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Dramatic Publishing

Pizza With Shrimp on Top

A play
by
AARON LEVY



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Thanks to Arizona State University’s theatre and English departments, Nevada Council of the Arts, Silverado High School, Hamilton High School, and to all the students who have been in the touring cast and crew.

For all teens. Stick around, please. Eat a pizza for us.

For Jeannie and Holden and Rebecca.

Pizza With Shrimp on Top received its first full production in Arizona State University's Lyceum Theatre, Tempe, Arizona, February 5-8, 1992. The director was Nancy Perzan; the cast was as follows:

CAST

Steph. SHEELA SATPUTE
Daniel JOSHUA KNUDSON
Stuart TYRONE GRAY
B.J. GREG FORAN
Lisa. KIMBERLY GIBBS
Muggy OWEN KERR

Pizza With Shrimp on Top was further produced by Silverado High School, Henderson, Nevada, December 3-5, 1998. The director was Aaron Levy; the cast was as follows:

Steph. CARLY AVELLO
Daniel AARON LEVY
Stuart. WILL COLEMAN
B.J. JOSH PEREIRA
Lisa CHRISTY WILLIAMS
Muggy. STEPHEN ALBRIGHT

Pizza With Shrimp on Top

A Play in One Act
For 4m., 2w.

CHARACTERS

STEPHANIE 13 years old, Stuart’s little sister
DANIEL dead, from the city
STUART senior in high school
B.J. dead, stupid and from the city
LISA senior in high school, ex-prom queen
MUGGY very dead, former English military person

AUTHOR’S NOTES

SET: This play was originally designed to tour high schools, so a minimal set is all that is needed. The characters should do as much to create this world (if not more) as the set does by make-up and responding to the “rules” of the place.

Although the play takes place in Stuart’s mind, we see the story through his eyes. We are in a limbo-land where people who commit suicide have to go until their time to “really” die should arrive. The rules, as we find out in the play, are you can’t eat, sleep, cry, love or be loved, and no sex. Pretty much no pleasure, but all your yearnings for these things intensify. Also, no wounds heal in this place.

All characters except for Steph, who is just a visitor, should look dead and should amplify their initial suicide wounds. So have fun with make-up.

MUSIC NOTE: Some specific musical selections have been suggested throughout the play. So as not to restrict any production, however, similar music of producer's choice may be substituted for those pieces which are not in the public domain and/or for which permission of copyright owners cannot be secured.

Productions may update **POP-CULTURAL REFERENCES**, i.e., Hanson and Marilyn Manson comments, to make them more current for audience.

Pizza With Shrimp on Top

(We are in the realm of dead people who have committed suicide—a limbo. They must stay in this place until their time to “really” die arrives. It should ambiguously be hinted that the play, although set in limbo, is created and takes place in STUART’s altered mind. A flute fades in, and an acoustic song is played—live. “Running Away” by Peter Himmelman works well to create the tone/mood of the play. Whichever song is played, guitar player should appear behind a screen, almost in silhouette—suggesting a symbol for who STUART would like to become. The flute should be heard in a blackout, and a bare dim comes once the guitar begins. As the song ends, STEPHANIE enters, a girl of about 13.)

STEPH. Stu! Stu! Where are you, ya twit?! *(She sings from parts of Joni Mitchell’s “The Circle Game” as she searches for STUART. Still calling:)* Stu! Stu! *(She is looking under and around furniture and closets that are in her world, but not seen on stage, calling for STUART.)* I know you’re hiding, Stu...ya fart face. I’m gonna find you. *(Pause.)* And if I don’t, Dad will. And he said if he has to find you to take the trash out, he’s throwing you in the can! *(Pause.)* This is something I

wouldn't mind seeing. (*Pause, leans back and yells.*)
STUUUUUUUUUAAAART!

(*She listens for a response and then gestures as if to say, "Oh well." She exits humming from the same song. Enter DANIEL as STEPHANIE exits. He sports a head wound, which bleeds down his face, underneath a cap perhaps. He looks to be in his 20s or 30s. He speaks with a city-street accent, very loud.*)

DANIEL. Go on, kid, scam! (*Pause, to audience.*) I don't care much for kids. I don't care for kids much the same way I don't care for lima beans. Except lima beans you can pick out of your soup and put 'em on a napkin. You can't do that with kids—you just gotta leave 'em in the soup. That was Stephanie, Stuart's little sister. Now Stuart, there's a funny image. The kid just gulped down a whole bottle of vitamin C, tryin' to off himself. It's hysterical. He decides to off himself, end it all. So he goes scamperin' through the house like blind mice looking for some kind of pill that'll do the trick. He's throwin' open cabinet doors and drawers, and all he can find is some Visine and vitamins. He's pissed that his mom don't have any rat poison in the house. But he thinks if he takes enough pills, vitamins or not, that he can still die. So he chugs down the vitamin C. Then he gulps down what was left in the vitamin E bottle. (*Chuckles.*) Guess he needed a vowel, he's tryin' to spell somethin'. (*Laughs.*) Then he swallows down a brand new bottle of Robitussin Cough and Cold. Grape. Go figure. No, Stuart ain't dead yet, but his mind's all mushy, like a pizza with too much cheese stuck to the box. (*Quick pause.*) I

hate that. Which doesn't help those of us (*points to himself*) who have to swim around this guy's brain. Kind of makes us the oily spots left over when you finally peel the cheese off the box. (*Pause.*) Anyway, it's the funniest thing you ever saw. Stuart's in this state of mush, and for the life of 'im, excuse the pun if you will, he can't figure out where he is—the power of the association completely escapes him. (*Laughs.*) Then...then, all of a sudden he starts thinkin'. I guess that's what you do if you don't take enough pills ta off yourself, you start thinkin'. You lay there in some hospital and “ponder.” (*Beat.*) I hate kids. They're all over this place. Lima beans everywhere.

(STUART, dressed in pajamas, enters after DANIEL's “he's tryin' to spell somethin'.” STUART is literally cast wearily on stage, with an acoustic guitar in his hand. While in real time STUART is in a comatose state, the audience enters his mind and takes this journey with STUART's subconscious. He moves wearily about “the place” still on his butt, unable to stand just yet. He moves to avoid DANIEL, while trying to figure out exactly where he is. B.J. enters, bleeding from both sides of his neck. ALL CHARACTERS are extremely pale. DANIEL and B.J. talk with city-street accents. B.J. is playing with one of those paddles with the rubber ball attached to the string. He gives a spare one to DANIEL. STUART, still not totally aware, tries to avoid B.J. as well.)

STUART. Where am I?

DANIEL. It's no big deal, kid. I've been dead for years.

Except over here everything seems like one long night.

What? You don't talk? B.J. here didn't talk for months when he first got here. He was like a moaning doormat, just layin' there stiff, holdin' his stomach in place
(*Laughs.*)

B.J. Yeah. (*Pause.*) Then the guys started wipin' their feet on me. So I got up.

DANIEL. He was feelin' all sorry for himself. You don't feel sorry for yourself, do ya, kid?

STUART (*facing down*). Uh-uh. Where—

DANIEL. Good.

B.J. Yeah, good.

DANIEL. Everybody's got their stories, you know. From the looks of your face, I suppose you've got yours. But who cares, really?

STUART. When's dinner? (*DANIEL and B.J. laugh hysterically.*)

DANIEL. When's dinner?

B.J. When's dinner?

DANIEL. Hey, get this load.

B.J. When's dinner?

DANIEL. Would you look at this kid. (*To STUART.*) What are ya? Slow?

B.J. We don't eat here, kid. It just don't happen like that.

STUART. Here? What's—what if I'm hungry? (*ALL except STUART break out in laughter.*)

B.J. What if I'm hungry? (*Laughs.*)

DANIEL. You ain't hungry, kid. We all got our stories to tell.

B.J. Daniel, didn't you tell the kid the rules? You should tell him the rules.

STUART. What rules? Where the heck am I?!

DANIEL. Why should I tell him? He doesn't know if he wants to stay or not. (*To STUART.*) You don't know a lot of things, do ya, kid? Probably suck at Jeopardy.

B.J. (*raises hand*). Aye, yo, I suck at Jeopardy, Daniel. That don't prove notin'. It's a backward game.

(*DANIEL walks up to STUART and wipes the corner of his mouth.*)

DANIEL. You got blood on ya lip, see? You don't got a head wound, do ya? I got a good one. See? (*He shows him quickly, laughs.*) A beaut, huh?

B.J. Yo, Daniel, easy.

DANIEL. What? He doesn't know if he wants to stay or not.

B.J. How ya feelin', kid?

STUART. I'm just hungry, that's all. Can you tell me where I am? Please?!

B.J. He's stayin' all right. (*Laughs and points.*) I'm lookin' at 'im, Daniel. He brought his guitar. Just look at 'im. I'm lookin' at 'im.

DANIEL. You ain't really hungry, kid. Well, you may be a little, but in essence you're just emptying out like we all did. You don't realize it, but your whole insides are being vacuumed out. (*Laughs.*) Oh sure, Dominos pizza with da works sounds great, but you got no stomach to keep it. You'd still be hungry. You'll always be hungry.

B.J. Vacuum. That's a very good way ta put it, Daniel. We had a dog named Aunt Jemimah—used to bark at the vacuum every time my modder tried to run it. Have to

stick her out in the back yard. (*Pause.*) Aunt Jemimah, see, not my modder.

DANIEL (*to B.J.*). Why don't you go fetch Muggy while I explain to him the rules. Looks like he might be stayin'. (*B.J. starts to exit.*) I don't think Mug knows we got a new one yet. (*To STUART; B.J. exits.*) He's our boss so to speak, like a captain general of all the stupid dead people here. (*Laughs.*) Ahh, (*sigh*) we all got our stories to tell, kid. But it doesn't matter—you'll see. I'm gonna tell you the rules 'cause you and me got a bunch of time to kill, (*laughs*) get it? Kill? (*Beat.*) Anyway, rule number one is—

STUART. What is this place?! Am I dead or what?!

DANIEL. You know, personally I think you're bein' very rude to cut in on me like that. (*Pause.*) You ain't from Cleveland, are ya, kid?

STUART. Please, just tell me where I am! Am I dead or alive here?!

DANIEL. Whadya wanna be?

STUART. I don't know.

DANIEL. Then that's what you are, and where you are—a big stupid, "I don't know." Anyway, back to the rules: You can't eat, that's first off—

STUART. Then where am I?

DANIEL. Can't sleep—

STUART (*overlapping*). Am I dead?!

DANIEL. Can't cry really.

STUART. I'm dead, right?

DANIEL. Can't love or be loved, and you can't have S-E-X, you know, sex. (*Beat.*) But you could smoke. (*He takes a smoke from behind his ear and sucks on it.*)

STUART. I don't smoke.

DANIEL. Good, 'cause smokin'll kill ya. (*Laughs at own joke, a lot.*) It's no big deal anyway 'cause you can't light 'em up, so they don't taste like notin', see. We just suck on 'em, that's all—basic rule you gotta keep in mind is there ain't no pleasure, not here. So let's re-view—can't eat, sleep or cry—

STUART. So then where the hell am I?!

DANIEL. What is this, kid? You don't wanna hear the rules? I'm startin' to feel unhospitable, you know?

STUART. I just want to know where I am.

DANIEL. You're in limbo, kid. Limbo in your own mind. It's like you're under the limbo pole, archin' your back. Stay with me, kid, this is good. You're under the limbo pole and either you make it without your nose hittin' the pole, or your spine breaks like a toothpick, and you're on the ground, and you can't remember how to count to ten for the life of ya.

STUART. If I'm in limbo, how come I can't eat a pizza?

DANIEL (*laughs*). You are confused, kid. Don't worry, Muggy will straighten everything out like he always does. Like I said, he kind of runs this place. And it ain't easy running the suicides. You gotta have a certain "Suave"...or whatever that fancy French word is. Or is it Spanish? It's been so long, you know? Ahh, we all got our stories, kid. You know what I'm saying?

STUART. No. I don't care either—wouldn't believe any story you told anyway.

DANIEL. Oh yeah?

STUART. That's right.

DANIEL. Yeah? Well, quite frankly there ain't no stories here worth believin', we just tell 'em anyways. Like old ladies playin' bridge or what's that other one with the

“m,” marginon or somethin’? *(Beat.)* There is somethin’ you can believe, kid. Here. Take a look-see at this up close. *(DANIEL shows STUART his head wound up close. STUART is disgusted by it.)* Happened three years ago, but it never stops bleedin’. I shot myself—was in style back then.

STUART. Does it hurt?

DANIEL. Nothin’ hurts. You’re just always hungry, that’s all. *(Pause—a bit pensive.)* What I wouldn’t do for a pizza with shrimp on top. *(DANIEL sighs, looks around, then maybe to his wrist where there is no watch.)* Uuuuppp, gotta go, it’s time.

STUART. Time?

DANIEL. Yep, time.

STUART. Time for what?

DANIEL *(leaving, chuckles)*. Just time. It’s always time, kid.

(DANIEL exits. STUART checks out this world and then sits down. LISA, dressed in nice black jeans and a fashionable shirt enters. She is about 17, very shapely and pretty with much makeup. She is, however, extremely pale and bleeds a bit from her lips as well. STUART is sitting with his guitar in his lap, and at this time seems very involved in picking a toenail from his foot. LISA approaches STUART as if lost. STUART doesn’t really look up at her for any length of time. STUART may put guitar down beside him.)

LISA. Can you tell me where the kitchen is?

STUART. Uh-uh.

LISA. What?

STUART. There is no kitchen.

LISA. Well “dude,” or whoever you are, can you point me to the nearest “diner” of some type? I’m new here.

STUART. Why?

LISA. What do you mean, “Why?” Why? Because I’m hungry? (*Pause.*) Look, I don’t mean to be rude. (*Looks around and then:*) Yes, yes I do. I’m hungry, and small talk doesn’t cut it with me anymore.

STUART (*a little annoyed*). They don’t have food here.

LISA. I hate men.

STUART. I’m not tryin’ to pick you up. And even if I was, where would I take you? Look, there’s a lot of space here so if you don’t mind, I’d like to pick at my toenails in private. I don’t know anything except that there’s no food, and even if there was it wouldn’t (*looks up at her*) matter—hey, I know you—

LISA. Oh, right. Here it comes—

STUART (*overlapping*). You’re that one girl—that girl who killed herself—you go to George, I mean went to George Washington High School. We went to the same school—

LISA. What?

STUART. You offed yourself with a drill.

LISA. I did no such thing!

STUART. They said you couldn’t take it anymore so you took a power drill to your wrists. That’s gross. I mean that’s creative, but that’s as sick as it gets.

LISA. That’s what they said? Did they say I was easy too?

STUART. They said that when you were alive.

LISA. Look, I overdosed on Advil, not a drill. Why does everybody have to lie?! (*Beat.*) I am so depressed. Do you have like a tissue or something?

STUART. You can't cry here for more than like thirty seconds. Your eyes go dry and they burn like someone's usin' your pupils for ashtrays.

LISA (*sees that he is right and rubs her eyes dry. Quickly collecting herself*). Can you play any Doors on that thing?

STUART (*puts guitar down*). No. Uh-uh. I'm not really that good—

LISA. Play something.

STUART. No. I don't really—

LISA. You're boring. Are you from Cleveland?

STUART. You really don't remember me?

LISA. Yes I do.

STUART. No you don't.

LISA. Well, who are you then?

STUART. Jeez, I was in the same English class with you our whole junior year—

LISA. Excuse me if things look a little pale.

STUART. Mrs. Drew's class.

LISA. Ohh, ohh! You're—you're that kid who used to sit in the front all the time. Corner seat against the wall... except I forgot your—

STUART. Stuart—

LISA. Right, Stuart. I remember you. I used to dig your poetry, thought it was deep. The whole metaphor and symbol thing—

STUART. Really?

LISA. I don't know. I could never do that with my stuff. (*Beat.*) Although, Mrs. Drew was probably the only teacher at Washington that I ever really liked...besides Coach Chester.

STUART (*pause*). How come you never...

LISA. What?

STUART (*looks down, backs off*). Nothing.

LISA. C'mon, play somethin'. Please?

STUART. Naah.

LISA. You are like really, really, really depressing.

STUART (*sarcastic*). Oh I'm sorry. I'm sure you were really, really happy before you met me.

LISA (*pause*). My cat's dead.

STUART. Your cat's dead. I'm sorry.

LISA. I killed it.

STUART. You killed it?

LISA. On account of Sylvester. My bird.

STUART. A bird named Sylvester?

LISA. Do you have to ask so many questions?! Fine. My parents have this cat named Detroit 'cause they love that movie, you know *Doctor Detroit*. They've never been anywhere close to the actual city. (*Beat.*) One day I come in my room and see Sylvester in the cat's jaws. He wasn't moving or making a sound... I thought he was dead.

STUART. The cat or the bird?

LISA. The bird.

STUART. The cat ate your bird?

LISA. Detroit was chewing on him for God knows how long before I came in. But I saved him. I pulled the cat's jaw like a slingshot... (*she makes a proud sound of the cat's screech*) broke his jaw. (*Pause.*) Sylvester plopped out of his mouth into my palm... I ran him under the drip of the faucet, put him on my shoulder and he stood up, thank God. He tried to flap his little wings. (*Pause.*) My mother made me let him go the next day, kind of like a punishment for killing the cat. That's not what she

said. She said it wasn't fair to keep him cooped up in a cage. Things are never fair with her, at least as far as I'm concerned.

STUART. Wow.

LISA (*feels head*). I don't feel so good...

(*Enter DANIEL and B.J., who quietly sneaks up and scares STUART and LISA.*)

DANIEL (*noticing LISA*). Another one. What's this world coming to? They're never gonna learn.

B.J. Nope, they're never gonna learn.

DANIEL. Hi, I'm Daniel.

B.J. Hi.

DANIEL. And this here's B.J.

B.J. Hi.

DANIEL. We all got our stories, ah—

LISA. Lisa.

B.J. Hi.

DANIEL. Lisa. Now, Lisa, why are ya here? This is not where you want to be. You gotta know that.

B.J. You gotta know, you gotta. (*Pause, to DANIEL shaking his head.*) Nope, I don't think she knows, Daniel.

DANIEL. What? Was it something with a boyfriend, your parents, school, sex?

LISA. Yes. (*Quick pause.*) All of the above.

B.J. Ooh, Muggy is really gonna like her.

STUART. Who is this "Muggy"?

LISA. Maybe you know where a girl could get some food around here.

DANIEL (*laughing, to B.J.*). Food.

LISA. Nobody eats around here?