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**BIG DOG PUBLISHING**

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*This play is dedicated  
to my wife, Ying-hsiu Lu,  
and to my son, David Braden (D2),  
who provide all that I need:  
peace, love, and laughter.*

## alien education

**CHILDREN'S COMEDY.** To help Jesse earn a good score on her middle-school placement exam, Uncle Ed and Aunt Lilly have decided to hire a tutor, Mr. Small. But Mr. Small turns out to be an alien shape-changer from the planet Squee, whose real job is to squeeze all happiness out of life. But before Mr. Small can crush Jesse's spirit, an alien from the planet Xylon (who just graduated from grade school herself!) unexpectedly lands in Jesse's bedroom and shows her that learning can be a lot of fun!

**Performance Time:** Approximately 20 minutes.

## CHARACTERS (2 M, 3 F)

**ZAPHORINKA:** An alien shape-changer from the planet Xylon; just graduated from grade school.

**JESSE GARDENER:** A fifth-grader studying for her middle-school placement exam.

**LILLY GARDENER:** Jesse's aunt.

**ED GARDENER:** Jesse's uncle.

**MR. SMALL:** Jesse's English tutor; an alien shape-changer from the planet Squee.

## SETTING

Earth, present day. Jesse's bedroom has a bed and a dresser. Mr. Small's office has a door, a desk, three chairs, a window, and a computer. The Gardener's living room has an assortment of chairs and/or a couch.

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

**Scene 1:** Jesse's bedroom

**Scene 2:** Mr. Small's office.

**Scene 3:** The Gardener's living room.

**Scene 4:** The Gardener's living room.

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### PROP2

Large box made to look like an alien; has buttons and flashing lights.

Pencil

Papers

Bedspread

Book bag

Computer

### SPECIAL EFFECT2

Flashing multicolored lights

Electronic voice recording

Puddle of green jelly-like goo

## SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Jesse Gardener's bedroom. Zaphorinka is a shape-changer from the planet Xylon. She is currently in the shape of a large box.)

ZAPHORINKA: This isn't my grandmother's house, and it's not Alpha-Centuri. I've been sitting here for 16 hours, and I'm sick of it. Leave it to the Xylonic Transport Authority. Well, what do the regs say? *(She hits a button on the box and hears an electronic voice recording: "Stay in transport form for 24 hours to allow for lost package tracking and retrieval.")* Sit here like a box for eight more hours? They must be crazy. All the same, maybe I'd better wait and find out more about the local life forms before I try anything.

*(Jesse Gardener enters. She dumps her book bag in a corner and lies on her bed.)*

JESSE: I'll never finish all my homework!

*(ED and Lilly Gardener enter.)*

LILLY: *(To Jesse.)* You're late, dear. Where have you been?  
It's almost 6:30!

JESSE: Come on, Aunt Lilly, I'm tired, okay?

LILLY: You went to that video place after your cram school.

ED: You're to come home straight after your lessons unless you're going to see your tutor. We promised your parents to look after you, and that's just what we're going to do. Have you finished your homework?

LILLY: *(To Ed.)* Of course she hasn't. Just look at her. No wonder she's tired, rotting her brain with all those video games.

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ED: Now you listen to me, my girl. The middle-school placement exam is right around the corner, and you had better be prepared. Do you want to be a failure? Do you? Look at me! Answer me! Is that what you want...to be a silly little sniveling failure?

JESSE: No, I'm sorry, Uncle Ed. You're right. I just wanted...I'm sorry. I don't know what I wanted. I guess I better study some more...

LILLY: Of course you should, dear. Your mom and dad are on a very important scientific mission in Antarctica. You mustn't let them down.

JESSE: Sure, Aunt Lilly.

LILLY: Good, now try to study a little before you go to sleep.

ED: Goodnight.

JESSE: Night, Uncle Ed.

*(She lies down on her bed. Ed exits.)*

LILLY: Jesse? What's this box doing in the middle of your room?

Jesse: I don't know. It's just a box. I'll move it. Night, Auntie.

*(Lilly exits. Jesse is lying on her bed and staring at the ceiling, preoccupied with her depression.)*

JESSE: It's hopeless.

ZAPHORINKA: Hello?! What about the box in your room?!

JESSE: You're just a box. Who cares?

ZAPHORINKA: That's all? A strange talking box is sitting in the middle of your room and that's all you can say.

JESSE: Fine, a box that talks, so what?

ZAPHORINKA: My name is Zaphorinka. I'm from Xylon. Pleased to meet you.

*(Jesse jerks abruptly into a sitting position.)*



JESSE: Whoa! An alien! No, wait a minute. Is this some kind of joke? Who's in there?

ZAPHORINKA: I'm not in anywhere. I'm a Xylonic shape-changer. What are you?

JESSE: Sorry, my name's Jesse. I'm a human.

ZAPHORINKA: (*Aside.*) Earth? Well at least it's the right galaxy.

JESSE: Look, uh, Zaphorinka, I'm kind of tired, so if this is some kind of joke, can we stop now?

ZAPHORINKA: I'll prove it to you in awhile, but I'm not supposed to change shape yet.

JESSE: Fine, then I will go to sleep if you'll stop talking, that is.

ZAPHORINKA: Let's see, I got here about 16 hours ago, so I'm well over half way there. I don't think the transport authority is ever going to find me.

JESSE: Sixteen hours ago? Why didn't you say anything then?

ZAPHORINKA: You were asleep. And then you left. You didn't even look at me. I wasn't sure I was safe. I thought maybe you were an evil robot. You do act like a robot, you know.

JESSE: I'm a fifth-grade student.

ZAPHORINKA: But that's great! I just graduated from grade school myself...best time in my life.

JESSE: Now I know you're an alien.

ZAPHORINKA: Don't you want to learn anything? It's so exciting!

JESSE: Sounds great, E.T., but I think I'll just go to sleep.

ZAPHORINKA: Don't you want anything?

JESSE: I want to sleep.

ZAPHORINKA: Come on, Jesse. I'm an alien far from home. I was being shipped in box form to my grandmother's house on Alpha-Centuri. The Xylonic Transport Authority made a mistake, and now I'm stuck here. Can't we be friends?

JESSE: With a box?

ZAPHORINKA: I can change if you want.

JESSE: Not for at least another eight hours, you said.

ZAPHORINKA: I'll change now if you really want me to.

JESSE: I don't know. What do you really look like?

ZAPHORINKA: Xylons have their insides on the outside.

JESSE: Yuck!

ZAPHORINKA: I'll just change into a girl, okay?

JESSE: Okay, change into a girl then.

ZAPHORINKA: Hang something in front of me and get me some clothes. I don't want you to see the inside-outside part when I'm changing.

JESSE: I won't look.

ZAPHORINKA: Yes, you will.

JESSE: Okay, okay, I'll hang up the bedspread.

*(Jesse rips her bedspread off of her bed and grabs some clothes out of her dresser. She hangs the bedspread in front of Zaphorinka. There are flashing multicolored lights and wet squishy sounds as Zaphorinka changes.)*

ZAPHORINKA: *(While changing.)* Jesse? There's one other thing I should tell you.

JESSE: Like what? You're a vampire or something?

ZAPHORINKA: No, but Xylons can feel what other species can't feel. Maybe it's because our insides are all on the outside. I don't know.

JESSE: So?

ZAPHORINKA: *(Dramatic.)* Someone in your life is a spirit crusher.

*(More flashing lights and a final squishy sound. The bedspread is pulled aside, and Zaphorinka appears as a girl.)*

JESSE: Wow! You look real! I mean, you look normal. I mean, the box is gone. You really are an alien shape-changer!

ZAPHORINKA: Zaphorinka. Pleased to meet you.

JESSE: Can I just call you Zaph?

ZAPHORINKA: Sure.

JESSE: Okay, Zaph. You can call me Jess if you want to.

Now, what's this stuff about spirit crushers?

ZAPHORINKA: You have one after you. I'm talking about a real spirit crusher... *(Dramatic.)* ...a Squee.

JESSE: What's a Squee?

ZAPHORINKA: There are two known races of shape-changers in the universe, the Xylons and the Squee. The Squee feed on the positive life-affirming energy of other species.

JESSE: Sorry, I don't get it.

ZAPHORINKA: They suck the happiness out of you and eat it.

JESSE: Oh.

ZAPHORINKA: Do you have anyone like that in your life?

JESSE: Mr. Small, my new English tutor. The cram school recommended him to my Aunt and Uncle because I got bad scores in English last year.

ZAPHORINKA: *(Dramatic.)* I don't know how long the Squee have been here or how many there are. You may have noticed more and more people like yourself...people living without joy?

JESSE: Maybe. I don't know.

ZAPHORINKA: Of course you don't. Xylons have been fighting the Squee for a long time. I must help you.

JESSE: My Aunt and Uncle are going to meet with the Squee tomorrow.

ZAPHORINKA: We must follow them. Don't worry. I'll try to help you get your joy back.

JESSE: Thanks, Zaph. I really do feel better.

ZAPHORINKA: Get a good night's sleep then. We have work to do tomorrow.

JESSE: But what about you? Where are you going to sleep?

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ZAPHORINKA: I'm an alien, remember? I don't sleep. I'll access your planet's electronic network and study while you sleep.

JESSE: Okay then. *(She flips off the light switch, and lights fade to black except for Zaphorinka's blinking multicolored lights.)*  
Night, Zaph.

ZAPHORINKA: Goodnight, Jess.

SCENE 2

*(AT RISE: Mr. Small's office. Mr. Small is facing a computer. He salutes the computer screen.)*

MR. SMALL: Hail, great Slarb. I have penetrated the educational system of this sector. Spirit crushing is underway. I have acquired new minions and new minds for the glory of the Squee. *(Salutes again.)* All hail the great Slarb! *(There is a knock at the door.)* Ah, "minions." I love that word! Yes, come in, come in.

*(Ed and Lilly enter.)*

LILLY: Mr. Small, thank you so much for taking the trouble to see us.

MR. SMALL: Indeed, I am a busy Squee...I mean...*man*...as you well know. So many young minds are in my care, and I must find time to prepare them all.

ED: We know you are a great tutor, Mr. Small, a great educator. We are very grateful for the time you take with our Jesse.

MR. SMALL: Good. Why don't you make yourselves comfortable? *(He points to the ground. Ed and Lilly sit down on two chairs.)* Ah, on your knees, I think?!

LILLY: Our knees?

MR. SMALL: Yes. Allow me to cite Abrams and Egger, Parent Teacher Conferencing, 2003: "Communication is facilitated by a clear hierarchy of authority." Mr. Gardener, you may kneel a little ahead of your wife, if you wish.

*(Ed and Lilly are kneeling down before Mr. Small. Enter Jesse and Zaphorinka. Jesse and Zaphorinka pop up and peer through a window, unnoticed by Mr. Small and the Gardeners. They continue to pop up at odd intervals throughout the following exchange.)*

MR. SMALL: *(To Ed and Lilly.)* Now, don't you feel more comfortable?

ED: *(Trancelike.)* In a way, yes, I do.

LILLY: *(Trancelike.)* You're so wise, Mr. Small.

MR. SMALL: Good, thank you. Now to Jesse...have you followed my instructions?

ED: We have done our best, sir.

LILLY: We keep her from playing. We don't allow friends. She goes to cram school every night. We remind her to study.

MR. SMALL: So, any problems? Anything I should know about?

ED: Uh, well, she, uh, did come home a little late last night.

MR. SMALL: Ah-ha! Still a spark of mischief in the girl, hey? We must rub it out, I tell you. If that girl is to move ahead, we must rub it out! *(He viciously grinds his pencil eraser on a paper on his desk.)* I have spoken to her other teachers at the cram school. We have prepared tests for her to do in her free time.

LILLY: Oh, thank you, Mr. Small. Thank you so very much!

*(Jesse can't keep silent anymore. She pops her head up.)*

JESSE: *(Shouts.)* I can't stand it! Someone has to stop this!

ZAPHORINKA: *(Whispers.)* Jesse, no! Stop!

*(Mr. Small hands Ed a pile of exams.)*

MR. SMALL: Jesse has possibilities. These tests will help.  
Remember now, grind her down. Don't allow her to have  
any fun.

ED: All for her own good, of course. You're a great man, Mr.  
Small.

LILLY: Oh, Ed, did you hear? Our Jesse has possibilities!

*(They all begin shaking hands, preparing to leave. Jesse bursts into  
the room without knocking.)*

JESSE: Stop, Auntie! Stop, Uncle Ed! He's a Squee! He's  
brainwashing you! Don't listen to him! He's a Squee! He's  
a spirit crusher! Run! Run!

*(Lilly and Ed grab Jesse and start pulling her to the door.)*

LILLY: I'm so sorry, Mr. Small. I don't know what's gotten  
into her.

ED: It's those gosh darn video games! That's what it is.

JESSE: *(To Mr. Small, shouting.)* Squee! Squee!

MR. SMALL: Take the girl home so she can study.

*(Mr. Small helps Ed and Lilly push Jesse out the door. Ed, Lilly, and  
Jesse exit. Mr. Small closes the door behind them.)*

MR. SMALL: *(Aside.)* I don't like this. I don't like it at all.  
How could she possibly have found out? No Xylons have  
ever been reported here. Hmmm... *(Blackout.)*

**[End of Freeview]**