

# CAULDRON BUBBLE

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A full-length comedy by  
Brian Daly

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

SPENCER WILSON, male, the ambitious student director.

TEACHER, any gender, in the hallway.

MR./MRS. TALBOT, any gender, Spencer's English teacher.

SUE STEIN, female, the cool intern.

RUDY, male, tough.

CAMDEN, female, the Queen Bee who rules Spencer's class.

TAYLOR, female, Camden's handmaiden.

JASON, male, infatuated with Camden.

DOUGLAS, male, pompous.

DANA, female, ethereal.

BUNNY, female, childlike.

MAGDA FALLON-ST. THOMAS, female, the very theatrical drama teacher.

MR. BOYLE, male, the dimwitted principal.

MISS CONNORS, female, the crabby school secretary who adores Mr. Boyle.

Three O. G. WITCHES, any gender, here from ancient Scotland.

COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, any gender.

SHAKESPEARE, male.

## SETTING NOTES

When The Theater Project did *Cauldron Bubble*, the sets were minimal. The English classroom had a table and chair for Mr. Talbot, and the students carried their own folding chairs onto the stage; they didn't use desks.

For the *Macbeth* play-within-a-play at the end, an image of a theater audience was projected onto the back wall to give the impression that we were seeing the action from backstage, looking out at the audience. A curtain was pulled back from time to time to give us a look at *Macbeth* being presented on the stage, but most of the scene was played backstage with the curtain closed. If you would rather not use a projection for this scene, it's easy enough to use lights and a few pieces of scenery to designate three areas: audience, stage and backstage.

### PRODUCTION NOTES

If you'd like, the role of Spencer may be played by two actors, with one handling the interior monologue of Spencer--that is, the "out" lines.

The director can assign any available actor or actress to play Malcolm in Scenes 14 and 17.

In Scene 15, if you can find a safe way to attach sparklers or something similar to Camden's hair for a sizzling-fuse look, that would be great. If you can't, don't worry about it. When the play was done at The Theater Project, the actress playing Camden took her wig off while her head was inside the cauldron, and when she stood up, the audience saw her hair matted down on her head.

In Scene 17, you may substitute another witch and another rapper for Maleficent and Wiz Khalifa if you'd like to do that.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*Cauldron Bubble* premiered at The Theater Project (Brunswick, ME). Putnam Smith was the director of the play, and Wendy Poole was the executive director of the theater.

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**SCENE 1**

*(A contemporary high school. SPENCER WILSON is navigating the hallways. He's glib, haughty, self-dramatizing and solitary.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* I go to Parkside High, home of the Not-So-Great-Apes. Wait. That might not be their name. But what is it? I have to remember what to call them so I can cheer them on to victory in the Big Game. Oh, please. If you see me at the Big Game or even the Petite But Adorable Game, shoot me. Shoot me dead before I cram my hand into a foam "We're Number One" finger.

*(Spencer passes a TEACHER standing outside her classroom door. He nods and smiles.)*

**TEACHER:** Hey...

*(She can't think of his name. Fake smile.)*

How's it going?

*(Spencer sticks a thumb up.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Hey, how's it going, *Spencer*. Just once.

*(He exits.)*

**SCENE 2**

*(English classroom. MR. TALBOT, ancient and doddering, is at his desk, flummoxed by his iPad. Hip SUE STEIN [20s] enters.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Mr. Talbot?

*(Nothing from him. He's concentrating.)*

I'm your intern.

*(She walks to him with an outstretched hand.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** What?

**MS. STEIN:** I'm Sue Stein. Your intern.

**MR. TALBOT:** Oh, my goodness. Welcome to Parkside High, Ms. Stein. Milton Talbot.

*(They shake. Spencer enters and is surprised to see Ms. Stein.)*

**SPENCER:** Hi.

**MS. STEIN:** Hi.

**MR. TALBOT:** *(To Ms. Stein:)* This is one of your sophomore English students: Schuyler Watson.

**SPENCER:** It's Spencer Wilson.

**MS. STEIN:** Ms. Stein. Nice to meet you, Spencer.

*(We hear a bright and joyous ding because Ms. Stein got Spencer's name right.)*

**SPENCER:** Right. Spencer. Nice to meet you, too, Ms. Stein.

**MS. STEIN:** I'm going to be here for a while doing an internship.

**MR. TALBOT:** Teaching *Macbeth*.

**MS. STEIN:** Really?

**MR. TALBOT:** Oh, yes. Every year at this time. You can use my *Macbeth* file.

*(He produces a tome and drops it onto his desk.)*

*(STUDENTS are entering and texting while they take their seats.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Do you mean now?

**MR. TALBOT:** No time like the present. I'll introduce you.

*(Quick blackout. Several minutes pass.)*

*(And we're back. Ms. Stein reads the Macbeth file to bored Students.)*

**MS. STEIN:** The Bard arranged words to suit his needs and desires, whether to create rhythm or to highlight phrases or to

make a character's speech pattern unique. At times he inverted the typical word order of English speech. For instance, a character might say "goes he" instead of "he goes."

*(Tough RUDY raises his muscular arm. Spencer tries not to look at him.)*

**RUDY:** Ms. Stein, I've got to go.

**MS. STEIN:** Go? You mean to the—?

**RUDY:** Bad.

**MR. TALBOT:** You're in high school, Rudy, and it's time you learned self-control. See if you can hold on.

*(Rudy slumps at his desk and scowls.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* When they get around to remaking the juvenile delinquent movies of the 1950s, Rudy will be cast as a brooding loner in a tight t-shirt who gets shot accidentally when a zip gun battle breaks out at the Pulaski Day Dance.

*(Ms. Stein puts the Macbeth file down.)*

**MS. STEIN:** You know, kids, William Shakespeare was a playwright trying to forge a career in an iffy business, and he did it. He really did it. He wrote his plays four hundred years ago, and they still speak to us. One of the topics we'll explore in this one is ambition. Ambition drove Shakespeare to make a name for himself in the theatre, and ambition drove Macbeth to make a name for himself by murdering Duncan and—

**MR. TALBOT:** All well and good. Thank you, Ms. Stein. Now please return to the lesson.

*(Spencer makes a note.)*

*(Queen Bee CAMDEN, watching a video on her iPad with earbuds plugged in underneath her mane of perfect hair, snaps her fingers. TAYLOR, her minion, leans forward from the desk behind her.)*



**CAMDEN:** Write that down.

*(Taylor obeys.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Last year, all Taylor was allowed to do for Camden was give her her dessert at lunch, and now this year she picks out the horror movies that Camden watches in school. If that isn't the American Dream in action, I don't know what is. Of course she makes herself sick worrying that her movie selection might displease Her Highness, but today's movie seems to be a winner. From what I can glimpse, it has something to do with dead teenagers. Maybe you've seen it.

*(Ms. Stein hoists the Macbeth file and reads.)*

**MS. STEIN:** In the year 1603, King James VI of Scotland ascended to the throne of England, at which time he also became known as King James I. Londoners of the day became as interested in Scottish culture as students at Parkside High are today.

*(Heads are doing the slow orbit thing, and there is drooling.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Well, there's a meaningful benchmark.

*(The school bell rings. Students exit groggily, checking their phones, but Spencer stays behind and highlights his notebook.)*

*(Out:)* Ambition. Make a name for himself. Theatre. The seed of an idea is taking root in the mental soil inside the cerebral flowerpot on the psychological windowsill of my mind's kitchen, right next to the virtual spider plant.

*(At the front of the room, Ms. Stein is wiped out.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** Too bad the way you lost them. They were bored.

**MS. STEIN:** Can't this wait, Mr. Talbot?

*(Ms. Stein points discreetly at Spencer.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** I think we should talk about it now while we're alone and straighten it out so you can make the most of your internship. You do want to become a good English teacher, don't you?

**MS. STEIN:** Yes.

**MR. TALBOT:** Of course you do. Now, do you know why the little savages weren't paying attention?

**MS. STEIN:** Because I was reading to them and they had trouble listening?

**MR. TALBOT:** Oh, don't blame your students, Ms. Stein. You don't really mean that, do you? When you presented the material in the file, you failed to maintain eye contact with them.

**MS. STEIN:** How am I supposed to read your *Macbeth* file word for word and maintain eye contact with the kids at the same time?

**MR. TALBOT:** Ms. Stein, you can't rely on me for all the answers. You have to accept responsibility for your own education.

**MS. STEIN:** Okay. Will do.

*(She tries hard to stay cool.)*

**SPENCER:** Mr. Talbot?

**MR. TALBOT:** Yes?

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* He saw me. *(To Mr. Talbot:)* I have an idea.

**MR. TALBOT:** What is it, Sandler?

**SPENCER:** Spencer. Mr. Talbot, I think we ought to study *Macbeth* by putting it on as a play with me as director.

**MR. TALBOT:** That's not the way I teach literature.

**SPENCER:** But *Macbeth* is a play. It should be put on and seen.

**MR. TALBOT:** First it should be studied.

**SPENCER:** There's no better way to study it.

**MR. TALBOT:** Young man, staging a play is a huge undertaking, but staging a Shakespeare play is even more of a challenge. It's far beyond the meager intellectual capacity of the students in this class. There's simply too much to learn.

**SPENCER:** That's why we're in school.

**MR. TALBOT:** Absolutely not. We will study *Macbeth* as we've always studied it. For your own good and the good of all your classmates, I have to say no to this idea.

**MS. STEIN:** Let's do it.

**MR. TALBOT:** What did you say, Ms. Stein?

**MS. STEIN:** I said let's do it.

**MR. TALBOT:** You're overruling me?

**MS. STEIN:** I just want to accept responsibility for my education and make the most of my internship.

*(Mr. Talbot thinks. Makes her wait.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** All right then. I see Macbeth's ambition is rubbing off on you two already, but just remember what happened to him.

*(Mr. Talbot exits.)*

**SPENCER:** Thank you, Ms. Stein. This means so much to me.

**MS. STEIN:** It's going to be great.

**SPENCER:** Thanks to you.

**MS. STEIN:** Thanks to *you*. I don't know what I'm doing.

**SPENCER:** You don't?

**MS. STEIN:** I know nothing about the theatre.

**SPENCER:** Really?

**MS. STEIN:** Really. But I know how to get what I want.

**SPENCER:** You do?

**MS. STEIN:** No. But we'll figure it out.

### SCENE 3

*(English classroom. Next day. Camden is making minor adjustments to her hair, using her iPad as a mirror. Taylor and JASON, who is infatuated with Camden, are watching her.)*

*(Spencer and Ms. Stein enter, and Spencer turns the lights off. Camden shrieks. Spencer turns the lights back on.)*

**CAMDEN:** *(To Spencer:)* Look what you made me do.

*(Her hair is slightly mussed up.)*

What a tool, turning the lights off and not telling anybody.

**TAYLOR:** You're such a tool.

**JASON:** I can't believe what a tool you are.

**SPENCER:** What's my takeaway?

**MS. STEIN:** Let's try it again.

*(Spencer turns the lights off, and scary music plays from Ms. Stein's iPad.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* "Terrifying Tunes from the Boneyard." This music gave me the shivers the year Mom and I dressed up as Big Edie and Little Edie to pass out the Halloween candy. Loved that scarf.

*(Mr. Talbot enters.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** What's this?

**MS. STEIN:** *(To the Students:)* It's a tale of ghosts and murder and nightmares and madness. It's *Macbeth*.

**MR. TALBOT:** The file, Ms. Stein.

*(She does not open the file.)*

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**MS. STEIN:** *(To the Students:)* We've already talked about King James of Scotland becoming the king of England too in 1603, but we haven't mentioned that he was interested in witchcraft. In fact, he wrote a book on how to identify witches. So *Macbeth* was written to be more than a crowd-pleaser; it was written to be a king-pleaser, too. But legend has it that Shakespeare wrote authentic incantations in the scenes that had witches in them. Yes. What the witch characters did and said on the stage was what real witches did and said in private. And when the real witches found out their secrets were going to be revealed on the stage of the Globe Theatre, they got mad. And do you know what they did? They put a curse on the play.

**MR. TALBOT:** Oh, Ms. Stein.

**MS. STEIN:** The production is cursed if anybody says the name of the play inside the theater.

**RUDY:** What do you mean cursed? Like they get small crowds?

**MS. STEIN:** Worse than that. Like the actor who was supposed to play Lady Macbeth in the premiere got sick and died. Like an actor in another production of the play accidentally used a real knife when he stabbed Duncan, and killed him. Throughout history, countless productions have fallen victim to the *Macbeth* Curse. That's why even now, in these enlightened times, actors refer to *Macbeth* as The Scottish Play when they're inside the theater. And if someone says the last line of the play before opening night, the Curse is complete.

**RUDY:** What does that mean, "The Curse is complete"?

**MS. STEIN:** I don't know.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Maybe nobody has ever lived to tell.

**MS. STEIN:** Now, I have exciting news, everybody. For our study of *Macbeth*, we're going to form our own theatre company and put the play on.

*(The Students look at Camden to see how she'll react, but she's watching a video.)*

Won't that be fun? The important thing is we'll think deeply about the play, and after the production, we'll have a deep understanding of it.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Let's be frank. The kids in my English class are not known for their deep thoughts. You see, ours is a "baccalaureate" class. Sounds impressive, doesn't it? Well, on the academic totem pole here at Parkside High, "baccalaureate" is at the bottom. Grass grows up around us. Dogs lift their legs and pee on us.

**MS. STEIN:** We'll investigate *Macbeth* and figure out how to present it. To act a scene, we'll have to understand the intentions of the characters. What do they want? And to understand what they want, we'll have to understand Shakespeare's language, his poetry. What do the words mean? Then, through our acting, we'll have to make the characters' intentions clear to the audience. To put it succinctly, we'll have to understand the play.

*(Camden pulls her earbuds out.)*

**CAMDEN:** Wait. You can't make us act in a play. I signed up for English, not drama.

**TAYLOR:** Camden's right.

**JASON:** This is English, not drama.

**MS. STEIN:** We're going to study the play by putting it on. That's how I'm teaching you.

**CAMDEN:** You have no right to do that. You aren't even a teacher. You're just a... What are you?

**MS. STEIN:** I'm an intern, and I'm your teacher while I'm here.

**CAMDEN:** Mr. Talbot, is she in charge?

**MR. TALBOT:** Yes, Ms. Stein is in charge.

*(The school bell rings. As the Students exit...)*

**CAMDEN:** Well, I won't do it.

**TAYLOR:** No way.

**JASON:** Never.

*(Spencer catches up with Camden.)*

**SPENCER:** Camden? May I have a word with you? It's important.

**CAMDEN:** How could anything you say be important to me?

**SPENCER:** It's about you.

**CAMDEN:** Well?

**SPENCER:** I'm directing *Macbeth*.

**CAMDEN:** I thought you said this was going to be about me.

**SPENCER:** It is. Camden, I need you.

**CAMDEN:** That's just disgusting. If you have some perverted idea in mind, I swear I'll report you and have you expelled.

**SPENCER:** I know you will. I know you can do it. And that's why I need you to play Lady Macbeth. This role is ideal for your gift.

**CAMDEN:** My hair?

**SPENCER:** Your gift of leadership. You control this class. And you could make Macbeth kill Duncan.

**CAMDEN:** Of course I could. No problem.

**SPENCER:** If you play Lady Macbeth, this production will take off. Everybody in the class will be inspired by you and try to be like you.

**CAMDEN:** Good luck with that. As if.

**SPENCER:** So you'll consider playing the role of Lady Macbeth?

**CAMDEN:** I'll consider it.

**SPENCER:** Thank you. Thank you. Now Camden, Ms. Stein and I have to open the auditions to everyone, but I want you to know that if you audition for the role of Lady Macbeth, it's yours.

**CAMDEN:** I'm surprised you can see my talent. I thought you'd be holding a grudge after — you know — what happened.

**SPENCER:** Me? You're kidding. I've forgotten all about it.

**CAMDEN:** Really? It was a pretty big deal at the time.

**SPENCER:** Fourth grade was a lifetime ago.

**CAMDEN:** Well, maybe you've gotten over it, but you were mad then.

**SPENCER:** I can't remember. (*Out:*) That's true. I can't remember a thing. Really. I don't remember what led up to the incident. I suppose it could have been a cruel remark Camden made about my love of singing and dancing and acting. That one thoughtless comment of hers could have provoked some organized teasing, and I suppose that could have metastasized into day-long harassment in the classroom and out on the playground. That might have been it, but my memory of the time is foggy. I've even forgotten the details of how the incident happened that night, with Camden telling the boys to pull the dress on over my head and hold me down while she put the lipstick on me. I can't remember how they pushed me out into the bright lights of the stage. And then before I could



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make a move to run away, Mrs. Kane was playing the introduction to the song I'd been working on for weeks, and all of a sudden I was making myself sing, even though I was mortified. It was all I could do not to cry. The details are lost now, faded away, but the thing is I doubt that a boy soprano had ever sung "Some Enchanted Evening" better than I did that night. I put all my feeling into that song, turning my rage into something beautiful. But I've forgotten everything. The whispering and pointing while I sang. The puzzled expressions on the parents' faces. Mom and Grammy looking stricken but proud in a defiant way. How I finished the song and walked off the stage never to return. That's all forgotten. Gone. Whoosh. I can't remember a thing.

**CAMDEN:** Well, I remember all of it. It was so funny.

#### SCENE 4

*(English classroom. Another day. Mr. Talbot sits at his desk while Ms. Stein stands in front of the class of Students.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Who wrote out a speech and brought it to class today to read for the audition? Douglas, did you copy Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech longhand?

*(DOUGLAS is pompous.)*

**DOUGLAS:** Not to my knowledge.

**MS. STEIN:** Have any girls copied Lady Macbeth's "full of the milk of human kindness" speech?

**CAMDEN:** I didn't copy it, but I'm ready. I'll go first.

*(She glides to the front of the room.)*

**SPENCER:** *(To Camden:)* Okay, here's the situation. Lady Macbeth has just read a letter from Macbeth, her husband, that lays out what the Witches said to him. They said he'll be king.

Remember? And now Lady Macbeth wonders if her husband is man enough to become king.

**CAMDEN:** Of course I remember.

*(She takes a moment.)*

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
 What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;  
 It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
 To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;  
 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,  
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,  
 And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,  
 That which cries "Thus thou must do, if thou have it;  
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
 Than wishest should be undone." Hie thee hither,  
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;  
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
 To have thee crown'd withal.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* She can act. Who knew? I was sure she'd be terrible. How can a person that shallow – and I mean one cell thick – feel something and express it so fully that other people can feel it?

**MS. STEIN:** Thank you, Camden. Are there any other girls who would like to audition?

**TAYLOR:** Me.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* What? Taylor competing with Camden?

**TAYLOR:** Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
 What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;  
 It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
 To catch the nearest way.

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**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) Now I get it. Taylor is a foil for Camden. She's the velvet fabric draped across the shelf of the display case, and Camden is the diamond shining in the center of it.

(*Ethereal DANA is up now.*)

**DANA:** I dedicate this performance to my husband, the adorable Mr. Trent Adams.

**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) Dana. Living in Dana World. "Married" to a vapid pop singer she's never met.

**DANA:** Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way.

**MS. STEIN:** Thank you, Dana. Bunny?

(*Childlike BUNNY gets up holding her toy bunny.*)

**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) I still marvel at how Bunny worked puppies into her essay on the gold standard.

**BUNNY:** (*Using her bunny like a puppet:*) Glamis thou art, and  
Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way.

**MS. STEIN:** Now the boys with Macbeth's final soliloquy, the "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech. It's the one he delivers after Lady Macbeth dies.

(*Douglas goes first.*)

**DOUGLAS:** She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

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The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Douglas. Bless his heart. He is not smart. The thing is he gives the impression that he's smart, and that's all that matters. He'll make a good Banquo.

*(Jason gets up and takes a look at Camden.)*

Jason could be our Macbeth. He's used to getting bossed around by Camden.

**JASON:** She should have died hereafter.

*(He looks for a reaction from Camden. Doesn't get one.)*

*(Pouring it on:)* There would have been time for such a...

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* If a hesitation can be characterized as a pregnant pause, then this gestation period is long enough for the full development of an elephant fetus. "Boil some water. Rip some towels. Run out and buy up the entire inventory of the Bath Barn! Go go go! STAT! They're having their Annual Tent Sale!"

**JASON:** ...WORD!!!!

## SCENE 5

*(School basement. Another day. Spencer shows us an invitation.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Ms. Magda Fallon-St. Thomas requests the favour of my presence for a private luncheon meeting today in the Drama Den at 11:30. "Favour" spelled the British way. How urbane. I think the Drama Den is down here beneath the auditorium.

*(We hear odd clanks and creaks and drips as Spencer makes his way toward the mysterious Drama Den...)*

*(Out:)* A cult of personality has sprung up around La Magda over the years, theatre kids hanging on every crisply articulated syllable while she regales them with tales of her glorious experiences in the theatre, which consist primarily of serving as an assistant costumer for a bus-and-truck production of *Brush Your Teeth*, an insipid oral-hygiene musical aimed at the very young. When it came to my elementary school, I detested it immediately. The mugging and the banal songs sung to recorded tracks made me grind my teeth, which ran counter to the stirring message about dental health, so I pretended to faint and was carried away on a tumbling mat and allowed to rest in the nurse's office until the show was over.

*(He looks around.)*

*(Out:)* How deep beneath the school am I? If this isn't the bowels of the earth, it's bowels-adjacent. This might be the spleen of the earth. I wouldn't be surprised if I have to dodge blind ponies pulling wagons of coal. Oh, look! A masked tenor standing in a skiff, transporting a soprano to his subterranean lair.

*(Spencer goes through a doorway into the Drama Den. MAGDA FALLON-ST. THOMAS, dressed in her trademark bold-print caftan and lofty turban, is lounging on a throne.)*

**MAGDA:** Darling. Do sit.

*(She wiggles her fingers to show Spencer a pillow directly in front of her – and beneath her. As Spencer tries without success to get comfortable...)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Should I sit criss-cross applesauce? No, thank you. I'm not a yogi. But sticking my legs out straight will make me look as if I should say "Whee!" and slide down an icy hill on a toboggan like Morales in *A Chorus Line*.

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**MAGDA:** I've heard you're directing *The Scottish Play*. How exciting. Unprecedented, actually. No student has ever directed a play here before. But what a play to direct. Thrilling. Tell me, dear boy, what are your plans for this production?

**SPENCER:** I don't know yet.

**MAGDA:** Nothing in mind?

**SPENCER:** Well, I guess I'd like to mount a traditional production. (*Out:*) I *guess* I'd like to mount a traditional production? I *know* I do. Of course I do. I despise alternative settings for Shakespeare's plays. What's wrong with kings and thanes and Scotland? What's to be gained by making Duncan the captain of an Ultimate Frisbee team?

**MAGDA:** Traditional. Marvelous. And when does the show go up?

**SPENCER:** I haven't set a date yet. I'd like to see how rehearsals go first. Get a feel for how long it'll take to put everything together.

**MAGDA:** You sound like an old pro, but you haven't worked with me.

**SPENCER:** No.

**MAGDA:** Have you done community theatre?

**SPENCER:** No.

**MAGDA:** Theatre camp?

**SPENCER:** No.

**MAGDA:** Really. An absolute tyro. Such ambition. Remarkable.

**SPENCER:** Thank you.

**MAGDA:** Well, break a leg. Ginger snap?

*(She offers Spencer a plate of cookies.)*

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**SPENCER:** No, thank you.

*(And that's that. Magda puts the cookies away, flips her iPad open, and gets busy.)*

*(Out:)* We're done? What happened to joining her for a luncheon meeting? *(To Magda:)* I'd better be going.

**MAGDA:** Lovely meeting you.

*(Her focus is on her iPad. As Spencer exits...)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* I find this woman unsettling. And there's more to a luncheon meeting than ginger snaps.

## SCENE 6

*(Auditorium. Spencer is talking with Ms. Stein as the Actors [the Students will be called this from now on] enter.)*

**MS. STEIN:** I'm so glad we've finally finished the read-through.

**SPENCER:** Four days of torture. I would have confessed to anything just to make it stop. In fact, I'll confess to you right now so I won't have to sit through anything like that ever again. Here goes: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum art heist in Boston? I did it. The Rembrandt, the Vermeer, the Manet, all hanging in my room.

**MS. STEIN:** You weren't alive then.

**SPENCER:** That's just a technicality. The preponderance of evidence will show I did it. I also murdered Tupac and Biggie. *(To the Actors:)* Today we're going to do some improvisation to explore our characters, so let's have everybody up here on the stage.

*(The Actors move slowly into place.)*

We'll take a moment to get into character. If you play multiple characters, pick one.

*(Spencer is much more excited about this exercise than the Actors are.)*

Now imagine this space is an art museum, and you're in it. Go.

*(The Actors do not go.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Probably not a good idea for us to tell them what to do.

**SPENCER:** Right. Let's just see what happens.

*(Nothing happens. The Actors' phones come out. Blackout.)*

*(And we're back. Another day.)*

We're going to try some more improv. You've come so far with your character work. Today we walk. Macbeth and Banquo? You've just led your soldiers to victory in battle. Can you imagine how you're feeling?

**DOUGLAS:** Of course.

**SPENCER:** Good. Now walk the way Banquo is walking after the battle. And as you walk, make right-angle turns when I tell you to.

**DOUGLAS:** Clarifying question: What is your definition of a right-angle turn?

**SPENCER:** Ninety degrees.

**DOUGLAS:** That would be the assumption.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* And I assume Douglas thinks I'm talking about ninety degrees as in a heat wave in Scotland. "Mix some sunscreen in with the war paint, lads!"

*(Douglas walks. Jason does not.)*

Turn.

*(Douglas turns, and Spencer is delighted.)*

**JASON:** I don't get it.



**SPENCER:** Try to feel what Macbeth is feeling after the battle. Is he tired? Exhilarated? Do Macbeth and Banquo want to keep going and win more battles, or do they want to break their swords and never fight again?

**JASON:** I don't know. What does it say in the book?

**SPENCER:** Walk and see what happens.

*(Jason walks, sure that Spencer has lost his mind.)*

Witches.

*(The Witches – played by Taylor, Dana and Bunny – get moving.)*

**BUNNY:** I'm scared. What if I'm real?

**SPENCER:** I don't know how to answer that question.

*(Bunny skips. Taylor bends over as if she has a concrete birdbath strapped to her back and glances at Camden to see what she thinks. Dana closes her eyes and puts her hands out in front of her and walks tentatively.)*

Turn.

*(Douglas and Jason and the Witches turn.)*

Good. Now let's get Lady Macbeth out here.

*(Camden joins the other Actors, and as soon as she gets out there, the Actors dial their walks down and try to read her for a sign of approval.)*

Great! Now everybody in the cast get out here and walk as your character.

*(The rest of the Actors join in.)*

Turn.

*(Everybody turns. Mr. Talbot enters and looks at the Actors walking around.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** What's this?

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**MS. STEIN:** They're getting to know their characters.

**MR. TALBOT:** Are they? I see students walking. What about getting to know their lines?

**SPENCER:** (*Butting in:*) The actors will inhabit their characters so fully that the lines will come organically.

**MR. TALBOT:** Well, as the Bard said, "If it were done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

(*As Mr. Talbot exits...*)

**RUDY:** (*To Mr. Talbot:*) That's not what he said.

(*But Mr. Talbot keeps going. The school bell rings.*)

**MS. STEIN:** That's it for today, everybody.

**SPENCER:** (*To the Actors:*) Thank you all. See you tomorrow.

(*The Actors exit, checking their phones.*)

(*Spencer looks around the stage, tugging at ropes, feeling the fabric of the curtain, taking it all in.*)

(*To Ms. Stein:*) We're getting there.

**MS. STEIN:** Well...

**SPENCER:** I feel the play coming alive. Don't you?

**MS. STEIN:** Well...

**SPENCER:** And I feel alive. I feel alive in the theater. I love this place. This is the temple where I worship, and at this moment I feel as if I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.

**MS. STEIN:** I think you're right, Spencer.

**SPENCER:** Ms. Stein, this is going to be the best *Macbeth* ever. (*Wails.*) No-o-o-o-o!

**MS. STEIN:** What? What is it?

**SPENCER:** Now I've done it.

**MS. STEIN:** Done what?

**SPENCER:** The *Macbeth* Curse. Didn't you hear me?

**MS. STEIN:** Oh, Spencer, it's just a superstition.

**SPENCER:** And?

**MS. STEIN:** Well, that's all it is. You said the title of *The Scottish Play* inside the theater, but that means nothing.

**SPENCER:** This from the woman who lectured her class with detailed accounts of the horrors that befell the cast and crew of cursed productions.

**MS. STEIN:** That was just to get them interested. You haven't cursed our play. There's no such thing as the *Macbeth* Curse.

**SPENCER:** Really, Ms. Stein? Then tell me how the Curse has stayed strong all these years. And why haven't other plays been cursed like this one? People say "Arsenic and Old Lace" and nothing bad happens, but people say you-know-what and there's wholesale slaughter. The blood of actors runs down the aisles and pools up in the orchestra pit. You know it does. Souvenir caskets are sold in the lobby. Plaid lining. Actually tartan. Dress MacGregor.

**MS. STEIN:** You're exaggerating.

**SPENCER:** I never exaggerate. Why isn't there a superstition about saying "Kinky Boots"?

**MS. STEIN:** I don't know.

**SPENCER:** It's because all the bad luck is focused on *The Scottish Play*. It just is. Believe me. You'll see. This production is doomed.

**MS. STEIN:** Well, let's take a look at what we're working with if you want to talk about doom. You haven't directed before. That doesn't bode well for this project. As for me, the faculty adviser, I don't know the first thing about putting on a play. Dicey, right? And our cast is made up of total novices who've

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been forced into doing this play like a road crew working out of a southern prison. We don't stand a chance, Spencer. Doom is staring us in the face even without the *Macbeth* Curse.

*(Suddenly a sandbag counterweight attached to a rope breaks free and swings down and clobbers Ms. Stein with an outsized whomp.)*

### SCENE 7

*(Spencer enters wearing a bathrobe.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* I can't sleep. Spencer Wilson hath murder'd sleep. I went to bed and stared at the ceiling, wondering if the entire cast will suffer. What might happen to them? Appalling verbs came to mind: impale, dismember, asphyxiate, decapitate. With all the stress I'm under and the lack of sleep, I can feel the free radicals ripping into my body's various systems and aging me prematurely. What a disaster for me and for the theatre. I might be forced to skip juvenile roles and go right into character parts. Goodbye, Rolf. Hello, Max. I could benefit from a spa getaway. A multi-day cleanse would be nice. You must have noticed by now that I can seem too cool for school, but I want you to know that I really am heartsick about what I've done, and so I'm going to screw my courage to the sticking place and try to take the Curse off this production. And I want you to know something else: I really am too cool for school.

### SCENE 8

*(The corridor outside the auditorium. Spencer enters nervously. He turns around to the right three times, spits on the floor, and knocks on the door of the auditorium.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Reads:)* Angels and Ministers of Grace defend us!  
*(Out:)* There. That did it.

---

*(Spencer opens the door and enters the auditorium. Relieved, he enters and joins Ms. Stein, Mr. Talbot and the Actors. Everybody in here is stressed out, and disorder reigns.)*

**CAMDEN:** Ms. Stein, I can't rehearse because I'm having a bad day.

**MS. STEIN:** Use it.

**CAMDEN:** You don't know what I'm going through.

**TAYLOR:** I can't rehearse because Camden's having a bad day.

**JASON:** I can't either.

**MS. STEIN:** Yes, you can. *(To Douglas:)* Do you have your book today?

**DOUGLAS:** Of course I have my book. Not with me.

**MS. STEIN:** Find one.

*(Rudy hands a book to Douglas.)*

**BUNNY:** Ms. Stein, I think I have chicken pops.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* The breakfast cereal.

**DANA:** I have a sore throat. Or maybe consumption.

**MS. STEIN:** Suck it up, people.

*(Mr. Talbot tut-tuts and writes something in his notebook.)*

*(Taylor approaches Camden.)*

**TAYLOR:** Camden? I've found a Japanese horror movie about a—

**CAMDEN:** Eew. What's wrong with your face?

**TAYLOR:** Sorry. I broke out a little.

**CAMDEN:** Don't breathe on me. Text me.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Airborne pathogens.

*(Bunny plucks wet finger puppets out of her backpack. She cries as she pulls out a broken snow globe that plinks mournfully. She snuggles with her toy bunny.)*

*(Out:)* Good thing I took the Curse off, or Bunny's life could be like this permanently, like the sad parts of Disney classics without the happy parts: Dumbo's mother behind bars, Bambi's mother shot by a hunter, Nemo's mother eaten by a barracuda. Note to self: Check on Bunny's mother just in case.

*(Rudy comes up behind Spencer, startling him.)*

**RUDY:** Spencer.

**SPENCER:** Yes?

*(Spencer fixes his shirt and hair quickly and tries hard to look casual.)*

What's up?

**RUDY:** My dad can get us some construction scraps. Free. Lots of different stuff.

**SPENCER:** That'll be...great.

**RUDY:** Ms. Stein, is it okay if I call my dad about getting some building materials for the sets?

**MR. TALBOT:** *(Butting in:)* No, Rudy. Students are forbidden to use cell phones while school is in session.

**MS. STEIN:** Right. But I can call him.

*(Rudy punches his dad's number and gives the phone to Ms. Stein. She walks away with it.)*

**SPENCER:** Thanks, Rudy.

*(Mr. Talbot is listening.)*

**RUDY:** That's okay. And I think I know a way to build that thing you were talking about. We can put it right over there—

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**MR. TALBOT:** Be careful, people. Show some respect for Ms. Fallon-St. Thomas's stage. You're guests in her theater.

**RUDY:** I thought it was everybody's theater.

*(Ms. Stein comes back.)*

**MS. STEIN:** All set. Your dad said you two can deliver the lumber tonight. So before I forget, here's a key to the stage door.

*(She gives Rudy the key. Mr. Talbot notices and writes something else in his notebook.)*

*(To Spencer:)* Can we talk for a minute?

*(They wander off together.)*

This play is in bad shape, Spencer. It has all the earmarks of a hot mess.

**SPENCER:** I know. It's the Curse.

**MS. STEIN:** It's not the Curse. I'm not talking about the Curse. There is no Curse.

**SPENCER:** No Curse? What about getting flattened by that sandbag?

**MS. STEIN:** That was an accident.

**SPENCER:** How about Bunny?

**MS. STEIN:** What does she expect carrying a snow globe around inside a backpack?

**SPENCER:** And Taylor?

**MS. STEIN:** An adolescent girl has a minor skin problem and you take that as evidence of the *Macbeth* Curse?

**SPENCER:** Yes, I do.

**MS. STEIN:** Well, what's the deal? Do you think there's some malevolent force behind this?

**SPENCER:** Yes. The Witches.

**MS. STEIN:** They've come here to Parkside High, and they untied the sandbag and rifled through Bunny's backpack and clogged Taylor's pores while she wasn't looking?

**SPENCER:** Maybe. But that doesn't matter anymore, because I've taken the Curse off.

**MS. STEIN:** Oh, really? And when did you take the Curse off?

**SPENCER:** Just a minute ago, outside in the hallway. You see, the sandbag attack and the broken snow globe and Taylor's leprosy or whatever it is all happened before I removed the Curse. Now that it's off, we're in the clear.

**MS. STEIN:** No, Spencer. We're not in the clear. This play is going to be terrible, and it has nothing to do with a curse. It's because the kids are never going to memorize their lines.

**SPENCER:** Oh, come on. Of course they will. They can do it. This is the shortest tragedy Shakespeare ever wrote. It's nothing. They just have to try.

**MS. STEIN:** They're trying, but the play needs to be cut.

**SPENCER:** Cut Shakespeare? Ms. Stein, how could you even think of doing that?

**MS. STEIN:** Shakespeare would have done it if he had to.

**SPENCER:** How do you know that?

**MS. STEIN:** Well, I don't. I'm guessing. But you have to admit that learning every line of this play is asking too much of these kids.

**SPENCER:** Didn't Mr. Talbot say that?

**MS. STEIN:** No. Well, not in so many words. But we can streamline the play and simplify it.

**SPENCER:** Dumb it down? No. Shakespeare must not be cut.

**MS. STEIN:** You are a cranky old man in a teenager's body.

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**SPENCER:** Just because I love old movies and old television shows? Is that it? Since when is it a crime for a young person to watch *Bonanza* on The Prostate Channel?

**MS. STEIN:** You're sixteen years old and stuck in your ways.

**SPENCER:** I have standards, and no amount of verbal abuse from you can make me lower them.

**MS. STEIN:** You want Shakespeare to be done one way.

**SPENCER:** Yes. My way.

**MS. STEIN:** You're rigid.

**SPENCER:** I am not rigid. I'm flexible. If I were twelve feet tall, I could rent myself out as a wind-sock dancing man blowing around in front of a phone store. I'm the least rigid person I know. I'm go-with-the-flow and let's-just-see-what-happens in everything—absolutely everything!—except those areas that are sacrosanct and must be kept unchanged.

**MS. STEIN:** And Shakespeare is one of those areas?

**SPENCER:** Yes. We do the play uncut. Every word.

## SCENE 9

*(Night. Spencer is washing his hands with a cloth.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* But what if I *didn't* take the *Macbeth* Curse off our play? What then? Could one of the actors accidentally drink formaldehyde instead of water in biology class? Yes. And I would be held responsible. Why not? Whose fault would it be? Mine. I could be looking at life in prison just for saying the title of a play where I shouldn't have said it. Instead of working on Broadway or the West End, I could be wearing a garish jumpsuit inside the walls of the state prison directing an all-convict production of *Cats*, clapping my hands and saying, "Energy, kids!" while the chorus boys reach for the shivs they've secreted inside their dance belts.

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**SCENE 10**

*(In front of the locked auditorium. Spencer enters and joins Ms. Stein and Rudy.)*

**SPENCER:** What's this? Why can't we rehearse in the auditorium today?

**MS. STEIN:** I don't know. Mr. Talbot told me it's off limits.

*(Mr. Talbot enters.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** *(To Rudy:)* Mr. Boyle wants to see you.

**RUDY:** Why?

**MR. TALBOT:** You know why.

**RUDY:** No, I don't.

**MR. TALBOT:** Because of what you did in the auditorium.

**RUDY:** What did I do?

**MR. TALBOT:** Just go.

**RUDY:** *(As he exits:)* I didn't do anything.

*(Spencer's gaze lingers on Rudy.)*

**MS. STEIN:** *(To Mr. Talbot:)* What's going on?

**MR. TALBOT:** He's an arsonist. No lumber was delivered last night, but Rudy did come back. Alone. He let himself in through the back door of the auditorium.

**MS. STEIN:** How do they know?

**MR. TALBOT:** *They* know because Chalky the Janitor saw him from a window on the third floor of the science wing. Hmm, I wonder where Rudy got the key... Oh, yes. That's right. You gave it to him. Nice play, Shakespeare. Chalky walked down to the auditorium to see what was going on, but by the time he got there, Rudy was gone – and the backstage area was on fire. That's why you can't rehearse in there.

---

*(Mr. Talbot exits.)*

**MS. STEIN:** On fire? And they think Rudy did it?

**SPENCER:** I don't get it. If Rudy did do it, why?

**MS. STEIN:** I don't know. I can't come up with a motive.

**SPENCER:** Neither can I, although I can see why he'd want to set fire to Mr. Talbot. So now not only do we have a cast of raw beginners, we've lost Rudy.

**MS. STEIN:** Who was doing exactly what? He never rehearses, but he seems to know the play inside out.

**SPENCER:** I didn't exactly cast him.

**MS. STEIN:** Because...?

**SPENCER:** I'm afraid of him. The muscles. And so forth.

**MS. STEIN:** Are you sure that's it?

**SPENCER:** I was hoping he'd volunteer.

**MS. STEIN:** Spencer, you're driving yourself crazy. You're frazzled. You might not make it to opening night. But you have to hang in there. Okay? You can't leave me on my own.

**SPENCER:** Guilt is chipping away at me, Ms. Stein.

**MS. STEIN:** But you're not guilty of anything. You didn't curse our play.

**SPENCER:** I did, and I'm not sure I took the Curse off.

**MS. STEIN:** There's no Curse.

**SPENCER:** The other thing that's getting to me is the mismatch between my commitment to the play and theirs.

**MS. STEIN:** I see. Well, let me ask you something. What are you doing in baccalaureate?

**SPENCER:** What? Do you think I belong in college prep or AP?

**MS. STEIN:** Don't you?

**SPENCER:** Maybe. I don't know. The thing is I don't care. I hate school.

**MS. STEIN:** But you love the theatre.

**SPENCER:** Okay. I see where you're going with this.

**MS. STEIN:** They auditioned because they had to. They're doing the play because they have to, not because they want to. Certainly not because it means the world to them.

**SPENCER:** Well, they know it means the world to me.

**MS. STEIN:** Do they?

**SPENCER:** I don't know. Probably not. But I want it to be good.

**MS. STEIN:** You want it to be perfect. But done is better than perfect. I read that on a mug in a gift shop. And we're not going to get this done if we do the play uncut. So can you meet the kids where they are and help them get better? They're not used to being pushed, Spencer. But you've got them doing something. That's more than Mr. Talbot can say. You should be proud.

**SPENCER:** Maybe I should, but I feel ready to dry up and blow away.

**MS. STEIN:** You have the whole weekend to get better.

*(Ms. Stein exits.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* And I did get better over the weekend. I watched *Cool Hand Luke* and *Singin' in the Rain* and ate some incredible day-old eclairs, but that wasn't why I felt so much better this morning on my walk to school. I felt better because of two important decisions I made.

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**SCENE 11**

*(School office. MISS CONNORS, the crabby secretary, is arranging little ceramic figurines from boxes of tea bags when Spencer enters.)*

**MISS CONNORS:** What do you want?

**SPENCER:** Not bad. How are you? Spencer Wilson here to see Mr. Boyle.

*(She checks a piece of paper.)*

**MISS CONNORS:** I don't see a Spencer Wilson.

**SPENCER:** I'm a Spencer Wilson.

**MISS CONNORS:** Do you have an appointment?

**SPENCER:** Yes. I made it after first period. With you.

**MISS CONNORS:** He might be able to squeeze you in *if* it's important.

**SPENCER:** It's important.

*(Miss Connors crosses to the inner office.)*

**MISS CONNORS:** Excuse me, Mr. Boyle.

*(She bevels like a showgirl.)*

Are you busy?

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Did you catch the bevel? She could be a Rockette!

*(He demonstrates.)*

Magic.

**MR. BOYLE:** *(From the inner office:)* I'm always busy.

**MISS CONNORS:** There's a boy here to see you.

**SPENCER:** It's important.

*(Miss Connors gives Spencer the evil eye.)*

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**MR. BOYLE:** (*From the inner office:*) I think I have a minute.

(*Inner office. Spencer enters and shakes hands with MR. BOYLE, the dim principal.*)

**SPENCER:** Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Boyle.

**MR. BOYLE:** My pleasure, young man. Now what can I do for you?

**SPENCER:** I'm afraid I've done something that could cause some trouble here at school, specifically for the cast of *Macbeth*.

**MR. BOYLE:** Really? What have you done?

**SPENCER:** I've put the *Macbeth* Curse on our production.

(*Nothing from Mr. Boyle.*)

(*Out:*) I'm waiting for a spark of recognition. It's one thing to be calm in the face of danger, but it's quite another to be oblivious to impending disaster, like a brontosaurus blithely munching on water plants while little raptors are feasting on its tail. I wonder if there could be rodents on the floor behind Mr. Boyle's desk right now chewing on his ankles as an appetizer before they start in on his bowl of Werther's Originals.

**MR. BOYLE:** What do you mean?

**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) Wow. (*To Mr. Boyle:*) I have put the *Macbeth* Curse on our production. Of *Macbeth*. Here at Parkside High School.

**MR. BOYLE:** Why did you do that?

**SPENCER:** I did it inadvertently. I didn't mean to, but I said the title of the play inside the auditorium.

**MR. BOYLE:** The play?

**SPENCER:** *Macbeth*.

**MR. BOYLE:** And that was all it took to put a curse on the play?

**SPENCER:** Right.

**MR. BOYLE:** Are you pulling my leg?

**SPENCER:** No. The Curse has a long history that started in 1602. You see, there are witches in the play, and when Shakespeare wrote their lines, he used the actual incantations of real witches, and that made the witches so mad that they put a curse on the play. One of the leads in the show fell ill with a fever and died right before the premiere and Shakespeare himself filled in for him. And for more than four hundred years now, strange "accidents" have happened to the cast and crew if somebody in the company says the title of the play inside the theater. That's why the wall behind the stage caught on fire. Rudy didn't do it.

*(Mr. Boyle pops up out of his chair and escorts Spencer to the door.)*

**MR. BOYLE:** Thank you, young man. The *Macbeth* Curse is my new number one priority. Don't you worry. I'll be on it twenty-four/seven, five days a week.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* Did somebody replace his Werther's Originals with Coffee Nips?

*(They exit the inner office and enter the school office. Miss Connors, back to arranging the figurines, bevels again when she sees Mr. Boyle.)*

**MR. BOYLE:** Miss Connors, this young man right here says he put the *Macbeth* Curse on his English class's play, and that's why the wall behind the stage caught on fire.

*(He makes the crazy ding-a-ling hand signal.)*

**MISS CONNORS:** Well, imagine that. That curse sounds like nasty business.

**MR. BOYLE:** Oh, it is. One of the actors in the first show ever got a fever all of a sudden and died before opening night, and

guess who had to fill in for him: Sir Walter Shakespeare himself.

## SCENE 12

*(The auditorium stage. While Spencer sticks a spike on the floor, Ms. Stein wanders close to a flat.)*

**MAGDA:** *(Off:)* Don't touch!

*(Magda enters on a catwalk over Spencer's head.)*

I know what you're up to.

**MS. STEIN:** What do you mean? You don't even know me.

**MAGDA:** No, I don't because you haven't introduced yourself. You haven't taken the time to learn about this school, and that's because you have no respect for tradition and no respect for your superiors.

**MS. STEIN:** Who are my superiors?

**MAGDA:** The question, young lady, is who isn't?

**SPENCER:** Hey —

**MS. STEIN:** Wait a minute —

**MAGDA:** You waltz in here and announce a production of The Scottish Play without consulting me. Don't you know I run the theatre program at Parkside High School? I decide on the season. I cast the plays. I direct them. And you didn't ask me if I wanted to do The Scottish Play. I know what you're up to, and I'll be watching you. Truth will come to light. At the length, truth will out!

*(She exits above.)*

**MS. STEIN:** What a freak.

*(Mr. Talbot and the Actors enter.)*

**SPENCER:** *(To the Actors:)* Hi, everybody. I have two announcements to make. The first is that I've cut the play. The

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story hasn't changed, but the running time will be shorter, and you won't have as many lines to memorize. But even though I've shortened the play, the famous lines that everyone waits to hear are still in the script, even if I've had to make adjustments. For instance, Scene Three of Act One will now be our opening, but the audience will still hear the Witches do their "Fair and foul" speech that's in Scene One.

**CAMDEN:** Wait. We're not doing the first two scenes? How come you made us rehearse them if we're not going to do them? What a waste of time.

**SPENCER:** It wasn't a waste of time. We all learned something.

**CAMDEN:** Well, you didn't learn how to direct.

**TAYLOR:** Camden's right.

**JASON:** You don't know what you're doing

**SPENCER:** Whether or not you think I know how to direct, I am the director, and I've cut the play. My hope is that instead of going broad—doing every word—we'll go narrow and deep. There will be fewer lines for you to say, but you'll deliver them with more meaning because your focus won't be scattered over so many lines. To me, it's like having one dish of fantastic ice cream instead of a whole gallon of bad ice cream. (*Out:*) I just compared a Shakespearean masterwork to a tub of flavorless supermarket-brand ice cream. I'm glad no one is listening to me.

**CAMDEN:** (*To Spencer:*) I hope you didn't cut any of my lines. Actually you'd better hope you didn't cut any of my lines, because if you did, I swear—

**SPENCER:** I cut a few.

**CAMDEN:** What? You have no right to cut my lines.

**SPENCER:** Here's the thing. If we go the full-length route, we'll lose momentum, and the play will drag. That means the audience will lose interest. When you're on stage, Camden, you'll control the audience's attention. There's no question about that. But we want their attention to be on the play at all times. If you have to recapture it every time you go on, they'll miss the first few lines you speak because they'll be like people who are being roused from a sound sleep and don't know where they are or what's going on. You don't want that, do you?

**CAMDEN:** No.

**SPENCER:** Of course not. This play is going to be a headlong rush into tragedy. No intermission. It won't be so much intellectual as physical. An avalanche. A landslide. One impulsive move leads to another, and once the boulders are rolling down the hill, there's no stopping them. *(To the Actors:)* My second announcement is this: I put the *Macbeth* Curse on our production.

*(The Actors vent their outrage ad lib and...)*

**BUNNY:** The witches are going to kill us!

**DANA:** Something wicked this way comes, and when I'm dead, my devoted husband will be all alone in the world!

**MS. STEIN:** Quiet! That's enough! QUIET!!!

**MR. TALBOT:** Ms. Stein, if you can't control yourself, how can you expect to control your students?

*(The yelling continues as Spencer, looking shaken, starts to exit. Camden comes up to him.)*

**CAMDEN:** You're trying to get back at me, aren't you, Princess.

**SPENCER:** No—

**CAMDEN:** Well, it's not going to work.

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**SCENE 13**

*(School hallway. Spencer, on edge, enters from the auditorium and bumps into Rudy.)*

**RUDY:** I'm back.

**SPENCER:** *(Jumpy:)* Rudy. You're not suspended anymore?

**RUDY:** Nope. The fire inspectors said it was an electrical fire and I didn't have anything to do with it. It turned out that my dad and I couldn't use the truck to drop the lumber off, but I remembered I left my *Macbeth* book out behind the stage, so I came back by myself to get it, and that was lucky because if I hadn't done that and Chalky hadn't gone to the auditorium to see what I was doing there, nobody would have noticed the fire.

**SPENCER:** That was lucky.

**RUDY:** I didn't see the fire, because I just popped in and right back out, but the fire inspectors looked around and found out that squirrels did it.

**SPENCER:** Really?

**RUDY:** Yeah. They were living inside the wall backstage, and they chewed through some wires, and a spark caught fire on their nest.

**SPENCER:** Well, I'm glad you're back.

**RUDY:** Me too. Mr. Boyle said you tried to take the blame for the fire. Thanks, Spencer. That was a nice thing to do.

*(Spencer almost hugs Rudy, but he restrains himself. They shake hands.)*

**SCENE 14**

*(Auditorium. While Spencer is out in the school hallway, Ms. Stein and Mr. Talbot are here with the Actors.)*

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**MS. STEIN:** Shall we get started?

**MR. TALBOT:** If it were done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.

*(Rudy enters.)*

**RUDY:** You got it wrong again. The line is, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

**MR. TALBOT:** Keep your wiseacre comments to yourself.

**RUDY:** Check it out.

*(Rudy holds his Macbeth book out for Mr. Talbot, who turns his back and exits.)*

*(Spencer enters looking frazzled.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Just the man I've been looking for. Spencer, we need a stage manager.

**SPENCER:** I'm the stage manager.

**MS. STEIN:** And the director. Directing is enough. It might be too much, judging by how you look.

**SPENCER:** I'm just having a bad chin day.

**MS. STEIN:** What do you think about Rudy?

*(Spencer is suddenly on full alert.)*

**SPENCER:** What do I think about Rudy? What do you mean what do I think about Rudy? Are you insinuating something?

**MS. STEIN:** Have I touched a nerve?

**SPENCER:** No, you have not touched a nerve, Ms. Stein. I'm just overtired. Overwrought. I don't think about Rudy. He never crosses my mind at all.

**MS. STEIN:** What I mean is, would you mind if I asked him to be the stage manager?

**SPENCER:** Oh. Well, no. I guess not.

**MS. STEIN:** Good. I'll talk with him.

*(While Ms. Stein crosses to Rudy...)*

**SPENCER:** *(To Taylor:)* Taylor, how are you feeling about playing the First Witch?

**TAYLOR:** Good.

**SPENCER:** Good. Because I like how you act. You use who you are.

**TAYLOR:** What do you mean?

**SPENCER:** You have a talent for reading people's moods. You know if somebody is feeling cranky or apprehensive or whatever, and you do what needs to be done. You're like a jazz musician playing in a band. You hear what the other players are doing, and you give them the space they need and the support they need.

**TAYLOR:** Really?

**SPENCER:** You might not even know you're doing it. It might just come naturally. But the thing is that you have to have your solo, too. When you're working with the Second Witch and the Third Witch, don't forget the First Witch.

**TAYLOR:** Are you telling me to look out for Number One?

**SPENCER:** Yes. Look out for Number One.

*(Spencer sees Jason.)*

Jason, good work lately. I'm seeing a huge improvement.

**JASON:** Thanks.

**SPENCER:** But what I'm not seeing is your bio for the program. It was due yesterday. If you don't get it in, I'm going to have to write it myself.

**JASON:** I've got it right here. *(Reads:)* The Need, formerly known as Jason Thompson, is a human being walking the face of this tiny planet with his eyes and heart open. His new name

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reflects the human need to connect with others of like mind. He shares his gift of acting with all in the hope of fostering oneness where there used to be twoness or greater. He sends his love to all in attendance tonight and to all who would be here if not for the harsh realities of life, such as disease and death and unfeeling bosses who won't give people the night off. To them and to everyone, know this: You have a friend in The Need.

**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) My systems are shutting down. Take me now. No. Wait a minute. That was a knee-jerk reaction, and you can erase the "knee" part because I feel like a jerk passing judgment on Jason for taking his acting seriously. Yes, his bio is over the top, but we high school students tend to go too far. Of course I restrain myself in matters of self-expression, but I'm hardly typical. I feel bad for making fun of what he wrote. There are plenty of people—common as rats, really—who sit in judgment of people's art, whether it's music or drama or visual arts or literature or whatever, and make fun of it but never produce any art themselves. That takes neither talent nor courage. I don't want that to be me, so I'll call him The Need.

**MS. STEIN:** Has everybody checked in with Rudy, our new stage manager?

*(No answer from the Actors. Rudy steps out from behind the curtain and just stands there.)*

**ALL THE ACTORS:** Yes!

**SPENCER:** (*To the Actors:*) First time for us working in the evening, and that's exciting. We're teching the show tonight, making sure everything works. Ms. Stein has done a wonderful job designing the look and the sound of our play and running everything through the computers. Thank you, Ms. Stein.

*(Applause.)*

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Okay, we'll go straight through tonight, start to finish, so please concentrate. Remember your cues for set changes and for anything else you've been assigned to do. Rudy will be backstage with you to help.

*(Rudy steps out from behind the curtain again.)*

Thank you, Rudy. Anything to add, Ms. Stein?

**MS. STEIN:** All I want to say is it's been a wonderful experience for me to work with you kids, and I think you're ready. You've come so far. When you started the year, did any of you think you'd be acting in a Shakespeare play?

*(A few heads shake.)*

Well, you are, and you're doing it well, and I know you'll be great Friday night.

**SPENCER:** Thank you, Ms. Stein. So just to be clear: tech tonight, dress tomorrow night, show Friday night. We'll run our dress rehearsal tomorrow night exactly as if it were the real thing. Your call is 6:30. Curtain is 7:30.

**RUDY:** Ten minutes!

**ALL THE ACTORS:** Thank you ten!

*(The Actors exit.)*

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* And in ten minutes the play is underway. It starts well and flies by, scene after scene. Everything is good: acting, sound and light design, props. We've created a cauldron that appears to be hewn from solid rock but really is just painted papier-mâché. Inside the rock is a metal trash can, and at the bottom of the trash can are buckets of chemicals that the Witches will activate when they concoct their brew.

*(Spencer sits down next to Ms. Stein. She passes him a Macbeth book, and he follows along as the Actors enter marching while they hold stylized tree branches made of wood and green fabric.)*

(*Out:*) Macbeth thinks he's living a charmed life, but Birnam Wood goes to Dunsinane and Macduff kills him. Now Malcolm closes the play.

**MALCOLM:**                   ...by the grace of Grace  
We will perform in measure, time, and place.

*(Malcolm stops.)*

*(Spencer, caught up in the euphoria of seeing the play on the verge of succeeding despite the odds, stands up with the book and recites proudly even though Rudy is waving his arms frantically to get him to stop before it's too late.)*

**SPENCER:** So thanks to all at once and to each one,  
whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone!

*(It's too late. The enormity of what Spencer has just done body-slams him.)*

NO-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!!!!!!!

*(All the sound effects play at the same time: wind, howls, screams, ghostly moans, thunder, cries. And all the lighting effects go off like fireworks. The Actors scream.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Easy does it, everybody! No running!

*(But everybody exits running, except Spencer, who is now alone on the stage. He thinks he sees something in the wings.)*

**SPENCER:** Rudy? Is that you?

*(Spencer takes a look in the wings. There's nothing to see.)*

Anybody here? (*Out:*) I'm seeing things. Nice.

*(Spencer leaves the wings and addresses the audience).*

(*Out:*) Yes, I did it. I said the last line of the play before opening night and completed the Curse. So I did not sleep last night. How could I? I lay awake imagining unspeakable horrors. Then I arrived at school this morning expecting to see a gigantic smoldering hole in the earth surrounded by yellow



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crime-scene tape, but I saw the same old Parkside High I know and loathe. My day in baccalaureate classes was a trial, as always. Nothing had changed. How odd. And now it's Thursday night: time for our dress rehearsal.

### SCENE 15

*(The auditorium stage. Spencer is watching the Actors get ready. They're wearing simple tunics, cloaks, robes, and gowns. Taylor is touching up Camden's famous hair.)*

**TAYLOR:** Perfect.

**CAMDEN:** It's not perfect, but it better be tomorrow night.

*(Camden crosses to Jason.)*

You have to get through your lines faster. When we have an audience out there, they're going to be waiting for me. For me. Do you understand? If you keep them waiting too long, they'll get restless. So pick up the pace.

**JASON:** Okay. That's a good note.

**CAMDEN:** Of course it is.

**SPENCER:** Camden, please don't give notes to your fellow actors.

**CAMDEN:** Somebody has to.

**SPENCER:** That's my job.

**CAMDEN:** Well, you're not doing it.

**SPENCER:** I give notes when I think they'll help.

**JASON:** I don't mind. Really, Spencer—I was thinking I should talk faster.

**CAMDEN:** See?

**SPENCER:** No, I don't see. It's confusing for an actor to get notes from more than one source. I'm the director, so the notes should come from me.

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**CAMDEN:** (*Exiting:*) Your little power trip is pathetic.

**SPENCER:** You're doing wonderful work, The Need. Don't listen to her. One thing, though. I feel awkward calling you The Need when I'm speaking with you. It's not bad when I refer to you, but I feel odd if I say something like, "How are you, The Need?" The article, the "the," makes me feel as if English isn't my first language, or even in the top five.

**JASON:** Need is okay.

**SPENCER:** Good. Thank you, Need.

*(Ms. Stein enters.)*

**MS. STEIN:** So what's the deal with completing the Curse? Anything to report?

**SPENCER:** Still a mystery, but you know, from the look of things, I think it means that the Curse is complete in the sense that it's finished. Kaput. Gone. Really. I think it's going to be clear sailing from here.

**RUDY:** (*To the Actors:*) Places.

**MS. STEIN:** Seven-thirty. Rudy runs a tight ship.

**SPENCER:** (*Out:*) Evidently our computers made it through last night's premature Fourth of July celebration without getting fried. The sound and lights are in sync. And I'm delighted by the work the actors are doing. As good as they were last night in tech, they're even better tonight. They know the play, they know the characters, and they know what they're saying. The Need especially has made himself into a fine actor. It might be because he wants to impress Camden, but if that's the case, great. I don't care why he's put the effort in. He probably hasn't impressed her anyway, but he certainly has impressed me.

*(Spencer and Ms. Stein bump fists.)*

**MS. STEIN:** This is incredible.

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**RUDY:** *(To Camden and Taylor:)* Let's go. The cauldron's supposed to be out there.

*(Taylor is tending to Camden's hair.)*

**CAMDEN:** We're busy, in case you hadn't noticed.

**RUDY:** Get busy doing your jobs. You're supposed to put the cauldron where it belongs, so go do it. See the mark? Over there? You can fix your hair afterwards.

*(Camden and Taylor begin to shove the cauldron into place.)*

**CAMDEN:** This would be easier to move if it didn't have the pails inside it.

*(She bends over and leans deep into the cauldron.)*

**RUDY:** Hey, don't touch those chemicals in there—!

*(A slosh inside the cauldron followed by a poof and a weird lime-green glow and now a bloodcurdling shriek from Camden. She straightens up screaming, her hair sticking out in all directions and sizzling like fuses.)*

*(Rudy grabs a fire extinguisher off the wall and sprays her head with foam. [Note: If you don't want to go the fire extinguisher route, you could use a fire blanket.]*

*(Camden's hair is almost gone, and what remains of it looks like something that's been left in the oven too long.)*

**CAMDEN:** *(To Rudy:)* I hate you! *(To Spencer:)* I hate you! *(To Ms. Stein:)* I hate you! I hate this whole school and everybody in it, and I'm leaving!

**TAYLOR:** You don't hate me, do you, Camden?

**CAMDEN:** No. Now let's go.

*(But Taylor doesn't move.)*

Are you coming or not?

**TAYLOR:** No. I'm not. I can't. I can't drop out of the play.

**CAMDEN:** That means you're dropping out of my life.

*(She starts to exit.)*

*(To Jason:)* Coming?

**JASON:** Nah.

**CAMDEN:** And why not?

**JASON:** Well, you looked a lot hotter when you had all that hair. Now you're kind of a dog.

*(Camden starts to exit.)*

**MS. STEIN:** Come back, Camden. We're all depending on you. If you walk out now, we're going to have to call—*(Stopping herself from saying "off":)* ...ON every ounce of our ingenuity to put this play on without you.

**CAMDEN:** Then do it. I'm out of here.

*(She exits. Silence.)*

**SPENCER:** The show must go on! *(Out:)* "The show must go on"? It's an eye-opener to know I'm capable of saying something that corny. What's next? Will I start wearing lapel pins?

**MS. STEIN:** You're right, Spencer. The show must go on.

**SPENCER:** So what are we going to do?

**MS. STEIN:** I'll fill in as Lady M for now, but there's no way I can learn all these lines by tomorrow night.

**SPENCER:** *(Out:)* What are we going to do?

## SCENE 16

*(Auditorium. The next morning. Spencer, Ms. Stein, Mr. Talbot and the Actors enter, and Spencer flips the lights on. The stage has been vandalized: The sets have odd graffiti spray-painted on them, wooden swords and tree branches have been snapped, and costumes have been shredded.)*

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**SPENCER:** What? You're kidding me! Who did this?

**MS. STEIN:** It doesn't matter who did it. Not now anyway. We just have to deal with it. We can paint over the graffiti.

**SPENCER:** No. The graffiti stays. We don't have time to paint over it. Well, we do, but if we spend our time doing that, we won't be able to spend it other ways, like figuring out what to do about the costumes and the props. Besides, if people walk in and wonder if they've come on the wrong night and we're doing *West Side Story*, that would be good. For some plays, it's good to sit back and relax; for this one, it's not so good.

**MS. STEIN:** Well, desperate times and desperate measures and all that, so let's just call a no-go for our classes and spend the day cleaning up and seeing what we can salvage.

*(The Actors pick up the trashed sets and props and costumes.)*

**MR. TALBOT:** Questionable judgment, Ms. Stein. If your students skip classes—even one class—they will be ineligible for after-school activities, and that means the play.

**MS. STEIN:** Oh.

**MR. TALBOT:** Yes. Oh. We don't want the kiddos to miss out on their big night, do we? This is the culminating event of your internship. Such an evening. You'll agree, I assume, that we must make the most of it. And to make sure that as many people as possible are here tonight, I've decided as chair of the English Department to offer extra credit to all students who attend. I expect a full house.

**MS. STEIN:** *(Sarcastic:)* That's thoughtful of you.

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