

**LICKSPITTLES,  
BUTTONHOLERS AND  
DAMNED PERNICIOUS  
GO-BETWEENS**

**BY JOHNNA ADAMS**



**DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.**

LICKSPITTLES, BUTTONHOLERS AND DAMNED  
PERNICIOUS GO-BETWEENS  
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LICKSPITTLES, BUTTONHOLERS AND DAMNED PER-  
 NICIOUS GO-BETWEENS was originally produced by the  
 Boomerang Theatre Company (Tim Errickson, Artistic Director;  
 Sue Abbott, Managing Director) in New York City in 2013. The  
 original production was reprised in 2015. Both productions were  
 directed by John Hurley; the costume designers were Cheryl  
 McCarron (2013) and Holly Rihn (2015); the sound designer was  
 Jacob Subotnick; the lighting designers were Benjamin Weill  
 (2013) and Morgan Zipf-Meister (2015); the set designers were  
 Jennifer Stimple Kamei (2013) and Sandy Yaklin (2015); the fight  
 director was Michael Lawrence Eisenstein. The cast was as follows:

GUTHBERT GRUNDTVIG ..... Nat Cassidy  
 PEDER PAARS ..... Joe Mathers/Sean Williams  
 STUB BASBURTOV ..... Chris Weikel/Aaron Zook  
 EGLANTINE DE SURRETTE ..... Kristen Vaughan  
 CANDINE DE LIBERTE ..... Kelley Rae O'Donnell  
 CHRISTIENNE CLAUDETTE ..... Felicia J. Hudson/  
 Catherine McNelis

FLEMMING/OPERA PATRON/  
 DUKE OF WELLINGTON ..... Ridley Parson  
 IBSEN/LIMERICK/  
 PRINCE FREDERIK ..... Gavin Starr Kendall  
 NARRATORS/FRENCH GRENADIERS/  
 BRITISH NAVY MEN ..... Ridley Parson & Gavin Starr Kendall  
 SESTINE LYKSALIGHEDER/  
 JOSEPHINE BONAPARTE ..... Amy Lee Pearsall  
 NAPOLEON BONAPARTE ..... Isaiah Tannenbaum

## CHARACTERS

GUTHBERT GRUNDTVIG, a Danish go-between

PEDER PAARS, a Danish lickspittle

STUB BJARKSEN BASBURTOV, a Danish buttonholer

EGLANTINE DEVILLE DE SURRETTE, a French buttonholer

CANDINE DE LIBERTE, a French go-between (in disguise as  
SIMPLE FRENCH BOY)

CHRISTIENNE CLAUDETTE, a French lickspittle

FLEMMING, a palace guard

IBSEN, a palace guard

NARRATOR, a player excusing the cheap production values

SESTINE LYKSALIGHEDER, a Danish maid

OPERA PATRON

JOSEPHINE BONAPARTE, Napoleon's Empress

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, Holy Roman Emperor, ruler of France

TWO FRENCH GRENADIERS

LIMERICK, an Irish butler

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON, Commander of the British

TWO BRITISH NAVY MEN

PRINCE FREDERIK, ruler of Denmark

## PLACE

**Act I:** Scene 1: The gates of the Charlottenborg Palace, Copenhagen  
Scene 2: A nearby Lutheran church

**Act II:** The steps of the Opéra de Paris, the Palais Garnier, Paris

**Act III:** Scene 1: Eglantine's salon, Paris  
Scene 2: Outside in an open park, Paris

**Act IV:** The deck of the British ship of the line, the *Prince of Wales*, Baltic Sea

**Act V:** The gates of the Charlottenborg Palace, Copenhagen

## TIME

Summer of 1807

## Suggestions on Actor Doubling

*The following roles should be cast without doubling:*

GUTHBERT  
STUB  
PEDER  
CANDINE  
CHRISTIENNE  
EGLANTINE

*Other roles may be doubled as follows:*

**Actor 1:** FLEMMING, GRENADIER 1, BRITISH NAVY MAN  
**Actor 2:** IBSEN, GRENADIER 2, BRITISH NAVY MAN  
**Actor 3:** SESTINE, JOSEPHINE  
**Actor 4:** NAPOLEON, DUKE OF WELLINGTON  
**Actor 5:** NARRATOR, OPERA PATRON, LIMERICK,  
PRINCE FREDERIK

# LICKSPITTLES, BUTTONHOLERS AND DAMNED PERNICIOUS GO-BETWEENS

## ACT I

### Scene 1: Rubbish, Trifles, and Dastardly Foul Effrontery

*1807, May. A warm spring day. Copenhagen. The gates of the Charlottenborg Palace. Ibsen and Flemming, guards, stand at attention, grinning with malice.*

*Peder Paars is tossed out through the gate. He looks around for someone to berate.*

PEDER. Of all the uncommon and effronterous acts!  
Thrown right out of court with just the shirts on our backs!  
Jesus Christ, how did my life get this screwed up?  
One minute I'm happy, drinking from the prince's own cup,  
The next I'm dejected, downtrodden, and disdained,  
Tossed soundly out the palace gates, the reason unexplained.  
I thought they adored me, or at least my clever praise.  
My compliments, flattery, my sucking-up ways.  
They'll miss it, they'll regret it, fickle, heartless court!  
Wait. Where's the buttonholer, my aggravating cohort?

*Stub Bjarksen Basburtov is tossed out. He lands with a squeal and a shout.*

STUB. Stop this! You cad! You villain! You ignoble philistine!

Crown Prince Frederik could not possibly mean

To eject from his court a speechifier such as I—

IBSEN. He never shuts up, will you get a load of this guy?

FLEMMING. No, thanks, I've been trapped by him at a party or two.

PEDER. Stub, give it up, they've bounced us. We're through.

STUB. Never! Impossible! I'm the royal essayist and extoller.

IBSEN. You drive the prince crazy!

FLEMMING. You're a worthless buttonholer!

STUB. Now, see here, Sergeant Simple and Officer Rude,

You should blush for displaying such an attitude.

I am aware that whisperers call me unflattering names.

Buttonholer, bore, blatherer—but I'm not one who blames

The ignorant for hurtful slurs, no, sirs, not at all!

The court may name me Sir Flapgums, and that takes gall,

But I don't protest, not a peep, not a reproach.

So, they call me a nuisance and consider me gauche,

Fain to sweat and swoon from the hot air I produce,

This court is unimaginative, intolerant, and obtuse.

I go out of my way to speak with nearly everyone here,

And passionately regard rhetoric as my beloved career.

You'd think for the attention I pay people would be grateful,

But they are hostile, vicious, wicked, and hateful!

I won't utter a word, not a syllable, in my own defense,

Let them pillory me, let the public stoning commence!

I've committed an unpardonable crime just by talking,

Or as my enemies have it, by jawing, whining, and squawking.

You would not hear the end of this, if I were a lesser man—

IBSEN. He never shuts up.

FLEMMING. Yeah. I don't think that he can.

IBSEN. In case you guys haven't noticed, Denmark is at war.

FLEMMING. The prince has real, serious concerns, ass-kiss and bore.

IBSEN. He's fighting two fronts against the French and British.

FLEMMING. Your foolish, selfish plotting leaves the prince skittish.

He can't make decisions or plan out a complex battle

When his head is filled with your meaningless prattle.

IBSEN. You, lickspit, spent two hours yesterday praising his feet.

PEDER. The prince has a fine instep: manly, yet dainty and neat.

FLEMMING. And you, buttonholer, took our prince aside just to rave

About the shine on the palace doorknobs. Insipid knave!



STUB. It's astonishing! How they polish the small carved flowers.  
IBSEN. Evidently! Since your aimless chatter took over four hours!  
PEDER. Come on. At least let us go in and collect all our stuff.  
FLEMMING. You're not to set foot inside.  
IBSEN. No way. Enough is enough.

*There is a commotion inside. Someone argues and is denied.  
Guthbert Grundtvig is tossed out, too, with a bag of clothes  
and a single shoe.*

STUB. As I live and breathe!

IBSEN. Holy crap!

PEDER. What can this mean?

FLEMMING. They've finally exiled that damned pernicious  
go-between!

GUTHBERT. Finally, you say? Finally? Oh, I like that a lot.

Finally exiled the last sane man, was that your thought?  
That's my thought, or else the Danish prince has turned mad,  
I fear for his crown and our city, if things are this bad.  
Turning from his gate the one person who gets things done,  
Yes, it's finally happened, he's our crazed king's true son!  
Who will deliver letters? Who will go between the courtiers?  
I'm ambassador, procurer, choreographer of affairs!  
Copenhagen society won't last without a broker and dealer,  
Someone must handle money, spy on husbands, put out a feeler.  
How does he expect court business to continue? To thrive?  
I know more dirty court secrets than anyone alive!  
Oh, I assure you I know my value, my appraisal, my worth;  
In honest, ingenious Danish go-betweens there's a dearth.  
In the prince's own interests I went to Lyksaligheder,  
He has a lovely daughter, and the prince wants to bed her.  
I ought to go to her now, fill her little head with lies—  
The prince wets his bed, his minute prick won't rise.  
He's offering her father three kroners for her rent.  
He wants her to suck animals in his royal circus tent!  
Oh, I could hurt him, I could spread destruction so keen,  
He'd regret to the end of his days banishing the go-between!

PEDER. It's like seeing the bell banished from the church steeple!

STUB. Egad! What on earth happened? I thought you knew people.

FLEMMING. We've no time for the chaos created by your  
machinations.

Your tongue's like a foreign weapon with its wild gyrations.

GUTHBERT. Be careful, Guard Flemming, I run errands for your sister.

FLEMMING. Leave her out of it, you sneaking, creeping tongue-twister.

GUTHBERT. She often sends me after creams and oils for her complexion,

You wouldn't like it if one day they gave her an infection.

An awful betrayal of her confidence and trust.

Let me see the prince so I can complain that this is unjust.

FLEMMING. This villainous go-between is a demon, a monster, and more!

IBSEN. All right, Guthbert, you can see him. But come back at four.

GUTHBERT. Thanks, your concern for Flemming's sister does you credit.

IBSEN. Shut up, Guthbert, or you'll make me regret it!

GUTHBERT. If the Prince asks about your part in this, I'll never tell, I'm grateful all the guards know Flemming's sister so well.

*Flemming screams and starts a fight. Guard Ibsen runs and Flemming chases him out of sight.*

FLEMMING. *(To Ibsen, his friend.)*

You son of a whore!

IBSEN. Jesus, Guthbert! Please! Say no more!

GUTHBERT. Well, what have we here? A brown-noser and a hopeless bore?

*Guthbert tries to get in, but they've locked the gate. He fumes, glares, and is irate.*

STUB. How far you've fallen, Guthbert Grundtvig, you sad fraud.

When I think how you've fooled the court and kept them awed,

I feel perfectly ill. Your sly treachery and vulgar pride.

The people you've misled and befuddled. I'm fit to be tied.

GUTHBERT. Well. You're fit to be hog-tied, yes, I'll give you that.

STUB. You rude little man! Why, I think he just called me fat.

PEDER. Guthbert, dearest go-between, let me teach you a new trick,

Spread honey with the tongue, and the flies will be thick.

GUTHBERT. Your tongue on thick flies? Why, Peder, are you that sort?

No, your tongue makes rear approaches, that's your sport.

STUB. Oh! He's got you there, Paars. Rear approaches! No dispute.

PEDER. Oh, that's funny. Aren't you clever? Oh, yeah, you're cute.  
How's this for a joke? Look around. What do you see?  
They kicked your ass to the curb like lockjaw and me.  
STUB. A richly deserved end to your schemes and nefarious plots,  
It's over now, no riches and fame, no fine wine, no yachts.  
Yes, you dastardly worm. Lie there in the bed that you made.  
GUTHBERT. I'll get you back in the palace in exchange for your aid.

*Peder and Stub fall on their knees, fawning, begging, and eager to please.*

STUB. Guthbert! You brilliant man, you'll restore us, it's true?  
PEDER. I'll kiss any ass that you want, please, just tell me who!  
STUB. Any subject you need me to speak on, I'm ready at the nonce:  
Grecian urns, Croatian philosophy, that explorer named Ponce.  
You won't find a topic that gives me even a moment's pause,  
Come, man! Tell me what you need. I'm warming up my jaws.  
GUTHBERT. There is one sure, simple path to the prince's good  
grace,

We don't aim for his head, no, instead, a much lower place.  
He wants this Sestine, Lyksaligheder's pretty daughter,  
He'll grant our request when to his bed I've brought her.  
I know the Lutheran church where Sestine likes to pray.  
You'll buttonhole her there, Stub, in your inimitable way.  
And you, Peder Paars, show this girl none of your pride,  
'Til we're safe, your face is a saddle any may ride.

STUB. But, Guthbert, good fellow, in this drama you've planned  
I don't see how this toady and I can best lend a hand.  
Dress the stage more. Raise the curtain. Set the scene.

PEDER. For the plan of the lickspittle,

STUB.

Buttonholer,

GUTHBERT.

And go-between.

*Here we end the scene. But not quite the narration. An actor steps forward to provide explanation.*

*This can be any of the actors not playing—and to clever directors, this goes without saying—a lickspittle, buttonholer, or go-between. Get another actor to do it, preferably one not in this scene.*

*It might be nice to have the same actor narrate throughout the play. But you're the director and have the final say. You can*

# LICKSPITTLES, BUTTONHOLERS AND DAMNED PERNICIOUS GO-BETWEENS

by Johnna Adams

14M, 6W (doubling, flexible casting)

During the Napoleonic wars, three extraneous Danish court officials—a professional loudmouth (the buttonholer), a kiss-ass for hire (the lickspittle), and a successful dastard (the go-between)—are tossed out of court just as Denmark's merchant fleet becomes of strategic importance. The three men journey to France and meet Napoleon's top lickspittle, buttonholer, and go-between—who are females?! Unnecessarily complex plots abound, flying machines are destroyed, and the head of Marie Antoinette is discovered during the madcap struggle to save Copenhagen from British howitzers. With an extraordinary use of rhyming alexandrine verse, plus cameos by sestina, haiku, free verse, limericks, and sonnets, LICKSPITTLES, BUTTONHOLERS AND DAMNED PERNICIOUS GO-BETWEENS is a farce for the ages, a delightful romp no matter your poetic preferences.

*"... an extraordinarily clever work... How Ms. Adams resolves the romantic shenanigans yet keeps the historical context clear is both amusing and mindboggling."*  
—**TheaterPizzazz.com**

*"Johnna Adams' LICKSPITTLES... is one of the hidden gems of this fall season... Recommended if you enjoy word trickery and witty turns of phrase, you like Shakespeare, you dislike Shakespeare but enjoy rhyming couplets... [or] you enjoy clever, well-written, original, romantic comedies..."*

—**Maxamoo.com**

**Also by Johnna Adams**  
GIDION'S KNOT  
SANS MERCI

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