

ANTIQUÉ WHITE

By Clete Keith

A Two-Act Play

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Johnny Kowski, 70's, a retired house painter

Clara Kowski, 70, Johnny's wife

Terry, 50's, Clara's daughter from her first marriage

Pete, 20's, a traveler looking for work

Roy, 70, mailman

Mertle, 60, nosy neighbor

TOWNSPEOPLE

Felix, Tex, Polly, Grover, Viola. All in their 50's & 60's.

SETTING

Small town America.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The main set is the front of a house with a garage, a small vegetable garden and beautiful pots of flowers. The second story window of the neighbors house can be seen stage right. There are three sets. The front of the house, the Wild Rose Cafe, and Terry's backyard porch. The cafe and backyard porch are wheeled into place downstage.

ACT 1

It's moments before dawn.

The moon beams down on the front of a weather beaten house in rural, small town America.

The porch has flowers in pots and two chairs that have seen better days.

Stage right of the house is a garage. A fence provides the divide of the yard to the house next door whose second story window overlooks the property.

Stage left, a fence encloses the front yard that has a small raised garden with tomato plants. A hose is upstage left near the gate that opens to the backyard.

The dim light on the porch suddenly goes off, exposing stars in the sky.

Slowly sneaking out the front door is JOHNNY KOWSKI. He is in his September years. His plaid shirt is wrinkled. His polyester pants are... polyester.

He crosses down off the porch, knocking over a pot of flowers. He freezes. He quietly opens the garage door and slips inside, closing the door behind him.

A light comes on from inside the garage. The SOUND of a car door opening is heard along with the faint SOUND of some sixties music. A tool drops and bounces, clangs, and finally comes to a stop.

After a beat, a light comes on from inside the house. Walking up to the front door in a robe is CLARA KOWSKI, Johnny's wife. Her feminine face is aging but beautifully delicate.

She steps outside and turns on her flashlight. She sees the knocked over flower pot and the light from inside the garage. She walks over to the garage and listens. Finally...

CLARA

(quietly)

Johnny.

(There is no response.)

Johnny.

(Again, no response.)

Johnny, come out of there.

(The music stops.)

I know you're in there. You just turned off the music.

(Silence. The light inside the garage turns off.)

And now you just turned off the light.

(A light comes on in the upstairs window of the neighbor's house next door.)

And now Mertle's up. The whole town is going to know. Come out or I'm coming in.

(Clara opens the door and shines the flashlight into the garage. Lots of shelves filled with cans, boxes, and tools are next to an old convertible.)

(MERTLE, can be seen coming to her window next door.)

(Clara shines the light at the old car.)

Sit up. I know you're in there. Sit up.

(Finally Johnny sits up, blocking the beams with his hands. He gets out of the car, walks slowly past Clara, who follows. As he gets near the porch...)

Johnny.

(He stops.)

Give it to me.

(He holds out the key to the car. She takes it. He looks up at Mertle who backs away and turns off her light. He steps up onto the porch.)

Don't turn off the porch light, Johnny. Always leave that on. It helps us find our way when we're in the dark.

(Johnny slowly walks inside the house. Clara replaces the flower pot, looks up at the stars and takes a deep breath. As she walks into the house, A FALLING STAR STREAKS ACROSS THE SKY.)

(MOON FADES OUT. WE ARE IN BLACK.)

(THE LIGHTS FADE UP.)

(Mailman ROY walks into the front yard, places down his mailbag, takes out a handkerchief and wipes his face and neck of sweat. He re-tucks his uniform shirt, pulls out a comb and a small mirror from his shirt pocket. He combs his hair, puts away the mirror and comb and walks up on the porch to the front door. The number "3" on the 2523 address plate is hanging down. He tries to fix it but it swings back down. When he opens the metal mailbox and puts in the mail, it falls off the wall. He panics and scrambles to pick it all up. Johnny opens the front door, steps out and stares at him.)

ROY

Sorry about that, Johnny. I was just... putting the mail into your mailbox here.

JOHNNY

Can't you put the mail in the box without tearing it off the wall?

ROY

I really didn't mean to have it come off the wall. It just...

JOHNNY

Did you put that magazine in the box?

ROY

Well...

JOHNNY

Why? Why would you do that?

ROY

I haven't had any problems doing that before.

JOHNNY

There's a lot of things I haven't had problems doing before. Like driving my car, which I guess now is a federal offense. Or seeing without glasses. Or trying to pee.

ROY

And what does that have to do with her magazine?

JOHNNY

Know what you can and can't do. I'm still trying to read without glasses. I'm still gonna drive my car one day. And God knows I'm still trying to pee when I want to pee and not pee when I don't want to pee. But if you see somethin's worn down, like the mailbox, don't expect it to do what it's always done. In other words, just put the damn magazine on the porch mat.

(Roy looks to see if Mertle's watching.)

ROY

How's Clara? I suppose she's... up early?

JOHNNY

(curtly)

Is that it for the mail?

ROY

I know I'm not supposed to do this... I mean if the government found out... I could probably go to prison.

JOHNNY

Take Mertle with you. (looks her way) You gettin' all this, Mertle?

(Roy pulls out a letter.)

ROY

This is for Terry.

JOHNNY

That's another one. Take 'em both to prison. They deserve each other.

ROY

I won't get by her house for another couple hours and I know she usually comes by here most every morning, so, maybe she needs it sooner rather than later.

JOHNNY

Just leave the damn thing. I'll get it to her.

(Johnny grabs it and looks at it.)

An unemployment check? Why is she...

ROY

I'm guessing Clara and you don't know this already so I'm only tellin' you because Mertle's probably already got it up on her Twitterbook thing.

JOHNNY

What are you talking about?

ROY

I was droppin' off the mail at Dr. Presten's a week or so ago, and I heard both Dr. Presten and Terry, behind the little frosted sliding glass window there, having an angry argument. He said something about he was letting her go.

(Clara steps out onto the porch. Johnny puts the letter in his pocket. Roy puts the mailbox and mail in his bag.)

JOHNNY

I thought you were gonna make some eggs?

CLARA

I was folding the wash. Why don't you make yourself some eggs if you want them while I get the mail from Roy.

JOHNNY

He's gotta go.

CLARA

Not before he gives us our mail. Johnny, go inside and make your eggs.

(Johnny finally walks inside.)

I thought I heard someone out here.

ROY

Yeah, well, I was just, uh...

CLARA

Are my tomatoes sagging?

ROY

No. Don't be silly. I think you look wonderful.

(Clara grabs her apron and hurries over to the garden. Roy follows.)

CLARA

Oh, Lord.

(She puts on the apron, gets down on her knees and checks the plants.)

It seems like they're about to poop out. Do you have that problem?

ROY

I have my days.

CLARA

(giggling)

Not you, your garden. As far back as high school, in FFA, I remember your gardens were always overflowing with vegetables. I was always envious of your green thumb.

ROY

(smiling back)

Well, my thumb and I are flattered. We had no idea.

(Clara points at Roy who points back at her. They recite the FFA credo.)

CLARA	ROY
Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.	Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.

(They laugh as Roy puts down his bag, and helps Clara straighten up the plant.)

(Mertle looks out her window.)

ROY

There we go.

CLARA

Thank you, Roy. I'm just hoping these tomatoes don't die in this heat. It's been horribly hot.

ROY

Triple digits from what I hear. For all we know, that could mean... two hundred degrees.

CLARA

These tomatoes need to be watered when it's this hot. I've been so busy with the wash and ironing and vacuuming... I've asked Johnny if he would water them, but, so far, no such luck.

ROY

Well.

(Awkward silence.)

We best pray for rain, don't you think? The last time it got this hot I wore shorts.

CLARA

When was that?

ROY

About sixty pounds ago.

CLARA

My poor garden.

ROY

Speaking of gardens...

(Roy pulls out a magazine from his bag.)

ROY

Home and Garden today!

CLARA

(excited)

Oh, my favorite.

ROY

Don't I know! There's actually a whole section on mulching. That tomatoes mulched with mown vetch produced root systems that were especially robust and far exceeded those mulched with plastic. Damn it!

CLARA

What?!

ROY

I shouldn't have ruined that for you!

(Johnny looks out the kitchen window as Clara touches Roy's arm.)

JOHNNY

Gonna make some eggs now!

CLARA

It's okay, Roy. I'm glad you told me. That's good to know. I'll read more about it. You didn't ruin it for me.

ROY

I'll keep my big mouth shut now.

CLARA

Don't be silly. It's okay.

ROY

It's just that I'm excited for you. I know how you like reading about all of that. I do too. In fact, I have a magazine called "Mulch" that I'll bring you that delves into every spread on the ground that prevents excessive evaporation or erosion.

CLARA

Oh, my.

ROY

Exactly. It's given me hours of pleasure. Let me get the rest of your...

(Roy digs into his bag of mail. Clara sees the mailbox.)

CLARA

Is that our mailbox?

(Roy freezes as they both stare at it. Clara looks back on the wall and sees it's gone.)

ROY

Where?

CLARA

In your bag.

(Roy sheepishly pulls it out.)

ROY

What do you know. There it is.

CLARA

Why is it in your bag?

ROY

I'm sorry, Clara. It fell off when I was putting in the mail and I didn't know how to tell you. Johnny came out and...

CLARA

I understand.

ROY

I am so embarrassed.

CLARA

I'm the one who is embarrassed, Roy.

JOHNNY

He pulled it off the wall.

CLARA

No, he did not, Johnny!

JOHNNY

Yes, he did.

ROY

I didn't mean to...

CLARA

It's not your fault. This house is in such disarray. It needs so much work. It has nothing to do with you.

(Johnny walks outside.)

JOHNNY

He put that Gardening At Home magazine in the box and the weight pulled it off the wall.

CLARA

Weight? It's a magazine!

JOHNNY

A heavy magazine.

CLARA

A magazine isn't heavy!

JOHNNY

Heavy enough to rip it off the wall.

(Mertle emerges at the window.)

ROY

I didn't mean to open up a hornet's nest here.

CLARA

It's not you, Roy.

JOHNNY

It's not *me*. *He* tore it off the wall.

ROY

I'll just uh...

JOHNNY

It's been fine for the last twenty-five years. Then he comes along...

CLARA

Do you hear this? This is exactly what I'm talking about.

ROY

Why don't I just...

(Roy places down the mail and the mailbox.)

CLARA

Twenty-five years! I've talked to him about someone coming in to at least paint this...

ROY

I'm going to leave this here...

CLARA

...and give it life again. At one point, Roy, you remember, this was the most beautiful and well respected home on our street. Don't you agree?

ROY

I should really be going.

(Clara turns to Johnny. Roy escapes to his next delivery.)

CLARA

The entire outside of our house is faded and peeling like a sunburn. And you aren't embarrassed?

JOHNNY

Is that why you brought all of this up in front of Roy? To embarrass me?

(Clara looks around.)

CLARA

Where did he go?

JOHNNY

He's a mailman.

(She picks up the mailbox.)

CLARA

Look, the screws fell right out of the rotted wood. It's not just Roy who sees this. I'm sure the whole town is talking behind our backs.

JOHNNY

That's only because of old Miss Scuttlebuttface next door.

CLARA

I'm so upset this happened to Roy.

JOHNNY

It didn't "happen" to him. He yanked it off the wall. And don't think I don't see you and Roy with all the little chitter chatter going on. Talking and giggling about plants and dirt. I know why he wants to stop by and it sure as hell isn't to talk to me.

CLARA

Don't be silly. It's just conversation. Engaging conversation. Something that's been hard to come by around here lately.

JOHNNY

That's because there's nothing left to say to each other. It's all the same routine. Day after day. You have nothing new to tell me and I have nothing new to tell you. There's no gold nugget left in me to discover and excavate. It's all been said or done. Our dreams have come and gone and we're left to look at ourselves in the mirror and say, "Well, I guess this is it." (beat) I'm makin' my eggs.

(Johnny walks inside the house.)

(Clara spins the hanging number 3. She takes off her apron and sits on the steps of the porch.)

(Johnny finally walks outside with a glass of orange juice. He takes a sip, then offers her.)

Do you want some orange juice? Fresh. Right out of the can.

(Awkward silence.)

CLARA

This place is falling apart and you just don't want to admit it.

(He sips again.)

I would like to have this house painted, Johnny. When was the last time you looked at our house?

(Johnny continues sipping.)

I'm asking, when was the last time you really looked at our house?

(She walks out to the front yard and turns back to him.)

Come out here.

(He sips and doesn't move.)

I said come out here.

(Johnny finally walks out next to her. She turns him toward the house.)

(Beat)

JOHNNY

It looks fine.

CLARA

Johnny... Terry thinks she could get someone.

JOHNNY

I doubt it. Have you seen her lately? She's starting to look like Willie Nelson. She's got that handkerchief on the head thing going on.

CLARA

I meant for the house. She's looking into hiring someone for us to paint the house.

JOHNNY

She's what?!

CLARA

I never ask anything of you, Johnny. Never.

JOHNNY

How long ago did you and she come up with this plan behind my back?!

CLARA

It wasn't behind your back. I wouldn't do that. I've been suggesting this to you for months and you ignore me and won't respond. And besides, if I asked you to sit down with Terry and me and talk about having the house painted, what would you have said?

JOHNNY

Hell no! But that's beside the point. Nobody's paintin' our house, Clara. And if anybody's gonna paint this house, it's gonna be *me*.

CLARA

You can't paint houses anymore! Those days are over. What happened to you a few years back...

JOHNNY

I'm fine. Don't let nobody kid ya'.

CLARA

All I'm asking is for you to consider letting someone else...

JOHNNY

I could paint the outside of this house in one day.

CLARA

No, Johnny!

JOHNNY

Okay, two, with prep.

CLARA

No!

JOHNNY

But this house doesn't need it.

CLARA

The last time it was painted was twenty five years ago!

(Beat)

JOHNNY

It was good paint.

(Clara puts on her apron, grabs a trowel, walks to her garden and begins to work out her anger on the soil.)

(Johnny sits on the porch and watches her as he sips.)

Keep diggin' like that you'll end up in China.

(She stops, stands, and faces him.)

CLARA

You never embraced Terry from the very beginning.

JOHNNY

You can't embrace a porcupine.

CLARA

How would you know? You've never even tried. You've never given her a chance. She respects you.

JOHNNY

No, she doesn't. Never has. Never will. Do you remember what she said to me when we first met? You were there. About what I did for a living?

CLARA

That was over twenty-five years ago. How would I remember that?

JOHNNY

You wouldn't. Because it didn't mean anything to you. I remember word for word. She asked me what I did for a living and I said, "A painter." And she laughed. Then she said, "Please, God, tell me it's fine art and not houses that you paint." And when I didn't laugh at her comment, she walked away from me mumbling under her breath. And I knew exactly where we stood from that moment on.

CLARA

I'm sure she was just being silly and having some fun with you.

JOHNNY

If I could choose any two words in the dictionary that *don't* describe Terry, it would be "silly" and "fun." She couldn't care less what I think. And now she's got you thinkin' we need our house painted. I painted houses for forty years. *I* know. *She* doesn't. She'll hire some crooked bastard out there who'll soak us for every dime we've got! I know. I've been on the other side of the bucket. I'll bet most of 'em out there don't even "cut in" anymore. A roller for this, a sprayer for that. She's stickin' her nose in our business again where it doesn't belong.

CLARA

If it's pride that's preventing you from allowing someone else to paint this house, I suggest you walk out from this porch again and have another look. Yes, it's old and weathered and creaks in places that shouldn't be creaking, just like us, but that doesn't mean it can't be made to look respectable. I just want to be respected and dignified again.

JOHNNY

"I?"

(Beat)

CLARA

What?

JOHNNY

You said "I." "*I* just want to be respected and dignified again."

CLARA

I said *it*. I want *it* to be respected and dignified. I was talking about the house.

JOHNNY

That's not what you said.

CLARA

That's what I meant.

JOHNNY

I think you meant what you said. Sometimes the truth just has a way of slippin' out when you're not trying to hide it.

CLARA

Don't be silly.

(Clara turns back to her garden.)

JOHNNY

Wait a minute, here's something new we could share. A stone left unturned. Something I've never asked you, so I'll ask you now. Have you been embarrassed all these years to be married to a painter instead of a doctor? I know that's how Terry feels. Deep down inside, you must miss being the respectable, dignified wife of a doctor who was beloved by the whole town. Someone who made great money. Who had a great pension and who could take you on vacations, and get your hair and nails done every week. Buy you a silk... whatever comes in silk.

(Beat. She turns to him.)

CLARA

All I was saying is that we can hire someone to paint the house.

JOHNNY

You didn't answer my question.

CLARA

Johnny, Terry said she could help pay for it. But we also have money put away for something exactly like this.

JOHNNY

That money is for important things. Like food and clothing and medical insurance. It's not money to throw away!

CLARA

Throw away? We're not throwing it away! Our home will be painted. It will look new. It will be like it used to be!

JOHNNY

It's never gonna be like it "used to be."

(They both freeze. Beat. Clara turns away and works on her garden.)

Your daughter's trying to run our lives, Clara. And if we let her, that's the beginning of the end... of us.

(A small amount of smoke begins to come from the kitchen window. Entering the front yard is TERRY, Clara's daughter from her first marriage. She is carrying her purse and a box of doughnuts.)

TERRY

Hi, Momma. Good morning.

(She gives Clara a hug and kiss.)

My God it's hot already. Is this crazy? It's like living in an oven. You shouldn't be outside. Why don't you go inside, close up and put on the air?

(Johnny looks at Clara as Terry has just proved his point.)

I'm on my way to the art fair in Oakdale and I thought I'd stop by and bring breakfast.

(She displays the doughnuts to Johnny.)

TERRY

They were out of apple fritters.

JOHNNY

Bear claws.

TERRY

What?

JOHNNY

I like bear claws.

TERRY

Oh. Not apple fritters?

JOHNNY

Bear claws.

TERRY

Right. That's right. Well, anyway. It's the thought that counts.

(She hands him the doughnuts and reluctantly gives a half hearted hug that ends up looking awkward.)

(She looks over and sees smoke pouring out of the kitchen window.)

Oh my God! The kitchen!

(Terry shoves Johnny out of the way and runs inside. Johnny drops the doughnuts and follows. Clara runs up on the porch.)

(Terry can be seen putting out the fire. She turns to Johnny.)

Get back! Move away. I've got it!

(Terry lifts the kitchen window higher to let out more smoke.)

The fire's out, Momma! I put it out! It's okay. Everything is okay!

(Mertle comes into the yard taking photos with her cellphone.)

(Terry fans the smoke with a towel then hands it to Johnny.)

Here, you do this!

(Terry walks back outside, picks up the doughnuts
and sees Mertle.)

Mertle!!

(Mertle runs back into her yard.)

I better not find that on Instagram!

(Terry embraces Clara. They sit.)

It's fine, Momma. I caught it in time. It was only in the frying pan. It's okay.

CLARA

(overwhelmed)

He was cooking eggs. He must have forgotten.

TERRY

You can't *forget* something like that, Momma. We can not allow situations like this to happen. It's unacceptable.

CLARA

It was an accident.

TERRY

But this isn't just a little "accident." This is an "accident" that could have resulted in the loss of your life had you been in the house and I not come by. Something has to be done. (beat) Were you up early this morning?

CLARA

This morning?

TERRY

You look exhausted.

CLARA

It's just my nerves.

TERRY

Was Johnny in that car again? I heard he was in his car.

CLARA

How did you know about...

TERRY

Mertle Twittered a tweet or something about it. Is it true? I thought you took the keys away from him.

CLARA

I did. I take them from him every time. First I thought Fred, at Schwitter's Hardware, was making him extras, but I called him and he swears he's not. I checked everywhere for other keys, but I can't find them.

TERRY

You can not let him drive that car. He can't see.

CLARA

He can still see.

TERRY

Barely. If he didn't see that the flame was up too high on the stove he certainly shouldn't be driving. We have to sell that damn car. He'll kill someone on the road and you'll lose the house. Everything you have will be taken. We can not let him drive.

CLARA

It gives him hope.

TERRY

There is no hope. Not anymore. Not when it comes to his driving again. You saw what happened to Ed Dulehopper. He can't see less than Johnny can't see. So he decides to go for a Sunday drive and he hits the Kite's dog, Mutley. And he didn't even know it. Got home, parked his truck in his garage with that dog still stuck on the front grill. The Kite's only found out later because Grover went over to borrow Ed's channel locks and he smelled an odor in the garage. He said Mutley still had a ball in his mouth. Poor thing. No, Johnny has to face facts. And the fact is he can't and shouldn't drive anymore.

(Johnny walks out. He has urinated slightly in his pants from his fear in the kitchen. Clara sees this and tries to deflect this so Terry doesn't see.)

CLARA

Johnny, go change your clothes. You're all dirty.

(Johnny looks down and sees the spot on his pants. Terry looks and he quickly turns and walks back into the house.)

TERRY

Did you see?! He urinated in his pants.

CLARA

He was scared. He got frightened. That's all.

TERRY

I was scared and frightened but I didn't pee myself.

CLARA

You're also twenty years younger.

TERRY

This is more serious than I thought. His lack of control mentally and now physically is extremely alarming. Along with the fact that he's constantly resistant to any change for the better. The writing is on the wall, Momma. Something has to be done.

(Terry sees the mailbox off the wall.)

What happened to the mailbox?

CLARA

Roy... it just fell off. It doesn't matter.

TERRY

Sure it does. How did it...have you spoken to Johnny about hiring someone to paint the house?

CLARA

He said nobody is going to paint the house. And that if it *was* to be painted, it would be him.

TERRY

That's ridiculous! He's not... he can't do that! Not at his age and in his condition!

CLARA

I told him the same thing. He won't listen.

TERRY

Well, I'm taking care of this.

(Terry pulls out a flyer.)

CLARA

What is that?

TERRY

I was going to try and tell you first but I didn't have the time what with... work and all... it's Adobe Coat. Kenny Blizzard's company. It's more than just painting the house. It's like a protective covering that will last for years. Exactly what we need.

CLARA

But I think Johnny should be part of the decision.

TERRY

Why? So he can say no? At some point he has to deal with the realization of this situation. And so I did my homework. Trust me. It's what this house deserves. More importantly, it's what *you* deserve. I'm just looking out for you, Momma. I realize there's been a strain on you lately. I can see it in your eyes. I see the warning signs. Johnny can be irrational. That can be dangerous. Not just to *his* health, but to *yours* as well. I see mental issues at work everyday with patients.

CLARA

Mental issues?

(Johnny, having changed, walks up to the screen door holding Terry's letter. He listens.)

TERRY

With Johnny, it's everything, Momma. We're talking eyesight, losing control of faculties, and memory. It all works in unison.

CLARA

But who isn't like that at our age?

TERRY

Have you cooked eggs with a flame way too high and walked away from the kitchen? There's a difference. A decline in awareness. Not being able to function properly. The whole house could have burned down with you in it.

CLARA

He got distracted, is all.

TERRY

I understand you trying to protect him. I really do. But I'm looking at it from a health professional's perspective. And the truth is he's fragile. Very fragile. And with that in mind, the facts as I see them, suggest that we look into having him in a place where he is less apt to make those mistakes. One that protects him. An environment that is more... controlled.

(Johnny steps out onto the porch and stares at Terry who becomes uncomfortable.)

TERRY

Do we have any coffee, Momma? I'd love some coffee.

CLARA

I'll get it. You rest.

(Clara enters the house. Johnny stares at her with contempt. Terry, still holding the flyer, picks up the box of doughnuts and opens it to display them for Johnny.)

TERRY

Maple bar? It's no bear claw but... they are really, really, great.

(Silence.)

A little heavy for the morning, but... really great.

(Clara walks out with a cup of coffee and hands it to Terry. She sits.)

Perfect timing. Thank you, Momma.

(Silence. Terry sips.)

Ummmm. French roast?

CLARA

Folgers.

(Silence. Finally...)

TERRY

Dad, have you noticed the outside of the house?

(Johnny stares at her.)

CLARA

Terry asked you a question.

TERRY

I was just asking if you've noticed the outside of the house lately? (beat) Maybe I should have been more specific.

JOHNNY

That's a good idea, Terry. Be more specific. Just what is it you want? And why?

TERRY

Dad, I was just wondering whether you put any thought into having the house painted, that's all.

(She holds up the flyer.)

There is a company called...

JOHNNY

First of all, don't call me "Dad." I'm not your father. I never was and never intended to be.

CLARA

Johnny! That's a horrible thing to say!

JOHNNY

Secondly, nobody's paintin' this house. And thirdly, I don't know what you've got planned, but I think I've figured it out. And guess what? Whether you like it or not, I'm not going anywhere.

CLARA

Nobody said you were.

TERRY

What on earth are you talking about?

JOHNNY

Don't play me for the fool. I see right through you.

CLARA

Johnny.

TERRY

All I was asking about was the house. Momma has wanted our house painted for quite some time now and...

JOHNNY

“Our” house? I think *you* want this house, your *future* house painted, more than Clara does.

CLARA

That’s not true.

TERRY

I don’t have to sit here and listen to this.

JOHNNY

Why don’t you tell us the truth about your job?

CLARA

What about her job?

JOHNNY

There you go, Terry. Your mom just asked you about your job. And please, be “specific.”

TERRY

I’m not sure to what you are referring.

(Johnny tosses her the unemployment letter.)

JOHNNY

There. That’ll clear up as “to what I am referring.”

CLARA

What is it?

(Terry quickly puts it in her purse.)

JOHNNY

Another question from your mother. Answer her.

CLARA

What is going on?

TERRY

Momma... I didn’t have a chance... I’ve been so busy...

JOHNNY

When Roy dropped off our mail this morning, he gave me a letter to give to Terry thinking she would be over here today and might need it sooner than later.

CLARA

A letter?

JOHNNY

This “letter” happens to be an unemployment check. Anything you want to tell momma?

(beat)

TERRY

Momma, Doctor Stevens feels... felt... that it was time to make a change. So... I retired.

JOHNNY

You were fired. You didn’t retire. You were fired. So now it all makes sense as to why you want things redone around here. With no job and no income you’ll lose your house. Which means you’ll need a place to stay because you have no savings for your retirement... because of Jill.

CLARA

Johnny!

TERRY

How dare you bring that up and throw it in my face!

CLARA

Terry, please. He didn’t mean that.

JOHNNY

Yes, I did.

(Mertle comes to her window.)

TERRY

My *only* concern is what is best for the both of you.

JOHNNY

No. Your only *concern* is what’s best for Terry. And then your mother. There’s never been any *concern* for me.

CLARA

Johnny, that’s not true.

TERRY

My *concern* stems from the fact that I’ve been in the medical field long enough to recognize a potential liability when I see one.

JOHNNY

Medical field? You don't have an M.D. or an R.N. after your name. What the hell do you know about medical liabilities? You're a receptionist! Or, *were* a receptionist. You couldn't fix a hang nail. So don't start puttin' ideas in Clara's head that maybe I should be in some spotless room with beige tiled hallways and that fresh morning scent of ammonia.

CLARA

What are you talking about?

JOHNNY

A "controlled environment." Sound familiar?

(Terry stands and faces Johnny)

TERRY

Let's talk about Momma.

JOHNNY

No. Leave her out of this. This has nothing to do with her. This is between you and me.

TERRY

No, it's not. She's the reason for this conversation. You're a danger to her. You could have burned down this whole house with her in it. Did it ever dawn on you that you are a burden to her?

CLARA

Stop it!

TERRY

The last thing she needs at her age is to take care of a child. Because that's what you are, a child!

CLARA

That's enough! Both of you!

JOHNNY

You may run her life, but you will never, ever, run mine. I'm gonna do what I want to do. See as far as I can see. Live in this house as long as I can. And don't you ever try and stop me or I'll...

TERRY

Or you'll what? Are you threatening me?

CLARA

He wouldn't threaten you.

JOHNNY

She's right. I don't make threats. I make promises.

TERRY

You're sick. You are mentally and physically frail and in need of professional help.

JOHNNY

In your unprofessional opinion.

(Terry turns to go. Clara moves to stop her from leaving.)

CLARA

Terry.

(Johnny grabs Clara by the shoulders.)

JOHNNY

Let her leave. Can't you see what she's doing?!

TERRY

Let her go! Leave her alone!

(Terry tries to pull Clara away from Johnny's grip.)

CLARA

Please stop! Both of you. Stop all of this!

(Clara, caught in the middle, suddenly falls backward, tumbling to the floor. She lays there stunned. Terry shoves Johnny out of the way. He backs up in fear seeing Clara laying there. Mertle takes a photo.)

TERRY

Oh my God! Easy, Momma. Easy. Are you okay?

(Johnny takes a step forward.)

Get back!

(He steps back.)
Can you sit up?

(Terry helps Clara sit up.)

Tell me what hurts?

CLARA
My knee. I turned my knee.

(Terry looks at Johnny.)

TERRY
(angrily)
Get some ice in a plastic bag.

JOHNNY
(shaken)
Clara.

TERRY
Get some ice! Now! (beat) Momma, can you stand?

(She helps Clara into a chair. She looks back at Johnny.)

Useless!

(Terry hurries off into the house.)

JOHNNY
Clara. My God. I didn't mean... I would never... do anything to...

(Terry comes out with an ice bag and places it on Clara's knee.)

TERRY
That should help with the swelling and the pain. Momma, I'm going to gather a couple of your things. You need to come home with me, where it's safe.

(Terry gets up and walks quickly into the house.)

JOHNNY
Clara?

(Silence.)

CLARA

Johnny... *(beat)* I need some time.

JOHNNY

Okay, take a deep breath.

CLARA

No... I need some time to think about *us*.

JOHNNY

Us?

CLARA

About our sleeping in separate rooms. Living our separate lives. About what time there is left. And how I want to spend it. There was a time when we were together that was beautiful. And this house was beautiful. I was filled with such pride. It made me feel special. *We* were special.

(Johnny gets down on his knees next to her.)

JOHNNY

Clara.

CLARA

Remember the evening drives in the convertible? Our long walks? You used to hold my hand and tell me how you loved me. Maybe, like you said, "It's never gonna be like it used to be." But better to live in those memories than what we have today.

(Terry comes out with a bag of clothes, walks over and stands between Johnny and Clara.)

TERRY

Let's get you up.

(She helps Clara up, making sure Johnny can't assist her.)

That's it, slow, Momma. Let's go slow.

(She ushers Clara down the steps. Clara begins to turn back to Johnny but Terry points ahead.)

Watch your step, Momma. Nice and easy. That's it.

(Mertle backs out of the window. Johnny watches helplessly as Clara and Terry exit the yard.)

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

(LIGHTS COME UP ON MID-DAY AT THE WILD ROSE CAFE.)

(A small diner in the center of a small town. A counter with tables and chairs. Entrance is stage left.)

(Seated are GROVER, who maneuvers a gold medallion between his fingers while eating, and POLLY, his wife. At another table are TEX, a rancher, and FELIX, the local barber. Seated at the counter is PETE, a young man who is taking in the conversations. VIOLA is the young waitress dabbing her face with her towel from the heat.)

TEX

I bet this is the hottest day on record.

GROVER

Someone makin' a bet?

POLLY

Nobody's betting on anything, honey. (She points at his medallion) I am so proud of you.

(Polly walks over to Tex and speaks in confidence.)

Tex, don't use the word "bet" around Grover, okay? He just got his one year medallion yesterday. He's still a little fragile.

TEX

I'll bet he is.

GROVER

What's that?

(Polly walks back to Grover.)

POLLY

Eat your brisket, pumpkin.

FELIX

More iced tea, Vi. If it gets any hotter, the Devil himself is gonna move into this town.

(Mertle bursts into the cafe.)

MERTLE

She's gone!!

TEX

Speak of the devil.

FELIX

For crapsake, Mertle, you run in here screamin' like someone just robbed the Pony Express.

(Viola grabs a menu.)

MERTLE

Meatloaf special, Vi, tell Hector no Tabasco! Last time I had the chorizo I couldn't feel my tongue. I thought I had a stroke.

VIOLA

You you got it.

MERTLE

She's left! She's no longer there!

POLLY

Who left, Mertle?

MERTLE

Cup a Joe while you're at it!

TEX

Make it decaf, Vi. She's already shaking like a chihuahua.

MERTLE

Clara! I'm talking about Clara!

(Pete grabs his backpack and walks out just as Roy, soaked in sweat, walks in. He takes a seat at the counter. Vi brings him some ice tea.)

ROY

What about Clara?

TEX

Don't listen to her, Roy. Her rumors will suck you right in.

FELIX

She's like a human vacuum. She fills up with everyone's dirt and then sooner or later it all comes spewin' out.

MERTLE

For your information, my information, is reliable information.

TEX

For your information, your information, isn't information. It's fabrication that you spread around as information.

MERTLE

She left Johnny! It's over!

ROY

What?

VIOLA

After all these years?

TEX

I'm not buying it.

FELIX

Me neither.

ROY

They were having some words today when I delivered their mail, but I didn't think...

POLLY

You heard them arguing? You mean Mertle is right?

MERTLE

You bet I am.

GROVER

What's the bet?

POLLY

Nobody's betting on anything, sweet boy. Eat your brisket.

MERTLE

Johnny got in some sort of quarrel with Terry. Something about her *concern* that they want a *child*.

POLLY

Who wants a child? Clara wants a child?

GROVER

Could she... can she... is that possible?

VIOLA

No.

POLLY

Maybe they want to adopt?

VIOLA

At their age?

MERTLE

Then Johnny made a threat.

ROY

To Clara?

MERTLE

No, to Terry.

VIOLA

About having kids?

POLLY

About adopting?

FELIX

What the hell are you all talking about?

TEX

She's spinnin' you around. Don't get sucked into the vacuum, Felix!

MERTLE

And then there was a fight.

GROVER

A fight?

ROY

With Terry?

MERTLE

Just after the fire!

POLLY

A fire!?

VIOLA

A fire?!

ROY

What fire?!

MERTLE

That Johnny started in the kitchen and Terry put out. And then they had the fight.

POLLY

You mean an argument?

MERTLE

No. The knuckle sandwich type. Clara took a right hook from Johnny and was out cold.

ROY

What?!

VIOLA

No!

TEX

It ain't true! She's full of it! Don't believe a word!

FELIX

You better watch your slander-mouth, Mertle. Your lies better be facts before you spread your rumors as the truth!

GROVER

You're telling me Johnny coldcocked Clara? *(to Viola)* More ketchup, Vi.

ROY

I don't believe it. You actually saw him hit her?

MERTLE

One minute she's standing and the next she drops like a sack of potatoes. It had to be him. Terry wouldn't hit her. It was ugly. Very ugly. I almost stopped watching.

FELIX

We know *that's* a lie.

MERTLE

Terry took Clara away, saying she was coming back for the "safe." So there must be hidden money in that house somewhere.

FELIX

"A safe?"

TEX

It's all a bunch of hogwash and baloney!

MERTLE

Hogwash and baloney, huh? I took photos!

(Mertle files through her phone.)

VIOLA

Without them knowing?!

POLLY

Mertle, that's wrong!

FELIX

You're crossing the line!

GROVER

You shouldn't be doin' that!

ROY

Have you no morals?!

TEX

That ain't right!

(Mertle finds the photos.)

MERTLE

Here they are!

(They all rush over to look.)

ROY

That's just Terry looking mad.

FELIX

We've all seen that before.

TEX

Johnny had his anger issues when he was drinkin', but he hasn't had a drop since he met Clara. He'd never hurt her.

MERTLE

Unless he's off the wagon, and he throws a haymaker, and drops her like this!

(Mertle shows another photo.)

FELIX

She could've tripped.

TEX

That shows nothin'!

VIOLA

Yep, I bet she just stumbled!

GROVER

If *I* were a bettin' man, I'd take that bet.

POLLY

Grover, control yourself!

(They all yell out their thoughts on Mertle's photo.)

(LIGHTS GO DOWN ON THE WILD ROSE.)

(LIGHTS FADE UP ON THE HOUSE. IT'S LATE AFTERNOON.)

(Johnny is staring at Clara's garden. He wipes his sweat away, walks over to the hose and pulls it over to her garden. He begins to water her plants.)

(Terry enters.)

TERRY

Seriously? Since when do you care about her garden? Too little, too late.

(She walks toward the porch.)

JOHNNY

What are you doing here? Where's Clara?

TERRY

She's at my house, where she finally feels safe. She asked me to pick up a couple things. Is that okay with you? If you want me to, I can tell her you said no.

(Johnny continues watering the plants. Terry enters the house.)

(Johnny turns off the water. Terry comes out with Clara's robe and a bag. Mertle emerges at the window. Terry walks off the porch and turns to Johnny.)

She's not moving out.

JOHNNY

(hope)

She's not?

TERRY

No. You are. You do not belong in our house. You don't deserve to *be* in our house. You are a threat to this house and you are a threat to her. And she is never, ever coming back to this house as long as you are still here. Is that clear? And with that in mind, I will make sure that you are out of this house if it's the last thing I do.

JOHNNY

Over my dead body.

TERRY

Don't make "promises" you can't keep.

JOHNNY

Like the one Jill made to you? That you fell for? You thought you finally found someone who actually liked you for you. But what she really liked, she took and cleaned you out of everything. Down to the last penny. And now you want to run home to "Momma."

TERRY

I've hired Adobe Coat to come here and finally give this house it's due. To give Momma what she wants. So after our dinner at the Wild Rose on Sunday, I'm bringing her by for the rest of her things and to surprise her. And once that's completed, I'll spend all my time and effort, every minute I now have, dedicated on relocating you to a place where you won't harm yourself, or more importantly, others.

JOHNNY

You're not going to force Clara and me apart by trying to convince her I'm some decrepit, senile, invalid.

TERRY

I don't have to. You've done that all by yourself. So why don't you take the next couple of days, sit on the porch, and watch a professional company restore this house back to its original beauty, the way my father had it, before you came along and ruined it. And I know you're struggling with your memory, but while you're just sitting here, try your hardest to think back on how you *pissed* away all your dignity.

(Terry begins to walk out of the yard. She stops and turns back to Johnny.)

And don't try and call her. For some reason it seems my home phone is disconnected.

(She leaves. Johnny looks up at Mertle who slowly sinks beneath the window frame. He sits on the porch steps.)

(LIGHTS FADE TO EVENING.)

(Johnny gets up, opens the front door, switches on the porch light to help Clara find her way home. He sits in a chair on the porch and stares out at the night. Overwhelmed, he puts his head in his hands.)

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

(MORNING FADES UP.)

(Roy, combing his hair, pulls the mail out of his bag. He walks up on the porch and he sees Johnny sleeping in the chair. He creeps over to the window and looks inside. He places the mail on the mat and turns around to see Johnny staring at him.)

ROY

Geeze! You startled me.

JOHNNY

You wouldn't be startled if you weren't doin' somethin' you shouldn't be doin' to be startled.

ROY

I was just dropping off your mail.

JOHNNY

Do you always look in the window when you drop off the mail?

ROY

No, it's just, you were sleeping and I didn't want to wake you so...

JOHNNY

You looked in the window?

ROY

Is Clara here? (beat) Were you out on the porch here, all night? Because of the heat? Or... got locked out... accidentally. Or... not?

(Roy starts to leave but sees the Adobe Coat flyer that Terry left. He picks it up and looks at it.)

JOHNNY

I'll take that.

(Roy hands it to Johnny and hurries off. Johnny reads from the flyer.)

“We take a home that has that weather-beaten, faded, neglected look, and restore its beauty like it was built yesterday by shooting on our famous 3.175 millimeter ‘Adobe Coat.’ It is a specialized mixture of your chosen color and our secret formula of latex, silicone, and polymer molecules.” Not much of a secret. They just said what it is.

(He walks out into the yard to look at his house.
Mertle looks out her window.)

“We then sculpture carefully, with crafted confidence, our secret formula,” which isn’t really a secret, “to make your house look like a modern home built in the early eighteen hundreds by an authentic Pueblo Indian tribe. We do this in two days. That’s right, in just two days, and it’s guaranteed for twenty years.”

(He looks back at the house.)

My paint lasted twenty-five years. “Imagine, you and your loved ones living out your dreams in a house decorated in Adobe Coat.” My ‘loved one’ and I won’t be alive in twenty years.

(Johnny wipes his face and neck with his handkerchief. As he staggers a bit from the heat, he sees Mertle who ducks away and closes the curtains. He looks at the flyer and then at his house.)

Over my dead body.

(Johnny crumples up the flyer and throws it down.)

(He opens the garage and drags out a ladder and several boxes and rummages. He finds an old painting hat and plops it on his head. He pulls out some brushes and studies them closely. He finds a scraper and takes the ladder over by the porch. He climbs the ladder and begins inspecting the paint on the house.)

(Walking into the yard with his backpack, bedroll, and drinking a bottle of water is Pete. He stops, wipes the sweat from his face and looks over and sees Johnny up on the ladder. He picks up the crumpled flyer, and starts reading it.)

(As Johnny starts to lose his equilibrium on the ladder from the heat, Pete hurries over and reaches up, steadying him.)

JOHNNY

(startled)

God almighty!

PETE

I've got you.

JOHNNY

Let go of me!

(Pete lets go. Johnny points at the flyer.)

You're one of those Adobe Coat guys, aren't you?!

(Johnny climbs down the ladder.)

Well, you can take your Indian teepee rubber coated poly gunk and spray it on Mertle's house, or better yet, spray it on Mertle. Go tell your boss, and Terry, for that matter, that no one's gonna paint my house. I don't need anybody's help. This is my house and I'll do what I want. How I want. When I want. She can run Clara's life, but she's sure as hell not gonna run mine!

(Johnny walks over to the boxes, and starts pulling out equipment.)

PETE

I'm just passing through, looking for some work.

(Johnny opens a can of paint, looks inside, turns it upside down and shakes it. The paint is dried out. Pete walks over with the flyer.)

I'm not an "Adobe Coat guy."

(Johnny grabs the flyer out of Pete's hand.)

JOHNNY

What's your name?

PETE

Pete.

JOHNNY

Do you have a phone?

PETE

Uh...

(Pete searches his backpack and finds it.)

Yeah.

(Johnny hands Pete the flyer.)

JOHNNY

Call that number.

(Pete dials the number on the flyer.)

PETE

Hello?

(Johnny takes the phone from him.)

JOHNNY

This is Johnny Kowski. Terry Connor called you about... right. I need to cancel that job. She's busy and asked me to call. When did she have you scheduled... right, that's what she said. What was the color she ordered? (*rolls his eyes*) No, that sounds right. Okay, and how much was the deposit? Five hundred? That's okay. Not a problem. It's the least we can do, after all, we cancelled the order in such short notice. I understand. One last thing. Do you have a Pete that works for you? Pete. Okay, thanks. You too.

(Johnny gives Pete back the phone.)

And you don't know Terry?

PETE

Nope.

JOHNNY
(all business)

Can you paint?

PETE

I can do a lot of things. But painting...

JOHNNY

You've got a job. Hundred bucks a day. Starts now.

(Johnny tosses him the scraper.)

We've got to first scrape down all the paint.

PETE

Sweet. Where's the paint we'll use?

JOHNNY

They're the cans in the garage up on the shelf. But I'm sure they're all dried out like this one. We'll have to figure out how to get to town to buy more.

PETE

Are you sure they're all dried out? Let's have a look first just in case. Then we'll know how many we'll need. I'll grab the others.

(Pete goes into the garage, brings out the paint and opens the first can.)

Looks good to me.

JOHNNY

What?

PETE

Check it out.

(Johnny grabs a paint stick and shoves it in. He begins to stir the paint.)

JOHNNY

I'll be God... I knew it was good paint.

PETE

(looking in can)

This looks like new. And you must have eight to ten cans in there.

JOHNNY

Amazing.

(Pete follows Johnny over to the house.)

PETE

This may take awhile. What do you think?

JOHNNY

Two days.

(Johnny turns and starts scraping the cracks in the wood. Pete looks at the house.)

PETE

It's gotta be scraped, sanded, patched...

JOHNNY

Primed and painted...

PETE

In two days?

JOHNNY

(biting)

Not if you don't get started. You wanted work. So work. Get up on the ladder.

PETE

Been quite a while since this house was painted.

JOHNNY

Twenty-five years.

(Beat.)

PETE

Good paint.

(MONTAGE: THIS SEQUENCE IS DONE WITH MUSIC AND LIGHTS. EACH SCENE SHOWS A GRADUATION OF THEIR WORK ON THE HOUSE.)

EACH TIME THE LIGHTS FADE UP AND DOWN, JOHNNY AND PETE ARE IN DIFFERENT PLACES WORKING ON THE HOUSE.)

(LIGHTS CROSS-FADE TO MID-DAY. MUSIC CONTINUES.)

(LIGHTS CROSS-FADE TO EARLY AFTERNOON. MUSIC CONTINUES.)

(When they finish scraping, Johnny grabs some sandpaper and hands some to Pete. Johnny drinks a soda and holds the cold can on his neck. Pete drenches his head with water.)

(Johnny gestures to start sanding. They both start on different ends of the house and quickly work their way toward each other.)

(MUSIC AND LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

(LIGHTS FADE UP TO LATE AFTERNOON AT THE WILD ROSE.)

MERTLE

I was right! I had a hunch about him falling off the wagon!

TEX

Where's your proof, Mertle, that Johnny's drinkin' again?

MERTLE

He was staggering out in the front yard, reading somethin' out loud.

FELIX

He was probably talking to himself about how to stop Old Nosy Nellie from looking out her window every time he walks outside his damn door!

TEX

That doesn't make him drunk.

GROVER

What was he sayin'?

MERTLE

Something about Indians and how he won't be alive.

FELIX

Indians? Maybe he *was* drunk.

POLLY

Do you think he's suicidal?

MERTLE

Who knows? If he's drunk, and Clara's gone, anything's possible.

GROVER

Mertle's right. Anything's possible with Johnny. Vi, got more fries?

VIOLA

I'll rustle some up. I think you lost me on this one, Mertle.

MERTLE

That's just the tip of the iceberg. Terry came back and told Johnny that he didn't belong in that house and she's gonna get him out if that's the last thing she does.

ROY

I got it! Indians!

(Roy pulls out the flyer from his mail bag.)

Johnny must have been reading this flyer that just came out about Adobe Coat. I handed it to him. It talks about your house looking like the adobe used by the Pueblo Indians.

TEX

Johnny would never let a company paint his house.

FELIX

Nope, never!

TEX

He'd do it himself.

VIOLA

At his age?

POLLY

I bet he hired the Indians.

GROVER

I heard that! And I'll take that bet!!

POLLY

Grover! No! I meant...

GROVER

Give me the odds!

POLLY

Oh, for the love of God! Get his fries, Vi!

FELIX

I'm with Tex! I think Johnny would rather die first before anyone painted his house!

MERTLE

Fine! Let's bet! Money where your mouth is, boys!

GROVER

I'm in!!

(They all yell at each other as the LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

(LIGHTS FADE BACK UP TO DUSK.)

(An exhausted Johnny and Pete are looking at the house. It's now prepared to paint.)

JOHNNY

Dinner.

(Pete goes into his backpack on the porch. Johnny goes inside the house.)

(Pete pulls out his food with his water. Johnny comes out with a bowl of ice cream and a soda.)

JOHNNY

We've gotta hurry. We got about fifteen minutes to stay on schedule.

(Johnny sits. Pete sits on the steps.)

PETE

The problem with soda is... it's all sugar.

(Beat.)

JOHNNY

The problem with water is... it's all water.

PETE

So you're going to eat ice cream for dinner?

JOHNNY

I didn't want to use the stove... 'cause it's too hot. And besides, I don't have time to cook.

PETE

Take the time. And if you don't want to cook, grab a tomato from your garden and savor the flavor. What's the rush? I used to always be in a rush. Day in and day out. Rush here, rush there. Non-stop. Too busy for anything or anybody. Absolutely no time for even myself. *(beat)* Then all of that changed. Talk about an awakening.

(Pete crunches into a rice cake.)

JOHNNY

What do you got there?

PETE

Carrots, celery and some rice cakes.

JOHNNY

Half your meal is air.

PETE

So you think we can finish by late tomorrow? This heat is brutal. Not that I'm trying to get an extra day's pay. By the way, where is Clara?

(Johnny stops mid-bite.)

JOHNNY

How'd you know her name?

PETE

You said something about how Terry can run Clara's life but not yours. So I'm guessing that Clara's your wife?

JOHNNY

She's visiting... a relative of hers.

PETE

Terry, your daughter?

JOHNNY

Step daughter. Step. As in fake, not really mine, just looks like she's part of the package.

PETE

You didn't want any kids of your own?

JOHNNY

No.

PETE

Why?

JOHNNY

Because they ask too many questions. Because they're a pain in the ass. And because they don't know when to shut up.

PETE

That's not been my experience.

JOHNNY

Well, it's mine now.

(Johnny finishes his dinner.)

PETE

So what did you use to do?

JOHNNY

(with dignity)

I painted houses. Have you got a problem with that?

PETE

No. In fact, my uncle painted houses. He and his buddies. I remember asking him if I could go with him one day.

JOHNNY

What did he say?

PETE

He said no, because I ask too many questions. I was a pain in the ass. And I didn't know when to shut up.

JOHNNY

Your uncle is a smart man.

(Johnny checks their prep work on the porch.)

PETE

He used to drink a lot.

JOHNNY

Probably only when you'd visit.

PETE

Actually he drank all the time.

JOHNNY

I know from that.

PETE

You do? How did you stop?

JOHNNY

I got some help and then when I met Clara... everything changed.

PETE

My uncle and his friends all painted together, drank together, but when the day was done, they went off on their own. Didn't really have any friends. They were loners. I think my uncle saw that in me. It's what made us close. *(beat)* Are you a loner? You know what? I think you and I have a lot in common.

JOHNNY

God, I hope not.

PETE

When I was a kid growing up in the country, kind of like this, I used to get up at four or five in the morning, right before the crack of dawn, without my parents knowing, and sneak out my window and pull my bike out of the garage. I'd ride for hours before school... alone. I'd just ride for miles upon miles. It was my freedom. My sanctuary. And I'd listen. Listen to the morning. It has its own sound, the morning. It can be as loud as you want it or so quiet you can actually hear yourself think. Imagine that? Sometimes I'd stop my bike, and just... listen... to the silence... and I'd get goose bumps....

(Pete holds up his arm.)

Look! Goose bumps! I haven't felt that for so long! What about you? Is there anything that used to give you goose bumps?

(Johnny looks over at the garage. Finally...)

JOHNNY
(barely audible)

My car.

PETE

What did you say?

JOHNNY

My car. Driving my car.

PETE

I saw your car in the garage. Sweet ride, my man.

JOHNNY

If I could have just one more time.

PETE

Why don't you? What's stopping you?

JOHNNY

It won't start. I've tried. Done everything I can think of to get it started but...

PETE

We still have a couple minutes left on our dinner break, don't we? I'm not the best painter around, but I do know cars.

(Johnny checks his watch. He grabs Pete and drags him over to the garage. He turns on the lights inside.)

JOHNNY

I keep trying to start it and Clara keeps catching me and takin' away my keys. But no one knows that I've got a lever operated, key duplicator machine locked away underneath the bench. Not a word!

PETE

About what?

(Johnny opens the cabinet and takes out a hidden key. He rushes over and jumps inside the car. Pete opens the hood.)

Go ahead, give it a try.

JOHNNY

Come on, girl.

(Johnny turns the key. The car CHUGS and DIES.)

PETE

Hang on. Again.

(He tries it again. Same result. Pete leans in for a closer look.)

There it is. It's the wire coming from the starter to the ignition resistor coil. It's not making contact...

(Pete reaches into the engine.)

Go ahead.

(The engine suddenly kicks over and STARTS! Johnny jumps out and runs over to Pete. He slaps him on the back.)

JOHNNY

Oh my God!

PETE

Let's go for a ride!

JOHNNY

Wait!

(Johnny looks at how much work there is left on the house.)

I don't think we have enough time.

PETE

We can take a couple minutes. You said you wanted one last time!

JOHNNY

Jump in!

(They get inside the car and pull out of the garage.
Johnny holds out his arm.)

Look, goose bumps!

(He stops and revs up the engine.)

PETE

What are you doing?

JOHNNY

Watch this!

(Mertle's window light comes on. She looks out the window. Johnny flashes the lights, honks the horn and turns up the sixties music. He holds up his middle finger as Mertle takes several photos. She backs out of the window.)

I've wanted to do that for years! It's like livin' next door to the KGB.

(THE SIXTIES SONG FADES UP AND THE LIGHTS UPSTAGE FADE TO BLACK.)

(THE VEHICLE MOVES CENTER STAGE.)

(Johnny and Pete are riding with the wind in their faces and the trees passing by. Johnny leans his head out his window.)

JOHNNY

Lean out and fly in the wind!

(Pete follows his lead.)

PETE

Smell. What's that smell?

JOHNNY

The sweet scent of twilight! Breathe deep! Nothin' like it! Wait! Wait!

(Johnny reaches over and turns up a song and lip-syncs to Pete's amusement. Finally...)

You used to take bike rides, I used to take drives, just like this! For hours! My hair blowin' in the wind, when I had hair. Music playin'. I was alive!

PETE

You seem pretty alive right now.

JOHNNY

No worries! No cares! No money to my name! Just livin' day to day! And lovin' it!

(Johnny turns up the music again, looks out the window and suddenly turns it down.)

JOHNNY

My God.

PETE

What's wrong?

JOHNNY

(amazed)

I can see!

PETE

That's comforting to know since you *are* driving.

JOHNNY

No. No. I mean... I can really see! The road! The trees! The bushes. It's crystal clear!

PETE

Are you all right?

JOHNNY

I'm great! I'm greater than great!

PETE

Why don't you pull over and let me drive?

JOHNNY

Hell no! I'm alive! I feel like a kid again!

(Johnny turns up the music.)

PETE

You're going a little too fast. Actually, a lot too fast.

JOHNNY

That's life, buddy! It's flyin' by so fast you just gotta grab it and take it all in while you can!

(Johnny holds out his arms like he's flying. Pete grabs the wheel.)

PETE

Steady. Johnny, slow down. Slow down!

JOHNNY

Why? Can't take it?!

PETE

Feel that? It's starting to sprinkle. Looks like a summer storm, just passing through.

(Johnny puts on his hat and sees the clock on the dash.)

JOHNNY

Is that the right time?

PETE

Yeah.

JOHNNY

Damn, we gotta get back!

(THE CAR MOVES BACK TO THE HOUSE GARAGE AS MUSIC FADES.)

(Pete follows Johnny as they run into the yard. Johnny throws his hat up into the air.)

I drove my car. I drove my car! *I* drove my car!!

(Mertle's light comes on.)

Hide!

(Johnny grabs an extension cord and a clip-on light from the box. He tosses it to Pete.)

Plug it in!

(Pete plugs in the cord. Johnny runs over to the fence and joins him. They duck down.)

(When Mertle comes to the window and looks out, Johnny pops up, turns on the light and shines it in her face.)

Mind your own business, Mertlemouth!

(Mertle gasps and closes her window. Johnny clips the light on the fence, aimed at her window. Mertle closes the curtains and shuts off her light.)

That'll teach Miss Buttinsky to mind her own business.

(Pete follows Johnny back into the yard while he dances and quietly sings.)

I drove my car! I drove my car!

PETE

How great was that? You drove your car. A perfect night. The only thing that would have been better is if Clara was with you. She would have loved that, I bet.

(Pete looks up at the night sky.)

Look at that moon.

(Pete looks over at Johnny who is staring at him.)

What? Did I say something wrong?

(beat)

It's just I remember wishing during all those secret bike rides of mine that I could share them with someone. So I just thought maybe you...

JOHNNY

(angry)

We're way behind. Where's my hat?

PETE

(pointing)

Right there.

JOHNNY

Where?

PETE

Right there. To your left.

(Johnny feels for it, grabs it, and puts it on.)

JOHNNY

(curt)

Let's go. We've got work to do.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

(LIGHTS FADE BACK UP TO LATER
EVENING ON TERRY'S BACKYARD PORCH.
IT HAS OUTDOOR CHAIRS, A RAILING, AND
CHIMES THAT HANG FROM THE FRAME OF
THE PORCH.)

(Clara is looking out by the railing. Terry enters
with some lemonade for she and Clara.)

CLARA

The stars are amazing.

TERRY

Momma, you shouldn't be on that leg.

CLARA

My leg is fine. It was a slight twist, that's all.

TERRY

A twist? It's at least a sprain. And it could have been a torn meniscus.

CLARA

But it wasn't.

TERRY

(fanning herself)

I'm just glad you're okay. This heat is stifling for cripes sake.

CLARA

It is warm.

TERRY

It's beyond warm. This town is like an oven. We've been roasting at three hundred and fifty degrees for two months. Enough already. I'm done.

(Clara takes a sip and runs her hands along the chimes.)

CLARA

Didn't you get these from Jill?

TERRY

Yes. It's the only thing she ever gave me.

CLARA

They sound so beautiful.

TERRY

I thought so, too, when I first got them.

CLARA

Because they reminded you of her.

(Beat.)

TERRY

(near tears)

Yep. But I don't hear them anymore. All that beauty left a long time ago.

CLARA

The beauty is still there, it's just our perception that's changed. Terry, I've only ever wanted what was best for you.

TERRY

I know that. And I feel the same about you.

CLARA

When your father died *you* took care of *me* at a time *I* should have been taking care of *you*. You gave up your studies in medicine, something you adored, to be with me. And I allowed that.

TERRY

Don't you think it was up to me to decide?

CLARA

How could you have decided any other way, when I was depending so much on you?

TERRY

I didn't mind. You needed someone to lean on. And I wanted to be there for you. Just like dad was.

CLARA

I loved your father very much but his work was everything to him. I hardly saw him. We were more like roommates in the end. Then Johnny showed up. He made me laugh. Made me feel special. The last thing in the world I ever thought was I'd fall in love again and share my life with someone.

TERRY

So where's the sharing now? You're a nurse to him and he's draining the life out of you.

CLARA

I know you resent him.

TERRY

It's not that I...

CLARA

And maybe that's why he shut you out. And I'm sorry for that. But he came along at a time that I felt I had to do what was best for me and to deal with the consequences later, whatever they may be. When you were with Jill, I didn't like it. I didn't like *her*. I didn't think she had your best interest in mind. But I couldn't say anything. Because you loved her. You wouldn't have heard me. When she took everything from you, I can't tell you how much it broke my heart, because there was nothing I could do. I was helpless. I couldn't protect you because it was your choice. It was your journey. (*beat*) Sometimes the best advice is no advice.

(Beat.)

TERRY

(hiding her emotions)

Dinner is almost ready. I'll be right back.

(As Terry walks out, Clara reaches up and runs her hand through the chimes.)

(LIGHTS FADE OUT ON THE PORCH.)

(LIGHTS FADE BACK UP ON THE HOUSE.
IT'S LATER THAT EVENING.)

(Johnny walks out of the garage and shoves some more work lights and extension cords into Pete's arms.)

JOHNNY

Set 'em up. Let's go.

(As Pete walks over and plugs in the portable lights, Johnny grabs some cans of paint, some boxes and the toolbox. He pulls rollers, pads, and handles out of the boxes.)

(Pete takes the screwdriver from the toolbox, opens a can of paint, and takes everything over to the porch.)

PETE

How do I start?

JOHNNY

(irritated)

You cut in first before you do anything.

PETE

Cut in?

JOHNNY

You said your uncle was a painter. Didn't you learn anything from him? You paint all the angles and corners first with a brush. Any amateur would know that.

(Johnny grabs Pete's materials and throws them to the ground. He walks back to the boxes and begins searching inside.)

PETE

(stunned)

What was that all about?

JOHNNY

We're way behind! I should've stuck to what I was doing and not had you distract me.

PETE

Distract you? All I did was... You said...

JOHNNY

We wasted too much time.

PETE

You said you wanted just one more time to drive. How is that wasting...

JOHNNY

And now I'm stuck with some fool who obviously has no clue how to paint!

PETE

Fool? Wait a minute. I never claimed to be a painter. I said I could do a lot of things but painting... and then you cut me off and offered me the job. I was going to say that painting wasn't my forte'.

JOHNNY

So you *don't* know how to paint?

PETE

Not like Rembrandt, no, but I'm sure I could slap some paint on the outside of your house. What's the big deal?

JOHNNY

I want it perfect.

PETE

(sarcastic)

Aren't all homes painted perfectly in two days? What is this? Some kind of contest for you? Look, I've been bustin' my butt, thinking you just might appreciate what I'm doing, or at least the effort, and all you do is yell at me about "cutting in." It was a mistake. All right? I made a mistake.

JOHNNY

I can't afford mistakes.

PETE

Why are you putting so much pressure and importance on painting this house so quickly? Why not take your time? Do it right.

JOHNNY

I don't have the time.

PETE

Or common sense. To paint and finish this whole house, in this heat, in twenty-four hours, just to get back at Terry? It's too much. It'll kill you.

(Johnny walks up on the porch and looks at the wood. Pete follows.)

Or is that what you want? Work on the house all night and drop dead in the morning light? How poetic.

(Johnny grabs Pete by the shirt, and shoves him against the house.)

JOHNNY

(intense)

My wife left me! And painting this house is my only hope to get her back! It's my last chance. So I'm gonna paint this house for Clara, by myself, if I have to, and have it done before Terry brings her over after their dinner, even if it kills me!

(He lets go of Pete, walks over and grabs the screwdriver and a can of paint. He struggles to open the can.)

(Silence.)

(Pete walks slowly over to Johnny.)

PETE

(apologetically)

You told me she was just visiting a relative.

(Beat.)

(Pete takes the screwdriver and pries off the top of the can.)

How do you cut in?

(Beat.)

JOHNNY

Grab the ladder.

(Pete takes the ladder and follows Johnny to the porch. Pete climbs up and Johnny hands him a can of paint and a brush.)

We'll prime the house first and then paint it. You'll cut in by starting from the top corner and work your way across and down.

(Pete starts stabbing at the wall with the brush.)

Don't jab at it! It's not a sword fight! Follow the angle. Find the flow and follow the angle. Even strokes. You're all over the place. Watch what you're doing. I only have so much paint. We'll need every drop.

(The paint is splattering down on Johnny.)

You're losing half the paint down here! Stop! Stop!!

(Pete stops and looks down at Johnny.)

Have you ever made love to a woman?

PETE

Huh?

JOHNNY

Have you ever made love to a woman?

PETE

Check your medication. You've either had too much or not enough.

JOHNNY

Answer this. Have you ever been in love?

PETE

Yeah, I think so.

JOHNNY

No, you wouldn't "think so." You'd know so.

PETE

What does this have to do with...

JOHNNY

Think back!

PETE

Yeah. It was a while ago. But... yeah.

JOHNNY

Remember the feeling of touching her. Stroking her.

PETE

Now that you mention it. It's all coming back.

JOHNNY

Caressing her.

PETE

Yeah. Got it. I'm there.

JOHNNY

That's what this is.

PETE

Caressing the house with paint?

JOHNNY

Feeling! It's a feeling. It's a passion. You don't just grab the tools, rip everything off, and get it over with as fast as you can. You observe her closely. Every detail. Inch by inch. Slowly. Follow her lines. Enjoy her beauty. Every curve. Every bend. Every angle.

(Pete looks back to the wall.)

Go ahead. Feel it.

(Pete dips into the paint and eases his brush up to the wood and makes one long continuous stroke. Then another. He looks down at Johnny.)

Keep going.

(Pete continues. The strokes are perfect. The job looks professional.)

That's it.

(Johnny grabs a can of paint.)

PETE

Johnny.

(Johnny looks back to Pete.)

PETE

I think I'm in love.

JOHNNY

Just keep goin'. We gotta a lot to finish.

(Johnny quickly rolls the wall with paint while Pete cuts in.)

You said a while back that you were a different person. Rushing here and there. What was your "awakening" that happened to change you?

PETE

A death.

JOHNNY

Someone close to you?

PETE

Extremely. When that happened it helped me to focus. I found real clarity. Suddenly everything made sense.

(The sun begins to rise.)

JOHNNY

I knew Clara was special the minute I saw her. She was graceful. Delicate. And she smelled good, too. I'll never forget when she first opened the front door and let me in. I thought, this is one beautiful, sad, lady. Terry wanted me to paint the house the way it was before; Avocado Summer (*he rolls his eyes*) with white trim. But after seeing how sad Clara was, I decided to paint it Antique White with Wedgewood Blue trim, to make it classy. Like her. Have it stand out among the crowd. Hopefully she would feel that and it would cheer her up. I didn't ask, I just did it. When all was said and done, Terry wanted to fire me, and Clara wanted to marry me.

PETE

Fate. It was meant to be.

JOHNNY

I thought Terry might turn out to be the child I never had. But I turned out to be the father she never wanted. To her, I was “just a painter.” No “M.D.” after my name. I never thought Clara felt that way, but lately... I’m not so sure.

PETE

You honestly think that Clara feels that way? You don’t believe that, do you?

JOHNNY

I don’t know what to believe anymore.

(THE LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE ON THEM
PAINTING. WE GO TO BLACK.)

(LIGHTS FADE UP TO MORNING AT THE
WILD ROSE CAFE.)

MERTLE

It was dark, but it was his car! Who else could it be? He drove down his driveway blinking his lights, honking his horn, and playing loud music like the circus come to town!

GROVER

So he finally got it started?!

TEX

Here comes another whopper.

MERTLE

It’s the truth! He’s lost his mind, I’m tellin’ ya.

FELIX

Oh, and you haven’t?

VIOLA

This sounds crazy, Mertle. Johnny, driving his car? Are you sure?

MERTLE

Positive! And now here’s the kicker! When I happen to pass by the window...

TEX

“Happen to...?” Yeah, right.

MERTLE

...I look out and see him in his car with all the lights blinking and the music blaring, and he sees me!

POLLY

How do you know he sees you? And how do you know it was him? You said it was dark.

MERTLE

There was just enough light for me to see him... flip me the bird! Just like this! Just like I'm doing here! Just like that!

POLLY

(offended)

Oh, well, really.

TEX

All right. All right! We all know what that is. You don't have to...

MERTLE

This is how it was! Standing straight up! Get a good look!

FELIX

Oh, for the love of God, Mertle!

VIOLA

That sounds crazy.

MERTLE

Exactly. He's gone berserk in some kind of senile dementia way!

FELIX

The only senile dementia around here is the looney standing in front of us flipping us the bird!!

GROVER

Don't be so sure, Felix. Anything's possible. Maybe Mertle's right!

MERTLE

You bet I'm right!

GROVER

How much?!!

(Roy walks in.)

ROY

What's all the commotion?

MERTLE

Johnny was drivin' his car last night! I know it was him because before he drove off, he flipped me off!

(Mertle walks up to Roy, flipping him off.)

Just like this here!

ROY

Well, at least we know Johnny's of sound mind.

(Roy sits at the counter. Mertle grabs her phone.)

MERTLE

Wait a minute! The video! Wait just a minute!! I took a video of him at that very moment!

(She searches her phone.)

FELIX

Not again! I'm not stoopin' down to your level, Mertle!

POLLY

I can't. I can't look. I will not look!

ROY

Have you no shame?!

TEX

You will never get me to look at...

MERTLE

Here it is!

(They all crowd around.)

FELIX

I can't see a thing.

TEX

I don't hear any horn or music.

MERTLE

The volume control is broken. I'm eligible for an upgrade so I'm goin' to Oakdale today.

ROY

It just looks like two flashlights in the dark!

MERTLE

That's his car!

ROY

Where?

MERTLE

Right there.

POLLY

(pointing)

Well then, what is that?!

MERTLE

That's the bird he's flippin' at me!

VIOLA

It looks like a big bug.

MERTLE

That's his finger!

TEX

You did it to us again, Mertle! This proves nothin'!

MERTLE

Oh, I'm not done! And to top it off, when he comes back from his little joyride he takes some kind of spotlight, puts it on the fence and shines it in my window. Must've been a thousand watts! Damn near blinded me. Lit up my bedroom like a Walmart. I had to keep my curtains closed all night.

TEX

I bet that'll teach ya' to mind your own business and stop lookin' out your window like some old prison guard.

GROVER

I'll take that bet!

POLLY

I “bet” your sponsor would be so disappointed in you!

GROVER

Two to one odds you’re wrong!! Anybody want to play No Limit Texas Hold’em?!

(THE LIGHTS BUMP TO BLACK.)

(THE LIGHTS THEN FADE BACK UP TO MID-MORNING. THE SUN IS ALREADY BLAZING.)

(THE HOUSE IS COMPLETELY PAINTED EXCEPT FOR THE TRIM.)

(Pete, who has paint all over himself, climbs down off the ladder. Johnny, without his hat, sits on the steps in exhaustion.)

JOHNNY

Now we just need to finish off the trim.

(Pete sits next to Johnny, who checks his watch.)

PETE

Break time?

JOHNNY

We don’t have much time. It’s hot already. We’ve got to paint the fascia board, the window and door frames.

(Pete helps Johnny get up and puts his hat on his head.)

PETE

Stay out of the sun as much as possible. It’s going to be a scorcher today. I’ll get the paint for the trim.

(Pete brings two cans of paint to the porch.)

JOHNNY

That’s all we got?

PETE

Yeah.

JOHNNY

That'll be just enough if we spread it out.

(Pete opens one can. They look in.)

PETE

Wow. That's some color.

JOHNNY

Wedgewood blue.

(Pete opens the other can.)

PETE

This one's dried up.

JOHNNY

What?

PETE

This top wasn't sealed all the way.

JOHNNY

Damn it, we won't have enough.

PETE

We might. Let's split the can and start that way.

JOHNNY

Don't put it on too thick if that's all we got.

PETE

Right.

(Pete splits up the paint. They each take a can and a brush.)

You okay? Johnny?

JOHNNY

(barely nods)

Yeah.

PETE

Why don't you begin on the porch in the shade? Let me start outside on the fascia board.

(Johnny walks up on the porch wiping the sweat from his face. Pete keeps an eye on him as he begins to climb the ladder.)

(Johnny's paint strokes are messy and missing the door frame. He suddenly drops his brush. Pete climbs down and hurries over to him.)

JOHNNY

My hands are sweaty, is all. From the heat.

(Pete takes his can and brush and sets it down. He see the mess he's making on the door frame.)

PETE

Why don't you sit and take a break? Have some water.

(Pete hands him his water bottle. Johnny barely sips.)

Take two minutes.

JOHNNY

(checking his watch)

We don't have two minutes.

PETE

(smiles)

Sure we do. I'll work twice as fast in the next two minutes to make up for it.

(Pete sits him in a chair, takes his handkerchief, drenches it with water and puts it around Johnny's neck.)

How's that feel?

JOHNNY

Better. That's better. It's getting a little cooler, isn't it?

PETE

(giving hope)

Sure. Yeah. It's a little cooler.

(Pete climbs his ladder but watches him carefully. Johnny gets to his feet walks unsteadily, picks up his brush and the can of paint.)

JOHNNY

(Staring into can)

We're not gonna have enough.

PETE

We'll be fine.

(Johnny takes one step onto his ladder and suddenly stops. He drops the can of paint which splashes all over the wall, rolls off the porch down onto the dirt below.)

(Pete sees Johnny stagger off the porch and collapse by the can of paint.)

Johnny!

(Johnny desperately tries to scrape up the paint that is seeping into the dirt. Pete rushes to his side.)

JOHNNY

She'll never take me back!

(Pete helps him over to the steps. Johnny suddenly grabs his chest.)

Oh my God! Help me.

(LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO BLACK.)

(LIGHTS UP ON LATE AFTERNOON AT THE WILD ROSE.)

(Mertle bursts into the cafe holding her new huge phone high above her head.)

MERTLE

This just in! Just received a phone call on my new 5.5 inch Retina HD display phone with a new 12MP camera with a...

TEX

Okay already, for cripsake! We get that you got a new damn phone!

MERTLE

...and I've been told, and granted, this is unconfirmed, but it is an extremely reliable source...

FELIX

Aren't these "reliable sources" just you, which means they're *not* so reliable?!

MERTLE

...that Clara now uses a cane and drags her left leg behind her from the fall, AKA the punch. And she has some kinda twitch when she talks which I bet confirms the AKA punch, AKA when Johnny clubbed her in the head.

GROVER

How much?

TEX

First you said that Johnny was trying to drive. Then suddenly he was driving at night, where he'd be blind as a bat. Then he's making obscene gestures at you. That there, is the *only* thing I think is true! And now you're sayin' Clara's twitchin' and walking like the Elephant Man! Enough is enough!

MERTLE

I bet it'll all come out in the wash that I was right!

GROVER

How much, God damn it! What's the wager?!

POLLY

Grover!

TEX

(standing up)

Mertle, you can keep spinning all these tales and lies but I know for a fact one thing that's true. When I first come to this town and bought my ranch twenty-three years ago, I didn't know anyone. Not a soul. Johnny just showed up at my house and started to help me paint. Never took a dime. He's a decent stand up guy and I'm willing to back him one hundred percent!

(Tex reaches into his wallet.)

POLLY

Tex, don't!

TEX

(ignoring)

I'll bet twenty dollars that Clara will be back with Johnny! And another twenty that if anybody is gonna paint his house it'll be Johnny! And another twenty that Terry don't ever move into that house while Johnny's there! And my last twenty that Clara don't have some kind of tick in the head! What'll you say to that, Mertle?!!

MERTLE

You're on!!!

(Tex takes out the cash and slams it down on the table. Mertle matches him.)

TEX

And when I finish my meal and all bets are in place, I'm goin' over there to check it and then collect it!

(Felix throws down his money.)

FELIX

I'm all in too!! Take that "AKA" Mertlemouth!!

ROY

(appalled)

I can't imagine betting on someone else's misfortune. *(beat)* Here's sixty against you, Mertle, you old bag of wind!!

VIOLA

(going through her tip money)

Oh, what the hell, count me in!!!

GROVER

(over the crowd)

I'll take some of that action, Tex! Hell, I'll take ALL the action!! I'll bet whatever is the limit and then raise you all another one hundred!

(He looks at Polly.)

Call my damn sponsor! I don't give a shit!

POLLY

(screams)

Grover!!

GROVER

In fact, double or nothin'!!

POLLY

Grover, stop!!

TEX

You're on!!

FELIX

I'm in!!

POLLY

No, Grover! You know what will happen if you start... double or nothin'?

(Tex nods. She looks at Grover.)

You've got the problem, not me! I'm all in and I'll add another hundred that says Johnny won't, Clara won't, Terry will, and Clara does!

(Suddenly through the front door walks Terry and Clara. Everyone freezes. Silence. It's so quiet you can hear the coffee brewing. Viola turns to them.)

VIOLA

Two?

(Viola seats them and hands them a menu.)

TERRY

Give us a couple minutes, Vi.

VIOLA

Of course.

(The confrontations between everyone becomes whispers and gestures.)

FELIX

(trying to be quiet)

Johnny's paintin' his house!

GROVER
(matching Felix)

We'll see, won't we?

(Grover and Polly pull out every dollar they have
and dump it on the table. Tex stands up.)

TEX
I've had enough. Vi, keep an eye on all of this, would ya?

FELIX
I'm with you, Tex.

(Tex and Felix throw down money for their bill and
walk toward the front door. Tex tilts his cowboy hat
to Clara.)

TEX
Ma'am.

CLARA
Tex.

FELIX
Clara.

CLARA
Felix.

(Tex and Felix walk out of the cafe.)

TEX
I didn't see any tweaky thing in her face. That's twenty bucks right there.

(They high-five and walk off.)

ROY
I best be going as well.

(He hurries over to Clara.)

A pleasure as always, Clara.

CLARA
Thank you, Roy.

(He leaves. Polly, Grover, and Mertle all nod to Clara as they quickly exit.)

TERRY

What is going on? Where is everyone going?

VIOLA

I believe they're all going to Clara's house.

CLARA

My house? What in the world for?

VIOLA

Something about it being painted.

TERRY

Momma, I didn't want you to find out. It's probably another case of Mertlemouth. My surprise for you is I hired Kenny Blizzard's company out of Oakdale to Adobe Coat our house! Remember the flyer?

CLARA

When? We were supposed to talk to Johnny about this...

TERRY

You'll love the color, Momma. At least *that* will be a surprise. It'll bring back good memories. I'm so excited for you!

CLARA

(worried)

Does Johnny know about this?

TERRY

I told him. He knew he couldn't paint it, so I'm sure he appreciates the fact that I took the initiative.

CLARA

What did he say?

TERRY

I'm thinking the Salisbury steak, Vi.

CLARA

Terry.

TERRY

Is that served with mashed potatoes or noodles?

CLARA

Terry.

TERRY

Let's eat, Momma, and then we'll go by and take a look when we're done.

CLARA

I'd like you to take me there *now*.

TERRY

How about we order first and then...

(Clara stands up.)

CLARA

(stern)

Now.

(Terry and Clara exit the café. Viola grabs all the bet money, shoves it in her apron, changes the sign on the front door to "CLOSED," and rushes out.)

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

(LIGHTS FADE UP ON THE HOUSE AT LATE AFTERNOON. Johnny, with his overalls splattered with paint, is still on the steps with his eyes closed.)

(The house is painted beautifully. No spill or splatters. It could be on the front of 'Home and Garden' magazine.)

(OFFSTAGE, The town's people can be HEARD. They rush into the front yard and see Johnny and the house at the same time.)

(Clara and Terry arrive.)

(Clara pushes through the crowd and hurries up to Johnny's side.)

CLARA

Johnny! Johnny!

(Johnny slowly opens his eyes.)

JOHNNY

Clara.

CLARA

Are you all right! Is it your heart?!

(Johnny slowly sits up.)

JOHNNY

I thought... but... No. No. I think I'm fine.

(He looks at everyone staring at him, except Terry who is fixated on the house.)

Tex.

TEX

(relieved)

Johnny.

FELIX

Hello, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Felix. Roy. Polly. Grover. Vi. Mertle?

(Tex stares at the house.)

TEX

My God, it's beautiful.

TERRY

(irate)

No. This is wrong!

(Everyone is startled and parts for Terry who barges through.)

This is not Adobe Coat!

(She walks up to Johnny.)

And this isn't the color I chose!

JOHNNY

It wasn't *your* choice.

(Clara stands and faces her.)

TERRY

This was to be painted Avocado Summer! What momma wanted. You did this just to get back at me.

(Johnny stands.)

CLARA

Terry!

TERRY

I will handle this, Momma!

CLARA

No!! You will do nothing of the sort!

TERRY

Let me have Adobe Coat come out and...

CLARA

Stop! Stop trying to run our lives! This house will stay the way it is. And that's final.

(There is SILENCE. All eyes are on Terry.)

(Believing she still has a shred of dignity, Terry turns and walks through the stares and glares of the group and exits the yard.)

(Mertle pulls her new phone out of her bra, takes a selfie with Johnny and Clara in the background, and posts it immediately.)

ROY

(pulling out the mail)

I better get goin'.

JOHNNY

What?

CLARA

It's perfect. Don't change a thing.

PETE

Have you ever climbed out of a swimming pool into a gentle summer breeze? Makes you feel so alive. God, I miss that.

(Pete holds out his arm.)

Look, goose bumps!

(Johnny is bewildered. He looks at Clara who smiles back at him.)

CLARA

It's overwhelming, isn't it?

JOHNNY

You have no idea.

PETE

When we drove in the car and laughed and shared our dreams, all that happiness and joy came from you, Johnny. The little boy with all the dreams, is still in there. It's never too late to be what you might have been.

(Pete smiles and walks down the steps.)

I'm glad she likes it. Makes you feel good, doesn't it?

(Pete walks over and stands between them. Johnny suddenly gets goose bumps and looks at his arm.)

CLARA

Did you just get goose bumps?

(Johnny nods.)

I did too.

(Johnny looks at Pete.)

JOHNNY

Is it as beautiful as they say?

CLARA

It's heavenly.

(Pete nods and smiles.)

PETE

I couldn't have said it any better. We're all a summer storm, Johnny. Just passing through.

(Pete walks away slowly from Johnny and Clara.
He stops and turns back.)

Johnny, she's the best thing that's ever happened to you. And she almost slipped through your hands.

(Pete takes one last look at the house, gives Johnny the thumbs up, and walks off.)

(Johnny looks at Clara and slowly takes her hand.)

JOHNNY

I love you, Clara. How would you like to go for a long walk?

CLARA

(tears in her eyes)

I'd like that. I'd like that very much.

(As they slowly walk off, hand in hand...)

(THE LIGHTS FADE TO NIGHT. THE SKY IS FILLED WITH GLITTER. A SHOOTING STAR STREAKS ACROSS THE SKY. JUST PASSING THROUGH, NO DOUBT.)

THE END