

A FUNNY WAY OF SHOWING IT

By Jerry Rabushka

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CHARACTERS

MICHELLE, a high school girl, aged 16

TASHA, a friend of hers

RYAN, a star player on the football team

STEVE, a friend of his, who's not on the football team

Ryan's COACH

Mrs. Jones, a school COUNSELOR

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This play is an expanded version of a piece written to help start a dialogue about teen dating violence. It was originally produced by the Los Angeles Jewish Family Service and sponsored by the cities of West Hollywood and Beverly Hills, along with other groups dealing in domestic violence prevention. One of the reasons behind writing and producing the play was to help people involved become more comfortable in discussing and dealing with a difficult topic.

This is a play that can be set just about anywhere: on the school grounds, at a small eatery, outside on the street, or simply on a bare stage. Therefore, scene changes can be done quickly, and the play can keep a fast pace. The play, with its relatively small cast, can be done on a small budget and low key set to facilitate touring to various schools interested in the topic.

An important part of this play is to make sure each character understands his or her point of view, rather than portraying everyone as "good or bad." The more the players can understand why their characters think and feel the way they do, the more they can bring to the piece. People obviously like Ryan and he must play his character in a way that shows some likeable qualities.

This play has a lot of important issues but raises them in a way that doesn't preach. The script has plenty of opportunities for humor, for well rounded characters, and for people to show how they relate to people their own age as opposed to authority figures or the "younger generation."

Let the emotions fly, because the characters are very set in what they believe. Ryan and the coach feel just as strongly as Michelle and the Counselor. Then, the audience can determine for themselves what they think the issues are.

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SETTING: Just about anywhere, a coffee shoppe, on the school grounds, walking along the street. This can be done on a bare stage or with just a few props. Scenes one through four take place in the same location, but very close together time wise, as if we're jumping back and forth between two simultaneous conversations. Scene 5 is immediately after; therefore, transitions should be made quickly.

SCENE 1

TASHA: (*upbeat, like SHE's getting gossip*) Ryan?

MICHELLE: (*excited*) Ryan!

TASHA: I can't believe you're going out with Ryan! Football Ryan!
(*happily*) You have got to keep me better informed, Michelle!

MICHELLE: (*a bit embarrassed SHE didn't say anything*) Well, yeah,
for awhile now! I didn't want to tell you until I knew it was for real.

TASHA: And is it?

MICHELLE: Straight up, Tasha! He says he doesn't want me to see
anyone else, and he's real protective of me.

TASHA: Well, congratulations!

MICHELLE: (*still excited*) Yeah, like you know, when I don't go out with
him, he gets real mad and such until I do. He really wants to be with
me.

TASHA: Well, (*not quite as sure this time*) congratulations.

MICHELLE: Yeah, I'm even sharing my biology notes with him. And you
know how I am about my biology notes.

TASHA: I know. You take them; you keep them. It's like a diary with you.
But biology? With Ryan?

MICHELLE: Oh, the notes. Just the notes!

TASHA: Well, I know Ryan, though. He wants a lot more than notes
when it comes to biology.

MICHELLE: (*her tone of voice leads us to realize something is
wrong*) No, Tasha. He just needs a little help studying, that's all.

TASHA: Right. I didn't know Ryan even studied. I thought he just
whizzed through school on his football prowess.

MICHELLE: No, he wants those notes. He gets kinda mad if I don't hand
them over.

TASHA: How mad?

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MICHELLE: Oh, it's nothing. (**blowing it off**) Well, Ryan is so cool, you know. I mean, he's *football* Ryan! He wants what he wants. (**trying to laugh it off**) I told him he won't learn anything if he just copies off me. We sorta had a fight about it in front of his friends.

TASHA: What happened?

MICHELLE: Well, you know Ryan. He likes to be in charge. He... (**embarrassed**) well, he hit me.

TASHA: (**shocked**) He did? And you're still going out with him?

MICHELLE: Well, sometimes he does it when I don't do what he wants. I'm just trying to figure it out. Then it'll stop. Well, that's what he says.

TASHA: Michelle, you fell for that? That's the oldest trick in the book!

MICHELLE: This is the first real boyfriend I've had! He's *football* Ryan! I'm... (**as if SHE's no big deal**) Michelle... I'm like... nobody. I have to prove-

TASHA: If he really cares for you-

MICHELLE: I know. (**reciting what SHE's read in advice columns, being silly**) If he really cares for me he'll respect me. (**back to normal**) Right, Tasha. It's Ryan. We have some good times together. Well, okay, so he did want to do biology. If you know what I mean.

TASHA: (**in disbelief**) And did you? You don't seem like the type.

MICHELLE: When I said I wanted to wait, he just hauled off and slugged me. It still hurts a bit. But it's only because he wants me so much.

TASHA: He hit you? He just can't hit you! You've got to tell-

MICHELLE: Tell? Who? I can't tell anyone. You're the only one who knows. Look, Tasha, I don't like it, but I don't want to be alone!

TASHA: You can't just let this go!

MICHELLE: No. My mom'll blame me for it. She blames me for everything.

TASHA: Well, I'll talk to Ryan. He's good friends with my boyfriend. I'm sure we can get through to him.

MICHELLE: (**trying to get out of the conversation**) He can't know we're talking. He gets jealous.

TASHA: I'm a *girl*.

MICHELLE: He gets jealous. Don't ask me. He wants all my attention. It's nice, in a way. I feel loved. And in another way, I feel afraid. But if my mother finds out I'm seeing him, she's going to assume I *am* doing the biology thing. No one can know! I shouldn't have told you either.

TASHA: (**trying to understand**) Well, we all think Ryan's a good guy. He's on the football team, so it makes him a good guy.

MICHELLE: He's strong. But I don't know what I'd do without him. I don't want to be alone again. (**dismissing her concerns**) So he has a temper. He says I make him angry sometimes, and he just loses control. It's no big deal, if he loves me. That's more important.

TASHA: I've been seeing Steve for a year. He never hits me. If I say no on something, he respects me. He pouts, but no means no. No matter what. (**in confidence**) Well, I get kind of bossy sometimes.

MICHELLE: (**can't believe her**) And he stays with you?

TASHA: (**matter of fact**) I'm worth it. I've heard about this stuff. About guys beating up their girlfriends and stuff.

MICHELLE: Yeah. You always think it's going to happen to someone else. I can't – let anyone know. I feel so stupid. I'm afraid of him, but I'm more afraid to be without him.

(Blackout, then lights up on STEVE and RYAN, most probably in the same general location.)

SCENE 2

STEVE: (**dismayed**) You *hit* her?

RYAN: (**so what?**) Yeah, I hit her! Grow up.

STEVE: Ryan! You shouldn't hit anyone! Guy, girl... (**joking just a bit**) ever heard of conflict resolution?

RYAN: She aggravates me. She doesn't see it my way. Hey, when I'm in the mood, I'm in the mood. (**makes a swinging motion**) I just let my hands do the talkin' for me.

STEVE: Tasha would waltz off my dance floor in a minute if I hit her.

RYAN: (**playfully pushing STEVE around**) That's because you let her waltz all over you. I can't believe you even waltz.

STEVE: Tasha's the deal! I don't wanna lose her. Besides, she'd tell my mom.

RYAN: (**almost too proud of it**) Michelle's keeping quiet.

STEVE: Still...

RYAN: Hey, maybe you're some kinda wuss that lets yourself be pushed around by a girl. But look. We were at the party, and all the guys are like – "Ryan, Ry-boy, how long you been with her, and you let her boss you around?" Well, you know, they make you feel stupid. I'm a leader to them! I'm the leader of the pack! I gotta stay alpha male.

STEVE: You gave in to peer pressure? And you're the leader of the pack? You can't have it both ways. You're a mess, Ry-boy.

RYAN: It's my right as her boyfriend-

STEVE: You can't force her into anything. You talk to her. You don't always get your way. (**joking**) I *never* get mine.

RYAN: I just put it to her in a way she'd understand. It's my way or the highway.

STEVE: Oh, that's original.

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RYAN: When you're *on* the highway, it makes a point. Look, we had a talk. She didn't see it my way – yet – and I just got a bit angry. I'm ok now. But I really hate biology. It's better when she does it for me.

STEVE: I'm not sure your talk was a *talk*.

RYAN: Whose side are you on, Steve? No wonder you didn't make the team. (***again, playfully pushing him around***) You've got no fight in you.

STEVE: (***pushing RYAN off***) I don't have to fight with girls.

RYAN: We don't fight. But if I let her loose, she runs off. Who knows what she does? If I keep her close by me, I stay in control. (***smiling***) I gotta practice for when I get married, you know. Alpha male!

STEVE: Ryan, I knew you were kinda hotheaded, but you're way over the cliff on this!

RYAN: (***as if this excuses everything; condescending***) You know the guys talk about you. They say Tasha's got you whipped. I'm not gonna have them say that about me.

STEVE: She'll tell someone eventually.

RYAN: She better not. I've told her, what we do is just between us.

STEVE: (***gets an idea***) Then you think it's wrong! You *know* it's wrong, or you wouldn't try to hide it.

RYAN: (***shoves STEVE and brushes past him***) I can't talk to you about anything.

(Blackout, and back to MICHELLE and TASHA)

SCENE 3

MICHELLE: I can't talk to her about anything. She'll accuse me of starting it. You know my mom. "What did you do to make him so mad?"

TASHA: Well... talk to *my* mom. She's understanding and helpful. (***joking***) Really!

MICHELLE: (***in disbelief***) I didn't think anyone's mom was understanding and helpful.

TASHA: Look, I know that's unusual, but... she is. It's almost embarrassing.

MICHELLE: Nobody wants to hear about my problems. Look at the world, Tasha. Who am I? I'm insignificant little Michelle. Ryan likes me, and now I'm someone special. I like that. I've never had it before.

TASHA: /like you.

MICHELLE: You're a girl.

TASHA: You say that with such disdain. I'm a girl.

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MICHELLE: Ryan's romantic. No, really. He only does this because he loves me. (*joking a bit*) And because he needs the help in biology. And- I mean, you might think it's-

TASHA: Cruel?

MICHELLE: I like it. It makes me feel wanted.

TASHA: How about scared?

MICHELLE: That too. Look, Tasha, I'm going to do what Ryan wants. That's what people in love do. They do what the other one wants.

That's what he says, and... he's right. Besides, if I tell my mother-

TASHA: Ryan's only 16 years old. You can do something about it. There's people in authority. (*joking again*) The dreaded parental authority. Sometimes it comes in handy. Hey, my mom got Lanie Ryland in *deep* doo-doo after that locker incident.

MICHELLE: Ryan says my mom's an idiot. (*angry at herself, her mother, and her situation, lashing out*) And I can't talk to her about anything. You can talk to your mom, so great. So you're the only lucky teenager in the world. I have to do this on my own. He'll change. I like him! Why is that so hard for you to understand?

(Blackout, and lights up on RYAN and STEVE)

SCENE 4

RYAN: Yeah, why is that so hard for you to understand? She digs it! I tell her, "Baby, you're all mine. You're only mine!" She gets this look.

STEVE: She's scared. Hey, call me what you want to call me-

RYAN: We're friends, bro. You know that.

STEVE: I like having a girlfriend that's with me because she wants to be. I don't have to force her. I don't have to threaten her.

RYAN: You don't *get* nothin' from her either.

STEVE: I'm 16. I don't need that from her.

RYAN: See? I'm different. In our relationship, I expect things. I guess I'm more mature. (*cocky*) If she doesn't like it, there's plenty of other girls out there who'll take what I got to offer.

STEVE: Not when word gets around that you beat them up.

RYAN: You think so? You think Brad's never laid a hand on Suzanne? Chicks go for that kind of thing. They like it. (*like it's a secret*) They'll tell you they don't like it, but they like it. Hey. I'm the man. She's the woman. She does for *me*. (*defensive, as STEVE isn't convinced*) I don't do it *all* the time. She just makes me mad sometimes. I don't even mean to sometimes. But she makes me mad, you know. It's like I stop liking her. I just lose control. (*STEVE walks off in disgust; RYAN grabs him, insistent*) It's no big deal.

STEVE: (**straight into his eyes**) You scare me, dude.

RYAN: You gonna go blabbing to the principal or something?

STEVE: I could. He's my father.

RYAN: I know that. Hey, if we're friends, you stand with me. (**a bit more threatening**) You will, won't ya bro? (**STEVE won't agree to it.**)

Dude! Don't make me have to hurt you.

STEVE: Would you?

RYAN: Well... I made the team, you didn't.

STEVE: So you're gonna kill all the witnesses.

RYAN: You're getting on my last nerve... (**threatening, grabbing his arm**) bro.

STEVE: (**shakes RYAN off**) Fine, go take it out on Michelle. If I hear one more thing, I'm telling my dad.

(exits; RYAN is frustrated that HE couldn't get through to STEVE; MICHELLE enters)

SCENE 5

RYAN: (**HE's already upset**) Where've you been?

MICHELLE: (**afraid, and said it quickly**) Just with Tasha.

RYAN: (**sarcastic**) Oh, the angel. What trouble's she starting?

MICHELLE: Nothing. We were just talking.

RYAN: What about?

MICHELLE: About you.

RYAN: (**scared himself**) What about me?

MICHELLE: That I love you.

RYAN: (**more a threat than a question**) Do you love me?

MICHELLE: I love you.

(During this conversation, we see STEVE and TASHA come in together, contrasting by being affectionate, or just having fun together, silently.)

RYAN: You better.

MICHELLE: You know I do.

RYAN: (**a bit scared himself**) You do like me, don't you? I mean. I'm good to you and all.

MICHELLE: Yeah, you're always good to me. Of course I like you!

RYAN: (**starting trouble when HE doesn't have to, mainly due to insecurity**) You don't act like it sometimes.

MICHELLE: Sometimes...

RYAN: What?

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MICHELLE: Sometimes...

RYAN: What? Now what?

MICHELLE: **(turning away)** Sometimes you act like what I think doesn't matter to you.

RYAN: **(turning her back)** Sometimes, you're so stupid. You say things like that, and that's why I get mad at you. That's why-

MICHELLE: Ryan, please don't. I didn't mean it.

RYAN: Tasha told you to say it, didn't she? She's so granola. New age this, organic that. She's just some giant wimpy bar of cherry granola.

(imitating TASHA) "Oh, men have to be in touch with themselves"

(letting it fly) Look, I don't want you hanging around with Tasha, okay?

MICHELLE: She's the only friend I have left.

RYAN: I don't want you hanging around with Tasha. You love *me*, right?

MICHELLE: Right.

RYAN: So, you do things for the guy you love. I mean, that's what love is, isn't it? **(kinder and gentler, but still in control)** It makes me feel good when you say yes. Makes me feel important. You're the only one that makes me feel that way.

MICHELLE: Ryan... It's so special to be with you.

RYAN: **(holds her close)** Yeah. And I don't want you to ever leave.

(MICHELLE looks over to TASHA, afraid; TASHA looks past STEVE and shows a look of concern, but SHE's not quite sure what to do, so SHE hugs STEVE as the lights slowly go down.)

SCENE 6

(On campus, STEVE and TASHA are talking with Ryan's Football Coach)

COACH: **(HE's burly and standoffish and not taking them seriously. Perhaps HE has something else to do, like work on a playbook, and HE's considering them a distraction.)** So what did you want me to do about it?

TASHA: **(fighting against hope that SHE'll get through to COACH)** Talk to him. He respects you. **(knowing RYAN is too full of himself)** He might listen to you.

STEVE: He doesn't really respect anyone else. He's too busy being king of the hill.

COACH: **(like it's no big deal that RYAN is a spoiled brat, still otherwise occupied)** He deserves to be king of the hill.

TASHA: He's beating up-

COACH: (*smiling, looking right at her and cutting her off*) The opposition! He's taking our team to a nice big fat winning season. He's got a lot on his shoulders already, and he doesn't need the extra stress of people following him around (*accusing TASHA of being in the wrong*) ratting on him.

STEVE: Sounds like *you* don't want the stress.

COACH: Someone has a big mouth.

STEVE: (*not terribly afraid of COACH, since HE has nothing to lose*) Now I see where Ryan learned it from.

TASHA: (*trying to calm things down, but standing firm*) We thought if *you* could talk to him, we could stop it now. We won't have to involve anybody's parents. (*HE's still not terribly interested.*) Or any other important people.

COACH: I smell a bit of a threat from a little girl who wants to bring down a football team.

STEVE: We just want to do what's right.

TASHA: You should see Michelle. You should talk to *her*.

COACH: Ryan's just being a kid. That's all. He's just finding his way, just like the rest of us.

TASHA: He hit her, he's making her do his homework, and-

COACH: (*accusing TASHA of starting trouble*) So you believe her? What if she's just some poor lovelorn girl crying out for attention? We've had that happen here before. Some girl makes up some story and gets the whole school turned on its head, and then some boy or some teacher has to go through all sorts of trouble to get his reputation back. Then we find out she just wanted to be in the limelight. I don't really want to go through that here again.

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