

CEMETERY PUB

**A dark comedy by
Tom Dugan**

Inspired by actual rumors

CEMETERY PUB

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This play is dedicated to Royana Black

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Notes from the playwright

The trap here is to play these characters as New Jersey stereotypes. They are not.

These are intelligent people, with a lot of heart, caught in a desperate situation. Please keep in mind: self-pity is even less interesting on stage than it is in life. These characters never indulge in sentimentality. Nobody tears up explaining how difficult their lives have been. They don't have time for that.

Although he doesn't know it at the start of the play, Cousin Dan has stepped into an emergency. If their plan to neutralize Choo-Choo doesn't work, both Dixie and Ken will lose their lives just after five o'clock.

When it comes to "The Jersey Pub Trilogy" ("The Curse of the Banshee," "Irish Goodbye," & "Cemetery Pub"), if events don't seem to line up exactly, please keep in mind - people remember, people forget, people lie.

/ Indicates an interruption of thought.

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CEMETERY PUB by Tom Dugan was first produced by The Alliance Repertory Company in Los Angeles, CA, on April 22, 2022. It was directed by Kait Haire, JP Hubbell, and Tom Dugan. The set design was by Tom Dugan; the lighting design was by Rebecca Petersen; the sound design was by Steve Shaw; the costume design was by Amy Dugan; and the production stage manager was Cameron Kauffman. The press representative was Philip Sokoloff; the dramaturg was Andy Hubbell. The cast was as follows:

DIXIE Kait Haire
DAN JP Hubbell
KEN Tom Dugan

CEMETERY PUB was subsequently produced by Pigs Do Fly Productions in Fort Lauderdale, FL, on March 3, 2023. It was directed by Deborah “DK” Kondelik. The set design was by Ardean Landuis; the lighting design was by Preston Bircher; the sound design was by David Hart; and the production stage manager was Patrick S. Vida. The press representative was Carol Kassie. The cast was as follows:

DIXIE Caroline Dopson
DAN Todd Bruno
KEN Dave Corey

MUSIC NOTE: The original Badfinger recording of “**Baby Blue**” is used in this play. To obtain permission to use the recording, producers should contact **Apple Corps Ltd.**

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Characters

DIXIE (Female, early 30s, Irish Catholic.) - The beautiful owner of the family bar O'Brien's Tavern. She is aggressive and no nonsense, some might call her "tough as nails" - it's a façade. Having had her hand pinned to the bar with a carving knife by "Choo-Choo," a local admirer, she signs on to her Uncle Ken's scheme to convince their long-lost cousin Dan to kill her assailant before Choo-Choo makes good on his threat to murder her.

DAN (Male, early 60s, Irish Catholic or open ethnicity.) - A tough, street-smart, retired hitman with a wry sense of humor. Recently widowed, he accepts an invitation from his long-lost cousin, Ken, to return to O'Brien's Tavern under the pretense of potential employment. [*Note: Dan is written as a character with an Irish-American background, however, the role may be played by an actor of any ethnicity. Alternative dialogue is provided to establish that while Dan's mother was Irish American, his father was not.*]

KEN (Male, early 60s, Irish Catholic.) - An extremely conflicted Catholic priest with a big heart. Ken's unorthodox methods have put him in deep trouble with the church. Under the guise of offering his cousin Dan a job at the family bar, he plans to convince him to murder his niece Dixie's stalker.

Time

Late afternoon, Monday January 3, 2000.

Place

O'Brien's Tavern, on the other side of the train tracks that cut through the back of St. Gertrude's Catholic Cemetery, somewhere in New Jersey.

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The setting is the interior of O'Brien's Tavern, aka "Cemetery Pub," on the other side of the train tracks that cut through the back of St. Gertrude's Catholic Cemetery, somewhere in New Jersey. It's a family bar barely holding on to the frayed threads of its former glory. Behind the bar are shelves holding bottles, and a bunch of bar stuff. A mirror, crucifix, landline telephone, and collection of framed photos hang on a brick wall, the largest being a memorial photo, marked with a black ribbon, of a beautiful brunette woman, "Sandy." Left of the brick wall are stairs leading up to the second-floor residence, and a back door with a boarded-up transom window above. In front of the bar are bar stools and a faded rug. A bathroom door is stage right, next to a very dead Christmas tree. Downstage right is a record player with a boom box on top. There is a coat rack somewhere. On the bar is a jar of pickled eggs, a tip bell, a gumball machine holding a few stale peanuts, and a bar caddy with olives, lemon twists, cherries, etc. A front door, some windows, and booths are indicated downstage center. A screened porch is referenced off right. There is evidence of a small fire.

SOUND CUE - a freight train toots its horn as it approaches, then passes slowly, the sound fades.

At rise - two middle aged men KEN (early 60's.), and DAN (early 60's.) roll up a large, damaged rug. Dan wears a winter coat. Ken is dressed in black with a scarf around his neck.

DAN. Be careful there.

KEN. So, Mr. Heider and my dad were stationed in France together.

DAN. Yeah, ya gotta remind me, 'cause I don't remember nothing. Make sure you lift with your legs, not your back.

KEN. Got it.

DAN. Were they kicking Hitler's ass?

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KEN. No. Well sort of, it was World War One.

DAN. World War One? How the hell old was your father?

KEN. Not old enough. You never heard this story? Let's put this over there. *(They lay the rug over to the side.)* It's like lugging around a dead body, isn't it?

DAN. Not really.

KEN. My dad was born in 1902, in 1917 he was only fifteen, so he lied about his age to get into World War One. Then when World War Two rolled around, he was in his forties, too old for the draft, so he lied about his age again. He saw action in both wars. *(Ken gets a broom and dustpan, Dan helps.)*

DAN. Shit, and I lie just to get out of jury duty. That's some serious patriotism right there. So, old man Heider and France ...?

KEN. Yeah, Mr. Heider, we called him "Uncle Otto," remember him?

DAN. Oh yeah, I think so.

KEN. Anyway, Uncle Otto got blown up or something in World War One, at the battle of Merlot in France and/

DAN. / The Battle of Merlot?

KEN. Yep.

DAN. What, were they fighting over red wine?

KEN. Huh?

DAN. I think you mean "The Battle of Saint-Lo" maybe?

KEN. Yeah, that.

DAN. But that wasn't in World War One, it was in World War Two.

KEN. Was it? Aw crap. I know that they were in a forest in France somewhere. It was near the end of the war/

DAN. / The Argonne Forest?

KEN. Yes, the Argonne Forest! How did you guess that?

DAN. The History Channel. It's all I watch.

KEN. We call it The Hitler Channel. All Hitler all the time.

DAN. They sprinkle in some World War One every now and then, to break up the monotony.

KEN. That's all you watch?

DAN. That and Turner Classic Movies, unless there's a Mets game on.

KEN. You're still a Mets fan, huh? So how much do you hate the Yankees?

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DAN. With all my heart.

KEN. Good man. Anyways, so Uncle Otto got blown up, or stabbed or gassed, or something out on patrol one night and my dad saved his life.

DAN. You don't say?

KEN. I do say. They became best buddies. Built this tavern together, well, it started as a speakeasy. There are some photos on the wall over there.

DAN. *(Dan crosses to the wall.)* Yeah, keep going, it's all starting to come back to me now. *(Reading a photo.)* "Otto and Hank," no wait - "Otto and Kank." Who's Kank?

KEN. Oh, it's a nickname Uncle Otto had for my dad. "Kank" instead of Hank.

DAN. Okay.

KEN. This used to be The Old Mortuary Building for Saint Gertrude's Catholic Cemetery across the train tracks there. *(Indicating out center.)* Uncle Otto was a carpenter. They were short on wood, so they actually built this bar here out of coffins.

DAN. Coffins, right! And you guys were gonna have it blessed by a priest, weren't you?

KEN. Never got around to it.

DAN. And and there was some kind of ghost somewhere, wasn't there?

KEN. You mean "Callum"?

DAN. "Callum the Ghost"! Yeah, yeah, he haunts the graveyard only on Halloween night. I dressed up in a bunch of green garbage bags and scared the hell out of your little sister one year.

KEN. Yep, Sandy slept with the lights on for like a year after that. My mother was so pissed at you.

DAN. She told me that she was "gonna rip the skin off my back," chased me half a block.

KEN. Yeah, my dad had a temper, but/

DAN. / you never ever wanted to piss off Aunt Katherine. She locked me outta the house that night. I had to climb in the transom window.

KEN. There are more than a few ghosts around this place. Let me see, it was, um, Veteran's Day early 70s, and they had a ceremony across the street at Saint Gertrude's. They honored my dad, Uncle Otto, and few other locals. I was still studying in Ireland, but I'm told they got all dressed up, their

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uniforms still kinda fit; the New Jersey State police did a 21-gun salute. It was cool. So, afterward, the two of them are tossing back a few, right over there. (*Indicating an unseen booth down center.*) They started arm wrestling, they arm wrestled, it was a thing. Anyway, my father had a heart attack and died right there.

DAN. I never knew the details. So, who won the arm wrestle?

KEN. That's the thing. Mr. Heider did, it changed him, he felt so bad, he never got over it. He drank himself blind here most nights.

DAN. Oh, sure, I remember him now.

KEN. His car must have driven itself home.

DAN. Been there, done that. So, what happened to the rug?

KEN. The rug? Oh, um, nothing, somebody dropped a candle. (*A lie.*)

DAN. Pretty big candle.

KEN. (*Avoiding the subject.*) I appreciate your coming here on such short notice. Especially with all that's been going on with you lately. Was it weird walking back in here after all these years?

DAN. Still is. These walls are screaming at me. It's like stepping into a time warp or something. So, am I supposed to bring this up to her, or wait until she brings it up? The job I mean.

KEN. Might be best if you mentioned it. She may need a little coaxing.

DAN. I appreciate your setting this up for me. My wife's treatments took all my savings, but still, I don't want to force her into anything. Who's been running this joint since her mom died?

KEN. She has, about a year now.

DAN. That's a lot for a little girl. It looks pretty much the same.

KEN. Yeah, I think if we ever dusted, the whole place would crumble to the ground.

DAN. I did notice that the front steps are new.

KEN. Yeah, Sandy never did get around to fixing that front porch. She told me that some customer actually fell through the rotted wood once.

DAN. She's lucky she didn't get sued.

KEN. Yeah. Anyway, she'd just keep replacing the plywood over and over. After we buried her mom, Dixie marched right across the train tracks here, and demolished the porch with a sledgehammer, she framed out the whole

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thing, mixed the concrete, and poured it all by herself. Wouldn't let anyone help her. Took her two days, she worked non-stop, didn't even sleep.

DAN. She did all that by herself?

KEN. A broken heart can be a great motivator. Oh, I did help with one thing. She asked me to say a prayer when she mixed some of Sandy's ashes right into the concrete.

DAN. Wow, that's, that's actually kinda great. *(After a beat.)* So, things not going well? It's pretty dead in here. No pun intended.

KEN. We're closed on Mondays, but yes, things could be better. I wonder if we'll all freeze to death before the heat kicks in.

DAN. These old buildings, I could take a look at it, but she really should switch to electric. That broken window isn't helping either. *(Referring to the transom window above the back door.)*

KEN. *(Avoiding the subject.)* Yeah, that's ah, yeah. You want some coffee? *(Dan nods. Ken retrieves the coffee from beneath the bar and pours.)* Any upgrades you can think of you should mention to Dixie, it's her place. Maybe you can get her excited about you two collaborating. *(Dan pulls out a flask from his coat and dumps some booze in his coffee, he puts the flask back. Ken finds this odd, it being a bar and all, but says nothing.)*

DAN. Am I hearing you right, Sandy's daughter is named Dixie?

KEN. Yeah, Dixie.

DAN. How about that. Am I ever gonna get to meet her?

KEN. Yeah, she's up in the kitchen. *(Calling up the stairs.)* Hey Dixie, come down and meet your cousin Danny!

DAN. I'm gonna take this slow. I don't want to intimidate her.

KEN. *(Ken is amused by the idea and plays along that Dixie could be intimidated by anyone.)* Yeah, yeah, you wouldn't want to do that.

DAN. She shy?

KEN. Oh, terribly.

DAN. Poor kid. I think the heat's kicking in. *(Dan takes off his coat and hangs it up.)*

DIXIE. *(From upstairs.)* "Cousin Danny" is here? I'll be down in a minute; *(Pointedly.)* should I check the lasagna?

KEN. No. It is way too early for the lasagna. Just come on down and meet Danny.

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DAN. Lasagna? I love lasagna. Tastes like home.

KEN. Right.

DAN. She keep the front door locked?

KEN. Yeah.

DAN. How about the upstairs?

KEN. Yeah, she usually keeps it all locked, why?

DAN. It's just a good idea, ya know? A helpless little girl like that, no man around. There are some bad people in this world. You oughta get that window fixed. (*Referring to the transom window above the back door.*)

KEN. Oh yeah, that ... So, so, where was I?

DAN. Um, lasagna/ No, you were telling me about some jerk-off stalker?

KEN. Right, right. You remember Choo-Choo?

DAN. Choo-Choo?

KEN. Yeah, you and your mom were visiting for Easter that year. The huge, ugly, stupid guy you beat up?

DAN. Narrow it down a little.

KEN. He was throwing rocks at us from the train tracks, (*Referring out center.*) right out there next to the telephone pole?

DAN. Oh yeah, my teeth! He got in a lucky punch. We were like fifteen, sloppy fat guy. Hah, my mom was so pissed I got blood on my suit, that she didn't even notice my two front teeth were missing. Yeah, I remember him.

KEN. His son.

DAN. They let him breed?

KEN. Apparently. As I remember you were the only guy in town who wasn't afraid of Choo-Choo.

DAN. Scared the shit out of me, but I wasn't going to let him know that. These teeth cost my mom a bundle, but Choo-Choo got the worst of it. He still around?

KEN. Died in prison.

DAN. Lovely. So, his son has been elected local asshole?

KEN. He even calls himself Choo-Choo.

DAN. Big as a freight train? (*Ken nods.*) Huh, sounds like a bad sequel, "Son of Choo-Choo."

KEN. "Choo-Choo Meets the Wolfman."

DAN. "Abbott and Costello Meet Choo-Choo."

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KEN. “Choo-Choo vs. Godzilla.”

DAN. “Choo-Choo II.”

KEN. Nailed it.

DAN. *(Referring to the memorial photo behind the bar.)* Why would a guy like that think he had a shot with a girl like this? I mean your sister Sandy was, she was something else, a real beauty. I assume her daughter, I mean Dixie, I assume Dixie is also ...? *(Ken gives a negative look.)* Really? That's too bad, I mean her mother looked like Natalie Wood. *(Or whomever the actress may resemble.)*

KEN. *(In a whisper.)* Unfortunately, heredity was not kind to Dixie.

DAN. Well, her father must have been some ugly son of a bitch to bring the average down so low. Is she real smart like your sister? *(Ken gives another negative look.)* No way!

KEN. I mean she's not an idiot. She can do addition and subtraction, but division/multiplication, makes her anxious. We think that's what made her hair fall out.

DAN. Ow, the poor thing, but I'm sure she's good person though, right?

KEN. That's what her parole officer tells me.

DAN. Her “parole officer”? Oh no, what a disaster. I guess I was hoping/

KEN. / That Dixie would be exactly like her mother Sandy? Not even close. Look, I love my niece, and she's made a lot of progress toward her self-esteem recently, but her twitching persists, but on the bright side the orthopedic shoes I bought have helped even out her limp.

DAN. You've got to be kidding me?

KEN. *(Ken calls upstairs.)* Hey Dixie, come down and meet Danny. *(Whispering.)* Oh, and no matter what happens, look in her left eye. *(Ken exits up the stairs.)*

DAN. *(Under his breath.)* Jesus Christ.

(Dan is left alone for a moment. He pulls the flask out of his coat, takes a swig, then quickly puts it back. He crosses to the far end of the bar and looks at something on the underside. As Dixie (early 30s.) descends the stairs, Dan steps back, preparing for the worst. Dixie comes halfway down the stairs and stops, right next to the memorial photo of her mom on the wall. Contrary to Ken's imaginative description, Dixie is an exact replica of

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Sandy. The only thing that isn't perfect about her is her bandaged left hand. Dixie does not suffer fools gladly; she is aggressive and no nonsense - it's a façade. Dan is absolutely dumbstruck at the resemblance the girl holds to her mother Sandy.)

DIXIE. So, you're our infamous Cousin Danny? I'm the pathetic niece. I'd give you a hug, but my hair might fall out. *(Dixie descends the stairs, crosses to Dan and extends her right hand.)*

DAN. Sandy? But they told me that you were/

DIXIE. / The names Dixie. *(They shake.)* So, does Cousin Danny want a drink?

DAN. Jesus Christ, I/ I mean you're exactly like/ it's, it's just like, like she/

DIXIE. / It's a simple question. You want a drink, or not?

DAN. Yeah/ I mean yes, yes, I do, please, if you don't mind? If, if, if it's no bother.

DIXIE. It's a bar. That's kind of what we do around here, right?

DAN. *(A realization.)* Oh, okay, okay/ I get it now. You guys knew that I'd be completely freaked out by how much you look *exactly* like your mom, and so naturally you decided to make it much, much worse for me. Very nice. Very nice. That's a real riot. I'll take that drink now; it'll loosen me up before I murder your uncle.

DIXIE. Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

DAN. *(Confused.)* What's that?

DIXIE. Never mind. Yeah, my uncle thinks he's a comedian. He knows how much it pisses me off, so he keeps bringing it up. It's a thing, everyone in town knows my mom died last year, but they still call me Sandy. It's like I never existed at all, like I'm just an extension of my mother. Like women are interchangeable. Yeah, yeah, I know, poor me. So, what'll ya have?

DAN. You got Vodka?

DIXIE. Well gee whiz, let me check. Of course, we got vodka. We got eighteen different flavors of vodka, which one you want?

DAN. Whichever.

DIXIE. Martini?

DAN. No, just a glass.

DIXIE. Ice?

DAN. No. *(Dan shows three fingers.)*

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DIXIE. What's that mean?

DAN. Three fingers.

DIXIE. What?

DAN. *(Indicating how much vodka he wants.)* This much vodka.

DIXIE. Why didn't you say so? *(Dixie pours, then hands Dan his drink.)*
Your parents were Uncle Jake and Aunt Moira?

DAN. Yeah, um yes. My mom's buried just across the tracks as a matter of fact.

DIXIE. Mine too. Yeah, Saint Gertrude's, everybody's buried there.

DAN. I'm sorry I didn't make it to your mom's funeral, but I had an important business/

DIXIE. / Fuck you, it would have meant a lot to her/

DAN. / I

DIXIE. / Now that we got that out of the way. Is there a Mrs. Cousin Danny?

DAN. Up until last week there was.

DIXIE. Oh right, forgot about that. It sucks. Breast cancer?

DAN. How did you know?

DIXIE. Everybody dies of breast cancer around here; "The Family Curse," it's all the rage. My mom, your mom, my grandmother ...

DAN. Yeah, but of course my wife wasn't related to me so ...

DIXIE. Really? I thought that was your type. *(Dan is confused and slightly put off - Ken calls down from upstairs, trying to keep the conversation friendly.)*

KEN. Dan was just suggesting that you buy a new heater!

DIXIE. He gonna friggin' pay for it?

KEN. *(With a smile, Ken comes halfway down the stairs and throws a towel at Dixie.)* She's just kidding, kidding. She kids.

DIXIE. I'm not kidding. I can barely afford the property taxes, where am I supposed to find the money for a goddamn new heater, pull it out of my ass? I'm going to the powder room. Make sure you talk about me while I'm gone. *(Dixie exits into the bathroom.)*

DAN. *(Quietly.)* I was expecting a sad, shy girl, you son of a bitch. You could have given me a little heads up; I would have covered my nuts.

KEN. Did she throw a shot glass at you?

DAN. What?

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KEN. A shot glass. Did she throw one at ya?

DAN. No.

KEN. Good, that means she likes you.

DAN. A shot glass?

KEN. I'm not kidding, she's good. I saw her knock the car keys out of a drunk's hand, twenty feet away.

DAN. I'd better watch my step.

KEN. You'll be fine. It takes her a while to warm up to people.

DAN. If she needs help with the bar, why don't you do it?

KEN. I wish I could. I really wish I could, but I've got my own stuff going on.

DAN. That homeless thing?

KEN. The Rescue Mission.

DAN. Like a soup kitchen?

KEN. No. Well yes, and a lot more. The idea is to break the cycle through education, offering opportunities. It works.

DAN. Really?

KEN. Yes really! *(Ken takes off his scarf and hangs it up, revealing a priest's collar.)* You sound like that lazy prick of a monsignor I report to. One of our first clients went from being a homeless drug addict to a successful business owner in Freehold.

DAN. Was that Springsteen?

KEN. Eat me.

DAN. I thought all you did was hand out sandwiches and pray together.

KEN. That's just what the monsignor thinks. Substandard jackass. Waiting around for miracles is not really my style, Dan. I'm more of a "God helps those who help themselves" kind of guy.

DAN. I see.

KEN. Yeah, it's like, teach 'em how to fish instead of giving them a fish type-a-thing.

DAN. Got it.

KEN. Anyway, please give Dixie a chance.

DAN. I'm just hoping she gives me a chance.

DIXIE. *(Returning from the bathroom. Dan turns to Dixie, as Ken shoots daggers at his niece. Dixie gets the message and attempts to play nice.)* I'm

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sorry, I'm usually not this much of a douche. I'm actually very happy you're here, Cousin Dan.

DAN. Okay.

DIXIE. It's just sometimes I get nervous and um, well, I would like to talk to you about maybe working here. I really could use some help. Thank you for coming.

DAN. Okay, sure. You're welcome.

DIXIE. It's just/ I've been under a little stress lately. Anyway, can we start over?

KEN. No. You're fired.

DIXIE. *(Ignoring Ken.)* My friend Jan, she works at the Wawa up the tracks, she said I have "anger issues." Seriously, let's have a do-over. First of all, how exactly are we all related?

KEN. *(Speaking slow and loudly to her as if Dixie is an idiot.)* Oh, ya poor thing. I - am - your Un-cle Ken-neth ...

DIXIE. Cut the shit, please.

DAN. Your grandmother and my mom were sisters. So, I'm your mom and uncle's first cousin.

DIXIE. So that makes you what, my second cousin?

KEN. First cousin once removed.

{In case Dan is played by an actor of color, this alternative dialogue may be used...}

DIXIE. *I gotta say you don't much look like an "O'Brien."*

DAN. *Yeah, I get that a lot. Apparently, I take after my father.}*

DIXIE. Got it. I mean I've known about you all of my life. My mom talked about you, a lot actually. Do I remember that you used to write to each other?

DAN. Yes, it's been quite a while, but yes. *(Referring to Dixie's injury.)* That's one impressive bandage you got there.

DIXIE. You should see the other guy.

KEN. *(Crossing to the stairs.)* You guys should talk.

DIXIE. That's what we're doing.

KEN. Play nice. Oh, and do me a favor, Dixie, don't answer the telephone.

DIXIE. Why not? I'm expecting a call at five.

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KEN. Until then, please don't answer the phone.

DIXIE. Why shouldn't I answer my phone?

KEN. Because I asked you to.

DIXIE. But why?

KEN. Never mind why.

DIXIE. But/

KEN. / Knock, knock.

DIXIE. Who's there?

KEN. Don't answer the phone! (*Ken exits upstairs.*)

DAN. So, you run this place all by yourself?

DIXIE. Yessir.

DAN. That can't be easy.

DIXIE. I've never really met "easy." How about you?

DAN. I have actually run a couple of bars over the years. I've been everything from a bouncer to a manager. That is why your Uncle Ken called me, right?

DIXIE. Yessir.

DAN. Get rid of the cigar smoke, open a couple of windows, you'll get families to come in. We'll turn the place around.

DIXIE. (*Seriously offended.*) "Turn the place around"? What are you talking about? There's nothing wrong with this place.

DAN. It's an alkie bar.

DIXIE. Fuck you.

DAN. My mistake.

DIXIE. What makes you think it's an alkie bar?

DAN. Never mind.

DIXIE. No, no, you said it. Now tell me what you meant?

DAN. Alright. The big jar of pickled eggs is there to help coat an alcoholic's stomach, so he can keep drinking. That vague sour smell behind the bar means the tap hasn't been cleaned recently, which means the drinkers either don't care, or they just come for the hard stuff. You probably took away the pool table, in the back, because it causes fights. And the sign outside says "Live Music" but there hasn't been any of that here since FDR could walk. How am I doing?

DIXIE. Okay, so maybe I like alkie bars.

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DAN. I'm serious about the cigars, I've seen it work, get rid of them and you'll see improvement.

DIXIE. Some regulars don't like change.

DAN. Yeah, Old Man Heider.

DIXIE. How the hell do you know about Old Man Heider?

DAN. He can't still be here? He was here when I was the bartender.

DIXIE. I'm gonna need a minute to process the tragedy of that. Yeah, he came in here for years, "Cognac and soda," "Cognac and soda," "Cognac and soda," coulda been hundred years old. Sit right there. (*Indicating the stool Dan is sitting on.*) About five years ago (*Remembering.*) Fourth of July 1995, round midnight, Mr. Heider orders just "A soda" ... no Cognac. As I turn around to hand it to him, he falls backward off that stool, hits the floor dead.

DAN. What was with the soda?

DIXIE. Last ditch effort at self-improvement?

DAN. (*Creeped out, Dan gets up and changes stools.*) I don't want to come in here and push anything on you, but I've been looking to pick up a little extra income/ I can fix things.

DIXIE. Oh yeah? Can you fix this? (*Placing her elbow on the bar and resting her chin on her bandaged left hand.*)

DAN. What happened there?

DIXIE. I'm dating Prince Charming, haven't you heard?

DAN. Why don't you just tell that guy to take a powder?

DIXIE. Take a what?

DAN. You know, tell him to amscray.

DIXIE. Huh?

DAN. I'm sorry, sometimes I sound like a Damon Runyon character.

DIXIE. Who's Damon Onion?

DAN. Damon Runyon? Really? "Guys and Dolls"? "Luck be a lady tonight..." (*Still no clue.*) Oh, shit. What I mean is, why don't you just tell this guy to "get lost"?

DIXIE. Well, golly gosh, why didn't I think of that? I find that life can be a bit more complicated than that, Cousin Dan. Yes, I tried to tell him to "Take a powder" on Friday night, New Year's Eve. Didn't go so well. He and his buddies were sitting in the corner.

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. Which corner?

DIXIE. Doesn't matter. The friggin' low-lives used to stay away when my mom was running the place.

DAN. So, they didn't like Sandy?

DIXIE. She kept a shotgun filled with rock salt behind the bar.

DAN. I miss her.

DIXIE. Not enough to come to her funeral/ Anyways, after my mom died a year ago business dropped off/ a lot. I had to get a second job over at a bar in Cranford.

DAN. Cranford? Yuck.

DIXIE. Believe me, it was not my preferred career strategy, but a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. Anyways, I made enough once a week over there to keep the pub going over here. Long story short, Choo-Choo Jr. stumbles into that bar/ why the hell he was all the way over in Cranford I'll never know.

DAN. What bar?

DIXIE. Doesn't matter.

DAN. Why not?

DIXIE. Because I said so.

DAN. I don't understand.

(Sound Cue - The "toot- toot" of a freight train approaching.)

DIXIE. Oh, for Christ's sake/ I'm trying to/ Okay fine. *(Dixie gestures to wait for the train noise to cover their conversation. She crosses down stage, Dan follows.)* It's called Delilah's Den.

DAN. Delilah's Den? *(Dixie waits for Dan to catch on that it's a strip club.)* Oh! Oh okay, I see now.

DIXIE. Do *not* tell my uncle.

DAN. Sure. Absolutely. No problem.

DIXIE. Moving forward, Choo-Choo Jr. stumbles into this bar, recognizes me from high school, drops fourteen singles on the stage/ such an insult/ says he's been in love with me since freshman year. He starts showing up every Monday, telling anyone who'll listen he's "my manager."

CEMETERY PUB

Thanksgiving night, he finds me in the parking lot, drags me out of my own back seat, and stabs the guy in the leg.

DAN. What guy?

DIXIE. Doesn't matter.

DAN. Wait, what were you doing in the back seat of your car, in the parking lot?

DIXIE. Doesn't matter!

DAN. You lost me a little.

DIXIE. You're either very dumb, or a complete prick.

(Sound Cue - train starts to fade out.)

DAN. *(Dan catches on. He's embarrassed.)* ... Oh shit! I'm sorry I didn't mean to/ no, I'm not a prick. I mean, yes, I may be a prick sometimes but just by accident. Really, I didn't mean to/

DIXIE. *(Waving in his face.)*/ Relax, I get it! All it takes is a few "enthusiastic admirers" and I earn enough dough to keep this place running for another month.

DAN. I understand now.

DIXIE. Most of the time these guys only want someone to listen to their stupid problems, but anyway if you don't mind, I'd prefer my uncle doesn't know about it.

DAN. Mum's the word.

DIXIE. *(Dixie doesn't know the phrase but whatever...)* Good ... I think. *(She crosses behind the bar again.)* So, Choo-Choo knifes this guy in the leg, and I get fired. End of story, I thought.

(Sound Cue - train out.)

DIXIE. A few weeks ago, he and his pack of geniuses start coming in here every night, sitting in the corner, gawking at me like, like hyenas stalking a wounded zebra.

DAN. Which corner?

DIXIE. Still doesn't matter.

DAN. Did he get arrested for the knifing?

CEMETERY PUB

DIXIE. Of course not, he's a cop.

DAN. How did *that* become a cop?

DIXIE. Well maybe he's not a cop, but he might as well be. He's the janitor or something at the police station, sleeps in the back. A couple of his uncles are cops, one's the police chief, I think. You know how a firehouse usually has a dog? Choo-Choo is like that at the cop shop.

DAN. Their mascot. (*Pointing to her cast.*) What happened there?

DIXIE. On Friday night, New Year's Eve, we're having an "End of the World" party/

DAN. / "End of the World"?

DIXIE. The Y2K thing.

DAN. The what thing?

DIXIE. The Y2K thing. You know, 1999 going into 2000?

DAN. What?

DIXIE. You know, all the computers were gonna to freak out, and the power grid was supposed to fail ...

DAN. Not ringing a bell.

DIXIE. Planes falling from the sky... Our entire financial system going belly up?

DAN. Sounds serious.

DIXIE. Our whole infrastructure was supposed to crash!

DAN. I guess I must have missed all of that.

DIXIE. Would it kill ya to open a newspaper?

DAN. I suppose I was preoccupied with my own stuff.

DIXIE. Yeah, that's called being a man.

DAN. Why do you hate men so much?

DIXIE. I don't hate men. I just think that there are higher life forms.

DAN. Like what?

DIXIE. Jellyfish. Look, if I'm threatening your masculinity I'll stop.

DAN. No, no, keep on going.

DIXIE. Gee, thanks. So, Choo-Choo Jr. and his pack of gorillas walk in. He'd combed his hair and put on a clean T-shirt; I could smell the Old Spice from thirty feet away. I knew I was in trouble.

DAN. Ring a ding-ding.

DIXIE. Ring a ding what?

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. You know, he was “putting on the dog.”

DIXIE. What dog?!

DAN. He came a courtin’?

DIXIE. What?

DAN. Oh, I’m sorry. What I meant to say is/

DIXIE. / He wanted to bone me.

DAN. Got it.

DIXIE. Moving forward. I tried to keep it light. You know, keep your friends close and your enemies closer sort of thing? Egged on by his buddies, he shuffled over to the bar and finally asks me out to the Sizzler, which he thinks is fancy.

DAN. Why?

DIXIE. I don’t know, because the salad bar has a sneeze guard? Anyway, I said, “No thanks, I have to work.” He retreats to the corner, gets some sage advice from his “brain trust,” and comes back to take another shot at me. So, I started playfully insulting him, loud enough for his friends to hear. Keeping it light you know? I’d say something like... “Choo-Choo, I wouldn’t fuck you with someone else’s vagina.”

DAN. Yeah?

DIXIE. Yeah, you know the type of erudite humor you men appreciate. And it was working. They’d laugh their heads off, and Choo-Choo laughed too. I hoped that would be the end of it, but after conferring with his “college of cardinals,” he came back again and asks me this time to play miniature golf.

DAN. Miniature golf?

DIXIE. To show off his athletic prowess. And I say... “Choo-Choo I wouldn’t fuck you for practice!”

DAN. Good one.

DIXIE. You’re too kind. Everyone laughs louder. It was actually kind of fun, until it wasn’t. The bar back was out sick, and we have corned beef on Fridays.

DAN. (*Remembering.*) Your grandfather’s tradition.

DIXIE. Uh huh. I could have used his help on Friday/ anyways, I was very busy and actually becoming quite frightened. I mean I’m the only one here, right? I’m starting to tremble, so I have a shot to steady my nerves/

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. / What kind of shot?/

DIXIE. / Doesn't matter! Choo-Choo comes over one last time and asks me to The Monster Truck World Series.

DAN. They have a World Series?

DIXIE. Apparently. So, I figure I'd better stop this now before it goes from stupid to ugly. This is where those two shots I had turn out to be a bad idea.

DAN. I thought it was one shot.

DIXIE. Doesn't matter! I rang the tip bell (*She does.*), quieted the whole crowd down, and announced... "Choo-Choo, I wouldn't suck your dick if it had the antidote in it!"

DAN. Brutal.

DIXIE. Well, the place lit up laughing, but I guess Choo-Choo finally caught on that we weren't laughing *with* him. He got that look on his face like when a dog turns on you? He said, "If you don't fucking marry me, I'll kill myself!"

DAN. Uh-oh.

DIXIE. Yeah well/ and this seemed like a good idea at the time, but I grabbed the carving knife from the corned beef platter and ceremoniously handed it to him. At this point people don't know whether to laugh or run. Well, Choo-Choo takes the knife and drives it through my left hand, pinning it to the bar.

DAN. Oh, Holy Christ! Goddamn, it's just like, it's just like in that movie?

DIXIE. Yep, *The Godfather*. It was like Luca Brasi in *The Godfather*. That's what all the doctors kept saying in the emergency room. The nurses were cool, but those friggin' doctors ... "Hey, check out Luca Brasi over there," "Would you like some apple juice, Miss Brasi?" Men suck. (*Dixie points to the knife hole in the bar, Dan inspects.*)

DAN. Oh, I'm so sorry. That must have hurt like hell.

DIXIE. (*A lie.*) Pulling it out hurt the most, because I had to wiggle it.

DAN. Didn't anyone help you?

DIXIE. Why? I can pull a knife out of my own goddamn hand!

DAN. Really?

DIXIE. (*A confession.*) Actually, I kind of fainted. My friend Jan pulled it out. Then she called the ambulance.

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. I'm so sorry. There's still some dried blood in there.

DIXIE. Maybe I should try a toothbrush.

DAN. (*Dan gently takes Dixie's hand, examining it.*) Did it break a bone?

DIXIE. No, the doctor said it went clean through the tissue.

DAN. You're lucky it was a sharp knife. I'll tell you what kid, you got gumption.

DIXIE. What's that?

DAN. Gumption? Oh um, it's like moxie.

DIXIE. No help.

DAN. Pluck?

DIXIE. Balls? You mean like balls?

DAN. Yeah, that. So, now Junior's in jail, right?

DIXIE. Yessir, just up the train tracks. Scheduled to be shipped to county tomorrow.

DAN. End of story?

DIXIE. This morning, I dropped the charges; he gets out at five.

DAN. Wait, what?

DIXIE. Deep down I know he truly loves me/ just kidding, I hope he gets hit by a fucking train. Late last night Uncle Ken was down here mopping the floor. Choo-Choo's friends threw a Molotov Cocktail through that window. If my uncle hadn't tossed the bucket of water on the rug, the place would have lit up like a match box.

DAN. (*Putting two and two together.*) Oh yeah, the burnt rug. Did Ken see who did it?

DIXIE. Yeah, he ran out and got hit in the back of the knees with a bat.

DAN. What kind of bat?

DIXIE. Doesn't matter! What are you, writing a book?

DAN. I'm a logistics kind of guy. If your uncle was hit with a bat, he wouldn't be walking today.

DIXIE. Oh okay, maybe it wasn't a bat, more like a stick. Then one of those goons got Uncle Ken in a chokehold. Said if I didn't drop the charges against Choo-Choo, they'd kill me.

DAN. Did you go to the police?

DIXIE. They are the police!

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. Wow, wow, I can see you got a real problem here. Have you thought about selling the place and getting out of town?

DIXIE. (*Dixie is furious.*) What a chicken shit thing to say! Really, that's all you got? That's it, I should just run away? (*Dixie grabs Dan's coat and begins ushering him out of the bar.*) Well, it's been just swell meeting you, Cousin Dan. Thanks for the tip about the cigars. That's a real game changer for me.

DAN. I didn't mean to piss you off.

DIXIE. (*In Dan's face.*) O'Brien's Tavern, or Cemetery Pub, whatever you want to fucking call this place, is mine! It was my grandfather's bar, then my mother's bar, now it's my bar. Mine! My family are all across the street at the cemetery, watching how I do. Those people made it through the Depression, two world wars, polio, race riots, Vietnam, and *friggin' disco*, and your advice to me is to just get out of town? Maybe running away works for you but/

DAN. / I was just/

DIXIE. / I should what, get a job as a friggin' librarian in Cranford? All the women on both sides of my family have died of breast cancer, young. The doctor told me to have a mammogram every three months, *every three months!* The way I see it, you've got a longer life expectancy than I do. My currency is time. Leaving town, starting over, that's time I don't have to waste!

DAN. I get it.

DIXIE. Do you? And by the way, why the fuck should I leave? I think it would be much more equitable if Choo-Choo "left," don't you? Really, don't you? You know "left," one way or the other, "left"?

KEN. (*Yelling from upstairs, very alarmed.*) The lasagna is not ready yet!!

DAN. (*Confused.*) Thanks for the update! So, you reached out to your Uncle Ken for advice?

DIXIE. He picked me up from the hospital on Saturday morning.

DAN. But why'd he call me?

DIXIE. How's business?!

DAN. (*A big crash is heard from upstairs - Dan is distracted.*) Well, that's what I thought you wanted to talk to me about ...

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. (*Coming halfway down the stairs, Ken is extremely worried that Dixie is going to expose their scheme.*) Hey Dixie, I'm looking for that thing! Have you seen that thing? Maybe you can come up here and help me look for that thing!

DIXIE. (*Defiant.*) I threw that thing in the garbage!

KEN. No, no, that *other* thing, you know, maybe you could come up here and help me find that *other* thing?

DIXIE. That other thing is dead, I killed it!

KEN. (*Laughing nervously.*) No, no, she's just kidding again, but maybe that thing is upstairs here somewhere, and um... (*Dixie and Dan just stare at Ken, who gives up on trying to get Dixie upstairs. Embarrassed, Ken pulls out some rosary beads from his pocket, pretending to find "that thing."*) Oh look, I found that thing. It was right here in my pocket all along.

DAN. Congratulations. (*Ken exits up the stairs in embarrassment. Dan and Dixie pick up just where they left off.*) Look I didn't mean to piss you off/ but I'm a little confused/ Helping you with the bar, that's what you wanted to talk to me about right? That's why I'm here right, you need help with the bar?

DIXIE. Little bit.

DAN. Okay ... (*Trying to make peace.*) Hey, I really meant it when I said I'm sorry about not going to the funeral.

DIXIE. Yeah, yeah, it's okay, I figured. The black sheep returns.

DAN. Yeah, I didn't exactly/ wait, "black sheep," what do you mean?

DIXIE. My mother and I told each other everything.

DAN. (*Dan is shocked and horribly embarrassed.*) Oh, holy shit! I, I, I don't know what to say ... Holy shit ... I think, I think, maybe I should just go.

DIXIE. (*Alarmed.*) Why should you go/

DAN. (*Still holding his coat, Dan goes to leave but needs to explain.*)/ Listen, last year I saw in the paper that she'd passed away, your mother Sandy. Well, I didn't come to the funeral, because I didn't think the family needed to be reminded that she and I were involved/

DIXIE. / Yeah, well I guess that was the easy way out for you, but ... wait/what? What did you just say to me?

DAN. Huh?

DIXIE. Did you just say to me, that you and my mother were "involved"?

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. (*Dan is paralyzed.*) I just/

DIXIE. / You mean you and she/ you guys were a thing?

DAN. Well I/

DIXIE. / Holy shit!!

DAN. You just said your mother told you everything!

DIXIE. I lied!

DAN. Holy shit!

DIXIE. Holy shit! All she told me was that you two just had a little crush on each other.

DAN. Holy shit!

DIXIE. Holy shit! You mean you and she actually went right ahead and/ she was your goddamn first cousin, what the hell were you thinking?

DAN. I was thinking, I was in love.

DIXIE. I may puke.

DAN. I never should have come here!

KEN. (*Rushing downstairs trying to change the subject.*) Um, where, where, where did you put the cucumber?

DIXIE. Well, isn't that the million-dollar question. I'll get it! Holy shit, if this day gets any more fucked up... (*She goes to exit. Ken descends the stairs as Dixie goes up, she punches him hard in the arm.*)

KEN. (*Trying to make the best of a terrible situation.*) Well, seems like the heat is starting to kick in. How'd it go?

DAN. She was like putty in my hands! Give me another drink!

KEN. Sure. You, okay? (*Ken pours the vodka, Dan gestures three fingers.*)

DAN. I feel like I've been mugged! This was a bad idea, I come here. I don't know how to talk to people/ by the way, thanks a lot for that introduction, you son of a bitch.

KEN. It's all part of my charm.

DAN. (*Truly shaken.*) You have all the charm of walking into a fart. I was expecting a defenseless halfwit, and I get fucking Calamity Jane. On top of that... (*Pointing to the memorial photo.*) I have *never* seen somebody look *exactly* like somebody else so much! She walks like her mother, she talks like her mother, she even feels like Sandy!

KEN. Feels like her?

CEMETERY PUB

DAN. Oh, calm down, we shook hands. I just got the full story, well, I guess she did too.

KEN. How did that come up?

DAN. I don't even know. Believe me it was not my choice. All of a sudden, I was just spilling my guts.

KEN. That makes everything a little bit more difficult. I was hoping you'd win her over.

DAN. Win her over?! I get the sneaking suspicion that Dixie doesn't much care for men.

DIXIE. *(From upstairs.)* I heard that!

DAN. *(Calling upstairs.)* Not that I blame her! *(Back to Ken.)* I've been in a lot of bad situations, but I've never seen somebody "Luca Brasi-ed." That guy must be completely out of his mind.

KEN. Yeah right, the hand? The Choo-Choo family makes the Manson Family look like the Brady Bunch.

DAN. His father, you said, went to prison for manslaughter?

KEN. Remember he had a girlfriend in high school?

DAN. Oh, let me check my diary/ No, I don't fucking remember!

KEN. Well, we all called her "Peas."

DAN. "Peas"?

KEN. Because she always had a black eye. *(It takes a second, but then Dan gets it.)* Well, Choo-Choo and Peas got married and after Junior was born, she tried to leave him. They found her body in the meadowlands.

DAN. How did they pin it on the husband?

KEN. There was a note in her pocketbook that said: "If I'm dead, Choo-Choo did it."

DAN. *(Dan finds this amusing.)* Amateur.

KEN. What?

DAN. Never mind. Listen, I tried my best to speak to her about the job, but clearly, that's not gonna happen.

KEN. She's got a lot on her plate right now, give her some time.

DAN. *(Looking at his watch.)* Doesn't sound like she has a whole hell of a lot of that. She is one tough chick.

KEN. She talks a good game, but it's a façade.

DAN. I don't know, she seems pretty capable of taking care of herself.

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. Dixie is a 110-pound little girl, being brutalized by a 290-pound monster. She's scared shitless and needs to be protected.

(Sound Cue - phone rings.)

KEN. *(Without missing a beat, Ken picks up the phone, then immediately hangs up.)* You know I tried to keep tabs on you over the years as best I could. You're a hard person to reach. I almost had a heart attack when I saw you.

DAN. Well, a cemetery is the right place for it. Do you really think this bum is gonna come for her?

DIXIE. *(Ken picks up a bottle to pour himself a drink, but Dixie coming down the stairs, grabs the bottle of booze from Ken's hand, then sits down on the stairs.)* Oh yeah, he'll be coming for me alright. I'm his friggin' destiny. *(She takes a gulp from the bottle.)* But enough about me, how's your day going? By the way how did you guys run into each other again?

KEN. Last week I was assigned a funeral at St Gert's for a women named McGuinness, Edna McGuinness. Nothing special there, do it all the time. So, I arrive at this grave site, only it's my Aunt Moira's plot, we buried her years ago. So, now it's all dug up, and I'm thinking this is a terrible mistake. Then I look over the coffin, and standing there is my cousin Danny, who I haven't seen in forever.

DIXIE. Who was Edna McGuinness?

DAN. My wife. My name was Phillips, but I changed it to McGuinness/ actually there were a few other names in between that/ but anyway, my mom had bought a double plot across the street, which my father didn't use, so when my wife passed away/ Ken is the only priest I know so...

KEN. It was quite a shock. If you had given me some heads up, I could have done a better job of it. Personalize it more.

DAN. You did great, Ken. I didn't give you a heads up because I didn't think you'd show.

DIXIE. Where's the grave?

KEN. Along the path right next to the water spicket, near your mom.

DIXIE. So, Edna McGuinness was your wife?

DAN. Yeah.

CEMETERY PUB

DIXIE. I'm sorry.

DAN. Thank you/ yeah, it was much better that it happened sooner than later, she was in a lot of pain.

KEN. So ...? *(Ken urges Dan to tell his sad story. He wants to elicit Dixie's sympathy.)*

DAN. She just laid down on Christmas Eve night and didn't wake up. I was happy that I was home, otherwise you get the coroner involved and neither one of us liked that idea.

KEN. That's one hell of a Christmas morning.

DAN. I was never big on the holidays anyway. *(The three of them drink in silence. Dan gets up and crosses to the bathroom, stops himself.)* Please excuse me, I have to hit the head. I either got a prostate the size of a football or a bladder the size of a change purse.

KEN. I hear that.

DAN. Sometimes I get the urge to pee while I'm peeing. *(Dan exits into the bathroom.)*

DIXIE. *(Extremely irritated.)* I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't that!

KEN. Shhh! *(Ken turns on the radio so Danny can't hear their conversation.)*

(Sound Cue - instrumental music plays softly.)

KEN. *(The tension is getting thicker for both of them.)* What the hell happened down here?

DIXIE. "Hit the head," what does that even mean? *That, that* is the great Cousin Danny? My mother used to talk about him like he was friggin' Clint Eastwood. What did she ever see in that guy?

KEN. It takes him a while to warm up.

DIXIE. *(Checking her watch.)* I can't wait, I mean it, I actually can't wait. This is just perfect. I need Superman, but all I get is Captain Underpants. Why don't we just come out and ask him?

KEN. We agreed to try and find an alternative first.

DIXIE. While you're finding alternatives, that motherfucker up the road is sharpening his knife.

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. Will you just wait a minute?

DIXIE. (*Flying off the handle.*) I have spent my whole miserable life waiting for men. “When will Daddy come home?” - “Will the teacher give me a passing grade?” - “Will the friggin’ Easter Bunny show up?”

KEN. I always thought the Easter Bunny was a girl.

DIXIE. DOESN’T MATTER!

KEN. Calm down!

DIXIE. I never should have hocked that shotgun!

KEN. That money helped to keep these lights on. Besides, what are you going to do, Dixie, have a shootout with the local law enforcement?

DIXIE. Why not?

KEN. ’Cause you never shot a gun in your life.

DIXIE. I’ll learn!

KEN. Calm down! You gotta give Danny a break!

DIXIE. (*Dixie is absolutely apoplectic.*) Why should I give him a break? Nobody ever gives me a break!!

KEN. (*Alarmed.*) Hey, hey, hey, calm down, calm down! Look at me, stay with me here. I need you.

DIXIE. (*No self-pity, it’s just a fact.*) I’ve never gotten a goddamn break in my whole stinkin’ life/

KEN. / Hey listen, you’re starting to hyperventilate here. Get the Bag.

DIXIE. I don’t need the Bag! (*She needs the Bag.*)

KEN. You’re gonna pass out again!

DIXIE. I’m not gonna/

KEN. / GET THE BAG! (*Begrudgingly Dixie storms behind the bar and gets a brown lunch bag and starts breathing into it.*) Now just try to relax. Let’s, let’s talk about something else for a second.

DIXIE. (*With the Bag over her mouth.*) Like what?

KEN. Anything. How’d you sleep last night?

DIXIE. (*Still speaking into the Bag.*) I had a dream that garbage trucks were falling from heaven - what does that tell ya?

KEN. Jesus that’s dark. (*Focusing on the distraction.*) Come on, what else has been on your mind lately?

DIXIE. (*Figuring this is as good a time as any.*) I think I might be gay.

KEN. Oh, this is good. You finally figured that out, did ya?

CEMETERY PUB

DIXIE. (*Dixie takes the Bag off her mouth.*) You think I'm a lesbian?

KEN. You're definitely a lesbian.

DIXIE. You knew before I did?

KEN. Yes.

DIXIE. How?

KEN. It's always been there. I mean, even when you were a little squirt/

DIXIE. / What do you mean?

KEN. Oh, I don't know. (*Looking for an example - the distraction is working.*) There was that one time, whenever, I was visiting from Ireland, when you were really young, and your mom had arranged a sleepover with that little boy up the street.

DIXIE. Russell?

KEN. Sure, anyway, when it came to bathtime you got all pissed off because Russell had a "tail" in front, and you didn't.

DIXIE. A "tail" in front?

KEN. Yep.

DIXIE. (*Amused.*) Oh shit, really?

KEN. You just couldn't get over it. "Why does that kid get a tail and I don't? It's not fair!"

DIXIE. I don't remember any of that.

KEN. Makes sense, you were really small. Stomping around the bathroom floor; "I want a tail! I want a tail!" It was actually pretty adorable. So, when did you first catch on?

DIXIE. Junior high gym class? I couldn't figure out why the girls locker room was the best part of my day.

KEN. Well, there you have it. (*Dan exits the bathroom, stops, registers disgust with himself, turns around and goes back into the bathroom.*)

DIXIE. So, my mom knew?

KEN. Of course.

DIXIE. Why didn't she say anything?

KEN. She figured you'd bring it up when you were ready.

DIXIE. I wanted to, but I never had the guts. Now I'll never know how she felt about it.

KEN. Well, I do. She didn't care who you loved as long as you loved yourself first.

CEMETERY PUB

DIXIE. *(This means a lot to Dixie.)* She said that?

KEN. Yes, Dixie, she said that. *(Back to the urgent matters at hand.)* Speaking of not judging people, you really gotta cut Danny some slack here.

DIXIE. *(Referring to the bathroom.)* Did he die in there or what?

KEN. It takes old guys a minute to warm up. *(Ken puts the brown lunch bag back behind the bar.)*

DIXIE. I mean should we call an ambulance?

KEN. He's fine. *(Really selling Dan.)* Ya know, your life has been Disneyland compared to his.

DIXIE. *(Sarcastic.)* Oh, really?

KEN. Yes, really! He never even got a Christmas present from his parents.

DIXIE. What?

KEN. That's why they came to our house on holidays. So my parents could make sure Danny had a winter coat.

DIXIE. His parents never bought him a winter coat?

KEN. Absolutely not.

DIXIE. What did he wear?

KEN. A couple of old flannel shirts. Sometimes he'd stuff newspaper in between as insulation.

DIXIE. What kind of parents did he have?

KEN. Shitty ones. My dad made sure that every Easter Dan got a pair of new shoes, and every Christmas he got a new winter coat.

DIXIE. Oh, shit. *(It's starting to work.)*

KEN. So find some kindness in your heart, will ya? It's in your best interest, especially if you want to live to see tomorrow. So please, just drop that Joan Jett act you've got going on here.

DIXIE. Who's Joan Jett?

KEN. She was kinda like Pat Benatar.

DIXIE. Who's Pat Benatar?

KEN. Doesn't matter.

DIXIE. Are we gonna die today, Uncle Ken?

KEN. Absolutely not... probably not... I hope not... but just in case - I love you.

DIXIE. *(Dixie is too frightened to respond, she shakes it off and changes the subject.)* Anyway, what was the funeral like? Lot of people?

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. Just the two of us.

DIXIE. Not really?

KEN. Yeah, I mean there were a few others, people who worked at the cemetery. They send employees out into the field when it's like that. No relatives, no friends.

DIXIE. *(Dixie's intense sense of empathy is starting to break through - I told you it was a façade.)* That's the saddest thing I've ever heard in my life.

KEN. *(Going in for the kill.)* When he saw that I wasn't going to leave, that I was going to stay and perform the ceremony, I saw tears in his eyes.

DIXIE. Oh shit. Oh shit! Ya gotta stop. Ya gotta stop. Ya gotta! Oh shit. I can't start blubbering over some old gangster. I got my own problems... *(Dan successfully emerges from the bathroom. Ken shushes Dixie and turns off the radio as he crosses to Dan.)*

(Sound Cue - out.)

KEN. Hey, I got a big kick out of that article a bunch of years back about your surviving that boat crash. Did I ever tell you about that, Dixie? That must have been something.

DAN. Oh yeah, yeah, it wasn't a crash, it was an accident.

KEN. Yeah, he went fishing, what was it ten years ago?

DAN. More.

KEN. Shit, really? Out in Raritan Bay. Bunch of guys, right?

DAN. I was working construction on the parkway and some of the crew found out I had been a Navy Seal/

DIXIE. / A Navy Seal?

DAN. Yeah.

DIXIE. Were you like a sniper, or an assassin, or something?

KEN. *(Dan and Ken laugh nervously.)* No, no, of course, not. He wouldn't hurt a fly.

DAN. Wow, she's got some imagination, huh Ken?

KEN. It isn't like in the movies, Dixie.

DAN. *(A lie.)* All I did was a lot of training and maybe, occasionally, some underwater demolition. Pretty boring stuff. Nonetheless, these construction guys thought it was cool, so they invited me fishing.

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. The boat springs a leak! So, this guy swims all the way to shore. How far was that?

DAN. About four miles.

KEN. I read about it in *The Star Ledger* “Local man, sole survivor.”

DIXIE. Did they ever recover the bodies?

DAN. Nope, or the boat. People have been buying me drinks ever since.

DIXIE. Were these guys your friends?

DAN. Not really. They weren’t the brightest bulbs in the chandelier, but what the hell, they had a boat, right?

DIXIE. That’s a long swim.

DAN. You get used to it.

KEN. (*Absentmindedly.*) The water’s not all that deep out there, they never even found the boat, huh?

DAN. (*Shooting daggers at Ken, he quickly changes the subject.*) So, did you ever get married?

KEN. Who me?

DIXIE. The man’s a priest, Dan, remember?

DAN. (*Playing dumb.*) Oh, yeah, sorry. Sometimes my brain...

KEN. Yeah, it’s been almost thirty years now.

DAN. Bummer.

KEN. It’s not a bummer, I’m very happy being a priest.

DAN. (*Checking his watch.*) Nobody’s happy. Would you guys mind if I stay just a little longer?

DIXIE. (*Dixie pokes Ken, alarmed by the idea of Dan leaving.*) Lasagna!

KEN. (*Ignoring Dixie.*) Of course!

DIXIE. Why not?

DAN. Hey Dixie, is that beef lasagna?

DIXIE. What?

DAN. The lasagna, is it beef?

DIXIE. Umm ... yeah sure, yes, yes, it is.

DAN. Cheddar cheese?

DIXIE. You bet. But/ but it’ll have to sit for a while, might get late. I’ll uh, go check on it. (*As Dixie exits upstairs, Ken takes her bottle of booze away.*)

DAN. Be careful of the pan, they get really hot. (*Under his breath.*) So, you haven’t gotten laid in thirty years?

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. (*Embarrassed.*) Well I...

DAN. Oh. I thought that was kind of what it's all about.

KEN. It's about service, it's about helping other people.

DAN. I don't mean to stick my nose in.

KEN. No, it's good to think about these things. You know, I became a priest because/ my parents were great people, great people, but they drank. I think I became a priest, to maybe make them happy. In the seminary I found the same problem, alcoholism, lots of it. I guess everybody fills the void somehow.

DAN. So, you're an alcoholic?

KEN. Nah... I tried but it didn't take.

DAN. And so you fill the void?

KEN. What, you want a confession? Let's just say, I feel that I can do better from inside the church than out, even if I don't exactly follow the letter of the law, so to speak.

DAN. I'm waiting for the confession.

KEN. Now I need a drink.

DAN. (*Eager to hear the gossip, Dan crosses behind the bar.*) What'll you have, Father?

KEN. Scotch. (*Dan pours Ken a drink. Ken points upstairs.*) Needless to say, if this gets out, a lot of people will be hurt, not just me.

DAN. I'll alert the media.

KEN. I mean, I'm kinda like Dixie's hero.

DAN. Hero. Got it.

KEN. Okay so, remember that snowstorm we had on Halloween?

DAN. Yeah.

KEN. On Halloween night, in the village, they have this big "costume parade" type thing.

DAN. Bunch of drag queens.

KEN. It's more than that. If you've ever been, it's a lot of fun.

DAN. I'll put it in my calendar.

KEN. So, I was there with my friend Robbie, he's a parishioner at the church, thirties, charismatic as hell. You'd like him...

DAN. Don't get off the subject.

CEMETERY PUB

KEN. I'm not. Shut up and listen. So, Robbie was dressed up as a Las Vegas showgirl.

DAN. Sounds horrifying.

KEN. No. That's the thing, he can pass. (*Dan doesn't understand.*) He can "pass," that means people think he's actually a girl.

DAN. Really?

KEN. Trust me, this is one good-looking human being. He's/ I mean/ something to write home about.

DAN. Damn! He's really all that?

KEN. And a bag of chips/ Anyway, he disappears around the corner with some guy, and I go looking for him. Well, I guess they started going for it, but this guy didn't realize, so he freaks out and beats the hell out of Robbie. On the car ride home, it was snowing, Robbie was really pissed off and he kind of turned on me. He told me that I was even worse than the guy who beat him up. "At least *he* didn't pretend to be my friend," he said.

DAN. Seems to me he should have been grateful, you helping him out and all.

KEN. He said that he was just "a gold star" for me.

DAN. Oh, like "Hey, look at me, I'm a tolerant person..."

KEN. Yeah. He said, "When people look at me, they don't see a person, they think, 'Ew, he has sex with men.' When you look at me, Ken, you don't see a person, you think 'Ew, he has sex with men.'" I thought he was going to hit me, so I pulled the car over; the wind was howling. He was right... When I looked at Robbie, I didn't see a person. All I thought was, "Ew, he has sex with men." It was one of those moments of truth, you know? Sitting in the middle of a blizzard. In the silence of a church station wagon. I finally saw Robbie as a person, I didn't think, "Ew, he has sex with men"... Then we had sex.

DAN. (*After a moment.*) So, you're queer?

KEN. Nah... I tried but it didn't take.

DAN. Wanna run that by me again?

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