

A BOWL OF SOUP

Eric Lane

A BOWL OF SOUP was originally performed as part of *The Gary & Rob Show*, a longer play consisting of ten ten-minute pieces. It was presented by Orange Thoughts Theater & Film at the LaMama LaGalleria New Voices/New Plays Series (Lawry Smith, Curator) in New York City, October 1994. Martha Banta directed the following cast:

EDDIE Frank Deal
ROB Mark Bateman

The Gary & Rob Show was developed with the additional help of Thomas Keith, James Georgiades, Oliver Wadsworth, and New York Theatre Workshop.

CHARACTERS

ROB: mid-twenties to thirties. Sweet, gentle, physically and emotionally exhausted.

EDDIE: Rob's older brother. In the tile business.

SETTING: Rob's studio apartment with a makeshift kitchenette.

NOTE

While Rob doesn't speak until the end of the piece, his presence is equally important as that of Eddie. He hears what Eddie is saying although he doesn't overtly respond.

(EDDIE opens a can of soup with a can opener. ROB sits, stares.)

EDDIE: I got you the chicken. The onion I can't eat. I eat the onion I'm tasting it for days. Ma's the same way. You like that? . . . I didn't know if you was like that so I got the chicken. The chicken's good. What? Something's wrong with the chicken. Nothing's wrong with it, it's good. Improved. New and improved. You'll like it. I promise. You'll try it, you'll see. Just wait. Improved.

(He puts the open can in a pot of water without emptying soup. Puts pot on hotplate, which he turns on. Soup heats in can without dirtying pot. Stirs occasionally.)

You know, you shouldn't just buzz somebody in, you know. You should ask. I know you knew it was me but what if it wasn't. What if it was somebody else. Like somebody not your brother but I don't know—deranged-like. You know, mental. You don't know. There are a lot of crazy people out there. You gotta be careful. Not that I'm telling you what to do. You do what you want. That's up to you. Just be careful, you know. Safe.

You O.K., Robbie? . . . You O.K.? . . . Of course you're O.K. What'm I even asking. Forget I even said, just forget it, O.K. O.K.

'Cause that's the way it is now, the world. We're talking about the world here—outside. It's—what—it's scary, that's

what. Terrifying. You think—you think a lot of stuff but you know what I'm saying. It's like walking a highwire act—like you need your net just in case. God forbid,

(*Knocks wood*)

anything should, you know, happen you want your net in place. That's all I'm saying. You want your net.

(*Sits*)

You remember that mayonnaise jar we buried in the backyard behind the fireplace. You remember that. What? That's over what? Twenty years ago. I was trying to remember what we put in there. Like a time capsule. That's what we called it. Stuck some stuff in there from around the house so that when they dug it up sometime—like some time in the future there'd be this stuff to remember us. That was what? Like twenty, maybe more years ago. Behind the fireplace—not, you know, bar-be-que. (*Realizes it wasn't behind the fireplace, but behind the bar-be-que.*) That's it, behind the bar-be-que. You remember that? . . . Anyway, Ma says the other night some dog was digging back there and I thought of it. Some stray probably roaming the neighborhood digging and I was wondering maybe he knew—like all these years something inside there, in that jar he wanted to get at. You think? I mean, after all these years could he be remem—I mean, like smelling that jar. Something inside he wants to get at. Maybe, I don't know. You think? . . . And like what? What'd we put in there. To remember us, I try to remember but—Some pennies maybe. And a note. Some kinda note like a letter but—You remember. I don't know. Something. Like . . . What? Maybe some change and a letter and who remembers, I don't. You remember that? Some marbles maybe. String. I don't know. Just forget about it. Forget I even brought it up. O.K. We'll just act like I never even said it. You know. Just forget it. . .

You cook much? . . . How you gonna cook much, you don't even got a kitchen. A kitchenette. That's what it is. A little kitchenette. So what's wrong with a kitchenette. What you need anything bigger. You cook your soup. You toast your bread. You got a meal. There. There's a meal. And you didn't even dirty a pot. No dishes to wash. Just a spoon. And that's if you don't use plastic. You use plastic, you don't even got a spoon. It's done. You cook. You eat. You're done. Not a trace. Not a friggin' clue you was even here. You know. You could write a mystery. A detective story. If you could write, you could write a story. "The Case of the Disappearing Soup." You could sell that. You think people don't sell stories. I could sell it. Forget you, I'll sell it myself. Move to L.A. Give up the tile business and set myself up round some pool. I'll dictate, that's it. Won't even touch the pad, just dictate to some secretary in a two piece, her name's Gloria. Gloria Towers. Takes shorthand. She'll write it out. All you gotta have's an idea. A story to tell. You know some story, Robbie? . . .

You O.K. on money? 'Cause you need money. I got. Not that it means anything to me. I mean, like it's only money. But you need, I got so all you gotta do's say and it's here. Don't even say, it's here.

(*Takes out money, slips it in ROB's hand.*)

Here. You take it. What do I need. You take yourself out for dinner. Someplace nice, on me. Someplace you wouldn't usually go. Like special. You know.

(*Slips him another bill.*)

And take yourself a cab home. You don't wanna be taking the train late at night. I heard about the train. I watch the news. You take a cab, 'cause I say so, O.K.

(*Money drops from ROB's hand. Eddie picks it up. Lays it out on counter, flattening it out.*)

I'm putting it here. I'm putting it down here. It's for you. You put it away. But it's for you, O.K.? O.K. . . . How's the soup?
(*He checks.*)

Almost there.

You hear that dog? Digging. In the backyard. That was looking for that jar. It was the night you slept over. At Ma and Dad's. You hear it? . . . What're you gonna hear? It's just a dog. Just digging. Forget I even said it. Just forget it.

(*Zips his lips shut. Throws away key.*)

Gone. Look.

(*Tries to talk, can't. His lips are sealed.*)

My seals are lips. Get it. Ah, you got it. Smart kid like you, of course you got it. How're you not gonna get it.

(*Checks soup.*)

All I'm saying is, you want to go to Orlando, you go. You see where he's buried, you go. I'm offering you the money. I just got a raise two weeks ago. A lot. I won't say how much but a lot of money. It means nothing to me. You want it, it's yours. Don't even think about it, O.K. If that's the question—the problem. It's not a problem so O.K.—it's up to you.

Look, I understand they're in pain. His parents. Their son dies of AIDS. They haven't spoken to him for two years. Two years they haven't spoken and now he's gone. They grab. At whatever they can.

His body. What's his body. Like some empty jar, you know. Like that mayonnaise—

(*He stops himself.*)

I just—

(*A beat*)

I understand they're in pain and just wish they could see somebody else might be, too. You know. That's all.

You love him? David. I think so. I think you're lucky, you know. You probably don't want to hear this so I'll shut up, but you really loved him. And like, what? I never had that. Like who's gonna love me, right? Like . . . You know, you had that with him, like with David and half of that was you. You was like half and you'll find that again. Maybe not right away. Maybe like what, in time, you know. Some period of time. But like if you could have that with him then maybe with, not maybe. But like with somebody else. You know. That's all I'm saying. That's all.

ROB: It wasn't a dog. It was me.

EDDIE: What?

ROB: In the backyard. I kept thinking he was in that jar. David. I kept seeing him. I mean, I knew he wasn't. Part of me. Knew. But I just had to see.

(*ROB starts to cry. EDDIE holds him. He starts to weep. EDDIE rocks him. ROB stops crying.*)

EDDIE: You want some soup?

ROB: Put it in a bowl. I want to know we were here.

(*A moment. Lights fade.*)