

**THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW?**

*A Comedy in Ten Minutes*

By C.S. Hanson

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## THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW?

### Cast:

TABBY        14, female, California "valley girl"  
RAY           elderly male in his 70s or early 80s, stoic  
               Scandinavian from the midwest

### Setting:

Ray's kitchen on a farm in North Dakota.

### Credit:

THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW? was developed thanks to a commission from America-in-Play, Lynn M. Thomson, founder and artistic director. It was included in a staged reading of "Crossing Over: A Medicine Show Entertainment."

### Honors:

THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW? was named a Heideman Finalist by Actors Theater of Louisville.

City Theatre of Miami named THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW? a finalist in its National Short Play Contest.

**THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW?**

(Ray is seated at the kitchen table. There's a plate of cookies on the table. Tabby enters.)

TABBY

Hey. It's me. Nice to see you again.

RAY

Pull up a chair.

(Tabby sits with Ray.)

TABBY

Aunt Margie said she'd be back in a little while. She wanted to give us time for, you know. I really wanted to ask you stuff after the dinner last night and everything. But whoa, I was meeting so many cousins. First cousins, second cousins, cousins once removed. It was awesome.

RAY

Supper.

TABBY

Excuse me?

RAY

Evening meal, we call supper.

TABBY

Awesome. And you call lunch dinner. Is that a Scandinavian thing?

RAY

Hmf.

TABBY

Okay, like, maybe I should just jump in, if you don't mind.

RAY

Why should I mind?

TABBY

Cool. Okay, uh, so, my first question is . . . sort of observation slash question. Um, my mom drives me to school every day, and I'll be getting my permit next year so by the time I'm a senior I'll probably have my own car - no, I WILL have my own car. Yeah, and I know what I want. Don't get me wrong, not a convertible or anything, but something really cute and definitely red. Sorry. Okay, question: What was it like for you, when you were growing up, to walk six miles to school each way?

RAY

Fine.

TABBY

Really?

RAY

You bet.

TABBY

Even in the freezing winter? What was THAT all about?

RAY

Cold.

TABBY

And?

RAY

Like I said . . .

TABBY

Cold?

RAY

Cold is cold.

TABBY

Okay. Next: What were your impressions of the one-room school house? All the grades in one room with just one teacher? I mean, in my school, we've got - oh, just, sorry. Anyway, my dad said to ask about the little wooden school house with just one teacher for all the grades?

RAY

Yep.

TABBY

Anything to add to that? . . . No? Okay, um, what's your worst memory - like, give me something really really harsh? . . . Life on the farm kind of bad memory?

RAY

Couldn't say.

TABBY

Pick one. A bad memory. Anything.

RAY

I don't know.

TABBY

My grandfather - Olaf - he was your brother, right? He almost froze to death, right? Caught in a blizzard that came out of nowhere?

RAY

Almost.

TABBY

Almost what?

RAY

Like you said.

TABBY

Froze? So what's it like, living in a place where people freeze to death?

RAY

Cold.

TABBY

Oh my God. Jesus. Sorry - I shouldn't swear. I know, you're religious.

RAY

Who said that?

TABBY

Well, you go to church every Sunday. I found that out, yesterday.

RAY

Lutherans do that.

TABBY

Why? Why do they go to church . . . every Sunday?

RAY

Habit.

TABBY

Look, I appreciate all this, but, um, do you think, you could, like, give me longer answers? It's important. Social Studies. I gotta come up with 500 words minimum, 750 max. I have, like, five words so far. My parents will freak if I don't get a paper out of this. It's really important to my dad. The Scandinavian ancestry and all.

RAY

That so?

TABBY

Yeah. Said you were full of answers. So, um, what about the Swedes?

RAY

What about 'em?

TABBY

I don't know. Margie said there are two Lutheran churches in every town. One for the Norwegians? One for the Swedes?

RAY

Oh for heaven's sake.

TABBY

Okay, forget it. Just tell me something about my dad. Did he ever do any crazy sh-- sorry. Stuff? Crazy stuff?

RAY

Better ask him.

TABBY

You've never been in therapy, have you?

RAY

I should say not.

TABBY

You're expected to talk. My mom thinks therapy is like flossing your teeth - a preventative. So you don't get deranged and one day wake up and kill the neighbor's schnauzer. But since you can't even see your neighbors for like, miles, I guess you don't need to talk about anything. TMI. Excuse me.

(Tabby pulls out her cell phone and begins texting.)

RAY

T - ?

TABBY

Too much information. And, just 'cause I'm texting doesn't mean I'm not listening. I can text and talk and write my paper all at the same time. But the thing is, in therapy, if you don't talk, that means there's a problem. So when I ask what it's like living here, and you don't say much, I think it must be a real problem. So if you could just -- Oh my God, I don't believe this.

RAY

Something wrong?

TABBY

My dad texted me back. Look. "GET HIM TALKING."

RAY

He wrote you all the way from California? Just now?

TABBY

Uncle Ray, it's a Smart Phone. He could be in China and I'd - oh, this is so unfair. It was all his idea. Putting me on a plane: LAX to Minneapolis to Fargo, like this paper is some big deal or something. I could of flown to New York for the weekend with Ashley - my BFF - Best Friend Forever.

RAY

They let you fly alone?

TABBY

Yeah, so?

RAY

You ever flown alone before?

TABBY

I don't know. No. Not a big deal. Look, can we just? So, like, what made you decide to become a farmer?

RAY

Decide?

TABBY

Oh my God. You weren't forced into it, were you?

RAY

You want a cookie, Tammie?

TABBY

No, and it's Tabby. I want you to tell me something about what it's like to live here and grow up here. My dad said, he was, like, closer to you than to his own father. But, like, this really sucks. I mean, half the time you sound just like him. I coulda just stayed home for all I'm getting. And I have, like, a million questions - how the whole farm thing got started, work ethic, and blah, blah, blah. Oh God. You know what? Forget it. I'll Google North Dakota. I'll Google Scandinavia. And I'll make up the rest. I can do it. I make honor roll. I'll say that you eat Swedish meatballs for breakfast and at every meal. Sorry. I'll wait outside.

(Tabby heads toward the door.)

RAY

Your great-great grandfather came down through Canada from Sweden. He stole a horse somewhere in the Eastern United States. Sit down. By the time he got to Minnesota he found your great-great grandmother and brought her in a wagon pulled by two horses.

(Tabby sits.)

Eat a cookie. Staked a plot of land in the Red River Valley. I said eat. Raised three boys and two girls, I among them. You want to know why I became a farmer? Look out the window. Best farmland in the world. I'm glad he stopped right here in North Dakota. If he'd gone on ten more miles, I don't know what would have come of us.

TABBY

(eating) This is good.



RAY

Most summers, I'd ride the John Deere alone from sun up until about 9 at night. Break for dinner and supper. Coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon. Your grandmother would bring the noon meal right out to the field in a big pot. Hot dish usually. Sandwiches if she was feeling lazy. And molasses cookies. That's her recipe. I'd keep working until Ingrid - my deceased wife, your great aunt - waved a handkerchief and flagged me down to stop. Ingrid. With me almost sixty years. You never seen a woman who looked better in a polka dot dress. . . . You mentioned work ethic? If it's there, you do it.

TABBY

Are you happy? Oh, sorry. Who's ever happy?

RAY

I'd like to answer that. I was never so happy as the day your father took the John Deere and went with it on his own. That boy went from picking rock and hauling grain and bailing hay to being my right hand during harvest.

TABBY

Was he any good? 'Cause he's a crazy-ass driver on the freeway.

RAY

Ask him.

TABBY

But, I'm asking you.

(Ray gives Tabby a glass of milk.)

RAY

Drink some milk.

TABBY

I only drink soy. . . . No, I'll drink it.

(Tabby drinks.)

It's good.

RAY

Okay, I'm done.

TABBY

Wow. Okay. Well, Aunt Margie took me for a ride in a big grain truck. Showed me farm equipment. She knows a lot.

RAY

Oh my, yes, she knows all right. You think that's natural? You think it's right for the boy to take off and his sister to take over? It is not. She married the weakest man in the county, so that didn't help matters. Usually the boy takes over the farm. I'd have given him a portion of my own acreage.

TABBY

Are you talking about my --?

RAY

I'm talking about what's usually done. Usually a girl does not step into those shoes. Yes, I'm talking about your dad but not anymore.

TABBY

What does it matter? A girl can run a farm just like a boy can. Girls can do anything. . . . Otherwise, it's sexism.

RAY

I know that.

TABBY

Then what's the problem?

RAY

Ask your dad.

TABBY

Uncle Ray, I have. Over and over. But he's so, I don't know, he doesn't like to talk. What was it like for him, here?

RAY

I don't know why I should have to do all the talking. He's the one who left. Just left. Maybe it was too boring.

TABBY

Boring? My dad likes boring.

RAY

Always thought, he's one of us. Bright boy. Up early, didn't fool around too much. Ah, sometimes he went with the town kids, but he always came back, got his work done.

TABBY

I think Margie's here.

RAY

Didn't think he would high tail it to the cities. Hard worker. No complaints. Took the offering on Sundays, didn't have to twist his arm. Woulda been a good farmer. Graduated high school. Went to the U. And I just, well, I expected him back in the summers. Summer school? That was a surprise. Maybe wants to graduate early. Pretty soon, seemed he wasn't coming back. How do you do that? Just leave? Don't say anything? If there was something he didn't like about this place, he coulda come to me, but he didn't. Never understood why. But then, lotta things I don't understand. Why California? Why he named you after a cat.

TABBY

Short for Tabitha.

RAY

What I will never understand is why a bright boy goes off and sells air conditioners.

TABBY

Cooling systems. Actually HVAC. He has big clients. Hospitals, school buildings, even the orchestra hall. Uncle Ray, he's not a loser.

RAY

I think your ride is here.

TABBY

Okay, okay. Just, I have to ask -- this is really lame, but - - do I look Swedish, or, like, half Swedish?

RAY

Minute I saw you, I saw your dad. . . . And it kinda made me want to ring your neck.

TABBY

Really?

RAY

But you tell him . . . you tell him I'm not gonna be around forever. Make sure you tell him that.

TABBY

You could tell him.

RAY

And get your facts straight. Did not walk six miles to school. Walked two-and-a-half. That makes five miles round trip.

TABBY

Maybe you could come back with me. We could fly to LA together?

RAY

Thought I had good hearing for an 80-year-old. Guess not.

TABBY

Why don't you ever visit my dad?

RAY

Never got an invitation.

TABBY

Okay. Then I'm inviting you.

RAY

That's enough.

TABBY

No it's not. I don't wanna fly back alone. I hated being on that plane. I know I act really mature and everything, but, it was like, what if the plane crashes down on Fargo? I'm not from here, but I'm sort of connected. Or I want to be. I can make you a reservation. My mom lets me use her AmEx. I'll even use her miles to upgrade us to First Class.

RAY

No.

TABBY

You wanna come, don't you? I know you do. I'm flying out tomorrow. Noonish.

RAY

Noonish?

TABBY

Please?

RAY

We'll see.

**THE END**