

Joyrider

by Michael Olsen

Characters:	NATALIE	(the immediately deceased)
	LUCAS	(the favourite boyfriend)
	DANIELLE	(NATALIE's sister)
	KATE	(a friend of DANIELLE's)
	PENNY	(NATALIE's best friend)
	REBECCA	(a wannabe friend in the car)
	MONICA	(LUCAS's potential new girlfriend)
	BOB	(the apprentice Angel)
	DON	(the master Angel)

There are, roughly speaking, three performance areas: stage right, centre, and stage left. Down stage right is Rebecca's room: an upturned milk crate, covered by a batik cloth. On it are a collection of photos, candles, and incense, like a small shrine.

Upper stage right is Natalie's room: just a big collection of toys: dolls, teddy bears, golliwogs.

Stage left is Penny's room: a small table with a crucifix on it. Extreme downstage centre is a car rear view mirror.

We start off in darkness. In the blackout we hear a god awful screech of car tyres on a road, and then a loud smash as a car hits a tree that will not budge.

Instantly the centre lights come up on NATALIE lying on her back—and instantly Natalie sits bolt upright, looking around, panting.

NATALIE: What a rush! *That was a joyride!*

Bob enters from stage right. He's dressed in a white neck-to-toe gown.

BOB: Hello Natalie.

NATALIE: Who are you?

BOB: I'm Bob.

NATALIE: You're an angel?

Don enters from stage left. Like Bob he's dressed in a white neck-to-toe gown, the only difference being he carries a white clip board and he has wings on his back. Natalie looks from one to the other.

DON: He's only an apprentice angel—level seven.

NATALIE: Of course. I knew that.

BOB: If I do this job right I'll get my wings.

DON: We will see. Proceed.

NATALIE: Job? What job?

BOB: I've—um—I've got some bad news for you.

NATALIE: Really?

BOB: I'm sorry to say you just had a shocking car accident.

DON: A very obvious combination of a wet road, speed, failure to take a corner, and of course, inexperience. It hardly needs to be said no-one in the car had a driver's license.

BOB: As you can see, the car wrapped itself around a tree. Such a beautiful car, too. A 1973 Holden HQ Monaro GTS 4 Door. What a classic! It broke my heart when I saw it. Come and have a look.

Bob gestures Natalie over, and together they look down offstage front.

NATALIE: What about the others? Was anyone else hurt?

BOB: The tree there took the full force of the impact. Poor tree.

DON: I think she means people, Bob. (*smiling at NATALIE:*) You were the only one who died, my dear.

NATALIE: Is that—is that me there?

Bob nods.

NATALIE: I'm dead! I'm really dead!

BOB: It's OK. Don't worry.

NATALIE: Don't worry? But I'm dead!

BOB: Do you feel dead?

NATALIE: No. No I don't. But—

BOB: It's actually—OK, isn't it? Sometimes it takes people quite a while to appreciate the fact. To adjust. (*Pause*) Are you—adjusting?

DON: She's adjusting.

Natalie nods slowly.

BOB: I find deep breathing helps.
Natalie takes deep breaths.

DON: Let's get on with it.

NATALIE: So you're both—angels, huh?

BOB: Yep.

NATALIE: OK. And you can—do stuff?

BOB: Like what?

NATALIE: Oh I don't know. Get me a packet of—
Bob pulls out a packet of Tim Tams from under his robes.

NATALIE: How did you know—

DON: Oh for goodness sake any first year can carry out telepathy!

BOB: You're kind of predictable.

NATALIE: Oh really? You know what's going through my mind, do you? What about—
And Natalie executes a karate chop, coming within a whisker of hitting Don. Don doesn't move a muscle.

DON: Like Bob says, predictable.
Bob snaps his fingers, but nothing happens.

DON: Try again.
Bob does so. This time, all the characters from the car walk in one by one, and walk backwards and forwards across the stage before heading off: MONICA, LUCAS, PENNY and REBECCA.

BOB: You had an effect on all of them. (*As Bob reels off the names, each character stops a moment and looks out at the audience briefly.*)
Monica. Lucas. Penny. Rebecca. (*Pause*) And of course, Kate.

NATALIE: Kate?
KATE enters.

BOB: Oh, and your sister, Danielle.
DANIELLE enters. Kate is obviously worried. Danielle turns and sees Kate.

DANIELLE: What's the matter with you?

KATE: Nothing. Nothing.

DANIELLE: Doesn't look it. What's up?

KATE: I can't—I can't tell you.

DANIELLE: What is it? What—?

KATE: That was Mr Seagrave on the phone. He's been trying to track you down. He didn't know you were staying at my place. He said there's been an accident. Up on Mount Clarkson.

DANIELLE: What sort of accident?

KATE: They took Zachary's car—and they went too fast—and it crashed, and—and—and she's—she's dead.

DANIELLE: Who?!

KATE: Who do you think?

DANIELLE: Natalie?

KATE: (*nodding*) Uh-huh.

DANIELLE: Natalie? No. I don't believe it.

KATE: It's true. He said it was—quick. She wouldn't have felt a thing.

NATALIE: Well it's true, I didn't.

DANIELLE: So it's OK.

KATE: No, he just said—

DANIELLE: She didn't feel a thing.

KATE: I didn't mean—

DANIELLE: Where is she now?

KATE: The morgue.

NATALIE: Yuck! Don't show me that.

DANIELLE: Natalie!

Danielle crumples. Kate rushes over to comfort her.

NATALIE: So what's the point of showing me all that? Is this how you get your kicks? Scaring people?

Kate leads Danielle off.

BOB: You can go back. Fix it all.

NATALIE: Back? But I thought I was—

- DON:** For some reason The Man Upstairs (*pointing upwards*) thinks some people should have a second chance.
- NATALIE:** Great. So what do I have to do?
- BOB:** You have to understand the problem that led you to die in the first place.
- NATALIE:** Problem? What problem?
- BOB:** That's about all I can, I'm afraid.
- DON:** Tell her the Rules.
- NATALIE:** What Rules?
- BOB:** OK. Let me see. You can move things, but you can't talk—well you can, but no-one'll hear you. And of course no-one will see you—and you can't touch anyone.
- DON:** No touching allowed.
- NATALIE:** And all this has got something to do with the car accident?
- BOB:** Yes.
- NATALIE:** That's all you're gonna say? No more hints?
- DON:** Yes, that's all he's gonna say. Right Bob?
- BOB:** Yes. (*Bob moves Natalie downstage, whispering:*) I'm not really supposed to give you hints, but you should start with those in the car.
- NATALIE:** Alright.
- BOB:** So who's first?
- NATALIE:** Might as well start with Rebecca. I don't know what she was doing there anyway, but—
- BOB:** Rebecca it is then.
- Bob clicks his fingers. The lights crossfade to stage right—Rebecca's room. Natalie goes over to it and inspects it.*
- NATALIE:** This is Rebecca's room?
- Bob nods.*
- NATALIE:** She's got no sense of colour that girl: salmon and mustard do not go with each other.
- Natalie picks up a picture off the shrine.*
- NATALIE:** It's a picture of me. And so's this one. And this one. My God they're all of me! What is this? It looks like some sort of—shrine. I suppose I should be flattered, shouldn't I? (*Pause*) What a basket case!

Rebecca enters, pauses, then goes up to the shrine and starts cleaning the photos one by one.

NATALIE: Rebecca! Why the hell were you in the car in the first place? Wanted to be one of the Top People, I suppose. Come on, Rebecca. What's going on?

Rebecca kneels in front of the shrine and pulls out a photo.

REBECCA: I'm sorry, Natalie. I'm so sorry. It was all my fault. It all happened so quickly. I was yelling at Lucas to slow down, and that distracted him, and he lost control on that curve and we crashed.

NATALIE: (to **BOB:**) Is that what happened?

BOB: I don't know. You tell me. You were there.

DON: (flicking through his notes:) Doesn't say anything on the file.

REBECCA: What if I didn't nick the keys off Zachary in the first place? We wouldn't have had the car. (Pause) If if if.

Natalie looks at Bob.

BOB: Who's Zachary?

DON: Rebecca's brother. For goodness sake keep up.

NATALIE: She nicked her brother's car so we could go for a joyride. Wanted to impress me, I guess. I was impressed. (Pause) Guess she's taking it pretty bad. OK, next. I want to see Lucas.

BOB: Very well.

Bob clicks his fingers and the lights crossfade to the centre. Rebecca exits. Monica enters with a picnic basket and a rug. She sets down the basket and lays out the rug.

NATALIE: This isn't Lucas. It's that troll Monica. Where's Lucas?

DON: Patience is not listed here as one of your virtues, is it?

NATALIE: For your information, Monica Carter is a loud little bitch who only thinks about herself.

DON: Sounds like someone I know.

NATALIE: Yeah? Who?

DON: I think we'll find the answer to that question very shortly.

MONICA: Lucas? Over here.

Lucas slowly enters, unsure of what Monica is up to.

NATALIE: Here we go! Isn't he cute? He's my favourite boyfriend.

BOB: There are others?

NATALIE: You always have to have back-ups.

BOB: Oh I see.
Lucas walks over to the rug.

MONICA: Well sit down.
Lucas sits.

MONICA: I thought I'd try and cheer you up.

NATALIE: Sink your claws into him more like.

LUCAS: I'm OK.

MONICA: You don't look OK. *(Pause)* Still thinking about that silly old crash?

LUCAS: No.

MONICA: Well what then?

LUCAS: Rebecca.

MONICA: Rebecca?

NATALIE: Rebecca?

MONICA: Why? What's wrong with Rebecca?

LUCAS: I think she's more upset about the crash than me.

MONICA: It was three months ago.

NATALIE: *(looking at BOB:)* Three months? We're jumping ahead a bit aren't we?
Bob shrugs.

MONICA: We all have to move on.

LUCAS: You weren't there.

MONICA: I was so!

LUCAS: In the car, I mean. There wasn't room for all of us, was there?

MONICA: If you put it like that. *(Pause)* What about Rebecca?

LUCAS: She's taking it pretty bad.

MONICA: From the way you're talking about her I'd almost think you were keen on her!

LUCAS: Monica!

- MONICA:** Well. Here. I've gone to all this trouble and you haven't even noticed.
- LUCAS:** I have. I just haven't said anything.
Lucas kisses Monica on the cheek. Natalie is shocked.
- LUCAS:** Rebecca thinks she's to blame for the crash.
- NATALIE:** That's what she told us.
- MONICA:** It was an accident. That's what "accident" means—it means no-one's to blame.
Monica pours two drinks.
- MONICA:** Here's to the future. Our future.
Lucas and Monica clink glasses.
- LUCAS:** The future.
Monica leans in for a mouth-to-mouth kiss, but Natalie bobs down and tips Lucas's glass into Monica's lap.
- LUCAS:** I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I must have—
- MONICA:** This is my favourite dress!
- NATALIE:** Gotcha!
- LUCAS:** Here, let me help.
Lucas dabs at Monica's wet dress with a serviette. Monica is about to protest, then realises what Lucas is doing.
- MONICA:** Well. If you insist. *(Pause)* A little higher, I think. Yes, that's it.
- NATALIE:** Alright, I think I've seen enough!
Bob clicks his fingers, but nothing happens. Monica is quite obviously enjoying Lucas's attention. Bob frowns, rubbing his fingers together.
- NATALIE:** I said enough! Let's go!
Bob clicks his fingers again, and this time the lights crossfade to a half light at stage left. Natalie, Bob and Don move stage left.
- BOB:** Are you going to put that in my report?
- DON:** Of course. Finger failure isn't a small matter.
- BOB:** I've been practising. Really.
- NATALIE:** Hey! Hey! Back to me. Back to me. Did you see the way she was manipulating him? He's my boyfriend!
- BOB:** Your favourite boyfriend.

- NATALIE:** Yes.
- BOB:** It looks like he's moved on, doesn't it? And he didn't mention you. Only Rebecca.
- NATALIE:** Whatever. I can't have girls like Monica Carter stealing my boyfriend.
- BOB:** I don't think there's too much you can do about it now.
- NATALIE:** I suppose not. *(Pause)* What about Penny Davis? She was in the car, sitting behind me—in the passenger seat. Good ol' Pen will tell us what we need to know.
- BOB:** Penny Davis it is.
- Another snap of the fingers from Bob, and the lights come up full on stage left. Penny enters and kneels in front of the crucifix. She clasps her hands together to pray.*
- NATALIE:** What is she doing?
- BOB:** It looks like she's praying.
- NATALIE:** Praying?
- BOB:** Yes. It's where you open yourself up to God to receive His love and mercy.
- NATALIE:** I know what praying is. Why is she doing it?
- DON:** Why do you think?
- NATALIE:** Oh boy.
- BOB:** Do you want to hear what she's saying in her prayer?
- NATALIE:** No way. She can have it. Geez. This means—oh no!
- DON:** Oh yes!
- NATALIE:** She's gone Christian on me!
- DON:** Excellent.
- NATALIE:** How the hell did that happen?
- BOB:** She nearly died in the accident. A branch from the tree you hit punctured her lung and she almost suffocated.
- DON:** Asphyxiated.
- BOB:** Whatever.
- NATALIE:** So she turned to God.
- BOB:** More or less.

NATALIE: She was my best friend! How could she do this to me?

BOB: She still thinks about you. Listen to her prayer.

NATALIE: No.

BOB: It might help.

NATALIE: I don't want to know. Here, this'll make her think God's listening.
Natalie bends down and moves the crucifix back and forth across the table. Penny is shocked.

PENNY: God? Is that you?

NATALIE: No it's me, silly.

PENNY: It was all my fault. I couldn't stop her! She insisted we do it! It was her idea to get Rebecca's brother's car—and I couldn't stop her! I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! Do you forgive me?

NATALIE: Oh for goodness sake get over this crash! How long's it been now? Three months? Is that right Bob?

BOB: Yes, three months.

PENNY: I don't even know why I was there. Because of Natalie, I suppose. She can make the eskimos buy refrigerators if she wanted to. *(Pause)* Is she with you—or at the other place?

NATALIE: I'm fine, Pen. I'm feeling good. Don't worry about it. *(Pause)* Come to think of it, where am I?

DON: Limbo.

NATALIE: Between the two.
Bob nods.

NATALIE: Not a good place to be, huh?
Bob shakes his head.

BOB: No-one ever died of boredom here—but it can still drive you nuts.

NATALIE: OK.

DON: You might like to hear your friend's final thoughts.
Natalie listens.

PENNY: I just miss her smile. That's all. When she smiled at you you always felt good.