



SINS OF THE FATHER

by Jeff Helgeson

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But stand closer to me, and let us,
if only for a little, embrace, and
take full satisfaction from the dirge of sorrow.

The Iliad of Homer

This play presents an intriguing dialogue between two men, two life-long friends of greater and lesser success. A.C. and Pat are the two players in this drama. Both are married and share common memories, but it is clear that it has been in their maturity that they have gone in different directions. A.C. appears to be the dominant one in the friendship. He is also the most successful in the most obvious ways, but his marriage is less than satisfactory in ways that he cannot explain. Pat's marriage seems much more stable, though he wonders less at its foundations than does A.C., who is caught between a decent wife and a great mistress. The two differ in their attitudes toward their children as well. One never wonders why these two guys keep talking through their disagreements, arguments, shared memories, disputes. A.C. needs to figure things out but can't, and Pat probably should try, but is unable.

Helgeson, on the other hand, is quite able to convey meaning and change through his use of simple action, simple dialogue, simple use of the stage, and the simple qualities of our lives that add up to complex meaning. His characters live on beer and Bolivian marching powder, and that is appropriate and a part of the "realism" which dominates this play. So is A.C.'s pornographic talk. And yet, Helgeson brings an allusive quality to his work with references to classical Greek legend in his modern characterizations of Achilles and Patroclus which at times seems as (or more) important as is the "real" narrative.

"Sins of The Father" brings us to a conclusive moment between the two characters seen in the play which is neither strained nor unusual. It is a powerful contemporary drama.

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Characters:

A.C. – fairly successful restaurateur in his mid thirties

Pat – less successful assistant office manager of about the same age

Setting:

The recreation room of a suburban house. A bar with two stools stands before a large, ancient Greek-styled painting that hangs on the rear wall. There is a football resting on one of the stools. There is a coffee table with a large comic book lying on it at one corner, and a collection of space toys is scattered around on the floor.

On the bar stands a large reproduction of “The Winged Victory of Samothrace.”

As the house lights fade, “*When Doves Cry*” by Prince plays and eventually fades to silence during a brief blackout.

After a long moment, a flash bulb goes off in a bright and sudden illumination at the back of the audience.

The house lights slowly rise.

Both A.C. and Pat carry cans of beer. A.C. is wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt. Pat’s clothes are casual, but not flamboyant.

Pat (from the back of the audience)
Damn! Hey, let's not do that again, alright?

A.C. (also from behind the audience)
Had to record the moment, Pat, my boy. Don't know when last we took a picture together.

Pat
Your wedding probably.

A.C.
Sounds about right, so it's time. (to an audience member) See what a couple a centuries a "married bliss" can do? (turning back to Pat) My "best man." (to a second audience member) You'd a thought I could've done a little better. (turning his attention back to Pat) Head on downstairs, buddy-boy; I got somethin' I wanna show ya. (again addressing the second audience member) We'll probably be awhile; got a lot a catchin' up to do. You might as well go on to sleep if you want. (turning back to Pat) Go ahead. I'll be down there in a second.

Pat
Alright.

Pat comes forward through the audience as the stage lights begin to rise.

Pat
Good ol' A.C., long as I know you, sixth grade straight on through, always the man in charge.

A.C. from behind as Pat approaches the stage and its lights come fully bright.

A.C.
You got that right. First in war . . .

Pat

. . . and anybody else's piece. (pause) Captain, my captain for any team we ever played on!

A.C.

Better a short glorious life than a long boring one.

Pat

Everybody's local hero.

A.C. (calling toward Pat)

And don't you ever forget it!

Pat

I doubt that I could, or that you'd ever let me. (pause) You haven't so far. (pause) You comin', or ain't ya?

A.C.

Yea, I'm comin'. I'll only be a second. Go play with yourself or somethin'. I'll be right there.

A.C. once more addresses an audience member.

A.C.

You'd think that I was married to this guy or somethin'. Jesus.

Pat

Yea, right. Hey, what the hell is all this?

A.C. (coming onto the stage)

What?

House lights fade.

Pat (indicating the space toys)

This damned stuff. (pause) You tryin' to remake "Star Trek" for home video or something? (pause) "Beam me up, Scotty."

A.C.

Kid's space shit. (pause) Toy soldiers ain't good enough no more. Nah, now you gotta have armies a' space invaders and enough technical hardware for at least ten battalions a fuckin' Marvel Comic Super Heros. That's toys these days! I got more goddamned money tied up in plastic war machinery than I do in the house, my business, the motor cycle, my Jaguar, and the mother-fuckin' boat all put together, (picking up the football from one of the bar stools) and that's not even to mention the fuckin' sports equipment that the little chip off a' my poor ol' block is startin' to pile up. (pause) Your kid ain't got crap like this?

A.C. tosses Pat the football.

Pat (catching the ball)

He's only two. (pause) We ain't gone "high tech" yet. Vacuum cleaner still holds the little bugger in wonder. "Vroom, vroom, vacuum!" (pause) I try to keep him in the dark about anything that we wouldn't already have.

Pat tosses the football back to A.C.

Pat

Maybe next year, I thought I might let him know about TV.

A.C.

Oh, I wouldn't do that if I were you. (pause) That's where *commercials* come from.

Pat

Good point. (pause) Somethin' for me to look forward to?

A.C.

Hhh, you have no idea about the amazing fuckin' wonders that await.
 (pause) A.C. The Third is almost ten, goin' on *twenty-one* in June.
 Plays football as good as his ol' man ever did . . .

Pat

What, no better?

A.C. (setting the football on the bar)

Ah, in a few years, maybe. He needs some size yet, but he's really gonna be somethin' that son a mine. Straight honors classes in school, builds "Two Thousand And One" megaliths in his spare time, and has brought me through more goddamned changes and wild-asses fuckin' moments than any ten kids I'd ever hoped to have known.

Pat

Think so, huh? Maybe I outta ask your ol' man 'bout that. I'm sure he'd have one whale of a tale to tell. (pause) When you expect the paternity suits to start rollin' in?

A.C.

Hey, at least I waited till I was in my teens.

Pat

Barely.

A.C. (rubbing his cheek)

Yea, so maybe I could've still passed for a girl at the time. Taught me!
 (pause) I been through my share of Trojans since, that's for sure.
 Course, kids start everything younger these days. (in a heavy Hispanic accent) "Hey, man, 'is eleven o'clock; do ju know vere chur little chip is sticking hit?"

Pat

Public service announcement? (sipping his beer) Hey, so, how old you think your first "little chip" is by now, anyway?

A.C. (starting toward the coffee table)

Somewhere 'bout nineteen or twenty, I guess. I ain't heard anything in years.

Pat

You're probably a grandfather.

A.C. (picking up the comic book)

Could be.

He finds a pornographic magazine tucked into the comic book, holding it up so that the center-fold is visible.

Pat

Like father, like son.

A.C.

Somethin' for us both to think about. (pause) You ready for another beer?

Pat (looking at his half-full can)

Sure, I guess. I'll just put the, ah, "finishing touches" on this.

He drinks down the contents.

A.C. (starting to get the beer)

Always was one of your *better fuckin'* qualities.

Pat (lowering the can)

Thanks. (burps) There. I accept that as high praise, coming from an ol' chugger like you. (pause) Not somethin' I get too much practice at anymore.

A.C.

That's a pity. You shouldn't ever give up on somethin' that you've devoted a lifetime to perfectin', but if you start to getting' a little groggy, there's a bit of a "pick-you-up" in the head over there. (pause) You *got* a dollar bill or somethin' you can roll up?

A.C. sniffs through one nostril while sealing the other with an index finger.

A.C.

Ah, there's some nice, clean, *clear-headedness* under the soap dish. Just in case you might be interested.

Pat

No thanks. The beer'll be just fine.

A.C.

Welp, suit yourself. Here.

A.C. hands Pat a beer.

Pat

Thanks. I try to steer clear of "snow-blindness" as much as I can. Can't afford it any more, and even one taste 'd probably just make me hungry for another.

A.C.

Well, I've always been kinda fond a forbidden fruit myself. (pause) Suppose that's somethin' to think about.

Pat

Could be. (pause) Hey, how *is* the ol' man, anyway? "Archie the First," Christ, I haven't seen him in . . .

A.C. (coming around toward Pat)

. . . just about as long as its been since anybody's seen you, my man.