Ruffled Feathers

By Gregory T. Burns

Notes

Ruffled Feathers is a contemporary retelling of the childhood classic Hans Christian Anderson’s The Ugly Duckling. This short play is written for a male; however, a female can easily perform this selection by changing the name of the ugly duckling from David to Darla. Ruffled Feathers may be performed as either a Humorous Interpretation or, with creative blocking, may be used in Duo Interpretation. With the myriad of characters found within the play, each character should be distinct and unique. It is important for the audience to fall in love with the protagonist of the story, so make the ugly duckling as likeable and endearing as possible. There is nothing like hearing an audience collectively go “aww” as the ugly duckling reacts to the taunts and insults from the others throughout the play. Be creative. Use sound effects, creative blocking, and play the humor found within the script; however, be sure to have the characters react to what has been said. Comedy is all about timing, and much of the humor found within this play lies in the reactions of its characters. The vocals of the ugly duckling would work well with a Donald-like voice; however, the rest of the characters would contrast beautifully, if performed as more realistic, human-type characters with perhaps even a few stereotypical voices thrown in the mix for fun!

Characters:

Narrator
Nguyen, a Peking duck
David, the little ugly duckling
Tong, another Peking duck
Mama Duck
Sally Swan, owner of Sylvia Swan’s Swan Lake Salon
Bank Manager
Producer
Cat
Jon, an actor
Dr. Webb, M.D.

Narrator: Once upon a time, there was a little duckling named David. David was—well, let’s just say that he didn’t have the natural grace and beauty of all of the other ducks around the pond. When the other young ducks saw David approaching, they would hide and peek out through the bushes. They were, after all, Peking ducks. They would often taunt David as he passed by.

Romeo and Juliet in Hollywood

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Romeo:

(Remembering the horrible scene, he begins to cry)
ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD…

Juliet:

(Consoling him) Remember, Romeo, BOYS DON’T CRY…

Romeo:

(Regaining his composure, reading from the notebook) Against their families’ wishes, they secretly decide to marry—

Juliet:

PROMISES, PROMISES…

Romeo:

(Reading from the notebook) But Juliet’s parents have already promised her to someone else… (Looking up from the book, to Juliet) Who? ROCKY? (Juliet shakes her head no.) HARVEY? MARTY? (Juliet again shakes her head no) JERRY MAGUIRE? BILLY MADISON? BILLY ELLIOT? THE NUTTY PROFESSOR? BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID? (Juliet continues shaking her head no and begins laughing at Romeo’s jealousy) THE CABLE GUY???
herself) Dost thou not possesseth THE RIGHT STUFF? (She smiles approvingly. Romeo looks around for a quieter place)

Juliet: (Sensing he wants to be alone with her, she suggests) Wouldst thou like to make out a bit in BIG MOMMA’S HOUSE?

Romeo: (Impressed by her possible wild side) Oh, thou art a BAD SEED… (Worried her parents might be around) HOME ALONE?

Juliet: (Obviously she wouldn’t be home alone) GET SMART! (New idea) Wouldst thou liketh to MEET THE PARENTS?

Romeo: (Not sure about this idea) MEET THE FOCKERS?

Juliet: (Daring him to meet her parents) CHICKEN?

Romeo: (Accepting the dare)—RUN! (Both turn with their backs to the audience)

Scene Two: The next morning

Juliet: (Impressed by where Romeo has taken her for her morning meal, looking around the room) Thou art impressive… I doth liketh thee’s choice in taking me to BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S…

Romeo: WAITRESS? (The waitress approaches and Romeo gestures for Juliet to order first)

Juliet: It all looketh so delicious. I will tryeth the FRIED GREEN TOMATOES, DUCK SOUP, THE GRAPES OF WRATH, HAM—

Romeo: (Quickly trying to interject) –LET…me steereth thee away from so much GREASE…

Juliet: (Quickly stopping him from breaking the flow of her order, pointing to the potatoes on menu) MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO…

Romeo: Potatoes for breakfast?

Juliet: —and MILK! (Gesturing that Romeo may now order)

Romeo: (Looking up at the waitress and pointing to the menu) 200 CIGARETTES… (Looking back at the menu and pointing) And I wouldst like a COCKTAIL…

Juliet: (Concerned) Romeo, my sweet, what about THE HANGOVER? (Romeo looks over at her, but says nothing. After a long pause) SAY SOMETHING!

Romeo: (After a longer pause, embarrassed by Juliet’s insinuation that he might not drink responsibly, Romeo gets angrier by the second) ROSECRANZT…AND GILDENSTERN…ARE DEAD!!!

Juliet: (Recalling the fight last night) OH, GOD! (Trying to blame it on someone else) HAMLET—

Romeo: (Trying to stop this line of conversation, he moves his hand quickly under his chin and back forth across his neck, as if motioning for Juliet to stop talking completely) THE DEAD ZONE… (There is a long awkward silence between the two as they wait for their order. Meanwhile, it becomes obvious Juliet is trying to hide something by her side. Romeo

Nguyen: You’re ugly!

David: (Sadly) I know.

Tong: No! I don’t think you do know! I don’t think you realize just how ugly you are!

David: How ugly am I?

Nguyen: Let me put it this way. If ugliness were bricks, you could be the Great Wall of China!

David: Am I really that ugly?

Tong: Let me put it another way. If ugliness was a crime, you’d get the electric chair!

Narrator: David, the little ugly duckling, was naturally upset by the ridicule of the other young ducks. He tried to make friends.

David: Hey, would you like to be my friend? We can play peek-a-boo!

Narrator: David, the little ugly duckling, peeked. All of the other little ducks would boo. So he decided to talk to his mother.

David: Mama, was I always this ugly?

Mama Duck: Well, yes. I suppose so. I had a feeling from the very beginning—the way your egg looked—well, it just wasn’t an attractive shell. I think that’s what made me put up tinted windows around your incubator.

David: Is that why you always told me to sneak up on my mirror?

Mama Duck: Well, yes. Sweetheart, I’ve never told you this, but when you were born the doctor took one look at you and slapped your father and me!

David: I’m sorry, Mama.

Mama Duck: Don’t you worry about that, sweetheart. That was a long time ago. Besides, he was just a quack! (She laughs) Sometimes I just quack myself up! Listen, David, I suppose I should tell you a little secret.

David: What is it, Mama? (Hopeful) Are you giving me a make-over for my birthday?

Mama Duck: No. Your father and I are flying South for the winter.

David: Why, Mama?

Mama Duck: Well, Sweetheart, it’s too far to walk!

David: But Mama, why would you leave me here by myself?

Mama Duck: Honestly, David, you won’t even notice we’ve flown the coop. (Feeling guilty) Oh, all right, I’ll find replacements for your father and me before we leave.

Narrator: And she did. David’s mother left two decoys on the embankment of the pond. David knew there had to be a reason for his mother and father to just…fly off like that.

David: (Sadly) They left because I’m ugly.

Narrator: It was time for Donald, the little ugly duckling, to do something about his ugliness. He tried preening himself, but got a little down in the beak. David tried to make friends, but alas, that daunting task proved to be