

DON'T FEED DEAD ROSES YOUR DRINKING WATER **DRAMATURGICAL PACKET**

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DRAMATURGY NOTE

“Sometimes letting go is simply allowing yourself to come to terms with the truth that you have been watering dead plants.”

- Steve Maraboli

One of the most significant elements of theatrical literature and performance is how playwrights and performers can harness the unmatched power of symbolism. From lightness and darkness representing good and evil to hues of purple associated with wealth and royalty, symbols have become a necessary ingredient when telling impactful stories with hidden depths inside the text. Ozzy Wagner has mastered this magnificent method of storytelling with *Don't Feed Dead Roses Your Drinking Water*, creating a timeless piece of theatre that displays how the early performative stages of relationships cannot prevent damage at the hands of toxic masculinity. Emotionally draining and neglectful partnerships are prevalent issues that have been present in society since the dawn of time, and these unhealthy connections often lead to the subconscious internalization and acceptance of blatant abuse.

This script gives audiences a world where a vase is more than just a vase – it is an idealistic woman's commitment to a broken relationship. A vase can be a manipulative man's leverage over someone who merely wants to be loved in return. Water isn't simply liquid; it is the physical representation of effort being poured into something unwilling and unable to reciprocate. Swallowing wilted rose petals becomes the act of internalizing one's abuse and longing to be close to a partnership that no longer breathes. Through hauntingly beautiful imagery throughout *Don't Feed Dead Roses Your Drinking Water*, Wagner assists audiences with identifying warning signs and encouraging women found in these dangerous situations to leave before they begin to lose sight of themselves and the truth of the relationship.

“I don't think people realize how much strength it takes to pull your own self out of a poisonous situation with someone you love deeply. So if you've done that today or any day, I'm proud of you.”

- Horacio Jones

TERM DEFINITIONS/REFERENCES

Most of these terms may seem familiar to you, but each of them plays a role in the script and it would be wise to give them some extra thought – even the simplest references/terms can help provide informative context when building the world of the play!

Note: While not all of these terms/phrases may have appeared in the script directly, all of them assist in deeper analysis and insight towards central themes.

BRITA – Brita is the name of a company that manufactures water filters that reduce traces of lead, chlorine, asbestos, benzene, particulates, and other



contaminants from your drinking water. Activated charcoal is the main filtration component of the Brita filter. Chlorine, pesticides, and organic impurities adhere to the charcoal, which eliminates foul tastes and odors from the water. According to Markus Hankammer, CEO of Brita since 199, the name stands for “trust and expertise.” [COMPANY WEBSITE](#), [VIDEO DEMONSTRATION](#)

BROKEN RECORD – This phrase is used to describe when someone or something is repeating the same thing over and over again. This originates from certain characteristics of a vinyl or phonograph record. When a vinyl record has been damaged (leaving a scratch or an indent) it may either completely skip a portion of the sound or repeat the same segment over and over until someone manually fixes it. “I feel like a broken record but I can’t stop talking about the loss” is an example from Merriam-Webster. [VIDEO EXAMPLE](#)



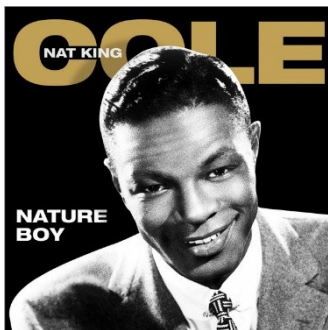
CITRONELLA – Citronella oil is an essential oil obtained from the leaves and stems of different species of Cymbopogon (also called lemongrass). The oil is often used as a source of chemicals in perfume such as citronellal, citronellol, and geraniol. Candles with citronella oil in them are known to be effective at repelling mosquitoes, but only in the immediate area surrounding the candle. In addition to perfumes and insect repellent, citronella has also been used to treat parasitic infections, promote wound healing, and fight fatigue. [CITRONELLA OIL WEBMD PAGE](#)

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE – The phrase “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” originated in the United States Declaration of Independence. It lists three examples of the unalienable rights that the Declaration claims have been given to all humans by their Creator, and that governments are expected to protect. [FULL DECLARATION TRANSCRIPTION](#)

ELLA FITZGERALD – Ella Fitzgerald, also called “Lady Ella” and the “First Lady of Song,” was the most popular female jazz singer in the United States for more than 50 years. During her life, she won thirteen Grammy awards and sold over forty million albums. She was known for having an extremely flexible vocal range and being able to sing in a variety of ways. She was also capable of imitating orchestra instruments. Her career took her all over the world, and she performed with many great jazz performers such as Frank Sinatra and Count Basie. Some of her most famous tracks include ‘Dream a Little Dream of Me,’ “Cheek to Cheek,” “Summertime,” and “They Can’t Take That Away from Me.” [FULL BIOGRAPHY](#), [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)



EMOTIONAL ABUSE – Emotional abuse involves nonphysical behavior that belittles another person and can include, but is not limited to, insults and verbal threats or tactics that make the victim feel inferior, ashamed, unworthy, and unwanted. Three general patterns of behavior include aggressing, denying, and minimizing. (For more information, see the section below entitled *What is Emotional Abuse?*)



“NATURE BOY” – “Nature Boy” is the title of a song first recorded by the American jazz singer Nat King Cole, and it was released on March 29th in 1948. It was written by the songwriter Eden Ahbez as a way to pay tribute to his

mentor, Bill Pester. The final line of the song is considered to be very poignant and profound – “The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.” After the song received critical acclaim, it helped introduce Cole to a much wider audience. It received the Grammy Hall of Fame Award in 1999. [FULL SONG](#), [FULL LYRICS](#)

PRESERVATIVES – Preservatives, in foods, are considered to be any of numerous chemical additives used to prevent or slow spoilage caused by chemical changes (oxidation, mold). Preservatives also help to maintain the freshness of appearance and texture. However, sustained, and excessive consumption of artificial preservatives can weaken heart tissues and sometimes cause obesity because of fatty acids. Perfumes also have preservatives to increase the shelf life of products and protect consumers from microorganisms that cause infection. Preservatives are second to fragrance in causing skin irritation, sensitization, and allergies.

RECORD PLAYER – A record player is an apparatus for reproducing sounds from vinyl records, consisting of a turntable that spins the record at a constant speed and a stylus that slides within the groove and picks up the sound. Together with an amplifier and loudspeaker, it changes sound vibrations into electric signals. Even though record players were more common in years past, many people still consider them to be better than digital formats because no audio data is lost when pressing a record.



TEQUILA – Tequila is a type of distilled liquor that is usually clear in color (sometimes golden) made from the fermented juice of the Mexican agave plant. It is named for a town of west-central Mexico where the agave plant is grown in a particular fashion that created a lot of smoothness in the drink. Flavors associated with tequila are earthy, fruity, and sweet.

TOXIC MASCULINITY – Toxic masculinity refers to a set of attitudes and ways of behaving stereotypically associated with or expected of men, regarded as having a negative impact on men and on society as a whole. It is a cultural concept of manliness that glorifies strength and dominance in a way that is socially harmful to mental health. Both men and women suffer when toxic masculinity perpetuates expectations that are restrictive and discriminatory. (For more information see the section below entitled *Toxic Masculinity in Relationships*)

VASE – A decorative container typically made of glass, china, metal, or earthenware that is used as a method of displaying cut flowers.

VISCARIA – *Viscaria Vulgaris* (also called the sticky catchfly or clammy campion) is a flower in the family Caryophyllaceae. The flowers, which are 20mm across and bright pink, appear in whorled spikes from May to August.



“YOU’RE LAUGHING AT ME” – “You’re Laughing at Me” is a popular song written by Irving Berlin for the 1937 film *On the Avenue*. Popular versions of the song were recorded by Fats Waller, Wayne Kind, Mildred Bailey, and Ella Fitzgerald. [ELLA FITZGERALD RECORDING](#), [FULL LYRICS](#)

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

IMPORTANT: If as you are learning more about this very important subject, you realize that you or someone you know might be in a relationship that contains forms of domestic violence, here is a link to the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#). We are here for you, and you deserve to feel loved and safe.

[Psychology Today](#)

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior in which the perpetrator insults, humiliates, and generally instills fear in an individual in order to control them. The individual's reality may become distorted as they internalize the abuse as their own failings. Such mistreatment can occur in a range of interpersonal contexts – parental, romantic, professional.

People who suffer emotional abuse can experience short-term difficulties such as confusion, fear, difficulty concentrating, low confidence, nightmares, aches, and a racing heart. Long-term repercussions may include anxiety, insomnia, and social withdrawal.

Perpetrators of emotional abuse consistently criticize, shame, and humiliate in order to gain control and power in a relationship. They may yell at their victim, call them names, or level baseless accusations against them. They may act jealous and possessive, monitoring the person's whereabouts and communication by checking their phone.

Warning signs of emotional abuse are listed below.

- Monitoring and controlling a person's behavior, such as who they spend time with or how they spend money.
- Threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones.
- Isolating a person from family, friends, and acquaintances.
- Demeaning, shaming, or humiliating a person.
- Extreme jealousy, accusations, and paranoia.
- Delivering constant criticism.
- Regular ridicule or teasing.
- Making acceptance or care conditional on a person's choices.
- Refusing to allow a person to spend time alone.
- Thwarting a person's professional or personal goals.
- Instilling self-doubt and worthlessness.
- Gaslighting: making a person question their competence and even their basic perceptual experiences.

[WomensLaw.org](#)

Abuse comes in many forms. Even when there is no physical violence, abusive language can be very damaging to you and your children. Emotional and psychological abuse include mostly non-physical behaviors that the abuser uses to control, isolate, or frighten you. Often, the abuser uses it to break down your self-esteem and self-worth in order to create a psychological dependency on him/her. Emotional and psychological abuse are hard forms of abuse to recognize because the abuse is spread throughout your everyday interactions.

Additional signs of emotional and psychological abuse are listed below.

- Getting angry in a way that is terrifying to you.
- Threatening your pets.
- Saying things like “If I can’t have you, no one can.”
- Constantly accusing you of being unfaithful.
- Changing the subject whenever you try to start conversations.
- Continually pretending not to understand what you are saying, making you feel stupid, refusing to validate your thoughts and opinions.
- Making your needs and feelings seem unimportant.

If you are the victim of emotional and psychological abuse, you may be hesitant to seek help or tell your friends and family because you fear they will not believe you or take you seriously. You may feel shame or confusion as to what is happening. However, seeking help and support is essential to ending an emotionally or psychologically abusive relationship. The effects of these types of abuse are serious and it is common for emotional and psychological abuse to escalate to physical violence. Local domestic violence programs often offer free counseling, support groups, and the advocates in these organizations could point you to other local help and support options. In addition, depending on how domestic violence is defined in your state, the abuser’s behavior can fall under certain crimes, or you may qualify for a restraining order. A few states specifically allow someone to get a restraining order based on “coercive control,” which is a form of emotional and psychological abuse.

TOXIC MASCULINITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

“Toxic masculinity is what can come of teaching boys that they can’t express openly, that they have to be tough all the time; that anything other than that makes them ‘feminine’ or ‘weak.’ It’s these cultural lessons that have been linked to aggression and violence, leaving boys and men at disproportionate risk for school discipline, academic challenges, and health disparities, including cardiovascular problems and substance abuse.” – [The New York Times](#)

[India Times](#)

While many men tend to take pride in the machismo of being a man, they secretly are victimized in the process, which in turn creates a toxic relationship with their families, co-workers and even their partners. In our everyday lives, we may ignore the implications of such socially constructed masculinity; however, it is a matter of grave concern that must be tended to before it becomes the root of all other problems and poisons the very foundation of our society.

- The concept that men must suppress their emotions. Even when in a relationship, they tend to hide a lot from their partners, and instead of discussing their grievances and sharing their problems, they let the toxic masculinity creep in and destroy their peace of mind.
- The idea that men must always win arguments. Winning and losing are two sides of the same coin and although, in terms of love and relationship, the two don’t really matter, but for a man who is suffering from the complex of toxic masculinity, it is but all about the win.

[Center for Modern Relationships](#)

Toxic masculinity can be damaging in close relationships, especially in romantic relationships. It can interfere with how you relate to your partner, how you express your emotions to your partner, and whether or not you even allow yourself to feel a certain emotion. This emotional disconnect between yourself and others can impact not only communication and conflict resolution, but also your physical intimacy. Here are three ways in which toxic masculinity could be hurting your relationship:

- Communication, especially during an argument. Effective communication between couples requires active listening, expressing understanding, providing empathy, and learning the skills to articulate how you're feeling. Most of us aren't taught these skills from our parents or from society, and from my work with heterosexual couples, I notice it can be difficult for some men to identify what their partner is feeling and ask about the feelings as opposed to becoming defensive or angry. On the other hand, a man may have his feelings hurt by something that happened, and he may struggle with how to express himself without coming across as angry, aggressive, or avoidant. By not teaching boys and men how to communicate when they're hurt or upset, we are hurting them in their communication and how they connect in their intimate relationships.
- Physical Intimacy. The same way society puts unrealistic expectations and pressure on women about their sexuality and libido, we also place a great deal of pressure on men. Men are often labeled as "sex fiends" or needing to have an insatiable sexual appetite, or there must be something wrong with them. Men are taught that they must easily and quickly have and maintain an erection, or they're a failure in the bedroom. These pressures coupled with no emotional outlet to discuss stress and anxiety can often cause erectile dysfunction and anxiety related to sex and other physical intimacy. Such pressures can place a further strain on the relationship causing partners to become emotionally and physically distant.
- Expressing vulnerability. Being able to express vulnerability in your romantic relationship is a key factor in building trust, maintaining security, and feeling emotionally and physically connected. Vulnerability can show up in all types of ways in your relationship, and often, we don't see it as a missing piece after an argument or when something is feeling off. To take accountability for your actions and offer a genuine apology is extremely vulnerable because you have to admit to yourself and your partner, "I messed up" or "I hurt you." Vulnerability also plays a major role in connecting physically. If you see being vulnerable equated to being weak or something to stay far away from, you may be inadvertently sabotaging your relationship.

Toxic masculinity can be harmful to yourself and to your relationships; however, it can be improved upon and changed with intentional self-reflection, work, and time. Toxic masculinity can be combated by examining messages you've received about what it means to be a "man" from your family, your cultural background, your religion, and so forth, and by reflecting on what is helpful and relevant to who you are today and what isn't helpful or what is an outdated message. Many of the cultural and societal messages we give to men about what it means to be "masculine" or a "real man" can be harmful and can cause men to feel disconnected and confused as to how to handle difficult emotions in intimate relationships. If you are struggling with how to combat toxic masculinity individually or in your relationship, I challenge you to take action. Finding a therapist for yourself or for your relationship, joining a men's support group or

simply starting to open up to loved ones are good starting points in experiencing deeper intimacy in your relationships.

Vocal Media

- The effects of toxic masculine mindsets can cause people to become shallow. Men now care about weight and appearance more than they did in the past, and this increased pressure from men for good looks has led to eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and weight anxiety.
- Women are encouraged to manage men's emotions when men adopt a lack of responsibility for their actions and shift blame onto victims.
- The media frames dating as transactional – this leads to the toxic person “keeping score.” This is what makes people believe that people can be “won over” if they shower them in gifts and affection, gaining some sort of “love points.”
- Men have begun lashing out and raging at any sort of rejection. Men are taught that being rejected means there must be something wrong with the woman, not with themselves.
- Toxic masculinity leads to men viewing sex as an act of domination rather than one that should be enjoyed by both parties.
- Toxic masculinity also pits women against each other due to the fear of winding up alone.