

*The Consumption of Mercy Brown*

## Characters

MERCY BROWN: A girl.

EDWIN BROWN: A boy.

GEORGE BROWN: A dad.

MARY ELIZABETH BROWN: A mom.

MARY OLIVE BROWN: A sister.

TOWNSFOLK: Some people.

JUST A GUY: Just one guy. One of the townsfolk.

Note: The townsfolk could be two or three people or like fifteen people. It shouldn't be clear that JUST A GUY is any different than the TOWNSFOLK until it's too late.



(Exeter, Rhode Island. MARY ELIZABETH is sick. She coughs.  
TOWNSFOLK do nothing, maybe have a drink or a snack.)

MARY ELIZABETH

It's okay I'm fine.

GEORGE

Well now come on now let's sit down now.  
(They go into their house.)

TOWNSFOLK

Did you see her.  
She looked like a fucking ghost.  
Well she looked great.  
What are you talking about.  
Well I'm just saying she maybe lost a little weight is all.  
(Laughing) That's absolutely terrible that woman is dying and you-  
(MARY OLIVE walks out of their home, looking sullen.)  
(Immediately) Oh hello Mary Olive how are you?

MARY OLIVE

Well. My mom is. Not doing great.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh I don't know what you're talking about, do you know what she's talking about?  
No I don't know what she's talking about! Mary Elizabeth looks completely fine!  
Wonderful!  
Really excellent!  
Nothing to worry about, Mary Olive.  
Totally nothing.

(MARY OLIVE walks away.)

What a strange girl.  
Mm she's always been like that too. Even when she was young, she didn't like to talk to anybody, not even her sister.  
(Laughing) Well who would want to talk to her sister?  
(Impersonating MERCY) OH it would just be WONDERFUL thank you I WOULD like a new hat!!!  
Fake-ass bitch!  
Haha!

(MERCY walks out of their home, crying.)

MERCY

Oh hi everyone.  
(She smiles.)

TOWNSFOLK

Oh hi Mercy, how's your mother?  
I saw Mary Olive earlier, but she didn't say much.  
No not much no.

MERCY

Well you know how she can be sometimes.

TOWNSFOLK

Yeah.

MERCY

My mother is good.  
(Pause for effect.)  
Well...

TOWNSFOLK

We saw her, and she is looking perhaps a little weak.  
(A cough from inside the Brown home.)

MERCY (Staggering)

Yes. She is a little weak. We fear it might be, well, it might be consumption.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh no.  
Oh god that's awful.  
I'm so sorry.  
I'm so so sorry.  
I'm so so so sorry.  
That should never happen to anyone.  
And such a wonderful woman.

MERCY (Solemnly)

Thank you.  
(She leaves.)

TOWNSFOLK

So dramatic.  
I expected as much.  
Well with the chill? It's amazing she's the first one this season.  
Yes.  
Knock on wood.  
(The TOWNSFOLK all knock on wood.)  
Well I just wonder how Edwin is holding up with all this.  
(They all look toward the Brown door.)  
Yes he's always been quite.

Vulnerable. (They all look toward the Brown door.)  
But what a good. (They all look toward the Brown door.)  
Voice. (They all look toward the Brown door.)  
Little ugly though- (They all look toward the Brown door. Very long pause.)  
(EDWIN walks out.)  
Edwin! How are you? How is your mother holding up?  
We heard from Mercy she might have fallen ill?  
(EDWIN is silent.)  
Perhaps with a specific disease?  
Yes.  
(EDWIN is silent.)  
With um. Well.  
(EDWIN is silent.)  
Consumption.  
(EDWIN grimaces and leaves. A cough is heard from the Brown home.)  
God that sounds ghastly.  
My cousin died of consumption and it wasn't quick or painless.  
Yeah. They call it consumption for a reason.  
(GEORGE walks out of the Brown home.)

GEORGE

Everyone gather for I have terrible news.

TOWNSFOLK

What is it?  
What's wrong?  
What?

GEORGE

My wife Mary Elizabeth has perished from the wicked disease of consumption.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh my god.  
George I'm so sorry.  
Are you okay?  
That's awful.  
Oh.

GEORGE

I ask only for your solidarity and support for my kin at this time.

TOWNSFOLK

Of course George.

Yes of course.

(GEORGE walks back into the Brown home, but he leaves the door open. Everyone is silent while he does something that apparently takes great effort inside. He returns outside holding MARY ELIZABETH's gross body in his arms.)

Oh.

GEORGE

We must bury her.

TOWNSFOLK

Yeah no we will.

(GEORGE hangs his head in solitude as the TOWNSFOLK try and fail to comfort him from afar.)

TOWNSFOLK

But did you see her at the church? God her dress was just in shambles.

Unlike her, not to think about her clothes all the time.

God but no she doesn't think about it ever, of course no she never thinks about her appearance, she just wakes up that way, does nothing.

Ha yeah does nothing my ass.

Fake-ass bitch!

All she does is get all dressed up and put her little makeup on and put on her little shoes and walk through town like it's no fucking thing with her wack-ass fucking sister-

(MARY OLIVE coughs into the Brown home. The TOWNSFOLK look at her and then each other.)

Oh shit.

God another one of them.

Hey don't say that. Could be anything.

Although I'm sure we'll find out soon enough. Mercy's gonna come through here like she always does, batting her fucking lashes.

Well we don't know that-

(MERCY leaves the Brown home, batting her lashes.)

MERCY

Oh hello everyone. It's so unexpected to see you all out here. How are you?

TOWNSFOLK

We're good how's your sister?

MERCY

Ohhh not too well I'm afraid. We fear it might be consumption again.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh no.

Oh my god.

Well I'm sure she'll get better and everything will be just okay.

Some devils hit certain families harder than others.

MERCY

Well we'll see how it goes. She's resting now, so hopefully all will pass. After all, it could just be... a common cold...

(She starts to cry.)

I'm sorry. It's a challenging time as you can imagine.

(She leaves. A pause.)

TOWNSFOLK

(Mocking) A CHALLENGING time... as you can ... imagine.

Ha ha!

My fucking ASS!



God what a stupid bitch.

Fake-ass bitch!

Sucks about her sister though.

Yeah Mary Olive is cool, it'd be stupid if she died.

She's so quiet and mysterious. Makes me curious about what else she's doing you know.

Yes.

I've always thought that was a very desirable trait for a woman. Or I mean for anyone. But I mean you know.

Yes.

To know when not to talk.

Yes.

It's very intriguing.

Yes.

(EDWIN leaves the Brown home.)

Oh hello Edwin how is your sister.

(EDWIN grimaces.)

Not good?

(EDWIN frowns.)

Oh I'm very sorry to hear that.

We heard it might have been...?

(EDWIN shrugs.)

...Consumption?

(A cough is heard from the Brown home. EDWIN sighs and leaves.)

What a strange kid.

Yeah.

Things don't seem right about him.

I'm sure he fell or was dropped or something.

Well.

I mean it happens, nothing wrong with it! I've dropped my kid.

TOWNSFOLK (Cont'd)

Have you?

Well. From small heights. Nothing excessive. And always an accident.

Sure.

It's true.

I believe you.

(A pause.)

Anyway did you see Mary Olive?

Oh almost nothing left of her.

Well they call it consumption for a reason you know.

Absolutely.

It's terrible that it's happened to that family again.

Yes it could've happened to any of us.

Still could.

Knock on wood.

Yes.

(The TOWNSFOLK all prepare to knock on wood.)

Well we still don't know that anything has happened to Mary Olive.  
Well. Yes. But. Still.

(The TOWNSFOLK all knock on wood. GEORGE walks out of the Brown home.)

Oh boy.

GEORGE

Everyone gather for I have terrible news.

TOWNSFOLK

What is it George?

GEORGE

My daughter Mary Olive has been slain by the demon of consumption.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh my god.  
George I'm so sorry.  
Are you okay?  
That's awful.  
Oh.

GEORGE

She fought with effort and grace. But unfortunately, after all of her tribulation, the beast turned out the victor.

(GEORGE goes into the Brown home, leaving the front door open. All are silent as he does what they fear he is doing. He reemerges with MARY OLIVE's gross body in his arms.)

There are her remains.

(He drops her roughly on the ground. The TOWNSFOLK wince.)

GEORGE (Cont'd)

We shall bury her.

TOWNSFOLK

Yeah George we will.  
Yeah.

(It's winter. A very long silence.)

TOWNSFOLK

Ha ha that bitch Mercy Brown am I right?

(The TOWNSFOLK turn to look at the Brown family door. A long pause.

A cough from inside.)

Have you seen her around?

No have you?

I haven't seen any of them. Anywhere.

Well when your whole family dies.

It wasn't the whole family, come on, it was two people.

(A long pause.)

Did I tell you about uh- my wife she- well we were uh- y'know- and she was being difficult- anyway my son ended up- well 'cause we had thought he was gonna be out til five, but the schedule for- it doesn't matter- anyway he uh was talking and we were doing- y'know- we were doing uh husband and wife stuff and he was talking about the town- about Exeter and uh- I said "she's my wi-" or he was- he said something about Exeter and I said, "Exit 'er? She's my wife!" and uh-

(A long pause.)

Through the door- we were talking through the door.

(A long pause. A cough from inside the Brown home.)

Who do you think it is?

Well so far it's only been the women.

Knock on wood.

(They all knock on wood.)

So do you think it's Mercy Brown?

Well that would be awful.

Yes awful it would be awful.

It would be awful if it was any of them.

George is getting up there in years.

What is he now...?

Fifty? That's up there. And the way Edwin acts you'd think he had something anyway.

I bet it's him.

Why?

I just have a feeling something's got him. He seems taken from.

TOWNSFOLK (Cont'd)

Well they do all it consumption for a reason. Takes you from yourself.

Mmmmm.

Who would you want it to be?

What?

If it had to be one of them?

That's a terrible question.

Probably Edwin. He just doesn't do much. At least Mercy gives us something to talk about.

(EDWIN walks out of the Brown home. A cough from inside. He glances at the TOWNSFOLK and leaves.)

It must be George then.

Why do you say that?

It makes sense, he's an old man.

I don't know, maybe it's a female thing.

Could be. My brother's a doctor and he says sometimes things can affect girls more than boys, and the other way around!

All the men in my family have had chest pain before they died.

(GEORGE walks out of the Brown home.)

GEORGE

Everyone gather for I have terrible news.

(The TOWNSFOLK look at him.)

My daughter Mercy has been taken from us by the devil's workers. Consumption.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh my god.

George I'm so sorry.

Are you okay?

That's awful.

Oh.

GEORGE

It was quick and treacherous, but we can at least rest in knowing that she was not in pain for long.

(He goes back into the home and stumbles around, while the TOWNSFOLK wait impatiently. GEORGE comes out with MERCY's rather okay-looking body and drops it on the ground.)

These are her remains. Let us bury her.

TOWNSFOLK

Well wait George uh. With the freeze I don't know if we'll be able to do that just yet.

GEORGE

What?

TOWNSFOLK

Yeah my soil has been super tough over the last few weeks.

We could put her in a... structure of some kind. Like an above-ground thing just for the time being.

(EDWIN walks out.)

Edwin, do you think it would be okay for your sister to be in a building instead of a coffin just til spring?

(EDWIN raises his eyebrows then scratches his head.)

Alright George is that cool with you?

GEORGE

Yes.

TOWNSFOLK

Alright.

(EDWIN coughs. The TOWNSFOLK look at him, then the deceased.)

TOWNSFOLK

Just seems strange doesn't it.  
I mean I wouldn't put too much faith in it.  
But it is weird that they've all gotten it.

JUST A GUY

I think they're probably related.

TOWNSFOLK

Why would you think that?  
It does seem like that family is experiencing an unprecedented quantity of consumption victims.

JUST A GUY

And it's always the same coughing. I mean I might be wrong, but it is weird. You just can't say it's not.

TOWNSFOLK

No it is weird.  
It really is like something is eating the family slowly.  
If something was eating them, we'd see it asshole.  
Or...  
What?

JUST A GUY

Maybe it *is* a demon. That's what George is always saying.

TOWNSFOLK

Doesn't that seem a little- I dunno- unrealistic?

JUST A GUY

They're in the Bible aren't they?

TOWNSFOLK

They are in the Bible.

JUST A GUY

I mean the seven plagues and all that. It's happened before.

TOWNSFOLK

But what would God be punishing them for?  
They are a weird family. It could be lots of things.

JUST A GUY

Yeah.

TOWNSFOLK

They've got to be hiding something. A family secret or something.  
Does anybody know where they came from?

(The TOWNSFOLK just look at each other.)

I mean I'm not related to them.

JUST A GUY

I don't know anybody who is.

TOWNSFOLK

George was cousins with my aunt.  
It does seem strange that they're not very connected.

JUST A GUY

Is it all of them? George and Edwin seem pretty normal now-a-days.

TOWNSFOLK

As normal as they've always been.  
Haha yeah.

JUST A GUY

Maybe it wasn't God.

TOWNSFOLK

What?  
Not a demon?

JUST A GUY

Yes a demon, but not God.

TOWNSFOLK

What?

JUST A GUY

What if a demon was attacking them?

TOWNSFOLK

And we're not seeing it? Seems unlikely!!!

JUST A GUY

What if the demon was one of us?  
(A silence.)

TOWNSFOLK

One of us?

JUST A GUY

One of them.

TOWNSFOLK

What?

Oh maybe Mary Elizabeth did something and God was punishing her and gave her a demon child.

I thought you said it wasn't God...?

JUST A GUY

Demons can come from many places.

TOWNSFOLK

And how they look...

A demon in the Brown family??

Do you remember when I shot that cat?

Very well.

It seemed like a witch. I knew it was a witch. In my bones I knew it was a witch. And I shot it. Because it was a witch. And the bullet passed through its back right leg, shattered it into a million pieces. It screamed and screeched, but I knew it was a witch. So I went to shoot it again. But then I remembered it was a witch. And I know witches can only get killed with silver. So I took a rock, since I thought maybe the rock could have some silver in it, cause silver's sometimes in rocks. And I put my shoe right on the cat's throat, and it screamed, and I lifted the rock and smashed its head. Got my toe that time, that's why I've had this limp. And I was gonna walk away. But then I remembered a witch can hex you if you don't eat it. So I picked up one of the bloodiest, juiciest pieces of the witch's brain, which was a cat's brain at the time, placed it in the very far back of my throat, gagged and gagged and swallowed it, and I forced myself to keep it down, since witches taste like the devil, since witches taste like the devil, so stomachs aren't too happy with them. But the same day that I shot that witch cat in the back right leg, Mercy Brown started limping around town. So maybe it was Mercy Brown who was the cat witch. Couldn't you be the cat witch since you're limping too?

How could he be the cat witch if he was the guy who shot the cat? Fucking idiot.

Wait I thought you shot the cat this past fall, but Mercy started limping in the spring, I know because I started helping her up the stairs at church.

Mmmmmm. No well then it must have been spring then. When I shot the cat.

JUST A GUY

Hm.

TOWNSFOLK

How can we know it's Mercy for sure? I'm not interested in convicting people on intuition alone!

Well firstly, it's not intuition alone we have a solid correlation, but secondly, we haven't finished discussing our theories yet, so calm down.



Maybe they've all been getting consumption, because something was consuming them, like you said.

(EDWIN enters, coughs, frowns, and exits.)

Oh my god.

Whatever it is has got him too.

If Mercy Brown's dead, how could it be her?

JUST A GUY

Maybe she's not.

TOWNSFOLK

What?

JUST A GUY

Maybe she's not.

TOWNSFOLK

What?

JUST A GUY

Maybe she's not.

TOWNSFOLK

Oh.

Huh.

Maybe none of them are.

Logically, it would make sense that it would be one of the dead women, since nobody would suspect a dead woman to be stealing someone's life.

JUST A GUY

Yes.

TOWNSFOLK

How can we know for sure that it is Mercy Brown? How can we know that it wasn't Mary Elizabeth or Mary Olive.

It wasn't Mary Elizabeth or Mary Olive.

But how can we know for sure?

JUST A GUY

You're right it's important to explore all possible explanations.

TOWNSFOLK

Well if someone was stealing someone's life, they wouldn't be dead.

Right.

Should we... dig up... the bodies...?

Probably right?

JUST A GUY

Yeah.

TOWNSFOLK

Well. Let's dig up the bodies then?

Yeah.

(They did up the bodies of MARY ELIZABETH and MARY OLIVE, and they get MERCY's body out of the temporary structure it was being held in.)

Huh.

What.

It's just that. Well. Look at Mary Elizabeth.

Right.

I mean there is no question. That is a sufficiently dead woman.

Mm.

JUST A GUY

Yes.

TOWNSFOLK

And Mary Olive too. She looks pretty dead.

Extremely dead I would say.

So it couldn't be them.

(Everyone turns to the body of MERCY BROWN.)

Hm.

Her face is pretty, uh, in tact.

Yep.

(To the body) HEY!

(The TOWNSFOLK all jump, the bodies do not.)

Hm she's a good actor.

So it is Mercy Brown?

JUST A GUY

It would seem that way.

TOWNSFOLK

So now what do we do?

We've got to kill her right? With silver?

Or with fire witches also die with fire.

Do we have to eat her?

We shouldn't have to, just the ones that are cursed.

That sounds right.

The whole thing?

JUST A GUY

Just the heart will work.

TOWNSFOLK

How do you know?

JUST A GUY

The heart's where the life is.

TOWNSFOLK

Right.

JUST A GUY

The heart and the liver and the brain.

TOWNSFOLK

So let's cut them out?

JUST A GUY

So let's cut them out.

(They cut out MERCY's liver with relative ease. They cut out MERCY's heart with some difficulty. They try and fail several times to cut out MERCY's brain.)

TOWNSFOLK

Heart and liver will do.

JUST A GUY

Heart and liver will do.

TOWNSFOLK

So let's burn 'em?

JUST A GUY

So let's burn 'em.

(They burn MERCY's heart and liver until they're ash.)

TOWNSFOLK

God they're gonna be kinda hard to eat like that.

We could bake them into a bread.

I don't wanna bake that bread in my oven, it'll stink like the devil forever! A witch's stench will never leave, regardless of how much you scrub.

Oh yeah.

JUST A GUY

So no bread.

TOWNSFOLK

What about a tonic?

What the fuck's a tonic?  
A medicinal substance taken to give a feeling of vigor or well-being.  
How the fuck do we make a tonic?  
Mix it in water I think.

JUST A GUY

That could work.

TOWNSFOLK

Sure.

(They scoop the ashes into a cup.)

Hey can you grab some water?

Should I boil it first?

Uhhh. Nah it should be fine. It's getting mixed with all this shit anyway.

Alright.

(They get the water and mix it up with the ashes.)

Now we just gotta get Edwin to drink it right?

JUST A GUY

Yes.

TOWNSFOLK

(All at once) EDWIN! HEY! EDWIN! C'MERE! EDWIN! WE HAVE A THING FOR YOU TO DRINK! IT'S A MEDICINE! EDWIN! COME OVER HERE! WHERE'D YOU GO! EDWIN!

(EDWIN enters.)

Hey we figured out that the reason you're all getting consumption is because your bitch sister Mercy was a fucking witch, I say *was* because we just killed her, we knew she was a witch because she didn't rot after she "died" a few months ago in that weird building she was in, and so even though she stayed super calm the whole time, we cut out her heart and her liver, and then we tried to cut out her brain, but it was super hard, so we just took the heart and the liver, because those are the important ones anyway, and we set them on fire and waited til they were dust, and we were going to bake them into a bread, but then we realized that it would make whoever's oven stink like shit, so we mixed it up in some water to make a tonic, and now you have to drink it so that she won't kill you too, because you have to eat a witch or she won't stop killing you, because you're cursed, and we've been hearing you cough, so we know you have consumption, so you have to consumer your sister before she consumes you haha now drink it!

(EDWIN looks at the tonic.)

Pussy!

(EDWIN looks at the TOWNSFOLK. Very long pause.)

EDWIN

(Slowly) W- I uh- th- sh- I- y- wh-

(Long pause.)

Yeah okay.

(He drinks the tonic, gagging at the end, and releasing a terrible cough.)

JUST A GUY

That was it. That was the demon leaving you.

EDWIN

I think I'm gonna move to Colorado.

(Now it's almost summer.)

TOWNSFOLK

...

...

...

Oh! I uh-

...

...

...

...

Never mind.

...

...

(EDWIN walks in, wearing a hat or something. He is smiling. The TOWNSFOLK look at him expectantly. He inhales to speak. The TOWNSFOLK look at him expectantly. He utters a single sound, then breaks into the most horrific coughing fit anyone has ever had. As he finishes, he inhales again to speak, but collapses onto the ground, dead. The TOWNSFOLK look at him with mouths agape.)

JUST A GUY

... Huh.

(GEORGE exits the BROWN home's front door. He sees his child dead on the ground. He immediately falls in front of EDWIN and begins to weep, screaming to God unintelligibly. He tries several times to call to EDWIN by his name. The TOWNSFOLK all kind of look at each other like "what do we do now" before slowly encroaching in and patting GEORGE on the back, arm, head, and shoulders. GEORGE begins crying even more.)

GEORGE

Thank you! Thank you so much! So many thanks! You are so wonderful to me! I do not deserve such exceptional neighbors! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

(GEORGE dies of old age thirty years later, in the same house, surrounded by the same wonderful neighbors.)

(End of play.)