

PLAY'S END

A Dramatic One Act

by
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(Late afternoon in the Doe family kitchen. The sound of a car pulling into a driveway. JOHNNY sits at the table and plays with a pair of toy soldiers. The soldiers battle, with JOHNNY making occasional sound effects. One soldier shoots the other. The wounded soldier falls. Beat.)

JOHN: Johnny, Jay - I'm home! *(enters carrying a small suitcase and wearing an overcoat)* Hey sport. Shooting the enemy? *(points at the toy soldier; beat; waves his suitcase at JOHNNY)* See how light my suitcase is? Feel it. Go ahead. *(JOHNNY picks up the suitcase.)* See how light it is? *(JOHNNY tentatively waggles it.)* Go ahead. You can shake it. *(JOHNNY gives it a good shake.)* Empty. Absolutely empty. Sold the whole stock. You know why, Johnny? You know why? People are feeling unprotected. That is very good news for me and my suitcase. *(takes a newspaper from inside his coat, takes off the coat, sits in a chair and reads the newspaper)* What did you learn in school today?

JOHNNY: *(reciting)* Oedipal rhymes with edible. George Washington is the father of our country. She sells sawed-offs by the seashore. Dinosaurs are extinct. Look both ways before crossing. Two plus two equals four. The meek shall inherit the earth. April showers bring May flowers. Mayflowers bring pilgrims. The Yankees are even money against the Twins in Vegas. The times, they are a changin'. These are the ten things I learned in school today. By Johnny Doe.

JOHN: Did you say the meek shall inherit the earth?

JOHNNY: Uh huh.

JOHN: Is that any way to answer Daddy?

JOHNNY: Yes, Daddy. We learned the meek shall inherit the earth.

JOHN: I'm glad they're teaching values in school again.

JOHNNY: *(beat)* Was Billy Fireman meek?

JOHN: Who?

JOHNNY: That's what Mr. Wright said.

JOHN: Your teacher?

JOHNNY: Uh huh.

JOHN: Johnny!

JOHNNY: Yes, Daddy.

JOHN: Why did Mr. Wright say Billy Fireman was meek?

JOHNNY: 'Cause he inherited the earth. Mr. Wright says that when you die, you inherit the earth. That's what inheriting the earth means.

JOHN: Billy Fireman died? *(beat)* Oh - that was the boy who had the accident.

JOHNNY: *(shakes his head)* He didn't *have* the accident. Rachel Parker *had* the accident. Billy Fireman was the accident.

JOHN: I see. Yes, that was very sad. *(beat; face still buried in the newspaper)* Does thinking about Billy Fireman make you sad, Johnny? You look sad.

JOHNNY: Something happened today.

JOHN: Something sad?

JOHNNY: I think so.

JOHN: Well, what was it?

JOHNNY: I don't remember.

JOHN: You should have written it down. *(beat)* Maybe what's bothering you is what happened to Billy Fireman. *(lowers his newspaper)* I'm lowering my newspaper. *(puts it on the floor)* See? You have my undivided attention.

JOHNNY: Why?

JOHN: So we can have a talk. I want you to tell me what happened to Billy Fireman.

JOHNNY: Why?

JOHN: You'll feel better.

JOHNNY: But that was last week. The thing I can't remember was today.

JOHN: And it bothers you that you can't remember. *(beat)* Sometimes it's better not to remember, if a thing's bad enough.

JOHNNY: I want to remember.

JOHN: I see. *(beat)* Sometimes, if you get your mind off it, the thing you're trying to remember will come back when you least expect it.

JOHNNY: Really?

JOHN: *(nods)* So let's talk about Billy instead.

JOHNNY: *(beat)* It was on the playground. Billy wanted to copy Rachel Parker's homework.

JOHN: And you were with him?

JOHNNY: (**shakes his head**) I didn't even like him. I was playing on the merry-go-round.

JOHN: Aren't you getting a little old for that?

JOHNNY: I like to get it going real fast and make the other kids puke.

JOHN: Oh. (**beat**) So you push? (**JOHNNY nods.**) So you were pushing the merry-go-round which is close by?

JOHNNY: Yes. Is "yeah" okay?

JOHN: You'd like to say "yeah" instead of "yes"?

JOHNNY: If that's okay.

JOHN: Sometimes or all the time?

JOHNNY: Just sometimes. I could say "yes" the other times.

JOHN: (**tries to be chummy**) Yeah. I think you could do that. (**beat**) So you were pushing the merry-go-round... you didn't ride on the merry-go-round...

JOHNNY: (**tries it out**) Nah?

JOHN: Like "yeah." The opposite of "yeah." Good for you. So you didn't ride?

JOHNNY: Nah.

JOHN: And then...

JOHNNY: I heard a shot.

JOHN: She shot him. (**JOHNNY nods.**) And that's it?

JOHNNY: (**nods again**) Not counting the ambulances and stuff.

JOHN: Do you remember the thing you forgot yet? (**JOHNNY shakes his head.**) Doesn't surprise me at all. It takes more than talking about something else for ten seconds to get your mind off what you're trying to remember. How could you get your mind off it? You barely told me what happened to Billy. One second, he's alive. The next, he's dead.

JOHNNY: That's what happened.

JOHN: Do they teach you in school about telling an anecdote?

JOHNNY: What's an anecdote?

JOHN: A story.

JOHNNY: They tell us stories.

JOHN: What stories do they tell?

JOHNNY: There was one about loaves and fishes.

JOHN: Bible stories. Good. Glad to hear it. Do you like those stories?

JOHNNY: Yeah. I guess.

JOHN: And do you know why you like them? (**JOHNNY shrugs.**) Because they're good stories. With a beginning, a middle, and an end.

JOHNNY: (**beat**) In the beginning, Billy wanted Rachel's homework. In the middle, she shot him. In the end, he died.

JOHN: That's fine, son, but a good story needs to be longer than that.

JOHNNY: Why? I thought it just has to have a beginning, a middle and an end.

JOHN: (**not so nice**) Do you want to remember this thing or not? (**JOHNNY looks ready to cry.**) I'm sorry, Johnny. Sorry. You're right. It does just have to have a beginning, a middle and an end. But the thing is, you can't get to the middle right after you tell the beginning.

JOHNNY: I don't understand.

JOHN: Okay. In the beginning of your story, you want to tell us who's in it.

JOHNNY: Billy and Rachel.

JOHN: Now what else about Billy?

JOHNNY: He didn't do his homework. (**catching on**) And he had to turn it in right after recess!

JOHN: Good! That's the idea!

JOHNNY: And Mr. Wright doesn't like Billy very much!

JOHN: Didn't. Didn't like.

JOHNNY: And Mr. Wright didn't like Billy very much.

JOHN: So if Billy didn't turn his homework in, Mr. Wright might want to shoot Billy himself! (**an uncomfortable pause**) Now what about Rachel?

JOHNNY: She's got boobs.

JOHN: Johnny!

JOHNNY: She let Billy feel her boobs. So Billy thought if she let feel her boobs, she'd let him copy her homework.

JOHN: I stand corrected. That's good storytelling. Good detail. What else about Rachel?

JOHNNY: She's eleven. She stayed back a year. And she had a gun - (**scolding himself**) duh - she had a gun in her bookbag.

JOHN: Good. You're adding color to the story. We've arrived at the middle.

JOHNNY: He went up to her.

JOHN: And he said...

JOHNNY: Can I copy your homework?

JOHN: I feel like I know these children. Do I know these children?

JOHNNY: (**shakes his head**) So Billy asks -

JOHN: And she says no?

JOHNNY: Daddy! Let me tell it!

JOHN: Sorry.

JOHNNY: He says, "Can I copy your homework?" And she says, "No."

JOHN: No? Just like that?

JOHNNY: Oh - first she says, "What will you give me for it?"

JOHN: For the homework.

JOHNNY: Yeah. So he says, "How's about my rabbit's foot?"

JOHN: She tells him no?

JOHNNY: He gave her the rabbit's foot last week so he could feel her boobs.

JOHN: He tried to give her something that was already hers? (**JOHNNY nods.**) The kid's a con artist. He had it coming.

So then what does he try?

JOHNNY: He'll do her homework for a week. Only everybody knows he never does *his* homework.

JOHN: So she says no? (**JOHNNY nods agreement.**) See the way this story is building?

JOHNNY: What's building?

JOHN: Getting more interesting; the last part is the best part. (**JOHNNY nods.**) When does she take out the gun?

JOHNNY: I'm getting to that part.

JOHN: Sorry. You've got me on the edge of my seat. (**leaning forward**) See? You're telling such a good story I'm on the edge of my seat.

JOHNNY: We're still in the middle.

JOHN: Don't leave me hanging, Johnny.

JOHNNY: So recess is just about over. The little kids are lining up already.

JOHN: Did you make any of them puke?

JOHNNY: Just one. But he puked all over his pants. Anyway, the little kids are lining up to go in.

JOHN: Billy doesn't have much time to get the homework.

JOHNNY: Daddy, are you gonna let me tell this?

JOHN: Sorry. Keep going.

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