

An Excerpt from the First Act of the Mason Jar©

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Cast of Characters

(All characters must be cast White)

Maggie Smith-Azurian 42, daughter of Rose Irene Smith and John W. Smith III, mother of Kennedy Lee Azurian and wife of Adam Azurian. Homemaker.

Adam Azurian 45, husband of Maggie, father of Kennedy Lee Azurian. Investment banker.

Kennedy Lee Azurian 12, son of Maggie and Adam Azurian, grandson of Rose

Irene and John Wilson Smith III. Ardent Barack Obama supporter, he lives with his parents in Manhattan.

Luke Winnett 12, neighbor to Rose and John, and sometime playmate to Kennedy.

Rose Irene Smith 79, mother of Maggie, wife of John Wilson Smith III. Homemaker.

John Wilson Smith III 86, patriarch. Semi-retired law partner.

Setting October 2008. Philadelphia's Main Line. A lazy Sunday at the Smiths. All action takes place on a unit set comprised of the Smith home.

Act I Sunday Morning Interrupted

Act Two The Interrogation

Act I Action: Rose and John have left for church. Adam, Maggie and Kennedy wait for them in the living room. Adam reads the paper while Maggie and Kennedy look at scrapbooks[...]

MAGGIE

It looks small in the pictures, but it was a big hill to us then.

KENNEDY

Did you live near them when you were my age?

MAGGIE

No, but I did stay with them sometimes on my summer breaks. He used to have this crooked churn that made the most incredible ice cream. All the kids would take a turn in the back yard. I'll show you next summer. *(Purposefully loud and distinct)* When we visit their town.

She looks over at Adam to confirm their visit. He nods unconvincingly.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I remember the first day I rode my bike from their house to the store. I'm sure Granddad followed behind me the whole way.

KENNEDY

Like you did the first day I walked by myself at the beginning of school this year.

Listening in, Adam shakes his head. Maggie frowns at Adam.

ADAM

Four blocks on the Upper East Side, you'd think that--

MAGGIE

--Vigilant parents still worry about young boys in Manhattan. You saw me Kennedy?

KENNEDY

A bunch of Moms did that, it was OK.

MAGGIE

Well thank you sir.

Maggie smirks triumphantly at Adam. Adam stops looking through the photographs. He holds one apart.

ADAM

Maggie could you come here a minute?

MAGGIE

What is it?

ADAM

Could you come right now please?

Maggie and Kennedy dart around the couch to look at the photograph Adam holds. He hides the photograph from Kennedy's view. Kennedy cranes his neck to see it.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Kennedy go upstairs.

KENNEDY

Why?

ADAM

Now. All the way up the stairs young man.

Kennedy begins to exit, then turns back.

KENNEDY

Why can't I see it?

ADAM

Go.

Maggie starts to follow Kennedy, but Adam stops her.

ADAM (CONT'D)

He'll be fine.

MAGGIE

(Under her breath) Where were you when he was rolling around on the floor like an epileptic?

Maggie walks over and sinks heavily into the couch. Kennedy crouches on the stairs.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Let me see that.

Adam hands her the photograph, walks over to a shelf on the wall and removes a framed, graduation photograph of John Wilson Smith III, Maggie's father. He brings the Mason Jar from the side table to the coffee table and places it in front of Maggie. He sits down next to her. Adam takes the photograph from her, holds it up and compares it with John's graduation photograph.

ADAM

It's him.

MAGGIE

Why would you say something like that?

ADAM

And he's smiling.

MAGGIE

That can't be him.

ADAM

Maybe we should go and see if there's anything else in the boxes.

MAGGIE

No we shouldn't.

ADAM

Look on the back of it.

Maggie doesn't respond. Adam turns the photograph over and reads silently.

MAGGIE

What are you implying?

ADAM

Look at your father's graduation photograph. Then look at the postcard.
Read it yourself.

Adam hands her the photograph he took from the sideboard.

MAGGIE

That's not him. My Dad's chin is chiseled.

ADAM

What? Your Dad's chin isn't chi--

MAGGIE

--It is. Some people think he looks like Kirk Douglass.

ADAM

Right there he looks like part of a lynch mob.

Maggie turns away from him.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You don't think it's him, do you?

MAGGIE

No I don't. You're being ridiculous.

ADAM

If it's not him and that's not a finger in there then open it.

MAGGIE

No.

ADAM

If you think it's a pickle then open the Mason Jar.

MAGGIE

I'm not going to open it. It's not my property.

ADAM

It's not your Dad's either, but it's too late to give it back to that poor man in the postcard.

MAGGIE

Don't be smug.

ADAM

It's a finger. Look at that postcard.

The sepia toned postcard is blown up on either side of the stage. In it a young White man stands between two other young White men, arms around one another smiling broadly. Behind them a charred body hangs from a tree. The foreground is festive, with other Whites smiling directly at the camera. Maggie takes the postcard and looks at it more closely. She puts it on the coffee table and exits into the kitchen. Maggie begins to cry softly as Adam searches through more papers.

Lights Slowly Fade Out

Scene Four

Minutes later. The living room. Maggie exits the kitchen and enters the living room. She perches on the arm of the sofa, next to Adam.

MAGGIE

My Dad wouldn't do something like that.

ADAM

How do you know?

MAGGIE

I just know.

ADAM

You don't know what your Dad did before you were bor--

MAGGIE

You don't know what yours did either.

ADAM

I didn't say I did. Calm down. Let's think about how to handle this.

MAGGIE

How to handle what?

ADAM

This situation. You don't think we should drop this, do you?

MAGGIE

I didn't say that.

Maggie looks at the postcard again and hands it to Adam.

ADAM

Your eyes did. You want to put this back up in the attic, don't you?

MAGGIE

No.

ADAM

You can discuss this with your Dad alone.

MAGGIE

I thought you might like to be here with me.

ADAM

I probably should. You always think your father is rig--

MAGGIE

This is why everyone at your job thinks you're an asshole.

ADAM

How would you know what everyone at my job thinks?

MAGGIE

The executive directors' wives make sure I can overhear them in the bathroom.

ADAM

What do they say?

MAGGIE

(Pause) They say you're not.....personable.

Adam is visibly shaken.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have said anything. Not like that.

She tentatively moves toward him. He moves away.

ADAM

Should we tell your Mom and Dad together?

MAGGIE

Tell them what? It's one hell of an allegation for a Sunday afternoon, don't you think Adam?

ADAM

I'm sorry. You're right. We should ask your Mom Maggie. I don't mean to sound...to be presumptuous, but this is... he has a grin on his face in front of that burnt man. You can still see puffs of smoke! He's just hanging there with that picnic underneath him.

MAGGIE

Did you just say you were sorry?

ADAM

What? I'm talking about the lynching.

MAGGIE

So now it's a lynching?

ADAM

What would you call it Maggie?

MAGGIE

We don't have to call it anything. We don't even know if that postcard--

ADAM

--You do know. This is so like you. Just ---

MAGGIE

--I'm thinking of Kennedy! We don't have to tell Kennedy the details.

ADAM

He's the one who found the Mason Jar.

MAGGIE

I mean the postcard. Depending. We can say that that Mason Jar is an old experiment we should throw out.

Maggie picks up the Mason Jar then puts it down and pushes it away.

ADAM

That's unacceptable.

ROSE (OFFSTAGE/V.O.)

Hello? Is anyone here?

ADAM

Do you want me to leave you two alone?

Kennedy begins to creep down the stairs.

MAGGIE

No, but let me do the talking. I don't want to upset her.

ROSE IRENE SMITH enters the living room through the front door carrying a bakeshop box and a small grocery bag. Crisp and stylish, she's cheerful. She hangs her Sunday best coat on the rack. Very softly, Aaron Copland's "Tender Land" begins to play again.

ROSE

How is everyone?

MAGGIE

Fine. Did you know that there was a finger in a Mason Jar in the attic?

Rose begins to exit into the kitchen.

ADAM

Maggie!

ROSE

You would have enjoyed the service. Everyone asked about you Maggie.

Maggie and Adam follow her into the kitchen. Rose puts a bag on the kitchen table, then takes her apron from the cupboard and ties it.

MAGGIE

Where's Dad?

ROSE

With the Deacons.

Adam winces.

MAGGIE

Mom, did you hear what I said?

ROSE

Yes. Something about a Mason Jar. Where's that grandson of mine?

ADAM

He's upstairs.

Rose spots Kennedy spying outside the kitchen door. The two keep his location a secret.

ROSE

I stopped at Dreyer's bakery and bought some of that chocolate cake he loves so much.

MAGGIE

Why would you buy him chocolate cake? He doesn't need that sugar.

ROSE

Here are your cigarettes dear, you paragon of healthy living.

She moves to the counter, reaches into the bag and hands Maggie a pack of cigarettes. Rose unpacks the rest of the bag.

ROSE (CONT'D)

And don't make me out to be uncaring. He's much better. Kennedy knows to eat a thin slice, unlike your father.

Maggie looks at Adam who shakes his head. Rose waters the hanging plant in the kitchen. She snaps a loose thread from the twine plant hanger and tries to make the straggly threads tidy.

MAGGIE

Lunch is all ready. I just have to set the table.

Rose glances at the Mason Jar.

ROSE

What's that?

MAGGIE

I told you when you came in.

ROSE

Don't be so cross with me. Wait until you're seventy-nine.

ADAM

It's a finger in a Mason Jar.

ROSE

Don't be ridiculous. It looks like a pickle to me.

ADAM

It's a finger Rose.

Maggie picks up the Mason Jar and holds it out to Rose. Maggie and Adam sit down at the table. Rose takes out a cutting board and walks toward the table. Kennedy exits upstairs.

MAGGIE

Mom did you hear us?

ROSE

I may not move as quickly as I used to, but I'm not deaf. You said lunch was ready. In honor of yesterday's labors, I think some stewed apples would be nice.

She takes apples from a bowl, sits down and begins to pare them. Maggie places the Jar directly in front of her.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Where did you get that thing?

MAGGIE

Kennedy found it in the attic.

ROSE

We told him not to go up there. Remember that day the door stuck? It was so hot up there I almost died. Thank God Yolanda starts her cleaning upstairs. I know I told him not to go up there.

ADAM

So did we, but he did... And he found this.

ROSE

Don't put that pickle there.

Adam looks at Maggie. The music swells, and becomes louder.

MAGGIE

Open it Mom.

Maggie pushes the Mason Jar closer to Rose.

ROSE

Why should I open it? It looks ancient. Put it in the trashcan.

MAGGIE

If it's a pickle, then open it.

A surprised and annoyed Adam stares at Maggie.

ROSE

I told you I don't want to open it, and neither should you.

John enters the living room and looks around for his family. The music ends abruptly as John enters the room, sounding like a record that has been scratched because the arm moved across it too quickly.

JOHN

Hello. I'm home

John enters through the front door in the living room and hangs up his coat. In the kitchen Maggie moves toward Rose, and places her hand on Rose's back.

MAGGIE

Kennedy found some photographs too. There was a stack that was in the same box as the Mason Jar. This postcard was in it.

Adam hands Rose the postcard and points to its center. Rose examines it. John swings open the door to the kitchen. The music stops.

JOHN

Is anyone home?

The hanging plant falls and splatters on the floor, the frayed twine still swaying. They all turn to look at the plant, then at John.

ROSE

Dear God.

Immediate Curtain

End of Act One

