

Faithful Son

By Mark Bellusci

CAST

KURT - The father. 50s to 60s.

MARJORY - The mother. 50s to 60s.

LORI - Daughter. Early 30s. Stiff and formal.

BRIAN - Son. Late 20s.

SCENE: A living room.

AT RISE: KURT is freshening the room. MARJORY enters, carrying a tray with coffee.

MARJORY

(Placing the tray down on a table.)

You don't have to --

KURT

Just sprucing up for --

MARJORY

The place looks fine.

KURT

Never hurts to --

MARJORY

You never used to --

KURT

Yeah, well, now you've got your hands full and --

MARJORY

So do you.

KURT

Hey, we're a team, right?

(Tired nod and smile from MARJORY.)

MARJORY

Like the old days.

KURT

(Chuckles.)

Like the old days. Remember when we first got this house?
How cavernous it was?

MARJORY

Stayed that way a long time. Till we got our first couch.

KURT

(Chuckling.)

Plywood and straw, and it was disintegrating before we even paid it off.

MARJORY

But what a thrill to have furniture without the word "lawn" in it.

KURT

Still say that was the most comfortable couch I ever slept on.

MARJORY

You were just so tired from the three jobs you had. Every night, I had to wake you.

KURT

Could have left me sleeping.

MARJORY

And you'd still be sleeping. And we'd have never started a family. And we wouldn't be waiting for Lori.

KURT

(Serious.)

Or taking care of Brian.

MARJORY

(Sighing.)

Or taking care of Brian.

KURT

Did he eat the burritos?

MARJORY

(Smiling.)

One of his favorites. You know, when he eats like that, it's almost like the old days. Before he --

(Doorbell rings. DAD goes to answer it.)

Now remember, gentle and gradual.

KURT

She knows --

MARJORY
She knows from the phone. She hasn't seen ...

(DAD opens the door. LORI enters.)

KURT
Heyyyy.

LORI
Hi.
(SHE hugs her parents.)

MARJORY
It's sooo good to see you. How was the flight?

LORI
Oh, same as usual.

KURT
You look great.

LORI
You, too ... considering.

MARJORY
We're doing ... okay.

LORI
(Looking towards BRIAN's room.)
Is he --

KURT
Sit down a minute. Have some coffee.

MARJORY
Tell us about you.

LORI
That's not important.

KURT
No, it *is* important.

MARJORY
As much time as we spend with Brian, we don't get to --

KURT

So. How's the glamour life?

LORI

Busy. Ever since the book came out, I've been on the speaker circuit.

KURT

We're so proud of you.

LORI

Just doing what needs to be done.

MARJORY

Like it says in your book.

KURT

It's such an accomplishment.

LORI

Nothing, compared to you.

MARJORY

Us?

LORI

The time and money to finally enjoy yourselves, and instead, *this*.

KURT

This is life.

MARJORY

And we don't regret a moment of it.

LORI

Well, you've inspired me.

KURT

Must be in the genes.

MARJORY

Speaking of which, how are my adorable grandchildren?

LORI

Busy and productive for a six- and seven-year-old.

KURT

Don't we know? Every time we call them, they're rushing off for another lesson or practice or --

MARJORY

As long as they're having fun.

LORI

Of course they are. We've built one-point-two-five hours a day of it into their schedules.

KURT

(Uncertain.)

Good ... Good.

LORI

"Life on the run, or life as a nun."

MARJORY

Page 256 of your book.

LORI

252 in the second edition. So ... is he sleeping?

MARJORY

No, but --

LORI

Then let's --

KURT

Lori, we just want you to ...

MARJORY

Brian is ...

KURT

Well, he's not the Brian you know.

LORI

I know he's --

MARJORY

We know you know. But knowing is not seeing ...

LORI
Mom, I'm a professional psychotherapist. With a best
selling self-help book.

KURT
This is different.

MARJORY
This is family.

LORI
"Family is job one."

MARJORY
Page 164.

LORI
166, second edition. Look, I've handled everything Brian's
ever thrown at me, so --

KURT
We just want you to be prepared.

LORI
"To prepare for life, live life."

MARJORY
Page 38 -- first edition.

LORI
I'm trained and ready, so let's just ...

(MOM takes LORI's arm and DAD opens the door to
BRIAN's room. Light up on BRIAN, who is lying in bed,
mumbling to himself incoherently and twitching. LORI
is momentarily shocked. SHE shakily re-assumes her
professional demeanor.)

KURT
Hey buddy.

MARJORY
Look who's come to visit?

LORI
(Recovering.)
Hel -- Hello, Brian.

LORI (CONTINUED)

(No response from BRIAN.)
You look --

KURT

Great today.

MARJORY

He's excited to see his big shot sister.

LORI

Mom, I wish you wouldn't --

MARJORY

Why? We're proud of you.

KURT

And Brian is proud, too. Right, Bri?
(Incoherent mumbling.)
See?

LORI

(By rote, like a mantra to calm herself.)
"Small steps, always forward."

MARJORY

Page 69.

LORI

First edition.
(Sotto voce to MOM and DAD.)
He seems --

MARJORY

Oh, we don't whisper in front of Brian.

KURT

So when he's ready to join us, he'll be up to speed.

LORI

The doctors?

MARJORY

Full battery of tests. All negative.

LORI

Then it's a psychological trauma. When did he --

KURT

Few months ago. Had a cold. A week later, this.

LORI

Is he always like ...

MARJORY

At times, he's alert, responsive.

KURT

Other times, he's ...

(Gestures towards BRIAN.)

LORI

Is there a pattern?

MARJORY

Well, it's the strangest thing. Sometimes, before I come in, I listen at the door. And he sounds so calm. I hear the TV on, as if the sounds -- and maybe even the colors -- give him a sense of peace.

LORI

That's been known to--

MARJORY

And yet, when I open the door, he reverts to ...

(She gestures to BRIAN.)

As soon as I leave, he's calm again.

LORI

So solitude has a recuperative effect. People set him off -
-

KURT

Not all people.

MARJORY

When his physical therapist comes, it's like our old Brian again.

KURT

And when she starts massaging and manipulating his joints?

MARJORY

He practically beams.

LORI

So the physical manipulation sparks some kind of visceral reaction.

KURT

But only when she does it.

MARJORY

When we do it, he gets agitated.

LORI

Strange.

KURT

Therapist thinks so, too. But she says it's important for him, so she comes five days a week. Till we can make him comfortable with us doing it.

MARJORY

We were hoping you could help.

LORI

Well, I can consult with my colleagues and --

KURT

No -- I mean, yeah, go ahead and consult.

MARJORY

But we were thinking he might be more responsive to manipulation if you --

LORI

Oh no no no. Touch my brother? Ewww.

KURT

Lori, you're a doctor.

LORI

A psychotherapist. I don't touch patients, and I definitely don't touch my brother.

MARJORY

He needs you.

LORI

Aww mom. Please don't do that.

MARJORY

Do what?

LORI

My whole life, it's been, "Show him, Lori. Teach him, Lori. Motivate him, Lori."

MARJORY

He wasn't blessed like you.

LORI

He's smarter than I ever was. Just lazy.

KURT

Didn't have your drive.

LORI

Why bother when you have shortcuts. He always did just enough to get by, then we had to pick up after him. While I worked 20-hour days, slaved at night school and had no life.

KURT

We know how hard you --

LORI

And here we are, back to him again. Why is it always him?

MARJORY

Maybe it was our fault.

KURT

Maybe we should have been tougher.

LORI

I'll never escape the guilt, will I?

MARJORY

Guilt, or love?

LORI

Excuse me, I'm the psychotherapist here.

(Sighing.)

What do I have to do?

KURT

It's not heard, really. You start by moving his joints through a range of motions.

MARJORY

Then a soft massage.

LORI

Oh, please.

MARJORY

We'll leave you two alone.

LORI

No, don't --

KURT

It might make him more receptive if we're not here.

LORI

All right, but not long.

MARJORY

Call if you need us.

(They leave. LORI sits on the bed, shakes her head, smiles and sighs.)

LORI

You did it to me again.

(She pulls the sheet down..)

Ewww. No way I'm --

(Sighs.)

Look at me, complaining while you're ...

(Shakes her head.)

To everyone else, I'm the take-charge guru. To my only brother, I'm the Wicked Witch of the West.

(Chuckles.)

You know, I used to envy you. Yeah, really. You had a way to get people to like you, no matter how much you schemed and scammed. Everyone was happy to lend you a ten, pick up your check, give you a job. Mom's favorite, dad's favorite -- hell, you were my favorite. Oh Brian, what did you do to yourself?

(She wipes a tear.)

Oh, well. "Save reflections for mirrors. Just do what needs to be done." Page 296, second edition.

(LORI pulls back the sheets and massages BRIAN's thigh.
But as soon as she touches him, he bolts out of bed.)

BRIAN

Uggh! Touched by my sister!

LORI

(Ecstatic.)
Brian!

BRIAN

Shhhhhhh!

LORI

(Bear hugs him.)
You're okay!--

BRIAN

Please! Keep your voice down!--

LORI

My voice! It triggered the recovery! Dr. Stanislovski
wrote about this --

BRIAN

You almost touched me.

LORI

Whatever the trigger, it worked! You're --

BRIAN

(Putting his hand over her mouth.)
Quiet! They'll hear you!

LORI

(Removing his hand.)
Why wouldn't you want them to --

BRIAN

I'll explain if you just --

LORI

(Realization.)
Oh no.

BRIAN

If you'd let me get a word in edgewise, I'll--

LORI

Nooooooo!

BRIAN

(Covering LORI's mouth again.)

I'm not going to let go till you promise to keep your voice down.

(She squirms. After a moment, she nods.)

Okay.

(He removes his hand.)

LORI

(Making a fist.)

Thirty seconds till I turn this charade into reality.

BRIAN

(Sighing.)

I know this looks a little weird.

LORI

A little? What, some loan shark threatened to start your organ donation program early?

BRIAN

No --

LORI

Your last jilted lover is a card-carrying member of the NRA?

BRIAN

You think I would go out with someone from the NRA?

LORI

Maybe this is just one step closer to your ultimate destination: mom's womb.

BRIAN

Uggh. What is wrong with you?

LORI

Me??

BRIAN

I mean, okay, I'm sorry. I never knew my popularity damaged you so badly.

(LORI grabs BRIAN in a front choke.)

LORI
Tell me why I shouldn't put us all out of our misery.

BRIAN
(Through a strangled voice.)
I'm doing this ... for ... the folks.

LORI
(Releasing HIM.)
Go ahead, I need a good laugh.

BRIAN
Did you see mom and dad?

LORI
Brian--

BRIAN
I mean, really see them?

LORI
I see two people watching their golden years go from
beaches to bedpans.

BRIAN
I never put them through bedpans!

LORI
Great, they just get to nurse you around the clock.

BRIAN
You have no idea how hard it's been on me.
(LORI laughs.)
You've been away too long to appreciate the fire.

LORI
The ... fire?

BRIAN
In their eyes. They have a purpose again.

LORI
Lunatic. You're a stark, raving ---

BRIAN

Every moment of every day there's something on their plate.

LORI

Yeah, a mutant vegetable.

BRIAN

You're not getting --

LORI

Let me explain how normal people handle this. You help them do the things *they* want to do.

BRIAN

What has dad ever wanted to do but work? And mom but take care of us?

LORI

Then introduce them to hobbies.

BRIAN

(Rote.)

You mean, like the gourmet cooking class mom took till her doctor told her she couldn't eat anything she cooked? Or pop's golf games where he pops four Valiums to deal with the stress of putting for a Nassau bet?

LORI

Then get them to travel, have fun.

BRIAN

What, you forgot that Alaska cruise we practically forced them to take? They turned the ship around thanks to dad's cabin claustrophobia and mom's sea sickness anorexia.

LORI

Then find them a real cause. A charitable foundation, a church group, a -

BRIAN

Mom volunteers at bake sales and dad runs a charity golf outing. But how many people have a non-stop Mother Theresa gene?

LORI

Then just butt out and leave them alone.

BRIAN

They'll never survive each other.

LORI

They've done it for thirty-five years.

BRIAN

That was just exhibition season. This is playoff intensity now that they're on their own.

LORI

They're the same people they always were.

BRIAN

No they're not. They're watching their bodies fail, their minds wander. And that makes them bitter. But they can't lash out at the inevitable, so who bears the brunt? The one at your side, who's as confused and angry as you are.

LORI

So instead, they get to take care of you for the rest of their lives.

BRIAN

Not the rest of their lives. I'm planning to have a miraculous recovery in a month.

LORI

Then they'll return to their "withered ways."

BRIAN

Nope. At that point, they'll have assumed my condition is permanent. So the exhilaration and relief of having their normal -

LORI

Ha!-

BRIAN

Son back will carry them for years.

LORI

This is --

BRIAN

But if I return too early, they'll just resort to their sniping, cannibalistic ways.

LORI

It gets better and better.

BRIAN

The folks need this.

LORI

Who needs this?

BRIAN

What, you think acting like a sponge is fun?

LORI

If it walks like a sponge and talks like a sponge ...

BRIAN

Have they fought since you've been here? Something's working.

LORI

(Chuckling.)

It's always funny to hear the word, "working" coming from your mouth.

BRIAN

Look, I'm sorry you're still bitter about my natural personality, but --

LORI

For the last time, I'm ... not ... bitter!

(LORI chokes BRIAN. As they struggle, MARJORY enters with a tray. LORI releases her choke grip and smoothes BRIAN's shirt.)

LORI

Manual shock therapy has proven to --

MARJORY

I brought some coffee, if you'd --

(Upon seeing BRIAN standing on his own, SHE drops the tray.)

Brian?

BRIAN

Um--

MARJORY

Brian!

(SHE hugs him. As she does so, BRIAN looks questioningly over MOM's shoulder at LORI.)

LORI

(Looking directly at BRIAN.)

A miraculous recovery.

MARJORY

I knew this day would come! Kurt!

(She runs off.)

BRIAN

Guess I should thank you, for not telling the --

LORI

They've had enough hardship without knowing --

BRIAN

Just hope the role playing was long enough to have a lasting effect.

LORI

Don't push it.

(MARJORY and KURT enter.)

KURT

There's the big guy!

(DAD hugs BRIAN.)

I knew you'd be back.

BRIAN

It's great to--

MARJORY

I told you.

KURT

(Light-hearted chuckle.)

Told me? The stress has robbed you of few brain cells.

MARJORY

Oh, Brian, you look wonderful!

KURT

How do you feel?

BRIAN

Great!

MARJORY

I'm so happy. My whole family together, healthy and happy.

KURT

Like I said a million times: nothing to worry about.

MARJORY

When did you ever --

KURT

Don't tell me you forgot how many nights I said our Brian would be back?

MARJORY

(Still light hearted.)

There's your father for you. Maybe we could work on his senility now that Brian's healthy.

LORI

(Forced enthusiasm.)

Isn't it great to see Brian healthy again?

KURT

Yeah. All those nights I sat with you, watching ball games, talking sports.

MARJORY

Surprised you didn't drive him into a deeper coma.

(To BRIAN)

Do you remember all those scrumptious meals? Lasagna, nachos, pepperoni pizza --

KURT

Your mom slaved hard over those take-out menus with my money.

MARJORY

Your money? I was making twice as much as you before we retired.

KURT

What about all those years I was the sole bread winner?

MARJORY

While I raised a family on your bread crumbs.

KURT

(To LORI)

See the way she --

LORI

Excuse me, your son, Brian? The one who has miraculously recovered from --

KURT

And I'm ecstatic. All the work I --

MARJORY

How do you feel?

KURT

Was I talking here?

MARJORY

You were pontificating about yourself and --

KURT

Well if you'd ever let me finish, I'd --

BRIAN

I feel ... good.

MARJORY

I was so scared that --

KURT

Your mother; always with the panicking.

MARJORY

That's because I love my son.

KURT

You saying I don't?--

BRIAN

I feel like my old self, thanks to you two.

KURT

Ah, well ...

LORI

It's like you memorized my book on productive living.

KURT

I knew we'd have to --

MARJORY

Like you read anything other than your name in the dedication.

KURT

I opened the book plenty of times.

MARJORY

Ha!

KURT

And what, you're some kind of genius?

MARJORY

Depends on whom I'm being compared with.

KURT

(To LORI)

See how she shows off? She never says "whom."

LORI

It's not important now that Brian --

KURT

(Sighing, then smiling.)

You're right. We should just be grateful that our son is back.

MARJORY

(To BRIAN)

You and Lori are two people for whom I'd give my life.

KURT

(To LORI)

Another "whom" dig?

BRIAN

(To LORI)
Here we go.

MARJORY
You keep throwing "I-did-it-all" speeches, and I'll keep
throwing "Whom" right in your credit-taking face.

KURT
Oh yeah?

(MARJORY and KURT continue arguing. After a while,
LORI pushes BRIAN back onto the bed.)

LORI
A relapse!
(BRIAN looks at LORI, and then resumes his vegetable
act.)

KURT
No!--

MARJORY
Brian! --

LORI
It's okay. Temporary relapses are common. Shouldn't last
too long, If he's in the right environment.

KURT
What do we do to --

LORI
It's what you *don't* do. In his delicate state, he's very
sensitive to tension, hostility and anger.

MARJORY
Of course.

KURT
Whatever it takes.

LORI
If you can both stay on the same page, I'm sure he'll be
back to himself ...
(Addressed with finality to BRIAN.)
in one month and not a day over.

MARJORY

Well, he loves pepperoni pizza, so I better ...

(Unseen by his parents, BRIAN pumps his fist.)

KURT

I'll help.

MARJORY

Oh, that's okay, I'm just ordering --

KURT

No reason for you to do all the work.

(They hold hands and start to leave. LORI starts to follow, but BRIAN groans to get his attention. LORI turns back to him.)

LORI

(Sotto voce.)

What?

(BRIAN grunts and points to the remote control. LORI hands it to him.)

Hate to admit it, but this could be a new chapter in my third edition.

BRIAN

(Grunting.)

Ca ... mish ... ion.

LORI

Don't push it.

(From offstage, a doorbell rings.)

KURT

Hi, Lolita.

LOLITA

(Sexy offstage voice.)

Hello, Mr. Beck. How's the patient?

KURT

Well, he returned to normal for a while, but he's had a temporary setback.

LOLITA

At least he's making progress. Today's total body massage will help.

(BRIAN grunts in joy.)

LORI

Enjoy, Vegentino.

(She leaves. Lights down.)

LOLITA

How are we today, Brian? I brought the hot oil.

(Brian grunts excitedly.)

END