

Oh Brother: A Therapy Play

BROTHER – Brother. Incredulous and gullible.

CLASSMATE – Classmate. Worn down and painted over.

MOTHER – Mother. Typical and intricate.

SUZY – An absolute platonic ideal; what I wished it was like; the perfect recipe for success; if you could only just trust that *this* is the solution, *this* is what you've been paying so much money to achieve, *this* is your surefire path to self-actualization; omniscience incarnate.

NOTE: Don't feel like just because "brother" is a boy word that the actor playing him needs a penis, and the same goes for the female characters – the actors playing girls don't need boobs. It's theatre. It's fantasy. The audience knows that. Be inclusive etc. etc.

(BROTHER stands in the room, surrounded by thousands of walls and tables, organized and neat, cataloged and labeled, everything stacked cleanly in boxes and drawers, hung at right angles, tape cut and piles straightened, scraps of paper and lifesaver wrappers, shoes sorted and shirts hung, everything intentional. He does not realize how much here is a product of his life. He doesn't realize much.)

(Younger.)

(In front of him there is a toy ferris wheel made of legos or something. MOTHER appears from nowhere and, without stopping, sweeps it off the table, into the wall, onto the floor. It explodes into thousands of tiny pieces. They scatter frictionless, bouncing spark-like through the vacuum.)

(Older.)

(Behind him, there is a voice. Behind him, CLASSMATE sits at her desk taking notes from the board. It's an eleventh grade English class. He can't see her face, but she looks really pretty. He watches her take notes. At another table, MOTHER picks up unimportant pieces of paper, crumples them in her hand, and puts them in a plastic grocery bag.)

BROTHER

What are you doing?

MOTHER

Cleaning up your garbage.

BROTHER

I was gonna do that.

MOTHER

It's fine.

BROTHER

But I was gonna do that.

MOTHER

(Laughing) It's fine.

(MOTHER laughs. She finishes picking up the garbage but leaves the table out of order. CLASSMATE gets up and puts on her backpack, puts in her headphones, messes with her hair, and leaves. BROTHER watches her do these things.)

(Younger.)

MOTHER
How was school?

BROTHER
It was good.

MOTHER
How's your stomach feeling?

BROTHER
Better I guess.

MOTHER
There's a tums in the junk drawer.

BROTHER
Thanks.

MOTHER
What did you learn?

BROTHER
Long division.

MOTHER
In the first week of school?

BROTHER
Yeah she seems really serious.

MOTHER
She is. I would've put you in Mrs. Kidd's class if the school was still letting me, but Mr. James is still being really strict with the rules. It's only his second year.

BROTHER
It's hard.

MOTHER
I cannot do math.

BROTHER
You're a teacher.

MOTHER

Fake it 'til you make it.

BROTHER

What if a kid has a question?

MOTHER

We have textbooks.

(Older.)

(BROTHER starts carefully, quickly looking through all of the tables, looking for something)

SUZY

What are you looking for?

BROTHER

Uh. I don't know.

SUZY

Why did you come here?

BROTHER

I suck at everything, and I don't have any friends.

SUZY

(Looking at audience) Is that true?

BROTHER

Yes.

(SUZY smiles.)

(Younger.)

CLASSMATE

Hi!

BROTHER

Hello.

CLASSMATE

What's your name?

BROTHER

Brother.

CLASSMATE

That's a cool name!

BROTHER

Thanks, I got it when I was a baby.

CLASSMATE

Haha!

BROTHER

What's your name?

CLASSMATE

I don't have one!

BROTHER

You don't have a name?

CLASSMATE

Nope! My parents never gave me one.

BROTHER

That's kinda weird.

CLASSMATE

Haha!

MOTHER

How was school?

BROTHER

It was fine.

MOTHER

Meet anybody interesting?

BROTHER
A girl talked to me.

MOTHER
Is she cute?

BROTHER
Yeah.

MOTHER
Are you gonna date her?

BROTHER
Maybe.

(Older.)

SUZY
What was her name?

BROTHER
She didn't have one.

SUZY
How did you address her?

BROTHER
You don't usually say people's names when you talk to them.

SUZY
That's not what I asked.

(Younger.)

(BROTHER sits, looking at the broken pieces of ferris wheel everywhere. MOTHER opens the door and rubs her eyes.)

MOTHER
Can you say you're sorry?

BROTHER
I'm sorry.

(BROTHER cries)

MOTHER
For what?

BROTHER
For being mean and stupid.

MOTHER
You're not stupid!

BROTHER
I'm sorry.

(BROTHER cries more. He watches himself cry in the mirror)

MOTHER
(Disgusted) Quit fucking looking at yourself cry.

(MOTHER leaves)

(Older.)

CLASSMATE
Hi!

BROTHER
Hello.

CLASSMATE
What's your phone number?

BROTHER
Oh.

(He gives her a piece of paper.)

CLASSMATE
Thanks I'll text you!

MOTHER
How was school?

BROTHER

Good.

MOTHER

How's that girl?

BROTHER

Good. She asked me for my phone number.

MOTHER

(Teasing) She wants your aaaaaaa-ass, she wants your aaaaaaa-ass. You do have a good ass, it's so cute. Like a little bubble.

BROTHER

I wish she'd given me her number so I could text her.

MOTHER

She'll text you tomorrow.

BROTHER

Why tomorrow?

MOTHER

Girls never text day of. You gotta make them wait for it.

BROTHER

I want her to text me today.

MOTHER

Then it's working.

(Older.)

SUZY

Did your parents ever use physical violence with you?

BROTHER

I guess.

SUZY

What do you mean?

BROTHER

We had Mr. Sad Spoon. It was a wooden spoon that had a smiley face on one side and a frowny face on the other. She would lean it up against the wall with the smiley face out when she was working, and if we were being loud or fighting, she would turn it around, and then if we kept being bad she would give us a spanking. It worked.

SUZY

I'm sure it did.

(Younger.)

(MOTHER reenters the room, crying)

MOTHER

I'm sorry I shouldn't have broken the ferris wheel. I'm so sorry. God I'm so sorry. If I could go back in time and take it back I would. God. I'm so so so sorry. It's just I'm working two full time jobs, your dad's never home, and I've been dealing with kids all day, and I know it's not right, but it's just so hard to come home and deal with it here too. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to break it. It just happened. I'll help you clean it up, okay?

(Together, MOTHER and BROTHER pick up the pieces of the ferris wheel and put them in a plastic grocery bag. Meanwhile, CLASSMATE takes notes. We can't see her face, but she looks really pretty.)

(Older.)

BROTHER

(Texting) Hey do u wanna come over and watch a movie?

CLASSMATE

(Texting) SURE!

(Texting) Omg my caps lock was on sure!

MOTHER

Are you gonna fuck?

BROTHER

I want to.

MOTHER

Just don't be loud. I don't wanna hear you through the walls.

BROTHER

I can't guarantee anything.

MOTHER

Haha gross.

(Older.)

SUZY

Have you always talked to your mom like this?

BROTHER

Since I was fifteen yeah.

SUZY

Did anything specific happen when you were fifteen?

BROTHER

Not really. I remember she walked in on me masturbating one time, but that didn't really change anything. I think it was more that I was taller and more muscular and showing a clearer sexual interest in women.

(Younger.)

(BROTHER and CLASSMATE sit on a bed, watching a movie. BROTHER leans over to kiss her. He kisses her hard. She returns the kiss. She puts her hand on his neck and arches her back. He puts his hand on her boobs. She lets him. He moves his hand down her torso.)

CLASSMATE

I don't actually think I want to do this right now.

(BROTHER pushes over a box on a table)

BROTHER

Oh. Yeah that's fine.

CLASSMATE

You're just a really nice guy, and I don't want to ruin it with sex.

(BROTHER pushes over something else.)

BROTHER

I understand.

(Older.)

SUZY

It seems that upset you.

BROTHER

Well. Yeah. The way she was talking leading up to it made it seem like that's what she wanted. And it's fine that she didn't.

SUZY

Of course it is.

BROTHER

Yeah of course it is.

SUZY

She has every right to say no.

BROTHER

I know. It just sucks.

(Younger.)

MOTHER

Ah shit that sucks. And you stopped after that?

BROTHER

Yeah.

MOTHER

Sorry man. I know that sucks.

(Trying to cheer him up) What did your seventh-grade science teacher say?

BROTHER

Bitches be bitches and pussy ain't free.

MOTHER

Bitches be bitches and pussy ain't free.

(Older, technically.)

(Close, visceral, directly to the audience so that BROTHER can't hear)

MOTHER

(Different, unrehearsed) You do know that when I was getting my doctorate I was planning on leaving your father. I was like- when I get this thing I am moving away and starting over. He's just such a simple man, and- and with having kids it was all just a little overwhelming. I had spent my whole life trying not to be a housewife and all of a sudden I was kind of like what the fuck? You know? And I was seeing this new world of people thinking on a different level, which I know you get that. And I was really planning on leaving.

Don't tell your brother that.

(Older, technically.)

(BROTHER begins searching again through drawers and cabinets and binders.)

SUZY

What are you looking for?

BROTHER

(Startled) Oh sorry I was um.

SUZY

...?

BROTHER

What.

SUZY

You said "I was um" and then you stopped.

BROTHER

Oh. Yeah.

SUZY

Were you going to say something?

(BROTHER shrugs and shakes his head.)

(Younger.)

(CLASSMATE comes in with a quiche and gives it to MOTHER.)

CLASSMATE

I made you a quiche!!!

MOTHER

Oh my god.

CLASSMATE

It's made of puff pastry! It was no big deal. It's very good!

MOTHER

Thank you. I'll put it in the fridge.

CLASSMATE

Well I just heard about your father-in-law and figured I'd do a little something.

MOTHER

Thank you.

CLASSMATE

...

MOTHER

Do you want anything to drink?

CLASSMATE

Oh my gosh if that wouldn't be a problem!

MOTHER

Not at all.

CLASSMATE

It is really hot out there! Six month summer, six month fall!

MOTHER

I do not like living in this state.

CLASSMATE

It'll grow on you! I didn't like it when I moved from Seattle when I was a kid, but you get used to it!

(MOTHER smiles.)

(Older.)

SUZY

Your mom didn't like her?

BROTHER

She did.

SUZY

Doesn't seem like it.

BROTHER

Yeah.

SUZY

What do you want from this?

BROTHER

I don't know.

SUZY

So far we've only talked about your mom. Do you have trouble talking to her?

BROTHER

No we talk a lot.

SUZY

How does it feel when you talk to her?

BROTHER

Good. I trust her.

(Younger.)

CLASSMATE

(Texting) Hey do u wanna grab coffee after class today? My dad is super high and i don't wanna go home

BROTHER

(Texting) Ya

(Texting) Meet me at car

MOTHER

(Texting) Are you OK?

BROTHER

(Texting) Ya I'm just getting coffee

MOTHER

(Texting) You don't usually drink coffee... OK

BROTHER

(Texting) I'm with friends.

MOTHER

(Texting) OK, text me when you get back if I'm not home. Love you!!!

BROTHER

(Texting) Just got home, do we have anything for supper?

MOTHER

(Texting) There should be some chicken in the freezer and I think we have leftover takeout from last night. If not you can order something if you want – I'll transfer money into your count.

(Texting) Account

(Younger.)

(BROTHER is sitting on the counter eating miniature powdered donuts from a bag. MOTHER stands in front of him with a cotton ball and hydrogen peroxide.)

MOTHER

This is going to hurt okay?

(BROTHER nods. She places the cotton ball on his finger, and he continues eating the donuts.)

BROTHER

Ow OW OW STOP!

(Powdered sugar erupts from his mouth on the P of "stop." MOTHER takes a deep breath.)

MOTHER

I have to do this or it's going to get infected and you'll have to get a tetanus shot or they'll cut your finger off.

(BROTHER shakes his head.)

MOTHER

I had to get a tetanus shot when I was in cheerleading, and they hurt like a mother. It sucks. It really sucks. Hydrogen peroxide is nothing compared to a tetanus shot. Give me your finger.

(BROTHER hesitantly extends his finger. MOTHER just pours the hydrogen peroxide on this time, her knuckles turning white as she holds his finger outstretched. BROTHER screams, but she remains consistent. It's over fast, but it takes forever. She puts a bandaid on it.)

(Older.)

(BROTHER and CLASSMATE cook a full dinner, listening to music and dancing. They're happy. It's domestic theatre. They make potatoes and meatloaf and sandwiches and celery sticks and pies and orange jello with shredded carrots and casseroles and cranberry chicken walnut salads and steamed broccoli with cheese and peas and chicken wings and chili and pizza on a sheet tray. They eat it and pack leftovers into tupperwares and put them in the fridge. BROTHER begins cleaning up the things he knocked over earlier.)

(MOTHER stands in the kitchen late at night, hair falling into her face. She is scrubbing pots and pans. These pots and pans are so big, she thinks. Could they not have just microwaved the chili? Why didn't they just reuse the sheet tray from the potatoes for the pizza? Why didn't they buy pre-sliced bread for the sandwiches, and did they have to toast them in the oven? Did they have to make so much meatloaf? No one in this fucking house likes fucking meatloaf. When is the last time we had a casserole? Now the fridge is full, where are we going to put any of the shit we buy on Sunday? This cost like three hundred dollars, did they realize that?)

(Younger.)

(BROTHER sits at a desk in the guest bedroom on a very small laptop. It's noon on a weekday. MOTHER walks in.)

MOTHER

Hey.

BROTHER

Hey.

MOTHER

Well hey! Do you want to go to a movie.

BROTHER

What movie?

MOTHER

I don't know it's some dumb action comedy thing. I just need to get away from my computer. Figured you might need to too. Haha tutu.

BROTHER

When does it start?

MOTHER

12:30, but if we leave now we'll miss the commercials.

BROTHER

Okay.

(Older, technically.)

CLASSMATE

(Different, transparent, close to the audience so BROTHER can't hear) Yeah that sounds really hard. I've just been doing whatever, going to the gym every day, and you know it sounds like it would suck but it's actually pretty easy once you get it into your schedule! I'm so much stronger now and it's only been five weeks! I can totally bench your brother, even though he doesn't think I can. Well just because you can't go running like outside or anything, it's a hundred and ten out there silly! As soon as it's fall we're gonna go hike South Mountain and absolutely collapse and eat some terrible-for-us good food! Plus it's just good to get out of the house now that I'm not doing school anymore. My mom left needles on the counter which really freaked him out, so we don't hang out at my house a ton, but I kinda like that, just 'cause my house has been really difficult to be in recently. My dad just went to the doctor and they think he might be relapsing so, it's pretty cool, just spick and span A-Okay! And I don't mind all the cooking and cleaning, it's kinda meditative! I'm gonna have to teach him a thing or two haha! But yeah taking care of them can get kind of exhausting. Anyway. God what is taking him so long!

(Older, technically.)

(MOTHER and BROTHER stand around the kitchen island. MOTHER is mixing up a bagged salad kit in a gallon zip-lock. BROTHER has just finished crying.)

MOTHER

I mean are you glad you did it?

BROTHER

I don't know. Fuck!

(BROTHER punches something over, and it knocks over more stuff than he initially intended.)

MOTHER

Do you want to talk about it?

BROTHER

No.

MOTHER

Okay, well, if you want to talk about it, I'll be in here.

(MOTHER begins vigorously shaking the zip-lock to toss the salad.)

BROTHER

She just was crying and I was crying and we were hugging and I just wish we could.

(Older.)

SUZY

You saw an individual instance of peace in an otherwise difficult relationship, and you wanted to cling to it because the peace is what made you want to create that relationship in the first place. That makes sense. Nobody wants to make mistakes. Do you know what plan continuation bias is? It's when you've already decided the best possible path to take in order to achieve a certain outcome, so you ignore all other potentially better solutions even if the initial path makes no sense after you start down it. Changing your mind is hard. And it's never going to be an obvious choice. Choosing one thing will mean losing the other, and that is a difficult reality to accept.

(Younger.)

(MOTHER is sitting on the couch at 10:00 with a glass of watered-down cheap red wine, a bag of pretzels, and a jar of mild salsa. She watches guilty-pleasure TV. BROTHER and CLASSMATE enter with two plastic grocery bags filled with snacks.)

BROTHER

Hey do you know where my dress shoes are? I thought they were in my car.

(MOTHER pauses the show and turns around. She is surprised to see CLASSMATE.)

MOTHER

Oh! Um. Yeah they're in the left side of your closet. I put them back when I cleaned your room. What do you need dress shoes for?

(BROTHER goes to his room to get the shoes.)

BROTHER

We're going to her sister's rehearsal dinner then we're probably gonna chill at her house afterward.

MOTHER

Oh!

(CLASSMATE smiles at MOTHER. MOTHER smiles back.)

MOTHER

I didn't know your sister was getting married.

CLASSMATE

Yep! I keep telling him that it's a rehearsal dinner like it's fine if he doesn't have dress shoes! But y'know boys.

(MOTHER smiles. BROTHER enters again with his shoes.)

BROTHER

Didn't you have to pee?

CLASSMATE

No I'm okay thank you!

BROTHER

Okay well c'mon let's go!

(BROTHER rushes out into the garage and gets back into the idling car.)

CLASSMATE

Boys.

(MOTHER smiles at her.)

(Older.)

(BROTHER is once again digging through drawers and looking in the back of cabinets and checking under the same pile of papers again.)

SUZY

Hey.

(BROTHER doesn't stop.)

BROTHER

Hey.

SUZY

What are you doing?

BROTHER

I just can't remember when I changed my mind about weed.

SUZY

What do you mean?

BROTHER

Like I used to think that people who smoke weed are failures. Now I smoke weed.

SUZY

Does that upset you?

BROTHER

No. People can change their minds I guess.

SUZY

Then why all this?

(She indicates the searching. BROTHER stops.)

BROTHER

Oh. I don't know.

(SUZY looks at the audience, concerned.)

SUZY

Okay. Is it important to know when you changed your mind or why?

BROTHER

I think so.

SUZY

Can it be okay that you don't?

BROTHER

Yes.

(BROTHER picks up one of the things he knocked over and puts it back in its place. SUZY smiles.)

(Older.)

(BROTHER is lying on his bed on his phone laughing at a video. MOTHER knocks twice on the door.)

BROTHER
Yeah?

(MOTHER enters.)

MOTHER
Hey. I gotta ask. What the fuck.

BROTHER
What?

MOTHER
Didn't you guys break up?

BROTHER
Oh. Yeah.

(MOTHER raises her eyebrows.)

MOTHER
So then...

BROTHER
What?

MOTHER
Why were you at her sister's rehearsal dinner.

BROTHER
I mean we're still friends, she needed a date.

MOTHER
Why didn't she take that other girl?

BROTHER

She was busy, also she's not a lesbian haha.

MOTHER

Haha. It's just weird.

BROTHER

I don't think it's weird. We still talk all the time.

MOTHER

That's weird.

(Older.)

BROTHER

Oh my god my mom didn't like her.

(SUZY smiles.)

(Younger.)

(BROTHER takes a shower and sings along to alternative metal he's playing on his phone. He leaves the bathroom and walks into the hall in just a towel.)

MOTHER

I really wish you wouldn't listen to that.

BROTHER

Why.

MOTHER

I think it makes you more violent.

BROTHER

I mean it doesn't.

MOTHER

I'm saying that I've noticed that you have a shorter temper after you've started listening to that band.

BROTHER

Okay.

(MOTHER sighs.)

MOTHER

Is there other music that you like?

BROTHER

I listen to a lot of different kinds of music.

MOTHER

I know, it's just weird that you've started liking this when before you didn't.

BROTHER

I've always liked rock.

MOTHER

I just wrote a paper about young people and violence in schools. It's published.

BROTHER

Okay.

MOTHER

Have you read it?

(Older.)

BROTHER

I hate it when she does that.

SUZY

When she does what?

BROTHER

Talks about her job like it makes her better than everyone else. She has a doctorate, but it's from an online university.

SUZY

You went to online school.

BROTHER

What?

SUZY

You went to online school.

(BROTHER looks at SUZY.)

BROTHER
For middle school.

SUZY
You went to online school.

(Younger.)

(BROTHER and CLASSMATE are in his car.)

CLASSMATE
Yeah but I got fired and not even for a good reason. Do you remember the girl with the blonde hair who you met last week? You also met her at the choir thing that one time.

BROTHER
Yeah.

CLASSMATE
Well apparently she was giving “secret massages” to this guy in the massage room even though Number One, she isn’t even licensed to go back there in the first place and Number Two, she was totally like jerking him off back there and making out and stuff, and I knew, but I didn’t want to get her in trouble because she has opened up to me about her family stuff and it’s like it’s this or stripping and I want her to be safe, but then my manager found out, but she told me that I would only have to have a meeting and that I wouldn’t be punished, but then she called me into her office and just fired me, it was so stupid, like I get that it’s against the rules but she lied to me and that’s not cool either.

BROTHER
Yeah that’s pretty fucking stupid.

CLASSMATE
I just hate it when people break their word.

BROTHER
I mean you did break the rules.

CLASSMATE
What?

BROTHER

I'm sure you have to report that kind of stuff.

CLASSMATE

I know, but she should have just told me if that was the case.

BROTHER

Maybe, but-

CLASSMATE

What do you mean maybe? If you're just going to yell at me again, then you can take me home.

BROTHER

I'm not yelling at you.

CLASSMATE

Like you weren't yelling at me last night for just being at my friend's house??

BROTHER

I was drunk.

CLASSMATE

You have to take accountability for your actions.

BROTHER

You just- never mind it's not worth it.

CLASSMATE

What?

BROTHER

Nothing! I'm sorry! Okay? I'm sorry I'm a stupid fucking asshole!

(They sit in silence.)

(Older.)

SUZY

Did your mom ever say anything that directly stated how she felt?

BROTHER

Nothing really.

SUZY

It sounds like there was miscommunication about boundaries, and you both had different understandings of what was and wasn't okay, and she was upset about her home being used in a way that she saw as disrespectful.

(Younger.)

MOTHER

Honestly? And this is my honest opinion. She just seems very fake to me.

BROTHER

I don't think she's fake. I think she's so genuine that it makes her get emotional.

MOTHER

That's not what I get, but you spend more time with her.

BROTHER

I just don't understand why she snaps sometimes.

MOTHER

Maybe she just wants validation. Some people just need to be told they're right, and that fixes the problem.

BROTHER

But she isn't right.

MOTHER

Little lies hold the world together.

BROTHER

I don't believe in lying.

MOTHER

Well.

(Older.)

BROTHER

It just seems like everyone thinks they know better than me, but I know I'm smart. I know a lot of things. I know how the world works.

SUZY

There's only so far knowing things will get you.

BROTHER

What do you mean?

SUZY

Knowing information is good, and having skills is good, but you have to be able to talk to people and manage your feelings or none of that does you any good. Does that make sense?

BROTHER

Uh.

SUZY

Why do you think it's so important to know things?

(Younger, technically.)

(BROTHER runs directly up to the audience. MOTHER watches and cries.)

BROTHER

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS ACT LIKE YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ME? WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE SMARTER THAN EVERYONE? I LOVE YOU MAN BUT SOMETIMES YOU'RE A HUGE FUCKING DICK FOR NO FUCKING REASON AND I'M FUCKING SICK OF IT! WHY DO YOU HATE ME? IT'S LIKE EVERY TIME WE TALK YOU'RE COMPETING WITH ME, AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE CAN'T JUST TALK! I WANT TO BE YOUR FRIEND, AND I TRY TO BE YOUR FRIEND ALL THE TIME! AND YOU JUST SHIT ON ME LIKE I'M LESS THAN YOU! I'VE TRIED BEING NICE, I'VE TRIED ASKING YOU TO STOP, I'VE TRIED NOT FUCKING TALKING TO YOU AND STILL! IT'S LIKE I DON'T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU OR ANYONE! DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE YOUR BROTHER? DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO NEVER BE GOOD AT ANYTHING? YOU'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING YOU'RE BAD AT! I FEEL BAD FOR MOM AND DAD. YOU'RE SUCH A FUCKING ASSHOLE TO THEM, AND I TRY SO HARD TO KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT, BUT THE WAY YOU TREAT THEM IS SO DISRESPECTFUL AND SO FUCKING MEAN SOMETIMES! I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU! I JUST ASK YOU TO BE RESPECTFUL TO ME! I JUST ASK THAT YOU TREAT ME THE SAME WAY I TREAT YOU, BECAUSE THAT IS HOW A PERSON SHOULD BE TREATED! OKAY? OKAY?

(BROTHER leaves. MOTHER looks at the audience. There is a very long pause. Perhaps the play has ended.)

(Older, technically.)

(SUZY directly faces the audience.)

(I'm a narcissist.)

SUZY

You're not a narcissist. You know how I know?

(How?)

SUZY

Narcissists hurt other people for their own benefit.

(Oh. I didn't know that.)

SUZY

If you keep trying to fix him, he will only keep getting angry with you.

(But I want to help him. He doesn't see that.)

SUZY

You can help him. But it's very difficult to help someone who doesn't want your help. You can't brute force help someone. They have to trust you and have a relationship with you and come to you with the problem.

(But that takes so long.)

SUZY

It does. And it takes a lot of energy. So maybe it's time to let it go.

(But I know he can be happier.)

SUZY

Maybe. But that isn't up to you. Can it be okay that he's figuring it out on his own?

(But if he listened to me, he could be so much better.)

SUZY

Maybe so, maybe not. Maybe he's going through things you don't understand or even know about. Think about all the things he's done well. He is almost completely financially independent because he worked a terrible job and did it well and saved that money. He knows how a lot of things work. He's slow to trust sources but quick to love people. Incredulous and gullible right? Most people are like this. Messy and unfinished and so apparently close to awakening that they can sometimes catch a glimpse of that truth. Do you know what Dąbrowski's positive disintegration theory is?

(No.)

SUZY

It's a psychological theory that people can be roughly divided into five categories. I'll draw a diagram to help it make more sense.



I find this stuff interesting so stop me if it gets boring or confusing. In tier one are people who have little to no moral conflict. You have people like ruthless CEOs, Hitler, etc. Then there are tier twos, which is where probably eighty percent of people are. They'll have some moral conflict but it's about small things; should I help my kid cheat on a test, should I lie to try to get a promotion, etc. Tier twos generally wish they were tier ones. Then there are tier threes, who are "cursed with knowledge." They see the world not just within the logic of their tier, but they also see the other tiers and how life is easier for them because of the way that they see the world. Tier threes are so stressed because they want to be in both tier two and tier four; they wish they didn't have the knowledge that they do have, but they also wish they could do something constructive with it. A lot of artists are tier three. Tier fours are tier threes who apply that knowledge to make positive change, meaning there are lots of activists and cultural leaders, and tier fives are people who are enlightened to the point that they know that don't have to help anyone and that they can just exist peacefully with their knowledge. Trauma pushes people through the tiers – that's why it's called "positive disintegration."

(Oh. Okay.)

SUZY

I think you're a tier three, trying to pull a tier two up a layer. Does that make sense to you?

(Yeah.)

SUZY

But they don't want to come up there with you. Why would you choose a life that's more stressful when you're happy already?

(Because you can be so much more aware.)

SUZY

Some people don't care about being aware. And you have to be okay with that, or you're going to keep doing this.

Why do you keep making him look through everything up here?

(I thought maybe he'd find something.)

SUZY

I think that's going to take longer than we have.

(A pause.)

SUZY

Don't tell me how to talk.

(Sorry.)

SUZY

It's okay.

Y'know. Progress usually isn't about making a mess of things. It's about cleaning up little by little until you can see what's wrong with the system. Then you can choose whether you want to reorganize into a better system or find a good way to function within the flawed one.

(Yeah. I'm sorry.)

SUZY

Don't apologize to me. Change your behavior.

(So what do I do?)

SUZY

Stop trying to figure it out for him. Stop trying to fix his life. Let him dig through things in his own time. Allow him that.

(Okay.)

(BROTHER enters and sits on a very old green-and-white striped couch with a plastic guitar-shaped video game controller. He presses a button. Weezer's "Say It Ain't So" begins playing. BROTHER plays, and we all sing.)

*(Oh yeah alright
Somebody's Heine' is crowdin' my crowdin' my icebox
Somebody's cold one is giving me chills
Guess I'll just close my eyes
Oy yeah alright
Feels good inside
Flip on the tele' wrestle with Jimmy
Something is bubbling behind my back
The bottle is ready to blow*

*Say it ain't so
Your drug is a heartbreaker
Say it ain't so
My love is a life taker*

*I can't confront you I never could do
That which might hurt you so try and be cool
When I say this way
Is a waterslide away from me
That takes you further every day so be cool*

*Say it ain't so
Your drug is a heartbreaker
Say it ain't so
My love is a life taker*

*Dear Daddy I write you in spite of years of silence
You've cleaned up found Jesus things are good or so I hear
This bottle of Stephens awakens ancient feelings
Like father stepfather the son is drowning in the
Flood yeah yeah yeah yeah*

*Say it ain't so
Your drug is a heartbreaker
Say it ain't so
My love is a life taker)*

(End of play.)

After the play ends: BROTHER, slowly and inefficiently and sometimes with the help of others, begins to put one or maybe two of the things that he knocked over back in their places on the tables.