

Fatherhood

by Ethan King

Address
Phone Number

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING.

Two girls, MARY (8) and VERA (12), sit at a kitchen table while their father, HAL CLARK (46), cooks breakfast. Their mother, ANNE, is roughly the same age as their father and is getting ready to leave for work, bobbing in and out of the room to check on them and grab food. The kitchen is painfully suburban bordering on artificiality. There is a studio audience in the background, punctuating lines of dialogue with canned laughter.

HAL

Vera, did you finish the rewrite of that paper for Mrs. Ellis?

VERA

Yes, but I still don't understand what was wrong with the first one.

HAL

I think writing your historical argument paper on "why I shouldn't have gotten a C last quarter" was a little inappropriate.
(Audience Laughter)

VERA

Well it *is* history. (more audience laughter)

HAL

I just think you misunderstood the assignment. Or maybe you understood it a little too well.

Anne comes in, throwing on her coat and slinging a bag over her shoulders, she rifles through the pantry and produces a breakfast bar, which she opens and begins eating.

HAL (CONT'D)

Morning, honey.

ANNE

(with a mouth full) Morning.

(Audience Laughter)

MARY

Mom? What happened to the scooter I got for my birthday?

ANNE

I don't remember but I'm sure its
around here somewhere. We'll find
it.

HAL

I'm pretty sure its in my tool
shed. I'll go get it later, I don't
want you or your sister going in
there. It's not safe.

ANNE

I gotta go.

HAL

Ok, I'll be ready with lunch at
noon.

Anne kisses Hal on the cheek and hugs each of her daughters
before shuffling out of the room.

INT. MINIVAN. LATER THAT MORNING.

Hal is driving while his daughters sit in the backseat
singing along to whatever song is on the radio. The car is
jostled, and the girls are mildly startled.

MARY

What was that?

HAL

A raccoon, I think. (Audience
Laughter)

Mary whips around in her seat to look at the dead animal in
the road behind them.

VERA

We need to stop to see if it's
alive!

HAL

There's nothing we can do now.
Don't worry, I'm sure it was just a
rock in the road.

VERA

No, I saw! It was an animal!

HAL

Well either way there's no use
stopping now. Gotta get you girls
to school on time.

Vera settles back into her seat looking sullen. Mary looks teary-eyed. The song on the radio continues.

EXT. DRIVE THROUGH DROP OFF AT MIDDLE SCHOOL. MORNING.

The car slows to a stop and the girls open the sliding door of the minivan. They hop out of the car where they are greeted by their teachers. Hal turns around in the drivers seat to see his daughters off.

HAL

Don't forget your lunches! I'll see you at 3! Love you!

The girls slam the car door shut and walk into the school. Hal rolls the window of the car down to wave to teachers, grinning.

HAL (CONT'D)

Mrs. Ellis! I walked Vera through that rewrite you wanted!

MRS. ELLIS

Oh good Hal, I'm glad she understood why I wanted her to do that.

HAL

No problem. Be well!

Hal rolls up the window and drives off. Once he is out of the roundabout and well past the school the grin is immediately wiped from his face and replaced with a glazed and agitated leer. He snaps the radio off.

INT. COFFEE SHOP. LATE MORNING.

With the same unsettling look on his face and a matching body language, completely stripped of the kind of goofy energy he had at breakfast, Hal walks up to the counter at his local suburban coffee and bagel shop. The barista is a girl in her early 20s.

BARISTA

Good morning sir, what can I get you?

HAL

I'll have an iced chai.

BARISTA

Ok, do you want a petit, moyen, or grand? (Audience Laughter)

HAL

Whatever one is large.

BARISTA

Alright, that'll be 4 dollars.

Hal hands her a credit card.

BARISTA (CONT'D)

Sorry sir, we're only accepting cash right now.

HAL

What? I thought this was a chain. I used my card in here just last week.

BARISTA

We're updating our credit card policy. There's an ATM in the back if you need-

HAL

I have cash I just don't know why the fuck you decided to change your policy just for me. (Timid audience laughter)

BARISTA

I'm sorry, it's just a temporary change that we've had in place for a couple weeks. Maybe you're confusing us with a different coffee shop?

HAL

I'm older than you but I'm not fucking senile. I remember using a card here last week. (Audience laughter tapers off and becomes awkward.)

Hal fishes four dollars out of his wallet and puts it on the table. A small line has formed behind him. He turns from the counter and heads to the back of the shop.

HAL (QUIETLY) (CONT'D)

Annoying bitch. (A cough and some shuffling from the studio audience)

The Barista can be seen over his shoulder reacting to this. She looks stunned for a moment and turns to a coworker next to her.

CUT TO:

EXT. COFFE SHOP. LATE MORNING.

Through the window of the coffee shop Hal can be seen sitting at the corner table with his back to the wall, drinking his iced chai. The manager comes over and confronts him. He reacts with anger and begins gesturing wildly. Only the sounds of cars passing by and pedestrians on the sidewalk can be heard.

CUT TO:

EXT. COFFEE SHOP. LATE MORNING.

Hal is thrown out of the coffee shop and the door is shut behind him. He whips around and hurls his drink against the entrance, spraying it against the glass windows.

INT. HARDWARE STORE. LATE MORNING.

Hal is pushing a cart around a hardware store, browsing shelves. He pulls a pair of pliers off a wall and places them in his cart. He approaches a staff member.

HAL

Excuse me, do you have limestone here?

Staff Member

I think we have some in the back with the gardening supplies, I'll show you where it is.

CUT TO:

INT. HARDWARE STORE. LATE MORNING.

Hal waits in the line at checkout. KEN (50s), comes up behind him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

KEN

Hal! Good to see you. How are the girls?

HAL

They're good Ken, how about Marsha, how is she? She hasn't been over to the house in a couple weeks.

KEN

She's been really busy with ballet lately but I'll try to bring her over soon. She misses Vera.

HAL

Yeah well Vera misses her.

Hal turns away to start ringing up his items when Ken speaks up again. They continue talking while he pays and puts the bagged groceries back in his cart.

KEN

Hey did you hear about Herb Winters?

HAL

No, did something happen?

KEN

He's been missing for almost a week now. I've seen posters plastered up around town and a bit about it in the local paper.

HAL

Any idea where he went? Is there a suspect or did he just run off?

KEN

I think the assumption people are making is that he's ducking town to get away from his family. That wife of his is really awful.

HAL

Well Herb isn't much better. Plus their kids are real mean according to Vera and Mary.

KEN

I'm still hoping he turns up alright somewhere, no family deserves what they're going through right now.

Hal puts the last of his groceries in the cart.

HAL
Keep me updated on that Ken, I
gotta get home for lunch with Anne.

KEN
Ok, tell her I said hi, take care.

INT. DINING ROOM. EARLY AFTERNOON.

Hal and Anne are eating lunch. She is still dressed for work and her bag is in the chair next to her. Hal looks a little tired but still cheerful, attentive, and gregarious.

ANNE
How was your morning?

HAL
It was fine, I think I hit a
squirrel or something on the way to
drop the kids off and they seemed
kind of upset.

ANNE
Ah, I bet they don't even remember
it by the time they get home.

HAL
Also, you know the coffee shop
downtown? Average Joes? I think
they're under new management or
something cause they wouldn't
accept my credit card.

ANNE
Isn't Average Joes a pretty big
chain?

HAL
That's what I thought, which made
it more annoying.

ANNE
Oh by the way, I saw the Wilsons'
trash spilling into our yard as I
pulled in. I know they're a young
couple but it's getting ridiculous
at this point.

HAL
I'll talk to them about that. It's
not all bad, though.

(MORE)

HAL (CONT'D)

I found some pretty good Chinese leftovers in our yard the other day. (Audience laughter)

ANNE

Oh so *that's* why you were up in the middle of the night. Puking from all those rangoons you fished out of the trash. (More audience laughter)

Hal's smile falters and is replaced with a worried look.

HAL

I didn't know I woke you up last week. I'm sorry. How long were you awake?

ANNE

I don't know, a minute maybe. I sort of just drifted into consciousness when I felt the bed shift.

HAL

Oh, good. Anyways, I'll go over and talk to them once you head back to work. I've had minimal exposure but they seem like pleasant folk, I'm sure they'll be cool about it.

EXT. FRONT YARD BETWEEN WILSONS AND CLARKS. AFTERNOON.

Hal walks across the connected yards past a tipped-over trash bag, some of its contents spilling onto the ground and getting blown into the Clarks' front yard. He climbs the steps to the Wilsons' front porch and rings the doorbell. The door is answered by JOAN, a woman in her mid 20s.

JOAN

Hal! Good to see you! How're Anne and the girls?

HAL

They're good Joan. Are you and Paul all settled in? Enjoying the neighborhood?

JOAN

Yeah, it's nice here. Paul just got promoted at work so we've been doing some extra interior decorating. Anyways what's up? Did you want to talk about something?

HAL

Yes, actually I was going to ask you about the trash. It's been spilling into our yard over the last couple weeks.

Hal gestures to the pile of trash in the yard behind him. Joan looks at it over his shoulder and appears embarrassed.

JOAN

Oh God, I'm sorry Hal. We're still getting used to the suburbs and stuff like that just slips my mind, what with all the other things I've had to do since we moved in.

HAL

Could you pick it up?

JOAN

What, the trash? Right now?

HAL

Yes.

JOAN

Uh, I was in the middle of something but Paul and I can take care of it once he gets home.

HAL

I just don't want my daughters to have to walk through your trash when the bus drops them off in a couple hours.

JOAN

You're right, I'm so sorry. I promise it won't happen again.

HAL

I know it won't, I'm just concerned that you'll put off actually picking up your garbage and I'll wind up doing it myself again.

JOAN

Once Paul gets back we'll get it done. I'm sorry but I was cooking dinner, so I have to go. Goodbye.

She shuts the door. Hal stands there for a moment and then turns around, walking towards the trash pile. He grabs the open bag and drags it to where Joan's car is parked. Hal leans the trash bag against the car and goes to the small garden adjacent to it to grab a rock. He smashes the sunroof of the car with the rock and hauls the trash bag up, dumping its contents into the front seats. Audience laughter and applause. He gets down and walks back over to his house, flinging the empty trash bag into the branches of a newly planted tree.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Hal and Anne lie face up in bed next to each other. Their bedside lamps are the only light on in the room.

ANNE

Thanks for putting the kids to bed.

HAL

I think they're still upset about the squirrel thing, they seemed to want me out of the room as quickly as possible.

ANNE

Death is still a new concept to them, and at their age an animal dying is still a crushing and horrendous injustice. It's good that they're showing empathy though, right?

HAL

Sure, I guess.

ANNE

Did you talk to the Wilsons?

HAL

Yeah, they said they're sorry and that it won't happen again.

ANNE

That's good. I like them, they're just young and inexperienced. We were like that once.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)
They're so much better than the
Herberts with their damn dogs. I'm
sure Mary is still terrified of
Pitbulls after what happened.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT YARD. AFTERNOON.

A pitbull is gnawing on the leg of Mary's jeans and growling, shifting its weight and tearing more and more of the fabric. Mary is screaming and Anne is tugging at her, trying to wrestle her away from the dog. From behind Anne you can see Hal striding forward, brandishing a golf club.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

ANNE
Goodnight.

Anne rolls over and turns off her bedside lamp. Hal stares at the ceiling for a moment and then does the same.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Hal lies on his side, awake and facing away from Anne. His face is visible in the moonlight. He quietly gets out of bed and puts on pajama pants and slippers, grabbing a key from inside the dresser before going downstairs. He enters the kitchen where he reaches under the sink and produces a white sanitary face mask. He hangs it around his neck and walks to the shed in the back yard. He puts the mask over his nose and mouth and unlocks the shed. The inside of the shed is completely dark, but a crack is illuminated as the door swings open, a silhouette filling the visible space. The door shuts and the shed is dark again. A single bulb in the middle of the room turns on and we see a crumpled heap of a body on the floor at Hal's feet. He pulls a shovel off of the wall where it is mounted.