

The Broiler Queen: A Mid-Coast Comedy

By Jonathan Mirin

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All the text / scenes below should be considered "work in progress."

CHARACTERS

Harbor Master, Magical Being, Nautical Gear. Narrates, plays piano between scenes, plays various characters including Rosanna,

Chip Stevens, a young man from Camden, mid-20's, khaki pants, polo shirt, short hair

Sherry Hager, a young woman from Belfast, mid-20's, jeans, heavy metal t-shirt

William (Bill) Stevens, Chip's father, 50's, sport jacket, golf club,

Helen Stevens, Chip's mother, late 40's, not a hair out of place

Mike Hager, Sherry's father, 40's, works at Prime Portions Poultry on the water in downtown Belfast.

Rosanna, Sherry's Best Friend, cosmetologist and caterer, mid-20's

WHERE

Belfast, Maine

WHEN

June and July, 1986

Audience enters. Appetizers. Performers mingle in character.

HARBOR MASTER

(wearing a minister's collar, rings nautical bell)

We're glad to welcome the extended families and friends of Chip and Sherry and on their behalf, we welcome you to beautiful Belfast. I know many have traveled from different parts of the country and even the world to join together these two wonderful young people in holy wedded bliss. (offstage scream). And we've put together a special retrospective about their relationship to help us all understand how we arrived at this special day. There are so many places we could start their story. The Big Bang. The most recent ice age. Sherry's great grandparents fleeing from Europe or Chip's Great Great Great Great Grandparents peacefully sailing to our shores from England but for now let's begin when Chip was 12 and playing golf with his father at a lovely seaside course just a few minutes from their summer estate in lovely Camden.

CHIP and BILL on the golf course in Camden.

CHIP
Dad?

BILL
Yes, Chipster?

CHIP
Can you stop calling me Chipster?

BILL
Well, that's a family tradition – you know my father called me Williamster until I turned 35.

CHIP
What did he call you then?

BILL
Nothing, he died of cirrhosis.

CHIP
What's cirrhosis again?
(Butler brings Bill a martini on a platter. He drinks it and puts the empty glass back on the tray, upside down).

BILL
Disease of the inner organs. Now it's preventable.

CHIP
Oh yeah. Anyway, when you call me Chipster . . . it just makes me feel . . . elite somehow.

BILL
Elite?

CHIP
Like we're in some kind of little rich bubble where all the boys are called Chipster and Biffster and Camster and we're better than everyone else and know more and . . .

BILL
Chipster, listen to me. Just because we have enormous wealth doesn't mean we're better than the poor pathetic masses trying to eke out their miserable lives carrying around open bags of chips.

CHIP
I like chips.

BILL

So did my second wife. Nonetheless, there are reasons families like ours prefer to associate with other families like - ours.

CHIP

who are boring, inebriated and unsympathetic?

BILL

No, Chip, no, no, no . . . families who are prepared to lead. That's why I decided to run for Senate in the first place. I felt all of my privilege needed to translate into civic responsibility. And of course, I have been able to be a great service to my friends.

CHIP

You mean that whole cutting taxes for the rich thing?

BILL

If the rich don't cut taxes, who will?

CHIP

I never thought of it like that.

HARBORMASTER

Meanwhile, on a quiet Belfast street just an eggs throw from the Prime Portions Poultry Plant and not too far from the peaceful flow of the Pennagassawassy River -

SHERRY

*(Sweeping up chicken feathers in the yard.
MIKE walks out on his way to the plant).*

Dad, got a sec -.

MIKE

(looks at his watch)

Ay – yuh. Got a whole 11 minutes. What's up?

SHERRY

Some kids are making plans – you know, for what they're gonna do next year.

MIKE

Ay – yuh.

SHERRY

I know we talked about me helping on Carl's boat this summer.

MIKE

Ay – yuh. We did talk about that.

SHERRY

But after that, in the fall, I kinda thought maybe I'd go to college.

MIKE

Ay – yuh. College, sure. So you mean you don't want to be lobsterin' next summer.

SHERRY

Well, I don't know. But I probably don't want to lobster, process poultry, rake blueberries, have a paper route, cater, waitress, plow, babysit, shovel, break down boxes and do in-home care my whole life.

MIKE

You'd be surprised how mercifully short life can be when you're busy. Course, it's up to you. You not a little girl anymore who just babysits, has a paper route and plows.

SHERRY

And shovels.

MIKE

Where is that little red shovel anyway?

SHERRY

You gave it to Lisa's little girl.

MIKE

And she's makin' good money!

SHERRY

She's six.

MIKE

Learn while you earn. Where you going tonight?

SHERRY

Rosanna and I have a caterin' job in Camden.

MIKE

Need the car?

SHERRY

She's pickin' me up at Perry's.

(Night Ranger's 1984 song "Sister Christian" starts to play)

Not yet!

HARBOR MASTER

Sorry . . .

MIKE

Listen, sweetheart . . . I understand. And I guess I could rent your room if you leave.

SHERRY

Dad!

ROSANNA pulls up with a squeal of the brakes.

ROSANNA

I thought you said Perry's -

SHERRY

Sorry, we were just havin' a little talk.

ROSANNA

Hey Mr. Hager!

MIKE

Have a good night, girls. Drive safe.

“Sister Christian” starts again. They rock out in the car in slow motion while applying make-up, eating, painting their nails, putting on their catering clothes, etc. Get out and start serving snacks to the audience / guests at the party. WILLIAM backs into SHERRY while she is carrying a tray. Tray falls. Music stops. Lights on SHERRY and WILLIAM.

SHERRY

Oh, so sorry . . .

WILLIAM

You have to watch where you're going.

SHERRY

Hey - you backed into me.

WILLIAM

What?

CHIP

Father – please. Just go get cleaned up.

(to SHERRY, helping her pick things up).

So sorry about that. He's used to people moving out of the way.

I didn't see him. SHERRY

All set? CHIP

Yes. SHERRY

Do you want to take a break? CHIP

I'm fine. SHERRY

Sure? CHIP

Yes – thanks - SHERRY

Chip. Chip Stevens. CHIP
(Extends his hand).

I'm Sherry. SHERRY
(Awkwardly taking his hand. Piano love at first sight sound effect).

Do you – cater often? CHIP

No - just helpin' my girlfriend. SHERRY

What are you doing tomorrow? CHIP

Weekends I help my cousin with blueberries. SHERRY

I love blueberries. CHIP

MUSIC: "Bluberry Hill" (Glenn Miller/Fats Domino)

WILLIAM AND HELEN

Yes, Chipster?

CHIP

And I'd like you to meet her. And her family.

WILLIAM

Yes.

HELEN

Chip.

CHIP

Tomorrow.

WILLIAM

Ster.

HELEN

I feel like I'm in a movie.

WILLIAM

Nightmare on Route 1?

HELEN

Who *is* she?

CHIP

Rather than cluttering your mind with false assumptions, I'd prefer you meet Sherry with the fresh, open, welcoming happy faces you reserve for shareholder meetings, winning at golf and book club – respectively.

WILLIAM

Did you say –

HELEN

Sherry?

WILLIAM

What's Sherry's family name?

CHIP

Hager.

WILLIAM

Where did you meet Miss Hager?

Camden. CHIP

Yacht club? HELEN

Close. CHIP

Country club? WILLIAM

Closer. CHIP

THE Club? HELEN

CHIP
We met right here at the campaign kick off party.

WILLIAM
I don't remember any donors with debutante daughter's named Sherry.

CHIP
Maybe when you meet her tomorrow you'll remember. We've been invited to her family's home for dinner – in Belfast.

WILLIAM sticks fork into the side of his mouth. CHIP and HELEN try to get it out. Lights change to SHERRY and MIKE.

Dad? SHERRY

Ay-yuh? MIKE

There's uh . . . SHERRY

Ay-yuh? MIKE

SHERRY
A guy . . . who uh – likes me.

MIKE
Ay-yuh.

SHERRY
And I like him.

MIKE
Ay-yuh.

SHERRY
And he wants to come over.

MIKE
Ay-yuh.

SHERRY
With his parents.

MIKE
(They chew.)
They like chicken?
(Feathers float down.)

Lights up on CHIP, HELEN and WILLIAM ringing the doorbell. It's the sound of a rooster crowing.

SHERRY
Hi, thanks so much for coming. I'm Sherry.

WILLIAM
Bill Stevens.

HELEN
Helen.

SHERRY
This is my Dad, Mike.

MIKE
Nice to meet'cha.
(Pause.)

HELEN
What a unique doorbell you have.

MIKE
Ay-yuh. Everyone at the plant got one. Holiday bonus. Nice gesture but unfortunately it killed off all the real roosters in the neighborhood. Vet thought it was over-stimulatin' for 'em. You all want a beer or . . . orange juice or something?

WILLIAM

Anything alcoholic will be fine.

MIKE

One of those days, huh?
(Going to fridge).

WILLIAM

You could say that.

SHERRY

Dad, William is better known as Bill, Bill Stevens. Or Senator Stevens. I met Chip because I was catering for a fancy party about how awesome he is at their house.

MIKE

No shit. Bill Stevens in my house. I mean you're basically famous – or I guess infamous is more the word.

SHERRY

Dad -

WILLIAM

Well, I do my best to serve.

MIKE

But now Paul Flaherty's getting close in the polls. Says you're just working for the rich. What'd he call you – gravy on their golfclubs?

WILLIAM

A clumsy metaphor at best.

HELEN

Bill works hard on the behalf of all Mainers – from bank presidents to just regular folks plucking chickens beside the pristine Passashirassaspleag as it empties into our sacred blue coastal waters.

(Mike starts to choke).

Are you all right?

SHERRY

He'll be fine. Why don't you go lie down Dad.

CHIP

Shall I apply the Heimlich maneuver?

SHERRY

Really he's fine it's just - my mom, she um died last year in a bizarre accident at the plant and now every time someone says "pluck"

(Choking gets worse. To MIKE).
Sorry Dad, sorry, sit down!

HELEN
My lord, what happened?

SHERRY
(Handing her a newspaper, tending to MIKE)

HELEN
Belfast woman in critical condition after falling into plucker at Prime Portions Poultry.
(Coughing redoubles).
Oh dear. "Union blames unsafe working conditions." Well, this is something you should be doing something about dear.

WILLIAM
Perhaps we were on vacation. Of course, I would have sent a letter to the family.

MIKE
(hands him a letter, still coughing).

WILLIAM
"With my deepest condolences for your tragic loss" . . . Please understand that elected representatives have so many responsibilities my work would be absolutely impossible without a staff to address constituent tragedies.

MIKE
And this whole time I thought you actually cared.

CHIP
Well, now that we're all getting along, Sherry and I have some great news.

CHIP AND SHERRY
We're engaged!
(MIKE coughs again. WILLIAM is frozen.)

HELEN
But you just met –

SHERRY
And we can barely wait to get married because -

CHIP AND SHERRY
We're in love!

WILLIAM

Nothing personal Sherri, Mike –
(to CHIP).
but if you marry this this this . . .

SHERRI

Strong, independent woman . . .

WILLIAM

I will have no choice but to cut you out of the estate plan.

HELEN

And we will no longer have Melinda clean your room.

Dream Sequence later on . . .

LOUDSPEAKER: And Belfast's Broiler Queen for the year 1984 is . . . Sherri Hager!

SHERRI

I am just so happy to be crowned the Broiler Queen amidst such an incredibly competitive field. And I am particularly happy to announce that just a few weeks ago, I became engaged to be married with Chip Stevens, the son of Senator and Helen Stevens. And I know Bill just happens to be here today. And so it is with great pleasure that I want to introduce to you Maine's voice in Washington, champion of the working class, and lover of chicken Bill Stevens!

Crowd: Bill Bill Bill Bill Bill

*(SHERRY kisses him on the cheek. CHIP hugs him.
Camera's flash.)*