

Chagrin Falls by Mia McCullough © 2006

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The lights come up on a barroom: rustic and old, but clean and presentable enough. We see the back of the bar, as if the audience were serving the drinks. Beyond the bar is an elevated area with several tables. RILEY sits at the bar facing the audience, staring into his beer. IRENE, a pretty, but weather-worn woman in her early forties, stands behind the bar, wearing an apron and talking on the phone.

IRENE

Well, are you a relation of the victim or of the accused?... We've already got family of the victim staying here. I don't like to mix, it makes people uncomfortable. No, I'm not saying you *can't* stay here, I'm saying you shouldn't...

HENRY HARCOURT, a young man in a prison guard's uniform, ENTERS.

HENRY

Hey, Riley.

RILEY

Hey.

HENRY beats his hands on the bar in an arhythmic pattern, waiting for IRENE to get off the phone.

IRENE

Look, I don't play favorites. I book whoever calls first and I stick with it. This time the family of the victim beat you to it. The Chagrin Falls Motel is down the road about three miles. It's just as close to the penitentiary. You want the number? She hung up on me.

HENRY

Who's that?

IRENE

Kin of the accused.

HENRY

Anyone showed up yet?

IRENE

No, but it's a little early. What can I do for you, Henry?

HENRY

Two burgers?

IRENE

All right... Say, you seen Thaddeus today?

HENRY

Nope.

RILEY

Why don't you call over to the house instead of asking every damn person that walks through the door.

IRENE

What if I wake her up? You know she don't sleep more than a few hours a day. Anyhow, he's due at work, right about now. I was just wonderin' where he's been at all day.

RILEY

Even if you knew she wasn't sleepin', you wouldn't call.

IRENE

There some point in upsettin' her, in her state?

RILEY

You ruined a good friendship, is all I'm saying.

IRENE

You know, I'm not going to let you hang around here 24 hours a day if you're going to give me a hard time. You wanna be a pain in the ass, you can go down to McNeally's and sit with the rest of them old bastards.

IRENE EXITS into to the kitchen. HENRY continues to tap on the bar.

RILEY

Will you knock that off.

HENRY stops. He is feeling only slightly

chastised.

HENRY

What's the matter? You got a hangover?

RILEY

Why are you so fucking happy all the time?

HENRY

I don't know. What do I got to be sad about? I got my wife, my friends, a baby on the way, and everyday I get out of jail free.

RILEY shakes his head, bewildered and amused.

RILEY

You still like it over there?

HENRY

It's all right, I guess. They got me on suicide watch for the new guy's last week. He keeps it pretty interesting.

RILEY

What's his name?

HENRY

Jonas Caldwell.

RILEY

What'd he do?

HENRY

Murdered and raped an eight year old girl.

RILEY

Good riddance.

HENRY

I s'pose. So, what'd you do on your first day as a free man?

IRENE

(from offstage)

Hung around here, makin' me crazy.

HENRY

Is that right? What'd they get you, anyway?

IRENE (O.S.)

They didn't get him anything. After thirty years. Nothing.

RILEY

They said they got me somethin'. It just wasn't ready yet.

HENRY

Rumor has it, they got you somethin' real good.

RILEY

By whose standards?

IRENE REENTERS.

IRENE

Well, I'll believe it when I see it.

RILEY

What do I care? It'll just be something stupid to put on the mantel piece or hang on the wall. Remind me that I'm a washed up old man with no way to fill my days.

IRENE

Oh Lord. We're gonna have to find you a hobby right quick.

PATRICE, a petite Asian woman, ENTERS. She has a carry-on bag slung over her shoulders.

IRENE

Hi. Can I help you?

PATRICE

The sign said I should ask for Irene at the bar.

IRENE

That's me.

PATRICE

I have a reservation. The last name is Dougherty.

IRENE

Oh, yeah, right. Hang on a sec. I'll go get the key.

IRENE EXITS. RILEY and HENRY stare at
PATRICE.

Hi. HENRY

Hi. PATRICE

You in town for the execution? HENRY

Yes. PATRICE

Friend of the victim? HENRY

No. I'm a... I'm a journalist. PATRICE

Oh. One of those. HENRY

I guess so. PATRICE

IRENE ENTERS with a key in hand.

Here you go. It's room four. You need help with your bags? IRENE

No. I got it. Do you serve dinner in here? PATRICE

And breakfast, and lunch. IRENE

Is it too early? Is the kitchen open? PATRICE

IRENE

My kitchen is always open. Have a seat, I'll get you a menu. Unless, you'd like to freshen up first.

PATRICE

No, I'll eat first.

IRENE hands PATRICE a menu.

IRENE

Sit wherever you want.

PATRICE sits at a table near the bar. IRENE
EXITS into the kitchen.

HENRY

(to PATRICE)

You writin' a story on Jonas?

PATRICE

Oh, um, yes, well, I'm hoping to get an interview with him. See him. You work at the prison?

HENRY

Yep. I'm on Jonas' day watch? You gonna watch him die?

Beat.

PATRICE

That's the plan.

HENRY

Are you Chinese?

RILEY

Henry!

HENRY

What?

RILEY

She's not Chinese, you idiot, she's Vietnamese, and it's rude to ask questions like that.

HENRY

I wasn't trying to be rude. I'm sorry. I've just never met an Oriental person before.

PATRICE

That's all right. Anyway, I'm only half Vietnamese.

HENRY

What's your other half?

PATRICE

I'm not sure. American soldier, probably. I've been trying to get Jonas' consent to be interviewed. You wouldn't happen to know if he's gotten my letters?

HENRY

I wouldn't know about that, but it wouldn't matter if he did get them.

PATRICE

Why is that?

HENRY

He can't read much more than his own name, and he don't want us read the letters to him anymore. Just rips 'em up into tiny little pieces. And he gets a fair bit of mail. It's a /mess sometimes—

PATRICE

/Who writes to him?

HENRY

Oh, I don't know, folks opposing the death penalty. Religious leaders. Crazy women who want to marry him. I don't get that. I mean, I guess he's good looking enough, /but why would anyone—

PATRICE

/Would you ask him if he'd let me interview him?

HENRY

Sure, I guess I can ask. He doesn't much like me though, so I wouldn't be too hopeful. Not a day goes by that he doesn't offer to wring my neck. Says they can't kill him twice so what does it matter how many more people he knocks off.

THE DOOR OPENS AGAIN and THADDEUS
ENTERS with a book in hand.

HENRY

Hey, Thaddeus. How's it goin'?

THADDEUS

How do you think it's goin'?

HENRY

Now there's the man you should ask. Thaddeus gets on with him much better than I do.

THADDEUS

Who do I get on with?

HENRY

Jonas Caldwell.

THADDEUS

I don't "get on" with him. I put up with him and I do my job.

THADDEUS sits at the farthest end of the bar and reads his book, not looking up to talk to HENRY.

HENRY

Well, he don't give you half the shit he gives us.

THADDEUS

I don't know what to tell you, Henry. Luck of the draw.

HENRY

Say, what's your name?

PATRICE

Patrice.

HENRY

(to THADDEUS)

This is Patrice. She's doin' a story on Jonas.

THADDEUS

Hi.

PATRICE

Hi.

IRENE ENTERS with HENRY's burgers in a bag. IRENE is one of the few people THADDEUS will look in the eye.

IRENE

There you are. Why aren'tcha at work?

THADDEUS

Roger asked me to switch with him. I'm doin' his graveyard shift tonight.

IRENE

Where you been all day?

THADDEUS

I had some things to do.

IRENE

What's that on your hands?

THADDEUS

Just some wood stain.

IRENE

(coy)

Whatcha makin'?

THADDEUS

You mind fixin' somethin' for me to take home?

IRENE

All right. Don't tell me. Here you go, Henry.

HENRY

Thanks. I'll see you later, Patrice. Say, how do you spell that anyway?

PATRICE

Why?

HENRY

'Cause if I can't spell it, I can't remember it. It's a thing I got.

RILEY

Yeah, it's called brain damage.