

# **PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED TEN MINUTE PLAY**

**By Jonathan Markella**

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## **PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED**

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**SYNOPSIS:** Two women meet on a playground bench – a grandmother and a first-time mother, both watching youngsters in their care. Conversations begin, generations collide and parental guidance is suggested, whether either of them likes it or not. A little comedy with a lot of heart.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(TWO WOMEN)*

PEGGY (F) .....An inquisitive, outgoing grandmother,  
55-65 years old.

JULIE (F) .....An over-protective, energetic first-time  
mother, 28-32 years old.

### **SETTING**

A bench on the outskirts of a public playground. As simple or as elaborate as the theatrical venue allows.

### **PROPS**

- ☐ A park bench
- ☐ A baby bag full of child care supplies
- ☐ Baby wipes
- ☐ A purse and cell phone

### **TIME**

Early fall, the present.

**AT RISE:**

*JULIE sits on a park bench with a large baby bag by her side, full of all her child care gear. She is focused on the playground, looking straight ahead at the audience, anxiously watching her young daughter at play. PEGGY casually walks up to the bench, glances out towards the playground, then sits next to JULIE who suddenly stands bolt upright, motioning to her daughter.*

**JULIE:** Careful honey! (*Tentatively sits.*) Oooh... (*Jumps to her feet again, pointing.*) let him have a turn now...that's a good girl. (*Sits.*) Oh, oh... (*Stands up again.*) don't pick that up...that's it, put it down... (*Sits.*)

**PEGGY:** Quite a workout you're getting.

**JULIE:** I'm sorry...?

**PEGGY:** Your legs must be getting quite a workout.

**JULIE:** Oh, well, you know, with kids...

**PEGGY:** (*Glancing towards playground.*) Is that your daughter?

**JULIE:** Yes, in the pink.

**PEGGY:** She's cute. And she's eating mulch.

**JULIE:** OH! Honey, no... (*Bolts up, wide-eyed at playground.*)

**PEGGY:** It's okay, wait... (*Grabs her arm, watching playground.*)

**JULIE:** But she's putting it in her mou... (*Pointing to playground.*)

**PEGGY:** (*Focusing on playground.*) Watch...wait...aaand she puts it down.

**JULIE:** Because she tasted...mulch...

**PEGGY:** Because she learned.

**JULIE:** I've got to go over and wash her mouth out... (*Baby wipes in hand.*)

**PEGGY:** No, she's doing it herself.

**JULIE:** She's spitting mulch.

**PEGGY:** She's fine. (*Pause.*)

**JULIE:** I'm normally not like this...

**PEGGY:** So over-protective?

**JULIE:** No, so under-protective! Normally, I'd be baby-wiping her tongue all the way home. (*Pause.*) What am I doing here, I should be over there... (*Standing, gathering her baby bag.*)

**PEGGY:** (*Motioning to playground.*) Look, she's wiping her mouth on her sleeve...and...she's off playing again.

**JULIE:** I'll have to dry clean that jacket now... (*Sits.*)

**PEGGY:** Kids learn; kids live.

**JULIE:** Thank you...I think. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry, my name's Julie and that's my Katie.

**PEGGY:** Your first...

**JULIE:** Yes, but how did you know...?

**PEGGY:** Jiffy Pop.

**JULIE:** Excuse me?

**PEGGY:** We call first-time moms "Jiffy Pop"...after the popcorn you pop on the stove...?

**JULIE:** Because...?

**PEGGY:** You're jumping up and down, popping around non-stop...like...

**JULIE:** Jiffy Pop...yes, I get it. (*Tight smile.*) Isn't that...nice...

**PEGGY:** My name is Peggy, and that's...(*Looking around.*) my Jessie...somewhere...oh, there she is, over there. (*Points ahead, to the left.*)

**JULIE:** (*Following her point.*) She's so...young...

**PEGGY:** Grandchild.

**JULIE:** Oh, that's nice...and who's "we"?

**PEGGY:** Beg your pardon?

**JULIE:** You said "we"...*"we call first-time moms Jiffy Pop"*...who's the "we"?

**PEGGY:** Oh, sorry, grandparents, empty nesters...those of us who have fought the battles and weathered the storms. We see first-timers like you all the time, and it's like watching the Weather Channel...with a pressure-packed storm system moving in off the coast... (*Laughs.*) quick, get the bread and milk!

**JULIE:** Glad we can be so entertaining for you. (*Tight smile.*) I've heard of "helicopter parents"...but Jiffy Pop...that's a new one.

**PEGGY:** Helicopters crash and burn. With Jiffy Pop, you're only in danger of a little burn now and then. Jiffy Pop's better.

**JULIE:** Katie! (*Focusing on her daughter.*) Wait in line! Everyone needs a turn!

**PEGGY:** No offense, we were all beginners once. (*Casually scanning the playground for Jessie.*) I have three of my own, all who've grown and had three of their own. Each.

**JULIE:** Is it going to be that bad?

**PEGGY:** What do you mean?

**JULIE:** You said "storms" and "battles"...is that all there is? Because I'm already exhausted.

**PEGGY:** No, that's just old lady talk. It's wonderful, it changes, you grow up...and guess what? So do they.

**JULIE:** You're far from an "old lady"...but you do seem a little...casual about watching Jessie.

**PEGGY:** Thank you.

**JULIE:** It wasn't meant as a compliment...just an observation...

**PEGGY:** I know. I mean, look, I don't know everything, but once you've raised three kids, and watched a gaggle of grandchildren, you realize that sometimes you're just a spectator.

**JULIE:** Well, that just doesn't seem right. Kids need so much – love, guidance, care...

**PEGGY:** Of course, and you give them all of that but you end up learning, sometimes the hard way, that kids...just sort of...happen. And if you provide plenty of love, care and guidance, good things happen. The big things.

**JULIE:** Oh. Kids...happen. (*Furrowed brow.*)

**PEGGY:** So, eventually I stopped worrying about the small stuff. (*Gestures to the playground.*) The...mulch stuff.

**JULIE:** Seems a little "hands off" to me, that's all. I always saw my job as the fixer. I want to fix everything that goes wrong for her, so everything will be...right...

**PEGGY:** Fixing is good. Learning is better. If you let kids live, you let kids learn.

**JULIE:** I appreciate your advice, but right now, fixing makes sense to me...because I'm a first-timer, pressure-popping system...whatever. Believe me, I feel the pressure. But I can't fast forward to you. I can't be a grandparent, until I go through the parent part first.

**PEGGY:** Well obviously, but...

**JULIE:** No, I mean, I appreciate what you're saying – "Don't sweat the small stuff," "Kids figure it out by themselves" ... but parents need to figure it out too. I need to learn before I can relax and enjoy it, you know? I need to be the helicopter parent before I learn that a few crash landings won't kill me. I need to over-protect before I figure out what the alternative is.

**PEGGY:** (*Nodding, knowingly.*) Every once in a while, Jiffy Pop needs to burn on the stove before you figure out the right timing and touch.

**JULIE:** Thank you.

**PEGGY:** Just like parenting.

**JULIE:** (*Laughs, nods her head.*) Timing and touch.

**PEGGY:** I think so. (*Pause.*)

**JULIE:** (*Introspective, tired.*) I need more of the time.

**PEGGY:** (*Introspective, honest.*) And maybe I'm a little out of touch. (*Pause.*)

**JULIE:** Did you have talks like this with your kids...while they were..."popping"?

**PEGGY:** Oh, no...not as much as I'd like. I had three boys, so as much as they love their kids, I couldn't come between them and their wives. And their wives weren't always the easiest to talk to.

**JULIE:** (*Focusing on her daughter.*) Katie! Hold on, okay? Two hands. (*Pause.*) So was that hard?

**PEGGY:** Is. Is hard. I love my boys, but men make funny choices. And I love them for it, but it's hard to step back to make room for another woman in their lives.

**JULIE:** I've never thought of it that way. Do you think my husband's mother feels this way? About me?

**PEGGY:** Do you like her? Do you enjoy her company?

**JULIE:** Well, yes, I do.

**PEGGY:** Then good for you. And yes, she feels that way. Can't be helped. But if you welcome her into your life, then you're doing all you can do. The rest just happens.

**JULIE:** Does it? (*Pause.*) Can I give you some advice?

**PEGGY:** Please dear.

**JULIE:** I think you "let" things happen too much.

**PEGGY:** Do you think?

**JULIE:** If you feel shut out of your sons' lives, speak up, and get yourself back in there. *Make it happen.*

**PEGGY:** Well, it's not that simple...

**JULIE:** But you have no problem sharing your child-rearing advice with me, a total stranger...?

**PEGGY:** Well that's different...

**JULIE:** How?

**PEGGY:** Because this way, no one's feelings get hurt.

**JULIE:** What about mine? I have feelings.

**PEGGY:** But you're not family, dear.

**JULIE:** Right, but I'm *someone's* family. And I have feelings. And so do you. Look, there's one thing we do pretty well...

**PEGGY:** Who's "we" dear...?

**JULIE:** Oh...uh, my generation, I guess...

**PEGGY:** Oh, now it's a generational thing...

**JULIE:** Well, we speak our minds...to the people who need to hear it. If you're the "let it happen" generation, we're the "make it happen" generation. *(Pause.)*

**PEGGY:** Well, after all these years, I can't just go bursting into their lives like a bull in a china shop...

**JULIE:** Of course not. You've got to find the right time, and approach it in the right way.

**PEGGY:** *(Smiling at the realization.)* Timing and touch.

**JULIE:** *(Smiling, nodding.)* Jiffy Pop.

**PEGGY:** Damn. *(Pause.)*

**JULIE:** You seen Jessie lately?

**PEGGY:** Nope. Katie?

**JULIE:** Nope. Think they're playing in traffic?

**PEGGY:** Possible, but I doubt it.

**JULIE:** What did you say...? Kids live; kids learn...?

**PEGGY:** Yeah, feel free to embroider it on a pillow... *(Laughs.)*

**JULIE:** I hope it works for me some day...

**PEGGY:** It will. Pink jacket?

**JULIE:** Yeah...

**PEGGY:** Over there, three o' clock...apparently playing "You show me yours, I'll show you mine" with that little blonde boy.

**JULIE:** KATIE! Oh my God! (*Jumps up.*) Please don't tell me you're going to stop me on this one...?

**PEGGY:** (*Laughs.*) I would field this one if I were you.

**JULIE:** Thank you. (*Takes two steps towards playground, stops, turns around.*)

**JULIE:** Thank you. (*She exits, trotting off to her daughter. Peggy sits and thinks. Then pulls out her cell phone and dials.*)

**PEGGY:** Oh, hi. Hi Michael, didn't think I'd catch you. I was going to leave a message...no, of course not, of course...I'd prefer to speak to you. So what's new? (*She nervously nods, listens and nods.*) Uh huh, uh huh...okay, look, I was thinking of coming by this Saturday. Yes, of course, coming by...I know it's a busy day for you and the kids...but I miss them...I know Skype is easier, but it's not enough, they need to really see their Nana. And I want to visit with you...and Marcy...you *and* Marcy...it's been so long. Sure, I saw you last month, but not Marcy. Yes, I know she's busy, but how long has it been since we've all been together? (*Pauses, flustered.*) I know it will...*happen*, but I'm coming by on Saturday to see all of you. All of you. (*Pause.*) Well, what time will she be free? Well, tell her I want to see her. (*Pause.*) Well tell her to call me. (*Pauses, sternly.*) Michael Joseph, I am coming over on Saturday at 2pm to see you, the girls, and I want Marcy to be there, too. (*Pause.*) *Make it happen.* (*She ends the call, puts the cell phone down in her lap, and a smile slowly spreads across her face.*) Jiffy Pop.

**THE END**