**BACKSTAGE**

**By Lee Hotovy**

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*Synopsis: Somewhere on Broadway, there exists a backstage where the drama unfolds slightly differently than on-stage. Several crew members must help resolve relationship issues with each other, as well as, with an over- dramatic cast. Audience members are drawn into the play by being acknowledged by the opening crew members. Throughout the play, the idea of kindness is brought in by Eunice Toomey, a sweet old lady who doubles as the writer and janitor. To add to the fun, a phantom of the backstage seems to be taking props…leaving the entire cast propless with an ultimatum from the producer to make the show work,or else. A fun musical comedy that brings out the worst and the best in every performer both on and off stage, and teaches a lesson about kindness…which is God at work.*

**CAST:**

**Director**

**Writer/janitor/mother/ Eunice Toomey**

**Backstage Manager/Roger**

**Prop Master /Barbara**

**Emerson/fired actor**

**Crew Members:**

**One**

**Two**

**Three**

**Chorus-Line Crew Members, Four-Thirteen**

**Actors:**

**Philippe**

**Gloria**

**Simmons**

**Madge**

**Victor**

**Daphne**

**Children performers:**

**Annie Child One/Hopskotch**

**Pepper Child Two/Tag**

**Jo-Jo Child Three/Cinder**

**Lydia Child Four/Rosa**

**Penny Child Five/Paige**

**ACT 1/Scene 1**

*Opening Scene: Somewhere on Broadway; Stage is set up to look like backstage with props lying around, fake doors, /Background with three rolling walled pieces large enough for performers to stand on/each painted with logo of musical Annie, West Side, Phantom/ladders run along side screened wall to an upper deck area above screen. Performers will move up and down ladders and runway above.*

***Prelude/Act 1/Scene 1:***

*Theater is in blackout. Orphans sit frozen on moving wall facing back/posed from Annie scene.*

*Janitor enters wipes off word kind on wall./Girls giggle/spot on Maria.*

**Maria: Life is like a stage.**

**CHILD THREE: Many times our performance is dependent upon our own abilities, and even more so upon**

**the abilities of the rest of man*kind* who have shown us that the *kindness of man*, is really a reflection of the *kindness of God.***

**CHILD FOUR: This helps us to become the characters of life, who perform acts of love for others.**

**CHILD ONE: There is a saying*: You* must be the change you wish to see in the world.**

**CHILD FIVE: Change is desired for something better…there is always room to improve.**

**CHILD ONE: How does one change?**

**CHILD TWO: Perhaps by seeing things from the inside out…**

**CHILD THREE: Or from the upside, down…**

**CHILD FOUR: Or from the backstage, front…**

**CHILD TWO: When we truly see, then we know what’s missing…very often what is missing, is simply kindness.**

**CHILD FIVE: Kindness is the Divine ingredient necessary for change. It adds sweetness to everything.**

 *Song/Kindness*

***Black out****/ 1-3 crew, Actors, Director, Roger, Barbara are placed on rolling walls that are turned to back.*

*Mic. Exchange/extra crew enter in blackout.*

*Door opens .No light. Voice of backstage manager.*

**1-6 enter/Roger**

**ROGER: Hey, who’s the wise guy that took my flashlight? It was right here a minute ago…ow! I can’t see a thing**

**In this theater…One, can I borrow your flashlight?**

**ONE: No can do…**

**ROGER: What dya mean, no can do?**

**ONE: Missing!**

**ROGER: Great…just great…(yelling) Can we have some lights down here…Eight…Nine…anybody in the booth?**

**EUNICE: *haunting ghost voice/clean for me***

**ROGER: What …was that?**

**THREE: The Phantom.**

**ROGER: What did you say?**

**THREE: You know…the Phantom…of the opera…only, in our case, it’s the Phantom of the backstage.**

**ROGER: Get serious…**

**THREE: I am.**

**EUNICE*: ghost voice/clean for me***

**ROGER: Victor…if that’s you, you’re overacting again.**

*Silence*

**ROGER: Victor?**

*Whooshing cape sound/phantom runs down aisle.*

*ROGER: Ahhh…*

 *Door opens and closes*

**TWO: What was that?**

**FIVE: It’s us, four, five, and six.**

**ROGER: Oh good, you have flashlights…we think the phantom is in here…shine your lights around**

**But be prepared to run…**

**FOUR: Do you see anything? (shine lights away from audience)**

**FIVE: Not so far?**

**SIX puts head on floor: Wait! Someone was just performing here…its still warm.**

*Crew shine flashlights around stage, Suddenly one shines flashlight towards audience, slowly other crew members turn one at a time to see audience.*

**SIX gasps: I think I found the Phantom!**

**FIVE: Where?**

**ROGER plus crew: Ahhhh!**

**FOUR: I don’t believe it!**

**SIX: I didn’t know the Phantom had so many heads…he’s not at all what I expected.**

**ROGER: Me either!**

**FOUR: Should we say something?**

**SIX: I don’t speak Phantom…do you?**

**FOUR: I didn’t even know we had seats in here…it’s like, it’s like the Twilight Zone.**

**FIVE: You know…I don’t think it’s the Phantom at all…**

**SIX: You don’t?**

**FIVE: No…because that head over there looks like a relative of mine. I’m getting the lights.**

**SIX: Maybe it’s “Invite a relative or friend to Work Day”?**

*Lights come on.*

**FIVE: Found the switch.**

*Crew gasps as they survey crowd*

**FOUR: You know this is even weirder than the phantom…there are people seated in our backstage! Someone seriously messed up in tickets.**

**FIVE: I wonder if we should try to entertain them or something…as long as they’re staring at us.**

**FOUR: But we’re crew…we don’t sing and dance!**

**SIX: I feel like a little white mouse in a laboratory experiment…just being stared at.**

**Cut lines**

**FIVE: Okay people…the good news is that we’re not dealing with a phantom ghost…the bad news is that we have an audience watching our “back stage”…**

**ROGER: So we must roll with it. I suggest we explain what we do, and then maybe they’ll go away.**

**FOUR: Good idea…and if we add some music to it, maybe they’ll feel like they got their money’s worth.**

**Vamp music brought in as other crew members enter**

**ELEVEN: Good evening. I’m Crew Eleven and this is our backstage. Please excuse the mess…we weren’t expecting company.**

**SEVEN: Yes, and even though it looks messy, in reality, it is actually very organized…it just looks unorganized because it’s the backstage and well…even though we try to be organized, we aren’t very because…its hard to be organized in the dark…all the time…uhmmm…so…**

**SIX: So…we ask you to not look so much at the stuff that’s back here…but rather at the possibilities of the stuff that’s back here!**

**NINE: Exactly! Everything you see here is a prop or set piece that will transform the real stage out there into a faraway land or room in an enchanted castle…the possibilities are endless.**

**FIVE: So what we’re giving you tonight is an introspective look at theater, turning the table, forcing the viewer to ask the question, “Just what is real here?”**

**TEN: Like, “am I seeing the back stage with its crew who are not really performers, but appear to be performers, or am I seeing real actors only acting like they are not actors at all, and the real backstage crew are actually performing as actors to give the illusion that backstage crew people can actually act, when in truth they cannot.**

**FIVE: And even if they could act, would the deception of their role play cause us to avoid the real question at hand?**

**FOUR: Which is?**

**FIVE: Did you order pastrami on rye or whole wheat?**

**FOUR: Whole Wheat.**

**EIGHT: You see…here is reality…what’s for lunch. But don’t let that confuse you…no, the point of seeing a production from the inside out, is to come to understand the performance that most of us are really interested in… the performance of the heart...And there we will find reality.**

**ELEVEN: In other words…the performance of the heart will either make the show or break the show…no matter where you stand.**

**NINE: Which in our own little make-believe way is exactly where we have placed you. Backstage of Broadway, New York, New York.**

**Backstage Song/Walls turned**

**TWELVE: If this is your first time backstage, let us point a few things out to you…(pointy signs appear)**

**THIRTEEN: This…is a crew member (sign). She takes direction from the backstage manager. Usually this involves moving set pieces on and off the stage…not this stage, but that stage…through the curtains.**

**TEN (to Moira): Now while that explains the mechanics of her role, it does not touch on the real heart of the matter, which in her world means she must first of all take direction from someone other than herself. Her heart must have a certain meekness to it.**

**SIX: Here we have the prop master (sign)…her sole purpose is to manage every single prop in the theater.**

**THIRTEEN: Organization and control are key, but like most of us, she tends to become attached very quickly to the props, since, in a way, they represent her very essence…*her* part in the play. Without props, she is master of nothing.**

**SIX: Her mind must be like a steel trap, unable to lose track of any item…filing everything from a feather dusters to Finnish flutes in the prop compartments of her mind to be retrieved at any given moment upon the whims of the director.****For example…**

Crew member touches prop master and director who “un-freeze”.

**PROP MASTER/Barbara: So what is The director asking for this time Roger?**

**ROGER: Thirty-six umbrellas, all black, five hundred and sixty-two gallons of rainwater, a street lamp, and a puddle…**

**PROP MASTER: Let me guess…Singin’ In the Rain?**

**ROGER: You got it…oh and a salmon-colored sofa…no pillows.**

**PROP MASTER: Salmon?**

**ROGER: Yes…well with the all the water, I think she wanted some kind of fish connection….**

***DIRECTOR: Yes, I do…it’s such a witty idea!***

***EIGHT: And here is the director, who takes a story and brings it to life, transforming every word on paper, to an action, a* song, a dance, or even a joke!**

**TWELVE: She must work within the confines of a stage, which in the beginning is devoid of anything but a bare floor and a bare wall. She must also mold her performers into something they are not…for example…**

**FOUR: Gloria Van Camp…famous broadway star, leading lady, known for her high C and Kool Aid with a prop…she never misses. She like the other performers, must take direction…even if it kills her…or anyone else within range of her candlestick.**

**GLORIA: *(Soprano short aria…and then karate chop with candlestick)***

***PHILIPPE: Nice one Gloria…***

**ELEVEN: This is the lead male. His job is to counter the leading lady on stage. He has an equal share**

**in conceit, and can’t help but touch the star that adorns his dressing room every time he passes by it.**

**TWELVE: Here we have the supporting actors and actresses. They do just that, support the lead roles, at least on stage….however, backstage…**

**THIRTEEN: …they seem to do the very opposite… Jealousy is the rule of the day with sad distructive conversation.**

**TWELVE: A little kindness would go a long way…only they haven’t discovered it yet.**

**SEVEN: And finally, if you haven’t already figured it out, this is the backstage manager (sign). She has to navigate her ship in the dark, stirring clear of dropped lines, broken props, and falling walls…not to mention an over-demanding director and pretentious performers. Steadily she stays on course and directs the backstage much as the director directs on stage… but who has the tougher job you ask? The director… or the back stage manager?…that remains to be *seen* …*snort/laugh…get it…remains to be seen…***

*Move into Backstage Song/ reprisal*

*Light change****./Black Out***

*Crew remain with Roger, Barbara/Actors and Actresses move to spots “onstage”/Simmons, Daphne, Victor act like audience members sitting just below main stage. Vacuum onstage with Gloria in boat. Philippe stands unseen in wings for next scene.*

**ACT 1/SCENE 4**

*West Side story America dialogue and dance/Barbara moves backstage looking for props. Roger stands looking at clip board discussing things with Crew 1-6*

**BARBARA frantic: Where are the knives? Roger…I’m going to lose my mind! Every play in the last six weeks…props keep vanishing…I can’t go on like this…do something!!!**

**ROGER: You’re the prop master…which means *master* of the props…you must tame the beasts…tame your props…cage them…but don’t come to me! I have enough problems! The director wants me to build a staircase out of bAMboo, so that we get the sound of a xylophone every time Maria runs up and down the stairs!**

**BARBARA: This is not a circus!(cries)**

**ROGER: That’s right, its Broadway, which is worse than the circus!**

**BARBARA: *Broadway*….what does that mean anyway?**

**ROGER: Music and theatre at its best! Broadway! That’s what it means!**

**BARBARA: How do we know that? I mean there could be some little theatre in Nebraska producing better shows than us, but because they aren’t on Broadway…nobody knows!**

**ROGER: Is that where you want to be…Nebraska?**

**BARBARA: I’m sick of this place…I’m sick of prima donnas, and over dramatics…I’m sick of losing props…I need some air, I need some space…I need light…I need…**

*Philippe moves across stage admiring himself in cowboy hat/looking in mirror*

**Singing: Oklahoma… (holds note length of stage)**

**BARBARA shouting: NO! Santa Fe!**

**ROGER: Will you knock it off…we have a show to do!**

**BARBARA: And what am I supposed to do if there are no props?**

**ROGER: Take a well-earned vacation, I suppose! Besides, no props makes my job easier since I won’t have to worry about them as *actors!***

**BARBARA: Oh, that was low Roger…your just jealous because you didn’t think of the hatrack first…wait, did you say *no* props? How do I know you’re not the one taking them…huh…Rog…er?**

**ROGER: Are you calling me a theif?**

**BARBARA: Where are my props?**

**ROGER: Hopefully on Craig’s List!**

*Conflict between Roger and Barbara, crew members taking sides 1-3 on Roger’s side, 4-6 on Barbara’s side*

*Actors emerge on surrounding staging watching and cheering*

*Song and Dance sequence with conflict between Roger and cast, crew, Barbara (constantly asking for props), and Director (in word only)*

*Climatic end with Roger getting “killed” with a script, as in West Side story, by Barbara reacts with shock holding the script*

*Roger appears dead (acting)*

*Crew members react (like scene from West Side)*

**BARBARA: (gasps) I killed him with this….pppp…prop…**

**SIX: Let me see that…(takes prop)…it’s just a feather duster…**

**BARBARA: It doesn’t matter …I *used* it as a prop…I’m doomed…**

*Barbara starts babbling and moving around stage agitated/exits*

**SIX: Whoah…**

*Director and Writer enter*

**DIRECTOR: What have we here?**

**FIVE: A dead backstage manager?**

**DIRECTOR: Hmmm…weapon?**

**FOUR: This feather duster…**

**DIRECTOR: How very***…(writer hands sheet)* ***clean*. Well I guess we will have to find a new backstage. Do I have any takers?**

*Everyone backs off, grumbling*

**DIRECTOR: You know, I really hate to be the bad guy here, but the timing of this is very…(paper from writer) *unfortunate*. Because of your lack of self control, selfishness, and utter clumsiness with a script…you have put a real damper on this theatre! We have had poor performance after performance. Nose bleeds on the set; forgotten lines; people sleeping; missing props, singing vacuums, dead managers, and… dog slobber everywhere. Our audiences are dwindling. Now the time has come for me to point out that the sad fact of the matter, is that the *producer* of this theatre has given me an, an, an…(paper) oh yes…*ultimatum*. Everyone of you must improve in your character development, or we will be forced to shut down! That means better acting! Better props! Better planning! And better animal control!**

*(writer taps Director on shoulder and hands paper)*

**DIRECTOR: That includes me…what? (crumbles paper)**

*(writer hands another sheet to director)*

*DIRECTOR:* **Oh there’s more… A kind word or a kind act, is like lighting another man’s candle with your own, which loses none of its brightness by what the other gains. (whistles) You are a good writer…**

**So there you have it. Either we shape up, learn kindness, or the theater will be shut down. Here, take this.**

*(Writer Hands sheet to Roger who is still lying on floor)*

**ROGER: What’s this?**

**DIRECTOR referring to paper: It is a line up of our season…six plays in fifty-two weeks. By the end of the season, the Big Guy upstairs expects a huge profit of change in the theatre. Understood?**

**ROGER: Are we talking budget cuts?**

**DIRECTOR: No…just “meanness” cuts. However, if things are missing or broken, you will have to work it out on your own… the producer, won’t be giving you any extra funding…and remember, Music Man opens in six weeks, so there had better be a shiney brass instrument in the hands of every band member and a snappy brown suitcase for every salesman…or else!**

*Exiting*

**GLORIA turning to Philippe: Is she serious?**

**PHILIPPE: I believe so.**

**Talk/Sing Song/Where Does It Say I Have to be Kind**

***(Pause)***

**BARBARA** *enters mumbling crazily and moves across stage***: I cannot find a single prop…not a single proppity proppity prop…they’re all gone…gone…gone…gone with the wind…**

*Everyone stares*

**FOUR: I think we just lost our prop master…**

**FIVE: Doesn’t matter…we don’t have any props.**

**Song finish**

**Black Out**