



# SUSIE SITS SHIVA

BY ARLENE HUTTON

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DRAMATISTS  
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INC.



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*To high school Thespians, past, present, and future.  
And to my actor cousins: Alyssa, Sofia, and Sydney*

## CHARACTERS

SUSIE, 18, a high school senior

MAX, 16, Susie's younger brother, a high school sophomore

JOAN, Susie's mother

GERALD, Susie's dad

*The following can be doubled by three or more actors or cast separately:*

ALYSSA, 17–18, Susie's best friend

BRIANNA, 17–18, another friend from Susie's school

KAYLA, 17–18, a friend from Susie's school

OFFICER SMITH, female or male, a young cop in civilian clothes

SISTER CLAIRE, a Catholic nun, preferably cast other than Caucasian

MR. COOPER, Susie's science teacher

JASON, 17, a junior on the swim team at Susie's school

PASTOR JOE, the youth minister at Susie's church

ROBIN, 16–18, a neurodivergent student, any gender

LULU, 20s, a young Muslim woman who works at the school

## CASTING NOTE

The family members, school friends, and other adults can be of any race, except for Lulu who should be as written. In addition, Mr. Cooper could be “Ms. Cooper,” Pastor Joe could be “Jo,” Max could be female or trans, Kayla could be “Kyle,” and Brianna could be “Brian.”

## **PLACE**

The seldom used living room in a modest raised ranch house in the suburbs or a small town.

## **TIME**

Spring break of next year.

*Susie Sits Shiva* was developed at the Educational Theatre Association's 2019 International Thespian Festival.



# SUSIE SITS SHIVA

## Scene 1: Friday Afternoon

*The boring living room of a modest home in an American town. If we could see it from the street the house is probably a raised ranch. The interior is very beige, was decorated twenty years ago, has not been updated since, and is seldom used. Sofa, chairs, footstool, end tables with lamps, and a couple of family photographs. There is a small mirror on one wall and candles in candlesticks on a console. There are doors on either side of the room, one leading to the kitchen and garage and the other to the front hallway and bedrooms. The set doesn't have to be realistic; simple furniture pieces can suffice.*

*Susie sits alone on a footstool in the living room, staring out, thinking. Susie's mother, Joan, calls from the kitchen, unseen offstage.*

JOAN. (Off.) Susie?

*Susie doesn't answer.*

Will you set the table?

*No answer.*

Are you going to eat supper tonight?

*Susie doesn't answer.*

There was a lot of food there today.

*Susie doesn't answer.*

It was nice that so many people brought dishes.

*Susie doesn't answer.*

I'm heating up meat sauce for supper.

*Susie doesn't answer.*

You like my meat sauce.

*Susie doesn't answer. Joan enters.*

Do you want spaghetti or fusilli?

*Susie remains silent.*

*(Calling off.)* Max, do you want spaghetti or fusilli?

MAX. *(Calling from the offstage bedroom area.)* What?

JOAN. Spaghetti or fusilli?

MAX. *(Calling to Joan, from off.)* What's fusilli?

JOAN. Spirals.

*Joan exits to the kitchen as Max enters from the hallway.*

*The lines come quickly.*

MAX. *(As he enters, calling to Joan, off.)* Is it the itty-bitty spaghetti?  
*(To Susie.)* What's it called?

SUSIE. Angel hair.

MAX. *(Calling off.)* Is it angel hair?

JOAN. *(Off.)* I do have some angel hair pasta. I thought you didn't like it.

MAX. *(Calling off.)* I don't.

*Joan sticks her head in. They continue, quickly.*

JOAN. I thought you didn't like angel hair.

MAX. I don't.

JOAN. It cooks faster.

MAX. I ate a lot at the church.

JOAN. Did you ruin your appetite?

MAX. No.

JOAN. Did you eat the pasta salad? I forgot they had pasta.

MAX. It was the curly ones.

JOAN. Spirals.

SUSIE. Fusilli.

MAX. Yeah. I don't like that.

JOAN. Okay. Spaghetti, then.



*Joan starts to exit. Susie continues to sit.*

MAX. I don't like spirals.

JOAN. You used to like it.

MAX. Why do you buy spirals?

SUSIE. Fusilli.

MAX. Why do you buy fusilli?

JOAN. Maybe I like fusilli.

MAX. I never thought about that. *(To Susie.)* Do you like spirals?

*Susie shrugs.*

You gotta know if you like something or not.

JOAN. I have linguine or macaroni.

MAX. Is linguine like fusilli? I don't like—

JOAN. We know. *(Looking around.)* I need to dust this room.

MAX. What's linguine?

*Joan starts to exit.*

JOAN. Linguine is flat spaghetti.

*Joan exits.*

MAX. Why don't they just call it flat spaghetti?

JOAN. *(Off.)* We're having linguine.

*Silence. Max stares at Susie.*

MAX. Did you know him really well?

SUSIE. Yeah.

MAX. Oh. Like in your class?

SUSIE. Homeroom.

MAX. Oh. I thought he was your lab partner.

SUSIE. He was.

MAX. Oh.

JOAN. *(Off.)* Max, will you come set the table?

MAX. *(Calling off.)* Yeah.

*Max sits on a chair. Nobody says anything for a while. Then:*

Do you get a new lab partner?

SUSIE. I don't think so.

JOAN. *(Off.)* Max!

MAX. *(Calling off.)* Coming!

*(To Susie.)* They should give you a new lab partner. *(Pause.)* So you don't have to do all the work by yourself. Don't you think Mr. Cooper will give you a new lab partner?

*Susie doesn't answer.*

I mean he should. But maybe everyone is already paired off? Since it's halfway through the semester? Maybe Mr. Cooper will be your lab partner. You'd always get an A. But that wouldn't be fair to everyone else. Maybe you'll rotate? Like whenever someone is out you fill in for them? You'll be the, what, understudy lab partner. Like you were the understudy Anne Frank. Did you know that Frankenstein wasn't the monster? He was the doctor. A lot of people don't know that.

*Joan enters.*

JOAN. Max, I asked you to set the table.

MAX. I set it last night. And the night before.

JOAN. Please come set the table.

MAX. And the night before that.

*Joan exits.*

JOAN. *(Off.)* MAX!!!

MAX. *(To Susie.)* Are you ever gonna set the table again?

*Max exits. Susie remains sitting.*

## **Scene 2: Friday, Just Before Sunset**

*After supper. Susie is still sitting on her footstool. Her father (Gerald) and Joan are sitting on the sofa or chairs. Susie is looking at her phone.*

JOAN. I didn't realize you two were that close.

SUSIE. He was my lab partner.

JOAN. That's really lovely. I mean that you had a lab partner you liked. Lab partners are important. Right, Gerald? Your dad always made good grades in science. Isn't that right, Gerald? Did you have good lab partners? Did that help you?

GERALD. Susie doesn't need a lab partner. Susie can do it all on her own. Right, Tiger? You're gonna get back in there and keep your grades up. Take some time off for spring break.

JOAN. Maybe we should've gone out of town for the week.

GERALD. Spring break is the worst time to go away. Crowds.

JOAN. Susie, honey, would you like to go away somewhere? We can visit Aunt Margaret in Orlando. You can go to Disney World.

SUSIE. I don't want to go to Disney World.

GERALD. It's spring break. No one in their right mind goes to Disney World.

JOAN. We could stay at Aunt Margaret's and go to the beach.

GERALD. Daytona? During spring break? You're kidding.

JOAN. *(To Susie.)* Would you like to go somewhere?

SUSIE. I have to stay here.

JOAN. I didn't see anything on the calendar on the fridge.

*Susie continues to text and scroll on her phone. Max enters, carrying a dish towel.*

MAX. What's everybody doing in the living room?

GERALD. It's time to do your homework, buddy.

MAX. We never sit in the living room.

GERALD. Go do your homework.

MAX. It's spring break. I don't have any homework.

GERALD. Then why don't you go work on your homework for after spring break.

JOAN. *(To Susie.)* We could go to Waterworld.

GERALD. It's too cold.

JOAN. I mean the Waterworld in Orlando.

GERALD. I'm not driving all the way to Florida. *(To Max.)* Max, did you hear me?

MAX. I don't have homework for after spring break. They haven't assigned it yet.

GERALD. Then read ahead. Get ahead of the game.

JOAN. (*To Susie.*) Susie, I saved a plate of spaghetti for you.

MAX. It's linguine.

GERALD. (*To Max.*) Okay, buddy. Do as you're told. Go to your room and do your homework.

MAX. I thought we were going to watch a movie tonight.

GERALD. Not now.

MAX. It's movie night. Family time. Isn't that what a family room is for?

GERALD. Max, go to your room.

MAX. I did the dishes four days in a row.

GERALD. Max!

MAX. Isn't anyone going to say thank you?

SUSIE. Thank you.

MAX. Thank you for what?

SUSIE. Thank you for doing the dishes.

MAX. Thank you for doing the dishes, what?

SUSIE. Thank you for doing the dishes, Max.

GERALD. Max!

MAX. What did I do?

GERALD. I said go to your room. We're trying to talk to your sister.

MAX. I thought the funeral was over.

JOAN. (*To Susie.*) Let's get you something to eat.

MAX. (*To Susie.*) Mom made meat sauce for you. But we're out of Parmesan. We're running out of everything. Hasn't anyone been to the grocery store this week?

GERALD. Why don't you go to your room and make a list. You've got your license now. You can drive to the grocery store tomorrow and do the shopping.

MAX. I'm on spring break!

GERALD. You still have to contribute to this family.

MAX. I did the dishes four nights in a row! I did Susie's turn twice.

*Max waves the dish towel. Susie checks something on her phone. She stands up. Everyone is quiet. As they all watch in silence, Susie takes the dish towel from Max, crosses to the mirror and hangs the dish towel over the mirror. She sits back down on her footstool.*

JOAN. Honey, what are you doing?

SUSIE. I'm sitting shiva.

GERALD. You're doing what?

SUSIE. I'm sitting shiva for Tyler.

*Joan, Gerald, and Max stare at Susie.*

MAX. What's shiva?

*Susie remains sitting on her footstool.*

### Scene 3: Saturday Morning

*Susie has changed her shirt and is perched on her footstool. Alyssa sits on the sofa or a chair. There is a box of tissues on the coffee table. Alyssa speaks quickly, stream-of-consciousness, with uptalk.*

ALYSSA. So I like didn't know Tyler very well, but when I saw the posts I thought I should be here to support you in case nobody else comes. I mean like you're one of my best friends. It's like amazing what you are doing, honoring this guy who nobody really knew. I mean I think they're gonna plant a tree right by the front drive, some kind of tree. I don't know what good planting a tree does, but it's something people do, to do a, like a what, like a memorial or something. Like I think there's gonna be a sign, or a plaque they call it, that's what they called it on the news, a plaque, with Tyler's name on it.

Years from now someone will drive by the tree and if they're close enough to read the plaque they will say, wow, someone named

Tyler got hit by a car and like died here, maybe I should slow down. Although I guess if they are driving slow enough to read the plaque then they're probably already slowing down, so I don't see the point.

SUSIE. Tyler died in the hospital.

ALYSSA. Oh. Right. So I guess the plaque will say like he got hit by the car there.

*Susie is silent.*

I think you can see the spot from the windows of the science lab. The spot where they're going to plant the tree. The spot where he was hit by the car.

*Susie is silent.*

My locker is on the same hallway as his. I used to see him between fourth and fifth periods. (*A pause.*) I don't think I ever said hi to him. I feel really bad about that now. I could at least have said hi. I could have said, "Hi, Tyler." At least once. Although I don't think I knew his name before this week.

*A pause.*

I was thinking... I think I saw him that day in the hallway. And what if I had said hi to him. What if he had stopped just for like, not even like two seconds, maybe that would have delayed him and he wouldn't have been hit by the car.

*A pause.*

You know, it really wasn't clear if it was a practice drill or something real and if we were supposed to lock down or leave the building. Like if it's a fire drill we leave the building, duh. It was really confusing. I guess if it had been real it wouldn't have been so confusing, we would have like smelled smoke and left or heard shots and...but since it was a false alarm... Is it worse that he died because he got hit by a cop car during a false alarm? I guess if it had been real maybe more people would have... It was really confusing that day...

*A pause.*

So what am I supposed to be doing here with you?

SUSIE. Nothing.

ALYSSA. Nothing?

SUSIE. Just showing up.

ALYSSA. That's it?

SUSIE. Some people bring food.

ALYSSA. Oh. I didn't know that. I didn't know I was supposed to bring food.

SUSIE. It's okay. Did you sign the guest book?

ALYSSA. Yes. Was I supposed to write something, too? I never heard of this before.

SUSIE. Shiva?

ALYSSA. Yeah. Is that how you say it? "Shiva"?

SUSIE. Tyler was Jewish.

ALYSSA. Is that why you are doing this?

SUSIE. Yes.

ALYSSA. But the funeral was at the Catholic Church.

SUSIE. He told me he was half Jewish.

ALYSSA. Oh. Well, somebody posted about what you're doing for him and then everyone was talking about it and I thought, well, you're like my best friend, so I should come support you.

SUSIE. Thank you.

ALYSSA. I mean it's hard to honor someone you didn't know. I mean we all went to the funeral yesterday 'cause that's what you do when someone at your school dies. And the assembly in the auditorium the day before that. Somebody said we should light candles for Tyler and hold them and stand in a circle, but somebody else said that was just for like school shootings and suicides and tornadoes and he got hit by a car and people get hit by cars all the time or I mean are like in car accidents and we can't light candles for everybody. It was nice they had the assembly.

SUSIE. It was the last day before spring break. They always have an assembly to talk about drunk driving.

ALYSSA. Oh. I didn't remember that. I thought it was for Tyler. Nobody mentioned drunk driving. Do you think the cop was drunk?

SUSIE. It was a regular assembly and they had a moment of silence. That was it.

ALYSSA. Oh. Well, I definitely was silent. It made me sad to think about him.

*A pause. Alyssa starts to get a little weepy.*

I don't think I ever knew anybody who died before.

SUSIE. You didn't know Tyler.

ALYSSA. Our lockers were like almost next to each other. I saw him like every day. Tyler. And now I'll never see him again. Never in my whole life. I'll never get to know him. It's so sad. It's really, really sad. It's like when we had to put my dog to sleep. Foxy. Remember Foxy? He looked like a little fox. He's buried in our backyard. Next to Scamper the cat I had when I was in elementary school and Puff, the cat we got after that. I still miss Puff. She was so smart and really fluffy. That's why we called her Puff.

*Alyssa is visibly sniffing.*

Can you sit shiva for dogs and cats?

#### **Scene 4: Saturday Afternoon**

*There are as many students in Susie's living room as there can be. At least three, but more would be great. Perhaps we see Alyssa again. Possibly these are the same actors dressed as different students. Or maybe they are completely different actors. The actors cast in the scene should reflect the diversity of the community. Perhaps two of the students are Deaf and are signing to each other.*

*Susie is sitting on her footstool. The other students are sprawled around the room like a litter of puppies. Some are on the sofa and chairs, others sitting on the floor. They are all texting on their cell phones, including Susie. Maybe Max walks through the room.*

*At one point one of the students looks up at another and says, "Yeah. Right?" These two have been texting each other, as are most of the students in the room.*



*Susie puts down her phone. One by one the others do also, until they are all staring at Susie. No one speaks. At first it's sort of sweet and then it gets uncomfortable.*

*Finally Susie picks up her phone again and one by one the other students do, too, until finally everyone is happily texting again.*

### **Scene 5: Saturday, Late Afternoon**

*Susie is sitting on her footstool. Joan is beside her on a chair. Brianna and Kayla have just entered. Kayla is wearing dressy shoes; Brianna is holding a Tupperware container with brownies in it.*

*Gerald enters, crossing through the room.*

GERALD. Shiva's over, everybody. You can all go back home now.

*Gerald exits through the opposite door.*

BRIANNA. On Twitter [*Or whatever is current.*] it said it was for a whole week.

KAYLA. We tried to come earlier but there wasn't any place to park and the yard was all torn up and I didn't want to walk through the dirt in my nice shoes. So we went shopping and came back.

SUSIE. It's okay.

BRIANNA. This is so beautiful what you're doing—

KAYLA. —I didn't know he was—

BRIANNA. —Honoring him—

KAYLA. —I never knew what shiva was—

BRIANNA. —It's so important—

KAYLA. —Yeah.

BRIANNA. —I'm gonna always do a shiva from now on. Whenever someone dies.

KAYLA. Are we supposed to do anything special?

BRIANNA. (*Aside, to Kayla.*) We're here to comfort Susie.

KAYLA. *(To Susie.)* Are you comforted?

*Max enters.*

BRIANNA. And we're supposed to bring food. That's why I made brownies. Would you like a brownie, Max? *[Note: a cookie can be substituted for a brownie.]*

MAX. Sure.

JOAN. Let me get some napkins so there won't be crumbs on the, oops, there we go.

*They all stare at the brownie crumbs on the floor.*

BRIANNA. Oh, I'm sorry.

JOAN. I'll get it later.

KAYLA. Do we leave now?

BRIANNA. We sit. That's why it's called "sitting shiva."

KAYLA. Oh.

*Brianna and Kayla sit.*

BRIANNA. It's all over social media.

KAYLA. Should we take a selfie?

BRIANNA. Are we supposed to pray or something?

KAYLA. Or read from the Bible?

SUSIE. I don't think so.

*Brianna holds Susie's hand. Kayla follows her lead and takes the other one. It's awkward. Max starts to leave.*

JOAN. Max, where are you going?

MAX. To my room?

JOAN. What for?

MAX. Um, to play video games?

JOAN. You can't play video games.

MAX. Why not?

*Gerald enters.*

JOAN. We're sitting shiva.

GERALD. No, we're not.

MAX. Wikipedia doesn't say I can't play video games.

**The play doesn't end here...**

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