

Scene Changes

by
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CHARACTERS

MATT - Matthew Simmons, male, married, 27

SAM - Samantha Wheelwright, ex-Brit, female, single, 40

SM - Stage Manager, three lines delivered offstage in ACT II

SCENES

ACT I Thirty Minutes till Tech Run

ACT II Thirty Minutes till Curtain

ACT III Final Curtain

SETTING

Concord NH in December where a traveling production of *A Christmas Carol* is being presented. The play takes place backstage where there are a number of set pieces and props. Most prominent is a small four poster bed prop used for the scenes in Scrooge's bedroom.

SYNOPSIS

Samantha Wheelwright, legendary ex-Brit, star of stage and film, whose career is faltering, finds herself performing the role of Mrs. Cratchit, in a traveling production of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The actor playing Bob Cratchit has suddenly taken ill and the producer, much to the dismay of Ms. Wheelwright, is forced to hire a much younger, inexperienced, local actor, Matthew Simmons.

This romantic dramedy shows what happens when youthful star-struck enthusiasm slams headlong into mid-life realism and cynicism. They both grow and learn from the encounter and, in the end, the world seems different - the scene changes.

ACT I

Backstage, thirty minutes till tech run.

At rise MATT is in makeup and costume for Bob Cratchit, holding a script and a takeout coffee cup, going over his lines.

SAM enters, dressed casually, holding a takeout coffee cup.

MATT

Oh my God! It's really you - Samantha Wheelwright.

SAM

Yes, I believe so - last I checked.

MATT

I - I couldn't believe it, when they, uh, told me you were - you know.

SAM

When they told you what? What in heaven's name are you babbling on about?

MATT

Sorry, I'm really surprised - to see you - here.

SAM

Yes, we all are - especially me. But who the hell are you?

MATT

Who, me?

(off SAM's look)

I'm, uh, you know, uh, your husband, uh...

SAM

My husband?

MATT

Yeah, your husband, Bob.

SAM

Oh, really?

MATT

Well, not like your real husband.

SAM

I would hope not - since I don't recall ever having a husband named *Bob*. What a dreadful thought - *Bob*. I'd much prefer Robert.

MATT

Yeah, well, I'm playing your - you know - husband - uh - I'm Matt, actually, Matt...

SAM

Oh, never mind. *Who* you are is frankly immaterial. The real question is - why on earth are you here - wandering around backstage?

MATT

Uh, I was, actually, looking for you to...

SAM

Looking for me?

MATT

Yeah, uh, I was needing to...

SAM

How the hell did you manage to get in here?

MATT

I came in, uh, over there - somewhere, uh...

SAM

Great! Some fool must have left the stage door open.

(calling out)

SECURITY. HAS ANYBODY SEEN SECURITY? WE SEEM TO HAVE A SITUATION HERE.

MATT

No. I'm actually, uh...

SAM

And what the hell are you doing in Fred's costume?

MATT

This is mine - I mean, not actually mine, but my, uh..

SAM

Wonderful! Now we have people wandering in off the streets playing dress up.

MATT

No, really, I'm supposed to be, uh, here. I'm supposed to be here.

SAM

HA. I seriously doubt that.

(calling out)

WHERE THE HELL IS SECURITY!

MATT

No, really, it's okay.

MATT moves towards SAM.

SAM

PLEASE, don't come near me.

MATT

Why? What's wrong?

SAM

You're not dangerous, are you?

MATT

No!

SAM

Of course you'd say that. Wouldn't expect you to admit to have recently escaped from some nut-house.

MATT

What? What do you mean?

SAM

(calling out)

SECURITY!

MATT

You think I'm some nut-case?

SAM

Keep your distance.

MATT

Trust me, I'm not some whack job.

SAM

So you claim.

MATT

I'm not - it's really okay.

SAM

No. Trust me. Ha. This is *not* okay.

MATT

I'm - I'm actually playing Bob Cratchit.

SAM

(incredulous)

Ha. Yes. Of course you are. Silly me.

(calling out)

SECURITY!

MATT

I am.

SAM

And they call me crazy.

MATT

I'm not crazy!

SAM

Now don't get excited. We'll soon have you back in your cozy little room, back on your meds...

(taking a closer look)

Is that makeup you're wearing?

MATT

Uh, yeah.

SAM

(calling out)

SECURITY!

*MATT puts down his script and cup,
puts on his scarf and top hat.*

MATT

No, here, really - I'll - I'll show you.
(as Bob Cratchit)

We're home.

MATT takes off the scarf and top hat and tries to hand them to SAM.

SAM knocks the hat and scarf to the floor.

SAM

(horrified)

What the hell do you think you're doing?

MATT picks up the hat and scarf.

MATT

The first Cratchit scene - when Tim and I come home? I say,
(as Bob Cratchit)

We're home.

(normal)

Then I give you the hat and scarf.

MATT hands the hat and scarf to SAM, who reluctantly takes them.

SAM

(sotto voce)

Security.

MATT

And then you ask, "How was the service...?"

SAM

(overlapping, breathless horror)

- the service dear?

MATT

Right. And I say,

(as Bob Cratchit)

"Beautiful as always. Where's Martha?"

SAM throws the hat and scarf.

During the following rant, MATT picks up the hat and scarf and neatly places them aside, then picks up his script and cup.

SAM

Oh my god.

(yelling at an imagined producer, pointing at MATT)

ARE YOU KIDDING ME!? THIS. HE'S THE REPLACEMENT? NO. No.

(thinks, beat)

ALRIGHT, ALL RIGHT. LISTEN. SEEING THAT I AM THE ONLY SANE PERSON IN THIS PRODUCTION, I'LL EXPLAIN TO YOU HOW THIS IS GOING TO WORK. WE HAVE EXACTLY TWENTY FIVE MINUTES TILL OUR TECH RUN. SO, YOU EITHER FIND A SUITABLE REPLACEMENT BEFORE THEN, OR PUT A HOLD ON THE TECH RUN UNTIL YOU DO, OR - OR YOU SIMPLY CANCEL THE SHOW - THOSE ARE YOUR ONLY OPTIONS. PERIOD.

(listens, incredulous)

WHAT'S WRONG!? WHAT'S WRONG!? MY GOD! HAVE YOU TOTALLY LOST YOUR MIND!? HE'S TWELVE! ... YES HE IS! LOOK AT HIM!

(to MATT)

How old are you dear?

MATT

Twenty seven.

SAM

Ha! No. Trust me. You're twelve, sweetie.

(to the producer)

HE'S TWELVE... I DON'T CARE HOW MANY GREASE PENCIL LINES YOU PUT ON HIM, HE IS STILL GOING TO LOOK TWELVE AND IT WILL BE A BLOODY JOKE!

MATT

They really can do a lot with makeup.

SAM

Excuse me, but, am I talking to you?

MATT

No, I was saying...

SAM

No, no, no, no, no. See, I'm trying to fix a problem here, and once I've resolved this casting catastrophe, you will no longer be here. It's nothing personal.

MATT

I know, but - I'm saying - it's amazing what they can - you know - do - with makeup.

SAM

(sotto voce)

Unbelievable.

MATT

Right, it's like totally incredible; the way they use shadowing to make features stand out and all it's - it's like an art. Right? I mean - that's why they're called makeup artists?

SAM

(dryly)

How insightful.

MATT

Thanks!

SAM

So, are you done, sweetie? Or do you have other gems of acute observation you wish to share?

MATT

No. That's it.

SAM

Good. I think I see what's going on here.

(unamused, calling out)

ALL RIGHT, I GET IT. YOU'RE ALL MESSING WITH ME. THIS IS ALL A JOKE. HA. VERY FUNNY. THOUGH YOU'LL HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN THIS IF YOU WANT TO FOOL ME. THIS IS SIMPLY TOO RIDICULOUS. ABSURD. SO. WHERE IS HE? WHERE IS THE REAL REPLACEMENT? ... NO. COME NOW. YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN. IT'S TIME TO STOP PLAYING GAMES. WHERE IS HE? ...

(pointing at MATT)

YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!

MATT

Don't worry, I really can do this.

SAM stares at MATT for a couple beats before breaking out in fits of incredulous laughter.

SAM

HA... HA HA... HA...

MATT

No, really - I am I - I actually played Bob Cratchit in High School.

SAM

Oh, well, why didn't you say so. High School... Here, hold this.

SAM shoves her coffee cup into MATT's hand, takes out her cellphone and starts dialing a number.

MATT

Sure, no problem.

MATT does his best to manage holding two coffee cups and his script.

SAM

(to the producer)

I'M CALLING GERRI AND TRUST ME - IF YOU INSIST ON GOING FORWARD WITH THIS LITTLE CHARADE, THERE WILL BE *BLOOD!*

(into phone)

Hello, Mary. It's Sam. I need to talk to Gerri right away... Yes! It's an emergency.

(on hold, looks at MATT, muttering to herself)

Unbelievable. High School. HA.

SAM grabs what she thinks is her coffee cup.

MATT

Actually, that's my cup.

SAM and MATT exchange cups. SAM takes a drink, only to discover that her cup is empty