

THE LAME NAME CLUB

By Scott Haan

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THE LAME NAME CLUB

A One Act Comedic Farce

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SYNOPSIS: We all have our favorite stories about people who have been saddled with bizarre and embarrassing names. Well now, there's help. Witness the origins of a support group for people like Carrie Oakey, Paige Turner, and Jed I. Knight (and all of the names in the story are real names found in past U.S. Census records). The only thing these people have in common is that they are all ashamed of their terrible names...or is it?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 3 males, 1 either; gender flexible)

DR. BURR (m)	The wise and mature university professor. <i>(86 lines)</i>
ANNA (f).....	Very timid and shy; doesn't say much. <i>(34 lines)</i>
BARB (f).....	A bitter, anti-social young woman. <i>(76 lines)</i>
CARRIE (f).....	A nice, normal girl, with a great singing voice. <i>(35 lines)</i>
JED (m).....	<i>Star Wars</i> fanatic, a little out-of-touch with reality. <i>(29 lines)</i>
LES (m).....	A world-class smart-aleck, although he doesn't mean any harm. <i>(89 lines)</i>
PAIGE (f).....	Sweet girl, but impossibly, record-breakingly stupid. <i>(40 lines)</i>
ANNOUNCER (m/f)	Addresses the audience at the beginning and end of the show; could be a director or crew member, if needed. <i>(2 lines)</i>

DURATION: 45 minutes.

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A meeting room in New Haven, Connecticut, not far from the Yale University campus.

PROPS

- 6 chairs
- An easel with a drawing pad and marker (SR)
- A table (USL)
- Some markers, pens, blank nametags, and blank sheets of paper on the table
- Nametags (worn by ANNA, BARB, CARRIE, LES and PAIGE)
- A clipboard and pen (for DR. BURR)
- Watches (worn by DR. BURR and BARB)
- A cell phone (for BARB)
- A retractable toy lightsaber (in a hidden pocket in JED's cloak)
- A wallet (in DR. BURR's back pocket)

COSTUMES

JED – Wears a hooded brown robe, looking as much like Obi-Wan Kenobi from the “Star Wars” movies as possible.

BARB – Dresses only in dark, depressing colors.

DR. BURR – Wears a white lab coat, if possible.

ALL OTHERS – Dress in normal everyday clothes.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: The story could take place on a blank stage, or it could be decorated as elaborately as you would like. The only absolute necessities are six chairs, a table, and a drawing easel with markers. Additional furniture or set decoration is optional.

AGES: The six subjects (ANNA, BARB, CARRIE, JED, LES and PAIGE) should all be roughly the same age. DR. BURR should be portrayed as about two decades older than the subjects. The age and gender of the ANNOUNCER are completely flexible.

CHAIRS: There are six chairs on the stage. For easier identification, we will refer to them as chair #1 (far Stage Left) through chair #6 (far Stage Right).

SONGS: The character of CARRIE has a tendency to break into song. Whenever she does this, the title and artist of that song are listed in *[brackets]* afterwards. If the actress is not familiar with certain songs, she should research them online to learn the melodies. YouTube, iTunes and Amazon are excellent sources.

PREPARING THE EASEL:

A lot of confusion can be avoided by preparing the drawing pad on the easel in advance before each show. To do this, write the following on each page. Beginning with page 4, these should be VERY tiny notes in the top, near the fold, too small for the audience to see, that tell actors (namely LES and BARB) what to write on that page. Because a lot of confusion could result from writing the wrong phrase at the wrong time, we recommend using this method to guide the actors. This has been structured to fit 2 phrases on every easel page.

Pages 1 & 2: Blank

Page 3: Two columns of large, bold names as follows:

Anita Bath	Sandy Beach
Otto Reck	Early Bird
Bill Board	Stan Still
Major Fluke	Harry Hiney
Daisy Picking	Worm Eaton

Page 4: VERY small -- “Paige has a great smile.” “I have met people who are even weirder than Jed.”

Page 5: VERY small -- “I like Lettuce best ... with bacon and tomato.”
“Mmhlq qhhxz gklkl srnfm.”

Page 6: VERY small -- “Paige has never been convicted of manslaughter.”

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The main stage is dark. Spotlight on the ANNOUNCER.*

ANNOUNCER: *(To the audience.)* The following story is pure fiction. However, the names...even though they SOUND ridiculous...are 100% real. It has been legally documented that actual people have walked around bearing the names Ivana Tinkle (*Beat.*), Fanny Whiffer (*Beat.*), and even Giant Pervis (*Beat.*), as well as the names of all the characters in our story. Have you ever wondered what would possess parents to be so cruel and heartless to their children, to saddle them with names that would guarantee a lifetime of humiliation? This story presents one possible theory. So the next time you don't like the sound of your own name, think of these poor people, and remember...It could be a LOT worse.

The ANNOUNCER exits. Curtain opens or lights come up to reveal the main stage. It is an empty room with 6 chairs. From SL to SR, the characters are seated in this order: LES (chair #1 far SL), PAIGE (#2), CARRIE (#3), ANNA (#4), and BARB (#5). Chair #6 (far SR) is empty. DR. BURR is standing CS, with a clipboard and a pen. The five seated characters are all wearing "Hello, My Name Is" nametags, with only their first name hand-written in big black letters. PAIGE'S nametag is on upside-down. ANNA sits very tensed in her chair, arms and legs close, as if she is afraid of physical contact with the people around her. An easel with a drawing pad and markers is set up on the SR side. A small table containing some nametags, markers, pens and papers is located USL.

DR. BURR: *(Checking his watch.)* Well, we're still waiting for one more person, but why don't we get started?

CARRIE: *(Singing.)* "LET'S GET IT STARTED, HA! LET'S GET IT STARTED, IN HERE!" [*Black-Eyed Peas, "Let's Get It Started".*]

DR. BURR, PAIGE, LES, ANNA, BARB look puzzled.

Sorry.

PAIGE: *(Confused.)* Wait. I thought you said there were six of us.

DR. BURR: That's right.

PAIGE: But there are already six of us here. (*Pointing and counting each of them, starting on SR, including DR. BURR and herself.*) One, two, three, four, five, six.

DR. BURR: I mean six SUBJECTS. I wasn't counting myself.

PAIGE: Oh. Well, then... (*She counts again, but when counting DR. BURR, she makes a grunting noise and shakes her head instead of saying "three".*) One, two, MM-MMM, four, five, six. See? Still six!

LES: (*Staring at PAIGE, speechless with wonderment at her stupidity.*) Wow. Please don't ever procreate.

DR. BURR: Les, be nice. Paige, you're right, I guess there are seven. Thanks.

PAIGE: (*Beaming.*) Don't mention it.

DR. BURR: Everyone, allow me to officially introduce myself. I'm Dr. Burr, professor of Sociology in the Behavioral Sciences department here at Yale University. It's good to finally meet you all in person. As I explained, you've been gathered at random from all over the country, but you all have something very important in common.

LES: We all look good in halter tops?

DR. BURR: Ha! No. No, you were all given a very unusual name at birth. Yale has commissioned a study about the psychological ramifications of having names that are a little... abnormal, as well as the parental rationale behind choosing those names in the first place. We think we have a lot to learn from you, so I appreciate you flying all the way out here.

CARRIE: Well, I appreciate the free vacation. It's very generous of you to pay for our air-fare and hotel.

DR. BURR: Not a problem, Carrie. I realize a research study in New Haven might not be as exciting as, say, Daytona Beach, but I hope you all have fun while you're here. And as promised, I'll try to send you on your way with a little spending money as well.

BARB: Yeah, speaking of that, how much dough do we get, exactly?

DR. BURR: We'll get to that, Barb.

ANNA raises her hand meekly.

Anna?

ANNA: (*Timid.*) Um, if this is a University study, why aren't we on campus?

DR. BURR: Good question. There are several events there this weekend, so it'll be pretty crowded. I just thought it would be easier to meet off-campus.

ANNA nods her understanding.

So, why are you all here? The answer is that, while we can speculate on the mind-set of people with unusual names, nobody but you could provide insight into the full range of emotions felt by those saddled with this burden. The point is to not only learn from you, but to offer you a supportive network of peers who understand what you're going through. My hope is that when this is over, you'll exchange information so you can turn to each other for support and friendship.

BARB: (*Aiming this at PAIGE.*) And intellectual stimulation. Right, Paige?

PAIGE: (*Embarrassed, badly misinterpreting this.*) Oh, I'm... I'm sorry. No offense, you seem very nice, but I like boys. Thanks, though.

Pause.

BARB: What just happened?

CARRIE: Doctor Burr, is this the only study that's been done like this?

DR. BURR: As far as I know. Initially I'm focusing on names that become undesirable when the first and last names are combined. At least MOST of you have first names that are perfectly normal on their own. After this I'm hoping to do a separate study on bizarre first names. Here are some actual names I've discovered: (*Consulting a page on his clipboard, with a slight pause between each name.*) Freak... Plague... Egghead... Zombie... Satan... Headless... Alcohol... and even Toilet! That's right, there was a BOY named Toilet Queen. Try going through school with THAT name.

LES: I'll bet he felt flush with embarrassment!

DR. BURR: I just want you to realize, you're not alone. Okay? So before we go around the room and give our full names, I want to share a few more with you. *(Walks to the easel SR.)* All of these are real people, from one time or another. *(He flips over a few blank pages of the drawing pad. Hand-written in big, black marker on page 3 are ten names, preferably readable from the audience. DR. BURR begins to read them aloud.)* Anita Bath...

LES: Whew! No lie.

DR. BURR: *(Ignoring this.)* Bill Board... Daisy Picking... Early Bird... Harry Hiney...

LES: Harry Hiney?!? Oh, that is the BEST name in the history of the world!

DR. BURR: Otto Reck... Major Fluke...

BARB: Major Fluke. I'll bet HE was an accident.

DR. BURR: Sandy Beach... Stan Still... and finally, Worm Eaton.

CARRIE: "Worm"? Who names their child "Worm"?

BARB: I wonder if Early Bird and Worm Eaton know each other?

LES: Speaking of which, I actually know Daisy Picking!

PAIGE: *(Surprised.)* You do?

LES: Sure. I'm also friends with her brothers, Nose and Cotton.

PAIGE: *(Clueless and excited.)* Ohmygosh, that's so crazy! Do they go to school with you?

BARB: *(To PAIGE.)* Tell me. Was the lobotomy painful?

Just then, JED enters. He wears a large brown robe, just like the one worn by Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars, with a hood over his head. JED takes a few steps into the room, and DR. BURR hears him.

DR. BURR: *(To JED, indicating empty chair #6 SR.)* Ah, good. Our final participant. Welcome! Come on in, and have a seat.

JED ignores this request and walks right up to DR. BURR, then removes his hood. He looks at DR. BURR intently, then waves his hand slowly in front of the doctor's eyes, as if trying to mind-control him.

JED: *(Slowly, significantly, as if doing hypnosis.)* I... am not... late.

DR. BURR: Well, maybe just a few minutes, but it's no big—

JED: *(Interrupting him, eyes wider, concentrating more intensely on DR. BURR'S eyes.)* No. I'm not late. In fact, I was the first one here.

DR. BURR: *(Baffled.)* Um... sure. Okay. Why don't you have a seat there?

JED: *(He sits in chair #6 far SR, next to BARB. Then he speaks to BARB conspiratorially, tapping his temple, proud of his power.)* Jedi mind control.

BARB: *(Also baffled.)* Um... kay.

BARB scoots her chair slightly SL, putting a little distance between herself and JED. She is now closer to ANNA, which makes ANNA look a bit uncomfortable.

DR. BURR: All right. Everyone is here, so why don't we go around the room and introduce ourselves? Just tell us your name, where you're from, and anything else you might want to share. Les, we'll start with you.

LES: *(Standing.)* Okay. Name's Les. Well, technically it's Lester, but everyone calls me Les. The problem is, my last name is P-L-A-C-K. Plack. My name is Les Plack.

CARRIE: Oh, no.

LES: Oh, yes. As you can imagine, dentists have a field day with me. "I want to see Les Plack at your next visit!" Or, "Oh good, there's Les Plack!" Makes me want to attack them with their own drill.

CARRIE: I'm sure.

LES: I would almost prefer being called Lester. ALMOST. *(He says the name "Lester" in the following sentence with great disdain and disgust.)* Can you imagine going by "Lester" because that's LESS nerdy?

DR. BURR: And where are you from, Les?

LES: My family moves around a lot, but I CURRENTLY reside in Beaver, Oklahoma, the "Cow Chip Throwing Capital of the World." *(Beat.)* I'm not kidding. They have t-shirts.

DR. BURR: I'll bet you get interesting tourists. All right, next?

LES sits. Pause.

PAIGE: (*Giggly, she stands.*) Oh, me! Hi! I'm Paige!

CARRIE: Hi, Paige. Um, did you know your nametag is upside-down?

PAIGE: (*Confused, looking down at her nametag.*) No it's not, I can read it just fine.

Pause as EVERYONE shakes their head in disbelief.

LES: (*An aside not meant for PAIGE'S ears.*) I'm surprised you can read at ALL.

DR. BURR: And where are you from, Paige?

PAIGE: Oh, I live in Phoenix. (*Beat.*) That's in Arizona. Oh, and here's something interesting I just learned. (*Significantly, as if revealing a deep, dark secret.*) Even though it SOUNDS like it, there's NO "F" in "Phoenix".

LES: Huh. That's because they're all on your report cards.

DR. BURR: (*Scolding.*) Les.

LES: (*To PAIGE.*) Out of curiosity, can you tell us what the capital of Arizona is?

PAIGE: (*Proudly, showing off her intelligence.*) Of COURSE I can. The capital of Arizona is the letter "A".

BARB: (*To LES.*) Ha! She showed you!

DR. BURR: Paige, would you like to share your last name?

PAIGE: Sure! It's Turner. Paige Turner.

LES: (*Bitterly.*) THAT'S ironic.

DR. BURR: (*To LES.*) Mr. Plack, let's keep the smart comments to ourselves, all right?

LES: (*Sunshiny and bright, to placate DR. BURR.*) So, Paige Turner... Read any good books lately?

PAIGE: Yes, actually, I just read this scary book – it was really creepy – about these two little kids who are left at home alone, and a wild animal breaks in and starts destroying the house. Actually, Dr. Burr, it was written by another Doctor, like you!

BARB: Do you... Are you talking about *The Cat In The Hat*?

PAIGE: YES! You've read it, too? Wow, it gave me nightmares!

LES: Then I would avoid reading *The Grinch* next. You'll never sleep again!

PAIGE: Ooh, I won't. Thank you!

DR. BURR: All right. Next?

PAIGE sits, and CARRIE stands.

CARRIE: I guess that would be me. (*Motioning to her nametag.*) Well, I'm Carrie, obviously. I'm from Portland, Oregon. Aaaaand my last name is spelled O-A-K-E-Y. I...am Carrie Oakey.

PAIGE: (*Smiling.*) That's cute. I like that.

BARB: So, spill. Are you any good at karaoke?

CARRIE: Not bad. I can carry a tune. And I LOVE music. My head's full of song lyrics, so I can usually do karaoke without even looking at the words.

LES: Huh. So unlike Paige Turner, your name is actually appropriate.

CARRIE: Kind of. I wouldn't win "The Voice," [*Insert popular TV vocal competition.*] but I do okay.

DR. BURR: All right. Thank you, Carrie. Anna?

CARRIE sits, and ANNA stands.

ANNA: (*Meekly.*) I'm... I'm Anna. I'm from Indianapolis. Um, I like writing poetry, and... and I don't really know what else to say.

LES: You COULD explain why you're so tense. You look like a cat in a rocking chair store. Unclench!

ANNA: Sorry, I just... I have personal bubble issues.

BARB: Personal bubble?

ANNA: (*Gesturing around herself as if showing them an invisible force field.*) You know, space. I don't like people in my bubble. I need a little private air.

BARB: (*Thinks this is really strange, and with a glance to both sides, realizes she is stuck between two weirdos.*) Um... kay...

CARRIE: What's your LAST name, Anna from Indiana?

ANNA: (*Hesitant.*) I'm... I'd rather not say. It's pretty bad.

LES: Aw, come on. We're all sharin' and carin' here.

ANNA: (*To DR. BURR, pleading.*) Do I have to?

DR. BURR: No. It's all right, Anna. (*To EVERYONE.*) There's no pressure in here. We can all still benefit from Anna's input if she remains anonymous.

LES: Fine. Just one question. (*Beat.*) Are you Anna Sassin?

DR. BURR: LESTER. Enough. Barb, why don't you go next?

ANNA sits, and BARB stands.

BARB: *(Looking towards SL at the row of people who have already had their turns.)* Yeah, I kind of picked up on that pattern. Okay... name, rank and serial number. I'm Barb. I'm from Tallahassee, Florida. I don't have a "bubble" problem, but I don't like people in general... No offense. And my last name is Dwyer. That makes me Barb Dwyer.

LES: Barbed wire! That's actually kinda cool!

BARB: What?!? No, it's not!

LES: Yes it is! *(Deep voice, like a movie trailer.)* Don't mess with "Barbed wire!" *(Normal Voice.)* Sounds tough and dangerous. And at least YOUR name isn't about dental hygiene!

BARB: *(Conceding.)* True. *(Takes her seat.)*

LES: *(Pointing to each woman as he says their name.)* Hey, so I've met Anna, Barb, and Carrie... *(Pointing to each woman again, in the same order, as he says her initial.)* Now I know my A-B-C's! Ha!

PAIGE: *(Proudly.)* Ooh, I know MY A-B-C's, too! *(Singing the alphabet song, although it soon gets confused with "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," which shares the same tune.)* "A, B, C, D, LITTLE STAR, HOW I WONDER—" *(Confused.)* Wait...

LES: *(To PAIGE.)* Yeah, don't hurt yourself. *(To JED.)* Okay, so we've heard from everyone but our little Jedi Knight friend down there.

JED: *(Jumping to his feet with alarm.)* How did you know my name?

LES: *(Baffled.)* What? I didn't SAY a name.

JED: You said "Jed I. Knight." That is my name. Jed Isaac Knight.

The OTHERS all look at DR. BURR, some with surprise, some with confusion.

DR. BURR: It's true. *(Indicating the USL table.)* Jed, do you want to grab a nametag?

JED: *(Sitting back down.)* I have no need for a nametag, for individuality is a human conceit. The force binds us all as one.

BARB: (*To DR. BURR.*) 'Sokay. I don't think we'll have any trouble remembering his name.

CARRIE: I don't understand. What's a "Jedi Knight"?

LES: It's a "Star Wars" thing. Jedi Knights keep peace throughout the galaxy. Are you telling me you've never seen "Star Wars"?

CARRIE: Nope. 'Cause, see, I have friends and a life.

DR. BURR: And Jed, where are you from?

JED: A galaxy far, far away. I've spent most of my life on Tatooine, but I currently reside in Louisville, Kentucky.

LES: Wow. Do they have mental hospitals on Tatooine?

JED: (*Matter-of-fact.*) No, but we have two orbiting suns.

PAIGE: (*Innocently.*) But no daughters?

DR. BURR, LES, BARB, ANNA, CARRIE and JED blankly stare.

What?

LES: (*To PAIGE.*) Enjoy this visit to Yale, Paige. I'm sure you'll never be here again.

DR. BURR: Les, can you just TRY to be nice?

JED: (*Doing his best Yoda voice from "The Empire Strikes Back".*) "No. Try not. Do... or do not. There is no try."

LES: Oh good. Then I choose "Do not."

DR. BURR: Okay, I think we need a new ground rule. I imagine everyone in here has been teased and ridiculed about their names all their lives. This group should be a sanctuary from that. So here's the rule. There is to be NO more making fun of anyone in here, for their names or ANY other reason. All right? If you say something snide or mocking about someone, your punishment is, you have to go to the easel and write something NICE about them. Everyone understand? Les?

LES: I understand. I'll have writer's cramp within the hour, but I understand.

DR. BURR: (*Telling, not asking.*) Why don't you PROVE it by writing something nice about Paige up there.

LES: (*Standing.*) I can do that.

LES walks SR to the easel, flips to the next page, and uses the black marker to write "Paige has a great smile."

DR. BURR: (*Reading it aloud.*) “Paige has a great smile.”

PAIGE: (*Moved.*) Awww!

DR. BURR: (*Surprised at his cooperation.*) Thank you, Les. You can sit back down now.

LES complies, resuming his seat in chair #1.

Now. You were all given these names at birth. Some people marry into a bad name, or legally change them to make some sort of point, but that’s not the case here. So I’m curious... Did your parents tell you WHY they chose that name for you? Anyone?

PAIGE: (*Sweetly.*) Mine thought it was cute.

BARB: Mine officially named me Barbara. They said they didn’t realize calling me Barb for short was a pun until I was a week old, and by then it was too late.

ANNA: Mine thought they were being funny.

LES: Well if you tell us your last name, we’ll tell you if they succeeded.

LES’S eyes narrow, ANNA merely shakes her head.

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