

Fried Grits

A short play in two ACTS by Sam Stone

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Time: Present day.

Setting, may be minimal:

OLLIE'S DINER.

- Downstage, a table with three chairs.
- Upstage or to the side, a "ready" counter/table with coffee pot, menus, a "RESERVED" sign and restaurant-type props.
- There are two exits.
 - Entrance Door – may have frosted glass with "OLLIES DINER" facing outward.
 - An escape to the kitchen, remainder of the diner and rear exit.

Characters, in order of appearance:

JOE -	Attorney, married/separated. 30's/early 40's.
OLLIE -	Owner of Ollie's Diner. Middle aged or older.
MIKE -	Investment Counselor – JOE's age. Divorced.
DON MICHAELS -	Real Estate agent – 50's/60's. Happily married to JOAN.
MONICA -	20's/30's. Waitress. Bright, good social skills.
JOAN MICHAELS -	DON's wife. Volunteer at "Women's Aid," an agency helping abused women.
Dr. CHARLENE HIGHTOWER -	Psychologist. Therapist at "Women's Aid."
GEORGE JOHNSON -	MONICA's abusive boyfriend. Older than MONICA.
BENNIE DONUTS -	Mobster – same age as Joe and Mike.

SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene 1 – Saturday Morning

Scene 2 – Monday Afternoon – 13

Scene 3 – Tuesday Morning – 20

Scene 4 – Closing Time (2:00 P.M.) – 26

ACT TWO

Scene 1 – A Few Weeks Later – 29

Scene 2 – The Next Morning – 34

Scene 3 – Friday Afternoon Two Months Later – 40

Scene 4 – Early the next morning – 41

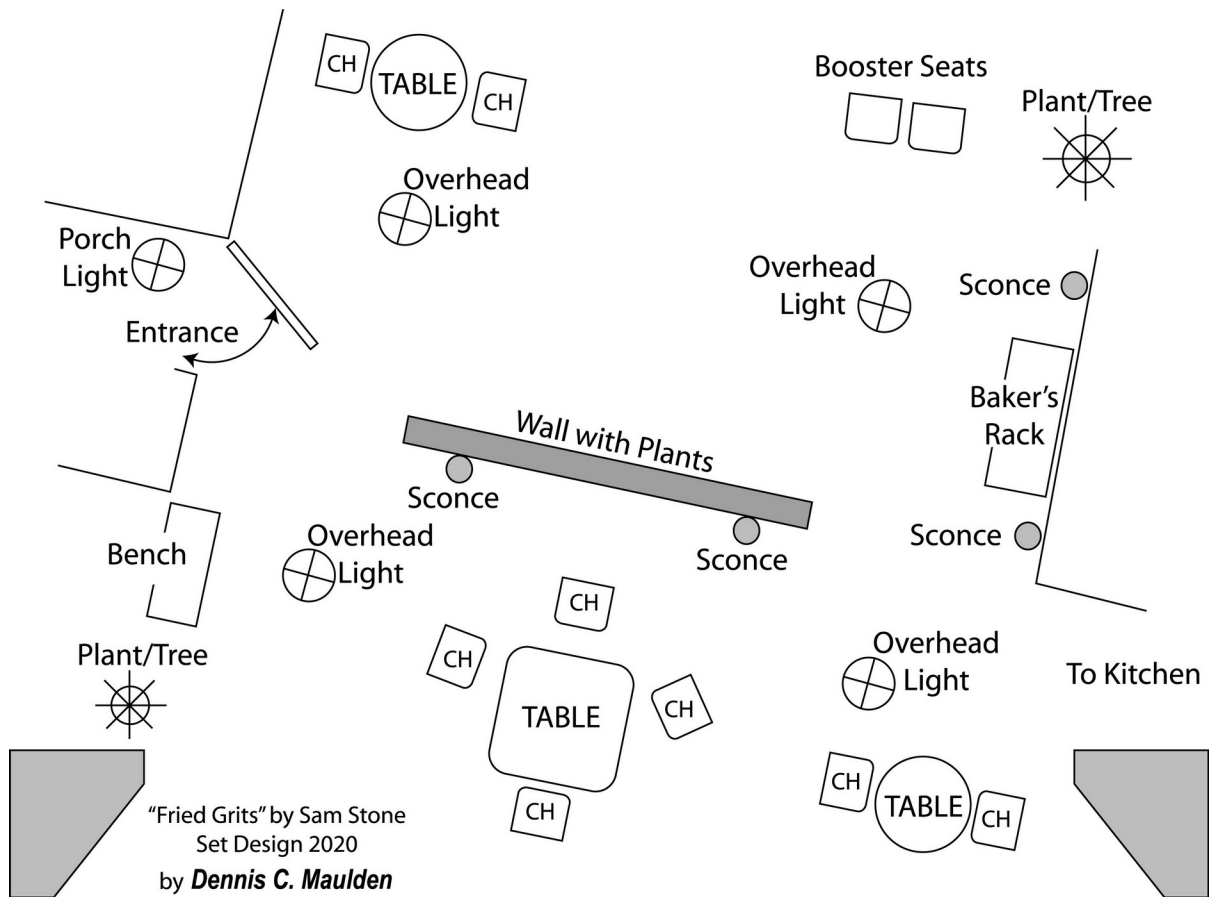
Scene 5 – Later That Morning – 43

Scene 6 – Saturday Afternoon A Week Later – 49

Scene 7 – Two Years later – 54

Short Synopsis: JOE, MIKE and DON meet for breakfast at Ollie's Diner six days a week.

MONICA (waitress) has an abusive live-in boyfriend, GEORGE. The men observe bruises and are concerned for MONICA's welfare. A confrontation at the diner involving GEORGE causes the men to get involved. MONICA goes to "Women's Aid," a support organization for abused women. JOE (attorney – former prosecutor) arranges to have GEORGE's parole revoked. MONICA enters a therapy program offered by Women's Aid, gets her life in order, earns a G.E.D. and enrolls in the local community college.



ACT ONE
Scene 1
Saturday Morning

The table at is set for three. "RESERVED" sign is on the table.

On rise, JOE ENTERS carrying a newspaper. HE looks around. Seeing no one he goes to the ready table, gets the coffee pot and pours himself a cup. HE takes the reserved sign and the coffee pot back to the ready table.

JOE SITS, opens the paper and casually peruses the front page. HIS attention is suddenly focused on an article.

JOE

What?

(HE READS for a few seconds.)

When did that happen?

(Searches for a page further back, takes a few seconds to find the article and reads, mouth moving with the words. HE is obviously upset. Speaks loudly as OLLIE enters from kitchen.)

That idiot!

OLLIE

Good morning, Joe.

JOE

(Startled. Looks up.)

Ollie! Good morning. Where's Monica?

OLLIE

Linda had a fender bender. Monica's covering her station. I can take your order.

JOE

I'll just enjoy some coffee and wait for the guys.

OLLIE

Okay, holler if you need anything.

(EXITS.)

(JOE returns to the article he was reading. After a moment MIKE and DON enter.)

JOE

What a jerk!

MIKE

(To DON.)

Is he talking about you?

(MONICA ENTERS on JOE's line.)

JOE

Oh, hi guys! I was just reading about the latest antics of our local sports hero. Good morning, Monica. Ollie said you were covering for Linda.

MONICA

She just came in.

(Goes to "ready" table. Brings coffee pot.)

JOE

Ollie said she had an accident. Is she okay?

MONICA

(Pouring coffee for DON and MIKE.)

She's fine but her car's totaled. She says it's the other guy's fault and wants to talk to you about it.

JOE

(Pulls a huge wallet out of HIS pocket. Begins to search through it.)

Okay, let's see. Where did I...

MIKE

I can't believe you're still carrying so much in your wallet.

JOE

Hey, don't make fun of my filing system.

(Pulls a business card out and returns the wallet to his pocket.)

Can I borrow your pen?

(MONICA hands JOE a pen. JOE turns card over and writes on the back.)

Here. Tell her to call Annie Monday morning and make an appointment.

(Shows MONICA the back of the card.)

That's Jason Cardiff's number over at Cardiff's Car Rental. Have her call him this morning and tell him I said to call. He closes at noon today. Make sure she calls early so he can have a car dropped off here. He'll give her a good deal and she won't have to settle until she gets paid by the insurance company.

MONICA

(Takes the card.)

Thanks, Joe.

JOE

(JOE holds up newspaper to MIKE.)

Did you see this?

MIKE

No, but I heard it on the morning sports report.

MONICA

Who are you talking about?

MIKE

Honest John Wilson's wife caught him with another woman.

MONICA

Again? (Beat.) Are you guys playing golf this morning? It looks like rain.

JOE

I'll cary an umbrella. What's going on with you Monica?

MONICA

Same old stuff, different day.

JOE

You look tired.

MONICA

I didn't sleep well.

DON

(Looks at HER long and hard.)

Sure looks like it... (Beat) what time did you start work this morning?

MONICA

Five thirty.

DON

Aren't you wearing a lot of make-up for this time of day?

MONICA (defensive)

I got up early and wanted to look nice for a change. You... you just don't understand. I...
(Rapidly EXITS.)

MIKE

What's with her? She looked like she was going to cry. Okay, what did you do?

JOE

Why do you think I did anything?

MIKE

(Turns to DON questioningly.)

Don... want to help me here?

DON

I guess the gorilla beat her up again.

MIKE

You're right! She is wearing lots of make-up.

DON

Her cheek is bruised! How long has she been with that guy?

JOE

Maybe six months, why?

DON

She's coming in bruised more often. This has become a pattern and it's gonna get worse.

MIKE

What do you mean by that?

DON

Abuse gets more commonplace the longer the relationship goes on. Maybe it becomes easier if the woman stops resisting. The guy feels entitled. Psychological and physical abuse work together to make the woman feel like she's to blame.

MIKE

That's kinda' deep. Where'd you learn that?

DON

Joan volunteers over at Women's Aid.

MIKE

You never said anything about that before.

DON

Well, it's kind of personal.

MIKE

What's that mean?

JOE

(Rising, pointing offstage.)
Excuse me guys, I gotta...
(EXITS.)

DON

Okay, I'll try to make this short. Do you remember when Joan's sorority sister was in town... Rebecca?

MIKE

Yeah! We all went to dinner at Lorenzo's. They called themselves The Two Musketeers.

DON

Right, except there used to be three of them but when Eloisa got married she stopped communicating.

(DON stops speaking and seems to be lost in HIS thoughts.)

MIKE

So... ???

DON

(Recovers, takes a deep breath, then speaks.)

About three years ago she died of a blood clot and after the funeral her daughter Michelle asked Joan and Rebecca to help go through her things.

(A long pause.)

Mike, they found a journal of thirty plus years of abuse by her husband.

MIKE

What kind of lowlife was this?

DON

That's the problem! On the surface he was an upstanding member of society and his church... a very successful businessman, respected by the community.

MIKE

So, what happened?

DON

Nothing! There wasn't enough evidence to prosecute.

MIKE

That's it?

DON

Well, yeah... except as soon as Joan got home she went over to Women's Aid and volunteered. Do you know the average woman returns to an abusive relationship seven times before she finally leaves for good?

MIKE

Really?

DON

At least that's what they say.

MIKE

How often do they leave in a body bag?

DON (wincing)

Ugh! I don't know about that one, maybe I'll ask next time I see Charlene.

MIKE

Who?

DON

Charlene Hightower. She's the director and chief therapist over there.

MIKE

Maybe we should hook Monica up with Charlene.

DON

That's not a bad idea.

MIKE

Does Joe know about all this?

DON

Yes, he had just changed from working in the State's Attorney's office to private practice. He and Joan spent lots of time on the phone while she was out of town.

MONICA

(ENTERS. Brings coffee pot. Checks cups.)
You guys ready to order?

MIKE

Sure but Joe's not back. Maybe we should...

DON

He always orders the same thing anyway...

MIKE

Oh! And you don't?

DON

Okay... Monica, I'd like some French toast.

MIKE

You never order French toast!

DON

You accused me of always ordering the same thing so I thought I'd try something different. (Laughs.) How 'bout you? Going to order your daily portion of gruel?

MONICA

He's got you there, Mike. You always have oatmeal with raisins. Oh! How 'bout fried grits? They're really good.

MIKE

Fried grits?

MONICA

Yeah, Ollie takes the leftover grits and chills them overnight in a shallow pan. Then, next morning, he cuts them in squares about yeah big...

(Gestures.)

...and fries 'em in olive oil. They're good with pancake syrup or gravy or almost anything.

MIKE

You're kidding, right?

MONICA

No! I'm serious, they're excellent!

(MIKE looks at DON questioningly.)

DON

Sounds like fried gruel to me. Why don't you try it?

MIKE

(Shrugs.)

Fried grits, huh? What the... okay, what comes with 'em?

MONICA

Most folks get them with bacon, eggs...

MIKE

Yeah, but I'm trying to cut back on my cholesterol and animal fat. Okay, one order of fried grits and sugar-free syrup. Hold the eggs and bacon.

(To DON.)

If I don't like it, you're buying.

DON

Why me? This is your decision!

MIKE

That's what you get for calling my usual breakfast "gruel."

(JOE ENTERS. Looks closely at MONICA's cheek. MONICA doesn't see him.)

DON

Monica, how'd we get into this?

MONICA

Don't ask me! I just take the orders and deliver the food.

(Turns and sees JOE. Covers HER cheek and hurries offstage.)

(JOE watches MONICA exit. Sits.)

DON

Joe, we ordered fried grits for you.

JOE

(Paying attention to MONICA's exit and not focusing on Don's words. Finally realize he's being spoken to.)

What?

MIKE

Fried grits! They're on special this morning.

JOE

This some sort of joke?

DON

No! Monica said they're fantastic and we should try them... so, we did. You get a double order.

JOE

Fried grits? How do you eat them?

MIKE

With a spoon. They come with onions and sauerkraut on the side like Hokie's Hot Dogs over on Johnson Street.

(By this time, DON is laughing.)

JOE

Enough, already! What did you really order for me?

DON

Nothing! You always order the same thing so Monica didn't wait to ask.

(JOE shrugs.)

Mike's having fried grits.

(JOE looks at MIKE, who shrugs.)

MIKE

So...??? When do you go to court? Or is there another continuance?

JOE

Wednesday.

DON

What's going to happen? More of the same, or is she going to settle on what you agreed to this time?

JOE

Who knows! We meet at her lawyer's and come to an agreement. Then, when we get to court, she's not happy. We meet again and she wants some small change... that she knows I would have given her anyway.

MIKE

Maybe she doesn't want to get divorced.

DON

She's the one who was running around and she's the one that asked Joe for the divorce.

MIKE

I'm just saying. Who knows, she may not want to get divorced any longer. Stranger things have happened. How long were you guys married?

JOE

Seven years.

DON

Isn't there a movie about that? Yeah... "The Seven Year Itch!"

MIKE

You think that sorta crap applies to real life?

(MONICA enters with food and distributes the plates.)

DON

It's not crap. It's a statistical fact.

(JOE watches MONICA closely, silently seething during the following.)

MIKE

Don, don't say any more. That line of talk is so lame. Maybe Monica can help on this. What do you think? Joe's wife keeps delaying the divorce process. Do you think she really wants to stay married?

MONICA

I'm the wrong person to ask about relationships!

MIKE

Really? What's going on?

MONICA (defensive)

Nothing's going on! I wish you guys would keep my private life out of your conversation.

DON

Why? Don't you know we care?

MONICA

Thanks Don. Maybe I'd be happier if you cared a little less. Every morning you're checking me out for bruises.

DON

It's happening more often lately... you're just getting over the last time and this morning you show up with a new lump on your cheek. Aren't you getting tired of all that?

MONICA

But he said that if I leave him, he'll...

DON (interrupting)

Now you're sounding like every other battered woman!

(MIKE tries to interrupt. DON pushes through.)

These bums all use the same threats. OR... maybe it's YOU! You get into the mindset that if this guy leaves, there's no one else.

MIKE

Don, take it easy.

DON

No, Mike, this isn't the time for taking it easy. Dammit Monica, you're an attractive, intelligent woman! That bum's just another bully and you're encouraging him to be worse by letting him get away with it.

MONICA

Don, it's not all that bad. And, talking about you guys to him is what makes him so mad.

DON

What!?

MONICA

Well, sometimes I just want to talk a little bit about my day. Maybe tell him something funny, which often involves you guys, of course. He asks me a lot of questions about you, then he gets defensive like you're butting into my life or hitting on me.

DON

What all does George know about us?

MONICA

That you're friends and in here all the time. And you're nice to me. And you're generous with your tips. George asks where I get so much money...

MIKE

How does he know how much money you have? Does he take it?

MONICA (defensive)

Well he's looking for work and needs a little money for himself...

DON

So you're supporting him?

MONICA

I told you, he's looking for work. I gotta see to my other customers' orders.
(EXITS.)

MIKE

It's obvious she's defensive. The more we push her the more she backs off. We just need to give it a rest for now, guys.

JOE

(Has sat silently, seething through the above.)
I can't let it rest.

MIKE

So why didn't you say something?

JOE

She's really in denial. I don't know how we can get through to her. I've seen my share of domestic abuse cases. They don't usually end pretty.

DON

Why didn't you tell her?

JOE

I didn't want to overreact.

(MONICA returns. Brings coffee. SHE tries to return to the usual banter.)

MONICA

So, Mike, how do you like the grits?

MIKE

(Looking down at his plate.)
I haven't tasted them yet.

MONICA (laughs)

Come on! Don't be chicken!

JOE

(Ignoring banter, blurts to MONICA.)
I want to know why George says we're trying to control your life. If he's like that, I don't know why you'd keep talking about us to him unless you want to provoke him.

MONICA

No! I never do that! He has a buddy who comes in here in sometimes in the mornings. He told George you guys talk to me a lot.

JOE

Does he tell him we ask about the bruises?

MONICA

Maybe...sometimes... But George grills me about all my customers. He's kind of possessive. He loves me.

JOE

He loves you??? I can see it all now! When you wind up in the hospital, you'll tell yourself he got carried away and it won't happen again. You'll also tell the doctor you tripped over the cat and fell down the stairs. I'll bet you don't have any stairs and don't have a cat! The only hazard in your home is the guy that beats you up!

(Rises, counts off a few dollars.)

Tell you what. I don't feel like breakfast. Mike, enjoy your grits. I'll see you guys at the links.

(Tosses money on the table and EXITS.)

(MONICA watches JOE exit and looks to MIKE for help.)

MIKE

Don't look at me!

(Points toward exit.)

I'm on his side.

(Holds up the syrup container.)

Do you have any sugar free syrup?

(MONICA EXITS without answering as lights fade to black.)

End of Scene 1

Scene 2
Monday Afternoon

On rise, JOAN and CHARLENE ENTER and look around.

CHARLENE

There's no sign. I guess we just take a seat.

(They sit at the table.)

MONICA

(ENTERS. Seeing the ladies, she brings menus from the ready counter.)
Good afternoon ladies. Are you here for lunch?

JOAN

Yes.

MONICA

What would you like to drink?

CHARLENE

Iced tea for me.

MONICA

Sweet... unsweet... lemon?

CHARLENE

Unsweet, please... with lemon, thanks.

JOAN

I'd like water. No lemon please.

MONICA

Okay. Oh... today's special is tuna salad on toasted rye with lettuce and tomato. It comes with a choice of chips or slaw and a pickle.

JOAN

Does the chef use mayonnaise or salad dressing?

MONICA

Neither! Ollie makes his own recipe that's mostly olive oil and egg whites along with spices and other stuff.

JOAN

Okay, I'm sold. One special please.

CHARLENE

Me too!

MONICA

You won't be sorry. Chips or Cole Slaw?

CHARLENE

I'd like slaw please.

(JOAN signals agreement.)

MONICA

Okay, two orders of tuna salad on rye with cole slaw.

(EXITS.)

JOAN

Don was right. That's some bruise!

CHARLENE

Actually, there are several. I can see why they're concerned.

JOAN

So... what can we do?

CHARLENE

Unfortunately no more than she'll let us.

(MONICA ENTERS with drinks.)

JOAN

Monica, I'm Joan Michaels... Don's wife.

MONICA

The Chairman of the Board. Welcome to Ollie's!

JOAN

Chairman of the board?

MONICA

I can't explain it but those guys aren't like most of my customers. It's like they're doing business without actually doing business. I've started thinking of them as 'The Board of Directors' and Don seems to be the chairman because he's older than the others. I'm so glad to finally meet you! To what do I owe this honor?

JOAN

Well, Don's been talking about this place so long that Charlene and I decided to give it a try.

MONICA

(To CHARLENE.)

Uh... you're not Joe's wife, are you?

CHARLENE

Why?

MONICA (laughing)

If you have to ask that question, you don't know the breakfast guys very well.

JOAN

(To Charlene.)

Charlene, Joe's going through a difficult divorce.

MONICA

Yeah, difficult, that's a word with a wide interpretation!

CHARLENE

Why's that?

MONICA

Poor guy's whole life is turned upside down over this thing. First, she tells him she's lost interest. Then he finds out she's been playing around with this other guy for over a year, then...

CHARLENE

Bummer!

MONICA

Oh, yeah. Now, Mike says she wants him back.

JOAN

Don says that too.

MONICA

(Quietly.)

I hope not!

(Suddenly realizes she spoke out loud. Covers her mouth in embarrassment, stammering.)

(FX. A bell rings twice offstage.)

Uh... uh... that's your lunch. I'll be right back.

(EXITS rapidly.)

JOAN

(Watches MONICA exit.)

That was interesting.

CHARLENE (laughing)

Yes. (Beat.) How often do the guys meet here?

JOAN

They have breakfast together six days a week. Saturdays they go from here to the golf course.

CHARLENE

And the waitress becomes part of their extended family.

JOAN

Uh... (Beat.) You want to explain that?

CHARLENE

Research shows the waitress becomes like a friend or relative with regular customers, depending on the situation.

JOAN

I guess their tips depend on it.

CHARLENE

Yes, but that's not always the motivating factor. Sometimes they have trouble establishing long term relationships and that's why some of them become waitresses in the first place.

JOAN

Because they can avoid commitments?

CHARLENE

It's not all that simple. There's this person with good social skills and is comfortable in the presence of strangers but typically little education and has difficulty finding better work. It's not just women... plenty of men are like that too but women make up the majority.

JOAN

How do you know all that?

CHARLENE

Morty Osmer and I collaborated on a grad school research project on service persons. Wait staff are unique in some ways.

(MONICA ENTERS with two plates.)

Monica, how many regulars do you have?

MONICA

Gee... uh... let me see. Does that include the ones that come in two or three times a month or just the daily folks?

CHARLENE

Whoever you think would fall into that category. Let's say, everyone that seems to prefer your station.

MONICA

Now, you're talking about half my customers, maybe more. Must be nearly a hundred or so.

CHARLENE

How many men's breakfast groups do you have?

MONICA

Not too many. I mean, not like those guys. Mostly, that time of day, folks come in alone or in twos and just eat and leave. Sometimes there'll be a whole crew on their way to a job.

JOAN

Not a lot of talk?

MONICA

Nah! But these guys... you can tell two things about them that's different. One, they don't work together and, two, they like each other's company. I think Mike and Joe went to school together." (Beat, thinks.) "Maybe College. Those two can reach back a dozen years or so and throw barbs at each other nobody would expect someone to remember but it must have been important at the time.

CHARLENE

(To JOAN.)

See what I mean? Okay, you're the authority on those three. How close is she?

JOAN

I'm not an authority but I remember Don saying the boys played basketball together in high school. I think Joe was the better player but Mike was the one all the girls wanted.

MONICA

That's probably why he can't stay married.

CHARLENE

Why's that?

MONICA

He's really good looking and has cute ways so women think life with him will be a bunch of laughs. When they find out that living with him takes the same amount of work as any other guy, they lose interest. He's been divorced twice and doesn't have a clue why.

CHARLENE

(To JOAN.)

See! I rest my case.

MONICA

Huh?

JOAN

Monica, Charlene's a psychologist and was telling me about the relationship waitresses develop with their customers. You're a perfect example of what she was saying.

MONICA

Gee, I hope that's good.

CHARLENE

It's not good or bad. It's just that waitresses with better developed social skills make better tips.

MONICA

You mean like knowing what a customer drinks after the second time they've been here?

CHARLENE

It takes that long?

MONICA

No, but the second time I still ask. After that, I just deliver the goods. If it's not what they want, I simply take it away.

CHARLENE

Brings the customer back because they like to feel you care about them, right?

MONICA

That's how I see it. Excuse me but I gotta take care of some tables in the other room.

CHARLENE

(Reaches into her bag and removes a business card while talking.)

Monica, before you go, there's something else I'd like to discuss. It'll only take a couple of seconds.

MONICA

Okay, shoot.

CHARLENE

I'm a therapist over at Women's Aid.

(Reaction from MONICA.)

Yeah, you know about us, don't you? You see, no matter how hard you try to hide those bruises, they still show. To be totally honest, Don and the other guys are concerned for your welfare and... well... the reason I'm here is to offer an invitation.

(Holds out the card.)

I know you don't have time right now, and may actually feel your problem isn't all that bad. Please, take my card. You can call any time day or night.

MONICA

(Hesitates, then takes the card. Stares at the card and then CHARLENE.)

I gotta take care of some tables in the other room.

(EXITS.)

(CHARLENE and JOAN watch her exit. After a pause, JOAN speaks.)

JOAN

So...?

CHARLENE

So, we get to know her. It may be a long process.

JOAN

But she's obviously in need of help now!

CHARLENE

If we push her now, she may never come over. This sort of thing takes time... or a very bad experience.

JOAN

You mean that bruise on her cheek doesn't qualify as a 'very bad experience'???

CHARLENE

Probably not according to Monica. If we're patient, she may come around.

JOAN

'If we're patient'... you must have the patience of Job.

CHARLENE

Don't I wish! I constantly have to remind myself that change happens on the patient's timetable, not mine.

JOAN

Yes but... well, what about intervention?

CHARLENE

That's rarely the best answer...

(JOAN tries to interrupt.)

Yes, we do it, BUT, as seldom as possible. The chance of permanent change is far less than if the patient willingly participates in the process. Greatest need for intervention comes when the patient's physical well-being is at stake.

JOAN

So, what now?

CHARLENE

Now, we enjoy our lunch, engage Monica in some casual conversation and make plans to come back.

(Continues as lights fade to black.)

I wonder what specials Ollie has on other days.

End of Scene 2

Scene 3
Tuesday Morning

On rise, JOE, DON and MIKE are nearly finished eating. MONICA enters.
SHE goes to the ready table and brings coffee.

MONICA

More coffee guys?

JOE

Not for me, thanks.

MIKE

(Holds his cup.)
Yeah, I guess.

(DON waves her off. MONICA pours for MIKE.)

MONICA

Say, Don... I met your wife yesterday. She came in with another lady... uh... Charlotte?

DON

Charlene. Joan said you took good care of them.

MONICA

Well... even though we'd never met before, she already knew how well I get along with my customers and the fact that I could serve their beverages without being told... that sort of thing.

DON

Monica, Charlene's a behavioral psychologist. That's what she does... studies the habits of people and helps them achieve more positive thoughts and actions.

MONICA

You want to dumb that down to my level?

DON

What?

MONICA

She told me where she works... even gave me a business card.

(Pulls CHARLENE's card from her pocket. Reads from it.)

'Doctor Charlene Hightower. Lead Therapist. Women's Aid.'

(Focusing on DON, she continues.)

George is right! You guys are trying to control our lives and I don't appreciate it one bit.

DON

Monica, I... uh...

(DON stops talking as MONICA spins around and EXITS, grumbling to HERSELF.)

MIKE

I guess that falls in to the "nice try" category. (Beat.) So, what's the latest on the guy that doesn't want to pay the commission?

DON

He'll come around. Bigger the commission the more they don't want to pay it. That's where Joe comes in handy.

JOE

Yeah. I almost had to go back to law school to learn more about this stuff.

MIKE

Is there enough money in it...? I mean... can you earn a living doing that kind of law?

JOE

Closings? Yes, if you have enough of them but it's kind of dull. Suing clients for commissions however, that's exciting. There's not enough work to earn a living doing it. At least not at this time. Besides, I like criminal law.

MIKE

Doesn't taking someone to court for refusal to pay a commission place you in the position of receiving less? I mean, aren't the judges inclined to split the question half-way and...

DON (interrupts)

Not if you present your case well. That's where Joe's history with the State's Attorney comes in handy. I don't have to tell you how well he prepares himself for court.

(The conversation is interrupted by voices OFFSTAGE.)

MONICA (offstage)

Don't even think about it. George... No, you can't do that! Now stop!

GEORGE (offstage)

Out of my way!

(A clatter of dishes or pans. GEORGE enters – he has obviously been drinking – followed by MONICA – and goes directly to the men at the table. MONICA tries to pull him from the table. He shakes her off.)

Leave me alone, woman, or I'll slap you clear into next week. So, I hear you guys are telling Monica how to run her life.

MIKE

Mister, I think it's time for you to leave.

(GEORGE acts in a menacing manner toward MIKE. MIKE notices the alcohol on GEORGE's breath and waives his hand to clear the air.)

(JOE instinctively touches MIKE's shoulder to encourage him to stay seated.)

GEORGE

I'll leave when I'm damn well ready. Who the hell do you dudes think you are? Maybe you're looking to score with her. She's mine, ya hear???... and if she does anybody around here I get a cut of the action.

(MONICA is trying to drag GEORGE away. HE turns to her.)

Back off!

(MONICA withdraws a short distance. GEORGE speaks to the group.)

Tell you what. I take care of dudes like you in your fancy suits... know what I mean?... And I'll take damn good care of you guys if you don't stop butting your heads into our lives.

JOE

Mister. You've said what you came to say. Now, it's time for you to leave.

GEORGE

Just what does that mean?

JOE

It means that I'm a lawyer and have a lot of friends at the State Attorney's office. How 'bout you turn around and leave now or I'm personally going to file assault charges.

(MONICA tries to pull GEORGE away. HE turns toward MONICA and threatens to hit HER.)

(JOE and MIKE spring to their feet.)

AND... if you touch her or anyone else again, I promise you'll go away until you're an old man!

(No action. GEORGE stares at JOE menacingly.)

MIKE

What's it going to be tough guy?

(GEORGE turns to MIKE and tries to look menacing.)

Eighty-second airborne, assHOLE, and looks don't impress me.

(Indicates JOE.)

Him too and we work really well together! Joe, I'm going low... that right knee's mine.

Mister, I promise you'll never walk right again.

(MONICA is now able to drag GEORGE back a short distance.)

GEORGE

(Speaks over his shoulder as MONICA continues to pull him from the room.)

You remember! I take care of dudes like you!

(Shakes MONICA off.)

Let me go, woman!

(EXITS staggering.)

MONICA

(Obviously shaken, she watches GEORGE leave then returns to the table. MIKE and JOE, still standing, help her to a seat.)

I don't know what's come over him. He never acts like that... it's like he...

JOE

Come on Monica... cut the crap! How many times have you come in with lumps and bruises... and that's just the ones we can see.

DON

This is just the beginning, Monica. I promise it'll get worse. This guy's a bully and you're the one he's used to bullying.

MONICA

He just gets carried away sometimes. He just...

DON

Don't go home tonight.

MONICA

He'd get mad... I'd never be safe if I did that. Besides, it's my apartment.

JOE

Then we'll find a way to get him out. Give me his full name. You don't happen to have his social, do you?

MONICA (still very shaken)

I don't think so... I do have his parole officer's number in my bag.

(Starts to rise.)

JOE

Parole...? Where's your bag? In the back?

(Motions her to stay seated.)

Don't move, I'll get it.

(EXITS to back.)

MIKE

Monica, listen to Don will you? He knows what he's talking about.

(MONICA looks to DON.)

DON

Monica, you need help. What do you say I give you a ride over to Women's Aid?

MONICA

Don, I can't... I...

MIKE

Monica, don't say it. You need to take charge of your life. Please, let Don take you over there.

MONICA

But... I have customers, and...

(JOE enters and hands MONICA her bag. SHE searches inside the bag.)
It's here somewhere.

(MONICA pulls out a card and hands it to JOE.)

JOE

(After a quick look, holds up the card.)
This is all we need. I've worked with this parole officer before. What's George's last name?
(Hands card back to MONICA.)

MONICA

Johnson.

DON

I'm taking Monica over to Women's Aid.

MONICA

No! (Beat) Stop making plans for me like I wasn't even here! I'm not a child. Joe, please don't cause new trouble for George. Things are just bad for him now. He's been trying to find work but it's really hard for ex-cons. He wasn't always like this.

DON

Monica, can't you see how he's manipulating you? Do you really feel safe going home to him tonight?

MONICA

Oh sure. He'll be sleeping it off when I get home. Then he'll be full of apologies.

JOE

You say he wasn't always like this. How long have you known him?

MONICA

Since I was maybe fifteen. My parents were killed in a car crash and my older brother, Jason, took care of me. He took over Dad's roofing business and George worked for him. I had a crush on George and... (Her voice trails off.)

JOE

I didn't know about your parents. That's really tough. But how did a teen crush turn into this situation? Why does your brother let George treat you like this?

MONICA

The business went bankrupt when the economy tanked. Jason's health was always bad... he had a heart attack and died on the operating table... he was awfully depressed and didn't take care of himself.

(There is a silent pause as all this information sinks in for the guys.)

MIKE

So you were left alone. Is that when you and George hooked up?

MONICA

No. I was already working. George (hesitates) had got in trouble. I ran into him a few months ago. We just hit it off.

(The GUYS look at each other.)

JOE

You can still go to Women's Aid tonight.

MONICA

(Shaking her head defiantly.)

NO!

JOE

Okay.

(JOE pulls out his wallet and removes a card.)

Here's MY card. Call me any time day or night if you need help. Put the number in your phone.

MONICA

(Looks like a stubborn child but takes the card and puts it in her pocket.)

Aren't you guys late for work? The breakfast crowd is long gone and I need to start prepping for lunch. Ollie had to run an errand.

End of Scene 3

Scene 4
Closing time (2:00pm)

On Rise, MONICA is cleaning. OLLIE ENTERS from back carrying a pouch.

OLLIE

We had a good breakfast and lunch crowd, Monica. You sure were a trooper after that scuffle with George.

MONICA

I'm really sorry about that.

OLLIE

I'm kinda worried about you going home to him after we close up. You're welcome to stay upstairs with Grace and me.

MONICA

Thanks but he'll be sleeping when I get home and probably won't even wake up when I get up tomorrow morning.

OLLIE

He won't find a job that way. (MONICA's expression tells him to let that go.) Oh, well, you do what you think is best. I'm going next door to the bank. I should be back before you're finished. I won't be gone long but go ahead and lock up behind me anyway. Sometimes customers don't read the closed sign.

MONICA

Okay.

(OLLIE EXITS.)

(MONICA continues to clean for a few moments. She then crosses to the door and turns the "OPEN" sign around as GEORGE shoves the door open pushing MONICA back. GEORGE closes the door behind him and locks it.)

(Startled, MONICA screams as she catches herself from falling. GEORGE grabs her and pulls her to her feet, grasping her with one hand.)

GEORGE

It took forever for him to get gone. Now it's just you and me. That bar across the street is real convenient for watching over here.

MONICA

Let go of me. You're drunk.

GEORGE

(Drags MONICA to a chair and sits HER down still holding on to HER.)
Those dudes trying to get you to leave me this morning?

MONICA

They're just concerned. They don't understand us.

GEORGE

What's for them to understand? Our life ain't none of their business. I told you not to talk to them.

MONICA

They're customers. I need to be nice to them.

GEORGE

Nice! How nice are you, huh? You do a little tricking, okay, long as you remember to hand the money over to me. And keep your mouth shut about our private life. We got a good thing going. Let's just keep it that way.

MONICA

George, Ollie will be back any minute. Please let me go.

GEORGE

Ollie. Now, for a boss he's awful nice to you.

MONICA

Ollie's like a father to me. Please let me go. You're hurting me.

GEORGE

Father? He offer to take you in, huh? Did any of those other dudes offer to take you in if you leave me?