Under the Knife, Under the Gun

by

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ABSTRACT

UNDER THE KNIFE, UNDER THE GUN

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This thesis is an investigation of the current healthcare system in the United States and the past system of healthcare in Canada before 1963, when the province of Saskatchewan started a single payer system of healthcare. The results of my research are written in the form of a play. Not only are there comparisons between the present U.S. system and past Canadian system of healthcare delivery, Under the Knife, Under the Gun focuses on the personal conflicts between the American family that is featured in the play as well as the systemic conflicts that arise in surviving in a capitalist system that thrives on the labour of a very large economic underclass.
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Introduction

Will the United States ever have universal health care? This was the question that I explored in writing my play, *Under the Knife, Under the Gun*. I incorporated the research that I did on both the United States and Canada's health care systems and used it to tell a story of a U.S. family and a few of the people in their lives and how lack of access to quality and affordable health care has adversely affected their lives, though the play is not solely about this topic. Lack of affordable health care is a reality that lives in the background of these characters' lives; they have always lived with this reality, so they know nothing different. If any of them ever have to go “under the knife”, they may not be able to get treatment. They are always “under the gun” as they are under pressures to make a living while doing their best to deal with, support, and co-exist with one another. They all lived in the same small, cramped house and while they have dreams for the future, they will likely be never solid plans as there is always the urgency to get through the month, week, shift, and on some cases, the moment. While medical emergencies wipe out middle-class families financially (Mangan), they can kill the working poor if they do have have adequate insurance coverage, and they often seek care when it is too late.

Below, I will explore: the settings of the play, the local economy of those setting; the jobs that various characters have and their health risks, not only from lack of access to care, but the hazardous conditions in which some work; how their lack of coverage affects their every day lives; distrust of the government; the realities of “patient dumping”; and the comparisons of the U.S.'s present health crisis with Canada's past and how both were blended into *Knife/Gun*.

Setting of play in Aberdeen and Riverside, Maryland

Taking place in 2010 during the heated, partisan debate between Democratic and Republican Party politicians over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (colloquially named “Obamacare” or “ACA”), *Knife/Gun* is set in Aberdeen, Maryland, a small town that is divided by the Route 40
corridor. Next to Aberdeen along Route 40 is a small, unincorporated town called Riverside. Here, Route 40 intersects with Interstate 95 as well as Route 543, making it a prime location for factories and business parks, though some factories, such as Mercedes-Benz and Bata Shoe have closed years ago. The location of Riverside on Route 40 makes it an important source for jobs for those in Aberdeen and other surrounding towns. Riverside is also the secondary location in Knife/Gun. It is where Ronnie, Chuck, and Diego work at night unloading trucks.

Unfortunately, most of the jobs in factories, warehouses, and distribution centers are temporary with many temp agencies located in Aberdeen who eagerly send their applicants to work as early as the next day to earn about two thirds of what the lucky minority of permanent employees make per week, and unlike the permanent employees, temps earn no benefits and have no job security. At any time, temps can be let go for any reason, and many times, those reasons have nothing to do with the temp's performance. To qualify for these jobs, one must go through mandatory drug testing and in some instances, hair follicle drug testing is also required. This leaves out those with prior criminal records, even for petty crimes as well as those who are recovering from drug addiction, which is rampant in Aberdeen.

Those who cannot make the cut, or who are told that there is “no work this week” from the agencies, are often left to work under the table at jobs such as unloading trucks. Truck unloaders, or “lumpers”, can work at retail businesses, but the best potential for work is at large distribution centers located along the highway where many trucks are unloading their goods. Truckers, under enormous pressure to meet delivery deadlines, to go and get the next batch of goods as soon as possible, need lumpers to help unload their freight immediately. Lumping is also precarious and depends on how many trucks are present in ratio to lumpers who show up to work. Of course, there is no job security, benefits, or even standards of workplace safety as these individuals are “work to hire”, paid by cash by individual truckers for a couple hours of work.
Characters in the play, their working conditions, and lack of health insurance

Ronnie, the main character in *Under The Knife, Under the Gun*, works as a lumper, as do the characters, Chuck and Diego. All three work at night when most of the deliveries come in. Ronnie is one of 49.9 million Americans who was lacking health insurance in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau). Both Ronnie and his father were laid off from their stable jobs at a local plant years before the start of the play. Ronnie and his father (who does not appear in the play because he died years before the first scene takes place) had not only economic stability while working at the plant, but health benefits. They both represent a part of the uninsured who lost their jobs and benefits as a result of the U.S. losing its manufacturing base (Kelton).

Ronnie's sister Wendy works in a nursing home as a nursing assistant, caring for elderly patients. The work is physically and emotionally strenuous with intentional understaffing. Burnout in this line of work is great, leading to rapid turnover as most cannot stay in the profession very long. Wendy is looking to quit the nursing home to care for various patients in home care such as Pat, one of her patients who is chronically ill and bedridden at home. Home health care is big business and working under the table can be quite an incentive for a nursing assistant who is overworked, underpaid and taking care of too many patients at one time in a facility. Wendy, like many others have done, is a nursing assistant who takes a gamble on surrendering her health care benefits for the better working conditions of taking care of one patient at a time in home health.

Telling the story of one of Wendy's patients, Pat shows how the nation's health care crisis has not only hit the working poor, it has also hit the middle class. In fact, the Michael Moore documentary, *Sicko*, is about how the health care crisis has hit middle income Americans who have stable jobs with access to what is considered by U.S. standards, “good” health insurance. Donna Smith, a woman who was featured in *Sicko*, lost her home due to medical bills that she could not pay because of her cancer, and the documentary shows her and her husband having to move into her adult child's basement.
(Moore, *Sicko*). Donna Smith not only had health insurance, she had AFLAC disability insurance and a health care savings account ("American SiCKO Donna Smith Talks Health Care and Ted Kennedy").

In *Knife/Gun*, Pat, a retired Internal Revenue Service employee, was formerly married to Charlie, a retired U.S. Customs agent. They had three children, lived in a nice part of Bel Air, Maryland, a middle class suburb about 45 minutes northeast of Baltimore City. Charlie left Pat for another woman. She became seriously ill, and after being in the hospital and receiving rehabilitation to learn to walk again, her insurance company arbitrarily stopped paying for her care, resulting in Pat being forced to live with her daughter, Kara. She is bedridden from losing the progress that she made in the hospital learning how to walk again. Pat's daughter is only able to afford to have someone come in for two hours each day and take care of her, well below the level of care that Pat needs.

With the exception of Donna Smith's story, I did not have to do any research for most of the above realities as I grew up in Harford County, not far from Aberdeen, and in my mid-20s, my then-boyfriend and I were temping at various factories and distribution centers in the Riverside area. As I indicated in my proposal, part of the research for the play would be my own anecdotal experiences as an American who has, at various times, had no access to health care. My boyfriend went on to lumping for a brief time and I went to train to become a nursing assistant; I was also in training to do this type of work at the vocational-technical high school I attended in the late 80s, early 90s for three years. While temping, we had no health care benefits. While working in a nursing home, I did not have health insurance as we had to wait six months in order to qualify for it. Even if I had it, I would have given it up to do the much easier, more personally rewarding, and slightly higher paying job of private home care. I also took care of many patients in their homes, after working in a few facilities, driving from job to job. Some jobs were through an agency, while some leads for jobs I developed on my own. Pat is a composite character of many of my patients who lived comfortable lives only to see their life savings depleted in retirement thanks to illness.
In *Knife/Gun*, Ronnie's sister Wendy also follows this route as a nursing assistant of working in a facility and transitioning to home care. Though it is never mentioned in the play, she is likely starting to develop back problems and there is a good chance that the stress of working in a facility is making her clinically depressed, though she would not know that she has depression. Her working conditions, with the added stress of losing her son Chris (she lost him long before he ran away) years after she lost custody of her other child, and dealing with her mother who lives with her, are collectively likely the source for any depression that she may have.

Nursing assistants are the lowest on the totem pole of employees in the health field, work the hardest physically, and are constantly admonished by nurses, administration, and frustrated family members. Nursing assistants are usually required to attain six months of working experience in order to move into home care, but as the nurse who taught my high school health occupations program constantly stated, many nursing assistants burn out in a nursing home before they can complete the six months of work experience. Nursing home residential stays are funded through a combination of private money and assets of the patient, private insurance, Medicare, a single payer program for senior citizens, as well as Medicaid, a state medical assistance program for those who are impoverished. Very little is done to enhance quality of life for residents and they are often overprescribed medications, especially antipsychotic drugs (Jaffe).

Lena, Ronnie and Wendy's mother, was a housewife who took care of her kids and should be living off of her husband's pension, though it is gone thanks to her husband's and son's job being exported overseas. Lena, a prescription drug addict, recently won eligibility for disability and back pay, though she refuses to sign the paperwork that would give her an actual monthly income. Audiences for this play would likely rightfully attribute Lena's refusal to sign as part of her mental illness, and maybe some would attribute to a power play on Lena's part to stay and bully her daughter, and some may see it as distrust of the federal government. I believe that all of those interpretations would be correct,
though there is a real-life federal policy as well as a story on which Lena's refusal to sign for her disability is based (Collins, Erfle).

In the 1980s, then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan had required all recipients of federal disability payments to re-certify in order to continue to receive their benefits (McEnteer 63). Those who did not were kicked off of the rolls. One of those people was Jim Beane, one of the actors who author James McEnteer writes about in *Acting Like it Matters*, a book about the Los Angeles Poverty Department, a theatre troupe of homeless people living on Los Angeles's streets, many with drug addictions and mental illnesses. When Beane joined the troupe in 1987, he had been homeless for years, living in a vacant lot near Chinatown and digging through the trash for food. The troupe secured Beame a pro-bono lawyer to restore his disability benefits. When the lawyer won Jim Beame's case months later, all he had to do was sign paperwork attesting to the fact that he was schizophrenic and he could receive his payments with $30,000 in back pay. Beame refused (63).

“Jim would not sign,” writes McEnteer. “That's signing my death warrant....I'll be blackballed from law school, from teaching, from real estate..." The head of LAPD pleaded with him repeatedly to sign the form. Beame refused and eventually quit coming to rehearsals altogether and dropped off of the scene (63).

Distrust of the government on the part of those who are poor and with mental illness is not entirely unfounded, especially if one sees re-certifying for disability benefits as a way to throw people off who do not have the wherewithal to get back on track with their payments. This distrust, however, often veers off in wildly misguided directions. With both Jim Beame and Lena, the distrust of the state leads them to act against their own best interests. They deprive themselves of much-needed benefits, and for Lena, life did not turn out the way it was supposed to for her. She blames immigrants and the current U.S. President, Barack Obama, not for any policies that he may have passed that make her life harder, but because he is black and she possesses both the racism and fear of communism that so many of the white, working class political right hold. Lena, who constantly watches television and
propaganda channels like FOX News, which are only too happy to cater to Lena’s fears and those of millions of others, as they have only been too happy to show personalities such as Saturday Night Live alum Victoria Jackson who repeatedly call President Obama, “a communist” (Dimiero, Willis).

Of course, Lena also does not have health insurance, so she cannot get the psychiatric help that she needs, though she would possibly be eligible for Medicaid, a now-privatized, state insurance program for the poor, that would give her coverage if she applied. Ronnie may also be eligible to apply. In some states, Medicaid coverage has not been expanded under the Affordable Care Act, and some are finding that they are “too poor” for Medicaid (Young), though Maryland expanded its coverage. Though the play is set in Maryland, there are millions all across the U.S who are in similar circumstances who do not qualify for Medicaid. Just as I incorporated Los Angeles stories of patient dumping and Jim Beame's refusal to sign for his disability payments into the story of this Maryland family, I blended stories of poor people across the U.S. who do not qualify for Medicaid as well. The play never really answers the question of whether or not any of these characters are eligible for Medicaid, since even if they were, they would not know to apply.

Chuck, Ronnie's lumper friend, could possibly be eligible to apply, though he also does not realize that he can. Those who are impoverished do not know the system and its bureaucracy well enough to know what they are eligible for, and they often do not think that they would be approved for such programs. “Obamacare” with its layers of bureaucracy, has already made a very confusing, private multi-payer health care system even more confusing. However, Chuck is waiting until he turns 62 to receive Medicare, a single payer program for senior citizens. What Chuck does not yet know is that in most instances, eligibility does not begin until age 65 (“When will My Coverage Start?”). He has horrible emphysema, which cannot be cured, but the symptoms could be relieved with medical care, and in some instances, can be helped with surgery (Mayo Clinic).

Diego's situation is a bit different, but not much more so. As an undocumented immigrant, he is not eligible for any type of programs, but it is federal law that all who come to seek care in the
emergency room must be admitted regardless of ability to pay (EMTALA). Diego was able to get his finger re-attached, but as Chris told him in the first scene, he will have a large bill sent to him soon. Heated debate in the news media continues over undocumented immigrants using emergency services as some U.S. Presidential candidates seek to make it an issue, despite the fact that undocumented immigrants use fewer health services than U.S.-born residents (Lai, Driscoll).

The Hospitals Dump the Homeless

However, federal law is not always followed. “Patient dumping” is a term used for taking homeless people in hospital emergency rooms and putting them back on the street instead of releasing them to their families. Rosa took Ronnie to the emergency room when he was in great pain, likely from pancreatitis. She left him at the ER to go get Wendy and bring her back to the hospital, which would have been an hour round trip. Ronnie had no identification because he refuses to carry it thanks to his prior criminal background and distrust of the system. While Rosa is gone, Ronnie is in and out of consciousness from his pain. The hospital does not treat him, he has no family to be released to, or at least they think he does not. They assume he is homeless and he is dumped by taxi at a mostly-abandoned Aberdeen shopping center, where he eventually dies amongst other homeless people. One in particular stays with Ronnie most of the time that he is alive. Dumping happens all over the U.S., but it is more likely to occur in California as that state has a large homeless population (McEnteer 1). In Knife/Gun, what likely saved Diego from such a fate was not only his visible need for medical attention: his severed finger. His sister, who speaks English well, was with him and likely communicated with the admissions counselor for the hospital and medical staff.
Life During and After the Introduction of “Obamacare”

As the fight over the Affordable Care Act, a piece of legislation that was birthed on the political right (Reich), is in the news, Wendy asks Ronnie why he does not sign up. He does not have any money to spare. The United States had 49.9 million uninsured Americans in 2010 (“Health Insurance Highlights: 2010”), the year that this play is set, but the number of uninsured since the Affordable Care Act was rolled out has decreased by 11 million. Those who are still not insured at this point must pay a fine through their annual filing of taxes if they do not purchase a plan. If Ronnie continues to work under the table, this fine will not apply to him. The problem with ACA, however, is that more insured people does not mean access to good care; the coverage is often inadequate. There are still no caps on health care costs, there are still expensive co-pays, and most enrollees in the Affordable Care Act have the “silver” plan, which only covers 70% of all costs, with 30% of the costs covered by the consumer (“Estimate Your Subsidies Under the New Federal Health Law”). In a market-driven system with no caps on health care costs resulting in astronomical health care bills, the system is still for-profit with a tiny few making a lot of money at the expense of the many. Even if Ronnie gets another full-time “above the table” job that does not offer health insurance and he signs up for a silver plan, at best, medical bills could ruin him, even owing just 30% on his bills. At worst, he may not be able to get any future treatments that he needs.

Health Coverage in the Present-Day United States and Canada's Past

So is it possible that the United States could have a single payer health care system like every other industrialized country in the world? Can it be done when the conditions are so bad? In Knife/Gun, I incorporated scenes from various locations in Canada before the 1963 fight for Medicare in the province of Saskatchewan to show Canada also had poor conditions for its people as far as access to health care. The excellent book, Life Before Medicare: Canadian Experiences, published in 1985, contains personal accounts from older Canadians on what life was like before Saskatchewan, and
eventually all of the provinces in concert with the federal government, adopted Medicare (Charters).

I use the shy, smart, and Internet-addicted character of 13-year-old Chris, Wendy's son, to introduce these stories to the audience. Chris looks everything up on-line; he is more engaged with the Internet than he is with school. He researches the health care system in other countries, including France, where he seeks to relocate, but he does more research and then realizes that he cannot leave the country on his own until he is of age.

Initially, we see Chris on his computer, Googleing about the Canadian health care system. He gets up from his computer and stands to the side and watches various scenes unfold. He sees a society where people cannot afford a doctor, so one never comes; where a son has to operate on his own mother; a Scottish immigrant who is prematurely discharged from the hospital and all of his money taken to pay for his stay; a young cancer-ridden woman who insists that her husband lock her in the house so she can scream without anyone coming into the home to check on her. Her baby is with her mother-in-law until she passes on. Money is scarce. People are isolated and struggling. Whiskey and rye are the only painkillers available.

In 1961-62, a single-payer health program was introduced in the province of Saskatchewan by then-Premier Tommy Douglass, and would be implemented by Premier Woodrow Stanley Lloyd in 1963. Doctors in the province waged a strike to oppose the plan. The province flew doctors in from Great Britain so provincial residents would have access to medical care during the strike. After negotiations, the program went forward, with the rest of the provinces adopting it by 1970 (Simons, Sterrenberg, *The Healthcare Movie*).

I created two fictitious characters, Canadian doctors, based on the strike and the real-life rally that striking doctors held to try to pressure Premier Lloyd to drop the single payer plan. The rally was poorly attended and this signaled a turning of public opinion in favour of the plan. The doctors appear three times in brief scenes. The first and the third scene, Ronnie is unconscious and lying on the ground. They are oblivious to him, stepping on him, even jamming one of their signs into him in their
first scene onstage. These actions imply their indifference toward their patients and the potential
damage that they do in calling the strike.

Why do a play on this topic?

Many positions papers have been written on health care in the United States and the need for a
single payer system. In the U.S. corporate media, little attention has been paid to the idea, as the debate
has been mostly for and against the ACA, and before ACA, single payer has often never been
mentioned in reports on the U.S.'s health care crisis. Still, Americans support single payer in various
polls by two-thirds (Sullivan). While most American plays dealing with illness have been about AIDS
and mental illness, very little has been about the delivery of care with the exception of Michael
Mulligan's play, Mercy Killers, a one man show about a man whose wife falls ill with cancer
(Milligan).

Americans, overall, know very little about Canada, let alone its health care system. While there
have been comparisons between the health care systems of the two countries, there has also been false
propaganda about the Canadian system and the systems of various other industrialized nations who
have universal health care from the U.S. media and the health insurance industry to try to scare the
public out of supporting single payer (Potter). The polls show that these tactics have not worked
overall.

While position papers and U.S. Congressional testimonies are effective in arguing for the
implementation of a single payer healthcare system in the United States, their reach is limited. Michael
Moore made the excellent documentary, Sicko about the failure of the for-profit American health care
system, and another documentary, The Healthcare Movie, compares the histories of the U.S. And
Canadian health care systems and the very differing paths they took into the latter 20th Century.

Performance art is another avenue in which to raise the issue of the U.S. health care system, and
the theatre is one medium where Knife/Gun's concrete comparisons between pre-Medicare Canada and
21st Century United States could hit home. *Knife/Gun* shows us that in both societies, healthcare is only accessible to those who can afford it. We see the Canadian boy who had to operate on own mother in a farmhouse in 1933 because they could not afford the $10 for a doctor. Ronnie had to instruct his lover on how to sew up his leg because his girlfriend stabbed him after she caught him cheating on her. Incidentally, the first scene of *Sicko* shows a young man who gave himself stitches because he could not afford to go to the hospital (Moore, *Sicko*). There are also YouTube videos showing the uninsured how to self-administer this same treatment; one graphic Youtube video titled, “Must See - DIY - How to Give Yourself Stitches at Home” contains the following description: “When you live in the United States with its great healthcare system and its fabulous insurance companies - sometimes you just do what you have to do”.

The character “Young Man” from Scotland in *Knife/Gun* was discharged early from the hospital because he could not afford to pay. He looked through his clothes after he was discharged and discovered that the hospital took his money for the bill. In 2010, when Ronnie was unconscious in the hospital from the pain, he was searched for identification, none was found, so the hospital staff assumed that he was homeless. Though the play never addresses the question of why he was dumped in an abandoned shopping centre instead of being treated, it is likely that the hospital staff assumed that he was merely going through drug withdrawal and not seriously ill, and understaffed and overcrowded, they made a snap decision to discharge him. Overwhelmed emergency room staff and hospital social workers who deal with large homeless populations have nowhere to put homeless people who cannot afford treatment, and the homeless people usually do not have the luxury of choice of hospital; they cannot elect to go to a nicer one in a wealthier neighborhood. The young Canadian woman who is screaming from cancer, is locked, by her own choice, in her home with only liquor for the pain. In the U.S. in 2010, there is Lena, who is mentally ill, and self-medicates with prescription pills that she illegally obtains.
Today's health care system in the United States looks quite similar to Canada before it started its Medicare program. I felt that a play was the best format in which to tell this story; a story as the best way to bring these comparisons to life for an American audience who may have only heard about the Canadian system in passing, but for most, who know nothing of that system's history. Many Americans who support a federal single payer program, but may feel that there are too many powerful people profiting off of the current health care system can see that despite the opposition from powerful interests, Medicare prevailed in Saskatchewan in 1963, then the rest of Canada in 1970 (Simons, Sterrenberg, The Healthcare Movie). With the current mess of the U.S. healthcare system, a single payer is inevitable despite the interests who oppose it.
Under the Knife, Under the Gun

by Brandy Baker

RONNIE / YOUNG MAN
KENNY / SAM / PARAMEDIC #1 / HOMELESS MAN
WENDY / SARAH / MISSY
LENA / MISS DYSON / PAT / MISSY’S MOTHER
CHRIS / PARAMEDIC #2 / DOCTOR #1
ROSA / CINDY / HELEN
DIEGO / STEVE / CABBIE
CHUCK / COP / MAX / TRUCKER / DOCTOR #2

Act 1
Scene 1

Aberdeen, Maryland. 2010. A living room with secondhand furniture, cluttered. Kenny opens the door, looks around, and cautiously takes a couple of steps.

KENNY: Miss Lena? Miss Len--

RONNIE: MOTHA’FUCKER! I told you to never come back here!

_Ronnie runs across the room, towards Kenny. Kenny takes off. Ronnie is at the doorway yelling out._

RONNIE: You lil' pencil dick druggie. I see you here again, I'll kick your fuckin' ass!

_Ronnie slams the door. Lena and Wendy open the door and come in. Lena wheels in a metal cart full of groceries._

LENA: Who you yellin' at? We could hear you all the way down the street.

RONNIE: Kenny. He tried to come in here. Are you buyin' shit off him?

LENA: No.......haven't for a long time. I stopped before you moved in here.

RONNIE: Then why is he coming 'round here?

LENA: I dunno. I'm gonna take these groceries to the kitchen.

Lena wheels the cart into the kitchen.

RONNIE: Saw Joe the other day, he asked about ya'.

WENDY: Fuck Joe....was he alone?
RONNIE: Had a guy with him, probably from work. Tall, black guy.

WENDY: Don't think I know him...Joe's problie' turnin' queer.


Ronnie laughs.

*Chris opens the door, comes into the house, excited. He has something wrapped in a sock.*

CHRIS: Look what I found!

WENDY: Oooh, what 'cha got?

*CHRIS holds it up.*

WENDY: Oh gross, it's bloody.

CHRIS: Look!

RONNIE: Holy fuck, it's a finger!

CHRIS: Yeah, I'm going to take it to school tomorrow! That dead rat that Bobby brought in is nothing compared to this!

RONNIE: Yeah, this tops a dead rat.

WENDY: You're not going to take that in! That belongs to somebody! Where did you get this?

CHRIS: Mr. Jameson's backyard.

WENDY: We should call the police.

RONNIE: I dunno. Maybe we should just put an ad on Craigslist and see if someone calls us, we don't need to get the pigs involved.

WENDY: Craigslist? Ronnie, we have to call the police.

RONNIE: OK, but let me leave get 'da fuck outta' here first.

WENDY: You don't have to leave, just go upstairs.

*Ronnie goes upstairs.*

WENDY: I'm gonna to call the cops, then I'm gonna to clean this up and put it on ice so that it will be cold. They might be able to reattach it. Chris, go upstairs and do your homework. And don't tell anyone about this.

CHRIS: I can't take it to school with m--

WENDY: No!

*Chris goes upstairs. Wendy calls 911.*

WENDY: Yes, hello. My son found a finger in the woods.....a finger. Looks like a pinky finger. It's brown.......hello? Hello, 'you there? Oh good, I thought I lost you. Can you send
somebody?....Okay...right....okay......okay, thank you.

WENDY hangs up, after studying the finger for a bit, WENDY walk with it into the kitchen. LENA is putting on a pot of coffee as WENDY comes into the kitchen. She runs the finger under water, wraps it in a wet paper towel, then she opens the refrigerator and goes to put the finger in.

LENA: Why are you getting somethin' to eat? I'm cookin' dinner soon. You are always openin' that frig. Always eatin'. You could have...

LENA AND WENDY: ...married Chad Sherman, had a wonderful life, married a Marine...

LENA: ...but he left you standing on the front porch waiting for him in your pink prom dress that you were bustin' out of because you gained weight right before prom and have done so ever since.

Wendy looks at the audience and addresses them.

WENDY: She always says this every time she harps on my weight, which is almost daily. I could have married Chad, I could have been the wife of a marine living overseas, I could have had polite, perfect kids, picket fence, on and on, but Chad never showed up to pick me up from prom because I was fat. Because I was "bustin' out of my dress".

The real story is that Chad cheated on me. I knew he was cheatin' on me, and many told me after he took her to prom instead. He went away for basic for the part-time state National Guard, NOT the Marines. And his life went to hell.....I've told her all of this before and she doesn't listen. Watch...(turns and talks to LENA)

Mom, Chad took someone else to prom, joined the National Guard, PART TIME, not the Marines, PART TIME National Guard. One weekend a month, two weeks in the summer. He came back from basic, knocked up this other girl, and beat the hell out of her and the baby that they had and she took the baby and left. And now Chad is a meth head who supports his habit by giving rides to junkies to go pick up their shit. Yeah, mom, that would have been a great life...

LENA: Can't you stay out of that 'frig? Supper will be ready soon. You really shouldn't eat so much. You are still standin' on the front porch in that pink prom dress. You had just eaten before then, and I told you not to.

Wendy puts the finger in the freezer and as she walks out of the kitchen, LENA continues to talk to her...

LENA: You could have married Chad. Had a great life, would have had a nice figure, been stationed in Germany, the Philippines.........England.........even close by up in Canada. But you got FAT, (WENDY goes out the kitchen door) and he didn't want you, and now you are a single mother in a shit job with two kids, one of them really weird. He doesn't have a father. That is probably why he walks around reciting fag poetry.

WENDY: He doesn't anymore. He hasn't in a long time. Thanks to you, my son doesn't say much of anything anymore--

LENA turns on her television and blares it, drowning out WENDY. The first channel is a screaming pundit. LENA turns the channel. It's a daytime soap.

KENNY: Miss Lena! Over here!

LENA turns down the TV, KENNY is at the kitchen window, looking scared.
LENA: Been waitin' for you! My shit's wearing off and my stories are comin' on.

KENNY: I was here earlier, but your son tried to beat my ass.

LENA: I told you to call me on my cell before you come over, we were shoppin'.....here

*LENA gives $20 to KENNY.*

KENNY: If Ronnie sees 'em, he'll know they are from me and he'll fuckin' kill me.

LENA: Nah, I put 'em on the table in my blood pressure medicine bottle.

KENNY: I didn't know he was here, did he move back in?

LENA: Yeah, just recently. Until he gets on his feet.

*As they make the exchange, Ronnie comes back downstairs and talks to Wendy.*

RONNIE: Pigs here yet?

KENNY, hearing RONNIE, is terrified and runs off before the exchange is complete and the pills drop on the floor. Lena picks them up, takes a few without water, and puts the rest in her pocket. She then goes to the stove and starts preparing dinner.

WENDY: No, they haven't showed up.

*RONNIE looks upstairs.*

RONNIE: Wendy, hate to say it, but I think that boy is retarded.

WENDY: What? He's a fuckin' genius, he's just lazy.

RONNIE: That's what I mean. He's like one of those kids that's so retarded, he's super smart.

WENDY: Ronnie, why are you bein' mean to him?

RONNIE: I'm not! I love that kid! I always have. I used to take him everywhere with me, now I can't 'cause he...just...changed. Except for today, I haven't heard him talking for weeks.

WENDY: I know, he stays in his room all of the time on that damn computer. And he tells me nothin'....but he knows everything. He pipes up and gives a lot of information on any topic you can imagine, whatever me or mom are talkin' about. He ain't learnin' it in school, he's on that computer all the damn time.

RONNIE: I don't see 'im much anymore since I work nights, so I don't know 'bout his being a walking 'cyclopedia, but he's probably up there right now tryin' to sell that fuckin' finger on Ebay. Before, he was reading poetry and talking non-stop about France...odd, but at least we knew what he was thinkin'. He could be up there right now plannin' to bomb the politicians in DC....I mean, that ain't a bad idea, but I don't want him to go ta' prison.

WENDY: I don't think he's doin' that, he's just older now....he's distant...it's normal.

RONNIE: It ain't normal.

WENDY: He's 13.
RONNIE goes into the kitchen, open the refrigerator door and looks in as LENA opens the freezer door and takes out the hot dogs. She goes to the stove, puts the hot dogs on the counter, and is chopping hot dogs into the pot.

RONNIE: Supper ready yet, mom?

LENA: Not yet, I'm making dogs and beans, I'm going to bake the hotdogs with cheese, but if you want something to hold you over, there's tuna salad in there. Look in there, I also have leftovers from last night.

Ronnie takes out some tuna salad, grabs a spoon and eats it out of the bowl as he walks over to look at what his mom is cooking.

RONNIE: There's something wrapped in the pile of hot dogs... (RONNIE puts down the tuna salad, he starts screaming) Mom! Oh fuck!

LENA: What?

RONNIE: What the fuck?...Mom!!

LENA: What? What is it?

RONNIE: FUCK! MOM!

LENA: What?

RONNIE: MOM!!!

LENA: What, what??

RONNIE: FUCK!! MOM!!! FUCK!!!

LENA: What Ronnie, what?

RONNIE: FUUUUCCKKK!! MOM! FUUCKK!

LENA: What??!!

RONNIE: MOM!!! THERE IS THE FINGER IN THE HOT DOGS!!!!

Ronnie lifts then finger out of the bowl on the counter.

LENA: Ewww.....

WENDY comes into the kitchen.

WENDY: What are you all yellin' abo...Ronnie don't put that finger in the dinner!

RONNIE: I'm not! I was pullin' it out of the bowl. Mom was cuttin' up hot dogs and this was in the bowl!

WENDY comes over, takes the finger, washes it.

WENDY: Mom, how did this get in?

LENA: I dunno.
WENDY: Are you poppin' Lortabs again?

LENA: NO!

RONNIE: I chased that junkie fucker out of here right before you all got ho---

WENDY: I thought you were going to bake the--

*Chris bursts into the kitchen.*

CHRIS: I posted on Craigslist about the missing finger and a lady got in touch with me!

RONNIE: You mean, you didn't try to put it up or auction?

WENDY: Chris, I told you not to tell anyone about this.

RONNIE: Chris got a response quicker than you did, the pigs still haven't showed up.

CHRIS: This lady said that her brother was doing some work with a saw in Jameson's backyard, and he lost the finger. He couldn't find it in the leaves after he cut it off. He called her and she just picked him up. Her son found the ad and called her as they were on our way to the hospital. And then she called me.

WENDY: What were you doing in this guy's backyard in the first pla---

*A knock at the door. All three go into the living room.*

RONNIE: Shit, I'm goin' upstairs.

WENDY: Hold on, let's see who it is.

*Wendy answers the door. A lady and her brother are at the door. The brother has his hand wrapped in a bloody towel.*

ROSA: Hello, I talked to Chris about the Craigslist ad?

WENDY: Yes, we have the finger, let me go get it. Come on in.

*WENDY goes to the kitchen.*

ROSA: We have to go, I'm sorry, we are going to go to the hospital and see if they can reattach it.

DIEGO: No, no hospital.

ROSA: Yes, Diego.

*ROSA and Diego exchange words in Spanish.*
ROSA: Thank you again, but we have to go.

WENDY: Yes, of course.

_They both leave._

LENA: They don't want to go to the hospital because they are illegal.

CHRIS: They broke the law?

LENA: Well yes, they are not supposed to be here.

CHRIS: They're not supposed to come here to get the finger?

LENA: No. They are not supposed to be in this country. And now, they are going to go to the emergency room and get free services. They get all of this free stuff for coming here illegally. That's why we don't have jobs, they're takin' them. That is why it takes so long to get seen at the ER. You have all of these illegal aliens with broke off fingers in the ER who are doing jobs that should go to us.

RONNIE: Oh, let me guess: if he were not here cutting wood in ol' man Jameson's backyard, you would be doing that job? Hardly. Jameson is such a cheap, greedy bastard that he probably charges rent to anyone standing in his backyard workin' for him. That guy probably lost his finger for under minimum wage.

CHRIS: They'll take him at the ER and won't ask his immigration status, but he'll get a fat bill. This is the America and unlike other countries, we don't cover our people, let alone any immigrants.

WENDY: Well, I'm just glad that they were able to get the finger back, I hope that they can get it put back on at the hospital.

CHRIS: If they can't reattach it, maybe I can buy it off of him. I have $20.

WENDY: Chris, go on up and finish your homework. I'll call you down when dinner is ready.

_Chris goes up to his room._

LENA: I'm going to finish dinner.

_LENA walks toward the kitchen._

RONNIE: Mom, throw all that out.

LENA: Why?

RONNIE: Why? What do ya' mean why? There was a bloody finger in those hot dogs.

WENDY: Yeah mom, we can't eat that.

LENA: All right, I'll do somethin' else, but it's going to take a while.

RONNIE: That's ok, I have to get a few hours of sleep soon for work tonight.

LENA: Ronnie, you need something to eat. Unloading trucks is hard work.

RONNIE: All right, but make sure that there's no fingers or toes in the food, please.
LENA goes into the kitchen. RONNIE and WENDY sit down, and RONNIE turns on the TV.
WENDY: I'm hope she don't make chickin' fingers or fish sticks. I've lost my appetite for anything shaped like a finger.

RONNIE: Yeah, I usually like my fish sticks with ketchup, but now....damn. Don't think I can do it. Ever again.

WENDY: Ronnie, you should get that new Obamacare insurance, with the truck loading and grass cuttin' that you do, something could happen to you like this poor guy who cut off his finger.

RONNIE: Wendy, every dime that I am making is going to either help you out for me living here and sleeping on your couch, my gas guzzlin' piece of shit that gets me to my job, or for Trey. Unless I can find another job like the one I had at the plant, or even one that pays more than the two that I have now, this is my life for at least another 15 years.

WENDY: You could probably get your child support payments reduced since you were laid off last year.

RONNIE: I probably could, but I don't want to. I want to give Trey as much as I can. In fact, I want to give him more than I am givin' him now. And I'm on good terms with his mother and I know that she is usin' it all for him, which is why I don't get it adjusted. I would only do that if I thought she was wastin' it, drinking it away, spending it on a boyfriend, like some mothers do.

Even if I did get it adjusted, it wouldn't get me out of 'da hole. I still would not be bringin' in enough to pay the bills.

WENDY: Well, at least let me help you with the brakes on your car. They're grindin'. That's why mom and I walked to the store instead of drove.

RONNIE: I can't ask you to do that---

WENDY: Ronnie, I didn't even have a car until you moved in and now we share it, so it's the least I can do. Drive it tonight and I'll take it in tomorrow morning. I have off tomorrow.

RONNIE: Thanks Wendy. I'll pay you back when Christmas shoppin' picks up. I'll be workin' 'round the clock then....You're a good sister, better than I deserve.

WENDY: We get on each other's nerves, but at least you didn't move in and insult me non-stop unlike others who live here.

Wendy looks toward the kitchen.

RONNIE: She's fuckin' nuts, Wendy, don't take her seriously.

WENDY: I know.

RONNIE: If you ever throw her out, I won't blame ya'.

WENDY: Nah, she's our mom. They take care of us when we are young, we take care of 'em when they're old. She just went nuts when you and dad lost your jobs when the plant closed down. Then, him dyin'. It made her nuts.

She's a younger version of the Alzheimers' patients whose butts we wipe down at the nursin' home. There's this one ol' bitty that reminds me of mom. I think she was mean even before she got Alzheimers'. She always calls me Patty. “PATTY, COME HERE!!” She says.
LENA: What???


RONNIE: 47 is not old. I’ve dated women older than our mother. And she really didn't take much care of us, but that's 'nother story. And our mom was nuts before dad and I were laid off at the plant.

WENDY: You've dated women older than mom? You pickin' up the patients at my job now? The average age there is about 88.

RONNIE: No, not that old. Damn.

WENDY: Most are incontinent.

RONNIE: Ewww. I'm not pickin' up women at the nursin' home where you work, or any nursin' home, that's for damn sure.....unless it's your co-worker, Monica, now she is hot. You gave her my number like I told 'ya, right?

WENDY: That reminds me. You know everyone 'round here. You remember an old lady named Clara LaFonde?

RONNIE: Yeah, I went to school with her grandson, Leon. She used to be one of the lunch ladies in the cafeteria. She punched our tickets, she was really nice, which is sayin' a lot, because some of those lunch ladies were ballbusters. She works at the nursin' home now?

WENDY: She did about ten years ago. Anyway, yesterday, Annie, who knows the insides and outs of that place because she has been there for over 30 years, told me that, Clara, while she worked there, was on the night shift on the ground floor. The head nurse went looking for her because she disappeared for a while. She passed by one of the patients' rooms and a curtain was pulled so you could not see to the back of the room, which was odd, because you never see that unless a patient is being changed or if a patient is with it, they may choose to have a curtain pulled for privacy....anyway, the head nurse pulled the curtain back and Clara was giving this old guy a blowjob.

RONNIE: Ewwww!

WENDY: Yeah, and he had dementia.

RONNIE: Oh my god.

WENDY: And he was incontinent!

RONNIE: EWWW!!! Aww my fucking god.

WENDY: She was fired right on the spot and she immediately left town, like, the next day.

RONNIE: Aww man, that sucks, I still see Leon occasionally. That sucks when somethin' like that happens to people that you like......but it's useful when it happens to someone you don't like.

WENDY: Yeah, I know.

RONNIE: I won't say anything to him 'bout it if I see him again.

WENDY: He may not even know 'bout it.

RONNIE: That's true. Best if he don't.
WENDY: But I bring all this up, Ronnie, 'cause I'm worried. There have been rumours in that place of male aides doin' it to the women patients. You seem to have a strong sex drive, now I really don't wanna talk about this stuff with my brother, but I don't want it to get you in any trouble. I worry 'bout you sometimes.

RONNIE: You ain't gotta worry about me goin' down on some old lady. Plus, I wouldn't do it with anyone who has Alzheimer's. That's just not right.

WENDY: Well, that's true, you wouldn't do that, I know some guys who are sleazy enough to do that, but you're not. But you've dated half the town and now you are working on the other half. Pretty soon, you'll have to leave the county to find any new girlfriends, as you tend to leave a lot of angry women in your path.

RONNIE: Nah, I'll just start over here in our county, and no old ladies or nursin' home patients, there are plenty of available women without havin' to do all of that. And by the time I work my way back around, any hard feelins' that they had will have passed.

WENDY: So you can piss 'em off all over again?

RONNIE: Nah, when it ends, I always try to end it on good terms...

WENDY: ...you a lyin' motha'fucker...

RONNIE: No I ain't. I don't tell any woman, "I love you" if I don't. I like 'em all, but I 'don't love any of 'em. I'm honest, and in most cases, it ends, and no one's upset.

WENDY: That doesn't always work out, sex is usually messier than that. A lot of women bring their feelins' into it. Remember when you were cheatin' on Nadine and she came by and smashed the kitchen window? Mom was home, in the kitchen that night watchin' TV, scared her half to death. And remember when Sherry, at least we strongly suspect it was Sherry, smashed your windshield while you were workin' overnight down at one of the distribution centers? I still can't believe no one heard that.

I hope that you have learned by now that you need to leave the psycho bitches alone. If you get even a whiff of psycho-bitch off a new girl, run as fast as you can.

I'm just glad that you didn't have Trey with a psycho bitch.

RONNIE: Me too! That would be hell. But those are exceptions to the rule, and not even the worst cases. Remember this? (Ronnie rolls his pant leg up and shows a huge scar).

WENDY: (Looks toward the kitchen door to make sure that their mother is not coming out, looks back at Ronnie.) Yeah, you got that when you were with that crazy bitch down in Port Deposit when she caught you cheatin'. She stabbed you in the leg, I still don't know how she did that, did she get on the floor to do that or did you try to kick her?

RONNIE: No, I didn't kick her, didn't touch her at all, I'd never hit a woman. I was in the bed and I couldn't get up quick enough. You think being nekkid' would've made me move faster, but I got tangled up in the sheet and tripped. But of course, mom thinks even to this day that it was an accident at the plant.

WENDY: How did she happen to have a knife at the time? Did she just happen to come home from work and walk into the bedroom carrying a kni-
RONNIE: She always carried a knife, she was from South Carolina, Myrtle Beach. She did a lot of huntin' and bass fishin'.

WENDY: That's not hard to believe, she was a big, manly lookin' bitch.

RONNIE: She wasn't manly lookin' she was just big. She was about 6' 5 and built like a linebacker. Anyway, she cut me here on the side of the leg, a jagged cut from the kneecap to the shin. Blood everywhere. She went for Joya first, but I blocked her and Joya was able to get out of the bed and throw some clothes on. I didn't want Joya ta' get hurt. I'm the one who cheated on Debbie, not Joya. After I blocked Debbie from Joya, she went ta' stab me, like I said, I couldn't move fast enough. Joya was screaming, screaming loud enough to wake up the dead. After Debbie stabbed me, she just stops, she stops screaming and cussin', she stops after she got me. She missed a few times and shredded the mattress. It was a waterbed. Blood and water gushing everywhere, it was a hell of a mess. She drops the knife and runs out. Out of the room, out of the house, probably out of town, hell probably out of the country. Joya is screamin' and cryin', I do my best to calm her down. After a while, I can't take it and I finally yell at her, "SHUT UP!"

LENA: (from the kitchen) What??

RONNIE: Nothin' mom, I'm tellin' a story....Anyway, I yell, "shut up! I'm bleedin' help me!" She helps get to the bathroom and she helps get into the tub. I elevate my leg and put my foot up on the wall. I have her tie my bandana above my knee, making a tourniquet, I learned that in the Scouts. She tells me that I need to go to the hospital. I said, "hell no, I ain't goin' to no goddamn hospital".

WENDY: You should have went, you had insurance at the plant.

RONNIE: This was before I was workin' at the plant...I tell her to go get some fishin' line from her tackle box and get a large sewing needle from the neighbour below me, Miss Tilson, she sewed as well as made quilts and those thick yarn things that you put on tables, doilies, or some shit. Anyway, she would make 'em and sell 'em outside her apartment every Saturday mornin', and she sold 'em at the sale barn on Monday nights. Anyway, Joya went and got a needle from her. While she was gone, I lit up and started puffin'.

WENDY: You were smokin' while bleedin' in the tub?

RONNIE: Yes, but they were Philly Blunts. They had weed in 'em 'cause I tore 'em apart and made long, skinny joints out of 'em. Anyway, I kep' 'em handy, and I have one in each hand, I take a puff off of the blunt in my right hand, blow it out, then take a puff on the blunt in my left hand. I go back and forth. Joya comes back and I tell her to start sewin' my leg. She is still shakin', afraid that Debbie's gonna come back and kill 'er. I told her to take a hit off of the blunt. She does, one hit, and she cleans my leg up again, threads the needle, and starts to sew. I can still feel the pain, so I have her go get two more blunts out of the drawer, she get 'em, and she sews up my leg as ahm' a smokin'.

WENDY: You didn't feel any of that?

RONNIE: Not after I started on Blunts 3 and 4. Didn't know that your brother was a natural surgeon, did ya'? See, who needs insurance?

WENDY: Joya was the surgeon that day.

RONNIE: I instructed and supervised.

LENA comes out of the kitchen.

LENA: Dinner's ready in five minutes. I'll go get Chris.
LENA goes to the bottom of the stairs.

LENA: CHRIS!! DINNER'S READY. COME ON DOWN!

LENA goes back to the kitchen. After a long pause, WENDY speaks.

WENDY: I could get her out of here, but she won't sign the papers.

RONNIE: What papers?

WENDY: They're willing to give her disability. $869 a month with $20,000 backpay. She won't sign it?

RONNIE: What? Why the fuck not?

WENDY: She says that they'll come get her and put her in jail.

RONNIE: She needs to sign it!

WENDY: I know Ronnie. I can't get her to do it. She tried to trash the papers, I wouldn't let her. I have them hidden away.

There is a knock at the door.

LENA: Who is it?!

VOICE FROM THE FRONT DOOR: It's the police.

Scene #2

CHRIS is at his computer, reading the screen. He starts typing.

CHRIS: Canada plus emergency room plus illness.

CHRIS gets up, walks off the stage, stands on the side, and watches the following scene unfold.

Canada. 1933. A modest farmhouse.

There is a knock at the door.

SAM: Who is it?

COP: It's the police.

SAM opens the door.

COP: Hello, just checking in on the condition of Mrs. Smeegie, I am assuming that you are her husband?

SAM: No sir, I'm her brother, her husband has three more months in Burwash before he comes home. Come on in.
COP comes in.

SAM: Sadly, she has taken a turn for the worse, but I can't find a doctor willing to come out without payment in advance, so Steve is out trying to get some money from relatives, and I have been as well.

COP: I heard that her son operated on her.

SAM: Yes sir. 12 year old boy, drained about a quart of fluid out of her. That boy, he ain't normal.

COP: No? What do you mean?

SAM: Well, Steve's a bit of a lightweight when it comes to working out here on the farm. He tries to do his fair share, but he has always stuck close to his mother. He helps her with cooking, cleaning around the house. Domestic stuff, women's work. So it's not really surprising that he was able to operate on his mother.

COP: I don't know if I would call surgery “women's work”. It's a pretty amazing feat.

SAM: Oh sure. Not sure I'd be able to do it.

COP: Is Steve an only child?

SAM: Yes.

COP: So, she's not doing good?

SAM: She was wheezing and couldn't breathe or talk. He drained a lot of the fluid, but it's coming back. Now, she's sleeping, I've been giving her rye for the pain and to sleep. But it's not lookin' good.

Lights out.
Scene 3

RONNIE is standing outside. It is 1 AM. CHUCK walks over.

RONNIE: We've been out in this bitch for two fuckin' hours. Where's 'da trucks?

CHUCK: I just talked to one of the other lumpers. DOT is on 95, so they're takin' 40.

RONNIE: Shit, no wonder they're late.

CHUCK: Yeah, 40 is much slower. Traffic lights, it's a longer, more 'round about way with a slower speed limit.

RONNIE: I hope DOT is not going to spend much time on 40 during the Christmas season.

CHUCK: I know, man. We'll still make money, but we'll have to be here 'round the clock to get work.

RONNIE: Fuck that. If I am going to be here 'round the clock, I want to be workin' round the clock, not waitin' for work. Busiest time of the year. I need to make some money.

CHUCK: I hear you. But it's an hour walk back to my place from here, I live right on 40 toward Edgewood. I'd be walking home just to sleep for an hour or two and comin' right back. But at least I'll be paddin' my mattress.

RONNIE: You don't have a car?

CHUCK: Nah. Can't make enough to get one on the road, and if I could, I still couldn't get one. License's suspended.

RONNIE: Oh wow, that sucks.

CHUCK: Yeah, too many DUIs. Can't drive for 'nother six years. By then, I'll be 62, probably too old to do this stuff, but old enough to get social security, but it won't be enough, I'll have to be a Wal-Mart greeter. I unload their trucks now, but by then, I'll be saying hi to people in front of their store. (Laughs)

RONNIE: I hear ya, man. I can barely keep my piece of shit on the road. I'm takin' it in when I get out of here to get brake work, but my sister's payin' for that until I can pay her back. I'll give you a ride home when we're done here in the mornin', you're right on the way for me. And I'll give you my cell, that way I can come get you when we're both workin' and take you home if we get off at the same time.

CHUCK: Aww, thanks Ronnie. I really appreciate that. But I don't drink anymore, but I still smoke and got real bad emphysema.

RONNIE: No offence, Chuck, but I knew you had emphysema. You would never make a good burglar. You would break into someone's house, be creepin' across the floor at night and you would give yourself away because the people would wake right up thinking that a locomotive was coming through their house.

Both laugh.

CHUCK: Yeah, the Lord still hadn't cured my emphysema since. Found Jesus five years ago and I go to church on Sundays. A little church four miles down 40 towards the city. Don't have to walk there though, the bus comes and gets me. Say, if you ever want to come to church, you're more than welcome. They're really nice, friendly people.

RONNIE: Oh, thanks, but that's not really my thing, but I'm glad that it's helped you, though.
CHUCK: I think it did with the drinkin' at first, but you know, even if I stopped goin', I don't think I would drink anymore. Even if I didn't find God, the desire to drink just wore off. I just wish it would have done so before my wife took the kids and left. That was over 20 years ago. My son's probably about your age. He was 5 last time I saw him.

But, I pray for them all every day. And I have a large, plastic jar that I put spare change in every day that I have some. When I see 'em again, I'll give 'em that jar.....you got kids, Ronnie?

RONNIE: Yeah, I have a son, 3. (RONNIE takes a picture out of his wallet and shows it to CHUCK).

CHUCK: Aww, he's a cute liddl' bugger.

RONNIE: Yeah and very smart. I see him every Sunday. He is the reason why I am here doin' what I do. I want to make enough money this season to get off of my sister's couch and get my own place. Then, I want to find a steady job, workin' daytime. That way, I can have my son stay with me some evenings throughout the week. And eventually, get a house big enough for both he and his mother and me. I'll have one half, then his mother can have the other and live her own life. Do whatever she wants, boyfriend, husband, both, neither, whatever, I don't care. And I'll do whatever I want. But Trey will have both of us all of the time.

I saw that arrangement on one of 'em reality shows. The kids seem happy and it worked for everybody in 'da house. But it was a big, fancy apartment in New York, where rich people live. I can't do all that, but maybe I can buy a house around here, or heck, even a couple of single-wides and put them on the same lot...

(both laugh)

......Shi-I mean, shoot, we could be out there 'til 3 or 4. I'm going to drive down at the end of the road here to the gas station, get some smokes. You want anything?

CHUCK: Nah, I'm good, thanks. But I'll call you if the trucks come while you are gone.

Scene 4

RONNIE is at the gas station prepaying at the register.

RONNIE: Can I get $30 on 2?

CINDY: I doubt that there is anything that you want that you cannot get.

RONNIE: A million dollars.

CINDY laughs.

CINDY: Where are you headed this late at night?

RONNIE: I work up the road. Waitin' for the trucks to come in.

CINDY: Oh you're a lumper.

RONNIE: Yeah.

CINDY: That's why you’re so strong and look so good in a tight shirt.

RONNIE: Your name is Cindy.
CINDY: Yes, have we met?

RONNIE: No, it's on your tag. I knew a Cindy. In fact, I've known a lot of Cindys. None as striking as you.

CINDY: Well I have some boxes back at my place that I need moved.

RONNIE: Where do you live?

CINDY: Rosedale. Just up 40. I get off at 8, I'll be home around 8:30.

RONNIE: Well let me drop my buddy off, he's just a couple miles on 40 in the opposite direction. Then I'll swing on by and help you out. Free of charge.

*CINDY gets a piece of paper and a pen.*

CINDY: Here, I'll write down my address and phone number. In case you get lost. Take 40 to Rossville Boulevard. Franklin Square Hospital is on your right. Second light after the hospital, turn right. I’m in the apartments in the back. 4C. I have it all written down.

*RONNIE takes the piece of paper.*

RONNIE: See you in a few hours.

CINDY: Definitely.
Scene 4

CHRIS is at his computer, reading the screen. He types in a few words, then gets up, goes to the side of the stage, and witnesses the following scene.

Canada 1936

Miss Dyson with two paramedics to a door.

MISS DYSON: He's a pleasant young fellow. From Scotland. Keeps to himself. Just rented the room five days ago on the first, is paid up until the end of this month. Was going to pay me for August next week, he said.

PARAMEDIC #1: How long did you say he was in bed?

MISS DYSON: Three days. They all leave to go to work in the morning and I go in the rooms and open their windows to let in air. Well the past three days, he's been in bed and I have been checking on him. Last night, he started getting lethargic, out of it. Talking to people who are not there.

They arrive at the door. MISS DYSON knocks.

MISS DYSON: Danny, Danny.....

They enter the room.

MISS DYSON: Danny, these gentlemen are going to help you.

The one paramedic looks him over.

PARAMEDIC #2: Yeah, we'll take him in.

MISS DYSON: Good, I have all of his things packed and ready to go.

Phone rings.

MISS DYSON: That's my phone. I'll get that. His things are here. Let me know if you need any help.

MISS DYSON leaves the room and goes to answer her phone.

MISS DYSON: Hello? ....Yes? ......Yes, I'll have a vacant room that will be ready in about an hour.

Scene 5

CHRIS is standing in front of a classroom.

CHRIS: And I picked it up and it was bloody, like Texas Chainsaw Massacre! I didn't know what it was, then I saw a fingernail. It was cold. I took off one of my socks and wrapped it up. I took it home and showed my mom and uncle. My mom took it and made me go up to my room and do my homework, but this finger IS my homework! She called the police while I posted it on Craigslist. I took a picture of it and put it on there. Here's the picture!

(Chris shows the picture to the class).

CHRIS: And it is illegal to lose your finger if you are not supposed to be in this country. My grandmother said so after they left. But the cops didn't show up for a long time after they were gone. And
my grandmother said that everywhere, all over the country, there are long lines of Mexicans who have cut off fingers flowing out of all of the emergency rooms. That's a lot of blood. A lot of it probably gets on the floor, so be careful that you don't slip and fall whenever you go to the ER.

I wonder how many students across the country right now, this minute, are showing cut off, bloody Mexican fingers in science class?

Scene 6

CHRIS is at his computer. He types a few words, then gets up, goes to the side of the stage, and witnesses the following scene.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada 1936

MISSY’s MOTHER and MISSY are outside hanging up clothes.

MISSY’S MOTHER: All right, Missy, I am going in to start the next load. I want to get these done, dried, and ironed by this evening. Mrs. Bancroft is very meticulous about her laundry as you know, and she wants it on time. I want to have enough time to make sure everything is done and perfect.

Knocking. MISSY goes around to the front to check the door.

MISSY: Mother, there is another young man at the front. Are you going to let him in, too? Father won't be home until tonight. Dad is not even here.

MISSY’S MOTHER: Missy, don't be afraid. It is the Christian thing to do to help someone, but I will go see what he wants. Keep hanging the clothes. I will go to the door.

MISSY’S MOTHER goes to the door.

YOUNG MAN: Sorry to trouble you, ma'am. I was wondering if you had any work for me to do.

MISSY’S MOTHER: Oh there's plenty of work, but I am afraid that there is no money. Have you eaten this morning?

YOUNG MAN: No, ma'am.

MISSY’S MOTHER: When was the last time you ate?

YOUNG MAN: Two days ago.

MISSY’S MOTHER: Goodness, come in. Sadly, all I have is some toast and tea leftover from breakfast.

YOUNG MAN: Anything you have would be most appreciated ma'am.

Both enter the kitchen. YOUNG MAN sits down. MISSY’S MOTHER starts talking as she gets the toast and tea together.
MISSY'S MOTHER: Are you from England?

YOUNG MAN: No ma'am. Scotland. Glasgow.

MISSY'S MOTHER: Do you have family in Canada?

YOUNG MAN: No, ma'am.

MOTHER: What brought you to Canada all the way from Glasgow?

YOUNG MAN: Came to find work.

*MOTHER takes the toast and prepared tea and gives it to the YOUNG MAN. He tries to control himself out of politeness, but he cannot help but to quickly devour the sparse meal.*

MOTHER: How much work is in Glasgow?

YOUNG MAN: None, ma'am.

MOTHER: None at all?

YOUNG MAN: The Irish have come in and now there are ten men for every job.

MOTHER: And you cannot find one here?

YOUNG MAN: I had a job on a farm in up north until late May. The farmer did not need me anymore, so I came here to Toronto. Got off a freight train before it came into the Danforth Station.

MOTHER: Yes, most of the men that come here looking for jobs to do come off of that train.

YOUNG MAN: I stayed at a rooming house closer to downtown for a few days.

MOTHER: Oh, so you didn’t just get off that train.

YOUNG MAN: No ma'am. I suppose that I am just retracing my steps. The steps that I took off of the train to the rooming house.

MOTHER: And you only stayed there for a few days and now you are retracing your steps back to the train?

YOUNG MAN: No, ma'am. I got sick and the landlady called an ambulance. They took me and a couple of my suitcases. Though when I was discharged, so many of my things were missing.

MOTHER: Oh no, that is terrible. You’re not able to go back to the rooming house?

YOUNG MAN: No, ma'am. The hospital discharged me two days ago and they took all of my money that I had saved to pay for the bill. They couldn’t keep me any longer because I couldn’t pay more. I went back to the rooming house, and the landlady, Miss. Dyson, had already rented my room. So I came back here because I remembered this house, it's beautiful, it stuck out and I figured that I cou--. (YOUNG MAN goes silent).

MOTHER: Yes, a few years ago, there would have been money to pay for all of the work that we need done here. And from a distance, the house is exquisite. I thought that the first time my husband, Arthur and I saw it. But as you get closer, you see the roof of the porch ready to cave in. That the house with its chipped, faded pink paint needs a few more coats. And for the past three years, we have had no maid to keep the windows spotless.

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MOTHER walks away from the table and away from the scene. She appears to be talking to someone.

MOTHER: Arthur, he was only a few years older than Miles. If we had the room, I would have let him stay until he was better. He looked horrible. I knew that he was sick even before I saw him at the door.

Scene 7

RONNIE has stopped by a motel to ask for directions. He has a piece of paper in his hand. He approaches the front desk.

MAX: Can I help you?

RONNIE: Hi, I'm headed up to Baltimore County...Rosedale, to see a friend. Can you tell me how to get to... (reads paper) Franklin Square Hospital?

MAX: Not sure, I've never been that far up 40.

RONNIE: That's ok. I have her number. I'll call her.

MAX: Hey, my co-worker just came in, she may know. Hey, Rosa! This man is trying to get to Franklin Square Hospital. Do you know where that is?

ROSA: Yes. You go up---

RONNIE: Hey, you are the lady that came to my house with your brother yesterday evening. We had his finger and you came and picked it up.

ROSA: Yes! I remember you.

RONNIE: How's your brother?

ROSA: They were able to reattach his finger---

RONNIE: Oh good!

ROSA: ---but there is a lot of nerve damage.

RONNIE: Oh, I'm really sorry.

ROSA: Yeah, but at least he gets to keep it.

RONNIE: That's true.

ROSA: He wanted to go back to work this morning, but it's too soon. But that's my brother. He works close by loading trucks at night, so it will be a while before he can do that.

RONNIE: I do that as well. Right up the road here.

ROSA: Oh really?
RONNIE: Yeah.

ROSA: Have you ever worked with Diego?

RONNIE: Not sure. There are a lot of warehouses and stores along 40, especially here in Riverside. And some of these places are huge with a lot of trucks.

ROSA: Right. You may have, but not known it. Or even seen him.....You need to get to Franklin Square?

RONNIE: Yes.

ROSA: That's easy. Go towards Baltimore, but not all the way into the city. About 10 miles, you will see a Toys R Us. Turn right. About five miles down from there, it is on your right.

RONNIE: Thanks.......is your husband also a lumper?

ROSA: Oh no, my husband passed away 5 years ago. Just me, my son, and Diego, of course, who just came here...to Aberdeen four months ago, and he lives with us.

RONNIE: You live in Aberdeen?

ROSA: Yes.

RONNIE: We live in Aberdeen also...as you know....here, let me give you my number in case Diego ever needs a ride.

ROSA: Wow, okay, great!

Ronnie writes down his number on a piece of paper and gives it to Rosa. He almost writes it on the paper that Cindy gave him, but stops himself. He gets a paper from the front desk and writes his phone number down. Then, he hands it to Rosa.

RONNIE: I take a buddy in who only lives a few miles away, right on 40. He coughs and wheezes a lot because he has emphysema...

ROSA: Chuck.

RONNIE: Yes!

ROSA: Yes, Diego has worked with him before and my son and I go to the same church as Chuck. We hear him coughing and wheezing terrible when people in the pews are shouting and saying amen, you usually hear wheezing after that, but he is very sweet. We don't go often, but when we do, Chuck is always there. He's very nice.

RONNIE: He is. Listen.....I'm not sure if you're interested.....but...would you like to......meet up for coffee sometime? If you're not doing anything today....or another day.

ROSA: Umm.....yeah, sure........I get off today at 3.

RONNIE: I could pick you up here, or I could pick you up at your place...or, of course, we could meet at the coffee shop. Whatever you prefer.

ROSA: Yeah, let's meet there.

RONNIE: There is one on Main Street in Aberdeen, by the Court House.
ROSA: Yes, I know where that is.

RONNIE: 5:00?

ROSA: Sounds good.....It was good to run into you, but I have to get to work. But I'll see you at 5.

RONNIE: Definitely.

(Rosa goes out of the front office. Ronnie takes the paper from Cindy and throws it away. He then goes back to the trashcan, takes out the paper, looks at it, and puts it in his pocket).

Scene 8

LENA is watching TV in the kitchen at the table, but she has the TV turned down low. KENNY comes to the window. LENA gets up and opens it.

KENNY: Why did you call me over here? I was just here last night.

LENA: I need some more pills.

KENNY: Already? I gave you six.

KENNY: Already? I gave you six.

RONNIE wakes up and gets off of the couch. KENNY gives LENA her pills, LENA gets ready to give
him the 20 dollar bill, but she hears the kitchen door and hides both the pills and the money in her pocket. He sees KENNY.

RONNIE: Motherfucker! I told you--

RONNIE runs to the window, KENNY runs away. From off-stage, KENNY shouts to RONNIE.

KENNY: You used to do this, Ronnie! You got me into it!

RONNIE: Yeah, but I never went to your house and tried to sell to your mother! And I wasn't dumb enough to get hooked on any shit! I'm going to fuck you up, you weasel!

KENNY: No asshole, you only got my sister hooked and she had her kids taken away....

LENA: Calm down, I didn't buy anything off of him.

RONNIE: Bullshit! Where's your pills?

RONNIE searches the kitchen.

LENA: Haven't done 'em in over a year. Not since I was arrested.

RONNIE: What was he doin' here?

LENA: He was talkin' to me. He has family problems.

RONNIE: That's because he's ripped off his family so many times.

LENA: Let me fix you some breakfast and you can lay back down.

RONNIE: No thanks, mom. I have no appetite. You have anymore Pepto?

LENA: Yeah, up in the cabinet. I also have Tums if you need 'em.

RONNIE takes the Pepto and Tums out of the cabinet. He takes a fistful of Tums and puts them all in his mouth at once and chases them with a swig of Pepto.

LENA: What's wrong?

RONNIE: I dunno. My stomach is killin' me. It was like a dull ache, but it got worse over the past few days. I'm gonna go lay back down.

Scene 9

1938, modest farmhouse in Canada.

SARAH is doing various household chores. There is distant, but loud screaming that ceases periodically. After about a minute, it will start up again. Then stop, only to soon start again. This cycle constantly repeats.

In order for this scene to work, it is very important that SARAH does not react to this screaming, or react to the starting or stopping of the screaming.

There is a knock. SARAH answers the door.

SARAH: Helen.
HELEN: We have way too many tomatoes, more than we can use or even selor even can, I thought I'd bring some over.

*HELEN hands Sarah a bag.*

SARAH: Thank you so much, please come in.

*As SARAH takes the bag from Helen, the two walk in. The screaming starts again and startles HELEN.*

SARAH: I'll make us some tea.

*The screaming stops.*

HELEN: Sar-

SARAH: Have a seat and I'll go get the tea, and funny you should bring by the vegetables. We have extra cheese and I was going to drop some off to you.

*HELEN sits down, and SARAH goes to the kitchen. The screaming starts again. Startled, HELEN jumps up, goes to the door, and looks out. The screaming stops, and HELEN closes the door. HELEN goes to walk over to sit back down, the screaming starts again. HELEN looks toward the door. The screaming stops. SARAH comes out with a tray.*

SARAH: Come over and sit down. I also have muffins that I just made this morning.

*HELEN comes over to where SARAH is standing and they both sit down. SARAH is busy pouring the tea. The screaming starts again.*

HELEN: Sar-

SARAH: She's been doing that for a month.

HELEN: Shouldn't someone go over and...

SARAH: I used to, but she now has her husband lock the door every morning before he leaves for work....they've only been married for seven months.

*The screaming stops.*

SARAH: It's comforting that she screams less now. It was nearly non-stop until yesterday...

HELEN: Sarah, we should go over...

SARAH: ...she's dying, Helen.

HELEN: ..or maybe call a doctor...

SARAH: ...no doctor will come....no money.

*A long silence, then the screaming begins.*

SARAH: Cancer...
HELEN: Doctor Emerson would have come...

SARAH: ...yes, he would have....(*the screaming stops*) but taking chickens, eggs for payments.....made him broke and broken....and led him to the his very fresh grave at 52....

HELEN: Emily was one of his last patients.....ear infection....

SARAH: ...I remember...six months ago...

HELEN: ...yes....he came over as soon as I called him...took him two hours, but he got in his car as soon as I called....he arrived at 3 AM....

SARAH: ....God bless Doc Emerson.....

HELEN:....yes, God bless Doc Emerson.....can we give her something for pain?

SARAH: My cheese and muffins will do her no good.....nope....her husband buys her rye whiskey......for the pain......I snuck a little money and got her a pint. Dropped it off to her husband...made sure John didn't find out. He gets irritated by her screaming. He yells, curses. He's been wearing plugs at night for a whole month. He gets up, takes his breakfast with him and stays gone all day, until near bedtime.............she's now quiet.......pretty soon, it will always be this quiet, like before.....it won't be long now.

Scene 10

*CHUCK'S place. RONNIE comes over to pick him up, but Chuck is asleep and quiet.*

RONNIE: (offstage, is knocking on Chuck's apartment door). Chuck! Hey Chuck!

*CHUCK does not wake up. RONNIE tries CHUCK'S apartment door. It is unlocked. RONNIE lets himself in. He sees that CHUCK is sleeping and he walks over to him.*

RONNIE: Chuck.

*He touches Chuck's shoulder. There is on response.*

RONNIE: Oh fuck, Chuck. Chuck!...Wake up!

RONNIE shakes CHUCK, trying to wake him. CHUCK finally wakes up.

CHUCK: Oh, hey Ronnie.
RONNIE: You scared the shit out of me! You were so still, it seemed you weren't breathing. And you weren't wheezin'...you not wheezin'? That was real scary.

CHUCK: Really? People are always tellin' me that I snore so loud. I had to move into this place because I snored so loud. I had a roommate and we each had our own room in a pretty nice place. But I had to move out because of my snorin'. He said he couldn't sleep at night. And this was all I could afford on my own. He said that I was loud enough to wake the dead.

RONNIE: You were dead quiet just now....AWW SHIT (*RONNIE doubles over in pain*).

CHUCK: What's wrong?

RONNIE: I dunno, my stomach has been hurtin' real bad.

CHUCK: Here, lie down. I have some whiskey in the cabinet. You want a shot?

RONNIE: Yeah, thanks.

(*CHUCK goes over to the cabinet to get RONNIE some whiskey, pours it into a coffee mug*).

RONNIE: I thought you quit.

CHUCK: I did. Years ago. I just keep this around to show that I am cured. To not forget the miracle of me no longer drinkin'.......so I wasn't snorin' when you came in?

RONNIE: No snorin', no nothin'. I thought you had crossed over.

CHUCK: Oh, I wish I had. Sometimes I feel like I will soon, like I don't have much longer.

RONNIE: You'll outlive us all, Chuck.

CHUCK: Nope, I don't think I will. Not by choice, mind 'ya. I can feel it, inside. In my bones. My bones, that inner knowledge that we all have that the Lord gives us. I'm not long for this world.

RONNIE: Nah, don't say that.

CHUCK: Its true.

RONNIE: Nah. You're just having a bad day. You'll feel better in the morning when we get off work and you come back here and get some sleep.

CHUCK: I don't feel bad about it, and I don't think that it's a bad thing. It's a very good thing, if anything. I'm not young like you. You have decades. My time is almost up.

RONNIE: You're not old, Chuck. I've dated women older than you.

CHUCK: You've dated all the women in Harford County. (*Laughs*). I've heard about you. I was never like that when I was younger. Married the first woman I loved. The only woman I loved. But I loved booze more than her. Maybe if I were like you when I was younger, I would have never started drinkin' like I did. I would have had too many things keepin' me....occupied. But I focused on alcohol, the devil's poison, the Preacher calls it. He rails a lot against booze, hell, I guess because half the congregation are sobered up drunks. Which is what I am. An old, dried up drunk who will soon be gone from this world.

RONNIE: But you're not old. After you've been a Wal-Mart greeter in retirement for about ten years, then you can call yourself old.
CHUCK: (gets up off the bed) Ronnie, I have this jar. I told you about it. I keep money in it to give to my sons. It's not much, I put a nickels, quarters, occasionally dollars in it. (Goes and gets the jar, brings it over to where RONNIE is sitting). A few hundred dollars, perhaps. It's a kings' ransom to me....Ronnie, I want you to have it.

RONNIE: No, no I can't accept that, you keep it. Give it to your sons.

CHUCK: I would, but I'm never going to see them again.

RONNIE: You'll see 'em again, Chuck.

CHUCK: No, I won't. Even if they knew where to find me, they wouldn't bother. And I don't blame them. Take this. Save it for your son. Or keep it for yourself. Or use it for a down payment on those two single-wides for you and Trey's mother.

RONNIE: Tell ya what. Hang on to it for now, and we can talk about it later. Right now, we need to get to work. (RONNIE slowly gets up, clearly in pain, CHUCK helps him).

CHUCK: Okay, I'll hang onto it. For now. (After RONNIE is standing, CHUCK takes the jar and puts it away).

RONNIE: Good.

CHUCK: But I'll have to give it to you soon. I feel death comin'.

RONNIE: Nah, death's going. Bypassing you. It will skip over you and come get someone else whose time has come.

RONNIE'S cellphone rings.

RONNIE: Hey Wendy....what??? Okay, I'm on my way....aww fuck. Chuck, I'll drop you off, but I can't work tonight.

CHUCK: What's wrong, Ronnie?

RONNIE: Chris is missing.

Lights out.

ACT 2

Scene 1

LENA is in the kitchen sitting at the table. She turns off the television and CHRIS comes in armed with
CHRIS: Mr DeMille, she's ready for her close-up......so Lena, what do you think about Obamacare?
LENA: I'm your grandmother, why you stop callin' me 'grandma'?

WENDY comes through the front door. She then goes to the kitchen as CHRIS and LENA are talking.

CHRIS: I stopped calling you 'grandma' years ago, Lena. You are just now noticing.
LENA: This porch monkey president is causin' a government takeover of our healthcare system. It's communism.
CHRIS: How is giving public dollars to private health insurance companies communism?
LENA: What?
CHRIS: What else is going to happen with this takeover?
LENA: Death panels, more will die. The government will decide who dies. They will put us down like dogs. Like Hitler did. They took our jobs to Mexico. Your grandfather and uncle, their jobs went to Mexico. Your grandfather killed 'hisself soon after. Foreigners are coming here gettin' all the free shit they can get their hands on. They'll replace our own people, who this Obamacare will wind up 'killin off.
CHRIS: Do you know, Lena, that grandpa would still be here if we had a government-run health care system, like they have in France, because he would not have had an insurance company refuse to pay his bill.
LENA: What?
CHRIS: That's a wrap!
CHRIS walks out of the kitchen. WENDY comes in the door from work. RONNIE is waking up on the couch.
WENDY (to Chris): You're here!
CHRIS: Yeah.
WENDY: Oh my god, your Uncle Ronnie and I were worried sick, we were out all night looking for you!
CHRIS: I was walking around, clearing my mind.
WENDY: Chris, you can't be out all night. You are 13.
RONNIE, sleeping on the couch, wakes up.
RONNIE: Hey! We've been out looking for you!
WENDY: He says he was out walking around.
RONNIE: Can you let us know next time? I missed a night of work tryin' to find ya.
WENDY: Let us know? Ronnie, he's 13! (turns to CHRIS) Where else did you go?

CHRIS: I told you. I just walked around. Then I went to the 24 hour grocery store and talked to the cashier, Britt.

RONNIE: Oh yeah, I know her.

CHRIS: Yeah, she says hi. She has a baby now. About two

RONNIE: Well, I haven't seen her in about five year---

WENDY: Chris, please don't do this again.........now, before your went missing, your Uncle Ronnie and I were talking. We were thinking that maybe the three of us along with Trey and Rosa and her boy on Sunday could all get together and do something. Like maybe lunch and the movies. Rosa has a son not much younger than yo---

CHRIS: I can't mom, I'm busy.

WENDY: Busy? What do you have to do? You don't do anything but stay up in that room.

CHRIS: Wendy, you've always been really cool to me, and I appreciate it. But I do need to inform you that I will not be staying here much longer.

WENDY: What? This is your home. You don't need to leave and you don't need to scare us half to death by staying out all night.

CHRIS: This was my home until a couple of years ago.

WENDY: Chris, you are 13. You are not going anywhere until you are at least 18....look, we can talk about this later, after being up all night looking for you, I now have to take your grandmother to the doctor.

CHRIS: Before you go, I always wanted to tell you: you know that last guy that you dated who worked across the Route 40 bridge at Perry Point?

WENDY: Yeah.

CHRIS: I always hated him.

WENDY: I know. I hate him, too.

CHRIS: But you didn't hate him soon enough. When you first started dating him, he would ride over across the bridge in your car because he didn't want to pay the toll to come back over.

RONNIE: He didn't wanna to pay the toll? Hell, when I was datin' Yolanda, I was payin' $8 per day to cross over, and of course there was the extra expense for the Grey Goose, that fancy shit from France, that was her favour-rite vodka. But it was worth it! Then, after we split, I found out that you can buy a pass for $8, pay $8 one fuckin' time that will last you a whole fuckin' year! Those fuckers at the toll booth made about $300 off 'a me, can't say I never gave...but Joe didn't want to pay the $8 to come 'cross the bridge to see you? Boy has a point, Wendy.

WENDY: Yeah, I sure can pick 'em.
WENDY goes into the kitchen. CHRIS goes up to where RONNIE is sitting.

RONNIE: Your mother loves ya'.

CHRIS: I know.

RONNIE: You'd break her heart if you left for good.

CHRIS: I want to go to France. But I'll have to wait until I'm 18.

RONNIE: That's only five years away. Not too long.

CHRIS: In the meantime, I'll go to Montreal.

RONNIE: Montreal? Where's that?

CHRIS: Up north.

RONNIE: Chris, just stay here 'til you turn 18, you don't need to move to Iceland.

CHRIS: How are you feeling, Uncle Ronnie?

RONNIE: Awful, but the pain is dulled. I got some good weed. But I gotta get back to work, and I can't smoke when I'm workin'.

CHRIS: Here's some money to hold you over until you get better.

CHRIS hands RONNIE a wad of cash.

RONNIE: Where you gettin' money? Are you sellin' pills? I will fuck Kenny up if he has you workin' —

CHRIS: No, no. Nothing like that. I am working in mass communications.

RONNIE: You're 13.

CHRIS: Yes, you all keep reminding me. Over and over again....I have a video channel and a lot of people watch what I am uploading.

RONNIE: You're not in porn, are ya? That would be against the law. You could be gettin' a lot of people in tr---

CHRIS: No, no....don't worry about money. I got you until you can get back to work.

RONNIE: Thanks. I wish I was makin' this kind a' money when I was 13. Or even now.

SCENE 2

CHRIS is standing on the side of the stage, watching as the below scene unfolds.

Canada 1961.
**STEVE is on the stage with MISSY and HELEN, but they are not talking to one another nor are they aware of one another.**

MISSY: Mother was always taking in any tramp off the street and feeding him.

STEVE: I cut into my mother right underneath her slip. Her back under her rib cage on the right side. My hands were shaking.

MISSY: This young man was so sick. We don't know what happened to him. We never saw him again. But mother was always taking these boys off the street and feeding them.

STEVE: She had me take a couple of sips of whiskey. I used it as an antiseptic, this was 1930s, rubbing alcohol was not invented yet, or wait, I think it was. We just didn't have any. Anyways, I got it out, about a quart of fluid from around her lungs, she had pleurisy. I was in the papers. The doctors admired “my skill”.

HELEN: I can hear her screaming now. How on earth did Sarah endure that for so long? Sometimes, I still dream of her screaming. I never saw her, but I always have the same image.

STEVE: Sometimes, I would see my wife lying on her stomach in bed, and I would get a very sick feeling.

HELEN: A young, blonde newlywed screaming, and sleeping whenever the screams stopped, no matter how briefly. Never any tears, just resignation to her fate and impatience that it took so long to end. I always see an empty bassinet in the corner, in the house where she had her husband lock her in every morning. Empty because her mother-in-law had to take the baby. But sometimes, I also see the baby there, before they decided to take the baby from his mother. The baby is screaming as her mother screams.

MISSY: Why would anyone not want Medicare? The doctors are going on strike to stop it?!

HELEN: Why are these damn doctors trying to stop this?

STEVE: A boy should never have to operate on his own mother.

_All three walk each walk separately to one of three doors and at the same time, they each see a sign on the door in front of them._

STEVE: This office is---

MISSY: closed due to a---

ALL THREE: Strike!

_Lights out._

**Scene 3**

**RONNIE and ROSA are out on a date at a coffee shop. They are sitting opposite from one another at a table. There is no physical contact.**

ROSAR: (Looking at a picture of Trey). He's beautiful. (She hands it back to Ronnie).
RONNIE: Thanks. Love 'em to death. How Diego?

ROSA: Better, but his finger is still swollen. He's back at work, I told him that he did not have to do that yet and to let his finger heal, but he is stubborn.

RONNIE: I know how he feels, I'm going back in tonight after I drop you off at your place. I haven't worked in a week and it's killin' me.

ROSA: Bored?

RONNIE: Yeah, I'm livin' on my sister's couch, but I also need money. I can't live off of my nephew forever.

ROSA: Your nephew? I thought he was only 13.

RONNIE: He is, but he's got a job and he's makin' lots of money. Hell, even more than I am now at age 27.

ROSA: What's he doin'?

RONNIE: I'm not sure, he says communications.

ROSA: Hmm, well, he sounds like a neat guy. I look forward to meeting him.

RONNIE: I'm not sure he's goin' to be there, Rosa. He told his mom that he can't make it. He's a little strange, I'll warn ya.

ROSA: It's the age. Manny is 12. It is exasperating. I hope it's a phase.

RONNIE: How old is Diego?

ROSA: 20. We're 14 years apart. We share the same father. He's young, but he's very astute. The truckers are always trying to rip him off, but he knows what to charge. They think that he doesn't know enough English to avoid getting ripped off.

RONNIE: They always try to rip off the new lumpers who don't know what to charge.

ROSA: I suspect that has made him some enemies for standing up for himself, but he doesn't tell me much. He doesn't talk much since he has come up from Mexico... He was very chatty in his letters before he came up here. Something happened on his trip up here, Ronnie.

RONNIE: Oh?

ROSA: He took La Bestia. That is a line of trains that come from Mexico to the U.S. Mexicans ride on top of those trains into the U.S. It is very dangerous. People have fallen off of the trains. I have a friend whose cousin who lost her leg falling off the train. There are gangs who rob and kill migrants.

RONNIE: Why don't they just buy tickets?

ROSA: Because they have to sneak into the country if they don't have papers to work, which are hard to get....but something happened on that ride Diego won't talk about it....you okay, Ronnie?

RONNIE: Yeah. It's just my stomach. I'll be all right. I hate to do this, but can we cut this date short? I got to stop off at my place after I run you home.

ROSA: Sure.
They both leave.

Scene #4

KENNY is at the window looking for LENA who is not in the kitchen. RONNIE comes into the house, then the kitchen. KENNY goes to run.

RONNIE: Wait Kenny! I'm not going to kick yer' ass.

KENNY stops.

RONNIE: You got any Percocet? I goin' back to work and the weed isn't doin' it for me 'cause I can't work when I'm stoned.

Scene #5

WENDY and her patient, PAT are sitting out in front of PAT'S house.

PAT: So are you gonna quit the nursin' home and do home care full time?

WENDY: Yeah. As soon as I can line up at least two more jobs which shouldn't be----.

PAT: It'll be easier.

WENDY: It will, but I'll lose my health insurance, but I'm still doin' it. The patient load at the nursin' home is too much. I get up 12 people every morning, give 'em breakfast, and get 'em dressed and showered and by the time I am done, lunch rolls around and I have to get 'em fed again. My back can't take much more of this. One on one is a a lot easier.....I am glad that after over a year of comin' over here, I was finally able to get you to sit outsi---.

PAT: My daughter is, too. I have been in that room for seven years.

WENDY: Never been out?

PAT: No, 'cept for doctor's appointments and such.

WENDY: I wish I could work for you 40 hours a week instead of two hours a day, fourteen hours a week.

PAT: I know, but Kara can only afford you for two hours. When I got sick, I was in rehab and they had me walking 235 steps per day, which is about the distance to the mail box there. But Blue Cross out of the blue stopped said that they were no longer paying for anything and they don't cover home care.

WENDY: Oh, I know, but I feel bad with you lying in a dirty diaper all day. If I worked here 8 hours a day, you wouldn't have to do that, at least in the daytime.....I never noticed your front yard before, it's prett--.

PAT: Thank you. I worked on it evenings and weekends. When I retired, I worked on it constantly until I
got sick. You should have seen it then. I won awards every year from the neighbourhood association.....the lady who lived over there? She made lemonade for the neighbours at community meetings, real sugary, she was from the deep South....Alabama, I think....those people from the deep South like sugary tea and lemonade. I went to McDonalds in Biloxi, Mississippi and asked for unsweetened iced tea and they looked at me like I had three heads!...Anyway, she doesn't live there anymore.

WENDY: Is she the one you got audited?

PAT: No, in all of my years working for the IRS, I only got one person audited.

WENDY: Your ex-husband?

PAT stays silent.

PAT: I didn't get her audited........One day, her husband came home and she had another man in the house. You could hear a lot of screamin' and breaking things. I was sitting right here, right in this spot when that was going on. Then, he chased her out of the house. She was runnin' down the street, naked. That was pretty funny.

Both laugh.

PAT: I wish I had that easy of a time catching my husband. When he was screwing around on me and I hired that private detective to go to his girlfriend's house and take the pictures.

WENDY: That must 'of been hard to look at----.

PAT: No, I didn't look at them. I told the detective, "I don't want to see them." I got a good discount because he was a cop who had just started working privately, so he was just starting his business. But he kept the pictures and I was prepared to use them as evidence. He told me that he was just leaving. He rented an apartment in a cheap, run-down section of Harford County, in a drug-infested apartment complex where drunks and junkies piss on the trees in broad daylight, just to give me the idea, the illusion, that he was living alone and that he only wanted to leave me because he just fell out of love with me. He was such a cheap bastard. It must have killed him to even rent that dump that he did in order to fool me. It worked, initially. 'You're a good person, you know that?' he said to me right before he left. Okay, if I'm a good person, why are you leaving? I thought to myself. He wrote Kara a long letter, but she didn't bother reading it. 'It's bullshit, I already know, I don't need to read it,' she said.

WENDY: Why didn't he just tell you the truth? That he found someone else.

PAT: Two reasons: number one, he was trying to nickel and dime me to death on the divorce settlement. He was insistent on selling the house and splitting the profit. He was stupid about everything. He was splitting the damn towels and everything else. So when I confronted him with the evidence, the address where he was living with his girlfriend, the fact that I had pictures...pictures that I never saw, I never saw them, I told that detective, 'I don't want to see them', the fact that I knew where he was really staying.....with her, he let me have everything. The second reason: he wanted an annulment from the Catholic church and he did not want it to get out to the local parish that he was an adulterer. He met her at church. They sang in the choir together. But he still got his annulment because he gave them enough money. 31 years of marriage and three kids, 31 years and three kids, and they fuckin' gave him an annulment......the Vatican's priests are like doctors, if you throw enough money at 'em, they'll hop on board for anything......So...I told you he worked for Customs, right?

WENDY: Yeah.

PAT: So, he worked for customs, and I guess he is still there, or he's now retired, who knows? Anyway, I took everything that he ever brought home from work...they are not supposed to bring home anything
that they confiscate...but he brought lots of shit home...liquor, Cuban cigars, souvenirs... Anyway, I gathered everything that he brought home and put it all in the living room. And I called up his boss and told him to COME ON DOWN HERE AND GET IT. I told him that I was Charles Sulik's wife and that he had tons of stuff from customs here. “Chah-lie?” He asked? “CHAH-LIE??” “Yes” I said. “CHAH-LIE SULIK??” “Yes!” I said again. Yes....Yes......YES, goddammit! So they brought a truck and came and got all of it. And that truck was packed. He worked there since he was 20.

PAT pauses, staring off for a bit, then begins to speak again.

PAT: He would never apologize. 31 years and three kids and he never apologized.....Now, my daughter is always angry.

WENDY: My son doesn't even talk to me. Or anyone. He's 13 and he just told me that he wants to move out.

PAT: But Kara's turning away from me is my fault. I never let her stay after school to act in those school plays. I made her come home right after school every single day, she couldn't be in any clubs. I belittled her desire to be an actress. “They are a dime a dozen,” I would say. She became a nurse. Good job security, good benefits. And she doesn't have to pay anything because she lives here with me, but she's horribly unhappy. She calls that damn psychic hotline. They call back here and ask for her. “They're psychic, they should know that I'm not home,” she says. I should have let her do whatever she wanted, my sister says. But if I would have done that, she wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be able to stay in my home after I got sick. I'd probably be in some damn home. What did you want to do?

WENDY: Exactly what I am doing now---

PAT: Oh come on! I know better than that.

WENDY: And you wanted to work for the IR--

PAT: It was a stable job, with good benefits.

WENDY: But what did you want to---

PAT: I never really thought about it. I stayed home with the kids when they were little, then I applied to work for the IRS. I really liked my job. I got awards for helping people and they would call in and compliment me. My co-workers would always tell me to not work so hard, but I really liked working hard, but I never wanted to...be......anything. Now, I am a 61 year old cripple who wears diapers. That's not somethin' I was shootin' for, just to let 'ya know.

WENDY: I want to be a midwife.

PAT: Oh. Really?

WENDY: Yes, there is a school in Seattle that trains midwives. I sent away for some information, that was before people used the Internet for everything, and they sent it to me, but I never got it. My mother threw it away.

PAT: Oh no.

WENDY: Yeah, she wanted me to marry my high school boyfr-----

PAT: The junkie who was in the Guard?

WENDY: Yes. I was 17 at the time, and well, legally, she could stop me, but I should have stood up to her, or really...not even have stood up to her, I should have just gotten in my car and headed west. Kept
driving. Here I am now 31, and she is still there, in my life, in that kitchen, every
day....every...fucking....day.

PAT: Why didn't she want you to be a midwife?

WENDY: The reasons changed every day. The school was too expensive, it was too far away from the
family, I was meant to be a military wife, I could possibly flunk out, it was a hippy lifestyle that would
make no money.

PAT: You would make a great midwife, you should go for it, you are still young. Well, instead of tending
to babies, you are changing old peoples' diapers.

Both laugh.

WENDY: Nah, it's over.

PAT: You said you “want” to be a midwife, not wanted.

WENDY: I said, “wanted”.

PAT: No, you said “want”.

WENDY: “wanted”

PAT: Nope, nope, I heard it, and I wish I could have recorded it and played it back.

WENDY: I meant to say “wanted”, but it wouldn't be a bad idea, but I can't right now beca---

PAT: Oooohhhh, my back's hurting. I think I'll go in now. That way you can set me up and get going.

WENDY wheels PAT into the house.

Scene #6

RONNIE and CHUCK are sitting side by side grabbing a bite to eat.

RONNIE: There's been a lot of work tonight and it looks like there will be for the rest of the night, too.

CHUCK: Yeah, it's been busy, will be up until Christmas Eve....It's good to have you back.

RONNIE: Thanks. Missed me, huh?

CHUCK: Yeah, but I have done a lot of walking to and from my place. My muscles are sore, but I am
sure that by summer, they will be nice and toned. It will look like I worked out with my ex-wife's
thighmaster.

RONNIE: Thighmaster?
CHUCK: Yeah, that girl from Three's Company. She used to sell thighmasters and buttmasters on TV at 2 in the mornin' about 20 or 30 years ago. My wife bought a lot of crap on TV late at night right before she left. All on my credit card. Back when I had decent credit. Now, they'd laugh like hell if I tried to get a credit card.

RONNIE: Buttmaster? What the hell's that? That sounds like somethin' my sister would call her ex-boyfriend.

_Chang laughs._

CHUCK: Call her ex-boyfriend?

RONNIE: Yeah, she says that he's gay.

_Chang laughs even harder._

RONNIE: I doubt it though, she's just mad at him. She get it from my mom. If there's a dude that she don't like for whatever reason, she'll say he's a fag. She's accused my dad of being gay, her various ex-boyfriends, my nephe--

CHUCK: She ever accuse you of being gay?

RONNIE: Hmmmm........let me think.....no, I can't say she has. At least not that I remember.

CHUCK: She probably knows about all of 'em girlfriends you have.

RONNIE: No, we've never really talked about me dating....at least not that I can remember.

CHUCK: What does she think of Rosa?

RONNIE: I don't think she knows.

CHUCK: Are you serious about Rosa?

RONNIE: Yeah.

CHUCK: But you're still seeing Cindy who works at the gas station down the street here, and who knows who else you're seein'.

RONNIE: I haven't seen Cindy since I stopped workin' a couple of weeks ago. I've seen only Rosa since then.

CHUCK: Oh wow, so you are serious.....yeah, I think that your mother knows that you ain't a fag. For men, it's ain't natural.

RONNIE: No, it's ain't..........but I don't care if people do it.

CHUCK: It's a sin, but hell, I've committed many sins. Not that one, of course. I ain't never been with no man....but it ain't natural for a man. Now for a pretty woman, it's very natural.

RONNIE: Yeah, it is. It's nice if it's two pretty women.

CHUCK: You've been with two women?

RONNIE: At one time? No............once I was with four women at one time.
CHUCK: Holy smokes! Four women? At one time?

RONNIE: Yeah, it was after I graduated high school. A few buddies of mine and I formed a KISS cover band.

CHUCK: A KISS cover band?

RONNIE: Yeah, with cheap-ass version of 'da make-up and costumes. I was dressed as Gene. We couldn't play for shit, 'though.

CHUCK: Neither could KISS.

RONNIE: We did a show at a pizza joint, there were about three people, hung over kids, in the audience with their heads on the table, they were pretty zoned out. The guy runnin' the register paid us to stop playin' early, he just wanted us to get the hell out 'a there. But we got paid and we were all stayin' in a room together. Anyways, I was walkin' on 'da beach alone and I met up with a group of girls....right there on 'da beach, late a night, few people around.

CHUCK: Wow, you are a lucky dog, Ronnie...whew!

RONNIE: Afterward, I never saw any of 'em again........I haven't been able to get another scenerio like that together since.....So you ain't gonna condemn me to hell?

CHUCK: Nah, that's between you and God. And I don't think it's a sin like it is with two guys. That turns us men on. God made us that way. And he made women look the way they look. The pretty ones. I don't want to see two ugly dykes together, that's gross, almost as bad as seeing two men together. God didn't make us to take it up the tailpipe from another man.......Two women....ummmm..........That was my dream once. The wife wouldn't go for it. I was about your age, and I tried to get her into swingin', she wouldn't go for it.

RONNIE: Damn Chuck, I would 'a never guessed that.

CHUCK: Yeah, that was my number one dream. Some men, they wanna big house, some wanna boat, some want tuh play golf uninterrupted for a year. Some of those guys at the VA, they live out their dream by playin' on that golf course all the time. A small golf course, nothin' fancy. It's for patients and staff. My brother...he was in the Navy... did it all the time, always on that course, drove his wife nuts....but me. I wanted a threesome. Never got it....but after the wife left with the kids, my number one dream was to see my kids. In fact, I stopped thinking about threesomes after she left. I just now started thinkin 'bout it again talking 'bout that girl on Three's Company............dreams don't come true, Ronnie.

RONNIE: Oh I dunno Chuck, I think you'll make a great Wal-Mart greeter.

CHUCK: That's not a dream, that's me bein' tired and wantin' 'ta rest. But I'm tired now. Sometime, I get so tired, I just....wanna stop. You come tuh a point, where, you think you reached the end, but the boat hasn't come yet. Like in the third movie with the hobbits. Yeah, exactly like that. I'd never seen any of those movies before, but I treated myself to a movie one time when I had some extra money....I didn't know what it was that was showin', I just bought a ticket and went in, sat in 'da back, I had my glasses on, so I could see from the back....anyways....that movie was so long, I slept through half of it.....then I feel something hittin' me on my head....kids sittin' in front of me were throwin' popcorn at me to wake me up...they said my snorin' was so loud, they couldn't hear the movie.....anyways.......I wake up and the hobbit, he's gettin' on a boat with some old people and some elves. And sailin' away. He was awful young to be sailin' away to the next life, but sometimes, I feel like that hobbit. But I'm waitin' by the water and the boat, it's late. Not there yet. And I ain't young like that hobbit.

RONNIE: Nah Chuck, don't talk like that. You'll outlive us all, even Trey, even if Trey lives to be a hundred, and that's 97 years away........we should get back. The trucks pulled in a bit ago, they'll be ready
to unload as most of 'em probably already checked in.

CHUCK: All right, let me get up.

*CHUCK goes to get up, RONNIE helps him.*

CHUCK: Took me a while to get up, I ain't young like that hobbit....it's always sad when a young person passes, but I wasn't sad for that hobbit. He was goin' some place nice. Sailin' into the sunset.....

*CHUCK and RONNIE walk off the stage. Lights out.*

---

Scene #7

RONNIE is loading boxes onto a truck. He grabs at his stomach and falls.

TRUCKER: Oh, fuck me. I gotta be out of here in an hour and you're too fucked up to do the job.

RONNIE: No, no, it's my stomach. My meds are wearin' off. I'll do it, I need that 125 bad.

*RONNIE gets up.*

*TRUCKER starts loading again.*

RONNIE collapses again and loses consciousness.

*TRUCKER pulls RONNIE over to the side of the stage and starts loading again.*

Lights dim on scene, but the audience can still see RONNIE unconscious on the side of the stage. Two Canadian DOCTORS in white coats carrying picket signs walk by RONNIE. They walk so close by RONNIE and are oblivious to his presence, they could easily kick him without realizing it.

As the stage lights up, we see signs lying around the stage such as VOTE LIBERAL! KEEP SOCIALISM OUT OF SASKATCHEWAN!, DEMOCRACY IS THREATENED, and SASKATCHEWAN IS TURNING INTO CUBA.

DOCTOR #1: Later today, there will be so many people here, that the government will have to give in.

DOCTOR #2: They will do all that they can to save some face. They are feeling the pressure now, but it will be too much this afternoon when all of the capital grounds are covered with people supporting our strike.

DOCTOR #1: We have to wi---

DOCTOR #2: We will win.
DOCTOR #1: If we cannot kill medicare in its crib, it will come not only to this province, but other provinces and eventually, all of Cana----

DOCTOR#2: (standing next to RONNIE) We will kill (takes sign and jams it into the ground, poking RONNIE) Medicare. We will not emulate Cuba, we will have a system where we doctors can practice without government interference, a system like the United States (jams sign into RONNIE again).

Lights dim as the doctors walk off of the stage. Lights come back up and the scene with the trucker loading boxes and RONNIE on the side is as it was before. DIEGO comes out and walks toward RONNIE. The TRUCKER calls out to him.

TRUCKER: Hey. Hey Julio. Can you help me with this truck? I'll give you $75.

DIEGO ignores the TRUCKER and leans down to RONNIE.

Lights dim and go out.

Scene #8

WENDY'S house. RONNIE is lying on the couch, there is a knock at the door.

RONNIE: Come in.

Another knock.

RONNIE: Come in!

Another knock.

RONNIE: Shit....COME IN!

Another knock.

Ronnie: Fuck...

LENA comes out of the kitchen.

LENA: I'll get it.

LENA opens the door. ROSA is standing there. ROSA steps inside. LENA shuts the door.

RONNIE: Hey!

ROSA: Hi. (To LENA) Hello.

LENA: Hello.

LENA walks to the kitchen door, but does not go through it. ROSA comes down to RONNIE.

ROSA: Diego told me what happened.
RONNIE: Yeah, I barely remember any of it. Wendy told me that Diego brought me home last night and helped me onto the couch and that she took him home. That's all I knew.

ROSA: Ronnie, shouldn't you go to the hospital?

RONNIE: You sound like my sister.....I'm okay.

ROSA kisses RONNIE'S forehead, LENA leans in to see as ROSA is doing this. Ronnie slowly looks back at LENA, ROSA is following RONNIE'S gaze. LENA goes into the kitchen.

ROSA: How's the pain?

RONNIE: It's okay. I took some extra pills. I just didn't bring 'nough to work with me, that's all.

LENA sticks her head out the door.

ROSA: We can cancel for Sunday.

RONNIE: No, no. Let's do it. It'll be nice to meet your son. And for you to meet mine. Wendy'll be there, but I don't think that Chad will make it....but of course, pretty lady, I will be seeing you t'night like we planned.

ROSA: Okay, we'll see how you feel. Call me if you feel bad and we'll reschedule.

ROSA leans in and gives RONNIE a long kiss. LENA leans in, trying to see as ROSA is leaning in.

RONNIE: I feel better already.

*Lights out.*

**SCENE #9**

**RONNIE** is on the couch, sitting. He has showered and he's dressed for work.

In the kitchen, **LENA** is watching TV. **KENNY** comes to the window.

KENNY: Ms. Lena.

LENA: I don't need anything today.

KENNY: Actually, I want to see Ronnie.
LENA: Ronnie?
KENNY: Yeah.
LENA: Ronnie?
KENNY: Yeah.
LENA: You sure 'bout that?
KENNY: Yeah.

*LENA goes into the living room.*

LENA: Kenny's here.

KENNY: I got the Lortabs. How many of 'em you want.

*RONNIE gets up and goes to the kitchen window. LENA looks through the kitchen door as RONNIE and KENNY are talking.*

KENNY: I got 'ya.

KENNY and RONNIE make then exchange. *LENA goes into the living room and goes upstairs before RONNIE turns around.*

WENDY comes in through the front door. *She goes into the kitchen as RONNIE is turning around.*

RONNIE: Wen--

WENDY: Ronnie, have you seen Chris?

RONNIE: No, isn't be upstairs?

WENDY: No, it looks like he cleaned out his bedroom and he is gone.

*RONNIE runs upstairs, then comes back down.*

RONNIE: He's gone.

*The phone rings. WENDY answers it.*

WENDY: Hello? Yes, Mr Jameson....oh my god....oh no, please don't do that.......no, pleas----

WENDY hangs up the phone.

RONNIE: What did he say?
WENDY: He said that Chris stole money from him. That he has bundles of cash and some is missing, he knew that Chris stole it and that he was calling the police after he got off the phone with me. Then he hung up.

_A knock at the door._

VOICE OUTSIDE THE DOOR: Open up, it's the police!

_Lights out._

Scene #10

_WENDY is closing the door as RONNIE comes down the stairs._

WENDY: The cop kept askin' me about you, Ronnie. He was askin' if you put him up to it.

RONNIE: Wendy, I didn't! I fuckin' swear it! I never put him up to any of this. I didn't even know about it.

WENDY: I believe you.

RONNIE: He told me he was in “communications” and that was where he got 'da money. I don't know what the hell he meant. I made sure it wasn't porn or anything like that.

WENDY: He was makin' videos of mom yelling at him and puttin' 'em on Youtube, but he didn't make no money from it. Not many people watched 'em. The cop said that Jameson said that money's been missin' for a while. That Jameson keeps large loads 'a cash 'round 'da house, he never uses a bank. Nothin' can be proven. Nothin' can be tied to Chris. The cops just want to question him.........I didn't want him to leave.

RONNIE: Don't worry, Wendy, we'll find 'em.

WENDY: No, we won't.

LENA: (from upstairs) What's going' on down there?

RONNIE: We won't....he's long gone.

LENA: It's late.

RONNIE: But we have to try.

LENA: Ronnie, you're not goin' to work tonight?

WENDY: I'll miss him. I miss him so much now.

LENA: Wendy, you're still up?
RONNIE: *(Long Pause)* We'll die here.

LENA: What's goin' on?

RONNIE: We'll die here.........we'll fucking die here.

LENA: You still sick, Ronnie?

WENDY: I'm already dead.

Scene #11

DOCTOR #1 and DOCTOR #2 holding their picket signs come onto the stage.

DOCTOR #1: Things aren't looking good here. We need more people than this if we are going to kill Medicare in this province.

DOCTOR #2: Don't worry. The rally doesn't start for an hour. It's a bright sunny day, 1963 here in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. This day will be historic. This day will be the day that we kill medicare and defeat the NDP. We will make history, then we can go back to work.

*Lights out.*

Scene #12

RONNIE comes through the door of the house. WENDY comes out.

RONNIE: Didn't find anything. I looked all over the county.

WENDY: You want some breakfast?

RONNIE: Nah. No appetite.

WENDY: I'll go out this mornin'. Get some sleep, Ronnie. I'll call the school tomorrow.

RONNIE: Call 'em now.

WENDY: Can't. They're not open on Sunday. Of course, the police'll call as well, at least I hope they do. I'm takin' off tomorrow from work. I'll just have to go to Pat's house for a couple of hours, then I'll look for him.

LENA comes out of the kitchen.

LENA: *(To RONNIE)* Want some breakfast?

RONNIE: Nah, I'm not hungry. I'll go back out with you, Wendy.

LENA: You should get some sleep after workin' all night.

RONNIE: I didn't work, I was out looking for Chris.

LENA: Oh, he'll come back. You two worry too much.
RONNIE: Your 13 year old grandson has been missin' since Friday.
LENA: He'll be all right.
WENDY: That's not the point.
LENA: Ronnie used to take off all 'da time.
RONNIE: But you knew where I was. I mostly went to Jay's house.
LENA: And when Jay and I were growing up, he used to take off.
WENDY: Ronnie and Our Uncle Jay never took all of their stuff with 'em. Chris took everything he could carry. The furniture and lamps are still up there. The bed is stripped, closet and dresser are emptied out, and we think Chris had money. Our Uncle Jay is dead, so Chris ain't there. Chris said to me a couple of weeks ago that he was movin’ out.
LENA: He'll be back.
WENDY: I know you don't care about me or Chris. You never have.
LENA: I care about you and Chris and your other child that is not with you.
WENDY: I've kept you here, and now my son is gone. You refused to sign the paperwork giving you monthly disability and backpay, which would have given you enough to get your own place. You are here and now my son is gone.
LENA: I am not signing that paperwork because I do not trust the Obama government. I won't get anything. They'll come after me.
RONNIE: Yes mom, because you are so important. Our family golfs with the Bushes and the Clintons.
LENA: They put people in jail who stand out.
WENDY: You fucking know that they are not gonna put you in jai-
LENA: Wen---
WENDY: You are still here and MY SON IS GONE! MY SON IS GONE!!!
LENA: Wen--
WENDY: You crazy bitch!
WENDY lunges for LENA. RONNIE grabs WENDY before she can get to LENA.
RONNIE: Wendy, stop. Stop!
LENA: I am supposed to get my husband's pension.
RONNIE: Mom, the pensions are gone. The plant is gone. And dad is gone. You need to sign the paperwork to get your disablity. You were approved for it.
LENA: I can get the pension after Obama leaves office.
RONNIE: Mom, the pensions are fuckin' gone. They shouldn't be, but they are. But we don't have time to talk 'bout this, we'll settle it later, we have to go find Chris.

LENA: It wasn't s'pose to be like this. I should have your father's pension. (To Wendy) You should be married to Chad and livin' overseas, (To Ronnie) and you should be dating a nice, white girl from this country. Out of all the women you dated, you had to pick an illegal?

RONNIE: Mom, we have to go.

LENA: What if she gets deported?

RONNIE: We're leavin' now.

LENA: She's going to be deported.

RONNIE: Call us if Chris calls you.

LENA: I called her in. To ICE. Both her and her brother.

**RONNIE stops, stands, staring at his mother. Then he looks at WENDY.**

WENDY: She don't know nothin' 'bout 'em, Ronnie. Their last names, where they live. She only knows their first names.

**RONNIE looks at LENA again. Then he looks at WENDY.**

RONNIE: (To WENDY) Let's go.

**RONNIE and WENDY go out the door.**

Scene #13

**RONNIE is walking, he is putting haphazardly money and pills into his pocket. In the background, someone yells out.**

VOICE: You pencil dick druggie. I see you here again, I'll kick your fuckin' ass!

**RONNIE looks over his shoulder in the direction of the voice and as a space in front of him lights up, he has arrived at a café where ROSA is sitting.**

ROSA: Ronnie, are you okay? You've seem distant the whole time we have been here.

RONNIE: Yeah, yeah, I'm okay. Sorry.

ROSA: I missed you, Ronnie. Are you seeing someone else? Ronnie, if you don't want to see me anymore, I understand.
RONNIE: No, no. I definitely want to see you and only you.

ROSA: I heard about your life from before I met you.

RONNIE: You and only you, I swear. I have never felt this way about anyone before. In fact, I think we should get married.

ROSA: Married?! We just met a few weeks ago!

RONNIE: Yes. I don't want you to leave the country.

ROSA: I'm not going anywhere.

RONNIE: I don't want you to be deported.

ROSA: Deported?

RONNIE: Yes, I can marry you and you can stay in the country. I can't marry Diego, but I can marry you.

ROSA: Ronnie, I am a permanent resident. They can only deport me if I commit a serious crime. I do not commit crimes.

RONNIE: I thought you and Diego were here illegally.

ROSA: Diego is. He is much younger than I. We have different mothers. I actually barely knew him until he came here. We wrote, but I only saw him once since before I came here, back in Mexico. I really did not want him to come here, it's too dangerous, but he did come here, and he is my brother, so I needed to give him a place to live....I am legal because I dated and married an American in Mexico 14 years ago. We immediately came here after getting married, with the baby. We lived on the proving ground, he was in the Army. He died in Iraq in five years ago, Manny was 7. I have been raising Manny on my own. I had to drop out of nursing school, I only had a semester left. That is why I work in at the hotel.....I don't clean rooms, I work the front desk.

RONNIE: Oh, I knew you worked the desk. You were dressed so nice and pretty that time I saw you in the hotel. Of course, you are always dressed nice and are very pretty.

ROSA: Yeah, Manny grew up here, he doesn't speak any Spanish.....so no, we don't need to get married for me to stay in the country......how are you feeling?

RONNIE: I'm on pain killers. Hopefully, I won't need 'em much longer. I took the last ones this mornin' and so far, so good.

ROSA: Great. Should we head back?

RONNIE: Sure.

Both get up and leave.
Scene #14

RONNIE AND ROSA are steps away from her front door.

ROSAN: It's a nice night out. It was a good idea for you to park here and us both to walk to the cafe and back.

ROSAN gets out her keys to unlock the door.

RONNIE: I had a wonderful time, tonight, as always.

ROSAN: Me too.

RONNIE: Goodnight, Rosa.

RONNIE Kisses ROSA'S cheek. ROSA grabs his hand.

ROSAN: Ronnie, this is our fourth date and at the end of the first three dates, you shook my hand.

RONNIE: Right.....that's 'cause I'm crazy about 'ya.

ROSAN: Well......I know that that is NOT what YOU do when you like someone.

RONNIE: What do 'ya mean? I kissed you just now.

ROSAN: Come on, Ronnie. We have been seeing each other a few weeks now. I kissed you on your couch and you just kissed me for the first time. Otherwise...nothing. Now I have talked to some of the housekeepers at the hotel. Maria, Cynthia, Donna, Carmalita, Nan. Some of the front desk ladies who work day shift who you, before I met you, got to know you quite well...

RONNIE: Okay, okay...

ROSAN: Even Max, the guy who works front desk during the daytime wants to sleep with you.

RONNIE: Now Rosa, I never slept with Max.

ROSAN: I know, I know.....but pretty much everyone wants to sleep with you, even the ones who haven't yet. I even talked to Cindy at the gas station, you are still sleeping with her-

RONNIE: Rosa- 

ROSAN, still holding RONNIE'S hand, pulls RONNIE toward her and kisses him. RONNIE returns the kiss. While they are kissing, ROSA guides RONNIE towards the door. RONNIE breaks the kiss.

RONNIE: Diego workin' tonight?

ROSAN: Yes. And he now has a girlfriend, so he will probably not be back in the morning. And Manny is spending the night with a friend.

RONNIE: Rosa. I stopped seein' Cindy at least two weeks ago.

ROSAN: I don't care.

She kisses RONNIE, opens the door, and pulls him into the doorway. They shut the door.
A long pause.

The door opens. RONNIE is in pain, clutching his side. ROSA has his arm.

ROSA: Come on, Ronnie. I'm taking you to the ER.

Lights out.

Scene #15

A HOMELESS MAN sitting on the curb. A CABBIE is holding RONNIE up, supporting him as they both walk, and sits him on the curb next to the HOMELESS MAN.

HOMELESS MAN: Is he from the hospital?

CABBIE: Yeah.

HOMELESS MAN: Man, you all are always dumpin' sick people here. You've even brought me here when I went to the ER. That's why if I get sick or beat up, hurt, I'll just stay here, this is where I'll wind up anyways.

CABBIE: Man, I just drive the cab. They tell me where to take 'em. When they're homeless, they call a cab and bring 'em here.

CABBIE leaves. HOMELESS MAN moves closer to RONNIE. Tries to shake him awake.

HOMELESS MAN: Hey....hey. Man. You awake?

RONNIE does not wake up.
SCENE #16

WENDY comes through the door. LENA is in the kitchen watching TV. Before WENDY closes the door, she sees an envelope taped to the outside of the door. She pulls it off before closing the door. She opens the letter and reads it. Then, she clutches the letter to her heart.

There is a knock at the door.

WENDY opens it.

ROSA: Hi, I'm Rosa.

WENDY: Yes! Hi Rosa.

ROSA: I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but Ronnie is in the ER.

WENDY: Oh my god.

ROSA: Yeah, he was over my house, and was fine one minute, then was in excruciating pain and I had to take him in. I did not have your number and Ronnie was out of it by the time we got to the hospital, so I came here to let you know. I have his car.

WENDY: Yes, yes, let's go. But first...Chris left me this note, or had someone drop it off...I just came in from looking for him and I saw it. He said in the note that he left money for Ronnie upstairs under the floorboard because he wanted him to go to the doctor.

ROSA: Looking for Ronnie or Chris?

WENDY: Chris. He's been missing since Friday.

ROSA: Oh my god.

WENDY: Let me go get the money, Ronnie doesn't have any insurance, I can pay the bill and we can finally find out what is wrong with him! He's had these stomach problems for weeks.

WENDY goes upstairs to get the money.

ROSA: Chris has been missing since Friday, it makes sense now.

WENDY comes back down.

Both Wendy and Rosa go out the door.
Scene #17:

HOMELESS MAN: ...and then, I asked her, 'When is your husband coming home?' ......and I look up and there he is, standing there with what I thought was a shotgu---(RONNIE stirs slightly) hey, hey, my friend. (shakes RONNIE). You wakin' up?

(RONNIE stirs, then opens his eyes)

RONNIE: Hi.

HOMELESS MAN: Hey. You've been out for about a couple hours.

RONNIE: Looks like the ol' Jamesway shoppin' center.

HOMELESS MAN: It is.

RONNIE: Oh. This is where people go when they die.

HOMELESS MAN: Nah man. That's funny. You ain't dead. They just dumped your ass here 'cause you're homeless.

RONNIE: I ain't homeless. Close to it, though. I live with my sister.

HOMELESS MAN: They didn't check you for ID?

RONNIE: Don't carry it. Don't wanna be ID'd.

HOMELESS MAN: Yeah, that's a good idea. I don't have one, either. I just want you ta' know that I have been here with 'ya the whole time 'ya been here. No one has messed with 'ya, robbed 'ya. No government people have come here. I'm always on the lookout for 'em. I go hide in one of these abandoned stores if they do....I gotta go take a piss, but I'll be back.

HOMELESS MAN gets up to leave.

RONNIE looks far off in the distance and sees CHRIS. CHRIS looks at him, then turns around and walks away. RONNIE grabs his stomach, and then dies.

HOMELESS MAN returns.

HOMELESS MAN: Hey man, if you ever need to use the bathroom, or clean up, the closed down drug stores about three doors down, by the barbershop. The barbershop and the Eagle's Nest are the only two things left open here. They don't allow me in the Eagle's Nest anymore. They got good draft beer, but the manager kicked me out---hey, hey man. (Shakes RONNIE)....oh shit.....(checks RONNIE'S pulse)......oh shit....(looks around)......oh man.

HOMELESS MAN searches RONNIE'S pockets and find his pills and money. He takes them, looks around and quickly walks away.

DOCTOR #1 and DOCTOR #2 each walk out carrying a protest sign. They both step on RONNIE, oblivious to his presence.
DOCTOR #1: The crowd is about a fifth of the size that we need.

DOCTOR #2: I just got word that they are flying in doctors from Great Britain.

DOCTOR #1: We are now on par with Cuba. Who would have known that four year later, their revolution would come here? Are they going to make Castro our Prime Minister?

DOCTOR #2: Our strike is broken.

DOCTOR #1: Not sure what I'll do now.

DOCTOR #1 and DOCTOR #2 both start walking off of the stage. Each grab one of RONNIE'S ankles without looking at him and drag him along.

DOCTOR #2: My brother-in-law has a practice on a small town called Aberdeen, right outside of the proving ground. I think maybe I'll look for work there, the wife would love to be with her sister....... 

Scene #18

WENDY'S house. She is standing by the doorway and she hugs ROSA, then DIEGO, then CHUCK. CHUCK gives her his jar of change. ROSA, DIEGO, then CHUCK go out the door.

WENDY brings the jar of change into the kitchen. LENA has her head on the kitchen table as the TV is on. She looks up as WENDY sits the jar on the table.

LENA: What's that?

WENDY: From one of Ronnie's friends......it's for Trey.

WENDY walks into the living room and sits on the couch. Then she goes upstairs.

KENNY comes to the kitchen window. LENA opens it. He gets out the pills. She looks around the kitchen. She picks up the jar and brings it to the window. She starts counting out change to give to KENNY.

Lights out.

END
Works Cited


3 July 2015.


7 Jun 2015.


