

Call Him 'Gene'

A ten-minute play

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“Call Him ‘Gene’”

Characters

Maddy..... Female, mid-thirties. Joel’s wife.

Joel..... Male, mid-thirties. Geneticist, trying to finish his work.

Setting

The play takes place in Maddy and Joel’s house. More specifically, in Joel’s basement lab.

Synopsis

Joel is working late hours in his home-lab to finish his National Science Foundation deadline. After he refuses his wife’s invitation to go to bed, she tries to help him with his genetic problems and helps him deal with the larger question: how can you change what you’re given?

"Call him 'Gene'"

It is late at night, and JOEL is working in his basement lab.

MADDY

You have to come to bed.

JOEL

I'll be there in a minute. The incubator is still processing the blood on the slides.

MADDY

How much longer?

JOEL

Three hours.

MADDY

Joel, it's midnight. You need your sleep.

JOEL

No, I need 3.2 million dollars. If you can give me that, then I'll go to sleep.

MADDY

How about you tell me what's bothering you.

JOEL

What's bothering me is that I'm *this* close to a breakthrough, but genes keep on fucking with me.

MADDY

Maybe you have to trust with sleep, you can get it.

JOEL

Or maybe I'm ramming my head against a brick wall.

MADDY

You just have to take a fresh approach.

JOEL

I don't have time for a fresh approach. If I sleep right now, I've lost my research.

MADDY

Then explain it to me. Get it out in the open.

JOEL

(if I bore you to death, you'll go away)

Each gene has a pair of dominant and recessive qualities.

MADDY

(you're hiding behind your talk)

Put it simply.

JOEL

I don't know how I can talk any simpler.

MADDY

Pretend you're addressing a child.

JOEL

This isn't going to help.

MADDY

C'mon. I'm our kid, and I want to know what daddies' working on.

JOEL

If our kid was actually curious about science, I would buy it a football jersey, and tell it to go away.

MADDY

You do exciting work.

JOEL

Science is hell. Science is looking at the truth, and being able to do nothing about it.

MADDY

(as kid)

Like daddies' research?

JOEL

Maddy. Science is glazed-over eyes at dinner parties.

MADDY

(as kid)

Daddy, what's a dinner party?

JOEL

(as kid)

It's where you were conceived.

MADDY

(as maddy)

Joel.

JOEL

There's no way it can make a difference. Our fictitious child is not going to give me a breakthrough.

MADDY

(as maddy)

It means something to me.

JOEL

You want to know what daddies' working on? Well, daddy is working on you. You are made up of blood. And your blood is made up of genes, and genes decide who you are.

MADDY

(as kid)

Why?

JOEL

Because you carry a combination of positive-- different traits. You could be blond, or have brown hair. Now that's chosen because one is stronger than the other one, and the stronger gene always wins. Brown is the strongest. That's why your mother has to die her hair red every other week.

MADDY

(as kid)

She has natural, beautiful, full red hair. And you're a liar.

JOEL

But gene's aren't fair. Because a lot of good traits are weaker than bad ones. *(pause)* Like long legs are weaker than short legs. So if you wanted to be a basketball player, than your body is working against you.

MADDY

(as kid)

So what are you doing?

JOEL

Well... Son.. Daughter? *(to Maddy)* I can't tell, Maddy.

MADDY

(as kid)

I'm a boy!

JOEL

Well, son. I am trying to *switch* the genes. Making the stronger one weak, and the weaker one strong.

MADDY

(as kid)

Why?

JOEL

Madd, I can't do this.

MADDY

(as kid)

Why?

JOEL

Because you should have the freshest start possible. You should be free to be you. *(stops)*
I'm not explaining this to a kid we're never going to have.

MADDY

(as kid)

You don't want me?

JOEL

Maddy. Stop it.

MADDY

(as kid)

Why not?

JOEL

Because, son. Because of my genes you have problems sleeping. You grind your teeth at night.

MADDY

(as maddy)

Joel.

JOEL

What? You want me to keep on going? Son. Because of me, you're an alcoholic. A strong one, too.

MADDY

(as maddy)

Joel.

JOEL

But watch-out. You have to learn self-restraint on your own. That's not covered by my genes. You. Son. Have to fight against everything you are since you were born. That's my contribution to you.

MADDY

I wouldn't have asked you to marry me if I thought you couldn't do the job.

JOEL

There's more to the *job* than what I can control.

MADDY

So don't control it.

JOEL

Why?

MADDY

Because he'll be part me. He'll probably rebel against that anyway.

JOEL

Tell me. What will happen?

MADDY

I don't know!

JOEL

I can't plan for every event!

MADDY

Why are you trying to?

JOEL

What else can I do?

MADDY

Have faith! Have faith that you have at least one thing positive in you. Have faith that I have one thing in me. Have faith that we will be here to raise him together. And have faith that our best qualities are dominant.

JOEL

But we have no control!

MADDY

If you want control, then you have to be more than a gene dispenser! You need to be there for him!

JOEL

(you're pregnant-- this isn't theory)

This is just theory.

MADDY

No, Joel. This is fact. I'm asking you to be more than a gene dispenser. Because I don't know if I can raise him on my own.

JOEL

Him?

MADDY

I can feel it. He's a boy.

JOEL

Then, son. I will give you the strength to fight what I gave you.

END OF PLAY