

Characters

Stagehand 1 (M/F) – **(SH1)** a stagehand for the theater

Stagehand 2 (M/F) – **(SH2)** another stagehand for the theater

Scene 1

(An empty and dark stage. If possible, the curtain should be left open from the previous play and the stage lights are down or very dim. If the curtain is closed, it should be opened as subtly as possible. The stage should be clear. Just offstage are a small table, two chairs, and a battery-powered candle or lamp. If music is usually played between performances, it can begin at the end of the previous act but should diminish in volume over time. After a subtle curtain rise (or not) in the dark, SH1 enters stage left carrying a chair, places it center downstage, and exits stage left. After a moment, SH2 enters stage right carrying a chair, places it center upstage, and exits stage right. After another moment, SH1 enters stage left, takes the chair from upstage and places it downstage, then exits stage left. After yet another moment, SH2 enters stage right and moves the two chairs upstage then exits stage right. This is all done on an almost dark stage.)

(SH1 enters stage left, brings onstage a small table and places it near stage right, then takes the two chairs upstage and brings them down stage, then exits stage left. SH2 enters stage right, runs into the table and calls out or curses, moves the table from stage right to near stage left, moves the chairs from down stage to up, then exits stage right. SH1 enters stage left with a battery-powered candle or lamp, runs into the table and calls out or curses, moves the table back to stage right, puts the lamp on the table, moves the chairs from upstage to downstage, then exits stage left. SH2 enters stage right, almost runs into the table again, calls out or curses, moves the table and the lamp to stage left, then switches on the lamp.)

SH1: (enters stage left to the table and speaks in a half whisper) No, no, no. (switches off the lamp)

SH2: What are you doing? (switches on the lamp)

SH1: Shh! The audience will hear you. Grab the table!

SH2: (in a half whisper) What are you doing? (grabs the table but does not let it be moved)

SH1: We're moving this table to the other side of the stage.

SH2: I can see that but *why* are we doing that?

SH1: Because that's where it goes.

SH2: No, that's *not* where it goes. The table goes stage *left* and the chairs are *upstage*.

SH1: No, the table needs to be stage *right* and the chairs are *down* stage.

SH2: No, if you had actually bothered to read the script you would know that the table is stage left and the chairs are up stage.

SH1: If you had shown up at the final production meeting instead of staying home to nurse a hangover then you would have known that they made some last minute changes to the script including putting the table right and the chairs down. Grab the lamp!

SH2: **(takes the lamp)** I didn't have a hangover. I wasn't feeling well.

(SH1 grabs the table and brings it across to stage right. SH2 follows with the lamp still on but does not put it on the table.)

SH2: Oh really? So you weren't at Finnegans last night?

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SH1: The pub?

SH2: Like you don't know. Just like you don't know that I'm friends with at least half the people who work there.

SH1: Keeping tabs on me now, are you? I can go where I please. I don't need you to check up on me.

(SH1 turns to cross the stage to put down the lamp. SH2 follows and catches SH1 about halfway across or very near the chairs.)

SH2: Hey! I was concerned about you, alright?

SH1: **(turns around to face SH2)** Why?

SH2: Why? What do you mean why? You know very well why.

SH1: No, actually, I don't. If I recall, we didn't end things on the friendliest of terms.

(By this time SH1 and SH2 have slowly lost their whispers and are oblivious of the audience.)

SH2: **(comes closer)** Need I remind you that it was you who left me there in the dark and in my underwear?

SH1: I left because I had to.

SH2: You had to? You had to? Is there a law that says you're not allowed to stick around? Afraid you might have to trade lust for romance?

SH1: What are you talking about?

SH2: Look! I get it. You're afraid of commitment. If you hang around it might seem like you want something more... something you're not ready for – but at least have the nerve to say so. We can talk about it.

SH1: **(sits in a chair)** No, we can't.

SH2: **(sits)** What are you so afraid of?

SH1: I'm not afraid, alright?

SH2: Then what is it? **(SH1 does not respond)** Oh no! I did something, didn't I?

SH1: What? No. You were...

SH2: What? What! Did I pick my teeth? Have hair in my ear? Bad breath? Did I belch, burp, fart? What?

SH1: You didn't *do* anything.

SH2: **(thinks)** Then I must have said something wrong.

SH1: No. **(stands)** C'mon. We need to get off the stage before the next play begins. **(starts to exit)**

SH2: **(a beat then sincerely)** Oh no... I'm so sorry. Sometimes I just forget about it.

SH1: **(turns around and sits back down)** Look! I'm sorry too. It's just that I...

SH2: I know, I know. I should have said something before you saw it.

SH1: You had your arms around me and I was kissing you. Then I look over and see two empty sockets staring back at me. It kind of ended the mood for me.

SH2: I can see how it might do that.

SH1: Every time you moved your shoulder I thought it was going to devour me. I had to get out. I had to get a drink... or two.

SH2: I understand.

SH1: You're right, though.

SH2: About what?

SH1: I should have said something. I should have talked to you instead of just leaving without explaining myself.

SH2: You were caught off-guard. You were confused.

SH1: No, I was a coward.

SH2: It's just a tattoo!

SH1: Of a skull, a very scary skull.

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SH2: How is a tattoo going to cause you any harm?

SH1: It's what it represents.

SH2: What it represents? What is that supposed to mean? You don't even know what it represents to me.

SH1: That's what frightened me.

SH2: You see something you don't understand and you immediately jump to conclusions about it instead of taking the time to just ask me about it.

SH1: I guess I was afraid to hear what you might say.

SH2: What about now? Are you afraid now?

SH1: No.

SH2: Because I have a shirt on and we are in the dark?

SH1: That's right.

SH2: But nothing's changed. I'm still the same person and my tattoo is still there.

SH1: I know. I'm sorry. **(pause)** So why do you have a skull on your shoulder?

SH2: It's a reminder.

SH1: Of what?

SH2: The fact that everything dies.

SH1: How morbid!

SH2: No, no! It's more than just that. A reminder of the inevitability of death is also a reminder of how precious life is. We are each given something special and unique and we can choose to either celebrate and engage with that or we can squander it away.

SH1: OK, but a skull?

SH2: It just seemed a more powerful image to me than a flower or a heart.

SH1: That's for sure!

SH2: A skull represents decay and that is the driving force of everything around us. The universe drifts apart and all things fall away.

SH1: And that is the very thing I was afraid of. When I saw that *thing* on your beautiful shoulder I was afraid I had in my arms someone who could only focus on the negative in life, someone who would find a way to inscribe ugliness where there is beauty.

SH2: You are only seeing half the picture, then. That tattoo reminds me that there is only one thing in this entire universe that can counter the decay that surrounds us and that one thing is life – us – you and me. Life is what resists the separation of things.

SH1: I still don't understand.

SH2: Life is the one thing that creates – through love. Love brings us together. Love brings us new life. Love encourages us to build a future.

SH1: You get all that from the image of a lifeless skeletal head?

SH2: Yes. It's there to remind me to grab hold of anything good that might come along and not let go. That's why I kissed you in the back of the theater that night.

SH1: What makes you think I'm a good thing?

SH2: Sometimes you just have to take a chance. I was willing to take a chance with you but then you ran out.

SH1: Maybe I wasn't willing to take a chance, yet.

SH2: There's never a good time, never a right time.

SH1: And rarely a next time.

SH2: Exactly. **(after a moment)** I have a confession, too

SH1: Oh, really?

SH2: I knew about the changes to the script. I called to get the notes. I was putting the props in the wrong place just to make you mad. **(pause)** I'm sorry.

SH1: Then everything is where it should be.

SH2: Almost.

(SH1 and SH2 start to kiss with the lamp between them. The lights begin to come up slowly.)

SH1: The play's starting. Let's go.

(SH1 runs to put the lamp on the table. They both exit. SH2 runs back on to switch off the lamp. The lights go out.)