

HOOEY-HAHS & FOOFARAWS:
The Compleat Button Man's Picket Fence Party Planner
An unnecessarily long-titled
new farce by H. Russ Brown

HOOEY-HAHS & FOOFARAWS:
THE COMPLEAT BUTTON MAN'S PICKET FENCE PARTY PLANNER

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To my beautiful wife, Elizabeth, whose love, support, and belief in me has literally given me everything I hold dear: my career, my family, and my life.

Eternal gratitude to my original production team of designers, technicians, and performers at COM Theatre: The BIGGEST Li'l Theatre In Texas. It was your passion, talent, and creative energy that empowered me to hone this farce to its full, fast, funny, firearm-flingin', foodie fanatic, flimflammer flippin' fruition!

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HOOEY-HAHS & FOOFARAWS: The Compleat Button Man's Picket Fence Party Planner was originally produced April 18th – May 5th, 2024 at College of the Mainland in Texas City, TX. Direction by H. Russ Brown with scenic / prop / sound / lighting design by Curt Meyer, costume / hair / makeup design by Amanda Bezemek, fight direction by Carlo J. Aceytuno, stage management by Ava-Raye Palton, assistant direction by Devon Baxa and Sara Gaeta, assistant stage management by Madeline Kmiec and Felicity Leal, fight captained by Aleck Devon, and with additional production support by the COM Theatre majors.

The cast was as follows:

JO JOHANSSON: Audra Klinger

MO JOHANSSON: Mario Sweeney

WIN JOHANSSON: Riley Bowers

KRIS HEMMIG: Angel Purl

STEF HEMMIG: Bri Delaney

GIMLET: Justin Taylor

WOO-WOO: Zariah Crowder

AGENT(s) PEELER: Karlee Chapman

ESTHER ERK: Dianna Peoples Nelson

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:

Farce is my favorite thing to write. I'm of the mind that there are plenty of tragic stories out there, why not focus on adding more laughter to the world? Sometimes, I particularly love the challenge of taking something that is serious and dark and exploring how I can infuse it with laughter to find the lightness and defuse the darkness; to take away its power. All of my farces start out as "What If?" statements. I keep a running list of them. Any time I'm ready to start tackling another play, I go to the list and see which one calls to me. This one started as "What if a hitman accidentally showed up at the wrong house?" – which I added to my "What If?" list after seeing a headline to that effect in a tragic 2016 New York Post article. It's not everyone who instantly thinks... "Hmmm. How do I make that FUNNY?"

Not only did the challenge of making the subject matter funny excite me, but I was also excited to explore comedic contemporary stage combat violence involving theatrical firearms and found objects – like Jello. And so, *Hooey-Hahs & Foofaraws* was born!

HIGHLY IMPORTANT: It is strongly suggested that a qualified fight director is hired and given ample time to work for a dramatically effective production. In production, for this play to truly "land", it is vitally important that the moments of violence and the characters who carry them out do not cross that line over to true terror and an intensity that is actually disturbing to the audience. Keep it fun, broad, and comedic through the slapstick actions and overreactions of the characters. I would suggest contacting a representative of the Society of American Fight Directors to help you locate a qualified individual. www.safd.org

CRAZILY HIGHLY IMPORTANT: Racially-diverse, gender-inclusive, and body positive casting is highly encouraged for all roles. I've purposely written this script with no gender specific names or pronouns – so any role could be played by anyone – they just have to embody the spirit of the character. So, try and read it without letting yourself be informed and influenced by traditional gender roles and expectations. The only requisite for each and every role onstage is the bias-free casting of the best performer with the skills sets to bring the funny.

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CHARACTERS

JO JOHANSSON

Mo's spouse and Win's parent. A stereotypical, rough talking Jersey type. They are obsessed with home décor and entertaining guests.

MO JOHANSSON

Jo's spouse and Win's parent. A stereotypical, rough talking Jersey type. They are obsessed with gourmet cooking and DIY home repair.

WIN JOHANSSON

Teenage child of Mo and Jo. Blames Mo and Jo for moving them from their home they loved in Jersey to the "wastelands" of Minnesota.

KRIS HEMLIG

Next door neighbor of the Johanssons and spouse of Stef. The Minnesotan stereotype.

STEF HEMLIG

Next door neighbor of the Johanssons and spouse of Kris. The Minnesotan stereotype. Always cracking lame jokes.

GIMLET

Mafia assassin aka "Button Man". Ambitious and talkative with a curious nature that leads to distraction. Speaks with a British dialect.

WOO-WOO

Mafia Assassin aka "Button Man" and more professionally focused partner of Gimlet.

AGENT MORT PEELER / AGENT MAL PEELER

Federal agents and identical twins. Played by the same actor.

ESTHER ERK

Stereotypical Midwestern sassy senior and next-door neighbor of the Johannsons.

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

At rise, we see the interior living room / dining area of a contemporary suburban home decorated in mid-century modern style. It is the home of MO and JO Johansson - pronounced 'yo-hansen' - who claim to be from Minnesota, but look and sound like they just dropped out of an episode of 'The Sopranos'. It is one of three homes on Pallduva Court: an isolated cul-de-sac in a rural area of Battue Haven, Minnesota. The Johanssons are hosting a cookout and their guests are next-door neighbors, KRIS and STEF Hemlig – who actually are the epitome of the native Minnesotan stereotype. Downstage center is a sunken living room area with a couch that has an afghan blanket spread decoratively on it's back and a coffee table. Downstage left is a front entrance. Upstage right is a raised dining area with a stage right swinging door leading to a kitchen with a pass-through opening. Upstage center is a set of doors leading to a back patio visible thru the large, open windows - showing more window than wall. On the back patio is a charcoal grill and a couple of patio chairs. There is a visible, white picket fence and landscaping. Stef and Mo can be seen on the back patio conferring over the coals. Upstage left is an open hallway leading to the rest of the home. The raised area allows for passage from hallway to kitchen / dining area on the same level. On a retro turntable console, Rat Pack era music plays softly. A couple of beats after the lights have come up, WIN, the teenage child of Jo and Mo, appears spy-like in the hallway entrance and holds up their phone and leans against the couch, which messes up the afghan, and takes selfies of themselves, obviously passing judgement on the unaware Stef and Mo in the background outside. Win then starts to sneak over toward the kitchen and is about to sneak a

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peek thru the kitchen door when, suddenly, uncontrollable laughter is heard coming from the kitchen. Win quickly gets low and flattens out against the wall, just as Jo comes bursting thru the swinging door, laughing and moving toward the stereo. Jo turns down the music and flips the record over, but before they can restart the music, Jo is distracted by the askew afghan and goes over to fix it, still giggling. Kris follows in as far as the kitchen doorway.)

KRIS. It's true! I'm tellin' ya... those "hairless cats" look like a Yoda penis! *(They laugh. Kris collapses laughing against the kitchen door frame.)*

JO. Haaa! Kris! You're killing me!

KRIS. *(They both are trying to "get it together".) Ah, geez, ohhh, geez...! (Jo fixes the afghan and, on the way back from the couch, makes eye contact with Kris and the two both make a "Yoda growly sound" - then explode again into hysterics. The two have a completely unintelligible dialogue exchange thru the laughter as they stumble back into the kitchen together. Win rises up just enough to squeeze in a selfie through the pass-through, passing judgement on the fading laughter of the unaware 'hyenas' in the kitchen. Win starts to grab a plate off the table, but there is a sudden burst of activity from Stef and Mo that sends Win flying across the room and plopping down flat on the couch - once again messing up the afghan - unseen from the patio door as, Stef and Mo enter. Mo is wearing a griller's 'utility belt' which holds a homemade spice bottle and tongs - like an old West BBQ cowboy.)*

STEF. Oh, for Pete's sake, Mo. You have got to be kidding me! Hand to God?

MO. *(Confirming.)* Foot to Zeus!

STEF. *(Still doubtful.)* Buddha's dupa! *(Polish for 'butt'.)*

MO. *(Confirming beyond doubt.)* Any deity to any appendage. Brewski? *(Removing their novelty robot hand oven mitts and reaching into a mini-fridge / cooler.)*

STEF. No, yah, you betcha 'dere! *(They both pop a cold one and do a*

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fun, familiar 'cheers' with their bottles. WARNING: Dad joke approaching.) It may be a Pilsner going in, but later on... I pee, eh? *(Mo and Stef laugh. As though slain by the Dad joke, Win softly groans and rolls their eyes as they roll off the front of the couch onto the floor, still unseen, but making a loud thump. Mo and Stef hear it and start to look in the direction the sound came from but, another sudden burst of laughter from the kitchen pulls their focus for a split second before taking them back to their more immediate concern. Stef then speaks to the beer, giving it a small salute – as if to say “see ya later”.)* See ya lager! *(The agony of yet another bad Dad joke, sends Win crawling back out through the hallway commando style – unseen - as Mo and Stef take a long swig of their frosty ones, Their sips complete, the two overlap their appreciation for it.)*

MO. Fuggedaboutit.

STEF. Durn tootin'. *(Getting back to the conversation as they were entering.)* So, ya really just turn the steak once?

MO. Absotively! Hand-Foot-Dupa.

STEF. No, yah, but, I sorta heard...

MO. Ahh, whaddayatalk?! Anybody what says otherwise don't know from nothin'. Un giro. One turn. *(Pats the top of the spice bottle in their holster.)* Plus a skosh of my “spezie assassine”. *(FUN FACT: Italian for 'killer spices'. Mo calls into the kitchen.)* Babe! Coals'r ready to rip!

JO. *(From kitchen)* Almost ready, Babe!

STEF. Ohhh, yah! *(Calling into kitchen to get Jo's attention, too.)* The infamous “killer spices”! *(Mo whips the spice bottle out, aims it like a gun barrel, and 'fanning the hammer', Old West gunslinger style, playfully fires off three rounds at Stef.)*

MO. Pew-pew-PEW!

STEF. *(Comedically startled by it.)* Yiiiiipe! Sorry! Sorry, I... Yah, no.... Sorry... I-I... I got a thing about those... *(Can't bring themselves to say 'gun', so forms a pistol with their fingers.)* ... the “pew-pews”. *(Exhales.)* Cheese and crackers.

MO. *(Not having meant to startle, Stef, but still amused.)* Sorry, pardner!

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(Mo blows 'the smoke' from the end of the 'barrel' and puts it back in the holster.)

STEF. *(Calling in to kitchen.)* Do you know what's cookin' in dat bottle, 'dere, Jo?

JO. *(From kitchen. Overly emphasizing the last name.)* Nonna Johansson didn't raise no stoolie! *(FUN FACT: 'Nonna' is Italian for 'grandmother'.)*

STEF. Never go against the family, yah?

MO. I plead the 5th, your honor! *(They laugh. Holds out hand expectantly while peeking into kitchen from the pass-through.)* Steaks up?

JO. Steaks up! *(Entering from kitchen door.)* Here we go! *(Hands it to a mildly perturbed Mo and spying the yet-again askew afghan goes to fix it and the newly askew throw pillows.)*

MO. Aw, come ON! Babe! I spent two weeks on this pass-through; practically read that whole article in "This Old House". *(Gives it a solid pat or two to demo its sturdiness.)* The whole point is ta pass-through.

JO. I passed through... the door!

MO. If I knew that was all the passing through you was ever gonna do... What's the point of building a pass-through ya never pass through?

JO. It's not functional.

MO. It's a hole. In the wall. How is that not functional? *(Jo walks over, takes the plate from Mo, sets the plate with the steaks on the pass-through which has a very uneven ledge. Plate slides, tilts, and falls into kitchen with a crash.)*

KRIS. Oh, my gravy!

STEF. *(Calling into kitchen.)* Ya okay 'dere, Hunny-Bun?

KRIS. Yah, sure, Bunny-Hun! *(Appearing in pass-through from inside kitchen.)* Not a very practical pass-through, dohn'cha know?

JO. *(Offering sarcastic reassurance to Mo.)* But it's practically a pass-through.

MO. Bob Vila can bite my bevel.

KRIS. *(Still inside kitchen. Trying to smooth things over.)* Ope! I'll just pop' em on another platter, yah? *(Mo reaches expectantly to the pass-*

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through as Kris comes out the kitchen door.) Anywho, here ya go!

MO. The pass-through?

KRIS. Gosh, I know, yah! It really opens up the room, 'dere! *(Mo snatches the platter and huffs toward the back patio.)*

STEF. Guessin' steak's already been flipped once, 'dere, Mo.

MO. Hardee-har-har.

STEF. Did anyone else want their steak "medium-FELL"?

MO. Shut your pie hole, Stef... *(Gives 'a look' on the way out to Jo.)*

STEF. Can't! This pie hole is served "holla" mode! *(Stef follows and shuts the door behind them.)*

JO. *(Indicating Mo's reaction)* Geez...

KRIS. Well? Ya passed over the pass-through!

JO. I didn't pass over the pass-through, I bypassed the pass-through.

KRIS. What's the diff?

JO. "Pass over" implies ignoring or being hither to unaware of said pass-through's existence, "bypass" implies a full consideration of said pass-through's pros and cons and then saying... *(Kris is catching on.)*

KRIS. / JO. "Bye, Pass!!" *(They wave and laugh as they go back into kitchen.)*

KRIS. Oh, Jo, you're just awful! *(They are gone. After a short beat, Win half appears from the stage left hallway, making sure the coast is clear. Pulling out their smartphone – that they are not supposed to own - while also keeping a third eye on where the adults are, they start filming.)*

WIN. *(Into phone)* Welcome back, my melancholic boheems, to the "Blah-Blah-Blog" – Your BFE Bohemian's dystopian backyard bee-bee-cue edition. *(Does a quick pan and scan of the room with phone while making ominous orchestral noise with their mouth – then faces the screen again.)* Update: Day 228 of exile. *(Jo comes out of the kitchen with something for the table and Win quickly hides the phone behind them.)*

JO. *(Spots the place settings, bemused but corrective.)* Now, Win, polpettina, remember? *(Trying a little too hard to make work fun, while also – ineffectively - trying to be 'hip'. FUN FACT: "polpettina" is Italian for "little meatball".)* We were totes vibin'...yeah? *(Producing a*

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homemade party planner book with a decorated crafty cover. It should be colorfully decorated except for one element that clearly, comically shows Win's goth / emo / slightly twisted 'contribution' to the craft project.)

Having that “tight rap sesh” over the party planner we made for our little swah-ree...? *(Thinks they're saying 'soirée'. Win decides to let it go. Jo continues speaking as though trying to prompt Win to notice the mistake themselves.)* We were so “hype” after settling on a “five-course place setting” which means the dessert spoon... *(Picks up the dessert spoon.)*

WIN. / JO. ...is placed above the plate.

JO. Like... *(Sets it accordingly and admires the place setting.)* ...so! Check the “drip”!

WIN. Looking riiiiight at ya.

JO. *(Thinking it's a compliment.)* This par-TAY is gonna be LIT.

WIN. I really wish I was. *(Jo, with desperate joy, fixes the rest of the place settings – only half listening to Win's forced enthusiasm.)* But... Cheese whiz, I couldn't remember and then, silly me, went to Google it and then I realized... *(Switches to normal sarcastic demeanor.)* I'm not allowed to have a computer anymore.

JO. *(Still focused on the place settings, but dropping the 'hip' talk. Speaking as though referencing a parental grounding situation.)* Well, now, you know...

WIN. Why I've been stranded in the year 1885? YES. All too aware.

JO. Yo! *(Heading back into the kitchen.)* Howzabout puttin' a cork in that whine, hah?

WIN. But... *(Jo has already hurried back into the kitchen.)* *huff*... Yet another... good talk. *(Switching focus back to their phone.)*

Callousness, cluelessness, and a side dish of cringe are on the menu today, apparently, boheems... and my anti-tech 'rents still don't even know I have a phone – so I gotta make this one quick. After last night's forced melon-balling duty masked as “family jam sesh”...? *(Indicating Jo and correcting their pronunciation.)* The Stalin of soirées shackled me with “novelty napkin folding”. *(Sneaks place setting away to film it. On the plate is a grey napkin folded to look like an elephant trunk and ears.)* It's

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an elephant. Why an elephant? So it will be... “a night to remember”... (*deadpans into camera for a beat*) Yah. Followed by Jo launching into a mortifying riff about what the napkin was going to do with “all that junk... up in that...” (*points at elephant's trunk*) ...culminating in a twerk (!) against humanity cut mercifully short by a charley horse. (*Doorbell rings, startling them as they scramble to hide the phone on a shelf or mantle or wherever.*)

MO. / JO. Win!

WIN. (*Startled again.*) Wha?!

MO. / JO. Get the door!

WIN. Geezuuu-...

MO. / JO. (*Redirecting the sentiment.*) ...Ziss watching you! (*Catches eyes with a decorative cross or a religious bust / portrait / candle. Doorbell rings again.*)

MO. / JO. Win!! (*Agitated, Win opens door revealing GIMLET, a cheerful “delivery driver”, who speaks in a British dialect.*)

GIMLET. Afternoon! (*Holds out two packages.*) Pony Express! (*Begins peeking around the room.*)

WIN. (*Takes packages*) Giddyup. (*Slams door on Gimlet, who barely avoids getting hit and sets packages on a table near the door and starts to walk away. Doorbell rings again.*)

MO. / JO. / WIN. WIN!! (*Win yanks open door.*)

GIMLET. (*Holding nose.*) Ow. Not really ‘Pony Express’, heh, the only ‘chaps’ I have are m’mates down at the pub! Haha! (*Win just stares them down.*) Sorry, needed a signature. (*Holds out clipboard.*)

WIN. Oh. (*Takes clipboard and signs. Gimlet is very intent on surveying the interior.*)

GIMLET. (*Deeply inhaling, taking in the scent...*) Mmmm... that ambrosia wafting about... is that...?

WIN. (*Handing back clipboard.*) Suburban despair. Yes. (*Slams door, again, almost catching the delivery driver in it. Retrieves their phone from it's hiding place, then calls into rest of the house.*) Yo! More crap that can never fill the desolate void within! (*Intentionally messes up the*

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afghan on the way by the couch and exits via the hallway.)

JO. *(Kris and Jo enter together. Jo is excitedly expectant of what it is – almost singing the next line.)* Martha Stewart Collection corncob holders! *(Kris sets out a couple of items on table and heads back into kitchen. Jo checks one package and the expectation is broken.)* Whadda we got here? *(Jo checks other package.)* Wait... Win!

WIN. *(From down the hallway.)* I did it, a'right?!

MO. *(Poking head in from patio.)* Who's dat?

JO. Packages. Neither o' which belongs here. *(Indicates their guests.)* One's for Kris and Stef. *(Indicates across the street.)* The other's Esther Erk's.

MO. / JO. Win!!

WIN. *(Still shouting from down the hallway.)* I answered the door!

MO. / JO. *(Both verbally react their mild displeasure at the attitude being displayed and then simultaneously to each other.)* Your child. *(They look at each other in momentary standoff. Each expecting the other to do something about it.)*

JO. Rock-Paper-Scissors. *(They engage in a round but between Mo's robot grill mittens and Jo's animal oven mittens they don't know who won, they stare at the outcome for a beat. Then...)*

MO. / JO. WIN?!

WIN. *(Win comes charging in from hallway.)* Chriiiiiiiii-!

MO. / JO. *(Redirecting the sentiment.)* ...Stiz watching you!

WIN. I answered the DOOR!!

MO. Yo!! Attitude!

JO. We know you did!

WIN. So, what's the prob here, Jo?

JO. I'm asking you nicely... *(The urge to not do so is obvious.)* ...to not call me by my name, please. *(Indicating there are guests in the house. Stef and Kris both peek in slightly from their respective locations and slowly drift away when they realize they've been caught looking.)* A little decorum for our guests??

WIN. *(Suddenly ala Jayne Eyre – Genteel dialect and all.)* Oh, do forgive

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my most churlish manner... *(Throws a dainty 'queen' wave to Kris who's peeking through the pass-through again.)* Salutations! *(Kris responds in kind, unsure of what's happening and disappears again quickly.)* ...but when you did bid me greet our mysterious caller, I sped forth with all due haste. And, I must say, none were more elated than I to discover that parcels and their timely delivery were the pride and vocation of the aforementioned caller. After obliging their request to serve as signatory for its release, I, with great care, placed said bundle upon the escritoire in yon vestibule and then announced its fortuitous arrival to you, my progenitor, my begetter, my sire. *(Curtseys.)*

JO. At the moment, you are definitely my issue. *(‘Issue’ meaning both child and problem. Jo looks at Mo, who shrugs.)*

MO. Blame it on Brontë.

JO. *(Giving the sass right back to Win, but not quite as period appropriate.)* Parcel twath delivereth to wrongeth castle-eth... *(In their frustration, grabs the wrong package.)* Smart ath.

WIN. Oh.

JO. Run this across to Esther Erk? *(Win reaches out to take it, but Jo holds on and makes eye contact with Win.)* Forthwith? *(Jo lets go and Win heads out door, but just before it slams...)*

WIN. Son of a bi-!

MO. *(Opening door and calling after Win.)* Ay-Oh! You kiss your begetter with that mouth?? *(Shuts door.)*

JO. Ooo, I'm tellin' ya.

MO. Who you tellin'...? Phew, I'm about ta...

JO. You're about ta...? Shooo, I just wanna...

MO. You think you wanna? *(Thinking they should be more patient.)* But, don't we gotta...?

JO. Yeah, we do gotta. *(Reflecting on how much change Win has been through.)* Cuz, they really....

MO. They really have. *(It's not been easy.)* And it ain't been...

JO. No, it ain't. *(Commenting on how rude Win has been.)* But, that don't mean...!

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MO. No, it don't! (*Wanting Win to be happy.*) I just want them to be...

JO. All I could ever wish for them! But, with a little more time...

MO. And a lot more patience.

JO. Ya think?

MO. I know. (*Mo and Jo hug and then Jo pulls away to ask.*)

JO. So, just to clarify, we are not going to throttle our child?

MO. Don't put words in my mouth. (*They laugh.*)

STEF. (*Poking head in from patio.*) Uh... Yah-dere, uh, Mo?? I think it might be time... Want I should flip 'er over?

MO. "Flip 'er o-?" Stef. It's not a friggin' FLAP-jack – you could jar the marbling. You coax it over.

STEF. "Jar" the...?

MO. (*Reaching out.*) Surrender the tongs. (*Stef complies and follows Mo back out to grill. Jo spots and goes over to fix the afghan, yet again, and then Kris hollers out from kitchen.*)

KRIS. Jo!! (*Appearing in pass-through.*) Hot-dish crisis! Oven mitts?! (*Jo realizes they still have the oven mitts and rushes back to kitchen.*)

JO. Ah, geez! (*As Jo disappears into kitchen, Stef is seen out on patio, entertaining Mo with a napkin-inspired elephant impression, followed by belly laughs. After a few "Oh careful!" / "I got it" / "Let me get that" being heard inside the kitchen, Jo and Kris suddenly reappear, team tackling a hot casserole dish.*)

JO. (*Gesturing to wait!*) Ah-ah-AH! Perfect opportunity for... (*Pulling a pair out from the appropriate drawer or cabinet.*) My new Brazilian Cherry trivets! (*Helps guide one under the hot-dish as Kris sets it down.*) There! Gotta love Etsy. (*Showing Kris the underside of the second one.*) Each one is signed by the artisan couple and their one-eyed Weimaraner, Banjo. Lookit the little paw!

KRIS. (*Loves dogs.*) Oooh for cute! (*Taking off mitts and shaking hands to disperse the heat.*) Whew! Fire and brimstone 'dere!

JO. (*Testing the top of the casserole.*) I think we're golden here! (*Benign joke to say how delicious it looks.*) Golden brown!

KRIS. Alrighty then, sooooo, got that out...

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JO. *(Confirming.)* Got the other in...

KRIS. Aaannd the dessert haaadn't quite set just yet, so it's still next door in da icebox. We'll give it a smidge and Stef'll fetch it over.

JO. Molto Bene! Whadja whip up??

KRIS. Wellll, I gotta say, I hope you like surprises 'dere because, if ya don't, you're really gonna be disappointed but, *(Now referring to how delicious the dessert is.)* not for long for ya won't be disappointed, that's for sure-zees, because I'm telling YOU, *(Switching back to the fact it's a secret.)* but I'm not gonna tell ya!

JO. So, it's a surprise?

KRIS. It's a surprise!

JO. I love surprises!

KRIS. Me too!!

JO. *(Gesturing towards the small package.)* Oh! Speaking of surprises! Package for ya accidentally got dropped off here.

KRIS. Oh, yah?! Thanks! *(Jo turns away to set oven mitts aside as Kris starts to go look at the package. Suddenly, though, Stef distracts Kris by knocking on the patio door.)*

STEF. Knock! Knock! *(Kris and Jo both look with curious faces, but do not respond. Stef repeats - clearly setting up a 'knock-knock' joke this time.)* Knock! Knock!

KRIS. *(Begrudgingly humors them.)* Who's THERE??

STEF. *(Opening the door and poking their head in, but abandoning the knock-knock joke formula.)* Heya, Hunny-Bun, how can ya tell your burger was grilled in outer space? *(Kris and Jo shrug.)* It's a little meteor! *(Kris and Jo both laugh politely, and Stef closes the door repeating the punchline through the glass and pantomiming a meteor crash landing and turning into a burger they take a bite of, chew and then acknowledging...)* A little meteor! *(As Stef turns back toward the grill and a laughing Mo... Kris' smile quickly fades. This does not go unnoticed by Jo and Kris realizes that fact. Jo gives a concerned friend look. Kris tries to deflect.)*

KRIS. Oh, whaddaya do with such a goose?

JO. Ya get da goose to make like a canary. *(Sitting and then pulling out a*

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chair for Kris.)

KRIS. Yah, no, you... y-you don't wanna...

JO. *(Interrupting Kris and pretending to be a sideshow fortuneteller.)*

Madame Pettelogezzo knows all, sees all! *(Drops the act.)* ...as long as you show her and tell her. So... dish!

KRIS. Oh, for Pete's sake. It's just... Oh, truth to tell, it's just been a struggle. The... sudden... career change, the sudden move here, the...

'severance' package not... being... all it was cracked up to be.... And Stef is just so heckin' cheery about it all! We can't have a straightforward conversation dese days. It's always with the jokes and the puns and....

(Stef is suddenly in the window doing a short, poorly executed mime routine against the glass before letting the "wind" blow them away.) Uff-da! I should have a six-pack on my forehead from alla da eye rolls.

JO. *(Sighing sympathetically and moving to a cabinet / buffet / hutch to pull something out for the table.)* Well, maybe Stef's "way", I guess, is to try and keep things light and breezy...? Mo's "way" is to "line the nest" by way of... *(Cabinet door / drawer won't close despite repeated attempts.)* *Sigh*... "home improvement" and foodie fanaticism...

(Finally slams it shut – saying "darn it" in Italian.) Mannaggia! I'm just... "Irritated" takes too long to say. There's got to be a shorter version. It's irritating just having to say it... What would it be... "tated"? I'm tated! *(Sits back down next to Kris.)*

KRIS. Ha-ha! You're preachin' to the polka band here! And no, yah, I am choosing to love and I am trying like holy heck to appreciate Stef, but, working remotely now, they are around... allll the time... Slurping coffee and chewing and humming and... breathing and... *(Stef belly laughs at grill with Mo.)* It's PUN-ishing. *(Realizes what they just did.)* Oh, for geez, already... now I'm doing it!! *(Shaking their head.)* Which why I appreciate so much how you and I can just relax and shoot the doody. It's just... easy. I know it's only been a few months, but already...

(Indicating appreciation for Jo's friendship, takes boths hands.)

JO. Amen! The two of youse moving in next door shortly after we did has been my saving grace, between "Surly Temple" in there *(Meaning Win.)*

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and ol' "Measure Once-Cut Thrice" out there... (*pushes down on one end of table a couple of times demonstrating how one leg is clearly shorter – then sticks the second Brazilian Cherry trivet under the short leg.*) *Sigh* DI-Yin' like a... (*Pitches voice loudly in direction of patio.*) ...friggin' moron!!

MO. (*Pops head in door.*) Babe?

JO. Filet Mignon?

MO. Who ya talkin' to here?

JO. That's my babe... (*Mo goes back out.*) ... actin' like some kinda "Wolfgang Putz" wit' alla these pretentiously condescending...

MO. (*Popping back in.*) Specific-kully Japanese A5 wagyu. I gotta guy. (*Winks and leaves.*)

JO. And I'm gonna strangle 'em wit' those apron strings if I first don't go... (*Pitches voice out.*) ...nuckin' futz!

MO. (*Popping back in.*) Babe?

JO. (*Holding up a platter of Asparagus and Swiss Chard that Mo accidentally left on table.*) Asparagus!

MO. (*Commenting on their own confusion.*) Ha! Yeah! And I'm all up in my head here going back and forth, forth and back about da Swiss chard. (*Does a pantomime demo of the difference.*) Brunoise or chiffonade?

JO. (*Not at all serious.*) How to choose?!

MO. Guess somebody's gonna be serving up a side of surprise. (*Makes "mystery" noises and faces that Jo echoes back.*)

JO. (*Door shuts.*) Seriously, just shove me under the nearest falling comet. (*Suddenly, there is a massive ground-shaking explosion and flash of light from the direction of the front yard. Everyone jumps and shouts and stumbles and falls and hits the ground. Flames and crashes and a car alarm are heard. Mo and Stef come running inside.*)

JO. Holy!

KRIS. Jucy Lucy!

MO. Geez-its!

STEF. (*Helping Kris up.*) Cripes, Hun, y'okay 'dere?

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KRIS. Woof! Thanks, Bun. Yah, no, I'm so deskumpopulated (*Beat reaction.*) I can't even say disbumbobberlated! (*They were trying to say "discombobulated".*)

JO. What was...?!

STEF. Explosion!

KRIS. What the ding-dong dickens?! (*To Mo.*) Did your tank...?

MO. (*Insulted.*) Whoa-whoa-WHOA. (*Beat.*) Propane?! With wagyu??

JO. NOT the big picture here, Mo! Explosion! Explosion is the big picture here!! (*Jo moves downstage center, reaches up and opens imaginary front window curtains. All present stare in amazement and shock as light comes in from the house ablaze across the street.*)

STEF. Holy Cowpats! It's... Esther Erk's house! It went all Kah-Blooey, Louie!

KRIS. Whadda we do?! Esther might still be... (*There is a second even larger explosion, the room is now flooded with light and heat. All react grimly.*) Ope.

JO. Nope... Poor Esther.

MO. (*Reaching out hand toward the front of house – commenting on the heat.*) Whooooo. Ya feel that? It's...? (*Suddenly remembering and grabbing Jo's arm.*) Wait! Did...??

JO. (*Reacting.*) *Gasp!* I dunno!

MO. / JO. Win!! (*Mo runs back thru hallway to Win's room.*)

KRIS. (*Grabbing Jo.*) What da Hamburger Helper is going on??

JO. I sent Win over... (*Gestures toward the blaze and collapses into Kris.*) Oh, I sent... Win! (*Kris and Stef give each other terrified looks.*)

MO. (*Running back in shouting.*) WIN! (*Runs out front door which brightens and intensifies the light / heat / sound in the room. Kris stops Jo from running after Mo. Stef runs to door and calls out – holding up hand to fight heat and glare.*)

STEF. Mo, Wait! (*Runs out after Mo.*) Ahhhh, geez...

JO. Nooo!!

KRIS. Jo, hold on, ya just can't with all that dangerousness 'dere!

STEF. (*Bringing a coughing Mo back in.*) It's a holy, hot mess! (*Mo*

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goes to Jo.) What with the mess a-and the hot.

KRIS. And the smoke! *(Runs over and shuts door.)*

MO. Babe... I tried to... but... *(Rumble from across the street.)*

JO. Oh, my God...

MO. *(Starting toward door again.)* I gotta...!

STEF. *(Stepping between them and door.)* No, Mo, it's...

KRIS. Should we...? *(At a loss.)*

MO. Babe. Our little Win.

JO. Polpettina... no... no... no... *(A quiet dread settles in as all stare in horror out the window. Suddenly, Win comes dancing and bopping out of the kitchen, eating a pudding cup and dancing and singing along to their iPod – in their own little world as they cross behind the adults toward the hallway.)*

WIN. *(Singing as the adults slowly turn to discover.)* “Burn, baby, burn!
Disco inferno!”

MO. / JO. WIN!! *(All start screaming for joy & running toward Win, who shrieks in terror and drops their pudding cup near the hallway entry. Mo and Jo pull the shell-shocked Win in and shower them with affection and gratitude.)*

JO. My baby!

MO. Ahhhh, my little sweet-n-sour pickle. *(Stef and Kris celebrate at a distance until, finally.)*

WIN. Aaagh!! *(Separating themselves from the chaos and accidentally messing up the afghan in the process.)* We've had the PDA talk! I'm pretty sure the ground rules of my conditional consent were clear and concise and “Pickle” is way over that line and you made me drop my BUTTERSCOTCH!

JO. Omigod! I'll buy you a 1,000 Butterscotches-es!!

KRIS. Holy Schnikes, Bun.

STEF. Mouthful dere, Hun.

MO. We didn't see you come back from Esther's!

WIN. *(Never feels they do pay attention.)* *Huff* No surprise there.
(Decides to just let it go.) I came in thru the side kitchen door!

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JO. Are you okay?!

WIN. Of course, I'm okay! Why shouldn't I... *(Sees house ablaze.)* Ho-lee smokes. Guys, Esther Erk's house is on fire! *(Now understanding their reaction.)* Ohhh... K. You get a pass on that one. I would be a tragic loss. *(Win heads back into kitchen for another pudding cup – doing nothing about the one that's on the floor. Jo fixes the afghan and starts to move toward the pudding cup on the floor. Win calls out from kitchen.)*

Good thing Esther wasn't home!

JO. Not ho...?

KRIS. Praise beans! *(There is a collective relief that is interrupted by a small, muffled boom from across the street – snapping them back to reality.)*

MO. Jeeeeeze.

STEF. Crapola.

KRIS. They gotta be seeing this blaze, like... miles away. *(Jo is reaching for the phone to dial 911, but Mo stops them from picking up.)*

MO. Yeah... *(Gives Jo a knowing look.)* I'm sure someone will be checkin' in on us... soon. Don'tcha think?

JO. *(Agreeing.)* Big blaze.

STEF. Loooootta attention, yah? *(Win comes bopping back in with a fresh pudding cup.)*

KRIS. *(Decides Mo might be right.)* No, yah! Fire Trucks.

MO. Police. *(Mo reaches up and slowly closes the curtains.)*

KRIS. / JO. News trucks...

WIN. *(Sitting on arm of couch and enjoying the pudding.)* Social media! *(Adults have undefined looks of concern on their face.)* Not that we'd know.

STEF. Hold the...! *(Runs to door - Looking out and around from front door.)* Holy buckets... the wind is carrying sparks and embers this direction and... next door! *(Win stands to look, too. Stef homages the familiar tune by Rock Master Scott and the Dynamic Three.)* "The roofs! The roofs! The roofs could catch fire! We gon' need some water, lest the motha..." *(Catches the look on Kris' face.)* Yah, no...

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MO. We gotta soak 'em down!

STEF. (*Offering solutions.*) No, yah, I gotta nozzle what makes Niagra look like a bubbler.

MO. And I got hose for days! (*Kris and Jo exchange an awkward glance as Stef and Mo head out front door.*)

STEF. Brag.

WIN. Cringey. (*Win turns away back toward couch. Singing along to the Talking Heads classic while focusing on their pudding cup.*) "Some! Things! Sure! Can! Sweep! Me! Off! My! Feet!" (*Plops down onto couch.*) "Burning down the house!" (*Jo and Kris look back at Win.*) Too soon?

MO. (*Flying back into the house thru the kitchen door, Stef's fancy water nozzle in hand, past Jo and Kris.*) Jeez-o-Jeez-o-Jeez.

KRIS. What's wrong??

MO. (*Without breaking stride on way out to patio.*) Gotta coax the wagyu!

JO. (*Grabbing Mo.*) Are you kidding me wi' dis?! We're living on the corner of Pompeii and Krakatoa and you're worried about the way-goo?

MO. (*Correcting pronunciation.*) WAH-gyu! I don't make the rules!

JO. I got it! Go a'ready! I'll flip it! (*Mo starts to correct, but Jo immediately catches themself.*) Coax, I'll coax!

MO. (*Hurriedly removing their utility belt and putting it on Jo, as though it were a battlefield promotion, in a both solemn and urgent fashion.*) It's up to you now... (*With intense sincerity.*) Coax! Don't wanna...

MO. / JO. "Jar the marbling!"

JO. That's not a thing!!

STEF. (*Appearing in kitchen door with a garden hose slung over one shoulder.*) Did you coax the wagyu already 'dere? I wanted to...

KRIS. / JO. Save the houses!! (*Jo rushes Mo toward front door. Kris grabs Stef and rushes them toward the kitchen door.*)

STEF. (*Being pushed out the kitchen door by Kris and calling out to Mo.*) Ya didn't jar the marbling did'ja? (*Mo, Kris, and Stef are gone. Jo gives a frantic sigh and seems pulled in every direction for a moment and then, with a start, moves toward the patio as Win surreptitiously moves toward*

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their cellphone's hiding place and attempts to retrieve it. Suddenly, both Jo and Win are startled and stopped by erratic banging on the front door. Win scurries away as Jo growls towards the door – crying out to be heard by the person knocking – thinking it's Mo.)

JO. I swear I'm gonna jar more than your marbling! *(Yanks open the front door.)* Save the-!! *(Jo is shocked to see Gimlet, the delivery driver from earlier, standing in the doorway, coughing and covered in soot.)*

Ohh! So sorry! You okay? *(Jo helps Gimlet into room.)*

GIMLET. *Cough!* *Hack!* Blimey... I was waiting on a call from dispatch and, suddenly, everything went all rowdy-dow! What happened? *Cough-cough*

JO. Dunno. Gas Main?

WIN. *(Star Trek reference.)* Photon torpedo?

JO. Win.

WIN. *(Dragonball Z reference.)* Kamehameha?

JO. Win!

WIN. *(Dungeons & Dragons reference.)* Rolled a "Nat 1" on a meteor swarm?

JO. WIN!! ...will you please go get...? *(Trying to acquire their name, but Gimlet begins hacking more intensely.)* ...a drink of water?

WIN. M'Kay. *(Speaking to Gimlet as though the coughing is their name.)* I'll be right back, *Cough-Cough*!

JO. Sorry about that. *(Leads them toward the couch.)* Are you okay?

GIMLET. I will be... soon enough...*Cough-cough*

JO. Let me get you a towel! *(Jo hurries thru hallway into back of house. Gimlet is alone for a second and stops coughing and just calmly looks around. Win then enters, Gimlet starts coughing again, and accepts glass of water from Win.)*

WIN. Here you go, *Cough-cough*!

GIMLET. *Cough* Cheers.

WIN. Suppose we should call somebody... *(Picking up landline phone.)* ...or not. *(Sets phone down.)* Phone's dead. *(Looks over to where they hid their cellphone earlier.)*

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GIMLET. Zero bars out here for me. Guess, I can't ring up dispatch. *(Gimlet coughs a couple more times as Win goes over to where they hid their cellphone earlier, discreetly picks it up and unlocks the screen - considers calling for help.)*

JO. *(Reentering with a large bath towel.)* Here we go! *(Win quickly attempts to swipe the phone closed and hides it again. Gimlet reaches out with gratitude to take the towel, meaning to clean off their face.)*

GIMLET. Thank... *(Instead, Jo sets it out on couch and pats on it, encouraging Gimlet to sit on the towel – sparing the couch and the precious afghan from getting dirty.)* ...K. Much obliged. *(Gimlet sits and Jo looks very relieved and then straightens a ruffled edge of the afghan. Gimlet puts fingers at their earpiece and tries to communicate with someone surreptitiously.)* “Woo.”

JO. *(Sees their fingers at their ear and speaking way too loud as though Gimlet can't hear well.)* Are your ears ringing?? *(Gimlet shakes their head from the volume of Jo's question.)* Dizzy? Are you sure you're good??

GIMLET. Right as rain! *(Ducking head toward their earpiece.)*
“Wooooo.”

JO. Are you concussed? *(Lifting Gimlet's arms.)* Put your hands up over your head!

WIN. That's choking.

JO. Holy DeVito!! You're choking?! *(Starts moving their hands toward Gimlet's face. Gimlet puts their hands up and recoils to stop Jo.)*

GIMLET. Not choking! Just, you know, “wooo” as in “Whew!”
(Urgently into earpiece.) WOOOO??

MO. *(Bursting in from kitchen door.)* Okay, I got roof: hosed down and sprinkler: vacillatin'...

WIN. “Oscillating”.

MO. *(Agreeing with Win while not realizing their error and, without skipping a beat, continuing toward back patio door.)* ...too and also... like some kinda Bellagio hydro barrier.

JO. Babe...

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MO. *Wagyu. (Jo follows Mo out. Win indicates to Gimlet, covered in soot, as though they have just a little spot of something on their face.)*

WIN. *You got a little schmutz... (Gimlet reaches up and, in their attempt to clean it, smears it everywhere – making it much worse. Win decides to just roll with it.) Nailed it.*

MO. *(Mo, tongs in hand, has reacquired the utility belt and is coming back in from outside followed by Jo.) You gotta be kiddin' me!*

JO. *I was too afraid I was gonna (Sarcastically.) ...“jar the marbling”!*

MO. *Urgh... (Mo heads into kitchen.)*

JO. *(Commenting on the chaos.) I sorta got distracted!*

MO. *(Reappearing with a roll of tinfoil and tearing off a sheet.) There is a window for the coaxing and if ya miss it – ya can ruin it! (Realizes.) Tongs! (Heads back into kitchen.)*

JO. *So, it's maybe a little Cajun on one side!*

MO. *(Appearing in the pass-through. Dead stop.) I don't even know who you are right now. (Reentering from kitchen with the tongs in hand, but without the foil.) HOWEVER, if I move the coals to one end and make a foil yurt to keep the marbli- (Realizes.) Foil! (Disappears into kitchen.)*

JO. / WIN. / GIMLET. *(Looking at each other.) A yurt??*

JO. *(Calling toward kitchen.) A little foil tent?*

MO. *(Coming out of kitchen with foil, but no tongs.) Whaddayatalk?! A “tent” would just... (Realizes and shouts to the heavens.) TONGS!! (Goes back into kitchen – Reaches out the pass-through with foil.) Foil. (Jo takes foil. Mo extends tongs out pass-through.) Tongs. (Jo takes tongs. Mo's face appears in pass-through – looking triumphantly at Jo.). Pass-through!! (Jo rolls their eyes as Mo re-enters from kitchen demonstrating the shape difference with the long piece of foil they've torn off.) A “tent” would just cover the wagyu, but a yurt...*

GIMLET. *(Catching on and chiming in.) Would encase the wagyu, maximizing moisture retention.*

MO. *(Just now really seeing Gimlet and enthusiastically acknowledging someone who “gets” it.) THANK you! (A smaller explosion from across the street brightens the room temporarily. Mo goes over to window and*

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opens curtain to one side. Unseen by everyone else, a red laser dot suddenly appears on Gimlet's chest – who reacts nervously.)

GIMLET. *(Into earpiece.)* Woo?

MO. “Whew!” is right. That’s some serious heat. *(The red laser dot slowly travels up to Gimlet's forehead.)*

GIMLET. Woouoooo. *(Mo steps in front of window so the dot is on Mo's forehead. Gimlet is relieved.)* Whew....

MO. *(Remembering the wagyu.)* Agh! Priorities! *(The laser dot is back on Gimlet now, who quickly staggers up toward the window and realizes the dot is staying on them. They throw the curtains closed and hit the deck.)* WoOoO-WoOoO!!

JO. Don't let 'em swallow their tongue! *(Mo, who was almost out the patio door, and Jo rush over.)*

MO. Ay-oh! Ay-oh! *(Trying to help and hold Gimlet down.)*

JO. *(Grabbing a small wooden decoration.)* Get'em to bite down on this tcho... *(Jo looks at it and decides they really like that one.)* Ohhh, the Sofia Vegara collection! *(Puts it back and grabs and a different one.)* THIS tchotchke!

MO. *(The group tumbles and scrambles across the floor closer to the kitchen.)* Open up!

GIMLET. *(Scrambling out from under their frantic rescue efforts and backs away toward couch – the family in between the couch and the kitchen. Mo's back directly to the kitchen door.)* Whoa! WHOA!

Enough! Hold on a tick! I'm NOT choking! *(No longer subtle.)* WOO-WOO!!

MO. A'right! What's with Chattanooga choo-choo here? Who are you?

WIN. *(Same cough as name bit from earlier.)* Meet *Cough-Cough*!
It's a family name.

MO. *(Nodding.)* Old country. Respect!

JO. This is the mail carrier from earlier.

WIN. Who was apparently at ground zero.

MO. No kidding? Oughta buy a lotto. You're one lucky cluck.

WIN. Duck.

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MO. Same diff.

WIN. Not at all.

MO. Duck: Cluck! (*Makes a sound like a duck.*)

WIN. Chicken: Cluck. Duck: Quack.

MO. (*Makes a sound like a duck again then says...*) Cluck.

WIN. (*Also makes a sound like a duck then corrects...*) Quack!

GIMLET. (*In their higher voice register – greatly concerned.*) Wooooo!

JO. You're thinking "loon."

GIMLET. You have NO idea. (*WOO-WOO steps out from kitchen seen by everyone but Mo. Gimlet smiles.*) Cluck... Quack... (*Woo-Woo places Pistol #1 at back of Mo's head. Mo freezes.*) Cock... (*Woo-Woo cocks the pistol as Gimlet pulls out their own Pistol #2.*) A-Doodle-Do. (*To Woo-Woo.*) Finally!

WOO-WOO. (*Indicating they can't hear Gimlet.*) Say wha?? You gotta speak up! (*Cue a string of exchanges illustrating Woo-Woo's explosion-compromised hearing.*)

GIMLET. I was starting to wonder...!

WOO-WOO. Blunder?? Oh, ya think? (*Uncocks pistol.*)

GIMLET. I meant finally appearing...

WOO-WOO. Fighting an ear ring? Yes! Like I'm underwater... (*Trying to unblock and pointing to their ears.*) ...and ringing-ringing-ringing!

GIMLET. So...

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. (*Both pointing at their earpieces.*) You couldn't hear me? / I couldn't hear you!

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. (*Both referring to the laser sight earlier.*) And you couldn't clearly see through the smoke? / And I couldn't clearly see thru the smoke!

GIMLET. Whoa! (*Waving hand to gain Woo-Woo's attention.*) Can we pause?

WOO-WOO. Because??

GIMLET. No...

WOO-WOO. Because a HOUSE BLEW UP!

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GIMLET. Yes, but...

WOO-WOO. / GIMLET. The **WRONG** house! / ...wrong house.

WIN. *(For their own amusement, homaging the famous Abbott & Costello routine in a Vaudevillian voice.)* Who's on first?

JO. *(Whispering.)* Win...

GIMLET. No, yes, I mean pause now, not before.

WOO-WOO. Uh, yup! It was far too much C-4!

WIN. What's on second?

MO. *(Whispering eyes wide.)* Win.

GIMLET. I didn't say "C-4".

WOO-WOO. Well, you have to weigh C-4!

WIN. I don't know....

MO. / JO. *(Whispering urgently.)* Win!

WIN. Third base! *(Mo and Jo cover Win's mouth.)*

GIMLET. Yeah, you, but, um... I'll tell ya later.

WOO-WOO. *(As though they'd just been accused.)* Wasn't my thumb on the detonator! You built it, you delivered it, and you blew it... *(Woo-Woo gestures across the street.)* ...in Homeric fashion! It was...

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. ...only supposed to be enough to stun them!

WOO-WOO. But then you...

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. ...had to be a show off.

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. You told me so! / I told you so!

JO. *(To Win. Not blaming, just realizing. Woo-Woo tries in vain to follow along.)* You took the wrong package!

WIN. *(Feeling blamed.)* You gave me the wrong package!

JO. Cuz you were being a "smart ath"!

WIN. It's not my fault Esther's went *(Turning the last name into a sound effect.)* ERK! *(Pointing at Gimlet.)* Who delivered the wrong package? *(Woo-Woo begins to question Gimlet, but Gimlet interrupts.)*

GIMLET. Now, now, there is plenty of blame to go around here... *(shifting focus back to Woo-Woo.)* ...BuUuUut, aren't you **GLAD** it was the wrong house?!

WOO-WOO. No, I'm not **MAD** it was the wrong house!

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GIMLET. Our goose woulda been in trouble.

WOO-WOO. *(Looking in direction of exploded house.)* Yeah...

(Brushing dust and soot off themselves.) ...it reduced it to rubble, alright.

AH-CHOO!

GIMLET. / JO. / MO. *(Reflexively.)* Bless you. / Bless you. /

Gesundheit.

WIN. *(As if a run-on sentence with the blessings.)* Happy snot blast!

WOO-WOO. Hey!! *(Opening mouth as if trying to yawn and testing ears.)* I'm back!!

GIMLET. Great, then...

WOO-WOO. *(Then, suddenly patting on and trying unsuccessfully to clear the right ear.)* At least on one side.

GIMLET. *(Thinking they can just talk at a normal level now.)* So, you're ready to proceed?

WOO-WOO. *(Hearing is clearly not 100% and is clearly accustomed to having to get Gimlet back on track.)* Maybe later, we gotta handle this first, though!

GIMLET. *(Just goes along.)* Agreed. *(Sits in relief on back of couch.)*
So...

JO. *(Moves to try and put the towel under Gimlet.)* Don't schmutz the 'Karlstad'! *(Trails off as Gimlet's demeanor suddenly becomes very intimidating. FUN FACT: 'Karlstad' is a mid-modern couch by IKEA.)*

WIN. *(Sarcastically.)* It's a 'Karlstad', *Cough name bit*... Chiiiiilllll.

GIMLET. Karlstad?

JO. IKEA?

GIMLET. Don't care-a.

MO. Babe! Do not anger out guests...

GIMLET. A most sensible strategy. Now... The 'boss' sends their regards.

WOO-WOO. *(Not fully hearing.)* As does the boss.

GIMLET. *(Looking at Woo-Woo.)* Yes, indeed.

MO. The... boss?

WIN. You gettin' fired?

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WOO-WOO. *(Indicating that they are sort of correct.)* “Terminated.”

WIN. What’d you do?

JO. Win. *(To Woo-Woo.)* W-w-we don’t gotta clue what you’re talking about.

GIMLET. *(Speaking very pointedly by the end of the sentence, insuring that Woo-Woo clearly hears.)* I think we’re all fully aware of the Ukraine Foofaraw! *(For Mo, Jo, and Win there is a long beat filled with tension and confusion – then Woo-Woo breaks the silence.)*

WOO-WOO. Son of a... GRRR...

GIMLET. *(Suddenly very proud of themself.)* Ha Ha!! Bangers and Mash!!

WOO-WOO. *(Begrudgingly hands over a \$5 bill)* Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GIMLET. *(Being deliberate with their vocabulary while displaying and snapping the bill.)* I thank you for your expeditious recompense.

WOO-WOO. *(Equally deliberate.)* My aspiration is that it metes out occluded insufflations upon you.

GIMLET. Wait... *(Whispers to themself.)* ...“insufflations”.
(Lightbulb!) You hope I choke on it! Full Marks! *(Offering the \$5 bill back.)* I feel I should give this...

WOO-WOO. No-no, merited and venerable.

GIMLET. “Fair and square!” You’re on a roll!!

WOO-WOO. Well, I...

MO. “FLOOFER-WALL”?? *(Woo-Woo puts Mo immediately back on point.)*

WOO-WOO. *(Responding too loudly and turning ‘good ear’ to them.)*
Pardon?

JO. You... You said...

GIMLET. *(Realizing an explanation is in order.)* Oh! Foofaraw! I got m’mate here one’a those word-a-day books...

WOO-WOO. *(Correcting loudly.)* Toilet Paper!

GIMLET. For their birthday...

WOO-WOO. Christmas.

GIMLET. A couple-a weeks ago...

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WOO-WOO. Last year...

GIMLET. And now...

WOO-WOO. First one to fit that day's "Word-A-Day" ...

GIMLET. Gotta "work the W.A.D."!

WOO-WOO. Into normal conversation...

GIMLET. Deep-sea diver! Gets a Fiver... from the subjugatee.

WOO-WOO. (*Getting Gimlet back on track.*) But, back to the aforementioned Ukraine "foo-fuh-raw"...

GIMLET. "Ruckus"...

WOO-WOO. "Brouhaha"...

WIN. "Kerfuffle"!

WOO-WOO. / GIMLET. (*Elated.*) Win!

GIMLET. The power of vocabulary!

WIN. Speaking of... "Gimlet"? And "Woo-Woo"?

GIMLET. (*Point of pride – striking the iconic movie poster pose as they do their best James Bond.*) Code names. Saucy code names.

WIN. Now, I know what a "Gimlet" is...?

JO. How do you kno-?

WIN. But, what's a "Woo-Woo"?

GIMLET. Vodka, peach schnapps, cranberry juice with a lime garnish. (*Directed at Woo-Woo.*) It's also the code name you GET, when you refuse to choose your own!

WOO-WOO. I chose one!

GIMLET. "Beeer?!" Beer is not a code name! I'm trying to cultivate a business model that conveys "proficiency and finesse", not "chili stains and tractor pulls".

WOO-WOO. (*Sarcastically while gesturing towards the blaze.*) Oh, we're lousy with finesse.

GIMLET. (*Choosing to ignore it. Back to Win.*) Classic cocktails. (*To Woo-Woo.*) Classy code names. (*Woo-Woo begrudgingly acknowledges Gimlet's right.*)

WIN. An air of stylish mystique.

WOO-WOO. Gimlet...

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GIMLET. Yes! An air of... stylish professionalism.

WIN. Not just an "air", but a "debon-air"!

GIMLET. Ho-Hoooo! *(Impressed that Win gets it. To Mo and Jo.)*
You're clearly doing something right.

MO. I am so lost.

WOO-WOO. *(Speaking to Mo but actually redirecting Gimlet.)* Then, let us redirect you back to what you're doing wrong. *(Gimlet and Woo-Woo are wanting information, but Mo and Jo assume the 'boss' wants their complete silence. The confusion begins.)*

MO. Now, now you can tell the boss I ain't gonna say nothin'!

WOO-WOO. You're not?!

MO. No way!

JO. No how!

MO. Never!

GIMLET. *(To Woo-Woo. Confident they can get Mo to talk.)* Dunno. Looks like a bloody squealer to me, Woo-Woo.

MO. *(Thinking what they want is reassurance of their silence.)* I ain't no stool pigeon!

WOO-WOO. I think you're right, Gimlet. A rat fink.

GIMLET. Snake in the grass.

WIN. Snitch weasel. Third-ear quisling.

GIMLET. Now, they know how to work the W.A.D.!

WIN. Ewww.

WOO-WOO. You have got to stop saying that.

JO. Nobody here is gonna say nothin'!

MO. Even less than nothin'! Nothin' minus nothin' squared to the negative power like.

JO. We swear before all that is holy.

MO. You couldn't torture it out of us.

WOO-WOO. Don't be too sure about that.

MO. We're taking it to the grave!

GIMLET. Well, that may be sooner than later, mate.

JO. Wait, what?

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GIMLET. But first?

WOO-WOO. We need it.

GIMLET. All of it.

MO. All of what?

GIMLET. Don't play dumb.

WIN. Who's playing??

MO. / JO. Win!!

WOO-WOO. The boss wants everything or else.

WIN. (*Ominous orchestra hit under their breath.*) Duh-duh-DUHHHH!

JO. (*Smacking on Mo in frustration.*) "We'll just take off.", you said!

MO. (*Trying to shield themselves.*) Babe.

JO. (*Continuing to smack Mo.*) "You'll love that small town feel.", you said!

MO. (*Continuing.*) Babe!

WIN. (*Mo continues to shield herself from Jo.*) "You'll ride monochrome rainbows on psychedelic muskrats.", you said!

MO. Win! (*Still getting smacked by Jo.*) Baaaabe!!

WOO-WOO. (*Jo stops. Then Woo-Woo, shrugging...*) Witness protection ain't the pleasure cruise it used to be, huh?

JO. We were so careful!

WOO-WOO. You probably woulda got away with it...

GIMLET. Had it not been for "lost-nnn-bonkerz".... (*Win's eyes open wide. FUN FACT: Deliberate reference to Lost In Yonkers by Neil Simon.*)

MO. Hah??

JO. What's...??

WIN. (*Inching their way toward the hallway.*) This is clearly "adult talk", so I'll just...

ALL. Whoa!

GIMLET. (*Looks at their phone and spelling out an online handle*) Specifically, "@ lost hyphen n-n-n hyphen bonkerz..."

WOO-WOO. With a "z"...

GIMLET. With a "z..." (*finishing the handle*) "2FB".

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JO. That some kinda pig Latin?

MO. Uht-way the ugg-fay is going on here??

GIMLET. Your cyber trail, old chum.

MO. We got zilch for “zypher” trail in this house.

JO. We don't even have an online!

WIN. “Have an online?!” Ugh. We don't “go online”, because we “don't have wifi”, so we can't “access the internet” which is where CYBER trails exist out there in the apps and accounts and profiles of post-Neolithic, non-AMISH families that DON'T rip their progeny away from their home and their school and their friends - against their will – and doom them to drown in this sick honey of Midwestern nice with no computer, no tablet, no cellphone, no TELEVISION?! No access to the outside world like normal people.

GIMLET. *(Slightly incredulous and looks around.)* No telly??

MO. *(Talking about the online profile, not the television.)* We ain't normal!

GIMLET. *(Still processing and looking around.)* Not even like... a little one?

JO. We don't got profiles.

WOO-WOO. Well...

GIMLET. *(Still trying to find one.)* I'd go billy bonkers without my *(Saying it as the crowd chants it on the show, but not shouting.)* Wheel! Of! Fortune!

WOO-WOO. *(Redirecting Gimlet.)* You “don't got profiles.” Buuuuut... *(Looks at Win)*

JO. *(Realizing.)* “Lost-n-Bonkerz”...

MO. *(Clueing in now, too.)* Bonkers is right! *(To Win.)* You got one-a them “Facegrams” or “Tic-Tacs”?!

WIN. *(Correcting under their breath.)* “Tik-Tok”.

MO. But how? You don't got a... *(Sees the sheepish look on Win's face and realizes they must.)* *Low Gasp* You do got a...

JO. A cellular?!

GIMLET. *(Woo-Woo shows a screenshot to them.)* Somebody spotted

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just the barest bit of blurry flash of you in a video with some other blokes playing cards and dipping fondue.

WIN. *(Eyes wide. Under their breath.)* Blah-Blah-Blog: Day 217...

JO. Game night?

WIN. "Game Night - Lame Night."

WOO-WOO. *(Looking at the blur and then at them. Implying that Mo and Jo have had plastic surgery.)* Looks like we've had some work done, though. *(They react slightly self-conscious – maybe touching an area where work was done.)* But, not enough, I guess.

GIMLET. Because the boss is relentless and has little birdies tucked away hole-and-corner everywhere and Woo-Woo here's got skills.

WOO-WOO. Skittles? *(Turns good ear.)*

GIMLET. Skills!

WOO-WOO. Yeah, serious skills.

GIMLET. With a "z". *(Indicating Win.)* Following Gretl here's bread crumbs like some cyber Sacagawea, leading us across the Sinai until we found Atlantis.

WOO-WOO. *(Giving Gimlet a look.)* Metaphor mixtape aside, Gimlet and I have been hunting you a while now...

GIMLET. *(Star Trek: TNG reference.)* "Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra."

WOO-WOO. *(Actively ignoring Gimlet.)* And...

GIMLET. *(Low level confirmation-seeking with Vulcan hand greeting.)* Trekkies? *(Win pushes back imaginary nerd glasses in acknowledgement.)*

WOO-WOO. *(Trying to regain control of the conversation.)* AND we are now here.

MO. *(To Win.)* You are so grounded.

GIMLET. *(Tagging on to Mo's statement.)* The six-foot-under variety... for all of you, unless. See, the boss does want you to talk... before we are forced...

JO. Forced to...?

WOO-WOO. *(Ignoring the question.)* You are going give us all the Ukraine numbers.

MO. *(Fear turns to confusion.)* What...? Seriously??

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GIMLET. NOW. (*Woo-Woo points pistol at Mo. Gimlet gets mini notepad and pen ready.*)

MO. Okay-Okay!! Geez, uh... (420) 621-8957, (420) 621-7135, and (420) 621-7622.

WOO-WOO. (*Not realizing they are getting phone numbers.*) That's it?!

MO. Yeah... maybe... (*Woo-Woo moves threateningly.*) No-no-no! One more!

WOO-WOO. Trying to cheat us? Think we're playing some game here?!

GIMLET. Shenanigans?

WOO-WOO. Tomfoolery?

WIN. Knavery?

MO. Nay...?

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. (*Doubling down on their aggression toward Mo.*) KNAVERY?!

JO. (*Smacking on Mo again.*) You tryin' to get us whacked?! Give 'em everything!

MO. A'right, already! I forgot! I FORGOT! And... (420) 628- uh... 0085, but... (*Not understanding why they would want it.*) but... that was only for a beeper service that I was holding onto because... (*Sees their confused faces.*) I know, I know, they're ancient, but I always thought they might make a comeback? And then, I literally forgot I had it except for that time I got that message from some schmuck who insisted it was their proctologist's number, SUCH a pain-in-the-ass... them in mine... but I'm sure theirs also... cuz they just kept beepin' like a bleepin'...

GIMLET. Wait! Wait! Wait! Are these phone numbers??

MO. The last one's a pager technically, but..

WOO-WOO. You try'na be funny here?

WIN. Oh, trust me, there is not a funny bone in their entire body.

JO. Can confirm!

MO. Thanks?

GIMLET. We want the numbers... where you stashed the goods...

MO. The... goods? The goods-goods?? Ahh, but... but... that's all gone.

GIMLET. Gone?!

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MO. Heck, I gave it away... to charity.

GIMLET. Ohh, this philanthropic gesture is most grievous.

MO. Hah...??

WOO-WOO. Distressing.

GIMLET. Woeful.

WIN. Disquieting. (*Gimlet and Woo-Woo take a step away to quietly confer with each other.*)

JO. (*Muttering to Mo out the side of their mouth, almost, but not unintelligible.*) Whudduh bow duh uhdduh nuhmbuh adduh uhthah playz? (*Translation: 'What about the other numbers at the other place?'*)

MO. (*Speaking in the same fashion out the side of their mouth.*) Deh dohn wuhnnuh noh bow dad. (*Translation: 'They don't know wanna about that.'* Gimlet and Woo-Woo have heard the whole thing and turn with menacing glares. Mo still speaks in the same fashion out the side of their mouth, but directed to Gimlet and Woo-Woo.) Uhhhkay, mebbeh yuh do wuhnnuh noh. (*Translation: 'Okay, maybe you do wanna know.'* Gimlet grabs Mo by the shirt.) A'right! I may have squirreled away...

GIMLET. The numbers!!

MO. I don't got that one mesm'rized!

JO. Cookbook rack to the left of the stove. (*Woo-Woo heads to kitchen. Jo continues calling out directions for them as they do.*) Baby blue cover! "Truman Capote's Heirloom Recipes...!"

GIMLET. Wait...

WOO-WOO. (*Having not heard correctly, appears in pass-through holding up a non-descript cookbook.*) Fruit & Compote?

JO. TRUMAN CAPOTE!! (*Woo-Woo disappears again with confused look.*)

GIMLET. (*Doubtful and suspicious.*) Capote? "In Cold Blood"-Capote??

WOO-WOO. (*Reappearing in pass-through.*) Capote? In-Cold-Blood-Capote??

JO. / MO. / WIN. (*All nodding.*) YES!! (*Woo-Woo moves out of sight with very confused look on their face.*)

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GIMLET. Wrote a cookbook? You pokin' mullock at me?

MO. *(Confused by the phrase.)* I... wouldn't know where to begin.

GIMLET. What do I look like, some kinda...?

WOO-WOO. *(Coming back out of kitchen.)* Fruitcake!

GIMLET. *(Realizing they meant the book and then sees front cover.)*

"By Truman Capote." Socks on a monkey!

JO. Pink post-it note next to the splash page for "Pore Man's fruitcake".

GIMLET. Repugnant... *(Woo-Woo flips through the book that is filled with post-its.)*

JO. I keep all the pertinent stuff from "before" in there, because who's gonna look in a book full of...

WOO-WOO. / JO. Fruitcake recipes!

GIMLET. *(Pointing to title on book.)* It's pronounced 'Booger Loaves.'

MO. There's a recipe in there ya just might... See, ya double down on the treacle and add smoked chipotle. It's called a 'flaming fruitcake'. *(Small boom and increase in fire sounds from across the street pull everyone's attention toward window and then back to Mo.)* Not the time.

Acknowledged.

WOO-WOO. *(Finding the post-it note.)* Got it! (420) 621-5281.

MO. But that's just a dinky unit with a slew of cheap South American knockoffs I couldn't get rid of... 'Pokey-moons'.

JO. 'Sailor-mons'.

WIN. 'Juvie Freaky Samurai Tortoises'.

MO. But just the purple one...

WIN. 'Donut-jello'.

MO. Wit' the hockey stick.

WIN. *(Appalled by Mo's lack of culture.)* It's a bo sta...

GIMLET. *(Interrupting.)* WHAT IN THE NAME OF JUMPIN' SAINT JUNIPER ARE YOU ON ABOUT?!

WOO-WOO. Gimlet, now simmer...

GIMLET. That's it!! I'm done! *(Holds pistol up toward Jo. Jo, Mo, and Win are alarmed. Woo-Woo then slams the book closed - loudly. Mo, Jo, and Win all think it's a gunshot and jump and scream.)*

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MO. / JO. / WIN. AAAAH!! (*Jo feeling around for bullet holes. Mo frantically sings "Kumbaya". Win's initial fear turns to an endorphin rush that they're honestly not mad about. Suddenly, Stef appears in the kitchen doorway – oblivious to the scene in front of them.*)

STEF. Who got SHOT?!?!?

JO. (*With great relief.*) Not me!

STEF. (*Fully enters holding up a bottle of schnapps – followed by Kris who is carrying the "surprise" dessert.*) I got shot! Heh heh! House is hosed down, so I figured there's nothing schnapping us from having a schnort.

WIN. YES.

JO. / MO. NO.

KRIS. (*Seeing the tableau of chaos but not understanding.*) Starting charades without us??

JO. I am so sorry to drag you into this.

MO. (*To Stef.*) I'm gonna want a double.

WOO-WOO. (*Who's been unseen by Stef and Kris until now.*) Hey-diddly-do, neighbor! (*Taking aim with Pistol #1 at Stef who, again, is terrified of guns.*)

STEF. Buh-b-buh, buh-b-buh... I.. If now's not a g-g-good time, though...

GIMLET. I'd say it's perfect timing. Come on in, set a spell.

KRIS. What the loony limbo is going on here, folks?

JO. I am so embarrassed. This is not how I had planned this evening.

STEF. I... I envisioned fewer g-g-g... "pew-pews" myself, yah.

GIMLET. Why don't we all gather rou-

WOO-WOO. (*Interrupting and indicating the covered platter Kris has.*) Whatcha got there?

KRIS. (*Lifting lid of platter to reveal a green jello-mold in the shape of a fish in the style of a salmon mousse mold.*) Uh... Jello Mold?

WOO-WOO. (*Reacts as though being shown how bologna is made.*) Uhnnn...

GIMLET. Woo-Woo... (*Woo-Woo either can't hear or is too entranced*)

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or both.)

WOO-WOO. Flavor?

KRIS. Lime?

WOO-WOO. Hmmnnngghh...

STEF. With p-p-pineapple.

WOO-WOO. Gluuhhh...

KRIS. And walnuts.

WOO-WOO. *(Aghast. Clearly not having heard correctly.)* WALRUS?!

KRIS. / GIMLET. Walnuts!!

WOO-WOO. *(Equally as repulsed.)* May as well be... *bl-Urk*

GIMLET. You need a minute...?

WOO-WOO. No! I'ma need a minute, though... phew... brrmmm...

GIMLET. I got this, you just...

WOO-WOO. *(Woo-Woo begins pacing around the room mumbling to herself.)* Walk it off... walk it off...

MO. What is goin' on with ya friend, there?

GIMLET. Woo-Woo is both repulsed and entranced by jello...

WOO-WOO. Like a fish... *(Softly.)* Why?!

GIMLET. Especially jello molds.

STEF. Who-woo? *(Woo-Woo makes a short retching sound.)* Oh, they-woo!

GIMLET. Woo-Woo...

WOO-WOO. Do you know that it's made of? What makes it... *(Indicates how jello jiggles, but could just as easily be a shiver of revulsion.)* ...like that?!

MO. *(Shrugging.)* Yeah, it's gelatin? Wha-

WOO-WOO. *(Interrupting.)* It's Gela-SKIN! Boiled down bones and tendons and ligaments and skin! Skin from pigs and cows... *(Shudders.)*

WIN. *Blech.*

WOO-WOO. ...But HEY! Whaddaya say let's float some fruit and nuts in some soupy, psychedelic, jiggly-PIG pâté... serve it to our loved ones and call it dessert!

GIMLET. Steady on, mate...

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WOO-WOO. But... uh...!!

GIMLET. I know! Just rein it in. Stiff upper lip.

KRIS. Uh... what the holy hammock is going on here?

STEF. Yah, we get raided by the vegan squad?

MO. Not exactly.

GIMLET. Let's all just gather 'round the table for a wee bit of a chinwag, shall we? *(All except Gimlet and Woo-Woo move cautiously toward table to sit. Kris begins to set jello mold on a side table.)*

WOO-WOO. Nuh-uh, set it... there. *(Indicates spot on table. Kris does and Woo-Woo nudges at plate in fascination and watches the jiggle in horror and fascination.)*

STEF. *(Even with the fear of guns, cannot stop themselves from bad joking – so, as though calling a meeting to order.)* I'm sure you're all wondering why I've gathered you here... Probably not as much as me, though!

MO. Well...

GIMLET. We've got a little bit of business with your friends here...
Woo-Woo??

WOO-WOO. *(Snapping out it.)* Huh? Oh... *(Referring to Stef and Kris.)*
Want I should Swiss their cheese?

GIMLET. Mmmmm... Let us consider their ingress a fortuitous boon.

WIN. *(To Mo.)* A lucky break...

MO. I know what "ingress" means.

STEF. Well... *(Starts to stand.)* I can't say I'd be very fondue my cheese being Swissed... Heh-heh... *(Woo-Woo threatens with pistol. Stef carefully sits back down.)* D-d-didn't realize you were Lact-joke intolerant... heh... hmmm. *(Kris looks as though they wish they had a pistol to point at Stef, too.)*

KRIS. Criminy, I wish you lacked joke.

STEF. Heh. Good one, Hun-Bun.

WOO-WOO. *(With a straight face.)* You're funny...

GIMLET. Chucklesome.

WOO-WOO. Jocular.

MO. Jocu...?

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KRIS. Take our money! Our jewels! Whatever you want, just...

GIMLET. *(Interrupting.)* We don't want...

WOO-WOO. *(Interrupting – the jello seems to have flipped a dark switch in Woo-Woo.)* Now, hold on... We've already "jumped the shark" plan-wise, let's 'Second City' this fustercluck.

GIMLET. *(Catching on.)* Improvisation.

WOO-WOO. Yes, AND!

GIMLET. *(Assessing the situation.)* YES, we've gone off script from our initial plan, which now includes some left-field looky-loos.

WOO-WOO. AND! We should perhaps abscond with valuables from both houses...

GIMLET. Making it all look like a robbery...

WOO-WOO. Gone horribly, horribly "awry".

WIN. Now, we just need Wayne Brady to sing about it to a Calypso beat!

STEF. Sing?

GIMLET. The only singing we wanna hear...?

STEF. Singing?

WOO-WOO. ...is from you...

STEF. Sing.

WOO-WOO. In my good ear.

GIMLET. *(Woo-Woo and Gimlet point pistols at Mo and Jo.)* Sing!

STEF. *(Bee-Gees panic-mode: Activate! Woo-Woo and Gimlet slowly begin relaxing their pistol arms in disbelief.)* Ahhh! "Whether you're a mother or whether you're a brother, you're stayin' alive, stayin' alive!"

JO. / MO. / STEF. / KRIS. / WIN. *(Gimlet and Woo-Woo's arms relax completely now and the others join Jo in stages until all are singing by the first 'stayin' alive'. Win is the only one not singing out of amusement, not fear, disco arms and all.)* "Feel the city breaking and everybody's shakin' and you're stayin' alive, stayin' alive."

JO. / MO. / STEF. / KRIS. / WIN. / GIMLET. *(Gimlet now gets swept up by the disco fever, too.)* "Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah... Stayin' al-" *(Woo-Woo shatters it by thrusting pistol against STEF temple and cocking it. All but Win and Gimlet scream – Stef's technically is more of a shriek - in terror.)*

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AYIEEEEE!!!!

WOO-WOO. *(Redirecting Gimlet.)* Those lyrics...? Are a trifle suppositious.

GIMLET. *(Agrees, but slightly bummed the sing-a-long is over.)* That is jumping the “pew-pew”... a trifle.

STEF. Heh-heh. *(Others glare.)* Yah, no...

KRIS. Wait. “Look” like a robbery??

GIMLET. *(Acknowledging.)* Subterfuge.

KRIS. What the crud muffin is going on here?

JO. Well, we’re not exactly the “simple country folk” we seem to be.

WIN. *(Taking on a “country” voice for the following bit.)* Name on the mailbox is spelled “E-I-E-I-O”.

WOO-WOO. *(Doubtful.)* ‘Country?’

WIN. Up every day at the crack of noon.

STEF. That didn’t spell...

WIN. Those Ferragamo’s ain’t gonna milk themselves...

JO. / MO. WIN!!

GIMLET. Enough!! Look, your friends scarpered...

WOO-WOO. Skedaddled.

GIMLET. Sallied forth without so much as a glimmer as to how that might make our dear employer feel, especially under the circumstances.

WOO-WOO. Bereft.

GIMLET. Bamboozled.

WOO-WOO. Betrayed.

JO. Your boss is the last person I would betray!

WIN. Most people can’t even break the “Top 10”.

MO. Win.

GIMLET. So, what’s with the runaround?

JO. Runaround?

WOO-WOO. Runaround!

STEF. *(Jumps up and starts running around the kitchen table – thinking that’s what they want.)* I’ll run around! *(Gimlet’s pistol pointing shifts Stef right back down without missing a beat.)* I’ll sit back down!

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JO. We are only too happy to cooperate!

MO. We won't say a word!

WOO-WOO. So one of you is and one of you isn't?!

MO. Isn't what??

GIMLET. Cooperating!

MO. We wanna cooperate.

WOO-WOO. But you're not giving it up!

JO. No way, no how!

GIMLET. Tap dancing!

WOO-WOO. Side steppin'!

GIMLET. Pussy footin'! We asked you for...

MO. I gave them to you!

GIMLET. Oh... yes... but...

MO. Every single one that we had...

WOO-WOO. But where our employer is concerned...

JO. No need for concern!

MO. Yeah, why with the concern?

WOO-WOO. *(Commanding them to speak – and were they allowed to finish, it would be “You don't open your mouth right now, we're gonna *graphic repercussion*.”)* You don't open your mouth...

JO. *(Thinking it's a command to stay silent.)* We will take it to our grave.

GIMLET. That comes later! But now, think, think real hard, because, dollars to donuts...

WOO-WOO. Bucks to burritos...

GIMLET. Shekels to shish kebabs, there is something you forgot.

JO. Think.

EVERYONE ELSE. Think.

MO. Omigosh.

GIMLET. Yeah??

MO. I just... Nevermind...

GIMLET. Again, with the dilly-dally!

WOO-WOO. With the twiddle-twaddle!

GIMLET. With the shilly-shally! Delaying an inevitability. Two ways

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forward, one way out, zero chances of a miracle. (*The formation that everyone on stage is in is very important – make it look dynamic – read on, in Act II you'll see why... Because, suddenly, the front door bursts open, revealing federal agent MORT PEELER with Pistol #3 drawn – catching Woo-Woo and Gimlet off-guard.*)

MORT. Freeze! Federal Agent!

JO. (*Excited.*) Agent Peeler!!

MO. / JO. / STEF. / KRIS. YAYY!! (*There is a sudden flash and boom from across the street and the sound of a *thunk!* - After a beat, the agent falls face down, revealing a red mailbox flag protruding from the back of their skull.*)

GIMLET. / WOO-WOO. YAYY!! (*Woo-Woo quickly shuts the door.*)

MO. Crap.

WIN. Classic Agent Peeler. (*Kris and Stef give each other a very curious look.*)

WOO-WOO. Serendipitous.

GIMLET. Kismet?

WOO-WOO. Karmic!

GIMLET. (*In agreement.*) “And if they come for me, they will welcome death.”

WOO-WOO. Sun Tzu?

GIMLET. Stallone.

WOO-WOO. (*Remembering.*) Rambo?

GIMLET. (*Confirming, but looking directly at Mo.*) “Last Blood”.

WOO-WOO. But... (*Indicating Mort's body.*) ...back to “Federal Express” here.

GIMLET. Yeah, odd, that.

WOO-WOO. (*Semi-interrogating Gimlet.*) Did we or did we not get the jump on “Agent Airmail” earlier?

GIMLET. That we did.

WOO-WOO. And did I or did I not tell you to cuff ‘em and stuff ‘em in their own trunk, while I took care of the communication lines?

GIMLET. That you did.

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WOO-WOO. And did you or did you not assure me it was... (*Mocking Gimlet's dialect.*) all "squared away".

GIMLET. (*Confirming.*) Kippers in a tin!

WOO-WOO. ...disarmed and detained as you were preparing the hijacked mail truck to make a certain ill-fated package delivery?

GIMLET. That I did.

WOO-WOO. But, I see one pistol, zero cuffs, and this living room is most definitely not the interior of a sedan's trunk.

GIMLET. Not unless it's a Tardis, Doctor.

MO. Who?

GIMLET. (*Point to Mo - thinking they get it. Mo does not.*) Precisely.

WOO-WOO. And YET... (*Gestures emphatically at the body on the floor.*)

GIMLET. Whoops...

WOO-WOO. There it is.

GIMLET. (*Contemplates a very brief moment.*) No one is more dumbfounded than me.

WOO-WOO. Undoubtedly... but... the cuffs??

GIMLET. Oh! (*Gimlet takes the agent's cuffs from their holster on the agent's belt and cuffs the hands of the deceased agent as Woo-Woo stares on in deadpan agony. Gimlet finishes and smiles – pleased with themselves.*)

WOO-WOO. My cuffs??

GIMLET. (*Almost simultaneously - lightbulb moment.*) Your cuffs! Well, they must be in... (*opens door, intending to go look in the car, which immediately explodes in the distance.*) ...the once and former sedan.

WOO-WOO. (*Looking out toward the blaze.*) Those cuffs had...

GIMLET. (*Closing the door as though it makes it all go away.*) ... sentimental value, I know.

WIN. Who hurt you?? (*Woo-Woo looks like they've lost their best friend. Gimlet gives the others a frantic look to 'skip the subject' and then searches for the silver lining.*)

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GIMLET. Not as though they're "lucky cuffs".

WOO-WOO. *(Trying to remind Gimlet.)* What...?

GIMLET. Happened-in-Vegas, etc. etc. *poof*! Done.

WOO-WOO. But...

GIMLET. Why hold on to the past? They left you at the altar.

WOO-WOO. Handcuffed! To the altar!

KRIS. *(Sucker for a lost love story, takes Stef's hand tenderly.)* Awww, unrequited love.

GIMLET. *(Clarifying.)* Oh, no, they requited...

WOO-WOO. Twice.

GIMLET. *(Slowing shaking their head at the memory.)* Right there at the altar.

WOO-WOO. *(Singing softly.)* "Loved me tender, loved me twice..."

GIMLET. Elvis had to clear the chapel, but when the smoke finally cleared...

WOO-WOO. Stupid candelabra...

GIMLET. And the firemen had left, there was Woo-Woo at the altar...

WOO-WOO. Abandoned...with nothing but those cuffs as a... remembrance.

GIMLET. *(Clarifying and still struggling with the image.)* NOTHING... but a pair of fuzzy pink handcuffs.

WOO-WOO. *(Singing again softly.)* "Never let me go..."

(Remembering.) Took it all... My chips, my heart... Ah! I do miss those boots.

GIMLET. Thank God, the king could pick a mean lock... But forget that! Happened-Vegas-poof-done! *(Grabbing the cuffs still on the wrists of the departed agent.)* Instead, let's turn the key... *(Frantically searching pockets and backs with their free hand for a handcuff key – the agent's or their own from the recently destroyed cuffs.)* turn... the key... on a new... future? *(Gives up. Drops the cuffs and the agents arms plop on floor.)* Why question karmic-kismet-serendipity?

WOO-WOO. I... guess.

GIMLET. *(As if Woo-Woo had just lost the little league game.)* Ice

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cream after?

WOO-WOO. *(Small, but still mildly upset, smile.)* Yeah.

GIMLET. *(Picking up the prone agent's Pistol #3 and talking to the agent's body.)* Guess I gotta fix the lock on my glovebox now. Thanks. *(Puts their own Pistol #2 in the back of their waistband and holds on to Pistol #3 with dissatisfaction.)* Government issue. Meh.

WOO-WOO. Then why...?

GIMLET. Oh! *(Retrieves Pistol #2 from waistband and points it toward the neighbors and fires three times in random places in their general direction— each time there is simply a *click* of the trigger on an empty chamber – sending the neighbors scrambling behind objects. Gimlet then displays the bottom of the pistols grip – revealing what's missing.)* Lost my magazine in the “boom”. *(Putting Pistol #2 back in waistband and keeping Pistol #3 in hand.)* In the big bada-boom.

WOO-WOO. *(Would love to restart the day and starting to get on edge.)*
Sigh

JO. You mean?? This whole time...?

STEF. *(Can't resist.)* Shooting blanks? Heh.

GIMLET. Right?! Haha! Bit of sticky wicket, that. Had it in my hand at the time, then *Boom!*, then... *(Shrugs an amused apology.)* Whoopsy-doo! All thumbs!

WOO-WOO. *(Nodding. Really annoyed now.)* All DUMB.

GIMLET. *(Thinking Woo-Woo misheard again. Wiggles their thumbs and over-articulates for emphasis.)* THUMBS!

WOO-WOO. Agree to disagree. *(Back to business – playing the rest of the scene more and more like a little league coach with anger management issues and an inept roster - waving pistol to direct them.)* Okay, team! Bring it in! Huddle up! *(They gather together again.)*

WIN. *(Cheerleading.)* Go! Fight!

MO. / JO. WIN.

WIN. That's the team spiri-!

WOO-WOO. *(Shoving Win just a little too hard – effectively ending the 'honeymoon' for Win.)* Zip it, kid. *(Looking at the group with a very*

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knowing subtext.) Now, where were we?? I can't seem to remember.

GIMLET. *(Joining the same mind game.)* I, too, am at a loss.

WOO-WOO. *(Commenting on Gimlet's lack of success so far.)*

Shocking. But, wait! I do remember... *(Pointing at Mo.)*. ...that you remembered something...

GIMLET. *(To Mo.)* Remember??

MO. I... Yeah... I... but... It hardly seems important now.

WOO-WOO. Let us make that call.

GIMLET. Say it!

WOO-WOO. SAY IT!

STEF. *(Gasping in a lower voice.)* Oh Good-golly. You forgot to yurt the wagyu.

MO. *(Tortured. More to Stef than anyone else.)* I forgot to yurt the wagyu!

JO. *(To Mo.)* Are you kidding me here?

WOO-WOO. *(Thinking it's a person's name.)* "Wah Gyu?" We talking yakuza? Syndicate?

GIMLET. Wagyu, ya troglodyte! *(Woo-Woo does not like being called that, but doesn't know what it is. To Mo.)* That what I've been smelling? You got a wagyu out there??

WOO-WOO. Wagyu?

MO. *(Confirming specifically.)* Wagyu A5. *(Woo-Woo looks more confused.)*

KRIS. It's just a steak.

WOO-WOO. I wasn't talking to you!

GIMLET. *(Scoffing at Kris and pulling Mo and Stef into the incredulousness.)* It's "just" a steak.

GIMLET / MO / STEF. Pfft!

GIMLET. It's a wagyu.

WOO-WOO. What's a wagyu??

GIMLET. The prime cut of beef.

WOO-WOO. So, a steak.

GIMLET / MO / STEF. Pfft!

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GIMLET. *(Done talking with the troglodyte, turns to Mo.)* ¼ inch?

MO. Half inch.

GIMLET. Ribeye?

MO. Naturally.

GIMLET. *(Testing them.)* Marinade?

MO. Now, who's the troglodyte? *(Woo-Woo sticks Pistol #1 up Mo's nostril.)*

WOO-WOO. We haven't gotten to that word! *(Gimlet keeps listening to Mo while encouraging an angrily reluctant Woo-Woo to lower their pistol – Woo-Woo cannot believe this is the conversation they're having.)*

GIMLET. *(Seeing that Mo is a fellow foodie.)* Salt-n-Pepper?

MO. A... secret blen-.

STEF. *(Eager to please with the knowledge.)* "Killer spices".

GIMLET. Aw, I gotta know now.

STEF. Ha! Good luck gettin'...

GIMLET. *(Points pistol at Mo.)* Kill...? Or spices?

MO. *(Rattles it off.)* Two parts smoked Himalayan, one-part fresh ground Tellicherry pepper, and a dash of chipotle.

GIMLET. *(Appreciative.)* Good answer.

STEF. But... Nonna Johansson??

MO. Already has her halo, I'm in no kinda hurry.

STEF. And then you coax it over. *(Kris smacks Stef.)*

WOO-WOO. *(Every little fancy food comment from this point on has them becoming more impatient and agitated.)* Coax it?!

MO. *(Demonstrating the gentle turning of an imaginary steak.)* So as not to jar...

MO. / GIMLET. ...the marbling!

GIMLET. Plat d'accompagnements?

MO. *(Excited to find a kindred spirit.)* Asparagus and Swiss Chard!

WOO-WOO. I may be losing my mind.

JO. Welcome to my world.

GIMLET. Prepared?

MO. Braised asparagus and and either brunoise or chiffonade wit' the

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charred Swiss Chard.

GIMLET. *(Suddenly concerned.)* Either??

MO. I hadn't decided.

GIMLET. Are you havin' a crack at me??

MO. Well, there's the leaves and the stems.

GIMLET. You've a half-inch wagyu A5 ribeye with smoked Himalayan out there and you act like there's a choice here?!

MO. I... *(Still slightly unsure.)* Chiffonade?

GIMLET. You're chiffon-right, ya chiffonade. What else? Fuller flavor release of the mild-sweet when charring the Swiss Chard's leafy greens...

MO. Combined with the smoky of the salt...

GIMLET. And...

MO. / GIMLET. ...the spicy sweet of the Tellicherry!

GIMLET. And fob off the stems, you're not running a chuck wagon!

MO. Of course.

STEF. I knew it. *(But not really.)*

WOO-WOO. Gimlet, I'm about to lose it here... *(Gimlet is busy recipe bonding.)*

KRIS. *(Really annoyed at Stef.)* You knew it?

STEF. *(Just can't sense the immediate danger from Kris.)* Well, hun-bun, there really brunoise no other choice!

KRIS. Cheese and rice, Stef...

STEF. *(Holds up a chicken decoration on the table.)* There's only a hen-full of reasons to chiffonade.

KRIS. *(Taking advantage of Gimlet and Woo-Woo's distracted state, scooping up a plate from the table, but making it seem like an attack on Stef.)* Well, Bunny-Hun...!

STEF. *(Eyes wide – Trying to defuse.)* Yah, no...

KRIS. Here's a plate full of reasons to shut yer yapper! *(Switches targets last second and shatters the plate over Woo-Woo's head. Quick and comedic chaos breaks out < NOTE: Hire a qualified fight director – www.safd.org > as all, except Win - who chooses to eat invisible popcorn - try and disarm the two intruders. Sadly, they are all terrified and terrible*

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fighters, and they are quickly and comedically brought under control without a shot fired by Woo-Woo or Gimlet. Strong Suggestion: Avoid involving the food around the table and other found objects in this violence sequence – save it to escalate things in Act 2's big fight sequence.)

WOO-WOO. *(Has Mo by the collar and raging at them.)* Do you not know what's at stake here?

MO. The wagyu, if I don't yurt it!

WIN. *(Still the bemused spectator.)* Or serve it. *(Gimlet looks at Win, who shrugs. Then Gimlet looks to Woo-Woo.)*

WOO-WOO. SERIOUSLY?!

GIMLET. *(Shrugging.)* I am a bit peckish. *(Blackout.)*

END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***