



It's Not Real Music
By 11th Grader Monie Duong

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CONTENT WARNING:

At times this play contains mature language. Appropriate for ages 14+.

Character (s)

Jackson, a quiet boy and inspiring poet/rapper

Jackson's mom, a loving hard-working woman

Jackson's dad, a complicated man

Jackson's best friend, Ronnie, an energetic, playful boy



Scene 1

(Jackson's mom is bbqing in the backyard. Jackson's dad is sitting down and drinking beer. Five-year-old Jackson and five-year-old Ronnie is chasing each other around with nerf guns. The kids are laughing loudly.)

RONNIE

I'm going to get you Jackson!

JACKSON

Never! I'm too fast for-

RONNIE

Got you!

JACKSON

Ugh, I'm gonna get you now!

(Kids laugh again and chase each other.)

MOM

Look at them, I love them so much. They're getting so big. Don't you think?

DAD

Yeah, I guess. They're not going to be babies forever.

MOM

I know, I was just saying. I remember taking Jackson home for the first time like it was yesterday. Don't you remember?

DAD

No because he kept us up all night, I didn't know what time of day it was for a whole week.

MOM

(chuckles) That's how it is with first borns.



DAD

First borns? *(raises an eyebrow)* We ain't having another one. We barely survived with this child.

MOM

Well it wouldn't hurt to have another little thing running around with them too. Maybe now isn't the right time.

DAD

How bout never? You're crazy woman.

MOM

All right, all right. It was just a thought.
(They stop talking for a bit while the kids continue to run around laughing. Dad calls Jackson and Ronnie over to hand them toy guns.)

RONNIE

(Takes the toy gun.)
Thank you Mr. Butler!
(Ronnie and Jackson runs off to play.)

MOM

(Towards Jackson's dad) Why did you have to get them guns? They're only 6, babies. Are you teaching them violence already?

DAD

They're just toys, calm down. And that's exactly what they are, babies so how are they going to understand that? *(with an attitude)*

MOM

It doesn't matter! You couldn't buy them a ball or bubbles? How much did you even spend on those, not just one but two? They're huge.
(flips the meat kabobs over and looks over at the kids who are screaming)



DAD

You always have something to say about everything I do.

(gets up and points at the kids)

Look! *(loudly)* They're happy, having fun! What else do you want from me? You want more kids when you keep saying I'm not doing anything right? Jesus. Make up your mind and stop being crazy!

(chugs the beer and walks back into the house)

MOM

Fine, leave! You never listen to me away! *(screaming)*

(She turns around and sees that the boys are staring at her. Her eyes begin to water.)

Jackson go play with your friend! The food is almost done.

(She turns back around and wipes her eyes. The boys look at each other and then resume playing. She continues to turn the meat kabobs, looks at the empty chair where Boy's dad sat and went back to the food.)

Go play with your friend! The food is almost done!

(Lights out.)

(Lights up, Mom is waiting for Dad to return. Lights out.)

Scene 2

(Six-year-old Jackson sits in the middle of the couch with his chin on his knees as he watches tv. Oil is popping in the kitchen as Jackson's mom cooks. The cartoons are on but the volume is quite low.)

MOM

(yells) Jackson baby! You want some breakfast?

JACKSON

(yells back) What's for breakfast mom?



MOM

It's bac-

(Jackson's dad walks through the door and into the kitchen.)

MOM

(Mom tells Jackson to go to his room. Towards Jackson's dad)
Where were you last night? I was up until 5 am. It's 1 pm and you're just now walking in. Why is your phone off? Are you stupid?!

DAD

Man I don't gotta tell you sh-t. I do what I want and I'm here now so what's the problem?

MOM

This is the 3rd time you wanna act out. *(Pause)* Are you cheating on me? Is there something you want to tell me?

DAD

(raises his voice) What are you talking about?!

MOM

I know you be going into the bathroom with your phone for hours. What else are you in there for? Talking to another woman?

DAD

You ever heard of a man cave? You're suffocating me man.

MOM

How? How am I suffocating you? All I asked you to do was watch Jackson while I take a shower or go to the grocery store. You know it's hard for me to take him when I'm doing it all by myself!

DAD



I watch Jackson! I watch my son! I just want to live my own life too! It's always just home and work, home and work. I'm tired of it. *(looks down at the floor)*

MOM

(stares at him angrily and in shock) So you're tired of your family? Your son? Me, your wife? Or whatever I am to you now.

(Argument fades out and they begin to scream at each other. Jackson is still sitting on the couch watching tv peacefully. He picks up the remote and changes the channel. The tv plays Tupac (pick a song) and he turns the tv volume up louder so now all you can hear is the music. He puts the remote back down next to him and sits back. Then lights out.)

Scene 3

(Tupac music is blasting as 13-old Jackson is at his desk writing and 13-old Ronnie is lying on the bed singing along. They're just chilling for a few moments and then Jackson spins around in his chair.)

JACKSON

(enthusiastically) I finished!

RONNIE

Finished what?

JACKSON

Listen to this man.

(stands up and begins rapping)

I was raised with one mom and one dad.

(points with his fingers)

I don't say parents because they relationship was bad.



They loved me as one even if their sh-t didn't add
I listened and listened to the screaming and the yelling
You can tell both of them was dwelling
Dwelling on this bridge that they built, that was me
(pats his chest)

I am the reason they can't part free.
(Pause) What do you think?

RONNIE

Damn *(in a sad way & takes a pause)*, that was fire!
(screaming and laughing)

My man!

JACKSON

Ay, thanks bro. *(cheesing)*
(The boys do their signature handshake. Sounds of things dropping loudly downstairs and then arguing.)
Oh my god, they at it again. *(shakes his head)* I'm tired of it.
They're so annoying.

RONNIE

(uncomfortably but understanding way) Ay, it's okay man. We can go to my house if you want.

JACKSON

I wish but I can't. I have to stay to watch these angry kids.
(light heartedly laughs but smile drops)

RONNIE

You sure? You know you're always welcome to my house. *(smiles widely)*



JACKSON

Yeah man, thanks though. Don't you have to walk home now?
(raises eyebrow)

RONNIE

Yeah.

(Walks over to grab his book bag. More things drop downstairs and arguing gets louder.)

Actually, I can stay for a little while longer. Let them tired themselves out.

(Both of them laugh. Ronnie drops his bag and hops back on the bed. Jackson goes back to writing. Lights out.)

Scene 4

(Jackson is in his bedroom, writing in his book. He's focused and bobbing his head. He writes and erases a few times. Then he sets the pencil down, gets up and runs downstairs. His parents are on the couch, either side, watching tv.)

MOM

Can you change the channel man?

DAD

Ughhhhh. *(Changes channel)*

JACKSON

Mom, dad! I finished my song. *(with smiles)*

DAD

What song son? *(confused face)*

MOM

(Slaps his arm and mean mug him & he mean mug her back.)



Let's hear it baby. *(in a supporting and happy way)*

JACKSON

(clears his throat)

My tummy stays full, I always have a bed
Unlike these stinky people that we call crackheads
My momma always tells me to stay away from the feds
She'll do anything for me like hide in this shed
Moms holding onto babies never wanting to let go
When cops be shooting innocents they act like they don't know
Everything happening fast, at the same time it's so slow
People posted selling drugs just to make some quick dough
But it kills them, and they still gone do it
And it beats them, and they still gone do it
You can't do anything to change what was set
Just gotta pray and hope for the best

(Jackson's mom and Jackson's dad is just quiet, staring at their son.)

Sooooo, what did you think? *(shaking his head)*

(Jackson's parents look at each other and give a nod to tell the other person to go first.)

MOM

Um, it was good hunny. Different. *(nods her head)* Are you sure we feed you enough? *(raises eyebrow)*

JACKSON

Yeah mom, *(laughs)*, it was just something to say for the culture, you know?

DAD

What culture boy? What chu know about the streets? You only twelve years old fool!



JACKSON

I'm 13 -

MOM

Don't talk to him like that! He just likes to write music.
(has her hand towards Jackson)

DAD

But he's writing things he doesn't know about. It's not real music!
(waves his arms in the air)

MOM

It doesn't matter if he knows or not. We're supposed to be supporting him or giving back constructive criticism. Not a lecture!

DAD

What he know about hunger, huh? I feed this kid. He's wearing Nike for god sakes. Huh, hunger. *(fake chuckles)*

JACKSON

Hey, heyyy stop it stop!

(Jackson's mom and dad continue to go back and forth. Jackson stands there just staring and then walks to the yard. Head down.)

DAD

(very loudly but in an exhausting way) What do you want from me? I'm tired of arguing and this back and forth nonsense.

MOM

(crying) You know Jackson's all that matters. I'm fighting for him, not with you. If you want to go, then leave.



DAD

Who said I was going? Do you want me to leave? Is that what you want?

MOM

You're never here anyway so what's the difference! You never loved us enough and you never will!

DAD

I-

(Jackson's mom slaps Jackson's dad in the face. Jackson's dad stares at Jackson's mom in an undefeated way. He relaxes his body as he releases all the anger and tension that was built up inside. He walks out the kitchen and walks towards Jackson. Jackson's mom begins to sob quietly in the kitchen. Jackson's dad kisses Jackson on the head.)

JACKSON

(Looks up at his dad) Are you going somewhere dad?

(Jackson's dad admired his son. Pats him on the head and leaves the house. Jackson's mom is still crying in the background softly. Jackson just stared at the closed door.)

MOM

Baby, come here.

(Jackson walks into the kitchen.)

Your daddy loves you, you know?

(Jackson nods his head.)

But mommy and daddy don't work. We tried to work for you but sometimes people just don't belong together and that's okay. I don't know if daddy's coming back this time.

(begins crying)



I love you soooooooooooooo much baby. Don't you ever forget that. I got you forever.

(She pulls Jackson over into her arms, caresses him, and quickly kisses him on the head.)

JACKSON

I love you too.

(Jackson's eyes' begin to water as he lays in his mother's arms.)

I just want my dad...

(Jackson sobs quietly. Lights out.)

Scene 5

(Eighteen-year-old Jackson is staring at himself in the mirror. He takes a good look and moves his face around to analyze every angle. He runs his fingers through his hair and over his face. He licks his lips and stares with empty eyes.)

RONNIE

Hey man, I haven't heard from you in a long time. How have you been?

JACKSON

Ay man, you heard Tyler The Creator's new album?

RONNIE

Who?

JACKSON

Tyler The Cre- man you don't know who Tyler The Creator is? The dude that was on Adult Swim all the time back when we was kids?



RONNIE

Oh, him? Man that bum ass lil boy, (Laughs) Nah, I haven't listened to it yet. But what you been working on? Any new stuff?

JACKSON

I was gonna write this one piece about my parents.

RONNIE

Seriously? Another one?

JACKSON

Yes, another one. What yo? I'm writing about the sh-t that I'm feeli-

RONNIE

Listen. You need to get yo music off the ground. People ain't gonna wanna hear you talk about your pops in every single song.

JACKSON

So you telling me that I should stop expressing myself because people ain't gonna wanna hear it? (*frowns*)

RONNIE

No! (*shakes his head*) I'm saying that if you wanna be something in this industry you have to make music people wanna bump to. There's enough J Coles in this world and I get that you love Tupac, but it's different times now.

JACKSON

I thought you were my friend, you ain't supporting me for nothing right now.

RONNIE

A *friend* keeps it real and that's what I'm doin-

JACKSON

Man, you ain't worth sh-t-



RONNIE

Ya music ain't worth sh-t.

JACKSON

(Long pause)

Get out.

(Longer pause, Jackson yells)

Get the fuck out my house, man!

RONNIE

(Gets up)

You need to move on from your past, or else you won't make it out. Let that sh-t go Jackson.

(Ronnie exits and lights out.)

(Jackson is in his room laying down on his bed with a pencil and a notebook.)

JACKSON

(Crumbles up a piece of paper and throws it)

Let that sh-t go!?

(Clears throat and places pencil and notebook beside him.)

Yeah, I didn't need no pops, God was right
Don't need no man to kiss my head and tuck me in at night
But still I think about the times my parents used to fight
Now I gotta keep my head up cause my future bright

But I can't blame him, he left cause mom was tryna change him
And all the pressure from the situation overcame him
I still got love for him so I would never try to shame him
But how you bring someone in this world and then refuse to raise him

But I can't let that eat me
I got bigger dreams now can't let my past defeat me
When I get famous I'll forget about that man completely



You gotta fail before success so that could never beat me

MOM

(Knocks on the door and creaks it open.)

Hey honey. I heard you. Is everything alright?

(She walks in and sits next to Jackson)

JACKSON

I don't know mom. My chest been heavy for a while and I don't want to make it any harder on you. This music. It's really what's keeping me going for you.

MOM

Baby, you shouldn't keep these types of things to yourself. I'm here for you. Let me do my thing. I'm not your mom just for food.

JACKSON

I'm not on any suicidal type time. It's just like nothing feels right. Ever since dad left, it's been better but not the same. Are we even a family?

MOM

There's one thing that I have learned from your father leaving us and it's that you don't depend on anyone for anything. You depend on yourself because that's all that matters. Now, you can depend on mommy because I will whoop your ass in check but you know you're my whole life.

JACKSON

I love you ma. I know I haven't been myself but you know I do this for you. I'm tryna make it for you. When we make it, dad's going to regret not sticking around.

MOM

He ain't gonna regret sh-t. We've been together for years. Our time was done sweetie. Now go call Ronnie over for dinner. You know that's my son too. I raise you both like my own.



JACKSON

Yeah, I don't know about I just told him to get the f--k out my house

MOM

Well tell him to get the back in this house and stop cursing.

JACKSON

Okay, okay.

(Lights out)

Scene 6

(Jackson and his mom is sitting on the couch. They're watching Maury on the television. Mom is laughing and Jackson is smiling.)

MOM

I told you that wasn't the father! Now who her baby daddy, god dammit!

JACKSON

(Laughing) Mom! Calm down. It's just a show.

MOM

I'll be damned to be on that show and not have my man be the baby father. Who do I look like opening my legs at all times?

(Jackson's mom continues to yell at the tv and Jackson's chuckling. They continue to watch when suddenly there's a heavy knock on the door.)

At this point, I don't see why Ronnie doesn't just walk in like he never been to this house before.



JACKSON

No ma, that's not Ronnie. We have a secret knock and he would've texted before coming over.

(Pulls out his phone)

I ain't get no text from your other son.

(Jackson opens the door and frowns.)

JACKSON

Dad?

DAD

Hey son.

(reaches out for a hug but Jackson backs up)

You don't want to hug your old man? I haven't seen you in years.

MOM

(Jackson's mom comes to the door in front of Jackson)

What are you doing here? Leave. Don't try to pop up on us five years later?

JACKSON

Mom.

(reaches out for her arm but she pulls away)

MOM

(looks back at Jackson)

No baby, he doesn't belong. He chose where he wants to stand in your life and that's not here.



DAD

Hey, I'm just trying to check up in my lil man. He's still my son.

(Jackson's mom is leaning on one leg, arms crossed and tapping one foot, blocking Jackson's dad from coming into the house.)

JACKSON

I'm not your lil man anymore.

DAD

Ok, well my big man then. You got so big the last time I seen you.

JACKSON

Yeah because that was five years ago when you last seen me, or us for whatever that matters.

DAD

Can I come in? I would love to catch up with you.

MOM

He doesn't want to see you.

(She tries to close the door but Jackson's dad stops it with his hand.)

Get out!

DAD

I didn't come here to fight. I've had this heavy thing on my chest for the longest and I just need to make things right. Please. Jackson?

(tilts head through the crack of the door)



MOM

I don't know how many times I need to say it to get it through you thick head. Five years later and you never changed. He-

JACKSON

Mom, stop.

MOM

But baby-

JACKSON

I got this. Just move back, okay?

(Jackson places his hand on her shoulder. She waits a moment and then nods okay. She lets go of the door and walks behind Jackson. Jackson walks up and opens the door. Jackson's dad is smiling.)

DAD

(excitedly) I-

JACKSON

Don't talk, listen. Let me tell you something.

(Jackson's dad stops smiling and nods his head okay.)

I just want to say thank you for the first thirteen years of my life. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you AND my mom. I will never forget that. Thank you for all the toys, clothes, shoes, memories, care and love you gave me. Thank you for all the hard times too because they helped me as well.

(Jackson's mom starts to tear up in the back. Jackson's dad looks proud and happy.)

But you don't belong here anymore.

(Jackson's dad happy face drops.)



You used to belong, but not anymore. Not since you left us five years ago. I was thirteen then. Young, innocent. I believed that you were going to come back everyday. Until I turned fourteen. Then fifteen. Then sixteen and then I finally realized my dad left me. He wasn't going to come back. You weren't coming back. Nothing was okay. I was angry, hurt, and confused. I thought there was something wrong with *me*. I wasn't enough for you and that's why you left.

DAD

Son-

JACKSON

(holds his finger up)

I'm, I'm not done. I told you to listen first.

(Jackson's dad switches position and continues to listen)

But just the other day, when I was at my lowest, no inspiration, just frustration. No love, just anger. For god sakes, I cursed and kicked *Ronnie* out because I was so mad. At you! But just the other day, I was okay. I accepted you how you were. I accepted you *gone*. And I finally feel okay. So, no, you can't come in. You don't belong. So I'm asking you to leave like how you left five years ago and never come back.

DAD

(looks down and rubs the back of his head)

Damn, I'm too late. Huh. *(smiles and then stops)*

(Jackson and Jackson's dad stare at each other for a few moments in silence.)

I didn't know what to expect when walking back here. I didn't even know if you still lived here. I see that I hurt you guys very deeply and I sincerely apologize. There's nothing I can do now to fix that. I just hope you guys will continue to be okay. You'll always be my son Jackson and I love you unconditionally. I will always have love for your mother too. She was the love of



my life but the heart is hard to understand. I'll go now, if that's what you want.

(Jackson just stares at his dad blankly.)

No answer is an answer. Okay, I'll go son. Bye.

(Jackson's dad begins to walk away. He puts his hands in his pockets and stops abruptly and turns around.)

Oh, I forgot something.

(Pulls out an envelope)

I remember how you loved writing those crazy little songs when you were younger. Crazy.

(He chuckles and hands it over to Jackson. Jackson takes it and stares at it.)

Ok, goodbye son.

(Jackson's dad walks away and Jackson looks up to watch him go. Lights out.)

Scene 7

(Jackson is sitting on the couch by himself. It's the night after his dad came back. The envelope is opened on the table and he stares at it. Ronnie does the secret knock on the door and Jackson gets up to answer it.)

JACKSON

Hey man. *(does a handshake with Ronnie)* My dad came back.

RONNIE

What? *(jokingly and then clears his throat to become serious again)*

JACKSON

Yeah, the old man.



RONNIE

(Ronnie walks over to the kitchen, and opens the fridge.) So what happened? Was he on his knees begging for forgiveness? (walks back to the couch with his hands full of stuff)

JACKSON

(Jackson looks at Ronnie with an expression that's like really? Ronnie offers him something with a smile and Jackson shakes his head no with a laugh.)

He wanted to come in and talk, but I told his ass off. He wasn't allowed to come in. My mom was ready to stab him. *(They both chuckle.)*

RONNIE

That's definitely something your mom would do. But all jokes aside, how you doing? Like on all serious sh-t. Are you good?

JACKSON

I don't know honestly. *(Pauses)* I was really f--ked up. Like I don't know how to explain what I'm going through so I write it out. So when you was shooting me down, I got upset. My music isn't *just* about making it. It was about sorting out my feelings and trying to understand them, ya mean?

RONNIE

Yeah, I know man. I'm sorry. I should've known better because I know what you been through.

JACKSON

So my dad gave me an envelope.

RONNIE

Was it money?



JACKSON

(laughs) I'm not gonna lie, I thought it was money too but it was light so I was thinking no this is a check then.

RONNIE

Man, he couldn't give you any money? The hell he give you?

JACKSON

It was a letter. Apparently he found me on Soundcloud and listen to my recents. He said it was quality and he has a friend in the music industry who was interested in one of my tracks and wants to meet. I know it's not something huge yet but it's a start for a new chapter in our lives. Hold on.

(He answers the call.)

Hello? *(Ronnie points at the letter and Jackson nods. They both jump around excitedly.)* Aw, yes. It's nice to meet you too.

(Ronnie runs around the living room with his arms in the air with snacks in his hands. Jackson smiles and he continues to

talk on the phone. His voice fades out but it's clear to see he's happy about the phone call. Lights out.)

END OF PLAY