

# **WAITING FOR DINGLEMAN'S COMET**

by Albi Gorn

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

HENNY, mid 30s to mid 40s

TOM, mid 30s to mid 40s

SHANE, their thirteen year old daughter

*(HENNY, TOM and SHANE are walking through the theater, which is a forest, toward the stage. It is an August night)*

HENNY: I should have brought the bug spray. I'm being eaten to death already.

TOM: They're not biting me.

HENNY: Of course not. They're looking for a Hennyburger.

TOM: They biting you, Shane?

SHANE: No.

HENNY: My shampoo probably smells like fried onions to them.

SHANE: *(Running ahead)* It's up here.

TOM: *(Stopping)* Should I run back and get the spray?

HENNY: No. Why deprive the mosquitoes of a midnight snack?

TOM: It wouldn't take me more than a few minutes.

HENNY: *(Stopping)* Forget it, Tom. I'll live with it.

SHANE: Are you coming? I don't want to miss it.

TOM: I'll go back. *(Starts to go)*

HENNY: *(Going ahead)* Jesus, do what you want.

SHANE: Daddy, don't. You're gonna miss it.

TOM: *(Stops and comes back. To HENNY)* You're sure?

HENNY: No, Tom, I'm not sure. And you know something, not being sure is the only thing I'm sure about. Maybe I'm better being bitten. It's like little pinches to let me know I'm not dreaming.

TOM: What's wrong with dreaming?

SHANE: Just through these trees.

*(They come up on stage; it is a clearing on a hill)*

SHANE: Isn't it great? It's my secret place.

TOM: It's terrific, honey.

SHANE: I don't think anyone has been here since the Indians. What do you think?

TOM: Probably not.

HENNY: You made us walk through the woods getting eaten alive to come here? You can walk straight up here from the road.

SHANE: No you can't.

TOM: I don't think so, Hen.

HENNY: Tom, this is the hill behind Tucker's farm.

TOM: Henny.

HENNY: God knows we used to come up here often enough. Look, Shane, see those outlines there?

SHANE: Yeah.

HENNY: That's the shed. You and Maggie used to play there, when you used to play with Maggie.

SHANE: *(Disappointed)* Oh. I never noticed that. I only come up here at night.

TOM: It's called Peniston Crag.

SHANE: (*Excited again*) Like in *Wuthering Heights*?

TOM: Yep.

SHANE: How come?

TOM: Ask your Mom.

SHANE: How come? Are there gypsies here?

HENNY: It's not called Peniston Crag. It's called the hill behind Tucker's farm.

TOM: Once I wrote your mom a note and told her to meet me on Peniston Crag and even though we had never called it that before, when I got here she was here.

SHANE: Wow.

HENNY: Yeah. Well, there must be something wrong with that story because when you wrote that note Heathcliff hadn't been born yet.

SHANE: Why did you want her to meet you here?

HENNY: When is this comet supposed to happen?

SHANE: Soon. Mr. Truman didn't know the exact time. He just said after midnight.

HENNY: I never heard of Dingleman's comet. I think he was pulling your leg.

SHANE: No. He said it for real. Daddy, did you ever hear of Dingleman's comet?

TOM: I'm not sure. It sounds vaguely familiar. Why *did* I ask you to meet me up here, Henny?

HENNY: (*Beat; stares at him*) You don't remember?

TOM: I remember fine. I was wondering if you did.

(*There is a silence; SHANE looks from HENNY to TOM, waiting*)

SHANE: You can't stop there. Why?

HENNY: Whenever your father wanted to be alone with me, this is where we'd come.

SHANE: Why?

TOM: It always felt like our place; and I felt like I could say anything here, things I was afraid to say anyplace else. And your mom felt the same way.

HENNY: You're dreaming again, Tom.

TOM: Like your poetry. You were so afraid to let anyone see it but you would talk to me about it here.

SHANE: Wow, mom, you wrote poetry?

HENNY: No, I just talked about it.

TOM: Your mom wrote great poetry, very hot.

SHANE: I'll bet. About what?

TOM: About lots of things. She even wrote a poem about you, even though you weren't born yet:

*And when the child of our loins  
Walks beneath these August skies  
She'll hear the cadence mommy hears  
And see the stars through daddy's eyes*

SHANE: Wow, you wrote that?

HENNY: Yeah. Now you know why I gave up writing poetry.

SHANE: Why? I like it. I just didn't understand the part about the loins.

HENNY: Explain it to her, Tom.

TOM: And I talked about the Everbat.

SHANE: Your invention.

TOM: And how rich it was going to make us.

SHANE: But what did you talk about on that day, the day you wrote the note?

TOM: Hennie?

HENNY: (*Beat as she looks at him*) You father told me how our life was going to be. But the way we're living now, you never mentioned that at all, did you, Tom?

TOM: On that day we decided that if we ever had a kid, and we did, you know.

SHANE: I know, dad.

TOM: That we would name him, or her, Shane, because we had just seen the movie on television. Did you ever see it?

SHANE: Dad, you make me watch it every time you rent it. I mean it's all right, but it's no *Wuthering Heights*.

TOM: So, would you rather we named you Catherine?

SHANE: No.

HENNY: I don't see any comets.

TOM: There's Cassiopeia.

SHANE: Uh-huh.

TOM: Would you rather we named you Cassiopeia?

SHANE: No.

HENNY: I don't even see Dingleman.

TOM: Can you see the tyrannosaurus rex?

SHANE: (*Frightened*) Where?

HENNY: (*Peering off*) Oh, God, is that still there?

SHANE: Where?

TOM: Still munching on a triceratops bone.

SHANE: WhereWhereWhere?

TOM: See, over on that other hill?

SHANE: (*Looking*) I don't — (*excited*) oh, it is, it is.

TOM: I would have imagined by now lightening would have hit it or something.

HENNY: Or it would have become extinct like all its brothers and sisters.

SHANE: What is it?

TOM: It's just a big old oak tree. But silhouetted against the night sky and the lights from town, it always looked like a T-rex chomping away on a bone. What do you think?

SHANE: Yeah, yeah. It does.

TOM: Still here looking out for us the way he did then.

HENNY: He was looking out for us? Hell of a job he did.

SHANE: Mr. Truman says it was a comet striking the Earth that killed all the other dinosaurs.

HENNY: Yeah. (*Yelling towards the T-rex*) Watch out, fella, here comes Dingleman.

SHANE: I want to see it close up. (*Starts to go*)

TOM: You'll miss the comet.

SHANE: I'll walk looking up. (*She leaves, looking up*)

TOM: You would think after all these years it would have grown into something else.

HENNY: Well, after seeing Jurassic Park, it doesn't look much like a T-rex anymore. Thank you, Mr. Spielberg, for destroying yet one more childhood vision with modern technology.

TOM: Why are you so crabby lately?

HENNY: School starts in three weeks, Tom, and I have to go back to work. I hate it there. Six years working in that stupid library and I hate it.

TOM: You always say that in August and you're always loving it come December.

HENNY: Loving it? Try tolerating it. I love the kids, some of them, and I love that Shane loves it there. So I grow into a kind of numbness that I can tolerate, because, stupid me, I think I have no other choice. It never occurred to me that one can quit, that is, until you showed me it can be done. Maybe that's what you can do, Tom; you can write a book: *How To Quit Your Job*.

TOM: I couldn't stay there anymore, Henny.

HENNY: You never said anything to me, you never asked me about it, you never tried to work anything out; it's just: "Henny, I quit my job today. What's for dinner?"

TOM: This happened months ago, Henny.

HENNY: It takes me awhile. First I had to believe it actually happened. Then I had to figure out how I felt about it. Angry was how I felt. Then I had to figure out if I had a right to feel angry. Then I had to go back and find my anger. And by the time I got through doing all that I was exhausted and I thought why bother.

TOM: You were angry?

HENNY: One fine spring day I go into school and the first thing I see is the distributor has sent us sixteen copies of the book version of *Dumb and Dumber*. While I'm on the phone with them, Wanda meanders in a half hour late and tells me she can't lift the books anymore because she's afraid of developing Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Then I get the mail which includes a letter from a group of concerned parents who have a list of fifty titles they consider to be politically incorrect, or, as they put it, socially insensitive to regional mores. Then Grummond comes in and I tell him about the distributor, and he says he placed the order and didn't I see the movie, boy was it a hoot. And then I tell him about Wanda and he says not to worry since she's not being rehired anyway as there is no money in the new budget for a library assistant. And I show him the letter and he tells me to call the parents and negotiate, maybe we can whittle it down to twenty-five. Then he asks me why his daughter's reading comprehension score is below the 70th percentile and an all but irresistible urge overcomes me to smile at him and say "Dumb and Dumber" but I squelch it because I'm afraid of losing my job. And as I'm driving home I think to myself: Afraid of losing my job? Why? What's to lose? And so I walk into the house thinking all I need is a good back rub and a little sympathy and what do I get? "Henny, I just quit my job."

TOM: (*Long beat*) Henny, I had no idea.

HENNY: Right, Tom. You had no idea. Fourteen years ago on this hill you said: Henny, you're the missing piece. If I had you, Henny, I would have the life I want. Marry me, share my life. And so I did, Tom. And what has happened in those fourteen years? After six jobs, God knows how many hours in your workshop trying to reinvent the battery, a lot of promises and a lot of dreams, here we are back on that hill, we have gone absolutely nowhere and something is still missing.

TOM: I'm so close with that Everbat. There's just one piece of the puzzle to figure out.

HENNY: I don't want to hear about your missing pieces anymore. Just like I don't want to hear when you finally get another job how this is the one, this is where you'll be happy. That's what's wrong with dreaming, Tom. Waking up.

TOM: (*Beat*) I know you think I'm a dreamer, Henny — well, I am a dreamer, that's why you think that. It's just that I want to leave my mark, I want what I do to mean something. Going to work on these meaningless jobs, I want to know I've brought something new and special to the world. I know it's hard for you to understand —

HENNY: No it isn't. Don't you think I would have liked to have written something special? But I can't put my life on hold until it happens.

TOM: No, you put your writing on hold.

HENNY: And you put your family on hold.

TOM: I've tried to keep us going as best I can. I'll get another job, Henny, you know I will.

HENNY: You're missing the point, Tom. If you want to bounce from job to job and work on that stupid whatever it is, that's fine. But take us along. Let me know what's going on. Don't keep coming to me to tell me what already happened and what decisions you've already made about it. (*Beat*) We used to share everything, Tom. How did this happen?

TOM: It's hard to say.

HENNY: It is hard to say. This is all hard to say.

*(Crossfade to SHANE standing in front of the T-rex)*

SHANE: Hey there, old T-rex. How're you doing? It's Shane. My mom and pop are over there. (Looks and points) See? Well, you can't really see them but they're there, at least they were when I left. They've been there before. They call that hill Peniston Crag, but at school the kids all call it Makeout Mountain. I guess you can figure out why. We came out here tonight to see Dingleman's Comet. But don't be afraid, it can't hurt you. You see, there is no Dingleman's Comet. I made it up. I needed to get them up on that hill again. Things have been pretty scary at my house lately. My mom and pop aren't really getting along. I know they love each other. When my mom takes me horseback riding she's always telling me how much she loves my pop; and when my pop took me to the Natural History Museum — I saw some of your friends there, by the way; they say hello — he was telling me how much he loves my mom. But for some reason lately they haven't been able to say it to each other. Anyway, I remembered this letter I found when I was looking through my mom's poetry in the attic where my pop asked her to come out to Peniston Crag. Well, it wasn't too hard to figure out that was Makeout Mountain. So I got 'em up here. I guess I was hoping that under the same stars on the same hill with you watching over them, maybe they would find the courage to tell each other how much they loved each other, instead of telling me, 'cause I know already, and then things would be all right again. *(Beat)* Well, it was the best I could think of. *(Peering off)* I wish I could see how they were doing. I better go back. And by the way, you should watch how much triceratops you eat; it's very high in cholesterol.

*(Crossfade to HENNY and TOM)*

HENNY: I never heard of Dingleman.

TOM: Me neither. But he left us a comet to remember him by. Why *did* you stop writing poems, Henny?

HENNY: I don't know. When we were courting I just couldn't get enough of you. And even when we were apart I would keep on talking to you and loving you and sharing my life with you and all that just made its way into poems. It's been awhile since I felt like I had anything to say.

TOM: You don't love me anymore? *(HENNY doesn't answer)* You know my invention, the Everbat, it's very delicate. The idea is to make a battery that would keep its charge for years by making it recharge itself as it discharged. But no matter how much power I charge it up with, it still needs a jolt now and then to keep it going. That's the missing piece I can't figure out. *(Beat)* The other morning as I was walking down to my workshop, about halfway down the stairs I guess I was daydreaming — for a change — but I felt like I was on a staircase from one of those Escher drawings where depending on your perspective the steps could either be going up or down. And I guess I couldn't figure out which it was because the next thing I know I'm walking off the stairs and falling. So I grabbed on to a pipe and twisted around, with my foot caught up in a beam. And I was hanging there for maybe two, three minutes. And you were right upstairs in the kitchen. And I just couldn't bring myself to call for help. I couldn't bear the thought of you seeing what a stupid predicament I'd gotten myself into. I lowered myself down somehow, tore my shirt, scraped my shin and got very dirty. I was amazed you didn't notice when I came up later.

HENNY: You always look like that after you've been working on that thing. *(Beat)* Are you all right?

TOM: I'm not hurt, if that's what you mean. *(Beat)* I should have told you about what was going on at work, I meant to. I was just waiting for — I don't know what I was waiting for.

HENNY: *(Beat)* I don't know what I was waiting for either.

TOM: *(Thumb pointing up)* Dingleman's Comet?

HENNY: God, I hope not. It probably won't come again for another 150 years. We should be able to communicate a little more frequently than that. What do you think, Tom?

TOM: Henny, I—  
(SHANE comes back)

SHANE: Hey, I'm back.

TOM: So, how's our friend T-rex up close?

SHANE: Awesome. We had a nice talk. He knows all sorts of cool stuff.

HENNY: Like what?

SHANE: Well, see, from that hill he can see the whole town so he sees everything that goes on.

HENNY: I thought they couldn't see at all, just movement.

SHANE: No, that's just something Spielberg made up to make the movie more exciting.

HENNY: He lied to us?

SHANE: Well, you're allowed to make up things when you're doing important stuff, like making a movie.

HENNY: (Smiling) Oh you are?

SHANE: And T-rex said he isn't watching over people any more. It's too hard. So people better start watching out for each other, is what he says.

TOM: Good advice. What else did he say?

SHANE: I asked him if he remembered you. He said he wasn't sure.

HENNY: Well, it was a long time ago.

TOM: An August night like this fourteen years ago.

SHANE: A year before I was born. No, wait, (counting on her fingers) August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May; nine months before I was born.

(SHANE looks up at the stars. HENNY and TOM look at her)

HENNY: Are you cold?

SHANE: No.

HENNY: Wanna go back?

SHANE: No, I haven't seen what we came up here for.

TOM: Right. Wait, is that it?

SHANE: Where?

TOM: Up there, next to that sort of beige star.

HENNY: You mean next to the two that are under the four next to the big blotchy one?

SHANE: I don't see a big blotchy one.

TOM: No, next to the ones that look like a backwards T.

SHANE: Where?

HENNY: How can a T be backwards?

SHANE: Is that it, beside that whole clump of stars?

HENNY: Yeah, under those two that look like they're looking at each other.

SHANE: Right. Over there.

TOM: No, no, look, come down about eight or nine stars from that.

SHANE: To the bowling ball?

HENNY: What bowling ball?

TOM: Past the bowling ball.

HENNY: Oh, yeah, the bowling ball.

TOM: Now, take a sharp right.

HENNY: Actually, it looks more like a tennis ball.

SHANE: Over to the empty space with the two in the middle?

TOM: Right, now up to the sort of, I don't know, what would you call it?  
HENNY: Like a beehive.  
TOM: Yeah, the beehive. Isn't that something moving right below that? (*Beat as they all look*)  
SHANE: It must be a bee.  
HENNY: Be a bee?  
SHANE: That's not Dingleman's Comet. Dingleman's Comet is much bigger.  
HENNY: (*Still looking up*) Boy, on a night like this you can see how they first saw the constellations. Man.  
TOM: Yeah.  
SHANE: That's just what we were doing.  
HENNY: Yeah, sort of.  
SHANE: All we need is to give them Greek or Latin names. Like that one, right next to the ones we were just looking at. See the four in a sort of a row with the three on top and then the other one?  
HENNY: Yeah.  
SHANE: It sort of looks like an iron.  
HENNY: (*Chuckling*) Yeah, sort of.  
SHANE: So we can call it Procorus.  
TOM: Procorus the iron. Maybe Orion can use it to iron his loincloth.  
SHANE: Orion is in the winter sky.  
TOM: That he is.  
SHANE: (*Musing*) Loincloth. Child of our loins. Oh, now I get it.  
TOM: (*Beat; TOM and HENNY smiling, looking at SHANE who stands before them looking up at the stars*) Henny, what you were saying about doing things together —  
HENNY: Yeah?  
TOM: I just want you to know that maybe I'll never invent that Everbat and you may never publish a poem, but together I think we managed to produce something very special.  
HENNY: (*Looking at SHANE*) We sure did. (*They have moved side by side*) I do love you Tom. You know that.  
TOM: I do, but it's always good to hear. And it's always good to say. I love you, Henny.  
(*TOM puts his arm around HENNY. They look at each other, perhaps kiss. SHANE, unseen to HENNY and TOM, without looking back at them, makes a Yes! gesture with a fist pump*)  
SHANE: You know something? I don't care if that comet never comes. It's great just to watch the stars.  
(*TOM and HENNY smile at her as the lights fade*)

— end of play —