

Shoestring Theatre

By
Eddie McPherson

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DEDICATION

To my wonderful and talented drama students who brought these characters to life for the first time. Your comments and suggestions were invaluable.

The Playwright, Eddie McPherson

STORY OF THE PLAY

Sanders is very upset. The budget that is to fund his opening show of the new theatre season is being cut by eighty percent. This particular play is to be an epic retelling of the timeless classic, "Cinderella," an expensive show that includes grand costumes, elaborate sets, and high-priced special effects. But how is he expected to pull off such a spectacle with practically no money?

To add insult to injury, Sanders learns that the reason his budget is cut is because Mrs. Brakes, the executive director of the theatre, and her pal Bonnie, the president of the board of directors, have embezzled the "Cinderella" money to fund a nice long cruise in the Caribbean. Sanders is outraged and decides to take matters into his own hands. "If it's a low-budget show they want, it's a low-budget show they'll get," he tells a friend.

He rounds up some local yokels with no acting experience and casts them in the show. He uses cardboard boxes for the set, paper confetti and flashlights for special effects, and a child's wagon for the royal carriage in which Cinderella rides to the ball. Cinderella's "beautiful" gown is even worse.

But revenge turns from sweet to bitter when Sanders learns that the trip planned was a surprise for him and his wife. Too late, the show has already opened. What a disaster ... that is until the reviews come in and the show is the hit of the season!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

6 m, 11 w, extras

SANDERS: Director of a play at a local theatre.

MRS. BRAKES: The theatre's executive director.

BRUTUS: A truck driver with a heart. (Plays the Prince.)

JED: Brutus' employee. (Plays Mouse/Chauffeur.)

TED: Brutus' employee. (Plays Cinderella's Father.)

ERVING: Another employee. (Plays the Royal Announcer.)

GWEN: A star who is her own favorite fan.

PEPPER: Publicity chairman. (Plays Fairy Godmother.)

DENISE: A theatre volunteer. (Serves as Narrator for the play.)

EVA: Another volunteer. (Plays a Stepsister.)

MOLLY: Another volunteer. (Also plays a Stepsister.)

CHRISSEY: Waitress at Herman's Bistro. (Plays the Stepmother.)

HERMAN: Owns his own bistro. (Plays the King.)

AUBREY: A talented, but crazy woman. (Plays Cinderella.)

MARY: A bag lady and entrepreneur. (Plays the Queen.)

BONNIE: President of the theatre's board of directors.

CAPRI: The city's infamous theatre critic.

STAGEHANDS: As Delivery Boy, Beast, Ball Guests and Doctor.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Act I takes place in the theatre's large general office. Act II is basically a bare stage with cheap, ugly sets and props brought on and off. It's important that everything look homemade. Ordinary cardboard is perfect for the cottages, the trees, etc. The beast is nothing more than a couple of stagehands covered in a brown cloth with the cutout picture of an animal's head on a long stick. The partition Aubrey stands behind to dress needs to be large enough to cover her but is nothing more than unpainted cardboard. The director or cast may come up with other creative ways to stage Sanders' low-budget production. Allow the people to enter and exit with momentum moving the action along quickly.

*See additional notes at the end of the script.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: MRS. BRAKES ENTERS followed by a distraught SANDERS.)

SANDERS: What do you mean our budget has been cut?

MRS. BRAKES: I'm sorry, Sanders, it had to be done.

SANDERS: But the board approved the budget just two weeks ago.

MRS. BRAKES: Things have changed since then.

(Large boxes sit in a stack. They are labeled in bold letters: COSTUMES, CASTLE SET, CINDERELLA'S COACH, etc. BRUTUS, and his ASSISTANTS, dressed in coveralls, ENTER and start carting the boxes out on dollies.)

SANDERS: *(Gesturing to boxes.)* We just received all of this from New York yesterday. Most of them haven't even been unpacked.

MRS. BRAKES: I have spoken to the New York company this morning. All we are required to pay is shipping as long as we get them back today.

SANDERS: *(To one of the moving GUYS.)* Bring that back, that's our castle! *(To MRS. BRAKES.)* How are we supposed to do "Cinderella" without a castle?

MRS. BRAKES: We'll simply have to go a different route, that's all.

SANDERS: That was a New York castle set. The board approved!

MRS. BRAKES: And I told you things have changed.

SANDERS: *(Watching a box go.)* Cinderella's gown. They're taking Cinderella's gown.

MRS. BRAKES: *(Shouting after the WORKERS.)* Be careful with those boxes; the contents are very fragile!

SANDERS: *(To HER.)* Please explain something to me, Mrs. Brakes. What could have happened so drastically between the board meeting two weeks ago and today that suddenly caused the budget to be cut by eighty percent?

SANDERS: *(Continued.)* Twenty percent I could understand; forty percent I could understand; but eighty percent I can't understand.

MRS. BRAKES: Unexpected expenses with the company have arisen. Things like this happen all the time with companies. It shouldn't be such a surprise to you, Sanders.

SANDERS: But to have all that money stripped away without an explanation.

MRS. BRAKES: *(Stopping and looking at HIM for the first time.)* I feel just as badly as you do about this whole thing, but it's really out of my hands.

SANDERS: *(Crossing and watching another box being carted away; speaking to the WORKERS sarcastically.)* Go ahead! Take it all away! Take away my lifelong dream of directing the most beautiful production of a classic tale the world has ever seen! Don't look back! It's just another job to you! They're only cardboard boxes to you! Nothing!

BRUTUS: *(Approaching with a big cigar in HIS mouth.)* Hey, Mister. You think this is easy for me? I happen to love "Cinderella."

SANDERS: YOU love "Cinderella"?

BRUTUS: Don't look so surprised. When I heard you were staging "Cinderella," I went home and told my little girl I would get her a ticket.

SANDERS: I'm sorry, I didn't realize

BRUTUS: You know how hard it's going to be telling my little angel there's not going to be a "Cinderella"?

MRS. BRAKES: *(Approaching.)* But there will be a show, Mr. Big, Scary, Burley Man. Just because we have to send back this overpriced, Broadway-rental merchandise doesn't mean there's not going to be a production.

BRUTUS: It doesn't?

SANDERS: *(To MRS. BRAKES.)* I have a reputation to think about. You cut my budget by eighty percent and expect me to direct a dignified show? It's "Cinderella" not "Tobacco Road." There's a coach ride on a moonlit evening. A ballroom dance in the main hall of a castle. Special effects with the fairy godmother.

BRUTUS: (*Wiping a tear.*) The fairy godmother. When she grants Cinderella that beautiful ball gown, I get misty-eyed all over again.

MRS. BRAKES: Don't you have work to do?

BRUTUS: You don't have to get nasty. I may be tough on the outside, but I have feelings too. (*Turns and continues HIS task.*)

MRS. BRAKES: (*To SANDERS.*) We still have money for the show; we just have to be resourceful in how we spend it.

SANDERS: (*Sarcastically.*) Fine! Why don't you just give me a ride to the corner costume shop and we should find everything we need for ten bucks.

MRS. BRAKES: There is no need for ridicule. You're acting as though this is all MY fault.

SANDERS: All I know is I had a top-notch show coming up to open our season and now it's being carried away by a cultured truck driver.

BRUTUS: (*Approaching.*) That's everything, ma'am.

MS. BRAKES: Fine. (*Hands BRUTUS a business card.*) Send the bill to this address.

BRUTUS: (*To SANDERS extending HIS hand.*) The name's Brutus. You keep your chin up, mister. Don't let a lot of stiff-necked white collars take away your dream. This is one man who will buy front-row tickets and read the program from cover to cover! Even the advertisements! (*Starts to EXIT.*)

MRS. BRAKES: (*Under HER breath.*) You mean he can read?

BRUTUS: (*Stops in HIS tracks and turns toward HER.*) What did you say?

MRS. BRAKES: I didn't say anything, Mr. Big (*Gulp.*) Strong, Massive, Blue-Collar Working Man.

BRUTUS: (*To SANDERS.*) I'll be at that show. And I'll read that program. And my little girl and I will give a standing ovation just clapping our little hands off.

SANDERS: Thank you.

BRUTUS: You're welcome. (*HE throws a stare toward MRS. BRAKES and EXITS.*)

End of Freeview

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