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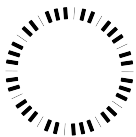
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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THE SHAKESPEARE CONSPIRACY

A most lamentable epic
romantic tragic comedy

by Andrew Shepherd

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THE SHAKESPEARE CONSPIRACY was first performed over the course of two productions at Chelsea Theatre, London in June 2011 and November 2012. The Directors were Chris Hislop, Jack Bowman, Designer Zahra Mansouri, Lighting Designer Sherry Coenen, Sound Designers Gustav Mahler, Tshari King, Assistant Directors Kuba Drewa, Sarah Meadows, Fight Sequences Matt Gardner, Assistant Designers Jaemi Bermudez, Abi Bath, Alex Kerr, Produced by ACSRandom. The cast was as follows:

MARTIN	Andrew London	Andrew London
VALENTINE	Tom Ashley	Will Bryant
JULES	Alethea Steven	Alethea Steven
TYBALT	Jay Carrington	Danny Solomon
GARFIELD OBERON	James Ellis	Richard Armah
PUCK	Joanne Gale	Nayomie Karen
IAGO	Andrew Shepherd	Andrew Shepherd
EDMUND	Lee White	Lee White
LADY MACBETH	Alexa Brown	Leonora Barton
RICHARD III	Matt Gardner	Alexander Pankhurst
BENEDICK	Jack Baldwin	Jack Baldwin
BEATRICE	Libby Evans	Libby Evans
THREE SISTERS	Lynne Rodgers	Francesca Cicic
	Melanie Loudonsack	Charlotte Mack
	Leanne Wigginton	Holly McClay
HELENA	Holly Janowski	Holly Janowski

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

MARTIN SHAKESPEARE – A travel agent

VALENTINE – Martin's best friend

JULES – An agent for the RSC

TYBALT – A hitman

GARFIELD OBERON – Artistic Director of the RSC

PUCK – An agent for the RSC

(ALOYSIUS ARCHIBALD) IAGO – An evil genius

EDMUND BASTARD SON OF GLOUCESTER – A bastard

LADY (ANTONIA) MACBETH – Iago's sister

RICHARD III – Lady Macbeth's son

BENEDICK – An agent for the RSC

BEATRICE – An agent for the RSC

HELENA – From *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

THREE SISTERS – From *Macbeth* (Also playing Partygoers/Agents/
Prison Guards/Trainees)

VILLAINS & HEROES – Played by members of the cast

Please cast as inclusively, imaginatively and openly as you want. Roles can be doubled/tripled dependent on your budget.

SETTING

The "Real world" is set in modern times.

The "Theatre world" is timeless.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

It began in the bath, as many good things do. A thought popping into reality – what would happen if Richard III gatecrashed into *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and started wooing Helena instead of Lady Anne, taking the place of the spurning Demetrius? Once the first boundary had been crossed, the possibilities were endless – especially if you combine them with a love of superhero movies.

Now, a key theme in those movies is that the stakes are always HUGE, the same can be said for Shakespeare and the best comedies. This is not a play to be underplayed, understated or taken at all seriously... as long as you play it completely seriously and believe that the world is about to end. You need to lean into the theatricality, silliness and the epic.

But you don't necessarily have to do it on a massive budget. We certainly didn't in the first instance, but we used all the theatrical tools in our imagination and arsenal to create a sense of scale.

I've often believed if Shakespeare were alive today, they'd be writing the big movie/TV hits – re-read *Henry IV parts I, II* and *Henry V* and tell me it's not a superhero trilogy. Then there's the definitive doomed teen romance (*Romeo & Juliet*), the original romantic comedy (*Much Ado About Nothing*) and the greatest supervillain of them all... Iago. A man who, but with a few well chosen words, a brilliant and dangerous mind, and an understanding of the frailties of human nature brought down the best of us – some people just want to watch the world burn...

I'm sharing this because it's all in here. There's something for everyone – from the purists to the Easter Egg hunters to those of you who've never met William Shakespeare. It's also a classic hero's quest, where an ordinary person becomes truly extraordinary when they realise their potential. It's about the power of love and imagination. And for the more academic out there it could be argued that the whole thing smacks of a metatheatrical experiment which tries to play around with archetypal tropes, but cannot as every character must behave as it was originally written, all wrapped up in a five act structure that seems familiar to those of a Bardic disposition... but only if you're in to that kind of thing.

How should it be performed? However you want but *only* if is done with joy, imagination, collaboration, silliness, kindness, compassion and with the only people in mind who really matter... your audience.

Have fun, I did writing it...

ACS

For my Father, who gave me the gift of Shakespeare

PART ONE

ACT ONE

(1.1)

(Darkness. The stage is divided into two areas: the “real world” and the “theatre world”.)

(MUSIC: GUSTAV MAHLER’S [“MOVEMENT V. IM TEMPO DES SHERZO”]. *Giving the feeling of an epic movie opening. Lights up on a young man, MARTIN (in the theatre world) who sits with his head buried in his hands.)*

(A faint light comes up on the real world revealing two characters observing MARTIN. One is standing wearing a long coat and is holding a trilby, the other is wearing a ridiculous woolly hat with a suit. The man in the coat puts on his hat and they both exit, as the lights fade on them.)

(The lights change and come up fully on the theatre world. MARTIN’s friend VALENTINE swaggers on drinking from a bottle of champagne singing.)

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VALENTINE.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR MARTIN WHO KEEPS ON
FALLING IN LOVE WITH THE WRONG WOMEN DESPITE
HIS FRIENDS INSISTING THEY DON'T REALLY LOVE
HIM AND JUST WANT TO BE FRIENDS AND NOT
GETTING BACK TO YOU ISN'T BECAUSE THEY'RE BUSY
IT'S BECAUSE THEY'RE PROBABLY NOT INTO YOU...
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

*(VALENTINE offers MARTIN the champagne.
MARTIN speaks with his head still in his
hands.)*

MARTIN. I'm not going

VALENTINE. It's your party.

MARTIN. I don't care, Valentine, I'm not going

VALENTINE. You can't sulk here all night

MARTIN. Watch me

VALENTINE. She's not worth it

MARTIN. She was the one

VALENTINE. Just like all the others

MARTIN. Rosie's different

VALENTINE. She likes girls?

MARTIN. She's... virtuous

VALENTINE. You take three months to get to second base
and the day after she tells you she's thinking of joining
a convent

MARTIN. Our relationship was deeper than that

VALENTINE. You'd choose a life of chastity to be near a
god-fearing feminist with the sexual charisma of a dead
squirrel because you thought you love her.

MARTIN. I *did* love her, Valentine.

VALENTINE. You have no concept of love

MARTIN. Coming from the man whose idea of romance is to ask if they've got any friends who want to join in.

VALENTINE. And I rise with a huge... smile every morning.

MARTIN. There's no feeling in your life

VALENTINE. Oh there's plenty of feeling... with me it's Valentine's Day every day...

MARTIN. You don't understand

VALENTINE. Just come to your party, get outlandishly pissed, dance like it's the end of the world and we'll find you someone to ride you all the way into next week.

MARTIN. I'm not that kind of person

VALENTINE. Then at least act like it for a night. Love has screwed you over too many times, my friend. Brace yourself, take it like a man, flip it over and give it the treatment it fully deserves.

MARTIN. I won't enjoy myself

VALENTINE. Then I'll have fun for the both of us.

MARTIN. I'm not dancing

(VALENTINE *helps* MARTIN *up*.)

VALENTINE. Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance

MARTIN. What did you say?

(*A momentary pause*.)

VALENTINE. Nothing – just hot air

(VALENTINE *puts his arm around* MARTIN *and leads him off*.)

MARTIN. I had the strangest dream last night

VALENTINE. So did I – which reminds me – you should call
your mother.

(1.ii)

(They exit. Party music plays. The lights shift as a young lady, JULES, enters wearing a tattered pair of angel wings. She is holding a half-drunk bottle of champagne and a bunch of roses. Her mascara has run down her face. She takes a large swig of champagne, and begins to tear apart the roses muttering various curses and snide remarks under her breath, MARTIN re-enters with a small glass of champagne. He is holding a number of letters, which he proceeds to tear apart muttering various curses and snide remarks. They become aware of each other's presence and turn towards each other and look away suddenly.)*

MARTIN. Did my heart love 'til now?

JULES. What did you say?

MARTIN. Nothing

JULES. I thought you said, "Did my heart love 'til now"

MARTIN. Why would I say that?

JULES. Must be hearing things

MARTIN. Must be

JULES. Sorry

MARTIN. No problemo

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(MARTIN winces at his own cliché. They go back to their respective property destruction. JULES looks up.)

JULES. That which we call a rose by any other name, would smell as sweet

MARTIN. Were you talking to me?

JULES. No

MARTIN. Sorry

JULES. No problem... o

(JULES walks up to MARTIN.)

Do you believe in love at first sight?

MARTIN. No

(She grabs and kisses him. They pull apart.)

JULES. Sorry

MARTIN. That's OK

JULES. My life's a bit crazy at the moment

MARTIN. Tell me about it

JULES. Two households... both alike in... no... do you like poetry?

MARTIN. No

(JULES grabs and kisses him again. She pulls apart.)

JULES. My last guy loved poetry. That's all he was interested in, that and – he was dull.

MARTIN. Why did you go out with him?

JULES. The sex was mind blowing

MARTIN. How... lovely

(JULES laughs.)

JULES. Is that the best you can come back with?

MARTIN. This usually doesn't happen to me

JULES. Where are you from?

MARTIN. Stratford

JULES. What brought you to London?

MARTIN. I left my wife

JULES. You're married?

MARTIN. No – I'm sorry – I completely made that up

(JULES looks blank.)

I was trying to be more... I came to London to seek my fortune

(JULES smiles brightly.)

JULES. What do you do?

MARTIN. I'm a travel agent

JULES. You're so normal!

(JULES grabs and kisses him again.)

MARTIN. I was going to say boring – but if it does it for you –

JULES. I love it! Makes a nice change from...

(A pause.)

MARTIN. I'm Martin

(JULES looks startled.)

JULES. Jules

MARTIN. Any chance I could get your number?

JULES. No. I'm sorry – this was a mistake – you should go –

MARTIN. But...

(JULES turns away. MARTIN thinks about to say something but is interrupted by VALENTINE stumbling out.)

VALENTINE. There you are! I say – has young Martin found himself a birthday *(JULES glances at VALENTINE who strops in his track; JULES turns away again.)* – present

MARTIN. Do you know each other?

(VALENTINE goes up to MARTIN and ushers him off towards the party.)

VALENTINE. Oh no mate – it's just I can smell the crazy ones from a mile off and I've found some Italian twins inside – I'll be along in a sec...

(VALENTINE shoves MARTIN offstage and turns on JULES, instantly sober and furious.)

What are you doing here?! Do you any idea how dangerous the situation is?

JULES. Is it him?

VALENTINE. We'll discuss it later

JULES. I'm so sorry –

(Any further conversation is interrupted by screaming and general panic backstage. Three terrified (female) partygoers spill out onto the stage followed by MARTIN, with a sword at his neck held by a man in dark Elizabethan costume (he is a hitman called TYBALT but we do not know this yet). JULES slips away unseen.)

MARTIN. Mate! I think you ordered the wrong stripper

(Silence. VALENTINE steps forward and quietly draws a concealed rapier behind MARTIN's back. TYBALT releases MARTIN. MARTIN grabs his neck.)

He cut me! He actually drew blood! He –

(MARTIN notices VALENTINE's sword.)

What? What's going on?

(VALENTINE ignores MARTIN and begins to circle TYBALT.)

Why are you holding a sword?

VALENTINE. Because he is

MARTIN. Yeah but... who carries around swords these days?

VALENTINE. Run

MARTIN. Why?

VALENTINE. Please Martin – no more questions – just run

MARTIN. Not until you put your sword down...

VALENTINE. If I do that, he's going to kill you

MARTIN. Me? Why would he...

(TYBALT makes a sudden lunge for MARTIN. VALENTINE intercepts it and there is a brief and violent sword fight. As quickly as it happens the two fighters break apart.)

What the hell is going on?!

(VALENTINE & TYBALT fight again, TYBALT is disarmed, VALENTINE goes to kill him. Without thinking MARTIN run towards them.)

Gentlemen for shame – forbear this outrage!

(VALENTINE turns in astonishment towards MARTIN, while at the same time TYBALT pulls out a dagger and stabs VALENTINE. There is some screaming followed by a stunned silence. VALENTINE looks down at his wound, and back up at MARTIN. He smiles.)

VALENTINE. Tis nothing... a scratch

(He collapses, MARTIN catches him.)

MARTIN. Valentine!

VALENTINE. *(Struggling to speak.)* It has begun... I'm so sorry Martin...

MARTIN. Somebody call an ambulance! You've got nothing to be sorry about – you're going to be OK –

VALENTINE. ... 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough 'twill serve...

MARTIN. You're going into shock, Valentine – just stay with me

VALENTINE. I am peppered I warrant, for this world... my name... isn't Valentine

MARTIN. What?

(GARFIELD OBERON & PUCK enter – they are the same people we saw at the beginning. VALENTINE looks past MARTIN and directly at them.)

VALENTINE. A plague on both your houses

(VALENTINE dies. MARTIN lays down his body. He slowly stands in utter disbelief, turns and -)

GARFIELD. There will be time to mourn his passing Martin. For now you must come with us.

(I.iii)

(GARFIELD turns and walks into the real world. PUCK goes up, takes a stunned MARTIN by the arm and leads them both in GARFIELD's wake. GARFIELD nods at the Partygoers, who instantly snap out of their shocked state to become Agents for the RSC, turning the real world into an office space and then moving over to the theatre world to dispose of VALENTINE's body. They also return to add background to the RSC office. PUCK leads MARTIN to a seat. GARFIELD meanwhile has removed his hat, which makes it a lot clearer he is also wearing an eye patch, taken out a decanter of brandy and two glasses out, poured out two healthy measures and places one in MARTIN's hand.)

GARFIELD. Drink that, it'll help with the shock

(MARTIN drinks automatically, GARFIELD picks up the other glass.)

One of my finest agents. We shall all miss him

MARTIN. Agents? Who are you?

GARFIELD. My name is Garfield Oberon; I am the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

(GARFIELD downs the brandy. Pause.)

MARTIN. Is this a sick joke?

GARFIELD. I really wish it was

MARTIN. What has the RSC got to do with Valentine being murdered?

GARFIELD. Everything. To begin with your friend –

MARTIN. Valentine... his name is... was... Valentine

GARFIELD. His name was Mercutio.

MARTIN. Mercutio... the RSC's a theatre company.

GARFIELD. The RSC is a branch of the government. It is dedicated to the protection of Shakespeare's work and characters from threats within and without of this world.

PUCK. We're a bit like MI6 but with better costumes

(MARTIN is at a loss for words.)

GARFIELD. The key question, Martin, is what is the difference between reality and fiction? Reality is the physical and emotional perception of the world we wake up to and interact in. Fiction is the realms of imagination expressed in various means, to entertain those within the immediate vicinity. But what if reality is, in fact, fiction? Furthermore what someone might believe to be fiction could actually be reality. And once you know the answer to that question we can address the matter in hand: William Shakespeare.

(MARTIN stares blankly at GARFIELD for a moment.)

MARTIN. What?

GARFIELD. Shakespeare's characters are real.

(Pause.)

MARTIN. Why didn't you say that in the first place?

PUCK. He likes the sound of his own voice

GARFIELD. Do you mind?

PUCK. Sorry

MARTIN. Shakespeare's characters are real?

GARFIELD. Yes

MARTIN. Living, breathing, flesh & blood, walking around like you and me real?

GARFIELD. Yes

MARTIN. I can't believe I'm asking this – how did that happen?

PUCK. We have no idea!

GARFIELD. No one can quite explain it on, say, a cross – dimensional, metaphysical, actual scientific-based rationale; but it is... as it is.

(Slight pause.)

MARTIN. What?

PUCK. Four hundred years ago William Shakespeare brought his characters to life.

MARTIN. *(Sarcastically.)* A bloke walks around Elizabethan London telling everyone he's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark...

GARFIELD. That's classified – how do you know that?

PUCK. Elizabeth's spymaster, Francis Walsingham, put together a group of his finest agents under the leadership of Richard Burbage. On the surface a simple acting troupe called the Queen's Players, underneath the first guardians of Shakespeare's work and characters.

MARTIN. A prototype RSC –

GARFIELD. Excellent, Martin, you're catching on fast

MARTIN. Thanks

PUCK. I don't think he believes us

MARTIN. No, but don't let that stop you.

GARFIELD. It is the truth

MARTIN. Why does the rest of the world think the RSC is just a theatre company?

PUCK. No one would believe us

MARTIN. And I'm expected me to believe you because...?

GARFIELD. Because why would he choose the worst moment in your life so far to tell you a "sick joke" and because your best friend chose, in his dying moments, to tell you his name wasn't Valentine.

(Silence.)

PUCK. That was cheery

GARFIELD. Shut up, Robin

MARTIN. Robin... as in?

GARFIELD. Meet Robin Goodfellow, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

(PUCK takes her hat off to reveals a pair of horns protruding from the top of his head, and removes her coat to reveal his costume. She lowers his head towards MARTIN.)

PUCK. You can touch them if you like –

GARFIELD. Robin is also known as Puck or Hobgoblin

PUCK. Good Luck!

GARFIELD. Or Sweet Puck

PUCK. Good Luck! How many times have I told you to stop doing that?!

GARFIELD. Apologies

MARTIN. Why do you say "good luck"?

PUCK. Those that Hobgoblin call me, or Sweet Puck... I sweep their houses and wish them all good luck.

MARTIN. Hobgoblin?

PUCK. Good Luck!

MARTIN. Sweet Puck

PUCK. Good Luck!

MARTIN. Hob –

PUCK. Stop it!

MARTIN. (*Sarcastically.*) Aren't you going to sweep my house?

PUCK. I have – twice – his too – your wife is in one of her moods again, sir.

GARFIELD. What is it this time?

PUCK. She says “if you have to ask...”

MARTIN. You didn't leave the room

PUCK. I'm very fast

MARTIN. Really...

PUCK. On your browser history there's a subscription to big –

MARTIN. Oh my God – Shakespeare's characters are real!
How fast can you –?

PUCK. I can put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes.

MARTIN. You're actually Puck.

PUCK. Yes, yes, thou speakst aright, I am that merry wanderer of the –

GARFIELD. He's got the point

MARTIN. And you're the “real” Oberon?

GARFIELD. No – it's just my name

MARTIN. Valentine – Mercutio – Mercutio was?

GARFIELD. From *Romeo and Juliet*

MARTIN. If he's dead – the play – the whole plot will be altered

GARFIELD. To destroy Mercutio completely you'd have to burn or rewrite the original manuscript.

MARTIN. He's still alive?

GARFIELD. Once killed in the real world, characters revert to the state they were written as. I'm sorry – the Mercutio you knew is dead.

MARTIN. Couldn't he be rewritten to remember me?

GARFIELD. Anything is possible in theatre. That's why all the original drafts are locked away in a location only accessible to the incumbent Artistic Director.

MARTIN. Why only him?

PUCK. Or her

(**GARFIELD** gives **PUCK** a look.)

GARFIELD. To prevent a repeat of "*The Macbeth Incident*". The work of the coldest, most devious manipulator to walk the face of the globe. The greatest villain ever created

MARTIN. Macbeth?

PUCK. Iago

MARTIN. But he's in *Othello*.

GARFIELD. So was his sister

MARTIN. Iago never had a sister

GARFIELD. She disappeared in 1605 and reappeared a year later in an early draft called *The History of That Most Excellente and Good King Macbeth of Scotland* claiming to be Macbeth's wife, turning a historical romp into a supernatural pot-boiler.

MARTIN. Lady Macbeth is Iago's sister –

PUCK. Aloysius Archibald and Antonia

GARFIELD. Iago formed a syndicate of villains from the Bard's work. They were responsible for the rise in crime around the Southwark area during the time. It was only when Iago started meddling with the other plays that Shakespeare himself put two and two together and felt compelled to act.

PUCK. Shakespeare's villains were rounded up and placed in a custom-made maximum-security prison.

GARFIELD. You call it the Globe.

MARTIN. The Globe's a... oh never mind... why is Iago so dangerous?

GARFIELD. Iago is planning to break the rules of theatre which we theorise will cause a chain reaction that will destroy humanity. The rules of theatre are a force more powerful than you could possibly imagine.

MARTIN. How's he's going to pull that off?

PUCK. We have no idea

GARFIELD. We know it's got something to do with you

MARTIN. Me? Why?

GARFIELD. Your name

MARTIN. Martin?

GARFIELD. Your last name

(A slight pause.)

MARTIN. Don't be ridiculous

GARFIELD. Martin Shakespeare... you are the last living descendant of William Shakespeare. In your veins flows the blood protecting the world from certain destruction.

MARTIN. Hang on – his son died...

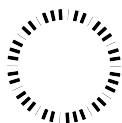
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