

SCENE 1

The stage is bare save for three black cubes set together in a line across DSC. They are covered in three layers of fabric. From bottom to top: white, black, green.

S.C. “Sugar Sugar” by the Archies. :01 - :40

L.C. Lights in the house fade to black.

S.C. Fade out when Colleen sits on cubes.

L.C. Lights fade up on the greater center stage area at :53 mark in song.

A young , vibrant 60-year old woman, COLLEEN, dressed in black and white clothing, is already dancing “60s” style on stage. She dances exuberantly, playfully, full of life and joy.

As the song fades she sits on the DSL block facing the audience. She mimes pulling out, eating and reveling in a piece of homemade fudge. Then addresses the audience.

COLLEEN

Freakin’ A, why does fudge have to be so good? One bite and I’m already thinking, how much of this can I eat and, you know, not be a complete pig? I remember a girlfriend from high school who could, and would, sit down and eat an entire pan of fudge all by herself, in one sitting. Of course, she was skinny. Mmmmmm that was so good. (*Licking fingers*) Nothing like chocolate to get the creative juices flowing.

Mimes putting pan of fudge away behind the blocks. Talks directly to the audience.

So, okay, yes, I’ve been avoiding you. Not completely, but just enough to keep me from putting pen to paper and writing about this. The journey to the page, to this place (*gestures to the stage around her*), has been a long one. But I am here now. I’m on the precipice, about to jump, about to leap into your arms, trusting that you will catch me. Trusting, hoping, giving...all of me.

L.C. Black out. Spotlight on Colleen seated on DSC cube.

She gently caresses the fabric that is now the couch from her living room.

COLLEEN

To know and be known. To love and be loved. To stand tall and be counted for good.

She stands and moves around the blocks as she speaks until she is fully behind them Center.

COLLEEN

To be a conduit for creativity, with no fear, just an open heart, mind and soul, and a willingness to learn...

L.C. Crossfade into blue light, center stage.

No one ever tells you what it's really like. They don't tell you the about the shock that consumes you cell by cell, front to back, top to bottom, like the slow motion, mushroom-cloud explosion of the bomb. They don't tell you about the confounding, dumbfounding disbelief in the moment when you realize...this is really happening, and it's happening now, to me. They don't tell you because they can't. Nothing can prepare a person for the surreal experience of the death of a loved one. Consequently, there is a strange separation of self:

She steps back to a place of observation.

one part watches, observing as if from another dimension, while the other part fights for each precious, lifesaving moment that slips away like glass under clawing fingers.

Cell phone doesn't respond. She throws it down and picks up the cordless house phone, dials.

COLLEEN

Aaarrggghhhh!

S.C. "911. What's your emergency?"

COLLEEN

Hello? Please help, I think my husband is having a heart attack. 4090 E. Cullumber Court, Gilbert. The front door's locked. Right now? Okay.

She leaves to unlock the front door. She returns.

Oh my god! He's not breathing! He's not moving!

She lets the phone drop and backs into observation.

They were my fingers that slipped and punched and slammed down the touchscreen phone. They were my eyes that watched the love of my life dying before me, and I could do nothing to stop it. His heart had stopped. Why did mine still beat?

She begins to turn around slowly, looking for answers in the spiral as she turns. Then stares at the place where her husband was in bed.

It was inconceivable, unbelievable, and untenable. My mind kept asking, "How can I still be here when he is not?" Death, and its comrades in arms, shock and grief, inhabit battlegrounds and invade bedrooms like egalitarian commandos.

S.C. Ambulance siren/Police radio in background, outside.

L.C. Red, blue, white like the spinning colors of a cop car light on back wall. A dark yellow gel fills the acting space.

For forty-five minutes I stood there, staring at the bedroom door numbly watching the parade of policemen, firemen, and paramedics go in and out. Behind closed doors the paramedics worked to revive my husband. I stared. Just there, I thought, on the other side of that door, was my heart and soul, lifeless on the floor.

I was bizarrely calm, outwardly holding it together, following instructions,

S.C. "Ma'am, we need you to stay out here."

politely staying out of their way, (*backing away*) while inside I was quietly cracking apart. (*She doubles over from grief, then look at his bed.*) It was like watching a death scene in a movie with the sound off.

L.C. Lights change to morning, daylight.

Cross down to empty bed.

The next morning came. I felt disconnected; it was hard to stay focused and follow conversations: my brain felt fuzzy.

Pull off green bedspread, fold. Turn and place it ceremoniously on tiered shelf USC.

Yet, the trumpet of responsibility sounded reveille, and it was time to make decisions: pick a casket, choose a mortuary, secure the gravesite, design the grave marker, decide the order and content of the service, the flowers, the when, where, and who...it was like planning a wedding for a dead person who will never enjoy it,

She crosses to the three blocks as the casket for viewing. See Richard in the casket.

and all those who are there, (*looks and grabs the hands of family to right and left*) are not enjoying it. I know why we do it. We do it to comfort ourselves, to honor the deceased, and to create a space for the sharing of grief. We'd been married less than a year. Shock turned to grief, and it engulfed me.

S.C. "Come Away With Me" by Norah Jones.
Fade out at 1:25 seconds.

Exit SL. Reenter from USL, unlock the door, entering the home we shared. Seeing all the photos and reminders of him, she picks up a photo from the dining room buffet DSR and holds it to heart, knees buckle and falls to the floor sobbing. As tears subside, her head looks up at the audience.

It started here, as I lay a crumpled mess on my dining room floor; I would talk to Richard. Whether it was the shock of his death, or the simple comfort I derived in doing so, I talked to him as if he were still alive. He was not only my husband and the love of my life, he was my best friend, and we talked about everything.

Colleen stands to the right of the cubes.

When we first started dating, ours was a long distance romance: he in Arizona and I in California. For the first year-and-a-half we would steal away for weekends whenever we could, but mostly our relationship developed in conversation. We talked on the phone for hours at a time. Often, from the time I would get off work until we went to bed at night,

he was my confidant and I his. By the time we got married, three years later, we figured we talked more than most couples did over 20 years of marriage. He knew me better than anyone.

Today is Valentine's Day, the week before he died.

Colleen moves to stand in front of the right of the three cubes. She is handed a small jewelry box with a card. She opens and reads the card first.

"My dearest Colleen, You have taught me how to "live" every day and to cherish our time. A token of the joy you have given me. Forever yours, Richard.

It is a Swarovski heart necklace, shining brilliantly. She touches the necklace, she is wearing it.

COLLEEN

Oh, my god, honey, its beautiful! Its perfect. Thank you, sweetheart.

They sit on the couch together. She on the right, he to her left.

COLLEEN

You know, you can never leave me. You've completely spoiled me for any other man!

RICHARD

(smiling)

Good.

COLLEEN

He was pretty satisfied with himself on that one.

She stands. Starts pushing a grocery cart to the left and around the cubes.

So, it seemed natural to just keep talking to him. I have to admit, in hindsight, it was funny. You know, in a "we've got a camera hidden in the canned goods, and we're catching all this on tape" game show kind of way. Picture me shopping at the grocery store,

M.C. "As Time Goes By" faint in background from grocery store speakers.

and carrying on a conversation with Richard, out loud, he being conspicuously absent, or laughing at something that only he and I would think funny about canned peas.

RICHARD

Canapé. Something I don't want to drink.

COLLEEN

(laughs)

Okay, that's just disgusting.

RICHARD

(loading more than a few into the cart)

They are on sale. We should get a few.

COLLEEN

(looking into grocery cart at number of cans)

Are you preparing for the Big One, here in Gilbert, Arizona?

M.C. Music fades out.

I could hear his voice so clear in my head. I imagined those around me must have thought I was like one of the poor souls we see patrolling the sidewalks talking intently to people who aren't there. In the days before Bluetooth, this was odd behavior, believe me. The fact that he was no longer physically present didn't seem to matter.

A fearlessness kicked in. My attitude became "after what I've been through, nothing can hurt me – *nothing* can touch this pain." What people thought of me no longer mattered.

I became more authentically me, more real and raw than I had ever allowed myself. I also knew that expressing this pain in a healthy way was important to my healing. I channeled this newfound "can't touch this" courage, and started blogging about it. I called it, "There You Are."

Colleen sits (on B3), at her computer, typing.

"I mowed the lawn today. I know that for many of you, this may not sound like anything to brag about, but considering it's the first time in my life that I have wielded an electric mower, I consider it a feat. God help me if I don't kill that frickin' weed-wacker. I hate that thing! And in this heat. How did he do it in 110 degrees? Richard did this, and all the outside chores around the house, and never complained. Is it possible for my love and esteem of him to grow any stronger? I think it does."

Colleen removes the black cloth from the blocks and folds it up, revealing the white. Crosses USC to shelf, places above the first.

Writing about my daily challenges and conquests, from mowing the lawn to putting up the sunscreens around the house, brought back a sense of balance, equilibrium and personal power that I had lost. In losing my husband, who had become the central focus of my life, I found my center.

She crosses and sits on center of the blocks.

COLLEEN

Living through tragedy brought insights I could never have foreseen. Fair flowers and fierce women bloom when life gives them shit. Pain, it seems, is the manure of magnificence.

I am still learning. It's been ten years since his death, and with every day that passes I recognize, and rely on, many of the changes it induced in me.

M.C. "Thank You, Stars" by Katie Melua. Fades out at after blackout :40 seconds.

I will never be the same person I was before his death, but I don't think I am supposed to be.

L.C. Fade to black.

FADE TO BLACK.

The Dramatists Guild of America was established over 80 years ago, and is the only professional association which advances the interests of playwrights, composers and lyricists writing for the living stage. The Guild has over 6,000 members nationwide, from beginning writers to the most prominent authors represented on Broadway, Off-Broadway and in regional theaters. To learn more about the Dramatists Guild of America, please visit www.dramatistsguild.com