

DEAR HENRY,

by
ZOE VALES

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Characters

Henry Edward Bodsworth- male, mid twenties- mid thirties, anxious, well-spoken, historian, believing, educated

Madeline Ruby Kaye- female, mid-late teens, inquisitive, easily agitated

Adaline Ellis Bodsworth- female, mid-late twenties, Henry's wife, assuring, caring

Elmira Evangeline Kaye- female, between ages 10-13, Madeline's sister, "expert in annoying people"

Setting: A dusty, old attic in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1867.

Scene 1

Lights up on MADELINE as she enters an attic. Cardboard boxes are stacked miscellaneously, and household possessions scatter the floor. It is obvious that this house had been recently moved into. A journal is placed in the corner.

MADELINE

(talking to herself)

Light bulbs... Hello light bulbs? I know you're up here...

(MADELINE spots the journal, a red leatherbound book, in the corner. Curious, she walks over and picks it up. She cautiously opens it and begins to read.)

Dear Henry,

As the last journal has been filled, I have found comfort and consolation in this book instead.

The date today is December 9, 1867, and the clouds move across the sky like grey turtles casting dark and shadow upon this dreary town.

(HENRY EDWARD BODSWORTH enters the stage.)

MADELINE AND HENRY

Of course, Adaline brings me endless joy despite the gloominess of my own soul. She is the light of my life and keeps my heart warm in the bleakness of winter.

(MADELINE'S VOICE slowly fades.)

HENRY

Writing letters to myself, like this one, aids me as well. Confiding emotions into a letter is much easier than confessing all of my feelings out loud, even with Adaline always by my side.

(ADALINE'S VOICE can be heard humming "Silent Night". The cardboard boxes are removed and a small writing desk and chair enters on HENRY'S side of the stage. ADALINE enters, carrying a tray with muffins and coffee.)

HENRY

Ah, there she is now, singing a sweet tune like she does every morning to remind me how lucky I am to have her.

ADALINE

(placing the tray on the writing desk)
Here you are, Henry.

HENRY

Thank you, my love.

(HENRY kisses ADALINE'S cheek. ADALINE exits. HENRY moves to the writing desk.)

The snowfall outside should spawn excitement in me, but it is sadly not so. The frigid weather and my demeanor are practically asymptotic.

(MADELINE'S VOICE joins in with HENRY'S.)

MADELINE AND HENRY

However, my studies have excelled far by the turn of the season. I suppose I have attempted to distract myself with them. If it has worked, though, is a mystery.

Yours Sincerely,

Henry Edward Bodsworth

(HENRY freezes in tableau.)

MADELINE

Henry Edward Bodsworth...

(MADELINE flips a few more pages. She begins to read again.)

Dear Henry,

I fear that I am confusing dreams and reality. Pages in this journal are wrinkled in new places, and even the very air seems just so peculiar.

(HENRY joins MADELINE.)

MADLINE AND HENRY

Fresher? Crisper? I cannot yet tell if the change is for the better, but it is still off-putting. Even with my personal troubles, the days keep piling on like weights on a scale. The day is December 13, 1867, and the snow is as present as before.

(MADLINE'S VOICE fades and she freezes in tableau.)

HENRY

The sky, however, is now a slight sickly green like the leaves of a pale fern, and the sun is dimmer now than the dying flame of a kerosene lamp.

(MADLINE comes out of tableau and trips on a small box. She catches herself before she falls over. HENRY reacts.)

HENRY

Adaline? Are you alright?

ADALINE

(offstage)
I'm fine, my dear.

HENRY

But, that noise...

ADALINE

(walking onstage)
What noise? I didn't hear anything. It must have come from outside. Children are out of school and they are bound to be mischievous.

HENRY

Yes, yes, of course. I'll be down for supper once I've finished this entry.

ADALINE

Until then.
(ADALINE exits.)

HENRY

I know that noise came from inside this house. It came from just a few feet over-

(HENRY begins to walk over to MADELINE, almost crossing the boundary between their worlds. He freezes in tableau as there is a knock at the door on MADELINE'S side. MADELINE comes out of tableau.)

ELMIRA

Madeline! Open the door! We still need those light bulbs!

(Beat.)

Did you die up here or something?

(MADELINE angrily storms to the door and opens it.)

MADELINE

(grabbing light bulbs from a box)

Here, take your stupid light bulbs, and go away!

ELMIRA

(entering)

Jeez, Madeline, what happened to you?

MADELINE

Just leave me alone, okay?

ELMIRA

(walking forward)

Whatcha got?

MADELINE

(acting clueless)

Huh?

ELMIRA

That red book.

(teasingly)

Did you get it from your boyfriend?

MADELINE

Elmira, for the last time, I don't have one!

ELMIRA

Well, what's in it?

MADLINE

Is annoying the only thing you can be?

ELMIRA

It's my job! Now, what's in the book?

MADLINE

(thinking)

S-science- science notes!

ELMIRA

(unbelievably)

Science notes.

MADLINE

Yeah, none you would understand. It- it's full of- of ionic compounds and molecular structures and... and mitochondria!

ELMIRA

Seriously?

MADLINE

(sighing)

Just... just go, okay?

ELMIRA

(Beat.)

Fine.

(ELMIRA walks to the door and exits. MADLINE listens as ELMIRA walks away. As soon as ELMIRA'S footsteps cease, she quickly turns back to THE JOURNAL. MADLINE freezes in tableau as HENRY unfreezes.)

HENRY

-Here!

(He stops, confused.)

But it couldn't be, could it? It's just the floorboards creaking as the bitter air flows through my house. Or a mouse in the wall, or...

(He chuckles.)

HENRY (cont.)

No. I cannot kid myself with the means of ghosts or fairy tales. Ghosts are for children's stories, not for grown men with houses and wives to care for.

(HENRY walks back to his writing desk and drinks from a cup of coffee.)

I must keep myself calm, although I regret to say that the creaking of floorboards is the most interesting thing that has happened this winter.

(MADELINE joins HENRY.)

MADELINE AND HENRY

Although I find great joy and opulence in writing these entries, all good things must end. I will write again tomorrow, when maybe the bleak atmosphere will lift somewhat. I do hope to see the sun again.

Yours Sincerely,

Henry Edward Bodsworth

(MADELINE looks up and her shoulders sink. Her facial expressions convey what she is thinking about- the noise. Without saying a word, she looks around the room, as if trying to find something that isn't there.)

MADELINE

(talking to herself)

Madeline, oh my God, are you serious? Ghosts aren't real, idiot!

(laughing)

You've been watching too many conspiracy theories.

(She turns a few more pages with a small smile on her face.)

Dear Henry,

It has happened again, but this time, I have heard a voice.

(Her expression becomes worried.)

It is faint like a midsummer breeze, but it does not sound like a school child. It sounds like a young adult, but somehow not from our time.

(HENRY joins her.)

MADELINE AND HENRY

It baffles me how it could be true, but it must be so. The voice is not my Adaline's, for it is more youthful.

HENRY

However, it sounded contentious- as if being madly challenged by another. If this is true, however, I heard no other voice. The date is December 17th, and this house has never been less comfortable. It feels like someone else wanders the room, and I can feel soft vibrations in the floor as though it were being roamed by some force invisible to the naked eye. I understand that I sound like a madman, and I imagine that when I read this in the future I will think that of myself.

(HENRY freezes.)

ELMIRA

(knocking on door)

Madeline, it's time for dinner!

MADELINE

I'm not hungry!

ELMIRA

(opening the door and sticking her face through)

Shut up, you're always hungry.

MADELINE

(annoyed)

Elmira!

ELMIRA

Okay, okay, fine! But you're missing spaghetti tonight.

(She shuts the door.)

(MADELINE quickly turns back to the journal. HENRY jumps.)

HENRY

See? There it is again! It must be real, it must! It sounded so clear and concise that the speaker could be standing right in front of me!

(He takes a deep breath, clearly shaken.)

I fear my sanity is slipping through my fingertips like sand in an hourglass.

MADELINE AND HENRY

I haven't told Adaline this, of course. I don't want to upset her. She already does so much for me and I don't want her to treat me like a child. But with all of these thoughts and jumpy actions, I am acting like one. It is getting late now, and I suppose I should try and sleep, even though I don't think that will be possible. However so, goodbye, my journal, and goodnight.

MADLINE AND HENRY (cont.)

Sincerely,
Henry Edward Bodsworth

(MADLINE quickly flips several pages)

MADLINE

Dear Henry,
This is it. It is December 24, 1867, and instead of partaking in Christmas festivities, I have decided that I must try to communicate with the spirit that lurks in my house.

MADLINE AND HENRY

I am determined to get to the bottom of this for my and Adaline's sakes. So, I suppose I must start sometime, for I think that I will never be brave enough.

HENRY

If I wait, I'll be standing here for the rest of my life.

(He begins to talk to the room.)

Spirit, show yourself!

(MADLINE seems startled and freezes.)

I can see her now! Her hair is very dark, but her skin is pale. She is young, almost an adult. She is wearing a yellow shirt and black pants, not the proper dress for a girl. She-

(he falters)

She seems terrified, as though-

MADLINE

Who said that?

HENRY

Do you not see me?

(HENRY walks to MADLINE'S side of the stage. MADLINE nods, clearly terrified.)

Tell me spirit, why are you in my house?

MADLINE

You're- but you're dead!

HENRY

I am not dead, I am alive and we-

(He sees his journal in MADLINE'S hands.)

How did you get that-?

MADELINE

I just found it in the corner-

HENRY

(interrupting)

It was sitting on my desk just a moment ago, how did you get that?

(HENRY looks over and sees another journal on his desk. He picks it up and slowly walks over to MADELINE. Beat.)

Who are you?

MADELINE

I'm Madeline, I just moved here-

HENRY

But this is my house!

MADELINE

No, it isn't!

(She takes a deep breath.)

I've been reading your journal and...

(She pauses as she thinks of how to say what she needs to.)

HENRY

And... what?

MADELINE

Henry, it's 2019. You're dead.

HENRY

You're wrong.

MADELINE

No, I'm not! Look outside! It isn't 1867 anymore, face the facts! I'm not the ghost, you are!

(HENRY quickly runs towards MADELINE, enraged.)

HENRY

(yelling)

I AM NOT A GHOST!

(MADELINE shuffles backwards, holding back startled tears. She turns around. HENRY reaches out to her, as if he is about to apologize, but pulls back. He walks to the window, looks outside, and walks back to MADELINE, face distraught.)

HENRY

I suppose that time is unstoppable. It has pummelled like a racing train for all of these years and left me in the dust, still clawing for some sense of reality, or sanity... or life. It seems that life keeps going even when... even when there is none left in you. Even when the lights are dimmed, there is always a spark of light somewhere, waiting.

MADELINE

Henry, I'm sorry-

HENRY

No. If I am truly stuck reliving my life over and over, it has been a good one. Appreciate your life, Madeline. Please, do that for me.

(Lights down.)

Scene 2

Lights up on MADELINE asleep in the attic, the red journal curled under her arm. HENRY and his desk are gone. MADELINE jolts awake. She spots the journal and throws it in fear, the book sliding across the floor. ELMIRA opens the door.

ELMIRA

Jeez Maddie, you've been asleep up here for like two hours. You don't have to come downstairs, even though this is weird, even for you. I'm just up here to prove to Mom that you aren't dead.

(She starts to leave, but notices MADELINE'S face.)

Hey, are you ok?

MADELINE

I'm fine.

ELMIRA

Madeline, I've known you since I was born. This is exactly how you act when you're scared.

MADELINE

Elmira, please.

(ELMIRA hesitates, but leaves. MADELINE walks over to the journal and begins to read the last filled page.)

MADELINE

(voice shaking)

This journal is dedicated to those whom time has forgotten, and to those whom time has yet to meet. Even when the lights are dimmed, there is always a spark of ember somewhere, waiting. I dedicate this journal to those who helped me find a side of myself that I was far too scared to know. Thank you, Madeline, and goodbye.

(Blackout.)