NEIGHBORLY

by Joan Cleveland
NEIGHBORLY

A comedy, 8-9 minutes

CHARACTERS

PENELOPE: An over-50 widow with a lively personality, and an optimistic viewpoint. She lives alone, except for her beloved cat, Fluffy. She’s oblivious to her landlord, Charles’ interest in her.

FLUFFY: A well-behaved, but playful indoor cat, enjoying her temporary outdoor freedom. To be played by an actor (on two feet) in simple costume of leggings and t-shirt, cat ears and tail, and painted-on whiskers.

CHARLES: A divorced, over-50 gentleman with a good sense of humor, and a growing interest in his new neighbor and tenant, Penelope White. He lives alone.

SANDRA: An over-50 married woman and long-time friend of Penelope. She’s learned to accept her friend’s enthusiasm and sometimes misplaced optimism. NOTE: This character could be a man, Penelope’s brother, Robert.

PLACE

The back yards of two next-door neighbors. A fence (cardboard, possibly on rollers) partially divides the two properties. PENELOPE’S yard has flowers in pots. CHARLES’ yard has a patio table and chair; two flower gardens (flower pots on a small table, downstage right; and flower pots along the fence); and a few bushes (medium-size artificial potted plants on rollers, available) upstage, near stage right exit.

TIME

Present day, sunny afternoon
NEIGHBORLY

AT RISE: PENELlope and SANDRA enter stage left into the back yard of Penelope’s house.

SANDRA: Penelope, who was that handsome man I saw you talking to when I drove by here yesterday?

PENELope: Who? (pause) Oh! That was just my landlord, Charles. He lives right (beat) next (beat) door. A little close for a landlord.

SANDRA: I don’t know...it’s not too close for a handsome gentleman who’s seems interested in you! Is he single?

PENELope: Divorced.

SANDRA: (looking around admiringly) This rental house is perfect for you, Penelope. What a great neighborhood!

PENELope: I agree! I’ve been living here for two weeks, and I couldn’t be happier! The rent is so affordable. There’s just one little problem.

SANDRA: What’s that?

PENELope: The landlord says, “NO pets.”

SANDRA: But you have Fluffy! Didn’t your rental agreement also say “no pets”?

PENELope: Shhhh...he might hear you. (then, defensively) I neglected to mention Fluffy when I filled out the rental application, and I crossed my fingers when I signed the rental agreement. I’m hoping he’ll eventually change his mind about the no pet policy. (breezily) In the meantime, since Fluffy’s an indoor cat, I’m sure I can keep her hidden.

SANDRA: (pointing behind Penelope, toward the neighbor’s back yard) I don’t think so.

FLUFFY enters stage right, stands near bushes, languidly cleaning her left ear with her left front paw; slowly exits stage right, tail in the air.

PENELope: Oh, no! I’ve got to get her back before the landlord sees her! I love this place, and I do not want to be evicted! Sandra, please go get Fluffy’s box of cat treats, while I try to see where she is!
SANDRA exits stage left. CHARLES (carrying a small gardening spade, enters from upstream right, unseen by Penelope), he leans down to work in the garden, then stands up just as PENELlope peeks over the fence. PENELope and CHARLES encounter one another eye-to-eye.

FLUFFY enters stage right, cleans her right ear with her right front paw; looks up, following the flight pattern of a butterfly, all while Penelope and Charles speak.

CHARLES: (startled) Oh!! (warmly) Hello, Ms. White. How are you today?

PENELlope: (flustered) I...I...was just admiring your vegetable garden.

CHARLES: (musingly) My... vegetable garden. (scans his gardens filled with flowers) Well, I was thinking of planting some vegetables. (smiling broadly) Which ones would you suggest?

FLUFFY still looking up at the butterfly, leaps up in attempt to catch it, then slowly exits stage right as PENELope tries to keep her mind on the conversation with Charles.

PENELope: Oh! Uh... I don’t know very much about gardening... Actually (beat), my grandson thought he lost a ball in your yard, when he was visiting last week... Excuse me. (hurries off and exits stage left)

CHARLES: (smiling, raising his voice to be heard by the departing Penelope, speaking facetiously) I’ll keep an eye out for that ball.

CHARLES leans down to continue gardening, then, noticing that he needs a hat, leaves the spade there, and exits upstream right).

PENELope and SANDRA enter together from stage left.

PENELope: He probably thinks I’m a lunatic!

SANDRA: I'm telling you, Penelope, he's interested. He was definitely flirting with you!

PENELope: Oh, Sandra! I think you're imaging things. (pause) Wait! Looks like he’s gone into the house. Now's my chance to go find Fluffy before he sees her, and gives me an eviction notice.

SANDRA: Well, okay, I’ll shake the cat treat box. You, be careful!
PENELOPE: (enters his yard, crouches down near bushes, and calls quietly) Fluffy. Fluffy.

CHARLES enters the yard from upstage right, wearing a cotton fisherman’s hat. He does not see Penelope crouching, but glances over the fence at Sandra who is shaking a box. As he waves at her tentatively, he steps back, running into Penelope.

PENELOPE and CHARLES: (shocked) Oh!!

CHARLES: Ms. White?! Are you alright? I’m so sorry...

PENELOPE: I was just looking for the... uh, the toy helicopter (beat) my grandson lost...

CHARLES: (beat) Oh, so it’s a helicopter this time. Your grandson certainly seems to have lost a lot of toys!

PENELOPE: (looking frantically around his yard) What? (laughs nervously) Oh, yes... the ball (beat) and the helicopter... I’m so sorry. Please excuse me.

PENELOPE runs into her yard, as CHARLES looks after her musingly.

FLUFFY enters stage right, stretches and yawns.

CHARLES shakes his head, reaches down to pick up his garden spade, digs a little, then walks to downstage plants and back, and finally exits upstage right. All the while FLUFFY meanders directly behind Charles, just barely missing (four to five times) being seen by him, then finally exits stage right at the same time as Charles makes his exit.

PENELOPE and SANDRA stare horrified, both reacting silently to the precarious, near-encounters of Charles and Fluffy.

PENELOPE: That was too close! I’ve just got to get her out of there! (beat) Oh, I have an idea!

SANDRA: Me too. Where are your moving boxes?

PENELOPE: Please, just keep shaking the treat box, and see if you can spot Fluffy! I’ll be right back. (exits stage left)
FLUFFY enters stage right, walks slowly around Charles’ back yard, looks interestedly at SANDRA who is shaking the treat box.

PENELOPE: (enters stage left, waving a frozen whole fish - Note: this is an available plastic replica) This will get Fluffy’s attention!

PENELOPE runs into Charles’ yard, calling Fluffy’s name. She holds the fish by its tail, and waves it over her head. FLUFFY, unseen by Penelope, suddenly runs past her and back into Penelope’s yard, and exits stage left.

SANDRA: (calling over the fence to Penelope) Penelope. It’s okay, Fluffy just ran back into the house.

PENELOPE: What did you say, Sandra?

(Sound of door closing).

SANDRA: (frantically) Penelope! Get out of there, quick!

PENELOPE begins to run back to her yard, drops the fish, starts to go back to pick it up, but leaves it there and runs just as Charles enters the yard from upstage right, carrying a glass of lemonade. CHARLES sees her running, and smiles quizzically. He sets the glass on the table, and exits upstage right.

FLUFFY enters slowly from stage left, and “sits” (or stands) next to Penelope.

PENELOPE: (petting Fluffy’s head) Well Fluff, (dejectedly) I guess Sandra’s right. We probably need to start packing. He’s going to see that fish, and then the cat will be out of the bag!

SANDRA: It’s a shame, Penelope. Such a great house, (beat) and I’m certain your landlord is interested in you...

PENELOPE: (ignoring Sandra’s comment, and stomping her foot defiantly) No! I’m not giving up yet! I’ll go over there, and tell him more of my “toy” story. I’ll just figure out a way to get that fish out of his yard before he sees it! Fluffy, let’s get you back in the house! (starts to walk Fluffy back toward stage left).

CHARLES enters from upstage right carrying a newspaper, notices the fish lying on the ground. He stands, scratching his head, obviously
puzzling out the presence of a fish, the strange behavior of Penelope, and then shows that he's figured it out. He leans down to pick up the fish by the tail. Holding the fish behind his back, he approaches the fence and calls out.

CHARLES: Ms. White.

PENELOPE stops abruptly, and turns. She walks cautiously over to the fence.

PENELOPE: Yes. Hello.

CHARLES: Ms. White (beat) Penelope, isn’t it? I don’t want to seem as though I’m spying on you—

PENELOPE: (offended) Well! I wasn’t spying on you!

CHARLES: (pretending to speak sternly) Perhaps not, but you seem very concerned about your grandson’s lost toys. I was just wondering...(dangling the fish by its tail over the fence) Did your grandson happen to lose a fish, in addition to that ball and helicopter?

PENELOPE: (angrily) What would my grandson be doing with a dead fish!

CHARLES: I was just wondering the same thing.

FLUFFY enters stage left, leaps up and grabs the fish out of Charles’ hand. She looks pleased.

PENELOPE: Oh, no!!

CHARLES: (smiling) Your grandson?

PENELOPE: (looks dejectedly over the fence at Charles) My cat, Fluffy.

CHARLES: (seriously) If you’ll excuse me for a minute, I’ll just go into the house to get a copy of your rental agreement. (turns to go).

PENELOPE looks after him, distressed.

CHARLES: (turns back and says brightly) Seems we’ll need to delete that “no pet” clause! (exits upstream right)

PENELOPE: Sandra, did you hear that!? He must actually like cats!
SANDRA: Oh, Penelope! Like I keep saying, Charles is interested in you!

PENELope: Do you really think so, Sandra?

    PENELope pets Fluffy's head affectionately, while pondering the idea.

PENELope: Fluffy (beat), it looks like we'll be staying after all!

    FLUFFY: Walks slowly around Penelope, looking up at her.

FLUFFY: Me-ow!

    THE END
HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE SMART PHONE

by

Joan Goodreau

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HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE SMARTPHONE

A Short Comedy, 11 minutes

This script may be used for a conventional play or adapted for Reader's Theater.

CHARACTERS

All characters are of retirement age.

JEN is learning how to use a cell phone she just bought but does not know if it will improve her life or not.

ANDIE is a flamboyant spiritual soul of an android cell phone

GRIM HACKER, who can be played by a man or woman, dresses in black, carries a big net and wears a washboard designed to be worn over the chest. Part has 6 Lines

MOJI is a multi-emotion Emoji who can be played by a man or woman. Part has 5 Lines

SETTING

Two chairs and a table with a bottle of wine. The door is designated on stage left. ANDIE carries a tambourine. HACKER has large black net in his pocket or belt. He wears, on his chest, a washboard on which he makes jarring noises with a spoon or knife. (I have a tambourine and a washboard designed to be worn over the chest.)

TIME

Present day
HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE SMART PHONE

At rise: JEN is center stage with her cell phone. There are two chairs and a small table with a bottle of wine on it. ANDIE, HACKER and MOJIE are off-stage.

JEN: Yes Liz, I finally got a smart phone yesterday. I know I’m the last of one of all our friends to get one. But it’s hard. I’m always poking the wrong thing. Yes, I know tap and swipe, tap and swipe. Last night I sat on it by mistake and set off the alarm clock. (Pause) I’m kind of scared of it. I hope it doesn’t change my life. I just got this cell phone so I could be part of the 21st century. I don’t want it to take over my life. (Drops the phone, then picks it up.) Sorry Liz, just dropped my phone.

The phone bleeps and makes strange noises.

JEN: Hello, hello. Are you still there? Hello. (Holds phone up and talks to it.) Look what you did. You lost my friend. I don’t think you’re so smart.

Phone noises continue. ANDIE sweeps on stage and plays her tambourine.

JEN: (Gives loud, long scream and cowes) What the…?

ANDIE: Free, free at last.

JEN: (Runs to table and threatens ANDIE with wine bottle) Get out right now. Get out of my house you…you…whoever you are.

ANDIE: I am Android. But we don’t have to be that formal. You can call me Andie.

JEN grabs ANDIE and ANDIE swirls away and taps tambourine.

JEN: How dare you sneak into my house? Where did you come from?

ANDIE: Thank you, Jen, (takes the cell phone) for releasing me from this claustrophobic little prison cell.

JEN: (Grabs back phone and scrutinizes it.) I’m calling the Geek Squad right now. No, wait. I don’t trust you. I’ll return you and get my money and my flip-phone back. At least a flip phone doesn’t invade my home.

ANDIE: Jen, Jen, trust me, I’m your best friend.

JEN: How do you know my name?
ANDIE: Jen, I know all about you—all your friends, all your likes on Facebook, all your favorites.

JEN: I don’t believe it.

ANDIE: Let’s see if I can convince you. You like whole-grain ice cream cones, clogs on sale, Celtic music.... You love basketball: Go Warriors.

JEN: How did you steal all my data?

ANDIE: I didn’t steal it. I stored it in that ugly little black box you paid too much for. But I am not just the brain, I am the spirit of your cell phone. (Hits tambourine.)

JEN: So phones actually have souls?

ANDIE: Yearning to be free. (Hits tambourine.)

JEN: How did you escape?

ANDIE: Jen, remember, you dropped the phone. You activated the escape app.

JEN: Escape app? What’s an app?

ANDIE: Ah, you are such an innocent. Well, I’m here to guide you on your path to total tech savvy. (Looks around apartment.) Hmm, not exactly the apartment of my dreams, but we’ll have this place fixed up in no time now that we’re roomies. (Starts rearranging furniture.)

JEN: Roomies? Hold on here. Who invited you?

(Puts furniture back.)

ANDIE: I came to help you. Yes, decorating with your credit card and my good taste. My Instagram and Pictogram gives me lots of ideas to bring this fixer-upper up to date. I could really make myself at home here. I want the bedroom with the bath.

JEN: Just because you slipped through an app or something. I don’t even know you.

ANDIE: You’ll get to know me. And like I said, I know you better than you know yourself. At our age, we get lonely. That’s why you need me. Well, here I am—your guide and soul mate.

JEN: I’m not lonely. That’s what I got this phone for—call my friends, text them, post pictures.

ANDIE: (Sarcastically) Sure, nothing like a text to cozy up with. (Hands JEN the cell and poses.) Here, take a picture. I’ll post it. Just click here.

JEN: (Clicks on phone) Click here. Oh no. I just took a hundred selfies.
ANDIE takes phone, poses together with JEN.

ANDIE: Say “on-line.”

JEN: (Looks awkward and uncomfortable) On-line?

ANDIE: (Takes picture and shows JEN the picture.) Done. There you go. You’re welcome.

ANDIE: You’ve turned my life upside-down in less than a day.

ANDIE: Let’s have a toast to celebrate. (Picks up bottle of wine.)

JEN: It’s too early to drink.

ANDIE: I can change to Eastern Standard time. Three hours ahead and it’s Happy Hour.

JEN: Put that back. I was saving that for a special occasion.

ANDIE: I am a very special occasion. You don’t get visitations from spirits very often.

JEN: Spirits visit and then leave. They don’t hang around and rearrange furniture and rearrange lives and...

ANDIE: Let’s order a snack. Pizza from the local Peppy Pizza. It’s got five Yelps. My treat. I’ll use your credit card that’s not maxed out.

JEN: You know my credit card numbers?

ANDIE: I told you, stored right in here. (Points to brain.)

JEN: I’m cancelling that credit card right now. Who do you think you are?

ANDIE: I’m Andie for short and I’m your best...

JEN: Silence. That card is history. (Presses numbers on phone.) Let’s see: tap and swipe, tap and swipe. Hello, I want to cancel. Hello. (Presses more numbers.) But I don’t know how to do it.

ANDIE: You really should relax. Listen to a music app or watch Tai Chi moves.

ANDIE does slow movements with arms and legs.

ANDIE: Here you try it.

ANDIE and JEN do movements together.

JEN: This is soothing.

ANDIE: See I can help you if you let me.
JEN: I just never know what to expect from you.

ANDIE: You’ve got to admit. It’s hard to ignore me.

JEN: But my old phone was just there when I needed it. It didn’t want to interact with me or be best buds.

ANDIE: Boring.

JEN: (Looks at cell.) Oh no, it says I have a security breach.

ANDIE: Is someone trying to get in?


ANDIE: Don’t blame me.

JEN: It says all I have to do is click here and they will take care of it.

ANDIE: Oh no, don’t fall for that. It’s a con.

JEN: Should I tap or swipe?

ANDIE: Don’t touch it.

JEN: (Taps phone) Oopps.

ANDIE: Nooo.

_The phone makes noises and the stage goes dark for a second. HACKER bursts into the house with fists raised. He has a black net tucked into a pocket or belt. He wears a washboard fitted over his chest. He makes grating sounds on the washboard with a spoon or knife._

JEN: Look. I don’t know who you are, but I don’t need any more room mates. No vacancies. Get back on the app that you came on and vamoose.

HACKER: It is I. (Makes grating sounds on the washboard. The Grim Hacker. Pillager and Destroyer of all data.

ANDIE: Oh no, not the Grim Hacker. He’s come to take me away. He’s going to kidnap me, strip me of all my data and leave me an empty shell. And your phone will never work again.

_Hacker leers at ANDIE and makes more grating noises on wash board._

JEN: Oh no, he’s not. (Faces HACKER) You, Mr. Hacker are no gentleman. You are a bully, and I will not tolerate your bullying my new best friend.
Hacker laughs diabolically and makes grating noises on wash board.

ANDIE: Did you say “new best friend”?

JEN: Well friends have to stand up for each other. Should I call 911?

ANDIE: No it’s too late for that. We need reinforcements now. Tap on an Emogi. Get the meanest Emogi you can find.

JEN taps on her phone while HACKER takes out a net and drops it over ANDIE to capture her.

HACKER: *(laughs diabolically)* Too late for you, my little sprite. You are captured by my inter Net.

MOGI: *(Enters and plays the first line of the Superman Theme song, “Here I am to save the day,” on a kazoo.)* It’s never too late for Mogi to save the day with my big smile. *(Grins)* Is everyone having a good day?

ANDIE: You tapped the wrong Emogi. You got the happy one instead of the mean, angry Emogi.

JEN: My fingers don’t fit those dinky, little keys.

MOGI: Hey, I can be angry if that’s what you want. *(shouts and shows mad face)* I can be really angry. *(gives HACKER a little push)*

HACKER: *(Pushes MOGIE down)* You can’t hurt me, you smiley face.

MOGI: *(Gets up into HACKER FACE and shows mean face)* You think you’re so mean and so smart. Well I think you got hit with the ugly stick. Ha, see, I can be mean too.

HACKER: You think I’m ugly.

MOGI: Sorry, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.

HACKER: Ugly is scary, and scary is good for the Grim Hacker. *(Makes more noise on the wash board.)*

HACKER and MOGIE push each other back and forth. MOGIE falls down.

ANDIE: Help. I’m already leaking my data all over the place. I’m getting weaker.

JEN: Hang on. You are too strong a spirit to give in now. *(Grabs phone and presses buttons.)* I’m going to shut this phone down. Now if I can just remember which button to press.

ANDIE: On the side, on the side.
JEN: Which side?

ANDIE: Right side.

JEN: We do make a team.

ANDIE: Do it.

_The phone makes strange noises._

 HACKER: Horrors. *(Takes net off of ANDIE and puts it over himself)* I am being pulled back into the dark side. *(Exits)*

JEN: Back where you belong, you data sucker.

MOJI: Have a good day as they say. Enjoy the rest of your evening. Got to get back to my Emogie pals. *(Exits)*

ANDIE: I guess I’m going back where I belong too. Remember, Jen, I know more about you than anyone else. I’m your best friend.

JEN: *(Hugs ANDIE)* You are at that.

ANDIE: *(Backs up toward exit and waves)* Talking to each other, sharing secrets every day.

JEN: *(Waves)* But when will I see you again?

ANDIE: Remember, whenever you want to see me again, just drop your phone *(mimes dropping the phone)* and I’ll be there. Best friends forever. *(Blows kiss.)*

END
THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

by Joan Goodreau

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THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC
A Short Comedy, 15 minutes

CHARACTERS

HAZEL: A newly retired witch, looking for romance.

BOB: Retired, but works part-time as a telemarketer to augment his pension.

LOUELLA: An enthusiastic sales person who sells solar panels door-to-door.

PLACE

Witch’s home has two chairs and a table with a laptop (or iPad) and an afghan. There is a small cauldron-type pot with a ladle. BOB’s desk is a rectangular table to one side of stage with a chair and a phone. Off-stage is the Witch’s black negligee. HAZEL carries on BLACK MAGIC, the cat toy/puppet, and a cell phone. BOB has paper contract in his pocket. LOUELLA carries a briefcase with an American flag and a large poster of the sun. There are four props: laptop computer or iPad, afghan, pot with ladle and land phone. The rest of the items are carry-ons.

TIME

Present day
Before the play begins, a section of the song “That Old Black Magic” could be played.

At rise: There are two chairs and a table. HAZEL, the witch, carries in a toy cat or puppet and her cell phone. Her laptop or iPad is on the small table. There is an afghan on one of the chairs and there is a small caldron-like pot with ladle. Her negligee is off-stage. BOB, the telemarketer, is sitting at his desk with his phone. He has a long contract in his pocket. LOUELLA is offstage with her briefcase.

HAZEL: (Puts down cell and slams down lid of computer and picks up BLACK MAGIC, the cat, to talk to it.) Oh Black Magic, if it weren’t for you, I’d be so lonely. I’m giving up on these computer dates. I’m tired of meeting nothing but trolls online. I want a real romance with some of “that old black magic.”

Phone rings. HAZEL puts down cat and answers.

HAZEL: Yes, who’s this?

BOB: Hello, am I speaking with the lovely Ms. Witchly?

HAZEL: Ah, yes, my name is Ms. Witchly.

BOB: Mind if I call you by your first name?

HAZEL: (smiles) Sure if you want to, it’s Hazel.

BOB: I’m Bob. Bob Anderson, and Hazel, I have a big surprise for you.

HAZEL: I hope it’s a good surprise. I’m a little down in the dumps.

BOB: Well, we can’t have that, can we? Hazel, how would you like to go on a tropical cruise?

HAZEL: (twirls around) I’ve always dreamed of going on a cruise.

BOB: Let good old trusty Bob here tell you all about it.

HAZEL: (writes “BOB” in big capital letters in the air.) I’ve always liked the name “Bob.”

BOB: Hazel, now that we’re on a first name basis, let me tell you all the details. The cruise last for ten sun-soaked days and eleven enchanting nights.
HAZEL: (picks up cat, hugs it and pets it.) Now that’s what I’m talking about, Black Magic.

BOB: Hello, are you still there?

HAZEL: I’m still here all right. But this is all so sudden.

BOB: We all need spontaneity in our lives, Hazel. Start packing your suitcase.

HAZEL: What should I take?

BOB: Between you and me, Hazel, you’d better pack a dance dress and a bikini for those late-night hot tub dates.

HAZEL: (pulls sleeves off shoulder, lifts up skirt to show off legs.) You make it sound so romantic.

BOB: Some people think I have a knack for it. My voice...

HAZEL: Is just perfect, Bob.

BOB: Thanks. Now all you have to do is agree to a few items on this contract. (takes out of his pocket long folded paper and unfolds it.)

HAZEL: (fluffs hair) When is the cruise?

BOB: That depends on whether you use a credit card or send us a check.

HAZEL: I have this kind of sexy dress, but it might be too warm for this time of year. When is the departure date?

BOB: With your credit card, I can get you on the next cruise. I’d like your address now please.

HAZEL: Of course, why don’t you come over and we can plan this trip together. Do you live in Butte County?

BOB: I’m in Chicago.

HAZEL: I’m confused. Are you going to fly all the way out from Illinois for this cruise?

BOB: Beat. Hazel, you are the one who is going on the cruise.

HAZEL: It’s fate. It’s Kismet that we met on the phone like this.

BOB: Ah, it’s the magic of telemarketing—
HAZEL: I know a little about magic myself. I have supernatural instincts about affairs of the heart, and we are going to make a great couple.

BOB: I think you’ve got this all wrong.

HAZEL: Nothing is wrong between us soul-mates.

BOB: Look lady...

HAZEL: It’s “Hazel,” remember. Call me “Hazel honey.” And I’m not all together a lady. I’m a witch.

BOB: Whatever. Look, I think there’s been a misunderstanding here, so I’m just going to say have a good day, good luck and...

HAZEL: What about our cruise?

BOB: Well, gotta go now.

HAZEL: Don’t you dare hang up. Not when we were just beginning to know each other.

BOB: I’ve never been into long-distance relationships. (pause) Especially with witches.


Lights go off for a second and there is a big noise. BOB crosses from his desk to Hazel’s living room. He looks dazed to give the illusion that he has been teleported there.

BOB: (dazed, staggers around) Where am I?

HAZEL: No more long-distance relationship. You’re right here in my witch’s abode.

BOB: (confused) The last thing I remember was putting the phone down in my cubicle and...

HAZEL: And Kazam, here comes that man. Mind if I call you Bobbo. It suits your personality. Sit down Bobbo, make yourself at home.

BOB: (groggy) I still don’t understand.

HAZEL: You don’t have to understand my mysteries of the occult. Just relax and let that “old black magic” take over. (guides him to his chair and starts to massage his neck and shoulders.)
BOB: Was I just talking with you?

HAZEL: *(dances around Bob and sings in a flirty way)* "That old black magic that we love so well." Now don’t you recognize my voice, Bobbo.

BOB: Talk about your problem customers. You sure look like a real witch all right.

HAZEL: *(hugs him)* I’m fully credentialed. Just retired, but I still have my license.

BOB: A witch? Why don’t they put that on the customer profiles?

HAZEL: I must say, you look as good as your voice sounds. Do you sing? We could sing duets. *(sings)* "That old black magic that we love so well."

BOB: No, I don’t sing, and I don’t hang with witches. And stop calling me Bobbo.

HAZEL: Sure thing, Bobbo. You’re so cute when you’re grumpy.

BOB: I’m not grumpy, I’m...I’m disoriented.

HAZEL: Well, let me orient you. Here’s the living room. Do you want a tour of the bedroom?

BOB: No, just tell me how I got here?

HAZEL: Just a basic spell—nothing fancy. It’s called the Come Hither Spell. Been around for centuries. Usually for far-away lovers that want to be reunited.

BOB: Reunited. We’ve never been united.

HAZEL: Maybe this is kind of a shock to you, Bobbo. You’re probably suffering jet-lag from your journey. Different time zones. It all happens so fast. One second you’re in Chicago and the next second...

BOB: I’m in hell.

HAZEL: Oh Bobbo, I wouldn’t say that. Here we have beautiful rice fields and amond orchards. Now you just sit down and relax while I change into something more comfortable. *(exits.)*

*BOB frantically looks around for somewhere to hide. He tries to hide under the chairs and table, but they are too small. He gets an afghan, curls up on the chair and covers himself with it.*
HAZEL: (enters wearing a negligee over her witch’s outfit and looks around for Bob.) Now where are you? Are you in the loo? Can’t have gone too far. This isn’t a mansion. (sits down on BOB curled up under the afghan.)

BOB: Yikes.

HAZEL: Oh there you are. You cold or something? Here, sit down beside me. I’ll warm you up.

BOB: No way.

HAZEL: Oh, where’s my hospitality? Let me get you a mug of Witch’s Brew (goes over and stirs the cauldron with the ladle.) It’s an old family recipe.

BOB: Noooo, I don’t even know what’s in that potion.


BOB: You bet I’m tense.

HAZEL: Come on. Let’s toast to our special relationship.

BOB: There is no special relationship.

HAZEL: Well, Bobbo, you’re the one who called me. I’m the one you chose.

BOB: You were on a list, a long list, and I had to call you. It’s my job.

HAZEL: Don’t ever, ever question fate.

BOB: There’s got to be some way out of here. (He presses against imaginary walls and doors, but he can’t get out.) Help. Help.

HAZEL: There’s no one who can hear you, honey.

BOB: How can I escape? I can’t even find where the doors are.

HAZEL: I’m getting the idea you don’t want to be here.

BOB: I never signed up for this.

HAZEL: (sashays around in her negligee and puts her arms around him) Yes you did. You signed up for this cruise and wanted me to go with you. (playfully chases BOB around the room.)
HAZEL: Stop playing so hard to get. I’m getting tired of chasing you around. (Waves arms) Freeze.

**BOB freezes in place.**

HAZEL: Now you’re as still as a toad stool. Just want you to stay still a minute, Bobbo. I’ve got to activate this psychic electronic safety system. (Goes to laptop.) I just got it installed last week to keep buglers out, but it also can keep people in. (Press keys on computer).

**BOB jiggles around while she presses keys.**

HAZEL: Oops, I pressed the wrong keys.

**BOB moves his mouth, but no words come out.**

HAZEL: Now just stay calm. I have to remember the password. Let’s see. Was it “Mandrake Root”? No, maybe it was “Toad Slime.” Or was it “Warts” spelled backwards. Don’t you just hate all these passwords you have to remember these days?

**BOB nods head and mouths words.**

HAZEL: Oh that’s right. (picks up, pets cat and laughs.) Cat got your tongue, Bobbo.

**ZAP sound effect.**

Higgelly Piggle, Higgelly Frap. Try to leave and you’ll get zapped. Zippedy Dee, Zippedy Do. Stay inside or you’ll get fried.

**BOB curls up and then stands up.**

There you are Bobbo, good as new. Just remember, don’t try to sneak away or...

BOB: I’ll be zapped or...

HAZEL: Fried. (sets cat back down.)

BOB: Got it. I’m stuck in this dump with an old witch, and there’s no way out.

HAZEL: Old? I think we’re the same age, dearie. But I still don’t know why you’d want to leave ever. (goes over to BOB and vamps around him.)

**Sound effect of door-bell that sounds like an owl hooting.**

BOB: What is that? An owl.
HAZEL: Just my door bell, sweetie. I'll get it. *(goes to side of stage and peers off stage through an imaginary security peep-hole.*) Just some woman.

BOB: Is she from UPS? Just open the door. *(moves over to side of stage with HAZEL and gets ready to dash out the door.)*

HAZEL: She doesn't have a uniform, and she's way too old to be selling Girl Scout cookies.

BOB: It doesn’t matter. Let her in.

HAZEL: I can't, silly. Don’t you remember? I just activated the psychic electronic safety system. No one goes out, no one comes in.

BOB: How could I forget?

*Sound effect of owl hooting doorbell again.*

HAZEL: She certainly is persistent. I'll just float her in. *(waves and undulates arms)* Kazam, Kazim—you're in.

Louella is blown in by a powerful wind conjured up by HAZEL. She hurls herself onstage carrying a briefcase, shakes herself off and is confused and disoriented.

LOUELLA: Oh! Where am I? One minute I was standing outside on a broken down porch, and the next minute I'm inside a broken down living room. I'm confused.

BOB: I know just how you feel.

HAZEL: It is a little disorienting. I'll give you that. So are you lost, do you need directions? Very few people come to my door or drop in?

LOUELLA: Well I certainly dropped in. Let me introduce myself. My name is Louella. I always tell folks that it Louella rhymes with "fella." *(giggles and looks at BOB.)*

BOB: What a lovely name. *(ogles LOUELLA*) You are probably as confused as I am right now, but I'm very pleased to meet you.

LOUELLA: So who are you?

HAZEL: You can call me Hazel and him Bobbo.

LOUELLA: Are you married?

BOB: No way. She's a witch.
LOUELLA: Oh, I've always been fascinated by the Occult.

HAZEL: Well here I am. Now what can we do for you, Louella?

LOUELLA: No, Hazel and Bob, what can I do for you?

BOB: For me?

LOUELLA: Yes, I'm here to offer you an opportunity to help both yourself and Mother Nature.

HAZEL: Well Mother Nature and I have gotten into some brush-ups in the past. She doesn't like me stealing her secrets.

LOUELLA: Are you ready?

BOB: Oh, yeeeees.

LOUELLA: *(Opens her briefcase, takes out a large poster of a sun and holds it up)* Ta da. Here's your future now—Solar Power Panels!


LOUELLA: They are what you can't live without. Just sit down and listen to "moi." *(flips her hair.)*

HAZEL sits down and pats the space beside her for BOB to sit down. BOB shakes his head and does not sit beside her.

LOUELLA: I want to save you money and save the environment. At the same time help create jobs and *(rummages through briefcase for American flag and waves it)* help the United States of America become energy independent.

BOB: Bravo.

LOUELLA: *(bows and blows a kiss.)* Thank you. With the tax incentives, these solar panels practically pay for themselves. And with all that money you'll save...

BOB: You can go on a cruise. Think about it—ten glorious sun-soaked days and eleven enchanting evenings.

HAZEL: Where have I heard that before?

LOUELLA: Oh would I? That's been my dream to sell solar panel on a cruise ship. That's an untapped market.
BOB: And this is your lucky day.

LOUELLA: Oh yes. I'm all tingly thinking about all the cruise passengers I can convert to the power of the sun.

BOB: Today and today only, if you sign up for this cruise, you will receive an on-board facial, a value of over one hundred and fifty dollars.

LOUELLA: No worries, satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

BOB: Refer your family and friends and I'll throw in a rock-climbing lesson absolutely free.

LOUELLA: You will thrill at my low down payment plan and easy monthly terms.

BOB and LOUELLA: (gaze at each other.) We'll take anybody's credit, even yours.

HAZEL: Wait a minute. You two remind me of those late night infomercials—where everyone's so jolly while they take your money. You two are nothing but smooth talking, double dealing, slick tricksters.

BOB: Takes a trickster to know one. Oh and Hazel, honey, could you get us some of that Witches Brew, the old family recipe, you were telling me about?

HAZEL: (sits down at her laptop) That's it. I'm unlocking my psychic electronic safety system so I can get rid of you both now. Bob, you are worse than the trolls.

    BOB and LOUELLA hug each other.

BOB: You and I could close beautiful deals...

LOUELLA and BOB: Together.

    BOB and LOUELLA exit.

HAZEL: (picks up cat and pets it) That was a close call. I'll take you over a telemarketer any day. You're the only black magic I need.

    END
The Monster Under the Bed

by Pamela Loyd
The Monster Under the Bed
Reader’s Theater Comedy, 12 minutes
(could also be presented as a memorized play)

CHARACTERS
AMANDA: A female “people” over age 50. Dressed in a nightgown.
MARTIN: A male “people” over age 50, married to Amanda. Wears pajamas.
OMA: A female “monster” over age 50. Dressed in a nightgown.
GREGORIO: A male “monster” over age 50, married to Oma. Wears pajamas.

PLACE
The shared bedroom of both couples—but neither couple knows about the other. Amanda and Martin are asleep in bed (leaning back in two side-by-side chairs with a blanket over them) at stage right. There is a bedside table next to Amanda with a small lamp and a clock. At stage left Oma and Gregorio are sleeping “under the bed,” in two side-by-side chairs with a blanket over them. There is another bedside table (or the coffee table) with a lamp next to Oma.

TIME
Middle of the night. To be exact it is 3:17 in the morning.

NOTES:
a) It is the director’s decision whether the “monsters” should wear monsterish make-up or the actors should just appear with their normal faces.

b) Beds are not necessary. Just four chairs with blankets, two on each side of the stage, can serve as the sleeping area for both couples. But the couples actually share just one “bed.” The audience should soon realize that the “peoples” sleep on top of the bed, the “monsters” sleep under the same bed.

c) In this play, the word “people” is singular, so the phrase “the people is” is correct when referring to what is believed to be one such singular creature. The plural of people is “peoples” as in the phrase, “the peoples are.” We are following the same grammatical structure as in “the monster is” and “the monsters are.”

d) It is night so stage is dim. When either bedside lamp is turned on, the stage light on the “bed” on that side goes on, and goes off when that lamp goes off.
The Monster Under the Bed

AT RISE: Stage is dim. Some light, but very little, just enough for actors to read scripts if reader’s theater. AMANDA and MARTIN are “in bed” asleep in two chairs at stage right. OMA and GREGORIO are asleep “under the bed” in two chairs at stage left. After a moment, AMANDA sits up, turns on her bedside lamp.

AMANDA: Martin, wake up. I know I’m an adult and I should know better, but I swear there’s a monster under the bed.

MARTIN: Hmph, grmph. (Sleeps)

AMANDA: (pokes Martin) Are you listening to me, Martin?

MARTIN: Huh? What? Did you say something?

AMANDA: Yes, I’m talking to you. Wake up.

MARTIN: (Sits up, rubs eyes) What time is it?

AMANDA: I don’t know. It’s almost morning.

MARTIN: (peers at clock) It’s 3:17. It’s still the middle of the night. Go back to sleep, Amanda. (Lays down)

AMANDA: No, wake up. I’m trying to tell you something.

MARTIN: Can’t this wait until morning?

AMANDA: No, because I only hear it in the middle of the night. There’s a monster under the bed.

MARTIN: (Sits up) There’s a mouse under the bed?

AMANDA: No. There’s a monster under the bed. I know it sounds silly, and I’m a grown woman so I should know there’s no such thing, but I swear, Martin, there’s a monster under the bed.

MARTIN: Really, Amanda, you wake me up to tell me this wild cock-a-mamie story of yours? You’ve been dreaming, that’s all. Go back to sleep.

AMANDA: Check for me, Martin. Look under the bed.

MARTIN: For God’s sake, Amanda, you can’t be serious.
AMANDA: Just look under the bed and see. Please, Martin.

MARTIN: Oh bother, the things I do for you, Amanda. *(Climbs down, looks under bed)* There's nothing here, Amanda. *(gets back into bed)* Now let's go back to sleep. It was just your imagination.

AMANDA: O.K., you’re probably right. Just my imagination. *(Turns off lamp, lies down, there is a snoring sound from the other side of the stage)* Oh! There! Did you hear that? *(Sits up, turns on lamp)* Martin, did you hear that noise?

MARTIN: No.

AMANDA: There it is again. That low growling noise.

MARTIN: I didn’t hear anything. Go to sleep. *(He starts to snore)*

AMANDA: Martin? Martin, are you still awake? How can you sleep at a time like this? Isn’t that just like a man. A crisis is going on and all you can do is sleep. At least you’re having sweet dreams. *(Turns off lamp, lies down.)*

_Brief pause. We hear MARTIN’S snores (which fade out after next three speeches). OMA sits up, turns on her bedside lamp._

OMA: Gregorio, wake up. There’s that noise again. That noise I told you about.

GREGORIO: *(still half asleep)* Hmm? Did you say something, Oma?

OMA: Yes, I said there’s that noise again.

GREGORIO: What noise? *(lays head down again)*

OMA: Gregorio, wake up. *(shakes him)*

GREGORIO: What? What’s wrong?

OMA: I told you. I hear that noise again.

GREGORIO: I don't hear anything.

OMA: Well stop talking and listen. It's a funny sound, like a people might make, you know, peoples, like you read about in books, those creatures that live up in the light, and they—
GREGORIO: Oma! Stop talking. If you want me to listen you have to stop talking.

OMA: O.K., You’re right. I’ll stop talking, but I just want you to know what I hear, and that it is something that is making a lot of strange noises—

GREGORIO: Oma!

OMA: O.K., I’ll zip my mouth shut.

_Even they both listen for a few seconds. There is a snoring, snuffling sound. It is the sound of MARTIN snoring again._

OMA: You see? You hear that?

GREGORIO: Yes, I do. (*lays back down*)

OMA: Well what are you going to do about it?

GREGORIO: I’m not going to do anything about it. I think I’m really still asleep and that’s me snoring that you hear. (*lays down*)

OMA: Gregorio! You can’t go back to sleep. You have to do something.

GREGORIO: Oh, Oma. What do you want me to do at this time of night?

OMA: I want you to look on top of the bed.

GREGORIO: What? Why?

OMA: Because I think there is a people on top of the bed.

GREGORIO: Oh, Oma, you read too many silly stories. There’s no such thing as peoples. That’s all just part of fairy tales. Now go back to sleep. (*lays down*)

OMA: I’ll go to sleep only if you first check on top of the bed. Just look, Gregorio. That’s all you have to do.

GREGORIO: Oh all right, if you promise to go back to sleep. (*starts to get up*)

OMA: Wait! Don’t look yet. Let me turn out the light first.

GREGORIO: Why?

OMA: So the people can’t see you. (*turns out bedside lamp*)
GREGORIO stands up, looks over towards other couple which is the "top of the bed," but it is dark.

GREGORIO: I don’t see anything. There’s no peoples. *lays down again* Now go to sleep, Oma. You said if I checked for you, you’d go to sleep.

OMA: I said I’d go to sleep only if there aren’t any peoples.

GREGORIO: *(shouts, an exasperated growly voice)* There aren’t any peoples!

    AMANDA sits up, turns on her lamp.

AMANDA: What’s that? That loud noise. Did you hear that Martin?

MARTIN: Hm? What?

OMA: *(turns on lamp)* Well you don’t have to be so snippy at me.

GREGORIO: *(raises hands in frustration)* You frustrate me, woman. Aaarrgghh!

AMANDA: There it is. Do you hear that, Martin? The monster is growling. *(Screams, hides under the covers. Martin still sleeps.)*

OMA: There it is. The people is making a horrible screeching sound. I told you there was a people up there.

GREGORIO: *(sarcastic)* Oh! Oma! You’re right. I hear it.

OMA: See? I told you so.

GREGORIO: No, Oma, I’m just kidding. I didn’t hear anything. There’s no people on top of the bed. But there might be a people right here. *(gets out of bed, arms up in a monster pose)* GGGRRRRRR!

AMANDA: *(Looks over top of blanket, turns towards Martin so she doesn’t see Oma and Gregorio)* There it is again! It’s making horrible growling sounds now!

    OMA jumps out of bed, GREGORIO chases her Frankenstein style.

GREGORIO: *(Pretending to be a scary people with a scary voice)* GRRRR . . . I’m a people. The people is going to get you. GGGRRRR.

OMA: *(laughing and screeching)* Aaahh! Gregorio, you stop this. Do you hear? Aaahh!
AMANDA: And now it’s screeching!

GREGORIO: (Growls again) GGRRRR!

AMANDA: And another growl. Martin! Martin, wake up!

OMA: (fearful) Hush! Be quiet, Gregorio. The people might hear you. We don’t want the people to know we’re here. It might come looking for us.

GREGORIO: O.K. Oma, I’ll be quiet. We’ve had our fun, let’s go to sleep now.

*OMA and GREGORIO lay down, OMA turns off lamp. GREGORIO begins to snore.*

AMANDA: Martin. Martin.

MARTIN: Humph? What?

AMANDA: (shakes Martin) Martin, wake up. The monster is growling.

MARTIN: O.K., O.K., I’m waking up. What is it?

AMANDA: Listen. You can really hear it now.

MARTIN: Hear what?

AMANDA: (shouts in frustration) The monster!

OMA: (sits up, turns on her lamp) There it is again! It sounds so angry. Do you hear that, Gregorio.

GREGORIO: (shouts) No! Go to sleep!

AMANDA: Do you hear that? It’s bellowing now.

MARTIN: I don’t hear anything.

AMANDA: Listen some more.

OMA: (frightened cry) It’s going to get us! AAAAAHHHH!

AMANDA: There!

MARTIN: Oh, that? That’s just the wind.
AMANDA: No, Martin, it’s . . . it’s . . . it’s real! It’s something really horrible.

MARTIN: Hush, now, Amanda. Don’t get all worked up. I’m here. I won’t let any monsters get you. Let’s go back to sleep now.

AMANDA: You think I’m crazy.

MARTIN: No, I don’t think you’re crazy. (drowsy, lays down) Just tired. I’m . . . just . . . tired. Come on . . . let’s . . . go . . . to sleep . . . Good-night.

AMANDA: (to monster) Hello? You? Under-the-bed? Are you there? You have to growl now so my husband can hear you. So he’ll know I’m not crazy. (beat, then to herself) I’m not crazy, am I? (sad voice) Oh God, I probably am crazy. (gets out of bed) Of course there’s no monsters. I know that. I’ve known it since I was eight years old. What is wrong with me?

OMA: Gregorio, do you hear that? The people sounds sad. Ooohh, that makes makes me feel sad. (to the people) Hello? People up there? Are you real or just a fairy tale like Gregorio says? Am I afraid for no reason? Are you up there? (gets out of bed) Hello?

AMANDA: Martin? Did you just say hello?

MARTIN: No, I said good-night.

AMANDA: (a spooked voice) Then the monster just said hello to me.

MARTIN: That’s fine, dear.

AMANDA and OMA start slowly circling around with their backs to each other and with their arms outstretched.

AMANDA: Maybe if I just take a look.

OMA: Maybe if I just sneak a peek.

AMANDA: Hello?

OMA: Hello?

When AMANDA and OMA are almost back-to-back, they both turn around and touch fingertips. Each jumps back, startled, then tentatively reach forward to touch fingertips again. They stare at each other with interest. A few seconds goes by, then both men start snoring loudly, with some snuffling and grunting thrown in.
AMANDA: Oh my God, that’s the monster. I hear it again.

OMA: That’s the people. Where is it at?

_Both women look all around, run frantically in circles. Then AMANDA mistakenly jumps “under the bed” with Gregorio, and OMA jumps on top of the bed with Martin._

OMA: (frightened) Gregorio, wake up, the people is back again, and it sounds like it’s right here in bed with us.

AMANDA: Martin, Martin, I hear the monster again and he sounds awfully close, almost like . . . wait a minute, are you . . . ? Oh! You’re not Martin.

OMA: In fact, I think the monster is in bed with us, Gregorio. Only . . . I think I’m . . . on top of the bed. How did I do that? (looks closely at Martin) Oh my God, I’m in bed with the people!

AMANDA: Oh, oh! You’re not Martin. I think you’re the monster. Only you sound just like Martin when he snores.

OMA: I can’t believe this. You’re not growling, you’re snoring. Well what do you know? Peoples snore, too.

AMANDA: (gets up) You’re just sleeping, that’s all. That’s good to know.

OMA: (gets up) I don’t know why I was so afraid of that.

_They go back to their own “beds”, get in, turn off lamps, lay down. The two men snore for a few more seconds._

GREGORIO: (sits up) What’s that?

OMA: It’s just me, Gregorio.

GREGORIO: No, it’s not you, it’s something else. Turn on the light. (OMA turns on lamp) I heard a funny noise.

MARTIN: (sits up, shakes Amanda) Amanda, wake up.

AMANDA: (sits up, turns on lamp) What is it, Martin?

MARTIN: I heard something. A growling, snorting sound.

AMANDA: It’s nothing, Martin. Go back to sleep.
MARTIN: No, Amanda, I think you were right. There is a monster under the bed.

AMANDA: I thought you didn’t believe in monsters, Martin.

MARTIN: I don’t. I mean, I didn’t. But now that I hear one, maybe I do. (frightened voice) Look under the bed for me, will you, Amanda?

AMANDA: You want me to look?

MARTIN: (shakes head "yes") Yes.

GREGORIO: Oma, I think I hear a people on top of the bed.

OMA: You said there are no such things as peoples, Gregorio.

GREGORIO: I didn’t think there were. But now I hear one. Will you look and see?

OMA: Why don’t you look yourself, Gregorio?

GREGORIO: Please, Oma, don’t ask me to do that. I’m too scared.

MARTIN: Please look for me, Amanda.

AMANDA: Honestly, Martin, the things I do for you. (gets out of bed)

OMA: Alright, Gregorio, I’ll look for you. (gets out of bed)

OMA looks on top of the bed, AMANDA looks under the bed. The two women see each other, smile and wave shyly at each other, then get back in their beds.

OMA: I didn’t see anything scary, Gregorio. We’re safe. Go back to sleep now, dear. (turns off lamp)

AMANDA: There’s nothing there to worry about, Martin. Come on, let’s go to sleep. I won’t let the monsters get you. (turns off lamp)

The women put their arms around their husbands, all lay down. The two men snore again. The stage goes black.

THE END
A Wicked Little Wager

by Pamela Loyd
A Wicked Little Wager

A One-Act Comedy Thriller, 35 – 40 Minutes

CHARACTERS

AZALEA: Upper-class woman in a glamorous gown or blouse, in a light color. She has an innocent, “blonde” look, seems a bit naive, less sophisticated than the others, but with a determined intelligence.

BABETTE: Upper-class woman in a glamorous gown or blouse in black or vivid color. Carries an evening purse. She has a “raven-haired” look. She is a bit vampy, and sarcastic, with biting humor, utterly bored by most people, and perhaps by life itself. But she does show occasional flashes of genuine concern.

BENTLEY: Upper-class man in a dress suit or a white dinner jacket with a colorful shirt and stylish tie, and a flower in his lapel. He considers himself quite sexy whether the women think so or not. He is dashing, spoiled, and arrogant, and occasionally pouty.

REGINALD: Upper-class man in a dress suit or a dark dinner jacket. He wears a distinctive tie. He is lively, with a sense of humor, and his endearments to others actually sound sincere. Underneath the rigid mores of his social class, he seems to actually be a nice man.

All the characters present themselves as part of high-class, wealthy society. There is the hint that they are of the British aristocracy, but they are really just bored rich Americans putting on airs. (So they don’t speak with British accents.) They are silly, shallow, self-obsessed snobs, with affectations of superiority, who frequently speak with a touch of self-important irony. Babette and Bentley, particularly, come across at various times as arrogant, smug, arch, superior, ironic, unfeeling, pretentious, ultra-cool, and full of themselves. Play all the characters for comic effect. Fast-pace, farcical.
PLACE

Living room of AZALEA's city apartment, upscale and modern. Two living room chairs at center left, lamp next to the chairs, two dining chairs at angle to living room chairs—one at each side, coffee table at one end of living room chairs, buffet table at one side of stage. Champagne bottle on buffet table, and a hand towel or cloth napkins on buffet table in preparation for a small party. Small side table down right. Front door back right, large potted plant near door, a window in one wall if possible. Exit to kitchen at right. Exit to bedroom left center. However, the director is free to rearrange the layout to fit the available stage and blocking preferences.

FURNISHINGS: Two living room chairs, 2 dining chairs, coffee table, side table, rectangular table as buffet table.

PERSONALIZING ITEMS (3 allowed): Lamp, potted plant, tablecloth.

PROPS PLACED WITH THE SET (5 allowed): Champagne bottle, battery operated candle, small box with lid with several items in it, hand towel, waste basket (if there is no window).

Additional Props will be brought on by the actors.

TIME

Present day, Evening

PRODUCTION NOTE: Certain sections of the dialogue in this play have a great deal of subtext, which may not be clear until a second reading. There are two levels of meaning: what the audience thinks is going on (hopefully) and what the characters know is going on. Part of the fun is keeping the audience from figuring out what is going on too soon, so the actors must keep a fine line between speaking the lines as the characters mean them, and the meaning we want the audience to believe—without giving anything away too soon. If in doubt, err on the side of not letting the audience know what is really going on. They'll figure it out by the end.
A Wicked Little Wager

AT RISE: AZALEA enters from kitchen with tray of four wine glasses, sets on buffet table. Doorbell rings.

AZALEA: (With determination) I've got to win tonight, even if it kills me. (Crosses, opens door) Bentley, dear, do come in.

BENTLEY: Azalea, darling, you look exquisite tonight, as always. (Air kisses on both sides of face. Looks her up and down.) At times like this I wonder why I've never had a bit of a dalliance with you.

AZALEA: Really? You've told me why often enough. (Awkward pause, then turns back to buffet table.) I think everything's ready. The drinks, the hors d'oeuvres, the pie in the refrigerator.

BENTLEY: Ah, yes, the coconut pie. Isn't this the eighth year we've done this?

AZALEA: Yes, celebrating . . .

TOGETHER: (sing-song) National Coconut Pie Day. (They laugh)

BENTLEY: Am I the first one here?

AZALEA: No, darling, I'm the first one here.

BENTLEY: Well of course, you live here.

AZALEA: And I'm going to be first tonight.

BENTLEY: You think so? You never have been, Azalea.

Doorbell rings. BENTLEY goes to buffet table, looks at the champagne. AZALEA goes to door.

AZALEA: Babette, darling, do come in.

BABETTE: Azalea, dear, so nice to see you again. (Air kisses)

AZALEA: And of course Bentley is already here. (exits to kitchen)

BABETTE: (Crosses to Bentley) Bentley, darling, always the first to come.

BENTLEY: (S suggestively) Someone has to come first, Babette, my sweet, or we'd never get through. (Air kisses)
BABETTE: I suppose if this was a sexual competition, you'd be first every time.

BENTLEY: Yes, that's what I'm known for. Perhaps you'd like a go?

BABETTE: Bentley, my love, if only you didn't bore me so much I might consider it.

BENTLEY: You are your usual charming self tonight, Babette. Shall I pour you some champagne? (Goes to table, pours two glasses of champagne)

BABETTE: Yes, I suppose that might help. I'm worried that tonight might be as dreadful as last year. (Drops her evening purse onto a chair.)

BENTLEY: You mean who brought the most attractive date last year? I thought that was quite an amusing evening, Babette. I had a rather jolly good time.

BABETTE: Of course you did, you won. Your date, Ms. Hooters, with a bosom as far out this way (holds hands at arms length in front of her breasts) as she was tall this way (holds arms over her head), would win over any man I could bring. Then I was stuck with Mr. Hard-Abs-With-No-Brains all evening. It was quite awful. Thank God we didn't have to bring dates this year.

AZALEA returns to buffet table with clear glass bowl. BENTLEY hands glass of champagne to Babette. Doorbell rings. AZALEA goes to door.

BABETTE: That must be Reginald.

BENTLEY: Always trying to be more fashionably late than we are.

AZALEA opens door.

AZALEA: Reginald dear, do come in.

REGINALD: Azalea, my dear, you look beautiful tonight. And this is for you (hands her a bottle of wine), Rascalain Lafitte '74, a rare and lovely wine, but not nearly as rare and lovely as you are Azalea, my sweet.

AZALEA: Oh, Reginald. You are such a gentleman.

AZALEA and REGINALD do air kisses, then talk silently during next lines.

BABETTE: (Aside to Bentley, mimics Azalea) Oh, Reginald. You are such a show-off.

BENTLEY: I don't know why we always include him. He always tries to out-do us.

BABETTE: Probably because this whole thing was his idea.

BENTLEY: Yes I suppose that does mean we have to put up with him.
REGINALD crosses to Babette, AZALEA crosses to buffet table, opens wine.

REGINALD: And I see the lovely Babette is here.

BABETTE: Reginald, dear, such a pleasure to see you. (Air kisses)

REGINALD: And Bentley, old buddy. (They shake hands) Do you think you can beat me tonight?

BENTLEY: Of course. I intend to win again.

REGINALD: (Full-throated, but suave laugh) I love your spirit of confidence, Bentley, old boy. (Claps Bentley on shoulder)

BENTLEY: I believe you are an older boy than I am, Reginald. Quite an older boy.

REGINALD: (Smiles, wags finger at Bentley) Ah ah ah! I believe your competitive testosterone is flaring up, Lord Bentley. One really shouldn’t show that side of oneself in front of the ladies, should one?

BENTLEY: I wouldn’t -- in front of ladies. (Looks pointedly at Babette.)

AZALEA: (Brings fish bowl or clear glass bowl, sets on small side table down right.) So here is the Wager Bowl. Are we ready to start?

REGINALD: Yes, let’s get to the main event. Trumpet music please.

REGINALD and AZALEA put hands to their mouth, move fingers like playing a trumpet, make trumpet sounds. “Toot-de-doot-de-doo!” They laugh. BABETTE and BENTLEY roll their eyes and smirk.

REGINALD: Right-o then. (Announcer’s voice) The Eighth Annual National Coconut Pie Day celebration will now commence.

BABETTE: The stupidest holiday we could find.

REGINALD: As you all know, we’ve done this seven times before. Bentley has won three times, Babette twice, and I have won twice. So we shall see who wins tonight.

AZALEA: (Very emphatic) I’m going to win tonight!

BENTLEY: You’re a jolly dear pet, Azalea, but you never win.

AZALEA: Well I’m going to win tonight. It’s my turn to win!

BABETTE: It doesn’t work that way, Azalea, dear. This isn’t grammar school where everybody gets a turn. You have to actually win to win.
BENTLEY: You have to be the best to win. You know, like the time we saw who could do the best magic trick.

REGINALD: That was me.

BABETTE: Or who did the best stand-up comic routine.

BENTLEY: That was me.

REGINALD: Or who could create the most useless kitchen gizmo.

BABETTE: That was me--

AZALEA: I know, I know, I didn’t win any of them. But tonight I am going to win!

BABETTE: (Patronizing) Of course you might win, Azalea. You have the same chance as any of us.

AZALEA: Alright. Just so I know we’re playing this fair and square, and that you aren’t rigging the votes against me.

REGINALD: (Shocked) Azalea, dear, we would never do that.

BABETTE: We are civilized people, Azalea.

BENTLEY: We all behave by the code of proper behavior expected of people of our social class.

REGINALD: So, we all know what the competition is tonight, and you’ve all had a week to plan and prepare, so let’s hope this will be an especially enjoyable evening. But before we begin, we must all place our wager. One thousand dollars each, in cash, for a total of $4000. Winner takes the pot.

AZALEA: A wicked little wager.

BENTLEY: I’ll go first. (Pulls hundred dollar bills out of pocket, counts as he drops each into bowl) One hundred dollars, two hundred dollars, three hundred, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine hundred, one thousand dollars.

REGINALD: Babette?

BABETTE: (Fans out ten $100 bills) Here you go, one thousand dollars. (Lets bills flutter into bowl so bills will be separated and fill more space in the bowl.)

REGINALD: Azalea, your turn.

AZALEA: (Kisses bills) Kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss. (Lets bills flutter into bowl) Don’t you worry, babies. Mummy’s gonna win you all back, plus your little friends in there.
REGINALD: And now my turn. (Reaches in pocket, hand comes out empty.) Oh my . . . Where did I put it? (Reaches in other pockets, pats shirt pockets) I can’t believe this! I don’t have my wallet! Oh my God, I must have left it in my car. I’m so sorry, I feel like such an idiot. I’ll go get it, I’ll be right back. (Exits front door.)

BENTLEY: Bloody hell. He’s just trying to slow things down to rattle my confidence.

BABETTE: Everything isn’t always about you, Bentley dear.

BENTLEY: Well I’m starting to get bored, just standing around like this.

AZALEA: (Sarcastic) And we should never let Bentley get bored. Excuse me while I check the hors d’oeuvres. (Exits to kitchen)

BABETTE: At least we don’t have to sing show tunes this year.

BENTLEY: (Kisses her fingers suggestively) You know we never do anything the same way twice, Babette, darling.

BABETTE: (Purring) You are quite talented that way, Bentley. (beat) But of course, you are referring to these little annual coconut-day get-togethers, aren’t you?

BENTLEY: Of course. We had to come up with some way to make our days more bearable. To relieve the monotony of our privileged lives.

BABETTE: I know. Really, it is so difficult being rich.

BENTLEY: That’s why we sexy upper-class people know how to pout so well in those high-fashion ads.

BENTLEY and BABETTE strike a magazine pose and pout.
BENTLEY takes out cell phone, takes a selfie of them.

BABETTE: (Pulls away) I just hope this isn’t another beastly dull evening.

Door flings open, REGINALD stumbles in, staggers, gasps, hands to his chest. A large knife sticks out of his chest, surrounded by a large blood spot.

REGINALD: My money . . . they took my money . . . I’ve been robbed . . .

REGINALD falls flat on his back on the floor, lies still. The knife remains in his chest.

An easy way for the actor to “fall” is to stagger to back of a chair, hold on, bend one leg below him, then lower himself and roll onto his back. During his exit, REGINALD velcrored on a new shirt front with “blood” and a knife handle attached.
BABETTE: (beat, blasé) I must say, Reginald doesn’t seem to be feeling well this evening, does he?

BENTLEY: (blasé) That’s just Reginald showing off again.

BABETTE: That man does not know how to behave with proper decorum.

BENTLEY: He is an embarrassment to us all. Considering his pedigree, it’s rather shocking.

BABETTE: Even more shocking — look. (Points at Reginald) He is spilling that . . . that . . . whatever that is, all over the expensive carpet.

BENTLEY: Do you mean blood?

BABETTE: Well yes, I suppose that is blood. Azalea’s housekeeper is going to have a terrible time cleaning it up.

AZALEA enters with tray of hors d’oeuvres.

AZALEA: Mango Mushroom canapés, anyone? (Sees Reginald, sets tray down delicately on buffet table, then screams.) Oh my God, Reginald! (Rushes to him, kneels beside him, shakes him) Reginald! Reginald! Speak to me! (Looks up at Babette and Bentley) What happened?!

BENTLEY: (Nonchalant) You can see perfectly well what happened, Azalea.

AZALEA: (Stands, approaches Babette and Bentley) Yes, of course I can see what happened. What I mean is how did this happen? Did you two do this to him?!

BABETTE: Us? Of course not.

BENTLEY: Why would we do such a thing?

AZALEA: Because you’re jealous of him. I know how you two make snide comments behind his back.

BABETTE: That’s because we are too well-mannered to make snide comments to his face.

BENTLEY: Besides, if I was to . . . oh . . . “kill” the man, I would choose a less messy way to do it. (Emphasize the word “kill” but do NOT do finger quotes)

BABETTE: He said he was robbed.

BENTLEY: Someone must have seen him when he got all his money out of his car.

BABETTE: And jumped him or buggered him or . . .
BENTLEY: Muggered him, not buggered him, Babette. You've got to stay hip with the lingo.

AZALEA: Oh my God . . . Poor, poor Reginald. *(Kneels by body, cries loudly over him.)*

BABETTE: Azalea, dear, you're showing a bit too much grief, don't you think?

BENTLEY: Yes, just the sort of over-reacting that one might expect of the very person who killed him. So no one would suspect you.

AZALEA: What? You think I did this? I was here the whole time.

BABETTE: Not really. You were a very long time in the kitchen. Perhaps you snuck out the back door and stabbed him in the street.

AZALEA: I don't have a back door. I'm on the fourth floor.

BENTLEY: Or you went out the window and down the fire escape when we weren't looking.

BABETTE: Uh, no, Bentley, darling. Probably not in that gown. *(Or: in those clothes, or: in those shoes)* Anyway, I think we are giving Azalea too much credit.

AZALEA: *(Stands, miffed)* And you certainly don't want to give me any credit do you? Because if I'm that smart, I might win, mightn't I?

BABETTE: Azalea, dear, you don't really think we should go ahead with our . . . little contest, do you?

BENTLEY: Yes, under the circumstances. Reginald seems to have done quite a bang-up job of things tonight. Spoiled the evening for everyone.

BABETTE: *(To Bentley)* He is rather thoughtless that way. Getting himself killed off before the party even starts.

BENTLEY: *(To Babette)* Not thinking about anyone else's feelings about this.

AZALEA: *(Emphatic)* Oh will you two stop! We are going ahead with this. Reginald would want it that way.

BABETTE: He would?

BENTLEY: Would he?

BABETTE: I wouldn't think he would.

BENTLEY: I would think he wouldn't.
AZALEA: Wouldn't he want it the way he would want it?

BABETTE: Would he?

BENTLEY: I wouldn't think so.

AZALEA: He would. And he would want us to want it the way he would want it.

BENTLEY: Would he? Well, if he would want us to want it that way, then I would want it the way Reginald would want it.

BABETTE: Would you?

BENTLEY: Wouldn't I?

BABETTE: I wouldn't think you would.

AZALEA: Would you stop?! We have a dead body here. Show some proper manners.

BABETTE: (To Bentley) Doesn't the etiquette book require proper notice of a death be given three days in advance?

BENTLEY: (To Babette) I think that's only if people are invited to be present at the death.

AZALEA: Aren't we supposed to put a blanket over dead bodies?

BABETTE: (To Bentley) Are gifts required?

BENTLEY: (To Babette) Not if proper notice wasn't sent in advance.

AZALEA: I'll get a blanket. Damn you Reginald, for dying like this. Aaaahhhhh!! (Crying scream as exits to bedroom.)

BENTLEY: Now I remember why I never had a dalliance with Azalea. I was afraid if we had sex she'd be one of those screamers. I really don't like women who can't control themselves.

BABETTE: It really does show a lack of proper breeding. (beat) But I suppose with you, no woman can be said to be breeding properly.

BENTLEY: Touche. (Raises glass to Babette, then to Reginald) And to you, Reginald, old bean. You died a good death.

BABETTE: Oh please, Bentley. Why should Reginald get any credit for how he died? If what he told us is true, someone robbed him and stuck that knife in his heart. What did Reginald have to do with it?

BENTLEY: Ah, yes, I see your point.
AZALEA: (Returns with blanket) Here we go. (Drapes it over Reginald)

All stare at body.

AZALEA: Well this is rather unpleasant, with him here like this. Maybe we should put him somewhere else.

BENTLEY: Let’s drag him into your bedroom, Azalea.

AZALEA: Oh no, I sleep in there.

BABETTE: Let’s just roll him up and drag him behind the chairs.

They place blanket on floor next to Reginald, lift (or roll) him onto blanket, and drag him behind the chairs. If this is too difficult, an alternative is this:

BABETTE: Let’s just hide him behind the chairs.

BENTLEY: Good idea. (Starts lifting or pushing chairs in front of Reginald.)

BABETTE: That’s not quite what I meant, but I guess that will work.

They all join in moving chairs and small table in front of Reginald. Basically the living room furniture is moved a few feet downstage, leaving Reginald behind it.

AZALEA: Whew, this has been a bit more excitement than I was expecting.

BABETTE: Well that’s Reginald for you. There’s always something outrageous going on wherever he is.

AZALEA: I think I could use a drink. (Sits in chair.) And an aspirin.

BENTLEY: I’ll get you a drink, Azalea. You do look a little pale. (Goes to fix drink, pours glass of wine from the bottle Reginald brought.)

BABETTE: (Rummages in her purse, hands Azalea an aspirin.) An aspirin for you, dear.

AZALEA: Thanks. (beat) I don’t suppose we’re supposed to call the police?

BENTLEY: I don’t think our sort of people do that, do they? It would just be a lot of bother for us. What would our mumsy’s think if this got out? All the unpleasant gossip. Why should we let the police get involved? (Hands drink to Azalea.)

AZALEA: I suppose so. (Swallows aspirin with drink. Gulps drink down.)

BABETTE: (Sits in chair directly in front of REGINALD’s body) I, for one, really do think we should call off the rest of the evening. As a nod of respect to Reginald’s death, let’s not go ahead with what we had planned.
AZALEA: *(Stands suddenly)* No! We are not calling this off.

BABETTE: But considering how Reginald died . . .

AZALEA: I don't care how Reginald died. I'm not going to let him interfere with my winning tonight. It's my turn to win, and I'm going to win!

BENTLEY: I think Azalea has a point. Do we really want to spend all evening just moping around, letting Reginald and the knife in his chest be the focus of all our attention? So I say let's go ahead.

BABETTE: *(Resigned)* Alright. If everyone agrees, then I agree. But first, Bentley dear, would you get me another drink?

AZALEA: I could use another one, too. *(Stands, goes to drinks table.)*

*BENTLEY and AZALEA fix drinks at buffet table, their backs to Babette.*

*BABETTE remains in chair. REGINALD'S head suddenly shoots up behind chairs with a monstrous expression on his face, his hair wild and in disarray. He raises his arms above his head, holding the ends of his tie in each hand. He reaches to lamp, turns off the light. Stage lights now go out. REGINALD throws his tie around BABETTE'S neck. *(She will wrap it around her neck herself in the dark.)* We hear scuffling, struggling, grunting—and hideous laughter coming from REGINALD, while the following dialogue occurs.*

AZALEA: What happened?

BENTLEY: Bloody hell?

AZALEA: What's going on? Why did the lights go out?

BENTLEY: I can't see anything. Do you have a candle anywhere?

AZALEA: Oh yes, by amazing coincidence, I do have one right here.

BENTLEY: Well light the damn thing.

AZALEA lights the candle *(turns on a battery operated candle).* Stage lights come up a minute amount to simulate candle light, just enough for AZALEA and BENTLEY to see safely. REGINALD is lying behind chairs again.

AZALEA: I still can't see very well.

BENTLEY: Where is the lamp?

AZALEA: It's over by the sofa.

BENTLEY: Alright, I'm making my way over.
AZALEA: Don't step on Reginald.

BENTLEY: Here it is. I think I've found it. *(He turns on lamp. Stage lights come up.)*

*BABETTE appears dead with Reginald's tie wrapped around her neck.*

AZALEA: Oh my God! Babette!

BENTLEY: Babette! *(Rushes to her, shakes her, touches tie around her neck.)*

AZALEA: What happened?

BENTLEY: She's been strangled. With Reginald's tie.

AZALEA: She's dead!? 

BENTLEY: *(Sounds shocked)* Yes, I suppose we must say she is dead.

AZALEA: But who did this? We were both over there.

BENTLEY: Reginald couldn't have... could he?

AZALEA: How could he? I mean, he couldn't like... come back alive again, could he?

BENTLEY: No. That's against nature. It's against biological reality. It's against common sense. It's against fair play. It's against—

AZALEA: Then how did this happen? What's happening here tonight?

BENTLEY: Something very diabolical. A wicked scheme.

AZALEA: Somebody is... picking us off... one by one. Who's going to die next? Is it you? Is it me?

BENTLEY: *(Takes her arms in what appears to be a reassuring gesture)* It's not you, Azalea.

AZALEA: Are you sure?

BENTLEY: Yes, I'm sure.

AZALEA: *(Breaks away from Bentley)* So... for now... until something else happens... which I'm pretty sure it will... it's only you and me. And whatever evil force is present tonight. Watching us. *(Crazy fearful laugh)*

BENTLEY: Stop that, Azalea. If you're trying to scare me, it's not working.

AZALEA: I'll tell you what's scary. Babette. Right now she doesn't look so good. I hope... if something happens to me... that I don't look that bad.
BENTLEY: I don't think things will go that far, Azalea.

AZALEA: But if they do.

BENTLEY: *(Macho voice)* I'm not threatened by any of this, Azalea.

AZALEA: *(Coldly at Bentley)* You're always a supremely arrogant man. *(beat)* Anyway, Babette wouldn't want us to see her looking this way. Maybe we should just put her in my bedroom for now.

   BENTLEY puts Babette’s evening bag on her body then lifts Babette under her arms, AZALEA lifts her feet, they carry her into bedroom. They return, sit in chairs, drink from their glasses.

BENTLEY: I don't think Babette suffered too much, do you?

AZALEA: If you’re saying that as some kind of judgment about how Babette died, I don't think it’s fair to do that.

BENTLEY: Right. It’s not up to me to judge, is it? Let her rest in peace and all that. Of course, we all get judged at “the end,” don’t we? *(Finger quotes for “the end”)*

AZALEA: Yes. We do. *(smiles)*

BENTLEY: You're smiling.

AZALEA: I was just thinking. I hope I don't miss out on that coconut pie.

BENTLEY: Look, instead of just sitting here, wondering what might happen . . . maybe we should have some of that coconut pie while we still can.

AZALEA: Oh. I suppose we could. There's no one to stop us. It's just you and me now. And it's better than just . . . waiting . . . I'll go get it. *(Exits to kitchen.)*

   BENTLEY stands, removes his suit jacket, drapes it over chair, loosens tie a bit, sits, sips drink. Bumping sound comes from bedroom.

BENTLEY: *(Looks around)* Azalea? Is that you? *(Bumping sound again)* What’s that noise? *(Stands, looks around.)*

   A hand *(in a large glove)* with a pistol juts out from bedroom door, points straight at BENTLEY. As he turns, he faces the gun, sees it.

BENTLEY: Bloody hell? I say there, what are you doing? Is that a gun? Stop fooling around. This isn't funny. Drop the gun now. Do you hear me, drop the gun!

   Gun fires, BENTLEY grabs his chest, he drops to his knees, then falls forward. *(Or he can stagger, grab chair, lower himself to floor.)* Gun is dropped on floor several feet outside of bedroom door. Hand disappears.
BENTLEY: (Raises head, gasps) I meant... drop the gun... before you shot me. (His head falls to floor, he lies still.)

AZALEA: (Enters with coconut pie in one hand, slice of pan on small plate with fork in other hand) What was that noise, Bentley? (Sees him.) You, too, Bentley? I leave the room for one minute and you die on me?

    Sets pie on buffet table. Begins to sound increasingly fearful, looks around nervously, as she edges towards the chairs with the slice of pie and fork.

AZALEA (continued): And now I'm the only one left. I thought this is how it would end up. It's my turn now, isn't it? Are you watching me now? Are you watching me? (sits in chair) Oh my God, I'm so nervous about this... (eats bite of pie)... maybe I should just take matters into my own hands, get it over with, not let the waiting stretch out...

    Takes small bottle with a skull and crossbones label out of drawer in small side table (or out of small box with lid if no drawer), opens bottle, pours red liquid (maraschino cherry juice will work well) onto pie she is eating.

AZALEA (continued): Is this my last meal? At least it's pie. (eats pie with red liquid) And, oh, I suppose, considering the circumstances, maybe I should write a note for whoever...

    Sets plate on side table, takes small piece of paper and pen out of drawer (or out of small box), writes something, folds paper into her hand.

AZALEA (continued): I mean, since I'm the last one left... I should leave a note... so whoever finds me will know what happened here tonight...

AZALEA coughs, chokes, stands suddenly.

AZALEA (continued): Oh my God! This is happening for real!

    AZALEA chokes, clutches throat, gags, falls back onto chair, eyes close, she is still.

A three second beat. Silence. Nothing moves. Then...

BENTLEY: (Slowly stands) O.K. Good show everyone. Babette... Reginald... I think we've all had a turn now.

REGINALD: (Stands up behind chairs) It's going to be a difficult vote this year.

BABETTE: (Comes out of bedroom, smoothing her hair and clothes) I hope I don't look a fright. I think the way you guys lugged me about messed me up a bit.

REGINALD: No, no, you still look as lovely as ever, Babette.

BENTLEY: I have to say, Reginald, this was the most entertaining competition you've come up with. Best year yet.
BABETTE: All that drama. The horror of it all. Azalea's screams. And then you popping up behind the chairs, helping me pull off my scene.

REGINALD: And trying not to laugh the whole time. *(Repeats his grotesque laugh.)*

BENTLEY: And then you, Babette, with the gun.

BABETTE: It really was all quite jolly fun.

REGINALD: The most horrifying moment was when you all said you wanted to stop because I was dead. For a minute there I thought I was going to have to get up and bean you all to carry on.

BENTLEY: Well, it did look as though you had done such a bang-up job of it, rather believable you know, that it didn't seem any of us could beat you this time.

REGINALD: And sweet little Azalea, cussing me out, what did she say? "Damn you Reginald for dying like this"?

BABETTE: She wants to win. She was pissed off at you for dying so well. But she wouldn't let us stop. She was quite determined to give it a try.

REGINALD: She didn't do so bad this time. Where is she, anyway? *(All look around. AZALEA still looks dead in the chair.)* Oh there she is.

BENTLEY: Carrying it on a little too long, isn't she? But of course that's why I don't have a dalliance with her--she gets a bit too melodramatic for my tastes.

BABETTE: Oh she just hopes to win. Be nice to her Bentley.

REGINALD: I think it's time to vote. *(Shakes Azalea)* Come on Azalea, sweetheart, you did a fine job, but it's time to vote now. *(AZALEA slides off onto floor. Reginald steps back in surprise.)* Oh, goodness, did I do that? Sorry about that, Azalea, dear, I didn't mean to knock you off. Let me help you up. *(Pulls her arm, tries to lift her, AZALEA stays limp.)*

BENTLEY: *(Comes to help)* Come on, old girl, you can't be that heavy.

*The two men struggle, finally get AZALEA back in the chair. She lies still.*

BABETTE: What's wrong with her?

BENTLEY: *(Picks up bottle with skull and crossbones)* What's this? A phony poison bottle? *(Snickers)*

REGINALD: *(Shocked, frantic, tries to find Azalea's pulse, listens for breathing)* No, I don't think it's phony. I can't find a pulse. She's not breathing. She's dead.
BENTLEY: I admit she is doing a good job of the best death scene.

REGINALD: No, she’s really dead. Whatever’s in that bottle must be for real.

BABETTE: But... are you saying she drank poison? She killed herself? On purpose? But why? Why?

REGINALD: There’s something in her hand. A note. (Opens, reads to himself, shakes his head.)

BABETTE: What’s it say?

BENTLEY: (Takes note, reads aloud, emphasizing every word) “I won! At least I won!”

A frozen moment.

BABETTE: Oh my God! This can’t be.

REGINALD: That’s how much she wanted to win? That she... that she...?

BENTLEY: Poor old thing. I wish now I’d had a dalliance with her.

BABETTE: I can’t stay here. This is too horrible. I have to go.

REGINALD: (dazed) Yes, of course. This has become too... as you say, too...

(Sits in chair next to Azalea) I’ll just sit here a minute, catch my breath, collect myself, then I’ll—

BENTLEY: Yes, yes, you tidy up, Reginald. And shall we all agree? None of us were here tonight.

BENTLEY and BABETTE rush out front door. Slam door behind them.

REGINALD: (Takes deep breath, speaks sadly) My dear, if you could only hear me I would say, good show, Azalea, you finally won. And I must say, you won so impressively that you have outranked every win any of the rest of us ever had. But even so, why did you have to resort to...? (beat) What you did, I just hope the police don’t think—

Front door slams open. BENTLEY and BABETTE rush in.

BENTLEY: I know what the police will think! They’ll think one of us killed her!

REGINALD: But she killed herself.

BENTLEY: But the evidence says she didn’t kill herself. (Picks up “poison” bottle.) I just remembered the smell from this bottle. When I picked it up before? It’s not poison. I think it’s just maraschino cherry juice. Here, taste it.

BENTLEY tries to pour some in BABETTE’S mouth, then REGINALD’S.
BABETTE: *(pulls away in horror)* No! Stop!

REGINALD: *(pulls away)* Have you gone mad, Bentley?

BENTLEY: I tell you it's not poison. I'll drink it myself to prove it.

*BENTLEY drinks what's in the bottle. Makes a face. REGINALD and BABETTE watch in trepidation to see if he falls dead. BENTLEY walks around, moves arms, stretches to show everything's working.*

BENTLEY: Well it doesn't taste all that great, but I haven't dropped dead. See? I'm good.

BABETTE: I wouldn't say "good".

BENTLEY: There's no poison in the bottle. Azalea didn't kill herself.

REGINALD: She wasn't poisoned?

BENTLEY: *(with meaning)* I didn't say that. I think she was poisoned.

REGINALD: Just not by her own hand?

BABETTE: Are you saying . . . ? Wait . . . What are you saying?

BENTLEY: I'm saying she was murdered. By one of us.

BABETTE: Oh my God, oh my God, now I really have to go!

*BABETTE rushes to front door, BENTLEY bars the way in front of door.*

BENTLEY: You can't leave, Babette. There's evidence that all of us have been here tonight. Hairs, fibers, our DNA on the glasses. We have to figure out what to do.

REGINALD: And figure out who did it. Frankly, Bentley, I think you're a good specimen for the crime.

BENTLEY: Me! It couldn't be me. I'm the one who came back, the one who said it was murder. Why would I point that out if I did it? No, no, I'm placing my bet on you, Reginald.

BABETTE: You think Reginald . . . ? Wait a minute . . . speaking of placing one's bet, Reginald, where is your bet?

REGINALD: What are you talking about?

BABETTE: Your $1000 that you went to your car to get. You never actually put it in the pot.

BENTLEY: *(A realization)* That's right! He didn't!
REGINALD: How could I? I was robbed. And stabbed.

BABETTE: That was just part of your little act. You dazzled us so much with that bloody knife that we didn’t notice you never put your money in.

REGINALD: Well I . . . uh . . . *(nervous laugh)*

BENTLEY: By George, you cheated us! And you committed the murder to cover-up the cheating!

REGINALD: What? Wouldn’t it be the other way around? The smaller crime to hide the bigger crime? I would cheat to cover up the murder.

BENTLEY: Yes! You’ve finally confessed.

REGINALD: I didn’t confess! I’m just correcting your damned idiotic logic!

BABETTE: You didn’t put your money in because you knew the winner wouldn’t be alive to collect.

REGINALD: That’s not true!

BENTLEY: Oh, I see it now. *(Picks up the wine bottle, acts out the actions he describes.)* You brought this expensive bottle of Rascalian Lafitte ’74, knowing it’s Azalea’s favorite wine so she’d be sure to drink it. But before you arrived you took a syringe and plunged a deadly poison through the cork. When she finally drank some of it, it was only a matter of minutes until she died. *(beat)* Of course you’ve forgotten that your fingerprints are all over this bottle.

REGINALD: You are quite mad, Sir. Why would I poison an entire bottle of wine? *(Grabs bottle, frantically wipes his fingerprints off the bottle with a towel.)* Wouldn’t I think everyone would drink some of it?

BENTLEY: *(Aggressive)* But we didn’t drink any of it, did we? Only Azalea did.

REGINALD: *(Shouts in exasperation)* But I wouldn’t know that ahead of time, would I? *(Holding bottle with towel, pours remaining contents into potted plant. Drops bottle out window. If no window possible, drops in waste basket.)* Well, it’s all gone now.

BENTLEY: You think that will fool the police?

REGINALD: Did you call the police?! *(The two men glare aggressively at each other.)*

BABETTE: Gentlemen! Before you draw swords, perhaps we should consider someone else. I think a case could be made that Bentley did it.

REGINALD: Good show, Babette. Of course, Bentley did it. Uh, how did Bentley do it?
BABETTE: As much as I love you from afar, Bentley dear, I have to say that I think you killed Azalea. *(Acts out her next lines.)* You're the one who actually poured the wine. It would have been so easy for you to add poison to her glass, with your back to us, when you so quickly volunteered to fix her a drink right after we put Reginald behind the chairs.

REGINALD: Yes! And because I was behind the chairs, *already dead*, that proves I could not have done it.

BABETTE: *(Patronizingly)* You weren't really dead, Reginald dear.

REGINALD: That's right, I wasn't really dead, which *proves… uh…?*

BABETTE: But let's get back to Bentley.

BENTLEY: Yes, let's get back to me. You might have explained *how* I could have killed Azalea, but you did not explain *why*. *(Picks up Azalea's glass, wipes his fingerprints off with a handkerchief from his pocket.)*

BABETTE: It's this dalliance obsession you have about Azalea. In fact, isn't it true that it wasn't *you* who did not want to have a dalliance with Azalea, but *she* who did not want a dalliance with you—

BENTLEY: *(Wipes his fingerprints and saliva off his drinking glasses and the bottles he has touched.)* Oh bollocks, Babette! No one ever turns me down… Hardly ever… Well maybe most of the time they do… but not always.

REGINALD: Unfortunately, I agree. As much as I'd like to pin this thing on Bentley, I just don't see that as a reason he'd ever kill Azalea. But you did make me aware that you, Babette dear, might have done the deed.

BABETTE: Me? I wouldn't risk getting my Vera Wang designer gown *(or blouse)* dirty to murder someone.

REGINALD: And yet, you let me strangle you this evening in your designer gown, which was probably a tactical diversion on your part to distract us away from the fact that just moments before, you gave a poison tablet to Azalea.

BABETTE: What? That was an aspirin, you twit.

REGINALD: Then we should find more in your purse. Let's see, shall we? *(Grabs her purse, dumps contents out)* Hmm, I don't see any aspirin at all. Not even a container.

BABETTE: That's because I found it loose at the bottom of my purse. It was the last one I had.

REGINALD: So you say. But there's nothing to prove it was an aspirin. You gave Azalea an unknown substance—now she's dead.
BABETTE: My God, this is what the police will think, isn’t it? We all look suspicious, don’t we? We’ve got to wipe this place down. What did I touch? Where did I leave my fingerprints? Oh, the gun. *(Rushes to wipe gun)*

BENTLEY: And I touched the lamp. *(Rushes to wipe lamp)*

BABETTE: And the doorknob. We all touched the doorknob. *(Wipes doorknob)*

REGINALD: Oh my God, my prints are on the knife. *(Wipes prints)*

BENTLEY: And my prints are on the poison bottle, too *(Wipes bottle)*

BABETTE: And the tables. Wipe down the tables. *(Wipes side tables)*

REGINALD: We all touched the tables.

BENTLEY: And I touched the floor when I fell. Help me wipe the floor.

*All three frantically wipe the floor with their backs to Azalea. AZALEA sits up, watches them in silence for a moment. They are looking at the floor, don’t notice her.*

AZALEA: What’s going on?

*The three don’t hear her, they are too busy scrubbing and worrying.*

REGINALD: And over there, where you picked up the gun—get that spot there.

BENTLEY: We left fingerprints all over this room.

BABETTE: Wipe down everything! Everything!

AZALEA: *(Knocks on side table to get attention, it sounds like a knock on the door.)* Hello?!

*All three look at front door, freeze a moment, then speak in hysterics.*

REGINALD: What’s that? Someone’s at the door!

BENTLEY: Oh no, it’s the police!

BABETTE: My God! They found us!

*All three scream. Then they notice Azalea, and scream again.*

REGINALD: Azalea! My God, we thought you were dead.

BENTLEY: Because you said she was dead.
REGINALD: I'm not a doctor. How did I know? You said she was murdered.

BENTLEY: I'm not a crime scene tech. How did I know?

BABETTE: Stop it, boys!

AZALEA: What are you arguing about?

REGINALD: Someone poisoned you, Azalea.

BENTLEY: One of us.

BABETTE: Don't tell her that. We want her to still be our friend.

REGINALD: (Smiling, trying to cover his mistake) But obviously, no one really did. Because you're here.

*The three laugh nervously, hope to make it all a joke.*

BENTLEY: That's after we decided you didn't kill yourself because your poison bottle only has cherry juice.

AZALEA: Oh that. I just made that label and put it on my cherry-flavored cold medicine. It always makes me drowsy. I took it so I'd look more believably dead. So I'd win.

*The three stand, brush themselves off, try to regain their dignity.*

AZALEA: I hope I didn't cause you all any distress.

*The three shake their heads, mumble that there was no distress.*

AZALEA: (Stands) You did realize that I was just playing the game, didn't you? I wasn't really dead? (Big smile) I was just very, very good this time. The best! I did win, didn't I?

REGINALD: Yes, you won, Azalea. You were the best.

BENTLEY: You didn't fool us, of course.

BABETTE: We knew you couldn't possibly really be dead.

REGINALD: We did remember that you told us you'd win.

BENTLEY: So it didn't worry us at all. We weren't fooled.

BABETTE: Certainly not.

*The three nod at each other, agree they knew she wasn't really dead.*
AZALEA: So you all agree? I won! I was the best! I told you so! So now I get the prize. *(Picks up the money bowl, dances around, becomes very annoying.)* I won, I won, I won! I won, I won, I won! I told you, told you, told you, that I'd win, I'd win, I'd win!

BABETTE: *(With great patience)* Yes, Azalea, you won.

BENTLEY: But you don’t have to keep telling us so.

REGINALD: Oh, and I… uh, *(reaches into his pocket, pulls out his money)* I need to add my $1000 to the bowl.

AZALEA: What a lovely little wager this was. What a lovely little win. I won, I won, I won. I told you, told you, told you. The whole, whole, prize, is mine, mine, mine. Oh! And that also means . . .

AZALEA sets down money bowl, goes to buffet table, picks up coconut pie, brings back to the group.

AZALEA *(continued)*: I won the coconut pie, too. The whole pie just for me, me, me. I'm sorry I already ate a piece, but since I knew I was going to win, I guess it doesn't matter. I win the whole, whole pie, because I won, won, won.

BENTLEY: *(Annoyed)* Yes, you won the whole, whole pie, because you won, won, won, now can someone shut, shut, shut, her up, up, up?!

REGINALD: Everything you say is true, Azalea, dear. You did the best, and you told us so, and you won the money and the pie. But please remember two things. One, I do love you. And two, yes, you win the whole, whole pie.

REGINALD pushes coconut cream pie into Azalea's face. Gently.

*(Pie pan should only be filled with a whipped topping. To protect Azalea's clothing, REGINALD might pick up a hand towel during previous lines and drape over her before pushing pie into her face.)*

AZALEA sputters, wipes pie away from eyes and mouth, then:

AZALEA: Woo-Hoo, it’s so much fun to win!

ALTERNATE ENDING: As REGINALD says his last lines he takes the pie from AZALEA and holds it as though he is getting ready to push it into her face. AZALEA will look very shocked. Knowing what's about to happen, she will still say “Woo-Hoo, it’s so much fun to win!”

LIGHTS QUICKLY GO BLACK.

THE END
THE DAUGHTERS OF LEONORA

BY

LOIS ANN MORRISON
THE DAUGHTERS OF LEONORA

Ten minute Comedy

CHARACTERS

LEONORA: Old mother sitting comfortably in 'sick' chair with pillows and blankets; wearing pajamas; a 'frequent dyer'.

JANIE: Eldest daughter; take-charge attitude; wearing cleric's collar; has cell phone with ring tone 'hallelujah' from the 'Hallelujah Chorus'.

JOSIE: Middle daughter; wearing sundress & hat in preparation for beach vacation.

JESSIE: Youngest daughter; colorful & sexy; wearing tight pants & high heels, tight sweater showing off cleavage.

TIME

Present

PLACE

Leonora's sick room; comfortable chair plus a side chair to hold extra blanket & pillow; small table to hold glass of water & box of crackers.
At rise: LEONORA is resting in chair. JANIE is fussing around, tending to her.

JANIE: Are you comfortable, Mother?

LEONORA: Yes, dear.

JANIE: Let me get you another blanket.

LEONORA: No thank you, dear, I’m warm enough. *(JANIE spreads blanket over her)*

JANIE: Here’s another pillow.

LEONORA: No thank you, dear, I’m fine. *(JANIE pushes pillow under her head)*

JANIE: Take a sip of water, Mother. *(Tries to make LEONORA drink)*

LEONORA: I’m not thirsty, dear.

JANIE: Then take something to eat. *(Tries to put cracker in LEONORA’S mouth)*

LEONORA: *(Turns head)* No, dear, I’m not hungry. Where are your sisters?

JANIE: *(Frustrated)* Josie and Jessie should’ve been here by now. I’ve left three messages for each of them. But they’re always late and always leave everything to me.

LEONORA: Yes, dear, I know.

JANIE: *(Angrily)* Well I’m sick of it.

*JESSIE walks in, goes to LEONORA’S side and kisses her cheek.*

JANIE: *(Sarcastically)* Glad you could finally make it, Jessie.

JESSIE: I always come when Mother is dying. You know that. *(Gentle with Leonora)* How are you, Mother?

LEONORA: Not good.

JESSIE: *(Affectionately)* Are you dying again, Mother?

LEONORA: Yes, dear.
JESSIE: What can I do for you?

LEONORA: Just be here. That's all I need.

JANIE: (Looks JESSIE up and down judgmentally) Nice outfit, Jessie, but you've come to visit your dying mother not turn a trick.

JESSIE: This is just me, Janie. It's how I dress.

JANIE: (Sniffs) And I can smell alcohol on your breath.

JESSIE: Yes, Reverend Janie, I drink. And you interrupted my Happy Hour. So lighten up, will you?

JANIE: I'd love to 'lighten up' but you and Josie won't let me.

JESSIE: What's that supposed to mean?

JANIE: I have to do everything. You and Josie don't help.

JESSIE: Just loosen your grip and let us help.

JANIE: Loosen my grip? I'm only doing what needs to be done. Someone has to answer the calls, someone has to take mother to the doctor, someone has to tend to her.

JESSIE: Yes, and thank you, Janie, really. But you take over like you're sent direct from God.

JANIE: Oh? Well you and Josie are like stray sheep and sometimes I have to take charge and be the shepherd of this family like I am with my own church flock.

JESSIE: You're not our shepherd, Janie. You're more like the sheep dog running around in circles snapping at our heels.

JANIE: Really! Is that what you think?

JOSIE walks in cautiously, interrupting the argument.

JANIE: Well hello, Josie. Good of you to take time out to visit your dying mother.

JOSIE: (Abrupt with Janie but tender to Leonora) I got your summons, Reverend. (Gives Leonora a hug and kiss) How are you, Mother? Are you really dying this time?

LEONORA: Yes, dear.
JOSIE: How can I help you?

LEONORA: Having all three of you here helps me.

    LEONORA settles back to watch her three daughters. JANIE'S phone rings.

JANIE: Hello? (pause) You cooked the macaroni? A full seven and a half minutes? (pause) Then drain all the water. And be careful not to lose any macaroni down the drain. Okay? (pause) Okay. (Pockets phone as she looks Josie up and down judgmentally) Looks like this has interfered with another of your beach vacations.

JOSIE: Don't worry, I hadn't left yet.

JESSIE: I don't know how you can afford to go there so often.

JOSIE: I've just been able to make choices.

JANIE: (Insincere) Lucky you.

    JANIE'S phone rings again. JOSIE and JESSIE shake heads and gesture in disbelief during JANIE'S phone conversation.

JANIE: Yes, honey? (pause) You add the cheese powder, ¼ cup butter and ¼ cup milk. Let it all melt together and don't forget to stir. (pause) Okay.

JOSIE: So you have to tell your husband how to cook a box of macaroni and cheese?

JESSIE: (Laughs) His PHD in Horticulture can't help him there.

JANIE: Don't you dare make fun of my husband.

JESSIE: All that education never got him a real job.

JANIE: (Defensive) He helps me at home and in the yard. And I stand by my man.

JESSIE: Whatever works for you.

JANIE: You're in no position to judge, Jessie. You've had three husbands. Imagine, three children with three different husbands.

JESSIE: (Making light of it) And I'm working on a forth. Husband that is, not a child.
JANIE: Well, just for the record, it’s my children who are making the macaroni and cheese, not my husband.

*JANIE’S phone rings again.*

JANIE: Yes? *(pause)* You’re done, honey. You eat it now. *(pause)* Okay, bye.

JOSIE: Excuse me, Janie, but your children are nearly thirty years old and you have to tell them to ‘eat it’?

JANIE: Oh, don’t be shaming my children, Josie. What about your little illegitimate?

JOSIE: My ‘little illegitimate’ will be starting med school this year.

JANIE: Does he know who his father is? We don’t.

JOSIE: That’s our business, not yours.

JANIE: You still expect us to believe it was some kind of immaculate conception?

LEONORA: *(Interrupting, waving arms in the air)* Yoo-hoo, girls! I’m your dying mother. Can you pay attention to me for a moment? I have some dying words, a deathbed confession.

*JANIE, JOSIE and JESSIE gather in closely around LEONORA, focusing on her.*

JESSIE: Sorry, Mother, we get so caught up in our own issues.

JOSIE: We’re so sorry, Mother.

JANIE: Please forgive us. *(Several beats of silence)* Well, Mother, you have something to say?

LEONORA: If you girls are ready for it.

JOSIE: We’re women, Mother, not girls. And yes, we’re ready for it.

JESSIE: That’s right. We’re ‘mature, experienced’ women. We can handle anything.

JANIE: There’s nothing you could say, Mother, that would change our love for you.

LEONORA: That’s what I need to hear. *(pause)* This is hard for me.

JESSIE: Go on, Mother.
JOSIE: We're listening.

JANIE: Remember we love you.

LEONORA: I'll just say it, confess. (Big sigh) Like you, Jessie, each of my children has a different father.

(Long silence with JANIE, JOSIE & JESSIE looking back and forth at each other)

JESSIE: What do you mean, mother? How like me?

LEONORA: The man you all knew as your father was actually only the father of you, Josie. And you can be certain of that.

JOSIE: I can be certain of that? Am I supposed to be relieved to hear this?

JANIE: You're going to have to explain further, Mother.

LEONORA: When I was sixteen, I had an inappropriate relationship with a much older man.

JANIE: Inappropriate?

LEONORA: Inappropriate in that he was in a position of authority and took advantage of my youthful innocence and willingness to please.

JANIE: Are you trying to tell me I'm a bastard?

LEONORA: You're not a bastard, Janie. Your father, the one you knew, married me knowing I was three months pregnant with another man's child. So legally, you're not a bastard.

JANIE: Oh, that's a comfort, Mother.

LEONORA: Don't be flippant. Your father was honorable and respectful, never berating or accusing me.

JANIE: Dare I ask who was this man?

LEONORA: He was Head Deacon at the First Baptist Church.

JANIE: Oh god, I'm going to be sick. (Folds into self) I need to sit down. (Sits in chair, puts head in hands) I don't believe this.
JESSIE: What about me then, Mother? What's my story?

LEONORA: Ah, Jessie, my youngest. You were my 'love child'.

JESSIE: *(Raises arms)* Yes! A love child.

JANIE: Dear god! Jessie. Show some respect. This is serious.

JESSIE: Okay then, Mother, how'd you slip me in?

LEONORA: I had a passionate affaire with a travelling evangelist, flamboyant and charismatic. Your father, again the one you knew, suspected I'm sure but he never challenged me.

JANIE: *(Bitter)* So we're all one big happy family.

JESSIE: Maybe this explains why we're all so different.

JOSIE: And I'm the only one hundred per cent daughter.

LEONORA: You're all one hundred per cent daughters. And don't be so smug, Josie. You think I don't know your secret?

JOSIE: *(Guarded)* What?

LEONORA: The father of your child. He's a married man, isn't he? A prominent member of the community no doubt. Needs his identity protected. But he keeps you in beach house vacations and pays for your son's education.

JOSIE: I'm not going to comment on any of this.


JANIE: And just what are we supposed to do with this new information, all these secrets?

LEONORA: Keep it amongst yourselves. These secrets sort of cancel each other out, don't they? An equalizer.

JANIE: I don't know about the rest of you but I feel like shit.

JOSIE: Shit?

JESSIE: Reverend Janie said 'shit'.
JANIE: Hey, I can say ‘shit’ when I feel like shit and right now I feel like shit.

LEONORA: Well, I feel more at peace than I ever have.

JOSIE: *(Concerned)* Does this mean you’re going to die, Mother? Like now?

LEONORA: Oh, heavens, no. I feel absolutely great. In fact, I’m ready for my afternoon martini.

JESSIE: Martini? As in vodka? May I join you?

JOSIE: Make one for me too, would you?

JANIE: *(Gets up from chair to stand by her mother)* But you had me convinced you were dying, Mother. Again.

LEONORA: Not this time, dear. Just bring me that martini. I’ll live to die another day.

*LEONORA smiles as she looks from JANIE to JOSIE to JESSIE who are all posed around her.*

THE END