

Acting Edition

I Need That

by Theresa Rebeck

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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I NEED THAT was commissioned and originally produced by Roundabout Theater Company in New York City, and premiered on October 13th, 2023. The performance was directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel, with sets by Alexander Dodge, costumes by Tilly Grimes, lighting design by Yi Zhao, sound design by Fitz Patton and Bradlee Ward, hair and makeup design by Tommy Kurzman, and original music by Fitz Patton. The Production Stage Manager was Jereme Kyle Lewis. The cast was as follows:

SAM Danny DeVito
FOSTER Ray Anthony Thomas
AMELIA Lucy DeVito

CHARACTERS

SAM – Any ethnicity, late 70s/early 80s. A vital, intelligent, funny guy, a raconteur who won't give up the chaos of all the stuff he has, which is everywhere.

FOSTER – Black, late 70s, Sam's best friend. Easygoing, working class. Enjoys Sam's eccentricities. There is real love between them.

AMELIA – Any ethnicity, mid/late 30s, Sam's daughter, harried but strong. Adores her father as much as she is frustrated by him.

SETTING

Sam's house, which is cluttered with an intense level of stuff.
It's just this side of a hoarder's disaster area.

TIME

The present.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The description of the couch can be altered to reflect the couch that is on the set.

It's important to find the balance between the dire situation Sam is in, and not letting the clutter on the set go too far. He is not crazy. But there should be no question that he has way too much stuff.

(The kitchen and living room of a decent-sized house, once well-kept, now fallen into disarray.)

(The place is an astonishing vision of stuff. Some things are wonderful, but there are lots of piles of papers and old magazines as well. It seems just like a complete disaster, but there is also beauty in there. At moments it's possible that someone lavished love on the placement of a chair next to a plant. But that impulse to organize was in the distant past.)

(This is not a hoarder's space, but it is only a few steps away from it.)

*(**SAM** enters, ready for bed, and gets into his barcolounger in the middle of this mess. After he settles in, he claps his hands twice and the light by the side of the chair goes off. He settles in to sleep.)*

(The lights shift. It is the following morning.)

(The sound of knocking. Then more knocking. Then banging.)

*(**SAM** wakes up.)*

SAM. Yeah yeah yeah hold your horses. I'm coming I'm coming.

What time is it? It's two in the morning. What do you want, it's two in the morning. Stop hammering on my door.

FOSTER. (*Offstage.*) Hey SAM.

SAM. Where's the door. Hang on, I don't know where the door is. I can't find the door, can you knock a few more times so I know where I'm going? Okay okay okay

(The knocking starts up again.)

Where am I?

(He finds the door and opens it. FOSTER enters, carrying a paper bag.)

WHOA.

(He is caught in the blast of light.)

What is that, the sun? What the hell it's two in the morning!

(He shuts the door fast.)

FOSTER. It's two in the afternoon.

SAM. No.

FOSTER. Yeah, man. You just got out of bed?

(FOSTER turns on lights and opens blinds, also claps his hands. The light next to Sam's chair goes on.)

SAM. I took three ambien. Wow. That shit works. You want a coffee?

FOSTER. I won't say no. I was down at the croissant place, got you that ham and cheese croissant, I know you like those.

SAM. You're the one who likes the ham and cheese.

FOSTER. Am I? You know what? I am!

(He laughs, and takes it.)

SAM. What else you got in there.

(He goes to make coffee, while FOSTER clears off a place on the couch for him to sit.)

FOSTER. Chocolate. Spinach. Almond. Two plains. I like a plain croissant too. You heat 'em up a little and put some butter and jelly on them, delicious.

SAM. You got enough croissant for half of America.

FOSTER. The day old stuff, they're practically giving them away down there. They're still good. You don't want 'em I can take them home with me.

SAM. I didn't say I didn't want 'em.

FOSTER. It sounds like you don't want 'em.

SAM. Well give me a chance I'm just waking up.

FOSTER. What are you doing.

SAM. I'm getting a glass of water.

FOSTER. What for?

SAM. That's what they say now, you're supposed to be drinking water all the time. First thing in the morning, you have to have a glass of water.

FOSTER. Who says that?

SAM. Listen I'm just repeating something that was given to me as a useful piece of I don't know.

(He has a bottle of water in his hand.)

FOSTER. You buying water in bottles now?

SAM. What? No, I refill this. I bought this in Calabasas in 1976. The water comes out of the sink.

FOSTER. Good. That makes no sense to me, water in bottles. Just never did. Plants in the earth do just fine with water out of the sky. Good enough for them.

SAM. How's your garden these days?

FOSTER. You should see it. It's crazy, things growing everywhere. I put in a couple of those plants they're just a giant leaf. Like a leaf this big. Then I got those vines I put in a couple years ago, they're everywhere now. And I got this giant oak leaf hydrangea, cost me fifteen dollars last year, it's the size of I don't know what. It's big, it likes it out there. So green and leafy, big white flowers. That Mrs. Gundersun, she never had nothing out there, it was like a little square of dry earth. Now she wants to charge me more because I made the place so nice.

SAM. Predictable.

FOSTER. Right? Anyway it's nice out there, everything growing. Not everything. Some things are dying already, some of them don't last long, you got to be sure to get out there and pull them up or they take up too much room when all they're doing is dying.

SAM. Sounds like you and me.

(They laugh.)

Don't touch that. Hey. Don't touch that.

(For FOSTER is now moving things around so that he can spread out the croissants.)

FOSTER. I got to put them somewhere.

SAM. I got things the way I like it over there. And don't sit there, neither.

FOSTER. It's the only place to sit!

SAM. There's plenty of places to sit. Sit there.

(He points. Goes back to the kitchen.)

FOSTER. You got to clean this place up, Sam.

SAM. I'm doing it. You know, I'm organizing.

FOSTER. You need to organize some of this right out the door. Ow. What's this.

(He sits and then stands up. He holds something in his hand.)

SAM. You sit on that? Don't sit on that. I need that. You can't just sit wherever you want, you know.

FOSTER. It's a bottle cap.

SAM. That's right it's a bottle cap. It's sixty-seven years old. It's worth something.

FOSTER. Sixty-seven-year-old bottle cap isn't worth anything.

SAM. That's what you think. That's from my youth. Okay. When I was a kid I used to sell sodas at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Bingo, every Friday night. Grape Fanta, Pepsi, that kind of Jamaican lemon lime. They'd bring this big block of ice by the bingo hall and I'd chop it up to put the bottles in it, keep 'em cold. All night people are yelling at me, bring me a soda! SAMMY! Bring me a soda! The place was always packed. Father John up there calling out the numbers, it was crazy. Those little plastic chips, I got some of those around here too.

FOSTER. You saved the bingo chips.

SAM. The priest used to make me pick 'em up and put them in those little glassine bags, twelve to a bag, they'd resell 'em for a dime. They're here somewhere. Here it is, here it is.

(He shows him a box with stuff in it. FOSTER looks through it.)

FOSTER. This all come from Bingo night?

SAM. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Bingo. Every Friday night. I'd come home smelling like a chimney. Everybody smoked like two to three packs a night. The place was like a giant diseased lung. It was a wild time.

FOSTER. What's this?

SAM. That's a ring.

FOSTER. Looks like an engagement ring.

SAM. Yeah the ladies sometimes took their rings off, somehow it made it easier to play bingo, I'm not sure why. Their hands got sweaty, I think, so if the ring was loose you took it off. Or if it was tight maybe, all that sweat provided an opportunity.

FOSTER. So this person left their wedding ring on the table, while she was playing bingo and then what, it fell on the floor and you found it in there with the garbage?

SAM. That's right.

FOSTER. This is a real engagement ring? This is a real diamond? And you didn't turn it in to the priest?

SAM. Oh what's he going to do with it. He's going to put it in the collection plate. Because the Pope needs another ring.

FOSTER. It's pretty. It's probably worth something.

SAM. Everything here is worth something.

FOSTER. You say that Sam but I think this might actually be worth something.

SAM. Hey don't just eat that without a plate, you slob. You get crumbs everywhere. Here, let me get you a plate.

FOSTER. You could sell this.

SAM. You want me to sell some old lady's wedding ring?

FOSTER. She's an old lady?

SAM. They were all old ladies! They were playing bingo on Friday night! And this was sixty years ago. She's dead. Even if I wanted, I couldn't return it.

FOSTER. Poor thing. She lost her wedding ring, at bingo night.

(He considers the ring, tosses it back in the box with the bingo chips.)

SAM. She was not a nice person.

FOSTER. You knew her?

SAM. None of them were all that nice. A couple of 'em would give me a buck if they hit the bingo. The rest of them, these were hardened women. The hairstyles were very threatening, huge, like helmets. They came to play but they weren't playing around, you know what I mean? Their fingernails, you can imagine. Sharp as a blade and blood red, all of them. The stiletto shoes. These women were not victims. I need some jam.

(He heads for the kitchen.)

FOSTER. *(Considering the box.)* How come you saved the chips but not the cards?

SAM. They aren't in there? I don't know where they went. Ginny must've moved them at some point. She's gone three years, I'm still trying to figure out where things are.

(Knocks on the door. More knocks.)

What the hell, it's Grand Central Station today.

(FOSTER looks through the blinds.)

FOSTER. Oh, it's Amelia.

SAM. What, Amelia? You didn't tell me it was Amelia. Do not open the door.

(He goes and starts to move a pile of magazines and blankets. It is not clear immediately where he is moving it.)

FOSTER. Why not?

SAM. I didn't know she was coming today.

AMELIA. (*Offstage.*) Hey Dad, I know you're in there.

(**SAM** continues to clean with no apparent effect.)

SAM. (*Calling.*) I didn't know you were coming today, honey! I can't come to the door.

FOSTER. What do you want me to do? I'm going to open the door.

AMELIA. Mr. Foster? I can hear you in there.

SAM. It's not, it's not a good time!

AMELIA. Mr. Foster, can you open the door for me?

SAM. Tell her to go away.

FOSTER. I'm not going to tell her that.

AMELIA. (*Offstage.*) I can hear you both talking in there, I know you're there, open the door.

(**SAM** moves things around.)

SAM. (*Overlap.*) I just got up. I'm naked. I don't want you coming in here and seeing me naked.

AMELIA. (*Overlap.*) OPEN THE DOOR. DAD. You are not naked! I know you are not naked!

(**SAM** continues to move things around.)

SAM. No. Wait. Okay. Okay, you can let her in. Let her in. Yes, it's fine, let her in.

(**FOSTER** opens the door. **AMELIA** enters. She is lovely and fierce and pragmatic. She has a bag full of groceries.)

AMELIA. Thank you Mr. Foster.

FOSTER. Hey Amelia. You look good.

AMELIA. Thank you!

FOSTER. Makeup on, your hair looks so nice.

AMELIA. I got a job interview this afternoon. Hi Daddy.

(She hands the bag to SAM.)

SAM. What's this?

AMELIA. Groceries. Here's some broccoli, it's already chopped up so you just have to steam it, butternut squash also already chopped, you bake this, in the oven, carrots, some apples and – tada! Lettuce.

SAM. Oh like vegetables.

AMELIA. Yes Dad you should be eating vegetables, we talked about this.

SAM. This looks great honey. Thanks. Let me find a place.

AMELIA. The refrigerator is a place.

SAM. That's a great idea. I'll put this in the refrigerator. This looks great. Eating my vegetables, drinking my water. Drinking a lot of water, like you told me. I mean, some people might think, you get to a certain age, you can eat and drink whatever you want.

AMELIA. Who thinks that?

SAM. Nobody.

(SAM starts to put the vegetables away.)

AMELIA. *(Looking around.)* So the place looks – worse. It just looks worse!

SAM. Look, I've been organizing. I've been moving things around. You know how that is. You're in the middle of cleaning, and suddenly everything looks worse? That's what's happening.

AMELIA. I see that that *happened*, you moved things around –

(She picks up a few pieces of clothing to show him.)

SAM. Those are your mother's clothes.

(He takes them from her. She remains frustrated.)

AMELIA. You finally brought her stuff down from upstairs, piled it all on top of everything else that was already here, made everything worse, and then you stopped. Isn't that what happened? That's what happened.

SAM. *(Irritated.)* This is my process.

AMELIA. This is not PROCESS.

SAM. You can't just throw out everything. You have to figure out what you want to keep, and what you can let go. It's like *Sophie's Choice*.

AMELIA. *(Really frustrated.)* This is not like *SOPHIE'S CHOICE*! This is like: The fire department is coming and they're going to condemn the place and tell the health department to throw you out if you don't do something.

This is a disaster. This is collapse. The weight of the universe –

SAM. Here she goes.

AMELIA. Not the universe, yes, the universe, a black hole, sucking itself and everything around it into – gravity pulling everything into entropy – You know what this is? This is not *Sophie's Choice*, this is *Carrie*, the end of *Carrie*. Where the house is so full of terrible things it just sucks itself into the earth. And poor psycho Carrie and her evil mother are buried, just completely buried. Under the wreckage. Of their lives. That's what this is. And that is what is going to happen to you.

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