

FAMILY REUNION

by Amanda Grissom

CAST OF CHARACTERS

EVAN – 24. A man returning home and to his father and mother's grave after being away for 3 years. Positive, funny.

JAMIE – 22. Evan's sister. A college drop out. Wanted to be an engineer, but is stuck working in a small-town grocery store. Provides for her little sister.

SAMMIE – 20. The youngest sister. History student. Angry and hurt at the loss of her parents and her brother's abandonment.

CAM – Cemetery groundskeeper; short cameo role at the end.

THE SETTING

A cemetery in rural Illinois. Onstage there is a block representing a stump, but no set should represent the parents' tombstones.

(Lights come up. EVAN enters and sits on stump.)

EVAN

(Takes his time crossing and sitting. Addresses the graves of his father and mother in front of him.)

Hiya Pops. Hey Mom. It's good to be home. I'm sorry it's been awhile. I've been real busy and just haven't had time to come back. You'd be proud of me though; I met an amazing woman. We got married about a year and a half ago. You woulda liked her; she's –

(Ad lib if necessary.)

(JAMIE enters from a different direction than EVAN did. Sees him and stops in surprise. EVAN faces her.)

JAMIE

Evan. I didn't know you were in town.

EVAN

(Rising to meet her)

Jamie! (Holds open his arms. JAMIE doesn't advance.) What, no hug for your big bro? (She stiffly hugs him. They part.) Was that so hard, Pickle?

JAMIE

Don't call me Pickle.

(She turns to the graves, perhaps kneels, and ignores EVAN.)

Hey, Poppa. Hey, Momma.

EVAN

(In an effort to make conversation.)

So, when did they cut this tree down? I mean it gave Mom and Pops some shade, but I can't say I miss it that much. Makes a good seat.

(Demonstrates.)

JAMIE

Not long after you left. A month or two, maybe. So... (calculates) three years ago.

EVAN

Ay, still the math whiz. How'd that degree go?

JAMIE

I had to drop out. I couldn't afford it. I work at Mason's Groceries now.

EVAN

Oh. Well hey, it's great that you're working! Keeping yourself busy.

JAMIE

Sure. (Pause.) Look, Sammie's on her way. She just ran back to the car to grab the flowers I forgot in the backseat. Maybe you oughta go before she gets here.

EVAN

Why? I want to see her.

JAMIE

She's not going to want to see you.

EVAN

Come on, who wouldn't want to see me? I bet she's missed me.

JAMIE

She hasn't. Seriously, Evan, you should leave. It's hard enough for her to come here, she doesn't need to deal with you, too.

EVAN

It's hard for her? Doesn't she come to talk to Mom and Pops?

JAMIE

No, she'd rather talk to them at home than in a cemetery. (Smiles.) She talks to that little bird-shaped windchime Poppa bought Mom when we were kids. I swear she thinks the music is them talking back.

EVAN

Maybe it is.

(SAMMIE enters with flowers in her hand. She stops immediately and stares at the two. EVAN stands.)

Hey, Sammie. It's good –
(Ad lib if necessary.)

SAMMIE

(To JAMIE)

Really Jamie? You thought you could get Evan here, pull some stupid family reunion out of your ass, and patch everything up?

JAMIE

No! I didn't know he would be here.

EVAN

Come on, Sammie. Can't we just talk?

SAMMIE

Shut up, Evan. I'm not here to talk to you. I'm just here to visit Mom and Poppa for a bit. Then I'm gone.

EVAN

At least tell me what you're up to these days! Jamie tells me she's got a new job.

(SAMMIE snorts.)

So what's new with you?

(SAMMIE does not reply.)

Come on, what's staying mad at me forever going to do?

(Still no response. To graves. Trying to make light of the situation.)

Pops, you're on my side, right? Mom, talk some sense into your daughters.

SAMMIE

(Suddenly.)

You can't do this. You can't just show up and pretend everything's fine. You can't talk to them like they're still here.

JAMIE

Did you really think dropping in was a good idea? Especially today?

EVAN

Yeah, it's a good idea. And I may as well talk to them; it seems like they're the only ones happy to see me.

JAMIE

It's not that we're not happy to see you, it's –

SAMMIE

I'm not happy to see you.

JAMIE

(Continuing earlier sentence.)

It's just that you've been gone so long, and you're just going to leave again, so why bother? Why'd you come now?

EVAN

The anniversary.

SAMMIE

Don't pull that crap. There's been two other anniversaries and you didn't come to either of those.

EVAN

Well I'm here now, aren't I? I want to catch up with you and Jamie. I want to talk to Mom and Pops. (Beat) I want to tell you about my family.

JAMIE

Your family?

EVAN

Yeah. I got married last February.

(Pause. Unsure of if he should continue.)

Her name's Catherine. Caty. I met her when I moved to Milwaukee. She lived in the apartment across from me. Then she lived in my apartment with me. Then she married me.

JAMIE

Did she come back with you?

EVAN

No, she didn't feel up to travelling.

(Playfully casual.)

You two are going to be aunts in about a month, so the trip down would've been a little rough.

SAMMIE

(Softening.)

That woulda made Mom and Poppa happy. To have a grandchild.

(Hardening again. Sarcastically.)

Are we going to get to meet the kid?

EVAN

Of course! I'm going to take Caty out here in a few months and you'll meet the little marshmallow then.

JAMIE

Marshmallow?

EVAN

That's what Caty and I are calling the baby. We're waiting to know the gender, so 'marshmallow' it is.

SAMMIE

(To JAMIE)

10 bucks says we don't meet the marshmallow 'til it's a s'more.

EVAN

(Beginning to get frustrated.)

Sammie, you'll meet your niece or nephew in less than six months. I promise.

JAMIE

She's got a right to be skeptical, you know.

EVAN

I don't get it. You're mad at me for leaving, you're mad at me for coming back. What do you want? For me to be stuck here for the rest of eternity like you?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry.

JAMIE

Look, we're not mad you left. We're not mad you came back. We're mad it took so long.

EVAN

But I'm back *now*. Doesn't that count for anything?

SAMMIE

It's too late.

EVAN

I don't think it has to be. I don't see why we can't just start over from where we were.

(Pause.)

Can we try?

(Pause. To SAMMIE.)

Are you in school?

SAMMIE

(Reluctantly.)

Online classes.

EVAN

(Encouraged.)

What're you studying?

SAMMIE

History.

EVAN

(Prying.)

The history of...

SAMMIE

(Drily.)
Dead people.

EVAN

Well, that narrows it down. Most historical figures are dead.
(In spite of themselves, JAMIE and SAMMIE laugh.)
Ay, there it is! I knew you two had it in you.

SAMMIE

(Reluctantly, but lowers guard as she continues.)
I study the Middle Ages. So, King Arthur, William the Conqueror, Richard the Lionheart... Leif Ericson. It's getting deeper into specifics, but Ericson was probably the person who actually discovered North America, not Christopher Columbus.

EVAN

That's awesome, Sammie. It sounds like you really know your stuff. (Beat.) Jamie, why aren't you taking online classes too? You could keep pursuing that engineering degree while working.

JAMIE

(Dismissively.)
Eh, it's not worth it.

SAMMIE

That's a lie. She's working practically all day and half the night to support me.

EVAN

You two live together? Are you in the house still?

JAMIE

No, we sold it not long after Mom and Poppa died.

SAMMIE

We're renting that little one-story from the Youngers.

(EVAN nods. Pause.)

EVAN

Pops worked so hard on that house.

JAMIE

Yeah. He never did get that front door fixed.

SAMMIE

Damn thing squeaked every time.

EVAN

Remember when Pops lost his job?

JAMIE

When the gas station closed?

EVAN

No, when he worked at the pawn shop. They thought he stole those watches, remember?

(SAMMIE and JAMIE shake their heads/shrug.)

I guess you coulda been too young to remember. I was 7 or 8, so you

(to JAMIE)

woulda been about 5, you

(to SAMMIE)

woulda been 3. We were all pretty young.

JAMIE

Why'd they think he took them?

EVAN

I don't remember. Something about it being his shift to close when they went missing. I remember the screen door squeaking when he came home that day. It was how we knew Pops was home. We'd hear the door, then Pops would sigh and mutter, 'One of these days I'll fix that hinge.' Then we'd come running. But that day... That day he didn't mutter about the door.

SAMMIE

Was he mad?

EVAN

Nah. You know Pops. Mad wasn't his style. He felt... sorry. Sorry for the pawn shop owner because he lost money on those watches.

SAMMIE

Sounds like Poppa. He loses his job and he feels bad for the guy who fires him.

JAMIE

(With a smile.)

How'd Momma react?

(CAM enters quietly from back. Holds a rake or some other prop to indicate work. Sees EVAN and watches/listens for a moment.)

EVAN

(Laughs.)

She was pissed. If Pops hadn't talked her out of it, she would've gone down to that pawn shop and given the owner one of her "Listen here, young man" talks. God knows I got plenty of those.

(JAMIE and SAMMIE chuckle.)

SAMMIE

I got my fair share of "Listen here, young lady" talks myself.

JAMIE

Me, too.

CAM

(Coming forward.)

Hey there. Who ya talking to?

EVAN

(Pleasantly.)

Oh, hello. I'm just catching up with my family. My mom and pops,
(indicating graves)
and these are my sisters, Jamie and Sammie.

SAMMIE

Hi.

JAMIE

Nice to meet you.

CAM

(Smiles.)

They're beautiful headstones.

EVAN

I got the best ones I could.

CAM

How'd they pass, if you don't mind?

EVAN

It was Sammie's high school graduation. They all wanted me there, but I had better things to do. They crashed on the way home.

CAM

I'm so sorry. That must be really difficult to deal with.

EVAN

It is. I would've given anything to be lectured by them about skipping.

CAM

How old were they?

EVAN

Pops was 51, Mom 50, (Beat) Jamie 19, Sammie 17. Jamie was gonna be an engineer. Sammie... God, Sammie coulda been anything she wanted. (Beat) They both could've.

End of play.

Important notes:

- The last section with the groundskeeper is really important. It should not be revealed the sisters are dead until Evan says their ages. "Them" truly refers to all of Evan's relatives, but should sound like he is only referring to his parents. Cam can smile in the general direction of the sisters as if she sees them, but is really seeing (and talking) about their headstones.
- Evan is not schizophrenic. He is simply having the argument/conversation he never got to have with his siblings. He is trying to make everything right when he knows he can't. When the Cam arrives, he is no longer pretending they are alive because he knows they are not.
- Feel free to add movement. The stage directions are largely suggestions, and there are opportunities for action.
- Feel free to artistically stage the sisters at the end so they are in the place of their headstones. Also feel free to not.