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(WAKE-UP CALL)

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## WAKE-UP CALL

A One-act Play

For 2 Men, 2 Women, 3 or more either

### CHARACTERS

JIM ..... a high school student  
ROCHELLE ..... a high school student  
MOTHER ..... Jim's mother  
DAD ..... Rochelle's father

Three (or more) chorus members

### SETTING

The present. The action alternates between Rochelle's bedroom and Jim's bedroom.

## WAKE-UP CALL

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(*Onstage, a large bed. The bigger the better.*)

JIM. My life could not get worse.

ROCHELLE. So ... you're not even gonna ask me?

JIM. I'm sorry. That was rude. What's the big favor?

ROCHELLE. No, you first. Why is your life so terrible?

JIM. Because I'm lazy. I had two weeks, and I haven't done any of it.

ROCHELLE. Get your mom to let you stay home.

JIM. She's not that kind of mom.

ROCHELLE. I like her.

JIM. I like her too. I love her. But she's not going to let me stay home just 'cause I blew off studying for my test.

ROCHELLE. It doesn't sound that bad.

JIM. It is. I promised her I'd study this time.

ROCHELLE. Your mom is really beautiful. Does she date?

JIM. Not yet.

ROCHELLE. Will she?

JIM. Maybe. Your dad?

ROCHELLE. No. He's not ready. It's different after a death. He just needs time to be alone.

JIM. Now. Your favor.

ROCHELLE. No, I'm not ready yet.

JIM. What do you mean, you're not ready yet?

ROCHELLE. I'm not ready to ask you.

## WAKE-UP CALL

JIM. I love you too. So.  
 ROCHELLE. So.  
 JIM. Now you can ask me anything.  
 ROCHELLE. I want you to help me kill my father.  
 JIM. OK. Anyone else?  
 ROCHELLE. No, just Dad.  
 JIM. All right. How?  
 ROCHELLE. Poison.  
 JIM. Why do you need my help?  
 ROCHELLE. I need someone to corroborate that he was sad all the time.  
 JIM. He's not sad.  
 ROCHELLE. That's my point. Everyone thinks he's been handling it great. I need someone to say that they'd seen him crying. That you'd walked in on him once and he was sobbing.  
 JIM. Whatever. Whatever you want. Now, unless you know something about Heisenberg, or relativity or the solar system, I should get going.  
 ROCHELLE. Wait. We need to talk about this. I think I just made a bad mistake.  
 JIM. What?  
 ROCHELLE. Saying what I said. About my dad.  
 JIM. You were joking.  
 ROCHELLE. Yeah.  
 JIM. See you later.  
 ROCHELLE. You staying up all night?  
 JIM. Probably.  
 ROCHELLE. Awv ... You'll be exhausted.  
 JIM. Nah. I'm the world's champion all-nighter puller. *(He starts to go.)*  
 ROCHELLE. One more thing.

## WAKE-UP CALL

JIM. Why?  
 ROCHELLE. I'm just not. It's big.  
 JIM. So ask. I'll do it. Or I won't. But you can ask.  
 ROCHELLE. No. I was brave enough a few minutes ago.  
 Now I'm not brave enough.  
 JIM. What do you need to be brave for?  
 ROCHELLE. I can't.  
 JIM. I'm not gonna say no. *(After a moment.)* All right, you want brave? I can be brave. *(He gets up his nerve.)* Or not.  
 ROCHELLE. What?  
 JIM *(it takes him a long moment, but finally)*. I love you.  
*(And it seems to take ROCHELLE an eternity to respond, but she manages.)*  
 ROCHELLE. I love you too. Thank you.  
*(They kiss. He's very pleased, then suddenly shy. He looks at something out a window.)*  
 ROCHELLE. Hmm?  
 JIM. Just looking at those kids. I used to have picnics in that park. It's weird when you think...  
 ROCHELLE. What?  
 JIM. I don't know. It feels like the world is different all of a sudden. So much better, and those kids are just... they don't have any idea that this huge thing has happened fifty yards away. And it makes you think, what's the closest I've ever been to some huge event in somebody's life and not know it?  
 ROCHELLE. I love you.

JIM. Sure.

ROCHELLE. If my dad were to die suddenly, would you feel obligated to mention this conversation to the police?

JIM. Rochelle, what are you talking about?

ROCHELLE. What do you think I'm talking about? I'm talking about my dad suddenly dying. *(He just stares at her.)* I did this all wrong. I didn't expect it to be a surprise.

JIM. You're kidding, right?

ROCHELLE. No, I've been leading up to it. I was giving you hints.

JIM. Hints.

ROCHELLE. I've been giving you lots of hints, and I thought you were—I thought we were on the same page is all. And you gave me one.

JIM. What?

ROCHELLE. When you were talking about that movie, *Double Indemnity*. They kill her husband because they love each other.

JIM. Rochelle, that was a movie. I was telling you the plot of a movie.

ROCHELLE. For you, it was just a plot. To me, it was a wake-up call. I need to take control of my life. And the easiest way to do that—I wish I hadn't brought this up.

JIM. Me too!

ROCHELLE. And now you think I'm a bad person.

JIM. No.

ROCHELLE. Yes. I can feel your opinion of me just going. *(A sound effect and swirling hand gesture to indicate "down the toilet.")*

JIM. I think you're talking about a stupid fantasy that you had for two seconds. That everybody has, and you don't realize what it sounds like out loud.

ROCHELLE. But. If he did—if something did happen to him, would you say something? To the police?

JIM. Yes, of course.

ROCHELLE. What if they didn't ask you?

JIM. Rochelle, I'm the boyfriend. I'm the first person they'd ask.

ROCHELLE. Not if they didn't ask anyone. If they're sure it's a suicide there might not be an investigation.

JIM. Would you just let this go?

ROCHELLE. Not yet. Answer this question and I'll drop the whole subject. Assume that my dad kills himself, as many widowers do. The police are not in any way suspicious. They do a quick investigation, and all the signs point to suicide. Are you gonna turn me in? *(He won't answer. She moves in close.)* Tell me again that you love me.

*(ROCHELLE disappears. The lights change. JIM sits bolt upright in the bed. He's disoriented, breathing hard. There's a pounding coming from offstage.)*

MOTHER. Jim! I don't want to barge in but I'm about to! JIM. You can come in.

*(MOTHER enters.)*

MOTHER. This is your wake-up call.

JIM *(disoriented)*. What?

MOTHER. You are dressed.

JIM. Yeah, I...

MOTHER. What'd you do? Fall back into bed?

JIM. I guess...

MOTHER. What's the matter? Are you sick?

JIM. No, I'm—I had a bad dream.

MOTHER. About what?

JIM. Oh, it's stupid, I—

MOTHER. Sweetheart, are you OK?

JIM. I'm fine. It's dumb. It was so real.

MOTHER. You're sweating.

JIM. It was really—it was scary. Rochelle was going to kill her father.

MOTHER. About time.

JIM. Mom.

MOTHER. Well, whatever you do, don't tell Mr. Simmons.

JIM. Don't worry.

MOTHER. What is that? Is that Oedipal? No. What's it called, to want to kill your girlfriend's father?

JIM. I don't want to kill him.

MOTHER. Apparently you do.

JIM. Rochelle wanted to kill him. She just wanted me to help.

MOTHER. Hmm. Well. As long as we're on the subject... what do you think of Mr. Simmons?

(After a moment, JIM gives a conspiratorial thumbs-down. This makes his MOTHER laugh.)

MOTHER. Me too. And I tried to like him. You know I'm crazy about Rochelle, but... What have you got against him?

JIM. He's a little cold.

MOTHER. A little! All right, I'm going to tell you a story. You cannot tell Rochelle. Promise?

JIM. I promise.

MOTHER. I ran into him at Foodmart, about a... maybe three weeks ago. I said, "Mr. Simmons"—I blanked on his name.

JIM. Howie.

MOTHER. I just blanked on it. I said, "Mr. Simmons, what do you think of our kids hooking up?"

JIM. You said "hooking up"?

MOTHER. I know. Unfortunate. But that is what I said. I meant dating.

JIM. That's not what it means exactly.

MOTHER. I was trying to be, I don't know what I was trying to be, but I said, "What do you think of our kids hooking up?" And he said, "It's fine."

JIM. It's fine?

MOTHER. Yes!

JIM. Yikes.

MOTHER. What's he got against you, or do I want to know?

JIM. Nothing! I've been a perfect gentleman.

MOTHER. I know you have. It made me really angry when I thought about it.

JIM. That's so weird.

MOTHER. The truth is, I'd sort of had my eye on old Howie. You know, he's attractive.

JIM. He's not ready to date.

MOTHER. No?

JIM. No, he's... Oh wait. No, that was just the dream.

MOTHER. That was part of the dream?

JIM. Yeah, in the dream we talked about whether or not he was ready to date, and Rochelle said it was too soon after the accident.

MOTHER. Quite a dream.

JIM. Yeah.

MOTHER. That was so ironic.

JIM. Hmm.

MOTHER. Her mother, an Olympic swimmer, drowning.

JIM. The theory is, that's *why* she drowned. She was too confident. People underestimate the current. No matter how good a swimmer you are, you shouldn't try to fight it. You just get exhausted until you can't fight it anymore. And you go under. The lesson is, if you're in too deep, don't struggle.

MOTHER. Good to know.

JIM. Yeah, but so, the point is, as far I know, he's available.

MOTHER. Well now I don't want him.

JIM. Oh, right.

MOTHER. After what he said about you.

JIM. Yeah, I don't know what's going on with that. I thought he liked me.

MOTHER. What's not to like?

JIM. Exactly. I'm polite, smart...

MOTHER. Well-mannered, clean and incredibly attractive.

JIM. Thank you!

MOTHER. *Incredibly* attractive, lately. I mean, *really* attractive.

(*There was something, perhaps, slightly too emphatic about this.*)

JIM. Thanks.

MOTHER. Anyway, the point is, he's lucky to have you seeing his daughter, and it irritates me that he's not jumping up and down about it.

JIM. Well.

MOTHER. And he's not *so* good-looking. Not like you. Or me!

JIM. Not nearly.

MOTHER. Ha! Say *that* again! (*After a moment.*) Go ahead.

JIM. What?

MOTHER. Say it again. Say "You're much more attractive than he is."

JIM. (*Playing along, partially overlapping.*) You're much more attractive than he is...

MOTHER. 'Cause you are looking good.

JIM. 'Cause you are looking good.

MOTHER. Say "You're looking good to me."

JIM. You're looking good to me!

MOTHER. But say it like you mean it.

JIM. (*After a moment.*) You're looking good to me.

MOTHER. Thank you! Still firm in all the right places. Go ahead, take a feel.

JIM. Mom.

MOTHER. Oh come on. I'm your mother, it won't mean anything. (*He just ignores this.*) So?

JIM. Mom, no.

MOTHER. You don't find me attractive?

JIM. You're beautiful. You're spectacular, but... you're my mom.

MOTHER. That's why it's innocent. (*A little nod from MOTHER: Go ahead.*)

JIM. No!

MOTHER. You don't find me attractive at all, do you?  
 JIM. No, I don't! You're attractive. But I don't....I don't think of you that way at all. In the least.  
 MOTHER. Well. That's good to know. I wish I could say the same. But, you know, it's been a little lonely since your father left. And...I don't have a lot of male companionship, except you. I see you all the time. You've been working out. You're looking amazing. You parade around in those gym shorts all the time, like I'm just supposed to not notice.

JIM. Mom.

MOTHER. No. I'm laying it out there. You're my son. But I'm attracted to you, and I think that acting on that attraction is something we need to at least put out there as a possibility. Now, admit it. Aren't you just the tiniest bit attracted to me?

JIM. No.

MOTHER. Jim...

JIM. No! I'm not.

MOTHER. I don't believe you...*(She starts advancing toward him.)* How could you not be attracted to this? Let me have a little kiss.

*(She disappears. He sits up with a start. He's breathing hard. He's back in ROCHELLE's room. She's standing over him.)*

ROCHELLE. Are you OK?

JIM. I'm...

ROCHELLE. You fainted.

JIM. I did?

ROCHELLE. I was about to call a doctor. Are you all right?

JIM. Yeah.

ROCHELLE. You were dreaming. I could see your eyes moving back and forth. What were you dreaming about?

JIM. My mother.

ROCHELLE. Your mother?

JIM. It doesn't matter. I...

ROCHELLE. Hmm?

JIM. How long was I out?

ROCHELLE. Not long. A minute.

JIM. That's all? It was such an elaborate dream.

ROCHELLE. We should get you checked up.

JIM. No. I'm fine. *(There's a long moment, while JIM tries to assess the state of the world.)* Why... why do you think I would have fainted?

ROCHELLE. No idea. That's why we should get you checked.

JIM. What were we talking about before I fainted?

ROCHELLE. You know.

JIM. But tell me.

ROCHELLE. I'm not going to say it again.

JIM. Please. Just give me a hint.

ROCHELLE. Relax!

DAD *(offstage)*. Hello there!

ROCHELLE. Hey, Daddy! We're up here!

JIM. Just tell me what we were talking about before I passed out.

ROCHELLE *(quiet)*. Now is not the time.

*(Her DAD enters.)*

DAD. In Somalia, you could be executed for having a boy in your room.

ROCHELLE. The door's open.  
 DAD. Hello, Jim.  
 JIM. Hello, sir.  
 DAD. How was the day?  
 ROCHELLE. Jim fainted.  
 DAD. Are you all right?  
 JIM. It's never happened before. I'm fine.  
 ROCHELLE. We were just doing homework.  
 DAD. Did you finish?  
 ROCHELLE. Just about. Did you do yours?  
 DAD. Right here. (*He's carrying two pieces of paper.*)  
 ROCHELLE. Thanks.  
 DAD. No problem.  
 ROCHELLE. Snack?  
 DAD. Love it.  
 ROCHELLE. Be right back. (*She exits.*)  
 DAD. So, Mr. Oneira.  
 JIM. Sir.  
 DAD. Bend your ear for a moment?  
 JIM. Sure.  
 DAD. You've been... accompanying my daughter now for five months.  
 JIM. Eight.  
 DAD. Eight! Where does the time go? She's quite a girl.  
 JIM. Yes she is.  
 DAD. She's... I guess you know, she's got me wrapped around her finger.  
 JIM. Yeah, I could sort of tell that.  
 DAD. I'd do anything for her. Which is why... what am I trying to say here? Things have been a little tough for Rochelle since her mother died. Tough for both of us, but... I'm really glad you're with Rochelle. It's fine!

JIM. It's what?  
 DAD. It's fine! It's a fine thing.  
 JIM. Thank you! I'm glad you approve. I wasn't sure... What's she got you doing?  
 DAD. For that forensics class. Graphology.  
 JIM. Like, handwriting analysis?  
 DAD. Yeah.  
 JIM. They use that stuff?  
 DAD. I was surprised myself. The way she explains it is, nobody really believes, these days, that you can tell a person's personality from the way they dot their I's. But forensic scientists are trying to find out the psychological state of the person writing. The idea is that what you write influences your handwriting in ways that can be measured. So. Two writing samples. Different states of mind. (*He picks one up and reads it.*) "I can't wait to go to Disneyland tomorrow." And... (*Reading the other paper.*) "I don't wish to continue living. Nothing has any meaning."  
 (*ROCHELLE enters, with cookies and three glasses of milk.*)  
 ROCHELLE. Snack time!  
 DAD. I'm starving.  
 ROCHELLE. Me too.  
 (*They eat the cookies.*)  
 DAD. Good! When did you make these?  
 ROCHELLE. This afternoon. When I was supposed to be studying.



(*JIM's not eating them.*)

DAD. Jim?

ROCHELLE. Jim doesn't like peanut butter.

JIM (*the homework*). Could I see that?

(*DAD hands it to him. JIM stares at it for a moment, then tears it up.*)

ROCHELLE / DAD. What are you doing? / Jim.

JIM. I'm sorry. I couldn't take the chance.

ROCHELLE. Are you crazy?

JIM. "Nothing has any meaning"? Why would she have you write that?

ROCHELLE. It was an assignment!

JIM. Let me see it. Let me see the assignment.

ROCHELLE. No!

DAD. Did you hit your head? Because I don't understand this behavior at all.

JIM. Maybe. I hope so. But don't drink that milk.

DAD. Excuse me?

ROCHELLE. Jim!

JIM. Don't, just don't drink it.

DAD (*picking up his glass*). Tell me one more time what I shouldn't do in my house?

JIM. At least taste it first!

ROCHELLE. You've lost your mind. (*By way of demonstration, she drinks her milk all the way down.*) Delicious.

JIM. Please. Humor me. Dip your tongue in it before you drink it down.

DAD (*takes a little sip. Makes a face*). Is this old?

ROCHELLE. No, is it off?

DAD. A little.

JIM. Sour?

DAD. No. More like, salty.

JIM. I told you! It's poison!

DAD. Don't be a jerk. (*He swallows it in one chug.*)

JIM. No! NOOOO!

(*The lights change again. JIM's sitting up in bed. His MOTHER runs in.*)

MOTHER. Jim, wake up!

JIM. What?

MOTHER. Wake up! You were having a bad dream.

JIM. Was I?

MOTHER. I think.

JIM. You're right, I...

MOTHER. You're fine. Everything's fine. Listen to your breathing! That's never happened before, has it?

JIM. Uh...

MOTHER. Even as a little boy, I don't remember. Sweetheart, what were you dreaming about?

(*Suddenly, JIM notices how close his MOTHER is. He covers himself.*)

MOTHER. What's the matter?

JIM. Nothing. I... was dreaming about... How many times have you been up here this morning?

MOTHER. What's wrong?

JIM. Just tell me. How many times?

MOTHER. Twice. I knocked. You said you were up. When you didn't come down I came back up.

JIM. But you didn't come in the first time.

MOTHER. No. Why?

JIM. So you knocked. And I said I was up. And you didn't come in.

MOTHER. I wouldn't come in. Unless I heard you screaming. (*They're both starting to find this funny.*) What was the dream?

JIM. One more question. Don't take this the wrong way. Am I attractive?

MOTHER. Very attractive! You know that. Does this have something to do with Rochelle?

JIM. No. No, I—it was a wild dream.

MOTHER. Well, you know what? I can't wait to hear about it. But you are running really late. Did you study for your test?

JIM. A little.

MOTHER. Jim.

JIM. I'll do better next time.

MOTHER. Hmm. All right, scamp. Get moving. And do me a favor? Pick up some skolareebavitch on the way home.

JIM. Some...?

MOTHER. Skolareebavitch. Do you need cash?

JIM. No, I have some.

MOTHER. Check the expiration date. (*He just stands there.*) Honey, you're late enough as it is. Go!

JIM. I just—what do you want me to get?

MOTHER. Skolareebavitch. A half-gallon's fine.

JIM. So it's like... milk?

MOTHER. Like what?

JIM. Milk.

MOTHER. One more time?

JIM. Milk.

(*She's never heard this odd-sounding word before.*)

MOTHER. "Milk"? What's "milk"?

JIM. Momm, milk. Milk!

MOTHER. What are you talking about?

JIM. Milk. The white stuff you put in your coffee.

MOTHER. Skolareebavitch.

JIM. Milk.

MOTHER (*mocking him*). Hey, Jim, I'm going down the street for a quart of "milk." Pour some "milk" on your cereal.

JIM. No, but that is the word.

MOTHER (*most amusing of all*). Hey, Farmer Jones. I'm gonna help you "milk" your cow.

JIM. Momm, that is the word. It's called "milk."

MOTHER. Ooh, I heard a riddle. Plitthig pa. Feh! Feh! Squqqqqaaa? (*This last was not even remotely a human sound. He just stares at her. This annoys her.*) At least play along. Plitthig pa. Feh! Feh! Squqqqqaaa?

JIM (*after a moment*). I give up.

MOTHER. Jackson Pollock! (*He doesn't laugh. She's hurt.*) I thought it was funny. It doesn't matter.

JIM (*after a moment*). I'm dreaming.

MOTHER. No, sweetheart.

JIM. I am. Things aren't making sense.

MOTHER. You're not dreaming. You are acting very very very very very very really very very very very very very very very very very ...

(She keep repeating "very." At first it probably seems that she's doing this for emphasis. But it becomes apparent that she's stuck. Time isn't working quite right. He stares at her. Moves up close. Walks around her. Finally:)

MOTHER. ...strangely this morning and I'm a little worried about it.

JIM. No, I'm definitely dreaming.

MOTHER. Well, the good news is, if you're dreaming, you'll wake up.

JIM. Yeah...

MOTHER. So either way, everything's fine.

JIM. But I'm just not sure that...

MOTHER. What?

JIM. I'm not sure I want to wake up.

MOTHER. Scout, something's wrong with you. I'm going to make an executive decision here. You're going back to bed.

JIM. OK. (He starts toward the bed, then stops.)

MOTHER. What's the matter?

JIM. I'm nervous.

MOTHER. About what?

JIM. About waking up.

MOTHER. You mean, about going to sleep. I'm really worried about you. (She leads him to the bed. Tucks him in.)

JIM. I don't think I can...fall asleep.

MOTHER. Yes you can.

JIM. I don't want to, though.

MOTHER. Why not?

JIM. I'm having a bad dream. I mean I will be.

MOTHER. Not if I'm here.

JIM. I don't want to go to sleep.

MOTHER. Shhhhh. Close your eyes.  
JIM (closes them). This isn't going to work.  
MOTHER. I'm going to sing for you.

(She starts to sing. It is in no way a song that a human being would sing. The call of a whale, crossed with a theremin, punctuated by an occasional King bushman tongue click. In spite of this, it is strangely beautiful. Music comes up to accompany her. When she's finished, she disappears. In her place are ROCHELLE and her DAD.)

ROCHELLE. That's twice now. And I'm losing sympathy. It's one thing to lose consciousness, it's another to start spouting crazy accusations. You're acting really strange, Jim.

JIM. Am I?

ROCHELLE. Yes. You're not making the best impression. I think you owe both of us an apology.

JIM. Oh. Oh, yeah. You're right. I...Mr. Simmons, I...boy, something is just wrong with me today. I don't know what's going on, but...it's funny timing because, Rochelle and I had a talk this afternoon. We realized we're in love. Or we probably realized it before, but we didn't say it until today. And maybe that's what's wrong with me. Maybe I'm so happy that my brain is... You know, they say it's a form of craziness. And so if I'm acting weird, I apologize. I'm sorry. But I really do love your daughter, and that's... I've never said that to anyone before and so to be saying it to her and then to admit that I said it to her, to you... I'm going to stop talking now.

(Self-conscious because the father is there, JIM kisses his fingers and touches them to ROCHELLE's cheek. She kisses him back. DAD vomits.)

DAD. Excuse me...I...

JIM. Oh my God.

ROCHELLE. Dad, are you OK?

DAD. Yeah, I'm... No. I'm not OK. (He starts to hyperventilate.)

ROCHELLE. Dad, what's the matter?

DAD. I don't feel... I'm...

ROCHELLE. What's happening to you?

DAD (starts to shake violently). What did you do?

ROCHELLE. I'm sorry!

DAD. WHAT DID YOU...

ROCHELLE. I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

(He falls to the ground. He's dead.)

ROCHELLE. I really am.

JIM. You killed your father.

ROCHELLE. I warned you.

JIM. You killed your father!

ROCHELLE. Shhh! The windows are open. (He looks out the window.) Well, yell if you're going to yell. (She joins him at the window.) But I don't see the point. And you'll ruin their picnic. It is weird, isn't it? Watching them. It's like you were saying. It makes you wonder what's the nearest you've ever been to something horrible and not known about it. Now, look, you can turn me in. Or you can do nothing. Or you can help me. And split the insurance. Since we no longer have a suicide

note, I'm thinking that our best option is that he just disappears.

JIM. I'm not going to help you.

ROCHELLE. Are you gonna tell on me?

JIM. It won't matter. People will find out anyway.

ROCHELLE. No.

JIM. Yes, they will, Rochelle. The police always figure this stuff out.

ROCHELLE. They didn't figure out Mom. (He just stares at her.) Jim, she was a championship swimmer. She drowned. Doesn't that seem strange to you?

JIM. She was... it was the current. She got exhausted.

ROCHELLE. Believe it if you want. Everyone else did. The trick was to knock her unconscious but not kill her.

If they're dead when you dump them in the water, the pathologist can tell. But she was still breathing when I threw her in, so it looked like she just hit her head on a rock while she was trying to get out.

JIM. No. No no no. This is not happening.

ROCHELLE. What do you mean?

JIM. This takes it too far. Your dad's not dead. You didn't kill your mother.

ROCHELLE. OK. (He slaps himself.) What are you doing?

JIM. I'm going to wake up. (He slaps himself some more.)

ROCHELLE. You're weird.

JIM. I'm going to wake up! I'm going to wake up! I'm going to wake up!

ROCHELLE. You do that. (The body.) I have other problems.

(He jumps into the bed, rolls up his sleeve and bites down on his arm.)

ROCHELLE. Jim, don't freak out on me.

*(He keeps biting harder and harder. It makes him start to yell. LOUDER. He hits himself one more time. Everything disappears. He's alone in bed. It worked. He takes his arm out of his mouth. He's very pleased.)*

JIM *(the arm)*. Ouch. *(He examines the room. Makes sure that everything is as he expects it. It is.)*

*(A SINGER wanders in wearing a tux and carrying a parrot.)*

JIM *(to the SINGER)*. Excuse me!  
SINGER *(sings)*. Do ...  
JIM. Hello?

*(The SINGER ignores him. A SECOND SINGER comes out from under the bed. Harmonizes with the first.)*

SINGERS. Do ...

*(A THIRD SINGER appears, stranger looking than the first two.)*

CHORUS. Do ...  
JIM *(calling)*. Mom?

*(They sing the old campfire song, "Do Your Ears Hang Low?" but they sing it very slowly, and very beautifully.)*

CHORUS. Do your ears hang low ...? *(A long pause.)* Do they wobble to and fro ...?

JIM. Mom!

CHORUS. Can you tie them in a knot?

JIM. Mom, are you here?

CHORUS. Can you tie them in a bow?

MOTHER *(offstage)*. Yeah?

JIM. Could you come up here, please?

CHORUS. Can you throw them over your shoulders?

MOTHER *(offstage)*. In a minute!

CHORUS. Do they hang down to the floor?

JIM. Could you hurry, please?

CHORUS. Do your ears hang low ...?

*(They continue to sing it, low and lovely—or perhaps only intermittently—for most of the rest of the scene.)*

MOTHER *(offstage)*. What's the matter?

JIM. Just hurry.

MOTHER *(offstage)*. What's up?

*(MOTHER enters. She is twice the size she used to be. At least one thing about her is drastically altered: perhaps one of her arms has been replaced by an elephant's trunk, or her hair extends all the way out of the room. A calendar dangles from one arm. He stares at her for a long time.)*

JIM. All right, this is definitely the dream.

MOTHER *(smiles indulgently)*. Did you have that dream again?

JIM. Which one?

MOTHER. The one where you live in a world where the mothers are small and puny, like you. Where the ocean is made of water instead of milk, and people don't have their own personal choruses.

JIM. No...

MOTHER. You believe you lived in another world entirely. You have this idea that I used to be tiny and frail, instead of as I am. But then you wake up! Here I am! Let's eat some squirrels.

JIM. I don't think this is right. I don't think this is how it's supposed to be.

MOTHER. The dream is so powerful that you're convinced that you had an entire life, a life full of tests and girlfriends and trips to the dentist. You remember seeing plays and skiing. The dream is so richly imagined that you can remember dreams *within* the dream, nightmares about going to math class naked, about your teeth falling out or about killing people.

JIM. I did have those dreams. But still, this isn't real.

MOTHER. Test it. I'm real. You can touch me.

(*He touches her.*)

JIM. How long was I asleep?

MOTHER (*checks her calendar*). Not long. Seventeen years.

JIM. Seventeen years?

MOTHER. Give or take a month. I would have let you go longer, but you've got that test. You ready for it?

JIM. I...I don't think so.

MOTHER. Oh, sweetheart. You promised.

JIM. Um. Sorry.

MOTHER. No, I'm really disappointed.

JIM. What's the test on?

MOTHER. Physics. The solar system.

(*Now JIM notices something about the light streaming in through the window. He goes to the window and looks out.*)

JIM. The sun is blue.

MOTHER. One of them is. You didn't study at all.

JIM. And this is my...

MOTHER. Your own personal chorus.

JIM. What do I do with it?

MOTHER. Sing along. Harmonize, if you like.

JIM. And they'll sing whatever I want?

MOTHER. No. Only that song.

JIM. Wait, this isn't—I don't remember any of this. I'd remember *something*.

MOTHER. You're still half asleep. WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP! Now do you remember things?

JIM. No.

MOTHER. What is the ocean made of?

JIM. Milk. But you told me that.

MOTHER. What do we eat?

JIM. Squirrels. You told me that too.

MOTHER. And what do squirrels eat?

JIM (*after a moment, remembering*). Eels.

MOTHER. That's right! And what do eels eat?

JIM. Cotton.

MOTHER. And what does cotton eat?

JIM (*after a long moment*). Us. Me!

MOTHER. Correct. Stay away from the cotton.

JIM. I don't think I like this world.

MOTHER. No one does. It's proof you're awake. Now, the suns are up! It's going to be a gorgeous century. Give me a hug.

JIM. Uh ... No.

MOTHER. Come on!

JIM. No. No, thank you. No, no no no!

*(He falls backward. MOTHER disappears. JIM is on the floor, next to the corpse.)*

ROCHELLE. This behavior is starting to irritate me. *(JIM runs to the window, looks out.)* What are you doing?

JIM. One sun.

ROCHELLE. What?

JIM. And—Everything is normal.

ROCHELLE. I'm glad you think so. Are you going to help me now?

JIM. No.

ROCHELLE. Please?

JIM. I'm sorry, Rochelle. But I can't just let you do this.

ROCHELLE. I already did it.

JIM. I'm going to have to turn you in.

ROCHELLE. Why?

JIM. Because. I just do.

ROCHELLE. What good will it do?

JIM. I can't just let you get away with murder.

ROCHELLE. That's what I was afraid of. *(She takes out a long, menacing knife.)*

JIM. What are you doing?

ROCHELLE. You're either an accomplice or a witness. I don't have much choice, do I?

JIM. This isn't real.

ROCHELLE. OK. *(She moves toward him, slowly, knife raised. He holds his ground, pinching himself.)*

JIM. This is not happening this is not happening this is not happening. *(At the last moment, he ducks out of the way.)*

ROCHELLE. Don't make this harder than it should be.

*(JIM turns to the window and SCREAMS: "Help me!" Oddly, no sound comes out. He tries again. Still nothing. He looks at the door.)*

ROCHELLE. You won't make it to the door.

*(He turns and tries to run to the door. Strangely, he's not getting anywhere. She moves, very slowly, closer.)*

ROCHELLE. I'm gaining on you.

*(He runs faster. But still, she's slowly catching up. He makes it to the door. Opens it to find his MOTHER, normal-sized.)*

JIM. Mom! Thank God!

*(She smiles at him.)*

MOTHER *(singing)*. Do your ears hang low?

JIM. What?

ROCHELLE *(singing)*. Do they wobble to and fro?

DAD *(still dead, without moving)*. Can you tie them in a knot?

## WAKE-UP CALL

CHORUS (*appearing from all over*). Can you tie them in a bow?

(*JIM stands there, breathing hard.*)

MOTHER (*spoken*). Poor dear. You're exhausted. Have you been sleeping?

ALL EXCEPT JIM (*very slow*). Can you throw them over your shoulders/ Do they hang down to your toes?/ Do your ears ...

JIM (*harmonizing, while they hold the note*). Is this a dream I see...?

ALL EXCEPT JIM. Hang ...

JIM (*harmonizing, while they hold the note. To his MOTHER*). You're looking good to meeeee.

ALL. Low.

QUICK! BLACKOUT  
BEFORE ANYONE THINKS TOO HARD.

## Some Notes

While the scenes in Rochelle's bedroom tell one continuous story, the scenes in Jim's bedroom do not. Each time he wakes up there, he's in a different universe. In other words, the second time we see Jim's mother, she has no interest in seducing him (though he initially fears that she does). The third time we see Jim's mother, she's less a concerned suburban mom than a powerful alien queen.

Ask around, and you'll eventually come up with someone who knows the song "Do Your Ears Hang Low?" It will usually be someone who went to camp as a child, and—depending on their background and gender—they may know the song in bawdier, more anatomically explicit versions.

Several people have told me that my memory of "Do Your Ears Hang Low?" is faulty. These purists insist that the full lyrics of the song are properly:

Do your ears hang low?  
Do they wobble to and fro?  
Can you tie them in a knot?  
Can you tie them in a bow?  
Can you throw them over your shoulder  
Like a Continental soldier?  
Do your ears hang low?

If that's the version you prefer, feel free to have the chorus sing it.



The chorus is a little tricky, since it's important that they not distract. Play around with it. After the first time through, they can sing the song very softly, they can mouth it, or they can sing it intermittently.

The harmony at the end is simple and is recorded below. Thanks to Margo Rodgers and Julia Millar for transcribing my less-than-perfect singing.

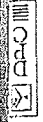
It's important that the end of the play be treated almost as a musical number. That is to say, it needs to build, to be big. Otherwise, it'll fizzle, and that would be a nightmare.

sg.

## Do Your Ears Hang Low

The musical score is written on two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the top staff includes the lyrics: "Do your Ears Hang Low". The bottom staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the top staff.

It's this a dream I see... You're looking good to me...



# WAKE-UP CALL



Comedy. By Stephen Gregg.  
Cast: 2m., 2w., 3 or more either gender. Sev-

enteen-year-old Jim is having a really bad day. After getting up the nerve to tell his girl- friend, Rochelle, that he loves her, she asks him to help her poison her father. Is she jok- ing? Just when it becomes clear that she's defi- nitely not joking, Jim's mother wakes him up. It was all a dream! But now Mom is acting a lit- tle strange: needy and affectionate. As Mom begins to seduce him, Jim wakes up again. He's back with Rochelle, who tells him he fainted, and Dad comes home just in time for Rochelle to offer him a big glass of suspi- cious-looking milk. Now Jim isn't sure what's real and what's a dream, and every time he thinks he's got it figured out, his life takes another surprising left turn. A funny, spooky play about the nature of reality, *Wake- Up Call* starts as a nightmare and goes to places you'll never expect! *Until set.*

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