



drama by george

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Father's Day

George Halitzka

(Stark, sparse lighting. A wheelchair center stage, facing away from the audience. JACK enters. He speaks to the wheelchair as though it contains his father. He has the attitude of one rehearsing a speech.)

JACK

Mornin', Dad. Happy Father's Day.

(JACK crosses to a table and picks up a box of cereal. During the next few lines, he prepares breakfast.)

I gotta work today--hope you don't mind cold cereal for breakfast.

(An awkward pause.)

Um--yeah. Sons love their fathers, right?

Dad, I'm gonna be late

(A long silence.)

Do I love you? Yeah . . . I take care of you, right?

I do, really . . . but, y'know, it's Father's Day . . . I can't help remembering things.

The Accident . . . and, well, that was the last time you ever--hit me. Right before . . .

(A pause. He sits.)

I was fourteen. I helped Sarah and Timmy get ready for church--just like every Sunday after mom left. I tried to keep 'em quiet, 'cause we were gonna surprise you with breakfast in bed. For Father's Day. But then Timmy spilled the orange juice, so Sarah yelled, and you woke up. Of course, it was all my fault, 'cause I was the oldest, and I was in charge, and I didn't make 'em shut up. So much for Father's Day.

JACK (*cont'd*)

No--that's a lie! You always hit hard.

(He shows a small bald spot on the top of his head.)

See that? You knocked me on the head with your shoe when I wouldn't stop cryin'. You used to whip me so bad with your belt I would bleed.

(Two beats.)

I hadda go change into a turtleneck so the Sunday School teacher wouldn't see what you did. On the way, I swore, like I swore before, that as soon as Timmy and Sarah could take care of themselves, I was leavin'.

After you dropped us at the church--I guess that's when you got in the accident.

The pastor took me to see you, and on the way, I remember prayin'--not out loud, of course--that you would die, so I could have a new dad. We got to stay with Grandma and Grandpa while you were in the hospital. Three or four days later, one of the doctors told me you would live, but you wouldn't ever walk again. I figured we'd live with Grandma and Grandpa, but I guess they didn't want us. So everything went back to normal--sort of.

(JACK's actions become increasingly menacing during the next paragraph as he realizes his power.)

The first couple times I walked into your room, I was afraid you would beat me up. But then I realized--those legs that kicked me when I laid on the ground crying? They were the ones shrivelin' up in a wheelchair. Those arms that hit me? They could barely hold a cup of coffee. That mouth--used to call me goofball and cuss me out--it was beggin' for help.

It's been ten years, dad. I don't take care of Sarah and Timmy anymore--but I take care of you. And I've never heard you say "thank you." Today you ask me if I love you. And I don't know what to say--I guess I'm glad you never asked before.

(A long beat.)

And I won't do this anymore.

You see these arms you burned with your cigarettes? You'll never do it again.

JACK (*cont'd*)

(He violently overturns the wheelchair.)
These feet? The ones that ran away for fourteen years? Now they bruise your ribs!

(He kicks the place where his father would be, had he just fallen out of the wheelchair.)
The mouth that begged you to stop beating me? It spits on you.
(He spits.)

And this mind you held in fear? You wanna know if it loves you! It hopes you suffer. For the rest of your life, then in hell!

(JACK starts to exit. He turns around and pitches the bowl of cereal back at the wheelchair.)

Hope you don't mind cold cereal.

(He has started to exit when a voice--gruff, but broken and hollow--calls from offstage. The voice says--)

VOICE (JACK'S FATHER)

Jack? Jack, can you gimme a hand?

(JACK starts back across the stage, shoulders slumped and subservient. The lighting changes to a softer look.)

JACK

Mornin', Dad. Happy Father's Day.

(He picks up the wheelchair and begins to push it offstage in the direction of the voice.)

I gotta work today--hope you don't mind cold cereal for breakfast.

(A slow blackout as JACK exits.)

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