

BACKSTAGE

By Shirley McNichols

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It's easy to understand why the popular and talented drama adviser, Laura Armbruister, is posing as her own substitute teacher. The school administration wants to put an end to all this drama nonsense, but they can't close down the upcoming play until they find Miss Armbruister to fire her. Meanwhile, fellow teacher and admirer, Steve Clarkson, is doing what he can to help Miss Armbruister keep her job. But one of the students gets the wrong idea and thinks the two teachers are eloping at lunch time! Naturally, this rumor makes the rounds with lightning speed!

Add to the mix an overbearing stage mother who threatens to take over the production with her son, a minor character taking over the lead. The students come up with their own plan to save the show, which includes having a boy in the cast, Dave, dress as a woman and pretend to be Laura Armbruister!

Unfortunately, he's trying to impress Annie, his romantic lead in the play, and it's hard to do with a short skirt and hairy legs. Other crazy characters include Wayne and Francis, the bumbling stage hands; Sam, the aspiring young playwright; Kara, the girl with an attitude; two journalism students who can't seem to get a story straight; several students who scare themselves silly playing spooky games backstage, and of course, the school administrators and board members. In the end, the arts—and true love—triumph!

SYNOPSIS OF PLAY

ACT I

Scene 1: Backstage of the high school theater, Thursday after school.

ACT II,

Scene 1: Backstage, Friday morning.

Scene 2: Backstage, Friday evening before curtain time.

Scene 3: Backstage, Friday evening during intermission.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 m, 8 w, 11 flexible)

ADULTS

LAURA ARMBRUISTER: Teacher- drama advisor

STEVE CLARKSON: Science teacher

TED RUNYON: Math teacher

CAROL MEADOWS: Secretary

EUGENIA BRIMWELL: Stage mother

***CHARLIE (CHARLENE) GRAVES:** Principal

***SHARON (SHELDON) ANDERSON:** Board member

STUDENTS

DAVE: Gets to wear a dress!

ANNIE: Likes Dave

MOLLY: Popular, cheerleader

MOUSE: True to his name

JEFF: Football player

SAM: Budding playwright

HEIDI: Nervous about her first play

SUSIE: Heidi's reassuring friend

GEORGE: Everybody's understudy

KARA: Somewhat negative

WAYNE: Prop crew

***FRANCIS:** Prop crew

***PAT:** Cast member

***CHRIS:** Cast member

***LOU:** Cast member

***AL:** Cast member

***JODY:** Cast member

***MARTY:** Cast member

***KELLY:** Reporter for student paper

***TERRY:** Reporter for student paper

*Roles can be played by either males or females.

SETTING

Set needs are minimal as the entire action takes place “backstage.” Two chairs are used as props. Suggestions are in the script regarding their placement for various scenes. A box of costumes is at DSR. The director is free to leave it at that or to add other props to create a backstage feel: ladders, flats against the upstage wall, paint buckets and brushes, etc.

COSTUMES

As always, performers should consider who their character is when selecting costumes. Students wear contemporary school clothing. Molly may wear a cheerleading uniform in ACT I. Adults should dress more formally: ties, jackets, skirts, etc., to set them apart from the students.

Act I takes place Thursday afternoon, and Act II starts out Friday morning, so characters in both acts should modify or change costumes to show a change of time. “Laura” will need a gray wig, glasses and maybe a cardigan sweater to complete her disguise. “Jeff” must have a front buttoning shirt for his scene with Heidi and Susie.

Act II, Scene 3 takes place during the “performance” so performers should dress in “costumes.” These can be as outlandish or as simple as you wish. Dave will need a dress, wig, and shoes to wear over a man’s shirt and pants that can be rolled up. A front opening dress would work best. Sam should wear a suit when he’s a play character, and Mouse is a handyman.

PROPS

Props needed are as follows: dress, wig, heels; clipboard, pen; stack of programs; stack of memos; notebook and pen; camera; (2) clipboards; typed pages (manuscript); printed scripts; handcuffs; gray wig, glasses, old-lady dress; note in envelope for Dan; note for Laura; sheet of notebook paper; notepad and pen; folder; flashlights (optional) for students.

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ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is Thursday after school, the day before the play. The stage is made up to look like the backstage area of a theater. Props are stacked in a box DSL, a single chair is at SC, flats lean against the UPS wall, at DSR is another chair and a box full of costumes. DAVE is going through the costume box looking for a dress, which he finds. He already holds a wig and heels. GEORGE is seated at SC drawing. He can use a clipboard or an art board to support his drawing. A stack of programs sits on the floor to his SL. OTHER CAST AND CREW MEMBERS can cross the stage at various times going over scripts, checking for props or costumes, etc. The high school students are rehearsing their play which is to open the next night. Once Dave finds the correct dress he crosses to George at SC.)

DAVE: Hey, George, whatcha doin'?

GEORGE: Oh, you know how it is for us understudies. We wind up being the Jacks of all trades. I just finished folding the programs. Now, I'm working on a publicity poster. *(Looking up)* Do you know how to draw fire?

DAVE: Sure. You just stand out in the open and yell, "Shoot me! Shoot me!"

GEORGE: Very funny, Dave. *(HE picks up the programs and exits SL.)*

DAVE: *(Turning and noticing the audience.)* Oh, hi! You know you really shouldn't be back here but, oh what the heck. The way things are going it's probably a lot more interesting back here than it is out front anyway. I'm Dave. You're probably wondering about the dress. Don't worry. It's just a costume. See, in this play I'm a cop who goes undercover as a woman to catch some bad guys. I get the girl in the end and everything, so it's okay. But it's embarrassing to have to wear this dress. I wanted to be the private eye. My best friend, Sam, got that part. He gets to wear a cool suit.

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DAVE: *(Cont'd.)* But, Miss Armbruister said I had to play the cop because he has the most lines and I'm best at memorizing. It's true. I don't even try. I just always remember everything I read. When Miss Armbruister, she's the drama teacher I was talking about before, when she gave us monologues to memorize I was ready to do mine the next day. It took everyone else a week.

SAM: *(Entering SL)* Hey, Dave, I finished my play. You wanna take a look at it? I think it turned out pretty well.

DAVE: Sam's a playwright. 'Course he hasn't sold anything yet. *(To SAM)* Did I ever tell you my Uncle Fred was a writer, too?

SAM: He was? Did he ever sell anything?

DAVE: Yeah, his house, his car, all his stocks and bonds.

SAM: Are you gonna read my play or not?

DAVE: Not right now, Sam. The break's almost over. Miss Armbruister's gonna want us to get back to rehearsal.

SAM: *(Disappointed)* Okay. But you gotta promise you'll read it later.

DAVE: I promise.

(WAYNE and FRANCIS enter SL.)

SAM: *(To Wayne and Francis)* Hey, I finished my new play. You wanna read it?

(WAYNE and FRANCIS hurry off SR followed by SAM.)

DAVE: Sam's last play was about a guy who could turn himself inside out. Miss Armbruister said the story was okay, but makeup might be difficult. Anyway, getting back to the Modern Major General, since then I've always had the biggest parts. Not the best parts. Just the biggest. Like the last play we did. It was a Western. I really wanted to be the bad guy. But, no. I had to play the sheriff because he had the most lines. I got the girl in that play too, but I didn't have to dress like one. Boy, it's too bad life doesn't imitate art more. I've never gotten the girl in real life. I guess I just don't know how to talk to girls.

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DAVE: *(Cont'd.)* Too bad there's no script I can memorize. Anyway, there's really only one girl I'm interested in, Annie. She's in this play, too. In fact, she's the girl I wind up with in the end. She's really pretty and nice too. But she'd never notice me. Not when there are guys like Jeff Masterson around. He's this big, dumb football player. I guess all the girls think he's pretty good-looking. He's only got eyes for Molly Briggs, though. I think she's the only reason he tried out for this play. Molly's really into drama, and she's pretty good. She's also the head cheerleader. Most of the guys at school are crazy about Molly. Not me, though. We've been friends since pre-school. I guess she's kind of like a sister to me. Anyway, Jeff sure isn't much of an actor. I don't think he's getting anywhere with Molly, either!

MOLLY: *(Offstage)* Dave!

DAVE: Here's Molly, now! *(To MOLLY)* Back here, Moll!

MOLLY: *(Entering SR)* Dave, here you are! Miss Armbruister wants you out front. You have to go over the couch scene with Jeff and Annie. He's having trouble with his lines.

DAVE: Now there's a shocker!

MOLLY: Dave, don't be so hard on Jeff. Not everyone has your natural talent.

DAVE: True. Okay, let's go.

MOLLY: Yeah. We don't want to keep Miss Armbruister waiting. She's been in a real bad mood lately.

DAVE: Wouldn't you be if you were directing this play?

(DAVE and MOLLY exit SL. A beat later LAURA ARMBRUISTER enters SR.)

LAURA: Molly! David! Where are those two?

(MR. GRAVES, the school principal, and his secretary, CAROL MEADOWS, enter SR.)

MR. GRAVES: Ah, Miss Armbruister. I knew I'd find you here.

End of Freeview

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