

THE GLASS CEILING

by

Donald Arneson

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By Donald Arneson
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The Glass Ceiling

Cast

KURT CADWALLER, Male. 30s. A member of the board of the Bright Lights Community Theatre and the director of the *Glass Ceiling*, the controversial play that BLCT is attempting to produce.

NATHAN PEASE, Male. 30s. Also on the board and an actor in BLCT's production of *The Glass Ceiling*. Somewhat of a cipher, he is talked into being in the play in spite of voting against it.

CHERESE SEYMOUR, Female. 30s. On the board, the female lead in *The Glass Ceiling*, and a friend of the playwright, Sydney Galtier.

SYDNEY GALTIER, Female. 30s. The author of *The Glass Ceiling*, described as an up-and-coming playwright, who will stoop at nothing to see her play produced.

RUSSELL SMOOT, Male. 50s. President of the board. Very conservative, very vocal, very domineering, he is opposed to BLCT doing *The Glass Ceiling* because of the women's issue, which he thinks of as propaganda and considers the play too controversial for what he considers is a conservative community.

CHALMERS MILLINGTON, Male. 60s. Also a board member, who used to be on Broadway, at least that is what he has told everyone. He wants to do Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but is too much of a ham to pass up any chance to act.

MAXINE NORMAN, Female. 50s. A relatively new board member. Being on the board and involved in the theater is a new venture for her, having spent most of her adult life as an obedient housewife. Now she is tentatively exploring the world beyond her male-dominated household.

DIANA BREENE, Female. 30s. A board member, she is Kurt's would-be lover, who, initially at least, fawns over him and defers to him for her opinions. Her attitude changes when she sees another side of her precious sweetheart.

COURTNEY LONG, Female. 20s. A young assistant to Kurt.

HARRIET WHITE, Female. 40-50. She auditions for *The Glass Ceiling*.

ALBERT NORMAN, Male. 50s, Maxine's husband, opposed to *The Glass Ceiling*, especially Maxine's participation. One of the community's elite, he is president of the school board.

Time: the present.

Setting: All of the action takes place on the essentially bare stage of The Bright Lights Community Theatre. There are three scenes in Act I and two in Act II.

The Glass Ceiling

ACT I, SCENE I

Open to a darkened stage. Enter RUSSELL from the auditorium.

RUSSELL

(as he makes his way in the pitch-dark theatre, stumbles getting onstage.)

Ow! I can't see a damn thing in this place.

(Calls:)

Hold on until I find the lights.

(Makes his way across the stage and then backstage. Shouts from offstage.)

Where's that damn light switch!

(There is a horrendous clatter of objects falling onto the floor.)

Ouch! Damn! I'm wounded! Where are—?

(A moment later stage lights come on and RUSSELL limps back onto a stage that is bare except for a table off to one side and a number of folding chairs scattered about. Raises his arms heavenward.)

And there was light!

(Rubs his shin as he looks out over the audience.)

Are you there? Where are you? Speak up! Hey, you, what's your name! I'm up here on stage.

(Raises both arms in a slightly different pose; bows; laughs.)

In front of a packed house.

(Adds in an undertone.)

Don't I wish! Are you coming?

CHERESE

(calling from the auditorium.)

Yes! I'm coming. Jeez! Do you want *me* to break a leg too?

RUSSELL

Yeah! Break a leg.

(Laughs.)

Why should I be the only one?

CHERESE

Because you deserve it.

(Enters the stage.)

RUSSELL

Where are the others? Why are they never on time?

CHERESE

To irritate you.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Well, they're doing a damn good job of it.

(Checks his watch.)

This is a first for you, isn't it, Cheryl?

CHERESE

What?

RUSSELL

Being on time.

(Laughs.)

CHERESE

You have me confused with someone else. *Cherese*. My name is *Cherese*. Remember? And people who know me know I'm always on time.

RUSSELL

Cherese? Oh, damn! I keep forgetting. Well, you've only been on the board a short time.

CHERESE

Six months.

RUSSELL

Well, you're doing a good job. Keep up the good work.

CHERESE

I saw Kurt and Diana coming just behind me. Kurt's driving his antique. What is it, a nineteen thirty model? He thinks it's such hot stuff. It's ready to fall apart.

RUSSELL

Appearances are deceiving. He holds it together by the force of his overpowering personality.

CHERESE

You mean *grating*, don't you?

RUSSELL

(shrugs: maybe, yes,)

Let's see. Besides you, me, Kurt, and Diana there's Nathan and Chalmers.

CHERESE

(correcting him.)

Mister Chalmers.

RUSSELL

(with a smirk.)

The Glass Ceiling

Yeah. *Mister!* Mister William Chalmers Shakespeare Millington.

(Pauses; adds:)

The second.

CHERESE

The first. The one and only. Our ex-Broadway star, or so he says.

(Pauses; quickly adds:)

And Maxine. Don't forget Maxine.

RUSSELL

Who? Oh, yeah. Maxine, another newcomer. How could I forget *her!*

(Pauses; counts.)

You, me, Kurt, Diana, Nathan, Chalmers, and Maxine. Seven. An odd number.

CHERESE

Who's odd besides Kurt and Chalmers?

(Adds:)

And Nathan.

RUSSELL

Yeah. Well, Diana is kind of odd the way she fawns over Kurt. I guess they're a hot item.

CHERESE

How about me? What are my oddities?

RUSSELL

(pauses to consider.)

Well, you're always on time. That's odd for this group *and* for a woman.

CHERESE

For a woman? You—!

(Raises her hand as if to hit him, then pauses to gain self-control.)

Another oddity for me as a woman is that I can resort to foul language that would blister any trucker's ears. Nor do I tolerate fools with fat lips.

RUSSELL

Oops! Did I say something wrong?

CHERESE

You wouldn't know if you did.

RUSSELL

I was just kidding, Cheryl. Relax. Enough of this! Make yourself useful and help me bring this table center stage.

The Glass Ceiling

(RUSSELL sets a folder he has been carrying on a chair and then, with CHERESE's help, moves the table center stage. They place seven folding chairs around the table. RUSSELL makes certain that there are three chairs on each side of the table and the seventh at its head, where he places his folder. Dialog continues as they work.)

CHERESE

Are Chalmers and Kurt still not speaking?

RUSSELL

Still? They never did speak to each other. And I don't speak to either of them — well, Chalmers a little when I can get a word in edge-wise.

CHERESE

How about Nathan?

RUSSELL

He's harmless. Everyone speaks to him. Actually they speak around him or through him or over him or under him or—

(Sighs.)

or they just ignore him.

CHERESE

(derisively, with an eye on the table and chairs.)

Such an outstanding group to preside over, Mr. Illustrious President: the Board of Directors of the Bright Lights Community Theater, each member with certain oddities. Except for you, of course.

RUSSELL

Of course.

(Pauses slightly.)

I wish we had our own facility instead of having to use the public school's stage. It's such a bother always being subject to their schedule, always having some nuisance thing going on that interferes with our schedule.

CHERESE

Yes, like band and choral concerts and school plays. Yes, such nuisances.

(RUSSELL ignores her and busies himself with rearranging items on the table.)

CHERESE

Is the playwright coming?

RUSSELL

Shakespeare?

The Glass Ceiling

(Laughs.)

Afraid he's busy in Stratford upon Avon, probably whipping out another one of his super tragedies.

CHERESE

I was thinking of Sydney Galtier. After all, it's her play.

RUSSELL

Her play? What do you mean?

CHERESE

Her play that we're considering for production.

RUSSELL

Oh, that! Well, that was before I read it. It'll be a cold day in hell when we do that kind of play here! I mean, can you imagine how a play like that would go over in this community?

CHERESE

"A play like that!" I think it has potential. After all, we more or less agreed that it would be great doing something different, breaking new ground, so to speak.

RUSSELL

(sarcastically.)

Big deal.

(Hearing a sound, he looks into the auditorium.)

Someone's coming. Maybe Kurt finally found a safe place to park his relic.

(There is a commotion as NATHAN, KURT, and DIANA, who is clinging to KURT's arm, enter the auditorium, ad-libbing as they move down the aisle and onto the stage. RUSSELL, at the head of the table, busies himself with papers, waiting not too patiently.)

KURT

(gently frees himself from DIANA's arm and speaks to CHERESE in French.)

Ah, mon Cheri! Comment allez vous?

(Hugs her; speaks with a hillbilly accent.)

How ya all doin', gal?

(DIANA is slightly put out by Kurt's attention to Chereese.)

CHERESE

(not necessarily enjoying the embrace.)

Oh, fine, Kurt. Hello, Diana. Nathan.

The Glass Ceiling

(NATHAN and DIANA respond to CHERESE with a nod and give RUSSELL a brief acknowledgement.)

RUSSELL

Okay. Have a seat.

KURT

(grabs his behind with both hands; laughs at his joke and speaks Hill Billy.)

Hey, y'all, I already got one.

(Each acts with differing expressions of disdain at KURT's attempt at humor. Suddenly there is another distracting commotion as CHALMERS and MAXINE enter, CHALMERS singing, "We're here because we're here, because we're here because we're here," as they make their way up to the stage.)

CHALMERS

(with a theatrical flourish.)

Welcome, good friends and fellow Thespians! I and this fair damsel, whom I met parking in the lot, have strove to overcome all obstacles to be at your side. So now, without more ado, let the festivities begin.

(Bows.)

MAXINE

(giggles; adds somewhat self-consciously:)

Yeah! Ado all.

(Curtsies, again self-consciously.)

RUSSELL

(not amused.)

Okay, we're all here. Let's begin.

(Waits as the others seat themselves, the men on one side and the women on the other. CHERESE opens a notebook preparatory to taking the minutes. RUSSELL pretends to bang down a gavel.)

The meeting of the Bright Lights Community Theater Board of Directors will come to order, at least some semblance of order.

KURT

That's a tall order.

(pretending to gavel.)

All right, y'all, order, order in the court, er theater, y'all uns.

CHALMERS

The play's the thing.

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

Ah...

(Thinks a moment, then responds,)

Wherein we'll catch the king!

CHALMERS

(corrects him.)

Wherein *I'll* catch the *conscience* of the king.

KURT

If anyone can do it, you can Chalmy, ol' boy.

CHALMERS

(with another grand flourish.)

To be or not to be.

KURT

How about, "not?"

RUSSELL

Yes. Save the Shakespeare for later, huh, Chalmers?

(Opens his folder.)

I guess you all received a copy of the minutes of the last meeting. Thanks to, ah, Cheryl here.

CHERESE

Cherese. Cherese Seymour.

RUSSELL

Oh, sorry. *Cherese*. Thank you *Cherese* for mailing the minutes out ahead of time. Any questions?

(Each, except KURT, retrieves a copy of the minutes.)

KURT

I forgot mine.

CHALMERS

What's new?

(NATHAN offers to share his copy with KURT. There is a short undercurrent of conversation around the table, but no one has a question.)

RUSSELL

Okay! Approved! Treasurer's report.

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

Don't we need a vote? According to Robert's Rule of Orders...

RUSSELL

(slightly exasperated.)

Okay. Vote then.

NATHAN

I move we vote.

(Raises his hand and the others follow.)

There!

CHALMERS

The deed is done!

RUSSELL

Treasurer's report. Nathan prepared it and made copies.

NATHAN

I have a receipt for the copies, which I paid out of my own pocket, which I'll give to the treasurer, which is me. I hope that's okay.

(Passes out a one-page treasurer's report, which ALL hastily examine.)

KURT

Egads! We're bankrupt!

CHALMERS

'Sblood! No! A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

NATHAN

What?

(Examines the report.)

No, we're not bankrupt. We have a pretty good balance and only a couple outstanding bills.

(KURT and CHALMERS roll their eyes; the others grimace.)

RUSSELL

Well, we'd have a much better balance if it hadn't been for that extravagant cast party after the last play. I mean, after all, that wasn't necessary.

CHERESE

Wasn't necessary! I totally disagree. What else do the actors get? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! And, besides, to perform they have to pay to join the Bright Lights Community Theater and then perform gratis.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

If they don't like it, they don't have to try out. Actors are expendable. They're a dime a dozen.

CHERESE

You're not serious! Considering we don't pay anyone, even the director, I think we're getting off cheap. A little party is not out of line.

RUSSELL

Little!

CHALMERS

(imitates a bird flapping its wings.)

Cheep! Cheep! Cheep!

(Continues when only MAXINE laughs. SHE, however, quickly shuts up when she sees no one else laughing.)

Methinks our players are indeed undersold, yet as they have been told, their pay rests in the play.

(Adds:)

Methinks, so to say.

KURT

If we didn't have these big expenses for making copies of financial reports, we'd be in good shape. Anyway, I think we should approve the treasurer's report and get down to business, s'il vous plait, y'all.

(Pleased with himself, chuckles.)

DIANA

(laughs at KURT; pats his arm affectionately.)

Oh, darling!

(CHERESE rolls her eyes; she thinks Kurt is obnoxious.)

DIANA

Anyway, I think Kurt is right.

(Gives KURT a sweetheart's smile. Afterwards she starts passing notes to KURT, who glances at them and smiles back politely.)

I second the motion.

RUSSELL

All in favor say, "Aye."

(There are "ayes" all around.)

Motion passes. Now to the business at hand.

CHALMERS

Delay not. Let's on with it!

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

The main item of business is our next production. Since some have suggested that we do a musical like, for instance, *The Sound of Music*, I've contacted—

CHERESE

No! At our last meeting we discussed this original play by Sydney Galtier.

CHALMERS

What about *Hamlet*?

KURT

(tries to be funny.)

If he can't come to the meeting, then the heck with him!

(Fawning DIANA smirks and winks at Kurt.)

CHALMERS

Or better yet, *King Lear*.

RUSSELL

Not *Hamlet* nor *Lear*. We really need to do a musical. Musicals pay off, especially if we have one with a big cast with lots of bratty little kids. Then all the adoring parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and friends will come.

(Rubs his hands together in an expression of greed.)

And pay!

CHERESE

Well, Sydney's play is a musical.

NATHAN

(with a shrug.)

Eh! Sort of.

RUSSELL

Cheryl — I mean, Chereese — I have told you already that it is not the sort of play for this community. I mean—. Well, you're new here and I can assure you I know this community.

CHERESE

There you go again! What's the matter with this sort of play?

RUSSELL

It's just too— too, well too avant-garde. Too liberal. Too—. Well, it's the sort of play that won't play here. That's all there is to it. Now I was willing to read it and I read it with an open mind and I know it just won't work here.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Maybe it'll play in Peoria.

CHERESE

(to RUSSELL.)

I read it also and I think it has potential.

(To all.)

I think it's time we broke the mold and ventured into new fields. There's more to theatre than the same old standards, the same old money-makers, the same old—. Diana. Did you read it? What do you think?

DIANA

(about to pass another note to KURT.)

Huh? Read the play? Oh. Well, I—. I thought it was, well, ah, interesting.

RUSSELL

Interesting, maybe, but we're not an experimental, far-out, nutty theater, not here, not in this community. We're a traditional, down-to-earth, straight arrow community theater. We're not out to break new ground. The old standards! That's our bag. I mean, well, we're here to make money and this thing will not only not be a money-maker, but it could ruin us.

KURT

This playwright... what's the name? Sydney? I must have missed the last meeting.

DIANA

Yes, you did, Darling. You were out of town. But you got a copy of the play.

KURT

I did?

(KURT gets an accusatory glance from RUSSELL.)

KURT

Oh, yes, of course! Yes! Yes! I certainly did.

CHERESE

Sydney Galtier. She's a very talented, up-and-coming young playwright—

KURT

She?

(From the auditorium is heard, "Hello! Did someone call my name?" A moment later SYDNEY comes up onto the stage, carrying a script.)

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

—whom I invited here to talk about her play because I was certain we had decided...

(SYDNEY crosses and hugs CHERESE, and shakes hands with the others, introducing herself with, "Hi! Hello. I'm Sydney Galtier." Each in turn shakes SYDNEY'S hand, offering a greeting and saying, "My name is —." This ends with KURT, who is so taken with her he forgets to release her hand until she, with some effort, frees it. Throughout the scene KURT's infatuated gaze keeps returning to her. After all the greetings, SYDNEY remains standing since there is no chair for her.)

KURT

(eagerly offers his chair.)

Here. Have my seat.

(Wiggles his behind as he exits offstage but returns shortly with another folding chair. DIANA does not respond to his attempt at humor; in fact, she is less than pleased.)

SYDNEY

(discreetly moves the chair away from the table.)

Sorry to interrupt. Please go on. Cherese — we were in an acting class together — has graciously invited me and...

(Holds up the script.)

Well, I'd be glad to answer any questions. I guess you've all read it.

RUSSELL

(sourly.)

Yes.

(Pauses; takes a deep breath.)

There seems to be some misunderstanding.

(To CHERESE.)

I don't know where you got the idea—??

SYDNEY

I'd be happy to clear up any problems, you know, production problems, any questions, any—.

RUSSELL

The fact is, we've decided we're not quite ready for—. I mean, I'm sorry you went to all the trouble... Well, the fact is, this community—. You see, it's quite conservative and this play — as good as it may be — well...

(Pauses for another deep breath.)

Well, all I can say is that this is most unfortunate. Your appearance here is a little premature. We have not officially decided on our next production.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Oh! Oh, really? But I thought—.

RUSSELL

(with an eye toward Chereese.)

Well, someone acted prematurely without consultation.

CHERESE

I acted on what we had decided at our last board meeting. I'm sorry but—. Well...

RUSSELL

You should have read the minutes from the last meeting.

CHERESE

I did! I wrote them. *You* didn't read them.

(Consulting minutes, reads:)

Let's see. Blah, blah, blah and so forth... Blah, blah, blah.

KURT

Chalmers, no doubt.

(CHALMERS gives KURT a sign of disapproval.)

CHERESE

(continues.)

Here! "So, therefore, it seems that the Bright Lights Community Theatre is ready to break new ground by presenting an original musical entitled, *The Glass Ceiling* by Sydney Galtier."

CHALMERS

Seems! Seems, Madam! Nay, it is or, as in this case, maybe is not. I know not, seems. 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, blah, blah, blah.

RUSSELL

There was no *official* vote. *Official* is the word. It was only *discussion* and at that time not all of us had read the play. Cheryl— *Chereese* gave us a sanitized version and—. Well, it seemed — *seemed*, I say — seemed like ground breaking but, well, the proof is in the pudding. Well, quite frankly—. As I said, this is too conservative a community for such a controversial play. Maybe somewhere else... And a musical? How can we decide when we haven't heard any of the music?

SYDNEY

Yes, I'm sorry about that — not having the music ready. There were some minor problems I hadn't anticipated, but they're due to be corrected very shortly. Anyway, we're working on it.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Ah! There's the rub! It's still in the tub and that's the reason for the hub, Bub.

(Points to MAXINE as a cue for her to laugh, which she dutifully does.)

RUSSELL

"Working on it?" Well, I just don't think we can wait.

KURT

I say, Russell, ol' boy, *I* think you're overdoing it; you're getting yourself all steamed up and that's not good for you, especially at your age.

SYDNEY

Since I'm not musically noted, I've had to rely on someone who is and he has given me his word that very soon...

RUSSELL

(quickly in anticipation of CHERESE's objection.)

No, this is too much to ask. Besides — well, I hate to say this but I don't—. Well, I'm not crazy about it.

(To SYDNEY.)

Sorry. It's just—. Well, what I mean is, it's not bad, but it needs work — revisions — and we don't have time.

(Quickly, to NATHAN.)

What do you think, Nath?

NATHAN

Yeah.

(ALL look at NATHAN expecting more. When he sees this, he adds:)

NATHAN

Ah, yeah, I guess I agree with Russ. It's kind of, well, you know, kind of, well—. Ehhh!

RUSSELL

Chalmers?

CHALMERS

(addresses NATHAN.)

Ehhhh? Oh, capital! Well said, Nath. Your eloquence has once again come to the fore, forsooth. For this play, you say, has reached the height of ehhhism. Or depth. Whatever.

(Pauses, but then quickly.)

What did you say the name of it was, this ehhh play? I forgot.

CHESESE

For such a bag of wind you have a very short memory, Chalmers. It's called The Glass Ceiling.

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

The Glass Ceiling?

CHALMERS

‘Swounds! The Glass Ceiling. Words, words, words. Brittle words. As promised, I read – skimmed it — with an agile mind, mind you — and have so far put it so far out of mind that I no longer can see either the fore nor the aft of it.

CHERESE

You know, Chalmers, there are times — many times, in fact — when you can be a big pain in the aft.

CHALMERS

(feigns being wounded.)

‘Swounds! ‘Swounds!

MAXINE

But what an interesting title! I’m sorry I haven’t had a chance to read it yet. I missed the last meeting. Well, as you all know, we were gone, my husband, Albert, and me. Florida. A little get-away. What’s it about? The Glass Ceiling? Funny title.

CHERESE

You’ve never heard the expression, “the glass ceiling?”

MAXINE

Ah, well, ah, yes, of course, I have, I think. The glass ceiling... Yes. Well, it’s been a while. Let’s see...

CHERESE

It refers to the inequities imposed on women, especially in the workplace. There is an invisible barrier, a glass ceiling, that prevents women from advancing upwards in the corporate world, for example. They can rise so far, but then this ceiling, this glass ceiling, imposed by the rulers — men! — stops them cold. A barrier. An invisible barrier. A glass ceiling. When women reach that ceiling, bong, they hit their heads and are told that they should be happy tending to their knitting — and housework — and staying out of managing businesses, especially big businesses.

MAXINE

I see. Well, that’s too bad, isn’t it? I mean—. Well, I never worked for a living — much. I stayed home and raised the children. Yes. Albert did the work, brought home the bacon. That was his expression. Bringing home the bacon. Sometimes I wonder—. I mean, all that time... Scrubbing floors. Washing dirty diapers. Baking. Polishing, ah, glass ceilings?

(Giggles a little.)

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Well, what did you expect, poor damsel? 'Swounds!

(Assumes a theatrical stance and points upward.)

Ah, The Glass Ceiling! The brutal barrier. Ah, the poor oppressed female! Oppressed? Nay, say I! *Oppressor!* Oppressor, say I, for she hath clothed herself in the garb of grieving thus to induce pity and uses the tongue of obfuscation.

CHERESE

(to CHALMERS.)

Can't you ever keep your big mouth shut?

CHALMERS

(dramatically.)

You see? You see? Cut to the quick!

(Beat.)

Nay! Nay! This mouth of mine must always shine for it was made for talking.

RUSSELL

I've said it before and I'll say it again. It's just not the play for this community. No, I think we should do an old—. An old—. An *old!* Nathan, what do you think?

NATHAN

Huh? Oh, yeah. I think we should do an old musical like—

KURT

Like The Glass Ceiling?

CHERESE

I second the motion! All in favor.

RUSSELL

Wait! You can't do that. There's been no motion.

KURT

You didn't see it because it was a slow motion.

CHERESE

All right. Mr. President, I would like to make a motion that the Bright Lights Community Theatre—

RUSSELL

You can't make a motion. You haven't been recognized.

CHALMERS

You don't recognize her? Let me introduce you. Russell, this is—.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Will you shut up?

(CHALMERS *over-reacts as if he has been stabbed in the heart and MAXINE laughs.*)

RUSSELL

Nathan, you have the floor.

CHERESE

How did he get the floor?

KURT

Aw, let him have the floor. It's dirty anyway.

(CHALMERS *shakes a finger at KURT for stealing his line.*)

RUSSELL

I recognized him.

CHALMERS

Well, it's about time you recognized somebody!

CHERESE

You did not! You just asked him a question. I made a motion. I moved that the board do Sydney's musical play, *The Glass Ceiling*.

(*Nudges DIANA.*)

Come on, Diana, we need a second.

DIANA

We do?

(*Looks to KURT for approval, which he gives with a very discreet nod.*)

Well, okay. It is a woman's play and—.

CHALMERS

And egads! Guess what?

DIANA

(*with a shrug.*)

All right. I second the motion.

CHERESE

All in favor, signify by saying, "Aye!" Aye!

(*After a quick count.*)

Maxine! We women have to stick together.

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

We do? Well, yes, I suppose we should. Yes. At least some of the time. I mean, well, bringing home the bacon isn't all there is to life. That's why I joined the community theater — to see what else there is.

CHERESE

Good for you, Maxine!

RUSSELL

Out of order! You're out of order!

MAXINE

(shocked.)

I am? What did I do?

RUSSELL

All of you!

CHERESE

Because we're women.

CHALMERS

They're taking over! We're being inundated! Womanized! Feminized! Cuckoldized! Henpeckized!

CHERESE

Vote, Maxine. The Glass Ceiling. There's a great part for you. It'll launch a new, diaperless career. Vote aye.

MAXINE

(with a shrug and an apologetic glance at the men, especially CHALMERS.)

All right. Aye.

(With added force.)

Aye!

RUSSELL

You can't—! This is all illegal.

KURT

So far, that's three in favor — the three women. There are four men. We can de-womanize the vote. Chalmers, how do you vote?

CHALMERS

With my tongue.

The Glass Ceiling

(KURT raises a hand as if to beat CHALMERS.)

CHALMERS

Okay. Opposed.

KURT

Nathan?

NATHAN

(with a none too forceful shrug.)

Opposed, I guess.

KURT

Well, we know how our illustrious president will vote.

RUSSELL

You certainly do! Opposed! Now I hope this is the end of this business. This illegal motion has been legally turned down.

KURT

Wait! It's three to three and we're not done voting.

RUSSELL

Kurt! Surely, you're not thinking—. Since you weren't at the last meeting, you probably haven't read it, but I can assure you—. Well, you heard what I said.

KURT

But it sounds interesting. And different. And exciting. And from what I've heard... well...

RUSSELL

From what you've heard?

KURT

Yes. Here. And Diana's been raving about it.

(DIANA raises a questioning eyebrow.)

KURT

(to SYDNEY.)

Who did you have in mind to direct your play?

SYDNEY

I was thinking of someone very imaginative, forceful, creative, broadminded, and understanding...

(A meaningful pause.)

The Glass Ceiling

...such as yourself.

KURT

A wise choice, mon cheri. I can see that you are very perspicacious, as well as... all of the above. I vote aye. Motion carried. Let's get on with it! Schedule auditions.

(CHERESE claps her approval; MAXINE and DIANA, catching the spirit, follow her example. KURT and SYDNEY exchange sly, perhaps sexy glances that go unnoticed by the others.)

RUSSELL

Hey! This is a railroad job.

CHALMERS

Toot! Toot!

RUSSELL

This will not stand! Mark my words!

Curtain

The Glass Ceiling

ACT I SCENE II

A few days later. Auditions for The Glass Ceiling

The same bare stage as in Scene I, except now, on opening, it is lighted and the table and chairs have been removed. KURT is standing downstage with his back to the audience.

KURT

Okay, who's next?

(When no one responds, he shouts:)

Next! Courtney!

COURTNEY

(enters from offstage, carrying a clipboard and a script.)

Yeah?

KURT

Get with it, Courtney. Why do you think I hired you?

COURTNEY

Yeah. Okay. Big deal. Assistant director. Top pay, huh? Sixty minutes an hour.

(Refers to her clipboard:)

Okay! Next is Harriet White. She—

(Reads from a résumé.)

— “has extensive experience in live theater, having performed in the following productions: ‘The Wizard of Oz,’ ‘The Sound of Music,’ ‘Singing in the Rain,’ and ‘A Streetcar Named Desire.’”

(Does a double take on “Streetcar.”)

Huh? Well, anyway, Harriet White.

(HARRIET, of indeterminate age, probably in her 50's, steps out from backstage carrying sheet music. She is wearing a frilly, skirted dance costume and tap shoes.)

HARRIET

I prefer musicals and I heard this was that. Anyway, I've taken voice lessons.

(Sings a few bars from “Climb Every Mountain,” slightly off-key. Proudly:)

As you can tell. Anyway, I was a dancer in “Singin’ in the Rain.”

(Dances and sings a few bars from “Singin’ in the Rain,” also off-key and with little panache.)

Just a sample. Anyway, I love the stage. I think I was born for it. A star is born, right?

Anyway, “Streetcar” wasn't my favorite. It's not a musical, you know. So, anyway, how are you, Mr. Catwalker?

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

Cadwaller.

HARRIET

Oh, my! I'm terrible sorry. Mister *Cadwalker*. Well, anyway...

KURT

(attempting to contain his impatience, checks his watch.)

Okay. You want to begin?

HARRIET

(waves some sheet music.)

Anyway, I brought some music. Do you have an accompanist? I could of brought my husband, Oscar, but he — well, anyway — he was tired. He works so hard.

KURT

No. We're just reading from the script today. You have a script?

HARRIET

(slightly miffed.)

Really? It would seem that for a musical you'd want the actors to sing or dance something. Anyway, that's what I, naturally, assumed. Well, anyway, you would think you'd at least have an accompanist for those of us who came prepared, anyway, with music.

KURT

Anyway, for now we're just reading. Why don't you get a script from Courtney? Top of page thirty-eight.

HARRIET

(visibly disappointed.)

I was so looking forward to—. I have a strong voice.

(Sings, "Do, re, me, fa, so, la, te, do." — not well.)

See! Well, all right anyway, I guess. Anyway, I don't see why—. Well, anyway, if you insist, I suppose.

(COURTNEY hands HARRIET a script open to the page.)

HARRIET

Okay. Well, anyway—. Top of page?

COURTNEY

Thirty-eight, top of page. Mercedes' line.

HARRIET

Anyway, I need to understand the play. Anyway, could you — you know?

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

Basically, it's about the subjugation of women by men, by society, and their struggle to break through the glass ceiling that hinders them to achieve equality with the males of the species. Some of the women in the play don't get it; they accept their lot. Others, however, are determined to break the mold — the glass ceiling — this character, Mercedes, for example. Top of thirty-eight. Okay?

HARRIET

(doubtful.)

I see. Thank you. May I have a minute?

(There is a pause while she reads and gradually becomes agitated.)

Oh, my heavens! The very top? With *that* line?

(Points.)

KURT

Yes, anyway, if you please.

HARRIET

Well I—! Such language! I'm afraid... Well, anyway, I *heard* this play might be disreputable but I—. Well! Anyway, I couldn't believe that our very own community theater would stoop... Anyway — well — I simply cannot utter that word in public in front of a live audience of friends and relatives and maybe even innocent, little children. Anyway!

KURT

(annoyed.)

Well, anyway, Harriet, dear, if “bastard” bothers you, how about substituting “bitch?”

HARRIET

Oh! Disgusting! I have never been treated—! Anyway, I can see this is not the play for me. So, anyway, they were right. I should have listened. Oh!

(Throws down the script, stomps on it, and storms backstage but quickly returns.)

My husband, Oscar — *Doctor* Oscar White — of White Chiropractic has been financially supportive of this theater. *Has been!* But after he learns—. Well, anyway, I can assure you—!

(Exits back stage.)

KURT

Thank you, anyway.

(SYDNEY enters on stage from the auditorium and tiptoes up behind KURT. During the scene she acts discreetly flirtatious.)

SYDNEY

Hi.

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

(startled; swings around to face her.)

Oh! Sydney! Hi.

SYDNEY

(picks up the script and hands it to him.)

You dropped something.

KURT

What? No, not I. This is too precious. We had a little scene, a true-to-life sort.

SYDNEY

I saw.

(Moves as close to him as possible.)

Couldn't stay away. Hope you don't mind. I don't want to intrude. If I do, just—. Well, just shoo me away.

KURT

No, you're welcome. More than welcome. Who knows, I may need to consult with you from time to time.

SYDNEY

Oh, yes, any time! If I can be of help, why, I'm — well, you know, available, *totally* available. This is my baby. I want it to be a success.

KURT

Of course! I understand completely. On to bigger and better venues?

SYDNEY

Oh indeed! For both of us, I hope.

KURT

So do I!

(Pauses; is still impressed by her and gazes a little moonstruck.)

Yes! Well, I believe you've really got something here, Sydney. I mean, well, I feel lucky to have this chance, to be a part of— of, well — a play that could—. Well, who knows?

SYDNEY

No doubts? No second thoughts? No criticisms? Surely you must have a few suggestions for improvements, tightening it, polishing it — whatever. Most competent directors, such as yourself, will have a few bones to pick with the playwright. After all, this is a collaborative art.

KURT

(with a pleasant smile and a shrug.)

The Glass Ceiling

Well, of course, yes, there were a couple of things — *minor* things — moments — little nuances. Well... Maybe before we go too far, we could — you know...

SYDNEY

Certainly! I'd love it.

KURT

You would?

SYDNEY

Yes!

KURT

When?

SYDNEY

Ohhh... Tonight?

KURT

Where?

SYDNEY

Any suggestions?

KURT

(gives the question some thought, during which time they exchange knowing glances.)

My place? I'd say a restaurant, but there may be too many distractions.

SYDNEY

We definitely don't want distractions, do we? But how about my place? I'll prepare a little snack.

KURT

Your place? Well, okay. What time?

SYDNEY

How about seven?

KURT

Okay. Seven it is.

SYDNEY

You might need to know where I live.

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

I know.

SYDNEY

Oh?

KURT

Cherese told me. I asked her.

(HARRIET, wearing a coat over her costume, enters from back stage carrying her music, strides across the stage, and stops in front of SYDNEY.)

HARRIET

(to SYDNEY.)

You won't like this play, my dear. Anyway, there are no parts for decent, upright people like you and me. It's just disgusting! Obscene! Anyway, this community will never stand for it. They will be up in arms when they learn— when they learn the truth and, believe me, they will if I have anything to say about it, and I certainly will — have something to say about it— you can bet your bottom dollar on that for certain. Anyway, you can take my word on it, dear.

(To KURT.)

You are an evil man and, anyway, I won't allow you to corrupt the morals of my community.

(Starts to leave, stops, does a huffy tap dance and exits through the auditorium, singing a line from "Climb Every Mountain." KURT pretends to clap.)

KURT

Encore! Encore!

SYDNEY

Hmmm. We might have our hands full if there are more like her. All the more reason for us to get together.

KURT

Oh, yes, indeed! I'm looking forward to it.

SYDNEY

(grins approvingly; crosses to a chair downstage to one side.)

Okay if I sit over here? I'll be as quiet as a mouse.

KURT

Great. I'll join you.

(Goes off stage, brings another chair and places it next to the other; gently pats SYDNEY's arm. Then:)

Courtney! Who's next?

The Glass Ceiling

(COURTNEY enters checking her list.)

COURTNEY

Maxine Norman. She and Nathan Decker and Mr. Millington are going to do the Garden of Eden scene — without scripts, they want you to know.

KURT

Hmmm. Excellent idea! So Chalmers is auditioning? Well, great.

CHALMERS

(shouts from off stage.)

I'm only doing it to help you out, you dunce! You're going to need some experienced, accomplished talent.

KURT

(shouts back.)

Let me know when you find some.

(To COURTNEY.)

Okay. Any time they're ready.

COURTNEY

Yes, Master.

(Exit COURTNEY.)

SYDNEY

(in an undertone.)

I was thinking of a young Eve for the part. Nubile. Maxine is...

KURT

Non-nubile. I know. I have her in mind for another part, but this will give me an idea of, you know, her stage presence. And she's so eager!

(Pauses.)

This should be interesting. I like this little scene. A play or, I should say, playlet, within a play. Very clever.

SYDNEY

Thank you, Kurt — Mister Director.

(SYDNEY pats his arm; KURT momentarily places his hand over hers; they smile knowingly at each other.)

KURT

You're welcome, Miss Playwright extraordinaire.

(Shouts orders to Courtney.)

Any time, Court!

The Glass Ceiling

(COURTNEY brings out a tree prop, then scurries off and returns with a bush prop. CHALMERS, in a serpent costume, dashes onstage and hides behind the bush. MAXINE enters wearing a rather skimpy, tight-fitting skin colored costume. She sashays in tossing an apple in the air.)

MAXINE

(stops, begins eating the apple as she scrutinizes her surroundings.)

Not bad. Not bad, as gardens go. How does my garden grow? Ahhh, smells heavenly!

(Inhales, sighs, and looks again at the setting.)

But that tree would look better over there. And that bush... Mmmmm. I think the bush will have to go. It's just not— not—.

(A hissing sound disturbs her.)

What's that?

(It grows louder.)

I thought I was all alone here. The Garden of Eden, God called it. "It's all yours," he said. Garden of Eden. I think Garden of Eve sounds better. Yeah! Garden of Eve. That has a nice ring to it. Or just Eve's Little Garden.

(Hissing sound again.)

Doggone it! There's just no such thing as privacy any more!

(Irritated, stomps her foot and calls out:)

God!

(CHALMERS, the serpent, pops up from behind the bush.)

CHALMERS

(Speaks with a hiss.)

Shhhhh! Ssssshouldn't wake Him. He can get ssssort of—. Well, you know, huffy.

MAXINE

Who are you?

CHALMERS

Ssssserpent.

MAXINE

Sir who? Sir Pent?

CHALMERS

No, silly. Not Sir Pent. Ssssserpent. I'm a, you know, ssssserpent.

(Slithers and hisses to illustrate.)

See? Kind of like a ssssnake only more ssssubtle and ssssupple and sssslithery and sssslack in sssscruples and sssso forth and sssso on. Ssssssee?

MAXINE

Okay. Whatever. What do you want? I thought I was alone here.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Ssssurprised? Sssshould have guessed.

(Points at the apple.)

Where'd you get that? Off the...

(Hisses gleefully.)

Tree? I mean, you know, *the tree*, the, you know— *FORBIDDEN TREE!*

MAXINE

The *TREE*? No, stupid! How dumb do you think I am? I found it on the ground. It fell off. I didn't *pick* it. That's the key: No picky. Gee!

CHALMERS

How does it taste?

MAXINE

Wormy.

(Throws it away.)

(Enter NATHAN as ADAM also in a skin colored costume, carrying a shopping bag.)

CHALMERS

Ssssssay! Ssssseems like we have ssssome company.

MAXINE

Yeah. This is Adam. He's my manservant.

CHALMERS

Man sssservant?

MAXINE

Yeah, you know, he fetches things for me, does the cooking and cleaning, answers the door, fixes things around the house, waits on tables, does the laundry, the ironing, cleans out the garage and, well, all around handy-man. He's not much company but he's better than nothing.

(With a grimace.)

Almost.

(Confidentially to CHALMERS.)

He's not too bright, though. Yeah, it's hard to get good help these days. See, God created me and gave me this cute little garden — Garden of Eve — I'm Eve — but I got a bit, you know, bored — I mean, what's there to do around here besides name things?

(Names things, pointing at each thing.)

Tree! Branches! Leaves! Bush! Clouds! Dirt! Apple! Worms!

(Points to NATHAN, who smiles naively.)

Jerk!

(CHALMERS nods agreement.)

The Glass Ceiling

And I was getting a little lonely and... So...

(Pauses; reflects.)

God wanted to take one of my ribs to make him,

(Points at NATHAN, who is fidgeting, scratching himself, and looking off into space.)

but I said, “No way!” I mean, after all! That would tickle. So we argued and then finally He gave in and took my little toe. What’s a toe or two? I’ve got twelve — eleven now.

(Looks at NATHAN and shrugs.)

Adam, say hello to Sir Serpent.

NATHAN

Hi there. Ya a real serpunt?

CHALMERS

Yes. Honest to goodnesssss, er, badnesssss.

NATHAN

(impressed.)

Goll-EEEY!

(To MAXINE.)

D’ja hear that? A real serpunt!

(MAXINE nods impatiently. She considers him stupid and much beneath her.)

NATHAN

(reaches into the bag,)

Look! I brung ya somethin’ ta eat.

(Proudly pulls a bright apple out of the bag. MAXINE exclaims with fright and CHALMERS with glee.)

MAXINE

Where did you get that?

NATHAN

(with a nod toward the tree.)

Off a apple tree, a course.

MAXINE

You *picked* it?

NATHAN

Yeah! So? How else ya gonna git apples off of a ol’ apple tree?

MAXINE

Off *what* apple tree?

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

(points at the prop.)

That big un right thar tha's in the middle a the gardun. It's the only one what's got bright, shiny apples. The others is just dinky, sour crabs. Hey! No big deal. Didn't even have ta climb it, jus' reached right up 'n' plucked the big ol' apple.

(Demonstrates by jumping up and pretending to pick an apple.)

Got the brightest, shiniest one there was.

MAXINE

(moans.)

Oh, no! Off the— the F tree! Now I'm in *BIG* trouble! Didn't I tell you to stay away from that tree? If I told you once, I've told you a million times that you-know-who said it's forbidden to pick apples off that tree. That's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you stupid jerk!

NATHAN

Well, goll-EEY, ya don't hafta blow a gasket! I was jus' tryin' ta be nice. Yer always shoutin' at me 'n' runnin' me down in public 'n'—. Gol-EEY!

(Begins crying.)

MAXINE

That's because you never listen and do what you're told. What do you expect?

(Slaps him.)

Now quit bawling. You're always bawling.

NATHAN

Anyways, I don't care what ya say, them apples is sure good, I kin tell ya that.

MAXINE

I said we're forbidden to pick the apples off that particular tree. Can't you get that through your thick skull?

NATHAN

Why's that?

MAXINE

Just 'cause, Stupid.

NATHAN

“‘Cause?” That ain't no answer. Even I knows that.

(Offers her the apple.)

Here. Take a bite.

(MAXINE shakes her head no.)

Jus' a little nibble. Ain't gonna hurt ya none, no-how.

(Takes a bite.)

Hey! Wow-ee! If that ain't the best apple I ever tasted!.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Oh, that's why He — the Big Honcho — didn't want no one eating them! Wanted to save them for Himself.

(To MAXINE.)

Go ahead. It's like what's-his-name here says—

NATHAN

(indignant.)

A-dam!

CHALMERS

Yeah. It's just what Adam says. A little bitty nibble won't hurt.

MAXINE

(takes the apple and wipes it on her sleeve.)

Hmmmm. Well, it does look pretty good.

(Looks around apprehensively.)

No one's looking. He's probably sleeping — does that a lot.

(Bites into it. The crunch is loudly heard throughout.)

Wow! Great taste!

KURT

(steps forward, script in hand.)

I'll be God.

(With a slight deprecating laugh.)

It only seems appropriate.

CHALMERS

Oh, yeah! You make a good God. Type casting.

KURT

(reads from the script in a deep, godly voice.)

Eve! What did I tell you?

MAXINE

What? Who's there?

KURT

You know perfectly well who it is.

MAXINE

Oh! God!

KURT

I specifically commanded you not to pick and eat any apples from that one tree. But in spite of that, you went ahead and did it. Eve, what am I going to do with you?

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

(points at NATHAN.)

He made me do it!

KURT

A dunce like that?

NATHAN

(feels insulted.)

Hey!

KURT

Okay, here's the deal, Eve. Because you disobeyed me—.

MAXINE

It was just one itty-bitty bite.

KURT

That's one bite too many. And I don't care if bird-brain here talked you into it. He doesn't know any better, but you do! Therefore, you're both going to feel shame and go out and work — you've been getting by cheap until now — free rent — and you — Eve — — you're going to have to bear the children.

MAXINE

Me? What about him?

KURT

He's just a flunkey. Besides he wouldn't know how.

MAXINE

Yeah. Well, what can you expect of somebody made out of a toe?

(After a short pause.)

Am I still in charge, still running the show?

KURT

I'll let you fight that out between you. Okay! I'm leaving. When you hear the thunder, that's it.

(Walks away as if exiting. A second later there is a loud clap of thunder.)

Hey! Good, Court! You're on the ball!

MAXINE

(Suddenly transformed, she looks at ADAM and then herself, screams, and tries to cover herself with her hands.)

Oh, my! I'm naked. Help! Help!

(Runs in circles.)

The Glass Ceiling

Where are they — those things? I forgot to name them. Fig leaves! Yeah! Fig leaves!
That's what I'll call them.

(Runs to the bush and picks some fig leaves; gives one to NATHAN, who scratches his head in wonder, and keeps three.)

Help! Help ! I'm naked. Oh, woe is me! Woe is me!

(Turning her back to the audience, she attaches the fig leave in strategic places. NATHAN, not knowing where to attach his, puts it on the end of his nose.)

No, not there, Stupid!

(Points at his crotch.)

There!

NATHAN

Gol-EEY!

(Turns his back and attaches it.)

(During the rest of the scene, ALL sing.)

MAXINE

Oh! I'll be damned!

CHALMERS

(gleefully.)

Yes, you will, yes, you will, yes, you will!

MAXINE

And even worse, I'll get the boot.

CHALMERS

But as for me, I don't give a hoot.

MAXINE

Out in the cold, I'll have to work. And all because of this stupid jerk.

NATHAN

Me? Naw, not me! It cain't be me! Just 'cause I picked a rotten apple from off a ol' apple tree?

MAXINE

A tree! *The* tree! The *F* tree. The forbidden to touch tree!

CHALMERS

The tree, the tree, the good old tree; it's out of the garden for one, two, three!

(Counts himself, MAXINE, and NATHAN.)

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

(Stops singing; takes NATHAN by the hand.)

Come on, Stupid. We gotta look for new quarters.

(Since this is the end of the scene, NATHAN, MAXINE, and CHALMERS step out of character. KURT and SYDNEY applaud. CHALMERS bows.)

KURT

Thank you, all.

SYDNEY

Yes, that was good.

(From the auditorium is heard a loud shout: "No! No! Outrageous!" A moment later ALBERT NORMAN enters onstage, with RUSSELL on his heels.)

ALBERT

Maxine, good grief!

MAXINE

(shocked.)

Albert!

ALBERT

What are you doing? Look at you! Indecent!

(To RUSSELL.)

You were right.

(To MAXINE.)

I heard it all. Not only indecently dressed but sacrilegious! Disgraceful! I thought you said this was a musical — I mean, something decent and wholesome, something family oriented, something bland. But this! This is blasphemy! And look at you! Look at you!

(To RUSSELL.)

Look at her!

(To MAXINE.)

Go get dressed this instant!

MAXINE

(indicates her costume.)

But this is—. Well, it's just—. Anyway, I probably won't play the part. Who ever heard of a fifty-something Eve?

ALBERT

I don't care. I've heard enough. Russell has been telling me what this — this propaganda, this *female* propaganda — is all about and it's nothing like what you've tried to pawn off

The Glass Ceiling

on me. Innocent musical, my foot! Think of your reputation! Think of *our* reputation! We have to live here, you know. I run a business here. Why, I'll be ruined.

RUSSELL

And Chalmers! What are you doing here? You voted against this trash. So did you, Nathan.

CHALMERS

Well, as I've said before on countless other occasions, the play's the thing. In this case, the thing that hooks ol' thes Chalmers. Simply stated, I can't resist. No willpower. Besides, this play isn't as bad as you made it out to be.

NATHAN

Yeah.

RUSSELL

It's a disgrace! You'll be the laughing stock of the community.

CHALMERS

Ah, I hope so!

(Dances and sings:)

Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh! Make 'em roar, Make 'em scream,
Take a fall, Butt a wall, Split a seam, Make 'em laugh.

(KURT claps.)

RUSSELL

And Kurt! Well, this is exactly what I would expect from you.

KURT

Yes? Are you here to try out? Satan maybe?

RUSSELL

I'm telling you this play does not have the sanction — the *official* sanction — of our community theater. The manner in which it was rammed through at the board meeting was improper and illegal. I'm investigating... You're not getting a dime from us.

KURT

Who's "us?" Isn't us, we? Am I and some of the others not a part of "we?"

RUSSELL

Don't get smart!

KURT

The board approved this production.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Not on your life, young man! As I've already stated, the entire process was invalid — illegal. I've spoken with certain people. I've gotten one opinion and am getting more; I have experts looking at our by-laws. I can tell you this will not be! You mark my words!

ALBERT

(to RUSSELL, pointing at SYDNEY.)

Is that—. Is she???

CHALMERS

That is she. She is that.

SYDNEY

Yes, I'm the playwright, the evil influence, the corrupter of community morals, the degenerate, the radical women's libber. Sydney Galtier, the fiery feminist.

ALBERT

Huh! Well, I would have guessed. You have the look of one.

SYDNEY

I do? Well! I'm curious to know just what is that look.

ALBERT

A man knows it when he sees it. It's an arrogant, superior look, a look of disdain for all males. It's written all over your face. It's insidious. The message is clear: It's all about taking over, degrading men, condemning them for all the world's evils, turning society on its head, and for disgruntled women to take revenge for their shortcomings.

SYDNEY

Oh, my yes! You've hit the nails on their heads. And also, we have plans to imprison all men who do not toe the line, to shackle them.

ALBERT

I don't doubt it.

(As an afterthought.)

Sydney. Huh! Isn't that a man's name?

SYDNEY

Well, isn't that just another example of how we're taking over, turning the world upside down? My father's name was Clarissa and my mother's, Albert.

ALBERT

(Ignores her and turns to MAXINE.)

Maxine! Get out of that costume and come with me this instant!

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

This instant?

(Starts to undo the snaps, etc. of her costume; acts sexy; pulls it partially off her shoulder. CHALMERS, NATHAN, and KURT cheer her on with: "Take it off! Take it off!" as MAXINE goes into a burlesque routine.)

ALBERT

Maxine!

(As MAXINE continues:)

Maxine! Stop it! You know what I mean. Go back stage and get into your clothes.

MAXINE

(screws up her courage — not easily.)

I— I think not. No. I—. No! You can go home if you like, Albert, but I'm staying here.

ALBERT

What! Maxine! What has gotten into you?

MAXINE

(raises one hand above her head, somewhat resembling the Statue of Liberty.)

Liberty!

SYDNEY

Equality!

KURT

Fraternity!

CHALMERS

Storm the Bastile!

(Raises an invisible flag and dashes around the stage; sings.)

Liberté! Liberté! Marchons! Marchons! Liberté chérie!

ALBERT

This has gone far enough!

(Crosses and attempts to grab MAXINE, who resists and runs away as ALBERT pursues her.)

CHALMERS

(joins in the pursuit, and grabs ALBERT just as he corners MAXINE.)

Stop cad! Blackguard! Stop, I say! Unhand this innocent damsel!

(ALBERT knocks CHALMERS to the floor. In his typical way, CHALMERS dramatizes his injury with loud moans and groans.)

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

Albert! What have you done?

(Kneels beside CHALMERS.)

Chalmers! Speak to me! Are you all right?

CHALMERS

It is only a mortal wound. But never mind. I go gentle into that good night happily protecting you, dear, sweet Max. Farewell, sweet Princess, and may a choir of angels sing me to my rest-stop.

(Writhes in agony for a few moments and, of a sudden, stiffens.)

MAXINE

Oh, Chalmers! No! Oh, I'm so sorry.

ALBERT

Maxine! I'm your husband! How can you—? This is shameful! Quit groveling over that— that. Maxine, I'm telling you! Get up! Change clothes and come with me. I've had enough of this— this— this— this glass ceiling nonsense! It has gone to your head.

MAXINE

Perhaps. Perhaps it is shaking up that poor little obedient head of mine. Perhaps it's time I woke up. I am not your slave. I have my rights — my inalienable rights — and you can't deny them to me — not any longer.

(CHALMERS raises an arm, shakes it at ALBERT, then feebly drops it.)

ALBERT

(to RUSSELL.)

This stuff is lethal. You have to put a stop to it quickly.

RUSSELL

I intend to. Most assuredly!

(To KURT and the others.)

You will hear from me on this. You'll regret this. I warn you!

(Turns and storms out.)

(ALBERT lingers. MAXINE strokes CHALMERS' forehead.)

ALBERT

Maxine, have you no shame? Are you coming? This is your last chance.

MAXINE

My last chance?

(CHALMERS groans.)

The Glass Ceiling

ALBERT

Yes! Now for goodness sakes, come to your senses, Maxine. Remember who you are.

MAXINE

The obedient housewife.

ALBERT

Oh, stop that, Maxine!

MAXINE

(stands and assumes a defiant pose.)

My last chance, you say? Ah, the man has spoken and I am meant to cower and cringe and obey. To grovel! To happily bear the chains of bondage! Ah, but chains do not become me any longer, dear husband. They are not the fashion. I prefer the jewels of freedom and equality. Thus, dear Albert, I have decided — I, former wretched slave — that I will come home when I am damn good and ready.

(After the speech, CHALMERS quietly, unobtrusively claps, then drops both hands on his chest in repose. Shocked and embarrassed, ALBERT exits in a huff. After his exit ALL cheer. We hear: “Good for you, Maxine!” “Way to go, Maxine!” CHALMERS lifts his head.)

CHALMERS

Liberté!

Curtain

The Glass Ceiling

ACT I SCENE III

A Few Days Later. Rehearsal.

Lights up on the same bare stage, except for some folding chairs upstage. KURT, upstage center with script in hand, is pacing off an area, marking it with pieces of masking tape, then placing three of the folding chairs in the area. SYDNEY enters from the auditorium and, sneaking up behind KURT, puts her hands over his eyes.

SYDNEY

Guess who.

KURT

Oh, my! I love guessing games. Let's see. A woman with soft, caressing hands. A woman whose sweet voice and warm breath are irresistible. A woman—

(Dropping the script, KURT spins around and clasps her around the waist.)

with tender, irresistible lips.

(Kisses her passionately.)

SYDNEY

So they are!

(Still in an embrace, they stand looking admiringly, contentedly at each other, occasionally indulging in tiny, nibbling kisses. During this moment of entrancement, DIANA, with script in hand, enters unobtrusively from the auditorium to the edge of the stage, then on tiptoe, onstage but to one side partially hidden by the curtains so that she will be unnoticed.)

SYDNEY

Last night, our consultation on the play... was, well, I thought especially productive.

KURT

We accomplished a lot; covered all the bases.

SYDNEY

Yes, you did — ah, *we* did. You have such a grasp for ah...

KURT

For the ins and outs of...

SYDNEY

For the ups and downs...

KURT

The delights of...

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Our daily — ah, nightly — consultations...

KURT

Of which, I hope, there will be more.

SYDNEY

Oh, there will be and I expect they will be even more productive.

(Gives him a full-blown kiss.)

You are good, Monseur Director, I mean with your many subtle — ah — suggestions.

(adds:)

For the play, of course.

KURT

And you are so agreeably receptive, so open to my proposals. We make an excellent team.

SYDNEY

Yes, we've clicked; we've meshed.

KURT

We've come together.

SYDNEY

(with a chuckle.)

You can't believe how pleased I was with everything.

KURT

I was—

SYDNEY

Masterful. Your talent as a director was amply demonstrated. Does it come naturally or have you had lots of practice?

(Beat.)

Directing, that is.

KURT

Don't spoil it.

SYDNEY

No. Mustn't spoil what is.

KURT

Look ahead, not back.

(kisses her, then releases her as he hears noises offstage.)

Here come my actors.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

I'll let you be. Will you be over tonight?

(Adds, with a knowing smile.)

So we can continue discussing the play in even greater depth?

KURT

Of course, Miss Playwright. In greater depth, if that's possible!

(NATHAN, CHERESE, MAXINE and CHALMERS enter from backstage, chatting amongst themselves, each carrying a script. KURT picks up and opens the script. As SYDNEY begins to exit through the auditorium, she bumps into DIANA.)

SYDNEY

Oops! Oh, Diana. Sorry. I didn't see—. Did you just arrive?

DIANA

(coolly.)

Just.

(Adds as an aside.)

In time.

SYDNEY

(slightly flustered.)

I was just—.

DIANA

Leaving?

SYDNEY

Yes. I have an appointment.

(Stammers.)

Ah—. Ah—. Yes. It's going well. Kurt is doing a good job.

DIANA

He's got what it takes. And he tries *soooo* hard.

(Pauses.)

Ol' Kurt.

(To SYDNEY.)

Bye, Syd.

SYDNEY

Bye.

(Descends the auditorium steps and starts up the aisle as if to leave but halts half-way. Gradually she sneaks back and stations herself out of sight behind the side curtains.)

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

(After a pause to catch her breath, she dashes across the stage to KURT.)

Hello, Darling.

(Gives him a prolonged, passionate kiss from which he discreetly tries to free himself.)

Oh, Darling, please! I just can't take my hands off you. I never could. I'm as hungry for you as ever.

NATHAN

Hello. I hope we're not interrupting anything.

DIANA

It's nothing! Same old, same old. You know.

CHERESE

I have to leave in a few hours. I hope this will not become more intense or prolonged.

(With some difficulty, KURT finally escapes from DIANA's embrace.)

KURT

(embarrassed.)

We were just rehearsing.

CHALMERS

Indeed! And with good accent and good discretion, with unparalleled passion, too. How fortunate that fair Maxine and I came early for our love scene so we could pick up some pointers from the experts. We need the practice.

KURT

Love scene? Oh, yes. Practice? Well, a little.

CHALMERS

And, at my age, a little is often enough.

(To MAXINE.)

Would you like to sneak backstage and practice until we are called forth?

MAXINE

(playfully slaps him.)

Chalmers!

KURT

Why don't you just take a seat, huh?

CHALMERS

A love seat, perhaps?

(Looks around the stage and spots two folding chairs.)

The Glass Ceiling

Ah, there! Exquisite! Delightful! The latest in love seat fashion! Come, my dear.

(Leads MAXINE to the chairs and runs his hand over them.)

Such ornate upholstery!

(THEY sit.)

KURT

Okay! Let's get started.

NATHAN

As long as we're still in business, as long as the big bad wolf — Russell — doesn't huff and puff and blow down our stage.

KURT

Ah, what can he do? He's just a lot of huff and puff and *fluff* — that's it.

(Pauses; claps to get everyone's attention.)

Okay, cast, for now we'll just use our imaginations. Here's the way the set will look. There'll be a platform...

(Describes the area he paced off graphically with gestures and by walking off the dimensions.)

Seven feet tall. About eight deep and twelve wide. There'll be steps up to it from the back. Okay? Now the floor or ceiling — depending on your point of view — will be glass. Well, actually, not glass — too dangerous — but plastic, thick plastic but transparent.

DIANA

Transparency! That's what I like, you know, so you can see what you're getting. Like Kurt.

(Takes KURT's arm.)

NATHAN

This is for those scenes when the men — the hotshot executives — are together?

(Points upward.)

Up in the executive, off-limits-for-women, board room?

KURT

(gently frees himself from DIANA, who hovers close.)

That's right. Above, the board room, below, the—.

NATHAN

The dungeon.

(Laughs; CHERESE frowns.)

KURT

The waiting room, the room where women wait for justice, for equality, only now their patience is wearing thin.

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

Oh, Darling, you're so perceptive!

KURT

(to NATHAN & CHERESE, indicating the imaginary set.)

Yeah. Anyway... Great set, huh?

NATHAN

Yeah, I guess! But, well, wow! That's a big job!

KURT

(stands in the middle of the area he has described, first looking up and then, down.)

The men look down through their glass floor...

CHERESE

(crosses to a spot below the "glass floor.")

Yeah, I know. And the women look up through their glass ceiling.

(Waves upward.)

Hello there, oppressive, dominating males. I'm an oppressed feminist bent on stringing you up by your you-know-whats. I realize that when you look down on little ol' me, you see merely a fantastically beautiful object of your desire, yet powerless, helpless, sometimes clueless, sometimes witless but — oh! — *oh* so obedient!

NATHAN

(moves near CHERESE and pretends to look down through the glass floor.)

Hi there, Beautiful. Fancy seeing you down there through my glass floor — down where you belong.

KURT

(pretends to clap.)

Very good, guys. I guess the play could have been called The Glass Floor instead of The Glass Ceiling. Or The Glass Floor, slash, Glass Ceiling.

NATHAN

I was thinking... Is it going to hold the actors? The floor, ceiling. I mean—? As I recall from the script, there will be several actors in the boardroom, on the so-called glass floor, at the same time, along with the furniture.

KURT

Of course! You think I'd do this if it weren't safe?

DIANA

Not my darling, Kurt. You can trust him to be— to be— well, you know, safe.

(Aside.)

The Glass Ceiling

He's always protecting his behind.

CHERESE

(to NATHAN.)

You should worry! You're up on top. What about me? I'll be under you — you and the other hotshots *and* the furniture.

NATHAN

(to KURT.)

Where are you going to get a piece of plastic eight by twelve?

DIANA

Don't you trust Kurt, Nathan? Goodness! After all this time and you haven't learned to trust him! Shame!

KURT

Diana... Ah—. Would you—?

DIANA

Of course, I would, Darling. Don't I always? Anything you say. You know that. You've always been able to count on me, you know, through thick and thin, through high tide and low, through good and bad, through ups and downs, ins and outs, through hard times and—

KURT

Diana! Damn it all! I mean — sorry — what are you doing? I mean, why are you acting like a— .

DIANA

Like a what, dear? Like your constant, ardent lover?

KURT

Okay! Never mind! I'd like to rehearse this scene.

CHALMERS

(shouts with a flourish:)

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. And do so before we fall asleep. And before we forget what we learned!

KURT

Okay, Ham. Okay.

(Walks back and forth describing the scene.)

Now! Here's the way it is. Nathan — Morton Black, the CEO of Stellar Industries, in his early fifties — has just presided over a board meeting. The last of the board members has left and he is alone in the room. In the real set, there'll be a big swivel chair and a desk

The Glass Ceiling

for our rotten CEO, but for now, you can use this, Nath. And that one is for the aspiring female executive. And over there, for the secretary.

(Indicates each of the three folding chairs.)

DIANA

(squeals with delight.)

Oh! Oh! Oh, darling! How kind! I get my own little chair for my own little derriere.

(Wiggles her behind.)

KURT

(with effort contains his irritation with Diana. Continues with his directions.)

He — Black— takes out a cigar and makes a big production out of lighting it — you know, clipping the end, rolling it in his fingers, smelling it and all that stuff.

(NATHAN goes through the motions with an invisible cigar.)

KURT

At the same time, while he's doing that, Chereese — Mercedes, the aspiring — sexy, I might add — female executive in her late thirties who wants to break through the glass ceiling — enters below. For now, Nath, we'll pretend that this area...

(Describes it by drawing it with his hand.)

see the tape ... is the board room and this area, Chereese...

(Does the same.)

... the area below the board room, is the waiting room, where Mercedes is waiting.

DIANA

Cooling her heels.

NATHAN

I'm really looking forward to getting into this part.

(Forces an extravagant scowl.)

A real villain. I think I should play it heavy, really lay it on, you know.

(Pauses.)

And also, this will certainly be a test of my skills as a vocalist. Although once I played Lancelot in Camelot, you know.

(Sings a few bars of "If Ever I Should Leave You.")

CHERESE

(clowning, acts thrilled.)

Oh, Lance, Baby! Don't ever leave me.

KURT

Okay! I've set the scene. Just imagine the desks and other stuff, you know, the intercom, computers and office equipment. Morton Black, the misogynist CEO of Stellar Industries, is high up in the plushy board room and the aspiring female quasi-executive,

The Glass Ceiling

Mercedes Graves, seeking a high level position is *underneath, below*, so to speak, in the austere waiting room, looking up at the glass ceiling — gravely.

(Short burst of laughter.)

She is intent on breaking through the glass ceiling and he wants to keep her in her place.

DIANA

(sings.)

Keep her in her place, keep her in her place, that's the way! Keep her in her place, keep her in her place, make her pay.

KURT

(ignores DIANA.)

Since we don't have the music yet, just do your best. Okay? Places.

(With scripts in hand, DIANA, CHERESE, and NATHAN take their places.)

KURT

The scene opens with Morton at his desk and Mercedes in a chair. Morton calls for his secretary, Miss Brindle.

DIANA

That's me, the none-too-bright, basically incompetent Miss Brindle who is madly in love with her boss, is grossly subservient, but who has other features that appeal to the misogynous *and* lascivious C-E-O.

(Does a sexy strut as she cups her breasts prominently. Then crosses to her chair, crosses her legs, exposing a lot of flesh, and pretends to be looking into a mirror fixing her hair and putting on lipstick.)

NATHAN

(makes a buzzing sound pretending to turn on the intercom.)

Miss Brindle?

DIANA

(jumps excitedly with the buzzing; looks around for the source of the sound and finally realizes it is the intercom; answering it, she acts the part of a dumb blonde, chewing gum, speaking in a high, squeaky falsetto, and using the exaggerated expressions of a simpleton.)

Yes, Mr. Black?

NATHAN

Come in.

DIANA

Come in? Did I knock, Mr. Black?

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

Come into my office!

(Rolls his eyes as he clicks off the intercom.)

DIANA

(shocked by the tone of his voice.)

Oh! Oh, yes, Mr. Black. Right away, Mr. Black.

(Pauses, clicks off the intercom, and swoons dramatically.)

Oh, he's such a darling!

(Aside to KURT.)

Like you, sweetheart.

(Quickly back in character.)

He wants me to come into his office. What a treat! What an honor!

(Takes another look at herself in her mirror and straightens her skirt.)

I suppose I should take these whatchacallits.

(Holds up a note pad and pencil, sticking the pencil in her hair.)

NATHAN

What an incompetent knucklehead! Typical female!

DIANA

(enters sashaying sexually and, in a high-pitched feminine voice, sings:)

Oh, Mister Black! Here I am, at your disposal. Dictation, computation, duplication, and adoration!

(Bows; continues singing:)

Good morning, Mister Black. How are you this fair morning, Mister Black? How was the coffee, Mister Black? Was it black enough, Mister Black? Black. Black. Black.

(Reads from the script.)

Here, she stops singing and continues in her normal, sickening voice.

(With an embarrassing laugh.)

Oh! Those are the stage directions.

(Pauses.)

'Sickening!' Huh!

(In character.)

I've switched to a new coffee brand. Misses Coffee. And I bought a new measuring cup. Does the coffee measure up?

(Giggles.)

NATHAN

It was probably the worst coffee I've had in thirty years. Let's stick to the old standards. Mister Coffee! None of this new fangled stuff, Miss Brindle.

(Sings.)

Tradition!

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

(sings.)

Oh, no, Mister Black! Oh, no! No! No! I tried so hard, Mister Black. Oh, yes! Yes! Yes! You can dock me, you can sock me. You're the C-E-O and if there's one thing I know, it's that the C-E-O always wants a good cup of Joe.

(Talks.)

Mister Black, I hope you'll forgive me. Oh, what can I do to make it up to you? Please! Please! Tell me!

NATHAN

I'll think about it.

DIANA

(talks.)

I can massage your feet again.

NATHAN

Yeah... Maybe.

DIANA

Rub your back?

NATHAN

I'll think about it.

DIANA

I'll do anything, Mister Black. Anything at all!

NATHAN

Anything?

(Leers a big, bold, audacious leer, adding a long, lascivious cackle.)

He-he-he-he-he!

CHERESE

(out of character.)

What was that supposed to be?

NATHAN

A leer.

CHALMERS

King Lear!

NATHAN

(Points at the script and quotes.)

See? "Leers."

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

Oh. I thought maybe you were sick to your stomach.

(NATHAN shrugs, then, hamming it up, gives CHERESE another leer, which she returns by giving him an even more sinister one.)

NATHAN

(back in character.)

Anything, huh? Can you stay after hours, Miss Brindle?

DIANA

(sings.)

Oh, yes, Mister Black! Oh, thank you, Mister Black. Oh, Mister Black, you're so good to poor little ol' me! Yes! Yes! Yes! I am always at your beck and call, always waiting to do my all, but, oh, that's not all. No, not all, Mister Black!

(Puts her arm around him, cuddles, runs her hand through his hair.)

You'd be surprised what I can do, Mr. Black.

(Out of character, to KURT.)

Right, darling?

KURT

Diana! Please! Stick to the script.

DIANA

Yes, darling. Anything you say.

NATHAN

All right, Miss Brindle. Relax. Relax. We'll talk about this later. Right now I want to know about my appointments for today.

DIANA

(reads from the appointment book she has brought with her.)

Let's see... Ah... Ah... Ah...

(Squints. Turns the book right side up.)

Oh!

NATHAN

I was hoping to get in a round of golf.

DIANA

Oh, yes, Mister Black! That would be fun, wouldn't it? Oh, I can just see you hitting your little balls all over the freeway. Oh, yes!

NATHAN

That's *fairway*, Miss Brindle.

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

What?

NATHAN

You hit your balls — er, your golf balls — on the fairway, not freeway. Freeway is for cars and fairway is for— for golf.

DIANA

Well, whatever. Freeway, fairway. I just know how great you are, a regular Babe Ruth.

(NATHAN roles his eyes and sighs.)

However, there's this woman...

(Laughs.)

But she shouldn't take long since she's only a woman. That Ms. Graves. Isn't that a funny name? Anyway, ten o'clock appointment. I'm sorry, Mister Black. Shall I tell her that something important has come up — like golf?

NATHAN

Graves? Who—? Oh, yeah, that irritating, female aspirant. Damn! Now what does she want? Always some damn petty grievance! I'm sorry we hired her. And we certainly wouldn't have if it had been up to me. A woman in management! Absurd! The board's idea was to hire a token woman in management to avoid the criticism that we were sexist or some such preposterous reasoning and put her out of sight, off in some corner.

(Beat.)

What did you say she wanted?

DIANA

Let's see... Ah... Ah... It says here...

(With some difficulty, reads.)

Disgust duties for new, advanced executive position.

NATHAN

Discuss! That's *discuss* duties for new executive position.

(Checks watch.)

Okay. It's just ten. Let the bitch cool her heels for a while, just to let her know who's boss. I'll buzz you when I'm ready to see her.

DIANA

Oh, yes, Mister Black, buzz me. I love it when you buzz me. Ooooo!

(Does a little dance and wiggles her rear.)

Thank you, Mister Black. I just love working for you! You're—

(Inspired; swoons.)

You're everything wonderful I am not. A man!

NATHAN

Yeah.

(Twirls cigar.)

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

(looks at the script.)

Oh! This is the duet. Shall we give it a shot? It'll be fun, even though we don't have the music.

NATHAN

Why not?

KURT

(looks at the script.)

Okay. Proceed.

NATHAN

(reads:)

Black lights his cigar, rises, paces, pauses and looks down at the floor.

(Rises, paces, pauses, and looks down at the floor.)

The glass floor.

CHERESE

(reads.)

Mercedes rises, paces, pauses and looks up at the ceiling. The glass ceiling, no less.

(Sings.)

Oh, bitter subjugation!

NATHAN

(sings.)

Oh, dulcet domination!

CHERESE

Oh, woeful depression!

NATHAN

Oh, sweet repression!

(shakes a warning finger.)

Woman, know your place. These upper chambers are not yours to grace. Hail to the male!

Oh, hail the male as he strides the earth. Oh, hail the male for all he is worth. Oh—

CHERESE

Oh, good God! You're awful!

NATHAN

(double-checks the script.)

What?

CHERESE

You heard me. You sound terrible!

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

Well, I can't help it. There's no music.

CHERESE

Come on, Lancelot, you should be able to do better than that!

NATHAN

Well, you don't sound so hot yourself.

CHERESE

What! I'm a damn sight better than you!

DIANA

Oh, the hell with it! Even if there were music, even if we had someone who could sing, it's still an awful piece of—.

(To KURT.)

Kurt, Darling, how can you stand directing this crap? It's, well — I hate to say it... I mean—. Well, you have to admit, Sweetheart, it's pretty — well, corny — stupid, I mean. When I first read it, I thought it was — well, maybe okay — but now I think it's — well, you know, just plain stupid.

(Makes a face to show what she thinks.)

KURT

Stupid?

DIANA

Okay. Maybe that's not the right word. Dumb.

KURT

Dumb?

DIANA

Dumb. Corny. Amateurish. How can you, with your vast, stage experience, want to direct such — ick! — such a piece of—? Jeez! I mean, Kurt, darling, you're an expert!

KURT

Okay, Diana, maybe a little of that — what you said. Okay, yes, I'll admit there are some things wrong with it but, well, I aim to get it worked out eventually.

DIANA

How? Won't you need the playwright's approval for any changes?

KURT

I suppose. Well, yes, I guess I will.

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

You'll have to consult with her.

KURT

Well, yes, I probably will.

DIANA

But she doesn't seem like the type you can handle very easily. You know how these artsy types are. Temperamental. Touchy. Resistant. You would have to be extremely tactful, clever, manipulative.

KURT

Well, yes, I know; however, I think I know enough about these *artsy types* to know what strings to pull. I know they think every word they write is somehow holy and unchangeable, but I'll handle this one all right — tactfully, yes, cleverly, yes — with kid gloves, so to speak.

DIANA

Just don't let her handle *you* — or should I say manhandle?

KURT

Oh, don't worry.

DIANA

You've got her number, eh? She's putty in your hands?

KURT

So to speak.

(Aside.)

Not putty exactly.

DIANA

(with a knowing leer.)

Well, you have a lot of experience handling women, if you know what I mean. I can certainly attest to that!

KURT

(a little taken aback.)

Well, no, not that kind of handling. But I think I can — what? — work her. She's so eager to get her play produced...

DIANA

I see. So, therefore, she'll be an easy conquest?

KURT

Conquest? Well, only in the sense of getting her to make the necessary changes in the

The Glass Ceiling

play, to make it, well, less corny, less stupid, less dumb.

DIANA

So, you'll be able to cover all the bases with her, deal with all the ins and outs, the ups and downs; in other words, all the delights of consultation?

KURT

(shocked and suspicious: where has he heard those words before?)

What? What do you mean?

SYDNEY

(steps out from the shadow of the curtain.)

The question isn't what *she* means; it's what do *you* mean?

KURT

(jolted.)

Sydney! I thought—

SYDNEY

That I had left? Obviously.

DIANA

I hadn't. I can smell a rat.

CHALMERS

Glory be! Clear the poop deck! Man the battle stations!

SYDNEY

(looks at DIANA, then KURT, not knowing whom to address; finally chooses KURT.)

So how do you mean to work me, to manipulate me, to manhandle me? That is the question.

CHALMERS

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer—

SYDNEY

Slings and arrows? Yes!

(To KURT.)

She has discovered us and I have discovered you — the real you.

KURT

Now, wait a minute, Sydney. I can explain.

DIANA

This should be interesting. Please explain to me the delicious delights of consultation.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

And explain to me the shortcomings of this stupid, dumb play which you have been raving about to this vulnerable artsy female who you assume will do anything — *anything!* — to see her play produced, even if it is directed by an artless, conniving bonehead.

KURT

(flustered.)

I didn't mean it that way. I mean, I didn't mean to imply—. I mean—.

SYDNEY

Nor, I expect, did you mean any of those sugary phrases you whispered in my ear when we were engaged in delightful consultation.

DIANA

Oh, ho! You can count on that! What did you expect? Engaged in delightful consultations? Oo-la-la! Hot and heavy they were, no doubt. But how else to bed down a playwright, whose play one wants to direct? Flattery will get you everything! Oh, I can imagine those intense, hot and heavy consultations, the great director's hot breath in your ear.

(Imitates Kurt's voice.)

“Oh, Sydney, my sweet, you're absolutely, stunningly, astonishingly brilliant; you're so much better than that dumb broad I've been shackled with — and besides you have a play I can direct and she doesn't.”

KURT

Diana! I never said that!

DIANA

Oh, I'm sorry I misquoted you, Darling! But, of course, I wasn't there. I was at home wondering what you were doing, waiting anxiously for a promised call, and then, when the silence was too oppressive, imaging all sorts of scenarios. So tell me now so that you are not misunderstood. What did you say when engaged in those delightful consultations?

SYDNEY

Oh, yes, scores of sweet nothings! Mainly empty, devious nothings, however!

DIANA

(indignant.)

Huh! I never even got sweet nothings!

SYDNEY

Maybe you were lucky.

CHALMERS

Nothing can come from nothing. King Lear.

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

(to DIANA.)

I'm sorry. I—. I—. Well, I'm sorry.

DIANA

You certainly are! A sorry example of an honest man.

CHALMERS

Good line! Lay it on!

KURT

I mean... Well, what I want to say is...

DIANA

Yes?

(KURT looks from one to the other, at a loss for words.)

SYDNEY

Our hero has lost his voice. Trapped by his two lovers, his mouth is frozen wide open, creating an enormous, cold draft. The audience is hushed, waiting breathlessly. As he stands thus, center stage, in wordless wonder, Sydney Galtier, the artsy playwright, crosses and strikes him on the cheek...

(Slaps KURT on the cheek.)

(Stunned, KURT staggers, then stands, frozen, his hand on his cheek.)

DIANA

Not to be outdone, the spurned, artless Diana delivers another blow for womankind.

(Slaps KURT, who reels again.)

CHALMERS

Anyone else?

RUSSELL

(from the auditorium, as he enters.)

Yeah, how about me?

(Laughs loudly. Enters onstage.)

Was that part of the play or was it real?

(Looks from one to another.)

Regardless, it was well done.

(Pauses. He is enjoying himself.)

No comment? It must have been real, a sign of how well rehearsals are going.

Congratulations! It's good to know that Kurt has everything under control and that the rest of you have learned what a great director he is.

(Laughs derisively.)

The Glass Ceiling

So great that I probably won't even need this.

(Holds up a piece of paper.)

This, dear fellow thespians, is an order from the school board, signed by the illustrious president, Mister Albert Norman, asking you, members of this particular production known as The Glass Ceiling, to desist, to disband, to quit this stage since the school board considers the, ah, play not suitable, objectionable, perhaps obscene, and that they, the board, in order to protect the reputation of this public institution will ban it. Thus your glass ceiling is shattered!

(Hands the paper to KURT.)

How's that for a slap in the face?

(Exits.)

DIANA

Wait for me! I've had enough!

SYDNEY

You're quitting?

DIANA

Duh! You think I'd stay around and take directions from this jerk?

(Exits.)

CHALMERS

At the moment, he's the only jerk we've got.

NATHAN

I wish we had music. I mean, it's not easy singing when you have to, well, sort of invent it on the go.

CHERESE

For you, it wouldn't be easy period!

NATHAN

That does it! I've had enough from you!

(To all as he points at Chereese.)

I don't have to stand around and be insulted by this bitch!

(Exits through the auditorium.)

CHERESE

(calls after Nathan.)

Good riddance! Come back after you've had a voice transplant!

KURT

(calls after Nathan.)

Wait! Nathan! Wait!

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Abandon ship! Abandon ship! All hands overboard!

KURT

Jeez! Okay! It's all my fault! I'm done, I'm finished, washed up, I resign!
(Begins to exit.)

SYDNEY

Kurt, wait!

KURT

No!
(Hurriedly exits.)

CHERESE

Yeah! Abandon ship.
(Exits.)

(CHALMERS, MAXINE, and SYDNEY look at each other with a degree of amazement. SYDNEY throws up her arms and sinks into a chair. CHALMERS crosses to her.)

CHALMERS

The life of the playwright is not easy, my dear.

SYDNEY

You can say that again!

CHALMERS

If you insist.
(Steps forward to down center, facing the audience. Drawing a deep breath, he begins to orate.)

The life of the playwright—

(SYDNEY throws a shoe at him, interrupting his speech as the curtain falls.)

Curtain

The Glass Ceiling

ACT II, SCENE I

The next day.

(The darkened stage. RUSSELL enters from the auditorium as in Act I, Scene I and crosses the stage in search of the lights.)

RUSSELL

Damn! Why do they always have to have it so dark in here every time I come in? They must have it in for me.

(Bumps into a chair, knocking it over with a loud crash.)

Owww! I broke my leg again.

(Another crash of objects falling, then lights come on to the same bare stage as in Act I, Scene III. Rubbing his shin, RUSSELL emerges from backstage and advances to downstage center, peering out into the auditorium.)

I wonder if they'll come. According to what I was able to get out of Chalmers, they had quite a row after I left. Total disintegration! Poor Kurt. Poor ol' Lover-boy. But I don't feel a bit sorry for him. He got what he has always deserved. Two slaps. Oh, that was quite a sight!

(Pretends to slap one cheek, then the other, reeling with each stroke.)

Take that, you cad! And that, Lover-boy! A right! A left! A jab! An uppercut! A haymaker and down he goes!

(Laughs as he pictures it.)

And Chalmers said Nathan's singing was awful. Well, what did they expect? He has the voice of a sick frog.

(Imitates a frog singing something simple like, "Happy Birthday.")

But how do you sing without music? Well, I hope they've all learned their lesson. It's such a disgusting play. Very amateurish. I mean, after all—

(Derisively.)

The Glass Ceiling! A blatant piece of feminine propaganda, pure and simple. The inequality of women! Ha! That's a laugh. I mean, well, women have their place and men have their place. What's the matter with that? The home and the office. The kitchen and the executive suite. That's the way it should be. I mean, well, someone has to run the show. I've heard that some women complain that they don't make as much money as men. So? They don't do as much. They don't work as hard. They—

(In an undertone chuckle.)

They're not as smart.

(Resuming in his normal voice.)

And, besides, they're always running off having babies and stuff like that. What do they expect? God made Adam and then later, as an afterthought, He made a companion for hard-working Adam, who was, after all, in charge of things. So, that's the way it should be.

(Pauses; peers more intently into the auditorium.)

Anyone out there?

(Pauses.)

The Glass Ceiling

Speak up!

(Pauses.)

Well, I'll wait ten minutes and if no one shows, the heck with 'em. I'll pick a new play myself and then ram it down their throats. We can't just let the season fold without doing a money-maker.

(Turns his back on the audience and begins to arrange the stage for a meeting. As he counts the chairs, he hears a sound and looks out into the auditorium.)

A-ha! Hello?

(Enter SYDNEY from the auditorium, dressed appealingly. During the scene, SYDNEY will act coquettish and RUSSELL will respond eagerly.)

RUSSELL

(impressed by her appearance.)

Well! Hello! To what do I owe this visit?

SYDNEY

I knew you had called a meeting and I came to tell you, you've won.

RUSSELL

Won? Oh! You mean my better judgment has prevailed?

SYDNEY

We've lost our director — as bad as he may be — most of our cast and our stage.

RUSSELL

Well, you seem calm in the face of this— well, what I imagine is, for you, a disaster.

SYDNEY

I've accepted it. I have no hard feelings. In fact, I've come to realize—. Well, I hate to admit it but I know that you are—

(Draws a deep breath; this is hard to say.)

—that you are a man of good judgment. I just wish—.

(Turns away, somewhat distraught.)

RUSSELL

You wish?

SYDNEY

Never mind. You've won. It's too late now.

RUSSELL

They say it's never too late. Tell me, what is it you wish.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

I wish I had seen your— your qualities sooner.

RUSSELL

My qualities?

SYDNEY

Well, judgment for one thing — good, solid, down-to-earth judgment, I mean.

(Beat.)

What I really wish is that I had known you better and that I had turned to you for advice and help and—. Well, too late, I asked around among reputable theater people and learned that you are the real bulwark of this theater group, that without you it wouldn't be, that you were the one I should have turned to as the best person for my needs, as the person who, in addition to having the expertise, had the temperament and understanding to work with someone such as I.

RUSSELL

Someone such as you?

SYDNEY

A novice, so to speak. Anyway, as I talked to people in the theater, yours was the name that repeatedly surfaced. "Russell Smoot," they said. "He is truly gifted." Not only that, but that you were always eager to help — to *guide* — theater hopefuls. They spoke of your charisma, your charm, your vision for the theater. They were ecstatic about some of the roles in which you had had such amazing success and went on and on about your outstanding work as a director, especially as a director of musicals.

RUSSELL

(puffing up.)

My Fair Lady, no doubt.

SYDNEY

Oh, yes! And others.

RUSSELL

I was especially pleased with my work in *The Sound of Music*.

SYDNEY

That was high on the list.

RUSSELL

And *The Music Man*.

SYDNEY

That was high too. I heard the word, brilliant mentioned.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Really! Well, yes, I suppose brilliant is accurate.

SYDNEY

It was a long distinguished list, but—. Well, it was my mistake, turning to—.
(*Sighs.*)

RUSSELL

To our dear friend, Kurt?

SYDNEY

Yes. Kurt's merely a—. What shall I say?

RUSSELL

A pretty face?

SYDNEY

An empty head.

RUSSELL

A conniver?

SYDNEY

A philanderer.

RUSSELL

But he can take a slap.

SYDNEY

He's certainly not like you. With you there's substance and maturity.

RUSSELL

(*preeningly.*)

I hope not *too* much maturity.

SYDNEY

Oh, no! Just the right amount.

(*Pauses.*)

But I chose the wrong mentor, the wrong director. I mean, as bad as my play is, it must have *some* potential.

RUSSELL

Well...

(*Takes another look at her; walks around her.*)

Yes, of course. Yes. Potential. Yes. Appeal. Yes. Yes. Full body. Ah... full-bodied appeal. Yes. Well, I felt that from the beginning. However—. Well, you didn't ask me.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Sadly.

(Another long, regretful sigh.)

Yes, I should have come to you — hat in hand — and asked... But I didn't. I was too proud, too vain, too, well, immature. If I had asked you, if I'd approached you—. Oh, never mind.

RUSSELL

Whatever I might be, I am approachable.

SYDNEY

And talented. I mean, solidly talented, not like—. Well...

RUSSELL

Yes, I know who you mean.

SYDNEY

But it's too late.

(Turns away; bows her head.)

It's not to be. Oh, how I dreamed!

RUSSELL

Sweet dreams, no doubt.

(SYDNEY begins crying softly.)

SYDNEY

(with head still bowed.)

If I had known...

(Sighs.)

... what a great director, what a great person you were.

RUSSELL

(pleased with himself.)

Yes.

SYDNEY

Are you still?

RUSSELL

Still?

SYDNEY

Approachable?

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Oh! Yes, I believe so.

SYDNEY

But there was so much wrong with the play.

RUSSELL

Nothing irreversibly. I mean, it had — *has* — potential. I've had some— well, some accomplishments to my credit. I think it could be fixed.

SYDNEY

You really think so — that it has potential?

RUSSELL

Oh, yes. It's just—.

SYDNEY

Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that. I mean, coming from you, that means a lot.

RUSSELL

Yes. Well, as I said, it—.

SYDNEY

Could be fixed. But—

(Pauses; draws a breath.)

Will it?

(They exchange meaningful looks.)

RUSSELL

Try me. Approach me.

SYDNEY

Really?

RUSSELL

Sure. Give it a try.

SYDNEY

Oh, I'm tempted, but—. Well, after how I treated you and all... After our disagreements...

RUSSELL

Water under the bridge.

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

I don't know. Perhaps I should just accept— accept defeat. It's just that— that I promised.

RUSSELL

Promised?

SYDNEY

My family: my mother, my father and, above all, myself. But—. Oh, damn!

(SYDNEY turns away and appears to be sobbing. RUSSELL slowly approaches her, taking in her appealing figure as he does, then begins to reach out to take her but holds back as she speaks.)

SYDNEY

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

(Stops crying and searches for a handkerchief.)

RUSSELL

(quickly offers a handkerchief.)

Here.

(SYDNEY turns, takes the handkerchief, wipes away a few tears, then as she bursts out crying more than ever, throws herself on him, as he simultaneously takes her in his arms and comforts her.)

SYDNEY

I'm acting like a weak female. Oh, but this is just what I've dreamed of — your coming to my rescue in one way or another, helping me as a playwright... or as a woman... holding me...

RUSSELL

Protecting you? Comforting you?

(Bends close to her.)

Kissing you?

(They kiss lightly, then are spurred to great passion.)

SYDNEY

Oh, my God!

(Steps back and wipes away her tears.)

RUSSELL

What's the matter? Do you regret it — my kissing you? Well, I suppose, because after all, I am the big, bad wolf.

(Raises her chin so that she faces him a few inches away.)

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Oh, no! It's just that—.

(Moves toward him allowing him to hold her close again.)

It's just that— that I didn't expect it.

(Pauses.)

The kiss. Any of this.

RUSSELL

Nor I.

SYDNEY

Can it be real?

RUSSELL

(gently runs his hand over her face.)

It seems so. It feels so.

SYDNEY

It does. It feels real and true but so unexpected.

(Pauses; carefully considers her words.)

So unexpected I worry what you might think.

RUSSELL

Like what?

SYDNEY

Like— like, well, that I planned it.

RUSSELL

Did you?

SYDNEY

No, I don't think so.

RUSSELL

You don't think so?

SYDNEY

You were the big, bad wolf and I may have had thoughts of boiling you alive, but I'm not thinking that way at all — not in the least. No! No!

RUSSELL

I'm not a big, bad wolf any more?

SYDNEY

Neither bad, nor wolfish. And what I'm thinking now is that I don't want you having any

The Glass Ceiling

bad thoughts about *me*.

RUSSELL

Are lustful thoughts necessarily bad?

SYDNEY

(laughs.)

Not necessarily.

RUSSELL

You're very beautiful.

SYDNEY

I shouldn't be doing this.

RUSSELL

What?

SYDNEY

What I'm doing. What we're doing. Letting myself be swept off my feet .

RUSSELL

Why not? It's fun.

SYDNEY

It is. It's just that, well, as I said, it was so unexpected.

RUSSELL

Good.

SYDNEY

But you are so approachable.

RUSSELL

Didn't I say so? And you are so—so full bodily desirable.

(Kisses her. It is another passionate kiss. When they break:)

You know I'm waiting for the other board members? They may be here any minute.

(Looks apprehensively into the auditorium.)

SYDNEY

Of course. What do you want me to do? Should I leave?

RUSSELL

Well, perhaps.

(A little unsettled.)

But we should—. I'd like to take another look at your play. Could we—

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Oh, yes!

RUSSELL

— get together? I mean, things have changed. I mean, I feel differently now — about you, about your play, about us. Still, I think it best for the moment, until we can get together, you know, just the two of us, *alone*, to work things out—.

SYDNEY

(meaningfully.)

Alone?

RUSSELL

Yes.

(Pauses.)

Your place?

SYDNEY

Oh, yes! Do you know where I live?

RUSSELL

In the New Garden Apartments?

SYDNEY

Four- eleven.

RUSSELL

Immediately after?

SYDNEY

Immediately, if not sooner. I'll be waiting for you. I know with your many talents, your talents as a director... as a man... Well...

(As SYDNEY moves to exit, RUSSELL takes her arm.)

RUSSELL

Wait! A little reminder first.

(Pulls her toward him and they kiss passionately.)

Ah, yes!

SYDNEY

I hope that's worth remembering.

RUSSELL

Oh, definitely.

(As she begins to exit through the auditorium, he again takes her arm.)

The Glass Ceiling

No, not that way. Through the backstage, through the backdoor.

(Beat.)

Just in case, you know, to avoid any misunderstandings, I mean, just for now, until we work things out later.

SYDNEY

When we're alone! Yes!

(Exits blowing him a kiss.)

RUSSELL

(pauses until he hears the backdoor slam, then laughs derisively.)

Ah, how gullible some women are! Ha! Most women! Being the weaker sex — weaker in so many ways — they believe that by using cunning, their most powerful weapon, they can turn the tables and gain domination over men. Yes!

(Glances in the direction to which Sydney exited.)

Huh! Well, think again, Miss Phony Playwright! If you think you can seduce *me* into supporting your ridiculous piece of propaganda, you are deceived, you are yourself seduced. Yes, I'll admit you have attractions, but I'll give in to you only to the extent of enjoying those attractions. I'll rendezvous, tell you we're going to do The — ugh! — Glass Ceiling, get my reward and then — toodle-loo --- another change of heart.

(Hears a noise from the auditorium.)

Oh! Just in time.

KURT

(calls from the auditorium before entering onstage.)

What's just in time?

RUSSELL

Your entrance. Actually, I didn't expect it at all.

KURT

Sorry to disappoint you.

(More sounds are heard from the back of the auditorium. Enter CHERESE, NATHAN, DIANA, CHALMERS, and MAXINE. Unlike in an earlier scene, DIANA stays as far away from KURT as she can, occasionally glowering at him.)

RUSSELL

Welcome! Welcome! Glad to see you all.

(Greets them as they enter onstage.)

Nathan. Cheryl.

CHERESE

Cherese!

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Oh, sorry. *Cherese!*

(Continues the greetings.)

Ah... Diana. Chalmers!

(They give a slight, obligatory nod of acknowledgement.)

CHALMERS

Hail, mighty lord of the lights!

RUSSELL

What, flattery or insult?

CHALMERS

Take your choice.

RUSSELL

Maxine, good to see you. Welcome fellow board members. Have a seat.

(Casts a quick warning glance at KURT, who barely notices. They seat themselves as in Act I.)

Well! Here we are. I am delighted that you all were wise enough to respond to my call for an emergency board meeting.

(Pauses; draws a breath.)

So, I will officially call the meeting to order. The meeting will come to order.

(Pauses as they come to order.)

Given the decree from the school board, it seems we have no choice but to select another play, one that is more appropriate for the community. Also, it appears that you yourselves may have run into some problems that make it necessary to, well, adjust. However, never mind about that. Suffice it to say that I am happy to come to the rescue, to forgive and forget. I am convinced that without the school board's intervention our beloved community theater would have been faced with a disaster.

(Draws another breath.)

But all of that is behind us. Well, almost. Decisions need to be made, first to officially abandon this Glass Ceiling farce and secondly to choose another play.

(Passes out a sheet of paper to each member.)

Here are the plays that the school and the community want to see. Choosing one of these will show our community that we are serious about providing wholesome entertainment, not insulting, rank amateur—. Okay, let me say no more about your — *our* — mistake.

(Pauses.)

I'll give you a moment to look these over.

CHALMERS

How magnanimous!

CHERESE

Why bother looking? Why don't you just tell us what to choose?

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

Yes! Why pretend that this is a democratic organization?

RUSSELL

Don't you understand? The Glass Ceiling is not suitable.

MAXINE

That's just your opinion.

RUSSELL

And your husband's.

MAXINE

What does he know? He's not even read it.

RUSSELL

He knows enough. He's seen some of it and I gave him a summary and—.

CHERESE

Some summary he must have gotten from you!

RUSSELL

Besides, it's a terrible play! I mean, it's poorly written and it's a musical without music and—. Well, can you imagine: a musical without music! That's a laugh.

(Enter SYDNEY from backstage.)

SYDNEY

But Russell, darling, you will use your magnificent powers and change all of that. You'll shape up the composer and, with your musical skills, will help orchestrate the score and – well – take over everything, rewriting so it's not terrible, and directing so...

RUSSELL

What?

CHALMERS

"Russell, darling?"

MAXINE

Darling?

CHALMERS

(to MAXINE.)

Yes?

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Russell, darling, earlier, just a few minutes ago, when we were together, after you embraced me and smothered me with your kisses, you said the play had potential. You said it could be fixed and that you would do it. Oh, Russell, darling! You were not just leading me on, were you? No, I cannot believe it! Not you! I thought you were intrigued by the idea of guiding and directing and creating and transforming and—. Well... You talked about our working together — alone — working things out: fixing the play and, I assumed, your taking command.

CHALMERS

Holy mackerel! Don't tell the misses.

RUSSELL

Stop with those lies, you bitch!

SYDNEY

But Russell, darling! You promised.

RUSSELL

I promised nothing! What I said was—.

SYDNEY

Yes?

ALL

Yes?

RUSSELL

(struggles.)

I mean—. Ah, I—. Well, I — ah — I mean—.

CHALMERS

What he means is: ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. Ah, dash it all! I mean, I've been caught with my pants down.

SYDNEY

What he means is that, to have his way, he would say anything, make any promise.

KURT

(to SYDNEY.)

And you, you were an innocent lamb?

DIANA

Ha!

The Glass Ceiling

SYDNEY

Not innocent, perhaps, but a lamb, prey for the big, bad wolf.

(CHALMERS does a wolf call.)

RUSSELL

This is outrageous!

CHERESE

(points at RUSSELL.)

Director? Hmm. Well, that's not a bad idea, considering.

MAXINE

Oh, Russell, that's so good of you! Oh, wonderful!

RUSSELL

Hey! I didn't say—!

NATHAN

But we still need a stage.

MAXINE

I'll get Albert to change his mind.

DIANA

How are you going to do that?

MAXINE

I have ways. But if he doesn't do what I ask—. Well, I'm through being his doormat, through feeling inferior. I've been liberated!

CHALMERS

(with a dramatic flourish.)

Ta-da!

MAXINE

Men! Huh! Except for sex, what are they good for?

CHALMERS

(partial aside.)

Hmmmm. Well, at least we're good for something.

MAXINE

(to CHALMERS.)

I don't mean *all* men.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

(raises his hand above his head.)

Ta-da!

RUSSELL

Stop this nonsense! This is getting out of hand!

SYDNEY

All those kisses: they meant absolutely nothing? And it was a lie when you said the play had potential, that you could fix it? We were going to my place to work things out. What things?

RUSSELL

Stop that! You're not going to frame me.

(points at SYDNEY.)

She's a liar! She's an imposter! She tried to seduce *me*! I just played along to see what she was up to and, just as I suspected, it was to get her way with her play, her stupid Glass Ceiling. I'm telling you, all of you, you can't do it; you won't get away with it. It'll be to your detriment if you try. The community will come down on you; the board will come down on you; you'll be branded as— as— I don't know what.

CHALMERS

Liberals? Phssaw! How disgusting!

MAXINE

Well, that's fine with me! Do I get to make a motion?

RUSSELL

I'm still president and I say no.

NATHAN

I don't think you can do that. According to Robert's Rule of Orders—

MAXINE

I move we stick with our choice of The Glass Ceiling.

CHALMERS

Second!

KURT

Third!

CHERESE

Fourth!

The Glass Ceiling

NATHAN

(raises his hand.)

Yeah, I'll go along with it.

(ALL turn to look at DIANA who reluctantly raises her hand.)

CHALMERS

(raises his hand in a salute.)

The Glass Ceiling! All hail!

(CHALMERS begins marching and directs MAXINE to join in front of him. Soon the others, except a reluctant DIANA, join the parade as they march around the stage. Finally, after being coaxed, DIANA gives in and joins at the end of the line.)

CHALMERS

(sings:)

Hi ho! Hi ho! We're off to do the show! And fiddle dee dee and fiddle dee doe, it's going to be one hulluva show!

RUSSELL

Oh, my God! I can't believe this!

MAXINE

The board has spoken.

CHALMERS

Outspoken! Six to one.

(Following MAXINE, they march out of the auditorium.)

RUSSELL

(steps downstage center and shouts after them.)

You'll regret this! You're not getting away with this! Stop! Come back!

(As they disappear.)

This is not the end, I can assure you of that!

Curtain

The Glass Ceiling

ACT II, SCENE II

Two days later.

Opening: A darkened stage. Enter RUSSELL from the auditorium onto the stage, where he stumbles and curses, crosses backstage and turns on the lights.

The set, mainly upstage center, is similar to that in Act I, Scene III, the office of CEO Morton Black, the outer office of his servile secretary, Miss Brindle, and the waiting room below the glass ceiling/floor of Black's office. Of course, the real ceiling has not been installed. Black's office contains a desk, a large swivel chair and any other furniture or items that suggest the opulence of a CEO's office. The waiting room, to one side, is sparsely furnished with a couple of chairs, and a coffee table with magazines. To the other side, Miss Brindle's office has a small desk, with an intercom set that could be anything that looks like an intercom and, perhaps, a computer or typewriter.

RUSSELL takes in the set, looks out at the audience, then stamps his foot.

RUSSELL

(looks out into the darkened auditorium.)

Albert?

ALBERT

(calls out as he comes down the aisle and enters onstage.)

Yes! Here I am.

(Looks out at the audience; performs without any attempt at being dramatic.)

To be or not to be and all that stuff.

RUSSELL

(sarcastically.)

Very good, Albert. I can tell you were born for the stage.

ALBERT

Yeah.

(pauses; reflects.)

Well, Maxine thinks *she* is; that's for sure.

RUSSELL

Poor Maxine. She's been taken in by all of this.

ALBERT

You've got that right! I thought it would be okay, you know, to let her have a little, well, innocent fling or whatever. I mean, I figured it's just— just harmless fluff for women. You know? But now—!

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

(points at the set.)

See, Albert, defiant as ever! The only thing they're missing is the glass ceiling.
(Crosses, examines the set, and kicks the impressive swivel chair.)

ALBERT

Hey! That chair— that's my old—! Be careful. It's an antique! Been keeping it in the attic. How in hell did Maxine get it down and over here?

RUSSELL

And the only reason they're going ahead with this in spite of the consequences is just to spite me, to get my goat and, believe me, they certainly have! Wonder who lets them in.
(Pauses.)

We can place the blame for this on that sneaky playwright woman and Kurt Cadwallier.

ALBERT

I understand he's a real Casanova, and she's—. Well, I heard they were going hot and heavy for a while.

RUSSELL

(not eager to pursue the subject.)

Yeah, I guess.

ALBERT

I mean, she's—. Well, she's pretty—. Well, you know.
(Indicates with a gesture that he thinks she's a desirable.)

RUSSELL

I suppose.

ALBERT

Well, you *should* know!

RUSSELL

What do you mean by that?

ALBERT

I heard. I have my sources.

RUSSELL

Yeah! Maxine! What lies are they—? Jeez!

ALBERT

Hey! Don't get bent out of shape. It's okay. I understand. I mean, well, there are certain male prerogatives... I mean, after all, we work hard; we bring home the bacon.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

Yeah.

ALBERT

(takes a piece of paper out of his pocket.)

Anyway, here's their eviction notice, this one *official*, signed sealed and ready for delivery.

(Pauses; sighs.)

Yeah, this whole thing's been a real problem for me, for *us*, Maxine and me. Things at home are going to pot! I mean, you should see how this has affected our household, our formerly orderly, well-run household.

(In a confidential undertone.)

Well, to be honest, Russell, sometimes I think—I think there's some hanky-panky going on, I mean, other than with this Kurt fellow and the playwright woman.

RUSSELL

Hanky-panky?

ALBERT

Yes. You know what I mean.

RUSSELL

You mean between—??? Ah— between — ??? — and—???

(Makes vague motions with his hands that are somehow meant to indicate who.)

ALBERT

Yes. I've just got these suspicions. I mean, the way Maxine's been acting and how she's been changed and all. I mean, well, I just can't believe it's the same woman the way she can't wait to get to these rehearsals. She's gone simply ga-ga over this stuff. And from what I've seen and heard and—. Well, like I said, I've got suspicions. Know what I mean?

RUSSELL

Yeah! I mean—. Well, yeah!

ALBERT

Yeah, is right! I don't mean the sort of stuff you—. I mean, this is serious. Well, you know how women are.

RUSSELL

Yeah.

ALBERT

I mean, I got a reputation in this town.

The Glass Ceiling

RUSSELL

(struck with an inspiration.)

You know, you could—

(Shakes his head no.)

ALBERT

Could what?

RUSSELL

Well...

(Now he warms up to the subject.)

Well, I expect they'll be coming pretty soon.

(Points to the set.)

See, they're ready and it's about that time and—

(Stops again.)

ALBERT

And? Get to the point, will you?

RUSSELL

Well, maybe we could hide off stage.

ALBERT

Hmmm. Yeah. And—. Hey! I've got this cell phone that takes pictures. If I saw anything fishy, any shenanigans, I'd shoot 'em and have the proof. That would not only shut them down for certain but stop any hanky-panky. Yeah. Not a bad idea, Russ, I gotta hand it to you.

RUSSELL

And *then* we'll serve them their eviction notice!

(Becomes alert to noises in the auditorium; grabs ALBERT and together they disappear behind the curtains.)

(Enter NATHAN, KURT, CHALMERS, MAXINE, DIANA, COURTNEY and CHERESE from the auditorium up onto the stage. All except CHALMERS and MAXINE are carrying their scripts. They ad-lib among themselves as they enter.)

KURT

Okay. The set is just the way we left it. Wonder who turned on the lights. Some kids probably. Okay!

(To COURTNEY.)

Court, what's on the schedule?

The Glass Ceiling

COURTNEY

(consults her clipboard.)

The final scene, the big blowout.

(Proudly showing off.)

The denouement! We're back in Stellar Industries, Morton Black's office, his outer office, and the waiting room where subservient women cool their high heels.

KURT

Okay, guys. Ready, Mort?

(NATHAN, dressed in three-piece business suit, takes his place behind his desk.)

NATHAN

Am I! Okay, bring on those miserable peons, those inferior females! Evil, misogynist Morton Black is ready to put them in their proper, assigned lowly place!

(Growls.)

DIANA

(At her cluttered, messy desk outside Black's office. Speaks as the obsequious Miss Brindle.)

Here I am, Miss Simpy, bird-brain Brindle, at my hero's beck and call, ta-da!

(Bows to NATHAN.)

Oh, he's so— so, oh what should I say? So— utterly, colossally, totally a jerk!

(NATHAN acknowledges the insult as a compliment.)

CHERESE

(swaggers to confront NATHAN.)

But I don't put up with that masculine superiority crap! Not I! I am a liberated woman and a junior exec!

(Gives the appearance of flying through the air like Superwoman.)

Look! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superwoman!!

(Pretends to slug NATHAN with an uppercut.)

CHALMERS

(dressed in a chauffeur's uniform, bows in several directions.)

Nigel, the family chauffeur, at your service. I may look harmless and nondescript but don't let that fool you.

(Cackles with devilish glee.)

And you may also notice that I am script-less, unlike some others here.

MAXINE

(in a stylish, off the shoulder dress with exquisite jewelry.)

Not I. Script-less also, you will notice. I am — *was* — the really — I mean, *really!* — subservient wife of the afore mentioned colossal jerk. Graceless, ingratiating Gertrude. I am — or was — his perennial floor mat.

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

Ah, dear Mrs. Black, you make such a beautiful floor mat!

(Offers MAXINE his arm and parades her around.)

Here she is: floor mat of the year.

(ALL clap.)

KURT

Okay. Let's get started. If you can get along without your scripts, do it. On with the show!

(KURT and COURTNEY move to one side, COURTNEY with script in hand to act as a prompter. During the scene, those with scripts hold them and may refer to them on occasion.)

DIANA

(to KURT as she crosses to her desk.)

How's Sydney these days?

KURT

How should I know? Fine, I guess.

DIANA

You haven't made up?

KURT

I've sworn off women.

DIANA

We're happy to know that, in fact all of womankind is.

KURT

(makes an effort to ignore the implied insult.)

Are you ready?

DIANA

Don't rush me.

KURT

Jeez, Diana! Can't you—? Look, I'm just trying to do a job.

(Unobserved, SYDNEY comes down the auditorium aisle.)

DIANA

Yeah, well, you sure did a job on me! Here I'm waiting for you and you're with—.

The Glass Ceiling

KURT

I'm sorry.

DIANA

Yes, you said that, but what good is it?

(SYDNEY enters onstage.)

SYDNEY

Not much, I would say.

KURT

(throws up his hands.)

Oh, no!

(To both women.)

Hey! Do you want me to direct or not?

(To one and all.)

How can I direct with two unhappy females hounding me?

SYDNEY

He's right. For the moment, we are in the middle of a play, not a love triangle. I suggest we put aside our hurt feelings and concentrate on the matter at hand.

CHALMERS

Here! Here! Let's on with it!

CHERESE

Let's hope he's a better director than a lover.

(Beckons DIANA.)

Come on, Diana. Get over it.

DIANA

Okay, I'll perform, but not on your life will I get over it: jilted for a conniving — well, Russell had the right word.

(In case no one remembers what word Russell used.)

It starts with a "B."

SYDNEY

Bitch. Okay, I'm a bitch. I'll admit it. Bitch. And Kurt is bastard. And we both tried to use the other. But that is a different matter. Right now we have a play to produce and I would like to see if, in addition to being a plain, old bitch, that I'm a bitch of a playwright. May we?

KURT

That's what I say, "may we?" May we rehearse? Please, pretty please? The scene: the

The Glass Ceiling

outer office and inner office of filthy, slimy, contemptible Morton Black, CEO of Stellar Industries.

(In passing to NATHAN.)

Look contemptible.

(NATHAN attempts a “contemptible look.” The actors take their positions: DIANA at her desk, NATHAN at his and CHERESE, MAXINE, and CHALMERS off to one side, ready for their entrances. SYDNEY crosses downstage and to one side, the opposite side of the stage, on which KURT and COURTNEY station themselves. DIANA briefly consults her script then begins.)

(DIANA whistles as she polishes her nails, brushes her hair and checks her lipstick in a small hand mirror. NATHAN makes the sound of a buzzer. This frightens and confuses DIANA as MISS BRINDLE. She scurries around looking for the source. Finally NATHAN stops making the buzzing sound, marches to the outer office door and opens it.)

NATHAN

Miss Brindle! I’m buzzing you!

DIANA

Oh, Mr. Black, you are? Oh, wonderful! I just love it when you buzz me.

(Giggles excitedly.)

Oh, do it again!

NATHAN

(exasperated.)

You stupid idiot! The intercom! When it buzzes, that means you are to answer it. You say, “Yes, Mr. Black. What is it?”

(Points to the intercom.)

This thing. It’s called an in-ter-com. It’s like a telephone but it’s just between you and me.

DIANA

Oh, how nice!

NATHAN

You answer it to see what I want.

DIANA

What do you want, Mr. Black?

NATHAN

I want a secretary! I want—! Oh!

(Sings.)

The Glass Ceiling

Oh, why do I put up with her when she is so impossible?

(Aside.)

Except she does have other attributes and services...

DIANA

(sings.)

Oh, why do I put up with him when he thinks he's so much better?

NATHAN

Yet she obeys my every command and worships the ground I walk on.

DIANA

But I'm just a lowly female and it's a fact he is my better. He is so much my better!

NATHAN

(with effort controls himself. Speaks.)

Okay! Let's practice again. I'll go back into my office and buzz you and you answer — this!

(Puts his hand on it.)

— the in-ter-com.

(Returns to his chair and "buzzes.")

(DIANA jumps when NATHAN buzzes, then remembers, looks around for the intercom, finally locates it, pushes a button and responds.)

DIANA

Hello? I mean, yes Mr. Black. What is it?

NATHAN

That's better.

(Pauses.)

What appointments do I have today?

DIANA

Huh? I mean—. Appointments? But where—?

NATHAN

(tries to control his temper.)

Look in the appointment book, stupid! It's the green book in the middle of your desk. It says, "appointments," a-p-p-o-i-n-t-m-e-n-t-s.

DIANA

(picks up the book and squints at it.)

A-p-p-o— Oh! Oh, yeah, appointments. Let's see.

(Opens the book and reads:)

"Wife for lunch." Oh, you're having your wife for lunch!

The Glass Ceiling

(Perplexed, scratches her head.)

Wow!

NATHAN

Oh, damn! I forgot. Get her on the phone. I've got more important things to do than take her out to lunch.

DIANA

Golf.

NATHAN

(pretends to click off the intercom button. Rises; paces; sings.)

Lunch with her is such a bore! What can we talk about any more? She speaks only her feminine drivel. While I sit and try to be civil. I try to cover the important matters. But it leaves her simple mind in tatters. Women! All they do is yak, yak, yak, with words enough to break my back.

(CHERESE, carrying a briefcase, enters and crosses to Diana's desk. NATHAN sits at his desk, takes out a cigar from his humidor and rolls it reflectively in his hand. DIANA, busy polishing her nails, fails to notice Chereese.)

CHERESE

(grows impatient.)

Excuse me.

DIANA

(startled, jumps.)

Oh! Oh, my! Who are you?

CHERESE

Mercedes Graves. I'm the new junior executive — female executive — the company's reluctant concession to equality of the sexes.

DIANA

(pleasantly.)

Oh, yes! I remember now. The bitch. Well, how are you today?

CHERESE

I'd like to see Mr. Black. Could you buzz him, please?

DIANA

Buzz him? Oh, golly, it isn't often—. Only important stuff. He doesn't like to be buzzed.

(At that moment NATHAN swings around and presses the intercom and makes a very loud buzzing sound.)

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

What was that?

CHERESE

Your intercom, your buzzer.

(NATHAN continues to buzz.)

DIANA

(Gleefully.)

Oh! Oh! He's buzzing *me*! Oh, I'm so excited! I just love to have him buzz me. It gives me goose bumps.

CHERESE

Shouldn't you answer it?

DIANA

Huh? Oh, yes.

(Depresses the intercom.)

Yes, Mr. Black? You buzzed?

NATHAN

Yes! Did you get a hold of my wife?

DIANA

Get a hold of her?

NATHAN

Did you call her, Stupid!

DIANA

Oh. No. Should I?

NATHAN

Yes! What have you been doing?

DIANA

Well, I've been—. I've been talking to that woman, you know, the one—.

(Lowers her voice.)

The, uh, bitch. She's standing right here.

NATHAN

The what?!

The Glass Ceiling

DIANA

Oh, Mr. Black, you know. That's what you called her; that and that other word ass—ass-spir-runt, or something like that.

NATHAN

Good God! Aspirant. What does she want?

DIANA

She wants to see you.

NATHAN

Does she have an appointment?

DIANA

(to Charese.)

Do you have an appointment?

CHERESE

No. I've been trying to get one for days. You always tell me he's busy.

DIANA

(aside.)

Golf.

CHERESE

This is urgent. I need to know what my duties are.

DIANA

To get an appointment. That's number one.

CHERESE

(looks at the appointment book.)

There's an opening right now. Put my name down.

DIANA

(looks at appointment book.)

Well! So what's your name?

CHERESE

Mercedes Graves.

DIANA

How do you spell it?

CHERESE

Graves. G-r-a-v-e-s. Here let me.

The Glass Ceiling

(CHERESE scribbles her name in the appointment book. Meanwhile, growing impatient, NATHAN buzzes.)

DIANA

Oooo! He's buzzing again! Isn't that a wonderful sensation?

(Answers.)

Yes, Mr. Black.

NATHAN

What are you doing out there?

DIANA

Oh, Mr. Black, I just made an appointment for you.

NATHAN

You did? Who? When?

DIANA

That, uh, woman, you know, the, uh— ass— uh—.

(Reads.)

Graves. I think she works here.

NATHAN

Oh, her! The one who thinks she can make it in a man's world.

CHERESE

(sings.)

Oh, bitter subjugation!

NATHAN

(sings.)

Oh, dulcet domination!

CHERESE

(sings.)

Oh, woeful depression!

NATHAN

(sings.)

Oh, miserable woman, know your place. These upper chambers are not yours to grace.
Hail to the male! Hail to the male as he strides the earth, hail the male for all he's worth!

CHERESE

(sings.)

As women rise and demand their say, the ol' glass ceiling will be swept away. Oh, female rights! Male injustice has had its day. Female rights are here to stay!

The Glass Ceiling

(Then suddenly, without waiting, CHERESE marches into the office and crosses to NATHAN, stretching out her hand.)

Mercedes Graves, the new junior executive in charge of—

(Shrugs. She doesn't know what she's in charge of.)

How do you do?

NATHAN

(at first not certain what to do with the outstretched hand. Finally, reluctantly, he shakes it.)

Yes. Uh, how do you do?

CHERESE

I'm so happy you were gracious enough to find time in your busy schedule to see me. I'll be brief. I want to know what my duties are.

NATHAN

Duties? Huh! Well, didn't the board tell you? This was all their idea.

CHERESE

No. They said you would.

NATHAN

Huh! Always passing the buck. Well, the main thing is to stay out of trouble. Stay in your office, do not talk to the media, and answer the phone, that is, if it ever rings and—

(Shrugs and adds as an afterthought.)

Polish your nails.

(During NATHAN and CHERESE's dialogue, CHALMERS and MAXINE enter gaily chattering, giggling, and fawning over each other. They cross to DIANA's desk, still absorbed in each other. DIANA, typically busy polishing her nails, does not notice them. Finally CHALMERS taps DIANA, who almost jumps out of her chair. CHALMERS talks to DIANA, explaining with words and gestures who they are and their purpose, then they step aside to the waiting room. Flustered, not knowing what to do, DIANA searches her desk for an answer, opening drawers, throwing papers in the air, scurrying around the room, pulling at her hair, screaming. In the waiting room CHALMERS and MAXINE continue chummy and chatty, thoroughly enjoying each other)

CHERESE

Office. That's another thing. Mine is just off the storage room in the basement. It's rather dark. *And* dank. There aren't any windows.

NATHAN

Well, we all have to start at the bottom and work our way up.

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

(aside.)

Up through the dark, dank basement, up and up through interminable obstacles and finally to the glass ceiling where we — the subjugated — come to an abrupt halt.

NATHAN

What? Did you say something?

CHERESE

I? No, nothing. It's just that—. Well, as I said, I'd like to know more about what I am supposed to do.

NATHAN

Well, I could use a new secretary.

CHERESE

If I were in charge of personnel, I could manage that; I could hire one or promote one.

NATHAN

I wasn't thinking of that.

CHERESE

Mr. Black... I've studied Stellar Industries quite extensively, in fact the entire industry, and I have come up with some plans that I believe could enhance our bottom line.

(Pats the briefcase to indicate the plans.)

Currently we're not exactly leading the industry; we're, well, not exactly stellar; however, I believe my plan could bring us to the top. Of course, I don't expect you to take just my word but I feel that for the sake of the future of this, uh, stellar company, it should be considered; it should be carefully scrutinized.

NATHAN

(not impressed.)

Oh, you do, do you! Not exactly stellar! Not leading! Why, I've never—! I—! I—!

(Finally DIANA remembers the intercom, presses a button and makes a loud buzzing sound.)

CHERESE

As I said, I've studied our entire industry and—

(DIANA continues buzzing, only louder than before.)

NATHAN

What's that stupid noise?

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

I'm not saying we're at the bottom exactly. Not quite. But we have potential. Now if you would—

(Now DIANA is buzzing with all of her might.)

NATHAN

It's the fire alarm!

CHERESE

No, it's your secretary. If you would just take a few minutes...

(Crosses to the door, opens it, and addresses DIANA.)

Mr. Black is busy now and is not to be disturbed.

NATHAN

I am greatly disturbed and I will not tolerate insubordination — especially from a woman!

CHERESE

I'm only trying to help.

NATHAN

Huh! What do you, a woman, know about this business? I've been head of Stellar Industries for twenty-five years. I know all there is to know.

CHERESE

The world is changing, Mr. Black.

(Beat.)

Well, if you're not interested in the plan, I'll give it to someone who is.

(Pauses.)

The chairman of the board might be interested.

(Turns to leave.)

NATHAN

Wait! No need to do that. Besides you'd have a hard time getting to see him. Give it to me. I'll see that he gets it.

(NATHAN reaches out for the briefcase. When CHERESE hesitates, he snatches it from her and retreats behind his desk, where he opens the briefcase, pulls out the plan and begins to read it.)

(CHALMERS and MAXINE have been enjoying each other in the waiting room. Now they embrace.)

CHALMERS

Ah, Gertrude, my darling, my delicious hunk, my adorable sweetie-poo-poo.

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

Oh, Nigel, my precious, you have such a way with words!

CHALMERS

Speaking of words, I can't wait to see his face when we give him the word.

MAXINE

The old sourpuss!

*(At that moment NATHAN looks up from reading the paper and gives
CHERESE a quick scowl.)*

CHALMERS

I cannot resist your lips any longer.

MAXINE

Nor I, yours. Kiss me!

(They kiss passionately.)

CHALMERS

Every second I yearn for you.

(Kisses her.)

MAXINE

I constantly hunger for you!

(Kisses him.)

CHALMERS

I thirst for you!

(Kisses her again.)

Ah, my darling, my love! Fear not! Everything will work as we planned. We will have a wonderful, exciting, exhilarating, adventurous life together! Oh, I'm overcome with joy! I could not have waited a day longer.

MAXINE

Nor I! You are so wonderful! So strong! So powerful!

CHALMERS

Yes. However, my strength and power do not equal the power you have over me. I'm your total slave! Your every wish is my command.

MAXINE

(plays with his hair.)

Yes, you are my adorable slave. I love having a slave instead of being one. With that slob—

The Glass Ceiling

(Motions toward NATHAN.)

— I was the slave to do his every bidding. And I accepted it! But no longer. I have seen the light. Now I will free myself of his curse — plus a good portion of his purse. Oh, Nigel, slave, shower me with your kisses! Sing my praises! Bow to me! Scrape! Scrape, you dog! Grovel! Kiss my feet!

(CHALMERS drops down, takes off her shoes and begins kissing her feet.)

Oh, I love this reversal! Justice is finally being served.

(Giggles.)

Oooo, that tittles. Ooooo! Ooooo! How wonderful! But don't slobber so much, slave. Contain yourself a little.

(Pauses.)

Arise poor slobbering slave and kiss my luscious lips.

(CHALMERS jumps up and they kiss, now more passionately than ever.)

(ALBERT, who has been struggling to get out from the curtain, manages to appear and take a picture with his cell phone camera, while RUSSELL tries to restrain him.)

MAXINE

(out of character.)

What's that?

COURTNEY

Hey! This isn't in the script, is it?

(Checks her script.)

(ALBERT rushes to attack CHALMERS; however RUSSELL hurriedly puts himself in the way.)

RUSSELL

Albert, calm down. Not in public, Albert.

ALBERT

(to CHALMERS.)

You dog!

(Struggles to get around RUSSELL.)

That's my wife you're playing with.

(To MAXINE.)

Have you no shame? You're a married woman. Now I know why you've been so eager to attend these rehearsals. Rehearsals, my foot!

MAXINE

Albert! Goodness! We were just acting!

The Glass Ceiling

ALBERT

Ha! That was more than acting. I could see you were enjoying yourself. Your little libido was probably going crazy! And look at you! That outfit is indecent! Disgraceful! Now, Maxine, I backed off once, but no more! No more! You've gone too far. I will not stand for any more of this. Enough is enough.

CHALMERS

Enough is enough? But we were just getting started.

ALBERT

Listen, you!

(Makes a threatening gesture and a move, but again RUSSELL stops him.)

RUSSELL

Albert! Please! There's a better way to handle this.

MAXINE

Albert, please!

ALBERT

That's my line, Miss Fancy Actress. Please! Please stop acting like a— a—

CHALMERS

—Like a liberated woman. Like an equal. Like a woman with a mind of her own. Like—

(This time ALBERT is able to push RUSSELL aside and strikes CHALMERS, knocking him to the floor, landing at NATHAN's feet. CHALMERS appears unconscious. MAXINE screams and kneels beside him, taking his head in her hands.)

MAXINE

Chalmers! Are you—? Speak to me! Open your eyes! Oh, Chalmers!

(Rubs CHALMERS' forehead. Turns to ALBERT.)

You brute!

ALBERT

I barely tapped him. He's acting.

(CHERESE, DIANA, and KURT cross to CHALMERS. DIANA takes his pulse.)

DIANA

He's still alive.

The Glass Ceiling

CHERESE

He looks pale.

NATHAN

Hey, Chalmers!

MAXINE

Oh, Chalmers! Speak to me!

(CHALMERS groans and opens his eyes.)

KURT

He's coming to.

CHALMERS

What happened? Where am I?

(Looks up at MAXINE.)

Maxine! Did you hit me? I'm your slave, but—. I mean, after all!

MAXINE

No, Chalmers. No, I would never—. Albert hit you.

CHALMERS

Your husband? Again? That's a bad habit of his.

MAXINE

Yes. I'm sorry.

ALBERT

Well, I'm not!

CHALMERS

(rubs his chin and shakes his head.)

You think I should sue him?

MAXINE

(distraught.)

Oh, I don't know what to think! I don't know what to do, where to turn.

(Stands, as CHALMERS stretches and makes himself comfortable on the floor; addresses ALBERT.)

Albert, why can't you—? Oh, I wish I knew what to say.

CHALMERS

(with great effort, gets to his feet.)

But I know! The *truth!* The time has arrived, fair Maxine! There's no need to beat around

The Glass Ceiling

the tree — I mean the bush! No time to beat around the bush any longer. The truth! The whole, entire varnished truth!

(To MAXINE.)

Are you ready? Shall I out with it?

MAXINE

(slightly bewildered.)

The truth? But Chalmers—

CHALMERS

Do not fear, my dear. The truth will not spurn us, 'twill not forsake two such as we.

MAXINE

(apprehensively.)

Okay. Ah, what is the truth?

CHALMERS

Famous words, Maxine. Famous words. The truth is—

(Now that he has everyone's attention, CHALMERS raises his hand high above his head, ready to strike down with the truth.)

Let all the world know that Maxine and her slave — yours truly, truly hers — are about to make an announcement, an announcement that will shock the world, at least that part of the world that is on this stage tonight, and shortly thereafter the rest of the known world, at least the world of this grubby little town. In this moment, this moment of truth, all will hear it as I Chalmers — ardent slave — make it official. The TRUTH!

(To ALBERT.)

Are you ready for this, Albert, ol' boy? Brace yourself. Grip something so you do not fall in a faint. Perhaps that miserable man there.

(Points to RUSSELL.)

Remember, we're adamant. We're determined. Though the world gird against us, nothing — nothing, I repeat! — will stop us. Here it is, our announcement for the whole world to hear!

(Pauses to be certain all are ready; takes a deep breath.)

For all the world to hear but especial Albert!

(Half aside.)

Ah, I can't wait to see his face when he hears.

ALBERT

No! Stop!

CHALMERS

Nothing can stop me! Nothing can stop us! Are you ready?

ALBERT

No! Wait! Please! Not in public! No!

(To MAXINE, pleadingly.)

The Glass Ceiling

Maxine, please! Maxine! You can't do this! Think of—! Oh, Maxine. No! Please no!
(*Gets down on his knees.*)

What do you want me to do? We've been married twenty-five years.

MAXINE

Twenty-six. You forgot our twenty-fifth. I'm sorry, Albert, that you have to learn the truth under these conditions; however...

CHALMERS

Yes! The truth shall make us free!

ALBERT

Oh, no! Oh, what can I say? Maxine, please!

MAXINE

It's too late, Albert.

ALBERT

Oh, no! No! No! No! I'm ashamed. Maxine, what can I do? I'll turn over a new leaf. I promise. It came in a flash — how bad I've been. How I've mistreated—. When I saw you kneeling over what's his name here, I—

MAXINE

Chalmers.

ALBERT

(*to CHALMERS.*)

Sorry. Chalmers.

(*To MAXINE.*)

When I saw you kneeling over Chalmers, *Mister* Chalmers, in a flash I recalled the time I fell on the ice skating and you skated to me and you lifted my head off the ice and—.

MAXINE

Your hair was frozen to the ice and some of it ripped off.

ALBERT

Ouch! Yes, I can remember it like yesterday. You kissed my lips and—.

MAXINE

My hot lips and your cold ones.

ALBERT

Yes. And I came to and there you were, young and beautiful, gazing down at me with those iridescent eyes and that's the moment, the very real moment when I knew— Oh, Maxine! Please forgive me. I promise I won't forget our fiftieth. Please! Tell me what you want.

The Glass Ceiling

MAXINE

How do I know you'll change?

ALBERT

Oh, I will! I will! You have my word.

CHALMERS

Maxine, don't listen to him! Think of Paris, London, Rome, an Italian villa in Tuscany, the French Riviera, a carefree, unencumbered life. Think of it, smell it, listen to it, revel in it.

MAXINE

Ah, Chalmers! Yes, it all sounds so wonderful and I'm certain would be, but—. But there comes a time when just the ordinary, down-to-earth, mundane, lackluster things have glamour..

(Waves a hand at ALBERT.)

when you remember the words of dedication you uttered years ago, and you think of what you have invested and—.

(Takes CHALMERS hand.)

Oh, yes, dear Chalmers, it would have been heavenly; however...

(Crosses to ALBERT.)

...If there is a chance that he — Albert — has truly undergone a transformation, a conversion, a return of the earlier, kinder, fairer, more reasonable Albert, then I must — ah! — I must turn my back on those delicious temptations and work on his redemption. However! However, I have learned a lesson too. I know that the buck stops here...

(Points to herself.)

... that my fate is in my hands.

CHALMERS

Ah, dear Maxine! I am saddened. I had such a grand vision!. But as you say, "However!" Yes, *however*. I know that you are right, right on, as they say, and I must bow my head and accept it.

(Makes a great show of bowing his head.)

Farewell.

(Begins to walk off stage.)

MAXINE

Wait! Where are you going?

CHALMERS

To drown my sorrows.

MAXINE

But the play!

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

This is act three — curtain. Curtains for old Chalmers. His last role. He cannot go on. For old Chalmers, the laughter, the deep gasps of adulation of the audience and the din of applause have died. Hear the echoes fade, fade, fade. Ah! There will be no more encores. Farewell, sweet princess!

(Begins a slow exit, heading toward an auditorium aisle)

MAXINE

(recovers from her shock.)

Chalmers!

CHALMERS

Farewell. All is lost.

MAXINE

(commandingly.)

Chalmers! Stop! Come back here this instant! Enough nonsense!

CHALMERS

(stops.)

Nonsense? But nonsense is what I'm all about.

MAXINE

I know! You and Albert. Now come back here before I tell them your secret.

CHALMERS

My secret? Maxine! You wouldn't!

MAXINE

Oh, yes I would! Now march back up here!

(Begins counting and snapping her finger.)

On the double! One-two! One-two! Hip! Hip! Hip! March, I say! March, you slave! One-two! One-two!

(CHALMERS marches in step as she continues counting. When he stops in front of her, he drops to his knees.)

CHALMERS

I'm here as bidden. I'm at your command. What must I do to placate you and keep you from revealing my terrible, terrible secret?

MAXINE

Remain in the show.

CHALMERS

But I—!

The Glass Ceiling

CHALMERS

(with gestures, indicates ALBERT, who flinches.)

But he—!

MAXINE

He will do what I want.

(Faces ALBERT.)

Give me that letter, the one to kick us off the stage!

(When ALBERT hesitates, MAXINE stamps her foot.)

MAXINE

Albert! You promised! This is not a request. It's an ultimatum!

ALBERT

But, Maxine, the board...

MAXINE

But, Albert, your wife!

ALBERT takes the letter, looks forlornly at RUSSELL, then the others, and hands the letter to MAXINE.)

ALBERT

(to RUSSELL.)

I'll report that after further consideration, after close examination, I found the play — well — acceptable.

RUSSELL

But that's not the case.

ALBERT

However, I won't say anything about your little indiscretion.

RUSSELL

Well, I'll be damned!

CHALMERS

(half aside.)

Probably.

RUSSELL

But that's black—! I won't stand for it! You can't—

MAXINE

Oh, Russell, don't be an ass all of your life. Get with it. Join us. You can be music

The Glass Ceiling

director. Perhaps composer. Put your genius to work. We need it, Russell. Only you can get it done. It will be another star to add to your galaxy.

(Pauses for RUSSELL to consider.)

Well?

RUSSELL

Well, I can see that you all need some expert assistance. I might as well give in and come to your rescue.

MAXINE

Oh, Russell, just think of it! Picture it! Look up! There! There!

(Carried away, she points out above them.)

Ah, I can see it now. Your name in lights. Broadway. Oh, yes, Broadway! There, with the other names, in bright neon: The Glass Ceiling by Sidney Galtier!

(SYDNEY bows.)

Music by Russell Smoot!

(RUSSELL bows.)

Directed by Kurt Cadwaller.

(KURT bows.)

Starring—

(EACH bows with the mention of his/her name.)

CHALMERS

Maxine Norman!

MAXINE

And Chalmers Millington!

CHALMERS

And Diana Breene!

DIANA

And Cherese Seymour!

CHERESE

And Nathan Pease!

MAXINE

And all because of the wisdom of my wonderful, loving, adoring husband, Albert. Here, Albert take a bow. You can be the stage manager.

(Shyly, a bit reluctantly, ALBERT moves forward, takes MAXINE's hand, and bows.)

(Enter COURTNEY.)

The Glass Ceiling

COURTNEY

What about me? Do I get my name up in lights?

MAXINE

Of course! Courtney Long, Assistant Director!

(COURTNEY bows. Enter HARRIET WHITE.)

HARRIET

This is the end! I'm telling you all, this is the end! My husband, Oscar — *Doctor* Oscar White — of White Chiropractic will see to that.

(Does a soft shoe and bows.)

CURTAIN