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Dramatic Publishing

TWITCH

By
STEPHEN GREGG



Dramatic Publishing

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(TWITCH)

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For
Don Corathers and Nancy Brown.

* * * *

Thanks to the writers and actors of
Lab Twenty6,
who are, collectively, the best critic I know.

The premier production of *Twitch* was given by the students of Drury High School, North Adams, Massachusetts, June 28, 2009, at the International Thespian Festival, Lincoln, Nebraska. The production was directed by Dr. Len Radin with the following cast:

Don Trevor Foehl
Nancy Chelsea Smith
Emma Jamie Lee McNary
Aiden Luke Sisto

Creators of the creature. Ron and Tiger Waterman

* * * *

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

My thanks to Len (Doc) Radin and his crew at Drury High School in North Adams, Massachusetts, for offering to stage the play and take it to the International Thespian Festival, even though the play wasn't actually written when they made that offer.

For that production, they enlisted the help of two special-effects people, Ron and Tiger Waterman. In three weeks, the Watermans created a fantastic tentacle, pink with fringe and suckers. And it moved. It could reach for things and sort of curl and cuddle.

You are unlikely to do better, though you are welcome to try.

Don't get hung up on the tentacle. All that's necessary is something that clearly shows that whatever is behind that couch is not human. Some kind of snapping beak might be good, or an arm, or an entire person—but altered: blue, perhaps, or with fur, or fangs, or scales or neon.

Emma and Aiden are, at the time of this writing, the most popular girl's and boy's names respectively. Adjust accordingly. By coincidence, Jayden is listed as the second most popular girl's name. Something about the rhyming of Jayden and Aiden does amuse me. Rhyming strikes me as an alien idea of how the naming of Earth children should be done. So the choice is yours: choose the second most popular girl's name, or choose something that rhymes with

one of the parents' names, or choose something you decide an alien would find plausible.

When Emma says "Ho ho" I find it funny if she actually says those words. If that doesn't feel right, then there's no need to insert an actual laugh. Just show us that Emma is gently amused by her daughter's adolescence.

There is probably something about Emma and Aiden's appearance that is a little off. The clothes might not match quite right. Or they might be dressed too formally for a visit to the next-door neighbors. Or both.

Nancy is wary of Emma and Aiden before they arrive, but once they arrive, there will be moments when her natural host instincts and basic goodwill show themselves.

Some of the things that Emma and Aiden say may seem menacing but remember that they don't mean to. When in doubt, err on the side of cheerful obliviousness.

TWITCH

CHARACTERS

DON a young man

NANCY a young woman, Don's wife

EMMA a young woman

AIDEN a young man, Emma's husband

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A small town.

TWITCH

(The living room of DON and NANCY. It's warm, made so largely by the pictures of loved ones that seem to be everywhere.)

An exit to one side leads to the kitchen. To the other side is a hallway that leads to the unseen front door.

We find DON straightening up for guests, noticing all the little things that could be neater or less dusty. NANCY enters with some figurines and arranges them carefully on a table or shelf.

This silence is a break in a disagreement they've been having.)

DON. You can't just accuse them of watching us.

NANCY. Don. They are watching us.

DON. You don't know that.

NANCY. You don't know it. I know it.

DON. But based on what?

NANCY. I shouldn't have to explain it. I'm telling you there's something weird about them. And not nice. And they're watching us.

DON. They're not.

NANCY. I was at the window and I looked up and saw their curtain just fall back into place.

DON. You were at the window.

NANCY. Yes.

DON. So they probably think you're watching them.

NANCY. We still don't know what happened to the Filkersons.

DON. They moved.

NANCY. Overnight. With no warning.

DON. Yes.

NANCY. Then there's the tree.

DON. It was on their property.

NANCY. Don. It was a beautiful tree, almost a historic tree, and it gave both houses privacy. Why would you cut it down?

DON. Ask them if you want.

NANCY. I'm going to.

DON. OK. Good. *(Beat.)* I mean, unless they're really nice.

NANCY. Why would that make a difference?

DON. Because it does.

NANCY. Don. Why do you care so much about what these people you've never met think of you?

DON. They're twenty-five feet away. So if they're really nice, you know... *(He doesn't finish his sentence, but the point is they might become friends.)*

NANCY. So I shouldn't mention the tree.

DON. Just maybe not for our first interaction...

NANCY. Won't be my first.

DON. Won't be my first either, but as a couple.

NANCY. When did you talk to them?

DON. Yesterday. I ran into them at the school.

NANCY *(beat)*. At the school?

DON. Yeah.

NANCY. What were they doing at the school?

DON. Just enrolling their child.

NANCY (*beat*). They have a child?

DON. Yeah.

NANCY. Boy or girl?

DON. Girl.

NANCY. Did you see her?

DON. No.

NANCY. They don't have a child.

DON. Nancy.

NANCY. Have you ever seen her? (*Beat.*) They're twenty-five feet away. Have you ever seen any evidence of a child?

DON. Maybe they're foster parents.

NANCY. Why are you fighting me on this?

DON. Why would they lie about having a child?

NANCY. To get to the school. So they could watch you.

DON. Nancy.

NANCY. They're watching us, Don. I keep running into them.

DON. It's not that big a town.

NANCY. How much time did you spend with them?

DON. Probably four minutes. Why?

NANCY. Did you see his twitch?

DON. No.

NANCY. He has this...it's a tic.

DON. So?

NANCY. It's weird.

DON. You can't blame someone for having a tic.

NANCY. All right.

DON. I mean, seriously.

NANCY. I'm just saying "all right," because you're going to see the tic and then you'll think, "I wish I'd been nicer to Nancy."

DON. I'm being nice.

NANCY. No. You think I'm crazy.

DON. I think you're jumping to conclusions.

NANCY. That's not nice.

DON. I just, you know, I need more evidence.

NANCY (*smells something, It annoys her*). Are you baking?

DON. Yeah.

NANCY. What are you baking?

DON. Scones. I thought I told you.

NANCY. When was the last time you baked anything?

DON. Wasn't there some kind of coffee cake thing when your mom brought over that boyfriend?

NANCY. It's different.

DON. No. It's just about trying to make a good impression.

NANCY. Don. That was my mother. I'm telling you that I think these people—that I think they're evil and you're fixing them something.

DON. Evil. You're actually calling them evil.

NANCY. Yes, Don. I am.

DON. *So why did you invite them over?*

NANCY. I didn't.

DON. Yes you did.

NANCY. No. Of course I didn't.

AIDEN (*OS*). Knock knock!

(AIDEN and EMMA enter. They are pleasant looking, about DON and NANCY's age. They weren't quite ex-

pected yet, and it's a little unclear to DON and NANCY how they got into the house...)

EMMA. Oh, we startled them.

AIDEN. We didn't startle them.

DON/NANCY. A little. /I didn't know the door was open.

(This makes EMMA and AIDEN laugh and it makes them all friends, for the moment.)

EMMA. Oh! I'm so sorry. What a terrible start!

DON. Not at all.

EMMA. We're Emma and Aiden!

DON. Nice to meet you. I'm Don.

NANCY. Yes. Welcome. I'm Nancy.

EMMA. Should we come back later?

DON. No, no problem. We were just futzing around...

EMMA. We just couldn't wait.

AIDEN. We come bearing gifts. *(He hands NANCY a plate covered with Saran Wrap.)*

NANCY. Oh, you didn't have to do that. Let's see, what have we got here... It's...

AIDEN. Steaks.

NANCY. Oh. How nice! Thank you.

EMMA. You're welcome.

DON. Nice seeing you yesterday.

AIDEN. Yes. Nice seeing you. You're great with the kids.

DON. Thanks.

AIDEN. I watched you.

DON. Oh?

AIDEN. Yeah, for like five minutes. I wanted to say hi but I didn't want to interrupt you, and the kids kept coming

up and you were so patient about answering their questions.

EMMA. We love that you're a teacher.

DON. Oh, thank you.

NANCY. He's really good, too. He keeps winning all these awards but then he won't let me put them up.

AIDEN. There's absolutely nobody more important than teachers.

DON. Thank you.

EMMA. We think it's a crime, what you guys are paid.

DON. Oh, well...

EMMA. Seriously. I know there are people who say, well, sure they don't work summers. The hours are short, but still we think you guys are great and anyone who says they're not, oh, I just want to decapitate them.

(Deathly silence.)

NANCY. You know what was funny that I was just telling Don? I didn't even know you had a...*daughter* was it?

AIDEN. Yes. The shine of our lives.

NANCY. What's her name?

AIDEN. Jayden.

NANCY. How nice. Going into what grade?

AIDEN. Sixth.

NANCY. What does she look like?

EMMA. She's tall. With short hair. And big masculine hands that make it easy for her to dunk a basketball.

DON. Oh. A little bit of a tomboy?

EMMA (*a memorized profile*). Jayden is good at science but she's also very interested in the humanities. She's popular but not exclusive about it. She's the kind of girl

who everyone wants to have in their class even if they don't know they want it. She's interested in photography and gymnastics but not boys yet. Ho ho. That'll change soon.

NANCY. I'm just surprised I've never seen her. You know, ever since that tree came down it seems like I can see every single time you come and go, so...just out of curiosity, why did you cut down that tree?

AIDEN . So we could watch you.

DON (*after a moment, DON is amused*). Whoa. For a moment I couldn't even tell you were kidding. That is some dry humor.

EMMA. Dry as a bone.

DON. No kidding.

EMMA. Like a thigh bone that's been stripped of its meat by carnivores and then left around for the scavengers to finish off.

DON (*taking the steaks*). Why don't I put these in the fridge... And while I'm there, can I get you something to drink?

EMMA. I would love it.

(AIDEN's tic happens. The tic begins as AIDEN's neck swivels slowly to one side at the same time that he makes an alien noise. Then his head swivels slowly to the other side, while he makes the same noise at punctuated intervals.

Everyone pretends this didn't happen.)