

Phantom of Center Stage

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Clarise and Daphne Montague have just inherited the Center Stage Theatre which their uncle founded years ago. It closed three years earlier but they plan a grand reopening by restaging the first play ever performed there, a funny but cheesy melodrama. The sisters have contracted a famous acting couple for the starring roles while local talent fleshes out the cast.

The players quickly learn the Center Stage Theatre has a reputation of being haunted by a Phantom. Most folks think it is the ghost of a young actress who disappeared decades ago during intermission of a performance of the very play they're doing. Strange noises, items missing, and things falling have been experienced by earlier casts, but no one is particularly concerned as rehearsals begin.

Unfortunately, Tempest Storm, owner of a big-box store, wants to buy the theatre so she can tear it down and build a parking garage for her customers. The sisters will have none of it, but that's when the Phantom begins to cause enough chaos that the celebrity couple, used to Broadway stages, becomes desperate to quit the production.

To help save the theatre while it is being "appraised," some of the cast act as representatives of a historical preservation society to point out the building's splendid features. When the sisters refuse Tempest Storm's low purchase offer, she threatens a bulldozer will show up Monday morning. The actors, including the celebrity couple who have come to recapture the joy of working in a small theatre, devise a plan to permanently derail any parking garage. In doing so the mystery of the Phantom is solved and the show will go on!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 9 w)

CLARISE MONTAGUE: Twenties, new owner of the Center Stage Theatre.

DAPHNE MONTAGUE: Twenties, her sister, co-owner of the theatre.

TITUS TREMAIN: Seventies, handyman at the theatre.

LILY LAFONTELLE: Seventies, playing Granny.

TED BARRYLESS: A famous actor playing Devious Dan Dreadful.

LETICIA BARRYLESS: A famous actor playing Claudia Chesterfield.

NINA ROSE: A young teen playing Cassie Chesterfield.

RICKY POWERS: A young teen playing Chucky Chesterfield.

DERMOTT WILSON: Thirties, playing Dreamy Doug Darling.

OLIVIA HILL: Twenties, playing Sugar Bowl.

LOTTY DUNN: Twenties, stage crew.

TEMPEST STORM: Thirties, owner of a big-box store.

SYLVESTER NESTER: Thirties, a civil servant.

HEDDY LYON: Twenties, a news reporter.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Mainstage of the theatre, morning.

Scene 2: The following day.

Scene 3: The following morning.

ACT II

Scene 1: The stage with more set pieces and a third flat, the following morning.

Scene 2: The following afternoon.

Scene 3: The following afternoon.

SET

The mainstage of the Center Stage Theatre during a rehearsal period. Two flats depicting walls of a Victorian parlor stand upstage right. On one flat hangs an old-fashioned portrait of great-uncle Bosco. On another is a framed landscape scene. Two or three comfortable chairs sit at center. A table and chair sit down left covered with papers and scene designs. A rocking chair sits up right near a rack of colorful costumes. Nearby is a small table with a few props sitting atop it.

Please see back of script for Production Notes, Costumes, and Props.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: CLARISE enters at back of house jingling a full key ring and moves quickly down to stage.)

CLARISE: *(Calling.)* Daphne! Daphne, are you here? *(Steps up onto stage, looks around.)* Sister dear, where are you? We've got a rehearsal starting in a few minutes! Oh, and by the way, *she* called again! She says she's going to "drop by" whatever that means, and I'm not sure what to do. Daphne, where are you?

(DAPHNE, wearing a sheet-sized piece of diaphanous fabric steals up behind CLARISE with hands outstretched.)

DAPHNE: *(In a ghostly voice.)* Behind you!

CLARISE: *(Turns and screams.)* What are you doing, trying to give me a heart attack?

DAPHNE: *(Laughing, removing fabric.)* Clarise, now that we've inherited the Center Stage Theatre, this stage will be filled with high drama—

CLARISE: And stupid pranks?

DAPHNE: *(With a laugh.)* I really did scare you, didn't I? Maybe you really *do* believe we've also inherited the Phantom!

CLARISE: I do not! It's all just a bunch of nonsense. Or a silly conspiracy theory! Or an urban legend!

DAPHNE: I dunno...lots of people in town swear there's something funny about this old place.

CLARISE: Great! That's why we're opening with a comedy! There is no Phantom, period!

DAPHNE: If you say so.

CLARISE: Did you hear me say *she* said she's going to stop by today?

DAPHNE: No wonder you're a bundle of nerves.

CLARISE: I am not a bundle of nerves! *(SHE drops her keys.)*

DAPHNE: Right.

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CLARISE: *(Snatching up the keys.)* Why couldn't Uncle Bosco leave us a multiplex with recliners?

DAPHNE: C'mon, the Center Stage is a famous place! It's a local icon! Aren't you proud that it's part of our family history, and as of now it's ours? All ours?

(SFX: A crash backstage.)

DAPHNE: *(Cont'd.)* What was that?

CLARISE: *(Nervously.)* Nothing. Nothing at all.

(SFX: Another crash offstage.)

DAPHNE: Was that nothing, too?

CLARISE: Something just fell.

DAPHNE: Like a body? Look, Clarise, there's nobody here but us, right?

CLARISE: Go back and see what fell.

DAPHNE: Why don't *you* go back and see what fell, Curious George.

CLARISE: Daphne, please go back and check it out.

DAPHNE: I don't have to do what you tell me.

CLARISE: I'm older, so do what I say.

DAPHNE: We're adults! That stopped working when I was ten.

CLARISE: I *am* the executor of Uncle Bosco's will. Go check it out!

DAPHNE: Big deal! So, you're the executor! You still can't tell me what to do!

CLARISE: You'll do what I say if you want to be paid.

DAPHNE: You wouldn't dare!

CLARISE: Wanna bet, little sister?

DAPHNE: The things I put up with! If I'm not back in 30 seconds, call the cops.

(DAPHNE exits right. CLARISE is facing right and behind her TITUS enters from behind a flat with his toolbox. He walks up to Clarise and taps her shoulder. She screams, Titus screams and drops his toolbox. DAPHNE runs on right.)

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DAPHNE: What happened?!

CLARISE: What's with you people! You're both trying to scare *me* to death!

DAPHNE: Well, neither of us did a good job then 'cause you're still here. Glad you made it, Titus. We've got to get those closet rods up in the dressing rooms.

TITUS: That's what I'm here for, yeah.

CLARISE: I'm sorry I scared you, Titus, but I'm just feeling edgy today.

DAPHNE: Clarise is worried about the Phantom.

TITUS: And well you should be. The Phantom starts acting up whenever this place has a new director.

CLARISE: Now why would that be?

TITUS: She just wants to let you know who's really the boss.

DAPHNE: She?

TITUS: No secret it's a she. Most everybody says her name's Charlotte. Charlotte Darcy. Beautiful young thing, playing the ingenue in...in...what was the name of that show? Anyhow, she was the ingenue. This was back...let me think, 40, no, 45 years ago.

DAPHNE: Were you here then?

TITUS: I was a young, green stagehand back in those days.

CLARISE: So, what happened to this Charlotte?

TITUS: (*Shrugging.*) Nobody knows. Just vanished during intermission one night. They say it must have been one of the men who had a hankering for her scared her off...or worse, but she never said nothing about it. Some say it might have been one of the investors.

CLARISE: You mean nobody would stop this guy?

TITUS: If he had invested a lot of money in the show, the producer would've been afraid if he said anything and the investor pulled all his money out.

DAPHNE: It's always about money.

TITUS: Then there are those who say the Phantom isn't her, but the ghost of a soldier killed during the Civil War on this very spot. He's searching for his rifle, they say.

CLARISE: So, he's back knocking stuff over while he's searching, ha?

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TITUS: No, ma'am, that was me. I dropped a couple of tools. But the Phantom could be an electrician -- one time who was rigging the lights up there (*Points above.*) and somehow fell right on that very spot.

(HE points to spot where DAPHNE stands. She quickly steps away from it.)

CLARISE: Or all three of them are wandering around banging into each other!

TITUS: Personally, I'd put my money on Charlotte.

DAPHNE: The actress?

TITUS: Vanished during an intermission. Makes you wonder. And ever since, folks say they hear somebody crying or chains rattling or things going bump in the night. And when anything goes wrong, we all know who did it.

(OLIVIA enters right.)

OLIVIA: And just who did what?

CLARISE: The Phantom, Olivia! Who else?

OLIVIA: Oh, brother, what a crock! Although having a phantom in the background makes the Center Stage a very mysterious place to work and audiences love it! Everybody's hoping they'll see it in a dark corner or behind a curtain in an alcove.

TITUS: Underestimate the Phantom at your peril, folks. *(Moving right.)* I'll be in the dressing rooms. *(Exits.)*

OLIVIA: Poor old guy. When I'm that old, I want to be living somewhere warm where I have servants waiting on me hand and foot.

DAPHNE: Ready for rehearsal?

OLIVIA: I better be. I stayed up far too late working lines, so I'll be off book. I hope.

(RICKY and NINA run on left.)

DAPHNE: Hi, kids!

NINA: My mother said you're not allowed to yell at me.

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DAPHNE: I never yell at you.

NINA: But she did. (*SHE points to CLARISE.*)

CLARISE: When, Nina?

NINA: When I spilled my Gatorade on the chair there.

CLARISE: Nina, we've borrowed that furniture and a spill like that can ruin the chair, hon.

NINA: I'm not your hon, and you're still not allowed to yell at me.

(*TED and LETICIA enter left grandly, then halt.*)

TED: (*With a flourish.*) Your stars have arrived!

LETICIA: (*Looking around, horrified.*) No, no, no! There's been a mistake! This can't be the Center Stage! It's ghastly, Ted!

TED: (*Taken aback.*) Well, now, Leticia, my dear, it's certainly got a great deal of...long-ago charm.

OLIVIA: Built in 1960.

LETICIA: (*Distastefully.*) How quaint.

NINA: (*To LETICIA.*) My mother said there's no way you're 35 like you said you were in the paper. Do you always lie, Ms. Barryless?

LETICIA: Little girl, the only thing worth lying about *is* your age.

CLARISE: Nina, the Barrylesses are our guest performers. They've played everywhere—London, Paris, New York.

RICKY: So, what are they doing here?

LETICIA: Apparently, we're slumming it.

RICKY: (*To CLARISE.*) Got any cookies or candy?

DAPHNE: I've got snacks for our break. But we've got to get this show on the road, so let's go take a look at the costumes Clarise has picked out for you.

TED: I hope you've remembered what we said about Leticia's costumes.

CLARISE: Absolutely. A mossy palette of greens and blues.

NINA: And my mother says I can't wear yellow. It doesn't look good with my hair color.

DAPHNE: Well, let's just go see.

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(DAPHNE leads the ACTORS off right. DERMOTT and LILY enter left.)

DERMOTT: We made it!

LILY: Oh, Ms. Montague, I hope we're not too late.

DERMOTT: I told Lily I'd bring her, but I got lost on my way to her place. The GPS had me turned around.

CLARISE: You're both on time, Dermott, and I hope you're ready for a good rehearsal today.

DERMOTT: *(Saluting.)* A Royal Canadian Mountie's always ready to go, ma'am.

CLARISE: *(Sweetly.)* My hero! *(As herself.)* And how about you, Lily?

LILY: I'm Granny, so I just have to act like myself, right?

CLARISE: Are you really a grandmother?

LILY: No, not that lucky. But I've hung around enough grandmothers to know how to play the game.

CLARISE: Well, just between you and me and the deep blue sea, your grandkids in this show are something of a handful.

DERMOTT: You know, I'm afraid one of them might have sticky fingers.

CLARISE: Has something gone missing?

DERMOTT: Loose change here and there, packs of gum, and someone drank more than half my soda yesterday.

CLARISE: If you see anything suspicious, let me know. We can do something about it.

LILY: Unless it's the Phantom.

CLARISE: Oh, please! I don't want to hear any more about that old wives' tale.

(SFX: Her phone rings.)

CLARISE: *(Cont'd. To DERMOTT and LILY.)* Everyone is in the dressing rooms checking out costume pieces, so go ahead and take a look. I've got to take this call.

(DERMOTT and LILY exit right.)

End of Freeview

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