

NO SUCH THING

by
Seth Etcetera

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DMACC Ankeny Theatre at
The Simon Estes School of Fine Arts
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CHARACTERS

All are students at Meadowview, with the exception of two alumni: Bridget and Cooper.

- **GORDON: Student Director**
 - A senior
- **TONY: Production Stage Manager**
 - A junior.
- **BRIDGET: Costume Designer**
 - She graduated from the program and now works on staff.
- **JACK: ASM, Dramaturg, Intimacy Coordinator and Fight Coordinator.**
 - A junior.
- **LANIE: playing Grumio**
 - A junior.
- **JOE: playing Petruccio**
 - A senior.
- **QUINN: playing Katherine**
 - A senior.
- **ALICE: playing Curtis**
 - A junior.
- **DYLAN: playing Baptista**
 - The only first-year in the cast.
- **COOPER**
 - He graduated from the Theatre Department the past spring. He is engaged to Quinn.
- **CALEB**
 - A senior. He is Student Body President and Chair of the Front of House and Marketing Committee.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

All scenes take place in or around Meadowview's Fine Arts Building.

- **Scene One: Rehearsal Prep**
 - Gordon, Tony, Lanie, Bridget, Jack, Joe
- **Scene Two: Running Lines**
 - Quinn, Cooper
- **Scene Three: Tarot Reading**
 - Alice, Dylan
- **Scene Four: In Rehearsal: Scene Work**
 - Lanie, Caleb, Jack, Gordon, Tony, Quinn, Joe, Alice
- **Scene Five: In Rehearsal: Break**
 - Bridget, Dylan, Cooper, Jack, Alice, Lanie, Tony, Gordon, Joe, Caleb
- ***Intermission option***
- **Scene Six: Dress Rehearsal (Places, Please)**
 - Bridget, Quinn, Joe, Alice, Lanie, Dylan, Jack, Tony
- **Scene Seven: Flashback to Last Halloween**
 - Cooper, Lanie, Gordon, Tony, Jack
- **Scene Eight: Dress Rehearsal (Act Two, Scene One)**
 - Joe, Quinn, Gordon, Jack, Tony (on mic)
- **Scene Nine: Opening Night performance**
 - Alice, Lanie, Caleb, Quinn, Joe, Dylan, Cooper, Tony (on mic)

SCENE ONE: REHEARSAL PREP

In darkness, three scenes are set:

In the center, GORDON is standing at a rehearsal table, addressing an unseen audience.

TONY sits next to him.

At stage right, BRIDGET & LANIE are doing a costume fitting.

At stage left, JACK helps JOE select a pair of character shoes.

Lights up on GORDON & TONY.

GORDON “Thus have I politicly begun my reign!” Don’t worry. That isn’t my directorial mindset. These are Petruccio’s words, after he delivers his new wife, Katherine, to his country home and sends her to bed without dinner. It’s not a happy marriage. Katherine is the so-called “shrew” of the play’s title. She’s too strong a woman for comfort in Shakespeare’s age, too outspoken, too willful. And so Petruccio, sets his sights on her. He punishes her, and the play punishes her, over five long acts. Petruccio insists on complete dominance over his wife. He insists his authority is even greater than the natural order: “It shall be what o’clock I say it is! . . . It shall be moon or star or what I list!” It is almost impossible to read these scenes and think how they once played for laughs! So: why did I select this play for my senior project, this “quote-unquote” “comedy”? You might doubt the choice. I understand. You might say, “There is no such thing as a 21st-century Taming of the Shrew!” Well, maybe not! But, I wonder . . . what if we look at the text with fresh eyes? What if we dare to look at Shakespeare’s play and see it for what it is?

Lights up on BRIDGET & LANIE.

BRIDGET is fitting a pair of pants on LANIE, adding pins as they talk.

LANIE An embarrassing disaster! A complete public meltdown! That man is very insecure.

BRIDGET About directing?

LANIE Well, he’s very defensive.

BRIDGET He’s delicate.

LANIE I mean, look - the play would not have been my choice.

BRIDGET It’s a difficult play.

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LANIE It's a terrible play. But, oh, you know, he has a vision! He's going to reinvent the classics for a modern audience! It's so pretentious!

BRIDGET It's Gordon.

LANIE So a group of us were out at Tiny's when the season was announced, and I said, "There is no such thing as a 21st-century Taming of the Shrew!"

BRIDGET That was the quote.

LANIE That's all I said.

BRIDGET And it got around to Gordon.

LANIE And I would have said it to him directly. But it was summer, I didn't know where he was.

BRIDGET He was apprenticing at Intrepid Arts.

LANIE Of course he was.

BRIDGET He was the Assistant Director for something.

LANIE Intrepid Arts! Please! Whether any of their stuff is actually "intrepid" . . .

BRIDGET What is the definition of "intrepid" . . . ?

LANIE Nobody knows. Intrepid Arts doesn't know.

BRIDGET Can you hold the waist here?

LANIE Anyway, he posts this flood of Instagram stories, not addressing me directly, but starting with "So, I've heard that some of you are saying there is no such thing as a 21st-century Taming of the Shrew!" And I thought, oh Lord, here we go!

Lights up JACK and JOE.

JACK I just don't think he's done his homework. He's been very busy, you know, with the apprenticeship. We went out for a drink last night, and I was asking him questions, quoting a bit from the script, and just talking through some of the dramaturgical work I've been doing . . .

JOE Are you the Dramaturg?

JACK Yeah.

JOE Since when?

JACK He asked me to do it a few months ago.

JOE I thought you were the Assistant Stage Manager.

JACK Yeah. I'm both. How do those feel?

JOE They feel like they're a million years old.

JACK Try these.

JACK hands JOE a new pair of shoes.

JOE I wore those three years ago for our freshman cabaret, for the Macbeth monologue. A character only slightly less evil than Petruccio.

JACK Shakespeare doesn't paint Petruccio as evil. That's what I'm worried about.

JOE We are reinterpreting the work. The Villain Petruccio: now onstage at Meadowview!!

JACK The play's a comedy.

JOE The drama is right there on the page, Jack. And it wants out!

JACK It's written as a comedy.

JOE Nobody wants to laugh at a husband abusing his wife.

JACK The audience does not. But the script does! The script is all jokes!

JOE Jokes which no longer work.

JACK It's laugh lines and wordplay and physical comedy all the way through!

JOE Here's some wordplay for you, Jack: cultivate indifference.

JACK What?

JOE I've been studying Stoic philosophy this summer. It would do you some good. "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." You know who said that?

JACK Shakespeare.

JOE Shakespeare: the man of the hour!

Back to GORDON and TONY:

GORDON This will be a confrontation: not only between Kate and Petruccio but also between our audience and the play - the violence of the play! Look: the days where an audience can sit back and laugh as a woman is beaten, starved, and emotionally manipulated by her husband? Those days are over. Katherine says, in Act 3, "My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, or else my heart concealing it will break." It is past time for the American Theatre to tell that story. To tell Katherine's story.

Back to LANIE and BRIDGET:

LANIE I mean, if you're gonna give me a pants role, at least give me something great. Give me Petruccio! Give me Baptista, at least! Not some servant! Gremio!

BRIDGET Grumio.

LANIE Gremio?

BRIDGET Grumio.

LANIE I thought it was Gremio.

BRIDGET Gremio is one of Bianca's suitors, another character. Grumio's the servant.

LANIE Whatever.

BRIDGET It will be the most comfortable costume you've ever worn.

LANIE I don't mind a corset.

BRIDGET Said no one ever.

LANIE Do you think I'm being punished?

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BRIDGET No . . .
LANIE Gordon was upset with something I said. He blows up about it on Instagram. He never speaks to me about it directly, and now he casts me as . . . as . . . Grumio?
BRIDGET Gremio.
LANIE Gremio.
BRIDGET No -- Grumio!
LANIE A servant! Is there a connection here or am I paranoid?
BRIDGET I don't know.
LANIE What do you think?
BRIDGET I don't know.
LANIE I guess you're in a difficult position, now that you're on staff. Congratulations, by the way.
BRIDGET Thank you.
LANIE You probably don't want to talk dirt about a student with me.
BRIDGET Of course I want to talk dirt. About Gordon anyway. Here, let me look at this length.

BRIDGET steps back and looks at the pants.

LANIE looks at her reflection in the mirror. She performs one of her lines:

LANIE "Knock you here, sir? Why, sir, what am I, sir, that I should knock you here, sir?"
BRIDGET There she is!
LANIE There are no small roles in Shakespeare, I guess. Only big egos!
BRIDGET I don't think you're being punished. Gordon's so insecure about his work. Don't you think he'd insist on the best people in the best roles?
LANIE Ouch.
BRIDGET In my head, that wasn't offensive.
LANIE Tactless!
BRIDGET Capital "R": Rude!
LANIE But the pants are comfortable.
BRIDGET Would you like a beard?
LANIE Ooh! That could be fun! But no. Not some spirit gum monster.
BRIDGET Just makeup stubble.
LANIE I like it!
BRIDGET And huge eyebrows.
LANIE And bags under the eyes!
BRIDGET Grumio lives!

BACK to JOE and JACK.

JOE Indifference, Jack! I'm telling you! All of the new wisdom is very, very old. Epictetus. The Stoics. Cultivating Indifference. Read about it. When I was your age -

JACK So: last year.

JOE I had no interest in ancient philosophy back then. I was extremely online all the time, and I could just feel my brain, ughhhh, melting into nothing. Because you can't concentrate on anything. You know! There's always something new and important screaming for your attention. Plus, all the stress from school. The answer is: distance and indifference and objectivity. Epictetus writes that the real harm is your perception of harm. We only feel stress when we label our surroundings as stressful. We only feel betrayed when we decide we have been betrayed.

JACK That sounds like victim blaming. Like, if you're the victim of abuse then it's your fault for calling the abuse what it is.

JOE No, the point is empowerment. The power to control the things that are yours to control. Look at you: you're worried about the audience, you're worried about the script, you're worried about Gordon. Are you even enjoying yourself? Are you?

JACK Is that a trick question?

JOE No.

JACK No. I'm not enjoying myself. I'm stressed out!

JOE Because of the show or because of the world?

JACK You mean the ongoing pandemic, the rise of domestic terrorism . . .

JOE Well, don't dwell on all that.

JACK . . . renewed threats of nuclear warfare and institutional collapse . . .

JOE Focus on the task at hand.

JACK . . . on top of all the old standards like global food insecurity and impending climate catastrophe . . .

JOE Let the rest go.

JACK And the task at hand is to anticipate every possible landmine . . .

JOE Touch grass, Jack.

JACK . . . in an ill-conceived and overly ambitious production of an impossible play. But I'm supposed to cultivate indifference?

JOE Cultivate boundaries, if not indifference. Epictetus tells us: everyone is in control of their own experience. That includes you. If you can't change it, release it.

JACK Just be glad Epictetus isn't your Intimacy Coordinator.

JOE Wouldn't it be nice to have an Intimacy Coordinator!

JACK Pleased to meet you.

JOE You? Since when?

JACK Since like twelve hours ago. Gordon asked me at breakfast.

JOE And the Dramaturg? And the Assistant Stage Manager?

JACK And eventually, probably, the Sound Designer.

JOE Who's the Sound Designer now?

JACK Gordon.

JOE Ahh. You're in too deep, comrade.
JACK My entire theatrical résumé will be jobs from this production of "The Taming of the Shrew."
JOE Why do you say yes to all these things?
JACK Sometimes the least stressful option is to just say yes and do things yourself.
JOE Indifference, Jack. Cultivate indifference. "Of all the things that are, some are good, others bad, and yet others indifferent."
JACK Shakespeare again?
JOE Epictetus. The Stoics, man. I'm telling you!

Back to GORDON and TONY:

GORDON For those who don't know me, I'm Gordon Tripp. I guess that only really applies to our first-year, Duncan. Let's have a round of applause for our freshman. Look, this is not going to be an easy process. The text is challenging. The content is triggering. I am so grateful that you have all signed on to be a member of my ensemble. And I want you to know that we are going to take care of each other. We are going to hold each other up. Our production will be the first in the history of Meadowview's Theatre Department to have an Intimacy Coordinator. And that's just one example of how we are being intentional in fostering a collaborative and caring rehearsal space.

Back to LANIE and BRIDGET:

LANIE And Quinn! I worry about her.
BRIDGET It's a lot. With the wedding coming up!
LANIE If anyone can handle the part, she can.
BRIDGET No doubt.
LANIE No doubt!
BRIDGET The wedding's in December?
LANIE The spring.
BRIDGET No, not the spring.
LANIE Well . . . I guess I'm not sure.
BRIDGET Are they postponing again?
LANIE I really don't know. I think it was discussed.
BRIDGET They've already delayed twice, haven't they?
LANIE Well, first for Covid.
BRIDGET Right, everybody delayed.
LANIE And then last fall.
BRIDGET Right.
LANIE Because of the shooting.

BRIDGET Right.

BACK to JOE and JACK.

JOE I know Cooper's upset, but I completely understand where Quinn's coming from on this. You just cannot do it all! You can't rehearse Katherine and do course work for your senior year and plan a wedding all at the same time.

JACK Are they delaying again?

JOE Yeah. To the spring.

JACK I didn't know that.

JOE Maybe they haven't said anything publicly yet.

JACK You heard this from Cooper?

JOE No, from Caleb.

JACK Caleb would know.

JOE Oh, Cooper's so fragile right now, don't mention I said anything. I don't want to be on his bad side.

JACK Where's that indifference, Joe?

JOE Ah, you're right! "There is nothing either good or bad!"

Back to GORDON and TONY:

GORDON The last thing I want to talk about before we begin with our read-through is, uh ... Our Opening Night is November 5th, so that lines up pretty closely with Halloween and the anniversary of last year's shooting. Obviously, this is a difficult thing to talk about. And nothing's set in stone yet, but we think there may be potential for a tie-in with our production. Maybe there's an opportunity to take this conversation that we're having in the play, about violence against women, and expand that outside the walls of the auditorium into our community. People are still grieving, of course, after those three women were killed, just off campus last Halloween. And so Tony and I have been coordinating with some other agencies on campus to brainstorm what that might look like. If any of you have ideas on that, bring them to me, and we'll see what we can make happen. Okay? So, with that, let's begin our read-through!

*A beat change. GORDON takes a deep breath.
He relaxes and turns to TONY, who looks up from his notes. He had been reviewing his script.*

GORDON Okay. How was that?

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TONY It was four women who died. Not three. Amber Fay. Elizabeth Colson. Monica Ruiz. Crystal Ludwig.

GORDON Oh. I always think it's three. Other than that? How'd I do?

TONY references his notes.

TONY Katherine's quote is from Act 4, not Act 3. Dylan is the name of the first-year cast member, not Duncan. And our Opening Night is November 3rd, not the 5th.

GORDON Okay! So . . . not so bad! I think I'm ready!

End of Scene 1.