

# **The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet**

**Everyone's a critic**

**A Comedy in One Act by James Hutchison**

**Also available from [www.jameshutchison.ca](http://www.jameshutchison.ca)**

**What the Dickens!** *Even Scrooge got a second chance.*

When Marty Fisher gets caught kissing his stage manager Samantha and the actor playing Scrooge shows up drunk Marty has to scramble to save the opening night production of a Christmas Carol and his engagement to his fiancée Tami.

**Two Act Comedy, 6M, 3W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes**

**A Christmas Carol – Two versions available.** *Every man has the power to do good.*

When Scrooge's nephew Fred finds some letters Scrooge had written to his sister Fan a long time ago the past is unlocked, and Scrooge learns how his fear of poverty and pursuit of wealth have cost him a chance for love and genuine happiness.

**CAST OF 10+ - Two Act Drama, 6M, 4W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes**

**CAST OF 25+ - Two Act Drama, 15M, 10W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes**

**Under the Mistletoe** *Not every romantic evening goes as planned.*

Two couples in their late fifties, one long time friends and the other having just met, try to navigate the tricky road of love, sex and desire while spending a romantic night in the Christmas Themed Suites at the Prairie Dog Inn.

**Two Act Romantic Comedy 1M, 1W or 2M, 2W Single Set, 120 minutes**

**Heart of Stone: A Jessica Quinn Mystery** *Trusting the wrong person can be deadly.*

When Jessica Quinn uncovers the truth about her father's killer and the truth behind a woman claiming to be the long-lost daughter of her client Mary McConnell more than one person ends up dead.

**Two Act Mystery, 7M, 3W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes**

**Death and the Psychiatrist** *Even Death could use a friend.*

Feeling depressed about having a job where no one likes him, Death goes into therapy with Dr. Thompson in order to help him cope with his guilt.

**One Act Comedy, 3M, or 2M, 1W, Single Set, 50 Minutes**

**500 bucks and a pack of smokes** *How much is your life worth?*

Calling off a hit he put out on himself because he mistakenly thought he was dying proves to be more difficult than Donny had expected.

**One Act Comedy, 3+ 2M, 1W, Multiple Sets, 60 Minutes**

**Plus, other One Acts and 10 Minute Plays including The Blood of a Thousand Chickens, Written in Stone, and Elvis is Dead.**

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### Acknowledgements

The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was partly developed through the Alberta Playwrights Network Wordshed Program in 2014. Many thanks to actors Elinor Holt, Eric Wigston, Jennica Grienke, and Trevor Rueger for their participation and assistance in developing the play.

The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet – Everyone’s a critic.  
A Play in One Act by James Hutchison

ISBN: 978-1-9992733-2-3

## **CAST of CHARACTERS**

Scarlet Osgood	the critic
Morgan Brown	the playwright
Leo Green	the phantom

Characters may be any ethnicity.

## **SETTING**

The abandoned Chelsea Theatre

## **TIME**

7:45 pm

On a Monday

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

After being drugged playwright Morgan Brown and theatre critic Scarlet Osgood wake up tied together back to back on stage at the abandoned Chelsea Theatre. Leo a failed playwright and Scarlet's ex-husband has brought Scarlet and Morgan there to prove that his most recent play The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet is better than anything Morgan has ever written and worthy of Scarlet's critical praise. Desperate to win back his wife and get his play produced Leo is prepared to kill – or so he says – to get what he wants.

For Jessica, Meredith, Phyllis, and Marylou

## The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet

*Setting: The abandoned Chelsea Theatre. This is a grand old theatre that has fallen on hard times and is now slated for demolition. Remnants of past shows litter the stage.*

*At Rise: SCARLET OSGOOD and MORGAN BROWN are tied together. They sit on the floor with their backs to each other. They are bound together by a rope wrapped several times around their middle which pins their arms to their sides. SCARLET is awake and struggling against the ropes, but MORGAN is still groggy. (As an option you could open the house and already have the actors playing MORGAN and SCARLET tied together in the middle of the stage. MORGAN would be out cold, and SCARLET could start to wake up and assess her situation. And then as the house lights dim...)*

SCARLET

Damn. Hey? Are you awake?

MORGAN

Ohhhahhhmmm.

SCARLET

Are you awake?

MORGAN

What?

*SCARLET shakes the two of them back and forth.*

SCARLET

Wake up would ya!

MORGAN

What?

SCARLET

Wake up!

*MORGAN shakes his head. HE goes to move but discovers he can't.*

What the hell?  
MORGAN

Are you awake?  
SCARLET

Jesus!  
MORGAN

Hello.  
SCARLET

Oh my God! What's going on!  
MORGAN

Shhhh, not so loud.  
SCARLET

Help!  
MORGAN

Would you shut up.  
SCARLET

Help! Help me!  
MORGAN

Stop yelling – be quiet.  
SCARLET

Help! Heeeeeelp! Anyone? Heeeeeelp!  
MORGAN

For Christ's sake would you shut the fuck up!  
SCARLET

You shut the fuck up!  
MORGAN

SCARLET

Listen, I don't know who the fuck you are and what the fuck we're doing here but I wish you'd shut the fuck up. We need to figure out how to get out of this fucking mess without letting the bastard who put us here know that we're awake.

MORGAN

What bastard?

SCARLET

I don't know. Whoever put us here. I was at a charity thing for the Shakespeare Under the Stars Festival and I had a glass of champagne and the next thing I know I wake up tied to you.

MORGAN

I was at a bar...having a drink...and then nothing.

SCARLET

Clearly we've been drugged.

MORGAN

Drugged? That's crazy. By who?

SFX: SINISTER LAUGH

SCARLET

What the hell was that?

MORGAN

That's fucked up. That's what that is.

SCARLET

Would you just calm down! Can you move your arms?

MORGAN

Hardly.

SCARLET

What about your legs?

MORGAN

My legs are fine.



SCARLET

Let's try getting up.

MORGAN

Good idea.

SCARLET

We'll push against each other. Alright?

MORGAN

Alright. Let's do this.

*SCARLET and MORGAN try to stand up pushing against one another but just end up scooting about the stage.*

MORGAN

Where the hell are we anyway?

SCARLET

We're at the Chelsea.

MORGAN

Oh my God – the Chelsea – I love this place. I've seen some great shows here over the years.

SCARLET

Me too. When I was sixteen, I saw Nicolas Cage in Hamlet. That production never made it to Broadway, but I thought he was brilliant. His melancholy prince had all the vulnerability of a moonstruck Romeo and the raw rage of a wrongly convicted veteran hell bent on revenge. I still get chills thinking about it. Whooooaaa

*SCARLET and MORGAN fall onto their side.*

SCARLET

Shit.

MORGAN

Now what?

SCARLET

Let's try and work our way over to the wall.

*SCARLET and MORGAN spin in circles on their side.*

MORGAN

You know I saw Jim Carrey's *Hamlet* here. That's when he was trying to make the transition from comic actor to serious artist. His performance was sort of a cross between *Ace Ventura Pet Detective* and *The Cable Guy*. Goofy but intense. Not that I fault him for trying. Nobody likes to be type cast.

SCARLET

It's one of the great roles.

MORGAN

Every actor, worth his salt, wants to play Hamlet.

SCARLET

This isn't working.

MORGAN

Let's try sitting up.

SCARLET

Alright. On three. And one and two and three.

*SCARLET and MORGAN right themselves.*

MORGAN

There.

SCARLET

Whew!

MORGAN

It's just such a shame they're going to tear this theatre down and build condos.

SCARLET

Good location though.

MORGAN

Very central. I couldn't afford it myself – not on what I make as a playwright.

SCARLET

You're a playwright?

MORGAN

Morgan Brown.

SCARLET

Morgan Brown! Oh my God, Morgan. It's Scarlet Osgood.

MORGAN

Scarlet?

SCARLET

I loved your last play. *Jerk Off* was amazing theatre!

MORGAN

Well tell all your friends we're not doing so well at the box office.

SCARLET

Oh, I did better than that. Didn't you read my review?

MORGAN

I never read reviews.

SCARLET

No? Oh, how disappointing. Well, I gave your play quite the rave, and as you know, I'm not an easy one to impress. Oh Morgan, in my opinion you're the brave new voice of the next generation.

MORGAN

Well thanks, but you're a lone voice in the woods. That asshole, Scott Bradley over at the Chronicle, hated it. Called it trite.

SCARLET

I thought you said you didn't read reviews.

MORGAN

Most of the time I don't. I try not to. But sometimes you can't help yourself. It's hard to avoid. Especially on social media.

SCARLET

Hold on a second. You're a playwright, and I'm a critic. We're in a theatre. Do you think there's some connection?

MORGAN

If there is, I don't know what it could be.

SCARLET

A jealous rival perhaps. A stalker maybe?

MORGAN

Playwrights usually don't have stalkers.

SCARLET

Well neither do critics.

MORGAN

No, but I'll bet you have enemies.

SCARLET

No one crazy enough to do something like this.

MORGAN

Do you want to try scooting over towards the wall?

SCARLET

Good idea. On three, okay? And one and two and three.

*MORGAN and SCARLET lurch towards the wall. SCARLET pulling with her feet and MORGAN pushing with his.*

MORGAN

You know actors are the ones who usually get all the groupies.

SCARLET

Well they are the ones who bring your words to life.

MORGAN

And then there are some who kill what you've written.

SCARLET

Casting is so important.

MORGAN

You know I'm not saying all actors take advantage of their situation, but there are some actors who seem to have a different bunch of groupies hanging around them every night.

SCARLET

Do you mind if we keep moving?

MORGAN

Sure.

SCARLET

And one and two and three.

*MORGAN and SCARLET lurch towards the wall.*

MORGAN

How is that fair I ask you? I'd like to see how long an audience would wait around watching Denzel Washington twiddle his thumbs on stage if he didn't have anything to say.

SCARLET

Oh, I'd watch Denzel twiddle. And one and two and three.

*MORGAN and SCARLET lurch towards the wall.*

SCARLET

Did you see his Hamlet?

MORGAN

I did. Nobody can brood like Denzel. But as good as Denzel is if he didn't have the bard's words to say – no one would watch – you need character and story and dialogue to make theatre. You need the playwright.

SCARLET

Well, as a critic, I do appreciate good writing. That's why I love your plays. Even though you may not always succeed, your plays do make a bold attempt to examine our place in the universe. And one and two and three.

*SCARLET pulls with her feet but MORGAN doesn't push and the two remain where they are.*

SCARLET

You have to push.

MORGAN

What do you mean, "not always succeed?"

SCARLET

Oh, Christ.

MORGAN

What?

SCARLET

It's never a good idea for a critic and a playwright to compare notes.

MORGAN

I just want to know.

SCARLET

Can we please move towards the wall so we can get out of here?

MORGAN

I'll push when you tell me what you meant.

SCARLET

I didn't mean anything. And one and two and three.

*MORGAN pulls in the opposite direction that SCARLET is pulling. The result is they are scooting around a few inches here and there as each battle with the other. The two continue to scoot around the stage as they argue.*

SCARLET

What are you doing?

MORGAN

Answer my question.

SCARLET

Listen, I love your writing, okay.

MORGAN

But?

SCARLET

I love how your characters come to life on stage.

MORGAN

But?

SCARLET

Well I'm sure you don't like everything.

MORGAN

So?

SCARLET

I'm sure you have writers and actors that you admire but that doesn't mean you admire everything they're in or everything they write – does it?

MORGAN

Of course not.

SCARLET

Well, I have actors and writers I adore, but sometimes the work isn't as good as it should be.

MORGAN

Well, you do know that half the time the work is decided by the budget.

SCARLET

That shouldn't make a difference.

MORGAN

But it does make a difference.

SCARLET

You can make compelling theatre with an empty stage. You don't need elaborate costumes or sets.

MORGAN

I know that, Scarlett. What I'm saying is that sometimes decisions are made because the budget doesn't allow for the production you originally imagined.

SCARLET

I understand that Morgan, but that shouldn't be a consideration when evaluating a production.

MORGAN

It plays a factor that's all.

SCARLET

I didn't say it didn't play a factor.

*MORGAN and SCARLET stop scooting about the floor exhausted.*

*Pause*

SCARLET

Okay! You want to know what play I had a problem with?

MORGAN

Yes.

SCARLET

*Stuff it Bush.*

MORGAN

My satire about the Bush administration.



SCARLET

Yes.

MORGAN

How can you say that? What Bush and his cronies did was a crime. I'm a believer in the rights and freedoms of the individual, and as a defender of free speech I believe a strong America ensures that the voice of freedom will be heard around the world. Bush didn't just hurt America he damaged the moral voice of the west. How the hell can we stand up and criticize the actions of Russia or China or Kenya when we use our military might and take away the rights and freedoms of our own citizens without just cause in order to achieve our own short sighted economic objectives.

SCARLET

Oh, that's so typical – don't criticize my play because I'm discussing important issues. If you venture into the depths of political discussion and debate then you should expect an even more in depth critical evaluation of your work, and although I appreciate the subject matter and what you're trying to say, your writing was a little too on the nose, if you know what I mean.

MORGAN

It was satire.

SCARLET

Of course, it was satire. I love satire. But having the actors wear signs around their necks that said "war criminals" undercut the humour and destroyed a serious message. You have talent. I've seen it. You should use it to better ends. What you wrote was a little too blatant and rather undramatic.

MORGAN

I don't understand how you can love *Jerk Off* so much and hate *Stuff it Bush*?

SCARLET

I didn't say I hated it.

MORGAN

You said, "The playwright's heavy-handed approach and blatant preaching made the play humourless and tedious." You said, "Too often playwrights like Mr. Brown get up on their soap box and expound on issues and ideas forgetting that theatre requires a story not just a discussion of the subject." You said, "My suggestion to Mr. Brown is that in future instead of writing a play, to voice his opinions, he would save us all an agonizing evening at the theatre by simply writing a blog."

SCARLET

Ah ha! So, you do read reviews.

MORGAN

Alright, yes. I read reviews. I read them all. Okay. I read every last word of praise or disapproval. I read all of them. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

SCARLET

You're being way too sensitive. It wasn't a bad review. It was my honest reaction to your work. You shouldn't take things personally.

MORGAN

It was unnecessarily harsh and deliberately cruel, in my opinion.

SCARLET

So, your real problem isn't with the content of what I said but rather with how I said it.

MORGAN

Yes.

SCARLET

The tone.

MORGAN

Yes.

SCARLET

My style.

MORGAN

Yes.

SCARLET

Which is exactly the same problem I had with your play.

MORGAN

Oh, you critics like to criticize but you don't like it when the tables are turned and you get a little of your own medicine, do you?

SFX: SINISTER LAUGH

SCARLET

Look as much as I'd like to sit here and discuss theatre criticism with you, I think we should scoot over to that wall as fast as we can. Get on our feet. And get the hell out of here.

MORGAN

I'm with you on that one.

*SCARLET and MORGAN quickly scoot off stage and into the wings.*

SFX: ORGAN MUSIC AND LIGHTS HEARD THE ENTRANCE OF THE PHANTOM

*The PHANTOM enters in a dramatic fashion. HE can fly in or rise from a trap door – whatever the theatre allows and can be staged. He is dressed in black and wears a cape, but he doesn't wear the typical Phantom mask. Instead he wears a full mask half of which is the mask of comedy and half of which is the mask of tragedy. HE enters in such a way that he doesn't see MORGAN and SCARLET have scooted off the stage. HE is singing THE BEGINNING OF THE END*

PHANTOM

AND THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE END

I HAVE ENDURED NOTHING BUT PAIN MY FRIEND

BUT THAT WILL END TONIGHT MY DEAR

THE CURTAIN WILL FALL THERE IS NOTHING TO CHEER

THE AUDIENCE IS GONE WE'RE THE ONLY ONE'S HERE...

Ah, horse biscuits!

*The PHANTOM turns as he sings the last line to face his prisoners but they aren't there. He comes out of character and removes his mask so he can see better. He starts to look about the stage and looks off into the audience trying to figure out where they've gone. He hears a noise in the wings.*

SFX: CRASH IN THE WINGS.

PHANTOM

Ah ha! You can not escape me!

*The PHANTOM runs off towards the sound carrying his mask.*

*There is a crash – a bump – and a moment later SCARLET and MORGAN still tied together come running across the stage. SCARLET is leading the way and MORGAN is running backwards. LEO comes huffing after them. They run about the stage weaving in and around set pieces while being chased by LEO.*

LEO

There's no point running. The doors are locked, and I have the keys. You aren't going to get out of here unless I let you out.

*SCARLET stops and turns to face LEO.*

SCARLET

Leo is that you?

*LEO realizes he's not wearing his mask and tries to put it back on.*

LEO

Oh fudge!

MORGAN

You know this guy?

SCARLET

Yeah, I know this guy. Leo what the hell do you think you're doing? Have you lost your mind?

*LEO stops fiddling with his mask and leaves it off.*

LEO

Hardly, for the first time in my life I know exactly what I'm doing and you're not going to stop me, Scarlett. Not this time.

SCARLET

You know this is kidnapping.

LEO

Is it? It's your word against mine. You have no real evidence to prove that I kidnapped you. Why should the police believe you without evidence?

MORGAN

What are you planning to do?

LEO

Oh, I don't want to give away too much of the plot just yet. (*Assuming the role of the Phantom*)  
Let's just say you two will be lucky to get out of here alive.

*LEO lets out a sinister laugh.*

SCARLET

Oh, come on Leo, you're no psychopath.

LEO

You see that was the problem with you and me. You never took me seriously. You always put me down. You always made fun of my plans. A wife is supposed to stand behind her man.

SCARLET

I stood behind you.

LEO

Yeah, so you could put a knife in my back.

SCARLET

I was doing my job.

LEO

You plunged it in nice and deep. (Beat) And then you twisted it.

SCARLET

If I'd been soft on you it would have ruined my credibility.

LEO

You could have let someone else review my play.

SCARLET

You said you could handle it.

LEO

I was lying.

SCARLET

How was I supposed to know that?

LEO

Because you were my wife and you should have known how I really felt.

SCARLET

How can I know what you really feel if you don't tell me?

MORGAN

You two are married?

LEO & SCARLET

Divorced.

MORGAN

Look if you've got a problem with your wife –

SCARLET

Ex-wife.

MORGAN

Ex-wife – that's fine. But what the hell am I doing here?

LEO

You're here because according to Scarlet you represent the voice of a new age. An obscene – ugly – crude new age – if you ask me.

MORGAN

What are you talking about?

LEO

Your plays are nothing but filth.

MORGAN

I'll have you know that my plays deal with relevant social issues and the style of presentation is meant to shock an audience into awareness.

LEO

Oh, horse biscuits and pumpkin pie! You're just covering the same old ground other playwrights have already explored. You're not saying anything new. Your plays are simply designed to be offensive.

MORGAN

My plays force people to examine their beliefs and opinions – it should shatter their perceptions of the world – it should provide food for thought.

LEO

Food for thought. Wow! You're the voice of a new age and that's the best you can do? Food for thought! How original! Shakespeare better watch his back because there's a new kid in town and boy can he – “turn a phrase.” Can't you come up with something a little more original?

MORGAN

Well if you don't like the way I write you're welcome to write a play of your own.

LEO

Oh, I have. That's why you're here.

*LEO walks over to the easel and whips off the cover to reveal a poster for The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet! Written by Leo Green. Starring Leo Green as the Phantom. Directed by Leo Green. Music and Lyrics by Leo Green.*

LEO

Behold my masterpiece – *The Phantom of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet!* Written by Leo Green. Starring Leo Green as the Phantom. Directed by Leo Green. Music and Lyrics by Leo Green. I wrote it for you Scarlet. Everything I write – I write for you.

SCARLET

I appreciate that Leo, but you know – you really need to move on with your life.

LEO

But I am moving on. And with your help the world will discover a bold new playwright. And when my play reaches Broadway and sweeps the Tonys and when Hollywood options it and I get to direct and star in the movie and we sweep the Oscars – it will all be because of you.

SCARLET

Why don't we just start with you untying us?

LEO

I don't think so. I want you to hear about my play. If I untie you, you'll just run off.

SCARLET

Well then stop wasting time and tell us about your God damn play – would ya? What's it about?

LEO

It's about love. Love and devotion and sacrifice. When the curtain rises, we see two young lovers tied together in the catacombs beneath the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

MORGAN

There are catacombs in Winnipeg. I don't think so.

LEO

In my play there are.

MORGAN

You know Leo – I don't know how to tell you this, but your idea doesn't sound very original.

LEO

It's more original than anything you've ever written.

MORGAN

Oh really? You don't think your play sounds an awful lot like *Phantom of the Opera*.

LEO

Oh please. This isn't *Phantom of the Opera*. My Phantom is completely different. He doesn't write opera he writes ballets – singing ballets – and he's not in love with the girl – everything he does he does for the boy.

SCARLET

The Phantom is gay?

LEO

No, he's not gay. The boy is his son.

MORGAN

Hold on a second Leo – that's not a bad idea. I like the gay angle.



LEO

I don't want the Phantom to be gay.

MORGAN

Why not? Gay plays do very well. *La Cage Aux Folles* was a big hit.

LEO

No.

SCARLET

*Angels in America* won the Pulitzer prize.

MORGAN

And a Tony for best new play.

LEO

I don't care.

MORGAN

*La Cage Aux Folles* was made into a movie with Nathan Lane and Robin Williams.

SCARLET

HBO made a mini-series out of *Angels* starring Al Pacino.

LEO

Would you two shut up. This is my play not yours.

MORGAN

I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were so homophobic.

LEO

I'm not homophobic. I just don't want the Phantom to be gay. This is a story about a father sacrificing everything for his son.

MORGAN

What if the son was gay?

LEO

He's not gay. He's a playwright. A playwright who had a disastrous opening night.

MORGAN

We've all had a few of those.

LEO

The critics have savagely attacked his work and he was booed off the stage.

SCARLET

Oh, how typical make the critic the villain.

LEO

Words can hurt Scarlet. Sometimes when you rip into a play you go too far.

MORGAN

I guess we've both been the victim of her poison pen.

LEO

Poison pen? Really?

MORGAN

What's wrong with poison pen?

SCARLET

I have news for you two. Not everyone is going to like what you write.

LEO

Yeah, but most people don't get to put it in print.

SCARLET

In this day and age any audience member can tweet, blog, and text about the show they've seen. And if you think my reviews are savage you haven't been on Twitter lately. The world is changing. How we communicate is changing. Sadly, the critic doesn't have the influence she once did.

LEO

Oh, I don't know about that. You were pretty influential on getting my show cancelled.

SCARLET

Are we going to start that again?

LEO

I just think you owe me.

SCARLET

I won't say I like something if I don't Leo. I owe it to my readers to tell them what I think. I won't have somebody paying good money to see garbage. There's nothing more useless in this world than a wishy-washy critic who likes everything.

LEO

I'm not asking you to lie. I'm telling you that what I've written is really good and it deserves to be seen. It deserves a chance.

MORGAN

Okay Leo. Go on. Tell us more about your play.

LEO

Okay, well the Phantom is watching from the shadows when the young playwright takes out a gun and is about to commit suicide. But the Phantom stops him.

*LEO pulls out a gun.*

SCARLET

Oh my God, is that real?

LEO

Of course, it's real. Where am I going to get a prop gun?

SCARLET

What exactly have you got planned Leo?

LEO

Well I'm introducing the gun in order to create dramatic tension. You see by having the playwright try to commit suicide in Act one I let the audience know there's a gun – and that way the audience will anticipate the gun making an appearance during the climax of the play. Like in my all-time favourite whodunnit *Murder in Disguise*.

MORGAN

By Blake Gilmore. Oh, I love that play.

LEO

Me too. It's one of my favourites. Did you see the original movie with Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson, and Kenneth Branagh?

MORGAN

All three were nominated for an Oscar.

LEO

All three deserved an Oscar.

MORGAN

I love Hopkins.

LEO

Me too – I wish I'd seen his *Hamlet* on stage.

MORGAN

That would have been amazing. It's too bad it wasn't recorded. I heard it was one of the best.

LEO

No doubt. Have you seen Branagh's *Hamlet*?

MORGAN

I did. In fact, I saw him live on stage as well as in the movie.

LEO

No way. You lucky devil. I'm sooooo jealous. Recordings just don't capture the magic of live theatre, do they? As much as I loved the movie I wish I'd seen Branagh live on stage. That would have been amazing!

SCARLET

Excuse me Leo but do you mind not waving that gun about.

LEO

I'm not waving it about.

SCARLET

Is it loaded?

LEO

Fat lot of good it would do if it wasn't loaded.

*LEO takes the gun aims it at a vase or some other object and shoots. The object shatters.*

MORGAN

Jesus Christ!

LEO

That's just to show you that I mean business to – set the stage – so to speak.

SCARLET

To set the stage.

LEO

Yes

SCARLET

Okay then. I want you to untie us and let us go, Leo. You're being ridiculous.

LEO

I can't do that Scarlet.

*TIMER goes off on LEO's phone. He pulls it out of his pocket.*

LEO

Ah, fiddlesticks!

SCARLET

What is it now? Time to go kidnap someone else.

LEO

No. I'm in a two-hour parking zone. I have to go plug the meter.

SCARLET

Well you'd better run along then. You don't want to get a ticket.

LEO

And leave you two here alone. I don't think so.

MORGAN

We won't go anywhere Leo. I want to hear more about your play. You want to hear more about his play too don't you Scarlet?

SCARLET

Oh, most definitely.

MORGAN

I can't wait to hear how it ends and I give you my word as a fellow playwright that we won't try and escape.

LEO

Swear on Shakespeare's grave.

*BEAT*

MORGAN

Okay, I swear on Shakespeare's grave. We won't try and escape.

*BEAT*

LEO

Alrighty then. That's good enough for me. I won't be long. I'm parked across the street.

*LEO exits.*

MORGAN

You were married to that lunatic!

SCARLET

We all make stupid decisions in our lives. Leo is one of mine. I was young. He was a struggling playwright. I had ambitions to be an actress. Things didn't work out.

MORGAN

How are we going to get out of this?

SCARLET

I don't know. Can you turn around?

MORGAN

I don't know. Can you?

*SCARLET tries turning her body and ends up turning around so that she's now facing MORGAN's back.*

SCARLET

Okay, well this is a little awkward.

MORGAN

Hang on maybe I can face you.

*MORGAN turns his body so that he is now facing SCARLET*

MORGAN

Okay now what.

SCARLET

Give me your hand.

MORGAN

That's not my hand.

SCARLET

Oh sorry.

MORGAN

That's okay. I'm the one who should apologize. It's just you are an attractive woman and I...this is embarrassing.

SCARLET

Do you have anything in your pocket we can use to get free?

MORGAN

Uh no. Listen Scarlet.

SCARLET

Do you see anything lying around we could use?

*SCARLET and MORGAN search the stage.*

MORGAN

Do you think...oh, never mind.

SCARLET

Think what?

MORGAN

Think it would be weird if we went for a drink sometime? You know got to know each other a little better.

SCARLET

I thought you didn't like me.

MORGAN

I didn't say I didn't like you.

SCARLET

Is that a knife?

MORGAN

Where?

SCARLET

Over there.

*MORGAN and SCARLET move towards a table.*

SCARLET

Well, based on past experience, and our current situation, I suppose if we were to start seeing each other it would be best if I didn't review your shows.

*SCARLET and MORGAN reach the table and try to get a somewhat dull knife on the table which they eventually knock to the floor.*

MORGAN

But if we start to see each other – got to know each other – became involved with each other – I'd want you to review my shows. I'd want to know what you think. I'd want to know whether or not you liked what I had written.



SCARLET

You say that now but...damn! Shall we get on our knees.

MORGAN

Why what did you have in mind?

SCARLET

So, we can reach the knife.

MORGAN

Oh. Sorry. Wasn't sure what you were suggesting.

*SCARLET and MORGAN get on their knees and try to reach the knife.*

MORGAN

When I write my plays, I always write with one person in mind. And it's that person whose opinion I value above all else. If I can't make that person laugh or cry, then I don't stand a chance with an audience. Damn it lets try leaning this way.

*SCARLET and MORGAN try to reach the knife.*

MORGAN

Do you believe in chance?

SCARLET

You mean fate?

MORGAN

Yes. Maybe this whole crazy thing is God's way of bringing us together.

SCARLET

Do you really believe that?

MORGAN

I'm an artist. I believe in the muses and unseen forces. And I'm thinking, maybe, ...whoa...

*MORGAN falls backwards onto the floor with SCARLET on top of him.*

SCARLET

Shit.

*MORGAN and SCARLET look at each other for a moment.*

MORGAN

Maybe this is a sign that you and I are meant to be more to each other than just playwright and critic.

SCARLET

Or maybe it's just the element of danger making us feel this way.

MORGAN

Whatever it is - if this is the beginning of something, I don't want it to end before we get started. Do you think Leo is crazy enough to use that gun?

SCARLET

He's always done crazy things, but he's never been violent. I can't believe he'd actually kill anyone.

MORGAN

But what if this was our last moment on earth, our last moment together, what would you do?

*SCARLET and MORGAN's look into each others' eyes and suddenly kiss.*

*LEO walks back in.*

LEO

Dagnabbit!

*SCARLET and MORGAN continue kissing.*

LEO

That just burns my goat!!!

*SCARLET and MORGAN continue kissing.*

LEO

Did you hear me?

SCARLET

What, is it Leo?

LEO

They towed my Toyota Corolla. No parking between six and midnight on Mondays. But it doesn't say why. I hate the screwball parking in this city.

SCARLET

Listen Leo don't worry about it. It's not a big deal. Why don't you untie us, and we'll head down to the pound and get your car?

LEO

I can't afford to pay the fine.

SCARLET

Money that tight?

LEO

I lost my job. I'm out of work.

SCARLET

I'm sorry Leo. But you'll find another job.

LEO

Will I? It's been five years.

SCARLET

Five years?

LEO

Oh, I've worked a bit, but I'm always the last hired and the first fired. Companies are always restructuring or right sizing or just reorganizing for the sake of reorganizing. You wouldn't understand.

SCARLET

When I started with the Journal two hundred people worked there. Now there's less than fifty. My salary is half of what it used to be, and I don't how much longer there's even going to be a newspaper.

LEO

This isn't how I imagined my life Scarlet. Forty-three years old, divorced, out of work, and living in my car. The only thing I have left in this world is my play. That's my only dream. That's my only hope.

SCARLET

That still doesn't give you any right to kidnap us and bring us here.

LEO

How else was I going to get you here? Be honest, you wouldn't have come here on your own if I had asked you, would you?

SCARLET

No.

LEO

There you go. So, my plan isn't so crazy after all.

MORGAN

What exactly is your plan Leo?

LEO

I want to see my play produced. That's all. I just want my words on the stage. You have an agent maybe you could introduce us.

MORGAN

Absolutely.

LEO

Really?

MORGAN

Sure thing – just untie us and I'll give him a call right now and set up a meeting.

LEO

You'd do that for me. And all I have to do is untie you. Well alrighty then.

MORGAN

Thankyou.

LEO

Do you really think I'm that gullible? You're not going anywhere. You're going to lie on that floor and hear the rest of my story and then I'll untie you. Not before. How did you two manage to turn around?

SCARLET

What?

LEO

To turn yourselves around. And what are you doing on the floor. And why were you two kissing when I came in. What's up with that?

SCARLET

That – is none of your business.

LEO

You're my wife. You can't just go around kissing other men.

SCARLET

I'm your ex-wife, and I can do as I please. Now would you help us up!

*LEO helps SCARLET and LEO get up.*

LEO

I was sort of hoping that maybe you still had feelings for me. That maybe I'd be able to remind you about the good times. The times when we thought we'd always be together.

SCARLET

We're not getting back together Leo.

LEO

I haven't had a kiss from your lips in more than a decade. I still dream about your lips...your touch...there's been no one else in my life since you Scarlet.

SCARLET

I'm sorry Leo we're not getting back together.

LEO

No?

SCARLET

No.

*LEO grips the gun and turns away from SCARLET and MORGAN.*

MORGAN

Uh, Leo why don't you tell us more about your play?

LEO

My play.

MORGAN

Yes.

LEO

Right. My play. But I'm not giving up Scarlet, I don't care how you feel. I love you.

MORGAN

Uh Leo I think you had said the Phantom was watching the young playwright from the wings.

LEO

Uh, yes...yes. You see the young playwright was about to commit suicide.

MORGAN

Because he's a failure.

LEO

And because he has no one in his life. He's alone and in pain. He has neither professional success nor personal happiness.

MORGAN

So, he's going to kill himself. Which you know – if you think about it Leo – is a good idea. Because if you're unhappy suicide can be a terrific solution to your problems. Murder on the other hand – well that's a messy business.

LEO

But he doesn't commit suicide – the Phantom stops him. He tells the boy that one day he will find love and success. They share a bottle of wine and when the boy falls into a deep sleep the Phantom stays up all night writing a new musical ballet.

MORGAN

And the next morning the Phantom gives the boy the new play.

LEO

Not exactly. The phantom leaves the new play beside the sleeping boy.

MORGAN

And someone finds the play and thinks the boy has written it.

LEO

Yes, the Count.

MORGAN

The Count?

LEO

Yes, the Count. And he reads the play and thinks it's brilliant and he wakes up the boy and tells him he's going to produce the new musical ballet the boy has written. The only thing is they need to cast the female lead.

SCARLETT

And that's where the girl comes in.

LEO

Exactly. While the producer and playwright are talking they hear this beautiful singing voice and when they check to see who's singing they discover that it's actually the cleaning girl.

MORGAN

Whose mother was once married to the Phantom and she's his daughter.

LEO

No.

MORGAN

No? Why not?

LEO

Because that would mean that the young playwright and the girl are brother and sister.

MORGAN

They could be half brother and sister. They could have different mothers.

LEO

I'm not writing a play about incest.

MORGAN

Why not? It's a great topic for a musical.

LEO

This isn't one of your sick plays.

SCARLET

You might want to listen to listen to Morgan's suggestions Leo. He has been nominated for a Tony.

MORGAN

And I've had three Broadway productions.

LEO

Two of them closed in less than a week.

MORGAN

How many shows have you had on Broadway Leo?

LEO

I don't care how many shows you've had in New York this is my play not yours.

MORGAN

But it would be a great twist. You don't reveal it until the end. After the Phantom has murdered the lovers – and then his hands dripping with blood he discovers that he's murdered his own daughter and son!

SCARLET

I thought you said murder was a messy business.

MORGAN

Oh, in real life it's a messy business but on stage it's great fun.



LEO

He doesn't kill the girl.

MORGAN

No?

LEO

No! The Count is the villain.

MORGAN

I don't know this is starting to sound a little too much like *Moulin Rouge*.

LEO

It isn't *Moulin Rouge*. In *Moulin Rouge* the Duke is the villain. My Count is completely different.

SCARLET

Are there a lot of Counts in Winnipeg?

LEO

Hundreds. Thousands. Hundreds of thousands!

MORGAN

So, does the Phantom becomes jealous of his own son whose success he helped create but for which he receives no credit.

SCARLET

Oh, I like that.

MORGAN

If this makes it to Broadway Daniel Ratcliff could play the young playwright.

SCARLETT

And Emma Watson the girl and oh... if Alan Rickman was still alive, he could have played the phantom.

LEO

I love Alan Rickman. I wish I'd seen his *Hamlet*.

SCARLETT

That would have been amazing.

MORGAN

You know I think there's real potential here Leo, but it needs work. It might be a nice idea to work in the girl's mother somehow – who never revealed to the Phantom that they had a daughter.

LEO

I'm not adding another character.

MORGAN

Shame. It would add so much to the story.

LEO

My story is fine thank you very much.

MORGAN

Well how does your play end?

LEO

With the Phantom's death of course, but not before the son reveals to the world that it was his father's musical ballet and that his father deserves the credit.

SCARLETT

You can't be serious Leo. Don't you think that's a little too Hallmarkish?

LEO

I don't think the Phantom dying is a Hallmark moment, do you?

SCARLETT

Just doesn't seem edgy enough.

MORGAN

I like my ending better. The one where he kills the young lovers and finds out he killed his children.

LEO

You see that's what's wrong with all your plays. They're twisted and dark and ugly. They're the sort of play that you theatre types think is brilliant but all it is – is crude and rude. I went to your

last play. I saw *Jerk Off*. I paid ninety bucks! Ninety freaking bucks to watch a group of actors sit around on stage in the nude talking in gibberish, swearing, and fondling each other.

MORGAN

I wanted to explore meaning beyond language.

LEO

What in the twisted gears of Big Ben does that mean? It was self-indulgent and obscene.

SCARLET

Leo, you just didn't get it.

LEO

I hate it when you do that, Scarlet. If I don't like something it's not because it's bad it's because I don't understand it. But when you don't like something it's not because you don't understand it it's because it's bad. You're such a two-faced hypocrite.

MORGAN

Two faced hypocrite – a little redundant don't you think Leo.

LEO

It may be redundant but it's better than any of the trashy kinds of words you use.

SCARLET

Leo, art is supposed to burst through boundaries and explore new ways of doing things. The purpose of theatre is to provide us with experience. Experiences that excite and thrill us.

LEO

You want to be thrilled? Alright then, how about I set fire to the theatre uh? Would that be thrilling enough for you? Would that be exciting enough for you?

MORGAN

Whoa hold on there a second Leo there's no reason to do that.

SCARLET

He's right Leo. Just because you're unhappy with your life and your playwriting career doesn't mean you have to kill all of us. In fact, a true suffering artist would live in poverty – tolling away long into the night – locking his manuscripts in his desk drawer or the glove compartment of his car in your case – where only after his death they are discovered for the true works of art they are.

LEO

Like Kafka

SCARLET

Exactly. Kafka was the very essence of the tortured genius requesting that his work be destroyed after his death.

MORGAN

I promise you Leo, if you let us go, that once you die, we'll make sure your work is destroyed.

LEO

You would do that for me?

SCARLET

Yes, of course we would.

LEO

Wait a minute. I don't want my work destroyed. I want it to live. I want it to reach the stage.

MORGAN

Okay fine, whatever you want Leo.

LEO

I don't know. This isn't turning out at all the way I planned it.

SCARLET

Why don't you untie us and we'll all go get a drink somewhere and talk more about your play?

LEO

How do I know you won't go running to the police?

SCARLET

We're not going to go to the police. You and I were married for three years and even though our marriage didn't work out I still care about you. Not in a romantic way you understand but I do love you, and I don't want to see you go to jail. I could help you get a job.

LEO

Look I know it was a crazy idea bringing you here, but if I hadn't done it neither one of you would have given me the time of day.

MORGAN

Time of day – can't you come up with something a little more original than that? How dare you put me down when you do exactly the same thing. There's nothing wrong with using a familiar phrase or two to set the mood so to speak.

SCARLET

Do you have to start that again?

MORGAN

I just think I've given him some really good ideas that would make his play a lot better and instead of listening to them he ignores them and puts them down.

SCARLET

Morgan shut up and leave Leo alone. Now are you going to untie us?

LEO

You're not going to call the police.

SCARLET

No.

LEO

And we're really going to go for a drink.

SCARLET

Yes. We swear on Shakespeare's grave.

LEO

Wow. Okay. Shakespeare's grave. That's good enough for me.

*LEO unties MORGAN and SCARLET*

LEO

You know – even though I hate to admit it – you did have some good ideas. Maybe we could work together? You know – workshop my play – get a reading? You know people. Maybe you could even get me a Broadway production.

MORGAN

Sure Leo. Anything you want.

*SCARLET and MORGAN are free. They stretch.*

SCARLET

Oh God, that feels soooooo good.

MORGAN

Doesn't it.

LEO

So where do you want to go?

SCARLET

I don't know what time is it?

MORGAN

It's getting late.

SCARLET

There's a Denny's near here. How does that sound?

LEO

I'm broke.

SCARLET

Don't worry about it. I'll pay.

LEO

We'll have to walk. I don't have my car.

MORGAN

I like walking.

LEO

Okay, let's go.

*SCARLET grabs the gun.*

SCARLET

Ha! Now who has the gun?

LEO

Scarlet, what are you doing?

SCARLET

Well you said you introduced the gun so it would reappear during the climax. This is the climax Leo. This is where the tables are turned. Just like in *Murder In Disguise*.

MORGAN

*Murder in Disguise?*

SCARLET

Yes, we've been playing a little game called *Murder in Disguise* all night.

MORGAN

Scarlet put the gun down.

LEO

Come on Scarlet you know me I was never really going to hurt you. I was just mad at how you'd treated me when we were married. How you trashed my play on opening night. How critical you were of me in the bedroom.

SCARLET

I never criticized your performance in the bedroom.

LEO

Oh, no? I read your diary.

SCARLET

You had no right to read my diary.

LEO

Well I did and I thought you could be cruel when you were talking about a play but your comments about our love life were crushing.

SCARLET

Leo you're the least original person I've ever known. On the page or between the sheets you're completely predictable. Use your fucking imagination for Christ's sake. You're dull in bed and

your plays are dull. If you want to move an audience try writing something about your own life for a change instead of phantoms and ballets. You're unemployed living out of your car. That's real! That's interesting! Write about that.

LEO

Scarlet, I have to warn you, that thing is loaded.

SCARLET

Oh, I know it's loaded. And I know how many bullets are in it Leo.

LEO

I don't think you do.

SCARLET

Yes. I figured it all out when you mentioned *Murder in Disguise* – one of your all-time favourite plays.

*SCARLET shoots the gun two more times and shatters more vases or other objects shatters.*

MORGAN

Jesus Christ! You two are both crazy.

SCARLET

Now how many bullets was that?

LEO

Three.

SCARLET

Right. And the fourth chamber contains a blank.

LEO

No, it doesn't.

SCARLET

Oh yes it does.

LEO

No, it doesn't.



SCARLET

In *Murder in Disguise* one of the characters pretends to murder one of the other characters and he sets it up by putting three live shells in the gun with the fourth chamber containing a blank. That way he fires the gun three times to – set the stage – so to speak – isn't that what you said earlier? And then when he fires the gun a fourth time – which is the blank – the other character is convinced he's going to die.

LEO

Scarlet there aren't any blanks in that gun.

SCARLET

Yeah right. Try and convince me otherwise. You're so predictable and unimaginative how dare you drug me and tie me up in this theatre and make me listen to your stupid play.

LEO

It's not stupid.

SCARLET

It's hardly original.

LEO

Scarlet those are real bullets in there.

SCARLET

Well there's an easy way to find out isn't there. Take a final bow Shakespeare!

*SCARLET aims the gun at LEO.*

MORGAN

Scarlet no!

*SCARLET fires the gun.*

*LEO grabs his chest. Blood appears on his shirt.*

LEO

Ha – maybe I'm not so predictable after all.

*LEO stumbles about positioning himself in centre stage.*

SCARLET

Oh my God! Leo are you alright?

MORGAN

Of course, he's not alright. He's been shot!

SCARLET

Quick call an ambulance.

MORGAN

I don't have my cell phone.

*SCARLET runs over to LEO*

SCARLET

Leo what did you do with our cell phones.

LEO

My dear sweet Scarlet – your happiness is all that matters to me – forgive a poor playwright who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and shall be heard no more. Know only that what I did – I did for love...that every word I wrote was for you...

*LEO collapses to the floor.*

SCARLET

Leo, where's your phone?

*SCARLET starts searching through LEO's pockets for his phone.*

LEO

My love it's too late for me. Promise me one thing.

SCARLET

Would you help me find his phone?

*MORGAN rushes over and starts to search through LEO's pockets as well.*

LEO

Would you forget about my phone I'm trying to tell you something before I die.

SCARLET

Would you just shut the fuck up.

LEO

You shut the fuck up. Oh my God I'm so sorry. Just because I'm dying is no reason to use foul language. Forgive me.

SCARLET

I'm not going to let you die, Leo.

LEO

Ah, so you do care.

SCARLET

Well of course I care. I told you I care. I just don't like being kidnapped and held at gun point.

LEO

Listen to me Scarlet, before I die, I want you to know how much I love you. And how proud I am of you and that my only regret is that I'll never get to see my grandchildren.

SCARLET

Your grandchildren?

LEO

Farewell my dear sweet boy. I go to that great stage in the sky.

*LEO slumps over but is breathing heavy.*

MORGAN

We're too late.

*SCARLET pulls a shattered smart phone out of Leos Breast pocket.*

SCARLET

No were not.

MORGAN

I can't believe you shot him.

SCARLET

Leo? Leo, are you listening to me?

*LEO groans.*

SCARLET

The only thing worse than your writing is your acting.

MORGAN

Hey, have some sympathy for the guy he's dying.

SCARLET

He's not dying.

MORGAN

How do you know?

SCARLET

(Showing the shattered phone to MORGAN)

Because his cell phone stopped the bullet.

MORGAN

But he's bleeding.

LEO

Yeah, I'm bleeding.

SCARLET

It's probably only a flesh wound.

MORGAN

Oh, thank God. What if you'd have killed him.

LEO

She would have been doing both of us a favour.

SCARLET

Leo we're not going to get back together.

LEO

No?

SCARLET

No.

LEO

What about my play?

MORGAN

I suppose I could arrange a workshop.

LEO

A workshop?

MORGAN

Yeah, why not.

LEO

But I want to see my play on stage.

MORGAN

Leo it needs work.

SCARLET

He's right. And if I were you Leo, I'd drop the whole Phantom thing and write about your experiences on the street – create something real. Something meaningful. Something people can relate to.

LEO

Maybe I will, but I'm not ready to give up on the Phantom.

*LEO hops up off the floor.*

LEO

So, are we still going to Denny's or not? I'm hungry.

SCARLET

Don't you think we should get you to the emergency?

LEO

I'll be alright. Besides sometimes you have to bleed for your art. Isn't that right Morgan.

MORGAN

Yes, but they don't usually mean that literally.

LEO

So, do you really think if Alan Rickman was still alive, he'd be a good choice to play the Phantom? I had sort of hoped I could play the title role.

MORGAN

It helps to have a celebrity.

LEO

What about Benedict Cumberbatch?

SCARLET

Oh, I love Cumberbatch.

MORGAN

Did you see his Hamlet?

*SCARLET, MORGAN & LEO exit.*

THE END