

Gadzooks and Ophelia

A Comedy in One Act

by Cheryl Ann Costa

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"Gadzooks and Ophelia" debuted in the summer of 1997.

Synopsis: A tale of a Norse Demi-God named Gadzooks, a godly mentor to young warriors who gets yelled at by Odin, God of the Norse. Odin is upset because Gadzooks has been tipping one too many tankards of mead in the hall. As punishment, and for Odin's amusement, Gadzooks is ordered to Earth to mentor a mortal artist in muse-like manner. Gadzooks ends up in 1961, in a little Texas town, in the middle of the night, with a drunken eighteen-year-old female who's flunking out of art school.

Dedicated with fond admiration and love to Karen Louise.

Characters:

Gadzooks: The Nordic Warrior Demi-God, young, handsome, tall, athletic, built like a warrior. He's a warrior and a serious party animal. He likes to drink, likes to fight, likes his fair women? He's clearly out of his element talking to an artist. He's witty without knowing it and considers himself charming to women. In a word, he's full of himself!

Ophelia/Pearl: Pearl is a struggling art student. She's the awkward loner, and the outcast of her high school class. She's been smothered by the little Texas town all her life. She wants to go way and make herself into something, but she lacks confidence in herself.

The Voice of Odin: Odin has a very clear command quality in his voice. He's has a no-nonsense cut-to-the-chase nature. After all, he is the God of Valhalla and all the Norse men.

Lighting Special Requirement:

A God Light, very special "living light", bright, containing motion, color and pulsating vibrancy.

Scene One

Place: Valhalla

Time: VST Valhalla Standard Time

[The play opens after a very triumphant-sounding pre-show of Wagner-style music. A single special God light brightens on a dark stage, and a very deep resonate voice is heard over the sound system.]

Odin:

[calm, a matter of fact] Gadzooks.

[pause 10 seconds]

[Strong with intent] Gadzooks!

[pause 5 seconds]

[Commanding] GADZOOKS !!!

[pause 5 seconds]

[Forceful, losing cool] I W A N T G A D Z O O K S !!!

[Gadzooks leisurely strolls into the light, holding a very large tankard]

Gadzooks: You wanted to see me, your excellence?

Odin: Gadzooks, I called for you four times. Where were you?

Gadzooks: Toasting victories and telling stories in the Hall of Valkyries, oh great one.

Odin: I thought so. *[beat]* Gadzooks, I've been meaning to speak to you about that.

Gadzooks: About what your omniscience?

Odin: You're spending entirely too much time in the Hall of Valkyries.

Gadzooks: I know, but Lokie's Garden is too full of, *[beat]* well, mischief.

Odin: That's not what I mean Gadzooks. You're a warrior, you have duties. I'm disappointed in you. I had such high hopes for you, I thought at one time that you might perhaps outshine your cousin Thor.

Gadzooks: You did? *[puzzled]* I mean, I didn't?

Odin: Instead all you do is guzzle mead in the hall. Gadzooks, why aren't you down on Earth inspiring new and talented mortal warriors?

Gadzooks: Well, your excellence, I would be there, but there just haven't been any glorious wars to inspire mortal warriors with. I mean it's hard to inspire someone to fight if the cause isn't *[beat]* fashionable.

Odin: FASHIONABLE!!! *[restrained]* Gadzooks, did you ever stop to think that until you inspire some talented warriors *[loud]* there won't be any glorious wars!?

Gadzooks: *[a bit on the sheepish side]* Huh. I never looked at it that way, your lordship.

Odin: I thought so. Who were the last two great mortal warriors you inspired?

Gadzooks: Well, there was this guy named Von Richtoven. He was a warrior of the air, something they call a flyer. He died a hero's death in the heat of battle, falling from the sky like a wounded eagle. *[matter of fact]* I was having a tankard of mead with him in the Hall of Valkyries when you called.

Odin: Who else?

Gadzooks: Then there was this great guy named Patton, George S. Patton! He was a warrior's warrior your excellence. Fearless, determined, with a sense of greatness and with face of stone, perfect for battle.

Odin: Did he die in a blaze of glory too?

Gadzooks: Not exactly, he was killed in his horseless chariot just after the last great mortal war. The last I saw of him, he was chasing a red-headed serving wench in the hall
--

[overlap "the hall" with Odin as Odin cuts off Gadzooks]

Odin: -- the Hall of Valkyries! I might have known. So Gadzooks, who have you inspired lately?

Gadzooks: Your excellence, good material in a mortal being is hard to come by. It takes special qualities, just the right instinct, the right character, the right sparkle, a warrior's essence; rare raw material at best. *[pompous]* Then it takes the hands of a fearless God warrior like myself to mold this raw quality into a truly great warrior.

Odin: Really? You give me the impression that you could inspire just about anybody for anything, is that right ?

[Gadzooks - aw schucks mode]

Gadzooks: Well, in all humbleness, your omniscience, I'm flattered that you think so. While I could be an inspiration for just about any mortal, I truly believe that I'm the best at inspiring warriors. That's my true calling.

Odin: You know, I'd like to see you do that, inspire someone other than a warrior. That would be a treat indeed, splendid fun too. Ha Ha Ha Ho Ho YES Splendid Fun!

Gadzooks: But your holiness, I didn't mean that I *[cut off by Odin]*

Odin: Gadzooks, I want you to go to Earth and I want you to inspire a mortal being. Hummm what will it be? I know, I want you to go down there and inspire an ARTIST! A painter, a sculptor, a perhaps a dancer. *[pleased with himself]* Yes, by Valhalla, that's it! Gadzooks you're going to earth to inspire a mortal artist!

[Gadzooks looking caught off-guard]

Gadzooks: A mortal artist? I am? BUT But but your excellence, don't the greek muses do that? Don't they have a Guild or something?

Odin: Oh, I'm sure they'll appreciate a little help from one of Valhalla's finest. HA HA HO HA HA! Let it be done! It is the Will of Odin! And Gadzooks *[beat]* don't come back to Valhalla until the deed is done.

[Odin's light is gone, Gadzooks is now in normal general lighting]

Gadzooks: *[Warrior's Scream]* Ahhhhhhhhh! How in the name of Odin am I suppose to inspire an artist? They're usually a finicky bunch, with strange habits and egos the size of Odin's bed. But wait. This could be an opportunity in the making. I could be going to inspire another Bach or Beethoven, maybe another DiVinci, or Michelangelo; I could end up *[pompous]* in all my glory on a ceiling someplace. I like the sound of this!

[deliver with powerful intent]

Look out mortal artist whoever you are. I am Gadzooks a God of the Norse and I'm coming to inspire you in your craft! You will know the love and greatness of the GODS of VALHALLA. You will know ME! BY ODIN!

[Black out - End of Scene One]

Scene Two

Place: Port Arthur, Texas

Time: 3 a.m. July 14th, 1961

[A soft blue ghost lighting is fluorescing the stage, a very dim warm light is up on the couch, where a lump of female human flesh lays sleeping off an evening's intoxication. Upon Gadzooks appearance on the stage the blue lights come up to full.]

Gadzooks: AH! A mortal dwelling, a bit shabby, lived in, obviously an eccentric artist type. Ah, a young female in the throes of mortal slumber. She must be the daughter of the maestro I'm here to inspire. Such a lovely thing she is.

[waves his hand over the couch, light brightens on only the couch area, he moves the back of the couch and admires the female]

Such a vision of loveliness, the skin of Idun and the hair of Gefjon, the bosom of Freya. She reminds me of the fair Ophelia of Denmark. Perhaps after I inspire her father as an artist I'll have my way with her. *[beat]* But mortal time is not to be wasted, I must wake her to find her father, the great master-to-be.

[Gadzooks leans over her and tries to wake her with gentle words]

Gadzooks: Ophelia, oh gentle Ophelia, wake up, wake up sweet princess. It is I, the warrior supreme from Valhalla. *[She just mumbles, he attempts to shake her gently]*

Ophelia, dear sweet Ophelia, I am here to inspire your father the maestro, please wake up sweet rose pedal.

[Groggy at first, then she snaps awake]

Ophelia: OK hummm OK humm OK what? Wait! Who the hell are you? What the hell are you doing in my apartment?

[holding her head, obviously hungover]

Gadzooks: I'm Gadzooks and I'm here looking for the maestro.

Ophelia: Mindy doesn't live here anymore. How the hell did you get in here? Did she give you a key?

Gadzooks: Who's Mindy, my dear sweet Ophelia?

Ophelia: My name is NOT Ophelia, it's Pearl. Anyway, Mindy moved out last month, her band got a record contract in LA. Didn't she tell you, fella?

Gadzooks: I'm afraid you misunderstand me Ophelia, I'm looking for the maestro, the budding artist of this dwelling. Would that be your father?

Ophelia: I told you my name's not Ophelia, it's Pearl. Look, my father is not here and he's not an artist!

Gadzooks: There must be a mistake. I was sent here to inspire an artist!

Ophelia: I'm the only one trying to be an artist in this place, and I really wish you'd go back wherever you come from, so I can sleep off this drunk. Don't slam the door on your way out, OK, Ciao!

[She collapses back on to the couch]

Gadzooks: Ophelia, if you're the artist of this humble mortal dwelling *[with pomp]* then I'm here to inspire you!

Ophelia: Oh, God they all say that! Who did you say you were?

Gadzooks: I'm Gadzooks, I'm a Warrior God and I'm here to inspire the artist within this dwelling, rather the artist within you. I'm here to take the character and essence of your mere mortal existence and fashion it into the heart of an artist, a true master among men.

Ophelia: Now I know I'm having a drunken nightmare. *[looking at his clothing]* Is that a sword your wearing? If you're really here, why don't you go home and let me sleep this off? Why not drop by in a few days, maybe we can talk about forming a band or something, OK? Now please leave!

[mood now down]

Gadzooks: I can't go home. I've been told not to come home until I accomplish the deed. No more mead in the Hall of Valkyries until I succeed in my mission.

[He sits down all forlorn on the end of the couch]

Ophelia: Jesssh, you west Texas boys sure do have strange rites of passage. Didn't ya know they closed down all the brothels a few months ago? I can't believe you didn't hear about it, it was in all the papers. Besides I've never heard of the Hall of Valerie. Look hon, I've got a bad drunk going on here and I really want to sleep it off. I'm asking you to "please leave" so I can get some sleep.

Gadzooks: Ophelia, dear sweet Ophelia, what do I have to do to convince you that I'm a very special muse and I'm here to help you in your artistic pursuits?

Ophelia: Damn it, for the last time my name is not Ophelia, it's Pearl! Who the hell is this Ophelia broad anyway?

Gadzooks: Ophelia is a very wonderful young maiden from Denmark that I had a loving flutter for many years ago. She had a crazy cousin, or at least everybody thought he was crazy. Anyway she died at all too young an age, a mere child in the flower of her youth.

Ophelia: I'm sorry to hear that zooky old boy but that's the way life is, sometimes alot of tough breaks. OK, if we're going to sit up all night and talk, then let's turn on some lights.

[She starts to get up, but stops as Gadzooks waves his arms with his palms up, the lights brighten]

[Looking pleased with himself]

Gadzooks: How's that?

[awe struck]

Ophelia: That's great. *[sits back on the couch stunned. Gadzooks sits smiling at her struggling]* How did you do that? Dah me, now I know that I'm having a drunken hallucination. Oh what the hell, I might as well enjoy it. What did you say your name was?

Gadzooks: I'm Gadzooks *[decides to be more pastoral]* Ophelia *[beat]* I mean Pearl, I am not an apparition for your drunken mind. I am truly an enlightened being from that place mortals call Valhalla. It is by the will of Odin that I come here to you, to help you in the pursuit of your artistic calling, whatever that might be.

Ophelia: You know, somehow I believe you, in a strange sort of way.

Gadzooks: That's your inner heart, confirming a universal truth.

Ophelia: OK, I'm game, I'll go along with this for now. So how does a God for Valhalla inspire a budding artist like myself? Do you wave your hands over me and presto! I'm a world renowned artist with ten hit records and a pile of money?

Gadzooks: It doesn't work like that Pearl. I give advice and help where I can, you do the serious work, I just make sure the really good work gets noticed. So, what kind of artist are you? A painter, sculptor, writer? A dancer perhaps?

Ophelia: I was trying really hard to be a painter but the jerks at the college say I just don't have it. So, I've been thinking about becoming a blues singer.

Gadzooks: That's wonderful Pearl, you want to be *[beat]* a blues singer *[confused - beat]* What's a blues singer?

Ophelia: You're a muse and you don't know what the blues is?

Gadzooks: I have an explanation. I usually teach warriors the fine art of battle, I guess the Greeks were short-handed with muses so Odin loaned me out. I'm still divine inspiration, no matter how you look at it. Pearl, think of it this way, if I were really a bonafide muse, surely I'd know what a blues singer was, but I'm not and I haven't the foggiest idea what these blues are.

Ophelia: So, you're some kind of hack and slash guy, and you're here to teach me how to sing the blues. Now I know I'm drunk.

Gadzooks: Pearl, why not teach me what blues singing is about, and I'll try and fit my experience into the problem the best I can. Please try and trust me.

Ophelia: "Trust me." They all say that. OK, it's like this, the blues are sort of sad songs.

Gadzooks: Sad songs? Do you really think people are going to like sad songs? I mean I like to hear happy songs of glorious battles myself. Is there really a market for singing sad songs?

Ophelia: They're not exactly sad songs, but you sing them like you're sad.

Gadzooks: I would think that if you're sad, you wouldn't be in a good mood for singing, but you are mortal and mortals do have strange ways.

Ophelia: Let me put it another way. You said you are a warrior. Have you ever lost a battle?

Gadzooks: ME!?! Lose a battle, I've never [*beat*] well, maybe one, perhaps two. What are you getting at?

Ophelia: Remember how down you were about losing, you just wanted to go home and get drunk and cry in your beer?

Gadzooks: Yes, I felt very bad. I just wanted to go and hold my head in shame. I had disgraced my great house.

Ophelia: OK, that's when you should have sung a love song about your girlfriend.

Gadzooks: You're saying that I should have sung about my girlfriend while I felt like pig dung? [*beat*] That's the blues?

[She just stares into his eyes as he begins to understand.]

Ophelia: That's the blues.

Gadzooks: The blues, what a concept, singing love songs while you feel bad. But does that mean that I can only sing the blues when I'm really feeling bad? Because I'm a God of Valhalla and I rarely feel bad.

Ophelia: The trick to singing the blues is to finding that little bit of feeling, that sad essence that makes you always feel a little bit sad, just enough to put you in the mood.

Gadzooks: Like what? A sad memory?

Ophelia: Not exactly a sad memory, but a memory that always puts you in a distant longing mood, something that makes you wish for something that can't be. It's there something you long for and can't have as a God?

[He thinks for a moment]

Gadzooks: Oh. Oh, yes, there's one memory, the memory of my sweet Ophelia.

[He becomes distant]

Ophelia: Wait a minute, I thought you said she died. Isn't she in Valhalla with you?

Gadzooks: Pearl, you don't understand, Ophelia was a mortal, she died while still in the flower of her youth. In death she went to the place where all who die in youth go. It's a special place, a place where they dance in the light of the creator of all things. Besides Valhalla is for warriors and those who are specially blessed by Odin.

Ophelia: You mean the Gods suffer?

Gadzooks: Yes! We suffer, in our own way.

Ophelia: Well, Gadzooks old boy, it looks to me like the blues is going to make a debut in Valhalla really soon.

Gadzooks: What do you mean?

Ophelia: It's my guess when you get back there, sooner or later you'll start crying in your beer and start singing.

Gadzooks: But I can't go back there until I've inspired you, and you're already a blues singer, so what's to inspire?

Ophelia: I may be a blues singer, but nobody else thinks so.

Gadzooks: Pearl, what's that blues place in your heart? That thing that makes you cry in your beer?

Ophelia: All the time I was growing up, especially in high school, I've been an odd ball and a bit of an outcast. Whenever I think about it, it makes me sad inside. Sometimes I just get angry and I start throwing things. I feel like I want to kill something, especially some of those little snits from high school.

[Gadzooks perks up]

Gadzooks: That's great!

Ophelia: That I want to kill something????

Gadzooks: Oh, you bet it is. Pearl, you've got the bloodlust of a warrior, that thirst to go out there and kill something. Now I know I can help.

Ophelia: Help me? You really can help me?

Gadzooks: Ophelia, the hardest thing I have to teach to young warriors is the technique of dredging up a some memory that brings out the animal in them. Trying to get them to come to rage of wanting to go out and kill something is a real challenge. Little Warrior, you're halfway there.

Ophelia: Am I going to have to hack somebody up into little pieces?

Gadzooks: Nah, not unless you want to. Remember, I'm here to help you with blues singing, not hacking.

Ophelia: That's a relief! So where do we start?

Gadzooks: Kid, you're most of the way there, but first I should have a little pep talk with you and sort of explain the rules of engagement. If you're going to be a warrior or a blue singer in your case, you got to do it with all your heart and feeling. You've got to charge out there like you own the place and take charge.

[Ophelia starts to get pumped]

Ophelia: I want to take charge! YAH!

Gadzooks: Yah! Fight hard and take no prisoners!

Ophelia: Take!! NO!! Prisoners!!

Gadzooks: Live life like there's no tomorrow, live every moment like it's the last breath you'll ever take.

[Gadzooks delivers the following with power and volume, Ophelia echoes back each phrase with equal and building enthusiasm]

Gadzooks/Ophelia: Fight hard !! Live hard!! Play hard!! Love hard!!!

Gadzooks: -- and when the battle is won, drink and feast hard.

Ophelia: Gosh, if I do all that I won't live to be thirty.

Gadzooks: Did you want to live forever?

Ophelia: Welllll??

Gadzooks: So what, if you don't live to be thirty? If you die, you'll come to Valhalla and feast with me and my pals Patton and Von Richtoven in the Hall of Valkryies. We'll drink mead from Odin's goat and feast upon the meat of Andhrimnir's boar until Ragnarok.

Ophelia: Me in Valhalla?

Gadzooks: Sure! And if you want to reincarnate, I'll fix it with Odin so next time you come back as a boy! So you can be a real warrior next time. How's that sound?

Ophelia: Great! Oh, what the hell! Let's do it! Let's do what has to be done!

[solemn tone]

Gadzooks: Pearl, is it by your will that you wish to be a warrior blues singer?

Ophelia: Yes, I want to go out and take on the world of music with the enthusiasm of a warrior. I want the world to know me as a warrior among blues singers!

[quizzically]

Gadzooks: and ?

Ophelia: and ?

Gadzooks: -- and don't forget the glory, *[beat]* never forget the glory!

Ophelia: Oh yeh, glory *[beat]* OH YEAH, the GLORY! *[beat]*

I want to return to this shabby little town without pity, and I want to show them damn little snits from high school, that I made someone out of myself. That I had dreams, dreams that I hunted down and captured. I want to ride into town on my ten year reunion day in glorious victory! Hailed as an accomplished maestro in my chosen art and as the Warrior Queen of the Blues!

[With enthusiasm]

Gadzooks: Now you're talking like a warrior!

If it's the will of Odin, then it shall be done!

[He motions her over to a spot in front of the coffee table and starts the process.]

Ophelia: What do I do?

Gadzooks: You get down on one knee and I'll invoke Odin's power and blessing upon you, and Pearl, no matter what happens, never be scared of anything. Trust me, I'll always be with you..

[He kisses her on the forehead]

[sheepishly]

Ophelia: I trust you.

[The following invocation of Odin delivered with a tone of solemn and building pomp]

[lightning: a special brightness begins to build from his first words, building with more and more wind and rumble]

Gadzooks: I call upon the gates of Valhalla to open so that prayers of the warrior Gadzooks and the young warrior Pearl can be heard clearly by the ear of Odin.

I call upon Bragi, god of poetry, son of Odin to bless this warrior with the gift of poetry so that her songs will have a handsome ring.

I call upon Freya, goddess of love, fertility and war to bless this singing warrior with a love for her craft and fertility in the creation of her songs and the strength to fight for her work.

I call upon Vor, god of vows to seal this blessing for this Queen of Warrior Blues Singers, who this day commits freely to Odin and Valhalla her strengths, talents and passions.

For which she will be rewarded with our love and promise of life in Valhalla.

LET THIS BE DONE, IN THE NAME OF ODIN !

[Blinding lighting and thunder sounds - FADE TO BLACK]

Scene Three

Place: Pearl's living room

Music: {something period country and western}

[General lighting comes up on stage, Ophelia is crashed out on the couch, after a few moments of general lighting she begins to wake up.]

[After a few moments, she looks around for someone]

Ophelia: Oh my head. Nah!! Must have been a wild dream. Gads, this dropping out of art school really has me wrapped around the proverbial flag pole. Now I'm having nightmares about it.

Girl, why are you letting yourself get messed up with those jerks at the damn college? Last night you wanted to quit art school and join a band *[beat]* and become a blues singer.

[pauses and tries to tidy the table - talking to herself]

And what's wrong with becoming a blues singer? Mama always told me I had a great voice.

Oh, what the damn hell!

[She picks up the phone, dials and pauses. She begins a one-sided conversation with her college]

Good morning, registrar's office please.

[Pause, looks around the room still looking for someone]

I hope you can help me. I'm an art student and I'd like to withdraw and get as much tuition refund as possible.

[pause]

Yes, I'm sure about it. You see I've made other plans for my life, that's right! You will?!

Gee I thought you folks would give me a hard time or somethin. Thanks!

My name? Oh, I forgot to tell you my name? Sorry.

My name is Janis *[beat]* Janis Joplin.

[Music: Trust Me, one of Jan's bluezy music fades up for a few bars. She keeps acting as if she is talking to the phone, the lights fade to black.]

Curtain Call

[Curtain call suggestion: A posthumous twist: Have her make her curtain call in the Valhalla space with Gadzooks]

Gadzooks and Ophelia

Gadzooks and Ophelia is by far the most popular play I have written to date. It's funny and it's very popular with high schools and college audiences because of its blatant irreverence and comic book hero quality. While the play was written in 1996, the project has much older roots.

In 1977, while I was in the Navy, a bunch of us were at my home in Navy housing, drinking tequila shots and slowly getting wasted one summer's night. Somehow we got on the topic of Shakespeare and the question:

What were the names of Shakespeare's flops?

We all suggested a number of goofy and stupid titles as we nursed the bottle and contemplated the worm within. Eventually my spouse "The Diva" after a lick of salt and a hearty sip of tequila blurted out "Gadzooks and Ophelia!"

The title hit a cord with everybody; sudden we all began explaining between shots how much we all knew about this lost work of Shakespeare. By the end of the evening, we had all decided that the popular '70s television program "Mork and Mindy" was based on Shakespeare's lost "Gadzooks and Ophelia." We all laughed and managed to sleep off the tequila. Somehow the only thing that stayed with me over the years was the title "Gadzooks and Ophelia" and that it was related to Mork and Mindy, kind-of, sort-of.

Then in 1995, the year between writing "Princess in Training" and "The Berdache," the muses started this "Neutron dance" on my creative heart again, giving me this odd stream of muse consciousness.

What if Gadzooks was a Norse demigod who was for all intents supposed to be a mentor to young mortal warriors? What if he was also a slacker and a drunk; what if all his partying invoked the wrath of Odin? What if Odin, the classic jokester, tossed Gadzooks out of Valhalla and told him he couldn't come back until he inspired a young mortal artist? Sort of loaning him out to the Greek muses! Of course Gadzooks would pitch a fit and Odin would think it was all very great fun!

But there was a deeper question. What if the Gods sometimes give faulty advice with disastrous results? From my Buddhist perspective, the Gods are just as messed up as we humans are, just more powerful and with longer lives, so why couldn't Gadzooks be a complete screw up. The first scene between Gadzooks and Odin setting up this premise was written in 1995.

It would take me another year and a half before I could find just the right artist for him to inspire. I was looking for just the right real person. Someone who was unique and world class for his or her chosen art but his or her personal life was a total disaster. After exhaustive research, I settled on Janis Joplin. Janis was that tragic personality who had it all but suffered from being the kid on the outside. In high school she was not the "cool" kid, and in college she wasn't exactly stellar either. She managed to become the Queen of the Blues and it's tragic victim too.

Being a kid on the outside and not popular in high school was something I had in common with poor Janis. I used to like to think that her and I might have to become friends had we met before she became a big rock star. —Of course that's just my ideal fantasy I'm entitled.—

Janis once said to a reporter, after a hugely successful concert,

“I just made love to 40,000 people, but I'll go home alone.”

Janis experienced the classic disappointment and suffering that sometimes comes with huge popularity, it can be very lonely at the top. On that premise I based the play. I laid the groundwork that being victorious and successful in your chosen art or profession sometimes comes at a high price and doesn't necessarily fulfill your personal life and expectations.