

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench.co.uk

Samuel French Acting Edition

The Open House

by Will Eno

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

SAMUELFRENCH.CO.UK

Copyright © 2014 by Will Eno
All Rights Reserved
Cover Image © Romakoma, Shutterstock

THE OPEN HOUSE is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-70309-6

www.SamuelFrench.com

www.SamuelFrench.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Info@SamuelFrench.com

1-866-598-8449

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPE

Plays@SamuelFrench.co.uk

020-7255-4302

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *THE OPEN HOUSE* may not be licensed by Samuel French in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Samuel French office or licensing partner to verify availability.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *THE OPEN HOUSE* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play(s) does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to Samuel French before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title(s) is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Professional/Stock licensing fees are quoted upon application to Samuel French.

No one shall make any changes in this title(s) for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title(s), or part of this title(s), to any social media websites.

For all enquiries regarding motion picture, television, and other media rights, please contact Samuel French.

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Samuel French, against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees. Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

THE OPEN HOUSE was first produced by the Signature Theatre at the Romulus Linney Courtyard Theatre in New York City on February 11, 2014. The performance was directed by Oliver Butler, with sets by Antje Ellermann, costumes by Bobby Frederick Tilley II, lighting by David Lander, sound by M.L. Dogg. The Production Stage Manager was Donald Fried. The cast was as follows:

DAUGHTER. Hannah Bos
UNCLE Michael Countryman
FATHER. Peter Friedman
SON Danny McCarthy
MOTHER. Carolyn McCormick

CHARACTERS

Each actor plays two roles, though only the first character should be listed in the program.

FATHER and **CHARLES** – late 50s-60s

MOTHER and **MELISSA** – late 50s-60s

DAUGHTER and **ANNA** – late 20s-30s

SON and **TOM** – late 20s-30s

UNCLE and **BRIAN** – 50s-60s

SETTING

A family room, somewhat drably and monochromatically decorated and wallpapered (beige?), not particularly beautifully lit. A couch, center, and an upholstered chair, stage left. Some small end tables. A door to the outside, upstage right. A bay window, with the curtains and shades drawn. A stairway, upstage. A closet door, stage left. A door, upstage, to another room. Perhaps there's an old dog bed downstage to the side somewhere. This is a normal family room, in a normal house.

PRODUCTION NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In the original Signature Theatre production of the play, director Oliver Butler and the cast created an opening moment in which, as the house lights were fading, Mother wheeled Father onto stage, accompanied by a very nice sound cue of classical music and New-England-ish sounds, such as lawnmowers and bicycle bells and birds. Once Father was in his spot, and Mother was seated in her chair, the lights faded down to black, and then, just three or four seconds later, the lights bumped up, as the music cue sharply ended, to reveal everyone, with Uncle (standing), and Daughter and Son (seated on the couch) being very still. There was a nice pause before Mother's first line. The three actors got onto stage in just slightly less time than one would think was physically possible. I found this to be a very strong, simple, and also startling beginning of the play. If directors want to do something different, I hope that they and their actors can find an opening moment that is simple and straightforward, but also slightly jarring, as this was.

In the first part of the play, where we meet the original family, there is probably not a lot of motion – the Father presides over the room from his wheelchair, the Mother (sincerely) offers food and drink, but never rises to get it, the Uncle remains standing, moving quietly and unnoticeably around the room, like a guest at a fancy party he wasn't directly invited to, and the Daughter and Son try to act as if they belong, but remain alert and wary. Probably, it is a "shoes off" sort of household. Despite the stillness, there is still a lot of tension, as each tries to manage the circumstance of "today," which is both new, because of Father's recent episode and because they are not often all together, and ancient, as they have all related to each other in a similar way for many years.

A thought on the Father character: it would probably be easy to make him into a cartoon, but it is best if he is played, instead, as a real person who just happens to be highly unkind and uncaring. He is someone who is probably in constant low-grade pain, and has needs just like the rest of the family, though he is unable to recognize and state those needs clearly. He inflicts his cruelty with minimal effort. If he can hurt someone with a word or two, sharply delivered, he will do it that way, rather than raising his voice and showing demonstrable anger.

A thought on the Mother character: she generally believes herself to be a caring and good mother, but perhaps because of her circumstances, she has developed some very deep defenses, so that, though her delivery may sound caring and concerned, she establishes very hard and strict limits on what can and cannot be said, on what feelings and emotional areas are allowed in the house.

Though there may be a formality and even a crispness to the way the family speaks to each other, they are also just human beings, trying to deal with life and each other. By that I mean to say that actors must find, as they always must find, a way to speak the lines so that they just sound like people.

When Anna, played by the actress who plays Daughter, enters, this is the beginning of a profound transformation, though it should begin slyly and quietly. That is, she should not charge in and immediately start transforming the room. In the Signature Theatre production, we used some magic battery-powered fake flowers that bloomed over the course of the last half-hour of the play. I'm sure many people did not notice this, but I mention it because I think attention to little details like this, things that slowly and almost unnoticeably accumulate, so that by the end of the play, the audience is looking at a different room filled with different people, can make for a very powerful experience.

I have heard interesting things from people about what *The Open House* represents. Some people have said it was the story of being born into one family, and perhaps through a husband or wife or through loving friends, finding yourself in another happier family. Some people have said it was about depression and how it can feel like the world is one seemingly unchanging beige room, without much air or movement in it, that slowly changes and becomes miraculously something colorful and hopeful. Some people have said it was a hard and true view of the very real Darwinian process that all of us participate in, in which we are here, and then suddenly, we are gone, replaced by other people. Somebody sent me a video about the Multiverse Theory and others mentioned Reincarnation. I think a simple but very detailed and specific production is best, in terms of evoking and allowing for these varied responses.

to the fleeting but perfect family of the Signature Theatre production

THE OPEN HOUSE

(Lights up on MOTHER, FATHER, DAUGHTER, SON, and UNCLE.)

(FATHER is in a wheelchair and has a blanket over his legs.)

(He is reading a newspaper.)

(See production notes, for details related to the play's opening moment.)

MOTHER. Well, I'll just say it again, it's wonderful having you all here.

(Pause. A dog barks, off-stage.)

FATHER. Would someone let the dog in.

SON. I'll get her.

(SON exits through the door, closes it. Calls out something that sounds like a dog's name.)

(from off-stage, muffled:) Vralen!

(He whistles and claps.)

DAUGHTER. Does anyone want anything? Coffee or anything?

MOTHER. I should be offering *you* a cup of coffee.

DAUGHTER. *(brief pause)* So, is there some?

SON. *(from off-stage, muffled:)* Hey girl!

DAUGHTER. Is there any already made?

MOTHER. Your father and I stopped drinking it. There might be some tea, though.

DAUGHTER. That's all right. Do you have any herbal tea?

MOTHER. I can take a look.

(SON jiggles door handle, from outside, knocks quietly a couple times. This is a household where the door is always locked. UNCLE opens door for him. He re-enters.)

FATHER. *(looking at SON)* Sorry – all I see is a human being.

SON. She's gone. The dog's gone.

DAUGHTER. She was just there.

FATHER. Did you close the door?

SON. Yeah.

MOTHER. Is she under the porch?

FATHER. I'm supposed to be resting.

SON. No, I looked under there.

FATHER. I'm not supposed to get upset.

DAUGHTER. *(to FATHER:)* We can find the dog without you getting upset.

FATHER. *(getting upset:)* And how is that?

MOTHER. Well, we're just going to have to –

FATHER. *(interrupting:)* Just going to have to, what? Oh, I'd love to hear how that ends.

MOTHER. We'll find the dog. It's not the end of the world.

FATHER. Who said anything about the... my God. Doesn't anyone in this family... And so now I guess she just upped and magically... I can't breathe. God... Can somebody please –

(DAUGHTER moves to him.)

DAUGHTER. Are you all right?

(FATHER regains his composure, returns to his newspaper:)

FATHER. I'm okay. If anyone cares.

DAUGHTER. I came right to your side.

MOTHER. I didn't think you wanted anyone to embarrass you.

DAUGHTER. I asked right away if you were all right.

FATHER. Yes, we all heard you say that. Let's move on. *(to SON:)* Now, what were you going on about?

SON. *(normally)* I just said, "She's gone."

MOTHER. Okay but you don't have to get angry.

SON. Why do you think I'm - . I went out there and looked and then I came back in.

FATHER. I forgive you, son.

SON. For what?

FATHER. Let me get back to this, okay? *(disappears behind newspaper)*

MOTHER. She seemed fine the other day.

FATHER. *(from behind newspaper)* She's a very smart dog.

MOTHER. We could probably start without her. Listen to me: "start without her." Like she's a stenographer or something.

FATHER. Start what?

MOTHER. But she's family, you know? She should be here. *(to FATHER:)* I didn't mean to say "start."

UNCLE. *(Brief general pause. His first line:)* She'll come back.

FATHER. Well, hello there. What's the matter - cat let go of your tongue? *(brief pause)* What's the matter - cat got your tongue?

UNCLE. I was, no, I was trying to say something positive.

FATHER. Just try to keep your tongue away from the cat, okay?

UNCLE. Okay. All you had to do was ask.

MOTHER. We don't have a cat. *(very brief pause)* Although, there was a time this whole place was a zoo. Remember? You all brought home every little wounded thing and asked if we could keep it. *(to DAUGHTER:)* You were so cute with that rabbit that got hit by the car. You carried it around the house and said, "It's hurt, just like me." It was like an animal hospital around here.

DAUGHTER. I wasn't trying to be cute.

MOTHER. No, I know.

FATHER. A zoo or an animal hospital? Because you said both.

UNCLE. I remember thinking all those animals might contribute to a, or, just, I thought it would give the kids a good sense of animals.

FATHER. How many times do I have to ask you to never think about this family?

UNCLE. (*very brief pause*) This is actually the first I'm hearing of it.

FATHER. (*sounding sincere:*) Oh, sorry – I thought I'd asked you about that.

MOTHER. She turned up in a snowstorm. A little puppy on the doorstep in the snow.

DAUGHTER. (*to FATHER:*) Do you remember that?

FATHER. One of the happiest days of my life. (*to SON:*) What are you looking at?

UNCLE. Lot of good memories bundled up in that animal. She did get nervous, though. With the peeing and the shaking.

FATHER. That was probably because of the previous owners. Who knows what kind of a household she ran away from. (*to SON:*) What were you looking at?

MOTHER. That was the happiest day of your life?

(*She takes out a pill from a pill bottle and puts it and a glass of water in front of FATHER.*)

I'm going to miss that dog.

DAUGHTER. She hasn't been gone that long. Maybe she went for a walk.

FATHER. The dog can walk herself? What have I been doing all these years?

(*He takes his pill and drinks some water.*)

SON. What did you think you were doing?

FATHER. I don't know – stunting your growth?

MOTHER. Nobody stunted anybody's anything.

SON. (*brief pause*) I'm going to take another look.

(He exits.)

(as before:) Vralen!

(He whistles and claps.)

DAUGHTER. It's good to be home. *(brief pause)* I don't think there's a rule that says we have to wait here in silence.

FATHER. *(Brief pause. Staring at her.)* No?

(Brief pause. SON enters holding a chewy dog toy.)

SON. Yeah, she's gone. There's just this thing she was chewing on and some fur stuck in the fence.

FATHER. Who are you, Sherlock Holmes?

SON. I'm just telling you what I saw.

FATHER. No, seriously – I don't know who you are. Is your name Sherlock?

SON. *(earnestly and with some concern:)* I'm your son.

FATHER. *(brief pause)* What do you want, a medal?

DAUGHTER. She loves all those chewy things.

MOTHER. I did not think I'd spend today thinking about *this*.

FATHER. Well, we've done everything we can. I mean, I haven't. I certainly haven't. *(to SON:)* Forget what I said.

MOTHER. Maybe we should have a conversation about getting another dog. Oh, I'll miss her.

DAUGHTER. Shouldn't we just go look for her, first?

UNCLE. I'll go out in a bit. We'll find her. Ouch. Splinter.

(He's suddenly noticed a splinter in his hand, and begins trying to get it out.)

But, you know, old house, splintery banisters. No one to blame but myself.

FATHER. Exactly. *(brief pause)* What's today?

DAUGHTER. Tuesday. *(or whatever day it presently is.)*

FATHER. It feels like a Thursday *(or whatever is two days later).*

DAUGHTER. It's Tuesday.

FATHER. I heard you. Why did I get out of bed?

MOTHER. Well, it's our anniversary.

FATHER. Other than that.

DAUGHTER. Isn't that enough of a reason? And we came home to see you.

SON. Happy anniversary.

DAUGHTER. (*handing MOTHER a wrapped gift*) Yeah, happy anniversary, Mom and Dad.

MOTHER. Oh, you shouldn't have done that. Thank you, okay? I mean it. It's very thoughtful. Well, this is just a delight.

(*She sets the gift down, unopened.*)

(*to FATHER:*) See? You got out of bed for all this celebration.

FATHER. How long have we been married? Wait, don't tell me. (*He goes back to reading his newspaper.*)

MOTHER. (*brief pause*) Are you going to try?

FATHER. Try what?

MOTHER. Are you going to try guessing how long?

FATHER. I'm sure it's written down somewhere.

UNCLE. (*trying to remove the splinter*) Time is crazy. One minute, you're standing on the deck of an ocean liner with your heart beating out of your chest and all the smoke and cathedrals of Europe at your back... (*distracted by the splinter*) I hope this isn't infected... it looks like it's really been in there for a while. (*removes splinter*) There we go. I think I got it.

MOTHER. Oh, good. Do you want some of that first-aid spray?

UNCLE. No, I'll just make sure to wash up. (*brief pause*) Auughh. This is so frustrating – now there's this song I can't get out of my head.

FATHER. (*very brief pause*) I don't hear anything.

UNCLE. I feel like I'm possessed. It just keeps going around and around and, actually, wow – it's gone.

FATHER. Do you really have to say things? Would the world stop?

UNCLE. Probably not. Although, not to be funny, but, who's to say that the world –

FATHER. (*interrupting:*) Somebody else! Somebody else!

DAUGHTER. But, so, yeah, congratulations.

MOTHER. Well, thank you, okay? I remember one year, on our Anniversary, we went – I was so surprised— but, your father took me out to –

FATHER. (*interrupting:*) I had French Onion soup.

MOTHER. You remember?

FATHER. Now you're questioning me?

MOTHER. I'm asking you a question.

FATHER. (*to no one in particular:*) Do you see what I have to put up with?

UNCLE. Who are you talking to?

FATHER. Not you.

SON. That's the same restaurant that...(*quietly but sharply, in pain, as he tries to straighten out his body on the couch:*) Jesus. Owww.

FATHER. It'll pass, son. (*very brief pause*) Whatever it is.

SON. Wow. Sorry. God. I had a leg cramp.

FATHER. We don't need to know the details.

MOTHER. Are you all right? You know, I just remembered, Lucy Paquette had terrible leg cramps.

DAUGHTER. Who's Lucy Paquette?

FATHER. Your mother learns people's names and then when one of you kids gets hurt or has some feelings, she'll talk about that person for a while.

MOTHER. Now that's just ridiculous.

FATHER. You know what, don't listen to me. (*sort of an imitation of Darth Vader:*) "I'm your father."

MOTHER. And who are you now? Is that one of your impressions? (*brief pause*) Sometimes, they kept her up all night. Lucy. Doctors said it was a potassium deficiency.

FATHER. (*said as if he means "I rest my case":*) *Cogito ergo sum.*

UNCLE. Don't you mean *Quod Erat Demonstrandum*?

FATHER. You're still here?

DAUGHTER. (*to UNCLE:*) I always thought it was great you learned Latin.

UNCLE. They said I was a fool to study Latin, but, where are they now?

FATHER. Probably at work.

UNCLE. We had to pick a new language or a hobby. It was a big part of my recovery.

FATHER. Yes, it was. And you've done very well with that.

UNCLE. (*Brief pause. Waiting for sarcasm.*) Thank you. I thought you were going to make fun of me.

FATHER. Yeah, I don't know what happened there. But anyway, yeah, you did good.

MOTHER. (*to UNCLE:*) Yes, huzzah, for how you faced that whole part of your life, okay? Huzzah. Anyway, that year on our anniversary, we went out for the most wonderful lunch. What was the name of that place? It was right down the street from that couple.

FATHER. The Rusty Scupper.

MOTHER. The Rusty Scupper. And what was their name? It sounded Greek but it wasn't.

FATHER. Temos.

MOTHER. Temos. Holly and Paul Temos. There was a little lake out in front of the restaurant and I remember the light, we went at the perfect time of day, and it was just so pretty, with the light just kind of –

FATHER. (*interrupting:*) Opalescent.

MOTHER. What? Opalescent? I guess it was that. That's my spokesman, over there. Holly and Paul took care of the dog, when your father was in the hospital, last year. They didn't call me back, this time. They loved having her, though.

DAUGHTER. Why didn't they call back?

MOTHER. Do you know what, I'm not sure. I don't think it's a very happy home, so they're probably busy with that. *(to FATHER:)* Did you see, I set out a coat and tie for you.

FATHER. Don't call me "dear."

DAUGHTER. She didn't.

FATHER. I know, I'm just saying, don't. And I can dress myself.

MOTHER. Well, you do have some trouble. It's nothing to be embarrassed about, we all need a little help.

FATHER. You always thought you were very helpful.

MOTHER. Is that – I don't know what you're saying.

FATHER. Nothing. *(He ends the following so it sounds like a diminishing echo.)* I am saying nothing – nothing, nothing, nothing.

MOTHER. So now you're, what, you're pretending you're a canyon? I don't know how he wants me to react. *(with some positivity:)* But, I guess it keeps things interesting. *(A general pause. No one responds. SON coughs or clears his throat, quietly.)*

DAUGHTER. *(to MOTHER:)* What were you going to say about the lunch place?

MOTHER. Oh, I don't know. *(very brief pause)* You know, the second I woke up, I felt, ah, this is a Tuesday *(or whatever day it is)*. But it also felt special. And I wanted it to be special. I was having an egg in the kitchen and the birds were chirping and I was getting ready to read my book. Then your father made some comment about how ugly the sunrise was and how he hated the smell of paper. And all the muscles in my back just knotted right up.

DAUGHTER. You should get a massage.

FATHER. Maybe I should, yeah.

DAUGHTER. I meant Mom.

FATHER. It's not important who you meant.

MOTHER. And this is my life. I sat there and thought, “Is this really my life?” Do you know I was a tomboy, when I was a girl?

FATHER. As you know, I’m not a talkative man, but, since we’re all here... The day I met your mother, it was a day very like today, a normal day –

DAUGHTER. (*interrupting:*) No, Dad, come on.

FATHER. A normal day with nothing especially promising in sight. Other than a girl in the distance in a hat and dress. She was beautiful and I wanted to say something. Hello, I said. It just came to me, right off the top of my head. Hello, she said. We walked into the Boston Common. We watched the swan boats. I held her hand in the sun. I was so happy. The day, like every other, no matter whether it’s unlike any other, ended. We bid adieu. On the way home, I met your mother here. We talked a little, probably went out to dinner a few times. Then her mother died of pneumonia and we got married. Hence, you two. And my brother became an uncle. His only accomplishment— correct me if I’m wrong – to date. And there we are, in a nutshell. Your origin story.

UNCLE. I’ve had other accomplishments.

(**FATHER** chuckles to himself.)

DAUGHTER. (*to MOTHER*) Doesn’t it bother you when he talks like that?

MOTHER. Well, to be honest, it does. He always tells it differently and I always hope it’s going to be me in the first part. (*to FATHER:*) But, I’ve grown accustomed to your voice. “Accustomed” isn’t the right word.

FATHER. It’s a true story – what can I do?

DAUGHTER. Not tell it?

FATHER. Actually, okay, you’ve got a point.

DAUGHTER. And it’s not a true story, anyway.

FATHER. It captures the general feeling.

SON. Since we're talking about this, there's a lot of different ways we could be toward each other.

(FATHER stares at SON for a moment, then yawns.)

FATHER. (*quietly*.) Whoo. Tired.

MOTHER. (*Brief pause. To DAUGHTER:*) Did you come straight from the airport? Have you eaten?

DAUGHTER. I drove here. It's a half-hour away. I don't live in Morganville, anymore.

MOTHER. No, of course, I know that. But have you eaten?

DAUGHTER. I'm fine.

FATHER. (*gently, as if it's fatherly advice:*) Maybe some young man makes you feel like you are, briefly, but, late at night, by yourself, you know it's not the case. You know you're not fine.

DAUGHTER. There's no reason for you to say things like that.

FATHER. No, and yet, here we are.

DAUGHTER. Well, it really hurts.

FATHER. So don't do it.

DAUGHTER. Don't do what?

FATHER. I'm sure they're just jealous.

DAUGHTER. Who?

FATHER. (*something in the newspaper has caught his eye*) Huh. (*He reads.*) "Councilwoman Wanda Perkova to be replaced."

SON. Who's Wanda Perkova?

FATHER. Well, I guess it doesn't matter anymore, does it.

UNCLE. (*brief pause*) Do you know that thing about, "A guy's got to do what a guy's got to do"? I just read this pretty long article about how scientists have discovered that, in fact, no, actually, he doesn't.

FATHER. (*said with enthusiasm, as if he's saying "Interesting."*) Uninteresting.

UNCLE. We think we have to be some certain way, you know?

FATHER. (*amiably agreeing:*) Why can't we just be happy being who we are?

UNCLE. Well, yeah – right.

FATHER. (*stares at UNCLE*) It's so hard to find your way. Speaking of all this, you ever seen this one? It's kind of a fun little parlor trick. (*He goes back to his newspaper. Brief pause. Quietly:*) Ta-da!

DAUGHTER. (*long pause*) Why are we like this?

FATHER. "We"? And what makes you think we're like something? Like what?

DAUGHTER. Like this.

(*Pause. Silence and stillness, from everyone, perhaps an air of tension and anxiety.*)

MOTHER. It's so quiet.

DAUGHTER. What were we like as kids?

MOTHER. You were kids. I don't know. You were great. It's so nice you're all here.

FATHER. You've said that three times, now. It's obviously not that nice, because if it were, then you'd probably just be enjoying the fact, instead of anxiously asserting that it's true.

MOTHER. I'm not asserting anything. And, I don't "do" anxiety, okay? I'm just saying I cherish you all. I cherish you right down to your bones.

FATHER. That's kind of a cold word, isn't it? "Cherish"?

MOTHER. Well, but I mean it, okay?

DAUGHTER. It's good to be home.

FATHER. Yeah, keep saying that. (*very brief pause*) Kind of a greeting card word, "cherish," if you ask me.

SON. (*quietly:*) Nobody did.

MOTHER. I think it's a fine word. "Cherish."

FATHER. (*to SON:*) What did you just say? Excuse me? (*very brief pause*) I know why you're all here. Vultures.

DAUGHTER. How are we vultures?

FATHER. You're here to be nice to me.

DAUGHTER. And?

SON. Yeah, how does that make us vultures?

FATHER. I've raised a bunch of poor people.

DAUGHTER. What?

FATHER. You don't have any money. You're poor. (*brief pause*) You are here to pretend to care, to appear to be kind, so that I don't write you out of the will.

MOTHER. That's ridiculous. As if we've got some huge secret estate. Everyone was worried about you, okay?

DAUGHTER. I don't know why you'd even think that.

FATHER. Assuming I ever wrote you *into* the will.

MOTHER. (*to DAUGHTER and SON:*) Don't worry. You're both very well taken care of.

FATHER. Actually, I changed that.

MOTHER. He's just trying to be threatening.

DAUGHTER. Why would you want to be threatening?

FATHER. (*gently, and with care*) It's not a threat, sweetie. Trust me. Please, I just need you to trust me on this.

DAUGHTER. That you've taken us out of your will?

FATHER. Exactly. Yes. (*to SON:*) It is good to talk about these things, isn't it?

UNCLE. (*points to a chair*) Who gets this?

MOTHER. He has a hard time saying how much he loves you.

FATHER. No, I don't.

DAUGHTER. That isn't what we came home for.

FATHER. No?

DAUGHTER. (*Brief pause. To MOTHER:*) Mom, the yard looks nice.

MOTHER. I try to get out there when I can. I think you all brought the good weather with you.

DAUGHTER. Yeah, we should open the curtains.

FATHER. Keep those closed.

MOTHER. It might be nice to get some sun in here.

FATHER. (*flare-up of anger*) It's not the most complicated idea: bright sun ruins furniture.

MOTHER. I don't think one afternoon of sun would hurt anything.

FATHER. Why don't we just throw it all in a bonfire in the backyard?

MOTHER. Nobody wants to light anything on fire.

FATHER. No?

DAUGHTER. Could we just not fight.

MOTHER. Nobody's fighting.

SON. I wish we did fight.

FATHER. No you do not.

DAUGHTER. Someday, we're not going to be like this anymore.

SON. (*brief pause*) So, can I say something here?

MOTHER. Of course. You can say anything you like. You can talk about the King of Norway, if you want. You know that. Although I hope it's not something about how I'm a terrible mother or how we need to fight. I know you'd never say anything like that.

DAUGHTER. (*to SON:*) Remember, today was just supposed to be about relaxing and being together.

FATHER. Let him talk. What shall my only son pronounce?

MOTHER. What do you mean, your only son? What about Richard?

FATHER. (*quiet but real disdain, as if someone just suggested a food he finds disgusting:*) Bleaghhk.

UNCLE. How is Richard?

DAUGHTER. I haven't talked to him for like a year.

MOTHER. I think he's very busy. (*to SON:*) You should call him sometime, you know? That's just being a good brother.

DAUGHTER. I left him a message for his birthday.

FATHER. Oh, I bet he enjoyed that. (*to SON:*) Weren't you going to say something?

SON. I was just wondering, like...

FATHER. (*brief pause*) "Like." The curse of your generation. I'm, like, sitting here. That wall is, like, beige. Eventually, all distinctions will disappear for you. And you will be, like, gone. (*He starts to chew a fingernail.*) Ouch. Cuticle. Maybe I should use one of those hand creams. (*to SON:*) You know, to moisturize the skin. To prevent dryness. In the hands. (*very brief pause*) Why do I bother opening up my heart to you.

MOTHER. I have hand cream upstairs. Now, is anyone hungry? (*to SON:*) Are you okay? Do you want a nice soup or something?

SON. I'm all right.

FATHER. (*returning to newspaper*) It's supposed to rain.

MOTHER. (*to SON:*) Oh, now don't slump. Sit up nice and straight, son. Let everyone see you.

FATHER. Yeah, let me take a look at my boy. (*He stares for a moment, returns to his newspaper.*) They say we need it, though – rain.

MOTHER. (*brief pause*) Was there any mail out there? I can't remember if I looked, yesterday.

FATHER. What if we got something urgent?

(*DAUGHTER gets up to check.*)

MOTHER. I forgot. Are you expecting something?

FATHER. That's why you look. To see if something is there.

DAUGHTER. (*having leaned out the door to look*) Nope, no mail.

FATHER. See? Now we know.

MOTHER. Just as well. All the terrible news. Who needs it. It's funny. I mean, yes, people can be barbaric, absolutely barbaric.

DAUGHTER. (*very brief pause*) But?

MOTHER. Sorry, hon?

DAUGHTER. People are barbaric, *but?* I thought you were going to say something more.

MOTHER. Well, I never know what you want me to say. And with your father always glaring at me.

FATHER. I stopped glaring at you years ago. (*brief pause*) I'm a real one-note-Johnny, aren't I? Always so cutting and sarcastic.

MOTHER. Is that an apology?

FATHER. I love how your mind works.

MOTHER. (*picking up her book*) Oww. My wrist.

DAUGHTER. You should get that looked at.

MOTHER. Well, I know I should, but, with your father and everything. (*She tries moving her wrist.*) Oww. This just does not go away. Oh, I don't want to read, anyway. That book is just all words. No, but it's interesting. It follows the whole lineage of Scandinavian Royalty. Denmark, Norway, all around there. There was a Viking king named Gorm the Old. (*to SON:*) Would you like it if we had named you "Gorm the Old"? Anyway, there's this whole part about his burial chamber. I guess it was a burial mound, really, which, from tree-dating and carbon, you know, the rings on the trees, they put the date at 958 AD. They found a skeleton in it, a man they think was about five foot seven, but they don't think it was Gorm. All the gold and jewelry was gone, too. Isn't that funny – graverobbers, way back then, people doing things wrong, thousands of years ago. Imagine robbing a grave. Is nothing sacred? His son was Harold. There were a lot of Karls and Margrets too.

DAUGHTER. (*brief pause*) What made you start reading that?

MOTHER. Someone left it here. (*referring to her wrist, as she flexes it:*) This is all right. It's just kind of "there," you know?

(*Very distant sound of an ambulance siren. No one stops to listen or pays it any attention.*)

SON. There's that sports medicine clinic right near the church.

DAUGHTER. Dr. Eckstein. He's great. Remember I went to him when I was training for the marathon?

MOTHER. No, it's all right. It doesn't really bother me.

FATHER. (*brief pause*) The good thing about things like this –

UNCLE. (*interrupting:*) Things like what?

FATHER. Don't interrupt me.

UNCLE. I was just trying to define some terms.

FATHER. Yeah, well, don't. Not in my house.

MOTHER. It's funny the dog picked today to run away.

DAUGHTER. She'll come back.

UNCLE. I'm sure she will.

FATHER. Now I forgot what I was going to say. Wait. (*He listens intently.*) I just heard her collar jingle. Somebody go look.

(UNCLE goes to the door, looks, returns.)

UNCLE. (*in an Irish accent:*) Must've been only the wind.

MOTHER. (*amused*) What is that?

UNCLE. It's probably from a movie or something.

FATHER. So I was wrong, it wasn't the dog's collar. I can admit when I've made a mistake. (*refers to MOTHER:*) Exhibit A. (*refers to SON and DAUGHTER:*) Exhibits B and C. Hi, kids.

UNCLE. She probably just needed a little air. Dogs need air, right? And she always got shy when everyone was around.

MOTHER. Oh, she would've spent her whole life under that porch, if she could.

DAUGHTER. We all would have.

MOTHER. Is that a comment? You know, your father loved you all when you were little. It was only when you started to talk.

DAUGHTER. Isn't that an important time?

MOTHER. It was just when he didn't know what you'd say – that's when he didn't know what to do.

SON. (*to MOTHER:*) What did you think, when we started talking?

MOTHER. Oh, it didn't really bother me. I mean, no – you kids were great. You know, with your father, I don't even hear him, sometimes. (*very brief pause*) I like this little old life of mine. I'm just very happy to be here with you all on this funny old planet.

SON. Yeah, me too. (*brief pause*) Actually, I just got a little hungry. Maybe some soup or something would be good.

MOTHER. Can you believe our little recipe club has been meeting for 22 years? I think that's, in this day and age, I think that's pretty impressive.

FATHER. (*to UNCLE:*) I guess I can't really call you a mistake. Although I did agree to let you live here when your wife left.

UNCLE. She was killed in a tornado.

FATHER. Oh, right. That does sound familiar.

UNCLE. That's because it's what happened. I miss Melanie almost every day.

FATHER. (*an entirely sympathetic sound, as if UNCLE has said something cute:*) Aww. (*very brief pause*) Now, if you all wouldn't mind, just let me sit here for a minute. I need to rest my eyes. (*He closes his eyes.*)

UNCLE. (*Brief pause. Quietly:*) Do you guys remember Melanie?

MOTHER. (*quietly:*) Of course.

DAUGHTER. (*quietly:*) She helped me make a map of the neighborhood for school. It was so big I could barely carry it, even rolled up. Remember when I was always making maps? She wore high heels.

UNCLE. (*quietly:*) She did. She liked clothes. She said I had the right body for an Italian suit. She used to say such nice things to me. Even first thing, waking up. That felt good.

MOTHER. (*quietly:*) She was, just, she was a real ray of sunshine.

(**DAUGHTER** moves toward **FATHER**, to pull the blanket up around him.)

FATHER. Get away from me! Oh, it's just you. (*quietly and plainly:*) Try to keep this area clear.

DAUGHTER. I was just going to pull the blanket up.

MOTHER. He has dreams he's being murdered.

DAUGHTER. You do?

FATHER. I guess you're not going to let me sleep. (*Very brief pause. To MOTHER:*) You know, we should go out for a nice dinner. Just the two of us. Or, just me.

DAUGHTER. Do you want me to call somewhere and make a reservation?

FATHER. I'm not hungry.

SON. I have nightmares too.

FATHER. (*without any of his customary edge:*) Really?

SON. Yeah.

MOTHER. Well, "good life – bad dreams," isn't that what they say?

SON. I've never heard that.

DAUGHTER. Yeah, me neither. But it makes sense. You work through stuff in your sleep.

MOTHER. You kids were such funny sleepers. You both had a blanket you loved. (*to FATHER:*) Remember those blankets?

FATHER. (*again, without any edge:*) Remember what you did? (*to SON and DAUGHTER:*) She sewed them together.

MOTHER. I did, I knitted them together, because we could never keep track of you two and we thought it'd be easier. So you took your naps together, both of you holding onto your own half. I think Richard wished I knitted him one.

DAUGHTER. I remember that.

FATHER. Really? You were so small.

SON. Yeah, I think I remember it too.

FATHER. You both really loved that thing.

DAUGHTER. It was yellow and blue.

MOTHER. That's exactly right. It was gold and blue. You still both got very fussy, at bedtime. All you kids.

SON. (*to FATHER:*) You used to smoke a pipe.

FATHER. Did I? (*very brief pause*) Work through this in your sleep. (*He makes his hand into a gun, points it at SON.*) Bang.

SON. What does that mean?

FATHER. It's a very simple gesture, son.

DAUGHTER. (*brief pause*) Remember how little the dog was? I can still see her shivering on the stoop in the snow.

FATHER. Can you.

DAUGHTER. Yes.

FATHER. Are you trying to make it seem like things are okay?

DAUGHTER. Yes.

FATHER. Part of me admires you for that. The rest of me is just afraid of having another stroke.

UNCLE. She was so tiny when she was a pup.

MOTHER. We put that little red ribbon around her neck.

FATHER. I'm afraid. (*brief pause*) Did anyone hear me say that? I wish one of you could show a little sympathy.

MOTHER. Well, you make it very difficult.

FATHER. But not impossible. Not impossible.

SON. I know you're not feeling well.

FATHER. No, I'm not.

DAUGHTER. We all just came here to try to help, to try to make you feel better.

FATHER. Are you done?

DAUGHTER. Yes. (*very brief pause*) I don't know what you want from us.

FATHER. It's a real conundrum, isn't it. If only we could figure it out.

MOTHER. (to **SON** and **DAUGHTER**.) He probably does need to eat.

FATHER. Yeah, maybe that's one of my needs: food. Can someone go look in a dictionary and see if humans eat food?

MOTHER. I'll make something in a minute. (to **FATHER**.) Have you done your exercises?

FATHER. Yes.

SON. Grinding your teeth doesn't count.

(*The others are quietly amused.*)

MOTHER. (to **FATHER**.) Have you, really?

FATHER. (to **SON**.) Are you using humor to deal with the situation? Because, don't.

SON. Okay.

FATHER. And there's no situation, anyway. I don't know who you all think you are. I paid for all of this.

UNCLE. What are you gesturing to?

SON. I know. We know that.

DAUGHTER. We appreciate everything you've done.

FATHER. I'm sorry, everyone. Things are a little stressful – because I actually haven't done my exercises, because she didn't remind me.

DAUGHTER. So you can do them now. It's fine. Or whenever.

FATHER. (to **MOTHER**.) You didn't remind me.

MOTHER. Well, I'm reminding you now.

FATHER. (*hatefully, but with no effort*.) I don't care. (*Brief pause. Musingly*.) You know, I bet if I had a little more charisma, this stuff would really fly. All this cruelty and negativity. What does everyone think about that? (*brief pause*) It's such a fine line, you know?

SON. (*brief pause*) Dinner was good, last night.

DAUGHTER. I'm sorry I missed it.

MOTHER. It came out well, didn't it.

SON. Yeah, it was great. Effi is a really good cook. I can't wait for you to meet her.

MOTHER. Well, thank you. Okay? I mean it.

SON. She and I cook together sometimes. We have a lot of fun.

MOTHER. Well, that's just a, that sounds like a real delight.

SON. I feel really calm with her.

FATHER. Your mother doesn't care, son.

MOTHER. I care.

FATHER. Then say something caring.

MOTHER. I can't just... I'm not a trained seal.

FATHER. Your mother is not a trained seal, son. And that's why she was unable to say, "I'm happy for you." Or, "You deserve love," or a single caring word. Like, as we all know, a trained seal would've done. Tell me about her. Tell your old pa about your new gal.

SON. Okay. So, she's in Med School, but she's thinking about getting into Public Policy.

FATHER. Good for her. Smart. What's she look like? I bet she's a real beauty.

MOTHER. (to SON:) I didn't want to embarrass you with a lot of questions.

SON. I swear, she's the most beautiful person. Just, the way she does everything, the way she walks through a grocery store or looks at the sky. It's like I sometimes can see the little girl in her and also the old lady, and then she looks at me and smiles, and, it's her, right there, just totally her.

FATHER. (stares at him for a moment) Did I take my medicine? I did, just remembered. (going back to newspaper) Answered my own question.

DAUGHTER. (to SON:) She sounds really nice.

SON. She is.

FATHER. (behind newspaper.) That's a good price for a car battery.

DAUGHTER. Would it... do you think you could read that later? We came all this way.

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.