

MY UNKNOWN SON, or The Interrupted Hug

[*My Unknown Son* was produced by the Circle Rep Lab in 1987 and then Off-Broadway in an Equity production at the Kaufman Theatre in NYC, 1988. The West Coast premiere, slightly revised, took place in Los Angeles in 1997.]

CHARACTERS:

THE FATHER, probably over forty, masculine
THE SON, in his twenties, versatile
THE MIDWIFE, female, any age, extravagant

SETTING: A few platforms for variety, but basically a bare stage. A suggestion of the FATHER's apartment — a chair, a desk, a typewriter, writing materials, an answering machine

(Enter FATHER to his apartment from lunch, very perturbed.)

FATHER The nerve! The nerve of her! I told John we shouldn't have told anybody! (mockingly imitating his lover, John) "Oh no, Glenda will understand. She's my friend!" Friend, indeed! (mockingly imitating Glenda) "You've done what? Sired a baby with a lesbian couple! Have you no sense of responsibility! That's not right. Bringing a little baby into the world that way! That's immoral!" Well, the deed is done, Glenda. Done! (Types, is blocked.) (to himself) I've got to live with it now. But how? (Holds his head for a moment as though he has a headache.) Oh, my head! (almost whimpering) I don't want to write this book!

(Plays back his messages on his answering machine, pushing an imaginary button.)

SECRETARY'S

VOICE (Beep) This is Alice calling from Random House in New York. Mr. Berg asked me to check on the manuscript. Is it ready yet? Please call us. You may call collect. Thank you.

(FATHER plays the next message.)

PUBLISHER'S

VOICE (Beep) Hello, this is Mike Berg from Random House. Your manuscript on the history of the theater was due in my office last week. How's it coming? Don't want to put too much pressure on you. We know you're working hard. . . . Aren't you? You may call collect. We need that manuscript!

FATHER (typing, to the machine) I'm working on it! I'm working on it, for god's sake! (Mimes throwing a hand grenade.) (Tries to type, stops.) (exploding) Fuck the theater anyway! What's it ever done for me! (Sighs, can't concentrate, holds his aching head.)

(The figures in the play are his headache.)

(The MIDWIFE enters with the baby now visible. She is dressed to suggest her roles as Earth Mother, Assistant to Fertility, the Eternal Female, Witch, and Father's conscience.)

MIDWIFE Here he is!

(She beckons to the FATHER, who gets up, points to himself questioningly, then goes to her. The MIDWIFE hands him the baby very gently.)

FATHER (to baby) How you doing, little fellow? You're just as cute as you can be, aren't you? (Looks more closely.) You look like me. Same ears. Same nose. (Touches the baby's ears, then his own.) Of course I'd love you even if you didn't.

MIDWIFE (abrasively) Would you? Would you really? (rushing over, grabbing the baby out of his arms, speaking on the run) Your time is up!

(The MIDWIFE doesn't attempt to be gentle, just takes the baby and runs off.)

FATHER But I just got here.

MIDWIFE (almost offstage) Tough!

FATHER That's my baby! I have a right to see him! To hug him!

MIDWIFE (returning) You gave up those rights, buster! You signed the paper when you donated. Don't you come in here now and start asking for more time with the baby. You've had your one visit. That's more than the mothers agreed to in the first place!

FATHER I just want to —

MIDWIFE Trying to get this baby away from the biological mother and her lover? I've seen your kind before. "Deranged Father Snatches Baby as Innocent Mother Pleads."

FATHER I'm just trying to see my son.

MIDWIFE (accusingly) Do you pay child support?

FATHER No, we agreed I wouldn't have to —

MIDWIFE Do you change the baby's diapers? Feed it, day in, day out?

FATHER No, but if I could just —

MIDWIFE You agreed to be an anonymous donor? Anonymous!

FATHER I did, but I don't see how a few more minutes will hurt.

MIDWIFE Siring a baby is the easy part! Raising it takes lots of —

FATHER It's the only time in my whole life I'm going to see my son! I don't want him to grow up thinking his father didn't care enough to even hold him for a few —

MIDWIFE He's getting plenty of love as it is. He's a very happy baby. (fiddling with the baby's chin, cooing to it) Yes, him is!

FATHER I want him to be a happy adult. I want to have some influence on the way he turns out!

MIDWIFE I don't imagine your hug is going to make that much difference. Rather egotistical of you! (Hands him an oversized photograph.) Here!

FATHER What is it?

MIDWIFE A photograph of your child when he was two.

FATHER He's two already?

MIDWIFE Cute, isn't he? You may keep the photo.

FATHER It's out of focus.

MIDWIFE Here's another one. (Pulls out second photograph.) When he was six. Look how he's growing! They say he's just like you.

FATHER (taking the photograph, examining it) Really? In what way?

MIDWIFE That his mothers did not give me liberty to divulge!

FATHER Can't I see him?

MIDWIFE He's fifteen in this one. (Starts to hand it to him.)

FATHER Wait! The time's going too fast! What's he like?

MIDWIFE You may keep the photographs. (Starts to leave.)

FATHER Is this all I get?

MIDWIFE Isn't that what you always wanted? You hold the perfect child in your hands.

FATHER (shaking the photos) These aren't a child. I want the real thing!

MIDWIFE Let me think about it. (A super-fast think.) No.

FATHER (angry) Give me that baby!

MIDWIFE (Holds it away from him.) Hands off!

FATHER (Grabs for it suddenly.) Give me my baby!

MIDWIFE Don't you touch this child!

FATHER It's mine! You're just the goddamn midwife!

MIDWIFE I knew this would happen if we let you see the baby. I warned the mothers! Men!

FATHER I'm going to hold my baby! That's all I want! That's all I want!

(He grabs the baby. The FATHER and the MIDWIFE struggle, each pulling, until finally they rip it apart.)

MIDWIFE (looking at the remnant in her hands) Oh, my God!

FATHER (looking at his remnant) Oh, sweet Jesus!

MIDWIFE See what you've done! You've dismembered your only son! You're going to have to live with this for the rest of your life! Baby-murderer!

FATHER You're just as guilty as I am. You pulled too!

MIDWIFE Why have a child if you don't know how to handle it?

FATHER I didn't get a chance to handle it! I could have done so much with that baby.

MIDWIFE Done so much? What? Plucked his heart out after you killed him?

FATHER (trying to put the remnants back together) Picked where he went to school, what religion he had — what religion he didn't have! Lots of things.

MIDWIFE You'd have lost interest — like most men. It's well known how they operate!

FATHER (bitterly) Thanks for delivering my son for my one visit. Now get out of here.

MIDWIFE I do my job well! I'm a professional.

FATHER (touching remnants) Yeah, I can see. Go. Go screw up somebody else's life.

MIDWIFE I'll go, but I leave you my curse. (hissing, putting a hex on him) My hideous *curssse!* (Exits hissing loudly.)

FATHER What curse? (Runs after her, worrying.) What hideous curse? (to the remnant of his baby, picking it up) My poor baby! What goddamn curse is she talking about? (The MIDWIFE re-enters.) (frightened) What do you want?

MIDWIFE Satisfaction guaranteed. Okay, you asked for it, daddy! (Olympian) The story of the Father and his Unknown Son as told to us by — (Gestures off toward SON.)

SON (Enters, a young man dressed in the garments of Greek tragedy. He picks the remnant of the baby out of his father's hands, moves away. In this section the SON and the FATHER should never stand together in realistic ways. The SON looks at the ripped baby, voice quavering) So this is what would have befallen us if left to thee! O hateful father!

FATHER You're alive! Thank God! You're grown up now!

SON Only because the MIDWIFE did not place our frail baby's body within thy evil grasp!

FATHER She didn't?

SON At the last moment she lay a shepherd's child in our place, fearing thy dread love. It was the shepherd's child thou rent asunder!

FATHER h good! I mean —

SON The shepherd will not be pleased — though he was but a peasant. (Drops the remnants.) We live because he died!

FATHER I'm so glad you're alive! . . . So you're my son? (Goes to embrace him.)

SON Lay not thy hands upon our kingly frame! We have been sent by the Furies to end thy life.

FATHER End my life?

SON Vengeance! Vengeance! Thou took our life, and now we must take thine.

FATHER I didn't take your life. You're obviously here!

SON Yay, another perished in our place, but Zeus has told us in a dream that thou must not live, lest thou make another attempt upon our life, most wicked parent!

(Enter the MIDWIFE as the Furies, in a head-dress with several hideous faces on it.)

MIDWIFE (epic voice) Spill his blood upon the altar or Zeus will be unsatisfied!

FATHER What about the shepherd's child? Isn't that enough needless bloodshed?

MIDWIFE (as Furies) There can never be enough needless bloodshed! And the horrid profusion of blood paid must be of royal spillage!

FATHER I'm not royal, so you can't spill mine.

SON If thou art our father, thou must be of royal blood, for we are royal king of all of Thebes. Prepare thyself.

(Takes out a large dagger, sharpens it, perhaps on his shoe.)

FATHER You can't kill your own father! That's — that's —

SON Patricide is the word thou wantest! The Furies must be heeded.

FATHER Fuck the Furies.

MIDWIFE What?!

FATHER (to Son) Everything is cleared up between us now. You've done pretty well. You're a king and everything. Let's get to know each other, make up for lost time.

SON All our life — all our life! — we have wondered who our father was. We had two mothers, and so we knew we were twice blessed, knew we were born to be a king, and yet . . . and yet?

FATHER And yet what?

SON We were different from the other children of Thebes, who had but one parent of either sex. The little Theban children pointed their little children's fingers at us. They sneered. And sneered! (Sneers.)

FATHER That made you strive to get ahead — to be king. Most kids fit in and turn out to be quite dull.

SON We wanted to be dull! But they would not let us. The vicious little bastards! (Slashes dagger) I wanted to drink their blood!

FATHER That's all past now. You've grown up . . . splendidly.

SON Verily we are great; nevertheless, thou must die — and at our hand.

(Raises the dagger.)

FATHER You're joking. You can't do this.

MIDWIFE What's wrong? Can't you handle the truth about your paternal crime?

FATHER I can't die now. I've got a book on the history of the theater to finish! That's it — you're merely a deadline! A headache!

SON Wert thou a writer? (Beat.) O, woe for thee.

FATHER No, no woe for me! Get away!

SON We will have thy book read to us when thou art dead! As we listen, we will weep many salt tears and eat green grapes. (weeping) O, the pity of it all!

FATHER Listen, let's talk about this.

SON Why didst thou sire us? That is our deepest question.

FATHER I was helping out these two women.

MIDWIFE Nay! Lies!

FATHER Yes, I was!

SON There's more here that must be speaked! (not sure) Spaked? Spooked?

FATHER There is more! I wanted a child.

SON But why? Why? WHY?

FATHER It was expected. I was Catholic . . . or Jewish or something. That's why!

MIDWIFE The Oracle knows!

SON Wert thou told in a divine vision to sire me?

FATHER (flippantly) No, my dick told me to do it.

SON Dick?

FATHER At least I didn't do it for the usual reasons — to have somebody to work the farm or to look after me when I'm old.

SON At least why not have one the usual way — one dam, one sire?

FATHER Because I was gay, and it wasn't possible to have a child the usual way.

SON Gay? What is gay?

FATHER I loved men.

SON (dismissively) Oh, that! Well, we're "gay" in Thebes, too. We still manage to have sons and daughters!

FATHER Lifestyles have changed a lot since your time. Under the circumstances, I did the best I could.

SON (moving away) One more gnawing, tormenting, agonizing question.

FATHER Yes?

SON Where placed thou thy parts? (Holds the dagger close to FATHER's groin.)

FATHER (moving the dagger farther from his "parts") Ah, I arranged with a midwife to give a donation of my seed to a lesbian couple.

SON Sappho! But donation? What did thou do with thy manly seed?

FATHER First we had a medical history — on both sides — and a sperm check.

SON Did thou consult at Delphi?

FATHER No, modern science is really something. A midwife told me I was able to have a child.

SON They can predict fertility before the act now?! Would have saved much trouble in times past.

FATHER I helped by taking garlic pills.

SON Thou art more cryptic than the Oracle!

FATHER Then I jacked off into an artichoke jar. With my lover, John. It was my sperm, but we held each other while I did it. I guess you were sort of our child, you see.

SON (falling back) Our mind reels!

FATHER And then the midwife came in her van and took my sperm away, wrapped in a towel, between her legs, and drove it to the mother-to-be, who was waiting with her lover, and then all three got in the van, and the midwife took something like an eyedropper and sucked up my sperm . . .

SON Even Zeus in all his disguises never thought of this!

FATHER That's why he told you to kill me. He's envious!

SON (afraid, looking at heavens, whispering) Do not anger the gods! They will rip our eyelids off!

(Exit MIDWIFE, afraid.)

FATHER Surely the gods have better things to do than rip off eyelids.

SON Do not blaspheme! (looking at the heavens) Or we are doomed!

FATHER Some of us have a smarter way of looking at things nowadays.

SON And that's why thou hast come to this pass — sacrificed horribly at the hand of thy only son. (Raises the dagger.)

FATHER Wait! You're being old-fashioned!

(Enter MIDWIFE with a drum, as the Gay Marching Band.)

MIDWIFE (banging away) Gay pride now! Gay pride now! I'm so proud, I'm so proud to be gay! To be gay! To be gay! (with a final bang) To be goddamned gay! (to SON suddenly) — Kill him!

FATHER What is this?

MIDWIFE I'm the Gay Marching Band — and Twirling Corps.

(She twirls and throws a baton high, not necessarily well.)

FATHER No, you're the Furies!

MIDWIFE Same thing! You tried to get around being gay by having a child. Doesn't sound like gay pride to me! You're a fake heterosexual! (Bangs the drum.)

FATHER It's just another option. People should have options!

MIDWIFE (to SON, as the Furies) Kill him or suffer Zeus's lingering revenge!

SON (uncertain) How can I kill my only father?

FATHER Exactly!

MIDWIFE It's done all the time, past and present. Revenge! Revenge! (Bangs drum.) *Do it!*

SON Our heart bears a burden.

FATHER I'm going to stop this. (Holds his hand up.) All it takes is a little toughness with figments! I didn't have a son so that he would turn out to murder me!

MIDWIFE Who does?

FATHER I gave him the precious gift of life!

MIDWIFE Not enough. Kids never forget their pain, especially ancient Greek ones. You should have adopted!

FATHER But I wanted my own flesh and blood.

MIDWIFE Well, you're going to get the blood anyway.

SON Farewell, Father. We are distraught that we must do this to thee. (The SON comes over and grabs the FATHER from behind across the chest and raises the dagger high.) Dost thou have anything to say? Speak now, for it will be more difficult once I slit thy throat.

FATHER I was just trying to live modern!

SON But thou must die ancient! (He slits the FATHER's throat. Red ribbons fly out, representing the streams of blood.)

FATHER (dying, getting into the Greek spirit) Oh! Oh, my son, my son! Thou hast taken my life even as I gave thee thine!

 (He collapses.)

SON The deadly deed is done. We are our father's murderer. We are at last content.

MIDWIFE (immediately as the Furies) Oh, be not content! We are sent to chastise thee for the wanton act of killing thy own father!

SON But thou didst goad me to the murder!

MIDWIFE Even as we must now goad thee for doing what we told thee to do! After all, that's what Fate means.

SON O, what have we done! Away, bloody dagger! (Tosses it aside.) He was a true father, even though we never knew him. If only we could take it back! But it is now too late! Ye gods, it was thy doing! We will run mad and pluck out our eyes and kill our wife and every second citizen, and then we will take an army and sack seven other cities beginning with Athens and Sparta and then later we'll —

(The SON runs off, maddened, in several directions before exiting.)

FATHER (coming to life) Oh no, you don't! I won't put up with this madness! Come back here!

SON (An offstage bloodcurdling scream.)

FATHER That's not my son. That's just your stupid curse.

MIDWIFE (as the Midwife) Well, what else can you expect from a patriarchy?

FATHER I don't want my son to turn out like that. Hating me.

MIDWIFE You started the ball rolling. Not me.

FATHER If I were around him, if I raised him, then he wouldn't hate me. I will have influence in this matter!

MIDWIFE That's not what you agreed to!

FATHER Well, I've changed the game plan. How do you like them apples? I'm in charge now!

MIDWIFE How many have thought that, only to see their children turn out quite, quite different from what they had in mind?

FATHER It takes good stock, good genes, like mine, and some intelligence! Take away your goddamn curse and let somebody who knows what he's doing handle this.

MIDWIFE Don't bite off more than you can chew, dickhead.

FATHER Come on, come on!

MIDWIFE It's your headache. (un-hexing him) Curse, be gone! I knew the mothers would do a better job of this!

FATHER I won't have them monopolizing my little boy. Those lesbians think they can create some cozy female nest, where no nasty old cock can ever bring his nasty old worm!

MIDWIFE One real son coming up! Heavy on the worm! (Exits.)

FATHER (looking offstage) Son? Are you there? Son?

(The SON enters, now dressed like one of the stupid, gawky, goofy characters in Shakespeare — Dogberry, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Bottom, etc. — who always misuse words and clunk about.)

SON (to FATHER) Hold there, thou varlet!

FATHER What?

SON I arrest thee in the name of Good Queen Bess, ruler of all England, Wales, Ireland, the top part of France, and other domains that thou canst find out if thou just ask! Run not away, sirrah!

FATHER Run away? I've been calling for you!

SON (Grabs the FATHER's ear) And now I have thee most prodigiously by the ear! Away to prison with thee, villain most cuckolded! (Tries to take the FATHER off.)

FATHER Wait! For what?

SON I am the watch and thou has loitered most impeccably, and so thou hast plotted most indifferently against the good queen!

FATHER No, I haven't. Indifferently?

SON *Sneck* up! (Snaps fingers in his face.) I give thee the lie in the thorax, sirrah. I pluck thy beard!

FATHER I don't have a beard. See! (Touches his own face.)

SON (looking at the face, a beat) Then I give thee a big pun in thy face, thou cuckold! Thou wouldst o'erthrow the royal Tudor line, and thus art a most scurvy fellow, a one-suited jackanapes, a bird-bolt, a lackpurse, and a stockfish, and, moreover, a bull's pizzle!

FATHER . . . Where's the big pun?

SON I couldst not think of one! (to offstage help) Help ho there!

FATHER You're a little confused. You've been sent here not to arrest me, but to meet your father.

SON (stuttering) F-F-F-F (FATHER slaps him, to make him get the word out.) — Father?

FATHER I'm (hedging) . . . I'm a friend of his. He sent me to find you.

SON O no, sir! My father is dead. My mother told me so. O no, no, no, sir!

FATHER I think she lied.

SON (in a huff) Dost call my mother a whore, a baggage, an uncleanly trollop, a trull, a drab, a minx, a jade, a slut?

FATHER Hold on! Hold on! Didn't your mother live with another woman, and your father was never around?

SON 'Tis true, but no man calleth me good mother such names! 'Twould make me a whoreson bastard! A baseborn, spurious, unchaste, dishonored, misbegotten coxcomb, and a stealer of blackberries! . . . And a cuckold!

FATHER (to see if the SON really knows) By the way, what is a cuckold?

SON (with giggles) Oh, sir, thou dost talk most naughty! A man's wife may not put the cuckoo's egg into her jolly place, or see what haps to a man's good repute! (Falls on the floor at his bawdy, naughty humor.)

FATHER Simmer down. You're not a bastard.

SON By my troth and all my gillyflowers, thou art most certain?

FATHER If you're born, you're legitimate. People used to care so much about all that paternity and maternity stuff. Now it's ceased to be such a big issue — you should pardon the pun.

SON (sadly) By Our Lady's virginity, if only such had been true when I were a boy.

FATHER Did you go through a lot of trouble?

SON Aye, sir. My mother was an outcast, for she had no husband, and yet she had me.

FATHER If you'd been born in the twentieth century — like my son was — then you wouldn't have had to worry.

SON (not too sure, his pain showing through a bit) You think not, sir?

FATHER (doubtful) Nobody today is going to suffer the way they would have in the old days! Not my son . . . not mine. (Takes out a coin.) Here's a little something — some support from your father.

SON From my father? (Looks at the coin, bites it, giggles.) I shall use my wealth well! I have many ideas by which to improve this world. First I shall . . . (Thinks hard.) (Smiles goofily.) Ooo! Ooo! That's it!

FATHER (curious) What?

SON (pompously, sitting on a raised chair) I'll make every man jack stand on their heads. And when they are all there, with their big *buttocks* up — (Laughs goofily.) I shall — I shall think of the rest later! I have lots of good ideas about the buttocks like that! I have written a paragraph about the buttocks. So there!

FATHER (thinking of his book) A have need of writing a few paragraphs myself.

(Enter the MIDWIFE as an Elizabethan Fool, with a cap and bells, motley, and a bauble — the Fool's scepter.)

MIDWIFE (as Fool) Hey, nonny! Hey, nonny! And a nonny, nonny hey! (bowing to FATHER) At your service, sir!

FATHER What are you doing here?

MIDWIFE (striking poses) Just fooling around.

FATHER Well, I don't want you here. I'm doing just fine.

MIDWIFE In truth, sir? (bopping him on the head with the bauble) Dost thou not admire thy child?

(The MIDWIFE bops the SON on his head, stays by his side as he sits in chair.)

SON (giddy, overly pleased) Oh, a Fool! They're fun! (to FATHER) Look! It's a Fool!

FATHER (with a double meaning about his child) I noticed.

SON (to FOOL) Quibble with thy words! Come on, quibble!

MIDWIFE (to FATHER) Has thou no quibbles? What shouldst I say to thy child?

FATHER Nothing.

MIDWIFE (alluding to the line in *King Lear*) Nothing will come of nothing.

SON Oh, 'tis most witty! "Nothing will come of nothing."

MIDWIFE (to FATHER, meaning the SON, but slyly) How like you this Fool, fool? Art glad thou hast such a fine offspring?

FATHER You can't control those things.

MIDWIFE Ashamed?

FATHER No, I'm not ashamed.

MIDWIFE Maybe you should be. Maybe your sperm wasn't good enough. And such good stock too! Maybe it was the way you did it!

FATHER I gave the best I had! Accidents happen! Even when people do it the "normal" way. It's biology!

SON (impatiently) Prithee, where are thy quibbles? Please, more quibbles — right into mine nose! (Points to nose.) Or into my butt! (Points to it.) See! (to FATHER) Hast thou quibbles for my *butt*, good sir?

MIDWIFE (to SON) Oh, he has no quibbles about anything. (Knocks on SON'S head.)
Knock, knock!

SON (going along) Who's there?

MIDWIFE Nobody.

SON Nobody who?

FATHER (to MIDWIFE) Stop this. Stop it!

MIDWIFE But I'm a licensed Fool. Wouldst revoke my license, sir? (going on, to SON,
knocking again) I hear there be a vacancy in this lodging! 'Tis true?

SON Yay, we have an attic vacant. Right here. (Points to his head, laughs.)

MIDWIFE (with a sly look at the FATHER) Does thy worthy father live in here?

SON (giggling) He's gone a-riding!

MIDWIFE A-writing? A veritable paragraph? A whole page?

FATHER (to MIDWIFE) Stop it!

MIDWIFE What's wrong, nuncle? 'Tis just a little fooling. Hast no meaning. Whoop, Jug! I
love thee!

FATHER (more quietly, turning away) Thou dost gall my heart.

MIDWIFE (to audience) He's nobody's fool!

SON God's wounds, this is the finest merry-making I've had since St. Athol's Day!

FATHER (with a double take) Whose day?

SON *Athol*. (spelling it out, but having some trouble) A-t-h-o-l. Athol! (It sounds like
"asshole.") Didst I tell you St. Athol's Day is *my* name day?

FATHER Somebody gave you that name?

SON Most truly. All do call me Athol!

FATHER Please don't say it so much, or so loudly.

SON Prithee, if I be an Athol, fain would I declare it, and gladly too!

MIDWIFE (as Fool) How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have an Athol for a son!

FATHER He's not really hurting anyone.

SON (interrupting, to FATHER) Dost thou not know . . .

(FATHER and MIDWIFE ignore the SON, keep on talking right across his body.)

MIDWIFE (to FATHER) No doubt he'll save the day. Just like in all the Shakespeare plays. The dumb jerks always manage to capture the bad guys. Just like in real life! You writers! Suck up! Suck up!

FATHER I'm just trying to have a decent son.

SON (to FATHER, about more quibbles) Dost thou, huh? Dost thou?

(The SON waves his arms, tries to get their attention.)

MIDWIFE (to FATHER) But this is the one you got. Hey, nonny! Hey, nonny! And my sonny is a nonny, nonny new! (to FATHER) Shall I tell him the truth, who you are?

FATHER No. (looking at his SON) What good will it do?

MIDWIFE Oh, a hug or something. I thought you were into hugs. Or is that only when they're little babies and dribbling all over themselves doesn't mean that much?

FATHER What do you want me to say?

MIDWIFE Why, that you love your son. You do love him, don't you? Whoop, Jug, I love thee!

FATHER (looking at SON) Love *him*?

SON I want that Fool's bauble! (He grabs it from the MIDWIFE, runs off, jabbering.) By my troth, I got it! I got the bauble! I got it in mine hand!

FATHER (disciplining) Here, give that back to her! (Goes after SON.)

SON (playing keep-away) No! I've got it forever!

FATHER Come here!

SON No!

FATHER Athol!

SON (singsong) It's mine!

FATHER (echoing SON) It's not yours!

MIDWIFE (watching him unable to control the child, sarcastically) Nice work. The male influence, no doubt.

FATHER You want some kind of mawkish declaration that I have the socially approved response to my "slow" child! Well, I won't give it! I can't love just any child that's given to me! That's ridiculous! You love the individual! Or don't!

MIDWIFE I think the Elizabethans had a word for it — “unnatural.” Nothing will come of nothing!

SON I’ve got the bauble! Prithee, look at me! (He sticks the bauble between his legs like a penis, giggles.)

FATHER I’m supposed to say I love that? That’s not love. It’s pity.

MIDWIFE Is that all, nuncle?

FATHER All right, it’s shame then. It’s pity and shame and disappointment, if that’s my child. How do I know his mother didn’t stick somebody else’s sperm in her at the last moment?

MIDWIFE You are something else!

FATHER Well, the world can use something else! I’m not going to make you or me feel good by saying I love my son. (almost breaking down with the pain of the thought and not being able to say it.) I love my . . . I love my . . .

MIDWIFE And here I thought you two might live together. A little cottage on the heath.

FATHER I want to write my book! I wouldn’t have time —

MIDWIFE — If he were on your hands — and for his whole life too? He’s never going to grow up, of course.

FATHER Nobody should have to go through that.

MIDWIFE People do. Mothers mostly. But then they’re so used to it. Not you! You’ve got your career to think about!

FATHER That’s right! I’m not going to squander my talent on that . . . thing.

MIDWIFE Don’t be so sure there’s so much talent here! (looking at his typewriter) I’ve read some of this history. I think you’d be better off taking care of him. (Points to SON.)

FATHER I won’t be pulled down this way! I want another son!

SON My bauble! My bauble! My bauble is a bubble! There is some trouble with my bubble, for my bauble is a bubble! My bauble makes me babble. Babble! I like to dabble in my babble! I like to dabble with my babble ‘cause my babble is a bubble, and my bubble is a bauble — and (being dirty) a *butt*!

MIDWIFE (to SON) Come along, Athol. He wants another son.

FATHER (to MIDWIFE) Shhhh!

SON Must go now?

MIDWIFE I'm afraid so.

SON (about FATHER) Is yonder gentleman to come with us?

MIDWIFE Are you to come with us?

FATHER (Shakes his head no, but reluctantly.)

MIDWIFE Come along. He can't make this journey.

SON (a little disappointed) Thou canst not go, noble sir?

FATHER No.

SON Well, I thank thee most portentously. Wilt I see thee more?

FATHER I don't think so.

SON No?

FATHER I want —

MIDWIFE (to SON) Tarry not! He is a-weary of thee, fool.

SON (hurt) Oh.

FATHER That's not the way to say it!

MIDWIFE A rose by any other name would stink as sweet. (to SON) Say bye-bye.

SON (to FATHER) God rest ye!

FATHER God rest ye.

MIDWIFE (to SON, who is going out the wrong exit) No, this way, Athol.

SON (somewhat melancholy, somewhat silly) My bauble! My bauble! My bauble is a bubble! My bubble! My bubble! My bubble is a trouble!

(The SON and the MIDWIFE disappear, the MIDWIFE leading him as he sings his rhyme sadly.)

FATHER Who would want that? It's not right! It's not fair!

(Enter MIDWIFE carrying a box with the next costume inside, with SON in attendance behind her.)

MIDWIFE One new son coming up!

FATHER Get out of here!

MIDWIFE (readying the next costume) I've got a job to do.

FATHER (trying to grab the costume away from her) You're not having anything more to do with *my* child, woman!

MIDWIFE Woman?! Yes, it must be the fault of women! Here! Do him over any way you like!

FATHER Don't worry. I will! (Grabs the costume box out of her hands) (to SON) Sit!

(The SON sits.)

MIDWIFE Need anything else?

FATHER Not from the likes of you. (Tosses that costume box away. Gets another one with another costume in it.)

MIDWIFE How about this? (She helps undress the SON.)

FATHER (trying to prevent her) Let's see. Something — something —

MIDWIFE Not something nineteenth century, I hope!

FATHER Something nineteen century! (to SON) Take that off.

(The SON and MIDWIFE remove his Elizabethan clothing. The FATHER takes clothes suitable for an Oscar Wilde play from the box along with a hand mirror. The undressing and dressing should be done as part of the action, with sharp choreography, or as a ballet with music underneath.)

FATHER Now this is more like it!

MIDWIFE (knowing full well) What's this one going to be? (Still helping dress SON.)

FATHER Get away. Get away!

MIDWIFE You'll forget the details!

FATHER Not bloody likely.

MIDWIFE Want to bet?

FATHER You'll see, Madame Midwife. This time *I'm* delivering the child!

(He helps dress his SON, combs his hair into the appropriate Victorian style, perhaps parted down the middle.)

MIDWIFE How about if I just fix his hair? (She starts to.)

FATHER (stopping her) Not one follicle!

MIDWIFE Well, I hope you're right this time, but I doubt it.

FATHER (smugly) I will be! This time he's going to be perfect! I'm going to make him gay!

(Points to finished SON.)

SON (preening, doubtful about some aspect of his clothing or hair) I don't know. I don't know about this!

FATHER It'll be fine, Algernon.

MIDWIFE I don't think this is the one for you.

FATHER Not a word more. You're fired!

MIDWIFE But that's . . . that's censorship!

FATHER Erased!

MIDWIFE Okay, okay, I know when I'm not wanted.

FATHER Apparently you don't.

MIDWIFE I know how to make an exit. Like this! (She exits crying loudly, overdone.) Back over her shoulder.) Call me if you need me, sport!

FATHER (triumphantly) The Story of the Father and His Son According to — (Gestures at SON.)

SON (sharply into the Oscar Wilde mode, preening in a hand mirror) I look absolutely dreadful!

FATHER Now, now!

SON I tell you I do! Just look at my tongue. (Sticks it out.)

FATHER It hardly matters.

SON (talking with tongue out) I don't think you grasp the gravity of the situation! How can I go to the opera tonight looking like this? Everybody will be staring at my tongue!

FATHER Most people don't care about it. Not deeply.

SON (looking at himself in an imaginary full-length mirror) And look at my trousers! You want me looking a perfect fright? And this is a morning coat. And the opera is in the evening! How can you be so obtuse!

FATHER Algernon, don't be shallow.

SON Why, all the best people are shallow! Indeed, it is only the shallow people who know the true value of anything!

FATHER Don't bandy words with me.

SON I never bandy with those who can't compete. It's like sticking pins in snails. They just never get away!

FATHER Algernon, let's not quarrel. I want to get to know you better. That's why I came today. How shall I say this? (significantly) *I am your long-lost father!*

SON (after a beat) Oh, how tiresome. You would come just when I'm off to brunch at Lady Huntington-Percival's!

FATHER I thought you'd be glad to see me!

SON I don't see you for years and years, and then you just pop up out of thin air and expect me to break all my engagements to spend some time with you. Well, if you think I'm going to get all gushy because my "long-lost" *pater familias* has finally dragged his dreary body into my life, you must be quite, quite mad!

FATHER I thought we might have something in common.

SON Something common about you, but certainly not about me! (about his wit) Oh, that's a treasure! I must write that down and use it this afternoon at brunch. (to himself as he writes it down) And possibly at teatime, or would that be too much wit for one day?

FATHER I meant — something common in our private life.

SON Nice people don't stoop to a private life. Public life is the only place where one can be truly intimate.

FATHER You know what I mean, Algernon — (with heavy insinuation) *Bunburying*.

SON Bunburying? Whatever in the world is that?

FATHER Running off to the demi-monde, to the "countryside." Your little trips to get "away."

SON I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about!

FATHER A euphemism for buggery.

SON Buggery?

FATHER The docks!

SON I wouldn't be caught dead at the docks — except of course to wave *bon voyage*, to the right people.

FATHER Even at night? Come now, I understand your secret life. I've lived one myself.

SON You have my sympathy, I'm sure! But I really must ask you not to impose your sordid little secret on me. Now I simply must be off to Lady Huntington-Percival's. She's serving cucumber sandwiches, and she gets in such a pet if one is late.

FATHER I'm trying to tell you something!

SON And I'm trying to tell you something! People of quality don't keep bringing up their vulgar little peccadilloes when other people are obviously not interested! Sir, if you are disclosing some sort of tasteless, unspeakable indiscretion in your past, I pray you to spare me. I believe there's a train for Paris at twilight. You might be on it!

FATHER It's all right! You won't go to jail for being who you are.

SON Father, I may be overly concerned with my wearing apparel, I may be acidic in my *bon mots*, I may love the opera, and brunch, but I assure you, sir, that I am not what you are implying I am!

FATHER I'm not accusing you of anything. At last you are free to be . . . homosexual!

SON Sir, you dare to ascribe that word to me! You leave me no option but this!
(The SON walks over and slaps his glove across the FATHER's face, looking silly.) My seconds will be in touch with you by morning.

(SON starts to leave, his dander up.)

FATHER A duel? Algernon, come back here! Don't be silly!

SON Do you realize that if a word of what you are implying ever reached the ears of Lady Huntington-Percival, I would not be allowed to continue my engagement to her daughter, my dear fiancée Cecily? To say nothing of never again being allowed to eat her food!

FATHER You don't have to marry Cecily after all. Those disguises are of the past.

SON But, Father, I wish to marry Cecily! I adore her. Adore her!

(Enter the MIDWIFE in a wig as Cecily, a young Victorian ingénue. She holds a fan, which she uses to cover her face much of the time so that the FATHER won't recognize her.)

MIDWIFE (as Cecily) Darling! What's keeping you? Mother and I were afraid you were not coming to brunch! Are you indisposed?

SON Forgive me, darling Cecily. This man here has prevented my departure.

FATHER (suspicious that it's the MIDWIFE) Who is that? Is that you, Midwife?

MIDWIFE (hiding face) Algernon, do I have the pleasure of knowing him?

SON Some man posing as my father. I'm not going to introduce you to him.

MIDWIFE Good, darling! I wouldn't want to meet anyone you wouldn't want me to meet — even your father.

FATHER (to Cecily, waving) Hello! How do you do?

MIDWIFE What am I to do, Algernon? (She's breathless.) I've been introduced to someone I don't even know! (Fans herself, turning away from the FATHER.)

SON (to FATHER) I'm afraid I must insist, sir! (He steps over and twists his nose.) You have insulted my fiancée by introducing yourself to her against her express wishes, to say nothing of mine!

FATHER I'm telling you that you don't have to marry Cecily or whoever she is! You can be who you really are!

SON Don't you dare, sir! Don't you dare sully her ears with —

MIDWIFE (curious despite her pretence) What awful thing is he trying to say, Algernon? What? What?

SON (covering her ears with his hands) Not a syllable, Cecily!

MIDWIFE Of course, darling, if you don't want me to hear. Even if he said the words, however awful they may be, they wouldn't penetrate beyond here. (She holds her hand close to her ears, yet not touching them.) (very curious) I ask, of course, only in order to love you better.

SON My tyrannical father is trying to come between us, dearest.

FATHER Tyrannical father indeed!

SON He does not want us to marry.

MIDWIFE Not to marry!

FATHER Do you really want to marry her, or do you just want her mother's brunches and all they represent?

SON However we have to fight you on this, however we have to overcome your objections, and even live in a sordid little bed-sitter somewhere in Putney with no money at all, we will do it — because our love is not to be denied.

FATHER Listen, I'm trying to save you a lot of hypocrisy, a lot of misery!

SON Cover your ears, Cecily. Go on now, cover them.

MIDWIFE (covering them) They're covered, darling! All right?

SON I don't want this man's foulness in your orifice.

MIDWIFE What? I can't hear you, Algernon. I promise to listen with but *one* ear.

SON No, precious one, I think not.

MIDWIFE Just one? (She daringly removes a hand from one ear.)

SON Cecily —

MIDWIFE Oh, that's much better.

FATHER Now that I have your ear, Cecily — do you want to marry a man who is not right for you?

MIDWIFE Ah, but Algernon is perfect. He takes me everywhere. We dance. We discuss plays and music, and have such a good time laughing and laughing. Most of all, he never takes liberties. A light buss on my cheek at parting, but no more. He's such a gentleman. What better preparation for marriage could there be?

FATHER Is that what you want after you're married? A light buss on the cheek? Is that the kind of buss you want to take for the rest of your life? You do intend to marry for life, don't you? Hasn't it dawned on you, Cecily, that your fiancé is, well, less physical with you than you might desire?

MIDWIFE Algernon, did you hear him accuse me not only of being physical but of wishing to take a bus! (distressed) *OH!*

FATHER (insistently) There's more here than meets the eye. It must be said! Cecily, your fiancé is one of those whose love dare not speak its name.

MIDWIFE (shocked) Is this true, Algernon?

SON I told you, Cecily, that he was a rotter. I told you not to listen. But, no, you would, wouldn't you?

MIDWIFE It's your fault, Algernon! As a man, and thus superior, you shouldn't have let him speak to me!

SON It's hardly my fault. You shouldn't have bared your ear!

MIDWIFE (getting tough) My ear, my foot! If you weren't such a little dandy, I wouldn't be in this compromised position now!

SON You think I'm a dandy? Well, that's the first I've heard of this! Perhaps our engagement has been pre-mature after all. We hardly seem to know each other, it appears. Perhaps we need some time apart to see if we're truly suited to each other. Dandy, indeed!

MIDWIFE I couldn't agree more. Yes, let's not see each other for a while. That's just fine and *dandy* with me!

SON Perhaps I'll go off somewhere, for a time. Yes, that's just what I'll do!
Somewhere.

FATHER (insinuatingly) Morocco?

SON Yes, it's warm in Morocco, I'm told. Bazaars, beads . . .

FATHER Arab boys.

SON . . . that sort of thing. It'll give me some time to mull things over.

MIDWIFE I'm leaving, Algernon!

 (She starts to exit.)

FATHER Just a moment there. I think we have been introduced before! (He pulls the fan
away from her face.) It is you!

MIDWIFE No, I'm Cecily!

FATHER How dare you interfere in this!

MIDWIFE (revealing more of herself daringly) You're right! I'm not Cecily! What are
you going to do about it, dickhead?

SON Father, who is this person?

FATHER An imposter. (Pulls her wig off.) Who's trying to come between us. (to
MIDWIFE) Admit it! You just did this because I fired you.

MIDWIFE I only did it because this son isn't good enough for you. Take me back into your
employ. I'll get you another son.

SON Father, I don't know who this woman is. As a result, yes, our engagement is
definitely off!

MIDWIFE I don't want to be engaged to you! Who would! (to FATHER) Take me back.
Come on! Come on!

SON Well, which is it to be, Father? This woman or me?

FATHER I can't reject another son.

MIDWIFE Believe me, this one you can reject!

SON (imperiously) Father?

FATHER (going between them) I choose (a hard decision) . . . my son.

SON (to MIDWIFE) Go at once!

MIDWIFE (to FATHER) When will you learn to make the right decision? Are you going to be like most people? You won't know what hurts until you're hit by a train!
(MIDWIFE exits angrily.)

SON (following after her) I guess I showed her!

FATHER I wonder if she knows something about him I don't. What are you going to do with the rest of your life, now that your engagement is off, Algernon?

SON (rolling his eyes) Is this fatherly advice I'm about to hear?

FATHER If you take up this new open life, it may have some pitfalls of its own.

SON Such as?

FATHER Hatred, in various forms.

SON Nice time to tell me!

FATHER I meant to break it to you more slowly, but events developed.

SON Will I be ecstatically happy now?

FATHER Not all heterosexuals are happy just because they're heterosexual. Why should it be any different for gays?

SON Why did you then try so hard to prevent my marriage to Cecily?

FATHER Because I knew it wouldn't work.

SON Shouldn't I have been allowed to find out for myself?

FATHER I wouldn't be a good parent if I didn't try to keep you from doing the stupid things I've done!

SON What might be correct for you might be entirely wrong for me! Father, Father, Father — what am I to do with you! Can't you see that I'm brilliant? Do you think I can't get a grasp on a little thing like . . . *life*? (He laughs dismissively.) Hoo, for one so "gay," you're no fun at all, do you know that?

FATHER Life isn't just fun! It's also —

SON Oh, dear! Do we have to have this conversation?

FATHER My life as a gay man hasn't been all that easy. I was arrested once in the baths. And —

SON Oh, please! I'm sure you had to walk barefoot in the baths and put up with a lot of rowdy, loathsome little chaps, but you're not making me into an old podge like you!

FATHER You can learn from me! You can —

SON Oh, fudge! That's what I say to you, Father. Fudge! Fudge! Double divinity fudge!

FATHER Goddamn you! I ought to wring your silly neck, you pretentious little snot!

(Goes toward him threateningly.)

SON (incensed) Father! I'm shocked at your attempt to interfere in my life!

FATHER You will listen! You will! You will!

SON I won't!

(FATHER grabs the SON and shakes him, gets him on the desk and begins to throttle him. It should be pretty passionate, not too abruptly ended.)

(MIDWIFE enters, pulls FATHER off SON, prevents him from killing him.)

MIDWIFE Wait! Stop! You're killing your only child! (pulling his hands off) Let him go! Let him go!

FATHER (gradually coming to his senses, looking at his hands around the SON's neck) What am I doing? I just wanted to give him some fatherly advice!

(The SON gets up, holding his throat, choking a bit.)

SON (as exit line) I won't forget this, (chokes) Father!

(He exits.)

FATHER Oh, you will too! Just like you'll forget everything else I tell you!

MIDWIFE I thought you were going to get this one right.

FATHER But why should he learn nothing from what I've gone through? The human race keeps repeating the same old awful, inane mistakes, lifetime after lifetime, century after century, because they won't learn anything from those of us who have gone before! This search is harder than I thought it was going to be. Maybe I should stop looking. No more sons. No more!

VOICE OF
PUBLISHER

(over P. A..) This is Mike Berg! Where the hell is that manuscript!

FATHER No more books either! It's not worth it! I'm going to take an aspirin!

(He starts to exit. MIDWIFE grabs him, pulls him back.)

MIDWIFE You want a massage?

FATHER No. (Tries to leave.)

MIDWIFE A lobotomy? (She begins to massage his neck and back — hard.) How's that?

FATHER Ouch!

MIDWIFE Boy, do I get tired of comforting you!

FATHER I didn't ask you to comfort me!

MIDWIFE (strangling him a little bit) I'm just trying to finish my delivery job here, that's all. Your real child does exist somewhere in all this.

FATHER Are you sure?

(The SON enters dressed as a Sam Shepard type, muddy work boots, plaid shirt, heavy coat, baseball cap — and crazy. In his arms he carries a bunch of celery. Several bunches if the budget can stand it. Probably just one bunch or else many would be funniest.)

FATHER Son, are you back? I didn't mean to hurt you. Are you angry with me?

SON (entering backwards) Celery is growing out of my ears.

(The MIDWIFE stops massaging FATHER.)

FATHER Son?

SON (mumbling) Zeke.

FATHER Geek?

SON Zeke! You had a son once, but you buried him in the celery out back.

FATHER I did? I'm your father.

SON (melodramatically) Wait? Do you hear that?

FATHER What? (Both stop to listen.)

SON Those coyotes howling across the desert.

FATHER (Listens.) Can't say that I do.

SON (Hands him the celery) Hold this. (Takes out a flask of alcohol, takes a swig.) Sure, you hear 'em. (suddenly, madly) *I* hear them! (Howls like a coyote.)

FATHER (holding celery) Geek — I mean Zeke? Are you okay?

SON How do I know you're my father? You haven't broken down a door even once. You're not drunk! Have you ever stayed in a cheap motel?

FATHER (in a Sam Shepard father's voice) I've come back, Zeke. Those are my clothes you're a-wearin'.

SON Let me smell that celery! (Rushes over and buries his face in it as Father holds it.) Smells like you, but I can't be sure. I can't be sure of anything these days. I need to get away in a Packard. A '49 Packard.

FATHER Really? Uh, tell me about yourself. Are you married?

SON Yup.

FATHER Kids?

SON (Takes another swig from his flask.) Sixteen. All just like me.

FATHER Just like you?

SON Yeah, the real people. Not like those zombies out there.

MIDWIFE (Enters as a stalking zombie.)

SON Not like those zombies who are trying to take away our — our —

MIDWIFE (stalking, trying to grab the celery) Give me your celery! (with swipe at FATHER) your male celery.

SON No, we're the good people. Normal. Farmers, ranchers, cowhands, not the corporate zombies like that! We made this country what it is!

FATHER (with a real dig) *What* is it?

SON Wait! (Listens melodramatically.) Hear them coyotes? (No sound.) Hear 'em!

FATHER (as though assuring a crazy man) Sure.

SON You don't hear that in the city, do you!

MIDWIFE Give celery!

FATHER (Starts to give it to her.)

SON (getting a rifle) Hands up, both of you!

(FATHER and MIDWIFE put their hands up, dropping the celery everywhere.)

SON (falling to his knees, keeping the rifle trained on them while chomping on the celery, ravenous.) I'm hungry! I'm hungry! I'm a-hungry! (stopping, then out of nowhere) . . . I feel like stealing a toaster!

MIDWIFE (with hands up, looking at the FATHER) Humor him.

FATHER Zeke?

SON I've been arrested for malicious vandalism, breaking and entering, assault with two deadly weapons. I'm the real American!

MIDWIFE I've gotta leave. (Backs off.)

FATHER I thought you were my conscience.

MIDWIFE So you have a bad conscience, what can I say.

SON (to MIDWIFE) Mom? Is that you, Mom?

MIDWIFE (coming back, now a beaten-down, passive woman) Yes, son, it's me.

SON You know what! I want to build me a door!

MIDWIFE You go right ahead, son You build yourself anything you please.

SON Mom!

MIDWIFE Yes, son?

SON I want to slam me a door!

MIDWIFE You go right ahead, boy! Slam away. Your mother gave up long, long ago.

(SON runs off, slams a door. He runs back on. He slams another door or the same one again. They must be *loud* bangs.) (It's possible to use the FATHER 's desk drawer to make the slamming noises.)

SON I feel much better now.

FATHER Good.

SON Now you! (Points toward the slammed door.)

FATHER Me?

SON How will I know you're my father otherwise?

FATHER I don't want to slam a door.

SON Slam it! (Threatens with the rifle.)

FATHER This is crazy. (He goes over, slams a door. The noise isn't very loud.)

SON (Wields the rifle.) Another one. Prove who you are.

FATHER (Slams a door again, but it's quieter still) Okay?

SON I don't know yet. You didn't do it right! My father would do it right! (Suddenly the SON starts rummaging through the FATHER's apartment, emptying drawers, tipping chairs over, throwing papers everywhere, general MAYHEM.)

SON That's how my real father would do it.

FATHER Did not having a father make you like this?

SON (suddenly vulnerable) Yeah, he fucked me over but good! But good!

FATHER Because I wasn't around? Is that what you mean? (with dig at MIDWIFE) Or because your mother *was*?

MIDWIFE (to SON) Which was it?

SON (Takes drink.) But I grew up strong, right? A real man! (Bangs rifle on floor.) A man-man!

FATHER Zeke, you don't seem to catch on. I'm your father.

SON (listening hard) Hear that?

FATHER The coyotes?

SON No! The '49 Packard coming over the hill. (Makes loud car sounds.) Zoom! Zoom! ZOOOOOOOM! Zoom! Zoom! (to FATHER, dreamy) Did I ever tell you the about the time I was out castrating the neighbor boys?

FATHER I don't think so.

SON Yup, there I was cuttin' off their balls and throwing them up on the roof of this shed. It was one of them beautiful days when balls really look good up on a shed. Then suddenly after about my fifth boy, I seen this shadow up in the sky. And I looked up and seen this huge bird coming at me. It was a robin. But huge! And this here gigantic robin comes hurtling down at me and grabs those boy balls in his beak and flies off to feed its young. Later it came back and stood on that shed and chirped at me. Just chirped and . . . chirped. And ever since then nothing's been the same for me. (Makes a slow-witted chirping sound twice.)

FATHER That's profound. (to MIDWIFE) What does it mean?

MIDWIFE (downcast) Beats me.

FATHER How about a drink, boy?

SON (turning quickly) Daddy? Is that you?

FATHER (Takes flask from SON.) I'm trying to tell ya. What more proof do you want? (Takes a drink.)

SON (getting up) I know how I can tell. I know! (Approaches FATHER slowly.

When he gets to him, he suddenly takes off his baseball cap and puts it on the FATHER) Daddy, it's *you*!

FATHER (taking the rifle out of SON's drunken hand) I'll just have this as a memento of this time together.

SON (Seizes FATHER around the legs and won't let go) I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!

FATHER (stumbling) Wait a minute now.

SON You're the best dad a guy could ever have! You're down-to-earth. You're the salt of the earth. You're the earth of the earth. You're the spit in the wind. You're —

FATHER Calm down now.

SON (holding FATHER's legs) I'll never let go of your legs again! I forgive you for the terrible way you neglected me.

FATHER Wait a minute now. I don't want your forgiveness. You weren't any worse off than any other son who loses his father for whatever reason. The world is unfair, and we make the best of it. . . .

SON You tom cat!

FATHER I have something I want to tell you, son.

MIDWIFE (a warning) Uh oh!

SON Tell me?

FATHER About myself.

SON (irritated) Yeah?

FATHER (after steeling himself) Your father is gay.

SON (after a take) My father is gay?

FATHER I know we can come to some understanding about this.

SON Understanding? (removing his arms from FATHER's legs) Why, you goddamn queer!

FATHER Now, son. You seem like . . . an intelligent person —

SON I wouldn't be intelligent if I was the last person on earth! Why don't you act right? Huh? Why don't you act like me? Huh? (Puts his arm around FATHER's head in a condescending way.) Let me walk you around this room until you get straight. (Walks him) You need a good talkin' to. That's what you need. You need some lessons in how to behave, boy! That's all you need! You got me, boy?

FATHER (pulling away) Yeah, that's what the world really needs — macho fuckheads like you! You do so much for the goddamn world, you do! (Grabs the rifle.) I ought to shoot you. Not that it would make that much difference 'cause they are so many of you in the goddamned world already. But I'll feel better.

MIDWIFE (as the MIDWIFE) Okay, this is getting out of hand. This is a comedy.

FATHER Is it? Is it?

MIDWIFE Put that rifle down. Before you hurt somebody.

FATHER I want to hurt somebody! The way I've been hurt.

MIDWIFE No, you don't.

FATHER Yes, I do! You don't know me.

MIDWIFE I know you. You're a gentle man — inside.

FATHER (with a snort) Is this what happens when there's too much male? Or is it too much female? Or not enough of each? Or is it something —

MIDWIFE All I know is you don't want to kill him. (pointing to SON) Your only son?

FATHER But I don't like him!

SON You don't *like* me?

FATHER (to MIDWIFE, about his feelings) Is this common?

MIDWIFE Most people don't admit it.

FATHER Is that why people have several children? That way, at least one of them might turn out right? It's just a matter of the chemistry. The right son with the right father! Is that too much to ask?

MIDWIFE Have you thought of getting counseling? Talking to someone?

FATHER Oh, crap!

MIDWIFE What way do you want your son to turn out?

FATHER Not just any old way. Not "just as long as he's happy" — that junk. Something special.

MIDWIFE And do you think you're special?

FATHER (going over to SON) Why do I have to accept any child I get? Anyway he turns out! That's sentimental. What are human beings for? To eat and shit and reproduce? So the next generation can eat and shit and reproduce? Is that what we're for? To use up all the world's goods and leave garbage behind?

MIDWIFE Were you loved as a child?

FATHER Cheap shot!

MIDWIFE Did you love your parents?

FATHER We lived in the same house. I guess that means I loved them.

MIDWIFE You don't sound very positive.

FATHER Sure, I "loved" my parents, but I would never have chosen them as friends!

MIDWIFE Do you think a son of yours would love you?

FATHER I don't think a child understands the way a parent loves a child, because the child isn't a parent, only a child. Does that make any sense? (to his SON) Only a parent fully understands those feelings of tenderness and concern and protection

—

SON (as baby) Goo-goo! (then makes a sputtering, dismissive sound) *Peww!*

(The SON gets up and walks off deliberately in the middle of his speech to get a lasso. FATHER shakes his head.)

FATHER Look at that! What I'm trying to say is that as a child I never truly felt the same warmth about my parents. I used to catch my mother smiling fondly at me when she thought I wasn't looking. Even my father. I didn't know why they were doing it. But now I think I understand. It was because they had made me. I was their creation!

MIDWIFE It's time you stopped worrying so much about what your son is like and a little more about what you are like.

FATHER (loudly) I don't want to hear!

(SON brings in his lasso, which he proceeds to throw around his FATHER, more than once.)

SON In my man-grief at findin' out my daddy's a faggot, and after listening to the celery grow, and after destroying something valuable, I've decided —

FATHER (standing up, over-reacting) No more posturing, obnoxious males, please! No more tragic white trash!

SON Dad, I knew that one day you'd come back.

FATHER (weary) And are you finally glad to see me?

SON I've got to sort these things out. Didn't I ever tell you about the time I went searchin' for my real father?

FATHER I don't want to hear another soliloquy! *Jesus!*

SON (ignoring him, searching) I left home on my souped-up Harley when I was sixteen and started searchin' in a grubby little motel in East Los Angeles, because I'd heard you was there . . . You fuckin' weren't. Then I hopped a Trailways bus to Modesto City. Someone said you were working there in a 7-Eleven store as a cashier who'd been shot. A *lie!* But I kept searchin'. Always searchin'. "Who is my daddy?" kept poundin' in my head! (banging his hand on his head) Who? Who? *WHO???*

FATHER Finished? (lassoed) And now that you've found me?

SON No, I don't want a homo for a father! I can't live with it! I'm going to drink bad booze and kill myself! (SON takes a bottle marked BAD BOOZE out of his pocket.)

FATHER (ironic) But you can't do that, not now that we're together at last!

SON (trembling) You're not what I thought you'd be!

FATHER (trembling, mocking) What did you think I'd be?

SON I don't know. Better! Not queer!

FATHER Talented, sensitive, productive, and generally non-violent men aren't good enough for you?

SON (Puts bottle to his lips.) Goodbye, Daddy! (He drinks booze and falls to floor. He writhes and retches in an exaggerated way.) I'm a-goin'!

MIDWIFE He's a-goin'.

SON I'm a-goin'!

MIDWIFE (to FATHER) I think maybe he's a-goin'.

FATHER I got the message.

SON I'm a . . . I'm a goner!

(He croaks, legs twitching in the air.)

MIDWIFE (trying not to laugh) He's a goner.

FATHER (turning sharply to the MIDWIFE) Don't trivialize my life!

MIDWIFE I'm just standing here!

FATHER You think my problems are just something to laugh at.

MIDWIFE Nothing I do seems to satisfy you! (nodding at twitching SON) Your son's dying.

FATHER No, he's not! He's got at least five more obscure soliloquies left. (to SON) Get up! Be real!

SON (getting up) What is it that you want from me, Father?

FATHER I spend all this time and energy and this is all I get?

MIDWIFE (as herself, to SON) You, out! Your visit with your father is over.

(SON jumps up, confronts the MIDWIFE.)

SON (having a vision, out of nowhere) I reckon I'll go now and lasso me a poodle!

(He leaps up, kicks his heels, and exits.)

MIDWIFE He always was a fireball!

FATHER (Still tied up.) I'm not finished with him!

MIDWIFE Yes, you are.

FATHER (struggling to get free) I have a lot more to say. I want some seriousness here! I will not take this any longer! I will not.

MIDWIFE No, I have a lot more to say! You want to hear it? Well, you're going to whether you want to or not. With every son you've had there's been something wrong with him. He was too this or he was too that. He didn't love you. You didn't want him. Enough already! You can't be satisfied. Goodbye. It's over. I'm sorry we met.

FATHER Is that all? That's the end?

MIDWIFE In seeking your son, did you at least find yourself?

FATHER (thinking) Maybe I did. A little bit, yes.

MIDWIFE (disgusted) No, you didn't! Not even close!

FATHER What do you mean?

MIDWIFE You've been through all this, and you still don't see it?

FATHER See what?

MIDWIFE How do you *feel*?

FATHER Great! (bitingly) How do *you* feel?

MIDWIFE I've tried to lead you gently all this time. I've even tried to keep you from the train that's coming now, you self-satisfied bastard!

FATHER Hey, wait a minute!

MIDWIFE What did you expect your child to be?

FATHER Nothing. I'm sorry I asked. It didn't work out. I don't have a son. You didn't fulfill your side of the contract. That's just fine with me. (Starts to leave.)

MIDWIFE You want reality? You want depth? Try this on for size. Let's take a look inside the great masculine mind. (Tries to touch his head.)

FATHER Stay away from me, you!

MIDWIFE Can't take it? "Give me this son, give me that son!" You don't know the first thing about having a child! It's work. And the rewards are very uncertain!

FATHER Is that the great message you've got to tell me?

MIDWIFE You want to know more than that? How much more?

FATHER What do you mean?

MIDWIFE You know what I mean. Can't you take it?

FATHER I can take anything you can give.

MIDWIFE I want you to say it. Or shall I say it? Yeah, let me say it.

FATHER (his pain starts) No!

MIDWIFE Then you say it. (loudly) Say it! Daddy. Mister. Dick! Head! (The MIDWIFE slaps or pushes the FATHER.) Say it!

FATHER (Gives out with a scream of pain, a pain deeper, louder than warranted by the slap or push) AHHH!

MIDWIFE More.

FATHER AHH! I . . . (Grabs in own body.)

MIDWIFE It's coming out. Breathe deeply.

FATHER (in a labor of the mind, breathing hard, building, building the breaths, as though he's having a baby himself, played believably as though in physical pain.) No! It hurts! It hurts! (Holds himself, breathing hard.)

MIDWIFE Good. You'll remember it. What is it? What is it?

FATHER Go away. Leave me alone!

MIDWIFE No more leaving. You knew all the time that you couldn't get rid of me. You needed me. You need me right now.

FATHER . . . No.

MIDWIFE Yes. To deliver you! Is there a human being there? Are you there yet? Are you there yet?

(The FATHER collapses, breathing hard.)

FATHER *AHH!* . . .

(The MIDWIFE lays her hands on his head or body, assisting in the birth.)

MIDWIFE Say it. You say it.

FATHER (almost crying) I . . . I wanted all the good in having a child.

MIDWIFE And?

FATHER (painfully) And none of the bad.

MIDWIFE More.

FATHER No more!

MIDWIFE Lots more! . . . You know it has to come out.

FATHER (slowly, crying) . . . I'm not very loving or generous. No son would have been good enough.

MIDWIFE Yes?

FATHER And I'm not as nice a person as I thought I was. (hurting) Very selfish.

MIDWIFE And?

FATHER It's a good thing I never had the chance to raise any child, any at all. I couldn't even get one right. I'm a failure as a father!

(This admission costs the FATHER a lot. The MIDWIFE enjoys her victory quietly; the FATHER is wrung out. Both are.)

MIDWIFE (after a pause) You want me to contradict you?

FATHER (hoping she will, but knowing she shouldn't) It's just hard to live with, that's all.

MIDWIFE Think of it as though you just had a baby. You've got to deal with who it is. (hammering it in) You've got to deal — not with the one you want but the one you *get*, the best way you can!

FATHER . . . I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MIDWIFE You've had a son who wanted to kill you, a stupid son, a gay one you wanted to

kill, a gay-hating, violent, crazy one — all your worst fears come to life. Such a raving pessimist you are!

FATHER What can I say?

MIDWIFE (feeling generous after her victory) You know something? I'm not so sure myself anymore what's the best way to raise a kid. (thoughtful) It's all a matter of individuals, isn't it? Individuals and mystery . . . I'm so, so tired of this man/woman stuff between us.

FATHER God, are you ever right!

MIDWIFE (giving in, being kind) You want one more try?

FATHER Could I? Could I?

MIDWIFE Just a teeny weeny one. (calling offstage) Can you come back one last time? The son he's really and truly going to have?

SON (offstage) I think so.

MIDWIFE Somebody here wants to meet you.

SON Who is it?

MIDWIFE Your father. (to FATHER) No encores! Try harder this time, okay? This is the very last child this midwife is going to deliver! If you can't get this one right, then . . . (Shakes head, exits.)

(The FATHER takes a deep breath, readies himself, somewhat apprehensive, as though meeting his grown-up son for the very first time.)

(The SON enters, casually dressed in contemporary clothes, looking ordinary, dressed like the Father. He's a little nervous, tentative, like the FATHER. The scene is realistic.)

SON Well, hello there.

FATHER Hello.

SON (ironically) Long time, no see.

FATHER Right . . .

SON How goes it?

FATHER Pretty good. And you?

SON Pretty good.

(Awkward pause between them.)

SON How about this weather we've been having! Something, huh?

FATHER . . . I'm sorry it's taken us so long to get to meet. I tried once when you were a baby.

SON (smiling) Did you? I guess I was too young to remember.

FATHER Didn't work out.

SON We're meeting now. Finally.

FATHER Do you resent me?

SON Resent you? . . . I'm working on it. A lot of fathers and sons spend all their lives together, and they still find it hard to talk.

FATHER It's a real problem. Would you like a cup of —

SON — There's a little coffee shop down the street. I don't have to get back for — for a while.

FATHER Let's go then.

SON I must say I've been pretty curious about you.

FATHER (Smiles.) Me too, about you. Boy, have I been curious.

SON You seem nice.

FATHER So do you. Are you?

SON I guess I'm reasonably together. As much as anybody. (He shrugs, grins.)

FATHER I've worried about you. I've wanted . . . But never mind what I wanted. Tell me about yourself, the way you are.

SON Have a job. Like to sail. Nothing too creepy about me — I think. Except that I want to be a writer.

FATHER Being a writer isn't that easy a professional —

SON But Mom told me you're a writer!

FATHER (quietly so that the MIDWIFE won't hear) Now I know I said I wouldn't try to influence you, but *this* is different! Do you really want it? The rejection slips, the bad reviews after all your work?

SON Yeah, I want it. Really want it.

FATHER It doesn't pay. It — (secretly pleased) A writer, huh? Well. Maybe I can give you a few tips. But only if *you* want it.

SON (excited) Would you like to start with a seven-hundred-page novel I'm working on?

FATHER (jokingly) Now I can't really encourage you in this . . .

(They start to leave, take a few steps. Each gestures for the other to go first, like "After you, Alphonse." Then both stop, half turn toward each other, uncertain.)

FATHER How about that hug I never got to give you?

(The SON hesitates. Then they hug. It's a strong, full hug.)

SON (fighting back tears) Dad!

FATHER (also fighting tears, sincerely) My boy! My baby!

(They hug, both happy and sad. It should be done realistically and touchingly.)

SON (looking at himself and his FATHER as he pulls away, tears in his eyes) Dad, this is schmaltz. We've got to work on it.

(The MIDWIFE enters, looks at them, smiles.)

MIDWIFE (calling to FATHER) Hey, you!

FATHER (a bit afraid) What? What now?

MIDWIFE Here's your book on the history of theater for Random House. You finished it!

FATHER I did? When?

MIDWIFE (teasing) *I* ghostwrote it.

FATHER No, you didn't!

MIDWIFE Show it to your kid. (She throws it to FATHER. He catches it) I think he'll like it.

FATHER Okay, I will!

(Shows it to SON, who approves.)

MIDWIFE /

SON (waving goodbye to the FATHER as they start to exit) See how easy art is!

FATHER Thanks, Art! (To MIDWIFE) Thank you! More than I can say.

(The MIDWIFE acknowledges his thanks.)

(Waves to SON) See ya later, kid?

SON Of course. Dad. . . . Soon?

FATHER . . . Soon.

(SON waves and exits.)

FATHER (Wipes some sweat from his brow, smiles) *Whew!* (Now back in real time, he holds up the finished book in triumph.) It's finished!

(Lights out.)

END OF PLAY

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