

**SCROOGE MACBETH**

by

David MacGregor

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800-950-7529  
[customerservice@heuerpub.com](mailto:customerservice@heuerpub.com)

### Setting

A community theatre.

### Time

Now and then.

### Cast

BOB - Co-executive director of the Hartland Community Theatre, plumber, and husband of SYLVIA (30s-50s).

SYLVIA - Co-executive director of the Hartland Community Theatre, intellectual property attorney, and wife of BOB (30s-50s).

VICTOR - Co-artistic director of the Hartland Community Theatre, English professor, and husband of RENEE (30s-50s).

RENEE - Co-artistic director of the Hartland Community Theatre, kindergarten teacher, and wife of VICTOR (30s-50s).

STAGE MANAGER - A middle-aged to elderly woman of difficult temperament, who apparently came with the building.

(NOTE: The word "goddamned" is used twice in the play. If this is considered objectionable, it can be dropped if so desired.)

(SYLVIA sits with a laptop and BOB is on his phone nearby, both half-dressed for tonight's show. Behind them is a painted backdrop of empty seats to give the impression that the audience is looking out into the auditorium. Perhaps some footlights at the back wall add to this effect. These footlights are twinned at the actual front of the stage. There are two open curtains, one against the back wall which will be used to cover up the backdrop, and one hung at half-stage. When closed, this curtain will separate "onstage" from "backstage." Characters will simply go through the curtain, then turn around and reappear to move between these two spaces. Off the "backstage" space is an exit that leads to an unseen green-room/storeroom/dressing room area, from which characters can enter or exit. SYLVIA types numbers into a spreadsheet and shakes her head at what she sees. She puts her hand through her hair and runs the numbers again. As she does all this, BOB talks on his phone, just far enough away from SYLVIA to make it plausible that she can't hear him.)

BOB

Oh no...oh my gosh...I'm so sorry. In the car? Well... that'll clean up...they've got, what do you call them, solvents and special detergents for that kind of thing, I'm pretty sure...yeah...and the smell should go away eventually...Projectile, huh?...Right into the air vents... that's not good. Jerry, are you--?

(he winces as he listens to  
horrible retching sounds)

I'm gonna let you go. You take care now.

(BOB hangs up just as the STAGE MANAGER shuffles past him, aided by her quad cane [a walking cane with four feet]. Her voice is the bored monotone of someone for whom death cannot come soon enough.)

STAGE MANAGER

Fifteen minutes to places.

(BOB brightens up reflexively and SYLVIA looks up as well.)

BOB AND SYLVIA

Thank you, fifteen minutes!

(The STAGE MANAGER doesn't pause or look back as she exits.)

STAGE MANAGER

It's what I live for.

(BOB approaches SYLVIA.)

BOB

I think we might have a little problem.

SYLVIA

What now?

BOB

I just talked to Jerry.

SYLVIA

Good! He finally showed up?

BOB

No. He...I guess he and Theresa went out to dinner last night with Carl and Diane. And the Bernsteins went too. They went to that new buffet place out on Highland Road [or preferably, the name of a local road].

SYLVIA

Okay. Why are you telling me this?

BOB

Well, I guess the food maybe wasn't quite as fresh as it could have been. Yeah. So, he was calling me from the hospital. They're all in there with food poisoning.

SYLVIA

All six of them?

BOB

Pretty much. But Victor and Renee are here! They're getting into costume.

SYLVIA

Let me get this straight. It's just going to be you and me and Victor and Renee tonight?

BOB

That's what it's looking like.

(VICTOR and RENEE enter in Shakespearean attire, each pushing a rack full of costumes. They are glowing with happiness and in character.)

VICTOR

A sad tale's best for winter: I have one  
Of sprites and goblins.

RENEE

Let's have that, good sir.  
Come on, sit down: come on, and do your best  
To fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it.

(VICTOR and RENEE laugh and kiss.)

VICTOR

Come on you two!  
(indicating the two racks)  
Into costume! We've got a play to do! *The Winter's Tale*  
awaits!

SYLVIA

Actually--

VICTOR

Do you know what tonight is? This night, tonight, will be  
the pinnacle of my career. To perform Shakespeare in my own  
community, surrounded by my best friends in the world. This  
is the best Christmas present I could have ever asked for!

SYLVIA

Yeah, well, Christmas is going to have to wait. Apparently,  
the rest of the cast has it coming out both ends at St.  
Mary's [or preferably, the name of a local hospital].

RENEE

Coming out both ends?

(For RENEE's benefit, BOB mimes  
projectile vomiting and violent  
diarrhea. RENEE's features twist in  
horror as understanding dawns.)

SYLVIA

So, that's that.

BOB

Wait, what are you saying? We're still doing the show.

SYLVIA

Bob, we can't do *The Winter's Tale* with four people!

BOB

Well, it might not be quite like we rehearsed it, but couldn't we just double up on some of the parts?

SYLVIA

We were already doubling parts! The original play has over twenty characters in it! We were trying to do it with ten, and now you think we can do it with four?

RENEE

But we can't cancel the show! Tonight's our big holiday premiere!

VICTOR

We've already sold thirty-two tickets!

SYLVIA

That's not exactly a sell-out, Victor! And ten of those are comps. That's why, when I checked out our presale numbers, I thought I'd better take a look at our budget.

RENEE

And?

SYLVIA

Okay, I'm a lawyer, not an accountant, but we didn't exactly help ourselves by opening our "season of classics" with *Waiting for Godot*...

(BOB and RENEE shake their heads at the unpleasant memory.)

BOB

What was that even about?

RENEE

Godot was just being rude to those nice men.

SYLVIA

...and I know we all thought that doing some Shakespeare during the holidays would be a good idea, but based on our projected ticket sales...

(She turns the laptop and the others crowd around to see. They react like they're looking at a dead puppy.)

RENEE

It wasn't such a good idea.

VICTOR

So, how bad is it?

SYLVIA

This theatre's been on life-support for the past three years. With these ticket sales and only half a cast...let's face it. It's time to pull the plug.

VICTOR

But Sylvia, we're opening tonight! People are coming to see the Hartland Community Theatre's presentation of a Shakespearean classic!

SYLVIA

It's just not going to happen. We'll refund whatever money we can and--

BOB

You can't be serious! There must be something we can do!

SYLVIA

Sure. All we need is our best-selling show ever and we can stay in business. But do any of you honestly think that's going to happen with *The Winter's Tale*?

(The others open their mouths to reply, then pause, cold reality sinking in.)

VICTOR

So, you're saying we're done.

BOB

I can't believe this.

RENEE

But Sylvia, you can't just...Victor and I happen to be the artistic directors of this theatre!

SYLVIA

And Bob and I are the executive directors. What difference does it make? If we're out of money, we're out of money. And we're out of money.

VICTOR

But Sylvia, the show must go on!

SYLVIA

Not this show.

(The STAGE MANAGER shuffles through on her way to the booth. At the sound of her cane clumping on the floor, all of the characters jump into their individual warm-up routines.)

STAGE MANAGER

I'm opening the house. Ten minutes to places.

ALL  
 (reflexively)  
 Thank you, ten minutes!

STAGE MANAGER  
 Ah, what the hell...

(The cast pull the half-stage curtain closed. The STAGE MANAGER exits, grumbling indecipherably. At this point [or when practical] the second curtain should be closed to cover up the painted backdrop of seats, which is not seen again.)

BOB  
 You know what our problem is? I've said this all along. Marketing! We needed a better way to sell *The Winter's Tale*. It's not one of Shakespeare's big guns, heck, for all we know, it's one of the plays he didn't actually write!

VICTOR  
 Oh my God...William Shakespeare wrote his own plays! All of them!

BOB  
 That's not what I've heard. Anyway, my point is, we should have been out there at the senior center and the gas stations with, you know, marketing stuff.

VICTOR  
 And with a more popular play, thank you very much! Didn't I say that? I did! I said all along we should do *Othello*.

BOB  
 And why did you keep saying we should do *Othello*?

VICTOR  
 Because I would be a kick-ass *Othello*!

(NOTE: By all means skip the next five lines if the actor playing VICTOR happens to be African American.)

SYLVIA  
 Victor, you're not black!

VICTOR  
 What is that supposed to mean?

SYLVIA  
 (fighting speechlessness)  
 It means you're not black! And *Othello* is a black character!



VICTOR

Technically, he's a Moor, you know, a North African. Conceivably, a very light-skinned Moor, or a Moor with a skin condition...like Michael Jackson!

SYLVIA

We are not doing *Othello* with a skin condition! And we can't do *The Winter's Tale* with four people!

BOB

Then how about this? Let's put *The Winter's Tale* on the back burner, yes? And tonight, we'll go out there and do...A *Christmas Carol*, just like we always have! Word will get out, we'll finish our season, then take a look at our marketing plan.

RENEE

Could we do that?

BOB

Of course! Look, we've done *A Christmas Carol* the past six years! We all know the lines well enough, and--

SYLVIA

--and the reason we're not doing it this year is because people didn't come last year. They're sick to death of it.

BOB

Then let's mix it up a little! I know! Let's make Scrooge a woman! Or gay! There you go! We'll make Scrooge a lesbian! A lesbian who learns the true meaning of Christmas! That's very progressive! Who's with me?

(BOB and RENEE shoot their hands in the air.)

VICTOR

Let me tell you something, amigo. I categorically refuse to do *A Christmas Carol* again. Not now, not ever. I don't care if we make Scrooge a lesbian, an astronaut, or a transvestite pirate.

(RENEE makes a little sound of excitement and nods enthusiastically at this idea, but VICTOR ignores her and plows on.)

VICTOR

I have played Ebenezer Scrooge. And Bob Cratchit. And Marley's Ghost. And every single one of the freaking Christmas Spirits! In fact, if I think about it, the only character I have never played is Goose Boy.

BOB

Goose Boy?

VICTOR

At the end. You know, the street urchin that goes to buy the goose for Scrooge. So, no. I am not doing *A Christmas Carol* again. Not in this lifetime or in my next ten lifetimes! It's Shakespeare or nothing!

SYLVIA

Then we just have to face the fact that--

RENEE

Why don't we do both?

SYLVIA

Both what?

RENEE

Let's do both! A Christmasy Shakespeare. Or a Shakespearean Christmas. We'll call it...

(She looks at the others hopefully.)

BOB

*Scrooge Macbeth?*

RENEE

Yes! *Scrooge Macbeth!* Who wouldn't want to see a play called *Scrooge Macbeth?*

VICTOR

Sweetheart, I know you mean well, but Shakespeare and Christmas do not mix. They have never mixed. Christmas was not a big deal in Shakespeare's day, which is why he never wrote about it.

BOB

Hang on...a Christmasy Shakespeare. I like it. Sylvia?

SYLVIA

If it brings in a paying audience, I love it.

VICTOR

Listen to you three! Is that what we've come to? Is that how low we are willing to stoop? A Shakespearean Christmas? It's asinine! It's a travesty! We would be making a mockery of the greatest writer in the history of the English language.

RENEE

Are you positive Shakespeare never wrote about Christmas? I seem to remember something--

VICTOR

No, you don't. I have taught Shakespeare classes at the university for thirteen years and trust me, there is no North Pole in *Twelfth Night* and no toy-making elves in *As You Like It*. You're mistaken.

BOB

What if she's not mistaken? It's a great combination! Shakespeare and Christmas...

RENEE

It's like peanut butter and jelly!

SYLVIA

Or gin and vermouth.

RENEE

Exactly! Let's put them together for one night and see what happens!

BOB

We've already got the Shakespeare costumes--  
 (rifling through one of the  
 racks of costumes)  
 --king, nobleman, lady...bear.  
 (pulls out the bear costume)  
 Everybody loves bears!  
 (swinging a paw)  
 RAWWWRR!

RENEE

(rifling through the other rack)  
 And we still have the *Christmas Carol* costumes we've used every year, not to mention the Santa outfit from last year's fund-raiser! What else? Sylvia?

SYLVIA

I suppose we've got the holiday decorations in the lobby we could drag in here--

RENEE

(clapping her hands excitedly)  
 Yes! Some tinsel, some twinkly lights, it will be wonderful! Victor? What do you say?

(VICTOR hesitates, looking dubious.)

BOB

Hey, I'm in! And I'll let you in on a little secret. I'm a plumber. I'm not real strong on Shakespeare.

VICTOR

That's not exactly a secret.

RENEE

Victor, don't be a bucket-dipper.

VICTOR

I am not a bucket-dipper!

RENEE

You're acting like a bucket-dipper.

VICTOR

And I am not one of your kindergarten students! I just think this whole Shakespearean Christmas idea is...it's...

RENEE

Victor, what happens tomorrow morning? You go back to teaching illiterate freshmen, Bob unclogs toilets, Sylvia looks for contract loopholes, and I take Kyle Duckworth down to the school nurse because he ate another jar of Play-Doh and has it coming out both ends.

VICTOR

Okay...so?

RENEE

So, that's why we need this theatre! Because without it, we're just...we're just us.

VICTOR

You know what? Fine. If you can prove that Shakespeare ever wrote about Christmas, then fine. But he didn't. And that's that.

BOB

I say we Google it.

VICTOR

Google away! Google to your heart's content! But you're wasting your time.

(SYLVIA taps rapidly at the keys on her laptop. BOB and RENEE huddle around her as VICTOR stands aloof.)

SYLVIA

Shakespeare...Christmas...here it is! Apparently, he only mentions Christmas once, in all of his plays, but here it is!

VICTOR

Here what is?

RENEE

(reading)

At Christmas I no more desire a rose  
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth;  
But like of each thing that in season grows.

VICTOR

Where's that from?

BOB

*Love's Labour's Lost.*

VICTOR

(reading from the laptop)

At Christmas, I no more desire a rose...

(looking around at the others)

Well, you know, to be perfectly honest, it's possible I've never actually read *Love's Labour's Lost*.

RENEE

Or you might have forgot it.

VICTOR

I might have! That's true. That's probably it! But here it is...Shakespeare does mention Christmas...

(The STAGE MANAGER walks through.)

STAGE MANAGER

Five minutes to places.

ALL

Thank you, five minutes!

STAGE MANAGER

Whatever.

(SYLVIA, BOB, and RENEE look at VICTOR expectantly.)

VICTOR

You know, I think Renee's onto something. I do. A Shakespearean Christmas! It makes perfect sense. Why has no one ever thought of this before?

BOB

It was too obvious?

VICTOR

That's it! Here it is, it's been staring people in the face for hundreds of years, and we're the first ones to actually see it! Do you know what we're experiencing right here, right now?

(MORE)

VICTOR (cont'd)  
 (as the others shrug or shake  
 their heads)

The perfect post-modern moment! We are about to create a pastiche, a collage, a blending and bringing together of humanity's two greatest narratives--Shakespeare and Christmas! Tonight marks a turning point in theatrical history! The stage will never be the same!

BOB  
 Great! So we're all on board?

SYLVIA  
 On board with what, exactly?

RENEE  
 What we've been talking about. A Shakespearean Christmas!

BOB  
 A Christmasy Shakespeare!

VICTOR  
 (singing to the tune of  
 "Frosty the Snowman")  
 Shakespeare, the playwright, was a jolly happy soul.  
 With an older wife and a dark mistress,  
 In the hay with whom he'd roll...

RENEE  
 Yes! That's my little bucket-filler!

(RENEE kisses VICTOR on the cheek and  
 rushes offstage.)

VICTOR  
 Now, since Renee and I are the more experienced Shakespearean actors, we'll handle the Shakespearean scenes with a Christmas flavor. You two do the Christmas scenes with a Shakespearean flavor.

SYLVIA  
 Hang on just one second. What's the quid pro quo here, exactly? Okay, we do this show and--

(RENEE rushes back on carrying a box  
 that is marked "Shakespearean Props.")

RENEE  
 We save our theatre!

SYLVIA  
 But how will a Christmasy Shakespeare--

RENEE

If people like it, if they really like it, we can make enough money to stay open, right?

BOB

Right! You just said the same thing, Sylvia. All we need is a hit!

RENEE

So if tonight's audience likes this show and word gets out, then we have a chance!

VICTOR

We're leaving our fate up to the audience?

RENEE

Why not?

SYLVIA

Because every audience is different, that's why not! Is it a matinee or an evening show? Are the Red Hat Ladies here or are the Red Hat Ladies not here? Are they drunk or not drunk? Audiences are like pet chimpanzees. One night they're sweet and cuddly and the next night they rip your face off. How do we know what kind of audience is out there?

VICTOR

That's a good point. Remember that Friday night show after Thanksgiving last year?

(They all shudder at a particularly vivid memory and BOB bursts into tears.)

SYLVIA

Oh, Bob, honey...it's over.

(VICTOR gives BOB a reassuring pat on the back as BOB struggles to compose himself.)

RENEE

All right, then if we don't trust the whole audience, we do the show for...Mrs. Kringle!

SYLVIA

Who?

(RENEE points to the curtain.)

RENEE

Mrs. Kringle!

BOB

(heading for the curtain to  
peek through it)

You know someone named Mrs. Kringle?

RENEE

No! And maybe Mrs. Kringle isn't out there. Maybe tonight,  
it's Mr. Kringle.

VICTOR

Sweetheart, you're not making any sense.

RENEE

Mrs. Kringle is out there. She's always out there.  
Practical yet idealistic, cynical yet romantic, week after  
week she watches play after play, hoping to be moved, to be  
inspired, wanting nothing more than to feel that sense of  
communion you can only receive from live theatre. Yes, life  
may have worn her down, but beneath her exterior lies a  
smoldering sensuality that roars through her body like the  
Niagara River pouring over the Falls. She *is* theatre. *She*  
is our audience. And she's out there...somewhere.

BOB

Okay, I get what you're saying. But how will we know if this  
Mrs. Kringle likes our play?

VICTOR

Simple. She gives us a standing ovation.

RENEE

Not necessarily. But if we touch her...we'll know. That's  
part of the magic of what we do here, the relationship  
between us and the audience. I don't know how we'll know...  
but we'll know.

(BOB, VICTOR, and SYLVIA mull this  
over, until...)

VICTOR

Works for me!

BOB

I am in!

RENEE

Yay! Here you go, Bob!

(RENEE hands BOB the box of props.)

BOB

What's this?



RENEE

Our entire collection of Shakespearean props!

(As VICTOR enthuses, he and RENEE start clearing the stage. They grab SYLVIA's chair and laptop, then push the two racks of costumes towards the exit.)

VICTOR

This is wonderful! My God, I can feel my adrenaline flowing. This is why we do theatre! The sheer life, the spontaneity of it! The pure act of inspired creation in front of a live audience! I've never felt so alive! Anyway...break a leg you two!

(VICTOR and RENEE exit.)

BOB

Isn't this exciting?

SYLVIA

Bob, we have no idea what we're doing.

BOB

Well, let's try and stay positive.

SYLVIA

Oh my God...

(SYLVIA crosses herself.)

BOB

You're not Catholic, Sylvia.

SYLVIA

I am now.

BOB

You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to focus on a happy thought. And that's what you need to do. Find a happy thought.

(SYLVIA shakes her head)

You can do it.

(SYLVIA is still coming up empty)

Sylvia...you're not trying.

(SYLVIA still has nothing and BOB snaps at her)

Sylvia, find a goddamned happy thought!

SYLVIA

Got one!

BOB

Good! What is it?

SYLVIA

I probably don't have a brain tumor.

BOB

Fine. Run with that. Just remember that our job, our only job, is to make Mrs. Kringle happy.

(checking his watch)

Thirty seconds to curtain.

(They adjust their positions slightly as they face the curtain, waiting for the show's opening announcement as if it's their execution.)

BOB

Maybe we should sing a Christmas carol like Victor did.

SYLVIA

I can't sing, Bob.

BOB

You could try.

SYLVIA

Not gonna happen.

BOB

But this is a special situation.

SYLVIA

You're a special situation.

BOB

I really think you need to expand your horizons.

SYLVIA

I'm going to expand something else if you don't--

(There is a squeal of microphone feedback and the STAGE MANAGER's voice comes over the P.A. system.)

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Good afternoon or evening. Welcome to the Hartland Community Theatre's presentation of *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare. Turn off your phones. Enjoy the show.

(Another squeal of feedback. BOB and SYLVIA disappear through the curtain and then quickly come back through the curtain as lights shift and they are now "onstage." They both take two brisk steps forward, smiling broadly and trying to appear at ease. The action that follows is, as August Strindberg's second wife described their marriage, "a death ride over crackling ice and bottomless depths." It should feel and appear as if the characters are simply making everything up as they go along. Sometimes, the Muses are with them and the words flow effortlessly. At other moments, they are caught like reindeer in headlights as they navigate the artistic high-wire act of their lives.)

SYLVIA

Good evening! Thanks so much for coming! We have a small announcement to make...a slight adjustment in this evening's program. We...um...Bob?

BOB

As it turns out, we're having a small problem securing the performance rights to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, but we're happy to inform you that tonight, on this very stage, you will be witnessing theatrical history. Won't they, Sylvia?

SYLVIA

Yes! A beautiful and timeless production in which we join together Christmas and Shakespeare in an unforgettable evening of magic and joy. In fact, I've just had a wonderful idea, Bob!

BOB

Thank God.

SYLVIA

(shielding her eyes from the lights as she looks up at the booth and waves at the SM)

Do you think you could whip us up a quick Christmas medley?

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

I hate Christmas medleys.

SYLVIA

But if you could just find--

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)  
Everyone hates Christmas medleys.

SYLVIA  
Well, we have some Christmas music, right?

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)  
No.

SYLVIA  
But you haven't even--

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)  
There's nothing. I looked everywhere.

(SYLVIA's face twitches slightly. It's everything she can do not to rush to the booth to strangle the SM.)

SYLVIA  
(through clenched teeth)  
Why do we put up with her?

BOB  
(trying not to move his lips)  
She's the only one who knows how to run the computerized sound and light board. She's a total techno-geek!

SYLVIA  
(snapping on a smile)  
All right then! Bob?

BOB  
What?

SYLVIA  
Why don't you start us off with a little *amuse bouche*, if you will, a hint, a tantalizing fragment of what's to come.

BOB  
Well, I thought I would kick things off with a...Christmasy Shakespeare riddle!

SYLVIA  
A riddle? How fun! I can't wait to hear it!

BOB  
Why...why did King Lear cross the road on Christmas Eve?

SYLVIA  
I don't know! Why?

BOB

To get his ungrateful kids some Christmas presents...which they really didn't deserve...but he felt obliged to get them something...which is why he crossed the road...because the store was on the other side of the road...

(SYLVIA's look is one of consternation and dismay as BOB shrugs his shoulders.)

SYLVIA

Which brings us to our first Shakespearean Christmas carol! "The Twelve Days of Christmas" à la Shakespeare!

BOB

(in an urgent whisper)

We can't do that!

SYLVIA

(whispering through gritted teeth)

Why not?

BOB

(whispering)

Aren't songs protected by copyright or something?

SYLVIA

(smiling at the audience and trying not to move her lips)

Campbell vs. Acuff-Rose Music, 1994 Supreme Court Decision, established that commercial parodies qualify as fair use. We're good. Ready?

(BOB nods slowly, horror in his eyes.)

SYLVIA

Then here we go! "The Twelve Days of Christmas" à la Shakespeare!

(NOTE: There is no avoiding the Bataan Death March feel to this song, but that's part of the fun, as BOB and SYLVIA plunge blindly through it, pulling props from the box and miming the action of various gifts [e.g., stirring witches' brews, stabbing with daggers, drinking poison, etc.] as they go. Every time they reach the chorus, they repeat the action or gesture for each gift as it is mentioned.)

SYLVIA

And a one, and a two...

(singing as best she can)

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

(She turns to BOB, who plunges his arm into the Shakespeare box and pulls out the first thing he grabs--a human skull.)

BOB

(singing)

The skull of a court jester.

SYLVIA

Seriously?

BOB

It was the first thing I grabbed.

SYLVIA

How is that Christmasy?

BOB

It could be.

SYLVIA

No, it couldn't!

BOB

(addressing skull)

Alas poor Tiny Tim. I knew him well.

SYLVIA

I can't believe you just said that.

BOB

Said what?

SYLVIA

The skull of Tiny Tim? You're saying that at the end of *A Christmas Carol*, Tiny Tim dies.

BOB

Well, he's dead by now! The story was written over a hundred years ago! What do you want me to say? It's the skull of Santa Claus?

SYLVIA

Oh my God!

(to audience)

It isn't! No, no, no! That's not the skull of Santa Claus!

(back to BOB)

Are you demented?

BOB

Okay then, it's the skull of...Yukon Cornelius! There! He was licking his pick-axe like always, you know, tasting for silver and gold, and his tongue slipped and the pick-axe went right into his brain.

SYLVIA

(to audience)

He's kidding! He's a kidder! It isn't the skull of Yukon Cornelius. It's the skull of Yorick, the court jester in *Hamlet*.

BOB

That's what I said in the first place!

(SYLVIA stares at BOB for a long beat.)

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

BOB

(singing)

Two...Gentlemen of Verona?

SYLVIA

(whispering)

Much better!

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

And the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(BOB reaches into the box and pulls out the kind of small, black plastic cauldron used for treats at Halloween.)

BOB

(singing)

Three witches' brews...

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(BOB reaches into the box again for inspiration and pulls out a dagger.)

BOB

(singing)

Four bloody daggers!

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

BOB

(singing)

Five shrewish wives!

SYLVIA

(suspicious that BOB has her in mind)

What? Who in their right mind would want five shrewish wives for Christmas?

BOB

I don't know. Some guys might.

SYLVIA

Like who?

BOB

Masochistic polygamists?

SYLVIA

This is supposed to be a Christmas song!

BOB

So what are you saying? Masochistic polygamists can't celebrate Christmas?

SYLVIA

(singing)

Four bloody daggers...

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

...three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...



BOB  
 (singing as he emulates a  
 hunchbacked king)  
 Six hunchbacked kings...

BOB AND SYLVIA  
 (singing)  
 Five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches'  
 brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court  
 jester!

SYLVIA  
 (singing)  
 On the--

BOB  
 (whispering)  
 I don't think I can keep doing this!

SYLVIA  
 (whispering)  
 Halfway there!

BOB  
 (turning the tables and singing)  
 On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(BOB is quite pleased with himself,  
 while SYLVIA has murder in her eyes.)

SYLVIA  
 (singing)  
 Seven...jealous husbands...

BOB AND SYLVIA  
 (singing)  
 Six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody  
 daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and  
 the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA  
 (jumping in before BOB and  
 singing)  
 On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(BOB reaches into the box and pulls out  
 a small vial.)

BOB  
 (singing)  
 Eight vials of poison...

(BOB attempts to drink the poison and  
 SYLVIA slaps his arm.)

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Seven jealous husbands, six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

BOB

(singing)

On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(SYLVIA reaches into the box, grabs an apron or some other article of feminine clothing, and puts it on BOB.)

SYLVIA

(singing)

Nine cross-dressers...

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Eight vials of poison, seven jealous husbands, six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

BOB

(singing)

Ten doomed lovers...

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Nine cross-dressers, eight vials of poison, seven jealous husbands, six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

BOB

(singing)

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(SYLVIA reaches into the box and pulls out a laurel or garland that she places on BOB's head.)

SYLVIA

(singing)

Eleven...forest fairies...

(BOB whips up the audience like a carnival barker.)

BOB

Everybody! Come on! Sing along! You know the words!

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Ten doomed lovers, nine cross-dressers, eight vials of poison, seven jealous husbands, six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

SYLVIA

(singing)

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

(BOB reaches into the box and triumphantly pulls out a truly horrific severed head of Macbeth.)

BOB

(singing)

Twelve severed heads!

SYLVIA

Bring it home, people!

BOB AND SYLVIA

(singing)

Eleven forest fairies, ten doomed lovers, nine cross-dressers, eight vials of poison, seven jealous husbands, six hunchbacked kings, five shrewish wives! Four bloody daggers, three witches' brews, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the skull of a court jester!

(BOB and SYLVIA applaud themselves and the efforts of the audience.)

BOB

That's some Christmas, all right!

SYLVIA

Sounds a lot like my family's Christmas, to tell you the truth.

BOB

And now, without further ado, we proudly present the first staging ever...

SYLVIA

Anywhere!

BOB

...of a classic Shakespearean scene, seasoned lightly with a merry sprig or two of festive Christmas cheer!

(BOB and SYLVIA exit as VICTOR and RENEE enter as Romeo and Juliet, to enact the famous balcony scene. RENEE brings out a ladder decorated with a wreath [ideally festooned with twinkly lights] and climbs atop it. Unfortunately, she finds herself right beneath a powerful light, which practically blinds her.)

VICTOR

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east and Juliet is the sun!  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she.  
It is my lady, O, it is my love!  
O that she knew she were!

RENEE

(shielding her eyes)  
O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

VICTOR

(aside)  
Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

(Mercifully, the light above RENEE dims and she plunges through her next lines with renewed vigor.)

RENEE

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name.  
What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet--

(BOB pops his head through the curtain, then enters as an ecstatically happy Ebenezer Scrooge. He climbs up behind RENEE on the ladder and gives it his best English accent.)

BOB

Hello there! Whoop! Hello! I don't know what to do! I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man! A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world!

(MORE)

BOB (cont'd)  
(looks down at VICTOR)  
You there, boy! What's today?

VICTOR  
What?

BOB  
What's today, my fine fellow?

(SYLVIA enters as a street urchin,  
dragging a fully trimmed Christmas tree  
with her. She speaks with a heavy  
Cockney accent.)

SYLVIA  
Today? Why, it's Christmas Day, Mr. Scrooge! I was just  
delivering this 'ere tree to the Cratchits, I was!

BOB  
(turns to RENEE)  
Did you hear that, Juliet? It's Christmas Day! And a very  
Merry Christmas to you!

(BOB shakes a discombobulated RENEE's  
hand vigorously.)

RENEE  
Forsooth...a Merry Christmas to you too, Mr. Scrooge.

BOB  
I say, is that your young man down there? Hasn't he brought  
you a Christmas present? Most miserly! Most tightfisted and  
ungenerous! I used to be just like you, my fine fellow, but  
I have learned my lesson and intend to mend my ways  
forthwith!

VICTOR  
But I have brought her a present!

(VICTOR holds up a sprig of mistletoe as  
BOB feels RENEE up and down her arms.)

BOB  
Skin and bones! All skin and bones! You know what this  
young lady needs for Christmas?

SYLVIA  
(setting up the Christmas tree)  
A Christmas goose!

BOB  
Precisely!  
(to VICTOR)  
Now you, Goose Boy, go and fetch me a goose!

VICTOR  
Have you lost your mind?

BOB  
Intelligent boy! Remarkable boy! I want the biggest goose you can find! Bring it here and I shall give you a shilling. Come back in less than five minutes and I'll give you half-a-crown!

VICTOR  
I am not getting Juliet a goose for Christmas!

BOB  
No? Wouldn't you like a goose, Juliet?

RENEE  
Why...yes! Yes, I would!

VICTOR  
No, you wouldn't!

BOB  
Well, if you won't give her a goose, I will!

(BOB gooses RENEE in her behind and she jumps and squeals, blushing furiously.)

RENEE  
Goodness! Season's greetings to you too, Mr. Scrooge!

BOB  
There we are! A Christmas goose!

VICTOR  
Oh really? That's how you want to play? Well, as it happens, I did have a Christmas present for Juliet. But since she enjoyed her Christmas goose so much, perhaps I had better give my gift to someone else.

(VICTOR twirls the mistletoe between his fingers.)

BOB  
What's that?

VICTOR  
Mistletoe! Quite a pretty little plant with a very charming tradition associated with it. Are you familiar?

BOB  
Well, I--

VICTOR

Then perhaps a demonstration is in order. I had planned on demonstrating this with my one true love, but since my one true love has developed such a healthy appetite for Christmas geese...

(he turns to SYLVIA)

I say there, street urchin. Would you be so kind as to hold this sprig of mistletoe over your head?

(SYLVIA takes the mistletoe and holds it over her head coquettishly, just as anxious as VICTOR to even the score.)

SYLVIA

Like this, squire?

VICTOR

Just so. Intelligent street urchin. Remarkable street urchin!

BOB

Hang on now--

VICTOR

And observe, good fellow, when you see a fair maiden beneath the mistletoe thusly, it gives you free rein to do this thusly.

(VICTOR grabs SYLVIA and bends her over backwards in a long, passionate kiss. When he releases her, she staggers a little, dazed and breathless.)

VICTOR

And that, Mr. Scrooge, is a very Merry Christmas!

(VICTOR stalks offstage. SYLVIA struggles to locate BOB, then finally sees him and smiles.)

SYLVIA

Hi...what?

BOB

You...get thee to a nunnery, while I give Romeo a good dose of Christmas cheer.

(BOB exits in search of VICTOR. SYLVIA and RENEE stare helplessly at one another. Quickly gathering her wits, SYLVIA turns to the audience.)

SYLVIA

Which brings us to our intermission!

RENEE

What intermission?

SYLVIA

This intermission. The one we're having right now.

RENEE

I didn't know we were having an intermission.

SYLVIA

Well, we are.

RENEE

But it's only been ten minutes--

SYLVIA

Which is as good a time as any for an intermission. So, we'll be right back with the second half of our Shakespearean Christmas celebration. Please chat, mingle, and feel free to visit the bar and drink heavily.

(to herself)

I know I will.

(SYLVIA grabs the Christmas tree and RENEE gets the ladder. They both go through the curtain and then instantly reappear, now "backstage." As they talk, they stow away the ladder and Christmas tree.)

RENEE

Why are you doing this?

SYLVIA

To give us a few minutes to try and figure out a way to save this catastrophe from getting any worse.

RENEE

I think things are going rather well.

SYLVIA

Oh really? We are just pulling things out of our butts, we have no idea what we're doing next, and our husbands are trying to kill one another! Is that your definition of things going well, Miss I Want A Christmas Goose?

RENEE

That...I did not expect that. That was a complete surprise. But you and Victor, you didn't look surprised at all!

SYLVIA

What do you mean?



RENEE

You looked like you wanted more.

SYLVIA

I...I was acting!

RENEE

You were acting?

SYLVIA

Yes! That's what I typically do when I'm on stage. I act.

RENEE

Sylvia, I have seen you on stage many, many times, and I think that is the best acting you have ever done. I mean, Meryl Streep [or another highly respected actress] should come in here just so she could learn a few things from you.

SYLVIA

She's welcome to buy a ticket whenever she likes.

RENEE

I'd like to buy you a ticket.

(The STAGE MANAGER walks past and they instinctively quiet down. The STAGE MANAGER pauses and looks at them.)

STAGE MANAGER

Intermission? Seriously?

(The STAGE MANAGER shakes her head, and exits.)

SYLVIA

Renee, I do not want to fight about this.

RENEE

Then don't feed me a line about acting. Victor kissed you and you liked it.

SYLVIA

He's a good kisser!

RENEE

Aha!

(rethinking her indignation)

Wait...that's true. He is a good kisser.

SYLVIA

But since we're being honest here, you be honest too. That goose from Bob got your blood going.

RENEE  
It did not! No! It didn't!

SYLVIA  
Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

RENEE  
Sylvia, it was a physical reaction, okay?

SYLVIA  
Oh, I could see that.

RENEE  
You could?

SYLVIA  
Renee, you lit up like a goddamned Christmas tree!

RENEE  
Well, Victor's not spontaneous like that!

(We hear VICTOR and BOB arguing heatedly.)

VICTOR (O.S.)  
Listen to me, plumber boy! You keep your snake out of my wife's drain!

SYLVIA  
He's sounding spontaneous right now.

RENEE  
We have a show to finish! You're the executive director! Do something!

(SYLVIA exits at speed, followed closely by RENEE.)

SYLVIA (O.S.)  
BOB!!!

RENEE (O.S.)  
VICTOR!!!

(BOB and VICTOR are propelled into the "backstage" area by SYLVIA and RENEE.)

SYLVIA  
This is no time to fight.

RENEE  
You can fight after the show.

BOB

Oh, we are fighting after the show.

VICTOR

It is on! Because I have never been so humiliated in my life.

(catching himself and looking around)

Wait. If we're all back here, what is the audience watching?

SYLVIA

We took an intermission...

RENEE

...to try and figure out what we're doing next.

VICTOR

Oh, that's rich. That is rich. I think what you mean to say is what abomination we're going to inflict on the unsuspecting public next. Unbelievable. I didn't think anything or anyone could ruin the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. And then along came Bob...

(BOB and VICTOR zero in on one another like a pair of rutting stags, kept apart only through the efforts of SYLVIA and RENEE.)

BOB

If you ask me, I did you a favor.

VICTOR

Favor? I was in the middle of one of Shakespeare's greatest scenes and then you showed up shouting about geese and ass-grabbing my wife!

BOB

That wasn't me.

VICTOR

What? What do you mean it wasn't you?

BOB

It was Scrooge. The new, full of the joy of life Scrooge. I was simply staying in character. You should try it sometime!

VICTOR

Oh, I will! I most definitely will. In fact, if we ever do another play together, let's make it *Julius Caesar*. You can be Caesar, I'll be Brutus, and I promise to stay totally in character.

BOB

That would be a refreshing change, Mr. I Teach Shakespeare!

VICTOR

Only there won't be a next time! Because I am done! We're closing up shop? Good! I'm glad. I do not need this. I have acting opportunities galore!

BOB

Where?

VICTOR

You don't think that community theatres in Saginaw or Pinckney [or much more preferably, the names of local cities] haven't been after me? Let me tell you something, I can play Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* [or some other suitable role for the actor playing VICTOR] any time I want! And don't even get me started on *Seussical, the Musical!*

(singing and snapping his fingers)

Oh, the thinks you can think,  
If you're willing to try,  
Think invisible ink!  
Or a gink with a stink!

(he stops singing)

That's what I'm talking about! All day, every day!

BOB

He's lost it.

RENEE

Honey, you're overreacting.

VICTOR

Amateurs! Amateurs, amateurs, amateurs.

SYLVIA

We're all amateurs, Victor!

VICTOR

Some more than others. And I'm not going to say who, I'm just going to look at that person and waggle my fingers in my ears.

(VICTOR looks at BOB and waggles his fingers in his ears.)

RENEE

Victor, stop that! You need a time out!

VICTOR

I'm taking a permanent time out, okay? I'll be happy to sit on the sidelines and watch this particular theatrical Hindenburg crash and burn in a festive Christmasy way. You're on your own.

(VICTOR walks away from the others.)

RENEE

Victor, you can't do this!

VICTOR

"Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow."  
*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2.

RENEE

Victor--

VICTOR

"So again good night. I must be cruel only to be kind."  
*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 4.

(VICTOR sits on the floor, possibly with his back against a wall, and perhaps, as the ultimate insult, pulling out his phone and fiddling with it.)

RENEE

So, that's it, then? You're just going to sit there feeling sorry for yourself?

VICTOR

"More sinned against than sinning." *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 2.

RENEE

Victor, please--

VICTOR

"Good riddance." *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 2, Scene 1.

RENEE

(to SYLVIA and BOB)

He gets like this when he's upset.

SYLVIA

How long can he keep that up?

RENEE

(to VICTOR)

"Until the crack of doom!" *Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1!

(VICTOR rockets to his feet.)

VICTOR

Renee! What are you...you can't...you just said the name of the...the Scottish play! In our theatre! You know you're not supposed to say that name! It's bad luck! You're just making things worse!

RENEE

Worse? How can I possibly make things worse?  
 (getting right into VICTOR's  
 face)

Macbeth! Macbeth! MACBETH!!!

(VICTOR backs away in horror as the  
 STAGE MANAGER enters.)

STAGE MANAGER

What the hell are you doing?

BOB

We're...brainstorming?

SYLVIA

We've just hit a little snag.

RENEE

And Victor just quit on us.

(The STAGE MANAGER turns to VICTOR, who  
 squirms under her gaze.)

VICTOR

I'm done...finished...not going back out there...no how, no  
 way.

(The STAGE MANAGER turns to the others.)

STAGE MANAGER

Are you sure you want him back?

RENEE

Well, of course! We can't do this without him.

STAGE MANAGER

Then let him play Othello.

(VICTOR perks up immediately as the  
 STAGE MANAGER heads for the booth.)

VICTOR

Othello? Did you hear that? She just said I could play  
 Othello! Well, in that case, the show must go on!

(VICTOR exits at speed.)

SYLVIA

(to the SM's retreating back)  
 But it's supposed to be Christmasy!

(The STAGE MANAGER stops and sighs.)

STAGE MANAGER

Then make it Christmasy.

BOB

Oh, like maybe another carol? I know, let's do "Othello Got Run Over by a Reindeer!" Or "Othello the Snowman?"

(wilting under the SM's gaze)

I'm just spit-balling here.

STAGE MANAGER

Would it kill you to try and class it up a little? Do a poem. A Christmas poem.

(The STAGE MANAGER heads off again.)

SYLVIA

(to the SM's retreating back)

Like "A Visit from St. Nicholas?"

(The STAGE MANAGER exits.)

RENEE

But one of us would have to know that poem.

(RENEE looks from SYLVIA, who is lost in thought, to BOB.)

RENEE

Do you know it, Bob?

BOB

Nope. Not really a poem guy. You?

RENEE

(shaking her head, then...)

But I know "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe!

(hopefully)

Quoth the reindeer...

(making antlers with her hands)

..."Nevermore?"

(BOB diplomatically pretends he hasn't seen or heard anything.)

BOB

Hey, here's an idea! Maybe the audience won't come back!

(They both rush to the curtain and peek through.)

RENEE

They're still here!

BOB

Maybe it's raining or something. Or sleet. That's probably it. The roads must be covered in ice and everyone's stuck here.

RENEE

That means Mrs. Kringle is still out there! We have to do something for her!

(There is a squeal of feedback and the STAGE MANAGER comes over the P.A.)

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

One minute to places.

BOB, RENEE, AND SYLVIA

Thank you, one minute!

(BOB, RENEE, and SYLVIA look at one another, the sword above their heads hanging by a frayed thread.)

SYLVIA

I know the poem.

BOB

"A Visit from St. Nicholas?"

SYLVIA

(nodding)

I had to memorize it in high school.

RENEE

Seriously? The whole thing?

SYLVIA

I swear!

(VICTOR bounds back in as Othello, now wearing a turban and cape, with a scimitar stuffed into the colorful sash around his waist. He strikes a dramatic pose.)

VICTOR

"She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange..."

SYLVIA

And apparently we have our Othello. Bob, will you be the evil and treacherous Iago?

BOB

Hey, if Hot Lips is in, I'm in.



(VICTOR brandishes the scimitar.)

VICTOR

"Then must you speak of one that loved not wisely but too well; Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought perplexed in the extreme."

(VICTOR makes a lunge at BOB, who darts out of the way.)

BOB

Hey, hey, hey! Watch that! You'll poke your eye out!

(BOB exits to costume himself.)

SYLVIA

(turning to RENEE)

And Renee, of course you'll be the beautiful and unfortunate Desdemona.

RENEE

Of course!

(RENEE exits on the heels of BOB. SYLVIA addresses her next lines to VICTOR, but loud enough for BOB and RENEE to hear.)

SYLVIA

But here's the thing. Not a word from any of you!

VICTOR

What? But I--

(SYLVIA pushes VICTOR in the direction BOB and RENEE just exited.)

SYLVIA

Shh! Use your eyes, your hands, use your bodies however you wish, but not one word!

(VICTOR exits. SYLVIA takes a breath to compose herself, then steps through the curtain and immediately reappears through the curtain, now "onstage." She addresses the audience.)

SYLVIA

Thank you so much for your patience! What we would like to share with you now is a Christmasy Shakespeare poem based on Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Our version is simply called, "A Visit from Othello." Are my pantomimists ready?

(BOB, RENEE, and VICTOR come through the curtain, all suitably, but hastily, costumed. They strike a frozen pose that encapsulates the play--VICTOR's hands around RENEE's throat as BOB whispers in VICTOR's ear. Once SYLVIA begins reciting, they do their best to play the action of the poem. Ideally, through an ingenious combination of acting and lighting effects, their performance has a sepia-toned, silent film feel to it.)

SYLVIA

Excellent! Then let's begin, shall we? "A Visit From Othello."

Tw'as soon after his wedding, when all through the house,  
 Othello was creeping, as quiet as a mouse.  
 He searched all the rooms with considerable care,  
 In hopes Desdemona soon would be there.  
 He was sure he would find, in one of the beds,  
 His wife and young Cassio, and cut off their heads.  
 Iago had tricked him, the poor Moorish sap,  
 Into actions that led to a permanent nap.  
 It took place in Cyprus, but that doesn't matter,  
 Othello's own fears made him mad as a hatter.  
 And so when Iago spouted all kinds of trash,  
 It drove our doomed hero to do something rash.  
 It is one thing to think, quite another to know,  
 If the secrets you're told, are most definitely so.  
 Rumors of scandal you happen to hear,  
 Do not mean that things are quite as they appear.  
 With a tongue that was ever so lively and quick,  
 Iago's dark tales made Othello feel sick.  
 Was it true that his wife had dishonored her name?  
 Was she really that bad, and had she no shame?  
 Was she truly a cold and insatiable vixen?  
 If she was then Othello would take care of the fixin'.  
 Alas, he had swallowed a tale that was tall,  
 And answered the jealous green-eyed monster's call.  
 The skill that Iago put into his lie,  
 Meant only one thing--Desdemona must die.  
 Othello was clear on what he must do,  
 He would kill her himself, with no need of his crew.  
 Iago stood by, quite amused and aloof,  
 For Othello believed him, with no concrete proof.  
 The thoughts in his mind spun around and around,  
 Till he fell in a fit and his head hit the ground.  
 He awoke and at once there was trouble afoot,  
 In his eyes Desdemona was covered in soot.

(MORE)

SYLVIA (cont'd)

Iago persisted, "She cuckolded you, Jack."  
 "Your wife and your friend made the beast with two backs."  
 The Moor's eyes didn't twinkle, his dimples weren't merry,  
 He was sure that young Cassio had popped his wife's cherry.  
 His features were hard, and his eyes they did glow,  
 As he looked at his bride, and then whispered, "I know!"  
 Had Cassio implanted his sword in her sheath?  
 Desdemona cried, "No!"--the Moor gritted his teeth.  
 He ran his dark hand o'er her soft rounded belly,  
 And saw that it shook, like a bowlful of jelly.  
 He wasn't exactly a jolly old elf,  
 And no laugh escaped him, I saw it myself.  
 But the look in his eye and the turn of his head,  
 Told poor Desdemona, she had something to dread.  
 He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,  
 And smothered her quickly, till she died with a jerk.  
 It was over that fast, and up her soul rose,  
 Othello was guilty, from his head to his toes.  
 When the truth finally hit him, it came like a missile,  
 This wasn't a graveyard past which he could whistle.  
 So he pulled out his sword, and he held it quite tight,  
 As he ended his life on this dark fateful night.

(SYLVIA bows as RENEE, BOB, and VICTOR  
 applaud. BOB sidles over to SYLVIA.)

BOB

How did you do that?

SYLVIA

Full bore linear panic.

(Something clicks inside BOB.)

BOB

Well, if Victor gets to play the part he's always wanted to  
 play, then so do I.

(approaching the audience and  
 spreading his arms wide)

Ladies and gentlemen, thank your for your patience and  
 consideration. If you'll give me a moment, I now propose to  
 set the stage alight with my very own special brand of  
 theatrical genius.

SYLVIA

Bob...Bob, honey...can I have a word?  
 (pulling him by the arm back  
 to the group)

What is that going to entail exactly?

BOB

What else? A Shakespearean silliquy. A Christmasy  
 Shakespearean silliquy.

RENEE

Good for you!

VICTOR

No! No no no no no. Bad idea.

BOB

Let it not be said, when the final curtain comes down, that I failed my fellow thespians on the hallowed boards of the Hartland Community Theatre.

VICTOR

Bob, I'm the...  
(with emphasis)  
...soliloquy guy.

BOB

You're saying I can't do a silliquy?

VICTOR

It's soliloquy! Not three syllables! Four syllables! Solil-o-quy! You can't do one if you can't say the word.

BOB

How is that fair?

VICTOR

Shakespeare is not fair! Shakespeare is the Olympics of acting! It separates the elite from the herd!

RENEE

Victor, you know the rule--you can't say you can't play.

BOB

Exactly! You can't say I can't play. And I'm tired of always understudying you. Tonight, the understudy gets his moment in the limelight.

VICTOR

But--

SYLVIA

Victor, let it go. Bob, the hallowed boards are all yours.

RENEE

This is so exciting!

VICTOR

And what "silliquy" will you be gracing us with?

BOB

I have one in mind. But I'm going to need a minute.

VICTOR

A minute for what?

BOB

To think. To compose.

(starts to exit)

Which will give you just enough time for another Shakespearean Christmas carol!

(BOB exits, then pokes his head back through the curtain.)

BOB

And make it about Amlet-hay!

(With a broad wink, BOB disappears.)

SYLVIA

Well, I guess we know what soliloquy Bob's doing.

VICTOR

Oh my God...

RENEE

Victor, it will be fun!

VICTOR

No...no, it won't.

SYLVIA

Christmas carol ideas?

VICTOR

"I Saw Mommy Shooting Santa Claus in the Face."

SYLVIA

That's not helpful.

RENEE

Oh, I know! I have the perfect song!  
(waving and looking up at the booth)

Some music would be nice!

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

It would be.

(SYLVIA has had enough. She makes a move to go up to the booth.)

SYLVIA

Wait here a second--

(RENEE grabs hold of SYLVIA's arm,  
holding her back like she's a rabid  
Doberman.)

RENEE

No, don't go up there! Sylvia, calm down...

SYLVIA

I'm just gonna give her a fruitcake...

RENEE

Sylvia--

SYLVIA

(shouting up at the booth)  
...where the sun don't shine!

RENEE

We don't need music! Really we don't. It will be more fun  
this way! Now, this song is for all three of us. Ready?  
Here we go!

(singing to the tune of  
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed  
Reindeer")

You know Falstaff and King Lear and Henry the Fifth...

(RENEE gestures to SYLVIA to take over.)

SYLVIA

(singing)  
...Romeo and Juliet and Lady Macbeth.

VICTOR

(singing reluctantly)  
But do you recall, the most famous Shakespearean character of  
all?

(Alternating lyrics between them,  
SYLVIA and RENEE launch into a song and  
dance routine. VICTOR provides  
Shakespearean asides, his enthusiasm  
growing with each one.)

RENEE

(singing)  
Hamlet the Danish Prince,  
Had a very angry Dad.

VICTOR

Revenge!

SYLVIA

(singing)

And if you ever saw him,  
You'd know that his Uncle's bad.

VICTOR

Fratricide!

RENEE

(singing)

All of the other Danes,  
Used to laugh and call him names.

VICTOR

Melancholy!

SYLVIA

(singing)

They really thought Prince Hamlet,  
Was a little bit insane.

VICTOR

Ask Ophelia!

RENEE

(singing)

Then one foggy Danish night,  
Ghost Dad came to say.

SYLVIA

(singing)

Hamlet with your sword so bright,  
Go and kill your Uncle tonight.

RENEE

(singing)

Then how the Danish loved him,  
As they shouted out with glee.

VICTOR

Flights of angels!

RENEE, SYLVIA, AND VICTOR

(singing)

Hamlet the Danish Prince,  
You'll go down in history!  
You'll go down in history!

VICTOR

(saluting the audience like a  
rock star)

Good night, Elsinore!

(They all bow to the audience as BOB enters dressed as some approximation of Hamlet, holding one hand behind his back.)

BOB

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my privilege and honor to share with you the greatest...so-li-lo-guy...  
 (he can't help but smile,  
 proud of himself)  
 ...ever written!

VICTOR

I can't watch this.  
 (to RENEE)  
 And you and I need to figure out what we're doing after Bob's train wreck.

(VICTOR and RENEE exit.)

SYLVIA

Have fun, Bob! I just need to check on something in the booth.

(SYLVIA heads off to the booth and BOB looks around, suddenly intimidated at the realization that he is alone on stage. The lights go out except for a single spotlight with BOB at the center. If he was intimidated before, he's terrified now. He clears his throat.)

BOB

It is, of course, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*...in one of the acts...I forget which one, exactly.

(BOB clears his throat again, then produces from behind his back not a skull, but a gaily wrapped Christmas present. He regards it with due reverence and gravity.)

BOB

To be or not to be--

(There is commotion up in the booth. Sounds of a struggle. The spotlight moves three feet to the left. BOB sidles over into the spotlight.)

BOB

To be or not to be--



(As sounds of struggle from the booth continue, the spotlight drops down to BOB's crotch, then wanders around the stage. Gamely, BOB follows it. When it finally stops, BOB enters the spotlight and just as he opens his mouth...)

SYLVIA (O.S.)

What's this? Do you see this? This is the *Nutcracker Suite*! It's holiday music!

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

No, it isn't.

SYLVIA (O.S.)

It is too!

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

It's classical.

SYLVIA (O.S.)

Right! It's a holiday classic! That means people play it during the holidays! Like this holiday! When else do you ever hear the *Nutcracker Suite*?" Groundhog Day? Flag Day?

(As SYLVIA rages, BOB taps his toe, impatient to get going. He checks his watch...then realizes Hamlet shouldn't have a wristwatch. He slides out of the light. More sounds of struggle from the booth. The spotlight slides over to BOB, who is trying to get his watch off. Caught in the act, he puts his watch hand behind his back.)

SYLVIA (O.S.)

(panting)

Bob?

BOB

Yes?

SYLVIA (O.S.)

That was wonderful...really beautifully done. Thank you.

BOB

I haven't actually done anything yet.

SYLVIA (O.S.)

Oh. Well, are you going to do it or not?

BOB

Of course! I mean, I want to! I think. Maybe I shouldn't.  
Um...

(he pauses, genuinely torn  
between two options, and now  
in the perfect state of mind  
to deliver...)

To be or not to be--that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The mega-mall on Black Friday  
Or to do all of one's Christmas shopping on-line.  
To stand outside at five a.m. for door-busters no more,  
And to end the heartache, the thousand natural shocks  
Of bait and switch advertisements.  
'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.  
To buy, to keep, to keep perchance to re-gift.  
Aye, there's the rub.  
For in that family gathering what gifts may come,  
When we shuffle through the front door must give us pause.  
There's no respect in a wooden nut bowl or a gift card.  
But we must accept such gifts with a smile.  
The brother-in-law's wrong, grandma's cluelessness.  
The pang of an ugly t-shirt, the gift in a paper bag,  
The insolence of spoiled children,  
Our patience stretching thinner and thinner,  
The feverish thought of suicide by fruitcake.  
Who would bear all this,  
To grunt and sweat assembling a new bicycle at midnight,  
But that the dread of an angry spouse, that desolate country  
From whose shores no traveler returns, paralyzes our will,  
And makes us rather bear those Korean instructions we have,  
Than fly to others we know not of.  
Thus Christmas doth make cowards of us all,  
And thus the yearly resolution to go to the Caribbean for the  
holidays,  
Is abandoned yet again.  
And our true desires, what we really want for Christmas,  
Disappear up the chimney like another Yule log,  
And lose the name of action.

(The spotlight dims and lights come up  
to reveal SYLVIA standing on the edge  
of the stage, looking at BOB in shock.)

SYLVIA

How did you do that?

BOB

Full bore linear panic. Works like a charm.

(BOB and SYLVIA smile at one another and  
exit as VICTOR and RENEE enter, RENEE as  
a little girl and VICTOR as a newspaper  
man.)

RENEE brings out a chair and VICTOR carries an old typewriter and has an envelope in his hand. RENEE sets the chair for VICTOR, who sits down. He opens the envelope and pulls out a letter, which he reads to himself as RENEE recites the letter out loud.)

RENEE

Dear Editor, I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Shakespeare, and that he didn't write his own plays. Papa says that if you see it in the newspaper, it must be true. Please tell me the truth; did William Shakespeare write his own plays? Sincerely, Virginia.

(VICTOR puts the letter down and types as he speaks. RENEE sits down on the floor like a child listening to a bedtime story.)

VICTOR

Dear Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.

RENEE

But I've heard some people say it was really Sir Francis Bacon who wrote Shakespeare's plays.

(VICTOR no longer types, but addresses RENEE directly.)

VICTOR

Indeed they do. And it's a very strange thing. When William Shakespeare died in 1616, no one suggested that he hadn't written his own plays. But in the middle of the 19th century, there was a certain writer who declared that Francis Bacon was the real author of the plays.

RENEE

What was that writer's name?

VICTOR

Delia Bacon.

RENEE

Ooh.

VICTOR

Ooh, indeed. She claimed there were secret codes in Shakespeare's work which proved that Francis Bacon was the true author.

RENEE

Were there secret codes?

VICTOR

No. When you grow up Virginia, you will find that there is a big difference between hoping that something is true, and whether or not it's actually true.

RENEE

But then after that, didn't other people say it was the playwright Christopher Marlowe who was really Shakespeare?

VICTOR

Yes, they did. But there was just one problem with that theory. You see, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in 1595, *Hamlet* around 1600, and *Othello* in 1603.

RENEE

So what's the problem?

VICTOR

Christopher Marlowe died in a bar fight in 1593. He got stabbed right through the eyeball.

RENEE

Eewww!!! Then I have one more candidate for the real Shakespeare! The Earl of Oxford.

VICTOR

Ah yes. Better known today as Edward de Vere, and the current darling of the anti-Stratfordians. Well-travelled, well-connected, they say that he had to hide his authorship because writing plays would have been far beneath his station in life.

RENEE

But he wasn't Shakespeare either?

VICTOR

No. You see, Edward de Vere died in 1604, which would have made it difficult for him to write plays like *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*, which all came out after he passed away.

RENEE

Oh my. Then why do people believe these things?

VICTOR

My dear girl, because they want to. Because the truth is both too simple and too extraordinary for their little minds to comprehend. So yes, Virginia, there was a Shakespeare. A man of humble origins, but of astonishing talents who penned the timeless and exquisite works that have come down to us today. Not believe in Shakespeare!

(MORE)

VICTOR (cont'd)

You might as well not believe in love or faith or hope. And it's through his poetry and plays, his comedies and tragedies, that the Bard of Avon reveals us to ourselves. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing more real and abiding. No Shakespeare? Thank God he lives, and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the hearts of humanity.

(RENEE jumps up, relieved and excited.)

RENEE

I do believe in Shakespeare!

(VICTOR picks up the typewriter and chair, then heads off, followed by RENEE. They exit through the curtain then turn around and enter the "backstage" area just as SYLVIA enters from the offstage dressing room in a sexy, Radio City Rockette costume. She holds out another Radio City Rockette costume to RENEE.)

SYLVIA

Hurry! Put this on!

(RENEE exits to the offstage dressing room.)

VICTOR

What are we doing?

SYLVIA

A song and dance routine. We need to pick up the pace.

VICTOR

Wonderful! What am I doing?

SYLVIA

I don't know. This is for me and Renee.

VICTOR

What? But I can sing and dance.

SYLVIA

Then sing and dance with Bob. I think he's in the Green Room.

VICTOR

But Bob can't sing or dance!

SYLVIA

Then I guess it's up to you. Just make sure it's Christmasy.