

UNDER HER HAT! ©2010

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Music by Tor Ingar Jakobsen

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SET REQUIREMENTS

Minimal sets are preferred for apartments, studio, showroom, airport, using door frames, signs, furniture, and props. The required furniture can be built upon benches or boxes for tables, chairs, bed; cushions, throws used according to the needs of the scene.

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

Cheryl wears a hat at all times except when in the act of changing hats, making a statement, making love, or as symbolic of an emotion. Velcro, zippers, wigs for character doubling, tripling, etc.

CAST

CHERYL RUSK

JUSTIN CHEN

FRAN RUTH RUSK

CHEN MEI CHANG

BUHBEE

GUNG GUNG

ESTÉBAN

HOWIE

CASTING SUGGESTIONS: Eight Actors

CHERYL

JUSTIN

FRAN - MODEL

MEI - MODEL

BUHBEE

GUNG GUNG

ESTÉBAN - RABBI - MODERATOR 1 - JUSTIN'S FRIEND

HOWIE - MINISTER - MODERATOR 2

Eight actors.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Scene opens on a blackout. Upstage high up, spotlight opens on a plain straw hat. In a follow spot, the hat zips over the dark stage from U to Downstage towards the AUDIENCE. Stopping mid-way, a hand reaches into the spot, adds an ornament to the hat, withdraws. Spot out. Spot up U on the same hat with the decoration on it, zipping to D, stopping again mid-way. More rapidly, two hands add generously to it. Enlarge spot: CHERYL picks the hat off the line, plunks it onto her head, sits on a high stool facing the AUDIENCE, barefoot in a sleep T. SHE peers intently into the AUDIENCE, using IT as a mirror. An artist's pad and discarded drafts lay on the floor.

CHERYL

Hah! Lit!

(Spot up on FRAN'S UL upstairs apartment.)

FRAN

Any love in the lovelife yet? Love still on top of people's heads?

(CHERYL collects drafts and pad, tucks the draft into the pad. Lights up on her apartment. Walls hung with hat posters, bed covered with hats.)

CHERYL

Ma-a-a...!

(SHE opens a portfolio, flips through it, adds the draft. Sings with hats.)

SONG: HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN

I CAN WHIP UP A HAT,
WITH THE MAGIC OF PAPER AND PEN,
BUT SHAPE UP A MAN FAST AS THAT?
HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN.

Remember last year's checkouts? Looked good from the outside---

THE TECHIE WHO NEEDED TO DATE A DEVICE,

FRAN

Ooo.

(BUHBEE joins FRAN.)

CHERYL

Byebye.

OR THE NECROPHILIAC, INTENT
ON GRAVEYARD MEETINGS, TWICE?

BUHBEE

HE WANTED TO LIE DOWN.

CHERYL

THAT'S WHAT HE MEANT?

But y'don't have to be dead. Byebye.

LET'S NOT FORGET THE GOURMET!
LAUGHED AT MY PERFECT PARFAIT OF A BONNET---
THEN REACHED OUT TO EAT THE FLOWERS ON IT!
YUP, HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN.

Byebye! Bye!!

BUBHEE

Yi yi yi.

I CAN FLIP A FEDORA
CUSTOM MADE FOR WHATEVER OR WHEN
LEAVE IT TO ME, I CAN DO MORE 'A',
HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN.

I CAN BREAK UP A HAT,
USE ITS PARTS ALL OVER AGAIN,
THERE'S NO MANLY MALE SPECIMEN
HALF AGAIN AS USEFUL AS THAT.
UN, DEUX, TROIS, HERE'S A DOZEN OR TEN.
EVEN TWEN-TY MEN, SUPER-DUPER MEN---
CAN'T DO-O-O-O THAT. UH UH!
HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN.

BUBHEE

The Schaparelli exhibit, brought her, age eight...a mistake?

FRAN

Eight. Whoever thought she'd fall in love?

*(CHERYL discards the T, sleep bra and panties
underneath.)*

Come upstairs for a bite.

CHERYL

Coming.

(While FRAN and BUHBEE talk, CHERYL wiggles into leggings and a top, crams a hat on her head, grabs some more hats, her portfolio, cell, coat and boots. As CHERYL runs out barefoot, lights dim on her apartment.)

BUHBEE

Tuna? With Estéban's left-over taco shells?

FRAN

Throw on some salsa.

BUBHEE

Her great-grandfather's hat shop in Odessa, a sensation.

FRAN

I thought she'd catch on---romance---after a semester in Paris---

(CHERYL bursts in, throws everything onto a chair, cell phone onto the table.)

CHERYL

Paris! Paulette!

PARISIAN PAULETTE,
LETS A FACE LOOK AS GOOD AS IT GETS.
A NINETEEN FORTIES HAT GODDESS---
A KINDRED SPIRIT, YES! ZEST!
I IDOLIZE HER!

FRAN

So...have you considered a woman?

BUHBEE

Women are romantic.

CHERYL

Grandma, I'm straight. Hopelessly straight. The Goddesses? I applaud them!

CHERYL (CONT'D)

A CLOCHE FROM CAR'LYN REBOUX? LILY DACHÉS---
ALLURING SCHIAPARELLI REBOOTS?
GARBO WORE 'EM WITH CACHÉ,
SPORTING A HAT MADE OUT OF A SHOE.
WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY! WHAT GALL!
WHO ELSE WOULD'VE MADE THAT CALL? SHOE OR BONNET?
GRAND-BABY CHERYL. THAT'S WHO. SHE'S ON IT.

CHERYL (CONT'D)
HATS...PLEASE MORE, TEASE MORE,
SET YOUR MIND AT EASE MORE---THAN MEN.

A hatless head is like a headless horseman---

FRAN
Still, y'can't sleep with a hat.

CHERYL
No? I do.

I CAN BREAK UP A HAT,
USE ITS PARTS ALL OVER AGAIN,
THERE'S NO MANLY MALE SPECIMEN
HALF AGAIN AS USEFUL AS THAT.
UN, DEUX, TROIS, HERE'S A DOZEN OR TEN.
EVEN TWEN-TY MEN, SUPER-DUPER MEN---
CAN'T DO-O-O-O THAT. UH UH!
HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN.

When I graduate, my hats will crown celebs all over the world---
Date thrills? Ha. Chips?

BUHBEE
Yah. Chips.

(SHE slides the bowl.)

Do hats keep your feet warm?

(CHERYL, wiggles her toes and pulls on her boots)

CHERYL
I have nat'rally hot toes. Family! As far as boyfriends go, I'm
a nay-sayer, truly a no-show...er.

BUBHEE
It's not 'boyfriends'...it's romance, love...the feelings,
longings...in your heart, your liver...

CHERYL
My liver?

FRAN
Locked up...in your spleen.

CHERYL
Do I need to feel anything in my spleen? Nothing's locked up in
me. That's you, Ma, not me.

BUHBEE
It's about b'shert.

CHERYL

B'shert. B'shairt? B'shecht? Yiddish? A word for the awesome 'babe' in my future?

FRAN

Grandma's speaking, did you expect Norwegian?

CHERYL

Superstition.

BUHBEE

Maybe there's a beloved, a farliebteh, out there for everyone. One time, me and your grandpa...

FRAN

Me and your father.

FRAN/BUHBEE

B'shert.

SONG: *B'SHERT*

BUHBEE

B'SHERT.
THAT'S A WORD, A LITTLE WORD,
IN A LANGUAGE SO OLD,
IT'S SELDOM HEARD,

CHERYL

NO-ONE SPEAKS IT ANYMORE.

FRAN

EXCEPT FOR A FEW.
IT'S A WORD THAT SAYS LOVE IS FORETOLD.

CHERYL

IT'S SO ABSURD
NO-ONE BELIEVES IT ANYMORE.

BUHBEE

EXCEPT FOR A FEW---
DOESN'T MEAN IT CAN'T COME TRUE,
B'SHERT. DO I BELIEVE? DO YOU?

FRAN

IF A GIRL'S A TAD ALERT,
IT CAN HAPPEN.
LIKE MAGNETS THAT ATTRACT, CLAP!
IT CAN HAPPEN...
DESTINY. B'SHERT.

BUHBEE

IF YOU GET OUT THERE AND FLIRT,
IT CAN HAPPEN.
LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING, ZAP!
IT CAN HAPPEN.
NOT BECAUSE YOU SET YOUR CAP,
JUST CAN HAPPEN.

FRAN

PAY-DIRT. SERENDIPITY. B'SHERT.

FRAN/BUHBEE

B'SHERTS ARE FOR ALWAYS AND EVER,
A B'SHERT'S A NEVER SAY DIE,
A B'SHERT'S A NEVER BYE-BYE,
TRULY YOUR FATE, UNMISTAK-ABLY YOURS,
FOREVER, FOREVER YOURS.

FRAN

Next-to-last semester---who makes you drool at your precious
Fashion School of cooly-cool Technology?

CHERYL

Non-availables.

BUHBEE

The Costume Institute at the Met...wear something gorgeous when
you sketch?

CHERYL

(SHE dances with a fork and knife.)

NO-ONE FLIRTS WITH ME AT THE MET,
NO ROMEO'S CRUISING THE MET
FOR A FEMALE JULIET.
IF A B'SHERT'S A SOULMATE,
IT WOULD BE NICE IF HE WERE STRAIGHT,

(Cantorially.)

STRAY-AY-AY-AY-AYT.

FRAN

Huh! Homophobia from my *daughter!*?

CHERYL

All the best guys are gay.

(Singing and dancing, THEY all flourish utensils.)

CHERYL/FRAN/BUHBEE
 NO-ONE FLIRTS WITH ME/HER AT THE MET,
 NO ROMEO'S CRUISING THE MET
 FOR A RAVISHING, RADIANT, REMARKABLE JULIET.

*(CHERYL's revelation moment. SHE hugs her utensils,
 reveals that underlying her resistance SHE deeply
 wants love and buys into her family's desires.)*

CHERYL

B'SHERT!
 B'SHERTS ARE FOR ALWAYS AND EVER,
 A B'SHERT'S A NEVER SAY DIE,
 A B'SHERT'S A NEVER BYE-BYE,
 TRULY MY FATE, UNMISTAK-ABLY MINE,
 FOREVER, FOREVER,
 FO-OR-E-VER MINE.

CHERYL/FRAN/BUHBEE

B'SHERTS ARE FOR ALWAYS AND EVER,
 A B'SHERT'S A NEVER SAY DIE,
 A B'SHERT'S A NEVER SAY GOODBYE,
 TRULY MY FATE, UNMISTAK-ABLY MINE,
 FOREVER, FOREVER,
 FO-OR-E-VER MINE.

*(The TWO WOMEN embrace CHERYL. A moment passes,
 then FRAN and BUHBEE pile up napkins, plates, water
 glasses, pitcher, bowls, etc., putting them on a
 back or sideboard. CHERYL begins to collect
 utensils, along with FRAN and BUHBEE as SHE talks.)*

CHERYL

I know *who* a b'shert is. *Where* d'you find him? Milliners Guild?
 That visiting professor Dr. Slaggit almost crossed me off the
 portfolio review with the Milliners Guild professionals!

FRAN

Really?

CHERYL

Thinks my hats are too over the top. Do you know what he said?

FRAN

Why would we...

BUHBEE

Know what he said?

CHERYL

I'll never make a living in millinery!

(SHE pulls the tablecloth.)

FRAN

Who makes a living in millinery? There's no market.

CHERYL

I'll make a market like you did for Amy's Lacy Lingerie.

(FRAN flips the tablecloth up,)

FRAN

Listen, every tush needs a panty, not a hat.

CHERYL

Cecily says 'Don't let him see your best stuff, could turn up on SoHo vendors' tables'. Slaggit rhymes with maggot.

FRAN

Street vendors? Shame on him!

(CHERYL folds the tablecloth. Hands it off.)

CHERYL

The Doc writes for the Guild Newsletter and the hot women's mags, so---handle with care!

(HER cellphone rings. FRAN glances at the ID, drops a napkin.)

FRAN

It's the maggot!

(To BUHBEE.)

Slaggit.

(The WOMEN repress an explosive laugh. Surprised, CHERYL pulls her hat down over half of her face.)

CHERYL

He-ell-o. Oooeee, Dr. Slaggit---we just talked. Oh, chat about the Guild's offer tonight? Love to but I promised my mother I'd deal with...uh...

(SHE gestures an appeal to FRAN.)

with...um...

FRAN

...the kitty litter.

CHERYL

The kitty litter! She's allergic! Must clean or she can't visit...

(Listening pause.)

...Cleaning? Takes forever. He's a really big cat. Big. Never feed a cat chili.

(SHE listens for a moment, holds the phone against her shoulder.)

He thinks my hats need tweaking.

BUHBEE
What else does he want to tweak?

CHERYL
But thank you. Thanks so much. See you at school. No, thank you.

(SHE clicks off.)

Text Cecily, Doc Slaggit called me again.

FRAN/BUHBEE
Again?

CHERYL
Why do I need men...you two are dinosaurs.

FRAN
A special person..share....just part of life.

BUBHEE
Not so easy to find with Slaggits around, like---

CHERYL
Outdated Camembert cheese?! Stinky.

BUHBEE
Maybe find someone less...ripe?

CHERYL
No. If there's someone real for me,

REPRISE: *B'SHERT*

CHERYL (*CONT'D*)
I WANT *ROMEO!* I WANT *B'SHERT!*
MY *B'SHERT* IS FOR ALWAYS AND EVER,

CHERYL/FRAN/BUHBEE
NEVER SAY DIE, A NEVER SAY BYEBYE,
TRULY MY FATE, UNMISTAK-ABLY MINE,

CHERYL
FOREVER.

FRAN/BUHBEE

FOREVER.

CHERYL/FRAN/BUHBEE

FOREV-ER.....MINE.

CHERYL

One of these days, I promise, I'll go to J-Dates or OKCupid.

(FRAN has an idea.)

FRAN

Ice skating with your friend. Wollman's Saturday night, a world's out there in Central Park. You'll see what you're missing, face-to-face.

CHERYL

O.K. O.K. One night. Ice skating. By myself, Cecily works Saturday nights. For my mother and my grandma! No-one will be there. No-one will be there!

BUHBEE

Destiny: a funny thing.

CHERYL

Holy crap---sacré bleu! Class in twenty minutes.

FRAN

Don't let that Slaggit son of a...bitch...get to you.

BUHBEE

May be a hat-loving skater hunk waiting!

CHERYL

Oh, sure!

(SHE plants her hat on BUHBEE'S head.)

BUHBEE

For me? Ooooo.

(CHERYL laughs as SHE sings, FRAN and BUHBEE join in. SHE takes back her hat, plunks it on her own head.)

REPRISE: *HATS ARE EASIER THAN MEN*

CHERYL

I CAN FINESSE A HAT
THAT FLOATS BY ON A CLOUD OF FLORA,
LIT UP LIKE LAST YEAR'S MENORAH,

BUHBEE

Menorah?

ACT ISCENE 2

Saturday evening. Simultaneous sets and scenes. Locker Room Scene: SL, a bench in the locker room at Wollman's Ice Rink in Central Park. Pop/rap music. Apartment Scene: SR, CHERYL'S apartment, where BUHBEE, in a freeze, caught while dusting, will be SR of CHERYL. Lights up on SL, CHERYL and JUSTIN are adjusting their skates on opposite sides of a bench, CHERYL on the SR side, allowing her to cross to Apartment Scene during each scene. SHE wears a signature winter hat, bedecked and individual. JUSTIN wears a standard winter knit cap fancied up with a bill and some buttons. CHERYL's skates, though they look like lace-ups, are fastened with velcro to enable HER to remove them quickly. JUSTIN's skates are lace-ups. HE'S on the SL side of the bench, lacing, SHE'S SR securing the fastenings. CHERYL rises, heads L across JUSTIN towards the entrance to the ice, UL, just as JUSTIN sticks out his foot to check the fit of his skate. SHE trips over his foot, teeters precariously. He grabs her arm. Action taking place in either Scene brings lights up more fully on that Scene. Justin freezes when CHERYL is with BUHBEE, BUHBEE freezes when CHERYL is with JUSTIN.

JUSTIN

Whoops.

CHERYL

Ohhhh. Sor-ry! Pardonnez-moi.

JUSTIN

No worries.

(HE rights her and lets go, but as SHE tries to move forward, SHE'S off-balance and flops into JUSTIN'S lap.)

Ooof.

CHERYL

Oh! Sorry, sorry, sorry!

(SHE wriggles her way to standing.)

CHERYL (CONT'D)

I can do it.

(SHE tries, but still off-center, can't. SHE flings arms about, trying for equilibrium, but goes down on her knees, swiping at her hat, which has fallen. JUSTIN takes a good look at her posterior.)

JUSTIN

Wow!

(HE gets hold of HIMSELF, extends his arm to HER. SHE takes it.)

Here, my fault.

(HE pulls HER part-way up, holds HER with one hand, retrieves the hat and hands it to HER. CHERYL plops it on her head, looking at JUSTIN. Freeze JUSTIN. CHERYL sheds skates, enters R to Apartment Scene, talking to BUHBEE'S back as BUHBEE dusts the desk.)

CHERYL

Buhbee, this guy at the rink last night? He's---he's a babe!

BUHBEE

Babe? Wonder of wonder, miracle of miracles.

(SHE pivots to CHERYL, making a sound somewhere between a gasp of shock and an exclamation of delight.)

CHERYL

And Buhbee, I'm having these strange feelings...I have to text Cecily.

BUHBEE

Feelings! Not just for hats!!

(BUHBEE almost dances a kazotsky (a Russian-Polish folk dance), drops into a chair. CHERYL kneels next to BUHBEE, WHO is entranced.)

CHERYL

I can't believe me. I only saw him for a minute...

SONG: THE HOT CHOC'LIT TANGO

(BUHBEE encourages CHERYL.)

BUHBEE

BUT HE MADE AN IMPRESSION...

CHERYL
O BUHBEE, HEAR MY CONFESSION,
AT THE CONCESSION,
IT WAS GUZZLE HOT CHOC'LIT OR GLOOM.

BUHBEE
Why?

CHERYL
Why? There we were on the bench...

(CHERYL rises, takes a dramatic tango pose, begins to tell the story in tango and song.)

BUHBEE
There you were on the bench...

CHERYL
SOON AFTER LACING MY SKATES,
HOPING FOR FIGURE EIGHTS,
I FELL LIKE DEAD WEIGHT,
ON'S LAP, WENT FLAT, REAR UP IN FULL BLOOM.

(SHE false-lands in BUHBEE'S lap. BUHBEE laughs, pushes CHERYL up.)

BUHBEE
Oy, you mooned him? And?

(THEY tango.)

CHERYL
AND, HE GOT UP FROM THE BENCH,
HELPED ME UP, LIKE *THE* PERFECT MENSCH,
MY TEETH SLIGHTLY CLENCHED,
THEN WHO KNOWS WHERE HE WENT AND WITH WHOM.

HOT CHOC'LIT, HOT CHOC'LIT,
I THOUGHT SOON I'D REMIND HIM...
BUT I COULDN'T FIND HIM,
WE HAD SOMETHING GOOD GOING,
BESIDES MY REAR END SHOWING,
NOW I COULD BE IN LOVE...

BUHBEE
In LOVE!?!

(SHE takes the same exaggerated tango stance that CHERYL did earlier.)

CHERYL
Do you know what he said? Do you know?

BUHBEE

How should I know what he said?

CHERYL

Oh, oh, oh-h-h---he said...

(Freeze BUHBEE. CHERYL crosses L, enters Locker Room Scene, steps into skates, fastens, rising, adjusts her hat.)

JUSTIN

That's a great hat.

CHERYL

(SHE smiles.)

Thank you! Hats are...well, I made this one. Hmmm, I like yours.

JUSTIN

Nothing unusual, just spiced it up a little.

(HE modestly indicates buttons on the cap.)

Buttons.

(SHE smiles, light pause.)

Uhhh, I was hurrying to lace up and get out on the ice. Me, the world's worst ice-skater.

CHERYL

I already hold that title.

JUSTIN

Maybe I come in second.

(THEY laugh. SHE tries to move on, slips again. JUSTIN supports her back, holding HER. HE doesn't let go. SHE doesn't pull away.)

JUSTIN

Whoa!

CHERYL

I'm solid. Solid as a rock. Like a wobbly rock, standing on top of a...a...

JUSTIN

...on top of a chopstick.

---Cantonese: Faai zi

---Mandarin: Kuai zi.

Chinese.

CHERYL

Faai zi.

JUSTIN

Perfect.

(THEY laugh again, JUSTIN helps CHERYL stand; SHE turns to look at JUSTIN. For a moment, THEY stare at EACH OTHER, slightly dazed. CHERYL starts to totter, attempting a solo step to cross JUSTIN to get to the entrance of the rink, UL. SHE stops, turns back to look at HIM again. THEY smile. Freeze. CHERYL breaks the freeze, takes skates off leaving them in position ready for the next CHERYL-JUSTIN segment, crosses JUSTIN to Apartment Scene, takes her dramatic tango pose.)

CHERYL

I SKATED 'N' WAITED, CHIN UP,
GULPING CUP AFTER CUP,
LIKE A SHIVERING PUP,
IT WAS STYROFOAM CHOC'LIT OR DOOM.

With marshmallows.

BUHBEE

So on the ice? When he showed up?...He didn't show up?

CHERYL

(Tangoing solo with maximum self-pity.)

NO!

(BUHBEE resumes the double dance.)

BUHBEE

Anything could have happened.

(THEY tango.)

CHERYL/BUHBEE
HOT CHOC'LIT, HOT CHOC'LIT,
I/YOU THOUGHT I'D/YOU'D REMIND HIM...
BUT I/YOU COULDN'T FIND HIM,
WE/YOU HAD SOMETHING GOOD GOING,
BESIDES MY/YOUR REAR END SHOWING,
NOW IF I'M/YOU'RE IN LOVE?

CHERYL
BUHBEE, THE CONCESSION IS CLOSED!

*(Bringing the song to a finish, the WOMEN pose.
CHERYL breaks the pose.)*

I have to find him! He's ideal! Where? Maybe Chinatown.

BUHBEE
Why below Union Square? No ice over there.

CHERYL
Did I mention that he's Chinese-American?

BUHBEE
Asian? On no occasion. Oh, like the Jews who sheltered in
Shanghai in World War II?

CHERYL
Like the Chinese who lived in Shanghai forever.

*(Freeze BUHBEE. CHERYL slips back into Locker Room
Scene, and into the Freeze with JUSTIN. SHE bends
over skates---pulling them on quickly, seen by the
AUDIENCE as adjusting them---as SHE talks. Unfreeze
JUSTIN.)*

CHERYL
Thanks for picking me up. A bientôt. See y'on the ice, or maybe
at the hot chocolate concession with wet...

*(SHE stands, crosses L, moves her hips once, left
and right, signaling her rear, sardonically, for
fun. HE laughs.)*

...knees!

*(CHERYL laughs. A shared laugh. SHE waves, exits
UL.)*

See ya out there.

JUSTIN
Soon!

(His phone rings.)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Hey, Uncle Edward...Saturday night crowd...now? Use another waiter. Kris Koor. Not now, I'm... skating...I can't. Hurry? Okay, okay, I learned English working for you. Yes, yes. I'll be there.

(JUSTIN leans down to unlace his skates, retrieves shoes from under the bench, drops the skates on the floor as he stands.)

Damn. I'll never find her again. What's her name? Damn! Damn!

(Freeze JUSTIN. CHERYL enters Apartment Scene from offstage. Unfreeze BUHBEE.)

BUHBEE

Cheryl, you're not Joan of Arc, go back to Central Park! Or go eat!!!...wonderful food! Then go hang out at the rink.

CHERYL

Ya think?!

BUHBEE

That's where you came across him.

(BUHBEE exits with duster.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Downtown, midtown, uptown. If I'm lucky...s/he's bound to show up somewhere---this is New York!

REPRISE: *THE HOT CHOC'LIT TANGO*

CHERYL

HOT CHOC'LIT, HOT CHOC'LIT,
CUPS 'N'CUPS TOT'LY CONSOLED ME,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WEIRD FEELINGS TOTES CONTROL ME,
HIS/HER SMILE WAS TOTALLY GLOWING,
WE KNEW EV'RYTHING WORTH KNOWING!
NOW WHAT? I'M IN LOVE,

CHERYL

AND THE CONCESSION IS CLOSED.

BROWNOUT

(Lights up above stage L, FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment. FRAN sits, punching a button on her cell, cutlery in one hand. BUHBEE enters and stands beside HER, beaming, but a touch apprehensive. FRAN waves at BUHBEE as SHE speaks.)

FRAN

Estéban? Fran, tostados---

BUHBEE

She met someone!

FRAN

What? She did? I knew it!! Estéban, send extra guacamole!

(Clutching forks and knives to her chest.)

Cheryl found someone.

BUHBEE

I hear very nice boy. Chinese-American.

FRAN

Estéban, cut the guacamole, extra extra on the chips. Chinese-American? Wontons and kreplach, Ma, kreplach and wontons.

BUHBEE

Kreplach are wontons.

FRAN

The way Americans feel about China?!

BUHBEE

Same way Chinese feel about America. I didn't ask...he liked her hat!

BROWNOUT

(Scene change: JUSTIN is on the Apron on his computer. Lights up above stage R on MEI on computer Face Time; MEI is sorting clothing. GUNG GUNG and HOWIE are in the background, arms full of garments.)

MEI

American girl? Disaster. Gung Gung, you hear this? Howie, please put the summer tops on the sale rack.

Cantonese: Lai tando ma? Nei hai keui, Gung Gung.
Gong keui dzi!

Mandarin: Ne ting do ma? Mai kwah ne hai? Hoah kun puh. Ah! Ye!

(GUNG GUNG hands clothes to HOWIE, leans over MEI.)

JUSTIN

A girl I actually want to date---disaster?!

Cantonese: Joy lan?!

Mandarin: How hong bu?!

GUNG GUNG

Ah.

JUSTIN

I don't even know her name.

GUNG GUNG

You very forgetful.

JUSTIN

We met at the rink. I left, Uncle Edward emergency.

MEI

Skating rink? You don't know this girl's family, is she well-brought up?

JUSTIN

Like me?

MEI

Of course like you. Is she kind-hearted, steady, smart?

JUSTIN

Like me?

MEI

Of course. Born smart, but I trained you. Cheerful? Will she make a good mother?

GUNG GUNG

Ho, daughter!

JUSTIN

Like you?

(MEI reacts modestly but proudly.)

MEI

If you think so.

JUSTIN

I do. But no-one's looking to marry their mother. I don't know her name and we're having a baby? Next time we meet, I'll ask her.

MEI

Gung Gung, say something!!

GUNG GUNG

American girl, hunh, interesting.

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 3

Late afternoon, one week later, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Costume Institute. Center Stage a bench facing a series of hats on pedestals, under a suggestion of glass showcases. JUSTIN and his FRIENDS are sketching, JUSTIN is seated, his portfolio leaning on the bench, sketchbook open, pencil in hand, but neglecting to sketch. Enter CHERYL, carrying her portfolio and a Chinese food take-out container. SHE pauses, thinking. The pair speak to THEMSELVES and the AUDIENCE. BOTH look forward.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

No evening classes...

CHERYL

Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

JUSTIN

Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Hey! The rink! Every moment I could spare. I lived for the moments/he'd appear.

CHERYL

Mind-boggling guy!

JUSTIN

Exciting girl!

CHERYL/JUSTIN

S/He was never there. Despair.

CHERYL

But it's Saturday night!

JUSTIN

The night we met.

CHERYL

The minute this homework is finished,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

I'm outta here and over there.

(THEY simultaneously and energetically move, CHERYL stepping further into the room, JUSTIN putting pencil to paper. When CHERYL spots JUSTIN, SHE stands stock still. JUSTIN looks up for a moment, sees CHERYL, freezes.)

CHERYL

I eat noodles and more noodles all over five boroughs and he's at the Met?

SONG: THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG

JUSTIN

I practically buy a bench at Wollman's, and you're at the Met?!

WHAT'S SHE DOING HERE! IT'S YEAR OF THE DRAGON LUCK!

CHERYL

WHAT'S HE DOING HERE. A MIRACLE! GIRL SCOUT LUCK!

CHERYL/JUSTIN

S/HE'S HERE, WITH A PORTFOLIO YET,

(SHE walks around to the front of the bench. Fiddles with her hat until SHE drops it near HIM. JUSTIN looks at it, lifts his eyes. THEY both direct THEMSELVES to the AUDIENCE until JUSTIN'S line 'The skating rink...' when HE begins to address CHERYL.)

JUSTIN

WILL SHE REMEMBER THAT WE MET?

CHERYL

WILL HE REMEMBER THAT WE MET?

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WILL S/HE REMEMBER THAT WE MET?
NOW THAT WE'RE HERE...AT THE MET.

CHERYL

COOL IT. SEE IF HE'LL GO AHEAD.

JUSTIN

WHAT CAN I SAY THAT WON'T BE MISREAD?

The skating rink.

CHERYL

First place, world's worst ice-skater.

(HE laughs, picks up her hat.)

JUSTIN

The girl with the hat.

CHERYL

Right.

(THEY laugh, a renewed synergy.)

JUSTIN

Ah-h-h, another hat.

(SHE takes the hat, puts it on.)

CHERYL

I'm a hat maniac.

(THEY sing back and forth, then it becomes JUSTIN'S song until THEY begin to sing to EACH OTHER about their emerging love on "IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ME/YOU I'M/YOU'RE SINGING TO...")

JUSTIN

Me too. A complete hat freak.

GREAT HATS, MY DOWNFALL.

CHERYL

MY TRUE LOVE.

JUSTIN

GREAT HATS! MY ALL-IN-ALL.
YES...TRUE LOVE.

CHERYL

Hats? Was Buhbee right? Is this my b'shert?

JUSTIN

I looked for you in the lockers, but...

CHERYL

Oh. Didn't notice.

JUSTIN

My family needed me to fill in.

CHERYL

Um, hardly noticed.

JUSTIN

Yeh. Had to leave. Didn't want to.

CHERYL

Well, noticed.

(HE smiles.)

JUSTIN

SO FAST, SO QUICK,
SUDDENLY LIFE WITHOUT HER---
IS LIVING LIFE THAT'S TOO SLICK,
BIRTHDAY CANDLES WITH NO WICK,
BEING AT HOME AND STILL HOMESICK!

I'M TRAPPED IN THE WORD'S WORST LOVE SONG,
LIKE A DUMPLING THAT'S WRAPPED UP ALL WRONG,
NOT A MUSCLE OBEYS ME,
'CAUSE I'M GOING CRAZY FOR YOU.

SOMEHOW WE CLICK,
SUDDENLY LIFE WITHOUT YOU
COMES ON TOO SLOW OR TOO QUICK,
SCARES ME SILLY, SCARES ME SICK,
LIKE STICKY RICE, WE'RE GONNA STICK.

KOOR

Apples and oranges, Justin.

JUSTIN

Old crap, Koor.

NO-ONE CAN TELL ME WHAT TO DO.
NO-ONE CAN STOP ME FROM LOVING YOU.

I'M FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU.

I'M SINGING THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG,
SO WHAT IF THE WORDS ARE ALL WRONG,
EV'RY HEARTBEAT BETRAYS ME,
'CAUSE IT'S BUMPING CRAZY, CRAZY FOR YOU.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING OKAY...
ABOUT ALL THE WORDS I'M SAYING,
IT'S BECAUSE OF WHO, WHOM, WHO, DANG!
IT'S BECAUSE IT'S YOU I'M SINGING TO.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ME/YOU YOU'RE/I'M SINGING TO.

JUSTIN

IT'S YOU...

CHERYL

IT'S ME...

JUSTIN

I'M SINGING TO.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WE'RE SINGING THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG,

CHERYL

IT'S ME...

JUSTIN

IT'S YOU...I'M SINGING TO.

SO WHAT IF THE WORDS ARE ALL WRONG

EV'RY HEARTBEAT BETRAYS ME,

'CAUSE IT'S BUMPING CRAZY FOR YOU.

I'M OH SO CRAZY FOR YOU.

(CHERYL extends a hand.)

CHERYL

Cheryl Rusk, Fashion School of Technology, Millinery Design Major.

JUSTIN

Justin Chen, FST, Merchandising Major; Minor, Millinery. You won the Millinery Design trophy! Did we...were we..Flat Pattern Construction, two semesters ago...?

CHERYL

Yes...of course. Can I see?

(SHE scans JUSTIN'S sketch.)

You stripped everything down to one line? Whew!

JUSTIN

(HE checks out CHERYL'S draft.)

What bling. Meet me at the Caveman Café between classes on Tuesday?

CHERYL

I'll bring my portfolio. Bring yours.

JUSTIN

Awesome. Your winning sparkle, my simple lines and merchandising--- we'll go into business together after we graduate.

CHERYL

Why not?

(BOTH chuckle, with an underlying unspoken, but possible, implication.)

BROWNOUT

Mini-Scene A: The Caveman Café. FST students at tables, played by CAST. Up front, CHERYL and JUSTIN sit, intently examining the OTHER'S portfolio silently, except for a gasp or quick inbreath or outbreath. EACH is clearly impressed. SHE looks up.

CHERYL
Your hats, pretty and practical.

JUSTIN
Yours? More than 'pretty'. You're an original. Totes. I've never seen hats like these. Where do you get your ideas?!

(SHE points to a page. SHE smiles.)

CHERYL
I bet you could sell that.

JUSTIN
And that.
(HE flips a page, looks at the right hand page.)

And that!
(CHERYL stops HIM by putting her hand lightly over his and pointing to the left-hand page.)

CHERYL
What about this one? Isn't it amazing?

(HE smiles. SHE laughs at HERSELF.)

Someone is gonna go for it. All we need---sorry, all I need--- is one high-flyer. Just one, a gala, a ball, a festival---a racetrack! To kick off my career.

(CHERYL freezes.)

JUSTIN
She's different! She's alive, alive!

SONG: *ALIVE!*

JUSTIN (*CONT'D*)

WHAT HAS SHE GOT---
THAT MAKES IT APPARENT
THAT OTHER GIRLS
HAVE HALF WHAT SHE HAS?
THEY'RE SO TRANSPARENT!

So different! Alive, alive!

WHAT HAVEN'T THEY GOT?
SHE DOES WHAT THEY DAREN'T.
THE OTHER GIRLS---
A LAUGH? NO. NO PIZZAZZ.
IT'S SO APPARENT!

Alive! Different!

SHE WANTS WHAT SHE WANTS
AND GOES AFTER GETTING IT,
DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN
FOR THOSE WHO'D SUBTRACT FROM HER ACT,
THE NO, NO'S! THE 'YOU CAN'T DO'S'
ARE NOTHING TO HER BUT MISCONSTRUES
OF FACTS THAT AREN'T FACTS.

'NOBODY WEARS HATS!'
WHAT'S THAT ON HER HEAD?
A TEACUP? A TOASTER? A ROASTER? A ROOSTER?
IT'S A HAT!

WHAT HAS SHE GOT---
THAT MAKES IT APPARENT
THAT OTHER GIRLS
HAVE HALF WHAT SHE HAS?
SHE'S MANIC WITH TALENT!

ALIVE!

Mini-Scene B: CHERYL and JUSTIN are dancing to hot Club music. She's wearing a hat with a glittering veil half hiding her face, tucked up around it. JUSTIN snatches her hat, puts it on his head. CHERYL tries to snatch it back, JUSTIN lowers the veil, lifts it, says 'Boo!' CHERYL gets the hat back, tucks up the veil. They peck kiss, continue to dance vigorously. Slow dance music comes on. THEY cling.

BROWNOUT

Mini-Scene C: CHERYL'S apartment. Beer is on the table. SHE'S serving ghastly food. JUSTIN chews slowly, then CHERYL takes a big bite, quickly gulps down some beer.

CHERYL

Omygod, omygod, omygod.

JUSTIN reaches down, brings up a large paper bag, rips it open, Chinese restaurant food containers spill out.

JUSTIN

Just in case...!

CHERYL strips off her apron, attacks HIM with it.

CHERYL

How thoughtful! You rat!!

JUSTIN

Yeah, but we eat.

HE quickly separates out one long lo-mein noodle, takes one end into his mouth, gently places the other end between CHERYL'S lips. BOTH chew to a kiss. HE then lifts her up, takes her into the darkness.

LIGHTS FADE

ACT ISCENE 4

A four-cornered chuppah on poles--- a traditional Jewish covering---is brought in by two CLERGYMEN, the poles attach to the floor; the fabric is held over the COUPLE'S heads. Actors bring in their chairs. FRAN and BUHBEE sit on one side of the COUPLE, MEI and GUNG GUNG on the other. BUHBEE puts a veil on CHERYL, GUNG GUNG puts a top hat on JUSTIN. The MINISTER and RABBI face the COUPLE. Lights up; from across the bride-side, groom-side aisle, FRAN and MEI nod to ONE ANOTHER, BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG smile graciously at ONE ANOTHER. The CLERGY raise their hands in benediction.

SONG: REFRAIN *THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG*

CHERYL

SOMEHOW WE CLICK,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

SUDDENLY LIFE WITHOUT YOU
COMES ON TOO SLOW OR TOO QUICK,
SCARES ME SILLY, SCARES ME SICK,

JUSTIN

LIKE CRAZY GLUE...

CHERYL

WE'RE GONNA STICK.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WE'RE SINGING THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG,
SO WHAT IF THE WORDS ARE ALL WRONG,
EVERY HEARTBEAT BETRAYS ME
'CAUSE IT'S BUMPING CRAZY FOR YOU,
I'M OH SO CRAZY FOR YOU.

I do, I do, I do love you.

(EACH places a ring on the OTHER'S finger. THEY kiss. FRAN and MEI break out in loud tears. BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG produce two boxes of tissues, GUNG GUNG gives a tissue to FRAN, BUHBEE gives one to MEI. The RABBI places a glass.)

(JUSTIN stomps on it. Loud congratulations. CLERGY exit with chuppah.)

FRAN/BUHBEE

Mazel-tov.

MEI/GUNG GUNG

Gung hai! Gung hai!

GUNG GUNG

Ho, I know, rice!!

(HE takes a bag from his pocket, tosses rice at the COUPLE, distributes more to EVERYONE, WHO ALL toss and babble. CHERYL and JUSTIN happily float off singing, followed by GUNG GUNG and BUHBEE.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WE'RE SINGING THE WORLD'S WORST LOVE SONG,
SO WHAT IF THE WORDS ARE ALL WRONG,
EVERY HEARTBEAT BETRAYS ME
'CAUSE IT'S THUMPING CRAZY FOR YOU,
I'M OH SO CRAZY FOR YOU.

(FRAN and MEI stare at EACH OTHER for a moment, then reach out to ONE ANOTHER, exit with linked arms dissolved in wedding-mother tears.)

FADEOUT

ACT I

SCENE 5

The wedding night. The bedroom of CHERYL and JUSTIN'S new apartment. The softest, warmest, almost liquid light. The TWO are on a disorderly bed, appropriately costumed with sheets to appear nude. JUSTIN, U, leans over CHERYL, holding HER. CHERYL is on the D side of the bed, back to JUSTIN; spooning. It's clear that THEY'VE been making love.

CHERYL

Am I Cheryl Rusk Chen, the used-to-be hat machine? Marrying the sexiest man...

JUSTIN

You mean...lang loi ever seen, Cantonese.

*(CHERYL repeats the phrase but intones it improperly.
JUSTIN laughs.)*

Hmmmm, you just cursed me out. We'll try again later.

Cantonese: Lang loi
Mandarin: Zha nan.

(HE grabs her into an intense kiss.)

SONG: THIS NIGHT

CHERYL

NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
I NEVER WANNA LEAVE HEAVEN
NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
AH-WOO---

JUSTIN

AH-WOO---
NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
I NEVER WANNA LEAVE HEAVEN
NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
AH-WOO---AH-WOO---

CHERYL
 NEVER HAS WARMTH SPREAD THROUGH ME
 WARM SILK WINGS SURROUND ME,
 FOLDING ME IN HEAVEN.
 LET ME BE ONE WITH YOU...
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.

JUSTIN
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
 I NEVER WANNA LEAVE HEAVEN,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.

CHERYL
 AH-WOO---

JUSTIN
 AH-WOO---
 NEVER DID STARS SHOOT THROUGH ME
 CIRCLING RINGS AROUND ME,

CHERYL
 OOH NEVER END THIS NIGHT...

JUSTIN
 HOLDING ME IN HEAVEN.
 LET ME BE ONE WITH YOU...

CHERYL
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 I NEVER WANNA LEAVE HEAVEN---
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT---

JUSTIN
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 AH-WOO---
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 NEVER LEAVE HEAVEN,

CHERYL
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
 I NEVER WANT TO LEAVE HEAVEN,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
 AH-WOO. AH-WOO.

CHERYL/JUSTIN
 I NEVER WANNA LEAVE THE GARDEN,
 I NEVER WANT TO LEAVE EDEN,
 NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
 AH-WOO. AH-WOO.

CHERYL
I NEVER WANT TO FALL FROM HEAVEN,

JUSTIN
NEVER WANT TO FALL FROM HEAVEN,

CHERYL/JUSTIN
NEVER WANT TO FALL FROM HEAVEN
NEVER LEAVE THE GARDEN,
NEVER LEAVE EDEN
NEVER END THIS NIGHT.
THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT.
THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT.
THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT.

(THEY close in on ONE ANOTHER again.)

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 6

The doorbell rings in FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment. Fall. The two WOMEN rush to The door. FRAN opens it with a flourish. CHERYL'S hat style is an extravagant Caribbean turban.

FRAN

Our honeymooners!! Blooming!

(EVERYONE speaks simultaneously. JUSTIN is handing out little boxes.)

CHERYL

We're so excited---we have souvenirs.

(SHE distributes turbans, helps BUHBEE and FRAN to wrap them while ALL talk.)

FRAN

Please, you didn't have to...! What did you bring?

(THEY sit around the table, FRAN and BUHBEE passing platters, opening gifts.)

CHERYL

Jamaica is gorgeous! Cecily was right.

JUSTIN

Beautiful beaches.

BUHBEE

You went outside?

(THEY all laugh. A lot of clanking utensils. displaying and oohing and aaahing over gifts. EVERYONE digs in.)

Kasha varnishkes.

CHERYL

The music! The reggae beat.

(CHERYL and JUSTIN push back, improvise a dance with EACH OTHER.)

CHERYL

SONG: *INTRO: FAMILY TREE*

ON JAMAICA ISLAND, HONEYMOON COUNTRY,

JUSTIN

ATTENTION'S PAID TO THE BIRD AND BEE.

CHERYL

THERE IS NO YOU, THERE IS NO ME,

JUSTIN

ONLY NEWLY-WEDS STARTING A FAM'LY TREE.

CHERYL

The robes! Perfect.

JUSTIN

Slid off in time to the music!

(More laughter as THEY sit and gobble. FRAN picks up a tray with four flutes of champagne. EVERYONE stands as FRAN distributes flutes of champagne.)

FRAN

Everyone, to our couple! Cheryl and Justin Chen! All the happiness...

FRAN/BUHBEE

All the success...in the world.

(THEY toast, put glasses down. CHERYL is excited, raises her glass again.)

CHERYL

And to our new addition...

FRAN

Already! Oh Cheryl!

(BUHBEE, sotto voce to FRAN, WHO answers the same way. CHERYL, distressed, looks to JUSTIN for help.)

BUHBEE

After a one-week honeymoon?!

FRAN

Must have gotten started earlier.

JUSTIN

We meant...we meant...our millinery company?----Sashay Hats, Inc. We're incorporated!

CHERYL

Like Amy's Lacy Lingerie, Ma. What did you think?

(SHE gulps champagne.)

FRAN

I'm...impressed.

BUHBEE

In business, in love...together!

FRAN

What could be better! 24/7! What a pair!

(CHERYL and JUSTIN put cups, plates, cutlery onto table, push back, prepare to leave.)

JUSTIN

Thank you for the early dinner---checking the latest at the Halloween Parade's important! Inspiration time!

CHERYL

(The PAIR takes their jackets. As THEY exit.)

Next time, dessert!

(BUHBEE to FRAN.)

BUBHEE

Family tree? Doesn't that mean a baby?

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 7

One year later. Fall. A large HAPPY ANNIVERSARY sign is strung across the stage, FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment, door ajar. The door is blown open, JUSTIN and CHERYL, in elaborate one-of-a-kind paper hats, CHERYL with a tote, burst in, singing as THEY hang up their jackets.

JUSTIN
IT'S ONLY A PAPER MOON...

CHERYL
SAILING OVER A CARDBOARD SEA,

CHERYL/JUSTIN
BUT IT WOULDN'T BE MAKE-BELIEVE,

(To EACH OTHER.)

IF YOU BELIEVED IN ME.

(FRAN and BUHBEE, in standard paper party hats, with party horns, jiggle excitedly, blow their horns.)

FRAN/BUHBEE
Happy Anniversary!

CHERYL
Ma, Buhbee, wherever did you get those hats?

(SHE removes FRAN and BUHBEE'S hats, places the ones SHE made for her family atop FRAN'S and BUHBEE'S heads. FRAN and BUHBEE happily fuss with them, look in a mirror.)

Better.

JUSTIN
Too bad the Parade falls on our Anniversary!

CHERYL
Darlings! Dinner on time so we can catch the Parade.

(EVERYONE sits; talk, serving, and eating are rapid and overlap.)

FRAN

Sashay---a marvel!

JUSTIN

The website! In the midst of filling last-minute holiday orders...

CHERYL

The Kardashians! Kim called. They want to be on red-carpet alert!

FRAN

Kardashians!

JUSTIN

Any time any day, anywhere.

BUHBEE

Have kasha...

FRAN

Varnishkes. Staggering.

CHERYL

And they couldn't decide, until---

JUSTIN

Ka-boom!

CHERYL

Eight of my layered, one-of-a-kinds. Eight! Exclusives! Ha ha, Doc Slaggit!

JUSTIN

Plus two of my grab-a-hat-anytime's. I see a retainer looming.

(Note: the Kardashian references changes to current celebrities or fashionistas.)

FRAN

Media photos! All over.

JUSTIN

We practically dropped all our friends. Kris Koor texted---

CHERYL

Cecily of course, also former classmates---

JUSTIN

Instagram.

BUHBEE

So when do you eat?

CHERYL

Take-out, Uncle Edward's restaurant. Or Estéban.

JUSTIN
Delivers himself if it's late.

FRAN
A sweetheart of a man.

*(CHERYL rises, patting her mouth, gets her jacket.
JUSTIN struggles into his jacket.)*

Already?

JUSTIN
Next time, we stack the dishes.

FRAN
The Halloween Parade! Let the creative juices flow!

BUHBEE
Talk soon!

*(CHERYL and JUSTIN exit, blowing kisses. FRAN and
BUHBEE blow farewell horns.)*

CHERYL/JUSTIN
Happy Halloween!

(BUHBEE to FRAN.)

BUHBEE
Baby?

(FRAN shrugs.)

FRAN
Not yet.

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 8

Late afternoon into early evening. CHERYL and JUSTIN are watching the Halloween Parade excitedly. The Parade is seen through their eyes.

SONG: *THE HALLOWEEN PARADE*

CHERYL/JUSTIN
THE HALLOWEEN PARADE, THE HALLOWEEN PARADE!

(JUSTIN locks his gaze onto one of the MARCHERS.)

JUSTIN
COSTUMES OVER-THE-TOP GLITZY,

CHERYL
WHO CARES IF THEY'RE TOO DITSY,
SOME THINGS IN LIFE YOU'D NEVER TRADE,
ONE OF THEM IS THIS PARADE.
OH, THE HALLOWEEN PARADE.

(CHERYL'S surprised.)

CHERYL
Omygosh, look! Dr. Slaggit! Space alien costume?! Perfect.

JUSTIN
I saw his byline in Vogue. Let's avoid bad karma.

(HE smiles and waves warily. CHERYL flicks her fingers in SLAGGIT'S direction, simulating a wave.)

CHERYL
FST never had him back, I wonder why. Okay, I waved.

(THEY shrug at EACH OTHER with forced half-smiles. HE looks at the MARCHERS.)

JUSTIN
The Parade! Great hats!

BROWNOUT

ACT I

SCENE 9

A year has passed. Fall. FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment, Second Anniversary sign. CHERYL is wearing a large CHERYL-version of a crocheted slouch tam hat. SHE PERCHES one each on FRAN and BUHBEE. THEY fuss, while CHERYL and JUSTIN seat THEMSELVES next to EACH OTHER, begin eating ravenously while FRAN and BUHBEE check their hats with EACH OTHER.

FRAN

Look at us!

(SHE turns to CHERYL and JUSTIN, watches them grabbing food for a moment, shocked by their apparent hunger.)

Can't beat the Caribbean for celebrating two years of joy! Happy second...

(CHERYL pulls her hat over her eyes.)

JUSTIN

Joy!? News that our biggest chain store closed eight branches! Bankrupt.

FRAN

I heard.

(CHERYL pulls her hat back up.)

CHERYL

Buhbee, I hope we don't see Dr. Slaggit at the Parade this year, Sashay's struggling!

(SHE stuffs her mouth.)

FRAN

Like every other business.

BUHBEE

Maybe he'll dress like a zombie.

FRAN

Isn't he a zombie?

(THE TWO WOMEN chuckle. JUSTIN pushes away from the table, paces, speaks to FRAN.)

JUSTIN
My assistant buyer connections...

(FRAN pushes her chair to JUSTIN.)

FRAN
No more assistant buyers. I know.

JUSTIN
E-commerce. Different buyers, reps, start over.

(HE sits, pushes in. FRAN follows as CHERYL pushes her chair back.)

CHERYL
People always came to our studio. My following. Will they be back? They'll be back.

(BUHBEE pushes nearer to CHERYL.)

BUHBEE
No Ka-Ka...KaKa---kasha---

FRAN
Kardashians?

BUBHEE
Varnishkas.

CHERYL
They were very nice---for now they have enough headgear to wear... betcha sooner or later they'll be back,

(To JUSTIN.)

of course, why not.

FRAN
Enough to wear! They're Kardashians---there's never enough to wear!

JUSTIN
Celeb hats are out! Where do we go from here?

(HE pauses, looks at CHERYL, worried. SHE's calm. BUHBEE leans over HIM.)

BUHBEE
Eat some Varnishkes. You'll feel better.

(CHERYL'S cell phone rings. SHE taps it on.)

CHERYL

Betsy? Betsy Whitney-Berradene? Yes I'm Cheryl of Sashay Hats, Inc. Hi-i-i-i. Hi Betsy. A brand-new Spring Gala idea? Auction a fab hat on a Save the Rainforest theme---based on a green palette. Of course!

(CHERYL mouths to JUSTIN, 'Kim.')

Ohhh, you saw Kim's last year. We'll have drafts ready---do you want a mock-up or two? In a week? We'll have them by the weekend. I'll call as soon as we have something. 'Bye, Betsy.

(SHE punches her cell shut.)

High fashion hats!!! Our hats...the best of the best!

(To JUSTIN.)

They're back!

(SHE dances around JUSTIN, extending her arms to HIM. Music imported from 'So Important'(early draft).)

REFRAIN: ALIVE!

JUSTIN

SHE WANTS WHAT SHE WANTS
AND GOES AFTER GETTING IT,
DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN
FOR THOSE WHO'D SUBTRACT FROM HER ACT,
THE NO, NO'S! THE 'YOU CAN'T DO'S'
ARE NOTHING TO HER BUT MISCONSTRUES
OF FACTS THAT AREN'T FACTS.

CHERYL

EVERY ROW SEWED WITH NOT A STITCH SHOWED,
EVERY BRIM A HYMN TO STYLE AND TO PANACHE,
EVERY RIM ROLLED WITH NOT A SNIP SHOWED,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

NO FLIMSY TRIM WILL DROP OFF
LIKE GLUED-ON KNOCK-OFF TRASH.

Hai maya!

JUSTIN

We'll stay---

CHERYL

For dessert!

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 10

Next year. Fall. Sign, Year 3. The locker room at Central Park's Wollman's Rink. Enter JUSTIN leading CHERYL, blindfolded, a hat pulled over her face.

JUSTIN

Okay, you can look now.

(HE pulls CHERYL'S hat up.)

CHERYL

Ohhh, Justin!

JUSTIN

This is where it all began, three years ago! I thought a surprise would re-charge our batteries, honey.

(CHERYL wraps HERSELF around HIM.)

CHERYL

Do we need re-charging?

JUSTIN

Not where it counts.

(THEY disengage. CHERYL mock skates.)

CHERYL

Betsy's hat brought in a *fortune* for the rain forest. Then the Oscars! The Oscars!!

JUSTIN

Okay, paid last year's rent for a few months!

(Skaters cross THEM from SR to the rink entrance UL.)

CHERYL

It'll happen. There'll be demand---les touristes are back---the fabulous Sashay Studio, try-ons...in person!

JUSTIN

They try, but do they buy? At Sashay's couture level?

(Slight pause.)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

The Doc came by looking for Newsletter-column gossip.

CHERYL

Great timing, I was out.

JUSTIN

He complimented your last mock-up.

CHERYL

That's exciting.

(A female SKATER passes THEM. CHERYL glances at the SKATER, then fixes her eyes on her hat, jaw dropping. The SKATER exits.)

My hat!

JUSTIN

What?

CHERYL

I designed her hat.

JUSTIN

We didn't make up that hat.

CHERYL

A draft. Hanging between the alpaca felt and the ruby druzies. Remember?

JUSTIN

Yeah. Her wearable take on it clicks.

CHERYL

You don't know what I planned to do with it. Layers. Dripping with wired semi-precious stones.

JUSTIN

Let's get to the Parade, catch the vendors' hats.

CHERYL

'Use it and improve it!'

(As CHERYL and JUSTIN exit R, lights dim, coming back to full as the PAIR re-enters L to Halloween Parade music.)

JUSTIN

Every vendor, sloppy copies of our last year's line. Chee seen.

CHERYL

Feh, feh, feh.

JUSTIN

Someone's cashing in on our originals. That's it, Cheryl, Sashay's going virtual---we've got to be the first to post.

CHERYL

Custom hats online?

JUSTIN

Measurement video on YouTube. We send it to the client. Join the marketplace! Online shopping's here to stay---not every hat goes to the Oscars.

CHERYL

Personal try-ons so great, but sure, I'm woke.

JUSTIN

Okay, tomorrow we use our client lists and FaceTime like crazy.

(THEY knuckle-shake, then turn their attention back to the Parade.)

JUSTIN

Cheryl, look, the grey? Makes my day. Sensible.

CHERYL

Sensible?? That's good? What about the purple, pink rhinestone drops on raffia. Bad-assy. I'd wear that hat to bed, with nothing else.

JUSTIN

Not in our bed!

CHERYL

Not in our bed?! Oh?! Happy anniversary!

(EACH does a slightly questioning 90 degree turn away from the OTHER and exits.)

BROWNOUT

ACT I

SCENE 11

Same day. Light fades onstage to CHERYL and JUSTIN'S BEDROOM. Enter CHERYL in a sweatshirt and hat. JUSTIN follows in t-shirt and sweatpants that match CHERYL'S top, carrying a laundry basket. As CHERYL speaks and sings, SHE takes the basket, dumps the contents on the bed, BOTH take up a sock. CHERYL uses her for emphasis.

CHERYL

What? Suddenly you think my head's in the clouds? That's the glitch, right?

SONG: *THAT'S THE BITCH OF IT*

IT TOOK THREE YEARS TO KICK IN,
THAT'S THE BITCH OF IT. OUCH!

(JUSTIN waves his sock as HE speaks.)

JUSTIN

You think my nose is always to the ground? My head lives in income-expense spreadsheets? I'm spoiling our pitch, right? So now---

YOU'RE GETTING YOUR LICKS IN,
THAT'S THE BITCH OF IT. OUCH!
WHERE'S THE ONE THAT GOES WITH THIS THING?

CHERYL

HERE. FOR WEEKS IT'S BEEN MISSING.

JUSTIN

PLEASE PASS THAT BLACK SOCK. IT'S MINE.

CHERYL

YOURS? MY CALVIN KLEIN?

JUSTIN

LAUREN. RALPH.

(THEY both grab at it. The pull becomes a Tug o' War. EACH holds a sock in the other hand.)

CHERYL

KLEIN. MINE. LOOK!

(SHE holds up another black sock.)

JUSTIN

LAUREN. MEN. LOOK!

(HE shows another black. THEY BOTH eyeball the socks. Eyes go back and forth in sync a few times.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Hard to tell. Can't tell.

(THEY toss socks onto the bed.)

CHERYL

'Head-in-the-clouds' girl.

JUSTIN

'Nose-to-the-ground' guy.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

WIPE THAT CRAP RIGHT OUTTA YOUR HEAD.
WHAT YOU GOT'S THE REAL ME INSTEAD,
YOU WANT STALE BREAD?
GET OUTTA MY BED---
AND STOP BITCHIN' ABOUT IT!

(JUSTIN unrolls a pair of argyle socks, one red-based, one green-based, same pattern. Their attacks are heating up in a sexy-teasing way.)

JUSTIN

RED-GREEN? WHAT SILLY SCHNOOK ROLLED UP THIS PAIR?

(CHERYL takes apart another pair of argyles, same mismatch.)

CHERYL

SAME SILLY SCHNOOK THAT ROLLED UP THIS PAIR!

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Wrong pair. Yeah.

(THEY switch, correct pairs, toss them onto the bed. Heating up, jumping on EACH OTHER'S lines.)

CHERYL

Getting my licks in, huh?

JUSTIN

Three years to kick in, yeh?

(THEY continue to heat up. SHE'S indignant.)

CHERYL

True, isn't it?!

(HE throws 'maven' at HER like a knife.)

JUSTIN

You're the truth 'maven'?! Maven, Yiddish for expert.

(SHE quickly reciprocates in kind.)

CHERYL

Jeung gahn. 'Expert'. In Cantonese.

(CHERYL runs her eyes over HIM, top to toes.)

Lucky the rest of you isn't too bad, maybe even attractive,

Cantonese: lang zai.

Mandarin: zha-nan

handsome. 'Cause you're...

A PAIN IN THE YIDDISH TUCHAS!

(HE reciprocates, looking her up and down.)

JUSTIN

You? Charisma, bod, beautiful---shayne. In any language.

(CHERYL and JUSTIN lick their lips.)

Let's go to bed.

CHERYL

Let's.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

YEAH!

(THEY push the laundry off the bed, glare at EACH OTHER with fake malice, deliberately jump onto the bed on their knees, THEY rip off articles of EACH OTHER'S clothing one at a time, singing directly into EACH OTHER'S face.)

JUSTIN

A FLUKE. FINI.

CHERYL

KAPOOT.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

MOOT.

WIPE THAT CRAP RIGHT OUTTA YOUR HEAD.
'CAUSE WHAT YOU'VE GOT'S THE REAL ME INSTEAD,
YOU WANNA BE FED DAY-OLD BREAD,
GET OUTTA MY BED,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

AND STOP BITCHIN' ABOUT IT.

*(THEY clinch into a long, hot, loud kiss. Release.
JUSTIN knocks off CHERYL'S hat. BOTH to the
AUDIENCE.)*

THAT'S THE BITCH OF IT!!!

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 12

Next day. CHERYL and JUSTIN are seated hunched over screens near the edge of the Apron on Facetime. FRAN, MEI, BUHBEE, GUNG GUNG, wearing fall hats, sit SL and SR on the edge of the stage, facing the AUDIENCE. CHERYL is in an Autumn-themed hat.

Phyllis!

JUSTIN

Mrs. Heartwell?

CHERYL

Justin
Winter's right around the corner...freezing...

JUSTIN

Cheryl
...tiara, looked like a Queen in...

CHERYL

Justin
...kangaroo ears...never...

JUSTIN

Cheryl
...your son's wedding....

CHERYL

Justin
...feather earflaps so you can hear...

JUSTIN

Cheryl
...At Zabar's?...two or three wooly caps! Lox-color, golden whitefish, bagel beige...

CHERYL

(JUSTIN chimes in from his computer, sotto voce.)

Justin
...and a bagel in a pear tree. Do we run a hat shop or a deli?

JUSTIN

(Quickly back to Phyllis.)

Phyllis, peacock feathers?

(CHERYL signals HIM---let's exchange clients. THEY race to switch computers.)

CHERYL

...speak to Justin, he loves whitefish.

JUSTIN

Ah, Mrs. Heartwell! Bagels..

CHERYL

...are endangered, Phyllis...peacocks *and* macaws, both. We'll find perfectly legal feathers for the flaps and dye them...

JUSTIN

...like lox...yes, lobster salad, delicious.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

...M-m-m-m. Ah-h-h. Sure.

(A moment of listening.)

CHERYL

She'll

JUSTIN

get back

CHERYL/JUSTIN

to us.

(Tap off, shrug to EACH OTHER. Exit.)

BUHBEE

Peacock bagels?

GUNG GUNG

Business endangered, marriage okay?

(BUHBEE shrugs.)

5-SECOND BROWNOUT

(Re-enter CHERYL and JUSTIN in a change of clothing and hat, going immediately to their computers. Next Fall.)

CHERYL

Trish, Cheryl from Sashay Hats...we're gearing up for Easter bonnets...at least a season ahead...

JUSTIN

...sailing on a yacht... Judy!? Monaco, ah, be noticed...

CHERYL

...orchid clusters, in vials of water...could...

JUSTIN

...see-through straw to match your see-through bikini!...under your cover-up...no cover-up?

CHERYL

...spill down your neck, walking...it is a parade...

(SHE stands and walks.)

Ha, ha, Judy. That's you all over...

(CHERYL wiggles.)

CHERYL

All over? Nude? She'll be noticed.

JUSTIN

It's Europe.

(CHERYL bends deeply over her screen.)

CHERYL

...lovebirds...two in a cage...four?

(SHE rises.)

JUSTIN

...a squid...wow...tentacles push...

(He rises.)

CHERYL

...bird poo...

(SHE turns towards JUSTIN.)

JUSTIN

...over your face onto your...

CHERYL

...tits?...

JUSTIN

...chest...sorry, Judy.

(CHERYL, sotto voce. SHE grabs at JUSTIN.)

CHERYL

...tentacles, that's the image for her?

(SHE and JUSTIN bounce down to their computers.)

I'm here Trish!

JUSTIN

I'm here Judy!

(CHERYL stage whispers.)

CHERYL

The sun. They'll both smell like...landfill?...in five minutes.

(BOTH run to their computers.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Of course/we can!

(THEY tap off. Facing EACH OTHER)

CHERYL

I'm going home...

JUSTIN

to sleep.

CHERYL

Only sleep?

(THEY drag off, ONE at a time.)

GUNG GUNG

Sales: improved?

BUHBEE

Not so much.

FRAN

No squids---

MEI

No lovebirds---

GUNG GUNG

No hats.

MEI

We'll see what next season brings.

FRAN

Turn their hat forms upside down, maybe they're---

BUHBEE

Lifeboats.

BROWNOUT

(Set change: CHERYL and JUSTIN'S bedroom. Change of clothing on chairs. CHERYL and JUSTIN in bed asleep. JUSTIN'S cell is ringing. Awakening tousled and startled, HE answers.)

JUSTIN

Ma? Gung Gung?

(CHERYL sits up, suddenly alert. SHE looks at her cell.)

Phyllis---? It's 4:15a.m...not where you are? Yes, no, you'll hear perfectly...

CHERYLJ

Who?

JUSTIN

Phyllis, Kenya, safari? Hot---thinking winter! Loved the feather flaps, yes, yes, we can get more flaps, I mean feathers, guaranteed.

(HE ends call. CHERYL reaches for HIM.)

4a.m. Hat therapy.

(HE hugs HER, then turns away.)

Sorry, hon. Too tired.

CHERYL

Oh. Tired.

(SHE covers her head with a pillow.)

SONG: TWENTY-FOUR/SEVEN

WHO THOUGHT WE HAD HEAVEN ON EARTH!

JUSTIN

I FEEL LIKE A LIFER IN LEAVENWORTH.

(BOTH snuggle down into their bedding. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE enter pulling a port-a-potty and door frame with no front door, exit. Hours pass with rotating time signs brought to the edges of the stage by BUHBEE, GUNG GUNG, FRAN, MEI, ESTÉBAN, HOWIE. Cell alarms go off, late afternoon. BOTH spring out of bed, shaking out, rubbing faces and heads. THEY slip into the preset clothing.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Dinner! Overslept! TG for the bathroom.

(C and J behave as though there was an intact door in front of the potty. They both head for it. JUSTIN makes it first, shrugs, enters the frame, unzips, fishes his cell phone from his back pocket, pulls down his pants, sits on the toilet seat boxers intact, hurriedly plays a video game, laughs at the moves, obviously winning. As though the door hid HIM, CHERYL paces and bangs on the frame.)

CHERYL

Are you ever going to get out of there? Ma and Buhbee, fourth Anniversary!

(JUSTIN stretches his legs, calls.)

JUSTIN

Yeah, yeah, coming.

(HE quickly continues the game, smiles a winner's smile, flushes the toilet, pulls up his pants, replaces the phone, zips, pops out of the potty.)

CHERYL

Finally. I'm going in!

(CHERYL pops in, pulls down her pants, undies intact, sits, pats her pockets. HOWIE hands HER a mirror and tweezer. SHE begins to tweeze her eyebrows. JUSTIN paces, bangs on the doorframe.)

JUSTIN

Cheryl, let's go. We're expected. You just said so. Never on time, this woman.

(A lipstick is handed to her by ESTÉBAN, SHE lipsticks, hands it back with mirror and tweezers. SHE calls.)

CHERYL

Almost ready.

(CHERYL pulls up her pants. JUSTIN stands, arms folded. SHE flushes toilet, exits the port-a-potty.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN

TWENTY-FOUR/SEVEN, HOG-TIED AND TETHERED,

(BOTH poke their heads out towards the AUDIENCE for one word.)

TOGETHER!

JUSTIN

EXCEPT WHEN YOU CALL YOUR BUHBEE.

CHERYL
EXCEPT WHEN YOU TEXT YOUR GUNG GUNG.

CHERYL/JUSTIN
ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX MILLION,
ONE HUNDRED FORTY-FOUR THOUSAND
SECONDS TOGETHER.
A BILLION, TRILLION, GADZILLION,
NANO-NANO-NANO FECUND
NANO-SECONDS TOGETHER!

CHERYL/JUSTIN
AGING AND WEATHERED! TOGETHER!

Dinner!

(BOTH grab jackets. CHERYL takes a new hat, stuffs a bag with hatboxes for FRAN and BUHBEE, takes her phone, and begins tapping. Bathroom set is pulled off.)

Lyft.

CHERYL
(THEY exit. FRAN, MEI, BUHBEE, GUNG GUNG poke in from SL and SR.)

PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLE BEING A COUPLE,
PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLE BEING A PAIR---
TIME LEAVES THEM LESS PLIANT AND SUPPLE,
IDEAS WERE ONCE EASY TO SHARE,
BUT WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE,
WHAT HAPPENS TO LOVE?

BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG
LOVE!

MEI/FRAN
(Overlapping.)

SUCCESS!/SEX.

GUNG GUNG
Marriage not improving.

(BUHBEE makes a so-so gesture.)

BUBHEE
Needs love.

FRAN
And sex.

BROWNOUT

(THEY exit.)

ACT I

SCENE 13

Set change: Lights up on FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment. Fourth Anniversary banner. The doorbell rings. FRAN and BUHBEE call as THEY bring in food dishes.

FRAN/BUHBEE

Coming! Coming!

(CHERYL and JUSTIN bang in, during quick hugs, CHERYL hands FRAN the bag from her tote.)

CHERYL

Mom, Buhbee. Winter hats.

(JUSTIN immediately falls on the food, CHERYL turns, attacks it, jackets stay on.)

FRAN

Wait. Sit. Your fourth year of togetherness!

CHERYL/JUSTIN

We know.

(BOTH are forking food into their mouths, speaking between swallowing.)

It's getting dark. Justin played video games---in the bathroom! When we were running late!

JUSTIN

Late! You must have tweezed your eyebrows to the bone! The Parade will be over.

(THEY gobble.)

FRAN

Hold your horses!

BUBHEE

You'll choke!

(CHERYL speaks, chewing rapidly, as she wraps kasha knishes in a napkin.)

CHERYL

Sorry, sorry! You know we'll be back...yum, kasha knishes.

(SHE drops them into her tote. JUSTIN swallows.)

It's just one more year.

JUSTIN

Yeah. Just one more. Year. Look, I'm eating the asparagus.

(HE stuffs an asparagus stalk into his mouth. CHERYL quickly takes an apple. JUSTIN has an asparagus stalk in each hand, taking bites of each.)

Finished! Thanks so much, Mom. Buhbee.

(HE opens the door. CHERYL slides out.)

CHERYL

We'll get a Anniversary dinner in! Love you! Love you!

(The door bangs shut after THEM.)

FRAN

Well, there's plenty of food, let's eat.

(BUHBEE looks over the food on the table.)

BUHBEE

Baby, no-o-o, but two knishes each!

(Lights down on the apartment, up for the Parade, late-afternoon/twilight ambiance. GUNG GUNG steps forward with a tuning fork or triangle. The CAST marches as part of the Parade, singing a refrain of 'Halloween Parade'.)

SONG: HALLOWEEN PARADE

HOWIE/ESTÉBAN

THE HALLOWEEN PARADE! THE HALLOWEEN PARADE!
MARRIAGE, BUSINESS, INTO YEAR FOUR,
HEADING FOR TROUBLE WE ALL DEPLORE,
WHO CAN PREDICT WHAT GETS BETRAYED,

FRAN/MEI

LEAVING A TASTE OF SOUR LEMONADE---
LIFE MOVES ON AT THE HALLOWEEN PARADE.

GUNG GUNG

Four, same as the word 'death' in Cantonese. Sei...

BUBHEE

Or see. Mandarin.

GUNG GUNG

Hunh.

HOWIE

Luck doesn't run all bad, after all, they're applying for the HATS ARE BACK! t.v. runway contest for Best Millinery Designer.

ESTÉBAN

Cheryl and Justin, turn your hats upside down---

(ALL chime in.)

ALL

Maybe they're lifeboats.

(CHERYL AND JUSTIN enter upstage, arguing.)

JUSTIN

Entering a nationwide t.v. Contest for gelt, and I'm the one out of touch?

CHERYL

Gelt---Yiddish. Sashay's more than money, honey. Look at that headdress.

(SHE gestures enthusiastically towards the panorama of paraders. HE pauses, thinking.)

JUSTIN

What about what I made for you at the Spring showing. Simplicity itself. Like a haiku.

CHERYL

A haiku. Do reps know from haiku? If the t.v. voters saw it?

(SHE mocks falling asleep, snores.)

JUSTIN

Not if you sew on your Thirty-Seventh Street schmutz---

CHERYL

Schmutz! Dirt? Shmaltz, not shmutz.

JUSTIN

Chicken fat?

CHERYL

Stop speaking Yiddish.

JUSTIN

It works when I'm *schmoozing* clients. You don't like when I speak Yiddish? You appreciate literature? Okay, appreciate this: at our last show you looked like...

(HE mimics a character, declaiming à la Olivier, particularly on the word 'whore'.)

the who-o-ore of Venice!

(ESTÉBAN, marching.)

ESTÉBAN

Othello, Act IV, Scene II, Shakespeare!

(Strong silence.)

CHERYL

The whore of Venice?! I'm leaving. You wanna go to this Parade next year,

(SHE wiggles her fingers around her ears and makes a funny, disparaging face.)

take Doc Slaggit.

(SHE exits.)

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 14

Weeks later, FRAN and BUHBEE'S apartment. The fourth Anniversary banner is bedraggled. A bowl of fruit is visible on the table, as is a cutting board with a roasted chicken. Enter CHERYL and JUSTIN. HE'S carrying flowers, SHE a large hatbox. Babble of greetings as they hang up outerwear, hugs.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Mom! /Buhbee!

BUHBEE

(SHE takes the flowers.)

You didn't have to!

(CHERYL holds up her hatbox.)

CHERYL

Making up for the Anniversary dinner...a-a-and...my newest!

(JUSTIN takes CHERYL'S hat out of the box, switches it from side to side, puts it on her head.)

JUSTIN

New to me too.

CHERYL

It's backwards, Justin!

(SHE adjusts the stalk rising from the top as HE removes the hat.)

JUSTIN

Oops. I crown thee Queen Cheryl!

(HE turns it around, replaces it. FRAN turns CHERYL backwards and sideways to view the hat from all angles. JUSTIN joins her, assessing it, BUHBEE makes it a three-person lineup. The hat has a large fountain on top, similar to a bunch of bananas upside down.)

(A stalk erupts from the fountain, a large sausage-shape with a mushroom-shaped cap, swirls of varied-colored drops suspended from the cap. The brim supports smaller bangles, mini echos of the top stalk.)

FRAN

Cheryl, I'm speechless---what a tremendous---no, spectacular...no---

(BUHBEE cuts in.)

BUHBEE

Aza prekhtiker fassohn. Fashion statement.

(Assessing the hat.)

JUSTIN

Hmmm.

FRAN

We've been looking forward to this get-together. Come, sit, let's talk.

(BUHBEE sings her next line.)

BUHBEE

I made stuffed cabbage.

JUSTIN

What could be better?

(FRAN tickles the bangles suspended from the brim as they head for the table.)

FRAN

Lively!

CHERYL

Hardly a moment to design. Or to be together. Sell, sell, sell.

JUSTIN

Busy. Busy. Busy. When?

(To FRAN.)

Calling every client.

CHERYL

I've been as busy.

(To FRAN and BUHBEE.)

A night of passion here and there, that's it.

JUSTIN

No time to...shuck the corn, peel the grape, shtup the cabbage.

(HE winks at CHERYL.)

BUHBEE

Shtup-p-ped. Yiddish, shtup-p-ped, English, stuffed, Cantonese, wah chi t'ai do. I learned it at Mah Jongg.

FRAN

That's what you talk about at Mah Johgg? Believe me, it has nothing to do with cabbage.

(To JUSTIN. FRAN pours water. BUHBEE serves salad and dressings.)

FaceTime, website, blog?

BUHBEE

Dressings?

(EACH chooses salad dressings, pours, eats. The pacing of eating is used for emphasis or de-emphasis.)

FRAN

Instagram? Tik Tok?

JUSTIN

Nope. But I have high hopes for the Fall trade show.

CHERYL

It's the t.v. show that counts, thousands, millions of viewers! Best millinery designer---this hat's the sample that gets us in---

JUSTIN

This hat?

BUHBEE

That hat? Finished, Cheryl?

(BUHBEE collects plates.)

FRAN

It's for young people, Ma. Why not---it's...it's unique.

CHERYL

What's wrong with this hat?

JUSTIN

What's on top?

CHERYL

Trim.

JUSTIN

A stiff stalk and mushroom-shaped cap? Looks like foreskin on a
...a...p...p...

*(HE hesitates to use the anatomical word with
FRAN and BUHBEE present.)*

Male organ.

FRAN

Penis? We've heard the word before, Justin.

(Hastily.)

Ma, where did I put the chicken?

CHERYL

PENIS?!

BUHBEE

Circumcised.

(To FRAN.)

On the cutting board.

*(FRAN lifts the chicken on a long fork, slams it
down, slams a cleaver through it.)*

FRAN

Light or dark?

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Light.

(JUSTIN tries to re-generate sexy playfulness.)

JUSTIN

You know I'm a breast-man.

(HE arches his eyebrows at CHERYL.)

CHERYL

Sorry, my long term memory isn't so great. I'll keep my breasts
to myself.

JUSTIN

Okay, dark. I'll be a leg man...tonight.

CHERYL

H-m-m-m.

BUHBEE

The vegetables! Broccoli or turnips à la Buhbee?

CHERYL/JUSTIN

Broccoli.

FRAN

Broccoli and turnips for our team!

(SHE delivers broccoli to the DUO. BUHBEE begins to plop mashed turnips onto JUSTIN'S plate.)

JUSTIN

Whoa, Buhbee, I don't eat turnips.

(CHERYL scoops up his turnips, drops it onto her plate, forks more broccoli onto his.)

CHERYL

My grandmother can't be expected to track your eating habits.

(BUHBEE tries to avoid disturbing turns to the conversation.)

BUHBEE

Both organic!

FRAN

Organic! What a difference!

BUHBEE

Your grandma knows.

(Silence for some moments. ALL eat. FRAN clears her throat.)

FRAN

So, what were we saying?

(ALL stare at EACH OTHER, mystified. CHERYL and JUSTIN overlap slightly, a split-second apart.)

JUSTIN

Trade show collection?

CHERYL

'HATS ARE BACK!' Contest?

FRAN

So your submission...

JUSTIN

Reminds me of something we just ate. Broccoli-turnip succotash.

CHERYL

Suck-a-what?

FRAN

Succotash is corn and lima beans.

CHERYL

The other hats in the shop---simple-minded! Oooo, flu? I'm nauseous.

(JUSTIN chokes. A wave of nausea overcomes CHERYL.)

JUSTIN

Simple-minded? You're nauseous over my designs?! We can't sell what's on your head for half the cash we need. What if we want to save for a kid?

CHERYL

Kid? We're not up to that! Voters want the winner to be totes extra, like royals. You don't like my trim?

(SHE rips the sausage off the top of the hat.)

Goodbye...penis!

JUSTIN

Hah! What about the upside-down banana bunch...v...v...female genitalia... underneath?

FRAN/BUHBEE

Vagina.

CHERYL

Sure. Let's take it off. Rip out the 'female genitalia'!

JUSTIN

And the mini-bangles...dicks...from the brim.

CHERYL

You don't like dicks, huh? R-i-i-ip. Rest in peace, dangling dicks.

(SHE tears off the brim, the bangles go with it. SHE grabs a bunch of grapes, stands, and squishes them on JUSTIN'S plate.)

Your hats Justin? Flat! Flat, flat, flat!!

(JUSTIN grabs a banana, stands and, pointing towards CHERYL, thrusts the banana towards HER on each 'phallic'.)

JUSTIN

Yours? Phallic! Phallic, phallic, phallic! Spouting!!

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(HE squeezes the banana. A creamy jet spurts onto CHERYL'S face.)

Oh crap.

(CHERYL snags the banana, raises it high. Gasping and sputtering.)

CHERYL

Banana phallic is better than no phallic at all! Too busy, for weeks! We could've managed more. My face! My hat! Ooo, my tummy.

(SHE shakes the hand holding the gooey denuded hat. JUSTIN brings a napkin. SHE snatches it, tries to wipe her face, wails.)

I'm gonna...puke!

JUSTIN

Okay, okay. The hat was super, the trim outstanding. I apologize.

(SHE moans, sits with a plop, drops her head on the table.)

CHERYL

Oh-h-h-h.

(FRAN'S head pops up among the debris.)

FRAN

Dinner's...over?!

BUHBEE

No coffee? No dessert? Rice pudding?

(CHERYL gags.)

CHERYL

Oh, oh, uh, oh, oh!

(SHE grabs the coffee carafe, heaves over it, sinks down into her chair. FRAN looks into the carafe.)

FRAN

Definitely no coffee.

(FRAN and BUHBEE hustle CHERYL into the kitchen. JUSTIN freezes, looking guilty.)

BLACKOUT

ACT ISCENE 15

FRAN and MEI cross to stand on SL and SR as we hear an alert signal and immediate pickup on the other end. The set change to the airport scene takes place during the following dialogue.

FRAN

Mei, can you hear me?

MEI

Hello, hello. Why are you calling, Fran? Cheryl's pregnant?

FRAN

I wish! I gather they weren't together---you know...bedroom-wise...for weeks! Bicker, bicker, bicker! The dinner I went through---they just left. And the business!

MEI

Bedroom *and* business troubles?!

FRAN

Come to New York, Mei.

MEI

I can't come, Fran. I'm dating. Sort of.

FRAN

Oh, Mei, I've been so alone in this struggle. You're dating?

MEI

If I come, I lose Howie. Special friend, shirt exporter from New Jersey, helps in the store. Youn-n-ng. You're...dating?

(FRAN blows out air from puffed-up cheeks, as if to emphasize her words, drops 'pretty much'.)

FRAN

Oh, uh. Pretty much. Estéban, owner of a..a...gourmet dining establishment, fabulous take-out. Biling-u-al. Bring Howie! You'll...share a room with him?

MEI

Howie?! No, no, no, Howie, no inconsiderate behavior---he'll double up with my father. You...sleep with Estéban?

FRAN

Of course not! Estéban, tries so considerately not to be the macho Latin lover. I'll sleep with my mother.

FRAN/MEI

Estéban/Howie. Considerate.

MEI

Gung Gung's crazy with internet Mah Jongg. You'd think *he's* in love.

FRAN

You're telling me! My mother has her own tablet, she spends hours.

(THEY both laugh.)

MEI

We'll come, Howie's a good idea man. I'll work out dates and airlines and get back to you.

FRAN

No problem.

FRAN/MEI

'Bye,

(THEY click off.)

MEI

Poor Fran. Stress. I give her a month, maybe six, poor Fran.

FRAN

Poor Mei. Tension. I give her a year, maybe two, poor Mei.

(MEI taps her cell phone.)

MEI

Air China?

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 16

One week later. Early afternoon.
CHERYL, JUSTIN, FRAN, BUHBEE, ESTÉBAN
at an airport gate. Airport noises,
Ladies Room sign.

FRAN

Over there! Over there!

JUSTIN

I see them. Au kin doe quoi dey. MaMa! Gung Gung!

(Enter MEI, HOWIE, GUNG GUNG. JUSTIN rushes to embrace MEI---briefly---and turns to GUNG GUNG. HE bows to GUNG GUNG and performs 'White Crane Spreads Wings', a T'ai Chi figure, for his GRANDFATHER, who imitates it, letting it melt into a hearty embrace of his GRANDSON as CHERYL takes MEI's hands.)

CHERYL

Lai Lai! I'm so excited! Nei hou, Lai Lai.

MEI

Cheryl, my best daughter-in-law. Nog gei hou. You speak Cantonese!

(Use Mandarin if called for in all Chinese dialogue. Huge hug. JUSTIN looks pleased, though HE tries to hide it. FRAN opens her arms.)

FRAN

Mei!

(MEI extends one arm to bring GUNG GUNG closer, and with the other, brings HOWIE closer. HOWIE'S outstretched arms are burdened with pricey leather bags; HE looks like a pocketbook tree.)

MEI

Fran! You remember Gung Gung, Justin's grandpa, from the wedding?

GUNG GUNG

Wo ho hoy sum gene doe nay---

FRAN

And you...Cheryl's grandma.

(GUNG GUNG bows to BUBEE. BUHBEE makes finger motions as though tapping a key-board.)

BUHBEE

Mah-Jongg?

GUNG GUNG

Mah-Jongg.

MEI

And this here with gifts is Howie.

FRAN

Hello-o-o!

(FRAN brings ESTÉBAN forward. BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG drift to one side of the stage.)

Mei and Howie, my friend Estéban.

(ESTÉBAN gives short shrift to his handshake with MEI, HOWIE is equally quick with FRAN, and then, looking at each other for a split-second longer than necessary, the two MEN shake hands, smile. ESTÉBAN helps HOWIE remove bags, as HOWIE speaks, the PAIR move away.)

HOWIE

I'm in shirts. What do you do?

(ESTÉBAN appraises HOWIE'S shirt, and torso.)

ESTÉBAN

Mmm, shirts. Restaurateur.

HOWIE

My my! I'm a foodie! We have so much to talk about!

ESTÉBAN

Sí, Cheryl and Justin...?

HOWIE

Exactly what I meant, Cheryl and Justin.

(HOWIE shepherds ESTÉBAN to the other side of the stage. CHERYL looks around for BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG.)

CHERYL

Did someone kidnap Buhbee and Gung Gung?

(JUSTIN spots GUNG GUNG and BUHBEE, points THEM out.)

(As HE speaks, BUHBEE is clearly asking GUNG GUNG about the figure JUSTIN performed before he hugged his GRANDFATHER. GUNG GUNG explains 'White Crane Spreads Wings' to BUHBEE by arranging her arms. As their dialogue continues, HE arranges HER in a few more poses. SHE giggles self-consciously; HE nods and smiles.)

JUSTIN
Kidnapped? Are you nuts?

CHERYL
Nuts?

JUSTIN
They're over there. Bosom buddies. Look, he's teaching her T'ai Chi.

FRAN
Estéban?

MEI
Howie?

(ESTÉBAN and HOWIE look up, wave.)

FRAN
The boys...are...are getting along beautifully.

(CHERYL comments.)

CHERYL
Beautifully, Mom. Absolutely.

JUSTIN
Cheryl, take everyone outside. I'll get a cab.

CHERYL
Nutsy me gets everyone outside. You get a cab.

(SHE clutches her stomach, withdraws her hand. BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG pause, notice, smile at EACH OTHER.)

JUSTIN
That's what I just said, isn't it? Isn't it?

(HE exits.)

ESTÉBAN
I'll bring a cart for the luggage.

HOWIE
I'll help.

(ESTÉBAN and HOWIE start off, chatting.)

CHERYL

Go ahead everybody, I'll be right there.

(CHERYL runs toward the Ladies' Room, both hands on abdomen. BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG point to the Ladies', chuckling. FRAN and MEI exit speaking the following lines.)

FRAN

Tomorrow morning, Mei, we'll do the 'New York thing', the Statue of Liberty, then corner these stubborn children.

MEI

Unreasonable young people...they need a wake-up call.

(Exit ALL.)

BLACKOUT

ACT I

SCENE 17

Next day, afternoon. FRAN and MEI are on the apron continuing their conversation about Cheryl and Justin.

SONG: 37TH STREET

FRAN/MEI
FIRST THEY KILL THE BUS'NESS.
THEN EACH OTHER, THEN...US.

MEI
Well,
WHEN HE SAID HE MET...AN AMERICAN GIRL...

(FRAN interrupts.)

FRAN
CHINESE BOY...

MEI
NO PROBLEM, BEST NOT MAKE TOO MUCH FUSS,
FOR KIDS, REBELLION'S A BIG PLUS,
NO PROBLEM.

FRAN
NO PROBLEM, JAKE GROWLED FROM HIS GRAVE,
I SAID, KIDS GROW UP, THEY'LL BEHAVE,
NO PROBLEM.

THE CHILDREN! WILL LOOK LIKE---

MEI
WHICH SIDE?

(Pause. BOTH rush in.)

FRAN/MEI
SLIM GROOM, PRETTY BRIDE, BABY'S SMILE?
NO PROBLEM.

FRAN
IN THIS KIND OF BREAK-UP NO-ONE WINS,

MEI
BREAK-UP? THAT'S HOW A GRANDCHILD BEGINS?

FRAN/MEI

So what if he's not al-l-l that Jewish...
So what if she's not per-fect-ly Chinese..

NO PROBLEM.

BROWNOUT

Lights up on a split stage. CHERYL and
FRAN are in FRAN'S apartment, JUSTIN and
MEI are in CHERYL and JUSTIN'S apartment.

FRAN

PILLOW-TALK TO SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE,
YOU'RE PUSHED AND PULLED AT WORK, RILED UP.

CHERYL

TALKING MEANS WE RAVE, AND/OR DISPARAGE.

No love lost.

MEI

EV'RY DAY YOU SLAVE--TAKE A VACATION!
IT'S UPS AND DOWNS AT WORK, PILED UP.

JUSTIN

WHERE TO? CHERYL'S PRIVATE CONSTELLATION?

No love there.

CHERYL

WHERE'S THE BOY WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO STEPPED WITH ME, KEPT WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

JUSTIN

WHERE'S THE GIRL WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO SLEPT WITH ME, SCHLEPPED WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

FRAN/MEI

NAME A SINGLE THING YOU LIKE ABOUT HIM/HER.

JUSTIN

TRIMS: NO MATTER WHAT BLING SHE NEEDS OR DESIRES,
SHE GETS ANY-AMOUNT DISCOUNTS---
SHE'S GREAT WITH SUPPLIERS.

MEI

GREAT WITH SUPPLIERS? THAT'S WHAT YOU LOVE?
OKAY, SUPPLIERS. SO WHY INSULT HER?
ANGRY PEOPLE DON'T SLEEP TOGETHER.

CHERYL

SALES: HE'S GOT THIS CHARM A CLIENT ADMIRES,
HE USED TO HAVE COUNTLESS ACCOUNTS---
WAS GREAT WITH STORES, AND NOW, ONLINE BUYERS.

FRAN

CHARMING WITH BUYERS? THAT'S WHAT YOU LOVE?
OKAY, BUYERS, BUT WHY INSULT HIM?
CRANKY PEOPLE DON'T SLEEP TOGETHER.

*(CHERYL and JUSTIN turn towards ONE ANOTHER though
THEY can't see the OTHER.)*

LIKE BLIND LITTER WHIRLING ON CONCRETE,
WE'RE TORN UP BITS THAT NEVER MEET,
REMNANTS OF TH'ONCE-WAS-SWEET,
WE'RE LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

FRAN/MEI

So?

FRAN

Common ground's found only on Thirty-Seventh Street?!

MEI

Better to sleep together.

GO HOME AND LOWER EV'RY LIGHT,
FEED EACH OTHER ONE SPECIAL BITE,
TRY A TENDER TOUCH BY CANDLELIGHT,
THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOVE IS RIGHT---
LOVE IS WHAT YOU NEED AT NIGHT.

*(JUSTIN interrupts MEI. BOTH PARTNERS speak to their
MOTHERS.)*

JUSTIN

I have it MaMa, hit me so clear!

CHERYL

I've got it, Ma, what an idea! I'll change my style for the trade
show! To his!

JUSTIN

To hers!

CHERYL

I'll do it his way.

JUSTIN

Her way.

CHERYL

Mine will look like his, ev'ryday scale.

JUSTIN

Mine will be hers, overwhelming detail!

(JUSTIN sings his "Overwhelming detail" first and third, CHERYL sings her "Perfect scale" second and last, with three repeats. Background music reverts to the 'Halloween Parade's' refrains.)

MORE: SUPERB DETAIL.

CHERYL

LESS: PEELED-DOWN SCALE.

JUSTIN

MORE, MORE DETAIL.

CHERYL

LESS: DOWNPLAYED SCALE.

JUSTIN

MORE.

CHERYL

LESS.

CHERYL/JUSTIN

THEN S/HE'LL KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE HER/HIM.

MEI

HATS! HATS! HATS! NO! YOU MUST DISMISS---

FRAN

THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET WITH A KISS
GO AFTER WHAT YOU REALLY MISS---

MEI

FIND EACH OTHER, THAT'S YOUR BUSINESS,
THAT'S YOUR BLISS!

(ALL FOUR freeze, lights on THEM lower as lights come up on GUNG GUNG, BUHBEE, ESTÉBAN, HOWIE, entering onto the apron with a '24/7' refrain.)

REFRAIN: 24/7

BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

ON THE GLITT'RING SET OF FASHION CITY---
TWIRL ON! SKIP, SHIFT, KEEP LOOKIN' PRETTY,
TAP ON TO ENTER FASHION CITY,
WHERE 'OUT OF STEP' COMMANDS NO PITY.

CHERYL

WHERE'S THE BOY WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO STEPPED WITH ME, KEPT WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOVE LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

JUSTIN

WHERE'S THE GIRL WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO SLEPT WITH ME, SCHLEPPED WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOVE LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

(Harmonize, EACH with their verses.)

FRAN/MEI

HATS! HATS! HATS! NO! YOU MUST DISMISS
THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET WITH A KISS
GO AFTER WHAT YOU REALLY MISS---
FIND EACH OTHER, THAT'S YOUR BLISS!

BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG/ESTÉBAN/HOWI

PUPPET POPPET, JIGGLE WITH ALACRITY
TAP TO THE SONG OF FASHION CITY---
STRING-A-LING ROCK TO A WELL-KNOWN DITTY,
CLICK CLACK, NO ROOM, NO ROOM! FOR SELF-PITY.

CHERYL

WHERE'S THE BOY WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO STEPPED WITH ME, KEPT WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOVE LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

JUSTIN

WHERE'S THE GIRL WHO SWEPT ME OFF MY FEET,
WHO SLEPT WITH ME, SCHLEPPED WITH ME,
NEVER MISSED A BEAT,
LOVE LOST ON THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

(Repeat, ALL singing together.)

BLACKOUT

ACT IISCENE 1

Two weeks have passed. In the Sashay studio loft, ESTÉBAN and HOWIE are prepping the oncoming pj showing, pushing back manufacturing apparatuses, bringing out boxes of hats, setting up tables, putting the hats on forms. ESTÉBAN turns away from HOWIE, taking bolts of fabric out of the way. HOWIE edges closer to HIM, takes one of the bolts, lays it down.

HOWIE

SONG: *ONE WHISPER AT A TIME*

I THOUGHT WE MIGHT TAKE TIME TO SPEAK,
LET THE WORLD WING ON BY US,
WHILE YOU AND I STOP ON A DIME,
ONE WHISPER AT A TIME,
UN SUSURRO A LA VEZ, ONE WHISPER AT A TIME.

ESTÉBAN

Un susurro? What do you know from 'susurro'?

HOWIE

What New Yorker from New Jersey hasn't learned a little Spanish.

FLICK ON THE LIGHT, TAKE A SMALL PEEK,
LET THE WORLD SWING ON BY US,
WHILE YOU AND I DROP OUT, NO CRIME,
UN SUSURRO A LA VEZ, ONE WHISPER AT A TIME.

WHO SAYS YOU AND I CAN'T BE
LIKE ANY OLD HE AND SHE---
PICK WHAT YOU WANT, MY FRIEND
PUT ME ON YOUR CALENDAR,
I'LL BE A PAL, LEND A HAND, 'R---
STICK WITH YOU 'TIL THE END.

HOW ABOUT TONIGHT WE PLAY HIDE AND SEEK,
LET THE WORLD FLING ITSELF PAST US,
WE'RE TWO SWELL GENTS STILL IN OUR PRIME,
READY AT LAST TO TASTE THE SUBLIME
UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO, UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO,
UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO A LA VEZ,
ONE WHISPER AT A TIME.

ESTÉBAN

I don't know what to say.

HOWIE

This is the time to say 'si'.

ESTÉBAN

Si, si, si!

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

HOW ABOUT TONIGHT WE PLAY HIDE AND SEEK,
LET THE WORLD FLING ITSELF PAST US,
WE'RE TWO SWELL GENTS STILL IN OUR PRIME,
READY AT LAST TO TASTE THE SUBLIME
UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO, UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO,
UN PEQUEÑO SUSURRO A LA VEZ,
ONE WHISPER AT A TIME.

*(HOWIE steps up to ESTÉBAN and kisses HIM. Slight
pause. ESTÉBAN then returns the kiss passionately.)*

BROWNOUT

ACT IISCENE 2

Next day, the trade show. On the Apron, tables hold hatstands showing creative, innovative millinery. Computers are set up L and R. JUSTIN wearing his imitation CHERYL-style hat, and CHERYL, wearing her imitation JUSTIN hat lead into the AUDIENCE, distributing head caps/liners and hats to several front row CLIENTS, whom THEY coach to place them on their heads. FRAN, MEI, BUHBEE, HOWIE, and ESTÉBAN, wearing hats and carrying trays of hors d'oeuvres and drinks wade into the AUDIENCE, creating a singing hubbub about food. GUNG GUNG provides tablets to the hatted CLIENTS. The elevator door, stairwell door, exit signs are clearly marked. DOC SLAGGIT, covered from hat to shoes, wanders through the millinery, snapping pictures on his cell.

SONG: *NADA, NOTHING, MO YEAH, BUPKIS*

CAST

NADA, NOTHING, WAN GUT, BUPKIS,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING SELLING.

NADA, NOTHING, WAN GUT, BUPKIS,
NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE ALL CRYING.

NADA, NOTHING, WAN GUT, BUPKIS,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING SELLING.

NADA, NOTHING, WAN GUT, BUPKIS,
NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE ALL CRYING.

FRAN
HOR D'OEUVRES? VODKA-MANGO JUICE?

MEI
SCALLION PANCAKES? PATÉ OF GOOSE?

HOWIE
SANGRIA WITH SALMON MOUSSE,

ESTÉBAN
SALSA THAT MAKES YOUR BONES GO LOOSE.

BUHBEE
Take a few. Don't be so skinny. Pretty summer straw on the
right? \$95.

*(GUNG GUNG points/nods to the hats displayed onstage,
demonstrates where to tap the screen to order.)*

GUNG GUNG
YOU MAKE A LITTLE MARK
IN THE LITTLE BOX,

BUHBEE
ON THE LITTLE SPACE
MADE FOR THE LITTLE MARK,

FRAN/MEI
THE LITTLE 'X' IN THE LITTLE BOX
WILL PLACE AN ORDER.

*(Looking up at the hats onstage, JUSTIN spots DOC
SLAGGIT.)*

JUSTIN
Dr. Slaggit!

*(DR. SLAGGIT, in long raincoat and 1940'S slouch
hat that hides his face, freezes. CHERYL looks
up.)*

CHERYL
That's him---on his cell camera.

(The light dawns.)

That where the knock-offs come from?!

*(DOC SLAGGIT slithers through the AUDIENCE towards
the back of the house.)*

(*CHERYL and JUSTIN freeze, facing EACH OTHER, remaining in the AUDIENCE, while ESTÉBAN, HOWIE, MEI, FRAN, BUHBEE, GUNG GUNG hustle back onstage as THEY sing, intermittently addressing SOMEONE in the AUDIENCE. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE peer intently at one computer, HOWIE reaching out, the FAMILY crowding around the other.)*

ESTÉBAN

NADA!

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

(*To EACH OTHER.*)

NOTHING, NADA, NIL,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING'S SELLING,

GUNG GUNG

MO YEAH,

BUHBEE

BUPKIS,

MEI

NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE ALL DYING.

Felt molded cloche in the middle? Wonderful for Fall! 125.

FRAN

WE'VE GOT TRY-ONS FOR ONLINE STORES,

The lavender with ribbons---definitely for Easter! 250.

MEI

REPS ON EV'RY ONLINE FLOOR,

HOWIE

EXCEL FORMS, TAP HERE TO ORDER,

ESTÉBAN

BUT NOTHING SEEMS TO SCORE.

FRAN/ MEI/BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG

NADA, NOTHING, MO YEAH, BUPKIS,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING'S SELLING.
NADA, NOTHING,

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

BUPKIS,
NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE ALL SIGHING.

(*JUSTIN and CHERYL un-freeze, talk to the planted AUDIENCE members.*)

JUSTIN

Monica! This baby---never again another like it!

(HE wiggles his finger at the CHERYL hat.)

Ah.

(HE nods, moves on. Jumping in, CHERYL shows off the JUSTIN hat.)

CHERYL

Incredibly unique...on you, Lucinda, fantastic!

(SHE shakes her head to show the hat, the shake becomes a 'no'. JUSTIN jumps in, shows the CHERYL hat more desperately.)

JUSTIN

Multiple bows, Susie, rhinestone dewdrops, veil---on special!

(HE freezes.)

CHERYL

Essence of minimalism...

(SHE freezes.)

MEI

Retail clients eating like wild horses, drinking every drop...but no orders---

(THEY focus on REP in the AUDIENCE.)

FRAN/MEI

MAKE A LITTLE MARK
IN THE LITTLE BOX
ON THE LITTLE SPACE
MADE FOR THE LITTLE MARK,
PUT A NUMBER IN THE LITTLE BOX,
AND WE'LL HAVE AN ORDER.

FRAN/MEI/BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

NADA, NOTHING, NADA, BUPKIS,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING'S SELLING.
NADA, NOTHING, MO YEAH, BUPKIS,
NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE MY-OH-MYING.

(Spot on a REP in the AUDIENCE. Unfreeze CHERYL, SHE holds up a hand to stop the onstage action and steps forward, eyes on the REP, quickly taking off the JUSTIN hat and holding it out towards the REP. Unfreeze JUSTIN, WHO watches intently.)

(The REP strongly reacts to the hat, peering forward studying it, nodding, then glancing down at her tablet, lifts her finger. Focusing on the REP, CHERYL sings.)

CHERYL
THE HAND IS LIFTING,

JUSTIN
THE FINGER'S UP, THE FINGER'S DOWN,

(ALL lean forward with baited breath.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN
Tap! Tap!

MEI
THERE'S A SMILE.

FRAN
NO, IT'S A FROWN.

CHERYL
THE BROW IS DRIFTING,

JUSTIN
THE FINGER'S SHIFTING,

FRAN/MEI/BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE
PLEASE DON'T LET HER LET US DOWN.

(A moment of suspense, the REP takes one last look, shakes her head 'no', uses her finger to signal to BUHBEE, holding out her tablet. BUHBEE steps down into the AUDIENCE with GUNG GUNG, ESTÉBAN, and HOWIE. THEY quietly collect her tablet and the other devices and hats, climb back onstage.)

BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG
NADA, NOTHING, MO YEAH, BUPKIS.

FRAN/MEI/BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE
NADA, NOTHING, NADA, BUPKIS,
NOTHING'S GELLING, NOTHING'S SELLING.
NADA, NOTHING, MO YEAH, BUPKIS,
NO-ONE'S BUYING, WE'RE MY-OH-MYING.

(CHERYL takes her JUSTIN hat to FRAN.)

CHERYL
They're totally bonked out.

(JUSTIN takes his CHERYL hat to FRAN.)

JUSTIN
Afraid to buy anything. I can't believe she didn't go for this one.

HOWIE
WE'RE ALL AY YI YI-ING,

FRAN/MEI/BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG
CUSTOMERS ARE FLYING,

CHERYL/JUSTIN
OUR COMPANY IS DYING,

HOWIE/ESTÉBAN
CASH FLOW IS GOOD-BYEING,

ALL
AND WE'VE GOT---

ESTÉBAN
NADA.

FRAN/BUHBEE
BUPKIS.

GUNG GUNG
MO SAN-N-N-NG YE!

MEI
NO BUSINESS.

HOWIE
Zilch.

(DOC SLAGGIT'S VOICE from the rear of the House.)

SLAGGIT
Never saw such a load of schlock. Floprooo-o-o-o-o-o-o.

(All freeze, then unlock and begin moving simultaneously. CHERYL and JUSTIN cross DC, stare at EACH OTHER in dismay. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE bring boxes from the office, place them near hat stands. Exit to office. BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG exit to office with the devices briefly, re-enter with jackets and sheaves of tissue paper, hanging the jackets, handing the paper to FRAN and MEI, and exiting from stairs. FRAN and MEI cross to SL and SR of CHERYL and JUSTIN, EACH with a sheaf of tissue, handing sheets to CHERYL and JUSTIN. The COUPLE, looking over at EACH OTHER coolly, wraps hats and hands them back to FRAN and MEI to put in boxes. Wrapping business.)

(FRAN and MEI speak to EACH OTHER over CHERYL and JUSTIN.)

MEI

In Hong Kong, people are polite. It isn't polite to eat and walk.

FRAN

In America, everyone eats and walks.

MEI

American reps aren't polite.

FRAN

Not polite! Let me tell you, when people like something---they stay!

(CHERYL turns to JUSTIN.)

CHERYL

You copy my ideas and caricature them? You call that support? No-one orders cartoons.

(JUSTIN turns to CHERYL.)

JUSTIN

What? I copied you as I see you. Your parody of me? No cojones! Trim looked like twigs with cotton balls.

CHERYL

Now it's all about your *balls*?!

JUSTIN

You had no problem with my balls last night!

CHERYL

I've had it! I'll enter the runway Contest for myself. Without your cotton cojones!

JUSTIN

I'll enter for myself! My cotton cojones tell me I can make ten better hats for the Contest.

(THEY continue to wrap intensely and store in silence. FRAN and MEI stage whisper across the intent COUPLE.)

MEI

Both applying to the Contest!?

FRAN

What about Sashay?

FRAN/MEI

Our grand-babies! A-w-w-w!

(CHERYL and JUSTIN stop wrapping, definitively push the last of their hats into boxes and turn furiously on their MOTHERS.)

JUSTIN

I listened to you, and look what happened. Now I have to cook up ideas for designs in a month.

(HE exits, grabbing a jacket. MEI calls after HIM.)

MEI

Cheryl copied you because she loves you...loves...you.

(CHERYL confronts FRAN.)

CHERYL

You made me do it, like the time you took out my tonsils!

(SHE runs out. FRAN calls after HER.)

FRAN

Tonsils? You were four! Justin imitated you because he loves you...! Where are you going?

CHERYL

Where? Where? Home to design hats for the Contest.

FRAN

Take your coat.

(CHERYL barges back in for her coat, exits.)

MEI

They're destroying each other!

FRAN

I feel faint.

MEI

I'm going to keel over.

(THEY support ONE ANOTHER. ESTÉBAN enters with more boxes.)

ESTÉBAN

Pools of blood on the showroom floor.

(Enter HOWIE. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE speedily finish the wrap, leave boxes, exit from stairs. FRAN crosses D, stands, crossing her arms. The atmosphere of gloom and tension ratcheting up between the two WOMEN is palpable.)

SONG: YOUR CLIENT OR MINE

FRAN
SHE TRIED TO DESIGN LIKE HIM.
NO WONDER HER STYLES WERE NO FUN.

(MEI crosses D.)

MEI
HE TRIED TO DESIGN LIKE HER.
NO WONDER HIS STYLES---OVERDONE.

FRAN/MEI
NO WONDER!

MEI
EVERYTHING YOU TAUGHT YOUR DAUGHTER?
SILLINESS, SILLINESS, SILLINESS,
NOTHING HOLDS WATER.
NO WONDER!

FRAN
Really!
EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE FOR YOUR SON?
PRACTICAL, PRAGMATIC, EXPEDIENT,
MAKES MOST PEOPLE RUN.
NO WONDER!

MEI
Really!

FRAN
You left out the best ingredient.

MEI
Best ingredient! You mean sex!? Like your sexy undies company.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT, TEACHING HER UNDERWEAR?

FRAN
Not underwear: lingerie. A billion-three-hundred-million
something people in China---someone there knows something about
sex...y...lingerie!

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT, SQUELCHING HIS ARTISTIC FLAIR?

MEI
Squelch? Squelch? I do not squelch.

FRAN
You and I, babe, are in the same business.

MEI
I'm not in your business. Babe.

FRAN
Oh no? You sell clothes to women, don't you?

MEI
So?

(U, lights come up. A dressing-booth doorframe is lowered. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE roll on a MANNEQUIN, dressed in exotic underwear, with a shopping bag at her side. THEY exit.)

FRAN
So they get what they want, and may I say, deserve out of life?

MEI
Of course.

FRAN
WE'RE IN THE SAME BUSINESS, MRS. MEI, YOU AND I,
NO, DON'T GAWK.
WE SELL AN IMAGE ALL WHOLE TO THE GAL
WHO GIVES IT A GO, WHO GIVES IT A SHOT,
IT'S THE SAME WOMAN,
WHETHER SHE'S YOUR CLIENT OR MINE.

MEI
Cover up. Cover up.

(SHE layers clothing from the bag onto the MANNIE, continues to add layers as the song progresses.)

FRAN
WHETHER SHE FANTASIZES OR TANTALIZES,
SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS FROM HER CLOTHES.
WHETHER SHE SHOPS YOUR STORE OR MY CATALOG,
SPENDS TIME WITH THE KIDS OR TIME ON HER BLOG,
SHE BLOWS US A DOLLAR OR TWO
WHEN WE DO WHAT SHE WANTS US TO DO.

MEI
THE SAME BUSINESS, MRS. FRAN?

(Slight pause.)

MEI
CAN'T SAY IT'S NOT TRUE---
SO DON'T LOOK 'ROUND.
WE SELL DAMAGE CONTROL FOR OUR PAL,
WHO GRABS FOR THE GOLD, THE FELLER, THE JOB,

FRAN/MEI
WHO CAN'T LET A FEW POUNDS RUN HER AGROUND,

MEI
IT'S THE SAME GAL,

FRAN/MEI
WHETHER SHE'S YOUR CLIENT OR MINE.

MEI
WHETHER SHE'S DRESSING,

(MEI firmly places a piece onto a top.)

FRAN
OR UNDESSING,

(FRAN tugs off the garment to reveal the bra, tosses it. MEI sticks a different piece onto the bra.)

MEI
SHE KNOWS HOW TO DISGUISE WHAT SHE SHOWS,

FRAN
WHETHER SHE SHOPS YOUR STORE---
OR MY CATALOG---

FRAN/MEI
SHE KNOWS HOW TO SET HER WORLD AGAPE AND AGOG,

MEI
AND THROWS US A DOLLAR OR TWO
WHEN WE DO WHAT SHE NEEDS US TO DO.

FRAN/MEI
WE MANAGE DAMAGE CONTROL FOR OUR PAL!

MEI
GO! GRAB FOR THE GOLD!

FRAN
THE FELLER, THE JOB,

FRAN/MEI
DON'T LET A FEW POUNDS RUN YOU AGROUND,
YOU'RE OUR WOMAN!!

MEI
OUR GO-GETTER!

FRAN
OUR STYLE-SETTER!

FRAN/MEI

OUR RED-LETTER WOMAN!
YOUR CLIENT OR MINE.

(THEY stop, turn to EACH OTHER, fling out their arms and hug. THEY assess the MANNIE.)

FRAN

Beautiful.

MEI

Very nice. Good business.

(SHE turns to look again at the MANNIE.)

Something is missing.

FRAN

A..a..a..!

(MEI and FRAN look EACH OTHER in the eyes.)

FRAN/MEI

Hat!

(MEI retrieves a hat from a box, quickly adds it to the MANNIE. The WOMEN re-assess the MANNIE, smiling at EACH OTHER. Elevator clanks, gears grind, door opens. From inside the elevator. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE to FRAN and MEI.)

HOWIE

Ready to go?

FRAN/MEI

Ma? Father?

(BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG enter from elevator, BUHBEE waving a mop, GUNG GUNG hoisting a bucket.)

GUNG GUNG

Clean water.

BUHBEE

Mop.

MEI

See you two at Uncle Edward's.

(THEY exit into the elevator, GUNG GUNG and BUHBEE withdraw into office. Enter the shrouded DR. SLAGGIT from the stairs, looking over his shoulder.)

(HE piles up the rest of the boxes, sneers at the MANNIE, starts to exit to stairwell carrying them, and drops a box with a 'clunk'. GUNG GUNG immediately opens the office door.)

GUNG GUNG

Hey! What's going on? What you doing?!

(SLAGGIT escapes with a box. Sound of his footsteps clattering downstairs.)

Hunh.

BLACKOUT

ACT II

SCENE 3

The next day. The elevator clank sounds, gears grind, door opens. GUNG GUNG shepherds JUSTIN out of the elevator.

GUNG GUNG

I see him! Same guy from show. I tell Buhbee. Whole box of your hats! A thief!

JUSTIN

A creep but what can we do about him now? Why did we come back here. I have to go home to think out designs for the t.v. spot. The runway show is our only hope, and I'm up against my wife, a great designer. She's going to---

GUNG GUNG

Think T'ai Chi. Meditate. Prepare mind for trip to Guangzhou.

JUSTIN

Guangzhou? I'm not going to China. Here, Gung Gung, rest up, I'll get you a chair.

(GUNG GUNG begins an adapted T'ai Chi form #39.)

GUNG GUNG

You go home to work in front of Cheryl? You have no sense of what you do to one another?

JUSTIN

Yeh, but last night she...

GUNG GUNG

She, she, she...what about you, you, you?

SONG: *SHIFT WEIGHT, MEDITATE*

GUNG GUNG

GRANDSON FIRST WILL YIELD, LIKE T'AI CHI.

(GUNG GUNG pushes JUSTIN'S SHOULDER; JUSTIN twists away, joining the form.)

GUNG GUNG (CONT'D)

SHIFT WEIGHT, MEDITATE.
YOU NOT YIELD, YOUR DOWNFALL SEALED.
NO PRODUCT, NO COMP'NY, NO 'SHE'.
SIXTY YEAR WORK MANY FACT'RY,
NO-ONE KNOW RETAIL LIKE ME.

HATS ONLY FOR HIGH-END? NOT REAL.
ONE-OF-A-KIND LINE LIKE WEAK TEA---
ALL LEVELS MUST STOCK...THAT THE KEY,
NO-ONE KNOW WHOLESALE LIKE ME.

(THEY continue the form together.)

JUSTIN

Wholesale? I'd like to, but Cheryl? it's a big change for her.

GUNG GUNG

SHIFT WEIGHT, MEDITATE.
IN GUANGZHOU, OLD FRIEND BIG BOSS.
HE SHOW PRODUCTION, THEN YOU TALK.
MAKE LOW-END HATS AT LOWER COST---
NO-ONE KNOW SHOPPERS LIKE ME.

Hai!

MAKE JOBS NEW YORK---TRAP CHINESE HAWK!
MAKE HATS HERE, OR SEASON'S LOST.
NO-ONE KNOW KNOCK-OFFS LIKE HE.

(JUSTIN stops dead.)

JUSTIN

Knock-offs, we don't do knock-offs.

GUNG GUNG

NO? WHAT REAL IS MIDDLE-BROW DEAL,
COPY YOUR DESIGNS, NOT STEAL---

Like cheat thief!

OLD-TIMERS TELL YOU: USE OWN ESPRIT.
HAH! NO-ONE KNOW ESPRIT
LIKE MY GOOD FRIEND AND ME.

(THEY continue the practice.)

JUSTIN

'Esprit', Grandpa? Where did you get 'esprit'?

GUNG GUNG
THINK ELDERS NOT KNOW FASHION SHPIEL?
WHEN YOU RESPECT YOUR ANCESTRY,
MIX WITH YANKEE INGENUITY,
BALANCE PERFECT, LIKE T'AI CHI.

(THEY hold one-legged pose.)

SHIFT WEIGHT. MEDITATE.
ANCIENT CULTURE DON'T TOSS AWAY,
YOU FORGET---YOU SLEEP-WALKING.
SHANGHAI OP'RA---OLD, YET IN TODAY,

JUSTIN
Sounds like Cheryl talking. She's the artist.

GUNG GUNG
SO? LISTEN TO HER, STOP CRISS-CROSSING---
LISTEN TO HER INSTEAD OF...SQUAWKING!

JUSTIN
Guangzhou know-how...

GUNG GUNG
And her esprit!

NO-ONE KNOW EXCEPTIONAL LIKE SHE.
Hunh.

YOU KNOW YOUR DESIGNS THAT GUY STEAL?
NO TIME TO HEAR HIM SAY 'WHO ME?'
YOU GO, COME BACK SECRETLY,
KICK MARKET BUTT, YOU GOING TO SEE---

(GUNG GUNG executes a T'ai Chi kick.)

WHY COOL TO KNOW BUS'NESS LIKE ME.

SHIFT WEIGHT. MEDITATE:
YANKEE INGENUITY,
RESPECT YOUR ANCESTRY,
BALANCE PERFECT, LIKE T'AI CHI.
SHIFT WEIGHT. MEDITATE.

JUSTIN/GUNG GUNG
NO-ONE KNOW REAL-TIME LIKE HE/ME!

(THEY hold hands up.)

JUSTIN
After the Contest...Guangzhou...with Cheryl?

(To HIMSELF, facing the AUDIENCE.)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

No way she'd go with me.

BLACKOUT

ACT II

SCENE 4

One month later. Lights up on HATS ARE BACK! Contest scene, stage empty except for MODERATORS' podium DC. Spots on TWO MODELS---FRAN and MEI disguised, one with CHERYL, one with JUSTIN, SL and SR, in black body suits, black masks, and heels. EACH wears a distinctive hat, one very much in sync with CHERYL'S style, the other with JUSTIN'S. ESTÉBAN and HOWIE as the two MODERATORS are at a desk facing THEM. A t.v. camera dollies in and around.

MODERATOR 1

Models!

MODERATOR 2

Face the camera, ladies! The camera!

(To the AUDIENCE, while the MODELS creep closer to ONE ANOTHER.)

MODERATOR 1

HATS ARE BACK! designers worked with quirky materials in our workshops, and we've seen remarkable chapeaux. What grueling and fun-filled days, but the moment's come: we're down to finalists! Your call-in, punch-in choices tell us...deep breath here: Cheryl and Justin Chen! Same company, two designers, challenging each other! Wife-husband, husband-wife con-front-ation! Hard-to-believe! Drama!!

(CHERYL and JUSTIN come forward, smiling stiffly.)

MODERATOR 1

Cheryl Chen...show us your final hat!

(MODERATOR 2 shoos CHERYL'S MODEL up front. SHE steps forward, poses.)

MODERATOR 2

And Justin Chen! Your final hat!

(JUSTIN propels the OTHER MODEL. She steps forward with a quiet surreptitious kick to the first model. SHE poses.)

MODERATOR 1

Thank you ladies! Let's hear it for our oh-so-chic models.

(Applause. MODELS exit.)

MODERATOR 1

Audience, give us your ultimate vote! The winner...our winner!...is guaranteed a starter contract with... mega-store and online presence, Sherrods of London!! Fifteen seconds, call 45800007448765---see it on your screen, 45800007448765---operators are standing by; onscreen, check the Cheryl box or the Justin box, press Enter...Contest over, votes flooding in!

MODERATOR 2

Only seconds to go. Three, two, one. Yes indeedy. The results, please. Do we have a winner? Ye-e-es, we have a winner!!!

(EVERYONE freezes.)

MODERATOR 2

Justin Chen, please step up to the microphone.

(CHERYL gasps quietly.)

JUSTIN

Me?

MODERATOR 2

Don't go away, Justin. It's you.

(CHERYL is crushed.)

Justin Chen, you're the Millinery Designer of the Year! The quote that locks it up: "Justin's hats? I'd buy 'em and wear 'em all day long, every day!"

MODERATOR 1

Ladies and gentlemen, Cheryl Chen, first runner up! Give it up everyone! Justin, you're a star!

(JUSTIN'S hears his cell, takes it out, clicks it open, listens, talks into it.)

MODERATOR 2

Great audience! Thanks for watching, thanks for voting. Good night, hat-afficion-ados!

MODERATOR 1

Wear our hats!--keep warm in winter, cool in summer! Glam all year 'round.

MODERATOR 2

We party tonight!

(Exit the MODERATORS. JUSTIN crosses to CHERYL, who has been standing stony-faced.)

(THEY speak, interrupting EACH OTHER.)

JUSTIN

I won't be there. It's/

CHERYL

You won. Winning's everything---/right?

JUSTIN

/not worth it---sometimes special people get hurt.

CHERYL

Not me. Don't worry about me, Justin./ You tried hard---your hats were terrific,/ you deserved it./ You're the star.

JUSTIN

Yours were supreme,/ better than star quality./ I don't know how I won./ But we came in one, two! That's the important thing. We have the Sherrods contract!

CHERYL

Sherrods is in England. Huge.

(JUSTIN is ecstatic, but contained, he points to his cell.)

JUSTIN

They want our hats---everyone and her sister wears hats there---

CHERYL

Sherrod's label, not Sashay, our baby?

JUSTIN

Sashay's not a baby, Cheryl.

(SHE starts, involuntarily embraces her abdomen.)

CHERYL

I know that.

JUSTIN

But first, Guangzhou Province to check out Gung Gung's friends for production. From Asia, London.

CHERYL

With or without me, your partner?

JUSTIN

You'd come? We weren't speaking. Come with me---Everyone knows Sherrods---it's international.

CHERYL

And not many know Sashay? Our little family business? That's correct...isn't it?

JUSTIN

Yeh. Regrettably, that's true. Couldn't pay the rent this month. Borrowed from both moms.

CHERYL

So we erase Sashay and they've

(SHE chin-points at his cell.)

CHERYL

already offered you Director of Marketing, slash, Millinery or something?

JUSTIN

You could be the Chief of Millinery Design. Your gift for innovation and my everyday caps? Nothing can beat us. London. Negotiation. Will you come to London?

CHERYL

No.

JUSTIN

Just no? 'No' what?

CHERYL

No everything. I don't need to be the 'Chief of Design'.

JUSTIN

Why not? Grab the chance.

CHERYL

I want to design. Not be a...a chief of anything. I can't believe you'd give up on me, chew me up, spit me out. Who knew you had the soul of a piranha?!

JUSTIN

Piranha? Spit you out? You're brilliant, I love you---I put everything I had into selling your hats. Mine were always second. That was dope, but forget about a company like Sherrods? What magic mushroom powder are you breathing?

CHERYL

I breathe hats.

(CHERYL sings in a space all her own, but also trying to communicate what's basic about HERSELF to JUSTIN.)

CHERYL

SONG: *CHERYL'S RHAPSODY*

WALKING ALONG, EVERYTHING I SEE

CHERYL (CONT'D)

SPLASHES COLOR ALL THROUGH ME---
 SPILLED SIDEWALK PAINT, SKY, CLOUDS,
 CHANGE INTO SILK FLOWERS, RAINBOWS OF RIBBONS,
 ON THE TOP OF,
 ON THE SIDE OF,
 IN THE BACK OF,
 A HAT! OH!

I DIDN'T CHOOSE IT,
 I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT,
 I DIDN'T ASK TO DO IT,
 I DON'T NEED IT. DO I?

Sashay isn't part of both of us? Hearts, lives, souls? I don't believe you!

JUSTIN

I might have wanted something---else---for us.

CHERYL

What? Bigger and better, bigger bigger bigger success-without-a-soul?

SONG: *JUSTIN'S RHAPSODY*

Note: In progress

JUSTIN

NO. YES, I WANT TO RESCUE SASHAY,
 OUR FAMILY BUSINESS, BUT THERE'S
 MORE THAN BUSINESS...
 WE'RE FREE TO MAKE OUR KIND OF FAM'LY...
 SHRUG OFF BUSINESS, TAKE DOWNTIME,
 TO BE. JUST TO BE.
 I'LL SHOP FOR VEGGIES AND FRUIT,
 MASH, GRIND IN THE KITCHEN,
 REPEAT: MASH, GRIND IN THE KITCHEN
 THREE TIMES A DAY, 'TIL I'M OUT OF MY MIND,
 OUTDOORS, I TODDLE WITH THE TODDLER
 AND PUSH THE SWING, THAT'S A HOOT.
 HECK, I'D MAKE A HELL OF A PARENT.

Survival. And maybe...a *family* business that starts with a baby.

CHERYL

Really? A baby? You want a baby? Underneath, that's what you wanted? You'd leave the baby just like you're leaving Sashay!

JUSTIN

And you wouldn't give a damn. Buhbee and Fran would raise the kid while you designed all day. Let's face it, you put hats before anything, anyone.

CHERYL

Oh. Oh. Bubbee and Mom? If you're on your way to Guangzhou, dammit, swerve. Go. GO. GO. GO.

JUSTIN

Fine, I'll bounce.

(JUSTIN exits with an explosive 'b'. CHERYL is standing alone. SHE rubs her tummy. The choreography for this song should fall between bits of mime and stillness.)

SONG: LOOK IN THE MIRROR

CHERYL

I DIDN'T CHOOSE IT,
I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT,
I DIDN'T ASK TO DO IT,
I DON'T NEED IT. DO I?

DO I?

I'LL RAISE MY KID!
I'LL LOOK IN THE MIRROR,
I'LL STARE STRAIGHT IN THE MIRROR---
I'LL KNOW WHAT I'M MADE OF.

I'LL BE THE MOM WHO LIVES HER SILLY,
UNDENIABLY SELF-WILLED DREAM,
MY UTTERLY THRILLING DREAM,
MY BABY GLOVED TO MY BACK.

SOME OF US SPEND LIFETIMES SCHEMING
TO HANG ON TO WHAT WE DREAM OF.
SCREAMING LIKE DEMONS IF WE'RE SHOVED
AWAY, AND NOW IT SEEMS
IF I LIVE MY DREAM---
I COULD LOSE HIM! LOSE LOVE!
BUT I CAN'T---I WON'T---
LOSE WHO I AM.

IF I LIVE MY DREAM
AND LOSE HIM?
HALF OF MY KID, HALF OF ME,
HALF THE FULFILLING DREAM,
I'LL STILL KNOW WHO I AM.

THE MOM FACING THE DIAPERS,
WIPING THE TUSH, GRIMACING,

CHERYL (CONT'D)

GRIPING, AND UGH!
SWIPING AT A THREE-YEAR-OLD
ABOUT TO EAT A SLUG,
WITH MY HAT HALF-WAY DOWN MY BACK.

I'LL LOVE MY KID!
I'LL LOOK IN THE MIRROR---
I'LL STARE STRAIGHT IN THE MIRROR---
AND I'LL KNOW WHAT I'M MADE OF.

*(SHE straightens, pulls off her hat, puts it over
her abdomen and hugs it to herself in the exact
position of pre-BLACKOUT.)*

Guangzhou? London?

*(SHE takes the small breath, anticipatory this
time, pauses, gently rocks her abdomen, and
smiles.)*

BROWNOUT

ACT II

SCENE 5

One week later. FRAN'S apartment. The coffee-dessert meet to brainstorm resolutions for the imminent collapse of CHERYL and JUSTIN'S marriage. Pots on a back table. Discover ESTÉBAN and HOWIE about to embrace. ESTÉBAN scatters plastic cutlery as HE begins to pull HOWIE'S shirt from his pants.

HOWIE

My shirt! Sh-h-h-h.

(HE smiles, but references BUHBEE, who is napping in one of the bedrooms. From the hallway a jiggling doorknob is heard, then the doorbell, then a loud knock.)

FRAN

Estéban? Estéban?

(The two MEN spring apart.)

I can't find my keys. Why are they never where I put them!

(HOWIE slips into the first door HE sees, the closet.)

ESTÉBAN

Caramba! The closet! Still?!

(The closet door opens.)

The closet! Old news.

(HE pulls HOWIE out and nudges HIM towards the kitchen door.)

Try the kitchen.

(Exit HOWIE to the kitchen. ESTÉBAN scrambles to pick up plastics. The front door opens.)

FRAN

I am so farcharded, completely discombobulated. In my pocket all the time. I bought what you told me.

(Jangling keys, then shedding her coat.)

ESTÉBAN

Fran, we need---

FRAN

I know, I know, chocolate chip cookies. Chocolate Babka. Eggs and sugar for the flan.

(SHE steps out. HOWIE peers in. As SHE re-enters with shopping bags and a bang of the door, HOWIE dips back into the kitchen. ESTÉBAN, focused on HOWIE, bangs his head with his hand. SHE opens a bag.)

What, I bought the wrong kind?

ESTÉBAN

As long as there are enough eggs---Fran, we should talk... soon...I'll start the flan---the kitchen.

(HE calls 'the kitchen' to HOWIE, takes the shopping bags, starts to exit to the kitchen. FRAN helps with the bags.)

FRAN

That'S it--everyone together, we'll bring Justin back. Cheryl's asleep in my bedroom, maybe she'll join us?

ESTÉBAN

Maybe!

(FRAN calls.)

FRAN

Ma-a-a...?

(ESTÉBAN chin-points to the bedroom.)

ESTÉBAN

Snoozing.

(FRAN looks for HOWIE.)

FRAN

Howie's helping you?

ESTÉBAN

Sure. Por su puesto. He's helping me.

(HE exits rapidly as the doorbell rings.)

FRAN

I'll get it.

(SHE opens the door to MEI and GUNG GUNG. The two WOMEN greet loudly.)

FRAN (CONT'D)
Sh-h-h, Buhbee's napping in her bedroom.

GUNG GUNG
(Gathering all the outerwear from FRAN and MEI.)
I tippy-toe.

(HE exits to the bedroom. MEI adjusts her clothes.)

MEI
Where's Howie?

FRAN
In the kitchen.

MEI
Howie?! He doesn't know his way around a bowl.

FRAN
Estéban will show him what to do.

(MEI raises a non-verbal eyebrow. Seeing the TWO MEN together has confirmed a suspicion on both MEI and FRAN'S minds.)

MEI
What to do? Oh good.

(Pause. SHE'S fishing.)

Such a nice man. You never think of re-marrying?

FRAN
To Estéban? I think not. You?

MEI
Howie, no. Not the marrying kind.

(The two MEN spring from the kitchen singing, ESTÉBAN drying his hands on a towel, which he uses to spin FRAN, while HOWIE spins MEI. The twirls are supported by Mariachi music.)

SONG: MARRIED

ESTÉBAN

WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIED, MARRIED, MARRIED!
TOO LONG HAVE WE TARRIED, TARRIED, TARRIED,
I WANNA BE CARRIED, CARRIED, CARRIED
OVER THE THRESH-HOLD.

HOWIE

WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIED, MARRIED, MARRIED,
NEVERMORE HARRIED, HARRIED, HARRIED,
OH! TO BE CARRIED, CARRIED, CARRIED
OVER THE THRESH-HOLD.

ESTÉBAN

I'll carry you, my little lovebird.

HOWIE

Don't be absurd, my love, I'll carry you.

*(THEY play a finger-pointing game---while FRAN and
MEI speak, until THEY join fingers. FRAN speaks
to MEI.)*

FRAN

Not the marrying kind?

MEI

Kitchen love! They found each other.

FRAN

Even better, bedroom love!

(THEY giggle.)

ESTÉBAN

BAILAMOS!

*(ESTÉBAN lifts MEI, introducing a wildly celebratory
Mariachi dance. HOWIE lifts FRAN into it.)*

HOWIE

UP 'N' OVER THE THRESH-HOLD!

ESTÉBAN

BAILE, BAILE, BAILE!

*(ALL dance. Enter CHERYL from the other bedroom in
a hat. Pause. ESTÉBAN, holding HOWIE, sings to
HER.)*

WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIED, MARRIED, MARRIED!
TRUE LOVE NEVER VARIES, VARIES, VARIES,
IT'S ONE OF US WHO'LL BE CARRIED, CARRIED,

(On 'FLY' CHERYL flings her hat across the room.)

CHERYL
CARRIED? YOU'LL FLY OVER THE THRESH-HOLD.

(CHERYL laughs, ALL dance, SHE joins in. Enter BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG. GUNG GUNG stretches and yawns in exaggerated motions. The dance pauses.)

BUHBEE
So the house is on fire?

GUNG GUNG
What's up daughter?

MEI
A wedding!

BUHBEE
One?

FRAN
Yes, Ma.

BUHBEE
Who?

FRAN
Estéban...

(SHE pauses for suspense, humorous.)

BUHBEE
Yah? Yah?

FRAN
And Howie!

(ESTÉBAN puts CHERYL'S hat on HOWIE.)

ESTÉBAN
BUHBEE, HERE'S THE PLAN, I'LL DANCE---
DANCE MY PANTS OFF WITH HOWIE, MY MAN.

(HE puts the hat on HIMSELF.)

BUHBEE
Boychiks, b'shert!

(GUNG GUNG heartily shakes hands with HOWIE and ESTÉBAN. Refrain of 'B'Shert'.)

IF A BOY'S A TAD ALERT,

CHERYL

IT CAN HAPPEN.

BUHBEE

LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING, ZAP!
IT CAN HAPPEN.
HE CAN DROP INTO YOUR LAP,

(To CHERYL.)

or you drop into his? Remember?

CHERYL

Justin.

BUHBEE

IT CAN HAPPEN.

(BUHBEE hugs CHERYL.)

GUNG GUNG

You need 'best man'?

(HE pounds his chest. HOWIE drops the hat onto Gung Gung's head.)

HOWIE

Gung Gung, bestie, come dance!

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIED, MARRIED, MARRIED,
TRUE LOVE'S UNVARIED, VARIED, VARIED
YEARS AND YEARS OF FOREVER MARRIED,
LINKED BY THE BAND OF GOLD.

(ESTÉBAN and HOWIE stop in front of MEI and FRAN.)

AT OUR WEDDING, WE WANT...WE WANT..

HOWIE

TO SHARE OUR JOY! NOT FLAUNT IT---

MEI

Flaunt away! Flaunt!

HOWIE

Dauntless gals---what do you want?

FRAN

A MAN TO DO FOR US
WHAT YOU TWO DO FOR YOU!

(MEI steps forward shimmying.)

MEI
IF A MAN CAN'T DO FOR US---

HOWIE/ESTÉBAN
WHAT THIS MAN CAN DO...

(FRAN and MEI drop into bump and grind.)

FRAN
FOR US.
GIVE IT UP FOR US,

MEI
LIVE IT UP WITH US---

FRAN/MEI
GET IT UP FOR US,
HE'S NOT THE ONE FOR US!
NO SIR, NO MA'AM,
THAT MAN WON'T DO!

FRAN
Middle age! We're ready!

HOWIE
Middle age!

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE! LET'S PICK UP THE PACE!

ESTÉBAN
MY TASTY HOT PEPPER, NO TIME TO WASTE!

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE
BAILAMOS, BAILAMOS, BAILAMOS!

(ESTÉBAN swings HOWIE into a chair. MEI, FRAN, GUNG GUNG, BUHBEE surround the chair, EACH taking a leg and lifting, ESTÉBAN leading the band. CHERYL is shooed away.)

WE WANNA GET MARRIED, MARRIED,
NEVERMORE HARRIED, HARRIED,
TOO LONG HAVE WE TARRIED, TARRIED,
WISHING, WANTING A BAND OF GOLD.

HOWIE
MARRIED. TO HAVE AND TO HOLD.

ESTÉBAN
SI! TO HAVE AND TO HOLD.

(The chair is lowered. ESTÉBAN helps HOWIE off and THEY embrace. EVERYBODY except CHERYL falls into chairs, exhausted.)

CHERYL
NEVER SAY DIE, NEVER ASK WHY,
TRULY MY FATE, UNMISTAK-ABLY MINE,

Oh, Buhbee, I let him go. My b'shert!

CHERYL/BUHBEE
FOREVER---

(SHE turns away, in shocked realization. A knock at the door. SHE walks to the door in confusion, and opens it, and faces JUSTIN. BUHBEE withdraws, singing the one word.)

BUHBEE
FOREVER.

JUSTIN
(To CHERYL.)

FOREVER?
(Their eyes meet, lock.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN
FOREVER MINE.

JUSTIN
I couldn't go without you.

CHERYL
I wouldn't have let you. Even if I had to pull you off the plane.

ESTÉBAN
The flan!

(HE exits to the kitchen, pulling HOWIE with HIM.)

HOWIE, MEI, FRAN, GUNG GUNG, BUHBEE
The flan!

(ALL except CHERYL and JUSTIN disappear, dispersing to bedrooms.)

CHERYL
No Guangzhou?

JUSTIN
No. Kris Koor's place in Brooklyn. I had to think, work some things out.

CHERYL

London?

(JUSTIN takes CHERYL'S hand.)

JUSTIN

Not unless Kris's apartment moved to London.

(THEY embrace.)

Sherrods wants you to kick off their worldwide celebrity campaign. Outrageous one-of-a-kind-Cheryls as bedazzling as you can make 'em. Celebs won't be caught dead in anything else.

CHERYL

I don't care if we sell socks for Sherrods.

JUSTIN

Socks? That's not you. We want a private label for Sashay, 'Sherrods' 'in small print underneath. They pay for our New York loft, materials, and promotion.

CHERYL

Are you real.

JUSTIN

There's plenty of precedent in the industry. Negotiation 3.1. I'm good at it.

(CHERYL bursts into tears. JUSTIN rushes to HER.)

SONG: *MORE LOVE*

CHERYL

TAKE MY HAND---DON'T LET GO,
LOVE, MORE LOVE---THAT'S ALL I WANT FROM YOU.
NOTHING'S DONE, NOTHING'S SAID THAT WE CAN'T UNDO.
LET'S FIND WHO WE ARE AGAIN.

JUSTIN

TAKE MY HAND, NEVER LET GO---
LOVE, MY LOVE, THAT'S WHAT I WANT FROM YOU.

CHERYL

LOVE THROWN AWAY, WORDS UNSAID, ARE BREAKING THROUGH.
LET'S BE WHO WE ARE AGAIN.

JUSTIN

SINCE YOU STOPPED LETTING ME IN---

CHERYL

MY DAYS HAVE BEEN UNTASTED,

JUSTIN
 MY LONG NIGHTS HAVE BEEN WASTED---
 MY SOUL UNTOUCHED, NIGHTS UNCOLORED BY LOVE.

CHERYL/JUSTIN
 SO TAKE MY HAND, DON'T EVER LET GO---
 WE KNOW WHERE WE STAND AGAIN,
 HAND-IN-HAND AGAIN,
 WE KNOW WHO WE ARE AGAIN.

MORE LOVE, MORE LOVE
 THAT'S ALL I WANT FROM YOU.
 NOTHING SHINES IN MY WORLD BUT YOU.
 LOVE, MORE LOVE, MY LOVE,
 MORE LOVE.

CHERYL
 We'll go to China and London together.

JUSTIN
 Of course!

CHERYL
 Oh! Let me mention---we're so creative that we may have to bump
 up to first class, larger seats.

*(As SHE begins to whisper in his ear, MEI and FRAN'S
 heads pop out. JUSTIN smiles hugely, hugs CHERYL.
 The MOTHERS fall out of the kitchen trying to
 eavesdrop. GUNG GUNG and BUHBEE enter from the
 bedroom. GUNG GUNG is carrying a red bag. HE
 holds it up.)*

GUNG GUNG
 Oranges. I tell our secret now?

*(MEI and FRAN look from CHERYL and JUSTIN to GUNG
 GUNG and BUHBEE and back.)*

BUHBEE
 We getting married. No baby.

MEI
 I feel faint.

FRAN
 Have some mijiu.

*(SHE quickly brings a glass to MEI. MEI knocks it
 down. To GUNG GUNG.)*

MEI

Father!

GUNG GUNG

We in love. She laugh New York, I sneeze Chinese, we play Mah Jongg, zoom. Partners.

BUHBEE

(Points to HERSELF.)

Grandma. Buhbee. We're very good players.

GUNG GUNG

(Points to HIMSELF.)

Grandpa. Gung Gung.

BUHBEE

You gung?

GUNG GUNG

You bee?

BUHBEE

We gungbee.

GUNG GUNG

No, no, we beegung.

(THEY slap each other five hilariously.)

Du bist---

BUHBEE

mine b'shert!

(THEY kiss. Then knuckle shake with JUSTIN and CHERYL. MEI explodes into an uncontrollable cough.)

FRAN

What's the matter? It can happen. It did happen.

(EVERYONE is elbow, foot or knuckle-knocking. THE TWO COUPLES smile at EACH OTHER.)

JUSTIN

And my dear wife, Kris reported Slaggit for industrial theft and harassment. Hitting on students---very uncool, you remembered it for years. He's in jail.

CHERYL

The skunk. Black and white stripes, perfect.

*(CHERYL hugs JUSTIN, turns to EVERYONE with a song.
Enter ESTÉBAN and HOWIE.)*

SONG: FAMILY TREE

CHERYL/JUSTIN/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

ON TROPICAL ISLANDS, HONEYMOON COUNTRY,
THEY PAY ATTENTION TO THE FAM'LY TREE.
THERE IS NO YOU, THERE IS NO ME,
WHEN BAD VIBES THREATEN THE FAM'LY TREE.

JUSTIN

LOVE MAKES BIGGER OUR FAM'LY TREE.

(FRAN suddenly lights up. As THEY sing.)

FRAN

Ma-a-a, plates, steel! Reggae! Wh...yah, yah!

*(FRAN and MEI pick up metal utensils from the table,
bang them together. GUNG GUNG and BUHBEE play pots
together. The FAMILY is the back-up band.)*

GUNG GUNG

I GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR GRANDMA,
WE GET SO CLOSE, YOUR GRANDMA AND ME,

BUHBEE

I GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR GRANDPA,
WE GET SO CLOSE, YOUR GRANDPA AND ME,

*(BUHBEE dances with CHERYL---EACH GRANDPARENT
sings to his/her GRANDCHILD.)*

LOOK YAH NUH, CLOSER, CLOSER, CLOSER WE COME,
WE GET SO CLOSE, WE CREATE YOUR MOM.

GUNG GUNG

LOOK YAH NUH, CLOSER, CLOSER, CLOSER WE COME,
WE GET SO CLOSE, WE CREATE YOUR MOM.

FRAN/MEI

*(Joining in, handing over their instruments to BUHBEE
and GUNG GUNG.)*

I GET SO CLOSE TO YOUR PAPA,
YOUR PAPA GET SO CLOSE TO ME,
CLOSER, CLOSER, CLOSER HE COME,
'TIL WHAT I GOT, HE GET SOME.

BUHBEE

WITHOUT HE---NUH NUH NUH NUH,

(SHE plays her improvised instrument...indicates GUNG GUNG.)

GUNG GUNG

(HE answers musically, indicating BUHBEE.)

WITHOUT SHE---NUH NUH NUH NUH,

CHERYL/JUSTIN

LOOK YAH NUH, NUH NUH, NUH NUH NUH NUH,
NO FRUIT GROWIN' ON THE FAM'LY TREE.

(A cell phone interrupts, with a different ringtone. CHERYL retrieves her phone. SHE turns away.)

CHERYL

Doctor Laub? What? I'm not going to have a baby?

(Deathly silence.)

Ah. Very funny. Ha, ha. Thanks. See you Monday.

(SHE hangs up. JUSTIN, FRAN, and MEI wait for CHERYL to speak. CHERYL shrugs, bemused.)

Twins.

(JUSTIN leaps at HER. SHE'S smothered by FRAN and MEI. BUHBEE, GUNG GUNG hug, exit to bedroom, chattering, MEI, FRAN, ESTÉBAN, HOWIE, exit to kitchen, chattering. JUSTIN brings CHERYL forward.)

JUSTIN

WE MAKE TWO NEW BUDS, YOU AND ME,
TWO BEAUTIES BLOOM ON THE FAM'LY TREE.
CHERYL, YOU 'N' ME, WE MAKE TWO BABIES!

(Re-enter BUHBEE and GUNG GUNG in baby bonnets.)

BUBHEE/GUNG GUNG

LOOK YAH NUH, IT'S TIME FOR YOU AND ME
LOOK YAH NUH, TO WELCOME NEW BABIES.

(Re-enter FRAN, MEI, ESTÉBAN, and HOWIE, with baby strollers, bonnets.)

FRAN/MEI/GUNG GUNG/BUHBEE/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE

LOOK YAH NUH, TIME FOR YOU AND ME
LOOK YAH NUH, TO WELCOME TWO BABIES.

ESTÉBAN/HOWIE
LOOK YAH NUH, HE AND ME,
WE BE MULTIPLYIN' THE FAM'LY TREE.

BUHBEE/GUNG GUNG
LOOK YAH NUH, HE AND SHE,
THEY BE MULTIPLYIN' THE FAM'LY TREE.

FRAN/MEI/GUNG GUNG/BUHBEE/ESTÉBAN/ HOWIE
LOOK YAH NUH, SHE AND HE,
TOGETHER THEY BE GROWIN' THE FAM'LY TREE.

CHERYL/JUSTIN
LOOK YAH NUH, S/HE AND ME,
TOGETHER WE'RE GROWIN' THE FAMILY TREE.

(ALL cross to the downstage edge of the stage.)

CHERYL/JUSTIN/FRAN/MEI/GUNG
GUNG/BUHBEE/ESTÉBAN/HOWIE
TOGETHER, WE'LL BE GROWIN' THE FAMILY TREE!

Sashay & Family Hats, Inc. Google us, Universe!

(THEY bow and freeze. CHERYL steps forward onto the Apron.)

CHERYL
Hats are easier than men? Not necessarily.

(SHE brings JUSTIN to HER.)

Actually, I never did want to sell socks!

(SHE winks and smiles at JUSTIN and the AUDIENCE, rather like the Cheshire Cat. THE COUPLE beams. ALL dance joyfully, bow, and freeze. Exit ALL except CHERYL and JUSTIN. CHERYL's smile becomes an odd smirk, with a faux-hurt look at JUSTIN.)

You were mean.

JUSTIN
Me? You were pretty pitfully...petty pitif...pitty-prit-omygod pritty-pat...cruel.

CHERYL
Pitilessly?

JUSTIN
Yes. Pitilessly cruel.

(HE seizes the word, then begins a return smirk. CHERYL, to JUSTIN, with deeply comic and erotic intention and body movements. HE echoes the tone.)

Abominably awful. CHERYL

Unconscionably...un-just. JUSTIN

Needlessly noxious. CHERYL

Nakedly nasty. JUSTIN

Naked? Animal. CHERYL

(Slight pause to stare hungrily at EACH OTHER. CHERYL pounces on JUSTIN, legs up around his waist, huge smooch. THEY wave to the AUDIENCE, exit. CAST returns for bows.)