

Just For Laughs

A Drama in Two Acts
by Gene Kato

JUST FOR LAUGHS

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JUST FOR LAUGHS

Just For Laughs received its world premiere by Next Stage in Denver, Colorado, on July 16th, 2004 at Red Rocks Community College. It was directed by the playwright and produced by Michael Kato. The lighting design was by Jake Kelly; costume design was by Alisa Vaughters; sound design by Gene Kato; and the production stage manager was Susan Vallagos. The cast was as follows:

JODI.....	Jenny Hecht
SAM.....	William Berry
TINA.....	Lisa Finnerty
JOHN.....	Brian Dowling
MAITRE'D.....	Bernie Cardell
MELISSA.....	Ashley Rose McEwen

THE SCENE: *The stage is relatively bare except for a few set pieces, which should suggest the various locales.*

AT RISE: *We are in the childhood bedroom of JODI FRANKS. She has locked herself in her bathroom and refuses to come out. It is the night before her wedding and she is beginning to have very serious doubts about marrying her fiancé, JOHN. As the lights come up full there is a man in his mid-twenties pacing around the room. It's JODI'S brother, SAM. He looks like he's been trying to get JODI out of the bathroom for quite some time and his patience is starting to wear thin.*

SAM. Again with the bathroom bit?! Why is it always the bathroom? You get upset-- the household hears the soothing sound of water running from a toilet! Come on, Jodi. Give us a break! It's been two hours!

JODI. *(Offstage)* Have the guests left?

SAM. Quite a while ago.

JODI. What about John?

SAM. Gone. *(He waits)* Are you coming out?

JODI. *(Offstage)* No.

SAM. Ever?

JODI. *(Offstage)* Just leave me alone.

SAM. You know it doesn't work like that. I was sent up here on a quest. I can't go back downstairs until I get some answers.

JODI. *(Offstage)* I want to just forget this evening ever happened.

SAM. Yeah, well, that's gonna be a trick since we have about sixty people that saw you disappear for most of the party. Come on. I know you're jumpy, but it's almost over. The rehearsal is done, the guests are all here, your dress is just itching to be put on -- it'll be fine. *(There is the click of the door unlocking and JODI comes out.)*

JODI. Except for one thing - I'm not going to marry John. *(Silence for a moment as the two just look at one another . . . then, JODI starts to cry.*

SAM'S anger turns very quickly to brotherly compassion as he walks over and puts his arms around her. She tries to collect herself, but it takes a moment or two.) I'm sorry.

SAM. Now come on, don't say that. You're not making any sense.

JODI. *(Overlapping)* I know. I'm just . . .

SAM. *(Overlapping)* You're just what? You can't even tell me what all of this

is about?

JODI. You'll think I'm crazy.

SAM. You're my sister, which automatically makes you crazy to me. Now, what is it? *(Long pause)*

JODI. I can't.

SAM. Look, Jodi. You can't just up and pull a Houdini in the middle of your own wedding. People frown on that. They want to see the bride all happy. Tears of joy, they love. Locked doors and cast off grooms they frown on.

JODI. It's not their wedding. I don't care. It's not gonna happen. I just -- I can't talk about it now.

SAM. You can, you just -- aren't.

JODI. *(To herself)* You men are useless.

SAM. Useless? I'm useless? I'm trying to help you? How did I suddenly become useless?

JODI. I never said you.

SAM. It was the first word out of your mouth. You said "You men are useless." You implied me!

JODI. You're not useless. And I don't mean you. Really. I was just meaning "you" as in "men other than you".

SAM. That makes almost absolutely no sense at all. Look, this is not the time to be cryptic, Jodi. I'm not in the mood to spelunk for answers.

JODI. Forget it. *(Pause)* Do you ever wish you were a kid again?

SAM. No.

JODI. Sometimes I do. *(She walks around her room and finds a small figuring of a jester.)*

SAM. You hated being a kid.

JODI. No, not really. I loved it. I just didn't know I loved it at the time.

SAM. How can a person obviously feel an emotion?

JODI. I don't know. *(She holds out the jester)* Look at Rico, here.

SAM. I'll look, but I'm not calling that painted piece of sculpted happiness by name.

JODI. You don't remember him, do you? *(SAM stares blankly at her.)*

You gave him to me when you were ten years old. A surprise present. According to Mom and Dad -- one you used your own allowance to buy.

SAM. What can I say? I was a sweet kid.

JODI. The story goes that I had been playing out back on the swings and fell off, scraping the back of my head. Couldn't stop crying. I guess a huge knot popped up on the back and lying on it was tough. So, you asked Dad to take

you out so you could get me something to make me feel better -- while you were out, you stumbled upon Rico. *(She smiles slightly, lost in thought.)* He made you laugh because he was balancing one of his juggling balls on his nose. So, you bought him for me, brought him home, and I smiled for the first time in two days. *(She laughs a little - then her face tears up. She buries her face in SAM'S chest.)* I need you to do it again.

SAM. What? Do what? Make you laugh? *(JODI collects herself)*

JODI. I'm sorry, Sam. It's not your place to shoulder this with me.

SAM. Shoulder what?

JODI. I can't say. I love you too much to say. Why spread so much unhappiness around, huh?

SAM. Are you doing this on purpose? You are, aren't you? You know this type of things makes me nuts! It's like when someone buys you a birthday present or a Christmas present, wraps it months early, and then sets it in plain view just to torture you.

JODI. It's not a gift, believe me.

SAM. Wait a second - The phone call. *(JODI nods)* Everything was okay at the rehearsal dinner -- so...you get this call -- and now all men are useless?

JODI. Sam, don't pry! Please.

SAM. Who was on the phone?

JODI. How often do you and Tina have sex?

SAM. Nice diversionary tactic, but -- no go.

JODI. I'll talk to you as a friend but not as a brother.

SAM. Even so, Friend, my sex life is not up for discussion.

JODI. I just need a sounding board.

SAM. Okay, I'm a sounding board -- shoot!

JODI. Not brotherly -- friendly!

SAM. I am! Look at me! I'm a friend! What is it?

JODI. No -- You're still being my brother and not my friend. I can tell by your tone of voice.

SAM. I'm your friend, too, Jodi.

JODI. No, I don't think so. You'd be able to discuss things like this with your friends.

SAM. Alright, fine! I'll -- try.

JODI. Is she a screamer?

SAM. Jodi, that's too personal.

JODI. Are you a missionary man?

SAM. You're mocking my confidence.

JODI. Do you tell her, "I'm here to pump . . . you up!"

SAM. ENOUGH!

JODI. I rest my case. *(Long pause)*

SAM. Alright, hold it. Will you just hold it for a second and let's just ease into this?

JODI. Is that what she tells you at two in the morning?

SAM. Alright! I'm done! This subject is closed!

JODI. Why? We're both adults.

SAM. It not the subject as much as it is your talking about it.

JODI. Typical.

SAM. What's that supposed to mean?

JODI. Men never have problems talking about sex with each other . . . why should they have a problem talking to women about it? What? You can do it, but you can't discuss it?

SAM. I don't want to discuss sex with you. Siblings don't talk about these things. It's the eleventh commandment.

JODI. There's only ten.

SAM. Well, then it's in The Bible: Special Edition. Forget it. No no no. No sexus cummunicadus.

JODI. That's just great. When I need you to be my friend, you're not there for me. You're too busy being my brother. When I want my brother all you want to do is be my friend. Why is it with you it's always too much of one and not near enough of another?

SAM. You're being impossible. Now, I realize that you're a little nervous. in, you're gonna be walking down the aisle in less than twelve hours, but . . .

JODI. *(Overlapping)* Have you ever cheated on Tina?

SAM. What?

JODI. I asked if you had ever cheated on Tina?

SAM. Of course not.

JODI. Oh, so your one of those guys with a faulty belt, huh?

SAM. Have you been checked recently for a brain tumor? You really believe all men are prone to this?

JODI. No . . . Yes . . . Maybe, I'm not sure. No, I do know. Men only use belts to make the top of their pants heavier so they'll fall to the ground quicker.

(Pause) It's kinda like living on the Italian coast.

SAM. Okay, get on the phone and dial 1-800-M-Y-T-U-M-O-R! Have it checked! Working belts do not equal fidelity!!!! *(After a long pause)*

I'm -- sorry. It's just that I know you so well. What is it? Just tell me. What

brought this up now?

JODI. Sit down. *(He does)* Maybe it's last minute jitters, I guess. Or full-on doubt. You name it. *(Pause)* You're devotion to Tina is amazing. It really is. How do you do it?

SAM. I didn't realize I was doing anything.

JODI. Things have changed between John and I.

SAM. Since dusk?

JODI. I suppose. I'm just not sure that the two of us are compatible anymore. I mean, when we first met everything was great. It just seems like now, we're two different people.

SAM. Well, you are two different people.

JODI. We hardly ever laugh, anymore. Now, I think we might be at the point where all of the good times are behind us. We're comedians for god's sake! If we can't laugh and have a good time, then who can? It wasn't like this before.

SAM. Before what?

JODI. Before we got involved with each other, you know? Before we decided to get married and all of this. What I feel is worry.

SAM. Perfectly natural.

JODI. I don't think so. I mean, John and I have been learning about each other every day for over two years. Some of the lessons are kind of hard to take, you know? What's worse is when I think about that love and I find myself regarding it in the past tense. That's something to consider, right?

SAM. I suppose.

JODI. Why would I do that? I've been sitting in that bathroom for the past two hours pondering the nature of the finality of the vows and the ceremony we're only hours away from. Why would I think of John in the past tense. It's a weird kind of nostalgia that I can't shake. Who knows? Maybe deep down I feel that if I speak in the past tense it somehow makes me closer to the past itself. *(Pause)* I guess I just want what we had. Like the night we first met. That was great! It was a good night.

SAM. The Crystal Pooch? I told you never to mention that place again. You and Tina dragged me to that hellhole. There was a night to hate! That awful music is still ringing in my head. *(The lighting changes and the bedroom disappears. A bar rolls on and a mirror ball comes into view from the ceiling. Then, as expected, we hear the blare of the Bee Gees (or some similar music); and we are deep into "Trash Disco" night at the Crystal Pooch. SAM has thrown on a jacket and enters with his girlfriend, TINA. SAM looks like he would rather be anywhere on the planet other than here. TINA, however, is*

drinking in the place - getting ready to have a great time.)

TINA. Come on. Let's dance.

SAM. We should probably wait on Jodi.

TINA. Why?

SAM. I just . . .this is ridiculous. There's a reason why the 70's ended, you know?

TINA. *(Sarcastic)* Yeah, Reaganomics. Come on. Don't be like this. I want to have fun.

SAM. I hate Disco.

TINA. But you don't hate me and I LOVE Disco. So come on! *(TINA pulls SAM to her and they begin to dance. JODI enters and walks up to the bar. The bartender, JOHN KURTH, dressed in a white polyester suit, walks over to wait on her.)*

JOHN. What can I get you?

JODI. Air! It's pouring down rain out there! Can't you guys put your parking lot a little closer?

JOHN. Sorry, we stopped serving air at eight o'clock. There are laws against drinking and breathing. Something else?

JODI. A better diaphragm. I'm out of breath.

JOHN. That's because they're not used for oral sex. Don't put it in your mouth.

JODI. *(Smiling)* Just give me a beer.

JOHN. You got it. Light?

JODI. A lady never discusses her weight.

JOHN. *(Smiling)* No, the beer.

JODI. Do I look like a lightweight? Give me the good stuff.

JOHN. *(Getting her beer)* Whew! Must be straight-laced night!

JODI. Why's that?

JOHN. Get a load of what just stop, dropped, and rolled onto the dance floor.

JODI. Which one?

JOHN. Okay, scan the floor and see if you can find the most mismatched couple out there. See them yet? Now look at the guy. He looks like he's on fire rather than dancing. How do they always get the good-lookin' women?

JODI. Jealous?

JOHN. Hell, yes, I'm jealous! Guys like that make it rough on the rest of us.

JODI. You don't know him.

JOHN. I know the type.

JODI. What type is that?

JOHN. You know? Repressed. Not really all that interesting. They always attract the great looking girls who eventually leave them. You know what I'm sayin'? Looking for satisfaction elsewhere?

JODI. Really? Satisfaction from where?

JOHN. Well, from . . . let's just leave it at . . . a different kind of man.

JODI. Like you?

JOHN. I don't want to brag. It's uncomely. (*JODI smiles*) I mean, look at him, can you just imagine what his home life must be like?

JODI. No, I don't have to.

JOHN. Well, maybe it's best not to. It wouldn't be a pretty picture, that's for sure.

JODI. I didn't get your name.

JOHN. No, you didn't.

JODI. I can't hold a conversation with you unless I know your name.

JOHN. I don't believe in labeling people. . .least of all, myself.

JODI. You don't?

JOHN. No. It keeps the mystery alive.

JODI. So, what you're saying is . . .you can label that guy on the dance floor as a loser by making up all of these fabricated notions about him, but you can't label yourself with a name?

JOHN. Don't put it like that, it makes me sound shallow. I told you . . .it's all about mystery.

JODI. Who are you being mysterious for? Yourself?

JOHN. Partly. A man needs to stay interested in himself. I'm just not into full disclosure, persay, of . . .me. Woman find me interesting . . .and I like to solve the mystery right along with them.

JODI. (*After a long pause*) That is, by far, the stupidest thing that I have ever heard anyone say.

JOHN. You think that's stupid, you just hang around.

JODI. Well, I have to call you something. And -- considering that white suit looks a little big on you -- the only thing I can think of is to refer to you as an anorexic S'More.

JOHN. Nice. Very nice.

JODI. I call it like I see it.

JOHN. It's a rental.

JODI. I hope so. Cause if this bartending gig doesn't work out, I'm not sure you could get a job lookin' like that. You're like the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man on Slim-Fast. (*JODI laughs. There is a small pause. The music changes.*)

JOHN. So . . . what do you do? For a living?

JODI. I'm professionally unemployed.

JOHN. Oh, you must be in the entertainment field.

JODI. Yeah, I'm a comedian.

JOHN. Really? Me too. Well, actually, that's not true. I'm a bartender -- I only do the comedy thing to pay the bills. Are you funny?

JODI. Yeah.

JOHN. Are you modest?

JODI. No.

JOHN. Are you single?

JODI. Sometimes.

JOHN. What's that supposed to mean?

JODI. *(Smiling)* I'd tell you but I don't want to spoil the mystery.

JOHN. Ummm. My kinda girl. Would you like to dance?

JODI. What about the bar?

JOHN. Well, I'd love to dance with it, but the corners keep hitting me in the balls when I try to spin it.

JODI. *(She stares at him)* I'd love to. *(They dance and the lighting seems to suspend them in time. The Crystal Pooch disappears and they dance into a park setting. The music eventually fades and they look at one another for a very long time. Then JODI says . . .)*

JODI. Why are you staring at me so intensely? Do you want to kiss me or something?

JOHN. Yeah, I'd love to.

JODI. Then, just do it.

JOHN. Okay. But first, you have something hanging out of your nose. It's making me sick, but I'm finding that I can't look away from it.

JODI. Oh, god! Why didn't you say something sooner?

JOHN. I didn't want to embarrass you.

JODI. How long has it been there?

JOHN. About an hour.

JODI. An hour?! Are you serious?! Why didn't you do something?

JOHN. What was I supposed to do? Pick it?

JODI. I can't believe this. *(Long pause. JOHN takes JODI and starts to kiss her. At the last second, he tilts her head up and looks up her nose. She pops him in the arm. Finally, they kiss. She melts in his arms. When they break there is a huge amount of tension that is lifted.)*

JOHN. Wow.

JODI. How long have you wanted to do that?

JOHN. For over an hour, but I was too afraid, you know. The thought of a booger on my cheek just gives me the willies. I mean, wouldn't you feel the same?

JODI. Okay, it's gone now, so let's stop talking about it. I feel stupid enough as it is.

JOHN. That made you feel stupid? That was nothing. Let me tell you about stupid. My sister got a yeast infection once and wouldn't go near a French bakery for a year. That's stupid. I have some cousins that live up in the mountains of Arkansas. They had six kids and decided that they needed to use birth control. The doctor asked them if they wanted to use an I.U.D. and my cousin said, . . .

JOHN/JODI. "No thanks, we'll pay with cash."

JOHN. *(Continuous)* That's stupid. *(Pause)* You're not stupid. You're beautiful. *(He kisses her again.)*

JODI. Okay, wait just a second. If you're gonna keep kissing me, I have to know your name. Call me traditional, but . . .

JOHN. *(Overlapping)* John.

JODI. John? Just John?

JOHN. John Kurth.

JODI. Kurth?

JOHN. Kurth. I think. Actually, we're not really sure if it is Kurth. It might be Kurs. My great great grandfather had a lisp.

JODI. Oh, well, John Kurth or Kurs. I'm Jodi Franks. It's a pleasure to finally get to call you by name.

JOHN. I hate my name.

JODI. Why? John is a good name? Strong. Simple.

JOHN. Do you want to know why I was named John? My mother and father always believed that your surroundings helped shape who you are as a person. So, my parents said that they would name me after the place my father was at when I was born. He was a shoe salesman. Well, at the precise moment I was delivered, my father was taking a pee at a Texaco station in Waxahatchie, Texas. Well, Waxahatchie sounded too tribal, Texaco reminded them of big business which was eating up small businesses like small shoe companies, so the only thing left was literally where he was, the john.

JODI. I don't believe that story.

JOHN. Maybe it's true and maybe it isn't, but my dad always told me, "Son, your identity began in the toilet . . . don't let it stay there." So, your turn, tell

me a little something about you.

JODI. Okay -- you remember that guy in the club?

JOHN. Our backdraft buddy? Yeah.

JODI. He's my brother. *(Long pause. JOHN opens his mouth.)* What are you doing?

JOHN. Would you look on the roof of my mouth and see what my shoe size is? *(JODI laughs)* Your brother? Why didn't you tell me? I feel like such an asshole.

JODI. You looked like an asshole. But, it's okay, you didn't know so I won't hold that against you.

JOHN. What do you hold against people? I mean, just for future reference.

JODI. Two things. Broken promises and me . . .when I'm cold.

JOHN. Are you cold, now?

JODI. No.

JOHN. Any chance of getting cold soon?

JODI. None. Not even a shiver.

JOHN. Where are we headed? First base? Second base? Third base? What?

JODI. That depends.

JOHN. On what?

JODI. On how many balls you have and how you handle your bat. See, I can speak in cliches, too. *(They stare at one another. Music starts to play and the scene changes back into the bedroom. SAM and JODI are once again in mid-conversation. The music fades as the lights return to a proper level.)*

SAM. You actually said that to him?

JODI. Yeah. I just wanted to get a reaction.

SAM. That's worse than some of the lines I used on Tina. Okay, so we agree that night was great? I mean, it obviously was because you eventually got engaged.

JODI. Over time. You learn things. You smile less.

SAM. That's what this is about? You remaining entertained?

JODI. Well, yeah, but I think it's important. And besides, it's more than that. We don't seem to be connecting on very many levels. He seems preoccupied.

SAM. HE'S GETTING MARRIED! GIVE THE GUY A BREAK!

JODI. I'm getting married too, you know?!

SAM. Yeah, but is he threatening to back out on you?

JODI. He's not threatening anything. -- Not one thing. *(There's a knock at the door and TINA enters.)*

TINA. Hey, you're out of the bathroom.

SAM. Yeah, finally.

TINA. Your parents will be thrilled. So, what's going on? Are we still having a wedding?

SAM. Yes.

JODI. No.

SAM. YES!

JODI. Well, maybe.

SAM. She's not backing out of this. I'll kill her first.

TINA. It's her choice, Honey. Not yours.

JODI. *(To TINA)* How unusually understanding of you.

SAM. What is that crack supposed to mean?

JODI. Just giving my best friend a long-overdue compliment.

TINA. Thank you -- I think.

SAM. This irrationality of yours is getting old. Now, either spit it out as to what's got you all bunched in a dither -- or go to bed and get ready to be happy! Stop acting like an idiot!

JODI. An idiot? You have no idea what's bothering me -- so don't stand there basking in your own ignorance!

SAM. Ignorance?!

JODI. Yes, ignorance!

SAM. That's it. I'm leaving. You can sort this out all on your own. All I was trying to do was help. I don't need to stand here and take this abuse from you!

JODI. Then go! *(SAM looks at his sister for a moment.)*

SAM. If this is how you treat, John. Maybe he's better off. *(To TINA)* I'll see you downstairs. *(SAM exits. TINA looks at JODI for a few moments.)*

JODI. How do you two do it?

TINA. What?

JODI. Staying so deep in love. The two of you make it look so easy. How do you do it?

TINA. *(Laughing)* Does it look that way?

JODI. It does.

TINA. Well, appearances can be deceiving sometimes.

JODI. From the horse's mouth, huh?

TINA. Yeah -- I guess.

JODI. My brother actually has fights with you?

TINA. All the time. When he really gets worked up, his face turns all red, his temples flair, he grits his teeth. It can be ugly.

JODI. Really? I thought he just did that with me.

TINA. I wish.

JODI. And you put up with that? (*Sarcastic*) You're a better woman than I am, I guess.

TINA. Nah, I just realize that that's the way Sam is. . .and, if I'm going to go so far as to tell him that I love him, then I have to love him honestly. Which means that I have to take him as he is, and not necessarily as I want him to be . . .faults and all.

JODI. Do you really believe that shit?

TINA. You know, Jodi, now is a probably a bad time for you to judge people's actions and motives.

JODI. Oh, yeah? Why is that?

TINA. You're going through that prenuptial panic that makes all brides irrational.

JODI. Irrational?

TINA. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. Every bride I've ever known has been moody and difficult to deal with before her wedding.

JODI. Excuse me, but are you passing judgment on me?

TINA. Of course not, I was just making a point.

JODI. It sounded like you were passing judgment on me. . .and I'm just wondering exactly where you get off doing that?

TINA. Honestly, Jodi, I really . . .

JODI. (*Overlapping*) I mean, had you ever been married yourself . . .or about to be . . .or even planning to be in this century, then you would realize the pressure that I'm under.

TINA. I'm not saying that you're . . .

JODI. (*Overlapping*) Oh, I think I know what you're saying. (*She pauses*) I . . .am a comedian. Do you realize what that means? I make people laugh for a living. I go onstage and make jokes about PMS, men, women, presidents, futons, blow jobs, and belly button lint! That's what I do. I'm supposed to be able to take what I see as mundane, frightening, upsetting. . . basically whatever stirs me up, and make light of it so that I can feel better about myself and the shitty world around me. Lately, I've been thinking very seriously about the changes that I see in myself and in John and I'm really starting to get worried. I've been trying to find the humor, but it seems like the more difficult he is with me, the only thing that comes to mind is how I'm gonna hate looking at his face and dealing with his dirty underwear five years from now! That's my problem, Tina! Right now, you don't have to deal with that with Sam because the two of you still have your separate apartments to go

to when you've had all of each other you can take! After I'm married, where am I supposed to retreat? Huh? Where am I supposed to go? Jesus Christ! I feel like the honeymoon is over and we haven't even walked down the aisle, yet! *(Pause)* Do you see my problem? I just want things to be like they were. *(Pause)* I'm scared that I'm asking too much. I'm afraid that I might just be in love with the image of what used to be . . .and not the hard, cold reality of what is. *(Long silence)*

TINA. I don't know what to tell you, Jodi. John loves you. I can see it when he talks about you.

JODI. But, the problem is, I need to see it . . .and all I see is someone who says one thing and wants another. *(Pause. She smiles.)* It's funny. I can remember a lot of times that he used to just crack me up. Like our first date, oh, it was terrible the way it ended up, but what a crazy night. We were at this really fancy restaurant . . . *(The scene begins to change. Classical music fills the air and we find ourselves in the middle of a very upscale restaurant. A MAITRE'D moves around setting the place settings and making sure that certain snooty ambiance is maintained. There are several empty tables around the room. JOHN and JODI enter. He is wearing the same white suit as when we first saw him. A MAITRE'D (dressed in black) strides over and intercepts them.)*

MAITRE'D. May I help you?

JOHN. No thanks, I can walk all by myself. We'd like a table.

MAITRE'D. Do you have a reservation?

JOHN. About what?

MAITRE'D. Very witty, Sir. I would like to oblige you, but I'm afraid we're all booked for this evening.

JOHN. What are you talking about? Every table in this joint is empty.

MAITRE'D. The entire restaurant is booked. There's a convention in town. Besides, you aren't dressed properly for dinner.

JOHN. What are you talking about?

MAITRE'D. I'm afraid our disco ball is being polished tonight.

JOHN. You're shittin' me.

MAITRE'D. No, Sir. I would never, as you so colorfully put it, shit you. *(He regards the white suit)* By the way -- loved you in Battlefield Earth.

JODI. It's okay, let's just go somewhere else.

JOHN. No, I don't think so. Look, Jack, I wanna talk to the manager.

MAITRE'D. The manager? This isn't a Burger King, Sir. We don't have a manager.

JOHN. (Looking around the empty room) Yeah, well, from the look of the crowd you got goin' here tonight, you probably couldn't afford one. *(Pause)* Okay, if there's no manager, then who is the main vein around here?

MAITRE'D. The what?

JOHN. The main vein! You know? The head honcho?

MAITRE'D. If you're trying to ask me who is in charge . . .you're looking at him.

JOHN. No, I want to talk to someone over your head.

MAITRE'D. You want to speak to someone taller?

JOHN. That's funny. You're a funny guy.

MAITRE'D. You're not.

JODI. Come on, John. Let's just go.

JOHN. *(Ignoring JODI)* Hey! There's no need to get snooty with me, Lurch! I just wanna eat! Now, you wanna get into a battle of wits with me, well, I can get into that just as easy. I mean, Jeez, where I come from, people know how to be cordial to one another.

MAITRE'D. Yes, apparently though, they don't seem to teach their children what it means to listen. We are booked tonight! You cannot get a table. I'm terribly sorry.

JOHN. No, you're not. Just look at you. Standing there all high and mighty with that hoity-toity poopie pants look on your face.

JODI. John . . .

MAITRE'D. What hoity-toity poopie pants look?

JOHN. That tight-lipped, upper crust wanna be, I can eat a candy cane rectally kinda look that people get when they're abusing the obviously limited amount of power that they're given. Well, fine my friend, that's just fine! You wanna turn me out into the rain without the chance to impress this beautiful woman with that certain abundance of charm and finesse I've been bragging about for days, go ahead. I can take it! Let me tell you a little something about me. I come from a long line of charmers. I don't mean the average, run of the mill, six panties a week for breakfast kind of charm . . .I mean real charm. You know the kind I'm talkin' about? Wait, what am I askin' you for? Of course you don't. I'm talking about the kind of charm that comes from a goodness that far exceeds the average guy. The kind of charm that wakes you up in the middle of the night only to say, "You're okay, I like you, go back to sleep." That kind. The stuff that poets write about, musicians sing about, and . . .museums seem to honor. That kind. This lady is hungry. You obviously have a nice place here. I need to take her to a nice place. It

goes back to what . . .what, I ask you? Charm. Pure and simple. Now, I ask you to look into my eyes and tell me . . .if you were me, and you were in the exact same position . . .what would you do?

MAITRE'D. I would take the lady to a restaurant that wasn't booked for the evening. Goodnight!

JOHN. Oh, no you don't, you crumb! (*Lifting his fists*) Put 'em up!

JODI. John, you're not serious!

MAITRE'D. Let me get this straight. I'm supposed to fight you now? Is that what I'm supposed to extrapolate from all of this nonsense?

JOHN. Extrapolate? Boy is that a five dollar word!

MAITRE'D. And you have no change, right? (*The MAITRE'D enjoys his "scored point"*) I love putting lowlifes in their place. It makes me feel all fluffy inside.

JOHN. Fluffy? Fluffy? I got your fluffy, Pal? (*JOHN and the MAITRE'D get into a shouting match.*)

JODI. HEY! (*To JOHN*) MR. SALT! (*To MAITRE'D*) MR. PEPPER! BOTH OF YOU TAKE A CORNER!!!

MAITRE'D. I'm terribly sorry. I am just trying to keep him in his element. Normally, types like him would only be seen in a bowling alley . . .and only late at night, for that matter. Well, a bowling alley and possibly a pawn shop.

JOHN. Alright, since you're obviously not gonna handle this like an irrational adult - we'll play it your way. How long before the masses storm the place? You tell me how long and I will make sure we are out of here when your people arrive.

MAITRE'D. Sir, we don't negotiate with comedians under any circumstances here. If you give in to them, they will only insist on trying to be even funnier than they already aren't. Now, please, move along before I call the police and have you removed by force.

JOHN. Oh, I see. Need other people to fight your battles for you, huh? Gotta have the police?

MAITRE'D. No. We just have a certain sense of decorum, here. Besides, I wouldn't want you to press charges against me -- it's undignified.

JOHN. Come on. One punch. It's a gift. A freebie. If you can hit me, I'll go away. No questions asked. If I get you, though -- we get a table.

JODI. John, it's okay. Let's just go.

JOHN. Nah nah nah. Jodi. We're guys. It's all about the sport. (*To MAITRE'D*) Right?

MAITRE'D. Sir, I don't recommend this.

JOHN. Oh, think you can take me, huh? Well, let's see what you got.

MAITRE'D. Goodbye, Sir. *(The MAITRE'D turns to go. JOHN grabs him and spins him around drawing back to throw a punch.)*

JODI. John, no! *(JODI jumps in the way as the lights go out and the music changes to move us from the restaurant to a park scene. JOHN enters as the music fades with JODI unconscious and draped over his shoulder and a bloody Kleenex stuck in his nose. He places her gently on a park bench and looks at her for a second.)*

JOHN. What did you have to go and jump in the way for? I could've taken that smart mouthed, mamby pamby guy out with one punch. *(Pause)* I'm so sorry. What a way to start a first date. Come to think of it -- what a way to end a first date. I've been told by women that I'm a real knockout but this is the first time I've actually believed it. *(JODI starts to groan and come around.)* Jodi, look at me. How many mees do you see?

JODI. *(Faintly)* Come closer to me.

JOHN. What?

JODI. I said for you to come closer to me.

JOHN. Okay. Is this better?

JODI. Perfect. *(JODI hits JOHN square in the face. He doubles over and falls unconscious to the ground. JODI lifts herself into sitting position and looks at the situation.)*

JODI. *(Continued)* Oh, my eye. Do you have any idea what it's like to be smacked in the face by someone that's supposed to be wining and dining you? *(Pause)* John? *(No response)* John? *(No response)* Oh, come on! I didn't hit you that hard! *(She goes over and tries to wake him up, but it's no use.)* Look, I deal in humor! And this . . . THIS IS NOT HUMOROUS!!! *(JOHN murmurs something.)* What?

JOHN. I said -- come closer. *(JODI leans in and JOHN pulls her into a kiss. She allows herself to enjoy it for a second, then pulls away.)*

JODI. Faker. *(JOHN sits up.)*

JOHN. It's been one of those nights. How often can you get thrown out of a ritzy-titzy restaurant.

JODI. I'm gonna have a black eye in the morning.

JOHN. I'm really sorry, but how was I supposed to know you were gonna swoop in at the last second and absorb my fist? *(Pause)* Hey, you're not gonna classify our relationship as abusive, are you?

JODI. I might. *(Pause)* This is the shittiest first date I've ever been on. Thrown out of a restaurant, I'm gonna have a black eye -- What in the hell

could possibly happen next?! *(There is a clap of thunder. JODI looks up into the sky.)* Well, fuck a duck! *(The lights change and music begins playing as we change scenes back to the bedroom. JODI is laughing as TINA just looks on, lightly smiling.)*

TINA. You find it funny that you got punched in the face and then became stranded in a rainstorm? Not my idea of a fun evening.

JODI. No, I guess it wouldn't be.

TINA. It sounds like it raised the bar on crap.

JODI. You know, kind of like a bonding thing. I mean, I only got punched in the face because John was trying to be chivalrous . . . I thought it was nice being that most men these days can't even spell the word chivalrous - let alone actually be it. It hurt like hell, but it was sweet. Hasn't Sam ever done anything like that for you?

TINA. Sam is always sweet to me.

JODI. No, I mean little quirky things that only you would find sweet.

TINA. *(After a pause)* Can I make an observation? You sound like you're trying to sell the idea on me that John is a great guy. I'm not the one that matters. If you think he's so wonderful, then why are you holed up here in this bedroom threatening to call off the wedding?

JODI. I haven't threatened anything. . .yet.

TINA. Yet? What does that mean? You're threatening to threaten?

JODI. I'm worried that the marriage won't last.

TINA. Every bride worries about that, Jodi. It's a standard issue feeling.

JODI. I guess. *(Pause)* Have you ever cheated on Sam? *(Silence)*

TINA. What?

JODI. I asked you if you've ever cheated on Sam. Don't worry. If you have, I won't say a word.

TINA. Jodi, how can you ask me such a question?

JODI. I just opened my mouth, my voice box did the rest. So, have you? *(TINA is silent.)* Little advice -- when you act evasive, it shows your guilt even more clearly. That's okay. I'd much rather deal with someone being evasive than lying to me.

TINA. I didn't say anything.

JODI. People say more with what they don't say. *(Long pause)*

TINA. Yes. Once.

JODI. Care to elaborate?

TINA. Not really.

JODI. Not really, huh?

TINA. It makes me uncomfortable.

JODI. We both know why. (*TINA stares at JODI . . .mortified.*) I'm not mad at you. I just want to understand why you would do something . . .like you did. My marriage depends on it.

TINA. Look, I never wanted to hurt your brother, Jodi. I love Sam. You know that.

JODI. I know you do. I never said that you didn't. But, why did you cheat on him? I mean, you have to have some reason. . .and don't give me that bullshit about how it just happened.

TINA. It did.

JODI. No. These things never just happen. You have to make a conscious choice to cheat on someone. It's not like some sort of freak accident. I mean, I've never been somewhere lounging naked on a bed and there just happened to be this guy that I was attracted to , who also happened to be naked and before we knew what we were doing . . .we were having sex. Nah. I don't buy it. (*Silence*) You see, I think that you and my brother look like a perfectly happy couple, but I could smell trouble in paradise. And the odd thing is, I find myself comparing my own relationship to yours. If my brother treats you so well, I want to know why you would want more than simple, pure, unconditional love. It's important that I find out . . .for my own well being . . .and we both know why.

TINA. Yeah. (*Pause*) Youth.

JODI. What?

TINA. Youth. If I had to blame something . . .

JODI. (*Overlapping*) No, I don't want you to blame anything. If you want to blame something, how about blaming yourself. At least be honest about it. I love you like a sister, Tina, but "Youth" is nothing but a cop-out. I know people well into their fifties that cheat. Who are they gonna blame? Certainly, not youth.

TINA. Youth is a state of mind.

JODI. Give me a break.

TINA. I don't know why I did it, okay? I just did.

JODI. That's a great reason. Have you told Sam?

TINA. No, it would break his heart if he found out.

JODI. My brother's heart is worth "I don't know. I just did."?

TINA. You know, technically, this is none of your business.

JODI. Lucky for me I'm not a technical type of woman. (*Pause*) This isn't really the point. What I'm trying to find out is why you would cheat on

someone that you love for a stupid fling? Was it worth it?

TINA. At the time I thought it was!

JODI. Don't get pissed at me! I'm just trying to resolve some issues!

TINA. You sound like you're trying to resolve my issues!

JODI. Oh, don't play dumb here!

TINA. I'm not playing! *(Pause)* Dumb . . .not playing dumb!

JODI. So, answer the question!

TINA. What was the question?

JODI. Why did you bang some other guy?

TINA. He was my type of guy at that time, Jodi! Okay?! I saw him in a nightclub and I wanted to feel him against me! Are you happy? He was everything your brother isn't! Rich! Strong! A good dancer! Charming! I was attracted to the possibilities and blinded by the bullshit! There! I said it! It's all out in the open, so leave me alone about it! It only happened once and I learned my lesson from it! Jesus! Is that answer good enough for you?!

JODI. Perfect. It was just what I needed to hear. *(JODI walks over to the bathroom and enters it. We hear a "click" and TINA stares at the door.)*

TINA. Jodi? *(No response)* Jodi, are you coming out? *(SAM enters.)*

SAM. What's all of this yelling up here?

TINA. She's locked herself in the bathroom, again.

SAM. Ah, damn! I get her out of the bathroom and you yell her back into it?

TINA. I . . .just . . .

SAM. *(Knocking at the door)* Jodi, come on! Don't do this!

TINA. Sam, I . . .

SAM. *(Overlapping)* What did you say to her?

TINA. Nothing, I . . .

SAM. Nothing? You must have said something. There was another body in here that looked like my sister when I left. I'm sure of it. Now, there's just you, me, and a locked bathroom door. *(At the door)* Jodi? What did she say?

TINA. I don't think that we should discuss what was said in here. It was girl talk. Right, Jodi?

JODI. *(Offstage)* If that's what you want.

TINA. That's what I want.

SAM. *(After a pause)* A secret? You have a secret that you're keeping from me? I thought we didn't have any secrets.

TINA. Sam, I just . . .

SAM. How long have you had a secret?

TINA. Quite a while, Sam. And I've lived a perfectly happy life up until

tonight!

SAM. You've been living a lie with me?

TINA. Sam . . .

SAM. Is this secret something that I would really hate?

TINA. Sam, if I tell you that, then you're just gonna start going crazy about this. I don't want you obsessing over this.

SAM. Over what? What? Tell me what?

TINA. I don't want to talk about it!

SAM. Oh, it must be a whopper! It is, isn't it? This has got to be the kingpin humdinger of all secrets.

TINA. Sam, you're starting it! You're obsessing!

SAM. Well, what do you expect? It must be really awful if you sent my sister back into the bathroom with it!

TINA. I didn't send your sister anywhere! She went into the bathroom on her own!

SAM. You know, a few minutes ago if you would've told me that I would've believed you completely . . .but I'm not so sure now. . .Miss Secrets!

TINA. Sam, don't start!

SAM. I'm not starting anything! You're the one who's lying!

TINA. I'm not lying to you! I'm just not telling you everything! Stop being a jackass!

SAM. Oh, so now I'm a jackass? Well, Heehawww! At least I'm not a sneaky little liar! *(The bathroom door opens and JODI comes out.)*

TINA. I'm a liar just because I don't share every little thing I do with you?

SAM. If it's not bad, then why do you feel you have to be secretive in the first place?

TINA. This is typical, male, caveman, domineering, I need to control so I feel important bullshit!

SAM. No, I think this is typical female, air-headed, I fucked up because I'm stupid bullshit!

TINA. Oh, really?

SAM. Yeah, really!

TINA. Fine. I'm going to my apartment!

SAM. Good! Go to your den of lies and hidden info!

TINA. I will! *(TINA storms out the door. SAM yells down the hall.)*

SAM. Goodnight! Secret Sally! That's what you are! A Secret Sally! *(He slams the door. JODI looks at him for a second.)*

JODI. I didn't realize that I could start such a huge fight just from takin' a pee.

SAM. This wasn't you. *(He looks out the window.)* She told you what it was?

JODI. Yeah.

SAM. It's big, isn't it?

JODI. Yep.

SAM. Should I be worried?

JODI. Do you want me to tell you what it is?

SAM. Yeah.

JODI. If I do, you have to promise me that you won't tell her that I told you. You can't let on that you know.

SAM. I can't promise you that.

JODI. Then, sorry Sam, I can't tell you.

SAM. I'm your brother. Now you're keeping secrets from me?

JODI. It's not my secret. *(Long silence)*

SAM. She cheated on me, didn't she?

JODI. Yep.

SAM. This is starting to have the makings of a really bad night.

JODI. Starting? I'd say the cat's out of the bag and it's one pissed pussy.

SAM. Why are we doing this? This is supposed to be a happy occasion and I feel like I'm gonna need a double dose of Prozac just to get the constipated look off of my face! *(A beat)* She really schtupt another guy?

JODI. Don't do that?

SAM. Do what?

JODI. Don't say words like "schtupt". I'll start making Jew jokes. It's uncontrollable.

SAM. Well, what do you think I should do, Jodi? I love this woman. I can't let it destroy us. . .she's a very loving person.

JODI. The other guy probably thinks so, too.

SAM. That's not funny!

JODI. It wasn't meant to be. It was a valiant attempt at brutal honesty.

SAM. Well, you didn't have to say it!

JODI. Hey, weren't you the one that was ranting and raving about truth a few minutes ago?

SAM. I wanted Tina to be truthful! You're my sister! Everyone knows that siblings can't be trusted! That's not my law . . .IT'S A LAW OF NATURE!!!
(Silence)

JODI. Sam? Do you think you'll forgive her? She said it was only one time.
(SAM is silent) You see my problem now?

SAM. I thought you were just worried that John couldn't make you laugh

anymore.

JODI. There's a reason why I'm not able to. *(Pause)* I just found out that he cheated on me, too.

SAM. Hah?

JODI. Yep. He never told me about it, and I think that's a problem.

SAM. Well, it's better that you found out before you were married.

JODI. I'm not so sure. *(Pause)* If I were married and found out, I could just write it off and say that he did that when he was single . . .so we're married now and there's nothing more to worry about. However, being single, all I can do is think about how he hid this . . .this . . .THING from me. Does this make any sense? *(SAM nods)* I didn't know what to do until I saw how you reacted. *(A beat)* You said that it was better that I found out before I was married, like it changes anything. You just found out and you're not married, you're not even planning it. Tina, although I love her to death, is trying to hide a time bomb from you. And you know one thing that's constant about time bombs . . .eventually, they always go off.

SAM. Jodi, I'm not the poster child for the "perfect relationship guy". Don't base your decisions on how I react to things. You be you -- you'll be much better off.

JODI. I'm me, Sam. I've been me for as long as I can remember. If there's one thing that comedy has taught me it's to constantly try to look objectively at problems in life, that's what a comedian does. Unfortunately, sometimes they hit too close to home and objectivity gives way to emotion. I have to feel as me, also. *(The telephone rings. SAM picks it up.)*

SAM. Hello? *(Pause)* It's John.

JODI. *(Taking the phone)* Hi. . . .No, I'm just sitting here mulling over a few things . . .Oh, she did . . .Well, wasn't that thoughtful of her . . .Yeah, I guess. . .I don't know, John, we have something huge hanging over us . . .Yeah, I know . . .Phone call. . .The two of you were seen together. . .Had to come out, that's what I was told . . .Yeah . . .uh-huh . . .It was made . . .It was made known today. . .I think we should . . .Okay . . .See you then. *(She hangs up)*

SAM. He's coming over, I take it?

JODI. *(With a weak smile.)* Oh, you know issues. They're always around waiting to be addressed.

SAM. He did more to you than you're letting on, didn't he?

JODI. It's not what he did that bothers me, it's what he didn't do. He didn't tell me.

SAM. He didn't tell you what?

JODI. He cheated with someone very close to me, Sam.

SAM. Jesus! What is it with these people? Is there something in the water?

JODI. Well, it's not something people tend to blurt out.

SAM. I'm not equipped to deal with this. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE HAVING A GODDAMN WEDDING!!!!

JODI. Yeah.

SAM. Wait a second. Who called John and told him you were upset? We were trying to keep this away from him until you decided what you were gonna do. Who called him?

JODI. You can thank Tina for that.

SAM. Tina?

JODI. Yep.

SAM. Why would she do that? It's none of her business, really.

JODI. Guilt, I guess.

SAM. Guilt? If anything she should feel guilt toward me. I didn't even know she had John's number.

JODI. Sam-- John was the one that Tina cheated on you with. *(There is a stunned silence. SAM stares at JODI, unbelieving.)*

SAM. Oh, no.

JODI. Sam, I . . .

SAM. NO! THAT CAN'T BE! YOU HAVE TO BE MAKING A MISTAKE!

JODI. Keep it down! You're gonna wake up the whole house! *(TINA bursts into the room.)*

TINA. Alright, Sam – I've been thinking that . . .

SAM. *(Reeling on TINA)* You. Did you do it?

TINA. What?

SAM. You know what I'm talking about. Did you sleep with John? Jodi said that you cheated on me with John. IS IT TRUE?! THAT'S ALL I'M ASKING YOU!!! *(A beat)* If you did, at least be woman enough to admit it.

(Silence) Oh, my god. It's true. You did. Why? JUST TELL ME THAT! WHY?! AFTER EVERYTHING I DID TO MAKE SURE YOU KNEW YOU WERE LOVED!!! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?!

(Pause) Jesus! WHAT A FOOL I WAS, HUH?! WHAT A FOOL I WAS TO GIVE MY HEART TO SOMEONE WHO WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A SECOND RATE WHORE! *(TINA slaps SAM, he slaps her back, TINA falls to the ground. . .near tears. SAM exits in a fury. JODI sits in silence, not looking at TINA.)*

TINA. You said you loved me like a sister . . .How could you tell him? (*Long pause*)

JODI. Because I love Sam AS a brother. (*TINA continues crying, JODI stares into space.*)

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