FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS

BY ALAN BALL



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC.



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC.

FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS Copyright © 1993, Alan Ball

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Abrams Artists Agency, 275 Seventh Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10001. Attn: Peter Hagan.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS was first produced by Manhattan Class Company (Robert LuPone and Bernard Telsey, Executive Directors, W. D. Cantler, Associate Director), in New York City, on February 13, 1993. It was directed by Melia Bensussen; the set design was by Rob Odorisio; the lighting design was by Howard Werner; the costume design was by Karen Perry; the sound design was by Bruce Ellman, the production managers were Laura Kravets Gautier and Ira Mont, and the stage managers were Hazel Youngs and Katherine Lumb. The cast was as follows:

FRANCES	Dina Spybey
MEREDITH	
TRISHA	
GEORGEANNE	•
MINDY	Allison Janney
TRIPP	

Understudies: Orlagh Cassidy, Jack Gwaltney and Linda Marie Larson.

CHARACTERS

FRANCES, a bridesmaid MEREDITH, a bridesmaid TRISHA, a bridesmaid GEORGEANNE, a bridesmaid MINDY, a bridesmaid TRIPP, an usher

FIVE WOMEN WEARING THE SAME DRESS

ACT ONE

The play takes place in Meredith's bedroom, a large, comfortable room on the second floor of a renovated turn-of-the-century mansion in a stylish, old-money suburb of Knoxville, Tennessee. There is a big brass bed, two large dressers, a vanity with a mirror. A compact shelf stereo system with CD player. A portable stair-climbing exercise machine. A large walk-in closet. A door leads to a bathroom; another to the hall. A large window with a window seat is suggested downstage.

The room has been decorated by Meredith's mother in a cluttered, eclectic combination of light Victorian and contemporary, mixing antiques and rich, deeply-hued linens & wall-paper with stark white custom shelving and high-tech lighting. A plush Persian rug covers the hardwood floor. Pillows abound. The effect is tasteful and inviting, not quite luxurious but definitely comfortable — it is clear this home is inhabited by the wealthy. The air of traditional privilege is disrupted, however, by a prominent poster of Malcolm X on the wall.

Underscoring the entire scene is an atmosphere of age and durability, conveyed by the original architectural details that remain: huge, multi-paned windows, exquisite molding, the sheer height of the ceiling. There is history in this room.

It is shortly after noon on a day in summer.

A few moments of silence, then someone knocks softly at the door.

FRANCES. (Off.) Yoo-hoo. (After a moment the knock is repeated, slightly louder. Off.) Anybody home? (A long pause, then the door opens slowly and Frances peers around it.) Mcredith? (Frances is a sweet-faced woman, twenty-one years old. She wears an expensive, off-the-shoulder bridesmaid's gown with a voluminous skirt, in peach or lilac or one of those horrible wedding pastels. She also wears an elaborate hat that matches her dress and she carries a bouquet. She enters the room tentatively and shuts the door behind her, moving stiffly in her dress, as if it intimidates her, which it does. She spots a jewelry box on top of the vanity, crosses to it, opens it and inspects its contents.) Oh, my. (She pulls out a glittering rhinestone bracelet. Handling it carefully, almost reverently, she puts it on her wrist and fastens it. Holding out her arm, she admires the bracelet in the mirror, assuming a series of poses she considers to be glamorous.)

MEREDITH. (Off.) Mother, I am just going upstairs — (A telephone somewhere in the room begins to ring. Off.) I am not answering that. (Alarmed, Frances struggles with the bracelet, vainly attempting to unfasten it. Meredith can be heard stomping up the stairs. Off.) No ma'am, I am not answering that. You will not get to me this way. (As Meredith gets closer, Frances panics. Unable to unfasten the rhinestone bracelet, she looks around the room for a place to hide. She scurries under the bed just as Meredith throws open the door and enters. Meredith is twenty-two years old. Athletic. Under a black leather motorcycle jacket she wears a dress identical to the one Frances wears; she seems resentful of it. She is also wearing a similar hat and carrying a bouquet. She has a beat-up backpack slung over one shoulder and sports a pair of sinister-looking sunglasses. She slams the door behind her and locks it, stares at the stillringing telephone, frowns and picks up the receiver.) Mother, what? I am just dropping off my stuff. No ma'am, this room is off limits to you today. Mother. Bye-bye. Byc-bye. (She hangs up the receiver, then kicks off a pair of pumps died to match her dress, throws the bouquet and the backpack on the bed and crosses directly to the vanity. She grabs the jewelry box and digs through it.) Shit! (She checks the surface of the vanity frantically.) I can't believe this! (She crosses to the bed, pulls up the bedspread and then gets down on her hands and knees and reaches under the bed. Crying out.)
Who is that?

FRANCES. (From under bed.) Oh, it's just me. (Frances emerges sheepishly from under the bed, keeping the bracelet on her wrist hidden behind her back. Sweetly.) Hi, there.

MEREDITH. Frances, what the hell are you doing?

FRANCES. Oh, well, there aren't too many people downstairs, and nobody I really know too well, aside from Mama and Daddy and Uncle Reece and Aunt Kitty, so ... I guess I'm just looking for a friendly face. (A nervous laugh.)

MEREDITH. Under my bed?

FRANCES. No, I — well, when I heard you coming in, I got scared, I realized I really shouldn't be here. I tried to hide from you, Meredith. I hope you can forgive me.

MEREDITH. (Staring at her.) Well, sure. (She pulls a milk crate from underneath the bed and digs through it.)

FRANCES. (Struggles with the bracelet behind her back.) It's just that this room is so beautiful. I remember whenever we came to visit when I was little, and Tracy still lived in here? You and her and all the other cousins would be having tea parties in her playhouse out back, but I would sneak up here and sit in the middle of this room and pretend it was mine. Of course, I just worshiped her. Tracy.

MEREDITH. You and everybody else. Herself included.

FRANCES. That's why I was so thrilled to be in her wedding. (Meredith, unable to find what she was looking for in the milk crate, shoves it back under the bed and groans in frustration.)

MEREDITH. Where the hell is it?

FRANCES. (Nervously.) What are you looking for?

MEREDITH. I am trying to find a joint that I was saving for this reception —

FRANCES. A joint?

MEREDITH. I know I had one in my jewelry box, and if Tracy took it, that would be just like her.

FRANCES. Oh, surely she wouldn't!

MEREDITH. Oh, surely she would.

FRANCES. (Shocked.) Take drugs? On her wedding day?

MEREDITH. Have you noticed how calm she is today? How serene? She has been a nervous wreck for weeks. She had to be high. (Catches sight of herself in the mirror.) Oh, lord. (Takes off her hat.) And then she has the gall to make us wear these horrible — things on our heads, so we all look like the flying nun —

FRANCES. I like this hat.

MEREDITH. Are you serious? Look at yourself in the mirror, Frances, you look ridiculous.

FRANCES. Well —

MEREDITH. You look like a lamp. At least you can wear this dress, though. Makes me look like a linebacker. (Meredith observes herself critically in the mirror, frowns, and gets a pack of cigarettes out of her backpack.) You want one?

FRANCES. No thanks. I don't smoke. I'm a Christian.

MEREDITH. (Digging through her backpack.) Of course, wouldn't you know it? Now I can't find any matches. (She goes into the bathroom, where she can be heard continuing her search. Frances works frantically to get the bracelet off her wrist.) I mean, okay. I can certainly understand why Tracy would want to be stoned today, just to get through this ordeal. But she could have at least asked. I mean, she just took it! Typical. (Frances finally gets the bracelet unclasped and slips it back into the jewelry box, greatly relieved.)

FRANCES. (Has learned her lesson.) Thou shalt not covet.

MEREDITH. (In bathroom.) And then all that stuff about obedience, everybody was acting so serious, I was like, Tracy? Obey Scott? She already runs that poor boy's life. I mean, what a joke! Tracy, the blushing bride. Excuse me while I barf. (Cries out.) Oh, my God!!

FRANCES. (Startled.) What? (Meredith enters from the bathroom holding a joint in front of her, reverently.)

MEREDITH. Look. It was in the medicine chest! We are in business now! (She grabs an ashtray and sits on the bed. Whining.) Shit, we still don't have any matches! (There is knock at the door. Irritated.) Mother, I told you my room is off limits!

TRISHA. (Off.) Meredith?

MEREDITH. Trisha! (She leaves the joint and ashtray on the bed, crosses to the door, unlocks and opens it. Standing outside is Trisha, a striking, glamorous woman in her early thirties. She is dressed exactly like Meredith and Frances, but unlike them, she wears her dress well and moves gracefully in it. She carries a stylish, oversized shoulder bag.)

TRISHA. (Cheerfully.) Hey, babe!

MEREDITH. Do you have any matches?

TRISHA. Uhm, I think I might have a lighter.

MEREDITH. Thank God! You just saved my life. (Meredith motions her in and rushes back to the bed. Trisha enters and shuts the door behind her.)

TRISHA. (Friendly.) I would have gotten here sooner but some creep with whom I apparently share some sort of history cornered me in the parking lot and chewed my ear to a bloody stump about how great it was to see me again, and could we get together soon, and so I said sure, did he have three hundred dollars, just to shut him up.

MEREDITH. Trisha! You didn't! What did he say?

TRISHA. He asked if I could wait for him to run to a cash machine, can you believe it? (Friendly.) Hey, Frances!

FRANCES. Hi there.

TRISHA. How are you doing?

FRANCES. I'm fine. Thank you so much for asking. (Trisha crosses to the vanity.)

TRISHA. Oh, Meredith, your mother said she wants you downstairs to greet the guests while she freshens up.

MEREDITH. Please. That woman hasn't been fresh in thirty years. While she pops a couple of Xanax is more like it.

TRISHA. I could use a couple of those myself.

MEREDITH. Well, as soon as you get that lighter out, we're going to get stoned.

TRISHA. Oh, boy. I haven't been stoned in ages. Promise you won't let me do anything stupid, okay?

MEREDITH. You would never do anything stupid.

TRISHA. (A laugh.) Are you kidding? I looked out at the congregation during the ceremony, it was like half the men I saw, I think I may have slept with. God, I dread this recep-

tion. Do you think anyone would notice if I left?

MEREDITH. Yes, don't you dare leave me here alone.

TRISHA. (Looking at her reflection in the vanity mirror.) God, would you look at me? I look terrible.

MEREDITH. You look like a million bucks, as usual.

TRISHA. I had to put about a gallon of white-out underneath my eyes this morning. (She pulls a cosmetics bag from her purse, and begins to skillfully retouch her make-up. The other women watch her, slightly cowed by her natural authority; this is a woman who knows how to be beautiful.) So Frances, did you enjoy the wedding?

FRANCES. Yes, it was so beautiful.

MEREDITH. It was ridiculous.

FRANCES. Tracy's dress sure was something.

MEREDITH. Yeah, it was a float.

TRISHA. You've got to hand it her, though, she carried it off. I could never wear anything like that with a straight face. MEREDITH. She didn't wear it. It wore her. If she has any sense at all, she'll put it on a mannequin and just roll it around the reception and leave herself free to mingle.

TRISHA. I shudder to think how much that thing cost.

MEREDITH. Six.

TRISHA. (Turns to her.) That's obscene.

FRANCES. Six hundred dollars?

MEREDITH. Six thousand.

TRISHA. She talked me into designing her invitations for free, and then she made me go through eight revisions, and she spent six thousand dollars on her dress? That is totally obscene. Your poor father must be paying a fortune for this wedding.

MEREDITH. Don't you know it. But Daddy put his foot down — for a *change* — and said no way was he spending six thousand bucks on something she was only going to wear once, so she had to buy it herself.

TRISHA. Wow. I guess she makes pretty good money working for Pepsi.

MEREDITH. I guess. She offered to get me an interview over there. I told her I would rather work at McDonald's. I

have spent my entire life being Tracy Marlowe's little sister, the last thing I want to do is go work at the same place she does. Trisha! Where is that lighter?

TRISHA. (Handing her purse to Meredith.) It's in there somewhere.

MEREDITH. Good lord, what the hell do you keep in this thing?

TRISHA. Only my entire life. (Meredith starts to dig through the purse.)

MEREDITH. I about died when they knelt down and somebody had painted "Help Me" on the soles of Scott's shoes — FRANCES. Oh, I hated that. How could somebody do something so nasty? A wedding is a sacred occasion.

MEREDITH. Well, I thought it was priceless.

TRISHA. Yeah, I figured you thought that was pretty funny. MEREDITH. I wasn't the one who did it, if that's what you're implying. I wish I had been. Trisha! Do you know who did? Who? Tell me.

TRISHA. I don't know.

MEREDITH. You lie.

TRISHA. Meredith, I have no idea. It could be any one of those overgrown frat boys.

MEREDITH. I wish I knew which one. I would give him a blow job. (She pulls an accordion-pack of condoms from Trisha's purse.) God, do you think you have enough condoms here?

TRISHA. Hey, the scout motto is be prepared.

MEREDITH. That's the boy scout motto.

TRISHA. Well, then, the girl scout motto is be extra prepared, because chances are the boy scout is an irresponsible jerk. (Meredith finds the lighter and lights the joint. She inhales deeply.)

MEREDITH. (Exhales, laughs.) "Help me."

FRANCES. Pew! That stuff stinks.

TRISHA. Poor Scott. He turned about three shades of red, didn't he? I think he thought he had done something wrong. MEREDITH. He did. He married my sister, that's about as wrong as you can get. God, I'm glad I found this joint.

TRISHA. I think Scott and Tracy are a perfect match.

FRANCES. Oh, I do too.

TRISHA. They're both smart, good-looking, rich — MEREDITH. Really white.

FRANCES. And you can tell he really loves her.

MEREDITH. Yeah, well, any dog loves its master.

TRISHA. Now, Meredith, be nice.

MEREDITH. Oh, Trisha, don't be such a cheerleader. I want to have fun today. Fat chance. Everybody here is so aggressively normal, it's like the bland leading the bland. I was hoping Scott's lesbian sister would perk things up, but she's about as much fun as having your teeth cleaned.

FRANCES. (Shocked.) Scott's sister is a — a — and everybody just knows about it?

TRISHA. I guess. (To Meredith.) She's pretty much out, isn't she?

MEREDITH. God, yes. She rubs it in everybody's face.

FRANCES. My goodness. I don't think I've ever seen one before.

MEREDITH. Well, now you've seen three.

FRANCES. Who else?

MEREDITH. Those two flute players that played during the ceremony.

FRANCES. You're kidding.

MEREDITH. Nope.

FRANCES. But — they looked just like *real* women. And them playing in church like that, isn't that kind of sacrilegious?

TRISHA. I don't think you need to worry about it, Frances. MEREDITH. Really. So far, this has been the most candy-ass wedding I've ever been to in my life. Things better pick up at the reception. I want something really sick and fucked up to happen. (Trisha, having finished touching up her makeup, crosses to Meredith and takes the joint from her.)

TRISHA. (Laughs.) To you or to someone else?

MEREDITH. Either way, I don't give a shit.

TRISHA. Well, I bet you won't be disappointed.

MEREDITH. (Senses dirt.) Why? What's going on? TRISHA. Nothing.

MEREDITH. Tell me.

TRISHA. (Offering joint to Frances.) Frances, you want some of this?

FRANCES. No ma'am. I do not take drugs. I'm a Christian.

TRISHA. I'm so sorry.

MEREDITH. It's Georgeanne, isn't it?

TRISHA. What?

MEREDITH. I saw her crying during the ceremony.

TRISHA. So? Lots of people cry at weddings.

MEREDITH. No, this had nothing to do with the wedding. (Pause.) Come on, Trisha, you have to tell me.

TRISHA. Meredith, I don't know. Georgeanne and I are not all that close anymore.

MEREDITH. (Suddenly, surprised.) It's Tommy Valentine, isn't it. It's because he's here today.

TRISHA. I seriously doubt it.

FRANCES. Tommy Valentine. I have been trying to think of his name all day.

MEREDITH. Georgeanne had a thing with him too?

TRISHA. About a hundred years ago.

MEREDITH. (A whine.) My God, is there anybody who didn't do it with him? (Pause.) I guess when you're as good looking as he is ...

TRISHA. He's not that good looking.

MEREDITH. Trisha. He is sweat-out-loud gorgeous. That man is walking sex. Why else would every single one of you go off the deep end over him?

TRISHA. I never went off the deep end over him.

MEREDITH. Right.

TRISHA. I didn't.

FRANCES. I met him once, when Tracy brought him to that family reunion at Uncle Reece and Aunt Kitty's lake house? He was real nice.

MEREDITH. (To Trisha.) You look me in the eye and tell me you did not have a thing with him.

TRISHA. I did not have a thing with him.

MEREDITH. Trisha.

TRISHA. We went out a few times, before he and Tracy

ever got together. As a matter of fact, I introduced them to each other.

MEREDITH. I know.

TRISHA. So how do you know everything? You were only a little kid.

MEREDITH. I was a smart little kid. And I also happen to be sisters with Tracy the mouth.

TRISHA. Well, then you probably know more than I do.

MEREDITH. I didn't know about Georgeanne and Tommy Valentine. (Georgeanne enters. In her early thirties, she wears the same dress and hat as the others and carries an opened bottle of champagne. Her hat is slightly askew. She bursts through the door, slams it behind her, kicks it once and then leans against it, crying, unaware there is anyone else in the room.)

GEORGEANNE. (Kicking the door again.) You stupid fucker! (She wipes her nose on part of her dress and takes a swig from the champagne bottle, then turns and sees the others. An awkward pause.) Well, hello there.

TRISHA. Hey, hon.

MEREDITH. (Sweetly.) Hey, Georgeanne.

GEORGEANNE. Please excuse me. (She goes into the bathroom and slams the door.)

MEREDITH. (Thrilled.) Whoa. (Trisha crosses to the window and looks out.)

TRISHA. They sure are taking their sweet time setting up that bar. Man, I love a good open bar. If I ever get to heaven and there's not an open bar, God is going to have some serious explaining to do to me.

FRANCES. There will most certainly not be any liquor in heaven.

TRISHA. Well, thank you for clarifying that for me, Frances. I'll be sure to bring my own.

MEREDITH. (Whispering.) Tommy must have said something to Georgeanne to get her that upset, don't you think?

TRISHA. Meredith, why do you even care?

MEREDITH. Maybe it's her husband! I notice he's not here today, I bet he's cheating on her!

TRISHA. Jesus.

MEREDITH. (Gleefully.) I bet he's cheating on her and she just found out! You think?

TRISHA. I think it's none of your fucking business. Her life is her life, it's not a source of personal entertainment for you. That's pathetic.

MEREDITH. (Stung.) I'm sorry. God.

TRISHA. I suppose you've never been through anything you didn't want the whole world to watch?

MEREDITH. I said I was sorry. You don't have to bite my head off. (Pause.)

TRISHA. Well. I'm just a little sensitive about that particular issue, since I am the reigning queen of the bad rep.

MEREDITH. (Not quite heartfelt.) Your reputation is fine.

TRISHA. You shouldn't lie, Meredith, if you can't do it any better than that.

MEREDITH. I have never heard anybody say one bad thing about you.

TRISHA. Your mother used to habitually refer to me as "that little whore."

MEREDITH. You're crazy. Mama always loved you.

TRISHA. Meredith. Your mother hated my guts. She still does. She will not look me in the eye to this day.

MEREDITH. Why would she hate you?

TRISHA. Because she thought I was the world's worst influence on Tracy. And I was. But it is just basic human nature to be a real degenerate every now and then. And you ought to be able to do it without the whole world looking down its nose at you and acting like it's anything out of the ordinary. (Looking out window.) Oh, God. There's the earring.

MEREDITH. (Joins her at window.) What?

TRISHA. That cute-boy usher, with the earring.

MEREDITH. Oh, him. He's Scott's cousin.

TRISHA. He is a piece of work.

MEREDITH. Ugh, you think?

TRISHA. Uh-huh.

FRANCES. (Brightly.) You know, my big sister was dating a boy who had an earring, but Mama and Daddy made her break up with him.

Frances, your sister is two years older than me. MEREDITH. FRANCES. Is she?

And she still lets her parents tell her what to MEREDITH. do? That is fucked.

(Flushed.) Meredith, the Bible says to honor thy FRANCES. Father and Mother.

The Bible also says that eating shellfish is an MEREDITH. abomination, but that didn't stop you from sucking down that lobster bisque at the rehearsal dinner.

TRISHA. What is his name?

His name is Tripp Davenport and you know it. MEREDITH. (Trisha looks at her.) Oh come on, he flirted with you all through the rehearsal dinner.

Yeah, but he never told me his name.

MEREDITH. Well, his real name is Griffin Lyle Davenport the Third.

TRISHA. I think Tripp suits him better. He's got that look, you know?

MEREDITH. What look?

That look that makes you feel like you're at a re-TRISHA. ally boring party and you and he are the only ones with drugs. It's the same look Tommy Valentine has.

MEREDITH. You'll have to point it out to me.

TRISHA. Oh, no. Believe me, you would be better off if you never even saw that look. It always turns out to be more trouble than it is worth.

MEREDITH. Look at all of them, in their tuxes. They look like a bunch of big - birds, you know?

Pigeons. (Laughs.) They are pumped.

Why are men so stupid? MEREDITH.

Because they're allowed to be. TRISHA.

They are so weird. They are so weird. MEREDITH.

Which one do you want?

The only one of them that doesn't totally gross MEREDITH. me out is Frank.

Frank? Really? TRISHA.

MEREDITH. I still remember what he was wearing the time he came to pick up Tracy for the Valentine's Dance when