

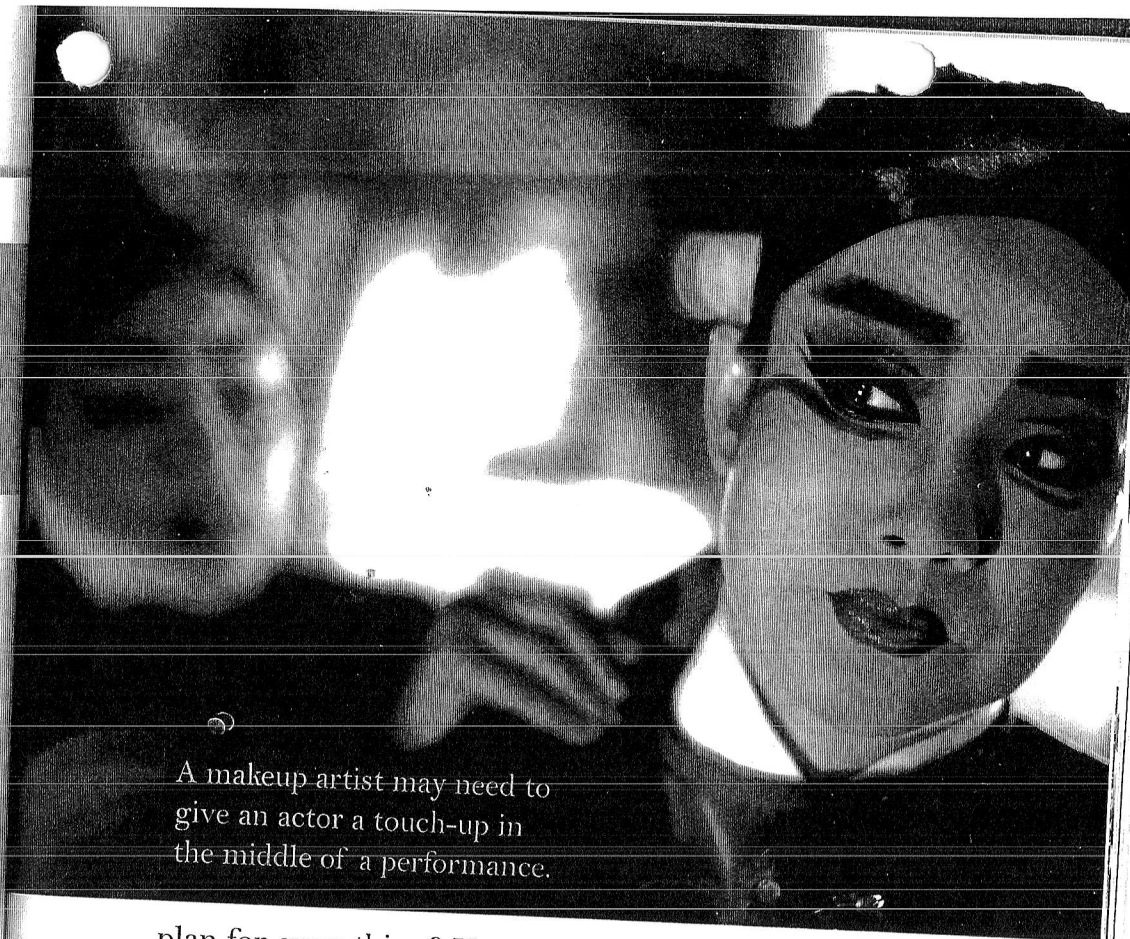
## CHAPTER FOUR

# When Things Go Wrong

**E**very production of every play in the history of time has faced some kind of **mishap**. If you were a part of the audience, it's possible you didn't notice at all. Perhaps a fast-thinking crewmember fixed the issue right away. Maybe you simply thought it was part of the show. Mishaps are simply a part of the theater experience, dating back to the time of Euripides. Issues can happen whether a theater company is a professional one or an amateur one. The most experienced member of a crew can make a mistake, just like anyone younger or less experienced can. Sometimes mistakes happen no matter how much time and preparation have gone into planning a show. That's theater! What you can do, as a hardworking member of the crew, is to help prevent mishaps from happening and acquire the tools to know what to do when something goes wrong.

## Preparing for Anything

The most important thing you can do, no matter your role in a production, is to plan for anything and everything that can happen. How can you possibly



A makeup artist may need to give an actor a touch-up in the middle of a performance.

plan for everything? You can't. But there are things you can do to help create a safeguard against anything that can go wrong.

**Have an Emergency Kit:** First, always have your emergency kit at the ready. A good hair and/or wig stylist will have a pocket full of high-quality bobby pins (of various sizes and for all types and shades of hair) ready to go just in case a curl falls out of place or a wig starts to shift. A quick spritz of hairspray just might save the day. A hair stylist or makeup artist might consider investing in an apron with a large pocket or pockets to hold any number of emergency items, just in case. That way, if an actor loses a contact lens or a false eyelash,

you'll be ready to help fix the problem before the next cue. A good emergency kit for a hair or wig stylist will include hairspray, bobby pins, a good wig adhesive, extra hair elastics, and a comb. Makeup artists might keep makeup removal wipes, mascara, eyeliner, powder puffs, and setting spray on hand in their emergency kits. What you add to your kit is up to you. After a little experience in the theater, you'll know exactly what you need to reach for in an emergency.

**Communicate:** One of the most important things you can do to keep mishaps from occurring is to make sure you're communicating with everyone. If you notice that part of a costume is missing or damaged, share that information with the members of your team and work to solve the problem. And don't limit yourself to issues that only pertain to your department. If you see an issue with a set piece, prop, or stage light, make sure you're passing that information along. Also, make yourself easy to communicate *with*. Make sure you pass your cell phone number along to those you work with most in the costumes, hair, and makeup departments, as well as to any actors you work with closely and the stage manager. Check your phone often to make sure you haven't received any emergency texts or calls. Also make sure that everyone knows who to contact if you are off site.

**Stay Focused:** If you're attending a rehearsal, pay attention. If you're backstage during a performance, prepping for a costume or wig change, keep an ear

open for your cues, or you might miss them. It's easy to get distracted by the magic of theater and get lost in the performance, find yourself caught up in backstage drama, or get tied up in a chat with friends and cohorts. If you struggle with getting distracted easily, you might want to set reminders on your phone—just be sure to keep the phone on vibrate, especially during a performance.

**Attend Meetings and Rehearsals:** It's very important to stay abreast of the latest production news, so make sure you're getting to every meeting and staying to the end, even taking notes, if possible. A lot of important information gets passed along during meetings, and you don't want to miss it. If you absolutely cannot attend, make sure you talk to someone from your department who can give you the scoop afterward.

**Arrive Early and Stay Late:** Sometimes going the extra mile is the key to avoiding any kind of mishap, and that might mean setting aside some extra time to complete a task. Arriving twenty minutes early or staying a couple of minutes late makes you look good to anyone you work with, but it also gives you more time to complete a task. If you're feeling rushed, you are more likely to leave a task undone. Also, if you have a few moments to yourself, it's easier to organize your thoughts. When your thoughts are organized, you're not as likely to make a mistake or forget something important.

**Keep a Running List of Notes:** Notes are not just for meetings. Keep a production notebook and update

it as often as you need to. This is a good place for your meeting notes, to-do lists, ideas, or quick sketches. Staying organized is the key to avoiding mishaps, and the best way to stay organized is to keep notes on anything and everything. Date all of your notes so that if you receive a specific instruction, you can go back and see when it was delivered, if necessary.

## Hair Mishaps

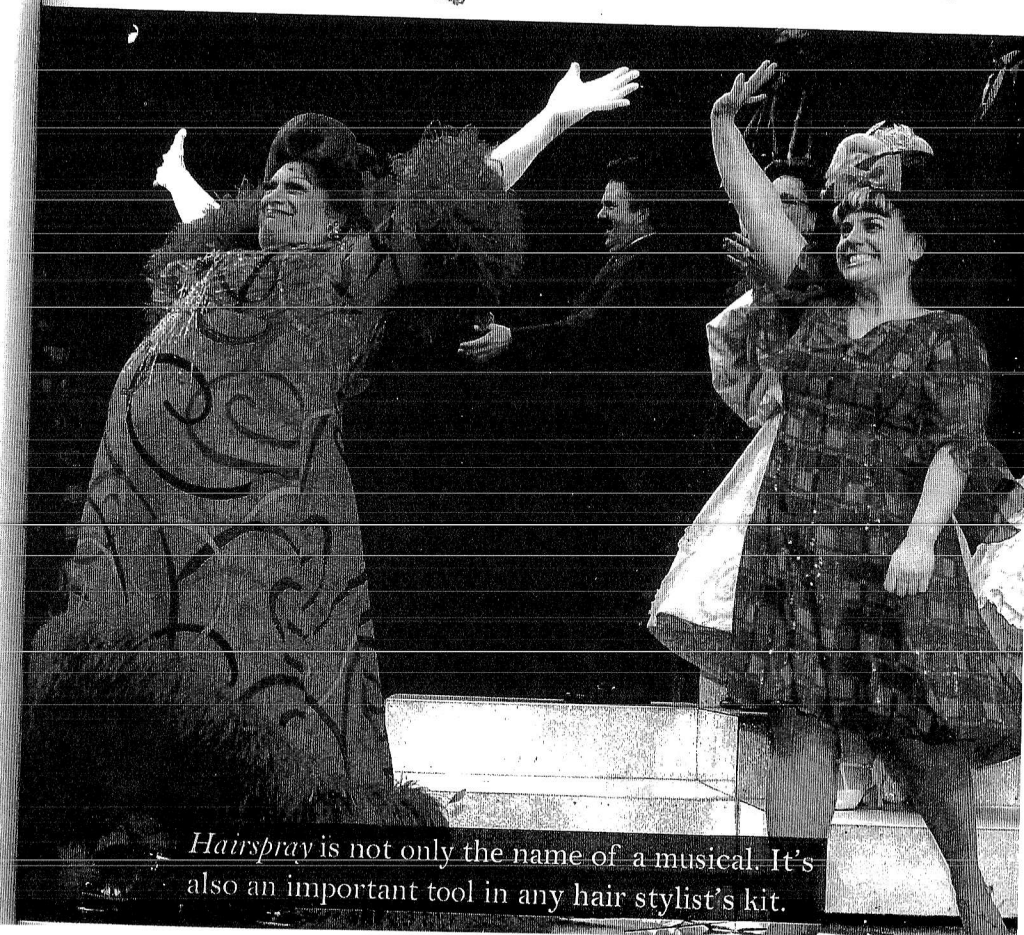
"You just put a bunch of pins in there and hope for the best," Stephanie Barnes said in a 2007 interview with *Playbill*. Barnes was the assistant hair and makeup supervisor for the Broadway production of *Hairspray*. The show utilized around 150 wigs, as many of the characters required more than one, and there were extras in case an **understudy** needed to go on. Five members of staff worked full-time to maintain and style the wigs for *Hairspray*, but no amount of preparation could keep character Tracy Turnblad from losing her wig. Barnes even saw wigs fall apart midshow during her time working on *Hairspray*.

When working with an actor's real hair, no amount of hairspray is too much (not just when you're working on a show called *Hairspray*). It's good to have a few different types in your arsenal: a strong-hold spray when you absolutely don't want hair to budge, and a flexible-hold spray for curls or any hairstyle that you want to be able to move naturally but still maintain its shape throughout a performance. You'll also want to make sure to keep a variety of spray around for styling wigs. There are finishing sprays that are basically hairspray for synthetic wigs.

You can use regular hairspray on wigs made from natural hair, but be sure to clean them frequently to remove any hairspray buildup. Having the right products will help you to make any necessary fix in case of a hair-mergency.

## Makeup Mishaps

As a makeup artist for the theater, you'll have a kit filled with tools that will help keep makeup in place and look great throughout a performance. According

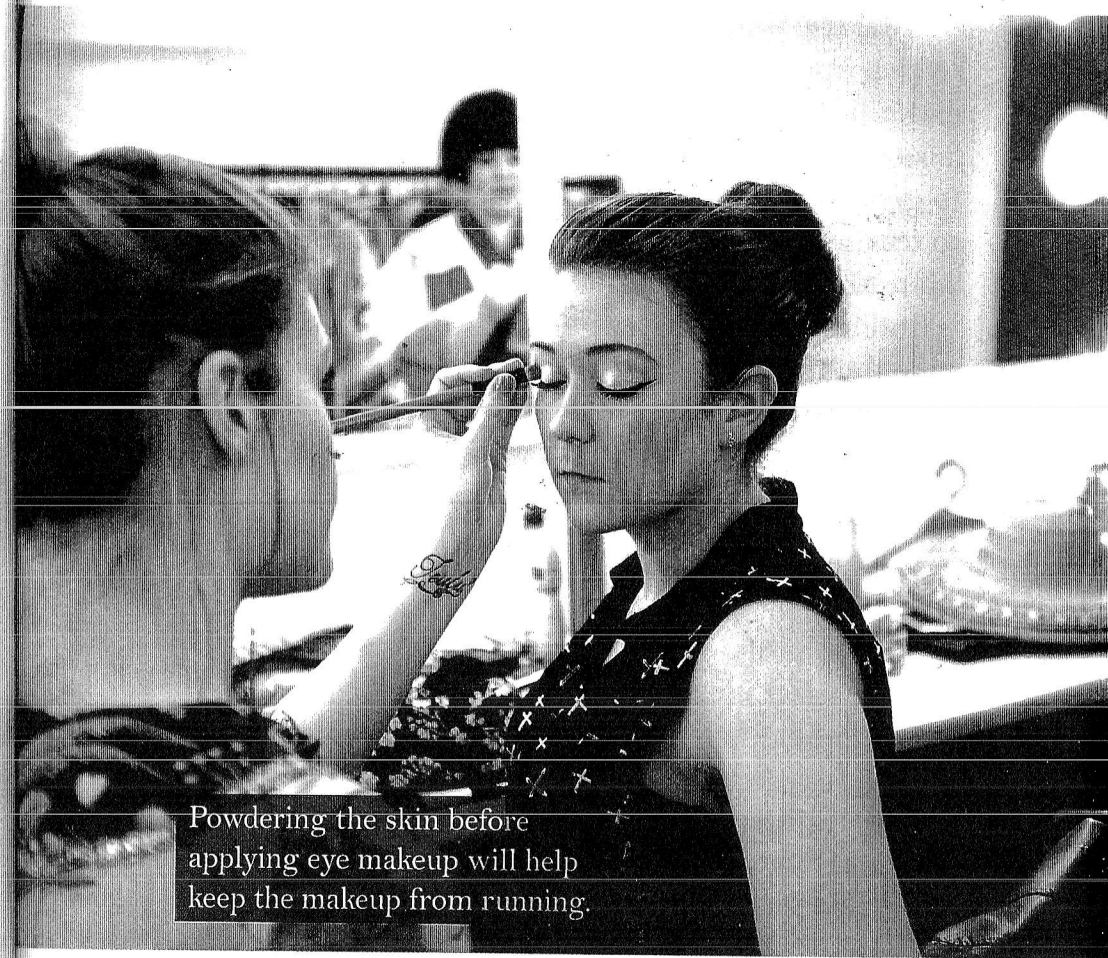


*Hairspray* is not only the name of a musical. It's also an important tool in any hair stylist's kit.



to an article on ThoughtCo, you can avoid any makeup issues by following a few simple rules.

1. Always use foundation, and make sure it's the right foundation. Foundation turns an actor's face into a "blank canvas," ready for makeup. Foundation evens skin tone and sets the base for powder, to prevent shine. Before applying foundation, you might want to start with a layer of barrier spray in order to protect the actor's skin.
2. Keep those hot stage lights in mind. It can be pretty easy to forget how hot it gets onstage, so be prepared with waterproof makeup, fixing spray, and a dusting of powder for a matte finish. And be ready for touch-ups with blotting papers and a powder puff! Waterproof makeup is your friend. Sweat, tears, a drink thrown in a face during a fight scene—any number of these things can lead to runny makeup.
3. Don't go light on makeup. Remember that you need actors to look good from afar, so you want to accentuate their features. If you're unsure of how much makeup to use or whether or not the finished product looks good, back up several paces and take a look. Or consult another makeup artist or member of the crew for a second opinion.
4. Keep bright colors in check and avoid heavy contrast, otherwise an actor may end up looking clown-like. Foundation with a slightly



Powdering the skin before applying eye makeup will help keep the makeup from running.

yellow tinge looks more natural from the audience, while pink can make an actor's face look too red. Again, if you aren't sure if a look is working, back up and take a look from a distance.

5. Don't skip any important steps. There is a lot of expression contained in the eyebrows, so don't forget to line them with a dark color. And don't skip the eyeliner and mascara.

Makeup is not a foolproof art. No amount of setting spray is always going to hold makeup in place under hot theater lights. An actor is going to lose a false eyelash during a dance number. An actor is going to get stinging eyeliner in his or her eyes and begin to tear up. As a makeup artist, you'll instantly know what to do to fix the problem. The trick in the theater is finding the right moment to make the fix. By the time the first performance begins, you should be familiar with all the cues and have them written out in your copy of the script. That way you'll know which actors will be backstage for a few moments, and you can do a quick touch-up or come by with your blotting papers before their next cue.

## Unforeseen Circumstances

Sometimes all of the preparation in the world isn't enough to prevent a problem from occurring. And that's OK. Mistakes happen. What you do next is what's really important.

1. Let someone know.
2. Formulate a plan.
3. Make the fix.

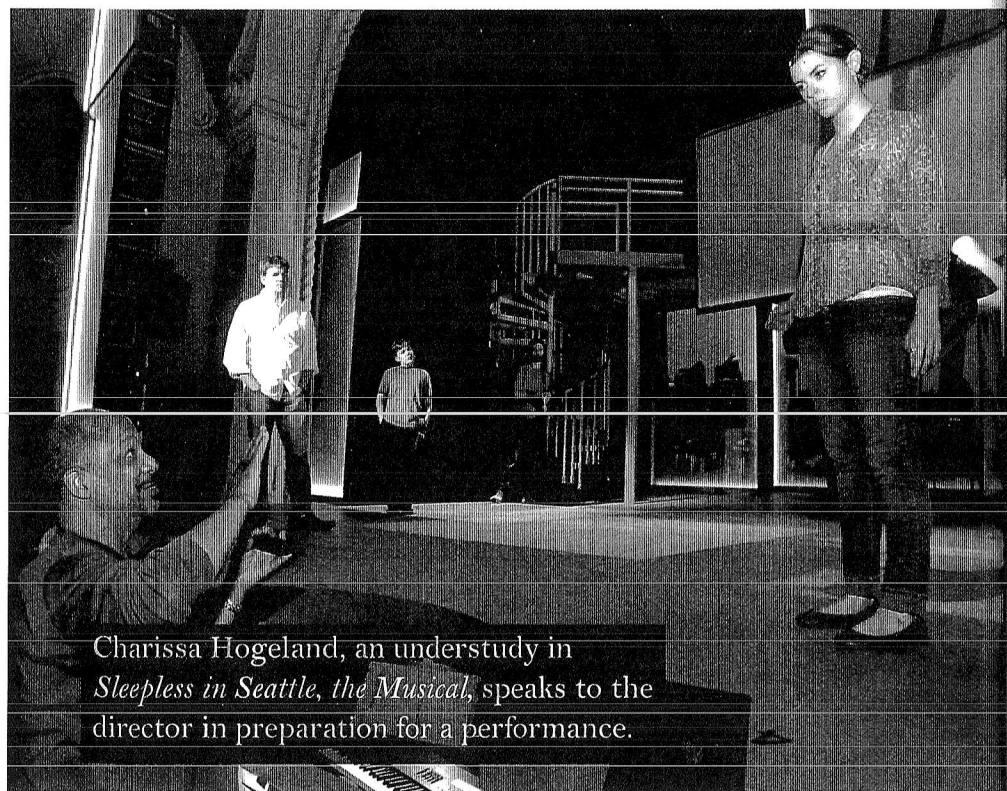
One of the most important people involved in a stage production is the stage manager, and this person is your go-to for everything involved with the show. Stage managers are the ones who schedule and run rehearsals, oversee any work done by the stage crew, call cues during a performance, and oversee the entire show every performance. If anyone needs to know about a mishap that is occurring, it's the stage manager. (Often the stage manager will have

an assistant. If you can't speak to the stage manager personally, this person is your next-best bet.) A stage manager knows all of the cues and will know the best moment for you to fix a wig or replace a missing set of eyelashes. Any fixes should take place backstage, out of the audience's view, unless there is no other way to get the job done. Work quickly and efficiently, causing the least amount of distraction as possible. Many crewmembers wear black or another dark color to avoid being seen by the audience.

## Showstopper

On a very rare occasion, the show will run into an issue that prevents the performance from continuing. An actor might get injured. The electricity might go out. A member of the audience might become disruptive or run onstage. Any number of things might bring a performance to a grinding halt. If this happens, it is important to stay in communication with everyone around you. Most theaters will have the stage manager make an official announcement to the audience. Some mishaps might require a few minutes of break. Some might end the show completely. If the show is set to continue, you have to be at the ready to get right back to your cues and to help the actors get back to theirs.

If someone is dangerously injured and you are the first person on the scene, call 911 immediately, and send someone nearby to tell the stage manager what's happening. Stay with the injured person until help arrives, and follow any instructions that the stage manager gives you. You might want to familiarize



Charissa Hogeland, an understudy in *Sleepless in Seattle, the Musical*, speaks to the director in preparation for a performance.

yourself with the locations of first aid kits so that you can be prepared in case of an emergency.

If a minor injury results in an actor having to leave the show, but there is an understudy available to take his or her place, as part of the hair and makeup team you will need to be on hand in order to get the understudy ready to perform. There will almost definitely be a plan in place just in case this happens. Be ready to do your part to allow the show to continue.

If there is a fire or electrical issue, making the situation inside the theater unsafe for cast, crew, and audience members, the theater should have

an evacuation plan in place. By the first night of a performance, you should be aware of all fire extinguisher locations and fire alarms. Keep a list of emergency contacts in your phone so that you won't have to search around for that emergency call sheet.

## Keep Calm and Carry On

If a big mishap occurs onstage, and there is no doubt in your mind that you were the cause of it, remember that the best policy is to admit you made a mistake and move on. Mistakes, large and small, provide you with valuable experience working in the theater. The next time you are faced with a similar situation, you'll know what to do to prevent a mistake from occurring. And then, when you're interviewing for your next big theater job and the interviewer asks you how you handle a crisis, you'll have an answer at the ready.