

Viewer Discretion Advised

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*(Lights up on a living room. There is a couch and several other typical living room furniture items, all under the light of visible stage lights (on the stage), like on the set of a sitcom. High schooler JASON DUNN enters his living room with an enormous knapsack on his back. Jason wears a stereotypical teenager's outfit- a bright jacket, jeans, and earbuds in. As he enters, he takes his earbuds out. His MOM enters from the opposite side of the room.)*

MOM

*(over-the-top, hammy)*

Hi, sweetheart!

*(She runs in and gives him a tight hug. Jason drops his backpack on his foot and winces in pain. There is a huge thud. We hear a canned laugh track, sitcom-style.)*

MOM

I have a surprise for you!

JASON

Is it a lighter backpack? Cause if I have to keep lugging this around all day, I'm gonna feel as old as UNCLE SAM!

*(Jason's uncle, SAM, who is in his 50s or 60s and in a wacky, colorful, outfit, enters, and watches him. Jason doesn't notice)*

MOM

Speaking of which, you've been so down in the dumps lately I knew there could only be one thing to cheer you up!

JASON

No way...

SAM

What's all this about feeling old?

*(Huge applause and cheering from the audience- as if Sam is a celebrity guest star.)*

JASON

Uncle Sam! You're back!

SAM

I sure am. And I brought you a souvenir!

*(Sam walks off and then struts back on with a suitcase. He struggles to lug it across the stage.)*

JASON

Let me help you with that-

SAM

Nonsense. You were just complaining about your heavy backpack. Plus, your arms are weak! All you kids ever do is sit there on those gizmos. I bet your arms are in *selfie mode*.

*(Laugh track. Mom laughs as well.)*

MOM

Hashtag *that was cold!*

*(Laugh track continues.)*

SAM

How do the kids say it? Like the marshmallow? You just got roasted!

*(The “audience” laughs harder and louder. Jason, to the audience, shakes his head, and then sits. Sam manages to drag his luggage far enough to where he is seated.)*

MOM

So do you think you know what it is?

JASON

A book?

SAM

A book? From Florida?

JASON

When you’d visit when I was little, you practically taught me how to read. *The Little Engine That Could*. That was my favorite.

*(The “audience” awws. Mom does as well.)*

SAM

*(chuckling)*

I didn’t think you remembered that.

JASON

Of course I did. “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” And then once he pulls the other train all the way up the mountain, he goes-

BOTH

-“I thought I could.”

*(They smile at each other for a moment, and then both forcibly laugh. The “audience” awws yet again.)*

JASON

How was your cruise, Uncle Sam?

SAM

Ah, it was much too loud for my liking. Too many people. Gave me a headache.

JASON

How was the food, at least? The entertainment?

SAM

Food was great- for it being a month old.

*(Laugh track.)*

SAM

But really, the dancing was exquisite.

JASON

Well, now I know you’re joking.

*(Laugh track.)*

SAM

No, seriously, it was fantastic!

JASON

Well, hey! That’s great-

SAM

Fantastic at putting me to sleep!

*(Laugh track, harder.)*

SAM

But that’s enough about my cruise. How are you, buddy? How’s school?

JASON

*(unconvincingly)*

Great.

SAM

How are you?

JASON

Well, I'm the captain of the basketball team, class treasurer, and editor of my school's newspaper.

*(A pause. Sam narrows his eyes.)*

SAM

No, no. How *are* you?

*(Jason doesn't respond.)*

MOM

Come on, bud. You can talk to Sam about anything, right?

*(The sitcom lights get brighter. Jason squints his eyes.)*

JASON

*(hesitant)*

Okay. Can we turn the lights down a bit?

MOM

Oh, don't be silly. The lights can't hear you.

*(Laugh track.)*

JASON

They're kind of giving me a headache-

SAM

Just say what's on your mind.

JASON

I guess I feel overwhelmed. And tired. I have all these tests coming up, and I have to think about college-it's really stressful, Sam. All you ever think about is school, and my best friend had to leave cause he couldn't handle it, for his own health, and it just makes me so f-

*(Laugh track. Mom forcibly laughs as well and puts her hand on his shoulder.)*

MOM

Frustrated. With girls, I know. It's hard-

JASON

No, Mom-

SAM

*(chuckling)*

Listen, Jason. It's those phone doo dads that are making you all tired. And lazy, too. When I was your age, I worked a job. And then right after high school I did service for my country. In fact, most of my life I was working and serving and I had to keep pushing. Life isn't a cruise ship in Florida, it's a tough little train going up a hill. I had to work hard, for me, for you, for your Aunt Patty.

*(The audience awws.)*

JASON

It's not just that, Sam, it's that no one will listen. Not even you. I feel so fu-

MOM

*(overly cheery, nervously)*

*Functional!* I knew bringing Sam in to help would make you feel better, Jason! I'm so glad.

JASON

*(ignoring Mom, at Sam)*

My friend Max, he had a *literal* mental breakdown, and no one cares. No one cares at all. Everyone knew, but no one who could help said anything about it. No teacher said anything about it. It was just left to the students to whisper rumors about it and up to me to add all my worries and my stress about it to that backpack that's heavy as fu-

*(He stops. Mom puts her hand on Jason's shoulder again, but with more force.)*

MOM

*(cautionary)*

We don't say *that*-

JASON

It's heavy as f- as f-

SAM

*Jason-*

JASON

I'm trying to say it but I can't, Sam, no one can *hear* me- I'm *struggling*.

*(Laugh track.)*

SAM

Jason, I'm gonna say it again. You're not struggling. Your little gadget's getting in your head. Your phone. I've read articles about how those things make you think you're depressed, but you've never had any real *struggle* in your life! You just need a little motivation to get you going. That's all.

JASON

I am struggling, Sam! I've got a billion lights on me and I have to keep going, five in the morning to whenever I get back from extracurriculars, and everyone's looking at me but nobody *sees* me. They're watching me so they can yell at me if I mess up, but no one's ever there when I need them.

MOM

You're gonna keep at it, Jason. Just like the little engine that could.

SAM

So what if you have a heavy load? So what if your friend's broken down. That little engine carried up his broken down friend with him. But no one's gonna do that for you, Jason. The little engine mustn't break down.

*(A beat.)*

SAM

Life isn't a cruise ship in Florida, it's a tough little train going up a hill.

*(Audience awws.)*

JASON

You already said that.

MOM

Hey, Sam never gave you your souvenir, did he?

JASON

Can we just turn the lights down a bit? My head's killing me.

*(Mom goes over to Sam's suitcase and pulls out a small toy train.)*

SAM

I figured you're so hung up on your phone gizmo that you don't ever play with toys anymore-

JASON

Uncle Sam, I'm seventeen-

MOM

Shhh! Chugga chugga chugga chugga-

*(She drops the toy in Jason's hand.)*

MOM

Choo choo.

*(A beat.)*

SAM

I think I can, I think I can, I think I can. Come on. All you need is some motivation, Jason.

*(The audience awws, then silence. Jason smiles, looking at the train, which is short lived. He then throws it on the ground. A beat, then another laugh track. Jason sits, and puts his head in his hands. The audience continues to laugh as sitcom payoff music begins to play, and the lights begin to dim, very slowly. Sam walks over to Jason.)*

MOM

*(gently)*

Now come on, Jason. Forget about the train. Just pick your head up. I think you can, I think you can.

JASON

*(muttering, head still down)*

I think I can, I think I can.

SAM

*(grinning at the audience, through clenched teeth)*

Say it and smile, now.

*(Jason keeps his head in his hands.)*

MOM

Pick your head up, Jason, and smile. You're okay.

JASON

*(mumbling)*

I'm not okay.

MOM

Make them think you're okay, then.

*(Jason does nothing.)*

SAM

Say it and smile!

*(Jason does nothing.)*

SAM

PICK YOUR HEAD UP AND SMILE, JASON!

*(Sam yanks Jason's head up and out of his hands, and holds it to face the audience.)*

JASON

*(smiling unconvincingly)*

I think I can, I think I can-

SAM

LOUDER!

JASON

*(breaking down)*

I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN- I CAN'T! I'M..I'M FUCKING...

*(No reaction from Mom and Sam.)*

JASON

I'M DEPRESSED!

*(Mom and Sam look around, panicked. The lights go down around Jason, and intensify on Mom.)*

MOM

*(highly unsure)*

I'm pregnant!

*(Silence.)*

MOM

*(with growing confidence)*

He- he'll be a boy! It's a boy!

*(The audience cheers. Mom and Sam breathe a sigh of relief.)*

MOM

And he'll grow up fast and...and happy! He'll be our happy son. He'll never break the rules.

SAM

He'll never say bad words.

MOM

Bad, sad words. Never.

*(Jason tries to step into the light of Sam and Mom.)*

JASON

Mom?

MOM

*(while pushing him out of the light, not looking at him)*

You'll have a new baby brother. Won't that be nice?

JASON

Mom, listen to me-

*(She doesn't face him. Jason runs to Sam, who also pushes him out of the light without facing him.)*

JASON

Sam, please-

SAM

*(quietly)*

You know the rules, Jason. The little engine mustn't break down.

JASON

Please, just listen-

SAM

I think you can, I think you can, I think you can.

JASON

I-

SAM

I knew you could.

*(The lights fade, and the "audience" cheers one last time.)*