THE BEST DADDY

Shel Silverstein

The Best Daddy was produced as part of An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein by the Atlantic Theater Company (Neil Pepe, artistic director; Beth Emelson, producing director) in New York City on September 9, 2001. It was directed by Karen Kohlhaas; the set design was by Walt Spangler; the lighting design was by Robert Perry; the costume design was by Miguel Angel Huidor; the sound design was by Malcolm Nicholls; the general manager was Ryan Freeman; the production manager was Kurt Gardner; and the production stage manager was Christa Bean. The cast of The Best Daddy was as follows:

LISA  Alicia Goranson
DADDY  Jordan Lage
LISA: Okay?

DAD: A little further.

LISA: Here? Can I open my eyes?

DAD: Hold my arm.

LISA: I'm going to bump into it.

DAD: You won't bump into anything. Keep your eyes closed. Now hold my arm, a couple more steps here.

LISA: Can I look now?

DAD: All right . . . Open your eyes right . . . now.

LISA: Is that him, there?

DAD: That's right.

LISA: Why is he covered with a blanket?

DAD: Well, he . . .

LISA: He doesn't look like a pony.
DAD: Well he is, a thoroughbred gelding $350 Shetland pony.

LISA: Is he laying down?

DAD: Um, yes.

LISA: Why is he laying down? Is he sick?

DAD: Pure strain Kentucky-bred Shetland.

LISA: Why is he laying down?

DAD: Lisa . . . I didn’t want to tell you this . . .

LISA: Why is he laying down? He is sick, he is.

DAD: He’s dead.

LISA: He . . . he’s dead?

DAD: It’s a helluva thing to have to tell your daughter on her birthday.

LISA: Dead? A dead pony?

DAD: We’ve got to face the facts.

LISA: You . . . you got me a dead pony for my birthday?

DAD: I didn’t get you a dead pony for your birth . . .

LISA: What happened to him?

DAD: Lisa, I’m going to be honest with you . . .

LISA: What happened to my pony?
DAD: You're thirteen years old now and I'm going to talk to you like an adult... 

LISA: What happened to my pony? 

DAD: I shot him. 

LISA: Y—you shot him? 

DAD: About an hour ago, but hear me out. 

LISA: Y—you shot my pony? You... you shot my birthday pony? 

DAD: I told you not to get excited, didn't I? Answer me, did I or did I not say, "Don't get too excited..." 

LISA: Why did you shoot my pony? 

DAD: I did not shoot your pony. He wasn't your pony when I shot him. You didn't even know he existed. He was a pony. 

LISA: Why did you shoot a pony? 

DAD: He bit me. 

LISA: But you didn't have to shoot him. You didn't have to... he's only a little pony. He didn't know what he was doing. 

DAD: You weren't there, you don't know the situation. 

LISA: My pony is dead. I'm thirteen years old today and you gave me a dead pony for my birthday. 

DAD: I told you, he bit me. 

LISA: But you gave him to me anyway. You took me out here to show me a dead pony?
DAD: Well, I thought about that. I thought, Well, if I take her out here and show her a dead pony that will upset her, but if I don’t give her anything she’ll think I forgot her birthday.

LISA: What could be worse than getting a dead pony for your birthday?

DAD: Listen now, someday you’ll have children of your own. I never shot a pony before. I want you to believe that, never in my life before today.

LISA: You hated my pony, you always hated him.

DAD: I didn’t always hate him, I never even . . .

LISA: You did. You hated him because you knew I loved him.

DAD: When I saw him I liked him, he was cute.

LISA: You knew he loved me and he could show his feelings and you couldn’t stand that. Oh no, ’cause you could never love anyone. You’re all bottled up. You keep all your feelings all bottled up. And he could show his love. He could swish his tail and toss his head, and lick my hand when I gave him sugar. And late at night when I’d ride him bareback through the gray mountains . . .

DAD: You never rode him—I just bought him . . .

LISA: (Music.) You didn’t know. I used to sneak out late at night when you thought I was sleeping. I’d climb out of my bedroom window and I’d run to the pasture . . .

DAD: Pasture? What pasture?
LISA: And he'd smell my scent and come galloping toward me, and I'd leap onto his back, and we'd go galloping over the moonlit moor . . .

DAD: Moonlit moor?

LISA: . . . with the wind in my hair. And now he's dead. You killed my pony. You killed Black Thunder.

DAD: Black Thunder?

LISA: You killed the only thing I ever loved.

DAD: I didn't.

LISA: You did.

DAD: I didn't.

LISA: You did. You said you did. (Music stops.)

DAD: (Blows party whistle.) APRIL FOOL! (Laughing.)

LISA: April Fool? But, but it's not April, it's my birthday.

DAD: BIRTHDAY FOOL! (Blows whistle, laughs.)

LISA: You mean Black Thunder's not dead? Then who is under that blanket?

DAD: Not "who," but "what."

LISA: Wh-what? Wh-what's under there?

DAD: Three guesses.
LISA: I...I don't know. You're cruel. You're the cruelest daddy in the whole world.

DAD: Three guesses.

LISA: A...a candy bar?

DAD: Uh-uh.

LISA: A...a turtle, a big gigantic turtle?

DAD: Nope, two down, one to go.

LISA: A...a...a rubber raft?

DAD: No...

LISA: What then, what is it?

DAD: It's your sister!

LISA: What?

DAD: It's your big fat sister!

LISA: Cathy? It's Cathy?

DAD: Big fat Cathy!

LISA: Why is she hiding under there? And you said it was a what, not a who. Cathy is a who.

DAD: Not exactly.

LISA: Not exactly? Cathy? Ca—Cathy?

DAD: It's a...what...it's Cathy's body.
LISA: Cathy’s body?

DAD: She’s the one that bit me.

LISA: You shot Cathy?

DAD: Teeth like a damn wild grizzly.

LISA: You gave me my dead sister’s body for a birthday present? First you tell me my pony is dead, and now you tell me you shot my favorite sister? You are the cruelest meanest most vicious . . .

DAD: DOUBLE APRIL FOOL! (Blows whistle, laughs.)

LISA: Double April Fool?

DAD: It’s not your sister. I wouldn’t shoot your fat little sister. Three more guesses!

LISA: (Crying.) I’m not guessing anymore. You ruined my birthday. You’re a mean, cruel . . .

DAD: It’s the motorcycle you wanted!

LISA: The Honda?

DAD: Uh-huh.

LISA: The red one?

DAD: Uh-huh.

LISA: (Screams.) Really and truly?

DAD: Mmm-hmm.
LISA: No April Fool?

DAD: No.

LISA: No Birthday Fool's day?

DAD: Mmm-mmm.

LISA: Oh, Daddy. (Kisses him.) Daddy, you're the bestest daddy in the whole wide world! (Kisses, kisses, kisses.)

END OF PLAY