

UNBRIDLED FEAR

A Short Play
by
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UNBRIDLED FEAR

Cast of Characters

RUBY, THE BRIDE: Age: 20s

Ruby is a young woman on the verge of marriage—and the edge of panic. Bright, emotional, and a bit scattered, Ruby vacillates between fear and wonder as she tries to make sense of where she is and what she truly wants. Beneath her confusion lies a tender, introspective soul grappling with the enormity of commitment and the unknown. By the play's end, she rediscovers her courage and her belief in love's mad, magnificent leap of faith.

WANKIE, THE CLOWN: Age: Any

Wankie is a weary circus clown with a permanent frown and a philosopher's heart. Sarcastic yet compassionate, he becomes Ruby's unlikely guide through her strange emotional landscape. He masks wisdom with wit, alternating between playful teasing and piercing insight. Beneath the greasepaint, Wankie represents life's absurdity and resilience—the ability to laugh at fear while acknowledging it fully. Though cynical on the surface, he helps Ruby rediscover her strength and her capacity for joy, ultimately revealing his role as both mentor and mirror.

SYNOPSIS

A confused young bride named Ruby suddenly finds herself inside a surreal circus tent, clutching a frying pan and dressed in her wedding gown. She encounters Wankie the Clown, a sardonic figure with a permanent frown, who becomes her unlikely guide through a fog of fear and self-doubt. As Ruby tries to recall how she got there, fragments of her wedding day return—her walk down the aisle, her sudden terror, and her fainting spell at the altar. Through some seriously philosophical, and absurd dialogue, Wankie helps her confront her “unbridled fear” of commitment and the unknown future. In the end, Ruby learns that—like the circus itself—marriage is a daring act of faith and balance. With newfound calm, she's ready to return, take her vows, and say, “I do.”

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SETTING: The interior of a circus tent.

AT RISE: *WANKIE THE CLOWN is seated on a stool reading The Wall Street Journal. HIS makeup gives him a permanent frown on his face.*

(RUBY'S frantic voice is heard from off-stage)

RUBY THE BRIDE

Hello!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ugh!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Hello!?!?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

What the hell is this now?

RUBY THE BRIDE

Hello? Somebody!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

No, nobody.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Anybody? Is anybody there?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

No, ain't nobody here! Now beat it!

RUBY THE BRIDE

I know somebody is there!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Nobody's here! Just echoes and regrets!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Then who's talking?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

A regret. Now go away.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I can hear you in there!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Maybe you are hallucinating.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No really, can somebody please help me?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

No! Go away. We're closed.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, really.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes, really!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Please! I need help.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yeah, Honey, we all need help...but nonetheless...

(RUBY enters dressed as a bride carrying a frying pan. SHE seems to be very upset and confused)

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, my goodness! You're a—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

What!?!? Smokin' hot? Insanely good-looking? Devastatingly handsome?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, I mean—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yeeesssssssss???

RUBY THE BRIDE

I mean—you're a— another human being!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ah, yes. Yes, I am.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, thank goodness!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Believe me, goodness had nothing to do with it.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I wasn't expecting to see— I mean— a— well, you know—a—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

A clown?

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, I wasn't expecting to see a—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

A clown! You can say it. You were not expecting to see a clown.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, right. I'm sorry if that offended—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't expecting to see a bride.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, right. I suppose not.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And not just a bride. A bride with a frying pan!

RUBY THE BRIDE

(Confused as SHE forgot SHE had a frying pan)

Huh? Oh, yeah. Right.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Look here Princess...I don't want any trouble...

RUBY THE BRIDE

Trouble?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

(HE points to the frying pan)

Yes, please— just drop your weapon.

RUBY THE BRIDE

My what? Oh, this!?!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes, that.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, no, it's not a weapon. It was a bridal shower gift. For you see—I am— a bride... apparently.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Apparently? You don't know for sure?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No. I don't. Not for sure. In fact, right at this moment...I have no idea who I am, where I am or how I got here.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

So, few of us do, darling...

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh my, my, my!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes???

RUBY THE BRIDE

It's just that— I don't have any idea what is going on here!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

You don't.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No! Do you?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I haven't a clue. But **you** do know some things.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No. Not really...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Sure, you do! For example...you said you were a bride.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

So, you see, you know that!

RUBY THE BRIDE

I don't *know* that. Not for sure—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

But you said it—

RUBY THE BRIDE

Well— yes, but truth be told, I can only assume I'm a bride because I'm wearing this white gown and I have a veil on my head.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ahh—

RUBY THE BRIDE

I almost never wear a veil.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I see.

RUBY THE BRIDE

And you do seem to be a clown?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

So judgmental!

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, no— I just meant the makeup and the costume—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh, yes—well then— yes, it would seem so.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I'm Ruby—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

How do you do? I'm Wankie the Clown.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh my! Wankie? Is that because you...?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I don't want to get into that.

RUBY THE BRIDE

(Embarrassed she mentioned it)

No, all right. Sorry. Yes, that's fine.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Let's just say....one little fart and they call you stinky for the rest of your life!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh—I see. So, where am I?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Well, geez—let's see. You are in a great big, colorful tent that smells of elephant dung—

RUBY THE BRIDE

Is that what that is?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes. And there are three large rings on the dirt floor— and there are bleachers all around the perimeter.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Uh huh.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And there are trapezes overhead!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, I see those too.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

So hmm— I wonder where the bloody hell you could be???

RUBY THE BRIDE

Language!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Sorry...

RUBY THE BRIDE

So, okay... obviously I'm in a circus tent...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

BINGO!

(Calling off-stage)

Tell us what the little lady has won Johnny! What's that? Oh darn...it seems you've won another frying pan.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, my stars and stockings!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Now there's an expression we don't hear nearly enough these days!

RUBY THE BRIDE

(Suddenly freaking out)

What the freak is going on here!?!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Language!!!

RUBY THE BRIDE

I said, "freak!"

WANKIE THE CLOWN

But I knew what you meant. What did you mean?

RUBY THE BRIDE

I meant, I am about to break down in tears any moment...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Then why don't you?

RUBY THE BRIDE

What!?!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I would love that!

RUBY THE BRIDE

You'd love to see me cry?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Well, it would be perfectly understandable, all things considered.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No! I am not going to give you the satisfaction...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh, go on! Look at me. I have a permanent frown on my face...and I'm none the worse for it.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Even so.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

No, go ahead. Let the tears flow. Go on...have a good cry...it will probably do us both a world of good.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No. I don't want to get my eye makeup on my veil.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ah.

RUBY THE BRIDE

And besides...I do need to get back...or at least I think I do.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And where is back? Back to where...?

RUBY THE BRIDE

Well, let's see... there were a lot of people sitting on benches...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Along the perimeter? Were there trapeses?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, no. These benches were on each side. Each side of an endless center aisle that I had just walked up.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ah.

RUBY THE BRIDE

And as I watched them watching me...I thought to myself...

(SHE begins singing "OH WHAT A CIRCUS" from "EVITA")

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, what a circus, oh what a show
Argentina has gone to town
Over the death of an actress called ..."

(Spoken)

No, wait— I'm not in Argentina— I'm in Brooklyn. And that wasn't me—that was Eva Perón! And then I think I fainted with those words repeating over and over again in my head. "Oh, what a circus, oh what a show!"

WANKIE THE CLOWN

That's what brought you here.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I fainted at my own wedding!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh, dear.

RUBY THE BRIDE

What they all must have thought!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

God only knows—

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh, my stars and stockings!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Again, with the stars and stockings!

RUBY THE BRIDE

I'm sorry, Wankie, but this is all so crazy.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

It's okay. We've all gone crazy, mourning all day and mourning all night... falling over ourselves to get all of the misery right.

RUBY THE BRIDE

What's that?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh, sorry. It's just more lyrics from that Evita song.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Anyways— I do remember—just before I fainted— I reached my destination at the end that endless aisle...at the steps of what seemed to be some sort of a stage— and then I saw him there.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Saw who? Was it Juan Perón?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, it was Benny. Benny, the man that I am to marry.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ah...

RUBY THE BRIDE

And I was suddenly terrified.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Why was that? Is Benny somehow creepy?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No not creepy...not creepy like a clown...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Hey! Watch it!

RUBY THE BRIDE

Oh sorry... but as I stood there...staring into the eyes of Benny... studying the face of the only man I have ever loved...staring at the only man who ever loved me—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Nice.

RUBY THE BRIDE

And as the words came out of the mouth of the man we had hired to read the words that would tie us together forever... suddenly...I could feel myself shaking a little.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh my...

RUBY THE BRIDE

Do you take this man to have and to hold... and my knees began to buckle—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Oh, no.

RUBY THE BRIDE

From this day forward, for better, for worse...I could feel my pulse quicken...for richer or poorer... my heart began to pound..., in sickness and in health, to love and to...and the next thing I knew...I was here...in a different circus tent than the one I had just left...talking to a clown with a permanent frown named Wankie...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Nicknamed Wankie... My real name is Gilbert.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Gilbert!?!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Don't say it like that. Makes me sound like a mime who mistook applause for affection.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, Gilbert, it's... nice. Human.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

It will have to do. It's not like us clowns keep spare names in our pockets. The pockets are saved for the rubber chickens and the emergency self-dignity.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Why "Wankie," then?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Because the crowds prefer cartoons to confessions. "Wankie" bounces. "Gilbert" broods.

RUBY THE BRIDE

May I ask a human question, Gilbert?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I reserve the right to juggle it into nonsense.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Have you ever been... where I am?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

In a circus tent with a stranger wielding a frying pan? Twice last Thursday.

RUBY THE BRIDE

No, I mean—standing on the edge. Loving someone and shaking anyway.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes. Yes, I have.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Really!?! What happened?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

There was an aerialist named Lark.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Lark? Like the bird?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Don't roll your eyes. It was the nineties—everyone dated nouns. Anyway, she flew, Ruby and not just on a tightrope or a trapeze. Lark flew when she laughed. Lark flew when talked. Lark flew when she tied her shoes. At first, I would just silently study her; secretly watch her—on the net, in the wings, on the high wire.

RUBY THE BRIDE

She never noticed you?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Eventually she did, and when she did, she said, "Come up here and be with me."

RUBY THE BRIDE

And what did you do?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I said, "No, you come down here where the floor is." We were both right, and so we both lost. We were together for a little while, but—

RUBY THE BRIDE

You broke up?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

We broke *open*. She took a contract overseas. France. Marseilles. I stayed home and took the next joke. I hid in the laughs I would receive each night. You can hide in a laugh the way a child hides behind a curtain—feet showing.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Did you ask her to stay?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I asked in a language she didn't speak—sarcasm. She answered me in a language I would had not yet learned— trust.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Did you love her?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I loved her enough to let her fly without me, but not enough to climb up to be at her side.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I'm sorry.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I am, too, but I also knew that "sorry" was a soft mat you can sleep on forever, and so I chose it over the springboard.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Is that why you stay in here... helping lost brides in tents that smell like—well—

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Elephant candor. Yes. People wander in when they faint, freeze, or forget. I keep watch.

RUBY THE BRIDE

You keep watch for what?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I keep watch so I can stop one of you beautiful fools before you bolt. Maybe each time that I do, I earn a little of what I couldn't do for Lark.

RUBY THE BRIDE

You think I'm going to bolt?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I think you're going to *choose*. Bolting is one choice.

RUBY THE BRIDE

What if I choose wrong?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

You'll always be able to fix it.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Are you sure?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes, the only mistake you can't mend is the one you never make.

RUBY THE BRIDE

You know Wankie, maybe you could also fix your situation. You *could* go after Lark.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I tried. Once. I bought a ticket to Marseille. Sadly, the plane never left.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Mechanical issue?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Wankie issue. I never boarded. Sat at Gate 17 telling jokes to a janitor until the last call became a last memory.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Gilbert, why have told me all of this? You barely know me.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I know what I see. I know your fear looks like mine, right before I started pretending it was all for the best. I can read it on your face—you're asking the damned difficult question: "What if I fall?"

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, what if I fall?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I want you to change that question—to upgrade it. Don't ask, "What if I fall?" Instead ask, "What if I fly?"

RUBY THE BRIDE

"What if I *fly*?" But I don't know how to fly.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

You'll learn, and one day you will remember this day. This day when a scared, young girl stood at a wedding and fainted into a circus. She met a clown with a tragic expression and name to match. He told her that love is not a trick. He told her love is the net.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Love is the net.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

You're going to be all right, Ruby. I don't tell you this because I am wise. I tell you this because you are willing to be all right.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I do feel willing but at the same time, I feel... wobbly.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Wobbly is willing's first step.

RUBY THE BRIDE

The last time I've been that scared was when I was five years old and my father insisted that we go to the circus.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

You were scared of a circus?

RUBY THE BRIDE

I was terrified.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

But circuses are made for kids of five-years-old.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Even so...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Well, that is just a pity.

RUBY THE BRIDE

In the days leading up to Circus Day, my whole family was thrilled and excited about attending the spectacle... "The Greatest Show on Earth".

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Well, sure! A circus is an exciting adventure.

RUBY THE BRIDE

That same enthusiasm was on the faces of my brothers and my mother today... as I walked past them... as I trudge up that endless center aisle. They were all beaming from ear to ear.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And your father?

RUBY THE BRIDE

My dad held me up for my walk. And I could feel both of our hearts pounding through my white, crisp, crinoline dress. I could feel his jitters as well as my own. But at the end of the aisle...he just left me there. No, worse than that! He passed me off...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Passed you off to Benny.

RUBY THE BRIDE

That's right.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Ruby...after you went to the circus...when you were five...the event that you were so fearful of...did you hate it? Was it still horrifying?

RUBY THE BRIDE

No. In fact it was quite exciting. Oh, there were scary times...like the fire eater, or when the lions got too close... or when the trapeze lady almost fell...but all in all...it was quite wonderful.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And so, you were glad you went. You were happy you went through with it.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, I was very glad. Very glad indeed!

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And today... you said you looked at Benny... you looked into his eyes, and you remembered how much you love him

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes... of course I do.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And how much he loves you.

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes, but still... the future is still so frightening... because the future is still so unknown.

WANKIE THE CLOWN

No, that's what makes the future so worthwhile.

RUBY THE BRIDE

I don't know...

WANKIE THE CLOWN

And whatever trapeses hang overhead...and whatever swords wait to be swallowed... and even if the lions look hungry...you and Benny are the main attraction. You and Benny are going to have each other to get you to the end of what may at times seem to be an endless aisle. And I'm telling you, when you reach the end, it will all have been worth it.

RUBY THE BRIDE

You think so?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

I know so.

RUBY THE BRIDE

So now what?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Take a deep breath... and slowly open your eyes. Your friends and family will help you to your feet.... Then you will smile... you will take Benny's hand...and you will say "I do".

RUBY THE BRIDE

Yes?

WANKIE THE CLOWN

Yes. And then then you and Benny will live happy ever after. Do you feel ready?

RUBY THE BRIDE

I do.

(BLACK OUT as Mendelssohn's Wedding March is heard)

(END OF PLAY)