

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEED A CELLO

A COMEDY IN SEVEN SCENES

By **Martin R. Collin**

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SYNOPSIS: A young man's worst nightmare: his own personal life, mistakes and failures, is brought hilariously to the stage in a succession of embarrassing moments orchestrated and revealed by a Greek chorus of six nagging mothers in his head. Vexed and hounded by finger-pointing failure, nagging guilt, missed opportunities, and a son's duties and responsibilities, the young man's trials result in a playful, comical, and paranoid theatrical presentation of a conscience riddled by a mother's overprotective love and good intentions.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(FIVE MEN, TEN WOMEN, SOME FLEXIBLE CASTING)

NOTE: ALL LINE COUNTS ARE APPROXIMATE

THE NARRATOR (M).....A handsome young man. College-educated. You know him. He sat next to you in Algebra a number of years ago. *(128 lines)*

GREEK CHORUS.....Six nagging mothers on a platform at the back of the stage. *(Mother #1 – 37 lines/Mother #2 – 37 lines/Mother #3 – 33 lines/Mother #4 – 31 lines/Mother #5 – 36 lines/Mother #6 – 36 lines)*

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Ideally, one of the mothers should be Jewish, one should be African-American, one should be Italian, one should be Asian, one should be Irish, and one should be an arrogant white woman from the country club. However, any combination of ethnicities will be fine as long as the operative word above, nagging, is the hallmark of each mother's personality. Use what you have. Have fun with them. A variety of grey wigs, wire-rimmed glasses, bad shoes, bangly/jangly jewelry, nasty sweaters, and large and loud dresses should outfit this chorus. Canes and walkers are optional.

MAX (M or F)The shoe store clerk. (6 lines)

THE TEACHER (M or F).....(5 lines)

THE PROM DATE (F).....Prom dress with corsage, serious hair, and heels. (8 lines)

ROOMMATE #1 (M).....Sweatpants. Harvard MBA. (Also needs a blazer and tie.) (8 lines)

ROOMMATE #2 (M).....Boxer shorts. Yale English and computers. (Also needs a blazer and tie.) (7 lines)

THE BOSS (M or F)Bustling, business-like. Managerial. A small cog in the corporate machine. (8 lines)

THE SECRETARY (F).....The Voice of Efficiency. (10 lines)

ANOTHER DATE (F)Chosen by THE MOTHERS. (21 lines)

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

ANOTHER DATE is a younger version of THE MOTHERS. Similarly and comically dressed as her older role models, ANOTHER DATE looks like THE NARRATOR'S MOTHERS from years ago. To THE MOTHERS, this is the ideal fiancée for THE NARRATOR.

SETTING:

Kitchen/Dining area with Formica-topped kitchen table and chairs. On a raised (*two to four inches*) platform, four or five feet behind the kitchen table and chairs, where the sink and dishwasher and the kitchen cabinets normally would be, stand the six mothers. This platform should be lighted separately from the main playspace. By rearranging the chairs and table and using a few carry-on props and furnishings, all suggested scenes will take place in this kitchen area.

Suggested scenes should be set up in short blackouts accompanied by 12-18 seconds of recorded music of the director's choosing.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

- SCENE 1: MY MOTHER'S HOUSE
SCENE 2: KUPPIE'S SHOE STORE
SCENE 3: FOUNTAIN ROCK SCHOOL
SCENE 4: PROM DATE, AT A RESTAURANT
SCENE 5: THE APARTMENT, THE ROOMMATES
SCENE 6: MY JOB, THE OFFICE
SCENE 7: ON A PARK BENCH FOLLOWING DINNER WITH
ANOTHER DATE CHOSEN BY MY MOTHER

SCENE 1 - MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

SETTING:

Lighting reveals the kitchen/dining area with a Formica-topped kitchen table and chairs. Comfortable and well-worn, the home of many meatloaves, uneaten helpings of canned peas and brussel sprouts, and thousands of bowls of cereal. The platform is in darkness until THE MOTHERS begin speaking.

THE NARRATOR: *(To the audience. Sighs.)* You don't have to feed a cello? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

The lights slowly fade up on the platform to reveal:

MOTHER #1's back is to the audience. Then, she turns to face the audience and speaks.

MOTHER #1: Please don't use that tone of voice in front of me, young man. Uneducated people talk like that; your father and I didn't spend good money . . .

MOTHER #6's back is to the audience. Then, she turns to face the audience and speaks.

MOTHER #6: Don't you swear in this house. This is not some high school locker room with a bunch of your friends . . .

MOTHERS #1 and #6 turn their backs again to the audience. All MOTHERS shake their heads and nod in agreement and ad-lib under breath comments to each other.

THE NARRATOR: I had asked her when I was a kid, maybe sixth or seventh grade, if we could get a dog. And her response was . . .

MOTHERS #3 and #4 backs are to the audience. Then, they turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

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MOTHERS #3/#4: Listen, you don't have to feed a cello.

They turn their backs again to the audience. All MOTHERS shake heads and nod in agreement and ad-lib comments to each other under their breath.

THE NARRATOR: *(Shrugs.)* Needless to say, I never got a dog or a cello.

MOTHERS #2 and #5 backs are to the audience. Then, they turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

MOTHERS #2/#5: Complain, complain, complain . . .

They turn their backs again to the audience. All MOTHERS shake heads and nod in agreement and ad-lib comments to each other under their breath.

MOTHERS #1, #3, #4, #6 backs are to the audience. Then, they turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

MOTHERS #1/#3/#4/#6: *(To the audience.)* Can you believe it?

MOTHER #2 turns to face the audience and speaks.

MOTHER #2: Whine, whine, and whine . . . when you grow up and get your own place, you can get as many dogs as you want.

MOTHER #5 turns to face the audience and speaks.

MOTHER #5: But until that time, in *my* house, under *my* roof, we are *not* getting a dog.

They turn their backs again to the audience. All MOTHERS shake heads and nod in agreement and ad-lib comments to each other under their breath.

THE NARRATOR: Other parents gave advice, wisdom, shouted warnings, thoughtful words, wise old sayings passed down by ancient ones, baked brownies, put Mercurochrome on your boo-boo when you scraped your knee . . .

With their backs to the audience, MOTHERS #1 and #6 turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

MOTHERS #1/#6: And I *did* put Mercurochrome on your knee . . .

THE NARRATOR: I know Ma . . .

MOTHERS #1/#6: Don't make such a conniption. Pull up your pants. Show me. Nobody's gonna see.

THE NARRATOR: Mom . . .

With their backs to the audience, MOTHERS #3 and #4 turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

MOTHERS #3/#4: That was a nasty scrape. Out there on the driveway. Show me, come on, where does it hurt? Pull up your pants. You don't have to make such a face . . .

THE NARRATOR: I know, Ma . . .

With their backs to the audience, MOTHERS #2 and #5 turn to face the audience and speak in unison.

MOTHERS #2/#5: And you loved those banana brownies. You never complained about those banana brownies . . .

THE NARRATOR: Ma, I know Mom . . .

MOTHERS #1/#6: You and your brothers ate the brownies and . . .

THE NARRATOR: Mom!

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(To the audience.) It was always like that. How do you get a word in edgewise? How do you get a word in sideways? How do you get a word in lengthwi . . . ?

MOTHERS #3 and #4 speak in unison.

MOTHERS #3/#4: Did you remember your glasses?

THE NARRATOR: See? *(A beat.)* For crying out loud, how do you get a ball past the infield grass? What difference did it make if you got that little black puck down the ice if you were always playing against the best goalie who ever played the game?

MOTHERS #2 and #5 speak in unison.

MOTHERS #2/#5: Do you have your lunch money?

MOTHERS #1 and #6 speak in unison.

MOTHERS #1/#6: Wear the overshoes. You are not leaving this house without . . .

THE NARRATOR: It stopped raining a half an hour ago . . .

ALL MOTHERS: I want you home by 11:00.

THE NARRATOR: How about 11:30? Everybody else . . .

MOTHER #6: Everybody else, Mister-Late-Night-You-Need-To-Be-In-Bed-By-11:00, is not my son. You, sir, are my son. I don't care what they are doing in other places, but in this house, you need to . . .

THE NARRATOR: *(Resigned.)* Mom, I'll see you at 11:00.

MOTHER #1: I don't like that tone . . .

All MOTHERS turn their backs again to the audience. All MOTHERS shake their heads and nod in agreement and ad-lib comments under breath to each other.

Lighting now reveals The NARRATOR stepping downstage to address the audience.

THE NARRATOR: Tone. That tone. It was always about the tone - the delivery. It's like she always heard more than my words actually said. And maybe my words did say more. It is almost as if my words invited her in. *And she never left!* She pulled up a seat on the sofa and just made herself comfortable. She was always there. It's like the first time she let me go buy my own school shoes. I walked down to Kuppie's Shoes by myself. But she was still there . . .

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2 - KUPPIE'S SHOE STORE

In blackout, rearrange the kitchen chairs like the customer chairs in a shoe store. Have MAX enter with a couple of shoeboxes under his arms and in his hands. The kitchen table can become a shoe store customer counter. Shop bell rings.

MAX: Hello, handsome young man. How's your mother?

THE NARRATOR: She's fine, Max. *(Pause.)* Max, I need some school shoes.

MAX busies himself around the suggested shoe store, stacking boxes, checking receipts, and pulling up a chair to his young customer.

(To the audience.) I'm not sure he even knew my name. I was always the handsome young man. *Everybody* was the handsome young man. Even the ugly kid with the facial tics, the mustard on his sweatshirt, and the uni-brow was the handsome young man.

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MAX: Of course you need some school shoes. Every good boy needs new shoes for school. What do you like? How do you think? Did you look around? I got a lot of nice shoes in the window. For a handsome young man like you, I think I got just the thing. I know I got just the thing. What are you a seven and a half, an eight? I got a lot of nice shoes.

THE NARRATOR: Max, I think I want to get a loafer this year and . . .

MAX: Hold it right there, Mister Frank Sinatra.

THE NARRATOR: What?

MAX: You want with a tie or with a buckle?

THE NARRATOR: No Max, I think I want to get a loafer this year . . .

MAX: Listen, handsome young man, if I send you home in a pair of cordovan penny loafers, your mother . . .

The lights slowly fade up on the platform to reveal:

The MOTHERS backs are to the audience. Then, they turn to face the audience.

MOTHER #6: That Max is such a nice young man.

MOTHER #1: A handsome young man.

MOTHER #3: Ida's boy.

MOTHER #4: You remember your cousin Ida?

MOTHER #5: Max, loafers? I don't think so.

MOTHER #2: With a tie or a buckle.

ALL MOTHERS: *Sensible shoes!*

MAX: . . . would be down here faster than you could pickle a herring.

No sir, it's a tie shoe or a buckle. A loafer? Are you out of your . . .

Max, mumbling, grumbling, shaking his head, exits.

Lighting now reveals that we are back in the kitchen. The NARRATOR steps downstage to address the audience.

THE NARRATOR: Under every rock, behind every bush, uptown, downtown, even in the boys' lavatory at Fountain Rock Elementary School . . .

MOTHER #6: Wash your hands. Do you know what kind of germs live down there?

THE NARRATOR: And Kuppie's Shoe Store. She had spies everywhere. Why I remember the first time she went for a parent teacher conference at Fountain Rock Elementary . . .

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3 - FOUNTAIN ROCK SCHOOL

In blackout, rearrange the kitchen chairs so that there are three chairs stage right angled center. Three MOTHERS seated in chairs and three MOTHERS standing behind the chairs, like a biased jury box. THE TEACHER'S seat (the hot seat) is stage left and angled center-facing THE MOTHERS. School bell rings.

MOTHER #5: I think maybe you could give him a little more homework.

THE NARRATOR: *Mom, what are you doing?* I don't need . . .

THE TEACHER: He is actually a decent student and a polite young man . . .

THE NARRATOR: See? Decent. Polite.

ALL MOTHERS: He can be lazy at times . . .

THE NARRATOR: So, who's not lazy at times? A little cable TV, a nice nap, some Dorito chips . . .

MOTHER #4: . . . and he does watch a lot of those television programs.

THE TEACHER: He reminds me of your older son . . .

THE NARRATOR: *Please, don't go there* . . .

MOTHER #1: No, his older brother is at Stanford at medical school.

MOTHERS #2/#3: Yes, at medical school . . .

THE NARRATOR: Do you have to remind me?

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MOTHER #1: This one is not so . . .

THE TEACHER: He is always respectful. He always does his homework.

THE NARRATOR: See, respectful. Does his homework.

MOTHER #6: His older sister is applying to Columbia and Yale . . .

THE NARRATOR: Please, come on! Do you have to go there too?

MOTHER #5: . . . and Harvard . . .

MOTHER #4: . . . and Princeton . . .

MOTHER #3: . . . and Brown . . .

MOTHER #2: . . . and U Penn . . .

MOTHER #1: . . . and The Sorbonne, in Paris, France . . .

MOTHER #6: . . . and Oxford . . .

THE NARRATOR: Yes, she wears Wonder Woman pajamas too . . .

THE TEACHER: He has a lot of friends. He works and plays well with others.

MOTHER #4: He goes out a lot with those nogoodnick friends of his too.

MOTHER #5: This one is going to need math help.

MOTHER #2: He doesn't even know his times tables!

MOTHER #3: Have you seen this book? *1001 Math Problems for Overachievers Who Need To Get Into . . .*

THE TEACHER: He is above grade level in reading.

MOTHER #1: Fine, we need a list of 150 reading books for this July when we send him to Math Camp.

MOTHER #3: And . . .

ALL MOTHERS: Are there any girls we need to worry about?

Lighting now reveals that we are back in the kitchen. The NARRATOR steps downstage to address the audience.

THE NARRATOR: No mom, there aren't any girls you need to worry about. (A beat.)

(To the audience.) But she did. I would always have to bring them home. I would always get the third degree. *They* would always get the third degree. Needless to say, these relationships never lasted too long. It was embarrassing.

MOTHER #1: Is this the one with the brother in jail?

THE NARRATOR: Yes, Ma. Her brother is in Sing-Sing doing five-to-ten with time off for good behavior.

MOTHER #2: Maybe you should ask her what her father does?

THE NARRATOR: He's an artist, Mom.

ALL MOTHERS: *Oooooooh, an artist . . .*

THE NARRATOR: I think he carves woodland creatures, squirrels and deer, out of soap and maybe margarine.

MOTHER #3: Do you think with those beautiful nails that this one can cook?

THE NARRATOR: Mom, for crying out loud, she's in eleventh grade! We eat a lot of cheeseburgers and French fries! *(To the audience.)* I took Beautiful Nails to the prom before she had a chance to dump me. She said that she would go with me, and that makes any girl attractive. In the back of my mind, though, I knew that this was temporary, a very temporary, arrangement . . .

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 4 - THE PROM DATE, AT THE RESTAURANT

In blackout, move the kitchen table center stage and place a white tablecloth, small floral centerpiece, and candle on the table. Place two chairs on opposite sides of the table to create an "intimate" prom night dining experience.

THE MOTHERS, in black waiters' vests (over their dresses), with water pitchers, white dinner napkins over their arms, cutlery and water glasses, stand directly upstage of the table monitoring (and participating "in") the date as the wait staff.

As the young couple sits down and begin speaking (The NARRATOR pulls the chair out for his date), MOTHER-WAITERS set up water glasses, pour water, and set up napkins and cutlery for the young couple.

THE PROM DATE: Well, this sure ain't cheeseburger and French fries . . .

MOTHER #4: *Ain't?* She says *ain't*?

THE NARRATOR: No, this ain't cheeseburgers. (*Forced laughter.*)

MOTHER #5: *Ain't?* Again with the *ain't*?

THE NARRATOR: You really look terrific tonight . . .

MOTHER #6: Where are your eyes? Are you looking where I think you're looking?

THE NARRATOR tries to hush MOTHER #6 with forceful stare.

THE NARRATOR: (*Under his breath.*) Mom!!

MOTHER #1: You call that a dress? This Victoria, she *ain't* got too many secrets.

THE NARRATOR tries to hush MOTHER #1 with forceful stare.

THE NARRATOR: (*Under his breath.*) Mom!!

THE PROM DATE: You look handsome yourself. Have you ever eaten here before?

THE NARRATOR focuses on his date again.

THE NARRATOR: (*Lying.*) Oh yes, my family and I dine here at least once a month.

MOTHERS all look at each other in disbelief.

THE PROM DATE: Really?

THE NARRATOR: Yes, we're really close.

MOTHER #2 and MOTHER #3 come to fill water glasses.

THE NARRATOR: Thank you.

MOTHER #2: Don't mention it. We're really close.

MOTHER #3: We can get some more water when we eat here next month.

MOTHER #2: No, *dine* here next month.

THE NARRATOR: It's sort of a family tradition.

MOTHER #3: Tradition?

MOTHER #3 dumps/spills cold water from pitcher into THE NARRATOR'S lap.

THE NARRATOR: *What the . . . !*

MOTHER #3: *Oh, I'm so sorry. Here, let me help you. (MOTHER #3 tries to clean him up.)*

THE NARRATOR: *(Stands.)* It's okay. It's okay. Really it's . . .

MOTHER #2: *(Rushing over to assist.)* I can help. Let me . . .

THE NARRATOR: No, it's okay. Really, it's okay.

MOTHERS #2 and #3 back off. THE PROM DATE gets up and comes around to The NARRATOR.

THE NARRATOR: Look, I'm sorry.

THE PROM DATE: It's okay.

THE NARRATOR: I don't know what we're going to do now.

THE PROM DATE: Maybe if we got a hair dryer . . .

THE NARRATOR: Maybe I can dry them off in the bathroom.

THE PROM DATE: Really, it's okay.

THE NARRATOR: I can go to the prom with wet pants. It's okay.
Really, it's all right.

MOTHER #6: You *can't* go to the prom with wet pants.

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MOTHER #5: Who says you have to go to the prom in wet pants?

THE PROM DATE: But his pants . . .

MOTHERS #1 and #4 bring in, and dramatically unfurl and present, a dry pair of tuxedo pants.

MOTHER #6: Come on, come on . . .

MOTHER #5: Come on already . . .

MOTHER #3: Off with the pants, Mister Sinatra.

THE NARRATOR: Here?

MOTHER #2: Don't make such a face . . .

MOTHER #4: You don't want to catch a cold . . .

THE NARRATOR: Right here? In the restaurant?

MOTHER #1: What? You need a fancy dressing room?

MOTHER #6: You don't want to go to the prom in wet pants.

THE NARRATOR: Mom . . .

MOTHER #2: What's with the wet pants?

MOTHER #3: Don't make a conniption. Why do you always have to . . . ?

MOTHER #5: Excuse me. Miss Beautiful Nails, I'm sorry. Please turn around . . .

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