

**FINAL
CONVERSATIONS**

Rita Anderson

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by Rita Anderson

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Final Conversations

SYNOPSIS:

Final Conversations is about a Mother's regret, wanting to roll back time to attain one perfect moment, one real conversation with her Son before he's accidentally killed. The set up is simple: one day before school Mother suddenly "knows" that Son has an hour to live. With a "kitchen sink" approach, she attempts to change fate, using comedic often absurd methods to reach Son, none of which alters destiny or brings peace.

PRODUCTION HISTORY:

Final Conversations was nominated for the John Cauble Outstanding Short Play Competition at The Kennedy Center. It is unpublished.

CHARACTERS:

MOTHER tired (in many ways), too comfortable.

SON high-school senior, chronically distracted and currently in a hurry.

SETTING: a small American kitchen and a front door

TIME: The eternal present, or so it would seem. It is the morning of May 1st (over and over again)—after sunrise but before the work day.

Note: Lines are quick, run together, interrupted as the characters are running for their lives.

Conversation # 1: "I Had a Dream." Lights up on a kitchen consisting of a small table with two chairs. A standing calendar with the single date, MAY 1, in big letters is on the table. [Costumes/set-up are the same throughout: *It is the last hour of SON's life; MOM knows it and he doesn't.*]

An alarm clock chimes. SON enters in jeans and a graphic tee.

SON

Never anything to eat in this house. No food and I'm starving. Time for a Wish Sandwich. (He toasts bread and catches his reflection, combs fingers through his hair.) Bed-head, now *that's* attractive. (sings) "My *bedhead* brings all the girls to the yard."

He dances and delivers the next line in an exaggerated God-voice.

"Man cannot live by bread alone!"

He pulls out orange juice and looks behind him before drinking from the jug, thirstily.

MOTHER appears in robe and slippers. Startled, he drops the juice.

SON

Sorry. I'll clean it up. (She's crying.) I'll buy you some more, Mom, sheesh.

She cries worse, shaking her head.

MOTHER

No. You won't.

SON

I *will*. Right after school.

MOTHER (wailing)

You can't.

SON

What? I hearda crying over spilled milk but it's juice, Ma. As in orange. And I got it all over me!

He peels his shirt, exits OS for a clean one.

She runs to the discarded shirt and holds it to her. She confronts him when he returns in a new shirt.

MOTHER

I had a dream.

SON

Okay, MLK. But why get all crucial-as-a-tumor about it. I have dreams too.

MOTHER

I know you do. *Did*, so sorry. But I'm serious.

SON

So "serious as a crutch" or more like "serious as a heart attack."

MOTHER

This isn't a game. It's no joke.

SON

Damn! So you had a dream. What does that hafta do with me? I dream too. Every night!

MOTHER

Not like this you don't.

SON (sighs)

Good Morning to you too!

He shakes his head and gets his knapsack.

MOTHER

Don't go.

SON

Can't be late. I have a test.

MOTHER

You won't pass this one.

SON

I studied for four hours last night.

MOTHER

A nightmare you don't wake from.

SON
You're *awake*.

MOTHER
But you won't be.

SON
What?!

MOTHER
Not for much longer. Don't know how long but—

SON
But I already brushed my teeth.

MOTHER
Clean underwear? Because you'll need them. And your wallet, so the officer can make the ID.

SON
This is nonsense.

MOTHER
Wish that were the case.

SON
So you've opened up these seventeen cans of worms—and *someone* has to eat them?

MOTHER
Funny you should say worms. --Don't expect me to survive this, Son. You never did listen.

SON
You're creeping me out, Creepezoid.

He makes a twisting finger at his temple like she's cuckoo as he sings the *Twilight Zone* theme music and exits, slamming the door.

A beat later, he pops back in and she's still standing there, smelling his shirt. He snatches it, and peels off the shirt he's wearing, putting on the original.

SON
I need that back. Got a test today. That's my lucky shirt. —Oh, and here.

He pulls a flyer out of his back pocket.

MOTHER

What's this?

SON

It was stuck in the door, a flyer. (reads) *Final Conversations with a Dying Loved One*. Prob'ly the Jehovah slash Mormon press. (hands it to her) --God, I hope they're not still out there canvassing the block. In their ties. On bikes. Wouldn't that suck. (salutes) Later days, Mother Ship.

He exits, slamming the door.

Conversation #2: "Knock Knock." Alarm clock chimes. SON enters. Lights flash and haunted house sound effects play loudly. MOTHER, who's been onstage in shadow, steps into the light dressed in robe and slippers. She sports a clown nose and, holding a bicycle horn, she points at the stereo and the odd lighting.

MOTHER

That too much? Or like too random too early? Gotcha.

She clicks off the music and the lights.
SON eats his toast, unimpressed.

MOTHER

Was afraid of that. Not really the tone I wanted to set either. Okay, then. (overly cheerful, switching gears) Knock knock, it is.

SON

What's this?

MOTHER

Knock knock.

SON

I don't have time for—

MOTHER

(honks the horn to redirect) Knock knock.

SON
What's gotten up your crawl?

MOTHER
Knock the freakin knock knock and answer the damned door already.

SON (sighs)
Who's there?

MOTHER
Pushing up daisies.

SON
Pushing up daisies who?

MOTHER
You who! (honks) Knock knock.

SON
Mom, this is so stupid!

MOTHER
Knock knock.

SON
Knock knock who?

MOTHER
That's not the sequence.

SON
What sequins, where?

MOTHER
The sacred sequence. Of events? The way things are ordered.

SON
What things? --Did we order?

MOTHER
Ordered and forced to happen.

SON
What's happening?!

MOTHER

In a certain pattern—like crop circles and? Cookie cutters! Not that cookies don't crumble because they do. Fall apart. Everything falls. Apart. (lost) For reasons unbeknownst—

SON

Unbeknownst?

Mother takes off the clown nose.

MOTHER

--to us, yeah. None of this makes any sense.

Son throws his arms up in exasperation so Mother puts her nose back on.

MOTHER

Okay, let's try again. Knock knock.

SON (screams)

Who's there?!

MOTHER

Kicking the bucket.

SON

Kicking the bucket who?

MOTHER

(mimes an exaggerated crying gesture) *Boo who*. And even, "Booo!" It's *you*, as a ghost. Get it? --You're eating toast: you're *toast*. Don't you see? All these roads lead to you!

He shrugs, not catching on.

MOTHER (con't)

Dense, okay. Back to the drawing board. --Knock knock.

SON

Is this game ever gonna end?

She takes off her nose for the next line then puts it back on to resume "Knock Knock." [He follows her "script" here, a dummy to her ventriloquist, deadpan delivery.]

MOTHER

Oh, it ends, alright, and before you know it. So, Knock knock.

SON
 Blah Blah.

MOTHER
 Shakespeare.

SON
 Shakespeare who?

MOTHER
 Dead as a door nail. (honks) Knock knock.

SON
 (said to rhythm of “Who’s there?”) Who-the-frick-cares.

She waits, hand to ear, then says the punchline.

MOTHER
Silence. --Get it? I was giving you the same silence you’d hear down in Davy Jones’s locker, as in *Sleeping with the fishes*. Anything?

He snaps out of it.

SON
 Off the deep end, okay, Crazy Lady. Wish I were dead. Can I go now?

MOTHER
 If you insist, meet your maker, Worm Food. Take a dirt nap. Entertain a visit from the Grim Reaper. Don’t eat the salmon. –Nothing? Okay then, let’s try charades.

Exasperated, he exits, slamming the door.

MOTHER (con’t)
 Step out and meet Jesus (honk).

Conversation #3: “Risk.” Alarm clock chimes and SON enters. MOTHER, in robe and slippers, films everything he does.

SON
 A *camera*? At breakfast? What is this, my last supper?

MOTHER takes camera off her eye.

MOTHER

Why would you say that?

SON

It's not my birthday.

MOTHER

No. It's not. (sniffing) Wish, oh how I wish, it was that!

SON

Do you know something I don't?

MOTHER

Lots of things, most definitely. You're too young. Too green to—

SON

Did someone have a cocktail for breakfast?

MOTHER

Why say such an awful thing? To your loving mother?

SON

You're recording me. *Eating*. Since when is there something special about breakfast?

MOTHER

Can't believe I never thought of this before. I have *no* footage of you eating. Breakfast.

SON

What am I missing?

MOTHER

So much. --Why don't you stay home? Go back to bed. Or, watch TV as long as you want! We'll catch a matinee, break into the pool out of season. --When's the last time you saw Nana?

SON

I just washed my hair. Brushed my teeth. --Wait. You *want* me to play hookie?

MOTHER (nods)

What would you like to do for this special day? Gimme a kiss and I love you.

SON

Wait! Am I getting *Punked*? Who put you up to this?

She pulls out Monopoly and Risk.

MOTHER

I figure (playfully saying it wrong) *Monotony*, huh, before Risk? (delighted) They'll both take *forever* to play. *Risk*, what a name, and if they only knew, ha? Remember how you used to love these.

SON

Can I have some more toast?

MOTHER

I have no more to give you.

SON (shrugs)

Then, I'm done. Gotta run.

With knapsack he exits, slamming the door.

Conversation #4: "Leaving the Beaver."

MOTHER is in a frilly apron over her robe. Her hair's swept back with a ribbon and she wears red lipstick. Her slippers have been replaced with black heels. She has three pans in her hands and a stack of waffles are at the table next to the MAY 1 calendar.

Alarm clock chimes. SON enters, half-delighted, half-freaked by the cornucopia. [Each speaks, especially at the start, as if involved in separate but parallel conversations at once: text & sub-text.]

MOTHER

(flat aside) What's done is done. (uber-cheery) --Good Morning, My Darling.

Wearing the same graphic tee and jeans, he walks sleepily to the table, gobbles the feast.

MOTHER (con't)

(flat aside) Making the *most* of it. (cheery) --You always had the most beautiful blue eyes. The color of sea glass.

SON drinks the juice she hands him.

MOTHER (con't)

(to self) The most of life, that is, good to the last drop. (to him) Would you like more--

well, of *course* you would, who wouldn't? Given the chance. --I mean, of *juice*? More juice?

SON

(blasé-blasé, to self) Mornings come and mornings go. (correcting) --And, it's *have*, Mother. I still have them. These eyes?

She leans in and cheerfully kisses his cheek.

MOTHER

(desperate, to self) Making every second *count*. (cheery) --Of course you do! But, you *are* an organ donor, dear.

SON

(frustrated, to self) As if we *could* count them. (bewildered) --That's an odd start to the day but, yeah, last time I checked. Not that I plan on handing my organs over any time soon. Don't wanna be the best-looking corpse in the graveyard, right?

Horrified, Mother freezes, juice pitcher in hand. They are on the "same page," briefly.

MOTHER

What makes you say that?

SON

What?

He holds up the glass and she overpours. Juice spills before she catches on and puts the pitcher down.

MOTHER

Is there something I need to know, son?

SON

Why?

MOTHER

Exactly! (relieved) Why would I *need* to know?

SON

(to self) You don't need to know anything. (frustrated) --Geez, already, Mom. A *clue* would be helpful.

MOTHER

(to self) I don't need to know everything. (searching) --But really, darling, *would* it?

SON

Everything's fine!

MOTHER

(to self, he's oblivious) No clue. (cautious) --For now. Let's not talk about it.

SON

Let's not. Talk about it in the morning—as in tomorrow.

MOTHER

Not tomorrow. *No tomorrows.*

SON

Right now I just wanna eat.

MOTHER (smiles)

Eat!

SON

Eat until I pop.

MOTHER (smile fades)

Why would you say that?

She yanks the plate away from him.

SON

Give that back! Knew this was too good to be true. Fine, then I'll just make myself toast.

MOTHER

Nooo! (beat) –It's just . . . Maybe it's not a good idea to eat so much. All at once. Although, what difference would it make? *Now.*

SON

What?!

She puts the plate back down in front of him and pats him encouragingly on the back.

MOTHER

So go ahead, dear. Might as well. Eat as much as you wish.

SON

Get a grip, Potato Chip.

She squirts whipped cream on his plate.

MOTHER

Did you know that Death Row inmates no longer get to order whatever they want for their last meal?

He whips around to look at her. She shrugs and smiles fakely.

SON

Feeling feverish, are we?

MOTHER

Not me. You?

She presses the back of her hand to his forehead, taking his pulse with her free hand. She persists, talking to herself at first.

No signs, no. There never are, not when you need ‘em. Not that we’d pay attention. –Sorry, Son. No fever. But you may stay home, (beat) if you wish.

SON

Already brushed my teeth. –Nah, don’t feel like it.

MOTHER

What *are* you feeling?

Confused, son pushes away from the table.

SON

Something so strange about you today. I don’t understand. None of this.

MOTHER

No, I know. Neither do I—and I *know* know, ya know? Not that that helps matters.

SON

Gonna be late for school.

MOTHER

Don’t go!

SON

Since when isn’t late-for-school the end of the world for you, always harping about it.

He grabs his knapsack. She races after him.

Are you sure you're done?
MOTHER

You can wrap the rest.
SON

I didn't mean the food. –And, why would you say that?
MOTHER

There's enough waffles alone to last me two weeks.
SON

But it won't.
MOTHER

What won't?
SON

Last.
MOTHER

Sure it will. Freeze it.
SON

Freeze what? I can't freeze anything. Much as I'd like to.
MOTHER

Sure you can, the leftovers. They'll last forever.
SON

Nothing does, you know.
MOTHER

(to self) *Asylum!* (to her) Not last, in the freezer? Why wouldn't it? Is it too full, those big drawers? I could climb in there myself there's so much room.
SON

(to self, wringing hands) The morgue! (to him) Don't talk like that! --Isn't there anything else, Son? Nothing else you'd like to—
MOTHER

She speaks between the lines, fishing for something deeper. For more.

I'm done.
SON

MOTHER

To *say to me*, perhaps? The Unsaid? Anything. . . pressing?

SON

I gotta go, Mom. I'm out of time.

She grabs him by the wrist, stopping him.

MOTHER

Why would you say that?

SON

Because it's true. I *have* to go.

MOTHER

Please. Don't. (more forcefully now) –I said, *please*: you have to do it!

He exits, slamming the door.

Conversation #5: "Talismans." MOTHER holds the MAY 1 calendar, staring at it when the alarm clock chimes. SON enters. She starts piling things in his hands, at his feet, on his person.

SON

A rabbit's foot?

MOTHER

Hell, yeah.

SON

Shouldn't I have breakfast first?

MOTHER

Foods not gonna help you, not today. Or ever again.

SON

Mind if I ask why?

MOTHER

Rabbit's feet are for good luck, of course.

SON

I meant the food. (holds up rabbit's foot) –And how is this good luck? Cause it sure didn't work out so well for the bunny.

MOTHER

Then, here.

She holds up a big vest, and he reluctantly puts his arms through the holes.

SON

A vest? Is this like for some killer paintball course? Cause I got school today—and we stopped with the field trips like in the fourth grade, Mom. Along with Dress Up to Show Your *Spirit* Day. This thing weighs a ton!

MOTHER

It's a lead vest from the dentist and *that's* the point. To protect you.

SON

Am I having x-rays?

MOTHER

No, they said DOA, so, you're right. There'd be no point.

She pulls it off him, and sprinkles him with a vial of HOLY WATER as she circles him. Around his neck she hangs a string of garlic.

SON

This is outta-the-box psychosis, you know that, right? Mom?! I am NOT going to school smelling like Bela Lugosi.

MOTHER

Wait! You know who Bela Lugosi is?

SON

No clue, but then this is nowhere near “me,” either. These are just your words for me in your head. Wishful thinking. (beat) –May I continue?

MOTHER

Right. (beat) Of course. –Where were we?

SON

I'm not going to school dressed like smelly Uncle Dino. Dude, I just washed my hair.

