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Cast of Characters

LUCY, 20s–early 30s, Eric’s sister.

ERIC, 20s, Lucy’s brother. Rooted to his spot.

TOM, 20s–30s, Lucy’s boyfriend.

DAN, 30s, New tenant for this apartment. Married to Nancy.

NANCY, 30s, Moving in to this apartment. Dan’s wife.

Time

Now.

Setting

An apartment in New York City.

COUCH POTATO

by Patrick Gabridge

Scene 1

(The living room of a small apartment. A worn couch faces a television. ERIC, in his early-twenties, lies motionless on the couch, staring at the TV. LUCY, a little older, enters through the front door, carrying a bag of groceries. She exits and then returns, empty handed. ERIC has not moved.)

LUCY. What are you doing?

ERIC. Watching TV.

LUCY. What's on?

ERIC. A stupid show.

LUCY. Did you eat anything?

ERIC. No.

LUCY. Do you want something?

ERIC. I'll have what you're having.

LUCY. I'm going out.

ERIC. Oh.

LUCY. Do you want something to eat?

ERIC. Sure.

LUCY. What do you want?

ERIC. Whatever.

LUCY. I don't have time for this. I have to get ready.

ERIC. Okay.

LUCY. So you'll have to get something for yourself.

ERIC. I will.

LUCY. What are you going to have?

ERIC. I don't know yet.

LUCY. But you will eat something?

ERIC. Yeah.

(LUCY exits. ERIC remains motionless. LUCY returns, half dressed, brushing her hair.)

LUCY. Did you go out today?

ERIC. No.

LUCY. I thought you were going to look for a job.

ERIC. I didn't go out.

LUCY. I thought we agreed that you would start looking for work. Starting today.

ERIC. That's what you said.

LUCY. But you didn't go?

ERIC. No.

LUCY. Why not?

ERIC. What's the point?

LUCY. We need the money.

ERIC. Ask Mom and Dad.

LUCY. They'll want to know if you have a job.

ERIC. Lie.

LUCY. Why should I?

ERIC. We need the money.

LUCY. That's why you're supposed to get a job.

ERIC. Ask Mom and Dad. They have it.

LUCY. But they won't give it to me unless...

(She gives up and goes back into the bedroom. She comes out dressed for an evening out.)

LUCY. How do I look?

ERIC. *(Not looking up:)* Fine.

LUCY. You didn't even look at me. Come on, what do you think?

(He looks at her.)

ERIC. Beautiful.

LUCY. Thanks. Eric, when I get back tonight, can you be someplace else?

ERIC. Where?

LUCY. Go out. Stay with some friends.

ERIC. I don't have any friends.

LUCY. Make some. Go to the movies. Walk around. I need a little privacy. Tom and I are going to have a talk.

ERIC. Talk at the restaurant.

LUCY. Please. Just this once.

ERIC. Okay.

LUCY. You won't forget?

ERIC. I said okay.

LUCY. Fine. Fine. Just don't forget, all right? Bye.

(She exits. ERIC pushes buttons on the remote control, but remains where he is.)

Scene 2

(ERIC is still on the couch, watching TV. The front door opens, and TOM and LUCY walk in. TOM is in his early-thirties, sturdily built, with the confident bearing of a man used to working with his hands. LUCY leads TOM to the couch.)

LUCY. Eric! You're supposed to be gone.

ERIC. I forgot.

TOM. This must be your brother.

LUCY. Yes. Tom, this is Eric. He was just leaving.

ERIC. I was?

TOM. He can stay, it's all right.

LUCY. No, it's not.

TOM. Maybe he and I should talk.

LUCY. He's not a very good listener.

TOM. Maybe he and I should have a little talk about the future.

LUCY. I should probably do it.

TOM. Sometimes brothers don't like to listen to their sisters. Why don't you let me try?

LUCY. I'll make some coffee.

(LUCY exits. TOM moves ERIC's legs and sits next to him on the couch. ERIC looks at TOM for the first time. There is a long pause.)

TOM. Lucy says you watch a lot of TV.

ERIC. She's very perceptive.

TOM. She also says that you, uh...that you won't get a job.

ERIC. My sister says a lot of things.

TOM. But you don't care.

ERIC. It's a free country. I respect her right to say whatever she wants.

TOM. Look, Eric... I know it's tough being your age. But, don't you think you could help out a little? I mean, you're a smart guy, you been to college, you're educated. Would it hurt so much to get a job?

ERIC. What's the point?

TOM. Well, you can't sit around here all day doin' nothin'. You gotta work. Don't you want a career? Somethin' you can be proud of?

ERIC. Does it really matter?

TOM. Sure it does. I mean, you gotta make your own way, you know?

ERIC. Do you realize that the average species dies out after three million years?

TOM. Uh, no, I wasn't aware of that.

ERIC. We've already been around for almost two. We've got a million years left, at the most.

TOM. I don't see why that means you can't get a job.

ERIC. The human race is not important.

TOM. I ain't so sure about that. I mean, here we are. Right?

ERIC. You can't leave a permanent mark. All your descendants will die out in a few thousand generations.

TOM. Hey, if everyone thought that way, where do you think we'd be? Huh?

ERIC. Where are we now?

TOM. In the United States of America, that's where. The best country in the whole world. That much I know.

ERIC. How long do you think it'll be around.

TOM. I don't think we're goin' nowhere, mister. Those pinkos over in Russia, they failed big-time. We proved our system is number one.

ERIC. How long do you think it'll last? The Romans kept their government intact for a thousand years. That's the record. Do you think we're as well-managed as they were?

TOM. A helluva lot better.

ERIC. They had a fraction of our population. Our days are numbered.

TOM. You can still get a job in your lifetime.

ERIC. There's no point. I can't make a difference.

TOM. Work for a charity. Help other people.

ERIC. Whom should I help? The homeless? AIDS victims? Cancer patients? Teenage alcoholics?

TOM. Pick one.

ERIC. Shouldn't I help the neediest? How do I decide?

TOM. I don't know.

ERIC. Neither do I.

TOM. Just do somethin', all right? You gotta do somethin' to support yourself. (*Long pause.*) So what are you gonna do?

ERIC. Nothing.

TOM. Just sit here and watch TV?

ERIC. Very observant. You and Lucy make a good couple.

TOM. Your sister and I are gonna move in together.

ERIC. There's not much room here.

TOM. Not here. We're gettin' a new place.

ERIC. Okay.

TOM. You're not invited.

ERIC. Oh.

TOM. So you might want to think about gettin' a job. You might want to start lookin' for someplace to live.

ERIC. I might.

TOM. I don't mean to upset you, but that's the way it's gonna be. Okay?

ERIC. All right.

TOM. You'll find someplace.

ERIC. Sure I will. When's it ever been hard to find an apartment in New York?

TOM. Maybe you can find a roommate.

ERIC. Don't worry about it.

TOM. Your sister's already worried.

ERIC. That's nice of her, but I'll be okay. And if I'm not...

TOM. You'll be all right. We'll just reassure her a little, okay?

ERIC. You go ahead.

TOM. Lucy. Lucy, come on out.

(LUCY enters, cautiously.)

LUCY. How'd it go?

TOM. He's fine with it.

LUCY. You are?

ERIC. Do I have a choice?

LUCY. No.

ERIC. Well, then.

LUCY. We have to go out for a few minutes.

TOM. I found us a place. We're gonna sign the lease tonight.

ERIC. Have a blast.

LUCY. You'll find a new place. Don't worry.

ERIC. I'm not worried.

LUCY. Really, it'll be okay.

TOM. Come on, Lucy.

(They exit. ERIC changes the channel with the remote.)

Scene 3

(ERIC is still on the couch, as usual. A young couple, DAN and NANCY, walk in the front door.)

DAN. This is it. Our new home.

NANCY. Oh, Dan, it's beautiful. The best wedding present I could imagine.

DAN. I knew you'd like it.

NANCY. How did you find it?

DAN. Connections. You married the right guy, Nancy.

(They kiss.)

NANCY. I never dreamed our first place would be like this. In Manhattan. It's so big and airy.

DAN. Just what you've always wanted.

(NANCY starts walking around, completely ignoring ERIC.)

NANCY. I love the windows. And the floors.

DAN. Can't you imagine that wall filled with books?

NANCY. Everyone will be so impressed.

DAN. What a view, huh?

NANCY. I can't wait to tell Elaine. She'll be green. They've been looking for months.

DAN. I guess you just have to know what you're doing.

NANCY. This room has such an aura. It really feels like we belong here.

(She notices the couch and TV for the first time.)

NANCY. What's all this?

DAN. Oh, nothing. Came with the apartment.

NANCY. We can throw them out tomorrow. I can't wait to furnish this place. Wait until you see my decorator's eye at work.

DAN. Think we should go modern?

NANCY. All wood. This is so exciting. I can barely catch my breath.

(She moves to the couch and is about to sit on ERIC.)

ERIC. Excuse me.

(NANCY shrieks and runs to DAN.)

NANCY. Dan!

DAN. It's okay, Nancy.

NANCY. *(Very softly:)* Dan. Dan. There's a man on that couch.

(DAN puts his arm around her.)

DAN. Don't worry about him, Honey. He's harmless.

NANCY. What's he doing here?

DAN. Like I said, he comes with the apartment.

NANCY. He what?

(DAN walks to the kitchen doorway.)

DAN. We can make some serious pasta in this kitchen, Nance.

NANCY. Daniel. Come here. Why is there a strange man in our living room?

DAN. You know how hard it is to find an affordable apartment.

NANCY. Of course I do.

DAN. I heard about this place from Charlie, who works with the boyfriend of the woman who sublet this apartment. The only condition is that we let her brother stay here. Just until he gets his own place.

NANCY. What?

DAN. I know you've always wanted to live in Manhattan, so I—

NANCY. My new husband has arranged for us to live with a complete stranger.

DAN. Now, Sugar, I think—

NANCY. This is great, Dan. Just how I imagined it. You, me, and some guy.

DAN. Lucy said we should think of him more as furniture.

NANCY. Furniture? He's alive, isn't he?

DAN. Well, yes, from what I know.

NANCY. Cancel the lease. I am not living here.

DAN. I can't.

NANCY. What do you mean, you can't? This is unacceptable.

DAN. She already has our money.

NANCY. This is no way to start a marriage.

DAN. Look on the bright side. We don't have to buy a TV.

NANCY. You clearly are not the man I thought I married. He was intelligent, sensible.

DAN. It's not a big deal. Really.

NANCY. Someone already lives here, Dan.

DAN. He doesn't mind. Isn't that right, Eric?

ERIC. Fine with me.

DAN. Nancy, this is Eric. Eric, this is Nancy, my wife.

(NANCY walks over to the couch and stiffly offers her hand.
ERIC accepts her hand and looks up.)

NANCY. Nice to meet you, Eric.

ERIC. Don't worry about the situation, okay?

NANCY. That's easy for you to say. You have no idea how I feel.

ERIC. You were counting on a little privacy. You want to spend some time alone together.

NANCY. Exactly.

ERIC. And do you think I'm pleased with all this?

NANCY. Well, I don't know. I really didn't—

ERIC. My sister moved out all of a sudden. And now here I am living with two strangers. At least you've got someone you know. I'm all by myself.

NANCY. I guess that could be tough. But you do plan to move out soon, right?

ERIC. It's hard to find a place. As you know. But don't worry. You'll get used to me.

NANCY. I don't want to get used to you.

DAN. Now, Nancy, I think Eric is—

NANCY. Shut up, Dan. You got us into this mess. Why don't you get us out?

ERIC. Be patient for a day or two.

NANCY. As long as this is only temporary.

ERIC. I'll change the situation as soon as I can.

DAN. Let's look at the kitchen.

NANCY. I am not happy, Dan.

(They exit. ERIC goes back to watching the TV.)

Scene 4

(ERIC is as usual. DAN struggles through the front door, carrying an armful of heavy moving boxes. He sets them down loudly to catch his breath. His face is red, and he is very sweaty.)

DAN. Oh, my God. Hoo. Hoo. Oh my God. All those steps.

(DAN walks heavily over to the couch and stands expectantly. ERIC makes no move of recognition.)

DAN. Mind if I sit?

ERIC. Go ahead.

(ERIC slowly moves his legs out of the way. DAN plops down onto the couch.)

DAN. Four flights is a long way.

ERIC. Yeah.

DAN. What are you watching?

ERIC. Documentary on pygmies.

DAN. Oh... Interesting?

ERIC. It's okay.

DAN. If you watch the right things, you can learn a lot.

ERIC. Television is for idiots.

DAN. Well, yeah. I guess so. Most shows. But, hey, takes your mind off your problems, huh?

ERIC. Yeah.

(They both sit there, watching in silence.)

NANCY. (*From bedroom:*) Dan? Dan?

DAN. What?

NANCY. Why don't you start moving the boxes in here?

DAN. Just a minute, let me catch my breath.

(DAN goes back to watching TV. NANCY appears in the doorway.)

NANCY. Dan?

DAN. I was just—

NANCY. Don't get used to that couch.

DAN. I just need a second, all right?

(NANCY exits. DAN gets up off the couch, a little sore.)

DAN. Say, Eric?

ERIC. Hmmm?

DAN. I know this is a lot to ask, but, uh, I've got all these boxes to move, and I was wondering if maybe you'd feel like...you know, lending a hand?

ERIC. You want me to move your boxes?

DAN. It'll only take a couple minutes.

ERIC. Dan, you seem like an ethical, sensitive kind of guy.

DAN. Thanks.

ERIC. Your wife, Nancy, is not pleased with my presence in this apartment. I think she's made her feelings clear.

DAN. Very.

ERIC. Imagine her distress if she sees me become "part of the family," building up an accumulation of goodwill by pitching in here and there. How do you think she's going to feel?

DAN. Threatened?

ERIC. Maybe you need a little help with the boxes. But the more favors you let me earn, the tougher it'll be to force me out. Now, I don't think you want to get involved in that kind of trouble. Am I right?

DAN. You stay right there.

ERIC. If that's what you want.

DAN. I think it's best.

(DAN carries the heavy boxes into the bedroom. While DAN is in the bedroom, there is a loud knocking at the door. ERIC remains motionless. The knocking persists. NANCY comes out of the bedroom.)

NANCY. Just a minute. I'm coming, I'm coming.

(Before she can get to the door, a key opens it from the other side. LUCY swings open the door, a casserole dish in her hands.)

NANCY. You.

LUCY. Didn't think you were going to get the door.

NANCY. I said I was coming.

LUCY. Sorry to interrupt your unpacking.

(NANCY stops, then turns around and heads back to the bedroom.)

NANCY. Dan. Dan, she's here again.

(LUCY walks over to ERIC.)

LUCY. She still seems a little uptight.

ERIC. She'll get over it.

LUCY. Why didn't you open the door?

ERIC. Not my apartment.

LUCY. You could have opened the door.

ERIC. You and Tom fighting again?

LUCY. I brought you some lasagna.

ERIC. What did he say this time?

LUCY. You look very thin. Have you been eating?

ERIC. Sure.

LUCY. What have you been eating?

ERIC. Nothing specific.

LUCY. Ma would kill me if she saw you like this. I'm going to heat this up.

(LUCY exits to the kitchen. There is a knocking at the front door.)

ERIC. Come in, Tom.

(TOM rushes in, angry.)

TOM. Where is she?

ERIC. You're getting slow.

TOM. Where is she?

ERIC. In the kitchen. Relax.

TOM. I knew she'd be here.

ERIC. Very clever.

TOM. She's too much, your sister.

(He moves towards the kitchen.)

ERIC. She'll be out in a second, Tom. Why don't you sit down?

(TOM sits.)

TOM. How did I get involved with the stubbornest family in the whole world? That's what I want to know.

ERIC. It started with the relatively poor decision on your part to start dating my sister. That, coupled with—

TOM. Shut up, Eric.

(They are silent. TOM waits impatiently.)

TOM. Where is that woman?

ERIC. She'll be out.

TOM. This is nuts. You ain't a baby.

ERIC. Can't you fight about money or politics? You're in a rut.

TOM. A real wise guy, aren't ya? You know what I oughta do to that mouth a yours?

ERIC. Getting mad at me will not solve your problem.

TOM. It's your fault. If you'd get off your ass, she wouldn't be worryin' all the time. I mean, she comes home from work and first thing cooks you some dinner.

ERIC. And you blame me?

TOM. If you wasn't rooted to this stupid couch, she wouldn't be workin' herself to a frenzy.

ERIC. Look, Tom. When someone brings you their car, do they blame the road for the problems with the car? Do they say "That freakin' road is wrecking my car. If it wasn't there, my car would never break down."

TOM. Um. What do you mean?

ERIC. I'm the road. I'm just lying here, not asking for any favors, not causing any trouble. You don't fix the road, you fix the car. Right?

TOM. And...Lucy's the car?

ERIC. Exactly. The problem's with her, not me. You're blaming the wrong party.

(DAN walks out of the bedroom and over to the pile of boxes. He is sweating and breathing hard again.)

DAN. Hi, Tom.

TOM. Hi, Dan. Need a hand?

DAN. Uh, no, better not. Lucy in the kitchen?

TOM. Yeah.

DAN. Maybe I'll take a quick break.

(They scoot over. All watch TV.)

TOM. What is this, anyway?

DAN. Documentary on pygmies.

TOM. Oh

(They watch in silence for a moment.)

(LUCY enters with a plate of lasagna and a glass of milk.)

LUCY. *(To TOM:)* Oh. You're here.

TOM. Lucy. You gotta cut this out.

LUCY. Why don't you leave? I know you don't want to be here.

TOM. That's right, I don't.

LUCY. Then go home.

TOM. Come with me.

(He gets up.)

LUCY. I'll leave in a minute.

TOM. Lucy.

LUCY. What?

TOM. Look at your brother.

LUCY. *(To ERIC:)* Eat.

(ERIC starts eating.)

TOM. Whatta you see?

LUCY. He's eating. He knows what's good for him.

TOM. Is he a baby? Is your brother a baby?

LUCY. No.

TOM. Then you gotta stop treatin' him like a baby. (*To DAN:*) Does he look like a baby to you?

DAN. Not at all.

TOM. Lucy. This boy can take care of himself.

LUCY. But he won't. Look how thin he is.

TOM. He looks the same as always.

LUCY. He's so pale. Someone's got to look out for him.

TOM. Eric, do you need your sister to feed you?

ERIC. Need?

TOM. Yeah.

ERIC. Well, it's awful nice of her. I mean—

LUCY. See. He appreciates me.

TOM. (*To ERIC:*) Tell her you don't need for her to come around no more.

LUCY. Don't tell him what to do.

ERIC. I'm not the problem, Tom, remember?

TOM. Lucy, you gotta cut this out.

(*NANCY comes out of the bedroom.*)

NANCY. Dan. What are you doing?

DAN. Nothing.

NANCY. I can see that. Did you ask them to leave?

DAN. Hadn't gotten around to it yet.

NANCY. What are you waiting for?

DAN. They were in the middle of a discussion.

NANCY. Why are you so nice to strangers, but you won't do your own wife a simple favor. *(To TOM and LUCY:)* Would you both please leave?

TOM. Fine with me.

LUCY. What's the matter?

NANCY. You barged into my home, uninvited, unannounced. Again.

LUCY. I brought a little food for my brother.

NANCY. If you'd stop feeding him, maybe he'd stop being such a bum.

LUCY. My brother is no bum.

NANCY. That...that thing *(Points at ERIC)* has not moved an inch from that couch since we got here.

LUCY. You calling my brother a thing?

(DAN and TOM step between the two women.)

DAN. Now, Nancy.

TOM. Come on, Lucy. Let's go home.

(TOM leads LUCY to the door.)

LUCY. My brother is no thing.

NANCY. If he's not gone by tomorrow, I'll toss him out like so much garbage.

(LUCY lunges for NANCY and is barely restrained by TOM.)

LUCY. Don't touch him. You hear me? Don't touch him. I'll have you out on your ass in two seconds.

NANCY. Try it. I'll sue you and your whole family.

TOM. Come on, Lucy.

NANCY. He's leaving tomorrow. On a stretcher if necessary.

LUCY. You go near him and I'll tear your lungs out. I'll rip your head from your scrawny little neck.

(TOM drags LUCY into the hall. DAN and ERIC stare at NANCY.)

NANCY. Why are you looking at me like that? I am not the villain here. There is no excuse for them to barge in. No excuse. *(Silence.)* Dan? Dan?

DAN. Yes, Dear.

NANCY. Call the locksmith. I want the locks changed tomorrow.

ERIC. Nancy, don't you think—

NANCY. Quiet! Don't try your tricks on me. Don't speak to me. Understand?

(ERIC nods.)

NANCY. Come on, Dan.

(NANCY walks into the bedroom. DAN shrugs to ERIC and follows her. ERIC focuses his attention back on the TV and clicks the remote.)

Scene 5

(DAN and NANCY push the couch, the television, and ERIC into one corner of the living room. DAN deposits another pile of boxes by the door and also adds a chair. They exit.)

(ERIC seems undisturbed by the change in location and watches the television.)

(DAN walks out of the bedroom, carrying a briefcase.)

DAN. Good morning, Eric.

ERIC. Morning, Dan.

(He sets down his briefcase and joins ERIC on the couch. They both watch the TV.)

DAN. Sorry you're so scrunched.

ERIC. That's all right.

DAN. You know, I was thinking... *(No comment by ERIC.)* Maybe if you show Nancy a little effort...

ERIC. And do what?

DAN. Oh, I don't know. Maybe go out and look for a job. You know, just look.

ERIC. Maybe later.

DAN. Eric, you've got to protect yourself. She's going to come down hard on you. She's just getting started.

ERIC. No matter what I do, Nancy will not be happy as long as I'm here.

DAN. Maybe you could appease her, just a little.

ERIC. Would it make a difference?

DAN. Probably not.

ERIC. Then there's no point.

DAN. So what are you going to do?

ERIC. Nothing.

(They go back to watching TV. NANCY comes out of the bedroom, ready for work.)

NANCY. Daniel. What are you doing?

DAN. Watching a little TV.

NANCY. That is not our couch. Why aren't you sitting on our chair?

DAN. I can't see from there.

NANCY. That couch is garbage. I do not want you sitting on garbage.

DAN. Okay.

NANCY. So get off!

(DAN sits on the chair, but keeps watching the TV.)

NANCY. Now what are you doing?

DAN. I'm trying to see the TV.

NANCY. That is not our TV.

DAN. It's garbage.

NANCY. And we've had enough contact with the garbage in our house. Isn't that right? Later today, the delivery company will come with our own new TV and new couch.

DAN. I just want to see the weather.

NANCY. Look out the window. You've got to stop treating that leech like a human being.

DAN. But he is—

NANCY. He is not.

(NANCY walks over to ERIC.)

NANCY. You had all night to pack your things and go.

ERIC. Didn't fit into my schedule.

NANCY. You think this is a time for jokes. That's fine. Be out of here by noon. Today.

ERIC. Don't you think you're being a little harsh?

NANCY. No.

ERIC. Dan?

DAN. Well—

NANCY. Shut up, Dan. (To ERIC:) I've seen what you've been doing to him. Playing with his mind. Every time I come in here, you've got him sitting on that couch.

ERIC. Did I ask you to sit here this morning, Dan?

DAN. No.

ERIC. How about yesterday?

DAN. I went over there on my own, Nancy. He's not doing anything to me.

NANCY. That's what he wants you to think. That's what he wants everyone to think. That he's so harmless. I know better. You're like a cancer on our marriage.

ERIC. Dan?

DAN. He hasn't said a thing against you, Dear. I really think—

NANCY. Whose side are you on, Dan? This...this creature? Or your wife?

DAN. My wife, but maybe you should—

NANCY. (To ERIC:) See what you've done to him. I've had enough. Enough.

ERIC. I think you're overreacting.

NANCY. I'm sure you do. I'm sure you'd love it if I was a complacent little woman that you could twist around your finger. No chance.

ERIC. What have I taken from you? A small amount of floor space. Even smaller today, thanks to your redecorating scheme. I breathe a little air. I've asked for no food, no clothing. I speak to no one unless spoken to first. I make no more impact than a speck of dust.

DAN. He's been quite well behaved.

NANCY. I want my privacy. My own home. You don't belong here. That couch is an eyesore. And you...you are some sort of deranged lunatic.

ERIC. Why don't you take a couple deep breaths. Relax. Breathe deeply.

NANCY. Don't tell me what to do.

ERIC. I'm not I just—

DAN. Nancy.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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