

Further Reflection

By Tom Moran

Tom Moran
2855 Mack Boulevard
Fairbanks, AK 99709
(907) 328-0994
moranplays@gmail.com
www.moran-plays.com

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Setting

The Time: Wednesday night

The Place: Beneath a highway off-ramp

Characters

ROSS, 19, caucasian male

PAUL, 40's-50's, caucasian male

COP, any age, ethnicity or gender

Synopsis

Ross is headed home to tell his parents he's dropping out of college to pursue a wildly ill-advised business venture. Then he encounters Paul, who's headed home to deal with a domestic crisis of his own: his daughter is engaged to a guy Paul is convinced just wants her so he can obtain a green card. When Ross asks Paul to pose as his dad to practice his speech, the exchange leads to both of them revealing their secret doubts, and realizing they can learn a lot from each other.

(A bare stage, except for an upright girder stage center. ROSS enters stage left, carrying a small wall mirror. Picking his way through imaginary rocks and obstacles, he walks to the girder and hangs the mirror on it [maybe using duct tape.] Tentatively, he speaks into the mirror.)

ROSS

Hi Dad. Great to see you! Why am I home a few days early? Funny you should ask. But before I tell you, can we talk a little about how arduous and fraught with peril is the road to adulthood for today's youth? (Shakes head and mouths 'no.')

You know, Dad, society really overvalues college degrees, don't you think? (Shakes head and mouths 'no.')

Good news, Dad! I'm gonna save you a buttload of money!

(Sound of CAR BRAKES SCREECHING overhead offstage left.)

ROSS

(cont.)

So Dad. Remember how you said you'd love me no matter what? Well, I'm gonna call you on that one!

(PAUL enters stage left, also picking his way carefully. He looks concerned. He approaches ROSS.)

PAUL

Son! Are you all right?

ROSS

I'm not your son. Why are you calling me your son?

PAUL

I'm at the age when I call everyone son.

ROSS

Does that mean I should call everyone dad?

PAUL

Look - buddy. Are you okay? What's the emergency?

ROSS

I'm dropping out of college.

PAUL

What?

ROSS

I just decided. It's not for me. I don't want to be a
(throwing out words) chiropodist or a statistician or a
regional sales manager. Why am I trying to live other
people's dreams?

PAUL

Okaaaaay.

ROSS

(gestures to mirror)

So I'm trying to figure out how to tell my parents.

PAUL

Here? Now?

ROSS

There's no time like the present, right?

(Sounds of more BRAKES and HORNS. PAUL
looks offstage left and up.)

PAUL

Sure, but. You're parked in the middle of the exit ramp.

(ROSS looks offstage left and upwards
with disinterest.)

ROSS

Oh yeah, right. Should I go put on my hazards or something?

PAUL

Son, are you tripping? You on the wacky tobacky?

ROSS

What? No. I'm nervous. I just needed to stop and focus on
this for a minute. Will you be my dad?

PAUL

Excuse me?

ROSS

I mean, will you play the part of my dad. It'd be super-helpful.

PAUL

Bud, I need you to get your car out of the way so I can get home. I have my own family problems to deal with.

ROSS

Like what?

PAUL

Not your concern.

ROSS

This will only take a minute.

(ROSS approaches PAUL, pushes his shoulders back. He adjusts PAUL's hair as well.)

PAUL

Hey!

ROSS

My dad has excellent posture and an absurd combover. This'll do.

(More HONKING from above.)

PAUL

Can we make this quick? I'm pretty sure we're fostering an angry mob here.

ROSS

Sure. (Pause. Stage whisper.) Well, go ahead.

PAUL

Oh, um. Son! You're home! Welcome! It's wonderful to see you! How are things at - your institution of higher education?

ROSS

(snorts)

Like my dad would say that.

PAUL

What brings you home so early?

ROSS

Dad, I can't do college anymore.

PAUL

Can't, or won't?

ROSS

It isn't for me, dad. It's not my place. I don't fit in.

PAUL

Son, are you gay? It's okay if you are. I mean, I never brought it up, but your mother and I always wondered-

ROSS

First of all, no. Second of all, quit grasping for motivation. This is my affirmational dialogue.

PAUL

The stage is yours.

ROSS

I feel like I spend all of my time learning when I could be doing. I'm action-oriented, Dad! Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates didn't stick around for their diplomas.

PAUL

(snorts)

You're no Bill Gates.

ROSS

Hey! How would you know?

PAUL

Because I'm your father. So what cockamamie scheme have you cooked up this time?

(ROSS pulls a toy egg out of his pocket and hands it to PAUL, who examines it.)

PAUL

Kinder Surprise.

ROSS

It's a chocolate egg with a toy inside. Made in Germany.

PAUL

I know of them. So what?

ROSS

Did you know they're illegal in the United States? Choking hazard. They make a knockoff you can buy here, but frankly it's not the same thing.

PAUL

I repeat, Patty: so what?

ROSS

(confused)

Patty? My name is Ross.

PAUL

And I'm Paul.

ROSS

Actually, Paul, you're Leonard. And I'm going to import the eggs.

PAUL

You mean, smuggle them.

ROSS

That's one alternate term.

PAUL

We bring you into this world. We raise you. We put up with your larks and your tiresome antics for twenty-one years-

ROSS

Nineteen.

PAUL

-and you repay us by becoming a CANDY EGG MULE?!

ROSS

Geez, Dad, I'm not cramming them up my - orifices! I found this cool suitcase with a false bottom. I can get thirty of them in at a time. They cost two dollars in Germany and I can sell them for ten. Maybe twenty.

PAUL

(Does math in head)

So you can make - let's see - two hundred forty dollars a trip. And how much does a ticket to Germany cost? A grand?

ROSS

Okay, so, we might start out at a marginal loss. But it's really more of a long-term business plan-

PAUL

Besides which, you can buy them in Canada.

ROSS

You can?

PAUL

Just wait until your mother hears about this. After all you've done to us already. All of our suffering. We give you everything. We take you to Europe. Buy you a convertible for your 16th birthday. We put you through Spacecamp - twice!

ROSS

Wow. Twice?

PAUL

And this is the choice you make. To betray us. This is the last straw, Patty.

ROSS

You mean Ross.

PAUL

Don't you sass back to me!

ROSS

But I'm making you proud! I'm trying to do right by you!

PAUL

You bury us in your shame. You are not my child.

ROSS

Now that seems a little dramatic.

PAUL

I'm being dramatic? You're being dramatic! And immature. And irresponsible! This can never work! You are far too

young to get married! And this is sure as hell a terrible reason to do it!

ROSS

Wait, what?

PAUL

You may think you're in love but anyone can see he's just using you! There are plenty of other ways Miguel can get his green card!

ROSS

Okay time out.

PAUL

Oh, don't you play dumb with me, young lady!

ROSS

(shakes PAUL)

Paul. PAUL!

PAUL

(like coming out of a trance)

Oh. Um. (laughs softly, embarrassed). Whew. Little carried away there.

ROSS

Who's Miguel?

PAUL

My daughter's fiancé. He's from Venezuela. Here on a student visa.

ROSS

Ooh, rough scene. I assume he doesn't want to get shipped back?

PAUL

He asked me for Patty's hand in marriage yesterday.

ROSS

Didn't know people even still did that.

PAUL

I told him no. And now I'm trying to drive over to talk to her about it.

(More HONKING. Louder VOICES from above. Sound of BANGING on metal.)

ROSS

You know, you may have a point about that mob. Maybe we should-

PAUL

You understand, right? He was taking advantage of her.

ROSS

Well, I don't know. Are they in love?

PAUL

Does it matter?

ROSS

I would say so!

PAUL

(shrugs)

They've been together a couple of years. They seem very affectionate.

ROSS

How old is she? Have they both got jobs?

PAUL

Twenty-one. They're in college together. They both interned at Morgan Stanley so they've got positions pretty well lined up.

ROSS

He's an investment banker?!

PAUL

Not yet.

ROSS

Your daughter wants to marry a freaking financier who actually asked your permission, like he's landed gentry or something. How is this not every father's dream?

PAUL

Look, I mean, I-

ROSS

What, are you afraid he's a bad hombre?

PAUL

Now hold on a minute, son, I did NOT vote for-

ROSS

Ask yourself: would you be turning Miguel down if you weren't worried about having latte-colored grandchildren?

PAUL

Hey, I like lattes! I just want what's best for Patty.

ROSS

Do you? What if I proposed to her?

PAUL

Gee, I suppose that if you two were in love, then -

ROSS

I'm a soon-to-be college dropout with a scheme to smuggle choking hazards at a substantial loss! How is *that* good enough for her and Miguel isn't?

PAUL

This is an abrupt change in tone.

ROSS

Upon further reflection, I admit my business model could perhaps stand for a tweak.

PAUL

Exactly. So why should I listen to you anyway? What do you know about anything?

ROSS

The thing about kids these days, Paul, everyone says we lack direction. But maybe we've just learned to see through everyone's hypocrisy and bullshit and that makes it hard to find a direction worth taking.

PAUL

Try that one on your dad.

ROSS

It's in the quiver.

PAUL
I didn't come here for a lecture.

ROSS
I'm just calling it like I see it, Paul. Take it for what you will. (points offstage left and up) Hey, are those torches they're carrying?

PAUL
(looks up)
I think so, yeah. So what are you going to do?

ROSS
(examining mob)
I figure I can sneak in the passenger side, turn the key with my right hand and hit the gas with my left. That should get me the first few hundred feet, then-

PAUL
I meant in the larger sense.

ROSS
Oh. Dunno.

PAUL
Listen, don't drop out. You at least have a drive for business. Go get a head for it. All the aimless kids just end up business majors anyway, right?

ROSS
Hey, good point. Thanks. Vaya con dios, Paul.

(ROSS waves and exits stage left, stealthily. PAUL notices the mirror is still there and starts to yell after him, but ROSS is already gone.)

PAUL
Hey! You forgot your...

(A COP enters from stage right.)

COP
Sir, is that your vehicle blocking the exit ramp?

PAUL
No, but it should be first in line in a moment.

COP

Okay, sir, I'm going to need you to move your car immediately - hey, is that a Kinder Egg?

PAUL

Oh. (Sheepish.) Yes, it is.

COP

My daughter loves those. It's so hard to find them though.

PAUL

Oh. Here. With my compliments.

(PAUL hands it to the cop, who pulls out his/her wallet.)

COP

Oh, I can't just take this. How about I give you twenty bucks for it?

ROSS

Really?

COP

Sure. Now is there anything wrong with your car, sir?

PAUL

No. I'll move it. I just need a minute.

COP

Make it fast, please, I have a violent horde to disperse.
(Exits offstage left, yelling upwards.) Hey! You!
Nunchucks? Seriously?

(PAUL stares after the COP. Then he looks at the mirror, collects himself and speaks into it.)

PAUL

Patty. Miguel. So, I've been thinking.

(Blackout. End of play.)