

THE FATHER'S GIFT
A play in one act
By George Halitzka

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THE TIME

1873 and the years following.

THE PLACE

Molokai, Hawaii. A leper colony
and other locations in the Islands.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Older Kalani
Mr. Hall
Reverend Hyde
Superintendent
Leper 1
Leper 2
Hawaiian Man
Father Damien de Veuster
Young Kalani
Makua
Lili
Bishop Maigret
Petero
Captain
Mother Marianne
Other Lepers

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The Father's Gift premiered at Parkview Church, Iowa City, Iowa, on December 3, 2005. It was directed by the playwright. Set design by Ann McCaffery-Elder and Scott Sterner; lighting by Dan Grimes; original music by John Carlson and Dan Van Oss; costumes by Jean Boatman. The production stage manager was Joy Perkins, assisted by Julie Bates.

Older KalaniKatie Aunan
Father DamienJohn Claassen
Superintendent. . . . Doug Boatman
Leper 1 John Ceponis
Leper 2 Wayne Johnson
Bishop Maigret. . . . Matt Johnson
Mr. Hall. Howard Meadows
Rev. HydeMichael Scherer
Hawaiian Man.Scott Wylie
Young Kalani. Jill Aunan
Makua William Anderson
Lili. Jordan Hougham
Petero. Tony Ortale
Captain Craig Dahlen
Mother Marianne . . . Beth Noeller

Other Lepers: Evonne Smith, Jason Tinnian, Stephanie Brooks, Gabe Frantz, Rachael Rooy, and Jen Shelman.

To view photos from the original production, visit
www.dramabygeorge.com/gallery/mainimages/TFG.html.

**"Greater love has no man than this,
that he lay down his life for his friends."**

*- Inscribed on Father Damien's
memorial at Molokai*

*This one is for Scott Sterner, who believed in telling a story
about lepers at Christmas; and for Joy Perkins
and Jessica Lewis, the best dramaturgs money can't buy.*

THE FATHER'S GIFT

(In darkness, we hear a group of LEPERS singing softly; beautifully. A shaft of dreamlike light finds a rough wooden manger. YOUNG KALANI approaches it in awe. She strokes the wood; feels the hay; puts her hand inside to touch the Christ Child.)

LEPERS

(singing)

WHEN, OH WHEN SHALL IT BE GIVEN TO ME TO BEHOLD MY GOD?
HOW LONG SHALL I BE CAPTIVE IN THIS STRANGE LAND
WHERE NIGHT AND DAY WEEPING, WEEPING ALONE IS MY PORTION?

(The singing continues under as OLDER KALANI steps into another pool of light and speaks. Meanwhile, KALANI'S FATHER joins YOUNG KALANI by the manger.)

WHEN SHALL I LEAVE THIS VALLEY OF FEAR
WHERE THE ONLY BREAD I EAT IS MY CONTINUAL TEARS?
WHEN SHALL I SEE MY BELOVED JESUS?
WHEN SHALL I LOOK UPON MY SAVIOR'S FACE?
WHEN SHALL HE BRING ETERNAL REST WITHOUT WEEPING?
WHEN, OH WHEN SHALL IT BE GIVEN TO ME . . .

OLDER KALANI

Christmas. I was a little girl, eyeing the manger at Christmas Eve Mass. "Papa," I whispered. "Papa, why was Jesus a baby?"

He tried, between stares from the old lady next to us, to whisper the Mystery. "We couldn't understand God," he said. "We were broken. We were hopeless. We despaired. So God was broken too. It was the only way we would listen."

God became a man . . . I never understood it. Not then. Not even when Papa died.

But when Father Damien picked up his cross and started to climb Skull Hill . . . when his face was swollen and his hands falling apart . . . when he couldn't even get out of bed . . . the Mystery was clear. That was the first time I understood my Papa.

(The lights quickly rise on two officious-looking men, REV. DR. HYDE, wearing the garb of a Congregational clergyman, and MR. HALL, Superintendent of the Board of Health, dressed in a bureaucratic suit. We hear native Hawaiian music playing underneath. On screen caption: "Honolulu, 1866.")

HALL

The heathen make beautiful music, Rev. Hyde.

HYDE

One might hope they would learn to sing of their Savior.

HALL

Many have.

HYDE

And even more continue in debauchery. Perhaps you are familiar with the Leprosy Problem, Mr. Hall?

HALL

You need not be insulting--

HYDE

I simply thought the President of the Board of Health would act to prevent an epidemic.

HALL

Then you have not read the new Segregation Law. We are addressing the problem humanely, scientifically . . . and dare I say, Biblically.

HYDE

Our Dr. Fitch has demonstrated beyond doubt that leprosy is a fourth stage of syphilis. Any *Biblical* solution must account for the judgment of God upon the leper.

HALL

Beyond doubt. You are familiar with Molokai Island?

HYDE

Hawaiian geography does not elude me.

HALL

There is a small peninsula of land completely isolated from the population. Sea on three sides. A cliff, one third of a mile high, on the fourth.

HYDE

And the lepers will be exiled there?

HALL

Exiled? Reverend Hyde, they will be colonists! The lepers will farm; fish; supply their own needs . . . in a place where they can hardly infect more with their promiscuity. We believe the epidemic will be a memory in ten years.

HYDE

I did you a disservice. A noble experiment, sir.

HALL

Then you will make it plain to your congregation that all good Christians will submit to the new law?

HYDE

Of course. I have investments in the cane fields. Should I stand by while the island economy is destroyed by sin?

(HYDE and HALL exchange a handshake as the lights fade out on them.)

(Elsewhere on stage, with the sound of seawash in the background, DAMIEN and a HAWAIIAN MAN enter carrying a long board. The HAWAIIAN MAN is sweating and out of breath. As they set the board down, he collapses onto the ground. On screen: "Hawaii, the Big Island, 1873.")

HAWAIIAN MAN

Father . . . Father, aren't you stopping for lunch?

DAMIEN

Waste of time, lunch.

(He begins planing a large wooden beam.)

HAWAIIAN MAN

I've never seen a white man work like you. Not many *kanaka*, either.

DAMIEN

Call me God's athlete. Help me with this.

(DAMIEN easily picks up his end of the beam. The HAWAIIAN MAN struggles mightily with the other.)

HAWAIIAN MAN

Can I borrow God's strength?

DAMIEN

(laughing, not unkindly)

I can get it.

HAWAIIAN MAN

You embarrass a weak old *kanaka*. And you call yourself a holy man.

(DAMIEN hefts the entire beam on a shoulder and moves it into position. Suddenly, YOUNG KALANI, a native Hawaiian girl about ten years old, rushes onstage.)

YOUNG KALANI

Father Damien, they need you! Right now--

DAMIEN

(facetiously)

Kalani . . . is someone dying?

YOUNG KALANI

He's going to start shooting--

DAMIEN

Shooting! Who--

YOUNG KALANI

The new law, Father! Doctor says Lili has the Separating Sickness, just like Papa.

DAMIEN

Leprosy . . . God forbid--

(The HAWAIIAN MAN crosses himself.)

YOUNG KALANI

Makua has a gun; won't let the doctor out of your house--

DAMIEN

My house? Stay here, Kalani!

(To reinforce his point, DAMIEN moves YOUNG KALANI to the HAWAIIAN MAN, who puts a protective arm around her. The lights shift to where MAKUA and LILI, a young native couple, are crouched behind the doorway of DAMIEN'S house. The DOCTOR is running away from them, black bag in hand.)

MAKUA

Run, white devil! Run!

(MAKUA fires his rifle into the air and laughs.)

Not so brave when the *kanaka* have guns like you!

(The DOCTOR runs offstage. DAMIEN approaches the door, hands held high.)

DAMIEN

Makua? It's Father Damien--

MAKUA

(pointing his gun at DAMIEN)

No one is taking my wife to die!

DAMIEN

I want to talk--

MAKUA

Who comes with you?

DAMIEN

I am alone--

LILI

I trust *Kamiano*--

MAKUA

If anyone else crosses this door, he dies!

(DAMIEN advances cautiously to his doorway. As he comes inside, LILI motions to MAKUA to lower his gun, which is still pointed at DAMIEN. When MAKUA does not comply, she reaches up and lowers it herself.)

LILI
Forgive my husband, Father. He is not well--

DAMIEN
How long have you known?

LILI
His crazy ways? Before our wedding day--

DAMIEN
(gently)
No, Lili . . . the Separating Sickness.

MAKUA
(raising his gun)
What devil told you that?

LILI
Makua!
(to DAMIEN)
The doctor saw my spots. I knew you would help us . . .

(LILI reaches her hand out to DAMIEN. Perhaps subconsciously, he flinches away from her. LILI lowers her head--she expected a different response.)

MAKUA
(spitting)
You white swine are all the same.

DAMIEN
Leprosy! Aren't you afraid--

MAKUA
Of sending my wife to die?

LILI
(sorrowful; trying to sound brave)
I go to Molokai; it is God's will--

MAKUA
(grudgingly)
She catches a new disease--and a new religion.

DAMIEN

Lili is a brave woman. No one will get sick if--

MAKUA

She cries last night, Father. Wails and weeps for hours--

LILI

Makua!

MAKUA

Not because she is ill. Because she leaves her husband; her home--

LILI

Does God want families torn apart?

MAKUA

Remember little Leilani? They found the spots on her; tore her from her mother--

DAMIEN

So you hide, and when the deputies come with their guns--

MAKUA

(waving his own rifle)

They go to hell ahead of me!

DAMIEN

Lili, I won't betray you.

MAKUA

(threateningly)

That is well for you--

DAMIEN

--But you will live in caves for the rest of your life--

LILI

(to MAKUA)

I am going to Molokai--

MAKUA

To die while you live--

(In the background, the DOCTOR returns, leading with him an armed DEPUTY. The DEPUTY steals

through the door of Damien's hut. He approaches MAKUA and LILI quietly, unobserved.)

LILI

Maybe you will come; Kalani goes with her Papa.

MAKUA

And Leilani does not! You white devils are the death of us all!

DAMIEN

(motioning the front door)

Makua, we'll talk to the doctor. Please . . .

MAKUA

I love Lili more than life!

LILI

The Father is a wise man, Makua . . .

(The DEPUTY is in position; he puts his gun to MAKUA'S head. MAKUA looks at the DEPUTY and drops his rifle.)

MAKUA

Yes . . . the Father is a wise man, Lili.

DAMIEN

No . . . Makua, I didn't know--

LILI

It is God's will--

MAKUA

Treachery is always the white God's will.

(The DEPUTY motions with his gun for MAKUA and LILI to walk ahead of him, never touching their bodies.)

(Across the stage, OLDER KALANI steps back into the light. We see images of victims in various stages of leprosy onscreen. Meanwhile, YOUNG KALANI kneels in another pool of light, cradling a rag doll.)