

STEALING SAXOPHONES FROM HOMELESS PEOPLE

By Jonathan Dorf

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Production History

Stealing Saxophones from Homeless People premiered as part of A Bunch of Fives at the Street Theatre in Canberra, Australia. It was performed by Jake River Fraser, for whom it was written.

Notes

Despite the fact that the character in the play was originally written as a teen male, there is nothing in the text that would prevent a female actor (in which case, the character would be named Jill) from doing the role. The play can be performed on a bare stage with just a chair and rope.

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(JAKE, a teen boy, stands next to a chair in a room--could be his bedroom. On the chair is a copious amount of rope, perhaps even a padlock or two. HE locks the door. Throughout the monologue, HE goes about the process of securing himself to the chair.)

You're going to end up stealing saxophones from homeless people. My mother said this to me when I was three. I cried. I didn't even know what a saxophone was and I cried, because it didn't take knowing what a saxophone was to know this was a terrible thing.

(beat)

I know what she'd say--my mother who in her mind is never wrong. She'd say that by the time you're three, you're done developing. You are who you're going to be--at three. So she looked at me, took stock, and then projected a few years into the future.

(beat)

But she didn't have to say it. And what if she had it all wrong? Maybe I was growing up to be perfectly normal and then "why don't I start stealing saxophones from homeless people" just got planted in my head. It could be worse: the girl down the street--I'd hear her mother tell her every day, "You'll grow up to be a murdering psychotic who guts your family in our sleep with a butter knife and a pair of knitting needles." Her mother was wrong about the knitting needles.

(beat)

My Dad was no help. My Dad only shows up in my life in moments. Highlights. My first step--he comes the week after. My first word--he leaves work early and waits outside in his car. "You're going to end up stealing saxophones from homeless people." My Dad is standing right there for that one. Does he say, "No, he isn't" or "honey, you're wrong?" I'd have settled for a "you can't know that for sure." But my Dad stands there, absent again, and I'm three, and my mother has just changed my world.

(beat)

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If my Dad had said something. If he had said anything, this never would have started. But he didn't--and it did. When I was five. Not with a saxophone. Not with a sleeping man living out of a bag huddled on the street with a saxophone at his feet. It never starts that way. It always starts with something small. Something that seems harmless.

(beat)

I've read about addiction. I've read up on it. I'd go to meetings, but the closest Kleptomaniacs Anonymous chapter is **(the actor may also say "500 kilometers" instead of 300 miles)** 300 miles away. I went to AA once--when I was 12. It's not my problem, but I figured they'd understand.

I'm the youngest one there--most of them could be my parents--and I get all these looks, these really heart-broken looks, looks that say "oh how tragic, he's 12" and "that poor, poor kid." There are a lot of "poor kid" looks. Three women and one man burst into tears just looking at me--one of them has to be carried out. She keeps screaming "we've lost our children." I try to tell her that no, I'm not an alcoholic, but she just keeps screaming "nothing matters anymore--we've lost our children. Let's all get drunk and die."

(beat)

Once they get her out, the meeting starts, and I listen politely for about an hour to all of these people stand up and talk. Hello, my name is Barry, and I'm an alcoholic. And then it's Murray and Shelley and Tommy and Lonnie. . . and as they stand up one by one, I realize that I don't fit: all of these people are alcoholics and have names that end in a long e sound. Jake doesn't do that at all. Maybe these aren't their real names and I should come up with one that fits. And then it's my turn.

(beat)

Hello. My name is Jake. . . **(pronounced as a long e)** y.

(beat)

And some people say "hello, Jake. . . y" and some say "Jakey" and a couple just say Jake--and everybody's out of sync.

(beat)

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My name is Jakey and I'm. . . I steal saxophones from homeless people.

(beat)

Silence. And then the man who was sobbing uncontrollably earlier says, "So. . . drinking. . . it makes you steal saxophones from homeless people."**(as himself)** No. **(narrating again)** More silence. "So how does your drinking problem"--**(as himself)** I don't have a drinking problem. There's this stunned silence, and four people--three women and one man, but not the same people who were crying before--they open their mouths to say something, but nothing comes out. And before it can come, before someone can tell me I'm going to end up an alcoholic, I run out of the meeting. Stealing saxophones is bad enough.

(beat)

It started with a toy flute. On a bench. I see it, and I look around and nobody's there. Somebody's left it there to get thrown out. I walk up to it. It's almost brand new, with just a little chip in the paint. Aren't we all a little chipped somewhere? And as I stand there and look at this almost brand new, almost perfect toy flute, I grab it. I pick it up and walk away. And I feel good. I was meant to find this flute--why else would it be there, all alone, waiting for me? I am righting a great wrong.

(beat)

That's what I tell myself. At the age of five, I am a rescue worker. I save lost toys from being thrown away. No mission is too hard or too dangerous. In fact, the harder and more dangerous the better. If a toy gets put down for even a few seconds. . . Pretty soon, I'm doing good deeds all over my neighborhood.

(beat)

And then, just after my tenth birthday, I see this woman. I smell her before I see her. She's passed out on the street, bags all around her. She's had an accident. In her pants. And she's lying in a pile of puke. But there at her feet is a saxophone. It's beautiful. It's almost shiny. With one good polish it will *be* shiny. I hear the words of my mother in my head.

(beat)

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