

THE CAMELS

by

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Characters

The Stepfather

The Mother

The Son

The Pianist

The Doctor

The Agent

Setting

A Theatre. A high tension electric wire fence surrounds the audience. Somewhere on the stage, a table and plastic chairs, a Casio keyboard and a 24 inch Sony television, which doesn't work, of course.

STEPFATHER

A pretty little trinket...an uncle of mine used to say that. A pretty little trinket, when he didn't like something or it made him uncomfortable...

Pause.

MOTHER

Are you uncomfortable?

STEPFATHER

It's not that. It dawned on me after that long silence.

MOTHER

Was it long?

STEPFATHER

You didn't notice it?

MOTHER

Your uncle felt uncomfortable?

STEPFATHER

Uncomfortable?

MOTHER

Did something specific bother him?

STEPFATHER

I don't know, I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Trinkets come up in many ways. They creep in. Even an uncomfortable silence causes them.

Silence.

MOTHER

We're not being quiet.

STEPFATHER

We were a while ago.

MOTHER

No, we weren't. That man hasn't stop playing...And so?

STEPFATHER

So?

MOTHER

You didn't finish the idea. What bothered him?

STEPFATHER

No one knows. No one ever knew. It's likely...that he came in from the street, took off his shoes and started telling everybody off...probably everything bothered him...

MOTHER

It wasn't the bleach?

STEPFATHER

The bleach? What the hell are you talking about?

MOTHER

The floor at your house...often stank like bleach.

STEPFATHER

What about it?

MOTHER

Maybe that bothered him.

STEPFATHER

He didn't notice it.

MOTHER

I guess.

STEPFATHER

But maybe you weren't used to cleanliness. Maybe that much cleanliness irritated your nose. Like someone who isn't used to it...?

MOTHER

...That smell wasn't normal. Maybe that bothered him. Maybe that's why he used that phrase.

STEPFATHER

No, I don't think so. My Mother was obsessed with shiny floors. That's because my uncle would vomit on the floor, and the smell was unbearable.

Pause.

MOTHER

Did something else make your uncle uncomfortable?

STEPFATHER

I don't know. I already said so. Everything and nothing. I don't know...

DOCTOR

During World War II, you're not going to believe this...the Nazis used chlorinated gas in large quantities to kill enemy soldiers.

STEPFATHER

Ah...

Pause

MOTHER

That's strange...Maybe your Mother wasn't interested in cleanliness. Maybe she wanted to exterminate him...

STEPFATHER

Don't be stupid. She loved him.

DOCTOR

Chlorine is denser than air, and causes a toxic fume to form over the ground. Chlorinated gas is toxic to the mucous membranes because it dissolves them, and ends up in the blood. When chlorinated gas is inhaled, it fills the lungs with fluid, as if someone is drowning.

MOTHER

I see. He didn't die from cirrhosis, like they made you believe as a child. He died because they drowned him, because his lungs turned into water and evaporated. He must be floating in a cloud along with thousands of soldiers.

STEPFATHER

That's enough.

SON

There's something I don't understand...

STEPFATHER

How strange. Really? Seriously, I don't believe it...

MOTHER

All right? Can you...?

STEPFATHER

What? Go on.

SON

Why us?

STEPFATHER

Because we're a dysfunctional family...that's what they said. Trinket, I like that word.

MOTHER

Do you have to say it like that?

STEPFATHER

How else do you want me to say it?

MOTHER

I don't know. You could say it another way. In fact, you could lie... You could say it was by chance. No one has to know the truth... Maybe you should keep telling us about your family.

STEPFATHER

And who am I to go around lying to people?

MOTHER

Don't tell me you don't care. You're the first to...to...and in fact, you can tell miles away. You're not convincing.

SON

What did they say? Why exactly...?

MOTHER

They said it was the first time someone was going to do something like this. They said it was important...keep telling us about your family. It's a good topic...

STEPFATHER

...Because we don't get along. We have a communication problem; because she takes pills and I like soccer and South American variety shows, and because you, what's the word, you seem autistic, that's why...

MOTHER

Can't you be quiet? Why don't you stop playing? Can't you stop...?

STEPFATHER

No, he can't. They pay him for that.

MOTHER

Who wants to listen to that? It's torture. Listen, could you stop...?

STEPFATHER

What...?

MOTHER

Listen...

STEPFATHER

...don't do it..

MOTHER

What the hell...?

STEPFATHER

Don't you get it?

MOTHER

What's the matter?

STEPFATHER

Leave him alone. It's in our contract.

MOTHER

...To put up with a two-bit pianist?

PIANIST

I'm not a two-bit pianist. I'm from the conservatory.

Pause.

SON

So, why play that? That's not from a conservatory. And...how was it? Was there an open call or something like that?

STEPFATHER

Yea, there was. This open call came out in the newspapers that said: dysfunctional family needed for a show. Like that. What are you, a dummy...?

MOTHER

Don't speak to him like that.

STEPFATHER

There aren't open calls for these things. We were chosen.

MOTHER

We were chosen?

STEPFATHER

Yes, what?

MOTHER

Chosen...

STEPFATHER

Yes, what about it?

MOTHER

I don't buy it.

STEPFATHER

What? Why are you laughing?

MOTHER

What do you mean we were chosen? What kind of crap is that? They said it in the news, I think, the day they talked about the applications to who the hell knows what. They said it, and since you like that little word, that's why...

STEPFATHER

It's a manner of speaking. You don't have to...

MOTHER

What's wrong with you? Where are you from? Mars? I don't know who would think such a thing. You speak as if we'd won some contest to speak to the president. What's the matter with you? Where's your head?

STEPFATHER

Are you done?

MOTHER

I think you think with your rectum...

STEPFATHER

We were chosen...

MOTHER

We were chosen. Yes, we were chosen...

STEPFATHER

Somebody got in touch with me. Those things happen...

SON

And why were we chosen?

STEPFATHER

I already told you.

SON

That's too general.

STEPFATHER

For many reasons. Not one specifically...I remember years ago, I wrote down the words I liked in a notebook. The first one was trinket.

SON

Tell me more...

STEPFATHER

The second one was felt.

SON

No, not about that. Why were we...?

STEPFATHER

They gave me a list, but I don't remember all the points...

MOTHER

Can you be quiet...?

STEPFATHER

Because your Mother suffers from insomnia...

MOTHER

Not anymore.

STEPFATHER

Because your Mother doesn't suffer from insomnia anymore thanks to those pills her friend gives her...

MOTHER

I'm not playing.

STEPFATHER

Because you've been expelled from several schools...

MOTHER

And you?

STEPFATHER

Me, what?

MOTHER

Don't you have problems?

STEPFATHER

Of course I have problems. But I'm not going to go around talking about them. It's common sense...no one shaves his own ass.

MOTHER

He has a lot of problems. He falls asleep...Listen, listen to me, he falls asleep and in the middle of the night, he rocks himself hugging his pillow...

STEPFATHER

That was...

MOTHER

Wait...

STEPFATHER

That...

MOTHER

No, no. Hang on. Not only that, but you have to caress him until he falls asleep again. You check your blood sugar every half an hour with that machine you stole from your uncle.

STEPFATHER

I didn't steal it...that's because when she was pregnant...

MOTHER

Yes, yes, yes. You've told me.

STEPFATHER

Wait, wait, the doc must know. When my Mother was pregnant, they removed her Bartolini gland. That affected my nervous system.

DOCTOR

What happened?

MOTHER

You spend hours watching those shows and then when you sleep, you repeat what you saw and you scream...

STEPFATHER

I don't want...

MOTHER

And when your Mother gets sick? What do you do when she gets sick? What the hell do you do? Tell me...

STEPFATHER

That's enough. Could you lower the volume...?

PIANIST

The piece requires those decibels...I'm sorry...

MOTHER

Tell them. They're waiting...He falls asleep in the same bed because the woman is sick.

But don't think she's sick that way, like those of us who feel sick and go see a doctor a couple of times so that he can check us and prescribe something. She's sick from sadness...

DOCTOR

...an emotional disorder...

MOTHER

Thank you doctor, but please don't interrupt me anymore...

STEPFATHER

You're also depressed.

DOCTOR

Excuse me...

MOTHER

She's sick from sadness and she needs her son to fall asleep with her so it passes.

STEPFATHER

They also found it fascinating that you sprung from spontaneous combustion. All of a sudden, boom, there you were...alive.

MOTHER

Very funny...

STEPFATHER

Like that, like magic.

MOTHER

You don't have to...

STEPFATHER

...you surfaced from nothing...

SON

That's not true.

MOTHER

Don't fall for that, your Father...

STEPFATHER

I'm not his Father...

MOTHER

But you accepted him from the beginning. Don't start with that now.

STEPFATHER

I can't figure out who spawned you. Maybe it was one of those Cubans who lived on top of your Mother...

MOTHER

There's no point in going on.

STEPFATHER

You shouldn't trust those people. They shout a lot and smile at the slightest provocation.

SON

There is a point, why not...

MOTHER

Not now, not in front of those people.

SON

So when, then?

MOTHER

When we're alone.

SON

When we're alone, we don't even talk. We lock ourselves up and watch TV...I don't know who came up with this contract.

MOTHER

You were free to accept it.

Pause.

STEPFATHER

You were free to say no.

MOTHER

And so?

STEPFATHER

Did we have options?

MOTHER

Yes.

STEPFATHER

We had options? Tell me...

MOTHER

I already...

STEPFATHER

What?

MOTHER

There were more options than signing that contract. I feel like merchandise.

STEPFATHER

What options? Tell me. Go on, let's go...

MOTHER

You could've stayed at that job.

STEPFATHER

What job?

MOTHER

At the packaging plant.

STEPFATHER

They cut personnel. What do you want? The owner had a horrible illness.

MOTHER

What does that have to do with anything?

STEPFATHER

I don't know, I don't know. It was a degenerative disease. You should know.

DOCTOR

What were the symptoms?

MOTHER

I don't give a shit what illness it was. I don't give a shit, really. And what about the job at the parking lot...?

STEPFATHER

I didn't tell you what happened? I told you, we got...I told you. I'm sure. I told you. Someone brought in a car without brakes, it didn't have brakes, it didn't have brakes...

MOTHER

You wrecked it...But there were options, weren't there? I was working.

STEPFATHER

Do you know where she worked?

MOTHER

I was...

STEPFATHER

Do you know where she worked? At a whore house.

MOTHER

It wasn't a whore house. It was a clinic.

STEPFATHER

Don't give me that shit. It was a whore house.

MOTHER

But I only changed towels and cleaned. Nothing more.

STEPFATHER

And how was I supposed to know? That's how those stories about abuse begin; it's easy to get mixed up with a woman who...what did you say?

DOCTOR

About what?

STEPFATHER

About that...

DOCTOR

Ah, an emotional disorder.

STEPFATHER

It's easy to take advantage of that. You go around like a defenseless animal, wait, why that face? Anyone can screw you and...stop it...

MOTHER

And what about you?

STEPFATHER

...understand me. You can get lost when you listen to people. What kind of people went to that clinic? What's that called? Abusive people, people who walk through the door...thinking about...how to screw you. Have you noticed? And you're someone who's easy to screw, very easy. And in fact you signed the contract, too. So that's that.

MOTHER

You got me when I was high. What do you want?

STEPFATHER

You did it. We did it. We have a future here.

MOTHER

Our future, our future, a pretty little...

SON

...trinket.

Pause.

MOTHER

I don't know if I can do it.

STEPFATHER

You should've thought about that when you signed on the dotted line.

MOTHER

I'm telling you. I don't know if I can do it. We've only been here for days and I can't stand it.

STEPFATHER

Think about the days we're off. We're only on for four days. Four days. We have three days to do whatever we want. We should go out for a walk on Monday, we should...

MOTHER

What are we supposed to do while they're watching us?

AGENT

Really, you can do whatever you want...

Pause.

MOTHER

Ah...now he speaks. He also speaks. Not only does he sit there, with this serious face, he...

AGENT

What I'm saying...

STEPFATHER

Hang on a moment...

AGENT

No, please, I know...

STEPFATHER

Don't him angry...

AGENT

No, no, it's not about that. In fact, there's a way to go before I get angry. What I do want to say, very clearly, is that the contract stipulates that you can do whatever you want. I'm only here to make sure that it's honored.

MOTHER

The other day, we decided to go out...and you followed us.

AGENT

Yes, that's how it is. We can't afford to take any risks in public places.

MOTHER

What risk could there possibly be?

AGENT

That you escape, for instance....Or tried to.

MOTHER

So...?

AGENT

You can't stop doing the show every single weekend, as a family. During the week, you can travel, go out, and have some privacy, in the bathroom, in your bedrooms. But no one can attend an event, or a public or private function by themselves. That's how it's stipulated.

MOTHER

Suppose I want to go to a motel with him.

AGENT

No one is stopping you, just as no one is stopping you from being alone in the house that was rented for you.

MOTHER

Listen. Are you going to be in front of us when we...?

AGENT

No...no. Neither me nor your son. We can wait for you out in the hall. And if I could watch you, I'd feel, how can I say it, a bit disgusted.

STEPFATHER

Me, too.

MOTHER

You're not the only one, okay, idiot?

SON

I don't like it when he talks that way. You shouldn't have made him speak.

STEPFATHER

Everything is all right...

SON

No, nothing is all right. What kind of future do I have here?

STEPFATHER

You're better off now than you were before. If you get sick from that thing you have in your stomach, they'll get you VIP care at the best hospital.

SON

Is that true?

DOCTOR

Yes, it's true.

AGENT

You have medical insurance with extensive coverage.

DOCTOR

It's true.