

SNAKES IN A HOSPITAL

a short play by

Caitlin Cieri



MEMBER
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398 North State Road
Springfield, PA 19064
United States of America
Mobile: [610-322-5407](tel:610-322-5407)
ccieri@fandm.edu

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- CHRIS: Male, twenties to thirties, any race. A reporter from the Philadelphia Inquirer. Specializes in cover-ups and scandals. A fast-talking, wisecracking reporter with an eye for Jess.
- DR. JESSICA COLEMAN: Female, twenties to thirties, any race. The head of neonatal intensive care. Trying to become the Chief Medical Officer of the children's hospital. A scatterbrained flowerchild who's in over her head...until the very last line.
- DR. RICHARD STERN: Male, forties and up, any race. The head of surgery. Trying to become the Chief Medical Officer of the children's hospital. An "old boy" who gave a bright young girl a chance, and immediately regretted it.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

SETTING: Jessica's Office, A Children's Hospital, Now. There's a Desk with Jess' laptop on it, along with an empty flowerpot, and a potted aloe plant. It's old, but with a little love and care it could be 100% healthy again. A trashcan sits on the right side of the desk.

AT RISE: JESS is inspecting her aloe plant and CHRIS is watching her.

CHRIS

Jess, are you going to spend all day playing with that plant, or are we going to bust your boss?

JESS

(Distracted)

Richard isn't my boss, Chris. He's just the Head of Surgery. And if this plan works, he'll never be my boss. And I'm not playing. I'm repotting.

CHRIS

When you said you were "digging up dirt on your slimy boss," this wasn't what I had in mind.

JESS

Chris, this is an aloe plant. It can treat rashes, burns, skin irritation in general. It has antiseptic properties. If I let it die, it'd be a disservice to my field. That's why I'm putting it in a bigger pot with more dirt.

(CHRIS stares at her in disbelief.)

JESS

Do you know how many children I used to see every day with horrible, painful skin conditions?

CHRIS

So a sick kid comes into your office and you rub them with a plant.

JESS

Obviously not. I make my own lotion. Which I've "accidentally" slipped into the poor mothers' bags with a nod and a wink.

CHRIS

Because the other ones are full of snake oil.

JESS

I don't like depending on other people.

CHRIS

Yet here I am, helping you prove that Dr. Richard Stern, Head of Surgery at the Children's Hospital, isn't fit to be its new Chief Medical Officer.

JESS

I don't like depending on other people, but in this case I have to.

(JESS has finished repotting her aloe. She looks at her dirt-covered hands.)

JESS

And now I have to wash my hands.

CHRIS

Now?

JESS

I left Richard's information open on the laptop. You can just go through it while I'm out.

CHRIS

Can't you do it? I mean, you did get his bank statements somehow.

JESS

Only because he keeps his password on a Post-it note stuck to his computer, and he uses the same password for literally all of his accounts. And I can't touch the computer with dirty hands. I'll cross-contaminate it!

CHRIS

You couldn't have just done the plant later?

JESS

(Talking to her aloe plant while stroking it)

Don't listen to him!

(JESS gives her plant one last friendly pat and walks out of the room. CHRIS sits at JESS' desk and starts typing.)

CHRIS

Go into Richard Stern...Projects...Complaints...Grant Budgets. That looks promising.

(CHRIS double-clicks)

CHRIS

Huh, that's a lot of money to be getting back from a business that cleans surgical equipment. Sneaking a little money on the side, eh Ricky?

(RICH knocks at the door. He can't see that CHRIS is inside.)

CHRIS

Who is it?

RICH

Who's this?

CHRIS

You first.

(RICH opens the door and storms in.)

RICH

I'm Dr. Richard Stern, Head of Surgery. Where is Jessica?

CHRIS

I know who you are, Ricky. Dr. Coleman isn't in right now.

CHRIS

But maybe I can help.

(RICH steps into the office, and shakes CHRIS's hand.)

RICH

I certainly hope you can. Did you find anything that would make her seem... "unfit for office?"

CHRIS

I was working on that now.

RICH

Then why are you in my folder? I'm paying you to investigate her!

CHRIS

It was already there when I got on. I'm a reporter, not your private eye, Ricky. The story's my biggest concern. Let me just exit out of here...get into here...

RICH

She would do that, wouldn't she? Embezzle money and then throw the blame on me. And after everything I've done for her...

Voila!

CHRIS

So that's her folder.

RICH

Yep.

CHRIS

Click on the one that says Grant Budget.

RICH

Which one is that?

CHRIS

It's right in front of you. Any closer and it would've bitten you.

RICH

Okay, okay! I'm clicking it.

CHRIS

(CHRIS clicks twice)

CHRIS

Oh, that's sweet. She's trying to update the NICU.

RICH

Not that. Look at her accounts.

CHRIS

Looks like she's been getting refunds from a "Surgical Sterilization Solutions."

RICH

Refund, shmefund! That's a kickback if I ever saw one.

CHRIS

And how would you know?

RICH

Because I work with them too.

CHRIS

"Surgical Sterilization Solutions?"

RICH

Yes.

CHRIS
Doing what?

RICH
(Pauses)
They clean our surgical equipment. That's how I work with them. Obviously.

CHRIS
Look Dick, I'm a reporter. If there's something you want to confess, then you should tell me sooner rather than later.

RICH
Absolutely not. The walls have ears.

CHRIS
You have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide.

(Turning his back to the audience, RICH writes out a check and offers it to CHRIS.)

RICH
I have nothing to hide.

(CHRIS takes the check.)

CHRIS
Good to hear. Now let's get back to exposing Jess.

RICH
Wait a minute.

(RICH takes out a flash drive and holds it up.)

CHRIS
Thanks.

(CHRIS reaches for RICH's flash drive. RICH holds it out of reach.)

CHRIS
Look, Ricky. I'm the one who needs these files.

RICH
Didn't you bring your own flash drive?

CHRIS
Of course I did.

(CHRIS takes out a Spiderman flash drive.)

Spiderman? Really?
RICH

Peter Parker's a journalist.
CHRIS

So is William Randolph Hearst.
RICH

But does he have his own flash drive?
CHRIS

Let's just make the copies before Jessica gets back.
RICH

Okay. Together.
CHRIS

(CHRIS and RICH triumphantly stick their flash drives into the computer. CHRIS types a bit more, then stops.)

And there they go. Why do you need copies of Dr. J's bank statements anyway?
CHRIS

What if your files get corrupted? Ever think about that?
RICH

No, because I know how to use a flash drive. Done!
CHRIS

(RICH and CHRIS remove their flash drives.)

I can't wait to see the look on Jessica's face when she sees this in the paper! She won't know what hit her!
RICH

Pleasure doing business with you, Richie-Rich.
CHRIS

I'd better get out of here before Jessica comes back. I'm needed in the OR, now.
RICH

You'd better wash up, then. Who knows what you've caught in here?
CHRIS

(RICH leaves. CHRIS reinserts the flash drive and starts typing.
JESS comes back in.)

JESS

Did you get it all?

CHRIS

Just about to. Richeroo came in, and he knows.

JESS

That we're onto him?

CHRIS

No. He knows about your history with "Surgical Sterilization Solutions."

(JESS pauses, and CHRIS turns to face her.)

CHRIS

What are the odds of both of you laundering money from the same place?

JESS

Well, at least one embezzler will be out of this hospital. So really, it's a good. We're draining the swamp, driving out the snakes.

CHRIS

Good. Maybe we can celebrate over a nice dinner at The Olde Bar? My treat.

JESS

Are you asking me out? Again? That is highly inappropriate, Chris.

CHRIS

So, is that a no?

JESS

Yes, that's a no. Look, you just focus on the files. I just remembered I left my phone in the bathroom. I'll be right back.

(JESS leaves. CHRIS plays with the Spiderman flash drive.)

CHRIS

Too bad. A pretty little woman like you shouldn't have to go to prison. But that's exactly what's going to happen as soon as your finances make next week's paper.

(CHRIS walks out of the office whistling the Spiderman Theme, and JESS walks back in and types on her computer JESS turns to the repotted aloe plant.)

JESS

(Gradually becoming more of a stone cold bitch)

Well, you did your job. You got Chris and Rich onto my computer. And now instead of my finances, they have viruses.

(JESS chucks the aloe plant in the trash.)

(BLACKOUT)