EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

A Collection of Captivating Comedic and Dramatic Monologues

by

Dennis Bush
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CHARACTER

NOAH: Struggles with a lack of praise from his father.

How hard would it have been? How much of a challenge would it have been for him to say, “Good game.” When he knew how hard I tried, how difficult would it have been for him to just say, “Good game. . . You did your best and I’m proud of you.” OK, the last part would never have happened but the first part—the “Good game”—was in the realm of possibilities. (letting the anger subside; starting at the beginning) My father was the assistant coach of my Little League baseball team. . . Our next door neighbor was the coach and my dad was his assistant. We were the Pirates. (quick pause) Named for the Pittsburgh Pirates Major League Baseball team not the Pirates of the Caribbean. (pause) I played outfield. I was a near-sighted eleven-year-old who wasn’t allowed to wear his glasses—my glasses—to play baseball because they might get broken or a ball might hit me in the face and break the lens and the broken glass would get in my eye and I’d be blind or—worse yet—I’d have to have an eye removed and get a glass one and surely the greatest tragedy a parent can suffer is having a child with a glass eye. (pause) So, there I was in right field without any . . . vision enhancement. (quick pause) I could barely see the batter at home plate, much less the ball when it was hit in my direction. I squinted really hard the minute I heard the sound of the ball making contact with a bat. I squinted in the hope that it would enable me to see the ball if it was coming at me. (quick pause) So I could catch it. . . So, it wouldn’t drop on the ground a few feet away from me and then I’d have to feel around for it and, then, have to throw it to one of the infielders who I couldn’t see very well. (quick pause) It was like playing a game inside a lava lamp. I was surrounded by amorphous blobs and shapes that kept moving. It wasn’t fun. It was not the slightest bit fun. (pause) And after every game, all the guys on the team would do this thing where you walk past the other team and high-five the guys on the other team and say, “Good game.” And after we did that, we’d go back to our dugout and the coaches would be there and they’d high-five all the players and say, “Good game.” (pause) Except my father. When I got to him, I’d have my hand up all ready to high-five and he’d give me a look like, “No, we won’t be high-fiving, today. I doubt if we’ll ever high-five. It would take a miracle of epic proportions for you to ever be worthy of a high-five from me.” I know that’s a lot of disapproval and disgust packed into one non-high-five moment, but it was like time slowed down to a crawl. Like, I’d be two people away from him and I’d see him high-five the guy two people in front of me and hear him say, “Good game,” and time would slow down a little and, then, I’d see him high-five the kid right in front of me and I’d hear him say, “Good game,” and time would slow down even more and then it would be my turn and it was like a half an hour went by in the non-high-five moment that was filled with disapproval and disgust and . . . disappointment.

END OF FREE PREVIEW
Wandered-Off

CHARACTER

SHEILA: Wants to be found.

When you’re a little girl with a bossy older sister, you don’t have much say in what kind of games you play. My sister and the kids in our neighborhood loved hide-and-seek, so that’s what we played. (pause) It wasn’t much fun for me. I didn’t really like the hiding or the seeking. I still don’t. If I have to look for something too long in a store, I stop wanting to find it. So, playing hide-and-seek didn’t have much appeal for me. I played along because it’s what my sister and the other kids said we were gonna play. Like I said, I didn’t have much say in the matter. One Saturday afternoon, when I was eight, we were playing hide-and-seek, as usual, and I just wandered off. I’d been hiding for a while and got bored and I was annoyed that nobody had found me, yet. They couldn’t have been looking very hard. Or maybe they were just really bad finders. Either way, I was bored and annoyed. So, I wandered off. Just walked away, like a fed-up factory worker walking off the job. (pause) At first, I was only going to go a couple of blocks to the health food store down the street and get one of those vegan oatmeal raisin cookies. They’re delicious, though, if you eat too many of them, they’re like a laxative. (quick pause) That’s just a tip. Do what you want with the information. (pause; getting back on track) After I got the cookie, I kept walking. . . farther and farther away from my neighborhood. I must have walked a mile. When you’re eight and you walk a mile from your neighborhood, you might as well be in a foreign country. Nothing looked familiar. . . not even remotely familiar. (pause; SHE’s reliving the walk) When I got tired of walking, I sat down on a bench outside a grocery store. They had one of those horse rides. (quick pause; then sharply) Not a real horse. That would be messy. No one wants to step over big piles of horse. . . droppings, when they’re going into a grocery store. (quick pause) The horse was a ride for little kids. You put a quarter in it and it rocked back and forth. (pause) I wanted to ride it, but I didn’t have a quarter. So, I asked a lady with a big, lime-green purse to give me one and she did. I was a charming child. I was polite.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

Trapped

CHARACTER

JOHN: Struggles with his inability to experience joy.

There was a moth flying around the curtains near our table when the waiter was taking our order. And he stopped—the waiter. . . before all of us had told him what we wanted—and he grabbed a napkin off the table and tried to trap the moth in it. He said he didn’t want to hurt the moth. For ten minutes, he tried to trap it. Ten minutes. And the moth kept escaping and flying around. At one point, he dive-bombed my sister. I think the moth was having fun. It was like he was playing a game, like how a dog can fetch a ball for hours. I think keeping from being trapped in the napkin was the moth’s version of fetch. (pause) I’m sure it was a male moth. You could just tell by the way it was flying. It was very male. No female moth would do the dive bomb thing. At first, I was frustrated with the whole moth trapping-and-escaping-and-trapping-and-escaping thing. I was hungry. I wanted the waiter to take my order and bring us some bread while we waited for the food.

END OF FREE PREVIEW
Obstacles

CHARACTER

ISABEL: Is taunted by judgments and insecurities

I thought I’d be further along by now. *(quick pause)* With my autobiography. It’s not as easy as I thought it would be. I’ve done a lot of deleting. I don’t want to share too much personal information. Once it’s out there, in print, it’s out there. You can’t erase something once it’s in print. *(quick pause)*

Well, you could, but it would be a lot of work locating every copy of the book and blacking out the parts I didn’t want anyone to see. *(pause)* I used to have a blog. I updated it every day until I read an article about a psychological study that said the more often people update their blogs, the more important they think they are. They’re sick with self-importance. I don’t want to be like that. I’m *not* like that. So, no more blog. No more posting photos of myself and hoping people will say nice things about the way I look. *(pause)* I rely on the opinions of others too much. My self-esteem is in the toilet—which is exactly what I have a view of, when I look at myself in the bathroom mirror. The toilet is behind me and slightly to the right. I don’t look in the mirror too long. If I do, I start to see things in the reflection. It’s like my fears come to life. My insecurities swirl around me and I can see them. And my mother’s disembodied head floats around dispensing advice. Being judged and criticized by a disembodied head is an unnerving experience. Especially when it’s your mother’s disembodied head. *(quick pause)* She only seems to appear in the bathroom mirror. I wonder why that is? *(pause; pondering)* Maybe that’s the only place she feels comfortable being disembodied. *(quick pause)* If I was writing that sentence in my autobiography, I’d go back and delete it all. The delete key is very important to me. If I misspell a word, I can’t just go back and fix that word, I have to delete the whole sentence. I have to have a fresh, error-free start.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

Where You’ll Find Me

CHARACTER

AARON: Gives directions.

She doesn’t like me. I know that. She made it very clear. When she married my dad, she actually told me not to call her “mom” because she had no intention of developing a close relationship with me. I thought that was really harsh. *(pause)* I’m documenting everything she says. *(quick pause)* I have a written record of everything she’s said and done to me, since she moved in. My dad’s gonna find out what she’s like. *People* are gonna find out. If they’d look in the trash they’d find out. That’s where I put the pages from my journal.

END OF FREE PREVIEW
Feeling Air

CHARACTER

KRISTIN: Is weighed down with sadness.

I move slowly. When I'm walking, I move slowly. I feel the air moving around me as I walk. Not like when you’re next to an air conditioner or a fan and you feel the air blowing on you. This is different. Sometimes, I can see the air, too. Air comes in different colors. Really good colors like aquamarine and seafoam and azure. Azure-colored air floats by so softly... like aaaaaaaaaaaa-zhur. (pause) Seafoam-colored air smells— but not like sea—at least it doesn’t smell like that to me. To me, it smells like foam. Like hair-product foam.

Pre-Approved

CHARACTER

OLIVIA MARIE: Has been validated.

I’m going to be amazing. (clarifying) When I’m 35, I’m going to be amazing. I think I’m fairly amazing, now. Already. But in eleven years, when I’m 35, other people will think so, too. No one will be laughing at me. (quick pause) There will be a convergence of appreciation of my amazingness. (pause, struggling to stay focused and positive) Until then, I’m just trying to get through the day. Every day. One day at a time. Nights are easier to get through than days. I’m distrustful of days. It’s the sunshine. It makes me squint. Having to squint makes me feel distrustful. I could wear sunglasses, but when you wear sunglasses, people think you’re hiding something. And you are. You’re hiding your eyes. So people are distrustful of you—which I think is worse than me being distrustful of daytime. Eye contact has become very important to me. (quick pause) Since yesterday.

A View of Love

CHARACTER

DREW: Loses his heart on the sky ride.

The view from the sky ride is incredible. You can see the whole amusement park. It’s not at all like a thrill ride. It floats slowly along, high above everything. (pause) When I was little, I was afraid I’d slide under the skinny bar that comes down across your lap and fall to a bloody death down below. (quick pause) I don’t worry about that anymore. Now, the sky ride is the first thing I go on. If you take it from one end of the park to the other, you can see where everything is—the good rides, the places that sell corn dogs and funnel cakes, not just one or the other—all the important stuff. The view gives you
perspective. You can plan out your whole day. (pause) Most of the time, when I'm on the sky ride, I look down. Down is where everything is. And the other people on the ride are looking down, too. Except the woman with the giant stuffed frog. I glanced up for a second and I saw her and the giant frog coming toward me. (clarifying) We were going in opposite directions. I almost dismissed her as one of those people who carry around a giant stuffed animal all day. Winning a giant stuffed animal should be reserved for just before you're ready to go home.

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An Ascension

CHARACTER

DOVE: Talks to the angels.

I lay on the floor in the living room and talk to the ceiling fan directly above me. It's like an angel. It has a head, two arms and two legs. When it spins, there are 5 heads and 5 pairs of arms and legs. It's a dizzying display of angels and they all listen to me. Where I lived before, we didn't have ceiling fans. Nobody did. A climate kind of thing, I suppose. But, here, we have them in every room. And I talk to them all. It's like having friends all over the house. Their faces are hopeful and their arms are open wide, as if they're always ready to give me a hug. Their legs are spread apart, too, kind of like they've been riding a horse. (pause; a smile) A cowboy angel. (pause) Sometimes, when I'm laying on the floor and the angels are spinning above me, I feel like they're lifting me up to them. Like I could float right up to the ceiling. (quick pause) An ascension. A glorious, holy ascension.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

Loud Silences

CHARACTER

HARMONY: Can't keep her parents or herself together.

I didn't change my name. A lot of people think I did. But “Harmony” is the name on my birth certificate. So, no, I didn’t change it. (quick pause) I’ve thought about it a lot. (quick pause) It’s not an easy name to have. When you go on vacation, there aren’t any souvenirs with “Harmony” on ‘em like you can buy little Chelsea or Megan key chains. And people usually have some kind of comment to make about your name, when it’s Harmony. “Oh, were your parents hippies? Were you born in a commune where there was a lot of drug use?” Some woman asked me that at a party. I laughed, but I didn’t think it was funny and I didn’t think it was a very nice insinuation to make, especially at a party. I didn’t choose my name. It was chosen for me. I think your name is something you have to accept. (quick pause) Like your family. (quick pause) You don’t get a choice about the family you’re born into and you don’t get to pick your own name. (pause) I’m an only child. I think my parents decided to name me Harmony because they thought it would be symbolic. Like, “Here we are, two people who’ve come together in this relationship and we’ve created something like two voices that blend in harmony.” (quick pause) That’s what I like to think. I’m sure the choice of names was symbolic, but
probably not as romanticized as my version of it. (pause) They named me Harmony but, as far back as I can remember there wasn’t anything harmonious about their marriage or our family. They didn’t yell and scream, but the silences were so loud. My mom used to say, “I love you and your dad loves you.” But they never said anything about loving each other. It was like they were roommates. Roommates who were being forced to live together when all they really wanted to do was get away.

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JonandJen

CHARACTER

JEN: SHE and JON are inseparable. And, maybe, that’s the problem.

We met in high school. He was my first boyfriend. He was my only boyfriend. He had one girlfriend before me, but that only lasted a couple days, so I don’t think that really counts. We were inseparable. (quick pause) Once we got together and we were a couple, we were inseparable. Everybody said it was meant to be. People always referred to us in the same breath. It was never just Jen or Jon, it was always JonandJen. That kinda bothered me. I like my whole name–Jensen–not just the first syllable. Jon is short for Jonathan. J-O-N, not J-O-H-N. We moved in together, right after high school. We both had jobs. Not careers. Jobs. The kind of things you have where you look forward to what’s on TV that night more than what you’re gonna do at work. At first, money was tight, so we cut corners. A studio apartment instead of a one bedroom and basic cable, instead of HBO and all the good, premium channels. We had one e-mail account for both of us. We still do. We only really need one account. (quick pause) JonandJen. (quick pause) That’s the e-mail address.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

A Rock That Rocks

CHARACTER

KRISTIN: Hopes to find confidence and clarity.

A bigger piece of starry jasper would really help. Starry jasper is a powerful rock. (sharing an important truth) It’s just one of a many powerful rocks. Rocks are powerful. They are. Well, not all of them, but a lot of them are. Just by holding them or placing them on parts of your body, rocks can do amazing things. When I’m in a relationship, I use unakite. It’s a stone of partnerships. It promotes harmonious relationships in love and business. I’m not in business with anyone, but I figure the unakite is smart enough to know that and work extra hard to promote a harmonious love relationship. (quick pause) When I have one. (quick pause) I haven’t had a relationship in a while. (getting back on track) It also clears out blockages from the past. That’s crucial. I have a lot of blockages from the past. . . Emotional baggage. (quick pause) We all have a lot of blockages from the past. Not just me. And unakite helps clear those out. You should get some unakite. You really should. And goldstone. You have got to get some goldstone! It’s not gold. It’s goldstone. It’s entirely different from gold. It sparkles, but you don’t really notice it ‘til you get really close to it. It’s a revitalizing, energizing stone. It’s a rock that rocks! (laughs at her own joke) I just thought of that. A rock that rocks. (SHE laughs, again) It’s also a transmitter stone that causes light to pass through you in order to convey or receive as a medium. That’s just cool. A rock that can help you be a medium is just plain cool. (quick pause)
I’m not talking about medium-size, like small, medium or large. I mean a medium who *receives messages from beyond.* Goldstone comes in purple, too. Purple goldstone. It’s beautiful and does the same things as regular goldstone except it’s purple. *(a new piece of information)* I just got some apache tears, last week. *(clarifying)* Apache tears are a kind of rock, not what a sad Native American person cries.

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**Left Alone**

**CHARACTER**

**SKATE:** Is afraid to leave his little sister behind, when HE moves away from home.

I don’t want to move out and leave her. *(backtracking)* My little sister. *(quick pause)* When I move out, I won’t be around to keep an eye on her. . . To look after her. . . To make sure she’s OK. *(pause)* She’s shy. She’s not as outgoing as I am. She doesn’t have many friends. And, when I’m away, I’m afraid she won’t have anybody to talk to. *(pause)* My parents both work a lot. They’re not home much. And when they are, they like to be left alone. I know how that is. I have a job, too, and when I come home I like to play video games in my room for a while. With the door closed. Sometimes, through the wall between our rooms, I can hear my sister crying. *(pause)* When somebody’s crying, it’s hard to know whether they wanna be left alone or if you’re supposed to say something to cheer ‘em up or if they need a hug or whatever. It’s hard to know what to do. When I hear my sister crying, I usually go over to her room and tell her about my day. Kinda distract her from what she’s upset about.

Sometimes, I tell her I feel like crying, too. There’s a difference between feeling like crying and actually doing it. I don’t cry. Crying is admitting weakness. It’s like surrendering to whatever it is that’s making you hurt inside. When I tell my sister that, she keeps crying. That’s what worries me.

**END OF FREE PREVIEW**