

**Breaking Up
With My Mother
by Matthew K. Weiland**

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BREAKING UP WITH MY MOTHER was first produced as part of Program B in Collective:10 at The McGinn/Cazale Theatre in New York City, and premiered October 10, 2013. It was directed by Sayra Player. The cast was as follows:

MATTHEW Dave Hanson

SALLY Susan Aston

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

MATTHEW: Mid-30s.

SALLY: 60-ish.

SETTING

SALLY'S condominium living room, teeming with the chaos of comfy clutter: afghans and pillows, folded towels and folded clothes, unopened mail, and rolling mounds of glossy catalogues. Most notably there are— on hangers and in two or three boxes — men's clothes — shirts, pants, etc. — all cleaned and pressed and ready for packing off.

(MATTHEW enters through the front door, taking off his coat and pausing at the boxes. He checks out the shirts on the hangers then approaches the cartons, removing various items. He eventually removes an armful of shirts then opens a closet door in search of extra hangers. He is halted with gritted teeth at the discovery of a blue blazer hanging on the inside door hook, fresh in dry-cleaning plastic wrap. A large Post-It note with the words "JIM's / for MATT" in SALLY'S handwriting, is taped to the front.)

(MATTHEW puts the shirts down and takes the hanger off the hook. He then lifts the dry-cleaning plastic wrap up off the blazer then the blazer off the hanger. He holds it up in front of him. He puts the blazer on and looks at himself in a hallway mirror. It fits him nearly perfectly.)

(He then casually reaches his hands into the pockets and discovers in one an envelope, the name 'MATTHEW,' also written in SALLY'S script, emblazoned across the front. MATTHEW'S jaw sets as he looks at the envelope in his hand.)

(MATTHEW takes the blazer off, returns it to the hanger, then returns the jacket to the closet door, squeezing until crushing the envelope in his hand. He gets a handful of other hangers out of the closet and begins re-hanging up pants and shirts as his mom, SALLY, enters, likewise through the front door from where MATTHEW has come. She is carrying yet another armful of shirts and is startled by MATTHEW standing there.)

SALLY: Oh! *(Catching a breath.)* Geez. — I thought it was... *(Flatly.)* I thought it was your father standing there. — How'd it go?

MATTHEW: I don't know. The same. Lousy. — Where were you?

SALLY: Down in the storage lockers.

MATTHEW: *(Referring to the boxes.)* What's with this?

SALLY: It's exactly what it looks like. *(Searches for then hands MATTHEW a specific shirt.)* Here. Try this on.

MATTHEW: No thank you.

SALLY: They're all fairly new... *(Approaches MATTHEW and holds it up as if to measure it beside him.)* They should just about fit you.

MATTHEW: *(Stepping away.)* How many times I gotta say, 'No?' I won't wear 'em. – Jesus, this isn't the Jim and Sally show. – I will never wear these, I promise you. He and I are... We had different tastes.

SALLY: They might be good for interviews.

MATTHEW: Thank you. No.

SALLY: Then I'm taking 'em down to the St. Vincent De Paul. Whatever you don't want, I'm giving away.

MATTHEW: For why? Why this great rush? Why's everything gotta be gotten rid of right now? Can't we just... keep things intact for a time?

SALLY: Seven months is time enough intact. What am I saving them for?

MATTHEW: I don't know, it just... Still seems a little fresh to be striking the set. I mean, don't you think – ?

SALLY: *(Holds out another shirt.)* Here. Try this one.

MATTHEW: – Don't hand it to me – I'm not trying it on! – Ma, don't you think – ?

SALLY: I think I'm doing what I think I need to do! And I think you should worry about the same, yourself.

MATTHEW: *(Picks up a handful of catalogues strewn at his feet.)* But we're saving these?

SALLY: *(Continues to sort through shirts.)* This one's brand new. It was a gift. He never wore it.

MATTHEW: But we're saving these?! We're saving every catalogue traveling over the transom. *(Begins reading through the stack in his hand.)* – *Domestications; Soft Surroundings; Potpourri; Comfort Food.* – We're saving, what? One. Two...Four. Nine issues of *Comfort Food*?! – I don't wanna try it on! Get it away from me! – But dad's clothes can't hang around for a while without being exiled? I mean, Jesus – *This* is what's important? – Getting rid of his stuff? It's *the* crucial thing? How about clearing out your *stuff*? How about getting rid of the flea market of tchotchkes? Or putting the clean towels away? How about watering the plants? I mean, Christ, we're running a hospice for house plants! – But *this*! This is vital:

Packing off Dad's stuff to clear out some closet space.

SALLY: *(Continues her packing.)* Don't mind my business.

MATTHEW: You're ruining my Feng Shui! How am I supposed to get my game together when there's this continual... churn of bedlam? – No regimen. No routine. No continuity. Just this... This eternal entropy and-and perpetual pandemonium! Your chaos infects me, too, you know! All these catalogue swamps. Advertising all this glossy consumption! It's sinful!

SALLY: I *like* looking through my magazines. It takes my mind off things. Something I can enjoy.

MATTHEW: They're not magazines. They're circulars. *(Referring to the plants.)* I'm watering these.

(MATTHEW moves toward a watering canister located on an end table near SALLY. SALLY beats him to the watering canister, grabs it, and holds it away from him.)

SALLY: No you won't! – Don't you touch a thing.

MATTHEW: Someone's gotta quench their parch.

SALLY: You drown 'em.

MATTHEW: That was one time.

SALLY: An orchid your father gave me for our last anniversary? All it takes is one time.

MATTHEW: It was an unfortunate once.

SALLY: Just...Leave my stuff alone. This is *my* home.

MATTHEW: How long you gonna play that card?

SALLY: Until I'm living in your home. – Leave. My stuff. Alone. *(Taking a breath.)* – What's going on with these interviews? Why's everything...Why's everything coming up bust every time?

MATTHEW: What, it's all on me?

SALLY: Well?

MATTHEW: It's my fault times are tight? My fault I get the stink-eye from human resources gate keepers? Maybe I don't look flattering in fluorescents. I don't know. What do you want from me?

(SALLY doesn't say anything.)

MATTHEW: It's not like I'm not trying.

SALLY: I didn't say anything.

MATTHEW: You did. – And you don't have to.

SALLY: (*Gestures toward the blazer on the open closet door.*) Do you wear a blazer to these interviews?

MATTHEW: No. I don't. I feel constricted.

SALLY: You might at least try it on. –

MATTHEW: It feels like I'm wrapped in Saran.

SALLY: – I'm just saying, it might matter.

MATTHEW: Mom, you *know* how many gigs I've gone after since coming back? – I'm trying. And it can't be all because I'm not wearing a suit jacket.

SALLY: Yes, Matthew, I know.

MATTHEW: Then how 'bout quit crushing my grapes about it? Believe me. I'm trying.

SALLY: Maybe the time has come to quit looking for 'gigs' and to find a 'job.' – I'm sorry. I just... Look, if you don't want any of these, then we're getting rid of all of it.

MATTHEW: (*Holds up the crushed letter in his hand.*) What's this about?

SALLY: Did you read it?

MATTHEW: I have no intention of reading it. What's in it?

SALLY: Some things I feel the need for you to hear. About you getting your life together. About your anger. About finding work and paying me the money you owe me.

MATTHEW: Then just say it to me!

SALLY: Relax your tone.

MATTHEW: Then just say it to me. – Don't write me notes and hide them in coat pockets.

SALLY: Okay. – It says I think you might need to readjust your sights.

(*MATTHEW doesn't say anything.*)

SALLY: Matthew, you know I'm on your side. That I root for you more than anyone –

MATTHEW: – You know, Ma, I've tried taking the road less traveled – Just like everyone said to –

SALLY: – Maybe it's time to take some proven avenues... You know, there's no shame in... in being... In not aiming so high for... For whatever it is you're aiming at. Sometimes you have to adjust.

MATTHEW: This is how you root for me? Encouraging me to aim low?

SALLY: That's not what I said.

MATTHEW: Yeah, it pretty much is.

SALLY: Maybe it's just time to consider other options. Another... 'destiny.' Or... I don't know. Something.

MATTHEW: I don't have other options. – You know what? Fine. I'll accept my Salieri status. Whatever. – Just say it to me! Don't write me notes. Don't pen me epistles. Quit putting prayer cards in my pockets. – I'll tell you what: I'll 'readjust my sights.' And you readjust yours. Quit looking at me with that longing and yearning and that-that-that sad gawp!

SALLY: Excuse me?

MATTHEW: Yeah. It's a word. – Sad *gawp*. Quit gazing at me. Seeing me as him. – I know, I get it. I'm the last man standing. I get that. And I can sense the... the inconsolable loneliness of every hour. But quit putting it on me. Quit giving me the gawp.

SALLY: Maybe you're confusing 'gawping' with 'glaring.'

MATTHEW: This is hard on me, too, you know! All of it. All this – All this everything! Major to minor. I mean, do you know how much I've suddenly grown to *hate* – Hate! – 'Sally' songs? All these songs about 'getting with' Sally. Songs about getting with my Ma? – 'Long Tall Sally.' 'Mustang Sally.' 'Lay Down Sally.' Never gave 'em a thought. Now I'm haunted by Sally songs!

SALLY: Lower your voice.

MATTHEW: Don't act like you don't give me the look. – I mean, Christ, / hear the sounds of his keys in my pocket. See his arms coming out of my shirt sleeves. I clear my throat, it's his phlegm. – Then you, wanting to dress me up like some Dapper Dan in his blazers and cardigans.

SALLY: You're the one who wants to store it all in some tabernacle. /'m getting rid of it!

MATTHEW: The clothes aren't – They're just... atmosphere. They're not hurting anyone. – And don't claim you're not aware of it. The awkward slips? Introducing

me as – J-J-J-Him – before reeling it in?

SALLY: Enough. With your tone.

MATTHEW: You know, Mom, I think about Dad every day, too. And I miss him. Wish he were here. But you, you revel in it. You let it define you. The sadness. The endless void. The so-loneliness. Talking about him incessantly. Canonizing him. And then looking at me like I'm... You sit there looking at me like you're waiting for me to say, 'Let's go grocery shopping.' Or, 'Let's go for a walk.' Or, 'Let's drive up to Marblehead.' This isn't the Jim and Sally show. You keep looking at me like it is.

SALLY: Then why do you care if I get rid of all his everything?

MATTHEW: I don't know! – Because I like the look of his clothes still around. And I can't help but think that maybe if we got rid of all this other *shit*, we could pack his stuff neatly away so it wouldn't intrude on our... on this 'transition.' But no chance! Instead we're swallowed up by all your comfy, cozy infinite indulgence and instant gratification! I can't deal with it!

SALLY: You, my friend, have trouble dealing with many things. That's just a fact of my life.

MATTHEW: *(Holds up the letter in his clenched fist.)* I can't deal with this!

SALLY: Lower. Your. Voice.

MATTHEW: NO! I won't lower my voice!

SALLY: Go away from me.

(SALLY finishes packing a couple of boxes and prepares to leave.)

MATTHEW: Don't write me any more letters!

SALLY: I'm done listening to your lip.

MATTHEW: Then listen to this! Your letters? They drove Dad nuts. All your hectoring about him and his drinking too much. His neglecting poor you. He told me. Didn't even bother reading 'em. Told me one day when I was, what, seventeen? – In fact, he said to me, 'If you ever repeat this I'll call you a liar to your face.' He said that to me. – And he told me, 'I don't even open the envelopes. I find 'em in my jacket at work and toss 'em right in the dumpster.' – *(Further crushes the envelope in his hand, throwing it across the room.)* – And you, every day, sticking another ambush letter in a different pocket! You drove me nuts with this shit! Drive all of us nuts! You and your Goddamn letters!

SALLY: *(Stands for a moment, absorbs the thrust, then quietly puts on her coat.)* I need you to start making payments on the money you owe me. This month.



MATTHEW: Ma – I didn't mean it like that –

SALLY: *(Hoists the boxes into her arms and readies to leave.)* Like what?

(MATTHEW says nothing.)

SALLY: You meant it in a constructive, positive, nourishing way?

MATTHEW: I'm sorry.

SALLY: Don't apologize. Just...Pay me the money you owe me. *(Opens the door and begins to exit.)*

MATTHEW: Ma –

SALLY: What.

MATTHEW: I didn't mean to say that. I'm really sorry.

SALLY: Save your sorries. *(Begins to exit, then stops.)* I miss your father so much, I could crawl into that bed in there and never get out of it. I feel paralyzed. All the time. It's all I can do to force myself up. Brush my teeth. And trudge through another day without him. Nothing matters to me anymore. You think you can remedy or replace that? Or that I would want you to? Just... pay me the money you owe me. And start thinking of a plan. I need you to move on. Preferably sooner than later. *(Exits, closing the door behind her.)*

(MATTHEW stands a moment, visibly, perhaps humorously, angry with himself. He eventually goes after the crushed letter, picks it up, and tries creasing out the crumple. He then approaches the closet door and looks at the blue blazer. He reaches toward it, then in behind it, taking out a hanger on which there is an old, beaten autumn coat, one of his dad's favored casual jackets. MATTHEW takes it from the hanger and tries it on. He smells the collar as he looks at himself in the hallway mirror. It too fits perfectly. He then reaches into the pockets, mildly smiling at what he finds as he sets the items out on a table, all the half-finished things from his father's last days: A set of keys. A half pack of Parliaments with a book of matches. A dollar thirty-eight in change. A pack of Certs... MATTHEW takes one of the Certs and puts it in his mouth. He then takes the book of matches, removes one from the pack, and lights the match as the stage darkens. As the lights fade, the chorus to 'Lay Down Sally' rises for a measure then fades.)

END OF PLAY