

YOU CALL THIS HOSPITALITY?

a farce in one act (and three accents)

by

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Characters

Mr. Weisman: The sardonic, waggish and irresponsible owner of Accent on Hospitality. He has a facility for adopting stereotypical but convincing accents, and he is strongly affected by good-looking women. Age 35 to 45.

Mauve Darling: Weisman's assistant. Neat, intelligent, and efficient, with a pleasant nature that's tinged with a hint of well-placed sarcasm. Poised and attractive; stylish in a low-key way but not glamorous. Age 25 to 45.

John Cuthbert Sebaceous: A famous, arrogant, and conceited author from England. Handsome, demanding, well-dressed and humorless. Age 40 to 50.

Floyd: An over-eager, clueless, and annoying young man who talks too much. Overdressed (business style). Age 20-25.

Jacqueline Cahier: A strikingly beautiful, highly-polished representative of the French Cultural Clique. Speaks perfect, proper English with just the hint of a French accent. Dressed with a typically-European blending of professionalism and elegance, suitable for hosting stylish evening events. Age 30-45.

Time: The Present. It is Thursday morning.

Place: A small office in midtown Manhattan,
the home of a company called Accent on Hospitality.

Notes:

1. Unless otherwise indicated, Weisman always speaks to Sebaceous in his fake British accent, and to Jacqueline in his fake French accent.
2. Exits and entrances refer to the SL door that leads to the corridor, unless the other door (to the inner office, SR) is specified.

(Scene 1)

(The office of Accent on Hospitality. A door SL leads to the corridor, and a door SR leads to an inner office. Mr. Weisman sits at a desk left of center, angled inward so that he faces both the audience and the other side of the office. Mauve Darling sits, more or less symmetrically, at a desk right of center. Each desk has a computer, a telephone, stacks of papers, etc. -- but Mauve's desk is impeccably neat, while Weisman's is a mess. Mauve's desk also has an intercom apparatus. Weisman's extensive desktop clutter includes several *Archie* comic books and a hand-mirror. An "in" tray full of bills is also discernible. Mauve's attire includes a mini-skirt, and she has a small take-out coffee cup.)

(As the play begins, the telephone on Mr. Weisman's desk is ringing. He answers it.)

WEISMAN

(With a breezy self-confidence)

Good morning, Accent on Hospitality Yes, Kim. We're all set. Car service will meet you at the baggage claim. And that was three nights in the hotel, correct? No problem. We'll make sure to have the group at the venue in plenty of time for the interview, and you should be able to squeeze in the photo shoot as well You bet Yep, that's our motto: "We take care of everything." Okey-doke. Talk to you soon. Bye-bye

MAUVE

If we "take care of everything," boss, then how come you can't take care of that stack of invoices that's been sitting in your tray for a month?

WEISMAN

I *am* taking care of them. I feed and water them three times a day. So there's no need for you to butt in.

MAUVE

I wasn't butting in.

(Beat)

I was merely interfering.

WEISMAN

My mistake.

MAUVE

But Mr. Wiseass --

WEISMAN

(Irked)

Weisman. If I can refer to you correctly by your surname of "Darling" -- even though I feel like an idiot talking about my assistant "Mauve Darling" all the time -- then *you* can remember that my name is Weisman. Anyway, don't you have anything to do besides nag me? Something important, I mean, like alphabetizing the dust bunnies?

MAUVE

(Persisting)

Mr. *Weisman* . . . your business is not only in the black, it's thriving. There's no reason you can't pay those bills.

WEISMAN

That's what you think. It so happens that I have a very good reason for not paying those invoices: Paying invoices is boring.

(He affects a Swedish accent.)

Ja, very boring, ja.

MAUVE

(She smiles and wags a forefinger at him.)

Don't think you can get me off the subject with your exotic voices.

WEISMAN

(He resumes speaking in his normal voice.)

Okay then . . . how *do* I get you off the subject? Dinner and a movie?

MAUVE

(Awkwardly)

Ahem. Naturally I'm flattered, Mr. Weisman,

(She does not sound very flattered)

but I've told you before that I don't care to go out with you.

WEISMAN

Who said anything about *me*? I was going to send you out to dinner and a movie by yourself. Preferably a very long movie.

MAUVE

But it's not even lunchtime.

WEISMAN

Then find a movie you want to see in . . .

(He hesitates, thinking.)

Baltimore. It'll take you at least 4 hours to drive to Baltimore, and then there's parking to consider.

MAUVE

You're a real charmer, aren't you.

WEISMAN

(Modestly)

It's a gift, I suppose.

MAUVE

Does that mean I can exchange it?

(She stands.)

You can send me to Baltimore if you want to, but that won't get the bills paid. How many times have I tried to tell you --

WEISMAN

(Wearily)

I give up. How many times?

(He does not wait for an answer.)

You know, I get plenty of grief about the bills from the creditors, without you putting your oar in. Whose side are you on, anyway?

MAUVE

The *neutral* side.

(She walks around to the front of her desk.)

And if you get bored paying your bills, let *me* do it! If I can cope with the monotony of hearing you make the same ingratiating small talk to your clients all day long, then I can put up with the boredom of signing a few checks.

WEISMAN

. . . while I get to break up the monotony of *my* work with the monotony of listening to you pester me. Look, Mauve, you know perfectly well that you're not authorized to sign company checks.

MAUVE

I could be. All you'd have to do is set it up with the bank.

WEISMAN

Yes, but visiting the bank is even more boring than paying invoices. I remember the last time I had to go there to fill out paperwork. By the time I got all those documents witnessed and notarized, I was having a conniption fit.

MAUVE

Well, then you should have had the conniption fit witnessed and notarized, too. The point is that I'm a little concerned about these bills, and I'm a little nervous about the firm's reputation.

WEISMAN

(Dismissively)

A little concerned, a little nervous . . . How very *diminutive* of you. I see that you're even wearing a *mini*-skirt, drinking a *small* coffee, and bothering me with *petty* trifles. The only problem is that you're making yourself a *major* -- not minor -- pain in the ass.

(Mauve retreats to behind her desk and sits back down.)

MAUVE

(Sulkily)

I'm just trying to help.

WEISMAN

(More kindly)

I'll make you a deal. *You* don't tell *me* which aspects of my business to focus on, and *I* won't tell *you* which lake to go jump in. Okay?

MAUVE

(She gets a second wind.)

How about this? If I happen to notice an invoice on your desk that's over 90 days old, I'll get it all ready to pay, and you can just sign the payment.

WEISMAN

I do *not* want you checking up on me.

MAUVE

I wouldn't do it in a "checking up on you" kind of way. I'd just do it in an "if-I-happen-to-notice-when-I'm-standing-there" kind of way. After all, you can't expect me to remain idle while your affairs drift into chaos.

WEISMAN

What's so bad about chaos, anyway?

MAUVE

Oh, I wouldn't mind a little *bit* of chaos -- if it would just contain itself in a tidy manner within a designated, orderly space, that is. But you've long since passed that point.

WEISMAN

Instead of worrying about what I'm doing . . .

MAUVE

I'm not worrying about what you're doing! I'm worrying about what you're *not* doing.

WEISMAN

Well, cut it out. I think worrying is just your way of goofing off, Mauve Darling.

MAUVE

Goofing off! I'll have you know I'm breaking a sweat over here.

WEISMAN

(Distractedly -- he has stopped paying attention.)

Then *fix it!*

MAUVE

(She gets up from her desk again and walks to him.)

Mr. Weisman, I know things can be stressful in the workplace.

WEISMAN

(Giving her half his attention. He does not look up from his desk.)

I hear you.

MAUVE

And I realize your job is probably the most stressful of all.

WEISMAN

I hear you.

MAUVE

I consider it *my* job to do whatever I can to make *your* job easier.

WEISMAN

I hear you.

MAUVE

But you just make it worse when I'm trying to help you, and you get all bristly and defensive.

WEISMAN

(Putting his hands over his ears)

I'm not listening.

MAUVE

(Disgusted, she walks back to her own desk, but she remains standing.)

Ugh!

WEISMAN

(He withdraws his hands from his ears.)

Come on, don't get all bent out of shape.

MAUVE

(Contentiously)

I'm *not* getting all bent out of shape. I'm only getting a *little* bent out of shape.

WEISMAN

Please, Mauve. Can we turn back the clock and start over from scratch on the right foot, so that I won't have to get up on the wrong side of the bed and turn over a new leaf?

MAUVE

(She smiles and sits down.)

I'll say one thing for you: You sure know how to mix a metaphor. It's just that sometimes I think you and I must be the most mismatched office team in New York.

WEISMAN

Ridiculous. You and I are *perfectly* compatible.

MAUVE

"Perfectly compatible"? But you drive me up the wall!

WEISMAN

Exactly. I drive *you* up the wall, and you drive *me* up the wall. A perfect match. Much better than if one of us only drove the other *halfway* up the wall.

MAUVE

All right, you win. If this were later in the day, I might keep arguing . . . but I'm not very good with words first thing in the morning.

WEISMAN

(A little surprised)

You're not?

MAUVE

No. I find myself distinctly inarticulate at this hour, lacking in the customary facility and flexibility of expression that more typically characterize my discourse.

(She takes a breath.)

So, what's on the agenda today?

WEISMAN

John Cuthbert Sebaceous.

MAUVE

(Sarcastically)

Great. Just what I need -- a stuck-up, overrated author with a fake British accent.

WEISMAN

It's *not* a fake accent. He was born just outside of London.

MAUVE

How do you know? You've never even met the man.

WEISMAN

I know because I've heard it from multiple sources.

(Significantly)

Some of them even reliable.

(He tilts his chin triumphantly. Then he lifts a document from his desk and waves it in the air.)

It even says so in this publicity sheet. Granted, I *wrote* this publicity sheet. But *I'm* reliable.

MAUVE

Hmph. Well, I'm sure his *name* isn't real. "John Cuthbert Sebaceous". Give me a break.

WEISMAN

Hey! Watch it. It just so happens that both my grandmothers were named John Cuthbert Sebaceous.

MAUVE

Have you ever caught Sebaceous on any of his TV appearances? What a nimrod.

WEISMAN

Would you *please* try to refrain from describing our clients as nimrods?

MAUVE

I don't think I've ever seen anyone as full of himself as John Cuthbert Sebaceous. Why, he's worse than *you*. I'm glad at least that we won't have to deal with him personally.

WEISMAN

That's what you think. Apparently, Sebaceous is the kind of client who insists on getting personally involved in every detail.

MAUVE

But why?

WEISMAN

(Shrugging)

Because he's a nimrod.

(The intercom buzzes. Mauve answers it.)

MAUVE

(Into the intercom)

Yes? Fine. I'll tell him.

(To Weisman)

There's a Mr. Carstairs here to see you.

WEISMAN

(Not looking up from his desk)

That's ridiculous. Cars don't have stairs.

MAUVE

(She shrugs and speaks into the intercom.)

I'm sorry, he'll have to go away.

(To Weisman)

You were also supposed to return that call from Miss Tracy -- the one who's bringing in her dance company tour.

WEISMAN

I don't speak to anyone who uses a word like "Miss" in lieu of a first name.

(He thinks for a moment.)

Unless Miss Tracy is a puppet. Do you think she might be a puppet? I would definitely talk to a puppet.

MAUVE

I'll call her handlers this afternoon and ask.

(She makes a note to herself.)

Of course, if the puppet's not in on Thursdays, you might have to deal with this at a later date.

WEISMAN

I can wait if the puppet can.

(He picks up a hand-mirror and checks his appearance.)

On a more important subject: Do you think this haircut is up to my usual standards?

MAUVE

Sorry, but I have my policies, too. And I never answer a question that includes the word "haircut". Besides, I think you're a little too obsessed with your own appearance.

WEISMAN

What do you mean?

MAUVE

I mean, for example, commissioning self-portraits by *five* different New York painters.

WEISMAN

(Aloofly, still looking himself over in the mirror)

My motivation in doing that was, of course, purely artistic.

MAUVE

Since when does egotism count as an art? Really, I'm amazed at the way you indulge your own narcissism.

WEISMAN

It just so happens that I'm very *interested* in my own narcissism.

(He puts down the mirror.)

We're probably going to have to take Sebaceous to lunch. Any ideas?

MAUVE

Yes, my idea would be to tell him to go get his own lunch.

WEISMAN

I meant, do you have any ideas about *where* we should eat?

MAUVE

(She lifts up a take-out menu.)

We just got this menu from the new café around the corner.

WEISMAN

Do they do a Western omelette?

MAUVE

(Looking at the menu)

Yes. It's served with "tender hearts of romaine lettuce."

WEISMAN

This is no time to get sentimental.

(He stands, picks up a legal pad, and walks around to in front of his desk.)

Here -- tell me how this sounds:

(He reads aloud.)

"John Cuthbert Sebaceous has received top honors from all the MVP's of the publishing world"

MAUVE

I don't think the publishing world has MVP's.

WEISMAN

(He gives her an irritated look, then begins reading again.)

"John Cuthbert Sebaceous has received top honors from all the MVP's of the publishing world in the same short space of time during which his legendary book tour has made headlines from Boston to San Diego and even Canadian papers like the *Ottawa Star* in a business not known for making headlines." What do you think?

MAUVE

I think your run-on sentences go great with your mixed metaphors.

WEISMAN

(Tossing her the legal pad)

Type it.

(Beat)

Why don't you like my writing?

MAUVE

It's not that I don't *like* it. It's just that it has a certain tendency, as they say, to suck. Are you *sure* you're ready to branch out into writing publicity?

WEISMAN

(Arrogantly)

Absolutely. And not only that . . . I'm confident that Sebaceous is going to be every bit as sensational as I'm going to say he's going to be.

MAUVE

(Doubtfully)

Do you want me to type *that*, too?

WEISMAN

Sure, if you need the practice.

(He walks back to his chair and sits.)

Actually, I'm a little puzzled by the lack of PR from Sebaceous' people in England. I haven't found any ads yet.

MAUVE

(Helpfully)

Did you look under the sofa cushions?

WEISMAN

(Studying his computer monitor, he drums his fingertips on the desk.)

And speaking of people dropping the ball . . . We have three major music acts arriving in New York next week, and hardly any television bookings that I can see. Not our problem, of course . . . but I can't help wondering what's wrong with those TV hosts. Ed Sullivan is really lying down on the job.

MAUVE

Ed Sullivan? Ed Sullivan has been dead for over thirty years.

WEISMAN

See -- what'd I tell you.

MAUVE

I guess if we're going to have our hands full all day with Mr. Sebaceous, I'd better keep working my way through this pile on my desk, while I have the chance.

(She begins to sort through the papers on her desk.)

I have several things to ask you about.

WEISMAN

Can't you ask me later?

MAUVE

When, "later"?

WEISMAN

When I'm not here. After all, this is a business office, Mauve. So I'd appreciate it if you would stop distracting me with all this . . . business. I can't concentrate.

MAUVE

And that's my fault?

WEISMAN

Approximately, yeah. For a minute there I had a rhythm going, and you ruined it.

MAUVE

Drumming your fingertips on the desk does not constitute "having a rhythm going."

WEISMAN

All right, all right. What have you got?

MAUVE

(She looks over her notes.)

Let's see There's the matter of that gift from Liza Minelli.

WEISMAN

Right. Send a card telling Liza "thanks for the paperweight." Tell her that weighing paper is one of my favorite hobbies.

MAUVE

And, speaking of thank-you's: What do you want me to do about the thank-you note we got from Phil Collins?

WEISMAN

Send him a "you're welcome" note, of course.

MAUVE

Job applications We had that eager young man, Floyd, fill one out. Any thoughts?

WEISMAN

I don't know . . . I'm not sure I want to hire him. In fact, I'm not even sure I want to hire anyone. It's a big decision.

MAUVE

No, it's potentially *two* decisions. That is, if you decide you *do* want to hire someone, then you've made Decision Number One. But then you'd still have the decision about whether you want to hire Floyd, specifically -- Decision Number Two. On the other hand, if you decide that you don't want to hire anyone, then,

logically, you don't want to hire Floyd, and so you've only had to make one decision. In other words, the whole thing could pan out either to one decision or two. So let's call it a decision and a half.

WEISMAN

Whatever you call it . . . I don't like having to make decisions.

MAUVE

You're telling me! You're the kind of person who, if informed that the world would be ending in five minutes, would probably spend his last five minutes trying to decide what to *do* with those last five minutes.

WEISMAN

(Wearily)

Read me that application again.

MAUVE

(Reading)

"During my time as a doughnut consultant in Pompton Plains, New Jersey, I was responsible for consulting many important doughnuts. I also spent three years as a dental floss representative . . . representing dental floss. Prior to that, as a dog kibitzer, I kibitized dogs, as well as some cats."

(She stops reading.)

Your opinion?

WEISMAN

He's overqualified. But I guess you'd better hire him. I can't bring myself to listen to any more applications.

MAUVE

(She turns her attention back to the pile on her desk.)

Next, we have a letter from an agent, asking if we'd like to take on Nat Noshnik as a new client.

WEISMAN

Who is Nat Noshnik?

MAUVE

You know, one of those old crooners. His big selling point, apparently, is that he still tours in his original toupee. He's the guy who did a version of "On the Street Where You Live" that made everyone want to sell their houses and move away.

(She tosses the note aside and pulls out another piece of paper.)

And speaking of houses . . . here's a message I took yesterday from your realtor. She says she has a two-bedroom ranch available.

WEISMAN

Call back and tell her I prefer bleu cheese.

MAUVE

Check.

(She continues to sift through her papers.)

And . . . should I go ahead and re-write this car service mileage agreement? Or did you want me to wait until the first of the month?

WEISMAN

(Speaking in a fake British accent, a comical exaggeration of a stereotypical upper-class Londoner)

Ms. Darling, old girl . . . I daresay you are ahsking me rahther a lot of questions this morning. Should you find the need to bring any further of these iss-see-ews to my attention, perhaps we had better shedyool a meeting, yes?

MAUVE

(Laughing)

You'd better be careful. If John Cuthbert Sebaceous hears you doing that, he'll think you're poking fun at him.

WEISMAN

(Normal voice)

So what? I'm sure he has a sense of humor about Americans doing British shtick.

MAUVE

Sense of humor? Ha!

(Weisman reacts with surprise.)

MAUVE

John Cuthbert Sebaceous has no sense of humor. Didn't you read the book where he talked about that?

WEISMAN

I guess not. Which book?

MAUVE

His second one, entitled *I Have No Sense of Humour*.

WEISMAN

Oh.

(After a beat, he returns to the English accent.)

Well, it's simply *super* that you've told me this, because now I shall *most definitely* refrain from speaking

(While Weisman is talking, Sebaceous enters. Weisman is facing away from the door, so he does not see Sebaceous enter; nor does he register the frantic hand-signals by means of which Mauve attempts to direct his attention to the client's arrival. Sebaceous is a stylish celebrity author, handsome but stuffy-looking, who exudes an arrogant self-importance.)

Weisman, oblivious to his presence, continues to do the British shtick.)

WEISMAN

in such a manner in the presence of the particular *individual* whom we --
 (Thanks to an incidental turning of the head, he finally sees Sebaceous in his peripheral vision. He stops short, then completes his sentence, still maintaining the accent.)
 are expecting.

(He hesitates for only a moment, makes a decision, and comes out from behind his desk. He proceeds to address Sebaceous using the English accent.)

Ah! Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous!* Super! I say, *jolly good* you've found us. May I have Ms. Darling fetch you a cup of tea?

SEBACEOUS

(His accent, which is in fact real, is a much more understated cousin to the one Weisman is affecting. Unsure what to make of Weisman, he speaks guardedly)

Um . . . coffee's fine, thanks.

(The conversation flags briefly, as Mauve exits to the inner office to get the coffee and Sebaceous continues to study Weisman. Finally Sebaceous speaks.)

SEBACEOUS

Funny you being British.

WEISMAN

You don't know the

(His accent slips)

half --

(He tries to control the damage)

er, *half* of it.

(Sebaceous gives him a strange look.)

WEISMAN

Now then. Right.

(Mauve re-enters with two cups of coffee. She brings Sebaceous his cup, then gives the other to Weisman.)

WEISMAN

(Idiotically)

Uh . . . cheers. *Rather.* Quite. Cheers-io. Eh?

(Sebaceous gives him another quizzical look, then finally turns his attention to his coffee. The beverage seems to wipe away his discomfort, and he proceeds with business.)

SEBACEOUS

(Self-importantly)

I'm hoping you've got everything lined up for me. I'm very tired from my flight. I'd like to go straight to the hotel, get some sleep, and have a nice dinner, so that I'll be in good shape to start fresh in the morning. I don't want any hassles, or any surprises.

(Mauve rolls her eyes.)

WEISMAN

My *deah* Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous*, don't you give it another thought. Our motto is
(He thinks for an instant about how to "Britishize" it)
"We *solicit* your every concern and attend to each *fahcet* of the situation."

SEBACEOUS

That's a bit cumbersome, isn't it?

WEISMAN

(He shrugs.)

Easy to trademark.

(He grabs a folder off his desk and holds it up for Sebaceous to see.)

Here's everything you'll require. I'll just review the contents with you, yes?

SEBACEOUS

Mr. Weisman -- I am a very important, very celebrated, very *handsome* author. I *trust* that you've made sure everything's in order for a client of my stature. I do realize, of course, that I shall probably have to make twenty or thirty little corrections to what you've written up for me -- grammar, punctuation, style -- but I can do that better in the peace and quiet of my hotel room, and fax you my revisions. So I'll just take these materials with me now, and I shall ring you up if I have any questions. You'll be personally available, I assume.

WEISMAN

Yes, yes. Splendid! *Do* ring me up. *Rather*.

(Sebaceous gives him another funny look, then exits -- forgetting to take the folder from Weisman. Weisman is so flustered he puts the folder down on his desk, without noticing that he should have given it to Sebaceous.)

WEISMAN

(He mops his brow.)

Whoo!

MAUVE

You are a nut. Do you really think you're going to get away with this?

WEISMAN

(He walks back to his chair and sits. He now speaks in his normal voice.)

I don't know, but I'm sort of committed now.

MAUVE

Anyway . . . when do you want that Floyd guy to start?

WEISMAN

Immediately -- I have a feeling we're going to be under a strain for the next twenty-four hours.

MAUVE

(She gestures at the door through which Sebaceous has recently exited.)

A strain? I'd call him more of a *pain*.

(She, too, sits back down at her desk. She picks up the job application again.)

But, luckily for you, Floyd lives right in this building, so you can't get more immediate than that.

(She dials the phone, waits a moment, and then speaks into it brusquely.)

You're hired. Accent on Hospitality. Seventh floor. Come as you are.

(After mere seconds, Floyd enters. He is impeccably dressed in "first day on the job" business attire. He carries a briefcase, ostentatiously. Weisman's facial expression makes it clear to the audience that he already regrets hiring this individual.)

MAUVE

(Rising)

Floyd? I said "come as you are."

FLOYD

(Shrugging)

This is how I am.

(He approaches Mauve.)

I can't tell you how much I appreciate this opportunity, Ms. Darling.

MAUVE

Good, then don't.

FLOYD

(Giggling foolishly)

It's kind of funny that your name is "Darling".

MAUVE

Congratulations -- you are the one millionth customer to make that comment.

(Sebaceous enters.)

SEBACEOUS

I forgot to take my itinerary.

WEISMAN

(Rising. He speaks with the British voice.)

I say, you shan't get far without *that*, eh wot?

(Sebaceous tries to ignore Weisman. He sees what he's looking for on Weisman's desk.)

SEBACEOUS

Ah -- there it is.

WEISMAN

(Extending the folder to him)

Right-o. *Sooo* sorry not to have *bestowed* it on you before you popped off.

(Sebaceous snatches the folder, gives him another funny look, then exits. Weisman sits and focuses on his computer screen.)

FLOYD

(To Mauve)

I didn't know your boss was British.

MAUVE

Neither did he.

FLOYD

Was that John Cuthbert Sebaceous, the famous writer?

MAUVE

Unfortunately.

FLOYD

But he looks so *old*.

MAUVE

He didn't used to.

FLOYD

(He walks to Weisman's desk, and extends his hand.)

I'm Floyd, Mr. Weisman. I'm so pleased to meet you.

(Weisman does not take Floyd's hand or even look up from his desk.)

WEISMAN

(Normal voice)

The pleasure is entirely mixed.

MAUVE

(Coming out from behind her desk and addressing Floyd)

Now then . . . I'd better give you a tour of the office.

FLOYD

Cool! I love tours.

WEISMAN

(Sarcastically)

No flash photography.

(Weisman starts to make some entries at his computer. Though Mauve is waiting to give him his tour, Floyd walks around behind Weisman's desk with a look of eager curiosity.)

FLOYD

(Speaking quickly, with an annoying energy and enthusiasm)

What program is that? Do you make all the entries around here? How come you have so many applications open on the taskbar?

WEISMAN

(Trying to ignore Floyd)

Uh, Mauve

FLOYD

Hey, how come you're not British anymore? Do you guys ever write your own spreadsheets? Where do you get your computer serviced? I love your desktop pattern. Do all the computers here have that?

WEISMAN

Mauve . . . uh, Mauve

FLOYD

Lately, I've been doing everything in Illustrator instead of Word. Of course, it depends how much memory you have. Are you guys all networked?

WEISMAN

Mauve

(Suddenly shouting)

GET HIM AWAY FROM ME!

(Floyd jumps back, startled. In an instant, he recovers his composure and turns to Mauve.)

FLOYD

(Aside, to Mauve)

Does he often lose his temper like this?

MAUVE

No. But when he does, that's what it looks like.

FLOYD

(Off and running again)

What hours does he work? Who do I need to ask about my W-4? Do I screen his calls or just put them right through? Are you two, like, dating?

(Mauve grabs Floyd by the shoulder and hastily steers him into the adjoining office.)

MAUVE

(As they exit)

Most of your work will be done *in here*, where we have all our back files and a *nice* water cooler

(Jacqueline Cahier enters from the hall. Weisman does not notice her.)

WEISMAN

(Affecting a comical French accent, to amuse himself)

Eh bien, zhis new Monsieur Floyd, he is beaucoup annoying.

JACQUELINE

(She is genuinely French, though she speaks perfect English, with only the suggestion of an accent and just a hint of non-native formality to her speech.)

Pardon me . . . Monsieur Weisman?

(Weisman looks up, and he conveys to the audience by his facial expressions that he has been instantly struck by Jacqueline's exquisite loveliness. He is also instantly aware that she must have heard him doing the "funny" French voice. He is consequently not sure how to proceed.)

WEISMAN

Uh . . .

JACQUELINE

I am Jacqueline Cahier, from the French Cultural Clique of New York.

(Weisman looks at the audience, gulps, and plunges in. He rises and comes out to greet Jacqueline.)

WEISMAN

(French accent)

Ah, Meez *Cahier*!

(He stands, approaches her, and kisses her hand.)

Enchanté.

(Jacqueline is a bit taken aback. She disengages her hand from Weisman's lips and offers him a firm handshake.)

JACQUELINE

So . . . you are French, no?

WEISMAN

No!

(French accent)

I mean . . . no *doubt* . . . *ma chérie*.

JACQUELINE

(Surprised by his familiarity)

"*Ma chérie*"!

(Formally)

We have only just met, *Mr.* Weisman.

WEISMAN

(He continues to affect the French accent)

But of course. I offer a *million* apologies.

(Weisman tries to kiss Jacqueline's hand again, but she backs away.)

JACQUELINE

(With a bit of effort, she maintains her polish and composure. She avoids eye contact with Weisman as she speaks.)

I have merely come to invite you and your staff to a little *soirée* tonight. Your client, Violette Drib, will be reading from her new book about bathing in dry river beds in Normandie . . . and your name appears on the guest list she has asked us to compile. We will be serving strawberry-flavored champagne.

(She hastens to clarify, and speaks with just a hint of disapproval.)

That is at Ms. Drib's request, of course.

WEISMAN

Ah, but zat ees so very kind of Meez Drib -- and of you, *ma chér* --

JACQUELINE

(Cutting him off. She now makes eye contact.)

Thank you, Monsieur Weisman.

(With perfect, formal courtesy)

I hope we shall see you tomorrow evening.

(She exits.)

(Floyd enters from the inner office. Weisman is looking longingly at the door through which Jacqueline has exited, and does not see Floyd approach him from behind.)

FLOYD

Are you okay, Mr. Weisman?

WEISMAN

(He is in another world and speak absent-mindedly, without taking his eyes off the door.)

Oui.

FLOYD

(Puzzled)

What?

WEISMAN

(Confused, he turns to Floyd and reverts to the British accent.)

Oh! *Terribly* sorry. Right-o!

(Floyd shakes his head, as if to clear his thoughts. Weisman finally snaps out of his trance.)

WEISMAN

(Impatiently, in his normal voice)

What do you want?

FLOYD

Nothing. Mauve just asked me to leave her alone for a minute.

WEISMAN

That I can understand.

FLOYD

Evidently something has irritated her.

(In perfect unison, both Weisman and Floyd clear their throats significantly, look at the audience, and roll their eyes in the direction of each other, as if each indicating who the irritating one is.)

WEISMAN

Fine. Just find yourself something to do out here for now.
(He sits down at his desk.)

FLOYD

(Approaching Weisman's desk. He speaks quickly, with his usual excess of enthusiasm.)
You know, I'm basically an "idea guy". For example . . . how about we swap desks every Tuesday? Or maybe we could form a miniature-golf team.

WEISMAN

Those are *lousy* ideas.

FLOYD

(Confidently rattling on)
No problem. If you don't like those, there are plenty more lousy ideas where they came from.
(He begins to pace the room, self-importantly.)
But I'm not just about ideas. Oh, no. I also have a way with people.

WEISMAN

(He stands.)
I *bet* you do.
(He walks toward Floyd, as he speaks.)
Everytime you interact with them, they probably shout "Away! Away!"

(Floyd backs off. Weisman sits down, and re-focuses on his work. After a moment of quiet, Floyd again approaches the desk and looks over Weisman's shoulder.)

FLOYD

What are you doing? It looks fascinating!

WEISMAN

If you must know, I'm making up my grocery list.

FLOYD

Oh, good! I love making up foods.

WEISMAN

Wonderful. Why don't you go over there
(He gestures across the room)
and make some up.

FLOYD

Not necessary, at the moment. I have my crackers.
(He takes a small package of crackers out of his pocket, and begins to eat, noisily. Weisman looks up.)

FLOYD

(Mouth full)

D'you like crackers?

WEISMAN

(With a dry, sardonic delivery that is tinged with annoyance.)

No. Ms. Darling is in charge of liking crackers. I'm in charge of liking walnuts.

FLOYD

Oh.

(Floyd continues munching, loudly. Weisman gives up, and stands.)

WEISMAN

(Annoyed)

I'm going out for a stroll.

FLOYD

How far are you going?

WEISMAN

I don't know. I'm just going to walk until I can no longer hear your cracker-chewing -- *if* my legs can carry me that far.

(He exits to the hall.)

(Floyd decides he has had enough crackers and puts them away.)

(Mauve enters from the inner office. She looks around for Weisman.)

FLOYD

He went out for a walk.

MAUVE

Did he leave any instructions for me?

FLOYD

Just that you are to be in charge of liking crackers.

MAUVE

(Puzzled)

Uh . . . okay.

(She shrugs.)

Floyd, before you spend any more time here, I'd better tell you one thing.

FLOYD

(Agreeably, he sits down on the corner of Weisman's desk.)
 Sure! Do you have a particular thing you want to tell me? Or do we just get to pick one thing at random?

MAUVE

No, it was actually a specific thing. But first, a little background: You should understand that Mr. Weisman is good at what he does.

FLOYD

(Innocently)

And what, exactly, is it that he does?

MAUVE

Well, that's another question. A good question, in fact. Yes, Floyd, that's a rather handsome, good-looking, charming and irresistible question you've got there. But getting back to what I wanted to tell you . . . It's a warning, really. Mr. Weisman is a bit fussy. He likes to do things his own way, and he does not have much patience with staff members who try to influence him otherwise. No matter how helpful their advice may be.

(She begins to pace the stage, dramatically.)

No, even when Mr. Weisman is faced with input that is indisputably sound, which has only his own interests at heart, and which comes from someone who is admirably devoted to the success of this business . . . he doesn't want to hear it.

(She breaks the dramatic mood and rejoins Floyd.)

Or so I've been told.

FLOYD

Have you ever advised him, in suitably strong terms, that he *oughtn't* be that way?

MAUVE

(To the audience, with a shrug)

At least I *tried* to keep Floyd from getting fired on his first day.

(To Floyd)

Don't you get it? He *doesn't* want to hear it -- even if you're right. Which, of course, I usually am.

FLOYD

(Standing)

But -- if you're *right*

MAUVE

Mind you, I'm not *always* right. I do have the annoying habit of being right *almost* all the time, but not always. I'd say I'm right about 95% of the time. Well, maybe more like 97 or 98% -- which is practically the same as being always right. But -- *technically* -- I'm not always right. I openly admit that.

(Beat.)

Can you handle things out here for a second? I left my notes in the other room.

(Mauve exits to the inner office. Floyd, unsure what to do next, picks up a stack of files from Weisman's desk and begins putting them in order. His back is to the inner office door.)

(A moment later, Mauve enters from the inner office with a legal pad. Floyd does not see her.)

MAUVE

(Loudly, looking over her notes)

Okey-doke!

(Startled by her, Floyd jumps and scatters the file folders, and their contents, all over the floor.)

MAUVE

(Without moving, she assesses the mess.)

I thought you said you could handle things.

FLOYD

Not to worry. I can assure you that these things that you see all over the floor have all been handled -- with both hands.

(He hastily picks up the folders.)

MAUVE

(Consulting her notes)

Since you've toured most of the office, I'll fill you in on the routine. We get here at around 10:00 in the morning, and you and I are responsible for answering the phones, opening the mail, and doing whatever other work Mr. Weisman weasels out of -- I mean, uh, *assigns* us.

FLOYD

Doesn't he do *anything*?

MAUVE

(Doubtfully)

Well . . . sure. I mean, he must, right? Uh . . . he speaks authoritatively and *inaccurately* on many subjects. He whines, he reads comic books, he asks me out on dates

FLOYD

Can I ask you out on dates, too?

MAUVE

(She looks him over. Her expression shows that she's not impressed. She shrugs, as if to say "Suit yourself.")

You can *ask*.

FLOYD

That's great! I hate actually going on dates, but the asking part is kind of fun.

MAUVE

(Continuing the orientation)

Mr. Weisman usually goes out for lunch at around 1:30, and sometimes he comes back. I almost always eat at noon. You can take your lunch whenever you want, and we won't miss you -- I mean, we'll manage without you.

FLOYD

I actually don't eat lunch.

MAUVE

Oh?

FLOYD

But I do like to have a second breakfast at about 12:30 every day.

MAUVE

Fine. You can use your lunch break for breakfast.

(She continues.)

We lock up at 5:00. Then, during the night, the cute little hospitality elves come in through the window and do all the work that we neglected during the day. But since hospitality elves don't know how to save and back up files -- or even send documents to the printer -- their work has always vanished by the time we get here the next day, and we start over. Any questions?

FLOYD

Are there any girl elves I could ask out on dates?

MAUVE

Yes. However, it would have to be a lunch date, since they work evenings.

FLOYD

But I don't eat lunch.

MAUVE

That's a problem you and the elf will have to solve for yourselves. I'm not saying it can't work But you're both going to have to invest the energy in coming to an arrangement that you can live with.

FLOYD

(He walks around the office, taking everything in.)

You know, I think I'm starting to get the picture. Mr. Weisman may be the owner But would you say that *you* can take credit for everything I see around me?

MAUVE

Well, I don't like to brag . . . but no.

FLOYD

Why do you stay here, if you don't like it?

MAUVE

Oh, I wouldn't give up this job for a million dollars.

FLOYD

Why not?

MAUVE

I don't have a million dollars. Still -- in case of a sudden windfall -- I'd love to know who I pay it to.

(Beat.)

No, I really don't mean that. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that I'd love to know who I pay it to.

(Beat.)

I should have said "Whom".

(Weisman enters from the corridor. Mauve, upon seeing him, looks at her watch.)

MAUVE

Mr. Weisman, it's 11:30. I thought you were supposed to pick your nephew up at the orthodontist at 11:00.

WEISMAN

That's my overbite -- I mean, *oversight*.

MAUVE

You *knew* you were supposed to pick him up there Thursday at 11! It says so right on your calendar.

WEISMAN

Yes, but how was I supposed to know *today* was Thursday? Did it *ask* me if it could be Thursday? Answer me that, smartypants.

FLOYD

But --

WEISMAN

(He turns to Floyd and addresses him sharply.)

Is *your* name "Smartypants"?

FLOYD

(Reaching for his wallet.)

I'll check my driver's license.

WEISMAN

(To Mauve)

Why didn't *you* remind me about this?

MAUVE

Me? You think *I'm* supposed to stay on top of your personal life?

WEISMAN

Mauve, if you can't manage to keep track of things that are neither your responsibility nor any of your business, you'll never go far in this company.

MAUVE

(Bitterly)

At the moment, I'm more interested in going far *from* this company. Then maybe I won't ruin your *rhythm*.

WEISMAN

Oh, for crying out loud.

(Insincerely)

Okay, I'm sorry. When I said you ruined my rhythm, I meant "ruined" in the *good* sense of the word. Now would you call my sister, please, and tell her she'll have to pick the kid up herself?

MAUVE

Really, Mr. Weisman -- for you to be so irresponsible, and then make me do your dirty work What kind of fool do you think I am?

WEISMAN

(Thoughtfully)

I don't know. What kinds are available?

MAUVE

And now you're insulting me.

WEISMAN

(More sincerely conciliatory now)

I'm sorry. I promise it won't happen again.

MAUVE

You promise -- ha! I've had it with your promises.

WEISMAN

All right, no more promises.

MAUVE

Promise?

WEISMAN

(He walks to his desk chair and sits.)

On second thought, never mind my sister. I need you to call the TV station in Boston, and find out what time Sebaceous has to be there tomorrow. So we can make sure we get him out of New York in time.

MAUVE

(Brightening)

Get him out of New York? You got it!

(She walks around to her desk, looks for the phone number, finds it, and dials. After a moment, she speaks into the phone.)

Hi, is this Clark? Mauve Darling in New York -- you know, Accent on Hospitality? Yes, we have John Cuthbert Sebaceous with us Well, we just wanted to know what time you No *What?* But that's -- I mean -- nobody told us a thing. Well, this is awful *Us?* I -- I guess, if we have to Okay. Bye.

(She hangs up.)

WEISMAN

What was *that* all about?

MAUVE

That was about the fact that the John Cuthbert Sebaceous book tour has, evidently, been cancelled.

FLOYD

(Cluelessly)

Is that good?

WEISMAN

(Ignoring Floyd, he stands up and addresses Mauve)

What?

MAUVE

That's what *I* said.

WEISMAN

Why didn't anyone tell us?

MAUVE

I have no idea. But don't take it personally. Apparently, nobody told John Cuthbert Sebaceous, either.

WEISMAN

This is little consolation.

MAUVE

It is, however, the one aspect we can redress.

FLOYD

What do you mean?

MAUVE

I mean that we get to be the ones to tell him *now*.

WEISMAN

Oh, we do, do we? Please explain to me why it's *our* job to inform a huffy author who has just flown across the Atlantic for a book tour that, by the way, said book tour will not be happening?

MAUVE

(With an ironic grimace)

Because, my dear, "We take care of everything."

WEISMAN

Oh, shut up.

MAUVE

So, when do we break the bad news?

WEISMAN

You can do that after lunch.

MAUVE

Okay, then I suggest we --

(Double-take)

I can do it!?

WEISMAN

(He turns his back on her, evasively, and pretends to be busily engaged sorting the papers on his desk.)

. . . after lunch, yes. But if you'd prefer to do it before lunch, that's fine with me.

MAUVE

(She walks around to Weisman's desk and speaks adamantly.)

I would *not* prefer to do it before lunch!

WEISMAN

(Avoiding eye contact with Mauve)

Good, then that's settled. You'll do it after lunch.

(Quickly)

Now, about those invoices you wanted me to pay

MAUVE

But why in the world must *I* tell Sebaceous he's been cancelled? Why can't *you* do it?

WEISMAN

Because, for one thing, bad news clashes with my charming British accent.

MAUVE

(Furiously)

Oh!

(She storms to the outer door.)

I'm going to lunch.

(She exits, still fuming.)

WEISMAN

(British accent, calling after her)

Cheers!

FLOYD

(To Weisman)

Mr. Weisman, you're not treating her very well.

WEISMAN

(Shouting)

Away! Away!

(Floyd rushes out the front door as well.)

WEISMAN

(To the audience, with ironic politeness, using his British accent)

Jolly good.

(Blackout.)

(Scene 2)

(It is a little while later. Weisman sits at his desk, nonchalantly munching on an apple and reading an *Archie* comic book.)

(After a moment, the door opens gently and Floyd tiptoes back in. He walks to Mauve's desk in a gingerly manner, hoping to avoid any contact with Weisman. He sits, looking self-conscious. Weisman, absorbed in his comic book, ignores him.)

(After a few tense moments, Floyd gets up again, approaches Weisman, and speaks to him in a tentative manner.)

FLOYD

Uh . . . Mr. Weisman?

(Weisman, who has been in his own world, is startled.)

WEISMAN

Huh!

FLOYD

Sorry! I just wanted to know if there's anything you'd like me to do.

WEISMAN

Yes. I'd like you to leave me alone.

FLOYD

(Considering the request)

Okay. I think I can do that.

(They are quiet for a few moments. Weisman reads his comic book, while Floyd stands there looking fidgety and unsure what to do.)

(Sebaceous enters. He carries a notebook and a pen.)

WEISMAN

(Rising, he adopts the British voice.)

Ah, Mr. Cancelled!

SEBACEOUS

(Confused)

What?

WEISMAN

Er . . . so sorry. Mr. *Sebay-cee-ous*, I should say.

SEBACEOUS

Yes, you should.

WEISMAN

Rah-ther. I should say *so*.

SEBACEOUS

(Confused)

What?

WEISMAN

Yes. *Quite*. It's --

SEBACEOUS

(With an impatient wave of his hand)

Never mind. Look here -- the hotel you booked me in has lost electrical power.

WEISMAN

Oh, dear. Frightfully sorry! I'll just book you a suite elsewhere. I shan't be a moment.

(He reaches for the phone.)

SEBACEOUS

No, that won't be necessary. It's a ghastly nuisance, of course. But they've assured me it will be back on shortly. I do, however, need a place to make my daily notes. That's why I've come back.

(He crosses the office to Mauve's desk.)

I'll sit here, shall I?

(He makes himself at home at Mauve's desk.)

I must record my New York impressions before leaving town.

WEISMAN

New York *impress-ee-uns*? Well, well, you *are* talented, aren't you!

(To Floyd, idiotically)

Did you hear that, Floyd? Mr. *Sebay-see-ous* does *impress-ee-uns*.

(To Sebaceous)

I *must* hear your Brooklyn and Bronx accents before you proceed on your journey. But -- oh, my! -- I'm afraid we have no recording equipment.

SEBACEOUS

(He rises, and speaks impatiently.)

Mr. Weisman: Once upon a time, before I made the mistake of setting foot in this office, I was actually what's known as a *writer*. And, as such, I merely intend to *write* about New York -- if you will be so kind as to *permit* me to get started.

WEISMAN

Oh! Yes, yes, of course. Positively chuffed! *Do* commence.

SEBACEOUS

Please see that I am not

(He gives Weisman a dirty look)

further *disturbed* or interrupted.

(He sits.)

WEISMAN

Certainly. *Super. Do* record those *impress-ee-uns*. Straight off. Before you

(He glances guiltily toward Floyd)

leave town.

SEBACEOUS

Have you finished, Mr. Weisman?

WEISMAN

Most definitely. Quite.

(To Floyd)

Got that, Floyd, have you? We are *not* to disturb Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous*, as he is *most* intent on completing his *impress-ee-uns* before proceeding on his -- ahem -- *travels*.

FLOYD

But I thought he wasn't going to *be* travelling.

(He immediately realizes that he's said something he shouldn't have, and he cups his hand over his mouth.)

SEBACEOUS

What?

WEISMAN

What? Wot? Eh?

(He hesitates, unsure how to cover Floyd's indiscretion.)

No, no, Floyd old man, you've got things entirely arse-over-Oxford.

SEBACEOUS

(He has never heard this ridiculous expression before, on either side of the Atlantic.)

What?

WEISMAN

Remember, Floyd old bean, I said Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous* was not going to be *ravelling*.

(Floyd and Sebaceous look at Weisman for a moment, uncomprehending.)

WEISMAN

Good *heavens*, Floyd old top, have you forgotten your Shakespeare?

(He walks downstage to soliloquize, with great pomposity.)

"Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care . . ."

(He breaks the dramatic mood and grins fatuously at Sebaceous.)

Our good old English Bard, eh wot?

(To Floyd)

But since Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous* has obviously come here to *write*, he is *not* going to be *ravelling* just now, as this would require him to be asleep at his hotel, yes?

SEBACEOUS

(Still puzzling over Weisman's previous remark.)

Did you say, "arse over Oxford"?

WEISMAN

Terribly sorry. Cambridge man, are you?

FLOYD

(He takes Weisman aside and speaks confidentially.)

Am *I* supposed to be speaking with a British accent, too? It wasn't in the job description.

WEISMAN

(Confidentially to Floyd, in his normal voice)

You are not supposed to be speaking at all.

(Mauve enters. She does not notice Sebaceous.)

MAUVE

I've been thinking it over, Mr. Weisman . . .

WEISMAN

(Still in the British voice)

Thinking, eh? *Jolly* good exercise. Try to do it every day, myself.

MAUVE

(As she has not noticed Sebaceous, she thinks Weisman's use of the British voice is an attempt to soften her. She does not welcome this.)

Oh, cut it out. This is serious. I've decided that if I don't stand up for myself here and now in this office, I never will. So as far as telling John Cuthbert Sebaceous that

(She notices Sebaceous and breaks off)

SEBACEOUS

That what?

WEISMAN

That . . . *joke*. Smashingly funny one we've all just heard. I wanted Mauve to tell it to you -- she's got quite a gift for that, don'tcha know -- but it's quite apparent she's not in the mood just now, I daresay. So I shall have to tell it myself. Now then . . . how did it start . . . ?

(Jacqueline enters from the hall. Weisman rushes to meet her.)

WEISMAN

(French accent)

Ah, Jacqueline!

(He kisses her hand.)

JACQUELINE

(She withdraws her hand. She remains poised but is clearly losing patience with him.)

Really! If I wished to be constantly annoyed by amorous Frenchmen, I would have remained in Paris.

FLOYD

(To Mauve)

Frenchmen?

(Mauve shrugs. She is just as perplexed as Floyd is.)

WEISMAN

(French accent)

I beseech you to forgive me, my charming mademoiselle. I am ashamed to have so forgotten myself, under the disorienting spell of your beauty.

FLOYD

(Helpfully)

B-e-a-u-t-y.

JACQUELINE

(Disdainfully)

I will make you a deal, Mr. Weisman. You stop "forgetting yourself," and I will do my part by forgetting you entirely.

SEBACEOUS

(He drops his pen dramatically on the desk and rises.)

Mr. Weisman, I was assured that I would be able to work peacefully in this office. It is essential that I do so without further delay. If I'd known this was to be a crossroads of civilization, I would have taken my journal someplace more off the beaten path -- such as the middle of Times Square.

JACQUELINE

(Noticing and recognizing him)

But you are John Cuthbert Sebaceous himself. Excellent!

SEBACEOUS

(Curtly)

Yes, madam. I *am* excellent, and I *am* John Cuthbert Sebaceous. What of it?

WEISMAN

(French accent, to Jacqueline)

Après tout, someone has to be John Cuthbair Sebahzieuse.

MAUVE

(Aside)

That's a matter of opinion.

SEBACEOUS

(To Floyd and Mauve)

Why is your boss speaking in that ridiculous French accent?

WEISMAN

(Turning hastily to Sebaceous and affecting the British accent)

French? Why, how frightfully amusing! Do I sound *French* to you, Mr. *Se-bay-cee-ous*? Tut-tut, that's quite a lark. Perhaps what you're hearing is a trace of my great-great-grandmater. I'm given to understand that *she* was French. Or had a French maid, at least.

JACQUELINE

(Confused)

But . . . are you not French, Monsieur Weisman?

WEISMAN

(Turning to Jacqueline and speaking in a bizarre mixture of the two phony accents)

No, I am not French Monsieur Weisman. *Zhat eez . . . I am Monsieur French Weisman*. Jolly good, eh? Eh . . . eh . . . *Eh bien . . .* but of course, mademoiselle, I am French as bloody kippers, tremendously, *absolument* French.

(He blows her a comical, lip-smacking kiss, then turns briefly to Sebaceous.)

In a manner of speaking, don'tcha know.

(He turns back to Jacqueline.)

Exactement. French. Jolly-well ruddy French, I am. *Northwestern* French. Close to *Dovaire*.

(Back to Sebaceous)

Dover, eh? Smashing town, wot?

JACQUELINE

(She has lost interest in Weisman's unfathomable behavior and addresses Sebaceous)

I must return to my office, before my staff gets things entirely arse-over-Oxford, as you say in English.

(Sebaceous reacts once again to this idiosyncratic turn of phrase.)

JACQUELINE

(Speaking to everyone generally)

However, the reason I have come is that I wished to extend our invitation to Mr Sebaceous for this evening. Now I can do so in person.

(She approaches Sebaceous.)

It would be a great honor to have a writer of your stature at Ms. Drib's soiree, Mr. Sebaceous. And Ms. Drib has specifically requested it.

WEISMAN

(Aside, in his normal voice)

That, and strawberry-flavored champagne.

(Ironically)

Ms. Drib is evidently a woman of exquisite taste.

SEBACEOUS

(Condescendingly)

Drib . . . Drib No, not a name I recognize. *Minor* author, is she?

JACQUELINE

How amusing. That is exactly how *she* described *you*.

(She walks to Mauve and addresses her discreetly.)

Tell me, confidentially . . . your Ms. Drib, she is not French?

MAUVE

No, she's American.

JACQUELINE

Quite as I thought. Then perhaps you can explain how she comes to have a name like "Violette". I did not consider it polite to ask her directly, you see.

MAUVE

Well, according to her publicity sheet, she decided as a teen that "*Purple Drib*" sounded a little drab.

JACQUELINE

Ah, I see. Thank you -- er, I am so sorry, but I'm afraid I do not know *your* name.

MAUVE

It's *Mauve*, of course.

JACQUELINE

(She takes this in.)

Very well.

(She walks to the door.)

Good day, everyone.

(She exits.)

SEBACEOUS

(Petulantly)

It's obvious I'm not going to get any work done here. I think I'll go for a walk. I'll try writing again later.

WEISMAN

(Eager to get rid of him)

A long walk! *Super* idea.

(He goes to the door and opens it.)

SEBACEOUS

I didn't say a *long* walk. Now, tell me -- is there still a shop in this part of New York that sells gourmet mustards? I promised to get something for my sister.

WEISMAN

Yes, it's just around the corner. *Mountains* of mustard. Why, you could simply spend *hours* in that shop, selecting mustard for a sister -- couldn't you, Floyd?

FLOYD

I don't *have* a sister.

SEBACEOUS

They'll wrap it for me, I suppose.

WEISMAN

(With an unnatural enthusiasm)

Yes! Oh, dear me, *yes!* *Splendid* idea! Why, they could *wrap* it for you! Oh, yes *indeed*.

(To Floyd)

Floyd, old man, wouldn't you say that's a simply *super* --

SEBACEOUS

(He impatiently cuts off Weisman's rambling effusiveness.)

I'll be back in a little while.

(He exits.)

WEISMAN

(He resumes his normal voice.)

Whew! That's it. I refuse to do another session like that without the help of a simultaneous interpreter. And the more simultaneous, the better.

MAUVE

I warned you.

WEISMAN

And you, Mauve -- I must say you've picked a fine time to become uncooperative.

MAUVE

(Pleased with herself)

Yes, I thought so too.

(More earnestly)

But you realize it's all your own fault, don't you? How many John Cuthbert

(She says the next word with difficulty, and plenty of saliva)

Sebaceous

(As Mauve continues to speak, Weisman and Floyd wipe her spittle from their eyes.)

MAUVE

does it take to convince you that --

WEISMAN

Stop! I hate those lightbulb jokes.

(Thinking)

You know . . . maybe neither of us has to tell Sebaceous his tour has been cancelled.

FLOYD

Don't look at me!

WEISMAN

No . . . I'm just thinking that maybe if we wait long enough, he'll find out through some other channel.

MAUVE

Like what other channel?

WEISMAN

I don't know . . . maybe the sales clerk at the mustard shop will mention it.

(Beat)

Hey! We could leave an anonymous message care of the hotel.

MAUVE

You'll have to get him to go *back* to the hotel, though. As long as he's hanging around here, the suspense is going to be as deadly as his books.

FLOYD

But the power is out at the hotel.

WEISMAN

(To Mauve)

Well then, how about a little nap?

MAUVE

Mr. Weisman, you're becoming a pest. Once and for all, I'm not interested in you that way.

WEISMAN

No, no. I mean we persuade *Sebaceous* to go back to the hotel and take a nap -- you know, to rest up. Then we make our anonymous phone call, lock up the office . . .

MAUVE

And leave town? Works for me.

WEISMAN

Who said anything about leaving town?

MAUVE

You did. You promised me tickets to a movie in Baltimore.

FLOYD

(He's confused by this.)

What's playing in Baltimore?

WEISMAN

(Impatiently)

The Orioles.

FLOYD

(He waves his arm dismissively.)

Seen it.

MAUVE

(To Weisman)

But are you sure this nap strategy is a foolproof plan?

WEISMAN

You should know by now that my plans are never *foolproof*. They're only *fool-resistant*.

(Jacqueline enters. Weisman has his back to her.)

WEISMAN

(He speaks while in the process of turning to face her, making an incorrect assumption that it is Sebaceous who has come in. He consequently speaks in the British voice.)

You should go take a nap.

JACQUELINE

I beg your pardon?

WEISMAN

(Now seeing her, but still stuck in the English accent)

Pardon *grahnted*.

(Now he quickly assumes the French accent and rushes up to her.)

Uh, *pardon granted*, zhat eez. To what *merveilleuse concatenation of circonstances* do we owe zee present veezeet?

JACQUELINE

Eh bien, I was just thinking. Since the John Cuthbert Sebaceous book tour has been cancelled, would you possibly be in a position to suggest to him that he give a talk tomorrow at the French Cultural Clique, before he leaves New York? I realize that neither he nor his subject matter are French; but he is, as you say, "box office", and we're really not as fussy as you might think.

WEISMAN

(Normal voice)

I think that's a great idea. After all, since the tour has been --

(French accent)

Comment? Cancellèd?! But . . . saperlipopette!

(Normal voice)

Who told *you* that?

JACQUELINE

I heard it on public radio.

MAUVE

Then perhaps Sebaceous knows, too!

JACQUELINE

But of course he knows. I ran into him at the mustard shop -- I always shop for mustard on Thursdays, of course -- and he told me that he was glad to have a break, because it will allow him to tour the country at leisure and do some real sightseeing.

WEISMAN

(Normal voice)

Incredible! Then he must have known all along. He was just using his time in New York -- and our services -- to rest up for his vacation! What a nimrod.

JACQUELINE

You surprise me, Monsieur Weisman. You speak like an *américain*.

MAUVE

No, he speaks like a

(She uses a Yiddish word but gives it a French twist)

meshuganneur.

(To Weisman, with spirit)

You see where your negligence, irresponsibility, and general asineness have led, Mr. Weisman? You've made an idiot of yourself, alienated your staff, stranded a nephew at the orthodontist, and wasted an entire morning. From your use of stupid voices to avoid attending to business, to your cowardice about telling John Cuthbert Sebaceous something he already knew . . . you've behaved in an utterly juvenile manner.

WEISMAN

Your point being?

JACQUELINE

(Interrupting the intra-office argument)

I still do not understand. Why did you speak to me like a cartoon Frenchman?

WEISMAN

I'm sorry, Jacqueline. I happened to be using a French accent when you first came in -- for reasons you probably wouldn't understand -- and I didn't want to disappoint you.

JACQUELINE

(Approaching him)

You should not have worried, Mr. Weisman. You could not possibly disappoint me.

WEISMAN

Really?

JACQUELINE

Accent or no accent, I knew from the first that you were, as we say in Paris, a *bloody twit*.

MAUVE

(She snaps her fingers and addresses Floyd)

That's the phrase I've been looking for. Just goes to show -- I should have studied harder in French class.

WEISMAN

(To Mauve, brusquely)

Don't you have some invoices to pay?

(He swiftly grabs the invoices from his desk and tosses them to her.)

MAUVE

(To Floyd, as she dissolves into laughter)

Like I said . . . I wouldn't leave this job for a million dollars.

(Mauve laughs harder and harder, as the lights fade.)

(The End)