

**BACKSTAGE**  
By Adrian Ahlquist

## Cast of Characters

15 Females; 12 Males

<u>CASSIE:</u>	Stage manager, dressed in black.
<u>DEBBY:</u>	Assistant stage manager, dressed in black.
<u>HIPPO:</u>	A girl dressed as a hippo.
<u>TREE:</u>	A man dressed in a foam tree costume.
<u>CONSUELO:</u>	A woman dressed as a maid.
<u>CRUMPLE FEATHER:</u>	A woman dressed as a Native American Indian.
<u>WILLIFRED:</u>	Reggie's girlfriend in the "play" and in real life.
<u>GIOVANNA BELLACARISSA:</u>	The lead female role in the "play." An Italian diva.
<u>KIMMY WILLIAMS:</u>	One of the Siamese twins. Rusalka's "sister."
<u>RUSALKA:</u>	One of the Siamese twins. Kimmy's "sister."
<u>PEONY:</u>	One of the ballet dancers.
<u>PANSY:</u>	One of the ballet dancers.
<u>PETUNIA:</u>	One of the ballet dancers.
<u>CLEANING LADY:</u>	A Mexican cleaning lady.
<u>MOM:</u>	A mother in the audience.
<u>TONY ZANE:</u>	The lead male role in the "play."
<u>WASHBURN:</u>	The butler in the "play."
<u>EMMERICK:</u>	The writer of the "play" who also plays an Islamic terrorist.
<u>O'REILLY:</u>	The stagehand.
<u>REGGIE:</u>	Willifred's boyfriend in the "play" and in real life.
<u>FLAVIO:</u>	Plays an Islamic terrorist in the "play," has crush on Cassie.

PHILLIP PATTERSON:

Tony's understudy.

HIVES:

Plays multiple roles in the play, very superstitious.

COP 1:

Swat cop.

COP 2:

Swat cop.

COP 3:

Swat cop.

GARY FINCH:

Tech maintenance guy.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I - Backstage area of a theater.

ACT 2 - Backstage area of a theater.

Approximate Length

90 Minutes

Time

Modern Day

Place

The action takes place in the backstage area of a theater.

ACT I

Setting: Backstage Area with a prop pile that includes noisy items as well as a giant salt shaker.

At Rise: TREE is standing in the background, completely straight-faced.

(Enter WILLIFRED)

WILLIFRED

(To audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the show. Please turn off your cellphones and keep the aisles clear. If you would like to take pictures, please turn off the flash. Make sure...the...um...crap...

(Enter CASSIE)

CASSIE

What are you doing?

WILLIFRED

I'm practicing the announcement for the play. I forgot what comes after the flash part.

CASSIE

Are you kidding me? You're on in five minutes.

WILLIFRED

I was just given these lines.

CASSIE

You were given the lines a month ago.

WILLIFRED

I know. Short notice much?

CASSIE

Just get ready to go on stage.

WILLIFRED

What was it? Oh yeah. "Enjoy the show!" As if telling them to enjoy the show is going to do anything.

(Enter CONSUELO)

CASSIE

Alright, everyone get in here!

CONSUELO

Cassie, my—

CASSIE

Hold on, I need to make an announcement.

CONSUELO

But my earring got stuck to my costume, and it really hurts.

CASSIE

Can't you get—fine, come here.

(While fixing it)

Where is everybody?

WILLIFRED

A few minutes ago when I checked on the way to the bathroom—

CASSIE

What? They were on their way to the bathroom?

WILLIFRED

No, I was on the way to the bathroom.

CASSIE

Willifred, I don't care where you were. Where is everyone else?

CONSUELO

They're still farding.

CASSIE

What?

CONSUELO

Farding. It means putting on cosmetics.

CASSIE

Ok, Consuelo, why did you think I'd know what that means?

CONSUELO

Yeah, I know, it's a new word I learned. I think it's archaic—

CASSIE

Why are they still getting ready? We're just about to start!

WILLIFRED

I'll get them.

(Exit WILLIFRED)

CONSUELO  
What's the announcement?

CASSIE  
That we're just about to start!

CONSUELO  
Oh. Well shouldn't they already know that?

CASSIE  
Yes, they should!

(Enter REGGIE)

REGGIE  
Cassie, have you seen Willifred?

CASSIE  
Yes, but she's getting—Reggie, do you have eyeliner on yet?

REGGIE  
No, no one's put it on me.

CASSIE  
What! We're just about to start.

REGGIE  
I know. That's what I told the makeup artists.

CONSUELO  
See, they know, too.

REGGIE  
They were busy putting on other people's makeup.

CASSIE  
They should be done with the makeup by now.

REGGIE  
Do I even need eyeliner? I don't wanna look like—

CASSIE  
Yes, you need it! Now go tell them they have to put it on you as fast as they can.

(Exit REGGIE. Enter O'REILLY.)

CASSIE

(After fixing CONSUELO's earring)

There.

CONSUELO

Thanks, Cassie.

(Exit CONSUELO)

O'REILLY

Cassie, why am I the only stagehand, huh? I can't move every set piece in such little time.

CASSIE

O'Reilly, this is absolutely the worst time to come to me with this.

O'REILLY

Well, I couldn't come earlier because I didn't know about it.

CASSIE

There are at least fifteen bodies that can help you move.

O'REILLY

But they're actors.

CASSIE

Yeah?

O'REILLY

They can't do my job.

CASSIE

O'Reilly, don't take this the wrong way, but anyone can do your job.

O'REILLY

Anyone except an actor.

(Exit O'REILLY. Enter EMMERICK.)

EMMERICK

Cassie, how's it going? I'm excited—



CASSIE

You're excited to see the play you wrote come to fruition, yes—

EMMERICK

Ah, you knew what I was going to say—

CASSIE

But if you don't stay out of my way, things may still come crashing down.

EMMERICK

Yes, I'll try. One question though. As you may know, I am also in this play portraying the Islamic terrorist. The controversy surrounding this decision is not lost on me. It is my wish to tackle such a—

CASSIE

There had better be a question coming up.

EMMERICK

I can't find my assault rifle. Or rather, how big a deal is it if I can't find my assault rifle?

CASSIE

(Through clenched teeth)

Well, Emmerick, without a weapon, how is the terrorist going to terrorize?

EMMERICK

I'll check the prop closet again.

(Exit EMMERICK. Enter DEBBY, wearing black like a stage manager.)

DEBBY

Cassie, we have a problem.

CASSIE

Yes, Debby?

DEBBY

Agathe somehow jammed the makeup case shut. It's pretty remarkable how she managed to do it. We tried everything to get it open.

CASSIE

(Sigh)

Ok, I'd better go solve the problem. I seem to be the only one capable around here.

(Exit DEBBY. Enter FLAVIO.)

Hi, Cassie, um—  
FLAVIO

Not now, Flavio.  
CASSIE

(Exit CASSIE)

Yup, okay.  
FLAVIO  
(Looks around for a few seconds. Exit FLAVIO.)

(Enter PEONY, PANSY, and PETUNIA, who leap onto stage and begin to dance as gracefully as they can. Then PEONY steps on PANSY's toe.)

Ow! What was that!  
PANSY

Oh no.  
PETUNIA

She stepped on my toes!  
PANSY

It's not my fault your feet are so big.  
PEONY

PANSY  
The only big part of my feet are my arches, but you wouldn't know what arches even look like, would you, when you've been staring down at those feet your entire life.

Keep talking, Sasquatch.  
PEONY

PANSY  
At least I know how to use my feet. Tell me, did your grandma teach you how to pique?

PEONY  
My grandmother is in a wheelchair!

PANSY  
I know.

PETUNIA

(Sweetly at first)

Ladies, let's all take a breath to allow for a brief moment of introspection. Let us realize that we are going on stage in a couple of seconds to perform the dance that you two not only just botched, but manage to somehow botch every time. In fact, I can't remember the last time we've successfully made it through this piece. That being said, if you girls embarrass me in front of an auditorium full of people, I will kill you, and then dance on your graves. And I won't miss a step.

PEONY

That wasn't very introspective.

(Enter CASSIE with FLAVIO right behind her)

FLAVIO

Cassie, is there anything I can do to help you out? You look a bit frazzled. Not that that's bad— not that you look bad, I mean. You look good. It's bad that you're frazzled. And looking frazzled is bad. Wait a minute—

CASSIE

Flavio, I appreciate that you want to help, but honestly the best thing you can do right now is to stay out of the way. If you steer clear of my line of sight, you're golden.

FLAVIO

Sure thing. I'll get on that.

(Exit FLAVIO. Enter WILLIFRED, REGGIE, O'REILLY and CONSUELO.)

CASSIE

Good, you're here. Are you ready?

PETUNIA

We couldn't possibly be more ready. Right, girls?

PEONY and PANSY  
(Glaring at each other)

Mhm.

CASSIE

Ok, Willifred, go on.

(Exit WILLIFRED to "stage")

CASSIE

We're starting. Is everyone who is in the opening scene here?

PETUNIA

All accounted for.

CASSIE

Ok, I've told this to everyone before, but I'm going to say it again. No matter what happens tonight, no matter what chaos may possibly ensue, the show must go on. Even if the theater comes crashing down around you, do not break character. As for when you are here backstage, do not talk or make any noise unless it is absolutely necessary. Alright, your entrance is coming up.

(Exit O'REILLY)

(Exit PEONY, PANSY, PETUNIA, CONSUELO, and REGGIE onto "stage.")

(Enter DEBBY)

DEBBY

Cassie, we have another problem. Emmerick just locked himself in the prop closet when he was looking for his gun. Again, I don't know how. It locks from the inside.

CASSIE

Oh my gosh. Why is everyone so helpless?

(Exit CASSIE. Enter PHILLIP PATTERSON.)

PHILLIP

She looks frazzled. Badly frazzled.

DEBBY

I'm sorry, you're not in the play, are you?

PHILLIP

Well...

DEBBY

Who are you?

PHILLIP

I'm Phillip Patterson.

DEBBY

But who—

(Enter CRUMPLE FEATHER)

CRUMPLE

Debby, I need to speak up about the offensive depiction of my character in this play. I have serious reservations about—

PHILLIP

(Laughs)

I get it. Like an Indian reservation. That's funny.

DEBBY

I'm just the assistant stage manager, Crumple Feather.

CRUMPLE

That's not my name!

DEBBY

(Points to her list)

I'm sorry, it's easier to go by the character name—

CRUMPLE

That's no excuse.

DEBBY

I'm not the one to talk to about this.

CRUMPLE

Well, where's Cassie?

(Enter CASSIE)

CASSIE

(Reluctantly)

I'm here.

CRUMPLE

Cassie, I need to speak up about the offensive depiction of my character in this play. I have serious reservations about—

CASSIE

(Sarcastically)

Ha ha. Reservations. That's hilarious. I don't have time for jokes right now, Crumple Feather—

CRUMPLE

It's not supposed to be funny. And Crumple Feather is not my name—

CASSIE

I'm sorry, I can't remember everyone's name. I go by the list.

CRUMPLE

This script is discriminatory to multiple races and cultures—

CASSIE

What do you want me to do? Stop the play? Because that's not going to happen. My job is to keep the play going no matter what. Talk to Emmerick. He wrote it. And he's out of the closet now, thanks to me.

CRUMPLE

Why would you do that?

CASSIE

No, I mean—nevermind.

(Exit CASSIE enter EMMERICK)

CRUMPLE

Emmerick, I need to speak to you about the offensive depiction of my character in this play. I have serious reservations about—

EMMERICK

Ah, reservations. Humorous.

CRUMPLE

This is serious!

EMMERICK

Ah, well my portrayal of the Native Americans—

CRUMPLE

Indigenous People, not Native Americans.

EMMERICK

And even Indigenous People doesn't suffice, which is part of the point. You see, by focusing on the Atchatchakangouen tribe to which you belong, I wish to capture the unique nature of—

CRUMPLE

It's racist and I don't like it.

EMMERICK

While I always welcome criticism to better my writing, why didn't you come to me with your concerns when you first read the script?

CRUMPLE

Well, it's a play... I had to see it to know what was in it.

EMMERICK

I see. Do you have concerns with the script regarding any other sensitive issues?

CRUMPLE

Not off the top of my head.

(Enter FLAVIO from "stage")

FLAVIO

Emmerick, the next scene is the one where you kill all those innocent people.

EMMERICK

Oh, that's right. May I borrow your gun?

FLAVIO

Sure.

(Exit EMMERICK, PHILLIP, CRUMPLE and FLAVIO)

(Enter PEONY, PANSY, PETUNIA from "on stage")

PANSY

Debby, my dress tore.

PEONY

All by itself. Truly a phenomenon.

PANSY

You know, if you hadn't been chasséing so invasively, I would have had more space to avoid the nail sticking out of the dresser.

DEBBY

Uh, okay. Go to the dressing room. I'll get someone to fix it.

(Exit PANSY. Enter GIOVANNA BELLACARISSA.)

GIOVANNA

You, black one.

DEBBY

Oh, here we go.

GIOVANNA

It is so hot in here. Why does it feel as though I am in hell?

DEBBY

Premonition, maybe?

GIOVANNA

What?

DEBBY

I'll see if I can lower the temperature,  
(Softer)  
but don't get used to it.

(Exit DEBBY. Enter TONY and WASHBURN.)

TONY

The stars have arrived. Isn't that right, Washburn?

WASHBURN

Don't talk to me. I'm concentrating.

TONY

Oh, of course. Beg your pardon.

WASHBURN

(Articulate)  
Tongue twisters twist tongues.  
Tongue twisters twist tongues.

TONY

Right, you have to do your little actor ritual before you do anything.

WASHBURN

While Peter picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
Picky people picked Peter peanut butter.  
As she sells seashells by the sea shore,  
Six slimy snails sailed silently.  
Unique New York's unique,  
And Worcestershire's the worst for sure.

TONY

That's a cute tongue twister.

WASHBURN

For the last time, it is a collation of warmups which exercises all the areas of the mouth.



TONY

And you did it stupendously, Washburn. You have warmed yourself up. I, on the other hand, can just wing it.

WASHBURN

(Scoffs)

That attitude is why you'll never be a competent actor.

TONY

Like yourself?

WASHBURN

Precisely.

TONY

That's why you got the lead and I didn't.

WASHBURN

Yes, that's—wait—

TONY

Oh, that's right, I got the lead. Not you. Silly me.

WASHBURN

Just because you're the lead doesn't make—

TONY

Blah blah blah blah. This is my tongue warmup.

GIOVANNA

Quiet, both of you. I am clearly the lead.

TONY

Well, the female lead.

GIOVANNA

That is the only lead that matters.

WASHBURN

Enough of this! I refuse to engage in such an infantile debate.

TONY

Sounds like you're just jealous.

WASHBURN

Listen, you piddly pile—

TONY

Blaaaaaah blah blah—

PETUNIA

What's got them at each other's throats?

PEONY

Honestly, I don't understand why people fight sometimes.

(Exit PEONY and PETUNIA. Enter CASSIE and DEBBY.)

WASHBURN

If I had wanted your part, I would have tried out for it. But hero roles are superficial, to say the least. I wanted to play a character with depth.

TONY

Of course. Why settle for the hero, when you can have the butler.

WASHBURN

Anything is better than a cardboard cutout who doesn't even have to change the expression on his face!

TONY

You don't understand nuance. You're always playing to the back row.

CASSIE

Alright, quiet! Quiet! The "no talking" rule applies to everyone, including you hotshots.

TONY

It's Washburn's fault.

WASHBURN

It is *not*!

(Exit WASHBURN)

CASSIE

Shh! Debby! Make sure Giovanna doesn't need anything.

DEBBY

Giovanna, do you—

GIOVANNA

I prefer that you call me Madame Bellacarissa.

DEBBY

Of course...

(GIOVANNA waits)

DEBBY

...Madame Bellacarissa. Do you need anything?

GIOVANNA

I noticed that the fruit basket in my dressing room did not have any peaches in it.

DEBBY

That was actually a prop basket, Madame Bellacarissa. All that fruit was plastic.

GIOVANNA

(Pause)

Still, it didn't have any peaches in it.

DEBBY

Well, I'll make a note of that. Is there anything you need right now? Are you ready to go on?

GIOVANNA

Of course! Why wouldn't I be ready? Silly girl.

DEBBY

And you have that line straight? It's "We should be appalled by the garbage of infidels" and not "We should be upholstered by a garage of imbeciles."

GIOVANNA

Hmm. I wonder if the way I say it isn't actually better.

DEBBY

But shouldn't you stay on script?

GIOVANNA

I used to be an opera star, you know.

DEBBY

I think I knew that.

GIOVANNA

I'm not boasting. It's just a fact.

DEBBY

And why did you stop doing opera?

GIOVANNA

All that singing. I felt it was starting to interfere with my acting. And that is what my fans come to see.

DEBBY

They do?

(GIOVANNA casts her a look)

I mean, they *do*!

GIOVANNA

Remind me who you are.

DEBBY

I'm Debby. The assistant stage manager.

GIOVANNA

Very good. Run along and do your assisting. If I need you, I will beckon.

DEBBY

I'm also...

(But GIOVANNA turns and exits)

DEBBY

...your understudy.

CASSIE

(Walking up to DEBBY)

You're her understudy? I didn't realize that you had tried out for the play.

DEBBY

Yeah, maybe someday I'll get on stage.

(When TREE, who has been standing there the entire play so far, speaks, CASSIE and DEBBY jump because they didn't realize TREE was there)

TREE

Just because you're on stage doesn't mean you're acting.

(Sits down)

CASSIE

You know who the real stars of the play are, Debby? The stage managers.

DEBBY

I wouldn't say that.

CASSIE

No, it's true. We do all the work.

DEBBY

Yeah, we do all the work and get no credit. Stars get all the credit, and do no work.

GIOVANNA

(Entering and crossing back to DEBBY)

Karen! I know what you can do for me.

DEBBY

I prefer that you call me Debby.

GIOVANNA

What is this "you prefer"? You don't get to prefer.

DEBBY

It's just that my name is Debby.

GIOVANNA

Oh, if you say so. Get the air conditioning working. It still hasn't cooled down. I will not work under these conditions if the air condition does not work. You see?

(Exit DEBBY)

TONY

Work? You call this work, Gigi?

GIOVANNA

Of course it's work, Antonio.

TONY

Being a star isn't work. It only feels like work if you're no good at it.

GIOVANNA

What! Are you saying I am no good at acting?

TONY

I don't know. Is it hard work for you?

GIOVANNA

(Considers)

Of course not. A walk in the park.

(Enter FLAVIO)

CASSIE

Alright, just...stop talking.

(GIOVANNA grumbles and exits with TONY)

CASSIE

Will someone please move this prop pile? Someone is going to trip over it.

(Exit CASSIE)

FLAVIO

I will, I will. Leave it to me, Cassie.

(Enter HIPPO)

HIPPO

Do I look fat?

FLAVIO

(Unconvincingly)

Not really.

HIPPO

I feel fat.

FLAVIO

It's the costume.

HIPPO

(Giving him a look)

I know it's the costume. I hate it. Whose idea was it to have a giant hippo in the play?

TREE

At least you're not a tree. You get to move around. I just have to stand there and...

FLAVIO

Look like a tree?

TREE

It is not the path I would have chosen.

HIPPO

It's not that bad. I mean, sure, you do have to stand there and be expressionless, and you were probably given the role because they didn't trust you with any lines, and in the end, a set piece could do your role better than you could. But...

(Pause)

TREE

But...?

HIPPO

No, I got nothing. You're stuck.

TREE

Yeah. Most trees are.

(Exit TREE)

HIPPO

(To FLAVIO)

What are you doing?

FLAVIO

I was picking up these props for Cassie.

HIPPO

(Gossipy)

Oh yeah, you still have a crush on the stage manager, don't you?

FLAVIO

Yup.

HIPPO

How's that going?

FLAVIO

She said I was golden.

HIPPO

Really?

FLAVIO

The exact words were, "If you steer clear of my line of sight, you're golden."

HIPPO

Oh. So basically you can make her happy by making sure she doesn't look at you.

If you want to put it that way.

FLAVIO

That's kinda sad.

HIPPO

Yeah.

FLAVIO

HIPPO

But no, it's okay. I mean, sure, she probably hasn't noticed you, and this is definitely the worst time to try to make her do that because she has a million other things on her mind, but you won't get many chances to talk to her afterward, and she is generally an irritable person...

Alright, alright.

FLAVIO

You're just in an unfortunate situation.

HIPPO

If only there was something I could do to make her notice me.

FLAVIO

(Enter CASSIE)

You just missed your entrance!

(To FLAVIO)

CASSIE

Oh no!

FLAVIO

Get your head out of your...out of the clouds!

CASSIE

(Exit FLAVIO to "stage")

That worked.

HIPPO

This is why there's a "no talking" rule.

CASSIE