

**Colby's Corner**

A play by  
Larry Maness

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Contact: [LJM@larrymaness.com](mailto:LJM@larrymaness.com)

## Characters

Colby: A middle school administrator in his 50s

**Time:** The present

**Set:** An open stage with an upright piano on one side, a plastic tube with an oxygen mask at one end hangs nearby from the ceiling, a chair and side table in the middle faces the audience.

**At rise:** Colby plays the theme song of a current popular television show then segues into another and another—all short snippets played by a struggling amateur. Finally, he settles on themes from Late Night television beginning with Saturday Night Live.

COLBY  
Live from New York...

He bangs out the theme from "Late Night" with Leno.

COLBY (cont)  
Here's the funny man himself...

His last intro is from "Tonight" with Johnny Carson.

COLBY (cont)  
And, here's Johnny!

He ends with a poor flourish, bending and swaying like a famous soloist playing Carnegie Hall.

Silence. He's momentarily lost.

He stands and runs one hand along the plastic tube, raising the facemask but not putting it on.

COLBY (cont)  
You never know what's going  
to pop into your head when you  
go under. A thousand ideas.  
Will I make it?  
(Beat.)  
I wish I'd taken piano lessons.  
(Beat.)  
I hope this operation doesn't hurt. I  
can't stand pain.

Colby dances a little soft shoe then stops, looks around.

COLBY (cont)

My father ran a service station he called G.I. Joes. He started when he got discharged from the service. He pumped Texaco gas for thirty years, washed windshields, changed oil and took dancing lessons with his best friend, Shorty. They took flying lessons, dancing lessons, lessons on how to best cook squirrel.

He spins into another short dance.

COLBY (cont)

Something happened and my father and Shorty didn't speak for years. Shorty came by the house the day before dad died. When he came outside where I waited, he said everything was all right. They'd patched things up.

It was the dancing lessons, wasn't it?

"How do you mean?"

I mean you weren't dancing with the women. Not on your feet.

Shorty didn't answer and I never had the courage to asked my father if he was getting a little on the side.

Noise from a powerful drill fills the stage. Colby winces. The drill grinds on, then stops.

COLBY (cont)

Jesus. That noise. Like being in a dentist's chair only this drill..

From above on the right back of the stage, a spotlight shines down on the floor. The light shifts left, then right, back, then forward.

COLBY (cont)

...lets the surgeon look inside my brain after he cuts a hole.

Colby looks up, bathed in the light.

COLBY (cont)

Any news? I mean good news. Like the judge changed his mind and I can go home now.

(Beat.)

I'm a little thirsty. Could you send something down? And the nurse, the cute one. Full frontal nudity would take my mind..

The light snaps off. Colby takes a drink of water from the side table.

COLBY (cont)

Six months ago this would have been vodka or cough syrup or anything I could get my hands on.

His second drink is longer, more satisfying.

COLBY (cont)

My father drank. My mother watched. Just the fumes gave her a headache, and there were plenty of fumes and headaches in our house, but mother stood by us, back rod-straight, chin out—the picture of defiance that was in reality acceptance that nothing would change for the better.

Not that life was terrible. Far from it.

We had land and horses and cows and chickens and horse trainers and blacksmiths and furious neighbors who threatened suit when mother's peacock flew down from the giant elm, feet out like death hooks, and scarred the face of little Nell.

Twenty-seven stitches. Plastic surgery into her teens. Neurotic. But like the evening glory she blossomed at night;

a flower opened wide.

COLBY (cont)

I was like a bee drawn to her mysteries.

(Beat.)

How is it women know more about sex than men? Even at thirteen? Is it a gene they have that men don't? An extra chromosome or rib? Part of the brain, maybe.

He moves to another part of the stage and points.

COLBY (cont)

This part right here. You can't see it because I'm a man. But in women, this brain part is like a mountain filled with all teases and flirtations and future satisfactions known to us lesser of the species: men. Women have it over us all. They lead, we follow. At least I do. And did. Little Nell was my training ground. When I'd learned all she wanted to teach me, she kicked me out of the hayloft.

I was seventeen, thinking about college and ripe for picking. I had a horse of my own then. A big, used pink Lincoln my parents bought me for graduating high school, a trailer to haul the horse to pick-up rodeos. Same thing as pick-up basketball. People show up and the games start.

Colby picks up an imaginary lariat and spins a loop above his head.

COLBY (cont)

Calf roping.

He lets the loop fly.

COLBY (cont)

You back your horse into the chute, give a quick nod to the cowboy on the gate who pulls the pin.

He spins the loop again.

COLBY (cont)  
The calf bolts ahead clocking a  
hundred miles an hour, then...

The loop flies again.

COLBY (cont)  
...drops like a shot when it hits  
the end of the perfectly tossed  
sphere.

Colby runs to the end of the rope, flips the calf to the ground and ties the legs in a flash, his pleasant memory broken by the light above his head shinning to the floor.

Colby is more concerned this time around.

COLBY (cont)  
What do you see? What?

The light shuts off.

COLBY (cont)  
I'm not sure I feel so well.

He sits in the chair. He looks at his watch.

COLBY (cont)  
They said if they hit the spot right  
off, it wouldn't take long. The  
CAT scan pinpointed the possibilities.  
They shaved my head, marked the spots with  
red dye so no one would forget where  
to drill.

(Beat.)  
Maybe my brain isn't cooperating.

Softly, he caresses his head. He shivers at the thought of the drill. He can't shake the tremor that rolls through him. He jumps up.

COLBY (cont)  
I think I need more anesthetic.

He pulls on the plastic tube and looks toward the ceiling.

COLBY (cont)  
Send down some more. You hear?

He sucks eagerly in the mask. He hyperventilates, then, slowly calms.

He sits at the piano. His fingers dance along the keys. He stops playing. Starts. Stops again. The tune unrecognizable. He stops.

COLBY (cont)  
I do know how to play the banjo.

He sings.

COLBY (cont)  
"Goin' up to Cripple Creek,  
goin' on the run, goin' up to  
Cripple Creek to have a little  
fun. Goin' up to Cripple Creek..."

He's lost interest.

COLBY (cont)  
Why there's no banjo here, I  
haven't a clue. Why I think of  
my rodeo fling, I haven't a clue  
either. I guess when you grow  
up around horses, one thing leads  
to another and pretty soon, there  
you are looking up into the dark  
brown eyes of Darla Deitweiller,  
rodeo queen for all of Douglas  
County. How she jammed those  
beautiful long legs into those  
skin tight blue jeans, I'll never  
know, but how fast she took them  
off was legend.

Not to cast aspersions on the lady's  
character, but when Darla's husband  
was off shooting quail, Darla did  
a little hunting on her own.

One day, she set her sights on me.



Colby runs one finger along the side of his nose.

COLBY (cont)

That's how I got this knot right here and this bend. Mr. Deitweiller—never known as a crack shot—bagged his limit early, came home unexpectedly, and punched me in the nose.

He didn't say hello. He didn't say anything as he bulled his way across the greenish shag carpet. Darla put down her rum and Coke and jumped to her feet. I knew we were in a hell of a lot of trouble when her slinky robe flew open on lovely, white skin. "I can explain," she said, but Mr. Deitweiller was not in the talking mood as my nose found out.

I woke up in the backseat of my pink Lincoln which I soon learned was not the kind of car designed to maintain anonymity. Something small with no fins, gray maybe—certainly not pink with a horse trailer attached to the rear.

That sort of reminded me of...

The sound of the drill again fills the stage. Colby ducks down as if a bird swooped toward him. He straightens up and puts his fingers in his ears.

Silence.

Colby is suspicious. He walks slowly about the stage and stops opposite from the sight of the first light. Above him, a second light strikes the floor. As before, the light scans left, right, forward, then back.

Colby inches toward it.

COLBY (cont)

Yes?

The spot dims. As it brightens, Colby raises his right arm. When the light dims, his arm goes back down. The light and his arm are in sync. When the light snaps off, his arm returns to his side.

COLBY (cont)

Right brain, left brain. Frontal. Parietal. Occipital. They're drilling them all, searching for oil, the Mother Lode, the spot or spots that cause my troubles. They're not really sure how many there might be and won't know until they have a look. Not something I would volunteer for, but I didn't have much choice.

His right arm lifts above his head, then drops.

COLBY (cont)

Must be mucking about in the temporal region. Must be...ahh...must be...

A change comes over him producing a professorial stride to his gate and an air about him of an intellectual. He strokes his chin.

COLBY (cont)

Indeed. Sexual urges are not the only driving forces. There is the analytical as when my friend Holcomb lost his prized fishing pole.

(Beat.)

Not his exactly. It was his father's and his father's before that. Split bamboo. It'd been in the family for years when young Holcomb borrowed it without asking and dropped it into the lake. He came to me, of course. He wanted assistance. He wanted his pole back.

Colby removes a packet from his pocket. He tears it open and holds forth a prophylactic. He blows it full of air, then lets it go and sail around the stage.

COLBY (cont)  
Physics. Logic. Not to fear, dear  
COLBY (cont)  
Holcomb, the pole must on the  
bottom. How to retrieve?

Colby takes out another prophylactic and lets it dangle between his fingers.

COLBY (cont)  
A diving lung. A container of air.

He shoots the prophylactic across the room like a rubber band.

COLBY (cont)  
S.C.U.B.A. SCUBA. It had always been in the back of my mind to learn how to dive. Morgan, another friend of mine, and I devised a plan to get rich mining Alaskan gold by strapping on scuba tanks and diving under falls deep within the Alaskan wilderness. The rivers and streams, we surmised, carried the gold along until the shear weight of it dropped to the bottom once the nuggets fell over the falls.

We would be millionaires.

Morgan and I scoured the local Kansas newspapers, looking for used scuba equipment. I stuck gold first, finding a nearly new set of U.S. Diver's complete with tank, regulator, weight belt, fins, mask, and full wet suit which I paid cash for and lugged home.

Morgan was envious. Morgan pleaded. He wanted to be the first to try it all out and since he was heading to Florida over spring break, I gave in and let him take it for one week.

I realized the danger, Morgan being one of those types who climbs to the

top of the mountain and straps on  
skis, even though he's never had a

COLBY (cont)

lesson, can't turn, can't slow down,  
can't stop. Which was one of the  
characteristics I admired about Morgan.  
Most people when I told them about my  
Alaskan gold mining adventure said I  
was crazy. When I told Morgan, he  
said we'd need to buy a camper or  
else the bears would have us for  
a snack.

Diving in Florida without a lesson,  
Morgan blew out his eardrums. No  
more diving for Morgan, no more Alaskan  
dreams. I scurried around for another  
partner, but never found the right mix.  
Or...

(Beat.)

...maybe something about a dive mask full  
of ear blood kept me out of the water.  
I still had all the equipment. Holcomb's  
pole on the bottom of the lake was my  
chance to measure the level of my fear.

I filled my bathtub full of water and  
climbed in. After five minutes of breathing  
through the regulator, I called Holcomb  
and told him I'd pick him up in the  
morning.

Inexplicably, Colby's left arm and leg lift at the same  
time. In tandem, they rise and fall slowly, only to lift  
again before coming to rest.

Colby looks up at the ceiling.

COLBY (cont)

What? No lights?

His right leg moves up, then down. A grim look crosses  
Colby's face as he walks stiff-kneed, like a wooden  
soldier, to the piano and sits abruptly on the bench.

COLBY (cont)

Wait a second.

His hands stretch out before him on stiff arms, his fingers flex and stretch. His arms jerk toward the keys, the palms slam down on the keyboard again and again. The noise horrific.

COLBY (cont)  
Stop it. Stop. STOP!

The banging grows more intense. Colby fights against the invisible force holding him in his seat. He's in the fight of his life.

COLBY (cont)  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?

Silence.

Colby is spent. He regains control of his limbs and slumps forward against the piano, exhausted.

Slowly, he regains his composure. He walks back and sits in the chair.

COLBY (cont)  
Pre-op. Doctors stroll in with an explanation of what they're going to do. Their voices soothing. Their confidence spills out so that I can lap it up. Still, the only one in the room not confident is me. Why should I be? They're going to bore a series of holes into my skull, looking for that part of my brain that is turning me into an angry moron. The judge's term, not mine.

"Never in my forty years on the bench have I seen an apparently normal human being filled with so much anger. How is it possible?"

I had an idea, but the judge didn't want to hear it. What he wanted to hear was my answer: Would I agree to experimental brain surgery that

might set me straight or would I

COLBY (cont)

prefer jail? Surgery seemed the only hope I had of a normal life going forward.

(Beat.)

I've never liked that phrase "going forward." I'm not going backward unless the surgeon makes a mistake and turns me into a fruit. I went under the knife a man and came out a banana. I know it's possible. It's one of those possible things like crashing in an airplane that I don't let myself think about. When I have to fly, I fly. When I have to have surgery, I have surgery. I didn't have much choice. The headaches were a killer. The only cure for them was a drink. And another and another. I never stopped drinking long enough to have a hangover or to give my liver a rest. In time, I had skin the color of a Kansas sunflower. I'd seen that skin color before. My father-in-law had it.

(Beat.)

Father-in-law from my only marriage. He was a tall, strapping man with a quick mind put to good use keeping track of all the booze he kept hidden around the house from his shrew of a wife.

He kept half-pints in the basement behind tool boxes and tucked up in the rafters; fifths on the second floor in closets, and nips for the night shakes buried in plant stands. The problem was, my mother-in-law was a snooper and when her husband was away at work, she'd snoop out the bottles and pour the contents down the drain. It was a relationship

that couldn't go forward so my

COLBY (cont)

father-in-law checked himself into  
detox and there he fought his demons.  
And won.

In six months, he'd come home from  
his office and instead of looking  
around for a drink, he'd strap on his  
jogging shoes and hit the pavement. He  
was up to ten miles the day his heart  
exploded.

I got divorced right after I stated  
to my mother-in-law that he'd likely  
still be alive and happily drunk if she  
hadn't poked and prodded and hounded the  
poor man into a healthy life. A life that  
killed him.

(Beat.)

My personal physician said that drink  
and anger would kill me, too, and laid  
my options out one last time: get off the  
booze, go under the knife, then find  
a good shrink to dig around in what's  
left of my brain. Maybe then I might  
find a little happiness. But I've  
already known a little happiness. I  
found it the day I went diving for  
Holcomb's pole.

It was one of those sunny and warm Kansas  
mornings filled with possibilities. I'd  
borrowed my father's truck and small  
fishing boat and headed to the lake where  
Holcomb found grief. I put the gear  
into the boat then slipped into my  
wet suit. I tucked the zippered top into  
the bottoms and backed off the dock.

Holcomb drove over the spot while I  
strapped on my dive tank and weight  
belt. Kansas lakes are rarely clear  
and this was no exception. To overcome  
the lack of vision, I devised an  
ingenious plan: Holcomb would hold  
onto a rope attached to me and once on

the bottom, I would swim around the  
COLBY (cont)  
boat in ever smaller circles—feeling  
my way through the mud until I stumbled  
upon the pole. Anything else  
I found—old boat motors, lures, anchors—  
I'd keep since I was doing all the  
work.

Dive time, I said, sitting on the gunwale.

"You sure about this?"

I'm sure about this, I said and spit  
in my mask. It was what divers did before  
exploring the deep and what I'd done  
yesterday in my bathtub.

"We'll I'm not so sure. What if you  
drown?"

Don't be negative, Holcomb. You want  
your pole, don't you?

I put on my mask, made the final adjustments  
and rolled backward into the water like  
I'd seen done on TV. My weight belt slid  
under my armpits, pulling my head under  
and keeping it there while the air bubble  
in my pants bobbed on the surface. I was  
a human ass-over-teacup cork learning a  
valuable lesson: Wetsuit pants go on  
first; the zippered top goes on last.

I've learned other valuable lessons over  
the years, all by trial and error. My  
father never took me aside and said, "Son,  
here's the secret to a good life." My  
mother never took me aside either except  
to tell me to stop playing doctor with  
my cousins.

Did my parents know the secret and, for  
whatever reason, not pass it along? I  
wondered about that as I nearly drowned in  
the lake.

(Beat.)



That was the beginning of my angry period.

COLBY (cont)

Mad at the world, I'll tell ya. Mad at the whole goddamned world! Although part of the anger could be genetic. Grandma, on my mother's side, did one morning after breakfast, open the second floor window and shove grandpa out. That he lived was a miracle. And then there was my uncle who flew into a rage when his sixteen year old daughter ran off with her married social studies teacher. At first, Uncle Clevis was going to shoot them both. He came to his senses and swore to only shoot the teacher who had run off to some small town in the Oklahoma panhandle once he'd had all he wanted of my cousin.

It was a family scandal that took years for Uncle Clevis to get over. I'm not sure he ever did. Even today there's something about the way he looks at you with that cold, dead eye of the lawless.

Colby glares out at the audience, then reels backward as if struck.

COLBY (cont)

Whoa! Did you feel that?

He rubs the top of his head.

COLBY (cont)

Must have been one of those probes, one-thousandth the width of a human hair but one-hundred times as long.

He rubs more vigorously, feeling for the probe.

COLBY (cont)

I know it's there. A faint sensation; a pressure in the gray matter. My gray matter. Not unpleasant unless I think about it; a spike jabbing around in there. No future in that sort

of thing.

He shudders at the thought.

COLBY (cont)

I gave up the rodeo and scuba diving because I didn't see any future in them either. Besides my parents wanted me to go to college even though they didn't want to pay my tuition. I'd appreciate it more if I spent my own money, they said.

Colby shivers. He's under attack from the unseen probe.

COLBY (cont)

Now that was cold. Not my parents. Must be poking around in the parietal zone with a Popsicle.

He bolts to another, safer spot on stage, looking up and ducking as he goes. He feels momentarily safe.

COLBY (cont)

I applied to the Ivies, highlighting my experiences as a diver and in the rodeo. How many high schoolers show up at Harvard with a pink Lincoln and that background? Zero. I didn't get in.

That was a big disappointment, right up there with not making my junior high football team. I knew I wasn't good enough to play quarterback and zing down field the perfect spiral. But I was good enough to catch the perfect spiral and step into the end zone. The coach, a drill sergeant type, saw differently.

I was too slow and too unreliable. Oh, I ran the pass patterns well enough. It was just that when I got whiff of a particular tackling drill I despised, I had mother write me a note excusing

me from practice because grandpa had  
COLBY (cont)  
again fallen from the second floor window.  
He hadn't, of course, and Coach Killer  
always knew it. He kicked me off the  
team.

Think of it: my football dream dashed;  
Darla Deitweiller slipped through my  
fingers; my Alaska trip crushed; Holcomb's  
pole still lies on the bottom; no  
Ivy offered me an interview, and now  
this THING...

He claws furiously at his skull.

COLBY (cont)  
...is stabbing me in the BRAIN!  
WHO WOULDN'T GO MAD?  
(Beat.)  
WHO WOULDN'T?

Lights Dim on Act 1/Scene 1

Act 1/Scene 2

Setting: Same

Time: One hour later

At rise: Colby sits in the chair concentrating on piloting his airplane. He pulls up, levels off, looks down at the ground passing underneath, then looks out at the audience.

COLBY

Flying lessons for my father came after some good fortune. The property adjacent to his service station came on the market and he bought it. In time, he bought others eventually ending up owning several houses, three of four bars, a restaurant, a car dealership, and a large gentleman's farm my mother populated with two of everything like a female Noah.

She had barns built for the special pair of goats she prized; she built an aviary so the rare banty chickens could fly about; she even built a pond for the koi.

Every Wednesday morning, my father would drive out to the local airport and climb in the Piper Cub for his lesson. The flight instructor, sitting beside him, would run dad through the normal maneuvers of turns, aborted landings, real landings, take offs, and all else expected of a student pilot.

All went peachy until the instructor leaned over during a steep climb and switched off the plane's engine. The plane stalled, fell backward, and

spun toward the ground. To hear my  
COLBY (cont)  
mother tell the story, it was one of the  
few times my father was ever afraid.  
No, petrified. He froze. At the  
last minute, the amused instructor took  
control and landed the aircraft.

My father got out of the plane, furious  
at his own weakness and at the chortling  
pilot who exposed it. It was a  
kind of public embarrassment,  
a humiliation that burned so deeply  
in the pit of his stomach, that  
he jerked the pilot out of his  
seat and threw him to the ground  
so hard the smile fell from his face.

I mention this because I have made  
a connection, or the jabbing about  
in my brain has made it for me.

Colby gets up from the chair.

COLBY (cont)  
Imagine the bright lights of a carnival,  
the jammed thoroughfares filled with  
thousands. I'm maybe twelve or thirteen  
and am standing in line with my  
father waiting for the next car to  
free up on the roller coaster. Mother  
has no interest. For that matter,  
neither do I.

Carnival rides scare me. Why, I don't  
know, but they do. They provide no  
joy. I squirm, close my eyes,  
scream along with the other riders  
but not out of any sense of pleasure.  
It's a scream of pure panic.

My father knew this. My mother, too.  
She never pushed me to ride, but  
my father did. He got a perverse  
thrill taking me on the loop to loop,  
the drop, the roller coaster. A  
spitefulness in him relished my

discomfort and I hated him for it.

COLBY (cont)

Had I been older and stronger and more confident I would win, I would have jerked him off that carnival ride and thrown him to the ground so hard his glee would drop from his face.

(Beat.)

I never knew before why he did that. Now, I do. He was tired of torturing himself for his own fears and instead tortured me with mine. Parental prerogative, I suppose. Parental perk. Some parents live their fantasies through their children, others feel better only when their children feel worse. Mother was not that way and spent her entire life putting me on a pedestal I did not deserve. It was a way of compensating for dear old dad, a way of evening things out as if raising children was some mathematical formula.

It isn't of course and the scars remain.

The sound of the drill. Colby looks up toward the sound. He appears rejuvenated, hopeful.

COLBY (cont)

I'm thinking this is the one. Bore a little hole, find the culprit, take it out with the precision of a...surgeon, patch me up, and send me on my way. I don't deserve another outcome. I deserve to be one of the ones stamped "Cured." Live long and prosper. Pick your happy ending.

The drill stutters, the sound grows ominous and stops. Colby's hope sags as he looks up.

COLBY (cont)

Did I do something? Vital  
COLBY (cont)  
signs give somebody a start?  
I'm okay. Pass that along.  
I'm making do, just get this  
fucking business over with,  
will ya?

(Beat.)

I didn't mean that. I'm calm,  
really. I'm under control. I could  
burst into song at any minute. A  
happy tune.

He dances sprightly about the stage.

COLBY (cont)  
La, de, da, de da. La, de,  
de, de, dum.

He stops.

COLBY (cont)  
See? Calm. As. Can. Be.  
Calmer, even.

He stands to attention and walks a straight line, careful  
to keep his balance.

COLBY (cont)  
It's the calm you need when the  
cops pull you over.

"Been drinking?"

Nope.

"Pretty hard to miss a pink Lincoln  
weaving across the double lines."

Straight as an arrow.

"You went over the curb and knocked  
down a dozen mailboxes."

I don't think so.

"Smashed a dozen mailboxes."

COLBY (cont)

I love my car.

"How come you don't have any clothes on, mister?"

What?

"Where's your license?"

In my pants.

"And they are?"

At Morgan's house.

"Who's Morgan?"

A scuba diver, an adventurer. We were planning our future while doing a little work on my car.

The "cop" looks into the Lincoln.

"Looks like you tore out the back seat."

A minor repair. I got a little warm and rinsed off with a hose. Hot out here, don't you think?

"Looks like you got about a hundred pounds of marijuana where that seat used to be."

I don't see anything.

"You didn't see the mailboxes either. What'd you do, get hot drying those plants? Is that why you rinsed off? Or were you washing away evidence?"

I think I should talk to my lawyer.



COLBY (cont)

"You can talk to him at the station."

Am I under arrest?

"Big time, young fella. Big time."

Colby addresses the audience.

COLBY (cont)

On the other hand, well-connected fathers in small town America can come in very handy. In my particular circumstance, because of a lawyer my father kept on retainer after the blind man fell down the stairs of the Bierstubber, breaking his arm and two ribs. Attorney Willard Muncie found witnesses at the bar that night who swore that the man was not only blind, but blind drunk. Before the case went to trial, the blind man saw the light and settled his suit for ten cents on the dollar.

I called my father from the police station, who then called Willard who got dressed at midnight and came down to see me all tucked up behind bars.

Neither one of us was happy. From what Willard said, neither were my parents.

"Should I know the truth?" Willard asked like any good attorney.

We've got them where we want them, I told him.

Willard sat as if pushed down, world  
COLBY (cont)  
weight making him shorter. "I'd  
like to hear how this ends."

False arrest. They pulled me over  
for being drunk. They locked me up  
for indecent exposure.

"And speeding and reckless driving  
and marijuana possession," Willard  
added, mulling over what I'd tossed  
his way. "If I can get the false  
arrest to stick, they can't legally  
look in the backseat. No look, no  
drugs; no drugs, no jail." A  
conspiratorial flicker flashed from  
behind Willard's dark eyes. "This  
calls for an offensive."

Meaning?

"We sue for damages. Your name means  
something in this town. You can't  
be dragged around in the mud."

My father's name means something.

"Same damn thing. One question,"  
Willard said, leaning forward.  
"What the hell were you doing with  
all that grass?"

Selling it. That's how I'm paying  
my way through college.

The lights dim.

End Act one

Act 2

Setting: Same

Time: Two hours later

At rise: The shrill sound of the drill abruptly stops.

COLBY  
I'm bored. Get it?

He chuckles.

COLBY (cont)  
I don't know what I'm  
laughing about. This is  
one hell of a terrible thing.  
(Beat.)  
Who deserves this? Not me.  
Granted, I did have a firearm  
on school property and it, and  
I, were both loaded. No contesting  
that.

The drill spins again.

COLBY (cont)  
But is that any reason to go  
there...

The drill stops. A light shines down from front center stage.

COLBY (cont)  
...frontal lobe is serious business.  
It's like lobotomy, man.

Colby looks into the light as it glares down into his eyes.

COLBY (cont)  
I thought we had an agreement.  
You could use my head like a  
putting green and move the  
pin anywhere you wanted, but  
back off when it comes to my  
personality.

The light goes out.

COLBY (cont)

Thank you very much. I mean,  
I want to come out of this  
resembling something like the  
man I was before. Witty. Smart.  
Don't drill it all away.

(Beat.)

Please?

Colby's suspiciously cautious as he backs away.

COLBY (cont)

I'll see that you all get  
a big tip if you don't screw  
up.

He can't keep his eyes off the newest hole as he slides  
over to the piano and sits. He pecks out a few notes.  
Stops at the revelation.

COLBY (cont)

I know why this piano's here.  
It's just like the one that  
fell out the back of the truck!  
Why didn't I think of that before?

He's up on his feet.

COLBY (cont)

It was mid-week and I'd just  
made my deliveries to the frat  
houses. Wednesday night was  
Sigma Chi, Thursday was Delta  
House. I don't remember the  
others, but I made the loop dropping  
off nickel bags just like  
delivering pizzas. In fact, that's  
where I got my idea. If I was  
going to push a little weed  
to further my college education,  
I wanted to cultivate clients  
least likely to attract the law:  
frat boys who ordered in everything,  
why not a little recreational smoke?

COLBY (cont)

I never drove my pink Lincoln on deliveries. Since Willard not only won my suit against the police and got me three-thousand dollars in emotional damages to boot, that car kept a low profile. I took part of the money and bought an old pickup. No point pushing my luck when pushing the Mary Jane, which you may wonder how I got my hands on.

(Beat.)

I picked it. Out along the railroad tracks it grows wild. The railroad men planted it themselves to keep the rail beds from washing away while they were pushing west. The northeast corner of my parents land bordered the railroad. One day hunting for my mother's lost goat, I found a match made in heaven: more than a thousand marijuana plants and my unpaid tuition. I'd pick, dry, package, and deliver. Complicated only by smoking some myself and succumbing to the loonies. As in said piano borrowed from Professor Jenkins house.

Jenkins was a campus famous; a weird little man with a wife and son who couldn't keep his hands off the boys in his Whitman seminars. Not that he'd molest them in class. He'd single one out, invite him for a beer at the Bierstubber, get friendly, then invite them back to his house for a sauna in the basement.

I was never invited, but Holcomb was. Holcomb the naïve who stripped

down and crawled inside the wooden  
COLBY (cont)  
box filled with hot rocks and a  
hotter Jenkins whose wife washed  
the dishes upstairs and cared for  
her son.

Mrs. Jenkins in her own way was  
also a campus famous. Following  
her husband's instructions, she'd change  
into driving slippers before getting  
behind the wheel of her car. The  
routine repeated when she stepped  
inside her spotless house where  
miles of plastic runner separated  
foot from carpet.

Re-pressed and de-pressed.

I felt so sorry for her I once left a  
nickel bag behind the screen door  
complete with rolling papers and  
a book of matches. It never dawned  
on me she still couldn't figure  
out what to do to find a little  
happiness.

He walks back to the piano.

COLBY (cont)  
A football player brought charges  
against the professor and the university  
quietly showed him the door. I heard he  
ended up selling men's clothes in  
a department store in Omaha.

Mrs. Jenkins committed suicide. The  
note she left read, "My only claim  
to fame was that Johnny Carson and  
I were born in the same Nebraska town."

Colby plays a few notes of the Tonight's show theme song.

COLBY (cont)  
Here's Johnny!

The light shines again from the frontal spot. It moves left, right, front, back.

COLBY (cont)

Screw.

The spot focuses on one place for the longest time.

COLBY (cont)

You found something?

He approaches the spot eagerly.

COLBY (cont)

What is it?

He scrunches his shoulders and ducks.

COLBY (cont)

Hey, I don't think I like that.

He bows and sways as if attacked by a swinging blade.

COLBY (cont)

I guess you didn't hear. I.  
Don't. Like. That.

(Beat.)

Hey!

(Beat.)

What's it take to get you to  
pay attention?

Desperate, he looks around and finds what looks like a broom handle. He grabs it and swings, jabs, and generally fences with the light until out of breath.

The light hasn't changed. A grim Colby struggles for air.

COLBY (cont)

I'm about to kick your ass,  
you know that? Once I get my  
second wind..

The light widens.

COLBY (cont)

Giving up?

The light widens more. Colby's demeanor improves.

The light widens even more. Colby beams. He twirls the broom handle and shuffles his feet; a snappy version of Fred Astaire dancing "Putting on My Top Hat."

Suddenly, the light narrows in focus. Colby becomes rigid just as suddenly. He taps the handle on the floor then uses the other end as a microphone.

COLBY (cont)

All right, all right, children.  
This is Principal Colby with  
a few announcements before we  
say our Pledge of Allegiance and  
get the day started.

Mrs. Peterson's class will not  
be going on the field trip to  
the hybrid seed farm this morning  
on account of the threat of  
tornadoes. The trip will be  
rescheduled when the weather  
improves. The same goes for  
the afternoon softball games,  
play rehearsal, and detention  
for those making up work.

I know it looks bright and sunny  
out, but believe me, a storm is  
coming. Have a good day, everyone.  
Remember mommy and daddy in  
your prayers.

The light narrows again. Colby is a mixture of delight and surprise.

COLBY (cont)

You will? You'll really  
marry me? Really? I can't  
believe it.

Again the light narrows. Colby snaps to attention and salutes.

COLBY (cont)



One of my regrets is that I  
was never in the military

COLBY (cont)

learning discipline, marksmanship,  
and career skills that would  
serve me for life as an electrician.

The light goes out. Colby seems to not know where he is.  
He gathers himself.

COLBY (cont)

The possibility that I will  
remember very little about who  
I am after the operation bothers  
me. What can I do about it but  
work the old synapses before I'm  
derailed?

(Beat.)

My grandfather was an engineer  
on the Atchison, Topeka and  
Santa Fe. He rode the rails  
from Kansas City to Chicago  
until he retired with a gold  
watch and died in his sleep.  
He once bought a new car that he kept  
in his garage and never drove  
in the rain. If he was coming  
to my parent's house for lunch  
and the sky was cloudy, he  
would cancel. If my parents  
drove to his house and interrupted  
the lunch grandma was preparing,  
she'd stop cooking instead of  
inviting us to join them. My  
father said it was because of  
the depression. Grandpa never  
had enough and wasn't giving  
anything away.

(Beat.)

I painted his kitchen once and  
he paid me five dollars.

(Beat.)

Reluctantly.

(Beat.)

Driving to his funeral, mother  
asked me if I was disappointed  
that grandpa never gave me a

hug. I didn't know he was supposed to.

COLBY (cont)

(Beat.)

Grandma lived to be ninety-five. My other grandparents lived to over one-hundred without anymore second floor tosses. That was a freak event blamed on a chemical imbalance. That was my first diagnosis: chemical imbalance. I'd have headaches and mood swings. My medicine cabinet looked like a pharmacy and I wasn't feeling any better.

(Beat.)

"Be patient. We'll try something else" was the typical line. And, I went along while my face grew to twice its size and my skin turned red. Friends couldn't recognize me, or if they could, they spun the other way. I didn't blame them. Who wants to be around a dope-head unless he's the one giving the party which brings me back to the piano rolling down the street.

(Beat.)

It was an accident, is all I can say. You've probably used that excuse yourself when you could think of no other response. The difference is that this really was an accident. Holcomb wanted to chop that piano into little pieces. He even brought along an axe and sat there sharpening it as we smoked a couple of joints, hatching our plan which started out as a beheading.

(Beat.)

Holcomb was that pissed that Jenkins had wandering hands. Not that anything happened before Holcomb burst naked through the sauna's door, but the idea that it might have produced shivers. Holcomb

wanted his pound of flesh and as  
with the retrieval of his father's

COLBY (cont)

prized fishing pole, he called on  
me for expert advice.

(Beat.)

Beheading is tricky, I told him,  
recounting the aunt who never spoke  
to me again after I botched killing  
the Thanksgiving turkey. Must have  
been the axe's shadow or the sun  
hitting it just right causing the  
damn bird to flinch. Took three  
whacks to get its head off what  
with all the flapping and squawking  
and blood squirting all over my  
aunt. No, I said. Let's think of  
something else.

"Like?"

Set his car on fire. Little ragtop  
Volkswagen ought to burn to the ground  
in thirty minutes.

"You basing the timing on the Caddy?"

Yes, I am. The Cadillac—twice the  
size of a meager VW—burned for nearly  
an hour. I woke up in the middle of  
the night and thought I'd slept through  
an airplane crash landing in my parent's  
driveway. The vinyl-covered seats and  
thirty gallons of gasoline sent flames  
and black smoke fifty feet in the air.  
Maybe it was a Piper Cub not pulling  
out of a stall? But no, the fire  
was the result of a cigar left burning  
in the ashtray. The tray got hot  
and set the dash on fire. The seats  
caught next, the headliner, the gas  
tank and tires.

(Beat.)

It was the last cigar my father ever  
smoked.

"Let's go back to the piano," Holcomb said.

"Jenkins loves that piano. I want to steal that piano and hack it into little pieces."  
COLBY (cont)

I lit another joint. Fuzzy and warm little bees seemed to fly in and out of my ears. The piano it is, I finally said and started the truck.

Jenkins lived on the eastside of campus halfway up one of the highest points in Kansas. We made sure the family was not at home and like delivery men who only worked at night, backed into the drive. I'd brought along rope from my cowboy days, tossed a loop around that piano and with Holcomb's help, tugged away.

Halfway to the pickup, Holcomb doubled over and fell to his knees in tear-producing laughter.

What's so damn funny?

He pointed to the piano. "Yamaha," he said. "Yamaha."

Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha.

(Beat.)

Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha,  
Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha.

Colby drops to the floor in hysterics. He rolls to one side, his sides splitting.

COLBY (cont)

Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha, Yamaha.

Ohhhhh, God. Stop, please. You're killing me.

Colby crawls to his knees, wiping away the tears. He pulls in a controlling breath and, finally, stands.

COLBY (cont)

So much for stealth.

(Beat.)

I got Holcomb to his feet and

COLBY (cont)

the piano, whose name I will not mention due to uncontrollable laughter from smoking all that weed, into the back of the truck. Most of it. A foot or two hung out so the tailgate wouldn't close. While I pulled out under the glare of a street light, Holcomb took the rope and tied the piano securely to the hitch.

(Beat.)

At least, he said he did. We drove one block before our cargo slid out the back with a...

Colby bangs on the keyboard.

COLBY (cont)

...terrible crash, headed downhill before sideswiping a row of parked cars and coming to rest in an intersection where, last seen, a group of joyously stoned men carried the remains toward their frat house.

(Beat.)

I thought you wanted to hack it into pieces with your axe.

Holcomb rolled a joint the size of a Cuban cigar and disappeared behind a cloud of smoke. "We make a good team," he said. "Incompetent, but good. Let's never change."

(Beat.)

Risky business predicting the future. We found that out when Holcomb rode his motorcycle into oncoming traffic.

(Beat.)

I always wondered if he told me the truth about Jenkins and that night in the sauna or if his death

really was an accident.

The light appears front and center. Colby looks up, resigned.

COLBY (cont)

I think they're about to get serious. I wonder how I can get them the message that I've changed my mind. Hey, up there! Plug up the holes. I'm done. I promise to be a good boy. No more shenanigans, no more...

The light goes out, the drill commences.

COLBY (cont)

...no more exploring. I can tell you where the problem is. It's not in my head, it's here.

He points to his chest.

COLBY (cont)

I have a black heart. A vengeful black heart. Not of my own making, but I've had to live with it all the same. So, if you'll shut off...

The drill stops.

COLBY (cont)

...that drill.

(Beat.)

I'll explain what happened that afternoon in school. It all began with that new substitute teacher who looked just like my former wife and brought back too many memories. Painful memories, and as you know, I can't stand pain.

(Beat.)

How is it the distance between marriage and divorce—regardless of how many hours or days or years it lasted—contains the same amount of heartache? It doesn't seem

possible, but talk to anyone who sailed those waters and you'll hear

COLBY (cont)

the same anguish, the same shock, the same sense of failure. It's a hole some never dig out of. I did, but it took years of analysis to convince me that none of it was my fault. Was it all Alexandra's? In a way.

(Beat.)

She wanted to get married. I didn't care one way or the other. The critical point, according to my psychiatrist, is that she wanted to get married for the wrong reason. It wasn't so much that I was hanging from the tree of possibilities and had to be plucked, no, it was that Alexandra had to escape from the nut house she knew as her family. Marriage, she figured, was the best way out, so she spiffed up her already stunning looks, cranked up the charm, and brought me to my knees mumbling words of proposal.

Her father wanted to know how I was going to support his one and only while finishing up my last semester of college. Same way I'm supporting myself now, I told him: I work nights.

We went down in the basement, found a rafter-hidden bottle, and clinked glasses a time or two. My fate was sealed. Within a year of burying my father-in-law, my divorce was final. I kept women at a distance for most of the time thereafter. We'd share some good times, but nothing serious was ever again on the books. I spent all my time and energy earning my degrees and then putting them to good use at a middle-school where I worked my way up from sixth

grade teacher to vice-principal  
to, finally, principal.

COLBY (cont)

When my father died followed  
soon thereafter by my mother, I  
decided to create a memorial for  
them. I called it Colby's Corner.  
It was little more than a teak bench  
resting on top of cedar mulch and  
stone, sitting in a quiet corner  
of the school grounds under a lush  
Japanese maple.

I paid for all of it myself as well as the  
annual upkeep. In the morning before  
classes and after school, I would  
walk out to the bench, sit, and  
when an eight, ten, or twelve year  
old youngster would come around,  
I would give them words to live by.  
Words that I never got from my parents,  
and since I never had children of my  
own, words that I could spare.

Colby picks up a scroll.

COLBY (cont)

I've worked on it on and off for  
years. It's a blueprint for the  
future. Road signs for the highway  
that, if followed, will deposit one  
of my little tikes behind the white  
picket fence surrounding the yard  
containing the dog and two-point-five  
children complete with loving spouse.

(Beat)

I was giving away happiness. It was  
my calling. My new purpose.

He unfurls the scroll.

COLBY (cont)

I organized the material so as  
not to confuse. There was the  
do, don't section.

(Beat.)



Don't pick your nose. Don't hit your sister. Don't lie to your teachers.

COLBY (cont)

Do your homework. Do your share around the house. Do come back to Colby's Corner for a chat.

I had a section on how to be a good friend. Listen when spoken to. Don't always seem right. Be generous in giving as well as receiving. Don't rat out your buddies.

And then there was my section on respecting your classmates, your parents, your teachers, your school, your town, your country, yourself.

He refurls the scroll and tosses it away.

COLBY (cont)

Worthless. Every word, worthless. I thought I had all the relevant aspects of growing up covered, but the important ones slipped through the cracks like the little boy with the red hand.

(Beat.)

He was eight. He was sitting on my bench picking his nose when I told him to stop. It was then I noticed the red, slightly swollen hand. His father, he said, threw the baseball back too hard.

(Beat.)

I gave him some advice on respecting his father and the game of baseball and told him to tell his...no, to ask, his father...not to toss the ball back with such speed. The boy turned all smiles. Finally advice he could understand, advice he could live with. He came back to Colby's Corner the next day and said dad didn't listen. Didn't listen?

The boy shook his head sending a

stream of clear-water tears rolling  
down his fine-skinned cheeks.

COLBY (cont)

(Beat.)

I took his puffy, red hand in mine  
and felt the sting of the ball  
through the glove. I winced in  
pain and saw as clearly as if it were  
yesterday the ball drop to the ground  
and heard my father yell, "The runner's  
safe! You've got to catch the damn  
ball you idiot!"

(Beat.)

My father was a hard thrower, too. Even  
his words came out hot.

(Beat.)

"Idiot."

(Beat.)

"Stupid idiot."

(Beat.)

"Don't you know anything?"

(Beat.)

"Can't you learn anything?"

(Beat.)

"Get the hell out of my sight."

The memory jars. Colby collects himself, then steers his  
thoughts elsewhere.

COLBY (cont)

And then there was the ten-year  
old girl with yellow curly hair  
that should have framed big blue  
eyes but instead covered the bruises  
on her small, round face. Social  
workers went to her house and  
came away with nothing.

(Beat.)

Her parents were experts at excuses.  
But I knew the truth. You can  
only tell the truth on that Colby  
Corner bench. It's the lesson I  
learned there: You have to tell  
the truth even when I would prefer  
not to hear how some of my children  
lived.

Sex abuse. Drug abuse. Beatings.  
Shootings. Cops at the front

COLBY (cont)

door. Sirens on the way to the  
emergency room. No love. No  
kindness. No care. Or, not enough  
until I went to the bank and cashed  
a check for a thousand dollars,  
ten of which I gave to each kid who  
sat on my bench to talk. Before  
long, I had lines past the swing  
set. Everybody had a gruesome story  
that tore a piece of my heart.

When I ran out of money, I cashed  
another check and then another. In  
the spring, I was spending most of  
my days at Colby's Corner—a full eight  
hours listening to children who  
now came from schools out of the  
district, which is where the substitute  
who looked like my former wife came  
from. Miss Stonington, her name  
was. Carol Stonington. Carol the  
rock. Carol the heartless.

The drill screams in his ears. Colby winces, then looks  
toward the ceiling.

COLBY (cont)

SPEAKING OF HEARTLESS!

The drill grows louder, more intense. Colby lifts himself  
up to his fullest height, bracing against the onslaught on  
his skull.

The drilling stops. Starts. Stops. Starts. Stops. With  
each change, Colby bobs and weaves around the stage.

The drilling starts again. A fear grows as Colby senses  
the end for him is near. He rallies against it, running to  
the piano. He jumps onto the bench and plays a rousing  
rendition of the Calvary Charge.

COLBY (cont)

I'll kick your ass all the  
way across the Kansas River

and all the way back again.  
Hear me? Hear?

The drilling stops.

Colby stops playing, soaking in the silence. He climbs off the bench with a new found bravado.

COLBY (cont)

There are times when the only option for survival is to confront the enemy.

(Beat.)

There are other times when a slight of hand is required.

He reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out a one hundred dollar bill.

COLBY (cont)

In this case a hundred bucks.

Colby the magician manages a not so slight of hand. The bill disappears, then shows up again.

COLBY (cont)

Seems I had a little problem that I had not anticipated. My kiddies were so chatty...see?

He goes to the table and pulls a stack of books from the bottom shelf. He holds up the books.

COLBY (cont)

Every page blank and now, every page filled with my notes of sorrow. The children didn't need my words of wisdom, they needed someone to listen, someone to record their slights and hurts and pains. I did that.

He drops the books to the floor.

COLBY (cont)

I got writer's cramp.

(Beat.)

And I got teachers sitting on my bench

wondering why their students spent  
more time outside with me than in class;

COLBY (cont)

wondering why no one got into trouble  
for being late; wondering why I  
should not be reported to the superintendent  
of schools for irresponsible behavior.

(Beat.)

That's where this came in.

Colby holds up the bill again.

COLBY (cont)

One hundred smackeros for keeping teachers  
quiet. I gave the bus drivers fifty  
for the same silence and thirty-five to  
the crossing guards and fifteen for  
the janitors with the proviso that  
they could keep any student tens found  
on the gymnasium floor, no questions  
asked unless a locker was pried open  
and the cash stolen. No one was to  
take advantage of the children. That  
was the rule. In and around Colby's  
Corner, children were to be prized  
and their ramblings recorded.

(Beat.)

I was like some Margaret Mead in some  
new country, learning the language of  
the natives and jotting down every  
word, every accusation, every inadequacy  
that burned deep into their small hearts.

(Beat.)

They were my inadequacies. My failings,  
my fears about growing up. I was  
principal of a school filled with little  
me's and I wanted everyone of them to  
grow up, not little images of me. Far  
from it. I wanted them to grow up  
normal.

(Beat.)

What a responsibility. The weight of  
it was crushing. What is a man to do  
when so many depend on my decisions?  
I was feeling presidential. No, more  
than that. God must feel these tingles.

(Beat.)

Regardless, I was sitting in my

COLBY (cont)

living room, drinking a Manhattan, worrying about my operation when the doorbell rang. On the other side of the screen stood Carol Stonington.

"I think we have a problem," she blurted out. "Something quiet serious."

Presidents give nothing away when answering. Oh? I said.

"I'd rather not talk about it out here. May I come in?"

It's nearly midnight.

She stepped inside and closed the door I thought rather seductively. I held up the whiskey in my glass. Drink?

"Is that your excuse?"

Sorry?

"For not attending the PTA meeting. You're home drinking? I've never seen parents so angry."

There's always something, I reminded her. Always a rough spot needing patched.

"They chopped up a wooden bench," she told me. "Whacked it into a thousand pieces the parents swung around like clubs."

Was it teak?

"How would I know?"

The wood's heavy, oily.

(Beat.)

Where did they find this bench?

"I didn't ask. What difference does it make?"

COLBY (cont)

All the difference in the world if it's my bench.

(Beat.)

You seem to know everything and only a substitute. Where's my full-time staff? Why isn't one of them here? Defending me to the death, no doubt.

"They locked themselves in the cafeteria. The mob was angry."

Mob?

"What have you been doing to their children?"

Doing? DOING? What's that supposed to mean?

"Molestation."

You've got to be kidding.

"The possibility of rape."

You must be out of your mind.

"How do you explain the money? That's what the parents want to know. Where'd all those kids get all that money?"

I gave it to them.

"To keep them quiet?"

On the contrary, to keep them talking. I paid the faculty to keep quiet and the bus drivers and the janitors and the...

"The parents don't want a lengthy court battle. They want this entire nasty mess to go away...and you with it."

I'm not going anywhere. I have a

purpose and it's on that bench in Colby's Corner.

COLBY (cont)

"The parents seem to think a trial would do terrible damage. They won't put the children through that.

(Beat.)

"I have with me your letter of resignation drafted by the parents. Sign it. Never set foot in that school again. Never come close to any of those children."

You don't know what you're asking me. I can't just walk away from Colby's Corner.

"I don't know any Colby's Corner. I do know that if you don't do as asked, formal charges will be brought against you in the morning. You could spend the rest of your life behind bars, Mr. Colby. Do you know what prisoners do to pedophiles behind bars?"

Do I look like Professor Jenkins to you?

"Who?"

Jenkins. Played the piano with one hand, diddled the boys with the other.

(Beat.)

I do not play the piano, Miss Stonington. I do not molest children.

(Beat.)

You're disgusting, do you know that?

"Will you sign the letter?"

No.

"Will you stay away from your school?"

I will be there in the morning, bright and early.

"Then so will the police. Is that



what you want?"

COLBY (cont)

No, it is not what I want.

An idea flashes in his mind.

COLBY (cont)

Wait a second. You're going back to the mob, correct? You're going back to the asylum.

"The parents are waiting for your response, yes."

Tell them I will bring my letter of resignation to the school in the morning at which time I will clean out my office and leave as if it were a normal day. There will be no angry parents, no police, nothing to disrupt the children. If they agree to that, I will agree to their wishes. Will you deliver that message?

"I will."

Good.

(Beat.)

I have a spare hundred in my wallet. Since you remind me of my former wife, would you consent to taking off your clothes and..

Colby's head jerks left as if slapped. He rubs the sting on the side of his face.

COLBY (cont)

I'll take that as a no.

(Beat.)

One last thing, Miss Stonington. There is a boy in one of your classes, Bobby Ingram. A few weeks back, the little tike walked around showing everyone his sore hand. Hurt it playing catch with

his dad.

(Beat.)

COLBY (cont)

I want to give my resignation  
over to Bobby Ingram's father.  
No one else. Can you arrange that?  
Good. Very good, in fact. Until  
tomorrow then. Good night.

The lights snap to black.

End Act 2/Scene 1

Act 2/Scene 2

Setting: Same.

Time: 30-minutes later.

At rise: Colby has a half full whiskey bottle in one hand.

COLBY

Drinking before noon can be pure joy if one has the time to savor it, but my last day at school was not one of those days. I was a busy man.

Colby sips.

COLBY (cont)

First, I went to Colby's Corner. The bench was gone, the Japanese maple cut down. It looked like a typical patch that someone might want to turn into a garden.

(Beat.)

To me, it looked like a graveyard. Barren. Cold. Lifeless. There was no doubt who'd committed the violence and no doubt why the parents wanted to keep me silent. Without me, the tots had no one to talk to, no one to keep a record of what it feels like to be small and insignificant and powerless. All the things as a child I felt and was reminded of on a daily basis even though my father seldom said a word. It was his quick look that said it. A look intended to send me away or shut me up. His narrowed, hard eyes said, "Colby, you are small and insignificant and powerless."

Colby drinks again to help refocus his thoughts.

COLBY (cont)

It's a wonder I stayed in his

COLBY (cont)

house as long as I did. It's a wonder I didn't run off and join the circus as a midget or a clown with sparkly tears painted permanently down my face. It's wonder the children in this school don't do the same thing. It's a wonder circus performers aren't all ten year olds playing to audiences of their parents.

(Beat.)

In a sense, that's what happens, isn't it? We do the damnest things for a fleeting moment of approval. We drive pink Lincolns and ride horses out of chutes and become principals of schools and make phone calls to our parents in the middle of the night asking questions we already know the answer to just to hear the voice on the other end say something nice. Is that too much to ask?

(Beat.)

It might be.

(Beat.)

Hey! Notice me. I survived. I grew up. I have a wife and a job and debts like the rest of the world. Time ticked along. My marriage flopped, my drinking became a problem, my job was in jeopardy. All that advice you kept to yourself when I was a kid might come in handy now. Toss me a zinger, will you, dad? Point the way so that even if I fall on my ass that I can tell the regulars at the bar that my old man once took me aside and said...

(Beat.)

That's all I ever wanted. I wanted to be able to say to someone around me, I didn't care who, but I wanted to be able to say that I was on the brink of collapse, the brink of despair, the brink of ruin and the

only thing that kept me on my feet  
were those sage words spooled out  
COLBY (cont)  
by my father just for me. He said..  
(Beat.)  
He said..  
(Beat.)  
He said nothing.

Colby swallows a long, painful drink.

COLBY (cont)  
Not one wise word.  
(Beat.)  
Even on his deathbed as mother and  
I stood nearby, he remained tight  
lipped. His old friends trooped  
through the house to say their  
goodbyes and share a nervous laugh.  
Five days I stayed in the house  
giving mother a break, bringing dad  
water and helping him to the  
bathroom. The house was no longer  
surrounded by horses and peacocks.  
My parents sold the land to  
developers years ago. My mother  
wrote me a letter saying she'd  
stood in the kitchen looking out  
the window as the developer burned  
the barns making way for the bulldozers.

The house now stood at one end of  
a suburban development. I walked  
the main road through it down to  
the railroad tracks. A little league  
baseball field stood where the  
marijuana once flourished. A few  
kids lost balls in the hot Kansas  
sun and giggled around the bases.

When I got back to the house,  
mother lay on the sofa in an exhausted  
sleep. It was just me and dad. His  
face held no expression as he  
stretched one thin arm over the  
hospital bed's metal railings. I  
held his frail hand and bent

close, knowing this was my  
last chance to hear what I'd

COLBY (cont)

waited so long for.

(Beat.)

"Thanks for coming," he said. "Your  
mother appreciates it."

The disappointment still digs. Colby puts down the bottle  
then reaches behind the piano and drags out a full canvas  
carry-all bag.

He opens it and takes out a spear gun. He puts it on the  
chair.

COLBY (cont)

Those were the last words he ever  
spoke in my presence. One last  
jab. "Your mother appreciates it."  
He could have added, "I, on the  
other hand, could give a damn."

He again reaches into the bag and removes a SCUBA mask and  
fins. He drops them on the floor.

COLBY (cont)

When I let go of my father's  
hand, there was a thousand dollar  
bill rolled into mine.

Colby jerks the top of a wetsuit from the bag and drops it.

COLBY (cont)

If he loved anything, he loved  
money and was very generous with  
it. We never wanted for anything.  
Cars. Trips. Name it and it was  
there.

(Beat.)

Cold cash. It is a soothing balm.  
Just ask the children who sat on  
my bench. Some of them lying to  
get their hands on the ten dollars;  
others telling the truth only  
to lie when they got home after  
their parents grilled them, no  
doubt. A child will say anything

to avoid punishment.

COLBY (cont)

"Colby? Ya, he touched me. Ya, he did and gave me money not to tell."

In a rage, Colby kicks the books he's filled with children's confessions all about the stage.

COLBY (cont)

Never have a child. That's the lesson. Or, more to the point: never have a parent who doesn't want you. Instead, pack for Alaska.

Colby pulls the wetsuit bottoms out of the bag and struggles to get one leg on over his pants.

COLBY (cont)

Put some distance between you and the anguish.

He manages one leg to his knees, then stops from exhaustion.

COLBY (cont)

And, when you see your opportunity to strike back, take it.

He digs into the bottom of the bag and hauls out a handgun.

COLBY (cont)

You'll want firepower. You'll want to be able to stop all the bad memories clawing at your brain.

He looks up at the ceiling and raises the gun at one of the light sources. The light flickers.

Colby fires the gun. All the lights flash. Colby spins, firing at them all uncontrollably, yet managing to shoot out every one.

Like a gunslinger, he blows the smoke away from the end of the barrel then trades the handgun for the spear gun.

COLBY (cont)  
Nice to have a little peace and quiet.

A knock is heard at the door.

COLBY (cont)  
I said it was nice to have a little peace and quiet.

The knock continues. Colby connects the dots.

COLBY (cont)  
Who's there?  
(Beat.)  
Ingram is that you coming for this?

Colby takes a letter from his pocket.

COLBY (cont)  
My resignation.

Colby looks out over the audience.

COLBY (cont)  
I know you're out there, Ingram.

Colby waves the letter.

COLBY (cont)  
I'll wait right here for you to come and get it.

Colby listens for a sign from his prey. The knock is heard again. Colby tosses the letter to the floor.

COLBY (cont)  
Why don't you come in?

Colby raises the spear gun into firing position and aims it at the imaginary door.

COLBY (cont)  
What are you some idiot? Some



kind of stupid idiot? Don't  
you know anything? Can't you  
learn anything?

The door creaks open.

COLBY (cont)  
Get the hell out of my sight.

Colby fires the spear. Cautiously, he approaches the  
"fallen" man. Colby bends down for a closer look.

COLBY (cont)  
Dead?  
(Beat.)  
No?

He nudges the "body" with the toe of his shoe.

COLBY (cont)  
You should never hurt your son.  
Never. All those small slights  
add up and when he becomes a  
man, he might explode and kill  
someone. People will wonder why,  
and I'll have the answer.  
(Beat.)  
Are you listening to me?  
(Beat.)  
Mr. Ingram? Mr. Ingram?

He lays the spear gun down and stands, taking in his  
surroundings as if for the first time.

COLBY (cont)  
I want to thank you for coming,  
Mr. Ingram. You've helped me  
settle a few things.

The sound of a drill drones in the background.

COLBY (cont)  
Thank you for coming.

Colby sits in the chair staring out at the audience.

COLBY (cont)

Thank you for coming.

Lights and sounds snap off. The End.