

Show and Tell by Jenny Lyn Bader received its world premiere production at the "8 in 48 Idaho" Short Play Festival produced by the Treasure Valley Children's Theater on September 26, 2015. The play was directed by Jordan Peterson and starred Ethan Bass, Justin Ravago, Nichole Stull, and Elizabeth Timm. The Artistic Manager of the festival was Julia Bennett, the Submissions Coordinator was Valerie Baugh, and the Producer was Autumn Kersey.

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CHARACTERS

ERIC: *10 years old; always prepared.*

BEN: *10 years old; an old soul.*

CLARISSA: *10 years old; ERIC and BEN's classmate, generally meek.*

MS. OPEFUL: *Their teacher.*

NOTE: The character of MS. OPEFUL is played by an actor who is the same age as the actors who are playing ERIC, BEN, and CLARISSA.

TIME

The present day.

SETTING

One morning in MS. OPEFUL's class.

Note: The playwright has imagined and transcribed a tune or two for the musical bit in the script and would be happy to share these tunes with you if you get in touch, but it is also possible to invent other music for those moments. Although the characters are three kids and one adult, the playwright encourages the use of an all-kid cast. She would like to dedicate this play to her brother, John Bader, who understands the string of life.

MS. OPEFUL: Good morning class!

CLARISSA, BEN, and ERIC: Good morning, Ms. Opeful!

MS. OPEFUL: Today is a special day, because I won't teach! [Pause.] You will!

[CLARISSA, BEN, and ERIC look confused.]

MS. OPEFUL: Since, as I told you last week, today is . . . Show and Tell!

ERIC: [Smug, feeling in his pocket.] Oh yes.

CLARISSA and BEN: [Unprepared, horrified.] Oh no!

[ERIC puts his hand up in the air.]

MS. OPEFUL: Who would like to start? [She looks at ERIC's raised hand.] Anyone else? [No one else. ERIC waves his hand more frantically.] Is Eric the only one who remembered Show and Tell?

[As ERIC continues waving his hand all over the place.]

BEN: [To self/the audience.] Okay, okay, okay. This is not my fault. I just forgot. She told us *last week*. That is a long time ago!

CLARISSA: Ohh, ohh, ohh! This is all my fault! I am in so much trouble! I could get kicked out of school. End up in a bad school. Have a bad life.

ERIC: Why is she so mean to me? Why won't she call on me? I've had this in my pocket all week. All I want to do is show! And tell! Pick me. Please?

BEN: Ms. Opeful? [Helpfully points to ERIC.] I think he wants to go first.

MS. OPEFUL: Mmm. How about someone else today? What about—*You*? Ben, come on up!

[BEN stands in front of the class and stares out, terrified and lost.]

BEN: All right. I brought something in for Show and Tell today. It's. A . . . a . . . a . . . thing.

MS. OPEFUL: A thing?

BEN: [Trying to figure it out.] A—a—not a thing. But a thing. A thin thing. A string thing. A string!

MS. OPEFUL: Where?

BEN: This is a string you can't always see. It's the string of life.

ERIC: Oh, brother.

BEN: The life string that follows us wherever we go.

MS. OPEFUL: What are you talking about, Benjamin?

BEN: Let's say I'm walking with Clarissa.

[He pulls CLARISSA up to the front of the room. They speak in loud stage whispers.]

CLARISSA: What are you doing?

BEN: I messed up! Just go with it!

CLARISSA: But . . .

BEN: Please!

MS. OPEFUL: [Observing as they walk.] Mmmm . . .

BEN: If I then run around her in circles . . . [He starts running around CLARISSA.]

. . . I get tired, because I'm being pulled by the string of life!

ERIC: No, you're tired because you're running around in circles!

[BEN completes a third circle around CLARISSA, and then appears to be yanked backwards by an invisible string that was winding around as he circled her.]

BEN: We don't see the string, but—aaaah—it's pulling me back! [He stops.] Best thing to do? Is go back the same way.

[He runs three times around CLARISSA in the opposite direction.]

Ahh! Much better.

[The others watch, skeptically. He tries another example.] Or let's say I walk this way between the two of them.

[He walks between CLARISSA and ERIC.] It's easier to come back the same way. [He walks back on the same line.] 'Cause I don't want to get tangled . . . with him.

[MS. OPEFUL, puzzled, looks for evidence of the string.]

Like I would be if I walked like this. [Now he walks between CLARISSA and ERIC, but instead of coming back the same way, goes back the other way and appears to be pushed backwards into ERIC, held back by the now taut "string."]

ERIC: Hey, get off me!

BEN: It's not my fault. It's the string.

ERIC: [Sarcastic.] The string of life.

BEN: We all bump into it.

[MS. OPEFUL suddenly emits an exasperated high-pitched sound.]

MS. OPEFUL: Eeeep!!!! [BEN is alarmed. But she turns to ERIC.] Eric Hammermint!

ERIC: Yes, Ms. Opeful!

MS. OPEFUL: You have always been the best student in this class!

ERIC: Thank you. I think so, too.

[CLARISSA rolls her eyes at this.]

MS. OPEFUL: And you always do good!

ERIC: Yes.

MS. OPEFUL: What are you doing now?

ERIC: I'm doing good. And I'm doing it well.

MS. OPEFUL: No. You are speaking during another student's Show and Tell time.

ERIC: Gosh, I'm . . .

MS. OPEFUL: That's not okay.

ERIC: Sorry Ms. Opeful, but . . .

[MS. OPEFUL now turns to BEN, sharply.]

MS. OPEFUL: Now Ben, I don't see this life string!

BEN: No, you don't.

MS. OPEFUL: And Eric doesn't see it.

ERIC: No, I definitely . . .

[MS. OPEFUL snaps at ERIC.]

MS. OPEFUL: I told you to be quiet!

ERIC: Yes ma'am.

MS. OPEFUL: Clarissa doesn't see it either.

[A worried CLARISSA looks at Ms. Opeful.]

BEN: No, but . . .

MS. OPEFUL: But! But. But . . . [A beat. Then she seems suddenly intrigued.] It seems it's there.

BEN: Oh, it is.

MS. OPEFUL: Tell us more about this . . . "life string." Is it there all the time?

BEN: It's . . . It's there more, the more we think about it. If you forget about it, you might step over it and not notice. [He walks,

crosses back over to where he just walked, and easily passes by the "string."] But if it's on your mind? It's very much there. [He walks, crosses back over to where the string would be, and trips. MS. OPEFUL looks at him. She is more convinced now.]

MS. OPEFUL: [With concern.] My goodness! Are you okay? [BEN nods. ERIC raises his hand.] Yes, Eric?

ERIC: I have a question. It's more there, it's less there. But does it ever *show up*? Can you show us the string? It's *Show* and Tell, not *Tell* and Tell. I'd like to see it.

MS. OPEFUL: Good question. Ben?

BEN: Like I said, you can't always, um . . . see it . . . [CLARISSA nudges him.] But once in a while, a piece of it . . . shows up. [He sees what CLARISSA sees. The laces of his sneakers, one white and one orange. He undoes the orange lace.] Sometimes, like right now, part of it gets caught in an actual piece of string. So you can see. Like this.

ERIC: That's your shoelace!

BEN: No, this is my shoelace, when it's been hit by the string that's all around us! The life string. And look what's happened. It's turned orange!

MS. OPEFUL: Wasn't it orange before?

BEN: Are you . . . sure of that? Think back. Did I really have one white and one orange shoelace?

[ERIC, bursting to talk, instead hits himself on the forehead to imply BEN is being ridiculous.]

CLARISSA: Oh, wow! That's much more than a shoelace . . . [MS. OPEFUL looks at her quizzically.] I can see it now. May I? [She takes the shoelace and rapidly starts making cat's cradle-like patterns and designs with it. BEN holds part of it. Lights play on it.]

MS. OPEFUL: My, it's wonderful. Ben, we will all be much more careful from now on when we walk.

ERIC: Yeah, especially you without your shoelace!

MS. OPEFUL: Eric, it's your turn.

ERIC: Thank you, Ms. Opeful. During our school vacation, I visited Peru. I saw the Andes Mountains. And I brought back something to share with you today. [He reaches into his pocket, quite excited and

nervous.] This here is a rare stone, a piece of sphalerite I found in Pachapaqui.

[He is so nervous, he stares out at the class, stricken by stage fright, as he takes out a small gray object and places it in the palm of his hand.]

MS. OPEFUL: “Sphalerite”?

ERIC: That’s an ancient Greek word for “tricky rock.” See, it’s a rock that can trick you. It can look so much like other normal rocks you might find. But it isn’t. It’s sphalerite. It’s special. A very unusual precious mineral. *[BEN scribbles a note to CLARISSA and passes it to her. She ignores it, pushing it back. As ERIC continues to talk inaudibly, BEN whispers to her.]*

BEN: Doesn’t look like a rare stone. Looks like an old piece of gum.

CLARISSA: *[Quickly whispering back.]* Sssh!

BEN: Argh! I wish I’d thought of that. I had a piece of gum! *[Taking out an old piece of gum from his pocket.]* That would’ve been a lot easier. Do you know what I could’ve done . . . ?

CLARISSA: You’re going to get into so much trouble if you keep talking!

MS. OPEFUL: Clarissa! Where are your manners! Are you speaking during Eric’s turn? Has the whole world gone mad? You are usually such a quiet and kind child. Would you like to be sent to—

BEN: It was my fault Ms. Opeful. I talked to her. She was shushing me.

[Everyone is amazed by BEN’s turning himself in.]

MS. OPEFUL: I appreciate your honesty, Benjamin. May I ask what was so important that you felt the need to speak during Eric’s time?

BEN: I was just saying how Eric’s precious mineral looked more to me like an old rolled-up piece of gum.

ERIC: It is a rare mineral! And you are a dunderhead!

MS. OPEFUL: Eric! Sit down! Your Show and Tell time is over.

ERIC: Yes, Ms. Opeful.

MS. OPEFUL: That was interesting. Perhaps we can all learn from it. We can learn—that a special thing might look very ordinary.

Like an old rolled-up piece of gum. *[ERIC looks miserable.]* Clarissa. Your turn.

CLARISSA: *[Realizing she’s in trouble.]* For Show and Tell, I, um . . . *[She grabs a pencil and erases BEN’s note to her and stands up.]* . . . brought this . . . *[She picks up the piece of paper.]* It is . . . not just a piece of paper.

MS. OPEFUL: *[Cheerfully.]* It looks like a piece of paper.

CLARISSA: Oh yes! But we just saw a precious stone looked like an old piece of gum.

ERIC: *[Annoyed, raising his hand as he asks.]* Where’d you get it?

CLARISSA: My family also was maybe going to visit Peru this break, or France, or Zambia, but we didn’t. We don’t really go anywhere. But sometimes we go to a . . . magic shop. This is a magic piece of paper.

MS. OPEFUL: What?

CLARISSA: If you just give it a chance—it does things. It sings and dances.

MS. OPEFUL: It does?

[CLARISSA makes the paper undulate to a steady rhythm. As she does, she hums a simple tune to that rhythm, as if music is coming from the paper. ERIC rolls his eyes. As she pauses between phrases, BEN joins in on a low note, counterpointing her tune, harmonizing, helping give an impression of music from an unknown source. She holds the paper on its side, making it move and humming with BEN when she is not speaking.]

CLARISSA: And floats along . . . it makes waves . . . and then suddenly it takes off . . . *[She lifts the paper upwards: it faces the audience. Then she flicks her wrist and it seems to be waving in the air, side to side like a flag. The sustained notes she was humming are heard simply played on a musical instrument as BEN continues humming and she continues speaking.]* It changes direction . . . changes shape . . . *[She makes the paper dance up and down, gracefully.]* . . . takes on colors . . . Look at it. Look again. Is it only white? Wasn’t it plain a moment ago? *[Light shift: paper looks red, then blue, then purple, as music builds.]* But sing to it, listen to it sing to you, and it can do magic. *[Now CLARISSA lets go of the paper but remarkably it seems to stay*

aloft, as if connected to her hand by a thread or wire, a paper flag above her hands waving on its own, a paper dancer below her hands soloing. A swirl of lights and music, as the puppet-like paper seems to go off on its own ballet.

ERIC: [*In awe.*] It turned purple! Is that paper alkaline based?

CLARISSA: You know, it could be.

MS. OPEFUL: Fascinating! Now, if I hold it, will it do the same dance and song?

CLARISSA: Um, I think—it would, do a different one.

MS. OPEFUL: May I? [*CLARISSA hands over the piece of paper, scared.*

MS. OPEFUL *finger*s it like a Ouija board.] Hmm . . . Nothing.

CLARISSA: [*Panicked.*] Well, sometimes it . . .

MS. OPEFUL: [*Feeling movement.*] Wait. [*A false alarm.*] No . . . no. [*Pause.*] Mmm. [*Suddenly, a delighted MS. OPEFUL starts singing a rock version of the tune CLARISSA sang, as she makes the paper dance on her desk as if its corners were feet and it were doing an extremely animated jig.*] Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na! Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na!

[*Colored lights whirl, shadows are projected on the piece of paper.*] Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na! Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na!

BEN: Ms. Opeful?

MS. OPEFUL: Yeaahh! [*They all start singing and dancing together, joyous. Even ERIC joins in. Then MS. OPEFUL, now out of breath, hands CLARISSA her paper back.*] That was a great class, kids. We should go to lunch.

BEN: [*As if disentangling himself from her.*] Okay, be careful of the string of life on your way out!

MS. OPEFUL: [*Nearly trips from the suggestion as she starts walking.*] Oooh-hoh-hoh! Thank you. Yes. You know what? We had such a good Show and Tell, let's do one again tomorrow!

[*She exits.*]

CLARISSA: [*Horrified.*] Again tomorrow?

ERIC: Clarissa, that was really interesting. I'd like to talk to you more about the chemical content of that paper. Ben, I can't believe

you got her to think there was an invisible string that comes from us when we walk. That's seriously dumb.

BEN: Really? But it's right over here. You should be careful! [*He walks along and indicates along the floor where the "string of life" would be, the spot where he just walked.*]

ERIC: Whatever! [*He picks up his schoolbag and tries to walk over the imaginary line but he is too suggestible and trips despite himself.*] Aaaaah! What was that?

CLARISSA: Who knows? Can you ever be sure?

[*ERIC picks up his bag to see it's properly closed, checks the contents.*]

ERIC: Oh my goodness!

CLARISSA: Are you okay? What's wrong?

[*ERIC takes out a stone from the bag.*]

ERIC: This is it! *This* is the incredibly rare piece of sphalerite from the mountains of Peru! It's been in my bag this whole time.

BEN: Then what was the thing in your pocket?

[*ERIC takes out the thing from his pocket and looks at it.*]

ERIC: An old piece of gum?

[*He looks mortified. Then he starts to laugh. Then they all start laughing, then dancing together, with the paper, the gum, the sphalerite, and suggestions through movement of invisible strings between them. They add pieces of colored paper that float into the mix . . . It seems they are all friends now. Music. Lights fade.*]

END OF PLAY