

CLEAVING

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

TAYLOR	An estranged child from a rich family. Willful, stubborn, rebellious.
KENNEDY	A more straight-laced child from the same family. Full of him/herself and a little stuffy.
SHAWN	The executor of Mr. Barnes' estate.

NOTE: The genders of all characters are completely open. The descendants can be brothers, sisters, one of each, whatever. Where pronouns appear in the script I have used "he/him/his/brother" as a default, but this was purely arbitrary.

SETTING

An office. Present day.

SCENE

(The siblings Kennedy and Taylor are seated across the desk from Shawn O'Loughlin. There is a sealed envelope on the desk. The siblings are deliberately not looking at each other, and their body language speaks clearly of some past feud. Kennedy looks confident, while Taylor resents being there.)

SHAWN

Thank you both for coming. I understand this is a difficult circumstance for you, but your father's will made it clear that he wanted this handled in a timely manner.

TAYLOR

Right, well, we're here. Let's just get this over with. We all know what it's going to say.

SHAWN

There is both a will and a codicil. In accordance with Mr. Barnes' directions, I have read the codicil prior to your arrival, while the will itself has remained sealed.

(Taylor motions Shawn on impatiently.)

In this codicil, your father instructed me to inform you that he loves you both very mu—

(Taylor snorts. Shawn looks at him critically, then...)

Very much, and that he only ever wanted the best for each of you.

TAYLOR

Can we dispense with this bullshit, and get to the will?

KENNEDY

For god's sake, Taylor, if you'd just shut up, we'd be reading it already.

TAYLOR

What? Are you in that much of a rush to get your hands on—

KENNEDY

You're the one in a rush, asshole. Not like you could ever sit still for more than four seconds to—

TAYLOR

Just because *one of us* actually tried to lead a life and not sit around riding on the coattails—

KENNEDY

Oh, is that what you call running out every chance you—

SHAWN

Please, please. If I may continue.

(Kennedy sits back, composed, while Taylor waves Shawn on with a huff. Finding his place in a document...)

...wanted the best for you. Kennedy, I have always been very touched by your willingness to follow in my footsteps, and your devotion to the family's affairs.

TAYLOR

(With a snarl...)

Suck up.

KENNEDY

Fuck up.

SHAWN

Taylor, while I certainly wish you had found more time for us—

TAYLOR

Right.

KENNEDY

Will you just shut up?

TAYLOR

Why? So we can listen politely to dad's last sermon of hypocritical tripe?!

KENNEDY

Dad always had open arms for yo—

TAYLOR

Oh, bullshit! He basically kicked me out aft—

KENNEDY

You left! He didn't—

TAYLOR

He kicked me the fuck out! You think I planned to drop out of college? You think I said, hey, why don't I go get a job at Walmart so I can—

KENNEDY

You could have worked at the firm. Dad would have hired you to—

TAYLOR

You are so fucking naïve! But even if he would, I wasn't about to play along with his head games. Work for the old man? Right. I wouldn't play then, I'm sure as hell not playing now. Can we just get on with this?

SHAWN

(Finds his place, then...)

...wish you had found more time for us, I want you to know that I understand your need to follow your own path. In fact, I respect you for it far more than you realize.

TAYLOR

Hah. Sure you do. Let's see if you leave me more than fifty bucks and Hallmark card.

KENNEDY

You are such an ass.

TAYLOR

You know, honestly, there's only one damn thing I want from the old bastard anyway...

KENNEDY

(Muttering...)

Yeah, I know.

TAYLOR

(Continuing uninterrupted...)

Not that dad would ever have known. All I wanted was that...

TAYLOR AND KENNEDY

(Taylor continuing, Kennedy bored...)

...ceramic clock...

TAYLOR

...that used to be in my nursery.

(Shawn knocks on the desk to get their attention. During the next line, he lifts a cardboard box from behind the desk and puts it on top of the desk.)

SHAWN

This is out of order, but since I think it might make you pay attention long enough to get to the will...

(From the box, Shawn removes the clock. He places it where the box was, and puts the box away again.)

Now, I don't know what the story is here, but clearly Mr. Barnes knew you better than you seem to think.

(Taylor is stunned. He stares at the clock, and his posture softens, a semblance of calm coming over him. He slides it to the edge of the desk near him, then sits back in his chair.)

TAYLOR

Go ahead.

SHAWN

(Returning to the letter...)

In fact, I think my greatest failure as a father was not being able to make either of you understand just how important you each are – not only to me, but to each other.

(There's a pause, and the siblings regard each other in silence.)

But I think, nay, I *hope* that here in my last will and testament, I might have found a way.

(The siblings look confused, but interested. Shawn puts down the codicil, and picks up the sealed envelope.)

In your presence, I am opening Mr. Barnes' will.

(He opens the envelope. Kennedy is looking at peace, and Taylor suspicious but intensely curious. Shawn reads...)

SHAWN (CONT)

I, Douglas Barnes, being of sound mind and memory, do hereby bequeath all possessions, equities, and monies, excepting those necessary to cover expenses associated with my passing, to...

TAYLOR

(Muttering...)

Great. Just great.

SHAWN

...Taylor Haversall Barnes.

TAYLOR AND KENNEDY

(But with very different inflections...)

What!?!

(Shawn holds up a hand to silence them, then continues reading.)

SHAWN

Taylor, I know you felt that I never knew you, never understood what drove you, the choices you made, and those parts of your life that were not choices at all. And perhaps you were right, but at least in some respects, I truly believe I did. And that is why I am leaving the distribution of all my assets and worldly goods in your hands. Share them with Kennedy as you feel is right and just, or not if that is what you must do. Just, please know, that I love you. And more than that, I respect you.

TAYLOR

Holy shit.

KENNEDY

This can't be right!

TAYLOR

Holy shit.

KENNEDY

Is there...

(Shawn shakes his/her head to say, "no, the will is final".)

Well. Wow. I did not see *this* coming.

TAYLOR

Holy shit.

KENNEDY

That's all you have to say? Three holy shits, two Hail Marys, and on with your life?

(Kennedy studies Taylor for a long moment.)

Right, well... enjoy it.

(Kennedy gets up and starts to leave.)

TAYLOR

Wait.

(Kennedy stops, but doesn't turn around.)

You know, ever since dad got sick, I wondered what this moment would be like. Waiting for the axe to fall. Here you go, Taylor. Fifty bucks and Hallmark card. It made me so angry. I pictured myself... standing up... like you did just now. Even saying those same damn words. Right, well... enjoy it. Angry, bitter, although in some strange way, kind of relieved.

(Kennedy turns around, and Taylor turns to face him/her.)

At least it would be all over. Over and settled, and I was right. About him, about you, about everything. And I hated you. My god, how I hated you. You and your smug, unflappable grin. That dissemblance of calm and kindness floating over an ocean of ego. You didn't even watch me leave. And him. He never saw through it, never...

(Taylor pauses, shame starting to grow in his/her mind.)

Last week, I remember staring into that coffin, and thinking... Well, you can imagine. And now...

KENNEDY

And now?

TAYLOR

Now? Now I... I don't know how to feel. I don't know what to think. I expected him to try to say something at the end that would... Some platitude, some empty... I don't know. But never... *never*... did I even imagine that he... that he... you know, could have...

KENNEDY

Meant it?

TAYLOR

Yeah. (*Beat...*) Yeah.

KENNEDY

So what now?

TAYLOR

I... I don't know. This is... it's all just too much. I'm supposed to fly out to Boulder tonight, and now... everything's changed.

KENNEDY

You can still go.

TAYLOR

That's just geogra— (*phy*)

KENNEDY

Or you can stay.

TAYLOR

What?

KENNEDY

I said, or you could stay.

TAYLOR

Right. Give you a chance to convince me—

KENNEDY

Is that what you think I'm doing?! You know what? Go fuck yourself!

(*Kennedy turns to leave.*)

TAYLOR

Wait! Wait. Please.

KENNEDY

What?

TAYLOR

Why'd you say that? About me staying. Why'd...

KENNEDY

(Walking back to Taylor...)

Do you remember the last time we *actually* talked? Like *really* talked?

TAYLOR

What? You mean without insulting each other? It's been a while.

KENNEDY

A long while. It was after that last riding competition.

TAYLOR

Yeah. I remember that. We tied.

KENNEDY

Yep. Second place.

TAYLOR

And they only had one ribbon.

KENNEDY

Yeah. And they gave it to me because I was older.

TAYLOR

I remember that. And afterwards you pinned it on me. Said you wanted me to have it. You said... You said you were proud of me.

KENNEDY

I was proud of you. And you said that we should share it.

TAYLOR

That was a long time ago.

KENNEDY

You know, I never told you, but...

TAYLOR

What?

KENNEDY

When you gave me that ribbon back, Dad was behind you. He had just walked around the stable. I don't think he heard much of conversation. Maybe just the end. Maybe not even that. He put his finger up like this. Didn't want you to know he was there. I remember the way he watched you. He was so, so proud. To this day, I swear, I think I actually saw his eyes well up.

TAYLOR

Dad? Cry? That's hard to imagine.

KENNEDY

Anyway... I've thought back on that day a lot. What it was like to have a brother. That's why I said you could stay.

TAYLOR

You know what? Take the money. You earned it.

KENNEDY

Hey, that's not what I—

TAYLOR

I know. I know. But you did earn it. I mean, you were always there. I wasn't. Take it. Really. You deserve it.

KENNEDY

Maybe... maybe we could split it.

TAYLOR

No, it's—

KENNEDY

There's plenty there to split, Taylor.

(Taylor laughs a little.)

TAYLOR

Yeah. *(Laughs again.)* Yeah.

SHAWN

Is that your final decision? You can take some time to think about—

TAYLOR

We'll split it.

SHAWN

Very well. There's one final note at the end. *(Reading...)* No matter what your decision, Taylor, I want you to have the clock from your nursery. I know it always brought you comfort. Please take it, and let it remind you of happier times.

(Taylor picks up the clock, regards it, listens, then...)

TAYLOR

It's not ticking anymore.

KENNEDY

Maybe it just needs new batteries.

(Taylor turns the clock over and removes the panel to see if it has batteries. His eyes grow wide, and he pulls out a red ribbon. The clock starts ticking again.)

TAYLOR

Holy shit.

KENNEDY

Whoa.

TAYLOR

Here. *(Holding out the ribbon.)* Take it.

KENNEDY

Oh no. Dad gave it to you.

TAYLOR

I want you to have it.

KENNEDY

Yeah? Shame you have to go to Boulder, or you could try to convince me.

(Taylor smiles, then Kennedy smiles back.)

TAYLOR

Ehh, Boulder can wait.

(Lights out)