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The Simple Mind of Dillon Magee

A Short Play by

A.D. Hasselbring

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The Simple Mind of Dillon Magee

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CHARACTERS

KIM: *A woman in her mid-thirties, mother to Dillon*

DILLON: *A teenager who has not spoken since a car accident in which his father was killed. He is not autistic and has never been violent.*

DAVID: *About thirty; a young professional engaged to try and reach Dillon.*

SETTING

Dillon's bedroom

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Act I, Scene i

Lights up. Night.

A teenage boy's bedroom. A single lamp illuminates the room. There is a twin bed, nightstand, dresser, large closet, and a desk with a swivel chair. A small, oval-shaped decorative area rug with a pattern of circles that get progressively smaller is on the floor in the center of the room.

A closed door leads to a bathroom, and another door leads to a hallway. The hallway door is ajar. There are pictures hung on the walls, but nothing placed on top of any of the surfaces.

KIM, a woman in her mid-thirties, sits on the downstage side of the bed, her feet on the floor as she leans gently against the headboard of the empty twin bed.

ENTER DILLON, from the bathroom. He is a teenage boy, not yet a man, dressed in pajamas. He methodically closes the bathroom door behind him, then goes to the closet and removes some clothing from the hangers and drawers inside the closet. He carefully lays out his clothes in the middle of the room atop the oval area rug. He sets them down, from head to toe, in the shape of a person. When the shoes have been put in place, resting on their sides, toes facing out, he stands over it for a moment, then crosses to the far side of the bed and climbs in. He makes no acknowledgement towards his mother who stands to allow him to slide underneath the covers. He turns his back toward her and the audience. KIM strokes his hair for a moment and gets no response. She leans over and removes a book from the nightstand's top drawer and opens it to a marked page. She reads:

KIM

(Reading.) When I was sick and lay a-bed, I had two pillows at my head. And all my toys beside me lay, to keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes, for an hour or so, I watched my leaden soldiers go, with different uniforms and drills, among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets, all up and down among the sheets; or brought my trees and houses out, and planted cities all about.

I was the giant, great and still, that sits upon the pillow-hill, and sees before him, dale and plain, the pleasant land of Counterpane.

KIM leans over and replaces the book in the drawer of the nightstand. She stands and tucks in her son, stoops to kiss him on the head, then turns off the light. She follows the pathway of light thrown into the room by the open hallway door and crosses the room.

When she reaches the doorway, she stops and turns back to look at her son. DILLON lays silent and still as if no one is there. The hall light gently silhouettes KIM, before she leaves the room, shutting the door behind her.

EXIT KIM.

Scene ii

Lights up. Morning, the next day. DILLON wakes and sits on the side of the bed for a moment before standing and crossing to gather up his clothes. He piles them into his arms and crosses to the bathroom door, closing it behind him.

EXIT DILLON.

There is a knock on the bedroom door.

ENTER KIM and DAVID.

DAVID is around thirty years of age. He is dressed casually, but carries a satchel case in his downstage hand. KIM looks to the bathroom door and crosses to make the bed.

KIM

He's getting dressed.

DAVID

I see. He dresses himself?

KIM

He does. *(She smiles to herself.)* It's one of his greatest joys. *(She finishes making the bed and turns back to DAVID.)* He can do anything. He is very capable. You'll see. I don't really know how to explain it. I'm not even sure what a successful teaching session with him would look like. He has difficulty responding. He doesn't engage with anyone, or — or anything. *(Pause.)* That will be the hardest part.

DAVID

That's not unusual. We'll just move at his pace and see where we end up. I've worked with autistic children who have that same difficulty.

KIM

That must be hard.

DAVID

It can be, but...

DILLON enters fully dressed, closes the bathroom door, and stands near the door, not looking at anything in particular.

KIM and DAVID look at DILLON and smile.

KIM

Of course Dillon is not autistic. *(She crosses to her son.)* He doesn't have any learning difficulties and there has never been any violent behavior. *(Long pause as the three look at each other.)* Except for the baseball bat incident.

DAVID

I'm sorry?

KIM

I was joking. Badly. He's a good boy. He won't give you any trouble. (*She kisses DILLON on the head.*) Honey, this is David. Can you say hello? (*No response.*) Dillon, can you tell David hello? Or shake his hand? (*Nothing*) Sometimes he'll do it.

DAVID

He speaks?

KIM

No. But on occasion he will shake hands. Maybe later. I'll go get another chair.

DAVID

Can I help?

KIM

No. Thank you. Do you need anything else?

DAVID

We'll see how it goes. Thank you.

EXIT KIM.

DAVID and DILLON stand alone. DILLON begins moving idly.

DAVID puts his hands in his pockets and watches him.

DAVID

Dillon? My name is David. (*No response.*) Good morning. (*Nothing. DILLON is calm, but completely unengaged*) This is always my least favorite part.

After a moment, DILLON crosses to the closet and picks out clothes and lays them on the ground, starting from the top and working down to the shoes. DAVID watches.

ENTER KIM. She carries a folding chair. DAVID sets his satchel on top of the empty desk and takes the chair.

DAVID

Thank you.

KIM

Ahhh – he must like you. He’s showing you his routine.

DAVID

His routine?

KIM

Three or four times a day. (*They watch.*)

DILLON studies the outfit he has laid out on the floor and seems satisfied with the results. KIM and DAVID continue to look on. DILLON turns and walks to the desk where the leather satchel sits. He removes it, setting it gently down on the floor next to the desk.

KIM

He doesn’t like things on surfaces.

DAVID

I see. (*To DILLON*) Sorry, Bud.

DILLON gives no response. KIM smiles.

KIM

I’ll be downstairs if you need anything.

DAVID

Thank you.

DILLON begins idly moving again.

EXIT KIM.

DAVID opens the folding chair and sits in it, watching DILLON. DILLON crosses to the clothes he has laid out on the floor. He corrects the position of one of the shoes and stares at his handiwork.

LIGHTS FADE.

Scene iii

KIM and DAVID sit at the desk. It is the next day. The room looks the same, but there are no clothes on the floor.

DAVID

Yesterday was getting to know you day. I wanted to observe him for a bit and get a feel for what he was comfortable with. For the most part, I watched him pick out his wardrobe.

KIM

There will be a lot of that.

DAVID

Is that how post-traumatic stress disorder manifests itself most of the time? With fixations?

KIM

It can. Although I believe that the clothing enthrallment is unique to Dillon.

DAVID

I can imagine. There are worse fixations to have.

KIM

(She laughs.) At least he always looks good.

DAVID

Did the entire trauma stem from physical injuries?

KIM

He didn't have a scratch on him. He was dirty and scared, but he was outside of the car when the emergency vehicles arrived. They couldn't tell if he was thrown from the car and just caught a miracle, or if he unbuckled his seat belt and climbed out from under the wreck on his own. Either way, he watched his father die hanging upside down in the car. The trauma set in before I saw him at the hospital, but it got worse over the next two days. He hugged me when he first saw me, and cried, and again the next afternoon when he woke up. But he never said a word. And those were the last hugs I got from him.

ENTER DILLON from the bathroom, dressed.

KIM

Good morning.

DAVID

Hello, Dillon.

DILLON gives no reaction. He goes to his closet and starts picking out clothes.

DAVID

You said sometimes he shakes hands?

KIM

He does. They said that he shook hands with all of the first responders at the scene and the doctors that day as well. He doesn't do it all the time, but he will shake hands on occasion. Sometimes, when we are out, he will shake someone's hand and they will just start talking to him. I've seen people go on for ten minutes, thinking he is just a really good listener. (*DAVID likes this.*)

DILLON begins to lay out his wardrobe.

DAVID

So contact isn't a problem?

KIM

No. I hug him all the time and he can sit next to people in crowded areas with no problem. Like I said, he's not autistic. He can look you right in the eyes. He just doesn't engage.

DAVID

And he won't initiate contact, except for shaking hands?

KIM

That's right.

DAVID

But he won't always shake hands?

KIM

(*Sighs*) Not unless he feels like it. (*They smile, and watch DILLON for a moment.*) He's not on medication. We tried some, but nothing seemed to make any real improvement. So what you see is just Dillon.

DAVID

No medications at all?

KIM

None.

DILLON gathers up the clothes on the floor and takes them into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

KIM, *Continued*

His father and I never really relied on hospitals or medications before the accident and there was nothing that seemed worth the side effects afterwards.

DAVID

Was he close to his dad?

KIM

They got along well. Played together on the weekends, watched TV together; some sports, and a lot of Laurel and Hardy reruns. They went camping in the summer, (*Pause*) but I don't think they were any closer than other fathers and sons are. (*Pause*) I guess a mother never really knows how a boy feels about his father.

DAVID

I think that's very true.

KIM

I am going to go get started on breakfast. Would you like anything?

DAVID

No, thank you. I already ate this morning.

KIM

I'll make some extra just in case.

EXIT KIM.

DAVID stands alone in the room. DILLON ENTERS from the bathroom wearing a new outfit. This time he has a football jersey on. He closes the door behind him and stands upstage, looking nowhere in particular.

DAVID

Hi, Buddy. Would you like to get started for today?

DILLON stands still for a moment, then crosses to DAVID and holds his hand out, waiting for DAVID to shake it. DAVID looks at it for a moment, then takes hold and shakes DILLON's outstretched hand firmly. DAVID smiles.

LIGHTS FADE.

LIGHTS UP.

Evening. The Bedroom is empty.

ENTER KIM.

She crosses to DILLON's bed, avoiding the neatly laid out clothing on the floor. She sits at the head of the bed and picks up the book from the nightstand drawer.

ENTER DILLON, from the bathroom. He is dressed in pajamas. He crosses to the bed and climbs in under the covers, facing away from his mother. She strokes his hair and kisses him. No reaction. She speaks softly to her son.

KIM

Are you and David getting along? *(Pause)* I hope you are. I hope he's reaching you. I wish I knew what you were thinking. I wish I knew what you were thinking. *(She kisses him and opens the book again...)*

(Reading.) When I was sick and lay a-bed, I had two pillows at my head. And all my toys beside me lay, to keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes, for an hour or so, I watched my leaden soldiers go, with different uniforms and drills, among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets, all up and down among the sheets; or brought my trees and houses out, and planted cities all about.

I was the giant, great and still, that sits upon the pillow-hill, and sees before him, dale and plain, the pleasant land of Counterpane.

KIM closes the book and places it back in the drawer. She pulls the covers up around her son and leaves the room, closing the door behind her.

There is a light shift.

DILLON moves in his sleep and sits upright, startled. He quickly gets out of bed and gathers up the clothes in the middle of the floor, takes them to the bathroom, and returns, still in his pajamas,

without the clothing. With great urgency, he selects and lays out a different outfit on the floor again. He looks at it for a moment and returns to his bed.

Lights fade.

Scene iv

LIGHTS UP. A week later. DAVID is alone in the room, sitting in the folding chair next to the desk. His leather satchel sits beside him on the floor. There are no clothes on the floor.

ENTER KIM.

She carries a lunch plate and a can of soda to DAVID. He stands as she approaches.

DAVID

Thank you.

KIM

You're welcome.

DAVID takes the plate from KIM and sets it on the desk. He gestures to the bathroom door.

DAVID

We're on our second change this morning.

KIM

I would guess that they didn't cover this in class.

DAVID

Well, not in undergrad, but keep in mind I am working on my master's. *(KIM laughs.)* No. I can't say that PTSD fashion trends were covered under any prerequisite over the course of my education.

KIM

You must have attended a public university. *(Now DAVID laughs out loud.)* You know, before the accident, he would have worn the same shirt every day for a week if I had let him.

DAVID

Really?

KIM

He was a teenager.

DAVID

He still is.

KIM

Yes, but the days of wearing the same thing twice are gone.

ENTER DILLON.

He closes the door of the bathroom behind him.

KIM

(To DILLON) You look very nice, dear. *(No response.)*

DAVID

Is there any pattern to the clothes he chooses?

KIM

There doesn't appear to be. Each day is different and the outfits are never the same.

DAVID is intrigued by this.

DAVID

So there is no connection or organization to what he chooses to lay out?

KIM

No. He picks what he wants to wear. He always changes in the bathroom and he puts whatever clothes he had on in the hamper. Clean or dirty. Doesn't matter. Into the hamper it goes.

DAVID is deep in thought. KIM crosses upstage and pats DILLON on the back as she moves past him into the bathroom.

EXIT KIM.

DAVID stands downstage, searching for meaning in what he has heard. DILLON crosses directly to the desk, where he removes the plate still full of food and the soda, placing them gently in the trash can next to the desk.

DAVID

(Looking back a moment too late.) Okay. That was my fault. *(DILLON has no response.)*

DAVID begins to remove the items from the trash can and tries to clean up a bit. DILLON sits at the desk looking at his hand as he idly moves his arm.

ENTER KIM.

In her arms, she carries a bundle of clothing from the bathroom. She crosses to the closet and begins to hang up the clothes.

KIM

Will it bother you if I'm in here?

DAVID

Not at all. We are going to be working on expressing ourselves through writing.

KIM

(Still putting away the clean clothes.) Through writing?

DAVID

Well, pictures. We'll start with happy or sad faces and see where we end up.

KIM

Should I expect Robert Louis Stevenson by the end of the day?

DAVID

You shouldn't not expect it. *(KIM smiles.)*

DAVID sets the plate on the ground next to the trash can and holds the unopened soda can as he retrieves his satchel. He opens it and sets the soda on the desk as he searches in the satchel for pen and paper. DILLON immediately picks up the soda can and places it in the trash.

DAVID, pen and pad in hand, realizes his stupidity and goes to retrieve the soda can.

Without thinking, he sets the pad and paper on the desk and reaches into the trash for the soda.

DILLON quickly puts the pen and pad in the trash, which DAVID then stoops to pick up, setting the satchel down on the open folding chair, which DILLON efficiently gathers up and begins to place it in the now toppled over trash can.

A frazzled DAVID grabs the pen, pad, satchel, soda, and trash can, effectively ending this dizzying dance.

KIM looks on with enjoyment.

DAVID

(Embarrassed) That's a little-known teaching technique I've been developing recently.

KIM

Very effective.

DAVID

Thank you.

DAVID has now set everything on the floor and replaced the trash can where it belongs.

DILLON sits, uninvolved, in the chair. KIM continues to put away the pile of clothes and smiles to herself.

DAVID is undeterred. He positions himself in front of DILLON, who is seated at the desk.

DAVID, *Continued*

Alright, Buddy. Expression time!

DAVID swivels DILLON's chair so they are face to face and leans forward to the boy to get down at his level.

DILLON has a soft, emotionless focus in DAVID's general direction.

KIM has completed her chores and crosses to the hallway door.

DAVID, *Continued*

You two have fun.

DAVID waves from his crouched position.

Thank you. *(To DILLON.)* Happy. *(DAVID smiles widely.)* Happy. *(Nothing from DILLON)*
Happy! Sad. *(DAVID frowns.)* Sad. Sad. *(Nothing. DAVID repeats the exercise once more.)*
Happy. Sad. Now let's draw them!

DAVID bends down, picks up the pad and places it on the desk while he reaches for the pen. DILLON smoothly picks up the pad and places it in the trash as DAVID stands with the pen and realizes what has happened. DAVID stands, dismayed, and scolds himself.

I refuse to learn. I simply refuse to learn.

DILLON sits looking away. DAVID sets the pen on the desk in front of DILLON, who systematically places it in the waiting trash can.

Well. Now I think we all feel better. *(No response. DAVID lets out a frustrated sigh.)* Alright!
Here we go!

DAVID tries to reenergize himself as he picks up the trash can to retrieve his possessions. DILLON sits looking at nothing in particular. DAVID empties the trash can on to the floor.

He replaces the trash can and returns to pick up his items from where they sit on the floor. He picks up the items and, as he stands, he sets the satchel on the desk and reaches for the folding chair. As soon as DAVID's hands leave the satchel, DILLON systematically reaches for the satchel, picking it up to place it in the trash can. This time, however, DAVID is too swift. He instinctively drops the pad and pen to the desk and takes hold of the bag before DILLON can drop it in the waste basket. DAVID starts to set the satchel down on the floor, leaning it against the leg of the folding chair.

DAVID, *Continued*

Well, if nothing else, at least my reflexes are improving.

DILLON, in the same motion as DAVID setting down the satchel, reaches for the pad and pen on the desk, drops them into the trash with a clang.

DAVID hears the sound and, without turning to look, stands up, placing his hands on his hips, and looks heavenward. He leans back against the desk and, with half dismay and half amusement, he looks at a still disengaged DILLON.

DAVID, *Continued*

Ya' know? You might think I would have seen that coming. *(Pause, sigh.)* Alright! *(DAVID walks to the trashcan and gathers up his pad and pen and tries to get DILLON's attention. DILLON looks more through DAVID than at him.)* Dillon. I know you can do this. And this is the key. This is it. Once you can learn to express your feelings outwardly, you can break out of this. You can communicate. Communication is the key. How do I get you to communicate? *(Pause)* Let's try smiling again. Can you smile? *(DAVID smiles.)* See? Smiling. Happy. Happy. Smile. Laughing. *(DAVID laughs. DILLON looks away, disinterested.)* Dillon? Dillon? Can you look at me, please? Dillon? *(DAVID repositions himself in front of DILLON again and starts over.)* Dillon. Smile. Look, look. Smile. *(DAVID smiles, but DILLON has no response.)* DILLON! When we are happy, we smile. Now watch, watch. *(DAVID opens the pad, draws a smiling face, and holds it up for DILLON.)* Smile. Smile. I know that you remember how. It's an expression of joy. Try it. Smile. S-M-I-L-E. *(DAVID writes the word Smile under the picture and inadvertently sets the pen on the desk while holding up the pad for DILLON to see.)* Smile. *(DILLON reaches for the pen, but DAVID grabs it away from him before he can toss it in the trash can. DILLON has no reaction.)* No! Dillon, look. Look at the picture! Now look at my face! Smile. You can smile. Try it. *(DILLON looks away.)*

DAVID, now getting completely involved in reaching DILLON, sets the pad down on the chair and stands up. DILLON reaches for the pad and DAVID quickly moves it to the floor and tries to regain DILLON's attention. DAVID becomes more animated and energized as he tries to push his pupil.

DAVID, *Continued*

When we are happy, we smile. (*DAVID now demonstrates each action for DILLON.*) When we are sad, we frown. Frown. When we are very sad, we cry, and when we are very happy, we laugh. But I want you to start with a smile. We smile at things we like. (*Nothing.*) What makes you happy? Clothing makes you happy. You like to change your clothes. (*DAVID turns to cross to the closet and topples over the chair, landing flat on the floor by the satchel.*)

DILLON gently laughs.

DAVID looks up at DILLON from the floor.

(*Stunned*) Alright. Did - did you just - laugh? Did you — did you *laugh* at me falling over the chair?

DILLON has no response.

DAVID stands and resets the chair, and pauses a moment before deliberately toppling over it again, landing in a heap looking up at DILLON, whose face widens into a pleasant smile, looking more at the chair than at his fallen teacher. DILLON's face returns to a neutral expression and a soft focus as he gazes off to one side of the room.

DAVID stands up and resets the chair.

ENTER KIM, concerned.

KIM

Dillon? Is everything allrig—

DAVID holds up a hand to stop her at the door. KIM stops in her tracks, a bit worried but more surprised at this unusual occurrence, as well as DAVID's obvious change in demeanor.

There is silence. DAVID stands by the chair, his hand raised. KIM stands just inside the doorway, motionless, and DILLON sits quietly looking at nothing.

DAVID takes a step back before again toppling over the folding chair and tumbling to the floor.

Without fully looking at the event, DILLON smiles and lets out a small laugh, almost as if he is laughing at a memory. From the doorway, KIM gasps and raises her hands to her face in astonished joy. DAVID, from the floor, laughs a celebratory laugh that fills the room.

BLACKOUT.

Scene V

Spot up on DAVID.

DAVID

It didn't happen all at once, but that laugh broke through to something in Dillon's mind. It opened a door for him to heal. I was only there to fulfill the last few hours of my graduate requirements. Had he laughed a week later — had Kim believed what everyone else had told her — had I not tripped over that chair...

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes