

Careful Now

by

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Cast of Characters

Stacie, the hostess, mid-20's.

Donna DeVille, the Careful Now sales rep,
indeterminate.

Marcia Brady, a physically fit guest, 31.

Kashika, an African American guest, mid-40's.

Lois, a crotchety old lady guest, old.

Emma, a fag hag guest, mid-20's.

Bryce, Emma's roommate, mid-20's.

Setting

Stacy's tiny apartment.
The present.

CAREFUL NOW

Setting: The "living room" of Stacie's urban studio apartment. The few pieces of furniture are old and ratty -- stuff she had in college or family cast-offs. In an attempt to "decorate" for the party, sheets and blankets have been thrown over the sofa and chairs. A plastic punch bowl, a bag of paper cups, a box of triscuits and a can of cheese whiz sit on the only table in the room.

At Rise: We see Stacie, a mousy young woman in her mid-twenties. She is dressed casually and reasonably stylishly, but the look isn't working. (Perhaps she has a bit too much midriff to be emulating Brittany Spears, perhaps the proportions are off in other ways, or perhaps the outfit just screams "fun" on a young woman who has clearly never had fun in her life.) Even though she is alone, she is sitting by the open window of her apartment surreptitiously sneaking a cigarette.

The doorbell rings. Stacie snuffs out the cigarette and tosses the butt out the window. She opens the door to admit Donna DeVille. Donna is older than Stacie. Maybe five years, maybe fifteen, maybe thirty. Everything about Donna is BIG. Hair, jewelry, voice, attitude. Everything, including the very large sample case Donna is carrying.

DONNA

Hello Stacie!!

STACIE

Hi.

DONNA

Well, young lady, are you ready for a night that will change your life?

STACIE nods.

DONNA

We can do better than that, can't we?

STACIE (listlessly)

I guess.

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DONNA

Now honey, honey, honey ... you have to do a whole lot better than that when your friends start showin' up or we're not going to make one red cent tonight. I know you didn't go to all the trouble of setting up a Careful Now Home Demonstration Party to not make a cent. Am I right?

STACIE

Right.

DONNA

SO ... let's try that again! Are you ready for a night that will change your life?

STACIE (listlessly)

Yes, Donna, I am ready for a night that will change my life.

DONNA

That's much better!! (entering the apartment) And isn't your place ... cute. REAL cute! It's so you. It's kinda intimate, but won't that just make us all feel close that much quicker? ...

From the apartment next door we hear the sound of a domestic argument. We can't make out content, but we can clearly make out a loud, angry male voice and a softer, pleading female voice. After a few lines of the exchange, we hear two or three hard slaps, then whimpering, then silence. STACIE and DONNA pause, but do not acknowledge what they are hearing.

DONNA

Now where can I set up? You got another table, sweetie? ... I guess not. There really wouldn't be room, would there? We'd hate to cross that line between intimate and cramped now, wouldn't we? ... Why don't I just sit here on the bed ... and put my case here ... we can do makeovers sitting on the bed ... it'll be just like being back in college, won't it?

STACIE

Not really.

DONNA

Didn't you girls give each other makeovers on a slow Saturday night?

STACIE

I never hung out much with my roommates.

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DONNA

Now why is that?

STACIE

The Christian one moved out when I wouldn't take down my pentagram until she took down her stupid crucifix. It kind of flipped her out when I told her that having a corpse hanging on the wall violated my Wicca principles. The second one was really cool, but she went into rehab over Christmas break and never came back. The last one was always off tutoring underprivileged kids or singing in the glee club. She really made me sick. Once she rushed a sorority she wasn't around much, so I got used to having the room mostly to myself. I've lived alone ever since.

DONNA

I see. How many friends do you have coming tonight?

STACIE

I invited a bunch of people from the building and from the office.

DONNA

How many RSVP'd?

STACIE

A lotta people said they'd try to make it.

DONNA

How many RSVP'd?

STACIE

Six. The website said six was the minimum. So we're okay right?

DONNA

Of course we are, sweetie. Of course, we are. (sniffing) Do I smell tobacco smoke?

STACIE (busted!)

Ah ... I I tried to keep the smoke out the window.

DONNA

Now Stacie ... didn't you get the hostess packet?

STACIE

Un-huh.

DONNA

And you say you've been to the website?

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STACIE

Un-huh.

DONNA

Then you know that Careful Now guarantees our clients a smoke-free environment.

STACIE

But they all smoke ...

DONNA

Well, it's not just for the clients' health and comfort, it's also an OSHA reg to protect the sales staff.

STACIE

Oh.

DONNA

Hmmm, kinda thin on the snacks aren't we?

STACIE

I asked everyone to bring something. The hostess guide said that would make them "stakeholders in the event and increase the likelihood they would make purchases."

DONNA

Aren't you clever! I wish every hostess read the guide so thoroughly. Can I help you get these into serving bowls ...

STACIE

We usually just pass the box and cheese whiz around.

DONNA

Where did you get this lovely punch bowl?

STACIE

Stole it from a conference room at work.

DONNA

And what kind of punch do we have?

STACIE

It's sugar free ginger ale and sugar free lime sherbet.

DONNA

And doesn't it make a festive presentation!

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STACIE

I guess.

DONNA

Nothing that can't be helped with a little Careful Now secret sauce ... (she pulls a vodka bottle from her sample case)

STACIE

Ah ... I'm not sure ... some people don't do sugar ...

DONNA

Sweetie, do you even wanna make back the 7 bucks you spent on refreshments?

STACIE

I don't know. I mean, yeah, I do want to make money, but I don't know about spiking the punch ...

The doorbell rings. As STACIE turns and goes to answer the door, DONNA pours most of a fifth of vodka into the punch bowl. STACIE opens the door to admit MARCIA (always pronounce Mar-cee-ah). MARCIA is 31. She is very fit. Her hair is damp. She is carrying a gym bag.

STACIE

Hey.

MARCIA

Hey.

STACIE

Thanks for coming ...

MARCIA

Hey, no problem. You're right on my way home from pilates class.

STACIE

Cool.

STACIE ushers MARCIA into the apartment as DONNA finishes stowing the remaining vodka in her sample case.

DONNA (turning back to MARCIA & STACIE)

Hello there!!! I'm Donna Deville with Careful Now!

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STACIE

This is Marcia Brady. (*always pronounced Bra-DAY*)

DONNA

Nice to meet you Marcia. (*which Donna mispronounces as Marsha*)

MARCIA

It's Marcia.

DONNA

Oh, sorry. Marcia. ... And how do you know Stacie?

MARCIA

I'm in the library at Farris, Unger, Carr, Kennedy, Ellis, Davenport, Ullmann, and Peterson.

DONNA

Ah ...

Another disturbance from the apartment next door. This time we hear a baby crying. Then we hear the man yelling. The baby crying louder. The man yelling more. The woman pleading. The baby crying louder. Then the sound of a loud and sudden thud against the wall followed by total silence.

STACIE

There goes one of my RSVPs. (a beat) Want some punch Marcia?

MARCIA

You KNOW I don't do sugar.

STACIE (pleased with herself)

That's why it's all sugar free.

MARCIA

Really?

STACIE

Wanna see? The bottle and the carton on right on top in the trash can.

MARCIA

That's okay.

DONNA

Honey, if you don't mind, I'm going to help myself to the punch.

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Sure.

STACIE

DONNA fills a cup, drains it and fills herself a second.

DONNA

Sometimes I just get so parched. Aren't you thirsty after working out?

MARCIA

Maybe one cup ...

DONNA pours and hands MARCIA a cup of punch.

DONNA

Here you go.

MARCIA (after taking a sip)

Wow. Hard to believe that's sugar free.

DONNA smiles. STACIE glares. The doorbell rings. STACIE answers the door and admits KASHIKA and LOIS. KASHIKA is an African-American woman in her 40's. LOIS, who is wearing a housedress and scuffy bedroom slippers, is nearly 80. Both seem pretty sullen. As STACIE greets KASHIKA and LOIS, MARCIA finishes her punch and pours herself another cup.

STACIE

Hey you guys! Thanks for coming. Did you come together?

KASHIKA

Right.

LOIS

WHAT?

DONNA looks from LOIS to KASHIKA, finishes her punch, pours herself another and downs it. SHE looks from KASHIKA to LOIS and back and pours herself another punch and downs it.

LOIS

YOU SAID TO BRING A SNACK ... HERE YOU GO.

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STACIE

THANKS LOIS.

LOIS

YOU'RE WELCOME. OF COURSE IN MY DAY THE HOSTESS PROVIDED ALL THE REFRESHMENTS.

DONNA slams down another cup of punch. MARCIA follows suit more surreptitiously. MARCIA will continue sneaking punch throughout the scene. STACIE opens the paper sack LOIS handed her. It contains a box of triscuits and a can of cheese whiz.

KASHIKA

Ah shit ...

SHE hands STACIE a plastic bag from which STACIE removes a box of triscuits and a can of cheese whiz.

KASHIKA

I knew you liked 'em ...

LOIS

DID THAT COLORED WOMAN FROM THE FRONT DESK BRING THE SAME THING AS ME?

STACIE

IT'S OKAY, LOIS. YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY TRISCUITS OR TOO MUCH CHEEZE WHIZ AT A PARTY.

LOIS

IF YOU SAY SO ...

KASHIKA

These apartments are really tiny, aren't they?

STACIE

You've never been in one before?

KASHIKA

It's not like I'd want to hang with 98% of these people anyway. ...

DONNA

Would anyone care for some punch?

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KASHIKA

Sure. (to Lois:) PUNCH?

LOIS

DON'T YOU THREATEN ME!!! I'LL REPORT YOU!!!

STACIE hands KASHIKA a cup of punch as she moves away from LOIS. STACIE turns and hands a cup to LOIS.

STACIE

SHE WASN'T THREATENING YOU, LOIS ... HONEST. HAVE SOME PUNCH.

LOIS

YOU HAVE A GOOD HEART CHILD. DON'T LET THE WORLD MAKE YOU HARD LIKE IT HAS SOME PEOPLE I COULD NAME. (sipping the punch) THAT LIME SHERBET REALLY HAS A BITE, DOESN'T IT?

The doorbell rings. STACIE opens the door to reveal EMMA and BRYCE. EMMA is a plain looking girl in her mid-20's who has been dressed and made-up very well. (Perhaps she has succeeded with the look STACIE was attempting.) BRYCE is a big fag, also in his mid-20's. HE carries a picnic hamper, SHE carries a suspicious looking plastic bag.

STACIE

Hey you guys. Thanks for coming.

BRYCE

Your first party, darling! We wouldn't miss it!!!!

EMMA

Here you go. (Hands STACIE the plastic bag.)

STACIE (pulling out cheese whiz and triscuits)

Thanks, Em'.

BRYCE

I could NOT convince her that we are SO far beyond serving triscuits and ... dear god! ... cheese whiz at a party. (He sees the three boxes and cans already on the table and freezes.) Oh. Somewhere Martha is weeping.

STACIE

What's in here?

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BRYCE

Nothing, really. Just a little nosh I threw together. I didn't hollow out the brioche until right before we left so it shouldn't be too dry, just plop the spinach dip in the middle. The fig pate is an experiment.

STACIE

Wow. Would you guys like some punch?

BRYCE (Seeing the bowl is empty)

Not for me, thanks. There are a couple of bottles of San Pelligrino in the hamper. I'll take a splash of that.

EMMA

Punch would be great. Thanks.

DONNA

So Stacie, is this everyone?

STACIE

Looks like ...

DONNA

Then I'm going to go ahead and get started.

STACIE

Sure.

DONNA

Can everyone find a seat or a place to perch. (They all do.) I certainly don't have to worry about projecting, do I? (She is met with blank stares.) Since we're all in such close quarters ... (no response) ... Well how many of you have ever been to a Home Merchandise Party before ... (no response) ... Well, well ... a room full of virgins. (no response) Um well ... um ... I think I'm going to skip the usual icebreaker games for this group and go right into explaining our wonderful product line. (no response) All right then, my name is Donna Deville and I'm here to tell you about Careful Now Cosmetics.

Let me ask a basic question. Why do people wear cosmetics? And I say people, not just women. We have a product line designed especially to work for someone like you Bryce. Why do people wear cosmetics? The most obvious answer might seem to be that people wear cosmetics to themselves more attractive. And that may be true. For some. But the real reason most people wear cosmetics ... Heck, the real reason most people do anything at all is to get attention. Right? Think about it. No one puts on makeup hoping to be ignored, do they? But sometimes makeup isn't enough to get us attention, is it? Some of us. Many of us. Most of us ... are never going to be supermodel gorgeous, no matter how much pancake we slather on ... Does that mean

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we have to give up? Does that mean we have to despair of ever getting the attention we deserve? No we do not! Thanks to Careful Now Cosmetics.

Let's think about it in a different way. Who does get attention in our society? Certainly people who are really beautiful ... or handsome. People who are well built. Sometimes people who are smart. Look at Steven Hawking. If you can stand it. But, really, there's only so much we can do about our natural endowments.

Let's think just a little bit harder. Who else gets attention in our society? Hmmm? Victims of course. Victims. Victims. Victims. People raise millions of dollars for victims of natural disasters, don't they? For victims of accidents or terrible illness, for victims of crime and violence ... Victims get attention. Let's face it, that horse saved Chris Reeve's career. But being a victim isn't as easy as you might expect. There's all kinds of pain and inconvenience involved. Everyone can't be lucky enough to be born with a disfiguring disability or to contract a disease with sufficiently conspicuous symptoms. Careful Now Cosmetics has the answer for the rest of us. Our full line of easy to use cosmetics and minor prosthetics can make you look like a victim of violence or of the disease of your choice without having to experience actual pain or trauma.

We offer a full range of scars and lesions, as well as fresh cuts and bruises. And I will teach you expert techniques to subtly alter wounds from day to day so that the progression from emergence to disappearance is gradual and credible.

For those who don't have a partner, we also offer scenarios for random violence.

Marcia, Emma, Stacie ,, Think how your coworkers treatment of you will change when you show up to work scarred and bruised and with your own personalized mugging narrative. LOIS THINK HOW MUCH HARDER IT WILL BE FOR YOUR FAMILY TO IGNORE YOU IF YOU LOOK SERIOUSLY ILL OR INJURED. And, Bryce, we even have a very sophisticated selection of KS lesions and complexion sallowers. Aren't you tired of watching your friends who spend their days in subsidized housing dashing from the gym to the pool to Saks to Neiman's while disability payments cover the bills? And all because they lucked into a little virus and you didn't? We can't get you test results, but we can give you the look, Mister.

MARCIA, EMMA, and BRYCE look puzzled. STACIE and LOIS look enthralled. KASHIKA is vibrating with anger.

KASHIKA

I need to hear and I need to hear right now that this is a joke.

DONNA

Anything but. It's an opportunity for people to get the attention they've been denied all their lives through no fault of their own.

KASHIKA

We'll get back to what bullshit that is ... but I also have to note that you didn't include me in any of the product lines you're offering.

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DONNA

Well, Kashika ...

KASHIKA

Let's make it Mrs. Taylor, shall we?

DONNA

Mrs. Taylor ... I'm afraid that we don't have much to offer you people.

KASHIKA

What? What did you just say?

DONNA

I'm sure you know better than I do how hard it is to see a bruise on a darker complexion ... our estheticians just haven't come up with much that would be effective for you. Besides

KASHIKA

"Besides"?

DONNA

Wouldn't our products be kind of superfluous?

KASHIKA

Excuse me?

DONNA

Don't people just look at you and see a victim without any cosmetic enhancement? Isn't that what the politics of the last 50 years have been about?

KASHIKA

That's it. I'm gonna get outta here before people are leaving with real scars and bruises. That's sick and offensive and it's just WRONG! Stacie why'd you set up this sick fuck festival? And why the hell did you invite me?

STACIE (enraptured)

I'm sorry Kash,

KASHIKA

I would hope so.

STACIE

I didn't know they wouldn't have anything for you.

KASHIKA

WHAT?

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STACIE

But this is what I've been lookin' for since I was ten.

KASHIKA

No ...

STACIE

Yeah. My older sister has always been the smart and the pretty one. And she is. She is smart. Heck, she's a neurologist. And she's beautiful. And she's always known she was smart and beautiful. And my parents have always treated her like she's smart and beautiful. There was no way I could compete. And my little sister was born with a whole bunch of birth defects. She was sick her whole life. She got all the sympathy and attention. I was always this walking void between perfect Ellen and poor little Carol. She was eight when she died and I was ten. I knew even then that killing myself wouldn't do any good, 'cause I woulda just been the other one who died. From the first time I stumbled across the website, I knew Careful Now Cosmetics had the answer for me.

KASHIKA

Oh my god. That is so wrong. (To DONNA:) This must make you real proud of what you do.

DONNA

We fill a need.

MARCIA

I'm gonna be sick.

KASHIKA

Amen to that.

MARCIA

No, I mean really ... Are you sure there was no sugar in the punch? ... oh god.

MARCIA runs into STACIE's bathroom. The sounds of her vomiting run under the remainder of the scene.

KASHIKA (pointing toward the bathroom)

That sums it up!! I'm outta here. (A beat.) After what we just heard, I know I'm not the only one leaving ... (Staring at Bryce) Am I?

BRYCE

Oh right. No, of course not. (To STACIE:) This is wrong, Stacie. It's wrong because ... well, it just is. (To EMMA:) Don't you have anything to say to Stacie about this nasty business?

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EMMA

Gee, Stacie ... I guess this wasn't such a good idea after all ...

STACIE

Blah. Blah. Blah. I'm just glad that the men who don't love me are straight.

EMMA recoils as though she'd been slapped.

BRYCE tries to comfort her, but she pushes him away and runs from the apartment.

KASHIKA

Come on. (SHE takes BRYCE's hand and leads him out of the apartment. Slamming the door behind her.)

STACIE

WHAT ABOUT YOU LOIS?

LOIS

I DIDN'T HEAR A WORD OF THAT, BUT ANYTHING THAT WOULD GET RID OF THAT AWFUL COLORED WOMAN FROM THE FRONT DESK IS FINE BY ME.

STACIE

Okay, Donna, I'm ready for my makeover.

STACIE sits on the bed opposite DONNA as DONNA begins pulling make up pots and brushes from her sample case. LOIS sits and watches them in uncomprehending bliss.

DONNA

The biggest mistake people make is limiting their palettes to black and blue. Greens and yellows are an important part of building a credible bruises ...

As DONNA begins to work on STACIE's face, lights fade to BLACK. If budget and tech resources allow, it would be nice to go out with a few slides of STACIE in various stages of her Careful Now makeover.

END OF CAREFUL NOW.