

With This Ring

A “magic ring” that makes the wearer see everything from the opposite gender point of view. That can mean big trouble!

Robert desperately needs to sell his marketing campaign to the developers of PEA, a supplement to give older men more energy. Maybe that ring can help him see things through the eyes of the new female CEO of Braxton, who has developed this new drug.

Join the mayhem as this fun, zany tale unfolds.

4M, 4F

Great Stage Publishing

With This Ring

A Comedy in Three Acts

by
Kathy Campshure

Great Stage Publishing

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“With This Ring”

A Comedy in Three Acts

by Kathy Campshure

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Synopsis

Robert is a semi-successful, middle-age, 'old school' advertising executive whose latest assignment is to market PEA (an energy supplement) to the aging male population. The problem? The CEO from the company that manufactures PEA turns out to be a woman, and she's arriving two days earlier than planned. Robert's presentation just isn't quite ready, and he is absolutely certain that things couldn't get any worse, until the postman delivers an early wedding gift for Robert's daughter—a ring that supposedly changes the gender role of whoever slips it on. How the ring ends up stuck on Robert's finger—and what happens next—makes for a presentation that is anything but forgettable.

Cast

Robert Jones:	Mid to late forties
Claudette (Clo) Jones:	Mid to late forties
Heather:	Daughter; twenty-two
Mark:	Heather's fiancé; mid to late twenties
Pete:	Robert's neighbor and poker buddy; mid-fifties
Al Stanton:	Robert's boss; late-forties
Fran	Census taker; early-forties
Ms. Price:	Braxton's CEO; mid-thirties

Set

This play is set in the dining room of Robert and Claudette (Clo) Jones. A rectangular table with four chairs (two on the US side and one at each end) sits at CS, and a china buffet is at UL. There is a door at UC, with a window on each side. Floral curtains adorn those windows, and another window DSR. There is a door at CR that leads to the living room/bedrooms, and a door at CL that leads to the kitchen. The time is 11:30 A.M.

Props

This play requires the following props:

- Dishes, utensils and food for a complete spaghetti dinner
- Small cardboard box with packing peanuts and tissue paper
- Gold ring
- Large flip chart and display easel
- Note cards and presentation binder
- Landline phone on SL wall
- Two cell phones
- Full-length, white apron with red stains on the front
- Briefcase
- Pizza/Pizza box
- Beer cans
- Dish towels
- Icepack
- Drinking straws
- Purses for Clo & Heather
- Shopping bags

Sound Effects:

This play requires the following sound effects:

- Doorbell
- Landline telephone
- Two distinct cellphone ringtones
- Fly buzzing

Act One: 11:30 A.M.; Robert & Clo's dining room.

Act One, Scene Two: 1:30 PM, same day.

Act Two: Twenty minutes later.

Act Three: Fifteen minutes later.

Act One, Scene One

At lights up, it is 11:30 A.M. Robert is seated at the dining room table reviewing his upcoming presentation. He is shuffling through the pages of notes and scribbling changes as he goes.

ROBERT. *Chuckling.* Oh, this is good—I love it! This presentation is going to knock their socks off! They're going to be begging us to handle *all* of their marketing when they see this!

Robert continues shuffling through the pages as Mark enters SL. He is wearing a full-length, white bib apron with red stains on the front. He is carrying a sauce pan and is stirring the contents with a large spoon. He scoops a ladleful of sauce out of the pan and holds the ladle out for Robert.

MARK. Could you taste this? I don't know if I put enough oregano in.

ROBERT. What?

MARK. Taste this.

ROBERT. *(Looking up; beat.)* You can't be serious.

MARK. About what?

ROBERT. Guinea pigs are small and furry. Go find one.

MARK. I just want your opinion on this sauce; is that too much to ask?

ROBERT. *(Beat.)* You know, if you weren't marrying my daughter in two months I'd have some serious doubts about you.

MARK. *(Placing the ladle back in the pan.)* Doubts? What kind of doubts?

ROBERT. Like whether your parents should have named you 'Martha' instead of 'Mark'.

MARK. Martha?

ROBERT. Yeah, Martha—as in 'Martha Stewart'. Get it? No? Before your time, right? *(Beat.)* Well then, how about Rachel—as in 'Rachel Ray'?

MARK. Very funny! You'll have to forgive me.

ROBERT. For what?

MARK. I keep forgetting you were raised in the old days.

ROBERT. The 'old' days?

MARK. *(Setting the pan down on the table.)* Yes. You know, back when it was the husband's job to bring home the bacon and the wife simply had the honor of frying it up.

ROBERT. *(Half-interested; returning to his paperwork.)* Damn straight. That's the way it's supposed to work.

MARK. Maybe—back then. But times have changed.

ROBERT. Not for me, Buddy—or for any *real* man.

MARK. Face it, Robert. You're stuck in the old days. (*Beat; still offering the spoon to Robert.*) Are you going to taste this or not?

ROBERT. You say that like it's a *bad* thing.

MARK. It's not necessarily a *bad* thing. That mindset just doesn't work anymore.

ROBERT. (*Looking up.*) No? And why not?

MARK. (*Crossing USL.*) It just doesn't. It's a whole new century and, in case you hadn't noticed, things have changed. For example, lots of men do the cooking today.

ROBERT. Is *that* what you're doing in there—cooking?

MARK. Of course. What else would I be doing?

ROBERT. So, (*pointing toward Mark's apron*) is there any sauce left in the pan or are you wearing it all?

MARK. Very funny. I like to get into my work.

ROBERT. That's putting it mildly. I took one look at that apron and I was afraid one of the neighbors was about to file a missing person—or pet—report. (*Beat.*) And since when do men wear aprons, anyway? In case no one ever told you, aprons are for women; men wear tool belts.

MARK. (*Crossing back to Robert. Excitedly.*) Hey, that's not such a bad idea. A tool belt, worn over the apron, would be kinda handy. I could use it to carry a spatula, a wire whisk, a pepper grinder—and bottles of spices would fit right in the smaller loops.

ROBERT. I'm not hearing this.

MARK. (*Retrieving the pan from the table.*) Listen, the women are going to be here any minute. I really wanted to surprise them by having a meal ready and on the table, but if you don't want to give me an honest opinion on the sauce, that's fine. I'll just have to trust my own taste buds on the matter. (*Mark turns and heads back toward the kitchen.*)

ROBERT. Speaking of the 'old days', how long has it been since you proposed to my daughter?

MARK. (*Stopping halfway to the kitchen, shrugging, and turning back.*) Eighteen months, or something like that.

ROBERT. Refresh my memory. She did say 'yes', right?

MARK. (*Moving to doorway at SL.*) You know she did. I trust she told you that we set the date, the hall has been rented, the band is locked in—

ROBERT. So . . .

MARK. So 'what'?

ROBERT. So, it's a done deal. You don't have to try so damn hard anymore.

MARK. (*Turning, from kitchen doorway.*) Maybe I *want* to cook for Heather. Had that thought ever occurred to you?

ROBERT. (*Rising and crossing to the presentation chart.*) Please, you can't be serious.

MARK. (*Crossing to the table and setting the pot down again.*) Why not?

ROBERT. *(Turning back to Mark.)* It's wrong; that's why not. I don't care what century it is, that's not the way it's supposed to be.

MARK. Says who?

ROBERT. Says everyone!

MARK. Everyone?

ROBERT. Everyone who matters. *(Mark rolls his eyes; Robert rises and circles DS of table.)* Come on, even the Bible is clear on the subject of food preparation.

MARK. *(Joining Robert.)* Robert, nowhere in the Bible does it state that women are supposed to prepare and serve the food, and that men are simply supposed to eat it.

ROBERT. Oh no? Then why, right in the beginning, is Eve seen serving the apple to Adam?

MARK. Yes, and we all know how well that turned out.

ROBERT. Believe me, Clo has served me meals with more disastrous results, but that's not the issue. The issue is whether men or women are supposed to do the preparation when it comes to meals. I think that little story pretty much establishes the SOP for meal preparation throughout history.

MARK. SOP?

ROBERT. What—you know about something as weird as oregano and you don't know what SOP stands for?

MARK. No, but I'm guessing it's not 'soup'. It would need a 'u' for that.

ROBERT. No, it's not 'soup'. It stands for 'Standard Operating Procedure.' In other words, it establishes and documents how something should be done for maximum effectiveness. In this case, it demonstrates who *makes* the meal, and who sits back and enjoys it.

MARK. Okay, but if you want to use the Bible for reference, then explain the loaves and fishes.

ROBERT. Loaves and fishes?

MARK. Yes, the loaves and fishes mentioned in the book of Matthew. Jesus didn't wait for some woman to step forward and prepare a feast for a multitude of people using only five loaves of bread and two fish. He did it Himself.

ROBERT. Of course He did! If He had left it up to a woman, she would have turned it into another stupid potluck affair—and God only knows what they would have ended up eating then!

Robert crosses behind table, sits, picks up his pencil, and returns to reviewing the presentation.

MARK. *(Beat.)* And that would have been a 'bad' thing why?

ROBERT. *(Setting down the pencil in exaggerated disbelief and slowly turns to Mark.)* Because, then there wouldn't have been any story about 'loaves and fishes', now would there? You'd have deleted an entire miracle. That would have left poor Matthew a little short of material to write about, don't you think?

MARK. *(Drawing the word out.)* Right. I think I'll take my sauce back to the kitchen. I wouldn't want it to get cold. Sorry I bothered you. *(Mark exits SR.)*

ROBERT. *(Returning to his presentation; quietly to himself.)* You ought to be.

Claudette and Heather enter SR. They are chatting excitedly and carrying shopping bags which they set on the table, oblivious to the presentation spread out there.

ROBERT. *(Rising angrily.)* Hey, I'm working here!

HEATHER. *(Hugging her father briefly.)* Hi, Dad. Did you miss us?

ROBERT. Like a toothache.

CLO. *(Ignoring Robert's remark.)* Of course he did; your father hates being home alone. Especially this close to a mealtime. He lives in constant fear that we'll forget to come home and feed him.

ROBERT. You're exaggerating a bit, aren't you?

CLO. Am I? How many times have you recited that silly headline that you're certain will make the front page of the local papers one day? "Emaciated Man Found Dead in Home. Neglectful Wife Found at Neiman Marcus."

ROBERT. *(Sitting again.)* Well, it just so happens that you're wrong. You could have stayed out for the rest of the day and I couldn't have cared less.

CLO. *(Sarcastically.)* Really?

HEATHER. He's telling the truth, Mom. Smell that? *(Both women inhale deeply.)* Mark's here, and that's his awesome spaghetti sauce; I'd bet my life on it.

CLO. I'd forgotten that he cooks, too. How wonderful!

ROBERT. I believe the word you were looking for is 'whipped'.

CLO. *(To Heather.)* Never mind your father. He can't help it. He never quite made the leap from the era of the "Honeymooners" to the current century. Take the groceries in the kitchen, dear, and I'll set the table.

Heather exits SL as Clo attempts to clear the table.

ROBERT. Whoa, whoa, whoa! I'm working here. You know this presentation is due on Monday.

CLO. *(Hands on hips.)* And you've chosen to work out here as opposed to working in your office because?

ROBERT. It stinks in there.

CLO. Yes, it does. Is it two weeks now, or three?

ROBERT. How would I know?

CLO. You'd know because the date coincides with your trip to the hardware store to buy the rat poison.

ROBERT. You can't prove the two events are connected.

CLO. *(Crossing to the buffet for dishes.)* 'Don't worry,' he said. 'The mice will leave the house in search of water,' he said.

ROBERT. The box said that, not me.

CLO. Did the box also say that, if there's a leak in the pipe behind the hot water heater in the basement, then the mice wouldn't have to venture outside for that final drink?

ROBERT. Again with the leaky pipe. You were there when I got the estimate from the plumber. You saw what it would cost to fix it.

CLO. (*Crossing to the table with dishes.*) Yes, I saw the estimate. I believe that's when you offered him our daughter in lieu of payment.

ROBERT. Come on, Clo. It was a joke; he knew I wasn't serious.

CLO. Yes, and he also knew that you weren't about to pay him that amount of money. Hence, we still have a leaky water pipe in the basement and a rotting rodent somewhere inside your office wall.

ROBERT. Well, that's all going to change. Once I nail this presentation and Al locks in the PEA contract—

CLO. The 'PEA' contract? Is that a vegetable or a urinary tract company?

ROBERT. Very funny.

CLO. Well, you must admit that it's a very strange name. What, exactly, is it?

ROBERT. An energy supplement.

CLO. An energy supplement—called PEA?

ROBERT. (*Dismissively.*) Tell you what, forget I mentioned it.

CLO. Don't be so touchy. Come on; give me the details.

ROBERT. Are you sure you're interested?

CLO. (*Setting the stack of dishes on the table and sitting.*) Of course.

ROBERT. (*Beat.*) Okay, so what do you want to know?

CLO. Everything. Like, who are you marketing it to?

ROBERT. Our target audience is the aging male population.

CLO. Just the male population?

ROBERT. Yes.

CLO. Why not women?

ROBERT. Can I at least finish explaining the product concept before you start picking it apart?

CLO. Sorry. You're right. Please continue.

ROBERT. So, they have this awesome product.

CLO. (*Chuckling.*) Awesome? Really?

ROBERT. Yes, awesome. The hook is this—(*Clo giggles more loudly; Robert fixes her with a scowl.*) And what, exactly, is so damn funny?

CLO. Come on, Robert. You're marketing a product called PEA to aging men. Tell me that you don't see the humor in that.

ROBERT. I can't believe you're joking about this product, Clo. Have you forgotten that the advertising dollars from this deal are going to pay for our daughter's wedding to Mr. Julia Child?

CLO. *(Placing the dishes around the table, avoiding the paperwork that is still spread out there.)* There's never a guarantee in advertising, Robert. You know that better than anyone. I believe, to date, every deal you've ever worked on has been *(forming quotation marks in the air with her fingers)* 'the next greatest thing.'

ROBERT. That's not true, Clo.

CLO. Isn't it? What about that contract with the athletic shoe company that was going to allow us to take an awesome vacation in 2002?

ROBERT. And what was wrong with the vacation we took in 2002?

CLO. Nothing, unless you consider that you promised me Vienna and instead we ended up at the Maple Heights Campground in Lakewood.

ROBERT. *(Defensively.)* Heather loved that big, blue concrete ox they have out front by the road!

CLO. You mean the one you encouraged her to climb on and she slipped and hurt her wrist?

ROBERT. It was only a sprain.

CLO. Yes, of course. You're right. So, let's put our 2002 vacation aside for the time being. How about the deal you and Al were going to finalize with Big Joe's Cheese Emporium? What year was that—2004? That contract was going to earn you enough money for us to buy a new car.

ROBERT. We did alright with that deal!

CLO. Robert, free cheese curds for a year is not exactly the same as a new car. Yes, you stored several cases of them in the garage for winter, but the smell just wasn't the same.

ROBERT. Go ahead . . . be negative. It doesn't matter. This deal is different; I can feel it.

HEATHER: *(Entering from the kitchen with a bowl of pasta, followed by Mark with a kettle of sauce.)* What do you feel, Dad?

ROBERT. Hungry. Let's eat.

CLO. *(Gesturing to the table.)* Are we eating on top of your presentation, or could you possibly set it aside for the time being?

Robert gathers up the papers as Heather and Mark set the food on the table.

HEATHER. What's your presentation on this time, Dad?

ROBERT. The ultimate energy supplement—PEA.

HEATHER. *(Beat.)* Tell me you're kidding.

ROBERT. *(Shaking his head.)* It's not what you think. PEA is an acronym.

HEATHER. *(Relieved.)* Oh, that's good. What does it stand for?

ROBERT. 'Patented Energy Additive'.

Clo gestures for everyone to be seated. Mark pulls out Heather's chair for her. Robert simply sits down.

HEATHER. An energy additive? That's interesting, if it actually works. What do people add it to?

ROBERT. (*Sitting and grabbing the bowl of pasta.*) Anything you want; that's the beauty of it. A man can stir it into his coffee, sprinkle it on his breakfast cereal—

MARK. (*Sitting and taking the pasta bowl from Robert.*) Can you put it in beer?

ROBERT. I suppose so; I hadn't thought about it. (*Thoughtfully.*) Hey, that could change my whole marketing approach if it works.

HEATHER. Why just men?

ROBERT. What?

HEATHER. Why just men? You said, "A man can put it in his coffee, his cereal, etc." What about women?

ROBERT. What about them?

HEATHER. This PEA stuff is for us, too. Right?

ROBERT. (*Beat.*) I suppose so. I don't think the manufacturer is currently considering that.

MARK. Really? Why not?

CLO. (*Aside to Mark, who hands her the pasta.*) Robert is still struggling with the whole 'women's lib' thing. Men come first. Actually, in a case like this, that's a good thing. Let men be the guinea pigs. If this PEA stuff works, I'm sure women will be able to score some in a dark alley somewhere. But, more importantly, if there are some unforeseen side-effects, only men will be running around hairless—or with a third eye in the middle of their foreheads.

ROBERT. Very funny. It just so happens that the company that manufactures this stuff has a very masculine image, that's all.

HEATHER. You say that like it's a *good* thing.

ROBERT. Listen, kiddo. There's one thing they teach you in the advertising arena. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Braxton, the company behind this stuff, is currently worth \$58 billion. If they got there by marketing solely to men, they've obviously done it very well.

CLO. Just think, though. If they included women, they could potentially double their worth.

MARK. Or better! I read somewhere that women make the majority of spending decisions in a household.

ROBERT. Well, they've always *spent* the most, but I'm not sure that's the same thing.

CLO. (*Handing the pasta to Heather. To Robert.*) What time is the presentation on Monday?

ROBERT. 10 o'clock, but I've got to be at the office early to do a trial run of the sales pitch for some co-workers.

MARK. Good idea. Practice makes perfect.

ROBERT. (*To Mark.*) Being a chef wasn't enough? Now you're a life coach, too?

HEATHER. Mark is right, Dad. But you'll be great. You always are.

MARK. Hey, why don't you practice it on us this afternoon? We'd love to see it.

CLO. Mark, have you forgotten what today is?

MARK. I believe it's Saturday.

ROBERT. Not just ‘Saturday’. It’s the third Saturday of the month. (*Mark maintains a ‘deer in the headlights’ look; Robert continues.*) It’s poker day, remember? You, me, Al and Pete all sit around the table and I take your money.

CLO. But Robert, I thought you were working on your presentation. Can you really afford to take time to play poker today?

ROBERT. Is it my fault that my boss happens to like to gamble a little once a month? You should be glad I’ve got a boss that’s down to earth enough to socialize with his employees.

CLO. (*Nonchalantly.*) I’m thrilled, believe me.

ROBERT. Besides, all work and no play makes Jack—or in this case ‘me’—a very dull boy. (*Robert’s phone rings; he checks the screen.*) Well, speak of the devil. (*He answers the call.*) Hey, Al. Everything’s set for the game. Mark is already here, and I’m in the process of kicking the women out— . . . What’s that? Slow down, Al. You’re talking so fast I thought you said— . . . Well, yes. I’ve got the presentation here. We’re in good shape for Monday. . . . (*Robert gets up and starts pacing around the room through the remainder of the conversation.*) 3 o’clock today? But that’s not possible! Are you sure you got the story straight on this Braxton CEO? . . . Well sure, the charts are done, but I— . . . Now don’t panic, Al. . . . Why shouldn’t you panic? Um, just because. We’ll handle this, okay? . . . Sure, see you in a few.

CLO. Robert, what did Al want? What’s at 3 o’clock today?

ROBERT. (*At SR, by easel.*) There’s been a slight change in plans. The CEO of the company that manufactures PEA flew in early. They want to view the presentation today so the CEO can catch an early flight back tomorrow.

MARK. Today? Can you do that? I mean—are you ready?

HEATHER. (*Crossing to Robert.*) Oh, Daddy, this is terrible! I know how important this is to you. I know you were counting on the money from this contract to pay for my wedding.

ROBERT. I haven’t even told you the worst part. It seems the CEO is brand new . . . only been on the job for two weeks.

MARK. That’s not good. New employees are always trying extra hard to impress everyone. Your presentation is going to have to be perfect; you’re going to have to knock that man’s socks off.

ROBERT. I’m afraid that’s impossible.

HEATHER. Why, Daddy?

ROBERT. It would seem that the new Braxton CEO wears nylons, not socks.

CLO. You mean . . .

ROBERT. Yup, her name is Ms. Price, and she’s a she.

Lights down.

Act One, Scene Two

At lights up, it is 1:30 P.M. Robert and Mark are positioning a flip-chart stand at CS. Clo and Heather enter SR, carrying their purses. The two women address the men as they approach.

CLO. Robert, this is ridiculous. Heather and I just got back from the mall, and you want us to leave again? Are you sure you don't want us to stay and help with anything?

HEATHER. Yes, Mom and I discussed it, and we feel terrible leaving. How can we possibly go out and enjoy ourselves when we know what you're going through here?

ROBERT. Don't be ridiculous. Besides, the last thing I need is distractions. And wherever there's women, there's distractions.

MARK. And that's a bad thing?

ROBERT. It is today.

The two women cross to the door at US. Heather remembers something and crosses back to Robert.

HEATHER. Oh, Dad. I almost forgot. Aunt Milly said that she sent me a package. If it comes, you'll have to sign for it. Can you do that for me?

ROBERT. *(Distracted.)* Sign for a package. Sure thing.

HEATHER. And Daddy . . .

ROBERT. *(Still positioning the easel.)* Uh huh?

HEATHER. Please put it someplace safe, okay?

ROBERT. Someplace safe; got it.

HEATHER. I'm serious, Dad. The last time you signed for a package was when Aunt Milly mailed my Christmas present in 2005.

ROBERT. And?

HEATHER. I couldn't open it until Easter. It took us that long to find where you'd put the box.

MARK. *(Crossing SR to the women, reassuringly.)* I'll make sure it gets put someplace safe. Now you'd better go. Your father wants to practice his presentation—you know, run through it in front of us guys a few times before that CEO gets here.

CLO. *(Exiting.)* Goodbye, Robert. Good luck with the sales pitch. And Mark, pay close attention. We're going to want to hear all about it—every detail—when we get back.

ROBERT. *(Still distracted.)* Sure thing.

MARK. They were talking to me.

ROBERT. Yup.

The women begin to exit as Al enters US.

AL. Hello Clo, Heather. Are you leaving?

CLO. Robert thinks it would be best to eliminate any distractions.

AL. You, a distraction? Only in the best sense of the word.

CLO. That's very sweet, Al. *(She pats his cheek fondly.)* But we're out of here. He's all yours.

Clo and Heather exit.

ROBERT. *(Noticing Al.)* Hey Boss, how much time do we have before she arrives?

AL. *(Checking his watch.)* It's 1:30 now; I'm guessing we've got about one and a half hours.

ROBERT. Good. That will give us plenty of time to go over the presentation and fine tune it.

MARK. What do you want me to do?

ROBERT. *(Pulling out two chairs from the table and gesturing toward them.)* You and Al sit here and let me run through it. Then you can critique it and we'll go from there. *(The two men sit. Robert shuffles through his notes and straightens the flip chart a final time. He clears his throat and begins.)* To set the scene, picture this. *Robert displays the first page of the flip chart. It shows tables arranged at a wedding reception. You're at a wedding. The venue, the bride, and the entire bridal party are all breathtaking. Polished crystal glistens in the candlelight and enormous floral arrangements line the tables. (Robert flips to the next page. It shows the father of the bride seated alone, head in hands.)* At the side of the room, an older gentleman sits on a chair. He is the father of the bride. His hands are folded quietly in his lap. He isn't smiling; he isn't dancing. He isn't happy. Is it because he knows he has to pay for all of this extravagance? No. It's because he's too tired to enjoy any of it. For more than a year, he's listened as his wife and daughter planned this special day. He was spared having to voice an opinion on the color of the bridal party attire, the menu for the meal, or what band they should get. All he really had to do was walk his daughter down the aisle and give her away. All he really had to do was enjoy himself and the day. But he can't. He's just too tired. *(As Robert flips to the next chart, the house phone begins to ring. Robert glances toward the phone, obviously annoyed. To Mark.)* Answer that.

MARK. Me? *(Robert throws him a look and Mark crosses toward the house phone. When he is halfway there, his own smart phone begins to ring. He checks the screen, then points to the house phone as Robert had done. To Al.)* Would you mind getting that, Al?

AL. Do I have a choice? *(Al crosses and answers the phone.)* Hello?

MARK. *(Answering his phone.)* Hi sweetie. You just left; what's up?

AL. Say again, who's this? *(Aside, to Robert and Mark.)* This dude must have just jumped off his camel. I can't understand a damn thing he's saying.

ROBERT. There ought to be a law. What's he selling?

AL. I'm not sure. *(Listening to the phone closely for a beat.)* He either wants to repair your computer or he's offering you a life insurance policy.

MARK. Yes, I'm sure your father remembers that he's supposed to keep an eye open for the package. *(Beat. Turning aside so Robert will be less likely to hear.)* Don't worry, Heather. He won't lose it.

Robert scowls at Mark just as his own phone rings. He checks the screen, rolls his eyes theatrically, and answers it.

ROBERT. Hello, Millie. What's up? . . . No, Clo isn't here. She and Heather went shopping—again. Just out of curiosity, if you wanted to talk to them, why did you call my phone? . . . *(Looking at Al.)* The house line was busy. Right. . . . *(Al is still listening to the handset of the house phone, enjoying the diversion.)* So, you want to know—if Clo and Heather aren't home—why is the phone line tied up? Because Al is talking to someone. . . . Who's Al? He's my boss.

MARK. *(Still aside.)* I promise I'll keep an eye on the package and make sure your father doesn't lose it.

ROBERT. *(Still talking to Millie.)* What is my boss doing at my house, talking on my phone, on a Saturday afternoon?

AL. Listen buddy, I hate to cut you off but—

ROBERT. Well, we happen to be working on a very important presentation and—

AL. *(Into phone.)* Hello? Comprende English? I said—

ROBERT. *(Rolling his eyes again.)* Yes, I suppose we should all probably get off the phone. We'd get more done. But I—

The US door opens and Pete enters. He is carrying a small package and looks perturbed.

PETE. Doesn't anyone around here ever answer the phone? *(Taking in the scene.)* Oh. Right, then. I'll take a number, I suppose, and wait until someone is free. *(He places the package on the table and sits at right end of table.)*

MARK. Listen, sweetie, I've got to go. . . . Yes, love you, too. *(He disconnects the call. Beat, then with tenderness.)* Women. *(Sits at table.)*

ROBERT. *(Crossing SL toward Al.)* No, the mailman hasn't come yet, but I have strict orders to watch for something you sent and—*(Listening, resting his free hand on his hip and rolling his eyes.)* Yes, I'm sure it's very special. Gotta go, now, Millie. We'll talk again soon. *(Robert disconnects, shaking his head angrily. Crossing back to easel.)* Women!

AL. Tell you what you do, buddy. First, learn how to speak English. The man of the house is named "Rob-ert", not "Roe-beart"—and it's "house", not "hoose", and "good", not "goot". Got that? I'm sure they offer a course in speaking proper English over there somewhere, maybe in that distant camel tent. Next, take me off of your calling list. I don't want any of whatever you're peddling—not today, not tomorrow, not next week or next year. Got it? Oh yes, and have a nice day! *(Slamming the handset down on the receiver.)* Damn camel jockey! *(Sits at left end of table.)*

PETE. *(Noting that everyone is off of the phone.)* Well, now that that's behind us, are we ready to play some cards?

ROBERT. Sorry, Pete. There's been a change in plans. My presentation got moved up to this afternoon. No time to explain.

PETE. This afternoon? Wow. That stinks. So, I assume we won't be playing our usual round of poker?

AL. I'm afraid not. Robert has got to nail this presentation; there's a lot riding on it.

ROBERT. Yeah, like enough money to pay for Heather's upcoming wedding.

MARK. Really? Is that what you want to do with the money? I'm touched; truly I am.

PETE. I see. Is there anything I can do?

ROBERT. Not unless you're an expert on selling energy supplements to older men.

PETE. How old?

ROBERT. Our age. Why do you ask?

PETE. Well, if you were marketing it to really old men—say 60 or older—you should use naked women.

MARK. Really?

PETE. Sure.

ROBERT. So tell me Pete, why would that work specifically for men over 60 and not the rest of us?

PETE. (*Beat, rising.*) See? That's why you're in sales and I install furnaces for a living. You're absolutely right. It would work for us, too. Your instincts are amazing.

ROBERT. And you're an idiot, Pete—even if you are the best neighbor I've ever had.

PETE. So, if this presentation is this afternoon, shouldn't you be at the office or something?

AL. Nah, we're doing it right here. The Braxton CEO will be taking a taxi here from the airport . . . Probably around 3 o'clock.

PETE. Braxton?

AL. They're the company that manufactures PEA.

MARK. Don't ask. Dumb product name; we get it.

PETE. Okay, (*drawing the word out for emphasis*) and the presentation is this afternoon? That's kinda short notice, don't ya think? Are you ready for this, Robert? I mean, what's it going to take to knock this guy's socks off?

MARK. My best guess is a stunning performance by any one of the Chippendale dancers.

PETE. What?

AL. The guy's a gal. We've got to knock her *nylons* off—figuratively speaking, of course.

PETE. Of course. (*To Robert.*) So let me see if I've got this straight. This is a very important presentation, the success of which is going to determine how much money you'll have to spend on Heather and Mark's wedding. So, it goes without saying that you've got to really nail it.

ROBERT. You said it.

PETE. But, to do that, you've got to sell an energy supplement designed for older men to a woman. (*To Al.*) How old is this dame?

AL. (*Shrugging.*) Forty, fifty—I'm not sure.

PETE. (*Crossing to Robert.*) So, you've got to sell an energy supplement for older men to a woman of unknown age. And this all has to transpire in a few hours. How, exactly, are you going to do that?

ROBERT. No sweat. The presentation is all set. I've got the forecasted sales all figured out, the perspective target audience nailed down, and oh yes, (*moving to the flip chart*) I've got the charts to refer to so that I don't forget anything.

PETE. (*Snapping his fingers.*) I'm so glad you said that; it reminded me of why I came over early. (*Crossing to the package and picking it up.*) The postman left this package in my box by mistake. It's addressed to Heather. I brought it right over so I wouldn't forget. (*Pete hands the package to Robert.*)

ROBERT. (*Reading the label.*) Ah yes, Heather warned me to watch out for this. Her Aunt Millie has already called to see if this thing had arrived yet.

AL. Something important?

ROBERT. (*Shrugging.*) Some kind of gift she sent for Heather.

MARK. As worried as the women were that you'd lose it, I'll bet it's something valuable.

ROBERT. (*Tossing the package onto the table.*) Who knows? I haven't got time to worry about it now.

MARK. (*Rising.*) But you said you'd look after it and put it somewhere safe.

ROBERT. What—the table isn't safe?

MARK. It's not the safest place I can think of.

ROBERT. Well then, why don't you just imagine where that safest place is, then go and put it there.

MARK. Oh no, I'm not going to take responsibility for that. Heather entrusted it to you. Who knows what can happen before she and Clo get back? The package could get misplaced, or knocked off of the table and broken. (*Beat.*) Say, you don't think that there's a chance that it's already broken, do you?

PETE. If it is, I didn't do it! All I did was walk it over. (*Sits at end of table, SR.*)

ROBERT. Did you have to sign for it?

PETE. Nope.

ROBERT. Then we're off the hook. We can simply say that it was broken when we opened it. Better yet, we can say that it never arrived.

MARK. So, you think that it might be broken after all?

ROBERT. (*Picking up the package and shaking it vigorously.*) Nope. It doesn't rattle.

AL. Maybe you ought to open it—just to be sure.

ROBERT. Now that's about the dumbest idea I've heard yet.

AL. Why?

ROBERT. (*Gesturing with the package.*) See how small this box is? It doesn't take a genius to figure out that whatever's inside is even smaller. By the time you open the box and shake out all of those damn packing peanuts, or pull out the wadded tissue paper, what's left inside is going to be that much easier to lose.

MARK. (*Checking at window US.*) But, the postman is only one or two blocks over. If it is broken, we could still catch him and have him fill out a report or something.

ROBERT. Well, *I'm* not opening it.

PETE. (*Rising.*) Oh for gosh sakes! Give me the damn box. I'll open it and then we'll know for sure. Geez, Robert. If it's really such a chore to open a teeny, weeny little box, maybe *you* ought to be taking that energy supplement you're peddling. Sounds like it might do you some good.

ROBERT. Very funny. (*Pete tears open the box as the other men gather round to watch. He pulls out both packing peanuts and wadded tissue paper before extracting a small bag.*) See! What did I tell you? (*Pete sets the bag and box on the table and extracts a folded piece of paper from the box.*) What's that . . . some kind of instructions?

PETE. (*Unfolding the paper.*) Nope. It looks like a poem.

ROBERT. A poem?

PETE. Yup.

MARK. Then what's in the bag—a miniature Longfellow?

ROBERT. (*Picking up the bag and peering inside.*) It looks like some sort of ring. (*He extracts the ring and hands it to Mark. He then takes the sheet of paper from Pete. He straightens it and reads.*)

Life's a circle, roundabout;
a world no one can figure out.
Man sees that world in black and white,
convinced that what he sees is right.
But a woman has a different view,
in shades of gray and far more true.
These views, by fate, must collide
if man should ever take a bride.
This simple ring—a band of gold—
should not be lightly bought or sold,
For to wear it is to see the side
of life your gender has never spied."

AL. What in the hell is that all about?

ROBERT. (*Refolding the paper.*) It's about the necessity for us to have Aunt Millie committed to an asylum, and the sooner the better.

MARK. (*Studying the ring closely.*) What do you suppose it means by "to wear it is to see the side of life your gender has never spied"?

ROBERT. What difference does it make?

MARK. (*Sits at table.*) I don't know; I was just wondering, that's all.

PETE. Sounds to me, Mark, that if you put it on, you'll see the world just like a woman does.

ROBERT. In other words, it won't change a damn thing for Mark.

MARK. Very funny. I'm going to choose to ignore that.

ROBERT. What else is new? Now, could we possibly stick that thing on top of the fridge? I'm sure it will be nice and safe there until the women get back. I'd like to run through this presentation a few times before that woman—

AL. Ms. Price.

ROBERT. What?

AL. Ms. Price. That's the CEO's name.

ROBERT. (*Beat.*) I see. And that's an important detail why?

PETE. Wow, you're really dumb when it comes to women. If you don't call a woman by her name, she's going to be insulted. Even *I* know that.

ROBERT. (*Sitting at the table and rubbing his face with his hands. Exasperated.*) I wonder if a beer would help.

PETE. Couldn't hurt.

MARK. (*Picking up the bag with the ring. Thoughtfully.*) Wait a minute, guys. If this ring does what that poem implies, it could be exactly what Robert needs. It could make or break his presentation.

ROBERT. He's hallucinating. Never mind a beer. I want whatever he's on.

AL. Hold on, Robert. The kid may have a point.

ROBERT. How's that?

AL. Think about it. If you could really see the world the way a woman does, then you'd know what Ms. Price is going to think of your presentation before you even give it. Am I right, Pete?

PETE. (*Putting his hands up in a defenseless gesture.*) Don't ask me! I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the possibility of seeing the world through a woman's eyes. (*Shuddering.*) Geez!

MARK. Al's right. Robert, all you have to do is put the ring on and—

ROBERT. Oh no. No, no, no. I'm not putting that ring on.

AL. Why not? What have you got to lose?

MARK. Yeah, Robert. I think you should do it.

ROBERT. (*Rising.*) Have you all lost your mind? Some idiot stuffs a ring into a box with a poem and you guys are convinced that men and women see the world differently, and that putting on the stupid ring will change that!

PETE. (*Stepping next to Robert.*) I'm with him. It's creepy. Besides, we have no way of knowing if it even works.

AL. As your boss, I could order you to put it on.

ROBERT. Yup. And then you could immediately fire me for not following your order, because there's no way in hell that I'm putting that ring on.

AL. Then how are we supposed to tell if it works or not?

PETE. Have Mark put it on.

ROBERT. (*Chuckling.*) Like that's going to tell us anything. He's already comfortable cooking, and cleaning, and God knows what else. How are we supposed to tell if it's the ring or just his feminine side coming out?

AL. Robert is right. Mark's generation has blurred the lines between what men and women do. The roles aren't so distinct for these kids.

MARK. (*Rising.*) Okay. Maybe I wouldn't be a very good choice. (*Beat.*) What about you, Al? Why don't you put it on?

AL. (*Rising.*) I can't.

MARK. Why?

AL. (*Crossing DSL.*) Because I have to remain objective and view the presentation from my company's standpoint. If I were suddenly all 'womanized', I wouldn't even have a clue what I was looking at. I can't afford to take that kind of a chance.

MARK. So, if I'm not a good choice, Robert refuses to do it, and Al can't for professional reasons, that leaves—

They all look at Pete.

PETE. (*Beat. Rising.*) Oh no, no way! I'm not going near that thing, and that's final!

ROBERT. Why, are you afraid it actually has some kind of power? (*Beat.*) You are, aren't you? You're afraid that it will turn you into a woman!

PETE. I am not afraid! Me—a woman? Ha! I'm just tired of being the 'fill-in'.

ROBERT. The 'fill-in'?

PETE. Al gets invited to play cards because he's your boss. Mark is nearly family. But me, I'm just here because you need a fourth player.

ROBERT. (*Returning to the flip chart to review the presentation. Patronizingly.*) That's not true. I've known you for years; you're my neighbor.

PETE. Oh yeah? Well, you've got other neighbors—on both sides of the street. Go get one of them to put that thing on, because I'm not doing it!

AL. Come on, Pete. How many years have I known you?

PETE. (*Hesitantly.*) I don't know. Six, seven . . .

AL. And in all that time, how many times have I asked you for a favor?

PETE. Never, but—

AL. Do you want Robert to lose his job?

PETE. Well no, but—

AL. Do you want to see him lose this house and have to move?

PETE. Lose the house?

AL. He can't make mortgage payments without a job. And sales is a tough profession under the most normal circumstances. (*Beat.*) Would you like to sell a product called PEA to a woman, when your target audience is aging men? Can you imagine how hard that must be?

PETE. But—

AL. And when he loses that sale—and you're responsible for his failure—how are you ever going to live with yourself? *(Pete picks up the bag with the ring. He opens the bag and dumps the ring into his hand. He stares at it for a beat, then looks around at the other men, one by one.)* Come on, Pete. What can it hurt? It's just a ring. And even if it does have some kind of special power, which I doubt, you can always take it off if you don't like it. Right?

MARK. Al's right; just take it off if it feels weird.

ROBERT. *(Sarcastically, still reviewing the charts.)* Don't worry. If you head for my old lady's closet to try on a few skirts, we'll do our best to hold you back.

PETE. *(Nervously.)* Why do I let you guys talk me into this stuff? *(To Robert.)* If I start acting like a woman, you owe me big time!

ROBERT. *(Distracted.)* Sure.

Pete stares at the ring for a beat, then he closes his eyes and hurriedly slips it onto his pinky finger. He slowly he opens his eyes, shudders, and looks at the others.

MARK. Did it work?

AL. Are you seeing the world like a woman?

PETE. Well, you still look butt-ugly, but I'm not sure that's a good test.

MARK. Do you feel any different?

PETE. *(Beat.)* No. I don't think so. But then, how am I supposed to know what a woman feels like?

MARK. He's got a point there.

AL. Robert, why don't you just give your presentation and we'll see how Pete likes it?

PETE. Good idea. Let's see this presentation. Then I can take this stupid thing off.

Robert goes to the flip chart, repositions it for Pete's benefit, and clears his throat. Pete, Al and Mark all sit at the table, a captive audience. Robert flips to the chart with the wedding scene.

ROBERT. So, imagine this wedding scene, if you will. The guests have all arrived, the cake and decorations are 'picture perfect', and the meal was exquisite. You're the father of the bride, and everyone is milling around your daughter. She's breathtakingly beautiful. And where are you? You're sitting on the sidelines, exhausted by what has transpired throughout the day. The celebration will go on for several more hours, but instead of enjoying your daughter's special day, you're wondering how you're going to make it through until the band packs up.

PETE. Who's the band?

ROBERT. What?

PETE. I said, 'who's the band?' What band is going to be playing?

ROBERT. *(Beat.)* I don't know what band is playing; it's some band that plays for weddings. What difference does it make? This isn't real, you know.

PETE. But aren't you supposed to make it seem real?

ROBERT. (*Beat.*) You're right. (*To himself, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.*) Make it real. Hmm. (*To others.*) Okay, the band is Styx.

MARK. What—not the Lawrence Welk orchestra?

ROBERT. Very funny. Can I continue?

PETE. Well, forgive us for being curious. Go on.

ROBERT. Alright. So, like I said, it's your daughter's wedding, but you're too exhausted to even think about mingling with the guests. (*Pete is running his hands over the tablecloth, smoothing out wrinkles. Robert stops talking and studies Pete.*) Am I boring you?

PETE. No. (*Beat.*) Well, actually, yes. I mean, I get it; the man is tired. He doesn't have the energy to participate. But . . .

ROBERT. But what?

PETE. But I don't care. You haven't given me a reason to care.

ROBERT. I haven't given you what?

AL. I think what Pete is trying to say is that the character really isn't sympathetic enough. We don't feel sorry for him. Sure, we get that he's 'physically' tired—

MARK. But what is he feeling 'emotionally'?

ROBERT. (*Beat.*) Are you all wearing that stupid ring? You should hear yourselves! PEA is a supplement that enhances a man's physical energy level; it's not some kind of happy pill! Who cares if he's 'happy'!

PETE. Well, I think Ms. Price will—that's who.

AL. Pete is right. You know how women are. If you don't make her all teary-eyed, she's probably not going to go for it.

ROBERT. And how, exactly, am I supposed to do that?

PETE. How would *I* know? You just wanted me to put on this stupid ring and tell you what I thought of the presentation. Well, that's what I think. That, and (*crossing to the DSR window*) are these new curtains? I don't remember that lovely floral pattern. It goes so well with the walnut window trim.

ROBERT. (*Flipping the chart back to the cover page.*) Forget it. This was a dumb idea. I'll take my chances with Ms. Price.

MARK. (*Rising.*) I don't know if that's such a good idea. Listen, Robert, all you have to do is add a little emotion to the presentation.

AL. Yes. Show us how the father feels—

ROBERT. He feels tired!

MARK. On the inside.

ROBERT. He's tired on the inside *and* the outside. He's tired all over, okay?

PETE. So show us that, buddy.

ROBERT. Show you . . . how?

MARK. Well, maybe you should put on the ring. Just for a little while.

AL. *(Rising and crossing to Robert.)* I think the kid is right. If you put the ring on long enough to tap into the father's emotions, then you'll know how to show them to this Ms. Price.

ROBERT. I told you before, I'm not touching that ring.

AL. Listen Robert, you know how important this presentation is. If you're not willing to put on some stupid little ring just long enough to see if it works, then I seriously have to question the wisdom of my decision to give you a stab at getting us this account.

ROBERT. I never thought you'd stoop so low as to play the "boss" card.

AL. Well, I am. And as your boss, I am ordering you to put on that ring.

Pete stands, removes the ring from his finger and hands it to Robert. Robert hesitates, and Al crosses his arms and stares at Robert. At last, Robert takes the ring, glares at the three men, and forces it onto his pinky finger. He studies it for a long moment and shutters.

MARK. Do you feel any different? *(Beat. Robert doesn't answer. The men exchange a look and Al presses on.)*

AL. Okay, Robert. Now put yourself in that father's shoes. What is he feeling as he watches everything that is going on at the wedding? What's it like for him, just sitting in that chair?

PETE. *(Massaging his pinky finger where the ring had been.)* Boy, am I glad that thing is on his finger and off of mine.

MARK. *(To Pete.)* You mean, it really made you feel like a woman?

PETE. I don't know what it made me feel like. But I'll tell you this, if I ever show interest in curtains again, shoot me, okay?

AL. Come on, Robert. What's going through that head of yours? Can you feel what that father of the bride is feeling?

ROBERT. *(Softly.)* That's actually going to be me.

AL. What is? What are you talking about?

Robert sits at the table and runs his hands over his face before placing them, palm down, on the table. He looks at each man, then shakes his head sadly.

ROBERT. When Heather gets married; that's actually going to be me.

MARK. Are you okay, Robert?

PETE. Can I get you a beer or something?

ROBERT. No. No beer. Alcohol is a depressant; I don't think I could drink one right now.

PETE. Alcohol is a *what*?

MARK. Did I hear him right? Did he say that he couldn't drink?

Robert rests his arms on the table, begins to sob uncontrollably and rests his head on his arms. His shoulders jerk with each new sob.

AL. What is it? What's wrong?

MARK. Are you okay, Robert? Do you want me to call Clo?

ROBERT. (*Raising his head. Between sobs.*) It's just so sad.

AL. What's so sad?

ROBERT. The father . . . the wedding . . . the whole thing. He feels so left out, so unappreciated. Don't you see? The entire event was planned without his help. He wasn't asked his opinion on the band; he didn't have a say in the menu that was served to the guests—a meal, by the way, that *he* is paying for. He didn't even have a choice in the floral arrangements . . . And he *hates* lilies! (*Robert lowers his head and continues to sob. Mark crosses behind him and places his hands on Robert's shoulders. After a beat, Robert raises his head again.*) And do you know the worst part? If he left the reception right now, they wouldn't even miss him! (*Robert sobs all the harder and lowers his head again.*)

PETE. Why sure they'd miss him. Doesn't he have to sign the check to pay for the damn thing?

MARK. (*To Al.*) This is bad—real bad. We've got to fix this!

AL. We will, we will. (*To Robert.*) That's great, Robert. You did it. Now we know what the father is feeling. We can incorporate that into the presentation and be ready before Ms. Price gets here.

ROBERT. (*Raising his head.*) Maybe . . . maybe his daughter will get divorced, then—if she remarries—he'll have a second chance. He'll get to choose a menu, pick out the floral arrangements . . . and pay for it all over again! (*Robert cries inconsolably.*)

AL. Now, now, Robert. It's alright. Let's take the ring off, shall we? (*Still crying, Robert raises his head and looks at Al but makes no attempt at removing the ring.*) Here, I'll help you, okay? (*Al crosses to stand by Robert at the table. He reaches down and takes Robert's hand, then he tries to pull the ring off of Robert's finger. He looks at each of the men, then tries again.*) It's . . . it's stuck! (*Al and Pete rise. Robert stares at Al and sobs anew.*)

MARK. What do you mean, 'it's stuck'?

AL. Exactly what I said! It won't come off!

Robert straightens up and tries to wrestle the ring from his finger, with no luck.

PETE. This is terrible! He can't give the presentation like this; he's a mess! (*To Al.*) What are you going to do?

AL. What am *I* going to do? How should I know!

MARK. I'll get some ice water. If we soak his hand in it, his fingers should shrink a little. That might do it. (*Mark begins to cross to the kitchen.*)

PETE. My wife had a ring stuck on her hand once. She put dish soap on her finger and it slid right off.

MARK. I'll grab some of that, too. (*Mark exits SL.*)

Robert is still trying to remove the ring. Al pulls Pete aside.

AL. Do you realize how terrible this is?

PETE. Me? It was your idea for him to put that stupid thing on!

AL. It doesn't matter whose idea it was!

PETE. Well, at least he's in touch with the 'girlie side' of his sales pitch now. When that Ms. Price gets here, he's goin' to have her eating out of the palm of his hand.

AL. (*Pointing at Robert.*) Like that?! He's a mess! He won't even be able to *give* the presentation unless we get that damn ring off and get him straightened out! What time is it?

PETE. 2 o'clock.

AL. Good, we should still have plenty of time to—

The doorbell rings; Al and Pete exchange a look and Robert starts to rise and Al and Pete force him back into the chair.

ROBERT. (*Calling out; sniffing.*) Who is it?

The doorbell rings again.

AL. (*Grabbing Pete by the shoulders.*) You don't suppose it's that Price dame, do you? She can't be here already!

PETE. How should I know who it is! But if it *is* her, we're in deep trouble. (*To Mark, who is still offstage.*) Hurry up with that damn ice water already!

ROBERT. (*Wailing again.*) It can't be Ms. Price; it just can't. She's not supposed to be here for another hour!

AL. Don't worry; we'll get that ring off and everything will be just fine. (*Robert wails louder.*) I said don't worry—we'll get the damn ring off, okay?

ROBERT. (*Between sobs.*) That's not it; I don't care about the ring.

PETE. You don't? Then what's the matter—why are you sobbing like a baby?

ROBERT. If she *is* early, what will I do? I haven't got a thing to wear! (*Robert bursts into tears again.*)

Lights down. Intermission.

Act Two

Lights up on Al, Pete, and Mark sitting around the table, causally eating pizza.

PETE. That was a close call.

AL. Not really. If we hadn't been so fixated on that damn ring, we would have remembered that it's poker Saturday.

MARK. And?

AL. Parker's Pizza Palace delivers a sausage, pepperoni, and three-cheese pizza every third Saturday of the month at precisely 2 o'clock.

MARK. That's right. Poor Robert freaked out over nothing.

PETE. Speaking of which, where is he?

MARK. Not sure, but when I went to check on him and let him know that it was just the pizza guy, he was on his hands and knees in his closet looking for—and I quote—the perfect pair of shoes to go with his new khakis.

PETE. Oh boy, that doesn't sound good.

AL. Nah, you're making too much of it. He'll be fine. I've known Robert for many years, and he's not going to let a little thing like a ring throw him off his game.

MARK. I hope you're right.

AL. Of course I'm right.

PETE. *(Shaking his head.)* I don't know. Don't forget; that's no ordinary ring.

AL. Don't be stupid. There's no such thing as a magical ring that makes men act like women and women act like men. You're watching way too much TV. *(Al rises and checks for Robert at the door SR.)*

PETE. So, what are you saying—that Robert wasn't blubbering like a baby before the pizza arrived?

MARK. Yeah, and Pete wasn't admiring the curtains?

AL. *(Crossing back to the table.)* I'm not saying anything of the sort, but you've got to remember—Robert is under a lot of pressure. He was supposed to have the entire weekend to polish his presentation. Now he's got to give it today—and at his dining room table. Can you imagine what that's like?

PETE. Nope. But then, I can't imagine searching for the right shoes to go with my khakis, either.

AL. *(To Mark.)* Maybe you should go and check on him again.

MARK. Why me? Why can't Pete go this time?

AL. Because you're family, that's why.

MARK. That's a dumb reason!

PETE. I don't think so. (*The doorbell rings just as Robert enters SR. He is wearing neatly pressed khakis, a pink dress shirt, and white dress shoes. There is a white kerchief tied around his neck. He stops at the table and surveys the half-eaten pizza and the seated men. The doorbell rings a second time. The seated men look Robert over from head to foot, then they look at the door, then back at Robert again. Robert moves toward the door as the men get up. Pete grabs him by the arm as he passes.*) Where ya goin' there, buddy?

The doorbell rings a third time.

ROBERT. (*Nodding toward the US door.*) To answer that. Where did you think I was going?

PETE. (*Looking Robert up and down again.*) My guess would be your senior prom or a local pimp convention.

ROBERT. Very funny. (*He pulls loose from Pete's grip and takes a step toward the door. Mark rushes over and grabs Robert by the arm, stopping him halfway to the door.*)

MARK. Why don't you let Al get the door and we'll go see what else is in your closet, okay?

ROBERT. Why? What's wrong with what I have on?

PETE. You're kidding, right?

The doorbell rings a final time.

AL. (*Crossing to door.*) I'll get the door. Maybe we'll get lucky and Ms. Price will be accompanied by a seeing-eye dog.

PETE. Yeah, a blind one.

MARK. I don't think there's any such thing as a blind guide dog.

PETE. We can hope, can't we?

Pete and Mark position themselves in front of Robert, trying to shield him from view. Al opens the door UC and Fran is framed in the doorway, waiting to be invited in. She is dressed in a professionally-tailored suit and is carrying a briefcase.

FRAN. (*Extending her hand in greeting.*) Hello. I'm—

AL. Yes, we know. We've been expecting you . . . But you're a little early.

FRAN. You have? And I am?

AL. Yes. (*Beat.*) Won't you come in? (*He steps aside and gestures her into the room. As she enters, Robert busies himself by primping, and adjusting the collars on Pete and Mark's shirts.*)

FRAN. Thank you. (*To Al.*) Are you Robert Jones?

AL. No, I'm Al, Robert's boss.

FRAN. Robert's boss? Are you here on a social call? I don't know too many bosses that spend their weekends at an employee's house.

PETE. Heck, Al is here on the third Saturday of every month. He's got a standing engagement to play—

MARK. (*Stepping in front of Pete.*) What he means to say is that Al is here to make sure that the sales presentation is engaging. (*Fran looks confused, so Mark continues.*) Don't worry, if anyone can market PEA to old men, Robert is just the man to do it.

FRAN. I'm afraid you lost me.

MARK. It's okay. You might just say that Al likes to see his employees succeed.

FRAN. (*To Al.*) I must say, I'm impressed. You must be a very dedicated boss.

AL. I certainly try.

FRAN. (*To Mark.*) Well then, you're certainly not Robert Jones.

MARK. No, Ma'am. I'm Mark—a future son-in-law.

FRAN. Robert's future son-in-law, or Al's future son-in-law?

MARK. Robert's, Ma'am.

FRAN. I see, but please, call me Fran. 'Ma'am' makes a woman feel so old! (*To Pete.*) Well then, are you Robert?

PETE. (*Chuckling.*) No, Ma'am. And right now, I wouldn't want to be him for all of the tea in China.

AL. (*To Pete.*) Don't you mean all of the tequila in Mexico?

PETE. Now that you mention it, that would work, too.

Robert pushes his way between Pete and Mark and extends his hand in greeting.

ROBERT. I'm Robert Jones. It's a pleasure to meet you.

FRAN. Really? I certainly don't hear that very often. I'm generally the last person people want to see.

PETE. Well, that's understandable. There's lots of us 'old school' fellas left, ya know. We're not used to havin' women in positions of power. Heck, to us, you gals still belong in the kitchen— (*Al elbows him to shut him up. Pete rubs his arm.*) Ouch! Wud ya do that for?

AL. Because you never know when to shut up, that's why!

ROBERT. (*Ignoring the two men.*) You must be tired. Why don't you sit— (*He turns toward the table and surveys the mess; hands on his hips, addressing the other men.*) Just look at this mess! If I didn't know better, I'd say a bunch of pigs were here, not mature men. (*Holding up the pizza carton with the remaining slices.*) Haven't any of you heard of plates? (*Picking up a beer can.*) And what about glasses, hmm? Or, better yet, coasters. You've absolutely ruined this tabletop. How am I supposed to get these dark rings out of that finish? (*He hands the pizza box to Pete, and gathers up the beer cans and hands them to Al.*) Take those to the kitchen. Mark, would you please get a dish towel and wipe off this table for . . . Do you really prefer to be called by your first name? That seems very rude.

FRAN. Oh, heavens; there's no need for formalities. Yes, Fran is just fine.

ROBERT. Then Fran it is. (*He notes that the other men haven't moved.*) What are you guys waiting for? That mess isn't going to clean itself. I swear, do I have to do everything around here?

AL. We're going, we're going. Just don't do anything stupid before we get back, all right?

Robert follows behind the men, ushering them to the kitchen. He then returns and pulls out a chair at the left end of the table for Fran and gestures for her to sit.

ROBERT. I'd like to run through my presentation for you one step at a time so you can supply feedback. (*He is wringing his hands worriedly.*) I do hope that you won't be too critical; it technically wasn't supposed to be completed until Monday, and two more days may have made all the difference in the world.

FRAN. Are you telling me that you were going to spend your weekend working on this presentation?

ROBERT. Of course. What else would I be doing on a Saturday afternoon with my boss in the house?

FRAN. Well, I hadn't really thought about it. I mean, I came here to—

ROBERT. Yes, I know. All I ask is that you're not too critical about the details. Believe me, I think I truly grasp what you're looking for here.

FRAN. Me? All I want are the facts; it's that simple.

ROBERT. Of course it is, but—as they say—the devil is in the details, and I just haven't had the time to polish it yet.

FRAN. (*Smiling and leaning back in her chair.*) Well, you don't have to worry about me being critical. I'm usually the one who has to do all the talking. Believe me, I know how you feel. But, I believe that you said you want feedback from me? Are you sure that's a good idea?

ROBERT. If not you, then who? (*The other men enter SL. Al and Pete are each holding a fresh can of beer and Mark is carrying a dish towel.*) Larry, Curly and Moe here? You really don't think I could ask *them* for constructive criticism, do you? (*Mark proceeds to wipe the table off in long sweeping motions; Robert quickly snatches the towel away from him.*) Not like that! Look what you're doing! You're brushing all of the crumbs onto the floor. Who's going to sweep them up? Here, do it like this. (*Robert slowly wipes the table, brushing the crumbs over the edge of the table and into his cupped hand.*) See? Then you simply carry the crumbs to the garbage and the mess is all taken care of. Understand?

AL. What I understand is that I'm going to break your finger to get that ring off if you don't straighten out and stop being a wuss.

ROBERT. (*Taking the beer away from Pete and carefully placing the collected crumbs into Pete's hand.*) Don't be rude in front of our guest. Now, take these into the kitchen and throw them away.

Pete looks from his hand, to Robert, and back to his hand. As soon as Robert turns away and crosses to the flip chart to arrange the presentation, Pete crosses and dumps the crumbs into Mark's hand. Mark looks at the crumbs, then crosses and places them in Al's hand. Al quickly looks around, dumps the crumbs on the floor and wipes his hands on his jeans. Robert positions the flipchart closer to the table and flips the pages back to the beginning.

FRAN. (*Studying the chart.*) Is that a wedding reception?

ROBERT. Yes.

FRAN. (*Studying the chart closely.*) The bride's parents weren't the biggest spenders in the world, were they?

ROBERT. No, and I, for one, would never hire the wedding planner that put this thing together. The centerpieces are absolutely tacky, and—if I'm not mistaken—would you believe it? I think

ROBERT. (cont.) those are paper tablecloths. (*Studying the image more closely.*) Yup, (*pointing to a table on the chart*) if you look closely, you can see the fold marks. (*Pointing.*) And is that a rip I see?

FRAN. (*Leaning in for a closer look.*) Why, I do believe you're right. Now why do you suppose the bride's family would allow the caterer to use torn tablecloths? Is that what you really want me to focus on at this point of the presentation? Because I can't imagine why that would be relevant or important to—

AL. (*Interrupting Fran; nervously.*) Fran, the presentation—in its entirety—is almost an hour long. Perhaps you'd like to freshen up before Robert really gets into the nuts and bolts of it.

FRAN. (*Rising.*) Why, that's a marvelous idea. I certainly could use the powder room, if that's all right.

AL. Of course it's all right.

PETE. Yeah, it's hard enough to pay attention without having to take a—

MARK. (*Cutting in.*) The bathroom is right this way.

Mark escorts Fran to the door at SR. After she exits, Al and Pete grab Robert and try wrestling the ring from his finger.

AL. Mark, get that dish soap! We've got to get this thing off, now!

Mark quickly exits SL and the other men continue to struggle. Al grabs Robert's arm from behind and forces Robert down on the table, face-first. The hand with the ring is splayed out in front of Robert, and Pete tries to pry the ring off once again. As they struggle, Clo and Heather enter US. They stop short just inside the doorway, surveying the struggle. Pete sees the women, releases Robert's hand, and straightens up. He stuffs his hands in his pockets and smiles sheepishly.

PETE. Clo, Heather . . . We were just—

MARK. (*Rushing in from SL with a bottle of dishwashing liquid in one hand and a dish towel in the other.*) I've got the soap. Hold him down! (*Seeing the women, he slides to a stop midway across the room and places his hands behind his back, concealing what he's carrying.*) Oh, Heather . . . You're back. Hi, honey. Are you all done shopping already?

HEATHER. Daddy? What's going on here?

MARK. Going on?

CLO. Robert, get off that table this instant! Al—let him go, right now!

AL. Not until we get that ring off.

HEATHER. What are you talking about—what ring?

AL. Mark—the soap—now!

Mark rushes to the table and squirts dish soap onto Robert's outstretched hand. Pete immediately grabs hold of the ring again and starts twisting it off.

ROBERT. Ouch—easy there! You're taking my finger with it.

CLO. (*Rushing to Robert's side.*) Al, let him go!

PETE. *(Sliding the ring from Robert's finger.)* I got it! I got it!

CLO. Give me that! Who do you think you are coming into my house and accosting my husband? *(She crosses to where Pete is at CS and snatches the ring away from Pete. She looks around for someplace handy to put it. Seeing none, she slides it on her finger for safekeeping, shudders, and stands with hands on hips to address the men. Robert remains pinned to the table by Al, who is uncertain what to do.)* Pete, out. I want you gone—now! *(Turning to Mark.)* You—you can do your explaining to Heather. And as for you, Al . . . *(Clo approaches the table, rubbing the finger that bears the ring as she crosses. Al releases Robert, who remains sprawled over the table, and hesitantly crosses to meet her.)*

AL. I can explain, Clo. You see, Pete came over with this package—

Clo draws back, makes a fist, and swings at Al, catching him full in the chin. Al drops to the floor, out cold. Clo flexes her hand to check for injury. Satisfied that no damage was done, she smiles before placing both hands on her hips and surveying the room.

CLO. Damn, that felt good. Let that be a lesson to you, Al. No one messes with my man.

Fran enters from SR and strides to CS, speaking as she walks.

FRAN. Now, let's see that presentation. *(She stops, taking in the scene around her. Hesitantly.)* Well, I guess Robert was right after all; maybe it does need just a bit more polishing. *(Backing toward the door at UC.)* Listen, perhaps it wasn't such a good idea for us to do this today. You know, being a Saturday and all. I'll just show myself out. But don't worry; I'm sure we can reschedule this for somewhere down the road. Far down the road. *(She opens the door, starts to leave, then turns back.)* Don't call me; I'll call you. *(She exits.)*

PETE. *(Beat.)* Well, there goes the presentation.

ROBERT. And the sales account.

HEATHER. And the money for our wedding!

AL. *(Raising his head from where he is lying on the floor.)* Robert, you're fired!

Lights down.