Florida.

A Note On Casting

The characters can be played by actors of any race.

ACT I

1

Scene 1

1

The play takes place in the lobby of a charming and very well-kept community theater in central coastal Florida. This is the sort of theater that primarily does the classics, but every once in a while will put on something edgy to spice things up a bit.

Along the walls are posters for the theater's upcoming season.

Along the walls are also photos of past Ushers of the Year, smiling and holding plaques.

The entrance from outside is Stage Right.

Stage Left is a table that will be used for concessions, program stuffing, and all sorts of other things. There's another table in the center of the room that is used for box office.

It is late September, the very start of the season.

JOHN, an active man in his mid-sixties, enters carrying a box of programs. He sets them on the stage left table, then goes offstage, presumably to get more.

From the Stage Right door enters VELMA. She is a small, quiet woman in her early sixties. She wears a short-sleeved white shirt and black pants. She wears a wedding ring. She looks around the lobby, somewhat bewildered. She reaches into her purse and checks her iPhone. She is still very early to ushering.

VELMA approaches the table of programs and sifts through them.

(CONTINUED)

As she's doing so, JOHN enters with another box.

A NOTE ON STUFFING PROGRAMS: One action the ushers do frequently throughout this play is stuff programs for the performances. Just so we're all clear about the components of a program: A shell is a little magazine that local companies advertise in. The playbill is the program for that night's performance, which goes inside the shell. The inserts are slips of paper that announce upcoming shows, or sudden cast changes. These go inside the playbill.

Are we clear? Good. Yay!

JOHN

Hi there!

VELMA jumps a little.

VELMA

Oh!

JOHN

Did I startle you?

VELMA

A little bit...

JOHN

Sorry about that. You ushering today?

VELMA

I am.

JOHN

You're early.

VELMA

Yes, well... I prefer to be early to things...

JOHN

That's good. Rather you be early than late.

VELMA

Yes. I just wasn't sure about the traffic.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Well, clearly it wasn't a problem today.

VELMA

Oh, there was a car fire on Tamiami. Cars were backed up for miles.

JOHN

Where are you coming from?

VELMA

Bradenton. My phone said it would take me 20 minutes to get here, but it took a little over an hour.

JOHN

And you still showed up early to ushering.

VELMA

Well my phone said there would be traffic, so I figured the earlier I left, the better.

JOHN

Well. Glad you could make it.

VELMA

Me too.

JOHN

So, I'm gonna get you started on programs...

VELMA

OK.

JOHN shows VELMA what to do as he speaks.

JOHN

So basically you'll just be putting these inserts- one pink, one green, and one yellow- into these playbills behind the first page.

VELMA

OK...

JOHN

The playbill itself will then go into a shell, which is this right here.

VELMA

OK.

JOHN

And once those are done, you can put them in the pile right here.

VELMA

Do the inserts need to go in some sort of order, or...?

JOHN

Nope. Any order you'd like, as long as they're in there.

VELMA

OK. So, just so I'm clear, it's the three inserts in the playbill-

JOHN

Yes. Behind the first page.

VELMA

Then the playbill goes into the shell.

JOHN

Yes. Again, behind the first page.

VELMA does so.

Great. Perfect. Alright, so if you wanna carry on with that. We're still waiting for the other ushers to show up. Not sure how many of them are coming from your direction.

VELMA

Hopefully they won't be too late.

JOHN

There are some that show up twenty minutes late even when there's no traffic.

VELMA

Oh dear! Guess it's good I'm early then.

JOHN

Yeah.

A smile between them.

MARY enters Stage Right. She wears a black pantsuit, a white shirt, and a beaming smile on her face. She has a very distinct Minnesota accent. She is in her mid-sixties.

MARY

Hello, John.

JOHN

Well, if it isn't our usher of the year! Hello, Mary!

MARY

Oh, stop...

The two of them laugh with the familiarity of intimate friends. JOHN goes up and embraces MARY.

MARY

How are you?

JOHN

I'm doing good, very good. How was your summer?

MARY

Oh, you know...

JOHN

Bet you're glad to be back down here now. I heard it's already snowing up in Minnesota.

MARY

Wouldn't you know, our plane was delayed for three hours because it was overcast, and the weather report was saying that a major snowstorm was coming.

JOHN

Three hours?

MARY

Three hours.

JOHN

I bet you're glad to be back down here.

MARY

I am, I am. Another season in Sarasota.

JOHN

Did you have any traffic coming here?

MARY

No, why?

JOHN

There was a car fire on Tamiami coming from Bradenton. I wasn't sure, since you come from Venice, but...

MARY

I didn't have any traffic, no.

MARY notices VELMA. She smiles warmly.

MARY
Hello. I'm Mary. Are you a new usher?

VELMA
I am.

MARY
What's your name?

VELMA
Velma.

MARY
Velma. I'm Mary. It's so nice to meet you.

VELMA
Nice to meet you too.

JOHN
I was just showing Velma how to stuff programs.

MARY
Oh! Yes. I'll start helping.

MARY goes to the table and starts stuffing programs with VELMA.

JOHN
Oh! I forgot, I have to check the air vents in the theatre. I'll be back soon. Be nice to each other, ladies.

MARY
When am I not nice?

MARY chuckles as JOHN smiles and exits stage right. MARY and VELMA stuff programs.

VELMA
(Re: the programs)
I've been doing these in stacks of ten.

MARY
So you're a new usher.

VELMA
Yes, I am.

MARY

Well it's nice to see some new faces around here. Are you from the area?

VELMA

Yes, I live over by the high school.

MARY

Welcome!

VELMA

Thank you.

MARY

How long have you been in town?

VELMA

I've only been on the West Coast for a month now. My husband and I were snowbirds on the east coast for twenty years.

MARY

Where're you from originally?

VELMA

New Jersey.

MARY

Oh, OK. And what does your husband do?

VELMA

He passed six months ago.

MARY

Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.

VELMA

Yes. He had a heart condition that... well you know.

MARY

Yes, yes.

VELMA

So, I decided it was time for a change, and moved to the west coast.

MARY

Well you certainly came to the right place. There's a lot to do around here.

VELMA

I can see that.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

The group of ladies who usher here are very nice, too. You'll fit in in no time.

VELMA

I hope so. I know it's silly, but it's still strange, meeting new people at my age.

MARY

What age?

The two ladies chuckle. Program stuffing.

VELMA

So you've been ushering here for a while?

MARY

Six years.

VELMA

Wow.

MARY

Yes. My husband and I are both retired teachers. We moved down here in 2010. He can't *stand* the theatre, but I've always loved it.

VELMA

What did you teach?

MARY

He taught English, I taught special education.

VELMA

Oh, OK. You must have the patience of a saint, then.

MARY

You know, it's not so much patience as it is understanding the direction the students need that extra push in. Some of these students, they're incredibly intelligent people. I had one student who could recite over one hundred Emily Dickinson poems.

VELMA

Oh wow.

MARY

Yes. So you can imagine. A lot of them could have been top students if they had applied themselves, but... oh well.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Yes...

Pause. Program stuffing.

MARY

Well, if you're interested, I and a couple of the other ladies here volunteer at a few other theatres in the area, and they're always looking for volunteers. Not just ushering, but also in the costume shop, if you can sew.

VELMA

I'm not very good at that, I'm afraid.

MARY

Oh well. There's also the aquarium, which I sometimes volunteer at.

VELMA

Oh? What do you usually do there?

MARY

Oh, just greet people as they come in, help people if they're lost... I'm volunteering there on Monday. You could volunteer with me if you're not busy.

VELMA

I don't believe I am.

MARY

Then why don't you join me? I'll just let them know I'm bringing a new friend.

VELMA

Uh... OK, sure. Why not?

JOHN reenters. He speaks to VELMA.

JOHN

Oh good, glad to see people are treating you nicely.

MARY

We were just talking about other places to volunteer.

JOHN

I hope you're not planning to leave us, Mary.

MARY

Not any time soon, I can tell you that.

RHODA, a woman in her late sixties, enters.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA
Hello, everybody.

JOHN
Hi, Rhoda.

MARY
Hello.

VELMA
Hi.

RHODA takes her place at the usher table and begins to stuff programs.

RHODA
Oh, another season begins. I am so excited for this one. They're doing *Guys and Dolls*, that is one of my favorites.

JOHN
We're glad to have you back, Rhoda. We have a new usher here with us. Velma, this is Rhoda, Rhoda, this is Velma.

RHODA offers her hand. VELMA shakes it.

RHODA
Very nice to meet you.

VELMA
You too.

RHODA
Oh, John, if you need someone to do tickets-

JOHN
(Authoritative)
I'll assign positions when everyone is here.

RHODA
OK. I just wanted to let you know...

RHODA joins MARY and VELMA in stuffing programs.

JOHN checks his cell phone for the time.

JOHN
Alright, so it's 2:00. All we need is Ellen, then I can start the usher spiel.

VELMA chuckles.

VELMA

The usher spiel. I like that.

JOHN

I hope you like the spiel as much as the title.

VELMA

I'm sure I will.

JOHN

Mary and Rhoda know I do my best to make it as entertaining as possible. They've been ushering here so long they can practically memorize it.

RHODA

"Hello, and welcome to Rhinestone Community Theatre. My name is-

MARY

It's always useful to listen, though, because "you never know if a production is going to have unique requirements".

JOHN

That's right. Recently, we did one of those plays that was ninety minutes without an intermission, and at the first performance we forgot to tell the patrons there wasn't an intermission. We were at the theatre for an hour after the show had ended listening to patrons wishing they knew about the intermission. Not to mention the bathroom lines...

RHODA

I like the plays without an intermission. You just sit down, it starts, and it's over. You don't have to worry about not making it back from the bathroom in time for the second act, or being pulled out of the story...

MARY

As long as it's good, I will sit through it.

VELMA

How long is the show tonight?

JOHN

Two and a half hours with *two* intermissions.

MARY

Two intermissions! That's not something you see anymore.

JOHN

More time for us to sell concessions.

ELLEN, a woman in her early seventies, bursts in. She is brash, straightforward, and blunt.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Sorry I'm late. The traffic, you wouldn't *believe* it! Someone's car was on fire. And of course, people just *had* to stop and see the carnage. Yes, I know that fire is fascinating to look at, both for pyromaniacs *and* the general public, but we have places to be, people! Let's move it!

JOHN

2:04. That's a new record for you, Ellen.

RHODA

The traffic was fine on my way here.

ELLEN

You come from Nokomis, that's opposite from me.

JOHN

Ellen, if you want to help out with programs.

ELLEN

Oh, sure.

ELLEN jumps right on programs.

Oh, John, if you need someone on tickets-

JOHN

Ellen.

ELLEN

Just letting you know, I volunteer.

JOHN

Ellen-

ELLEN

Just in case no one else has volunteered yet.

JOHN

Thank you, Ellen. I'll assign positions when the time comes. Which, actually, is right now, since everyone's here. How's everyone doing on programs?

MARY

I have fifty.

VELMA

I have seventy.

RHODA

Thirty over here.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Zero for me!

ELLEN chuckles. The others do too,
more tolerating than anything...

JOHN

One-fifty, that should be enough. We're far from sold out
today.

ELLEN

Does that mean we'll get to see the show?

JOHN

It is highly likely, Ellen.

ELLEN

I was just wondering. I have a friend who saw it, said good
things about it. I'm surprised it isn't sold out.

JOHN

Well in any case, since everyone's here, I'm going to start
the usher spiel. Ladies who know it, let's all recite the
first line:

JOHN/RHODA/MARY/ELLEN

Hello, and welcome to Rhinestone Community Theatre, my name
is John, and I'll be your house manager today.

JOHN

Hey, John's my name!

The ushers laugh.

Excellent. So I'm just going to go over a few policies and
procedures, then I'm going to assign positions, then I'll
show you the house and point out emergency exits and such.
Then we'll open the house and see a great show.

MARY

Yay!

JOHN

So the show playing here today is *You Can't Take It With
You*, and it will be in three acts with two intermissions.

ELLEN

Oh, thank God. One more of those ninety-minute plays, and my
bladder *will* kill itself!

Awkward pause.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

For anyone who asks, the bathrooms are in that corner.

Points to a corner.

And concessions will be set up over there.

Points to another part of the room,
maybe with an empty table.

In the event of an emergency, our stage manager Roy is going to stop the show, make an announcement, and then we're all going to stampede out of this theatre like...

VELMA chuckles. JOHN smiles.

Just kidding. In all seriousness, we're going to encourage the patrons to walk out single-file, as calmly as possible. I ask that you all remain calm as well. Once everyone is outside of the theatre safely, I ask that you await further instruction from either myself or the box office manager, who is Kelsey tonight.

As a casual reminder, I ask that everyone remain calm, friendly, and professional with the patrons. We may not be a professional theatre, but we still have to act like professionals. If any of the patrons begin giving you a hard time, please come get me. I'll know if it's something we can solve, or if it's something they'll have to go to the box office for.

ELLEN

I'm always professional.

JOHN

Thank you, Ellen. We know you are. Now I just want to reiterate with all of you that it's a privilege to usher at our theatre. We love working with you all, yes, but we want you to keep in mind that it's not about who's the best usher, it's not about how fast you do your job, it's not about getting Usher of the Year. It's about helping a group of audience members have the best experience in the theatre possible. The theatre is the palace, we're the gatekeepers, as it were. So treat every patron with respect and courtesy. Alright? Now. I'm going to assign positions-

ELLEN raises her hand.

JOHN

Yes, Ellen, you can do tickets.

ELLEN

Yes!

RHODA has a noticeable look of disappointment on her face.

JOHN

Rhoda and Velma, I'm going to put you in the house handing out programs.

RHODA

Sounds great...

VELMA

Thank you.

JOHN

And Mary, I'm going to put you in the lobby and on concessions.

MARY

Excellent.

JOHN

Any questions?

VELMA

So since I'm in the house, I'm assuming I have to know the layout of the theatre.

JOHN

Yes, I was just about to get to that. At this time, I'm going to take you all into the house to refresh everyone's memories as to how the seats are numbered.

ELLEN

The odds are on the left, the evens on the right.

JOHN

Good, Ellen. Now if everyone wants to join me in the space.

JOHN exits into the auditorium, and the ladies follow him.

2

Interlude 1

2

During these interludes, we see the women ushering. The set doesn't change, but the lights isolate each usher during their task. We also hear the chatter of theatre-goers.

ELLEN

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone community theatre. May I see your tickets?

ELLEN checks tickets.

Let's see... You're in the right place at the right time!

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN tears the ticket and hands it back to the patron.

She sees another patron.

Hello! Welcome. We're so glad to have you today. May I see your tickets?

ELLEN checks the ticket.

Yep, you're in the right place at the right time! Enjoy the show.

ELLEN tears the ticket and hands it back to the patron.

Hello! Welcome to the Rhinestone. May I see your ticket?

ELLEN checks the ticket.

OK, these tickets are actually for tomorrow. See here? It says the 19th, today's the 18th.

Pause.

I understand. Tell you what, if you go to our box office, they'll be able to help you out.

...

I understand, it's frustrating.

...

RHODA enters and stands next to VELMA.

RHODA

I can take the next patron! Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone, may I see your ticket?

RHODA looks at the patron's ticket.

ELLEN

Yes, I can imagine how much of a hassle it was to get here. The traffic today...

RHODA

Oh, yes. Right place at the right time. Let me take you to your seat.

RHODA exits.

ELLEN

Yes, but the box office is the only one that'll be able to help you out, so if you'll just go there...

...

Ma'am, please calm down. Just go to the box office...

...

There's nothing I can do, ma'am. I'm sorry.

...

The difficult patron has left.

ELLEN takes a deep breath.

Don't say it, don't say it, don't say it...

RHODA enters.

RHODA

Hello! Welcome to the Rhinestone! May I see your ticket?

RHODA looks at the ticket.

Great. You are all set to go! The usher inside will help you.

ELLEN glares at RHODA.

RHODA

Sorry, Ellen, I saw you had a difficult patron, and I just wanted to-

ELLEN turns to a patron.

ELLEN

Hello! Welcome to the Rhinestone! May I see your ticket?

As ELLEN examines the ticket, RHODA exits.

3

Scene 2

3

The lobby, after the performance that night.

RHODA, MARY, and VELMA enters with some water bottles and tissues and put them in the trash.

VELMA

Is that everything?

MARY

After Ellen's out of there, it should be. I swear, she sees *through* those seats to the trash!

(CONTINUED)

RHODA

It is *astounding* what you will find on the theatre floor.

RHODA shows VELMA a ring on her finger.

Do you see this ring?

VELMA

Oh, it's beautiful!

RHODA

Thank you! I picked it up off the theatre floor last year. So I showed it to John, and he told me to put it in the box office for a week, to see if anyone claimed it. Somehow, no one did, and I got to keep it.

MARY

How no one can claim a beautiful ring like that astounds me.

RHODA

That's the area for you. Lots of rich people for whom stuff like this is just a trinket. Well, more for the ushers!

VELMA

Indeed!

ELLEN enters with an armload of tissues, water bottles, and program inserts. Among other things (seriously, feel free to improvise!). She ceremoniously dumps them in the trash.

ELLEN

You sometimes have to wonder if we're ushering for grown adults, or a group of kindergartners. And then I realize, what's the difference?

ELLEN exits to the bathroom to wash her hands.

RHODA

Well, it's getting late. I'm going to make my way home now.

MARY

You'll call me when you get home, Rhoda?

RHODA

Of course. Good night! Get home safe everyone.

MARY

You too!

(CONTINUED)

RHODA exits. MARY turns to VELMA.
I tell her to call me every night so I know she gets home safe.

VELMA

Oh, that's nice of you.

MARY

Yes... If you'd like, I can give you my cell phone number, so you can let me know when you're home safe.

VELMA

Oh, that's very nice of you. Thank you!

As they exchange numbers:

MARY

As the season progresses, it gets darker earlier, which makes it hard on old eyes...

She chuckles somberly.

VELMA

Yes, well. Thank you for your concern.

MARY

No problem. Did everything go smoothly for you tonight?

VELMA

I'll get the hang of it soon.

MARY

Well I was out here and you were in there, so I didn't really get to see you, but I'm sure you did wonderfully.

VELMA

Thank you.

MARY

Have a good night.

VELMA

Yes, good night.

MARY exits. ELLEN enters from the bathroom and approaches VELMA.

ELLEN

Velma, right?

VELMA

Yes. And... I'm sorry. I forgot your name.

ELLEN

Ellen. Ellen Flintwater. From Michigan.

VELMA

Oh dear!

ELLEN

Yes. Irony is my forte. I just wanted to give a couple pointers. If you don't mind.

VELMA

No, not at all.

ELLEN

You seemed very quiet in there. Don't be afraid to be talkative. Our patrons love ushers who talk to them.

VELMA

OK...

ELLEN

You gotta make them feel welcome. Like this is their second home.

VELMA

I'm still getting used to the place myself.

ELLEN

And get off your cell phone. I saw you on it a few times in there.

VELMA

Oh, I was just checking-

ELLEN

I know you were just checking it, but John doesn't want us using our phones during load-in. He forgot to say it during the spiel tonight, but usually he says we're not supposed to use our cell phones.

VELMA

I was just checking to see if my grandson called. He said he would call me this week, but of course I forgot to tell him I was ushering.

ELLEN

Well regardless, you can't use your phone.

VELMA

I tried doing it when things were slow...

JOHN enters.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Well you're off the hook for now, but-

JOHN

Off the hook?

ELLEN

She was using her cell phone while the patrons were coming in.

VELMA

I thought my grandson was going to call me. I'm very sorry.

ELLEN

You forgot to mention it during the usher spiel.

JOHN

Yes, I did, I'm sorry, *mea culpa*. But even so. You can't be on your cell phone during load-in. If you gotta make a call, let me know then go outside. OK?

VELMA

OK.

ELLEN

Well, I'm going home to drop off. Have a good night, Velma. John.

VELMA

Yes, you too, Ellen Flintwater from Michigan.

VELMA slightly chuckles. ELLEN stops at her remark, then exits. JOHN approaches VELMA.

JOHN

Don't worry about Ellen. She's a bit...

VELMA

Brash?

JOHN

That's one way to describe her. But she's really good with patrons, as I'm sure you saw.

VELMA

I did.

JOHN

Like I said. If you need to make a call. Just let me know.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Sure, sure...

A moment between them.

JOHN

So uh... When are you ushering next?

VELMA

I'm not sure. Maybe next weekend.

JOHN

We might be able to use some help tomorrow, if you're around.

VELMA

I don't think I had any plans. Besides go to church. I was going to check out St. Armand's.

JOHN

Oh, that's a beautiful church.

VELMA

I've heard.

JOHN

I go to the Episcopalian church on Palm Ave.

VELMA

I'm afraid I don't know where that is.

JOHN

It's just a few blocks down from here. Maybe you can come... check it out sometime?

VELMA

Perhaps... So you'll need me to usher tomorrow?

JOHN

If you can't, it's not a big deal. If you could, though...

VELMA

Uh... sure. I'll be here tomorrow, then.

JOHN

You sure?

VELMA

I've got nothing else to do.

JOHN

You're a life saver. Mary's ushering too, so she'll be able to help you out. And I don't think Ellen is ushering tomorrow, so...

(CONTINUED)

VELMA
That's good to know.

A moment. They look at each other.

JOHN
Alright, well. Either way, I'll see you next time you usher.
I'm going to close up now. Good night.

VELMA
Good night.

JOHN begins turning off the lights
in the lobby. VELMA watches him,
then after a few moments, heads
out.

4

Scene 3

4

The lobby of the theatre. One month
later.

ELLEN, VELMA, RHODA, and MARY
stuffing programs. MARY is relaying
a story to VELMA. The others listen
while stuffing programs.

MARY
So this one man in the audience had had *enough*, so he
shouted "Stop this filth!"

VELMA
He didn't!

MARY
Oh, he did. And everything went silent. And then the
audience started joining in- "Stop this filth! Stop this
filth!" And then one of the actors came onstage and starting
calling us Nazis and telling us how when the play was first
done in Germany, the Nazis burned the theatre down, and all
that.

Well. Then, the artistic director of the theatre comes on,
and apologizes to all of us, saying that the performance
will take a five minute break, and that anyone who wants to
stay for the rest of the performance can stay, and anyone
else who wants to can leave.

VELMA
What did you do?

MARY

Oh I stayed. Didn't think it could get any dirtier than that.

VELMA

And did it?

MARY

No.

ELLEN

You know, nowadays anything seems to go in the theatre. You know how sometimes you see a play and it's absolutely terrible, has no business whatsoever being onstage, and everyone loves it? And you have to say it's "interesting" or something else otherwise no one is going to listen to you? That has been my theatre experiences for the past year. That's why I like this theatre so much. They stick to the classics, and when they do decide to bring something new in, they're very careful in making sure people are going to actually like it before putting it on stage.

VELMA

Oh I love the classics, but it is nice to see a good new play now and then.

ELLEN

If only "good" and "new" were mutually exclusive.

MARY

Oh, that's not always the case. There's this new theatre company downtown that did a world premiere of a play, and it was a very simple set-up- a husband and wife thinking about getting a divorce.

ELLEN

I'm already uninterested.

MARY

But it gets more interesting- they're thinking of getting a divorce because she's obsessed with this video game, so she disappears into the game, and he has to go in and save her.

ELLEN

Sounds confusing. I've never played a video game in my life, so how would I understand that?

MARY

I tried playing them with my grandkids, but I wasn't any good. But I don't think you had to like video games to like this play. It was actually very poignant. The end made me tear up, I must admit.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

See, why would I go to the theatre to cry? Why not laugh, and dance, and sing along?

RHODA

Because the audience would tell you to stop singing.

Awkward silence. ELLEN glares at RHODA.

No offense...

They continue stuffing programs.

JOHN enters.

JOHN

How're we doing on programs, ladies?

MARY

We're almost there. We're at 150.

ELLEN

180. I have the rest of them right here.

JOHN

Excellent. Are we ready for the usher spiel?

ELLEN

Can't we skip it for this one night? We've all heard it before.

JOHN

...I'm afraid I have to go through it every night, since the policies change for each show.

ELLEN

Well is anything different in this show than from the others?

JOHN

Well... truth be told, it's pretty standard. Two acts, one intermission.

VELMA

The last show had three acts, so it's good to know this has two.

JOHN

Now let's see... who to put on tickets...

ELLEN raises her hand.

Why don't I have... Velma. What about you take tickets?

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

...I mean, I've never done it...

JOHN

Really? In the month you've been here, you've never done tickets?

VELMA

No.

MARY

I can show you how to do it.

JOHN

Great, thank you Mary.

VELMA

I mean, is it hard?

MARY

Oh, not at all. Once you get past the first few tickets, you'll be on them in no time.

VELMA

OK, good...

JOHN

Ellen, I think I'm gonna put you on Concessions.

ELLEN

Oh...

JOHN

And Mary and Rhoda, programs in house?

MARY

Sounds good.

RHODA

Yes.

JOHN

OK, great. So if everyone can just go into the house. I'll be right there.

The ladies go up to head into the house. JOHN stops ELLEN.

JOHN

Oh! Ellen, can I talk to you?

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Sure.

JOHN

Hey, so... You know we love having you here. You're a fantastic usher, and always so friendly with the patrons...

ELLEN

Yeah?

JOHN

And, I'll be honest, you're the only one who actually catches the wrong tickets.

ELLEN

Well I try my best.

JOHN

But there are times when you're a bit... confrontational.

ELLEN

Confron-

JOHN

Not with the patrons. But with your fellow ushers. Do you know what I mean?

ELLEN

No I don't.

JOHN

OK, well just now, when I was making the usher speech, which is something that is a part of my checklist that I have to accomplish every night. You said, "Can we skip the speech, we all know it."

ELLEN

Well we do, you even joke about how we've all memorized it.

JOHN

I have, yes. But like I said, I still have to give it to you in case policies have changed. And to be honest, I felt embarrassed and even attacked by you back there. In front of everybody. And quite frankly, that is unacceptable behavior from an usher. A co-worker. A *volunteer*. And this isn't the first time I've felt this way. Every time you come in here, you're always confrontational, rude, and not to mention late.

ELLEN

I wasn't late this time.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

No, you weren't. But you were late many other times. I always put in a good word for your ushering skills. But sometimes, the way you act around your fellow ushers is unacceptable. And if this were a professional environment, it would not fly. At all.

ELLEN

So let me ask you something. Why are you bringing this up now?

JOHN

Because by speaking up to me, you set a very poor example for your fellow ushers to follow.

ELLEN

I see...

JOHN

And I know you always want to do tickets. And you're good at it, this isn't an indictment of your skills. But you all want to do tickets, and I can only have one person doing it. And maybe I want to give another usher a chance to do them. See, my responsibility is not to make sure Ellen does tickets. My job is to make sure the audience gets into the theatre safely and conveniently, and start the show on time. And that's what you're all here to help me do. And to see a show for free. OK?

ELLEN is silent.

ELLEN

...I didn't know you felt this way about me.

JOHN

Please don't take this personally. I know you want to prove that you do a good job. But you don't need to prove it, because you already do it. Maybe if you just... took it easy, relaxed a little... OK?

ELLEN

OK...

JOHN

Alright. Good. Thank you. Now let's go inside for the rest of the spiel.

JOHN exits into the auditorium.
ELLEN is alone for a moment. She puts on her best smile, then follows him.

5

Interlude 2

5

MARY at the concession table.

MARY

Hello, would you like a little snack before the show?

...

Well, we have water, Pepsi, Coke, Sprite, Doritos, potato chips, both plain and sour cream and onion, and you can bring it all into the theatre, although we do ask that you open your concessions before the performance.

RHODA enters, and takes a place behind the concessions table.

RHODA

Hello! Would you like a snack before the show?

MARY

Snacks and water are two dollars, wine is five dollars.

...

Alright, that's totally fine. Enjoy the performance!

RHODA

Thank you. Enjoy your pretzels, and the performance!

Pause.

RHODA

Sorry. You had a line, I figured I'd help.

MARY

Aren't you supposed to be in the house?

RHODA

I am. But no one was coming in just yet. I just wanted to see if you needed help out here. I'll go back in there now.

MARY

Thank you, Rhoda.

RHODA exits. MARY sighs to herself, and closes her eyes.

Once she opens them, another patron is at the concessions table.

Hello, would you like a little snack before the show?

Lights dim.

Two months have passed. We are now in December.

VELMA in the lobby, alone, on her cell phone. The show is going on inside the auditorium.

VELMA

Of course I missed all of you at Thanksgiving, but Mary from the theatre gave a lovely dinner for people who didn't have anyone. She's been a dear friend since I moved here.

Yes. I'm glad too. Now. How is everything at school? I know you have finals coming up...

Well that's good. Just study hard, that's all you can do, right?

How cold is it up there?

...really? I couldn't imagine it being that cold anymore.

VELMA chuckles.

That's true. I am. Sunny Florida... Gives you a reason to come visit! I could also show you my new condo, show you around the town, it's a beautiful city. Restaurants, theatres, it's like a warmer and friendlier version of New York. And older, too.

VELMA chuckles.

I can joke about it if I want! I don't see any problem joking about getting older. You can't joke about getting younger, now can you?

Thought not.

...

I miss you too. I'm glad college is treating you well.

ELLEN enters from the auditorium.

She listens in on the conversation.

Well you know if you need a second ear or someone to just listen, I'm here, honey.

Me? I don't really... Well it's not the same since your grandfather died, of course, but...

...I'm doing... I'm getting by. Some days it's hard without him, but... you learn to get by. You keep yourself busy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VELMA (cont'd)

Maybe over your winter break you can visit me? I'm sure you can book some flights for January... Or maybe if you're crazy enough, you could drive down here.

VELMA chuckles.

I know, I'll see you at Christmas. But it would be nice if you visited down here. Even at its coldest, it'll be warmer than up there, I'm sure...

VELMA sees ELLEN.

Alright, I'm gonna let you go, but it was wonderful talking to you.

I love you too. Good luck on your finals! I know you'll do well.

Alright, bye now.

VELMA hangs up the phone and looks at ELLEN.

VELMA

I already told John my grandson would call me.

ELLEN

He couldn't call any other time?

VELMA

He's been so busy with classes. He's doing pre-med, so you can imagine...

ELLEN

I see...

VELMA

He says he's doing well, but you know young people. They don't want to tell us old folk the juicy stuff. Here, let me show you a picture of us...

ELLEN

I'm going to the bathroom.

VELMA

Alright. I'll pull it up while you're in there.

ELLEN

I'm going right back into the theatre.

VELMA

Isn't intermission almost here?

ELLEN

There *is* no intermission. It's one of *those* plays.

ELLEN exits into the bathroom.
VELMA pulls up the photo on her
iPhone anyway, and looks at it.

JOHN enters from the bathroom.

JOHN

How're you doing out here, Velma?

VELMA

Oh, you know...

JOHN

Everything alright with your grandson?

VELMA

Yes. He's fine.

JOHN

Good.

JOHN

Show's gonna let out in about thirty minutes.

VELMA

Is there anything I can do? Maybe stuffing more programs?

JOHN

Ummmmm not right at this moment, no.

VELMA

OK.

Pause. JOHN sits next to VELMA.
Silence.

JOHN

So your grandson's doing pre-med?

VELMA

Yes. He wants to be a doctor. Not sure what kind he wants to
be yet, but he's a bright boy. He'll figure it out. Here,
here's a picture...

VELMA shows JOHN.

JOHN

Good looking boy.

VELMA

Isn't he? He looks just like his father. He's studying for finals right now.

JOHN

God, I remember those...

VELMA

I don't. I actually never went to college.

JOHN

No?

VELMA

Mmm. When I graduated, a woman could either get married, become a teacher, or a nurse. I chose getting married, and wound up marrying my high school sweetheart, and right away we started having children. First, we had our daughter, Elena. Here, I have a picture of her, if you'd like...

VELMA pulls out her iPhone and shows JOHN. JOHN looks.

JOHN

Very nice. She's very pretty. Just like her mother.

VELMA slightly blushes.

VELMA

And then we had another child, a boy named Lucas, and that was it. He went to work in a factory, I stayed home and looked after the kids while I... No, I'm sorry.

JOHN

What were you going to say?

VELMA

It's silly, but... Well, see, I always dreamed of becoming an actress.

JOHN

Really?

VELMA

Yes. When I graduated high school, I got married and pregnant so fast that there wasn't any time, really. Later on, I did a few plays at the community theatre, but I had the worst stage fright, I could barely squeak out a word. After a few shows, I realized it was fun, but not really for me. Just the people I worked with, many of them thought they were professionals who were a stop away from Broadway or something, and in reality, most of them were... well, let's just say if you paid even a penny to see them, you would be demanding it back.

(CONTINUED)

I'm sorry, I'm talking too much. I'm sure you have work to do.

JOHN

No, not at all. I was actually hoping you'd keep talking.

VELMA

I'm sure I'm distracting you.

JOHN

I like being distracted by you.

VELMA

Oh... Well thank you, but I'm not sure why. I'm not that interesting.

JOHN

A lot of interesting people think that about themselves. Something I've learned over the years is that the most interesting people simply interest the right people at the right time. Don't you think?

JOHN and VELMA share a quick glance, then shy away from one another. VELMA smiles.

ELLEN comes out of the bathroom and sits next to them, uninvited.

ELLEN

You know, I was going to go back in there, but then I realized, I can't go back in that theatre for another *second* of that nonsense. I totally understand why you're not watching it, Velma.

JOHN

I'm gonna go check the temperature in there.

JOHN gets up and exits, leaving ELLEN and VELMA alone together.

VELMA

Do you have any special Christmas plans, Ellen?

ELLEN

Just getting together with some people. The usual.

VELMA

Your family?

ELLEN

No. Just some people. From the senior center I go to.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

I see...

ELLEN

Are you going to see your family?

VELMA

Yes. I'm so excited.

ELLEN

Well. I hope you have a good time.

Lights dim.

7

Interlude 3

7

VELMA after the show.

VELMA

Good night, thank you for coming... Good night, thank you for joining us... Good night, thank you for coming, hope to see you again... Good night, drive safely... Have a happy holiday, good night...

VELMA smiles- she is beginning to fit in here.

8

Scene 5

8

ELLEN, MARY, and RHODA stuffing programs.

RHODA

It's kind of sad, that they have to be here without their families, so I took them out for dinner.

MARY

That's very nice of you, Rhoda.

RHODA

We all went to the Bijou Cafe, which he said he could never afford himself.

RHODA chuckles.

Well, for all the hard work they do for us, I think they deserve it.

MARY

Oh absolutely. Singing and dancing up there eight times a week, I could never do it.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA

He said the theatre treated them to a nice Christmas feast, which was nice. That theatre always treats its actors well. But I figured I'd give him a little something extra.

MARY

How sweet...

RHODA

I don't think one should spend Christmas day alone, I firmly believe that.

MARY

Oh, I agree. That's why I'm thankful my sister and her husband were able to come visit this year with their children. I've been trying to tell my daughter for years to take the children down to Florida for Christmas, and this was the first year they did it, and they loved it.

RHODA

Oh, good.

MARY

My daughter said, "We're going to come every year from now on."

RHODA

Oh that's wonderful!

MARY

How was your Christmas, Ellen?

ELLEN

It was fine.

MARY

Did you do anything special?

ELLEN

Oh, you know. I got together with my girl friends from the senior center and we went to lunch, then the movies...

MARY

Oh! What did you see?

ELLEN

I forget the name of it, but it was good.

MARY

What was it about?

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Oh, you know. Just a silly Christmas family comedy...

RHODA

Is this the one with Jamie Lee Curtis?

ELLEN

No. That movie was awful.

MARY

Oh, did you think so?

ELLEN

The one with Jamie Lee Curtis and Tim Allen? Oh, yes. That was terrible.

MARY

I thought it was cute. Then again, I haven't seen it in years...

Pause. Program stuffing. JOHN walks by them, whistling.

JOHN

How're we doing over here, ladies?

ELLEN

We're just fine.

MARY

Almost there.

JOHN

Good.

JOHN exits, whistling. The ushers continue program stuffing.

ELLEN

John never whistles.

MARY

He whistles very well.

ELLEN

I've never heard him whistle before...

RHODA

He used to, when Ingrid was still alive.

MARY

Yes. I can't believe it's been two years already.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

I see he's been talking to Velma a lot lately.

RHODA

I hope she's keeping warm up north.

ELLEN

You two been noticing that? He's been putting her on tickets a lot lately.

MARY

Velma is very good at tickets.

ELLEN

But that doesn't mean he has to put her on them over and over and over again. Spread the wealth, you know?

RHODA

I don't mind Velma taking tickets so much. I like handing out programs in the house. It gives me more a chance to talk to the patrons.

ELLEN

But don't you wish you could do tickets sometimes, Rhoda?

MARY

OK, Ellen.

ELLEN

I'm just asking Rhoda if she thinks-

RHODA

(*re: the programs*) How many do you have, Mary?

MARY

I have...

MARY counts piles of ten.

Sixty.

RHODA

I have seventy. That's one thirty. What about you, Ellen?

ELLEN

...thirty.

MARY

OK, so that's one fifty, we just need thirty more. Let's all make ten each.

They start. Pause. Program stuffing. ELLEN speaks.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

So who do you think will win Usher of the Year?

MARY

You're already thinking about that? It's only December.

ELLEN

I'm just wondering who people think the Usher of the Year will be. I think Rhoda has a shot at it. We know Mary can't get it because she won it last year. And Velma hasn't been ushering here long enough.

MARY

Have you finished your programs, Ellen?

Silence. Program stuffing. ELLEN has effectively been shut down by MARY.

RHODA

Alright, I have ten.

MARY

Me too.

ELLEN

Yeah.

They pile the programs together. JOHN enters.

JOHN

Alright ladies, are we ready for the usher spiel?

MARY

Of course.

RHODA

Yes.

ELLEN

Yeah, yeah.

JOHN

Alright. Here goes.

Lights dim.

9

Interlude 4

9

RHODA seating people. She has a pile of programs in her hand.

RHODA

Hello, let me see your tickets...

RHODA looks at the tickets.

OK, you have row D, that's going to be the fourth row up from the... What? Hold on...

RHODA looks at another ticket.

Oh, you have row H... Oh, um... That's a little awkward... Did you buy your tickets separately?

Pause.

Uh huh... Uh huh... I see... Well tell you what, I don't think it's right for families to be separated from each other, especially at this time of year. This is a time you should all be together. So tell you what, why don't I put you all in row D, it doesn't look like anyone is sitting in those seats, and the show is going to start in five minutes... Oh, you're welcome, my pleasure. I hope you enjoy the show, and have a happy holiday.

10

Scene 6

10

The lobby during the same performance. JOHN enters, followed by RHODA.

RHODA

If you'll just please listen to me-

JOHN

Rhoda, you can't do that!

RHODA

There was no one sitting there-

JOHN

When you sat them, there wasn't. But those people *had those seats*, they were *ticketed for those seats*.

RHODA

I understand-

JOHN

You *do*.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA

Yes. I said they could sit there, until the next group came-

JOHN

Then why did they say "the usher said we could sit here for the performance"?

RHODA

I don't know, they must have misheard me-

JOHN

Rhoda, you know that if any patrons have any seating issues, you have to come to *me*, and I'll see if it's something I can solve. I say this in the usher spiel every time.

RHODA

Well if I may-

JOHN

And the other thing, you did this behind my back, under my nose, you *completely* undermined my authority-

RHODA

Yes-

JOHN

Rhoda, *I'm* the house manager. If there are any seating issues, *I'm* the one who decides what to do with them. Only *I* can finagle seats if I have to. That's *my* job, Rhoda. You're here as an usher. To help patrons find their seats, and make sure they have a good experience at the theatre. And quite frankly, you compromised that.

RHODA

...

JOHN

...

RHODA

...I'm sorry. It's just... they were a family, they told me they only get to see each other once a year, they were ticketed separately... No family should be separated on Christmas...

JOHN

Yeah, well... I don't know what to say, Rhoda. You're so helpful, and we're extremely grateful to have you at the theatre, but you can't just go around and do stuff like that. It compromises our integrity, it compromises *your* integrity-

(CONTINUED)

RHODA

Please don't talk down to me.

JOHN

I wasn't talking down-

RHODA

I feel like you are. Please. Don't...

Long pause between them.

JOHN

Look, I'm sorry for what I said, just... We were sold out today. It was a tight situation.

RHODA

I was just trying to do a good job. Be proactive.

JOHN

I know you were. And that's great that you care so much about ushering here. You just... you gotta learn when to pull back.

RHODA

Yes, I know-

JOHN

Because- I'll be honest with you, Rhoda, this isn't the first time I've heard about behavior like this from you.

RHODA

Behavior?

JOHN

Other ushers- I won't say their names- have said that when you're not doing tickets, you try to take tickets. When you take tickets, you try to help concessions. When you help concessions, you try to seat people in the theatre. You can't be everywhere at once, Rhoda. I assign you ushers these positions according to the theatre's needs, not yours. And I know you're great at all of those things, and you never complain, which is great. Really. But it distracts the other ushers from doing their job if you're constantly trying to do their jobs for them. And it distracts me too, because then I have an usher whose whereabouts I don't know.

RHODA

...how long have you felt this way?

Long, long pause. JOHN doesn't quite know what to say.

JOHN

It's... just something I've noticed more recently.

RHODA

I would appreciate it if you brought it up sooner.

JOHN

I know, I... I don't mean to pry, but... Is everything OK back home? Anything going on with your fam-

RHODA

Everything is fine.

JOHN

Is there anything you want to talk about, or-

RHODA

Everything. Is fine. I'm just trying to be the best usher I can be.

JOHN

And that's great. But just... know when you're not needed. OK?

RHODA

Yes.

JOHN

Alright. I'm gonna give Steve the go-ahead to make the curtain speech, then I'm gonna give the stage manager the house.

RHODA

Alright.

JOHN

You want to watch the show tonight?

RHODA

No. I've seen it nine times already. I'm going to take a break.

JOHN

Alright. I can bring you some programs, if you want to stuff them.

RHODA

Thank you.

JOHN smiles, nods, and exits.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA sits down, looks around her, more terrified than she'd like to admit she is. She's relieved she hasn't been let go, but she feels wounded that her helpfulness is perceived as irritating.

She presses her hand to her forehead. She digs into her coat pocket, taking out a little bottle of Advil. She then takes a water bottle from concessions, opens it, and swallows the pill down with the water.

She then sits in the lobby, breathing, breathing, breathing...

11

Interlude 5

11

JOHN in the lobby during intermission.

JOHN

Yes, I totally understand... I'm sorry... No, my usher should not have done that. I was sorry to have to separate you folks, but...

Pause.

Yes, I understand. You want to see the show together, but weren't able to sit together... Tell you what. I can see if I can get the box office to comp your tickets for the next show?

...

OK, OK, I just thought I'd offer.

Alright.

Sorry I couldn't be more help. I hope you enjoy the rest of the show...

...that's understandable. Well, I hope the next time you come, this won't happen.

12

Scene 7

12

MARY and RHODA stuffing programs.

MARY

It was a little too cold for the beach that day, but we went over to the Ringling museum, which I had actually never been to.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA

Really.

MARY

Oh yes. And it is gorgeous. A little expensive for a museum, but you really get your money's worth. Walking on the grounds, seeing the Ca' d'Zan, it's really something you have to do in this area.

RHODA

I'll look into it.

MARY

And then we went to the aquarium I volunteer at, so I was able to introduce my family to my co-volunteers.

RHODA

Good.

MARY

And then we went out for dinner at that restaurant Roast.

RHODA

Oh yes, I know that place.

MARY

I figured I'd treat them to some nice dining before they return to Minnesota. I love them dearly, but a place like Roast is usually beyond their budget. My sister is an office manager and her husband makes documentary films. He always picks the most fascinating subjects. They're mostly about science stuff.

RHODA

Oh...

MARY

My husband and I go to Roast every Valentine's Day, but I might like a change this year. Maybe go over to St. Pete for something a bit more adventurous...

RHODA holds her head down slightly more than usual. MARY notices.

...Rhoda?

Pause.

...Rhoda, everything OK?

RHODA

Yes, I'm fine...

(CONTINUED)

MARY

Oh, I've spent all this time talking about myself. I am so sorry for that. Let's talk about you. Are you excited to see this show tonight? I've heard it's really interesting.

Pause. Program stuffing.

RHODA

It's nice that you have such a nice family.

MARY

Yes, I'm very blessed... Did your family come down to visit you this year, or...?

RHODA

I don't have any family.

MARY

...you mean, none?

RHODA

No. None.

This is very delicate territory for MARY.

MARY

I see...

RHODA

Never married, never had children, my sister died from colon cancer five years ago...

MARY

Oh, I'm so sorry.

RHODA

Please, there's nothing to be sorry about. I'm the one who should be sorry. I'm making this evening depressing for you.

MARY

No, not at all. I'm glad you're telling me this. I had no idea.

RHODA

Yeah well...

Long, long pause. Program stuffing.

RHODA

This was the first theatre I came to when I moved down here. This tiny, little community theatre. I would see the ushers here, and they all looked so... happy. So fulfilled. So glad

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RHODA (cont'd)
to be helping others. I genuinely used to think that's what life was about.

MARY
...used to?

Long pause. RHODA stops stuffing programs to tell this story. MARY continues, but stops about halfway through.

RHODA
...I used to work in foster care placement. Because, since I never had children, maybe I could help others find a home. There was this one boy, a beautiful, smart, passionate young man who loved to read- his name was Fred- we would discuss books all the time. His mother was a drug addict and an alcoholic. She was horrible to him. Would throw things at him, use him as an ashtray- he had burn marks all over his arm... Well, the state took him away from her. I knew this other couple in our program who weren't able to have babies, and loved to read as well. So he lived with them, and eventually they decided to adopt him. Oh, they loved him so much.

But his mother appealed to the judge, saying she was ready to get her act together and take care of this boy. And, to this day I still can't fathom how this happened. But the judge ruled in her favor. So he went back to live with her and... six months later, he... he was only sixteen. And the... *wicked witch* killed him. Sixteen years ago today.

That's when I left that job. I couldn't help this young man, this bright, brilliant young man, all because the system cared more about the parent's self-esteem than the child's welfare. I wanted to help but, but I couldn't. I couldn't. I can't...

RHODA breaks down crying. MARY gets up, and pats her on the shoulder.

MARY
It's OK, Rhoda... Listen, if you want to go home, I'll tell John you're not feeling well.

RHODA
No, please. I have to stay. I want to stay. I want to help.

MARY
But if you're crying like this...

RHODA

I like helping the patrons here. Most of them come here having had a bad day, or a bad mood, and then they see us smiling, welcoming them, and then they smile back... It's wonderful to be a part of that magic. It's the only thing I live for now...

I'll go to the bathroom and clean up. Then I'll put a smile on my face and be ready to go.

RHODA takes her purse.

MARY

Rhoda... I think you are a deeply appreciated help to the usher team. You may not see it, but you are making a difference in the patrons' experience at this theatre. You have all the qualities of a great usher- a bright smile, a pleasant tone, and a kind demeanor. And I see you've been working extra hard this year. Harder than any other usher. So... when the time comes to decide Usher of the Year, I'm going to put in a good word for you to John.

RHODA's eyes brighten.

RHODA

Oh, would you?

MARY

Of course I will.

RHODA

That would be... I mean, I've always wanted to be Usher of the Year, but I never thought it would be...

MARY

Well, I can't make any promises now. It's ultimately not my decision. But I'll make sure John gives you the strongest consideration.

RHODA

Usher of the Year... Thank you, Mary. You really are an angel.

MARY

I try.

RHODA

I'm going to be smiling for the rest of the night now!

MARY

Good. I'm glad to hear.

(CONTINUED)

RHODA dries her few remaining tears, then rejoins MARY in stuffing programs at the table.

RHODA

I don't think I'll need the bathroom after all!

Program stuffing.

13

Interlude 6

13

VELMA taking tickets.

VELMA

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone.

Checks tickets.

Let's see... You're in the right place, at the right time!

Tears ticket and gives to patron.

Thank you for joining us, I hope you enjoy the show!

JOHN approaches her.

JOHN

How're you holding up over here?

VELMA

Everything's fine.

JOHN

Good... Good.

JOHN and VELMA look at each other. VELMA then notices a patron approaching. JOHN backs away.

VELMA

Hello, and welcome to the Rhinestone Community Theatre... May I see your tickets?

VELMA checks the tickets.

Great. You're in the right place, at the right time! The ushers in the house will help seat you.

VELMA gives the tickets back.

Enjoy the show.

You need anything, John?

JOHN

Yes. I was wondering if I could see you after the show.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Oh... Is everything OK, or...?

JOHN

You're not in trouble. Don't worry. I just wanted to discuss a possibility with you.

VELMA

What kind of possibility? I guess you'll tell me when we talk.

JOHN

Yeah.

VELMA

OK. Sure.

JOHN

Great. Thank you. Keep up the good work!

JOHN exits. VELMA looks after him, bewildered.

14

Scene 8

14

After the performance. ELLEN enters carrying some trash, which she throws in the garbage can. She digs into her jacket pockets, and digs out some more trash. She then holds up a little baggie of pills and looks at them inquisitively. She shrugs, and pockets the pills.

VELMA enters with some trash.

VELMA

That was a terrific performance.

ELLEN

It was OK.

VELMA

It wasn't exactly traditional, but...

ELLEN

No it wasn't.

Pause. VELMA throws out her trash.

ELLEN

I just need to use the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

OK.

VELMA

ELLEN exits into a bathroom.

RHODA enters from the theatre.

RHODA

The theatre should be clean. Velma, could you tell John that I left?

VELMA

I think you're supposed to tell him-

RHODA

I know, but I have to be up at 6:00 tomorrow, so I want to get to sleep as soon as possible.

VELMA

I suppose...

RHODA

You're a dear. Thank you!

RHODA exits. VELMA looks after her.

JOHN enters.

JOHN

You got everything?

VELMA

Yes.

JOHN

Everyone left?

VELMA

Rhoda just left. Ellen's in the bathroom.

JOHN

Really?

JOHN sighs.

I wish Rhoda would check in with me before just leaving like that.

VELMA

You should ask them to. In the usher spiel.

JOHN

Yeah, I should...

(CONTINUED)

Pause. The two look at each other.

VELMA

So you wanted to see me after the show?

JOHN

I did, yes. Um... I don't know exactly how to say this.

VELMA

What is it? Did I do something wrong?

JOHN

No, not at all. You took tickets beautifully tonight.

VELMA

Oh good. I was so nervous. I always get nervous doing tickets, as many times as I've done it. I don't know why everyone loves doing it so much.

JOHN

It's the position with the most control, I guess. If your ticket is wrong, you get turned away, you know?

VELMA

Yes, I can see that... So what did you want to ask me?

JOHN

Right. Yes. Well... As you probably know, Valentine's Day is tomorrow.

VELMA

I do know.

JOHN

I'm not sure if you had anything going on...

VELMA

I'm ushering the matinee.

JOHN

I mean afterwards. The house is usually pretty packed on Valentine's Day, so therefore all the restaurants are too, but I just wanted to know if... You wanted to come over my house? And I could make you dinner?

VELMA takes time to digest this.

VELMA

Oh...

JOHN

Yeah... I know it's probably not appropriate, in fact I *know* it's inappropriate, house manager asking one of his ushers out-

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Yes. Yes.

JOHN

But I'm not asking you out as a house manager- obviously- but just as person to person, man to woman, senior citizen to... Uh...

VELMA

I think I get what you're saying.

JOHN

You do. OK. Good.

Pause.

If you're going to say no, please do it now.

VELMA

I...

JOHN

I know your husband only died last year, so you're probably not exactly thinking about dating again-

VELMA

Oh Gosh, dating. I haven't used that term in years.

JOHN

Let me rephrase that. This wouldn't be a date. More of a... come over for Valentine's Day, if that makes any sense?

VELMA

It does...

JOHN

If you don't, I totally understand. And I understand if it'll make it awkward for you to usher at the theatre now.

VELMA

It won't at all.

JOHN

Really?

VELMA

Well... maybe just a little... If I said no.

JOHN

If you said no.

VELMA

Yes. If I said no.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN
But you're not saying no.

VELMA
No...

JOHN
So you're saying yes?

VELMA
Well...

JOHN
It's OK if you would rather say no. If you don't want to dishonor your husband or anything. I was skeptical to ask you because I didn't want to dishonor my wife, but... Our last Valentine's Day, we went to dinner at the Bijou Cafe. We knew that she would be gone soon, but didn't know when. She told me that if she died, and I found someone else to spend the rest of my life with, it wouldn't matter because she was dead.

VELMA
She said that?

JOHN
Yes. I then told her that she was going to live for a long, long time, and there wouldn't be anyone else. But she said, "There will be. All I ask is that you're happy with whoever she is." She died a week later. I hadn't dated anyone since then. God, you're right, it is weird to use that word.

VELMA
So what made you change your mind?

JOHN
Meeting a woman who's gone through a similar situation as me. And who's been a great help to the theatre. And who's made me actually look forward to house managing whenever she's ushering. Who, ever since I met her, has made me start whistling again.

VELMA
Oh...

JOHN
(Sings.)
"Once you have found her, never let her go."

VELMA
I love that song...

JOHN

Me too. I used to sing it for auditions when I was trying to be an actor in New York. All these years later, it hasn't lost its meaning for me.

They smile at each other.

VELMA

You still have a lovely voice.

JOHN

It's not what it used to be.

Pause.

VELMA

The last Valentine's Day I spent with my husband in the hospital, not knowing when his cancer was going to get to him. Somehow, I knew it was our last one together, but I didn't want to acknowledge it. When he died a month later, I...

JOHN

We never know when our last Valentine's Day is going to be, do we?

VELMA

I guess not... Yes.

JOHN

You mean-

VELMA

Yes.

JOHN

You'll come over?

VELMA

Yes. I will. After the show tomorrow.

JOHN

Well... great! I'll cook you my famous eggplant parmesean.

VELMA

I love eggplant parmesean.

JOHN

You're never going to eat it the same way after you taste mine.

(CONTINUED)

Perhaps not!

VELMA

The two laugh.

Well. Thank goodness.

JOHN

Yes. Thank goodness.

VELMA

Long pause.

Well. Now that that's over. I'm gonna lock up now.

JOHN

Yes.

VELMA

I'll see you tomorrow.

JOHN

Yes, see you tomorrow...

VELMA

JOHN looks at VELMA for a brief moment. He then kisses her on the lips- a quick peck. She smiles, then exits.

JOHN then turns the lights out in the lobby. He then goes into the theatre to do one more check on it. ELLEN enters from the bathroom. She's heard the whole conversation. She takes out the pills, still in their baggie, and shakes her head.

Stupid, stupid, stupid...

ELLEN

ELLEN throws the baggie in the trash.

JOHN enters the lobby.

Ellen! I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were still here.

JOHN

That's why you always check the bathrooms.

ELLEN

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Sorry, I'm uh... I was in a rush to get out tonight. There's a documentary on PBS I wanna watch, so...

ELLEN

I see.

Pause.

JOHN

Yeah well. Get home safe.

ELLEN

You too.

ELLEN goes out the doors. JOHN goes out after her and locks them behind him.

Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT 2

1

Scene 9

1

One month after the end of Act One.
March.

VELMA stuffs programs, smiling.
JOHN comes out of the auditorium
and kisses her on the cheek. They
smile at one another. Then they
kiss again. He pulls up a chair
next to her, and they begin to kiss
more.

ELLEN enters from the door.

VELMA and JOHN stop immediately.

ELLEN doesn't say anything.

VELMA

I'm just going to...

JOHN

Right.

VELMA exits, embarrassed to the
extreme.

ELLEN stands still. JOHN approaches
her.

JOHN

You're here early.

ELLEN

I am. Yes.

JOHN

That's unusual.

ELLEN

Well the traffic wasn't bad today.

JOHN

That's good. That's good.

Pause.

I uh... have some programs for you to stuff.

(CONTINUED)

Oh. Good. ELLEN

They're where they usually are, so... JOHN

OK. ELLEN

I'm going to use the bathroom, so... JOHN

I got it. ELLEN

JOHN exits. ELLEN goes to the table and begins to stuff programs. As she does, she chokes back tears, but eventually, she stops stuffing programs and looks down. She begins to cry. Quietly, softly, this is not something she does very often. But it's wanted to get out for a very, very long time.

ELLEN takes out a Kleenex from her purse and wipes her eyes dry.

She puts on her usual stern expression as she continues stuffing programs.

VELMA exits from the bathroom. She joins ELLEN at the table and the two women stuff programs.

Silence. Awkwardness.

Then:

You're here early. VELMA

Yes. No traffic. ELLEN

Silence. Stuffing.

Can you believe, the season is almost over. VELMA

ELLEN

Yes.

VELMA

What do you think your favorite production so far this year was?

ELLEN

Oh, I don't know. It was kinda lackluster. Nothing really... you know.

VELMA

Yes... Have you ushered at any of the other theatres, or...?

ELLEN

Some, over the years. But this one... you know.

VELMA

I think I'm going to usher at some of the other theatres next year. I didn't want to overwhelm myself, but I think now that I have the hang of ushering here, I was going to check out some of the other places.

ELLEN

(Terse.)

Good for you.

Silence. Stuffing.

VELMA

I'm very sorry.

Silence. Stuffing.

I hope this doesn't make things awkward. That's the last thing I wanted...

ELLEN

It's not like that.

VELMA

What?

ELLEN

I'm assuming you think it'll be awkward because I'm in love with John or something.

VELMA

I didn't want to assume-

ELLEN

But you did, clearly. Well you're wrong.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

...

ELLEN

...

VELMA

I didn't want to make things awkward.

ELLEN

...

VELMA

...

ELLEN

Yeah well...

VELMA

I'm sorry.

Silence. Stuffing.

JOHN enters.

JOHN

How are you doing over here, ladies.

VELMA

Good.

ELLEN doesn't say anything.

JOHN

Alright. Well, I just got a call from Rhoda. It doesn't look like she's well enough to usher tonight, and Mary's still on vacation, so it looks like it's just the two of you tonight.

VELMA

Can you call in anyone else?

JOHN

I tried calling in some other ushers, but everyone had plans this weekend.

VELMA

Oh, I see...

JOHN

Yeah. So, Ellen, I'm gonna have you do tickets, and Velma, can you do inside?

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Sure.

JOHN

Great. I'll get whoever's at the box office to do concessions as well. So we should be good for tonight.

VELMA

Alright.

JOHN

Great. So... time for the usher speil! All together now,

JOHN/VELMA

Hello, and welcome to the Rhinestone Community Theatre...

Both VELMA and JOHN notice that ELLEN didn't join in. They look at each other, then JOHN proceeds.

JOHN

Alright, so here's the deal for tonight...

2

Interlude 7

2

ELLEN and VELMA doing their respective ushering jobs.

They wear million dollar smiles while doing their tasks.

ELLEN

Hello, welcome, may I see your ticket?

ELLEN looks at the ticket, then tears it.

You're in the right place at the right time. Enjoy the play.

Welcome, hello, may I see your ticket?

ELLEN looks at the ticket.

I see, you're in the right place, at the perfect time.

ELLEN tears the ticket.

Enjoy the play.

We go to VELMA.

VELMA

Hello, welcome. May I see your ticket?

VELMA looks at a ticket.

Alright, you're going to be three rows from the back, the third and fourth seat in. Enjoy the play.

(CONTINUED)

Hello, welcome. May I see your ticket?

VELMA looks at a ticket.
 Alright, you're going to be the fourth row from the front,
 first two seats on the aisle. Enjoy the show. It's
 wonderful!

Hello, welcome. May I see your ticket?

3

Scene 10

3

After the performance. All the
 audience has gone home, and the
 theater has been cleaned up.

ELLEN stands by the door, looking
 at her cell phone. Which is a flip
 phone.

VELMA enters from the theatre. She
 sees ELLEN with her cell phone.

VELMA

When are you ushering next?

ELLEN

I am ushering every night this week, according to my
 calendar.

VELMA

You're very dedicated.

ELLEN

I am.

Pause.

You know, I've ushered more shows here than anyone else
 currently ushering right now.

VELMA

Really?

ELLEN

Mhm. I've been ushering here since before John got here.
 Fifteen years.

VELMA

That's a long time.

ELLEN

Yeah, well... It's something to do.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA
Yes...

Pause.

ELLEN
Who do you think is going to be Usher of the Year?

VELMA
Oh, I don't know...

ELLEN
Oh, come on. Who's your guess?

VELMA
I'd rather not get involved in that.

ELLEN
If you ask me, I think Rhoda might have a shot at win-

VELMA
Ellen. I said I didn't want to speculate. Please.

ELLEN
Sorry...

Pause.

You know, in all the fifteen years I've never been Usher of the Year.

VELMA
Really.

ELLEN
Mmhm. It's always gone to someone else. Someone generally happier, and smilier.

VELMA
You sound jealous.

ELLEN
Oh I am. I'm not even going to try to deny it. I know no one *just* waltzes in and becomes Usher of the Year. It took Mary five years before she earned the title. But after fifteen years, with each passing year, I think more and more, "Haven't I earned it yet?"

VELMA
Yes... Fifteen years must be hard.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

It's a pretty big deal, Usher of the Year. You get a plaque, and your picture on the wall of the theatre for all posterity.

VELMA

I see.

ELLEN

They get so excited to share it with their friends and family...

VELMA

Well of course. It must be a relief to them that their loved one has found such happiness down here.

ELLEN

No one would be relieved for me.

VELMA

You mean you don't have anyone?

ELLEN

Nope. Never married, never had children.

VELMA

Oh. I didn't know that. I'm sorry.

ELLEN

I don't tell many people. Because when I do, they apologize. Like you just did. It's nothing to be sorry for. It's just the way that things turned out.

VELMA

They didn't have to turn out that way.

ELLEN

But they did. Whether they had to or not doesn't matter. I don't want pity. I had a good life, thank you very much. Grew up in a nice home, worked in an office for fifty years, retired to Florida on a pension... Yes. A good life. Not a perfect life. Far from it. Never getting promoted in my job because I was a woman. Watching my friends get married while they and their families constantly asked me when I was getting hitched. Holding my friend's children while I knew I could never have one of my own.

VELMA

It must be hard. Not being able to have children.

ELLEN

Oh, I could've had them. It wasn't a matter of that. But when you don't like men, it's somewhat difficult to conceive.

(CONTINUED)

Oh. You mean-
VELMA

Yes. I am a lesbian.
ELLEN

I didn't know that.
VELMA

Again. Not something I tell many people.
ELLEN

Well... my grandson is gay. So I don't have a problem
with... that.
VELMA

If he is, hopefully he'll be less lonely than I. I've dated
a few women in my time. But they always left me for nicer,
more smiley women.
ELLEN

I'm sorry...
VELMA

What's there to be sorry about? I had a good life. That's
what I tell myself: "Ellen, you had a good life, you served
your purpose, and you won't die having wasted yourself."
ELLEN

ELLEN stands up.

I should go back home. Hopefully the traffic won't be too
bad.
ELLEN

It's almost eleven. Are you sure you'll be alright?
VELMA

I may be 74, but I still have eyesight like a dragonfly.
ELLEN

What are you doing tomorrow?
VELMA

Ushering the matinee. Why?
ELLEN

Maybe you would like to get lunch beforehand, or...
VELMA

It'll be my treat.
ELLEN considers. Long pause.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

That... I wouldn't want to make you spend your money.

VELMA

Oh, I wouldn't mind. It'll just be the two of us. You can pick the place.

ELLEN

I don't...

A moment. Then:

I don't know if it would be pleasant.

VELMA

What? Why wouldn't it be pleasant?

ELLEN

Oh, I don't know, just... I already had lunch ready for tomorrow, and...

VELMA

Well if not tomorrow, then another time.

ELLEN

You don't think it's ridiculous?

VELMA

How is it ridiculous?

ELLEN

Meeting new friends, at our age, when any second we could-

VELMA

When any second we could meet someone who could make the rest of our days better, however many there are. What are you afraid of, Ellen?

ELLEN

...I don't know. That's what I'm afraid of. That I don't know.

VELMA

You said you had a good life. Don't you want the rest of your life to be good?

ELLEN

Well...

VELMA

This And it doesn't have to go beyond lunch tomorrow. But just this once, perhaps you'd like to be with a fellow human- a fellow woman. Because this might be your last chance to. What did she sing in the show tonight, "before the parade passes by, la da da da da dadada da da..."

(CONTINUED)

VELMA "marches". ELLEN smiles.
VELMA stops.

Well tell you what. I'll give you my number, and-

ELLEN

Yes. I would like that very much.

VELMA

Excellent. Here, let me give it to you...

ELLEN

I meant lunch tomorrow. But yes, I really should take your number. I'll give you mine. Here...

The two of them exchange numbers.

VELMA

Well then. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

ELLEN

Yes... me too.

VELMA

Want me to walk you to your car?

ELLEN

...sure.

The two women leave the lobby together.

4

Scene 11

4

One month later. April. JOHN and MARY in the lobby.

JOHN

I don't want you to think I'm biased, because-

MARY

It's somewhat hard to not think that.

JOHN

But I really think she's earned it this year.

MARY

I'm not saying she's not an excellent usher-

JOHN

Aside from you, I'd say she's the best we have.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

I'm not sure I disagree with you, but I'm not sure I agree either. I think Rhoda has really earned it. She's been volunteering here for so long, and I just know it would make her so happy.

JOHN

Unfortunately, I can't just award Usher of the Year to whoever will be made the happiest by it. They have to have proven that they care about their job.

MARY

Well keep in mind- and I'm not saying this to be mean- but a lot of them think of this as more than a job.

JOHN

I understand, Mary. But that's neither here nor there. I know, we don't usually award first-year ushers the award, but Velma has been so pleasant, and so kind to the patrons...

MARY

I know. But knowing the ushers, they will talk. And they would probably treat Velma very differently too.

JOHN

Well that's just something they'll have to deal with.

MARY

Frankly, I do feel there are other people to consider that deserve it more.

JOHN

Well, Ellen's out of the race, I can tell you that right now.

MARY

Really? She's been much more pleasant the last month, ever since she and Velma started going out together. And she's just as good an usher as ever.

JOHN

But you don't think she could be pleasant because she wants to get the award?

MARY

Well, I don't know *that*, but...

JOHN

And who's to say she won't go back to her usual self after she gets the award?

(CONTINUED)

MARY

Maybe she won't. You need to give her more of a chance.

Pause.

Personally, I would still nominate Rhoda. I know, she can be a bit pushy, and can overstep boundaries at times, but that doesn't take away from how helpful she is. The patrons love her. Every time I'm doing programs, I'm asked "Where's Rhoda?" She's well-loved and respected by the patrons and the ushers, she goes out of her way to help them, and she is one of the only ushers I can truly say greets every patron like she's their best friend.

JOHN

There was that one seating incident back in December, though. She was very defensive, and insubordinate. And no, that hasn't happened since. But I still don't feel comfortable with Rhoda being Usher of the Year. Present company excluded, I just don't think there's another usher who's as... dynamic as Velma.

MARY chuckles.

MARY

Dynamic? John, an usher just seats patrons, tears tickets, sells concessions, and reports to you if there's a problem. I'm not sure how dynamic that can be.

JOHN

Well... Maybe dynamic's not the right word. Versatility, perhaps.

MARY

Don't get me wrong, I love this theatre and volunteering here. But even as someone who was Usher of the Year, I think it's silly that one volunteer should be valued above the rest.

JOHN

But if I don't nominate one, they're all going to feel unvalued. That would be saying, "Thanks for your time, but none of you were good enough to warrant this honor, see you next season." Plus, it gives them a volunteer to model after. Which, as I recall, you had no problem accepting.

Long pause. MARY is silent.

MARY

Well. I said what I thought. You can take it or leave it.

MARY gets up and picks up her purse.

I have to be at the aquarium in twenty minutes. Hope the traffic isn't too bad.

(CONTINUED)

MARY goes to the door, then turns around.

John.

JOHN

Yes?

MARY

Just... think about who you're awarding, and who you're not awarding.

MARY exits.

JOHN sits, alone, thinking, pondering...

5

Scene 12

5

Two weeks later. MARY and RHODA stuff programs silently.

After a few moments, ELLEN and VELMA enter through the entrance, laughing. MARY smiles at them.

MARY

Hello, you two.

VELMA

Hello, Mary. Rhoda.

RHODA

Hello!

MARY

What's making you two laugh so much?

ELLEN

I was just telling her about the time Reba- you remember Reba?

MARY

Yes, I do.

ELLEN

The time Reba told one patron that another patron was a bitch, and it turned out to be the artistic director of the Rhinestone!

MARY

Yes! I do remember that.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Needless to say, she never ushered since, which is a real shame, because she was *fun*.

VELMA

I'm sure I would've loved her.

MARY

She certainly spoke her mind.

RHODA

Always a joy to work with.

VELMA

Where is she now?

ELLEN

She died last summer.

VELMA

Oh, that's a shame.

ELLEN

Yes it is. The world lost one of the great comedians it never knew. Ah, well.

VELMA and ELLEN begin stuffing programs.

MARY

So did you two drive here together?

VELMA

Yep.

ELLEN

The traffic wasn't bad at all today.

MARY

Good, good. Have either of you seen this show yet?

VELMA

No, is it any good?

MARY

I don't know yet. I haven't seen it.

RHODA

My friend saw it the other night and said it was OK.

ELLEN

Any idea how long it is?

(CONTINUED)

MARY

John just told me it's an hour forty with no intermission.

ELLEN

Oh. Alright, that sounds good.

MARY laughs.

MARY

Good? I thought you hated those plays.

ELLEN

Well, maybe I've spent too much time thinking about how they don't have intermissions that I forget to focus on the play itself. Which really isn't fair to the play.

MARY

Who are you, and what have you done with Ellen?

The women chuckle.

JOHN enters.

JOHN

How're we doing over here, ladies?

MARY

Very good. Thelma and Louise over here just arrived.

JOHN

Oh no! Don't kill me!

VELMA and ELLEN roll their eyes.

RHODA and MARY laugh.

Well, it's almost time for the spiel...

ELLEN raises her hand.

ELLEN

I can do concessions.

JOHN is slightly taken aback.

JOHN

O...K. OK. That's good to know, Ellen. I'll keep that in mind when I assign tasks.

ELLEN

I always like to help.

JOHN

Alright. Well, let me know if you ladies need anything.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN exits. Stuffing.

ELLEN

(To VELMA)

I don't presume John has told you anything about Usher of the Year?

VELMA

Not a word. As it should be, really.

ELLEN

Oh... It's so nerve-wracking not to know who's even being considered.

MARY

You'll find out soon enough.

I promise.

6

Interlude 8

6

ELLEN at concessions.

ELLEN

Hello, would you like any snacks or drinks? We have soda, water, wine (red and white), chips, pretzels, anything?

MARY at tickets.

MARY

Hello, may I see your ticket?

MARY looks at the ticket.

Excellent, you're all set! You're going to go right into the theatre and enjoy a marvelous show. Enjoy!

ELLEN at concessions.

ELLEN

Well, what do you know, I think you've made the right choice.

ELLEN holds up a bag of pretzels.

These are my favorite kinds of pretzels. I eat no other kinds. Would you like anything else?

OK, that'll be two dollars for the pretzels.

VELMA waiting to direct patrons to their seats. JOHN enters and kisses her.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

John! There are people here!

JOHN

Not that many. And no one important.

VELMA

Still!

JOHN exits. VELMA looks after him, at first in shock, then she laughs it off.

ELLEN at concessions.

ELLEN

Would you like red or white?

Good choice. I never drink any red except this one. Would you like anything else?

Alright, that'll be five dollars for the wine.

I know, it's a little crazy, but I promise it's worth it. And you can bring it into the house, just be careful with it. Here's a napkin.

Thank you! Enjoy the show!

JOHN approaches ELLEN.

JOHN

How're we doing over here?

ELLEN

Very well. I don't know why I don't do concessions more. It's fun.

JOHN

Yeah? Well thank you for volunteering for this job. I know it's not tickets, but-

ELLEN

Oh, John. I'll do anything you need me to.

JOHN

Great. Thank you. Alright, let me know if you need anything.

ELLEN

I can't wait to find out who's Usher of the Year.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Yeah...

ELLEN

Not that I'm putting myself on there for the honor, and it would be a HUGE honor, but I think whoever gets it will absolutely deserve it.

JOHN

Yeah well... Just a few more weeks til we find out.

ELLEN

Looking forward!

JOHN

Right. Carry on, then.

JOHN walks away. ELLEN smiles after him, and for a moment, herself.

Another patron has walked up to concessions.

ELLEN

Hello, would you like a snack or drink for the show?

RHODA is doing tickets.

RHODA

You are in the right place, at the right time! Enjoy the show! I heard it's wonderful!

JOHN approaches her.

JOHN

All good here, Rhoda?

RHODA

Yep. Not one wrong ticket so far!

JOHN

Excellent.

RHODA

And I'm staying right where I am. I was assigned to do tickets, now I'm doing tickets! And nothing else!

JOHN

Great. Glad to hear it. I'll follow up with you soon.

RHODA

Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN exits. RHODA looks at another ticket.

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone Community Theatre. You are... Oh dear. I believe these are for tomorrow.

7

Scene 13

7

The lobby. JOHN enters in a different shirt and tie than before.

Today is the day when they announce the Usher of the Year.

The concession table is set with a small stack of paper plates, a stack of plastic cups, a cheese platter, a sandwich platter, water bottles, and a few bottles of red and white wine.

JOHN sets up a few tables and chairs around the room.

As he's doing so, ELLEN enters. For this one scene, the ushers aren't dressed in their normal black and white attire. They are dressed in every day clothes.

ELLEN

Hello, John.

JOHN

Hello, Ellen.

ELLEN

Another year, another luncheon...

JOHN

Yep.

JOHN continues setting up.

ELLEN

Anything I can help with?

JOHN

Nope. Feel free to have something to eat or drink.

ELLEN

Don't mind if I do.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN walks to the table and takes a paper plate. She puts a sandwich and some cheese on it. She also takes some white wine.

She walks to one of the tables and sits at it.

ELLEN

Are you staying down here for the summer?

JOHN

That's the plan.

ELLEN

You got anything else going on, or...?

JOHN

I volunteer at the summer theatre down in Venice.

ELLEN

I never got the point of that. Summer theatre in Florida. Barely anyone's here!

JOHN

There are a brave few who remain.

ELLEN

Yes, definitely... Velma and I were talking. I might stay with her up in New Jersey for the summer.

JOHN

Nice.

ELLEN

You should come join us.

JOHN

I'll visit, for sure.

ELLEN

Hm...

ELLEN takes a sip of her wine.

I've never been to New Jersey. I keep hearing it's awful, but Velma says it's beautiful.

JOHN

She's shown me pictures. It's very nice.

VELMA enters.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Well speak of the Devil!

VELMA

Oh no, what were you saying about me?

JOHN

Nothing bad, I promise.

ELLEN

No, we were gossiping about you behind your back.

VELMA

Ah, well. There goes my reputation.

VELMA chuckles.

VELMA

You need any help?

JOHN

Uh, yeah, actually. Could you help me get the sign up?

VELMA

Sure... What's the sign, exactly?

JOHN

It's just a little banner that says "thank you".

VELMA

Oh, sure.

JOHN

Great.

JOHN exits momentarily. VELMA looks at the food available on the table. JOHN returns with the "Thank You" sign.

ELLEN watches the following.

JOHN

Yeah, so just take this end...

VELMA takes the opposite end of the sign.

Then lift it...

VELMA lifts her end of the sign. JOHN lifts his, and he pins his end to the wall.

Just keep it up, and...

(CONTINUED)

JOHN pins VELMA's end to the wall.
Alright. Great, thank you.

VELMA
No problem.

ELLEN
I thought you said you didn't need any help.

ELLEN chuckles. A slight moment of awkwardness between VELMA and JOHN.

JOHN
Alright, now that we're all set up, we'll just wait for Mary and Rhoda to get here, then we can have some lunch.

VELMA
No one else is coming?

JOHN
Only those who were invited are coming.

ELLEN
That's the four of us?

JOHN
Yep. You four put in the most hours of work here, so...

ELLEN
Well. That's impressive. I wonder who put in the most...

MARY enters.

JOHN
Here she is!

MARY
Hello, everyone!

MARY goes to VELMA and ELLEN and gives them hugs.

MARY
How are you two?

VELMA
I'm well.

ELLEN
Same here.

VELMA
Yourself?

MARY
Oh, I'm just fine, thank you. Let's see what we have here...

MARY goes to the table spread.
RHODA enters.

RHODA
Hello, everyone! I made it!

JOHN
Alright! Now we can get this party started!

MARY
Oh, this all looks absolutely wonderful.

MARY puts some food on her plate.
VELMA gets up and does the same, as
does JOHN. ELLEN waits for them to
get their food and sit back down.

RHODA examines the food on the
table, and grabs a bunch of
sandwiches and cheese squares.

RHODA, MARY, and VELMA should feel
free to improvise some dialogue as
they get their food. When they've
filled their plates, they sit down.

They eat for a little while.

JOHN and MARY look at one another.

Then, JOHN stands up.

JOHN
Well, first I'd like to thank you all ladies for joining me
today, and congratulate you on another season well done.

The ladies thank him.

ELLEN
It's not over yet!

JOHN
No, we only have one more month of shows before our season
officially closes. But that does not mean you ladies can
slack off.

(CONTINUED)

The ladies say "Oh, we won't slack off," "What makes you think that?" etc. Light, jokingly.

As you all probably know, this is the not only the luncheon we hold every year to show our appreciation for you, but to also give out the Usher of the Year Award. This award goes not only to the usher with the highest amount of hours worked here, but also one who has shown dedication, efficiency, and has left a positive impact on the Rhinestone Community Theatre and all its patrons.

However, before I announce the Usher of the Year, I should also take this time to acknowledge every lady who came today. We'll start with Mary.

Mary, you were our Usher of the Year last year, and you have continued to be a mentor to new ushers and a favorite to our patrons because of your bright, gleaming smile. Thank you for being here.

MARY

Thank you.

The ladies applaud.

JOHN

Rhoda, you have also shown boundless dedication to your job, and we thoroughly enjoy having you as a part of the Rhinestone family.

The ladies applaud.

RHODA

Thank you.

JOHN

Ellen. I must say, you have made a great improvement this year. You've not only gotten better at being on time, but have improved an already stellar set of skills, and have expanded them stupendously in other departments. So thank you.

ELLEN

Thank you!

JOHN

And last but not least. Velma.

I hope I'm not showing any bias when I say the following.

Everyone laughs.

But you are our newest usher this year, and have already climbed the ranks to be one of our best. You have shown

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHN (cont'd)

great adaptability and willingness to work in whatever job we put you in, and we're so glad to have you as part of the Rhinestone Community Theatre Family of Ushers.

Applause, some "awww's".

And now that I've acknowledged everyone. It is now time to announce the usher of the year for this season.

ELLEN and RHODA tense up in excitement.

Our Usher of the Year Award goes to, drum roll please...

The ushers do drum rolls on the tables.

Ms. Velma Woodstock!

At first a shocked silence. Then, slow applause takes over the room. Everyone is doing their best to hide their shock/disappointment.

Velma will be getting a special plaque, and her photo on the wall of the theatre with past ushers of the year. And as a special bonus, you will also be getting a gift card to Outback, so I hope you like steak, Velma!

JOHN hands VELMA the plaque, and chuckles at his lame attempt to lighten up the mood of the room.

ELLEN clutches her heart, and gets up.

ELLEN

I'm sorry, I...

ELLEN leaves to use the bathroom. The rest of them eat in silence. RHODA stands up and starts to exit.

RHODA

I'm very sorry. I just remembered I have a... doctor's appointment.

JOHN

Rhoda?

RHODA

I'm fine, John. I'll be back to usher tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

MARY
Rhoda-

RHODA
Shut up, Mary! Shut up!

RHODA storms out of the lobby.

ELLEN enters from the bathroom. She picks up her purse.

ELLEN
I just have a few things I'd like to say.

JOHN
Now's not the time, Ellen.

ELLEN
No, now's the perfect time- where'd Rhoda go?

JOHN
She said she had a doctor's appointment.

ELLEN
Well she's obviously lying. You all know why she really left, you just don't want to admit it.

JOHN
I have no idea what-

ELLEN
Oh, come off of it, John. You know why she left. And why I'm leaving. Because the Usher of the Year, which is supposed to go to the most deserving usher, went to the least deserved candidate.

VELMA
Hey!

JOHN
Ellen, if you can't be positive and happy for Velma, then I must ask you to please-

ELLEN
No! I have been a dedicated usher to this theatre for fifteen years. For fifteen years I came here to tear tickets and seat a bunch of stupid patrons for no pay, aside from mediocre *community theatre* performance that even the worst *dinner theatre* would be embarrassed to put on. For fifteen years I learned every position of this theatre like the back of my hand. And so does Rhoda. Rhoda has been ushering here for just as long, if not longer, than I have, and the fact that both of us can just be pushed aside for some new girl whom you have a horny teenage-boy crush on, is appalling.

(CONTINUED)

VELMA

Ellen, please-

ELLEN

Shut up, Velma! You're the one who just waltzed in here and decided to *steal* Usher of the Year from people who've actually been working hard here! You knew about this, I know you did.

VELMA

No, I-

ELLEN

Maybe that's why you decided to befriend poor, sad, cranky old Ellen. To give her some sort of comfort when the Usher of the Year award wouldn't go to her. John told you you were going to be Usher of the Year during one of your dates or rendezvous or booty calls or something, and you decided, "I feel bad, why don't I be Ellen's friend?"

VELMA

If you think that's why I-

ELLEN

I don't need fake people like you in my life. And fake people like you sure as hell don't deserve that fucking plaque!

ELLEN lunges towards the plaque, which VELMA moves away from her. ELLEN clings on to a table, breathing heavily, clutching her heart.

ELLEN

I just can't... I can't... I...

ELLEN stalks out of the lobby.

JOHN, VELMA, and MARY continue eating.

MARY

(Coldly.)
Congratulations, Velma.

VELMA

Thank you.

VELMA glares at JOHN. He ignores her.

8

Interlude 9

8

RHODA handing out programs and seating patrons in the house.

RHODA

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone. May I see your ticket?

RHODA looks at the ticket.

OK, so you're going to be in the first row in the center. You got it? Good. We're so glad to have you here, it's a wonderful show, you're going to love it.

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone. My name is Rhoda. May I see your ticket?

OK, so you're going to be in the fifth row, two seats in. You're going to love it, it's a wonderful show, great singing, great dancing, great sets, it's very funny.

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone, may I see your ticket?

OK, so you're going to be in the back of the theatre, that seat right there, three seats in. You're all by yourself tonight?

JOHN enters and sees RHODA talking.

Oh, I see. Well it's never bad to have a date with yourself. Who else are you going to have dates with otherwise? Well, you're going to love this show. It's got great singing, dancing, and acting. And who knows? You just might meet the love of your life sitting next to you! Enjoy, enjoy!

Hello, and welcome to the...

JOHN

Rhoda, we have a huge line out there, could you speed it up a little?

RHODA

I'm just talking to these people-

JOHN

Well the show is going to start in five minutes, and half the audience hasn't been seated. So please, keep the pace.

RHODA

Alright, alright.

JOHN steps away from RHODA, but watches her on the periphery.

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone Community Theatre. May I see your-

(CONTINUED)

Oh, you know where you're going. OK. Do you want a program?
Here you go.

Oh! I'm so sorry, I forgot to give you one. Here you go.

And here, I am so sorry.

Hello, welcome to the Rhinestone Community Theatre. May I
see your tickets?

Alright, you're going to be in the second row, all the way
against the wall.

...well yes, that's what the ticket says. Would you like a
program?

...I understand. I understand, you have claustrophobia, but
let me get my house manager, he'll know what to do.

Here, here's your program.

Hello, and welcome to the Rhinestone-

Oh, hello sir-

Oh no! They're sitting in your seats? Well let's take a
look-see.

RHODA tries to leave her post.

JOHN

Rhoda!

RHODA

I'm just going to fix this-

JOHN

Let me fix it, Rhoda.

RHODA

I'm sure it was just a misunderstanding.

JOHN checks the tickets.

JOHN

Sir, I'm afraid these are actually for the wrong date. If
you could just follow me to the box office-

I understand, it's annoying, but it's the only thing I can
do right now.

...I believe we're sold out tonight, but let me see what the
box office can do.

(CONTINUED)

I understand, sir. I understand. But please, follow me.

JOHN leaves, looking at RHODA.

RHODA is beginning to break under the pressure.

RHODA

Hello, welcome to Rhinestone Community Theatre, let me-

Sir, I have to see your ticket. I can't just let you come in without-

Just let me help you, and you'll find your seat!

LET ME HELP YOU!!!

RHODA grabs the tickets and looks at them.

OK, so you're in row-

The tickets are snatched back from her.

We begin to hear complaints from patrons, gradually ciphering into the scene.

Sir, please, you can't just-

OK, enjoy the show.

Hello, welcome to Rhinestone Community Theatre. May I see your ticket? We're starting the show soon. OK, you're going to be in the seventh row. I'm sure you can find your seat.

Hello, welcome, let me see your tickets...

OK, that's the third row.

Next?

Hello, welcome, let me...

OK...

You're the fourth row.

Hello, welcome, tickets...

Eighth row. Take a program. Oh, I need to give them their...

Hello, tickets, welcome, let me see...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RHODA (cont'd)

OK, eighth row center... No! I'm sorry, the right. You're on the left, I MEAN the right! Programs, here.

Hello, may I see...

The complaints begin to increase in volume and intensity. RHODA tries to be heard above it all.

Hello, I need to see...

Yes, you're in this row- no, not that row, this row-

Programs, here you are. Enjoy.

Hello, may I see-

May I-

May...

There's too many people.

Please, I can't help this many...

I can't help this many...!

At this point, VELMA comes in to help her. The complaints suddenly stop.

VELMA

Hello, we're right about to get the show started, may I see your tickets?

Alright, they'll be in the fourth row, right in the aisle. Here's a program, and enjoy the show.

Hello, may I see your tickets? Great, so you're going to be right in this row here, on the aisle. Here's your program, enjoy the show.

RHODA begins to leave. VELMA continues.

Hello, may I see your tickets?

Great, you'll be right this way...

RHODA leaves the scene.

JOHN and RHODA. The performance is going on. Silence.

RHODA

I don't know what came over me. There were so many people, all at the same time, and... I've never had a load-in like that. Not in all the years I've ushered here.

JOHN

What do you think made this crowd different?

RHODA

...I don't know.

JOHN

Maybe the crowd was the same, but something's going on with you. Is everything OK at home, or...?

RHODA

I'm the only one at home. What could be wrong?

Pause.

JOHN

Rhoda... I know this is probably not the case, but is this about the Usher of the Year thing?

RHODA

I plead the fifth.

JOHN

Because... Well, just because you don't get Usher of the Year doesn't mean you have the right to slack off.

RHODA

I wasn't slacking off.

JOHN

But there was a line. You could've picked up the pace a bit.

RHODA

I'm sorry. I just got caught up talking to them...

JOHN

I understand, Rhoda. But... Do you think it would help if we... If we cut your time here? At the theatre? You're here every week, and I don't know if it's starting to become a bit too much for you.

RHODA holds her head down. Pause.

If you want to take the rest of the season off, recuperate,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHN (cont'd)

maybe come back on a limited basis next season, it's definitely not a crime.

RHODA

That's what you want me to do. Isn't it.

JOHN

...It's been a busy season for all of us. Just let me know, and I'll-

RHODA

No. I agree. I'm not feeling the love from the Rhinestone anymore. When I first got here, everyone was friendly, everyone was kind, they were here because they wanted to be. But then we introduced this Usher of the Year Award, and...

JOHN

It's just an award. Nothing to get excited about.

RHODA

Nothing to get...? I care just care too much about my work for it to be unnoticed.

JOHN

I'm sorry you feel that way.

RHODA

I think it's best I should go. I shouldn't even stay for the cleanup.

JOHN

We only have Velma tonight. Ellen was supposed to usher, but she didn't even answer her phone.

RHODA

I'm not feeling well...

Long pause. What JOHN said has hurt more than he intended.

JOHN

Well. Do what you gotta do, I guess.

JOHN gets up and exits into the auditorium. RHODA stands up, and slowly moves to the door. She looks back at the lobby. She heard the audience laughing hysterically in the theatre. We should get the sense that the real party is happening in there, and RHODA is left out here, alone in the

(CONTINUED)

isolation of a lobby that she once walked into with pride and joy.

She turns around, and goes to leave the lobby.

Suddenly, VELMA comes out of the auditorium.

VELMA

Rhoda-

RHODA

Please. Leave me alone.

VELMA

I just saw you needed help, and-

RHODA

You don't need to say anything else. I don't want to hear it anymore.

RHODA takes her ring off her finger and gives it to Velma.

VELMA

Rhoda, no-

RHODA

Just take it. I'm sure you'll need it more than I ever will...

VELMA

You're not gonna stay for cleanup?

RHODA

You're the Usher of the Year. Do it yourself.

RHODA leaves the lobby. VELMA looks after her, then goes back into the auditorium.

The stage is empty and silent for a moment.

Suddenly, we hear a THUMP from outside and RHODA screams.

RHODA

SOMEONE... HELP... I THINK I BROKE MY... HELP! Someone, please! Help me... Help me... Help... me...

JOHN

Hm... Let's give them five more minutes. Traffic's supposed to be really bad today.

MARY chuckles.

MARY

I'm sorry, just... That was always her excuse...

JOHN

Yes...

The three of them look at each other, and, in spite of themselves, laugh at the irony of it all.

Eventually, they stop.

JOHN

Well. The slideshow is ready, whenever you are.

MARY

Would it be alright if I used the bathroom, John? I need to take my...

JOHN

Absolutely.

MARY exits into the bathroom, leaving JOHN and VELMA with each other.

Long silence between them.

JOHN

So, uh...

VELMA

Shame a lot of people aren't showing up.

JOHN

Yeah... I'm surprised her family isn't here yet.

VELMA

Ellen doesn't have any family.

JOHN

...no?

VELMA

You didn't know that?

JOHN

No. I don't usually listen to the conversations the ushers have among themselves...

VELMA

But she's been volunteering here for so long, she should have had to tell you sometime.

JOHN

Nope. She was all about coming in, ushering, and seeing the show.

Pause.

VELMA

Fifteen years, and she'd never won Usher of the Year.

JOHN

Yep.

VELMA

I mean, I understand she wasn't always the most pleasant person, but she put in so many hours here...

JOHN

Are you saying we should award her Usher of the Year now?

VELMA

You could do it posthumously, couldn't you? Ellen had almost nothing else going on in her life, John.

JOHN

And what am I supposed to do about that now? She's dead, Velma.

VELMA

I know, but...

Long pause. VELMA moves away from JOHN. JOHN approaches her...

JOHN

Hey. It's...

...but VELMA moves away.

VELMA

I don't know if I can usher here anymore.

JOHN

What?

VELMA

I don't know if I can, in good conscious, usher here anymore.

JOHN

You're one of our best ushers here.

VELMA

...I know. But after everything that's happened... I know I should be happy about being Usher of the Year. My family is very happy for me. But they're happier about it than I am. I told them about Ellen, and Rhoda, and they called them "sore losers". But they weren't just sore losers.

JOHN

Look. The season's almost over. Just give it another few weeks, then if you decide you don't want to come back next year, then...

VELMA

I also don't know if I can be with you anymore.

Long pause.

JOHN

We'll talk about it later. After this is all done.

Silence. Then:

VELMA

If I'm going to come back next year, I don't want there to be an "Usher of the Year" ceremony.

JOHN

Why not?

VELMA

Why should we reward one person when there are other people who deserve it just as much?

JOHN

It's not about who deserves it, Velma. It's about who and what the other ushers should look up to.

VELMA

And you're saying *I'm* an usher others should look up to? When there are so many other ushers who are just...

MARY enters from the bathroom.

MARY

I'm going to go in there.

(CONTINUED)

MARY exits into the auditorium.

A long moment. VELMA and JOHN look away from each other.

A knock on the door. VELMA goes to open it. It is RHODA, with a walker. She goes right past VELMA and JOHN and into the auditorium.

VELMA closes the door.

JOHN

I'm surprised she didn't sue us.

VELMA ignores him.

12

Interlude 11

12

VELMA speaking.

VELMA

Ellen was certainly a character, in every which way. The first time I met her, it was last year, when I started ushering here. She was late, blaming traffic. This was apparently a normal occurrence. I'm going to be honest, I feared she would be a bit hard to deal with at first. However, after months of working with her, I realized that she was very lonely, and needed a friend more than anything. That was when we started going out for lunch together, seeing movies and plays together, going to museums together... She became my best friend for a time.

Her heart may have stopped, but the heart she gave to being an usher is a lesson to us all in dedication. She was a machine. A machine of human dedication.

She wanted to become usher of the year more than anything. She ushered at this theatre for fifteen years, and never once got the award. I know I was awarded the honor. But for her hard work, dedication, and incredible talent for ushering, I would like to posthumously recognize Ellen Flintwater, from Michigan, as Usher of the Year.

Quiet applause from the audience.

13

Scene 16

13

MARY and VELMA sit at the table in the lobby, stuffing programs. The summer has past. We are now in September, one year after the events of the play began.

(CONTINUED)

Another season. MARY

Yes. VELMA

Pause. Stuffing.

You had a good summer? MARY

Yes. You? VELMA

Yes. MARY

Pause. Stuffing.

Are you ushering anywhere else this year? MARY

I was thinking of ushering at the Opera. I've never been to an opera once in my entire life. VELMA

I went there once. Opera's not my cup of tea, but they did a good job with the sets and costumes, so... MARY

Are you still at the aquarium? VELMA

Yes. And you? MARY

That's the plan. VELMA

Good. You'll love your second season down here. You'll get to know more of this town, and try new things. MARY

Yes. VELMA

Silence. Stuffing.

I'm so glad you've come back to usher here. MARY

VELMA

I don't think I'll be ushering as much this year. I'm only here because the season hasn't quite started yet, and John needed some extra help today, so...

MARY

Ah, I see. Are you two...

VELMA

No. Not anymore.

MARY

Oh. That's too bad.

VELMA

Yeah...

MARY

It's also too bad they decided not to do Usher of the Year this year. I always thought it was a nice honor, but, seeing what happened last year...

Silence. Stuffing.

VELMA

Have you seen Rhoda since you've been down here?

MARY

Yes. In fact, I visited her last week.

VELMA

How is she doing?

MARY

She's good. Sad she can't usher anymore, but she's started writing mystery novels.

VELMA

That's a switch!

MARY

Yes it is!

VELMA

I'll have to see her some time.

MARY

I don't know if she would like that.

VELMA

I see.

EILEEN, a new usher, enters. She is played by the same actress who played ELLEN.

Hello...
EILEEN

Hello!
MARY

I'm here to usher...
EILEEN

Yes, come sit here! We were just getting started on programs.
MARY

Oh... What are we putting in them?
EILEEN

MARY demonstrates.

I'll show you. We are putting inserts- one orange, one purple, and one blue- into these playbills behind the first page.
MARY

OK...
EILEEN

The playbill itself will then go into a shell, which is this right here.
MARY

OK.
EILEEN

And once those are done, you can put them in the pile right here.
MARY

Do the inserts need to go in some sort of order, or...?
EILEEN

Nope. Any order you'd like, as long as they're in there.
MARY

OK. So, just so I'm clear, it's the three inserts in the playbill-
EILEEN

MARY

Yes. Behind the first page.

EILEEN

Then the playbill goes into the shell.

MARY

Yes. Again, behind the first page.

VELMA

Once you get the hang of it, it's easy.

EILEEN

Let me try one...

EILEEN tries one. She gets it.

MARY

And just keep doing that.

EILEEN

OK... I'm Eileen.

MARY

Hello, Eileen. I'm Mary.

VELMA

Velma.

EILEEN

Nice to meet you two.

Pause.

VELMA

So. Where are you from, Eileen?

EILEEN

I'm from Idaho. My husband and I are snowbirds. This is our first season down here.

MARY

Oh! Welcome. You've picked a great theatre to usher at.

EILEEN

That's good to know.

JOHN enters.

JOHN

Afternoon, ladies.

(CONTINUED)

John.

VELMA

JOHN stops and sees EILEEN.

JOHN

Hi, Eileen, right?

EILEEN

Yes. That's me.

JOHN

I'm John. Great to meet you.

EILEEN

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

JOHN

We're glad to have you here too. Velma and Mary here will be able to show you the ropes, too.

EILEEN

They've already showed me how to stuff a program.

JOHN

Excellent! Sounds like you all have things under control.

MARY

We do our best.

JOHN

I'm just going to check the temperature in the auditorium, then I'll be back to give you the usher spiel.

EILEEN

The usher spiel?

JOHN

Oh yes, the usher spiel. Just ask these two. They memorized it!

MARY

We couldn't help it! Listening to him do it again and again...

JOHN

Yes, well...

JOHN looks down at VELMA, who continues stuffing programs.

JOHN exits into the auditorium.
MARY, VELMA and EILEEN continue stuffing.

(CONTINUED)

EILEEN

So how long have you been ushering here?

VELMA

This is my second year.

EILEEN

Oh, so you're relatively new too.

VELMA

Yes.

EILEEN

I see... I tried getting my husband to usher, but he can't stand the theatre.

MARY

Same with my husband.

EILEEN

This is the farthest my husband and I have ever been away from home. Of course we've visited many times, we just fell in love with the area...

VELMA

It's a wonderful area.

EILEEN

Glad to know. What other places are there to volunteer at?

MARY

Well Velma and I also volunteer at the aquarium. And there's also the Opera house, and other theatres in the area...

EILEEN

We've been to some of the theatres. They do great productions here. It's just like Broadway with palm trees!

EILEEN chuckles.

MARY

Yes! That's a great way to describe it.

EILEEN

And the prices. So much more reasonable than they are in New York! But now that I'm ushering, I can see shows for free!

MARY

There you go!

VELMA

Just...

Pause.

EILEEN

Just what?

VELMA

Just don't get... *too* caught up in it.

EILEEN

Oh... OK.

Silence. Stuffing.

Lights out.

END OF PLAY