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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# Mustardseed

Comedy by Doug Cooney



# Mustardseed

*Comedy. By Doug Cooney. Cast: 4w.* Thrilled to be cast in a current production of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mustardseed buckles down to read the play and memorize her lines—all four of them! But she couldn't prepare for the backstage comedy that unfolds with the other three teenage girls cast as fairies. There's Moth, the seasoned ringleader; Cobweb, her wisecracking sidekick; and Peaseblossom, the boy-crazy pretty one. Ignoring Mustardseed's insistence that they should read the play, these fairies prefer to hang out in costume in the green room, playing cards, reading tabloids and gossiping about Bottom, Puck, Titania and other grown-up actors. As the run of *Midsummer* progresses, the action jumps between their comical antics backstage to well-rehearsed Shakespeare in the "forest outside Athens." Although they never buckle down to read the play, each character experiences a real-life coming-of-age moment in a young girl's journey through high school that is underscored and illuminated by the themes in Shakespeare's text. Wildly funny and unexpectedly poignant, *Mustardseed* includes the song "(I Want to Know What You Know) When You Know," written by Cooney and composer Deborah Wicks La Puma. *Single set. Approximate running time: 40 minutes.*

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Utah., (l-r) Maggie Jarratt and Katie Roth.

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# MUSTARDSEED

By  
DOUG COONEY



**Dramatic Publishing**  
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*Mustardseed* was developed in workshops during Florida Stage's 1st Stage New Works Festival with a staged reading on March 6, 2007.

Mustardseed . . . . . Rachel Chapnick  
Moth . . . . . Shannon Boyles  
Cobweb . . . . . Veronica Hoecherl  
Peaseblossom . . . . . Samantha Aberman

Director . . . . . Susan Hyatt  
Dramaturg . . . . . Andie Arthur  
Stage Manager . . . . . Emily Swiderski

The first production of *Mustardseed* was staged at Highland High School in Salt Lake City, Utah, as part of the Homestead 21st Century Play Series, produced by John Dilworth Newman.

Mustardseed . . . . . Maggie Jarratt  
Moth . . . . . Katie Roth  
Cobweb . . . . . Anna Reed  
Peaseblossom . . . . . Johanna Blair

Director . . . . . Glen Carpenter  
Stage Manager . . . . . Natalie Christensen  
Costumes . . . . . Charrisse Fuhriman

# MUSTARDSEED

## CHARACTERS

MUSTARDSEED . . . . . the youngest, 10-13, bright, brash  
MOTH . . . . . a leader, 15, confident, irreverent  
COBWEB . . . . . a follower, 13-14, funny, insecure  
PEASEBLOSSOM . . . . . the pretty one, 15, independent

## SYNOPSIS

*Mustardseed* follows a rite of passage for four teenage girls cast as fairies in a regional production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Confined to the green room during performances, the girls occupy themselves with microwave popcorn, backstage gossip, an endless card game called Spit!—and an ongoing effort to understand life, love and the play.

The setting is the typical green room of a regional theater in a mid-size American city. A sofa, comfortable chairs, a table. Bulletin board, sink, microwave.

## A NOTE ON TIME

The play has a running time of approximately 45 minutes. By omitting or abridging scenes 6 and 7, the play can be performed in 35-40 minutes.



## HOW TO PLAY SPIT

Two players. The goal is to get rid of your cards as fast as possible. Players do not take turns; each player uses speed and smarts to play faster than her opponent. The technical rules should be available in any book on card games or on the Internet. The point is—it's a fast and furious card game and you get to yell "Spit!" a lot.

## SPECIAL THANKS

To Sarah Resnick, John Newman, Deborah Wicks La Puma, Susan Hyatt, Shannon Boyles and Christian Lebano.

\* \* \* \*

*For Carole Healey*

# MUSTARDSEED

## SCENE ONE

*(A green thicket.*

*Three fairies—with large dragonfly wings—flutter in great agitation.*

*MOTH is in charge. COBWEB is her slightly overweight lieutenant. MUSTARDSEED, the youngest and greenest, wears eyeglasses.*

*NOTE: In this scene, the fairies speak in iambic pentameter—in the style of Shakespeare. It should flow as quickly and evenly as possible.)*

MOTH, COBWEB & MUSTARDSEED (*various*). She's late! She's late! Oh, no! She's really late!

COBWEB. I heard she called to say she's running late.

MOTH. But late like "late" or late "not gonna come"?

MUSTARDSEED. She's "on"! The scene before is almost done!

COBWEB. So who goes on in case she doesn't show?

MUSTARDSEED. Not me.

COBWEB. -- -- -- Not me.

MOTH. -- -- -- -- -- Not me.

COBWEB. -- -- -- -- -- Not me.

MUSTARDSEED. -- -- -- -- -- *You go!*

MOTH. No, *you*.

COBWEB. -- -- No, *you*.

MUSTARDSEED. -- -- No, *you*.

MOTH. -- -- -- -- -- No, *you*.

MUSTARDSEED (*to COBWEB*)-- -- -- No, *you*.

COBWEB. I can't go on! Moth, I don't know the lines!

MOTH. You've only heard the play a billion times!

MUSTARDSEED. I think I could if I could hold the book.

MOTH. Oh, Mustardseed, how stupid would that look?

*(PEASEBLOSSOM, undeniably pretty, enters in a state of panic. She wears a hoodie and sneakers over her fairy attire and carries a knapsack.)*

PEASEBLOSSOM. I'm late, I know!

COBWEB. -- You're always late!

PEASEBLOSSOM. -- -- -- I know!

It's not my fault! My mom! She drives so slow!

COBWEB. You better run!

MOTH. -- The scene's about to start!

PEASEBLOSSOM. D'I look okay? I changed—but in the car. (*She removes her jacket to reveal her fairy costume—but the dragonfly wings are backwards. Re: twisted wings:*) Oh, no! This sucks! How stupid do I look?

MOTH. It's fine!

COBWEB. -- It's fine!

MUSTARDSEED. -- -- It's backwards! Moth!

MOTH. -- -- -- -- -- Just go!

It's close enough that no one's going to know!

PEASEBLOSSOM. But wait! My lines! I knew 'em—now  
I don't!

*(The fairies surround PEASEBLOSSOM to coach her lines—and incant the play—as PEASEBLOSSOM tugs off her sneakers to perform in bare feet.)*

*NOTE: Pay attention to the meter. The text shifts from iambic pentameter to Shakespeare's rhyming couplets; the rhythm needs to be attended to so that the difference is heard. The language itself should accelerate the scene.)*

MOTH.

Over hill, over dale,  
Thorough bush, thorough brier—

COBWEB.

Over park, over pale,  
Thorough flood, thorough fire—

MUSTARDSEED.

I do wander everywhere,  
Swifter than the moon's sphere—!

MOTH.

And I serve the fairy queen,  
To dew her orbs upon the green.

COBWEB.

I must go seek some dewdrops here  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

ALL TOGETHER.

Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:  
Our queen and all our elves come here anon!

*(PEASEBLOSSOM flies off as the remaining fairies flutter and buzz with excitement and—directly into—)*

## SCENE TWO

*(They flop on a sofa and chairs.)*

*The lights change. Harsh, fluorescent.*

*We see the fairies as they really are.*

*TEENAGE GIRLS trapped in a regional production of William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

*The green thicket is the green room backstage. Green walls, a mismatched forest-green sofa and club chairs, a coffee table, a kitchen sink, coffeemaker, microwave, a refrigerator, a small backstage monitor and a bulletin board with various flyers including a poster of the current production.*

*No more metered speech.*

*NOTE: Don't misread the length of this stage direction. The transition between scenes should be lightning fast and MUSTARDSEED should jump on this line.)*

MUSTARDSEED. She make it?

*(Faintly over the monitor, we hear PEASEBLOSSOM: "Over hill, over dale, thorough bush, thorough brier.")*

*A fairy grunt of relief.)*

COBWEB. Made it.

*(MOTH shuffles a deck of cards. COBWEB sits opposite. MUSTARDSEED watches and listens intently. A little shy for now, a little intimidated, out of step.)*

MOTH. That one is always late.

COBWEB. And she always blames her mother.

MOTH. I may forget stuff and drop lines and leave my props where they don't belong—but at least I'm not late all the time.

COBWEB. And she only gets away with it 'cause she's pretty.

MOTH. That's the power of pretty. *(To MUSTARDSEED.)* Watch the monitor, Mustardseed. *(MOTH deals cards like a pro—or a girl who's been stuck at summer camp.)*

MUSTARDSEED. You're not the boss of me. You can boss me around onstage 'cause I'm the little fairy but that doesn't mean you boss me backstage too.

MOTH. Oh, yes it does. 'Cause if Rebecca-the-Directah gets all pissed at the fairies because we missed our cue or messed up our song, I'm gonna blame the *new* fairy, the little one who locked herself in the bathroom in the lobby because she didn't even know that actors use the bathroom backstage.

MUSTARDSEED. That wasn't my fault.

MOTH. Here's where your little fairy brain comes in handy. Do you want to spend the run worrying about what happens to your costume or where your props went and who put what in the popcorn you eat? 'Cause a *smart* fairy thinks about those things. Fairies got a peck-

ing order—just like with penguins. The tough ones survive; the weak ones fail; and the herd moves on.

MOTH & COBWEB. Spit.

MUSTARDSEED. Fairies don't travel in herds. They travel in packs and—"fairy bands."

MOTH. You're gonna travel with a kick in the fairy pants if you don't watch that monitor!

MUSTARDSEED (*watching the monitor*). My mom said I can be in the fairy parts but not to watch the play because it's obscene!

COBWEB. What's so obscene about it?

MOTH. Cobweb, have you read the play?

COBWEB. I know what I know.

MOTH. If you paid attention you'd know: this play is sex-sex-sex.

COBWEB. How did I miss the sex part?

MOTH. Hello? The "lovers"?!

COBWEB. They run around and yell a lot. That's not sex. I know what sex is. We got cable.

MOTH. Cobweb, it's *what* they yell; the *way* they yell—

COBWEB. Yelling is not sexy. My parents yell all the time!

MOTH. It's sexy to grown-ups. You're a smart fairy; figure it out.

COBWEB (*re: parents and sex*). My parents? Never! Nuh-unh! No way!

MOTH. Yes way! (*Re: card game; no more moves.*) I'm up.

COBWEB (*re card game; same*). Hang on. Okay, I'm up too.

MOTH & COBWEB. SPIT! (*They resume playing.*)

MUSTARDSEED (*re: the monitor and the cue*). We're getting close. Oberon is yelling and Puck is dancing around and the audience is laughing—except more at Puck's hips than anything Oberon said. (*Grinding her hips like Puck.*) "...I know a little western flower,— Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound, and maidens call it love-in-idleness." Bring me this flower!!!

COBWEB. Omigosh, this play is dirty!

MOTH. Told you so— (*Re: the monitor.*) Mustardseed! Watch the monitor!

*(Abruptly a trumpet sounds.*

*Uh-oh. The fairies missed their cue.)*

COBWEB. Uh-oh.

*(The fairies fly into action.)*

MOTH. Our cue! That was our cue!

COBWEB (*frantically playing cards*). Oh—fie, fie, fie!

MOTH. Mustardseed! You were our lookout! Give it up, Cobweb. You know I was winning anyway!

COBWEB. Liar!

MOTH (*leaping, with authority*). "Fairies, away!"

*(They scramble into position.*

*NOTE: No need for a blackout here. The lights change and we shift immediately from the green room backstage to the green thicket onstage—and directly into—)*



## SCENE THREE

*(Another part of the forest.*

*The lights are moody and mystical.*

*The backstage chaos gives way to grace onstage as the fairies begin—*

*The fairy dance.*

*MOTH, COBWEB, PEASEBLOSSOM and MUSTARDSEED recite the text as they perform a well-rehearsed dance. A flowing fairy round.)*

## FAIRIES.

The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,  
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs  
Light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,  
To have my love to bed and to arise;

Pluck the wings from Painted butterflies  
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes:  
Welcome my love; I knew him at first sight.  
To have my love to bed and to arise—!

*(In Shakespeare's play, this moment anticipates Titania's bedding-down in her fairy bower, so the moment should rise with some sense of uplift and anticipation.*

*The scene should be a director's image. Authentic, delightful, true to Midsummer—and quite magical.)*

## SCENE FOUR

*(The green room. During another performance.*

*The lights change—and we're back.*

*PEASEBLOSSOM sprawls across the sofa. COBWEB searches for something. MUSTARDSEED has her nose buried in an old copy of PEOPLE magazine.)*

PEASEBLOSSOM *(to MUSTARDSEED, re: tabloid).*

Gawd, Mustardseed. I can't believe you read that junk.

MUSTARDSEED. At least I read the play.

PEASEBLOSSOM. Oh, no you didn't. Are you saying I didn't read the play?

COBWEB. Peaseblossom, you *brag* that you didn't read the play.

PEASEBLOSSOM. I have friends; I don't have time to read plays, Cobweb! Like *you* read the play?

COBWEB. Oh, please. Where are the cards?

PEASEBLOSSOM. I don't have to read it to know what it's about. I watch it often enough.

MUSTARDSEED. It's Shakespeare; not a sitcom. You're supposed to read it. He wrote it to read it.

PEASEBLOSSOM. No he didn't. It's a *play*. He wrote it so I could be in it. And he's lucky to have me too. Because I'm good—

COBWEB. You guys. I'm serious. Where are the cards?

PEASEBLOSSOM. —Nobody in the *audience* read the play.

MUSTARDSEED. *They're* not supposed to read it.

PEASEBLOSSOM. So why should I either?

COBWEB. You guys give me a headache. Where are the cards?

PEASEBLOSSOM (*to MUSTARDSEED*). You think I don't know what this play's about? I'll tell you what this play's about. The king's getting married but the queen doesn't wanna. (*PEASEBLOSSOM takes her time to animate a "play-within-the-play" with green room objects: salt-'n'-pepper shakers, candlesticks, cold cream, raffia. Re: the lovers:*) The young people are all messed up. She loves him; he loves her; they all run away—smack into these nasty fairies. (*Re: Titania and Oberon.*) Fairy Girl and Fairy Guy fight over some kid, so Fairy Guy sends Puck to get the weird flower with the magic spell to mess Fairy Girl up. (*Re: the lovers.*) Puck spills the spell all over the place—and then it's all: he loves her; she loves him; they both hate the other—and Fairy Girl loves a donkey. The goofy guys with bad breath do their stupid play; everybody laughs. The End.

(*MUSTARDSEED waves one hand in the air.*)

PEASEBLOSSOM. What's that?

MUSTARDSEED. One hand applauding.

COBWEB. Okay, enough. The cards are missing and nobody cares but me.

(*A loud offstage flush is heard. MOTH appears, adjusting her wings and tugging her tights. [Let it be funny.]*)

PEASEBLOSSOM. Moth, you're not supposed to flush! They hear it onstage!

MOTH (*re: the stink*). Trust me, you're grateful. So what did I miss?

COBWEB/MUSTARD/PEASEBLOSSOM. The cards are missing.

MOTH. What'd you do with the cards, Mustardseed?

MUSTARDSEED. I didn't do anything. It was those fairies.

MOTH. Yeah, I know. They're everywhere. (*Snatching the magazine.*) Cough up the cards, Mustardseed. You're being a brat.

MUSTARDSEED. I am not a brat! I'm a mischievous fairy! I hid them in the forest. Onstage. In the scenery.

MOTH. Funny-funny, you brat. Go get the cards, Mustardseed. I'm not killing the next hour with Chinese checkers. Go!

PEASEBLOSSOM. Moth, she can't walk onstage in the middle of the play.

MOTH. I don't want her to walk. She's a fairy. She can fly. (*Re: the monitor.*) Where are we? Helena's beating up the boys. Perfect. The audience is already distracted. And if anybody should notice one little fairy, they'll think it's cute! Now go!

MUSTARDSEED. "I go, I go, look how I go!" (*Exits.*)

COBWEB. I smell trouble.

MOTH. I know. That's one uppity fairy.

PEASEBLOSSOM. What are we going to do about it?

MOTH. If we have to, we can always clip her wings.

(*And directly into—*)