

SPIRIT CALL

A 10-Minute Play
by Quinn Theobald

It's a grubby apartment. SAM is sitting on a stool at a kitchen counter while NASHA is on the couch. SAM is cleaning his glasses with a rag while NASHA picks at her nails. She glances up at him for a moment, looks down again. Sound of a door slamming and JIM enters. He is wearing a large brown coat.

JIM

Hi, is this... are you the spiritcallers?

They look at him.

NASHA

Hundred bucks a call.

JIM

Of course, of course.

(He digs into his coat pocket. As he does, he turns around, looking at the room.)

JIM

Nice place.

SAM

(SAM snorts.)

Thanks.

(JIM digs out a wad of bills and puts it on the coffee table. NASHA starts counting it.)

NASHA

So who's it going to be?

JIM

Ah I... you know, it's a weird thing. When she was alive it wasn't something I ever thought about or really wanted. I know it's such a TV trope but god I never wanted her meeting my mother. It's only now that she's gone I feel like I missed it, you know?

NASHA

So it'll be your girlfriend then.

JIM

Ah, wife, actually.

NASHA

Your mom never met your wife?

JIM

...no. She scared people off. Girls. Somehow always mentioned statistics on divorce rates. She was a couples counselor. So... yeah. But I'm doing it now.

SAM

So where's the mother?

JIM

Ah...

(JIM digs out another wad of bills and slaps it down on the kitchen counter in front of SAM. They look at each other for a moment.)

SAM

You have to be kidding me. I don't do mothers.

NASHA

Then you take the wife.

SAM

I don't do wives either.

JIM

Please. It's... I need this. For my peace of mind. She always wanted to meet my mother. And now... it's like I failed in some way.

SAM

You did.

NASHA

Sam. We'll do it. *(to SAM)* You want mom or wife?

SAM

(SAM glowers at her.)
I'll take the mother.

NASHA

(to JIM) You'll have half an hour.

(SAM stands up and holds out his hands.)

SAM

Give me.

JIM

Give you... what? I'm sorry, I've never done this before.

SAM

(irritably) Your head. Give me your head.

(JIM stares at him for a moment over the counter and then awkwardly leans his head forward until it rests in between SAM's hands.)

JIM

Like this? Is this good?

SAM

Shut up.

JIM

(after a moment of silence) Is it still going? I don't feel anything. Am I supposed to feel....?

(JIM slumps over the kitchen counter. SAM goes around the counter leisurely and rifles through JIM's coat pocket, comes up with another wad of bills and proceeds to remove some of them before replacing the rest. While he does this, NASHA speaks.)

NASHA

Can you not treat our customers like that? If they ask for a mom you say 'yes, of course', you summon their fucking mother and then you kiss their ass if they ask.

SAM

It's demeaning.

NASHA

I do fathers every fucking day of the week. It's called covering rent. You want to lose this place?

SAM

This disgusting shithole? I don't care if we lose this place.

NASHA

And where will you go, Sam? Huh? You gonna go from door to door calling up dead grandmothers in exchange for a room?

SAM

I don't do grandmothers either.

NASHA

(with a snort) Since when? Do you do *anything* other than overweight thirty-five-year-old males?

SAM

This is bullshit. This *(points to JIM)* is bullshit, Nasha. We should be paid more than 100 bucks for letting people give their last regards.

NASHA

You set up your own place and charge whatever the fuck you want. Meanwhile me and every other caller on every street from here to Philly can-

SAM

Alright, alright, I get it. I'm about to go. Hide the cash.

*(NASHA takes the cash from him and puts it in a cupboard.
SAM pulls out a chair and sits in it.)*

SAM

(wryly) No videos this time.

NASHA

No promises.

(SAM slumps forward just as JIM comes to.)

JIM

Uh. Did I...? Did I pass out?

NASHA

Part of the process.

JIM

(JIM rubs his hands and looks around.)
So he's gonna...?

NASHA

Uh huh.

(JIM sits. After a moment SAM stands up abruptly. He looks around. Down at his hands. After his transformation, there is a marked change in SAM's mannerisms.)

SAM

Huh.

JIM

(standing) Ma?

SAM

Jim? Oh of course.

JIM

Hi ma. Hi. Wow. This is weird. How have you been?

SAM

Since my death? I've been just fine.

JIM

I... uh... I want you to meet someone, ma. I want you to meet Dina.

SAM

Oh Dina. Great. Wait until I'm dead to introduce me to your fiancée.

JIM

Wife, actually. We got married. Ex-wife, actually. And then she died.

(SAM pauses then starts to laugh hysterically.)

SAM

So now that we're both dead it's time for a family dinner?
(laughs) Calling up your ma to get the birds and the bees talk?
(laughs; coming around as she leans on the kitchen counter) This counter is filthy.

JIM

(laughs uncomfortably) Yeah, well. Better late than never?

(While speaking, SAM comes up to JIM and puts her finger under his chin, moves his head. JIM is very uncomfortable with this.)

SAM

Look at you. You look older. How long have I been dead?

JIM

Six years.

SAM

Six years? It took you this long to call me up?

JIM

I... I've been busy. I got married.

SAM

Yes, no excuse like girls to ignore your old ma. (*chuckles to herself*) You remember the first time you had a crush? You were fourteen and you came running to me to tell me all about it. Sophia Tessing. She was a cute girl. (*seeing NASHA*) Hullo.

NASHA

Hi. I'll be Dina.

SAM

Ah. Nice to meet you, soon-to-be Dina. I'm Therese. Although I suppose I'll have to reintroduce myself when Dina's dragged here. (*closes one eye and uses her fingers to frame NASHA*) I'll try to substitute in the only picture of her I saw on Jimmy's facebook. Hmm. (*looks down at her hands*) He's got nice hands. I'm glad you found me someone limber. Don't get much post-mortem exercise.

JIM

So you'll meet her, ma?

SAM

What am I supposed to say, no? I've got nothing else to do besides growing tulips out of my rotting skull, wherever it is. Hey. Where was I buried? Just out of curiosity.

JIM

Next to dad.

SAM

Ah, that old fucker. Have you called him up?

JIM

No.

SAM

So I'm first! Good.

JIM

So... uh... ma. Just, when you meet her please be...

SAM

Yeah?

JIM

Just try not to make a bad impression.

SAM

What does it matter? She's dead.

JIM

But she was my wife. I want her to... to think...

SAM

Alright, alright. I'll be cordial. The perfect mom. I already look the part.

JIM

Okay. Alright. *(breathes deeply; to NASHA)* Let's do this.

NASHA

Terrific. Let's get on with it.

JIM

I'm ready-

(NASHA stands up and puts her hand against JIM's head. His eyes roll back and he falls onto the couch.)

NASHA

He'll be fine.

SAM

I'm sure. I've read about it in the paper. Spiritcalling. Almost went to see my old man, but remembered that I hated him just in time.

NASHA

(with a chuckle) I should get ready.

SAM

(spreading her arms) Please. *(pause)* So what do you think? Should I play ball or be a real devil?

NASHA

That depends on how friendly you're feeling. And how much you like your son.

SAM

My mother used to tell me stories when I was little about tiny ghosts that came back to haunt their descendants. Seemed to spend a lot of time stealing slippers. I wonder what Jimmy would think if he woke up without shoes. *(to NASHA)* Hey, has he called up Dina before?

NASHA

Not with me.

SAM

Okay. Not that it would be my business if he did.

(NASHA sits on the couch and closes her eyes. Then opens them.)

NASHA

Can I...?

SAM

Yes?

NASHA

Sorry, I'm not supposed to do this, but can I ask you a question?

SAM

Shoot, sugar.

NASHA

I... well Jim mentioned that you were a couples' counselor and I was just wondering. Uh. When are you sure that it's time to call it... um. How do you know when you're done?

SAM

Mmm, I see. The steam is running out.

NASHA

I guess? I'm sorry. This is way unprofessional. Let me get Dina.

SAM

No, please. I'll take any delay. Talk to me. No safer place than in the presence of my unconscious son.

NASHA

I shouldn't. I'm sorry. I don't know-

(SAM goes and gets the stool from behind the kitchen counter. She sits and raises her eyebrows.)

NASHA

I'll get Dina.

(SAM says nothing, but her eyebrow is still raised.)

NASHA

I've just had a long month.

SAM

Sure. We all have those. So who is he?

(NASHA gestures at SAM. She looks down at herself. Hmmphs.)

SAM

You have a mirror?

NASHA

By the door.

SAM

(SAM goes to the door, checks herself out over the audience.)

Huh. He's cute. *(turning back)* So what's been happening?

NASHA

Nothing's been happening. But we're just... not the same anymore. Haven't been. I mean, *(gestures around)* you think I wanted to end up in a dingy one-bedroom? No. I don't. But he doesn't seem to get that that's it. It's what... we have.

SAM

Yeah. Kind of strange. In my day it was easily ten grand a trip to a caller. Or was it property inflation? I knew that bubble was going to burst one day.

NASHA

Well there's a lot of callers now. It's easy money. Low bar of entry if you can do it. For a short time they passed a law against it. Then the money was pretty good. But it's legal again.

SAM

Damn. Those fucking politicians.

NASHA

Yeah.

SAM

(SAM returns to the stool.)

So how exactly do you feel? Like he isn't present with you?

NASHA

Kind of. Like he feels above it.

SAM

Uh huh. So are you trying to decide *if* you're done or *when* you're done?

NASHA

(hesitating) I'm not sure.

SAM

Well. That would be an *if*. If it was a *when*, you'd be sure. (she gives NASHA a wink) I wish I could give you all the answers, but one lifetime is not enough to figure out the truth behind men. In my case, we broke up, got back together again, and broke up once more in the end. Probably would have remarried a third time if he didn't get hit by a truck at the corner of eighth and third.

NASHA

Oh. I'm sorry.

SAM

It was the anniversary of our first divorce. But I guess at some point you rack up enough anniversaries that it'd be more of a coincidence if you *didn't* die on the anniversary of something.

NASHA

So you ended it too early the first time.

SAM

Oh, definitely not.

NASHA

...

SAM

(laughing) If I knew how to figure out relationships I wouldn't have spent my whole life thinking about them.

Sorry I can't be more help. There's some things you just have to figure out on your own. Or, rather, fuck up on your own. And then fuck it up again and again until you get tired and call it quits. You know one thing really nice about death?

NASHA

What?

SAM

It's too late to fix things. At that point it's too late; what's done is done. You've shot your shot. In a way it's a relief. Although, I suppose that really isn't true any more. *(she looks at JIM)* What ever happened to resting in peace?

NASHA

You don't have to stay.

SAM

No, I do. I suppose I ought to try one last time. If I can't fix anything, at least I can... I don't know. Marginally decrease my fuck-ups.

NASHA

So no devil?

SAM

(with a sigh) I suppose my son will be keeping his shoes.

NASHA

Thank you.

SAM

Don't thank me. I didn't tell you jack shit. But you seem like a sharp young woman. I'm sure you'll figure it out.

NASHA

Yeah, well. I hope. Should I...?

SAM

(with an exaggerated sigh) I suppose I ought to meet my ex-daughter-in-law at least once in my lifetime-plus-some.

(NASHA cracks a smile. She closes her eyes.)

SAM

Have you told him?

NASHA

(opening her eyes) Huh?

SAM

Have you told him what you feel? Wonder what he feels about it.
Your marriage.

NASHA

I don't know what he feels.

SAM

I almost wish I could meet him. 'Suppose being him will have to
suffice. Did I mention he has nice hands?

NASHA

(with a smirk) Yes, you've mentioned.

SAM

Good luck with your life, soon-to-be-Dina.

NASHA

Good luck with Dina.

(NASHA goes to lean back again, but doesn't quite make it.)

NASHA

I've never met his mother.

SAM

By his choice or yours?

NASHA

I don't know.

SAM

I'd bet neither does he.

*(She grins at NASHA. NASHA smiles back and finally closes
her eyes. After a moment, JIM jolts awake.)*

JIM

-ready. *(he frowns)* Did she go already?

SAM

She'll be back in a moment. Or rather, Dina will.

JIM

Okay. *(he is nervous; starts twiddling his thumbs or scratching his ear or biting his lip)*

SAM

(watching him) Dina. Is that short for anything?

JIM

No. No it's just Dina, ma.

SAM

(sardonic) Sounds like a pet grooming product.

(JIM looks at her, brows furrowed. SAM sighs inwardly and softens.)

SAM

I'll be nice. I promise.

JIM

Okay. *(he looks over at NASHA's slumped form)*

SAM

Ex-wife?

JIM

(looks at her) Yeah. It's, well-. It's a long story.

A beat.

JIM (cont.)

I thought I could do it, you know. Figure out the secret.

SAM

Honey, no one knows that secret.

(Another beat, JIM looks nervously back at NASHA. After a moment, SAM gets up and walks to the couch. JIM looks at her, confused/wary. She sits down next to him and hugs him. At first, he resists. Then he gives in and let's her hug him.)

SAM

It'll be okay.

JIM

This is weird, ma.

SAM

When I said she sounded like a pet grooming product, I meant the fancy kind.

JIM

... okay ma. *(pause)* Thank you for this. For meeting her, I mean. Not the hug. The hug is still weird.

SAM

Shh. It'll be okay.

JIM tentatively hugs her back.

Lights down. END OF PLAY.