

The Bus Test

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CHARACTERS

MICHAEL MASON, 29

HAL, 60s, Michael's dad

JENN, 29, Michael's ex-girlfriend

DAN, 29, Michael's friend from high school

RAUL HERERRA, mid 40s, a Wall Street executive

SETTING

The Mason living room; Fort Dodge, Iowa. November 2010 to April 2011.

SCENE 1

A dingy, suburban living room.
Fort Dodge, Iowa.

Suitcases and duffle bags are
scattered on the floor.

MICHAEL (29) - weary, worn-down -
enters through the front door
with some luggage; he's carrying
an expensive suit.

DAN (29), bright-eyed and sturdy,
follows with a few bags.

MICHAEL

Sorry we were so late. Our flight got delayed.

DAN

Our flight?

MICHAEL

My dad came to New York. Didn't want me to fly back alone.

DAN

Your dad? The same guy who wouldn't take off from work to
drive you to college?

MICHAEL

He's gotten better.

DAN

He must have if you survived a plane ride together.

Dan smiles; Michael doesn't.

A beat.

DAN

Man, it's good to see you.

MICHAEL

Yeah - you too.

Another beat.

Dan starts looking through the suitcases, bags. He pulls out a picture in an expensive frame.

DAN
(reading from the picture)
"To Michael." Is that...?

MICHAEL
Warren Buffett.

DAN
Wow. What's he like?

MICHAEL
I don't know. It was just a photo op.

DAN
(a big smile)
Look at you...

A cell phone rings. Dan pulls the phone from his pocket, answers it.

DAN
Hi grandma...
(after a second)
Yep - I heard it might rain later.
(a pause)
Uh huh. I've got an umbrella.
(another pause)
I'm still at Michael's. I'll call you when I'm leaving, OK?
(pause)
Yep - I'll tell him.
(pause)
Love you too.

He hangs up, puts the phone away.

DAN
My grandmother says hello.

MICHAEL
How is she?

DAN
She's out of the rehab, but it's still a little rough. And it's hard you know - most of her friends are...

MICHAEL
What about the senior center?

DAN

She doesn't feel safe leaving the house. We looked at Gateway Hills, but she didn't want to go - lose her independence. ... Though right now, that consists of me doing everything for her.

MICHAEL

Gateway Hills...

DAN

Remember when we used to go and play the oldies for them? When your grandma was-

MICHAEL

Yeah. That was fun.

Dan looks at Michael.

DAN

We should jam sometime.

MICHAEL

...I don't play anymore.

DAN

I saw a case in the car.

MICHAEL

Haven't touched that thing in years...
(pause)

You still play?

DAN

Yeah - I use it in my lessons sometimes.

HAL, Michael's dad, enters with a heavy backpack.

HAL

(dropping the backpack)

Jesus, what the hell do you have in here?

MICHAEL

Some books.

HAL

They probably fired you for reading too much.

MICHAEL

Dad.

MICHAEL

We started talking on Facebook - we, uh, got pretty close.

Hal gives a disapproving look.

MICHAEL

What?

HAL

...he's a loser.

MICHAEL

He's not a-

HAL

He teaches high school in the town he grew up in.

MICHAEL

He wants to be near his family.

Dan enters carrying a guitar case. Hal doesn't see him.

HAL

You think it's normal for a 30 year-old man to live with his grandmother? He's a loser.

Hal turns around and sees Dan. Then, as if nothing happened:

HAL

I'm gonna get a beer. You guys want anything?

DAN

No thanks, Mr. Mason.

Hal exits into the kitchen.

A pause. Then:

DAN

Yeah - doesn't seem like he's changed to me.

MICHAEL

Sorry. He just-

DAN

It's OK. That's what everyone thinks.

MICHAEL

Why? Because you live with your grandma?

DAN

And because I teach.

MICHAEL

That's bullshit. You know, I still think about Mr. Eisenberg's class sometimes - and that was, like, 10 years ago.

DAN

I teach that now - AP English.

MICHAEL

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears! I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him."

DAN

We still do that.

MICHAEL

And *Lord of the Flies*?

DAN

We read it. But they won't let us do the role playing anymore. "Too dangerous."

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

That's awesome.

DAN

I mean, I love it. But compared to what you're doing-

MICHAEL

What? Making millionaires richer?

DAN

You're in New York - doing things that matter.

MICHAEL

I guess.

DAN

You know, I got into the PhD program at NYU - to be an English professor. But then my grandma had her first stroke. ... would've had to put her in a home if I left.

MICHAEL

That sucks.

DAN

Yeah. Well ... that's life, right?

Dan and Michael start unpacking.

DAN

Any girls out there?

MICHAEL

A few. You had to be, like, a Perfect 10 to get hired at Infinity. And they all went to Ivy Leagues. It was crazy.

DAN

You dating anyone now?

MICHAEL

Not really. How 'bout you?

DAN

Still looking. They say they want someone nice - but apparently being a teacher and taking care of your grandma makes you an asshole.

Michael smiles.

DAN

This one girl I met online - she kept telling me she didn't care about looks. We met up for drinks, and the second she saw me, it looked like she had a stroke.

MICHAEL

What's wrong with how you look?

DAN

I know!

MICHAEL

Don't you have a picture on there?

DAN

Yeah - but it's a little fuzzy. It's me and my grandma. Trying to play up the sympathy card.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

Sounds like that's really working.

DAN

I just need a good wing man. I'll have to come out and visit when you go back to New York.

MICHAEL
If I go back.

DAN
 The economy's doing great.

MICHAEL
 Doesn't mean they'll want me back.

DAN
 I bet that place is falling apart without you.

MICHAEL
 Maybe that's why they won't take my calls.

DAN
 They probably don't know what to say. When we had layoffs at the school last year-

MICHAEL
 I worked my ass off for them, and they just pretend like I don't exist-

DAN
 They're probably waiting for things to die down.

MICHAEL
 No - they're probably waiting for *me* to die. ... maybe they won't have to wait that long.

A beat.

Dan can't tell if Michael is serious. Then Michael laughs.

DAN
 That's not funny.

Dan's phone rings again. He looks at the caller ID, a little frustrated this time.

DAN
 What is it, grandma?
 (pause)
 They're in your pill box. Next to the Lipitors.
 (he waits)
 I'm sure. I put them-
 (pause)
 I'll be home in a few minutes, okay?

Dan stuffs the phone back in his pocket.

MICHAEL

Something wrong?

DAN

She can't find her pills.

MICHAEL

She's lucky she has you.

DAN

Yeah - but sometimes...

(pause)

Well, uh, it was good seeing you.

MICHAEL

Yeah. It's been way too long.

DAN

I'm glad you texted me. I was kind of worried - hadn't seen you online for a while.

MICHAEL

I had some medical stuff.

DAN

Everything OK?

MICHAEL

Yeah. I'm doing great.

DAN

Well, uh, if you're free on Thursday, I'm getting together with Sean and a few of the guys.

MICHAEL

From high school?

Dan nods.

MICHAEL

Sean moved back?

DAN

Yeah - he works at the library.

MICHAEL

Oh.

DAN

You should come. They all want to see you - hear about New York. We can try the wing man thing...

MICHAEL

No thanks.

An awkward pause. Michael can sense Dan's offended.

MICHAEL

...I want to wait until I've got a job lined up.

DAN

No one cares about that.

MICHAEL

I know but- ... another time.

DAN

Jenn's gonna be there.

Michael's eyes come alive for the first time.

MICHAEL

I thought she was still in California.

DAN

Moved back a few months ago.

MICHAEL

I couldn't find her on Facebook.

DAN

Don't think she's on there.

MICHAEL

How is she?

DAN

I dunno. Haven't seen her much. But I ran into her yesterday and invited her.

(pause)

Told her you'd be there.

...

MICHAEL

And?

And...? DAN

What did she say? MICHAEL

DAN
(smiling)
That she couldn't wait to see you. 7:30. Blue Roof Inn.

Dan leaves.

Hal enters from the kitchen, beer
in hand.

Where's Dan? HAL

Had to go. MICHAEL

Some help he was. HAL