

CURIOUS FATHER

by  
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CURIOUS FATHER

CAST (in order of appearance):

HENRY: mid 50s, male  
SPIKE: early 40s, male  
BODI: early 40s, male  
KAT: mid 30s, female  
JED: mid 20s, male  
DOUG: mid 30s, male  
RONNIE/HUNTER: mid 30s, male  
TRACHTENBERG, early 40s, male  
VAN: mid 30s, male

SETTING:

A Victorian, in remote upstate New York.

TIME:

Present day.

ACT I

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP.

Empty stage save for Henry in a chair.  
He wears a nametag. It is blank.

HENRY

Yes, I'd like to say something.

(beat)

In the early part of my marriage, back when there are lists and you tack them up, I started an extension to my house that I never finished. A guest bedroom right off the master. Ten years and counting, conduit still sprouts from the ceiling. Big gray ribs of insulation are just there. I lost interest. Margot, my wife, put in a bed to home it up. She begged me to staple in carpeting, drywall. She was afraid our two kids -- I have two kids, Effie and Scott -- she was afraid they electrocute themselves, fork in a socket. But they never went in this room because they thought it was haunted. And in a way it was. Eventually Margot's needs faded until there was this empty room off our marriage that we never talked about, never went into. An unpainted door shut tight right where we slept.

(beat)

What I want to say is that what is empty is never empty.

(beat)

So early morning, this spring, Margot banged my toolbox into the addition. Made a big show. This was right after the tests on her Lump came back with nothin doin. She was all about new patterns. Like soy milk. Like no more unfinished business. When she moved the bed, I heard pages splash to the ground and every sound stopped. I know that silence well. I manage the state concert hall in New Brunswick. I've heard a soloist's violin crack and fold in from the pressure. I've seen the lighting grid come raining. Irrevocable things happen all the time.

(beat)

Margot sat on the edge of the mattress and leafed through the pile of magazines. My magazines. The ones I'd bought from a newsstand on Broadway and hid, for years now, between the mattress and the wall. Young men in them, penetrated on every page, wider than I thought possible. I sat next to my wife and my whole body shook.

(beat)

"Henry, sweetheart, tell me," she said. "Did these do you any good?" At that moment when our marriage made no sense, when all we had were our patterns...little sun of grapefruit in the morning, a joint each month on Date Night, I was more in love with her than I'd ever been. Love like she was the last log of a splintering raft. Everything I know is out on the water.

(beat)  
I was, I am, terrified.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 2

A whistle. The sound of a train departing. LIGHTS UP.

HENRY enters stage right, dressed in a heavy overcoat. He carries a suitcase.

SPIKE enters stage left. He wears a leather jacket that is open. Beneath it, he wears a t-shirt that reads, "Juicy" in sequins.

They stand at opposite ends of the stage. Spike slowly approaches, but Henry does not move.

SPIKE

Henry?

HENRY

My daughter has that same shirt.

SPIKE

She does. (extending hand) I'm Spike.

HENRY

No you're not. No one has a name like that.

SPIKE

Congratulations, I'm your first.

HENRY

Look, I shouldn't be here.

SPIKE

Shouldn't be...?

HENRY

This was my wife's idea.

SPIKE

Your wife.

HENRY

...Are you going to repeat everything I say?

SPIKE

Henry, nobody bites. Let me get your suitcase. We should get back.

HENRY

Give me a minute. Give me a minute here. (Beat) When's the next train?

SPIKE

To New York? Tomorrow. There's one a day.

HENRY

Just one? Well, I'll call a cab. I've got no problem calling a cab.

SPIKE

You're not going to find a cab.

HENRY

Then I'll just find a hotel and stay the night.

SPIKE

This is a small town. There are no hotels.

HENRY

There's a hotel somewhere. And I'll go back tomorrow. I've got work. And plants.

SPIKE

Henry...

HENRY

Don't waste your time on me.

SPIKE

(A new tack) You know Bodi hates that I wear this shirt. He tells me I scare people. I'm supposed to look...I don't know, *beige*. Barn jacket, jeans, boots, the whole upstate *shebang*. I'm not supposed to blow your "cover", our cover. This is a small town. Two stop lights -- God help the people who try to put in a third. Everyone's very quiet and peaceful except when they go hunting and kill the lovely animals.

(beat)

But I tell Bodi: isn't this why we created this place, outside of everything? So that anybody could be precisely anybody? So we don't have to pretend anymore.

Spike zips up his leather jacket.

SPIKE

Is that better? (beat) I'm sorry if I scared you. You've come this far, Henry. Try going a little bit further.

Henry takes one step towards him.

SPIKE

That's right. Come on.

Henry walks toward Spike. They exit.

SCENE 3

BODI enters, addresses the audience.

Behind him, high across the back of the stage, is the serrated profile of a mountain range. This is remote country.

As he speaks, lights warm and illuminate the interior of Dawn Manor.

BODI

Welcome to Dawn Manor. I see some returning faces - Ronnie, hello, always great to see you again. For those of you who are new, I'll start by saying you can pass all your valuables forward... your watches, wallets... Sorry, bad joke!

(Pause)

You're probably wondering what you got yourself into up here. *Who is this guy Bodi?* You're thinking. *I made a serious mistake-I'm not-This isn't-I don't have the time* -- Let go of that poverty mind. You have the time. This is the place.

(beat)

First, I've got to warn you about something. You see this forest here, behind the house? That's the West Kill Mountain Wilderness, part of the Catskills. It's very beautiful and very dense. Spruce, sugar maple, hemlock for miles. But I don't think you know how dangerous it is.

(beat)

A few years back, a group of men from Franklin Notch, the town down the road, went into the forest and disappeared. Their sons went in to find them and these were young guys, strong guys. And they didn't come back. So the Mayor asked some of the toughest men in the town to venture in after them. Guys with arms like car jacks. So they got their guns and their dogs and went into the forest. You can see where this is going. Over time, the remaining men in Franklin -- there were some and they looked like Alan Alda -- they wouldn't go into the forest anymore.

(beat)

One day a stranger shows up. Nothing special. He's got a belly, knee keeps giving him trouble. He says, "Anything dangerous to do around here?" Right this way, Stranger. Here's a nametag.

(Writes on notecard from his pocket)

Note to self: nametags.

(beat)

So he goes into the forest alone. At dusk. No gun. Just a torch.

(beat)

He walks the path, and eventually this path comes to a lake, as wide as he can see. And on the surface of this lake are all the bodies of the young men and hunters who have come to prove themselves. Drowned. The end of the road.

(beat)

What does the stranger do? The stranger goes back to town and gets, oh I don't know, how many of you are there? He gets you guys. And buckets. He takes these men back to the pond to bucket out the water. Now, if you've ever done bucketing, it's a pain in the ass. But these men clear the water. They clear the water off the soul. In time, they find, lying at the bottom of the pool, a giant man covered in hair. The hair on top of his head connects to his beard which grows into the hair on his chest which runs down all the way to his toes. And just as the last of the water is drawn from the lake, this man opens his eyes and says, "Thank you." He says, "I have been drowning my entire life."

(beat)

Are you ready to start drawing the water off? Are you ready to breathe?

(beat)

Dawn Manor is intentional spiritual community. It is designed to help men in transition. What do I mean by that? For the next four days together, I'm going to ask you to go deeper. Deeper than you've gone before. Inside the safety and unconditional love of this house, I'm going to ask you to put aside your jobs, and your lovers and outside expectations so that we're left with...just you. Because for the last howevermanyyears of your life, you've been trying to swim. To be straight. To be strong. And you're tired aren't you? Well, here's the shore. Here's some company --

KAT

Mr. Charles is there anything else you need me to do before I go?

FULL STAGE LIGHTS UP.

Dawn Manor. The living room of the Manor is the semi-circle of chairs. A vase with a pussy-willow branch. On one side, a small table with a phone. On the opposite side, a wood stove.

Upstage, is a double-door covered by a drawn curtain. A WINDOW to one side.

Kat, 40s, is standing stage right, dressing into a winter jacket and scarf.

Excuse me? BODI

I got all the upstairs. KAT

Kat, you got all the rooms? BODI

I did. KAT

Did you wipe the inside of the drawers, did you get that? BODI

And the bathrooms and I put the bread into the bread-maker. I'll think you're all set. I'll come by on Sunday. KAT

And the windows? We'll have guests here this weekend and - (at the window) BODI  
I wanted the windows cleaned. See, they haven't been.

The windows? Did you ask me to do that? KAT  
(taking off her scarf)

I shouldn't have to ask. BODI

I'm sorry. I can do it quick. KAT

I'll take care of it. You seem in a rush, are you in a rush? BODI

Well... (looks at her watch) KAT  
I'd like to get home. Lord knows my son doesn't cook for me.

I'd like to talk for a moment. Do you have five minutes? BODI

Sure. What is it Mr. Charles? KAT

I want to say that the last few times I paid for you to come and clean and I did not appreciate you sending your son. That was not the arrangement. BODI

KAT

Were there any problems?

BODI

I didn't hire him and you didn't inform me. And I'm afraid there were more serious issues.

KAT

What kind?

BODI

Some things have gone missing.

KAT

What kind of things?

BODI

A leather jacket, from the closet.

KAT

A leather jacket?

BODI

For example. A small antique clock. A stoker to the wood stove.

KAT

A stoker? What would he want with that?

BODI

You tell me.

KAT

Are you sure, I mean, how do you know it was my son? You have men here sometimes, don't you? It could be any of them--

BODI

Kat. We're sure.

KAT

I haven't seen any of those things, but I'll talk to him. He's a good kid. I'm sure he didn't mean to, or...he didn't mean. I'll bring him by and you two--

BODI

(writing her a check)

Actually Kat, we'd like you to get our things back.

KAT

...O.K.

BODI

Fine.

KAT

I'm sorry.

BODI

You don't need to apologize.

Kat dresses to leave.

Bodi takes out checkbook.

KAT

Is there something else?

BODI

There's one more thing.

(he rips check out)

You'll notice I added a couple of weeks pay to the check.

KAT

Why did you do that?

BODI

This will be your last day.

KAT

What?

BODI

I think it makes the most sense for us.

KAT

But...

Bodi waits, listening peacefully. Kat stumbles.

KAT

But I swear, you'll get your things back. I'll come by regular. You don't understand Mr. Charles how much this job means to me. There's not much work here. And I've worked hard for you, haven't I?

BODI

It's not a question of that.

KAT

There's not much work. Last winter, I shovelled horse manure every morning at 5 am. That's the kind of jobs there are. I had to drive 35 miles across the pass just to get...(beat) It doesn't matter does it.

BODI

I'm happy to be a reference for you.

KAT

Nobody asks for references.

BODI

There are some things that I've got to take care of before the guests come. But thank you Kat for all your help and time. And I hope to hear from you about what we've talked about.

Bodi EXITS stage right.

Kat folds the check. And again. And again. She exits out the door.

We hear the voices of Spike and Henry outside.

SCENE 4

Spike and Henry enter "The Manor."

HENRY

Who was that?

SPIKE

(watching her go)

Oh, our...former housekeeper. We've had some problems. Nothing you need to worry about. Where was I? Oh right, so we ask: no alcohol, no drugs, no sex, and no plastics because Bodi is environmentally sensitive.

HENRY

Plastics?

SPIKE

Some guys, they think they can bring their Rubber gear anywhere. (beat) You have no idea what I'm talking about do you? (beat) Lucky you. Well, this is the living room. Most of what happens here happens here. The kitchen is that way, but we ask you to not go in because we've had problems with over-snacking.

HENRY

This is a big place. So far from other houses.

SPIKE

You wouldn't believe how much we had to do. When we bought it in the spring, this old woman (beat) I mean, not like you, old old old. She lived here with a thousand cats and there was shag carpeting up these walls. For the cats. So they could climb around and hiss and fuck or whatever they do. Rigby, our dog, couldn't stand to be inside the house.

He howled at the walls I cannot tell you. We had to keep him outside until we replaced the floor planks.

HENRY

What happened to the woman?

SPIKE

Oh, funny, nobody ever asks about her. People only ask about Rigby. I don't know what happened to her. It was a foreclosure, so you know. She goes away. She has an aunt, we think, nearby. We did find lots of her stuff around. Letters, a whole bunch of terrible watercolors. That wood stove right there was down in the basement, pristine condition. Up here, antiques aren't antiques, they're furniture. It took us three months to get most of her junk out to the dump. And voila, Dawn Manor opened in August.

HENRY

Am I the only one here?

SPIKE

Your roommate is here as well.

HENRY

Sorry? I thought that I'd have my own room.

SPIKE

Oh no. Nobody does.

Spike and Henry ascend a small set of stairs to Henry's "room", stage left.

HENRY

(Stops on stairs)

There no singles? This is the kind of thing you could have told us.

SPIKE

It just doesn't make sense for what we're trying to do, to have guys on their own, closing the door to the process.

HENRY

The "process"? What's that?

SPIKE

(caught off guard)

To growing...and integrating...Oh Bodi answers that stuff. I just cook and fluff the pussy willow. I'm not the therapist.

Henry's ROOM. The room contains two small beds and a nightstand between them.

JED, mid-20s, sits awkwardly on one bed wearing a bright orange puffy jacket and loafers. No socks.

SPIKE

Jed, hello. Henry, Jed, Jed Henry (beat) You know Jed you can take off your jacket.

JED

I'm cold.

SPIKE

I set the thermostat myself. It's 68 degrees.

Jed shrugs.

SPIKE

You didn't want to go on a walk?

JED

Nope.

SPIKE

Well, then. I'll let you two get acquainted. I'll be downstairs cooking. Intros are at five.

Spike exits. Henry settles on the bed opposite Jed. Silence.

HENRY

I didn't know I'd have a roommate.

JED

Me neither.

Henry picks up a journal on the bed.

HENRY

What's this?

JED

For our secrets. Be nicer if it came with a lock.

HENRY

How long have you been up here?

JED

This morning.

HENRY

Did I miss anything?

JED

Some stuff. (beat) You're older than my father, aren't you.

HENRY

I don't know your father.

JED

So are you gay?

HENRY

What kind of question is that?

JED

Are you?

HENRY

I've been married for twenty two years. I have a son and a daughter.

JED

(visible relief)

Thank god. (beat) I thought they'd put me with... you know. Some guy who would try to make me.

HENRY

I don't think that happens here.

JED

Well don't get any ideas.

Henry opens his bag. Unpacks.

HENRY

(as much to himself)

This is going to be hell isn't?

JED

What's that supposed to mean?

HENRY

Oh I don't know.

(small talk)

Why don't you tell me where you came from?

JED

Why do you want to know?

HENRY

I'm trying to be nice.

JED

Well then.

HENRY

Well then.

JED

What's your wife think about this?

HENRY

You know Jed, I don't know you. And usually, if you get to ask questions you have to answer them too.

Jed goes quiet.

JED

Scranton.

HENRY

What's that?

JED

Pennsylvania. You asked. I saved half the drawers for you.

Henry opens the top one.

JED

Not that one. That one's for me.

HENRY

That your Bible? Or was that just here?

JED

It's mine.

HENRY

Some light bedtime reading?

JED

*"And it came to pass that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."*

HENRY

That's lovely. What is that?

JED

Samuel. It's the one gay part. David's the one who kills Goliath. Goliath was uncircumcised. I find that weird. Penises, being in the Bible at all, you know? Anyway, David meets Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and they fall in love. Jonathan "surpasses the love of women." They kiss "until David exceeds." What do you think that means? Exceeds?

HENRY

That's in the Bible? I find that hard to believe.

JED  
My father is a minister.

HENRY  
I see.

JED  
Hate the sin, love the sinner. Can you explain that to me?

HENRY  
That's outside my expertise.

JED  
I hope someone can.

LIGHTS DOWN

A bell rings in the darkness.

END OF EXCERPT