

This Jar of Peanut Butter Broke up my Family

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Characters:

Sue - (she/her) is an 18 year-old that is desperate for closure. She is reserved however, when she gets going she can talk forever sometimes about things you didn't even ask her about.

Sue's Lawyer - (written as he/him but can be any gender, adjust pronouns accordingly) looks a bit too young to be a lawyer and is not sure how they even were given this case because this has never happened before. Fingers-crossed it goes well, they are definitely not nervous at all.

Judge - (written as she/her but can be any gender, adjust pronouns accordingly) does not want to be there and thinks that Sue's Lawyer is making a mockery of the justice system but has a soft spot for Sue who possibly reminds her of herself.

Teddy - Teddy

(Lights up in a courtroom. Sitting on the plaintiff's side is SUE. She is dressed like she didn't know she was going to be in a courtroom that day which is especially weird because she is the plaintiff. She looks distressed. Meanwhile, in the center of the stage is SUE'S LAWYER. He is dressed like a stereotypical lawyer but his suit is a tad too big and he looks a bit young to be a lawyer. He is holding a legal pad in his hands almost as a security blanket. The JUDGE is sitting in the back of the house on a slightly raised platform. The audience is in the place of the jury. SUE'S LAWYER nervously clears his throat and begins to speak.)

SUE'S LAWYER

(nervous)

Good evening everyone. *(Realizing this is not how people start he tries again)* Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, today I will be representing uh Ms. Sue Miller. When I first received this case I thought well this is woahhh. But But trust me when I say that if you are willing to hear the whole story I promise—

JUDGE

Sorry to interrupt but what exactly am I looking at here? There is no defendant on the stand. Who are you charging?

SUE'S LAWYER

Wha— *(looking over his shoulder)* oh Oh sorry Miss your Honor just uh *(He walks over to the defendants chair and picks up a jar of Teddy peanut butter that is sitting out of sight and slams it down on the table with the bear facing out at the audience)* Your Honor THIS is the, pardon my French, DIRTBAG we are dealing with today. And I— *(looking over at the jar)* Sorry what? *(He goes back over and sees a slip of paper under the jar. He holds it up and we see it reads OBJECTION)*

JUDGE

Overruled? I suppose. You're charging a jar of peanut butter?

SUE'S LAWYER

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

With what exactly?

SUE'S LAWYER

Murder in the first degree, your Honor. Or at the very least voluntary manslaughter.

JUDGE

Okay you don't have to say your Honor after every sentence and MURDER? Who exactly did this thing murder?

SUE'S LAWYER

Well if you would allow me to finish my opening statement, your Honor.

JUDGE

(annoyed)

I said- *(giving up)* Proceed.

SUE'S LAWYER

Thank you. Now as I was saying, we are charging Mr uh Teddy here with murder in the first degree of the tie between Ms. Miller and her father.

JUDGE

So no one is dead?

SUE'S LAWYER

Well technically speaking...no. But But if you give me some time I promise I will prove to you—

JUDGE

Prove? What proof?

SUE'S LAWYER

Eyewitness testimony, your Honor.

JUDGE

From who?

(SUE'S LAWYER gestures to SUE who remains stoic with her hands in her lap)

JUDGE cont.

Okay this is ridiculous—

SUE'S LAWYER

Your Honor—

JUDGE

No. Ladies and gentlemen I'm sorry for wasting your time with this...disgrace of the justice system but this case is dismissed. *(She bangs her gavel)*

(She begins to rise as SUE'S LAWYER runs down the aisle to meet her trying to get her to hear them out but she refuses to listen.)

SUE

(quiet and childlike)

please.

(JUDGE and SUE'S LAWYER look back at SUE who still has her hands in her lap.)

SUE

With all due respect your Honor, my father is dead. At least to me he is. He died four years ago when I moved out of his house. I only hear from him now on the occasional birthday or Christmas and they might as well be automated messages. We don't even follow each other on Facebook. Over the years, I have thought a lot about where it all went wrong. But I'm done blaming myself. I want to blame this. *(gestures to the peanut butter)* So I would just ask that you please hear me out. *(beat)* Also...It's my birthday.

(There is a moment of silence while the JUDGE thinks about this. Looking at SUE and then looking at SUE'S LAWYER she lets out a sigh)

JUDGE

Does the peanut butter at least have a lawyer?

SUE'S LAWYER

(moving towards the peanut butter)

Teddy here has decided to represent itself this evening. *(pause)* Oh. *(He takes another piece of paper from under the jar and holds it up. It just says "I GOT THIS")*

JUDGE

Well then I guess...proceed.

SUE'S LAWYER

Yes! *(coughs)* I mean uh thank you, your honor. I would like to call my only I mean uh first yeah first witness to the stand, Sue Miller.

(SUE moves from her seat to behind the stand as SUE'S LAWYER gathers his notes)

Now uh Ms. Miller, do you recall the first time you met the defendant?

SUE

Yes sir. It was the summer of 2012. I was 10 years old.

SUE'S LAWYER

And what were you doing that summer?

SUE

My Dad's whole family rented this place on Lake Winnepesaukee for a couple weeks. We went every summer when I was little. But that was the last summer we ever went.

SUE'S LAWYER

Was there anything different about that summer compared to the previous times you went?

SUE

Well my Dad's new girlfriend was there with her two kids I guess. She was a major health nut. The first afternoon we were there she made us sandwiches for lunch. That's when I was introduced to the defendant.

SUE'S LAWYER

And how did that make you feel?

SUE

Not great I guess. I mean my whole life I had only ever had Skippy peanut butter. So when she brought it out and started *stirring* it, I'll admit I was a bit freaked out. I asked my Dad if I could have Skippy instead. I would have even taken Jif. But my Dad told me we needed a change.

SUE'S LAWYER

And leading up to this summer, had you dealt with any other recent changes?

SUE

Are you kidding? In the past year alone my parents had gotten a divorce, my Dad met this new woman and within a month her and her kids were moving into our house, and we got a new dog. Which yeah I mean the dog was pretty sick but still that is a lot of fucking change- freaking change sorry your honor.

JUDGE

Apology accepted.

SUE'S LAWYER

Alright so getting back to the peanut butter...

SUE

Right yeah the peanut butter. I guess it was my last straw ya know. I never complained. I learned it was better to just go along with things.

SUE'S LAWYER

And this relates to the peanut butter because?

SUE

The peanut butter yes the peanut butter well that was just something I couldn't get past. I asked my Dad later to reconsider but he wouldn't hear of it. I even offered to pitch in money for it. I was always a very good saver. I saved money from Christmas and birthdays and put it in this little purple piggy bank with pink spots—

SUE'S LAWYER

Sue.

SUE

Right. Well anyway my Dad refused. So to prove I was serious I stopped eating and not just peanut butter but everything I didn't like. Which was a lot. His girlfriend served a lot of weird food. At least weird to a ten year old who before she came around was exclusively eating chicken fingers and fries from the freezer.

SUE'S LAWYER

How long did this protest go on for?

SUE

About three weeks.

SUE'S LAWYER

Nice nice. Well... not nice I mean-so these protests? What did-yeah tell me about them.

SUE

I would sit at the table during dinner with my hands in my lap until I was dismissed. At first my Dad tried to force me to eat by making me stay at the table but I always waited him out. Finally my Dad gave in which really pissed Amanda off. They had a really long fight about it that night which I listened to through the wall of my closet. It sounded like Amanda won the fight but, the next morning I woke up to a jar of Skippy sitting on the counter.

SUE'S LAWYER

Well that sounds like a success then. No more Teddy.

SUE

That's not really how it felt. Amanda told her kids that only I was allowed to eat that peanut butter. But that didn't make me feel special. I felt like there was a target on my back.

SUE'S LAWYER

But you used the peanut butter right?

SUE

I tried. I went to take the Skippy out but, Teddy was also there. Watching me. A few times after that I brought it out but Teddy was always there. There was always some excuse about why she

left it out but I knew why it was there. And it worked. I stopped eating Skippy. But I didn't tell anyone. I didn't want to give Teddy the satisfaction. I thought this would make the feeling go away but it only got worse. I could even feel it when I wasn't eating. That constant surveillance.

SUE'S LAWYER

So you weren't eating at your Dad's at all?

SUE

Well sometimes on longer stays at my Dad's house I would wait until Saturday afternoons when everyone was out at soccer games or birthday parties. That was when I could feel it the least. Sometimes I noticed that more peanut butter was gone from the jar than the last time I touched it. I always suspected it was my dad but we never talked about it.

SUE'S LAWYER

Do you think your Dad— sorry (*looking at the peanut butter*) What? (*They go over to the peanut butter jar and pick up a piece of paper that says "SPECULATION"*) Speculation? F-Fine I'll reword the question. Did your Dad ever show signs that he knew about your eating habits?

SUE

No, not really. I mean I know he noticed that I would just move my food around my plate at the dinner table because sometimes I'd catch his eye and he'd give me a look. I don't know what the look meant though. Probably that we would never talk about the things he noticed. Because if we talked about them it meant I probably had to move in with my Mom but that happened anyways a couple years later.

JUDGE

Sue uh I mean Ms.Miller if you don't mind my asking, why isn't your father on the stand today?

SUE

(*SUE takes a second to think*) I've gone back and forth a lot over the years and I've tried blaming my father. Sometimes I get really angry at him thinking about everything that happened. But then I think about the missing Skippy and the fights that I listened to and I realize that maybe he felt like he was being watched too. And then I can't blame him. Besides I didn't come here to find another reason to be angry with my father for the rest of my life. I don't want that. I am eighteen now and I don't want to carry this anger with me. I want to let it go. I want-I want to finally be at peace.

JUDGE

I see. Well then I think we have reached a decision.

SUE'S LAWYER

You-you did? Doesn't the jury need to vote on that? And-and I mean there's still so much left I wasn't even finished with my questions. Do you uh at least want to hear my closing statement? Sue wasn't even cross-examined by the peanut butter—

JUDGE

There's no need. A verdict has been reached. Frankly I didn't even want to have this trial in the first place but we did and now I have my verdict. Alright?

SUE'S LAWYER

(voice cracking)

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

I declare Teddy peanut butter... *(She looks at SUE who has gone back to stoic but her demeanor is starting to crack and it is almost like she is a scared ten year old girl again)* Guilty.

SUE'S LAWYER

(let's out a shocked sigh) R-Really? Yeah Yes YES! Oh my god we won? We won! I won my first case! *(He runs up and hugs Sue during this who doesn't know how to feel and then goes over to the peanut butter)* Unh in your face. Whatcha gotta say about that huh? Oh. *(They pick up a piece of paper from the peanut butter that says "WHAT THE FUCK")*

JUDGE

Take him away please.

(Sue who hasn't moved since the verdict gets up as SUE'S LAWYER picks up the peanut butter)

SUE

W-Wait.

(She goes and takes the peanut butter staring into the bear's eyes one last time. Then she picks up a permanent marker that is on the peanut butter's desk, and is definitely how it has been writing notes this whole time, then she makes a thin line like a blindfold over the bear's eyes. She opens the jar of peanut butter one last time looking at the oily goo.)

Ew.

(She covers it and pushes it towards SUE'S LAWYER who takes it offstage and looks over at the JUDGE who is beginning to leave.)

Thank you for uh putting up with all this.

JUDGE

(with a small smile) Take care of yourself Ms.Miller. *(She goes to leave and turns back forgetting something)* Oh and Happy Birthday.

(She exits. Sue is left alone in the middle of the stage thinking about everything that has happened once again but then breathing out she lets everything go. She is at peace.)

END SHOW