

**SMALL JOKES  
ABOUT  
MONSTERS**

**BY STEVEN STRAFFORD**

**A DPS ACTING EDITION PUBLISHED BY**

**BROADWAY**  
LICENSING GROUP

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SMALL JOKES ABOUT MONSTERS was produced at the Landing Theatre Company (David Rainey, Executive Artistic Director) in Houston, TX, in 2017. It was directed by Clinton Hopper, the scenic design was by Shelby Marie, the costume design was by Bridget Paliwoda, the lighting design was by Clinton Hopper, and the sound design was by Robert Meek. The cast was as follows:

RYAN ..... Joshua Kyle Hoppe  
JOHN ..... Jonathan Gonzalez  
DEREK ..... Colin Brock  
MOM ..... Rachel Dickinson

SMALL JOKES ABOUT MONSTERS was produced at the 16th Street Theater (Ann Filmer, Artistic Director) in Chicago, IL, in 2019. It was directed by by Kristina Valada-Viars, the scenic design was by Eleanor Kahn, the costume design was by Rachel Sypniewski, the lighting design was by Cat Wilson, and the sound and music design were by Barry Bennett. The cast was as follows:

RYAN ..... Esteban Andres Cruz  
JOHN ..... Eric Slater  
DEREK ..... Christopher Wayland Jones  
MOM ..... Shariba Rivers

SMALL JOKES ABOUT MONSTERS was produced at the LAMB Arts Regional Theatre (Diana Guhin Wooley, Executive Director; Russell Wooley, Artistic and Managing Director) in Sioux City, IA, in 2019. The direction and scenic design were by Russell Wooley. The cast was as follows:

RYAN ..... Donny Short  
JOHN ..... Matt Chihak  
DEREK ..... Brian Hammond  
MOM ..... Diana Wooley

## CHARACTERS

RYAN—Late 30s. An actor. Smart. Funny. Loves making jokes. Has battled drug addiction and alcoholism.

JOHN—Early 40s. Smart. Dry. Funny. Uptight. Has keen insight.

DEREK—Mid 30s. Funny. Sweet. Always trying to diffuse the tension.

MOM—Late 50s/Early 60s. Direct. Somewhat weary but tough. She loves her sons. She speaks her mind always.

## NOTES

About Mom: She, of course, has a name, and if this play dealt with anyone but her and her three sons, then I would tell the director and actors, and perhaps one day I'll settle on a name that doesn't feel forced, but for now, I am leaving her name as the name she is called throughout the play, Mom.

About casting: I encourage productions to emphasize diversity in casting; there is no reason the brothers, or Mom, need to be the same race.

# SMALL JOKES ABOUT MONSTERS

## Scene 1

*Three men enter. They are Ryan, John, and Derek. They are brothers, and they are fine-looking people. They are funny, so they shouldn't be models, as models don't need to learn how to be funny. The brothers are dressed up because they have just been at a funeral. They have entered into a beach house, the kind you can rent for a weekend. The furniture is nice enough but kitschy. It is clean, but it should not be immaculate. It should be like a place you find on the Jersey Shore. Derek is the youngest, Ryan is the middle son, John is the oldest.*

**RYAN.** Well, in my opinion, and it is only my opinion, of course, but in my opinion, there are three kinds of funny people. There are three kinds.

**JOHN.** Only three?

**RYAN.** Three kinds.

**DEREK.** *(To John.)* Do you feel there should be more?

**JOHN.** I guess—

**DEREK.** There could be—

**JOHN.** —I guess I just feel like it seems so definitive: “There are three kinds of funny people.”

**RYAN.** That's why it's a theory. It attempts to define something.

**JOHN.** So, now we've quickly moved from an opinion to a theory.

**RYAN.** Do you want to hear my theory? Or no? I can turn on the TV if you like.

**JOHN.** No, go ahead.

**DEREK.** Yes, go ahead.

**JOHN.** The floor is yours.

**RYAN.** There are three kinds of funny people. There are Godzillas, Mothras, and Gamas.

**DEREK.** Wait. What's a Mothra and Gamera?

**JOHN.** They're all Japanese monster movie monsters.

**DEREK.** I don't remember those.

**RYAN.** Mothra was a giant moth that caused wind destruction, and Gamas were flying sea turtles that caused water damage.

**DEREK.** Oh. Isn't that funny?

**JOHN.** What?

**RYAN.** Do you guys want drinks?

**DEREK.** A beer is fine.

**JOHN.** Is there wine?

**RYAN.** No.

**JOHN.** A beer is fine. Wait, is there vodka?

**RYAN.** No.

**JOHN.** What do we have?

**RYAN.** Beer or dark rum.

**JOHN.** Dark rum?

**RYAN.** It came with the place.

**JOHN.** A beer is fine.

*Ryan goes to refrigerator to get beer.*

*(To Derek.)* What's funny?

**DEREK.** Huh?

**JOHN.** You said, "Oh, that's funny..."

**DEREK.** I did?

**JOHN.** Yes. Ryan said Gamas caused water damage and you said—

**DEREK.** —Oh, right!!! I just think it's funny that they're all manifestations of natural disasters. It's funny that the Japanese created contemporary fictional monsters to explain away the devastation of

earthquakes with Godzilla, hurricanes with Mothra, and tsunamis with...what was that one?

**JOHN.** Gamera.

**DEREK.** Gamera. I wonder if they had a monster to represent the atomic bomb...

**RYAN.** (*Returning with beers and snacks.*) That's dark—okay, so there are three kinds of—

**JOHN.** (*To Derek.*) And they don't have hurricanes. They have... what?

**RYAN.** Typhoons.

**JOHN.** (*To Derek.*) Typhoons.

**DEREK.** Typhoons.

**RYAN.** Okay, so there are three kinds of funny people: Godzillas, Mothras, and Gameras. Godzillas are people who walk into a room announcing they are funny, demanding you know that they are funny. Their jokes have jokes. You can hear them coming and know they are there. And when you describe them you use funny in the description. Like, "What's he like?" "Oh, he's really funny." I am a Godzilla.

**JOHN.** Naturally.

**RYAN.** Comedic destruction of property is loud and violent and constant. It is—

**DEREK.** —an earthquake of comedy.

**RYAN.** Correct! Now, Mothras. Mothras are the silent, but deadly types. They hang at a party all night and don't say a word, but then they take one flap of their wings and BAM!

**DEREK.** Typhoon!

**RYAN.** Yes. Complete destruction in one silent flap. Mothras are what every Godzilla wishes he or she could be because Godzillas put out maybe one hundred jokes in a night and say sixty land big. Well, that's a night full of laughs, but it is also a night plagued with silences and raised eyebrows. A Mothra hangs tight...surveys the land, gets a feel, and FLAP! The zinger that kills you full of wit and awareness of the room and the people in it. John, you are a Mothra. And I stand in awe of you.

**JOHN.** Well, I better gear up my wit and awareness of the room. I'll start stretching.

**DEREK.** And does that make me a Gamera?

**RYAN.** Gmeras are an interesting subset of funny.

**DEREK.** Am I going to hate you soon?

**RYAN.** Gmeras are sea creatures, they attack from underneath. They are the funny people who are not planning to be funny.

**DEREK.** Yep. I am going to give a preliminary fuck you on this one.

**RYAN.** Thank you. Fuck you too. Gmeras are the people who make a joke, and it bombs. And then they turn around and knock a tray down and the room erupts, but not in laughing at the poor slob, but in—

**DEREK.** —Yep. Fuck you.

**RYAN.** —in love with the Gamera. See, Gmeras are the monsters whose comedy powers engender love and well, maybe some pity...

**DEREK.** I am loved and pitied. Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck. Yoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo.

**RYAN.** For the record, Derek, I think you are more of a Godzilla/Gamera hybrid.

**DEREK.** You, sir, are an asshole.

**JOHN.** I like Derek's theory.

**RYAN.** My being an asshole is his opinion not a theory.

**JOHN.** But you have clearly illustrated that an opinion is just a theory your heart makes...

**RYAN.** I'm exhausted.

*He pulls out an envelope from his suit jacket pocket. He puts it on the table.*

Now?

*No response.*

Not yet. I thought Mom was all right today. Right?

**DEREK.** Yeah.

**JOHN.** As all right as she gets. Sometimes, I just want to put her in



a car. Put it in neutral, lock the doors and push the car over a cliff. I think the effort would make it worth it.

**RYAN.** I thought she was fine.

**JOHN.** She loudly sighed several times during the eulogy.

**RYAN.** So did you. So did I. So did Derek. We are a family of sighers. Our silent disapproval is more akin to running down the hallway naked, yelling, "I disapprove! I disapprove!"

**JOHN.** Yeah, but she...I just feel her waiting for the words to disapprove of. It's not the disapproval that drives me crazy...it's the preparation for it. It's the anticipation I can feel in her, getting ready to attack.

**RYAN.** She's like a cheetah.

**DEREK.** She wasn't all that bad. I'm surprised she came.

**JOHN.** She wasn't going to miss this. She's had her ticket to Dad's funeral for years.

**RYAN.** Dad's wife...seemed...nice?

**JOHN.** How Dad could've married a woman who is even more negative than Mom...it's a gift he has. Had.

*They are quiet a moment.*

**RYAN.** Dad's dead.

**JOHN.** I know...

**DEREK.** And how does that affect us?

**RYAN.** Jesus.

**JOHN.** Derek...

**DEREK.** No. How does that affect us on a day-to-day level?

**RYAN.** Well...on a day-to-day level...

**JOHN.** I'll miss him.

**RYAN.** Yeah?

**JOHN.** I guess...

**RYAN.** This would've been a great eulogy. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for joining us. I think we can all agree that we will miss Carl Hobson...I guess...

**JOHN.** Ha.

**RYAN.** (*Continuing the “eulogy.”*) He was a good man...in some regards...a decent father...kinda...and above all, sorta, he didn't cause too much damage in this world, for he barely lived in it...

**DEREK.** In a sorta kinda, not really kinda way.

**JOHN.** He just died. Shouldn't we miss him?

**RYAN.** I'll miss him. Not yet though. Just not yet.

**DEREK.** What'll you miss? About him?

**RYAN.** What about running into the room and yelling (*Cupping his hands together.*) “And the crowd goes WILD! (*Like an echo.*) Wild! Wild! Wild!”

**JOHN.** Fair point. That is a classic.

**DEREK.** Okay, I re-pose the question...what non-joke will you miss about our father?

*They are quiet a moment.*

**RYAN.** Open the envelope. Jesus...it's a will, right? It's not going to be some letter that says, “I was gay,” or “You all have Lupus,” or something, is it?

**JOHN.** How would Dad know we had Lupus?

**DEREK.** And isn't Lupus something old people get?

**RYAN.** Young people get Lupus.

**DEREK.** When?

**RYAN.** What do you mean, “When?” I mean, they get Lupus. I know a young person with Lupus.

**JOHN.** What's their name?

**RYAN.** I don't remember.

**JOHN.** You're lying.

**RYAN.** I'm lying.

**JOHN.** Lying about Lupus. That's rough.

**RYAN.** My point is, I don't want secrets revealed. I just want a simple: I have millions of dollars you don't know about, and these millions are equally split among my sons.

**DEREK.** I think that would qualify as secrets revealed.

**JOHN.** How would you feel if it said, “Boys, I was always gay. Just like Ryan. Ryan has Lupus, and you each get A MILLION DOLLARS!!!”

**RYAN.** But I’m the only one who has Lupus?

**JOHN.** Yes.

**RYAN.** That would be fine.

**DEREK.** You could be the millionaire face of Lupus.

**RYAN.** I’ll call my agent. I bet there’s a lot of money out there for being a spokesperson of how to manage your millions with Lupus in today’s economy. College circuits alone.

**JOHN.** What do you figure, UMASS, Rutgers...

**RYAN.** No, I feel more like the Wesleyan and Vassar circuit. Small liberal arts schools with a huge heart and a huge endowment... speaking of huge endowment...

**JOHN.** Neither Derek nor I want to hear about anyone’s huge endowment.

**RYAN.** You know, if titties were guaranteed in this story you’d listen.

**DEREK.** True. Tell your story, but add titties into it.

**JOHN.** Yes, we will hear your story if only there be titties in it.

**RYAN.** Okay...titties...

**JOHN.** What will come of this?

**DEREK.** What could come of this, really?

**RYAN.** Titties...

**JOHN.** Open the envelope.

*Silence.*

Open the fucking envelope. It’s probably just a will. You each get the same thing blah blah.

**DEREK.** I don’t know why he couldn’t just be normal. Why the secrets?

*There is a noise from the other room.*

**RYAN.** Is Mom staying here too?

**JOHN.** No. She’s staying with Paul, right?

**DEREK.** Okay...

**RYAN.** I specifically asked you, “Derek, is Mom staying in the beach house? ’Cause if she is, count me out.” You said, “Of course not!”

**DEREK.** Well, she was upset and she—

**RYAN.** —We are fighting.

*Mom enters.*

Hey, Mom! Let me help you with those bags. We’ll put them in one of the bedrooms.

**MOM.** Is there room? ’Cause I can stay on the couch. No need to put anyone out. Oh, John is staying here too? It’s a big brothers night... Oh, I didn’t realize, or I would’ve just stayed at the motel with Paul.

**RYAN.** Paul is at the motel?

**MOM.** He is passed out in front of the TV. I was happy to just stay there, but when Derek insisted I stay—

**RYAN.** Insisted? (*Mouthed to Derek.*) We are fighting.

**MOM.** —I just thought I’d stay and help out with whatever needs help.

**JOHN.** Everything is taken care of, Mom.

**RYAN.** We just have to bring Dad’s body to the crematorium in the morning. You wanna drive? Or strike the match?

**MOM.** Don’t be disgusting.

**RYAN.** I’m putting you in the bedroom in the back so you can sleep if we stay up...

**MOM.** Okay, that’s fine. Whatever is good for me. You know, I don’t care.

*Ryan exits with the bags.*

**JOHN.** Mom, do you want something to drink?

**MOM.** Yes. A beer would be great.

**JOHN.** K. I’ll grab one. Derek? Anything?

**DEREK.** No.

**MOM.** Where’s the bathroom?

**DEREK.** Right over there.

**MOM.** Is Ryan drinking?

**JOHN.** Mom. Lay off.

**MOM.** I'm not asking you. (*To Derek.*) Is he drinking?

**DEREK.** Yes.

**MOM.** Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

*Mom exits.*

**RYAN.** (*Reentering.*) Mom, I wish I had known that you'd—

*Ryan sees Mom is not in the room. He turns to Derek.*

Did you know the whole time that she was coming? No warning? Nothing? I am not emotionally prepared for her spin on things.

**DEREK.** Come on, she won't be that bad.

**RYAN.** She is the Fox News of family gossip.

**JOHN.** What about MSNBC? It's no better.

**RYAN.** Really? Politics? Now, we have a message from Dad and a visit from Mom to contend with, but you want to do politics?

**DEREK.** This is definitely a Norman Rockwell moment. "A Family at Odds."

**RYAN.** No. You do not get to be clever right now. You did this to us.

**DEREK.** Me? Clever? I'm just a Gamera...

**MOM.** (*Reentering.*) He did what? Invited your mother over to spend time with her three boys? Yes, Derek should be drawn and quartered. You kids have it very lucky. Your father and I loved you both very much.

**JOHN.** Both?

**MOM.** All. Loved you all.

**JOHN.** Both? I wonder which two made the cut.

**MOM.** Oh, quiet. It was a mistake. I made a mistake.

**RYAN.** Anyone need a drink?

**MOM.** Not me.

**RYAN.** Okay.

*Ryan opens a beer. Silence until Mom can't bear it.*

**MOM.** How long have you been drinking again?

**RYAN.** (*Jokingly.*) I have been drinking again for a while...I stopped for nine months...the pregnancy test. I read about it in *GQ*...if you can go as long as a woman needs to quit drinking when she's pregnant then you drop the weight, break the hangover cycle and start over.

**JOHN.** Who wrote that article?

**RYAN.** Lindsay Lohan...should I be worried?

**JOHN.** No. I love her work.

**RYAN.** Anyway, it's fine. I think I just freaked out when I lost that job and Brian and I broke up all at the same time. I had money and a lot of free time...bad combination. Now, I'm working out more—

**JOHN.** Brian and Ryan. I never got over that.

**RYAN.** Well, Brian did.

**MOM.** Well, good. As long as you're taking care of yourself. Derek?

**DEREK.** Yup. What's up?

**MOM.** Nothing. I just wanted to see all three of you. My grown boys. My men. I need a picture. Sit on the couch.

**RYAN.** Mom? A picture? On the night of Dad's funeral? Isn't that, I don't know, in poor taste?

**MOM.** He would've wanted it.

**JOHN.** It's true. He used to always say, "Make sure you take a bunch of photos at a rented beach house when I die. Please. Make sure you take photos..."

**MOM.** Don't be such a smart ass.

**DEREK.** Can we take pictures in a bit? We still have to open the envelope.

**MOM.** You haven't done that yet? Oh, good! I was hoping to find out whatever that no-account asshole did.

**RYAN.** So old-timey...no-account...that good-for-nothing, no-account varmint.

**MOM.** That's a good word for your father...a varmint...

**RYAN.** Who uses that word besides Yosemite Sam? No one.

**DEREK.** You did. Just now.

**RYAN.** We are definitely fighting. Okay, so, envelope... Then, pictures for Mom.

**JOHN.** Should the post on Facebook tag Dad too?

**MOM.** I don't think no-account is that old-fashioned anyway. All of my sons, too smart for their own good. That you got from your father.

**JOHN.** But our ability to love, that we got from you.

**MOM.** You did, even though I know you're being fresh right now.

**RYAN.** Okay! So...envelope, pictures, board games, tears, drunken fight, bed?

**JOHN.** Perfect.

**DEREK.** I haven't cried.

**RYAN.** What?

**DEREK.** I haven't cried. Not once.

**RYAN.** It's complicated.

**DEREK.** I don't think it's complicated. It's just sad. I hope my girls cry when I die.

**RYAN.** They will.

**DEREK.** Well, I hope so.

**RYAN.** Okay! Amended agenda for approval! Envelope, pictures, board game, skipping over tears, back on with drunken fight and bed?

**MOM.** Don't be flip about your drinking.

**RYAN.** I'm not being flip, Mom. Just trying to make a joke.

**MOM.** You are always trying to make a joke.

**JOHN.** She's right.

**MOM.** You're no better.

**DEREK.** Okay, time out. Time out. You have two more in this half. Two. More.

**MOM.** More jokes. Open the envelope.

*They are silent a moment.*

**JOHN.** Okay, I'll do it.

*John moves toward the envelope.*

**RYAN.** Don't.

*John stops.*

No. Do it.

*John goes.*

No. Don't.

**JOHN.** Ryan.

**RYAN.** Right.

*John grabs the envelope. Opens it. Takes out pictures and a letter.*

**JOHN.** Okay, Jesus...here we go... "To my sons, I want to keep this brief because what I have to say is simple. I was not the best father in the world, but I loved you all. There are so many times I wished I could have been there to see you succeed or to help you when you failed. I never for one minute stopped loving you all. I have included my favorite pictures of us as a group."

*John hands out the pictures.*

**MOM.** See. Your father would want the picture.

**RYAN.** Feel vindicated?

**MOM.** I feel right.

**JOHN.** *(Continues reading the letter.)* "These moments were my happiest. Getting to be a part of the family I left behind. I thought about staying, but I knew I couldn't. I just wasn't built to be a dad it seems. I am sorry.

"I have some money set aside for each of you. And for your mother as well. The money will come through soon enough. My lawyer will contact you. The number breakdown is enclosed. You will see that Ryan is getting more money. This is for reasons I cannot share. Please forgive me.

"I loved you all equally. I was lucky to know each of you, and I loved your mother as well. I hope your lives bring you joy, and I hope the worst day of your coming years is better than the best day of your last.

"Love always, Dad"



**RYAN.** Why would I get more? You all have kids. I'm doing fine. Why would I get more?

**MOM.** I have no idea. Oh! Wait!!!!

*She reaches into her bag. Gets a camera and takes a picture.*

It's a candid.

**JOHN.** Jesus.

**RYAN.** John—

**JOHN.** I mean, this figures, right?

**RYAN.** Sorry?

**JOHN.** Well, it figures that I'd get nothing.

**DEREK.** I mean, to be fair, it didn't say we get nothing. Just—

**MOM.** —Just less.

**DEREK.** Yes. Less.

**MOM.** Which is more than nothing.

**JOHN.** Always great at math.

**MOM.** And Ryan needs it more than you both.

**RYAN.** What does that mean?

**MOM.** It doesn't mean anything. Everything doesn't have meaning. This isn't one of your shows where everything means something, and people change because a bunch of rich people want to believe that things change for people like us.

**JOHN.** Mom. We are not poor.

**MOM.** You're not. You're—What is it you called it, Ryan? Oh! Bougie.

**RYAN.** John. I didn't—

**JOHN.** You didn't.

**RYAN.** I did. But I was kidding.

**MOM.** My point is: Some things just happen. Like meeting your father. It just happened. Getting pregnant, it happened. And then again. And then again. And then your father was an asshole, and now he is still an asshole. No more meaning than that. No big change. Just life. Just people doing the same things until...well... until they die... It's like with Paul.

**RYAN.** Mom—

**DEREK.** Mom, what?

**RYAN.** Seriously? Paul??? Now, you want to talk about Paul? We just heard the same thing, right? Were you just in the room?

**MOM.** I was. Obviously. I took a picture, remember? A picture which seems to be a terrible idea, but later on, when we have memories of this time, it will be because of that picture. And I'm sorry if I wanted to talk about something other than your father right now. I can't believe I came to this secret, brothers only party anyway.

**JOHN.** Why are you here? Why were you there today?

*Pause.*

**MOM.** I am here because I love you. I was there because I loved your father. I should just go back to the motel...let you sort this all out.

*Pause.*

You know this is exactly what Paul was saying about you boys.

**DEREK.** Mom. C'mon. Don't go.

**RYAN.** (*Silently mouthing to Derek.*) We are fighting.

**MOM.** Derek, don't try to make things nice. Things aren't nice between all of us. You and Ryan want me here, maybe, but John...

**JOHN.** But John is a horrible son. We all know. Listen, I can just go.

**MOM.** I did not say that. No one can say I said that because I did not say that.

**RYAN.** Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Just calm down. Mom, stay. John, stay.

**DEREK.** Yes. Everyone stay. Except, Dad. You can go. Oh, wait...

**RYAN.** Too late!

**DEREK.** Wait! Did Ryan tell you what was playing in the car?

**MOM.** I try to bring up Paul, no way can we talk about that, but this story...no, go on tell your story.

**JOHN.** That's right. Mom, please tell us your story about Paul. Tell us both, actually.

**MOM.** Both?

**JOHN.** Yes, tell us the one about how there is no meaning with Paul. And then, tell us what Paul was saying about us boys.

**MOM.** You're being aggressive.

**JOHN.** I am trying to be respectful and hear the story you got mad about not being able to tell.

**MOM.** Well, you are doing it aggressively.

**JOHN.** (*Sighs. Collects himself.*) I'm sorry. Tell your story, Mom. And then, Derek will tell his, and then, we can just go to bed. Maybe we can just...go to bed and wake up and talk about it.

**RYAN.** Yes, Mom, what were you going to say?

**MOM.** Well, Paul is always saying you boys don't know how good you've got it. Not just with me...and I know I am not perfect, but you do have it pretty good with me. I am here because I love you, but you can't see that. Your father left you money, but you focus on him being strange about it. It's not just with this, it's with everything. I don't know how you all turned out so scared and negative. But that's not my point. My point is that you all have each other. That is a blessing. And my other story was just that Paul came along in my life, and he is fine, and I am glad he is here in my life, but if I looked for meaning in my relationship with him, I would be sorely disappointed. Sometimes, you have to realize that life is just a series of days, nothing more, nothing less.

**RYAN.** Cheery.

**MOM.** You don't have to be cheery when you're right.

**DEREK.** Stitch that on a pillow.

**JOHN.** Excellent. Now, Derek...

**DEREK.** Well, Ryan and I drove to the cemetery together.

**MOM.** We all know that.

**DEREK.** Mom...

**MOM.** Sorry, go on.

**DEREK.** And—

**MOM.** It just seemed extra to say that.

**DEREK.** Mom!

**MOM.** Right. Sorry.

**DEREK.** So, we drove up to the cemetery, and Ryan wants to hear music. So, he flips on the radio and what is the song that is playing?

**RYAN.** It was pretty funny, I guess...

**DEREK.** You guess? We were howling with laughter.

**JOHN.** Yes?

**DEREK.** The song was, “Na Na Na Na. Na Na Na Na. Hey Hey Hey! Goodbye!!!”

**JOHN.** Seriously?

**DEREK.** Yup. We laughed and laughed. And then—

**JOHN.** That’s perfect.

**RYAN.** (*To Derek.*) Don’t—

**DEREK.** What? It just goes to show—

**RYAN.** Just don’t. It doesn’t show anything...

**MOM.** Well, what?

**DEREK.** Well, we were howling with laughter and then, I turn and see that Ryan is sobbing. I mean, sobbing. The first tears I’d seen all day. From this stupid song, that Dad would’ve laughed at... Ryan lost it. Maybe that’s why he got the money. Maybe Dad knew Ryan would mourn him.

**JOHN.** You cried?

**RYAN.** Yes, for about thirty seconds.

**DEREK.** And Mom, I would say that had a little meaning. On that note, Gamera is going to bed as instructed by Mothra and Godzilla.

**MOM.** What are you talking about? Are you having a stroke? Am I having a stroke?

**JOHN.** I—

**RYAN.** (*To John. Smiling.*) Don’t. Bed.

**MOM.** Well, it does seem perfect that this place sleeps four.

**JOHN.** Not that it means anything... Okay, good night.

**DEREK.** Good night. I love you all.

**JOHN.** Yup.

**MOM.** Good night. Thanks for having me here with you boys. Even if you all didn't want me to be here.

*Mom begins to exit.*

**JOHN.** I'm going to call Janet and go to sleep. Night.

**DEREK.** Yes. Wife call and bed. Ryan?

**RYAN.** I'm all right. I think I'm going to steal one of Mom's cigarettes and then head in.

**MOM.** You shouldn't smoke.

*Pause.*

They're in the front pocket of my purse.

**RYAN.** Good night.

*Mom exits for bed. Ryan rifles through her purse. Gets a cigarette and a lighter. He grabs the letter. Looks at it for a moment. Grabs the dark rum. Lights out.*

## Scene 2

*Same night. About a half hour later. After calls to wives. Lights up on Derek on his way into the bathroom, toothbrush in hand. John is on his way out of the bathroom.*

**DEREK.** Mom asleep?

**JOHN.** I think so.

**DEREK.** What. The. Fuck.

**JOHN.** Right? I mean, are you okay with this? That he gets more?

**DEREK.** Yeah, I guess. I mean, no. I have four kids. He has—

**JOHN.** A studio. An ex-boyfriend. A cable bill. I mean, I'm not trying to sound—I mean, I just—

**DEREK.** No, I get it. It just doesn't make sense. That fucking guy...

**JOHN.** Ryan or Dad?

**DEREK.** Either. Both. I love that phrase. "That fucking guy..." Is there a better phrase in all of the English language? "That fucking guy..." I think it must be the most often phrase said in New York.

You hear people speaking entirely in Swahili or Urdu or whatever, and then you hear them say, “That fucking guy...” Is there any phrase better suited to human existence than “That fucking guy...” I think Jesus must’ve been like, “Thirty pieces of silver? That fucking guy...”

**JOHN.** Do you think it’s the gay thing?

**DEREK.** The gay thing?

**JOHN.** I mean—

**DEREK.** You think Dad gave Ryan more money because he’s gay? That seems highly unlikely.

**JOHN.** Why else?

**DEREK.** Dad and he patched things up recently. They got closer toward the end there, but if Dad wanted to give a big fuck you, he just would’ve said that.

**JOHN.** (*Sighs.*) Then why?

**DEREK.** Who knows?

*Ryan enters visibly drunk.*

**RYAN.** Let the awkwardness begin!

**JOHN.** Hey.

**DEREK.** What? Awkward? Secrets? What secrets?

**RYAN.** I mean... WHAT. THE. FUCK? I have no fucking idea what is going on, and when I tried to ask our mother, she just said, “You know your father. He trades in secrets. Good night, sweetie. Use the money,” and went to bed. She just fucking went to bed. I mean, Janet will shit a brick, right, John? She will eat your nuts for breakfast if I take this money, right? I mean, you have kids and that is, like, the only thing that ever mattered... Right, Derek? C’mon, right? Janet will have a nut sandwich for brunch.

**JOHN.** You’re drunk.

**RYAN.** I’m right, though, right? I mean... It’s the kids. You guys all have the kids. Me? I’ve got nothing, right? Kids need money. What should I—I’ve got nothing, that’s what you said—

**JOHN.** Nobody said—

**RYAN.** But it’s what you always say. Kids mean you have a real life

with real problems. No kids mean you're a baby who doesn't know how to grow up. I lack gravitas. I lack gravity. Like traveling. Go to the kids. Always to the kids. No one comes to visit me. Who cares? I don't care. I've got no gravitational pull. But I've got cash! And Mom just went to bed as if I should be grateful for the extra money. As if there isn't a giant colossal Chernobyl size fucking secret in the room. WHAT. THE. FUCK. I should just give it away—just give it to starving children in China...or Africa...where are the starving children?

**DEREK.** Jersey.

*Ryan starts singing an amended version of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" that incorporates starving children and New Jersey.\**

**JOHN.** Hey. I think she's sleeping.

**RYAN.** Oh. Is she sleeping? Should I be quiet? Should I be more QUIET?

*He gets a pot and spoon and begins banging them together.*

I DON'T FUCKING CARE. LET HER WAKE UP AND FUCKING TALK TO ME ABOUT WHAT THE FUCK IS HAPPENING. WAKE. THE. FUCK. UP. MOM.

**JOHN.** Jesus, you're fucking wasted.

**RYAN.** (*Sings.*)

Rise and shine  
And give God your glory glory  
Rise and shine  
And give God your glory glory.  
Rise and shine  
And give God your glory glory

**DEREK.** Ry, seriously...enough. It's been a long day.

**RYAN.**

Children of the Loooooorrrrd!  
The animals the animals  
They came in by twosies twosies.

\* See note on songs/recordings at the back of this volume.

**JOHN.** Oh, great. Verses. Listen, if she wanted to get up, she'd be up by now.

**RYAN.**

The animals the animals  
They came in by twosies twosies.  
Elephants and kangaroosies roosies  
Children of the Looord.

**DEREK.** Jesus fucking Christ.

**RYAN.**

Oh! Rise and shine  
And give God your glory glory—

*Mom enters in a robe. Ryan stops singing upon hearing her.*

**MOM.** What is wrong with you? Are you drunk?

**JOHN.** Let the record show. I was wrong. It worked. She's up.

**RYAN.** (*Getting in Mom's face.*) Am I drunk? I just found out I inherited more money than my brothers from my dead father because of unknown and mysterious fucking reasons...it's like a fucking episode of *Murder She Fucking Wrote* up in here, so yes, I am drunk, and you are going to sit here and talk to me and tell me whatever the fuck reason Dad is talking about.

**JOHN.** Ryan, come on. Back up.

**MOM.** No, it's fine.

**DEREK.** No, it's not fine. Stop it, Ryan.

**MOM.** Go to bed.

**RYAN.** I will not fucking go to—

**MOM.** Not you. Them. Go to bed. Both of you. Leave us alone.

**JOHN.** Mom—

**MOM.** Do it. Make coffee first. You are drunk, Ryan. You are an asshole when you are drunk. I never told that to you before, but you are. You are an asshole when you are drunk. Why you started drinking again makes no sense to me.

**DEREK.** (*To John.*) Go to bed. I'll make the coffee.

**JOHN.** Okay. (*To Mom.*) If you want to clue in your other sons at



any moment about what's happening, you go ahead. *(To Ryan.)* If you need to wake me up. Do it, okay?

**RYAN.** *(Sulking.)* Okay.

**JOHN.** Good night, guys.

*John exits.*

**MOM.** I cannot imagine Janet's reaction to this. She'll probably cut his balls off.

**RYAN.** That's what I said!

**MOM.** Now, stop pacing and sit down. I'm getting you a glass of water. Derek, pour out whatever's left there. Ryan will not be drinking anymore tonight.

**RYAN.** I'm not seventeen anymore, Mom.

**MOM.** I know that. If you were seventeen, you wouldn't look like a sad old drunk. Sit down.

*Ryan does not sit.*

**DEREK.** Coffee is brewing. *(To Mom.)* Good night. I love you.

**MOM.** You don't have to do that.

**DEREK.** Say I love you?

**MOM.** Try to make this nice.

**DEREK.** Jesus, Mom. I just said, "Good night. I love you." It's what people say.

**MOM.** Maybe they shouldn't.

**DEREK.** All right, on that note. Good night.

**MOM.** Good night. I love you.

**DEREK.** *(To Ryan re: Mom.)* That fucking guy... Right?

**RYAN.** What the fuck are you talking about?

**DEREK.** Oh. That was with John. We were talking about how—

**MOM.** Go to bed.

**DEREK.** Good night.

*Turns to leave, but turns around with a smile.*

I love you.

*Derek bows and exits.*

**MOM.** (*Getting coffee and bringing it to Ryan.*) Okay, so you sang and sang until I woke up because you wanted to talk? Well, sit down. We'll talk. Drink this.

**RYAN.** I am not a child.

**MOM.** No, you are an alcoholic, just like your father, who chose to drink even though you know it will ruin your life. Maybe take my advice? Drink the coffee.

**RYAN.** (*Taking a sip.*) There's no sugar.

**MOM.** And babies in Africa have AIDS. Drink the coffee. Okay. I am going to talk until it looks like you can have a good conversation about what has happened, okay? You can respond. Pleasantly. Or this will end. I will go back to bed. Or leave and stay with Paul. And we will never talk about this again. Okay?

**RYAN.** Okay.

**MOM.** Okay?

**RYAN.** Yes. I'll be pleasant.

**MOM.** I thought the service was nice. As you know, I have very mixed feelings about the man, but I thought it was nice. You sang beautifully. I was very proud of you up there. You have come so far with your singing. When I think of you in that production of *Guys and Dolls* with me cringing at how you sounded. You were just terrible.

**RYAN.** Pleasant?

**MOM.** You need to be pleasant. I need to be honest.

**RYAN.** Mom—

**MOM.** I am just saying that you have come a long way. Your dad was very proud of you for following your dreams, no matter how successful or not successful you end up being. And I thought your brothers did well too. And your father's wife's eulogy seemed heartfelt enough, I guess. I found it funny that no one cried, but maybe no one will cry for me either. You boys are funny about your emotions. Oh, and I know the songs I want you to sing for me. No church songs. So strange to hear a hymn for your father. You'll sing—

**RYAN.** Mom—

**MOM.** You'll sing "Wanting Memories." I loved when you sang that. And "Drift Away."

**RYAN.** "Drift Away"?

**MOM.** Yes.

**RYAN.** Mom, that is too morbid for words.

**MOM.** Okay, you're sobering up a little. Good for you. But do as I ask please and sing those songs at my service. Sing them well. For me.

**RYAN.** I can't believe you are giving me a set list for your funeral.

**MOM.** Drink the rest of that.

**RYAN.** It's done.

**MOM.** Okay. Then, drink another.

**RYAN.** Mom. I'll be up all night.

**MOM.** No, You won't.

**RYAN.** Mom—

**MOM.** Please, Ryan. I need you to do this. Okay?

**RYAN.** Okay.

**MOM.** (*Going to refill the coffee.*) Okay. So, yes. "Drift Away" and "Wanting Memories"...and if you could get your friend Karen to come and sing "Wanting Memories" with you. That would be perfect.

**RYAN.** Mom, you know you won't be there, right?

**MOM.** A joke! Great. I love jokes. Like the one about the alcoholic who decided to drink again... He got drunk, and said mean things to his mother.

**RYAN.** Jesus, Mom. I get it. And technically, that wasn't a joke.

**MOM.** (*Smiling.*) Be quiet. Anyhow, Derek knows all this, but I want to be cremated not buried. And I want those songs. Other than that, who cares?

**RYAN.** Mom?

**MOM.** Hmm?

**RYAN.** The money?

**MOM.** Okay. You got more money. Your father is an asshole. The end. Any more questions?

**RYAN.** Mom...

**MOM.** Okay, fine. Ask.

**RYAN.** Why?

**MOM.** You and your father had a complicated relationship.

**RYAN.** (*Sarcastic.*) Really?

**MOM.** Let me tell this. You want to know why? I'll tell you. I don't think I should, but it seems to me that you are in a delicate place right now.

*A text notification goes off.*

And I don't want to see you back on drugs or in the hospital again or dead, so fine, I will tell you but please let me tell it my way.

*Another text notification.*

**RYAN.** Okay. Do you need to get that?

**MOM.** No. It's fine. This is important. All right, you and your father had a complicated relationship. He tried so hard to not be a complete failure as a father. Sometimes, I blame myself. I knew all along that he couldn't do it. He couldn't be there for you boys. He just didn't know how. Not that I did, mind you.

*Text notification.*

But I'm the mother. I have to stay. Your father, he would try.

*Text notification.*

He would stop drinking so much. He would be home for a while, but it wasn't long before he was gone again.

*Text notification.*

**RYAN.** Mom? Your phone, Mom.

**MOM.** It's fine.

**RYAN.** It's just going to keep—

**MOM.** It's fine. It's just Paul. He probably woke up and can't find his contact solution. He is absolutely useless. I mean, just useless. He reminds me of you a little bit.

**RYAN.** Mom!

**MOM.** Right. Sorry. But he does...your father...um... After you were born, he started working late which meant drinking in the

city, and I was left with you kids, alone. With John, he had a son, someone he could see himself in, but with you... It was just...too much responsibility. This is all my opinion, of course, but I knew your father. Even long after we were done, I still knew him better than anyone else. I had been up close and inside the way he felt about you boys and me. We were so young. I mean, two kids at twenty-two. You know, John and Derek were both accidents. But with you... We planned another child. We thought another child would be good. What did we know? We were children.

*Text notification.*

And I was pregnant, and my mother moved in with us to die...and it was too much. I can see now, he just hit the breaking point. He started an affair.

*Text notification.*

And he was gone for most of the pregnancy. And when he came back...he was different. Far away. I think that's when the drugs first started.

*Text notification.*

**RYAN.** Mom, I swear to God, please answer Paul.

**MOM.** It will wait... And then, you were born. And I loved you at first sight. You were mine. John was Dad's and your grandma's, but you...you were mine. I loved you so much. And he loved you too. You were special. So happy and friendly and talking so much so soon. And things got better. Much better. You can see it in pictures. We were happy. You made us happy. And then, well, your father was a shit. He left again. And John and I were never close. Always so distant and closed off, and you, you gave me so much joy. I think we would've divorced then, but I was raised Catholic and I do believe that kids need two parents. I would never wish the lot I was dealt on a woman or a man. It's too hard. And things got better then worse then better, then Derek happened, and then, your father gave one more real go at being home. And we would spend time together and then, you changed.

**RYAN.** Changed? I—How?

*Text notification.*

**MOM.** You know what? I should get this. It might be an emergency.

**RYAN.** Now? Now you answer?!?

**MOM.** I waited, and now I'm worried. Just hold on. Let me get my glasses. You know, it's been hell getting old. I feel like no one really tells you that.

**RYAN.** Mom, everyone says that.

**MOM.** But no one tells you. There's a difference. (*Gets her glasses. Looks at her phone.*) Okay. Nope. No emergency. Contacts. Was I right? Oh, he is so helpless. I honestly don't know how he lived on this planet for so long before meeting me to take care of everything for him. (*Saying this as she texts.*) Contacts are on counter in bathroom. Don't text back. Staying here. Love you. No. Not live...love. (*Done texting.*) Okay... What was I saying?

**RYAN.** I had changed...

**MOM.** Yes. You were sullen. Moody. My happiest of babies... And I don't know what we thought. We just thought it was growing pains, or I mean, I knew you were gay so early. You were so different. So sensitive. And, well... It just kept happening. You kept getting darker. Not all at once, but there was a change, and I couldn't figure it out. Your father... Your father, he insisted something had happened to you. I disagreed. What did he know, you know, never around. And he never liked your uncle. I mean, I didn't like him either. He was horrible, but I certainly didn't think him capable of that sort of thing...

**RYAN.** Mom...what?

**MOM.** For four weeks when you were four, your brother and you stayed with your aunt and uncle and your father thought that in that time you were molested, and that made you gay.

*Her phone rings. She answers.*

Paul! What?

**RYAN.** What?

**MOM.** I can't talk right now. I said I couldn't... Well, I didn't feel I needed to tell you text or call. I assumed you knew that if I couldn't text then I couldn't talk. Contacts case is in the bathroom too. Everything to do with your contacts is in the bathroom. Good night, Paul. Don't call back. I'll see you in the morning.

**RYAN.** Dad thinks that I was molested, and that made me gay.

**MOM.** Thought.

**RYAN.** What?

**MOM.** Thought. He's dead. And yes. He thought you were molested, and he thought that's what made you gay. Yes.

**RYAN.** And now I'm getting paid for it?

**MOM.** That's a strange way of putting it.

**RYAN.** Is there a normal way of putting it?

**MOM.** Your father got drunk one night and threatened your uncle. And I got in the way. Your father was so crazy then. Violent. The drinking, the drugs... You and your father. I have never understood drugs. How you can want to do that to yourselves. He just went insane and started threatening your uncle, saying he was going to kill him.

**RYAN.** But Uncle Phil didn't do it is the point. It was just Dad being crazy.

**MOM.** Yes! He didn't do it. You could tell in his eyes. I promise you.

**RYAN.** But all these years later, Dad thought he did.

**MOM.** It seems so. Listen, Ryan, this did not happen. Would I have let you spend any more time with him if I thought for one second that this happened?

**RYAN.** No...of course not...

**MOM.** Of course not. You believe me, don't you? I could never trust your father again, really. He went after my sister's husband with such rage. It was the worst time.

**RYAN.** Okay. So, all those years where Dad couldn't look me in the eye. It was this thing that Dad thought happened?

**MOM.** Yes.

**RYAN.** And neither of you ever thought to tell me.

**MOM.** I never wanted you to doubt yourself. You are gay. I have known your whole life that you were gay. Do you know what the first album you bought with your own money was? It was Whitney Houston. You played it over and over again. For your communion,

we took you to see *A Chorus Line*. For eighth grade graduation, you went and saw Wilson Phillips. You are gay, you always were, and I love you. Your father needed a reason, someone to blame. Not me.

**RYAN.** Mom, what if he was right?

**MOM.** Don't—this is exactly what happens. Don't begin to doubt yourself.

**RYAN.** What if this made me...not gay, but...different? What if this is it, Mom?

**MOM.** You need sleep. We can talk about this in the morning.

**RYAN.** Mom, my whole life I've felt like an alien. Like I didn't belong here. Doesn't that mean something?

**MOM.** I shouldn't have said anything. I am sorry I did. I am going to sleep. I love you. Do not let your father ruin your life with this crazy idea that some drunk and high mess came up with so he could hurt me. For what? He will not destroy us with this. He will not destroy you with this. Nothing MADE you this way. You are who you are. That's it. That's life. Everyone has hard things to deal with...you have yours. Your father had his. I have mine.

**RYAN.** Mom.

**MOM.** Yes?

**RYAN.** Thank you. For always being there. When Dad wasn't.

*Pause.*

Thanks. I love you.

**MOM.** I love you, too. Good night. Are you okay? Should I stay out here?

**RYAN.** Yeah, I'm fine. I'm the one who gets the money, right? What could be better?

*Mom begins to exit. Ryan calls after her.*

Mom?

*She stops. He's visibly upset. But it's just a moment. He covers.*

Nothing. Go to bed.

**MOM.** Okay. Get some sleep.

**RYAN.** (*Smiling. A small joke.*) Don't tell me what to do.



**MOM.** *(Smiling. Allowing the joke.)* Don't tell ME what to do.

**RYAN.** Don't tell ME what to do.

**MOM.** Enough. Good night. Get sleep. Maybe I'll get bagels in the morning.

**RYAN.** I'm going to smoke one more and then I'll brush my teeth.

**MOM.** *(She begins to leave. Turns.)* It isn't true.

**RYAN.** Of course it isn't. I know. Good night. And Mom?

**MOM.** Hmmm?

**RYAN.** Get cream cheese. We all deserve it. I think.

**MOM.** Maybe I'll get a few!

**RYAN.** There you go!

**MOM.** Okay, buddy. Night.

*Mom exits. Ryan is left alone. He gets another cigarette. Lights it and sits in silence.*

### Scene 3

*Lights up. Next morning. John and Derek sitting and having coffee.*

**JOHN.** Well, it's just that if I got all that money, I wouldn't get wasted and be an asshole.

**DEREK.** No.

**JOHN.** But you're not mad?

**DEREK.** Well...

**JOHN.** He gets everything because why?

**DEREK.** I don't know.

**JOHN.** Can't you just pretend to be mad?

**DEREK.** Um... Give me a moment.

*He scrunches up his face to look mad.*

How's this?

**JOHN.** Seriously?

**DEREK.** I am not the actor Ryan is. I can definitely do a sad face.

*He does.*

**JOHN.** I can't believe this.

**DEREK.** I'm sure he'll share it with us. He was even saying that he would.

**JOHN.** He can't afford to share, Derek. Drinks aren't free. Or coke. Or acting classes.

**DEREK.** Wow.

**JOHN.** Listen, I just think this needs to be dealt with today.

**DEREK.** Well, I'd be surprised if he's up anytime soon. And when he is... Good luck.

**JOHN.** Where's Mom?

**DEREK.** She went to get bagels.

**JOHN.** Why?

**DEREK.** Because we might be hungry. I think you're paranoid.

**JOHN.** She knows what's happening. I'm sure she'll have some crazy reason not to tell us.

**DEREK.** You are full-blown conspiracy theorizing. Calm down, Mel Gibson.

**JOHN.** What?

**DEREK.** Mel Gibson. He was in *Conspiracy Theory*?

**JOHN.** Okay.

**DEREK.** So, I called you Mel—Okay. No jokes.

**JOHN.** We should wake him up.

**DEREK.** Yeah?

**JOHN.** He had no problem singing and banging pots and pans at all hours because he got more money than us. Jesus, what is Janet going to say? She is going to hand me my ass about this.

**DEREK.** For what?

**JOHN.** For what? For Ryan getting everything he wants. Just like always. Like the world should stop every time he falls apart. Like how because he's a mess, we owe him something.

**DEREK.** I don't—

**JOHN.** I'm going to change and pack. Get me when the bagels come.

**DEREK.** O...kay.

*John exits to the bedroom. Then, Ryan enters gingerly.*

**RYAN.** Drinks and coke AND acting classes. Drinks and coke, sure, but acting classes? Fuck that guy. I haven't taken acting class in years.

**DEREK.** I've seen your work. It shows.

**RYAN.** Asshole. Coffee. Please.

**DEREK.** Yup.

*Derek gets coffee.*

**RYAN.** And what does he know about anything having to do with my shows? He hasn't seen me in a show in twenty years.

**DEREK.** (*Handing Ryan his coffee.*) He's just upset.

**RYAN.** Of course he's upset. Janet is going to cut his nutsack off.

**DEREK.** Everyone is so descriptive before noon today.

**RYAN.** Well, she will.

**DEREK.** You're not...

**RYAN.** What?

**DEREK.** Doing coke, are you?

**RYAN.** No. No, I am not doing coke. And Janet really is going to hand him his nuts.

**DEREK.** Did you hear the whole conversation?

**RYAN.** Yeah. I've been up for hours. Didn't want to interrupt him. Thought he had a real nice rhythm going. Thanks for being on my side.

**DEREK.** I'm not on your side.

**RYAN.** Oh. Okay.

**DEREK.** I'm just confused.

**RYAN.** Right. Well, I can safely say, according to Dad, I earned the money.

*Mom enters with bagels.*

**MOM.** Bagels! I cannot even begin to tell you the trip I had.

**DEREK.** (*To Ryan.*) What does that mean?

**MOM.** It means that going to a bagel place on a Sunday is a fool's errand. Not to mention, when did Indians start running bagel places?

**DEREK.** I was talking to—Wait. Indians?

**MOM.** Don't start.

**RYAN.** Yeah, Derek. The Indians. Duh. What part of India do you think they were from? Pakistan?

**DEREK.** Could've been Bangladesh, India...

**MOM.** I know. I am a terrible person. I'm a racist and will burn in hell because I don't take the time to find out where every single person in America came from. My point is, I would feel more comfortable getting my bagels from Jew—

**RYAN.** —Come on!

**MOM.** —ish people. I am not the only person in the world who thinks this.

**DEREK.** No. I'm sure any number of Trump voters would agree with you. Jewish people should make bagels.

**JOHN.** (*Entering.*) Three things: One, Jewish people are very good at making bagels.

**MOM.** Thank you.

**JOHN.** Two: Republicans are not just a bunch of racists.

**RYAN.** See, but when you have to use the word "just." Not just a bunch of racists... like they have other qualities, like being good at pottery and loving Agatha Christie novels...

**DEREK.** It's like when you say "deep down."

**MOM.** (*To John.*) What was three?

**JOHN.** (*To Derek.*) Hmmmm?

**MOM.** I asked.

**JOHN.** No, Derek...deep down?

**RYAN.** Yeah. What about "deep down"?

**DEREK.** Well, I was just saying to Kristen the other day. I said, "I'm so glad that no one ever has to say about me, deep down he is

a good person.” People describe an asshole for an hour, complaining about all of his worst qualities, and then right before the end they say, “But deep down, he’s a really good guy.” As if this is some sort of compensation against all of his terrible qualities.

**RYAN.** *(To Mom.)* Did you get cream cheese?

**MOM.** *(To Ryan.)* Yes. *(To John.)* What was number three?

**JOHN.** Number three was Mom is definitely a racist.

**RYAN.** BOOM!

**MOM.** I knew it. You know, just one day I’d like to not have my children speak so poorly of me.

**RYAN.** Mom, you are not a racist. A racist would never get three kinds of cream cheese. Only good people do that. *(To Derek.)* Was Kristen talking about me?

**DEREK.** When?

**RYAN.** When she was talking about, “Deep down he’s a good person.” Me?

*There is an incredibly long pause.*

**DEREK.** No.

**JOHN.** That was a very long pause.

**MOM.** Ryan, are you done with the cream cheese?

**RYAN.** Let me guess, it was a “When will he get it together conversation?” She said, “I know he’s your brother and you love him and deep down under all the drugs and drinking—”

**MOM.** You are not doing drugs.

**RYAN.** No, Mom, I’m just talking about before. I was kidding.

**MOM.** Because I don’t think I can—

**JOHN.** Mom, he said he isn’t, okay?

*He puts his arm around Mom.*

Jesus, Ryan.

**RYAN.** I was kidding.

**JOHN.** No. It was a good joke. Everyone loved it.

**MOM.** *(To John.)* You’ve gotten fat.

**JOHN.** What?!?!?

**DEREK.** That might've been some sort of record.

**JOHN.** Are you kidding me?

**MOM.** Well, you were holding me, and I noticed. When you're stressed, you eat. You got that from your Dad. When I'm stressed, I don't eat which is a gift, but not you...you eat.

*She exits offstage to wash her hands.*

**DEREK.** I mean, she didn't even bat an eye. She just turned and struck without warning.

**RYAN.** Like a velociraptor

**JOHN.** I'm done.

*Mom reenters. Wiping her hands dry.*

**MOM.** Don't be so overly sensitive. Everyone is so sensitive. I didn't say you look bad.

**RYAN.** No. Just fat.

**JOHN.** I'm done.

**MOM.** If I thought you looked bad—

**ALL.** I would've told you.

**MOM.** All right... Enough. Bagel, please.

*She is handed a bagel. Silence while she slices the bagel and puts cream cheese on it.*

Janet looked nice at the service.

*Pause.*

**JOHN.** And...

**MOM.** And?

**JOHN.** Fine. But...

**MOM.** But?

**JOHN.** Janet looked nice at the service, which you follow by saying, "but..."

**MOM.** But? There is no but or and. I just thought she looked nice.

*Long pause.*

**JOHN.** Thank you...

**MOM.** You're welcome.

*Long pause.*

**DEREK.** I'm terrified.

**MOM.** Don't get smart.

**JOHN.** What time do we need to be out of here? Janet has the kids at the hotel.

**DEREK.** The reservation has us checking out by noon.

**MOM.** But if you need to leave now, you should go.

**JOHN.** Thanks, Mom.

**MOM.** What? There isn't much to do here. I am sure Janet needs your help with the kids.

*John sighs deeply.*

**RYAN.** John will leave when John is ready. I am sure Janet is fine with the kids.

**JOHN.** Well...

**MOM.** *(To Ryan.)* So, how are you feeling this morning? Okay??

**RYAN.** Yeah, Mom. I feel great.

**JOHN.** So, what did you all discuss last night? Any big secrets revealed? Any earth shattering news about Ryan and Dad?

**RYAN.** No.

**MOM.** No. We talked until Ryan calmed down a bit.

**RYAN.** We just talked about what I could do with the money. You know, should I spend it on drinks, drugs, acting classes?

**JOHN.** *(To Derek.)* Seriously?

**DEREK.** I didn't tell him. He heard.

**JOHN.** You were listening? To how much?

**RYAN.** A lot.

**MOM.** To what?

**RYAN.** To them.

**MOM.** And what were they saying?

**JOHN.** Nothing.

**DEREK.** Nothing. We were just talking.

**RYAN.** About me. And acting classes.

**MOM.** Do you still take acting classes? Is that necessary at your age?

**RYAN.** Mom. No. I mean, yes. Some people take classes when they're older. But no. I'm not taking classes.

**DEREK.** It shows.

**RYAN.** You made that joke already.

**DEREK.** Yeah, but not for them. It was a fresh audience.

**JOHN.** Listen, Ryan...

**RYAN.** No. I get it. You're mad. But you shouldn't be. The whole thing was really just one of Dad's fucked-up lies. So, don't worry. I was thinking I would share it equally, but then I thought about how much you deserve it more than me... And I thought maybe I should just give it all to you because you really need it, right? You need the money?

**JOHN.** Okay. Do you want to talk about this? Because we can talk about it, but I don't want you to start something and then not actually talk about it.

**DEREK.** Guys—

**RYAN.** No. It's fine. Okay, let's talk about it.

**MOM.** I don't think now is really—

**RYAN.** No. It's fine.

**JOHN.** Okay. So, let me ask. What would you do with the money? Let's say you had a bunch of money all of a sudden. You said it yesterday. It's a recipe for disaster with you. I don't, honestly, care if you go to rehab—

**RYAN.** —I don't need—

**JOHN.** —or not. If you want to drink, okay. It really is none of my business. We see each other a few times a year. But if you get a bunch of money, tell me: won't it just go to going out?

**RYAN.** And if it did?

**JOHN.** What?

**RYAN.** If the money only went to partying, isn't that my business? Why does it matter to you? You don't see me unless I make the effort. You don't call, unless it's to call me back. I'm the reason we have a



relationship. I'm doing it, so if you don't care enough to call, why do you care how I spend money that has nothing to do with you?

**JOHN.** Because it's frustrating watching you destroy yourself.

**RYAN.** I actually think at an intervention you're supposed to have written things down.

**MOM.** I'm going into the other room. John, why can't you ever just leave it alone?

**JOHN.** Mom. That's all we do. We leave it alone. Let's just talk about it. You love telling the truth so much. Let me tell the truth. Ryan, it's embarrassing watching you. You're not young anymore. You parade these men... It's always the same man. You get older. He stays the same. And we're supposed to care? We're supposed to introduce them to our kids?

**MOM.** No. I'm leaving.

**JOHN.** Is it so hard to listen to the truth about your favorite son?

**MOM.** I don't have a favorite son.

**JOHN.** But you have a least favorite.

**MOM.** I didn't say that.

**JOHN.** No, you didn't. And you didn't deny it.

**MOM.** All I did was buy bagels and try to have a nice breakfast! You need to make everything an argument you can win or lose.

**JOHN.** You could have denied it.

**MOM.** Denied what?

**JOHN.** Having a least favorite.

**MOM.** Well, yes. I could have. But that's not the point. The point is we were talking about Ryan.

**JOHN.** We are always talking about Ryan. I have been talking about Ryan for forty years.

**RYAN.** I am not forty!

**JOHN.** Oh my God! I mean, am I the only one who sees this? Derek?

**DEREK.** Don't do that. No. I'm not in this.

**JOHN.** (*Sighs.*) Right. Okay, well, you spend this money that you

get for absolutely no reason fathomable to any of us, and I will just leave and raise my kids and work hard, but you, Ryan, just keep on doing whatever it is you do with your time, and Mom, you just keep on telling him he's great...and Derek, you keep on not taking sides. And I'll see you all at Christmas.

*John starts to leave.*

**RYAN.** John, I have a funny joke for you!

**JOHN.** What?

**RYAN.** Before you leave, I have a funny joke for you. What had no pubic hair but had sex anyway?

**MOM.** RYAN!

**RYAN.** A Brazilian prostitute.

**DEREK.** Wow.

**JOHN.** That's a...joke?

**RYAN.** Too much? I just came up with it. It's a new one. But really... I have a funny story to tell you. Don't leave until you hear the whole thing. Okay? Okay. It goes like this: Dad says Uncle Phil touched me where I pee. Mom says he didn't. I won a big cash prize for it!!!

**JOHN.** What?

**RYAN.** It was a quick story, but a good one. I think it was a good one. No punch line. But good storytelling. Beginning, middle—

**DEREK.** —What?

**RYAN.** —End.

**MOM.** Ryan—

**RYAN.** That's why I'm "the way I am." I'm a big drunk fuckup! And gay! And a liar! And a mess! But I got cash compensation for it! Salary deferred.

**MOM.** None of this is true. This is your father's last crazy lie.

**DEREK.** Well, I'm officially done with bagels.

**JOHN.** No.

**MOM.** *(To Derek.)* Finish your bagel.

**JOHN.** No.

**MOM.** John—

**JOHN.** (*Not emotional. Just no other words.*) No. No. No. No. No. No.

**DEREK.** Hey. Are you okay?

**JOHN.** No. No. No.

**DEREK.** John. Are you okay?

**JOHN.** This is the reason? He gets money because of this?

**MOM.** John, don't.

**JOHN.** You just let this happen. You just kept letting this happen.

**MOM.** This is what your father does. Did. Thank God I can say that in the past tense. He told lies and drew lines down a battlefield that does not exist. Don't go along with this, don't make your father's lie into—

**JOHN.** —It's not a lie. It can't be a lie.

**MOM.** Well, I think we have established a long time ago—

**JOHN.** You're lying.

**MOM.** I don't lie. When have I ever lied?

**JOHN.** Now. Now, you are lying. And you know it, and you're scared. And I don't care because you are a fucking liar. But you'll keep lying. You can do what you want. Just keep doing whatever it is you want. Just keep making things okay for you. Just keep destroying your sons.

**RYAN.** John. She's not—

**DEREK.** Listen, John. I mean, Mom is a lot of things.

**MOM.** Derek—

**DEREK.** (*Trying to keep it light.*) Mom is a lot of things, but not a liar. Right? I mean, right?

**MOM.** Derek, just eat your bagel.

**DEREK.** What? A bagel? What is wrong with you?

**MOM.** You don't eat enough.

**JOHN.** Mom. Enough.

**MOM.** Well, he doesn't. You? You eat. Derek never ate. He never did. I remember as kids just trying to get you and Ryan to eat less and let Derek have something! Just let him have something.

**RYAN.** *(To John.)* What are you talking about?

**JOHN.** It's as simple as this. It happened. To me and to you.

**RYAN.** What?

**JOHN.** All of us. He did it to all of us.

**DEREK.** Wait. What?

**JOHN.** Not all of us. Not Derek. I don't think to Derek.

**MOM.** John, I swear to God—

**RYAN.** I swear to God, Mom, if you say another word right now, I will shove this bagel down your fucking throat.

*Pause.*

John, what you're saying is...

**JOHN.** I was five or six, I think. I wanted so much to stay a little longer up at Uncle Phil's. Just a few more days. I begged Mom and Dad. I mean, I begged them. I didn't ask them for a lot of things and this is what I wanted...a few more days of swimming. Just a few more days. And they said yes! And they went home with you, Ryan. You were what, two? Three maybe... You all left, and it started. And it... It was what you think it was. It was—Well, it happened. And then it was done. And then it happened again. And then it happened again. And I didn't know how to stop it or to tell him no. I just let it happen again and again. They drove me home, and it was like the kid who went up there died and in his place was me. I felt like a completely new person dropped into my old life. And no one asked me about it. I guess it wasn't easy to tell from the outside. And Dad... He wasn't around much. And Mom, well... I wasn't such a happy kid to begin with, I guess. Right, Mom? You're always saying how moody I was. And so, maybe now I felt on the inside what I seemed like on the outside.

**RYAN.** Oh my God.

**MOM.** Ryan, you can't—

**RYAN.** Mom. Don't. John, I'm so sorry.

*Ryan goes to hug John.*

**JOHN.** Jesus, Ryan. Don't do that.

**RYAN.** I'm sorry. I don't—

**DEREK.** *(To John.)* Do you need some water?

**RYAN.** What?

**DEREK.** I don't know what else to do. I thought maybe water would help.

**RYAN.** What?

**DEREK.** I don't know.

*Derek grabs water and hands it to John.*

**JOHN.** It happened for such a long time. I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I'd just ask not to go up there anymore, but we'd go anyway. I just made sure to fake being sick and have to go home as early as much as possible. But it still happened. It always happened. We had to stay there for four weeks because Dad was doing drugs and breaking things at home. Four weeks. I just cried and cried and begged you not to go. Remember, Mom? But we went. We had to go. And we were there, and Ryan was old enough... And I—

**RYAN.** You couldn't help it. Oh God. I'm sure you tried. You must have. I can't even imagine. I'm so sorry—

**JOHN.** Please be quiet. Or I won't finish this. Please, just let me finish this. We were there, and Ryan you were old enough. I just thought... I just thought...maybe it will stop for me. If I bring you to him, it will stop for me. And it did. I was right. It stopped for me, and I was able to just walk away. He left me alone for the whole four weeks.

**RYAN.** You—

**JOHN.** And then, Ryan...you changed. I was, what? Eight? And I could see what I had done. I saved myself, and I ruined you.

*Laughs.*

Isn't that crazy? I saved myself and ruined you. And I told Dad. About you. Not me. You. And he was drunk and stoned on who knows what...and we just kinda stood there. He didn't say anything, but weeks later, he was gone on some tear, some bender. But we stopped staying there overnight. After you were hurt, we stopped. We stopped going. *(To Mom.)* Not Dad's lie. Not a lie at all. Just sad. Just really sad.

*Silence.*

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

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