

Four Hats and a Napkin Wreath

A short play

By Drew Petriello

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CAST

BLYTHE: Male. 25-35. Any ethnicity. Adheres to the rules laid out in the Best Book very strictly.

OVERITA: Female. Firmly middle-aged. Any ethnicity. Server at the diner. Everyone is out to get her, but she's going to get them back. Sarcastic.

CASSANDRA: Female. 25-35. Any ethnicity. Cannot make decisions without carefully considering all information.

SETTING

Present day in a mid-to-low tier diner known as "Bold Betsy's Wishy-Washy Diner" and would be suited to Anytown USA.

SCENE 1

Blythe sits at a table, waiting for his date to arrive. On the table is a wreath he made out of napkins, in the center of which rests The Best Book.

He opens the book.

He nods sagely as he reads. He grunts satisfactorily.

He stands on his chair, takes a deep breath, then produces a high pitched keening.

Overita enters, pad and pencil in hand. She freezes when she sees Blythe.

Blythe stops keening.

OVERITA

And here I thought the wreath you made out of napkins was the most ninnified thing I was going to see you do.

BLYTHE

None of the customers reacted to that.

OVERITA

Bold Betsy's Wishy-Washy Diner caters to a deeply apathetic clientele. Please step off the chair.

BLYTHE

I mustn't, for according to the Best Book -

OVERITA

Breakfast of Champions by Kurt Vonnegut?

BLYTHE

No. This book. It's called the Best Book. And it *is* the Best Book.

OVERITA

That's not vague or confusing in the slightest.

BLYTHE

It says in the book of Matery - Chapter Eight, Verse Nineteen - that if one has been awaiting a date for an embarrassing length of time, that one should stand upon the nearest tall object and produce a long, loud, single note so they can find you.

OVERITA

How novel.

BLYTHE

It's more a collection of parables. Now if you'll excuse me -
(takes a deep breath)

OVERITA

If you continue, I *will* risk a religious discrimination lawsuit for booting you on your behind.

BLYTHE

Ooh! I see her!

OVERITA

(standing on her tip toes, looking with
him)

Which one's the lucky lady?

BLYTHE

Cassandra! She's the one wearing four hats.

OVERITA

Get off the chair and go to her.

BLYTHE

I should do that.

Blythe doesn't make any movement to go to
Cassandra.

OVERITA

You should do that.

BLYTHE

It's against my religion.

OVERITA

Of course it is.

BLYTHE

I'll give you an extra tip if you fetch her for me.

OVERITA

That is demeaning. I may be an employee whose job description is to wait on you with the whole of my being, but I will never stoop so low as to wingman you for petty cash.

(beat)

How much?

Cassandra enters wearing four hats. One of them is a fez. She holds out her phone and looks from the screen to Blythe.

CASSANDRA

Excuse me? Um, I can't entirely be sure, but... are you... Blythe? Blythe D. Roules? I mean, you look a lot like the man in the dating app, but I can't be sure. Maybe you're a doppelganger or a twin. I don't want to be wrong.

OVERITA

It's him. I was going to ask about drinks, but I'll give you a minute. Get off the chair, *Blythe*.

(exiting)

Why couldn't the both of you be deeply apathetic like the rest of our clientele?

Silence.

Blythe gets off the chair then goes to Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

Hi. Pleased to meet you. Or... I'm not sure yet - I guess I'll only know retroactively whether or not meeting you has been pleasing. It took months of inner debate, but I've decided that I will only be happy after finding love.

(beat)

I see you've made a wreath out of napkins. How creative of you. Maybe.

BLYTHE

Thank you. I like the four hats you're wearing.

CASSANDRA

I couldn't decide which was the best to wear, so I chose all of them.

Blythe turns around and sticks his butt at
Cassandra.

BLYTHE

Please rub my butt.

CASSANDRA

Oh dear.

BLYTHE

According to Matery 1:9, it is customary to greet a potential mate by presenting the tushy - the book's word, not mine - and asking for a gentle rubbing.

CASSANDRA

I don't know. If I should, I mean.

BLYTHE

It's in the Best Book. Why would the Best Book lie?

CASSANDRA

Books lie all the time. Mein Kampf... most self-help books... Eat Pray Love...

BLYTHE

We are getting very close to breaking Matery 1:10 - "Pre-greeting small talk is allowed, but lo and woe to the one who makes too long a habit of it, for it is known that the heavens frown upon lengthy pointlessness."

(beat)

So please rub my butt.

OVERITA

(entering)

Can I get either of you anything to drink - what in the name of god are you doing?

BLYTHE

Yes, exactly.

Cassandra pats Blythe's butt.

CASSANDRA

After weighing all options, I decided to rub your butt.

BLYTHE

Thank you for accommodating my religious convictions.

OVERITA

Water?

BLYTHE

Imbibelibles 18:21 states that on Wednesdays, only absinthe is allowed.

(beat)

OVERITA

This is Bold Betsy's Wishy-Washy *Diner*.

(beat)

I've got a personal stash.

BLYTHE

Thank you for being so accommodating to my religious convictions.

Overita exits.

CASSANDRA

Wait, I haven't decided what I want. To drink, that is.

BLYTHE

It's, um, my turn to greet you.

(silence)

Cassandra? Cassandra. Please turn around. This greeting is very important for my religious convictions.

CASSANDRA

I've considered a multitude of variables and I've concluded that while I was fine touching your posterior, I think I would rather you didn't touch mine. Although maybe I do. I'm not sure. There's so many factors to consider. It could feel good, but the fact that you're so adamant about butt touching could be a warning sign of creepiness, though I do really want this date to go well I think...

BLYTHE

(sitting)

We can finish the greeting later. The Best Book makes such an allowance for non-believers. Please, have a seat.

CASSANDRA

Do I want to take a seat?

(silence)

BLYTHE

Cassandra? Cassandra. Cassandra!

CASSANDRA

Sh! I'm thinking!

BLYTHE

About what?

CASSANDRA

About whether or not I should take a seat.

BLYTHE

Manneronomy 83:4 states that no meal should ever be consumed on one's feet. So please. Sit.

CASSANDRA

But if I sit down, you might spring some arcane rules on me and I'm just not sure I want that.

Blythe squawks like a sick ostrich.

CASSANDRA

Do I like that sound? Um... I think... I'm about seventy percent sure I don't like that sound.

Cassandra thinks. Blythe squawks.

CASSANDRA

What deeply apathetic clientele.

Blythe becomes suddenly composed.

BLYTHE

Catharserosis 12:8 states - “Should one feel an overwhelming sense of rejection, one should -”

CASSANDRA

Do what you just did. I presume. I don’t want to presume. But it seems pretty obvious. But I didn’t reject you. I don’t think I did.

BLYTHE

I didn’t say you did. I just said it *felt* like it and that’s what matters according to Catharserosis 12:8.

OVERITA

(entering)

Absinthe from the special stores. I hope you understand how difficult parting with it is for me.

Overita plops the bottle on the table.

BLYTHE

Mmm, that looks... green. Good. Bow to the wisdom of the Best Book. A whole bottle. Thank you very much.

OVERITA

Cassandra, was it? Have you settled on what to drink or - seeing as you’re standing - are you calling this date a wash and scuttling off like the crab you are?

CASSANDRA

Ooh, I know this one: I’m not a crab. I spent a horrid weekend at the aquarium finding that out. I’m just not sure whether I should sit down or not.

OVERITA

Okay.

(beat)

Ready to order?

BLYTHE

I don’t need to look at the menu. I know what I’m getting.

CASSANDRA

Am I hungry at all? Oh dear, sitting... eating... so much to consider...

BLYTHE

Haggis.

OVERITA

Pardon.

BLYTHE

I request your finest haggis.

OVERITA

We don't... I'll get you your haggis. Does Food...alla...wumpus 29:3 say that you can only eat haggis while eating out?

BLYTHE

It's Foodallowumpus 2:14 and it's that I must order haggis while eating out during the summer, but only if there isn't going to be a new moon that night and if the -

OVERITA

I get the idea. Haggis. I'll tell the cook to do something artistic with intestinal scraps.

BLYTHE

I will now place the ceremonial garb upon myself as dictated by Manneronomy 2:2.

Blythe puts the wreath of napkins around his neck.

OVERITA

What else would you do with a wreath of napkins?

BLYTHE

"And lo, when thou dinest, thou wilt have napkins at convenient height for dabbing thy fingers upon." Get the haggis, Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

I don't think I like haggis. Or do I...?

BLYTHE

It doesn't matter if you like it or not.

CASSANDRA

Why?

BLYTHE

I wouldn't use the word "tum-tum" myself, but it *is* what the book uses, so I suppose -

CASSANDRA

I meant why is that a rule?

BLYTHE

(going to Cassandra)

I get no pleasure from this - I am merely following wisdom surpassing my own. I will now tickle your tum-tum.

CASSANDRA

If you do that I... I think there's a possibility that I will hit you.

BLYTHE

I don't want to get hit.

CASSANDRA

Then don't tickle me and maybe be forced to reckon with the possibility of my potential fist against perhaps your handsome jaw.

BLYTHE

I can't just not tickle you. It would be against the rules of the Best Book. Especially since I just announced that I was going to.

CASSANDRA

You could just... not do it.

BLYTHE

What? And spit in the face of ancient wisdom set down by desert people baked out of their brains from heat stroke, who possibly saw mirages that told them how to behave and act, which they then wrote down as a system for themselves and hadn't considered the possibility that someone like me would uphold such rules in a time when technology and culture has evolved into something vastly different than they ever could have imagined? I think not.

(beat)

Yes. That settles it. I must tickle you now.

(beat)

Unless you think it would be a good idea to sit in the chair.

CASSANDRA

I'd been so busy considering the hitting conundrum you that I had completely lost the thread on the sitting conundrum. Give me a second, where was I in my line of reasoning?

BLYTHE

I'm not happy about doing this.

CASSANDRA

Then don't do it.

BLYTHE

Dammit, Cassandra! I can't just not -

Blythe gasps and covers his mouth.

CASSANDRA

If I have analyzed your facial reaction properly, then you have broken a rule and feel ashamed about it.

BLYTHE

(nodding)

Mm-hm.

CASSANDRA

It was for... with my acute mental analysis it's possible I can discern the cause of your shame.

(a long pause while she thinks)

You said the word "damn."

BLYTHE

(nodding)

Mm-hm. And now I must... I must punish myself in accordance to the Cussonomicon 420:69.

(beat)

CASSANDRA

Ancient people wrote the Best Book?

BLYTHE

Yes! And they had oodles of foresight and a great sense of humor!

CASSANDRA

Okay.

Blythe shoves his napkin wreath into his mouth.

CASSANDRA

Are you eating your napkin wreath?

BLYTHE

(muffled through napkins)

Yeth!

OVERITA

(entering with a plate of haggis)

Okay Mister Roules, I brought your - what in the name of god are you doing?!

CASSANDRA

He's eating his napkin wreath.

BLYTHE

(muffled)

Im eabtingh mby mapgkind wgeaf.

CASSANDRA

In the name of god.

BLYTHE

Im bluh ngambe ov globd.

CASSANDRA

It's a punishment.

BLYTHE

Ibts a blunigshment.

CASSANDRA

I'm not sure whether I should help him.

OVERITA

For the love of - take the napkins out of your mouth!

BLYTHE

No!

CASSANDRA

On one hand, he could choke to death on napkins.

OVERITA

(wrestling with Blythe)

Put down the napkin wreath!

BLYTHE

NO!

CASSANDRA

On the other hand, this date has been going badly.

BLYTHE

Ybou think thbis dmate is goingh badbly?

CASSANDRA

I think so.

OVERITA

No way.

CASSANDRA

Has it been going badly? I know I need love, and I think I want to give Blythe a chance, but my perception tells me that I think he's disappointed I don't share his religious convictions...

Overita grabs the bottle of absinthe and chugs it.

BLYTHE

Nbot mby absbminthe!

CASSANDRA

Not his absinthe!

Overita finishes. She slams the bottle on the table.

OVERITA

The both of you... the both of you make me sick.

CASSANDRA

That'd likely be the absinthe -

OVERITA

Quiet! If I hear one more noncommittal phrase out of you -

(jabs finger at Cassandra)

- or one more chapter and verse from the Bunk Book out of you -

(jabs finger at Blythe)

I'm going to do something drastic, I tell you - something real goddamn drastic! Did shapes get more swoopy all of the sudden or is it just me?

(beat)

Well?! Don't you want to see me do something drastic?

CASSANDRA

Not really.

BLYTHE

Mnbot rbeallby.

OVERITA

If either of you did want to see such a thing, it'd probably involve... this!

Overita rips pages out of the Best Book.

BLYTHE

(still through napkins)

Nooo! Nbot thbe Best Book!

CASSANDRA

Is tearing pages out of the Best Book a bad thing? I can't tell. I can't tell anything! Truth is indiscernible and I can take no action until hitting upon the truth!

OVERITA

(still ripping out pages)

Die! Die, cursed book!

Blythe tries to get up, chokes on his wreath of napkins.

Cassandra picks up one of the pages and reads it.

OVERITA

(still ripping)

Yeah! How helpful is your stupid book now when you're choking to death on the stupid napkins you made into a stupid wreath because the stupid book told you to, huh?!

Blythe falls to his knees, choking and struggling.
He reaches out towards the audience. Overita
picks up the haggis tries to force feed it to him.

OVERITA

(shoving haggis in his face)

Eat your holy haggis! None of our deeply apathetic clientele will help you, you insufferable, narrow-minded, robotic, turd for brains -

Blythe gasps and gags up the napkins in his
mouth.

BLYTHE

(panting)

The haggis... oh god... the smell... it's like a horse regurgitated a kidney stone... oh god...

CASSANDRA

I've got it!

OVERITA

Got what?

CASSANDRA

(elated)

I...

OVERITA

Yes?

CASSANDRA

...am going...

BLYTHE

Go on?

CASSANDRA

...to not...

Okay.

OVERITA

...not...

CASSANDRA

Um.

BLYTHE

...sit down in that chair.

CASSANDRA

Oh.

OVERITA

Oh.

BLYTHE

Cassandra sits in the chair, beaming. She holds up a page from the Best Book.

CASSANDRA

This page of the Best Book that I picked up is the best thing that's ever happened to me. I've read over the soothing doctrines of Manneronomy 82:28 - 83:12 and for the first time in my life, I'm no longer clouded by doubt - it *is* best to dine sitting down! The Best Book has lain out its reasoning for me over the course of a dozen verses and I am in total agreement! Just listen to this - "Standing means that at least one hand is devoted to the holding of the plate, whilst sitting means both are free for devouring." Such profundity! Server! I wish to order!

OVERITA

I have a name, you know. Don't you want to know my name?

CASSANDRA

Absinthe and haggis!

OVERITA

No, Abby's my sister. I'm Overita Synthanaggis.

CASSANDRA

Oh! What is this feeling? Oh my... I... I just... *did* it! I didn't have to think about it, I just did it! I'm going to devote myself to the Best Book for my whole life. Oh shoot, I need to make a napkin wreath first, don't I?

BLYTHE

Have mine.

Blythe takes off his napkin wreath and holds it out for Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

(taking it, putting it on)

For me? Thank you! I'm sure this means so much in my new religious paradigm.

BLYTHE

I don't know if I can be a devotee to esoteric rules whose connections to reality are tenuous at best any longer. I mean, I nearly choked to death during my punishment. And that wasn't the first time!

CASSANDRA

But the smell of the haggis saved you - also dictated by the Best Book.

BLYTHE

Yes. Don't remind me. Um... server.

OVERITA

Overitaaaaaaaaa.

BLYTHE

I'll have... I'll have... the... lasagna.

(gasp ing)

Oh my god I did it I did it I did it - oh Best Book, do not be disappointed in me.

OVERITA

Getting your orders.

(wobbles offstage)

Lasik and handjobs. Coming right up.

BLYTHE

What deeply apathetic clientele, not to care about me choking.

CASSANDRA

I feel dizzy with decisiveness! There's no need to wear four hats anymore, just one! I choose this one!

(she takes off all hats except the fez)

Well? Do you like it.

BLYTHE

The Best Book says - no. No more. I must think. Do I like it...? Um...

CASSANDRA

Please rub my butt.

BLYTHE

Hmmm... I'll have to consider it... it's a custom I've always followed, but why, you know?

CASSANDRA

There's no embarrassment to be had. The clientele is deeply apathetic.

BLYTHE

Hmmm....

CASSANDRA

Rub my butt.

BLYTHE

Well...

The conversation continues in the same vein as music swells and lights fade.

THE END