

# America's Next Saddest Family

## By Dawson Moore

PO Box 3505  
Valdez AK 99686  
907.255.5325; [dawsonguy@juno.com](mailto:dawsonguy@juno.com)

## America's Next Saddest Family

### CHARACTERS

#### The Contestants:

- Tully: Female, 30s. The second wife.  
Sandra: Female, 50s. The first wife.  
Peter: Male, 20s. The only child.  
Lilli: Female, any age. Homeless, deranged.

#### The Judges:

- Evelyn: Female, 30s. The British leader. Hyper-critical.  
Billy: Male, early 20s. The youth representative.  
Archie: Male, 40s. So positive, it makes him seem simple.

### COSTUMES

The first three contestants wear dressy funeral blacks. Lilli wears an oversized men's trench coat over shabby clothes. The judges all dress fashionably, appropriate to their different personalities.

### SETTING

Center stage is a small platform. Stage left is a judge's table with three chairs. Stage right are three more chairs.

### TIME

A couple of years from now.

*Evelyn, Eric, and Billy sit at the judge's table, in darkness.  
Sandra and Peter sit opposite of them, also in darkness.  
Tully stands on the platform in a soft spotlight.  
She is giving a eulogy.  
It is very emotional.*

TULLY

When he returned the money he had stolen from the orphanage...  
To the orphanage.  
That was when I knew that I found someone I could save,  
And through him, I could save myself.  
All he had to do was leave his loveless marriage.  
And he did.  
But I couldn't save Jethro...  
From the insanity that destroyed both his marriages, and drove him penniless into the street.  
From his addictions, which took his lungs, which then took his life...

*She is overcome then starts again.*

Jethro and I—

*Billy blows an obnoxious horn.  
Lights rise on the rest of the stage.*

BILLY

Time, yo!

PETER

*To Sandra, hushed.*

But her time wasn't up!

EVELYN

Okay, nice try, Tully.

I see what you were going for there, with the emotional honesty.

BILLY

Boo!

ARCHIE

I thought it was great, Evelyn!

EVELYN

But she needed to make us feel it, Archie.

*To Tully.*

Hold back those tears, and make US cry them.

Not YOU.

We all know you're sad, hold it in.

ARCHIE

You were very brave!

TULLY

Thanks.

BILLY

What-evs.

EVELYN

And the saving.

There was so much saving...

You were saving him, then he was saving you, only you could only save him on Easter...

Or something!

I couldn't keep straight who was saving whom!

*The judges all laugh.*

TULLY

That's a ... a good point!

EVELYN

But I really liked what you were going for there.

Nice job.

Nice... try.

Who's next?

BILLY

Go... on!

ARCHIE

That was just super!

TULLY

Okay.

*The judges all begin working on their phones.  
Tully and Sandra briefly meet as they pass each other.*

SANDRA

Don't let it get to you.

TULLY

This is insane.

SANDRA

You've seen the show.

TULLY

I know, but—

SANDRA

We've been over this.

TULLY

What if all we do is end up on... the season opener... the blooper special?

SANDRA

Don't even say that.

Toughen up.

*She takes the stage and looks at the judges.  
They ignore her.  
Tully and Peter speak hurriedly in lowered voices.*

PETER

We can leave.

Right now.

Fuck this place.

No, it's okay.

TULLY

No, it's not.  
It's sick.

PETER

Don't be maudlin.

TULLY

I'm not... can men be maudlin?

PETER

Clearly, yes.

TULLY

... so I'm just a stupid little baby now.  
Is that it?  
No one cares if the baby doesn't know what the big words mean.

PETER

Maudlin is two syllables. Calm down.

TULLY

Maybe I should tell them about us.

PETER

What?

TULLY

See if that "bit of history" trends us up on the show.

PETER

Don't even joke about that.  
We all need this, so just buck up and pull your weight.

TULLY

PETER*Referring to Sandra.*

Look at her.  
She loves this.

TULLY

None of us love it.  
Jethro's dead.  
It's actually very sad.  
Reality game show contest notwithstanding.

*Sandra draws the judge's attention, one at a time.*SANDRA

Hello?  
Are you ready for me?

ARCHIE

You bet!  
How are you feeling?

SANDRA

I'm very sad, Archie.

EVELYN

Good!  
Take a couple of seconds, then you have a minute.

SANDRA

I thought it was—

EVELYN

We don't want to see the whole thing.  
I can tell whether someone is America's Next Saddest Family material within the first fifteen seconds.

BILLY*Still on his phone.*

Get... on... with... it... LADY!

ARCHIE

Just boil it down to the essentials. You'll do great! Ready to start?

SANDRA

Okay.

*They all stare at her.  
Sandra exchanges a look with Tully.  
She turns out to the audience.  
The lights narrow.*

Jethro was my first love.  
He was supposed to be my only love.  
He was so passionate, and smart... but sometimes that was the problem.  
I believed he was going to change the world, and I was going to be the one changing it with him. I believed...

*Billy starts making a TICK-TOCK noise in the background.  
She tries to summarize.*

um... okay, we were drifting apart, and then he left me for a younger woman...  
Who looks just like me.  
Which is creepy.  
And he kept getting weirder.  
And, and he's a bad father—

*Billy loves his horn.  
The lights return to full.*

BILLY

Boom.

ARCHIE

That was just super!

BILLY

For reals?



ARCHIE

Oh yes!  
She really took me on a journey!

BILLY

Naw, Dawg. Naw.

EVELYN

I agree with Archie, in that I thought the journey was there.  
But I concur with Billy, in that she didn't TAKE us on it.

BILLY

Aw yeah.

EVELYN

I get that it was SAD that she was abandoned, and I get that it's SAD that it was a direct trade-in for a younger model.

BILLY

Oh no you didn't!

EVELYN

...but boo-hoo, you know.  
I need to see that she really cares if she's going to make me care.  
Where were the tears?

TULLY

I thought you didn't want tears?

*Tense moment.*

*Sandra communicates "noooo" to Tully.*

*The judges look back and forth, surprised to be challenged.*

EVELYN

No, dear, we just didn't want them from YOU.

TULLY

... What?

EVELYN

I know what America wants.

So far, I've got to say that's looking like not you-and-your-cliché-run-of-the-mill family.

And, Sandra...

I believe what Billy is saying is:

How are young people supposed to relate to a story that scattered?

BILLY

What what!

EVELYN

Pick a topic.

We've seen enough.

BILLY

Get ... off ... LADY!!

SANDRA

Thanks, that's very useful feedback.

*Peter charges the stage.*

Oh, no ... Peter!

PETER

I have just about had it with you people!

ARCHIE

Wow!

PETER

You're a bunch of vultures, only instead of carrion, you feed on suffering.

BILLY

YAH YAH YAH!!!

PETER

We've suffered plenty already.  
Is that what you want?  
Is that what you want from us?

EVELYN

Yes, of course that's what we want.

ARCHIE

That's what everyone wants.

PETER

You want to hear about how my Dad was never actually capable of love for anything but dead philosophers?  
About how he married my saint of a mother as an experiment in Cartesian logic?  
About how three months after the divorce, he brought home a hot step-mom.  
And she looked like my mother, only younger.  
This was very confusing for me...  
I was a teenage boy!  
His last three years, he was mostly homeless.  
And an asshole.  
A homeless asshole.  
And there were... two of him.  
One who was normal, plain... friendly, but lost.  
And the other him:  
Dark. Maybe even evil.  
But more... present.  
And now I miss them... both.

*Evelyn and Archie rise, clapping.*

*Billy jumps up on the stage, stands in front of him, then chest bumps him.*

BILLY

Respect.

EVELYN

That is what we're looking for.  
That I felt.  
That I believed.

ARCHIE

When you said there were two of his dad... I was picturing two of them!

PETER

*Sad.*

You're not getting this.

EVELYN

That's perfect, keep that up.

The anger, the suppressed rage...

And those little scandalous bits...

Was he admitting he had an affair with his step-mother?

ARCHIE

Gives people something to talk about!

*Sandra and Tully bring Peter back to the seats as the conversation continues.*

BILLY

It's dirty.

ARCHIE

I was titillated.

EVELYN

Let's think about this, team:

Can we take the whole family?

Will those women pick it up with the grieving?

*To the contestants.*

Do you think you can do that, ladies?

Do you want to compete for the ten-million-dollar prize?

Can you be as sad as Peter for us?

*Tully and Sandra nod furiously.*

*Peter sadly tries to join in.*

EVELYN

Great, that's great.

There's just one more step.

TULLY

We're ready. We're ready for anything.

*Billy crosses over to their side to dance about them while Archie makes his announcement to the audience.*

*The dancing is a tad lewd...*

*But they all want the money.*

*Archie starts officially announcing to the cameras.*

ARCHIE

It's time for an America's Next Saddest Family... Twist!!!

We've found someone else who MUST speak.

SANDRA

Who?

BILLY

What what!

ARCHIE

We've already brought out the sad first wife!!

BILLY

Wikki-wikki-wikki!

ARCHIE

We've brought out the wife who thought she settled for him, but then HE left HER!!

TULLY

All right now.

ARCHIE

And his son, who can't even admit that he's sorry his father is DEAD!

*Peter starts sobbing.*

*Billy pets his sad little head.*

TULLY

Who's the guest? I'm not scared. None of us are scared. Stop it, Peter.

ARCHIE

Wife number one. Wife number two. We would like to introduce you to the wild woman he spent his last night on earth with... Miss Lilliford Marie Evans.

*Lilli enters.*

*She is wild-eyed, disheveled, and confused about where she is.*

*Billy goes to escort her to the stage.*

SANDRA

What on earth?

TULLY

Who... who is this?

EVELYN

Come on down, Lilli!

LILLI

"Come on, Eilene."

*After starting songs, she continues to mumble sing them until her next line.*

*Lilli seems scared of the lights, a la King Kong with camera flashbulbs.*

EVELYN

Relax, Lilli.

LILLI

"Relax, don't do it..."

EVELYN

We talked about this, Lilli. We're here to talk about Jethro.

LILLI

*Deeply felt.*

"I'm all out of love... I'm so lost without him."

PETER

Three's been so much great music since the fucking 80s!

*Peter and Lilli stare at each other.*

SANDRA

I don't care who you were to Jethro.

He was mine first.

He was mine best.

TULLY

That is so tired, Sandra.

LILLI

You are...

The wives.

EVELYN

That's right, Lilli.

These are the women from before Peter met you.

The women who hurt him.

Come on, Lilli!

Isn't there anything you'd like to say to them about how they made you feel?

What do you want to say to them??

*She points and silently screams as driving, violent music comes up.*

*Movement becomes stop motion for everyone but Evelyn.*

*She steps to the audience and narrates in real time.*

What happened a year ago this day still stands as the most important day in the history of the ANSF.

She pulled out the knife she had snuck into the audition room in her bra...

And stabbed Sandra to death.

*Sandra exits as she dies.*

Some say he just ran the wrong way,

But I maintain that Billy was trying to help when he was impaled.

*He runs onto the knife, then stumbles backward.*

EVELYN cont.

Archie said he was only trying to help him,  
But I think the network was right to fire him for his cowardice.

*Archie grabs Billy and drags him off.*

Peter fought valiantly,  
But the insane always fight harder.

*Peter's dead.*

She chased Tully all over that studio...  
And then Tully led her to me.

*Lili murders Evelyn.*

*Sandra enters in another outfit, nearly identical to Evelyn's attire.  
She is now the snarky commentator with a British accent.*

SANDRA

But Tully got away.  
While the crazy homeless woman we'd invited on our show murdered us, she unscrewed a  
vent, and escaped the murderous rampage.

*Lilli exits.*

Lilli was captured and executed on primetime, like she deserved.  
We mourned Evelyn, Billy, and...  
Well, none of us really liked Archie.  
He was too fake.  
We missed them...  
But the show had to go on.

*Billy and Archie reenter.*

*They have swapped clothes, and are now playing the opposite character type  
from before.*



ARCHIE

Pop pop!

BILLY

I think you're an excellent replacement host. You're just doing so well!

ARCHIE

Pa-chow!

*Tully moves to the center stage area.*

SANDRA

Tully went on to win America's Next Saddest Family...

Single-handed.

The first person to ever do that.

We all remember her interview one week later.

*The lights narrow to the center spot on Tully again.*

*She's clearly not all there, but she's happy you're watching.*

TULLY

In that moment,

When I knew I was going to live,

And I knew it was of my own doing,

That I had saved myself...

I knew my life was turning around.

ARCHIE

You see people die?

TULLY

I didn't really notice them.

BILLY

Weren't you glad that it wasn't you?

TULLY

Ha ha ha.

Of course.

SANDRA

What was that moment like for you?

TULLY

It's when I understood it.  
 Everybody dies.  
 Everybody.  
 Not everybody gets paid.  
 Not everybody gets seen.  
 And now was my time...  
 ...to be seen getting paid.  
 Instead of watching my life...  
 On the blooper reel.  
 I owe so much  
 To all of you.  
 For watching me  
 And my family.

*The judges are thrilled.  
 The rise to their feet, having found their reality messiah.*

THE THREE JUDGES

As they died.

TULLY

And I was born.

THE THREE JUDGES

Alone but so much richer!

TULLY

All I had to do...

THE THREE JUDGES

Was lose everything!!!

*The judges applaud Tully vigorously as the lights fade.  
 End of play.*