

LAUGHING STOCK

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Bradley Hayward

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LAUGHING STOCK

A One Act Comedy

By Bradley Hayward

SYNOPSIS: Michael stands alone on stage before an impatient audience, trying desperately to dramatize his lackluster existence. With the help of a madcap playwright, his life story is suddenly populated with exaggerated stock characters of every sort. One by one, the humdrum people in his life are replaced by pirates and princes, gunslingers and psychics, clowns and rappers. There's even a Greek chorus along for the ride. As this play-within-a-play unfolds, and with a little help from William Shakespeare himself, Michael begins to realize his life is only as dull as he allows it to be. The gender flexible cast, with roles large and small, is perfect for any size group looking for a comic showstopper.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(widely flexible cast of 10 to 100)

NOTE: ALL LINE COUNTS ARE APPROXIMATE

MICHAEL or MICHELLE (*171 lines*)

WRITER (*198 lines*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER (*11 lines*) doubles as SHAKESPEARE (*28 lines*)

MAN (*2 lines*)

TALLER MAN (*1 line*)

ELF 1 (*7 lines*)

ELF 2 (*7 lines*)

PIRATE (*4 lines*)

TEACHER (*2 lines*)

DENTIST (*2 lines*)

SOUTHERN BELLE (*5 lines*)

RAPPER (*10 lines*)

GUNSLINGER (*10 lines*)

PSYCHIC (*16 lines*)

HEAD CHEERLEADER (*5 lines*)

SMALL GROUP OF CHEERLEADERS (*9 lines*)

LAWYER (*1 line*)
CLOWN 1 (*2 lines*)
CLOWN 2 (*2 lines*)
CLOWN 3 (*2 lines*)
TOOTSIE (*6 lines*)
TRUCKER (*4 lines*)
YOUNG MICHAEL (*13 lines*)
FEMME FATALE (*3 lines*)
MAD SCIENTIST (*9 lines*)
PRINCE (*14 lines*)
HILLBILLY (*4 lines*)
MIME (*no speaking lines*)
GREEK CHORUS (*45 lines*)
ACTRESS (*8 lines*)
POP STAR (*15 lines*)
ENTOURAGE (*13 lines*)
ANGRY TOWNSPEOPLE (*2 lines*)
LADY MACBETH (*1 line*)
KING RICHARD (*1 line*)
HAMLET (*1 line*)
OPHELIA (*1 line*)
CLEOPATRA (*1 line*)
SWIMMERS (*no speaking lines*)

CASTING NOTES:

MICHAEL, WRITER and AUDIENCE MEMBER are the only characters that appear throughout the play. All of the other roles are to be played by an ensemble of actors. The ensemble can be large or small, depending on the number of actors available. It is possible for an actor to play one role or a dozen roles. Have fun with this!

Most of the roles are gender flexible, including MICHAEL and WRITER. Simply change the names and pronouns at your discretion. It is also acceptable (and highly encouraged) to have actors play both sexes.

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Changing the lead from MICHAEL to MICHELLE requires a few specific adjustments in the dialogue. See **PRODUCTION NOTES** at the end of the script regarding this option.

SETTING:

The present

SCENE:

A bare stage

RUNNING TIME:

35 – 45 minutes

PROPS:

Eye patch, stuffed parrot, sword, sleigh bells, baby doll, parasol, pistol and holster, crystal ball, pompoms, stack of papers, feather boas, cigarette extension, beaker, test tubes, triangle, stuffed skunk, crown, cell phone, headsets, torches, fright wig, dagger, beach balls.

AT RISE: *A high school senior named MICHAEL stands center stage. He's very plain and rather shy. He speaks meekly to the audience.*

MICHAEL: My name is Michael and this is the story of my life. I was born on May the 5th and up until now, my life has been pretty boring. *(He paces back and forth, very nervous.)* I dunno what else to say. There's not much else to say. I've never been on a date. That sucks. I've never been great at school. That sucks. Which makes this whole assignment pretty horrifying. *(He sits on the edge of the stage.)* "Write a play about your life." How can I write a play about my life if nothing has happened to me? *This* sucks. I don't even know any good jokes. Sorry, everyone. You might as well go home. Seriously, I'm going to fail. "Write a play about your life." I was born. I went to school. I graduated from school. That's it. Only I won't graduate because I'm going to fail this stupid assignment.

Suddenly a voice pipes in from the audience.

WRITER: Hey you!

MICHAEL: What? Is someone talking to me?

WRITER: I'm talking to you!

MICHAEL: Who's there?

WRITER: You need some help, buddy?

MICHAEL: Who are you?

WRITER: I'm a playwright. I don't know about the rest of the audience, but from where I'm sitting, it looks like you're dying up there.

MICHAEL: *(Looks into the audience.)* Where are you? The lights are so bright that I can't see you.

WRITER stands up. He should be wedged in the middle of row.

WRITER: I'm right here. In the audience. Would you like me to come up and help you with your play? We're starting to fall asleep back here.

MICHAEL: But what can you do? My life is pretty boring.

WRITER: Not if you let me spice it up. You'd be amazed how theatrics can make any story interesting.

MICHAEL: I guess it couldn't hurt.

WRITER: You're darn tootin'. Any longer and we'd start throwing tomatoes at you. *(To AUDIENCE MEMBER.)* Isn't that right?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I brought some vegetables, just in case.

WRITER: See there. So you better let me help before you find yourself covered in marinara.

MICHAEL: Okay, I guess. If you think you can help.

WRITER: I know I can help. *(WRITER squeezes down the row and into the aisle.)* Excuse me. Pardon me. Playwright coming through. Scooch back a little. I don't want to trip. That's it. Coming through. Playwright to the rescue. *(He arrives on stage.)* Hi there.

MICHAEL: Um, hi. So you say you're a playwright?

WRITER: That's right. I don't like to brag, but I'm the world's greatest living writer.

MICHAEL: Is that so?

WRITER: Yep. I rank somewhere between Sophocles and Shakespeare.

MICHAEL: But they're both dead.

WRITER: Okay, okay. So I'm the greatest writer ever. But I'm not bragging about it or anything.

MICHAEL: And you want to help me with my life story?

WRITER: Not really. But if I have to sit through your boring play, I might as well make use of my time and give it some zing.

MICHAEL: How are you going to do that? Nothing much has happened to me.

WRITER: *(Points to audience.)* But they don't know that. So just make things up as you go along.

MICHAEL: You mean lie to the audience?

WRITER: Why not? Writers, by definition, are liars.

MICHAEL: Is that true?

WRITER: Of course. I just told you I'm the greatest writer of all time, didn't I?

MICHAEL: But maybe you are.

WRITER: Yes, it's true. I am. But even if I wasn't, they don't know that. Trust me, the audience will believe whatever you tell them. Cause real life is blah, blah, blah.

MICHAEL: Is that so?

WRITER: Indeed. An audience suspends their disbelief in a desperate attempt to escape from their humdrum lives.

MICHAEL: But my life is pretty humdrum.

WRITER: Not if you add the right ingredients.

MICHAEL: Like what?

WRITER: There are lots of books that tell you how to write a play.

MICHAEL: Really? Maybe I should read one.

WRITER: No, don't. It's all hogwash.

MICHAEL: It is?

WRITER: That's right. But I know the secret to writing a great play.

MICHAEL: What's that?

WRITER: (*Proudly.*) Stock characters.

MICHAEL: Excuse me?

WRITER: You heard me. Stock characters.

MICHAEL: What are those?

WRITER: In the theater, stock characters are used for economy. Rather than interrupt a scene with character development —

MICHAEL: Blah, blah, blah?

WRITER: That's right. Character development is a drag. Quite often, a stock character is used instead. This way the audience instantly recognizes said character and is immediately able to empathize with them.

MICHAEL: Instant and immediate. I bet an audience would like that.

WRITER: Indeed they do. For example, I could send someone out center stage . . . In fact, let's do that. Send an actor center stage, please.

A nondescript MAN walks to center stage, showing no emotion.

WRITER: What do we know about this man?

MICHAEL: Nothing.

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WRITER: That's right. Nothing. He could be happy. (*MAN smiles.*) He could be sad. (*MAN frowns.*) He could be angry. (*MAN waves a fist.*) He could be confused. (*MAN scratches his head.*) He could be hot. (*MAN fans himself.*) He could be cold. (*MAN shivers.*) He could be itchy. (*MAN scratches furiously.*) He could be crazy. (*MAN acts crazy.*) He could be sleepy. (*MAN yawns.*) He could be dead. (*MAN drops to the floor like a ton of bricks.*) There's just no way of knowing. So in order to continue the play, he must be introduced to the other characters. Introduced to the audience. His motives revealed. His conflict established. His resolution determined. Blah, blah, blah. Who cares?

MAN: (*Not moving.*) Thanks for the intro.

WRITER: I'm not done with you yet. Let's bring in a stock character to make things more interesting. (*To MICHAEL.*) Any suggestions?

MICHAEL: Not a clue.

WRITER: Come on, work with me. This is *your* play.

MICHAEL: Okay . . . (*He gives it deep thought.*) A taller man.

TALLER MAN walks in blankly and stands next to MAN.

WRITER: So what do we know this man?

MICHAEL: Um . . . he's taller?

WRITER: And?

MICHAEL: That's it.

WRITER: That's right. He might as well be dead, too.

TALLER MAN flops down, dead.

MICHAEL: Here's more along the lines of what I had in mind. Stock character number one, please.

PIRATE leaps onto the stage. He's got an eye patch, parrot on his shoulder and enormous sword; everything one would commonly expect a pirate to have.

PIRATE: Avast ye mateys! Arrrrr!

WRITER: So what do we know about this character?

MICHAEL: He's a pirate. He's angry. He's dirty. He's smelly.

WRITER: And he probably killed these two extremely boring characters that lay before us.

PIRATE: They stole me hidden treasure and kissed me wench!
So walk the plank they did, and into the briny deep!

MAN/TALLER MAN: Come on.

WRITER: Hey, it's not my fault you have no personality.

PIRATE: Now come ye cowardly swabs and weigh anchor before
scurvy comes in thee scuppers and boards thee poop deck!
Ahoy! Blimey! Begad! Gangway! And yo-ho-ho!

WRITER: Okay, now you're overdoing it.

PIRATE: Aye aye, Cap'n!

He grabs an arm of both MAN and TALLER MAN and drags them off stage.

WRITER: See that. We learned everything we need to know about him before he even opened his mouth. That's how you tell a story, my friend.

MICHAEL: But there are no pirates in my story.

WRITER: What's with your fascination with the truth?

MICHAEL: That was the assignment. Write a play about your life in thirty minutes or less.

WRITER: Blah, blah, blah.

MICHAEL: I'm not disagreeing with you. My life is terribly dull.

WRITER: So let's change that.

MICHAEL: How?

WRITER: Let's start at the beginning. Go ahead, give us your first line again.

MICHAEL: *(Clears his throat.)* My name is Michael and this is the story of my life. I was born on May the 5th.

WRITER: Stop right there. Does it have to be May the 5th?

MICHAEL: Why? What's wrong with the fifth?

WRITER: Wouldn't it be more interesting if you were born on, say, Christmas day?

MICHAEL: But I was born on May the 5th.

WRITER: Doesn't matter. You were born on Christmas. Try it.

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MICHAEL: Okay. My name is Michael and I was born on Christmas.

Two of Santa's ELVES scamper in with sleigh bells on their ankles.

MICHAEL: Who are they?

WRITER: Santa's elves. (*The ELVES shake their feet and ring the bells.*) See, it's more interesting already.

MICHAEL: But what are they doing here?

WRITER: I'll let you know.

MICHAEL: My mother is a teacher and my father is a dentist.

TEACHER and DENTIST enter.

MICHAEL: They're your average, typical, every day parents.

WRITER: Stop, stop, stop! Nothing in a play should ever be average or typical. And certainly not "every day."

TEACHER: We're not that boring.

DENTIST: Yeah, we do crosswords together and everything.

WRITER: Sorry, but I have to do this. Elves, take them away.

The ELVES drag his parents off stage.

MICHAEL: But I love my parents.

WRITER: Boring! Your mother is a Southern belle.

SOUTHERN BELLE enters in a frilly dress. She carries a parasol in one hand and a newborn baby in the other. She has a thick Southern accent.

BELLE: Why, I do decare. I just gave birth to a child.

WRITER: And your father is a rapper.

RAPPER enters wearing baggy pants and a huge set of headphones.

RAPPER: (*Rapping.*) Yo, wife of mine! Now where's my kid? He's so fine. I blow my lid!

WRITER: Not a good rapper, but a rapper nonetheless.

RAPPER: Hey, dawg. Don't you be messin' with my rap or I'll get all diggety on ya.

WRITER: I just call it as I see it.

MICHAEL: Why would the two of them hook up?

WRITER: Why not? It is what it is.

RAPPER: That's right, boy. Go with the flow and flow with the go.

MICHAEL: That doesn't make any sense.

WRITER: Don't worry. They won't be your parents for long.

BELLE: Why Diddy, I do declare. We cannot keep this child.

RAPPER: Whyz 'at, missuz?

BELLE: I am far too young and beautiful to be a mother.

RAPPER: Fo shizzle.

BELLE: And I must get back to Tara. So please, take the baby away from my heaving bosom. Do it quickly before I get the vapors.

RAPPER: Affirmative.

BELLE: Too late. I have the vapors.

She hyperventilates, big time. She fans herself and then faints into RAPPER's arms.

RAPPER: Dayum.

He drops BELLE to the ground with a thud.

WRITER: Unable to care for the baby himself —

RAPPER: (*Picking up baby.*) You my kid, and that's a fact. But I know not, so take you back.

MICHAEL: That doesn't even rhyme.

RAPPER: Don't be a square. Now get outta my hair.

WRITER: That one rhymes.

RAPPER: Boo yeah!

He drags BELLE off stage.

MICHAEL: So now what? I don't have parents anymore?

WRITER: Not at the moment. But you will.

MICHAEL: I sure hope so. I wouldn't want to go through life alone.

WRITER: Don't worry. You won't. It was then that Santa's elves returned with the little cherub and set out to find a home for him.

The ELVES return, baby in hand.

ELF 1: Who deserves this little child?

ELF 2: What about the missus?

ELF 1: You think that's a good idea?

ELF 2: Mr. Claus is often away. A baby would keep her company.

ELF 1: But Mrs. Claus has a rotten temper. Remember last month when she drop kicked an elf?

ELF 2: He had it coming. He forgot to buy batteries.

ELF 1: True. And I suppose the North Pole is no place for a human child.

ELF 2: Then who should have this baby?

They think about this. For a while. A long while. Finally, they shake their bells.

WRITER: They're waiting for you.

MICHAEL: Oh, me? Sorry, I lost track of my life. Where was I?

WRITER: You're up for adoption.

MICHAEL: Right. So who adopts me?

WRITER: I don't know. Tell us.

MICHAEL: A teacher and a dentist?

TEACHER and DENTIST return.

TEACHER: Son!

DENTIST: Baby boy!

They run toward the newborn that's in the arms of an ELF. WRITER intervenes and scares them off with some judo moves.

WRITER: What did I say? Get out of here! You're boring! (*The ELVES also kick the air like ninjas. TEACHER and DENTIST scurry off.*) Make it interesting.

MICHAEL: Oh man, this is hard. (*Pause.*) So the elves put an ad in the newspaper.

WRITER: Good, good.

MICHAEL: And the first person to show up for me was . . .

WRITER: Come on, you can do it.

MICHAEL: A gunslinger. (*There's a loud gunshot off stage.*)

WRITER: Fantastic!

GUNSLINGER saunters on stage, the tip of his pistol smoking. He wears a cowboy hat and speaks slowly, like John Wayne.

GUNSLINGER: Howdy, partner. I put my ear to the wind and heard that someone abandoned a baby. I might be interested in having little boy of my own.

ELVES: It's a boy.

GUNSLINGER: Fine then. I'll teach him how rustle up some chow with one shot. Let me just check with the little lady and we'll be on our way.

WRITER: Who's the little lady?

MICHAEL: Uh . . . a psychic?

A mysterious PSYCHIC enters. She wears lots of beads, a flowery dress, and carries a crystal ball.

PSYCHIC: I see in my crystal ball that I am to be a mother.

GUNSLINGER: That's right, darlin'. A babe to call our own.

PSYCHIC: But I see his past is cursed.

GUNSLINGER: Balderdash!

PSYCHIC: It's true.

GUNSLINGER: What in tarnations happened to the boy?

PSYCHIC: A hex was placed on his soul.

GUNSLINGER: Quit beatin' the devil 'round the stump and out with it. What was this hex?

PSYCHIC: I hear it. The crystal ball speaks his curse. (*She listens to the ball.*) "If he don't be rappin', I'm a gonna whoop him."

GUNSLINGER: Say it ain't so. Then I have no choice but shoot him with my black-eyed Susan. (*He aims the gun at the baby.*)

PSYCHIC: Don't! If we free the demons from his soul, we may take him as our son.

GUNSLINGER: Then rid him of this calamity. At once.

PSYCHIC: I must call upon my minions to cleanse his spirit.

WRITER: Go ahead, Michael. Bring in her minions.

MICHAEL: (*To PSYCHIC.*) Well, what needs to be done? To rid me of sin and stuff?

PSYCHIC: We must dance. And chant. And call forth this bloody tumor that sucks your heart dry.

MICHAEL: What about cheerleaders?

PSYCHIC: That's fine.

A group of CHEERLEADERS rush on stage in full uniform. The more the merrier. They have pompoms and all. The HEAD CHEERLEADER grabs the baby as the others gather around.

CHEERLEADERS: Come on devil! Ra, ra, ra! Out you come! Ha, ha, ha!

HEAD CHEERLEADER: Give me a D!

CHEERLEADERS: D!

HEAD CHEERLEADER: Give me an E!

CHEERLEADERS: E!

HEAD CHEERLEADER: Give me a V!

CHEERLEADERS: V!

HEAD CHEERLEADER: Give me an I!

CHEERLEADERS: I!

HEAD CHEERLEADER: Give me an L!

CHEERLEADERS: L! Goooooooooooo Devil!

PSYCHIC takes back the baby and listens to his heart.

PSYCHIC: Perfect! The curse has been lifted!

CHEERLEADERS: Go cheerleaders! Woooooooooooo!

They form a pyramid as the GUNSLINGER holds the baby in his arms.

GUNSLINGER: Fine work, lassies. You saved our son from his crocky past. Let us celebrate your victory!

He tosses the baby to the HEAD CHEERLEADER at the top of the pyramid. She holds him high above her head.

CHEERLEADERS: Wooooooo hooooo!

GUNSLINGER: Now I'm off to the saloon, dearie. Don't wait up.

He fires a SHOT to the top of the pyramid and the baby drops into PSYCHIC's arms. He exits.

MICHAEL: It looked like things were finally going my way. But things aren't always as they seem.

PSYCHIC: *(To the baby.)* That's right, son. Your father's an alcoholic.

CHEERLEADERS: Goooooooooooo hangover! Wooooooo hooooo!

They dismantle their pyramid and rush off.

MICHAEL: So my mother the psychic was left all alone to raise me. *(To WRITER.)* How am I doing?

WRITER: Pretty good. Although one might say if she's a psychic, she would have seen this coming.

MICHAEL: Sorry. I'm new at this.

WRITER: We'll suspend our disbelief this time. Just don't let it happen again.

MICHAEL: Got it. What next?

WRITER: That's up to you.

MICHAEL: I'm not used to having this kind of power.

WRITER: It's always up to you. Don't forget that.

MICHAEL: So my mom is a psychic. As it turns out, a pretty bad psychic. So she calls a lawyer and divorces my gunslinger father.

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LAWYER enters with a stack of papers. He approaches PSYCHIC.

LAWYER: To proceed with this divorce, you must sign here. *(She does.)* And here. And here. And here. And initial here. And here. And here. And check mark here. And here. And here.

MICHAEL: On second thought, this is boring. She doesn't divorce my father. She shoots him. *(PSYCHIC pulls out a pistol and shoots it toward where the GUNGLINGER left.)* And the lawyer. *(PSYCHIC shoots the LAWYER. He drops dead.)*

WRITER: Careful of a blood bath. We want to keep this PG.

MICHAEL: Oh, right. *(To the audience.)* If there are any kids in the audience, I'm sorry.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Apology accepted.

MICHAEL: So my mother gets charged with first degree murder. Twice. Does that make it second degree murder?

WRITER: No clue. Details don't matter anyway.

MICHAEL: Fine. So she is forced to raise me in prison. One of her cell mates was . . . a trucker.

TRUCKER enters. She wears muddy overalls and a trucker's hat.

TRUCKER: I took a big rig full of cattle out for a joy ride.

MICHAEL: Newspapers everywhere ran the headline: "Where's the Beef?"

WRITER: Be wary of old jokes.

MICHAEL: I couldn't help myself.

WRITER: Try.

MICHAEL: Her other cell mate was . . . a mobster's tootsie.

TOOTSIE enters, draped in feather boas. She is dumb as a post and has a grating voice.

TOOTSIE: I don't know nothin' 'bout nothin'.

MICHAEL: She knew everything about everything.

TOOTSIE: Nuh-uh. And I don't squeal on nobody.

MICHAEL: Double negatives were her specialty.

TOOTSIE: Yes they ain't.

MICHAEL: So cozy as can be in our little cell, my mother the psychic . . .

PSYCHIC: (*Stroking the baby.*) I see a bright future in store for you.

MICHAEL: The tootsie...

TOOTSIE: Nothin's never gonna hurt you.

MICHAEL: And the trucker . . .

TRUCKER: (*Belches.*) I shouldn't have had that taco.

MICHAEL: Raised me in the slammer until I was five years old.

PSYCHIC holds the baby up in the air with one hand.

PSYCHIC: Don't you think you're awfully small to be five?

MICHAEL: Oh, crap. I forgot to age myself.

WRITER: That's what stage directions are for. Don't neglect them.

MICHAEL: In what seemed like the blink of an eye, I grew and grew until I was a toddler.

PSYCHIC drop kicks the baby into the wings. YOUNG MICHAEL rushes in from the same direction as the punted baby and into PSYCHIC's arms.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Mommy, mommy!

PSYCHIC: They sure grow up fast, don't they? But I knew he would all along.

TRUCKER: Sure you did.

TOOTSIE: I don't mean to say nothin', but I was thinkin' he should be in school. He's not learnin' nothin' in here.

PSYCHIC: Would you like that, honey? (*YOUNG MICHAEL begins to speak.*) No need to answer. I already know. So let's break you out of this joint.

MICHAEL: So the trucker contacted her friends on the outside and arranged to have me busted out of the clink.

Three quintessential CLOWNS cartwheel onto the stage. They wear colorful wigs, enormous shoes and hats made out of twisted balloons.

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CLOWN 1: A clown walks up a police officer in prison.

CLOWN 2: He has a desk strapped on his back, a typewriter under one arm, and a wastebasket under the other.

CLOWN 3: "What are you doing," the cop asks. And the clown says, "Impersonating an office, sir!"

CLOWNS: (*Miming a drum.*) Ba-dum-bum!

MICHAEL: And that was all the diversion it took to sneak me out.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Bye, mommies. I'll miss you!

PSYCHIC: You will behold a great and powerful life.

TRUCKER: Drive carefully.

TOOTSIE: And don't do nothin' I wouldn't do.

PSYCHIC, TRUCKER and TOOTSIE exit. YOUNG MICHAEL is left among the CLOWNS.

MICHAEL: I tried to live among the clowns, but that quickly became exhausting.

CLOWN 1: Why do clowns wash their clothes in Tide?

YOUNG MICHAEL: I don't know. Why?

CLOWN 2: Because it's cold out Tide!

CLOWN 3: Ba-dum-bum!

The CLOWNS cartwheel off in separate directions.

WRITER: (*Getting paranoid.*) Hey, you're getting pretty good at this.

MICHAEL: Thanks.

WRITER: Keep going, but don't get cocky or you'll get into a heap of trouble.

MICHAEL: You got it. So once again, I was on the lookout for new parents. People come in all shapes and sizes, but finding the perfect fit for me was not easy. First to cross my path was a beautiful femme fatale.

FEMME FATALE enters and skulks dangerously across the stage. She wears a huge slanted hat and carries a long cigarette extension.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Will you be my mother?

FATALE: *(Sultry.)* Hey, kid. Don't you know it's awful dangerous to play outside in the dark?

YOUNG MICHAEL: But it's the middle of the afternoon.

FATALE: Where I come from, it's always dark. Pitch black. Noir.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Um, okay. You shouldn't smoke, you know.

FATALE: I'm not a smoker. I'm a looker. *(She strikes a sexy pose, then exits.)*

MICHAEL: Clearly, she was out. Next up, a mad scientist.

MAD SCIENTIST stumbles in, carrying a beaker and two test tubes overflowing with blue, green and red liquid. His hair is gray and disheveled, and he speaks with a thick German accent.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Will you be my father?

SCIENTIST: Dat depends. Vill you be my experiment?

YOUNG MICHAEL: Sure.

SCIENTIST: Goot. Den drink dis.

YOUNG MICHAEL takes a test tube and swallows its blue contents. He waits. Nothing happens.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Is something supposed to happen?

SCIENTIST: Ya. But it didn't. So drink dis.

YOUNG MICHAEL swallows the green liquid. Still, nothing happens.

YOUNG MICHAEL: I don't feel anything.

SCIENTIST: Den try da red one. It's sure to verk.

YOUNG MICHAEL guzzles the red liquid in the beaker. Nothing.

YOUNG MICHAEL: Still nothing. Only now I have to pee.

SCIENTIST: Ah ha, it verked!

YOUNG MICHAEL: That was your experiment?

SCIENTIST: Just wait.

YOUNG MICHAEL: For what?

SCIENTIST: Dis.

All of a sudden, there's a flash of light and a burst of smoke. YOUNG MICHAEL spins and is replaced by a PRINCE in full royal garb.

SCIENTIST: How do you feel, Michael?

PRINCE: Like a prince!

SCIENTIST: You are a prince.

PRINCE: And I still have to pee.

SCIENTIST: My verk here is done.

SCIENTIST gathers his paraphernalia and exits. PRINCE poses grandly, with a big grin plastered on his face.

MICHAEL: Yes, I became a prince.

WRITER: Oh boy, oh boy. Now you're just getting off the beaten path.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think it's pretty good.

WRITER: What do you know? You're just an audience member.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, sorry for living.

WRITER: You should be. *(To MICHAEL.)* You escaped from prison to find new parents and go to school. Or have you forgotten that already?

MICHAEL: Why would I need to go to school if I'm a prince?

WRITER: Because. That's the way you set it up.

MICHAEL: Why are you acting so defensive all of a sudden?

WRITER: I'm not defensive, I just know better. You are seriously screwing up the narrative.

MICHAEL: No need to get huffy.

WRITER: *(Huffy.)* I'm not huffy!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Leave him alone.

WRITER: You want me to come down there? Cause I can take you!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Never mind.

MICHAEL: Would it make you happy if I become a prince and still go to school and find some parents?

WRITER: Yes it would.

MICHAEL: Fine. I went to school and found some parents. Happy now?

WRITER: No. Who are your parents?

MICHAEL: Does it matter?

WRITER: Of course it matters.

MICHAEL: Fine. My new adoptive parents were . . . a hillbilly.

HILLBILLY enters, smacking gum and ringing a triangle. She has fried hair and has a permanent sneer on her face.

HILLBILLY: Time for some grub. Your pa fetched us some real good road kill.

MICHAEL: And . . . a mime.

MIME enters, in black clothes and his face painted white. He walks against an imaginary wind, carrying a dead skunk that matches his costume.

WRITER: Now why would a prince end up with these two for parents?

HILLBILLY: Gosh darn, I dunno.

MIME looks at WRITER and shrugs.

WRITER: Then you have to assume the audience is just as confused.

MICHAEL: You had no problem with pirates and rappers.

WRITER: Well, that was funny. Now it's just getting ridiculous.

MICHAEL: Come on.

HILLBILLY: I could have a prince for a son. I'm classy. *(She spits.)*

WRITER: I just don't want you to end up stuck in a plot with no way out.

MIME performs the "trapped in an invisible box" routine.

MICHAEL: Sorry, guys. I guess he knows best. So I better listen to what he says and write you out of my play.

HILLBILLY: Shucks. I was hoping to get famous on this here stage.

MICHAEL: Sorry, Mom. Sorry, Dad.

MIME motions tears down his face. He and HILLBILLY exit together.

WRITER: That's better.

MICHAEL: Since you know so much, what should happen next?

WRITER: As I see it, you painted yourself in a corner several pages ago.

MICHAEL: To tell the truth, I was a bit lost. I'm suffering from . . . you know . . . um . . .

WRITER: Writer's block?

MICHAEL: That's it. Writer's block. Can you help me?

WRITER: Oh sure, now you need my help.

MICHAEL: That's why you came up here, isn't it?

WRITER: Yeah, but you just took over.

MICHAEL: I apolo —

WRITER: Apology accepted. Just don't get carried away again.

MICHAEL: Fine.

WRITER: Now writer's block happens to me on occasion. Not very often because, as you know, I am the greatest writer in the world.

MICHAEL: Living or dead.

WRITER: That's right. But you know what usually snaps me out of it?

MICHAEL: No, what?

WRITER: A Greek chorus.

MICHAEL: Really?

WRITER: Dialogue spoken in unison is, without question, always fascinating. No matter how bad it may be.

MICHAEL: Would a chorus really fit into my play?

WRITER: Who cares? This is the theater. Anything goes! Except "Anything Goes." That musical should be put out of its misery.

MICHAEL: I thought it was quite popular.

WRITER: That's just because the actors parade around in skimpy swim suits. A little skin may pack the house, but it's no excuse for great drama.

MICHAEL: So you're saying anything goes, so long as you come up with it first?

WRITER: That's right.

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