

THE OTHER CHEEK

A Play In 2 Acts

Greg Jones Ellis
gpauljones54@gmail.com
3523A Newport Avenue
Annapolis, MD 21403
(757) 894-8938

SETTING: PRESENT DAY. A WELL-WORN BUT WELL-FURNISHED APARTMENT IN A BROWNSTONE ON A SIDE STREET IN GREENWICH VILLAGE.

CHARACTERS:

- VIV (Vivian Furness): MALE, GAY, 50/60s, warm, intelligent. Famous for his books and lectures on atheism
- DAVID (David Mueller): MALE, GAY, 20s, social worker, soft-spoken and thoughtful
- RALPH (Rafael Maldonado): MALE, GAY, 30s, police officer, believes fervently in doing the right thing
- LUKE (Luke Stockhouse): MALE, NON-SPECIFIC, 18, troubled by his emotional issues
- CASSIE (Cassie Stockhouse): FEMALE, STRAIGHT, 40s, LUKE's mother. At the end of her emotional rope.

All characters are race neutral. Gender and sexuality should be observed, as well as age.

SYNOPSIS

Vivian Furness, a famous atheist author, is the victim of a seemingly random attack. After the young attacker is caught, the author wants to meet him face to face to explore the nature of forgiveness in the absence of a religion that dictates it. David, a young social worker, and Ralph, a police officer, try to prevent the meeting. When Luke, the young man, unexpectedly shows up, it is revealed that the attack wasn't completely random. His mother blames Viv's atheistic writings for Luke's emotional fragility and Luke, off his medications, attacked Viv. As all five confront the aftermath of the attack, each has to deal with betrayal, contrition, and forgiveness in order to move on.

VIV

No. It's nothing—I just said I wanted to talk to you. Now I can.

DAVID

No.

VIV

Look, we're not doing anything wrong now. Just let me talk to Luke.

RALPH

No. We have to do this right.

VIV

Oh, right. Luke, you have the right to remain silent—

RALPH

What are you doing?

VIV

I know the whole thing. Watch: *(To Luke)* Anything you say can be used against you in a court of law.

RALPH

You forgot the part about his right to an attorney.

VIV

Oh. Right.

RALPH

That's it.

He moves as if to take him out of the apartment.

VIV

No, please, Ralph! Just...

RALPH

No.

LUKE

No, he let me ask him questions. Let him ask me.

RALPH

No.

LUKE

Please. I want him to ask me. Nobody ever wants to know anything about me.

VIV

Ralph. Ten minutes.

RALPH

No.

LUKE

I confess. I don't need a lawyer. I did it. I cut this man's face. And I came in here without him knowing it. I'll say it. I should. I'm guilty.

RALPH

Ten minutes.

DAVID

I can't hear this. You shouldn't either.

RALPH

Go downstairs.

DAVID

I can't leave you!

VIV

See, David? You do care about him!

DAVID and RALPH look at him. VIV shrugs.

VIV (*Continued:*)

I just want you two kids to be happy. (*Grins. Then, to LUKE:*) Okay, Luke. We have ten minutes. Ready?

LUKE

For what?

VIV

(Steels himself:) I want you to take the bandage off. *(To RALPH:)* Ralph, can you take the handcuffs off, please?

DAVID

Viv, that's not / a good idea.

LUKE

/ What?

VIV

I think you need to see it.

DAVID

This is really not a good idea.

RALPH

No. Let him see what he did.

DAVID

This isn't the way you solve things.

VIV

Maybe it is.

LUKE

You want me to---

VIV

Just take the bandage off. It's due for a changing anyway.

DAVID

Please, Viv—

RALPH

(To David:) Let him do it.

RALPH goes to remove the handcuffs.

DAVID

(To Ralph:) What are you thinking?

RALPH

I'm here. He can't hurt him.

DAVID

He's *(lowers his voice:)* – we don't know if he's...okay.

RALPH

I can handle him.

DAVID

No. I will not have this turn into something violent.

RALPH

It won't.

DAVID

You don't know that.

During this exchange, VIV and LUKE have been looking intently at each other.

LUKE

Do I still scare you?

VIV

More than ever.

LUKE

I don't want to scare you.

VIV

Good. So, please come here and take off the bandage for me, okay?

LUKE considers this for a while. All four stand their ground, with RALPH clearly ready to intervene if things go wrong, DAVID hoping they'll back down, and VIV trying to remain calm. Finally, Luke approaches him. He tentatively touches the bandage.

LUKE

It will hurt.

DAVID

Luke, please.

LUKE

No. I don't mean I'll hurt him. Won't it hurt as I take off the bandage?

VIV

Yes.

LUKE

I—I don't want to hurt you.

VIV

I appreciate that. I do. I believe you. But it'll hurt whoever takes it off.

LUKE slowly reaches for the bandage.

VIV

It's like the old saying: it actually hurts less the faster you go.

DAVID

No, it hasn't healed yet. Don't rip it off. Peel it off.

VIV

It's okay. Go ahead.

LUKE takes off the bandage, carefully but quickly. The wound is red, jagged and deep, with crisscrossed stitches. LUKE looks at it in horror and begins to break down.

LUKE

(Anguished) I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

He becomes more and more upset. Suddenly he runs to the desk and grabs the box cutter and rips it out of the baggie. RALPH lunges for him, but LUKE turns the box cutter on himself, aiming it at his own face.

END OF ACT 1