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Dramatic Publishing



The **Worst**
High School Play
In the World

A Full-Length
Comedy Farce

By

WILLIAM GLEASON



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE WORST HIGH SCHOOL PLAY IN THE WORLD)

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THE WORST HIGH SCHOOL PLAY IN THE WORLD

A Full-Length Play

for Nine Men, Seven Women, Extras

C H A R A C T E R S

IVANHA squirrely heir to the throne of Saxonia
RICO an ever-increasing friar/narrator
BELINDA Rico's growing young friend
NINA Queen of Saxonia
CORSICANA Nina's daughter
VISCERA the darkly- evil Prince
MEDULLA an evil magician
SHECKY the Court Jester
ASTRID Medulla's assistant/secretary
FRIAR FRED the founder of Dabney Abbey
LADY LENORE Ivanha's main love
GWEN Lady Lenore's matronly handmaiden
MAMA Ivanha's squirrel mother
CHESTER Ivanha's squirrel father
TRUDY Ivanha's first love (a squirrel)
DIRECTOR, STAGEHANDS, SOUNDPERSON,
LIGHTPERSON, RASHAD, FELIPPE, MONKS,
KNIGHTS, HERALDS, ATTENDANTS,
FACES IN CROWD Extras

TIME: *The Present and The Past*

PLACE: Sometimes Reality, Sometimes Not

ACT ONE

Scene One

PROLOGUE: The house lights fade. Silence, stuffed with portent, prevails. In the Stygian blackness, from somewhere in the bowels of the backstage area, we hear the voice of the DIRECTOR, tense with emotion.

DIRECTOR (from offstage). Okay, kids, this is it. This is the moment we've all been waiting for. I've asked a great deal of you these last few weeks: hard work, sacrifice and, yes, even a certain amount of maturity. And you've come through for me . . . except for (use any student's name) who has been nothing short of a royal pain in the gazebo.

STUDENT (from offstage). Don't mention it.

DIRECTOR (from offstage). And now it's payoff time. The audience is seated, filled with family, friends and even perfect strangers. Let's not disappoint them. (His voice rises.) Are you ready, kids?

STUDENTS (from offstage, muttering surly ad libs). No. Not yet. Give me a minute, etc.

DIRECTOR (from offstage). Get out there and break a leg!

GIRL STUDENT (from offstage). Wha'd he say?

BOY STUDENT (from offstage). I think he said 'lay an egg.'
(We hear the sound of a distant chicken clucking.)

DIRECTOR (from offstage). Knock it off with the chicken! Hit

the music! Lights! (Light, inane music begins. The lights fade up.) Hold it!

(The DIRECTOR enters L. The lights remain at dim level.)

DIRECTOR. Soundperson? Oh, Soundperson?

(The SOUNDPERSON enters R as the music dims.)

SOUNDPERSON. You got your Soundperson here.

DIRECTOR. That's the wrong music.

SOUNDPERSON. I know. I lost the other tape.

DIRECTOR. I want to see you after the show, Soundperson.

(The DIRECTOR exits L.)

SOUNDPERSON. That figures. (The SOUNDPERSON exits R as the music comes back up with the lights.)

SCENE: A walkway on the outskirts of Dabney Abbey which is in front of the curtain. FRIAR RICO enters L and crosses slowly, his head bowed and concealed by his cassock. The music fades out and we hear him quietly singing his favorite Gregorian ditty in something akin to a monotone.

RICO (singing slowly). Antonym . . . Pseudonym . . . Synonym . . . What say, Jim? Can you swim?

(BELINDA, a precocious child, brimming with joy and curiosity, enters R, carrying a basket of flowers. Upon seeing FRIAR RICO, her face lights up and she waves.)

BELINDA. Friar Rico! Friar Rico! It's me. Belinda!

RICO (looking up, turning and starting back across the stage).

Antonym . . . Interim . . . Synonym . . .

BELINDA (rushing to catch him and stepping on his cassock, pulling him up short). Good morrow to you, Friar Rico.

RICO (turning slowly towards her and gesturing benignly). And to you, my child. How fare thee this morrow?

BELINDA. I fare fair, Friar, and you?

RICO. I celebrate this morrow as any other, for each day is a birth and a new beginning. What brings you to Dabney Abbey?

BELINDA. I thought perhaps you could tell me a story.

RICO. I only know one story, and I have told it to you at least a hundred times.

BELINDA. But it is a stupid story and each telling only makes it all the more insipid. Please, Friar Rico. Tell me the story. Tell me the story of Ivanha. One more time, and I shall never ask you again.

RICO (with a benign gesture). Ah, so be it.

BELINDA. Hot peppercorns!

RICO. Where do I begin?

BELINDA. At the beginning.

RICO. Makes sense.

BELINDA (gesturing dramatically). All was not well in the land of Saxonia.

RICO. Who's telling the story?

BELINDA. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

RICO. 'Twas the year one-two-four-three and all was not well in the land of Saxonia. Darkness and Discontent hung thick in the air like sausages in a smokehouse, or even thicker. King Isadore was off to the Crusades to smite the Infidels and to purchase porcelain. But Isadore left in his place his creep brother, Prince Viscera, who brought sorrow and fear to every hearth. But there was also joy in Saxonia, for the King not only left town, but left a son. Can you tell me the son's name?

BELINDA (thinking). Wallace? (RICO shakes his head.) Richard? Harold? (RICO shakes his head.) Irving? Gallamore? Donnybrook?

RICO. The son's name was Ivanha.

BELINDA (slapping the side of her head). Of course! Ivanha. And this is his story.

RICO. It is a story of love, honor, chivalry and revenge. But, more than that . . .

BELINDA. It's the worst story in the world.

RICO. Correct. (He and BELINDA cross slowly off L.) Our story begins in the chambers of Queen Nina. It was a day much like this one. (He and BELINDA exit L.)

SCENE: The curtain opens. We hear gay, rippling laughter off R as QUEEN NINA and her daughter, CORSICANA, approach. CORSICANA enters first, dancing and holding the baby, IVANHA. CORSICANA twirls and leaps, her laughter spinning spider webs of delight. QUEEN NINA follows, wearing a crown made from a hubcap. They enter the Queen's chambers at R.

NINA. Be careful, Corsicana. You'll have him dizzy and puking if you don't watch out.

CORSICANA. I can't help myself, Mother. Every time I look at him, I feel like dancing. Was ever there a more precious child?

NINA. There was you, my pet.

CORSICANA. But I was just a girl, an insignificant waste of labor, a useless appendage to the royal lineage, worth only as much as I might be bartered for. How could you compare me to this? (She holds up IVANHA.) A boy child, heir to the throne. Ivanha!

NINA. Granted, you weren't worth much to us, but you were cute.

CORSICANA (gasping). Oh, dear. He's all wet.

NINA (chuckling darkly). Just like his father.

CORSICANA. Should I summon the Royal Changer?

NINA. I think it's time you learned how to change a diaper.

CORSICANA. Oh, gross!

NINA (shaking her finger). It won't be long before you'll be having little wet ones of your own. Now bring him over here. (CORSICANA brings IVANHA to NINA. They place the bundle on a chair and cover it from the audience.) Hello, my little prince. Is you wet? (A horse whinnies offstage.) You is wet, isn't you? Now our first step is to take off the diaper. Sounds a little hoarse. (A horse whinnies offstage again. NINA and CORSICANA look off R.) Sounds a little hoarse!

CORSICANA (taking off the diaper). Like that?

SOUNDPERSON (offstage). Oops, sorry. (A baby coos offstage.)

NINA. Much better. Very good. (She takes the diaper from CORSICANA.) Then we say a little poem. "Diaper, diaper in the sky. How far will this diaper fly?" (She tosses the diaper savagely off R. We hear an offstage scream. NINA laughs and points off R.) Gotcha!

CORSICANA (looking at the bundle and recoiling, shocked and horrified). Mother! (She points toward the bundle.) What is that?

NINA (looking). What is what?

CORSICANA (pointing at the bundle). That!

NINA (chuckling). Silly girl. What does it look like?

CORSICANA. A birthmark.

NINA. Well, that's what it is! The royal birthmark. There's no mistaking our little Ivanha. (She wraps IVANHA in the blanket and picks him up.) All better now. (She sits, rocks and hums softly.)

CORSICANA. When do you think Father will return to us?

NINA. You miss him, don't you?

CORSICANA. Would I miss the sun if it failed to rise, or the stars if they fell from the heavens?

NINA. How should I know?

CORSICANA. Of course I would miss them. Why did he have to run off to those silly old wars anyway?

NINA. Honor, my child. Honor and duty. And chivalry. And porcelain. Besides, boys will be boys. You know how excited he gets every time war is declared.

CORSICANA (crossing angrily, her face flushing with the indignation of youth). War, war, war! How I hate that word.

How I loathe it. Is there anything more horrendous than war?

NINA. Only anchovies. Anchovies are more horrendous than war. And perhaps liver.

CORSICANA. Why can't men live as brothers? Why can't we live in peace with the filthy heathens? We have our beliefs, why can't they have theirs?

NINA. Because theirs are wrong.

CORSICANA. Oh, I see. That explains it.

NINA. They believe women should wear bells on their toes.

CORSICANA. Disgusting. They should be wiped off the face of the earth, or at least be forced to live in the suburbs with the other vermin.

NINA. Your father will see to that.

CORSICANA. Why didn't Uncle Viscera go to the wars with Daddy?

NINA. The Court Physician ruled him unfit for battle. Something about an allergy to armor.

CORSICANA. He certainly makes things unpleasant around here. It seems the only people smiling these days are the tax collectors.

NINA. And the executioner, what with all that overtime pay.

CORSICANA. He may be Daddy's brother, but I can't bring myself to like him. Every time he comes around, I grow goose-bumpy with fear. He reminds me of an eel.

NINA. He reminds me of two eels. Viscera lusts for power and that makes him a dangerous man. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a set of patio furniture.

CORSICANA. Saxonia is an unhappy place now.

NINA. Sad but true. Viscera places unfair burdens on our people and brutalizes them into compliance. And every time I confront him, he brushes me aside as if I were nothing more than a bothersome insect.

CORSICANA. But you are the Queen. Surely he must listen.

NINA. Alas, I am a powerless Queen. Viscera rules until the day your father returns.

CORSICANA. May it be soon.

NINA. I wouldn't count on it. You know how picky your father is when it comes to buying porcelain.

(An ATTENDANT enters through the wall which is tear-away paper. He stumbles, falls, rises, looks around and then bows grandly.)

ATTENDANT. May it please the Queen.

NINA. May *what* please the Queen?

ATTENDANT. Prince Viscera wishes an audience with Your Majesty.

NINA (recoiling with loathing and dread in her voice). That does not please the Queen.

CORSICANA. Don't let him in, Mother.

NINA. Tell Prince Viscera that I am otherwise engaged.

ATTENDANT. He says that it is urgent.

NINA. Tell him I am feeling under the weather. Tell him I have the plague.

ATTENDANT. I told him that last time, Your Majesty.

NINA. Very well, tell him I am dead.

ATTENDANT (bowing). At once, Your Majesty.

(VISCERA, a darkly-evil man, enters R. Three swords are strapped to his hips and he has trouble walking without tripping over them. He wears a battle helmet with a bull's horn poking from the top of his head. He staggers in, trips, then regains his balance and strikes a pose.)

VISCERA. What seems to be the delay?

ATTENDANT. The Queen is dead.

VISCERA (looking from the ATTENDANT to NINA and back). Dead, you say?

ATTENDANT (looking from NINA to VISCERA). Dead.

VISCERA. She will be missed.

ATTENDANT. Verily.

NINA. How dare you enter my chambers without my permission!

VISCERA. A miracle! She lives! I shall declare a day of celebration.

NINA. I told my attendant to tell you I was dead tired. He simply misunderstood.

VISCERA (to ATTENDANT). Leave us, knave. I wish to speak to the Queen in private. (The ATTENDANT looks to NINA who nods. The ATTENDANT bows and exits R. VISCERA crosses and looks at IVANHA.) And how is the heir apparent to the throne feeling this fine morn? (He slithers his hand out

as if to touch IVANHA.)

NINA (shielding IVANHA from VISCERA). He's sleeping. I do not wish him disturbed. State your business, Viscera.

VISCERA. So be it. Would that it were good news. Would that I could bring you glad tidings.

CORSICANA. Your voice reeks of dark portent.

VISCERA. 'Fraid so. Word reached me not an hour ago that our great and noble King, your husband and father, Isadore the Supine of Saxonia, has fallen on hard times. (NINA and CORSICANA gasp. VISCERA smiles evilly.) Very hard times. (He breaks into laughter, then covers it by trying to weep.)

Oh, ye gods! (He shakes his fist at the sky.) Take my heart, my soul, my bronze bongos even . . . but not my King!

CORSICANA (growing weak and sitting next to the ashen-faced NINA). What are you saying, Uncle Vizzie? Are you saying . . .

VISCERA (nodding). Yep.

NINA (shaken, not stirred). Dead? The King is dead?

VISCERA. As good as dead. He has been captured by the infidels.

CORSICANA (shuddering). Captured! (NINA holds her.)

VISCERA. In a porcelain shop. He never had a chance.

CORSICANA. Oh, Mother! He is doomed, doomed. (VISCERA giggles and does a little dance step.)

NINA. Hush, child. He is alive. And where there is life, there is hope.

VISCERA (laughing). Oh, that's a good one.

NINA. They are no doubt holding him for ransom.

VISCERA. That is true. The filthy slime say they will release him if we come up with twenty thousand gold fonders, eleven milk cows and a thousand feet of beachfront property, undeveloped.

NINE (brightening). Well, then, I assume you have already set about collecting the ransom?

VISCERA. Would that I could.

CORSICANA. What's that supposed to mean?

VISCERA. How can I collect a ransom when it violates the wishes of the King? How many times have I heard him say it? "Not a penny for ransom!"

NINA. Not "ransom." "Transoms!" "Not a penny for transoms!" You know how he hated transoms. They reminded him of gallows.

VISCERA. Transoms, ransoms, what's the difference? There's a principle at stake here. If we give in to the infidels this time, there will be no end to it.

NINA. You would let him die then?

VISCERA. You can't put a price tag on honor. Believe me, if I were in his place, I'd expect him to do the same.

CORSICANA. That's easy for you to say.

VISCERA. You bet it is.

NINA. I won't let you get away with this, Viscera.

VISCERA. Get away with what? Dear Queen Nina, I assure you my motives are strictly honorable. What I do is for the good of all Saxonians.

NINA. Indeed? Where you are concerned, Viscera, ulterior and motive are synonymous. You want to be King.

VISCERA. Honest, I don't want to be King. If I'm lying, may a lightning bolt strike me where I stand! (He counts to three and steps aside as a lightning bolt clatters to the stage where he stood. Back to NINA.) Why should I want to be King? What do I want with wealth and power and prestige and beautiful handmaidens and the best seats at jousts? (He grows dreamy just contemplating it.) Besides, how could I be King? Little Ivanha is heir to the throne. I couldn't possibly be King unless

something happened to the little nipper, something horrible — an accident perhaps. (He smiles.) Yes . . . an accident. (To NINA.) God forbid!

NINA (shuddering and passing IVANHA to CORSICANA as she confronts VISCERA). I'll go to the Council of Lords.

VISCERA. I've disbanded the Council.

NINA. Then I shall appeal to the Order of Knights.

VISCERA. They've all gone to the Crusades.

NINA. I'll appeal to the Archbishop.

VISCERA. He's on administrative leave.

NINA. Then I shall take my case to the people!

VISCERA. They're in prison.

NINA. In prison? All of them? (VISCERA nods.) Charged with what?

VISCERA. Littering. I'm determined to put a stop to it.

NINA (pointing accusingly at VISCERA). Treachery has a face!

VISCERA. Everybody has a face.

CORSICANA. Uncle Vizzie, I beg of you, don't let this happen. Save my father. For once in your self-serving, smarmy life, do something good. Please.

VISCERA. I'll think about it.

CORSICANA. Thank you.

VISCERA (thinking for a moment). I thought about it. No deal.

NINA. Treason has a face!

VISCERA. Everybody has a face. Look, you're a little upset and that's understandable. Why don't you let me send Medulla over here. He can fix you up a little sedative and read your tea leaves.

NINA. You keep that evil sorcerer away from us.

VISCERA. Sorcerer?

CORSICANA. He is a devil.

VISCERA. Well, if you don't want Medulla, how about the

Court Jester? You could use a laugh or two. Let me send Shecky over.

NINA. Keep your vermin out of my chambers.

VISCERA. I really must be going. We're opening a new vocational training center for executioners and they've asked me to cut the ribbon . . . with an axe, no less. (He laughs, then sighs.) There's no humor like gallows humor.

NINA. Remember this, Viscera. He who sows the seeds of discontent reaps a vengeful harvest, or something like that.

VISCERA. I'll keep that in mind. (He crosses to IVANHA and puts his hand in Ivanha's face.) Don't play in the street, kid. (He yelps and draws his hand back.) He bit me!

CORSICANA. Oh, dear. Now we'll have to wash his mouth out.

VISCERA. Lucky for little Ivanha that I'm not the kind of guy who holds a grudge. (He makes a fist and mumbles.) Well, duty calls. (He crosses R.) And if you should need anything, don't hesitate to submit a request in writing. 'Bye. (He exits R.)

NINA. Viper!

CORSICANA. I'm afraid, Mother.

NINA. With good reason.

CORSICANA. You don't think he would do anything to Ivanha, do you?

NINA. This I do know. When Viscera was a baby, they hung a sign on his crib. The sign said "Cave Canem." It's a Latin phrase meaning "Beware of the Dog." The dog has grown into a wolf. (There is a wolf whistle offstage.) See what I mean?

CORSICANA. And the wolf has teeth.

NINA. Come, child. We must make preparations. The life of the future King is at stake. (There is a wolf howl offstage and the lights fade. NINA and CORSICANA exit R.)