

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

By Michael Wehrli

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SYNOPSIS: It's three days before opening night and there's a half-finished set, a complete lack of props and costumes, the light and sound board operators are off videotaping a wedding, and the playwright is about to have a heart attack. Throw in an actress with an extremely jealous boyfriend, a dictatorial stage manager, a very organic method actor, and a techie running power tools during rehearsals and you have a splendid disaster of a comedy. Join the cast and crew as they hilariously struggle through this debacle of a tech rehearsal.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 2 males, 3 either)

- LUANNE/JASON (m/f) An upper classman student with lots of theatre experience. The stage manager. Gruff, no-nonsense. At times abrupt, but extremely dedicated to keeping things going and on time. *(49 lines)*
- BRIAN/MICHELLE (m/f) A younger student who is a playwright. Passionate, high strung, though strives to be the "nice guy." He desperately wants his play to come off well. *(60 lines)*
- TRISHA (f) A student. An actress. Very strong personality and quick to frustration. Consumed with her own petty problems. *(49 lines)*
- MATT (m) A student. An actor. Very serious about his craft but has a cool and supportive personality. Extremely concerned about Trisha. *(35 lines)*
- DERRICK/DENISE (m/f) An upper classman student with lots of life and theatre experience. The director of Brian's play. Pleasant personality, very easy going. Takes everything in stride. *(50 lines)*

DANIELLE (f).....A student. A techie. A “does everything” kind of techie. Has to push herself to the limit because she is so slow in getting things done. *(16 lines)*

MARCUS (m).....A student. Trisha’s boyfriend. Very possessive of Trisha and easily jealous. Sometimes lets his passions take over his reasoning. *(18 lines)*

DURATION: 25 minutes.

TIME: The present.

SCENE

A high school or middle school theatre or auditorium. A younger student has written a play that is being produced completely by fellow students (directed, acted, tech, etc.) with the occasional supervision of their theatre teacher, Mr. Pauley.

SET/TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

The set can be dependent on the school or group’s resources. The idea is that the construction on the set has just barely begun, or hasn’t happened at all. You can use whatever you have in stock (a platform, a couple of flats, etc.). Or, you can just leave the stage bare except for the chairs and table mentioned in the script. Lighting is a basic general wash of the stage.

COSTUMES

Everyday clothes that would be worn to a rehearsal. TRISHA puts on a rehearsal skirt.

SOUND EFFECTS

Can be done live off stage (sounds of a drill gun, a circular saw, and hammering) or done with standard recordings.

PROPS

- (2) Small Tables
- (5) Chairs
- Prompt Script
- Play Scripts
- (2) Cell Phones
- Stopwatch (or watch)
- Paper Plates
- Plastic Utensils
- Plastic Cups

***NOTE:** If you wish, you can dispense with the table items (paper plates, etc.) and just have the actress pantomime the action in the script.*

PRODUCTION NOTES

The best way to bring out the full comedy of the play is for the actors to play it honestly. All the characters are doing the best they can with this situation. Actors should strive to make their characters likable so the audience is rooting for them.

ORIGINAL CAST

LUANNE.....	Shannon Marie
MICHELLE.....	Debbie Darwin
MATT.....	Chris Niedzwiecki
TRISHA.....	Audra Hatchett
DERRICK.....	Tim Shane
DANIEL.....	Dave Miller
MARCUS.....	Brandon West

SETTING: *A school theatre or auditorium.*

AT RISE: *Six o'clock on a Monday evening at tech rehearsal. In the BLACKOUT, we hear a few grunts and grumbles. Soon, the work LIGHTS come up abruptly over the stage. We see 1-2 platforms and 1-2 non-descript flats creatively placed. If your school does not have these readily available, just use the chairs and table mentioned below on the bare stage. To the side of the stage are a chair and a small table set up for the stage manager.*

If there is any type of "set" at all, follow these directions. If not, skip to the next paragraph. LUANNE, the stage manager, enters from the side of the stage. She is slow moving, huffing and puffing and grunting all the way. When she gets there, she takes a look at the set. She grunts and shakes her head. Slowly, she goes over and "tests" the various set items to make sure they are sturdy. Finally, she grunts an "Uh-huh" then goes about slowly and begrudgingly setting the stage with the set pieces: a table with one chair, three chairs pushed together to be a "sofa," and paper plates, cups, and plastic utensils stacked up on the table. If you wish, you can dispense with the table items (paper plates, etc.) and just have the actress pantomime the action in the script.

If there is no "set" at all, follow these directions. LUANNE, the stage manager, enters from the side of the stage. She is slow moving, huffing and puffing and grunting all the way. LUANNE reacts to the lack of a set. All that's on stage are a table with one chair, three chairs pushed together to be a "sofa," and paper plates, cups, and plastic utensils stacked up on the table. If you wish, you can dispense with the table items (paper plates, etc.) and just have the actress pantomime the action in the script. LUANNE starts re-arranging the items so they will be in the "right place."

BRIAN, the writer, enters in an excited haste from the back of the theatre, singing softly to himself and is very happy. Once he reaches the stage, he stops in total horror.

BRIAN: *Oh. Oh! Oh, no...no... (He quickly runs around looking in disbelief at the lack of a set. Eventually, he runs over to LUANNE - who is still setting up.) Uh, Luanne. Where is the—*

LUANNE: *(Putting up a hand.)* Setting up.

BRIAN: But—

LUANNE: Busy!

LUANNE goes back to business. BRIAN is aghast and doesn't know what to do. He takes his script, notebook, etc. and nervously sits to the side of the stage. MATT and TRISHA enter from the back of the theatre. She is in the middle of a conversation - talking a mile a minute about her boyfriend.

TRISHA: ...yeah, and then he's all like, "You practice all the time" – practice, like it's some sort of sports thing – anyhow, he says, "You practice all the time" and like, he's all, "If you want me to stick around, you better find more time for me." Yeah, right. As if I'm gonna give up what I love to watch him play video games.

MATT: Whoa.

TRISHA: Yeah! And then he jumps my case about the scene with the kiss—

MATT: No way!

TRISHA: Uh, yeah! I mean, does he think he owns me? What an idiot. He so totally doesn't get the whole acting thing!

MATT: Tell me about it. So how come you are— *(They both stop dead when they see the lack of a set.)* Whoa.

TRISHA: No way.

They walk up to the stage. LUANNE is still setting up. She gets irritated that they are in her way, and finally shoos them away. They see BRIAN and go over to him. As they do, the stage LIGHTS come up to a bland general wash of the stage. Off-stage, we hear DERRICK, the director, murmuring on the phone, as he makes his way down from the light booth.

MATT: Lights. Cool. *(Calling out.)* Thanks Mr. Pauley!

DERRICK: *(From off-stage.)* Nope, it's me. *(Goes back to talking on the phone as he continues to make his way down from the light booth.)*

MATT: Oh. Hey, Brian.

BRIAN: Hey.

MATT: What, you're nervous? Dude, your play's going to come off beautifully. Trust me.

BRIAN: Yeah.

TRISHA: What's up with the set?

BRIAN: Uh...I don't know. Pretty depressing, really.

MATT: Whoa.

TRISHA: Whatever. Come on. *(They start walking to a far corner of the stage.)* So anyway, I tell Marcus that just because— *(Her phone rings.)* Aargh! Right on cue. What's he gonna whine about now?

She answers the phone and goes on quietly ad-libbing as they make their way to a far corner of the stage. She alternates between talking on the phone and talking to MATT.

BRIAN: This is not happening...Luanne, when is Mr. Pauley supposed to get here?

LUANNE: Later. He gave me the keys then headed off to grab some dinner.

BRIAN: But he's supposed to be here—

DERRICK comes bustling in. He is on his cell phone talking to his uncle about a computer problem.

DERRICK: *(On the phone.)* Tell me again what the blue screen says? *(Pause.)* Hmm...not good. I suppose you've already done the memory check diagnostic routine? *(Pause.)* Oookay then. Hmm... hope it's not your hard drive. Wwwwell, don't sweat it, Uncle Terry. I can get up there in a couple of hours and take a look at your computer. *(Pause.)* No, no, seriously. It's not a problem. I'll just cut rehearsal a little short this evening.

BRIAN: What? Uh, Derrick, you're not serious, are—

DERRICK: *(On the phone.)* Hang on, Uncle Terry. *(To BRIAN.)* Just a sec, Brian. *(Back on phone.)* So anyhow, sit tight, Uncle Terry, okay? *(Slight pause.)* Okay, great. Will see you soon. Let me know if there is anything else I can do for you, all right? Later. *(To BRIAN.)* What's up, bud?

BRIAN: *(Flustered.)* Early? You can't—first tech—leave?—no Mr. Pauley?—opening Thursday—leave early?! Oooh, LOOK!

Turns DERRICK towards the stage.

DERRICK: Hmm...

BRIAN: Sorry, Derrick. I'm just really flustered. But... (*Gestures to the stage.*)

DERRICK: Wwwwell...the set's not as far along as I'd have hoped.

BRIAN: That's the understatement of the year! What're we going to do?!

DERRICK: Don't sweat it. It'll get done.

DERRICK smiles to BRIAN and then crosses to LUANNE who by now is sitting at her "station" with her prompt script out. BRIAN takes a deep breath then follows him.

DERRICK: Hey, Luanne.

LUANNE: Hey. Ready?

DERRICK: Yeah, just give me a sec.

LUANNE: Uh huh.

BRIAN: Derrick, look, I'm not trying to be a pain, but last week Mr. Pauley said Danielle would be finished with the set before tonight's rehearsal.

DERRICK: Wwwwell...that's what he told me, too. But it'll get done, don't bust your gut over it.

BRIAN: But we only have three more days till opening!

DERRICK: I know.

BRIAN: I have a newspaper critic coming!

DERRICK: Yup. (*Smiles, nods.*)

BRIAN: Derrick, this play is my baby. Please, please tell me things are going to come together?

DERRICK: Things are going to come together.

BRIAN: Uh, good. Good. So...

DERRICK: Ssssooo...we better get started. Are Matt and—?

LUANNE: Over there.

DERRICK: Good deal.

DERRICK starts leafing through LUANNE's prompt script. She reacts. Pause.

BRIAN: *(To LUANNE.)* Uh...are you...going to get them?

LUANNE: *(Glares at BRIAN and he backs away. She bellows.)* MATT, TRISHA, WE'RE STARTING. *(Looks at the script with DERRICK.)*

TRISHA: *(Still on the phone.)* In a minute.

BRIAN: *(Looks at his watch.)* Oh, man....

LUANNE: NOW!

MATT and TRISHA return.

TRISHA: *(Still on the phone.)* Get off of my case! I'll wear what I want to when I want to! *(Pause.)* Oh, right. Well, too bad.

LUANNE: Can it. Time to start.

TRISHA: Don't you talk to me li—

LUANNE: *(Stands.)* Time to start!

TRISHA: Okay, okay... *(Makes a face when she's turned away from LUANNE. On phone.)* Gotta go. Bye.

MATT: Oh, dude, I gotta pee.

LUANNE: *(Starts her stopwatch.)* Ninety seconds.

MATT rushes off.

DERRICK: Hey girl!

Hugs TRISHA.

TRISHA: Derrick.

DERRICK: *(Overly concerned.)* What's going on, honey?

TRISHA: Oh, it's just my jerk-face boyfriend.

DERRICK: Same ol' stuff?

TRISHA: Yeah, and more of it. Today, he starts in on me with—

LUANNE: No time for that. Get your rehearsal skirt on—

LUANNE hands her a well-worn rehearsal skirt. TRISHA shoots LUANNE a nasty look then grabs it from her and puts it on. Below dialogue overlaps.

BRIAN: Uh, what about the costumes? —

TRISHA: (To *DERRICK*.) —anyhow, so, he's all like "I'm not gonna sit and watch you kiss some other guy." And I'm like—

LUANNE: Get to your place.

TRISHA: Luanne...

DERRICK: Hey kid, don't let him get to ya'. You'll work it out.

TRISHA: I don't know...

DERRICK: And no worries, we're not cutting the kiss.

TRISHA: You bet we're not!

BRIAN: Uh, what's that about cutting?

LUANNE: NOT cutting. Chill. (*Checks her stopwatch.*)

BRIAN: Not cutting. Good. Good...

DERRICK: (To *TRISHA*.) Just take a deep breath, hon'.

LUANNE: TIME! (*MATT rushes back in, zipping up his pants.*)

MATT: Sorry, sorry.

LUANNE: Uh huh. Derrick, ready?

DERRICK: Yeah. We'll skip warm-ups tonight, I suppose. Let's start from the top.

MATT: Cool.

TRISHA: All right.

BRIAN: Uh, Derrick...I don't mean to be a problem, but isn't this supposed to be first tech?

LUANNE: Guess you didn't get my e-mail. The sound and light board ops are helping their dad video a wedding. They'll be here at nine thirty.

BRIAN: Nine thirty? But we open in—

DERRICK: It's all good, Brian. They'll be here soon enough.

A huge crash is heard from back stage. DANIELLE, the techie, stumbles in. She has slept in the theatre overnight and looks like it. She lumbers in, tools in hand.

BRIAN: What on earth...

MATT: Whoa. Dude.

DERRICK: Someone's had a fun night.

TRISHA: She's totally wrecked.

LUANNE: What are you doing? How'd you get in?

Below dialogue overlaps.

DANIELLE: Ohhhhhh hey. Derrick. Sorry man. Just woke up—

BRIAN: —uh, Danielle, why haven't—

DANIELLE: —Mr. P. let me work here yesterday and I just kinda stayed and pulled an all-nighter—

LUANNE: —all right, now—

DERRICK: —sounds like fun. Did that a couple times during Dickensfest.—

DANIELLE: —yeah, cool—

BRIAN: —the set was supposed to be—

DERRICK: —there was one stretch where I had worked three days solid—

BRIAN: —uh, Derrick—

DERRICK: —and at four in the afternoon I found myself leaning against a streetlamp and had no idea how long I'd been there—

LUANNE: —come on, wrap it up—

DANIELLE: —sounds like the time I—

BRIAN: Can we PLEASE get back to the REHEARSAL?! (*ALL stop and look at him.*) Sorry. Sorry. But, can we, uh, get started here? Please?

DERRICK: It's all right Brian, we have plenty of time.

BRIAN: Plenty of time...

LUANNE: PLACES for the top of the show.

MATT and TRISHA get into their "places." TRISHA has her script with her and she sets it on the table. During the below dialogue, MATT and TRISHA prepare for the scene in the most ultra-serious "actor-y" way—stretching, making sounds, etc. Towards the end, MATT aids TRISHA in "getting ready": he puts his hands on her shoulders, puts his forehead to her forehead, and gives her lots of very quiet encouragement. The below dialogue happens during the above action.

DANIELLE: Man, I would've never made it last night without the Mountain Dews.

DERRICK: I'm a Dr. Pepper man myself.

DANIELLE: Yeah, those're cool, but M.D. has tons more caffeine.

DERRICK: Really? Ya' learn something every day, don't ya'?

DANIELLE: Sometimes without trying.

DERRICK's cell phone rings. He answers it.

DERRICK: Hey Lorie, what's up?

BRIAN: Oh, good grief...

DERRICK: (*Motions for them to keep going.*) Whoa whoa, slow down.

We'll take care of things. Now tell me what's happening with the props...

Ad-libs a conversation as he goes off stage. We should still hear him slightly when he's off stage. DANIELLE exits to backstage. By now, MATT and TRISHA are done with their preparation ritual. LUANNE looks at TRISHA who is now holding her script.

LUANNE: What are you doing with that?

TRISHA: I'm having trouble with—

LUANNE: We open Thursday, lose it.

TRISHA: Can't I just keep it here in case—

LUANNE: LOSE IT.

TRISHA: Okay, okay. Fine. We'll see how far I get...

MATT: Sshhh. It's all right, Trish. You got it. All is well. All is well.

TRISHA: Maybe.

MATT smiles at her. Pause.

BRIAN: (*Muttering to himself.*) Right. All is flipping awesome...

MATT: Hey, I thought we were supposed to have props tonight?

LUANNE: Derrick's on the phone with Lorie now. Just deal with it.

MATT: That's cool, that's cool.

BRIAN: Are we EVER going to get started?!

ALL stop and glare at him. Pause.

LUANNE: Do I have to toss you out?

BRIAN: No, no. Sorry. Sorry. I'm just really stressed. Sorry. Go on.

LUANNE: Ready?

MATT: Give us one more sec.

MATT and TRISHA do one last bit of “preparing” for the scene. They end with some vigorous shaking of their bodies. Eventually, MATT exits when they are fully “prepared.”

LUANNE: Lights up.

The scene begins. TRISHA goes about her stage business: setting the table with the plastic silverware and paper plates. (Or she pantomimes this action.) Her character looks quite miserable. Eventually, her character breaks down crying. MATT enters, sees her in tears, crosses dramatically towards her, and just as they are about to embrace, the SOUND of a drill gun goes off back stage and continues during the below.

BRIAN: Aaaarrggghhhhh! Does she HAVE to do that now?!

LUANNE: You want the set done?

BRIAN: But how can they—

LUANNE: They’ll deal with it. They’re actors, right?

MATT: Yeah. Cool. Sure.

TRISHA: Aaargh. I am totally out of the moment.

LUANNE: Find it.

BRIAN: Heaven help us.

Drill gun SOUND stops. DANIELLE pokes head in.

DANIELLE: Did you need something?

LUANNE: We’re good. Keep going.

BRIAN: Uh, Danielle, can you, uh, please try and keep it down if you can?

DANIELLE: *(Looks at him.)* Yeah.

Exits.

During the above dialogue, MATT and TRISHA go through a shortened version of their “preparing” ritual. MATT exits. They start the scene again. TRISHA goes through the same moves as before, this time with less energy and commitment. MATT enters again, crosses to her and embraces her precisely the same way he did before. Just then, the

SOUND of a circular saw goes off backstage. MATT and TRISHA react. They get a look and a gesture from LUANNE as if to say "Go on!" MATT and TRISHA struggle for a moment then proceed with the scene. They have to yell to be heard.

MATT: *(Yelling.)* "Guinevere, my dearest...It is my deepest hope this downpour of sorrow upon your cheeks are not shed for me."

TRISHA: *(Yelling.)* "In truth, darling Reginald, my morose and sullen nature has overwhelmed my spirits. For, knowing that...for, knowing that..." OOOHHH!!! I can't do this! NO ONE could do this with THAT going on.

Circular saw SOUND stops.

MATT: Trish, hon. We'll get through it—

Below dialogue overlaps.

LUANNE: I don't have time for this—

BRIAN: —none of us do—

LUANNE: Just think of it as a concentration exercise.

TRISHA: —give me a break—

BRIAN: —during tech week—

LUANNE: —so get on with it.

TRISHA: I've had just about enough of—

MATT: Trisha, Trish— *(Pulls her aside.)*

TRISHA: I'll show her "get on with it"...

MATT: Calm down, baby, calm down. Deeeeeeep breaths...

He puts his forehead on hers, takes her hands, and mutters some affirmations.

LUANNE: Actors...

BRIAN: I'm going to be the laughing stock of the entire school. Where is Mr. Pauley?

MATT and TRISHA start where they left off in the scene.

LUANNE: Lights up.

TRISHA: “In truth, darling Reginald, my morose and sullen nature has overwhelmed my spirits. For, knowing that...For, knowing that...”
OOOOHHHH! What is that stinkin’ line?!

LUANNE: Don’t break character.

TRISHA: I KNOW WHAT I’M DOING! Just give me the line.

LUANNE: Uh huh. “For knowing WHAT my instincts have told me.”

TRISHA: Aarghh. Got it, got it... (*Goes back to the scene.*) “For knowing WHAT my instincts have told me—”

DERRICK: (*Entering, still on the phone.*) Wwwwell. Don’t sweat it hon’. I’ll take care of it. (*Hangs up. SOUND of a circular saw and drill gun backstage begins.*) Lorie said Stageplay Theatre won’t let us use their props.

BRIAN: (*Yelling.*) What?!

DERRICK: (*Yelling.*) Stageplay says we can’t use their props!

BRIAN: (*Yelling.*) We can’t use their props!?

DERRICK: (*Yelling.*) No! (*Circular saw SOUND stops.*)

MATT: Whoa. That’s not so good. (*Drill gun SOUND stops.*)

TRISHA: What jerk-faces! I can’t believe they’d—

SOUND of hammering comes from backstage. It happens intermittently during below.

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