

TOM
by Daniel Irving Rattner

NOTE: “...” indicates someone on the other end of the phone speaking.

An apartment. Small and open concept, so everything is visible except the bedroom. Mostly, the room is filled with boxes that have yet to be unpacked. There are a few large pieces of furniture, like an unfilled bookcase and a sofa with a TV across from it.

You are seated on the couch. The TV turns on, and an episode of *Frasier* plays—specifically episode 3 of season 2: “The Matchmaker.” In the episode, Frasier invites his new boss, Tom, over for dinner in order to set Tom up with Frasier’s live-in physical therapist, Daphne. The catch? Tom is gay and thinks he’s on a date with Frasier. A typical Frasierian farce plays out over the course of the dinner party, with Tom discovering only at the end that the entire evening has been a misunderstanding (played up for laughs by Frasier’s brother and dad).

When the episode comes to its end, the TV turns itself off, and there is quiet for a bit. The sun has set outside, and no lights are on inside. It’s dark. You are alone.

Then the door swings open, and a man comes in. He flicks on the lights. He’s tall, white, with wavy dark hair and a square jaw. He’s wearing a blue suit with a red tie. He’s carrying a grocery bag. He tosses the keys and wallet into a box, which they fall into without his noticing. He goes into the kitchen area and tosses the bag onto the counter.

On top of one of the boxes is an old landline phone with the cord and everything. He takes the receiver off the hook and dials a number. He waits for a moment for the person on the other end to pick up. They don’t.

TOM turns on more lights.

He goes to the phone and calls again:

TOM

Roz. It’s Tom. I’ve just gotten home from my “date” with Frasier. I think you know how it went. Frankly, I don’t understand why you thought it would be appropriate to pull a prank like that on your boss. And I think it would be best if you didn’t come in on Monday. Or ever again.

He hangs up. Almost instantly the phone rings.

TOM
(chipper)

Duran residence, this is Tom.

...

Rozalinda! I had a feeling you'd call

Frantic jabbering on the other end. TOM laughs.

TOM

No, it's fine. It's fine! Everyone deserves to be hazed.

...

I promise. I'm not upset.

...

And how are you spending this lovely Saturday eve-

...

Oh! Oh.

...

Well it sounds like you're having a much more successful date than I did. Don't let me keep you a minute long—

The dial tone cuts him off. He hangs the phone up. He looks around the apartment.

What does he do? No phone to check. What did they do in the '90s when they were bored?

He turns on the TV. An old network show is on—probably "Sisters" with Sela Ward and Swoozie Kurtz—And then it goes to a commercial break.

TOM picks up the phone and dials a number.

TOM

(in an overly chipper voice)

Hello, is this Robin Samuels?

...

Tell me, Ms. Samuels, are you satisfied with your vitamin supplements?

...

Because here at Vitamins 'R' Us, we've got pills for your every need. Vitamin C for chlamydia, D for dysentery, E for—

...

TOM

(in a new voice)

No, it's Warren Christopher. I'm staffing up, and I really need a kindergarten teacher from the Bay Area to flesh out my team.

...

TOM

(dropping the voice)

Yes, it's me.

...

Yyyuuuuup.

...

TOM pulls a box of Cheerios out of the plastic grocery bag and starts making himself a bowl.

TOM

No, Robin, it went great. I just came home to grab my toothbrush and a bathing suit cause he's flying me to Bora Bora in the morning for a romantic weekend.

...

It was a set-up. With his physical therapist. He thought I was *straight*.

The sound of LAUGHTER from the phone. TOM holds it away from his ear.

TOM

I'll have you know, I had the entirety of Woonsocket High fooled. No fewer than *three* girls made it known they wanted me to take them to prom.

...

I went stag. Said it was a political statement.

Laugh. And then sigh.

TOM

Oh god. What a night. If they find me floating in the Puget Sound tomorrow face down, don't assume foul play.

...

The world is morbid, Robin. Don't you read the news? Genocide in Rwanda, Sarajevo is under siege!

...

I'm telling you, that's what I'm doing about it. It's your problem now.

They laugh. TOM takes a bite of his cereal.

TOM

(with his mouth full)

How was your day?

...

Yeah... Why?

...

Cheerios...

...

Are you serious?

...

No, fine, I'll stop eating if it *repulses* you.

...

No, Robin, I'm happy to starve so you can be comfortable.

...

Inedible. French something. Drowned in butter and overcooked. I even drank Chardonnay for him! I spent the entire evening fantasizing about ordering a pizza, and those fantasies got... vivid.

...

I wish you could come over too.

...

TOM stands up with a jolt.

TOM

I'm not gonna call him.

...

I'm not gonna call him!

...

Well if for no other reason than that he's 9 hours ahead so it's-

TOM looks at his watch.

TOM

Oh. I guess it's almost 7 in the morning there already.

TOM holds up a spoonful of Cheerios and examines them with disappointment.

TOM

Can I call you back in like two minutes?

...

I'm not calling Stephen!

...

Because I would have been a lot less obvious about it; I'm ordering a pizza.

He hangs up. And rummages through the kitchen drawer for a pizza menu. He dials the number and over the following call, he unpacks one of the boxes nearby. He finds a record player and begins playing an opera record.

TOM

Hey! Yeah, I'd like to place an order for delivery?

...

One plain pizza?

...

Nope—uh, maybe extra cheese.

...

Uh, sure I'll do sausage. But could I do only half sausage?

...

Thanks.

TOM farts. Even he is taken aback by it.

TOM

Oh, uh, what's the difference? Like how big is the small versus the large?

...

Ok I'll do the small. But maybe with some—do you have like, garlic knots?

...

Actually, you know what, make it a large. And sausage on the whole thing.

...

Yeah, I still want the garlic knots.

TOM lets out a much bigger fart and grimaces.

TOM
(speaking faster now)

It's 809 Olive Way. Apartment 5C. Thanks.

As soon as he can, TOM hangs up the phone and dashes into the bathroom. He doesn't bother to shut the door.

You are left alone and listening to the letter scene from *Eugene Onegin* play on the record player.

After a few moments, the sounds of bowel movements emanate from the bathroom. Loud and frequent at first, before becoming quieter and further apart—kinda like the pace of a bag of popcorn in the microwave.

This goes on for the duration of the song—about 7 minutes or so. Until suddenly:

TOM (O.S.)

Fuck!

Pause.

TOM (O.S.)

Goddammit.

The bathroom door opens, and TOM waddles out gingerly. His pants and underwear are around his ankles, though he still wears his shirt and tie. He resembles a foppish Winnie the Pooh.

TOM
(muttering to himself as he goes)

You fucking moron...

TOM goes through a few boxes searching for something. He doesn't find it. He takes the plastic garbage bag. He looks at it in something akin to horror. Then he spots a roll of paper towels on the

counter. He sighs with relief. He grabs it and waddles back into the bathroom.

After a minute or two, he comes back out of the bathroom, this time with his pants back on. He picks up the phone again and dials a number.

TOM

Hi sorry.

...

I did not call Stephen!

...

I told you: I was ordering a pizza.

...

A work thing came up.

...

Well you know that old expression: Seattle, the city that never sleeps.

...

Oh. Huh. Are you sure that's not it? *Anaheim, the city that never sleeps*. No that's not right either... Port St. Lucy, the-

...

Fine, I had to take a shit. Something I ate on my date I'm sure.

...

The music soars.

TOM

Girl, this is *Eugene Onegin*. This is Tchaikovsky.

...

Wow, Robin. I thought you were more tolerant than that.

...

Tchaikovsky? Of *course* he was. Would a straight man write something called Swan Lake?

...

No, on my record player.

...

I'm not a fag, I'm refined.

...

Sorry. You're right. I'm a fag *and* I'm refined.

...

TOM sniffs his fingers and wrinkles his nose. He washes his hands in the kitchen as he continues to talk.

TOM

Well, being a little maudlin never killed anyone.

The call waiting line on his phone beeps.

TOM

Hold on, I have to take this. Hold on!

...

Because someone is calling me!

He switches the phone lines.

TOM

Duran residence, this is Tom Duran—Duran Duran's number one superfan.

...

TOM
(his voice deepens)

Oh, hi Dad.

...

Not much. Pretty quiet night.

...

Saw a few friends from work for dinner. Called it early.

...

One of the hosts at the new station, Frasier. And his dad.

...

(a laugh) Yeah, well I told them all about you.

...

No, no ladies. Guys night in. You're calling awfully late, Dad

...

He listens for a long time.

Uh huh.

...

Oh gosh.

...

Well-

...

Uh huh.

...

Well, look, I'm sure she didn't mean anything by-

...

Yeah. Yeah...

...

Where are you now Dad?

...

Ok. Can you make yourself a cup of tea?

...

No I'm not going anywhere.

...

Yeah

...

Ok, yeah. Can you sleep in Jenny's room? Just for tonight?

...

Yeah, call me in the morning. It'll be fine. I love you.

...

Yeah, I love you too.

He switches back the lines.

TOM

Sorry. My dad.

...

No he's fine. He gets kinda confused late at night. He thinks my mom is in bed with him, arguing with him. But like she's *his* mom. I've learned it's best to let people talk it out when they're in one of those states. You're not gonna convince them out of it. So, I listen.

He rises suddenly.

TOM

Well, you said nothing maudlin!

He turns off the record player. And he turns on the radio. "Stay" by Lisa Loeb plays. TOM lets out a laugh and puts the receiver down and puts the phone on speaker:

TOM

This is what you get for telling me to put on the goddamn radio.

ROBIN

You love the radio.

TOM

Of course I do! It pays my bills.

ROBIN

You're so full of shit.

TOM

Ok, enough with the flattery. Tell me about *your* day.

ROBIN

It was good, to be perfectly honest.

TOM

That's ok. You can have a good day, even if mine was shit. What did you do?

ROBIN

I went to the movies with Denise.

TOM

She sobered up long enough to sit through a movie?

ROBIN

It's been a month actually.

TOM

Hey! That's wonderful!

Yeah. Yeah, it kinda is... ROBIN

What did you see? TOM

Little Women. ROBIN

With Katharine Hepburn? TOM

No, they made a new one. ROBIN

They did? TOM

They did! ROBIN

Who plays Jo? TOM

Winona Ryder. ROBIN

We love her. TOM

We *love* her. And Susan Sarandon is Marmee. ROBIN

TOM gay gasps.

And the girl from "My So-Called Life" is- ROBIN

Meg. TOM

Beth. ROBIN

I wanna see it!

TOM

I'd go again.

ROBIN

Sure, just fly up from SF.

TOM

I can be there by tomorrow morning.

ROBIN

It lingers. The song changes to "Come to My Window" by Melissa Etheridge.

Is this Melissa Etheridge?

ROBIN

I know! Can you believe they're allowed to play this on the radio? What are they gonna let us do next? Get married? *Own property?*

TOM

I like it.

ROBIN

Get it off my airwaves!

TOM

Thank God you're in charge.

ROBIN

I agree. Thank you.

TOM

Beat.

Perhaps we can do a brief customer survey while I have you. What are you listening to these days? What would you like more of? Less of?

TOM

I don't really listen.

ROBIN

At all?

TOM

ROBIN

At all.

TOM

What?

ROBIN

I listen to books on tape mostly.

TOM

Robin! Do you have any idea what you're missing? The radio is one of the great inventions of our time. One of the singular achievements. I mean think of it. Just think of it. Anyone, anywhere in this country, has access to music, to news, to—therapy! With the push of the button. From their home. At work. From their car. You can wake up to your clock radio. Listen to it as you get ready. Walk with your transistor to the car. Turn the radio on the in the car. Listen to it all the way to work. Listen to it at your desk with your headphones in. Get back in the car. Get back home. And fall asleep listening to the radio.

You can go your entire day without silence. And not just without silence. You can get financial advice. Learn about sports. Enjoy a gameshow. And not just you and me, but anyone who's got 15 bucks and a dream. Think of the little gay boy in Kansas hiding his transistor radio under the sheets, discovering his love for restaurant criticism. Or some dyke in Peoria listening to Ani DiFranco-

ROBIN

Do you enjoy trafficking in stereotypes?

TOM

I do, in fact. I find it makes the world that much more digestible.

ROBIN

I'm just saying, if you're going to be melodramatic you may as well be creative.

TOM

Ok fine, our sad little lesbian in Illinois can listen to whatever she wants on the radio. She can listen to Mozart, Bach, Beethoven. Pink Floyd. The Rolling Stones. Pavarotti, Callas, Placido Domingo. She can listen to Nirvana. Tupac. Red Hot Chili Peppers. Mariah Carey. Lauryn Hill. AC/DC. Jon Bon Jovi. Michael Jackson. Madonna! Think about that. You could listen to music. Every second of every day for the rest of your life. And probably still not hear everything that's ever been written. *Think what you could be missing.* Ugh.

Silence on the other end.

We live in an incredible time.

TOM

We do.

ROBIN

Beat.

But that's not why you love radio.

ROBIN

How do you know?

TOM

I know *you*.

ROBIN

It's tense, suddenly. TOM rifles through some boxes. And finds what he's looking for. A change of clothes. He takes off his suit pants and replaces them with baggy shorts; his shirt and tie with a t-shirt.

So, you never said: How was the movie?

TOM

Fine.

ROBIN

Oh.

TOM

But you should go!

ROBIN

Yeah, no I probably will.

TOM

ROBIN
It was nice to go. You know, things have been so tough with Denise. Better now to be sure. We're not fighting exactly anymore but... we don't really talk. About anything. Or hadn't anymore. That's been years. That's been hard. Sometimes when I'd go home, like for Thanksgiving, I'd sleep in Denise's room and just lie there. And I'd think about how if I could have imagined when we were kids that this is how our relationship would turn out?

Her voice catches.

TOM

Sweetie.

ROBIN

But today was good! It was good. It was a good day. We watched the movie, and we got lunch. And it was just *good*. I used to think so much life was about being as happy as possible. But sometimes it's like... the absence of unhappiness is enough. Just to be able to exist.

TOM

Yeah...

TOM pulls off his button down. The audience sees on his back: a large purple splotch or two.

ROBIN

Anyways, I thought that was a good sign.

TOM

Maybe it was.

ROBIN

Wasn't exactly an auspicious omen for your date.

TOM puts on the t-shirt, hiding his lesions from the audience once more.

TOM

Who knows? Maybe tonight was the last event of something. A turning point. A funny story I'll look back on someday.

ROBIN

I like that.

Call waiting beeps again.

ROBIN

Another call?

TOM

I must have a beacon today, I swear to God. All afternoon, too, I couldn't get off the phone-

ROBIN

You know you don't have to pick up.

TOM
(mock Valley girl)

I don't understand.

ROBIN

When someone calls, you don't have to pick up.

TOM
(still playing dumb)

Huh?

ROBIN

You can pretend you're not home.

TOM
(mock gasp)

Lie?!

ROBIN

No one's gonna smite you.

TOM

Hmm... Let's find out. Why don't we hang up, you call back, I won't answer, and if I get smited—

ROBIN

Smote

TOM

Smoted. I die. And if not, I don't have to have this conversation anymore!

ROBIN

Har har

TOM

I love talking on the phone.

ROBIN

Then don't complain.

TOM

See that's tough, because I also love to complain.

Call waiting beeps again.

TOM

It's probably my dad...

ROBIN

Take it. But see? This – *this* – is why you love radio.

TOM

I don't know what that means but

(in a funny accent)

Sank you for ze insight Doctah Freud.

(rushing)

I have to go!

He picks up the phone off the speaker and answers the other call.

TOM

Dad?

...

Oh! Bryan.

...

Yeah. How are-

...

TOM

(sad but unsurprised)

Oh, Bryan. Oh, I'm so sorry.

...

Were you there?

...

Yeah, but it's good you were there.

...

No, it's a lot to absorb.

...

Of course.

...

The buzzer. TOM hits the button on the panel to open the lobby door.

TOM

You'll sleep tonight. And then tomorrow will be hard. I'll call you first thing if you like.

...

Are you doing a service?

...

Oh, god. I wish I could be there. New job... But no, I can tell them I have to. I'll fly down-

...

I'll try my hard-

....

Ok. Ok.

A knock on the door. TOM hustles over.

TOM

Sure I'll call Phillip.

...

No, someone else should call Stephen. He and I aren't—

TOM opens the door. It's the pizza guy. Young, anywhere between 15 and 25.

TOM nestles his phone in the crook of his neck and reaches into his pants for his wallet. He realizes he doesn't have it. He's still on the phone. He holds up a finger to the pizza guy indicating to wait for a second.

TOM

Oh, Bryan...

TOM makes his way over to his discarded suit pants and begins rummaging through the pockets. No wallet.

TOM

Sleep. It will be the best thing for you. See if Monica will spend the night.

...

Ok I'll call her.

The wallet isn't in his suit jacket either.

TOM

Ok.

...

Ok.

...

I love you. I'm so sorry.

He hangs up. Finally. He looks at the pizza guy apologetically.

TOM

Sorry I can't find my wallet.

The pizza guy, KYLE, has not moved from the doorway. He holds the pizza out stiffly.

TOM

You can put that down if it's heavy.

It is not a problem.

KYLE

TOM is still looking for the wallet.

TOM

I'm sorry I know it's around here somewhere.

He notices KYLE lingering in the doorway.

TOM

You wanna come in and sit or something?

KYLE steps into the apartment.

KYLE
(indicating the boxes)

You coming or going?

KYLE seems relaxed. Very relaxed. Might even be a little stoned, relaxed.

TOM

Coming.

KYLE

Moving? Or for a visit?

TOM

It'd be a lot of boxes to bring for a temporary stay, don't you think?

KYLE

Life is a temporary stay.

TOM

Deep.

KYLE mimes being shot in the heart.

KYLE
(deadpan)

Ouch.

They laugh.

TOM

It's gotta be around here. Can I get you some water? Or, one of these boxes has liquor in it...

KYLE

Not supposed to drink on the job.

TOM

It's almost midnight, how many more deliveries do you have?

KYLE

Don't stop 'til I drop.

TOM

Conscientious.

KYLE

I wasn't bragging.

TOM

No, I meant—that's funny. Please put the box down you're stressing me out.

The delivery guy sets the pizza down on one of the unpacked boxes. TOM extends a hand to him.

TOM

I'm Tom, by the way.

KYLE

Kyle.

TOM is stumped in his search and looks at KYLE apologetically.

TOM

I *just* had my wallet. I was at the market downstairs. I bought Cheerios. I came straight here. I put my wallet down...

He tries to identify the spot where he put the wallet down.

KYLE

Maybe you left it at the store?

He would have called.

TOM

Beat.

Right?

TOM

Maybe your jacket?

KYLE's not sure.

KYLE

I didn't wear one tonight.

TOM

Maybe you left some money in there.

KYLE

TOM clicks his finger guns at KYLE to indicate "smart idea."

He goes and rummages through the jacket hanging by the front door.

KYLE sees it's going to be a minute.

Do you mind if I use your bathroom?

KYLE

Of course. I'm going to run downstairs to the grocery store while you're in there.

TOM

TOM is grabbing his coat.

Just, uh, don't rob me or anything.

TOM

Technically, you're robbing me.

KYLE
(indicating the pizza)

TOM chuckles. KYLE goes into the bathroom. And then TOM races out of the apartment.

And you are left alone.

After a minute, a faint flushing noise. KYLE enters the living room.

He doesn't sit, but he does drift through the apartment and look around.

He opens the pizza box. He takes out a slice. And he eats it. Fast.

TOM comes back in.

KYLE

No luck?

TOM

No luck. You don't accept payment in the form of used Phil Collins CDs do you?

He holds up a few from the box he was searching in. KYLE shakes his head.

TOM

Foolish of us to ever stop being a barter economy. Ok. Well. What do you normally do? In these situations? This must happen to other people?

KYLE shakes his head.

TOM

Well at least sit. You're stressing me out.

TOM clears some boxes off the couch to make room for KYLE. And this spot for KYLE should be near to the audience—on the same couch as them, for instance. Nearer than TOM has been to us all night. Maybe he sits in an area the audience thought was inviolable, and it startles them a little.

TOM

How's it been tonight? Busy?

KYLE

Saturday's not actually a big night for pizza.

TOM

I suppose most people like to go out. Hit the town.

TOM is making one last ditch effort to look for his wallet.

TOM

I imagine you'd rather be doing that than working.

KYLE

I like being home.

TOM

Me too. Do you live around here?

KYLE

Not far.

TOM

You grew up here?

KYLE

Yeah.

TOM

Nice city.

KYLE

Is it?

TOM

I don't know; I just moved.

KYLE

I'd like to move. I'm into photography.

TOM

They don't allow cameras in Seattle?

KYLE

What's there to take pictures of?

TOM

Then where?

I've been thinking San Francisco.

KYLE

TOM stops his search.

TOM

No kidding. My best friend lives there.

(leading)

Why San Francisco?

KYLE

No real reason.

Beat.

KYLE

I have family there. And it's not Seattle.

TOM

Well. Someday. Do you live alone now?

KYLE

Uh, no.

TOM

Right. I'm sure you have dormmates?

KYLE shakes his head.

TOM

A girlfriend?

KYLE

I live with my cousin.

Not a helpful answer.

TOM

Well, this is my first time living alone in 18 years.

KYLE

That's almost as long as I've been alive.

Terrific. TOM

Is it weird? KYLE

That I'm talking to someone who probably isn't old enough to know who Spiro Agnew is? TOM

No, living alone. For the first time. In a long time. KYLE

Uh... TOM

For some reason, this seems to have stumped TOM. He makes his way towards KYLE on the couch.

Yeah. It is. To be honest. It's been weird remembering what it was like to be alone, remembering what your body—is—when it isn't... in relationship to someone else's body. TOM

TOM is sitting close KYLE, and close to us, now. He flushes red off of Kyle's non-reaction.

Too much. TOM

No, I know what you mean. My, uh, girlfriend, and I *used* to live together. KYLE

And now KYLE is up and getting his things together.

And sometimes she would, like, go stay at her mom's for a weekend to help with her brothers. And I would get like *freaked out* at home, 'cause like I'd be doing all the same things me and her would do, except she wasn't there. And it was like- I was like: 'This is what it would feel like if she died.' KYLE

Yeah. Something like that. TOM

TOM is defeated. KYLE is ready and by the door.

KYLE

Look obviously you're good for it. My boss'll send someone in the morning to get the cash.

TOM rises to resume the search.

TOM

Give me another sec.

KYLE

Nah, don't worry about it. It's fine, I promise.

Practically before he's finished his sentence, KYLE is out the door, leaving the pizza behind.

TOM sits on the floor. He picks up the phone. He grimaces. He punches a number into the phone. He squeezes his eyes tight as if bracing himself for impact as he listens to the ringing on the other end waiting for- someone picks up.

TOM

Hey. This is, uh, it's Tom. Donthangup, donthangup.

...

I'm not gonna yell.

...

David died. Bryan asked me to tell you.

...

He's doing ok.

...

Yeah, I'm ok. I'm ok. How are you?

...

I can't ask how you are?

...

Fine. How's our apartment?

...

But more closet space.

...

What's going on there?

...

What do you see? Out the window?

...

Wait, I'm putting you on speaker phone.

...

'Cause I wanna look out my new bedroom window while you look out the old one. But the receiver won't reach my bed so...

TOM picks up the phone and drags it as close to the bedroom as he can. You are left alone with the phone.

TOM

(speaking loudly, but not having to shout)

Can you hear me?

A voice crackles through the speakerphone, audible enough. He has a British accent:

STEPHEN

Yes.

TOM

What?

STEPHEN

I SAID YE-

TOM

I'm kidding.

A tense silence.

TOM

What do you see? Out the window?

STEPHEN

Um. The sun is starting to come up...

TOM

Good start to the day.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

TOM

What does it look like?

STEPHEN

Like a fucking sunrise, Tom.

TOM

You can be a bit more descriptive.

STEPHEN

You know this is inappropriate.

TOM

There are multiple oceans between us. I harbor no illusions of a reunion. We're just exchanging vowel sounds. Now be a pal and describe the sunrise to me.

STEPHEN

Why?

TOM

Cause I miss it!

A catch in his throat. A long pause. When STEPHEN talks, it's a lot gentler.

STEPHEN

Uh, the sun is like a third of the way up-

Colors, Stephen. Colors!

TOM

Orange. Blue. Uh, purple.

STEPHEN

Paint me a picture!

TOM
(over the top)

Silence.

Stephen? Are you still there?

TOM

Yes. Are you done performing?

STEPHEN

Yes.

TOM

Ok. Well... it's unusually clear. So the sunrise, it kinda goes on forever. Like sometimes you can see an end to it, you know? 'Cause of the clouds, or the buildings. But this one, it has no edges. It's...

STEPHEN

Endless.

TOM

Yeah.

STEPHEN

What else do you see?

TOM

A pause.

Stephen?

TOM

I'm looking.

STEPHEN

TOM

Did you forget how?

STEPHEN
(shutting him up)

Ok. Remember that school across the street?

TOM

Mmhmm.

STEPHEN

Well. It's doors just opened for the morning. There's a teacher waiting out front. And a little further down the block, there's a mom- I suppose, I shouldn't assume: A woman in her 40s, I'd guess. She's wearing—what would you call it? A housecoat? Like it's for indoors, but it's warm, you know? She's certainly not meant to be wearing it out here. And she's got a kid in tow. A little girl. Maybe 8 or 9. Or 6? I'm terrible with kids' ages. The girl is carrying- oh she's just dropped it. She had a little doll and she dropped it. She's trying to go back for it, but her mom is pulling her forward. Wait! Turn around! Oh. Her mom's noticed now. They're going back for the doll. It's in the gutter- They can't see it. By the grate! By the- ! Oh, I should say something. Where are my shoes? Where are my- No, oh. No, she's found it. Oh good... My god she's really crying. And clinging to it. Is that normal? At that age? To be so attached? To something else?

No response. A pause.

STEPHEN

Oh. She's giving the doll to her mother. And she's walking into school. She's hugging the teacher. It's like she's forgotten about the doll completely. How silly. How easily she moved on. After all that.

No response again.

STEPHEN

Tom... ? Are you there... ?

A click.

STEPHEN's hung up.

The lights are out.

END OF PLAY