

# The Man and the Boy

By Emma Cort

In memory of the  
real Sunny.

[*Note: This dialogue is intended to be performed at a fast pace.*]

*Lights come up. It's the early 1960s. We see a typical 1960s kitchen. An oval wooden kitchen table is in the center. There's a door to the outside on stage right. SUNNY is wearing a navy uniform and sitting at the table. Helen is sitting across from him. She is folding towels. The energy in this kitchen is distant, awkward but familiar and light. SUNNY is holding a small photo. SUNNY looks at the photo, looks up at HELEN, then looks back to the photo.*

**Sunny**

So you're telling me the boy's a pitcher?

*HELEN responds but does not look at SUNNY.*

**Helen**

Number 8 on the field.

**Sunny**

Who taught him to throw?

*HELEN does not respond.*

**Sunny**

I'll be damned. Number 8. Huh.

**Helen**

Mhm.

**Sunny**

He's big now?

**Helen**

Very big.

**Sunny**

He looked big in that school photo.

**Helen**

Soon, he'll fit in your uniform. He'll be a little Sunny. He reads now too. With the 4th graders.

**Sunny**

And he's a smart one!

**Helen**

He is a smart one. Must've gotten that from you . . .

*HELEN sits with her thought for a moment. SUNNY looks away.*

**Helen**

Can I get you something to drink?

**Sunny**

I'm not thirsty anymore . . .

*SUNNY sits with his thought for a moment. He looks around the room.*

**Sunny**

Does the boy have people he can talk to? Friends?

**Helen**

His team mostly. They go out for ice cream after games and get all sugared up. I should have kept a tally of all the sugar meltdowns on the days after. Most of the team is in his class too.

**Sunny**

That's good. It's good he has other kids to be around.

*Beat.*

**Sunny**

You have friends? People you can talk to?

**Helen**

Are you hungry?

**Sunny**

Not anymore.

**Helen**

I have some cherry pie left over from last night.

**Sunny**

You bake pie?

**Helen**

I started last November. Learned from my sister. I'm pretty good for an amateur.

**Sunny**

It's fine, Helen.

*They sit in silence.*

**Helen**

Coffee?

*SUNNY looks around the kitchen.*

**Sunny**

Does the boy like music?

**Helen**

He sings along to my Chuck Berry albums. He has a nice voice.

**Sunny**

He gets that from me, you know.

**Helen**

Oh, I know.

**Sunny**

I gotta tell him 'bout my high school quartet. Is he a tenor?

**Helen**

I'm tone deaf.

**Sunny**

Ah, that's right. I forgot. I actually brought back some albums for the boy. They're still in my suitcase.

**Helen**

Maybe you can give them to him when he gets back.

**Sunny**

Maybe.

*They sit in silence.*

**Sunny**

I'll actually take a water.

**Helen**

Water. Yes.

*HELEN jumps up from her chair and opens the cupboard.*

**Sunny**

How long has the boy been over there?

**Helen**

Few hours, give or take. The neighbors take good care of him. They feed him too. I always tell them that I feed him well, but they insist. Her Sunny was gone for a year, so she understands. It's nice to know they're all home together, isn't it?

**Sunny**

Only a year. That's not bad.

**Helen**

You'd meet them all on Sunday, if you're still . . .

*Beat.*

**Helen**

Their boy is number 12.

**Sunny**

Stuff can change in a year, but not a whole lot. You still got patience after a year—

**Helen**

Two and a half years, I would say.

**Sunny**

Well, what I know is that four years doesn't feel like one year.

*Beat.*

**Sunny**

What about the cat? Where is she?

**Helen**

She ran away a little over a year ago.

**Sunny**

Well, I didn't know that.

**Helen**

I couldn't fit it all in the letters. And I didn't quite know how to write that. I figured the cat might come back. I didn't want to upset you—

**Sunny**

It still would have been nice to know. I liked the cat.

*Beat.*

Why'd you never write about the man?

*HELEN drops the cup of water. It shatters. She freezes and swallows the lump in her throat.*

**Sunny**

You dropped my water.

*HELEN bends down and starts cleaning up the broken glass.*

**Helen**

I did tell you a lot. Small paper, but I could fill it with stories from the week. Like that anecdote of when I forgot to pack the boy a lunch for school. I know you like to hear about the boy. I figured I'd tell you what you wanted to hear.

**Sunny**

You missed a sliver.

*SUNNY points to the corner of the kitchen floor.*

**Helen**

I'm sorry.

*HELEN throws away the broken glass.*

**Helen**

I was thinking last night, alone in bed. Maybe you, the boy, and I could take a trip somewhere.

**Sunny**

A trip?

**Helen**

To celebrate your arrival and to let the boy have some fun outside of the picket fence.

**Sunny**

Well, where would we go?

**Helen**

I don't know. Just a place where we can be a family . . . a family that never spent a day apart!

**Sunny**

I'm not good at pretending. My suitcase is still on the floor mat. I can't get myself to unpack it. I haven't even taken off my shoes.

**Helen**

We could go tomorrow, or now—

**Sunny**

I'm surprised you want this—

**Helen**

Keep it packed. I just think it would be good to visit somewhere, as a family—

**Sunny**

I don't know.

**Helen**

Anywhere, really. You could decide.

**Sunny**

I would rather stay here.

**Helen**

Okay. Here. We'll stay here.

*Beat.*

**Helen**

I feel more than guilty keeping you here.

*Beat.*

**Helen**

What about Gatorland in Florida?

**Sunny**

I don't—

**Helen**

That little clock with the alligator on the mantel was from the gift shop there. The neighbors took their boy once their Sunny arrived home. It was the happiest day for them. Our boy was joyful when they came back with it for him. We could go there. Maybe buy one for ourselves this time.

**Sunny**

I don't want to go anywhere. I barely remember what our yard looks like, Helen.

**Helen**

Okay. We will stay here. As a family. Listen to some jazz, teach the boy what a tenor is, or he can read to you, or something. We can try to act like how it was—

**Sunny**

Did the man ever have supper with the boy?

*HELEN looks at SUNNY.*

**Helen**

I forgot to get you a new water. I'm sorry.

*HELEN stands up and opens up the cupboard again.*

**Helen**

One thing I left out of the letters was the day the boy grabbed onto my legs like he used to do with you. When he was the height of your kneecap and would cry and tug on your pants as you would walk through the lawn to shut the water off. He loved summertime, when you'd come home from Bethlehem Steel early. I don't know if you knew that.

*HELEN fills a cup with water from a pitcher.*

**Helen**

He still plays with the hose. He's got the other kids on the block to join him now. I'll look out the window and see them all running around. Ha. They look like they went swimming in mud.

*Beat.*

**Helen**

It's delightful to see him laughing again—

**Sunny**

Does the boy not laugh?

**Helen**

We do now.

*They sit in silence, but HELEN quickly breaks out of it.*

**Helen**

Anyway, after the cat ran away, the boy didn't laugh for a week. He came up to me one night after I was out at—he'd been crying. He told me he thought I ran away. Ha. He squeezed my legs so tightly my pantyhose got all wrinkled. Then I started crying and my mascara—I looked terrible, but the boy didn't care . . . he was happy, relieved that I was home. I didn't add that in the letter because I wasn't sure if the cat was coming back.

**Sunny**

Did the boy ever hug the man like that?

*SUNNY looks at HELEN.*

**Helen**

He hugs my mother when she visits on occasion—

**Sunny**

How is your mom?

**Helen**

She's good, doing better since my dad . . . She came over often. It got lonely here, real lonely. The boy actually has this sense of relief every time Grandma comes. He fears the day she will stop coming over, and he knows it could be any day, considering her age. The boy is sometimes too smart for his age.

**Sunny**

That was in a letter.

**Helen**

He managed the years gracefully.

**Sunny**

He gets that from me.

**Helen**

I'm sorry. Do you want lemon in your water?

**Sunny**

No, thank you.

*HELEN gives SUNNY the water.*

**Sunny**

You think the boy needs me?

**Helen**

Of course, he will. This is a family. We all need each other in some way or another, don't you think?

**Sunny**

But what happens when we can't give each other what we need?

*Silence.*

**Sunny**

I think we both know the answer.

**Helen**

You know the boy isn't tall enough to reach his top dresser drawer, and he needs to get his slacks for school. He gets a step stool from the garage and does it himself. He won't need to do it every time now, because you're home, and you can help him. The boy needs you.

**Sunny**

The man is what, six-foot? Six-foot-one? Can't quite reach as high as him, even if I tried.

*They sit in silence.*

**Helen**

We're still a family—

**Sunny**

A different kind of family.

*HELEN sits back down, this time next to SUNNY.*

**Sunny**

I told my friends this afternoon would be like in the books we used to read as children.

**Helen**

Magical and . . . slightly terrifying?

**Sunny**

Yes . . . I was wrong, though. The others don't have someone. They weren't getting letters or anything. They didn't have anything to look forward to. They didn't have a reason to come home.

**Helen**

I'm sure someone was waiting for them.

**Sunny**

I've never felt more like them.

*Silence. SUNNY looks at his suitcase on the floor mat.  
HELENS notices.*

**Helen**

I'm happy you're home, you know. I don't think I've said that yet, but I really mean it.

**Sunny**

But you didn't wait for me to come home. I just . . . came back. What's that gotta teach the boy?

**Helen**

Sometimes I wish the boy could teach me. I wish he could teach me how to hold onto something so tightly, to want something so much. To be able to wait, to not change, and to be able to feel the same way I always should have felt.

**Sunny**

Does he love you?

**Helen**

Of course, the boy does.

**Sunny**

I wasn't talking about—

**Helen**

I know.

*SUNNY looks at HELEN; HELEN looks at SUNNY.  
They sit in silence for a moment. That's all SUNNY needed.*

**Sunny**

You probably think I'd be hollering right now.

**Helen**

I did.

*Beat.*

**Sunny**

It's been a while.

**Helen**

I'm sorry.

**Sunny**

If you're gonna be sorry, be sorry for no traffic on the interstate.

**Helen**

Bad timing.

**Sunny**

Thought the Mustang was yours. Got me worried that I bought that.

*Both are sad, but smiling.*

**Helen**

I guess the boy can wait for Gatorland. He's good at waiting.

**Sunny**

You think the boy is gonna miss me?

**Helen**

That's nothing new to him, so what's more time to that? It got easier with the cat. Do you want anything for the road? Coffee?

**Sunny**

I'll take coffee. I don't know where I'm gonna go.

**Helen**

Not too late to stay—

**Sunny**

This isn't my place to be anymore.

**Helen**

Perhaps you want to see the boy?

*SUNNY wants to say yes more than anything. We can see that.*

**Sunny**

My suitcase is already at the door. Probably should be gone before he comes home for supper. It's better I don't see him. Don't want to confuse him.

**Helen**

We're having meatballs with grape jelly.

**Sunny**

That's the boy's favorite.

**Helen**

Mhm.

**Sunny**

From the letters.

*SUNNY gets up and walks over to the door.*

**Sunny**

You can still write to me. You know, to let me know what the boy is doing.

**Helen**

I will.

**Sunny**

And make sure the man takes care of him too.

*SUNNY opens the suitcase. As he does this, we hear children outside the door. SUNNY slides open the curtain and looks out. He smiles.*

**Sunny**

He is big now.

*SUNNY looks out for a moment longer, then goes back to his suitcase, slides out two albums, and hands them to HELEN.*

**Sunny**

Give these to the boy. Tell him his dad sent these to him.

*Blackout.*