

THIS MAGIC MOMENT
Jonathan Dorf

Cast of Characters

BOONE, late teens and the average college-bound kid if he had his way

DEBBIE, his mother, sort of an obsessive, postmodern June Cleaver

(The living room of the tiny apartment Boone shares with his mother. Late afternoon. BOONE, late teens, tries to jam the last few pairs of socks into a suitcase. It is not essential that Boone be played by a real teenager, though he could be. Another suitcase is by the outside door. DEBBIE, his mother, sets up candles on the floor in a circle around the perimeter of the room. Not far from Boone and his suitcase, is the effigy of a man made out of pillows and dressed with men's clothing: sun hat, earmuffs, tie, button-down shirt, belt, pants, socks, shoes. A window is somewhere.)

They won't fit.

DEBBIE

They will.

BOONE

Unpack the suitcase, and I'll help you repack it later.

DEBBIE

I won't need it later.

BOONE

You're crumpling the socks. More than crumpling. They won't recover without ironing.
(Boone grabs the socks from the effigy.)

Leave your father's socks alone.

DEBBIE

Why? Because I'm messing up your dummy?

BOONE

They're in use.

DEBBIE

By a dummy.

BOONE

Not every dummy is just a dummy.

DEBBIE

BOONE

I need them. I don't have enough.

DEBBIE

You can't fit the ones you have.

BOONE

I'll squeeze 'em.

DEBBIE

Squeeze them? Like fruit? I hope I don't have to remind you what happens to squeezed fruit.

(brief pause)

We'll have to iron.

BOONE

They're just socks.

DEBBIE

You can hang a cat with a sock, if it's long enough. Or wrap a lawn bowling ball. Or break up a marriage.

(Boone and Debbie fight over the socks. Each ends up with one. The lights flicker, as Boone becomes his father in a different reality. Debbie smacks him across the face with the other sock.)

BOONE/FATHER

What was that for?

DEBBIE

Oh please—the sock told me everything.

BOONE/FATHER

What sock?

(She smacks him across the face again.)

DEBBIE

This sock.

BOONE/FATHER

Honey—

DEBBIE

Don't honey me. Honey is our sweet little boy who's going to be permanently scarred when he finds out his father was copulating with a cheap athletic sock.

BOONE/FATHER

It's not cheap. It's extra-cushioned.

DEBBIE

Is that what you're into? Big cushions? Aren't my cushions big enough?

BOONE/FATHER

Not like this.

(She smacks him again.)

DEBBIE

Get out. And take your tramp with you.

(She throws the sock at him, and the lights flicker. Boone becomes himself back in the apartment's original reality.)

BOONE

It's college—nobody irons their socks.

(beat)

If I have to, I can iron them when I get there.

(Boone shoves the socks in and struggles to close the suitcase.)

DEBBIE

You'll tear the suitcase.

BOONE

I can do it.

DEBBIE

You can't go to college with a torn suitcase.

(Debbie looks out the window.)

There's a man beneath the window.

(Boone continues to fight the suitcase.)

From up here, he looks like your father.

(Boone stops packing and rushes to the window. Debbie moves out of the way to let him look.)

BOONE

That's not Dad.

DEBBIE

Your father destroyed socks. Mangled them for fun.

BOONE

He doesn't even have the same color hair.

DEBBIE

(reopens Boone's sock suitcase and starts laying out the socks on the ground to repack them)

Like animals. Little helpless animals. That's what socks were to your father. He pulled their threads out like they were birds' wings or frogs' legs. And it wasn't just socks. He'd get nervous in a restaurant, go to work on the sleeves of his own shirt. Not because it was a tick, but because it made him feel better to hurt the shirt. Your father was a clothing killer.

BOONE

It's not Dad!

DEBBIE

It must be the way he's caught in the garage door.

BOONE

What are you doing with my socks?

DEBBIE

That's something your father would have done. But your father wouldn't have invited all of those police officers to stand around and watch.

BOONE

I already packed my socks.

DEBBIE

Your father was too sneaky for that.

BOONE

My socks were fine.

DEBBIE

I told you I'd repack them.

(brief pause)

I'm just trying to make your life easier.

(She brushes each pair of socks to insure their straightness.)

BOONE

I told you not to.

DEBBIE

Just because you're disappointed about the man under the window, there's no reason to get snippy about the socks. I never said it *was* your father.

BOONE

Mom, please.

DEBBIE

Of course, your father was more likely to get stuck in a beachfront garage door in Rio with a prostitute. I always thought he hated the beach. He said he burned.

BOONE

My ride'll be here in a half hour. Not even. Practically any minute.

DEBBIE

He just didn't want any of his beach bunnies to know he was married and with child.

BOONE

If I miss the last flight, I'll miss registration.

DEBBIE

What if we went to Rio?

BOONE

Who?

DEBBIE

Us who. Maybe we could find your father.

BOONE

Dad's in Rio?

DEBBIE

We never take family vacations anymore.

(Boone picks up a sun hat from his father's dummy.)

BOONE

I might want to take this. There's a lawn in front of the dorm. I might want to lay out.

DEBBIE

Your father laid out. He laid out far too often.

BOONE

Did he call from Rio?

(The lights flicker. Boone becomes his father.)

DEBBIE

Stop calling from the spice rack. Stop calling from the lasagna-shaped package wrapped in tinfoil in the freezer hiding behind the waffles.

BOONE/FATHER

You shouldn't have crushed my skull with a hammer and sliced me into pieces. Makes me hostile.

DEBBIE

You shouldn't have left me for a coed you met on the beach that you'd never take me to because you said you burned. Makes me hostile.

BOONE/FATHER

We talked about separating. Next thing I know—whack—I'm refilling the cumin.

DEBBIE

Letting down Boone as usual. He was so looking forward to the school's father and son softball game.

BOONE/FATHER

A little hard to play with no arms.

DEBBIE

No arms this year. No time last year. What's the difference?

BOONE/FATHER

Boone doesn't even like softball.

(The lights flicker again, and Boone becomes himself.)

I don't even like softball.

DEBBIE

Of course you don't. Your father always said it was a girl's sport.

BOONE

It is.

DEBBIE

Sweaty, unshaved men with beer bellies play softball. Shows what your father knew.

BOONE

But I had to play with girls.

DEBBIE

It was just so you could practice for the father-son game. You were too young to play with the sweaty men. You shouldn't bring it up if it upsets you.

(beat)

You had the cutest softball socks—let me give you some lessons on keeping your socks wrinkle-free.

BOONE

I can do it.

DEBBIE

I know you can. I'm just giving you motherly tips. Are you too old for motherly tips?

BOONE

No, but—

DEBBIE

You used to love my motherly tips. When you were six, I'd sit you on my knee and give you a motherly tip—sometimes two.

BOONE

Could you write them down?

DEBBIE

You don't have time for motherly tips anymore.

BOONE

It's not that—I don't have time *now*.

DEBBIE

Grandma always said that you're never too old for a motherly tip.

BOONE

I'm not too old.

DEBBIE

I agree.

(Boone wrests control of the socks from Debbie. She withdraws to the window.)

BOONE

How do you know Dad's in Rio?

DEBBIE

You should listen to my motherly tips.

BOONE

Did he call from Rio?

DEBBIE

Why would he call?

BOONE

Did he call collect?

(brief pause)

This tie would look really good on me.

(Boone grabs the dummy's tie and holds it up to see how it would look on him.)

DEBBIE

What about your socks? What will your roommate think if you can't fold your socks properly? What if he thinks you're like your father?

(He ties it around his neck. Reacting to the tie)

Boone!

BOONE

He doesn't know Dad.

DEBBIE

He knows the type.

BOONE

Type?

(The lights flicker. Boone becomes his father and stands at attention. Debbie grabs a candle—there's a small pile in the corner—and uses it as a pointer.)

DEBBIE

Homo desertus, also known as homo abandonus, aka homo manipulatus—

BOONE/FATHER

I thought that was you.

DEBBIE

Right—sorry. Aka—homo irresponsibilitus—

BOONE/FATHER

That's better.

DEBBIE

Homo excusus. Homo driven from home by your son Boone to Rio de Janeiro—us.
(The lights flicker, and Boone is himself again.)

Homo sock destroyus.

BOONE

What?

DEBBIE

Homo sock destroyus. My pet name for your father.

BOONE

They won't even be in the suitcase for a whole day. You don't mind if I take the tie—right? It matches my socks.

DEBBIE

The stories I could tell you about your father and his socks. Would you like to hear some of your father's sock stories?

BOONE

I want to—

DEBBIE

When your father and I got married—

BOONE

Does it bother you if I pack while you talk? I gotta' keep moving.

DEBBIE

Yes. It bothers me. When you were eight, you could sit on my lap and listen to your father's sock stories for hours. I'd make a picnic lunch, and we'd sit all day.

BOONE

I'm listening.

DEBBIE

You had a terrible attendance record through the ninth grade, because you would often stay home to sit on my lap.

(brief pause)

They're greasing up the man in the door.

BOONE

Have you seen my shoes?

DEBBIE

You're wearing them. Get the video camera and we'll watch it over dinner.

BOONE

Mom, I can't have dinner with you. I want to, but I can't. I'll be on the plane. Where are my other shoes?

DEBBIE

You won't want to miss this greasing. I haven't seen a greasing like this since you were ten and you gave yourself a vegetable oil bath. Do you remember your vegetable oil baths? Do you remember when your father tried to help, and he fell in the tub?

BOONE

No. I'm talking about the loafers with the tassels.

DEBBIE

He always forgot that the oil made the rim of the tub slippery. He fell in more than once. I'm surprised you don't remember it.

BOONE

I can't only have sneakers.

DEBBIE

You'd wash. I'd sit. Your father would slip, and we'd call you our oily boyly boy.

BOONE

I need to find my loafers.

DEBBIE

I'm not sure why we stopped.

BOONE

(picks up the dummy's shoes)

If I can't find my shoes, I'll take Dad's. They're almost the same size.

DEBBIE

No—I need these.

BOONE

Why?

DEBBIE

(takes the shoes from him and returns them to the dummy)

Because I need to polish them. They're not properly polished. It's not as if your father's been polishing them.

(pause)

I'll bet I have some vegetable oil in the kitchen. Your father always said it made a great polish. I never believed him, but we could see if he's right.

(brief pause)

Be my oily boyly shoe polishing boy?

(The lights flicker, and Boone becomes his father.)

BOONE/FATHER

About this oily boyly thing.

DEBBIE

What about it, dear?

BOONE/FATHER

I think it's time we moved on.

DEBBIE

Boone likes it.

BOONE/FATHER

A nickname like that makes a boy piss his pants.

DEBBIE

He does not wet himself.

BOONE/FATHER

Can't take that risk. Either oily boyly boy goes, or I do.

DEBBIE

But he's only eight.

BOONE/FATHER

Last time he was only eight. Pretty soon he'll be only twelve. It's like a creeping disease. You don't cut it out, it creeps.

(brief pause)

I might not leave today, might not leave tomorrow. Might still be here when Boone's sixteen years old. But you think I'm gonna' share a house with an eighteen year old oily boyly boy, you are sadly mistaken. It's either oily boyly boy, or me . . .

(The lights flicker, and Boone is himself. Debbie begins surrounding Boone's suitcase with candles.)

BOONE

What's with the candles?

DEBBIE

It's a surprise.

BOONE

For me?

DEBBIE

Who else could it be for?

BOONE

For you.

DEBBIE

It's not a surprise when it's for yourself.

BOONE

Why not?

(tries to hurdle the candles to get to the suitcase)

I think maybe my shoes are in here.

DEBBIE

They're gone. Careful with the candles.

(As the scene continues, Boone plays cat and mouse with Debbie, with him moving candles out of the way while she replaces them—the result is that he's thwarted in getting to the suitcase.)

BOONE

Gone?

DEBBIE

I threw them out. They were filthy. How can you surprise yourself?

BOONE

Those were my good shoes.

DEBBIE

You should have taken better care of them.

BOONE

I was taking care of them. I was taking care of them fine!

DEBBIE

There's no need to yell at me. You never used to yell at me.

BOONE

Just because you never let me go to school dances or parties doesn't mean I didn't wear them. I wore them a lot.

DEBBIE

If it's that much of an issue, we can buy new shoes tomorrow.

BOONE

I won't be here tomorrow.

DEBBIE

Why not?

BOONE

I won't be here in twenty minutes. I'm leavi—

DEBBIE

Do you hear screaming?

BOONE

I'm not screaming.

DEBBIE

I hear screaming.

(She looks out the window.)

It's the man under the window.

BOONE

I don't hear it.

DEBBIE

He's screaming all right. Because the police are trying to pull him out by his arms. He has a good reason to scream. Unlike some people.

BOONE

I wasn't screaming at you.

(Boone gives up on the candle war for the moment and picks up his father's earmuffs.)

DEBBIE

When you were an oily boyly boy, you were so sweet. You were sweet like honey. I could just eat you right up, because you were sweet like the homemade honey, not the kind you buy in the supermarket. I'm talking about the kind you see harvested by beekeepers on PBS specials. I wanted to change your pet name to "sweetie honey bunny yum yum," but your father fought me every inch of the way.

(He puts on the earmuffs.)

BOONE

I don't hear anybody screaming.

DEBBIE

Sometimes you have to listen very carefully. It's not all obvious and all at once like in the movies. Some of us scream a little all the time. Like this.

(Debbie screams, a series of tiny, exaggerated screams as the lights flicker and Boone becomes his father.)

BOONE/FATHER

Stop screaming.

DEBBIE

No.

(She goes back to screaming, continuing to do so whenever she's not speaking.)

BOONE/FATHER

How am I supposed to sleep with you screaming?

DEBBIE

I'm not screaming. Boone is screaming.

BOONE/FATHER

Boone's asleep.

DEBBIE

He's only ten. He can't scream all day.

BOONE/FATHER

I haven't heard him once.

DEBBIE

He doesn't like you enough to scream *for* you. Only *about* you.

BOONE/FATHER

He likes me fine.

DEBBIE

That's not what I heard.

(pulls the earmuffs from Boone's head)

I heard he told his teacher that he doesn't mind you when you bring him toys. I heard he told the mailman that you were adequate, if you like that sort of thing.

BOONE/FATHER

What sort of thing?

DEBBIE

He told the children in his play group and the mother who was driving the carpool that day that he finds your habit of licking the stripes on your socks—and I quote, “appalling.” Of course, that was nothing compared to the New York Times interview, in which he said you were—and I quote again—an “ethnic clothes cleanser.”

BOONE/FATHER

(pause)

I had no idea.

DEBBIE

I think you'd better go.

BOONE/FATHER

My own son. That's pretty rock bottom.

(beat)

What do you think—should I kill myself?

DEBBIE

I think that's what he'd want. Spare him the embarrassment of having you around.

BOONE/FATHER

Should we double-check?

DEBBIE

I'd rather not wake him up.

BOONE/FATHER

You're right. He needs his sleep. Mind if I hang myself with a sock? I've never seen it done on people, only cats, but no reason why it shouldn't work.

DEBBIE

You could be the first. I'm sure that would be very special to Boone.

(The lights flicker, and Boone, now himself, fights Debbie for the earmuffs. He wins, and she moves toward his sock suitcase.)

You don't need earmuffs in a place where you can lay out.

BOONE

It's hot during the day and cold at night.

(pause)

Maybe I just want to wear earmuffs. Maybe I want to wear earmuffs and a speedo and let girls check me out.

DEBBIE

I forbid you to wear a speedo!

BOONE

Maybe I just want Dad's earmuffs.

DEBBIE

You're not ready for speedos and earmuffs and girls and being checked out.

BOONE

How do you know?

DEBBIE

I've heard the words they use: package, basket—do you want to be some beach bunny's basket boy?

BOONE

Maybe I do.

(Debbie grabs a sock from his suitcase.)

Why are you unpacking my socks?

DEBBIE

I'm not unpacking your socks. I found it on the windowsill when I went to look at the screaming man that's stuck in the garage door.

BOONE

I just watched you take it out of my suitcase.

DEBBIE

You were mistaken.

BOONE

I know I packed all the socks.

DEBBIE

You must have missed one.

BOONE

You obviously don't want me to go to college.

DEBBIE

That's not true.

BOONE

Do you want me to go?

(He tries to repack the socks. Debbie moves to the suitcase standing by the door.)

DEBBIE

I don't want you to be your father.

BOONE

Where is he?

DEBBIE

Family-minded young people go to college and live at home.

BOONE

You know where he is.

DEBBIE

I don't. Maybe he's in Rio with one of his beach bunnies. Or in Oslo with a ski bunny. Or in Moscow with a vodka bunny.

(She flips a suitcase to the ground, as if she's preparing to open it.)

BOONE

Or on Easter Island with the Easter Bunny.

DEBBIE

Do you think I'm kidding?

BOONE

Don't open that—it's done.

DEBBIE

Do you think your father's whereabouts are a big joke in this family?

BOONE

No.

DEBBIE

Are you picking this up from the other children in the neighborhood? Did they put you up to Easter Island?

BOONE

Who? I have no friends except for the kid I sat with at lunch in twelfth grade, and I didn't even know his name. And don't call me a child. I'm not a child.

DEBBIE

You're *my* child.

BOONE

(beat)

I'm just going to college. I'll come back.

DEBBIE

But that could be months and months. Months and months without a motherly tip. And months stretch into years, and years stretch into never evers. You'll be a never ever like your father, and you'll forget all about me and my motherly tips.

(brief pause as she abandons the suitcase, leaving it lying down, and moves toward the couch, fixing any candles Boone has knocked over)

All of this has been very upsetting. I'm going to cry. You're going to make me cry.

BOONE

Don't cry.

DEBBIE

I'm going to—don't try to stop me. Unless . . .

BOONE

What?

(Boone rights the fallen suitcase by the door.)

DEBBIE

(thinks)

No.

BOONE

What, Mom?

DEBBIE

Maybe if I gave you a motherly tip.

BOONE

(pause)

OK.

DEBBIE

I can't do it if you're running around.

(Boone stops moving.)

You look like you want to run away. I can't give a motherly tip to you when you're sprinting through the living room.

BOONE

I'm not moving, but I have to go soon. Really, really soon.

DEBBIE

You want to see me cry, don't you? It's my fault your father left—that's what you think—and you want to leave me a quivering mess.

BOONE

Mom—

DEBBIE

Here comes the mess.

BOONE

I want a tip. Please.

DEBBIE

(beat)

Really?

BOONE

I want a million tips.

DEBBIE

I don't know that I have a million.

BOONE

I only have time for one right now, but you can think of some more for when I come home.

Want to read the rest of the play? Click the back button on your browser and follow the instructions at the top of the page for ordering a perusal copy.