

**Act 1.**

**Scene 1. A cellar.**

*1980-something.*

*Young Joseph wears a party hat and is tied to an old radiator by a rope around his ankle. Tears slice through the grime coating his face. He uses a little piece of metal to hack at his restraints.*

*A door clatters open. An eerie light falls through a square high above, cut by an ominous silhouette. Joseph freezes and looks about with terrified eyes. Through the darkness, we hear a whistling: "Entrance of the Gladiators." Footsteps - each one accompanied by a soft squeak - grow closer.*

*The boy gets his shit together, hiding the splintering rope and the makeshift knife, as he listens with dread at his captor's approach.*

*Through the blackness, he comes. A fat, greasy, middle-aged murderer, dressed in a soiled clown costume. He looks like John Wayne Gacy on crack. The stuff of children's nightmares. Crumb-Bum the Clown chuckles as he steps into the light.*

CRUMB-BUM

Joseph... Crumb-Bum is huuuungry!

*(No response)*

Now, Joseph, you know Crumb-Bum doesn't like it  
when you misbehave.

*Young Joseph looks up with horror. He knows there is no option other than to join in Crumb-Bum's sick game. He crawls towards the clown, who reveals a sinister suitcase.*

CRUMB-BUM

Are you ready to play, Joseph?

*Joseph, weeping and shivering, nods.*

YOUNG JOSEPH

Yes.

CRUMB-BUM

YES WHO?!

YOUNG JOSEPH

Yes, Crumb-Bum!

CRUMB-BUM  
Gooooood.  
It's showtime..  
Click click!

*Crumb-Bum opens the clasps on his suitcase and reveals a pair of tiny tea cups. He hands one to Young Joseph.*

YOUNG JOSEPH  
Th-th-thank you.

*Crumb-Bum's face changes from one of menace to elation. Pinky pointed towards the heavens, he addresses Joseph in a hoity British accent.*

CRUMB-BUM  
(*As Lady Winthrop*)  
Good morrow, Chancellor! How are you on this fine day?

YOUNG JOSEPH  
(*With dignity, through the tears*)  
Lady Winthrop, a pleasure.

CRUMB-BUM  
I say, did you hear about the Admiral's dreadful *faux-pas* at Drury Lane?

YOUNG JOSEPH  
(*With dignity, through the tears*)  
No, Lady Winthrop.

CRUMB-BUM  
He left his opera glasses in the same pocket as his snuff-box, and when he raised up his Galilean Glasses, they left the most ridiculous rings 'round the balls of his eyes!

(*He laughs ridiculously, then chimes:*)

Ding dong!

(*As Lady Winthrop*)

Jeremy!

(*He produces a stuffed animal butler*)

Who's at the door?

(*As Jeremy*)

Miss Evelyn of Trafalgar.

(*As Lady Winthrop*)

Delightful! Show her in!

(Jeremy "bows" and "exits"; as Lady Winthrop)  
Now Chancellor, Miss Evelyn is certainly expecting a proposal of  
marriage. Understand?

YOUNG JOSEPH  
Y-yes, Lady Winthrop.

CRUMB-BUM  
(As Evelyn, another stuffed animal, who "enters")  
Chancellor!

A silence.

CRUMB-BUM  
(As Lady Winthrop)  
Don't be coy, Chancellor. Haven't you something to say to Evelyn?

YOUNG JOSEPH  
Um...

CRUMB-BUM  
(As Evelyn)  
What is it, Chancellor?

*Young Joseph leaps forward and plunges the shard into Crumb-Bum's neck. The clown yowls in pain. Young Joseph goes berserk, bringing the shard down again and again. At last, Crumb-Bum is still. Young Joseph quickly frees himself of the rope. A noise. Jeremy appears from the suitcase.*

CRUMB-BUM  
(As Jeremy)  
Quickly, Joseph, that way! Before it's too late!

YOUNG JOSEPH  
Thanks!

*Young Joseph races out of the cellar.*

## **Scene 2. Jester's Rest.**

*Young Joseph races through the forest. Trees whiz past him.*

*Young Joseph stops to catch his breath and looks around. Small headstones slowly rise into view; the shadow of two stone elephants looms upon him.*

YOUNG JOSEPH  
What is this place?

*A Jimmy Stewart-type appears, smoking a pipe and reading a newspaper as one does in the middle of the woods at night. Young Joseph screams.*

MAN  
Woah, slow down there, kiddo!

YOUNG JOSEPH  
You gotta help me!

MAN  
Haha, quit talking crazy.

YOUNG JOSEPH  
I'm serious!

MAN  
Yeah, OOOO-kay.

YOUNG JOSEPH  
There's a killer clown after me!

MAN  
Boys will be boys.

YOUNG JOSEPH  
He kept me in his cellar for weeks! Please! We gotta get outta here--  
WAIT! Did you hear that?

MAN  
Just let me finish my paper now, sport. Oh hold on a second now: I think I *do* hear something.  
It sounds like... shoes...  
(*Faintly: a squeaking noise is heard.*)  
Squeaky shoes...  
(*Laughing it off*)  
Nonsense! Shoes don't squeak!

YOUNG JOSEPH

Yes they do...

*The man produces an enormous pistol.*

MAN

Now pipe down, sport. I'll get to the bottom of this!

*He and Young Joseph wait tensely. Then, suddenly, from behind a nearby tree, Jeremy - the puppet butler - appears.*

JEREMY

Joseph, behind yo-

*The man fires a shot, and Jeremy explodes into a shower of cotton.*

YOUNG JOSEPH

NO!!!

MAN

Well, that's the end of that.

*Silence. Then - Crumb-Bum flies out of the darkness from the opposite direction, tackles the man, and stabs him to death. Young Joseph watches the entire affair. Then he screams. He continues to scream as Crumb-Bum turns to face him.*

CRUMB-BUM

Now, Joseph, wasn't that funny?

*He takes a step towards Young Joseph, struggling to make his sinister whistling melodic following all the running. Suddenly, Young Joseph reveals the man's gun.*

CRUMB-BUM

Wuh-oh.

YOUNG JOSEPH

*It's showtime.*

*Young Joseph fires the gun. Many times. (Too many times.) Crumb-Bum falls and dies. Young Joseph fires again, a few more times, just in case.*

*He reloads. Fires some more. He pants and drops the gun. It goes off again as it hits the ground.*

*Young Joseph looks at the blood on his hands. Something inside of him turns dark. A light is extinguished. A light that cannot be relit. Ever. He is changed. He vanishes into the darkness.*

**Scene 3. The King Asylum, twenty-something years later.**

*Dr Curry and Dr Romero appear in lab coats.*

DR CURRY

Ah, Joseph Grady. Perhaps the saddest, most ghoulish story we've encountered in our three years of combined experience.

*She sniffles, wipes her nose with a tissue, and stuffs it up her sleeve.*

DR ROMERO

Joseph Grady, 9.5 years old, was abducted from a summer camp by party entertainer, Ronald William Donald Gretzky, AKA ...

TOGETHER

Crumb-Bum the Clown.

*They nod at each other, satisfied. Nailed it.*

DR CURRY

Ronald William Donald Gretzky lured young Joseph into one of his magic tricks, the conceit being that he would make the child disappear.

DR ROMERO

*Presto.*

DR CURRY

No one so much as lifted a brow when young Joseph failed to reappear. They simply clapped and cheered and laughed...

*Like a pack of fools.*

It was nearly a week before the summer camp counsellors thought to get in touch with Ronald William Donald Gretzky to ask if he knew where the boy was.

But by that time, Ronald William Donald Gretzky was long gone.

DR ROMERO

But *Crumb-Bum the Clown* was long... still there.

DR CURRY

Ronald William Donald Gretzky kept Joseph in a makeshift prison beneath his Footlocker outlet, deep in the old Gump Forest—

DR ROMERO

It's real spooky out there.

DR CURRY

— where Joseph survived solely on a diet of whip cream and seltzer water.

DR ROMERO

Luckily, Young Joseph was able to fashion a shiv - or "street sword" - out of one of the cream-pie pans that Ronald William Donald Gretzky would hurl at the boy's face, sometimes for hours on end. After Young Joseph finally escaped, he was found by a police officer who decided he would personally rehabilitate the boy... in a makeshift prison he constructed beneath his own house deep in the old Gump Forest... but shockingly, it did far more harm than good.

DR CURRY

*(Showing a photo of present-day Joseph)*

Finally, Joseph was transferred here, to the King Mental Asylum for the Criminally Insane, where he has remained for, lo, exactly thirty-odd years.

*She lowers the photograph, revealing present-day Joseph looking exactly the same as he does in the photograph.*

JOSEPH

Who are you talking to? And why are you telling me all this?

DR CURRY

Because, Joseph, I see great potential in you.

JOSEPH

Aw!

DR CURRY

*The potential to become a horrible serial killer.*

JOSEPH

Ah.

DR ROMERO

And, as such, it is our responsibility to determine whether or not you are mentally fit to return to society.

JOSEPH

But I am! Dr Romero, Dr Curry, you gotta believe me! I'm a good person.

DR ROMERO

Oh Joseph, you ought to know more than anyone that being a good person has nothing to do with being a part of society.

JOSEPH

But I was the victim-

DR CURRY

You murdered a man in cold blood.

JOSEPH

Crumb-Bum the Clown!

DR CURRY

*Ronald William Donald Gretzky!* His name was Ronald William Donald Gretzky.

DR ROMERO

And this is exactly what we're worried about, Joseph. Dr Curry and I are concerned that you've developed a tricky little case of (*reading*) coulrophobia.

JOSEPH

What's that? A fear of clowns?

DR CURRY

Close. It's a *phobia* of clowns. You see, Wikipedia tells us that clowns inhabit an "uncanny valley," effectively blurring the lines of what is real and what is not.

DR ROMERO

Coulrophobia. "Coul" from the Latin for "fool," and "rophobia" from the Latin for "real fucking scary."

DR CURRY

We're afraid that you won't be able to tell where the clown ends and where the human under the makeup begins.

JOSEPH

But I can! I can so tell the difference!

DR CURRY

And what happens if you can't, huh?! How do we know that you won't snap at the first clown you see and stab him to death with some sort of MacGyver-esque pie-blade-street-sabre?

JOSEPH

I'll use the breathing techniques you taught me. Go to my happy place. Look!

*(He mimes flipping pancakes)*

I'm making pancakes! Happy!

DR CURRY

That is truly impressive, Joseph, but before we simply turn you loose, we are legally obligated to make sure you are as mentally stable as your imaginary pancake-flipping might have one believe.

*Dr Romero pulls out a large suitcase. Joseph tenses.*

JOSEPH

What's that?

DR ROMERO

Oh, you'll see.

Click click.

*Dr Romero pulls out a pot of white make-up from the briefcase and applies it to his own face.*

DR ROMERO

How does this make you feel, Joseph?

JOSEPH

Fine.

DR CURRY

Do you feel yourself drifting down into the Uncanny Valley?

JOSEPH

Nope! Just making my pancakes. Mmmmmmmmmmm!

*Dr Romero produces a rainbow wig and puts it on.*

DR ROMERO  
How about now, Joseph?

JOSEPH  
Who ordered the short-stack?

*Dr Romero reveals a red clown nose and puts it on.*

DR ROMERO  
And now?

JOSEPH  
I KILL YOU!

*The doctors scream. Joseph knocks Dr Curry down and strangles Dr Romero to death. He then runs down the hallway of the asylum. He comes to a window, rips open the screen, and squeezes his way out to freedom, vanishing into the darkness. Dr Curry rushes to the window and looks out.*

DR CURRY  
(Aghast)  
It's showtime.

*Black-out. Sweet synthesizer music.  
A projection: CLOWNS IN THE GROUND.*