

"My Can of Soup"

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE

by Ralph Pape

Jerry is an out-of-work actor who lives in a shabby East Village apartment with his girlfriend, Ginny. His school chum, Steve, who tends to see the world as a situation comedy, is frantically trying to make his mark as a television writer. When Steve is not out looking for work, he likes to hang out in Jerry's apartment.

In the opening scene of the play, Jerry returns home after another unsuccessful audition. He is in a crisis over what to do with his life and in no mood for pranks. But Steve is full of them.

(Upstage left, a door opens and closes. JERRY enters. He has a traveling bag over his shoulder. He is carrying an 8x10 glossy of himself. There are a few moments of indecisive action. At last, he sits on the couch, stares at his picture and tears it up.)

JERRY: What next?

STEVE: *(He has been hiding behind the sofa. Quietly, he appears. He is wearing a gorilla mask and a brown derby. JERRY has not seen him.)* Excuse me, do you know that time it is?

JERRY: Holy shit!

STEVE: Wait. Before you say anything, I've got something wonderful to tell you! *(He removes mask as he speaks.)*

JERRY: WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY APARTMENT?!

You trying to give me a heart attack or something?!

STEVE: Oh, it's OK, Ginny let me in. She went to pick up her dress at the cleaners. How'd the audition go?

JERRY: What are you doing in my apartment, Steve?!

STEVE: You weren't right for the part, were you?

JERRY: Never mind! *(JERRY moves to kitchen area.)*

STEVE: Jerry, it doesn't matter! Wait till you hear what—

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JERRY: Not now! Please.

STEVE: Oh boy! Just wait till you hear what I've got to tell you! Come on: ask me what it is. I haven't told anybody yet—Ginny'll be right back, Bobby'll be here, we'll be leaving for the reunion—Come on!

JERRY: *(Turning around, holding an empty pot by the handle)* Where's the Chunky Turkey soup?

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STEVE: Soup? Soup? Who cares about soup?

JERRY: Where's the Chunky Turkey soup?

STEVE: I ate it! It was delicious! I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

JERRY: You ate the Chunky Turkey soup?

STEVE: Yes! I was all alone, I was excited and hungry and I wanted to celebrate and here was this little can crying out:

Take me, open me, eat me, I'm yours!

JERRY: In my cabinet, Steve, in my kitchen, in my apartment, there are the following items—

STEVE: And do you know why I was so excited???

JERRY: —3 cans of Chunky Beef soup, 3 cans of Chunky Vegetable soup, 3 cans of Chunky Split Pea and Ham soup, and 7 family-size cans of Franco-American Spaghettios. Are you listening?

STEVE: What are you doing? *(almost immediately)* Rehearsing a monologue! *(He watches and listens to Jerry.)*

JERRY: Early this morning, as I was about to leave my apartment, I paused for a moment in my kitchen and looked in my cabinet, and I made certain that hidden away behind all those other items, there was still one remaining can of Chunky Turkey soup. Why did I do this?

STEVE: *(checking imaginary watch)* 10...9...8...

JERRY: I did this because Chunky Turkey soup, as you know, for some mysterious reason, has become almost impossible to locate in this part of the city, and because I like it very much. In fact, I love it! Why do I love it? I don't know. I can't honestly tell you why I love Chunky Turkey soup. All I know is—

STEVE: Hey, thanks so much for coming. We would have preferred hearing something from Shakespeare, but this gives us a damn fine idea of your talents, and believe me, if a part

should turn up—

JERRY: All I know is: I love it! It is dependable. It is there. It is the last thing I can be certain of in a world filled with

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uncertainty, and in any case I don't believe that an emotion such as love has to be explained. Do you agree?

STEVE: Are you all right?

JERRY: Do you agree?

STEVE: My God, it was only a can of soup!

JERRY: It was only a can of soup. Was that what you said?

STEVE: Yes.

JERRY: Guess what word you left out?

STEVE: I have no idea.

JERRY: Guess.

STEVE: I don't know!

JERRY: Take a guess!

STEVE: But I don't know!

JERRY: What's the word?!

STEVE: (as *Groucho*) Hmmmm. It wouldn't be "swordfish," would it?

JERRY: My! The word is "my." My, my, my, my, my! It was only my fucking can of soup!

STEVE: You are really angry.

JERRY: Oh, yeah? How can you tell? Seriously. As an actor, it's important that I be able to recognize such things. Come on. How can you be sure I'm angry?

STEVE: All right. Put down the pot.

JERRY: You want me to put down the pot? OK. I'll put down the pot, Steve. Oh, I'll put down the pot! Are you sure you really want to see me put down the pot?!

STEVE: Oh, stop it. You sound just like Jackie Gleason!

JERRY: DON'T YOU EVER TELL ME I SOUND LIKE JACKIE GLEASON!!

STEVE: I'm sorry. That was the wrong thing to say.

JERRY: Don't you ever say that again!

STEVE: I'm sorry.

JERRY: Now I've got a headache.

STEVE: It's my fault.

JERRY: I know it's your fault.

STEVE: I said—

JERRY: Don't say another word!

STEVE: But— (Jerry sits down on couch.)

JERRY: Don't say another word! (closes his eyes) I've got to relax. Dear God, I've got to relax. Don't say another word. Just let me relax....

STEVE: May I make an observation? Do you know why you have so much trouble at auditions? It's because you're tense.

It's very hard to feel at ease in the presence of someone who's unnaturally tense. Do you know what your body says to the average person? It says: Tension. Do you realize what the—

JERRY: Why don't you ever listen to me?

STEVE: Because I'm your friend. What's the matter? Did your boss give you more static about taking off to go to auditions?

JERRY: Can't you see I've got a lot on my mind? And it's more than just an audition or a job that's bothering me?

STEVE: Of course I can see that. I'm not insensitive. Will you just let me tell you what I've been trying to tell you?

JERRY: Would you like a beer?

STEVE: Sure Fine. (Jerry gets the beer, hands one to Steve.)

JERRY: Thanks. OK. Are you ready for this? You know that girl with the red hair who comes in the book store where I work?

Miriam? Well, she knows I'm a writer, and she said she didn't know why she never thought of it before, but this morning she tells me if I ever come up with an outline for a situation comedy pilot, she has got contacts with Norman Lear and can get him to read it! Do you believe this?!

Norman Lear?!

Producer of *All in the Family*; *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*; right? OK. Now, by a strange coincidence, what do you suppose I have been working on in secret for the past two months? A completely original TV series in which—now, hold on to your seat!—I have modelled the central character on you. I even gave him your name! His name is Jerry! One day it just comes to me: a situation comedy about a group of people who are members of the very first TV generation, born and raised during the dawn of the Atomic Age, whose lives have gone nowhere, whose dreams have been shattered, who see themselves as hopeless failures, or, at best, historical curiosities, and who do not have the slightest idea what to do about it! I mean: I firmly believe the time is ripe for something like this: it cannot miss! Do you see what I'm getting at? You'll never have to work in an office again. When the show is picked up, guess who I'm going to recommend for the part? There will be no way they can turn you down! Well? What do you think? (pause)

JERRY: Steve, I hate to tell you this.

STEVE: Tell me what?

JERRY: You're fantasizing again.

STEVE: No, no, no! I'm not fantasizing again. You're wrong! What I'm writing now is the cumulative result of everything that has happened to me in the last ten years: this is it! I know—

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