

# THE CASE OF THE SHOW-STOPPING NUN NABBER

*by Kimberlee Mendoza*



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# The Case of the Show-Stopping Nun Nabber

A two-act mystery dinner theatre

by Kimberlee Mendoza

***CAST OF CHARACTERS***

- JAMES MADDEN III.** . . . . A handsome, likeable actor (M, 30s)
- COLETTE CORDELL.** . . A cranky, prima donna actress (F, 20s)
- RICHARD DOOLEY.** . . . . . A wise, veteran thespian (M, 60s)
- DEDRA ROLEY** . . . . . An elegant, veteran actress (F, 50s)
- SYLVIA BROWN.** . . . . . A down-to-earth actress (F, 20s)
- TYE BURTON** . . . . . A high-strung director (M, 40s)
- KELLY WILLIAMS** . . . . . A shy backstage manager (F, 20s)
- DETECTIVE CHRIS SMITH.** . An off-duty detective (M/F, 30s)

*(For full descriptions, please see Character Profiles on page ii.)*

***SUPPORT PERSONNEL***

**KITCHEN HELPERS:** To organize and help plan and cook the meal.

**WAITERS:** To serve the meal. For added fun, have them dress alike (e.g. white shirts, black pants).

**HOST/HOSTESS:** To greet guests. (Suggestion: Have one or all of the actors participate in this capacity.)

**PASTOR:** To pray for the meal and at the conclusion of the evening.

## *CHARACTER PROFILES*

**JAMES MADDEN III:** He studied theatre in Los Angeles and then moved to New York when he was twenty-five. He started out as a ticket salesman at the Regency Theatre and worked his way up to being an actor. He is a great performer and well liked by most people. He doesn't do well with big egos and prima donna-type attitudes. After all, he used to be a "little person" himself.

**COLETTE CORDELL:** Just a girl from New Jersey, she was thought to be a childhood prodigy and spent over ten years in fine arts schools. She's been told her whole life that she is the next big thing and certainly believes that. Unfortunately, she isn't happy with the road to success and simply wants fame handed to her on a silver platter.

**RICHARD DOOLEY:** One of New York's finest and well-respected veteran actors. He's been performing on and off Broadway for almost forty years. He never settled down but secretly has a place in his heart for actress Dedra Roley.

**SYLVIA BROWN:** She is quiet and down-to-earth. She is just acting to pay the bills. She enjoys the arts, but her heart belongs to medical school.

**DEDRA ROLEY:** Anybody who has spent time on Broadway knows her name. She has played almost every heroine role there is worth playing. Unfortunately, age has taken its toll and the roles aren't as glamorous as they used to be. She finds solace in her longtime friendship with Richard Dooley.

**TYE BURTON:** Famous for directing flops, he has one last chance to make an impression before being banned from the theatre world forever. He is recently divorced and a bit bitter about the fact that he is forced to use his ex-wife's autobiographical script.

**KELLY WILLIAMS:** She has worked at the Cortège Theatre for two summers now. Her only aspiration is to someday direct her own play. She loves the theatre but hates the stage.

**DETECTIVE SMITH:** He (or she) works full-time as a police detective. Though he (she) is tired from just getting off work, he (she) would do anything to help his (her) friend James out.

## *PRODUCTION NOTES*

### **SUMMARY**

It is opening night of the 1940s play *On with Broadway*. The script is a stinker, and the director is very nervous. The actors all have their own opinions about the show, but all agree on one thing: “The show must go on.” Shortly after the first act, actors begin to go missing. Why? How? And most importantly, who’s responsible? *Will* the show be able to go on if the mystery is not solved?

### **SETTING**

Present day in the green room at the Cortege Theatre. The rundown theatre walls are painted green and framed with varnished wood. There are two doors: one Upstage Left marked “Exit” and another on Stage Right covered by a curtain with a sign that reads “Stage Entrance.” In the middle of the stage are a couch, an overstuffed chair, and a coffee table. A small table with a lighted mirror and chair or stool is at Stage Left. A small shelf with a coffee maker, ice water, and cups is against the back wall. Next to the “Exit” door is a light switch with a fishing wire tied to it.

### **PROP LIST**

- Water pitcher, coffee pot, and cups (On the shelf)
- A brush and makeup (On the makeup table)
- Eye mask (With Colette or on the coffee table)
- Clipboard (Brought on by Kelly)
- Safety Pin (On the makeup table)
- Bible (On the coffee table)
- Script (Brought on by Tye)
- A purse (Next to the shelf)
- Business Card (In Smith’s suit)
- Pen (In Smith’s suit)

## *COSTUMES*

**JAMES I. MADDEN III\***: A tux, top hat, and dress shoes, and a robe.

**COLETTE CORDELL\***: A form-fitting, sparkly dress fit for a 1940s starlet, high heels, and a mink coat.

**RICHARD DOOLEY\***: A tweed jacket, khaki pants, a dress shirt, loafers, and a smoker's jacket and robe to change into.

**DEDRA ROLEY\***: A loose-fitting, worn black dress, Mary Jane-type shoes, and a white apron.

**SYLVIA BROWN\***: A nun habit, a dress that fits underneath, and plain black shoes.

**TYE BURTON**: A dress shirt, black dress pants, black shoes, a scarf around his neck, and an old wrist watch.

**KELLY WILLIAMS**: Black T-shirt, black pants, black baseball hat. and black tennis shoes.

**DETECTIVE CHRIS SMITH**: A suit and dress shoes.

\* Though the play takes place in the present day, the "actors" are starring in a play set in the 1940s. Those characters marked with an asterisk should wear costumes that reflect that period.

## ***THE EVENING***

The characters or a wait staff serve the audience their salads and appetizers as the guests arrive. The main course should be served before ACT I begins, probably by a wait staff. The dessert may be served during the intermission by the remaining cast members or by a wait staff. (Note: If the cast members are serving, they may have to answer questions regarding the mystery.)

During the intermission, Detective Smith should mingle among the audience members. He pretends to collect clues while really planting more clues (see Appendix A).

## ***SCHEDULE OF EVENTS***

- Guests arrive
- Cast mingles among audience
- Appetizers, beverages, and salad served
- Cast returns backstage
- Main entre served
- ACT I (As soon as all guests have entres)
- Intermission
- Detective Smith mingles among audience
- Coffee and dessert served during intermission
- ACT II
- Guests depart

### **PLAY RUN TIME**

Script: Approximately 35 minutes.

Play and full meal: Approximately 1-1/2 hours.

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**ACT I**  
**SCENE ONE**

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*(The appetizers and salads have been served, and the waiters distribute the entres. Begin this scene shortly after all the guests have received their entres. Scene opens with COLETTE lying on the couch with a mask over her eyes. JAMES enters through the outside door, warming his vocal chords.)*

**JAMES:** *(Overemphasizing facial movements)* **Me mo me mo me.**

*(Flicking his tongue.)* **La lo la lo la lo. Picky people pick Peter Pan...**

**COLETTE:** *(Cutting him off, irritated)* **Will you snap it?!**

**JAMES:** **No, I will most certainly not snap it. I have a show to do.**

**COLETTE:** **Yes, don't we all? But as you can see, I'm trying to get my beauty rest.**

**JAMES:** **Why? It won't help.** *(She snaps off the mask and glares at him. He just smiles.)*

**COLETTE:** **How dare you talk to me that way! I'll have you know that I happen to be the most sought-after actress in all of New Jersey.**

**JAMES:** **Yes, my dear, but we're in New York.** *(RICHARD enters from the "Stage Entrance" as JAMES says, "New York." He tosses his jacket onto the couch, and it hits COLETTE in the face. Unaware, he walks to the dressing table and puts on his robe.)*

**COLETTE:** **Richard! Watch where you toss your stuff.**

**RICHARD:** *(Looks back and smiles.)* **Ah, you make a lovely coat rack, my dear.** *(JAMES laughs, and COLETTE glares.)*

**COLETTE:** **You two are impertinent. I don't know why I put up with you!**

**JAMES:** *(Hand to ear)* **Hark! What is that I hear? Oh yes,**

1           New Jersey's calling you.

2   **RICHARD:** You do too know why you put up with us.

3   **COLETTE:** Oh yeah? Why?

4   **RICHARD:** For the same reason we're all doing this stinker

5           of a play. (*Dramatic pause*) Because of that most

6           wonderful *raison d'tre* (*ray-zone deh-truh*) ... (*Another*

7           *dramatic pause*) The show must go on.

8   **COLETTE:** I despise that phrase.

9   **RICHARD:** Ah, but it is our mantra. We must follow it. To

10          not do so (*Gasps melodramatically*) would be illogical.

11   **JAMES:** I'm obliged to concur. The show must go on.

12   **COLETTE:** OK, fine. (*Beat*) And what if there were no show?

13          What then?

14   **RICHARD:** Then I suppose we'd all be free.

15   **JAMES:** And unemployed.

16   **COLETTE:** Speak for yourself. I wouldn't have any problem

17          getting another acting job. (*DEDRA enters from the "Stage*

18          *Entrance."*)

19   **JAMES:** In New Jersey.

20   **COLETTE:** OK, drop it! The joke is dead. It's not funny

21          anymore. (*JAMES laughs.*)

22   **RICHARD:** (*Seeing her*) Ah, Dedra, my darling. You look

23          ravishing. (*Grabs DEDRA's hand and kisses it.*)

24   **DEDRA:** Ha! This dress wouldn't look good on Barbie.

25   **RICHARD:** And yet it looks sensational on you.

26   **DEDRA:** Aren't you sweet? (*Sighs.*) I do miss being young,

27          (*Beat*) back when they allowed me to play the youthful

28          starlet instead of an old nobody.

29   **JAMES:** Yes, but in real life you are the starlet, and ... (*He*

30          *looks at COLETTE*) others are the nobodies.

31   **DEDRA:** Bless you, James. (*Sighs.*) I do love all the flattery.

32          (*RICHARD keeps his eye on DEDRA while COLETTE and*

33          *JAMES converse.*)

34   **COLETTE:** (*Narrowing her eyes at JAMES*) Oh, please. And

35          why did you sign on for this show, James Madden the

1           **Second?**

2   **JAMES:** The Third.

3   **COLETTE:** Like anyone cares that there are others.

4   **JAMES:** My character, Nelson, has so many layers to him.  
5           My agent thought it would be good for me to stretch  
6           my legs in a role like this one.

7   **COLETTE:** Translation — you didn't have any other leads.  
8           *(RICHARD steps up to DEDRA and bows.)*

9   **RICHARD:** *(In an English accent)* Wanting and needing,  
10           holding forever. Until death, I pray God grant us love.

11   **DEDRA:** *(Swoons.)* Oh dear King, I will be yours forever. Not  
12           even death can keep me from your arms. *(COLETTE*  
13           *and JAMES exchange looks.)*

14   **RICHARD:** How I loved that play. I remember the first time  
15           I saw you. You walked about as if you owned the  
16           world. *(Pause)* You were simply gorgeous. *(Clears throat.)*  
17           Excuse me. Still are. *(He kisses her hand.)*

18   **DEDRA:** And you ... *(She curtsies.)* The house didn't know  
19           what hit them. I've never seen such a pool of tears. Not  
20           many leading men in my career could command the  
21           stage as you did that day. *(Pause)* Excuse me. As you  
22           still do.

23   **COLETTE:** Oh, brother. *(COLETTE lies back down and covers*  
24           *her eyes. JAMES combs his hair in the mirror. TYE enters*  
25           *and looks around frantically.)*

26   **TYE:** What are you all doing? Dress rehearsal is in five  
27           minutes and you're not even ready. *(Gasps.)* And ... and  
28           where is my nun?

29   **JAMES:** I have "none."

30   **RICHARD:** "None" of us do. *(They both laugh.)*

31   **COLETTE:** For over ten years my parents paid for me to  
32           attend the best arts schools in California, New York,  
33           and even a summer in Europe. And to what end? To  
34           end up performing with the Mad Hatter Theatre  
35           Company.

- 1     **TYE:** Would you all be serious? This is a tragedy. I need  
 2         Sylvia. How will Myra find redemption without a nun?
- 3     **JAMES:** You cast Colette as Myra. There is no redeeming  
 4         solution.
- 5     **COLETTE:** Ha ha. Very funny.
- 6     **TYE:** Please, James, not now. This is a tragedy. My first  
 7         debut after five years, and I'll be the laughingstock of  
 8         Broadway. *(They all exchange glances.)*
- 9     **JAMES:** But we're off-Broadway.
- 10    **TYE:** Yes, well, and I'll never get there if this show tanks,  
 11        now will I?
- 12    **JAMES:** I don't think Sylvia playing a nun will keep it  
 13        from ... *(RICHARD waves his arms emphatically behind*  
 14        *TYE for JAMES to be quiet. JAMES sees him and looks*  
 15        *away. TYE looks behind him, and RICHARD smiles.)*
- 16    **TYE:** I feel faint. I think I'm going to hyperventilate. *(Feels*  
 17        *neck pulse with fingers.)* No, I'm going to have a heart  
 18        attack. *(Moves to couch, almost falling on COLETTE.)* I  
 19        can't breathe. The room ... it's getting dark. *(COLETTE*  
 20        *moves to makeup table and pushes JAMES out of the way.)*
- 21    **COLETTE:** Great. There he goes again. It's like working in  
 22        *The Twilight Zone. (SYLVIA enters from "Exit" door.)*
- 23    **RICHARD:** Ahhh ... rest easy, young director. Your oxygen  
 24        has arrived.
- 25    **TYE:** *(Sits up.)* What? *(Spots SYLVIA, jumps up, runs, and*  
 26        *embraces her.)* Oh thank you, thank you. *(He holds her a*  
 27        *bit too tight, for too long. SYLVIA looks at RICHARD for*  
 28        *help. RICHARD takes his cue and pulls TYE back.)*
- 29    **SYLVIA:** Ouch! Your watch scratched me.
- 30    **TYE:** Sorry about that. I need to file the side down.
- 31    **COLETTE:** Or buy a new watch.
- 32    **SYLVIA:** I'm sorry I'm late. I had to take the subway.  
 33        *(Smiles.)* Apparently, I was missed. *(COLETTE glares at*  
 34        *her.)* By some people ...
- 35    **RICHARD:** There now, Tye. We're all here. You can now go

- 1           prepare yourself for notoriety and grandeur.
- 2   **TYE:** Yes, well ... *(He stands, wipes his forehead, and moves to*  
3       *the "Stage Entrance.") Curtain in five. Don't be late. (He*  
4       *exits. SYLVIA and JAMES sit on the couch.)*
- 5   **SYLVIA:** *(To JAMES)* So, I guess it is safe to say that Colette  
6       is in a mood.
- 7   **JAMES:** When isn't Colette in a mood?
- 8   **COLETTE:** I can hear you, you know!
- 9   **JAMES:** *(Ignoring Colette)* How was class?
- 10   **SYLVIA:** Good. But I really would prefer to spend more  
11       time at the library. Coming down here just takes so  
12       much time away from my studies. *(COLETTE flips*  
13       *around in her chair.)*
- 14   **COLETTE:** Then why come?
- 15   **SYLVIA:** Because I need the money for tuition.
- 16   **COLETTE:** Then get a job at Burger Barn. There are a lot of  
17       starving thespians that would kill to play a nun.
- 18   **SYLVIA:** *(Smiles.)* But then I'd miss out on all the quality time  
19       I get to spend with you. *(COLETTE stares at her for a*  
20       *moment, then goes back to the mirror.)*
- 21   **JAMES:** *(Whispers.)* I do believe you won that round. *(SYLVIA*  
22       *laughs. She walks to the clothing rack and puts on her habit*  
23       *and then grabs her headpiece and begins to put it on.*  
24       *COLETTE is trying to fix her hair.)*
- 25   **COLETTE:** Oh, why won't this curl stay? I always tell my  
26       hairdresser, "Use six-hour hold." Ludicrous. This is just  
27       ludicrous.
- 28   **JAMES:** Speaking of ludicrous ... *(JAMES walks behind her.)*  
29       Colette, say your lines in the first act, scene one, starting  
30       with how you hate New York. You keep forgetting them,  
31       and I don't want to have to rewrite the script by  
32       concocting a five-minute monologue to get you back on  
33       track.
- 34   **COLETTE:** *(Looks at him in the mirror.)* I know my lines.
- 35   **JAMES:** You didn't last Monday.

1     **COLETTE:** It was a bad day ...

2     **JAMES:** Or Tuesday at the tech rehearsal. (*COLETTE opens*  
3         *her mouth to speak.*) Come to think of it, you didn't know  
4         them Wednesday, or ...

5     **COLETTE:** Fine! (*She rolls her shoulders, clears her throat, and*  
6         *begins to speak in a country accent.*) Oh, how I hate New  
7         York. I miss the country. Flowers in the spring, miles of  
8         corn everywhere the eye can see. Even the chickens. Yes,  
9         I even miss those smelly birds. Why did I ever leave?  
10        They loved me more than these lights ever will. (*Dramatic*  
11        *pause*) No, I shall never perform in this town again.

12    **JAMES:** But Myra, you must not give up. Your beauty makes  
13        Broadway shine. If you give up, how will we all see our  
14        way?

15    **COLETTE:** (*Scowling*) Ugh! Can this play be any cheesier?

16    **JAMES:** Colette! Just say your line. You keep forgetting that  
17        one line, and I don't want any dead air tonight. Please,  
18        I beg you in the name of Broadway, just say the line.

19    **DEDRA:** (*To herself*) I should have been Myra. (*Walks to*  
20        *JAMES.*) The light of my love will shine through the  
21        universe and always return to you. (*COLETTE glares at*  
22        *her.*)

23    **JAMES:** Wonderfully done. Do you think you could fit in  
24        Myra's costume?

25    **COLETTE:** Don't be absurd. (*To DEDRA*) You're much too old  
26        to be Myra. I wish you'd stop dreaming and face the fact  
27        you're a big has-been.

28    **RICHARD:** Colette! How dare you speak to her that way!

29    **DEDRA:** It's fine, Richard. (*To COLETTE*) I may be old,  
30        Colette, but you'll never be half the actress that I've  
31        been. I've been in over forty plays on Broadway, and I've  
32        won nine Tony awards. My shadow has more notoriety  
33        than your entire being.

34    **COLETTE:** Yes, but I have twenty plus years to remedy that,  
35        now, don't I? (*KELLY enters.*)

- 1     **RICHARD:** That's enough, ladies. (*Looking at KELLY*) It's  
2     show time.
- 3     **JAMES:** Colette, say your line.
- 4     **COLETTE:** (*Moving to door*) What line? (*KELLY is in*  
5     *COLETTE's pathway. COLETTE pushes her as she exits*  
6     *through the "Stage Entrance." RICHARD takes off his robe*  
7     *and puts on his jacket.*)
- 8     **JAMES:** Exactly. (*He moves to door.*) Amateur. (*He shakes his*  
9     *head in exasperation and exits.*)
- 10    **RICHARD:** (*Puts out his hand to DEDRA.*) Shall we, my lady?
- 11    **DEDRA:** Do you think I'm old, Richard?
- 12    **RICHARD:** Old? No. (*Pause*) I would say aged like a fine wine.  
13    (*He spins her around and looks at her fondly.*) You're even  
14    more beautiful now than when you played Eliza  
15    Doolittle thirty years ago.
- 16    **DEDRA:** I always knew I could count on your charm. True  
17    or not, it's like chocolate to my self-esteem. (*They exit*  
18    *through "Stage Entrance." SYLVIA is struggling to get her*  
19    *headpiece to stay on.*)
- 20    **KELLY:** Sylvia, you need to wait in the wings. (*Crossing to her*)  
21    You know how nervous Tye gets when you don't make  
22    your cue.
- 23    **SYLVIA:** Yes, about as nervous as he'll get if my habit falls  
24    off halfway during the scene. (*She holds the safety pin in*  
25    *one hand while holding the headpiece with the other.*) Can you  
26    help me pin this, please? I can't seem to get it. (*KELLY*  
27    *sets her clipboard down and works on the loose headpiece.*  
28    *Once KELLY is done, she pulls back the curtain. COLETTE*  
29    *can be heard delivering her lines in the distance.*)
- 30    **COLETTE:** (*With a country accent*) Oh, how I hate New York. I  
31    miss the country. Flowers in the spring, miles of corn  
32    everywhere the eye can see. Even the chickens. Yes, I  
33    even miss those smelly birds. Why did I ever leave?
- 34    **KELLY:** There. Now go. Your cue is coming.
- 35    **SYLVIA:** Thanks, Kelly. (*She exits. KELLY pulls curtain closed*)

1           *and smiles. She walks to the couch, lies down, and puts*  
 2           *COLETTE's eye mask over her eyes. Lights fade out.)*

3

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ACT I

6

SCENE TWO

7

8           *(COLETTE enters with JAMES at her heels. RICHARD and*  
 9           *DEDRA enter a few paces behind them.)*

10       **JAMES:** Colette, you missed your line again! How could you  
 11       miss it again? It's so simple. *(Mocking a woman's country*  
 12       *accent)* The light of my love will shine through the  
 13       universe and always return to you. *(He bats his eyes and*  
 14       *then grows serious.)* You are pathetic. You better not miss  
 15       tonight!

16       **COLETTE:** Look, I'm sorry, but it wasn't my fault. I was  
 17       waiting for Sylvia to bring in the tea, and her lack of  
 18       professionalism threw me off.

19       **JAMES:** Don't blame your incompetence on Sylvia. She  
 20       doesn't even have lines in that scene. *(Beat)* And if she  
 21       did, I'm pretty sure she would have remembered them.  
 22       *(RICHARD looks around.)*

23       **RICHARD:** Speaking of Sylvia, has anyone seen her?

24       **JAMES:** Not since we went on.

25       **COLETTE:** Who cares? She can't make call time, she can't  
 26       make cue, and she doesn't even really want to be here  
 27       ... so, who needs her?

28       **JAMES:** Apparently you do. *(TYE enters.)*

29       **COLETTE:** *(Spotting TYE)* Oh, great. Here we go.

30       **TYE:** Where is my nun?

31       **JAMES:** *(Smirks.)* I have "none."

32       **RICHARD:** *(Smirks.)* "None" of us do.

33       **TYE:** Not now, please. *(Looks frantic, wringing hands.)* She  
 34       didn't come out with the tea. Has anyone seen her? *(They*  
 35       *all shake their heads.)* She was here? *(They all nod.)* Then

1           **I didn't imagine it?** *(They all shake their heads.)* **What am**  
 2           **I going to do?** *(He paces, pulling at his hair.)* **She speaks in**  
 3           **the last scene, and the play is dead without her part.**  
 4           **What will I do? I should stop the show.**

5   **ALL:** *(Together)* **No!**

6   **RICHARD:** **You can't.**

7   **TYE:** **Why not? You all hate this play anyway.** *(They all look*  
 8           *at each other uncomfortably.)*

9   **DEDRA:** **What on earth would make you say that?**

10   **TYE:** **I may not be the best director, but I know great acting**  
 11           **when I see it.**

12   **RICHARD:** **Well put, sir.** *(Hits TYE hard on the back.)* **But you**  
 13           **can't cancel the show. The audience will be here tonight.**  
 14           **They expect us to perform. The show ...**

15   **DEDRA and JAMES:** *(Together)* **Must go on.**

16   **COLETTE:** *(Under her breath)* **Yes, that's the only reason I'm**  
 17           **still here.**

18   **JAMES:** **Yes, and that's a shame.**

19   **TYE:** *(To himself)* **Oh, what will I do?** *(To the others)* **Did Sylvia**  
 20           **strike you as a girl with cold feet?**

21   **COLETTE:** **It's simple: Sylvia was a girl that hated acting. I**  
 22           **know for a fact she'd rather be studying than**  
 23           **performing. I say if you want to find her, try looking at**  
 24           **the local library.** *(TYE stares at COLETTE for a moment*  
 25           *and then crosses to "Stage Entrance" and yells through the*  
 26           *door. RICHARD hides a laugh.)*

27   **TYE:** **Kelly! Where are you? Kelly, I need you. Please get in**  
 28           **here.** *(KELLY enters.)*

29   **KELLY:** **Yes, sir?**

30   **TYE:** **Sylvia missed her cue. Did you make sure she made it**  
 31           **to the wings?**

32   **KELLY:** **Yes, of course. She was merely a second late because**  
 33           **she had to fix her headpiece. I assure you, I walked her**  
 34           **to the curtain myself.**

35   **TYE:** **Then why didn't she make it onstage?**

1     **KELLY:** I don't know.

2     **TYE:** You don't suppose she got scared and snuck out the  
3         back door?

4     **KELLY:** *(Shakes head.)* No, I was in the green room the entire  
5         time. She couldn't have made it past me without my  
6         knowing it.

7     **TYE:** And there's no other exit. *(He stumbles back.)* I feel faint.  
8         Dedra dear, bring me some water. *(He sits in the chair and*  
9         *DEDRA brings him a glass of water.)*

10    **COLETTE:** Unless she's up in the catwalk. A person afraid to  
11       go onstage could climb up the ladder, over the set, and  
12       out the back door at the last minute without anyone ever  
13       seeing.

14    **JAMES:** *(Cocks his head and smirks.)* You sound like you've  
15       been there before.

16    **COLETTE:** No, I just have an overactive imagination.

17    **JAMES:** Or an escape plan for a really bad show. *(TYE gives*  
18       *him a dirty look.)* Not referring to any play in particular,  
19       of course.

20    **TYE:** Your bickering is not helping me find my nun.

21    **JAMES:** Well, just call her understudy.

22    **TYE:** She doesn't have one.

23    **JAMES:** What? We all have understudies.

24    **TYE:** Actually, no. None of you do.

25    **RICHARD:** That's absurd. Of course we do.

26    **TYE:** *(Shaking head)* Our budget is tight. I could barely afford  
27       to pay you.

28    **JAMES:** That's crazy. What would you have done if one of us  
29       got sick?

30    **TYE:** I cross bridges when I get to them, Mr. Madden. Not  
31       before.

32    **JAMES:** *(Sighs.)* Well, how many lines does the nun have?

33    **TYE:** Three.

34    **JAMES:** That's not bad.

35    **RICHARD:** Yes, not bad at all. Why not have Kelly be the

- 1           saving persona of this wretched play?
- 2   **TYE:** (*Jumps up, spilling his water.*) Yes, yes, of course. That's
- 3           a wonderful idea. (*KELLY backs away slowly, shaking head.*)
- 4   **KELLY:** Oh, no. I'm not an actor. I'm quite comfortable in the
- 5           theatre shadows, moving props and staying hidden.
- 6           (*Swallows.*) Acting makes me want to throw up.
- 7   **JAMES:** Just stand close to Colette.
- 8   **TYE:** Please, Kelly. At this point you're my Obi-Won.
- 9   **KELLY:** (*Looking at JAMES*) I'm what?
- 10   **JAMES:** His only hope.
- 11   **KELLY:** Oh.
- 12   **JAMES:** You've been at every rehearsal and on book for most
- 13           of it. No one else knows this play like you do.
- 14   **KELLY:** Please, no. I haven't been in front of an audience
- 15           since grade school, and even then, little Sally Burton
- 16           was probably cleaning her shoes for weeks.
- 17   **TYE:** Well, if she doesn't want to do it ...
- 18   **RICHARD:** (*To KELLY*) You aren't giving up, are you?
- 19   **TYE:** I'll pay you Sylvia's salary as well as your own.
- 20   **KELLY:** (*Stops and smiles.*) What shall I wear?
- 21   **TYE:** Good kid. (*Looks at his watch and then at rest of CAST.*)
- 22           Break is almost over. Be on time, OK? (*To KELLY*) Follow
- 23           me. (*TYE and KELLY exit through the "Stage Entrance" door.*)
- 24   **COLETTE:** This play is getting worse by the minute. Now we
- 25           have stagehands playing the resolution lead.
- 26   **JAMES:** She's the backstage manager, and the part only has
- 27           three lines to deliver. How bad can she be?
- 28   **DEDRA:** I once had the back of a donkey end up as my
- 29           leading man. I had to carry him the whole way.
- 30   **JAMES:** (*Laughs.*) The back of a donkey?
- 31   **DEDRA:** You know — a two-person horse. He played the
- 32           back end.
- 33   **JAMES:** (*Smiles.*) Oh.
- 34   **COLETTE:** How insulting.
- 35   **DEDRA:** No, he was quite good. You'd be surprised at what

1 talent is just waiting to be discovered.  
2 JAMES: Yes, that's true. Believe it or not, I started out as a  
3 ticket salesman at the Regency Theatre.  
4 COLETTE: I'd believe almost anything about you.  
5 JAMES: I'm trying to make a point for your benefit.  
6 COLETTE: Sorry. Please continue.  
7 JAMES: As I was saying ... Because I was working at the  
8 Regency Theatre, I was allowed to watch all the shows  
9 for free. After about a dozen or so plays, I decided to  
10 audition for a part as a pageboy. It was a small part, but  
11 it launched my career.  
12 COLETTE: Oh, yes. And you've come so far.  
13 RICHARD: Many big actors have been found in the shadows.  
14 COLETTE: Oh, yeah? Like who?  
15 RICHARD: Harrison Ford.  
16 COLETTE: *(Dryly)* Harrison Ford? Come on.  
17 RICHARD: Honest. He was a carpenter on a movie set and  
18 was discovered by a client.  
19 COLETTE: Carrie Fisher should have pitched a fit.  
20 JAMES: Why? Ford is a way bigger actor than she'll ever be.  
21 COLETTE: Whatever. Where's a latte when you need one?  
22 *(Crosses to coffee stand and pours herself a cup of coffee. Takes*  
23 *a drink and looks repulsed.)* Oh, this is awful. Who made this  
24 tar?  
25 RICHARD: I did.  
26 COLETTE: Tsk, tsk, Richard. You've been in show business for  
27 almost forty years now. Haven't you learned that there is  
28 a reason why actors have assistants?  
29 RICHARD: I've never felt I'm too good to make a pot of coffee.  
30 COLETTE: Rephrase, Richard ... You're not *good enough* to  
31 make a pot of coffee.  
32 JAMES: When you remember your lines, we'll hire someone to  
33 make your coffee. In the meantime, drink up your cup of  
34 tar, because it's time to go. *(KELLY enters in a nun costume,*  
35 *with TYE behind.)*

- 1 TYE: To the wings, people.
- 2 COLETTE: *(To KELLY)* Do you know what you're doing?
- 3 KELLY: Yes, I'm covering your tail. *(JAMES laughs.)*
- 4 JAMES: I always knew you were cool.
- 5 COLETTE: I'm serious. I have to rely on you to save my  
6 character. Can you do that?
- 7 KELLY: *(Holding up Bible in hand)* I turn in this Bible to  
8 Ephesians one and read verses four to five. *(KELLY flips to*  
9 *verse.)* "Long ago, even before he made the world, God  
10 loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without  
11 fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to  
12 adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself  
13 through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure."  
14 Then I turn to you and say ... *(She puts her hand to her*  
15 *mouth like she's about to get sick.)*
- 16 JAMES: You OK?
- 17 KELLY: I, um ... told you stages make me nervous.
- 18 COLETTE: Oh, great! We're doomed.
- 19 JAMES: We'll be fine. Kelly, look at me. *(KELLY tries to focus on*  
20 *him.)* You see us every day. You know us, and we're all  
21 your friends.
- 22 KELLY: But you all ignore me.
- 23 JAMES: Actually, we adore you. We've just been afraid to say  
24 so, right everyone?
- 25 RICHARD: Of course.
- 26 DEDRA: Absolutely.
- 27 JAMES: Colette?
- 28 COLETTE: *(Half-hearted)* Yeah, sure.
- 29 DEDRA: Come on, you've been on that stage a million times.  
30 You've seen us rehearse. You can do this. Just focus on us.  
31 *(Pause)* Pretend there is a wall that separates you from the  
32 audience, OK?
- 33 KELLY: *(Nods.)* I think I can do that.
- 34 COLETTE: We're dead. *(COLETTE exits through the "Stage*  
35 *Entrance.")*

- 1     **JAMES:** Ignore her. We all do. (*KELLY smiles.*)
- 2     **RICHARD:** Hey, good going, James, you got the kid to smile.
- 3             (*Pause*) Let's go. It's show time. (*RICHARD winks at*
- 4             *DEDRA. JAMES and RICHARD exit.*)
- 5     **KELLY:** Ms. Roley, do you think ...
- 6     **DEDRA:** Dedra, please.
- 7     **KELLY:** Dedra, do you think you could help me with this
- 8             headpiece? Sylvia was right. It's quite loose.
- 9     **DEDRA:** Absolutely. (*DEDRA goes to work on the headpiece.*)
- 10    **KELLY:** Can I ask you a personal question?
- 11    **DEDRA:** At my age and in my profession, I have no secrets.
- 12    **KELLY:** Why didn't you marry?
- 13    **DEDRA:** (*Laughs.*) And we all thought you were shy. That's
- 14             quite a question!
- 15    **KELLY:** I'm sorry; I didn't mean to offend you.
- 16    **DEDRA:** Don't be silly.
- 17    **KELLY:** It's just that ... I'm seeing someone, and he proposed
- 18             last night.
- 19    **DEDRA:** Congratulations! That's wonderful.
- 20    **KELLY:** I wish I shared your enthusiasm.
- 21    **DEDRA:** Don't you love him?
- 22    **KELLY:** Yes, very much.
- 23    **DEDRA:** Then you shouldn't think so much.
- 24    **KELLY:** It's not that simple. I dream of being a working
- 25             playwright and directing my own show. It won't happen
- 26             overnight, nor will it be easy. I have so much work
- 27             ahead of me. (*Sigh*) I'm afraid to say yes. Having a family
- 28             might hold me back.
- 29    **DEDRA:** You, my dear, are an echo from my past. When I
- 30             was your age, I was always traveling or starting some
- 31             new show. I have worked seven twelve-hour days a
- 32             week for as long as I can remember. And I've never
- 33             really had time to start a serious relationship. (*Pause*) But
- 34             I don't recommend it. It's a lonely life.
- 35    **KELLY:** Were you ever in love?

1 DEDRA: Yes. I suppose I still am.

2 KELLY: To Richard?

3 DEDRA: *(Smiles and grabs KELLY's hand.)* Hmmmm .... Come,  
4 Ms. Kelly. Let's get you onstage. I can't wait to see you  
5 throw up on Colette. *(THEY both laugh and exit. Lights*  
6 *down.)*

7

8

9

## ACT I

10

### SCENE THREE

11

12 *(COLETTE comes storming in. JAMES, RICHARD, and*  
13 *DEDRA are behind her. RICHARD looks worn.)*

14 COLETTE: *(Yelling)* Unbelievable! Opening night is in less  
15 than three hours. Would anyone like to tell me how  
16 we've managed to lose two nuns in the last hour?

17 RICHARD: *(Rubbing temple)* Please stop yelling, my dear. My  
18 head is pounding. *(He crosses to shelf to get a drink of*  
19 *water.)*

20 COLETTE: I don't understand how all of you can be so calm.

21 JAMES: Kelly said she was afraid of the stage. I guess she  
22 couldn't bring herself to do it. *(Beat)* Has anyone checked  
23 the restroom?

24 COLETTE: Yes, and she wasn't there.

25 JAMES: She must have left then. *(TYE enters.)*

26 TYE: No, I had the door locked. No one could have left.

27 COLETTE: Check the catwalks.

28 JAMES: You've been there before. You go.

29 COLETTE: I have not. *(JAMES smiles.)*

30 DEDRA: Maybe we don't need a nun to make this play work.

31 COLETTE: My character must be saved. The audience needs  
32 resolution. They expect it. Without it, the play is ruined.

33 JAMES: Your point?

34 DEDRA: No, I simply meant maybe one of our characters  
35 could deliver the key lines.

- 1 TYE: Dedra, you're brilliant.
- 2 DEDRA: (*Blushing*) Well, I wouldn't go that far ...
- 3 TYE: Your character is perfect. You're now a nun instead of
- 4 a servant. (*Pause*) Wait. Better yet, a servant who desires
- 5 to be a nun. (*Excited*) Yes! This is brilliant. Just brilliant!
- 6 DEDRA: What? But I just meant ...
- 7 TYE: I'll make the adjustments in the script and have them
- 8 to you in a moment. (*TYE exits.*)
- 9 DEDRA: (*Dazed*) Now I'm the nun?
- 10 COLETTE: (*Shrugs.*) Your brilliant idea.
- 11 DEDRA: I didn't think it would be me.
- 12 COLETTE: Who'd you think would do it? Me? (*DEDRA falls*
- 13 *to the couch.*) And I suppose the show must still go on?
- 14 RICHARD: You have to ask?
- 15 COLETTE: Yes, I do. Your insistence on continuing with this
- 16 train wreck baffles me.
- 17 RICHARD: You will never be great until you understand the
- 18 actor's code.
- 19 COLETTE: That's dumb. Acting is about make-believe —
- 20 pretending to be someone you're not.
- 21 RICHARD: No, my dear. Acting is not a childhood game. It
- 22 is about heart and passion. About finding something in
- 23 your character that you can identify with. To stop the
- 24 show would stunt your growth. Whether you discover
- 25 something you want to know about yourself or not, it is
- 26 still worth pursuing.
- 27 COLETTE: What are you babbling about? You're talking in
- 28 riddles.
- 29 RICHARD: Like I said, you'll never be great until you truly
- 30 understand.
- 31 COLETTE: I think you've all spent one too many years living
- 32 in a fantasy world.
- 33 JAMES: Richard's right. You'll never understand — and for
- 34 that, you'll always be working in Jersey. (*Clears throat*
- 35 *and overemphasizes each syllable.*) Me mo me mo me.

- 1           Falderal, falderal, falderal. (*Pacing and emphasizing his*  
2           “p”) Up-pa up, up-pa —
- 3   **COLETTE:** James, please!
- 4   **JAMES:** Hey, if the Titanic is going to sink, at least my voice  
5           will sound good. (*Sticks nose in air, overemphasizing each*  
6           *word.*) Ba be bee bo boo. Tee-ee, tee-ay, tee-ah.
- 7   **COLETTE:** I’m going to have a mental breakdown. (*DEDRA*  
8           *stands and crosses to the mirror. She pulls at her wrinkles.*)
- 9   **DEDRA:** No, dear. Soon you will be old, and this will all seem  
10          like a hazy memory. So what if you were in one bad  
11          play? At least you’re working.
- 12   **COLETTE:** I’m too young to sell out. I should be the lead in  
13          a Broadway production with a cast of thirty or more. I  
14          mean, I understand why you’re all here. You’re washed  
15          up and lucky to be working. But I can’t remember why  
16          I agreed to do this.
- 17   **JAMES:** Oh, stop playing the victim. You know why you’re  
18          here. You’re here because you were turned down at your  
19          last dozen auditions. It’s the same old story. It always is.
- 20   **RICHARD:** Now listen here, Colette. This play may not  
21          receive a Tony for its brilliance, but I assure you, my  
22          performance will be top-notch. Dedra is right. At least  
23          you’re working. (*TYE enters with script flopping in his*  
24          *hand.*)
- 25   **TYE:** Dedra, my dear. (*He hands DEDRA the script.*) Here you  
26          are.
- 27   **DEDRA:** That was quick. (*She looks at it timidly.*) Wait. You cut  
28          more than half of my lines in Act Two.
- 29   **TYE:** Well, correct me if I’m wrong, but a nun would not be  
30          waiting on Sir Byde.
- 31   **DEDRA:** But I thought I was a servant aspiring to be a nun.
- 32   **TYE:** I changed my mind. This is better.
- 33   **DEDRA:** Oh, dear.
- 34   **TYE:** Look, I’m the one who should worry. My ex-wife wrote  
35          this play about her life. When she learns about all the

1           changes I've made, she'll kill me. *(Turns to leave.)* We'll  
2           run the last scene in ten minutes. Be ready. *(He exits*  
3           *through "Stage Entrance.")*

4   **RICHARD:** Chin up, my dear.

5   **DEDRA:** *(Weakly)* The show must go on?

6   **RICHARD:** Yes.

7   **DEDRA:** Then let's go.

8   **COLETTE:** It takes place in the nineteen fortys. How could it  
9           be written about his ex-wife?

10   **JAMES:** You simply don't understand the idea of fabrication,  
11           do you? Imagination, my dear. You should get one —  
12           they're free. *(He pats her on her arm and exits through "Stage*  
13           *Entrance.")*

14   **COLETTE:** No wonder they're divorced. No one's life could  
15           be that cheesy. *(COLETTE shakes her head and follows him.*  
16           *Lights fade.)*

17

18

19

## ACT I

20

### SCENE FOUR

21

22           *(RICHARD is pacing. JAMES is at the mirror, hand over face,*  
23           *leaning on the table. COLETTE is lying on the couch with her*  
24           *mask over her eyes. There is a knock at the door.)*

25   **COLETTE:** Watch — next he'll have me playing the nun.

26   **RICHARD:** Maybe that's her. She probably just needed some  
27           fresh air. *(Opens door.)* She was upset after losing so  
28           many lines ... *(JAMES looks up. COLETTE doesn't move.*  
29           *RICHARD is disappointed to see SMITH at the door.)*

30   **SMITH:** Good evening.

31   **RICHARD:** Oh, I thought you were someone else.

32   **SMITH:** Ms. Dedra Roley, I assume. *(SMITH enters.)*

33   **RICHARD:** Yes, do you know where she is?

34   **SMITH:** No. Nor do I know where Sylvia Brown or Kelly  
35           Williams have gone. I'm here to investigate the

- 1           disappearances, and I expect full cooperation.
- 2   **RICHARD:** And you are? (*JAMES gets up and crosses to*  
3           *SMITH.*)
- 4   **SMITH:** Detective Smith, an old friend of James.
- 5   **JAMES:** Chris, so good to see you. (*COLETTE pokes her head*  
6           *over the back of the sofa, rolls her eyes, and lies back down.*)
- 7   **SMITH:** I hurried as soon as Milly gave me your message. I'm  
8           a big fan of Ms. Roley, and I hope to get an autograph  
9           when I find her.
- 10   **JAMES:** And I'm sure you'll get it. Tye, this is Detective Chris  
11          Smith. Chris, Tye Burton.
- 12   **SMITH:** Nice to meet you. (*TYE nods.*)
- 13   **JAMES:** (*Motions.*) Please come in and sit. Would you like any  
14          coffee?
- 15   **SMITH:** No, thanks. Water would be great.
- 16   **RICHARD:** If you're here to find my friend, then I would be  
17          honored to get you a glass of water. (*RICHARD pours a*  
18          *glass of water and hands it to SMITH.*)
- 19   **SMITH:** Thank you. (*SMITH starts to sit on the couch, then*  
20          *realizes COLETTE is lying down.*) Oh, sorry.
- 21   **COLETTE:** How am I supposed to prepare for tonight's  
22          disastrous performance with all this racket?
- 23   **JAMES:** Meet Colette, our token prima donna.
- 24   **SMITH:** Charmed, I'm sure. (*COLETTE sneers and stands.*  
25          *SMITH sits and takes a sip of his water.*) Well, first I need  
26          to hear the whole story from top to bottom. (*TYE enters.*)
- 27   **TYE:** Curtain is in five minutes.
- 28   **RICHARD:** Tye, Dedra is missing. You can't just expect us to ...
- 29   **TYE:** That's exactly what I expect. (*Pause*) You of all people  
30          should respect that. Dedra would want you to, and I  
31          need you to. In your own words, "The show must go on."  
32          Isn't that what you people say like twenty times a day?  
33          Isn't that why you didn't desert me months ago? You  
34          agreed to this performance. The checks are written and  
35          the curtain will go up. I expect you to be on the other

- 1           side of it.
- 2   **RICHARD:** Look, I agree that we actors have a code, and I  
3           live by it. But I also consider myself a wise man. (*He*  
4           *moves closer to TYE.*) Doesn't it strike you as peculiar that  
5           three of our people have gone missing?
- 6   **TYE:** A bit, yes. Cold feet, I presume.
- 7   **RICHARD:** The first two I'll buy. But Dedra ... (*Beat*) Not in  
8           this lifetime. That woman is one of the most professional  
9           actors I know. There is no way that she would disappear  
10          of her own free will.
- 11   **JAMES:** He's right.
- 12   **COLETTE:** Does that mean we get to cancel?
- 13   **JAMES:** Don't sound so happy about it. (*JAMES studies*  
14          *COLETTE with suspicion.*)
- 15   **TYE:** There's a full house out there.
- 16   **COLETTE:** Really?
- 17   **TYE:** Well, full for a claustrophobic crowd, but paying customers  
18          just the same.
- 19   **JAMES:** (*Keeping his eye on COLETTE*) It seems to me that  
20          Colette is the only one here that really wants this show  
21          to fail. (*To SMITH*) What do you think about that, Chris?
- 22   **SMITH:** Yes, I would say she has some questions to answer.
- 23   **COLETTE:** Like what?
- 24   **SMITH:** Like where the three missing nuns are.
- 25   **COLETTE:** How should I know? I was on the stage the whole  
26          time. (*TYE looks impatiently at his watch.*)
- 27   **TYE:** We don't have time to point fingers. We need to take the  
28          stage. Let's go. (*TYE exits.*)
- 29   **COLETTE:** Does he realize we're still missing a nun? (*She then*  
30          *looks at JAMES and smiles.*)
- 31   **JAMES:** Hey, don't look at me. I'm playing your boyfriend. I  
32          don't think putting me in a habit would work.
- 33   **COLETTE:** Perhaps. But what if you broke up with me to  
34          become a priest?
- 35   **JAMES:** You aren't serious?

- 1 COLETTE: A few strokes of Tye's red pen, and you'll be  
2 married to the church.
- 3 JAMES: That's a stupid idea.
- 4 COLETTE: You have any other ideas? (*Dramatic pause*)
- 5 JAMES: No.
- 6 COLETTE: Of course not. (*Pause — she walks to "Stage*  
7 *Entrance" and yells out the curtain. JAMES follows her.) Tye!*  
8 *James is going to be a priest. (The lights snap off.*  
9 *COLETTE screams. Everyone is mumbling. RICHARD steps*  
10 *back in "Stage Entrance" door. JAMES is gone.)*
- 11 RICHARD: Where's James?
- 12 COLETTE: OK, I'm officially scared.
- 13 RICHARD: That's it, Tye. We have to get to the bottom of  
14 this.
- 15 SMITH: Yes, I need a roster of everyone who works here.  
16 (*Beat*) Have you checked the entire building?
- 17 RICHARD: Right after Dedra disappeared I looked all  
18 through the house, Tye looked in the backstage rooms,  
19 and Colette checked the restrooms.
- 20 SMITH: I need access to your audience. No one is to leave  
21 this building. Is that clear?
- 22 TYE: This is a disaster.
- 23 COLETTE: What did you expect? It's been a tragedy from the  
24 moment you handed us a script.
- 25 RICHARD: Start with her.
- 26 COLETTE: Me? Why?
- 27 RICHARD: We've already established that you didn't want  
28 the show to go on. You hate James, don't care for Sylvia,  
29 and you're jealous of Dedra.
- 30 COLETTE: Jealous of Dedra? Don't be absurd. She's twice  
31 my age and half the actress. I would never envy that  
32 washed-up woman.
- 33 RICHARD: Since we all know that none of that dribble you  
34 just professed is true, I'd say you had a motive.
- 35 COLETTE: But I also have an alibi. I was on the stage, same



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