

IMITATE THE SUN

A short drama by
Kate McGrath

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www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com
424-703-5315

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BEN HALPERN, 48, English teacher, divorced.

HANK HALPERN, 18, his son, bright, ambitious.

ENRICO RIVERA, 18, Ben's student, bright, ambitious.

SETTING

A desk or counter center stage is shared by two separate areas, minimally conveyed with just a few props/set pieces. Ben crosses back and forth between the two: stage right a classroom, stage left the kitchen of the apartment he shares with his son Hank. A stool and a wastebasket on either side of the stage.

TIME

The present.

(Lights rise on the kitchen side of the stage. HANK is seated at the counter, busy at his laptop, putting the finishing touches on something. BEN enters, carrying a battered briefcase and a bag of groceries. Hank rushes to help his father, doing a little urban-inspired dance.)

HANK: I got it done, I got it real done. Oh yeah, oh yeah, it's in the can!

(Hank does an elaborate clowning kick-move. Ben laughs:)

BEN: What, your application to Brown? That's huge, Hank. Though you certainly left it 'til the last minute.

HANK: No bustin' on me, Dad, you should read my essay! *(Pointing to the laptop:)* This is the essay to beat all essays. This is gonna knock the socks off the admissions people. Hey, you distinguished word-scholar-type: you ever wonder where that expression comes from? To "knock the socks off"? I mean, some people have really smelly feet, not sure I'd want their socks off, not if I was in the room, I'm saying. So what are we having for dinner? I am starved. Growing boy. Feed me!

BEN: *(Beat.)* How about something new? I have a recipe for a Spanish delicacy from the grandmother of one of my students. It's got protein, spiciness, and international...*je ne sais quoi*. Or the Spanish equivalent of *je ne sais quoi*.

HANK: I'll eat anything. And you did shopping! I love you!

(Ben pulls out a carton of eggs and some apples.)

What, no meat? *Again?*

BEN: You loved that minestrone soup the other night.

HANK: I'm not complaining. When I stay with Mom she makes me eat hummus wraps and salad nicoise... *(Making a face:)* ...and that disgusting tofu pie thing.

BEN: I have learned in divorce school that when in your presence, I must not make derogatory comments toward anything your mother does. Or bakes.

HANK: We are talking about the dreaded *tofu pie thing*.

(They smile.)

BEN: Any luck with your back up schools? Ahhh, Arcadia? You could live at home... They have an awesome theatre department at Bloomsburg — though that's not so close by.

HANK: You know those aren't on my list.

(He begins to juggle apples.)

BEN: About the list.

HANK: Oh—I almost forgot, I have *huge* news. The biggest. It's about that summer in London program. The auditions were this morning so I skipped lunch and walked over to where they were holding them. I met your friend Penny, she says hi, says you are the "bees knees." *(Beat.)* She was quasi-hot. For an older woman.

BEN: *(Chopping a pepper:)* Penny from LAMDA?

HANK: Yeah, she recognized me from my application right away, even said she knew me when I was "in nappies" or something like that. I did the Romeo "Banished" piece and then Claudio. "Aye but to die, and go we know not where..."

(He makes creepy sounds.)

BEN: Whoa. Hank, you performed two of Shakespeare's biggest spineless wimps for the director of the London Academy of Dramatic Art's summer acting program?

HANK: Oops.

BEN: Why didn't you do Prince Hal, knucklehead? *(Chuckles:)* SO??? And?

HANK: *(With a sudden grin:)* No worries! I got a callback and a then a "yes"!

BEN: That was quick. They must want to nail down their candidates.

HANK: Exactly. Aren't you psyched for me? So what I need now is airfare and tuition, but I figured you and mom might be able to work something out with that especially since I can work a little bit before I go, they start July 15th so I would have a little time to lifeguard, or, I dunno, do box office for the orchestra like I did last year? So, cool or what?

(Lights crossfade to stage left where ENRICO is in mid-speech. Ben crosses and listens attentively.)

ENRICO: "O gentlemen, the time of life is short!
To spend that shortness basely were too long,
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
An if we live, we live to tread on kings;
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!"

BEN: All right, Enrico. Leave it right there for a nano-second and answer me this: what is Hotspur afraid of? Deep down?

ENRICO: Not death.

BEN: Not bloody likely. Think. What do all of his speeches come back to?

ENRICO: I think he might be afraid of...inaction?

BEN: That's right. Impatience runs through the character, that's obvious in every line, and he gets sarcastic in "The King is Kind" speech. Here, in this moment, what do you think he wants?

ENRICO: To fight, no matter what the outcome. His next big scene is his death scene with the prince.

BEN: Can you relate to the urgency, the manic sense of fate pressing him forward into inevitable battle? I mean in a personal way, so you can click into that connection for this piece?

ENRICO: I'm clicking a lot more with Hotspur than I was with Mercutio. Yes, this is a whole lot better, Mr. H. Thanks.

BEN: Fantastic.

(He starts to pack up the books they have been using into his briefcase while Enrico moves the stool he was using and picks up trash from the floor and throws it into the wastebasket, etc.)

Keep working on this one then, for the Governor's School audition. That's not for a week or so, right?

ENRICO: That's right. A lot of private school kids try out, though. They may blow me out of the water...

BEN: Then you will be the sun that outshines them all.

ENRICO: *(Grinning:)* Hey, did you make the huevos rancheros yet? My abuela is dying to know if you tried her recipe.

BEN: I'm on my way to pick up some ingredients for it right now. See you on Monday, Enrico. Do key words, and use the Folger edition if you can get your hands on it. I might have one at the apartment but I'm not sure. My books are...in a state of flux right now.

ENRICO: *(Beat.)* How is your son handling your divorce? *(Beat.)* I'm sorry, that was personal. I shouldn't have asked that.

BEN: No, actually, it's *nice* for someone to ask. *(Beat.)* Hank's okay. He's a very adaptable kid—we think. Working on his own monologues madly. He's got a few auditions coming up the way you do. Busy time of year.

ENRICO: *(A pause.)* Thank you for coming to the funeral. My

family was so grateful to all of the teachers who came.

BEN: It was very sad. *(Beat.)* You must miss your cousin.

ENRICO: My aunt is not doing well. She is fixated on why they can't find the shooters. She thinks the Philly cops are jerking us around. It's hard. The neighborhood held a candlelit vigil for Carlos.

BEN: I saw it in the paper. *(Beat.)* You okay?

ENRICO: Mostly, I wish that I could have done something.

(Beat.)

BEN: You were there, I know.

ENRICO: I dove behind a different car. And that is what saved my life. I still can't believe it. And if I had spent five minutes longer at basketball, well, we'd both maybe still be alive. The deal would have gone down before we got to that part of the parking lot. *(Beat.)* I held this hand to his carotid artery for fifteen minutes before the ambulance got to us.

BEN: Jesus.

ENRICO: I hate this city.

BEN: You've got reason to.

ENRICO: Except there's cool people like you. Here and there.

BEN: *(Beat.)* About that. You know when I had something I needed to tell you, earlier today, in class?

ENRICO: Yes?

(Lights shift to the Halpern's kitchen. Ben crosses to where Hank is trying to crack eggs into a frying pan.)

BEN: So you know I was at school later than usual, right?

HANK: How's that kid Enrico doing on his Shakespeare pieces? The one who needed the extra help?

BEN: Fine, just fine. He's a hard worker. Anyway before that, I had a meeting. With the woman in charge. Your principal.

HANK: Oh, yeah? They finally gonna let you do a non-musical as the mainstage production? Remember how *Laramie Project* went over like a lead balloon as the fall play?

BEN: Yeah, not a whole lotta "Brotherhood of Man" numbers in that one. But I thought you were good in it. Anyway, I digress.

HANK: Gotta break a few eggs, yeah? Another great cliché!!! Heuvos rancheros here we come!

BEN: So I kind of got fired. (*Dead silence.*) I thought it would work better to do this in the Band-aid method, just quick, rip it off, no song and dance.

HANK: No "Brotherhood of Man." Wait. Dad. Tell me slower.

BEN: (*Correcting him:*) *More slowly.* (*Beat.*) Technically not fired, just...not renewed. See, I received a memo last week—

HANK: (*Pause.*) You received a memo?

(*Beat.*)

BEN: We didn't want to tell you before it was made—

HANK: (*Overlapping:*) So you've been sacked and I'm the last to know? Terrific. Just...wonderful. And what did you say to her, to this woman who holds my life in her hands, since your income is... And what does Mom say about all of this, you said we, did you mean she already knows?

BEN: I called her this afternoon. Not happy. And, one of her best friends also got a pink slip today. Do you remember Carolyn—

HANK: Guess what, Dad? I don't give a crap about that. I sound selfish, I know, but what *did* you say to the hatchet woman? Did you at least *defend* yourself?

BEN: *(With an odd smile on his face:)* Funny thing—I certainly didn't raise my voice. Not to our principal, Hank. *(Beat.)* I guess I could see this coming, I have no seniority. I only just got to your school once the divorce came through. We should have warned you. *(Trying to touch Hank:)* I'm so sorry.

HANK: You're sorry?

(Hank throws the eggs in their bowl into the trash can. Kicks it.)

BEN: Would you have preferred I throw myself out of the classroom window? It is on the 4th floor.

HANK: *(With venom:)* For God's sake, *Dad*, you have a *PhD in English Literature!*

BEN: *(Livid, sarcastic:)* No, *really* Hank? I'd *forgotten* that.

(Ben crosses away and says the next line to Enrico.)

That's nice of you to say. Keep working on classics, there may be someone in the department here I could recommend, and when you get to college you'll be prepared more than some. You've got real talent, and passion, Enrico. Come on, let's get out of here.

ENRICO: Oh, Mr. H? I forgot to tell you, what with...everything. I got my Early Decision to Temple. They've accepted me. With...a full free ride. I'm so grateful to you. You wrote one of my recs.

BEN: Brilliant! I'm so excited for you!

(They shake, then hug.)

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about the business. Kudos! Your parents must be beside themselves.

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