

*A Very Clean Place*  
*By Gale Mena and John Peat*

*Part of the Intriguing Interp Series*

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SAMMY: Rock....

*Benji is mourning slightly, turned from the audience, gently rocking back and forth*

SAMMY: C'mon Benji, this is the fourth time today you've said you wanted to play.. C'mon just say...

BENJI: Sciss... Sciss..

SAMMY: No Benji, we've been over this two gazillion times. If the name of the game is Rock, paper, scissors, then what comes next after rock ?

BENJI: *Turns towards the audience, making his disability apparent-* Rock?

*SAMMY sighs*

BENJI: You hate playing with me, and so I hate you. A lot.

SAMMY: Benji, stop it. I can't do this everyday with you. I have to go to school...

BENJI: You're leaving me again, you always have to go away, you like everyone else better than me, maybe I should just die because you hate me.. *Just go away ( turns from audience, crying )*

SAMMY: No, c'mon don't say that. You know how that makes me feel.

BENJI: *(wailing, now)*

SAMMY: You know what, forget about it. I'm going downstairs, I have to go to school.

BENJI: Sammy?

SAMMY: What?

BENJI: Can we play again?

*Benji is turned around from the audience, humming and playing a make-believe game*

SAMMY: What you have to understand is that Benji is almost seventeen. There's a seven year difference between us, which I guess is appropriate because Mom and Dad got married on the seventh of July, and great aunt Bertha's died on the seventh of February,

BENJI: Aunt Bertha was fat.

SAMMY: Benji ! That's rude!

BENJI. And true!

SAMMY: Well, yes. Oh, and in the year 1977 after many years of war and grief there was an important peace treaty issued to the Island of Manila which is located in the Philippines which is relevant because dad loves Philli— Oh dear, excuse me, I've gotten carried away again.

BENJI: Sammy's stupid.

SAMMY: Occasionally.

BENJI: And Sam is a boy's name!

SAMMY: And lots of people like to name their dogs Benji, so what's your point?

BENJI: Woof! Woof! Woof!

SAMMY: Anyway, As I was saying Benji was first born. (*turns to see if Benji is indeed engrossed in his imagination so she can speak "privately"*) Mom and Dad were alerted by their obstreccian that they were lead to believe due to tests , Benji was developing with an extra chromosome, which I'm not sure if you're aware but is a clinical sign of possible.. (*lowers voice to a barely audible whisper*) Down syndrome. They were given two options, and they chose the one they were supposed to: Benjamin Sylus Szarsky.

BENJI: (*turning around, smiling*) That's me !! HEY SAMMY!!!!!!!!!!!!

SAMMY: Yes, Benji, what is it?

BENJI: Is it my turn?

SAMMY: Go ahead.

BENJI: When Sammy was baby she was stinky and I hated her cuz she was small. But now she is bigger and less stinky. And I don't hate her all the time too much. And I like to go to the very clean place with her. Do you guys like the very clean place?

SAMMY: Benji, they don't know what the very clean place is.

BENJI: Oh, well it is this place, that is very beautiful and very clean. Sammy and I go there a lot.

SAMMY: We live over beyond the ridge, and the creek is just down the hill outside our backyard. I can't remember a time when Benj and I didn't go down there..we catch tadpoles

BENJI: I am a tadpoke! Look! *Does his best tad-pole imitation.*

SAMMY: Tadpole, Beji. TAD-POLE.

BENJI: I know, dumb-dumb. Tad-poke. Like this.

SAMMY: And race paper boats and stuff like that. It's our favorite place to go.

BENJI: And it's very clean.

SAMMY: He's always said that. So, even though Benji has always been in the classes for special kids at school, it's never been easy for him.

TEACHER: Samantha, if you could head down to Benji's...

SAMMY: My brother, I know. (*speaking to the audience*) What happened this time, Benji?

BENJI: Jimmy.

SAMMY: What about Jimmy, Benji?

BENJI: Jimmy told me all about the big machine that God has.

SAMMY: What? God doesn't have any big machine. Jimmy is just trying to...

BENJI: Yes he does. Yes he does. God has a very big machine and all of the people in all of the whole world pop out of the big machine. And most of the time the big machine pops out good people who have good bodies and big healthy brains, but then... *fades*

SAMMY: Yeah?

BENJI: But then sometimes the machine gets stupid and when the machine gets stupid it pops out stupid people with dumb heads. Just like me. I got very mad at Jimmy, and I tried to use my anger management skills, but I wanted to give Jimmy a thump on his very good head. But then I told him that everybody is equal. That everybody is good and-

SAMMY: That everybody has a place. That's absolutely right, Benji. Everybody is perfect and

BENJI: Just how they are supposed to be. Maybe one day Jimmy will grow up and be a very nice kid. I will pray for him.

SAMMY: Sometimes it's like the tide, ya know? Ebbing in and out. How he can get so angry and out of control, and then, suddenly, he's just so spot-on. Like the wisest person in the world.

BENJI: *Singing* Old MacDonald had a farm, e i e i, o, and on that farm he had some...poop...e i e i o

SAMMY: Well, you know what I mean. Sometimes Benji just makes me want to write poetry. Can I tell you guys a secret...? I promised Benji i wouldn't tell, but I, just, um, can't hold it in anymore. Benj is who he is, all the tough stuff, and all the wonderful stuff, it's like Benj was born with a "handle with care" or "contents fragile" label stamped on him, but recently he's been nervous and saying he feels sick all the time- I think I'm going to have to talk to Mom and Dad about it. And then, there was a day at school...

BENJI: *(Eric swivels from teacher to benj. crying moaning under a table)*

SAMMY: *(bends down under the table)* Benj we talked about this, what happened.

BENJI: *(Out of control, screaming)*. Nobody wants to play with me in here I hate them, and I hate you for not being here with me! And I feel very sick, very very sick in my tummy and in my big stupid head.

SAMMY: Benji, you gotta calm, down, and we gotta talk to Mom and Dad about this.

BENJI: Why do you hate me?

SAMMY: You know I don't hate you, please stop. I'm right here.

BENJI: Go away, You don't want to be with me.

SAMMY: I cant do this.

BENJI: *( pauses to consider this )* I feel sick Sammy. Really sick.

SAMMY: Is this so you can go home again? You've said you've been feeling sick alot lately- B, if you don't wanna go to school anymore, then we should talk about it at home with Mom and Dad, but right now, under this table is not a good place, why don't-

BENJI: Stop !! The spinny's are back *( covers his ears )*

SAMMY: *(standing up, addressing the teacher)* I need you to call 911. And then I need you to call my

parents. Right now.

BENJI: I have a secret that you cannot tell my sister. I am so scared.

SAMMY: No one is ever happy at a hospital. It's where you go to get the bad news. The news that no one wants to hear, but when you do hear it, it's like a worm that's getting into your brain, you know, when the Doctor is saying, *It's very difficult for me to tell you folks this, but Benji has developed Leukemia. There are some options.*

*The scene is now in a hospital, Sammy and Benji's parents are present and about to talk to a doctor*

DOCTOR: *(simultaneously)* Benji has developed leukemia. There are some options.

SAMMY: Oh my god..

BENJI: What is Leukemia? Is it a special treat?

SAMMY: No, Benj. Leukemia is a word that means um, it means very sick.

BENJI: Oh, I have been sick before. I will just take a lot of pills and it will go away. Or the doctor can put a super-berry in my butt. That will make the bad sickness go away.

SAMMY: Suppository, Benji. But Benj, this kind of sick

BENJI: I do not like it when the Doctor puts super-berries in my butt. But to kill the bad sickness sometimes

SAMMY: It's not that kind of sickness, Benji.

BENJI: Oh. It must be a sickness out of the God Machine.

SAMMY: Time moves like old people when you want it to hurry up..but then, when you need it to slow down, it's unstoppable. And so, the weeks past, and...and, the options for Benji got to be fewer. But he was very strong. And one afternoon, just before he had to go back to the hospital, for the last time, we couldn't find him. But..I knew where he had gone. He had gone to the very clean place.

BENJI: Does the creek go all the way to the ocean, Sammy?

SAMMY: I'm not sure, big brother.

BENJI: That would be so fun to swim all the way to the ocean. Maybe our paper boats get there.

SAMMY: I bet they do. When did you get so good at skipping rocks?

BENJI: I was always better than you. That is because I am a boy and you are a girl and it is a sport. I have a penis and -

SAMMY: Thanks for the anatomy lesson, Benji.

BENJI: I don't want to have the bad sick.

SAMMY: I don't want you to have it either.

BENJI: I didn't understand dead until Aunt Bertha and then she was dead. She looked really creepy in that room. I like a big, fat doll. Aunt Bertha was fat.

SAMMY: Benji...*reconsiders*. Yeah, she was.

BENJI: I do not want to look like an ugly or creepy doll when I get dead.

SAMMY: Benji..

BENJI: Well, I do not. I already have a bad brain. I do not want to look ugly or creepy too. I am not that scared of dead. What I am scared of is not seeing you anymore when I am dead. Is it really dark when you get dead, Sammy? I get scared of the dark and will probably need a night lite. And I will get scared and then I will start really missing you. Will it be really dark?

SAMMY: I don't think so, Benji. I think it's going to be full of light. It will be the most beautiful, clean place you've ever been. With a creek and tadpoles, and a warm ocean. And I'm going to start missing you, too.

BENJI: I need to tell you a very big secret, Sammy.

SAMMY: Okay.

BENJI: Every night since I can remember, which is a very long time, I have prayed to God before I went to sleep that he would go back to the God Machine and make you a brother that wasn't stupid and dumb and got angry. You deserve a good brother. I am very sorry.

SAMMY: Benji, I have a secret too.

BENJI: You do? What is it?

SAMMY: I have a perfect brother.

BENJI: You have another brother? Who is he? I have never met him.

SAMMY: No Benji, I have a perfect brother. His name is Benji. He's you.

BENJI: I love you, Sammy. You are the perfect sister. And that is truth. Not a lie. I don't want to go away because then we are not going to be able to play, and I still do not know a lot of games.

SAMMY: We will always be together, Benji. Always and always. I promise. Maybe not our bodies, but, right here... *they place their hands on each other's hearts. There is a very long pause.*

BENJI: You mean in our hearts. I know. I am not all dumb.

SAMMY: That's right, Sammy.

BENJI: Sometimes I wish I could have a girlfriend before I go away, but then I think. Some stupid girl could never be as good as my sister, Sammy. Never as beautiful or as smart or know how to handle me when I have a fit and help me get calmed down. So it's okay. I hope you get a boyfriend one day Sammy, before you get really old. And I hope he loves you as much as Dad loves Mom. And then, I hope you have kids that are perfect with big brains, like yours.

SAMMY: And when I do, I'm going to tell them stories about my hero. His name was Benji and he was...is, my big brother, and he was the most beautiful and perfect person I ever knew. That the God machine pops out a lot of people, and most of them are pretty good, but when that machine popped my hero, Benji out, he was perfect. I'm going to miss you so much, Benji. You will be right here *hand on her heart* and I will be right there *hand on his heart*.

BENJI: Please come here everyday. This very clean place. Please make paper boats.

SAMMY: I will.

BENJI: Please catch tad pokes.

SAMMY: I will.

BENJI: Please remember me when I get dead.

SAMMY: I will.

BENJI: Rock..

SAMMY: Paper .

BENJI: Scissors..

*End.*