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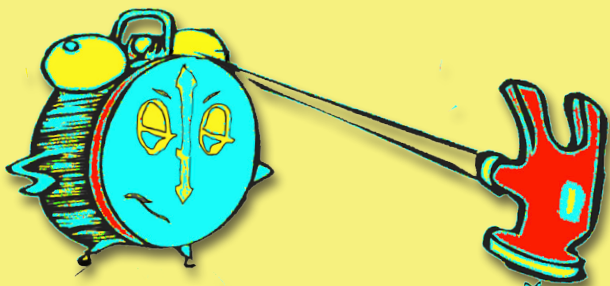
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Dramatic Publishing

NEWLY REVISED~



WAKE-UP CALL

COMEDY
BY
STEPHEN GREGG

“The best play I’ve worked with in 10 years.
Between laughing and gasping, our audiences were thoroughly entertained.
It’s a little edgier/darker than *This Is a Test*, but easily as much fun!”
—Margo Rodgers, Anderson Collegiate, Whitby, Ont.

NEWLY REVISED~



Comedy. *By Stephen Gregg.* Cast: 2m., 2w. 3 or more either gender. Seventeen-year-old Jim is having a really bad day. After getting up the nerve to tell his girlfriend, Rochelle, that he loves her, she asks him to help her poison her father. Is she joking? Just when it becomes clear that she’s definitely not joking, Jim’s mother wakes him up. It was all a dream! But Mom has bad news for him. Terrible news in fact. As the news becomes nightmarishly bad, Jim wakes up again. He’s back with Rochelle, who tells him he fainted, and Dad comes home just in time for Rochelle to offer him a big glass of suspicious-looking milk. Now Jim isn’t sure what’s real and what’s a dream, and every time he thinks he’s got it figured out, his life takes another surprising left turn. A funny, spooky play about the nature of reality, *Wake-Up Call* starts as a nightmare and goes to places you’ll never expect. *Unit set.* Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: W90.

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WAKE-UP CALL

A Play
by
STEPHEN GREGG

Wake-Up Call is also part of the full-length evening of plays *Three Nightmares*, along with *One Lane Bridge* and *The New Margo*.



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STEPHEN GREGG

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(WAKE-UP CALL)

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WAKE-UP CALL

CHARACTERS

JIM	16, in love
ROCHELLE	16, loved
DAD	Rochelle's father
MOTHER	Jim's mother, 30, concerned, then erratic, then magnificent
POET(S)	one, or a chorus

NOTES

Some of *Wake-Up Call* is based on T.S. Eliot's long masterpiece of a poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

You should read the poem, partly because it informs *Wake-Up Call* but mostly because it's a great read.

The poets can speak their lines singly, in unison or some combination.

There are lots of options for costuming the poets. They can look like poets: artsy and/or poor. They can reflect different aspects of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Or perhaps they look like sea captains or like the sea itself.

Likewise, an alien mermaid is, to say the least, open to interpretation.

In one of the early productions, she was nine feet tall. In another, she looked normal, except for a lobster claw.

The mother refers to other mothers as "puny" and "pale." If those characterizations don't accurately reflect how Mother has changed, just adjust the lines.

WAKE-UP CALL

(The setting alternates between JIM's bedroom and ROCHELLE's bedroom. The furnishings in both are neutral: a bed, a large desk.

We start in JIM's room.

ROCHELLE and JIM have been studying.)

JIM. My life could not get worse.

ROCHELLE. So...you're not even gonna ask me?

JIM. I'm sorry. That was rude. What's the big favor?

ROCHELLE. No, you first. Why is your life so terrible?

(JIM holds up two pieces of paper: his barely started paper on The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, by T.S. Eliot.)

JIM. Because I'm lazy. I had three weeks and this is all I've got.

ROCHELLE. Get your mom to let you stay home.

JIM. She's not that kind of mom.

ROCHELLE. I like her.

JIM. I like her too. I love her. But she's not going to let me stay home just 'cause I didn't write my paper. Would your dad?

ROCHELLE. My dad would write it for me if I asked him.

JIM. How's he doing?

ROCHELLE. I think he's having a rough time, a little bit.

JIM. He puts up a good front.

ROCHELLE. Yeah.

JIM. Now. Your favor.

ROCHELLE. No, I'm not ready yet.

JIM. Why?

ROCHELLE. I'm just not. It's big.

JIM. So ask. I'll do it or I won't. But you can ask.

ROCHELLE. No. I was brave enough a few minutes ago. Now I'm not brave enough.

JIM. Just do it.

ROCHELLE. I can't.

JIM. I'm not gonna say no. *(This just hangs there. He returns his attention to the poem: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, by T.S. Eliot.)*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells;
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "what is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo

So, he wants to go out, into the night. But then he never does anything. That's all I've got. Tell me your favor.

ROCHELLE. I can't.

JIM. All right, you want brave? I can be brave. Or not.

ROCHELLE. What?

JIM. I love you.

(And it seems to take ROCHELLE an eternity to respond, but she manages.)

ROCHELLE. I love you too. Thank you.

(They kiss. They're both very pleased and then suddenly shy. He looks at something out the window.)

JIM. Huh.

ROCHELLE. *(What?)* Hmm?

JIM. Just looking at those kids. I used to have picnics in that park. It's weird when you think...

ROCHELLE. What?

JIM. I don't know. It feels like the world is different all of a sudden. So much better, and those kids are just—they don't have any idea that this huge thing has happened fifty yards away. And it makes you think, what's the closest I've ever been to some huge event in somebody's life and not known it?

ROCHELLE. I love you.

JIM. I love you too. So.

ROCHELLE. So.

JIM. Now you can ask me anything.

ROCHELLE. I want you to help me kill my father.

JIM. OK. Anyone else?

ROCHELLE. No, just Dad.

JIM. All right. How?

ROCHELLE. Poison.

JIM. Why do you need my help?

ROCHELLE. I need someone to corroborate that he seemed sad all the time.

JIM. He's not sad.

ROCHELLE. That's my point. Everyone thinks he's been handling it great. I need someone to say that they'd seen him crying. That you'd walked in on him once and he was sobbing.

JIM. Whatever. Whatever you want. (*Re: the poem*) Now, unless you suddenly have insight about this, I should get going.

ROCHELLE. Wait. We need to talk about this. I think I just made a bad mistake.

JIM. What?

ROCHELLE. Saying what I said. About my dad.

JIM. You were joking.

ROCHELLE. Yeah.

JIM. See you later?

ROCHELLE. You staying up all night?

JIM. Probably.

ROCHELLE. Awwww...you'll be exhausted.

JIM. Nah. I'm the world's champion all-nighter puller. (*He starts to go.*)

ROCHELLE. One more thing.

JIM. Sure.

ROCHELLE. If my dad were to die suddenly, would you feel obligated to mention this conversation to the police?

JIM. What are you talking about?

ROCHELLE. What do you think I'm talking about. I'm talking about my dad suddenly dying. I did this all wrong. I didn't expect it to be a surprise.

JIM. You're kidding, right?

ROCHELLE. No, I've been leading up to it. I was giving you hints.

JIM. Hints.

ROCHELLE. I've been giving you lots of hints, and I thought you were—I thought we were on the same page is all. And you gave me one.

JIM. What?

ROCHELLE. When you were talking about *Double Indemnity*.

JIM. Rochelle, that was a movie. I was telling you the plot of a movie.

ROCHELLE. For you, it was just a plot. For me, it was a wake-up call. I need to take control of my life. You know, you think about—I'm already doing crappy in school. The idea of—I don't know, getting into a college, slogging through, getting some entry-level bank job or something. Everything would be so much easier if I just had the money right up front. And the easiest way to do that—I wish I hadn't brought this up.

JIM. Me too!

ROCHELLE. And now you think I'm a bad person.

JIM. No.

ROCHELLE. Yes. I can feel your opinion of me just going: *(A little sound effect and/or hand gesture to indicate “down the toilet.”)*

JIM. I think you’re talking about a stupid fantasy that you had for two seconds. That everybody has, and you don’t realize what it sounds like when you say it out loud.

ROCHELLE. But. If he did—if something did happen to him, would you say something? To the police?

JIM. Yes, of course.

ROCHELLE. What if they didn’t ask you?

JIM. Rochelle, I’m the boyfriend. I’m the first person they’d ask.

ROCHELLE. Not if they didn’t ask anyone. If they’re sure it’s a suicide there might not be an investigation.

JIM. Would you just let this go?

ROCHELLE. Not yet. Answer this question and I’ll drop the whole subject. Assume that my dad kills himself, as many widowers do. The police are not in any way suspicious. They do a quick investigation, and all the signs point to suicide. Are you gonna turn me in? *(He won’t answer.)* Tell me again that you love me.

(ROCHELLE leaves. The lights change. JIM sits bolt upright in bed. He’s disoriented, breathing hard. There’s a pounding coming from offstage.)

MOTHER. Jim! I don’t want to barge in but I’m about to!

JIM. You can come in.

(MOTHER enters.)

MOTHER. This is your wake-up call.

JIM (*disoriented*). What?

MOTHER. You are dressed.

JIM. Yeah, I...

MOTHER. What'd you do? Fall back into bed?

JIM. I guess...

MOTHER. What's the matter? Are you sick?

JIM. No, I'm—I had a bad dream.

MOTHER. About what?

JIM. Oh, it's stupid—

MOTHER. Sweetheart, are you OK?

JIM. I'm fine. It's dumb. It was so real.

MOTHER. You're sweating.

JIM. It was really... It was scary. Rochelle was going to kill her father.

MOTHER. About time.

JIM. Mom.

MOTHER. Well, whatever you do, don't tell Mr. Simmons.

JIM. Don't worry.

MOTHER. What is that? Is that Oedipal? No. What's it called, to want to kill your girlfriend's father.

JIM. I don't want to kill him.

MOTHER. Apparently you do.

JIM. Rochelle wanted to kill him. She just wanted me to help.

MOTHER. Hmm. Well. As long as we're on the subject, what do you think of Mr. Simmons?

(After a moment, JIM gives a conspiratorial thumbs-down. This makes his MOTHER laugh.)

MOTHER (*cont'd*). Me too. And I tried to like him. You know I'm crazy about Rochelle, but...what have you got against him?

JIM. He's a little cold.

MOTHER. A little! All right, I'm going to tell you a story. You cannot tell Rochelle. You promise?

JIM. I promise.

MOTHER. I ran into him at Foodmart, about a...maybe three weeks ago. I said, "Mr. Simmons—I blanked on his name—

JIM. Thomas.

MOTHER. I know. I just blanked. I said, "What do you think of our kids dating?"

JIM. You asked him that?

MOTHER. Why not?

JIM. What's he gonna say?

MOTHER. I'll tell you what he said. He said, "It's fine."

JIM. It's *fine*?

MOTHER. Yes!

JIM. Yikes.

MOTHER. What's he got against you, or do I not want to know?

JIM. Nothing! I...nothing. I'm pretty sure.

MOTHER. I know that, sweetheart. (*Beat.*) I guess I should cut him a little slack after what he's gone through. That was so ironic.

JIM. Hmm.

MOTHER. His wife, an Olympic swimmer, drowning.

JIM. The theory is, that's *why* she drowned. She was too confident. People underestimate the current. No matter how good a swimmer you are, you shouldn't try to fight it. You just get exhausted until you can't fight it any-

more. And you go under. The lesson is, if you're in too deep, don't struggle.

MOTHER. Good to know. Too bad about Thomas, though. Truth is, I'd sort of had my eye on him.

JIM. What do you mean, you'd had your eye on him?

MOTHER. Just as maybe someone to date. You know, he's attractive and...we're both professionals, both with kids. It seemed like we might have things in common.

JIM (*a long moment*). You thought about dating Mr. Simmons.

MOTHER. Yeah. I can see now it would have been a mistake.

JIM. Mom.

MOTHER. What?

JIM. What would Dad think about that?

MOTHER. I don't know. It's none of his business really.

JIM. Of course it is.

MOTHER. No. Now that the divorce is finalized, I can see whoever I want.

JIM (*stares at her*). When did you get divorced?

MOTHER. Oh, I've handled this so badly.

JIM. Yes. You got *divorced*?

MOTHER. I'm sorry! I get it. I get I should have mentioned it. Haven't you noticed he hasn't been around?

JIM. You said he was working nights.

MOTHER. He has been. He's got those alimony payments. And child support.

JIM. YOU GOT DIVORCED? AND YOU DIDN'T TELL ME?

MOTHER. We wanted you to find out in your own time.

JIM. I thought you were perfectly happy!

MOTHER. You know, we were for a long time, but lately... The truth is, when your grandmother died, it kind of changed your father. It took me a while to figure out, but it was kind of like he lost his zest for life. He was so quiet, he didn't take an interest in anything. He wasn't taking good care of himself. And when I'd say something about it, he'd get all defensive and angry.

JIM (*a sad moment*). When did Grandma die?

MOTHER. Last year. Oh, honey, shoot! I'm sorry. What a terrible way to find out.

JIM. Yes!

MOTHER. She had a stroke. I'm sorry. It's just—it's like I've...I've sort of lost some of myself ever since your sister...

JIM. Ever since my sister what?

MOTHER. Honey, that's not—yuck. There are some things you don't joke about.

JIM. What's the matter with Vivieene?

MOTHER (*tearing up*). Don't. That's so mean!

JIM. Mom, what happened to her?

MOTHER. Don't. Don't even mention it!!!!

JIM. What happened???

(MOTHER disappears. JIM's back in ROCHELLE's room. He's on the floor. ROCHELLE stands over him. He sits up, disoriented, out of breath.)

ROCHELLE. Are you OK?

JIM. I'm...

ROCHELLE. You fainted.

JIM. I did?