

CHARACTERS, INC.

By Amy Zipperer

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CHARACTERS, INC.**A COLLECTION OF SHORT PLAYS***A One Act Comedy***By Amy Zipperer**

SYNOPSIS: Ever felt weighed down by tough obstacles? The characters in this collection know just how you feel. In *Personality Shop*, Sarah, a girl who's been having trouble in relationships, seeks to reinvent herself with the help of her peppy friend and an enthusiastic personality salesman. In *Mr. Compatible*, a girl who's been experiencing frustration with the whole dating scene decides to treat finding love like a business, complete with spreadsheets, but her date has other ideas. In *Poster Child*, Lucy turns to her imaginary rock star boyfriend when things get upsetting at school, but even he can't satisfy her long-term needs.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(2-5 females, 1-3 males, 3 either, gender flexible, doubling possible)***PERSONALITY SHOP**

SARAH (f)

RUTH (f)

SALESMAN (m)

MR. COMPATIBLE

LUCY (f)

MRS. LOGAN (f)

IZZY WADE (m)

MOONBEAM STEWART (m/f)

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 (m/f)

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 (m/f)

POSTER CHILD

GIRL (f)

ERIC PORKBELLY MARTIN (m)

DURATION: 40 minutes.

PROPS**PERSONALITY SHOP**

- White Goddess Costume
- Hollywood Starlet Costume
- Shopping Bags
- Cash
- Pile of Shoe Boxes
- Mirror
- Service Bell
- Money
- Grecian Sandals
- Costume that is identical to Sarah's but with a Blue sweater

MR. COMPATIBLE

- Book
- Dictionary
- Guitar
- Stereo
- Bowl
- Microphone
- Laptop Computer

POSTER CHILD

- Candles (and lighter, unless candles are battery operated)
- Clipboard with Paper
- Phone
- Pencil
- 4+ Rorschach cards (one of a heart)
- Woman's Coat

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Though the plays in this collection feature a diverse group of characters and plots, they are presented here as one unit because they are thematically intertwined. All three of the short plays in the collection speak to the same problem: How do we forge meaningful relationships in a disconnected world? In the end, each of the plays puts forward the premise that we must be our most authentic selves if we are going to build relationships that are vital, meaningful, and real.

Do Not Copy

PERSONALITY SHOP

By Amy Zipper

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 1 male)

- SARAH (f)..... A girl, shaken up by a series of failed relationships. *(29 lines)*
- RUTH (f)..... Cheerleader, upbeat and peppy. *(31 lines)*
- SALESMAN (m) Peddler of personalities. *(20 lines)*

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A small costume shop. Racks of costumes and a few chairs dominate the space inside the shop.

PROPS

- White Goddess Costume
- Hollywood Starlet Costume
- Shopping Bags
- Cash
- Pile of Shoe Boxes
- Mirror
- Service Bell
- Money
- Grecian Sandals
- Costume that is identical to Sarah's but with a Blue sweater

COSTUMES

RUTH – Cheerleader uniform.

SARAH – A simple dress and pink cardigan, think Sandra Dee.

SALESMAN – Dressed as a superhero.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The crux of the play lies in our understanding that Sarah is yearning for a real relationship with a man who values the real her. In order to showcase who Sarah really is and what she desires most, go way over the top with the personalities Sarah assumes during the costume changes. When she is a starlet, she's the dumbest starlet who ever lived. When she is the goddess, she is the bossiest goddess. Use stock costumes for all of the characters in the play to heighten understanding of how we sometimes shirk our true selves in favor of other society-manufactured selves.

Personality Shop also finds its fun in the juxtaposition of the real and the unreal. Sarah has a good sense of her authentic self when the play begins, so she functions as the real in the world of the play. Everything else in the world of the play represents the unreal. Her friend, Ruth, relies on an artificial personality as does the Salesman. The shop is a great place to insert extras who can further showcase how the "costumes" we put on in our lives inevitably lead to a hard-to-navigate artificial world full of artificial people.

AT START: SARAH and RUTH enter.

RUTH: I'm telling you, Sarah. You're going to love this place. They've got anything you want. We're going to find exactly what you're looking for H.E.R.E. here. You'll see.

SARAH: I don't know about this. Maybe I should keep the personality I've got. After all, it does fit perfectly, and I'm a difficult size. Plus, they're closing in five minutes.

RUTH: No can do on keeping that personality. It's not working for you, honey. I know they say that a man wants a saccharine sweet woman who can cook all day and never dirty a pot. The kind of woman who understands the importance of a Saturday golf game and the fun of Sunday football, but it's just a myth. If you want to know the truth, men crave a little drama. A spitfire who can get a little nasty when she doesn't get her way. (*Sifts through the racks and comes up with a white goddess costume.*) They want somebody like her.

SARAH: What is it?

RUTH: The goddess. Try it on. You'll feel sensational. Talk about empowerment. (*Visibly excited.*)

SARAH: I just want to go home and cook a pot roast. I don't know. Maybe it's not a problem with my personality. I don't like drama. Oh, sure. I can put on one of these other personalities, but what happens when it starts to wear out? The real me is going to start shining through the holes. What then? I just haven't met the right man, the one who can value *this* me.

RUTH: You don't really believe that, do you? Come on. You've been through four relationships in three years. Try it on. I know you can do it. How'd you like to have the power to make any man fall in love with you for keeps? Let's go.

SARAH takes the white goddess costume. She steps into the white goddess costume while RUTH settles into a chair. SARAH twists and turns to show off her new personality.

RUTH: What do you think?

SARAH: It's a little big right here under the arms.

RUTH: That's an easy fix. A few quick stitches. How do you *feel*?

SARAH: Her goodly eyes like sapphires shining bright, her forehead ivory white, her cheeks like apples which the sun hath rudded, her lips like cherries charming men to bite. (*A bit bossily.*) Let me see your mirror.

RUTH pulls out a mirror.

SARAH: I knew it. I'm beautiful. Look at this, would you? Have you ever seen eyelashes like these?

RUTH throws her hands up in a gesture of pure power.

SARAH: I want a man. (*Nothing happens.*) I want a man. (*Nothing happens.*) This one's broken. (*Rings a service bell.*) Where's the help around this place? Excuse me. Hello?

SALESMAN enters at high speed, carrying a big stack of boxes. He sets the boxes down and jumps over them, then flexes his muscles.

RUTH: There's your man.

SALESMAN: My God, you're a raven-haired Athena. Or is it Aphrodite?

SALESMAN sinks to one knee, takes SARAH'S hand and kisses it.

SALESMAN: I'm determined to sell you this personality. (*Used car salesman-y.*) How are you liking it? Amazing fit, really. And did you see the Grecian sandals? What'll it take to put you in this personality today? This tag says \$35.00, but because that personality won't fit anyone else like it fits you, (*Looking around to make certain that no one else sees this crazy deal.*) \$32.99. (*With hands on hips, he makes a determined face, which will remain constant throughout each time he gets very determined.*)

RUTH: My friend Sarah –

SARAH: Tell me again how beautiful I am.

SALESMAN: It'd be a crime if you walked out of this shop without that personality. And you know what these guns do to criminals.

SARAH practices her goddess arms.

RUTH: Are there any problems associated with this particular personality? Any common returns?

SALESMAN: None at all. Just none. *(Long pause.)* I cannot tell a lie. *(Seems annoyed by his need to be honest.)* We've had a few returns. Not many. A few. 37 actually. *(Jumps over the boxes and flexes his muscles.)*

RUTH: Why?

SALESMAN: Complaints of alienation of same-gender friends.

SARAH: Oh, is that all? It's a small price to pay. *(To RUTH.)* No offense. I feel like I could rule the world, you know?

RUTH: Or sink a thousand ships. You may need to build up to this personality. We'll find a better one.

SARAH: No, I really like this one. *(Really wicked.)* You're just jealous. Oh, my God. Why did I say that? What a horrible thing to say.

RUTH: It's starting already.

SARAH: Maybe this isn't a great choice. It'd probably be overwhelming to be loved by so many men anyways.

RUTH: Yeah, a real drag.

SARAH: Plus, white. Think of how hard it'd be to keep this clean.

RUTH: True. And it's a little big under the arms.

SARAH: *(To SALESMAN.)* Help me find something else. *(Snaps her fingers, then looks horrified. She steps out of the goddess costume.)* How about this one? *(Moves to rack and holds up a Hollywood starlet costume.)*

SALESMAN: This is our most popular personality. I think you're really going to like it.

SARAH: *(Steps into the Hollywood starlet costume.)* What do you think?

RUTH: I really like it. It's G.R.E.A.T. How does it make you feel?

SARAH: I love my legs. That's for sure. It's a perfect...what's the word I'm looking for?...fit. It's the perfect fit. *(Wiggles around uncomfortably.)* What's this made of? Wool? Do you have a cigarette?

RUTH: You don't smoke.

SARAH: Yes, I do. Don't I? How's my pout? (*Puffs out her lips.*)

SALESMAN: I have to say. There is an air of glamour about you.

SARAH: And look at this. Happy. (*Makes a happy face.*) Sad. (*Makes a happy face.*) Sultry. (*Makes a happy face.*) Frightened. (*Makes a happy face.*)

SALESMAN: That's very good. Actually, that's not very good. Maybe with practice you could-

RUTH: This isn't the one. Take it off.

SARAH: Why? It feels fine to me. Except. Do you have a cigarette? I always think better with a cigarette.

RUTH: You don't smoke.

SARAH: Happy Birthday, Mr. Superhero Salesman. Do you have a cigarette? (*Practices her poses.*)

RUTH: Any returns on this one?

SARAH: Is this the way to Europe, France?

SALESMAN: Fewer than you'd think. Most women are willing to trade intellect for self-esteem. To tell you the truth, every personality has its pros and cons. Take mine for instance. On the up side, I feel very athletic. (*Jumps over boxes.*) And I exhibit classically good behaviors like determination and honesty. On the down side, the honesty can get in the way of immediate goals. Plus, this particular model is lacking the brooding trait that some of the newer models are featuring. I got it on sale, but still.

RUTH: Take it off, would you?

SARAH: Take what off?

RUTH: The personality. Take it off.

SARAH: I feel a little funny. Why did I want a new personality again?

RUTH: You're a doormat. Men treat you like crap because they sense that they can.

SARAH: Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. How sad. (*Makes a happy face.*) You know, this personality itches a bit.

RUTH: That's right. Take it off, honey. We'll find something even better. (*Steps out of the Hollywood starlet costume.*)

SALESMAN: We're closing in two minutes. Maybe you could come back tomorrow.

RUTH: You've got to have something for her. Come on. Let's get determined.

SALESMAN perks up a bit.

SARAH: They don't have anything for me.

RUTH: Yes, they do. Don't you?

SALESMAN: I think I might have something. Now, let's see... It was in the back and I thought I brought it out... *(Searches racks/boxes for a costume.)* I'm determined to find that thing. It's around here somewhere. *(Runs offstage exiting.)*

SARAH: I'm exhausted. I want to go. They are closing and there's nothing here for me. I told you I was hard to fit! I should never have come here. I didn't even want to. *(Begins to pull at her original outfit.)*

RUTH: Let's get fired up about this. Last one. This is going to be it. I can feel it.

SALESMAN enters with a costume.

SALESMAN: I've got it. The perfect personality for you! Guaranteed to... *(Begins to trail off as he notices that the outfit that he's holding is exactly the same as the one SARAH has on, except the sweater is blue instead of pink.)* Well, this is awkward.

SARAH: I love it!

RUTH: You can't buy this. It's exactly the same.

SARAH: No, it isn't. The sweater is blue. *(Removes her sweater and puts on the blue one.)*

SALESMAN: How does it feel?

SARAH: Perfect. It's a perfect fit. Sold.

SALESMAN: That's what determination gets you.

RUTH: You know that we're not solving anything here, right? You are going to have exactly the same problems. Men are going to continue to grow bored of your constant need to please.

SALESMAN: Actually, I really like this you. I'd like to be pleased.

SARAH: Really?

SALESMAN: It has to be true. There's something very appealing about a girl who feels comfortable in her own skin. Doesn't happen very often. Heck, last week I was a moody drifter and the week before that I was death. Talk about a personality crisis.

RUTH: Ring us up, I guess.

SALESMAN: That'll be \$33.27.

RUTH: I'll take the goddess, too. (*Motions to bag.*) Goddess.

SALESMAN: (*Lifting an eyebrow.*) \$79.06.

RUTH hands the money over.

RUTH: (*Without cheerleader vibe.*) Let's go. Thanks for your help.

SALESMAN bags costumes and hands them to SARAH and RUTH.

SALESMAN: Come again, ladies.

SARAH and RUTH exit, with their bags.

SALESMAN: It's all in a day's work for Roger Man.

SALESMAN stacks the boxes a little higher, jumps and knocks the boxes over.

END OF PLAY

POSTER CHILD

By Amy Zipperer

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 1 male, 3 either; gender flexible)

LUCY LOGAN (f).....	Basic tormented teenage girl. <i>(34 lines)</i>
MRS. LOGAN (f).....	Lucy's mom. <i>(12 lines)</i>
IZZY WADE (m).....	Rockstar, confident and uninhibited. <i>(18 lines)</i>
MOONBEAM STEWART (m/f).....	Popular television talk show host. <i>(9 lines)</i>
AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 (m/f).....	Izzy's adoring fan. <i>(2 lines)</i>
AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 (m/f).....	Izzy's adoring fan. <i>(3 lines)</i>

COSTUMES

- LUCY – Noticeably pocked by acne cream and with hair in pigtails and a roller in her bangs
- MRS. LOGAN – Conservative mom attire.
- IZZY WADE – Could have full tattoo sleeves and a killer head scarf.
- MOONBEAM STEWART – Smart business attire.
- AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 – Typical teenage garb.
- AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 – Typical teenage garb and a knockoff Coach bag.

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A teenage girl's bedroom, sparsely furnished with a bed and a mirror but cluttered with litter, stuffed animals, and piles of schoolbooks. At downstage right, two chairs and a twinkly marquee that reads "The Moonbeam Stewart Show" establish the set for a television talk show. The upstage wall features a large blank white poster.

PROPS

- Book
- Dictionary
- Guitar
- Stereo
- Bowl
- Microphone
- Laptop Computer

SPECIAL EFFECTS

- Loud Rock Music
- Talk Show Entrance Music

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The gravitas of *Poster Child* resides in the irony that Lucy is unable to memorize Hamlet's "What a piece of work is man" soliloquy. In this soliloquy, Hamlet, speaking to his disloyal friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, laments that he is unable to find any joy in the world. While Lucy struggles with the dense language of Shakespeare's work, she actually feels exactly like Hamlet does. In production, the unreal world should be over the top. Another key to a good production is really working through the Hamlet monologue with the cast. The student who plays Lucy should be able to nail the monologue when she recites it at the end of the play. If she can do this, the audience will understand that Lucy is going to overcome language as an oppressor, both in her school assignment as well as in her ability to rise above the hurtful language of cyber-bullying.

AT START: *LUCY sits cross-legged on the bed, poring over a book. IZZY WADE thrashes around with his guitar to SFX: Loud rock music.*

LUCY: Can you turn that down?

Nothing from IZZY.

LUCY: Can you turn that down?

Nothing. LUCY grabs IZZY'S arm and motions for him to turn the music down. He motions back that he can't understand then offers up a big strum. LUCY gets up and turns the music off, returns to bed and book.

IZZY: Come on, babe. How do you expect me to practice without my band behind me?

LUCY: You've recorded 21 albums. You don't need practice.

IZZY: That's a harsh tone, Luce. What's got my girl down, huh?

LUCY: It's just everything, Izzy.

IZZY plops onto the bed and awkwardly smooths her pigtails.

LUCY: For one, I have this monologue to recite for my theater class tomorrow, and I just can't seem to wrap my mind around it. It's gibberish. What's a sterile promontory?

IZZY thinks it over but gets nowhere fast.

LUCY: How can I remember something that I can't even understand?

IZZY: That's nothing. Just schoolwork. *(Swats away the notion of excelling at academics.)*

LUCY: It's not just the Shakespeare. Today someone- *(LUCY leaves the bed and turns away from IZZY so that he can't see that she's tearing up.)* Today someone. Somebody. What happened was –

IZZY: Spit it out, sweetheart. I've got an intense session to get back to.

LUCY: You know you're the only one I'd ever tell this to.

IZZY: That's how it goes with love. Good power ballad lyric! (*Stands on the bed for his mock concert. Singing*) THAT'S HOW IT GOES WITH LOVE.

LUCY: I'm trying to tell you something.

IZZY: (*Still in mock concert.*) And I cannot wait to hear.

LUCY: Someone at my school started a Facebook group for "I bet this pickle has more friends than Lucy Logan."

IZZY: (*Becomes insanely enraged.*) Who is it? The one who invited you out to the lake for the junior party that didn't really exist? And you got all dressed up. Remember that? What was her name? Megan? Oh, no. I know. It was that girl who put a dollar bill on the ground right behind you then made the farting noise right when you were bent over to pick it up? Andrea. It's that Julie, isn't it? The one that... Well, you know the one. What. A. Skank.

LUCY: I don't know who it is. It could be anybody. It's just someone who hates me.

IZZY: So big deal. One person hates you.

LUCY: The group has 63 members so far.

IZZY: Lots of people hate me because of my fame and my (*proud*) looks. It's the same with you. Beauty. Brains.

LUCY: Beauty? Look at all these zits. Yuck. And I don't even know what a sterile promontory is. I'm such a loser.

IZZY: I got it!!! We've got to set it to music. You know how easy it is to remember song lyrics. This is fierce. Look at this. (*Takes up the book, thinks over his choices. Singing*) WHAT A PIECE OF WORK IS A MAN! HOW NOBLE IN REASON? HOW INFINITE IN FACULTY? IN FORM AND MOVING HOW EXPRESS AND ADMIRABLE? IN ACTION, HOW LIKE AN ANGEL? IN APPREHENSION, HOW LIKE A GOD? THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD, THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS.

LUCY: That's just dumb.

MRS. LOGAN: (*Offstage.*) Lucy?

LUCY frantically begins to shove trash/clutter out of sight, and IZZY runs to "become" the image in the poster by standing in a classic rock pose in front of the white square. MRS. LOGAN enters.

MRS. LOGAN: (*Offstage.*) Lucy!?

LUCY: I'm busy, Mom!

MRS. LOGAN: (*Offstage.*) I hope you're doing your homework.

LUCY: I am.

MRS. LOGAN enters.

MRS. LOGAN: Look at this room! What a mess. What is this? (*Picks up a bowl.*)

LUCY: (*Unsure.*) Macaroni and cheese?

MRS. LOGAN: That is filthy.

LUCY: I'm going to clean it up. I've just got this big assignment.

MRS. LOGAN continues to tidy up clutter.

MRS. LOGAN: Who were your friends today?

LUCY: Mom! I'm not five. Look. I have to work. This is really difficult material.

MRS. LOGAN: Who did you sit with at lunch?

LUCY: People, okay?

MRS. LOGAN: Which people?

LUCY: You don't know them.

MRS. LOGAN: Lucy, you might make more friends if you dressed yourself up once in a while. I could take you shopping. And you should invite some girls over to hang out after school sometimes. Girls do that.

LUCY: I don't want to.

MRS. LOGAN: You used to have a lot of friends. I think the other girls are maturing at a healthier rate than you are. You need to act your age. Take down this silly poster. Retire your stuffed animals. Get a push-up bra.

LUCY: Mother! Just get out, okay?

MRS. LOGAN: I'm trying to help.

LUCY: Well, you're not.

MRS. LOGAN: Clean this room. Without fail!

MRS. LOGAN exits, and IZZY comes back to life.

IZZY: What a dried up old bag.

LUCY: *(Half-heartedly.)* Yeah.

IZZY moves to a mirror and begins to make faces. It's clear that he's checking out his stage presence.

LUCY: You know, Izzy. She does have a point. I don't have any friends. I rush home every day to be with you. Maybe if I just – I think maybe I should take you down.

IZZY: You can't be serious. This is me! Izzy Wade. We are meant to be together. *(Singing.)* THAT'S HOW IT GOES WITH LOVE. *(Back to speaking.)* Plus, I'm a big star. Think of what this'd do to my public image! I can picture it all now.

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