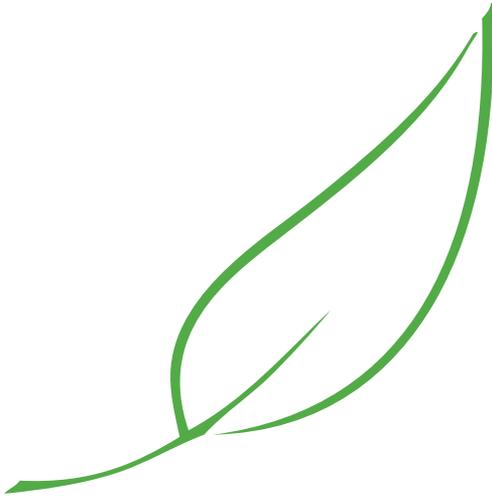


A Midsummer Night's Scheme

By Steve Cross



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SYNOPSIS: Wilma Shakespeare has been confined to a mental institution ever since her last disastrous play, *Haunted Hamlet*. As part of her treatment plan, she gets the opportunity to prove her competence by writing and directing a comedy. The play seems doomed from the start, as the set is repossessed, Wilma's psychiatrist won't leave her alone, and cast members abandoned the play. Three people, seemingly from beyond death, Ham, Ophelia, and Gertrude, arrive to fill in for the deserted cast members. Just as it seems as if the play will make it, two men arrive from Mercy Me Hospital and put Wilma under protective custody. Will her cast and the mysterious Alfred Bard make the play work, or will Wilma face the rest of her days in an institution?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10 females, 8 males, 4 either)

ALFRED BARD (m)	Plays King Jules. Sarcastic and quick-witted. WILMA's one true friend.
BORIS (m)	Plays king's advisor. A little wooden in his acting, but devoted to the business.
CLYDE (m)	Plays king's soon-to-be stepson. An opportunist looking to take advantage of others.
WILMA (f)	Writer and director of <i>A Midsummer Night's Scheme</i> . SHE has been in an institution and a successful production is the sign SHE is ready to go back into society.
YVETTE (f)	WILMA's psychiatrist who doesn't have much faith in WILMA.
FRIEDA (f)	Plays Helena (at first) in WILMA's play. Spunky, fiery and a very dedicated actress.

- JANET (f)Plays Ermia. YVETTE's daughter who is an arrogant, obnoxious spoiled brat who always wants to be the center of attention.
- MELVIN (m)Plays Lysander. Not very bright.
- GERTRUDE (f)Mysterious cleaning lady who appears to offer WILMA some stage advice.
- CHORUS MEMBERS (m/f).....Comment on the play as it develops.
- CHORUS MEMBER 5 (m)Rebels against WILMA who fires him.
- ULALEE (f)Plays Damon's conniving mother in *MNS*. In real life, she is just as conniving.
- KATE CRABLEE (f).....When her son, CHORUS MEMBER 5, is fired from the play, SHE refuses to give WILMA the furniture SHE promised to donate for the play. SHE is mean and vindictive.
- OPHELIA (f)Beautiful young woman who had troubles. SHE comes to WILMA's aid for the play.
- MS. WINKLEY (f)KATE's mean and vindictive friend who wants to ruin WILMA.
- HAM (m)Mysterious young man who wants to help WILMA. Confused, but kind.
- THREE MECHANICALS (m/f) Play country bumpkins in *MNS*. They want to do a play for the king at his wedding.
- MAN 1 and MAN 2 (m)They arrest WILMA and take her back to the institution.
- MS. CRITICAL (f)Administrator of Mercy Me Hospital. A patron of the arts.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The most important thing about this play is the casting possibilities. At least eight of the characters can be either male or female. CHORUS MEMBERS and THREE MECHANICALS can be either male or female. Although CHORUS MEMBER 5, Kelly, is written as a male part, the gender can be changed with rewording. CHORUS can be expanded to accommodate as many as 10 or 12 actors. For smaller casts, doubling is possible. I have attempted to develop a flexible play that is very easy to stage. OPHELIA's role may be doubled, depending on the director's needs.

SET

The set for *A Midsummer Night's Scheme* is a bare stage with six stools. Flats for background or columns to add atmosphere are at the director's discretion.

Detailed instructions for exits and entrances are in the playbook. People move in and out of the scenes pretty quickly.

A sound effect of an applauding crowd happens near the end of ACT 2.

Lighting effects, which are not mandatory but which would make the particular scenes more effective, are also detailed in the play itself.

PROPS

There are 6 chairs or stools onstage. The rest of the stage requires no furniture. In fact, it works well bare because the whole situation is that these people are rehearsing for a play.

ACT 1

BORIS – watch

YVETTE – notepad and pencil, in act 3 she carries a pen

MELVIN – sandwich

GERTRUDE – mop

OPHELIA – a bouquet of flowers and sticks

ALFRED – a quill pen

ACT 2

YVETTE –notepad and pen

HAMLET – a small bag of coins

TWO MEN – lab coats

ALFRED – watch, checks

THIRD MECHANICAL – robe and a crown

HAM – dress and a wig, letter

CLYDE – sword

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: ALFRED, playing the part of King Jules Caesum, sits on a chair that represents a throne. BORIS, as Abraham Ogee, stands at his side. CLYDE, as Damon who is soon to be heir to the throne, sits on a stool to ALFRED's left.

ALFRED BARD: How long have we been at peace, Abraham Ogee?

BORIS: My brother and my king, two weeks at least.

ALFRED BARD: Cants thou believe it has lasted so long?

CLYDE: **(aside)** I want to break into song.

ALFRED BARD: What was that, stepson soon so dear to me?

CLYDE: Thinking my liege.

BORIS: **(aside)** Something new for him.

CLYDE: I think our chances for peace are dim.

BORIS: **(aside)** Much like your brain.

CLYDE: New troops are being trained by the foul King Dane.

ALFRED BARD: So, honest Abe, how many troops should I send?

BORIS: King Jules, the soldiers grow faint as if they march through bogs that have no end. Hast thou ever considered compromise?

ALFRED BARD: That word I despise. I am as constant as the northern star - never will I shrink from war. To do this would be shame of cowardice. Caesum would be a beast without a heart if he should stay home from fear. Danger knows full well that Caesum is more dangerous than - I'm rambling, aren't I?

BORIS: No more than usual, Sire. We don't know if King Dane prepares for battle.

CLYDE: While we prepare for a wedding, his sabers do rattle -

BORIS: Are sabers invented yet? Your basic Roman fighter -

CLYDE: Don't ask me; ask the writer.

BORIS: Before this act ticks away. **(looks at his watch)** And this becomes an interminable play, I have something to say.

WILMA: **(offstage)** Cut! **(Enters right. YVETTE follows her.)** What is it now, Boris?

BORIS: Don't you think this scene is a bit long, Wilma?

WILMA: If it was a bit long, I would have to cut it now, wouldn't I?

YVETTE: Watch your temper, Wilma.

WILMA: Okay, Yvette. I'll think about it, Boris.

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CLYDE: I have to go to the bathroom.

WILMA: Fine! Take ten. (**The three men walk off left. YVETTE sits on a stool serving as a throne. WILMA walks down center to address the audience.**) Hello, my name is Wilma Shakespeare. That's right, descended from the bard himself, but I'm a much better writer than that hack. You may have heard of that little incident with my first play, *Haunted Hamlet*. They said I was crazy. I'm not crazy.

YVETTE: To whom are you talking?

WILMA: Uh, myself, Dr. Tuttle.

YVETTE: As your psychiatrist, I would advise you against such behavior.

WILMA: Thanks. There are refreshments backstage.

YVETTE: Really?

WILMA: Go ahead. I'll catch up with you. (**YVETTE exits.**) When I was, uh, away; I thought of this new play I could do. A *Midsummer Night's Scheme*. The trouble is I had to convince the, uh, staff I was capable of keeping it together long enough to complete the play. If I do, I am a free woman. If not, I have to, ugh, go back there.

(Two young ladies, JANET and FRIEDA, enter from right.)

FRIEDA: I don't see why you get to be Ermia.

JANET: Obviously because I am a better actress.

FRIEDA: Or else you've sucked up to the director.

JANET: I resent that remark. (**stops when SHE sees WILMA**) Good afternoon, Ms. Shakespeare. You certainly look smashing today.

WILMA: (**aside**) I'd like to smash her -

YVETTE: (**offstage**) Wilma! (**enters and sees JANET**) My darling. (**hugs JANET**)

JANET: Hello, Mother.

YVETTE: I trust Wilma is treating you well.

JANET: For the most part.

WILMA: All right, girls. Let's rehearse the hook scene. (**FRIEDA moves to her spot down left. JANET stays. SHE looks puzzled.**) What is it, Janet?

JANET: I don't remember a hook in any of my scenes.

WILMA: Don't you know what a hook is?

YVETTE: You're supposed to teach her those kinds of things.

JANET: I don't have to be taught what a hook is. (**pauses and looks around**) I don't see any hooks.

FRIEDA: It's our first scene, Janet. The one where we "hook" the audience.

JANET: How am I supposed to know that? Do your job, Wilma. (**sits, slouches back in a chair, covers one eye with her hand and sighs**)

WILMA: What are you doing?

JANET: I'm supposed to be sad.

WILMA: You certainly are sad. All right, action.

(JANET stands as FRIEDA walks into the scene.)

FRIEDA: Why dost thou sit there with eyes downcast? (**sits in the vacated chair**)

JANET: Why do you stand there as if this friend lost is your last?

WILMA: Cut.

YVETTE: What is it? I thought Janet did great. Now, Frieda -

WILMA: Janet was absolutely dazzling, but she's supposed to be standing and Frieda sitting.

JANET: We haven't blocked. How was I supposed to know?

WILMA: I thought the line "Why dost thou sit there" might give it away.

JANET: I don't say that.

WILMA: Of course you don't say that! (**YVETTE glares at WILMA and takes a note pad from her pocket.**) Frieda says that.

JANET: I don't remember a character named Frieda in this play.

WILMA: That's because there isn't a character named Frieda.

JANET: Then how can she say -

WILMA: Frieda plays the part! (**YVETTE jots down a note.**) Frieda is Ellena, remember?

JANET: Of course I remember. I'm not that stupid.

WILMA: Never mind. Let's continue.

FRIEDA: Wilma.

WILMA: What Ellena?

FRIEDA: Who's Ellena?

WILMA: You're Ellena.

FRIEDA: I'm Frieda.

WILMA: I mean Ellena is your part.

FRIEDA: I need to talk to you about that. What is my motivation in this scene anyway? I have to have conflict. Action. This is just not doing it for me.

WILMA: You're furious. You feel betrayed by Ermia because she's the king's niece, his brother's daughter, and you're little more than a peasant.

JANET: That's the truth.

(FRIEDA jumps for her and grabs her throat. WILMA rushes into their midst and breaks them apart.)

WILMA: Stop it.

FRIEDA: ***(backs away and smiles wickedly)*** I was acting.

JANET: You're jealous.

FRIEDA: I may be poorer than and not as tall as you, but I'm strong enough to reach up and snap your neck in two.

WILMA: That was great.

FRIEDA: What was great?

WILMA: The way you just said your line.

FRIEDA: Oh, was that my line? I thought it sounded familiar.

WILMA: Okay. Action.

FRIEDA: Wilma.

WILMA: What?

FRIEDA: You didn't answer my question. What is my motivation here?

WILMA: The King wants Ermia to marry Damon, his soon to be stepson. And Damon is the man you love.

FRIEDA: I guess that will have to do.

WILMA: Action.

FRIEDA: Friend. Friend? Did you say friend?

JANET: That is what I did intend. I don't think I stuttered.

FRIEDA: When I but hear his name, my heart goes aflutter.

JANET: What name dost make thy heart beat so irregular?

FRIEDA: The name of one who is a wondrous feller. The very man that thou dost wed.

JANET: Damon as my spouse? I would rather be dead.

FRIEDA: I can certainly make that come to pass.

JANET: My, aren't we a demented little lass. Such a shrimp and such low class. With manners like a braying -

FRIEDA: (**jumps for her and grabs her neck**) I may be poorer than and not as tall as you, but I'm tall enough to snap your neck in two.

(The two girls struggle. FRIEDA squeezes JANET's throat. JANET reaches up and grabs her hair.)

WILMA: Great acting, girls! Great! (**The two pull each other to the floor. WILMA looks up and offstage.**) Melvin! You missed your cue! Melvin!

MELVIN: (**runs onstage wolfing down a sandwich as HE comes**) Sorry, Wilma. Supper. (**The girls roll on the floor.**) Damsels, damsels, what means this fuss? (**tries to break them apart to no avail**) Break it up before I cuss.

WILMA: (**screams**) Stop it! Now! (**The girls stop. They slowly break apart and stand but with a little pushing and shoving as they do so.**) Get off the stage until you cool off.

YVETTE: I'd say you need to cool off. (**Writes in her note pad. WILMA jerks her pencil away and snaps it in two.**)

WILMA: And I'd say you need to get away from me before I take this pencil and shove it up your nose directly into your brain.

YVETTE: The clinic won't like my report.

WILMA: You can't make your report if I murder you. Everybody out of here. Now!

(YVETTE and JANET flee right while MELVIN and FRIEDA flee left. WILMA sits in the chair. A woman, GERTRUDE, comes in with a mop and begins to mop the floor.)

GERTRUDE: Out, out damn spot.

WILMA: (**whirls and sees GERTRUDE**) What are you doing here?

GERTRUDE: I'm certainly not watching a play.

WILMA: Ah, the play. The play's the thing.

GERTRUDE: That has a familiar ring.

WILMA: If this play doesn't work, I'll be in serious trouble.

GERTRUDE: Double, double, toil and trouble.

WILMA: You're not kidding. I have to work twice as hard to make it.

GERTRUDE: You want to do something real and alive but all you can do is fake it.

WILMA: All this hassle makes me blue.

GERTRUDE: To thine own self be true.

WILMA: I'm so far in debt I'll never break free.

GERTRUDE: Neither a borrower or a lender be.

WILMA: What country are you from?

GERTRUDE: Denmark. (**continues to mop the floor**)

WILMA: I heard there's something rotten there.

GERTRUDE: I used to be. 'Ere some 20 years before I come to this.

WILMA: I don't know why anyone would come to this.

GERTRUDE: It beats where I am during the day; oh, the tales I could tell ... but never mind. I'm here to deliver a message.

WILMA: From whom?

GERTRUDE: Let's just say he's a little more than kin and a little less than kind.

WILMA: That tells me a lot.

GERTRUDE: Let me tell you a lot. There is something in you that must come out. Let it come. Take arms against a sea of troubles and shield yourself against the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune.

WILMA: What?

GERTRUDE: Hang in there.

WILMA: Oh, thanks, uh, what's your name?

GERTRUDE: Gertrude. I have to go now.

WILMA: You're not finished with the floor.

GERTRUDE: Go to my lady's chamber. Though it be painted an inch thick, it still comes to this. (**WILMA bends over. GERTRUDE exits left. WILMA runs her finger over the floor.**) I don't think it's an inch thick here, but it's still pretty dirty.

WILMA: (**looks around**) Gone. Just as if she had vanished in the incorporeal air. Smart lady.

(Lights fade out.)

SCENE 2

AT RISE: Next morning with the scene is exactly the same as it was before. **WILMA** leans back in the chair and softly snores. **ALFRED, BORIS, and CLYDE** enter from right. **YVETTE** and **JANET** enter from left. **FRIEDA** trails behind them.

YVETTE: What are you doing here?

WILMA: (*jerks awake*) It's not that dirty.

YVETTE: That makes no sense.

JANET: It sounds almost crazy.

YVETTE: It is crazy.

WILMA: Write it in your report, Yvette.

YVETTE: I fully intend to.

WILMA: Maybe they'll lock me back up.

YVETTE: They might.

WILMA: Then your daughter's acting career will end before it even begins.

YVETTE: Uh...

JANET: Mother, you better not mess this up for me.

WILMA: I think I can safely say you would never work in this town again.

JANET: What makes you think you have that much power?

WILMA: I don't have that much power. I'm just the only one who would hire you.

BORIS: You hired her because of Yvette.

WILMA: I just hired you because you were cheap. Anyone else have any complaints? (*They look at her.*) Then get off the stage. The chorus needs to practice.

CLYDE: I could have slept for another hour.

WILMA: Clyde, you act like you're asleep on stage all the time.

CLYDE: What are you saying exactly?

WILMA: I'm saying a cadaver has more expression than you. (*CLYDE, BORIS, YVETTE, and JANET exit right.*) What do you want?

FRIEDA: Ms. Shakespeare, you know I'm a better actress than she is. It's not fair.

WILMA: Life isn't fair. If you read any Shakespeare at all, you would know that. Now, get off the stage. (*exits right*)

ALFRED BARD: How much Shakespeare have you read?

WILMA: I've read enough to know -

ALFRED BARD: None, right?

WILMA: What's your point?

ALFRED BARD: The point is this is Wilma Shakespeare's play. You are the author and director. You control its destiny.

WILMA: Thank you, Alfred.

ALFRED BARD: She is the better actress.

WILMA: You're a good friend. Probably the only one I have. You know what I'm up against here.

ALFRED BARD: All Yvette has to do is say the word and you're back in the rubber room, so you hire her talentless daughter. You're in debt to your eyeballs, so you hire Boris, a has-been, and Clyde, who's so wooden termites attack him. What kind of play do you think you'll wind up with anyway?

WILMA: I'm not sure, but you have given me cause to think on it.

ALFRED BARD: Sometimes, you have to do something for yourself without worrying about others.

WILMA: Have you ever been locked up in an asylum?

ALFRED BARD: No.

WILMA: Then just shut up. Chorus! (*As CHORUS enters, ALFRED exits.*) All right, people, when that curtain goes up, you're going to be the first people the audience sees. Make sure you have smiles on your faces. (*CHORUS 1 raises his/her hand.*) What do you want?

CHORUS 1: I just wonder if a smile is appropriate with this being a tragedy -

WILMA: The play ends happily and is not a tragedy.

CHORUS 2: But it is pretty serious. Maybe we should smile later in the play.

WILMA: And maybe you should be quiet and do what I tell you since I am the one who pays you.

CHORUS 3: When do we get paid anyway?

WILMA: After you do your job; half before and the rest after the opening night's performance.

CHORUS 4: Assuming there is an opening night.

CHORUS 1: What's that supposed to mean?

WILMA: It means I'm going to fire all of you if you don't start your part. **(They grumble a little and then get into a triangular position on the stage.)** All right, action!

ALL CHORUS: People, people gather round. This play is about to go down. There was this great king named Jules. Over a large land he rules.

CHORUS 5: **(interrupts)** I don't like to be picky, but the grammar in these lines is atrocious. The first two lines don't scan. It should be around. Then we have an unnecessary verb tense shift.

WILMA: Excuse me... **(pauses as if searching for a name)**

CHORUS 5: My name is Kelly.

WILMA: I don't care what your name is and I also don't care about your knowledge of grammar. Read the lines as I wrote them.

CHORUS 5: All right, but we'll sound uneducated.

WILMA: You're just the chorus. No one will even notice. Again. Action!

ALL CHORUS: But in this kingdom is deep intrigue. And it just might end with a deadly seige. For old king Dane - ancient enemy of the land has gathered troops into a mighty band. He will attack if something doesn't happen soon. All the suspense herein writ will make you swoon As if you have had a mortal wound. Other players must play their parts and sort out all the matters of the heart. The king's stepson is to take a bride and give King Jules an heir besides. But the bride to be loves him not - She's quite a spoiled little snot.

JANET: **(rushes onstage)** Spoiled little snot! How dare you.

YVETTE: **(scrambles onstage)** Are you calling my daughter a snot?

WILMA: I'm calling her character a snot. Surely, you don't think I would typecast Janet.

YVETTE: Well... no...

WILMA: It stands to reason then that I'm not calling her a snot.

JANET: Oh, I understand... I think.

WILMA: Don't think, dear; emote.

JANET: Did she just tell me to do something bad?

WILMA: I just told you to act... like you can act. Your part is most challenging because Ermia is such a dynamic character.

JANET: Cool.

WILMA: Now, get off the stage please.

(YVETTE exits.)

MELVIN: **(enters left)** I'm ready for rehearsal, Wilma.

ALL CHORUS: Lysander arrives pretending to be a diplomat but we know where it's really at. He is the son of good, old King Dane. He wants to end the wars, end the pain. One look at Ermia and he is smitten by love. Is it simply chance or intervention from above? The whole play will take an unexpected trail; hold on to your hearts all you weak and frail because Lysander and Ermia make quite a tale.

(Enter JANET and FRIEDA.)

JANET: What a hunk stands yonder cross the stage. **(starts to walk toward MELVIN but FRIEDA stops her)**

FRIEDA: Don't be stupid enough to engage -

JANET: On that handsome hunk I think I'll move.

FRIEDA: Alas, the course of true love never did run smooth.

JANET: Oh, what a piece of work is that man.

FRIEDA: All that glitters is not gold. At least that's what I have been told.

MELVIN: **(approaches, bows in a courtly fashion and kisses JANET's hand; aside)** Did my heart love till now? Forswear it sight. For I ne'r saw true beauty until this night. Whazzup, ladies, my name is... uh...

FRIEDA: Not Lysander I hope.

JANET: Don't be such a dope. What would King Dane's son be doing here?

MELVIN: My name is... uh...

JANET: Speak, speak I pray thee.

MELVIN: Uh... my name is Yorick. That's right. Yorick.

FRIEDA: It seems like I knew a Yorick. Funny, I can't place his face.

MELVIN: Wrong Yorick. I've never been to this place.

JANET: Well, Lysander.

WILMA: Cut!

FRIEDA: What now?

MELVIN: (*under his breath*) Crazy sow.

WILMA: You called him Lysander.

JANET: That's his name.

WILMA: But you don't know that.

JANET: Of course I do.

FRIEDA: You blonde bimbo. He's incognito.

JANET: Looks like he's in jeans and t-shirt to me. And I'm not blonde, not really.

FRIEDA: He's in disguise. You don't find out he's Lysander until later.

JANET: It's just too confusing. Melvin is playing Lysander who's disguised as Orrick.

MELVIN: That's Yorick.

JANET: Who's Yorick?

MELVIN: I'm Yorick.

JANET: Where did Orrick go?

WILMA: Right over your head.

JANET: Is he a ghost?

FRIEDA: And right through your ears. Speaking of incorporeal air!

MELVIN: I've lost my concentration and completely broken out of character. You realize I'm going to have to go off alone and work myself back into a frenzy.

JANET: Wrestling Association Raw is on the big screen in the bar next door.

MELVIN: I resent what you are implying.

JANET: I love wrestling.

MELVIN: How do you feel about piña coladas?

JANET: Wilma, I need to take a break to do - whatever it was Melvin was going to do.

MELVIN: I'd love to have you come along, but when I came in it looked like it might be going to rain.

JANET: I love getting caught in the rain.

MELVIN: Let's go then.

JANET: Pins and piña coladas. How exciting!

MELVIN: We'll be back in an hour.

(The others watch as MELVIN and JANET exit.)

FRIEDA: I give him 20 minutes tops.

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(ALFRED, BORIS and CLYDE enter from left.)

BORIS: To think we could be watching Wrestling Association Raw.

CLYDE: What scene are we doing? Could I be villainous?

WILMA: Let's do the scene with Damon and his mother. Where is Victoria? Ulalee! Where are you?

(YVETTE and an older woman enter left. ULALEE plays the part of Victoria, Jules' soon to be second wife and mother of Damon.)

ULALEE: I'm sorry. We were discussing... issues.

YVETTE: You might try electroshock therapy. I find it very relaxing.

WILMA: Places.

(CLYDE sits in the chair on stage. ULALEE stands behind him and places her hands on his shoulders.)

ULALEE: Did you know men fall in love with women who are just like their mothers?

(CLYDE shudders and removes her hands. CHORUS moves down right.)

ALL CHORUS: Damon's mummy ain't no dummy. **(ULALEE puts her hands back on CLYDE's shoulders.)** When old King Dane banished her for treason she nearly lost all her reason. She and Damon came to Jolly Jules the king to execute a most direful scheme.

CHORUS 5: I don't think direful is a word. **(Silence sinks over the stage. WILMA glares.)** Well, it isn't.

WILMA: Let me tell you what I think. First, I think that if you don't like the way I write, you need to go and write your own play.

CHORUS 5: I just might try that.

WILMA: Second, I think you are the rudest, most obnoxious person I have ever met. Third, I think you have put yourself in a most direful condition because I really don't like you, and I'm the director. Finally, I think you're fired. Get out of here.

CHORUS 5: You can't fire me.

WILMA: You're fired. F I R E D. Fired. Get out of here now.

CHORUS 5: I'm going to tell my mother. (*stomps offstage*)

WILMA: Alfred, come here for a minute. (*HE walks to her. SHE takes his arm and walks with him down center.*) Tell me there's no reason for me to be worried about him going to talk to his mother. (*HE doesn't say anything.*) All right then, Abraham. Tell me why I need to be worried about this person going to see his mother.

ALFRED BARD: She owns the antique place that was going to donate all the furniture for the play.

WILMA: Why didn't you slap me upside the head to keep me from firing him?

ALFRED BARD: He needed to be fired. I know you can make this work.

WILMA: That white room looks better all the time. At least there, no idiots bothered me. Okay. Ulalee and Clyde, let's do the scene. Chorus, carry on.

ALL CHORUS: Damon's mother.

CHORUS 1: Her name is Victoria. (*Everyone silently stares at him.*) I just noticed we didn't establish her identity. People will wonder who this woman is.

CHORUS 2: We say it's Damon's mother.

CHORUS 1: But everyone should know her name.

WILMA: Any time you have a suggestion -

CHORUS 1: I believe I do.

WILMA: Let's hear it. (*finds a chair and wearily sits*)

CHORUS 1: This evil dame goes by Victoria. She adds a bit to this history.

WILMA: We'll use it. Carry on, chorus.

ALL CHORUS: She fosters hatred against her former spouse and convinces King Jules he is a louse. Whenever Jules just tries to get along she convinces him his plan is all wrong. Let's listen in like flies on the wall as these two leeches ceaselessly plot King Dane's fall.

CLYDE: My stepfather to be thinks he might discuss a truce between Dane and us.

ULALEE: He and I will first join in wedded bliss -

CLYDE: Unless something runs amiss.

ULALEE: What means you, my fair child?

CLYDE: If the two kings meet, lies will run wild. My blood father will grind us apart bit by bit and on a unified throne I will never sit.

ULALEE: They must never get together.

CLYDE: Any alliance we will forever sever.

ULALEE: I shall be married to Jules in three days and you shall wed his niece.

CLYDE: Then, we will make sure there is no peace.

ULALEE: You shall in these confines with a monarch's voice cry 'havoc' and let slip the dogs of war.

CLYDE: That ends this scene. I'm heading for the bar.

ULALEE: It is a little late. May we knock off?

WILMA: Go, all of you. (**Everyone onstage exits.**) Goodnight, goodnight. Parting is definitely not sweet sorrow. (**CHORUS MEMBER 5 and an older woman, KATE CRABLEE, enter from right. WILMA turns to look.**) Oh, I am fortune's fool.

CHORUS 5: That's her, Mother. That's the shrew.

KATE: I'd say this shrew needs taming. (**strides to WILMA**)

WILMA: By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.

KATE: My name is Kate Crablee. This is my son Kelly. He goes by "Shrimp" Crablee.

WILMA: What can I do for you, Ms. Crablee?

KATE: We had a deal. My son got a part and you got your stage furniture. I didn't like it when he became a chorus member, but to be fired -

WILMA: Being a chorus member is not bad. Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. It all has to do with attitude.

KATE: Here's attitude for you. If my son is not part of this play, I am not furnishing your stage.

WILMA: That no longer matters. I've decided to go with more of a bare stage to give the entire play a surreal look.

KATE: What?

WILMA: We don't need your furniture and we don't need your son.

KATE: I've never been so insulted.

WILMA: Maybe not to your face. Goodbye, Ms. Crablee.

KATE: Come on, Kelly. (**takes her son by the arm and leads him offstage left; just before SHE disappears, HE turns around**)
You haven't heard the last of this.

(**As SHE exits, OPHELIA, comes onstage. SHE is young, drenched and tosses flowers or sticks around.**)

WILMA: When sorrows come, they come not in single spies but in battalions.

OPHELIA: Hello.

WILMA: Who the blazes are you?

OPHELIA: I am certainly not in blazes. The sleepy brook didst put out my blazes long ago. Here, have a daisy. (**hands WILMA a stick**)

WILMA: Who are you?

OPHELIA: We know what we are but not what we may be.

WILMA: What are you then?

OPHELIA: I am thy conscience's spirit, doom'd for a certain time to walk the night.

WILMA: Actually, it's just barely dusk.

OPHELIA: I am afraid of the dark - the wet, clammy, clinging dark.

WILMA: Conscience doth make cowards of us all. Did I just say something meaningful?

OPHELIA: You can spin a web with words. If you only knew what you could be.

WILMA: Unless my luck changes, I could be bankrupt and locked in a white room.

OPHELIA: You think you have it bad. My lover killed my father, told me to join a nunnery, and then killed my brother. Then, I fell into a creek and drowned.

WILMA: That would make a good play - wait. (**backs away from her**)
Did you say drowned?

OPHELIA: That's correct. You win the prize.

WILMA: You're mad, aren't you?

OPHELIA: I am mad north-northwest; when the wind's southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.

WILMA: What is that supposed to mean?

OPHELIA: I'm not sure really. The wind is not blowing southerly. Someone close once said it and I thought it was cool. To answer

your question, I was mad, but it's amazing how death clears your head. Word of advice. Never wear big dresses when you get in deep water.

WILMA: I must be mad. I'm seeing ghosts.

OPHELIA: Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

WILMA: What method?

OPHELIA: Your method. You are the writer and director of this play. You cannot let doubt consume you. Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good that we oft may win by fearing to attempt that which we should attempt.

WILMA: Coming from a dead girl, that's good advice.

OPHELIA: My father was the one who gave good advice. Alas, I must rejoin him.

WILMA: What is your name?

OPHELIA: My real name is Ophelia, but call me frailty or violet - no matter. What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. *(exits right)*

WILMA: What do I do now? *(stands straight and tall)* Didn't someone once say, "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie." I will go home and think on't.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 3

AT RISE: Lights come up. The setting is the same. Three chairs sit on stage. WILMA dozes in one chair. ALFRED enters, sees her sitting there, and walks over to her and shakes her gently. WILMA jerks awake.

WILMA: I will think on't.

ALFRED BARD: Think on what.

WILMA: Alfred, how long have we known each other?

ALFRED BARD: Why?

WILMA: Really. How long?

ALFRED BARD: You don't have to know someone forever to know the goodness in her heart.

WILMA: Thanks. I think. Do you think I'm crazy?

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ALFRED BARD: Why would you ask that?

WILMA: Well, duh, I was in a mental facility.

ALFRED BARD: Do you think you're crazy?

WILMA: The night before last I talked to a custodian named Gertrude and a girl named Ophelia who said she drowned. Now, that I think about it, Gertrude might have been dead too.

ALFRED BARD: Personally, I think most writers are a little crazy, and as far as your dead people go, it's a writer's job to take dead things and breathe life into them.

WILMA: I think that makes sense.

ALFRED BARD: I used to do some writing.

WILMA: You're a much better actor. Thanks, Alfred.

ALFRED BARD: No problem. I'll just disappear until the others arrive.

(As ALFRED exits right. CLYDE and FRIEDA enter left followed closely by YVETTE.)

FRIEDA: Did you spend the whole night here?

YVETTE: Are you homeless, Wilma? Part of the conditions for being allowed to enter the real world was that you find a suitable dwelling. ***(takes out a pen and pad and then says to herself)*** Check on housing for patient 636. ***(puts them back into her pocketbook)*** What scene will my daughter be doing first? Where is my daughter anyway?

WILMA: Scene two. The throne room. Where is Melvin?

(JANET enters.)

YVETTE: There's my precious baby.

JANET: I'm here.

WILMA: We can't do the scene without Melvin.

JANET: Uh, he'll be right here.

FRIEDA: How do you know? It could be all day before he gets here?

JANET: I, uh, talked to him.

MELVIN: ***(enters left)*** I'm here. ***(HE smiles and walks directly to JANET. HE tries to take her hand but SHE pushes it aside.)***

WILMA: Places everyone.

JANET: This would be so much easier if we had furniture.

YVETTE: And costumes. Janet would look so beautiful in one of those big, hoop skirts.

FRIEDA: A corset wouldn't hurt.

WILMA: Just don't go near the water.

YVETTE: What?

WILMA: Nothing.

YVETTE: (*again takes out a pen and pad, and reads what SHE has written*) Patient 636 makes cryptic remark that has no bearing on the conversation. Is she living in reality?

WILMA: I'm glad you mentioned reality. The reality of a play is mainly in our imaginations.

CLYDE: Uh, oh. Something's wrong.

(ALFRED re-enters.)

WILMA: I'm going for a surreal, farcical look, so we're mainly going with a bare stage and a few chairs.

CLYDE: That has to be the lamest thing I have ever heard. How could you do something so -

ALFRED BARD: Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Think, Clyde. The audience will focus on us. There will be no scenery taking their attention away. It's the way I - or the bard himself - would do it.

FRIEDA: What about costumes?

WILMA: Later, Frieda.

FRIEDA: Maybe we ought to get rid of them too.

JANET: I'd rather die.

WILMA: I could amend the script to accommodate you.

JANET: I don't think so.

WILMA: Places, everyone. (*ALFRED takes his place on the throne.*) Where are Boris and Ulalee?

BORIS: (*offstage*) Here!

(They enter left. ULALEE sits next to ALFRED. CLYDE stands next to JANET. FRIEDA stands next to JANET.)

WILMA: All right. Action!

ALFRED BARD: Oh, happy day, oh happy day, when I King Jules can say, finally and finally, it nears the wedding day. (*takes*

ULALEE's hand) Three days hence we two will wed any who stop us will wind up dead It makes me feel glad upon glad to make this announcement, the future of our great land depends upon this pronouncement. My lovely niece, daughter of my brother Abraham Ogee will wed that day along with me. Damon, my soon stepson will take her for his wife. Together, they shall make another life, an heir to my throne, a son to take my place.

BORIS: Isn't this incest? She would be marrying her cousin.

ALFRED BARD: Step-cousin, Abe, no blood relation here.

BORIS: It all seems a little weird.

JANET: Uncle, you have not listened to what I believe. The thought of marrying him makes me grieve.

ALFRED BARD: Do you want grief, girl? You'll do as I command or I will stick you in the dungeon where your blood will curl.

JANET: I would rather die than marry this jerk.

ALFRED BARD: We can make your wish quick work. You will wed or you will die. Now, go somewhere and have a good cry.

(JANET bursts into tears and runs offstage.)

BORIS: Maybe we should reconsider this whole arrangement.

ALFRED BARD: You speak as if from derangement. Go comfort your daughter and give her good advice. Meanwhile, I'll send someone to order rice.

(BORIS exits.)

ULALEE: Abraham has a lean, hungry look.

ALFRED BARD: That's because he cannot cook.

ULALEE: Let me have men about me that are fat, Sleek headed men, and such as sleep a nights. Abraham Ogee thinks too much; such men are dangerous.

CLYDE: Would he were fatter! But I fear him not.

ALFRED BARD: What are you trying to imply?

CLYDE: Perhaps, he does your throne espy.

WILMA: Cut!

MELVIN: I was just about to enter.

WILMA: In just a minute. We should do that scene again.

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MELVIN: But why?

WILMA: I'm just not quite ready for your brilliance.

MELVIN: I can understand that.

ALFRED BARD: It looks like we have company.

(KELLY, KATE, and MS. WINKLEY enter left.)

WILMA: All of you leave us please. ***(The troupe exits right.)*** What do you want, Ms. Crablee?

KATE: I would like for you to meet my friend, Ms. Winkley.

WILMA: Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.

MS. WINKLEY: We can do without your sarcasm. I don't guess you remember who I am.

WILMA: I have this gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach - much like gas - that I have met you before.

MS. WINKLEY: My friend Kate here convinced me to supply your costumes for the show. Guess what?

WILMA: We're going naked.

CHORUS 5: That's not all.

MS. WINKLEY: My husband works for the bank that was going to invest in your play.

CHORUS 5: He was going to front you lots of money so you could pay your cast members half of their salaries up front. Guess what?

WILMA: We're naked and bankrupt.

KATE: That about wraps it up.

MS. WINKLEY: Be glad we couldn't take this building out from under you.

WILMA: Get out of here.

KATE: Of course, with no money to put on your show, the building will do you little good.

MS. WINKLEY: It looks like the fat lady is singing.

WILMA: And you can't carry a tune. Now, get out of here before I have you arrested for trespassing. ***(The two turn on their heels and stomp out. ALFRED comes onstage as they leave.)***

WILMA: How long have you been there?

ALFRED BARD: Long enough.

WILMA: What am I going to do?

ALFRED BARD: You still have the stage. Put on a play.

WILMA: Do you think my cast will stand around knowing there is only a chance they'll get paid at all and only then if we have a good crowd and only after the performance, not half up front as I promised?

ALFRED BARD: Why don't you ask them?

WILMA: Why don't I?

ALFRED BARD: I was just thinking -

WILMA: Alfred, I like you, but please let me do the thinking.

ALFRED BARD: As you wish.

WILMA: I don't want to face everyone right now. Tell them I got sick and canceled rehearsal for the day.

(WILMA exits left. JANET, FRIEDA, ULALEE, CLYDE, BORIS and YVETTE enter right.)

YVETTE: Where is she?

ALFRED BARD: She's sick.

YVETTE: We all know that.

ALFRED BARD: Physically. She canceled rehearsals for tonight.

FRIEDA: Is she okay?

ALFRED BARD: I hope so.

JANET: Never mind her. What about the play? I'm about to make my stage debut and my director is going to destroy it. I can see a disaster now.

FRIEDA: So can I, but maybe you'll get better.

BORIS: I don't think Wilma had had her mind on her work.

YVETTE: Wilma hasn't had her mind for a long time.

JANET: ***(to FRIEDA)*** Wait a minute; you insulted me. ***(SHE starts for FRIEDA, but CLYDE steps between them.)***

CLYDE: This isn't helping anything.

BORIS: That's one of the smartest things you have said in a long time.

MELVIN: And you actually said it with emotion.

CLYDE: You can criticize me all you want--all of you, but I can say one thing most of you can't. I'm doing this because of my love for the stage not for money or fame or anything else.

BORIS: Bravo, old boy. You sounded very sincere and passionate.

ULALEE: That means you can do it on the stage too.

CLYDE: **(pauses to ponder this)** You know. You're absolutely right.

MELVIN: I'll believe it when I see it. Folks, there's still the problem of the play. It's all going to collapse if Wilma doesn't get her act together.

CLYDE: **(really mad)** What about us, Melvin? When are we going to get our act together? Even the greatest of artists must have something with which to work.

MELVIN: Are you insulting me?

CLYDE: I would insult you if there were something for me to insult.

FRIEDA: Oh, Clyde! Take off his hide.

MELVIN: I don't have to take this.

FRIEDA: You will though because you don't have the guts to do anything about it.

JANET: You know what we ought to do?

YVETTE: Listen. My baby has an idea.

JANET: Why don't we just take over the play and do it ourselves?

MELVIN: We could cut Wilma out completely.

ALFRED BARD: There are two things wrong with your idea. One, Wilma is the author of the play, and if you used it without her permission, she would sue you. I know a lawyer from Venice who would slice you up into little two pound pieces of quivering flesh. Two, I know the person who gave Wilma permission to use this building. One phone call, and he will banish you forever. **(silence)** Go home. Come back tomorrow. I'm sure Wilma will have a lot to share with you. **(They exit left. Lights dim to give the stage a surreal look. A blue gel and a spotlight on ALFRED is suggested. ALFRED sits in the chair and pulls out a quill pen. HE pantomimes writing a note in the air. As HE writes, the lights come back up, and when they are full, HE puts his pen back into his pocket.)** I think Wilma needs a little advice.

WILMA: **(enters right)** Are they gone?

ALFRED BARD: They'll be back tomorrow. You'll have to be straight with them. They're not happy.

WILMA: Now is the winter of our discontent. Blow, blow thou winter wind.

ALFRED BARD: Thy eternal summer shall not fade.

WILMA: What?



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