

CONFESSIONS OF A CHARACTER ACTOR
A Short Play by
Aaron M. Leventman

Characters:

Bertha, Late 40s, ethnic, loud but loveable

David, Early 20s, an eager, nervous young man

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SETTING: Living Room in an Apartment Brooklyn

TIME: Summer, 1968

(David enters and sniffs. He looks at Bertha offstage and calls to her.)

DAVID

Oh, come on, Ma. Get your head out of the oven. Things aren't that bad.

(Bertha enters wiping her hands on her apron.)

BERTHA

Ha ha! Something's the matter with that thing.

DAVID

You're cooking today? It's like a 100 degrees outside.

BERTHA

The oven's not working too well. It's either too hot or not hot enough. But when did that ever stop me from making my mandel bread anyways?

DAVID

Ma, you burned that thing the last 2 times you tried to make it. Maybe it's time to try something else.

BERTHA

That was because I was out of butter and used margarine but this time it will be perfect. I invited your Aunt Bessie over for tea and she's bringing Rebecca who just got a very nice position as a receptionist at a real estate office. You might like her, David. I hear she has a taste for the arts.

DAVID

Ma, stop trying to set me up, okay? It never works out. The last time, Aunt Bessie's niece from Sweden thought I was ugly.

BERTHA

How do you know?

DAVID

Because she told me!

BERTHA

But she couldn't speak English. And anyway you're not ugly. You're a handsome boy. You have your father's nose.

DAVID

(under his breath) That's the problem.

BERTHA

No offense but I think you haven't gone on a date in quite a while, am I right?

DAVID

I'm busy, Ma. I gotta focus on my acting career.

BERTHA

Well, I was already married at your age and your sister was on the way.

DAVID

(jokingly) That was a long time, ago. People play the field for a while now.

BERTHA

Oh, come on, now. I'm not that old.

DAVID

Yeah, okay, Ma. Why did you invite Aunt Bessie, anyway? She'll eat the whole bread. She'll say that she'll just have a nibble the next thing you know the entire thing is gone.

BERTHA

That's not nice. But I agree she CAN over do it. At her rate she'll be dead by the time she's 60 just like your Aunt Ruth, may she rest in peace. Oh, and she's also bringing your Uncle Ron who is starting a new venture going into the shoe business. And maybe you'll hear from your big casting agent and have some news for us.

DAVID

Don't remind me. I'm trying not to think about it.

BERTHA

I have an idea. Why don't you do one of your scenes from your acting class for everyone today at tea? You could even do your scene from your try-outs for the film.

DAVID

They're not try-outs, Ma. They're auditions. And I'm definitely not doing a scene from the film.

BERTHA

Well, okay then. Do something that you're working on in acting class. I'm paying all this money, I wanna see what you're getting out of it.

DAVID

Ma, I'm not a little boy doing magic tricks for your dinner guests. This is serious work I'm doing here.

BERTHA

Alright, alright, I get it. You're not a kid anymore. If you won't do it for the rest of your family at least do it for me.

DAVID

No, Ma.

BERTHA

Oh, come on now. Entertain your poor mother. I promise I'll be a good audience.

(The phone rings.)

DAVID

Saved by the bell. I'll get it.

(Bertha retrieves it first and smiles in triumphantly at having done so. She answers it.)

BERTHA

Hello?

(David rolls his eyes.)

Who may I ask is calling?

(Bertha nods her head enthusiastically. David tries to grab the phone from her.)

Yes, one minute please.

(She covers the receiver with her hand and jumps up and down.)

It's him. It's him.

(David grabs the phone and walks to the other side of the room she can't hear the conversation.)

What? You don't want your own mother to hear?

DAVID

Hello? This is David. Yes, Mr. Stanton. It was a pleasure reading for Mr. Loninger. ..He did?!

(Bertha tries to listen in frustration but can't really hear anything.)

Well, that's great news...Oh, it's THAT part? But I was reading for the insurance salesman...Oh, someone dropped out?.. Yeah, of course I want it, but what do I have to do exactly?...Uh hu. Uh hu. Uh hu. No, it's no problem. I can do that. No, really. It won't be a problem. Yeah, I can stop by and pick up the script. Sure, tomorrow's fine. Thank you, thank you Mr. Stanton. I won't let you down.

(He hangs up the phone and looks fearful. Bertha looks at his worried face.)

BERTHA

Not good news, huh? Well, you I'm sure you did your best. You're in a tough field and maybe next time the outcome will be better.

DAVID

Uh, Ma...?

BERTHA

Meanwhile, now that you have the summer free, maybe you could work at your uncle's shoe store. Then you could maybe have enough money to get your own place. Not that I don't love having you here, Davey, but a boy your age should...

DAVID

Ma! I got the part.

BERTHA

WHAT?!! You got the part?! What are you, crazy? You're walking around here like you just got a death sentence and you got the part? What did he say? Tell me everything.

DAVID

Well, it's a new movie with Gene Roth.

BERTHA

Gene Roth? Who's that? I never heard of him.

DAVID

Ma, he's been on Broadway. He's a stage actor. This is his first film. He got a Tony award for the last Arthur Miller play.

BERTHA

Arthur Miller. Very impressive. So what's the part? Do you have many lines?

DAVID

Yeah, a few, but, uh, well, it's not the part I read for.

BERTHA

So what part is it?

DAVID

Well, it's just one scene. (pause) It takes place in a public bathroom.

BERTHA

A public bathroom?

DAVID

And I'm this student, and I buy the services of a..well, you know..

BERTHA

What? I don't get it.

DAVID

Ma, your bread. Should you check on it?

BERTHA

It needs another 20 minutes. So what are you buying from this man in the bathroom?

DAVID

Hey, why don't I make my famous cole slaw for everyone today, the kind with raisins in it? You like my cole slaw.

BERTHA

What is it, David? What's going on?

DAVID

In the scene there's this guy standing in the bathroom, and he's a ...you now. He's a male prostitute. (pause) I hire a male prostitute. That's my part in the film.

BERTHA

(pause) I don't think we'll be telling your Aunt Bessie about this one.