

“The Perfect Partnership”

a one-act romantic comedy play

by Shelby Deglan

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

STEPHEN: A kind and polite young man with good intentions.

CLARA: A scatterbrained young woman with an imaginative and impulsive ideas.

PENELOPE: Stephen's high maintenance, snobbish girlfriend.

OPERATOR: Offstage.

PUPPY: Though the play centres around a puppy, the animal is inanimate throughout the performance and a stuffed animal or prop may be used.

SCENE

A sidewalk near a park.

TIME

Present day, on a sunny afternoon in summer.

“The Perfect Partnership”

At rise. A sunny day on a sidewalk near a park. A bench is center stage with foliage in the background. Upstage right there is a small table with a telephone on it, representing PENELOPE'S house. There is a separate spotlight to distinguish that part of the stage from the rest.

STEPHEN enters, walking down the sidewalk and holding a puppy. He has his phone to his ear.

STEPHEN: Penelope? Penelope? Come on, please pick up the phone. I'm so sorry about what happened earlier, but I've got the puppy now and I'm on my way to taking him back to the shelter right now. Penelope? ...All right, this is just getting ridiculous. Pick up the phone. I know you're there... I mean, unless you're not. Look, if you're not home, just call me back when you get this, okay? I love you. Penelope—

Lights on PENELOPE, upstage right with the telephone table. PENELOPE picks up the phone. She has a tissue in her hand.

PENELOPE: *(Sneezes)* Hello?

STEPHEN: Penelope, you're there!

PENELOPE: Stephen.

STEPHEN: Like I said, I am *so* sorry. When I get back I will clean everything up, all the hair and slobber, your whole house. There will be absolutely no traces of puppy left, I swear.

PENELOPE: There better not be. Stephen, you knew I was allergic to puppies—

STEPHEN: —I didn't!

PENELOPE: —But still you bring it to my home, let it rummage through my closet. My favourite pair of shoes are ruined now, Stephen. Ruined!

STEPHEN: Well in about ten minutes the puppy will be out of your life forever, I promise. ... Aw, poor guy.

PENELOPE: Excuse me?

STEPHEN: ...And poor you, Penelope. Have your sinuses clear up yet?

PENELOPE sneezes.

I guess, that's a no. (*Laughs, but then stops and clears his throat*) Penelope, I'm sorry.

PENELOPE: I swear, Stephen, I don't even know how I put up with you. You and all your random, lousy, useless gifts. Like the disco ball and the cheese grater. (*Wipes nose*) And now this, a puppy! I'm at a breaking point, Stephen, do you realize that?

STEPHEN: I didn't know you were allergic, I swear—

PENELOPE: It's not like we haven't been over this. I made it very clear when we started dating, didn't I? —I know, I know, you don't need to say it. You thought I'd love your latest gift, you thought I'd be *soooo* happy and you'd score a billion boyfriend points. But there are some gifts that are acceptable and some that are not. A puppy is not. So let's refresh. The acceptable gift categories *are*... What are they, Stephen?

STEPHEN: (*Reciting*) Perfumes, chocolates—

PENELOPE: Low fat only! And what's the third one?

STEPHEN: Uh, jewelry?

PENELOPE: Yes. Jewelry is definitely acceptable. Only fourteen karat and above, though, don't forget that.

STEPHEN: I'll try not to.

PENELOPE: If you ever bring me another one of your surprise gifts, this relationship is over.

STEPHEN: Penelope—

CLARA enters, walking down the sidewalk towards STEPHEN. She is wandering, rather absentmindedly.

PENELOPE: Shush. I don't care if you think I'm going to *loooove* it because I won't. Really, Stephen, why can't you be one of those normal boyfriends and just name a star after me or something?

STEPHEN: I didn't think a star was in an acceptable category of gifts.

PENELOPE: Are you talking back? Are you talking back to me, Stephen?

STEPHEN: No... but— Oomph!

STEPHEN, on the phone, bumps into CLARA. As she stumbles back, STEPHEN drops his phone and steadies her. The groceries tumble to the ground.

Are you okay?

CLARA: Just fine I think. What do you think you're doing, tramping around, not looking where you're going?

STEPHEN: I'm so, so, so sorry. You're sure you're all right?—

CLARA: People these days, don't they look up when they're walking?

STEPHEN: I guess not—

PENELOPE: Stephen? What was that noise?

CLARA: They think they can just blab on the phone and plough everybody else off the sidewalk.

STEPHEN: How inconsiderate of me—

PENELOPE: Answer me right now!

CLARA: I mean, just because you're tremendously handsome doesn't give you an excuse to be rude and ignorant—

STEPHEN: Of course not. Wait, what?

PENELOPE: Okay, Stephen. Very funny. I said no talking back and now you're not talking at all. But I wouldn't push my buttons right now if I were you.

CLARA: You're just lucky it was me, someone who's not going to make a big deal about it.

PENELOPE: If you're playing games with me right now I'm going to kill you.

CLARA: But really, who doesn't look straight ahead when they're walking somewhere?

STEPHEN: Again, I'm awfully sorry —Hey. There's a lot I could criticize about you.

CLARA: Yeah, like what.

STEPHEN: Where were *you* looking when you were walking down the street? Don't you watch where you're walking?

PENELOPE: Hellooooo?

CLARA: All right, all right, it was both our faults. I was just kidding with you anyways. (*Looks down at groceries*) Aw. Look at this mess.

STEPHEN: Let me help you pick all this stuff up. (*Hands CLARA the puppy and picks up groceries.*)

PENELOPE: Stephen, I swear, you are—

Dial tone.

OPERATOR: (*Offstage*) You're call has been disconnected. Please leave a message after the tone.

Tone.

PENELOPE: Stephen, you are the worst boyfriend ever! (*Sneezes.*)

PENELOPE hangs up. Lights down on PENELOPE. STEPHEN stands, having picked up everything.

STEPHEN: That's everything, I think.

CLARA: I like your puppy.

STEPHEN: Oh, jeez. (*Exchanges puppy for groceries*) Sorry. I just didn't want to set him down at all. I don't have a leash so I don't want him running off.

CLARA: You picked up my groceries for me, how kind. Look, why don't we just start again, (*offers hand*) I'm Clara—

STEPHEN: Oh my god! (*Scrambles for phone downstage on hands and knees*) Penelope? Penelope, are you still there? Hello? Dammit. ... Oh! (*Stands and brushes himself off*) Clara. Sorry, again. I'm being so rude, forgive me. Uh, Stephen. (*Shakes hand*) I'm a bit scattered today, this whole... puppy business. Uh, have a good day. (*Starts walking.*)

CLARA: (*Follows*) Look at that, we just happen to be going in the same direction. And I really do like your puppy. You guys going to the park?

STEPHEN: The shelter, actually.

CLARA: People usually take puppies out of the shelter, not bring them back.

STEPHEN: The puppy was for my girlfriend.

CLARA: *(Stops)* Oh. Your girlfriend.

STEPHEN: *(Stops and turns)* Yeah, Penelope. I got this little guy for her at the shelter and I really thought she was going to love him but—

CLARA: Well, I have a boyfriend too. ... And, and these are for him. *(Gestures to groceries.)* ... I buy them and, uh, bring them to his house. He's on crutches. And agoraphobic. It's really quite romantic.

STEPHEN: I hope your boyfriend appreciates it more than Penelope.

CLARA: He does. ... Yup, *my* boyfriend. The boyfriend that I have... somewhere.

STEPHEN: Well, won't he be at home, you know, if he's agoraphobic?

CLARA: He's only agoraphobic in the morning. In the afternoon he likes to wander. ... Yeah. Me and him, him and me, we're a real item. He's tall, very tall, not too tall, a real knight in shining armour type. He looks a lot like you, actually.

STEPHEN'S cellphone rings.

What's that?

STEPHEN: My phone. It's a voicemail notification. Is it okay—

CLARA: No, go on. I'll hold the puppy. *(Sets down groceries and takes the puppy.)*

STEPHEN: —It'll just be a sec. *(Steps away and dials.)*

OPERATOR: *(Offstage)* You have one new message. New message:

Lights on PENELOPE.

PENELOPE: Stephen, you are the worst boyfriend ever! *(Sneezes.)*

Lights down on PENELOPE. STEPHEN hangs up and redials. Lights on PENELOPE. PENELOPE picks up the phone.

PENELOPE: Hello, ex-boyfriend.

STEPHEN: Don't be that way, Penelope, please—

PENELOPE: How dare you hang up on me!

As they talk, CLARA looks around, cuddles the puppy, then sets him free. The puppy leaves the stage. CLARA sits back on the bench.

STEPHEN: I'm sorry, I just got held up, I ran into this girl—

PENELOPE: A girl?

STEPHEN: She was just getting groceries, I knocked her over.

PENELOPE: Knocked her *what?*—

STEPHEN: Over. Don't get worked up.

PENELOPE: Where's the puppy? Have you gotten rid of that mutt yet?

STEPHEN: Not yet, she's got it. *(Turns to CLARA, who does not have the puppy)* Gah! *(He searches frantically, circling the bench and checking behind the foliage)*

PENELOPE: Oh, I see. I didn't want your stupid puppy so you're giving it to some other girl. Classy, Stephen.

STEPHEN: *(Still searching)* Don't you worry, Penelope. I'm taking the puppy to the shelter where it will be out of your life forever. I just got held up a bit. *(Whispers aside to CLARA)* — Where is he?

CLARA shrugs.

STEPHEN: Heh, heh. You know what, Penelope, I was just thinking, why don't I just let the puppy, you know, go free?

PENELOPE: Are you insane?

STEPHEN: It's just that the shelter is so cold and sad, I feel bad taking the poor little guy back.