

Excerpt from...
"THE UNDERSTUDY"
by Bruce Kane

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WARNING No one shall make any changes to this play for the purpose of production. Publication of these plays does not imply its availability for production.

THE UNDERSTUDY

SETTING: Upstage center is a door representing the stage of a local theatre. A full length mirror stands stage left, representing the wings of a local theatre.

TIME: Now.

CHARACTERS:

ACTRESS – Beautiful and vain.

DIRECTOR – Manipulative

STAGE MANAGER: Nervous.

ACTOR: Handsome and hammy.

(At Rise the Actor stands in front of the backstage mirror doing vocal exercises and adjusting his tie. The Director and Actress enter arguing trailed by the Stage Manager carrying a clipboard)

ACTRESS: Not on your life. There is no way I'm going on stage in front of all those people... naked.

DIRECTOR: I'm not asking you to go out there naked.

ACTRESS: But you just said....

DIRECTOR: I'm asking you to go out there nude.

ACTRESS: I fail to see the difference.

DIRECTOR: Being naked on stage is just taking your clothes off to titillate the prurient interests of the masses. But when an actress... a real actress goes on stage nude... That's art.

ACTRESS: Well, then you go out there "nude."

DIRECTOR: Those good people sitting out there in the dark didn't shell out big bucks to see my boobs. They shelled out big bucks to see yours.

ACTOR: *(excited by the idea)* Are you really going to do the scene... nude?

ACTRESS: You can stop drooling. Of course, I'm not.

(The Actor registers his disappointment and goes back to his preparations)

DIRECTOR: You walk out on me now and you'll never work nude in this town again.

ACTOR: *(to Director, nervously)* Do ... do.... I have to do the scene in the nude?

DIRECTOR: Don't be ridiculous.

(The Actor is relieved)

STAGE MANAGER: What do you want to do, boss? Send the audience home?

DIRECTOR: Send the audience home? Send the audience home?? You never send the audience home.

STAGE MANAGER: Because the show must go on?

DIRECTOR: Because we'd have to give back the money. You're new to the theatre, aren't you?

STAGE MANAGER: What are we gonna do?

DIRECTOR: Here... Give me that. *(takes the Stage Manager's clipboard and pen and writes then hands the board back.)* Now go out there and read this to the audience.

STAGE MANAGER: Me... I'm not an actor.

DIRECTOR: I'm just asking you to read what I wrote, not do the soliloquy from Hamlet.

(The Stage Manager walks downstage and nervously begins to read.)

STAGE MANAGER: Due to the completely unprofessional conduct ...

ACTRESS: Unprofessional? I am not unprofessional. You can call me a lot of things...

DIRECTOR: And many people have...

STAGE MANAGER: ...on the part of the actress who was to perform the role as it was written when she was begging to be cast in the role.

ACTRESS: Beg? Beg? I have never begged for a role in my life. If I remember correctly you were the one down on your knees.

DIRECTOR: That was in a completely different context.

STAGE MANAGER: We are sorry to announce that Barbara Andrews will not be appearing as previously announced. In her place...

ACTRESS: In my place? You're going to send out a nobody in my place?

DIRECTOR: Of course, I'm not sending out a nobody.

STAGE MANAGER: ... no one will be playing the part of Helen.

DIRECTOR: I'm sending out... nobody.

ACTRESS VOICE: *(confused)* Nobody is going to play my part?

DIRECTOR: That's right. And she'll probably be ten times better at it than you.

ACTOR: Wait... wait... just a minute. *(nervous and confused)* You want me to play the scene all alone?

DIRECTOR: That's right.

ACTOR: Nobody else on that stage. Just me.

DIRECTOR: Just you.

ACTOR: Not her? Not her replacement, Just me. By myself. Alone

DIRECTOR: Just you, the spotlight and the audience.

ACTOR: I love it. *(He takes his place behind the closed door)*

(The play continues...)

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