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Norman Maine Publishing

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THESE ACTORS OF MINE

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For Cindy and Haydee

THESE ACTORS OF MINE

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THESE ACTORS OF MINE premiered at the Emerson Theatre in Downey, CA, on March 12, 2002. Directed by Jacquie Emerson.

PETE: Rosanna Ochoa

JACQUIE: Kelly Richart

CHRISTINE: Shannon White

PHIL: Stephen Desalernos

AARON: Victor Marquez

SANDI: Amy Duncan

CHICKY: Stephanie Sullivan

DEBBIE: Nicole Rodriguez

MATTHEW: Gary Nord

CARRIE: Lauren Fox

VINCENT: Tommy Neubauer

FRED: Jason Bonzon

THESE ACTORS OF MINE

COMEDY. In this hysterically zany play within a play, a cast of community theatre actors rehearse and perform a “unique” version of “Romeo and Juliet”—one that resembles a soap opera more than a Shakespeare classic. In this version, Juliet winds up in Hamlet’s arms after she discovers Romeo has gotten her mother pregnant. But that’s nothing compared to the drama backstage. When actor Buck Powers has a nervous breakdown and winds up in a mental hospital after performing “Hamlet,” the director, Jacquie, must find another actor to play Tybalt. Jacquie calls upon Fred, a theatre janitor and professional actor to fill in since he played a one-legged male prostitute in a TV drama. Good luck continues for the cast when they discover they can save money by wearing old costumes salvaged from a theatre fire. And with the directorial “help” of Jacquie’s know-it-all daughter who just graduated with a MA in theatre, the cast is optimistic they can keep the audience in their seats for 30 minutes—just long enough so the theatre doesn’t have to grant refunds. There’s a scene stealer for every cast member in this side-splitting comedy!

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(6 m, 6 f)

JACQUIE: Director of a community theatre production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

CHICKY: 22, plays Juliet; desperately in love with Vincent.

VINCENT: 22, Sandi's brother; desperately in love with Chicky.

AARON: 25, plays Romeo; married to Sandi.

SANDI: 22, plays Lady Capulet; married to Aaron and 7 ½ months pregnant; vehemently opposed to Aaron's kissing scenes with Chicky; angry she was passed over for the role of Juliet.

DEBBIE: 50, has lost 100 pounds and isn't happy about wearing a fat suit to play the Nurse; in the process of divorcing Matthew; dating Fred.

MATTHEW: 50, character actor who plays Montague, Capulet, and Prince Escalus; married to Debbie; prone to nervous breakdowns.

FRED: 40, professional actor and theatre janitor; Debbie's perfect boyfriend – he mops, cleans, and sews.

CARRIE: Jacque's arrogant, condescending daughter who just received her MA in theatre; in love with Fred.

PHIL: 45, drunken actor who plays Mercutio, Paris, and the Page.

PETE: Technical and lighting guy; can't seem to figure out the new sound board.

CHRISTINE: Stage manager and Jacque's right hand woman.

SETTING

A small Los Angeles County theatre. Running along the back wall of the set within a set is a long folding table, meant to hold the many foods that will be present at the elaborate party. For the actual performance of "Romeo and Juliet" an ornate table will replace the shoddy card table. The rest of the stage is bare. The walls are created using a scrim so that action backstage can be seen by the audience. Directly behind this stage is the backstage area, where actors wait for their many entrances and exits. Up above this resides a tiny sound booth, complete with steps leading back down to this backstage space.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I The set of the play *Romeo and Juliet*. The stage is set up for the banquet scene at the Capulet home.

ACT II: Two weeks later, dress rehearsal. The stage is a bit more "dressed up," for act one, scene five of *Romeo and Juliet*. Setting is the Capulet's banquet hall.

ACT III: Two weeks later, the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.

PROPS

Control panel	Beret
Homemade fat suit, for Debbie	Director's chair that reads, "Director" on the back
Technical manual	Pens
Clipboard	Notepad
Scripts	Blue Renaissance hat
Flask	Red Renaissance hat
Stopwatch	2 Swords
Dress	11 Gift boxes
Sewing needle	8 Embroidered handkerchiefs
Envelopes	Expensive looking watch
Dozen roses	Box of breath mints
Suit, for Fred	Dictionary
Extra small tights, for Aaron	Tray of bread
Hand fan	Piece of cake
2 Walkie-talkie headsets	Fork
Papers	Napkin
Apron	Turkey leg
Rubber gloves	Hammer
Toilet brush	

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Strange heavy metal music
Cell phone ringing
"Love Theme from Romeo
and Juliet"
Jackhammer
Buzzard
Elvira Gulch music from
"The Wizard of Oz" or the
like

Ripping sound
Lightning
Thunder
Def Leppard's "Pour Some
Sugar on Me" or a similar
song

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"IT TAKES
A SPECIAL PERSON
TO LIKE
THEATRE PEOPLE."

—SANDI

ACT I

(AT RISE: The set of the play "Romeo and Juliet." Currently, the stage is set up for the banquet scene at Capulet home. Jacquie is down right, staring up into the grid holding the many fresnels and leekos. Pete can be seen up in the booth, frantically peering over some hidden controls. Pete pushes some levers on his control panel, and the stage is plummeted into a world of yellow.)

PETE: How's this for act one, scene four?

JACQUIE: *(Yells toward the back.)* It's fine. The audience will think the cast is jaundiced!

PETE: No, I hit the wrong button. Here. *(The stage goes black.)* How's that?

(Pause.)

JACQUIE: Actually, the audience may thank you.

PETE: No, not the blackout! Wait a second! *(A mixture of soft purples and blues slowly fade up.)* See, for Mercutio's dream monologue!

JACQUIE: I don't know. It may be too dark! Bring up the intensity a bit!

(Pete does as Christine enters from the back. She is holding a homemade "fat suit" and carrying a clipboard, which she is never without.)

PETE: You know, Jacquie, I just can't figure out this new lighting board. There are thousands of controls, switches, and buttons. I don't think there is any way I can memorize and program this board in four weeks.

JACQUIE: Maybe we should have just kept the old one.

PETE: That old board was created before they even had drama. *(Pete stays in the sound/light booth throughout, reading a technical manual.)*

JACQUIE: How's the fat suit, Christine?

CHRISTINE: It's finished. Do you want Debbie to try it on today or what?

JACQUIE: Can't we push the fitting back a few more rehearsals?

CHRISTINE: We could, if the fitting goes all right. But if there's something wrong with the size, I may not have it done for dress rehearsal.

JACQUIE: When is the dress again?

CHRISTINE: Two weeks from tomorrow.

JACQUIE: I am not looking forward to this. She throws a fit at least once a rehearsal, and she hasn't even seen it.

CHRISTINE: You would too if you had lost almost a hundred pounds and then had to wear a fat suit.

JACQUIE: Maybe we could entice her a little by adding a little stuffing to her chest to make her more "voluptuous."

(Pete walks in from the back, script in his hand.)

PHIL: I doubt the farmers can harvest that much cotton.

JACQUIE: I wasn't talking to you, Phil!

PHIL: Yes, but I like to be helpful when I can.

CHRISTINE: Actually, I made it out of wool, not cotton.

PHIL: So here I am, Jacquie, right on time.

JACQUIE: Then go get into character. You're method, remember?

PHIL: I'm always in character, Jacquie. I have been Mercutio since day one, and I will be... *(He sniffs the air.)* What is that...what is that...intoxicating scent you're wearing?

JACQUIE: I cleaned my cat box before I left for rehearsal, Phil.

(Phil stops.)

PHIL: Oh.

JACQUIE: I hired someone for Tybalt, Phil.

CHRISTINE: Talk about last minute.

JACQUIE: He's an excellent actor...he played Tybalt two years ago off-Broadway.

PHIL: How far off Broadway?

JACQUIE: Cleveland. But that doesn't mean he's not reputable! Besides, chances are he still remembers his lines. He'll be here tomorrow afternoon. He's also a writer. He just finished writing a hysterical farce for his local theatre about a group of actors putting on an off-Broadway play.

PHIL: Yeah, that's just what the theatre needs—another play about actors putting on a play. What's his name?

JACQUIE: Buck Powers.

PHIL: Buck Powers? Sounds like a porn star. (*He throws his hands up.*) Why go through the process of hiring another actor? I told you I can do both parts. They're both small parts!

JACQUIE: (*Losing it.*) Phil, Tybalt kills Mercutio! How are you going to do that? Stab yourself? It'll look like suicide!

PHIL: I'm great at committing suicide! I played Jessie Cates in "Night Mother" in high school that knocked the audience off their seats.

JACQUIE: Jessie Cates is a female character, Phil.

PHIL: It was an all-boys' school. No one kills themselves like I do.

JACQUIE: And no one drinks like a fish as you do either!

PHIL: I promised you all—I think—that I wouldn't drink once during rehearsals!

JACQUIE: You're drunk now, Phil.

PHIL: But we haven't started rehearsals yet, have we?

(Aaron and Sandi enter from the back.)

JACQUIE: Oh, good, we're almost all here. How're you feeling, Sandi? Nothing out of the ordinary?

AARON: Well, she's as big as a house. Is that considered out of the ordinary?

(Sandi waddles in from backstage. She's 7 1/2 months pregnant.)

SANDI: I'm getting tired of fat jokes. Now I know how Debbie felt.

AARON: I totally agree. Fat jokes to one's wife are rude. So then, where is Debbie?

JACQUIE: No more fat jokes to Debbie. You're becoming more and more like Phil every day.

AARON: How is that possible? You don't see a drink in front of me, do you?

PHIL: Excuse me, but I'm right here in the room.

SANDI: Besides, those jokes are unwarranted. Her weight loss has been incredible!

PHIL: Well, she still has a big mouth...at least I have that.

(Sandi smacks Phil in the stomach.)

SANDI: Jackie said cut it out. *(She now smacks Aaron in the stomach.)*

And by the way, Aaron, thanks for waiting for me to get out of the car. I almost had to pull myself out through the sun roof.

JACQUIE: How's the baby doing today, Sandi?

SANDI: She's like people at a [Kathie Lee] concert—she's starting to shove her way out. *(Or insert the name of another "entertainer.")*

JACQUIE: Not yet, I hope! You have a month by my calendar. *(To Aaron.)* Hey, are you still working on your lines?

AARON: I've got the beginning down.

JACQUIE: *(Sighs.)* The beginning? Terrific. Why don't we just change the play to "Romeo and Rosalind"?

AARON: Well, I'm sure we could. *(Pause.)* If someone could tell me who Rosalind is.

JACQUIE: Oh my—

AARON: I'm just kidding, Jackie! You take everything so seriously! Jeesh, we can't even joke with you these days. I know who Rosalind is!

JACQUIE: Go backstage and work on your lines, please.

AARON: *(Aside, to Christine.)* Now, who's Rosalind again?

(Christine shoves him backstage as Matthew, Debbie, and Chicky enter from back.)

CHICKY: I hope we're not late. The police were taking away a flasher out back in the alley.

(Christine hides the fat suit.)

JACQUIE: We had a real flasher outside? Here? Overcoat and everything?

CHICKY: He was all scary and dirty.

DEBBIE: One of the theatre janitors held him until the police got there.

PHIL: Did the police know who to arrest?

JACQUIE: You're right on time. Are we all here?

CHRISTINE: Yup, that makes six.

JACQUIE: We're starting with the banquet scene. Chicky, go get Aaron. Let's not waste any time. We're starting in 60 seconds.

(Everybody begins to take their places as Chicky goes backstage. As the actors are moving, Debbie sees that Christine is hiding something.)

DEBBIE: What are you hiding?

CHRISTINE: Who? What? *(She shoves it further behind her back.)*

DEBBIE: That big piece of...fluff! What is that?

JACQUIE: *(Avoiding an argument.)* Now, Debbie, we talked about this...

DEBBIE: Insult me more! Drive the knife in deeper! First you make me the Nurse—of all characters—and then you make me wear this... *(Grabs the fat suit from Christine.)* ...cotton...thing!

CHRISTINE: Actually, I made it out of wool.

DEBBIE: Wool? You're joking, right?

CHRISTINE: What's wrong with wool?

DEBBIE: Do you know how many people are allergic to wool? Well, I happen to be one of those!

CHRISTINE: Can't you take a Claritin?

DEBBIE: Not for hives! I break out all over at the sheer mention of wool!

(Phil looks closely at Debbie's face.)

PHIL: Oh, I thought that was acne.

CHRISTINE: *(To Debbie.)* Don't worry about it then. I'll come up with some sort of anti-allergy solution. Costume creators do it all the time.

DEBBIE: Look, I don't care if you make it out of a leftover boob job! I just lost over a hundred pounds, and now you're making me put it all back on again!

JACQUIE: Debbie, the audience will know it's not real.

CHRISTINE: *(Offended.)* No, they won't!

JACQUIE: Just see what you can do, Christine.

DEBBIE: I'm deeply offended that you would even think of me as playing the Nurse. You typecast me when you thought I was still fat! That is so offensive! *(She shoves her script into Jacquie's face.)* Look here, every time the Nurse is onstage you have her shoving food in her face.

JACQUIE: That was a character decision I made. It doesn't necessarily make her a fat cow. She could just as easily be portrayed as a bulimic!

DEBBIE: And what am I supposed to do about all this food? I can't eat half the stuff you have listed here! Cakes and brownies and cookies—

PHIL: Oh my!

DEBBIE: I can't eat this on my diet!

SANDI: Maybe we can use plastic food. *(Thinks.)* Oh, okay, I get it. Never mind.

JACQUIE: Now listen. The Nurse is Shakespeare's most famous comedic character. I knew it would take an actress of your comedic timing. Besides, the last actress who played the Nurse in Los Angeles was a known anorexic! Now doesn't that make you feel better?

PHIL: The last actress to play the Nurse in LA was [Rosie O'Donnell]. *(Or insert the name of another overweight actress.)*

JACQUIE: Go along with it, Phil!

PHIL: Just trying to be helpful.

JACQUIE: In fact, many thin actresses from all over the world have played the Nurse.

DEBBIE: Name three.

JACQUIE: Well, there's [Sigourney Weaver]...[Meryl Streep]...[Susan Sarandon]... *(Or insert the names of other popular thin actresses.)*

PHIL: [Kathy Bates]. *(Or another overweight actress.)*

JACQUIE: [Kathy Bates]...

PHIL: Orson Wells.

JACQUIE: Orson Wells... *(Shakes her head furiously. Then, to Phil.)* Will you knock it off! *(Back to Debbie.)* Look, Debbie, everyone knows you've lost a lot of weight. If you want, I can even print it up in the program!

DEBBIE: How about letting me take the fat suit off for curtain call?

(Jacquie thinks, then gives in.)

JACQUIE: Fine, fine, you may take it off for curtain call.

PHIL: I must ask this, Debbie, even if it's none of my business...and even though I really don't think I care all that much in the first place...but how did you manage to lose all that weight?

DEBBIE: *(Pleased.)* Oh, you've noticed? Well, for years I tried diet after diet, but nothing ever worked. Then, one night I was at a

Weight Watchers meeting, frustrated that I had gained three pounds that very week.

SANDI: You gained three pounds on a diet?

DEBBIE: Yes, can you believe it? I never cheated, either. I ate all the meals that Weight Watchers gave me.

PHIL: You're not supposed to eat them all in one setting.

DEBBIE: *(Points to her butt.)* Kiss it, Phil.

PHIL: *(As Indian chief.)* Can't. Lips not big enough.

DEBBIE: But I finally found the plan for me: The [Adkin's Diet]. *(Or another trendy diet.)*

CHICKY: The [no-carb, all-protein] diet?

DEBBIE: The very one. Within weeks I had lost 20 pounds. It only took me seven months to get like this. *(She points to herself.)*

JACQUIE: Now, as enlightening as this all is, may I please have everyone take their places? *(She yells backstage.)* Aaron, Chicky, let's go!

AARON: *(Yells.)* Where are we starting from?

JACQUIE: Where Romeo and Juliet first meet.

(Aaron and Chicky appear.)

CHICKY: "Pilgrim's hands do touch?"

JACQUIE: Yes, that scene, but from the beginning. Christine?

CHRISTINE: Start with, "You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play." Everyone else, backstage!

(They all take their places for the dance. Christine and Jacquie sit in the front row of the audience seats.)

MATTHEW: "You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play."

JACQUIE: And music, Pete! *(Pete pulls a lever and some strange, heavy metal music comes blaring through. Everybody stops and puts their hands to their ears. Jacquie yells to Pete.)* You wanna tell me what that is?

PETE: *(As the music stops.)* Oh, sorry! *(He ejects a CD.)* Aaron! You left your [Metallica] CD in here again! *(Or insert the name of another heavy metal band.)*

JACQUIE: What did I say about using the equipment! What if that would have happened during a show?

PETE: I'm getting the right music, hang on.

AARON: This play could use a little pick me up!

JACQUIE: Try having some character, Aaron—that just might do it.

PETE: Okay, here we go!

(The right music starts. Everyone begins dancing...badly. It is the typical dance seen in all "Romeo and Juliet" versions, with the hand touching and the turning.)

JACQUIE: Wait, stop, stop. I thought I went over the dance movements of the period; you all look like crossing guard rejects. *(She walks up to them, grabs Aaron, and begins to model the dance she's looking for. Jacquie makes it look ridiculous, as does the cast when they try to imitate it.)* See, nice and easy. It's just touch and turn, touch and turn, okay? *(She goes back and sits down.)* And...go!

(They dance as badly as Jacquie did.)

MATTHEW: *(To Sandi.)* "Ah, madam, this unlooked-for sport comes well.

Nay, sit, nay, sit, Lady Capulet,

For you and I are past our dancing days.

How long is't now since last yourself and I

Were in a mask?"

SANDI: "By, thirty years."

MATTHEW: "Come Pentecost as quickly as it will,
Some five-and-twenty years, and then we masked."

(Aaron sees Chicky across the room. After a pause or two.)

JACQUIE: Aaron? Aaron, it's your line.

AARON: Um...

JACQUIE: Christine?

CHRISTINE: *(Looking at the script.)* "What lady's..."

AARON: "What lady's..."

CHRISTINE: "...that which doth enrich..."

AARON: "...that which doth enrich..."

CHRISTINE: "...the hand of yonder knight?"

AARON: "...the hand of yonder knight?"

(Jacquie throws her own script on the stage.)

JACQUIE: This is ridiculous! Take my script! *(He does.)* Continue!

AARON: *(Reading from the script.)*

"O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;

Beauty too rich for use, for Earth too dear.

(Chicky and Aaron walk to each other.)

If I profane with my unworhiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough neck touch with a tender kiss."

CHICKY: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

AARON: *(Trying not to use the script.)*

"Have not saints lisps, and holy...holy... *(Pause.)* ...holy..."

JACQUIE: Holy *crap!* Use the script—that's what I gave it to you for!

And it's "saints *lips,*" not "saints *lisps!*"

AARON: Like anyone is going to pick that up! It's Shakespeare!

JACQUIE: Go!

CHICKY: "Ay, pilgrim, lisps that they must use in prayers."

JACQUIE: Now she's doing it. It's "*lisps,*" not "*lips!*"

CHRISTINE: "Lips," not "lisps."

JACQUIE: "Lips"! Go!

AARON: "O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair."

CHICKY: "Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake."

AARON: "Then move not while my prayer's effect I take."

(He moves to kiss her. She backs off.)

JACQUIE: Not again, Chicky! For the last time, let him kiss you!

You keep backing off!

(Sandi pops her head in from backstage.)

SANDI: That's because she's afraid of me!

JACQUIE: Why are you afraid of Sandi, Chicky?

SANDI: Because she happens to be making out with my husband while I'm carrying his child!

JACQUIE: It's just a stage kiss! Besides, in this scene, the kiss is a quick peck on the lips. What are you going to do about the balcony scene?

CHICKY: Couldn't we just take out that scene? It's overdone too much as it is!

JACQUIE: Overdone? You're majoring in English lit, and you have the nerve to ask if we can take it out?

CHICKY: *(Sheepishly.)* Well, as long as it's okay with Sandi.

SANDI: *(Bitter.)* It's still not too late for me to play Juliet, Jacquie.

JACQUIE: Sandi, for the last time: you're seven and a half months pregnant. How are you going to play a 13-year-old virgin?

(The rest of the cast realizes they've stopped and have come out to watch "the show.")

AARON: It isn't as if we're sticking to the original script anyway! *(Points to Sandi.)* You've got a 22-year-old pregnant girl playing a middle-aged woman with a grown child! And you've cut half the characters out anyway.

SANDI: I didn't ask to play Lady Capulet. I auditioned for Juliet!

(Phil slips out a flask and takes a quick drink.)

MATTHEW: Don't you think your condition might get in the way? I suppose if it's left up to interpretation, she could be pregnant with Romeo's child, but they don't meet until scene five, correct?

DEBBIE: Matthew, not now!

PHIL: Maybe it's Tybalt's baby.

AARON: Now that's disgusting.

DEBBIE: What are you saying, Aaron? Middle-aged women can't have children?

PHIL: *(Speaking up from behind the others.)* Can we break for a...bathroom break...or maybe a drink?

DEBBIE: You just had a drink, Phil! We all saw you.

MATTHEW: But it's not very conceivable that I'm playing both heads of the family, Montague and Capulet, and the prince, but I think the audience will forgive us for a few minor—

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DEBBIE: Matthew, not now! Look at [Roseanne]...she had a child in her forties! *(Or insert the name of another actress.)*

(Matthew's cell phone is heard ringing from inside his jacket.)

AARON: Oh, good one to compare Lady Capulet to.

(Christine stands up from the audience.)

CHRISTINE: Oh, Roseanne played the nurse once too, Debbie!

CHICKY: This is going to be disastrous! I wonder if it might be early enough to throw in the towel.

MATTHEW: *(Still ignoring his cell phone.)* Oh, I don't think it's that bad.

DEBBIE: Really? If Lincoln came to the show, he'd shoot himself.

MATTHEW: Now that was uncalled for.

(Phil sneaks another drink.)

JACQUIE: *(Finally having enough.)* All right, that's it! That's it! You've gone on long enough! It is time to— *(She turns on Matthew.)* Matthew, are you going to answer that?

MATTHEW: I thought you didn't like it when I spoke on the phone during rehearsals.

JACQUIE: I also don't want a constant state of ringing! Answer it and then turn it off!

MATTHEW: From now on, I'll keep it on vibration mode. *(He quickly answers it and turns his back to them.)* Matthew Lorkovic.

JACQUIE: Debbie, before you leave the house for rehearsal, hide that thing!

DEBBIE: I have no control over what he does. *(Pause.)* Anymore. *(She looks around and waits for someone to say something regarding her last comment. No one does, for they are all busy with various tasks.)* He can do his own thing...now. *(Pause.)* If you know what I mean.

JACQUIE: *(Breaking away from her script.)* Debbie, are you trying to tell us something?

DEBBIE: Well, I guess I can't hide it now that you're all suspecting. *(Pause.)* Matthew and I are splitting up. We're getting a divorce.

(General yet subdued shock.) I know it's shocking and unexpected.

JACQUIE: Well, I don't know about unexpected...

(Matthew is off the phone and rejoins the group.)

MATTHEW: I hear you told them about the separation.

DEBBIE: Yes, I told them about the divorce.

JACQUIE: Look, we've got to get back to rehearsal. Take it from the music cue, Pete! *(Admonishingly.)* And make sure you have the right cue!

PETE: *(Hurt.)* It wasn't my fault.

(Everyone takes their places.)

JACQUIE: Aaron, do you think you can do it without your script?

AARON: *(Over confident.)* Oh, yeah.

JACQUIE: Then, action!

MATTHEW: "You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play." *(The correct music plays...all dance. To Sandi.)*

"Ah, madam, this unlooked-for sport comes well.

Nay, sit, nay, sit, Lady Capulet,

For you and I are past our dancing days.

How long is't now since last yourself and I

Were in a mask?"

SANDI: "By, Lady, thirty years."

MATTHEW: "Come Pentecost as quickly as it will,
Some five-and-twenty years, and then we masked."

(Aaron sees Chicky across the room.)

AARON: "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright."

(He stops. He looks at Jacque as if he's proud of himself.) See, I told you I could do it!

JACQUIE: Okay, now finish the line, Aaron.

AARON: There's more?

JACQUIE: *(Sarcastically.)* Uh-huh. "It seems..."

AARON: Oh yeah, oh yeah. *(He clears his throat.)*

"It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;

Beauty too rich for use, for Earth too dear.

(Chicky and Aaron come together.)

If profanity with my unworhiest hand..."

JACQUIE: Hold it, hold it.

AARON: What?

JACQUIE: It's not "If *profanity* with my unworhiest hand." The word is "profane." What are you going to do, give everyone in the audience the finger?

AARON: Huh?

JACQUIE: "Profane" in this case is referring to misuse, or to treat with contempt. Profanity...well, you know what profanity is. Now go on, go on, go on.

AARON: (*Continuing.*) "This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough neck touch with a tender kiss."

CHICKY: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

AARON: "Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?"

CHICKY: "Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer."

AARON: "O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do."

(*He breaks character.*) Ooh, isn't that a little nasty, Jacquie?

JACQUIE: Just get on with it!

AARON: "They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair."

CHICKY: "Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake."

AARON: "Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take."

(*As Aaron moves in to kiss Chicky, Sandi moves forward, producing a stopwatch. She hits the button. As the two kiss, Sandi watches the time.*)

SANDI: Okay, times up.

JACQUIE: (*Just noticing this.*) What? What in the—? Sandi, what are you doing?

SANDI: Just keeping things in perspective!

JACQUIE: You know what? For now, skip the kissing scene. From the Nurse's entrance. Everyone else, backstage. I'm going to the back to finish up the dresses. (*Everyone but Aaron, Chicky, and Debbie exit backstage. Christine exits into the back as well. Jacquie begins to take notes.*) You've got the first line, Debbie.

DEBBIE: "Madam, your mother craves a word with you."

(Chicky exits off left.)

AARON: "What is her mother?"

DEBBIE: "Marry, bachelor,

Her mother is the lady of the house,

And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous.

I nursed her daughter that you talked withal.

I tell you, he that can lay hold of her

Shall have the chinks." *(Debbie also crosses off left.)*

AARON: *(Reading from the script.)* "Is she a Capulet?"

O dear account! My life is my foe's debt."

CARRIE: *(From backstage somewhere.)* Mother? Are you upfront or back here somewhere?

AARON: *(Breaking character.)* Just when I was starting to feel the character!

JACQUIE: *(Yells backstage.)* Carrie? I'm out here, dear!

(Carrie enters from backstage. She crosses the set to Jacquie.)

CARRIE: I thought you would have broken for lunch.

(Carrie and Jacquie hug.)

JACQUIE: Not yet, we were just getting started.

CARRIE: *(To Aaron.)* Don't mind me, you go right ahead. I'll just sit here and listen.

JACQUIE: No, wait, I have to introduce you to everyone. *(She takes on an air of professionalism that is unlike her.)* Everyone, I would like a gathering, please.

(They all come dragging out.)

DEBBIE: I thought we were supposed to get started!

AARON: Come on, Jacquie! We go on in two weeks!

JACQUIE: Please! I am the director. I have things under control. I'd like you to meet my daughter, Carrie. Carrie, this is the cast of "Romeo and Juliet."

CARRIE: Oh, "Romeo and Juliet." Shakespeare's cutest play!

CHICKY: Cute?

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CARRIE: For my final project, I just finished directing and producing "King Lear," "Timon of Athens," and "Troilus and Cressida."

AARON: (*Rolls his eyes.*) So what? Greek playwrights are so overrated.

JACQUIE: Carrie has just received her masters degree in theatre! Following in her mother's footsteps...

CARRIE: (*She lovingly looks at her mother.*) Exactly, Mother. Only, you just have your AA, correct?

JACQUIE: Uh, yes. But here we are, following the same career path. Now, we absolutely must continue. Perhaps you'd like to stay awhile and observe the process, Carrie?

CARRIE: Well, since we're not going to lunch, I guess I could stay here for a while. I might even be able to give out some pointers!

JACQUIE: Please feel free! I tell you what... (*To the actors.*) ...let's skip to the balcony scene and show her what we've done there!

AARON: Why are you being so nice to us all of a sudden?

JACQUIE: (*Forcefully, pinching Aaron in the arm.*) Places!

(*As everyone goes backstage, Chicky stands over at the downright corner. Aaron gets on his knees a few feet in front of her.*)

AARON: What line?

JACQUIE: From the beginning. (*She yells up to Pete.*) Hit it, Pete!

(*The "Love Theme from Romeo and Juliet" plays over the sound system.*)

AARON: (*Sighs and begins.*) "He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?"

(*Matthew's cell phone is heard ringing from behind the stage.*)

JACQUIE: (*Politely yelling.*) Matthew, would you mind terribly turning your phone off?

(*Matthew pokes his head in from the back.*)

MATTHEW: It's going on vibration mode right now! (*He disappears.*)

JACQUIE: Continue.

AARON: "It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon..."

CARRIE: Excuse me, but are you still on script?

(Aaron looks at her, then at Jacquie.)

AARON: Uh, just for certain parts.

(Pete cuts the music.)

CARRIE: Aren't you performing in a couple of weeks?

AARON: Uh...yeah.

CARRIE: All right, just curious. Continue. *(Aaron looks at Jacquie again. She just looks away. The music starts up again.)*

"Who is already sick and pale with grief

That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.

Be not her maid since she is envious..."

CARRIE: Tell me, are you going to deliver the line that way when you perform for an audience? Oh, I don't mean it the way it sounds, it's just that I don't think you are quite grasping what Romeo is going through in this particular scene.

AARON: *(Folding his arms.)* Please, tell me.

(With a sigh, Pete cuts the music. Carrie gets up and goes to him.)

CARRIE: Well, first of all, Romeo feels like he's lost her forever at this point. He's young and immature. To put it in layman's terms, he most likely feels like a loser. Have you ever felt like a loser before?

(Aaron thinks.)

AARON: Uh, no.

CARRIE: Have you ever known anyone whose very essence is that of a pathetic loser where nothing ever goes his way?

(Pause. Aaron looks behind him.)

AARON: Hey, Matthew, can you hear me from back there? *(No answer. He turns to Carrie.)* Yes, I have.

CARRIE: Keep this in mind...is Romeo very different from the "adolescent in love with Rosalind," or is he in love with love, which we saw in the earlier scenes, using conventional courtly figures of speech? And though Romeo begins with a soliloquy, which we overhear, Juliet does not. Why is that? Why do we hear, but Juliet doesn't? Is Shakespeare doing this as a dramatic sleight of hand? What do you think?

(Long pause.)

AARON: I just thought he was excited 'cause he was gonna get some.

SANDI: *(From backstage.)* Aaron!

CHICKY: You're such a guy, Aaron.

CARRIE: *(To Chicky.)* And what about Juliet? Why is her love known immediately? Why is she able to be direct and frank in her avowal? Think about the language Romeo uses in his semi-soliloquy with Juliet's. Compare. Contrast.

(Long pause.)

CHICKY: Um, Jacquie?

AARON: *(To Chicky.)* You hold her down. I'll get some pig's blood and a prom dress.

(Jacquie jumps up to help her actors.)

JACQUIE: These are all wonderful thoughts to ponder, everyone. But for now, let's just try to keep the flow going. From "Wherefore art thou," please.

(Chicky puts her hand above her brow and searches for Romeo. The music starts up again from the beginning of the piece.)

CHICKY: "Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

CARRIE: Wait, hold it.

(Music stops.)

CHICKY: *(To herself.)* Have mercy.

CARRIE: Why are you searching for Romeo?

CHICKY: Why? Because Jacquie told me to.

JACQUIE: Well, Juliet is looking for her Romeo in the garden.

CARRIE: (*Singsong voice.*) No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, *no!*

AARON: Wait, I missed that, what did you say?

CARRIE: Mother, didn't you read the script? Juliet is not looking for Romeo! When she says, "Wherefore art thou?" she is asking him why he has to be a Montague, the son of her enemy. I can't believe you didn't pick that up! When I took script analysis 101, I had a professor who—

JACQUIE: You know, I'm not worried about interpretation as much as I am concerned with character.

CARRIE: Well, I don't know how you can have character if you don't comprehend the full complexity of Romeo's psyche. And don't forget about Romeo's latent desires for his cousin, Benvolio.

AARON: Ew, you mean I'm gay?

(*Phil pokes his head out from backstage.*)

PHIL: Well, the jury's not out on that yet.

AARON: Hey, Phil, why don't you poke yourself backstage and have a drink, huh? (*To Jacquie.*) You mean, my character's gay?

CARRIE: Everyone in the Renaissance period was bisexual. Anyone who's anyone knows that! (*From behind the stage, the whole cast chimes in with "Ew!" Sandi walks out onstage to observe Chicky and Aaron.*) In fact, if you watch the Zeffirelli version, you can see just a little "tension" between Romeo and Mercutio.

SANDI: What's a "Zeffirelli?"

AARON: Don't act dumb, Sandi. (*To Carrie.*) It's that Italian place we sometimes eat at after rehearsal.

CARRIE: Who's Zeffirelli you mean. He directed the film version of "Romeo and Juliet."

SANDI: Ooh, I saw that...uh...uh..."Shakespeare In Love" with Gwyneth Paltrow! I love that movie!

CARRIE: Well, that's not exactly "Romeo and Juliet." That was a sort of play within a play.

AARON: Okay, you lost me.

CHICKY: It was a movie about Shakespeare and "Romeo and Juliet."

CARRIE: "Romeo and Juliet" has been made into a film.

AARON: Hey, you don't have to act like I'm stupid. I saw it. It was with that Titanic guy. *(To the others.)* Now you talk about gay!

CARRIE: *(Trying to be patient.)* Franco Zeffirelli is an Italian director who made the original "Romeo and Juliet."

AARON: Oh. I don't think I saw that one.

CARRIE: Most people saw it in high school. Didn't you see it in 9th grade? *(Thinks, then kindly.)* Oh, why am I asking you?

AARON: Hey, I went to high school! I just didn't see the movie, okay?

(Phil pops his head in from backstage.)

PHIL: It was the one where they showed Juliet naked from the waist up.

AARON: *(Turns to Carrie.)* Oh yeah, I saw that one.

JACQUIE: Look, maybe we should get moving.

CARRIE: Actually, maybe I should get moving. I'd love to sit here and help, but since we're not having lunch, Mother, I suppose I'll leave you all be.

(Phil pokes his head out from backstage.)

PHIL: Perhaps you can come back during our dress rehearsal and give us some insight then! We could probably use some at that point!

(Everyone onstage, including Jacquie, glare at him.)

JACQUIE: *(Almost to herself.)* I can't believe I quit drinking before I agreed to undertake this show. I could sure use a drink right now...or two, or three.

CARRIE: *(Admonishing.)* Now, now, Mother it's all fun and games until someone has a bit too much and drives their car through a Blockbuster window! Remember that?

JACQUIE: How can I forget?

CARRIE: *(She becomes excited again.)* All right, kids, I'll see you real soon, and I'll even take notes next time. I'll make sure to bring the big notebook! *(She begins to go and everyone pokes their heads and bodies out to say goodbye.)* Have a great run through!

(Carrie exits through the back. Everyone glares at her as she exits. After a pause.)

PHIL: She's fun. I like her.

JACQUIE: Look, she really knows what she's talking about; she just received her master's degree in theatre last month. She's really quite knowledgeable. Now, places, please.

CHRISTINE: I'll be in the back if you need me.

CHICKY: From where?

JACQUIE: Do the balcony scene again. And forget everything Carrie just told you.

AARON: *(Sighs. This time he plays it really feminine.)*

"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the East, and Juliet is the sun..."

JACQUIE: Liberace, what are you doing?

AARON: I thought I'd try it Carrie's way.

JACQUIE: I told you to ignore what Carrie said. I am your director! Continue! Hit the music, Pete!

(Music.)

AARON: *(He does it straight this time.)*

"Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon

Who is already sick and pale with grief

That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.

Be not her maid since she is envious.

See how she leans upon her hand;

Oh! That I were a glove upon her hand

That I might touch that cheek!"

(Chicky puts her hand above her brow and then catches herself.)

CHICKY: "Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?

Deny thy father, and refuse thy name;

Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other word would smell as sweet;

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,

Retain that dear perfection which he owes

Without that title.

(She begins to get into the role, dramatics taking over. Aaron climbs up the ladder.)

Romeo, doff thy name,

(She throws her hand out, accidentally striking Aaron in the head. He flies off the ladder, but manages to hang onto the side.)

And for thy name, which is no part of thee,

Take all myself."

AARON: *(Still hanging.)*

"I take thee at thy word!

Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;

Henceforth I never will be Romeo."

(She helps him up.)

CHICKY: "What man art thou that, thus bescreened in night,

So stumblest on my counsel?"

JACQUIE: I should see kissing here!

(They kiss...quickly.)

AARON: "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear."

JACQUIE: And another one!

(They kiss again.)

CHICKY: "O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon."

JACQUIE: *(Shouts.)* Again!

(They kiss a third time.)

AARON: "What shall I swear by?"

JACQUIE: You keep forgetting to kiss! They're supposed to hardly be able to lay off each other! It should be line, kiss, line, kiss, line, kiss!

AARON: *(Yells back.)* How can we keep talking and kissing, talking and kissing, all the while she's hanging on me and I'm hanging on a ladder? You've made it so there's no time to even breathe!

JACQUIE: Breathing's overrated! Next time do it! I want you panting!

(Chicky grabs him and kisses him...again, quickly.)

CHICKY: "Do not swear at all.
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite."

JACQUIE: And the big kiss!

(The go into a deep kiss. Sandi sticks her head out to watch, timer in her hand. Sandi shoves Debbie out on stage to deliver her line, thus breaking the kiss.)

DEBBIE: Juliet! Juliet! *(They kiss again. Sandi shoves Debbie a bit more.)*
Juliet! Juliet! Your mother craves a word with you! *(Finally, Sandi yells out.)* Juliet, get to thy bedchamber now!

JACQUIE: Hold it, Pete! *(Pete stops the music.)* What's the problem, Sandi? You're not in this scene.

SANDI: Do they need to do *all* that kissing?

JACQUIE: Fine. Skip to the end of the scene. Again, Pete!

(Debbie exits backstage, dragging Sandi with her. The music blares back on, but Aaron is really losing his patience.)

CHICKY: "A thousand times good night!"

(She kisses him.)

AARON: "A thousand times the worse, to want thy light."
(He kisses her. Breaks character.) For the love of everything that is holy, do we have to have this music constantly blaring over our scene?!

JACQUIE: It's a classical piece of music, Aaron! It goes hand in hand with "Romeo and Juliet"!

AARON: Well, why does it have to be that piece?!

JACQUIE: I've told you before, Aaron, we aren't going with [Def Leppard's "Pour Some Sugar On Me!"] *(Or insert another heavy metal band/song.)*

CHICKY: *(To Aaron.)* Let's just do it. *(She continues.)*

"Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow."

(There is a scream backstage. Christine rushes on stage, everyone following her.)

JACQUIE: What happened?

CHRISTINE: *(Barely able to speak.)* I...I...I...I sewed the dress to my finger! *(She drops the dress, but it just dangles from her index finger.)*

JACQUIE: How did you manage to do that without feeling anything?

CHRISTINE: I had just taken a Vicodin 20 minutes ago. I had a splitting headache. *(She starts jabbing herself with the sewing needle.)* See? No big deal. And here I was just thinking I was pricking my finger!

JACQUIE: All right, let's go backstage and get this thing cut off.

SANDI: The dress, not her finger.

(Phil offers his flask to Christine.)

PHIL: Want some Jack before your surgery?

JACQUIE: Phil!

(Phil shrugs his shoulders and takes a sip himself. Everyone but Chicky exits backstage. Chicky climbs down and walks to the front, looking for a script. She wants to review her lines. As she is reviewing them, Vincent walks in from the front of the theatre. He is looking for his sister, Sandi. Finally, he sees Chicky and stops. He walks closer to her, but she does not see him. Finally, we hear his thoughts as he stares at her.)

VINCENT: *(Aside.)* Oh, who could this girl be?

She is brighter than any star in the galaxy!

It seems she just hangs there like a diamond in an earring

She is too beautiful for my looks.

Have I ever loved till this moment?

For I have never seen true beauty until tonight.

(He walks up to her. She sees him.) Hello.

(Chicky drops her script and is taken aback at first. Then she sees how intently he is looking at her. She starts to say something, but all of a sudden, she realizes she cannot. For she, too, cannot stop looking at him. She turns

to run away, embarrassed, but he starts to speak. She stops and faces him again. She looks at him, and then nervously straightens her dress.)

CHICKY: Hi.

VINCENT: Hi.

CHICKY: Hi.

(Vincent takes her hands.)

VINCENT: Your hands are so soft;

They deserve to be kissed.

(He kisses her hand, then flattens his own hand. He places their flat hands together like the way they did when they danced.)

My lips stand here waiting.

Does it seem too bold when I ask,

“May I kiss you right now?”

CHICKY: *(Totally enraptured.)* Yeah, okay.

(Vincent pulls Chicky toward him and they start to kiss. Debbie enters from backstage. She is licking envelopes.)

DEBBIE: Chicky, Jacquie craves a word with you!

(Vincent and Chicky immediately break apart as Debbie exits back.)

CHICKY: I’ve got to get back there. *(But she doesn’t move.)*

VINCENT: *(To Debbie.)* Who is Jacquie?

DEBBIE: She’s the director of the play. Who are you?

VINCENT: I’m Sandi’s brother, Vinny. And you’re...Chicky?

CHICKY: Yes. Well, it’s actually “Cindy.” “Chicky” is a nickname.

VINCENT: I like “Chicky.” It sounds like “chicken.” My father used to call my mother that.

(She just stares...and then giggles nervously.)

CHICKY: Oh. I like “Vinny.” Hey, look...“Vinny” and “Chicky” rhyme.

(Although he giggles, he never takes his eyes off hers. Then he stops giggling. He thinks and is confused.)

VINCENT: No, they don't.

CHICKY: (*Enraptured.*) No...they...don't, do they? (*They kiss again as the rest of the cast, with Jacquie still in the back, comes on stage. Chicky sees this and breaks apart.*) See, I told you, sir, they are really my natural eye color. You'll just have to take your colored lenses and sell them to someone else. (*To the rest.*) Traveling contact salesman. Well, he won't be getting my business, that's for sure.

SANDI: Vincent, what are you doing here?

VINCENT: (*Not taking his eyes off of Chicky.*) I just came by to drop off the extra pair of house keys you lent me. I won't be needing them anymore.

AARON: (*Seriously.*) And he came to sell Chicky some contact lenses.

SANDI: What?

JACQUIE: (*As she joins them.*) Tragedy overcome...we got the dress off. Now, everyone, get in your positions. And, Debbie, put down the envelopes. (*Double-take.*) Debbie, what are you doing?

(*Debbie stops licking the envelopes.*)

DEBBIE: Oh, this? It's this new thing I'm trying. I only have four pounds to go, and this is supposed to be the new revolutionary diet.

JACQUIE: Licking envelopes?

AARON: Doesn't that get you high?

PHIL: No, I believe that's licking toads.

DEBBIE: It's the answer to the [no-carb] diet! You get all the [carbs] you need from the flavored glue on the envelopes, and you curb your appetite at the same time. I've already lost six pounds.

SANDI: Really? How many envelopes a day? I oughta try it after the baby comes...

DEBBIE: Between 20 and 30. The rest of your diet is strictly protein based.

JACQUIE: All right, that's it! No more interruptions! You people are causing me to have a nervous breakdown! Now I want ten minutes...*ten minutes* of nothing but concentrated acting. Is that *absolutely clear*?!

(*Uncomfortable silence.*)

AARON: You don't have to get all pissed off, Jacquie. We'll do it, all right?

JACQUIE: *(Still upset.)* Christine, what scene needs the most work?

CHRISTINE: They all do, but I think we should do the death scene next.

JACQUIE: Fine. Take your places from the tomb scene. If you can get through the scene without stopping, we'll break for lunch. But only then! *(As she is turning to each one she notices Vincent.)* Oh-my-gosh-who-are-you?

VINCENT: *(Still staring at Chicky.)* I'm Vincent's sister, Sandi.

CHICKY: *(Jumps in.)* Vincent's brother, Sandi.

VINCENT: Right. I mean, Sandi's sister, Vincent.

JACQUIE: Never mind! I don't care who you are, just unglue your eyes from my actress and get out of the theatre. I have closed rehearsals.

AARON: *(To Vincent, totally serious.)* Hey, bro, what kind of a deal can you make me on lenses?

JACQUIE: *(Shouts.)* Out! Aaron, get backstage!

(Vincent exits backstage, bumping into a wall on the way out. Anyone who isn't in the scene also exits backstage.)

CHICKY: *(Finally breaking away and regaining her composure.)* From where exactly?

JACQUIE: Romeo sees dead Juliet. Start with Romeo's monologue. "O my love, my wife."

(Chicky lays down CS. Aaron kneels behind her, a script still in his hand.)

AARON: "O my love, my wife,
Death, that hath sucked the honey of they breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty."

(All of a sudden, there is a sound of a jackhammer coming from the speakers.)

JACQUIE: What is that?

PETE: *(Yelling from his booth.)* Whoops, sorry, I hit the wrong cue!

JACQUIE: There's no cue for the death scene!

PETE: I thought I might have some lightning and thunder. It'll make it more ominous!

JACQUIE: Fine, fine. Just get the cue right and turn it down! I don't want it to be distracting to the audience! Aaron, go on.

AARON: "Thou are not conquered. Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there..."

(There is a blackout, then all the lights start going on and off erratically. They can all see Pete frantically hitting some buttons. The lights return to normal.)

PETE: *(From the booth, very quietly.)* Sorry.

JACQUIE: *(As she is slowly walking toward the stage.)* I have been patient. I have been kind. But you...you demons have pushed me over the edge! Now you listen to me: no more stupid questions, no more divorces, no more heavy metal, no more cell phones, and especially no more envelope recipes! We have two weeks before dress rehearsal and we can't get through three lines of the play without stopping! We are not leaving this theatre tonight without getting through one act without breaking! Understood?

(All of a sudden, the front door of the theatre burst opens and Fred runs into room and onto the set. He is wearing an impeccable suit and carrying a dozen roses. Fred runs in and looks for Debbie.)

FRED: Debbie? Debbie?

(Fred spots her. The others back away, leaving Debbie CS. She looks surprised.)

DEBBIE: Fred? What are you—?

FRED: I couldn't wait till tomorrow to see you. I'm ashamed to admit this, but...but...I need you!

(He throws the flowers down, grabs her, and kisses her. During the long kiss, Matthew slowly walks up to them, mouth agape. The others soon follow suit, trying to get a good glimpse of the passionate couple. Finally, Fred lets her go. There is stunned silence for a while. Finally, Debbie looks over at Matthew, then at Fred. She pauses, looking sheepish.)

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DEBBIE: Matthew, this is Fred. Fred, this is...this is...aah, forget it!

(She grabs Fred and falls into his arms. Blackout.)

ACT II

(AT RISE: Two weeks later, dress rehearsal. The stage is a bit more "dressed up," for act one, scene five of "Romeo and Juliet." We are in the Capulet's banquet hall, and all actors are in Renaissance costumes. Everyone, except Debbie, Jacquie, and Christine are milling about talking. Jacquie and Christine enter from the back. Aaron is wearing extra small tights that barely make it up to his knees, revealing hairy legs.)

AARON: Where'd you get all the costumes, Jacquie?

JACQUIE: Christine and I found them in the storage bin with all the stuff not destroyed by the fire. There were a ton of costumes that are still in good shape!

SANDI: They smell smoky.

CHRISTINE: That'll wear off as you wear them.

CHICKY: How fortunate for us that they're all from the Renaissance period.

JACQUIE: They're from when I directed "Comedy of Errors" a few years back, remember? It saved us a bundle on renting costumes.

AARON: Jacquie, these tights are too small.

CHRISTINE: That's because a girl wore them. We ran out of men's tights.

AARON: A girl wore a guy's costume?

JACQUIE: Yes, it was when I directed "Comedy of Errors." A lot of girls played boys' parts. That's something an audience will accept in a Shakespeare play—girls playing boys' parts and boys playing girls' parts!

PHIL: How convenient, Aaron! You happen to have girl parts and boy parts!

(Sandi laughs.)

AARON: Can it, Phil. *(To Sandi.)* And what are you laughing at?

JACQUIE: All right, all right, knock off the squabbling.

(There is a scream heard from offstage. Debbie runs out. She is hysterical and wearing her fat suit.)

DEBBIE: (*Sneezing.*) I am not wearing this wooly mammoth on any stage! And I told you I was allergic to wool!

JACQUIE: Christine, can you do something?

CHRISTINE: I have a bodysuit left over from "Cats" that you can put on underneath the faa...costume. Come on, Debbie.

(They exit.)

JACQUIE: Okay, we can go over the rest of the costume problems later. These will work for now. Christine, get everyone in their places. (*No response.*) Christine? (*She realizes Christine has left with Debbie.*) All right, I'll do it myself! Places, everyone! Pete, have you got the sound and light cues ready for the banquet scene?

PETE: I hope so. I still don't understand this light board.

JACQUIE: Just do your best.

PHIL: We have no Debbie.

JACQUIE: Let's do it anyway.

(Jacquie claps her hands and everyone slowly takes their places and starts dancing as Matthew steps forward. Christine reappears and she and Jacquie sit in the front row to observe.)

MATTHEW: (*To Sandi, as he steps forth.*)

"Ah, madam, this unlooked-for sport comes well.

Nay, sit, nay, sit, Lady Capulet,

For you and I are past our dancing days.

How long is't now since last yourself and I

Were in a mask?"

SANDI: "By thirty years."

MATTHEW: "Come Pentecost as quickly as it will,
Some five-and-twenty years, and then we masked."

(Aaron sees Chicky across the room.)

AARON: "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand of
yonder knight?

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;

Beauty too rich for use, for Earth too dear.

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(Chicky and Aaron come together.)

If propane with my unworthiest hand..."

JACQUIE: Propane is a gas, Aaron. Try "profane."

AARON: "This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough neck touch with a tender kiss."

CHICKY: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

AARON: "Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?"

CHICKY: "Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer."

AARON: "O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair."

CHICKY: "Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake."

AARON: "Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take."

(They start to kiss.)

JACQUIE: Sandi, Matthew, and Phil, get backstage, I don't want you in this scene.

(They kiss as Debbie enters, wearing the fat suit and a Shakespearean nurse's outfit. In her left hand is a hand fan. One look into her eyes shows that she is still really pissed off.)

DEBBIE: "Madam, your mother craves a word with you."

(Chicky exits off left.)

AARON: "What is her mother?"

DEBBIE: *(Not in character, angrily.)* "Marry, bachelor,

Her mother is the lady of the house,

(Debbie accidentally drops the fan.)

And a good lady, and wise and virtuous.

(She bends over to pick up the fan. This is not an easy task, seeing that the fat suit is severely in her way. She tries several comical ways of picking it up.)

I nursed her daughter that you talked withal.

I tell you, he that can lay hold of her

Shall have the chinks."

(She lifts up her dress and bends way over, grasping the fan. She realizes she is stuck. Finally, she sneezes loudly.)

JACQUIE: *(From seat in audience, shouts.)* All right, I can't watch this anymore. What seems to be the problem with the fat suit?

DEBBIE: What seems to be the problem with the fat suit? Are the stage lights blinding you, Jacquie? It looks ridiculous! I look like an inflamed Q-Tip! *(She sneezes again.)*

JACQUIE: *(Yells backstage.)* Christine, isn't there some way we can lessen it somehow? It is awfully big!

DEBBIE: I swear, I'm gonna take it off and light it on fire.

(Phil pokes his head out from backstage.)

PHIL: Wait, don't take it off first!

DEBBIE/JACQUIE: Can it, Phil!

(Christine appears from backstage, clipboard still in hand. This time she has a walkie-talkie headset attached. A matching one is around Jacquie's head.)

CHRISTINE: *(To Debbie.)* Take it off. I'll see what I can do.

DEBBIE: I'm not taking it off here.

CHRISTINE: Come on then, let's go to the back again.

(Debbie and Christine disappear backstage.)

JACQUIE: Since we've stopped, let's have everyone out here, please! Pete, you too, I need to go over some lighting and sound cues with you. *(Everyone moves forward.)* I have notes. *(She goes through a sheaf of papers until she finds the page she's looking for.)* Chicky, watch it when you say, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." I can see the spit flying all over the stage. You're getting to be as bad as Matthew.

AARON: Yeah, no kidding.

JACQUIE: Which brings me to you, Aaron. When are you going to get that monologue down from act five, scene one? Can you give me an approximate date?

AARON: I know, I know, but be grateful! That's the only section I'm having trouble with!

JACQUIE: You're right, Aaron! Thank you, thank you for memorizing your lines for my play! We are all indebted to you for your sacrifice.

MATTHEW: I must ask, Jacquie, although I know you know what you're doing, but since this is a dress rehearsal, shouldn't we be running the show in order? We've only been doing scene work the past few hours; I think we'd all feel a lot more prepared if we ran the show from beginning to end without stopping.

JACQUIE: *(Sarcastically.)* Yes, now wouldn't that be fun! Look, we've been here since eight this morning. It's now... *(She looks at her watch.)* ...just past four. Let's do the final scene together now, break for dinner, and then we'll run the show from beginning to end without stopping!

PHIL: Which end scene?

JACQUIE: The one where Capulet and Montague find Romeo and Juliet's bodies. It's your big scene, Matthew.

SANDI: One thing I still don't understand...where is the guy playing Tybalt, and why isn't he here yet? This is making me very nervous.

JACQUIE: His name is Buck Powers. He SHOULD be here late tonight—plenty of time to run through the show a few times before we go up. And don't worry, he's done the part of Tybalt before. He knows all the lines.

PHIL: Buck Powers. I still think that sounds like a porno name.

JACQUIE: *(To Pete.)* Pete, how about having a huge, brilliant white light shooting down from above as the bodies are discovered in act five? *(There is a buzzard sound coming from somewhere in the room.)* As the parents discover them, we could...what is that? Pete, is that a sound cue?

PETE: No, I turned the machine off.

(Matthew gets a big smile on his face.)

JACQUIE: Well, what is it? Who's doing that?

MATTHEW: Excuse me for a moment. *(He dashes backstage.)*

JACQUIE: What was that all about?

SANDI: It was his phone. He went to answer it.

JACQUIE: I didn't hear it ring.

SANDI: You told him to put it on vibration mode, so that's what he did.

JACQUIE: Why did he have to bring it out in the first place?
Lawyers again?

SANDI: He says it's his lawyers, but since he attached the phone to
his butt I think he's just asking anyone to keep calling around the
clock.

CHICKY: He wrapped it on his butt? That is so disgusting.

(Christine enters from backstage with Debbie.)

CHRISTINE: Okay, all fixed. Much less fat now.

JACQUIE: Oh, good, it looks much better.

SANDI: You know, I don't usually take sides, Debbie, but you are
really doing a number on him.

DEBBIE: On who?

AARON: On who? Who do you think? Your husband!

DEBBIE: After all the years I put up with his...his...whining, I
deserve a little happiness.

AARON: And what whining did he do exactly? You were never
quite clear on that.

DEBBIE: It's really none of your business.

JACQUIE: Well, as much as I like Matthew, Debbie, I can't help but
say how much I'm enjoying your friend Fred. He certainly has
been a help during this production.

CHICKY: I know. I feel like I'm betraying Matthew because I like
Fred so much. A couple of days ago, he spent his whole lunch
period going over my lines with me.

SANDI: Yesterday, when I felt those contractions and I thought the
baby was coming, he bent down to my stomach and talked her
right out of it.

AARON: You mean "him." We're having a boy.

CHRISTINE: Why don't the two of you just have a sonogram and
find out once and for all!

SANDI: It's too late. Our insurance won't pay for another one.

CHICKY: Have you guys picked out names yet?

AARON/SANDI: Yes!

CHICKY: Oh, good! What?

SANDI: Scott if it's a boy. Meadow if it's a girl.

AARON: Aah, no. For the hundredth time, we're not naming our
child after something deers take a crap in.

CHRISTINE: Why not Meadow? It's not like your last name is Forrest.

SANDI: I had a friend whose last name was Christmas and her parents named her Mary.

CHICKY: No, you didn't!

SANDI: Yes, and even in the summer people would say to her, "Merry Christmas, Mary Christmas!"

AARON: We're not naming her Meadow.

CHICKY: What do you want, Aaron?

SANDI: He wants biblical names.

AARON: What's wrong with naming our child after people in the Bible?

SANDI: Esau is not a name for a child!

AARON: It's better than Meadow!

PETE: *(Yells from booth.)* Hey, how about Aaron Junior?

PHIL: *(In his own world, softly.)* I feel like he is the father I never knew.

SANDI: Who? Aaron?

PHIL: *(Shaking his head.)* Debbie's friend Fred. Did we switch conversations?

DEBBIE: Well, he loves being here.

AARON: Who? Me?

DEBBIE: No, Fred!

SANDI: It takes a special person to like theatre people.

DEBBIE: He doesn't. He just likes being here with me.

CHICKY: And Matthew really doesn't mind? He's not jealous?

DEBBIE: I don't care. We are no longer together. Lawyers or no lawyers, we are getting that divorce.

(Fred enters from backstage. He is wearing an apron, two rubber gloves, and a toilet brush.)

FRED: I thought I heard my name out here.

DEBBIE: You did, honey. We were just talking about you and how wonderful you are.

FRED: Oh, I don't really do all that much. You're such a wonderful group to be with!

(Matthew walks in from backstage and watches all this. Chicky takes this moment to quietly sneak out back. No one sees her.)

JACQUIE: Did you finish the greenroom, Fred?

FRED: All finished. I just waxed the floor in there too, so watch your step! If you don't mind, I'll wipe down the mirrors back there until it's time for a dinner break. Does dinnertime work for you, Sandi?

SANDI: Oh, that's right! You promised me a foot massage, didn't you, Fred?

FRED: *(Rubbing his hands together.)* I'm all ready for you! *(Everybody chimes in with phrases like, "Aah, Fred, we love you," "You're such a giver, Fred," "What would we do without you?" etc.)* Oh, now stop it!

CHRISTINE: You know what, Fred? You're such a lifesaver that if that Buck Powers guy doesn't show up, you should go on as Tybalt! You'd be a great Tybalt!

(Matthew clears his throat and they all turn to him. He looks horribly hurt. Finally, he hastily exits out the back again. Everybody but Sandi's eyes go to the floor.)

SANDI: I think he was crying!

(Pause.)

JACQUIE: I think we should take our places, so we can take that break. Christine, go get Matthew ready for his big scene, all right? Pete, let's try that bright white light. What do you say?

PETE: It shouldn't be a problem.

JACQUIE: And go ahead and play me that sound cue for the wedding scene!

CARRIE: *(From backstage.)* Yoo-hoo! Is everyone onstage?

AARON: Oh no!

SANDI: Oh no!

JACQUIE: Oh no...I mean, oh, hi, darling!

(Carrie walks in, wearing a beret, and carrying a director's chair, a notepad, and several pens. As soon as she walks over to Jacquie, Pete hits his sound cue. The Elvira Gulch music from "The Wizard of Oz" comes blaring over the speakers.)

PETE: Sorry, wrong cue!

CARRIE: Hello, Mother. I'm awfully sorry I'm late. I was driving down 82nd when I got this epiphany and— *(Notices Fred.)* My, my, my...who is this?

JACQUIE: Oh. Fred, this is Carrie, my daughter. Carrie, Fred.

(Fred goes to her and shakes her hand.)

FRED: Why it's very nice to meet you. I've read some of the notes you pasted all over the greenroom. You have a remarkable eye for detail.

AARON: Some notes? You can't even tell the room is green anymore...

CARRIE: *(Taken aback, and then flirtatiously.)* Well, thank you, Fred. And might I say that for someone named "Fred" you sure seem to have quite the intellect. What part are you currently playing?

DEBBIE: *(Jumps in.)* The part of my boyfriend, so reel it back, sister!

AARON: Who invited her?

JACQUIE: *(Trying to smooth things over.)* Now at this point an extra eye might help us a bit. I think we could stand some critiquing. *(She notices Carrie's chair.)* You brought your own chair?

CARRIE: Oh, yes, I did. It's awfully comfortable. *(She opens up her director's chair which says "Director" on the back. She sits in the center of the audience aisle.)* Now, don't mind me, I won't stop you during the performance. I'll just take notes and give them to you after each scene.

(Christine exits backstage. Aaron takes his place CS and drapes his body on the floor. Debbie kneels behind Aaron, as does Sandi. Phil stands directly to the right of the group.)

JACQUIE: Start with your line, Phil.

AARON: Uh, slight problem.

JACQUIE: What? I want you to go!

AARON: I have no Juliet.

JACQUIE: What do you—? *(She notices Chicky is gone. She yells out.)*
Chicky?

(Chicky pops up from the booth upstairs.)

CHICKY: Yes?

JACQUIE: What are you doing up there?

CHICKY: *(Nervously.)* Nothing. *(She giggles.)*

AARON: *(Evil grin.)* Hey, what's going on up there?

(Chicky's head slowly pops up.)

CHICKY: I tell you, nothing!

JACQUIE: Who is that?

(Vincent pops up.)

CHICKY: Just Vincent.

SANDI: Hey, what are you doing up there, Vincent?

VINCENT: Nothing.

JACQUIE: All right, you two, enough. Vincent, out! You can't be in a closed rehearsal.

CHICKY: You'd better go, Vincent.

JACQUIE: Chicky, I'm surprised at you! You don't let men come between you and the theatre!

CHICKY: Sorry, Jacquie!

(Chicky starts to shove Vincent out.)

JACQUIE: Goodbye, Vincent! We all like you, but we don't want to see you around here again. Not till opening night. *(To Christine.)* Keep watch for him; I want her whole attention, got it? *(To Carrie.)* You ready for the scene, Carrie?

CARRIE: Ready!

JACQUIE: *(To the cast.)* Now, go!

PHIL: "He came with flowers to strew his lady's grave..."

CARRIE: Ewww.

PHIL: *(Stops, concerned.)* Did I do something wrong?

CARRIE: Um, no, I'm sorry. I just need to write something down.

JACQUIE: Continue, Phil.

PHIL: "And bid me stand aloof, and so I did..."

(Carrie talks to herself as she furiously writes down notes.)

CARRIE: *(Writing.)* Oh, yeah. *(Writes some more.)*

AARON: *(To Jacquie.)* I'm not going to be able to act if she keeps stopping me to critique my performance.

JACQUIE: You're dead and you have no lines. You're just laying there.

AARON: She'll probably say my laying sucks.

(Debbie looks over at Sandi.)

DEBBIE: Well, that certainly seems to be the rumor around here.

AARON: Save it, Q-Tip!

JACQUIE: Continue, Phil.

PHIL: *(Hesitantly.)* "Anon comes one with light to ope the tomb,
And by and by my master drew o him,
And then I ran away to call the watch."

(Long pause.)

JACQUIE: *(Yells backstage.)* Matthew? I need a Prince! *(Pause.)*
Christine? Did you find Matthew?

CHRISTINE: *(Yells from backstage.)* I've got him! He's coming. *(They appear from backstage. Matthew is limping.)* Here we go.

JACQUIE: Why are you limping, Matthew?

CHRISTINE: When he was running through the greenroom, he slipped on Fred's wax job and sprained his ankle.

JACQUIE: Oh. Sorry about that, Matthew. Can you continue in spite of it?

MATTHEW: *(Slowly and deliberately.)* I am a professional.

JACQUIE: Okay, then, I need your first Prince line in act five.

(Matthew takes his place next to Phil.)

MATTHEW: "This letter doth make good the Friar's words..."

CARRIE: Oh, no, no, no. I'm sorry, I know I said I wouldn't stop you guys, but I absolutely must in this case.

JACQUIE: What is the problem, Carrie?

CARRIE: Sir...what is your name?

MATTHEW: Matthew.

CARRIE: Matthew? Well, Matthew, I don't want to hurt your feelings, so I'll put it nicely. You are atrocious!

MATTHEW: You can tell I'm atrocious by one line?

CARRIE: Sometimes that is all it takes!

JACQUIE: Well, what specifically is the problem?

CARRIE: Before I get into your acting, your makeup is horrid! Your base is way too light-skinned. You look more like Hamlet's ghost than the Prince.

MATTHEW: *(Swallows hard.)* I'm not wearing makeup.

CARRIE: Oh. Well. Then let's get on with your interpretation. The Prince is a strong, virile man!

MATTHEW: Virile?

(Pause.)

CARRIE: Um, it'll really move things along if you don't repeat everything I say, all right? Okay. He is a leader, a man that could put many to death with one command! You're so depressing and melancholy. You must reach for power, reach for strength. You are playing him like Ichabod Crane! Is this clear?

MATTHEW: I think so.

CARRIE: Then, please, continue.

MATTHEW: *(Trying desperately to be brave.)*

"Their course of love, the tidings of her death;

And here he writes that he did buy a poison

(Carrie moans and scribbles again.)

Of a poor 'pothecary, and therewithal

Came to this vault to die and lie with Juliet.

(His voice starts to crack.)

Where be these enemies?

(He looks at Debbie. She turns away.)

Capulet, Montague,

See that a scourge is laid upon your hate,

That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love,

And I, for winding at your discords too,

(He turns his back for the last line and puts on a blue Renaissance hat.)

Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished."

(He turns around. He is now Capulet, and he even changes his voice.)

"O brother Montague, give me thy hand.

This is my daughter's jointure, for no more

(He turns his back again and puts on a red Renaissance hat.)

Can I demand."

THESE ACTORS OF MINE

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(He turns around. He is now Montague.)

“But I can give thee more,
For I will ray her statue in pure gold,
That whiles Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
(He turns around once more and puts the blue hat back on.)
As that of true and faithful Juliet
(Turning around, he is Capulet again.)
As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie,
Poor sacrifices of our enmity.
(He rips his hat off and again assumes the Prince’s voice.)
A glooming peace this morning with it brings,
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.
Go hence to have more talk of these sad things.
(His voice begins to break.)
Some shall be pardoned, and some punished.
(He can barely make it through the rest of the speech he’s so emotional.)
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

(He collapses, crying on the stage. Aaron jumps up and throws Chicky’s body off him.)

AARON: And dinner!

JACQUIE: And blackout! *(All of a sudden a bright light comes down on the actors, blinding everyone.)* Uh, a little late, Pete!

PETE: Sorry, the private line rang back here. It’s for you, Jacquie!

JACQUIE: All right! *(To the cast.)* Everybody hang tight, this will only take a second.

CARRIE: Mother, I’ll come with you. I’d like to give you my notes before I give them to everyone else.

JACQUIE: Probably a good idea.

(Jacquie and Carrie exit backstage.)

CHICKY: You okay, Matthew?

MATTHEW: *(Pulling himself together.)* I’m fine. I’ll be all right.

SANDI: *(Trying to help.)* Why don’t you go call yourself again, Matthew?

MATTHEW: No, no, I’ll be fine. Let’s continue. What’s next?

DEBBIE: That was it, Matthew. The play is finished.

MATTHEW: Oh. Did I do well?

AARON: You know, you might want to think of your motivation when you're playing the Prince. You sound too emotional.

SANDI: Aaron!

AARON: And, Chicky, can you please focus? Stop giggling when you're supposed to be dead!

CHICKY: Look who's the drama critic now!

AARON: I don't know why you're so excited about this guy. You're a smart girl and it's not like he's a NASA engineer.

(Fred comes in from backstage, holding a dress and a needle and thread.)

FRED: I hemmed your skirt, so you don't trip going up the ladder, Chicky!

CHICKY: Oh, thank you, Fred! He sews, too!

(She takes the skirt. Fred sees Matthew and rushes over to him.)

FRED: Oh, son, son, what seems to be the trouble?

DEBBIE: Uh, Fred...

FRED: Someone hand me a handkerchief. This man is very upset.

(Debbie reaches in her fat suit and hands him some cotton.)

DEBBIE: Here.

MATTHEW: *(To Fred.)* Get away from me.

FRED: I hate to see a man cry. Are you sure you don't want to share your troubles with me? You just need a big shoulder to cry on.

(Phil takes a drink and no longer hides it.)

PHIL: Debbie, your shoulder's needed.

SANDI: That is true, Matthew. Why just yesterday I was telling Fred some of the problems I've been having with Aaron, and he gave me some excellent advice.

AARON: You were telling him our problems?

(Vincent sneaks in from backstage. Chicky sees him and giggles some more.)

CHICKY: Hi, Vinnie!

(They kiss passionately.)

VINCENT: I've got some great news! I don't have to go away for school. I heard from the university, and I was accepted! I get to go to a great school and be near you!

AARON: *(Uninterested.)* What are you studying, Vinny?

VINCENT: Astro-physics. I'm going to be a NASA engineer!

AARON: Oh, brother!

(Jacquie comes onto the stage with Pete and Carrie. She is troubled. Chicky hides Vincent behind her back. As the rest of them are talking, Chicky makes out with Vincent as she gently pushes him out the back way.)

JACQUIE: I'm afraid I have some bad news, everyone. News I don't know how I can possibly share with you, it's so bad.

SANDI: Why don't you tell Fred first. We were just discussing his wonderful outlook on life!

JACQUIE: No, this concerns all of you. I just got a call from Buck Power's agent.

CHICKY: He's not coming, is he?

JACQUIE: Well, probably not. He's in the hospital.

SANDI: The hospital? What for?

JACQUIE: *(Whispers.)* Well, he's in a mental hospital. Apparently he was performing "Hamlet" when he had some sort of a nervous breakdown.

SANDI: Oh, he must be devastated!

JACQUIE: Actually, he sounded very excited about the whole thing. See, he's a method actor, too.

SANDI: One disaster after another! I think I'm finally going to start crying! Debbie, give me some of your left boob, will you?

(Debbie reaches into her blouse and gives Sandi some cotton from her fat suit.)

DEBBIE: Good, I just lost four ounces.

PHIL: What do you propose we do, Jacquie?

JACQUIE: Well, we don't know how long mental illnesses can go on.
(To Matthew.) Matthew, you've had several breakdowns. How long do they typically last?

DEBBIE: Too long, trust me.

JACQUIE: I think we need to find a replacement.

SANDI: Who are we going to find at such a late notice?

CHICKY: Wait a minute! Fred! Fred can do it!

FRED: Fred can do what?

CHICKY: Fred, you can play Tybalt!

JACQUIE: How is this possible? Fred isn't an actor!

AARON: Matthew isn't much of one either, but you have him cast in three parts!

PHIL: I really wanted the chance to play Tybalt. Besides Fred's too busy cleaning toilets!

DEBBIE: And you're too busy drinking!

PHIL: I can do it! I only play Mercutio, and he dies in act three!

JACQUIE: I've told you before...Tybalt kills Mercutio! How are you going to play that off?

PHIL: Watch! Everybody clear the stage!

(Everybody backs off as Phil takes CS. He unsheathes his sword and faces an imaginary opponent.)

PHIL: *(Tybalt.)* "Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo."

(Mercutio.) "Consort? What, dost thou make us minstrels?"

An thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords. Here's my fiddlestick; here's that shall make you dance. Zounds, consort!"

(He swings the sword at the invisible Tybalt. He then jumps back as Tybalt and Tybalt dodges the swing.)

(Tybalt.) "What wouldst thou have with me?"

(Mercutio.) "Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives, that I mean to make bold withal, and, as you shall use me hereafter, dry-beast the rest of the eight."

(He swings three times as he finishes this monologue.)

Will you pluck your sword out of his pilcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out."

(As Tybalt, he dodges the swings three times.)

(Tybalt.) "I am for you!"

(Mercutio.) "Come, sir, your passado."

(He then jumps back and forth, jabbing this way and that, grunting and moaning. Everybody just stares. Finally, as Mercutio, he is stabbed, and Phil goes into a dramatic death scene.) (Mercutio.) "I am hurt.

A plague o' both houses! I am sped.

Is he gone and hath nothing? I am worm's meat!" *(He pretends to die.)*

(Finally Christine is given the cue by Jacquie and she goes over to him.)

CHRISTINE: Come on, Phil.

(Phil sits up.)

PHIL: "Ay, ay, a scratch, Marry, 'tis enough.

Where is my page?

(Grabs Christine and throws her across the stage.)

Go, villain, fetch a surgeon."

(He dies. Then he sits up. To Jacquie.) How was that?

JACQUIE: It would be fine if we were doing "Sybil." But unfortunately, we're not.

CHICKY: But Fred knows all the lines! He's been going over the lines with all of us for a couple of weeks now!

CHRISTINE: That's true, Jacquie, I've been watching. And he has quite good characters, too!

JACQUIE: I don't know. Have you had much acting experience, Fred?

PHIL: Well, he says he's smitten with Debbie. That has to take some—

DEBBIE: Can it, Phil.

FRED: Well, I don't know...let's see. Well, I haven't done probably as much as the rest of you have, but I once played Richard III at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford for a good run. I was Oedipus in all three Oedipus pieces a couple years back. But that was off-Broadway. I've had some film experience, though. I was a regular guest on ["Hill Street Blues"] and ["St. Elsewhere"] *(or insert the names of other popular TV shows)* for three seasons each. And, oh, yes, I almost forgot: I played opposite Julie Andrews in

the Hallmark Hall of Fame adaptation of "Moon Over Buffalo."
But other than that, I'm quite inept.

CARRIE: That's it!

JACQUIE: What's it?

CARRIE: *(To Fred.)* That's where I've seen you before! You played the one-legged man prostitute on ["The Practice"]! I loved that guy!

FRED: Yes, that was me...

CARRIE: I have loved you ever since that episode...you were nominated for an Emmy for special guest star, weren't you?

FRED: Yes, that was me...

DEBBIE: You loved him?

CARRIE: *(Totally enraptured.)* Since that performance, I followed your career! I was in the third row when you were in "Moon Over Buffalo"! I actually cried when you did your curtain call! You are the most phenomenal actor I've ever seen!

(Debbie steps up threateningly and clears her throat. Jacque sees this. After a stunned silence from everyone.)

JACQUIE: Um, Carrie, would you run home and get me my Excedrin?

CARRIE: *(Just staring at Fred, oblivious to Debbie's demeanor.)* Wow...

(Jacque shoves Carrie out the back door.)

JACQUIE: Now run along...get the big bottle! *(Back to the cast.)* Um, Fred, how would you like to be our Tybalt?

FRED: Well, I suppose if it would help you in a bind.

SANDI: Whew! We're saved!

CHICKY: This will be so fun! I hope the porn star stays locked up for a long time!

JACQUIE: *(Excited.)* We'll all keep our fingers crossed! I tell you what, let's run a scene with Fred right now and see how it goes! How about the Capulet and Tybalt argument at the banquet? Everyone who isn't in this scene go backstage.

SANDI: Oh, good, that will give us girls a chance to try the ring test on the baby!

(Everyone exits in the back but Fred and Matthew. Christine and Jacquie sit in their usual places in the front.)

JACQUIE: Capulet, Tybalt, take your places in the back where the table will be. *(They do. Matthew does not look happy.)* Do you need a script at all, Fred?

FRED: Oh, no, I believe I've got them all down.

JACQUIE: Then take it from the line, "Why, how now, kinsman? Wherefore storm you so?"

MATTHEW: *(Sadly, but trying.)* "Why, how now, kinsman? Wherefore storm you so?"

FRED: *(In an unbelievably real character.)*

"Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe,
A villain that is hither come in spite
To scorn at our solemnity this night."

(Matthew doesn't continue, and he pauses as he realizes that Fred is quite good. Finally, he bursts into tears again.)

JACQUIE: Try to hold it together, Matthew!

MATTHEW: "Young Romeo is it?"

FRED: "'Tis he, that villain Romeo."

MATTHEW: *(Still crying through his lines.)*

"Content thee, gentle coz. Let him alone.
He bears him like a portly gentleman,
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.
I would not for the wealth of all this town
Here in my house..."

JACQUIE: Matthew, we can't have a rehearsal like this, you know.

MATTHEW: *(Shoulders shaking.)* I know, I know. It's just so hard when all I can think about is her.

JACQUIE: Then don't, Matthew! You're an actor. I believe in you. I've seen your concentration before, Matthew! A band could march through the stage and you'd stay in character!

CHRISTINE: Let's hope that doesn't happen again!

JACQUIE: *(To Christine.)* Would you go rustle up some aspirins, please?

CHRISTINE: Sure thing. *(Christine crosses the stage.)*

JACQUIE: Matthew, you just need to focus, that's all.

MATTHEW: But this play is all about love and devotion, and you want me to forget about my marriage troubles?

JACQUIE: Concentrate on your characters, Matthew. Don't think about the romance and the love! *(As Christine opens up one of the set doors, Chicky and Vincent, consumed with passion, fall through the opening and land on the floor. They don't even notice the fall, they are so into their moment. Jacquie just stares at them for a moment. Matthew bursts into tears once more.)* Yes, I think a dinner break would be good right about now.

(Blackout. Intermission.)

[End of Freeview]