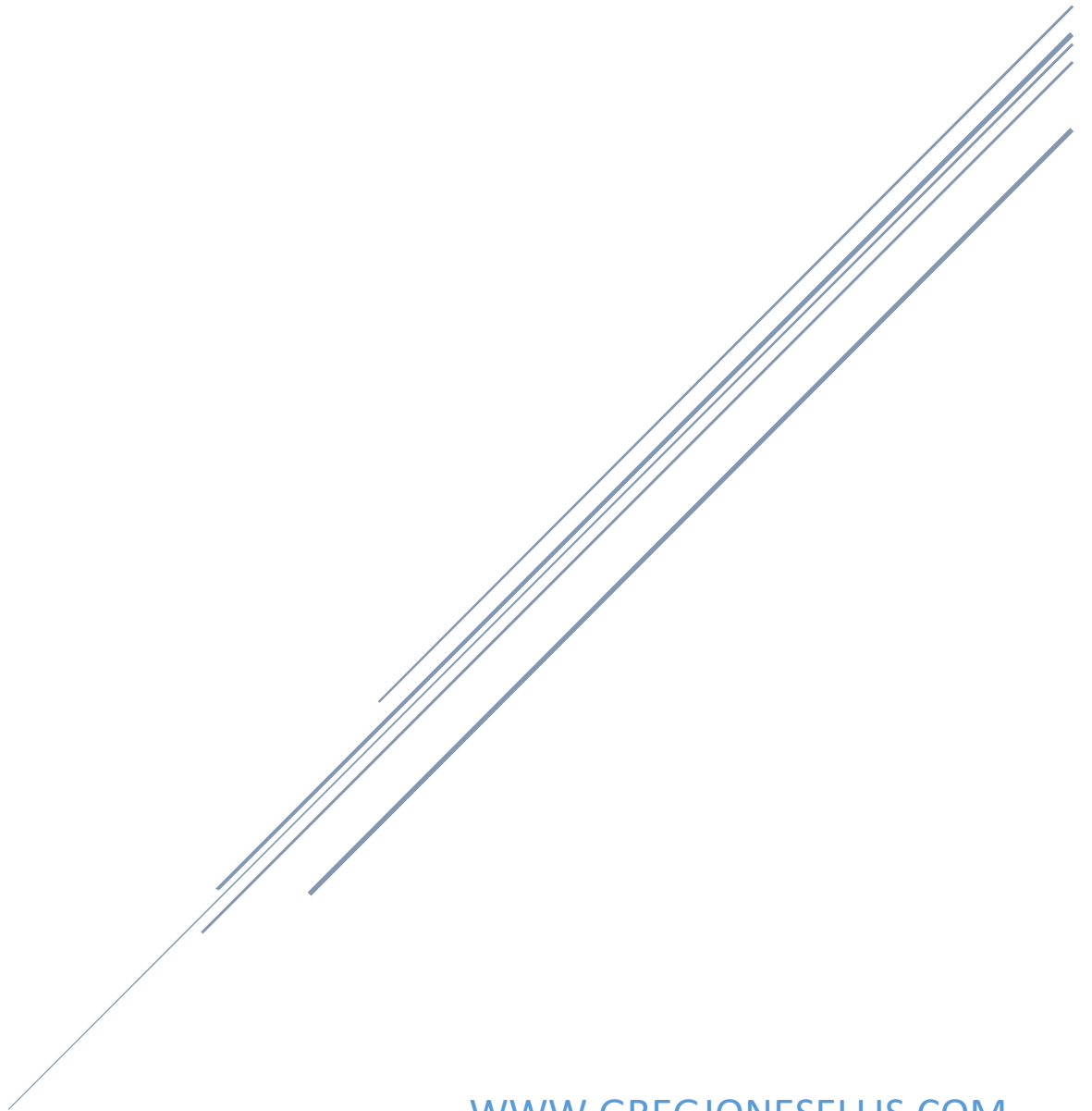


EXCERPT: DEAD AIR

BY GREG JONES ELLIS



WWW.GREGJONESELLIS.COM
GPAULJONES54@GMAIL.COM

MOTHER

So, what do you think of your mother now? Best News and Information Show Host.

SON

I'm wondering how your show is either news or information.

MOTHER

Thanks.

FATHER

We're proud of you.

MOTHER

(To FATHER:) Well, I do want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to sit with me and awkwardly kiss my cheek when they announced my name.

FATHER

You know I'm not very good at these things.

MOTHER

(Relenting:) I'm sorry. Thanks. Really.

SON

So, who'd you beat out?

MOTHER

You know all about it. You know everything.

SON

OK. Dr. Quack, some fake judge who yells at everybody and the political guy. He probably lost because this season he talked about the Middle East and how well things were going.

MOTHER.

They're asking about you.

SON

Who?

MOTHER

Everybody. (*To FATHER:*) Weren't they?

FATHER

They were.

MOTHER

One producer said, "I feel like I know you son. I can even picture him." But his description was pretty...off the mark.

FATHER

He wasn't far off about the eyes.

MOTHER

True. He said he knew your eyes would be very intense. That you probably didn't blink or look away much.

FATHER

No. I meant he said that he probably had your eyes.

MOTHER

Oh, right.

FATHER

That's what I remember. And he said that he wished he had a son like you.

SON

And you put him wise--?

FATHER

No, I didn't. I said that I was very proud of you. Of both of you.

MOTHER

And then he said he wanted to meet you.

SON

And you looked around the room, acting as if searching and then said, "He must have slipped away. He was just here."

MOTHER

I did not. You're not some figment of my imagination. You're real.

SON

Am I?

MOTHER

I said that you were at home.

SON

And he pressed the point and said, "I'd really like to meet this genius."

MOTHER

Something like that.

SON

(Turns to FATHER:) What did she say?

FATHER

Your mother is right here.

SON

(To MOTHER:) Okay, so what did you say?

MOTHER

I said I hoped so, too.

SON

(To FATHER:) I'm just verifying. Is that what she said?

FATHER

Stop. Yes. *(Pause.)* And then she said that—

SON

--Some day he'll do the show, since all of America is dying to meet him.

FATHER

Words to that effect.

MOTHER

You'd be great.

SON

No. I wouldn't. Because that kid is truly the figment of your imagination.

MOTHER

He is not!

SON

Let's just say that you let every viewer imagine who he is. Hey! I've got it! Why don't you tell everyone that you really have *two* sons? One's a genius who's adorable and witty and telegenic and the other is...me.

MOTHER

Stop.

SON

(Gains steam as he continues:) Why not just create another human being? Why endure the embarrassment of having a weird kid like me? Your fake kid can have an even higher IQ! 170! 180! That would really reflect well on you! Two geniuses. Smart mother, smart kid.

MOTHER

You are not weird! Everybody is shy at first. Look, I had to go through media training. They teach you how to be relaxed on camera.

SON

(Laughs) Really? Well, here's the thing. You have to want to be on camera. Stick to the fantasy kid.

MOTHER

He is not a fantasy! I talk about *you*. The person who has a phenomenal talent. Who is wasting that talent.

FATHER

Now---

SON

By not agreeing to be thrown into the pool? I bet you don't tell that one on air.

MOTHER

No.

SON

I bet you don't. I bet Philip has tried to book somebody who believes in throwing little kids into the pool but you set him straight. Off the air, of course.

MOTHER

You just didn't like to swim.

SON

(Really getting worked up:) No, I *couldn't* swim! There's a difference. But you listened to the experts. "Keep throwing him in." "Back in the pool, kid!" "No, please, I'm drowning. Really!" "No, you're not! Stop being silly! Don't struggle. Float. Float!" "Please don't throw me in again!" "Back in the pool. Float, goddammit! You're fighting too much! GODDAMN YOU, WHY CAN'T YOU FLOAT?"

MOTHER

All right, stop. Calm down.

SON

I AM NEVER GONNA FLOAT! I'm., never... gonna...float.

He sits. Down. He holds his temples, which are throbbing, and start to lose his balance. FATHER goes to him steadying him back onto his fee. MOTHER stars at him. For quite a while. Finally:)

MOTHER

I just...okay.

SON

Okay.

MOTHER

I just don't know—I've never known—how to—

SON

Deal with me?

MOTHER

Reach you.

SON

Fair enough. But...you're the parent. Could you help me figure it out? Because I don't know either.

MOTHER

Know what? You know—

SON

--everything. Right. I know everything. Yeah...I... I'm not available. Okay?

MOTHER

Okay. *(Pause)* I—

SON

Have to prep for tomorrow's show.

MOTHER

Um, yeah.

MOTHER looks at FATHER for some kind of supportive statement. It doesn't come. She exits.

FATHER

You okay?

SON

Yeah. I think I just forgot to eat today.

FATHER

You gotta watch that. Phytonutrients and all...I could—

SON

Chinese takeout is fine.

FATHER

Sure you're okay?

SON

Yeah.

fATHER takes a last look of concern. Exits.