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Mrs. Henderson's Cat
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4 Plays **by David Lavine**

Featuring:

Bingo and Rose-Marie: At a retreat for convalescing circus performers, Bingo the Clown tries in vain to rediscover his funny bone. An accidental run in with the Fat Lady who jilted him reveals that she's not so fat anymore. All's fair in love and pies. **1 Male, 1 Female.**

Suicide John: John wants to kill himself, but his sweaty, toilet-brush-wielding kidnapper won't let him. John's wife, Yetta comes home from shopping to find herself very, very inconvenienced. A love triangle emerges, as do a gun, carrot-scrapper and pantyhose. **2 Males, 1 Female.**

Smugglers Three: Kiki, Cliff, and Pablo have passports, pills and a plan. Not to mention a 200 pound one-legged Vietnam vet restrained in the bathroom. **2 Males, 1 Female.**

God in Machine: Locked away in a dark attic, young Louis insists he is Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. His harried sister hires a gum-cracking prostitute in an attempt to break the spell of his imaginary world. **1 Male, 2 Females.**

MRS. HENDERSON'S CAT
By Lia Romeo

Characters:

Bobby, 10, a loser (played by a grown-up)

Christine, 11, a pretty girl (played by a grown-up)

Setting:

Middle America.

Time:

The present, or something like it.

Synopsis:

Cats do not have nine lives. And when 10-year-old dork Bobby and 11-year-old pageant princess Christine accidentally kill the cat they're supposed to be caring for, they go on the lam to avoid their inevitable punishment. In a plot that twists and turns like a kitty headed for the bathtub, grand theft auto, petty larceny, sugar highs, pop music and hand holding combine.

MRS. HENDERSON'S CAT

SCENE 1

(An old woman's living room. Clutter, knick knacks, dust. A book-case, at the base of which a cat is sleeping. BOBBY enters the house with a spare key. He looks around nervously. Then he goes to the fridge, opens it, and squirts whipped cream into his mouth from the can. CHRISTINE enters.)

BOBBY *(startled)*: What are you doing here?

CHRISTINE: What are YOU doing here?

BOBBY *(wiping his mouth)*: Working.

CHRISTINE: Gross.

BOBBY: It's actually pretty good. You want some?

CHRISTINE: Ew. That's super fattening.

BOBBY: So? What, are you watching your weight?

CHRISTINE: Yeah.

BOBBY: Why?

CHRISTINE: For pageants.

BOBBY: You look okay.

CHRISTINE: Are you hitting on me?

BOBBY: No!

CHRISTINE: Are too.

BOBBY: Am not.

CHRISTINE: Are too.

BOBBY: Am not! I'm just saying – you don't have to diet. I mean you're only eleven.

CHRISTINE: I've been on a diet since I was seven.

(Beat.)

So what are you doing here?

BOBBY: Mrs. Henderson engaged my services to provide for her feline.

CHRISTINE: What?

BOBBY: She employed me to nourish her bestial companion.

(CHRISTINE gives him a blank look.)

BOBBY: She, uh, she hired me to take care of her cat. While she's away.

CHRISTINE: No she didn't.

BOBBY: Did too.

CHRISTINE: Did not.

BOBBY: Did too.

CHRISTINE: Did not. Know why?

BOBBY: Why?

CHRISTINE: Cause Mrs. Henderson hired *me* to take care of her cat.

BOBBY: When?

CHRISTINE: Yesterday afternoon.

BOBBY: Well, she hired *me* yesterday morning.

CHRISTINE: She must've thought you weren't gonna do a good job and hired me instead.

BOBBY: Why would she think *you* would do it any better than I would?

CHRISTINE: Maybe cause I'm not a freak who steals whipped cream and has no friends.

BOBBY: I don't have time for friends. I've only got seven years till I have to apply to Harvard.

CHRISTINE: They're not gonna let somebody with no friends into Harvard.

BOBBY: Are too.

CHRISTINE: Are not.

BOBBY: Are too. My parents both went there. Plus I've had a 4.0 since like kindergarten.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, well, you might get good grades, but I bet you don't know anything about cats.

BOBBY: Do too. I spent all last night reading about them at the library.

CHRISTINE: You spent Friday night at the library?
(*making an L with her fingers*)
Loser.

BOBBY: What did you do last night?

CHRISTINE: First I had dance lessons, then I met with my pageant coach, and then Katie Spencer's mom took us all out for burgers, except none of us eat burgers, so we just looked at other people eating burgers and talked about how fat they were gonna get.

BOBBY (*sarcastic*): Sounds fun.

CHRISTINE: It was.
(*Beat.*)
Kind of.
(*Beat.*)
More fun than the library.

BOBBY: Cats are amazingly resilient animals, did you know that?

CHRISTINE: Re – what?

BOBBY: Resilient. They can survive almost anything. Like this one guy, he dropped a cat off a nine story building.

CHRISTINE: Ew, that's so mean!

BOBBY: I know. But the cat was fine. It landed on its feet.

CHRISTINE: Really?

BOBBY: Yeah, and this other cat? This guy dropped a piano on it.

CHRISTINE: And it was okay? No way.

BOBBY: Way.

(They both look at the sleeping cat for a moment.)

BOBBY: So as you can see, thanks to my vast trove of feline knowledge, I am eminently capable of looking after this particular cat.

CHRISTINE: So?

BOBBY: So you can just . . . go home.

CHRISTINE *(shaking her head)*: Mrs. Henderson said she'd pay me twenty-five dollars for the weekend.

BOBBY: Mrs. Henderson said she'd pay *me* twenty-five dollars for the weekend. Maybe she got confused. She's pretty old.

CHRISTINE: She's *super* old. And super scary. Bettina Smith said one time she was walking her dog, and the dog pooped on Mrs. Henderson's lawn, and Mrs. Henderson came out screaming and waving a gun.

BOBBY: No way.

CHRISTINE: Way. Unless Bettina was lying. But she won't even walk her dog on our block anymore.

BOBBY: Whoa.

(Beat.)

I was really nervous when I first came in here.

CHRISTINE: I know, me too. I mean, look at this place.

BOBBY: I know. She's probably got mutilated corpses behind the couch or something.

CHRISTINE: Muti-what?

BOBBY: Mutilated corpses. You know, like dead bodies with the ears and legs cut off.

CHRISTINE: Ew. You're super weird.

BOBBY: Am not.

CHRISTINE: Are too.

BOBBY: Am not.

CHRISTINE: Are too.

BOBBY: Mrs. Henderson's the one that's weird. I bet if you look back there you'll find some freaky stuff.

CHRISTINE: I am not looking back there. That's gross.

BOBBY: If you look, and there's nothing there, I'll let you feed the cat.

(CHRISTINE considers.)

CHRISTINE: What if there is something there?

BOBBY: You have to kiss me.

CHRISTINE: Ew!!!

BOBBY: I'm just kidding.
(Beat.)
You have to let me feed the cat.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

BOBBY: Shake on it.

(He puts out his hand. She ignores it.)

CHRISTINE: Ew. You've probably been picking your nose and stuff.

(He drops his hand, dejected. She approaches the couch slowly and looks behind it.)

CHRISTINE: Nothing there.

(She looks underneath it.)

CHRISTINE: Nothing there.

(She lifts the cushions.)

CHRISTINE: Nothing . . . oh!

(She pulls a pistol from under the couch cushions.)

BOBBY: It's a gun!

CHRISTINE: Duh.
(Beat.)
I guess Bettina wasn't lying.

BOBBY: Is it loaded?

CHRISTINE: I think so. It feels heavy.

BOBBY: I wonder if she's ever killed anybody with it.

CHRISTINE: I bet she has.

BOBBY: Can I hold it?

CHRISTINE: You're not gonna go all Columbine, are you?

BOBBY: How do *you* know about Columbine?

CHRISTINE: It was super tragic. They had to cancel the Little Miss Winchester pageant that year.

(She hands him the gun. He turns it over in his hands.)

BOBBY: So I won the bet.

CHRISTINE: You did not.

BOBBY: Did too!

CHRISTINE: Did not!

BOBBY: Did too! And I need that money. I want to start investing in the stock market.

CHRISTINE: I need it too. I want to get the new Hannah Montana CD.

(She picks up a bag of cat food.)

CHRISTINE: I'm gonna feed the cat and there's nothing you can do about it.

BOBBY: Oh yeah?

(He drops the pistol and grabs the other end of the bag.)

CHRISTINE: Hey!

(They struggle. CHRISTINE backs into the bookcase. The bookcase crashes over and falls . . . squarely on top of the sleeping cat. A single high-pitched yowl, and then silence.)

CHRISTINE: Oh . . . my . . . gosh.

(BOBBY approaches the bookcase, lifts up the corner, and pulls out the cat by its tail. It does not move. He picks it up by the tail. It hangs limp. He drops it.)

CHRISTINE: Is it dead?

BOBBY: Uh huh.

CHRISTINE: Are you sure?

BOBBY: Indisputably.

CHRISTINE: That means yes?

(BOBBY nods.)

CHRISTINE: But you said cats were re – re –

BOBBY: Resilient?

CHRISTINE: Yeah! You said they could survive almost anything!

BOBBY *(looking at the bookcase)*: Almost.

CHRISTINE: You said a guy dropped a *piano* on a cat -

BOBBY: That might have been a bear, actually.

CHRISTINE: Well, what do we do?

BOBBY: I don't know! It's your fault!

CHRISTINE: Me? You grabbed the cat food!

BOBBY: Yeah, but you bumped into the bookcase!

CHRISTINE: Only cause you made me!

BOBBY: Did not!

CHRISTINE: Did too!

BOBBY: Did not!

CHRISTINE: Did too!

BOBBY: Did not!

CHRISTINE: It doesn't matter. Mrs. Henderson's not gonna know it was me.

BOBBY: Sure she will. She'll call in the cops, and they'll use forensic evidence.

(off her confused look)

They'll dust for fingerprints – or back prints – or whatever. They'll be able to tell her exactly what happened.

CHRISTINE: Really?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. What are we gonna do?

BOBBY: I don't know.

CHRISTINE: You have to know! You're smart!

BOBBY: Yeah, but –

CHRISTINE: You can figure this out, Bobby, I know it! What should we do?

(She seizes his hand. Long pause.)

BOBBY: Well, there's only one thing we *can* do.

CHRISTINE: What?

BOBBY: Go on the run.

(She drops his hand.)

CHRISTINE: We can't do that.

BOBBY: Do you know what Mrs. Henderson's gonna do if she catches us? I'm ten years old. I'm not ready to die.

CHRISTINE: You're only ten?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: How'd you get to be in sixth grade?

BOBBY: I skipped a grade when I was younger.

CHRISTINE: Whoa.

BOBBY: It wasn't a big deal.

(A moment.)

CHRISTINE: I can't run away. My mom would freak out!

BOBBY: What would she do if Mrs. Henderson shot you?

CHRISTINE: Freak out, I guess.

(BOBBY notices a hook next to the door with car keys hanging on it.)

BOBBY: We can take Mrs. Henderson's car.

CHRISTINE: I don't know how to drive. Do you?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Really?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Where would we go?

BOBBY: Mexico. That's where they always go in the movies.

CHRISTINE: But I don't speak Mexican.

BOBBY: Spanish.

CHRISTINE: Do you?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Really?

BOBBY: No. But we can figure that out once we get there.

CHRISTINE: But I've got the Little Miss Kleenex pageant coming up in a month. How am I gonna be Little Miss Kleenex if I'm in Mexico?

BOBBY: Look, we're not gonna be gone forever. Just until Mrs. Henderson forgets that it was us.

CHRISTINE: How long do you think that'll take?

BOBBY: Well, she forgot she'd hired us both to feed her cat pretty quickly. Forgetting we *killed* her cat -

CHRISTINE: And stole her car -

BOBBY: And stole her car. That might take a little bit longer.

CHRISTINE: But she's super old.

BOBBY: Yeah, and probably totally senile. So it shouldn't be more than - I don't know - a couple of weeks.

CHRISTINE: I've gotta pack some clothes and stuff. I'll tell my mom I'm spending the night at a friend's house - you should too.

BOBBY: I don't have any friends, remember?

CHRISTINE: Oh, yeah.

BOBBY: I'll say I'm going to the library - the college library. That one stays open all night.

(Beat.)

Do you have any money?

CHRISTINE: Twelve dollars and seventy-three cents.

BOBBY: Bring it. I'll try and bring some too.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

BOBBY: I'll meet you outside in ten minutes.

(She exits. BOBBY looks around the living room. He exits. Then he reenters, goes to the couch, grabs the pistol, and puts it in his backpack. He exits again. He reenters, goes to the fridge and stuffs the can of whipped cream in his backpack as well. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(Mrs. Henderson's car. BOBBY, sitting on two phone books, is in the driver's seat. CHRISTINE emerges from her house carrying a bright pink backpack overflowing with clothes. She glances around, then runs to the car and jumps in the passenger side. With a terrible screeching sound, BOBBY starts the car. The car swerves as it careens down the street. CHRISTINE screams.)

CHRISTINE: I thought you knew how to drive!

BOBBY: I do!

(The car swerves wildly and CHRISTINE screams again.)

BOBBY: Kind of.

(He gets the car under control.)

BOBBY: I've done it lots of times.

CHRISTINE: Lots of times?

BOBBY: A few times.

CHRISTINE: How many times?

BOBBY: Once.

(Beat.)

Including now.

CHRISTINE: Oh my gosh.

BOBBY: I just had a little trouble getting started. It's gonna be fine.

(The car swerves, collides with something, swerves back.)

CHRISTINE: Oh my gosh.

(BOBBY indicates the folded map on his lap.)

BOBBY: Now listen. Since I'm driving, you have to be the navigator.
(forestalling her question)
The map reader. We've gotta head south. And I think we should stay
off the main roads.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, so you don't kill anybody.

BOBBY: No! So nobody sees us.

CHRISTINE *(sarcastic)*: Right.

(She takes the map and studies it.)

CHRISTINE: Okay. There's this road here.

(BOBBY leans over to study the map. The car swerves. CHRISTINE screams.)

BOBBY: Yeah, that looks perfect.

CHRISTINE: Okay. So take a . . . um . . . left up here on Vine.

BOBBY: Okay.
(A moment of silence.)
We should take inventory.

CHRISTINE: Huh?

BOBBY: Figure out what we've got.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

(She begins pulling items out of her backpack.)

CHRISTINE: Three shirts. Two pairs of jeans. One pair of heels.
(off his look)
My mom says a girl should never go away without a pair of heels. A
Hannah Montana CD – the old one. And twelve dollars and seventy-
three cents.

CHRISTINE (cont'd):
(pleased with herself)
Pretty good, huh?
(off his look)
I fit all that in one backpack! My mom had *no* idea.

BOBBY: Okay . . .

CHRISTINE: What did *you* bring?

BOBBY: A six-pack of Mountain Dew. A package of Slim Jims.

CHRISTINE: Ew. I don't drink Mountain Dew. Or eat Slim Jims.

BOBBY: Well, I'm sorry I couldn't provide an ideal culinary assortment.

(Beat.)

Also twenty bucks.

CHRISTINE: Cool!

BOBBY: In quarters.

CHRISTINE: Whatever.

(BOBBY turns the wheel. A sound of the car scraping the curb.)

CHRISTINE: Watch out!

BOBBY: I'm okay. I'm okay.

(Beat.)

After I turn left on Vine, then what?

(CHRISTINE studies the map.)

CHRISTINE: Then turn, um, right on Melbourne.

BOBBY: Okay.

(Beat.)

Can you hand me the Slim Jims?

(CHRISTINE hands BOBBY a package of Slim Jims. He takes the can of whipped cream out of his backpack, squirts whipped cream on a Slim Jim, and eats it.)

CHRISTINE: Ew!

BOBBY: It's actually pretty good.

CHRISTINE: Whatever.

(Beat.)

Can I put on my Hannah Montana CD?

BOBBY: I don't think desperadoes listen to Hannah Montana.

CHRISTINE: Despe – what?

BOBBY: Outlaws.

CHRISTINE: Did *you* bring any CDs?

BOBBY: No.

(CHRISTINE puts on the Hannah Montana CD and begins dancing and singing along softly. BOBBY gives her a look and goes on driving.)

SCENE 3

(Late that afternoon. BOBBY pulls the car into the parking lot of a convenience store.)

CHRISTINE: Why are we stopping?

BOBBY: We're almost out of gas.

CHRISTINE: Again?

BOBBY: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Do we have any money left?

BOBBY *(counting coins)*: Two dollars . . . and fifty three cents.

CHRISTINE: That's not enough, is it.

BOBBY: No. I didn't think gas was gonna cost so much.

CHRISTINE: So what are we gonna do?

BOBBY: Not "we." You.

CHRISTINE: Me what?

BOBBY: You're gonna hold up the convenience store.

CHRISTINE: What?

BOBBY: I brought Mrs. Henderson's gun. You're gonna take it in there and you're gonna say, give me all the money in the cash register.

CHRISTINE: No I'm not!

BOBBY: Are too.

CHRISTINE: Am not.

BOBBY: Are too.

CHRISTINE: Am not.

BOBBY: Are too. Know why?

CHRISTINE: Why?

BOBBY: Cause somebody's gotta drive the getaway car so we can speed away into the night.

CHRISTINE: Afternoon.

BOBBY: Whatever. And you can't drive.

CHRISTINE: I can't hold up a convenience store either!

(Beat.)

BOBBY: Christine. We're criminals. Yesterday you were Little Miss I don't know what, but today you're a criminal. You're on the run. You're three hundred miles from home. You can't go back, because Mrs. Henderson will kill you. She'll take a shotgun and blow a

BOBBY (cont'd):

hole right through your pink headband and into your head. And you can't go on, because we don't have any gas, and in order to get some gas we need some money. And the only way we can get any money is if you go in there and get us some. Now, I tried not to use any big words, but is there anything about that you don't understand?

(CHRISTINE is crying soundlessly.)

CHRISTINE: You're so mean. I never knew you could be so mean.

BOBBY: I don't want to. I'm sorry. I just – I can do it, if you can drive, do you want to drive?

CHRISTINE: I want my *mom!*

BOBBY: I know. Me too.

(Beat.)

CHRISTINE: You should drive. I'd kill us. Give me the gun.

(BOBBY reaches under the seat and hands her the gun. She puts it in her pocket and pulls her shirt over it.)

BOBBY: You gonna be all right?

CHRISTINE: I think so.

(She gets out of the car and goes into the store. BOBBY drums his fingers on the wheel nervously. He tries to peer inside. He shakes his head. Finally CHRISTINE comes running out of the store, hair flying behind her. She is clutching a giant wad of cash. She gets in the car.)

CHRISTINE: Go! Go!

(BOBBY peels away from the store. The car veers wildly from side to side.)

BOBBY: You did it?

CHRISTINE: I did it! Bobby, I did it! Woo hoo!

BOBBY: Woo hoo! Yeah!

(BOBBY takes the can of whipped cream and squirts whipped cream into his mouth.)

CHRISTINE: Me too, me too!

(He squirts whipped cream into her mouth. They whoop and holler as they drive into the distance.)

SCENE 4

(Night. A field. The car is parked nearby. BOBBY unrolls a blanket.)

CHRISTINE: You think this is safe?

BOBBY: Yeah. We're kinda in the middle of nowhere.

(He sits down and opens his backpack.)

BOBBY: You want some whipped cream?

CHRISTINE: I shouldn't.

BOBBY: You did this afternoon.

CHRISTINE: That was a special occasion.

BOBBY: Your first armed robbery?

CHRISTINE: Yeah.

BOBBY: Then it's still a special occasion. Like Christmas is still a holiday after you open the presents.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, I guess. The rest of Christmas kinda sucks.

BOBBY: Yeah, but it'd be way better if everybody ate whipped cream.

(CHRISTINE smiles. BOBBY hands her the can. She sits down beside him and squirts it into her mouth.)

BOBBY: Mountain Dew?

(She shrugs consent. He hands her a soda.)

BOBBY: It's like we're at the movies.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, except there's no movie.

BOBBY: Yeah.

(An awkward moment.)

CHRISTINE: You know what's funny?

BOBBY: What?

CHRISTINE: Yesterday it would have scared me really bad to spend the night in the middle of nowhere in a cornfield.

BOBBY: How about today?

CHRISTINE: Today it doesn't scare me at all.

BOBBY: That was really brave this afternoon, how you went in there.

CHRISTINE: I didn't want to.

BOBBY: I know.

CHRISTINE: But I think it's like my mom says. Sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do, so that you can do things you do want to do.

BOBBY: Yeah, that makes sense.

CHRISTINE: Like I want to win pageants, so I have to be on a diet.

(She eats some more whipped cream.)

CHRISTINE: Most of the time.

BOBBY: Yeah, and I want to get into Harvard, so I have to study all the time and not have a normal social life.

CHRISTINE: You probably wouldn't have a normal social life anyhow.

BOBBY: Hey!

CHRISTINE: I'm just kidding.

(Beat.)

Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it, though. Like my mom really wants me to win cause she always did. She was Miss John Deere and Miss Dinty Moore Beef Stew. And she was Miss Trojan Condoms for a couple of months, but then she accidentally got pregnant with me so they took her title away.

(Beat.)

So now she wants me to be good – and I am – but sometimes I'm not sure if it's me wanting it or her wanting it – I don't know. This probably sounds stupid.

BOBBY: No it doesn't. I know what you mean. My dad went to Harvard, and my mom went to Harvard, and both my grandpas went to Harvard, and both my grandmas would've gone to Harvard except they didn't allow girls back then. So obviously I'm gonna go to Harvard, but, like, what if I wanted to go to Brown? Or Columbia? Or even Ball State? Or what if I didn't even want to go to college – I mean I do, obviously I want to go to college, but what if I didn't?

CHRISTINE: Yeah.

(Beat.)

Well, at least you can go to Harvard if you want. I couldn't.

BOBBY: You didn't think you could rob that convenience store either.

(Beat.)

I think you can do anything you want to.

CHRISTINE: Really?

BOBBY: Yeah. I mean you're obviously multitalented. You're really good at pageants and at armed robbery.