

WHAT DO YOU SAY, A TRUE STORY

by Mark Harvey Levine

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The Narrator speaks straight out to the audience..

NARR.: This is a true story. I was at work one day and I overheard two girls talking about a former coworker. Let's call him Steve. It's not his real name. I knew Steve and his wife had just had a baby. And the girls were saying it was such a shame. Apparently little Arthur had died.

ME starts to cross the stage.

NARR.: It was horrible and tragic. And yet I couldn't help thinking about-- and dreading-- the day I surely knew would come. The day I ran into Steve.

STEVE crosses the opposite way. Meeting is unavoidable.

ME: Hey... Steve...

STEVE: Oh hey... how's it going.

NARR.: What do you say to someone who has lost a child? What can you possibly say that doesn't sound cliché... that isn't banal and useless... lame and stupid? I decide to go right into the fire.

ME: Steve... I was so sorry to hear about...

NARR.: Ah, God, I've forgotten the child's name. I'm a terrible human being.

ME: ...your little one.

NARR.: Nice save, me.

STEVE: (*weirdly casual*) Yeah, yeah, it was very sad.

ME: I'm sure. Of course.

NARR.: I nod my head seriously. I can't think of anything else to say. I am an idiot.

STEVE: My wife was even more broken up about it than me.

NARR.: (*thrown*) This... seemed like an odd thing to say. But everyone grieves differently. And who can blame a mother for feeling destroyed?

STEVE: At least we still have the girl.

ME: ...Oh, there were two? I didn't know that...

STEVE: Yeah, apparently it was this genetic thing that they both had. We didn't know.

NARR.: I keep nodding, sadly.

STEVE: It's fatal in boys. In girls, it just makes them sterile.

ME: Oh, gosh.

STEVE: But I mean, we weren't going to breed her anyway.

ME: (*Opens and closes mouth, nothing comes out*)

NARR.: It was at this point I realized we weren't talking about a child. Puppies. Little Arthur was a puppy. They got him and his sister right around the same time they had their child.

STEVE: Anyway, great seeing you again.. I gotta run.

He exits.

NARR.: The child, thank God, was fine. And I felt horrible. Worrying about what I would say in the face of tragedy. When I should have been thinking about them.

ME: Who the hell names a dog Arthur, anyway?!

END OF PLAY