

Right Dad
A 10-minute play
by Courtney Kiolbassa Talty

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Characters

MICHAEL “DAD” DOMBROWSKI	The father
PETER DOMBROWSKI	The eldest son
JOHN MICHAEL “JM” DOMBROWSKI	The middle son
AUGUSTINE “GUS” DOMBROWSKI	The younger son
OLIVER	The boyfriend of the youngest daughter, Zelie (“ZELL-ee”)

Place

A back porch in Boerne (“BURN-ee”), Texas

Time

Fall 2023

The Dombrowski brothers are watching football with their dad. Their sister's boyfriend is also there.

It's halftime. And, for the brothers, it's go-time.

GUS

Shitty quarter, huh?

PETER

Don't.

GUS

Poopy quarter, huh? Is that better?

JM

Please, Gus, can you just ...

GUS

Whatever.

PETER

(looking to Oliver)

Alright. You've gotta know why we invited you, yeah?

OLIVER

Huh?

PETER

Why are you — Why do you *think* you're here.

OLIVER

To ... watch the game?

GUS

Fuuuuuck hahaha

JM

Oliver. We really like you, man. Like, so much.

OLIVER

Thank you. (?)

MR. DOMBROWSKI

I always wondered who my Zelig girl would end up marrying.

OLIVER

Oh. I haven't —

PETER

You haven't proposed. But you have the ring. So we need to get to know you better. Real talk.

Oliver looks at them. How did they figure it out?

JM

Sorry. Dad knows everyone in Boerne.

GUS

Our very own Polish Catholic mob boss.

PETER

Remember when *he* found out I got kicked outta cross country before *I* did?

GUS

How did you not know you were getting kicked out? You pinched Coach Winsome's wife's —

MR. DOMBROWSKI

Augustine! Peter and John Michael, too. We have a guest.

PETER

Right. Thanks dad.
So. Oliver.

JM

Sorry.

GUS (standing up)

Yeah. I need a beer.

OLIVER

Mhmm?

PETER

You're an engineering major?

OLIVER

Uh. Industrial distribution. But. Yeah.

PETER

Is that not engineering, or...?

OLIVER

It, like, combines business with engineering?

JM

That's so cool, man.

Peter looks to his dad, then back at Oliver.

PETER

So were you ... not smart enough for engineering? Or not charming enough for business?

OLIVER

I'm sorry?

GUS

What the fuck, Peter?

PETER

I'm just saying. Does this guy have a viable career path? That's important in a man. Right, dad?

Mr. Dombrowski nods, takes a deep breath, but is interrupted by —

GUS

This is coming from a ... a history major, was it?

PETER

This is coming from a man with a *steady* job. Who takes care of his *wife*.

JM

Guys.

GUS

Freelance design can be steady. Is steady. And I'm not taking care of anyone but myself.

PETER

(to Oliver)

Look, I got my shit together *before* I got engaged. That's important.

GUS

Ohhhh, yeah, I remember. It's because Genevieve said she wasn't gonna marry a part-time European history tutor living in his parents' house.

PETER

Don't you need to check Tinder or something?

GUS

Don't you need to check Grindr or something?

JM

Y'all! Chill. Just — I want to hear more about industrial distribution. What kind of, like, jobs do people — do industrial distribution majors — what kind of jobs are out there?

OLIVER

Uh. Thanks, JM. Yeah. I did an internship over the summer in electrical sales. It was, yeah, it was great. Selling lighting, light fixtures, getting them installed, that kind of thing.

JM

Oh, wait! I have a friend who does that! But with sinks, and water pipes, and stuff.

PETER

Who?

JM

You wouldn't know him, he's from my neighborhood.

Peter gestures at him, like, "Try me."

JM (CON'T.)

Ross Averett? He's like, 55. Great guy, never married.

PETER

(Has not heard of him)

I've heard of him. Ross Avert. Glad you mentioned him. Good thinking. You know him, Oliver?

OLIVER

I don't ... — I'm not from here.

JM

I can get you connected. It'll be great. He's great.

OLIVER

That's great.

MR. DOMBROWSKI

Gus, do you have anything to add?

Gus has been staring at his phone.

GUS

Nope.

PETER

‘Course not. Alright. Tell me about your hobbies. What do you do for fun, to burn off steam?

OLIVER

That’s a — a good question. I’ve told y’all about my soccer league, yeah?

PETER

Oh yeah! Goalie!

JM

Striker, I thought?

OLIVER

Midfield, actually. But — I — I switch around. Sometimes.

PETER

Are you good?

OLIVER

Not like I was in high school, but ...

JM

Ah, cut yourself some slack. No one’s ever as good as they were in high school. I can feel my hand actively disintegrating when I play catch with my son.

PETER

I ran my fastest mile in 11th grade. All downhill from there. But. I am trying to beat Dad’s 5K record this year.

MR. DOMBROWSKI

How about you, Oliver, you ever run?

Oliver nods, inhales, then is cut off by —

PETER

Running is a great way to stay in shape. Keep up with your future children, you know.

JM

I do CrossFit. That’s good too.

PETER

Nothing more primal than running.

JM

Sure. Anyway. One thing I wanna ask about is ... what you do love about your girlfriend — well, my sister. What do you see as her best — what are her best qualities?

OLIVER

Oh, man. Uh. So much. I love so much about her. So many things about her —

GUS

Watch it.

JM

That's obviously not what he —

GUS

That's my sister he's talking about.

PETER

You're disgusting sometimes, you know that.

GUS

I just wanna make sure he's after more than. You know.

JM

Augustine. They've been dating for two years. I think he's committed.

GUS

So why did it take him so long to pop the question?

PETER

Well. Genevieve and I dated for four years.

GUS

Oh, so is that why you're getting that seven-year-itch already?

PETER

Gus. Please.

DAD

What's that?

PETER

Ignore him. He's just being a pest.

GUS

Yeah, ignore me, dad. I'm just a little pest. A little bedbug. Itchy itchy bedbug.

PETER

I told you to stay out of it.

JM

Hey. Let's just... I know I tell you this a lot, Peter. But I admire your marriage very much. You're a great example to Julia and me.

PETER
(Snapping)

Well, you need one.

JM

...

PETER

Sorry.

OLIVER
(Mustering some courage)

I — um. If I can just. I think Zelig is. She's loyal and passionate. So smart. And she's beautiful, of course. And her faith is — wow. It's an inspiration to me. And. You've raised such an incredible daughter, Mr. Dombrowski. I'm just so grateful. To you. And Mrs. Dombrowski. All of you, really.

JM

Yeah, Zelig is — all of that. It's a lot of what I saw in Julia, when we were dating. Just these incredible qualities.

PETER

And I think it highlights something really important, that our society doesn't really value anymore, you know? How, every person is the result of their family. And, really, the father leads the way there, in the family unit. That's what our dad did, why Zelig is who she is.

OLIVER

... Uh-huh.

PETER

The family unit— it's dissolving, you know? It's the foundation of culture, and it's being torn apart.

OLIVER

Hm.

JM

Peter's a little — well, in a sense he's right. But I think it's more like, we can't forget that families are really important.

PETER

Don't downplay it. It's being destroyed. We talk about this all the time.

GUS

All we ever talk about.

PETER

You have something to say?

GUS

That's what you wanna talk about, isn't it? Theoretical families, being theoretically destroyed.

PETER

The family. As an institution. Marriage, the institution of marriage. The *institution* is crumbling. And *that* is what tears apart *actual* families.

JM

What y'all mean is, I think, being a strong husband and father really matters, these days. And that's the kind of person we know you'll be, for Zelig and, God willing, for your family one day.

GUS

This isn't an affirmation circle, JM. Don't be weak. We're supposed to be —

JM

We're supposed to be making sure our sister has an excellent husband, who is gonna protect her and provide for her, and protect her children and provide for them. Right, dad?

MR. DOMBROWSKI

Well, that's what spouses do for each other, they sacrifice for —

PETER

Sacrifice. Yes. That's what you have to do for Zelig. When you're married. Sacrifice.

OLIVER

I mean. She's really self-sufficient, though, too. She doesn't, like, *need* me to —

GUS

Sure, sure, all women are strong independent warrior hero geniuses. No one's saying otherwise.

JM

I mean, I think Julia is incredible. And also. I know my role as a man.

OLIVER

I want to love her and serve her, of course. But — I'm not, like ... I don't expect her —

PETER

The husband is the head of his family. Yes or no?

OLIVER

I know that's in the Bible, but —

JM

Hey, come on, Peter, it's certainly more nuanced than —

GUS

I have a question, and that is: Oliver, are you gonna be as much of a pussy as JM here?

JM

Are you serious? What is
that supposed to mean?

PETER

Holy shit.

DAD

Augustine.

GUS

I have known Julia for a long time, JM. Longer than you.

JM

I am — married! To her! She's my WIFE. We have two CHILDREN.

GUS

Happy wife, happy life, I assume?

JM

We. Are. Happy.

GUS

So weird, I don't get that impression when she calls me crying about her postpartum depression.

JM

That's not — just wait 'til you get married and have a kid and — it's so — it's not so easy — just
— tell him, dad!

GUS

Don't be a little bitch.

PETER

Gus could never get married, then he'd have to stop lusting after every woman he sees.

GUS

If I've learned anything from you, Peter, it's that the lust doesn't stop when you get married.

Peter gets up and throws a punch, but Gus dodges.

JM backs away—he's crying.

Gus winds up to punch back. But Oliver stands and gets hit by Gus' elbow.

GUS

Shit. Shit shit shit.
I'll — get some ice.

Where does mom keep ice
packs?

OLIVER

Fuck! Ow! Fuck!

I'll be fine, can you just —
give me some space?

Ahhhh. Shit.

PETER

God! Look what you did!
Are you ok?

Freezer. Dumbass. I'll go.

JM

(Wiping his eyes)

Back freezer, I know where it is.

*The brothers head to the kitchen. Oliver leans
back, holding his nose.*

MR. DOMBROWSKI

Lean forward.

OLIVER

I thought —

MR. DOMBROWSKI

Lean forward. Not back. Common misconception. My wife is a nurse.

A pause.

OLIVER

I really do like your daughter.

MR. DOMBROWSKI

This whole — this thing. It's not what I meant for it to ... my wife asked me to talk to you. And then the boys, they — they think this is how it goes.

OLIVER

Don't you want to, you know, make sure I'm, like, right for her?

MR. DOMBROWSKI

I trust my daughter. I raised her right.

OLIVER

That's. True. You did a great job with. Her.

MR. DOMBROWSKI

I think so too.

They both look to where the boys went.