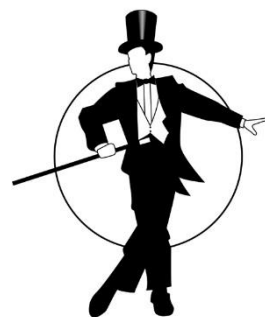


A Wicked Little Wager

Pamela Loyd



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A WICKED LITTLE WAGER

By Pamela Loyd

CAST

AZALEA: Upper-class woman in a glamorous gown or blouse, in a light color. Has an innocent “blonde” look, seems a bit naïve, less sophisticated than the others, but with a determined intelligence. She is insistent, demanding, stubborn, calculating, and less innocent and naïve than she at first seems.

BABETTE: Upper-class woman in glamorous gown or blouse in black or vivid color, a fur stole or shawl, carries an evening purse. She has a raven-haired look; is vampy, flirtatious, sultry, 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, stylish tie, and a flower in his lapel. He considers himself quite sexy whether women think so or not. He is dashing, spoiled, arrogant, competitive, occasionally pouty, and sees himself as wittily brilliant—quite taken by his own sense of superiority.

REGINALD: Upper-class man in a dress suit or a dark dinner jacket, cloth handkerchief in suit pocket. He is the creative thinker behind the group’s annual get-togethers. He is lively, friendly, with a sense of humor, and his endearments to others sound sincere. He seems to actually be a nice man. He speaks and smiles with warmth.

Place

Azalea’s city apartment.

Time

Present day, Evening.

PRODUCTION NOTES

- 1) 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.
- 2) All characters should be played in the style of high comedy, similar to a British comedy of manners, with an emphasis on relishing the use of affected, precise language and wit, and the gracious body movements and elegance of that style. Except, of course, when they lose their cool in the second half and the façades drop.
- 3) 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.
- 4) A bit of trivia: There actually is a National Coconut Pie Day.

PROP LIST and PLACEMENT

ON BUFFET TABLE: Champagne bottle in ice bucket (ice bucket optional). Fill with ginger ale. Four wine glasses; cloth napkins or small tea towels; candle (battery operated).

ON SIDE TABLE: In drawer or small box on table: Poison bottle; small pad of paper; pen.

BEDROOM (off stage): Blanket; large glove; gun (toy gun or squirt gun painted black)

KITCHEN (off stage): Open bottle of Rascalian Lafitte wine (make your own wine label, fill with non-alcoholic wine or any red juice); Tray with mushroom hors d'oeuvres; Coconut Pie (pie pan with soft white cloth peaked to look like whipped cream); Wager Bowl (clear glass bowl or clear fishbowl).

ACTORS' PROPS:

Azalea: \$1,000 in \$100 bills (can find realistic fake \$100 bills online).

Babette: \$1,000 in \$100 bills; Evening purse with an aspirin, comb, lipstick, wallet, etc

Bentley: \$1,000 in \$100 bills; Cell phone.

Reginald: \$1,000 in \$100 bills; Unopened bottle of Rascalian Lafitte wine (make your own label), and large fake knife. Will also need shirt front with large red blood stain (that matches shirt he is wearing) that can be velcroed quickly onto his shirt. A large fake knife handle can be attached to the blood stain or actor can hold it against his chest.

A WICKED LITTLE WAGER

SETTING: Azalea's city apartment, upscale and modern. A sofa at center with two additional living room chairs, small side table next to sofa, standing lamp next to sofa or a table lamp on side table next to sofa, buffet table stage left. On the buffet table is an ice bucket holding open champagne bottle, four wine glasses, four cloth napkins or tea towels, and a battery-operated candle, in preparation for a small party. A small side table down right with nothing on it—where the wager bowl will eventually be placed. Front door is back right, a window in one wall if possible but not required. Exit to kitchen at right. Exit to bedroom left center. However, the director is free to rearrange the layout to fit the stage available and blocking preferences.

AT RISE: Azalea is arranging items on buffet table, making sure everything is ready. 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, then 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: (singsong) 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, inspects the champagne. Azalea opens door.)

AZALEA: Babette, darling, do come in.

BABETTE: Azalea, dear, so nice to see you again. *(air kisses, then flings her fur stole at Azalea to hang up for her, as though she were a servant)*

AZALEA: And of course, Bentley is already here. *(exits with fur to bedroom)*

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

BENTLEY: *(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 arm's 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.

(Bentley hands glass of champagne to Babette. Doorbell rings. Azalea enters from bedroom.)

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)* Rascalian 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: *(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 takes wine into kitchen)

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?

(Azalea returns with opened wine bottle and clear glass bowl or fishbowl. Sets wine on buffet table.)

BENTLEY: I wouldn't— in front of ladies. *(looks pointedly at Babette)*

AZALEA: *(sets clear glass bowl or fishbowl 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 these 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: Now that we've all pontificated to ourselves that we are perfectly proper people, are we ready to proceed? 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.

(*Babette lets bills fall one-by-one into bowl so they flutter in and fill more space in the bowl. After all have put in their money the bowl should look fully stuffed with \$100 bills.*)

REGINALD: Azalea, your turn.

AZALEA: (*holds out bills, kisses them*) 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: (*annoyed*) 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.

(Front 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. This will be a shirt front with a red stain velcroed to his shirt. A knife handle can be attached to blood spot, or actor can hold a knife handle to his chest, or he can enter with large knife blade held between his arm and chest to give appearance that knife is in his chest.)

REGINALD: I've been stabbed...they took my money...I've been robbed...

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!