

On Clarion

by

Lydia Stryk

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Characters.

Curtie Larson, a boy

Margaret Ward

Ray Berman

Vivien Swanson

Bill Swanson

Becky Roberts

Dave Roberts

Margaret, Vivien and Bill are in their thirties. Ray, in his forties. Becky and Dave are in their early twenties.

Setting.

1954. Early September through December 21st. A suburban tract house, planted precariously somewhere on the planet earth in a sea of stars and planets. This is Margaret Ward's home. A kitchen, a living room, a back yard including the wall and roof of a garage and a section of the roof of the house.

I am indebted to the sociologists Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter for the true story upon which 'On Clarion' is very loosely based.

Author's note. The author envisions a fantastic stylized 1950's world in which images of squeaky-clean American television wholeness are banged up against the images of catastrophe. People who look and act like they have stepped off of an advertising poster are feeling and thinking and doing rather odd things in this play—other-worldly things, while engaged in the mundane—now reproduced as nostalgia--pursuits of people of that era—baking cakes, selling things door-to-door, etc. The dark humor strived for in the play comes from this odd juxtaposition. The tragedy and hope in the play, from their yearning for an escape.

Scene One

Before the lights come up, a popular tune of the day is heard, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" as performed by Frankie Lane, for example. And then, suddenly, the sound of an atomic explosion. Lights up on Margaret Ward's kitchen, mid-afternoon. Margaret is making a cake. Curtie Larson sits at the table. Margaret Ward is an intense and intensely charismatic woman who also happens to be a knock-out. Curtie is a boy of around nine.

CURTIE

Tell me again about the visitors, Margaret.

MARGARET

They'll be here soon.

CURTIE

(imitating an expression he has heard from Margaret) Any time!

MARGARET

That's right, Curtie. They're on their way. The visitors'll be here any time!

(A long pause. Margaret busies herself with her cake preparations. Curtie eats his snack, but seems preoccupied.)

CURTIE

Do they want to hurt us?

MARGARET

(stopping) God, no. Who said so?

CURTIE

Kids.

MARGARET

They want to save us, hon.

CURTIE

What from?

MARGARET

From ourselves.

(a pause, she continues her work)

(casually) And the catastrophe, of course.

CURTIE

Tell me about the catastrophe again!

MARGARET

It's something big and bad. I told you that.

(She holds up a beater covered in cake batter)

Who gets to lick the beater?

CURTIE

I do, I do!

(Margaret hands the beater to Curtie. He licks it through the following.)

Is it scary?

MARGARET

Very.

CURTIE

Will people die?

MARGARET

Oh, many. But it won't hurt you. They told me so.

CURTIE

Why do they talk to you, Margaret?

MARGARET

I don't know. Maybe because I like to talk.

CURTIE

I like to talk, too.

MARGARET

I know you do.

(They laugh.)

And because I listen. Most people don't listen.

CURTIE

Why not? Why don't they listen?

MARGARET

They're not ready.

CURTIE

I'm ready!

MARGARET

I know you are. They're not ready to hear.

CURTIE

Have you seen one?

MARGARET

Not in person. Well, I mean, they're everywhere. But they don't identify themselves as such.

(a pause, she stops)

But I'm sure they'll pay us a visit.

CURTIE

Are they afraid, Margaret?

MARGARET

I think they're waiting, hon.

CURTIE

What for?

MARGARET

For orders. Just like us. Plus. They're shy.

CURTIE

I'm shy.

MARGARET

Are you, Curtie? Not with me.

(They laugh. There is a pause.)

(seriously) They'll come to inform us when we're leaving.

CURTIE

Tell me again, what it's like on the ship.

(Margaret comes and sits with him at the table. She clearly relishes this part.)

MARGARET

Well, it looks simple on the outside. Just flat and white.

CURTIE

And big?

MARGARET

Big?! Inside it's as infinite as space, and there's nothing like time.

(CURTIE knows this part.)

CURTIE

'No watches. No clocks.'

MARGARET

The air is thick like the sea and turquoise blue. But weightless, so you float and somersault.

(CURTIE gets up and somersaults across the kitchen floor.)

CURTIE

Like this?!

MARGARET

Like that.

CURTIE

And how long does the journey take?

MARGARET

As soon as you think it, you're already there. Was it a month, an hour, a year? Was it your whole life? See thinking stops and speeds up all at once. You are passing through forever. In the blink of an eye.

(more to herself, now, than to him)

It's strange on the ship. But you feel as safe as in your mother's arms. The light is dusk and dawn rolled into one.

CURTIE

What can you see out the windows, Margaret?

MARGARET

(a little annoyed) There are no windows, Curtie. I told you that. The landscape lies behind your eyes.

(more to herself again)

There are shimmering planets spinning like dancers and stars bursting forth like fireworks and forests of roses as tall as skyscrapers and mountain ranges covered in marigolds and astral butterflies.

CURTIE

Are there horses?

MARGARET

(a pause) Sure, hon.

You can't sleep. It's all too beautiful. And yet, you are completely rested. You have passed through the barriers of sorrow and fear.

TO READ THE WHOLE PLAY AND FOR ANY OTHER INQUIRES, PLEASE
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