

**130K AND COUNTING (🤔)**

A 10-Minute Play

By

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## 130K AND COUNTING (🤔)

### **Characters:**

Gwen, late 20s/ early 30s, Janie's Mom

Tish, late 20s/ early 30s, Katie's Mom

### **Brief Synopsis.**

What goes bump in the night? Suburban mothers worrying about bowling parties and COVID19.

A darkly comic mother-to-mother discussion that explores the funny and frightening world lurking behind picket fences in the age of maternal impotence and a pandemic.

*(Three a.m. A suburban neighborhood. Lights on in TISH and GWEN's neighboring houses. Phone rings in TISH's house.)*

Hello.

TISH (*weary*)

Is this Katie's mom?

GWEN

Yes.

TISH (*growing concern*)

This is Janie's mom. I don't think we've met.

GWEN

What's wrong?

TISH

Janie can't come to Katie's bowling party.

GWEN

What?

TISH

I have to retract my RSVP.

GWEN

Do you know what time it is? You scared the hell out of me.

TISH

The invitation said to respond by the seventh. Which technically was three hours ago.

GWEN

It's 3 a.m.!

TISH

GWEN

I saw your light. I figured it was OK. I didn't want you to be charged for her. That is... unless... did you cancel? Will the children be social distancing?

TISH

The children will wear masks. The bowling alley will wipe down the balls. The governor said it was ok. Our curve is flat— flat enough— flat-ish. And—

GWEN

Janie's says she has no need for birthday parties. She's giving up on childhood.

TISH

Fine. Whatever. Goodnight.

GWEN

She just now decided, or I would have called sooner.

TISH

Just now? Is she up too?

GWEN

She watched the news and...

TISH

Well, you saved us \$19.99. Thanks. Goodnight.

GWEN

Twenty bucks! To bowl! I'm glad I called.

TISH (*sarcastic*)

Me too. (*TISH is about to hang up*)

GWEN

You were up weren't you? I didn't wake you.

TISH

It's three o'clock in the morning.

GWEN

Weren't you up? I saw your light.

TISH (*embarrassed*)

Yes.

GWEN

Don't worry.

TISH

I'm not. About what?

GWEN

You're not the only one. There's lights all up and down the street.

TISH (*peaking out*)

Really?

GWEN

The Sturmers. The Brandees. The Johnsons. The Goldsteins. The Abbotts. I'm always up. Does Katie like being a kid?

TISH

Yes! Of course. What kind of a question is that?

GWEN

And beyond our street, there's more lights.

TISH

Where exactly do you live?

GWEN

Number 29. The red split. Right in the middle. I can't believe we've never met. From my front lawn I can see all the houses up and down the street in either direction.

TISH

Including mine, apparently.

GWEN

You're the white colonial, right? (*TISH peaks out her door. GWEN waves.*)

GWEN

That's me. I came out to see if your light was on.

TISH (*stands on her front stoop, takes in the street*)

Everyone IS up!

GWEN

You didn't think you were the only one?

TISH

I wonder why.

GWEN

You're kidding, right?

TISH

Well... we'll be sure to save a goodie bag for Janie.

GWEN

And I'll bring over the present.

TISH

Now?!

GWEN

No, of course.

TISH

Oh, thank God.

GWEN

I wouldn't just barge in at this hour. And of course I'd leave it outside. I only called because your light was on and because of the deadline.

TISH

For a minute there, I thought... *(TISH laughs nervously. It turns hysterical)*

GWEN

What's so funny?

*(TISH stops immediately)*

She watched the news. That's all she did, but...

TISH

Well, like I said... we'll move Janie to the "no" column.

*(TISH tries to hang up, but Gwen keeps talking.)*

GWEN

We were working in the garden. She went in for a glass of water... must have sat down for a minute... turned on the TV. Why'd she have to watch the news? Why not one of those stupid shows with the idiot parents and the kids with the cool rooms?

TISH

I should let you go.

GWEN

It's the news. It's condensed. Adults understand that.

TISH

I really want to let you go.

GWEN

But to a little kid, it seems like everyone in the world is...

TISH

Good night, then.

GWEN

She said there was a 10-year-old boy, orphaned when his parents died, three days apart. He couldn't even say goodbye. And her day camp was cancelled, which means no talent show, and she's afraid she'll never see her teacher again. And even good news scared her: first time in 10 years... no spring school shooting.

TISH

I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude. But I have to hang up now.

GWEN

And suddenly she's asking questions about clusters of sick children in Europe... and what's an ICU.... and saying words like multi-system inflammatory syndrome and Kawasaki disease.

TISH

I'm going back to bed.

GWEN

But you weren't IN bed.

TISH

I'm going now.

GWEN

Janie says if she's not a kid anymore, then all these bad things won't happen to her. Can you imagine, your own child --

TISH

I'm getting off the phone! Right now! Right now!

GWEN

Don't *you* worry? Aren't you afraid?

TISH

Yes! No! What? No! We left the city when Katie was born. The numbers here are lower, and— .

GWEN

Something's keeping you up.

TISH

Nothing's keeping me...

GWEN

You're up.

TISH

I'm not.

*(GWEN has been walking toward TISH's house. She is at her house, standing right in front of TISH.)*

GWEN

I'm right here... watching you... being NOT asleep.

TISH

I'm asleep! I'm sleeping! Back up! Six feet! Where's your mask?

*(TISH pulls out a wad of masks from her pocket, throws one at GWEN)*

GWEN

I just wanted you to know: You're not alone.

TISH

I'm going to pretend this phone call never happened.

*(TISH starts to turn to leave)*

GWEN

Look around you. *(at the lights in houses)* Everyone's like us. Now.

TISH

Don't call me ever again. Please! Just please!

GWEN

The RSVP was just an excuse. I'm just looking for someone to talk to. Our kids are the same age. It was one thing when they said it was infecting adults, but— I watch Janie sleep. Her feet come just halfway down the bed... the heat coming off her body, and I feel so helpless. I can't be



GWEN (*cont'd.*)

the only one holding my breath 'til there's a vaccine. Tell me you know what I'm talking about.

TISH

I don't watch the news.

GWEN

What?

TISH

My husband doesn't watch the news. We hate the news. Katie doesn't watch the news. She hates the news, and she's never even seen it. She hates it because we hate it. We just simply hate the news.

GWEN

She knows why she's not in school, right?

TISH

I teach her everything she needs to know. And, if Katie wants to watch TV, we stream *Frozen* or... *Pocahontas*... Or *Cinderella*, Kids need happy endings. It's my job to give her one.

GWEN

For how long?

TISH

What?

GWEN

I mean, you can't always control what she—

TISH

Yes, I can.

GWEN

What? How?

TISH

I haven't thought that far ahead, but—

GWEN

You're spinning plates.

No. TISH

Eventually she'll— GWEN

You blew it with your kid. I won't. TISH

I didn't blow it. I turned my back for half a— GWEN

I can do this. TISH

Do what, exactly? You can't be everywhere all the time. GWEN

Yes I can! TISH

No you can't! GWEN

I can if I stay up all night!  
*(TISH covers her mouth)* TISH

What? GWEN

Pizza or grilled cheese? TISH

What! GWEN

Are they too old for party hats? TISH

What are you talking about? GWEN

TISH

Party hats! Party hats! What's the right answer?

GWEN

I don't --

TISH

And Cake! Chocolate or vanilla? Or both. Marble. Which is it?

GWEN

The right answer? There isn't one.

TISH

No, there is. I'm gonna figure it out if it takes all night. THAT'S why I'm up. You asked? I'm telling you. I'm worrying about cake. I'm scared to death about cake. I have a bowling party to plan. It has to be perfect. Then everything will be fine. Then, I'll be fine. My family will be fine. And safe. Like this street. Fine and safe. Safe and fine. My husband and I are very happy working remotely. We could do it forever. We don't think about clusters of children— or inflammatory whatever. We never think about that kind of thing. Or mile long lines at food banks.... Or running out of meat or toilet paper or never seeing my mother in assisted living. Or the simple pleasure of going out for coffee.... I never think about that. Or getting on a plane. I never think about that either....Why am I even bringing it up? What happened to the good old days of just worrying about terrorists in shopping malls.... Internet predators... sex offenders in classrooms... pesticides in fruit... antibiotics in chicken nuggets ... arsenic in our water....snow in October and summer after summer of endless record heat. It's cake that scares the shit out of me. Cake. CAKE! Do you understand? Do you get it?

GWEN

No. I mean, yes. I get it. I get it. I do.

TISH

If you call anyone else on the street tonight...

GWEN

I'm not gonna call anyone else.

TISH

If you call anyone...

GWEN

I won't, I said.

TISH

... the Brandees or the Johnsons or whoever – tell them...

GWEN

I won't be calling anyone ever again.

TISH

Tell them I'm planning a birthday party for my little girl. The bowling balls will be cleaned. The Governor said it's ok. That's why I'm up. Can you tell them that for me, please?

GWEN

Sure.

TISH

I'm tired.

GWEN

I bet you are.

TISH

I'm very tired.

GWEN

It's exhausting work, NOT being afraid.

TISH

Yes, it is.

*(Gwen starts to walk away)*

GWEN

I'm going home. To bed. Good night, Katie's mother.

TISH

Good night, Janie's mother. I'm sorry.... she can't come to the party.

*(Gwen is at her house. She turns out the light. Tish's light stays on.)*

THE END