

My Friend Will



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Norman Maine Publishing

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My Friend Will

FARCE. After poaching a rabbit, young William Shakespeare seeks the help of a witch to escape a mob of angry villagers. The witch finds Will the perfect place to hide...the future. Will suddenly finds himself on the stage of the Avon Little Theater, where he is cast as a frontier sheriff in the theater's upcoming comedy. However, rehearsals don't start off well when Will recites his lines with a horrible Texan drawl, and a drama professor proclaims Will a novice actor lacking in his knowledge of Shakespeare. In order to save the show and the theater, Will has to pose as a ghost, deal with a couple of real shrews, and bring together some star-crossed lovers before he can be whisked back to his 1585 home in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Performance Time: Approximately 75-90 minutes.

Characters

(5 M, 11 F, 3 flexible)

(With doubling: 5 M, 11 F)

WILL SHAKESPEARE: Young William Shakespeare who has been transported into the future by a witch and is cast to play the role of a frontier sheriff in the Avon Little Theater's production of the comedy "West by Northwest."

RICHARD GLADSTONE: Shakespearean professor who teaches the course "Introduction to Shakespeare" and who finds Will incompetent in his knowledge of Shakespeare.

OPHELIA OBERON: Reporter for the "Avon Advertiser" and one of Professor Gladstone's former students.

ROZ PICKAFLEUR: Owner and artistic director of the Avon Little Theater who is short on money and may lose the theater; female.

CLEO DEVILLE: Roz's greedy, manipulative friend who lent her the money for a down payment on the theatre; conspires with Fred to sell the theatre to the Megagrab Development Corporation; wears fancy clothing and is dripping in furs and jewels; female.

FRED LEBEAU: Cleo's nephew and a collection agent for Squeezy's Collection Agency.

JULIE GILLETTE: Student who is cast in "West by Northwest" and who is in love with Vinny.

VINNY ROMERO: Student who is cast in "West by Northwest" and who is in love with Julie.

JULIUS GILLETTE: Julie's father and the mayor; doesn't approve of Julie dating Vinny and despises Gertrude Romero.

GERTRUDE ROMERO: Vinny's mother who doesn't approve of Vinny dating Julie and detests Julius Gillette.

PORTIA: Student and cast member.

BIANCA: Student and cast member.

EMILIA: Student and cast member.

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OLIVIA: Student and cast member.

KATE: Student and cast member.

TITANIA: A 16th-century witch; dressed as an old hag.

VILLAGER 1-3: Villagers in pursuit of Will for poaching a rabbit; flexible. Note: Villagers can be played by cast members or crew.

EXTRAS (opt.): As Villagers.

Setting

Avon Little Theater, present day.

Set

Avon Little Theater stage. A few flats painted as Wild West buildings stand upstage. There are one or two other flats that are unfinished or in progress. A ladder stands USL and a costume rack SR holds western costumes. A director's chair sits DSL facing the audience, and benches are placed here and there. Several props lie about including a branding iron, a lasso, an old sword, several large sticks, a copy of *The Life of William Shakespeare*.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: A forest outside Stratford-upon-Avon, 1585. Played before the curtain.

Scene 2: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, present day.

Scene 3: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, two hours later.

Scene 4: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, the following evening.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, the following morning.

Scene 2: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, that afternoon.

Props

Copy of *The Life of William Shakespeare*

Cauldron

Several large stick

Canvas bag

Pants with tear, for Will

Branding iron

Lasso

Old sword (can be plastic)

Ladder

Paper

Men's handkerchief

Cell phone, for Julius

Jacket, for Julie

Cowboy outfit, for Will

Note

Contract

Purse, for Cleo

Scripts

Coins

2 Boxes of props

Several blankets

Small pillow

2 Crowns

Scepter

Purse, for Roz

Car keys

Tape measure

Clipboard

Mop

Cell phone, for Roz

Paintbrush

Ring, for Vinny

Bracelet, for Julie

Sword (can be plastic)

Camera (or cell phone)

Cowboy vest, hat, and boots, for Vinny

Granny dress, wig, and glasses, for Julie

Fake mustache

Cell phone, for Cleo

Scary costume, for Will

Paper

Newspaper

Wooden stick or pole

Pencil

Notebook

Special Effects

Thunder
Lightning
Tinny "twack" sound
Cell phone ringing
Gunshot

Sound of door closing and
locking
Sound of keys in the door
Sound of door opening
Footsteps

*“To haunt
or not to haunt:
that is the question!”*

—will

ACT I

Scene I

(AT RISE: A forest outside Stratford-upon-Avon, 1585. Played before the curtain. A cauldron, lit from the inside, bubbles away onstage. Titania, dressed as an old hag, stirs the brew with a large stick.)

TITANIA: (Recites.)

“Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!”

(Note: The following Voices may overlap.)

VILLAGER 1: (Off SL, shouts.) After him!

VILLAGER 2: (Off SL, shouts.) There he goes!

VILLAGER 3: (Off SL, shouts.) Get the poacher!

VILLAGER 1: (Off SL, shouts.) Hang the rascal!

VILLAGER 2: (Off SL, shouts.) Where’s he going?

VILLAGER 3: (Off SL, shouts.) Into the woods! He’s going into the woods!

TITANIA: (Smiling, dropping items into cauldron.) Fillet of finny snake...in the cauldron boil and bake. Eye of newt, toe of frog...wool of bat...tongue of dog.

(Will runs on SL, holding a canvas bag. He is out of breath and nervously looks behind him.)

WILL: (To Titania.) I say, good lady...

TITANIA: (Ignoring him, stirring.) For a charm of powerful trouble...like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

WILL: I say, couldst thou help a poor lad in a bit of a spot?

TITANIA: And which poor lad wouldst I be helping?

WILL: Me. I. He who stands before thee.

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TITANIA: And, pray, who be ye?

WILL: I be Will Shakespeare of yon village, Stratford-upon-Avon.

TITANIA: (*Points to his bag.*) So, Master Shakespeare, ye've been poaching on Sir Thomas Lucy's private lands.

WILL: Merely a hare for our meager supper.

TITANIA: They'll hang ye by your neck, lad.

VILLAGER 1: (*Off SL, shouts.*) He's got to be here somewhere!

VILLAGER 2: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Over this way!

VILLAGER 3: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Hear now! Here's his trail!

WILL: Canst thou save me?

TITANIA: (*To Titania.*) For a price.

WILL: Will a fine hare be enough?

(*Will holds out the canvas bag and Titania takes it.*)

TITANIA: For a start.

WILL: What else wouldst thou have?

TITANIA: Give me your hand!

(*Will gives her his hand. Titania turns it palm side up.*)

WILL: Hurry, please! I hear their footsteps coming!

TITANIA: Aye, Will Shakespeare, I see a fine future in store for ye.

WILL: But what can I payst thou now in order to enjoy my future?

TITANIA: Nothing!

WILL: Oh, please!

VILLAGER 1: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Quiet! I hear voices!

VILLAGER 2: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Smell that? A fire burning!

VILLAGER 3: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Which way? Which way?

TITANIA: You pay nothing now, but I want you never to forget Titania!

WILL: Is that all?

TITANIA: 'Twill be enough.

WILL: A bargain at twice the price!

TITANIA: Remember, Titania's my name and bewitching's my game!

WILL: (*Sly wink.*) I shall, sweet lady!

TITANIA: Oh, you smooth-talker, you!

WILL: I would stand here for hours talking even more smoothly, fair lady, but I do need a place to hide. Now!

TITANIA: (*Circles the cauldron as she thinks.*) A place to hide...a place to hide...where no one will find ye. Where no one can ever find ye.

WILL: There be no such place. When Thomas Lucy puts his men to it—

TITANIA: (*Snaps her fingers.*) Oh, but there is!

WILL: Where be it?

TITANIA: The future!

WILL: The future! Dost thou mean tomorrow or perchance next week?

TITANIA: Nay. Ye must be cast into the distant future. A future hundreds of years hence to a place I know not!

WILL: How will I know where I am?

TITANIA: When ye hear the words, "Much ado about nothing" ye will be safe.

WILL: Will I ever return?

VILLAGER 1: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Are you sure it's this way?

VILLAGER 2: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Aye! Here be a piece of his pants!

(*Will turns around and we see a tear in his pants. He is mortally embarrassed.*)

WILL: (*To Titania.*) Will I return?

VILLAGER 3: (*Off SL, shouts.*) Right through here! I see a light!

TITANIA: (*To Will.*) Aye. Upon the words, "Parting is such sweet sorrow!" ye will find yourself again upon this stage of life.

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WILL: Pray, may I quote you?

TITANIA: Stand here. Look into the cauldron. (*Will looks into the cauldron.*)

Do not look away,

Do not bat an eye,

Cross your fingers,

And don't ask why.

Into the future speed this lad,

Over many a day and year,

Hide him from approaching cads,

And let him live free from fear! (*Thunder, lights flash, blackout.*)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The stage of the Avon Little Theater, present time. A few flats painted as Wild West buildings stand upstage. One or two others can be unfinished or in progress. A ladder stands USL, and a costume rack SR holds western costumes. A director's chair sits DSL, facing the audience. Benches are placed here and there. Several props lie about including a branding iron, a lasso, an old sword, and several large sticks. Fred stands CS. Roz is sitting in the director's chair with her arms stubbornly folded across her chest.)

FRED: Ms. Pickafleur, are you going to be reasonable or not?

ROZ: Not!

FRED: That's the wrong answer.

ROZ: I didn't know this was a test.

FRED: It is a test! A test of your credit, Ms. Pickafleur, and unless you do something about it... *(Moves menacingly close to Roz, almost hissing in her ear.)* ...you're going to fail!

(Roz quickly rises and covers her ears.)

ROZ: I can't hear you! La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!

(Fred swings around in front of her and holds a paper an inch from her eyes.)

FRED: You owe Buddy's Used Cars two back payments on a ['93 Escort] totaling \$212. They turned the matter over to Squeezy's Collection Agency, of which I am a duly appointed representative. I have the right to either collect payment or seize the car! *[Or insert another type of car.]*

(Roz drops her hands from her ears.)

ROZ: *(Sweetly.)* Mr. LeBeau, you've got such a...handsome name.

FRED: (*Nervously backing away.*) Ms. Pickafleur.

ROZ: And it really fits. I can't imagine anyone more *le beau* in the entire world.

FRED: Are you trying to flatter me?

ROZ: Oh, no! I'm just trying to approach this in a very rational, adult manner.

FRED: (*Disappointedly.*) Oh.

ROZ: Not that it would be hard to flatter you. I mean...I could easily give in to your charms, Mr. LeBeau.

FRED: You can call me Frederick.

ROZ: (*Twirling a bit of his hair.*) I like "Freddy" better.

FRED: (*Wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.*) It's getting a bit hot in here, don't you think?

ROZ: You do look a bit...flushed. Can I get you something, Freddy? A nice cool soda? An icy iced tea?

FRED: (*Businesslike.*) Just a check would be fine.

ROZ: (*Dramatically.*) Oh, that I would be able to do! But, alas, my dreary little account is down to its last farthing.

FRED: You gotta pay in dollars, Ms. Pickafleur.

ROZ: Well, once "West by Northwest" opens next week and these seats are filled and the cash rolls in, I will be able to pay and pay and pay!

FRED: But you gotta pay now!

ROZ: I sank my last few dollars into this—my dream—the Avon Little Theater!

FRED: You're making this very difficult, Ms. Pickafleur!

ROZ: (*Tearfully.*) I'm sorry! From the bottom of my heart, I'm sorry, Freddy. I know it's wrong not to pay my bills, but is it wrong to follow my dream?

FRED: Golly, the Repo Squad never has to put up with this!

ROZ: Forgive me, Freddy! I just don't know what I can do. If only I could have a bit more time...

FRED: Can't you kick me or knock me on the head with a branding iron or something?

(*Roz grabs a branding iron.*)

ROZ: You mean like this?

(Roz "hits" him on the head with the branding iron. A loud, tinny "twack" is heard.)

FRED: Ouch! I wasn't serious! I'm gonna call the sheriff.

ROZ: Oh, no! You can't! You can't! I'll...I'll do something really awful if you call!

FRED: What do you mean?

ROZ: When people's dreams are thwarted—

FRED: You cut it out! Just give me 212 dollars and I'll be on my way—

ROZ: They simply lose touch with reality...and just before...they...lose it completely...

FRED: Ms. Pickafleur, I'm warning you—

ROZ: Their victims realize it was all much ado about nothing! *(Thunder, lightning. Fred screams in terror and runs off SL. Lights go out. Darkness.)* Hey, Avon Electric Company, I paid your bill! *(Lights come back on. Will stands CS. Roz has her back to him.)* Thanks!

WILL: Thou art welcome.

(Roz screams and turns. This scares Will and he backs away from her.)

ROZ: Don't do that! You could have given me a heart attack, do you realize that? I haven't slept for two nights, the only nourishment I've had are six cups of coffee and a [Twix] candy bar, and I've got bill collectors knocking on every door! *[Or insert the name of another candy bar.]*

WILL: Frightful!

ROZ: You're telling me. And on top of everything, that's totally the wrong costume, Billy.

WILL: Billy?

ROZ: You're Billy Shakeman, aren't you?

WILL: Actually, it's—

ROZ: (*Excitedly.*) I'm so glad you're here! Judy Sadler said her cousin would be coming by to play the part of Titus, the sheriff.

WILL: You know Judith Sadler?

ROZ: She's one of our biggest patrons, but she likes to be called "Judy."

(*Roz goes to the costume rack and begins selecting pieces for Will.*)

WILL: Then I shall endeavor to fulfill her wishes.

ROZ: And you can drop the accent. You want to sound more *Texas* than London Bridge.

WILL: I say, how does one sound more Texas?

ROZ: You say things like, "Howdeeeeeee!"

WILL: And just what does "howdeeeeeee" mean?

ROZ: It means "howdy." You know. And you say things like (*With a Texan drawl.*) "I'll take my rotgut straight, or I ain't takin' it at all."

WILL: (*Attempting to mimic Roz.*) "I'll take me rotgoot straight, or I ain't taking it at all."

ROZ: We'll work on it.

WILL: Pray, fair maiden, dost thou have a name?

ROZ: Are you talking to me, Billy?

WILL: Actually, I prefer "Will."

ROZ: Well, Will, if you think this is a fair maiden, you'd better get glasses.

WILL: I fear you're most incomprehensible.

ROZ: Forget it. I'm just up to my eyeballs in issues. I've put everything I have—and everything I *will* have—into this theater, and I'm so close now to realizing my dream that I can't let anything—anything, you hear me—stop it.

WILL: But...but thou art a woman.

ROZ: (*Insulted.*) When did that become a problem?

WILL: The Master of Revels forbids women to participate in theater in any way other than attend performances.

ROZ: Hello, Billy—

WILL: (*Correcting her.*) Will.

ROZ: Hello, Will. Welcome to the 21st century!

WILL: (*Looking around, awestruck.*) Is that where I am? She never said anything about this far into the future.

ROZ: Who? Did you visit your psychic this morning? Did she tell you to dress like that and speak like you're working for the BBC?

WILL: I daresay, I'm not following you, my dear Miss...Miss...?

ROZ: It's Ms. Pickafleur.

WILL: Enchanting name.

ROZ: Rosalyn Pickafleur, but everybody calls me "Roz."

WILL: (*Dreamily.*) Rosalyn: beautiful, harmonious, strong.

ROZ: Hey, what's with you?

WILL: Nothing's with me. I left everything behind in... (*Realizes.*) ...out there.

ROZ: You look like you could use the restroom. I mean, to wash up.

WILL: Restroom?

ROZ: The bathroom?

WILL: I hardly need a bath. I already bathed this month.

ROZ: (*Laughs.*) Are you in character or something? I mean, you can carry this acting thing a bit too far, Will. If you want to do anything to get into your part, think Texas.

WILL: I would do so if I had any idea what a Texas is.

ROZ: The Lone Star State, the Alamo, herds and herds of cattle. Mooooo!

WILL: Ah! Cows. Tell me...does one poach in Texas?

ROZ: If you want Eggs Benedict, you sure do. Say, I'll bet you're hungry. I've got a small kitchen downstairs. I can poach you some eggs if you like.

WILL: But won't the sheriff take offense?

ROZ: Now you're getting the hang of it, Will. But you're playing the sheriff, remember? (*With a Texas accent.*) C'mon, pardner, I'll show you where to clean up, and you and me'll tie on the old feedbag. (*Roz exits SR.*)

WILL: And just where, exactly, shall we do that?

(Will follows her off SR. Julie and Julius enter SL.)

JULIE: *(Nervously looking around.)* See? He's not here, Father. Satisfied?

JULIUS: You're having a rehearsal here?

JULIE: That's right! It is a theater.

JULIUS: Then where's everybody else?

JULIE: They'll be here. It's early.

JULIUS: Are you certain he won't be here?

JULIE: I am! Now, I've got to study my lines, so if you'll excuse me—

JULIUS: Young lady, I want you to understand that the election is only a few weeks away, and if there's any hint of a scandal, if my name is in any way linked to anyone from a disreputable family—

JULIE: Vinny's family isn't disreputable!

JULIUS: They're my opponent's biggest contributor! They're worse than disreputable! They're despicable!

JULIE: Dad, Vinny doesn't mean a thing to me. We're just casual acquaintances, that's all. I wouldn't give him the time of day.

(Julius's cell phone rings.)

JULIUS: *(Into phone.)* Gillette here. Yes, yes, yes, no! No, no, no, yes! Yes, no, yes, no, no, no, no! And you can quote me on that! *(Hangs up.)* Gotta run! City council's pulling another one of their we're-voting-while-you're-out routines. And, Julie, remember—

JULIE: Not even the time of day!

(Julius runs off SL. Vinny enters right behind Julie. He puts his hands over her eyes.)

VINNY: Hey! Guess who, doll face?!

JULIE: Alex?

VINNY: Alex? Alex who?

JULIE: Robert?

VINNY: Who's Robert?

JULIE: Harry?

VINNY: Hey, who've you been fooling around with?

(Julie spins around.)

JULIE: *(Laughs.)* Nobody, Vinny!

VINNY: Your dad around?

JULIE: He just left. How about your mother?

VINNY: She's got a hair appointment.

JULIE: Ah, alone at last!

VINNY: Oh, baby!

JULIE: Give me a great big kiss, Vinny!

(Vinny and Julie are just about to kiss when Gertrude enters SR.)

GERTRUDE: Vinny!

(Terrified, Vinny breaks away from Julie, who is likewise terrified.)

VINNY: Ma! How many times I gotta tell ya, don't do that!

GERTRUDE: You didn't mention she'd be here!

VINNY: Her name's Julie, Ma...and I love her.

GERTRUDE: Love? Love? I forbid it! You're too young!

VINNY: I'm 20, Ma! So's Julie.

JULIE: Twenty-one, actually.

GERTRUDE: Ah-ha!

JULIE: Ah-ha what?

GERTRUDE: A cougar!

VINNY: Give us a break, Ma. We're two people in love and you're just gonna have to accept it.

(Gertrude grabs Vinny by the arm.)

GERTRUDE: You're coming home right now!

VINNY: No! We got rehearsal!

GERTRUDE: *(Bursts into tears.)* Rehearsal? When's the wedding? And you didn't even invite your mother!

VINNY: Not a wedding rehearsal. We're in the play. This is a theater, Ma, not a wedding chapel.

GERTRUDE: Oh, my heart! My heart's going to give out, Vinny— *(Crumple to bench.)*

JULIE: Gosh, Vinny, we wouldn't want anything to happen to your mother.

VINNY: At her last checkup the doctor told her she's got the heart of a 30 year old.

GERTRUDE: Ha! Another shock and you might as well measure me for my coffin!

(Julius enters, holding a jacket.)

JULIUS: Julie, hon, did you forget your— *(Sees Vinny and then Gertrude.)* Of all the nerve! You said he wasn't going to be here, let alone bring along his handler!

(Gertrude rises from the bench.)

GERTRUDE: *(Incensed.)* Mayor Gillette, how dare you!

VINNY: Sorry, sir, but Julie didn't know I'd be here. We just stopped by.

JULIUS: You expect me to believe that? Like mother, like son!

GERTRUDE: What's that supposed to mean?

JULIUS: It means you've been circulating lies in an attempt to derail my re-election campaign.

GERTRUDE: Name one lie that I've circulated, you big baboon!

JULIUS: Baboon! You're telling voters I'm using public money to pay for my monkey menagerie!

VINNY: Oh, Ma, where'd you dream that one up?

GERTRUDE: I thought it was appropriate under the circumstances.

JULIE: What circumstances?

GERTRUDE: He's launching an investigation into our family business, Vinny.

VINNY: Yeah, well, the way Uncle Dimitri keeps the books, it oughta be investigated.

GERTRUDE: Remember, Vinny, blood is thicker than water. Now, you're coming home!

VINNY: We got rehearsal!

JULIUS: *(To Julie.)* I don't care if you're opening on Broadway, you're coming home, Julie!

JULIE: No! I'll be home when we finish.

VINNY: *(To Gertrude.)* Me, too!

JULIUS: *(To Gertrude.)* You've spoiled your kid rotten!

GERTRUDE: And just what kind of brat... *(Indicating Julie.)* ...do you call that?

VINNY: Ma!

GERTRUDE: Spoiled, spoiled, spoiled!

JULIUS: That's it! *(Moves SL.)*

GERTRUDE: Where are you going?

JULIUS: You drive that chartreuse [Mini-Cooper], don't you?
[Or insert another type of car.]

(Julius races off SL, almost knocking over Richard, who enters SL.)

GERTRUDE: *(Shouts.)* You wouldn't dare!

(Gertrude charges off SL, also almost knocking Richard over.)

RICHARD: I ought to put in for combat pay!

JULIE: Oh, don't mind them, Professor Gladstone.

RICHARD: Please, I'm only "Professor" in my Shakespeare classes. Here, I'm plain old "Richard."

VINNY: Those were our plain old parents who tried to mow you down.

(Roz enters followed by Will, who is now dressed like a cowboy.)

RICHARD: Ah, as William Shakespeare would have said, "In a false quarrel, there is no true courage."

WILL: Valor, actually. No true valor. My father thumped that into my head above all else.

RICHARD: And just who are you?

ROZ: Everybody, this is Bill Shakeman.

WILL: "Will," if you please.

RICHARD: Who thinks he knows something of The Bard!

ROZ: Will, Richard, here, is Professor Gladstone, a Shakespearean scholar.

JULIE: *(Fawning.)* He knows everything...absolutely everything about William Shakespeare.

VINNY: Yeah, we even gotta know Shakespeare's shoe size.

(Will picks up one of his feet to examine his shoe.)

JULIE: And what he ate for breakfast.

WILL: If ye must know, porridge with a hunk of old bread.

RICHARD: How droll. Now, students, I have never asked you such trivialities and I never will. We seek to uncover the genius of the man.

WILL: So ye art a university man!

RICHARD: If only we shared that distinction, sir.

ROZ: *(To Richard.)* And this is Julie and Vinny.

VINNY: *(To Richard.)* Cool duds, man.

WILL: *(To Richard.)* Howdeeeee, I'm from Texas.

(Voices are heard off SL as Portia, Bianca, Emilia, Olivia, and Kate enter SL.)

PORTIA: He told me to pick one of the presents, and I'd have to keep whatever was in the box and be happy with it!

BIANCA: Oh, Portia, that's lame.

EMILIA: *(To Portia.)* I'd have told him to jump in a lake.

OLIVIA: *(To Portia.)* Or taken all of the boxes.

KATE: *(To Portia.)* I hope you didn't obey. He's just a man bent on securing power over you.

PORTIA: Oh, but...but...I love him.

VINNY: That's how it oughta be, Portia.

KATE: Oh, listen to the slime ball.

JULIE: Kate! What's Vinny ever done to you? He's kind, sensitive, creative, and trustworthy.

KATE: Are you sure about the trustworthy part?

JULIE: Why shouldn't I be?

KATE: I'm sure I don't know, but you sound...doubtful, Julie.

VINNY: Hey! Just because I gave you a peck on the cheek when you were standing under the mistletoe at the Christmas party last year doesn't mean a thing!

KATE: I knew there was some reason you dropped me!

JULIE: Vinny! What's this about?

(Vinny starts to escort Julie toward flat.)

VINNY: Julie, baby, you know you're the only girl for me.
(Disappears behind flat.)

JULIE: Oh, yeah? Convince me!

(Vinny reaches out and grabs Julie, pulling her behind the flat. She giggles.)

ROZ: Guys, can I introduce you to somebody? This is Judy Sadler's cousin, Billy, and he's all the way from England.

BIANCA: He looks like he's from Dallas.

WILL: *(In a Texas drawl.)* Howdeeeeee! Pleased to make your acquaintance, pretty lady.

RICHARD: (*Cups his ear.*) Oh, hear that? It's the crackle of the critics laughing.

WILL: 'Tis a comedy, good sir.

EMILIA: Gee, you sound just like Shakespeare.

OLIVIA: Yeah! "Such as we are made of, such be we."

WILL: Pray, fair lady, but I usually say, "such we be."

PORTIA: Gosh! I'm named after that lawyer chick in "Merchant of Vesuvius."

RICHARD: That's "The Merchant of Venice," for crying out loud, Portia, my dear. (*Indicating Will.*) Perhaps our good friend has read it?

WILL: I...I...shall put it on my list of soon-to-be-accomplished accomplishments.

RICHARD: Yes, well, don't overtax yourself, kid. You might want to begin your study of The Bard by taking my class, "Introduction to Shakespeare."

ROZ: You know, I think we ought to get our rehearsal started?

KATE: Just for the record, Roz, I hate this play. I hate romances. It's like every story in the entire world has to end with a wedding.

WILL: A pleasant enough and fitting end.

KATE: What would you know about it?

ROZ: You're supposed to have your lines down for act one today, but because Will just got here, he'll be using his script. Now, we've already blocked scene one, so I'd like you all to take your places. (*All move to positions.*) Will, you'll be over here with one foot up on the bench. You'll be cleaning your weapon. And Vinny... (*Looks around.*) Vinny? Where's Vinny?

(*Portia moves to the edge of the flat and looks behind it. Will begins to pantomime polishing his sword.*)

PORTIA: Vinny, you're on!

(Vinny races out, combing his hair.)

VINNY: Here I am, right on cue!

(Julie enters, smoothing her hair.)

ROZ: Good, now... Will, what are you doing?

WILL: Cleaning my sword.

ROZ: Your sword?

RICHARD: Your weapon is a Colt .45.

WILL: A small horse?

VINNY: *(Using his hand to create a gun.)* A gun. You know, "bang, bang."

EMILIA: It's okay, guys. They don't have guns in England.

(Cleo enters SL, dripping in furs and jewelry.)

CLEO: Darling Roz, I hope I'm not interrupting anything!

ROZ: Oh, Cleo, we're just beginning rehearsal. "West by Northwest" goes up next week, and we really don't have time—

CLEO: Darling, I was expecting a check in the mail—

ROZ: Well, Cleo, I thought I explained that in my note.

CLEO: *(Reads note.)* "Cleo, be a pet and give me until next week. I'm fresh out of resources."

ROZ: Please, Cleo, I've put everything I've got into the theater and—

CLEO: You mean everything *I've* got!

ROZ: I know you lent me the down payment, and I'm eternally grateful.

RICHARD: We all are, dear lady. Apparently, there is an outstanding sum—

CLEO: Two thousand, four hundred and forty dollars. That's two payments you're behind, Roz.

ROZ: I know, but once tickets begin to sell—

CLEO: And what am I supposed to do in the meantime? I am desperate for cash myself!

WILL: Perchance I might offer a solution, kind lady?

CLEO: What's this? "Hamlet on the Range"?

ROZ: He's our new actor, Will Shakeman.

WILL: Actually –

CLEO: Go on, Billy Boy, what's your solution?

WILL: Thou wearest goodly baubles and luxurious furs that could be sold at fair for at least ten shillings.

CLEO: What?! Sell my jewelry and furs? Are you out of your mind? I need the money now, Roz, or my poor, poor grandmother...well...

ROZ: Oh, Cleo, what's wrong with her?

CLEO: She needs an operation.

RICHARD: What kind of operation?

CLEO: The expensive kind.

PORTIA: Oh, maybe if we all pitch in we could make the payment.

EMILIA: I've got three dollars.

BIANCA: I know! We could hold a car wash. You'd help us, wouldn't you, Billy?

WILL: A car wash?

RICHARD: Afraid to get your hands dirty, kid?

WILL: Oh, pray, they've been dirty many times. But I know not this...car wash.

ROZ: Forget the collection. Forget the carwash. Cleo, you and I have always been friends...kind of. And a friend would clearly understand I can't pay until the show opens, okay?

CLEO: But, darling Roz, friendship and business never mix.

KATE: "Neither a lender nor a borrower be."

WILL: 'Twould sound better the other way around: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."

(Cleo pulls a contract from her purse.)

CLEO: There's a clause in our agreement that says something to the effect that if you miss a payment...the place is mine.

ROZ: What? I don't remember that?

CLEO: Paragraph 18, clause 22. (*Points to a spot on the contract.*) Right there, Roz.

ROZ: You can't do this!

CLEO: I'd do anything for dear old Granny DeVile, poor thing. Without her operation, she's going to...well...it's too horrible to think about.

EMILIA: What's wrong with her?

CLEO: She needs two new knees, two new hips, a tummy tuck—

KATE: And a partridge in a pear tree.

CLEO: (*Angrily.*) Well! I did not come here to be insulted!

ROZ: Cleo, please! You've got to understand, I need another couple weeks.

CLEO: Roz, darling, even if I give you another couple of weeks, what makes you think you'll get enough money to pay me what you owe me?

BIANCA: Oh, "West by Northwest" is going to be a big hit!

PORTIA: Everybody's coming to see it!

RICHARD: I've already sold three tickets.

OLIVIA: And my mother, grandmother, and Uncle Festus are coming opening night.

ROZ: (*Hopefully.*) Anybody else?

EMILIA: My neighbor said she'd come if there's no bingo that week.

CLEO: As they say on ["Judge Judy,"] I rest my case! [*Or insert the name of another suitable TV show.*]

ROZ: Please, Cleo!

CLEO: Roz, honey, you've tried. Really tried! But I need that money, and if I don't get it by the end of this week, you'll force me to hire a locksmith to change all the locks. Ta-ta! (*Briskly exits SL.*)

WILL: (*To Roz.*) Dost this lady lend money?

ROZ: I thought borrowing from a friend would keep things...casual.

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RICHARD: My dear Rosalyn, with friends like that, you need to get yourself a pit bull.

PORTIA: She wants her pound of flesh all right.

WILL: A magnificently melodious metaphor!

ROZ: Well, she's not getting a pound of my flesh or anything else I've got until I'm good and ready to hand it over! And neither is Squeezy Collection Agency, or anybody else!
(Races off SR as lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Stage of the Avon Little Theater, two hours later. Roz is sitting in the director's chair, which now faces upstage. She's not paying attention to the action onstage. Will and Richard face one another as in a Wild West gunfight scene. Vinny stands USC with Julie hanging on to him in terror. Portia, Bianca, and Emilia cower SR behind Will. Olivia and Kate cower SL behind Richard.)

RICHARD: (In character, arms up, hands dangling, ready to draw.) So, Sheriff, are you man enough to take it?

WILL: (Holds up a finger indicating a pause.) Ah! (Pulls his script from inside his shirt. In character, reads.) "Ain't you all the cutest li'l possum on the tree?"

VINNY: (Bursts into laughter.) Li'l Richard hangin' from a tree, cutest thing you ever did see!

RICHARD: Roz! Roz!

JULIE: Vinny was just joking, Professor.

RICHARD: And you'll find the punch line on your next quiz!

VINNY: Aw, c'mon! Where's your sense of humor?

RICHARD: It fled about an hour and a half ago.

PORTIA: Billy, you got the wrong page.

KATE: Again!

WILL: Oh, I fear I had already delivered that line.

EMILIA: When you were trying to sweet-talk Kate.

KATE: But it didn't work, understand?

WILL: (Rubbing his arm.) I daresay I've the bruise to prove it.

KATE: Sorry. I forgot it's a play.

WILL: Quite all right. "All the world's a stage," you know...

JULIE: (Dreamily, looking at Vinny.) "And all the men and women merely players."

WILL: Oh, I must remember that line!

RICHARD: Roz, will you please tell this rank amateur to get back on book?

BIANCA: Here's where we are, Billy. Did anybody ever tell you you've got very pretty blue eyes?

RICHARD: Bianca! *(To Will.)* I'll feed you the line once more, Sheriff.

WILL: Quite right.

RICHARD: *(With a Texan drawl.)* "So, Sheriff, are you man enough to take it?"

WILL: *(In character, with a terrible Texan drawl, reads.)* "Why, shucks, Hot Spurs Hannigan, I've been a-waitin' fer the chance to shoot more holes in you than a chunk of Swiss cheese." *(Breaks character.)* Pray tell, about what am I speaking?

RICHARD: It don't matter, pardner! Draw!

WILL: I haven't any paper!

RICHARD: Draw!

WILL: Has anyone a quill with a spot of ink?

RICHARD: Draw!

(Richard draws his gun and "fires" at Will, who flies backward.)

PORTIA: Oh, gosh!

EMILIA: *(To Richard.)* You killed him!

(Portia, Bianca, Emilia, Olivia, and Julie run to Will.)

RICHARD: This is a toy gun! It couldn't hurt a flea!

(Bianca puts her hand near Will's mouth to see if he is breathing.)

BIANCA: Oh, thank goodness. He's still breathing.

JULIE: Are you all right, Billy?

(Will stands.)

WILL: *(To Richard.)* Apparently, the word "draw" has taken on a new meaning. I thought you meant—

RICHARD: Roz! We can't go on like this. Roz!

VINNY: Hey, Roz! Billy, here, just got shot 'n' you didn't even blink!

(Will approaches Roz.)

WILL: I say, fair Rosalyn, are thy humours out of balance?

(Will kneels by Roz and takes her hand.)

PORTIA: Gosh, Billy, you sound so...so...

EMILIA: Shakespearean.

RICHARD: Ha!

WILL: Fair Rosalyn?

ROZ: *(Dreamily.)* Oh, I'm sorry! Sorry, everyone! *(Gets up and takes command.)* I'm sorry I bolted earlier, and thank you for going on with rehearsal. You've been patient with Will and with me.

RICHARD: How about we take up a collection, cast? Whatever we've got will help our dear director in her moment of distress.

ROZ: It's worse than distress, Richard.

RICHARD: All right, panic, then.

PORTIA: Here's three dollars. *(Pulls out \$3 and hands it to Richard.)*

EMILIA: I thought you needed that for the bus ride home.

PORTIA: I'll walk.

RICHARD: I'll drive you and anybody else who can donate their bus money.

BIANCA: I've got five here. *(Pulls out \$5.)*

KATE: Count me in for ten. *(Pulls out \$10.)*

WILL: And I've twenty. *(Pulls out some old shillings.)*

KATE: Figures! Guys are always richer.

WILL: Shillings.

(Will hands Richard the coins.)

RICHARD: Young man, where did you get these coins?

WILL: I sold a pig and a thrasher of hay.

(Richard pockets Will's coins.)

ROZ: Guys, look, keep your money, please. I know what it's like to be a starving actor. I know what it's like to have a dream, and I know what it takes to get it. You need every penny you've got. I'll think of something. I really will. Let's call it a night. Go on and get some sleep, and we'll meet again tomorrow at six, okay?

PORTIA: You'll be all right?

ROZ: Sure! Now, go on. Get out of here!

RICHARD: Don't worry, Rosalyn, my sweet! We'll come up with some kind of plan.

KATE: *(To Roz.)* But if I were you, don't hold your breath for a knight on a white charger to ride in here and save you. Night, Roz.

PORTIA: *(To Roz.)* See you tomorrow!

EMILIA: *(To Roz.)* You'll be all right?

ROZ: Don't worry about me. I'm stronger than I look.

BIANCA: I promise to study all my lines, Roz. I really, really do. I just wasn't with the program tonight.

ROZ: You think I was? Have a good one.

OLIVIA: Roz, how about we have a bake sale? I can make some Rice Krispies Treats.

ROZ: We'd only have to sell 8,000 of them.

OLIVIA: Oh, gosh...I don't have any pot big enough for a batch that size. Sorry. Night!

ROZ: Night, all! *(Richard leads Portia, Bianca, Emilia, Olivia, and Kate off SL.)* Sorry I wasn't much of a director tonight, Billy.

WILL: I hear tell that "'tis the job of a player to draw a character from within himself."

ROZ: You must have studied at the Actors Studio. That's Method acting.

WILL: One method, I fear. Shall I help you clear things?

ROZ: Oh, you don't have to. I'm sure you're tired.

WILL: Not in the least.

ROZ: I...I hope we...weren't too far below your...expectations.

WILL: My dear Rosalyn, trust me. I...I honestly didn't know what to expect.

ROZ: I mean coming from the theatrical capital of western civilization.

WILL: I should hardly think Stratford—

ROZ: Oh, you're from Stratford! I feel even more ashamed. You must be appalled at this place.

WILL: I have never seen a playhouse like it!

(Roz and Will each carry several prop items off SR. Vinny enters SR carrying a box. The box contains several blankets, a small pillow, and a crown among other items.)

VINNY: Julie? Julie? Where the heck are you, Julie? *(Julie peeks out from behind one of the flats but then hides again.)* Boy, I sure wish you'd tell your father to take a flying leap! Or, better yet, I'll tell my ma I'm changing my name, okay?

(Julie pops out carrying a box.)

JULIE: Oh, Vinny, "What's in a name?"

VINNY: Yeah, "a hotdog by any other name's still a hotdog," right?

JULIE: And I'd love you even if you were named Herman Schmuckeldinker.

VINNY: I couldn't even spell that.

JULIE: So, you find any treasures?

VINNY: Yeah, I got a whole bunch of old junk here.

JULIE: Me, too! Look at this...an old crown. *(Pulls a crown out of her box.)* I dub thee King Vinny!

(Julie places the crown on Vinny's head.)

VINNY: Hey! I found a crown, too! I dub you Queen Julie!
(*Vinny crowns Julie.*) And look here...I got one of these
thingamajigs. (*Holds up a scepter.*)

JULIE: What's it for?

VINNY: It's a head whacker. And I'm gonna use it on
anybody who tries to come between us.

GERTRUDE: (*Off SL, calls.*) Vinny!

VINNY: (*To Julie, terrified.*) Except Ma!

(*Gertrude enters.*)

GERTRUDE: (*Angrily.*) Ah-ha! I knew it!

VINNY: Chill out, Ma!

JULIE: (*To Gertrude, sweetly.*) Hi, Ms. Romero.

GERTRUDE: Don't try to be nice to me! Practice was over ten
minutes ago!

VINNY: So what? Julie and I were doing something.

GERTRUDE: (*Melodramatically, shouts.*) My heart! My heart!

(*Gertrude flops down on a bench. Roz and Will enter SR.*)

ROZ: What's going on?

VINNY: Ma's havin' another one of her conniptions.

ROZ: (*To Gertrude.*) Can I get you something? Water? Tea?

VINNY: (*To Gertrude.*) How about some more drama queen
pills?

GERTRUDE: Vinny!

VINNY: Ma, you oughta be in the play!

GERTRUDE: (*Melodramatically.*) Can I help it if I only want
what's best for my boy?

WILL: It appears, my good lady, that your son is man enough
to decide what 'tis best for himself.

GERTRUDE: Oh, just because you got a funny accent you
think you know everything, huh?

JULIE: Billy just meant that Vinny is twenty. He's a junior in
college.

GERTRUDE: So I'm just supposed to kick him out of the nest
and wave goodbye as he falls into her clutches?

VINNY: Ma! Julie drives an automatic.

GERTRUDE: You're impossible! I'm leaving.

VINNY: Good!

GERTRUDE: And you're coming with me.

VINNY: I got my own car.

GERTRUDE: Mine's going to have a flat so I'm riding with
you.

VINNY: Yeesh!

JULIE: Night, Vinny. (*Sweetly.*) Nice seeing you again, Ms.
Romero.

GERTRUDE: I told you not to be nice to me!

(Gertrude drags Vinny off SL.)

WILL: I say, the woman's a true shrew!

JULIE: And I wish somebody would tame her. Of course, my
father's not much better. I don't see why they just can't
ignore Vinny and me and fight on their own.

ROZ: I hate to say it, but I think it's because they love you.

JULIE: I sure hate to see what they'd do to us if they couldn't
stand us!

WILL: Perhaps you should exercise your authority as the
queen of the realm.

JULIE: (*Laughs. Indicating crown and scepter.*) Oh, this? Vinny
and I found a bunch of stuff we can take to the pawnshop.
There are a lot of old props that are really nice and they
might raise a couple hundred bucks.

ROZ: Why didn't I think of that?

(Julie removes her crown.)

JULIE: We'll take them tomorrow, okay?

ROZ: You probably better get going before your father shows
up.

JULIE: Yeah, he was schmoozing voters at the retirement center, and they all retire pretty early! Night!

ROZ: Night, Julie.

WILL: *(To Julie.)* Farewell, peace be unto thee.

JULIE: Gosh, Billy, you sure got a way with words. *(Exits SL.)*

ROZ: *(To Will.)* And you, good sir, take your leave and surrender to the Land of Nod.

WILL: Ah! At last! One who speaks my language!

(Will kisses Roz's hand and exits SL. Roz picks up Julie's box of props and exits SR. Will sneaks back on, grabs a blanket and the pillow from Vinny's box, and hides behind one of the flats. Roz enters SR, picks up the other box, and exits SR. A moment later, Roz, carrying her purse and car keys, enters SR. She pauses CS and looks around.)

ROZ: *(To herself.)* You might not be much, Avon Little Theater, but you're mine! And I plan to keep you. Somehow!

(Roz exits SL. Sound of the door closing and locking. Will steps out from behind the flat.)

WILL: *(To himself.)* I fear I've traveled swiftly from the frying pan into the fire! Though the problem I now face isn't even mine own. 'Tis the problem of a lovely lady, and I knowest in my heart that I must help, but how? Oh, where's a sorcerer when you need one?

(Sound of keys in door and the door opening. Will slips behind the flats again.)

CLEO: *(Off SL.)* I thought they'd never leave!

FRED: *(Off SL.)* Yeah, well, they did. So let's get busy!

(Cleo and Fred enter SL. Cleo is carrying a tape measure and a clipboard.)

CLEO: You sound a bit jittery, Freddie, my boy!

FRED: This place gives me the creeps, especially at night.

CLEO: Oh, Freddie, you're not scared, are you?

FRED: Didn't you ever see "The Phantom of the Opera"?

CLEO: *(Laughs.)* When I was six and I thought it was a comedy!

FRED: You would.

CLEO: *(Hard, businesslike.)* Listen here, Frederick LeBeau, you're my nephew and you asked me to teach you the business. In memory of your dear, departed mother, I'm doing just that.

FRED: Yeah, well, you haven't taught me how to pull the rug out from under this starry-eyed spittfire who owns this place.

CLEO: I'm workin' on it! Timbuktu wasn't built in a day.

FRED: The place still gives me the creeps.

CLEO: Yeesh!

FRED: Old theaters always have ghosts wandering around.

CLEO: What ghosts?

FRED: All the frustrated actors who didn't get parts.

CLEO: They haunt their agents' offices, Freddie, my boy. Now, here, take this end of the tape measure.

FRED: Can I ask why, Aunt Cleo?

CLEO: We're measuring the place.

FRED: For what?

CLEO: The Megagrab Development Corporation wants all the stats.

FRED: They're the ones you're gonna sell this place to?

CLEO: Convention center, Freddie, my boy! They want to put up a mega resort right here with this old place restored as the main theater.

FRED: Why don't you just tell Roz what's-her-name and let her sell it?

CLEO: Freddie, Freddie, Freddie. Think, boy, think! How would I make any money off a deal like that?

FRED: You could charge her a finder's fee.

CLEO: Freddie, when I go into a Mexican restaurant, I don't order half an enchilada. I want the whole enchilada, get it?

FRED: You're making me hungry.

CLEO: (*Indicating tape measure.*) Then hold this end over there, and let's see how big this stage is.

(*Fred walks SL as Cleo walks SR, stretching the tape measure between them. A noise is heard from behind the flat. Fred freezes.*)

FRED: What was that?

CLEO: (*Frustrated.*) The building settling!

FRED: It's a hundred years old. Isn't it settled by now?

CLEO: Hold the end of the tape, please!

FRED: Yes, ma'am.

(*Fred holds the tape end. Cleo measures.*)

CLEO: [Twenty-five feet, six inches.] (*Marks it on her clipboard.*) [*Or insert the width of your stage.*]

FRED: Hey, how'd you get the key to the place?

CLEO: Before Roz bought this place, I came over and checked it out with the Realtor who was handling it. When she wasn't looking, I made an impression and here we are.

FRED: Wow, you sure planned everything out.

CLEO: (*Proudly.*) How do you think I got where I am today?

FRED: (*Puzzled.*) Where are you, anyway?

CLEO: On my way to a mega deal! It'll mean a Jaguar instead of a Honda, a swimming pool instead of a gym pass, and steak instead of macaroni and cheese!

FRED: I like macaroni and cheese. (*Will moans from behind the flat. Frightened.*) Aunt Cleo!

CLEO: An old water pipe.

(Will moans again.)

FRED: Another old water pipe?

CLEO: They just gurgle once in awhile.

WILL: *(From behind flat, hoarsely.)* Who goes there?

FRED: They're gurgling in English!

CLEO: Somebody's in here! Go back there and check!

WILL: *(From behind flat, hoarsely.)* Take your leave at once.

FRED: I don't think those water pipes are friendly.

WILL: *(From behind flat, hoarsely.)* Go!

CLEO: Check it out, Freddie!

WILL: *(From behind flat, hoarsely.)* Or die!

(Fred screams and races off SL.)

CLEO: *(Calls.)* Freddie! Get back here! *(Footsteps are heard coming from behind the flat.)* Who's that? Who's there? *(Cleo approaches to the flat and looks off SR. Will sticks a mop out from behind the flat.)* Roz? Are you still here? *(To herself.)* No, I'm sure we saw you lock up and drive away. *(Stiffening.)* Cleo DeVille, what kind of idiot are you? There's nobody here! This place is deserted!

(Will lowers the mop and dusts the top of Cleo's head and shoulders with it. She screams and runs off SL. Will steps out from behind the flat with the mop in hand.)

WILL: To haunt, or not to haunt: that is the question!

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: The stage of the Avon Little Theater, the following evening. Roz is on her cell phone. Will is painting one of the flats upstage.)

ROZ: (*Into phone.*) Mr. LeBeau, you don't seem to understand. I have the money I owe Squeezy Collection Agency. You can come pick it up...What do you mean you won't come here?...Send it?...I suppose I could, but I thought you wanted it right away...How did I get it? I robbed a bank...You're not laughing. Actually, I pawned some old props and things. I guess you aren't too anxious to get the money, so I'll send it whenever. Goodbye. (*Hangs up.*) That's weird. He says he won't step foot in this place again.

WILL: Perchance he harbors a fear of players and playhouses.

ROZ: It didn't stop him yesterday. Oh, well, I've got the money from pawning all that stuff, and it'll give me a bit of a cushion until the tickets start to sell.

(*Richard enters SL, dragging Ophelia with him.*)

RICHARD: Please, Ophelia, help us out.

OPHELIA: Professor Gladstone, this isn't really my thing!

RICHARD: You're a reporter, aren't you?

OPHELIA: You know I am! And if you hadn't taught me how to write, I wouldn't have a job.

RICHARD: There, you see, you owe me!

OPHELIA: But I don't want to stay on the staff of the "Avon Advertiser" forever.

RICHARD: No one expects you to. One little publicity story on a local theater opening with a new show isn't going to damage your reputation.

OPHELIA: I don't even have a reputation.

RICHARD: I rest my case.

ROZ: Hi, I'm Roz Pickafleur. You must be Ophelia Bloomenthal. I've read your stories in the "Advertiser."

OPHELIA: Really?

ROZ: Always perceptive and incisive.

OPHELIA: Yeah, I'm really good at writing obituaries.

WILL: The last word is often the most important, dear lady.

OPHELIA: Oh, my!

ROZ: This is Will. He's all the way from Stratford, and he's playing the part of Sheriff Titus.

WILL: *(With a terrible Texan drawl.)* Howdeee, y'all.

OPHELIA: I'm sure you're very good.

RICHARD: Yes, well, for a novice, he's perfectly inadequate.

ROZ: Oh, Richard, stop being such a snob. Everybody has to start somewhere. Even your beloved William Shakespeare had to begin at the bottom.

RICHARD: Oh, Roz, he oozed talent and determination from the moment he was born.

WILL: I did? I do?

RICHARD: Oh, no! He now fancies himself The Bard. And I thought global warming was disastrous!

(Vinny enters followed by Gertrude.)

VINNY: Ma! Get off my case, okay?

GERTRUDE: Do you know what he did to my car?

VINNY: I know! I know!

OPHELIA: Well, well, well! If it isn't Gertrude Romero.

GERTRUDE: And who are you?

ROZ: Ophelia Bloomenthal from the "Avon Advertiser."

GERTRUDE: The press?

VINNY: Ma! You say one thing—

GERTRUDE: Ms. Bloomenthal, have I got a story for you!

OPHELIA: *(Excited.)* Shoot!

GERTRUDE: Do you know what Mayor Julius Gillette did to my car?

OPHELIA: *(Excitedly.)* Flattened your tires?

GERTRUDE: No! Worse!

RICHARD: Slashed your tires?

GERTRUDE: Worse!

ROZ: Wrapped it around a tree?

GERTRUDE: (*Dissolving into tears.*) Much worse!

OPHELIA: Oh, gosh! Clear the front page!

VINNY: He stuck a "Gillette for Mayor" bumper sticker on her car, that's what.

OPHELIA: That's it?

GERTRUDE: It won't come off! (*Cries.*)

OPHELIA: I'm never going to get a great story.

VINNY: Ma, don't you got a lawyer to see or something?

GERTRUDE: You're right! And I'm taking your car so nobody can see that bumper sticker.

VINNY: Too late. I got three of 'em on mine.

(*Gertrude wails and runs off SL as Portia, Bianca, Emilia, Olivia, and Kate enter SL.*)

PORTIA: Gosh, Vinny, your mom looks like she saw a ghost.

WILL: Perhaps she has.

ROZ: What are you talking about, Billy?

WILL: I had a funny feeling when I first saw this place yesterday.

RICHARD: It had a funny feeling when it saw you, too.

VINNY: Now, wait a minute. I get the creeps here sometimes.

RICHARD: Only because Julie's mother may well be hanging around.

VINNY: No, last night right before we left, Julie and I collected props and stuff to pawn.

ROZ: And I thank you! I got over 300 dollars for all that.

VINNY: Yeah, well, I was downstairs by myself, but I'm sure somebody else was down there.

OPHELIA: Maybe there was.

VINNY: There's no outside door in the basement. And everybody else was up here.

RICHARD: I hate to say it, but it could have been a rather pretentious rodent.

VINNY: Could have, but wasn't. Somebody or something tapped me on my shoulder, but when I turned around, nobody was there.

ROZ: You didn't say anything.

VINNY: Hey, I got a rep to protect.

ROZ: Mr. LeBeau sounded awfully scared to come here, too. He ran off during a sudden blackout.

OPHELIA: Maybe he saw something, too!

(Portia, Emilia, Bianca, Olivia, and Kate enter SL.)

PORTIA: I'm sure it was nothing, Emilia.

EMILIA: I don't know. It was sure creepy.

ROZ: Hi, guys. What was creepy, Emilia?

BIANCA: When we left last night, something tried to grab Emilia.

EMILIA: It didn't exactly try to grab me.

OLIVIA: It was like a big cobweb brushing by your face, right?

EMILIA: Except there weren't any cobwebs there.

KATE: I think you're exaggerating, Emilia, but I don't know why.

(Will approaches Emilia.)

WILL: *(To Emilia.)* My dear lady, thou art still shaking.

KATE: Now I know!

OPHELIA: Look, guys, this building is pretty old, isn't it?

ROZ: Built in 1907.

OPHELIA: So it's seen its share of tragedies, right?

RICHARD: The last one was that dreadful production of The Bard's glorious "Comedy of Errors," which turned out more like the errors of comedy.

OPHELIA: I don't mean that kind of tragedy.

WILL: This morrow I troubled myself to ask of an older gentleman at the...book depository—

RICHARD: Benjamin Forsythe at the library?

WILL: The same. I asked if any strange or unusual happenings were ever recorded about this playhouse.

ROZ: What'd he say?

RICHARD: Did he go on and on about Desmond Ripley?

VINNY: The guy from "Believe It or Not"?

RICHARD: Hardly. Ripley was an amateur actor.

WILL: Long ago.

BIANCA: How far back?

WILL: Oh, well...I mean...quite...quite...

RICHARD: 1921. At least that's when he died.

EMILIA: Oh, gosh! Here? In this theater?

WILL: He did. *(Pause.)* Didn't he?

RICHARD: 'Fraid so.

ROZ: Well, that was an awfully long time ago.

WILL: But his spirit still walks! Spirits know nothing of time...only their own torment.

OLIVIA: I'm getting goose bumps.

KATE: How ridiculously female!

WILL: Thou wouldst be terrified, too, if you knew the whole story.

PORTIA: What happened to this...Desmond Ripley?

WILL: It's...it's too horrible to say, don't you agree, Professor Gladstone?

RICHARD: Really, Billy, they've been raised on Stephen King.

WILL: Of what realm is he king?

OPHELIA: Nightmares, terror, and all sorts of horrible things!

ROZ: Richard, what about Ripley?

RICHARD: Ripley was to be a bit player in The Bard's "King Lear."

BIANCA: "There are no small parts, only small actors."

WILL: I like that!

RICHARD: You should know. Anyway, nothing about Ripley's talent was ever recorded that I found. Rather, it was his love life that made the headlines.

OPHELIA: Mind if I tape this? It's getting good, Professor.

RICHARD: Not particularly. It seems Ripley fell in love with Cordelia. I mean the actress playing Cordelia. I can't quite remember her name...Polly...Polly something.

VINNY: You remember, Billy?

WILL: (*Caught.*) Why, I believe it was...perchance...

RICHARD: Provance. That's it. Polly Provance.

EMILIA: Did she love him?

RICHARD: She must have said she did. He went out the day before the play was to open and bought her a ring.

VINNY: Blew a bundle, I bet!

RICHARD: Every cent he had.

OLIVIA: But he gave her the ring and she said no!

KATE: Smart girl.

RICHARD: Not exactly. Ripley arrived at the dress rehearsal early knowing that Polly always arrived early because her bus was early. Anyway, he apparently planned to propose before the rehearsal.

PORTIA: How romantic!

RICHARD: He was until he saw Polly—his Polly—in the arms of King Lear. I mean the actor playing King Lear.

ROZ: Oh, no!

RICHARD: Oh, yes! Perhaps you'd like to finish the story, Billy?

WILL: Oh, I daresay thou art a master storyteller. Pray, continue.

RICHARD: There's not much to tell, really. Ripley ran up to the attic of the building, then climbed that small tower up there, and jumped to his death. (*Reactions of horror.*) And when they found him, he still had the ring clutched in his hand.

WILL: To this day, he wanders the theater looking for his Polly. Polly? Polly, are you here?

OPHELIA: Professor, I want to see where this happened! I need a couple of pictures!

ROZ: You're not going to write about this, are you?

OPHELIA: I'm not? It's the most interesting thing to happen in this town since the water main broke and flooded [Dairy Queen]. *[Or insert the name of another restaurant.]*

PORTIA: But everybody will think the place is haunted.

WILL: Will they not be intrigued?

KATE: Didn't somebody say there's no such thing as bad publicity?

OPHELIA: Especially if the ghost has suddenly become active!

RICHARD: Roz, might we adjourn to the attic?

ROZ: This way, troupe!

(Roz exits SR, followed by all others except Vinny. Vinny suddenly hears "Pssst!" behind him.)

VINNY: Who's that? *(Another "pssst" is heard.)* Your name ain't Desmond Ripley, is it?

(Julie enters SL.)

JULIE: It's just me.

(Vinny hugs Julie.)

VINNY: Baby, it's never just you.

JULIE: *(Pushing him away.)* You're sweet, Vinny, but we've got a new problem.

VINNY: Are our parents acting like kids again? I sure wish they'd grow up.

JULIE: Yeah, I don't know how long we're supposed to keep bailing them out.

VINNY: What is it this time?

JULIE: Your mother is having my father investigated for racketeering.

VINNY: She doesn't even know what that is!

JULIE: Neither do I, but it sounds good and can kill daddy's chances at re-election.

VINNY: Oh, Julie, I'm sorry. I just wish we could disappear and forget about it all.

JULIE: Maybe that would knock some sense into them.

VINNY: What a great idea!

JULIE: What?

VINNY: We disappear!

JULIE: You're not serious.

VINNY: Oh, no?

JULIE: Where would we go?

VINNY: That new guy, Billy. We'll go to his place.

JULIE: Where does he live?

VINNY: Who knows? We'll disappear and then find out.

JULIE: How do we disappear?

VINNY: *(Screams.)* Oh, no! No! Leave Julie alone! Help! Help! Ripley! Get your hands off her! *(Urges Julie to scream.)* Help! Help!

(With a final loud scream, Vinny takes off his ring, and Julie takes off a bracelet. They drop the items and run behind the flats. All come running in SL.)

ROZ: Vinny? Julie?

PORTIA: What happened?

EMILIA: Where are you guys?

RICHARD: Mr. Romero! Ms. Gillette! Show yourselves at once!

OLIVIA: I...I heard Vinny shout that name!

KATE: Desmond Ripley!

BIANCA: Ripley! Get your hands off her!

ROZ: No! This is ridiculous! There's no such thing as a ghost!

OPHELIA: (*Excited.*) Oh, no? This is my ticket out of Avon!
Clear the front page! (*Races off SL.*)

ROZ: We've just got to look for them. They're here
someplace.

PORTIA: Emilia, Bianca, and Olivia will check stage right and
left.

RICHARD: Kate, Roz, and I will check the basement.

WILL: And I shall check backstage.

ROZ: You'll be all right by yourself?

WILL: Oh, my dear Rosalyn, there is little that can any longer
strike terror into this rugged heart.

RICHARD: Oh, puh-leeze!

[END OF FREEVIEW]