

THE SPOILS

BY JESSE EISENBERG



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THE SPOILS
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THE SPOILS was originally produced in New York City by The New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Adam Bernstein, Executive Director) in association with Lisa Matlin, opening on June 2, 2015, at The Pershing Square Signature Center. It was directed by Scott Elliott; the set design was by Derek McLane; the costume design was by Susan Hilferty; the lighting design was Peter Kaczorowski; the sound design was by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen; the projection design was by Olivia Sebesky; the fight direction was by Unkle-Dave's Fight-House; the production stage manager was Valerie A. Peterson. The cast was as follows:

KALYAN Kunal Nayyar
RESHMA Annapurna Sriram
BEN Jesse Eisenberg
TED Michael Zegen
SARAH Erin Darke

CHARACTERS

KALYAN: Originally from Nepal, now in New York studying for an MBA. Ben's roommate.

RESHMA: Of Indian heritage but culturally American, now in medical school. Kalyan's girlfriend.

BEN: A young, angry man, in film school. Owns the apartment where he and Kalyan live.

TED: Ben's classmate from high school, now working on Wall Street.

SARAH: Ben's high school crush, now Ted's girlfriend.

“Know something about something. Don’t just present your wonderful self to the world. Constantly amass knowledge and offer it around.”

*—Richard Holbrooke,
22nd United States Ambassador
to the United Nations*

THE SPOILS

ACT ONE

Scene 1

*A PowerPoint presentation is illuminated on a white wall.
The slide says:*

Amusement or Barbarism?

*Lights up on a modern apartment in New York City and a young
Nepalese man, Kalyan, and his Indian girlfriend, Reshma. He
speaks with an accent; she does not.*

KALYAN. “Amusement or Barbarism?”

RESHMA. Am I supposed to choose one?

KALYAN. No, it’s just a provocative opener.

RESHMA. Oh sorry.

KALYAN. That’s okay. “Amusement or Barbarism?” (*Kalyan hits a
button on his laptop and the slide changes to:*)

American Football:

An Introduction to the Ballet of Brutality.

By Kalyan Mathema

“American Football: An Introduction to the Ballet of Brutality. By
Kalyan Mathema.” Now, before I continue, I must confess that I’m
of two minds on this. I feel, in a truly legitimate way, torn. And it
raises large questions about morality and ethics. Questions that all
the great minds have tried to tackle. Pun intended. Did you see
that? What I did with “tackle”? You’ll notice that I have several
puns sprinkled throughout this PowerPoint presentation.

RESHMA. Oh god, lucky me!

KALYAN. Continuing on. It raises a big question: Is it appropriate to withhold knowledge from someone even if you think it might hurt them? Is it ethical to deny someone information, even if disclosing that information might hurt them?

RESHMA. Are you saying that telling me something, presumably scintillating, about football will hurt me?

KALYAN. Well, I think it might hurt *us*.

RESHMA. And how, exactly, will me knowing about football hurt us?

KALYAN. Every Monday night, you and I gather together in this living room to watch NFL on ESPN, which is one of the great highlights of my week. In fact, it is the only highlight of my week. Is that too needy?

RESHMA. It's a little needy. But I know it's the highlight and I appreciate your honesty.

KALYAN. Thank you. And one of the things that makes it the highlight of my week—a week that's mostly spent reading economics textbooks and World Bank reports and fighting with my roommate—is that you don't know what's going on during the game. If I can speak frankly, I think it's so lovely that you don't know what anyone's doing on the field and yet you continue to come here, week after week, and let me put my arm around you while we watch something that I enjoy immensely and you simply tolerate.

RESHMA. So what you're saying is, you think my ignorance is lovely?

KALYAN. Amongst other things, very much so.

RESHMA. I've heard pretty much every cheesy pickup line. And, usually, I'm complimented on my brilliance. But, Kalyan, never has someone been so sweet and insulted me at the same time. What else do you like about me?

KALYAN. I like it very much when you ask me why the blue team doesn't just kick it between the yellow things and I get to tell you that they're way too far away to kick a field goal.

RESHMA. What else?

KALYAN. I like it also when you ask me why thirty seconds is taking twenty minutes. I find that to be very charming, especially when it's followed by a sigh of frustration because you have to be up very early in the morning to save the lives of strangers at your hospital.

RESHMA. Anything else? Not football related?

KALYAN. If you're asking me to tell you what I like about you that's not football related, I'm afraid you will definitely not make it

back in time to save any lives. Reshma, I like everything about you and all of the little things that you hide from other people, like that little protrusion near your elbow that you unconsciously cover with long sleeve shirts in the summer and the tooth that kind of turns inward and makes you talk with your mouth a little more closed than would be expected from someone with your verbal prowess. These are the things I like the most. I would like to buy you longer sleeves and braces but I would miss your elbow and tooth so much. RESHMA. You are the sweetest person in the world. Do you know that?

KALYAN. I've only just been alerted.

RESHMA. You really are. You are the kindest, nicest guy. And I don't deserve you.

KALYAN. Don't say that.

RESHMA. No, really. I don't deserve you.

KALYAN. Of course you deserve me. The only reason you wouldn't deserve me is because you're so overqualified. So you wouldn't deserve me through some reverse logic.

RESHMA. Sweet comments like that are just another reason why I don't deserve you.

KALYAN. What does that mean?

RESHMA. Nothing, it means nothing. Just continue on with the PowerPoint.

KALYAN. Okay. "American Football: An Introduction to the Ballet of Brutality. By Kalyan Mathema." (*Kalyan presses a button. The slide changes to read:*)

A Brief History: Bravery and Brevity

"A Brief History: Bravery and Brevity"!

RESHMA. Is that also a pun?

KALYAN. I think it's more a play on words.

RESHMA. 'Cause now I'm just looking for puns.

KALYAN. And you'll find them. (*Kalyan presses a button and there is a cheesy transition to a slide that says:*)

Rules and Regulations

"Rules and Regulations." (*And another slide:*)

Skin that Pig and Toss It on the Gridiron

"Skin that Pig and Toss It on the Gridiron."

RESHMA. I think that's a pun, but I don't understand the reference.

KALYAN. Don't worry, there are more on the way! (*The door swings open and Ben enters carrying groceries and a camera bag.*)

BEN. Namaste, motherfuckers!

KALYAN. Ben, what are you doing here?

BEN. What am I doing in my own fucking home? Hey Reshma! You're looking very Indian tonight.

RESHMA. Thanks Ben, you're looking smarmy.

BEN. Was he doing a PowerPoint presentation for you? Were you doing a PowerPoint presentation for her?

KALYAN. Ben, you said you would be at the bar for a while, you said this would be okay.

BEN. This guy *loves* fucking PowerPoint! Any excuse to make a PowerPoint presentation. Someone asks him a question, a simple fucking query and he's off and running. Hey Kalyan, how was your day? Hold on a second, let me answer that via PowerPoint. Hey sir, do you have the time? I do, let me show you on some PowerPoint slides. Do I have something hanging out of my fucking nose? Well, I can answer that using seven different shitty graphics with clip art and transitions!

RESHMA. Okay, we get it! He likes PowerPoint. I happen to think it's really sweet.

BEN. Fine, but he's teaching you about football? How is that sweet? You don't wanna watch that brutal, barbaric shit, do you Reshma? You're a classy woman.

RESHMA. And yet, when you say that, Ben, I somehow feel less classy.

BEN. The world is topsy-turvy! You can't actually like football. Bunty only likes it because it makes him feel more American and less Nepalese, isn't that right Bunty?

KALYAN. I'm sorry about this Reshma. Ben did tell me he was going to be out all night.

BEN. Do you want me to head back out?

RESHMA. No, you stay! I was just about to leave.

KALYAN. No you weren't. No, she wasn't.

BEN. Are you sure you want to leave? I don't want to break up the promising date you guys were probably having!

RESHMA. Well, if you have somewhere to go...

BEN. Really don't.

RESHMA. Why don't we just call it a night, and I'll call you tomorrow, Kalyan.

BEN. That does sound like the better idea, you're so smart all the time! Have a good night Reshie. Good to see you, as usual. (*Reshma*)

starts packing up her purse. Ben opens the door for her but stands in front of it.) Before you go...

RESHMA. Yes?

KALYAN. Ben...

BEN. Tell me you're the luckiest girl in the world.

RESHMA. What?

BEN. You are dating this fucking prince charming! This guy is my roommate and my best fucking friend in the world forever and if anyone does anything to hurt him or to touch him where he doesn't want to be touched or break his heart or even think of breaking that adorable fucking heart, I will personally track you down and slaughter you and enjoy it. So tell me you're the luckiest girl in the world.

RESHMA. Fuck you, Ben.

BEN. And give him a little kiss so he knows you appreciate him.

KALYAN. Ben, I don't need help.

BEN. Clearly you do. Give him a little peck on the face, Reshma. I'll turn around.

RESHMA. I'm kissing him because I want to kiss him.

BEN. I don't care why you're doing it, just give the man a kiss.

RESHMA. Turn around.

KALYAN. This is absurd. *(Ben turns around.)*

RESHMA. Good night Bunty. You're a great man. And you should get your own apartment.

KALYAN. Good night Reshma. I meant everything I said about your elbow and your tooth. I love them. I dream about your flaws.

BEN. Rein it in, brother!

RESHMA. Call me tomorrow?

KALYAN. First thing. Have a good night.

RESHMA. You too.

BEN. Can I turn back around now?

RESHMA. No.

BEN. I don't get a kiss? *(Reshma exits.)* That was kind of rude.

KALYAN. It was rude of *you*, Ben. You humiliated me.

BEN. Good cop, bad cop. I'm a dick and you look awesome by comparison. Which you are anyway, so I was just illuminating the truth of our dynamic. Anyway, you got some action, no need to thank me. Are you mad at me?

KALYAN. Well you did say you would be out—

BEN. Don't worry about it, no hard feelings. How was your date?

THE SPOILS

by Jesse Eisenberg

3M, 2W

Nobody likes Ben. Ben doesn't even like Ben. He's been kicked out of grad school, lives off his parents' money, and bullies everyone in his life, including his roommate Kalyan, an earnest Nepalese immigrant. When Ben discovers that his grade school crush is marrying a straight-laced banker, he sets out to destroy their relationship and win her back.

*"Ben is a worthy... contribution to the immortal gallery of black-hole masochists that stretches from Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* to the dubious heroes of Richard Greenberg plays and Noah Baumbach movies. Most important, while Ben would surely say *THE SPOILS* is all about Ben, Mr. Eisenberg has seen fit to surround his leading narcissist with characters who live and breathe and react independently. ... You may not want to identify with Ben. But when he's riding one of his self-sabotaging juggernauts of a monologue—talking too fast to ever put on the brakes—you're likely to recall those uncomfortable moments when you couldn't help screwing up something good. This guy is a jerk, for sure, but he's also well-drawn enough to remind us of the jerk within us all."*

—**The New York Times**

*"Eisenberg proves himself an astute chronicler of millennial misery, satisfying a dramatic craving we didn't realize we were having until the lights went down. ... *THE SPOILS* explores the internal jealousies that rear their ugly heads when everyone else seems to get what they want. ... As a writer, Eisenberg seems to have taken a few cues from Kenneth Lonergan's *This Is Our Youth*... he creates a circle where adults are ever-present, but grown-ups don't exist."*

—**TheaterMania.com**

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3502-6



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