

# ❖ The Miss Firecracker Contest

.....BETH HENLEY

CHARACTERS: TESSY (23), CARNELLE (24)

SETTING: *Area behind a large carnival tent.*

*After all the other contestants have arrived, CARNELLE makes a somewhat hurried entrance. TESSY, the beauty contest coordinator, offers last minute encouragement.*

TESSY (*As she enters the dressing room carrying only the tap shoes*): It's over here. It's this way. It's this way, here!

CARNELLE'S VOICE: Oh. Oh, I see. I see!

TESSY: Can you make it?

CARNELLE (*Making her way into the dressing room*): Yeah. I got it. Here, I got it. (*Dropping her belongings where she can*) Wheew! Brother. Thanks very much for the help.

TESSY: Sure. It's what I'm here for.

CARNELLE: Oh, look! Is this my dressing room? Is this mine?

TESSY (*Picking up her clipboard and taking a pencil from behind her ear*): Uh huh. It's the only one left. The good ones have all been taken. (*Looking at her watch*) You're running late, you know.

CARNELLE (*Struggling with her belongings*): Yes, I know. I was sewing on my dress. Things aren't going smoothly at all today. Oh, look! Now my hair piece is falling out. I worked all morning on that. So, is your sister nervous?

TESSY: Not really. I guess she knows she doesn't have a chance.

CARNELLE (*As she straightens up her things*): What makes you say that?

TESSY: Well, she's not at all attractive. I'm amazed she ever got in the contest. I'm sure it's just cause the judges think she's some sort of concert pianist. But she just knows that one opus by Johann Sebastian Bach. I swear that's all she knows.

CARNELLE: Hmm, I suppose that talent part of the contest will count quite a bit.

TESSY: Well, she looks like a tank in her swim suit.

CARNELLE: She does?

TESSY: She's hump shouldered from practicing that one Johann Sebastian Bach opus on our piano all day long.

CARNELLE: What a shame.

TESSY: This is strictly confidential, but the word is out that the only real contenders for the Miss Firecracker crown are you and Caroline Jeffers.

CARNELLE (*Overcome*): Oh, gosh, I don't know —

TESSY: It's the truth. Everyone's saying it. We're all agreed.

CARNELLE: Of course Caroline's really a lovely girl . . .

TESSY: Yeah, except for those yellow teeth.

CARNELLE: Well, I hear she took medicine for seizures that she had as a child and it scraped off most of her tooth enamel.

TESSY: I heard that too, but it doesn't matter.

CARNELLE: It doesn't?

TESSY: I really don't think the judges are interested in sentimentality — just the teeth themselves. (*Referring to the red dress*) That's such a beautiful red dress. It's really very fine.

CARNELLE: Yes, it's beautiful. I'm just a little worried though. It just arrived from Natchez yesterday and, well, it didn't seem to fit me exactly right.

TESSY: What's wrong with that?

CARNELLE: Well, the waist was a little snug. But I worked on it this morning and added in this extra bit of material. (*She shows that a large strip of pink material has been awkwardly added to the bodice of the red dress*)

TESSY (*Disdainfully*): Oh. Well.

CARNELLE: Course, I know it's not the exact matching color. Actually, my cousin, Elain's gone to get me seamstress, Popeye Jackson, and see what she can do. We couldn't find her last night. She'll fix it right up. This is just temporary.

TESSY: Well, I hope so. It looks a little funny.

CARNELLE (*Looking outside*): Oh, I know Elain'll bring Popeye; she promised she would. She's never let me down in her life. Gosh, I think I'm starting t'sweat. My make up is melting right down my face. (*She starts fixing her face*)

TESSY (*Looking at her watch*): Hmm. Actually, you don't have much time. It's only twenty-eight minutes till the opening Parade of Firecrackers. (*TESSY blows her whistle*)

CARNELLE: Oh, my word! Well, I'm ready except for my dress. I mean, my head is ready.

TESSY (*Removing schedule from her clipboard*): Well, anyway, here's your schedule.

CARNELLE: Thanks.

TESSY: Oh and have you seen the Grand Float they've made for

Miss Firecracker to ride at the head of the Independence Day Parade?

CARNELLE: Oh, yes, I saw it — it's . . . beautiful.

TESSY: Why, yes, it's very fine. Well, I'd better go let Miss Blue know you're checked in. (*After glancing at herself in the mirror*) Oh. Mind if I borrow some of your hairspray?

CARNELLE: No, go ahead.

TESSY: Thanks. (*As she sprays her already rock hard hair*) I, ah, hear your cousin Delmout's back in town.

CARNELLE: Yes, he's back.

TESSY (*Still spraying*): Well, you can tell him for me that I've forgiven him. I understand now that some men just don't have any self control. Just none at all. Think that'll hold?

CARNELLE: Uh huh.

TESSY: Anyway, tell him my Uncle Ferd's given us a new litter of siamese kittens if he wants to drop by and see them. I know he always enjoyed animals.

CARNELLE: I'll tell him.

TESSY: Well, good luck. I'll be standing by backstage running the contest. Let me know if any emergencies arrive.

CARNELLE: Alright.

TESSY: Give em H.

Source: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.