

BETTER THAN STEVE & EYDIE

by Laurie Graff

NAME: Laurie Graff

WHERE YOU ARE FROM: New York, NY

BIO: Laurie Graff is from the Upper West Side... and is very excited to participate in the Bake-Off! A published author, her novels include the best-selling *You Have to Kiss a Lot of Frogs* and *The Shiksa Syndrome*. She's a contributor to *NYT Complaint Box* and several anthologies, her short plays have been published and produced OOB, at WorkShop Theater. A native New Yorker, Laurie loves dogs, works in media, writes for Splash, is collaborating on a new musical and her all-time favorite acting role was playing "Frenchy" in Broadway's *Grease*.

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WHAT'S KEEPING YOU POSITIVE? Gratitude for getting over the virus. Socially-distanced picnics. The Hudson River. New recipes. Work. Zoom. Reconnections with so many friends. Movies, books, banana breads, looking at history, knowing all things change and this too shall pass. Having the time for fun writing challenges.

YES, YOU CAN PUBLISH THIS!

CHARACTERS

LANIE. Late 30s. Brooklyn-born, beautiful, bottled blonde who wants to be a star.

LES. Early 40s. His manager side is at war with the performer in him.

EMCEE. Off-stage voice, male, very Borscht Belt.

TIME

A Saturday night. August, 1965. 9:40 pm

PLACE

Scene: The back porch of the casino (clubhouse) at a bungalow colony (resort) in the Catskill Mountains.

Sounds: Of an off-stage EMCEE and a band playing "What's New Pussycat."

Scene 1

A wooden stairway at the end of a gravel driveway leads up to the back porch of a casino that is hopping on this summer night. The sign, Lefkowitz Bungalows, hangs above the back entrance. On either side of the screen door are two big windows. We can see in. A band plays on the small stage. In front of them, people are seated in rows of chairs. Several are dancing.

EMCEE

(Heard on a mic, over the music)

Up, up, up. Everyone on the dance floor. Come on, Morty. I don't think you've seen your toes since 1949.

Lights up on LANIE, heavily made-up and dressed in a gold sequin cocktail dress with a drink in hand. Pacing back and forth across the porch, one high heel gets stuck in a wood plank.

LANIE

Damn porch.

EMCEE

Where's Estelle Wanger? Where?? Oh, hello sweetheart. A big round of applause for last week's Bingo winner. The whole pot she got.

Sounds of clapping. LANIE pulls out her shoe.

EMCEE

It's Cha-Cha time. And I want to see everyone dancing. Because at 10 o'clock we have more dynamite entertainment.

LANIE

Oh shit.

Sounds of Cha-Cha music. SHE gulps the drink, checks her watch and continues to pace.

EMCEE

(Heard through the screen door)

He here yet?

LANIE

(Rushes to the door)

On his way.

EMCEE

You two screw up and you're canceled for Labor Day.

LANIE

(Resumes pacing)

Come on, Les, Where the hell are ya?

Sounds of a car door slam followed by footsteps sprinting up the stairs. LES, handsome and slightly ruffled in a black suit and tie, hurries over to embrace LANIE.

LES

Baby--

LANIE

Hands off. You know what time it is?

LES

I called.

LANIE

I didn't get any message.

LES

The kid took it.

LANIE

What kid?

LES

The concession kid. Said he'd find you.

LANIE

Well he didn't.

LES

I'm sorry, baby.

LANIE

We're doing a new song.

LES

You know I'd never miss a show. It was bumper to bumper on the Triboro.

LANIE

I told you - take the Palisades.

LES

I didn't.

LANIE
I told you - take the GW.

LES
Tolls.

LANIE
Triboro has tolls.

SHE reaches her hands into the breast pocket of his suit jacket and pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

LES
(HE stops her; his hand on hers)
Not before a show.

LANIE
Hey - I'm warmed up.

LES
Yeah, you're always hot.

LANIE
(Walks away)
So why didn't ya take the GW?

LES
The toll is double.

LANIE
Make me crazy for nothing. And not double. Is not.

LES
Is too. Fifty cents each way on the George Washington. Fifty cents *round trip* on the Triboro.

LANIE
Money. Everything's always money.

LES
We need it. Right?

LANIE
Sure, we need it.

LES

It makes life better, right? It's why I went to the city today.

LANIE

What do you mean?

LES

It was supposed to be a surprise.

LANIE

For me?

LES

For after. I wanted to surprise you. Later. After the show.

EMCEE

(Heard through the screen door)

Ten minutes. Oh, look who decided to show up.

LANIE

Hey Mel, put a lid on it.

LES

Come on, don't fight. It's not ladylike.

LANIE

He's lucky to get an act as good as Les & Lanie.

LES

That's the truth.

LANIE

Ya hear? You hear that noise?

Sounds of cars on the gravel driveway.

LANIE

They come here from the other bungalows. They leave their colony. Just to see us.

LES

We sure put on a show.

LANIE

They sneak in.

LES
I know.

LANIE
We're the best act up here.

LES
Oh, baby.

LANIE
We're even better than Steve & Eydie.

LES laughs.

LANIE
What? You don't think so?

LES
Lanie...it doesn't matter now.

LANIE
What do ya mean? Of course, it matters. It always matters.

LES
Not after today.

LANIE
You know?

LES
It's why I went to the city.

LANIE
He said he wanted to tell you. I thought I should. But he was right.

LES
I thought the whole thing would wait till after the summer. Then today happened. I seized it. You're my wife.

LANIE
And you're my husband. So.... you're good with it? Now?

The band plays "Old Devil Moon."

LES
I'm over the moon.

LANIE

Boy, I am so glad you went and talked to him today I don't even care you both went behind my back 'cause he's right. This is right. The money's in recording. The money is in Hollywood. We'll drive out west. I said we'd leave right after Labor Day. Wait. We could leave now. Yeah, why not? Let's skip Labor Day - too bad on Mel - and leave this week. I'll tell Harry. We're all set up to stay in his guest house anyway. Just till we find our own place.

LES

Whoa.... Whoa, there. Hold your horses. Put on the brakes. What are you talking about? Harry who?

LANIE

Harry. Landsman. That manager we met over Christmas. When we worked the Pines.

LES

Oh, yeah.

LANIE

You know Harry.

LES

Sure do. What about him?

LANIE

He's in town this week. What am I telling? You know. You saw him today.

LES

I didn't see him today.

LANIE

You said it was urgent you go the city. To talk to a guy. I just thought -

LES

You thought wrong.

The air is tense between them.

LANIE

(Tentative)

Who'd you go see?

LES shakes his head.

LANIE

Les. Tell me.

LES reaches into his breast pocket and slowly pulls out a piece of paper. HE hands it to LANIE. SHE reads it and throws it to the ground.

LANIE

(Voice rising)

No. Oh, no. Why'd you do this?

LES

Sssh... keep it down.

(HE rushes to check that no one is near the screen door)

I thought it was what you wanted. What we want.

LANIE

A house? How could you think I want a goddamn house? And *Levittown*?

LES

Last month, remember, when you missed?

LANIE

Don't remind me.

LES

We were fighting so much about money--

LANIE

What else?

LES

When I thought there was a baby--

LANIE

Thank god for small favors.

LES

I talked to my mom. I know I never told you, but my aunt left a little of her nest egg and well, she and pop were so excited, and there was enough for a down payment--

LANIE

Are you crazy?

There's a knock on the glass window. The band plays "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'."

EMCEE

(Hollers through the window)

Five minutes.

LANIE
You put a down payment on a house.

LES
For us.

LANIE
On Long Island.

LES
I had to hustle. They rejected the other offer when I showed up with cash.

LANIE
Without asking me?

LES
Hey. You agreed to move us to Hollywood and work with Harry Landsman. Without asking me?

LANIE and LES stare at each other. Neither wants to be the one to break the silence.

LES
(Quietly)
We've been struggling so long. I could get a real job. In a school.

LANIE silently sobs.

LES
Teach music.

LANIE
Oh, Les.

LES
Have a coupla kids, be a real fam---

LANIE
No.

LES
What?

LANIE
It's ---

LES
It's what? I thought after last month ---

LANIE shakes her head.

LES
Say it. Just say it.

LANIE
I still want *this*. I don't want that, Les. I don't want that life.

THEY look at each other in search of an answer.

LANIE
What are we gonna do?

LES
The show. What else?

LANIE
And after?

A trumpet solo plays the bridge of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'."

LES
We'll dance?

LES pulls LANIE close. THEY dance.

EMCEE
And now the act we've all been waiting for. The darlings of the Catskills, the couple we all want to be. Put your hands together for the magic of Les & Lanie.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF PLAY