

A FAMILY OF CLOWNS

Written by

Daniel Wallace

Based on story of the same name

June 1 2012

1 EXT. MORGAN HOUSE - DAY 1

JIM MORGAN, 37, is going to get the mail. He's unshaven, and in his T-shirt and rumpled jeans doesn't look like he gets out too much. He looks a little bit like his front yard: weedy, punctuated by dirt patches and fallen branches.

In the mailbox: nothing. But he stares into it, as if hoping something might jump out.

2 EXT. HOUSE NEXT DOOR - DAY 2

A REALTOR is pulling up a FOR SALE sign and putting it in the back seat of his Mercedes. Jim watches, stock-still, stunned. When the realtor drives away, Jim is still standing there.

3 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - DAY 3

The Morgan house is the kind people refer to as comfortable, but that's just code for messy. Clothes hanging over the backs of chairs, shoes scattered all over the place, dishes stacked in the sink: like everything else in their lives, it's just this far from falling into an impossible disarray.

Jim stops at the door to his wife's studio. JENNA MORGAN, 33, is a painter. She paints huge canvases similar to drawings found in prehistoric caves, primitive and dark. She has long blonde hair the color of sunshine. Her back is to us.

JIM

Bad news.

He says it as if someone has died, and Jenna quickly turns.

JENNA

What? What happened?

JIM

Someone bought the house next door.

She waits for more but nothing is forthcoming. This isn't good news for her either.

JENNA

Oh, honey.

JIM

I know.

JENNA

But it could be a good thing,
right? They could be wonderful.
People our age, friends . . .

But even she knows this is a stretch.

JIM

It's been nice not having anyone
there. Not that I'm glad Mr.
Conklin died.

Though maybe he is, just a little.

JIM (CONT'D)

But it's been quiet, you have to
admit.

She gives him a sympathetic smile. She knows her husband
well.

JENNA

Change is hard for you, I know. But
let's try to keep an open mind.

He nods, sighs, shrugs his shoulders. It's not going to be
easy.

JIM

Maybe we should make them a cake.

4 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

4

The clock reads midnight. Jim and Jenna are in bed, about two
feet of open space between them, asleep. Suddenly the silence
is punctuated by a high-pitched HONKING: the sound trucks
make backing up. A blinking RED LIGHT floods the room.

Jim goes to the window. Indeed, a huge moving truck is
backing into the neighbor's driveway.

JIM

(still watching the truck)
See?

He turns to Jenna, but she's still asleep. He can't believe
it. He gets back in bed, and stares hatefully at the ceiling,
red light flashing on his face.

5 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

5

A fresh-as-a-daisy Jenna is taking something out of the oven when Jim drags himself in, wearing the same T-shirt from yesterday and no pants, just boxers.

JENNA

Good morning. You look . . . tired.

An understatement: he looks like he's been run-over.

JIM

How did you sleep through it?

JENNA

Through what?

JIM

Them. And that truck. I could even hear them talking.

JENNA

Talking?

JIM

Whispering. Murmuring. Whatever. What are you doing?

JENNA

I'm making them a cake.

JIM

That was my idea.

JENNA

Well it was a great idea. It's what good neighbors do. Let's go say hi.

JIM

Can we go a little bit later? I'm in no condition. And my back is killing me.

She starts icing the cake . . .

JENNA

Sweetie, I don't want to be a nag --

JIM

I know, I know. I need a job. But with my back the way it is -- no one wants to hire someone who starts off by telling them all the things he can't do.

JENNA

You could pick up around the house a little? I would, but I've got three shows to get ready for.

JIM

I'd be working too if I had a job. And I will.

JENNA

But until then?

JIM

Okay. As long as I don't have to bend over.

Maybe he's trying to make a joke? Hard to say. He walks closer to her, and awkwardly tries to figure out a way to kiss her or touch her. He wants to, but he can't.

She looks at the cake.

JENNA

You know what? I'm just going to take it over now. While it's still warm. Okay with you?

JIM

(shrugs)

I guess. But tell 'em it was my idea.

JENNA

Absolutely.

He finger-licks icing from the bowl as she leaves.

6

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

6

It's later. He's on the couch, still in his T-shirt and boxers, looking bored. He's gone through the paper, which is everywhere. Hears Jenna returning. Sees pants on the floor, quickly picks them up, puts them on. Stacks some stuff to make it look neater.

JIM

(calling out)

Hey, honey. In here. I was just starting to . . .

He stops when he sees her. She's JUGGLING.

JIM (CONT'D)

Wow. I didn't know you could do that.

She stops juggling. She has a distant look in her eyes, as if she's been hypnotized.

JENNA

They're . . . clowns.

JIM

Clowns as in . . .

JENNA

Clowns, Jim. Professional clowns. Red noses, white make-up -- the works. They taught me how to juggle. Not as hard as I thought.

Beat.

JIM

They're going to kill us in our sleep. That's what clowns do. They're kind of scary, you have to admit.

JENNA

No. They're great. The sweetest people in the world. Really.

She's happier than we've ever seen her.

7

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

7

They're in bed, awake, staring at the ceiling. Jenna looks like she'll never go to sleep and doesn't want to; Jim looks like he wishes he had hours ago.

JENNA

And they've got these two kids, Jim. Two of the sweetest. Doodle Bug and Fizzlepop. Fizzlepop doesn't talk. I mean, he can, but he just mimes because ... that's the kind of clown he is, I guess.

JIM

All children should be raised as mimes. The world would be a better place. Weirder but better. Quieter.

They're still not looking at each other.

JENNA

Do you -- I mean, I know we've talked about this, but -- do you ever think, wonder what -- ?

JIM

Yes. I wonder. And I'm glad we decided to do -- not to do -- whatever. We're not made to have kids, Jenna. We're just not the type.

She looks at him. Then he looks at her. No spark there at all. Just a cool and distant moment.

JENNA

So, what type are we?

8

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

8

Jim and Jenna are standing at the window, looking at the CLOWN HOUSE. Things are getting busy. Two adult clowns are lugging a stand of some kind into the backyard. Two smaller clowns chase each other. All four are in their full clown-regalia: colorful clothes, huge shoes, face paint, red noses.

JENNA

Bubblegum and Breezytea.

JIM

What?

JENNA

Our neighbors?

JIM

Oh. That's what they asked you to call them?

JENNA

That's what their names are.

JIM

What are their real names?

JENNA

Being a clown is more serious I think than just dressing up and giving yourself a funny name. It's not something you pretend to be: it's something you are. And they're Bubblegum and Breezytea.

Jim looks at her like she's crazy. Jenna's cell phone rings.

JENNA (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Oh. Hey! Sure. Of course! Be there in a sec.

(laughs, listening)

Yes, in a puny schmoodle.

Hangs up.

JENNA (CONT'D)

(to Jim)

That was Breezytea. She needs to borrow a pound of flour. Come with me. You've always wanted to juggle. They'll show you how, for real.

JIM

I've always wanted to juggle? Really?

JENNA

I know you don't like to interact with people, sweetie, but really --

JIM

I know. And the clown thing only makes it . . . Next time, okay? I think I'll do a little cleaning anyway. Tell them I said --

(struggling)

-- welcome to the neighborhood.

She's disappointed, but shrugs it off. Gets a bag of flour.

JENNA

Back in a puny schmoodle!

9

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

9

He's asleep on the couch. Nothing has been cleaned. Wakes when he hears the door open and close. But he doesn't get up.

JENNA (O.S.)

Hello dee-oh!

JIM

In here . . .

She stops at the doorway.

JENNA

Hey.

JIM

How long have you been gone?

JENNA

I have no idea. Time flies when you're playing with Fizzlepop. Believe me. Now I have to get to work. If I don't --

But Jim sees something.

JIM

Come here.

JENNA

Jim, I really --

He turns on the light as she walks toward him. He motions her closer. Closer. They're face to face. He pushes back her hair, and there, on her neck, is a smear of WHITE. Also a bit beneath her nose.

JIM

What's this?

JENNA

(guiltily)
What?

JIM

Did you put on clown make-up?

JENNA

It's not called make-up. It's called a face. A clown face. And yes, I did. Just to see what I looked like.

JIM

And?

She's not guilty anymore: she glows.

JENNA

I looked good.

A familiar scene. Two unhappy people in bed, awake, staring at the ceiling.

JENNA
You never asked me.

JIM
Asked you what?

JENNA
What my name is. The name they gave
me.

Beat. He sighs.

JIM
Okay. So. What's your name?

JENNA
Gigglebritches.

Beat, then -- she giggles. Giggles as we

FADE TO:

11 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

11

Jim is watching the clown house. Now there are three rings set up in the backyard and stands and a guy wire and an above-ground pool with a diving board HIGH above it.

There are half-a-dozen clowns out there, practicing stuff. Juggling. Balancing. Falling. A couple of other clowns arrive.

JIM
Jenna?

No answer. She's not even in her studio -- but she's been painting. The formerly grim cave has been brightened by a little sun. He touches the canvas.

The paint is still wet. Something about this makes him sad.

JIM (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Gigglebritches.

12 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

12

Jenna is cooking dinner and Jim is doing nothing.

JENNA
Can you give me a hand?

JIM

Uhhhh, sure.

Gets up to go to her.

JENNA

No. I mean the hand. It's under the newspaper.

Under the newspaper is a rubber hand. He picks it up. Shakes it. It jiggles.

JIM

Jenna. Sweetie. This isn't weird?

JENNA

This? A rubber hand? No. What's weird is that we've had new neighbors for a week and a half and you haven't even gone over to say hello.

JIM

You say hello enough for both of us.

JENNA

We're married, Jim. We're a couple. Couples usually do things together. But now they're my friends and not yours and that feels wrong. Somehow.

JIM

Your friends?

JENNA

Yes!

JIM

They're freaking clowns, Jenna! They're everybody's friend.

JENNA

Not like that. It's different.

JIM

That's what they all say, I'm sure. Gigglebritches.

JENNA

At least I know my own clown name!

JIM
 What do you mean, at least you
 know?

She goes back to her cooking. Maybe she said too much.

JIM (CONT'D)
 I have a clown name?

She doesn't answer.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Well? What is it, Jenna? What is
 it?

JENNA
 Okay, okay. It's Doldrum.

It takes him a moment to process this.

JIM
 Doldrum? Like . . . Sad, depressed?
 Bubblegum, Breezytea,
 Gigglebritches and -- Doldrum?

She takes the rubber hand from him and uses it to pat him on
 the back.

JENNA
 It takes all kinds.

13 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

13

Dinner is over and the kitchen hasn't been cleaned. Jim is
 looking out the window toward the clowns. It's dark and so he
 can see into their lighted house. Nothing looks out of the
 ordinary, except that there instead of people there are
 clowns, and clown kids -- and Jenna. She's drinking coffee,
 chatting, laughing, just . . . happy. Like a different
 person.

The rubber hand is on the table beside the salt and pepper
 shakers. He looks at it for a moment . . .

14 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

14

Jenna turns the light on in the kitchen as she enters,
 shocked to see that it's spotless.

JENNA
 Jim?

JIM (O.C.)
Upstairs!

The whole house is dark. She proceeds upstairs carefully. She comes to the bedroom door, she pushes it open --

15 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

15

Jim is standing there wearing one of her old over-sized skirts, his shoes are on backwards, a Hawaiian shirt, a baseball hat and he's holding a balloon. Which he's tapping around. He's drawn circles around his eyes with mascara. This appears to be an attempt at dressing like a clown.

It's disturbing.

JENNA
Jim?

He drops a banana peel on the floor.

JIM
Have a nice trip.

JENNA
Jim.

JIM
That's my name, don't wear it out.

JENNA
Just don't. Okay? It's weird.

JIM
Wait. I'm weird?

JENNA
Yes. It's not about the silly clothes. It's an attitude toward life. Kind of like a religion, but . . . a frivolous one. The costume is just . . . a costume.

Jim doesn't get it at all.

JENNA (CONT'D)
Let's forget about it, okay?

JIM
I don't want you to go over there anymore, Jenna.

JENNA

What? Why?

JIM

Because it's tearing us apart.

JENNA

I've asked you a thousand times to come over there with me.

JIM

And I didn't. And now that ship has sailed. We need to start over. With a clean slate. Just the two of us. Recommit and reconnect.

JENNA

You mean disconnect, don't you?

JIM

No. No . . .

He looks so ridiculous. And feels ridiculous.

JENNA

I'm so tired. Let's just go to bed.

JIM

Good idea! I need my sleep. You know why? Because tomorrow I go looking for a job. That's right. My back is feeling better and, and I think . . .

But this has no affect on her at all. He approaches her, tries to figure out how to hug, to kiss her. Can't. Ends up holding her by the tops of her arms and pressing, the way you would your kid you were really proud of.

16 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

16

In bed. Backs to each other. Both wide awake.

FADE TO:

17 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

17

Jim walks into the house all dressed up, cleaned up, shaven. A different man.

JIM
Honey? Jenna? I did it! I got the
job! I'm a barista now! Jenna?

She's not around. The house is deathly quiet. He goes from
room to room.

JIM (CONT'D)
Jenna!

He has a bad feeling.

18 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 18

Over at the clown house, there are even more clowns -- in the
backyard, in the front, inside. Doing all sorts of clownish
things. He looks at them in horror.

He doesn't look at the painting in the studio, but as he
leaves we do. It's not a cave anymore: It's been turned into
a circus tent. It glows like something holy.

19 EXT. HIS HOUSE - DAY 19

He runs down the back stairs all the way to the clown house.

20 EXT. CLOWN HOUSE - DAY 20

Bangs on the front door. Nothing.

He runs to the backyard where all the action is. A dozen
clowns or more, and none of them pay attention to him: they
keep juggling, walking the tight rope, throwing oranges. A
ball hits him in the head. Behind him, it appears two smaller
clowns are following him, miming.

JIM
(to young clown)
Oh yeah. You, you -- Squiggly -- no
-- Confetti? -- uh -- oh --
Fizzlepup. Where is my wife, Jenna?
My wife -- Gigglebritches.

The kids do some really frustrating mime routine. He loses
his patience and screams at the kids and all the clowns
FREEZE in whatever movement they were engaged in. And stare
at him. For about three seconds. Then resume their clown
activities as if nothing ever happened.

21 INT. CLOWN HOUSE - DAY

21

Inside it's much weirder. Like a dream of a clown-filled circus tent opium den.

Jim tries to talk to them, someone, anyone. Desperate.

JIM

Excuse me. Yes. I'm sorry. I'm
looking for my wife. Jenna?

The clown shrugs. Pulls his pockets out of his trousers. Shrugs again.

He moves through the rooms of the house which appear to be infinite, growing more and more desperate as he does so.

Finally, he comes to a small room somewhere, where there are the two little clown kids again -- with another clown, who could very well be Jenna. She's all clowned-up so it's impossible to say with any assurance. But it could be her.

JIM (CONT'D)

Jenna?

The Jenna-clown stops what she's doing, and looks at Jim. So sad and empathetic. But loving too. She goes to him. She has a flower for him. The sweetest thing. He looks into her eyes: that's her. That's Jenna. It has to be. Jim is about to cry from this sad happiness as she hands him the flower . . . which, of course, SQUIRTS all over his face.

The clowns roll around laughing so hard it's crazy. Jim just stands there and drips . . .

22 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

22

A familiar scene -- but now it's just Jim there, alone, awake, staring at the ceiling.

23 EXT. HIS HOUSE - DAY

23

Jim's looking into the darkness of his mailbox -- nothing, of course -- when the realtor drives up, sticks a FOR SALE sign into the yard and, with a curt wave, drives off.

Jim watches him go as we

FADE TO:

24 INT. CIRCUS - NIGHT

24

It's a sweet little circus with a couple of ponies and clowns running around making kids laugh with the oldest tricks in the book.

Jim is sitting in the front row, sort of enjoying it. In his hand is A SCHEDULE, titled: THE SILLY CLOWN REVIEW TOUR. And below that: PERFORMANCES: Memphis, 6/12 Lafayette, 6/13 Decatur, 6/15 -- dozens of towns. About half of them are marked through with a pen. There are a lot more to go.

Jim's trying to get the attention of a clown. He's waving his hand back and forth.

JIM

Hey! Hey there! Gigglebritches?
Hey. Over here. Gigglebritches,
over here!

She waves him off -- she's making a balloon animal for a kid - - but he keeps waving and calling out for her. Finally, she stops, puts her hands on her hips and STOMPS over to him. Every move is exaggerated. Everyone is laughing, but it's funny and threatening at the same time.

She stops in front of him.

They look at each other.

Something is familiar about her. Something. Maybe. Jim thinks so, at least.

JIM (CONT'D)

Is that you Jenna? Is that you?

She cocks her head and smiles. Reaches inside her baggy jacket . . . then

POW!

He gets a cream pie right in the face. He's completely covered in it. But he doesn't even wipe it off and he doesn't stop looking at her.

JIM (CONT'D)

That's you.

Two other clowns come and playfully drag her away, but Jim and Gigglebritches don't stop looking at each other until we

CUT TO:

End