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The Meaning of Life

By: Sean J. White

Scene: Headstones cover the stage. A woman in mourning clothes, MOTHER, stands in front of one. Enter a man in his mid-twenties, FRANKLIN, and a YOUNG WOMAN holding a baby. The YOUNG WOMAN stops on the edge of the stage, FRANKLIN goes to MOTHER.

Franklin: (Smiles.) Hello, mom.

Mother: (Excited.) You came!

Franklin: I'm only here for you.

Mother: (Defensive.) Vernon gave you everything.

Franklin: (Undertones of disagreement.) Yeah, sure.

Mother: (Defensive.) He put you through college!

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Franklin: (Shrugs his shoulders.) Sure. Yeah, he did. Whatever.

Mother: Well, anyway, you're here now. (Embraces FRANKLIN and kisses his cheeks.)

Franklin: (Pulls away.) I'm only here for you, mom.

Mother: (Changes the subject.) When do I get to see my grandbaby?

Franklin: Later. (Distracted.) How long you gonna be?

Mother: (Sad.) Just a little bit longer.

Franklin: (Starts to leave.) Okay. I'll meet you out front.

Mother: (Reaches out without touching FRANKLIN.) Wait!

Franklin: (Stops. Turns.) Why? I've got no reason to be here except you.

Mother: Vernon gave you everything.

Franklin: I'm still glad he's dead.

Mother: (Taken aback.) Franklin! How could you--how could you say such a thing?

Franklin: (Somewhat incredulous.) C'mon, mom, he deserved it.

Mother: (Upset and sad.) How can you say that?

Franklin: It's too bad it didn't happen sooner. (Walks away.)

Mother: Franklin!

Franklin: (Waves dismissively without turning.) I'll meet you out front, mom.

Mother: Franklin! Nobody deserves--

Franklin: (Turns. Cuts MOTHER off.) We all get what we've got coming.

CURTAIN.

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Scene: A forty-something woman, TEACHER, sits at a big wood desk looking at papers. Two chairs are in front of the desk.

Teacher: (After a knock at an unseen door.) Come in. (Enter MOTHER and STEP-FATHER. They sit in the chairs.) Ah, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson.

Mother: It's--um--Fischer, actually. Johnson is my ex-husband's name.

Teacher: (With reflexive concern.) Oh, I'm sorry.

Step-father: (Seemingly overdressed, but the ruffled suit and five o'clock shadow shows he just came from work.) So, how's the boy doing?

Teacher: (With an undercurrent of worry.) Um--yes. Franklin.

Mother: (Concerned.) Is something wrong with Franklin?

Step-father: (Shakes his head and mutters.) Good, God. What's this gonna cost now?

Teacher: Franklin is...Franklin's a very bright child, but--um--he--uh--his interactions with others have been--um--problematic.

Mother: (Sobs.) Oh, God, no.

Step-father: (Sighs.) Like what? (After a pause.) Specifically.

Teacher: It's more than dipping pigtailed in ink, I'm afraid, though he's not killing small animals either. (To herself.) How do I put this? (To MOTHER and STEP-FATHER.) Franklin's on the verge of being transferred.

Mother: (Half-sob.) Oh!

Step-father: (Puts his hand on MOTHER's forearm gently.) It'll be okay, Laura. (To TEACHER.) What's the boy doing?

Teacher: Let me first just say that Franklin does very good work--though he tends not to do it. Do you work with him at all?

Step-father: I try to do stuff with boy on weekends. (To MOTHER.) How 'bout you, hon? (Back to TEACHER.) But you're evading my question.

Mother: (Interjects.) Franklin's my baby!

(STEP-FATHER locks eyes with TEACHER. No one says anything for a few moments.)

Step-father: (Clears his throat.) What's the boy doing?

Teacher: (Sighs.) He and a girl have been--um--

Mother: (Wails. Tries to embrace STEP-FATHER.)

Step-father: (Ignores MOTHER. Indignant.) What?

Teacher: He's been doing things to a girl in class.

Mother: (Somewhat relieved.) Oh!

Step-father: (Clenches his fists.) No! The boy knows better'n that. (To himself.) Good Lord. (To TEACHER.) Why--why don't we--

Teacher: (Confused.) I was told you'd been contacted.

Step-father: (Upset.) Nobody--

Mother: (Through sniffles.) I already--I already talked to him.

Teacher: It's still--

Step-father: (Rises. Rages.) Are you telling me the boy's a perv? (To MOTHER.) And you. Why didn't you say anything?

Teacher: Please, Mr. Fischer. Let's try to stay calm.

Step-father: (Bites his lip. Wags his finger. Takes a deep breath. Clenches his fists. Sits down.) What kind of pervo is he?

Mother: (Crying.)

Teacher: (Hands MOTHER a box of tissue. To STEP-FATHER.)

It's--um-- (Takes a deep breath.) I'm not a psychologist so I can't explain it any better than it's been explained to me... (Trails off.)

CURTAIN.

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Scene: A kitchen and four chairs. (Enter MOTHER and STEP-FATHER.)

Step-father: (Shouts.) Franklin! Get down here, boy!

(Heavy footsteps approach. Enter FRANKLIN at ten years old.)

Franklin: (Approaches STEP-FATHER.) Yes, sir.

Step-father: (Hits FRANKLIN with an open hand.) What's wrong with you, boy?

Mother: (Screams.) What are you doing, Vernon?

Franklin: (Responds stoically but wears a mask of anger.) What'd I do?

Step-father: (Hits FRANKLIN again. FRANKLIN falls.) I shouldn't have to tell you.

Mother: (Screams. Moves to intercede.) Stop!

Franklin: (Stands up. Meekly.) I'm sorry, sir. I won't do it again.

Step-father: Won't do what again?

Mother: (Grabs STEP-FATHER's arm.) Leave him be. You don't understand!

Step-father: What's to understand? (To FRANKLIN.) Won't do what again?

Franklin: I won't do it again, sir. I promise.

Step-father: (Hits FRANKLIN with his free arm.) You don't even know why you got this coming.

Mother: (Yelling.) Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

Step-father: (Shrugs off MOTHER. Hits FRANKLIN. FRANKLIN falls to the floor again.) I won't have a pervo living under my roof!

(FRANKLIN starts to scramble away.)

Mother: (Grabs STEP-FATHER. Sobs.) He was only kissing the girl. (Quieter.) He was only kissing the girl. (In a whisper.) He was only kissing the girl.

(STEP-FATHER pulls away from MOTHER, and moves menacingly toward FRANKLIN.)

CURTAIN.

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24 March 2013

Safe Streets Arts Foundation  
2512 Virginia Ave. NW  
#58043  
Washington, DC 20037


Dear Safe Streets Arts Foundation:

I arrived in prison in 1997 at the age of nineteen. I have had my short fiction and poetry published in such journals as descant, Trajectory, Harpur Palate, and Clare. I was a 2011 finalist for the PEN American Center's writing awards for prisoners in the genre of poetry.

Please consider for production the enclosed play, "The Meaning of Life." Julie from College Guild suggested that I might be interested in this opportunity. Please find also a #10 SASE for reply, and when you reply I hope that you will also include more information about the Safe Streets Art Foundation.

Thank you.

Respectfully,



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