

The Misfit Players

A Backstage Romantic Comedy

By Ellen Dean Price

PERUSAL COPY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

In Order of Appearance

<u>TESSA</u>	(F, 30-45)	The down to earth producer
<u>ZAYDEN</u>	(F, 20-60)	The 'no filter' light and sound operator
<u>JACK</u>	(M, 30-45)	The cool under pressure director
<u>BOB</u>	(M, 60+)	The slightly shady technical director
<u>PENELOPE</u>	(F, 20-40)	The positive thinking stage manager
<u>IAN</u>	(M, 30-45)	The eccentric prop manager
<u>WANDA</u>	(F, 60+)	The strong-willed actor and organizer
<u>DONOVAN</u>	(M, 25-45)	The eager leading man
<u>AINSLEY</u>	(F, 25-40)	The ultimate diva and leading lady
<u>HOWARD</u>	(M, 50+)	The theatre snob and lead actor
<u>CASEY</u>	(F, 20-40)	The constantly cosplaying costumer

ENSEMBLE (OPTIONAL) – ACTORS, COSTUME ASSISTANTS, MAKE UP AND HAIR ARTISTS, STAGE CREW, CARPENTERS

Suggested doubling for 7 actors, if desired:

ZAYDEN/CASEY

BOB/HOWARD

PENELOPE/AINSLEY

IAN/DONOVAN

Time: Present Day

Place: Fairfield (small town anywhere), USA

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ACT I SCENE 1

TESSA: (*from off stage*) Lights, please.

ZAYDEN: (*from the "booth", a bit crackly*) Got it, boss.

Lights up. Broken down sets, a few ratty chairs or other junk litter the stage. Tessa enters DSL. The old stage creaks as Tessa looks around. Zayden's lines are always from "the booth".

TESSA: It's seen better days.

ZAYDEN: Based on the equipment here, those days were back in 1987.

TESSA: Stage is no great shakes either. (*She moves back and forth on a creaky spot, testing it.*)

ZAYDEN: I didn't even know this theater was out here.

TESSA: Went out of business years ago. The town is buying the place for a community center.

ZAYDEN: Fairfield will have its own theater?

TESSA: This part will be the gymnasium.

ZAYDEN: Sports. Bleh.

TESSA: Some people like them.

ZAYDEN: Were you surprised to hear from Wanda?

TESSA: My phone hasn't been ringing. (*looking around*) It's run down, but there's something about a theatre.

ZAYDEN: Take it for a spin.

TESSA: (*scoffs*) No.

ZAYDEN: Come on.

TESSA: (*softening*) I don't think so.

ZAYDEN: You know you want to.

TESSA: (*a beat, then plants her feet, sings boldly, a belt*) "It had to be you, wonderful you, it had to be you!"

ZAYDEN: That's what I'm talkin' about.

Tessa laughs then, takes a grand bow.

JACK: (*entering DSL*) Not bad.

TESSA: (*startled, embarrassed*) I didn't know anyone else was here. Sorry.

JACK: For what? That's what a stage is for.

ZAYDEN: So, who's the hottie?

TESSA: Zayden, manners.

ZAYDEN: Don't got those.

JACK: Is Wanda somewhere?

TESSA: I didn't think she'd be here.

JACK: (*reaches out a hand*) I'm Jack.

TESSA: (*she takes his hand and shakes it*) Tessa.

ZAYDEN: Sky Masterson.

TESSA: (*to Jack*) She's not a character from Guys and Dolls. (*looks to the booth*) Just a bit random sometimes.

JACK: I think she's referring to me. Played him two summers ago. It's how I met Wanda actually. She asked me if I would direct this thing.

TESSA: (*surprised*) You direct?

ZAYDEN: (*laughing*) Sky directing. That's a good one.

JACK: Haven't had the opportunity yet. (*To Tessa*) But I don't get it. I'm new to the whole theater thing.

TESSA: You're a good-looking guy. In small town community theater, if you act, they want you *on* stage.

ZAYDEN: More than good looking.

TESSA: Is that necessary?

ZAYDEN: I got eyes. You got eyes.

TESSA: Z...

ZAYDEN: I'm sure he's seen himself in a mirror.

TESSA: (*changing the subject*) So, Jack. If you played Sky, you must be decent, even if you are “new”.

JACK: (*shrugs*) I can carry a tune, act a little. Figuring out the dancing thing as I go.

ZAYDEN: Dang, triple threat.

TESSA: You’ll be cast as romantic leads until you’re seventy. And even then.

BOB: (*entering DSL*) This theater is a disaster.

TESSA: Hey, Bob. Wanda roped you in, too?

BOB: Someone’s gotta build stuff.

TESSA: Staying out of trouble, I hope?

BOB: What’d you hear?

TESSA: Nothing.

BOB: Good. Not in trouble.

PENELOPE: (*entering DSL cheerily, with a notebook or clipboard*) Hello everyone! Am I late? I’m so sorry if I am. I’m Penelope. Just so grateful to be your Stage Manager. Can’t wait to get started!

ZAYDEN: You’ve got to be kidding me.

PENELOPE: (*looks at the booth*) Oh, hello, you must be Zayden. I’ve heard wonderful things about you!

ZAYDEN: Then it wasn’t me they were talking about.

Ian enters DSL.

BOB: Ian. Good to see you in one piece.

IAN: Am I ever gonna live that down?

BOB: Not while I have breath.

PENELOPE: Wanda’s not here yet? (*Tessa shakes her head*)

IAN: She likes to make a grand entrance.

TESSA: True. (*She looks out into the audience*) House will be a nice size.

BOB: Once the junk is removed.

TESSA: It’s been used for storage.

ZAYDEN: Or as a dumpster.

BOB: Well I think we—

Bob leans against a piece of junk, it falls overs, then perhaps a few others. They scramble to stabilize.

IAN: If we could not destroy the place. Before we even start.

BOB: Look who’s talking.

JACK: Probably fit two hundred fifty chairs. (*To Tessa*) Don’t you think?

BOB: At least four, five hundred.

IAN: Not if you want aisles.

JACK: Or meet fire codes.

BOB: We can get around those.

IAN: Not a great idea.

BOB: Learned that the hard way, did you?

IAN: Perhaps.

PENELOPE: And that’s also illegal.

TESSA: Gotta be on the up and up, Bob.

BOB: The fire marshal might take a bribe.

IAN: Also illegal.

BOB: Technically.

IAN: Actually.

TESSA: You can’t get five hundred people here anyway.

PENELOPE: We could, with the right publicity. And positive thinking.

IAN: Happy thoughts don’t sell tickets.

PENELOPE: They can, if you really believe. (*Writes a note in her notebook*)

TESSA: Two hundred fifty seats. If you could fill half, it'd be a win.

WANDA: (*enters DSL with a flourish*) Welcome everyone!

IAN: The woman of the hour.

WANDA: "April for the Arts" month was just announced. They'll be a dance troupe at Town Hall, a concert at First Church, an Art exhibit at Founders and that's where we come in. We're putting on a show right here.

TESSA: In April?

ZAYDEN: At this dump?

IAN: With...us?

WANDA: The building sale to Fairfield isn't finalized, but Mr. Sandoval is letting us use it for free.

PENELOPE: What wonderful news!

ZAYDEN: This place is a mess.

WANDA: It's not that bad.

ZAYDEN: There's a bucket up here still collecting rain water. And it's not raining.

BOB: I can fix a leaky roof.

WANDA: Problem solved.

IAN: Have you seen him on a ladder recently?

BOB: Just because one time I—

A 'mouse' scampers across the stage. (Can be just a sound cue, with actors reacting). Something else on the stage falls over.

JACK: Is everyone okay?

IAN: No thanks to Bob here.

BOB: I didn't do anything.

Jack and Bob reset the tipped over piece of junk.

TESSA: Is Sandoval gonna help with building maintenance?

WANDA: Are you always dollars and cents?

TESSA: Are you willing to round up the vermin?

WANDA: It's all on us. Sandoval's done with the place.

IAN: I wonder why.

BOB: I'll start with the mouse. Got to be a shovel around here somewhere.

PENELOPE: What's he going to do with a shovel?

IAN: I have some traps I can bring.

PENELOPE: You're not going to hurt them?

IAN: I could do live traps. Never done that before. Cool.

TESSA: You'd need to be careful.

IAN: I've learned my lesson.

BOB: Have you?

IAN: Have *you*?

TESSA: So Wanda, what kind of budget you talking about?

WANDA: Let's not talk about money.

TESSA: So not much.

WANDA: We have...five hundred dollars.

TESSA: That's not a budget.

IAN: I have access to supplies. I can help.

PENELOPE: We can try to find more funding.

TESSA: Still, Wanda, you can't possibly—

WANDA: It's a knock-it-out-of-the-park-team. Jack will be a fabulous director, he has a great eye.

ZAYDEN: I think you mean easy on the eyes.

TESSA: Z.

ZAYDEN: Sorry, no filter.

TESSA: (*to Wanda*) Even if you had five thousand dollars, it's a tall order for this group.

WANDA: That's not fair.

TESSA: I include myself. There isn't one person here – except maybe Jack – who hasn't had trouble in the theater scene.

WANDA: But this can be our fresh start.

TESSA: It's optimistic.

IAN: Oh come on, Tessa.

TESSA: Let's see a show of hands. Who is banned – actually prohibited – from volunteering for at least one community theater?

Tessa, Wanda, Bob, Ian raise their hands. Penelope hesitates. Tessa gives her a look, her hand shoots up.

TESSA: Zayden too.

ZAYDEN: Figured it went without saying.

JACK: All of you? What did you do?

They protest vigorously all at once

BOB: It was just one little felony. I mean it wasn't great but people do way worse. It wasn't a big deal.

WANDA: You get caught with one bottle of booze and everyone freaks out. There weren't any rules against it. It was a witch hunt if you ask—

PENELOPE: I didn't mean it. I'm really sorry it happened. I need to find a way to keep my emotions in check. My therapist says that—

ZAYDEN: Why do I need to be 'nice'? I just want to sit in the booth and push the buttons. I can do it if fine if people just leave me alone. What really—

IAN: They wanted pyrotechnics. I gave them pyrotechnics. How was I supposed to know it'd be a chain reaction. It wasn't my fault—

TESSA: It's a long story and I'm not gonna get into it. I feel ridiculous every time I think about it.

JACK: (*interrupting them*) Okay, okay. I get it. There were problems.

TESSA: Putting it mildly.

WANDA: I've hand-picked all of you.

PENELOPE: Why us?

BOB: (*sitting down in a ratty chair*) Because we were willing.

TESSA: And available.

IAN: Very available.

PENELOPE: No, we're like the all-stars!

ZAYDEN: More like the all-stinkers.

TESSA: Not even a good one, Z.

ZAYDEN: Everyone's a critic.

PENELOPE: Wanda has put together a dream team.

ZAYDEN: You're more like a nightmare

TESSA: Z.

PENELOPE: I don't think she likes me much.

TESSA: It's nothing personal. Zayden doesn't like people in general.

ZAYDEN: Tessa, you really get me.

TESSA: It was great to see all of you, but I gotta go.

General ad lib concern

WANDA: We need you to be the producer.

TESSA: Not interested.

More general concern

WANDA: But Tessa you said—

TESSA: I said I'd come see how the space looked and if it could work. It can. Break legs.

WANDA: No, no. Bob tell her.

BOB: It'll be tough without you, Tessa.

IAN: When you produce, everything runs smoothly.

TESSA: Not always.

IAN: Even the show with the 'incident' ran smoothly

TESSA: Until it didn't.

IAN: At least stay and help us pick out a show.

TESSA: (*scoffs*) Usually a quick process. (*she sits on a theater 'block'*)

PENELOPE: Little Mermaid. Or Mary Poppins!

WANDA: How about Gypsy? (*singing*) 'Ev-ery-thing's com-in—'

IAN: Do we have to pick a show with a role for you?

WANDA: It's preferable.

ZAYDEN: I say Sweeney Todd. (*sinisterly*) The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.

TESSA: You need to think smaller.

PENELOPE: We should think big and positive.

TESSA: You have no budget.

IAN: No musicals, then.

WANDA: I'd prefer to sing.

IAN: Again, not important.

WANDA: To you.

BOB: For the record, I just build stuff, I don't care.

TESSA: You need something in the public domain.

PENELOPE: Old plays you mean?

IAN: No rights to pay.

PENELOPE: We could do Shakespeare.

TESSA: (*scoffs*) Tough to do it right.

IAN: Maybe a well known Shakespeare?

WANDA: Much Ado About Nothing? I'd love to play Hero.

IAN: Hero? Aren't you a bit...

WANDA: A bit what, Ian?

IAN: Never mind.

WANDA: It's a dream role.

IAN: Hm.

PENELOPE: A Midsummer's Night Dream would be fun and exciting.

IAN: Or something darker. Like Hamlet or the Scottish Play.

ZAYDEN: Oh you mean... (*the sound of mike turning off, silence, then distant laughing.*)

IAN: Did you just say it?!?

PENELOPE: Say what?

TESSA: Z, you know people are sensitive to that.

ZAYDEN: (*turns mike back on*) Don't really care.

IAN: It still counts even if we can't hear you.

PENELOPE: She didn't say the play that starts with "Mac" and ends with 'Eth'. It's bad luck.

WANDA: Zayden, why would you do that?

ZAYDEN: Save us the time. We're destined for disaster.

IAN: Now you have to undo the curse.

ZAYDEN: It's a stupid superstition.

TESSA: It makes people nervous.

WANDA: You have to leave the booth and come back in.

PENELOPE: You have to knock first.

BOB: What? Never heard of that.

IAN: No, you have to spin three times, spit and curse.

PENELOPE: That's not right.

BOB: Just look it up on the net. Who has one of those fancy phones?

IAN: You still don't have a smart phone?

Bob shrugs.

WANDA: *(To Zayden)* Just do all three. To be safe.

ZAYDEN: C'mon.

TESSA: You're the one that started it.

Zayden lets out a frustrated noise, then we hear rustling sounds, a knock, a spitting sound.

ZAYDEN: Drat dratty drat drat.

WANDA: I don't think that counts as swearing.

TESSA: Close enough. Let's move on.

JACK: What about an original play?

TESSA: You still have to pay rights.

BOB: You can find the script and just make copies—

IAN: Please stop with the illegal suggestions.

BOB: Is it really illegal?

IAN: If you get caught.

JACK: I liked one from the Footlighter's play readings last year. The one set in the 80's.

IAN: Oh, uh, *What I Like About You?* Few awkward spots, but it was pretty cool.

BOB: They let you in the building?

IAN: They let me zoom in.

JACK: The playwright wasn't charging for rights.

WANDA: How do you know that?

JACK: I was on the selection committee.

PENELOPE: Oh, to be among the unbanned.

JACK: The Footlighters produced a different original. I bet the playwright'd love to hear from us.

WANDA: Who wrote it?

JACK: Anonymous submission. They didn't even come to the reading.

PENELOPE: Maybe he's a recluse. That would be exciting.

WANDA: I heard it has a role for me.

IAN: Again, not important.

WANDA: Again, not to you.

IAN: Any other ideas?

PENELOPE: We want to pick out the best play ever!

WANDA: There are endless options.

JACK: I'd like to direct this play.

IAN: Why should you decide?

JACK: I don't have to. But...

TESSA: But what?

JACK: If Wanda reached out to me, someone who's never directed before, I probably wasn't her first choice.

WANDA: You're up and coming around here. (*Jack gives her a look.*) I might have made a call or... several first.

JACK: Probably with all of us.

WANDA: I'd be a fool not to.

Ad lib agreement from everyone but Jack. "I don't blame you," "Good thinking"

JACK: My point is, we may have limited options for staff.

PENELOPE: The play we choose is important. We should get it right.

JACK: Here's the way I see it. We haven't announced auditions, made a rehearsal schedule, created a set plan et cetera and in exactly ten weeks, we have a scheduled performance... here.

Everyone looks around a moment with growing concern.

JACK: Maybe we should get started.

Ad lib agreement. Bob, Ian, Penelope all grab a piece of junk from the stage and they make a noisy exit.

WANDA: My husband will handle the box office.

TESSA: Does Larry want to?

WANDA: He's a theater husband. He doesn't have a choice. What do you say?

TESSA: I got out of all this. I don't know if I want back in.

WANDA: Haven't you missed it? I know I have.

BOB: (*from off stage*) There's more mice back here.

PENELOPE: (*from off stage*) Oh, it's a family!

BOB: (*from off stage*): Not for long. (*sounds of a commotion*)

PENELOPE: (*from off stage*) Run, my little friends, run and be free!

WANDA: I'll go. (*to Jack*) Talk to Tessa. (*Wanda exits SL*)

TESSA: Are you going to convince me to produce?

JACK: (*shrugs*) It's up to you.

TESSA: If I don't do it, who will?

JACK: We'd find somebody. Or we don't do it.

TESSA: You don't care one way or the other?

JACK: I think you'd be great.

TESSA: You don't even know me.

JACK: I know enough.

TESSA: We just met.

JACK: You're ambitious yet practical, hopeful but realistic.

TESSA: (*A moment*) You think I'm hopeful?

JACK: You're still here.

TESSA: I'm not a good choice.

JACK: Everyone here seems to have confidence in you.

TESSA: They're desperate.

JACK: I believe in second chances.

TESSA: Awfully brave with this bunch.

JACK: I think we'd work well together. But only if you're all in.

TESSA: What difference does that make?

JACK: We do community theater for free. If it's not fun, why bother?

TESSA: So you'd just walk away.

JACK: I'm a guy in a small town who's willing to sing and dance on stage. There'll be more opportunities.

TESSA: Not necessarily to direct.

JACK: It's my chance to try it.

TESSA: So, I'm supposed to produce a never-performed play with a few 'issues' opening in just ten weeks, with a budget of next to nothing, in a rat-infested theatre that hasn't been used in ages, with a group of misfits that community theaters with any sense have banned from working for free?

JACK: Pretty much.

ZAYDEN: They're not rats.

TESSA: Z.

ZAYDEN: They're mice.

TESSA: There could be rats we haven't met yet.

ZAYDEN: That's an unpleasant thought.

TESSA: *(to Jack)* Who knows what else we'll find here.

JACK: Pray we don't find any rodents of unusual size.

TESSA: You think we've entered the Fire Swamp?

JACK: It's possible.

Tessa laughs.

ZAYDEN: Please. No *Princess Bride*.

(at the same time) JACK: But it's a classic

TESSA: It's a classic.

A light moment between them.

JACK: *(To Tessa)* So, have you missed it?

TESSA: Theatre? *(a beat)* It's complicated.

JACK: *(a nod of understanding)* Just think about it, yeah?

TESSA: Sure.

JACK: I do have one question.

TESSA: Just one?

JACK: What did Penelope do? She seems so sweet.

TESSA: Terrible temper.

JACK: *(laughs)* I'd like to see that.

ZAYDEN: No, you wouldn't.

JACK: *(to Tessa)* Really?

Tessa shakes her head.

JACK: Well, let me know.

Jack smiles warmly at Tessa, then exits SL.

ZAYDEN: That's some smile he's got there.

TESSA: He needs to be careful with that thing.

ZAYDEN: So whaddya say boss? You in?

Tessa looks around, lets out a breath. Glances to where Jack exited, then up to the booth.

TESSA: You in?

ZAYDEN: Why not?

TESSA: Let's do it.

ZAYDEN: Back in business baby. Like the old days.

TESSA: It was three years ago.

ZAYDEN: Feels like longer. What made you say yes?

TESSA: *(soaking up center stage for a moment)* I've missed it.

ZAYDEN: It's because he's hot, isn't it?

TESSA: *(laughs)* No.

ZAYDEN: It doesn't hurt though.

TESSA: It doesn't.

ACT I SCENE 2

Two weeks later. Some debris has been removed from the stage. Newly cast “What I Like About You” table read in progress, scripts in hand. AINSLEY, DONOVAN, HOWARD, Wanda (and opt ensemble) sit at a table or in a semi circle. Jack sits holding a “to go” coffee cup. (ROLES: Jennifer, a very likable “girl next door” romantic lead, Scott, the male lead that Donovan plays a bit too suave, Gary, the slightly macho gym owner, Frances, a sassy gym employee.) The stage creak has been fixed and Zayden’s lines from the booth don’t crackle any more.

HOWARD: *(As Gary, to “Scott” and “Jennifer”)* I can’t believe I had no idea about the two of you.

WANDA: *(As Frances)* I knew something was up the day Scott walked into the studio.

AINSLEY: *(As Jennifer, to Frances, with a laugh.)* You did not.

DONOVAN: *(As Scott)* But I did.

AINSLEY: *(As Jennifer, flirtatiously)* Now *that* I believe.

HOWARD: *(As Gary)* Let’s get out of here, Frances. Leave these two love birds alone.

WANDA: *(As Frances)*: We still have time for couple’s racquetball.

HOWARD: *(As Gary)* I’m in.

AINSLEY: *(As Jennifer)* Those two.

DONOVAN: *(As Scott, dryly)* That will be an interesting racquetball game.

AINSLEY: *(As Jennifer, laughs)* Totally.

DONOVAN: *(As Scott, again suave)* At least it all worked out.

AINSLEY: *(As Jennifer)* For us, anyway.

JACK: And the kiss and black out. Great read through everyone.

Jack leads the applause, and everyone claps.

JACK: Before I turn it over to Tessa, any questions? *(Donovan raises his hand)* Donovan?

DONOVAN: *(excitedly, a stark contrast from “Scott”)* I’m super thrilled to be cast as “Scott” and can’t wait to get to know everyone.

JACK: Glad to have you, Donovan.

HOWARD: I am also looking forward to treading the boards with all of you.

WANDA: Easy for you to say, Howard. You have such a big part.

HOWARD: *(To Wanda)* You have a fine part. Plus, there are no small parts only small actors.

WANDA: The only people who say that have big parts. I wanted Ainsley’s role.

DONOVAN: *(confused, but not meanly)* The twenty something jazzercise instructor?

WANDA: *(with a steely glare)* Yes.

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah, sure, of course. Sorry it didn’t work out.

Tessa enters SR, carrying a branded paper cup of coffee, same as Jack’s. She hangs back.

AINSLEY: With my experience and New York training, I’m quite capable of carrying the show. I’m sure the director has every confidence in me, don’t you Jack?

JACK: The audition team was impressed with everyone.

WANDA: Apparently more impressed with Ainsley.

TESSA: *(unfazed)* Let it go, Wanda.

WANDA: Alright.

HOWARD: This isn’t typically what I audition for, I prefer a drama. Ah, to play Lear again. Should be enjoyable, though. Can’t have erudition all the time.

AINSLEY: I have a practical concern. The state of the theater here.

TESSA: We’ve been working on emptying it out.

AINSLEY: This is the *progress*?

HOWARD: Ah, truly a clearing of the Augean *(aw JEE uhn)* stables, then.

AINSLEY: The what?

HOWARD: Forgive me, it’s a task of Hercules in classical mythology.

JACK: We can use extra hands if anyone can. If there's nothing else, Tess?

TESSA: Our costumer is here for fittings. (*Calling off stage*) Casey, you ready?

CASEY the costumer enters SR dressed in Renaissance styled garments.

CASEY: (*in an affected voice*) Hail and well met! I'm happy to meet thee for your vestments.

AINSLEY: Have we stepped into some time vortex?

CASEY: Sorry, spent the weekend at a Renaissance festival, can't give it up yet. (*back to the affected voice*)

Fare thee well and don't tarry to see me off yonder. (*Casey exits SR*)

AINSLEY: Is she going to keep talking that way?

TESSA: She does great work.

DONOVAN: I think it's fun. Isn't it fun?

AINSLEY: (*not impressed*) Sure.

TESSA: Once you've had your fittings, you're released. We'll see you tomorrow.

All "actors" exit SR for their costume fitting. Jack and Tessa fold up chairs, take down tables.

TESSA: We have a great cast.

JACK: Still surprised we had such a good turnout.

TESSA: They're actors. Anything for stage time.

END OF EXCERPT