

COLLECT CALLS

By

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CHARACTERS

DAD

JIM

OPERATOR'S VOICE (recording)

Setting: There are four phones on the stage arranged in a semi circle with 1 phone and a high backed swivel chair in the center. If possible the phones could be from different times from 1980s to 2000s. After each phone call, JIM moves in a clockwise fashion from stage left to stage right.

(A phone rings and Dad picks it up. Lights up on Dad)

OPERATOR: Collect call from Jim, will you accept?

DAD: Yes. Hello, Jim.

(Lights up on another phone...preferably a phone from the 1980s to the left of Dad)

JIM: Hi Dad. Hope you don't mind me calling collect.

DAD: Nah, it's fine. How's Germany?

JIM: Great. It's unbelievable. We just got back from Berlin. People were partying everywhere. I got you a chunk of the wall.

DAD: A chunk of the wall?

JIM: Yeah. People are hitting it with sledgehammers and partying in the streets.

DAD: Ha! You know I had to stay in the service an extra 6 months when they put that wall up.

JIM: Yeah, I know. You've told me a dozen times.

DAD: If I hadn't I never would've met your mother.

JIM: Kind of funny how things work out like that. You were here when they put it up and now I'm here and they are tearing it down. Its like things have come full circle.

DAD: I heard you got another stripe.

JIM: Yep. Hard to get used to people calling me Sarge.

DAD: I'm proud of you. You've already gone farther than I ever did. Got a girlfriend yet?

JIM: There's a couple of girls I see--but nothing serious.

DAD: Well, I guess it's good to sow your wild oats now. But don't wait too long-like your mum and I nearly did. You don't want your son's friends mistaking you for a grandpa. I'd like to be a grandpa someday ya know.

JIM: Jeez. Don't rush me! You coming to visit?

DAD: I might come for your birthday. Can't believe you're going to be 21. Drop me a letter once in a while, will ya?

JIM: You know I'm not much for letters, Dad.

DAD: I never was either. But your mum would like to hear from you. You know what your granny used to do?

JIM: No, what?

DAD: She'd send me a care package filled with cookies and fudge, and a postcard.

JIM: A postcard?

DAD: Yep, it had a checklist on it: Are you OK? Yes or no? Are you coming home for Christmas? Yes or no? Do you need money? Yes or no?

JIM: Ha! Ha! Yes! I never say no to the first international bank of Dad.

DAD: Okay. I'll send you some, but I got to go soon. I have a genealogy society meeting.

JIM: Genealogy? What's that?

DAD: Digging up dead relatives.

JIM: What?

DAD: Tracing your family tree.

JIM: Am I the end of the line?

DAD: In our branch, yes. If you don't have a son, that's it. But no pressure or anything.

JIM: You're funny. Okay Dad. I'll let you go. Sure is good to hear your voice though.

DAD: You too son. Love you.

(Lights change, JIM moves to the next phone—it is 5 years later. Lights up on a different phone. Phone rings and Dad picks it up).

OPERATOR: Collect call from Jim, will you accept?

DAD: Yes. Hello, son.

JIM: Hi Dad. How's it going?

DAD: Good, how are you doing, college boy?

JIM: I'm good, Dad. My classes are great this term.

DAD: That's good. You haven't joined a fraternity or anything have you?

JIM: Are you kidding? Those guys are lame. Besides, my class load is too hardcore for all that partying.

DAD: Got a girlfriend?

JIM: Well, I have been seeing a couple of girls, but nothing serious.

DAD: I'd hope you'd meet a nice girl there.

JIM: There are plenty, but I'm not ready to settle down, yet.

DAD: Well don't wait too long.

JIM: How's mum doing?

DAD: Not so good. She's started chemotherapy.

JIM: Oh...I didn't know it was that bad. *(beat)* Should I come home?

DAD: No. Your mum wants you to stay there. She wants you to do your best and enjoy your college days—they will be the best days of your life, son.

JIM: Yeah, yeah. You always say that.

DAD: They were the best days of mine until I had to join the service.

JIM: You going to come up for graduation?

DAD: You betcha. You know I wouldn't miss that. Granny and Gramps are coming up too. You know you're going to be the first college graduate in the family.

JIM: Yeah, you told me. I hope I'll do you proud. I'll send you the announcements and you can send them out to the rest of the family, Okay?

DAD: Ok. Let me know if you need any money.

JIM: I do.

DAD: How much?

JIM: Dad. I'm sorry.

DAD: What is it, son?

JIM: Well, they have these people who swarm the campus.

DAD: Uh-huh.

JIM: They give you a gift and try to get you to sign up for a credit card.

DAD: You didn't.

JIM: Yeah, Dad, I did.

DAD: So how far in debt are you now?

JIM: \$30,000. *(Silence, Dad is fuming)* Dad? Dad, you still there?

DAD: Jim, Jim, Jim! Don't you know better than that? How could such a smart kid like you do something so stupid? I thought I raised you to be smarter than that.

JIM: Dad, I'm sorry. I don't know what to do.

DAD: God damn it! Boy! When are you going to grow up and be a man? Jeez! I thought I taught you better than that. *(beat, DAD composes himself)* We'll sort it out when I come up for graduation.

JIM: All right.

DAD: Don't tell your mother about this. She's sick enough as it is.

JIM: Okay, Dad. Whatever you say. I love you Dad.

DAD: Uh-huh.*(beat, reluctantly)* Love you too, Son.

(Lights change, JIM moves to the next phone—it is 5 years later. Lights up on a different phone. Phone rings and Dad picks it up).

OPERATOR: Collect call from Jim, will you accept?

DAD: Yes. Hi Son.

JIM: Hi Dad. How's it going?

DAD: Good. How's Japan?

JIM: Daijoubu desu. *(It's okay)*

DAD: Hope that means good.

JIM: Yeah. The money's good. I'm having fun, but I kind of stick out like a sore thumb here.

DAD: I'm sure.

JIM: I'm taller than everybody. And we are crammed in like sardines. It's like Gulliver in the land of Lilliput.

DAD: Got a girlfriend yet?

JIM: I go out with a couple of girls, but nothing serious. These Asian women sure are gorgeous though.

DAD: Maybe you'll meet your wife there. You know you're cousin Susan just had a baby.

JIM: I know. One day before my birthday? Couldn't she have held out for one more day?

DAD: Ha! Ha! You should've asked her. Or of course you could have one of your own, ya know.

JIM: That would mean I would have to get married though! So...how's Granny?

DAD: Well, she's home from the hospital now, but not doing so good.

JIM: That's too bad. Hope she gets better.

DAD: Well at 87 you don't recover from car accidents like you do when you're 30. I still can't believe you're 30, Son.

JIM: I can't either. Don't keep reminding me. I think I'd rather be 29 forever.

DAD: You and me both, Son. You and me both. You saving any money?

JIM: I'm doing okay, Dad.

DAD: You making your loan payments?

JIM: Yes, Dad.

DAD: I still can't believe what you did in college.

JIM: That was years ago, can't you let it rest?

DAD: It takes years to recover from bankruptcy, son.

JIM: I know.

DAD: How you ever going to settle down and have a family when you never have any money?

JIM: I'm saving now, Dad. I started putting some away for my retirement--just like you said.

DAD: I worry about you. I'm sure your mum would worry too if she were still with us.

JIM: You okay, Dad?

DAD: Just want to make sure you can stand on your own two feet. I'm not going to be around forever. You want your son to have a grandpa, right?

JIM: Yes.

DAD: You coming home for Christmas?

JIM: I hope so. I'm feeling a little homesick.

DAD: We're having it at Granny and Gramps this year.

JIM: Ok, I'll be there. Listen, I'd better let you go. I got to get up early and it's late here. Don't want to run up the phone bill.

DAD: Okay then. I'll let you go. Love you, Son.

JIM: Love you, too Dad. *(Lights Down on DAD as he hangs up the phone. Lights change, JIM moves to the next phone—it is 5 years later. Lights up on a different phone. Phone rings and Dad picks it up).*

OPERATOR: Collect call from Jim, will you accept?

DAD: Yes. Hello, Son!

JIM: Hi Dad. How you doing?

DAD: Can't complain. Doctor got me on these new pills. Can't say they agree with me though.

JIM: Oh yeah? You getting some exercise?

DAD: I am trying. Got to fit in that tuxedo in August.

JIM: You know it. Did you see the engagement photos I sent?

DAD: Yes. She is very pretty. You sure are a lucky man.

JIM: Aw. Thanks, Dad.

DAD: I've made all the arrangements for your wedding.

JIM: Thanks, Dad. I don't know how we can ever repay you.

DAD: Don't worry about it. You're my only son. What else am I going to spend my money on?

JIM: You're really the best, Dad. And speaking of the best, would you be my best man?

DAD: Oh, Jim. I'd be honored.

JIM: Thanks.

DAD: You sure that's all you want? You, me, the minister and your bride?

JIM: Well, everyone else is coming to the reception right?

DAD: Yep.

JIM: Then that's fine. We just have the ceremony with the four of us then.

DAD: Got any ideas where you want to go for your honeymoon?

JIM: Can't afford much. I think we'll just drive up the coast. Maybe show her around my old college stomping grounds.

DAD: I got the car tuned up. She's ready to go.

JIM: Hope I remember how to drive. I've no need here in Singapore. Can't wait to see you, Dad. And she's looking forward to meeting you.

DAD: I'm looking forward to meeting her too. I thought you'd never settle down.

JIM: Wish Mum could be there.

DAD: We all do, Son. Maybe I'll be a grandpa soon?

JIM: You never know, Dad. Well, I'd better let you go.

DAD: Okay. Love you.

JIM: Love you too, Dad. *(Lights down on Dad as they hang up the phone. A baby cries. (JIM moves to the center in front of Dad's chair and calls him on a mobile phone. The phone rings and spot light comes up on "Dad's phone" and it continues to ring and then stops. JIM turns the chair around to reveal that DAD is gone. He sits in his Dad's chair and looks up. DAD stands behind him in blue light.)* I don't know your number up there, Dad. But I'll make sure my son always has mine. Even if he has to call me collect. *(lights fade).*

END