

**PEEK-A-BOO**

A monologue play

By Tyler JC Whidden

(Approx. running time: 5 mins.)

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MAN stands CS next to an empty chair.

MAN

When I was two, my father would play this game with me wherein he would disappear behind his hands and, confused, I would watch him as he reappeared like a whole new man – smiles and laughter.

This game scared me.

I couldn't understand why my father would delight in leaving me there waiting for his return from his hands nor could I understand my part in this game. Was I too supposed to hide? Or worse, was I too supposed to smile and laugh and pretend like I didn't feel the entire weight of our relationship on my young, toddler shoulders? But, it was okay, because I learned that if I just wanted to disappear, all I had to do was hide behind my hands and then I could reappear whenever I felt like it was safe again. But I could never cry.

"Peek-a-boo, I see you."

As I look back, I see the impact that little game had on my life. Like when the television would interrupt episodes of *The Cosby Show* or *Family Ties* with alerts and warnings of funnel clouds in the area, I would be paralyzed with fear and I would cower in whatever room my mother was in.

Like the game, I held my hands over my face and disappeared till I could come back when it was safe for me to smile again.

While I was growing up, everything to me was a tornado. But I would never cry.

"Peek-a-boo, I see you."

From there, it was snakes & spiders, little white dogs (don't ask), thunder, going to school, what if people don't like me, what if my mom left, what if girls think I'm

ugly, what if boys think I'm weak, what if my teachers think I'm stupid, how will I ever pass the third grade, or junior high, or fucking high school with all the older people and seniors and sports and teachers who are tough on students especially the stupid ugly ones who haven't grown leg hair yet and what if everyone knew how scared I am to leave my room, or everyone catches on that I'm a phony and I will never be more than the fuck-up who has completely bungled his life?

I certainly wouldn't say I beat those fears or rejected others because I learned at a young age that, instead of facing fears, I could just get better and better at the game my father taught me when I was two. But I could never cry.

"Peek-a-boo, I see you."

My own son just turned two and I have never thought of more ways in which myself or others could instantly die at any moment as I have over the course of the past 24 months. What if the crib just collapses on itself, what if I fall asleep while holding him and roll over on him, what if I drop him, what if a car jumps a curb and hits us, what if the stroller somehow gets away from me and he rolls into traffic, what if a fucking deer charges at us while we're in the valley, what if there's an asteroid or a zombie apocalypse, what if this shitty house I can only afford to rent catches on fire and I'm not home, what if my wife dies and leaves us alone, what if a wolf spider crawls into his bedroom and bites him in the middle of the night, what if I forget him in the car, what if I forget to pick him up, what if I break the promises I made to myself on a daily basis and I grow up to be exactly like my father?

"Peek-a-boo, I see you."

But, on sunny days when I take him to the park and I push him on the swing and I slide down the slide with him in my lap and I sit on the merry-go-round right next to

him – holding on to him, of course, because those things break all the time, probably – and we walk home and we sing songs and he holds my hand and he laughs though, nowadays when he laughs he sticks his tongue out and he’s very klutzy and top heavy – which of course means he’s probably going to fall down and bite his tongue off, and when he looks at me his little face lights up and I just know he doesn’t want to be anywhere else, and when his mother comes home and makes him dinner and we watch him eat as he points to the tv and says, “Nemo” or “Sunny days” which is what he calls *Sesame Street* because of the song, and when it’s bath time I watch him splash around in the tub where I won’t sit down because I need to spring into action should he hit his head or whatever, or worse even – in case he shits in the tub and clogs the drain – ugh – and I put him in his PJs singing the “putting on our pajamas” jamma and only I sing because even though he hears the song every night, he still doesn’t know the words, or if he does he can’t sing it because he can’t really talk yet but when he does start talking, I’m secretly hoping he just says, “I love you Da-Da” but I taught him how to give hugs so his cheek rests on mine and his mother puts him to bed even though he wants to hang out some more ... but what he or my wife don’t know, is that when they’re both asleep, and the night is quiet and still, I quietly walk into his room and I pull the little chair next to his crib and put my hand on his back and feel him breathe and I watch him sleep.

And I tell him I’m sorry. I tell him how fucking sorry I am that he got me as a father and everything that will go wrong in his life will be because of me and no matter how hard I try I will always be the kid who’s too afraid of everything to be anything and that he’s a good kid – and he is, he really is – and he didn’t deserve to get stuck with a fuck up like me for a father and then I cry.

What if he's just like me?

"Peek-a-boo, I see you."

MAN sits in empty chair.

BLACKOUT.

END of PLAY.