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Dramatic Publishing

I Am Grock



Comedy by
Amanda Rogers

I Am Grock

Comedy. By Amanda Rogers. Cast: 3m., 4w. Family therapist, Dr. Phoebe Gardner, has written a groundbreaking book entitled *Brutal Honesty*, which is about to be released nationwide. Anticipated to be an international best-seller and the newest rage in pop psychology, a high profile television news-magazine is planning a one-hour special at her home. A notoriously ruthless newswoman will interview Phoebe; her husband, Paul; and their 9-year old son, Jasper. Cameras will reveal them to the nation as the preeminent example of an emotionally and psychologically healthy family—the result of Phoebe’s work promoting uncensored, brutal honesty within the family unit. The morning of the interview, Phoebe is shocked by the unexpected arrival of her parents, grandmother, sister and brother’s pregnant Japanese girlfriend. When the television newswoman finds out that Phoebe’s extended family is visiting, she insists that everyone must participate in the interview. Phoebe faces her family with all their amassed neuroses, psychoses and family secrets, and she is left with no choice but to heal her own family before the newswoman and cameras arrive. The problem is that she has only an hour and 20 minutes to do it. Phoebe’s methods of using childhood games to access the inherent honesty of a child prove disastrous when it comes to her profoundly dysfunctional family. So, she announces that she’s holding them captive for emotional ransom. Her demands? Honesty, vulnerability and truth—yikes! Truly a fate worse than death. They must spill the family secrets, demons, cover-ups and unexpressed feelings. Will Phoebe’s family successfully exemplify her life’s work before millions of TV viewers? Or will the family devastate her reputation and end her career? Phoebe discovers that the state of her family’s mental health is the key to her own. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: ID7.*

*Cover: Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Ind., featuring (l-r) Frank Buczolic, Nan Macy, Emily Goodson and Margot Morgan.
Photo: M. Elizabeth Hershey. Cover design: John Sergel.*

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(I AM GROCK)

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“*I Am Grock* was originally produced by Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Ind., in December 2011 and directed as a performed reading by Neil Patrick Harris at El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood, California.”

I Am Grock was first produced by the Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Ind., in December 2011.

Cast

Phoebe Broman Gardner..... Emily Goodson
Paul Gardner J. Allen
Jasper Gardner Austin Rawlins
Jackie Broman..... Margot Morgan
Lacey Broman..... Nan Macy
Grandma Lois..... Kate Braun
Ron Broman Frank Buczlich
Yu Takisama..... Stephanie Miekko Cohen

Production

Producer/Artistic Director..... Chad Rabinovitz
Director Tom Evans
Set design..... Shane Cinal
Stage Manager Travis Staley

I Am Grock was directed as a performed reading by Neil Patrick Harris at El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood, California, and produced by Peter Segal, Haley McLane and Bob Rossini.

Cast

Phoebe Broman Gardner..... Justine Bateman
Paul Gardner Micheal McDonald
Jasper Gardner Drew Carr
Jackie Gardner Mo Collins
Lacey Broman..... Susan Sullivan
Grandma Lois..... K Callan
Ron Broman Kurtwood Smith
Yu Takisama..... Ming Na

I Am Grock was chosen to lead the new playwriting series at the prestigious Barrow Group in New York City, and also as a workshop performance at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia.

To my parents, June and David,
who taught me to laugh, as well as to love.

I Am Grock

CHARACTERS

PHOEBE BROMAN GARDNER	30s
PAUL GARDNER	Phoebe's husband, 30s
JASPER GARDNER	Phoebe and Paul's son, 9
JACKIE BROMAN	Phoebe's sister, a few years older than Phoebe
LACEY BROMAN	Phoebe's mother, late 50s
GRANDMA LOIS	Phoebe's grandmother, early 80s
RON BROMAN.....	Phoebe's father, late 50s
YU TAKISAMA	Japanese woman, late 20s

TIME

Present year.

PLACE

Orange County, California.

The action takes place in the home of Phoebe and Paul Gardner.

I Am Grock

ACT I

AT RISE: *Lights up onstage. We see the living room L and a kitchen R, complete with counter, refrigerator and kitchen table. Off the kitchen is a door leading to a bathroom. On the kitchen table is a chilled bottle of champagne in a bucket. UC is an entryway leading into the home. The front door is not visible. Next to the entryway is a hallway closet. In the living room area there is a couch, coffee table, bar, a fireplace and bay window. Over the fireplace there hangs a large mounted fish. There is a collection of decorative mirrors on the upstage living room wall. UL a staircase leads to a second story. The house is modern in design and decor. It is an upper-middle-class home, very conservative, very clean and very organized.*

PAUL GARDNER and his 9-year-old son, JASPER GARDNER, sit at the table having cereal for breakfast. PAUL looks at his son and struggles to initiate some conversation. Finally ...

PAUL (*carefully reading the cereal box*). Well, isn't that fascinating? "Magically delicious." Why not mysteriously delicious? Miraculously delicious? ... Paranormally delicious? Well, maybe not. Dauntingly delicious? (*Pleased with himself.*) Yes. Dauntingly delicious. I realize it's going in a completely different direction, etymologically speaking. Originating from French "*danter*" and Latin "*domitare*," meaning, "to tame." Which is a bit ironic because the subtext implies, "this sugary substance will tame your already hyperactive child." Bottom line though, what's gained by the alliteration outweighs the duplicity of the word's origin. What do you think, Jasper?

JASPER (*continuing to eat*). Daddy, all I know is, I like Sugar Crispies for breakfast, I think baseball is fun and frogs are cool. And sometimes I'm amazed at how boring you can be.

PAUL. Jasper, what did I say to you about the sensitivity factor?

JASPER. I keep forgetting.

PAUL. Try rewording it.

JASPER. Uh ... 'cause you work all day long alone in a room, you don't, uh ... get a lot of practice talking to people.

PAUL. That's better.

JASPER. And that's what makes you so incredibly boring.

PAUL. Honesty is a really good thing, Jasp. But when you give your personal opinion, you must pick nice words, not words that sound mean ... harsh ... unkind.

JASPER (*on auto-pilot*). But Daddy, if I were forced to prematurely adapt to society's expectations by showing compassion at the expense of raw honesty, it would set up unhealthy patterns of emotional repression ...

PAUL. Yes, but ...

JASPER. If I edit myself in any way at this crucial time, I will grow up to join the millions who perceive a lie as an acceptable social tool which will inevitably produce for me a long succession of disingenuous relationships laden with conflict.

(Pause.)

PAUL. You spend way too much time with your mother. Give me those Sugar Crispies.

(PAUL takes a big handful out of the box and eats them. PHOEBE BROMAN GARDNER enters in a robe.)

PHOEBE. Good morning, family!

JASPER. Morning, Mommy.

PHOEBE. You're both dressed? What time is it?

PAUL. 9:30. I turned off the alarm. I thought you should sleep in so you'd be rested, relaxed, refreshed.

PHOEBE. Thanks. I feel great and I still have a couple of hours before she gets here. (*Noticing the bucket of champagne on the table.*) Champagne?

PAUL. For later, to celebrate.

PHOEBE (*picks up the bottle and looks at the label*). Whoa.

PAUL (*puts his arms around her*). Well ... I shaved a sliver off the top of your advance weeks ago. I've been saving this for the perfect time.

PHOEBE (*concerned*). Oh, Paul ...

PAUL. Come on, you deserve a little splurge. With a hefty advance like that, there's plenty left.

(*PAUL gives PHOEBE a kiss.*)

PHOEBE (*turns to JASPER*). How are you this morning, Jasp? Do you have any questions about what's going to happen?

JASPER. Nah, not really. I'm just s'pose to tell the truth, right?

PHOEBE. Right. Just like always.

JASPER. Even if it's my "personal opinion," right?

PHOEBE. Of course. You know that.

PAUL. Well, Jasper and I were having a little talk this morning about the sensitivity factor.

PHOEBE. Paul, let's not confuse him, OK? I thought we agreed on that.

PAUL. He called me "incredibly boring."

PHOEBE. It's a small price to pay for securing a healthy and happy future for your son. He's at a crucial age, Paul. You can handle a few raw criticisms for the time being.

PAUL. I guess. OK, Jasper, you want me to make you some of my famous pancakes?

JASPER. No thanks, Dad. They make me wanna puke.

PAUL (*entreating*). Phoebe ... !

PHOEBE (*quieting PAUL*). Paul ...

JASPER. Are you nervous, Mommy? Being on TV? Are you gonna freak out?

PHOEBE. Nope. I'm as calm as ever ... even though it is Rebecca Reynolds.

JASPER. Why's she such a big deal?

PHOEBE. She's a big deal, because she's got the number one interview show on television and she's known to be ... well ...

PAUL. She sort of has a reputation for being, uh ... shrewd ... pushy ...

JASPER. Bitchy?

PAUL & PHOEBE. Jasper!

JASPER. Well, that's the word you were looking for, right?

PAUL (*giving up*). Yes it is, son.

JASPER. But why does she want to talk to me?

PHOEBE. You and your dad are an important part of this interview. She wants to see, first hand, if I'm the "real deal." I'm so proud of the two of you that I couldn't be more relaxed.

JASPER. Boy, everybody's sure making a big deal over you, Mom.

PAUL. Just wait. If the interview goes well, *Brutal Honesty* will sell like crazy when it hits the stores next week. Then Mom will make enough money to open her own family therapy center over on Lancaster.

JASPER. You know, you're incredibly interesting, Mommy.

PHOEBE. Thank you, Jasp.

(*The doorbell rings.*)

PHOEBE (*cont'd*). It's only 9:30.

JASPER. Mommy, you're not dressed.

PHOEBE. Paul, are you sure you got the time right?

PAUL. Of course. They said 11:30.

(The doorbell rings again.)

PHOEBE. It can't be Rebecca Reynolds yet.

PAUL. Well, who is it then?

JACKIE *(offstage)*. Rasta! Rasta, Phoebe! Rasta, Paul!

PHOEBE *(confused)*. My sister?

JASPER *(delighted)*. Aunt Jackie!

(PHOEBE clasps her hand over JASPER's mouth.)

PHOEBE. She found out about the show!

PAUL. How could she ... we didn't tell anyone. Who could've told her?

JASPER *(frees himself)*. Grandma Lacey.

PHOEBE. How did Grandma know ... Jasper! You and I agreed that it wouldn't be lying if we withheld this information from your grandma until a more appropriate time.

JACKIE *(offstage)*. Rasta, you guys! That's greetings and health to you all in ancient Arabic! I know you're in there!

PHOEBE *(calling to offstage)*. Just a second! *(To PAUL.)* Quick, the closet. Get her sculpture.

(PAUL runs to the closet and frantically digs around. He lugs a large, ugly, unidentifiable statue out and drags it over to the fireplace.)

JASPER. I'm sorry, Mommy. I didn't get the whole "withholding thing" last week so when Grandma called ...

PHOEBE. You told her about the TV show and she told Aunt Jackie to come?

JASPER. No. Not Aunt Jackie ... the whole family.

PHOEBE. The whole Broman family? Together in this house?

JASPER. Is that bad?

PHOEBE. Is that bad?! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

JASPER (*amazed*). Hey, Mom! Look, you're freaking out! Dad, look! Mom's freaking out!

PHOEBE (*freaking out*). I am not freaking out! OK ... OK ... (*Tries to pull it together.*) Uh ... here's what we do. We keep it calm, we keep it light. Don't talk about politics, health-care, plastic surgery, sex, gender, race, religion or polyester blends. We avoid an episode of any kind and we get them the hell out of here before the TV people arrive.

PAUL (*trying to calm her*). It's gonna be OK, Phoebe. We have two whole hours.

PHOEBE. Paul, it's my family!

PAUL (*it's all coming back to him*). There's no time!

PHOEBE. Jasper, you get the door. No! First help me change out the mirrors.

PAUL (*paralyzed with fear*). The mirrors? Oh, God, get rid of them!

PHOEBE. Paul, you get Grandpa's war things and build the shrine. GO!

(JASPER helps his mom by taking down the mirrors and tossing them in the closet while PHOEBE takes the family photos from the closet to hang on the wall in their place. JASPER then runs out the entryway. PAUL jumps on top of the bay window and reaches for a high cabinet shelf, which he opens and pulls out an old, dusty bag. He pulls out an old M1 rifle, a military cap and some medals.)

JACKIE (*offstage*). You're so big!

JASPER (*offstage*). So are you! You look fatter than last time!

PAUL. I hate having a loose gun around Jasper.

PHOEBE. It's 60 years old. It's practically crumbling. Mom likes it displayed and I'd like to avoid at least one family drama.

(PAUL has ripped the mounted fish from the wall and in its place he hangs the rifle. He awkwardly drapes the cap and the medals on the rifle. PHOEBE is straightening the family photos she has hung on the wall. They both finish just as JACKIE BROMAN walks in with JASPER.)

PHOEBE. Jackie!

(PHOEBE throws her arms around her sister with forced glee.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd)*. What a surprise!

JACKIE. You're not dressed.

PHOEBE. I was just going. Jasper, show Aunt Jackie her sculpture.

(As JASPER takes JACKIE to the fireplace, PHOEBE pulls PAUL aside.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd)*. Replace all the 100 watt light bulbs in the house with 40 watt bulbs. There's a stash of them in the kitchen for just this sort of emergency.

PAUL *(remembering)*. The wattage, the wattage! Oh, my God, the wattage!

(PAUL runs toward the kitchen while PHOEBE goes upstairs to change.)

JACKIE *(proudly)*. "Marshmallow Under a New York Sky-line." Jasper, what do you think of your Aunt Jackie's work?

JASPER. What do I think? You mean my "personal opinion"?

PAUL *(stops dead in his tracks)*. Jasper! Uh, why don't you offer your aunt some juice or coffee? Perhaps in a to-go cup?

JACKIE. I'll have a Bloody Mary.

PAUL. Uh ... OK, sure, absolutely. *(Reluctantly heads to the bar for a glass.)*

JACKIE. So ... how's work?

PAUL (*quickly*). The excitement that comes with editing dictionaries is hard to put into words. Lexicography is ... well ... stimulating, thrilling, riveting work, really. Words, words, words. You can never get bored of words. Never!

JACKIE (*distracted*). Uh huh.

(*PAUL brings JACKIE the drink.*)

PAUL. So, Jackie ... uh, are you still sculpting?

JACKIE (*emotionally*). Oh, Paul, I stopped seven months ago. I did a three-week online emotional release retreat combined with an intense study of the teachings of Deepak Chopra and it really transformed my life. I invited the universe to reveal to me my purpose. I'm a poet now.

PAUL. Wow. Well, that's uh ...

JACKIE. Already, seven major publishing companies are vying for my haiku cookbook.

PAUL. Haiku cookbook?

JACKIE. Yes.

PAUL. A cookbook written in haikus?

JACKIE. That's correct. (*Recites.*) "Salmon Carpaccio with Tarragon Oil and Mustard Potatoes" ... By Jackie Broman.

Cut salmon so thin

Cut the potatoes in cubes

Season with salt ... yum.

(*Breaking the spell.*)

So, what about Phoebe? Mom said something about a little interview.

PAUL. It's nothing.

JASPER. But Daddy, you said Rebecca Reynolds was a really big deal.

JACKIE. Rebecca Reynolds? That bitch! I love her! She's a shark. She'll draw blood if she smells a fraud. Well, there's tons going on with me too. Did I tell you about the ear sculpture? (*Calling out.*) PHOEBE, DID I TELL YOU GUYS ABOUT THE EAR SCULPTURE?

PHOEBE (*offstage*). YEAH. YEAH, YOU DID. GREAT STORY! I REMEMBER IT. YOU REMEMBER IT TOO, PAUL ...

PAUL (*yelling to PHOEBE*). NO, I DON'T THINK ...

PHOEBE (*offstage*). IT'S A LONG ONE, PAUL!

PAUL (*still yelling, but to JACKIE*). ... I COULD EVER FORGET IT.

JACKIE. AND REMEMBER ARMANDO, THE LOBE SPECIALIST? PHOEBE?

(*PHOEBE enters, filing her nails in a state of panic.*)

PHOEBE. I can't believe this. I have a hang nail. When will Mom be here?

JACKIE. Any minute. Did you take down the mirrors?

PHOEBE. Of course. I need a glove. Where's a glove?

(*PHOEBE runs to the closet looking for gloves. She pulls out different hats and scarves.*)

JACKIE. So, anyway, here's the update. Armando calls the people in Washington ...

PAUL. The people in Washington? What?

JACKIE. Exactly. He tells them ...

PHOEBE (*to JASPER*). Find me a glove. (*To JASPER and PAUL.*) And remember nobody say anything about Dad's glass eye. Don't even look at it.

JACKIE. He tells them he has found the perfect model for the sculpture.

PHOEBE. Is it the left eye or the right? Just ... nobody look at Dad at all. *(To JASPER.)* Glove!

JASPER *(to PAUL)*. Mom's scaring me!

(JASPER runs into the kitchen. PHOEBE works frantically on her nail.)

JACKIE. So anyway ... the sculpture. He tells them ...

PAUL. What sculpture?

JACKIE. The ear sculpture. He tells them ...

PAUL. Who's he?

JACKIE. The lobe specialist, Armando. He tells the people in Washington that he has found the perfect model. He tells them to stop looking.

PAUL. For what?

JACKIE. For the perfect ear. He has found the most perfect specimen. Particularly the auricle ... that's the lobe. But he says my cochlea is pretty flawless too. And though the cochlea is barely seen by the naked eye, it is usually a good indication of a superlative lobe.

PAUL. Lobe? Did you say earlobe? *(To PHOEBE.)* Did she say earlobe?

JACKIE. Precisely. A symbol of communication without warfare. "Listen world! Listen to each other! Lay down your arms and listen!"

PAUL. Listen ...

JACKIE. Exactly. So, once the proposition passes, and anyone who's anyone in Congress knows that it will, then it's just a matter of securing our troops.

PAUL. Troops?

JACKIE. Exactly. And once the land and the sea are secured and our nuclear arms are protected, then all will be safe for the government to disclose the strategy to disband all aggressive forces.