

TO THE MOON

A Play in One Act

SETTING: the backyard of a suburban home. TIME: the evening.

(The lights rise on BOY, sitting on the ground. There is a tall, dying pine tree in the yard that rises above the stage, with its canopy concealed from the audience. Pieces from the trunk have been cut out, and an axe leans against the tree. Small wooden blocks have been fastened to the tree to form a ladder, and an old tire swing hangs from one of the tree's dying branches. An assortment of hedges and bushes create a natural fence around the yard and the house. Pine cones are scattered on the ground, and a weathered picnic table sits to one side of the backyard. The back porch of a home is upstage. A bucket and miscellaneous other items are on the back porch. The house lights are on, and someone can be seen inside the home. BOY is looking at the tree and the sky, while fidgeting with a pine cone. A moment passes. BOY rises and climbs up the tree. Then, a door is heard opening and two figures can be seen within the house.)

WOMAN

You're late.

JERE

I know. Sorry.

WOMAN

How long is this going to keep happening?

JERE

Not very.

WOMAN

Where were you?

JERE

Working.

WOMAN

You didn't call. You never call.

JERE

I know.

WOMAN

You should have called.

JERE

I said I was sorry.

WOMAN

Dinner is cold, I'll have to reheat it.

JERE

Fine.

WOMAN

I would have had it ready for you when you got home, but you didn't call...

JERE

I said I was sorry!

(The back porch light turns on and the door swings open. JERE enters the backyard, fumbles through his pockets, and takes out a pack of cigarettes. WOMAN walks onto the back porch.)

WOMAN

Where are you going?

JERE

I'm having a smoke.

WOMAN

Dinner will be ready in a few minutes.

JERE

And I'll be done in a few minutes.

(JERE lights a cigarette.)

WOMAN

We talked about this.

JERE

Yeah, we did.

WOMAN

You promised.

JERE

Yeah, I did.

WOMAN

So we're not trying tonight?

JERE

We tried before. It didn't work out.

WOMAN

But it could now.

(No response.)

What about tomorrow night?

(No response.)

I know it's a bit of a reach, and you're scared, but—

JERE

No.

(Beat.)

WOMAN

Fine.

(WOMAN exits into the house, slamming the door behind her. The back porch light turns off. JERE looks around the backyard and takes a long drag. He walks to the tire swing and attempts to sit on it. When he does, the branch above cracks slightly. JERE quickly moves away from the swing.)

JERE

Damn.

(A pine cone falls from the tree, almost hitting JERE.)

Shit...

(Another pine cone falls. JERE dodges it. He tries to see what's in the tree, but it's too dark.)

Fucking raccoons...

(Several pine cones crash onto JERE. JERE drops his cigarette.)

Hey! Who's up there?

(No response.)

Who's up there?

BOY

No one.

JERE

Get down here.

(No response.)

Now!

(BOY climbs down from the tree. JERE puts out his cigarette.)

What were you doing up there?

(No response.)

You just like to throw stuff at people?

(No response.)

What's your name, kid?

(No response.)

Okay, if that's how you want to play it...

(JERE sits at the picnic table.)

I have all night.

(A moment passes in silence.)

BOY

You swore.

JERE

What?

BOY

You swore. You're not supposed to swear.

JERE

Your mom tell you that?

BOY

Yes.

JERE

My mom told me the same thing. It's kind of a mom code, you know?

BOY

No.

JERE

Never mind. The bottom line is that kids shouldn't swear.

BOY

But grown-ups can?

JERE

Sure.

BOY

Why?

JERE

Well, swears aren't very nice words.

BOY

So why do you say them?

JERE

Because they just pop into our heads.

BOY

But you said they're not very nice.

JERE

(Chuckling)

Grown-ups aren't very nice.

(Pause.)

What're you doing here? Where's your house?

BOY

I don't know... I saw your tree and came over.

JERE

My tree? Don't you have trees at your house?

BOY

Not this big. You can't climb them like you can this one.

JERE

Ah.

BOY

And this one has steps, so my hands don't get sappy.

JERE

What kind of trees do you have?

BOY

I don't know. Sappy ones. My dad doesn't like me playing on them. He doesn't like it when I get dirty...

(The back porch light quickly turns on and then off again.)

What was that?

JERE

A warning.

BOY

About what?

JERE

Who knows...

(JERE takes out a cigarette and lights it.)

BOY

You shouldn't do that. It's bad for you.

JERE

Your mom tell you that, too?

BOY

No. Yes. My dad used to smoke.

JERE

But then your mom made him stop?

BOY

How'd you know?

JERE

Just a shot in the dark...

(JERE takes a long drag.)

BOY

Your parents let you do that?

JERE

I don't live with my parents, kid. When you grow up, you have to move out and find a place of your own.

BOY

What about her? Doesn't she care?

JERE

Too much.

BOY

What?

JERE

Nothin'. Why don't you want to go home?

BOY

I don't like playing at home.

Because of your dad? JERE

No. BOY

(BOY sits on the ground and picks up a pine cone. He fidgets with the pine cone.)

Does he hurt you? JERE

No. BOY

Listen, kid, you have to tell me if— JERE

I said no! BOY

(BOY throws the pine cone at JERE. JERE takes a step toward BOY, but BOY turns away from him.)

Well... Uhm... Do you see your grandparents much? JERE

Sometimes. BOY

Do you like them? JERE

Why? BOY

Well, when I had problems with my mom or dad, I'd go see my grandma. We lived just down the street from her. JERE

Really? BOY

Yeah. Is yours close? JERE

BOY
She died...

(BOY picks up another pine cone.)

JERE
Oh. I'm sorry.

BOY
It's okay. My mom didn't like it when I'd run over there, anyway.

JERE
I bet you miss her.

BOY
Sometimes...

JERE
Did she have a big pine tree in her yard?

BOY
Yes...

JERE
Ah.
(BOY continues to play with a pine cone.)
You know, my grandpa would pay me to pick up the pine cones out of their yard.

BOY
Really?

JERE
Yeah. He said he was paid a penny for picking them all up, so—

BOY
He gave you a penny for each one?

(JERE laughs.)

JERE
Because of inflation, yeah.

BOY
Mine too. I miss that.

JERE

Well, there are plenty on the ground here. Want to help me clean up? I was going to do it tomorrow, but if you wouldn't mind...

BOY

Sure!

(They both laugh and begin to pick up the pine cones. JERE takes a long drag from his cigarette, and BOY throws a pine cone at him.)

JERE

Hey!

BOY

You shouldn't do that.

JERE

Oh yeah?

(JERE takes another drag, and BOY throws another pine cone. This time, JERE retaliates and they begin playfully throwing pine cones back and forth at one another. Their laughter grows until WOMAN is seen walking toward the back door within the house. She shouts from inside the house.)

WOMAN

Jere! What's going on out there?

(BOY gets anxious and starts to look around the yard.

Jere!

JERE

Just a second!

(To BOY)

Calm down, what's the matter?

BOY

Don't tell her I'm here. Please! I don't want to go home!

JERE

Calm down, I—

WOMAN

Jere!

(The back porch light turns on, and WOMAN enters from the house.)

What have you been doing? The yard is a mess!

JERE

I'll clean it up tomorrow.

WOMAN

How long have you been done with that cigarette? Are you coming? I'm waiting for you.

JERE

What?

(JERE realizes that his cigarette has fallen out during the play fight with BOY. He finds it on the ground and puts it out.)

I've been—uh—

(JERE turns back to BOY, but he is gone.)

WOMAN

You've been what?

JERE

I've been talking to—uh...

WOMAN

Who?

JERE

...No one.

WOMAN

Huh. Funny. Me too.

(WOMAN exits into the house. The back porch light turns off.)

JERE

Hey! Kid! Where are you?

(BOY enters from behind the bushes.)

BOY

Thanks for not telling on me.

JERE

Of course.

BOY

Sorry I got you in trouble.

JERE
Don't worry about it, kid.

BOY
She was mad...

JERE
No, that's just how she looks.

BOY
I can help you clean up. For real, this time.

JERE
Nah, I can do it tomorrow.

BOY
Please?

JERE
Uh—sure, I guess.

(JERE gets the bucket from the back porch and places it in the middle of the yard.)
Just chuck the pine cones in there. I'll tell you what: we'll make a game out of it. Every pine cone you make into the bucket is worth two points. When we're all done, I'll give you a penny per point you score, okay?

BOY
Okay!
(JERE and BOY quickly race around and toss pine cones into the bucket. They make exclamations like "two points," "so close," "do a trick shot," etc.)
This is a lot more fun than doing it by myself.

JERE
No one ever played this game with me, either.

BOY
Someone helped me once.

JERE
Yeah?

BOY
Yeah.

JERE
A friend from school?

BOY
Yeah.

JERE
Was it a girl?

BOY
No...

JERE
It was, wasn't it?

BOY
No!

(BOY throws a pine cone at JERE.)

JERE
That's a two point deduction. You can't hit the referee.
(BOY picks up a couple more of the pine cones and throws them at JERE.)
Okay, okay!
(JERE picks up the remaining pine cones and puts them into the bucket.)
I think that's all of them...

BOY
One hundred points!

JERE
A hundred? You hardly made any into the bucket, and there were only maybe fifty pine cones out here...
(BOY picks up a couple pine cones from the bucket, threatening to throw them all out on the yard again.)
Ooohhh! Now I get it... you're a little extortionist, aren't you? Fine, a dollar it is...
(JERE takes out a dollar and gives it to BOY.)
Don't spend it all in one place.

BOY
I won't. I'm saving my money.

JERE
For what?

BOY
Nothing...

JERE
Uh huh... A present for your girlfriend?

BOY
She's not my girlfriend!

JERE
Okay, okay!
(JERE takes out another cigarette.)
Is it for your friend, who happens to be a girl?

BOY
No, it's for me. She wants to come, though.

JERE
So you're going somewhere?

BOY
It's a secret.

JERE
Running away from—
(BOY attempts to steal the cigarette from JERE. JERE holds it up higher, out of BOY's range.)
Oh, no, you don't!

BOY
Give it!

JERE
No!
(BOY quickly climbs the picnic table and grabs the cigarette from JERE.)
Hey, that's my last one!
(BOY holds the cigarette as though he's going to break it in half.)
Don't even think about it.

BOY
Stop asking so many questions!

JERE
You know what? Go ahead, I'll buy more. The gas station's only a couple blocks away.

BOY
I bet your girlfriend wouldn't like that.

JERE
She's not my girlfriend, she's my wife.

BOY
What's the difference?

JERE
Half your stuff. But you're right, she wouldn't like that. I told her my last smoke was last night, so smoking right now isn't getting me any brownie points.

BOY
So why are you doing it?

JERE
I'm upset.

BOY
Grown-ups get upset a lot, don't they?

JERE
(Chuckling)
Yeah. Do your parents get upset? With each other?

BOY
I guess.

JERE
With you?
(The back porch light turns on. BOY hides in the bushes.)
Hey! Kid!
(WOMAN enters from the house.)
Look, I'm sorry, I just went through my last smoke, I'll be right in.

WOMAN
No, go ahead, take your time.

JERE
What?

WOMAN
Take your time out here, as much as you need. I know how important smoking is to you.

JERE
I said I finished my last one, okay?

WOMAN
Forever? Or just for the night?

JERE

...I'll be right in for dinner.

WOMAN

Hmm. I don't think so. Dinner's over.

JERE

What are you talking about?

WOMAN

You didn't call and missed it, then you stood out here and smoked it away. I figured you really weren't interested, so I shoved it down the garbage disposal.

JERE

The whole thing?

WOMAN

It was cathartic. So go ahead and stay out here as long as you want. If you get hungry, go walk to the gas station and buy a new pack, okay? Because nothing's waiting for you in the house.

(WOMAN exits into the house. The back porch light turns off.)

JERE

Son of a...

(JERE takes out his pack of cigarettes, out of habit. Realizing it's empty, he throws it aside.)

Damn it!

(BOY comes from the bushes and approaches JERE.)

BOY

I'm sorry. Again.

JERE

It's fine.

BOY

But you're mad.

JERE

I'm fine!

BOY

I like to swing when I get really mad.

JERE
I'm not swinging.

BOY
You'll feel better.

(BOY pushes swing toward JERE.)

JERE
No!
(JERE pushes the swing back at BOY, and the branch above snaps off the tree. BOY is hit by the swing, and startled by the branch hitting the ground. BOY begins to tear up.)
I'm sorry...

(JERE approaches BOY, but BOY keeps a safe distance.)

JERE
I didn't mean to do that.

BOY
That hurt...

JERE
I know. Listen, I—
(JERE approaches BOY again, and BOY moves away again.)
All right. I'll just...sit over here. We could both use the space, I think.

(JERE sits on the picnic table. Pause.)

BOY
You two fight a lot.

JERE
Yep...

BOY
Do you have kids?

JERE
Uh... No...

BOY
That's good. I don't like it when my parents fight...

JERE
Yeah, I didn't like it when mine did either...

BOY

It always feels like—

JERE & BOY

They're mad at you.

(They laugh softly together.)

BOY

If you want to stop fighting, why don't you do something about it?

JERE

'Cause I'm the reason we're fighting.

BOY

That should make it easier.

JERE

Oh yeah? This from the kid who runs away and talks to strangers.

BOY

At least I'm doing something.

JERE

Yeah, well, adults have to deal with their problems, kid.

(Pause.)

BOY

Why don't you come with me?

JERE

What?

BOY

Run away with me! I was going to go with my friend, Sara...

JERE

Ah, your girlfriend?

BOY

She is not!

JERE

How does she spell her name? With or without an "h?"

Without. Why?

BOY

(Smiling)
Nothing. Go on.

JERE

BOY
We were going to run away as soon as I found the right tree, but I think you need it more than she does.

JERE
The right tree?

BOY
Yeah! And this one is just tall enough to reach.

JERE
To reach what?

BOY
The moon! And lucky for us, this one has steps!

JERE
The steps don't go all the way to the top.

BOY
I know. That's part of the fun. Who wants to climb steps all that way? It's way more fun to have to figure it out.

JERE
Kid, you shouldn't be climbing trees like that. You'll get hurt. Or worse.

BOY
I know. My dad yells at me all the time for it. All because I fell once...

JERE
So why are you climbing up again?

BOY
Because I got so close! The tree just wasn't tall enough. But this one is! I know it!

JERE
You should listen to your dad, kid.

BOY
So you're not going with me?

JERE
No. And you're not going, either.

BOY
You're not my dad.

(BOY goes to climb the tree, but JERE stops him and pulls him away.)

JERE
I said no!

(BOY loses balance and falls over.)

BOY
You don't get it.

JERE
What is there to get?

BOY
Haven't you ever wanted to go to the moon?

JERE
Yeah, when I was nine. Then I grew up. Now it's your turn to do the same, Peter Pan.
(BOY begins to cry silently.)

Hey, none of that... Come here...
(JERE sits next to BOY.)

Listen, I'm not your dad, so I can't really tell you not to go up there, can I? If you want to climb up by yourself, go on. It just can't be my tree, okay?

BOY
Go up by myself? No... What's the point?

JERE
To get to the moon, isn't it?

BOY
Yeah, but you can't go by yourself. What's the point in climbing all the way up there without anyone else? If someone climbs with you, then it's an adventure, you know? An adventure to the moon!

JERE
You can't really climb a tree to the moon, kid...

BOY

I know. But if someone climbs with you, then it can feel like it. Just you, them, and the moon! But if you're by yourself, you're just some kid playing in a tree. I don't want to be just a kid in a tree. I want to go to the moon.

WOMAN

Jere! Jeremy!

BOY

I should get going...

JERE

What? No, stay, she won't be mad—

BOY

No. I've been here long enough. Thanks... Jeremy.

JERE

Uh, you're welcome... kid. Just hold on, okay? Stay here.

(The back porch light turns on. JERE breaks eye contact with BOY and turns around. WOMAN enters from the house.)

WOMAN

Jere, can you come inside? Please?

JERE

Why don't you come out here with me?

WOMAN

What? I—

JERE

Please.

(WOMAN crosses to JERE. Pause.)

I didn't mean—

WOMAN

(Overlapping)

I lied.

JERE

What?

WOMAN

About your dinner. It's not down the garbage disposal. It never even got cold. It's been sitting on the stove, simmering, since you got home. I—

JERE

Sshh... I'm sorry. Now, about tonight...

WOMAN

No, it's okay. I know you're hesitant, and that's fine. We—

JERE

I'm on board.

WOMAN

Wh-what? Really?

JERE

Yeah, I... Let's try again.

WOMAN

Oh, Jeremy!

(They embrace.)

Why the sudden change? Did I say something? I didn't mean to be harsh, but—

JERE

No, it wasn't you. It was—

(JERE turns around to introduce BOY, but BOY is gone.)

It was... Hey! Kid!

WOMAN

Jeremy...

(JERE goes to the bushes, but BOY isn't there.)

JERE

Kid! Where'd you go?

(JERE looks up into the tree. Unable to see anything, he throws a couple pine cones at the branches.)

WOMAN

Jere!

(JERE looks around, unable to find a trace of BOY.)

JERE

There was a kid out here... a boy. You were checking on me through the windows, right?

WOMAN

I looked out here, sometimes, sure...

JERE

Then you saw him?

WOMAN

Who?

JERE

The boy!

WOMAN

Honey, you've been out here by yourself. Alone.

JERE

No, he was...

(JERE looks around him. Finally, he laughs softly. The lights fade to black.)

END OF PLAY