

## The Bus Test

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## CHARACTERS

MICHAEL MASON, 29, a hedge fund analyst who lost his job in the recession

HAL, 60s, Michael's dad

JENN, 29, Michael's ex-girlfriend

DAN, 29, Michael's friend from high school

RAUL HERERRA, mid 40s, a hedge fund executive and the embodiment of corporate America

## SETTING

The Mason living room, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

**NOTE:** "The Bus Test" has received two off-Broadway readings in New York (Abingdon Theatre Co. and The Platform Group), and was workshopped at the Lark Play Development Center.

## SCENE I

A dingy suburban living room. Suitcases and duffle bags are scattered on the floor.

MICHAEL, 29, weary and worn-down, enters through the front door with a suitcase and an expensive suit.

DAN, 29, bright-eyed and sturdy, follows with a large bag.

MICHAEL

Sorry we were late. Our flight got delayed.

DAN

*Our flight?*

MICHAEL

My dad came out 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's eyes remain dark and grave. It's unsettling.

A beat.

DAN

Man, it's good to see you.

MICHAEL

You too.

Another beat.

Dan starts looking through the box and pulls out a picture in an expensive frame.

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

MICHAEL  
 Donald Trump.

DAN  
 Wow. What's he like?

MICHAEL  
 I don't know. It was just a photo op - when we merged with another hedge fund.

DAN  
 Look at you: the King of Wall Street.

A cell phone rings. Dan pulls a phone from his pocket and answers it.

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

Dan puts the phone back in his pocket.

DAN  
 My grandmother says hello.

MICHAEL  
 How is she?

DAN  
 She's out of the rehab, but still pretty lonely. You know, all her friends are gone.

MICHAEL  
 What about the community center?

DAN  
 She doesn't feel safe leaving the house. We looked at Gateway Hills, but she didn't want to lose her independence.  
 (beat)

Though right now, that consists of me doing everything for her.

MICHAEL

My grandma loved it there.

DAN

Remember when we used to go and play the oldies for them?

MICHAEL

Yeah. That was fun.

DAN

We should jam sometime.

MICHAEL

...I don't play anymore.

DAN

I saw a case in the car.

MICHAEL

Just some junk guitar I bought.

(beat)

You still play?

DAN

Yeah - I use it in my lessons sometimes.

HAL, Michael's dad, crockety and crankety, 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

I told you, I don't want to talk about it.

HAL

No sense of humor. Just like your mother.

Michael turns to him, angry.

MICHAEL

*Don't.*

Another beat.

Hal and Michael's eyes are fixed on each other, with Dan frozen in the middle.

A cell phone ring breaks the silence.

DAN

(answering his phone)

What is it, grandma?

(he waits)

No, I already paid the cable bill. Yes, I'm sure-

He puts the phone to his chest.

DAN

(to Michael and Hal)

I'll be right back.

Dan exits through the front door.

HAL

Does he know?

MICHAEL

No.

A long pause.

HAL

We didn't need help. It's just a few bags.

MICHAEL

He wanted to come over.

HAL

You haven't seen him in years.

MICHAEL

We started talking on Facebook - 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 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. There's an awkward silence.

DAN

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

MICHAEL

Sorry. He just-

DAN

No. That's what everyone thinks.

MICHAEL

Why? Because of your grandma?

DAN

And because I teach.

(making quote marks with his hands)

"Those who can't do..."

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

Ten years from now, these kids will still be talking about your class.

DAN

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

MICHAEL

What? Working 16 hour days to make millionaires richer?

DAN

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

MICHAEL

I guess.

DAN

You know, I almost moved there. Got into the PhD program at NYU - was gonna be an English professor. And then my grandma had her first stroke. I would've had to put her in a home if I left.

MICHAEL

That sucks.

DAN

Yeah. I really wanted to go.

(beat)

That's life, right?

Dan and Michael start going through some of the boxes.

DAN

Any girls out there?

MICHAEL

A few.

DAN

It said on Facebook you were single.

MICHAEL

Well, no one serious. But you had to be, like, a Perfect 10 to get hired at Infinity. And they all went to Ivy Leagues. It was nuts.

(beat)  
How 'bout you?

DAN  
Still looking for the one. They all say they want to date a nice guy - but apparently being a teacher and taking care of your grandmother makes you a jerk.

Michael smiles.

DAN  
I met this one girl online - 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.

(beat)  
And I'm pretty cute.

MICHAEL  
Don't you have a picture on there?

DAN  
Yeah - but it's a little fuzzy. It's me and my grandma.  
(off Michael's dubious glare)  
I'm playing 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 picking up.

MICHAEL  
Doesn't mean they'll take me.

DAN  
I bet that place is falling apart without you.

MICHAEL  
Yeah. 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 saved my boss' ass a hundred times, and he won't even talk to me. Same thing with my friends - 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.

(beat)

Maybe they won't have to wait that long.

A long beat.

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

DAN

Don't joke about that.

Dan's phone rings again. He looks at the caller ID, frustrated.

DAN

What is it, grandma?

(beat)

They're in your pill box. Next to the Lipitors.

(he waits)

I'm sure. I put them-

(pause)

I'll be there 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...

(beat)

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. It was nothing.

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. Most of the others never left.

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

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 it.

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 waits in anticipation. Dan lets the tension build.

MICHAEL

And?

DAN

And...?

MICHAEL

What did she say?!

DAN

(smiling)

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

Dan leaves. Michael stares into space, eyes aglow.

Hal enters from the kitchen, beer in hand.

HAL

Where's Dan?

MICHAEL

Had to go.



MICHAEL

I'm trying. But everything is shit.

HAL

You need to stop thinking about yourself.

MICHAEL

What else should I be thinking about?

HAL

Finding something to do.

MICHAEL

Like what?

HAL

I don't know - ...day trading.

Michael stops, has an idea.

MICHAEL

What about volunteering?

HAL

Volunteering?

MICHAEL

At Gateway Hills. I used to love going there, playing music.

HAL

You were in high school. It's time to grow up.

(beat)

You'll like day trading.

An uncomfortable silence.

MICHAEL

I really appreciate what you're doing, dad. I know you're trying to change and-

HAL

I don't want to talk about it.

MICHAEL

I just-

HAL

Michael.

Another uncomfortable silence.

MICHAEL

Maybe I can help you fix this place up.



MICHAEL

So what have you been doing?

HAL

I got an eReader. Catching up on books. And chess is going great. I'm a national master on Yahoo - closing in on an ICF ranking.

MICHAEL

ICF?

HAL

International Chess Federation. I'm trying to qualify for the American tournament next year.

MICHAEL

What about stuff with other people?

HAL

I play against people all day.

MICHAEL

I mean in person.

HAL

I go to the community center sometimes, but most of the people there have a screw loose. And there's church...

MICHAEL

Don't you get lonely?

HAL

(deflecting the question)

Well now I've got company whether I want it or not.

Hal breaks away from the conversation and picks up the backpack.

HAL

Come on. Upstairs.

Michael picks up a duffel bag and follows Hal up the stairs.

Blackout.

## SCENE II

The Mason living room is dark and empty.

Michael and JENN enter through the front door. They're both a little tipsy.

MICHAEL  
(playfully)  
Yoga is not a sport.

JENN  
Yes it is!

MICHAEL  
It's not in the Olympics. Even curling's in the Olympics.

JENN  
It's an individual sport.

MICHAEL  
No. Running is an individual sport. Yoga is a reason to wear spandex and get touchy-feely.

JENN  
So I have to tape up my nipples up for it to be a sport?

MICHAEL  
Exactly.

Michael turns on the lights, but his smile alone is enough to light up the room.

Jenn is even more beautiful and vibrant than she was in high school. She looks around the living room.

JENN  
You're right - it's exactly the same.

She picks up a big stuffed animal.

JENN  
You still have the fake dog!

MICHAEL  
My dad hasn't changed a thing since I left.

Jenn hangs up her coat. Then she walks around the living room, examining the furniture and tchotchkes.

JENN  
I feel old.