A HARD PLACE

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A Play in Two Acts

By

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Cast of Characters

Colleen Gillen: A woman in her mid 40s, attractive, but bearing burn scars on her face and arms.

Jimmy Gillen: A man in his early 60s, Colleen’s brother.

Sheila Quinn: A woman in her early 60s, Colleen’s sister.

Virgil Gillen: A wheelchair-bound man in his late 80s who has Alzheimer’s.

Teenage Sheila: An 18-year-old girl.

Young Virgil: A man in his mid 40s.

Clarice Gillen: A woman in her early 40s, Virgil’s wife.

SETTING

The Gillen home in a small Illinois town.

TIME

Present and flashback to 44 years ago.

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: The kitchen of the Gillen home.

AT RISE: COLLEEN GILLEN enters stage right, pushing VIRGIL GILLEN in his wheelchair. She is wearing a sleeveless shirt and the scars on her arms are obvious. A cardigan sweater hangs on the back of a kitchen chair.

VIRGIL

Where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

Dad, we’re going to eat after Jimmy and Sheila get here.

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

Jimmy and Sheila. Remember? They’re coming for the weekend. (She steps back and inspects him.) I’d say you’re looking pretty dapper, Dad.

VIRGIL

Who, me?

COLLEEN

Yeah, you, you handsome devil!

VIRGIL

Oh…okay.

COLLEEN

Are you excited about seeing them?

VIRGIL

Yes? I, I guess so.

COLLEEN

I am. It seems like it’s been a long time. It’s weird being so much younger than they are, you know? They have such a tight bond and sometimes, I don’t know, I just feel like I hardly know them.

VIRGIL

Know who?

COLLEEN

I’m going to have a talk with them, Dad. I think things need to change, don’t you? Wouldn’t you like to get out of here? Go someplace nicer where there are people who can take care of your every need?

VIRGIL

You take good care of me. You’re a good girl.

COLLEEN

Yeah. (aside) And it’s freakin’ killing me.

VIRGIL

Where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

We’ll eat when Jimmy and Sheila get here.

VIRGIL

Where are they coming from?

COLLEEN

Jimmy lives in New York with Frank, remember? Jimmy’s a dancer, well I guess a choreographer now. And Sheila lives in Atlanta with her husband Greg. Remember? She has the twins, Lauren and Hailey…your granddaughters? And Hailey has two little boys…your great-grandsons?

VIRGIL

Have I met them?

COLLEEN

You haven’t met Hailey’s boys, but you’ve met the rest of them.

VIRGIL

I have?

COLLEEN

Yes. Do you remember when Lauren and Hailey would visit when they were little girls? Back when Mom was still alive?

VIRGIL

I think so. Are they your little girls?

COLLEEN

No, Dad. They’re Sheila’s. I don’t have any children (aside) maybe because I’ve been here taking care of you for the last ten years.

VIRGIL

What’s that?

COLLEEN

I said, no, I don’t have any children.

VIRGIL

I know that. Who said you did? Where’s my dinner?

(Offstage, a car horn honks. COLLEEN stands and puts on a cardigan sweater that was hanging on the back of a chair.)

VIRGIL

(alarmed) What’s that? Is someone here? Who…who…who is it?

COLLEEN

Oh, Dad, don’t worry. It’s Jimmy and Sheila. Remember, they’re here for the weekend?

VIRGIL

Jimmy…and Sheila?

COLLEEN

Yes, Jimmy, you know – Junior, and Sheila. Your other children.

VIRGIL

I know who they are. Why are they here? Is something wrong?

COLLEEN

They’re here for a funeral. Some friend from high school.

VIRGIL

Who died?

COLLEEN

Some friend of theirs from high school.

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

I don’t know who. Someone they went to high school with.

VIRGIL

What high school?

COLLEEN

*This* high school. Central High.

VIRGIL

Where’s my dinner?

(Tap on door. Stage left door opens and JIMMY GILLEN and SHEILA QUINN enter. JIMMY is in his early 60s and still has a dancer’s body. SHEILA is a year or two younger and is dressed as if going to the country club for lunch.)

JIMMY

(Hugging Colleen)

Hey little sister!

SHEILA

Colleen! (Hugs her) It’s so good to see you!

JIMMY

Yeah, kid. You look great.

COLLEEN

(Blushing as she doesn’t think she looks good.)

Well, I…It’s good to see you, too.

VIRGIL

Who’s here?

COLLEEN

It’s Jimmy and Sheila, Dad.

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

Jimmy and Sheila.

(JIMMY is taken aback by VIRGIL’s feeble appearance. He hesitantly approaches VIRGIL and extends a hand.)

JIMMY

Dad. How are you?

VIRGIL

(Looks puzzled, but shakes JIMMY’S hand.)

Fine. Just fine. Thank you.

SHEILA

(Leans to give VIRGIL an awkward half-hug)

Hi, Daddy.

VIRGIL

(flatly, as he has no idea who just hugged him) Well, look at you. (There is a long pause.)

SHEILA

Okay, well, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll go freshen up. Am I in my old room?

COLLEEN

Yep.

(SHEILA rolls luggage and exits stage right.)

VIRGIL

(Rolls to look out window)

So, young fella, what are you driving?

JIMMY

I don’t drive.

VIRGIL

(scoffs) Of course you drive. Everyone drives. That’s why I became a mechanic. People drive. Cars break down. I fix ‘em. How can you not know how to drive?

JIMMY

I know *how* to drive. But I *don’t* drive. I don’t need to.

VIRGIL

(winks at COLLEEN)

Probably has a bossy wife who insists on doing all the driving.

JIMMY

(annoyed)I live in New York. New York City. I don’t have a car.

VIRGIL

New York City. Colleen, doesn’t Junior live in New York City?

JIMMY

(snatches handle to suitcase and rolls it off as he exits stage left.)

Oh, for Christ’s sake.

VIRGIL

Where’s my dinner? Colleen? Where’s my dinner?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

SETTING: The Gillen kitchen.

AT RISE: SHEILA, COLLEEN and JIMMY are seated around the table, drinking coffee.

JIMMY

That was a great dinner, Col.

SHEILA

It sure was.

COLLEEN

Thanks.

JIMMY

Just like Mom’s.

COLLEEN

Oh! I don’t know about that.

SHEILA

No, seriously. That was her chicken and dumplings recipe to a tee.

COLLEEN

Well, she always said it was Jimmy’s favorite. More coffee?

JIMMY

No, thanks.

SHEILA

I’m too full!

COLLEEN

So what time is the funeral tomorrow?

SHEILA

Four o’clock.

JIMMY

Thanks for putting us up. I hope it’s not too much trouble.

COLLEEN

No. It’s good to see you. It’s been a while.

SHEILA

Yes, it has. I’m sorry I couldn’t get here last year. Once they told Hailey her pregnancy was high-risk, I wasn’t going to leave her.

COLLEEN

I understand.

(she looks at Jimmy as if waiting for his excuse. He avoids her gaze.)

JIMMY

Sheila, the funeral tomorrow – is it at a church or a funeral home?

SHEILA

The Methodist Church out on Route 17.

COLLEEN

Why didn’t Greg come? Didn’t he know, what was her name, Patty?

SHEILA

Not really. Greg moved here in the middle of senior year when his dad started at the factory. So, he didn’t get to know many of us before graduation.

COLLEEN

Senior year. That’s a tough time for a kid to move.

JIMMY

Maybe that explains why he’s such a hard ass.

SHEILA

*Jimmy!*

JIMMY

Oh, come on Sheila. Greg’s a bit of a control freak. You have to admit that.

SHEILA

I suppose. But I get my way when it matters.

COLLEEN

And Frank? How is he, Jimmy?

JIMMY

He’s fine. Underemployed as usual, but he gets some roles here and there. He books a few commercials a year.

SHEILA

Are you still teaching at that studio?

JIMMY

Yes. It’s steady income and it still gives me enough time to work on a show if I get hired.

COLLEEN

Okay. (bolsters herself) Well, while you’re both here, there’s something I really need to talk to you about. As you’ve probably noticed, Dad is getting worse.

SHEILA

Is he? He seems about the same to me.

COLLEEN

He is and he’s going to keep getting even worse. There’s a memory care facility in Carbondale. I’ve seen it. It’s nice. It’s just 45 minutes away. And it’s the only place in the area that has an opening right now.

JIMMY

Now, Colleen….

COLLEEN

Hear me out. I’d like you to take a tour of it tomorrow morning.

SHEILA

Honey, we’ve talked about this. Those places are outrageously expensive.

JIMMY

Stupidly expensive. I talked to Brad a couple of months ago. Remember Brad Koning? (Colleen shakes her head.)

SHEILA

From high school. (laughs) From before when you were born, Colleen.

JIMMY

His uncle had to sell his house and turn over every penny he had, just to end up in some county-run home. Brad said it was terrible. It was dingy, depressing and understaffed.

COLLEEN

(Looking around)

Yeah, that sounds familiar.

SHEILA

I mean, Colleen, we’d have to sell the house and Daddy’s auto shop.

JIMMY

And no one is renting the shop now, right?

COLLEEN

No. There’s not a lot of need anymore with the Firestone tire place out by the interstate. We mostly just use it for storage.

JIMMY

Exactly. So that means it’s worth even less.

COLLEEN

But someone has contacted me. He’s interested in buying it.

JIMMY

Who?

COLLEEN

(pulls business card out of cardigan pocket) Matt Carmichael. He has a construction company.

SHEILA

Carmichael?? (she and JIMMY laugh)

JIMMY

Holy shit, that would kill the old man!

SHEILA

I take it you haven’t told Daddy.

COLLEEN

No. Why? I don’t know this Carmichael guy, so I doubt he does. What’s the big deal?

JIMMY

The Gillens and the Carmichaels…it was like the Hatfields and McCoys.

SHEILA

Don’t get dramatic, Jimmy. You never heard of Henry Carmichael, Colleen?

COLLEEN

No, who is he?

JIMMY

The man our mother should have married.

COLLEEN

What??

SHEILA

I’ll tell this, lest Jimmy blow it out of proportion. You know that Mother’s family was rather proper and that Daddy’s family came from, well, as they say, the other side of the tracks.

COLLEEN

Yes. I knew that.

JIMMY

Well, Henry Carmichael was from the right side of the tracks and he was in love with Mom.

SHEILA

I’m telling this story. That’s right, he was. But he enlisted to fight in the Korean War…most of the boys in this town did. So he went off to war.

JIMMY

But Dad couldn’t enlist because he had asthma.

COLLEEN

Asthma? Really?

SHEILA

Yes, he outgrew it. But while Henry was off becoming a war hero…

JIMMY

No shit. He came home with a chest full of medals.

SHEILA

…Mother fell in love with Daddy and married him. Henry was furious when he found out and he held that against Daddy for the rest of his life.

JIMMY

Henry was heavily involved with Rotary Club, the Elks, Chamber of Commerce, all those types of organizations, a real shaker and mover.

SHEILA

And, of course, that’s the world Mom came from. Granddad was a banker, after all.

JIMMY

So Dad wanted more than anything to belong in those circles.

SHEILA

I think he didn’t want Mom to be constantly reminded that she married, er, shall we say, below her station?

COLLEEN

That’s ridiculous.

SHEILA

Well, it sounds ridiculous, sure. But this is a small town.

JIMMY

And our old man always had a chip on his shoulder.

SHEILA

And Mom grew up in a beautiful house with lots of nice things. She went off to college…

JIMMY

Until she met Dad one Christmas break.

SHEILA

I think her family worried that Dad wouldn’t be able to provide for her and that bothered him.

SHEILA

Anyway, Henry Carmichael did everything in his power to make sure Dad couldn’t gain any kind of traction, socially.

COLLEEN

Did that hurt business for Dad?

SHEILA

It hurt Dad’s ego more than anything.

JIMMY

He always knew he married up, but Henry Carmichael kept his foot on Dad’s neck, just so he wouldn’t ever have any kind of prestige in this town.

SHEILA

It wasn’t just that. Mother told me that Henry always referred to Dad as a 98-pound weakling who wasn’t man enough to go to war to defend his country.

JIMMY

Dad was the runt of his family. Uncle Pete and Uncle Burt used to pick on him when they were kids because he was small and sickly, so I think Dad was even more sensitive about it once he grew up.

COLLEEN

That’s awful!

JIMMY

Yeah. I wonder if Carmichael ever realized the effect his treatment of Dad had on our Mom…and us.

SHEILA

I don’t know. I mean, Dad was always a drinker. He took after Grandpa in that regard.

JIMMY

Yeah, and he wasn’t a funny drunk, either. He had a mean streak. But you could tell when he’d run into Henry by how drunk – and how mean – he was when he got home.

COLLEEN

I’m so glad Dad stopped drinking after I was born. I never saw that side of him.

JIMMY

You’re lucky.

COLLEEN

But, even if we don’t sell to this Carmichael guy, if he’s interested, someone else might be too.

SHEILA

But even if we sell the house and the shop, what’s the most we could get? I mean, what are property values like around here?

JIMMY

Pretty low, right?

COLLEEN

Well, yeah. Especially since the factory closed.

SHEILA

That pretty much killed this town.

COLLEEN

Slowly but surely. There were layoffs for years before that…people kept leaving.

JIMMY

So why didn’t they leave? Mom and Dad. Why didn’t they get the hell out of Dodge?

COLLEEN

It wasn’t that easy, Jimmy. And there were rumors that Standard Parts was going to take over the factory, so they thought they’d wait it out.

JIMMY

Another of Dad’s brilliant decisions.

COLLEEN

It wasn’t just Dad. Mom was on board.

JIMMY

Mom was too sick to be on board with anything, Col.

COLLEEN

(defiantly) How would you know? You weren’t here. How would either of you know what it’s been like here for all these years?

JIMMY

(defensively) I called her every day. I was with a national touring company. She didn’t want me to leave.

SHEILA

Colleen, the twins were still in school and Greg was working crazy hours. It’s not like I could just take off whenever I wanted. I came when I could.

JIMMY

I get it. You came home to help and you got stuck here. But you didn’t really get stuck, did you? You could have left after Mom died. You could have left the old man to fend for himself and gone back to Chicago. You chose to stay. That was your decision and your decision alone. Don’t blame us for that.

COLLEEN

Dad can’t take care of himself. And he was so heartbroken when Mom died.

JIMMY

(sarcastically) Yeah, I bet he was.

COLLEEN

He *was*. And so was I. I was devastated. It was all I could do to help Dad. I know you think I’m weak and pitiful.

SHEILA/JIMMY

No, that’s not true.

COLLEEN

But I’m the one who’s dealt with everything since Mom died.

SHEILA

Now, Col, we know how hard it was. We lost her too. Let’s stop bickering about this and get back to the point.

COLLEEN

And what exactly is the point?

SHEILA

The point is that the money just isn’t there. If we sell everything, that will pay for, what a year or two?

JIMMY

In the meantime, what happens to you? You won’t have a place to live anymore, so then you’ll have to pay rent somewhere.

SHEILA

And you won’t have Daddy’s Social Security coming in anymore…

JIMMY

…Because that will go to the nursing home.

COLLEEN

I can support myself. It’s not like I don’t work!

SHEILA

Of course you do, honey.

COLLEEN

I supported myself in Chicago…before Mom got sick.

JIMMY

We know that, Col. But you’ve not been out there on your own in a long time.

(long silence as Colleen fumes)

JIMMY

Nature calls. I’ll be right back.

(JIMMY exits as COLLEEN stands and walks toward the edge of the stage.)

SHEILA

Col, are you okay?

COLLEEN

(frustrated) So, I guess that’s that. It’s all decided. Just like that. Dad will stay here. In this house. With me. All day long. Every god damned day.

SHEILA

Now, Colleen….

COLLEEN

Sheila, I just don’t know how much longer I can do this.

SHEILA

I know. It’s hard. When I had the twins, I almost went crazy. It was non-stop…24/7. But it passes. This will pass, honey. I promise. It’s been a long day. I’m turning in, little sister. Thanks again for dinner.

(Rises, walks to COLLEEN, kisses her on the head and exits. COLLEEN continues to stare into the distance as the lights dim.)

(LIGHTS DIM)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: VIRGIL and COLLEEN are seated at the table.

COLLEEN

How were your eggs, Dad?

VIRGIL

Good.

COLLEEN

Is your coffee still warm? (she feels his cup) Do you like having Jimmy and Sheila here?

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

Jimmy and Sheila. Say Dad, do you remember a man named Henry Carmichael?

VIRGIL

He was a son of a bitch.

COLLEEN

Who was he?

VIRGIL

He was a snot-nosed rich kid who went off to war. He had a thing for Clarice. He came back after we were married. (laughs) Ooooo-weeeeee, he was not happy about losing Clarice, I can tell you that.

COLLEEN

Really? How do you know he wasn’t happy about it?

VIRGIL

Happy about what?

COLLEEN

About you marrying Mom.

VIRGIL

I married Clarice.

COLLEEN

Right. Clarice was Mom’s name.

VIRGIL

Oh, she was beautiful.

COLLEEN

Dad, what were you like when you used to drink?

VIRGIL

Oh, I had fun. Me and the boys down at Clancy’s Tavern after work. Ah, we’d get to laughing and carrying on. (looks sheepish) Clarice wasn’t always happy about it when I’d get home though.

COLLEEN

Did Henry Carmichael ever go to Clancy’s?

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

Henry Carmichael.

VIRGIL

That son of a bitch. He had a thing for Clarice. Colleen, where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

(sighs) I’m going out to get the paper.

(COLLEEN exits left. JIMMY enters from right.)

JIMMY

Dad.

(JIMMY pours himself a cup of coffee.)

VIRGIL

Huh?

JIMMY

Still a brilliant conversationalist, I see.

VIRGIL

Is that your car in the driveway? The silver one?

JIMMY

It’s Sheila’s rental.

VIRGIL

What is it? Foreign?

JIMMY

I suppose so.

VIRGIL

I’m a Ford man. Always have been.

JIMMY

(leans over to read brand name of wheelchair)

Looks like you’re more of a MedLine man these days, old man.

VIRGIL

What’s that?

JIMMY

I was just saying that you don’t really get around much anymore do you?

VIRGIL

Well now….

JIMMY

And why is that? Huh? Do you remember why you’re in a wheelchair?

VIRGIL

I’m an old man.

JIMMY

Yes, you are. But why are you in a wheelchair?

VIRGIL

Colleen puts me in it. In the morning. Where’s my dinner?

(COLLEEN enters from stage left, carrying a newspaper.)

VIRGIL

Colleen? Where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

You just had breakfast, Dad.

VIRGIL

What did I have?

COLLEEN

Eggs. Overeasy. With toast.

VIRGIL

Eggs.

COLLEEN

Overeasy. With toast.

VIRGIL

I had toast?

COLLEEN

And eggs.

JIMMY

Overeasy?

COLLEEN

Oh, don’t worry. He’s just getting started.

(COLLEEN AND JIMMY walk downstage as VIRGIL begins to nod off.)

COLLEEN

So, Jimmy, are you going to go to Windsor Hills today?

JIMMY

The place in Carbondale? Col, there’s really no point, is there? The money just isn’t there.

COLLEEN

We don’t know until we try to…

JIMMY

Now look, Sheila and I talked last night. This house needs some work. I mean, the wheelchair ramp out front is pretty rickety. And the chair lift is on its last legs…pardon the pun.

COLLEEN

(snippily) Yeah, well, I’ve been a bit too busy for home renovations.

JIMMY

Right. So, this weekend, let’s all go through the house, room by room, and make a list of any repairs that need to be done. I mean, some of them, I could probably take care of and Sheila and I can maybe go in together to pay for the rest.

COLLEEN

Jimmy, I know the house needs work. I don’t care. Dad needs to be someplace where he can be taken care of ‘round the clock. I mean, when I’m working, I can’t always drop everything when he needs me. And when he does need something, it’s…it’s not really all that exciting for me to change him and bathe him, you know?

JIMMY

I thought you had someone coming in. A home health care aide?

COLLEEN

Yeah. That lasted a week. She was a real sweet kid. Latina so, you know, she had an accent.

JIMMY

Oh boy.

COLLEEN

Yeah, you know where this is going.

JIMMY

Our racist dad couldn’t handle that. He can’t remember how to cut meat, but he has no problem remembering that he’s a bigot.

COLLEEN

Right.

JIMMY

And a homophobe.

COLLEEN

Really?

JIMMY

Hell yeah. Can you imagine being the gay son of Virgil James Gillen, Sr. – redneck, tough guy, ham-fisted automobile mechanic?

COLLEEN

I’ve never heard him say anything at all about you being gay. I just assumed he was okay with it.

JIMMY

Okay with it? Do you how many Saturday mornings I spent with my head under the hood of a car, trying to get him to approve of me? Of course you don’t. You weren’t even born. Anything I did that wasn’t in his narrow-minded idea of what a real man is, he pointed out incessantly, berating me until I was in tears. Then if I cried – which believe you me, I tried like hell not to do – he’d … you don’t want to know. So, yeah, he’s a homophobe.

COLLEEN

I never saw that side of him, just the racism, which is bad enough. I guess drinking brought out the homophobia in him.

JIMMY

Oh, he didn’t have to be drunk to rail on me. You never saw that side of him because I rarely came home.

COLLEEN

You know, when I’d get picked on at school because of all the scars, he would call the principal’s office every time and demand that the school made sure no one bullied me.

JIMMY

Trust me when I tell you he never did that when I got bullied. He said it was what I deserved. Thank God I had Mom.

COLLEEN

Hmmmm. Mom always lit up like a light bulb when you came around.

JIMMY

Man, I miss her.

COLLEEN

Me too.

JIMMY

And I know, I don’t come back as often as I should now. With her gone….it’s just….look, Col, Dad and I have never hit it off, you know?

COLLEEN

He’s not the only one here, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Shit, I know. I’m sorry, sis. (He hugs her.)

VIRGIL

Where is my dinner? Did I eat? Where is my dinner?

(SHEILA enters from stage right)

SHEILA

It’s in the future.

VIRGIL

Where? (nods back off)

SHEILA

Never mind. Just a joke. (sees JIMMY and COLLEEN embracing.) Now this is a sweet moment.

JIMMY

Oh, don’t you try to get in on this. You missed out.

COLLEEN

The early bird gets the worm.

SHEILA

You can have that particular worm. Col, look at this picture of Aidan and Xander. Hailey just posted it. (Shows her phone to COLLEEN.)

COLLEEN

They are adorable.

(JIMMY pushes VIRGIL offstage left as SHEILA and COLLEEN sit at the kitchen table)

SHEILA

I know I go on and on about them, but I do agree. My grandchildren ARE adorable.

COLLEEN

How are the twins? And Greg?

SHEILA

Oh, everyone’s fine. Greg keeps threatening to retire. Lauren is still at the bank and Hailey loves being a stay at home mom. You know, Col, I don’t know why you’re not on

SHEILA cont’d.

Facebook. It would be so much easier to keep up with everyone that way.

COLLEEN

I’m fine with phone calls and emails.

(JIMMY enters from stage right.)

SHEILA

Tell her, Jimmy. Oh, this brother of ours. Mister 6,000 friends! It’s like he knows anyone who’s ever worn tap shoes.

JIMMY

And ballet slippers. Don’t forget the people who wear ballet slippers.

SHEILA

You won’t let me forget. Colleen dear, Jimmy is as happy as a clam in fish poo with his career. Don’t ask him. He’ll just go on and on. And me? Well, there’s not much about volunteering at the hospital that’s worth going on about. But how is work going for you? Do you like it? Are you busy?

COLLEEN

I teach as many online classes as they’ll give me. It’s hard with Dad, but yeah, it’s okay. The pay is absolute crap, and there are no benefits. Really, I don’t mind the work. I do miss having co-workers, though. But there’s barely a gas station in this town anymore, let alone a college.

JIMMY

That’s it, then. Move. Move somewhere else.

COLLEEN

What? And leave all this? (they all laugh) I can’t leave Dad alone and I couldn’t afford to take him with me. If I moved, it would take me years to get on a tenure track, so until then, I could only afford a studio apartment or something like that.

SHEILA

Hmm. I knew adjuncts didn’t make much, but I didn’t realize it was that bad.

COLLEEN

It is. And whether Dad goes to a nursing home or a new place with me, he will be incredibly disoriented and confused…more so than he is now. But in a nursing home, there is a staff to handle that…to help him adjust. I’m barely coping with him here, and it’s a place that’s familiar to him.

SHEILA

(sighs)You’re between a rock and a hard place. That’s for sure.

JIMMY

Yeah. Jesus, Colleen.

COLLEEN

(frustrated) Wait! Why am *I* between a rock and a hard place? Why aren’t *we* between a rock and a hard place? Jimmy, I know you hate him, but he may not even remember that you’re gay, so why he can’t come live with you? And how about you, Sheila? How about that mini-mansion of yours? You don’t have an extra bedroom you could spare?

JIMMY

(defensively) Colleen, that’s not fair. Our place is the size of a postage stamp, and it’s all we can afford. We don’t have room for a parakeet, let alone a homophobic old bastard in a wheelchair.

SHEILA

And Colleen, I hear what you’re saying but, well, I’ve never told you this, but Greg doesn’t like Daddy. He just doesn’t. He wouldn’t stand for Daddy moving in with us.

JIMMY

There’s a lot you haven’t told her, isn’t there, Sheila?

SHEILA

Shut up, Jimmy.

(JIMMY makes a motion of turning a key in front of his lips).

VIRGIL

(Off)

Colleen?

COLLEEN

(looks at her siblings, as if expecting one of them to respond.)

(sarcastically) Oh, no, please, you two. Stay put. I wouldn’t dream of not jumping up to be at Dad’s beck and call. No, no, I insist. I’ll go see what he wants. (exits)

SHEILA

Damn it, Jimmy. Just stop it.

JIMMY

She needs to know.

SHEILA

No, she doesn’t.

JIMMY

She should know.

SHEILA

Why? What good would that do?

JIMMY

She thinks he’s a great guy. Well, I mean, clearly, she thinks he’s a pain in the ass right now, but she has no idea what an asshole the guy is.

SHEILA

Was. What an asshole he *was*. Once he quit drinking, he was better.

JIMMY

Once he busted ass over teakettle down that flight of stairs and ended up so crippled he couldn’t get to a bar, he was better.

SHEILA

You don’t know I don’t like talking about this.

JIMMY

Do you really think his behavior would have changed if he hadn’t snapped his spine? I mean, I don’t know about you, but I don’t see Virgil Gillen going meekly into that dark night of his own volition.

SHEILA

Jimmy, please.

JIMMY

Do you know how many times I had to pull him off Mom? How many times I had to take that punch so she wouldn’t have to?

SHEILA

I know, I know.

JIMMY

How many times I had to listen to him call me a disgusting, fudge-packing little fairy faggot while he kicked me in the side again and again and again…just so he’d stop hitting Mom? Or you?

SHEILA

Of course I know. Jimmy. I was there. You’re not the only one who had a front row seat to our family’s melodrama. I was there too.

JIMMY

Really? Do you still have your real front teeth? Because I sure don’t.

SHEILA

I’m not denying that he was a violent, horrible drunk. It’s not like I didn’t get smacked around from time to time.

JIMMY

I know you did. I’m sorry, Sis.

SHEILA

Why do you think I spent so much time at Patty’s house? I’m just saying that Colleen doesn’t need to know that side of him. What good comes of it? “Oh Colleen, by the way, the happy childhood you thought you had? It was a farce. That man you adored is actually a monster.”

JIMMY

Happy childhood? How happy a childhood are you going to have when 60% of your body is covered in scars?

(SHEILA shrugs)

SHEILA

She’s a pretty girl, otherwise. She does a great job with her makeup.

(JIMMY nods)

JIMMY

I don’t know, Sheila. But it wouldn’t have bothered me for a minute if he had just died at the bottom of that staircase.

SHEILA

And how do you think that would have affected me? Did you think about that?

JIMMY

Sorry. Look, I know Colleen is hoping we can all chip in some money to put Dad in a home, but Frank and I really can’t spare any money. Our work is off and on and we need to squirrel away every penny we can, so we can pay bills when we’re not working.

SHEILA

I know. Of course, Greg makes plenty of money, but he’s this close to retirement. We just built the lake house and he has his heart set on traveling. He’s looking at RVs right now. There’s no way he’s going to be willing to pinch pennies in his retirement.

JIMMY

Have you asked him?

SHEILA

There’s no point. I learned a long time ago to only pick the battles you know you can win, Jimmy.

(COLLEEN enters)

COLLEEN

Well, he’s down for a nap. So…what’s going on here?

SHEILA

(gathering her wits)

Oh, just reminiscing. Jimmy, you mentioned Brad Koning. His sister married that fellow who was a basketball player, didn’t she?

JIMMY

The one with the red hair? I think so.

SHEILA

What was his name?

JIMMY

No idea.

SHEILA

That’s going to drive me crazy. I’ll have to look it up in my yearbook when I get home.

JIMMY

You still have your high school yearbook?

SHEILA

Sure. Don’t you? Do you, Colleen?

COLLEEN

Mine’s around here somewhere.

JIMMY

Mine probably is too, because I didn’t take it when I left.

COLLEEN

It’s probably up in the attic. There are boxes up there that Mom packed up. They have your names on them. Jesus, you moved out of here, what? 45 years ago?

JIMMY

Sheila, does that mean our little sister has never seen you in your queerleader uniform?

SHEILA

Well, she’s survived this long without seeing it. I’m sure she’ll be fine.

COLLEEN

(laughs)You were a queerleader? You led queers?

JIMMY

And she did it while sporting the world’s largest bouffant hairdo. It bobbled back and forth when she’d cheer.

SHEILA

It wasn’t a bouffant. It was an afro. It was a perm. Everybody got them back them.

JIMMY

I certainly didn’t. Colleen, it was HUGE!!!!! It must have stood two feet high.

SHEILA

Colleen dear, our big brother is prone to exaggeration, I’m afraid.

COLLEEN

Ya think?

JIMMY

Nope. No exaggeration. That’s it. I’m going up. Who’s in?

(JIMMY runs off right and his sisters follow.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: COLLEEN, JIMMY AND SHEILA enter from right carrying a variety of boxes. They set them on the table and start unpacking them.

COLLEEN

Oh Sheila, here are some of the patterns Mom used to make. I think it must have been your baby clothes.

SHEILA

Oh my God! How cool is that!

JIMMY

(pulls an album cover out of a box)

What?!?!?! Diana Ross?! Good God, what a stereotype I was!

SHEILA

Was??? (pulls more patterns out of the box. Reaches in again and pulls out a metal box.)

COLLEEN

Hmmm. Probably needles and thread, huh?

SHEILA

(preoccupied with the patterns) Probably.

JIMMY

Here it is!!

(Retrieves the yearbook and leafs through the pages)

And now, here she is…Miss Afro-Desiac 1974.

(they huddle around to look at the picture. They all laugh and go back to sorting. SHEILA picks up the metal box.)

COLLEEN

Wow. Sorry, Sheila, but that was a pretty hideous perm.

JIMMY

Sheila, can you still do those splits?

SHEILA

Not on purpose! You think I looked weird? Let’s see, Jimmy. Weren’t you on the homecoming court? With your long, flowing shag haircut? You and Noelle.

(JIMMY opens the metal box, pulls a piece of paper out it and starts reading it as COLLEEN and SHEILA leaf through yearbook.)

COLLEEN

Who’s Noelle?

SHEILA

Jimmy’s prom date. Or more like his beard, I guess.

JIMMY

Ha! That shows what you know. I got to third base.

COLLEEN

With Noelle?

JIMMY

Yeah. But then her brother walked in on us and…let’s face it. He was way hotter.

COLLEEN

(looks into metal box)

Oh, it’s Mom’s notary stamp and seal. I forgot she was a notary.

JIMMY

Oh shit.

COLLEEN

Huh?

SHEILA

What?

JIMMY

I’ll be a son of a bitch. (He hands the piece of paper to SHEILA.)

COLLEEN

What is it, Jimmy?

JIMMY

Ask Sheila.

(SHEILA scans the paper. JIMMY snatches it back, folds it and puts it in his pocket.)

SHEILA

Oh, it’s a little hard to read. It’s some kind of form. We’ll look at it later when we have better light. Did I just hear Daddy?

JIMMY

(glares at SHEILA)

I didn’t hear anything. Not one damned thing.

COLLEEN

I’d better go and check.

(she exits right)

JIMMY

You look like you’re in shock.

SHEILA

I just….

JIMMY

You *are* in shock.

(JIMMY and SHEILA walk downstage as lights dim in kitchen)

SHEILA

Aren’t you?

JIMMY

Kind of. I mean, yeah. My God, Sheila. That explains it, right? Mom always said he was a changed man after the, well, the (makes air quotes) “accident.” Changed man, my ass. That bastard.

SHEILA

Jimmy, don’t get upset.

JIMMY

Why shouldn’t I get upset? Why aren’t *you* upset?

SHEILA

I am. Of course I am. But we have to keep it together. Colleen can’t find out.

JIMMY

You didn’t know, did you? Did you??

SHEILA

No. I was upstairs. It’s just…I was…

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5

SETTING: Kitchen, circa 1974.

AT RISE: CLARICE is at the stove, stirring a pot. A baby is in a high chair with its back to the audience. TEENAGE SHEILA enters from upstage door and walks over to stove.)

TEENAGE SHEILA

The clothes are in the dryer, Mom.

CLARICE

Oh, thanks, Sheila. If I’d known you were down in the basement, I’d have had you bring up some more canned peaches.

TEENAGE SHEILA

I can get them.

CLARICE

No, I’ll get them later. All ready for school?

TEENAGE SHEILA

Uh-huh.

CLARICE

The oatmeal’s almost ready.

TEENAGE SHEILA

I don’t have time. I told Patty I’d give her a ride.

CLARICE

You should eat breakfast.

TEENAGE SHEILA

I’ll grab a banana on my way out.

CLARICE

Did you finish your term paper last night?

TEENAGE SHEILA

Oh! I’m glad you said that! It’s upstairs. Yes, I did. Be right back!

(exits right)

CLARICE

Colleen, that sister of yours would forget her head if it wasn’t attached!

(Sound of car pulling up outside. Car door closes, foot steps on porch. YOUNG VIRGIL staggers in.)

CLARICE

So, which is it this time? Did you sleep it off at the shop or did you just drink through the night?

YOUNG VIRGIL

(surly) None of your business.

CLARICE

(sarcastically) Oh, I see we’ve decided to greet the day three sheets to the wind. Wonderful. (Looks out window.) Look how you parked. Sheila won’t be able to get out. You’ll have to…well, I’ll move it. Give me your keys.

YOUNG VIRGIL

So I ran into your boyfriend Henry last night.

CLARICE

Oh yeah? How’s ole Henry?

YOUNG VIRGIL

He started telling everybody in the bar about how Jimmy’s up in New York, fairy dancing with all his fairy friends in fairy land. Oh, they all got a big laugh out of that.

CLARICE

Why do you let him even get to you, Virgil? You know he just does that to gall you.

YOUNG VIRGIL

Mr. Big War Hero. Telling everyone how I wasn’t man enough to fight. I’d have killed every damned one of those gooks if they’d have let me go.

CLARICE

I’m sure you would have.

YOUNG VIRGIL

I know I would have. Where’s my dinner?

CLARICE

Dinner? It’s 7 o’clock in the morning. Give me your keys so I can move the car.

YOUNG VIRGIL

(angrily) I said where’s my dinner? A man comes home from work, he expects dinner to be on the table.

CLARICE

(calmly) Well it would be stone cold and rancid by now, that’s for sure. I need the keys. Don’t make Sheila late for school.

YOUNG VIRGIL

What’s that?

CLARICE

Oatmeal.

YOUNG VIRGIL

(furiously) You’re trying to feed me oatmeal for dinner? What the hell kind of dinner is that?

CLARICE

(sighs) It’s for the baby.

(CLARICE picks pan up from stove)

YOUNG VIRGIL

(yelling) Where the hell is *my* dinner?

(Baby starts to cry. YOUNG VIRGIL backhands CLARICE, oatmeal lands on the baby.)

CLARICE

*Virgil*!!

(Baby screams. CLARICE is sobbing. YOUNG VIRGIL reels away as TEENAGE SHEILA runs in from stage right.)

CLARICE

*Look what you’ve done!*

(YOUNG VIRGIL pauses in front of open basement door, tries to get his balance. TEENAGE SHEILA glances at CLARICE.)

TEENAGE SHEILA

You bastard!

(She shoves YOUNG VIRGIL and he falls down the stairs.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6

SETTING: Downstage in front of dim kitchen

AT RISE: JIMMY and SHEILA are continuing their discussion.

SHEILA

…and I just pushed him. It happened so fast. I could hear him tumbling down the stairs and then I saw the oatmeal. And Colleen’s skin. And Mom’s face. And I thought, “Oh my God, I just killed Dad. Because Mom spilled oatmeal on the baby.”

JIMMY

But she hadn’t.

SHEILA

No, but that’s what I thought. That’s what I’ve always thought. When the ambulance arrived, that’s what she told them. She told them that she had slipped and spilled the oatmeal.

JIMMY

She must have been terrified.

SHEILA

She didn’t even mention Daddy. She and Colleen left in that ambulance. I waited for about ten minutes before it dawned on me that she had only called an ambulance for Colleen, so I called to get one for Daddy.

JIMMY

Who was blissfully knocked out cold at the bottom of the stairs.

(JIMMY and SHEILA walk upstage into kitchen)

SHEILA

I remember when he finally came home from the hospital. It must have been the day this letter was written. You know, I was prepared for him to be angry and bitter. I was really

SHEILA cont’d.

terrified. But he wasn’t mad. I thought it was weird. It was like the wind had been knocked out of his sails.

JIMMY

More like all the piss and vinegar had drained out of him.

SHEILA

I left for college right after that. I almost didn’t go. I didn’t want to leave her, but she insisted. Do you know how guilty I’ve felt for all these years?

JIMMY

For leaving?

SHEILA

Well, yeah, I guess. But mostly for pushing him down the stairs? Every time I came home, I was sure he was going to remember. When I was younger, I was afraid that I could go to jail for it.

JIMMY

You really thought that?

SHEILA

Yes. Then as I got older, I figured I could just say he was too drunk to remember. But I have kept my distance. And for what? I could have spent more time with Mom, but I didn’t want to face him. And now….

JIMMY

Now, you realize he had it coming.

SHEILA

(waves the letter) This is so Mom, isn’t it? Do you think it would have held up in court?

JIMMY

(takes letter from her) I don’t know. But Dad wouldn’t have known either. Mr. “I don’t much cotton to book learnin’” And wasn’t one of Mom’s cousins a judge? Yeah, I think he would have believed her, even if it wasn’t legally binding.

JIMMY cont’d.

Why didn’t she just leave him?

SHEILA

I don’t know. I remember one time she told me she couldn’t leave because she had no way to support us and that he would hunt her down.

JIMMY

So she lived her whole marriage in fear.(determined) I swear to God, I could kill him.

SHEILA

Jimmy, stop it. What would that solve?

JIMMY

Sheila, it would solve everything. It would solve everything.

(BLACK OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 2

Scene 1

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: COLLEEN is at the sink in short sleeves, washing dishes.

(SHEILA enters. Surprised, COLLEEN grabs cardigan from back of chair and starts to put it on.)

SHEILA

Colleen, don’t. You don’t have to do that, honey.

COLLEEN

It’s just…habit, I guess.

SHEILA

We’re family. You don’t need to cover up for us.

COLLEEN

Thanks.

SHEILA

You really do a great job with your make-up. If I didn’t know, I wouldn’t be able to…

COLLEEN

Years of practice.

SHEILA

Do you remember that at all? Do you remember anything about that day?

COLLEEN

I was only a year old. No, I don’t have any memories of it.

SHEILA

Thank God, right?

COLLEEN

They always said it was the worst day of their lives.

SHEILA

Oh, I’m sure. What did they tell you happened? I mean, I wasn’t in the room and I know everything happened pretty fast.

COLLEEN

Well, you know the story. I got burned when Mom spilled the pot of oatmeal on me and Dad slipped in it and fell down the basement stairs. And then you came in the room and called for an ambulance.

SHEILA

Yeah. That’s how I remember it.

COLLEEN

I know I went to the burn unit in St. Louis. I guess you went with Dad to the hospital here?

SHEILA

Yep. He was in for about a month and then he went to a rehab center over in Marion.

COLLEEN

You know, I don’t have any memories of him before he was in a wheelchair. He always said that he used to be a strong, fit guy.

SHEILA

Yeah, he was. And wiry. He was never big, but he was strong.

COLLEEN

It’s like we had two different fathers, isn’t it?

SHEILA

Definitely.

(JIMMY enters from stage right. Tries to hide reaction to seeing COLLEEN’s scars)

JIMMY

Colleen, do you have a clipboard? I want to start making a list of things that need to be done around here. Where’s Dad’s big toolbox?

COLLEEN

Oh, it’s down at the shop, right where he always kept it. The key’s on the hook by the back door if you need it. I’ll get you a clipboard.

(Exits right.)

SHEILA

She doesn’t know anything. I mean, she knows the sanitized version of events. It was an accident. Dad slipped and fell.

JIMMY

She needs to know the truth. Especially now that we know what the whole truth is.

SHEILA

Why are you so intent on outing him as the brute he was?

JIMMY

She deserves to know the truth. She thinks he just picked on me because I’m gay. She has no idea of how he used to beat Mom, and us.

SHEILA

Why does she need to know?

JIMMY

My God, Sheila, Colleen’s entire life’s circumstances were determined on that one day. You moved on. I was already out of here. Don’t you think she has the right to know why it happened? How it happened? Who did it?

(COLLEEN enters from right with clipboard)

COLLEEN

Who did what?

SHEILA

Oh, stupid high school memories again.

VIRGIL

(Off) Colleen, where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

It’s not dinnertime yet, Dad.

VIRGIL

(off)

Where’s my dinner? Colleen? Where’s my dinner?

JIMMY

Jesus Christ! I’ll get him.

(exits right)

COLLEEN

Oh, thanks.

(JIMMY re-enters, pushing VIRGIL in wheelchair.)

COLLEEN

Where are you going?

JIMMY

I’m giving you girls a break. I’ll take him for a walk. Get him some fresh air.

COLLEEN

That would be great. Thanks, Jimmy.

SHEILA

(whispers) Jimmy, don’t do anything stupid.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: SHEILA is seated at table, reading on her phone.

(Colleen enters, yawning.)

COLLEEN

A two-hour nap! I can’t remember the last time that happened. It felt so luxurious. Are Jimmy and Dad back?

SHEILA

Not yet. I’m not sure where they could have gone.

COLLEEN

There’s not much to see around here, but it cheers Dad up to go to the garage. Jimmy wanted the toolbox, so they probably went there. (walks toward door.) Yeah, the key’s gone. That must be where they are.

SHEILA

For two hours?

COLLEEN

Did you try Jimmy’s cellphone?

SHEILA

No answer.

COLLEEN

Well, they couldn’t have gone far on foot. I’m sure they’ll be back soon.

SHEILA

Can I ask you an indelicate question?

COLLEEN

Uh, okay. Sure.

SHEILA

What will you do when Daddy dies? I mean, what will your life look like then? Have you thought about that?

(They sit at table)

COLLEEN

I can’t really say that I’ve thought about it. Maybe I’ve daydreamed about it, but honestly, it has never seemed like there was a way out of this, Sheila. (chuckles) I wouldn’t be surprised if he outlives me at this rate.

SHEILA

I think you should start planning for your future. A future without Daddy. I mean, he’s 87.

COLLEEN

Grandpa lived to 98 and Grandma made it all the way to 102.

SHEILA

Still, something could happen. At any time. (COLLEEN looks at her suspiciously) I mean, any of us could go at any time, right? I just think if you started to plan for that future, it would help you realize that the present is temporary.

COLLEEN

Hmmm…I guess.

SHEILA

And, you know, you’re right. We do have plenty of room at our house. You’d be welcome to come stay with us, maybe get a job in Atlanta? Settle down there? Get your own place eventually?

COLLEEN

We’ll see. Maybe you’re right. I should start thinking about inevitabilities. You really don’t think that Greg would mind if I stayed with you?

SHEILA

Oh, he’d be fine with it.

COLLEEN

Sheila, can I tell you something?

SHEILA

Sure, honey.

COLLEEN

Greg has always scared me.

SHEILA

Really? Why?

COLLEEN

I don’t know. He just seems so, I guess, certain about everything. Like he knows better than the rest of us.

SHEILA

Huh.

COLLEEN

Why doesn’t he like Dad?

SHEILA

Oh, that’s ancient history, Colleen.

COLLEEN

But why? What did Dad do to him?

SHEILA

Colleen, Greg and I started dating senior year and Daddy’s drinking was really out of control a lot of the time. And Greg didn’t think Daddy treated me – us – very well.

COLLEEN

But what about after Dad stopped drinking?

SHEILA

Greg can be rigid. He is, as you said, certain. He sees the world in black and white. And he rarely changes his mind about things.

COLLEEN

Does that bother you? To be married to someone who is that opinionated?

SHEILA

Well, I usually agree with him. I just think I see more nuance in situations than he does. But he’s been a good husband and father.

COLLEEN

I’m glad.

SHEILA

I know what to expect from him. Always. Growing up with Daddy taught me not to like surprises.

COLLEEN

What do you mean?

SHEILA

Oh, I don’t know. Here’s an example. I lisped until about sixth grade. One day, Daddy would think it was cute and the next day, he’d be screaming at me from the top of his lungs for being too idiotic to speak correctly. Or “talk right” as he would say.

COLLEEN

You’re kidding?!

SHEILA

Or he’d let me buy a pretty dress, then tell me I looked like a slut when I wore it. Depending on his mood and his alcohol intake.

COLLEEN

Wow.

SHEILA

Greg is steady. He is consistent. He *is* certain. I need that.

COLLEEN

I get it, I guess.

SHEILA

Where is Jimmy? The funeral starts in an hour. I’d hate to go without him.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: Virgil Gillen’s abandoned auto shop.

AT RISE: VIRGIL is seated in his wheelchair. JIMMY angrily paces around him.

JIMMY

Here we are, Gillen’s Auto Repair. Do you remember what you told me when I was a little boy?

VIRGIL

Huh?

JIMMY

You brought me here and you said, “One day, Junior, all of this will be yours.” Like I’d want this hellhole.

VIRGIL

Junior. Drove a Mustang. (slips into reverie about the car, not really hearing Jimmy.)

JIMMY

That’s right. You gave it to me for my 15th birthday, but the engine was shot. I had to rebuild the engine. It took me a year of Saturdays, but I did it. Want to know a secret? I hated every second I spent under that hood.

VIRGIL

It was a good car.

JIMMY

Do you remember what you told me when you gave it to me? You said, “Here. You’re going to spend your spare time working on this instead of prancing around in those plays and musicals. This will make you a real man.”

VIRGIL

It was a fast car.

JIMMY

So that’s what I did. Every Saturday. I’d spent my whole life listening to you make fun of gay men, calling them faggots, queers, pansies. I didn’t want to be those things. I wanted to be a real man.

VIRGIL

It was yellow, wasn’t it?

JIMMY

Stop talking about the god damned car. Do you know how much I wanted NOT to be gay? I was a miserable, terrified, ashamed kid, all because of you.

VIRGIL

What happened to the Mustang. Is it still here? Where is it?

JIMMY

I sold it. The second I turned 18, I sold it and used the money to move to New York…to get as far away from you as I could. And you know what happened when I got away from you? I became a man. Not what you’d call a man, but my own kind of man. A real man.

VIRGIL

Colleen drives a Taurus. It’s black. A black Taurus.

JIMMY

Right now I’m wondering why I shouldn’t just kick the living crap out of you.

VIRGIL

(snaps out of car memories) What? You want to hurt me?

JIMMY

You have it coming, you know? You’re a bigoted old bastard who beat the hell out of your wife and kids for years on end. My mother was the kindest person on Earth and you used her as your punching bag because you’re a weak, worthless pile of crap!

VIRGIL

What are you…? Where are….? Where’s Colleen? Colleen! Colleen!!!

JIMMY

Colleen? Yeah, we know now what you did to Colleen, you bastard.

(Virgil starts to cry)

JIMMY

(angrier) Oh, this is perfect! Big tough he-man’s a little girl now, is he? A cry baby? Simpering, sniveling little weakling?

VIRGIL

(crying and shaking) Colleen? Colleen?

JIMMY

(even angrier) Should I do to you what you did to me every time I cried? Should I? (shakes wheelchair and jars Virgil) How does it feel? Huh? How does it feel, old man, to be terrorized by someone who is bigger and stronger than you are?

VIRGIL

Don’t hurt me. Please don’t hurt me.

JIMMY

(getting angrier) Hurt you? Hurt you? Well, let me see, according to the Virgil Gillen Playbook, when someone asks you not to hurt them, you beat them senseless.

VIRGIL

(crying) Don’t hurt me.

JIMMY

(enraged) You know what? I’m not going to hurt you. I’m going to kill you. That’s right. I may be a faggot, but I’m the faggot who’s going to end your life, you son of a bitch.

(JIMMY picks up tire iron, swings it back and gets ready to bash VIRGIL.)

VIRGIL

My boy Junior. He’s that way, he’s a faggot…queer. He has a Mustang. It’s yellow. Where is he?

JIMMY

Your boy Junior? Who the hell do you think I am, old man?

VIRGIL

*I don’t know who you are*! Please don’t hurt me. Colleen? *Colleen?*

(JIMMY drops tire iron and yells at the top of his lungs.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: COLLEEN is seated at table, reading.

(JIMMY enters from stage left, pushing VIRGIL in his wheelchair. A large toolbox is balanced on the handlebars.)

COLLEEN

There you are! Jimmy, I was really getting worried.

JIMMY

Sorry. I forgot to charge my phone. Dad and I went to the shop and well, I guess I just lost track of time.

COLLEEN

Sheila left about an hour ago. If you want to take my car, you can probably get there for the end of the service.

JIMMY

Oh, well. Lugging this (gestures to toolbox) and pushing him have me a bit lathered up. By the time I showered and got ready, it will be too late to bother going.

COLLEEN

I’m sorry you’re missing it.

JIMMY

Yeah. Patty was Sheila’s best friend and she married my buddy Tom. We were all pretty close growing up, but I haven’t really talked to them in a long time. I doubt they’ll miss me.

COLLEEN

But you came all this way!

JIMMY

I’ll call Tom tomorrow. It will be fine.

COLLEEN

Dad and I were just going to have sandwiches for dinner, but I can make something if you’d like.

JIMMY

Oh, don’t worry about me. I’m really not very hungry. I think I might knock a few things off the Jimmy-Do list.

COLLEEN

Anything I can help with?

JIMMY

No, I’ve got it.

COLLEEN

Jimmy?

JIMMY

Yes?

COLLEEN

If you don’t mind, I’d rather we just kind of hang out and talk. I mean, we never get to see each other.

JIMMY

Okay. Um, sure, kiddo. Let me get a quick shower, okay? Hey, is the cribbage board still around here?

COLLEEN

Of course! What? A Gillen house with no cribbage board??!! That’s crazy talk!

JIMMY

You’re going down, little sister!

(JIMMY exits right)

COLLEEN

In your dreams, big brother! Dad? Did you have a good time down at the shop?

VIRGIL

Did I go to the shop?

COLLEEN

Yes, you and Jimmy…Junior. Junior took you down to the shop.

VIRGIL

Oh, there was a bad man there.

COLLEEN

At the shop?

VIRGIL

He tried to hurt me.

COLLEEN

Are you sure?

VIRGIL

I think so.

COLLEEN

Wasn’t Jimmy with you?

VIRGIL

Who?

COLLEEN

Jimmy…Junior! Wasn’t he with you?

VIRGIL

Did he bring me home?

COLLEEN

Jimmy did, yeah, Dad. Jimmy brought you home.

VIRGIL

He didn’t hurt me.

COLLEEN

Of course not. He’s your son. Are you okay, Dad?

VIRGIL

Where’s my dinner?

COLLEEN

(sighs) Yep, you’re fine.

Scene 5

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: JIMMY and COLLEEN are seated at table, playing cribbage.

JIMMY

Fifteen-two, fifteen-four, fifteen-six, and nobs is seven. (moves cribbage peg)

COLLEEN

Jimmy, when you were in the shower, Dad said there was a bad man at the shop.

JIMMY

What?

COLLEEN

I didn’t say anything before because I didn’t want to upset him. Did something happen?

JIMMY

No. He seemed really confused, though. Maybe he just…does he ever hallucinate?

COLLEEN

No, but sometimes he’ll get something wrong in his mind and then he’s obsessed about it for a bit. Maybe that’s all it was. He just seemed kind of rattled when you got back.

JIMMY

Well, I guess he was just out of his routine.

COLLEEN

Probably. Can I ask you a question?

JIMMY

Sure.

COLLEEN

It’s about Sheila.

JIMMY

Okay.

COLLEEN

Isn’t Greg really successful?

JIMMY

I suppose.

COLLEEN

Well, if you were married to someone who made a lot of money, wouldn’t you expect them to let you help your family? I mean, it’s not the 1950s. She is entitled to a fair share, don’t you think?

JIMMY

Colleen, not this conversation again. The money just isn’t there.

COLLEEN

(angrily) Neither of you are even willing to try to find a way to make this happen. God forbid you two make any kind of sacrifice. Your lives go on…business as usual. And me? Sacrifice? (laughs) You know how many times a day Dad asks me where is dinner is? About every five minutes, after that, all day long, every day, day in, day out. Yeah, Jimmy…I’d sacrifice that. I’d sacrifice that in a heartbeat.

JIMMY

Dammit, Colleen. If we sell everything to put him in a home, there won’t be a penny left for you. That should be your money when he dies. Sheila and I don’t want it. You’ve sure as hell earned it.

COLLEEN

I don’t want it either.

JIMMY

Don’t be stupid. It will be enough to let you move, I don’t know, back to Chicago. Build a new life. Go back to school. Travel…whatever. If that money goes to pay for his care,

JIMMY cont’d.

you’ll be struggling after he dies. We want you to have something to show for the years you’ve given up. It’s not like we’re unaware of what you’ve lost by being here.

COLLEEN

What if he lives another 10 years, Jimmy? What’s another lost 10 years of my life worth? Can you put a price on that, because I sure as hell can’t?

(SHEILA enters from left)

SHEILA

Whoa! What’s going on here?

JIMMY

I’m just trying to talk some sense into our baby sister. About putting Dad in that memory care center.

SHEILA

I thought we’d gone over this.

COLLEEN

We have. And your minds are made up. So, that’s fine. Whatever. I can’t fight you. And I can’t do it without you because, hell, I don’t even have power of attorney, do I? (sighs) It’s been a long day. Sheila, if you’re hungry, there’s tuna salad in the fridge. Goodnight.

(COLLEEN exits)

SHEILA

God dammit! Jimmy, I thought this was settled!

JIMMY

I thought it was, but she brought it up again. She doesn’t have power of attorney?

SHEILA

No. I do.

JIMMY

Really? Why? That doesn’t make sense.

SHEILA

It’s what Daddy wanted. Colleen has medical power of attorney, in case there’s a health emergency, but he didn’t want her to have to worry about the finances. He figured Greg would help me out when the time came. You know, because, why the hell would I be able to handle it on my own, being a woman and all?

JIMMY

Good old Dad.

SHEILA

You know, I was about to call the police this afternoon. Where the hell did you go? You missed the funeral. Tom was expecting you…I didn’t know how to explain your absence. Colleen was worried, too.

JIMMY

I know. I’m sorry. I took him down to the garage.

SHEILA

And you what, shot the breeze, played some poker, watched the game, drank a few beers?

JIMMY

Sheila (long pause) I came *this* close. *This* close to killing him. I had a tire iron in my hand and I just couldn’t do it.

SHEILA

Of course you couldn’t do it. You’re not a killer. You don’t have it in you. Most people don’t.

JIMMY

That’s not it. I could have done it.

SHEILA

Well, if that’s the case, then what stopped you?

JIMMY

He didn’t know it was me. My big moment of revenge for all he’s put this family through, and he didn’t recognize me. I mean, he was scared as hell, but just scared…not remorseful, not realizing that karma really can be a bitch. So I was just terrorizing a crippled old man who had no idea why he was being threatened.

SHEILA

Well, he doesn’t really know much of anything at this point.

JIMMY

But Sheila, if he had recognized me for a split second, I could have done it. I would have gladly done it. I wanted to show him that I could rain down more pain on him than he ever dreamed of inflicting on us.

SHEILA

Oh, Jimmy!

JIMMY

And that’s what scares me. I always thought I was nothing like him. I’ve worked so hard to erase any trait of him in me. But now I realize I have the same capacity for cruelty.

SHEILA

Jesus, Jimmy. I really don’t think you do. (Hugs him) Please don’t be so hard on yourself.

JIMMY

But you’re right, Sheila. Colleen doesn’t need to know. I think a part of me just envies that she didn’t have to grow up with Dad the way he was when we were kids. But there really is no upside to her knowing the truth. Christ, can today just be over already?

SHEILA

That works for me. Let’s hit the hay.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 6

SETTING: Kitchen

AT RISE: SHEILA is standing, drinking coffee and looking at her phone.

(JIMMY enters from right)

SHEILA

(cheerily) Good morning, sunshine!

JIMMY

Ugh. Morning. (Pours a cup of coffee)

SHEILA

How did you sleep, morning glory?

JIMMY

Why are always so damned chipper in the morning?

SHEILA

One of the benefits of good, clean living, I suppose. You should try it.

JIMMY

Thanks, but, uh, NO. (they chuckle) What time’s your flight? I go out at three fifteen.

SHEILA

Mine’s at two twenty. So, we should leave by eleven or so. Are you packed?

JIMMY

It won’t take me a minute.

VIRGIL

(off) Where’s my dinner? Colleen?

SHEILA

She isn’t up yet?

VIRGIL

(off) Colleen? Where’s my dinner?

JIMMY

I don’t know. I haven’t seen her.

SHEILA

You go pack. I’ll check on him. Wait a minute…what’s this?

(picks envelope up from table.)

SHEILA

It’s addressed to us. (she opens it)

JIMMY

From Colleen?

SHEILA

Well, it’s not from Daddy. There’s a note from Colleen, this Carmichael guy’s business card and…the notarized letter we found.

(unfolds piece of paper from envelope)

JIMMY

How did she get that?

SHEILA

I don’t know. I thought you had it. But I guess she knows everything now.

JIMMY

Oh, shit.

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 7

SETTING: A hospital room in 1974.

AT RISE: YOUNG VIRGIL is seated in a wheelchair.

(CLARICE enters)

YOUNG VIRGIL

It took you long enough. I’ve been in this rehab place for two months and the hospital a month before that. Where have you been? Why haven’t you answered my phone calls?

CLARICE

You’re lucky I came at all.

YOUNG VIRGIL

Don’t be ridiculous.

CLARICE

What about your daughter? Do you want to know how Colleen is?

YOUNG VIRGIL

Of course I do.

CLARICE

She is scarred for life. She has burns over 60 percent of her body.

YOUNG VIRGIL

(moans, then composes himself) If you weren’t so damned clumsy, she’d be fine.

CLARICE

How dare you. Virgil, that’s it. I’m leaving. I’m taking Colleen and Sheila and I’m leaving you.

YOUNG VIRGIL

Where the hell will you go? You’ve never worked a day in your life. And if you think for a second that I will give you a penny, you’re sorely mistaken.

CLARICE

Give me a penny? You can’t even work any more, Virgil. Look at you. You’re in a wheelchair. How are you going to work on cars in a wheelchair?

YOUNG VIRGIL

I can still run the shop. I have three guys working for me. And I won’t always be in this wheelchair.

CLARICE

Yes, you will.

YOUNG VIRGIL

No. I’m going to beat this. I’ll walk again.

CLARICE

Virgil, that’s a fantasy.

YOUNG VIRGIL

Well, if you’re leaving, why the hell did you come here?

CLARICE

I came to make you an offer.

YOUNG VIRGIL

(scoffs) An offer?

CLARICE

Yes, an offer. You can’t take care of yourself in this condition. If I stay with you for six months until you get settled and learn how to deal with this, you’ll take out a second mortgage on the house and give me that money so I can start over.

YOUNG VIRGIL

The hell I will.

CLARICE

Yes, the hell you will. You have a daughter who is scarred from head to toe. I told the hospital that it was an accident, but all I have to do is go to the police and tell them I was afraid to tell the truth -- that you threw that

CLARICE contd.

oatmeal on Colleen. They will lock you up in a heartbeat. And I’ll get everything.

YOUNG VIRGIL

I would never throw hot oatmeal on my baby! You must have spilled it. Who would even believe such a lie?

CLARICE

You have a reputation in this town, Virgil. No one would doubt for a moment that you snapped in a fit of rage. Not the police, not the neighbors, not my cousin, you know, the judge.

YOUNG VIRGIL

No one will believe you!

CLARICE

You think so? Who would vouch for you? Who in this whole town would stand up for your character, Virgil?

YOUNG VIRGIL

Go to hell, Clarice.

CLARICE

So, here’s the deal…six months and the money from the house or jail. And during that six months, if you lay a hand on me or my children, or even say as much as a cross word to any of us, I’ll go to the police and I’ll show them the confession you’re about to sign.

YOUNG VIRGIL

What if six months isn’t long enough? What if I can’t take care of myself by then?

CLARICE

We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. I’ve typed it all up. All you have to do is sign right here…or I can leave now. The police station is on the way home.

(CLARICE presents letter to YOUNG VIRGIL. He signs it, and she stamps it and seals it with her notary seal.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 8

SETTING: Kitchen.

AT RISE: JIMMY and SHEILA are seated at the table, reading the letter. The lights are dimmed on them. COLLEEN is downstage with a spot light on her.

COLLEEN

Dear Jimmy and Sheila, I found this letter in the hall outside Jimmy’s room. One of you must have dropped it. From reading it, it looks like everything you’ve been trying to tell me is true. The two of you grew up with a father who was a brutal, black-hearted drunk. And now I know that these scars I’ve carried all my life are the result of his violent behavior.

I can choose to believe that he was only good to me because Mom threatened him with jail time. Or I can choose to believe that his past behavior was caused by alcohol and that the Dad I grew up with *was* a kind and loving father – the Dad you didn’t get to grow up with. I don’t know what to believe. Was he truly reformed or just acting in his own best interests? We’ll never know, will we?

But I do know that he no longer recognizes either of you and it’s just a matter of time before he doesn’t know who I am either. I don’t want to remember him looking at me the way he looks at you – confused and clueless as to who you are -- so I’m leaving.

The reality is, you’re not going to just leave him in the house by himself. You will make sure he’s taken care of because he’s a feeble old man and you are not cruel people. Regardless of how he treated you, our mother didn’t raise you to be cruel. So whether he ends up in a home or with one of you, you will do the right thing. Just like I’ve done for the past ten years. I’ve put in my time. It’s your turn now. Love, Colleen

(COLLEEN exits right. Lights come up in kitchen.)

(JIMMY and SHEILA look shocked.)

VIRGIL

(off)

Where’s my dinner?

(BLACKOUT)

(CURTAIN)