

THE HIKER

By Anne Nygren Doherty

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CHARACTERS

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| THE HIKER | Male. 30s. Fit. Determined. |
| THE HEALER | Male. 50s. Wise. Purposeful. |
| MARTHA | Female. 50s. Compassionate. Patient. |
| SUE | Female. Mid-20s. Beautiful. Vulnerable. |
| MARY | Female. 30s. Worn. Embittered. |
| WILD BILL | Male. 12. Unstoppable. Questioning. |
| LIL' MARE | Female. 9. Curious. |
| ROSE ELLEN | Female. 5. Sweet. |

THE SETTING

A large, rustic mountain cabin with several bedrooms plus a common room/dining room and off-stage kitchen.

Action takes place in The Hiker's Room, The Healer's Room and The Common/Dining Room. Action also occurs in front of the cabin and at locations in the surrounding wilderness.

These locations may be indicated through props, lighting and/or projections.

RUNNING TIME

Depending on needs of the venue, there need be no intermission between the Acts.

THE HIKER
A play in two acts
By Anne Doherty

Act 1, scene i

Dawn. A small, sparsely furnished room in a large, rustic cabin or lodge. THE HIKER, 30s, unconscious, lies on a simple bed. Clothed only in boxer-shorts, his body is covered by a blanket. THE HEALER, 50s, sits in a straight-backed chair at his bedside. Next to him stands, MARTHA, 50s. Eyes closed, THE HEALER meditates, touching THE HIKER with his hands only, as if healing him with energy from his hands. The room remains silent, except for the changing breath of THE HIKER. At times, THE HIKER seems to be struggling in his sleep. At other times, THE HIKER'S breath becomes deep and restful. After a few minutes, THE HIKER sighs deeply, while still asleep, and THE HEALER removes his hands. THE HEALER, having finished his work, leans back in his chair and opens his eyes.

MARTHA

Do you think he has brain damage?

THE HEALER

Not now.

MARTHA

Then he'll be well?

THE HEALER

He's an unusual man. He has his share of life's battle scars and yet he's basically open to change.

THE HEALER rises and heads toward the door.

MARTHA

Do you think it was an accident we found him so near by...?

THE HEALER

Nobody sent him, if that's what you mean.

(pause)

There's no reason to be afraid.

(pause)

I've been waiting for someone like him. I had a dream.

THE HEALER watches as MARTHA sits in the straight-back chair. She reaches down to a bowl on the floor and twists cool water from a cloth, which she places on The Hiker's head. THE HIKER doesn't re-act and THE HEALER leaves the room. The moment the door clicks shut behind him, however, THE HIKER struggles and cries out in his delirium.

THE HIKER

Father. Father, I'm dying.

MARTHA

Shhh. You need to sleep.

Like THE HEALER, MARTHA lays her hands on THE HIKER and goes into a meditative state. Soon, his breathing returns to normal. LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene ii

Dawn. Next day. With MARTHA standing nearby, THE HIKER sleeps as THE HEALER maintains a meditative state with his hands on THE HIKER'S body. THE HIKER sighs deeply. THE HEALER removes his hands, leans back in his chair and opens his eyes.

THE HEALER

His body has almost recovered from the fall. He's not as afraid of death anymore.

(pause)

You know, sometimes I think there's no such thing as gravity – it's fear of dying that keeps people stuck to the Earth.

(rising)

Ask Sue to bring in a cup of that broth I had her make. And you can tell the children he'll finally be ready for company maybe the day after tomorrow.

MARTHA smiles and leaves. THE HEALER paces, thinking, then looks down at THE HIKER.

THE HEALER

But you're going to have to wait before I'll let you talk to Wild Bill.

SUE, 20s, enters carrying a cup of broth and a spoon. She is beautiful, but with the vulnerable eyes and hardened mouth of a woman who has lived a tough life. THE HEALER motions her to take the chair as he heads for the door. He looks back at the HIKER one last time, as the first morning light strikes the window. THE HEALER then closes the door after himself. The moment that the door clicks shut THE HIKER awakens. Still very ill, he seems barely conscious.

THE HIKER

Who are you?

SUE

I'm Sue. Drink this.

She sits and spoons some broth into his mouth. He takes the first sip, then gags as he struggles to talk.

THE HIKER

Where am I?

SUE

On the mountain.

THE HIKER

How did I...?

(remembering)

I fell.

SUE

Wild Bill found you. There's nothing to be afraid of.

THE HIKER

No! I fell.

SUE

You're not well. Try to drink this and then go back to sleep.

THE HIKER

(stronger)

Who are you? How did I get here?

SUE

My name is Sue. There's nothing to worry about. I guess you could say God brought you here.

THE HIKER

(weakening)

There is no God.

SUE

It doesn't matter whether there is or not; you've just got to drink this broth.

Exhausted, THE HIKER collapses. He allows SUE to spoon broth down his throat. LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene iii

Dawn. Next day. THE HIKER lies sleeping as the door clicks shut behind THE HEALER, who has just left. Already in the room and waiting, SUE crosses over to THE HIKER with a tray of food. THE HIKER awakes. Though he still can't get out of bed, he appears much stronger than the day before and speaks with more clarity.

THE HIKER

Who are you?

SUE

I'm Sue.

THE HIKER

Where am I?

SUE

On the mountain.

THE HIKER

What mountain?

SUE

The one bordering the ravine where you were hiking.

THE HIKER

I fell?

SUE

You fell, yes. I've been told you're ready for solid food today. Are you hungry?

THE HIKER

(sitting up)

How long have I been here?

SUE

I don't know. A long time. Maybe two weeks.

THE HIKER

(trying to get out of bed, failing)

Two weeks! I don't believe it.

SUE

It's all right. After what happened to you it doesn't matter whether you've been here two days or two years. You can eat now. You're hungry, aren't you?

THE HIKER settles back on his elbows and allows SUE to feed him. He's very hungry.

SUE

That's better. Go slow or you'll get sick.

THE HIKER

Who's been taking care of me? Wasn't there a man in here?

(She nods)

He's here every day?

(She nods. He sighs.)

Then I'm dreaming. All of this is a dream.

SUE

What makes you say that?

THE HIKER

Because the things he does are impossible. He talks to me without opening his mouth. I can hear every word as if he was whispering right in my ear. He says I have a choice. I can stay dead or let him rip my skin open and take out my heart. What would Freud say about that?

MARTHA enters, startling THE HIKER. She speaks to him warmly and compassionately, a light in the darkness. To his own surprise, he responds to her warmly as if she were a special friend or relation.

MARTHA

You're awake. I'm so glad. My name is Martha.

THE HIKER

I know you. You've been in my dream before.

MARTHA

Has Sue told you everything? Are there any questions I can answer for you?

THE HIKER

When am I going to wake up?

MARTHA

You ARE awake. You had a terrible fall while you were hiking. Our boy Wild BILL found you and we brought you back here. Did Sue tell you that a lot of time has passed?

THE HIKER

Why am I here? Why aren't I in a hospital?

MARTHA

I'm not really the right one to answer that. But you've been in good hands the whole time. When he found you, you were in grave danger; but since you came here, you've made a miraculous recovery. In a few days, I think you'll say you never felt better in your whole life.

THE HIKER

(relaxing briefly)

I don't know why, but I believe you... I guess.

(tense again)

Did you find my wallet? Didn't you try to call anyone to tell them where I am?

MARTHA

James, we did find it. And we wondered what we should do about calling people. But then we began to see there really wasn't anyone to call. We were right, weren't we?

THE HIKER

(dispirited)

Yes. Yes, you were right. There is no one to call. But how did you know?

MARTHA

A feeling.

THE HIKER

When can I leave?

MARTHA

When you're healed. You're doing just fine, but you can't walk yet.

THE HIKER

What's wrong with me?

MARTHA

Now? A little bit of everything. But don't worry. I'd like to believe that you're here for a reason. And you'll be well soon. Eat up, now.

(with a smile)

And if there's anything you need, well, like a bedpan, Sue will help you.

THE HIKER

Like a bedpan?

MARTHA

(chuckling wisely)

This really isn't a dream. People do that sort of thing in real life.

MARTHA winks at him and closes the door behind her, leaving him alone with SUE. The moment MARTHA is gone, THE HIKER becomes despondent.

THE HIKER

Oh, God... Why do I feel this way?

SUE

What way?

THE HIKER

As if everything's going to be all right.

SUE

Is that bad?

THE HIKER

It doesn't make sense. I shouldn't feel good like this. I shouldn't feel happy. I know... I'm on drugs. You guys have drugged me. You're a group of whackos... some kind of wacko sect...living out here in the woods. How many more of you are there? Who else is hiding behind that door?

SUE

Everything's all right. We're not whackos and no one is hiding. There's just me and Martha and Mary and her three kids and...

THE HIKER

...and HIM. The one who wants to tear my heart out.

SUE

(with compassion)

Don't you see how lucky you are? You were... Well, you were beyond help when we found you. But in a few days you'll be completely well. I was beyond help when I came here, too, but in a different way. And he's healing me.

THE HIKER

What do you mean, “healing?”

SUE

I can't explain what he does or how he does it. I just know it works, and... and... and it's like a miracle. He's teaching Martha how to do it now. And he says, if I can learn to control my feelings, he might teach me. And if I learn, I don't care. I don't even want to think about the way life was before I came here. And once you're walking around again, I bet you'll feel the same way, too.

THE HIKER settles back and allows SUE to feed him.

SUE

That's better. I know you're frightened. And I know what that feels like. But it's best to try to believe you're here for a reason, like Martha said. And then you can learn from it. So when I'm gone and you're just lying here, listen with all your might, and... and feel the air with your face and your skin and your whole body. And ask yourself... Is there something the air is trying to say?

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene iv

NIGHT. SUE and her tray have gone. THE HIKER lies in bed asleep. As moonlight pours through the open window, the shadow of a YOUTH appears outside of it. The shadow touches its head to the window, as if peering through. Then, it tries the window to see if it's locked. After a few quiet tugs, the window opens wide enough for it to slip through. It creeps to The Hiker's bed and suddenly, still trying for a better look, strikes a match right in THE HIKER'S face. In the glow of the flame, the face of a twelve-year old boy appears – WILD BILL. His face suits his name in that he seems a bit like a wild animal - untamed. WILD BILL takes a good long look at THE HIKER. Then, just as he is about to bring the match to his lips, a grown up hand shoots out of the covers and grabs his arm. The match blows out. WILD BILL lurches for the window. Another hand shoots up and grabs him by the belt. The HIKER falls halfway out of bed and knocks over a camping lamp by his bedside, as WILD BILL struggles for the window.

THE HIKER

Who are you?

WILD BILL

(keeping his voice as low as he can)

Stop it! My mom's awake in the living room. You want her in here?

THE HIKER

Who are you?

WILD BILL

(ceasing to struggle)

I'm Wild Bill.

THE HIKER

That's a crazy name. What do you want?

WILD BILL

I wanted to see what you looked like. I saved you. I wanted to see if you still looked... the same. They told me I wouldn't get to see you for days and days. Maybe never, He said, if I didn't watch out.

THE HIKER

Who's 'He'?

WILD BILL

You know who I'm talking about. The guy that's healing you.

THE HIKER

And who's that?

WILD BILL

Nobody calls him by his name. We just call him The Healer.

THE HIKER

(taking a moment to think before speaking)

Okay. You want to see me? You wanna turn on the light and take a good long look at me? Then you gotta answer some questions.

WILD BILL

What kind of...

THE HIKER

Since you're not interested, I'll just scream for your mom...

WILD BILL

Okay. Ask me anything you want.

THE HIKER

Good. Because I'm a sport, you can go first. Go ahead and turn on a light.

THE HIKER hands WILD BILL the camp lamp, which
WILD BILL lights. The brief tussle took a lot out of THE
HIKER. He breathes heavily as WILD BILL takes his look.

WILD BILL

You look a lot better. Nobody'd ever think you were... well, as sick as you were.

THE HIKER

Thanks, I guess. And, uh, thanks for saving my life.

WILD BILL

Hmmm. Yeah. Well. Okay.

WILD BILL turns to the window as if to go.

THE HIKER

Hey, questions! Remember?

(Wild Bill returns)

Tell me about the healer guy. I still haven't really seen him when I was awake.

WILD BILL

Oh, you won't see Him for a while. And He doesn't want you to see me at all. On
account of my big mouth, I suppose.

THE HIKER

Is there something I'm not supposed to know? Is this some kind of group with a special
purpose? Like religion or politics? Is there a reason we're up here so far away from other
people?

WILD BILL

(chuckling)

Don't worry. This isn't Waco, Texas. But they're always afraid people will think it is.
Nothing bad goes on here.

(sincerely)

Really. I swear. He's just a healer. He heals people, and he says it helps Him heal himself
when he's close to Nature. Besides, you can't beat mountain living for cheap.

THE HIKER

Who does he heal?

WILD BILL

People his senses tells Him to heal. That's what He says anyway. He healed me. And He healed my mom. But He couldn't heal my father or my little brother. It wasn't possible, he says. I don't understand that.

THE HIKER

And...what happened to them?

WILD BILL

They're dead... as far as my mom's concerned.

(pause)

Speaking of her, I gotta...

THE HIKER

My father's dead. He died just a few days before I went hiking and ...wound up here.

WILD BILL

No kidding?

THE HIKER

He never married my mom. Sometime after I was born he left. And sometime after that he got married to someone else and had a family with her. I never saw him until I graduated from college. I looked him up. He'd done all right. Then, the other day, one of my half sisters left a message on my phone that he'd had a heart attack. But she said they didn't really want me at the funeral. So I thought I'd hold my own funeral, and I went for a hike.

WILD BILL

It just about was your own funeral.

THE HIKER

Yeah.

(pause)

What happened to me?

WILD BILL

You fell. From the top of Stryker's Ravine, I guess. You remember being up there?

THE HIKER

Yeah. They should call it Stryker's Abyss - it's so deep.

WILD BILL

Well, anyway, I had this fight with my mom, and I ran away. I'd never been up there before. I liked it - up near the sun and the clouds - listening to the water rushing way, way down below where I could hardly see it. But, then, I saw you. I saw your bright

yellow jacket. And you weren't moving. I could tell by the way the rocks were you probably fell from the top.

THE HIKER

Yes, I remember listening to the water and not being able to see it.

WILD BILL

How did you get there? We're pretty far away from the park, and there aren't really any trails.

THE HIKER

I'm an experienced hiker. And I guess, well, I've never really had it in me to follow any predictable path.

WILD BILL

Me neither. I hate being cooped up.

THE HIKER

Are you cooped up here?

WILD BILL

Are you kidding? It's prison!

THE HIKER

You mean you're stuck here all the time? No place to go? No kids to see?

WILD BILL

Yeah, but it's more than that, too. It's the whole thing. Life, you know?

THE HIKER

Oh, a lot of kids feel that way. I know I used to.

WILD BILL

You don't you know what I'm talking about, do you? You really don't get it. Gosh, I really thought you would. You more than anyone else in the world, I thought you'd know.

THE HIKER

Know what?

WILD BILL

Nothing. Just something I heard Him say about you.

THE HIKER

What could He say about me? He doesn't know me.

WILD BILL

Are you kidding? He probably knows everything there is to know about you. That's what makes him so scary.

(heading to the window)

If anybody asks, I've never seen you. This never happened.

THE HIKER

Wait... You gotta tell me one more thing... Where are we?

WILD BILL

Fifteen miles or so out of Whiting.

THE HIKER

Whiting is the closest town?

WILD BILL

If you can call it a town.

THE HIKER

Can you get me a map?

WILD BILL

What do you need a map for? You can't even walk.

THE HIKER

I see I need to call for your mother...

WILD BILL

Okay, okay. But what are you so worked up for? What do you think this place is - some kind of prison?

THE HIKER

You just said it was.

WILD BILL

Well, yeah, but... Life's a prison!

WILD BILL disappears from the window and closes it behind him. LIGHTS DOWN.