

## **MORPHS**

By Cindy Prentice

### Cast of Characters

Joey: Cleans the facility. Nosy, likes snakes but likes them in a closed tank away from them.

Twila: Manages snake breeding. Cares deeply for animals and is considerate.

Christian: Handles customer support and paperwork. Is professional as often as they can.

Skyler: Handles imports and exports. Short, snarky, and rude. Strongly dislikes Joey.

James Atheris: Boss.

Angry Customer: Recorded voice of a disgruntled customer. Never makes an appearance.

### Setting

A snake breeding facility

### Time

Present day around 5:00pm, closing time for the facility

At Rise: There is a shelving unit with a (not clear) tub on each shelf on stage right, the tubs are used to house snakes. On stage left are a few tubs and a scrubbing brush. At the back area is a pile of small (not clear) containers and a mesh bag. Center stage is a desk with scattered papers all over. JOEY walks to the desk with a trash bin cleaning the area, quietly talking to himself.

JOEY: And I *told* him to not mess with a kingsnake with mice around, but nooooo. He just hadda go and stick his fingers in the cage. Dumbo, the thing latched right onto his thumb! Who tries to mess with a hungry kingsnake? Not that I'd touch 'em anyways...

(pause, picks up one of the papers on the desk)

JOEY: What's this? (pause, loud whisper) Psst! Hey! Mr. Atheris left, right? Get in here! (pause) Everyone! Get over here! Y'all wanna see this!

(enter TWILA, CHRISTIAN, and SKYLER)

SKYLER: This better be good, Joey. If this is another false alarm about a snake escaping, I'll put that boa in your cleaning supplies myself.

JOEY: You wouldn't...

SKYLER: I will.

CHRISTIAN: You will not! The boss would have your head.

SKYLER: Joey wouldn't know that. Before you said that, that is. So, thanks.

TWILA: Can we stop this? Joey, why did you yell?

JOEY: Is Mr. Atheris here? In the building?

CHRISTIAN: He left four minutes ago to pick his daughter up from school. He may be back, but he said it was unlikely. We can close up without him.

SKYLER: After you finish your job.

JOEY: Yea, yea I know. I don't care about that. Do you see this?

TWILA: What is it?

CHRISTIAN: (takes note) It appears to be a Letter of Demand.

TWILA: I don't understand.

CHRISTIAN: A Letter of Demand is what a lawyer sends the guilty party, giving them 21 days to take action or send payment. (pause) This...

JOEY: Yeah. Mr. Atheris is getting sued.

TWILA: What? What for?

CHRISTIAN: I don't think that it is my place to be reading Mr. Atheris' personal information.

SKYLER: Then sit down. (snatches letter) Hmm...faulty goods...refund...*animal abuse*?

(pause)

TWILA: But...Mr. Atheris hardly looks at the animals.

CHRISTIAN: Hardly relevant, as this *is* his company. He will likely be held responsible among anyone else who was involved.

TWILA: What? But we take care of them! If anyone should be...If anyone should...take blame...its...

CHRISTIAN: One of us.

(pause)

TWILA: I saw Joey shoving snakes away with a broom handle!

JOEY: That was one time! You were forcing eggs out of a snake.

TWILA: She was egg bound, she would have died otherwise!

JOEY: Egg bound?

TWILA: The snake had eggs stuck in her, so I had to help her get them out.

SKYLER: (throws document) What about Christian? She had four returns this week.

CHRISTIAN: That had nothing to do with me; the customers ordered brazilian rainbows and were shocked at how big they got *despite* my warnings.

(all four speak at the same time)

CHRISTIAN: You should ask about the janitor  
that hates snakes, it makes no sense!

SKYLER: Yeah, like all those customers  
ordered the same snake!

TWILA: What about Skyler packing all those  
snakes? He probably hurt some of them!

JOEY: Yeah, sure they get bound every  
time.

TWILA: Everyone! Pointing fingers won't help anything. Is there anything else on the document?

CHRISTIAN: (picks up letter) It says the event happened a couple weeks ago, so that narrows  
the timeline down. Anyone remember anything of interest?

(pause)

CHRISTIAN: Anyone remember anything at all?

(everyone shrugs/nods/looks around, etc)

CHRISTIAN: Fine, guess I need to single people out. Skyler.

SKYLER: My day was just fine, great in fact. I had a great time. Joey sure enjoyed it.

(the lighting dims on center stage and TWILA and CHRISTIAN stop moving. Light focuses on the back of stage and stage left and the light color changes as well. SKYLER walks to the back of stage and JOEY starts cleaning tubs with the brush on stage left)

SKYLER: That's three spider ball pythons, (stuffs a container in the bag) five pinstripe ball pythons, (stuffs a container in the bag) three normal ball pythons.....two normals? (looks around)  
Oh boy.

(SKYLER starts looking around the room)

SKYLER: (yells) Has anyone seen a normal ball around?

(At this JOEY acts immediately uncomfortable. JOEY jumps and dashes over to SKYLER)

JOEY: S-s-Skyler?

SKYLER: (groans) What do *you* want? I'm busy.

JOEY: Yes, but- but you said that, uhh, there's an escapee?

SKYLER: You don't have to look for it, keep working.

JOEY: I wasn't gonna offer! Just make sure you find it quick, I don't want it biting me.

SKYLER: For fu- for the last time Joey, snakes don't want to bite you. Snakes want nothing to do with you! Even if these weren't captive you're a large predator that frightens them so they'd run away. On the slim chance they *do* attack, you can just walk away. Running after you is the last thing a snake would do, let alone a *ball python*. They curl up into a ball the second they are threatened! I know grade schoolers who keep these guys! Just keep doing your job and the snake won't bother you.

JOEY: You better be right, I- I'll report you to Mr. Atheris!

(JOEY keeps acting nervous but he slowly walks back to his job)

SKYLER: (long sigh, keeps searching and eventually picks up a ball python) There's the escape artist.

(pause. SKYLER runs over to JOEY and carefully raises the snake above JOEY, supporting it properly with both hands)

SKYLER: Look, I found her!

JOEY: (screams like a little girl, knocks over tubs to get away) Get that thing away from me!

SKYLER: But it loves you! (leaves to put ball python away)

JOEY: What's *wrong* with you? I'm gonna report this! Are you listening? Mr. Atheris won't take kindly to this!

(Lights change back to original color and focus on center stage. SKYLER and JOEY return to their original positions on center stage. CHRISTIAN and TWILA are no longer frozen)

JOEY: That wasn't funny!

SKYLER: Yes it was.

TWILA: No it wasn't! What were you thinking? What if Joey hurt the snake?

JOEY: The snake? The snake? What about me? I was attacked!

SKYLER: The no-contact strike is the most deadly of strikes. Can't even feel it.



CHRISTIAN: Your actions were inappropriate. Bringing a snake by someone with a phobia is asking for an accident.

SKYLER: Then he shouldn't work here! There are snakes everywhere! It's in the job description.

JOEY: Hey man, I need a job!

CHRISTIAN: This is getting us nowhere. Twila, do you remember anything?

TWILA: Not really...

(Lights change color and focus on stage right. TWILA walks over to the rack and brings out one of the tubs)

TWILA: Oh hey Sunny! Looking extra healthy today, are you? Yes you are! You're such a good girl, and a cutiepie! I'm gonna boop your little snoot! (pause) Ha! You've been booped!

(takes tub out fully)

TWILA: Oh wow, are you ever big! You're ready to pop any second! Keep eating girl, you need to keep your strength up!

(grabs a dead mouse and feeds it to the snake)

TWILA: There you go.

(puts the tub back, slides the next one out)

TWILA: Pickles, look at you! Aren't you the best mom? Wow, look at that clutch! It's so large!

It's...(pause)

(TWILA closes the bin. Lights revert to original color and focus on center stage as TWILA returns)

CHRISTIAN: Another bad clutch?

JOEY: Clutch?

CHRISTIAN: Group of snake eggs.

TWILA: Yeah, poor girl. It's been three seasons now and they're all slugs.

JOEY: Slugs?

SKYLER: Seriously, Joey? You've been working here for months, haven't you learned anything?

JOEY: I don't like to be around the cages.

TWILA: Slugs are bad eggs. Means they weren't fertile.

SKYLER: We made sure we bred her in time.

TWILA: Yeah, I know. Something's wrong with her, but I don't know what. She's such a sweetheart.

JOEY: I guess I'll take your word on that.

CHRISTIAN: She is one of our captive-bred snakes. She should have had good conditions for breeding too.

SKYLER: Cool, Twila ruined the company. Let's go home.

TWILA: Hey!

CHRISTIAN: Hold on a moment. While Pickles' clutch was unfortunate, I highly doubt a bad couple rounds of eggs would count as animal abuse.

SKYLER: Does her disgusting baby talk count?

JOEY: ...Should I even ask?

TWILA: It's when you touch the snake's cute little nose!

JOEY: Oh good lord...

SKYLER: Snakes don't like being touched on the head, moron. At best he is annoyed, at worst you're stressing him out.

TWILA: Sunny likes it! I trained her to.

CHRISTIAN: That is what I am trying to figure out. Twila, were there any other situations that occurred?

TWILA: Nothing special. A few morphs came out with mental damage so we had to put them to sleep, a few more bad clutches, one girl was egg bound so I had to probe the egg out. Tough situations, but not a lot when you think about the sheer amount of snakes we breed.

CHRISTIAN: Hardly.

JOEY: This ain't doing nothing!

SKYLER: Crybaby is right. (starts to walk away)

CHRISTIAN: Wait! I'll... I'll tell you what happened with me.

(lights change color and focus on a blank area of stage. Audio of a telephone ring goes off and CHRISTIAN picks up)

CHRISTIAN: Atheris Snake Zone, this is Christian speaking.

(ANGRY CUSTOMER on the other end is loud enough for the audience to hear. CHRISTIAN quickly pulls the phone away from his ear.)

ANGRY CUSTOMER: How many times do I need to call you blokes to fix my order?

CHRISTIAN: I'm sorry, I'm not sure what you mean. Could you tell me your order number or card information-

ANGRY CUSTOMER: No! No, no. I am *not* going through that ridiculous system of yours again. All I wanted was a normal Western Hognose. How is that hard? It's a common snake nowadays, I didn't ask for a special morph! Do you want to know what I was sent instead?

(CHRISTIAN motions to respond but is interrupted)

ANGRY CUSTOMER: A blood python! A! Bloody! Blood! Python! And before that? An Amazon Tree Boa! Is that even remotely close to a Hognose?

CHRISTIAN: Well, not-

ANGRY CUSTOMER: No! It's not! I wanted a tame snake that would hardly bite. Do you know how many times those buggers tried to strike me?

CHRISTIAN: Sir-

ANGRY CUSTOMER: Too many! This store is beyond incompetent! If you don't send me a Hognose this time, I want my money back!

CHRISTIAN: Sir I agree this was a mistake, and if you will listen I will do my best to fix it. If you could send the blood python back in its original packaging we will send you the Hognose. Your shipping fees will be covered. Have a nice day.

(CHRISTIAN hangs up and the lights turn back to normal. CHRISTIAN walks back to center stage)

TWILA: A blood python? Couldn't you have mixed it up with a kingsnake?

CHRISTIAN: It wasn't my doing, I don't control exports. I just file the paperwork and take calls.  
(turns to SKYLER)

SKYLER: I ship over dozens of snakes a day, mistakes happen.

CHRISTIAN: Since I give you a list of every required snake and their addresses, I don't think that's a valid excuse.

SKYLER: Sure, I get it. Years of sending snakes and one screw-up is completely unacceptable. Got it.

JOEY: It's bad practice to send the same person the wrong snake twice.

SKYLER: (mocking) *It's bad practice to send the same person the wrong snake twice.* Thanks Joey, very helpful. I will keep that in mind.

CHRISTIAN: Skyler, that's enough.

JOEY: Not cool. Maybe next check off the snakes you grab so you know you got the right amount.

SKYLER: (pause) Are you, the guy with the snake phobia, telling me how to do my job? Is that what's happening?

JOEY: I was just trying-

SKYLER: You were "just" nothing. Leave it be.

TWILA: Skyler-

SKYLER: You know what? No, no, all of you shut up. I need this answered. I wanna figure why Mr. Atheris is getting sued, but I wanna know this first. Why is someone nervous about snakes working in a *snake breeding facility*? It makes no sense. And what, I'm supposed to *accommodate* him? How do I do that?

CHRISTIAN: You could start by not dangling snakes above his head.

SKYLER: Why does that matter? Forget that; he's surrounded by tanks! I can't make them disappear! There are enough snakes here to destroy the rodent population of Missouri! Why is he even here? Why would he take a job *here*? I'm scared of heights; you don't see me working for a skydiving company.

JOEY: You think working around snakes was my first choice? I didn't have a job! I needed something! Not that this should be your concern anyways. My job is my business, let me do it and leave me alone.

SKYLER: You took a job that someone else may have really wanted, you know that? Back when I was a teenager I would've begged for a job like you have. Not being able to handle, but just the sheer fact I would be around so many snakes is incredible. You're a waste of space here.

JOEY: Back off, man.

TWILA: Guys, please! That's enough.

CHRISTIAN: Don't we have more pressing matters? Joey.

JOEY: Uhh, I don't really need to tell mine. Skyler pretty much covered the worst part of my day.

CHRISTIAN: Walk through it anyways.

JOEY: Hmm. Well, I was cleaning tubs, hundreds of them. That took up most my day, damn things take forever to go through. Got chased by that damn snake-

SKYLER: For the last time, snakes don't chase people! (mumbles to self) Unless it's a bushmaster.

JOEY: Then I unloaded some bedding supplies and swept and mopped the place. Ran into Mr. Atheris after a bit; he looked in a rush.

TWILA: Don't you usually mop after hours?

JOEY: Yeah, that's why it was so weird! He said something about checking on the pregnant females, that something was wrong.

(pause)

TWILA: Please don't look at me like that, I told you what happened on my end!

JOEY: Breeding is your job, though. If you don't know, ain't that suspicious?

TWILA: What do you want me to do? I took a look at some of the pregnant mothers and separated clutches, threw away the bad eggs and made sure the snakes were in good shape. Nothing happened!

SKYLER: I saw you kill some snakes off before!

TWILA: They had *genetic defects*. They would've died painfully weeks after they were born; it was the most humane thing to do.

SKYLER: Sure have a lot of those genetic defects, huh?

CHRISTIAN: Skyler, enough of that.

SKYLER: Yeah, I don't think the reptile kisser did anything anyways. But what's keeping Joey from doing anything? He doesn't like snakes.

JOEY: I'm scared of them.

SKYLER: Exactly. You wouldn't blink if any of them died.

JOEY: I'm sorry, but are you suggesting I would open one of those cages up, exposing myself to a snake, all to kill it? Do you know what a phobia is?

SKYLER: Well how about miss Customer Support? Probably killed one of them off out of frustration.



CHRISTIAN: I would never do something so needless. Profit margins are already low, like I would make our inventory worse.

(pause)

JOEY: So that's it then, huh? None of us know nothing? (pause) Guess that's fine, they'll figure out who did it anyways and it ain't me. You guys can deal with your own mess.

SKYLER: I did nothing.

TWILA: I would never!

CHRISTIAN: So long as the jury is competent, then everyone innocent will stay that way.

(pause)

JOEY: But what if it's true? Won't that mean I'm out a job?

TWILA: If it is true, that means snakes are being hurt. I don't want to be a part of that, do you?

SKYLER: No.

CHRISTIAN: Certainly not.

JOEY: Well, I'm not a big fan of the suckers but I sure don't want to cause them needless harm. Not their fault they exist, I guess.

SKYLER: What a hero.

(JAMES ATHERIS enters)

ATHERIS: What's going on here?

TWILA: Oh, Mr. Atheris! How, uhhh, nice of you to show up! Why are you back?

ATHERIS: This *is* my office, Twila. Is there any reason I shouldn't be?

TWILA: Oh, no, not at all!

CHRISTIAN: Did you end up leaving early, sir?

ATHERIS: Not at all, my daughter wanted to look at the racks. But that is all besides the point, isn't it? (pause) Why are you all in my office?

(ATHERIS walks around looking at each actor until he looks at the Letter of Demands. He grabs it.)

ATHERIS: Who told you it was okay to come into my office like this? I have sensitive paperwork, as you can see.

JOEY: I'm sorry Mr. Atheris, I called them in. I, well I saw that while cleaning. And it, well, it worried me.

ATHERIS: So you decided to call my entire staff in and discuss rumors?

(pause. ATHERIS eventually sighs)

ATHERIS: Well sorry to tell you this, but your worries were for nothing. Some disgruntled customer was bit by their pet and decided that it was due to animal abuse instead of it being, you know, a typically aggressive baby banded water snake.

TWILA: That's ridiculous. They can sue for that?

ATHERIS: They can sue for anything if you get a shady enough lawyer.

CHRISTIAN: Snakes aren't exactly a favored pet, it wouldn't surprise me if the judge accepted the case by thinking of the snake from the movie Anaconda.

SKYLER: How stupid.

ATHERIS: Now that you all are thoroughly informed of something that I deemed pointless to talk about in the first place, please get out of my office. (pause) Except you, Christian. I need someone to help sort my paperwork.

(SKYLER, JOEY, and TWILA leave)

ATHERIS: Well.

CHRISTIAN: Well, sir?

ATHERIS: Things aren't looking good, Christian. They accepted the case.

CHRISTIAN: So it would seem.

ATHERIS: Those damn PETA loonies know nothing about snake breeding. Sometimes snakes have bad cognitive disorders.

CHRISTIAN: Most breeders would stop breeding those bad morphs, sir.

ATHERIS: People pay a hundred and fifty dollars a pop for these suckers, who wouldn't breed them?

(takes out ball python)

ATHERIS: Look at this guy. What an incredible cash cow, who would've thought so many morphs could come out of it?

CHRISTIAN: It would've never happened in the wild, sir.

ATHERIS: Which is exactly why people pay us. What's wrong with selling an animal if the buyer knows what they are getting? We tell the buyers about the brain problems with these guys, so we aren't misleading them.

CHRISTIAN: Some would say it's cruel to keep creating such an animal. Some may say it suffers because of us.

(pause)

ATHERIS: He doesn't look like he's in pain, does he? He isn't making any noise, any complaints.

CHRISTIAN: I wouldn't know, sir. Snakes don't tend to make sound.

ATHERIS: Well they hiss when they're threatened, don't they?

CHRISTIAN: I don't think a snake can be threatened by its own thoughts.

(pause)

ATHERIS: Do you think we deserve this? This company? All shut down for this little guy?

CHRISTIAN: Our industry boom was started by him too. This may be presumptuous of me, but perhaps we took it a bit too far and he has a say in that.

ATHERIS: Heh, maybe he does.

(light focuses on ATHERIS playing with the ball python)

ATHERIS: What a curious little thing he is. A monster from the savanna, yet one of the most gentle snakes out there. Hardly fights, rarely attacks, just balls himself up from the world.

CHRISTIAN: Perhaps we underestimated him.

ATHERIS: Perhaps.

(END PLAY)