

Face Value

by
Steve Totland

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Characters:

Miranda

Aaron

Robert

The play takes place in the dining room of Aaron's home.

[The dining room in Aaron's house.
The last bits of a good meal lie
scattered on the dining room table.]

Robert and Aaron sit at the table.
Miranda stands next to Aaron. She peers,
intensely, into Aaron's face.]

MIRANDA
I don't see a thing. You've had them how long?

AARON
About a month.

MIRANDA
Really? [She scrutinizes his face. Steps back. To Robert.]
Maybe you--

[Robert stands as Miranda sits.]

ROBERT
Where did you say--

AARON
Under my eye.

[Robert leans in for a closer look.]

ROBERT
Your right eye?

AARON
My right eye. Then over by my nose.

ROBERT
And it's what that I'm looking for?

AARON
Bumps.

ROBERT
Hummmm.

AARON
Little bumps that are slightly red.

ROBERT
Slightly red bumps.

[Robert examines Aaron's face.]

AARON
You see anything?

ROBERT
No.

AARON
You're sure?

ROBERT
You want the truth?

AARON
I do. I want the truth.

ROBERT
You've got a blackhead--

MIRANDA
[Throwing her napkin at Robert.] That's disgusting.

ROBERT
[Catching her throw.] -- and a couple of humongous nose hairs, but no bumps.

[The men share a laugh.]

MIRANDA
[Standing.] You are so rude.

[Miranda begins clearing the table.]

AARON
You don't have to do that.

MIRANDA
You made the meal--

AARON
After you've had me over for dinner how many times?

MIRANDA
That's what friends do.

AARON
That's what good friends do. It doesn't take much and you learn pretty quickly who your good friends really are.

MIRANDA
Well, I would say the people who are not good friends, are not really friends at all. They're acquaintances. [To Robert.] Isn't that how you see it?

[Robert nods his head, "Yes."]

Miranda gives Aaron a warm smile.

After a prolonged moment,]

AARON
That was maudlin. I'm sorry--

MIRANDA
There's nothing to be sorry--

AARON
[Overlapping Miranda.] That was not on the agenda. Sit.
And relax. Give me those. [He takes the plates from
Miranda.] This is my treat. Either of you want coffee? Or
tea?

MIRANDA
I'll have coffee.

ROBERT
You have tea?

AARON
You want black or herbal?

MIRANDA
You know what? I'll have tea. Don't make a pot of coffee--

AARON
I'm having coffee. Decaf?

MIRANDA
Decaf's great.

[Aaron looks to Robert.]

ROBERT
You have some of that mint?

AARON
Mint it is.

[Aaron disappears into the kitchen, his
hands full of dishes.]

MIRANDA
So?

[Robert is unsure what she means.]

MIRANDA
Did you see bumps?

ROBERT
No. Did you?

MIRANDA
No.

ROBERT
Then why are you asking?

MIRANDA
No reason. I just--

ROBERT
You think I saw bumps but said I didn't?

MIRANDA
No.

ROBERT
Why would I lie? What would be the point of that?

MIRANDA
To save his feeling?

ROBERT
Save his feelings? A friend thinks he has bumps you have an obligation to the truth.

[Miranda is silent.]

ROBERT
You saw bumps?

MIRANDA
Did I say I saw bumps? If Aaron had bumps we would see them. They would be on his face. Plain as day.

[Aaron enters with a plate of fancy cookies and colorful napkins.]

AARON
It'll be just another minute for the hot things.

[Aaron, sensing he's interrupted something, gazes at Miranda and Robert.

After a moment,]

MIRANDA
[The cookies.] They're so beautiful.

[Aaron sets down the plate, then passes out napkins.]

AARON
I got them at Angeline's.

[Each takes cookies, eats.]

AARON

What you said about blackheads reminds me. My aunt lived next door to this woman who had this thing on her face. It looked like a blackhead. Only she couldn't get rid of it. She washed her face. She squeezed. It wouldn't go away. But it didn't bother her. So she, ultimately, didn't think that much about it. But then, one day, it got bigger. And it started to hurt. And all the sudden, I think she was in church, my aunt said the blackhead popped open. And it was full of spiders. It wasn't a blackhead at all. A spider had laid eggs in her face. And they hatched. But because she was in church she didn't scream, or leave. She was afraid people would think she was dirty if they knew a spider laid eggs in her face. So she just sat there. And the spiders crawled all over her face. And they bit her. Some of them in her eyes. And they were black widows. And she died.

ROBERT

Uh-huh.

AARON

You don't believe me? You can ask my Aunt Ruth. You want me to get her number?

[From off, the whistle of a tea kettle.
Aaron stands.]

ROBERT

Aaron.

AARON

You can choose to not believe me.

MIRANDA

No one said they don't believe you.

ROBERT

In fact, I was just about to say that the exact same thing happened to my cousin. Only with her they were ants. And because she had cancer, they weren't in her face. They were in her wig.

[Aaron gives Robert a long look straight
in the eye.]

AARON

Talk to Aunt Ruth. She'll tell you it happened.

[Aaron goes into the kitchen.]

MIRANDA
You are amazing.

ROBERT
What?

MIRANDA
Teasing him. Your best friend is sitting here; telling us this story--

ROBERT
Which he has to know we know is made up.

MIRANDA
Yes.

ROBERT
"Call my aunt." What is that? He's daring me to call?

MIRANDA
He knows you won't call. Believing him is not the point. It's like with the bumps. It's his way of saying, "Look at me. I need someone to notice me." It's a cry for help.

ROBERT
People have tried. He pushes them away. [Standing.] Let's not stay too late.

[Robert kisses Miranda, then heads for the hallway.]

MIRANDA
Where are you going?

ROBERT
To pee.

[Robert exits.]

Aaron reenters. He carries coffee and tea service on a tray.]

AARON
Here we are. Where's Robert?

MIRANDA
He's in the little boys. Listen--

[As Aaron lays out the hot drinks.]

MIRANDA
-- your bumps. Do they hurt?

[Aaron, grateful for a chance to speak about his affliction, sits.]

AARON

Not really. Sometimes they're a little warm. Like a small sunburn. It looks bad.

MIRANDA

No. If you hadn't said something I wouldn't have even noticed.

AARON

You saw them?

[Miranda nods her head.]

AARON

You said you didn't. You and Robert--

MIRANDA

I know.

AARON

Both of you told me you didn't see them.

MIRANDA

We were embarrassed.

AARON

You talked behind my back?

MIRANDA

We were caught off guard. I'm sorry. We didn't know what to say.

AARON

[Empathetic.] That's how it is. People at my new job are totally unwilling to acknowledge. . .

[Aaron is unable to continue. Miranda leans across the table; takes his hand.]

Robert returns. He stops, surprised by what he sees.

Aaron sees Robert; pulls himself together.]

AARON

[To Robert.] Here's your tea. I forget if you like lemon.

ROBERT

Just a little sugar.

AARON

If it's cold I can nuke it--

ROBERT

[Testing the temperature.] This is great.

MIRANDA

[To Robert.] I fessed up. I told Aaron we saw the bumps.

ROBERT

Ah!

AARON

You shouldn't be embarrassed. I'm not. I'm the one that asked you to look.

ROBERT

Yes.

AARON

I'm worried. I'm nervous. It's hard for me to, sometimes, concentrate. But I'm not embarrassed.

MIRANDA

What does the doctor say?

AARON

That's what's so frustrating. The good dermatologists are all booked. My internist would squeeze me in. But he's just going to say I need a specialist.

MIRANDA

You should see a doctor.

AARON

I am. Just not for another three weeks. By then I'll be The Elephant Man.

[Robert stands.]

ROBERT

[To Miranda.] It's getting late.

MIRANDA

[Surprised. Setting down her coffee.] Oh--

AARON

You're not going are you?

ROBERT

I have to work tomorrow. I've got a huge project--

AARON

It seems like you just got here.

ROBERT

You get yourself in a state. You trick yourself, and everyone around you, into believing you're the victim of a crime, or some injustice--

AARON

Did I say I was a victim?

ROBERT

It's not going to work. Not this time. We are not going to twist ourselves into knots. Wrapped around your little finger. Thinking you have cancer--

AARON

Cancer?

ROBERT

Which is what you want.

AARON

Who said cancer?

ROBERT

You want us to feel responsible--

AARON

I asked about bumps. "I think I have bumps--"

ROBERT

You lost your job and your girlfriend left. Okay. Look. The job; you're right. That was wrong. You'd worked there a long time. You were a good employee. They're bastards for letting you go. But Laurie was a bitch. You knew it. I knew it. She knew it. Everyone knew it. She picked a hell-of-a-time to go but, you know what? It was inevitable. The two of you would never have worked. So, here's the thing.

MIRANDA

Robby, maybe, you ought to--

ROBERT

[To Miranda.] No. [To Aaron.] Here's the thing; bad things happen. They do. They happen all the time. They don't mean you're a loser. They don't mean you're special. And they don't mean you're dying.

AARON

[To Miranda.] Shall I wrap up some roast--

[Miranda shakes her head, "No."]

ROBERT

And what's with this, "I have an aunt who has a friend?"
"You can call my Aunt Ruth." Your Aunt Ruth is dead. I went
to her funeral.

MIRANDA

[To Aaron.] It was a lovely dinner. I had a really good
time.

[Miranda leaves.]

ROBERT

Did you hear what I said?

AARON

My face does not lie. You look at this face and you know,
whatever it is I am saying, I am speaking the truth. My Mom
and Dad, the entire time I was growing up, that's what they
said. "Aaron has a face that cannot lie." I have bumps.
And they're spreading. Something is happening to me, and
it's out of control, and it's registering on my face.

[Robert leaves.]

Aaron alone.

He touches his face along the cheekbones;
under his right eye, then under his left
eye. He lets out a big, oversized sigh.]

END OF PLAY