

*PURITY*

*Right Ascension 21 Hours, 2 Minutes, 56 Seconds. Declination 18°, 27' 16".*

*Age ten.*

*Enter MOTHER, with bleach.*

MOTHER: Sweetheart, I need you to drink this.

DRIZZLE BOY: You want me to drink bleach?

MOTHER: Yes.

DRIZZLE BOY: No. [*Aside*] Rule six: Don't drink bleach.

MOTHER: It'll be good for you.

*He takes the bleach and reads.*

It's supposed to clear out all the toxins —

DRIZZLE BOY: Guaranteed to remove stains—

MOTHER: And bodily imperfections—

DRIZZLE BOY: Kills ninety-nine-point-nine-nine percent of germs—

MOTHER: / And cures autism!

DRIZZLE BOY: / And cures autism?

MOTHER: It's meant to fix you.

DRIZZLE BOY: And then I'll be 'normal'.

MOTHER: Yes!

DRIZZLE BOY: No.

MOTHER: No?

DRIZZLE BOY: I just don't think it's a fantastic idea to be drinking bleach.

MOTHER: Well it's not an exact science. I know.

DRIZZLE BOY: Well considering most people use it to clean mould from the kitchen sink, it's hardly fucking science at all.

*Enter FATHER.*

FATHER: Don't speak to your mother like that!

DRIZZLE BOY: You do realise what's in this, right?

FATHER: Bleach I imagine.

*Pause.*

MOTHER: Sweetheart, we're just trying to help you.

FATHER: We've tried everything else.

*Pause.*

DRIZZLE BOY: Why don't you drink it?

*He pours them each a glass of bleach.*

FATHER: Excuse me?

DRIZZLE BOY: I mean, to show me that it's safe.

*He hands them the glasses.*

There's no harm in you drinking it, because you don't have any toxins in your body. Right, Mother?

*They consider, then drink their bleach. They die.*

[*To the audience*] There is a real school of thought that suggests administering bleach will cure your children of autism. Google it. Or don't, it's pretty horrific. Of course, most of that didn't actually happen.

*They rise up once again. Exit FATHER and MOTHER.*

Mum did try to get me to drink a new 'medicine' that contained bleach thanks to her work friend, Kate. 'Aunty Kate', who showed her a video about it online. But I get it, back here—Mum and Dad, they were desperate. At the time I only ate strawberry-jam toast, Hawaiian pizzas, and frozen blueberries. And I had just, um ... Ah—

*Pause.*

After the bleach incident, I hid in my room and didn't come out for a few days. But I like this version better, it's a bit more fun. You gotta laugh at this stuff. It's better than the alternative.



*PROTOSTAR*

*Right Ascension 15 hours, 43 minutes, 3 seconds. Declination 10°, 56', 0.6".*

*Age five.*

DRIZZLE BOY *makes himself comfortable*. MOTHER and FATHER *ready themselves for the diagnosis*.

DRIZZLE BOY: So he's all squared away in the playroom?

MOTHER: Yes, he found a *National Geographic* magazine. Happy as Larry.

DRIZZLE BOY: Please, make yourselves comfortable and we'll go through the results.

*They sit nervously opposite him. Pause.*

When I last spoke to your son, I asked him if he knew about his struggles with eye contact. Do you know what his response was? You have a very nice tie. Now, I appreciate that my tie is fucking glorious, however this is emblematic of the way he interacts with the world. For example, you might look at the night sky and see millions of stars. He looks at the sky and sees HD one-eight-nine-seven-three-three-B, a planet where it rains glass. He sees specific places, rich with meaning. A wholly different perspective, because he is autistic.

*FATHER is silent, deep in thought.*

MOTHER: And what does that mean? Is he okay? Can we fix it?

DRIZZLE BOY: It's not like he's got cancer of the nutsack.

MOTHER: Well, he'll grow out of it, right?

DRIZZLE BOY: No, he won't grow out of it, it's how he is. And life may be tricky, but with support and people who actually care, he'll be fine.

MOTHER: Does—Does this mean we have to put him in a special school? Or—Or—Will there be medication? I'm not—Do you have a pamphlet or something we could—

DRIZZLE BOY: Are you alright?

FATHER *says nothing.*

MOTHER: Hey, are you with us?

FATHER: Is that why he doesn't like playing football with me?

MOTHER: What? Football? That's what you're—We've just found out our son's never going to be quite normal and you—

DRIZZLE BOY: And what is normal? There's no reason why he won't be able to do anything he sets his mind to. Life's a progression, it isn't a linear thing, and indeed, no two people are the same. All a diagnosis does is help you explain why he may do or not do certain things. Autism is just a different way of being. The sooner you learn that, the sooner you can stop the self-pity, and love your son.

FATHER: Love him? He's our son. We're always gonna love him.

MOTHER: Do we need to get him a helmet?

FATHER: No, he doesn't like things on his head. He won't even wear sunglasses in summer.

DRIZZLE BOY: I realise that none of that is what the doctor would have actually said to you, but I was busy in the other room reading about a Southeast Asian primate called the tarsier, so I filled in the gaps.

FATHER: Thank you, you've given us a lot to think about.

*He shakes hands with DRIZZLE BOY. Exit.*

*Beat.*

MOTHER: Excuse me, doctor. I know you must be incredibly busy but—

DRIZZLE BOY: I imagine you have a lot of questions.

MOTHER: Is he going to be able to live his life? Will he get a job, or start a family? I—I—And what about all the things he might miss out on? Will he leave home? Will he fall in love?

DRIZZLE BOY: I'm afraid I don't have a crystal ball.

MOTHER: But is there anything we—That I can do? I just want my son to be okay.

DRIZZLE BOY: What did you really want to ask back here, Mum?

*Pause.*

MOTHER: Would I be a bad mother if I left?

DRIZZLE BOY: That's a question for yourself.

MOTHER: Forget I asked that, that's horrible.

DRIZZLE BOY: There are people you can talk to. Therapists for you, or family sessions if you'd like.

MOTHER: I would like that.

DRIZZLE BOY: Now, I know this can be a difficult time. But please try and refrain from going to Doctor Google—

MOTHER: Google!

*The SPEAKER appears.*

Can autism be cured?

SPEAKER: While there is no known cure for autism, there are a number of strategies you can adopt.

MOTHER: Will an autistic child put stress on your marriage?

SPEAKER: Autism Talks recommends you and your partner have a period of mourning, for the loss of the child that could have been.

MOTHER: Can autistic people make friends?

SPEAKER: While friendships are not impossible, autistic people often find connections and romantic relationships challenging. After all, who wants to love a Drizzle Boy?

*The SPEAKER disappears. Exit MOTHER. The stage is tinged with the colour of loneliness. Pause. DRIZZLE BOY dismisses the DOCTOR role, and with it the construction of the past. Silence.*