

HEN & HAM

Written by

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EXT. BACKROAD - DAWN

A faulty shopping cart wheel spins lucidly as it makes its way down a half-paved road. At the helm, a young man.

This is HEN. He looks about seventeen, but it's hard to precisely calculate his age.

Hen's cart is filled to the brim with odds and ends. Metal, toys, newspapers, it's a collection of sorts.

EXT. JUNKYARD - MORNING

A run-down junkyard, piled with mangled cars and guarded by a dilapidated, old shed.

Hen is bent over the engine of a banged-up, red sedan. With a swift jerk, he removes a piece from the exposed motor.

Suddenly, an aggressive male voice BOOMS:

VOICE (O.C.)

Hey! Hey kid! What do you think  
you're doing?

An older man emerges from behind Hen. He carries a shotgun cradled between his arms and a toothpick between his discolored teeth.

This is RUSTY (67), the junkyard owner.

CUT TO:

Hen gallops back down the road frantically. He's been caught! GUNSHOTS ring as Rusty continues his pursuit.

RUSTY (O.C.)

Hey you! Get back here!

After a moment, Rusty gives up.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

(muttering)  
Damn kid...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

An examination room doorway stands open, allowing stark fluorescent light to seep into the shadowy room beyond.

Within moments, a dark-haired woman in her early fifties comes into frame.

This is EILEEN (53).

Eileen is pushing a wheelchair holding her elderly mother, ROSE (87).

From behind, a female doctor helps guide the wheelchair across the office threshold. Once inside, she gently swings the door closed.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Eileen sits perched along a row of chairs in the office waiting room. She picks her cuticle meaninglessly and stares at the slick tiled floor.

Momentarily, the doctor enters. Eileen has no choice but to turn her full attention to the diagnosis.

As the doctor speaks, she nods obediently, hanging on every word. Eileen's expression goes from anxious to extremely somber.

The diagnosis isn't good...

INT. SEDAN - DAY

Eileen and Rose are driving home. Rose has an ice cream cone in one hand. She seems to be in high spirits, but Eileen is holding back tears.

ROSE (O.C.)  
(licking her ice cream)  
Are we going home?

EILEEN  
Yes, Mom. I'm taking you home.

ROSE (O.C.)  
I want to go home.

EILEEN  
I know Mom. We'll be there soon.

ROSE (O.C.)  
I don't want to go back to the old folks' home and wait to die. I want to go home.

A moment of deep silence rests upon the conversation, until:

ROSE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
Is Henry going to call?

EILEEN  
 (choking back a tear)  
 Henry isn't here anymore.

ROSE (O.C.)  
 Where did he go?

In response, Eileen's bottom lip quivers silently.

ROSE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 (pause)  
 Well, I'm gonna keep calling him.

Rose eagerly stops a drip of ice cream as it makes its way down the face of her cone.

ROSE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 Are we going home?

CUT TO:

HEN & HAM

EXT. ANTENNA - DUSK

Hen sways precariously from atop a ham radio antenna. He is attempting to make some important repairs. Gingerly, Hen finesses a salvaged part into place.

HAM RADIO (V.O.)  
 (screeching to life)  
 -- wishing I could be there right  
 now, it was ninety-three in Houston  
 today --

INT. HEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hen, headset on, is scrubbing through an antique ham radio.

His bedroom is scattered with scraps. Fast-food toys line the dusty windowsill, and a box of tainted car parts resides in the corner, unused.

HAM RADIO (V.O.)  
 (scrubbing to a different  
 frequency)  
 -- Could be nothing, just wanted to  
 check with you before I send it  
 down --

HEN  
 Hello? Dad?

HAM RADIO (V.O.)

-- And I told her that, but I don't think she could hear me over the --

HEN

Dad, can you hear me?

HAM RADIO (V.O.)

-- Anything else you need to ask us before we head out of range, over? -

-

HEN

Is anyone there?

HAM RADIO (V.O.)

-- Sorry, could you repeat that? I must not have been there for that conversation --

Suddenly, someone closes the apartment door. Hen briskly quiets the radio and slips his headphones from one ear.

VOICE (O.C.)

(pause)

Hen?

It's Hen's AUNT (47).

AUNT (O.C.)

Hen! I better not see that light on in your room?

Hen desperately unplugs his thin headset and shoves the device deep into his desk.

AUNT (O.C.) (CONT'D)

How many times have I told you to stay off that stupid radio? Hen?

(pause)

Hen! Are you listening to me?

Hen scampers hysterically to the bed -- before remembering to click off his lamp. He barely slips under the bedsheet before:

The bedroom door BURSTS open. Hen's Aunt looms in the dimly lit doorway. The twinkling embers at the tip of her cigarette burn intensely, announcing her icy presence.

Flipping on the light switch, she spots Hen tucked in bed, "asleep". Grumbling to herself, and with just as much theatrical gusto, she slashes at the switch and exits the room.

As the door slams shut, Hen is left in utter darkness...

EXT. BACKROAD - MORNING

The morning air is shattered by the unmistakable RATTLING noises of a gimpy shopping cart wheel.

EXT. JUNKYARD - MORNING

Hen ravages a broken-down pickup truck. His dexterous fingers scan the motor for any possible additions to his ever-expanding collection.

Looming into view, Rusty and his scruffy employee, BUDDY (27), gradually creep toward Hen. Wrapped tightly in Buddy's hand -- a bristled rope.

Hen doesn't even suspect the duo's ominous presence.

Then, with calculated intensity, Rusty jumps Hen from behind.

The skirmish is quick but effective. Grabbing Hen around the waist, Rusty pins the boy's hands to his sides while Buddy scrabbles to grasp Hen's wildly flailing legs.

RUSTY (V.O.)

Mine...

INT. JUNKYARD GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

CLANG. CLANG. CLANG.

Hen is shoved stiffly onto a corroded, metal folding chair. His ham radio is nestled tightly against his heaving chest.

RUSTY (O.C.)

Also mine...

CUT TO:

Framed within cluttered shelves, filled to bursting with dusty tools and unused automotive accessories, Rusty unenthusiastically rummages through Hen's shopping cart.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Hell! All this junk is mine.

With an unnecessarily aggressive shove, the contents of Hen's precious collection SKITTER across the rough concrete.

Hen jolts straight up, suddenly defiant. Buddy's thick palms press him back to his seat.

Swinging a decrepit folding chair under himself, Rusty takes a seat.

After a tense second of silence, he reaches for a cigarette. Lighting up, Rusty wipes his oily hand across the face of his jeans and extends his arm for a handshake.

Understandably, he doesn't get one.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Rusty, by the way. That's Buddy. We haven't officially met.

Rusty's hand hangs limp in midair. Hen, eyes unwavering, watches as the junkyard owner takes a blissful drag.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

(pulling his cigarette away)

Shouldn't you be in school?

Hen doesn't reply.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

(readjusting)

I'll take that as a no...

Clearing his throat and smacking his lips together, Rusty takes another drawn-out hit.

He eyes Hen's radio thoughtfully, before saying:

RUSTY (CONT'D)

(pointing with his cigarette)

All these parts and pieces, they're for that, aren't they?

(pause)

He come back yet?

In response, Hen clutches his ham radio tighter.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

(pause)

Guess not. Cause you're still carrying that piece of junk around.

Suddenly, Rusty thrusts his hand forward, beckoning to Hen's most prized possession -- his ham radio.

Fearfully, Hen jerks the radio to his side, out of Rusty's eager grasp.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Don't worry, little Hen. I just wanna see it. I won't break it. Promise. Cross my heart...

Rusty "exes" his chest dramatically.

After an apprehensive beat, Hen carefully passes his ham radio to Rusty.

Taking the radio into his palms, the junkyard owner gives it the once-over. Casually moving his cigarette back to his lips, he turns knobs and flips switches.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Well, well, well. This is a complicated bit of machinery, isn't it? Daddy give this to you before he shipped off?

Rusty's words strike a nerve.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Hasn't called, has he?

(pause)

Don't worry. I'm sure he didn't forget about you. I hear the signal's pretty bad in Afghanistan.

Every move calculated and calm, Rusty passes the ham radio back to his victim.

After a moment, Rusty leans forward, clamping onto the edges of Hen's chair. Unfolding like a horror movie reveal, he sluggishly slides Hen closer.

Before long, his knees are almost touching Hen's, Rusty resumes his casual position.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

Look, I get it, okay. Your dad was a decent guy, and I was willing to let it slide the first few times. But Hen, every day? You do realize everything you steal is a zero off my retirement fund, right?

(pause)

Right, Hen?

Then, without warning, Rusty roughly grabs Hen's face, yanking him even closer. Their eyes meet.

RUSTY (CONT'D)  
(through his cigarette)  
What did I tell you about stealing my stuff, huh? Remember? And how many times do I have to tell you to stay out of my junkyard!

There is no response from Hen's pursed lips, nor his steely gaze.

RUSTY (CONT'D)  
Huh, klepto?

Hen's pupils quiver...

Then, with a sharp shove from Rusty, Hen clammers to the hard floor. For a split second, he scrambles on the concrete, frenziedly trying to get to his feet.

Unfortunately, Rusty is quicker.

With full theatrics, he forcefully kicks his chair against the wall.

RUSTY (CONT'D)  
I hate this as much as you do, kid. But if I so much as see your shadow through my front gate, I'll call the cops! You hear me? Don't you ever step foot on my dirt again, got it?

As per usual, Hen doesn't take the time to reply. He is already halfway out the door in panic.

Hen is barely within earshot as Rusty releases his closing remarks:

RUSTY (CONT'D)  
I don't hate you, little Hen. You just have to stop poking your beak where it doesn't belong.

Rusty pauses at the garage door, checking to make sure Hen isn't stopping.

Grinning internally, Rusty leans to the ground and snags a wayward spark plug.

RUSTY (CONT'D)  
 Hey! You mind if I keep this?  
 Pretty sure it's mine anyway.

With this final facetious jab, Rusty quietly turns and shuts the decaying garage door.

INT. HEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Hen vomits into the toilet, his stomach unable to keep his emotions under control.

Rising slowly, the CLICKS and WHIRLS of instruments fill the room.

HAM RADIO (V.O.)  
 -- 'Bout to head back. Is there  
 anything I need to bring --

INT. HEN'S ROOM - DAY

Hen holds the ham radio responder limp in his hand. Behind his dark eyes, there is desperation.

HAM RADIO (V.O.)  
 -- You're back on. I haven't heard  
 from you in months --

Then, voice breaking:

HEN  
 Hey dad...

The response is instant, dull ELECTRICAL NOISE. Hen's eyes fill with glimmering water, and during his next plea, a slender tear falls free.

HEN (CONT'D)  
 I know you're probably pretty busy,  
 but.  
 (pause)  
 Where are you?

HAM RADIO (V.O.)  
 -- It's a couple of miles from  
 Denver. Any clue where that is? --

This question asked, Hen's facade crumbles. Pure emotion radiates from behind his eyes.

HEN  
 'Cause I could really use your  
 smile right now.

In a spasm, Hen turns off the transmitter and wipes his eyes. Sniffing, he attempts to regain his composure.

HAM RADIO (O.S.)  
 (pause)  
 Henry?

Hen's eyes light up, with both confusion and excitement. He fumbles for the responder sloppily and CLICKS it on.

HEN  
 Dad?!

VOICE (O.S.)  
 Henry?

HEN  
 Dad? Dad, can you hear me?

Hen shifts the knobs on his radio, trying furiously to get a clearer signal.

HEN (CONT'D)  
 Dad?

...

HEN (CONT'D)  
 Dad?

Hen's breath quickens. The tension is thick. But, as soon as it begins, the moment is gone.

The disappointing STATIC has returned.

VOICE (O.S.)  
 Is your name Henry?

HEN  
 Yes?

Hen waits intently for a reply, literally on the edge of his seat.

VOICE (O.S.)  
 My husband's name is Henry...

Exhale. Disappointment floods Hen's features. It is not his father. His eyes darken once again, his hope quickly fading from view.

HEN

Oh. Sorry, I. I thought you were someone else.

Embarrassed, Hen CLICKS off the receiver and sets it down on his desk. He dries his eyes across his shirt sleeve.

From the quiet comes a calming voice...

ROSE (O.S.)

You okay?

HEN

(trying to act confident)  
Yeah. I was just looking for someone...

ROSE (O.S.)

Your dad?

Hen scrunches his face, the emotion returning. For a second, Hen doesn't know what to say, how to respond.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You know, I was looking for someone too. My husband.

HEN

Where's he?

ROSE (O.S.)

I'm not sure. I haven't heard from him in a while... And you?

HEN

(pause)  
My dad's in Afghanistan. I haven't heard from him either.

ROSE (O.S.)

You wish he were home with you?

Hen doesn't say a thing, but that is all the response Rose needs. She gets it.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Well. It sounds like you and I are in the same boat, kid. My name's Rose, by the way. What about you?

HEN

Henry.

ROSE

My husband's name was Henry! Boy, I miss him. I wish he were home every day...

(pause)

But life isn't all skittles and rainbows.

Hen chews his lip. The conversation is far from comforting, but for some reason, Hen stays glued to the receiver.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You know what always makes me feel better?

HEN

What?

ROSE (O.S.)

Jokes. Do you wanna hear one?

Hen only hesitates a second before replying:

HEN

I guess so...

ROSE (O.S.)

Alright, well, let me know if I've already told you this one, I can never remember.

(pause)

Okay, so there's this guy, and every night after work, he goes to the bar. He always orders three drinks. And one night, the bartender asks the man, "How come you always come in here and order three beers?" And the man replies and says, "I have two brothers in the army, so I always order three drinks, one for each of my brothers overseas".

(pause)

Well, one night. The man comes in, and he only orders two drinks. The bartender is distraught, and he doesn't know how to respond. But after a bit, he goes over to the man and says, "I'm really sorry for your loss...". The man looks up with a confused look on his face and says, "Oh, my brothers are fine. I just quit drinking".

There is a moment of silence as Hen breaks into a giddy smile. On the other line, Rose tries to decide if she told the joke correctly.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Wait... I think I messed that up.  
Let me start again. He gets three  
beers all at the same time, and it  
was the brother who quit drinking,  
but...

HEN

(coyly)  
... He still has two beers for  
himself because his brothers are  
fine.

ROSE (O.S.)

Yes, exactly.  
(pause)  
Sorry, I'm bad with jokes.

Hen chuckles softly, he's obviously quite amused.

HEN

No, no. That was a good one. I do  
feel better.

ROSE (O.S.)

You could always land a joke. I was  
never any good. We complement each  
other... Anyway, that's one of my  
favorites.

HEN

(pause)  
I wish I had someone. Like you had  
Henry.

ROSE (O.S.)

You don't have anyone?

Hen pauses.

HEN

I'm alone.

ROSE (O.S.)

Well, you've always got me. I'm not  
going anywhere, especially if our  
daughter has anything to say about  
it!

Hen grins. His mood has softened considerably. Rose is obviously confused.

HEN  
How do you do it?

ROSE (O.S.)  
Do what?

HEN  
Stay so happy?

ROSE (O.S.)  
Hm. That's not an easy thing to do,  
kiddo.

HEN  
Any secret to it?

Rose thinks for a minute. It's no easy task to sum up one's credo in a sentence.

ROSE (O.S.)  
Well, I find something I love, or  
someone I love, and... I never let  
them go.

(pause)  
Have I mentioned my husband? He was  
the love of my life.

Hen's eyebrows knit together. Light floods his features.

HEN  
No. What did you say his name was  
again?

A remarkable kinship has just begun.