

Good for nothing

The lights rise on a meticulously kept suburban kitchen. The mother – also meticulously kept, is happily preparing breakfast. Enter an overly – and unnaturally – pleasant teenager. Their overly pleasant demeanor is – at first – enough to make you sick.

SON

Good morning, mom.

MOTHER

(Nervously perky) Good morning, sweetheart. Sleep well?

SON

Always do after a late night studying. But I know it's gonna pay off today when I take that math test.

MOTHER

How about some pancakes this morning, dear?

SON

No time mom. Gotta get to school. *(Pause)* Hey, is everything okay?

MOTHER

What makes you ask, dear?

SON

I dunno, you seem all... nervous, is all.

MOTHER

I just wanted to know if you wanted pancakes, dear. There's no reason to - *(Collapses dramatically at the table)* Oh, what am I doing? Who am I kidding?

SON

Mom? Are you all right?

MOTHER

Son, I need for you to sit down.

SON

What is it, mom? You can tell me anything.

MOTHER

Daniel, have you noticed that something is... different today?

SON

(Looking around the room, then at his mother) Did you get a new hairdo or something? If you did it looks very nice, mother.

MOTHER

No, dear. Look around you.

SON

(Looking around) Okay, but I don't see – wait a second. Where is he? *(Runs around the edges of the kitchen, yelling into the adjacent rooms)* Hello? Are you in there? Hello? Where are you? *(To his mother)* What happened? He was here just last night, when I went to bed.

MOTHER

Sweetheart. Please. Sit down.

The son grudgingly sits down.

MOTHER

I suppose the only way to say this is to just say it.

SON

What?

MOTHER

That cameraman whose been following you around? The one you thought was from an MTV reality show?

SON

Yea?

MOTHER

He wasn't from MTV at all.

SON

He was from VH1? That's okay, I guess, it's still TV, right?

MOTHER

No. What I mean is that he wasn't a real cameraman. I hired him.

SON

You hired him?

MOTHER

Yes. To make you think you were on camera.

SON

You mean I'm not going to be on an MTV series?

MOTHER

No. In fact, there wasn't even any tape in the camera.

SON

But why?

MOTHER

Oh, sweetheart, do you remember how things were? Your grades were failing. You were sneaking out at night and disappearing for days at a time. Your father and I didn't know what to do.

SON

Dad? Was he in on this, too?

MOTHER

No, your father doesn't know what I did. And that's why I had to let the cameraman go. You see, I've been paying him out of my own pocket, and yesterday I ran out of money.

SON

How could you do this to me? You've made me look like a fool in front of my friends.

MOTHER

Sweetheart, I did this to help.

SON

Help? I've been walking around like a big star. Everyone at Carswell High thinks I'm going to be on MTV. How is it going to help when they find out it's all been some kind of joke?

A middle-age man enters the room, unseen.

MOTHER

It's not been a joke. Daniel, look at everything you've accomplished over the past six months. Your grades have improved. You haven't had one day of detention. The guidance counselors think you have a real good chance of getting into college, now, if you just maintain

—

SON

This is a nightmare. It's an absolute nightmare. How can I go back there again? Don't you see what you've done? You've ruined my life!

MOTHER

I promise you that I will make this better.

SON

Yeah, right. How?

MOTHER

I don't know. I'll figure something out. Maybe we tell everyone that the show was cancelled.

SON

(Sees the father) Dad! Dad, did you hear? Did you know what Mom has been doing?

FATHER

Yes, I heard. In fact, I knew.

MOTHER

You did?

SON

What? And you let her do this to me?

MOTHER

How did you know what I've been doing?

FATHER

Loretta, what I have to tell you now is very difficult.

MOTHER

What is it?

FATHER

Look around you, Loretta. Haven't you noticed what's missing?

MOTHER

No, I – *(looks around the room)* oh, my God, where is he? *(races off-stage out of the room)*
Hello? Are you here? *(Returns to the kitchen)* Where did he go?

FATHER

You won't find him. He's gone.

SON

Who's gone?

MOTHER

Does this mean the show is done? When will it air? Oh, I can't wait to see how I –

SON

What show?

FATHER

(To the mother) I want you to sit, darling, and remain calm.

SON

What's going on?

FATHER

Loretta, that man who's been following you around for the past seven months is not from the Learning Channel.

MOTHER

No?

FATHER

No. I hired him.

MOTHER

You did what?

FATHER

I hired him. To follow you around with a camera pretending to tape a reality show about being the mother of a teenager.

MOTHER

(Stunned, the wind knocked out of her) What terrible thing to do to me.

FATHER

Terrible thing? I'll tell you what was terrible. The way you were ignoring your responsibilities as a mother. How while I was at work, thinking that you knew where our son was and who his friends were, you were drinking your lunch and falling asleep in front of Oprah Winfrey. How you haven't picked up a pot or pan or a broom for five years. Do you remember what this place looked like?

MOTHER

But you lied to me!

FATHER

Loretta, you were slipping away from us and I needed to do something to bring you back. And just look at what a great mother you've become. The parent teacher conferences. The volunteering at his school. For the first time in our marriage the house is clean and you've learned to cook.

MOTHER

Well, of course I did all those things. I thought there was a camera recording my every move for national TV. [NOTE: EXPLETIVE DELETED FROM END OF LINE]

FATHER

I did what I had to do to protect this family. To protect my son.

SON

Uh, dad?

FATHER

What is it?

SON

I think it's time I told you something.

FATHER

Told me what?

SON

Well... have you noticed anything missing lately?

FATHER

Missing? No, I haven't.

SON

Take a look around.

FATHER

(Looks around, then, in a panic) Wait a second. Where's Gordie?

SON

You mean the cameraman for that Fox special on fatherhood you thought you've been filming for the past eight months?

FATHER

You don't mean...?

MOTHER

Ha!

SON

You think you're so smug, so perfect a parent that you had to trick mom into doing what was right. What about you?

FATHER

What do you mean, 'what about me?'

SON

Come on, dad. Where do you think I was when I was out all night? I wasn't with my friends. I was following you and watching what you were really doing when you claimed to be working late at the office. Why do you think mom started drinking in the first place? Why she stopped caring about this house and about me? Because she knew all about your secretary and the regional sales manager and the checkout girl at the hardware store –

MOTHER

The checkout girl at the hardware store?

FATHER

So you hired someone to follow me around pretending to film a television show?

SON

It got you to start caring about mom and me.

FATHER

You little creep!

SON

Hey, she did the same thing to me.

MOTHER

I thought I was helping you. And he (*indicating the father*) was doing the same thing to me.

FATHER

I thought I was helping you. I had no idea he was doing the same thing to me that I was doing to you that you were doing – and you – holy cow. Do you realize what this means?

MOTHER

Of course I do. For half a year we've all been good to each other.

SON

Kind, even.

FATHER

We've stopped being selfish.

MOTHER

And self-indulgent.

SON

We've all behaved.

FATHER

We've all been good.

But no one's been filming us.

MOTHER

There are no TV shows.

SON

And no one's going to see us.

FATHER

Which means...

MOTHER

We've all been good for nothing!

ALL TOGETHER

Blackout