

BLACKBEARD'S CARDIGAN

A Comedy in Two Acts

by
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(Seattle. An office at Blackbeard's Cardigan Theatre Company. JARED LAMORT, current Artistic Director, sits behind a desk with a laptop computer in front of him. This transplanted southern boy is in well over his head and it shows.

Standing near the desk is GATES DARWIN, President of the Board of Directors. Slick, fast talking businessman with not an artistic bone in his body.)

GATES

Jared, theatre is dead.

JARED

Don't be so melodramatic, Gates.

GATES

Okay, it's not dead, but it's dying.

JARED

The theatre is not dying.

GATES

Theatre Schmeatre. The problem with you artsy types, Jared, is you don't know how to run a business. That's what got us here in the first place.

JARED

Flemming Fallis got us here in the first place, Gates.

GATES

The point is you've been in charge now, handpicked by Flemming, for a year and a half and the theatre is in the crapper.

JARED

Not my fault. I had no idea I'd be taking over for Flemming before he officially left. He was jetting back and forth to New York so often to direct shows on Broadway that he had no idea what was going on here. Flemming Fallis drove this theatre into the ground, Gates, not me.

GATES

You say potatoe, I say po-tah-toe. As president of the board of Blackbeard's Cardigan Theatre Company, all I can tell you is we are ready to shut this artless wonder down. Indefinitely. For a regrouping session. And if that happens, it may never come back.

(MORE)

GATES (cont'd)

You're out of a job. The whole staff's out of a job. One of America's most respected regional theatres goes down the tubes. You will never work again, buddy boy, unless we bring in Varushkin.

JARED

Svetlana Varushkin directing a sequel to a Shakespeare tragedy? How are we going to sell that?

GATES

Jared, buddy boy, think like a businessman. Think Hollywood. They sell sequel crap all the time.

JARED

Svetlana Varushkin. The woman who was just fired as director of the new STAR TREK musical. The same musical that is now in its five-hundredth preview. The same musical that, for the first time in theatre history, was reviewed during previews because the critics were pissed off waiting for an opening date that kept changing.

GATES

You want the five million endowment from the Rothchild Arts Fund? Varushkin's part of the deal.

(Jared looks at his computer.)

JARED

The New York Times:

(reads)

“STAR TREK: GET ME TO THE PON FARR ON TIME is like watching the Hindenburg, or in this case the Enterprise, crash and burn. If I'd had a phaser, I would have set it for kill and taken out everyone on stage.”

GATES

She's a five time Tony winner.

JARED

The Hollywood Reporter: “Incoherent, overreaching mess... no compelling reason for STAR TREK to be a musical. Hailing frequencies are not open.”

GATES

She's hungry to redeem herself.

JARED

Broadway Theatre World: “Broadway theatre doesn’t get much worse than this... Varushkin’s use of puppets, so charming in her Tony Award winning reboot of H.R. Pufnstuf, made me feel like I was watching the Muppets ‘Pigs in Space’ on acid.”

GATES

She’s a genius. What genius doesn’t pull out a stinker once in a while?

JARED

And my favorite. Time Out New York: “Twenty minutes into this space opera mess, I wanted to gouge out my eyes with Spock’s pointy ears. When the first red shirt crew member died, I envied him.”

GATES

We get her cheap.

JARED

Cheap doesn’t necessarily make good art.

GATES

Art schmart. We get her better than cheap. The Rothchild’s foot her bill as part of the five mil endowment. She and Reggie Rothchild go way back. He’s invested in a lot of her shows, including Pufnstuf, which made him a bundle.

JARED

But...

GATES

No butts, except the ones we get in the seats.

JARED

Subscribers are not going to go for this sequel. We’ll be refunding a lot of money.

GATES

No refunds. If the subscriber’s don’t want to see the new show, then we make some kind of deal with other theatres in town. They can go see a different show. Theatre’s change programming all the time. Sell it, man. Sell it. Put a spin on it. Make it work.

JARED

(at the end of his rope)

Fine. Set up a meeting with her.

GATES

Done.

JARED

But, she can't do a sequel to Romeo and Juliet because it's --

(Telephone rings.)

JARED

Hello. What?

(glares at Gates)

Send her in.

GATES

You're going to love her.

JARED

I don't have much choice, do I?

GATES

Nope.

(SVETLANA VARUSHKIN, a grand dame in her own mind, sweeps into the room. Her Russian heritage shows. She's a cross between a gypsy and Bea Arthur. Lots of long flowing fabric, a turbin, and an elaborate walking stick.)

SVETLANA

(to Gates)

Mr. Darwin.

GATES

Ms. Varushkin. Please call me Gates.

SVETLANA

Please to call me Svetlana.

GATES

(indicating Jared)

Svetlana, this is --

SVETLANA

Mr. LaMort.

JARED

Please to call me Jared. I mean, Jared, call me Jared.

SVETLANA

He of the Pig and Whistle fame.

JARED

Boar and Thistle.

SVETLANA

Is that not what I said?

JARED

It's the Boar and Thistle. Playhouse. The Pig and Whistle is a bar.

SVETLANA

It is of no matter. I know of your work.

(She sits grandly.)

JARED

And I definitely know of yours.

SVETLANA

Let us get down to the... how you say... nitty gritty. You are thinking Romeo and Juliet? A sequel? How is this possible?

JARED

It did cross my mind. And more importantly --

GATES

I think what Jared wants to say is how will we market this to our subscribers?

SVETLANA

That is of no importance. We will make art. They will come. Shakespeare was a good writer. That we know. But was he a great writer? Who can say?

JARED

I can say.

SVETLANA

It is of no importance. All things can be made to be improved. Shakespeare borrowed from those before him to write his plays. He improved what was on the page. I shall do the same.

JARED

You're going to improve Shakespeare?

SVETLANA

He was so talky.

GATES

Right there with you, Svetlana. Shakespeare for a new generation.

SVETLANA

Exactly.

(She pulls a very large manuscript from her bag and tosses it onto the desk.)

SVETLANA

I give to you ROMEO AND JULIET: ROSALINE'S REVENGE.

GATES

Who's Rosaline?

SVETLANA

(to Jared)

You have read Shakespeare, no?

JARED

No? Yes, I mean, yes, I have read Shakespeare.

SVETLANA

Then you know that Rosaline is --

JARED

Rosaline is the girl with whom Romeo was in love before he met Juliet.

GATES

There was another girl? It's got sequel written all over it.

JARED

Rosaline is only mentioned in the text, never seen. She vowed to Romeo that she would be chaste her entire life and therefore she couldn't love him.

GATES

Who was chasing her?

SVETLANA

Romeo was hormone driven adolescent. We all know that boys only want one thing. So, Rosaline says that she will be chaste to keep from giving it up.

(MORE)

SVETLANA (cont'd)

Or maybe she simply plays hardeth to get. Who knows? Point is Romeo falls in love with next girl he sees, Juliet. So, what happened to Rosaline? And what happens when she finds that Romeo and Juliet killed themselves in love pact? What's teenage girl to do but seek revenge on the living members of Capulet and Montague clans and Friar who wed them in first place?

GATES

Genius!

JARED

Sure, it might be genius if it hadn't already been written.

SVETLANA

It is in my head. How could someone write what is in my head?

JARED

I got nothing.

(Jared produces a script and throws it on the desk.)

JARED

AFTER JULIET by Sharman McDonald.

(reads from the back cover of the script.)

“A tense truce holds between the Capulets and the Montagues after the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Benvolio, Romeo's best friend, is in love with Rosaline, Juliet's cousin, but Rosaline is bent on revenge.”

(There is a tense moment as Svetlana considers this.)

SVETLANA

How do you feel about the Greeks?

(She produces an even larger script and tosses it on the desk.)

SVETLANA

Euripides' MEDEA.

JARED

Not a sequel?

SVETLANA

My own adaptation.

GATES

Svetlana Varushkin reinterprets MEDEA for a new generation. I love it. We can sell the crap out of that.

SVETLANA

(rises, heads for the door)

Good. You begin the process of selling... how you say... the crap. And I will cast.

JARED

Since MEDEA will be taking the slot of our already planned production of MACBETH, I'd like to use as many of those actors as possible.

SVETLANA

Do they have accents?

JARED

Accents?

SVETLANA

They must be foreign. All different. From many countries.

JARED

What?

SVETLANA

MEDEA is the story of a scorned lover who seeks revenge by murdering her children. It is a universal tale. We have all been there, have we not? To be universal, we must be multi-cultural. Only foreign actors.

(Gates whispers something in her ear.)

SVETLANA

And two Americans, but only two. The rest. Foreign.

JARED

Wait a minute --

SVETLANA

I must meet immediately with all designers. You have design staff, no?

JARED

No. I mean, yes. But, wait a minute --

SVETLANA

Jason is the North and Medea is the South. The American Civil War is our backdrop.

GATES

Inspired! I'm loving it.

JARED

Now just a minute.

SVETLANA

It will be what it wants to be. I leave script. You read. Tomorrow, noon. We meet actors. After, designers.

(She sweeps from the room.)

JARED

Medea set in The Civil War? She's nuts.

GATES

I like it. Greek tragedy meets American history. We can sell the bejesus out of that. Lots of school matinees for the kiddies. Genius. Our troubles are over, buddy boy.

JARED

I think they may just be beginning.

GATES

Oh, one more thing. There's an actress attached as part of the five mil. Yale Drama School, yada yada. Here's her resume.

JARED

Yale? Cool. Great.

(looks at the resume)

She has no classical training.

(holds up the resume, which is half blank)

In fact, she has not a whole lot of anything listed. Except... what is this? Ensemble in STAX OF WAX. What is STAX OF WAX?

GATES

It's a '50's music review or something. Look, she's Equity. That should at least make you happy. She got her Equity card at the Magic something --

JARED

Magic Plains Theme Park? In Oklahoma??

GATES

Let me put it this way. Daddy is Reggie Rothchild. Daddy wants her in the show. What Daddy wants, Daddy gets. And then Daddy gives us five mil.

JARED

(still perusing the resume)

Shanda... Lear? Her name is Shanda Lear?

GATES

Sounds kind of Shakespearean to me.

JARED

It's a light fixture. She named herself after a light fixture.

GATES

Who cares? She's a five million dollar light fixture. Deal with it.

JARED

Anything else?

GATES

Ummm... one more thing. Jet Storm is also attached to the project.

JARED

Who the hell is Jet Storm?

GATES

Jared, buddy boy, you got to get out more. He's a movie star. He's right up there with Bruce Willis, Vin Diesel, and Sly Stallone.

JARED

An action hero? He's an action hero?

GATES

Yeah. One of the best. BLUNT FORCE? LEATHER AND SMOKE? Seriously? You've never seen them? THE DIRT BRIGADE? The EAT MY DUST trilogy?

JARED

No.

GATES

His name on our marquee will be a cash cow, buddy.

JARED

Let me guess. Reggie Rothchild is producing one of his movies?