

THE TROUBLE WITH BRANDON

by:
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Players:

CARL, a middle aged man.

ORSON, his significant other.

AT RISE: A hotel suite parlor with a sofa, coffee table and telephone.

Carl and Orson have just returned from a wedding.

Orson is fiddling with his cufflinks.

CARL

It was a beautiful wedding, wasn't it?

ORSON

The bride was a vision. Darn it. My fingers are too stiff. Could you help?

CARL

With pleasure.

ORSON

You know what? Never mind. I'm going to stay dressed a little bit longer. I feel kind of Gary Cooper in this get-up.

CARL

You do look handsome.

ORSON

But, my feet are killing me.

Orson sits down and kicks off his shoes.

ORSON [continued]

Say, Carl, I've been meaning to ask. What's up with Brandon?

CARL

Brandon? Why?

ORSON

Well, he wasn't in town for our Christmas party this year. He skipped your 50th and now Gail's wedding. Doesn't that seem a bit odd?

CARL

I dunno. Why?

ORSON

I'm just accustomed to seeing him.

CARL

He's probably busy with college stuff.

ORSON

But, he got a break at Christmas, and don't you think it's peculiar that his parents, especially Brenda, haven't mentioned him in a while?

CARL

You've got a point.

ORSON

Maybe his grades have fallen?

CARL

Maybe...

ORSON

[*Ugh*] I feel guilty.

CARL

Why?

ORSON

We should have asked about him.

CARL

No, no. I'm sure Brenda and Tom would have mentioned him if there were any news.

ORSON

When was the last time we saw him?

CARL
Labor Day. Last year.

ORSON
Oh... At the reunion?

CARL
Yes.

ORSON
That was a botched affair.

CARL
Yes, well. I'm sure he's learned to knock since then.

ORSON
I wonder. Do you think he might be avoiding us?

CARL
I don't see why.

ORSON
Maybe we traumatized him. Most young men aren't comfortable seeing what he did.

CARL
It was just a kiss.

ORSON
Yes, but...

CARL
No. Brenda would have said something.

ORSON
He might not have told her.

CARL
True.

ORSON
Listen. I think the world of Brandon. He's a smart young man. He's got a good head on his shoulders, but don't you think it's strange that he's gone missing?

CARL
Kids have a way of disappearing when they go to college.

ORSON

I've got a feeling it has something to do with that kiss.

CARL

Nah. He's known about us since he was a kid.

ORSON

To know about something in the abstract is one thing. Seeing it first hand, that's a whole other kettle of fish.

CARL

I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill.

ORSON

Mountains? Molehills? Kettles? Fish? We can mix 'em with the best, can't we?

Still, I feel guilty we forgot to ask.

CARL

That's not entirely true.

ORSON

How so?

CARL

I did ask.

ORSON

O? Why didn't you say so?

CARL

I guess I forgot.

ORSON

Well?

CARL

Well, what?

ORSON

What did Brenda say?

CARL

I didn't ask Brenda. I asked Tom.

ORSON

What did Tom say?

CARL

Not much really. I guess that's why I forgot.

ORSON

And?

CARL

He said Brandon tried out for the football team, but didn't make the cut.

ORSON

Too bad. Anything else?

CARL

Not that I can recall.

ORSON

Hmmm...

CARL

What do you mean, "Hmmm...?"

ORSON

O, it's nothing.

CARL

Try me.

ORSON

Well. Brandon was never much into sports. He didn't play football in junior high or high school, so what made him think he could play for the Badgers?

CARL

I don't know. Raw youth and poor judgment?

ORSON

Perhaps. But, why did he try out in the first place? Was he trying to prove *something*?

CARL

Now, that's a stretch.

ORSON

Is it?

CARL
Yes.

ORSON
Or, was it a sudden burst of machismo to make up for—?

CARL
That's silly.

ORSON
[*Sing-song*] Stranger things. Stranger things.

CARL
Now look. There's no way one kiss could have that much sway over Brandon. Trust me, in the grand scheme of things, he's got more pressing teenage issues to deal with.

ORSON
Pressing teenage issues?

CARL
You know, imagining that we have any influence over Brandon is a perverse kind of adult conceit. At his age, nobody over 40 has much influence, not even his parents.

ORSON
You're probably right.

CARL
I know I'm right.

ORSON
[*Elaborately*] Thus spoke Zarathustra.

CARL
Cut it out, Orson. Don't mock me.

ORSON
I'm not mocking you. I'm just wondering.

CARL
Wondering what?

ORSON
If he were gay or struggling with his sexuality, would he come to us?

CARL
I don't see why.

ORSON
Why not?

CARL
Because he's not.

ORSON
Not coming to us, or not gay?

CARL
[Mildly irritated] Neither.

ORSON
You seem piqued.

CARL
Well, you're suggesting that my nephew is gay.

ORSON
Would that be so bad?

CARL
What do you think?

ORSON
No, what do you think?

CARL
Let's drop it.

ORSON
Why?

CARL
The topic's making me uncomfortable.

ORSON
That's strange.

CARL
Why? Is it so strange that an uncle wouldn't want his nephew to be gay?

ORSON
Now we *really* can't drop it. What would be wrong with Brandon being gay? Why would it matter?

CARL
You wouldn't understand.

ORSON
Try me.

CARL
I just think we'd get the blame.

ORSON
Blame? Blame for what?

CARL
Nothing. Really, can't we drop it?

ORSON
No. I think we're hitting on something important here. Do you really think it would be bad thing if Brandon were gay?

CARL
You're putting words in my mouth. I didn't say that.

ORSON
Not in so many words.

CARL
Look. I don't care if Brandon is gay, bi, straight or the next Candy Darling. It's none of my damn business. What I do care about is my sister. She'd be wrecked.

ORSON
Brenda's always been comfortable around you and me— around our friends.

CARL
Brandon is Brenda's only son. Do you really think she wants a gay son? Do you really think a critical eye wouldn't be cast on you? On me?

ORSON
Most mothers blame themselves.

CARL
Not when there are two convenient scapegoats at every family event.

ORSON
Now you're contradicting yourself. A few minutes ago, you said it was the height of conceit to think we have any influence over a teenager.

CARL

It is. It is the height of conceit... Brenda might not see it that way.

ORSON

You're underestimating your sister.

CARL

Am I?

ORSON

She's always been very accepting of you. Very supportive. Why, all of a sudden, is she intolerant?

CARL

You're twisting my words again. You're good at that.

ORSON

[Feigning distress] O, mercy!

CARL

Damn it, Orson. Stop it. We're going to drop this right now. I don't want to talk about Brandon, or my sister or your off-the-wall theories anymore.

We're just going to get into an argument.

ORSON

All right. All right. It's dropped.

CARL

Good.

Pause.

They appear uncomfortable.

ORSON

Could you help me with my cufflinks?

CARL

Yes.

Carl assists Orson. Their eyes meet.

[Sigh] I'm sorry.

ORSON
It's okay.

CARL
No. I apologize.

ORSON
I had no business riling you up.

CARL
I guess I'm a little touchy about my family.

ORSON
Carl, you've got every right to be touchy when it comes to your family. I don't know the dynamics. I'm an outsider.

CARL
Now. I didn't mean that.

ORSON
It's true. What do I know?

CARL
Orson, stop. You've been a part of this family for 15 years. Really. It's me who's being unreasonable.

ORSON
I just don't understand why you'd be so upset if Brandon was—was—

CARL
What? Gay?

ORSON
Yes.

CARL
I don't know...

ORSON
Maybe a little residual teenage angst in your 50 year-old body?

CARL
Maybe...

ORSON

Say. You ever wonder why teenagers could care less about what adults get up to, but we can't help obsessing over teenagers?

CARL

Maybe that's the dynamic that fuels the drama.

ORSON

Do you ever wish you could be a teenager again?

CARL

Me? No. *Hell* no.

ORSON

Me neither.

CARL

That's good. I'd probably try to fix you up with my niece.

ORSON

[*Laughs*] I'd probably let you.

CARL

Sick!

ORSON

I know. Girls are gross. They have cooties.

CARL

That's always been my contention.

ORSON

[*Chuckling*] Say, I have an idea.

CARL

What?

ORSON

Why don't we give Brandon a call? See what he's been up to.

CARL

A wonderful idea!

ORSON

Maybe he has a new boyfriend.

CARL
[*With humor*] O, stop!

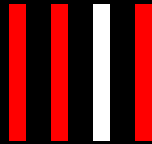
ORSON
Maybe he has a new girlfriend.

CARL
A girl with cooties?

ORSON
I'm dying to know.

CARL
Me too. Let's be annoying adults and ask about everything. Let's be nosy as hell.

Carl picks up the phone and dials.



**FIND OUT HOW
THIS PLAY ENDS.**

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