

THE WAFFLE TRUTH

a farce in two acts
by Jonathan Caws-Elwitt
from a story outline by Hilary Caws-Elwitt
© 2002

Time: The Present
Place: A small town in the Northeast
The action takes place over the course of one long summer Friday.

Characters:

Maxine Manx, an inventor
Her three daughters:
Precocia, "the pretentious one"
Fuschia, "the vain one"
Darla, "the ditzy one"
Gene Sturgeon, a part-time mail carrier
Anthony Crebbs, President of Crebbs Kitchen Concepts
Stu Currier, Vice-President of Crebbs Kitchen
Professor Edgar Tiswell, a poet
Blake, graduate assistant to Tiswell
Loopy, Maxine's younger sister
Abigail, a **Special Express Courier**

Production Note:

*The part of **Blake** is written so that it may be played by either a woman or a man.
Thus, if the company is short on male actors, the play can be cast with 4 men, and 7 women.*

Act I Scene 1

[LIVING ROOM OF THE MANX HOUSE. PRECOCIA AND FUSCHIA ARE PLAYING SCRABBLE, WHILE MAXINE LOOKS OVER SOME BUSINESS PAPERS AND DARLA READS THE FUNNIES.]

PRECOCIA: Well, I hope you realize what an honor it is for you to have beaten me -- *me*, the best Scrabble player in the county.

FUSCHIA: If you're the best, how come you never win?

PRECOCIA: Because I'm good at *playing*, not good at *winning*.

FUSCHIA: But shouldn't a good player *win*?

PRECOCIA: Oh! You are so vulgar.

FUSCHIA: Mother -- Precocia called me "vulgar"!

MAXINE: Well, you *are* sort of vulgar, Fuschia dear. But it's vulgar of her to say so. And if you didn't all waste so much time playing Scrabble, you wouldn't get into so many arguments.

DARLA: How can you guys play Scrabble before breakfast, anyway? I can't even *think* before breakfast, let alone spell.

FUSCHIA: Those of us who play to *win* learn to spell in our sleep.

PRECOCIA [AFTER GIVING FUSCHIA A DIRTY LOOK]: Now, speaking for myself -- since I am fortunate to possess creative genius -- I find that I do my *best* thinking when most of the world is still in bed.

MAXINE: Not to quibble, Precocia, but that's actually impossible, since much of the world wakes up the night before you -- depending what time zone they're in.

PRECOCIA: Hmph. Cheaters. [FROM OFFSTAGE, WE HEAR A SQUEAKING NOISE .] Oh! Was that the mail truck, Maman?

MAXINE: All I heard was a squeaking noise.

FUSCHIA: Well, it could be a squeaking mail truck.

DARLA: Do they have squeaking mail trucks in this area?

MAXINE: Darla, a squeaking mail truck is just an *ordinary* mail truck that squeaks.

FUSCHIA: Of course. The brakes, the tires . . .

PRECOCIA: Tires don't "squeak", they "squeal".

FUSCHIA: It's the same thing. Isn't it, Mother?

PRECOCIA: No, it isn't.

FUSCHIA: Is *your* name "Mother"?

PRECOCIA: No, and neither is hers. As a Frenchwoman with a family, this elder lady here [MAXINE BRISTLES VISIBLY AT THIS] is entitled to the appellation "Maman".

DARLA: But Mommy's not French! I mean . . . is she? Mommy, you're not French, are you? I mean, like, from France and everything?

MAXINE [TO AUDIENCE]: In case you're wondering, I am *not* from France, and, no, I *don't* particularly like being called "Maman". *You* [SHE WINKS COMPLICITLY AT AUDIENCE] may call me Maxie. But my eldest daughter, Precocia [MAXINE YANKS A THUMB IN HER DIRECTION] has enjoyed *imagining* that I am French ever since the day I let her taste my "café au lait". She was two years old at the time, and I don't think she's ever quite gotten the caffeine out of her system. [GENTLY, TO DARLA] I'm not French, honey. It's just a Precocia thing.

DARLA: Got it.

FUSCHIA [TO PRECOCIA]: You know perfectly well she's not French! She's from Elmira. You're just looking for attention. [SHE STANDS UP, FACES THE AUDIENCE DRAMATICALLY, AND BEGINS TO PACE THE STAGE, GESTICULATING THEATRICALY, AS A SPOTLIGHT FOLLOWS HER.] If there's one thing that irritates me, it's people -- *ordinary* people -- who deliberately try to attract attention to themselves in a ridiculous way. It's [SHE PAUSES DRAMATICALLY, THEN BREAKS THE POSE AND GESTURES POINTEDLY] -- it's *tacky*, that's what it is. [SHOUTING TO THE AUDIENCE] Tacky! Do you hear me! [SHE FINALLY SITS, TO EVERYONE'S RELIEF.]

DARLA [WITH A YAWN]: I wish the mail didn't come so early here. It makes it so hard to stay awake waiting for it when it's late.

PRECOCIA: Why are *you* waiting for the mail? Are you expecting something?

DARLA: You bet I'm expecting something. The replacement oscillator for my ham radio.

FUSCHIA: Not that annoying ham radio again! I was just getting used to the silence.

DARLA: If you want silence, Fuschia, then why don't *you* move out? That'll give us some silence.

[PRECOCIA LAUGHS WITH DARLA. MAXINE DISCOURAGES THEM.]

FUSCHIA [SNOTTILY]: Actually, I was thinking of getting a place of my own -- but I was afraid an oscillator would move in with me.

DARLA: Oh, ha ha. Shows how much you know, Smartycakes. The oscillator has *nothing* to do with the noise.

FUSCHIA: Listen -- the less I know about your stupid ham radio, the better.

DARLA: Well, good. I never asked you to take an interest in it, anyway.

FUSCHIA: You will have noticed that my "interest" in it has generally been limited to suggesting ways of disposing of it. Where's Bert the mail carrier, anyway?

PRECOCIA: Bert? Our mail carrier isn't named "Bert".

FUSCHIA [ANNOYED AT BEING CORRECTED]: All right, all right. I was just making conversation. Everyone is *so* touchy around here.

DARLA: What *is* our mail carrier's name?

FUSCHIA [INDIFFERENTLY]: Who knows. I don't think he's ever mentioned it.

DARLA: Maybe we could write him a letter and ask!

PRECOCIA [TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND BEGINS TO RAMBLE ENTHUSIASTICALLY]: His name is Gene Sturgeon, he's been a part-time mail carrier for two years (he also delivers groceries for his uncle), he lives exactly six miles from here -- by himself -- and he is the most gorgeous and kind and charismatic man I've ever met. [SUDDENLY SHE STOPS. SHE LOOKS AROUND SELF-CONSCIOUSLY.] I mean . . . Gene. His name is Gene. I think. [EAGERLY AGAIN] Would you like me to double-check? I could make a point of taking him aside to ask. I could ask him anything you want! Here -- here's a pencil, if you want to start a list. [SHE OFFERS THE PENCIL TO FUSCHIA.]

FUSCHIA: What I want, is for him to get here.

DARLA: With my oscillator.

FUSCHIA: No, with *my* contract from the modeling agency.

DARLA: Since when are you, like, into ceramics?

FUSCHIA: Wow, you *do* need a new oscillator, girlie. Not modeling *clay*. Modeling! As in beauty. As in star. As in . . .

PRECOCIA: As in I think I'm going to be sick. [SHE MAKES A GREAT SHOW OF TURNING AWAY FROM FUSCHIA, AND BEGINS WRITING INTENSELY ON A LEGAL PAD.]

MAXINE: Precocia, why are you scribbling so furiously? That can't all be a Scrabble score.

PRECOCIA: Scrabble, Schmabble!

DARLA: Oh -- is that a new version of the game? Gee, I hope we won't have to learn too many more rules.

PRECOCIA: I *happen* to be writing a scene for my award-winning (as soon as it's published) story, "The Vacant Avocado". This is the scene where my protagonist, the brilliant and dynamic Esther Cerebellum, leaves a note for her French Canadian computer consultant, the dashing Henri Fromage, that will propel him into action. And when that handsome man of letters *Gene* [SHE GLARES AT FUSCHIA AS SHE UTTERS THE CORRECT NAME] arrives, I expect him to have an enthusiastic letter from *The New Yorker*, replying eagerly to my inquiry about giving them first crack at publishing my inaugural work. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if they even enclosed a self-addressed-stamped-envelope to sweeten the deal. They're no fools at *The New Yorker*. They know when they're onto a good thing.

FUSCHIA [SNATCHING PRECOCIA'S PAD]: Hmph Let me see that. [SHE READS]

My dear Fromage . . . You must go at once to Port Folio. Only you can put things right. I knew you'd understand. E.C.

PRECOCIA [EAGERLY]: Well . . . ?

FUSCHIA: I'm afraid that "well" is *not* how you write, my dear.

PRECOCIA: And what exactly, pray tell, is wrong with it?

FUSCHIA: It's just so *fake* sounding. To begin with, no one would ever believe there's a place called "Port Folio". It's ridiculous. Fake, fake, fake. If there's one thing that wrinkles my culottes, it's artificiality. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go re-color my eyebrows. [SHE EXITS.]

DARLA: Gee, I wonder if I really remembered to order that oscillator I mean, if I forgot, then I guess it might not arrive today.

PRECOCIA: No, it might not. [SQUEAKING NOISE. SHE JUMPS UP.] Was that the mail truck!?

MAXINE: Mail truck? All I heard was a squeaking noise.

FUSCHIA [RUNNING BACK IN]: Was that the mail truck?

PRECOCIA: All she heard was a squeaking noise.

DARLA [LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW]: Here's the mail truck.

FUSCHIA: It's just a squeaking noise. Oh! The mail truck!

MAXINE: The mail truck!

PRECOCIA: The handsome truck!

[**GENE** ENTERS. HE GLOWS AS HIS EYES MEET PRECOCIA'S, AND SHE AVERTS HERS SHYLY. GENE APPEARS UNAWARE OF THE OTHERS PRESENT, BUT **DARLA** BOUNDS UP TO THE COUPLE LIKE AN EAGER PUPPY, PLACING HERSELF BETWEEN PRECOCIA AND GENE.]

DARLA: Do you have my oscillator?

GENE: Listen, I don't even have an oscillator of my own. Why would I have *your* oscillator?

DARLA: Well, I mean . . . if I'd ordered an oscillator through the mail, then you might have it.

GENE: True. Did you order an oscillator through the mail?

DARLA: I don't know. Do you have it?

GENE: I don't know. What does one look like?

DARLA: Oh, you know, sort of like an oscillator-y kind of thingee.

GENE: Have you ever considered working with United Parcel Service?

FUSCHIA [APPROACHING GENE]: Do you have my modeling contract?

PRECOCIA: Or my letter from *The New Yorker*?

GENE [LOOKING THROUGH MAIL]: *New Yorker*? Let's see . . . Here's a copy of *Ranger Rick*.

DARLA [SNATCHING IT]: That's mine.

MAXINE: Do you have any *real* mail for us at all today?

GENE: You mean, like, in a hand-written envelope? Just this one. [HE HANDS IT TO HER.] I'd say that looks like a bill.

MAXINE [SARCASTICALLY]: Thank you so much for the professional opinion. What do we owe you for the consultation?

GENE [MISSING THE IRONY]: Gee, I don't know. Got any cookies?

PRECOCIA [QUICKLY TAKING HIS ARM AND LEADING HIM TO A TABLE AT THE FAR END OF THE ROOM, WHERE SHE SEATS HIM AS SHE TALKS]: Yes! Yes, we do. See -- cookies. Right here. What'd I tell you! A whole plate of cookies. You're looking right at them. No denying these are cookies, is there? [SHE GIGGLES NERVOUSLY].

GENE [MOUTH FULL]: Mm, uh, mffthanks.

MAXINE: Well, I'm glad we got *that* settled. Now if we could just settle this \$900 invoice regarding the roof repairs.

PRECOCIA: I'm so glad those leaks have been fixed. Now it can rain all it wants. [TURNING TO GENE] Gene, do you think it's going to rain today? [PROUDLY, TO THE OTHERS] Gene knows *all* about the weather.

GENE: No idea.

FUSCHIA: It is *not* going to rain today.

DARLA: Those sure look like rain clouds to me.

FUSCHIA: It's *Friday*. Do you think the weather wants to hang around here and *rain*? It's got better things to do.

PRECOCIA: Maman, are we working on the WaffleWonder today?

MAXINE: Of course.

FUSCHIA: Well don't say "Of course" in that of-course kind of way.

MAXINE: How should I say "Of course"?

FUSCHIA: You shouldn't say it!

MAXINE: Ever?

FUSCHIA: I mean *now*, to us. What you do on your own time is your own business.

MAXINE: But, *naturally* we're going to work on the WaffleWonder today.

PRECOCIA: You've said that every morning for the past seventeen days. Not counting the day you went bowling with Grandma. It's laughable.

MAXINE: There is *nothing* laughable about bowling with your grandmother.

DARLA: She means it's laughable that you've told us every day that we were going to work on the WaffleWonder.

MAXINE: I told you that because I thought the part was arriving.

PRECOCIA: But it didn't arrive.

MAXINE: But it's supposed to arrive today.

FUSCHIA: But you said it would arrive today yesterday.

MAXINE: But it didn't.

FUSCHIA: I know.

MAXINE: So?

DARLA: So, what makes you think today will be different from yesterday?

MAXINE: Because today is today, yesterday was yesterday.

PRECOCIA: But the part didn't arrive the day *before* yesterday, either.

MAXINE: Don't you girls have a Scrabble game to play?

GENE [MOUTH STILL SORT OF FULL OF COOKIES]: What's a WaffleWonder?

MAXINE: I thought you'd *never* ask. [SHE CLEARS HER THROAT IMPORTANTLY.] The WaffleWonder, *my* invention, is a scientifically-designed template that allows a home waffle enthusiast to extrude a perfect waffle every time.

GENE: Who'd want to intrude on a waffle?

MAXINE: Not "intrude". *Extrude*. [SHE HOLD UP A TECHNICAL DRAWING.] Deceptively simple in appearance, the WaffleWonder is the product of my years of experience in the kitchen, combined with that Ph.D. in engineering I picked up at MIT. I've had the plans for a device of this kind for years . . . but it was only recently that technological advances made suitable materials available for its construction. The expense? Negligible. Materials cost about eight bucks for each WaffleWonder, and the labor time, in a custom-designed factory, would be mere minutes.

GENE: Wow! And how much would it cost to set up the factory?

MAXINE [DEJECTEDLY]: Four hundred thousand dollars. [BRIGHTENING] But that's *nothing* to a manufacturer who's sold on the idea. My accountant friend Vicky was explaining it to me -- a big company can just depreciate the investment.

PRECOCIA: I think you mean "depreciate", Maman. To "depreciate" is to belittle something . . . you know, to put something *down*.

MAXINE: That's just what I said -- they're going to *put down* four hundred thousand dollars.

FUSCHIA: The whole transaction, at the moment, is hinging on the arrival of a specialized phlumzbots that is required to power Mother's prototype device.

GENE: What's a . . . a "specialized bumflots"?

MAXINE: *Phlumzbots.*

GENE: Fine. What's a "specialized phlumzbots"?

DARLA: It's just like an ordinary phlumzbots, only with a different gauge.

GENE [BLANK LOOK]: Oh. [PRECOCIA SMILES AT HIM.] Well, gee everybody, I'm really sorry I didn't bring your phlumzbots

PRECOCIA [REASSURINGLY]: Oh, it's not you. It's coming by Special Express courier.

GENE: What's so special about a special phlumzbots courier?

FUSCHIA: Apparently, what's special about her is that she never shows up.

GENE [PROUDLY]: Aw, that's not so special. We've got some just like that down at the Post Office. [SELF-IMPORTANTLY] Tell you what -- next time you need any phlumzbotsees, you come to me first. [PRECOCIA IS PLEASED BY THIS.]

FUSCHIA: Mother, what are we going to do if Mr. Crebbs shows up before the phlumzbots?

GENE [EXCITEDLY]: Yeah! What are we going to do if Mr. Crebbs shows up!?! [ASIDE TO PRECOCIA] Er . . . who's Mr. Crebbs?

PRECOCIA: Anthony Crebbs is the head of Crebbs Kitchen Concepts, and he's supposed to drop in on us one of these days to look at the WaffleWonder.

MAXINE: Of course, I thought the phlumzbots would be here by now. It's going to take a little time to install it on the prototype.

GENE [NOW ACTING LIKE A KNOW-IT-ALL]: I'll say! In my experience, a phlumzbots install is a 2-hour job, minimum.

DARLA: Mommy, why couldn't Mr. Crebbs tell us exactly what day he was coming?

MAXINE: Well, you know how these big executives are. He has one of those "decisive personalities", and as a result he's rather vague about everything.

GENE: Say, he'd make a good Postmaster!

MAXINE: As soon as I convince Mr. Crebbs to purchase the patent on the WaffleWonder, I'll have enough money to embark on my next invention. [WHISPERING EXCITEDLY] It's still in the planning stages, but it's going to revolutionize the way we all think about *pushpins*.

FUSCHIA: And *I'll* have tuition for modeling school.

PRECOCIA: And I can enroll in the world-famous Wagglehurst Writing Workshop.
[EMBARRASSEDLY] Ahem, not that I need a workshop, of course. I just think it's a good opportunity for me to show the others how it's done.

DARLA: And *I* can get a bigger, *louder* ham radio! [HER FAMILY EMITS A COLLECTIVE GROAN.]

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 2

[IN FRONT OF THE MANX HOUSE. PROFESSOR TISWELL ENTERS WITH BLAKE, WHO CARRIES TISWELL'S BRIEFCASE AND WHOSE EYES ARE RIVETED ON A WRISTWATCH.]

BLAKE: I know you enjoy your little walking tours, Professor Tiswell, but if you're going to be ready for your 10:00 lecture, we'd better --

TISWELL: Nonsense, Blake, we have plenty of time. Ah -- now, *here* is a house with character. Stop a moment and just drink it in.

BLAKE: Oh, that's all right, Professor. I've got my hands full with just *one* character.

TISWELL: No, no . . . I mean the place has something *distinguished* about it.

BLAKE [WITH A LOOK OF DISGUST]: You call dry rot "distinguished"?

TISWELL: Oh! You are so vulgar! Blake, the difference between your sensibility and my own is like the difference between the word "theater" spelled e-r versus the word "theatre" spelled r-e. I confess I can't actually *hear* the difference, myself; but I can feel it in my eyebrows. **[SQUEAKING NOISE. TISWELL PAUSES AND LISTENS ATTENTIVELY TO THE SILENCE WHICH FOLLOWS. SUDDENLY HE SAYS:]** Shh!

BLAKE: I didn't say anything.

TISWELL: You were about to. It was a preventative "shh".

BLAKE: Why?

TISWELL: Shh!!

BLAKE [WHISPERING]: *Why?*

TISWELL [WHISPERING]: *Why what?*

BLAKE [ALOUD]: Why did you preventatively shush me?

[SQUEAKING NOISE.]

TISWELL: Shh! There it is again!

BLAKE: There *what* is again?

TISWELL: That squeaking noise.

BLAKE [TO AUDIENCE]: I've been preventatively shushed on account of a *squeaking* noise.
[SIGHING] Life as a graduate student.

TISWELL: Don't you understand? It could be the night-flying phalarope .

BLAKE [ASIDE]: Oh, brother! Not this again. [TO TISWELL] Listen, Professor, with all due respect . . . you've been told by all the ornithology specialists at our university that there is no such bird.

TISWELL: Ha! That's what they said about Einstein.

BLAKE: They said there was no such bird?

TISWELL: They said he was wrong.

BLAKE: About what?

TISWELL: How should I know? What do I look like, the *Encyclopedia of Science*?

BLAKE: But, sir, these colleagues you've consulted, they were *experts*.

TISWELL: And what do you think *I* am? Chopped chickpeas?

BLAKE: Yes, but you're an expert in *poetry*.

[TISWELL GLARES AT BLAKE BRIEFLY, THEN DROPS IT.]

TISWELL: I must get a look at this house. [HE KNOCKS ON THE DOOR.]

BLAKE [QUICKLY]: No answer, sir. I don't think anybody's home.

[TISWELL GLARES AT BLAKE DEFIANTLY AND KNOCKS AGAIN, LOUDER. HE PAUSES AND ADDS AN EXTRA KNOCK, FOR GOOD MEASURE.]

TISWELL: How can they not be at home, when there's a night-flying phalarope in the house!

BLAKE: Well, Professor, probably they just told the night-flying antelope to make itself comfortable till they got back.

TISWELL: Phalarope.

BLAKE [CONFUSED]: I beg your pardon, sir?

TISWELL: It's phalarope.

BLAKE: What's phalarope?

TISWELL: The phalarope!

BLAKE: I'm sure it is, sir.

TISWELL: You said "antelope".

BLAKE: Did I, sir?

TISWELL: Anyway, we'll just have to come back later, I suppose.

BLAKE: Yes, that would be one of the alternatives.

TISWELL [HOPEFULLY]: One? Do you have another idea?

BLAKE: Well, Professor, my idea would be more along the lines of *not* coming back later.

TISWELL [HUFFILY]: It just so happens that the transcendent majesty of the night-flying phalarope -- which I am convinced nests in the attic of this picturesque house -- is the central theme of my unfinished epic poem.

BLAKE: As your graduate assistant, I am, of course, painfully aware of that fact.

TISWELL: Pah! Look, young Blake -- may I ask you something? If you are so insensitive to the charms of nature that you consider it unrewarding to scour quaint old houses in the hope of observing rare specimens of the bird family --

BLAKE [CONTENTIOUSLY]: Rare, *nonexistent* specimens

TISWELL [IGNORING THIS]: Why on earth are you studying poetry?

BLAKE [SHRUGS]: Because I like to read vertically. And nobody offers a degree in crossword puzzles. Now, about that lecture

TISWELL: Yes, yes, all right. [HE JIGGLES THE DOORKNOB ONE LAST TIME, HOPELESSLY, AND DOES NOT NOTICE THAT THE DOOR SWINGS SLIGHTLY OPEN AS THEY LEAVE.] Always running hither and yon I tell you, it's positively tedious. [AS THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TOWARD THE WINGS] And where is it we must go *next* weekend?

BLAKE: The meeting at the Wagglehurst Writing Workshop, sir.

TISWELL: Ugh! You will phone them from the hotel this afternoon and tell them I am unable to attend.

BLAKE: But you have to go, Professor. You're chairing the admissions committee, remember?

[THEY EXIT.]

[**CREBBS** AND **CURRIER** ENTER FROM THE OPPOSITE WING.]

CREBBS: Are you sure this is the place, um . . . I'm sorry. I've forgotten your name again.

CURRIER: Stu Currier, sir.

CREBBS: I'm terribly sorry, Currier.

CURRIER: That's all right, Mr. Crebbs. After all, I've only been your Executive Vice President for a couple of years

CREBBS: I wish you'd call me "Tony". It sounds so impersonal for my good buddy and Executive Vice President, my pal -- um --

CURRIER: Stu.

CREBBS: Exactly . . . to call me "Mr. Crebbs". Anyway . . . are you *sure* this is the place?

CURRIER: Oh, yes, Tony. Absolutely.

CREBBS: Fine, fine. Do you have the promotional package we prepared?

CURRIER: It's back at the hotel.

CREBBS: Good. We can get that later, if the negotiations go smoothly. Oh -- were you able to reach Eve Colombo back at the office?

CURRIER: Sorry, I wasn't -- I can't seem to get any cell phone reception.

CREBBS: Well, that's all right. I gave her the number here. [HE NOTICES THAT THE DOOR IS SLIGHTLY AJAR.] Oh, swell, they've left the door open for us. [PEEKING INTO HOUSE] Hello! Hmm . . . I don't hear anyone. Do you think I should just walk in?

CURRIER: Well, no, Tony, I actually wouldn't --

CREBBS: I'm just going to go in and have a look around. You wait out here -- no sense in both of us acting like idiots. One executive acting like an idiot can pass for "cute", but it's hard to carry that off as a group project. Though, as our stockholders know, we've tried. [HE ENTERS THE HOUSE.]

CURRIER [TO AUDIENCE, AS HE LOITERS SELF-CONSCIOUSLY ON THE FRONT STOOP]: Executive Vice President . . . glamorous job, eh? I should have gone to graduate school or something.

[**CREBBS** RETURNS FROM THE HOUSE, WAVING PRECOCIA'S LEGAL PAD.]

CREBBS: Y'see? It's a good thing I went in there, like a good little decisive executive. Someone's already taken a message for me.

CURRIER: Really?

CREBBS: Yes. It's from Eve Colombo. [HE READS]

My dear Fromage . . .

Heh, heh. A little pet name, you understand. It's French for "cheese". [CURRIER DOES NOT REACT.] Heh heh, it's a long story. [STILL NO REACTION FROM CURRIER.] Ahem. I've asked her before not to call me that in phone messages. [HE CONTINUES READING]

You must go at once to Port Folio. Only you can put things right. I knew you'd understand. E.C.

You see what this means, of course.

CURRIER: Really, Tony, it's none of my --

CREBBS: Port Folio! Port Folio, *Maine*. Home of our sneaky competitors --

CURRIER: Grabb Gourmet!

CREBBS: *Exactly*. Our clever, ever-watchful Eve has caught on to something rotten in Port Folio. And, always cautious, she's not even saying what it is. Why, this is the most beautifully, *brilliantly* meaningless message I've ever seen! It doesn't really say a thing. I tell you, she's executive material, that one. And she *knew I'd understand*. I understand, all right. Only my personal appearance at their company headquarters will convince them to play fair with us, and to cease and desist from -- uh, whatever it is they're doing. Currier, you carry on here. Make my excuses and do as much groundwork as you can. As for me, I've no time to explain -- I'm on that plane to Maine! [HE CHUCKLES AT THE UNINTENTIONAL RHYME, AND EXITS.]

CURRIER: Just what I wanted . . . a weekend alone in the middle of nowhere. Sheesh! I wish I had my ham radio with me. [SQUEAKING NOISE. CURRIER LOOKS UP TOWARD TOP OF HOUSE.] Wow, they really need to oil those shutters. They're squeaking even without any wind! Unless it was a bird

[DARLA HAS ENTERED FROM THE WINGS BY FINISH OF PREVIOUS LINE, BUT CURRIER, LOOKING UPWARD, HAS NOT NOTICED HER.]

DARLA: I am *not* a bird.

CURRIER: Huh?

DARLA: I'm a Darla.

CURRIER [INTERESTED BY HER]: Well, yeeeeesss, now that you mention it. You are indeed a darlin'!

DARLA: No. *Darla*. It's, like, my name.

CURRIER [A LITTLE FLUSTERED, EXTENDING HIS HAND AWKWARDLY]: Hello, Darla. I'm -- uh -- Currier. I've come here especially to --

DARLA [GASPS, HAVING MISUNDERSTOOD HIS PREVIOUS LINE TO BE "I'M A COURIER"]: Oh! Of course! Oh, Mother will be so excited! I mean, I'm excited, too. [SHE BEGINS TO ENTER THE HOUSE, THEN TURNS AND SMILES BACK AT HIM.] And everything. [SHE GOES IN.]

[*CURRIER* REMAINS OUTSIDE, NOT SURE WHAT TO DO NEXT. *FUSCHIA* ENTERS FROM THE WINGS.]

CURRIER: Pardon me, Miss, but do you live here?

FUSCHIA: Sorry, pal. I know I've got that "irresistible something", but luckily *I* can resist *you*.

CURRIER: No, no. You don't understand. You see, I'm, uh, Currier, and --

FUSCHIA: Oh! Well, why didn't you say so! Ooh, I thought you'd never get here! Now I feel sorry for all the bad things we said about you. [*CURRIER* REACTS TO THIS. SHE PINCHES HIM PLAYFULLY ON THE CHEEK, AND WINKS.] Mother will be sooo excited! [SHE RUNS INTO THE HOUSE, LEAVING HIM OUTSIDE.]

CURRIER: You know, I'm not so sure I want to meet "Mother". Well, at least they're glad to see me. I just hope they remember to come back and bring me inside. [HE SETTLES HIMSELF ON THE STEPS, TAKES A COPY OF *THE NEW YORKER* OUT OF HIS BRIEFCASE, AND BEGINS LEAFING THROUGH IT.]

[*PRECOCIA* ENTERS FROM THE WINGS.]

PRECOCIA: Pardon me, may I -- [SHE GASPS.] *The New Yorker!*

CURRIER [STANDING UP]: Uhh -- yes. Good magazine, isn't it?

PRECOCIA [NUDGING HIM IN THE RIBS]: Oh, that's cute. "Good magazine, isn't it?" [SHE CHORTLES CONSPIRATORIALLY.] *Very* cute, sir.

CURRIER [BEFUDDLED]: Aha. Well . . . glad you liked it.

PRECOCIA: But really . . . you didn't *have* to come all the way here in *person*. Why, I hardly know what to say (in complete elegant sentences) . . . Why, I'm honored!

CURRIER: And I suppose Mother will be "sooooo excited", eh?

PRECOCIA: Well now, I imagine she will be! But not one-thousandth as excited as I am! [*CURRIER* TRIES TO BACK AWAY A LITTLE BIT. SHE ADVANCES TOWARD HIM.] And you even brought me a copy of the magazine. [SHE SNATCHES IT OUT OF HIS HANDS AND HOLDS IT UP TO GET

A BETTER LOOK.] How, sweet! Of course, I've already read this issue. [SHE TOSSES IT ONTO THE PORCH, AND *CURRIER'S* EYES FOLLOW IT HOPELESSLY.] But it's the thought that counts! Oh! I must tell everyone. [SHE DASHES INSIDE.]

[*SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER* ENTERS WITH A SMALL PACKAGE.]

SPECIAL COURIER: Do you live here, hon?

CURRIER: I should say not!

SPECIAL COURIER: Okay, okay. I'm just asking. I've got this package, and the label and tracking number got all covered in mud. I tried to phone the dispatcher, but I can't get any reception on my cell. I wanted to use your indoor phone.

CURRIER: You are most welcome to use my indoor phone. It's in my office in Boston. [RAISING HIS VOICE TO A SHOUT] Which is where *I'd* like to be!

SPECIAL COURIER [BACKING AWAY]: Well, uh . . . thanks anyway, mister . . . Maybe as a last resort. I mean, don't call me, I'll call you . . . if I can find a phone, that is. [SHE EXITS.]

[*CURRIER* RETRIEVES HIS MAGAZINE, DUSTS IT OFF, AND SITS DOWN ON THE STOOP. AFTER A MOMENT, *FUSCHIA* COMES OUT OF THE HOUSE.]

FUSCHIA: Are you still here?

CURRIER: Unless it's just a bad dream.

FUSCHIA: Well, goodness, I didn't mean to keep you waiting there while I looked all over for Mother. I thought you would just leave it on the porch.

CURRIER [CLUTCHING MAGAZINE TO HIS CHEST]: I haven't finished reading it yet!

FUSCHIA: Reading? Oh -- how silly of me! [SHE POINTS AT HIS CELL PHONE.] You need a signature to read into your little scannymahoozits, don't you? I *am* sorry. I'll sign for the package right now, and then you can be on your way. Oh! I'll need a pen, won't I? I'll be right back.

[*FUSCHIA* RE-ENTERS THE HOUSE. A MOMENT LATER, *DARLA* COMES OUT.]

DARLA: Are you still here? I don't know where Mommy went. [SHE LOOKS AROUND.] Where's the package?

CURRIER: Package? [TO HIMSELF] Oh, the promo stuff. [ALOUD] It's back at the hotel.

DARLA: Well, don't you think you'd better go get it?

CURRIER: Uh . . . yeah, okay. I guess. [HE EXITS.]

[*PRECOCIA* COMES OUT OF THE HOUSE.]

PRECOCIA: Darla, have you seen Maman? I can't wait to introduce her to -- hey! Where'd he go?

DARLA: Back to the hotel to get the package.

PRECOCIA [TO HERSELF]: Oh -- my contracts and advance, I suppose.

[*FUSCHIA* COMES OUT OF THE HOUSE.]

FUSCHIA: Where is he?

PRECOCIA: He went back to the hotel.

FUSCHIA: What a silly! I told him I had a pen right *here*.

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 3

[IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE. PRECOCIA IS NOW ALONE, TALKING TO THE FLOWERS.]

PRECOCIA: Sweet nasturtiums! You seem such *deep* flowers. If you could only write, as I do
[GENE ENTERS, IN STREET CLOTHES, CARRYING A BAG OF GROCERIES.] Oh! Hello, Gene.

GENE: Hi, Precocia. I think this is everything your mother ordered. **[HE PASSES HER THE BAG OF GROCERIES.]** Hey -- can I ask you something?

PRECOCIA [TAKING A DEEP BREATH AND CLOSING HER EYES]: Anything!

GENE: Well, why do you always blush when I talk to you?

PRECOCIA: I'm not blushing. I'm flushing.

GENE: What's the difference?

PRECOCIA: A blush is shy. A flush is just . . . **[SHE MOVES VERY CLOSE TO HIM]** *hot*.

GENE: Yeah, um, it is kind of hot. **[HE STEPS EVEN CLOSER TO HER.]** I'd better . . . get the rest of these provisions delivered. Some of them are hot. I mean cold. I mean, some of them are getting cold -- er -- no, I mean, the cold food isn't supposed to get . . . um . . .

PRECOCIA [STEPPING INTO AN EMBRACE AND LOOKING UP INTO HIS EYES]: Hot?

GENE: And the hot food isn't supposed to get . . . um . . .

PRECOCIA [WHISPERING PROVOCATIVELY]: Cold?

GENE: Oh, you used to deliver provisions, too, huh? Listen, I'll see you later, um . . .

PRECOCIA: Precocia? **[SHE KISSES HIM SOFTLY.]**

GENE [HAPPILY]: Sure. Yeah. Okay! **[HE EXITS.]**

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 4

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE, WHO IS STANDING, IS LECTURING HER DAUGHTERS, WHO ARE ALL SEATED. MAXINE PACES NERVOUSLY AS SHE SPEAKS.]

MAXINE: Children, Mr. Crebbs will be arriving -- I think -- any day now, and it's very important that we make a good impression. The WaffleWonder all but speaks for itself, of course. But I'm concerned that we not *scare him off* with some of the -- ahem -- *endearing* behavior that goes on in this house.

PRECOCIA [TO FUSCHIA]: She's talking about *you* and your self-centered preening and prancing.

FUSCHIA [TO DARLA]: She's talking about *you* and your stupid radio.

DARLA [TO PRECOCIA]: She's talking about *you* and your nonstop conceited boasting.

MAXINE: I'm talking about *all* of you. Now, when Anthony Crebbs gets here, I want no clothes horses, no shortwave hogs, and no highly-educated mynah birds. I want this to be a waffle technology showroom, not a wild animal park. There will be no squawking, no squabbling . . . and, most of all . . . no *Scrabbling!* Is that clear?

PRECOCIA: Yes, Maman.

FUSCHIA: If you insist, Mother.

DARLA: Okey-doke, Mommy.

MAXINE: You should also know that Mr. Crebbs is very fond of his pet turtle. I learned that from his bio on their corporate website. So if you want to make him feel at home, just talk turtles. Now please get this house cleaned up. And practice behaving yourselves! Practice makes -- well, maybe not.

[THE DAUGHTERS EXIT, AD-LIBBING LINES LIKE "I can behave myself better than you can," "I'm the politest of all of us," etc. AFTER THEY ARE OUT OF EARSHOT, WE HEAR THE SQUEAKING NOISE.]

MAXINE [CALLING AFTER THEM]: And will somebody *please* figure out what keeps squawking! Er . . . *squabbling*. I mean . . . *squeaking!*

[GENE ENTERS, WITH HIS MAIL CARRIER PARAPHERNELIA.]

GENE: Hey! Ms. Manx ! Glad I caught you in. I've got a Special Delivery letter for you.

MAXINE: Special Delivery? I didn't think there was really any such thing, outside of the movies.

GENE: Oh! Do you think maybe there isn't?

MAXINE: Well, you've got one in your hand.

GENE: I've got one what in my hand?

MAXINE: A Special Delivery letter!

GENE: I thought there was no such thing, outside of the movies.

[MAXINE SNATCHES THE LETTER FROM HIM.]

GENE: Oh, that's yours.

MAXINE: How kind. You shouldn't have.

GENE [CHARMINGLY]: Well, when it came across the Postmaster's desk, something just told me it was meant for you.

MAXINE: The address, perhaps?

GENE [MELODRAMATICALLY]: How can the mother of the woman I love be so unromantic!?

MAXINE: Practice. [SHE OPENS THE LETTER. SHE READS SILENTLY.] Oh my goodness! [SHE KISSES GENE.]

GENE: Whoa! Hey, cool it, Mama. I'm sorry I said you were unromantic, all right? You don't have to prove anything.

MAXINE: But this is the most wonderful news!

GENE: The Tractortown Trifles finally won a game?

MAXINE: Better than that.

GENE: They won a double-header??

MAXINE: Strike two. Take your mind off baseball for just a moment.

GENE: Okay. Right. Mind off baseball. Hey, I'm getting hungry. You don't happen to have any more of those cookies hanging around?

MAXINE: Stop thinking about food for a minute.

GENE: Listen, lady -- baseball, food When it comes to the topics a guy like me is interested in, we're working from a limited set of options, you know.

MAXINE: This is better than all your topics.

GENE: Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that. There's one I didn't mention.

MAXINE: Save it for Precocia.

GENE: I was going to.

MAXINE: Aren't you remotely interested in the contents of this letter you came all the way over here to deliver?

GENE: Believe me, it was my next question.

MAXINE: It's from a company called Grabb Gourmet Ventures, of [SHE REFERS TO THE LETTER] -- how about that? -- Port Folio, Maine. I've never heard of them, but somehow they've gotten wind of the WaffleWonder. I imagine they keep tabs on their rival, Mr. Crebbs. They say they're sending a representative our way to discuss my blueprints!

GENE: Golly! I don't suppose it says when they're arriving?

MAXINE: Of course it doesn't. This is business, not a cocktail party. [QUICKLY] What do you think we should serve?

GENE: Forget the hors d'oeuvres! What you need now is a little *strategy*.

MAXINE: Strategy? What do you mean?

GENE: I mean an ingenious scheme for proving your irresistible desirability.

MAXINE: I thought you were going to save that stuff for Precocia.

GENE: No, no. I mean your irresistible desirability as a waffle-template inventor.

MAXINE: But how?

GENE: Well, you've got two companies interested, right?

MAXINE: Right.

GENE: And the best way to *keep* them interested is to make sure they know there's some competition in the picture. Right?

MAXINE: I suppose. But obviously they've got their eyes on each other already.

GENE: Yeah, that's a good start . . . but it's not enough.

MAXINE: What are you getting at?

GENE: What you need is a *third* company in the picture. That'll really keep them on their toes.

MAXINE: But there is no third company.

GENE [WITH A KNOWING SMILE]: Oh, yes there is.

MAXINE: There is? Where??

GENE: Here.

[MAXINE LOOKS AROUND, CONFUSED.]

GENE: *Me.*

MAXINE: You?

GENE: I am . . . let me see [HE THINKS A MOMENT] . . . Yes! I am . . . Mr. Gene Gumption . . . of Gumption Food Technologies.

MAXINE: Well, I must say it's rather unfair of you to have kept that a secret all this time!

GENE: No, no. Not *really*. Don't you get it? It's just an act I'll put on while the real waffle nuts are visiting!

MAXINE: They're not waffle nuts -- er, waffle *enthusiasts* -- they're just kitchen equipment executives.

GENE: Well, whatever they are . . . from this moment on, I'm one of them. I mean -- one of *us*.

MAXINE [GRATEFULLY]: You're willing to undertake this ridiculous charade for *me*?

GENE: Close but no pickle. I'm willing to undertake this ridiculous charade for *Precocia*.

MAXINE: Same difference.

GENE [LOOKING HER UP AND DOWN]: Uh, yeah, if you say so. Look, I'd better go change into my Kitchen Equipment Executive costume. I *knew* that would come in handy one day! [HE EXITS.]

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 5

[*IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE. TISWELL ENTERS.*]

TISWELL: Ha! I knew if I put all my judgment, wisdom, and finesse into the problem, I could find a way to ditch that cranky graduate student. Locking Blake in the bathroom for an hour or two after the lecture was a stroke of genius. And they say a Ph.D. doesn't mean anything! [HE TURNS TO FACE THE DOOR, AS MAXINE COMES THROUGH ONTO THE STOOP.] Ah -- pardon me, madam.

MAXINE: Yes?

TISWELL: You live, I presume, in this house?

MAXINE: No need to presume. I do live here.

TISWELL: Excellent, excellent. I wonder if I might impose on you. You see, I'm from out of town, and there's something in this house that I'm very desirous of having a look at.

MAXINE: Are you . . . Anthony Crebbs?

TISWELL: Of course not. What an absurd question.

MAXINE [ASIDE]: Ah, then he must be Mr. Grabb. Arrogant, isn't he? Just what the world needs, arrogant kitchen equipment. And still no phlumzbots. What to do . . . Aha -- strategy! [TO TISWELL] I'm so sorry. I should have known you from what you wrote.

TISWELL [ASIDE]: What luck! She's a fan of my poetry. Not that it's surprising, of course. It's a good thing that I keep insisting the publisher put my image on the book jackets. I really don't know why the publisher always objects so much to that.

MAXINE: Ahem . . . it's very kind of you, I'm sure, to take an interest. But you must understand that there are a *lot* of people who want to see the special thing we've got inside. I'll have to see if I can squeeze you in. Please wait here. [SHE GOES IN.]

TISWELL: Well now, this proves me right, once and for all. Would she be deluged with visitors if that were not the rare and cherished night-flying phalarope in her attic? I think not. Wait till I tell that irritating Blake. [WRITING A NOTE ON A SMALL MEMO PAD] Must . . . remember . . . unlock . . . bathroom door . . . upon return.

[*FUSCHIA ENTERS FROM WINGS.*]

FUSCHIA [TO AUDIENCE, AS SHE SIZES TISWELL UP]: Hmm . . . this must be that Mr. Crebbs. Not much to look at, is he? Still, a patent purchase is a patent purchase. [TO TISWELL, TURNING ON THE CHARM] Welcome! I must say, *you* are a sight for sore eyes!

TISWELL [ASIDE]: And to think, they don't want my picture on the book jackets! [TO FUSCHIA] How do you do? I'm --

FUSCHIA: Oh, yes, I'm *sure* you are.

TISWELL: Sure I am what?

FUSCHIA: Tired, of course. Hungry. Thirsty. Won't you come in? I'll give you whatever you like.

TISWELL [FLIRTATIONOUSLY]: Indeed? Well then . . . just lead the way.

FUSCHIA: I always do. [SHE STARTS TO GO IN, THEN STOPS.] Oh! I suppose I'd better tell Mother, first. Just wait here. [SHE STARTS TO GO IN AGAIN, THEN STOPS ONCE MORE.] I almost forgot! [SHE TURNS AND FACES THE AUDIENCE DRAMATICALLY, AS SHE DECLAIMS] I think turtles are absolutely the most magnificent creatures in all the world! [TO TISWELL] There. [SHE GOES IN.]

TISWELL [SHRUGS]: Easy come, easy go. Anyway, it's clear these unusual people get a lot of visitors, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were a little weary of showing people up to the attic to see the phalarope. I must be more subtle. I'll just play it cool, and *ingratiate* my way up to their top story.

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 6

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE IS HASTILY TIDYING UP, AS FUSCHIA ENTERS.]

FUSCHIA: Mother, Mr. Crebbs is here.

MAXINE: Crebbs? But Mr. Grabb is here as well! Strategy is one thing, but they can't both look at the plans at the same time.

FUSCHIA: Who's Mr. Grabb?

MAXINE: No time to explain now. I'll escort Mr. Grabb around the back way and show him into my study. You keep Crebbs occupied in the living room.

FUSCHIA: Occupied?

MAXINE: Keep him company. Use your *charm*, daughter. Start a Scrabble game, if need be.

FUSCHIA: But you said

MAXINE: I know, I know. But we've got to stall him until Grabb leaves. Just don't chase him away, all right?

FUSCHIA: That is *usually* not the problem, Mother dear.

MAXINE: Yeah, yeah. Just get going, will you? [FUSCHIA LEAVES, AND MAXINE SIGHS.] And to think, I was once exactly like that. Yecch. Here's to glorious middle age! [SHE EXITS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FROM FUSCHIA.]

[FUSCHIA RE-ENTERS, WITH TISWELL.]

FUSCHIA: This is the living room. Won't you have a seat?

TISWELL: A charming room. Delightful furnishings. But you know . . . I'm not really a living-room man.

FUSCHIA: I may regret asking, but what kind of man *are* you?

TISWELL: Well, I'm more of an . . . *attic* man.

FUSCHIA: How interesting. Don't you get chilly?

TISWELL: My dear, what do you think blankets are for?

[FUSCHIA GIVES A FORCED LAUGH, WHICH IS FOLLOWED BY AN AWKWARD PAUSE.]

FUSCHIA: Anyway, we don't have much in our attic.

TISWELL: To tell you the truth, there's only one thing I want up there.

FUSCHIA: Say, let's stay here in the living room a while!

TISWELL [ASIDE]: Play it cool, ol' Tiswell, play it cool. **[ALoud]** Whatever you like, uh -- what was your name?

FUSCHIA: I'm Fuschia.

TISWELL: Fuschia! What a lovely name. It has such poetry to it.

FUSCHIA: Do you like poetry?

TISWELL: Do I like poetry? Why, what a question.

FUSCHIA: I *detest* poetry, myself. It's almost as bad as those awful stories my sister Precocia writes. Her writing really stinks. P.U.!

[MAXINE ENTERS AND SEES FUSCHIA WITH TISWELL.]

MAXINE [TO AUDIENCE]: Oh, so *here's* Mr. Grabb. No wonder I couldn't find him outside. I wonder what happened to Crebbs. **[TO TISWELL]** Is my daughter making you feel at home?

TISWELL: Er . . . quite.

MAXINE: She's a charmer, isn't she? **[SHE WINKS AT HIM. THEN, SHE TAKES FUSCHIA DOWNSTAGE INTO A PRIVATE CORNER OF THE ROOM.]** Where's Mr. Crebbs?

FUSCHIA: Right there!

MAXINE: Don't be silly -- that's Mr. Grabb.

FUSCHIA: Who's this "Mr. Grabb" you keep rattling on about? Honestly, Mother, you can be positively tiresome sometimes.

MAXINE: Never mind that. We've got a problem. I can only keep him looking at the plans for so long, before he'll want to see the demonstration. And for that we need the phlumzbots.

FUSCHIA: But didn't the courier come back with the phlumzbots?

MAXINE: No -- what are you talking about? When did you see a courier? The phlumzbots is here??

TISWELL [TO AUDIENCE, HAVING CAUGHT JUST THIS BIT OF THE PRIVATE CONVERSATION]: Phlumzbots? What kind of a bird is a "phlumzbots"? **[HE SHRUGS.]**

FUSCHIA: It was here. I can walk into town and try to track it down.

MAXINE: Please! I'll start to show Grabb the blueprints, and when you return with the phlumzbots, I can do the full demo.

[*FUSCHIA NODS AND EXITS. MAXINE APPROACHES TISWELL.*]

MAXINE: Fuschia had to go run an errand, but I'm here to take over. What were you talking about?

TISWELL [DEJECTEDLY]: Poetry.

MAXINE: You don't say! Well, I'm afraid I won't be much help there. I can't stand the stuff.

TISWELL: But, Madam, your familiarity with my work

MAXINE: That's exactly what I mean. *Your work* is the kind of thing that fascinates me. Nothing like poetry at all! [*TISWELL REACTS TO THIS.*] Anyway, I'd like to begin by showing you my blueprints.

TISWELL [STIFFLY]: Well, Madam --

MAXINE: Please, call me Maxine. After all, if we're going to be doing business together --

TISWELL: Business? Are we?

MAXINE [ASIDE]: Strategy, Maxie, *strategy*. [TO TISWELL] Well, that is the question, isn't it? I mean, naturally I've had a lot of propositions . . .

TISWELL [EMBARRASSED]: Really, uh -- Maxine -- I don't think that's any of my --

MAXINE: Many offers coming from various directions

TISWELL: Offers? [ASIDE] Ah, so that's her game. She's started charging a fee to let us phalarope fanciers get a glimpse of the bird in the attic. A shrewd, hard-headed householder trying to scrape up money for a new water-heater, no doubt. Ah well, if I have to pay, I have to pay. [TO MAXINE, AS HE REACHES INTO HIS JACKET POCKET WITH A POLITE CHUCKLE] What size "offers" are you currently accepting?

MAXINE: That remains to be decided. There are so many factors to consider, of course. I'm not going to let an extra ten thousand here or there prevent me from choosing the best all-around candidate.

TISWELL: Ten thousand!

MAXINE [WAGGING A FINGER PLAYFULLY]: Now don't you try to trick me into talking terms before we're ready, you sly fox, you. [*TISWELL LOOKS OVER HIS SHOULDER TO SEE IF SHE'S TALKING TO SOMEONE OTHER THAN HIM.*] I assure you that I will thoroughly mull over each

and every offer. I consider it a point of honor never to return an under-mulled proposition. But first things first: my blueprints.

TISWELL: Yes. Blueprints, eh? I'm certain they are endowed with a charm as captivating as . . . your own. But (ahem), my time is rather limited, and I'd really been hoping to get into your attic.

MAXINE [TO AUDIENCE] What a strange desire! Well, I know these big executives often have their eccentricities, and I suppose I have to humor Mr. Grabb's personal quirks. Hmm . . . this is a chance for a little more strategy. **[TO TISWELL]** But you can't possibly see our attic.

TISWELL: Yes, you've made that quite clear.

MAXINE: I mean, you can't see it *today*. It's a complete mess. **[IN A PATRONIZING, SACCHARINE TONE, AS IF HE'S A CHILD]** But if you come back tomorrow to look at the plans, I promise I'll show you the attic first, all right?

TISWELL: You'll let me in the attic tomorrow? At no charge?

MAXINE: Of course at no charge. What an extraordinary man you are!

TISWELL [TO AUDIENCE]: O happy day! My irresistible personal charisma has triumphed once again!

BLACKOUT

Act I, Scene 7

[*IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE. GENE ENTERS IN HIS "EXECUTIVE" COSTUME. HE DOES NOT REALIZE IT, BUT HE IS DRESSED EXACTLY LIKE PROFESSOR TISWELL -- BLUE SPORT JACKET, GREEN NECKTIE, CHECKED CAP. PRECOCIA ENTERS FROM THE OPPOSITE WING.*]

PRECOCIA: Hello, Dream Man. Where did you dream up that outfit?

GENE: Haven't you ever seen a Kitchen Equipment Executive costume before?

PRECOCIA [REFLECTING ON THIS]: No, I suppose I haven't. Anyway, *you'd* look cute in just about anything.

GENE: "Cute"! I'm supposed to look *important*, not "cute".

PRECOCIA [LOOKING HIM OVER]: I'd settle for cute, if I were you. Anyway, are you sure this is a good idea? Impersonating a nonexistent executive from a fictitious company?

GENE: Hey, I have to go with what feels real. [AFTER A PAUSE] Why, doesn't it sound like a good idea to you?

PRECOCIA: All I can say is that, as a writer, I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot quill. But if Maman asked you to do it, you'd better go ahead with it.

GENE [SHEEPISHLY]: She didn't exactly ask me. I kind of talked her into it.

PRECOCIA: I wish you hadn't told me that. In fact, the more I think about this, the more I think it's time to go up to my room and indulge in an hour or two of writer's block. You can't have a really good, unproductive writer's block unless you get some quality time alone, you know. Good luck, cutie-pie. Er . . . I'm sorry. Good luck, *important-pie*. [SHE EXITS.]

[*CREBBS AND CURRIER ENTER FROM THE FAR WING. GENE CONCEALS HIMSELF BEHIND A TREE, SO THAT THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE HIM BUT CREBBS AND CURRIER CANNOT.*]

CREBBS: Currier, I've made a terrible mess of things. I flew all the way up to Port Folio to accuse that scoundrel Grabb of trying to steal my waffle-template prospect here. And he didn't know anything about it. It's funny . . . Eve Colombo has never steered me wrong before. I don't mind when the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing; but when the *left* hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing, I start to get nervous. It must be this business of calling me "Fromage". I knew that would lead to trouble sooner or later.

CURRIER: Well, I'm sorry you wasted a trip, Mr. Crebbs -- uh, Anthony. [FROM BEHIND THE TREE, *GENE* REACTS TO THESE NAMES.] But it sounds like there's no harm done.

CREBBS: Ha! That's what you think. I said Grabb didn't know anything about the Manx family's WaffleWonder. Well, he didn't. But now he does. I went blustering into his office and spilled the

beans. I was trying to get him to admit to going after my find. But I might as well have been giving him a PowerPoint presentation on where to find Maxine Manx and what to offer her. I'm sure that within five minutes of my leaving, Grabb had a telegram off to Ms. Manx.

CURRIER: Or a Special Delivery letter.

CREBBS: Yeah, if there is such a thing. I hope you've been making progress in my absence, Currier. It's more important than ever, now.

CURRIER: Well . . . you might say I've been having "extensive discussions" with the Manx family.

CREBBS: Excellent.

CURRIER: I just didn't get past the front door yet.

CREBBS: Hmm. That doesn't sound very good, Currier.

CURRIER: I didn't like it much, either. So what do we do now, Tony?

CREBBS: I suppose I'll have to fall back on my shrewd business skills and negotiating acumen. I hate it when that happens.

CURRIER: But you can do it, Tony.

CREBBS: Yes, I guess so. As long as I'm competing against just one rival, I can usually get what I'm after. More than one rival is tougher. I start to feel like a network TV anchor.

GENE [COMING OUT CASUALLY FROM BEHIND TREE]: Pardon me, gentlemen. Can either of you direct me to the Manx residence?

CREBBS [WITH A FRIENDLY MANNER]: Oh, sure. It's right here. **[SUDDENLY SUSPICIOUS]** Say . . . why are *you* looking for the Manx place?

GENE [NONCHALANTLY]: Oh, I have some business to transact with them.

CREBBS [NERVOUSLY]: Business?

GENE: Yes, *business*. You've heard of business, haven't you? It's kind of like a hobby, only you can lose more money on it.

CREBBS [STIFFLY]: I *know* what business is, thank you very much. In fact, it just so happens that we have some business here ourselves.

GENE [CONDESCENDINGLY]: Oh, really? What do you do, sell toilet brushes or something?

CREBBS [HAUGHTILY]: I am Anthony Crebbs, of Crebbs Kitchen Concepts!

CURRIER: Careful, Tony. Don't give away the game!

GENE: Oh, so *you're* Crebbs, eh? Gee, bad luck you wasted your time coming out here.

CREBBS [SLOWLY]: What do you mean, wasted my time?

GENE: Well, everyone knows that Ms. Manx -- uh, *Maxine* -- plans to sell the rights on the WaffleWonder to Gumption Food Technologies.

CREBBS [NOW FURIOUS]: What in the world is "Gumption Food Technologies"??!

GENE: Oh, just a snappy little outfit I happen to own. I guess you don't keep up with the trade journals, do you, bud? Anyway, now that you've shown me where the Manx place is, can I offer you gentlemen a lift to the airport? My contract-signing with Maxie isn't until dinner time, and as you know there's not much else to do around these parts.

CREBBS: Thank you, no! We'll take a taxi. Come on, Currier . . . I can't compete with the entire world for this silly invention. Who needs it! We have plenty of other work to do back in Boston.

[*CREBBS AND CURRIER EXIT. GENE LOOKS SMUGLY PLEASED WITH HIMSELF, UNTIL HE REALIZES HE'S GONE TOO FAR. HE THEN RUNS AFTER CREBBS AND CURRIER, SHOUTING "Hey! Come back! You don't understand!" etc.*]

END OF ACT I

Act II, Scene 1

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE IS ALONE. GENE ENTERS, BACK IN HIS MAIL-CARRIER CLOTHES.]

GENE [LISTLESSLY]: Special delivery.

MAXINE [GLANCING DUBIOUSLY AT THE ENVELOPE IN HIS HAND]: You know, these Special Delivery letters aren't really that special anymore, are they? I don't know if I even want to bother with it.

GENE: I could coax you into reading it, if you like. It comes as part of the Special Delivery service.

MAXINE: No, that won't be necessary. [SHE TAKES THE LETTER AND READS SILENTLY.] Why, what do you make of this!

GENE: Nothing, so far.

MAXINE: Mr. Grabb of Grabb Gourmet writes to regret that he will not be paying us a visit, after all. He states that his company is reassessing their commitment to developing waffle-extrusion technology.

GENE: But I heard that Grabb was already here!

MAXINE [AFTER THINKING A MOMENT]: No! Someone we *thought* was Grabb was here.

GENE: But then who was he really?

MAXINE: Who else? It must have been Crebbs, after all, craftily impersonating his own rival to manipulate the deal.

GENE [GUILTILY, COVERING UP FOR HIS BLUNDER WITH THE REAL CREBBS]: Uh, yeah! It must have been Crebbs. That's who it was, for sure. Crebbs-a-roonie.

MAXINE: And, obviously, the advantage to him of impersonating his own rival is . . . that is . . . well . . . well, I don't see what it is at all, frankly. But you have to watch these wily executives every second, that's all I know. But now that it's clear where I stand, things should go more smoothly. One daughter to return with phlumzbots; a quick trip to the attic tomorrow; a bit of shrewd negotiating; and this deal should be wrapped up. You can expect champagne at supper tomorrow, Gene. You're invited, of course.

GENE [LAUGHING NERVOUSLY]: Thanks. Uh . . . listen, I have to get going. It's almost time for my favorite cable TV show, *Open Marriage in an Open Kitchen*. It's hosted by a couple who are both professional chefs, and every week they each invite a guest. It's a lot of fun to watch -- though they don't actually get much cooking done. See you later. [HE MAKES A HASTY EXIT.]

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 2

[*THE BAR OF THE LOGY MAPLE HOTEL. CREBBS IS SEATED ALONE. GENE ENTERS, DRESSED IN HIS "EXECUTIVE" OUTFIT.*]

GENE: Wow, I'm glad I caught up with you. [HE SITS AT CREBBS' TABLE.]

CREBBS [STIFFLY]: Are you?

GENE: Yeah. I need to talk to you. Uh -- listen, I'm sorry if I came off as rude back there.

CREBBS: Oh, that's okay. Business is business, after all. [REFLECTING] At least I think business is business. It certainly isn't pleasure.

GENE: Well, maybe. But I have to confess . . . I kind of exaggerated things a bit.

CREBBS [HIS INTEREST PIQUED]: What do you mean?

GENE: I mean, I don't really have a deal sewn up with Maxine -- er, Ms. Manx -- like I implied. In fact, to be perfectly honest, we've barely discussed the proposition at all.

CREBBS: Well! That changes everything. And here I was, thinking I'd been cut out.

GENE: Exactly. As I see it, you're still very much in the running. And I'll go so far as to wish you good luck.

CREBBS [SHAKES HIS HAND]: Well now, I must say that's *very* sporting of you.

GENE: Think nothing of it. You can go after that patent, with my blessing. To tell you the truth, I'm not even sure I'm that interested in it, after all.

CREBBS: Oh?

GENE [CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENTUM OF HIS OWN CHARADE, AND NO LONGER THINKING ABOUT WHAT HE'S SAYING]: Well, you know . . . another kitchen gimmick. How many more will the market bear before demand bottoms out? The latest report from my team of analysts advises no further investments along these lines in the present economic climate.

[*CURRIER ENTERS.*]

CURRIER: Hi, Tony. [GESTURING AT GENE] What does he want *now*?

CREBBS: Manners, Currier, *manners*. My friend Mr. Gumption has just given me some professional information that may have saved us from a *very* costly mistake. I'll need you to get us on the next Boston flight, Currier. The sooner we get out of here, the better. [HE RISES AND ADDRESSES GENE.] Thank you, Gumption. And I hope we meet again.

[*CREBBS* AND *CURRIER* EXIT. *GENE* LOOKS PLEASED WITH HIMSELF FOR A MOMENT UNTIL, ONCE AGAIN, HE REALIZES HE'S GONE TOO FAR. HE JUMPS UP WITH A START.]

GENE [RUNNING AFTER *CREBBS* AND *CURRIER*]: *Waaaaaaaiiiiiiiiiittttt!*

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 3

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE IS ALONE.]

MAXINE [TO AUDIENCE]: I don't like all this waiting. I'm not built for waiting, I'm built for action! Now that I realize Crebbs is the only game in town -- and a sly one, too -- I want to get him back here as soon as possible and seal this deal. I don't want to let 24 hours -- and my playing hard-to-get -- cool his enthusiasm. I'll even let him go up in the attic *today*, messy as it is. If he wants, we can even have dinner up there. All I know is, I want a Crebbs Kitchen Concepts document in my hands *tonight*. I don't care what it says. I don't care if it's even legible. I don't care if it's a picture of Anthony Crebbs' grandmother playing the ukelele! As long as I get it.

Hmm . . . I ought to go running into town right now and try to bring him back here. But I'd better not, because Fuschia will be back with the phlumzbots, and I've got to get that fitted onto the prototype. And I've learned the hard way not to let the girls do that kind of thing themselves -- I always give them precise, detailed instructions, and they proceed, with the utmost care and the best of intentions, to somehow do the exact opposite of what I've specified.

Ah! I know who can help me with this. My nutty sister. She needs a hobby, anyway. [SHE CROSSES TO THE TELEPHONE TABLE AND DIALS.] Hi, Loopy. You busy, kiddo? Oh. But how did so many giant stuffed gerbils get into your pickup truck in the first place? Ah. Yeah, if I were you I'd think of a different contest next time. Anyway, after you get through with that . . . would you be able to do me a hugie? You know the bar at the Logy Maple Hotel? *Really?* You must tell me that story, when I have more time. Anyway, if I could ask you to pop over there around cocktail time, and look for a man wearing a blue sport jacket, a green necktie, and a checked cap Here's what you need to do

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 4

[*LOGY MAPLE BAR. GENE PACES THE ROOM NERVOUSLY.*]

GENE: This is my last chance to set things straight with Mr. Crebbs before he flies back to Boston. I've *got* to change his mind about buying Maxine's patent.

[*LOOPY ENTERS.*]

LOOPY [*ASIDE*]: There he is, dressed just like my sister said. She always was nauseatingly precise. Still, I guess once you see someone in an outfit like that, you're not quick to forget. [*SHE APPROACHES GENE.*] Excuse me . . . do you have something to do with the purchase of waffle machine patents?

GENE: Unfortunately. Won't you sit down?

LOOPY: Thank you.

[*THEY SIT.*]

LOOPY: I represent someone who will remain nameless.

GENE: Won't that make it difficult for him or her to make restaurant reservations and so forth?

LOOPY: Heh-heh, very cute. [*SHE WIGGLES THE BRIM OF HIS CAP, PLAYFULLY.*] No, what I mean is that my client will remain nameless for the purposes of what I want to say to you.

GENE [*SHRUGGING*]: Well, if it's okay with your client, it's okay with me.

LOOPY: I don't know if you realize it, but in this very town resides someone who is ready to turn the home waffle-making world on its head. Whether she goes forward with this plan is entirely in your hands.

GENE [*GULPS*]: Don't tell me you represent someone who's invented a waffle-extrusion template?

LOOPY: Precisely.

GENE [*ASIDE*]: This is terrible! A rival to the WaffleWonder, right in this very town. Maxine's whole plan could turn to waffle crumbs before her very eyes. [*DECISIVELY*] There's only one thing to do -- buy them out!

LOOPY: My client is convinced that her invention will win over all the waffle nuts in the land.

GENE: You mean "waffle enthusiasts".

LOOPY: Isn't that what I said? You must learn to listen more carefully, young man. You'd like my client very much, by the way. Lovely family. So . . . are you prepared to act on what we have to offer?

GENE: Oh, absolutely! Just name your price.

LOOPY [TO AUDIENCE]: Boy, that was easy! You know, Maxine must be slipping, the old girl.
[TO GENE] Will you come with me now to sign a few cute little documents and so forth? We'll have such fun!

GENE: Yeah, I guess I'd better.

[THEY RISE.]

LOOPY: We just need to stop at the hardware store on the way. My client has asked me to pick up a size R "monkey tail" coupling. I have no idea what that is . . . but evidently we need one.

GENE: Who doesn't.

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 5

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE IS EXAMINING THE WAFFLEWONDER. LOOPY AND GENE ENTER. LOOPY LOOKS PLEASED WITH HERSELF, WHILE GENE, RECOGNIZING THAT HE HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO MAXINE'S HOUSE, LOOKS RELIEVED BUT SHEEPISH.]

LOOPY: Knock knock. Mission accomplished, toots. Any other little chores need doing around here -- as Gene Kelly would say?

GENE [QUIETLY, TRYING TO GET LOOPY'S ATTENTION]: Uh . . . you know, this is actually --

MAXINE: Fantastic! Loops, you're a doll. So where is he?

LOOPY [POINTING TO GENE]: What do you think *that* is, chopped chickpeas?

MAXINE: Not *him*. I mean Mr. Crebbs. The man I asked you to negotiate with.

LOOPY: *You* asked me to negotiate with a man at the Logy Maple Hotel bar, wearing a blue blazer with a green tie and a checked cap. You will notice beside me one (count 'em) man, dressed in blue blazer (check), green tie (check), and checked cap (check, check, check, check, check) [SHE POINTS OUT INDIVIDUAL CHECKS ON THE CAP AS SHE SAYS THIS].

MAXINE: But it's the wrong guy!

LOOPY: Fussy, fussy, fussy. Look, I know what you're thinking, Maxie. You're thinking I'm a mindreader! Well I'm not.

MAXINE: And Gene -- what were you doing dressed like that?

GENE: You wanted me to impersonate a kitchen equipment executive, remember? This is the outfit I use to fool people into thinking that's what I am.

MAXINE: But you weren't supposed to fool *her*.

GENE: Listen, lady, when I'm dressed for business, I'll fool whoever comes along.

MAXINE [TO LOOPY]: Well why did *you* have to come along?

LOOPY: You sent me, remember? I have a peculiar habit of doing the things people ask me especially to do.

MAXINE: Oh! You are so vulgar.

GENE [TO LOOPY]: Has she always been like this?

LOOPY: You mean an overly-demanding, self-centered, bossy, impatient, hyper-critical older sister? [SHE SHRUGS.] I wouldn't know.

[FROM THE NEXT ROOM, WE HEAR THE DAUGHTERS' VOICES.]

DARLA: "Fubsy"? Like, is that a word?

PRECOCIA: Ha -- it is now. Seven points.

FUSCHIA: Precocia, "fubsy" is *not* a legal word.

PRECOCIA: It is *so* a legal word. I made it up *specifically* to be a legal Scrabble word!

FUSCHIA: I've got a word for you, but luckily, I don't have the letters to spell it.

DARLA: Hey, whaddya know? Look -- "fubsy" is in the dictionary. [SHE GIGGLES.]

FUSCHIA: Don't be absurd. You must be thinking of our cousin Fubsy.

PRECOCIA: His name is *Fubswell*. Everyone knows he doesn't go by "Fubsy" anymore!

DARLA: Why do you guys always argue during *my* turn? My turn is becoming National Argument Month, thanks to you!

LOOPY: Isn't it odd that they're sisters, and yet they can't seem to get along at all?

[SQUEAKING NOISE.]

LOOPY: Hmm. Which one of them has that high, squeaky voice?

GENE: If you'll excuse me, I've got an errand to run. Give Precocia a pat on the Scrabble tiles for me. [HE EXITS.]

LOOPY: And I guess I'd better get back to the hotel and try again . . . [SHE LEAVES.]

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 6

[IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE. CURRIER ENTERS CAUTIOUSLY, WATCHING TO MAKE SURE NO ONE SEES HIM. HE CARRIES A MANILA ENVELOPE, ALONG WITH HIS EVER-PRESENT COPY OF *THE NEW YORKER*.]

CURRIER: Something was fishy about that Gumption guy. Besides his clothes, I mean. There's no convincing Tony once he's soured on a deal -- except with hard evidence, that is. He'd flip if he knew I were sneaking back here without him to scout things out -- and that I lied when I said there were no more flights today. But I can't let him drag us back to Boston until *I've* found out the waffle truth!

[TISWELL ENTERS. CURRIER SEES HIM AND DUCKS BEHIND THE TREE.]

CURRIER: Another one wearing the "Gumption" ensemble! They must have been running a sale. This guy could be someone to watch.

TISWELL [TO AUDIENCE]: This may be a big mistake, but I just had to come back and try once more to see the phalarope. Not tomorrow, *today*. **[HE RINGS THE DOORBELL.]**

MAXINE [OPENING DOOR]: Why, hello! Won't you come in? **[THEY ENTER THE HOUSE.]**

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 7

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE AND TISWELL ENTER THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR.]

TISWELL: Well, well. How are you, Maxine?

MAXINE: Oh, just fine, thank you. And you?

TISWELL: Very well indeed. To tell you the truth, I wasn't quite myself earlier.

MAXINE: Aha!

TISWELL: I beg your pardon?

MAXINE: Oh -- I just said "Ah", as in "I understand."

TISWELL: Understand what?

MAXINE: Whatever you just said.

TISWELL: I did?

MAXINE: Did *what*?

TISWELL: Er . . . quite. Now then, I don't wish to be pushy. But I was hoping to get into this attic of yours as soon as possible, as I've left my associate waiting at the hotel. One can't keep locking one's associates in the bathroom over and over again indefinitely, can one?

MAXINE: Uh . . . no, I suppose one can't. You *are* a man of peculiar habits, aren't you?

TISWELL: In my field, this is considered an advantage.

MAXINE: I didn't realize that. Perhaps I ought to develop some peculiar habits of my own.

TISWELL: But I thought you said you had, alas, no interest in poetry.

MAXINE: Poetry? That's right, I don't. What does that have to do with -- well, in any case, I guess my daughters have enough peculiar habits to go around. You'll find the attic up these stairs. You'll like these stairs -- the carpet is the smartest shade of *turtle* green. [SHE LAUGHS INGRATIATINGLY.]

TISWELL [UNIMPRESSED]: I see. That should prove most convenient for any smart turtles that happen to visit. You'd better lead the way, Madam. This staircase looks rather dark and windy, and my vision is poor in dim light. I'll keep an eye on you . . . from the rear.

MAXINE [CURTLY]: Watch your step.

[MAXINE AND TISWELL EXIT THROUGH THE ATTIC DOOR, JUST AS PRECOCIA ENTERS THE LIVING ROOM AND SEES THEM ASCEND. AS SHE IS CROSSING TO CLOSE THE ATTIC DOOR BEHIND THEM, SHE HEARS A KNOCK ON THE FRONT DOOR. SHE OPENS IT TO CURRIER.]

PRECOCIA: Goodness! What in the world kept you all this time?

CURRIER: Oh . . . delays.

PRECOCIA: I was beginning to worry that you'd never return. You can imagine what that would have meant for my self-esteem.

CURRIER: Your self-esteem?

PRECOCIA: Well, naturally. [SHE IS BECOMING EMOTIONAL.] I mean, having been accepted and then suddenly rejected

CURRIER: Hey -- take it easy! I mean, it's just a business contract, after all.

PRECOCIA: Is that all I am to you? "Just a business contract"?? I, pouring out my blood here each day

CURRIER: You should be more careful.

PRECOCIA: Careful? Is that what you're looking for? Is that what your magazine told you to tell me??

CURRIER [GIVING HER, AND HIS MAGAZINE IN TURN, A FUNNY LOOK]: My magazine? Aren't you perhaps a little too obsessed with my magazine?

PRECOCIA [NOBLY, HALF TOWARD THE AUDIENCE]: Oh, I guess you could call it an obsession. [SHE TURNS BACK TO CURRIER, HER EYES INTENSE WITH PRIDE.] I prefer to think of it as a *passion*.

CURRIER [BACKING OFF]: I'm not sure that's any better.

[THEY ARE INTERRUPTED BY A LOUD *SQUEAKING NOISE*.]

PRECOCIA [HER NERVES STRAINING]: For once and for all -- what in the world *is* that?

CURRIER: Ah -- that one I can answer. It's a ham radio. From outside it sounded like squeaky hinges, but now I recognize it.

PRECOCIA: Darla's radio!

CURRIER [VERY INTERESTED BY THIS]: Your cute sister is the ham operator?

PRECOCIA: Yes, but you must promise to overlook this. She can't help herself. She can't even help being cute, poor child.

CURRIER [IGNORING THIS]: Of course, her radio's not put together properly. They're not supposed to make that kind of noise, you know.

PRECOCIA [NOW BORED]: You don't say. [SHE TURNS INDIGNANT AGAIN.] Look, did you come here to talk about radios or about promising young authors?

CURRIER: Huh? Uh . . . neither.

PRECOCIA [NOW GENUINELY PUZZLED]: What? Well then what's in that envelope?

CURRIER: Oh -- this is just that stuff you folks were so eager to see. Promotional literature from our company.

PRECOCIA [LOOKING THE MATERIALS OVER]: But this isn't from *The New Yorker*!

CURRIER: *The New Yorker*? Of course not. It's from Crebbs Kitchen Concepts.

PRECOCIA: *You're* with Crebbs?

CURRIER: Incessantly.

PRECOCIA: This changes everything. [ASIDE] I think I feel a very long writer's block coming on. I've been such a fool! Luckily, foolhardiness is considered to be an important element of the creative personality these days, according to the latest guidelines published by the Wagglehurst Writing Workshop. [SHE SIGHS RESIGNEDLY AND ADDRESSES CURRIER.] Please tell Mr. Crebbs that, as a family, we are practically *obsessed* with turtles. It's a wonder Maman gets any inventing done at all, with her full schedule of turtle-related activities.

CURRIER [DUBIOUSLY]: Uh . . . no problem, I can tell him that, if you really want me to. Um . . . it's none of my business . . . but are you somehow working from the assumption that he'll be favorably impressed by this information?

PRECOCIA: Naturally! Why, his fondness for his own turtle is legendary -- and most inspiring.

CURRIER: His *own* turtle? What makes you think Tony has a turtle?

PRECOCIA: We read it on the Web.

CURRIER: Haven't you learned by now not to believe everything you see on the Internet?

PRECOCIA: But it was on your company's own official website!

CURRIER: Ha! Figures. That's where most of the worst inaccuracies occur. Personally, I never even look at the thing.

PRECOCIA: Oh. Anyway, I think your boss is upstairs with Maman right now.

CURRIER [STARTLED]: He is??

PRECOCIA: Does that surprise you?

CURRIER: Well -- no. But only because I'm so *used* to him doing surprising things that it never surprises me when he does something surprising. Hey, listen . . . he -- uh -- won't be pleased to know that I came here without his permission, if you know what I mean. I know we just recently met . . . but do you have a closet I could hide in or something?

PRECOCIA [POINTING TO A DOOR]: You may install yourself in there. It's a powder room.

CURRIER: Thanks. [HE DROPS HIS MAGAZINE AND ENVELOPE ON THE TABLE AND HIDES IN POWDER ROOM.]

[FUSCHIA ENTERS.]

PRECOCIA: What have *you* been up to?

FUSCHIA: Chasing a phlumzbots, what else? With very little success, I might add. Hmm . . . I wonder if phlumzbots-chasing is good for the complexion.

[GENE ENTERS, STILL DRESSED LIKE TISWELL.]

PRECOCIA: Gene! Darling! You can't hang around here dressed like that. It's -- it's likely to cause *confusion*.

GENE: Wow, am I relieved! I caught up with Mr. Crebbs again, and *this* time I think I actually straightened things out. Now I don't feel like such an idiot. If there's one thing that wrinkles my culottes, it's feeling like an idiot.

PRECOCIA: But Mr. Crebbs is right here in the house! In fact, he's upstairs with Maman.

GENE: No -- I'm talking about the *real* Crebbs.

PRECOCIA: Well, goodness -- he looked real to *me*. And, after all, I'm a writer. I should think I know a real person when I see one. They're so much more two-dimensional than fictional people.

GENE: Look, trust me. I got to the right guy, and he's heading this way to talk to Maman -- er, to talk to your mother. But he'd better not find me here.

[GENE LOOKS AROUND QUICKLY, AND THEN DUCKS INTO THE POWDER ROOM. FROM INSIDE, WE HEAR GENE'S AND CURRIER'S RAISED VOICES. FROM OUTSIDE THE POWDER ROOM DOOR, PRECOCIA AND FUSCHIA REACT TO THEIR CONVERSATION.]

CURRIER: Hey, do you mind, buddy? I was in here first.

GENE: But I *need* to be in here.

CURRIER: Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't realize you actually had to use the bathroom.

GENE: I don't! I just need to *hide* here.

CURRIER: Well, what do you think I'm doing, playing a chess match? And -- if you'll forgive me for repeating myself -- *I* was here first.

GENE: Look, there's plenty of room for both of us.

[WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A TOILET FLUSHING.]

CURRIER: Will you watch it!? Look what you made me do.

[*PRECOCIA* OPENS THE DOOR BRIEFLY TO SHUSH THEM. *CURRIER* PUSHES *GENE* OUT (BUT *FUSCHIA* DOES NOT SEE *CURRIER*). *GENE* LOOKS AROUND.]

GENE [MATTER-OF-FACTLY, TO *PRECOCIA*]: I feel like an idiot again.

[*GENE* RUNS OUT OF THE HOUSE. A MOMENT LATER, *TISWELL* COMES DOWN THE STAIRS, HOLDING A LARGE, ARTIFICIAL EGG.]

TISWELL [ASIDE]: *This* will shut that pesky assistant of mine up! Incontrovertible *proof* that the phalarope nests in this attic!

PRECOCIA [TO *FUSCHIA*]: Oh! This is Mr. Crebbs coming down from the attic. Though Gene says he's not real. Still, I know Maman will want us to stall him until the phlumzbots arrives.

FUSCHIA: So, stall him already.

PRECOCIA: Me? What would I say to a *businessman*? Especially if he's not real? *You* stall him. I'll go tell Maman that you're back. [SHE CROSSES *TISWELL* AT THE ATTIC DOOR, SMILES CONDESCENDINGLY AT HIM, AND GOES UP THE STAIRS.]

FUSCHIA: So, how was the attic?

TISWELL: Most rewarding! I wish you could have been there with me.

FUSCHIA: Trust me, it's better this way.

TISWELL: I *knew* I was right to come here. I felt in my heart.

FUSCHIA: Aw, how sweet. But I have to tell you . . . I just don't feel the same way.

TISWELL: Oh, that's all right. I don't expect *everyone* to share my passions, after all.

FUSCHIA: That's probably a good thing. The attic would get awfully crowded.

TISWELL: Eh? Oh, yes, I suppose it would. [HE CHUCKLES POLITELY.]

FUSCHIA [BACKING OFF]: Well, if you'll excuse me . . . I think my eyebrows are fading.

TISWELL: But don't you want to see the egg?

[FUSCHIA GASPS AND EXITS.]

[PRECOCIA COMES DOWN FROM THE ATTIC WITH MAXINE. THEY SPEAK OUT OF EARSHOT OF TISWELL.]

PRECOCIA: Do you think you have a deal, Maman?

MAXINE: How should I know! All he'll talk about is some silly bird that he thinks lives upstairs.

TISWELL: Ah, Maxine. I must implore you to let me impose on you once more before I leave town, to observe the bird itself when it's not abroad gathering food. And now . . . if you'll excuse me, I must let my assistant out of the bathroom.

PRECOCIA [OPENING POWDER ROOM DOOR AND SPEAKING TO CURRIER]: Sorry, my retired editor, the game's up. He knows.

[CURRIER STEPS OUT OF POWDER ROOM. HE AND TISWELL LOOK AT EACH OTHER BLANKLY. FUSCHIA RE-ENTERS AND SEES CURRIER.]

FUSCHIA: Hey! I've been all over town chasing you. Where's our phlumzbots?

[CURRIER DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS. LOOPY ENTERS, CARRYING A PACKAGE. BLAKE IS WITH HER.]

LOOPY: Is this yours, Max? There was a Special Express courier at the hotel asking directions to your house from this character here [SHE POINTS TO BLAKE], so I showed her my I.D. and signed for it. Oh! How about that? I seem to have walked off with her scannymahoozits.

[MAXINE TAKES PACKAGE, AND PUTS IT ON TABLE WITH PROTOTYPE. CREBBS IS HEARD OFFSTAGE.]

CREBBS: Hello! Is anybody home?

TISWELL [TO BLAKE]: Why aren't you locked in the bathroom?

CURRIER: Sorry -- occupied!

[*CURRIER* DUCKS BACK INTO POWDER ROOM BEFORE *CREBBS* CAN SEE HIM. *CREBBS* ENTERS, LOOKS AROUND BRIEFLY.]

CREBBS: Hi, everyone. Currier, please stop hiding. [*CURRIER* COMES OUT.] We've got work to do, Currier. That funny young man approached me yet again back in town. This time he said he wasn't Gumption at all, and that the whole thing had just been an absurd misunderstanding. [NOTICING *TISWELL*] How do you do.

TISWELL: Very well, thank you. I've just found that my visit to this house, from parts remote, has been rewarded.

CREBBS [TO *CURRIER*]: Oh no! This must be the *real* Gumption. Wow, that false Gumption sure did his homework on the clothing, I'll grant him that. [TO *TISWELL*] I tell you, you can't have it! I've had my eye on it for months, and I'm not going to let some upstart come along and snatch it from under me!

TISWELL: I *beg* your pardon, sir. This egg was *not* under you. It was under the night-flying phalarope.

CREBBS: Hey, buddy, who you calling a phala-- Huh? Egg?? What are you talking about?

TISWELL: The egg of the rare night-flying phalarope, of course, which you are -- without any legitimate justification -- trying to claim from me!

CREBBS: Hmm . . . that's the most interesting accusation I've had all day. Currier, are we presently seeking the acquisition of any phalarope eggs?

CURRIER: Negative.

CREBBS: I didn't think so. Though you never know.

LOOPY: Besides, it's just a plastic egg.

TISWELL: Bah!

LOOPY: I *recognize* it. It came with a pair of stockings.

TISWELL: Oh, shut up.

LOOPY: I probably still have the stockings, if you want to see them.

TISWELL: Madam -- I assure you that, come the moment when I am desirous of viewing your stockings, you shall be immediately apprised.

LOOPY: Okay, okay. They were pretty nice ones, as I recall.

BLAKE: The lady does have a point, sir.

LOOPY [TO BLAKE]: Would *you* like to see my stockings?

BLAKE [IGNORING HER, CONTINUING TO ADDRESS TISWELL]: I mean, in nature a bird's egg rarely has such a clearly-demarcated seam where you'd open it up.

LOOPY [ASIDE TO CURRIER, NOW]: Would *you* like to see my stockings?

CURRIER: Thanks, I'm all set.

[WE HEAR THE *SQUEAKING NOISE*. *DARLA* ENTERS.]

DARLA: Was that the mail truck?

TISWELL: The phalarope!

[*TISWELL* BEGINS TO RUN TOWARD ATTIC DOOR. *MAXINE* BLOCKS HIM.]

MAXINE: Look, Mr. Crebbs, I'm getting a little tired of you using my house as an interactive birdwatcher's theme park. Are we going to talk business, or aren't we?

TISWELL: Crebbs? Who is this Crebbs?

CREBBS: I'm Crebbs, of course. Now, this obstreperous gentleman here in the mismatched finery [HE INDICATES TISWELL] is a Mr. Gumption, I believe. Isn't that right, Currier?

CURRIER: Check.

TISWELL: Ha! Your command of names is evidently as weak as your knowledge of birds' eggs. "Gumption", indeed. Why it's an even more ridiculous name than "Crebbs".

MAXINE: Well if you're not Crebbs, and you're not Grabb, and you're not Gumption . . . then who in the world *are* you?

DARLA: He's Edgar Tiswell, Mommy. I'd recognize him anywhere.

MAXINE: You *know* him? "Tiswell"? What kitchen equipment company does *he* represent?

DARLA: None, as far as I'm aware. And I wouldn't say I *know* him, exactly. I just recognize him from the picture on his book, *The Essential Edgar Tiswell*.

TISWELL: *You* have a book of my poetry?

DARLA: I sure do. Precocia bought it, originally, but she didn't like it much -- she said it was pretty lousy -- and so I sort of, you know, inherited it. It's the *perfect* size for propping up my ham radio at the angle I like. It's the *essential* Edgar Tiswell, all right -- I don't know what I'd do without it! I mean, I'd probably have to use some mattress stuffing or something.

TISWELL: I am very flattered, I'm sure. Perhaps you can prevail upon me to autograph your ham radio for you.

CURRIER: Hmph. I wouldn't advise anyone to autograph that radio, unless they want their signature on a masterpiece of botched assembly.

DARLA: Hey! What do you mean by that!?

CURRIER [TRYING TO BE GENTLE]: Well, obviously, if you'd assembled your radio correctly, it wouldn't make that irritating squeaking sound all the time.

FUSCHIA: You may recall me making a similar comment, sister dear. About ten thousand times.

[WE HEAR THE *SQUEAKING NOISE* AGAIN.]

TISWELL: That's no radio! It's the night-flying phalarope, or my name isn't Crebbs – er, Gumption -- er, *Tiswell!* [HE RUNS FOR THE ATTIC DOOR AGAIN, AND MAKES IT THIS TIME.]

DARLA [GOING AFTER HIM]: You stay away from my radio equipment, buster! I don't care if your face *is* propping it up.

[GENERAL COMMOTION. *PRECOCIA* AND *CURRIER* FOLLOW *DARLA* UP THE STAIRS. *PHLUMZBOTS* PACKAGE NEARLY GETS KNOCKED ONTO THE FLOOR. *MAXINE* RESCUES IT AND EXITS TOWARD HER STUDY WITH PACKAGE AND PROTOTYPE.]

[*SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER* ENTERS, PUFFING, AND MAKES A BEE LINE FOR *LOOPY*.]

SPECIAL COURIER: Did anyone ever tell you you're a little too fast, hon?

LOOPY: In the circles I travel, it's not a drawback. Here's your scannymahoozits. [SHE HANDS IT TO HER.]

SPECIAL COURIER [IMPRESSED]: Hey, how'd you know that's what it's called? Did you used to be a Special Express Courier, too? [SHE BREATHES HARD AGAIN.] Wow, I'm really beat. Mind if I sit down? [SHE SITS AND BEGINS TO LEAF THROUGH *CURRIER'S NEW YORKER*. SHE SOON FALLS ASLEEP.]

LOOPY [TO *BLAKE*]: Well? Aren't you going up after your professor?

BLAKE: You've got to be kidding. Between you and me . . . I'm looking for a new job. I came really close to landing a great one just last week. They were *very* impressed with my resume.

LOOPY: What happened?

BLAKE [SHRUGGING]: They gave the job to my resume.

LOOPY: Well, better luck next time. Speaking for myself . . . I'm going back to the Logy Maple bar.

BLAKE: Now you're talking.

[THEY EXIT, LEAVING *CREBBS* AND *FUSCHIA* ALONE, EXCEPT FOR THE SLEEPING *SPECIAL COURIER*. AFTER A BORED SILENCE, *FUSCHIA* FINALLY GETS AN INSPIRATION, AND SPEAKS.]

FUSCHIA: Hey, Mister, would you like to Scrabble with me?

CREBBS [SURPRISED]: Do I want to *what* with you?

FUSCHIA: Play. *Scrabble*.

CREBBS: Oh. Well . . . I'm not very good.

FUSCHIA: I didn't *ask* you if you were very good. I could tell right away you wouldn't be very good -- since you bring it up. I just asked if you wanted to play. Do you?

CREBBS [QUITE DEFINITE NOW]: No.

FUSCHIA: No one ever wants to play Scrabble with me.

CREBBS: That is indeed unfortunate.

FUSCHIA: Then you'll play?

CREBBS: No.

FUSCHIA: Please?

CREBBS: Well, all right, maybe just one set, while I'm waiting.

FUSCHIA [SNOTTILY]: It doesn't have "sets", it has *rounds*.

CREBBS: *I* will play a *set*. Take it or leave it.

FUSCHIA [WITH A SHRUG]: Okay. [SHE WALKS DELIBERATELY TO THE ATTIC DOOR, OPENS IT, AND SHOUTS UP.] Precociaaaa! Darlaaaaa! Come on down! We've got some fresh blood!

CREBBS: Er . . . I didn't realize this was going to be a group activity.

FUSCHIA: What, you thought this was like a honeymoon cruise, just the two of us? I hate to tell you -- but when it's time for my honeymoon, I don't think you'll be part of the plan.

CREBBS: You are an extremely vain young woman, aren't you?

FUSCHIA [SUDDENLY REMEMBERING WHAT HER MOTHER SAID]: Oh! No! No, you mustn't think I'm vain. I'm not vain at all. I -- I just *act* vain sometimes, to overcompensate for my lack of confidence in myself. I'm really terribly, terribly humble. Look! See this face? What an ugly face! Even with all this makeup on. Ugly, ugly, ugly. Yecch! And I'm dumb, too. Even ditzier than Darla -- that's why I'm sometimes impatient with her, because deep down I'm really envious of her superior intelligence. And look at this body! [SHE PARADES AROUND, DISPLAYING HER CURVES AND POISE, THEN STOPS ABRUPTLY AND BEGINS TO LAUGH]. Have you ever seen such a funny-looking body? What a joke! Vain? Vain? What've *I* got to be vain about? Ahahahahaha

CREBBS [WHO IS ACUTELY EMBARRASSED BY THIS DISPLAY]: Uh . . . yes. I see. Say, weren't we going to play Scrabble or something?

FUSCHIA: Well, sure, if you really want to play Scrabble with someone as ugly and stupid as me.

[*PRECOCIA* AND *DARLA* ENTER FROM THE ATTIC. *CREBBS* AND THE THREE *SISTERS* TAKE THEIR PLACES AT THE SCRABBLE TABLE. AS THEY SETTLE IN, *FUSCHIA* WHISPERS SOMETHING TO *DARLA*, WHO TAKES THE CUE.]

DARLA: Gee! I think *turtles* are just, like, the greatest! I mean, they're so . . . green and everything.

[*PRECOCIA* MOTIONS TO *DARLA* TO DROP THE TURTLE STUFF. THE PARTICIPANTS ALL GRAB SOME SCRABBLE PIECES, AND BEGIN TO SET UP FOR PLAY.]

FUSCHIA [WITH A VERY OFFICIAL MANNER]: We'll keep score, of course, as usual. And remember, there's a bonus for the first one to get bored.

CREBBS: What's the bonus for becoming bored?

DARLA: You get to act bored.

CREBBS: Oh.

PRECOCIA [PLAYING THE FIRST WORD]: There. Sixteen points.

DARLA: Wow! That's a good one.

FUSCHIA: Hmph. Some people have all the luck.

PRECOCIA: Luck, nothing. To score thirteen points, you really have to know what you're doing.

DARLA: Ugh. I *hate* it when you have to know what you're doing.

CREBBS: Excuse me, but . . . I don't recognize that word. "SQUONO"?

PRECOCIA: That's right. S-Q-U-O-N-O. Squono.

CREBBS: Pardon my ignorance . . . but what does "squono" mean?

DARLA: It's a word for how Mommy's hair looks after she gets it permed by that spriggly Lucy Lipkins.

CREBBS: "Spriggly"?

FUSCHIA: Spriggly! [SHE LAYS THE LETTERS OUT.] Fifty-one points -- plus fifty more for using all my letters. Cool!

CREBBS: Ahem. You're not, by any chance, using words that exist only in this household, are you?

DARLA: Well, duh! Of course we are. Haven't you ever played Scrabble before?

CREBBS: Yes . . . but now I'm not sure I'll ever play again. Please excuse me. [HE GETS UP FROM THE TABLE, AS MAXINE RE-ENTERS.]

MAXINE: Mr. Crebbs, I have my blueprints – *and* prototype – ready to show you. If you're through playing, that is. I certainly don't mean to interrupt.

DARLA: Hey! What happened to that funny businessman who's not the Special Express Courier after all? I almost forgot all about him.

PRECOCIA: I think he's still upstairs where we left him, looking at your radio.

DARLA: Okey-doke. [SHE WALKS TOWARD ATTIC DOOR.]

FUSCHIA: "Okey-doke"? Aren't you *upset* that someone's fooling around with your radio?

DARLA: Oh, *he* can touch my knobs and dials anytime he wants. [OPENING ATTIC DOOR] I think I love that cute man in the attic.

[TISWELL COMES THROUGH ATTIC DOOR AS DARLA SAYS PREVIOUS LINE.]

TISWELL: Yes. Er -- I like you, too, young lady.

[DARLA IGNORES HIM AND HEADS UP THE STAIRS.]

TISWELL [TO MAXINE]: Madam, you have the most exasperating attic I've ever encountered!

MAXINE: As you are a guest in my house, Professor, I shall try to take that as a compliment.

TISWELL: I can *hear* the phalarope -- loud and clear -- but I cannot find it anywhere!

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 8

[*THE ATTIC. DARLA AND CURRIER ARE ALONE. CURRIER IS EXAMINING THE HAM RADIO. HE MURMURS SOMETHING AS HE DOES SO.*]

DARLA: What did you say?

CURRIER: Huh? Oh. I was just talking to myself.

DARLA: Oh. [BRIGHTLY] Well, say hello for me!

[*CURRIER, NOW FINISHED SCRUTINIZING DARLA'S APPARATUS, STANDS UP AND STRETCHES. HE LOOKS AROUND AND SMILES.*]

CURRIER: Wow. This is the classic American attic. Ham radio . . . trunk of old clothing . . . dusty, half-broken furniture. The only thing that's missing is the rollaway bed.

DARLA: We used to have one, but it rolled away.

CURRIER: Darla, I owe you an apology. There's nothing wrong with the way you've assembled this radio. It just needs a new oscillator, like you said. I can't imagine why it would be squeaking like that.

DARLA: But that's what I've been trying to tell you! The radio *isn't* squeaking.

CURRIER [LOOKING AROUND NERVOUSLY]: Now don't tell me you believe in night-flying phalaropes. I've only just rid myself of the *last* phalarope-fancier who was up here.

DARLA: Phalaropes, schmalaropes!

CURRIER: Well, good. I'm glad you don't have a bird in *your* attic.

[*DARLA MOVES TOWARD A WINDOW SEAT, WHERE SOMETHING HAS SUDDENLY ATTRACTED HER ATTENTION.*]

DARLA: But I do!

CURRIER: What!

DARLA: Right here. [SHE PULLS BACK A CURTAIN TO REVEAL A LARGE, PLASTIC PARROT ON A FAKE PERCH.] Only it's not a real bird. It's a big fake parrot on a creaky swing, getting blown around by the draft up here. Now I get it! The squeaking noise started right after they did all that work on the roof. They must have re-directed the drafts, somehow. [SHE EXAMINES THE TOY PARROT FONDLY.] Gee . . . I think this parrot is left over from Fuschia's ninth birthday party. [TURNING TO CURRIER, AS IF IMPARTING IMPORTANT INFORMATION] We had pizza, and peanut-butter ice cream! [SHE TURNS BACK TO THE PARROT.] Wow, I haven't thought about this

thing in years, though I guess it's been up here the whole time. *This* is what everyone's been hearing. If only Professor Tiswell knew . . . this bird of his really *would* lay a plastic egg.

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 9

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE AND CREBBS ARE SEATED TOGETHER. SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER IS STILL ASLEEP IN HER CORNER OF THE ROOM.]

MAXINE: I'm so glad we can finally get down to business, Mr. Crebbs.

[SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER SNORES LOUDLY.]

CREBBS: Uh . . . yes. So am I.

[LOOPY ENTERS. SHE SEES SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER AND SHRUGS.]

LOOPY: I hope I'm not disturbing you two. I decided I'd rather have some laughs with the old photo album than spend another dull evening in a bar with a stuffy graduate student. Can you believe it? One drink, and I was being quizzed on crossword clues, of all things. Boy, they don't make 'em like they used to. [SHE SEATS HERSELF AT ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM, WHERE A SMALL TABLE HOLDS A LARGE PHOTO ALBUM.]

MAXINE [CURTLY, BARELY RESTRAINING HER IRRITATION]: That's fine, Loopy. [TO CREBBS] Now, before I show you the demo, I think it's important that you understand exactly how I've engineered the WaffleWonder.

CREBBS: Of course. I want to know every detail.

[LOOPY, STUDYING A PICTURE IN THE ALBUM, BEGINS SHAKING HER HEAD AND MAKING A "CLUCKING" NOISE WITH HER TONGUE.]

MAXINE: Loopy! Stop clucking. I'm sorry, Mr. Crebbs. Would you repeat what you said? My sister was clucking.

CREBBS: I was just saying that I --

[LOOPY BEGINS TO GIGGLE SOFTLY. THE GIGGLES QUICKLY EVOLVE INTO A LOUD GUFFAW.]

MAXINE: *Loopy!*

LOOPY: I'm sorry, Maxie! It's just that picture of you from your Senior Prom. What a hairdo!

[MAXINE IS ABOUT TO RESPOND HEATEDLY, BUT SUDDENLY WE HEAR THE OFFSTAGE VOICES OF FUSCHIA AND PRECOCIA ARGUING.]

FUSCHIA: If Mother blows this deal, it's all because of that meddling boyfriend of yours!

PRECOCIA: Ha! It's not Gene's fault. If anything goes wrong, it'll be because Mr. Crebbs is an overstuffed potato-head.

CREBBS: Are they talking about me?

MAXINE: Uh . . . talking? Oh, the voices. It must be that irritating ham radio. Darla's always leaving it turned up and tuned in, isn't she, Loopy?

LOOPY [QUICKLY HELPING HER SISTER COVER]: Oh, yes. Terrible nuisance. I think she's picking up Denmark tonight.

FUSCHIA: So what if Crebbs is a potato-head! He's the kind of potato-head who can really help us out.

MAXINE: I think you're right, Loopy. It *does* sound like Danish, doesn't it?

PRECOCIA: *Why* do all the people with investment capital have to be such potato-heads, anyway!

CREBBS: You know, I think they're speaking English.

LOOPY: Yes, that's what they say about the Danish language! They say it almost sounds a little bit like English, sometimes.

MAXINE: Yes. [AWKWARD PAUSE] Beautiful language.

FUSCHIA: Well, *you* ought to know about potato-heads, because *your* head is the potato-est I've ever seen.

LOOPY: Heh-heh. Charming.

MAXINE: Still, it *is* distracting, don't you think, Mr. Crebbs?

CREBBS: Well

PRECOCIA: Ucch! How many times do I have to tell you to keep your stinky wet nails away from the thumb-indexes on my thesaurus!

MAXINE: Why don't we go into my study, where we can have more privacy. I'll show you the blueprints

[MAXINE AND CREBBS STAND UP. SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER SNORES AGAIN.]

BLACKOUT

Act II, Scene 10

[LIVING ROOM. MAXINE AND LOOPY SIT TOGETHER. PRECOCIA, FUSCHIA, DARLA AND GENE STAND ATTENTIVELY AROUND THEM. DARLA IS HOLDING THE PLASTIC BIRD. SPECIAL EXPRESS COURIER IS EVIDENTLY STILL ASLEEP.]

MAXINE: . . . and then that man Currier joined us, and I showed the plans to *him*, and then I did the demo. And then Crebbs asked if he and Currier could use my study to confer. They said they'd be out in a few minutes.

LOOPY: But isn't that a contract Crebbs gave you?

MAXINE: No, that's a picture of his grandmother playing the ukelele. [SHE PASSES IT TO LOOPY.]

[CREBBS AND CURRIER ENTER.]

CREBBS: Maxine, your invention is just what we'd hoped. Isn't that right, Currier?

CURRIER: It's *more* than we'd hoped.

CREBBS: Precisely. In fact . . . we're not sure the world is ready for such a revolutionary waffle-making development.

CURRIER: Now, if you'd made the WaffleWonder a little more *mediocre*, a little less well-designed . . . then people would have more of a chance to get used to it gradually, while all the little technical flaws come and go. You know, like with computers.

CREBBS: But please don't be alarmed, Maxine. This doesn't mean that we won't buy the patent. It just means that we'll need to allocate some of the budget toward having our own technicians adapt it to an appropriate level of semi-functionality. This will, unfortunately, reduce the figure that we can offer to you.

MAXINE [OUTRAGED]: And you think that I'd sell it to you, knowing that you were going to *ruin* it? Forget it! I'll wait till someone comes along who's forward-looking enough to do justice to what I've created.

PRECOCIA: Don't be hasty, Maman.

MAXINE: I *will* be hasty. So hasty that I'm prepared to wait five, ten, even *twenty* years to find the right buyer. [IN CREBBS' AND CURRIER'S FACES] How's *that* for "hasty"!

SPECIAL COURIER: I don't think that will be necessary.

MAXINE [SURPRISED TO HEAR A VOICE FROM THAT DIRECTION]: What are you talking about, um . . . I'm sorry, but I don't know your name.

SPECIAL COURIER: My name is Abigail -- but my friends call me "Fromage". Anyway, it's none of my business . . . but since I happened to be sitting here all this time, I couldn't help listening. This is a waffle-extrusion patent we're talking about, right?

DARLA: Like, totally! But what do *you* know about waffle extrusion?

SPECIAL COURIER: Personally? Nothing. But I've got this nutty uncle, y'see, back home. Runs a company called Gumption Food Technologies.

FUSCHIA [DISMISSIVELY]: There's no such thing.

GENE: Yeah, I just made it up!

SPECIAL COURIER: Oh, really? Well, tell that to my Uncle Gordon Gumption. The way he tells it, the company is not only real, it's quickly becoming the industry leader.

CREBBS: I *knew* that name sounded familiar.

SPECIAL COURIER: And, as the up-and-coming industry leader, he's pretty much in the habit of acquiring all the best inventions he can. [WITH A DISDAINFUL LOOK AT CREBBS AND CURRIER]. The *best*, that is. Not the lowest common denominator. [TO LOOPY] May I use the phone to call him? [MAXINE DIRECT HER TO THE PHONE. SHE DIALS AND BEGINS TO TALK SOFTLY WHILE THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES.]

[TISWELL ENTERS WITH AN EXASPERATED-LOOKING BLAKE.]

TISWELL: Sorry to drop in again so soon. I couldn't help wondering if the phalarope had returned.

DARLA [HANDING HIM THE PLASTIC BIRD]: *Here's* your phalarope, Professor.

TISWELL: This??

BLAKE: With all due respect, sir, I did warn you of some such outcome.

TISWELL: But this is amazing! A plastic parrot on a creaky perch! I mean to say -- can you hear the *music* in that? I must rewrite my epic at once, to focus on the magic and charm of this whimsical object! I shall spend the next ten days doing nothing but revising.

BLAKE [LIKE A NAGGING BABYSITTER]: Except when we go to the Wagglehurst Writing Workshop, sir. [TISWELL MAKES A DISPLEASED FACE.]

PRECOCIA: *You're* with the Wagglehurst Writing Workshop?

TISWELL: Unfortunately. I'm in charge of the Admissions Committee, of all things. Dreadful bore! They even require that I personally propose at least one nominee, just to give the impression that I'm taking an interest in the whole thing. I always procrastinate, since it's such a nuisance. [LOOKING AROUND HOPEFULLY] I don't suppose any of you people know someone?

[ALL FREEZE, AND THE LIGHTS GRADUALLY FADE.]

THE END