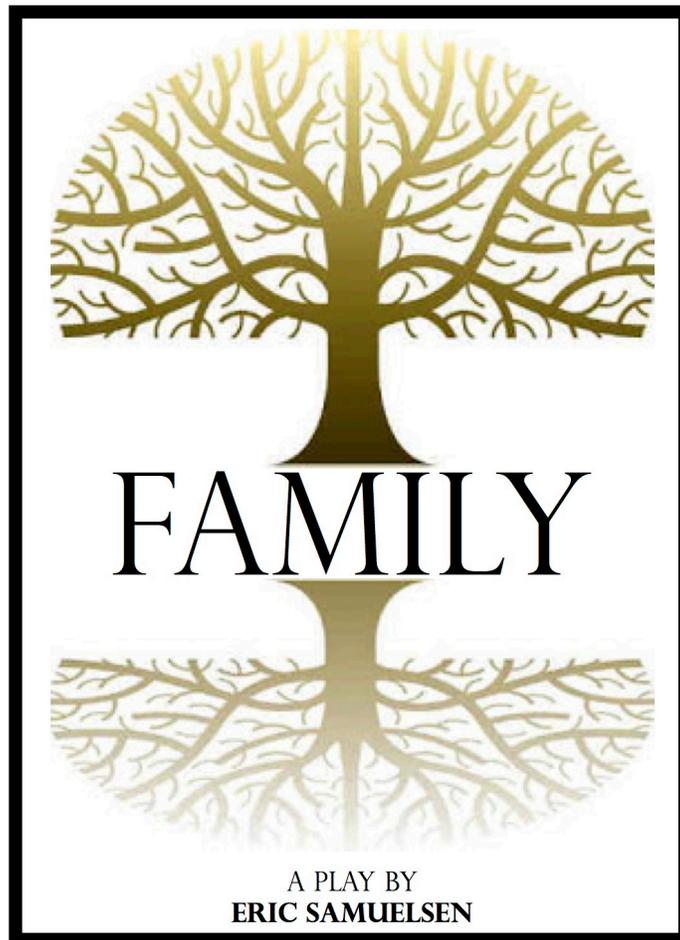


PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine

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FAMILY

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (2M 5W 1TG)

Craig Hull—also Dad, early fifties.

Melinda Hull—also Mom, in her late forties

 Their kids:

Ashley Hull Jarvis—26, newly married

Deanna Hull—24, RM, in grad school

Jack Hull—19, on a mission

Carla Hull—16, in high school

 AND, the Visiting Teachers

Sister Dawes

Sister Swanson

The play takes place in the Hull home, in San Jose California. The time is late January, 2003.

A note about notation. In this play, a double dash (–) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

ACT ONE

Friday night and Saturday

(As the play opens, we see each of the members of the HULL family in spotlight pools. The music is Collective Soul: "I tremble for your love, always." DAD is reading a book, ASHLEY is dancing wildly, CARLA more wildly, DEANNA most wildly of all. JACK dances uncomfortably, sedately. MOM watches them all, troubled.)

(As the song ends, lights up on the HULL living room. Sofa, coffee table, a bookcase, a piano. What we can see of it is very nice. Off left is the kitchen and off right, the family room, and other bedrooms and bathrooms. All very nice. Up some stairs, is the master bedroom, and two other bedrooms. All exceptionally nice, we gather, though we can't see much. Outside the HULL living room are a few Dark Spaces, essentially a single light special.)

MOM: *(On a phone.)* Craig. Pick up. Pick up! No, I've already left a . . . Craig! You've got to come home, they just called from Jack's mission, they don't know where he is.

(Pause.)

I mean they don't know where he is. He's not with his companion, he's not anywhere they can—

DAD: *(Enters, light shift, he nods to MOM on a cell phone, overlapping.)* AWOL?

(Pause.)

Because, you see, when you say he's AWOL, that implies a certain . . .

(Pause.)

Yes, President Garman, I am fully aware of the meaning of the acronym AWOL, which I would remind you is a military term, implying—

MOM: *(Pushes a button on her phone.)* Sister Swanson, I'm just telling you what they told me, he apparently ditched his—

DAD: My point is, President, I could be in San Diego in. . .

(Pause.)

No, look, I believe there are flights every two hours, if not, I could drive it in about six. . .

MOM: *(Phone.)* No, I still haven't heard anything.

(Pause.)

That really isn't necessary, Joan.

(Pause.)

Well, of course, but I don't want to be a . . . hang on, I've got a call on another line. . .

(Pushes button on phone.)

DEANNA: Mom. Hi, it's me, Deanna. Uh, listen, I'm wondering if I could come home after all. School is, um . . . would that be all right?

DAD: *(To MOM, standing next to her.)* What!?!?!?!??

MOM: I just got off the phone with her, she called from one of those inflight phone—

DAD: She's on a plane heading home today?

(Cell phone rings.)

Hang on, this might be—

(Pushes button on phone.)

Craig Hull.

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MOM: *(Pushes button on line.)* Joan, I do appreciate your concern, but. . .

DAD: *(On phone.)* So you're saying he *did* communicate with you?

MOM: I honestly do think that we. . .

DAD: Yes, all right, it's cryptic, but it would imply, would it not, that he's on his way here, home?

MOM: Yes, I suppose so. Come, I don't know what I'll have you do, but. . . Hang on.

(Pushes button on her phone.)

Bishop?

DAD: Yes, I'll certainly call you.

(Pushes a button on his phone, looks at it.)

Great, a message.

ASHLEY: *(On phone.)* Listen, Dad, I'm calling your cell because the home line's been busy. I'm just going to say this, I've left Steve, it's permanent, I'm coming home, I'll explain it all later. Look if you get this, can you pick me up? My flight arrives at, uh, three fifty five, American Airlines, flight one eight nine. I'll wait by the baggage pickup, and if you're not there, I'll, I don't know, grab a cab. Something.

MOM: WHAT?!?!?

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: And she left this just now? Today?

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: Unbelievable.

DAD: It's just an hour after Deanna's flight comes in, I'll get 'em both, I guess.

MOM: Ashley TOO? TODAY?

DAD: It would seem so.

MOM: While you're out there, check on flights to San Diego.

DAD: I think he's coming home.

MOM: What did they tell you?

DAD: Apparently, he did communicate with them, left a message on the mission phone. Two words.

MOM: What did it say?

DAD: I quit.

(Pause. DAD's cell rings. MOM jumps, then notices she's holding a phone.)

MOM: I forgot, I've got the bishop on hold.

(Pushes a button.)

Hi, Bishop, I'm so sorry, it's been quite the. . .

DAD: *(Answers phone.)* Craig Hull.

JACK: Dad, this is Jack. I'm at the airport. I'm home.

(Utterly depressed, he sits on his bag.)

I don't want to talk about it.

MOM: No, we don't know anything.

DAD: *(Cups phone, whispers.)* We do now.

(Pause. DEANNA and JACK in two DARK SPACES.)

DEANNA: Jack!

JACK: Deanna?

DEANNA: Jack. What in the world are you doing here?

JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.

DEANNA: You're supposed to be in San Diego, on your--

JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.

DEANNA: Did you get sent home?

JACK: Dad'll be here soon. I just wanna tell everyone once, okay?

DEANNA: Whatever.

(Pause.)

Dude, what did you do?

JACK: Deanna. . .

DEANNA: I mean, seriously, what did you--

JACK: Aren't you supposed to be in Rhode Island?

(Pause.)

DEANNA: I don't wanna talk about it.

JACK: What, did you flunk out?

DEANNA: Shut up.

(They look anywhere but at each other.)

JACK: So, Dad's picking you up too, huh? Great..

DEANNA: We're supposed to keep an eye out for Ashley too.

JACK: Ashley? Seriously?

DEANNA: Something about her leaving Steve.

JACK: No!

DEANNA: I don't know anything more.

JACK: Man.

DEANNA: Yeah.

JACK: Mom's freaking out, you know she is.

DEANNA: Yup.

(Lights down on them, doorbell rings, DAD sprints in, carrying his shoes.)

DAD: Honey, they're here.

MOM: *(Dashing down the stairs with an armload of fitted sheets, blankets.)* Why I ever agreed to let them come today of all days. . .

(Shouts.)

Carla!

(Scurrying.)

DAD: They're at the door.

MOM: I just have to. . .

(And she's gone.)

DAD: *(Slapping pockets.)* Keys, glasses, wallet.

(Checks the wallet.)

Honey?

(Doorbell rings again.)

Honey?.

MOM: (*Off.*) Carla!

DAD: Do you have any cash?

MOM: (*Sprinting back on.*) I got it I got it!
(*Shouting upstairs.*)

Carla!

(*To DAD.*)

What?

DAD: Cash?

MOM: Don't you have your checkbook?

DAD: Airport parking.

MOM: Purse.

(*DAD heads up the stairs. MOM does one quick dash around the living room.*)

On the way, I need you to stop at the store and—

DAD: I know I know.

MOM: (*Shouts upstairs.*) Craig?
(*Shouts downstairs.*)

Carla?

(*Sigh of frustration. Then, big smile, opens the door.*)

They found him, he's okay.

SISTER SWANSON: Seriously? Oh, Melinda—

SISTER DAWES: That's wonderful news!

MOM: Craig's going to get him now.

SISTER SWANSON: That's got to be such a relief.

SISTER DAWES: Absolutely.

MOM: It really is.

SISTER DAWES: Get him where?

MOM: The airport. Jack called us from San Jose Airport.

SISTER DAWES: So he's here, in San Jose?

MOM: Yes.

SISTER SWANSON: Well.

SISTER DAWES: Thank heavens, he's fine.

SISTER SWANSON: Thank goodness.

(*Another awkward pause.*)

Do you . . . know anything, what happened?

MOM: We don't really know much at this point.

SISTER DAWES: But you do know he's okay, he isn't hurt or . . . anything?

DAD: (*Enters.*) Honey, I couldn't find. . . oh, hi.

SISTER DAWES: Brother Hull.

DAD: Hello sisters.

SISTER SWANSON: It sounds like you've had some good news.

DAD: A great relief. Good of you to come by.

SISTER DAWES: We had to. When we heard.

DAD: Yes indeed, very much appreciated. Melinda, did you need me to. . . ?

MOM: Just while you're out, something to go with the roast tonight.

DAD: There wasn't cash in your . . . Never mind, I'll hit an ATM. Pasta salad, maybe, rolls?

MOM: Something suitable for company. The pasta salad, uh. . .

(Lots of head and eye gestures.)

DAD: *(Not sure, but okay.)* Right.

(He exits, out the door. Another awkward pause.)

MOM: I do appreciate you being here for us, today.

SISTER DAWES: It's just pure chance we happened to call.

SISTER SWANSON: I just wanted to set up our usual visit, and I catch you in the middle of this, uh. . .

SISTER DAWES: Well, we obviously had to come by. We're just five minutes away, it was no trouble.

MOM: No.

SISTER SWANSON: But at least the news is good. That's what's important.

MOM: Yes.

SISTER DAWES: Not much to do but wait, I suppose.

MOM: No.

SISTER SWANSON: Well. Perhaps we should begin our usual . . .

(With a look at SISTER DAWES.)

SISTER DAWES: It's really up to you, Melinda. Do you want a lesson? Company?

MOM: As a matter of fact, just some company would be welcome.

SISTER DAWES: Not a problem.

SISTER SWANSON: Well, I can only just imagine what you've been going through. Every single day that Charlie was out, I worried.

SISTER DAWES: I remember that.

SISTER SWANSON: I knew Australia was safe enough. But still your child, and on the other side of the world. . .

MOM: That's exactly right. I mean, Jack's been in San Diego, six hours drive.

SISTER SWANSON: But you worry. Every day.

MOM: Exactly.

SISTER DAWES: And you've been through it once, with Deanna.

MOM: That's right.

SISTER DAWES: Well. Why don't you catch us up? How is Deanna? I notice she didn't come home for Christmas.

MOM: None of the kids did this year, actually. Well, Jack, on his mission, of course. . .

SISTER SWANSON: Of course.

MOM: Yes.

(Pause.)

And Steve and Ashley spent the holidays with his family this year, in Montana.

SISTER DAWES: And Deanna, spending Christmas alone.

MOM: She felt she needed to work, she had a chance to pick up some extra shifts.

(Explaining further.)

The institute at Brown had a special Christmas celebration together, so she was with friends.

SISTER DAWES: Brown is where, I know you told us, but. . . ?

MOM: Rhode Island.

SISTER SWANSON: That's right. And what was her field again?

MOM: An odd field, actually. Brown's one of the few schools in the country to offer a grad program in it.
History of mathematics.

SISTER DAWES: Wow. History and Math. That sounds so . . . daunting.

MOM: Well, it's what she loves.

SISTER SWANSON: Still, I'm sure you missed her.

MOM: Yes.

(Another pause.)

Listen, sisters, I do appreciate you coming.

(She stands.)

SISTER SWANSON: Well, we just thought it was the least we could do.

SISTER DAWES: But we mustn't outstay our welcome either. Joan, perhaps we should . . .

SISTER SWANSON: *(Gets it.)* Oh, yes. I'm sorry, of course.

MOM: Thanks so much, as always.

SISTER DAWES: Well, what's important is that Jack is safe. That's what matters.

MOM: Yes. That's true.

(The SISTERS prepare to leave. Enter CARLA.)

SISTER SWANSON: And here's Carla.

MOM: Carla. Jack's okay, he just called Dad from the airport.

CARLA: That's a relief.

MOM: It really is.

CARLA: What happened?

MOM: We don't know. Just that he's okay, your Dad's gone to get him.

CARLA: Man. Scary day, huh. Hey, Sister Dawes.

SISTER DAWES: I was hoping you'd say hello.

(She gives CARLA a hug.)

Are you okay?

CARLA: A little freaked out, is all.

SISTER DAWES: We were all a little freaked out.

CARLA: So, Mom. Did you need something?

MOM: It's okay, honey.

CARLA: I was at a place I couldn't save.

MOM: It's fine, honey.

(With a hint of steel.)

No reason you shouldn't play video games on a day like today.

CARLA: I figured you'd tell me if there was something I could do.

SISTER DAWES: So what were you playing, Carla?

CARLA: Final Fantasy Ten.

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, a video game?

(Kidding around with her.)

Not one of those violent ones, I hope.

CARLA: Well, it's more an RPG than an FPS, but you can quest online too; and that can get kinda deathmatch.

It's not, you know, Quake or like Halo, but it's still pretty sick.

MOM: *(Quick save.)* She's doing a paper for school on role playing games.

CARLA: Uh, yeah. Um . . . ?

MOM: It's fine, honey.

CARLA: Okay. Hey, what were all those calls about?

MOM: Letting the rest of the family know what's going on.

CARLA: Okay. I just thought I heard Dad swearing when he hung up that last--

MOM: But you didn't. Did you?

CARLA: Whatever.

(To the Sisters)

Good to see you.

(She exits.)

SISTER DAWES: She's growing up so fast.

MOM: Yes, she is.

SISTER DAWES: And she's a Laurel now. I so miss the Young Women.

SISTER SWANSON: And she's doing well in school?

MOM: Yes. Carla, thank heavens, is doing fine.

(Lights out, SISTERS. MOM stands, irresolute, checks her watch, leaves. ASHLEY to a Dark Space.)

ASHLEY: So it's over. I still can't believe it. You get so used to it, married, a married woman. My husband this, my husband that. And now it's over. I dated so many guys, I know at the reception, they were all, why him? I mean, like: him? So of course now I'm beating myself up; why, when I knew all along we had nothing in common. I mean, outdoorsy Steve, and me. I met Steve at the Los Gatos REI, for heaven's sake. He hits on me, we start dating, and, you know, he took me nice places, museums, concerts, movies. And hikes, but I figured I could be a good sport and do the outdoors thing once in awhile, especially after I made him take me to see *The Vagina Monologues* in San Francisco, which he was a very good sport about. I mean, he's hunting camping fishing, while I'm your basic clothes, hair and nails kinda girly girl, but, so, opposites attract, and he promised me, promised, that we wouldn't live in Missoula forever. I took him at his word. And there were times we were great together.

(She steps out of the Dark Space. DEANNA and JACK are in, suitcases on the floor, MOM and DAD sitting on the sofa. CARLA standing.)

DEANNA: So it was just about Missoula?

CARLA: I mean, news flash, Ashley hates Montana. We did get your emails, Ash.

JACK: Do they even have a mall?

ASHLEY: Southgate Mall, with a Gap and an Eddie Bauer and the Maurice's I worked at, so not so bad.

JACK: You said you liked your boss.

ASHLEY: Brenda was terrific. She was a great buyer, and her husband is outdoorsy too, so we could commiserate. In fact, I've got to text her, let her know I'm fine.

DAD: So what happened?

ASHLEY: Okay, it's time for the deer hunt, which is a very big thing in Missoula. And he and his dad and his brothers, it's this major family thing, every year. And Steve wanted me to come along.

DAD: You shoot?

ASHLEY: I learned. Seriously, there's this shooting range, and I actually got pretty good, though it's death on your nails. So, up the mountain we go, me and Steve and his Dad and Larry and Bronco.

DEANNA: Bronco?

ASHLEY: Gives you pause? His real name's Brad, you met him at the reception. So there we are, up this mountain, and they say, I haven't been blooded; I haven't shot my first deer yet. So they tell me they'll find me this spot, sort of overlooking this ravine, and they'll drive a deer my direction, it'll be an easy shot. And I'm thinking, okay, I eat beef, veal even, still, I'm not shooting Bambi. So I'm primed to miss on purpose, take some gentle ribbing, and get back off the mountain to a hot bath and aroma therapy. And so I wait for a deer to come by so I can miss it. And I waited seven and a half hours.

JACK: Snipe hunt.

ASHLEY: Is that what it's called? Finally, I get a clue, spend another two hours clodding down the mountain in these new astoundingly ugly Birkenstocks Steve got for me. I'm exhausted, I'm famished, I finally find the camp, and they're all settled around the fire. And they thought it was so funny.

JACK: They put you through a snipe hunt.

DAD: I don't think it's funny.

ASHLEY: No it's not.

DAD: Someone with no outdoors training or experience, alone on the side of a mountain, with a hunting rifle she barely knows how to use. Completely irresponsible.

ASHLEY: Well, all right then. 'Cause Steve told me I was overreacting. He said I was just being hysterical.

MOM: Did he?

DAD: It's abusive, it's wrong.

MOM: Sure, if that's what--

ASHLEY: Then, when I shot him, you wouldn't believe the whining.

(They all pause, stare at her.)

In the hand. It didn't even require a lot of stitches.

(Another pause. Then DEANNA laughs.)

DEANNA: You did not.

ASHLEY: I did. I shot him.

DEANNA: You are such a liar.

ASHLEY: Deanna--

DEANNA: Okay, Tim McCormack, remember him? You told us he'd run the lawn mower over his foot, cut his whole foot off? I cried for two days, cause I really liked him, and you knew it, and now he was gonna be amputee boy. Church that Sunday, he's walking around fine, he'd taken a little skin off one of his toes.

ASHLEY: Okay, I know what you're--

DEANNA: Mark Martinez, remember, his ‘drug overdose?’ Which turned out to be Tylenol? Tina Higginbotham, remember that bogus story about her getting pregnant? And that’s not even counting the stories you told about yourself.

JACK: Remember the time I was supposed to have blown up the school chem lab?

MOM: I remember that one.

DEANNA: You didn’t shoot Steve. Get real.

ASHLEY: I did, though.

(Skeptical looks all around.)

Okay, I didn’t, you know, shoot him. Lethally. You know that little web, like between your forefinger and thumb? I got him there, just took a little skin off.

(Pause.)

The gun went off, I was holding it, the bullet got him in the hand. For real.

DAD: Ashley, you’ll understand that we’re still a trifle skeptical.

ASHLEY: I know. I’ve, like, cried wolf, in the past and stuff. Still. I’m telling the truth here.

DAD: Then I need to know something, honey. Couple things, I guess. Is Steve all right?

ASHLEY: He’s fine. Like I said, it just grazed him.

DAD: Are you in trouble, legally?

MOM: Craig. . .

DAD: I’m just asking. Have criminal charges been filed?

ASHLEY: No, there aren’t–

DAD: Is it possible they could be filed?

ASHLEY: Dad. Steve’s not going to file a complaint.

MOM: (Skeptical.) I wouldn’t think he–

DAD: You know this?

ASHLEY: I do. We’ve talked about it. He’s fine. We’re fine.

(Defiantly.)

It just means he never wants to see me again. And that’s fine with me.

CARLA: Snipe hunt would have ended it for me.

DEANNA: Amen.

DAD: Ashley. Honey.

(He has her attention.)

I need to say this, and I hope you’re listening. If you’re telling the truth, and you can see we’re still unconvinced of it–

MOM: To put it mildly.

DAD: Right. But if you are, you discharged a firearm aimed at your husband. Whether he’s badly injured or not, or whether or not there’s a criminal complaint, that’s a very serious matter, and one that has me concerned about you in ways I’ve never been concerned before. Do you understand me?

ASHLEY: I do, Dad.

(Pause.)

It was an accident. I stumbled, the gun went off. That’s all. I thought the safety was on. It wasn’t. And Steve’s not even all that pissed. Just scared him a little.

(Another pause.)

MOM: All right, then.

DEANNA: Ash, you know, the snipe hunt thing, that was rotten of him, okay. But then you make up these stories, and you do this, you really do, you think because you're cute and all you can get away with murder--

CARLA: Or attempted murder.

DEANNA: I mean, you didn't check the safety? I don't know anything about guns, and I know that you--

MOM: We don't have to talk about this.

DEANNA: All I'm saying--

MOM: *(With a hint of steel.)* We don't have to talk about this. Not now.

(Pause.)

DAD: I would like to talk to you about this again later, though. Perhaps just the two of us.

ASHLEY: Okay.

(Another pause.)

DAD: *(Awkwardly.)* Well. It sounds like we all have a lot to talk about. Beyond just hearing Ashley's story, I think it would--

DEANNA and JACK: Not tonight.

DAD: Okay.

MOM: Craig?

(At a loss.)

Fine. Dinner's served. Pot roast, everyone?

(Some weakly positive ad libs.)

And pasta salad?

(Even more weakly positive ad libs. JACK, DEANNA and ASHLEY exit. MOM collapses on the sofa. After a moment, DAD joins her. Long pause.)

MOM: None of them like that pasta salad.

DAD: Oh.

(Pause.)

It's a family favorite.

MOM: No, you and Carla like it. That was what I was trying to signal you, just before you went.

DAD: Oh.

(Pause.)

They choked it down.

MOM: Yeah, well, the alternative was overcooked pot roast, so. . .

DAD: Once Ashley's flight was delayed, there wasn't much we could --

MOM: I know.

(Pause.)

Real overcooked pot roast.

DAD: They choked it down.

MOM: Yes.

(Pause.)

Barely.

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(They share a brief chuckle.)

You're so subtle you know, just quietly getting up, handing out the steak knives.

DAD: Well, I think the chain saw's out of gas.

(Another chuckle. Another pause.)

MOM: I was just thinking. Five years ago. Next month.

DAD: I know exactly what you're going to say.

MOM: That twenty four hours. I still remember, Dr. Seitz saying, you know, inoperable cancer, three months tops, get your affairs in order. He pronounced you, basically. And then the bishop did the same.

DAD: I took great comfort in that blessing.

MOM: Well, it was not a 'rise and walk from your bed' kind of blessing. It was 'Brother Hull, go to the light!'

DAD: That's not what he said, and that's not all he said. I appreciated that blessing. It was a good blessing.

(Pause. Then, brief chuckle.)

All except for the 'you're going to die' part.

(They laugh together briefly.)

MOM: Thank heavens for second opinions. Dr. Holdman.

DAD: I love Dr. Holdman.

MOM: Oh, me too. Sweetest word in the English language. Misdiagnosis.

DAD: It's actually a word of Greek derivation, gnosis suggesting knowledge, while--

MOM: Good to know. But that twenty-four hours, before we saw him, when I knew, absolutely knew that you were going to be gone. The worst day of my life.

DAD: Until today.

MOM: Until today.

DAD: Strike one, strike two, strike three. Hat trick. If you'll pardon the mixed sport metaphor.

(He sighs.)

It's not as though we weren't warned.

MOM: No.

DAD: Deanna deciding to not come home for Christmas, for starters, and her emails explaining it. Too cryptic and too positive; they always struck a false note. And Ashley. . .

MOM: The calls.

DAD: At least twice a week, she'd call home.

MOM: Gripping about Missoula.

DAD: Or Steve.

MOM: I don't think she's called home since August.

DAD: We've talked to her, nearly every week.

MOM: Because *we've* called *her* cell. But has *she* called *us*?

DAD: No.

(Pause.)

I thought she was adjusting. I thought her having Christmas in Missoula was a positive sign.

MOM: Me too.

DAD: And Jack.

MOM: And Jack.

(Pause.)

He looks so thin.

DAD: He looks all right.

MOM: Thin and pale and exhausted.

DAD: All things considered, I think he looks fine.

MOM: I suppose.

DAD: All right, today was shocking. Admittedly. But we can't pretend we didn't know he was struggling.

President Garman kept us well apprized.

MOM: Health, he said he was having health issues.

DAD: That's what I was saying.

(Pause.)

MOM: So that is it, right, his health? He was sick, and he finally decided to come home.

DAD: I'm assuming.

MOM: You didn't talk to him about it?

DAD: He was so down, honey. I didn't have the heart to press him. Nor, I noticed, did you.

MOM: No.

(A pause.)

And then you bring home pasta salad.

DAD: As I recall, they also hate my biscuits and gravy. Got that for breakfast.

(They chuckle over this.)

At least Ashley would talk about it.

MOM: Oh, yeah. Ashley was just a . . . flood of information. Do you think she really shot him?

DAD: Typical Ashley, wasn't it, the big shocking announcement, then quickly backing down. Tomorrow, or the next day, she'll come to one of us and tell us the truth of things. Or some version thereof.

MOM: Sounds about right.

(Pause.)

You know the biggest mistake we ever made with her? Sixteen years old, paying for cheerleaders' camp.

DAD: I've often thought the same.

MOM: *(Starts to get up.)* Hey, in the car, home?

DAD: What about it?

MOM: Okay, Jack was down, the others weren't ready or whatever. Did you talk? At all?

DAD: We talked. A pleasant chat.

(Another pause.)

Interesting word, chat; one suspects a French origination, something to do with yowling cats, but, no, it's Anglo-Saxon, I believe, derived from chatter, which was originally a descriptive verb akin to twitter, describing bird--

MOM: (Oh so patiently trying again.) Is there information that was communicated to you that you might want to, you know, pass on?

DAD: We talked about the Sharks.

MOM: You talked hockey? Today?

DAD: It seemed to me that the alternative was to not talk at all.

(They exit. DEANNA steps into a Dark Space.)

DEANNA: It wasn't a guy. The guys at Brown are . . . they all drink exotic coffees and smoke exotic weed and listen to bands like Modest Mouse and Pailhead, and Dandy Warhols. Like, White Stripes is too mainstream for them. Besides, you sort of don't date at Brown. You arrange to, like, sort of decide you're both going to be at the same place at the same time. And then the idea is you hook up, sort of drift effortlessly into a sexual encounter. Like, 'not that it's important, but, whaddyasay, do you wanna?' . . . The boxes got smaller and smaller: Californian, straight, a virgin, a Mormon. And show some, you know, enthusiasm for the subject matter, and you get all this bored East Coast attitude. Enthusiasm, a word Greek in origin, meaning possessed by a god, prophetic or poetic frenzy. Enthousiasmos Yeah, if I'd really had that goin' on, I'da been all right. Anyway. So. Even half-stoned, listening to Portishead, I remained virgo intacta. No, it definitely wasn't a guy.

JACK: Dee, I went to those kinds of parties too, but—

(She steps out of the Dark Space, confronts JACK.)

DEANNA: I didn't inhale and it didn't get me high, instead it nearly choked me and I will really never do that again, ever.

JACK: I don't want to know about it.

(DEANNA steps into the living room.)

DEANNA: But I wanted you to know. Baby brother.

JACK: Well, I'm so proud of you. You only smoked pot. Boy, that's sticking to your standards, sis, way to go.

DEANNA: Bite me.

JACK: Seriously, you're on drugs? An RM?

DEANNA: I'm not *on drugs*, okay? I smoked grass once, no big deal.

JACK: It's a big deal!

DEANNA: I gave into peer pressure, I'm a weak person, get off my case. At least I managed an entire mission, and not a third of one.

JACK: That's a low blow.

DEANNA: So is you overreacting.

JACK: Peer pressure? A guy, right?

DEANNA: It was not a guy, I'm still a maiden, you're a churl for asking and I'm not talking about it.

JACK: Well, that's a relief.

DEANNA: Whatever.

JACK: *(Pause.)* Good game last night.

DEANNA: Yeah.

(She decides to let him off the hook.)

I like moving Graves to second line.

JACK: Me too. And that backhand goal Owen Nolan scored. . .

DEANNA: He's so tough in the crease.

(Enter MOM.)

They can say what they want about Robataille, Yzerman, Sakic.

JACK: Owen's as good as any of 'em.

DEANNA: Total jerk, though. I bet they trade him.

MOM: Look who's up.

DEANNA: Hi, Mom.

MOM: Hi.

(Nobody says much.)

So, anyone want some breakfast?

JACK: Omelettes?

MOM: Sure. It's not every day we have all the kids at home.

DEANNA: Mom. . .

MOM: What?

DEANNA: We said we're not ready to talk about it.

MOM: *(As they head towards the kitchen.)* I said nothing, I was talking about breakfast. . .

(They exit. JACK sits alone. Enter CARLA, passes him on her way to the family room.)

CARLA: Jack.

JACK: Hey, Carla.

(As she heads down.)

What's up?

CARLA: Nothing much.

JACK: Mom and Deanna are doing omelettes for breakfast.

CARLA: Sweet.

(Pause.)

JACK: Hey, Carla?

CARLA: *(Clearly antsy.)* Yeah.

JACK: How's it going? I mean, you know, it's been--

CARLA: Eight months. Since your farewell.

JACK: So. I saw you playing Final Fantasy.

CARLA: Yeah.

(Pause.)

Ten, it's sweet.

JACK: Better than Seven?

CARLA: Storyline's actually not as good as Seven, but the graphics are awesome, and it's got voice-tracks instead of supertitles. And the mini-games are dope, like, instead of those lame chocobo races, you can play this thing called blitzball.

JACK: Who's your character?

CARLA: Guy named Tidus, plus friends, of course, especially this hot, like 'summoner' chick called Yuna.

Oh, PS: the bad guy's name? Sin, I'm totally not kidding.

JACK: The bad guy's called Sin?

CARLA: Is that great? Way better than Shinra Corporation or whatever.

JACK: I may check it out later.

CARLA: Well, good luck, because when I'm not playing, Dad is.

JACK: Yeah, I saw that he got the new EA Sports NHL game.

CARLA: Yeah, he, like, plays dynasty mode, which used to piss me off, but then I realized, it's sort of an an

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RPG too, only with defensemen and wings and goalies instead of, like, elves and dwarves and dragons and stuff. Last week he played twenty seasons, took him, like, five hours. It's bad enough to get kicked off by Mom. Now Dad wants to hog it.

JACK: Uh, my system, right?

CARLA: Well, you're on a mission. Speaking of which. . . ?

JACK: I don't want to talk about it.

CARLA: Hey, you're sitting here, and you want to, like, make friends or something. And you totally freaked me out yesterday.

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: San Diego's a big city, Jack. You coulda been anywhere, you coulda been in an alley somewhere, you coulda been dead. I mean, we were freaked out. I was . . .

(Emotional, catches herself.)

I'm glad you're back, I'm glad you're safe. But I was thinking about where you could be, and yesterday was way too scary, you know? For you to come home and want to talk hockey and Final Fantasy and crap.

JACK: You were scared?

CARLA: Hi, you were lost, in San Diego--

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: So. What happened?

JACK: I'm still not ready.

(She heads downstairs as DAD enters.)

CARLA: Whatever.

DAD: Heading for the Playstation? I was sort of hoping, later today--

CARLA: I just want to do one thing fast before breakfast, then I promise, I'll save..

DAD: Okay.

(CARLA's gone.)

Hey, son.

JACK: Dad.

DAD: Good game last night.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: Love Owen Nolan in the crease.

JACK: Me too. I heard he's kind of a jerk, though. I bet they trade him.

DAD: He's team captain, I think that's most unlikely. Paper?

JACK: Help yourself.

(JACK looks at DAD reading the paper for a moment, then steps into a dark space.)

I tried. You can say lots of things, lots of things about what kind of missionary I was, but one thing you cannot say is that I didn't try. I tried so hard. . . I have eczema on the backs of my hands, groin and armpits. I can't keep anything down. I have rectal bleeding from colitis, and acid reflux, and blood pressure 170 over 110. And, uh, less pleasant symptoms. The President, my mission president, agreed. I tried. I tried hard.

(Back into the scene.)

Dad?

DAD: Yeah.

JACK: Nothing. Omelettes for breakfast.

DAD: I heard.

JACK: *(Abruptly.)* Dad. I tried.

DAD: I know you did, son.

(Enter ASHLEY.)

ASHLEY: Don't even look at me.

JACK: We won't.

ASHLEY: I'm a total mess, I know. Don't even look. Daddy, do I call him or what?

DAD: Well. . .

ASHLEY: I wouldn't even come down here looking like this if I didn't really need to know, so seriously, you tell me, I can go either way, do I call him or not?

DAD: Steve?

ASHLEY: Of course, Steve. Do I let him know I'm here all right, safe, huh, like he'd care, so of course I don't, what a dope, I'm divorcing him, but he might be worried too, I would, so let him, who gives a damn, I don't call him, obviously. Let him stew, you're absolutely right. Thanks, Dad.

DAD: You're more than welcome.

(ASHLEY heads off.)

They're making omelettes.

ASHLEY: Looking like this? Dad, honestly.

(She exits. DAD goes back to reading the paper.)

JACK: Did you understand any of that?

DAD: She's trying to decide just how final this divorce is.

JACK: I thought it was completely final.

DAD: That was yesterday. Comics?

JACK: *(Hands over part of the paper.)* Here.

(MOM sprints into the room.)

MOM: Paper away, twenty second clean-up, now.

(DAD and JACK pick things up quickly.)

DAD: What's going on?

MOM: Visiting teachers.

DAD: They were here yesterday.

MOM: *(Frenetically straightening.)* Don't you know, visiting teaching is more than just one visit a month, no, it's essential you show a personal interest in the families of those you visit teach.

DAD: They heard something.

MOM: My guess, Barnard blabbed. Jack, out.

(JACK leaves. MOM quickly straightens her hair as the doorbell rings, she opens the door.)

Sister Dawes, Sister Swanson. Why you were just here yesterday!

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry.

SISTER DAWES: I know we were here yesterday, we just wanted to stop by.

MOM: It's fine. You're my visiting teachers. Always welcome.

SISTER SWANSON: It's just that . . .with Jack home.

SISTER DAWES: We called, the phone was busy, and we just didn't know--

SISTER SWANSON: We went back and forth.

SISTER DAWES: If we could be of service, we wanted to be, but--

SISTER SWANSON: But if you'd rather be alone together, then that's fine too.

SISTER DAWES: On our way to the library we thought, two minutes, we'll just poke our heads in.

SISTER SWANSON: But I can see, we *are* intruding, and I'm so sor--

SISTER DAWES: We want to do what we can.

(CARLA has drifted up, stands behind MOM.)

MOM: It's really very kind of you. But everything's fine.

(Pause.)

CARLA: Jack hasn't told us what's up, if that's what you're asking.

SISTER DAWES: Really?

MOM: That's not entirely true. Jack became ill, and needed to come home immediately.

SISTER DAWES: Oh my.

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry to hear that.

SISTER DAWES: Is he okay?

SISTER SWANSON: Was he in a hospital, perhaps? In San Diego?

SISTER DAWES: What sort of illness. . . ?

MOM: We have a number of questions ourselves about Jack's situation. His illness does not appear to be . . . life threatening. We expect he'll be back in the field in a couple of weeks.

CARLA: Well, he did leave a message on the mission phone saying 'I quit,' so I don't think he's planning to go back.

SISTER SWANSON: 'I quit?'

MOM: *(Without MOM turning to look at her, we can tell that CARLA is dead meat.)* Yes. As Carla points out, he called the mission and left a short message. That message. I quit. What we don't know at present is his state of mind when he left it.

SISTER DAWES: No. Of course not.

(Pause.)

Well, we certainly must provide meals.

SISTER SWANSON: I feel so inadequate, a casserole, but if it would be of any help--

SISTER DAWES: You're surely far too distraught over his illness.

MOM: Not at all, we're managing nicely. Very kind of you to think of meals, but we're fine.

SISTER SWANSON: Now, are you sure this isn't just obligatory 'I don't want help' Mormon stubbornness?

SISTER DAWES: It's so hard to ask, I know it is.

MOM: That's really not--

SISTER DAWES: Sometimes, just not having to deal with dinner can be a big relief.

MOM: Well.

SISTER SWANSON: A little break from the daily grind?

SISTER DAWES: And Melinda. You know my chili taco casserole.

MOM: *(She can practically taste the casserole)* I do. It's awfully tempting.

SISTER SWANSON: Has there ever been a ward potluck when that casserole lasted more than two minutes?

SISTER DAWES: Unless Jack's illness prevents . . . it is a trifle spicy.

MOM: No. He should be able to handle it just fine.

SISTER DAWES: So, dinner, then?

(Pause.)

CARLA: You'll need enough for six. Deanna and Ashley are home too.

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, my.

SISTER DAWES: Goodness.

MOM: Yes. Thank you Carla. Yes, Deanna and Ashley are here to help out. Rallying around. The way families do.

SISTER DAWES: Well, that's very good of them.

SISTER SWANSON: Only what one would expect, of course.

CARLA: Jack doesn't look all that sick to me.

MOM: No. It's quite amazing. I can hardly tell that he's ill at all. But, doctors, you know. Better safe than sorry. Nonetheless, I think perhaps we'll take a rain check on your very kind offer of dinner.

SISTER SWANSON: Certainly.

SISTER DAWES: Of course.

SISTER SWANSON: Anytime.

SISTER DAWES: Please give our best to poor Jack.

SISTER DAWES: Our prayers are with him.

SISTER DAWES: It's in my freezer, you just say the word.

MOM: Thanks again. And thanks so much for stopping by.

(Mimes closing a door, with some firmness. Turns.)

Carla!

(The rest of the family has gathered.)

CARLA: What?

MOM: There are such things as family secrets. Things we don't just blab out, without any consideration for. . . You're grounded.

CARLA: What did I say?

MOM: Do you really want us to be the most gossiped about family in the ward? Is that what you want?

DAD: Plus costing us a whole chili casserole all to ourselves.

JACK, DEANNA and ASHLEY: Seriously?

CARLA: Mom, it's Saturday. Tomorrow, we go to Church. Everyone will see 'em.

MOM: Yes, they will. They will indeed. And I want things settled before then. So we can tell people the truth and not have to hang our heads. I'm sick of this, this, this 'I don't want to talk about it, I'm not ready' act. Jack, you will tell us why you're home from your mission and what you meant by 'I quit,' we will decide what to do about it and you will call the mission president, and see what can be done to allow you to go back and finish honorably, and tomorrow, we will tell everyone what the problem is and what we're doing about it, and that's all. And Deanna, same with you. Home from graduate school, nobody just quits grad school, I give you two days, two days, to get your head back on straight and go back to finish your degree. As for you, Ashley, if you really shot your husband, then, I don't know what to think, but I do know one thing, you can't stay here. Two days for you too, two days to figure out what you're going to do, and then

make a decision and go do it. I've had enough. Talking hockey and not saying anything, I've had it. I've got a nice breakfast in there, and we're going to go eat that nice breakfast, and we're going to say a blessing on the food, and we're going to feel good about saying that blessing on that food!

(They look at her, defiantly. No one says anything.)

CARLA: I'm up for breakfast.

(Muttered agreement from everyone else. All exit, except MOM and DAD.)

MOM: *(To DAD.)* Don't you start.

DAD: Not me.

MOM: It's all falling apart. And the kids hate me.

DAD: They don't hate you.

MOM: I just kicked three of 'em out, and grounded Carla.

DAD: They know you didn't mean it.

MOM: I did mean it.

(They laugh together briefly.)

What are we going to do?

DAD: We talk.

MOM: No, I know, but what are we going to do?

DAD: I don't know.

MOM: They really do hate me.

DAD: No, they don't.

(Pats her shoulder.)

Come on. Let's get some breakfast.

(They exit. After a bit, ASHLEY, CARLA, JACK and DEANNA drift in.)

ASHLEY: I just hate it when she acts like that.

JACK: Drives me nuts, I just hate it.

DEANNA: That was what I was dreading, on the plane coming home.

JACK: But she just explodes like that. Dee, Ash, was she always like this, or is she getting worse?

ASHLEY: Oh, you have no idea. Dee, remember that time?

DEANNA: Which one?

ASHLEY: That Halloween, you and me and Rickey--

DEANNA: Rickey Blake.

CARLA: Was that when you were, like, toilet papering?

ASHLEY: It was totally no big deal, we only had three rolls, we were just hitting like the Bishop's house and Sister Whatsis, remember Dee, the Young Women's leader we didn't like?

DEANNA: Sister Jenkinson.

JACK: I didn't know her.

DEANNA: No, they weren't here very long, moved out after about a year.

ASHLEY: Well, Mom totally freaked. It was horrible.

DEANNA: Grounded me for two weeks, you for like a month. . .

ASHLEY: Yeah, 'cause I was driving, and I was, like, the oldest, I should have known better.

DEANNA: And then the next weekend, there was this dance we wanted to go to in that stake in Los Gatos, and

she let us go.

ASHLEY: Yeah, well, you were too scared to ask her. I had to for both of us.

DEANNA: But she said yeah.

JACK: What, you do the airhead space cadet act?

ASHLEY: No, that only works on Dad. With Mom, you have to be, like, sincerely repentant. But she let us go.

JACK: Well, listen, it's mostly about me this time, guys. I'm really sorry, home early from a mission, that's just the kind of thing to make her go off.

ASHLEY: I don't know. Blown marriage, home from grad school, we gave her a lot to work with. Let's admit it, guys, our timing all kinda sucked.

DEANNA: Seriously. Next time, let's coordinate a little better, whaddya say?

CARLA: *(Drily.)* There's going to be a next time?

(They all laugh.)

ASHLEY: Oh sure. It'll be, like, 'August, you can't have cancer in August, remember, my nervous breakdown?'

DEANNA: *(Going with it, leafing through an imaginary planner.)* 'I'll come out of the closet in November, that'll give you October for your sex change operation.'

JACK: 'No, October's not good, that's when I'm having my affair.'

(They all laugh together again.)

CARLA: You guys are not setting a very good example.

ASHLEY: Okay, but see, Carla, this way, anything you screw up your whole life, you've got three bad examples to blame it on.

CARLA: I just think this isn't a very healthy dynamic.

DEANNA: What do you mean?

CARLA: What comes next.

(They stare at her.)

Dad comes in, sort of apologizes sort of explains, and he looks all puppy dog, and we all go, oh, great, it's Dad, he's the good guy. And we forgive him, and he's sort of adorable about it. And Mom's the bad guy. And we don't pay much attention, and that's too bad. Because, what if she's right.

(Pause.)

ASHLEY: *(A little dangerously.)* You're saying she was right to go off on us like that?

CARLA: Well, you know, Jack scared the hell out of us yesterday. And we still don't even know what happened.

(Pause. They all look at JACK.)

I mean it, Jack. You're gonna have to tell eventually.

ASHLEY: I told. No way you get off.

JACK: Okay, fine.

(Pause.)

Tell Mom and Dad to get in here. I'm ready to talk.

CARLA: Okay.

(She exits.)

JACK: Dee. You're next.

DEANNA: I'm still not ready.

JACK: Yeah, well, neither am I. But I don't get out of it.

(Enter MOM and DAD with CARLA.)

MOM: (As she enters.) I was working on the dishes.

DAD: Honey, when they're ready. . .

MOM: I know.

(To JACK. Awkward pause.)

Jack.

DAD: I understand you have something to tell us?

JACK: Yeah. I guess I do. Look, Mom, Dad. First thing, I'm really sorry. To you all. I just haven't felt ready to talk about things, you know. But Carla, you're right. It's time.

CARLA: *(Under her breath.)* Duh.

JACK: *(Gives her a quick glare, but continues.)* You're probably all wondering if I did something, right? That I shouldn't have done.

MOM: Go on.

JACK: I didn't. I didn't break any mission rules, and I didn't do anything I shouldn't have, not until that last day when I broke a whole bunch of rules at once. And I'm not sick, physically. Well, I sort of am, but also not really.

(Pause.)

I just . . . I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it anymore.

DEANNA: Couldn't do what?

JACK: Any of it. Missionary work. I couldn't go door to door. I couldn't teach people. I just . . . couldn't.

MOM: And why couldn't you? What was wrong?

JACK: Mom, I'd get, I don't know what to call 'em, anxiety attacks. I mean, I'd feel panicked, and, like, cold sweat, and I felt like I was going to pass out. It was all I could think of, just this feeling of terror and panic and . . . and it never got better, not even a little. It got worse.

DAD: We knew all that, of course. Your Mission President kept us well apprized.

MOM: You saw a counselor, right?

JACK: President Garman set me up with an LDS psychiatrist.

MOM: President Garman told us. A good LDS counselor who said your condition wouldn't prevent you from serving.

JACK: Right. He said I had something called acute anxiety disorder. But that I could overcome it. Will power, the power of prayer. I just had to want it enough.

DAD: *(Appalled.)* That's what he said?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That all you needed was more will power? For acute anxiety disorder?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That's the most appalling . . . that's medical malpractice, I'll have his license for—

MOM: Craig.

(DAD subsides, though he's still fuming.)

Jack, we knew about the diagnosis, of course—

DAD: But not his course of treatment!

MOM: Craig.

(DAD mutters to himself.)

We specifically asked President Garman if you could see another doctor, get a second opinion.

JACK: That never happened.

DAD: We were told it *did* happen. And that the second doctor confirmed the opinion of the first one.

JACK: I went to see another doctor.

DAD: All right.

JACK: I went to see him. I sat in his office, the nurse called my name. I knew that I would see him. I knew what he would say. And I couldn't face it. I booked.

MOM: You left?

JACK: Swore Elder Stokes to secrecy, told the President the second opinion had been the same as the first. I lied, so I could stay on my mission.

DAD: My goodness.

MOM: We didn't know. President Garman told us—

JACK: He told you what I told him.

(Pause.)

I think the first doctor was right, you know? I've got symptoms, lots of symptoms. I'm not well. But it's all caused by anxiety. I'm actually fine.

DAD: You're actually not fine, son.

JACK: Whatever.

DEANNA: No, you're sick. A treatable illness.

ASHLEY: Acute anxiety disorder.

MOM: With symptoms, physical symptoms.

JACK: I'm a casualty.

DAD: What?

JACK: There was a guy, Elder Bowers. He got ulcers a couple months ago, and had to go home. And President Garman talked it about in zone conference. He said we missionaries, we were at war. A war against evil. And so, you had to expect a few casualties.

(Pause.)

I'm another casualty.

DEANNA: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

JACK: No one came home early from your mission, Dee?

DEANNA: Lots of guys went home early, Jack. They weren't casualties.

JACK: What would you call it?

DEANNA: I'd call it—

MOM: Could we bring it back to yesterday?

(JACK and DEANNA glare at each other.)

Please?

JACK: Yeah, okay.

(Pause.)

I was sitting on a bus, and this rash on my leg, it just started itching.

DAD: President Garman said something about shingles.

JACK: Could be. Anyway I was scratching it. And it was getting painful, you know, like it really started hurting. It was driving me nuts. And I thought about it. Sixteen more months, my leg was going to itch like this. I mean, I had all these other symptoms, and just a stupid freakin' itch. . .

(Gets control of himself.)

Suddenly, I handed Stokes my backpack, and said 'look out for this, would you.' And I got off the bus, and he was slow pulling the stop cord, and by the time he musta pulled it, I'd gotten into a cab. I'd just gotten paid, so I had money for a plane ticket. Took a cab to the airport. Stopped on the way to use a pay phone, left a message for the mission president. I quit. That was the message. I quit.

DAD: We heard about the message.

JACK: Yeah.

(Pause.)

CARLA: Shingles. What are shingles, anyway?

DAD: What Jack described, really, a painful itching rash.

CARLA: And that was what set you off?

JACK: Could be. I don't know.

CARLA: So you're another casualty.

JACK: Yeah.

CARLA: I don't know about you guys, but that seems like a real nazi thing to say. Casualty? You're not dead..

DAD: I agree, Carla, a very poor choice of words. Well, the whole situation was appallingly handled. Starting with that psychologist.

DEANNA: No kidding.

MOM: The point is.

(They all look at her.)

The point is, you actually are sick. Physically. You really are ill. Getting off a bus like that, it's a nervous breakdown, really.

JACK: Well, something.

MOM: A nervous breakdown. And shingles. My point is, we can tell people you're sick, and it will be nothing but the truth. And when you're well again, I expect you can finish after all.

DEANNA: Mom, not a chance, no way they'd even let him.

MOM: Maybe not. None of us knows the future. My point is, I didn't actually lie to the visiting teachers. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to take the sacrament.

DAD: And you're home. That's what matters.

JACK: Yeah. I guess.

MOM: I just wish you'd told us.

JACK: You would have insisted I come home.

DAD: Son. . .

JACK: You would have. And I was going to stick it out. No way was I giving in.

DEANNA: Yeah, until you had to.

DAD: I do think we need to have you see another counselor.

JACK: Whatever.

DAD: I really am going to have to insist on it, Jack.

MOM: Absolutely.

JACK: Yeah, okay, we'll see.

(Pause.)

CARLA: Okay, I think it's time for the Farming Game™.

DEANNA: Okay!

ASHLEY: Not me. Nails won't be dry in time.

DAD: We can wait. I think a little crop failure and incipient bankruptcy may be just what the doctor ordered.

CARLA: You up for it, Jack?

JACK: Yeah. Okay, sure.

MOM: The Farming Game sounds great.

DEANNA: Wo -oo Farming Game!

(And they head off. JACK goes to a Dark Space.)

JACK: They're not the ones who failed. Me. I was.

(He starts to leave, then goes back.)

And we love to laugh, make jokes, not deal with things. And sure, they can laugh at President Garman all they want to. The casualty line. I'm the one who couldn't hack it. Fact is, he was right.

(He heads out of the Dark Space. Phone rings.)

CARLA: Ashley. It's for you. I think it's Steve.

(Pause.)

ASHLEY: Tell him I've gone out.

(Pause.)

Tell him I've told you to tell him I'm not here.

(Checks her nails.)

Good enough.

(MOM heads for a Dark Space. She gets to it, pauses for a second. Changes her mind.)

MOM: So we start with, what, twenty acres wheat?

(She exits.)

DEANNA: Ten wheat, ten hay.

CARLA: *(Off.)* Ashley?

(ASHLEY looks around. Heads to the Dark Space.)

ASHLEY: What I liked about Steve was . . . the dares. He'd dare me. We'd be in a restaurant, and he'd be like, I dare you to flash that waiter. With that mocking smile. And I'd be like, I can't do that, I can't. And the waiter would come over, and I wasn't even wearing a bra. And so I'd dare him back, like, same date, to hit on a guy in the men's room. It got bad, like the time he dared me to kiss five total strangers at a party, or my get-back, which nearly got him arrested. I loved that about him. The dares. It's still what I miss.

(Ruefully.)

The least healthy part of, you know, us, and that's what I miss.

(She steps out of the Dark Space.)

CARLA: Ash? You gonna play?

ASHLEY: You guys start without me. I gotta call Steve.

(She exits. Pause. Enter DAD. He sits to read. Enter JACK.)

JACK: Hey.

DAD: Jack.

(Picks his book up again.)

JACK: Whatcha reading?

DAD: Guy named Jared Diamond.

(Shows him the cover.)

JACK: Guns, Germs and Steel.

DAD: Are you up for this?

(JACK nods.)

Well . . . I often find immersing myself in a good book helps when I'm feeling stressed.

JACK: Me too.

DAD: Terrific book, this one. Marvelous explanation for why some societies evolve differently from others.

Why Mesopotamia, why Sumer and Ur, why those cities, at that time, 4000 BC, before the Egyptians—

JACK: I thought the ancient Chinese—

DAD: No, this is before the Chinese--I mean the Sumerians were maybe two thousand plus years before even the Shang Dynasty.

JACK: Ah.

DAD: It's marvelous. Why cultivated crops and domesticated animals, there, then, only at that place and time?

Not Africa, where mankind evolved, not China, not Egypt. Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent. Well, maybe, just maybe, and this is Diamond's thesis, it's because there was cultivatable vegetation there, only there, there were domesticatable animals there, only there. An accident of geography.

JACK: Sounds interesting.

DAD: It's so marvelously exciting. I know your sister was going to do her research on the suan chu, the Chinese art of calculation, math. And here I was urging her to study Pythagoras instead. No, no, Sumeria, Mesopotamia, that's where it started.

JACK: Great.

DAD: And the implications of this on Book of Mormon studies. Look at it, Enos talks of the Nephites as an agricultural society, and then talks about the Lamanites as this bloodthirsty society of hunters. Hunter-gatherers. But that's obviously nonsense, war propaganda really; the Lamanites outnumbered the Nephites pretty severely, and a hunting economy can never support that kind of population density. Besides, King Lamoni had herds, which clearly suggests an agricultural economy, the whole thing's so . . .

(Looks at JACK, as though seeing him for the first time.)

I'm sorry. I haven't laid any kind of foundation for any of this. I just find this sort of thing so exhilarating.

JACK: I know you do, Dad.

DAD: Ever since Deanna got home, I've been dying to talk to her about this. Well, you too, obviously, both of you.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: I have no doubt there are some who would argue that this kind of scholarship renders absurd the

historicity argument for the Book of Mormon--

JACK: Actually, Dad, on my mission, when we'd teach people, that objection didn't really come up much.

DAD: *(Laughs.)* Are you mocking me, son?

JACK: *(Grins.)* Just a little, maybe.

DAD: Well, mock away. I, for one, have no intention of changing.

(JACK moves to Dark Space.)

JACK: Nearly every evening, growing up, we'd be at the dinner table, and we'd have family history lessons, he called 'em. And he'd read everything, it felt like, and remembered everything, and it was as though, I don't know, Hammurabi or Zoroaster or Cyrus the Great were his best buddies. I mean, you seriously didn't want Dad helping you with your history homework. He'd take a black magic marker and cross things out of your textbook. They got it wrong, he'd say. And here's my Dad, and his degree's in accounting, and he's a supervisor for H and R Block. He's a tax law guy. I mean, he was on a first name basis with Hugh Nibley and Eugene England, guys at that level, and now he helps people do their tax returns for a living. But he got married right off his mission, and Mom got pregnant with Ashley his junior year at BYU, and he switched from history to accounting. Gave it up. Basically for us. And never once complained. And you've always got, you know like default mode; you can always talk to him about hockey and basically any time period in history. Yeah, I got real lucky when it comes to Dads.

(He steps out of the Dark Space, enter MOM.)

MOM: Are you still reading that?

DAD: Marvelous book.

MOM: And boring Jack to tears, I suspect.

JACK: No, it's interesting.

MOM: I bet.

DAD: You're welcome to it when I'm done.

MOM: Maybe so.

JACK: What are you reading these days, Mom?

MOM: Oh, you know me. Love my Anita Stansfield.

DAD: Blech.

MOM: Don't listen to your father. The man hasn't a speck of romance in him.

DAD: I beg to differ.

(Leans over and kisses her.)

MOM: All right, you have a speck. I came down to say, Jack. Big day tomorrow.

JACK: I know.

DAD: We're there for you, son. You know that.

MOM: That's absolutely right. And Jack, if you're not up to going to Church with us, that's your decision.

JACK: No, I'm going to church.

MOM: I hoped you'd say that. I love our ward, Jack, always have. But it has its share of wagging tongues.

JACK: Best to get the first Sunday over with, then.

MOM: Exactly. That's exactly right. Well, I'm exhausted. Honey?

DAD: Just want to finish this chapter.

MOM: Well, if you're more than half an hour, the light will be off.

(DAD waves her off. She heads upstairs.)

Don't stay up too late, honey.

JACK: *(Abruptly.)* Mom, Dad.

(They stop what they're doing. Look at him.)

Tomorrow's not really the problem.

DAD: Oh.

JACK: What do I do Monday?

MOM: What's Monday?

JACK: I'm an RM. I guess. A returned missionary. Sort of.

DAD: Certainly.

JACK: What do I do?

(Pause.)

Who am I? What do I do?

(Pause.)

DAD: We'll have to spend some time tomorrow talking that one over.

JACK: I guess so.

MOM: Well. Your bed's made up.

(At a loss.)

Fresh sheets, pillow case.

JACK: Yeah. Thanks. I thought I'd play a little Final Fantasy.

MOM: If you can pry the controller from Carla.

JACK: She said she'd show me how to get past this dragon.

(He exits down, MOM exits up. DAD's still reading. ASHLEY, JACK and DEANNA in Dark Spaces. CARLA is in a dark space too, watching.)

ASHLEY: No. Steve, no, I don't think that's a good idea. No. No.

JACK: Some guys couldn't wait to get home. There's even a word for it: trunky.

DEANNA: Suan Chu. So, see, this Emperor Yu guy, a mythical ruler who almost certainly never existed, was bathing by the Lo river, and saved this magic tortoise, who gave him this divine gift.

ASHLEY: Because I don't think it's a good idea.

JACK: I had this one companion, he knew exactly what he was gonna do, his first day back. He had a menu planned for dinner his first night back. He knew what TV shows he was gonna watch.

DEANNA: The gift was a series of diagrams called Lo shu, which contained the principles of Chinese mathematics. One diagram, the magic square, was thought to possess magical qualities, and led to the development of the dualistic theory of Yin and Yang.

ASHLEY: Because, I don't think it's a good idea. I just . . . you don't have to remind of . . . no.

JACK: Girlfriends. Their car. A job lined up. Some guys, they were counting the days.

DEANNA: Yin represents even numbers and Yang represents odd numbers. Or, conversely, men and women. Depending.

ASHLEY: You're not going to guilt me into. . . no. . . no, because it's a terrible terrible idea, and you're . . .

(She's weeping. Music starts up, perhaps U2, "Original of the Species", from the album How To

PERUSAL COPY -- Family by Eric Samuelsen

Dismantle An Atomic Bomb.)

JACK: But for me, a mission was the only thing I can even remember wanting to do, the thing I dreamed of when I was a kid.

DEANNA: It's a gift of God, pluses and minuses, debits and credits. One plus two, plus three plus four. Peace, found in the harmonious balance of oppositions, the perfect alliance and also perfect enmity of numbers.

JACK: I had a message, this perfect, beautiful message, and all I wanted to do was share it. With everyone. Anyone.

ASHLEY: I do remember that night . . .

JACK: And nobody was interested. Nobody cared at all.

ASHLEY: I do remember.

JACK: So . . . what do I do now?

DEANNA: And it's so cool, and spiritual, and zen, and it leads me toward God, or Buddha. One, or both.

ASHLEY: *(Crying.)* No, Steve. No. No, I can't.

DEANNA: And I don't want to do it anymore.

(Looks at her father, reading.)

It's going to tear him up.

END ACT ONE

29 additional pages in Act Two

AUTHOR'S NOTE

YEARS AGO, I wrote *Accommodations*, a play about a somewhat dysfunctional LDS family where maybe one or two finally get their act together. In early 2003, I decided to experiment with a play about a more functional family, one in which the whole family is the protagonist. My own kids are becoming adults, ready to be out on their own, and I'm discovering that it is at this point that a family is really forced to redefine itself. So I thought I'd create a more positive family and focus on issues in LDS culture which could unsettle such a family.

We Latter-day Saints idealize families and family values, yet we don't often write about them very realistically. So I set up this play about people who pretty much feel they're ideal. They've decided who they are, they're settled, happy as is, finished thinking about themselves. But they don't realize that in order to move toward being Gods, which is the whole point, they have to constantly reinvent themselves, be reborn, re-think, re-decide.

And so the Hull family gets unsettled by real life, which of course includes disagreeing on trivial as well as important matters, getting on each other's nerves, giving no respect nor privacy, not letting anyone get away with posturing and pretentiousness, and yet somehow muddling through crises and coping with mistakes.

In *Family*, real life becomes a bad weekend for the well-educated, intellectual, gospel-grounded, well-to-do Hull family. One daughter has left her husband (whom she may or may not really have shot), a son has left his mission early, and another daughter, an R.M., has left graduate school. Not exactly ideal. And their dark space monologues reveal the reality they're in that they don't want to tell anyone and almost can't speak. Even the parents who burn the roast or buy the wrong salad have to re-decide who they are and what they mean to each other as individuals and within the family unit. —ERIC SAMUELSEN

NOTE: This note appeared in SUNSTONE MAGAZINE, when the play was printed in its entirety, in the March 2005 issue.

REVIEWS

Thursday, March 17, 2005

A Great Mormon Play

FROM THE BLOG: Bigelow's Rameumptom

Musings, observations, memories, reviews, and reports from writer, editor, and publisher Christopher Kimball Bigelow

About Chris: I'm the author of seven books on Mormonism, including Mormon-themed humor and fiction. I'm the great-great-great-grandson of a Mormon apostle who had more than forty wives. I served an LDS mission in Melbourne, Australia, and worked as an editor at the LDS Church's official Ensign magazine. A graduate of Emerson College and Brigham Young University, I cofounded and edited the Mormon literary magazine Irreantum and the satirical Mormon newspaper The Sugar Beet. A Hodgkin's disease survivor and the oldest of ten siblings, I live with my wife and five children in Provo, Utah.

More than 10 years ago, I saw “Accommodations” at BYU, a family drama by Eric Samuelsen. This play blew my mind because it was my first encounter with a Mormon literary work that seemed authentic and provocative, in addition to featuring great dialogue and characters. From there, I went on to discover other worthwhile Mormon novels, stories, and plays that operate outside the usual Mormon safety zone.

Last night, I saw the latest Samuelsen play at BYU, the generically named “Family.” As in “Accommodations,” this new play revolves around a family with adult children gathered home in a time of crisis. I really like it, because the characters are so distinct and everyone is struggling with issues of faith and self-identity. Samuelsen just plain writes great dialogue, and he lets his characters demonstrate doubt, worldliness, and other human flaws. Plus, there's lots of humor.

The play only runs through March 19 at BYU, but I understand the script will be published soon in Sunstone magazine. I wish a bigger crowd would see this kind of play.