Smiling Cat Candy Heart

a short play about the big battles in the world
and the little things we do to try to safely navigate through them

by Jennie Webb

Represented by:
Mary Alice Kier
Cine/Lit Representation
Dramatic/Film/Literary Management
310.413.8934
makier@att.net

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Jennie Webb
1977 Escarpa Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90041
323.828.8708
jenniewebbsite@gmail.com

Smiling Cat Candy Heart

Characters:

MOTHER: *Female, 30s-40s – Not passive enough to be passive aggressive*

FATHER: *Male, 30s-40s – His perspective is the only perspective*

GIRL: *Female, 12 – Caught in the middle*

Setting: **A fast food restaurant.**

Time: **Sunday afternoon/eve.**

Multi-racial casting is encouraged.

Synopsis:

Smiling Cat Candy Heart is a short play about the big battles in the world and the little things we do to navigate through them. When two separated parents meet for their regularly scheduled child exchange, their usual communication challenges take an unexpected new twist.

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Smiling Cat Candy Heart received its World Premiere in May, 2019
as part of Ensemble Studio Theatre LA's MOVING ON: The 2019 One Acts.
Directed by June Carryl, with Lauren Campedelli, Desiree Mee Jung,
Christopher T Wood, Juliette Allison Bailey & Julianna Riley;
Producers Virtic Emil Brown, Christopher Reiling & Kevin Comartin.

Smiling Cat Candy Heart

We see a man and a woman facing off in a fast food restaurant. Between them on a table is a small suitcase or backpack; maybe it's got Hello Kitty or a cartoon character on it.

MOTHER:
Really? This is really what you want to fight about?

FATHER:
I don't *want* to—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) Because that's what it seems like to me. You, looking for something so that you can make me the villain. Again. Last week it was her hair—

FATHER:
(interrupting) Because it was blue. You let my daughter—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) She's my daughter, too, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with—

FATHER:
(interrupting) A 12-year-old girl with blue hair? I beg to differ.

MOTHER:
It washed out. But that's not really the point.

FATHER:
No. But it goes to—

He's interrupted by a young girl coming onstage with a milkshake. And hair that's not blue.

GIRL:
(seeing her mother, raising one hand) Hey!

MOTHER:
Hey, honey! Did you have a good weekend? I'll bet you did. You must've had all sorts of fun. And is that a milkshake? Your dad bought you a milkshake? I hope you won't be too full for dinner. I mean, that's a surprise: a milkshake at, what? Five o' clock in the afternoon? Well. I hope it's as delicious as it looks!

Very short pause as the girl drinks. Then,

GIRL:
(making the sign with her hand) Thumbs up!

FATHER:
All right, sweetie. We'll be done here in a sec.

MOTHER:
(to the girl) Your father's upset about something and you know how hard it is for him to—

FATHER:
(interrupting) I'm not— *(to the girl)* What your mother means is that she and I need to have a private discussion.

MOTHER:
We're in a McDonald's. Is it really possible to have a private discussion in a—?

FATHER:
(interrupting) What your mother is saying is that she's still angry I'm not going all the way to the house to drop you off.

MOTHER:
No, that is not what I'm saying.

FATHER:
But we all agreed that this establishment, here, is precisely the mid-way point between daddy's apartment at the University and the house—where daddy doesn't live anymore—and it's not serving anyone to journey down that emotional road every week. The toll is just too high.

MOTHER:
And just what is that supposed to mean?

FATHER:
(to the girl) Why don't you go put your bag in mom's car?

Still drinking the milkshake, the girl looks to her mother.

MOTHER:
Yeah. Why don't you do that, honey? There's a lot of traffic, so as much as I love the smell of freeway-adjacent fast food "establishments," we need to get going as soon as we can.

GIRL:
(putting her cup on a table, then making the sign with her fingers) Okay. Keys?

MOTHER:
(throwing or handing them to the girl) Right.

GIRL:
(eyeing her mother's sunglasses) Sunglasses?

MOTHER:
(offering them) Sure.

GIRL:
(two hands together in prayer) Thank you!

MOTHER:
Love you!

Wearing the sunglasses, the girl leaves with her bag.

FATHER:
So?

MOTHER:
So?

FATHER:
This is fine with you?

MOTHER:
This being…?

FATHER:
Seriously?

MOTHER:
I have no idea what you— You know what? Whatever heinous crime it is that you're hanging onto today is your problem. Not mine, and definitely not hers.

FATHER:
Oh, right. It's my problem that I want to be actively engaged with my daughter during the only time I have with her, instead of—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) "Only time." Are you really going to go there, again?

FATHER:
(interrupting) Okay, okay, okay! Listen, I'm not blaming or judging—

MOTHER:
Of course you are! I'm always the one who's to blame because I'm always the one who—

FATHER:
(interrupting) I'm just talking about a root cause!

MOTHER:
Of what?

FATHER:

(pointing after the girl) Of that! This… pattern of behavior that's certainly come to my attention, if apparently not yours! Behavior that can, perhaps, be mitigated. Truncated. Pruned before it grows into—

MOTHER:

(interrupting) Oh, Jesus. Will you talk to me like a real person, not one of your on-campus hothouse flowers?

The girl comes back without her bag, texting on her phone. She absent-mindedly hands the keys to her mother.

MOTHER;

(to the girl) Thanks.

GIRL:

(blowing one to her mother) Kiss.

FATHER:

That! Right there. This is what I'm talking about.

MOTHER:

The fact that she's openly affectionate toward her mother? Do you need her to give you a hug?

GIRL:

(momentarily looking up) Awww, sad puppy? Big hug.

She goes back to her phone.

FATHER:

No! I mean— *(pointing to the girl)* It's that!

MOTHER:

Wait. You're upset about her texting again? I thought we were on the same page about—

FATHER:

(interrupting) We are, and that's not— *(to the girl)* I'm sorry, sweetie, what your mother means is that—

MOTHER:

(interrupting) Stop that! You don't know what I mean! But I will now tell you: As much as you want to keep your little girl all to yourself during the weekends, the world is getting bigger and more complicated and she is doing what she needs to do to accommodate. She is almost a teenager and she has lots of friends. And a mother. Who she will continue to text. We're leaving, now. *(to the girl)* Honey: You sure you didn't forget anything this time?

GIRL:
(crossing fingers) Fingers crossed!

FATHER:
See!

MOTHER:
See what?

GIRL:
Ah! Bathing suit. Book. *(making the face)* Face with teeth! Sorry!

FATHER:
(to the mother) That! You're all "Thumbs up" with this kind of... accommodation?

MOTHER:
With…?

GIRL:
Eyes rolling upward.

FATHER:
That! It's an emoji.

MOTHER:
What's an—?

FATHER:
(interrupting) Those little pictures on—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) I know what an emoji is!

GIRL:
(sotto voce, to her phone maybe) Clapping hands…

FATHER:
Right! So haven't you noticed? Emojis! That's all that comes out of her mouth! Our daughter only speaks emoji, now!

GIRL:
Smirking cat. Monkey covering mouth. *(to her mother)* Car? Freeway? Traffic lights? Large red exclamation mark!

Pause.

MOTHER:
Yeah. We need to get on the road.

FATHER:
"*Okay,"* then! "See" you next week!

GIRL:
(hugging him) Heart heart heart heart! *(waving as she heads out)* Bye!

MOTHER:
Hang on. Honey?

The girl looks to her mother. Short pause. Then,

GIRL:
Dot dot dot question mark?

FATHER:
(to the mother) Do you understand why I'm "upset," now? Think about it.

Very short pause.

MOTHER:
That last wasn't technically an emoji.

FATHER:
Sure. Our daughter has lost the ability to functionally communicate and you're hanging onto technicalities.

MOTHER:
She's communicating. Probably more than most girls her age.

FATHER:
Which, I'm sorry, is not enough. I need for my daughter to use real words. In full sentences. *(to the girl*) Is that so very difficult for you now?

GIRL:
Thinking face… Big shrug! Grinning face with closed eyes, sent with love.

Her parents watch as she goes back to her phone, very much alive in silent conversation.

FATHER:
All right, then. Are you ready to take some responsibility?

MOTHER:
Me?

FATHER:
Who else but you? When you're not at home, she spends all her time staring at screens and more and more of these images get planted in her mind…

MOTHER:
What part of “working two jobs” doesn’t translate to you?

FATHER:
But I was talking to some of my friends about this, and—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) Your male friends, mostly single and childless, who happen to be experts on parenting?

FATHER:
Colleagues of all genders who are researching this very topic: The decline of the English language due to the proliferation of not only crude, cartoon images, but—

GIRL:
(interrupting) LOL!!!! Heart exploding pig snout!

FATHER:
Don’t you talk back to me! I’m serious, young lady! I am worried about you because I love you! Yes, the world continues to change, all around us, but a command of language is something you can hang onto. It’s the power of words. That’s what will secure your place in this world!

Short pause.

So what do you think, sweetie? I’m sorry we had to go into this here, but now that your old dad’s thrown it all out there on the table… do you have anything to say??

The girl looks as if she’s formulating… something. Then, she tries her best.

GIRL:
Happy pile of poop?

MOTHER:
Ha ha ha ha! Now I’m sorry, but that is too perfect.

FATHER:
Thank you for the support. What she probably meant was—

MOTHER:
(interrupting) Oh I think she was perfectly clear. No mansplaining necessary! *(to the girl)* These happy piles of poop: they look a lot like your father?

GIRL:
(screaming with frustration) Ahhhhh! Flaming comet stop sign! Scary scream face! Monkey covering ears! And eyes! Green vomit, crying cat, broken heart, footprints footprints footprints!

The girl runs out. After a moment,

MOTHER:
Well. Now, see what you've done?

FATHER:
What *I've* done?

MOTHER:
Yes! Talk about planting ideas. You take everything she says and turn it into some shining reflection of you and your own pathetic place in the patriarchy!

FATHER:
As opposed to the angry harridan who's too busy putting words in the girl's mouth to notice she's lost any of her own, so why don't you try to "momsplain" abandoning your child and allowing her to wither in some anonymous cyber space of commercialized, de-personalized icon idolatry!

MOTHER:
That's not— I don't understand a word you're saying!

FATHER:
Is there anything left in that milkshake?

The mother's cellphone beeps.

MOTHER:
It's—

FATHER:
Yeah.

The mother reads from her phone.

MOTHER:
Hey Mom. This is also for Dad. For you to share.

We now hear the girl, speaking directly to us rather than as if she's texting.

GIRL:
You have to understand that I'm kind of in a place right now where words don't really work. Or not the words that you use—that people use—that don't mean what they should, or what they used to. I guess I just understood that, just now. That the world right now is so crazy. It's falling apart and everyone's fighting and no one understands anything even if they pretend to. They stick to whatever it is that comes out and dig down into it until they're buried and all I want to do is swim away… into an ocean where words just dissolve and you can finally see all the way through them.

GIRL:

You don't really get what it's like to look ahead of you, your whole life, and wonder what the world will be like if the people who are in charge and think they're the boss are just allowed to say things and do things, over and over again, that have no meaning. Things they try to unsay or undo bit by bit by bit until someone else says something worse and then everyone waits for the next terrible thing to happen. And it does.

When I was little I thought there were things that were true. But now I'm not sure. Everything seems wrong but I don't know if anything can ever be right. You talk about things changing and you use words that you twist around you to keep you safe but it's mostly to hurt each other. I'm on the outside watching you and I don't feel at all safe and don't want it to be the same for me, or my friends, or forever. Especially not forever. So I think I have to find my own way. And until then, I love you, but…

MOTHER:

Smiling cat candy heart.

FATHER:

Smiling cat candy heart?

GIRL:

Smiling cat candy heart.

End of Play