

MY COUSIN LINO

By Bill Yowell

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DEDICATION

To Chloe

STORY OF THE PLAY

Katherine and Jonathan Prescott become hysterical when their Cousin Lino, a famous Italian botanist, cancels his trip to the States at the last minute. Katherine had planned for Cousin Lino to be the guest speaker at a flower society fundraising dinner, an important event as the society is several thousand dollars in debt! Her brother, Jonathan, feels even more desperate for he has again offended his upper-crust girl friend and to make up, he had invited her to meet Cousin Lino in hopes of impressing her. So when Jonathan's long-lost but quick-witted friend Robert drops in, Jonathan convinces him to play Lino. Katherine is the only one who seems to realize that Robert's Italian (limited to what he's read on pizza menus) and knowledge of plants (they're green) could torpedo this sophomoric plan.

She reluctantly goes along, however, and hosts the dinner, fearing the worst, which of course happens! Zany dinner guests include the desperate Beatrice, who's convinced Lino is to be her husband; Natalie, who's brought along an Italian dictionary and dying to try out the language; and Paul and Myra, nosy country folk. On top of it all, the newspaper has sent a reporter to cover the event, and the reporter just happens to be Robert's old girlfriend. As Robert goes on the run, complications spin out of control and stage doors rhythmically fly open and shut, producing and removing characters like a magic trick gone haywire, as everyone looks for the elusive and thoroughly comedic Cousin Lino.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Early summer morning, current day, home of the Prescott family.

Scene 2: Several hours later, just before lunch.

ACT II

Scene 1: Following evening, minutes before the party.

CHARACTERS

(4 m, 9 w 1 flexible)

JONATHAN PRESCOTT: Age - late 20s. Confident to the point of arrogant, yet when it comes to Jennifer his confidence fades to desperation. Throughout, he is ruthlessly determined to achieve his goal.

KATHERINE PRESCOTT: Age - mid 20s. Jonathan's younger sister. Bright, witty, and energetic, her personality seems to complement all the characters throughout the play. She is unafraid to challenge her brother.

ROBERT WILLIS: Age - late 20s. Jonathan's friend from prep school. He is quick witted and happy-go-lucky, full of energy and quite animated.

MISS CARLSON: Age - 50 to 60. The Prescotts' maid. A nervous wreck, she runs everywhere as if late for an appointment. She is cheery and tries to put a positive spin on problems.

BROCKINGTON: Age - 60 to 70. The Prescotts' butler. Calm and dignified, he moves slowly and seems unshaken by anything. He is virtually expressionless.

MRS. PRESCOTT: Age - 50s. Mother of Jonathan and Katherine. A most gracious lady of style and charm, quite aristocratic. She has a mother's instinct, and is fully aware of Jonathan's potential for ... trouble.

JENNIFER NEWBURY: Age - late 20s. Jonathan's girlfriend, gracious and stylish but loses it at the end just like her mother.

MRS. NEWBURY: Age - 50s. Jennifer's mother, a gracious lady of wealth and charm.

NATALIE: Age - early 20s. Jennifer's friend. Charmingly bubbly, Natalie is enthralled by Lino.

BEATRICE: Age - 50s. A member of the Flower Society. Desperate and plain spoken, she is blatantly after a man ... any man. She is rich but is dressed gaudily.

MYRA WELLS: Age - 50s. Another Flower Society member. A lady of wealth, kindness and much bashful excitement. She is quite country, but it is charming.

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PAUL WELLS: Age 30s. Myra's son who is not quite as charming. He is loud, obnoxious and rather annoying. His energetically wild cowboy and good-old-boy style grabs everyone's attention.

MESSENGER: Age - any. A bit of a "nerd," the messenger is overly proud of his/her job, and is determined to follow company policy to the end.

IRA MCGILLACUTTY: Age - late 20s. She is simply a kind person who is doing her job as a newspaper reporter. She drops her professionalism, however, when she discovers Robert, her former boyfriend.

SETTING

All the action takes place in the beautiful living room of the well-to-do Prescott family. The sofa is CS, between two high back chairs. In front of the sofa is a coffee table. SR we see a writing desk and chair in front of full bookshelf. On the SL wall we see a fireplace.

There are six ways to enter or exit this room. Moving SR to SL, French doors SR lead out to the garden. The north wing hallway, USR, leads to the bedrooms and is reached by several steps. SL of the steps is the door to a powder room and the main entry hallway. USL is the east wing hallway leading to the dining room, butler's pantry and other common areas. The DSL hallway leads to the kitchen.

PROPS

Telephone, pen and stationery on desk, encyclopedias in bookcase, box of costumes and bag of wigs, bouquet of flowers, sweater for Jonathan, 2 telegrams, menu from Italian restaurant, iced tea glasses, sugar bowl, and platter of finger food on serving trays, stained letter, hat and cape for Robert, books for Robert and Natalie, cactus plant and wrap for Mrs. Newbury, travel brochures in a large purse for Myra, suitcases for Mrs. Prescott, envelope with money for Messenger.

SOUND EFFECTS

Doorbell, telephone

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: We see JONATHAN PRESCOTT on the phone at the writing table. He is a decent fellow who would give one the shirt off his back ... for a price. While pleasant, Jonathan is shrewd, manipulative, and cunning.)

JONATHAN: *(Talking on the phone.)* No. No. No. You're not listening. I need something romantic. I sent that last time and it didn't work. How should I know? You're the florist! *(KATHERINE enters from the kitchen carrying a box. She is cheery, kind, and a bit dramatic.)* What! How dare you keep asking to put me on hold! Do you know who I am? I'm Jonathan Prescott ... as in Prescott Industries! *(Spelling it.)* P-r-e — what? Oh, all right. Put me on hold.

KATHERINE: *(Sitting on the couch.)* Who's on the line?

JONATHAN: No one. I'm on hold. Something about an emergency. You would think there would be one responsible florist in this city.

KATHERINE: The florist? *(Teasingly.)* Is my brother sending flowers to someone?

JONATHAN: *(Sarcastically.)* No. I'm entering a float in the Rose Bowl Parade and need 10,000 roses. Of course I'm sending flowers to someone ... one who I care deeply about ... one who's the most important person in my world.

KATHERINE: Yourself?

JONATHAN: Yes. I mean no. Your wit is not amusing, nor appreciated, my dear sister. What's in the box?

KATHERINE: It's the ... *(JONATHAN cuts HER off.)*

JONATHAN: *(Into phone.)* Yes, I'm still here! What do you mean you cannot help me at this time. I don't care if it is on fire, I called to place an order. You have insurance, do you not? *(Becoming very impatient.)* I am sure there's someone who will see your two-bit flower shop burning and will call the fire department, so please help me determine what to buy ... my situation is serious!

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JONATHAN: *(Cont'd. Furious.)* Fine, ... I hope your lilies never bloom! *(Hangs up.)* Now what am I to do? *(Calling.)* Miss Carlson!

KATHERINE: Trouble with Jennifer ... again?

JONATHAN: I will win her love no matter what it takes!

KATHERINE: You have said that for the past five years. Perhaps you need to try a different approach.

(MISS CARLSON, the maid, enters from the kitchen with tangled hair, a floured face and doughy hands. She's always in a hurry, and every entrance is announced with a high pitched "000000h.")

MISS CARLSON: You screamed, sir?

JONATHAN: I want the number of every florist in this city.

MISS CARLSON: Trouble with Miss Jennifer, sir?

JONATHAN: Does everyone know about my love life?

KATHERINE: No. I think most people would be surprised to find out you even have one.

MISS CARLSON: Pay no attention to your sister. Everyone knows about your love life! *(SHE exits back to kitchen.)*

(DOORBELL rings. BROCKINGTON enters from the east wing. He is the exact opposite of MISS CARLSON - calm, stately, and impeccably dressed. He walks sedately to the main entry way to answer the door.)

JONATHAN: Why doesn't that make me feel better?

KATHERINE: *(Crossing to JONATHAN.)* You need to try a different approach. How many times have you sent her flowers?

JONATHAN: I send flowers when I say or do something stupid.

KATHERINE: *(Wanting to say a large number.)* I see. Each time you call up the florist, order flowers the florist recommends, have the florist sign your name to the card, and finally the florist delivers the flowers. Who's after Jennifer, you or the florist?

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