

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Samuel French Acting Edition

House Rules

by A. Rey Pamatmat

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HOUSE RULES was first produced by the Ma-Yi Theatre Company. The performance was directed by Ralph B. Peña, with scenic design by Reid Thompson, costume design by Martin Schnellinger, lighting design by Oliver Wason, and sound design by Fabian Obispo. The Production Stage Manager was Jennifer Delac. The cast was as follows:

ERNIE		Jojo Gonzalez
ROD		James Yaegashi
HENRY		Conrad Schott
JJ		Jeffrey Omura
MOMO		Tiffany Villarin
TWEE		Tina Chilip
VERA		Mia Katigbak

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

ERNIE – late sixties, Filipino, Rod’s and JJ’s father

ROD – early thirties, Filipino-American, Ernie’s oldest son

HENRY – early thirties, not Filipino, Rod’s (recently ex-)boyfriend

JJ – late twenties, Filipino-American, Ernie’s youngest son

MOMO – early thirties, Filipino-American, Vera’s youngest daughter

TWEE – mid-thirties, Filipino-American, Vera’s oldest daughter

VERA – sixties, Filipina, Twee’s and Momo’s mother

PLACE

New York City

TIME

Now

AUTHOR’S NOTE

For dialogue in Tagalog, translations are provided in brackets (“[” and “]”). The English translation is not meant to be spoken. Translations in quotations are meant to be spoken (see Scene Thirteen).

A “\” in dialogue indicates the place where the current character’s line is interrupted by the subsequent character’s line.

PROLOGUE

(Setting up.)

(Lights up on ERNIE standing center with his hands folded in prayer. He's in church. Perhaps we hear a droned blessing from an offstage priest.)

(ERNIE looks up. His gaze wanders as his focus drifts from the prayer. He sees a good-looking woman [in the audience?]) and winks at her.)

(A hymn begins as a flirtatious smile spreads across ERNIE's face. The smile stretches wider and wider, becomes more and more crooked. It twists into a wince.)

(ERNIE's breathing becomes quick, short, and shallow. His hand flies up and grabs his chest. He starts to jerk and make grunting noises, gripping onto the church pew in front of him.)

Just as the hymn achieves ecstatic heights, ERNIE squeals loudly, terrified. The organist fumbles and the music stops, as ERNIE falls onto the floor in front of his pew.)

(Lights shift.)

(Player #1.)

(On another part of the stage, ROD and HENRY in their apartment.)

ROD. My family doesn't do small.

HENRY. Half of them are an ocean away.

ROD. They'll fly over for it.

HENRY. A gay wedding?

ROD. It's an excuse to gorge themselves on fancy food, get drunk, and sing karaoke.

HENRY. No karaoke.

ROD. No karaoke, no wedding.

HENRY. No wedding, no honeymoon.

ROD. No honeymoon, no...

HENRY. OKAY. Karaoke.

ROD. Okay.

HENRY. Okay, okay, okay.

(ROD and HENRY make out. Just as things are getting good, a cell phone rings. They break apart and sigh.)

ROD. I'm on call.

HENRY. Me, too.

(They look at their phones.)

Not me. The hospital?

ROD. No, Vera from upstairs. Let me just be sure...

(ROD answers the phone.)

Hi. It's Toto.

Slow down.

No. Slow down.

My dad what?

(Lights shift.)

(Player #2.)

(JJ, alone in his home office, holding a sketchbook.)

(He rips a page from the book and sets it on the floor. He rips out a second page and puts it next to the first. He rips out a third page and puts it on top of the first. He rips out a fourth page and puts it next to the second, making a new pile. He rips out a fifth and puts it with the fourth [on the new pile]. He rips and sorts pages quickly.)

(Rips. Pile. Rips, pile, rips, pile...)

(Faster and faster.)

(There's a logic to the system, but we'll never figure out what it is. Even if we get close, we're interrupted, as...)

(JJ's phone rings.)

JJ. *(Answering.)* Hello?

What?

(Twenty seconds.)

I'll get on a plane.

No I can come now. I'll explain later. I'll be there soon.

(JJ hangs up. He takes a deep breath... And then he furiously rips page after page after page out of the sketchbook, crumpling them, tearing them up, eventually destroying the sketchbook.)

(Lights shift.)

(MOMO with her sister TWEE in the living room of their mother's apartment.)

(Player #3.)

MOMO. They just gave you money?

(Player #4.)

TWEE. A grant in recognition of future promise in the field of photography.

MOMO. What are you going to do with it?

TWEE. I'm going to "do" photography, and pay my rent for six months.

MOMO. Then what?

TWEE. Momo, not everyone goes high school, pre-med, med school, hospital, boring ass life of a total tool. Okay? Stop looking for linear progression in my career.

MOMO. I just don't get why you have to quit your job, just because you got this grant.

TWEE. When, exactly, did you start giving a shit?

(VERA enters.)

VERA. Language.

TWEE. Really?

VERA. Why weren't you in church?

TWEE. I'm never in church.

VERA. Momo? Why weren't you in church?

MOMO. There was this brunch thing –

VERA. I needed you at church.

TWEE. You didn't need me at church.

VERA. TWEE, NOT NOW!

(Pause.)

TWEE. What's wrong?

VERA. Ernie.

TWEE. Ernie...?

MOMO. Toto and JJ's father.

TWEE. I know who he is. What did he do now?

VERA. In church...out of nowhere. He...

(VERA taps her chest. MOMO wraps a comforting arm around her mother. TWEE turns away from them, upset.)

MOMO. Twee?

(TWEE turns, stares at them, and then walks offstage.)

(Lights shift.)

(A hospital bed appears, which ERNIE climbs into. The only hymn playing is the beep of a heart monitor.)

(The others gather around the bed [except TWEE]. ROD clutches HENRY. VERA holds MOMO. JJ stands off to the side, lamely clutching a "get well" card.)

(Suddenly, HENRY disengages from ROD and exits. After a beat, ROD, VERA, and MOMO exit as well, leaving JJ staring at ERNIE from afar.)

(J approaches but can't get himself all the way to ERNIE's bedside.)

(Ten seconds.)

(J throws the card down nearby and then leaves.)

End of Prologue

Scene One

(Two months later.)

(MOMO and VERA playing gin rummy in VERA's living room. VERA laughs at her own hilarity throughout.)

VERA. I walked right into the break room...

MOMO. Mom, please stop. Please.

VERA. This is the only life you get. Sometimes, Momo, you have to go right in –

MOMO. No, you don't.

VERA. You have to own the things that happen to you in life, boldly.

MOMO. I do.

VERA. Boldly?

MOMO. No, but I own them.

VERA. I walked right into the break room, stood in front of the other nurses and Dr. Modi, and I just let it out. Then I said: "There! I farted."

MOMO. Oh, Jesus.

VERA. "There! I farted."

MOMO. That wasn't bold; it was rude.

VERA. It took courage!

MOMO. No, it took complete disregard for social norms.

VERA. What was I supposed to do?

MOMO. Go to the bathroom!

VERA. Our lunches are short, and we had to plan the party.

MOMO. Then hold it.

VERA. You know I can't. The minute I sat down or crossed my legs or bent over...

(VERA makes an atypical fart noise, like a whistle or a series of finger snaps or a nonsensical onomatopoeic word. Nothing like a raspberry – nothing even close.)

MOMO. Mom.

VERA. It's better to just come into the room and...

(Atypical fart noise.)

"There! I farted."

MOMO. Just shut up about it.

Can you teach me how to make palabok for this fundraiser?

VERA. You want to make pancit palabok, too?

MOMO. I want to cook everything you cook. Someone has to learn, and Twee can't even make fried rice.

VERA. Twee, Twee, Twee.

(MOMO plays a winning hand.)

MOMO. Gin.

VERA. You tricked me.

MOMO. Nope.

VERA. What rules are we using?

MOMO. It's gin rummy, so gin rummy rules.

VERA. But I have a rainbow.

MOMO. We're not playing with rainbows.

VERA. I could have won last turn, if I played my rainbow.

MOMO. We're not playing rainbows, and you didn't play the hand anyway.

VERA. I'm just telling you I could have won.

MOMO. No, you couldn't have, but fine. Whatever.

VERA. Fine. Twenty-five points.

MOMO. You can keep the points if you do me a favor instead.

VERA. But the rule is, win with gin and you get twenty-five points. Are you changing the rules?

MOMO. Not really.

VERA. Then I want to play my rainbow.

MOMO. We were already past the point where you could say, "Can I play this rainbow?"

VERA. And we're past the point now where you could say we're playing for favors instead of points.

MOMO. No, we're AT that point.

VERA. No.

MOMO. Yes.

VERA. No!

MOMO. Fine.

(A beat.)

VERA. What's the favor?

MOMO. Why even tell you? Twenty-five points.

VERA. Momo.

MOMO. Make Twee stay somewhere else.

(A beat.)

VERA. Twenty-five points...

MOMO. Mom.

VERA. I'm not putting your sister on the street. Her grant ran out, you know.

MOMO. Then she should get another grant, or – here's an idea – a job?

VERA. Photography is her job.

MOMO. Living off you is her job.

(VERA clucks her tongue.)

Twee depends on you to catch her when she falls.

VERA. I'll catch you, too.

MOMO. You don't have to catch me.

VERA. One day I might, so don't criticize your sister. Honestly, I don't know what you two will do when I finally get sick of your fighting and kick the bucket.

MOMO. Maybe if you let her fall she'll learn to stand on her own.

VERA. Or maybe she'll keep falling.

MOMO. Well, when you're gone, and she needs me instead of you, I'm going to tell her to take care of herself.

VERA. Hay naku. Then get your dad in here, because we have to change the will and give Twee more money.

(VERA starts to shuffle the cards.)

MOMO. What money? I've been paying your maintenance since Dad retired.

VERA. Because we're stealing from you, idiot. I won the lottery, and we have a house in Monaco that we keep secret so you don't bother us while we entertain Princess Caroline.

MOMO. Well, good. Give that house to Twee. She can slut around with the high rollers there to survive instead of leeching off of you.

(VERA sets down the cards and stares at MOMO with the disappointment only a mother can direct toward her child.)

VERA. *(Hands over her womb.)* I shot you out. I can put you back!

MOMO. Mom, that's gross. She hates me more than I hate her.

VERA. She doesn't understand you.

MOMO. And therefore she hates me. That's Twee logic.

VERA. When your dad and I are gone, she'll understand, and you will help her. And you'll want to help her, because she will help you. And that is that.

MOMO. Well then for her sake, you two better not die.

VERA. **MONICA.** That is that.

(MOMO is silenced. She takes the cards from her mother, shuffles them one more time, and deals.)

How's Ernie?

MOMO. I don't know, really. He's not one of my patients. I know he got a lot better and then sort of plateaued.

VERA. Is he still in the hospital?

MOMO. Yes. It's been two months. He's out of the ICU, though.

VERA. Poor man.

MOMO. You should visit him. He doesn't get many visitors.

VERA. What about his sons?

MOMO. Toto is there every day. I'm sure Ernie would be happy to see you.

VERA. Maybe next week. I don't like the nurses in your hospital, though. I come in and just want to correct them all the time. They're not very good nurses.

MOMO. Mom, come on.

VERA. Except Sheila. She should come to my hospital. She's a very good nurse.

MOMO. Yeah. She is.

VERA. I thought Sheila did orthopedics.

MOMO. She is – does.

VERA. Then how do you know how good she is? She works on neurology cases?

MOMO. People talk. And we're roommates. And Dr. Lo told me Sheila is...good. She told me. Dr. Lo.

VERA. Sometimes, Momo, you have to walk into a room and own things. Boldly.

MOMO. I...try.

(The jangle of keys. VERA puts away the cards, as TWEE strides in wearing a sari. She hauls an enormous suitcase into the room, throws it down, and declares [boldly]:)

TWEE. Here I am!

VERA. Welcome home!

(VERA hugs her, and then...)

What are you wearing?

TWEE. A sari.

VERA. You wore that on the subway?

TWEE. I took a cab.

VERA. I thought you were out of money?

TWEE. "Nice to see you, Twee. Don't you look lovely!"

"Hi, Mom. How are you?"

VERA. Get changed. We're going to a party.

TWEE. I just got home!

VERA. My home. And if I tell you you're going to a party while you're staying in my home, you're going.

TWEE. Um, JET LAG?

VERA. It will pass faster if you stay awake and go to bed at a normal time.

TWEE. "How are you, Twee? How was India?"

MOMO. How was India?

TWEE. Shut up.

VERA. Don't start. Momo and I are going to cook. Put your things in your room, put on real clothes, and then we're going. It's a fundraiser for people who can't pay their hospital bills.

TWEE. Are you serious?

VERA. Someone who needs funds shouldn't refuse to help at a fundraiser.

TWEE. Can I cook something, too?

VERA. Change first.

(VERA exits.)

(MOMO and TWEE stare at each other.)

TWEE. What are you cooking?

MOMO. Pancit.

TWEE. Bihon?

MOMO. Palabok.

TWEE. Is it a Flip party?

MOMO. No. Mixed. Need help with the bag?

TWEE. No.

(TWEE picks up her suitcase and exits.)

MOMO. Nice to see you, Twee.

End of Scene

Scene Two

(ERNIE convalescing in a hospital. ROD stands at the foot of his bed.)

(ERNIE plays pyramid solitaire throughout the scene.)

ERNIE. My son is a useless piece of shit.

ROD. Let's try to stay on topic.

ERNIE. The topic is shit. I shit myself, and you want to re-attach that shitbag.

ROD. That's not how I would put it.

ERNIE. That's not how they put it when my son was born, but I shit myself one useless piece of shit.

ROD. If your hips are in such pain you'd prefer to soil yourself\ instead –

ERNIE. No one *prefers* to shit themselves.

ROD. If you prefer that over enduring soreness in your hips on the way to the toilet, then we should consider other arrangements for your comfort.

ERNIE. The shitbag.

ROD. The...yes.

ERNIE. Do you know what would make me comfortable? If you shot me in the goddamn face! Because when someone's options are: a) shitting themselves or b) taking ten excruciating steps to the commode, it's probably best to skip to euthanasia.

ROD. Will you please –?

ERNIE. KILL ME.

ROD. Current medical practice does not permit me to provide on demand suicides.

ERNIE. I'm not asking for suicide. I'm asking for murder. Kill me.

ROD. Assisted suicide.

ERNIE. I am, apparently, incapable of suicide. I would have preferred that blondie blonde nurse found me dead

instead of reclining in a pool of my own soupy shit. But this body will not let go. A stroke, hip replacement, back surgery, emphysema, liver failure, and two heart attacks, and now, they tell me, diabetes. I would rather be dead.

ROD. Could you pause your rant while I dispense some medical advice? I have other patients.

(ERNIE flings a card at ROD.)

ERNIE. Shoot.

ROD. Thank you –

(Card.)

ERNIE. Fire away.

ROD. I would li –

(Card.)

ERNIE. Shoot me IN THE GODDAMN FACE.

ROD. I will not shoot you in the face, hellbound though it may be. I will recommend the nurse re-attach –

ERNIE. Re-attach the shitbag.

ROD. So you won't hurt yourself on the way to the toilet. We'll give you a stronger painkiller to help you with your general discomfort, too.

ERNIE. If there was a nurse here all the time like on the other floor, I wouldn't have shit myself in the first place.

ROD. This isn't an intensive care floor. You're on the mend.

ERNIE. I shit myself! I want a nurse here all the time. That Russian one.

ROD. Romanian.

ERNIE. Whatever. Just no Americans. They're lazy and want to do the least work for the most money. They're just waiting for a man to marry them. I want that hard-working Romanian nurse with the impressive chest.

ROD. "Impressive chest"?

ERNIE. I bet that heifer shot out some strong, healthy kids – nothing like my piece of shit son. That Russian or

Romanian is a good woman. Most women just want to rob you blind. They clean your house and cook your meals and let you do whatever you want in the sack –

ROD. Oh, god.

ERNIE. Until you're married. Then the laundry piles up and you eat frozen pizzas every week and you're lucky if you have a free minute from her moaning to sneak off and take care of your own business.

ROD. Please don't talk about –

ERNIE. WHERE IS MY USELESS SON? WHY IS HE LEAVING ME HERE?! WHY ISN'T THAT USELESS PIECE OF SHIT HERE RIGHT NOW?

(Silence.)

(ERNIE holds out a hand. ROD passes back the cards that were flung at him. ERNIE plays solitaire once again.)

ROD. I'll bring JJ around next time, I promise.

ERNIE. JJ?

ROD. I'll make Johan visit.

ERNIE. Not JJ. Roderick. My doctor son who could have gotten me onto a floor with a twenty-four hour nurse if he weren't such a USELESS piece. Of. Shit.

(Silence.)

ROD. Okay... I'll find out why your piece of shit doctor son hasn't come, I'll re-attach your shitbag, and I'll sedate the hell out of you, so you'll feel like you were shot in the goddamn face.

ERNIE. And the Russian with the tits.

ROD. ...Fine...

(ROD steps away from the bed just as HENRY enters and intercepts him.)

HENRY. Hey, Rod. How's your dad?

ROD. He's a loud, foul-mouthed, racist, misogynist curmudgeon.

HENRY. More himself than ever?

ROD. He didn't recognize me. He's experiencing some kind of dementia.

HENRY. Painkillers, maybe. You okay?

ROD. I'm under a lot of stress.

HENRY. Yeah.

I'm sorry.

ROD. Bullshit.

HENRY. Oh...no. I was expressing sympathy, for...

ROD. I know. But everything you say is bullshit.

HENRY. We should talk –

ROD. We have nothing to talk about.

HENRY. Your dad has been the same for days. With all the attention and care he's getting, the same isn't good. It's waiting for something bad to –

ROD. I'm also a fucking doctor, Henry.

HENRY. You're his son. Sometimes family members need to be reminded...

(HENRY puts a hand on ROD's shoulder. ROD pushes him off, roughly.)

ROD. You have lost the privilege of showing me kindness. I would rather you shot me in the goddamn face. Admin called me this morning. What kind of epic headfuck are you playing at, asking to be my dad's doctor after what you did?

HENRY. I don't know. I'm not...

ROD. I have to keep my life together, my loser brother's life together, and a man alive who has told me several times he wished I was dead. I don't have time for your pathetic consolation prize of consolation. I have rounds.

(ROD exits. HENRY looks at ERNIE's chart.)

ERNIE. Henry, where's my son?

HENRY. He just left.

ERNIE. Why won't he help me?

HENRY. He's trying.

ERNIE. Is he angry with me?

HENRY. He's doing his best, given the...circumstances.

We're all just trying to do our best.

(HENRY reaches out for the cards. ERNIE clutches them and rolls over.)

End of Scene

Scene Three

(TWEE and MOMO playing sungka in VERA's living room. TWEE is winning.)

MOMO. Are you cheating?

TWEE. Fuck you and your mother.

MOMO. Your mother, too.

TWEE. Don't remind me.

(MOMO finally gets a turn but winds up dead after once around the board.)

You suck at this.

MOMO. Shut up.

TWEE. You suck at everything. I mean that pancit palabok yesterday...

MOMO. It didn't suck.

(TWEE starts a turn.)

TWEE. Did anyone eat it? I didn't even eat it, and I like palabok. It was so embarrassing. Momo, white people don't eat shrimp heads.

MOMO. White people eat shrimp.

TWEE. They're white. They're already scared, because it's a foreign food, and this food is orange with squid rings and tentacles and slices of hard-boiled egg like weird yellow eyeballs.

MOMO. SHUT. UP.

TWEE. And then you throw in shrimp with the heads on?

MOMO. I peeled all of the shrimp, except for three.

TWEE. And you placed those right on top.

MOMO. I wanted it to be authentic.

TWEE. Mo, when white people say "authentic" they mean two steps better than fusion, but two steps less than real. Behead and shell all of the shrimp. Cut the squid entirely. Or bread slices of the body, fry them, and throw them on top.

MOMO. That's calamari.

TWEE. EXACTLY. Two better than fusion, two less than real. And next time write out a cute little sign that says, "Asian Rice Noodles with Shrimp!" Not Filipino, Asian. Maybe have a picture of a coconut tree.

MOMO. There's no coconut in palabok.

TWEE. The point is, no one wants to know what we REALLY eat: blood soup, fertilized unborn duck chicks still in the shell. You going to bring balut to the next potluck? It's soooooooo "authentic."

MOMO. Well, you brought Indian food. What the heck is that?

TWEE. Chicken tikka. I took a cooking class in Mumbai.

MOMO. That's not white people food.

TWEE. But they already know what it is.

MOMO. You're full of crap.

TWEE. Oh! Watch out everyone! Momo's breaking out the "LANGUAGE"! She said...

(Whispering.)

...crap...!

(Normal voice.)

I think she even said heck!

(By the way, we haven't forgotten; TWEE's turn is still going.)

What's with this über-Filipino schtick anyway? It's like you suddenly forgot we were born and raised in the U. S. of A.

MOMO. To Filipino parents who won't be around forever. Mom and Dad will pass away eventually.

TWEE. So now you're the one who cooks the pancit?

Our parents were smart. They didn't teach us Tagalog, because they knew: you've got to assimilate to succeed here. You've got to be just exotic enough to be interesting but not so exotic you're alien.

Asian rice noodles with shrimp, not pancit palabok.

MOMO. Do you have to criticize everything I say?

TWEE. And do.

MOMO. The only reason you know so much about white people is because you took your little rich white girl trip to India, took a cooking class, did some yoga. Wow.

TWEE. Your precious mother loved my chicken.

MOMO. WHY HASN'T YOUR TURN ENDED?

(Holy crap, TWEE is still going around and around the board.)

TWEE. No wonder you can't get a man.

Is this all part of some new strategy to walk up to guys and spout Tagalog? Go to a club, dance tinikling, and sing to a pandango? When you get him home, are you going to kneel by the bed and pray the rosary together?

(With a heavy Filipino accent.)

Hail Mary,

Pull op graces,

Dhe Lord is with dhee.

Blessed art dhou amongst women,

And blessed is dhe pruit op dhy womb, Jesus!

(Seductively.)

Put it in my womb, ha! Let's make a Jesus op our own, but screw dhis Birgin Birth shit – excuse me – STUFF!

(TWEE's turn finally ends across from the biggest house on the board. She tries to take the shells into her pot, but there are so many of them that they spill a bit. When she finally has every...last...one...)

MOMO stares at the board, dismayed. Suddenly, she picks it up, throws all the shells on **TWEE**, and brandishes it like a weapon.)

MOMO. WHAT KIND OF SISTER ARE YOU! "You suck! This game sucks! Everything you do sucks! Your hair looks stupid! That outfit is stupid! YOU'RE STUPID!" Well, you know what, Twee? YOU'RE STUPID! A STUPID PIECE OF CRAP! YES. CRAAAAAAAP.

Maybe some of us are fine looking au naturel. Some of us don't measure our self-esteem by whether or not our hair bounces like Beyoncé's. Some of us don't need to look like high fashion, call girl assassins who know how to put makeup on so we don't look like clowns or triple-threat actor/singer/dancers in *Cats*. Because I HATE your shoes, your stupid slut heels! And I HATE that you call them slut heels! And I HATE when you tell me I need a pair!

Because you're so mean! I don't want to look anything like a person who would be mean to her baby sister. My friends' older sisters looked out for them and taught them how to pick nice clothes and whatever. But I got you. YOU! You mean, horrible piece of crap crap crap crap crap CRAP!! YOU!!

And maybe I don't want one of those smelly, farting, unshowered, unshaven jerks that your slut heels attract praying for this sinner now and at the hour of her death. AMEN.

AAAAAAAMEEEEEEEEN –

(TWEE rips the board from MOMO's hands. MOMO freezes.)

TWEE. I'm helping you.

Without me, you'd be such a pathetic soul that you would have killed yourself at fifteen.

I make you face reality.

White people do not eat shrimp with the head on.

No man wants a girl with that rat's nest you call hair.

Listen to me and learn to play the game or prepare for a motherfucking solitary existence, pinay. Because your soft mama's girl ass needs a spine, and don't give me shit for mixing metaphors, because I know asses don't have spines.

When our precious mother does kick the bucket, you're going to be so fucking happy I pushed you to stand up for yourself and live your life and grow an ass spine that

you're going to drop down and kiss my smoking hot, slut-heeled feet.

(TWEE shoves the sungka board back into MOMO's hands.)

Go on. Hit me.

MOMO. I don't need your lessons. They're cynical and, frankly, sad.

(MOMO puts the board down.)

TWEE. Whatever, Momo. I don't have time to fight you anyway. The boys will be here soon.

Clean up this mess. That'll make you more Filipino than me. Pretend you're a hotel maid.

(TWEE tosses her hair and struts out, leaving MOMO surrounded by sungka shells. MOMO sighs and starts to clean up the game.)

End of Scene

Scene Four

(ROD and JJ on their way to VERA's [which is in the same building]. They exit ROD's apartment, ride an elevator, walk down a hall, and stop in front of VERA's and her husband's.)

ROD. You are a useless piece of shit.

JJ. Thanks, Toto.

ROD. Rod.

JJ. Right. Do I really have to call you Rod?

ROD. I'm done with the nicknames.

JJ. What's wrong with Toto? Because I can tell you with a change in vocal inflection and an arched eyebrow what's wrong with Rod.

ROD. Toto is a dog's name.

JJ. Rod is a penis's name.

ROD. It's short for Roderick, which is actually the name our mother gave me.

JJ. Our mother also gave you the name Toto when you were five and made up that dance routine to the *Africa* song.

ROD. Well we're grown men now, and my name is Rod.

(Seeing JJ's clothes.)

You couldn't even get dressed? Aren't those the clothes you wore this morning, which may, actually, also be the ones you wore last night?

JJ. I was not wearing these clothes last night. The pants, but they're pants. And the shoes, but these are my most comfortable shoes. All the stuff that counts, though, is clean and fresh as of this morning. Besides, it's just game night.

ROD. A game night party.

JJ. And I distinctly recall you showing up to several of Momo and Twee's game nights in undergrad smelling like bong water.

ROD. I never smelled like –

JJ. You did.

ROD. No, I –

JJ. YOU. DID.

ROD. Well, this is the first game night in awhile, and I don't smell like bong water now. This isn't undergrad. You should be cleaned up for a party like an adult.

JJ. I didn't even want to come in the first place.

ROD. You don't even have to leave the building.

JJ. I don't want to leave the apartment.

ROD. You are not turning into Howard Hughes. Not on my couch. You lost your job. Fine. But if you're supposed to be some hot shot comic artist, why let this turn you into such a useless piece of shit?

(They're at VERA's door [maybe they have been for awhile]. ROD knocks.)

JJ. Why are you knocking?

ROD. And visit Dad in the hospital.

(JJ huffs and pushes open the door before anyone can answer.)

(Lights shift as they enter the apartment. MOMO greets them. TWEE sits nearby, sipping whiskey.)

MOMO. Hey!

JJ. Hi.

TWEE. Wassup, suckaaaas?

ROD. Hey, Mo.

MOMO. I need to talk to you.

(MOMO tries to quickly pull ROD aside, but TWEE stops them.)

TWEE. Momo fucked up. Henry's here.

JJ. Where?

TWEE. Bathroom now, but he is in the apartment.

(Smiling broadly.)

Hi, Toto!

ROD. Twee.

TWEE. Mo. Fucked. Up.

MOMO. I was talking to Sheila, and he was just...lingering. I told her to come, if she could shift her schedule, and I guess he thought it was an open invitation.

ROD. No, he didn't. He took advantage.

MOMO. He wouldn't do that. He thought it was a PARTY party, not just game night.

JJ. JUST game night. See, Toto?

ROD. Shut up. ROD.

TWEE. Hell, I'm going to party. This is a party.

ROD. (*To MOMO.*) Is Sheila here?

MOMO. No. Just us and Henry.

TWEE. Mo. Fucked. Up.

(HENRY enters with wet hands.)

(*Smiling broadly.*) Hi, Henry!

HENRY. Hi, again.

JJ. How are you, Henry? It's been awhile.

HENRY. Yeah. Yes, but –

JJ. Since...?

HENRY. Since, uh...

JJ. Since Dad's heart attack. You haven't been by Rod's since Dad's heart attack.

HENRY. Yes.

JJ. That's weird.

(*Silence.*)

HENRY. Mo, there was no towel. No hand towel.

MOMO. Oh, sorry, I'll –

TWEE. No, no, no, no, no. You, Rod, and Henry stay right here. JJ will get one.

JJ. Excuse me?

TWEE. I want to watch.

JJ. Henry and I need to talk about where he's been since Dad's \ heart –

HENRY. I've been with Ernie in the hospital, JJ. I haven't been to Rod's, but I've been with him. Where have you \ been for the past –

JJ. I'll be right back.

(JJ exits for a towel. ROD shoots daggers at TWEE, and then walks up to HENRY.)

ROD. Henry.

HENRY. Hey, how are you?

ROD. I saw you at work yesterday.

HENRY. I know, but how have you been since then?

ROD. This is awkward \ but –

HENRY. *(Too quickly.)* Mo invited me.

ROD. No, she didn't.

HENRY. She and Sheila \ were –

ROD. She didn't. It was a mistake. You should leave. Don't play dumb. Just leave.

HENRY. Can you – will you step outside with me?

ROD. No.

TWEE. Why not?

HENRY. Yeah. Why?

ROD. Twee, this is none of your business.

TWEE. Then step outside with him, where I can't hear you.

MOMO. Let's give them privacy.

TWEE. Rod doesn't want privacy, or he'd step outside.

HENRY. Look...let's talk alone.

ROD. If you wanted to talk to me alone, HENRY, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DUMPED ME.

HENRY. That's not a fair characterization of what happened \ and you –

ROD. GOODBYE.

MOMO. We'll see you at work tomorrow, okay?

(Five seconds.)

HENRY. Okay.

(HENRY goes. As he does.)

TWEE. Thanks for stopping by, Hank! It was a pleasure!
Have a good night! Get home safe, bon voyage, and
bonne journée!

(JJ re-enters with a towel, sees that HENRY has
already gone, and throws it at TWEE.)

Watch it, slugger.

ROD. (To TWEE.) What the hell was that?

TWEE. I kept you from having to be alone with him. I was
helping.

ROD. That was not helping.

TWEE. It was, and now I deserve to know: why don't you
want to be alone with him?

MOMO. (To TWEE.) What are you doing?

TWEE. It's game night. I'm playing games!

(VERA enters with mahjong.)

VERA. We don't have to play.

TWEE. Moooooooooom.

VERA. I just said we don't have to play. Play whatever game
you want, and if at some point you want to love the
woman who labored to bring you into this beautiful,
beautiful world, then I can teach you mahjong.

TWEE. Monopoly.

MOMO. Finally something we can agree on.

(They start setting up the game.)

VERA. But it takes forever.

TWEE. You got some place to be, woman?

VERA. Twee.

TWEE. I mean, dearest Mommy, darling, dear?

ROD. I'm the car.

TWEE. Whoa, whoa, whoa...

MOMO. Iron. I'll be banker.

ROD. (*To TWEE.*) You're the top hat. You know you're the top hat.

TWEE. Maybe I want to change things up?

ROD. I already called it. JJ?

(JJ stares blankly at the pieces, as he has been this whole time. TWEE grabs the top hat.)

JJ, come on. Which piece?

TWEE. (*To MOMO.*) Why the iron? No one wants the iron.

MOMO. Maybe you should switch to the dog, by which I mean bitch.

VERA. (*Scolding but also chuckling.*) Momo...

MOMO. (*Not really apologizing.*) Sorry.

(*The board is almost set up...*)

ROD. JJ?

JJ. What? I don't care.

ROD. Battleship.

JJ. Fine.

VERA. I'll take the bitch. She's cute.

(*VERA places \$500 in the center of the board.*)

TWEE. No no no no no.

VERA. Why?

TWEE. Official rules only. If you land on property and don't buy it, it goes to auction. No rent if you don't ask for it. Your only option if you run out of cash is mortgaging or selling assets. Property surrendered to the bank by a bankrupt player immediately goes to auction. And no free money on Free Parking.

VERA. We always play this way.

TWEE. You do, the game never ends, and then you complain about it going too long. Official game rules. Vote: official rules only?

(*TWEE, ROD, and MOMO raise their hands.*)

VERA. House rules.

(**VERA** raises her hand.)

VERA. (*Cont.*) JJ didn't vote.

TWEE. You lost anyway.

VERA. Hay naku. JJ – come on. Just Free Parking, nothing else special.

JJ. What?

VERA. Free Parking!

JJ. Oh. Just a free space. No benefits or penalties. Nothing. For anyone.

(*Pause.*)

ROD. What's wrong with you? Seriously?

JJ. Nothing. Ness.

ROD. What?

JJ. Nothing. What's wrong with you?

(**ROD** rolls a die.)

ROD. Four. Someone stole my brother and replaced him with some guy who lives on my couch.

(**MOMO** rolls.)

MOMO. Three.

JJ. You want me to leave?

ROD. No, obviously. But aren't you bigger than two books? All those comic conventions, the commissions for paintings and drawings, the movie stuff.

(**TWEE** rolls.)

TWEE. Shit. Three.

VERA. Language.

ROD. Why are you playing Contest of Champions all day instead of getting back on your feet?

JJ. You asked me to stay when I left LA and Henry\ started getting all –

ROD. That wasn't permission to turn my living room into a kingdom of epic loserdom.

(**VERA** rolls.)

VERA. Five.

JJ. You need privacy for a little rebound wham-bam-Grindr-man?

ROD. I have never used Grindr.

VERA. (*Holding the die out to JJ.*) What is this Grindr?

JJ. Of course you haven't!

VERA. Is it for sandwiches?

MOMO. Yes.

JJ. Mr. Rod-not-Toto is too good for the name his mother gave him and for social media.

ROD. Mom gave me BOTH names, I just prefer one over the other now!

VERA. Enough fighting.

JJ. I'll pack up tonight.

VERA. (*Insisting with the die.*) JJ!

ROD. I don't want you to leave. Just stop making me do this on my own. Dad, the \ hospital, and –

JJ. I'm not making you do anything. Just don't do it. Just stop.

ROD. I can't do that.

JJ. Yes, you can. Leave Dad alone, leave me alone, just stop. You even sound like him now!

VERA. Both of you: stop fighting or go back to your apartment! I'm not having this in my house.

(**ROD** and **JJ** back off. **JJ** rolls the die.)

JJ. Five. We have to re-roll.

VERA. No. You go first. How's your dad?

(**JJ** starts his turn.)

JJ. Good, I mean, no. He's stable now. Henry told Rod he's stable.

ROD. He is.

JJ. And he's out of the ICU, but he's still in the hospital indefinitely. So even though he's stable, it's a stretch to say he's good.

(JJ moves his piece.)

MOMO. Vermont Avenue. You want to buy it?

JJ. But when was he ever good, right? He's bad, you know, he's kind of bad. A bad person. And now, apparently, Toto wants to take his place. To be in charge. Except the person he thinks he's replacing was pretty bad at being in charge. Our dad is a bad dad for sure, a bad man in a lot of ways, and a bad person in even more, and this is my last chance to say it, isn't it? Because once he's gone, we'll have to remember him fondly. We'll have to say good shit about him, even though there's so little good shit to say, and a lot more shitty shit to say about the abusive, possibly mentally ill piece of crazy who is my father.

(**VERA** smacks JJ.)

VERA. The first six months my husband and I were here, your father and mother let us sleep in the little bedroom they used as an office until we got an apartment. He had a difficult life back home and it made him a difficult man – I'm not stupid. But he still put food on your plate, a roof over your head, and money in your pocket. And he is proud of you! You don't have to like him, but you do have to be grateful. There. There's some "good shit" for you to say.

(Ten seconds.)

JJ. I need some air.

(JJ exits the apartment.)

MOMO. He could have at least put it up for auction first.

VERA. Hay, just auction it.

TWEE. Those aren't the rules. Anyway, he'd be allowed to bid, if it were auctioned.

MOMO. Do you think he'll come back?

ROD. Take him out of the game.

TWEE. Go get him.

ROD. No. I'm not – I'm not running after him anymore.

TWEE. Text him and see if he still wants to play.

VERA. No. My house, my rules. Take him out.

TWEE. Seriously?

VERA. This – tonight is our chance to be normal. To play games like always. For me to get bored halfway through, leave, and start making snacks. For you and your brother to stay too late. So everyone, let's just play. I have work tomorrow.

TWEE. At least text him.

VERA. No. He needs time, not games. My house. My rules. He's out.

(VERA removes JJ's piece from the board and puts a \$500 bill in its center. TWEE gets up.)

TWEE. Fuck this.

VERA. Language. Where are you going?

TWEE. Out.

(TWEE exits. MOMO, ROD, and VERA look at each other.)

MOMO. Maybe we could...you could teach us mahjong?
Mom?

End of Scene

Scene Five

(JJ on the roof of the building. His phone is in hand, but he stares out over the city instead.)

(TWEE enters. JJ quickly looks down at his phone.)

TWEE. Fuck 'em all, right?

(JJ stays focussed on his phone, barely acknowledging her.)

Your phone is more fascinating than me? Wait, I rank lower than sudoku.

JJ. I need something that makes sense. Whereas you... people in general...

TWEE. Are not sudoku. I still don't understand the appeal.

JJ. In sudoku every question can be answered in a nine-by-nine grid, unlike the question, "Why would someone blow an entire grant on one trip to India?" which cannot.

TWEE. Sure it can. Write these letters in the top line:
F-U-C-K – E-M – A-L-L.

JJ. Momo?

TWEE. All of them. They think they're such hot shit: living the American Dream – our parents' version of it, anyway. Doctors and nurses every one.

Fuck that and fuck them.

We all think we're so great because we grew up in this city, but honestly – until you've walked one block in Mumbai – you've got no clue how busy, disgusting, and exciting a city can be. It was another world.

JJ. Like Manila?

TWEE. No, totally different. India was gorgeous – I've got exhibitions upon exhibitions worth of pictures. Maybe some images to sell to stock agencies. I lived a life I knew nothing about. It was new.

JJ. New to you. Old to someone else.

(A beat.)

TWEE. My parents were miserable the entire time they lived in your parents' spare room. They used to make jokes about it. And your dad drives my mom insane; that's why she hasn't visited him at the hospital. Just like you haven't. Right? You haven't visited your dad. *(Pause.)* Just a hunch.

JJ. I can't take all the bitter, negative bile that spews out of him.

TWEE. Daddy's favorite son has abandoned him. I wish I had a set like yours. Some spectacular, testacular testicles. Instead I head home penniless and lick my overbearing cow of a mom's ass so I can sleep in my old room.

JJ. I'm on Toto's couch.

TWEE. And why does Mr. Goody Two Shoes let you get away with not visiting pappy-san?

JJ. Is there anyone you don't absolutely detest?

TWEE. You're not half bad. You and I actually made our own way. Plus, this whole not visiting your dad thing is pretty awesome.

JJ. That is not awesome.

TWEE. Your dad is a tool, JJ. Fuck him.

JJ. He's always been good to me, though.

TWEE. Being good to you at the expense of others is still being a complete cock. Look at my mom. I am an amazing woman, JJ. But she throws all of her disapproval and disappointment at me while doting on mousey, friendless, little ol' Momo as though she were god's gift, and I were devil's spawn. And Mo loves her for it.

Your dad adores you, and he's a dick to Toto. But you know he's a nasty, bitter old man, regardless of how differently he treats you – BECAUSE of how differently he treats you. If Mo were a real sister to me just once, looked out for me...sometimes I need a sister.

JJ. You don't look like you need anyone.

TWEE. You're not looking hard enough.

JJ. No one – most people usually don't.

TWEE. Fuck them, too.

JJ. Fuck 'em all.

TWEE. I see you, JJ.

JJ. These days I have trouble seeing myself. What do you see?

TWEE. A dude who lost his job and almost lost his dad in the same week, who can't handle when circumstances that should bring him closer to his family make him hide on the roof instead.

JJ. You're up on the roof, too.

TWEE. I am, because you're hiding something else. I'm trying to figure out what it is.

JJ. Look harder.

(TWEE looks at JJ. He turns and looks back at her.)

TWEE. Not your brother... Not your dad... Your job –?

(JJ kisses TWEE. He jumps back.)

JJ. Sorry.

(TWEE kisses JJ. It's a good kiss.)

TWEE. Huh. That wasn't half bad. Not true love, but not bad.

Let's do this. But not, for the love of god, on your brother's couch.

JJ. Excuse me?

TWEE. Trust me, I don't usually open with, "Let's do this. Not on your brother's couch." But sometimes you have to write the answers outside of the nine-by-nine grid. Plus, we've known each other forever, and for at least seven years of that forever, you've wanted to know me, biblically.

JJ. You're staying at your parents'.

TWEE. Shit. Stairwell?

JJ. We'll get caught.

TWEE. So?

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