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Suburban Peepshow
by James Comtois

6-8 Males, 2 Females

Synopsis: Bill is a husband, father, and professional. But this week, a cross dressing social deviant gets fired at the office and Bill is poised to step into his position. The promotion all but guarantees new dishtowels for the wife, and the in-ground pool for son Jeremy. But a New Girl in the office has designs for Bill, and he ain't gonna pass it up... if you know what I mean. Who can blame him with his wife contemplating jumping the Pool Guy, a strange Carnie Barker interrupting dinner, and the occasion Gladiator battle waiting at home. It all depends on how the Playwright is feeling tonight.

Touchstone, U.S.A.
or How Terrorism Brought an
American Family Back Together
by Paul North

3 Males, 3 Females

some play multiple roles

Synopsis: Billy converted to Islam causing his parents to think he's a terrorist; now the only solution is for the ghost of Billy's older sister, Liberty, to come back and set things right again. A look at the American family and all its dysfunction.

Characters

Dan: Early 20's, over active imagination and personality.

Charles: Early 30's. Café manager. Shut off from himself and the rest of the world.

ARTIFICIAL

(Black. We hear a crowd of people counting down from ten. At the end of the countdown everyone screams "Happy New Years!")

We see two round tables with chairs to resemble a restaurant. CHARLES, early 30's, wearing black pants and a white buttoned up shirt, wipes a table down and stacks some plates. Off stage we suddenly hear-

DAN: *(Singing)* Start spreading the news...

(DAN enters. He is in his early 20's, dressed casually, and holds a guitar case. He seems very animated and perhaps a bit drunk. Charles looks up at him, a bit confused and annoyed.)

DAN: *(Singing)* I'm leaving today...

CHARLES: We're closed.

DAN: *(Singing)* I want to be a part of it! New York! New York!-

CHARLES: Oh, Jesus Christ.

DAN: *(Singing)* These vagabond shoes, are longing to stray-

CHARLES: *(Raises voice)* Get out!

(Dan stops, unsure of how seriously to take Charles. He goes into his pocket and takes out a party blower. He blows it, making a horn noise you'd hear at a kid's party.)

DAN: Happy New Years!

(No response from Charles, who simply stares back at Dan coldly. Dan waits for a moment and then-)

DAN: Happy New Years!

CHARLES: We're closed, all right?

DAN: Sign says you close at 1. It's 12:40.

CHARLES: Well, it was a slow night.

DAN: It's the busiest night of the year!

CHARLES: Not here...Go down the block if you want something.

DAN: All right...Can I just get a water then?

CHARLES: Did you hear what I said?

DAN: What? You can't serve me a water? There's a faucet right there.

(Dan indicates across stage. Charles doesn't give in.)

CHARLES: Have a great New Years.

(Charles goes back to cleaning while Dan stands around for a moment. He begins to exit, but turns around and-)

DAN: Hey, you have bathroom here?

CHARLES: Would you give me a break?

DAN: Well, I'm sorry. I gotta go.

CHARLES: It's for customers.

DAN: Well, then serve me a fuckin' drink.

CHARLES: Listen, we open at noon tomorrow, all right. Come by then and you can drink coffee, take a piss, and do whatever else you want, okay?

DAN: How much do you sell coffee for?

(Charles gives a sigh and a cold stare.)

DAN: Well, If I'm gonna come back tomorrow I want to know how much money to bring. Do you have a morning special or anything?

CHARLES: 2 dollars, okay...Think you can afford that?

(Pause. Dan seems a bit offended.)

DAN: Excuse me? What does that mean?

CHARLES: Nothing.

DAN: I look poor to you?

CHARLES: I didn't say that.

DAN: Well, that's what it sounded like. *(Mockingly)* "2 dollars. Think you can afford that?"

CHARLES: All I said was...Why am I arguing with you?

DAN: Maybe you want to talk?

CHARLES: Oh, Jesus fuckin' Christ.

DAN: Do you want to talk?

CHARLES: I just want you to get the fuck out of here.

DAN: And I just want a fuckin' drink.

CHARLES: Well, we're closed! Now do you want me to call the cops?

DAN: And say what? That I annoyed you because you wouldn't give me a glass of water 20 minutes before you even closed?

(Pause. Charles seems to surrender.)

CHARLES: Fine, stand there for 20 minutes. And at 1 you can leave and annoy someone else.

(He cleans. Dan continues to stand.)

DAN: 50...

(Dan goes into wallet and takes out a 50-dollar bill. He puts it on the table. Charles takes notice.)

DAN: Here...50 dollars for a cup of coffee...25 times the amount it costs...not a bad deal.

(Charles pauses and then continues to clean, ignoring Dan. He begins to put a chair away on top of a table.)

DAN: I'm serious...look.

CHARLES: Bullshit...

DAN: It's quiet here.

CHARLES: It's quiet a lot of places.

DAN: Well, I'm here...The city's a mess tonight. Every restaurant, every apartment...can't go anywhere without someone breathing down your neck...I just want a quiet place to sit.

(Charles leans over to look at the money.)

CHARLES: It's cheaper across the street.

DAN: I don't want to be across the street...I'll be out of here by one. Just like the sign says...Come on...It's New Years...can't we make up?

(Charles picks the money up. He then begins to walk over to the coffee pot.)

CHARLES: Regular coffee good?

DAN: Perfect.

CHARLES: I'm still gonna clean up, though.

(Dan has already taken a chair down and is preparing to make himself comfortable. Charles takes notices of this and is a bit annoyed.)

DAN: Oh, yeah. Of course.

(There is a long pause while Dan just sits and looks around.)

DAN: It's a nice place, by the way.

(Charles smiles, but doesn't acknowledge him. Dan continues to search for something to say.)

DAN: I like the...the decorations...It's kind of got that winter cabin feel...good for drinking coffee...ya know?

(Charles ignores him.)

DAN: So...trying to get out of here early I guess...Goin' home to the family?

(Ignores him.)

DAN: Do you have a big family?-

CHARLES: I thought you wanted some place quiet?

DAN: I do.

CHARLES: Well, it's not quiet if you're talking.

(Charles goes back to the coffee. Dan seems a bit offended and under his breath he says-)

DAN: You don't have to be rude. I just gave you more money than you probably made all day.

CHARLES: Excuse me?

DAN: *(Over acting)* Um, I said I can't wait for some delicious coffee!

(Charles stares at him for a moment, sizing him up.)

CHARLES: Get the fuck out.

DAN: What hell is your problem?-

CHARLES: I'm not a bartender from a fucking movie, all right. I don't want to talk to you. I don't care what your problems are. Go to a psychiatrist if you wanna talk.

DAN: Do you go to a psychiatrist?

(Charles glares and begins to aggressively walk towards Dan's table. He stops when-)

DAN: You just seem a bit pent up. I'm really good at reading people.

(Charles continues to the table, picks up the money, and tosses it at him.)

CHARLES: Go buy yourself a date. You can tell her your problems when she's lookin' up at you-

DAN: You know my brother got hit by a car today!...right on 38th street. You hear about that?... Some guy went straight into a hot dog stand and took out 3 people. Took out half a sidewalk, actually...Danny, my brother, was just standin' there getting ready to order... He can't stay away from the junk food...Turn the news on, I bet you'll see it.

(Charles is a bit taken a back.)

CHARLES: Yeah...I...I saw it early.

DAN: God, then you know what I'm talking about...Don't worry, he's not dead or anything. Don't get all teary on me. He's just getting checked out with all those tubes and needles and such...Been a rough New Years...So I'm just looking for a quiet place to sit.

(Pause. Charles feels guilty for being rude before.)

CHARLES: You a musician?

(Indicating guitar case.)

DAN: Writer...I carry laundry in it.

CHARLES: You carry your laundry around?

DAN: You never know where you'll end up at the end of the night.

CHARLES: Doesn't it smell?

DAN: Sometimes...most people don't get close enough to smell it, though.

(Dan leans in, as if trying to be intimidating.)

DAN: Unless I have to hit someone across the face with it.

CHARLES: Oh, yeah?

DAN: Dangerous city we live in.

(They stare. Charles goes back to the coffee pot and begins to pour a cup.)

CHARLES: I don't have half and half...just milk.

DAN: You're funny, you know that?

CHARLES: Oh, yeah?

DAN: Yes, you are...Every other person I've ever told I was writer. You know what they did? They went like this... "Well, what do you write? Poetry? Fiction? Theatre?" You didn't ask me that... You're not as predictable as other people.

(Charles hands him the coffee.)

CHARLES: Here.

DAN: Thanks...So you don't care what I write?

CHARLES: I know what you write.

DAN: You do?

CHARLES: You write about yourself. Just like everyone else does. So you really shouldn't mock people for being predicable.

DAN: *(Laughing a little)* You think I'm predictable?

CHARLES: That's not what I said-

DAN: Don't be polite to me. We don't know each other. Do you think I'm predictable?

(Charles pauses and thinks.)

CHARLES: I think...you're in your early 20's.

DAN: What does that mean?

CHARLES: It's New Years. I think you're a little drunk. I think you live off your parent's money and can throw fifty dollars away, and I think you decided to have weird night and come into a bar and talk to me...Maybe get an interesting story to tell some friends about later.

(Dan leans in again, as if he's very surprised.)

DAN: Can you read minds?

CHARLES: Finish your coffee.

DAN: When I was in high school I wrote a short story about a waiter who could read minds so he never had to ask people what they wanted to eat. He'd just stare at them and he'd feel what they wanted. "Egg's over easy. Cheese burger and curly fries." Maybe that's you. You're the guy I wrote about because I was destined to meet you one day.

(Pause.)

CHARLES: Did you really write that?

DAN: No...maybe I will now, though.

(Charles walks away and cleans again.)

DAN: Aw...you mad I lied to you?...It was a joke, okay. Just trying to tell you something unpredictable. Maybe give *you* an interesting story to tell your friends.

CHARLES: Thanks...I think your brother getting hit at a hot dog stand was plenty interesting.

(Pause. Charles goes back to cleaning. Dan seems a bit offended.)

DAN: What's that mean?

CHARLES: Oh...nothing....

DAN: Are you being cute all of a sudden? You think it's funny when a family member gets run over?

(Charles grows more serious.)

CHARLES: You're full of shit. That's what's funny.

DAN: You think I'd lie about that?

CHARLES: Yes, you're a liar. That's what liars do.

DAN: You don't know me.

CHARLES: Then why should I trust you?

DAN: Why shouldn't you trust me?

CHARLES: Because people are liars. Jesus. How long have you been in this city?

DAN: Since I was born. So you really just think everyone's an asshole? You just see a person and assume the worst?

(A nod from Charles.)

DAN: Well, that's just great...I'm gonna start having fun then. I could tell you the most truthful story of my life, my first day of school, how I watched my grandpa die when I was 8. Or I could just sit here and make shit up and either way you wouldn't believe it so... I might as well have some fun.

CHARLES: I guess you think real life isn't fun?

DAN: Oh, look around. It's a blast.

CHARLES: I have an idea...Why don't you tell me a fun, made up story about how you carry laundry around in a guitar case?

DAN: That's a lie too?...You keep getting funnier.

(Pause.)

CHARLES: Open it.

DAN: Open up what?

CHARLES: (*Sarcastic*) Your soul... If you have laundry in there you can keep your parents money and stay as long as you want. If it's a guitar then I keep the 50 dollars and you leave. You can go back home and wait for your poor, hospitalized brother.

(*Pause.*)

CHARLES: Open it.

DAN: I don't want to right now.

CHARLES: You gonna open it later?

DAN: Maybe...maybe I'll hit you over the head with it and rob the place.

CHARLES: (*Laughing a little*) I'm funny? You're funny.

DAN: And why's that?

CHARLES: When you first came in here I just thought you were going to be annoying. But now that we're getting to know each other you're just a big pussy...I mean, we can be honest with each other, right?

DAN: Honest?

(*Charles leans in close to Dan.*)

CHARLES: Open it.

(*No response.*)

CHARLES: All right...Enjoy your 10 minutes.

(*Charles goes back to stacking plates. Dan watches for a moment.*)

DAN: Can I tell you something?

(*No response.*)

DAN: Did you hear what I said....What? You don't want to talk to me anymore?...Can't we make up...again?

(No response.)

DAN: Listen, do you wanna know why I really came in here or not?

(Charles turns back to him, showing some interest.)

DAN: I was standing outside with dozens of other drunken ass holes. Everyone's counting down from ten, dancing around. But instead of joining in all I could do was stand and watch you. And you know what I was thinking?... "Wow...what a lonely guy."

CHARLES: You think I'm lonely?

DAN: Yeah.

CHARLES: And what? You're here to cheer me up?

DAN: Yeah, haven't you ever wanted to do that?

CHARLES: Do what?

DAN: The whole Oprah thing? Do some good for someone you don't even know?

CHARLES: All you've done is annoy me.

DAN: Well, I still got 10 minutes.

CHARLES: More like 9.

DAN: Well, then I have 9 minutes to cheer you up-

CHARLES: I don't need to be cheered up... And I'm pretty sure Oprah just gives out makeovers and new cars. You gonna do that?

(Dan stands. He becomes more animated.)

DAN: Yeah. This is all actually a reality T.V. show! In a few minutes cameras are gonna storm the restaurant! Confetti! Balloons! The whole deal! And you're the star! Every week I give a brand new car away to another depressed soul in New York City! What do you think of that?

(Dan blows the party blower again. Charles watches.)

CHARLES: *(Sarcastic)* Well...I think it's my lucky night...I guess you're gonna save my soul?

DAN: Yes!

CHARLES: I don't know you.

DAN: Do you really think you know anyone? Why couldn't you tell me everything about yourself?

CHARLES: Because I can't.

DAN: So?

CHARLES: Well, I don't trust you.

DAN: So?

CHARLES: Well, I don't like you.

DAN: So? Don't you think life would be easier if you could open up to a stranger? If you could just cry with a bum or really affect some random kid on the subway-

CHARLES: Would you shut the fuck up! You can't just walk up to a stranger and change their life because you don't know their life! You don't know what you're changing or if it needs to be changed! Who the fuck are you to think you could make someone better? Like you're not fucked up too. And trust me... Oprah is not changing anyone's life...She's just adding money to it.

(Pause. Dan seems to reflect for a moment.)

DAN: You know what?...Fuck Oprah.

CHARLES: That's great.

DAN: I'm serious. And fuck you...You can too change someone's life without knowing them and you don't need a dollar to do it.

CHARLES: Well, you're wrong.