

The Zebra Baby

A play in One-Act

by

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## CHARACTERS

- GREG           A man in his mid-thirties living what he thinks is one day of his life, but is seeing a preview of sorts of what lies in store.
- LISA           Greg's wife. She is constantly getting older throughout the play until the end, when she resumes her initial age of 29.
- THE KID WHO LIKES SANDWICHES  
                  Greg's future son,  
                  unbeknownst to him.
- FATHER         Greg's father. He later becomes the PROFESSOR. 55.
- MOTHER        Greg's mother. 52.

## TIME

GREG thinks that only one day is passing, when actually time is flying, until the end when the initial day resumes.

## SETTING

The play takes place in the living room of Greg and Lisa's 'new' house.

**THE PLAY**

(The lights rise on a living room with a couch center stage amidst a room filled with moving boxes. There is a door stage right. GREG is asleep on the couch with his head inside a small box. After a beat, LISA, his wife, enters.)

LISA

Wake up Greg.

GREG

Huh?

LISA

Wake up, we've got a ton of work to do.

GREG

Oh, right. I was just looking for that thing.

LISA

What thing?

GREG

You know, that thing I used in the apartment whenever we had plumbing problems.

LISA

We never had any plumbing problems. Now would you—

GREG

What are you talking about 'We never had any plumbing problems?' Of course we did, and when we did, I used that thing. You know, kinda looked like a comet.

LISA

A plunger? Is that what you're looking for Gregory? A plunger?

GREG

(Sarcastically. Still rummaging through the box.)

No, Lisa, I'm not looking for a plunger.

LISA

Well I'm sure it will turn up eventually. Now will you—

GREG

-just sit down and relax for five minutes.

LISA

How can I? Our things aren't going to move themselves in, are they Gregory? Are they going to get up and walk in on their own? Or is someone going to have to get up off their lazy ass and bring them in.

GREG

My guess is that someone is probably going to have to get up off their lazy ass and bring them in, but I have been wrong before-

LISA

This is so typical of you. Sitting on the couch making snide comments while I do all of the work.

GREG

You aren't doing anything.

LISA

Organizing isn't work? Are you organizing what is going where? And how it's getting there? I didn't think you were, but if you insist, by all means.

GREG

I'm just trying to find that thing.

LISA

What thing?

GREG

Something you didn't organize.

LISA

I refuse to let you upset me.

GREG

Refuse away.

LISA

(Pause. She looks around the room.)

Can you believe that this is our home? These walls are our walls. That horrible moss green kitchen tile is our horrible moss green kitchen tile. This couch is our couch-

GREG

I bought this couch in college.

LISA

You're missing the point Gregory. You're too busy looking through that stupid box to realize that finally, after seven long years we have our own place. Doesn't that mean anything to you? To know that it's ours. To know that the next twenty years of our lives will unravel within the confines of these walls. These walls that now stare back at us like newborn children will overtime—and subconsciously—grow to be part of our family; and we a part of them.

GREG

Wow honey, real insightful.

LISA

Did you know that the Truman's didn't own their own house until they moved into the White House. Isn't that amazing? Makes you put things into perspective, shows you just how lucky you really are.

GREG

God bless us, everyone.

LISA

Go to hell Greg. I'm trying to share my feelings with you—

GREG

(He stops looking through the box,  
crosses to LISA, and embraces her.)

You're right Lisa, the Truman's were amazing people.

LISA

See if I ever share anything with you again.

GREG

Don't say that.

LISA

I won't, and you'll be sorry.

GREG

I will be.

(Pause.)

You know, there is still one more thing we need to do before this dump is really our home.

LISA

Oh yeah, and what might that be Gregory?

GREG

You know.

LISA

No, I don't know. Please enlighten me oh holy one.

GREG

You know, we need to...you know.

LISA

I called the cable guy before we moved.

GREG

Not the cable Lisa, you know, we need to—

LISA

Call the electrician. You're right dear, better safe than sorry.

(She exits into the kitchen. GREG goes back to searching through the box. LISA reenters after a few beats. There should be a small change in her costume/appearance to denote the passage of time.)

I called the electrician, he'll be here first thing in the morning.

GREG

That's great honey.

LISA

Larry and I got to talking and we were thinking...

GREG

What?

LISA

...that I want a baby.

GREG

What?

LISA

I want a baby. We have this big empty house, and I want it to be filled with boyish laughter—Larry and I think that a boy would be best for you.

GREG

Who's Larry?

LISA  
(Chuckling.)

Who's Larry?

(Beat.)

You know how you have trouble talking, with a boy you could just play catch and watch television.

GREG  
Where is this coming from? I'm not ready to be a father.

LISA  
In case you haven't noticed, I'm almost thirty years old. I've only got two or three more years of prime fertility left. And sometimes a woman needs something more than just herself to feel complete, and Larry and I think that now is the right time for us to bring a child into the world.

GREG  
Although I do value Larry's opinion, I don't think that now is the best time for us to have a baby.

LISA  
Well I do.

(Pause.)

I also don't know what to get my mother for her birthday, and she's been asking for a grandchild for years now.

GREG  
You're kidding?

LISA  
You know how she can get with gifts. Remember those gloves you got her last Christmas?

GREG  
Let me get this straight, you want to bring a child into the world so you don't have to get your mother—she didn't like the gloves I got her? What are you talking about, I spent over a hundred bucks on those stupid gloves.

LISA  
You're making it sound worse than it really is. My mother's birthday is just a perk to having a baby now. I also want a baby for baby reasons.

GREG

Oh, well why didn't you just say so honey? I guess we should head to the bedroom then and fulfill our duty to humanity.

LISA

I should have never told you, I knew you wouldn't support me. You're so selfish. It has always been about you. I took on an extra job so you could stay at home and write. I had to call you when we were dating and pay lofty long distance bills because you were in college. I mow the lawn because you are allergic to grass—

GREG

This is the first day we've had a lawn to mow.

LISA

Don't you trivialize what I do around this house.

GREG

Don't get like this.

LISA

Like what?

GREG

Like this.

LISA

I'm not getting like anything.

GREG

You're doing it right now.

LISA

How can I get like this if I don't know what getting like this is? I'm not getting like anything. You're the one who's getting to be an asshole.

GREG

Right.

LISA

Whatever. You're like this. Some father you're going to be.

GREG

Some mother you're going to be, this is the first time you've ever mentioned anything about a baby.

LISA

I knew you would forget the zebra baby. You're so oblivious.

GREG

What zebra baby?

LISA

Last year at the zoo? When I mentioned how cute that baby zebra was?

GREG

We never went to the zoo.

LISA

Now I'm a liar too?

GREG

No, I just think that I would remember going to the zoo seeing how the nearest one is nearly four hours away.

LISA

I even got a dolphin mold-a-rama for junior. You know how much he likes marine life. He gets that from my dad.

GREG

Your dad is a carpenter.

LISA

So was Jesus, and what did he eat?

GREG

We aren't having a baby right now and that's final.

(LISA begins to exit to the kitchen.)

Where are you going?

LISA

I'm going into the kitchen to organize.

GREG

Fine. Go ahead.

(LISA exits. Pause. GREG resumes his search through the box. The doorbell rings.)

LISA

(Off-stage. In a cold tone.)

Get the door, honey.

(GREG hesitates then answers the door.  
His MOTHER and FATHER enter. FATHER  
hands GREG a bottle of wine.)

GREG  
Oh Jesus Christ.

MOTHER  
It's good to see you too son.

FATHER  
We got you some wine on our trip to Italy.

GREG  
How did you know?

MOTHER  
So where is my grandchild?

GREG  
That big box in the corner. We figure we'll let him out  
once we get more situated.

MOTHER  
Don't be an ass dear, and speaking of boxes, it's about  
time you cleaned this place up.

(LISA enters carrying a small child.  
The "baby" can be anything from an  
actual child to a football. She again  
has a slight change in her  
costume/appearance.)

LISA  
Here's the little fella.

GREG  
Where the hell did that come from?

FATHER  
Son, when a man loves a woman—

GREG  
Not now Dad—

MOTHER  
Don't get cross with your father dear.

LISA

Fed Ex.

GREG

What do you mean Fed Ex?

LISA

Fed Ex brought little Alan this morning. He was a belated house warming gift from my mother.

MOTHER

(Aside to Father.)

I told you we should have gotten them those two little Korean babies. But no, you insisted on that stupid bottle of wine.

FATHER

(To Greg.)

He looks just like you.

LISA

They have the same eyes.

MOTHER

(She starts to cry.)

Oh, I can't believe it.

GREG

Stop crying mother.

MOTHER

I'm sorry son, but I never thought you'd procreate.

GREG

I didn't.

FATHER

Did you get a receipt for him?

LISA

Gift receipt. But we won't need it, will we dear?

MOTHER

Of course you won't need it, he's just darling.

LISA

Would you like to hold him?

MOTHER

I've waited my whole life.  
(She takes the baby.)  
He's marvelous. Isn't life beautiful?

LISA

More beautiful than Yosemite.

MOTHER

I think Mussolini said it best...

FATHER

(Pulls Greg aside.)  
I know that the kid's pretty and all son, but there's a lot more to raising a child than good looks.

GREG

That's not my child.

FATHER

I know it's all a bit overwhelming right now, but you'll get used to it.

GREG

Dad, I don't think you understand.

FATHER

I understand son, and it's time you settled down. You dodged a few bullets, but now enough is enough with the writing. You need to get a real job. You need to get insurance, and inoculations. You need to set up a savings account and college fund for little Alan. Buy a gun. Vote Republican. Drive a mini-van. Don't ruin Alan's future because you were a failure son.

GREG

That is not my child.

FATHER

I know the feeling son. Believe me, I know the feeling.

GREG

What do you mean 'you know the feeling'?

MOTHER

(To Father.)  
Henry darling, you simply must hold our grandchild.

(FATHER takes the child.)

MOTHER

(Pulling Greg aside.)

Son, I need to talk to you about something.

GREG

Dad already told me I was a failure.

MOTHER

I know son, but there's something else we need to discuss.

GREG

What?

MOTHER

Don't fly off the handle—

GREG

What is it?

MOTHER

I've put a lot of thought into this.

GREG

Okay.

MOTHER

This is very hard for me to say.

GREG

I noticed.

MOTHER

I'm putting your father in a home.

GREG

Are you serious? A 'home' home?

MOTHER

He's losing touch with reality.

GREG

He's only fifty-five.

MOTHER

Trust me dear, he's not like he used to be. This was a difficult decision for me to make and I'd appreciate some support.

GREG

I'd support you if I agreed with you. We just had a very lucid and intelligent conversation.

MOTHER

Who would know better? Huh? I've lived with that man for thirty-two years, and believe me son, he's gone.

GREG

I don't think this is your decision to make.

MOTHER

Of course it is. Do you think that it's easy to admit that you need help? I'm trying to help him son, don't you want me to help your father before it's too late?

GREG

What does he have to say about all this?

MOTHER

I haven't told him yet.

GREG

You haven't told him yet?

(Pause.)

No, oh no. I'm not-

MOTHER

I can't bear to.

GREG

I'm not telling him anything.

MOTHER

You keep this up and you won't get power of attorney.

GREG

Why are you even here?

MOTHER

(To Father.)

Oh Henry darling, our son has something he'd like to tell you.

FATHER

Lisa and I were just talking with Alan about the difference between fission and fusion. You know I always thought that when energy was released it had to be from the atom

splitting, but Alan told me that's not necessarily true.  
He's quite the cracker-jack.

LISA

He gets that from my dad.

GREG

Well, Dad...

LISA

What is it Greg?

MOTHER

Go on, tell them dear.

GREG

(To Mother.)

I don't think this is such a good idea Mom.

FATHER

What's not a good idea? Nuclear Holocaust.

(Chuckles to himself.)

I think we all know where Alan gets his sense of humor  
from.

GREG

Well, this is all Mom's idea, I can't stress that enough...

LISA

He never takes responsibility for anything.

MOTHER

You'd think he'd grow up now that he's a parent.

FATHER

Just spit it out already Greg. I'm not getting any younger.

GREG

This is for your own good Dad...

MOTHER

Say it already!

GREG

(Very quickly.)

Mom wants to put you in a home.

(Regular pace. Relieved.)

There I said it, now let's all have a good laugh and forget  
about it...

FATHER

(Pause.)

Very well then.

(Pause.)

GREG

Dad?

FATHER

Yes?

GREG

You know what that entails right?

FATHER

Yes.

GREG

Moving into a hospital with senile people who have no bodily control?

FATHER

Right.

GREG

And you're okay with that?

FATHER

Son, if I've learned anything in my life, it's that time catches up too quickly. All you can do is hope that you've lived your life when it does.

GREG

Dad!

LISA

Leave you father alone Gregory, you're upsetting Alan.

GREG

I don't even know who Alan is.

LISA

And it breaks my heart.

MOTHER

(To Father.)

Darling, maybe we should let these two have a few minutes alone. Why don't we take Alan and put this wine in the kitchen for them.

(MOTHER and FATHER exit to the kitchen.)

Can we talk? LISA

Why not. GREG

I mean really talk. LISA

Oh, well in that case— GREG

I've been thinking about making love to another man. LISA

Right now? GREG

Of course not. LISA

Anyone in specific? GREG

Yes. LISA

Are you serious? GREG

You don't know him. LISA

Who is it? GREG

I just told you that you don't know him. Jesus Greg, sometimes you really— LISA

Have you already, you know? GREG

LISA

No.

GREG

So you wanted to clear everything with me first.

LISA

You're making it sound worse than it really is.

GREG

No, you are.

LISA

This is so typical—

GREG

You know what, go ahead. I could really care less.

LISA

You're lying.

GREG

Wow, how did you know?

LISA

I'm trying to tell you something that is very important to me and all you can do is make sardonic remarks. This is so typical of you. I try and share something with you and you ruin it. You're so selfish.

GREG

You're the one who's having an affair.

LISA

Thinking about having an affair. You never listen. Forget it. Ruin this marriage if you want—

GREG

How did you meet him?

LISA

He's my professor.

GREG

Your professor?

LISA

I've been taking some classes.

GREG

Since when?

LISA

Since I wanted to. This proves my point so clearly.

GREG

I can't believe this.

LISA

You're the one who said we should try everything once.

GREG

Yeah, like snake meat.

LISA

Well, he's coming over to meet you.

GREG

When?

(The doorbell rings. LISA answers the door and gives the PROFESSOR a long kiss on the lips. The PROFESSOR is the same person as FATHER only dressed in a turtleneck and tweed blazer.)

GREG

(To himself. Confused.)

Dad?

LISA

Greg, I'd like you to meet Dr. Watson. He's a vegan.

GREG

Hi.

(GREG and the PROFESSOR share a hearty handshake, which they hold throughout the following scene.)

PROFESSOR

Lisa tells me that you're a writer, you know I used to work for The New Yorker, maybe I could take a look at some of your work.

GREG

Sure.

LISA

He's the chair of the University's English department now.

GREG

Great.

LISA

His Ph.D. is from Harvard.

GREG

Wow.

LISA

He's published six novels in four languages on three continents.

GREG

I had a story in Field & Stream once.

LISA

He can bench press two hundred and fifty pounds.

GREG

That's a lot.

LISA

He does his mother's taxes.

GREG

My mother doesn't work.

LISA

He's been to Europe twenty-seven times.

GREG

Twenty-seven huh?

PROFESSOR

Have you ever been abroad Craig?

GREG

Does Baghdad count?

(Pause. They relinquish their handshake.)

PROFESSOR

You know your wife is quite the little scholar. Scored a ninety-seven on her last exam.

(Looking over Lisa.)

Best in the class.

LISA

(She grows increasingly sexual toward the Professor.)

You just make everything so interesting that I can't help but learn. The way you take a piece of literature that before was totally inaccessible, and transform it into a living, breathing being is awe-inspiring.

PROFESSOR

Well thank you darling.

(To Greg.)

I wish all my students paid as much attention to detail as Lisa.

GREG

Yeah, she's a stickler.

PROFESSOR

Nothing gets by this one.

(The two share a fake laugh. Pause.)

LISA

Well, enough about me. If we're going to keep that reservation we should really get going.

PROFESSOR

See what I mean.

(Fake laughter. Pause. PROFESSOR and LISA exchange a series of glances. To Greg.)

Craig, would you like to join us?

GREG

No. I think I'll stay here and work out.

(Fake laughter by GREG only.)

PROFESSOR

Well, you're right darling, this small talk is exquisite but if we're going to keep those reservations...

LISA

Let me get my purse.

(LISA exits. GREG and the PROFESSOR share an awkward silence.)

GREG

Are you going to sleep with my wife?

PROFESSOR

I hope to.

GREG

Oh.

(Long pause.)

Could you really take a look at my work?

PROFESSOR

I'd be happy to.

(Pause.)

GREG

A ninety-seven, huh?

PROFESSOR

Yes, she did quite well.

(Pause.)

GREG

(GREG catches LISA re-entering from the corner of his eye and attempts to pretend like he is getting on fabulously with the PROFESSOR. Through fake laughter.)

...so it turned out that it was just my reflection the whole time. Can you believe that? I thought it was...but it turned out...you know, not to be...

LISA

Sorry it took so long, Alan wouldn't eat his ham sandwich. I told Greg to buy bologna, but you know how he can be.

PROFESSOR

Don't I? Well, it was great to see you again Craig, and just send those manuscripts to my secretary.

(PROFESSOR and LISA exit. Pause. GREG resumes his search. The doorbell rings again. GREG answers the door. THE KID

WHO LIKES SANDWICHES is there, with sandwich in hand.)

GREG

I don't want anything.

(Starts closing the door.)

KID

(Wedging his foot in the door.)

I'm not selling anything.

GREG

Good, because I don't want anything.

KID

I know.

GREG

Good.

(Pause.)

I'm glad we got that settled.

KID

(Pause.)

Can I come in?

GREG

Are you one of the neighborhood kids?

KID

No. You don't know me yet, we'll meet in the future.

GREG

But we're meeting now, so how can we meet again in the future? You can't meet twice.

KID

Time plays tricks on us all from time to time.

GREG

Really?

KID

Yes, but that's not why I'm here.

GREG

Okay. Why are you here?

KID

To help you.

GREG  
Are you like some sort of muse?

KID  
No.

GREG  
Cause I could use one, so if you do that, you know...

KID  
Look Gregory, we both know this isn't about your book, so why don't you just let me in so we can get something accomplished.

GREG  
(Letting KID in.)  
Who are you?

KID  
For now I'm the kid who likes sandwiches.  
(Greg gives him a quizzical look.)  
When you were a kid and you didn't like the sandwich your mother had packed for you, what would you do?

GREG  
I don't know, I always bought my lunch.

KID  
Suppose you didn't—

GREG  
I'm not in a hypothetical situations mood—

KID  
Pretend. Now suppose you had a sandwich you didn't want, what would you do with it?

GREG  
Throw it away.

KID  
Or?

GREG  
(Catching on.)  
Or...give it to the kid who likes sandwiches.  
(Noticing he's finished his sandwich.)

Oh, would you like another sandwich?

KID

Please.

GREG

Okay. One sandwich coming up. Make yourself at home.

(GREG exits to the kitchen. Pause. KID looks through the boxes and examines the room. GREG re-enters with a sandwich.)

KID

Bologna, my favorite. Thank you.

(Takes a bite.)

You're missing out on your life.

GREG

That's preposterous. I'm living it right now.

KID

You aren't, and you know it.

GREG

Why should I listen to you? You're just some kid who likes sandwiches.

KID

Why not listen to me? Maybe I know something you don't.

GREG

I doubt it.

KID

I know about your son.

GREG

He's not my son.

KID

Listen Gregory, you're so caught up in this fictionalized world you've created that your real life is passing you by. Every second another day goes by, every day another year. You sit around and write about life, poorly if I may say so, but you don't actually live it; all you do is sit on that couch. You're so out of touch it boggles the mind.

GREG

(Pause.)

Can I ask you a question about this son I supposedly have?

KID

Shoot.

GREG

Let me start at the beginning. Let's say you were at the zoo, and your wife mentioned how cute a baby zebra was, how would you interpret that?

KID

Obviously that she wants a baby.

GREG

How do you know that? What if she just thought the animal was cute.

KID

If she were simply commenting on the cuteness of the animal she would have done so with a lion, or tiger, or koala—not a zebra. Everybody knows that zebras are best used as metaphors. You know, the black and white stripes. Night and day. Oil and water. White and wheat. Therefore, by commenting on the cuteness of a zebra baby, she was saying to you that she feels a void in her life that would best be filled by a child.

GREG

But what if we never went to the zoo?

KID

Irrelevant. If the reference was made then the impact is the same.

GREG

How can it be? Lisa's never been to a zoo in her entire life, not even a petting zoo in some guy's garage.

KID

Maybe she has. There's a lot out there that neither you nor I know, or can begin to understand. Socrates wasn't wise because he knew everything, he was wise because he knew he knew nothing. Look, I'd love to stay and chat but I need to get going. You think about what we talked about here today.

(He exits.)

GREG

(To himself.)

But she hates animals.

(Pause. LISA enters from the kitchen.  
She is dressed and looks exactly the  
same as at the beginning of the play.)

LISA

I'm sorry I got snippy with you earlier, it's just that  
sometimes you can be a very difficult person to talk to.  
(No response.)

LISA

What's the matter with you? You look like you're high.

GREG

What?

LISA

Are you okay?

GREG

I'm fine.

LISA

Did you find that thing yet?

GREG

You mean the scrub brush? No, not yet. I stopped looking  
awhile ago.

LISA

A scrub brush? That's what you were looking for? A scrub  
brush? That doesn't look anything like a comet.

GREG

Well I'm sorry, but it's the best I could do.

LISA

Well, what have you been doing all this time?

GREG

I'm not sure. Do you want to make love to my Dad?

LISA

You are high. Dammit Gregory—

GREG

I'm not high. Do you still want a baby?

Yes. LISA

Okay. GREG

LISA  
(Pause.)  
Okay? Okay what? Okay you—

GREG  
Okay let's have a baby.

LISA  
Are you sure?

GREG  
(Pause.)  
No.

(Blackout.)

**THE END**