

WEIRD CHICKEN

By Bradley Walton

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A One Act Dark Comedy

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SYNOPSIS: Finley and Skyler are unwilling participants in the school science fair. To demonstrate the inaccuracy of bad pseudo-science found in TV and movies, they attempt to create a Frankenstein monster-style chicken out of chicken nuggets. Both are more than a little surprised when their project is actually successful—especially since they used vegetarian chicken nuggets. Can their creation find enough love and goodness in its heart to overcome the fear and prejudice of others? Or will it resort to using its mental powers and turn against everyone—including its creators? *Weird Chicken* is a darkly comic take on *Frankenstein* in a high school setting.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(13 either, 0-6 extras; gender flexible)

MR. /MS. KUMP (m/f)..... A teacher organizing a science fair. *(56 lines)*

MR. /MS. HENRY (m/f)..... A rather grumpy custodian. *(14 lines)*

FINLEY (m/f)..... A less-than-stellar student in Mr. Kump's science class. *(121 lines)*

SKYLER (m/f)..... Finley's buddy, also a less-than-stellar student in Mr. Kump's science class. *(105 lines)*

STUDENTS 1-6: Students in Mr. Kump's science class.

STUDENT 1 (m/f)..... *(5 lines)*

STUDENT 2 (m/f)..... *(5 lines)*

STUDENT 3 (m/f)..... *(4 lines)*

STUDENT 4 (m/f)..... *(4 lines)*

STUDENT 5 (m/f)..... *(4 lines)*

STUDENT 6 (m/f)..... *(4 lines)*

JONES (m/f)..... A science fair judge; secretly a government operative. *(26 lines)*

SMITH (m/f).....	A science fair judge; secretly a government operative. <i>(26 lines)</i>
CHICKEN (m/f).....	Not really a chicken, but we'll call him that for the sake of simplicity. <i>(47 lines)</i>
EXTRAS (m/f).....	Optional, 0-6 or more additional Students. The maximum number of extras is largely dependent on the number of science fair display tables you can fit on your stage. With two students per display table. <i>(Non-Speaking)</i>

DURATION: 35 minutes.

SETTING: Science fair in high school cafeteria.

SET

The only set pieces required are four (or more, if the production has EXTRAS) tables with two chairs at each table. These may be cafeteria tables, folding tables, or even card tables. The chairs may likewise be school chairs or folding chairs.

PROPS

- (8) Cell Phones – FINLEY, JONES, STUDENTS 1-6
- Long Extension Cord – FINLEY
- USB drive – FINLEY
- Wooden Salad Bowl – FINLEY
- Box of glued-together “vegetarian chicken nuggets” – SKYLER
- (2) Clipboards or Tablet Computers – JONES and SMITH
- (4) Colored Prize Ribbons – KUMP
- Money – STUDENT 6
- (3) Science fair projects of your choice – STUDENTS 1-6

COSTUMES

KUMP – Professional teacher attire.

HENRY – Custodial work clothes.

FINLEY, SKYLER, and STUDENTS – Contemporary teenage attire.

SMITH and JONES – Black suits with black sunglasses.

CHICKEN – Costume should resemble or imply a chicken, but there's a lot of room for artistic license here, as it is essentially a Frankenstein monster-type chicken that is not actually made of chicken.

SOUND EFFECTS

- School Bell Ring
- Clap of Thunder

AUTHORS NOTE

Later on in the play the tables will have science fair projects set up on them. The projects can be pretty much anything, but will need to be gathered up and carried offstage quickly. Simple displays on tri-fold display board are fine. One project will be needed for each pair of STUDENTS (not including FINLEY and SKYLER—their project is CHICKEN).

AT RISE: *A school cafeteria with four or more empty tables – two chairs at each. The table that is farthest left will be used by FINLEY and SKYLER later in the play. STUDENTS, FINLEY and SKYLER, are standing around, listening to their science teacher, MR. KUMP.*

KUMP: Okay class, I think we're done. Thank you all for assisting our dear custodian, Mr. Henry, with setting up the cafeteria for tonight's science fair. And Mr. Henry, thank you for helping us with our event.

HENRY: Not like I have a choice.

KUMP: *(Ignoring HENRY'S comment.)* Class, Mr. Henry and I both hope that tonight will be a positive and valuable experience for all of you.

HENRY: Don't vandalize the bathrooms! I get enough of that during the school day.

KUMP: *(Ignoring HENRY'S comment.)* Thank you for your time, Mr. Henry.

HENRY: My time? Hah! Nobody cares about my time. I might want to go bowling tonight, but is that what I'm gonna do? Nope. I'm comin' back here for another science fair so I can scrape baking soda off the ceiling again. *(Exits L.)*

KUMP: *(Ignoring HENRY'S comment.)* When you all return this evening, set up your projects with your partners at your assigned tables and above all, act dignified. High school science fairs are a time-honored institution. They challenge young minds to think creatively and scientifically, bringing honor to those who excel, and shame and humiliation to those who fall short. Major corporations, NASA, and assorted scientific government organizations have all been rumored to send talent scouts to high school science fairs. If you should find a stranger examining your project with acute interest, it's probably a judge. But it might also be someone with the power to offer you a career, or lock you away as a danger to yourself and others. Maybe even all of the above. One way or another, tonight's science fair will be a defining moment in your young lives. Don't screw it up. And try not to stress over it.

SFX: *School bell rings.*

KUMP: I'll see you all tonight.

STUDENTS exit L and R.

KUMP: Finley, Skyler—hang on a minute.

FINLEY and SKYLER cross to KUMP.

FINLEY: Yes, Mr. Kump?

KUMP: Everyone dropped their projects off in my room this morning...except for you. Is your project ready?

FINLEY: Yup.

KUMP: What have you prepared?

FINLEY: Um...

SKYLER: Uh...

KUMP: You haven't even started yet, have you?

FINLEY: Well...

KUMP: You need to put something together in the next four hours if you want to have a prayer of passing this class.

SKYLER: Mr. Kump, why did you let us be partners if you know we both have really bad work habits?

KUMP: Because I didn't want either of you to be responsible for bringing down somebody else's grade.

SKYLER: Good call.

KUMP: Okay. Go. Leave. And come back in four hours with something. *(Exits L.)*

SKYLER: *(Accepting cold, hard reality.)* We're gonna have to finally get to work on this thing...aren't we?

FINLEY: Unless we wanna take the class again.

SKYLER: I think I'd rather just do the project and be done with it.

FINLEY: Yeah. It's not much of a choice.

SKYLER: The teachers never give us much of a choice with anything.

FINLEY: The teachers have no respect for our free will. At all.

SKYLER: What?

FINLEY: Free will. You know. Doing stuff because you want to and not because somebody makes you.

SKYLER: *(Kind of getting it.)* Oh...yeah.

FINLEY: I can't really blame the teachers, though. I mean, if you could boss other people around and make them do whatever you wanted, wouldn't you do it?

SKYLER: Oh, yeah. Totally. It's just a bummer to be on the receiving end. Especially when the thing you're being forced to do is *science*. Science is hard.

FINLEY: Yeah. It's all so...technical and precise. I wish it could be more like philosophy.

SKYLER: Philosophy? For real?

FINLEY: Yeah. In philosophy, people just sit around thinking and making stuff up.

SKYLER: What kind of stuff?

FINLEY: Like...what's the point of our existence? Why are we here? You know...meaning-of-life-type stuff.

SKYLER: You're into that kind of thing?

FINLEY: Sure. I think about my existence all the time when I'm supposed to be doing school work. It makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something. And what I've figured out is, my life is really shallow. When I'm not in school, I sit around playing video games. I hardly ever leave the house, and I don't have any goals for the future. But you know what? I'm okay with all of that.

SKYLER: Yeah. I feel exactly the same way. I just wanna do what I wanna do, you know?

FINLEY: Yeah. Totally.

SKYLER: That's free will, right?

FINLEY: Yup.

SKYLER: But that also means being responsible for yourself, doesn't it?

FINLEY: Yeah, I suppose.

SKYLER: And it means making good choices...

FINLEY: I guess so.

SKYLER: (*Suddenly less enthusiastic.*) Free will is overrated.

FINLEY: Hmm. (*Shrugs.*) Maybe.

SKYLER: So philosophy's not hard?

FINLEY: The great thing about philosophy is that there are no wrong answers. They just need to seem like they make sense.

SKYLER: That's how science oughta be. I mean, that's how it works in movies. You know, where they toss random stuff together and it does something that seems like it might kinda make sense?

FINLEY: Mr. Kump would call that pseudo-scientific nonsense.

SKYLER: I think pseudo-scientific nonsense is awesome.

FINLEY: Pseudo-scientific nonsense is the greatest. It would be beyond amazing if our science fair project could be pseudo-scientific nonsense.

SKYLER: That would be beyond amazing.

FINLEY: Actually...

SKYLER: What?

FINLEY: Maybe our science fair project could be *about* pseudo-scientific nonsense.

SKYLER: Like, how?

FINLEY: Well, we could toss random stuff together that seems like it oughta do something cool, and then make our project about how it doesn't do anything cool.

SKYLER: But...if nothing cool happens...then how is that cool?

FINLEY: Because least we'll get to toss random stuff together. And if we set our project up for failure, and succeed at failing, then we might get a decent grade.

SKYLER: Huh?

FINLEY: Like, we're showing that two plus two doesn't equal three. Or ten. Or 234.

SKYLER: No—no math! Please!

FINLEY: Sorry. The point is, most questions in science only have one right answer, but lots of wrong answers. If we're trying to get a wrong answer instead of a right one, we've given ourselves a way bigger target. And then, by explaining that the answer is wrong, we'll have gotten something right.

SKYLER: I think that makes sense.

FINLEY: You know, this might actually work. And it'll definitely be easier than anything else we could do.

SKYLER: My mom would call it the path of least resistance.

FINLEY: The more I think about it...it seems so easy that I almost feel bad.

SKYLER: Why?

FINLEY: We wouldn't actually learn anything from doing the project.

SKYLER: Do you *care* if you learn anything?

FINLEY: No, not really.

SKYLER: Okay then.

FINLEY: But still...

SKYLER: Finley, it's a science fair project. Cutting corners won't put anybody on a path to the dark side.

FINLEY: Yeah, you're probably right. So...what do you think our project should be about?

SKYLER: I have no idea.

FINLEY: If the whole point is the project not working, then it should be something really out there. Something bold and crazy.

SKYLER: You think we should go totally mad scientist?

FINLEY: Yeah!

SKYLER: Like...Frankenstein?

FINLEY: (*Considering the impracticality of this.*) You wanna try to put together a body made out of pieces of other bodies and then bring it to life?

SKYLER: Sure! That would never work.

FINLEY: Where would we get pieces of dead bodies?

SKYLER: Graveyards?

FINLEY: No. That's gross. And I don't think we could pull it off in four hours. Plus, it's probably illegal or something.

SKYLER: What if it's not a person that we're trying to bring to life? What if we make an animal?

FINLEY: Out of what?

SKYLER: Whatever's in the deli section at the grocery store. Just toss a bunch of meat together, run electricity through it, and when it doesn't come to life, boom—instant science fair project!

FINLEY: That's a good idea, but deli meat can be kind of slimy.

SKYLER: What if we use chicken nuggets?

FINLEY: That's a great idea!

SKYLER: Would we need to give our chicken a brain?

FINLEY: I guess. Do chicken nuggets include brain parts?

SKYLER: I don't know.

FINLEY: Then we probably need to come up with something, just to say we've got the brain angle covered.

SKYLER: How about a computer chip or something like that?

FINLEY: Good idea. My mom has a bunch of USB drives. [Update technology reference as necessary.] One of those should work.

SKYLER: (*Shrugging.*) Sure.

FINLEY: Then we need to figure out a way to hold the nuggets together.

SKYLER: Glue?

FINLEY: Brilliant.

SKYLER: My dad's got a glue gun.

FINLEY: Great. Do you think you can get your hands on some chicken nuggets and glue them together before tonight?

SKYLER: Probably. Yeah.

FINLEY: I know there's some frayed extension cords at my house that are dangerous as all get out. We can wrap one around the nuggets and plug it into an outlet. And I can bring a wooden salad bowl so if the nuggets do pick up a charge, they won't be touching metal and shock somebody.

SKYLER: Did you learn that in science class?

FINLEY: No. TV.

SKYLER: Yeah. Me, too. You know, it'd be awesome if we could figure out some way for the nuggets to get struck by lightning.

FINLEY: (*Looking at phone.*) Actually...there's a 60% chance of a thunderstorm this evening. But I'm not standing out in the rain.

SKYLER: Me, neither.

FINLEY: So scratch the lightning part?

SKYLER: Yeah.

FINLEY: Okay. See you back here in four hours.

Blackout. The lights come back up on STUDENTS working in pairs—1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6—setting up their projects on the tables in the cafeteria. FINLEY and SKYLER enter from R and go to their table at L. FINLEY is carrying a USB drive, an extension cord, and a wooden salad bowl. SKYLER is carrying a box of vegetarian chicken nuggets. Throughout the scene, SFX: The occasional clap of thunder can be heard.

FINLEY: Looks like the forecast was right about the thunderstorm.

SKYLER: Yeah. I'm glad we got back here before the rain started.

FINLEY: Okay, I got the cord, the bowl, and the USB drive. (*Sets the bowl down on the table.*) And you've got the nuggets.

SKYLER: (*Handing FINLEY the box.*) Right here. They're all glued together and ready to go.

FINLEY: Awesome. (*Looking at the box.*) Wait a minute. Skyler, these are vegetarian chicken nuggets.

SKYLER: They are?

FINLEY: Yes!

SKYLER: But...how can something be "vegetarian" and "chicken" at the same time?

FINLEY: It's not real chicken. It's fake chicken.

SKYLER: I kinda thought that most chicken nuggets had fake chicken in them.

FINLEY: Well, this is faker chicken.

SKYLER: So that's bad?

FINLEY: It's not like we were expecting this to work, but still, it kind of shoots the whole idea down the toilet.

SKYLER: So whatta we do?

FINLEY: Well, for starters, don't let Mr. Kump see the box.

SKYLER: Right.

FINLEY: Just dump the nuggets out on the table.

SKYLER: Sure. (*Dumps the mass of nuggets onto the table.*)

FINLEY: Now I wrap the extension cord around them... (*Wraps one end of cord around the nuggets.*) Good job gluing these together.

SKYLER: Thank you. I glued the waistbands shut in a bunch of my brother's underwear while I was at it. I only burned myself twice.

FINLEY: Cool. (*Finishing with the extension cord.*) I think...that ...ought to do it.

SKYLER: What are you going to do with the USB drive?

FINLEY: That's a good question. Stick it into one of the nuggets, I guess. (*Wedges the USB drive into the mass of nuggets and puts the whole thing in the bowl.*) Okay. Now I just have to find an outlet to plug it in. (*Exits L with the free end of the extension cord.*)

SKYLER: There's one right over there!

FINLEY: (*Offstage.*) Found it! (*Enters from L.*) All right, it's plugged in. Anything happening?

SKYLER: Nope. It's still just your average, everyday mass of hot-glued vegetarian chicken nuggets that's been stabbed with a USB drive and wrapped in an extension cord.

FINLEY: So we have failed to bring a Frankenstein chicken to life.

SKYLER: *(With a disappointed sigh.)* Yeah.

FINLEY: Why do you say that like you actually thought it had the slightest chance of working in the first place?

SKYLER: It would've been cool.

FINLEY: Even if these had been real meat, would you seriously want a Frankenstein chicken made of processed nuggets running around?

SKYLER: Not really.

FINLEY: And I don't even know what's on that flash drive.

KUMP enters from L. SKYLER hides the box behind his back.

KUMP: Why is there a ratty extension cord plugged into the wall? That thing's an accident waiting to happen. *(Looks at the mass of nuggets in the bowl.)* Finley. Skyler. What is this?

FINLEY: That's our project, Mr. Kump.

KUMP: It looks like a bunch of chicken nuggets wrapped in an extension cord. With a USB drive sticking out of it.

FINLEY: That's right.

KUMP: What are you trying to prove? How is this a science fair project?

SKYLER: We're demonstrating how bad pseudo-science like you'd see in a movie doesn't actually work.

FINLEY: We're running electricity through chicken nuggets to prove that they won't come to life like Frankenstein's monster.

SKYLER: The USB drive is the brain.

KUMP: You can't be serious.

FINLEY: Sure. Why not?

KUMP: Because it's ridiculous.

FINLEY: Right. That's the point.

KUMP: Get this thing out of here before the judges' show up.

SKYLER: Why?

KUMP: It's embarrassing.

FINLEY: We tried to prove something and we did. How is that embarrassing?

KUMP: If you have to ask, I can't explain it so you'd understand.

JONES and SMITH enter from R, carrying clipboards or tablet computers. KUMP goes to them and tries to steer them away from FINLEY and SKYLER'S project.

JONES: We're here for the science fair.

KUMP: Um...hello. I'm Mr. Kump.

SMITH: My name is Smith. This is Jones. We've been sent to judge for you.

KUMP: Thank you both for coming! There's a lot here for you to see. Our students have put so much work into their projects. I'm sure you'll be very impressed. *(Crosses back to FINLEY and SKYLER.)*
Get it out now!

FINLEY: Okay, okay. I've gotta unplug it first!

KUMP: Wait—Skyler, what've you got behind your back?

SKYLER: Nothing.

KUMP: *(Holds out a hand.)* Let me see.

SKYLER sheepishly hands the box to KUMP. JONES and SMITH begin to gravitate back towards KUMP.

KUMP: Vegetarian chicken nuggets? Seriously? Not only did you have the nerve to attempt this joke, but you did it with *vegetarian* chicken nuggets? I am going to have *such* a talk with your parents.

JONES and SMITH stare at the mass of nuggets from behind KUMP.

SKYLER: *(Indicating JONES and SMITH.)* Um, Mr. Kump?

KUMP: *(Turning around.)* Oh! Nothing to see here! Nothing at all.

SFX: Clap of thunder. Lights blackout.

STUDENT 1: What was that?

STUDENT 2: Did the school get hit by lightning?

STUDENT 3: Are the lights gonna come back on?

STUDENT 4: Shoot! I just put down my phone!

STUDENT 5: I've got mine here somewhere.

STUDENT 6: Did anybody do a project on bioluminescence?

KUMP: Everyone just be calm.

Lights come back up. CHICKEN is lying on the table next to the overturned bowl. Everyone stares at CHICKEN in disbelief, except for KUMP, whose back is turned.

KUMP: There we go. See? No need to be alarmed.

CHICKEN: *(Abruptly sits bolt upright.) Squawwwwwk! (Abruptly collapses back onto the table.)*

KUMP: *(Startled.)* Aagh!

STUDENTS all pull out phones and point them at CHICKEN as if to photograph or record it.

KUMP: No phones! Unless you all want to fail my class, everybody put your phones away! This does not go on the internet!

JONES: That's good advice.

SMITH: You should all take it.

STUDENTS reluctantly put their phones away.

SKYLER: Finley, did our science project just work?

FINLEY: I think maybe it did.

SKYLER: What's gonna happen to our grade?

FINLEY: Probably nothing good.

SKYLER: *(Looking closely at CHICKEN.)* Is it dead?

FINLEY: No, it's breathing.

SKYLER: Then why isn't it moving?

FINLEY: I dunno. Maybe it passed out from the stress of being brought to life all of a sudden?

KUMP: This is a joke, isn't it? You swapped out those vegetarian chicken nuggets for this...thing when the lights went out, didn't you?

SKYLER: We didn't know the lights were gonna go out.

KUMP: Yes you did. You've got somebody else in the building who's helping you and they killed the power.

FINLEY: But how would we have known when the lighting was gonna hit?

KUMP: I don't know. But there's got to be some kind of explanation that makes more sense than you bringing to life a chicken made out of vegetarian nuggets! (*Turns to JONES and SMITH.*) I am so, so sorry that you had to witness this. I had no idea it was going to happen. Finley and Skyler are hardly model students, but they've never attempted anything of this nature before.

JONES: Am I understanding you to say that this creature is composed of animated textured vegetable protein, with added artificial chicken flavoring?

The following three lines overlap.

FINLEY: Yes.

SKYLER: Yes.

KUMP: No.

SMITH: Interesting.

JONES: Does it have a brain?

FINLEY: My mom's USB drive.

SMITH: What was on this USB drive?

FINLEY: I have no idea.

KUMP: (*To JONES and SMITH.*) Are you seriously going along with this?

SMITH: (*To FINLEY, ignoring KUMP.*) Did your mother know what you were going to do with the drive?

FINLEY: No. I didn't tell her I was borrowing it.

SMITH: Is your mom here?

FINLEY: No.

JONES: Can you call her?

FINLEY: My parents were going to a movie after they brought me here. Their phones are probably off.

SMITH: This is a recipe for disaster.

KUMP: What are you talking about? It's a high school science fair. Nothing *that* bad could happen.

Pause. SMITH and JONES stare intently at KUMP.

KUMP: Could it?

SMITH: Why do you think we were sent?

KUMP: Because I emailed the university science department asking for judges?

JONES: We're not from the university, Mr. Kump.

KUMP: You're not?

SMITH: The Department of Homeland Scientific Security monitors all phone calls and electronic communications for any mention of school science fairs, then dispatches agents to observe, and if necessary, intervene, at every such event.

STUDENT 1: You mean—all that stuff Mr. Kump told us about government agencies coming to science fairs was actually true?

STUDENT 2: I thought he was pulling our legs.

KUMP: I was! I made that up so you'd all take this seriously. I've never seen these people before.

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