

BROTHER

Mary Gallagher

BROTHER was originally produced at HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art, in New York City, December 1988. It was directed by Melia Bensussen; set designer was Geoffrey Makstutis; lighting designer was Dianne Mizzy; and stage manager was Randy Rollison. The cast was as follows:

JANET Janet Zarish
PHIL Phil Soltanoff

It's five o'clock in the morning. KITTY's entering in her bathrobe and heading for the refrigerator as CHARLIE enters from outside, wearing a worn-looking winter jacket.

CHARLIE: Oh great—
I was afraid Mom was
up—How the hell are ya?
KITTY: Oh God,
you scared me—
Hi! How are you . . . ?

(They kiss and hug awkwardly, he whirls her around as:)

CHARLIE: Jeez, whenja get so skinny?

KITTY: God, I don't know . . . has it been that long since we—?

CHARLIE: Yeah, gotta be
a couple years
or something . . .
KITTY: Well, yeah, I guess
we didn't make it last
Christmas, so—

KITTY: You look big! I always forget, I expect you to look
weedy, like when you were sixteen or something . . .

CHARLIE: That was many moons ago.

KITTY: I know, but I forget. Listen, I still picture you in that dal-
matian outfit you had to wear in the kindergarten play.

CHARLIE: Oh, yeah? You wanta wrestle? Now that you're a fly-
weight. Give you two falls out of three. How was the trip
down?

KITTY: Average. There was a wreck on '90 so everything was
backed up—and poor Matt got carsick, twice—your average
turnpike nightmare. . . . Are you just getting home?

CHARLIE: Yup. Had too good a time tonight, couldn't tear myself away. What is it, five o'clock or something? What're you doing up?

KITTY: I just got up, I've gotta make this damn potato salad for the reception and I want to get it done before the kids get up. I must've been crazy to say I'd do this . . .

(*She takes a bowl of hard-boiled eggs from the fridge and starts peeling them.*)

KITTY: So what's the story, you seeing somebody?

CHARLIE: Nah. I was just up at Dink's.

KITTY: That biker bar? I mean, it *was* . . . now is it . . . like, fun, or—?

CHARLIE: That's my club. There're some good guys hang out there. They call me the King. I walk in, they say, "The King is here." Plus they got a pool table—

KITTY: You didn't walk home, did you? God. I mean, it's none of my business, but you don't want to get mugged again—

CHARLIE: I was a kid when I got mugged, I don't even remember it. You remember—

KITTY: Well, but it's cold out, too—

CHARLIE: Haddaya *think* I get around? It's not like I can use Mom's car. Hey, I'm the champeen walker.

KITTY: Right . . . don't you have gloves, at least?

CHARLIE: I had some great gloves. Did you give me those? Blue wool with leather pads?

KITTY: Yeah, probably . . .

CHARLIE: They were great. But I lost 'em. That red shirt you gave me was great too, I lost that too. They're great while

they last, though. Man, I am starving. Mom made that chicken stuff for dinner, right?

KITTY: We killed it.

CHARLIE: Thanks, guys.

KITTY: There's salad left, though.

CHARLIE: Salad! Hey, this is me you're talking to—Oh shit, I better close this door or Mom'll be out here bitching, make me do the Breathalyzer . . .

(*He closes the door to the hall, goes to cupboards, takes out a can of Chef Boy-at-Dee Ravioli and a loaf of Wonder Bread, opens the can and makes cold ravioli sandwiches.*)

CHARLIE: Couple months ago I was a bad boy, really let myself go . . . she tell you about this?

KITTY: (*nods yes, but blankly*) What.

CHARLIE: It was pretty funny, or it woulda been if somebody'd been there to see it besides us . . . I came in real late, and I mean I was loaded, and coming through the living room, I tripped over her fucking sewing box and I fell flat, like, with this huge crash! And I couldn't get back up. It was wild, the whole room was going nuts around me . . . and then, Jesus, here comes Mom, with the electric carving knife!—she thought someone was breaking in—

KITTY: (*appalled but has to laugh*) What was she gonna do with the electric knife, she would've had to go get the extension cord so she could plug it in—

CHARLIE: (*laughs*) Yeah, right . . . yeah . . . but she doesn't sleep through stuff like she used to. That was great, how when she was sleeping, we'd go in and ask her stuff, like if we could do stuff or buy stuff, like donuts or something, and she'd always say—

BOTH: "Sure, honey . . ."

KITTY: She'd still be asleep . . .

CHARLIE: We got away with fucking everything. Forget it, *now*. The slightest thing, she wakes up screaming . . .

KITTY: Listen though, Mom says you're doing great at your new job, she says they really like you.

CHARLIE: Well, my boss keeps telling me I'm the best worker they got . . .

KITTY: Well, good for you . . . just keep it up. I mean I always knew if you got on a good roll . . .

CHARLIE: I figure she'd be telling you to shape me up—

KITTY: No, listen . . . I mean sure, she . . . she *cares*, that's all . . . but I don't want to . . . be telling you . . . we oughta be past that . . .

CHARLIE: Jesus, I think so, but Mom . . . she's really getting crotchety. Like ever since that night, she won't give me a ride anywhere except to work, and that's just if I oversleep. It's like, in her mind, the only life I should have is work. You know? I go, "Hey, Ma, I'm not gonna just work and come straight home and sit around watching the boob tube all night long, like the living dead . . ."

(*starts eating ravioli sandwiches, sees her watching*)

What.

KITTY: You really do still eat like that.

CHARLIE: Hey, the Chef's my man. Mom, once in a while she'll try to palm off some gourmet brand, what they call "pasta" now. I tell her, "Ma, I got my loyalties."

KITTY: So you psyched for the wedding?

CHARLIE: . . . Oh, right! Right . . . great!

KITTY: All the cousins are coming in—

CHARLIE: Oh yeah? Old Eddie's coming, too?

KITTY: Yeah, didn't Mom tell you?

CHARLIE: Hey. You're the one she talks to.

KITTY: Well . . . that's because I'm gone. But listen, Jen has hot plans to dance with you. Uncle Charlie. Like, rad.

CHARLIE: Oh, yeah?

KITTY: Oh, please. Don't tell her I said so, but she never stops playing that Jackson Browne tape you gave her.

CHARLIE: She's a babe, that kid, she's gonna break some hearts. Yeah, I wanted to make it home to see her tonight, but . . .

KITTY: And Matt's dying to see you too. You'll have to show him your MAD collection one more time.

CHARLIE: He remembers that?

KITTY: Are you serious? That's on the list now, that's required.

CHARLIE: Oh, shit.

KITTY: What.

CHARLIE: I think I have to work today.

KITTY: Oh, no, Charlie, you can't miss this—

CHARLIE: Shit. Get me up at eight, I'll call in sick.

KITTY: Well . . . wait . . .

CHARLIE: Nah, fuck it. If he doesn't like it, he can fire me.

KITTY: No, wait, Charlie, I shouldn't've . . . that wouldn't be too cool with Mom, or . . . you know, just . . . for *you*, I mean . . . this is a decent job . . .

CHARLIE: Pearl-diving, it's a privilege—

KITTY: Well, but if you stick it out there, maybe you can move up—

CHARLIE: Move up, how? To waiter? I'd rather wash dishes my whole life than be a fucking waiter. You know how much shit they have to take from these assholes? Come in ordering "Chivas and Coke," like that's a sign of class!

KITTY: Well, but you'd make a lot more money—

CHARLIE: Hey, I go in, I do my job, and I don't have to take any shit from anybody—including my "superior." The crew chief? What a dickhead! Keeps telling me about "technique"—which he doesn't know zilch what he's talking about—and when I tell him "Back off," he goes, "I am your superior!" Dickhead's never read a book, can't even speak English hardly, here he is telling me . . .

KITTY: Well, sure, but on any job—

CHARLIE: Then yesterday, I had a couple beers in the bar on my lunch hour—then my boss comes in and tells me the staff isn't *allowed* to drink on the "premises"—how's that for life in a democracy?

KITTY: That stinks. But, you know, why give them your money anyway—

CHARLIE: Man, I was seeing red, I went back in the kitchen, my "superior" starts in on me about "technique," I told him, "Yeah, you spent your whole life washing other people's dirty dishes, and you think that makes you my *superior*? I find that sad."

KITTY: Well, but Charlie, don't . . . this looks like a job you can keep for a while, right?

CHARLIE: Listen, there are a million—a zillion jobs like this. Pearl-diving, busing tables, washing floors—nobody wants these fucking jobs. Every kitchen is a zoo, they got no-shows, they got walkouts, guys right off the boat who can't even speak English, you gotta do a pantomime to show 'em what they're sposeta do . . . This is one thing I know more

about than you, okay? With my experience, I can walk into any restaurant and any bar in this city, and I can get hired, and I am not exaggerating, any day I ask—

KITTY: Okay, but asking is the hard part, and—Jesus, I swore I wasn't getting into this—Mom wants you to be working—

CHARLIE: No matter what scurwork it is—

KITTY: Now that's not fair—or true—God, Charlie—you're so bright—

CHARLIE: Oh shit, what, did you guys spend the whole night talking about getting me motivated—?

KITTY: (*overlapping*) No, I told her, I told everyone, I don't want to get into this! But when I hear you talking about—

CHARLIE: (*overlapping*) You come home every two years—

KITTY: (*overlapping*) It's not just me who's saying it—

CHARLIE: You wouldn't last one day washing dishes in a restaurant.

KITTY: Okay, fine . . . let's not do this, huh? I'm really . . . want to see you, I want to spend some time with you—

CHARLIE: You know, she keeps ragging me about "if you'd just get your equivalency"—like a high school diploma's gonna open the golden doors—McDonald's, that's the golden doors it'll open—and I'd rather haul shit! Listen, I couldn't make Mom happy unless I wore a suit to work—Shit.

KITTY: What.

CHARLIE: I forgot to get my good pants cleaned.

KITTY: I'll just iron 'em, they'll be fine—

CHARLIE: No, they're gross, got puke on 'em or something . . .

KITTY: Well, maybe Joe brought extra pants—

CHARLIE: Well, I was gonna ask him if he brought extra shoes. All I've got is tennis shoes.

KITTY: God, I sort of doubt it. Joe's not exactly Mr. Style, you know. I mean you don't have to worry about family standards here. Last week his boss took us out to dinner, and they wouldn't even let Joe in the restaurant because no tie, right?

CHARLIE: (*half-listening*) Assholes . . .

KITTY: So Joey takes off down the street and zips into some discount store and zips out with this plastic tie—God, did it feel sleazy, like it was made out of a shower curtain, or—well, most likely he'll wear it tomorrow at the wedding—

CHARLIE: I've got ties to lend him, God, they're still in the boxes—but I better find that white shirt, throw it in the washer. Can you wake me? Like at nine. And I'll call in. What time's the wedding?

KITTY: Noon. I'll prob'ly still be making this goddamn potato salad as they're marching down the aisle . . .

CHARLIE: Joe's gonna wear a suit, right?

KITTY: No, just a sportscoat, you don't have to—

CHARLIE: Would he have an extra one?

KITTY: . . . I don't think . . . but you don't have to . . . or we can go buy one, in a couple hours here. We can put it on the card and you can pay us back.

CHARLIE: Yeah? When?

KITTY: Oh, who cares? Shoes, too. Charlie. You should have a decent pair of shoes, you know? A decent jacket . . . for your life. Okay?

CHARLIE: (*beat; then.*) I can get away with a shirt and tie, huh?

KITTY: . . . Sure, this is very casual . . . home-catering, the whole trip . . .

CHARLIE: Okay, I'm gonna hit the rack. Wake me up, okay? Wake me at ten, ten's good enough.

KITTY: I'll send the kids in—

CHARLIE: Better not, you ain't seen my room.

(*as he exits*)

And listen, at the wedding? Just keep Uncle Bill away from me. I can get through anything if he just doesn't ask me what I'm "up to these days."

(*He exits, with remains of sandwiches. She keeps peeling eggs.*)