

The Landlord's Game

Act 1 Scene 1

An empty playing space. On the floor of this space is a Monopoly board, stretched out to take up the size of the entire floor. We use this space to transition in and out of other settings, but the floor never changes.

Lights up. After a moment, CHARLES enters the space, walking around the space clockwise, in the direction of the board game. After walking the entirety of the outline, he stops on the square that says "Pass GO" and Rolls a set of dice.

As CHARLES rolls, the space comes alive. The room turns into LIZZY's living room, as she tries to gather her things before leaving her apartment.

CHARLES

Fancy a game?

LIZZY jumps in surprise. It's clear that although CHARLES was visible to the audience, he's only just become visible to LIZZY.

LIZZY

Oh— my god. Don't sneak up on me like that.

CHARLES

I didn't mean to frighten—

LIZZY

I know you didn't, I'm just a little tightly wound at the moment, so if you don't mind...

LIZZY trails off, as she looks around the room for another item she needs to take with her.

CHARLES

I gather that's a "no"?

LIZZY

A “no” to what?

CHARLES

A game. Just a quick one, before you go.

LIZZY

No, no, I can't. Today is too important for me to be dwindling away with my games. I have to finish getting ready, then it's off to the meeting house, and—

CHARLES

That's more than an hour from now. Surely you can spare a few minutes.

LIZZY, reluctantly but enthusiastically, like indulging in a guilty pleasure, sits down on the floor as CHARLES sets out a few shrewdly thrown together board games. They clearly look homemade, tied together with rubber bands and scotch tape.

LIZZY

Lets see, we have *Bargain Day, King's Men, Mock Trial*—

CHARLES

Oh, you know I love Mock Trial. Don't mind if I do.

CHARLES takes the card deck out of LIZZY's hands and start to shuffle out cards. They begin to play as LIZZY continues the dialogue.

LIZZY

Well of course you do. It's the only one that's fully finished. We should really focus on the ones that need work—

CHARLES

Oh, poppycock. It's your big day! You deserve a little relaxation, stop working oh so hard. Here.

CHARLES hands LIZZY a card. Or gestures for LIZZY to start the game, however that works. LIZZY takes the card, accepting the gesture, and begins playing.

LIZZY

I *have* been working a lot lately. Here and at work.

CHARLES

How is the Dead Letter Office?

LIZZY

Dreadful. Sometimes I worry that my fingers might fall off, typing and typing all day. Draw.

(I'll figure out more about how this Mock Trial game works later, for now I'm going to assume it works kind of like go fish.) CHARLES draws a card.

LIZZY

I told you I gave my design to David?

CHARLES

I remember.

LIZZY

He told me he'd give it to his supervisor at Parker Brothers, if this goes well I might have my very first patented game.

CHARLES

Draw.

LIZZY draws. After a moment, she shuffles her cards, and then places out her hand as she speaks.

LIZZY

Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, I hereby claim that the defendant is guilty of *(looks at the card)* Public Urination. For my evidence, I'd like to submit exhibit A; *(flips another card)* a picture of the defendant at the Statue of Liberty, exhibit B: a gently worn pair of handcuffs, and exhibit C: 400 empty beer cans.

CHARLES

(playing out his cards), Your honor, despite this evidence, the defendant has a rock solid alibi.

As you can see here, the defendant was spotted *(playing a card)* playing the flute at the *(plays a card)* Taj Mahal, wearing *(plays last card)* bright yellow clown shoes.

LIZZY and CHARLES crack up at this. They spend a moment just reveling in the peace that the game affords them.

CHARLES

This is your true gift, you know. These games let you bring joy into the world, to me, to the women at game night, and soon to the whole world. I hope you treasure that gift.

LIZZY

I do. I do.

CHARLES

There's something on your mind.

LIZZY

Do you think I'm cut out for this?

CHARLES

I just told you, you're truly gifted.

LIZZY

No, not that, with the Georgist Society. With the movement. I've never spoken in public like this, and I believe in the cause, I know how important it is to keep the community involved and make sure that the ideology is understood, I just don't know if I can *do* it. I don't know if I'm the right person for the job.

CHARLES

Elizabeth, you built this society from the ground up. You deserve recognition for the movement, and you deserve to be the one to share it with the world. Don't let anyone take that away from you.

LIZZY

It's not that, I'm not worried about the recognition, I'm worried about the message. Maybe I could call Maxine, she could take over the presentation for me. Here, I'll call her right now—

LIZZY stands to pick up the phone, but CHARLES rushes to stop her from dialing the phone.

CHARLES

Elizabeth, no. You can do this. I know you can.

Beat. LIZZY sets down the phone.

LIZZY

You can call me Lizzy, you know. Everyone else does.

CHARLES

My dear, you'll always be Elizabeth to me.

Beat.

End of Scene

Act 1 Scene 2

Transition: The room has become no longer Lizzie's home, it's now the courtroom.

LIZZIE and CHARLES take a seat in the waiting space. There is a large opening or podium in the center of the room, drawing attention from the audience.

There are two rows of chairs, LIZZIE is sitting in the front row, and CHARLES in the back.

COUNCILMAN (unseen)

Thank you for addressing the council Mr. Fortsworth. Next we will be hearing from one, Elizabeth...

LIZZIE starts to stand, as she thinks her name is being called.

COUNCILMAN

Jacobsen.

LIZZIE sits down, embarrassed, realizing it was not her name being called. Another woman stands and starts to address the council. Before she can speak, a spotlight hits

LIZZIE and CHARLES as they sit and wait their turn. The other woman stands and mimes, but doesn't speak.

LIZZIE

Another Elizabeth. Fancy that.

CHARLES

What is she talking about up there?

LIZZIE

I don't know. Probably about how the price of aprons has gone up. Whatever she's talking about, I seriously doubt it concerns me.

CHARLES

You're right. You're out changing the world, you can't be bothered with the plight of the common woman.

LIZZIE turns back to CHARLES, aghast.

LIZZIE

(hushed) No, that's not what I mean. Of course I care about the common woman. I care! It's just...

LIZZIE looks out at the woman giving her speech.

I'm not like her. I can't live the way that women have lived for centuries, subservient to her male counterpart, I can't be the happy homemaker and only worry myself with how to raise my children. I used to think I could. Growing up that's all that I wanted to be.

I don't want to look down on women like that, That's not right. It's just that the things I'm doing now, they're for everyone's wellbeing, not just the women at home. I just can't relate to a woman like that anymore. It's not that I don't care.

CHARLES

Right. You care. After all, what kind of activist would you be if you didn't?

LIZZIE

That's not fair. You caught me off guard, I didn't even believe it, it was just a thought—

LIZZIE is interrupted by the COUNCILMAN on the god mic.

COUNCILMAN

Thank you, Mrs. Jacobsen. Next we will be hearing from Ms. Magie.

LIZZIE stands again,

COUNCILMAN

Sorry, Mr. Magie. Fredrich Magie, correct?

A man stands at the pulpit, and again, the light shifts to LIZZIE before he can begin to speak.

LIZZIE

Another Lizzie and another Magie. Go figure.

CHARLES

Are you going to belittle him too?

LIZZIE

I didn't intend to belittle her, you know that. I just...

LIZZIE trails off, ogling the man in the center. CHARLES leans forward, putting his face next to LIZZIE's.

CHARLES

What are you looking at?

LIZZIE

Nothing, it's just—he's handsome, that's all.

CHARLES

Ah, so the feminist activist facade falls, to reveal a woman who merely strives for man's affection, a regular Elizabeth Jacobsen in the making.

LIZZIE

(laughing) Stop that. I'm not a nun, I haven't sworn off men for the rest of my life. I'm allowed to find one attractive now and again.

CHARLES

Whatever happened with that boy from the office? Danny? Draco?

LIZZIE

David, and...Nothing. I don't think he sees me that way. We're coworkers, at the same dead-beat job, but that's all we really have in common.

Besides, even if he really saw me, he wouldn't want me. You said it yourself, I'm no Elizabeth Jacobsen. I can't make him a happy wife. I care too much about my work, I couldn't give it up to make a man happy. Not even David.

CHARLES

I see. In that case, keep ogling wonderbreath over there. I'm sure David won't mind.

COUNCILMAN

Thank you, Mr Magie, you may be seated. I'd also like to thank all of the members of the city council for their attendance today, and all community members who have come to raise concerns. With that, we have adjourned for today, and will convene again next quarter.

The COUNCILMAN bangs a gavel, still offstage. Bewildered, but determined, LIZZIE stands up and takes the stand before anyone can leave.

LIZZIE

Excuse me, Chairman, I was supposed to address the board today.

COUNCILMAN

I'm sorry, we don't take walk in complaints, you have to file a case and you'll be placed on the schedule.

LIZZIE

I was on the schedule. 10am sharp, although I'm happy to speak now.

COUNCILMAN

(sighs) Name?

LIZZIE

Lizzie. Err, Elizabeth Magie.

COUNCILMAN

Magie. Magie. Any relation to Fredrich?

LIZZIE

No, no. Just a coincidence. We don't know each other.

COUNCILMAN

Oh, here it is. You submitted a proposal on behalf of the Georgists Organization?

LIZZIE

Yes, I'm the co-founder and vice president of the organization. I wanted to talk today about the next legislative cycle and the opportunity—

COUNCILMAN

Ms. Magie, we've reviewed your proposal, and we've decided that it just isn't for this council.

LIZZIE

I'm sorry, could you explain a little more what you mean by that?

COUNCILMAN

You're proposing a whole economic ideology shift, all this, uh, socialized land and whatnot, it's just not how we do things in Macomb. Enjoy the rest of your evening ma'am.

LIZZIE

It's not a proposal for socialized land, sir, and our proposal doesn't require a shift in ideology. We're trying to address inequality, and housing prices is where all inequality builds from. The people who use the land should determine it's value, not landlords who live across the country and own half of the housing developments from here to Peoria. Landlords unfairly posting the prices of land is driving whole communities into financial ruin, and—

COUNCILMAN

I'm sorry, Ms. Magie—

LIZZIE

Lizzie. Lizzie Magie.

beat.

COUNCILMAN

There isn't anything we can do. We're a simple town, we're not going to take advice on how to run our city from radical pseudointellectuals wearing peonies in their hair. Thank you, and good evening. Bradley, turn off the light on your way out, won't you?

LIZZIE stands at the pulpit almost with amazement, fully unaware of how she should proceed. After a few more moments, the lights go out.

LIZZIE

Excuse me? Hello?

Transition.

End of Scene 2

Act 1 Scene 3

Back at LIZZIE's apartment. LIZZIE and CHARLES have returned, and are taking off their coats as they enter the apartment.

CHARLES

Now Lizzie,---

LIZZIE

Don't "Now Lizzie" me. That was humiliating! What made that bastard Chairman think that he rules the world? Or the rest of the council for that matter? Just because they're too simple of people to know what's good for them? Are they somehow better than me for thanking the hand that chokes them?

CHARLES

What were they supposed to do? It is a complicated economic theory.

LIZZIE

They were supposed to READ it. And, they should be smart enough to understand it. Why would we put idiots in charge of our cities and our policies if they don't even have the smarts to listen to the experts, the people who actually know what's going on?

CHARLES

Maybe they did read your proposal, Lizzie. You don't know that they didn't try.

LIZZIE

Well they ought to be trying harder. I'm trying hard, but they should be trying harder.

LIZZIE slumps to the floor, feeling utterly defeated. CHARLES sits down next to her, attempting to comfort her.

CHARLES

Should we play a game?

LIZZIE

A game? No! That's all you ever think about, you know that? All you care about is pleasure, and making your own self happy. The citizens of our country are suffering, at the hands of conglomerate enterprises buying miles upon miles of land and charging devastating rates on ordinary people. They've created Monopolies out of the very land we live on. This isn't a time for games!

CHARLES

I didn't mean to—

LIZZIE

No, of course you didn't. It's not your fault, is it? Actually, I think I know what's to blame for all of this.

LIZZIE walks over to a cabinet, and pulls out all of the games she's created over time.

Some of them are card games, some larger boards made with pens on cardboard. They are all homemade, and there are between 8-12 of them.

LIZZIE

These. These are the thing keeping me from my work, keeping me from making a difference in this world. Well guess what, Charles? I'm done being held back. From this moment on, no more games!

LIZZIE takes one of the games, and starts ripping it into shreds. CHARLES sinks to the floor, trying to get all of the pieces.

CHARLES

No! Stop it! You've spent years working on these games! Think about what you are doing, Lizzie!

LIZZIE

Oh, I'm thinking. Thinking about what a waste my life has been, what a waste it will be.

LIZZIE tears another game.

LIZZIE

I'm not a child, I shouldn't be playing my evenings away with you. I need to be working. I need to be better!

CHARLES

Lizzie, please don't.

LIZZIE

I'm done being stomped on. At the office, at the courthouse. It's all over. I'll make them listen, I'll make them hear me.

LIZZIE grabs a piece of one of her torn up games and starts writing on the back of it.

CHARLES

Lizzie, what are you doing?

LIZZIE

I'm writing an advertisement. I have a friend at the newspaper, I'm sure he can get it into this week's edition without it being spot checked by the editor.

CHARLES

Why an advertisement?

LIZZIE

Because people READ advertisements, Charles. They don't read economic plans, they don't read pamphlets, but they do read advertisements. They're just like you, all they care about is pleasure, and what they can buy to keep them satisfied. No one cares about the real problems in this world until it gets in the way of their precious little pleasures.

LIZZIE grabs an envelope, and places her advertisement inside it.

We'll they're not getting off that easy. Not this time.

CHARLES

Lizzie, please hold off a while, and think before—

LIZZIE

Charles, it's already done.

LIZZIE seals the envelope, and takes it over to a mailbox somewhere on stage. As soon as she sets the envelope inside, we cut to a complete blackout.

End of Scene

Act 1 Scene 4

This scene starts in complete darkness. A voice is heard over the speakers, a God-like presence reading the news. Three voices read out the advertisement, the first voice speaks out the advertisement almost in full, and the second only starts after the phrase "Womanly above all things." The third voice begins when the second voice says "gray-green eyes." And they overlap for a large amount of the text. This can be scaled up for dramatic effect, with many voices saying the same text, as long as the message doesn't get too muddled.

FIRST NEWS VOICE

For Sale: Young Woman American Slave. A petite brunette with gray-green eyes, not beautiful, but full of character and strength. Intelligent, refined, and truly feminine. Womanly above all things.

SECOND NEWS VOICE

For Sale: Young Woman American Slave. A petite brunette with gray-green eyes, not beautiful, but full of character and strength. Intelligent, refined, and truly feminine. Womanly above all things.

FIRST NEWS VOICE

Available for only 10 dollars a week.

THIRD NEWS VOICE

For Sale: Young Woman American Slave. A petite brunette with gray-green eyes, not beautiful, but full of character and strength. Intelligent, refined, and truly feminine. Womanly above all things.

ALL NEWS VOICES

Available for only 10 dollars a week.

For Sale: Young Woman American Slave.

A light flashes. LIZZIE stands center stage, as if getting her picture taken. The lights go quickly back to flash, and she stands as if she was leaving the picture, unaware that another one was being taken. Then harsh lights hit her and a podium. She walks to it, a little confused, but ready to speak. She stands at the podium, and tries to speak, but her voice is drowned out by thunderous applause. She realizes the microphone isn't even turned on. There is a stunned moment of silence and stillness. CHARLES walks on, and rolls the podium offstage.

CHARLES

A rousing response, don't you think?

LIZZIE stays put, paralyzed.

We ought to celebrate. Mock Trial? Kings Men?

LIZZIE

They didn't hear me.

CHARLES

Whatever do you mean?

LIZZIE

They weren't listening.

CHARLES

Please, Lizzy, can we not do this?

LIZZIE

They weren't FUCKING LISTENING

CHARLES

Well what do you expect? Lizzy? The public is dumb, okay? They didn't get your desperate and tragic attempt to explain georgism. It's not like you spelled it out for them. You'd need a degree to get the point of that ad.

LIZZIE

They don't LISTEN when I explain it! They don't care, I can't make them care! They're being taken for everything they own and they don't even care!

CHARLES

That's because they don't know.

LIZZIE

They don't LISTEN!

CHARLES

What are they supposed to do, huh? Is that their job? To know when to listen, who to listen to and who to tune out? There's a lot of garbage out there Lizzie, and not everyone else has such a high tolerance for it.

LIZZIE

Excuse me?

CHARLES

Don't turn this around. This is on *you*. It's your job to get their attention, and your job to make the lesson stick. The people ain't stupid, they just can't afford to go to school.

LIZZIE braces herself, on the verge of collapse. CHARLES goes to her, lowering her down to the ground.

CHARLES

Oh Lizzie.

He sits down with her, holding her as she cries.

Do you remember when we were 9? We'd paint over mama's bridge cards, creating new games that only we knew the rules to? Mama said it wasn't good for a kid to be playing cards by herself, but we didn't mind. The joy was in the creation, the discovery. We created whole worlds with those cards. You created me, the only person who can beat you at your own games. The only other person who knows the rules. You don't have to do this, you know. The activism, the city council meetings, the movement. I know you care but it isn't your responsibility. You didn't get us into this mess, and it's going to hell of a lot more than just your willpower to get us out of it. We can leave it all behind tonight, if you want. Pass the torch on to somebody else. And we'll go back to our games, just me and you.

LIZZIE stops crying, mid-realization.

What do you say kid? Care for a game?

LIZZIE

That's it.

CHARLES

That's what I thought.

CHARLES stands up and walks offstage to get a card game.

LIZZIE

That's the secret.

CHARLES *(re-entering with a stack of cards)*

What do you mean, secret?

LIZZIE

I need cardboard, as big of a sheet as we have. And grab me a marker.

CHARLES

What for? I thought we were—

LIZZIE

(fervently) Charlie, please.

CHARLES

(seeing this) Okay.

CHARLES leaves the stage to find some cardboard. LIZZIE pulls out a paper and a pen and starts frantically scribbling. CHARLES re-enters with a marker and the back of a pizza box.

This is all I could find.

LIZZIE

(still writing) It's fine, It's fine. It'll do. Tear off the top and flatten out the bottom. Big as you can.

CHARLES

What are you scribbling?

LIZZIE

The name of every street in Atlantic City that is owned by an LLC. I know there are more than these, I wrote them in my city council memo. Where is my bag?

CHARLES

What's going on Lizzie? What are we doing?

LIZZIE

Don't you get it, charlie? We're going to make a game. Something educational, shedding light on the ethical nightmare that is corporate-owned property. But something fun, to keep them engaged. Even kids will be able to follow along. This is it, Charlie. This is the answer.

CHARLES

...you called me charlie.

LIZZIE

That's your name, isn't it?

CHARLES

First I'm hearing of it.

LIZZIE

Look if you don't like it, we can pick something else—

CHARLES

No, Lizzie—

LIZZIE

What?

CHARLES

(Beat) I...I like Charlie.

LIZZIE

(smiling) Go get me some cards. And find my bag.

CHARLES dutifully exits to find the bag. LIZZIE sprawls out on the ground, and starts scratching away, creating the board for the Landlord's game. Lights fade to black.

END OF ACT 1