

Christmas Show TBA
Or
THE WIZARD OF SCROOGE
Or
Bleeding Hearts at Castle Dracula

A Christmas Carol for people who don't like A Christmas Carol

By Kate Brennan & David Lee White

Kate Brennan
kateemorybrennan@gmail.com

David Lee White
davidleewhiteplaywright@gmail.com

www.brennandwhite.com

CHARACTERS – all characters can be played by any race/ethnicity, with a preference for diversity and inclusion

JENNIFER BENDER 30s-40s, Female

A novelist and the most successful BHA writing alumna. Formerly Jenneth Michalski

PRINCIPAL STONE 50s, Female

Principal of Bleeding Heart Academy for Girls. Blunt.

KARA 17, Female

A stage manager. A+ student. Enjoys research, words and numbers.

CEE CEE 17, Female

A mover. Deeply expressive with scarves.

BRAYLEY teens, Female

A singer/songwriter. Sensitive with a heart-breaking singing voice.

CANDICE teens, Female

A spoken-word artist. Comes from money. Anti-establishment.

MADISON B teens, Female

An excellent dancer. Brimming with school spirit, better at stuff than Madison P.

MADISON P teens, Female

Also an excellent dancer brimming with school spirit. Better at stuff than Madison B.

MADISON T teens, Female

A Shakespearean actress, but a good one. Is cooler than you.

LIV teens, Female

An athlete. A master of literary critique.

DI teens, Female

Another athlete. A master of technical production, if you can convince her to say yes.

MRS. HAVESHAM 60s - 70s, Female

An aging ingenue. Jennifer's high school librarian. Possibly a ghost.

TIME – Present

PLACE – The auditorium of the Bleeding Heart Academy for Girls

SCENE 1

(JENNIFER is pacing the stage, waiting. STONE enters.)

STONE

(into phone)

Yes. I'm about to meet with her. She's right here, in fact. (waves to Jennifer. Jennifer waves back) I'm telling you, she's right here. (to Jennifer) Say hi. (Holds out phone)

JENNIFER

Hi. Umm... I'm right here.

STONE

See? You're gonna have to trust me. (glances at Jennifer, then turns away and talks quietly into phone) She's not what I expected, if you want to know the truth. (Pause) Like a sick deer. Yes, Bambi... More later. Bye. (she hangs up – to Jennifer) President of the school board.

JENNIFER

Ah.

STONE

Thanks for meeting here in the auditorium.

JENNIFER

I went to your office first, but -

STONE

The room formerly known as my office is now home to the counseling center Mondays and Wednesdays, AP French Tuesdays and Thursdays and serves as overflow for the cafeteria on Fridays. There is a 50 minute window on Saturday mornings when it is available if they are not administering the SATs.

JENNIFER

Oh.

STONE

So...Jennifer Bender. When did you graduate from here?

JENNIFER

1997.

STONE

Why don't I remember you?

JENNIFER

I'm not sure.

STONE

I mean, you're in all the alumni materials but I couldn't find any student records.

JENNIFER

Oh, well my name was different. Jennifer Bender is a nom-de-plume. A writer's name.

STONE

I know what a nom-de-plume is but thanks. What's your real name?

JENNIFER

Jenneth Michalski.

STONE

Jenneth?

JENNIFER

My mom wanted to call me Jennifer and my dad wanted to call me Elizabeth so they compromised.

STONE

That's weird. (Holding up a book) I found a copy of *Murder in the Grid* at Barnes & Noble. Snatched it right up. It was at the front with all the discounted books. What do you call them?

JENNIFER

Reminders.

STONE

I like that section. I also got my nephew a book on how to juggle.

JENNIFER

Did you read it?

STONE

The juggling book?

JENNIFER

My novel.

STONE

Of course I did. Eventually. That is to say I will in the not too distant future. I read the dust jacket. Brilliant so far.

JENNIFER

Ms. Stone...

STONE

Please don't call me Ms. Stone! *Principal*. Principal Stone is better.

JENNIFER

Principal Stone,...I'm not quite sure why you wanted to see me.

STONE

Every once in a while we like to draw on the good will of our alumni. You know...people who look back on their time at the Bleeding Heart Academy for Girls with affection and fondness.

JENNIFER

I'm not sure I'm that person.

STONE

(ignoring her)

And since you've achieved some measure of fame in the publishing world –

JENNIFER

Hardly. *Murder in the Grid* didn't even make it to paperback.

STONE

But your later books did much better.

JENNIFER

I have no later books. *Murder in the Grid* was my only novel.

STONE

That was ten years ago.

JENNIFER

Twelve.

STONE

And nothing since?

JENNIFER

Well, I did have a very well-received letter to the editor in this magazine that -

STONE

We'd like to hire you, Jennifer. Commission you. Is that the right word?

JENNIFER

When you pay someone to write something. Yes. Commission.

STONE

I'm going to be incredibly honest with you, Jennifer. Are you prepared for that?

JENNIFER

Uh...I guess so.

STONE

Bleeding Heart is not doing well. Financially, I mean. We are hemorrhaging money and I don't mean that as a pun. My office is being used for classroom overflow and storage space. There are still chalkboards in classrooms, pencil sharpeners in corners, textbooks that promote the food pyramid. The heating system is from the dawn of time and there is asbestos lining the lead painted walls. The bathrooms still have urinals from when this was an all-boys elementary school. In the 40s.

JENNIFER

I don't understand how I fit into all this.

STONE

In past years, Jenneth, we have been able to rally the campus community together to put on these big entertainments. These...what do you call them...?

JENNIFER

Plays?

STONE

Plays. Yes. Shows. Productions. Costumes and music and lights and dancing and kids in braces playing forty year olds. An audience full of parents and alumni with deep pockets. Everyone laughs and cries and applauds. And because said parents and alumni are filled with the spirit of community and nostalgia, our fundraising campaign becomes a rousing success.

JENNIFER

I see.

STONE

This year we'd like to premiere a brand new play by the author of *Murder in the Grid*, who also happens to be a former student.

JENNIFER

I wouldn't even know what to write about.

STONE

Go wild. Write whatever you want.

JENNIFER

Whatever I ...

STONE

As long as it's *A Christmas Carol*.

JENNIFER

A Christmas Carol?

STONE

Something wrong?

JENNIFER

I hate *A Christmas Carol*.

STONE

No one hates *A Christmas Carol*.

JENNIFER

It's Scrooge. He's very...overbearing. And angry.

STONE

Until the end when he learns he shouldn't be so overbearing and angry and everyone is happy. That's how storytelling works. Regardless, the play would be for our holiday slot, therefore it would be *A Christmas Carol*.

JENNIFER

Well...I guess I've got nothing going on over the next year –

STONE

The next year? Jenneth, please. We haven't got a year. We need this sucker up by Christmas.

JENNIFER

This Christmas?!

STONE

Or Chanukah or Kwanzaa or whatever you celebrate. I don't observe anything.

JENNIFER

That's not enough time. Maybe I could start writing it this year and we could premiere the play next year.

STONE

By then, the school could be shuttered, Ms. Bender. I'll be out of a job as well as every member of the faculty, and the students will wind up at some horrid public school where the guidance counselor teaches physics. Do you want that?

JENNIFER

I guess not.

STONE

No one does. No one understands physics in the best of circumstances. So, write us a play. Theatre is magic or whatever.

JENNIFER

And Sister Elena Maria will direct it?

STONE

You will direct it. You can stay in the convent in Sister Elena Maria's room.

JENNIFER

She doesn't direct the shows anymore?

STONE

No, because she's dead. Which has made directing a challenge for her. Her things are still in her room, though. You won't even have to bring your own towels.

(KARA enters carrying two large boxes)

KARA

Hi, Ms. Stone. I found all the financial records you were looking for.

STONE

This is Kara, your stage manager. Kara, this is Jennifer Bender.

KARA

The novelist.

JENNIFER

Well...yes.

STONE

Kara's very ambitious. Always does her research. She also manages my calendar and all my correspondence. But I'm sure she can handle both jobs.

JENNIFER

Look, this is all very flattering but I can't just uproot my life to –

STONE

What, exactly, would you be uprooting?

JENNIFER

Well, I have...that is...

KARA

You were a member of the drama club when you were here, right?

JENNIFER

I - well, I wanted to be, I really did, but -

KARA

But what?

JENNIFER

Well, to get into the Drama Club you had to do improvisation. I didn't like improvisation. I never knew what was going to happen next.

KARA

Yes. That's why they call it that.

STONE

I guess we'll just have to make you an honorary member of the Drama Club.

JENNIFER

Wait. What?

KARA

Welcome to the Bleeding Heart Academy Drama Club.

JENNIFER

I - I don't know what to say.

STONE

Say yes.

(Pause)

JENNIFER

Okay. Yes.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

(CEE CEE, BRAYLEY, CANDICE, MADISON B, MADISON P and MADISON T are in the auditorium, waiting for auditions to start.)

CANDICE

So why the heck are we all here?
It feels like we do this every year.

MADISON B & MADISON P

Auditions!

BRAYLEY

For a musical?

MADISON T

A play.

BRAYLEY

I don't know any plays.

MADISON T

A play is like a musical that never gets to the good part.

CEE CEE

(mumbling)

Willtherebedancing? (Will there be dancing?)

MADISON T

I have no idea what you just said, but probably the answer is "no."

MADISON B

What play is it?

MADISON P

I hope it's something I've heard of. It gives me anxiety when I don't know exactly everything about everything.

MADISON B

This is why we just watch the same movies over and over.

MADISON T

I heard it's a new play. They hired this person to write it. No one has ever done it before.

BRAYLEY

That makes my brain hurt.

CANDICE

No music
Just talking?
If it's stupid,
I'm walking.

(Kara and Jennifer enter. Kara has a clipboard.)

KARA

Alright everyone, listen up! LISTEN UP! Welcome to auditions for BHA's Christmas Show TBA. This is our director and writer and former BHA student, Ms. Jennifer Bender.

JENNIFER

Thank you, uh, Kara. Hi. Hi, everyone. I'm Jennifer. Or - I guess Ms. Bender. No, that sounds - how about just Jennifer?

(Everyone stares at her in silence.)

JENNIFER

So here's the scoop, people. We've got a little over a month to put together a new version of *A Christmas Carol*. You may ask yourself "Where's the script?" Well...I am writing the script. While we rehearse. I'm a professional writer.

KARA

This is what theatre is like in the real world, people! In the real world, writers are important!

JENNIFER

Thank you, Kara. Is everyone here?

KARA

Answer "Here" when I call you! Cee Cee!

CEE CEE

Here.

KARA

Candice!

CANDICE

Here.

KARA

Brayley!

BRAYLEY

Here.

JENNIFER

Brayley. Interesting name.

BRAYLEY

My dad wanted to name me Brenda and my mom wanted a Hayley so they compromised.

JENNIFER

I can relate.

BRAYLEY

I love my name. It's who I am. I'd never change it just to gain acceptance.

KARA

Moving on! Madison!

MADISON B

Yeah?

MADISON P

Yes?

MADISON T

Present.

MADISON B

JENNIFER

(to Kara)

There are three Madisons?

KARA

Four. Madison D has mono. Let's start with Madison P.

MADISON B

Did you say Madison P or Madison B?

KARA

P. As in pumpkin.

MADISON T

(under her breath)

Painful. Petulant. Pugnacious.

MADISON B

(to Madison T)

Powerful.

MADISON T

(to Madison B)

Pretentious.

MADISON B

Perky!

MADISON T

Predictable.

MADISON B

Playful!

MADISON T

Perturbed.

MADISON P

Please.

MADISON T

Perfect. (to Kara) I'll be out back.

(Madison T exits)

JENNIFER

Where is she going?

KARA

Smoke break.

JENNIFER

Wait...she can't... (shouting after Madison T.) You can't...um... aren't you all too young to -

MADISON B

Wait! What time is it?

MADISON P

3:30 PM on the dot!

MADISON B

Time to get stepping!

MADISON P

Oh, it is on!

(Madison P & Madison B start stepping in place.)

JENNIER

What is happening? What are you doing?

MADISON P

Steps.

MADISON B

10,000 a day.

MADISON P

At least. We are competing to see who can get the most.

MADISON B

Because the person who wins -

MADISON P

-gets a dress down day.

MADISON B

We love dress down days.

MADISON P

We eschew the school uniform for clothing that's casual, yet hip.

MADISON B

And only the top three steppers get a dress down day -

MADISON P

And the top two are going to be -

MADISON B & MADISON P

MADiiiiihhhhhSUUUUUUUUN!

(They do an elaborate handshake)

MADISON B & MADISON P

“Taking life where it may lead/ At Bleeding heart we make em' bleed!”

JENNIFER

Is it possible to stop stepping for a bit?

MADISON B & MADISON P

No.

KARA

Madison B and P are very competitive.

JENNIFER

I noticed.

KARA

They're on the spirit squad. But Bleeding Heart doesn't really have a spirit squad.

JENNIFER

So they are a spirit squad for themselves.

KARA

(to Jennifer)

Welcome to Wonderland.

JENNIFER

(sighs and regroups) Okay. If everyone else can take a seat, the Madisons can continue stepping in the back of the room. Kara will call you up one at a time and we can take a look at your monologues. I want to get a sense of who you are and what you'll bring to the project.

KARA

Fantastic, Jennifer. (to the room) Everyone sit down!

(Everyone but Madison B & Madison P sit down)

KARA

Cee Cee! You're up!

(Cee Cee steps to the front of the stage. She is wearing lots of flowing scarves)

CEE CEE

(shyly)

I'm Cee Cee.

JENNIFER

A little louder, Cee Cee.

CEE CEE

(even softer)

I'm. Cee Cee.

JENNIFER

Uh...okay. What have you got for us, Cee Cee?

CEE CEE

Thisisapiececreatedmyself (This is a piece I created myself.)

JENNIFER

What?

CEE CEE

(shouting)

This is a piece I created myself! (quieter) It's a tone poem based in organic movement. With scarves. It's called "Moi - by Cee Cee." Act I - "Pain"

(Cee Cee begins moving around the stage and feeling "pain.")

CEE CEE

"Pain, pain. So much pain. See my pain." (pause. She resets) Act 2 - "Joy"

(She begins moving around the stage and feeling "joy.")

CEE CEE

"I feel joy! All the joy! See how I feel so much joy!" (Pause. She resets) Act 3 - "Ambivalence."

(She stops moving and just stares at the audience. Long pause)

JENNIFER

Are you...um...are you done?

(Cee Cee holds up one finger...wait for it...slightly longer pause)

CEE CEE

And...scene.

JENNIFER

Wow. Okay. Wow. Thank you, Cee Cee.

CEE CEE

(mumbling and running back to her seat)

Thankyouverymuch. I'm Cee Cee.

JENNIFER

(privately, to Kara)

You told them all to do monologues, right?

KARA

Yes. But they don't really know what monologues are?

JENNIFER

How can they not know what monologues are?

KARA

They've never really done theatre before.

JENNIFER

You said this was the drama club.

KARA

Yeah, but we don't actually do shows.

JENNIFER

What do you do?

KARA

We listen to the *Hamilton* and *Be More Chill* cast albums. By ourselves. At home. Then we talk about them. Last year we were supposed to do *Dracula*. Built the set and everything. Then...(shrugs) The year before that, we were supposed to do *Wizard of Oz*. I helped with costumes.

JENNIFER

Why didn't those productions happen?

KARA

I guess we lack...

JENNIFER

Follow-through? Commitment? Work ethic?

KARA

Support. You haven't been back here in a while. The Latin teacher teaches gym now.

JENNIFER

Is she athletic?

KARA

She's 80.

JENNIFER

Like, a young 80?

KARA

We've got a lot to get through.

JENNIFER

Okay. Next.

KARA

Candice! You're up! (privately, to Jennifer) Candice comes from old money. Her dad funded the new wing of the library that houses the 17th century botanical documents collection. Flatter her and maybe we won't run out of money.

(Candice takes the stage)

JENNIFER

(sighing)

What have you got for us Candice?

CANDICE

This is a spoken word piece I wrote by myself. It's called "Wealth." (she takes a moment to center herself, then -)

Hate the rich!
Sinful parasites
Sucking the blood from the masses
Killing us with their cruelty
Gimme this!
Gimme that!
Gimme more!
Can't afford more?
Take out a loan.
Loan forgiveness?
No forgiveness!
I'm alone with my loan!
How about loaning me some humanity?
I came into this world screaming
Mommy pushing
Daddy working
Plants and flowers,
but I'm not your plant.
I'm not your flower!
Burn it down.
Burn it all down!

(Pause)

Thanks.

(Candice sits back down)

JENNIFER

(to Kara)
Is she okay?

KARA
Oh, yeah. When she was a freshman, she tried to burn down the library. But she's fine now.

JENNIFER
Why wasn't she expelled?

KARA
Because her dad -

JENNIFER
- funded a new wing for the library.

KARA
Right.

JENNIFER
Who's next?

KARA
Brayley! Front and center!

BRAYLEY
Not yet.

JENNIFER
What's wrong, Brayley?

BRAYLEY
I'm not ready yet.

KARA
Theatre is about being ready, Brayley! On time and all the time!

JENNIFER
Easy, easy. Take a moment, Brayley. We'll get back to you.

KARA
Suit yourself. (to the room) Madisons! Which one of you wants to go first?

MADISON B
We'd like to go -

MADISON P

- at the same time.

If that's possible.

Sure. I guess.

Hit the stage, ladies! Time is money!

Welcome, everyone! I'm Madison P!

And I'm Madison B!

Welcome to our sick dance off! Bring it!

Wow.

Ow! OWW!

Banana!

Hold! Stop the music!

(to Jennifer)

MADISON B

JENNIFER

KARA

(Madison P and Madison B take the stage)

MADISON P

MADISON B

MADISON P & B

(Kara starts the music. It's loud. Jennifer is jolted out of her seat. Madison P & B immediately start dancing)

JENNIFER

(The Madisons keep dancing. It gets extreme. Madison B. gets a charley horse.)

MADISON B

MADISON P

JENNIFER

(Kara holds up a banana. Madison P peels it and gives it to Madison B who scarfs it down.)

KARA

Low potassium.

JENNIFER

(to Kara)
You just carry bananas?

KARA

A stage manager is always prepared.

JENNIFER

Madison, are you ok?

MADISON P

Yeah. This happens a lot.

MADISON B

I just need to drink more water.

JENNIFER

This is insane.

KARA

What's wrong?

JENNIFER

This..this whole thing...it's not workable. There's no script, I'm not a director, you all know absolutely nothing about acting or theatre or auditioning. There's a potassium shortage. This may not be possible.

(Pause)

BRAYLEY

I'm ready now.

JENNIFER

What?

BRAYLEY

I'm ready.

JENNIFER

Didn't you hear what I just said.

BRAYLEY

Yes, but I'd like to do my audition please. I wasn't ready before. I'm ready now.

JENNIFER

OK. Go ahead.

(Brayley takes the stage)

BRAYLEY

This is a song I wrote. I'm sorry I don't have music to play or anything.

JENNIFER

It's fine.

BRAYLEY

(clears throat, shakes out her arms, closes her eyes, then sings...)

BREATHE, CLOSE YOUR EYES, FEEL YOUR FEET
FEEL IT DOWN TO THE BONE
YOU SEE ON THE RISE OF THE BEAT
THOUGH YOU'RE OUT ON YOUR OWN
OH PLEASE, I'M ALIVE, INCOMPLETE
BUT NOW I'M NOT ALONE

LISTEN TO ME NOW
REMEMBER THIS LATER
FORGET ALL THE WAYS THAT YOU THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE
IMAGINE THE CROWD
PART OF SOMETHING GREATER
DON'T LET THIS HURT WORLD KEEP TURNIN' WITHOUT ME

CAUSE I AM ONLY
AND YOU ARE ONLY
CAUSE I AM LONELY
AND YOU ARE LONELY
CAUSE I AM ONLY
AND YOU ARE ONLY
BUT ONLY'S ENOUGH FOR ME

(Brayley finishes. Jennifer is moved. There's a long pause.)

JENNIFER

Okay, everyone. You're all cast. First rehearsal is Friday afternoon. Don't be late.

(Madison T enters. She may be stoned and holding a joint.)

MADISON T

What'd I miss?

(Everyone looks at her. She slowly puts the joint behind her back.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3 – First Rehearsal

(Everyone is onstage.)

KARA

Hello everyone and welcome to the first rehearsal!

MADISON B

Yay, unwritten play!

MADISON P

Can I get a “Booyah!”

(No one “booyahs.”)

JENNIFER

Thanks, Madisons. So, I know this is kind of an unusual way to start the rehearsal process, but I’m still working on the script.

KARA

That’s okay, Jenneth! You’re in charge!

JENNIFER

Thanks, Kara. And...uh...maybe call me Jennifer instead of Jenneth.

BRAYLEY

I thought your name was Jenneth.

JENNIFER

It was. I mean...it is. Jennifer is my nom-de-plume.

MADISON T

That’s pretentious.

JENNIFER

Maybe it is. But it was the name the publisher insisted I use, so that’s what I’ve been going by.

MADISON T

You changed your name for a publisher?

JENNIFER

They thought “Jennifer” would be more familiar and palatable.

MADISON T

It’s like Ellis Island all over again.

JENNIFER

Yes. Look...just call me Jennifer.

KARA

Hear that, people? This is Jennifer! Do not, I repeat NOT, call her Jenneth!

MADISON B

Jennifer Bender! Jennifer Bender!

MADISON P

That’s her name and she’s a winner!

MADISON B

Ooo! Sweet!

(Madison B and Madison P high five.)

JENNIFER

Anyway, I thought we’d start with a little game (She takes out some balls.) to unlock our subconscious.

MADISON T

Awesome. But you don’t need balls to do that.

JENNIFER

Okay, so...I’m trying to get themes or ideas that I can use in the script. I want everyone to gently lob the ball to someone as you say a theme or idea that might be in the show. And then that person will lob the ball and so on and so on. Just go with the first thing that comes to mind. Here, Cee Cee, why don’t you start.

(Cee Cee throws ball to someone.)

CEE CEE

Hamilton.

JENNIFER

Oh - no, no. Not - not a show that already exists. Our show has to be *A Christmas Carol*. This is brainstorming for our show, our show *Christmas Carol* - kind of a - uh - an essence, an idea, a thought, a feeling, just - whatever comes to your mind. Let’s try again.

(Madison P & B have balls and throw them simultaneously.)

MADISON P & MADISON B

Be More Chill.

MADISON P
Ohmigod, ohmigod, jinx.

MADISON B
I knew you were going to say that jinx!

No!

JENNIFER

What else is there?

BRAYLEY

Wicked!

CANDICE

JENNIFER
No! It's *A Christmas Carol!* You know...Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the holidays. There are sets and costumes and...Okay, let's start with the set. Like I would throw the ball and say –

(Jennifer throws the ball to Kara)

Dracula.

KARA

What?

JENNIFER

KARA
The play will be taking place on the set of *Dracula*.

(The students “Oooo” and “Ahhh.” They like this idea.)

I don't -

JENNIFER

KARA
We have to use the set that was already built. I'll explain later.

JENNIFER
Uh...yeah. That doesn't make sense. We'll talk. There are also costumes like –

(Jennifer tosses the ball to someone)

KARA

Wizard of Oz.

JENNIFER

What is happening?

KARA

We're using the costumes from the production of *Wizard of Oz* that didn't pan out.

(The students "Yay!" They like this idea too. Maybe Madison T. starts to juggle balls.)

JENNIFER

No. Hold on. We're doing *A Christmas Carol* on the set of *Dracula* with the costumes from *Wizard of Oz*? That's ludicrous.

(Stone enters)

STONE

Hello, ladies. Just thought I'd check in on rehearsal. Pretend I'm not here.

JENNIFER

Oh, good. Let's take a break.

KARA

Breaktime people. When I say "let's take five," you say "thank you five." Let's practice. "Let's take five."

(No response.)

KARA

OK, we'll work on that. "Thank you, five."

(The students wander off to break.)

JENNIFER

(to Stone)

We need to talk.

STONE

What's the problem?

JENNIFER

Kara seems to be under the impression that we're going to be using the abandoned set from *Dracula* and the costumes from *Wizard of Oz*.

STONE

That's correct.

JENNIFER

That's insane.

STONE

Is it?

JENNIFER

A Christmas Carol is *A Christmas Carol*. It's not *Dracula*.

STONE

We commissioned you because of your creativity, Ms. Bender. Our apologies. Perhaps you're not creative.

JENNIFER

I'm plenty creative. I just don't see how it's possible.

STONE

It's possible because the father of one of our alumni is a European count. He paid for all the theatrical lighting with the stipulation that we produce *Dracula*. Our production was interrupted, therefore we must somehow do *Dracula*. Waste not, want not.

JENNIFER

Okay, but...what about the *Wizard of Oz* costumes?

STONE

Each one was handcrafted by the sisters. There is no additional costume or set budget. And we had to sell our stock to hire an assistant vice-president to take initiative on new initiatives.

JENNIFER

What new initiative?

STONE

"Faculty Reorganization." Sister Rita Marie is teaching gym now.

JENNIFER

I heard.

STONE

And Latin.

JENNIFER

Who would come to see something like this?

STONE

Kara?

KARA

Yes, Principal Stone.

(Kara takes out a large spreadsheet from her folder.)

KARA

My senior project is a study of the most profitable plays performed by private schools and community theatres around the country. For the past fifty years, the top three plays have been remarkably consistent. *A Christmas Carol*, *Dracula* -

JENNNIFER

- and *The Wizard of Oz*.

STONE

Very good, Ms. Bender.

JENNIFER

This is why you needed someone to write a new play.

STONE

Correct. And after three previous alumns turned us down, you were next on the list.

JENNIFER

You offered this commission to three other people before me?

STONE

They had stunning credentials. But they were all quite busy with other projects. Besides, who wants to write a play inspired by *Christmas Carol*, *Dracula* and *Wizard of Oz*?

JENNIFER

So you know it's -

STONE

Ludicrous? Absurd? Ridiculous? Of course. I'm not an idiot, Ms. Bender. But I also know that Bleeding Heart Academy has kept itself afloat all these years by thinking outside of the box. Are you able to think outside the box?

JENNIFER

Of course I am.

STONE

Fabulous. Break's over. Continue with rehearsal.

KARA

Break's over, people! Back in the circle! Madison, gimme back those balls.

(Stone exits. They return to the circle.)

JENNIFER

Okay. So, after consulting with Principal Stone, we have determined that our play will be an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, using the set from *Dracula* and the costumes from *The Wizard of Oz*.

(The students cheer. They love this. They begin talking amongst themselves. Madison T approaches Jennifer)

MADISON T

Selling out, huh?

JENNIFER

What?

MADISON

You heard me.

JENNIFER

Madison –

MADISON T

Sorry. Smoke break.

(Madison T. exits. Jennifer watches her go, then watches the students celebrate.)

(*scene note: *Hamilton* and *Be More Chill* titles can be replaced with more au courant musical theatre titles at the time.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 4 – AFTER REHEARSAL

(Rehearsal finished a while ago, but Kara and Jennifer are both furiously writing. After a moment, they both sigh in frustration.)

JENNIFER

What are you working on?

KARA

College essays.

JENNIFER

I remember them. The worst. Want another pair of eyes?

KARA

Sure. I mean, I had a session scheduled with the writing center, but then the rowing team needed a locker room and -

JENNIFER

I'm not even gonna ask. Let's see.

(Jennifer begins looking over essay.)

KARA

I've been working on it for a while I guess - but - I can't decide what's important. I mean, what does everyone want to know? How do I make sure everyone that reads it likes me?

JENNIFER

(scanning essay)

It's not about making - Let me see.

Ah, nice start. Mmm. Mm-hm. What if...OK. What if you move this here, see? Then you can lose this paragraph because it becomes redundant. No passive voice. And then you just need to bring in more of your perspective here to end.

(She hands it back to Kara. Kara looks it over.)

I took this poetry class once and the teacher said that the end of a poem should be both inevitable and a surprise. I think that's true of all writing in a way.

KARA

Wow. Thank you. You did that so fast.

JENNIFER

I'm a professional writer.

KARA

I know. I've been reading *Murder in the Grid*.

JENNIFER

Really? I'm afraid to ask -

KARA

Oh, I like it! I did guess the killer on page 22.

JENNIFER

Yeah, that's a problem.

KARA

Did you intend to write a murder mystery?

JENNIFER

It started out as a fictional version of my time here at the school. But, you know...it was my first novel. My agent told me that murder mysteries sell better.

KARA

Oh. Okay.

JENNIFER

Seriously, what?

KARA

Nothing. It's really good. Can I help you with the script?

JENNIFER

Nah. Hopefully I'll have something by tomorrow. Look, it's late. I know you have work to do. Why don't you go home. I'll be fine.

KARA

Yeah. Okay. Good night.

JENNIFER

Night.

(Madison B and Madison P enter as Kara exits.)

MADISON B

Hi, Jennifer.

MADISON P

Hi.

MADISON P

We'd like to play Dorothy.

JENNIFER

Dorothy is only one role.

MADISON P
But couldn't Dorothy be two roles?

MADISON B
Maybe she's twins.

JENNIFER
You realize that Dorothy isn't actually the lead in this version.

MADISON B
We can still put it on our resumes. Who's gonna know?

JENNIFER
I can't just write two Dorothy's.

MADISON P
Why not?

MADISON B
You're the playwright.

JENNIFER
I guess that's true.

MADISON B
Great!

MADISON P
Awesome!

MADISON B & P
Madiiiiiiiiiisons!

(They high-five, then exit. Cee Cee enters on their tails.)

CEE CEE
hijenniferi'mceeece. (Hi, Jennifer, I'm Cee Cee)

JENNIFER
Hi, Cee Cee. Yes, I know who you are. Shouldn't you all be back in your rooms?

CEE CEE
mymomsaysishouldplaythecowardlylionortinytim.Shesaysitwouldbegoodformyselfesteem.(My mom says I should play the Cowardly Lion or Tiny Tim. She says it would be good for my self-esteem.)

JENNIFER

I'm not sure what you just said. You want to play the lion?

CEE CEE

Mymomsays. MymomsaysIshouldplayit. It'smymomthatsaysit. (My mom says. My mom says I should play it. It's my mom that says it.)

JENNIFER

Cee Cee, I haven't written the script yet. It's hard to know what, exactly, -

(Cee Cee holds up a finger. Jennifer stops speaking. Cee Cee reaches into her pocket, pulls out a piece of paper, unfolds it and begins reading aloud, much more clearly.)

CEE CEE

Hello, Ms. Bender. This is Cee Cee's mom. I have encouraged Cee Cee to come to you with a request. However, she may have trouble asking you since she has problems speaking extemporaneously. If she becomes too anxious, I have instructed her to read from this note instead. Cee Cee would like to play the Cowardly Lion in your production. First of all, she loves lions. Second of all, she identifies with the cowardly aspect of said lion. Lastly, this is her last chance to conquer her fear of speaking in front of people. While she is very expressive with scarves and whatnot, her attempts to speak in crowds have been quashed by bouts of crippling fear. Her father and I anticipate that you will correct this problem prior to Winter break during this, her senior year of high school. Thank you.

(Cee Cee folds the note up and puts it away.)

CEE CEE

okaythatwasaletterfrommymomthankyou. (Okay, that was a letter from my mom. Thank you.)

JENNIFER

I'll see what we can do Cee Cee.

(Cee Cee exits.)

JENNIFER

Anyone else have anything to add, note, a request from beyond the grave perhaps?

(We hear something...the clattering of pipes maybe?
But other than that, silence.)

Ok then.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 5 – The Next Day.

(Kara is in the theatre. Jennifer enters.)

JENNIFER

Hello, Kara. How are your essays?

KARA

Perfect! Thank you so much. Excited to see the new scenes!

JENNIFER

I thought we'd put those off for one more day.

KARA

Why?

JENNIFER

Well, I'm having trouble -

(Stone enters)

STONE

Sorry for the intrusion. Don't want to interrupt the magic.

JENNIFER

Principal Stone. It's fine. Listen –

STONE

The students have said a few things that lead me to believe that you haven't written the script.

JENNIFER

What are they saying?

STONE

“Ms. Bender hasn't written the script.”

JENNIFER

Right now, we're listening to one another. Listening and learning. That's as important as the writing.

STONE

Anything I can do to speed things along? The parents are breathing down my neck and I literally have no other job skills that might apply to the outside world.

JENNIFER

We need more bodies in the ensemble. Voices! Chorus! The cast is lovely but there are so few of them it feels -

KARA

Dead. Hopeless. Like a failure.

JENNIFER

I was just going to say “empty.” Plus there’s a lot to manage with a full production - backstage too. Ticket sales, front of house, but also lights, costumes, set, advertising, design -

STONE

And is Kara not sufficient?

JENNIFER

Kara is one sixteen year old student.

KARA

Seventeen.

JENNIFER

What?

KARA

I turned 17 three days ago.

JENNIFER

Why didn’t you say anything?

KARA

Because 17 is the beginning of the end.

JENNIFER

Happy birthday.

KARA

Thanks.

STONE

More help, huh? I anticipated this eventuality. (shouts offstage) Come in, delinquents!

(LIV and DI enter. They are absurdly athletic.)

STONE

Ms. Jenson and Ms. Kiljoy are serving detention this week. Also last week and probably next week. They can work off their probation by assisting you.

Uh, hi. I'm Jennifer.

JENNIFER

Liv.

LIV

Di.

DI

Excuse me?

JENNIFER

That's Olivia and that's Diana. (in confidence) Don't make direct eye contact.

KARA

What's up?

LIV

What's good?

DI

(in confidence)
They're on the basketball team. And volleyball. And Lacrosse. And Smashball.

KARA

What is "smashball?"

JENNIFER

They invented it.

KARA

This, my soulless rebels in need of redemption, is a playwright. And director. And underrated, one-time novelist.

STONE

Underrated isn't quite how I'd –

JENNIFER

You will be assisting the pride of Bleeding Heart Academy in developing a brand new theatrical production.

STONE

(to Jennifer)
You the one who wrote *Murder in the Grid*?

LIV

JENNIFER

Yeah.

DI

Not gonna read it. Sorry. Can't do it.

JENNIFER

You don't have to.

LIV

I found it a little predictable and an oversimplification of the emotional landscape of the main characters. It started out strong, but I knew where it was headed. I guessed the killer on page 22. But those pitfalls are emblematic of a first novel. The writing itself has to be the teacher, ya know?

JENNIFER

Wow.

STONE

Liv, here, has quite the talent for literary critique. I figured you could bounce some ideas off of her.

KARA

Uh...that's kind of my job.

STONE

Don't be silly, Kara, we need you to stage manage, create the marketing, make phone calls to donors, organize the alumni, take reservations and run the concession stand.

KARA

But –

STONE

Di is our technical wiz. You need a piece of scenery fixed or an electrical hook up, Di's your pro.

DI

If I can do it, I'll do it. I'm a professional. But some stuff just can't be done no matter what. If you ask me, I'll just say no.

JENNIFER

Right.

DI

Seriously. I won't even try to come up with a solution or compromise. I'll just say "no."

JENNIFER

What if –

No. DI

Could I just ask you to – JENNIFER

No. DI

Okay. Got it. JENNIFER

I will leave you all in Ms. Bender’s capable hands STONE

(Stone exits)

Liv, Di. Welcome to our ensemble. You can. Just go. Over there. With everyone else. JENNIFER

(Di and Liv join the rest of the cast who have begun filtering in.)

(to the room)
Okay, everyone! Time to begin! KARA

So is the script done? CANDICE

Let me see! MADISON B

Let me see it first! MADISON P

Is it gonna be a musical? BRAYLEY

Later. First, I thought we’d all get to know one another. JENNIFER

We already know each other. MADISON T

CEE CEE

My name's Cee Cee.

JENNIFER

But I don't know you. So I thought we'd just...you know...chat.

MADISON T

Ah. So the script's not done.

JENNIFER

Not yet.

BRAYLEY

How far are you?

CANDICE

What page are you on?

JENNIFER

I'm not exactly on a page, per se. So let's all...sit down and...get to know each other. Let's start with: why are you here?

MADISON T

Like in an existential sense or...?

JENNIFER

OK, no. Not exactly-. I mean, what brought you here to this room? Why are you doing this? (Di raises her hand.) Yes, Di?

DI

I have not done my Calc homework all year. My brother is having a hard time in recovery. I think it's contributing to my inability to focus.

JENNIFER

OK...

LIV

And I got in trouble for telling Sr. Joellen that I had counseling during Theology but then I told the counselor that Sr. Joellen wouldn't let me out of class for counseling so then I skipped school and went and had breakfast at Albertos. Plus, I just don't know what I want to do with my life. In general, ya know?

DI

It was this or detention.

LIV

And we'd rather be here in group therapy.

JENNIFER

This isn't group therapy. This is drama club. We are putting up a show.

LIV

Hm. Ok. It's all cool.

DI

Oh, yeah, that makes a lot more sense.

JENNIFER

Anyone else? Maybe for those of you who chose to be here? Brayley? Why did you audition?

BRAYLEY

I write songs, but ever since the choir shut down last year, I haven't had a chance to sing.

JENNIFER

Okay. Candice?

CANDICE

Why am I here
To get this in gear
Where should I start
It's the only place to do art
No choir no poetry, painting or dance
They'd cut all humanities if they had the chance
Look, I don't like plays; I've never done a scene
But truth is— they cut the Lit magazine

JENNIFER

Wait- Candice, do you speak verse all the time?

CANDICE

Naw, Miss, only when I have the perfect rhyme.

JENNIFER

There's no music program anymore? Or Lit magazine?

CEE CEE

Ordance (Or dance.)

JENNIFER

Sorry, Cee Cee. What was that?

CEE CEE

No dance program either. I was hoping for a chance to (she does something lyrical with her body)
That's why I'm (shrugs)

JENNIFER

Wow. Kara?

KARA

I'm not in the show.

JENNIFER

We are all part of this ensemble.

KARA

Ok. I like to run things. And I have little agency in my own life. Stage managing is a way for me to have some kind of control when the future feels so untenable and unknown. Plus, it's a nice extracurricular to add to my college applications. Particularly since all of the other extracurriculars seem to be biting the dust.

JENNIFER

Thank you. Madison P?

MADISON P

I just like to be involved. A lot. Like my purpose in life is not missing out on life. If I see something and I'm not in it, I think "Why am I not doing that thing?" and it gives me a stomachache. So I try to do everything all the time. I'm tired a lot. And I still get stomachaches. But, I can't not do stuff because you never know, you know?

JENNIFER

Involved. Madison B.?

MADISON B

I'm here because of Madison.

MADISON P

We do everything together.

MADISON B

Yeah, that's true, but I actually meant Madison T.

MADISON T

Me?

MADISON B

Yeah, you did that *Hamlet* monologue in class last year.

MADISON P

We loved it.

MADISON B.

“I have of late,—but wherefore I know not,”

MADISON T

“—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?”

(Long Pause. Everyone waits. They don’t want to break the spell. Finally -

Why are you here, Jennifer?

JENNIFER

Well, because they offered me a job.

MADISON T.

So we’re a paycheck to you.

JENNIFER

That’s not –

KARA

OK everyone, time for break. Let’s take 5.

EVERYONE

Thank you, 5.

JENNIFER

Wait. I have an idea. I am not going to write this show.

KARA

You’re not?

JENNIFER

I’m not. We are. We are going to write this show together. We are creating it. Manifesting it. Devising it!

KARA

We are an artistic-collective. people!

JENNIFER

This way it’s not about me or the parents or the freaking *Wizard of Oz* or *Dracula*...it’s about us!

So, are we using the *Dracula* set?
BRAYLEY

If it works, we use it. If it doesn't, we throw it out!
JENNIFER

Is it still *A Christmas Carol*?
KARA

Maybe. Maybe there's no Scrooge! Maybe we're all Scrooge!
JENNIFER

So you just want us to throw out ideas?
CANDICE

Hit me! And everyone has to say "Yes, and!"
JENNIFER

You know that comes from improv, right?
KARA

Don't remind me! Tell me about Scrooge! Candice!
JENNIFER

He's wealthy!
CANDICE

But just with money.
MADISON T

He has no friends! Jinx!
MADISON P & MADISON B

What does that tell us about wealth?
JENNIFER

It corrupts!
CANDICE

You can't take it with you when you die!
BRAYLEY

Talk to me about Tiny Tim!
JENNIFER

CEE CEE

(barely audible)

Tinytimjustwantstobeseenandheardlikeanormalperson.(Tiny Tim just wants to be seen and heard like a normal person.)

LIV & DI

What?

CEE CEE

TINY TIM JUST WANTS TO BE SEEN AND HEARD LIKE A NORMAL PERSON!

KARA

What about Dorothy?

MADISON P

She just wants, like –

MADISON B

- there to be something more –

MADISON P

- than what's here!

MADISON B

And maybe she wants to leave and see other places and meet new people! Maybe she wants a little independence and not have to do and say the same things that people around her do and say!

MADISON P

(Alarmed.)

Madison?

MADISON B

Oh, my Gosh. "Maybe," I said. Just maybe.

MADISON T

Don't forget about the blood sucker.

JENNIFER

Dracula! What about him?

MADISON T

He's evil, sure. But did he have to be? Or did he become that way because everyone treated him that way?

JENNIFER

Yes! This is what I'm talking about! What do these stories mean to you? That's what our show is about!

KARA

Things just got interesting.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 6. – After rehearsal. Jennifer and Kara are working.

KARA

That was amazing!

JENNIFER

You felt it, right? The energy! They get to express themselves!

KARA

Kind of made me jealous.

JENNIFER

Why?

KARA

I don't know how to take what I do...what I care about...and turn it into...theatre.

JENNIFER

Kara, you think I could organize this on my own? You think I could come in here and keep everything running the way you do? This couldn't be happening without you!

KARA

Are you just saying that? Sometimes Principal Stone says stuff like that but it's because she wants me to answer her emails.

(Stone enters)

STONE

(to Jennifer)

Can we have a quick word?

JENNIFER

Of course...Kara, could you –

(Kara begins cleaning up while Stone talks with Jennifer)

STONE

Do we have a script?

JENNIFER

Not yet. The whole cast is writing it together.

STONE

I don't understand.

JENNIFER

They all have ideas and thoughts and feelings and talents and we're all going to chip in a write the show together so that it's a part of us. A part of them!

STONE

I've hired you to write an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*.

JENNIFER

It will be more than that. The ideas behind *A Christmas Carol* will be there but maybe it's a different story! Maybe there's no Scrooge!

STONE

You're writing *A Christmas Carol* with no Scrooge?

JENNIFER

We're doing something new!

STONE

So you have subcontracted out your work to the students?

JENNIFER

No! I'm still creating it. With them!

STONE

This is not what we hired you for.

JENNIFER

I know it's a little unorthodox, but –

STONE

The parents don't want to see something that their children wrote. That was in elementary school when children were encouraged to express themselves. Now, parents want to see how their children cope when thrown into uncomfortable situations - how they comport themselves in the real world.

JENNIFER

But they are.

STONE

I'm not paying twenty girls named Madison to write a play. I'm paying you to write a play. An adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. With Scrooge.

JENNIFER

In *Wizard of Oz* costumes.

STONE

Yes.

JENNIFER

On a *Dracula* set.

STONE

I'm sorry if there was some confusion.

JENNIFER

No confusion. I just...we got excited. I guess I just...forgot.

STONE

So who's your ringer?

JENNIFER

Sorry?

STONE

For Scrooge. Surely you don't expect one of the students to play the role.

JENNIFER

You never said anything about –

STONE

Years ago, the school put on a production of *Death of a Salesman* and it was a disaster. Have you ever seen a 14 year old girl play Willy Loman? Individual contributions dropped 40% that year. We burned all the production photos in the furnace. Willy Loman should not have braces.

JENNIFER

So I need to find an adult Scrooge.

STONE

A parent. A teacher. Someone with gravitas and experience and flair. And you need to write this script by yourself, not farm it out to a group of adolescents. You're the professional. You are a professional, aren't you?

JENNIFER

Yes.

STONE

Good. And remember that every single student needs to have a positive experience in a way that raises their self-esteem and makes them better people.

(Stone exits)

KARA

It was a good idea.

JENNIFER

I guess I should get to work. Script won't write itself.

(There's a loud thumping sound. Clattering of pipes again?)

JENNIFER

What was that?

KARA

Theatre ghost.

JENNIFER

Seriously?

KARA

Some people think so. The place makes weird noises at night.

JENNIFER

Anybody ever seen anything?

KARA

One time Madison P said she saw a tall man in black standing in the balcony. Then Madison B said "Well I saw a man with no head," then Madison P said "The man I saw had fangs" and on and on and on.

(Another loud sound)

JENNIFER

Wow.

KARA

Um...I hate to do this but I have three more applications due tomorrow.

JENNIFER

Go.

You sure you're okay?

KARA

Yeah. I'm a pro. Get outta here.

JENNIFER

(Kara exits. We hear the door slam. Jennifer is by herself, editing the script. We hear a voice.)

Jennnnnnneeeeeethhhhhh...

HAVESHAM

Who's there?

JENNIFER

Pay me what you owe me...

HAVESHAM

Come out where I can see you.

JENNIFER

(HAVESHAM enters)

Ms. Havesham?

JENNIFER

You owe me money.

HAVESHAM

What?

JENNIFER

Overdue fines for a copy of "The Yellow Wallpaper" that you checked out in 1992 and never returned.

HAVESHAM

Are you seriously still the librarian?

JENNIFER

The cost of the book plus the overdue fines which is a nickel a day comes to approximately nine-hundred, thirty-five dollars and seventy-five cents.

HAVESHAM

I thought you retired right after I graduated.

JENNIFER

HAVESHAM

I was forty-five.

JENNIFER

I don't have nine-hundred dollars. I don't even know what I did with the book.

HAVESHAM

Irresponsible children! No respect for epistolary Victoriana.

JENNIFER

Why are you creeping around the theatre in the dark?

HAVESHAM

I wanted to see how things were progressing. I used to appear in stage productions here, you know. Back in the glory days before Bleeding Heart was bleeding funds.

JENNIFER

I thought the school hadn't done a play for decades.

HAVESHAM

I trod these very boards during my first flush of womanhood! I turned 18 the night of the first technical rehearsal for *The Fantasticks!* And then, of course, I was on Broadway.

JENNIFER

Broadway?

HAVESHAM

Bah. It was unfulfilling. So, I returned to Bleeding Heart Academy and never left.

JENNIFER

That's...horrifying.

HAVESHAM

Just like life. Beautiful and horrifying.

JENNIFER

You know, Ms. Havesham, I really owe you a lot. You remember when I had to sit out of gym for an entire semester so I spent the whole period in the library? I had that growth problem in my knees.

HAVESHAM

Yes. You were the girl with the knee problem. We had a name for you.

JENNIFER

You did? What was it?

HAVESHAM

“Girl with the knee problem.”

JENNIFER

All those hours I spent in the library, reading instead of playing dodge ball...that’s really what made me want to be a writer.

HAVESHAM

The salad days! And now Bleeding Heart is, like me, a mere shell of what it once was. Oh, how I long to feel the theatrical muse thrive once more within my soul! But alas, I am too old. Too weary for the creative life.

JENNIFER

Wait. You could play Scrooge.

HAVESHAM

Pardon?

JENNIFER

We need a Scrooge. I need a ringer. Someone who’s not a student. You know someone who’s...mature and...experienced.

HAVESHAM

Are you offering me a role in your little pageant? Your stagecraft?

JENNIFER

I’m offering you the lead.

HAVESHAM

I was always impressed with you, you know?

JENNIFER

You were?

HAVESHAM

I remember looking over your shoulder at your stories. I’d give you ideas and you’d take every single one and spin it into gold.

JENNIFER

I don’t know if I can do that anymore.

HAVESHAM

Balderdash! It’s your talent! It’s your gift!

JENNIFER

It is?

HAVESHAM

I have given your offer a great deal of thought and I will do it! Expect me at rehearsal tomorrow!

(Havesham starts to exit)

JENNIFER

I'll tell Principal Stone.

HAVESHAM

No! You mustn't! I must remain anonymous!

JENNIFER

But she –

HAVESHAM

I have no desire for notoriety! I only desire to feel the muse once again!

JENNIFER

Okay. I guess...I'll tell her the actress playing Scrooge is...a secret.

HAVESHAM

And now I must take my leave.

JENNIFER

Good night, Ms. Havesham.

HAVESHAM

Good night..."girl with the knee problem."

(Havesham exits.)

JENNIFER

Okay. I can do this.

(She begins writing.)

END OF SCENE

(While this play isn't crying out for an intermission, if you would like one, it should go here.)