

# HOTHOUSE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Kelly DuMar

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**HOTHOUSE**  
**By Kelly DuMar**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
**(3 MEN, 2 WOMEN)**

KAREN (F).....A woman in her mid to late twenties, KAREN is an attractively intense, controlling, type-A, ambitious entrepreneur. She is LEN's sister. (150 lines)

LEN (M) .....In his early twenties, LEN is boyishly handsome and masculine, passionate, and literary. He is KAREN's brother. (160 lines)

TANIA (F).....In her early twenties, TANIA's sprite-like beauty blooms in the hothouse climate. (68 lines)

DAVID (M) .....DAVID is about thirty years old, an attractive, well-dressed businessman. Like KAREN, he is intense and type-A, but he is also out of his element. (30 lines)

LEN SR. (M).....In his early sixties, LEN SR. is a theatrical and handsome ghost. He is gruff and charming, but he is also ailing. LEN SR. is father to LEN and KAREN. (43 lines)

**SYNOPSIS**

LEN SR., a widower with a green thumb and a love of Shakespeare, hoped to sell his beloved nursery so that his kids wouldn't fight over the business after he died. His plan failed and after his death the nursery becomes a hothouse of sibling rivalry, where one kid's hell is another kid's heaven. KAREN, an ambitious entrepreneur, takes over the floundering business to turn it around, sell it, and create capital for her next venture. But LEN, who inherited his father's passion for plants, is wedded to his father's poetic dreams. Hurt and betrayed, he resists his sister's plan to sell their father's

legacy. LEN and KAREN struggle over loyalty to their father's memory, to themselves, and to each other, and make a surprising peace in the end.

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

**SCENE 1:** The greenhouse, early morning.  
(LEN, KAREN, LEN SR'S GHOST)

**SCENE 2:** The greenhouse, opening time.  
(LEN, KAREN, TANIA, DAVID)

**SCENE 3:** The greenhouse, closing time, same day.  
(KAREN, LEN SR'S GHOST)

### SETTING

The Bachelor's Button Nursery and Florist. The action takes place entirely in the greenhouse. There is a door STAGE LEFT that connects to the shop where customers enter, and a door STAGE RIGHT that leads "outside". The set can be kept very simple – real or artificial flowers/greenery can be used, whatever it takes to create the illusion of a space that is green and lush – the suggestion of greenery, flowers and greenhouse glass. Suggested props include: watering cans, pruning shears, plant misters, perhaps a birdbath. Required set pieces include: a bench FRONT CENTER and a tree sapling FRONT RIGHT. There are stands on which two large, thick texts are open for frequent consultation – a compendium of Shakespeare and an 1883 Advice and Etiquette book. There's a plaque (like one would place in a garden), prominently displayed with this quote from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream:

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopi'd with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night  
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight"

**TIME:** The present. Early spring.

**PRODUCTION HISTORY**

Hothouse was produced by the Hovey Summer Arts festival in Waltham, MA for two weekends in July of 2005, directed by Nancy Curran Willis. It was a finalist for the Robert R. Lehan Award (2004), The Arts and Letters Prizes, Journal of Contemporary Culture, and the Nantucket Short Play Festival and Competition, where it received a staged reading for two weekends in October of 2005. *Hothouse* had three developmental readings: the Arlington Center for the Arts New Play Series, Arlington, MA, for two nights in 2003 and at Playwrights' Platform, Boston, in November of 2004.

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The author would like to thank Leslie Day for permission to adapt her inspirational description of the Linden tree for use in this script.

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SCENE 1

*LEN, in baseball cap and apron, is misting plants. KAREN enters with a cardboard box, holding a straw hat and wearing a gardener's apron over short skirt and high heels.*

**KAREN:** Last day!

**LEN:** If you say so.

**KAREN:** What's that supposed to mean? (*LEN ignores her.*) I thought you'd be in early to help me finish packing.

**LEN:** I'm sure you did.

**KAREN:** Did you oversleep?

**LEN:** No.

**KAREN:** I can't wait to cash that sweet check after the closing today.

**LEN:** Sure. Cold, hard currency's your idea of a green thumb.

**KAREN:** We have to be there by 4:30. You can ride with me.

**LEN:** No, thanks.

**KAREN:** I don't want you to be late. (*A beat.*) Are you planning to screw this deal up?

**LEN:** Hmmm. "Suspicion haunts the guilty mind."

**KAREN:** What's that supposed to mean? Are you quoting at me again? (*He ignores her.*) You have to show up at the closing. We're legally bound.

**LEN:** Then what are you worried about?

**KAREN:** When are you going to pack? Your stuff's all over the back room. What about these books?

**LEN:** Don't touch them!

**KAREN:** Just clean up, okay? Throw some of your crap away. You want this old hat?

**LEN:** You mean *Dad's*? The one he wore every day he worked here for thirty years?

**KAREN:** If you want it, take it. It's worn to shreds. I don't want the new owners to think I'm a slob.

*The ghost of LEN SR. enters unseen.*

**LEN:** Can't imagine anybody thinking that. (*Takes off cap, puts on hat.*)

**KAREN:** It doesn't fit.

**LEN:** Thanks for pointing that out.

**KAREN:** So, this is the way it's going to be, our last day together? Sulking?

**LEN:** Just write me a memo on your little pad about what you expect from my attitude today, and –

**KAREN:** Trying to run a business with you has been my personal hell for the last two years.

**LEN:** Aw, c'mon! I thought we made such a promising team – if I just worked my ass to the bone and kissed yours every chance I got, I could one day live up to your standards.

**KAREN:** Go to – never mind. I'm not gonna let you get to me today. (A beat.) I'm worried about what's going to happen when we cash that check.

**LEN:** Don't.

**KAREN:** You've got no business instinct whatsoever. What are you going to do with your share?

**LEN:** Why, you thinking of investing for me?

**KAREN:** I could make your money work for you while –

**LEN:** While you pay me a weekly allowance to keep me in milk and cookies?

**KAREN:** Selling to Kabloom was the right thing to do! My timing is perfect. My strategies are sound.

**LEN:** It's your methods I question.

**KAREN:** I didn't go behind your back! They approached *me*. With an offer we couldn't refuse.

**LEN:** *You* couldn't.

**KAREN:** Why would you want to prolong this misery?

**LEN:** Who said I'm miserable?

**KAREN:** Right. Why *would* you be? This is your magic playground!

**LEN:** That's right. *You work, I play.*

**KAREN:** I worked hard for this sale, set achievable goals – which I met, despite *your* lack of discipline.

**LEN:** You should have told me you were looking for a buyer.

**KAREN:** How many times do I have to tell you? I wasn't!

**LEN AND LEN SR.:** The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

**KAREN:** Jeez! What'll I do when nobody's around to quote the Bard for me anymore?

**LEN:** He left us the business because he knew we'd take care of it.

**KAREN:** He left us the business because he didn't have a choice!

**LEN:** He would've wanted us to make it work.

**KAREN:** He knew it wouldn't.

**LEN:** Could've asked him myself, if you'd told me he was sick.

**KAREN:** I wanted to.

**LEN:** Right.

**KAREN:** Really. I did. (*LEN SR. steps into her awareness.*) The day he was diagnosed, I tried. He wouldn't let me.

**LEN:** He wouldn't *let* you?

**KAREN:** Yes! We were standing right here. I said, "Dad, you can't handle the nursery alone right now. Let me –"

*A spotlight comes up on KAREN and LEN SR., LEN fades to background.*

**LEN SR.:** You hate it back here!

**KAREN:** – *hire* someone.

**LEN SR.:** Can't afford the payroll.

**KAREN:** Then I'll get Lenny to help. Dr. Thornhill said you shouldn't be –

**LEN SR.:** Thornhill's a pain in my pancrea-ass!

**KAREN:** He's trying to save your ass. He's the best oncologist at –

**LEN SR.:** Don't confuse him with God. He's *not* God.

**KAREN:** Lenny'll be mad if I don't call him.

**LEN SR.:** Over my dead body! Let him finish his thesis. Get his degree.

**KAREN:** Which will qualify him for exactly *what*?

**LEN SR.:** To make a choice about his future. Same as you.

**KAREN:** I'm calling him. I have to –

**LEN SR.:** No! He'll want to come and help.

**KAREN:** Exactly!

**LEN SR.:** I didn't raise my kids to be slaves to my passions.

**KAREN:** You think I'm here 'cause I'm your slave?

**LEN SR.:** Hardly. You're an entrepreneur. You've got a nose for business.

**KAREN:** And Lenny's got your green thumb! Together, we could –

**LEN SR.:** Blow the place sky high with your fighting! Been there, done that.

**KAREN:** Lenny can work back here. I'll take the front. We'll stay out of each other's business.

**LEN SR.:** No way! Promise you won't call him!

**KAREN:** Promise me you'll take it easy! Let *me* run the business.

**LEN SR.:** Put the phone down! (*She does. In pain, he sits on bench.*) Won't be much left here for anybody, soon. Gotta get my energy back.

**KAREN:** *I've* got energy. We just have to tighten *our* belt, invest in the right inventory... Oh God, where'd this come from? Was Zena here this morning?

**LEN SR.:** Like it?

**KAREN:** No! It's bulky, gaudy, and poorly crafted.

**LEN SR.:** What do you mean? It's *Shakespeare!* (*Stands up, recites the poem in his best theatrical voice.*)

'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
quite over-canopi'd with luscious woodbine,  
with sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight.'

**KAREN:** (*Applauding.*) Great delivery, Dad, but this isn't community theatre. What's it doing here?

**LEN SR.:** Zena's new line of garden accessories. One-of-a-kind, hand-engraved plaques with Shakespearean quotes.

**KAREN:** Why didn't you tell her that *I* do the ordering?

**LEN SR.:** I want to help her out. She says my nursery inspires her expressive side.

**KAREN:** Great. What are we supposed to do with it?

**LEN SR.:** Inspire gardeners beyond their wildest dreams! They'll sell like hotcakes!

**KAREN:** It's January, Dad! Snow shovels are selling like hotcakes!

**LEN SR.:** Don't tell me how to run my business.

**KAREN:** You took this on consignment, right?

**LEN SR.:** Nah, Zena and I don't work that way.

**KAREN:** You paid her for this monstrosity? What kind of profit margin –

**LEN SR.:** Don't worry! Zena always gives me a good deal.

**KAREN:** So, how much? You've got a shop full of her crap that I can't even deep discount out the door! (*LEN SR. is misting plants, whistling and ignoring her.*) How can I balance the books if you won't tell me what you're spending on inventory?

**LEN SR.:** Inventory shminventory! Zena's an old friend!

**KAREN:** Great! Stay *friends* – whatever that means. But get a new supplier. Your loyalty's killing your profitability. (*A beat.*) Dad? Let me ask you something. Personal.

**LEN SR.:** Oh, jeez! Do you have to?

**KAREN:** Is Zena your girlfriend?

**LEN SR.:** For God's sake, Karen! She's *married!*

**KAREN:** But, you're...you know...attracted to her?

**LEN SR.:** No comment.

**KAREN:** She seems to like you, too.

**LEN SR.:** What makes you say that?

**KAREN:** The way you said, “Zena always gives me a good deal.”

**LEN SR.:** Listen, you want to help me turn this business around?

**KAREN:** Yes!

**LEN SR.:** Then quit prying into your old man’s private life and get to work.

**KAREN:** I take it she’s not *happily* married?

**LEN SR.:** None of my business!

**KAREN:** How could you not know that?

**LEN SR.:** Okay, none of *your* business.

**KAREN:** Dad, if you’re...um...fooling around with her, it’s not like I’m judging you.

**LEN SR.:** Oh, that’s a *huge* relief!

**KAREN:** You’ve got the hots for each other! Just tell her I’m doing the ordering and ask her out.

**LEN SR.:** The *hots*? For God’s sake, Karen! We’re not teenagers!

**KAREN:** There’s an expiration date on your Shakespearian passion? What about true love?

**LEN SR.:** “The course of true love never did run smooth!”

**KAREN:** Haven’t you been alone too long to...to keep yourself from a little grabbing?

**LEN SR.:** And just what do you think would inspire Zena to grab me?

**KAREN:** Nothing. If you’re scared to love again.

**LEN SR.:** I’m not scared of anything!

**KAREN:** Then take the risk! And not the safe and foolish way you’re taking risks with her product line.

**LEN SR.:** Zena’s product line is exactly the level of risk I’m committed to.

**KAREN:** You can’t run a business like this! Nobody can!

**LEN SR.:** Maybe so. But, I’m still the boss. (*In discomfort, handing her a mister.*) Listen, you take over here for awhile. I’ll go sit at the register.

**KAREN:** Dad, it’s dead out there. Why don’t you go home?

**LEN SR.:** Nope! Gonna say hello to my regulars! They’ll be by... (*Toward door, removes his hat, plucks a blossom and buttonholes it.*) You know, the values your mother and I raised you and Lenny on – about profit and loss – aren’t up for grabs. I don’t know if I can beat this...thing. If I can’t sell, I can leave you the business for whatever it’s worth. But I’ll be sorry if I can’t seem to leave you and Lenny the only thing it’s essential to have for happiness before you leave this world.

**KAREN:** Which is?

**LEN SR.:** You’ll find it in Shakespeare. Look it up.

*LEN SR. exits left to shop. Lights back up on LEN and KAREN.*

**LEN:** That's what he said? Look it up?

**KAREN:** Word for word.

**LEN:** Yeah, well. That part's believable.

**KAREN:** Okay. I know what this is about. You're not going to forgive my success, are you?

**LEN:** *Your success?*

**KAREN:** You think we'd still be in business if he left *you* in charge?

**LEN:** The customers buy the flowers *I* grow!

**KAREN:** Because *I* know how to merchandise them! The flower show last fall was a huge success! Pulled us out of the red. Sure, you have a green thumb. You grow plants – but there's no method to your madness! You think you can just keep scattering your magic seeds to see what'll grow? I'm sick and tired of playing the scold!

**LEN:** Ah, but you do it so well!

**KAREN:** Okay. I probably should have said something sooner about the sale, but –

**LEN:** You had the power to do it, and you did it.

**KAREN:** We have to go through with this, Lenny. It's the right thing, for both of our futures.

**LEN:** You're worried about my future?

**KAREN:** Yes! You need some kind of a plan.

**LEN:** Oh, don't worry, sis! I do have a plan! (*Picks up an open packet of seeds and flings them; some fall on bench.*) A magical plan!

**KAREN:** I know you're being sarcastic about me investing your share. But it's not a bad idea.

**LEN:** You really think I'd consider being a partner in your new venture?

**KAREN:** Not like it has been, trying to work together. *I'd* run the whole show. You could go back, finish your degree. Be a silent partner while I put your money to work for you.

**LEN:** And since I'm clueless about business, I'd never know you were robbing me blind?

**KAREN:** Screw it! I'm done taking risks to help you. It's your loss.

**LEN:** Or gain. It's all in the perspective.

**KAREN:** From a *business* perspective, he was trying to do the right thing by giving me controlling interest.

**LEN:** You managed to convince him of that, didn't you?

**KAREN:** Someday you'll understand. Maybe even thank me for calling it quits.

*LEN breaks off a stem of hydrangea and attempts to pin it to the breast of her apron.*

**LEN:** Wait! Let me thank you now! Hydrangea – to celebrate your victory!

**KAREN:** Cut it out! I hate it when you do that!

**LEN:** Do what?

**KAREN:** Speak to me like that!

**LEN:** Like what?

**KAREN:** Like I can't guess what you really mean, so you can insult me all you want. Why don't you have the guts to just tell me straight out what you think?

**LEN:** Because the language of flowers says it so much more poetically. *(Sound of bell on shop door offstage.)*

**KAREN:** Keep your corsage. Take this box of stuff out back and pack it or trash it! I'll take care of the first customer of our last day.

*KAREN exits left to the shop.*

**LEN:** Your wish is my command, master. *(LEN drops hydrangea, sighs, looks around. Begins misting, speaking aloud.)* Sorry, guys! You know this wasn't my idea! You witnessed the whole thing! I did my best... Not good enough, huh? *(Moving past the Linden sapling, it snags him on the arm of his shirt.)* Hey! Let me go! You've gotta let go! Nah, you'd be miserable in my apartment. Dark. Cramped. Lonely. You wouldn't survive very long.

*LEN takes a long, sad look around at the plants, then exits.*

**BLACKOUT.**

*HOTHOUSE*

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