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Setting: a hospital ER, and later - a singles bar.

Cast: 6 adults (at least 4 must be women)

Run Time: about 20 minutes

### This Travesty Must Be Stopped!

*In blackout, flashing red and blue lights wash the stage from outside to indicate the presence of an emergency vehicle. The ambulance siren screams offstage. A TV monitor facing the audience flashes the words INCOMING – CRITICAL in stark white letters on a black screen. The monitor winks out as stage lights come up on a busy hospital scene.*

*Two elevated stretchers on rollers. A pair of women in scrubs frantically place medical equipment on a tray. Forceps, tweezers, stethoscope, etc. A third woman rushes in, tying on her scrubs as she strides purposefully across the stage.*

Jennifer. I'm here, rough commute. So, where is this woman?

Abby (*hint of panic*). Just arrived. Still in the parking lot.

Jennifer. You said this was urgent! I have to tell you both honestly. From what you described, I don't have the greatest feeling about this.

Abby. I understand that. We are only asking you to take a look. As to the level of urgency, we'll defer to your judgement.

Wendy. Here she comes now.

*An attendant wearing a full face mask wheels in a stretcher. A white sheet, streaked with blood, covers the still form of a prone body. Jennifer moves behind the stretcher and lifts the sheet; the audience cannot see what horrors are revealed.*

Jennifer. Oh my god. Her stomach! I've never seen anything like it.

Abby. Out of your league?

Jennifer. I didn't say that.

*She hesitates over the all-but-lifeless form. Perhaps at a loss where to begin. Wendy places a comforting hand on Jennifer's shoulder.*

Wendy (*cautiously*). Look. It's not my place to say, but maybe it is time...for you to have a challenge again.

Jennifer. You are right.

Wendy (*brightening*). I am?

Jennifer. It's not your place to say.

*Jennifer frowns, her gaze moving from the stretcher to the operating utensils neatly laid out on the tray.*

Jennifer. But you are also right about something else. It is critical. We have to act now. I mean, I have to act now. You leave me no choice.

Abby (*dramatic voice*). Everyone has a choice.

Jennifer. I don't. Not after I saw the shape that she is in. Good lord, not after I saw her stomach. My eyes cannot unsee that. Hand me the tray, I am going in.

*Wendy lifts the laden tray of operating utensils. Abby rushes to assist her. A man suddenly stands up from his seat in the audience.*

Rick. Stop!!! Stop! What on earth are you doing?

*Another man leaps from his seat, opposite side of the house.*

John. Who the hell are you?

Rick. The playwright. You might have seen my name below the title of this play. Who the hell are you?

John. The director. You might have seen my name on the playbill.

Rick (*struggling in his rage*). You're the d...you....(*Rick heads to the front of the house, pointing in accusation, as the director crosses to meet him in front of the stage*) You did this to my play!

John. Did what?

*Rick throws up his hands in disbelief, pointing to the actors who are watching in astonishment.*

Rick. This! This...travesty! I don't even know what the hell to call it. This show that bears no resemblance to anything I ever wrote.

John. Are you crazy? Every single word is exactly as you wrote it. *(He pulls a rolled paper from an interior vest pocket. The paper unrolls into a comically long scroll.)* I have the license right here.

*He reads.*

"Creative liberty of the director shall be limited strictly to the style of verbal presentation, the costuming and the set design. Not one word may be altered from the licensed script."

Rick *(at a loss)*. Yes, but...

John. Besides which. *(John has rolled the contract back into a tight column, which he now uses to smack the writer on the chest)* Your script provides no stage directions at all! Just raw dialogue with the name and gender of each character. I staged it based on how your words – your words! – painted a picture of the drama in my mind. *(To audience)* Why do writers always feel they need to micro-manage? The entire script was his. Did he also have to dominate set design and costuming? Was that really needed as well?

Rick. Really needed. *(Gasps)* Really needed! *(Rick sits on the stage, placing his head in his hands)*

John. Now who is being dramatic. So what kind of script is this then? Some sort of Rorschach test? I mean, how different could my presentation possibly have been from what you envisioned, given these lines?

Rick. Are you insane? How could anyone read my brave, nuanced, contemporary play...and come up with....*(gesturing at the befuddled actors)*...that!

John. Is it really that different from what you had in mind?

*Placing a hand across his forehead Rick collapses flat against the stage.*

Rick *(to the ceiling)*. I don't even know where to begin. What kind of director are you?

John. The professional kind.

Rick. I should know you then. What have you directed?

John. My highest profile project was a film. Cold Winter Mountain.

Rick *(suspicious)*. What sort of film was this...Cold Winter Mountain?

John. Well, it was a... *(Mumbles something inaudible)*.

Rick. Excuse me? Speak up man! I am sure these people (*indicates the audience*) would like to hear your credentials.

John (*defensively*). I said it was a Hallmark special.

Rick. Ah-ha! That explains a lot. Do you want to know what I had in mind when this play was written?

John. No, I do not. (*Reluctantly indicating audience*) But they might.

Rick (*to audience*). Do you want to know how I would have directed this play? (*If no one speaks up, a plant in the audience will yell 'yes!'* Rick quickly gets to his feet, brushing off the palms of his hands)

Rick. Alright then.

*Rick ascends the stage and waives the actors into a huddle. He whispers to them at a level the audience cannot hear. The actors react with gasps, giggles, and murmurs of "oh my!" Meanwhile John interacts with the audience, creating a visual distraction that keeps the play moving.*

John (*to audience*). Can you believe this guy? Anyone know the reason why Shakespeare is still being produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? (*shouting to ensure Rick hears*). He doesn't show up at performances!

*The actor huddle breaks up; actors rush off in different directions. Some saying 'that is very different' under their breath. Rick and director now head off to stand at far stage left and far stage right.*

Rick: Lights please! *The set goes dark.*

Rick (*calling to actors*). Arrange the set as we discussed. (*Actors remove long sheets from the gurneys to reveal polished wood sides. With a quick re-shuffling of places, the hospital set becomes a piano bar. A covered table is revealed to be a small prop piano. Bar stools are pulled out from behind the gurneys. Actresses untie their scrubs to reveal semi-provocative nightclub attire - fishnet stockings, etc. Outlandish hairstyles might be revealed when the cloth head coverings of scrubs are removed.*)

Rick. And...action!

*Sounds of a busy nightclub – people laughing, glasses clinking. Light slowly comes up to reveal Wendy and Abbey on barstools at center stage facing the audience. Extra actors may fill in as additional customers. Wendy and Abbey hold their beer bottles high during the fade in. They click them together and laugh before drinking.*

*Suddenly Jennifer enters through the center door, out of breath. She is dressed to slay. Not overtly sexual, but with a sophisticated nightclub 'wow' factor – as if she has tried hard to pull off the effect. Seeing Wendy and Abby, Jennifer rushes over to join them at the bar.*

Jennifer. I'm here, rough commute. So, where is this woman?

Abby (*excited*). Just arrived. Still in the parking lot.

Jennifer. You said this was urgent. (*Suddenly self-conscious*) I have to tell you both honestly. From what you described, I don't have the greatest feeling about this.

Abby. I understand that. We are only asking you to take a look. As to the level of urgency.... (*winking at Wendy*) ...we'll defer to your judgement. (*Wendy and Abby share a conspiratorial laugh*)

Wendy (*stage whisper*). Here she comes now.

*Heather enters from the center door. She is tall, slender and stunning. She takes off her coat to reveal a dress with an exposed midriff.*

Jennifer (*stage whisper*). Oh my god. Her stomach! I've never seen anything like it.

Abby. Out of your league?

Jennifer. I didn't say that.

*Jennifer self consciously hides behind the wine list, lowering it just enough to peer at Heather who is now sitting alone at the opposite end of the bar.*

Wendy. Look. It's not my place to say, but maybe it is time...for you to have a challenge again.

Jennifer (*lowering the wine list*). You are right.

Wendy. I am?

Jennifer. It's not your place to say. (*She smacks her friend with the wine list*) But you are also right about something else. It is critical. We have to act now. (*laughs self consciously*) I mean, I have to act now. You leave me no choice.

Abby. Everyone has a choice.

Jennifer. I don't. Not after I saw the shape that she is in. Good lord, not after I saw her stomach. My eyes cannot unsee that. Hand me that tray, I am going in.

*Wendy lifts a tray with two martinis from the bar surface and hands it to Jennifer. Jennifer slow walks toward Heather, carrying the drinks. Stage lights fade to half brightness as everyone freezes.*

Rick. Scene two! The night before. Same bar, Jennifer and Heather are not present. Blackout please.

*Stage goes dark. Jennifer and Heather quickly exit. TV monitor facing audience displays white text:*  
SCENE II: THE NIGHT BEFORE *The screen winks out as stage lights fade up on the bar.*

*Wendy and Abby are seated together at the bar. Heather enters and takes a seat at the far end. Wendy pauses just as she is lifting her drink to her lips.*

Wendy. Yow! Who dat?

Abby. She's new here. Friend of Jessica's. *(Looks critically at her friend)* Aren't you in a relationship?

Wendy. I'm not looking for me, you idiot. I'm thinking about Jennifer's rebound.

Abby. Jennifer is still mourning Angie. She hasn't had a rebound.

*Wendy cannot take her eyes off Heather, who is typing on her phone.*

Wendy. Not yet anyway.

*Abby punches her friend's shoulder.*

Abby. Would you stop? You're like the worst matchmaker ever. Remember that girl you tried to set me up with?

Wendy. Ahhh, Samantha. She was beautiful.

Abby. She was straight!

Wendy. Who knew?

Abby. Not you, apparently. And for all we know *(pointing with her bottle)* that girl is straight, too.

Wendy. What is she doing in a gay bar?

Abby. It's trendy. On social media. She's probably some kind of influencer. *(Beat)* How do you know Jennifer would even like her?

Wendy. What's not to like?

Abby. I swear, you are such a guy sometimes.

Wendy. Is that a bad thing?

Abby. Women are not visually stimulated –

Wendy. This one is.

Abby. Nature intended women to be less shallow than men. We are attracted by personality. Jennifer has a type.

Wendy. What type? Angie was a train wreck.

Abby (*musings*). Yeah...and that is a type. Jen may have a need to rescue people.

Wendy. Well, it may be time for her best friends to rescue her. (*Wendy raises her bottle toward the obliviously texting Heather, in a little salute*) I think she's queer.

Abby. I think she's straight.

Wendy. Maybe she's pan? (*setting down her bottle*) Why hesitate? (*Wendy starts to rise*)

*Abby grabs her.*

Abby. Sit down, idiot. You are always doing impulsive things. And they always backfire. Jennifer isn't ready to date yet. She's still in mourning.

Wendy. Nonsense. A date is exactly what she needs. Who was it that sang 'the best way to get over someone, is to get under someone else'?

*John, from audience, blows a referee whistle.*

John. Full stop! (*To Rick*) Are you out of your mind? I am telling you right now, this will never play at the Kennedy Center.

Rick. Good thing we're in Scranton.

John. Look, I'm no bigot. I'm a business man. All I'm saying is...being gay is not exactly something you want to telegraph from a stage at this moment in our nation's history!

Rick. I'm not gay.

John. That doesn't matter. You write about queer people.

Rick. I write about people, all flavors of people. This play just happened to be set in a gay bar. That can't be helped.

John. Just happen to find another theme for these characters. Like I did!

Rick. But your play was terrible.

John. And your play cannot be produced! It will alienate conservative sponsors. Have you no business sense at all, man? What sort of playwright are you? What else have you done?

Rick (*with pride*). My last play was a sophisticated farce: Match #365. It opened at the Olde Brick in January. Did you see it?

John. No. But I saw the reviews. Plotless. Pointless. And tasteless.

Rick. They ran out of adjectives trying to describe it.

John. Look, I am not financing this. The moment they (*indicating audience*) leave this theater tonight, we're finished.

Rick. Are you sure of that?

John. I'd bet my life on it.

Rick. Perhaps. (*shoulders drop*) You may have a point.

John. And I'll tell you something else. It is too late to mount another production. This stage is paid for three more weeks. The advertising has been out for months.

Rick. Damn! We are both too far in to stop now.

John. I mortgaged my house to get this theatre.

John and Rick (*in unison*). What are we going to do?

*The actress playing Heather steps forward.*

Heather. May I offer a suggestion?

Rick. Oh god.

John (*throwing his hands up*). An actor.

Heather. Fine then. (*Offended, Heather starts to head back upstage*)

Rick. You might as well tell us.

John. Nothing to lose at this point.

Heather. Well I just thought. I mean. This time of year and all.



John and Rick. Yes?

Heather. I was in a musical once. We packed the place. Sold out every night.

*Rick and John sink their faces into their hands. John begins to sob softly. Heather turns to Rick.*

Heather. Someone told me you play piano. When you aren't writing, I mean.

Rick. Not really. I play for my family at Christmas.

Heather. What can you play?

Rick. Carol of the Bells.

Heather. What else?

*Rick stares at her blankly.*

Heather. Alright then. We can work with that. Get over to the piano. *(Rick does not move)* Get over there, before they start to leave. *(Rick walks dejectedly to the piano as Heather huddles with the cast. Quick murmured conversation, followed by 'OK, got it!' from the cast. Cast looks to Rick, who is staring blankly. They announce as a crowd.)*

Entire Cast. We're ready!

Rick. No you're not. It isn't ready until he *(indicating the director)* says so.

*John halfheartedly waives his hand, as if waiving a flag of surrender.*

John. Curtain up...

*The set goes to a wash of deep blue shadows. Abby, Wendy, Jennifer and Heather sit on barstools with their backs to the audience. As Rick plays the sweet opening notes to Carol of the Bells on the piano, each woman swivels on her stool to face the audience - delivering her line in song.*

*Sung to the tune of Carol of the Bells:*

Abby. I think she's queer...

Wendy. I think she's straight...

Jennifer. May-be she's pan...

Heather. Why hes-i-tate...?

*Any extra customers may now rise from behind the bar. Full cast of actors sing together as a chorus. The classic carol ramps up in energy as the piano pounds harder and faster:*

Chorus:

Patrons will balk!  
And never pay!  
They'll say we've gone woke.  
They'll claim it's too gay.

Donors will run!  
Closed are there minds  
Pan only means  
That love is blind...

*Dismayed, John frantically holds up a cue card that reads FAMILY VALUES in large letters. The cast notices, and their lyrics abruptly shift gears:*

Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas!  
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas!  
Merry merry, merry, merry...  
Merry, merry, merry, merry, merry!

*At the crescendo, the chorus falls silent for an eight measure piano solo, serving as segue to a melody lifted from God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen. The chorus now sings directly to John.*

*To the tune of God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen::*

God rest ye stressed pro-du-oo-cer,  
Box office not dismay.

Remember peace and tol-er-ance  
symbolize Christmas Day.

We'll save your soul  
from biased angst,  
by leaving in some gay.

Ohhh...

Tidings of en-ten-dre and joy  
(en-ten-dre and joy!)  
Ohh...  
Tie -- eye -- dings  
of en-ten-dre and joy...

*Fast piano break transitions back to Carol of the Bells, as the chorus turns to the audience.*

Snow falling fast, joy here at last!  
Audiences cheer! Christmas is near!  
Sold everywhere, no vacant chair...

Merry, merry, merry, merry box office!  
Merry, merry, merry, merry box office!

Merry, merry, merry, merry, merry...  
Merry, merry, merry, merry, merry, merry...

*The chorus crescendo peaks. Now a final instrumental break (fast piano baseline groove).*

*The piano then slows to a repetition of the opening of Carol of the Bells, but this time decreasing in speed rather than increasing. As each line is separately sung, each actress will hop up onto the bar gradually forming a seated row down its length.*

Wendy. I think she's queer....  
Abby. I think she's straight...  
Jennifer. Maybe she's pan...

*Heather lays lengthwise across their three laps, propping herself up with one elbow on the final actress. She sings in a clear falsetto.*

Heather. Why hes...i....tate....

John and Rick (*shouting as one*): That's it!

BLACKOUT

Notes:

- To avoid rights issues, original lyrics have been set to music in the public domain.
- I am able to construct the necessary props, appear as myself (the playwright) and play the piano accompaniment live on stage. I composed the mash-up of the two carol themes for piano.
- A volunteer choreographer would be helpful in staging the final segment; there are people I can ask to help us if the producing theatre does not already work with a choreographer.
- If any extras in the cast happen to play a musical instrument, it would be fun to have them whip an instrument out to augment the live piano music being played in the finale.