

TALES FOR SALE

By Justin Alejandro Gonzales

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance):

Alex Pirpin, mother and fiction author
Karah Pirpin, Alex's 7-year-old daughter
Billie, customer

Scene A

Coach
Jim Pirpin, boxer
Jimley Pirpin, Jim's conjoined twin brother
Announcer
Mahogany Blin, defending heavyweight champion
Referee

Scene B

Tai, undercover CICLOPS agent playing a barkeep
Patron 1, undercover CICLOPS agent playing a bar patron
Patron 2
Patron 3
Hondo Pirpin, undercover CICLOPS agent in training

Scene C

Silmera Pirpin, adventurer
Kimberly von Lindtmire, Earl Grey Matter host
Stage Crew

Scene D

Aurora Pirpin, trekker
Figure

Scene E

Daron Pirpin, blue collar worker
Ronny Pirpin, Daron's teenage son
Mel, Daron's coworker

Setting:

Yard sale, present day, with vignettes at various points at various places in the past.

Scene 1 – Alex’s Yard Sale

(It is early noon. Rows of tables are set on the front lawn displaying all sorts of mismatched objects: appliances, decorations, knick-knacks, etc. Eight items in particular stand out amongst the rest: a single vintage boxing glove, a well-worn dart board, a vibrantly colored baseball cap, a customized trekking pole, a hand-crafted rocking horse, a tall safe, and a lantern hanging delicately from a tree. ALEX is arranging some items when KARAH enters with a sheet of paper.)

ALEX

Hi, sweetie! What’re you up to? Come out to help mom with the yard sale? Awesome! Just take everything out of those boxes and arrange them by color and size and in alphabetical order! Thanks for the help!

(ALEX begins to walk away deliberately.)

KARAH

Ummm . . . no!

ALEX

Wha— No?!

(melodramatic)

You’re going to leave your poor mother to slave away under the sun all by her lonesome?

KARAH
(giggling)

Yeah!

ALEX

You stinker! At least I tried. What do you got in your hand there? Is that for me?

KARAH

Mm-hm! I wrote you a story, like the ones you always tell me!

ALEX

You did? Your very own story all by yourself? That’s incredible, sweetie! I want to read it right now!

KARAH

Here you go. But be careful, it’s scary.

ALEX

Oh my! A scary story? I'm going to have to sit down for this!

(ALEX and KARAH sit on the grass.)

ALEX

Hey, you know what would make this story even better?

KARAH

What?

ALEX

If I heard it read from the author herself!

KARAH

But I don't tell stories as good as you.

ALEX

That's not true! You know, when you come home from school, I always look forward to you telling me about your day because you always make it so exciting! You tell stories all the time and you're really good at it.

KARAH

It's just because you can't read it, can you?

ALEX

Uh, I'm really good at reading, thank you very much. And your handwriting is phenomenal! I just think that there's no one better in the whole world to read your story than you.

KARAH

Hmm . . .

ALEX

Please? For your mom?

KARAH

Okay! Because I love you.

ALEX

I love you too, sweetie. Now, I'm ready to be terrified!

KARAH

It's called: The Girl and the Rocking Horse! Ahem! "There once was a very pretty girl and she lived in a big house. And her family was rich and famous and bought her more toys than they could even count! And even though the girl was really pretty and had a lot

of toys, she was also really mean. She loved her toys more than anything, even her mommy or daddy. And her favorite toy was her wood rocking horse. It was pink and gold and had yarn and had ribbons for hair. And then one day, she rode her rocking horse into the big room with all the toys, and there were so many toys that she got lost. And her mommy and daddy tried to find her, but there were so many toys that they couldn't find her. And so then they ordered a bunch of people to take all the toys out, and they found the rocking horse, but not the girl. She disappeared! And now everyone thinks that the rocking horse is haunted by the girl's ghost, and that she rides it sometimes." What do you think?

ALEX

Wow, Karah. I am so proud of you! That was awesome! I am thoroughly terrified.

KARAH

Boo!

ALEX

Ah! Don't do that to me, you stinker!

KARAH

When I'm old like you I want to be a writer too.

ALEX

You're so creative, I'd be sad if you weren't. And don't call your mom old!

KARAH

You're old!

ALEX

Stop that!

(she gets a text)

Oh, your dad needs your help inside.

(They both stand up.)

ALEX

I loved your story, sweetie! Keep writing!

KARAH

I will! I love you, mommy!

ALEX

I love you, too!

(KARAH exits. A car door is heard opening and closing offstage. BILLIE enters.)

ALEX

Afternoon!

BILLIE

Hello.

ALEX

Feel free to look around. I have most of the stuff unpacked but barely anything is labeled. If you have a question about prices, just ask.

BILLIE

Will do, thanks.

ALEX

I'm Alex, by the way.

BILLIE

Billie. Nice to meet you. You have a nice property.

ALEX

Thank you. It's been in the family for a while, that's why we're trying to get rid of some stuff. It was taking up a lot of space in the house and it wasn't good to anybody collecting dust, you know?

BILLIE

I gotcha, I gotcha. My wife can never let go of anything. Have to force her to get rid of things, whether we're selling them or, God forbid, throwing them away.

ALEX

Your wife and I would get along, I think. Truth be told, this was my husband's idea. I'm a writer, so I like to keep things around in case they'll suddenly inspire me or something. Well, he finally convinced me to settle for photographs and put the real things out on the lawn. So, here we are.

BILLIE

I see.

Scene A – Boxing Glove

(BILLIE stops in front of the boxing glove to examine it. A signature that has been written on it.)

ALEX

You a boxing fan?

BILLIE

Just a passing interest. I watch it when the Olympics come on, pretty much. Is this signature a name I should know?

ALEX

Would? Probably not. Should? Well, I'm biased, but . . . that boxing glove belonged to Jim Pirpin of the famous Pirpin Pair!

BILLIE

Jim Pirpin. Was he a friend of yours?

ALEX

Relative.

BILLIE

Ah . . . you only have the one?

ALEX

Yep. But he only needed one.

BILLIE

What do you mean, did he box with one arm?

ALEX

Kinda.

(A transition. COACH is ringside with JIM and JIMLEY before the match begins. The brothers are turned away from the audience and wearing a hoodie.)

COACH

Alright, how are we feeling? Where's your head at? Talk to me!

JIM

You know I'm ready, coach. I don't care who this guy thinks he is, we're not leaving that ring without that belt!

COACH

Yessir, that's what I like to hear! But don't get careless in the heat of the moment. You remember our notes?

JIMLEY

Yes, ma'am. Got it all up here! Keep up a strong defense in the first half and whittle him down with quick jabs. Capitalize only on the clearest openings. Do that until he inevitably tires himself out, then switch to aggression with plenty of fuel in the tank!

COACH

Textbook, son! Still warm?

JIMLEY

Yes, ma'am. No thanks to them taking so long to get this started.

JIM

Probably doing it on purpose. This guy'll do anything for the upper hand. Make it all the better when we knock his lights out.

(The ANNOUNCER enters.)

ANNOUNCER

Hello there, miss. You coach the Pair, yes?

COACH

Yep. Are we ready or what?

ANNOUNCER

Yes. I came over here to let you know that we are going to be getting this bout underway very soon. Make sure your fighter is ready.

COACH

Fighters plural, sir.

ANNOUNCER

I'm sorry? Oh, my apologies.

(The ANNOUNCER steps into the ring.)

COACH

Alright boys, get that hoodie off. We're starting any second now.

(JIM and JIMLEY take off their hoodie and turn towards the audience, revealing that they are twins who have been conjoined at the side. JIM controls the right half of the body and JIMLEY controls the left.)

JIM

It's about time. These folks are going to be upset when the fight ends so soon.

JIMLEY

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. This guy's the reigning champ for a reason.

JIM

Yeah, 'cause he hasn't fought us yet!

JIMLEY

Technically true!

(The crowd surges as MAHOGANY enters wearing a flashy hoodie.)

COACH

Here we go. Let's get in there, boys.

(COACH, JIM, and JIMLEY enter the ring, as does MAHOGANY on the other side. They take their corners. The ANNOUNCER pulls down a microphone suspended from the ceiling.)

ANNOUNCER

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! The World Boxing Consortium is proud to present to you the main event of the night! Introducing our judges at the ringside: Roscoe Moore, Knox Collins, and Les White. We are scheduled for 15 rounds for this heavyweight championship event. In the red corner, weighing in at 193 pounds, fighting from Barbourville, Kentucky, the current heavyweight champion of the world, in the black trunks, Mahogany "The Timberwolf" Blin!

(MAHOGANY showboats to the cheering audience.)

ANNOUNCER

And in the blue corner, his challenger; weighing in at 206 pounds, fighting from Mississauga, Canada, in the black and gold trunks, they're the marvel of nature and the ring, Jim and Jimley Pirpin: "The Pirpin Pair!"

(The crowd erupts again. The ANNOUNCER, the fighters, and the REFEREE converge in the center of the ring.)

REFEREE

Gentleman, you've all been cleared by our inspectors to fight tonight. We went over the rules in the dressing room, but Mr. Blin, let me remind you that you must knock out both of these young men to win by knockout. I'll be enforcing the rules, and I want a clean fight. I want you to touch gloves now and when you hear the bell, start fighting.

(The fighters touch gloves.)

MAHOGANY

The last thing you needed was giving me a bigger target, double trouble.

JIM

I'm going to knock that smirk right off your stupid face!

MAHOGANY

That's the spirit!

(The fighters return to their corners and everyone else exits the ring. MAHOGANY removes his hoodie, revealing an impressive physique.)

COACH

Knock 'em dead, boys!

JIM

If we're lucky.

JIMLEY

C'mon Jim! Let's show him that Canadian decorum.

(The bell dings.)

JIMLEY

Remember: protect yourself, keep him busy.

(MAHOGANY opens with a flurry of punches that are blocked by the Pirpins.)

JIMLEY

Geez!

JIM

That's nothing!

(They block more punches.)

JIMLEY

He'll wear himself out in no time throwing punches like that.

JIM

See an opening?

JIMLEY

He still drops his right guard slightly on the left hooks.

MAHOGANY

What was that? Mind speaking up?

JIM

You ought to be focusing on yourself.

MAHOGANY

Then pipe down! This here's a fight, not a meet-and-greet.

(They block more punches. MAHOGANY throws a left hook and JIMLEY capitalizes with a solid blow to the right side.)

JIM

Nice. Let's see if he makes the same mistake twice.

(MAHOGANY throws another left hook and is hit again.)

JIMLEY

Good thing they don't make us take an IQ test, huh?

MAHOGANY

You best shut your mouth before they have to sew that together too!

(The bell dings. They return to their corners. Time skips ahead to later in the match.)

COACH

Round six already. How're you feeling?

JIMLEY

I think we've got this. As long as I can keep exploiting that weakness, he'll be worn down enough by round ten to go for the knockout.

JIM

You got him mad early on. He's been throwing harder and more often than normal, I can tell.

COACH

You're looking good up there, keep it up. Don't get too comfortable.

(The bell dings. The fighters engage for round six. They repeat the process of blocking and countering. JIM occasionally pokes with a jab. MAHOGANY is visibly slowing.)

JIM

Running out of steam, Timberwolf?

MAHOGANY

I got plenty, four-eyes.

JIMLEY

Hope you didn't use all your brainpower on that one.

MAHOGANY

Hmph.

(MAHOGANY feigns a left hook, which prompts JIMLEY to attack. MAHOGANY blocks it and counters with a devastating blow to JIMLEY'S head which knocks him out. JIM is dragged to the floor as his other half crumples down. The REFEREE starts counting.)

JIM

Jimley!

COACH

No!

REFEREE

1! 2 . . .

JIM

C'mon, get up!

COACH

Get up!

MAHOGANY

Oh no! C'mon Jimbo, where's that fighting spirit I love so much?

(JIMLEY starts to rise but falls back down.)

JIM

Fight through it Jimley!

COACH

C'mon, Jimley!

REFEREE

. . . 9! 10! Jimley Pirpin has been knocked out!

(JIM and JIMLEY are brought back to their corner.
MAHOGANY grandstands.)

COACH

Jimley. Jimley, can you hear me, son?

JIMLEY

... uh . . . yeah, I . . . I'm back.

COACH

No severe damage, so that's good. You got reckless! What did I tell you about getting comfortable?

JIM

I knew this was too easy. He's been conditioning us the whole time!

COACH

You gotta knock him out soon or we lose by decision easily. Jimley, you're allowed to move and protect yourself, but that's it, got it? Don't even speak. You got knocked out, so in every way but physically, you're out of the match.

JIMLEY

Yes, ma'am.

(The bell dings.)

MAHOGANY

You're half the man you used to be, double trouble!

(MAHOGANY throws some punches at JIM, then sends a right hook towards JIMLEY'S head which is blocked.)

COACH

He's out of the match! Leave him alone!

MAHOGANY

My bad, Jimmy. Not used to only fighting the dominant side of my opponent, I'm sure you understand.

JIM

You better be glad I'm a professional.

(They continue to trade blows. MAHOGANY throws another right hook at JIMLEY.)

MAHOGANY

Oops. Old habits die hard!

(Some more trading. MAHOGANY delivers a hard right hook that is blocked once again but causes JIMLEY to stagger. JIM grapples MAHOGANY.)

JIM

If you're asking for it, I'll give it to you. Last warning. Step off.

(The ref breaks them up. The bell dings.)

COACH

You're unraveling up there.

JIM

He's beating on Jimley. I know he knows the rules, he just wants to get me angry.

COACH

Is it working?

JIM

Sorry coach. I need to get my head right.

COACH

Good. But don't let Mahogany know that.

JIM

What?

COACH

He thinks he's in your head. And he's riding high off of his knockout. Let him think you're off your guard, so if he tries that again, which he will . . .

JIM

We'll be ready to go for the kill.

COACH

You've got it, son!

JIM

Let's bag us a timberwolf!

(The bell dings.)

MAHOGANY

Not so great without that little voice in your ear, huh?

JIM

Shut up!

(They trade blows.)

MAHOGANY

I was thinking about that offer.

JIM

Still stands.

MAHOGANY

Y'know, you're pretty good. Making me sweat. In fact, I think I might be seeing double!

JIM

Don't.

MAHOGANY

Uh oh! Which one's Jim? I'll just have to guess! Eenie, meenie, miney . . . moe!

(MAHOGANY swings at JIMLEY'S head with great force and is blocked. JIMLEY pretends to stumble over from the punch. MAHOGANY lets his guard down and JIM goes in for a powerful uppercut, which sends MAHOGANY to the ground. The REFEREE starts counting.)

REFEREE

1! 2 . . .

JIM

I'm a man of my word, so I've put you right where mahogany belongs: laid out flat across the floor!

REFEREE

. . . 9! 10! Knockout!

(The crowd cheers; everyone converges in the ring in celebration.)

ANNOUNCER

Introducing the new World Boxing Consortium heavyweight champion—or rather, heavyweight champions of the world, winners by knockout, Jim and Jimley Pirpin!

(A transition.)

BILLIE

Wow. That's pretty incredible that they could synchronize like that.

ALEX

I can't imagine . . . my hand-eye coordination is so bad! I tried juggling once. That was a very bad idea. There were broken bones involved.

BILLIE

Yikes.

ALEX

Yeah. Anyway, after they won the championship they bought a new pair, and only Jim kept his old one. Guess he would be a bit more sentimental about the whole thing than his brother, considering how it played out.

BILLIE

You'd think I would have heard about a thing like that, given how amazing it must have been.

ALEX

Well, it wasn't at the Olympics.

BILLIE

Sure, but, still . . .

ALEX

It was probably because their title was revoked a couple months later. People were apparently angry that they had an "unfair advantage."

BILLIE

It was two against one.

ALEX

Well, only kind of. But that's neither here nor there. I'll quit talking your ear off and let you look around.

BILLIE

It's fine.

Scene B – Dartboard

(BILLIE browses before landing on the dartboard.
"Nobody's Home" is printed on it.)

BILLIE

Hey, "Nobody's Home!" This came out of that old bar that used to be on the square, right? Man, I loved that place.

ALEX

You're thinking of Noobies'.

BILLIE

Oh, right.

ALEX

But it did come out of a bar. It's closed down now too.

BILLIE

Was it a family business?

ALEX

Oh, no. Surprisingly, no one in the Pirpin family has ever owned a bar. A family member of mine used to be a frequent visitor. I was told he was their favorite customer, in fact. When they gave our family the dartboard all those years ago, they actually told us that he . . . I don't remember if I'm supposed to talk about that or not.

BILLIE

Trust me, I have my own fair share of crazy bar stories. Whatever they told you, I promise . . . I've heard worse.

ALEX

That's not quite what I meant.

BILLIE

So what does that mean, then? "Not supposed to talk about it?"

ALEX

Well, I . . . it has been a while . . . okay, I'll tell you, but this stays between us, alright?

(A transition. PATRONS 1 and 2 are engaged in a screaming match. PATRON 3 sits alone with a drink, the dartboard hanging on the wall behind her. TAI wipes down the bar counter as he prepares to close up for the evening. HONDO enters, wearing a full suit.)

HONDO

Good evening. Looks like I made it just in time. You'll have to forgive me, the taxi got lost on the way here. You run quite an elusive little hole in the wall.

PATRON 1

You sure you're in the right place, pretty boy?

PATRON 3

Looks lost to me!

PATRON 2

You best call up a new cab, tell 'em you're in the wrong part of town; let 'em take you back to whatever white picket suburb you sauntered out of.

HONDO

No need for the hostilities. I simply heard that this bar has an excellent selection of beverages and I'd like to try one, if that's alright.

TAI

Sorry, but we're closing. Come back some other time.

PATRON 1

You heard him. We're closing. Now beat it!

PATRON 2

Suits coming in here, thinking they're one of us. It's like they're asking for a beating.

HONDO

I can assure you I'm not. And the sign clearly advertises that you're open, so I will be having my drink.

PATRON 2

Oh, will you now? Hear that, Tai? He still wants his drink!

TAI

That's a nice suit you've got on, sir. Won't look nearly as good on a dead man.

PATRON 1

He don't have to serve you if he don't want to. And he don't want to. Get it?

HONDO

I do. But I must also say that I don't. I'd say I'm probably the first person to come in here with a clean shirt on in quite some time. It would be foolish to pass up on my business, would it not, Mr. Tai?

PATRON 1

You trying to say something about us? Huh? Think you're better than us, is that it?

PATRON 2

Go on, be honest. You think you're better than us just because you dress all fancy?

HONDO

Not at all. How I dress has nothing to do with it.

(PATRON 1 stands up and confronts HONDO. PATRON 2 slowly makes his way to the door and locks it.)

PATRON 1

Oh, you're funny. He's funny, isn't he, Tai?!

TAI

If only I could've gotten to know you, sir.

PATRON 1

We told you to leave, and you didn't. You thought it'd be a great idea to hang around and disrespect us. You know what that tells me? It—

HONDO

I don't know, what does it tell you?

PATRON 1

It tells me that you've got yourself a death wish.

PATRON 2

And he's more than happy to deliver.

PATRON 1

Let's see if you're as durable as you are smug.

(HONDO shrugs off his suit jacket and tosses it aside.)

HONDO

Great idea. Don't worry, I won't go for the face. You do still have that going for you, if you don't mind me saying so.

PATRON 1

You're too kind!

(PATRON 1 takes several swings at HONDO'S face but all of them are effortlessly avoided.)

HONDO

It's a good thing you're so slow, or that would have been very rude.

(PATRON 1 continues to attack HONDO but still can't land anything. HONDO shoves PATRON 1 away.)

PATRON 1

Stop playing around and throw a punch; fight me like a man!

(PATRON 1 throws a powerful punch that is caught by HONDO. HONDO grapples PATRON 1 and throws them onto a table, incapacitating him.)

PATRON 3

My God!

HONDO

Sorry. I suddenly remembered that I have schedule to keep.

PATRON 2

Oh, have somewhere important to be?

HONDO

I'd say so.

PATRON 2

Who are you?

HONDO

I'm Hondo, nice to meet you. Now that we're on a first name basis, why don't we let bygones be bygones and share a drink like the good friends we are?

PATRON 2

I'll pour one out on your grave!

(PATRON 2 draws a switchblade knife and attacks. HONDO dodges the first couple of swipes but is eventually hit. He reels back from the pain.)

PATRON 2

Ha! How's it feel, not being the sharpest guy in the roo—

(HONDO kicks the knife out of PATRON 2's hand and take him down with two swift punches. HONDO'S charisma returns as he grabs his suit jacket. He turns to PATRON 3.)

HONDO

I presumed you were going to stay over there. Was I mistaken?

PATRON 3

Nah. I, uh, I'm good. I'll stay over here.

HONDO

Great.

(HONDO puts the suit jacket on and sits at the bar.)

HONDO

Do you happen to own a first aid kit?

TAI

Yes, sir. Let me fetch it for you.

(TAI enters a back room.)

TAI (VOICE)

I remember it being back here somewhere. Um . . . where did it go?

HONDO

You've lost it?

TAI (VOICE)

I'm sure I saw one back here at some point, but this room is a mess. Oh, wait!

(TAI reemerges from the room.)

TAI

I remember now. The rats got into it and we had to throw it out. Sorry. It's, uh, not too bad, is it?

HONDO

Thankfully, the human body produces a lot more blood than it actually needs. I'd prefer to keep it all, of course, but I can compromise. Would still like to wash my hands though. May I borrow your rag?

TAI

Sure, I've got plenty.

HONDO

Thank you. Actually, this will do nicely for the wound. There we go. Right then, now that that's out of the way . . .

TAI

Yes, sir. What will you be having?

HONDO

I'd like to see a list of your specialties, please.

TAI

We don't have a list. If you have something in mind I can see what I can do.

HONDO

No list? In that case, I'll be going with what I was recommended; one "Son of Poseidon" please.

TAI

One what?

HONDO

Perhaps it went by a different name, but I know at the very least I heard "Poseidon."

TAI

Sorry, I don't know anything like that. Your friend probably confused my place with somewhere else.

HONDO

I know for certain he said it was from this bar, "Nobody's Home."

TAI

Well, if your dead-set on this Poseidon drink then I'll do my best. What's the recipe?

HONDO

The recipe? He told me, but it was some time ago. Hmm . . .

TAI

I can't make the drink without the recipe.

HONDO

I understand, let me think.

(HONDO struggles to remember.)

HONDO

I think I've got it, write this down. One-half cup of orange juice . . . one-quarter cup of ouzo . . . one-quarter cup of vodka . . . a teaspoon of lemon juice, a half-cup of ice, and sugar on the rim of the glass. Shaken. As opposed to stirred.

TAI

I know this recipe. Call this one the "Polyphemus." And now your friend makes sense. Polyphemus is the son of Poseidon, that's probably what he was thinking about. Yeah, I can do that, coming right up.

HONDO

You know your classics . . . thank you.

PATRON 3

Hey, guy. Where'd you learn to fight like that, huh?

HONDO

You could say that I'm self-taught. Why?

PATRON 3

You just don't look like the rough and tumble type to me, that's all.

HONDO

Your friends certainly did though, didn't they? Goes to show how misleading appearances can be.

PATRON 3

Don't get too cocky. They'll get up eventually, and we never forget faces. They will get up eventually, right?

HONDO

I'm flattered. Yes, they will. Their threat hardly warranted lethal force, and besides, I'm not in the business of killing people I don't like just because I don't like them.

PATRON 3

What are you in the business of then? You're not some kind of cop, are you?

HONDO

I am, and you're under arrest.

TAI

You've had this one coming.

PATRON 3

I knew it from the second you came in! You—

HONDO

I'm only joking! I'm in real estate.

TAI

You've got to watch what you say around here.

PATRON 3

Not funny, guy! That was almost really bad for you, let me tell you . . .

HONDO

I don't doubt that.

TAI

Here's your Polyphemus, sir. Enjoy.

HONDO

Thank you, Mr. Tai.

(HONDO takes a sip of the drink. Something about the taste surprises him.)

TAI

What do you think?

HONDO

Did you add something to the recipe?

TAI

No sir.

HONDO

There's a tinge of something. I can't quite . . .

(HONDO woozily stumbles out of his seat.)

TAI

Right! There was something in my recipe that you forgot to list. I apologize for not mentioning it earlier; you're not allergic to poison, are you sir?

HONDO

And I was going to leave such a nice tip.

(HONDO swings his fist sluggishly through the air only for TAI to catch it and toss it away.)

TAI

You come into my bar, dressed like that, at this hour, and you have the nerve to knock out my patrons? I don't tolerate that kind of behavior, sir. Now let me explain a few things. The unique poison running through your body right now is of a very particular potency. In approximately 10 minutes, you'll be dead. I'd be happy to prepare you an equally unique antidote if you're interested. Mind you, it won't be on the house.

(HONDO tries some more weak punches and fails again.)

TAI

Please, sir. Getting your heart rate up like that will only expedite the process. If you take me up on my offer I promise there's some fun in it for you. You like having fun, don't you?

HONDO

What . . . do you want me . . . to do?

TAI

I'm glad you asked, sir.

(TAI sticks three darts into the counter.)

TAI

One leg of 301. Double in. If you win, I'll make you your antidote. You know how to play?

HONDO

Yes. Are you . . . going first?

TAI

No. I'll be keeping score. She's your opponent.

PATRON 3

Three-time Tri-State Darts League Champion. Hope you've been practicing.

TAI

Can't imagine he'd have much free time, being in real estate and all.

HONDO

This . . . isn't . . . very fair.

TAI

That's the fun part, sir. Now take your darts and step up to the line.

(HONDO prepares to throw his first dart. As he looks at the board, he makes a realization and begins to remember something intensely.)

TAI

Stalling isn't going to be an effective strategy in this case, sir.

HONDO

Thank you, Mr. Tai . . . just . . . working out my strategy.

(HONDO throws his first dart. It lands on single-11.)

TAI

Remember, sir: we're playing double in.

PATRON 3

Maybe you should just give up. Finish your drink while you're still alive to enjoy it.

(HONDO throws his next two darts: a single-7 and a single-18.)

TAI

No double, no score. Hoped you'd play better than this.

PATRON 3

I was going to win anyway, but I like a challenge.

(PATRON 3 retrieves the darts and throws her first three: two double-20's and a triple-20.)

TAI

Takes her down to 161 right off the bat. Here's hoping she spontaneously combusts or something; maybe then you'd have a fighting chance.

(HONDO retrieves the darts and throws a double-13.)

TAI

There you go! Now you can start playing.

PATRON 3

Worried we'd have a tin hat on our hands. At least you can die with some dignity.

(HONDO throws a triple-15 and an inner bullseye.)

TAI

Down to 180. Shame you didn't do that the first time.

PATRON 3

If it's any consolation, if I had to sell my house, you'd be my first choice.

HONDO

You need a . . . house for that.

PATRON 3

Who said I didn't have a house?

TAI

Well, you don't.

PATRON 3

In theory, okay? Geez, that's what I get for being nice.

(PATRON 3 retrieves the darts and does her last three throws: a triple-17, a triple-20, and a bullseye.)

TAI

And that's the leg.

PATRON 3

Three! Time! Champion!

TAI

Looking at the scorecard, sir, I have to say . . .

(TAI writes something on the scorecard and hands it to HONDO. TAI now speaks in his real voice.)

TAI

CICLOPS is proud to welcome you to the team, Agent Hondo.

(PATRONS 1 and 2 stand up. Everyone gives a short round of applause and begin using their real voices as well.)

PATRON 3

That was great, Agent Hondo! You held up well. Much better than I did when I was a rookie.

HONDO

Thank you . . . but . . . the poison?

PATRON 1

I got you, dude. This'll sting just a bit.

(PATRON 1 injects HONDO with a needle of medicinal fluid. HONDO immediately feels more or less normal once again.)

PATRON 1

Good job man, really. All that training paid off, right?

HONDO

Yes, sir.

PATRON 2

Didn't think you'd have to remember the recipe, huh?

HONDO

They only mentioned it once in passing, but I figured out by then that everything is important somehow.

PATRON 2

Yeah, I wish I'd caught on that quick. Oh, and your face when I pulled out the knife was priceless! I keep asking Command if we can add reaction cams in here but they're not very fond of that idea.

HONDO

They didn't tell me about the knife.

TAI

Of course not. They didn't tell you about the poison either. A good agent is prepared for things to go wrong and for the situation to change, which you were. Many new agents fail to remember the dartboard code when put under the unexpected pressures, but you responded excellently.

HONDO

I have never wanted anything more than I wanted to be a CICLOPS. agent, sir. I prepared myself to do whatever it takes.

TAI

That's what we like to hear. You'll be happy to know that your first mission briefing has been prepared, after we've patched you up, of course. Follow me.

(TAI and HONDO exit. A transition.)

BILLIE

Are you sure you didn't make that up?

ALEX

Of course not! I'm only telling what I was told.

BILLIE

With all due respect, Mrs. Pirpin, you are a writer.

ALEX

Please, just Alex is fine. And I'll have you know that writing fiction and telling lies are two very different things. I should know, because I'm very good at one and horribly bad at the other.

BILLIE

It's just that if he was a secret agent—

ALEX

Shh! Not so loud!

BILLIE

If he were a secret agent, then why would they tell you about it?

ALEX

CICLOPS was dissolved a long time ago, the same time the bar closed. It's since been declassified. Look it up. Cyclops with an "I."

BILLIE

Is that an acronym?

ALEX

Of course, these shady organizations love their acronyms.

BILLIE

So, what is it?

ALEX

If I remember right: "Centralized Intelligence Coalition Looking Over Pancontinental Security." Or something like that.

BILLIE

Right. If these guys have been gone for so long, then why are you so paranoid about talking about it?

ALEX

Because them being gone could just be what they want us to think, hmm?

BILLIE

I suppose. 007 had to get the idea from somewhere, right?

ALEX

Right. And you know what they say: reality is often stranger than fiction.

Scene C – Baseball Cap

(BILLIE finds the baseball cap and is shocked by its iridescence.)

BILLIE

That is a very bright hat, wow.

ALEX

That was Silmera Pirpin's lucky cap! Colorful and loud, just like she was.

BILLIE

Don't tell me this comes with a story too.

ALEX

Mr. Billie, everything on this front lawn comes with a story.

BILLIE

What's this one's? She fought a robot for it or something?

ALEX

If she had the chance, she would've. She was always looking for the next adventure, the next thrill. She was the epitome of "try anything once." This hat was on her head for just about all of it. She believed it was a good luck charm, and I don't blame her. Apparently there were many, many close calls in her life, but she survived them all. It was heart disease that got her in the end.

BILLIE

It definitely looks like it's seen a lot.

ALEX

I'm sure. When she wanted something, she went for it. Of course, as she got older she couldn't do all the crazy things that she used to, but you better believe that she had a plan for that. She put everything she could put off until her later years on to her "Rusty Bucket List."

BILLIE

Hm. Clearly a poet this Silmera.

ALEX

Indeed. And would you like to guess what was on the top of that list?

BILLIE

Well, I can only imagine. Um . . . I don't know, what?

ALEX

She wanted to be on a gameshow.

BILLIE

Really? Which one was she on?

ALEX

I can't remember the name, but it was a British trivia show that she had absolutely no business being on. I guess that was the appeal for her, though. Just her and her lucky cap way outside of their comfort zone.

BILLIE

Did she win?

ALEX

I have the recording on VHS in one of these boxes. I could throw it in for free with the cap.

BILLIE

Wow. You didn't strike me as such a ruthless businesswoman. Unfortunately, I don't own a VHS player, so I'll pass.

ALEX

Oh, well. It's really better to watch it for yourself, but I'll give you the gist.

(An unseen studio audience waits for the gameshow to begin. The stage is set to resemble a cozy English tearoom. A table sits in the middle of the "room" with an ornate tea set on top, which includes three teacups labeled "A," "B," and "C." On either side of the table are two large armchairs. In the left chair sits KIMBERLY, who is making last-minute adjustments to his attire, as well as checking the function of his earpiece and lapel microphone.)

KIMBERLY

How are the levels, gentlemen? Am I coming through alright? Excellent, excellent. Is the contestant ready to go? Not quite? What seems to be the hold-up? Got in late? I see. Well, if we start now will she be ready in time? Alright, then let's get on then!

(KIMBERLY stands up and addresses the studio audience.)

KIMBERLY

Good evening all of my lovely ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! We've a special game ahead of us tonight; are you ready?

(The studio audience cheers.)

KIMBERLY

Top notch, top notch! We love having a lively crowd such as yourselves. We're going to have a great night tonight! We are just moments away from going live so when we do, get up on your feet and share that energy of yours with all of our friends watching at home, alright? In . . . 5, 4, 3, 2 . . .

(The applause and cheering as the show goes live. KIMBERLY speaks into the camera.)

KIMBERLY

Good evening ladies and gentlemen! I am Kimberly von Lindtmire. Allow me to welcome you to a very special episode of Earl Grey Matter. For tonight, we celebrate our centesimal episode!

(Applause.)

KIMBERLY

Yes, it's very exciting. In order to celebrate the success of the program, we've decided to expand our horizons and do something unprecedented. For the first time ever, we are welcoming on a guest from across the pond.

(The studio audience reacts.)

KIMBERLY

That's right! An American guest will be joining us tonight, and from what I've been told she is quite the character. Joining us from the "Beehive State" of Utah, please join me in welcoming Silmera Pirpin!

(Applause and cheering. SILMERA enters with a confident stride and slows to a stop on her way to the table, taking in the sights and sounds of the scene with amusement and excitement. She cheers back at the audience and encourages them to get louder. As she takes her seat she shakes KIMBERLY'S hand.)

KIMBERLY

Good evening, Ms. Pirpin! That was quite the exuberant entrance! I trust that your time in London has been pleasant thus far?

SILMERA

Oh yeah, I've been having a good time; fancy buildings, good food. Your guys have been great, real nice folks, and of course this place is amazing!

KIMBERLY

Why thank you, it is quite lovely isn't it?

SILMERA

Hmm. Yes, quite. Hey, and sorry about the hold-up. We had to pull over on the way up for me to use one those telephone boxes. I forgot I had a trebuchet set up on a . . . in a particular location back home, and I needed to make sure someone broke it down for me.

(looking at camera)

Mr. Larvy, if you're watching this, they were all over-ripe anyway. And we fed your horses for you, so you can thank us later!

KIMBERLY

Haha . . . we don't broadcast to Utah, Ms. Pirpin. And did you say a trebuchet? As in, the medieval siege weapon?

SILMERA

Yep! My nephew thought it'd be fun to make one and woo-ee was he right. You'd think that those pumpkins had wings, Kim.

KIMBERLY

Fascinating. Well, I think it's about time we got the game underway. Are you ready, Ms. Pirpin?

SILMERA

You betcha!

KIMBERLY

Ladies and gentlemen, are you ready?

(The studio audience applauds and cheers.)

KIMBERLY

Then prepare yourselves for the 100th episode of . . . Earl Grey Matter! As always, a brief explanation of the rules. Each round I will ask you a multiple choice question of varying subject matter. When you are sure of your answer, you will confirm your choice by taking a sip from the corresponding cup of tea in front of you. Following that, we'll chat for a spell before moving on to the next round. At the end of five rounds, we will reveal your results. Three out of five correct answers, and you walk away with 5000 pounds! That's about 6900 dollars for any American viewers. Any less than that, and you'll leave here with nothing more than a pleasant experience. So, with all that said, are you prepared for your first question?

SILMERA

Bring it on!

KIMBERLY

Excellent. Then without further ado . . .

(KIMBERLY removes a card from his pocket and reads it)

KIMBERLY

Question one. "Which Italian liquor, named for the plant it is made from, is popular for its combination of anise and black licorice flavors?" Is it "A: Cynar," "B: Sambuca," or "C: Aperol?"

SILMERA

Well, I can tell you this Kim: whatever it is, I don't want it! If it isn't made with barley, yeast, and/or hops, hand me a different bottle.

KIMBERLY

Quite specific tastes, I see.

SILMERA

I like what I like. And what even is anise anyway? Can I phone a friend? I met a couple of winos at a parachuting competition once, they might know.

KIMBERLY

Um, no. But I can tell you that anise is a type of flowering plant.

SILMERA

Flowering plant, huh? I don't think that helps. What were my choices again?

KIMBERLY

“A: Cynar,” “B: Sambuca,” or “C: Aperol.”

SILMERA

Hmm. Aperol kinda sounds like “apple,” and apples are for sure a plant. So, “C: Aperol.”

KIMBERLY

A— Are you sure?

SILMERA

Kim, that's as sure as I am going to get.

KIMBERLY

It's only that your reasoning is quite unusual. But you do seem confident, so by all means. . .

SILMERA

Yep! It's “C” Kim, give me answer number “C!”

KIMBERLY

You must confirm your answer Ms. Pirpin.

SILMERA

I did. Oh, right.

(SILMERA picks up the “C” cup.)

SILMERA

Bon Appetit, sir!

(She drinks it and forces herself to swallow it. Despite her best efforts to mask disgust, it's obvious that she doesn't like the taste.)

SILMERA

Mm. Must be unsweet.

KIMBERLY

It's earl grey, as the name of our show would imply. It's our own proprietary blend.

SILMERA

Gotcha.

KIMBERLY

So, Ms. Pirpin. My producers tell me that you claim to have went to Harvard twice, is that right?

SILMERA

Yep.

KIMBERLY

I suppose that the study of distillation was not on the curriculum. Or did you decide to double up on medieval warfare instead? Either way, I think we're all curious to find out how you came to study at such a prestigious institute on two separate occasions.

SILMERA

Study? No, I didn't study at Harvard. I *went* to Harvard.

KIMBERLY

Are those not the same thing?

SILMERA

No. See, I never studied. For anything, ever. All of my tests in school? Winged 'em. Thought it would be too easy to just know the answers beforehand, you know? All I needed was my knowhow and this lucky cap. We always pulled through; straight "C's" y'all! Not good enough for Harvard, but good enough for me.

KIMBERLY

(shocked)

Then what do you mean by "went to Harvard?!"

SILMERA

I met one of their professors at a logrolling qualifier. I went up to visit a couple of times when I happened to be passing through. Great campus. Really makes you feel smart just standing in there, it's incredible!

KIMBERLY

“Passing through?” If I have my geography right, Harvard is on the other side of the country!

SILMERA

And it is a beautiful country, Kim. Can’t help but do a little ramblin’ every now and then.

KIMBERLY

I see. I think we’ll go ahead and move right along to question two,
(at the camera)

after a word from our sponsors. Don’t go anywhere, I’m sure we have a very interesting show ahead of us.

(KIMBERLY waits for confirmation that the commercial break has started, then abruptly stands up from his seat. He speaks into his earpiece.)

KIMBERLY

We’re going to need a new set of question cards, on the double! Ms. Pirpin! May I have a brief word with you, please?

SILMERA

Sure thing Kim. What’s up?

(They walk out of sight of the studio audience.)

KIMBERLY

Did you deliberately lie to us, Ms. Pirpin?

SILMERA

Excuse me. I never lied to anyone. During my interview they asked if I had any “higher education.” I told ‘em, “No, but I went to Harvard twice.” You know, just joshin’. They laughed about it, so I thought they got the joke. Guess not.

KIMBERLY

They didn’t question you further?

SILMERA

No. Said they wanted to “save it for the show.” Guess they got the surprise they wanted! He-he, that’s funny.

KIMBERLY

Funny? I’m not sure what qualifies for humor in the States but embarrassing yourself on live television is not what I’d call funny!

SILMERA

Embarrassing myself? I'm having a blast. See, I don't embarrass easy. You wanna know why?

KIMBERLY

Why?

SILMERA

See, most people say, "You'll laugh about this later." But me? I say, "Why wait?" It's no big deal, Kim, I'll have fun either way.

KIMBERLY

Regardless, we must uphold the integrity of the program. It's simply not fair for you to answer questions written with an Ivy League graduate in mind, so we've—

(A member of the STAGE CREW enters with cards in hand and gives them to KIMBERLY.)

STAGE CREW

Mr. Lindtmire, the new questions. Pulled these from the archives.

KIMBERLY
(pocketing them)

Thank you.

(STAGE CREW exits.)

KIMBERLY

We've prepared some easier general knowledge questions for you that should be, erm . . .

SILMERA

More my speed?

KIMBERLY

If you will.

SILMERA

Look here, I know I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, I'll freely admit that. But I'm not looking to have any part of this dumbed down for me. You wouldn't do it for anyone else, would you?

KIMBERLY

Well, that depends.

SILMERA

On what?

KIMBERLY

This is a special circumstance. You came all this way, there's money on the line, and—

SILMERA

I didn't do this for the prize; I did it to be on TV, and to have fun. I want the original questions, please.

KIMBERLY

Very well.

(hearing from his earpiece)

Let's get back on stage, we're going live in ten.

(They return to their seats.)

KIMBERLY

5, 4, 3, 2 . . . Welcome back everyone, to the 100th episode of Earl Grey Matter! Earlier we got to know a little bit more about our special American guest, Ms. Pirpin: parachutist, logroller, and trebuchet enthusiast. But is she a trivia master? We'll soon find out. Ms. Pirpin, are you ready for your next question?

SILMERA

We'll see!

KIMBERLY

Right then. Question two.

(He pulls one of the easy questions.)

KIMBERLY

“Acetaminophen is also commonly known as which of these household items?” Is it “A: Tylenol,” “B: white-out,” or “C: toothpaste?”

SILMERA

I know that one! “A: Tylenol!”

(SILMERA hesitates briefly before drinking from the “A” cup.)

KIMBERLY

Wow! Absolutely no pondering necessary there!

SILMERA

Nope. See, I went to a friend's golf tournament once. The most boring thing I have ever endured. I can't tell you how many times I read the ingredients list on my Tylenol bottle just to pass the time. I even made up a little tune. I think I still remember it too.

(singing)

“Active ingredient: acetaminophen. Inactive ingredients: anhydrous citric acid, butylparaben, calcium sulfate, and carrageenan!” Yadda yadda yadda. Not to mention it’s printed right there on the front in big bold letters.

(knowingly)

That one seemed pretty *easy* to me, Kim.

KIMBERLY

Hm. That cap of yours may be lucky yet. How about the next question?

SILMERA

Hit me.

(KIMBERLY pulls from the original questions.)

KIMBERLY

Question three. “In 1727, Thomas Short wrote that you could become overweight by merely living near what type of environment?” Is it “A: Taiga,” “B: Swamp,” or “C: Waterfall?”

SILMERA

Taiga . . . that’s snow, right?

KIMBERLY

That it is, Ms. Pirpin.

SILMERA

In that case I think I went dog-sledding in a taiga once, up in Alaska. They’re pretty physically fit up there. Swamp . . . tagged along on a diving expedition in a swamp, they all fit in their suits just fine. Waterfall . . . who lives next to a waterfall?

KIMBERLY

A bit more challenging, hm?

(SILMERA makes a show of thinking hard about her answer, scratching her chin, comically over-exaggerating the movements of her face. She looks at KIMBERLY, then at the studio audience, then up at the ceiling. She suddenly comes up with her answer.)

SILMERA

Ah-ha!

KIMBERLY

A revelation?

SILMERA

Dog sleds are pulled by huskies. And what do you call a fat person? Husky! The answer is "A" Kim, without a doubt!

(SILMERA sips from the "A" cup.)

KIMBERLY

Truth be told, I've never heard of anyone being called "husky" before. I suppose you learn something new every day.

SILMERA

You ought to, I think.

KIMBERLY

And you seem to live by that. Ms. Pirpin, I am quite impressed by the number of things you seem to have done in your lifetime, spanning all across the US. How is it do you find the time and means to do all this travel and sport?

SILMERA

Kim, my daddy always told me that there are three things you never talk about in public: religion, politics, and money, in that order. But I will say that if you need any high-class carpentry done, I'm your gal. As for time? I am blessed with the privilege of being my own boss, and so I take as many off days as I want.

KIMBERLY

Surely your work keeps you busy?

SILMERA

Oh yeah, when I want it to. But finding the time to let yourself have fun, being happy, that's more important than any paycheck, Kim.

KIMBERLY

That is a very pleasant sentiment.

SILMERA

'Course, I'm too old now to be doing all the action-packed business that I used to, but that hasn't stopped my adventure. Not for a second.

KIMBERLY

It certainly sounds like you've got it all figured out Ms. Pirpin. But do you think that you can figure out your next question?

SILMERA

I'm ready to rock.

KIMBERLY

Excellent. Here's question four. "This word, first published in the 1620's, describes the sun's warmth on a cold winter's day." Is it "A: Labarum," "B: Apricity," or "C: Kinchin?"

SILMERA

I just call that sunlight, Kim.

KIMBERLY

The 1620's loved it's fancy words, it would seem.

SILMERA

I wouldn't know, I've never been.

KIMBERLY

At this point, that's a surprise.

SILMERA

(chuckling)

Yeah, right? Well, you know what they say: "If you can't see the answer, c's the answer."

(SILMERA sips from the "C" cup.)

KIMBERLY

(annoyed)

I've never heard anyone say that, either.

SILMERA

Eh, must be a local thing.

KIMBERLY

It's certainly sounds like an American mantra to me.

(to the camera)

But will it be enough to secure the victory? We'll find out after the final question when we return.

(KIMBERLY waits for commercial, then suddenly stands up as before.)

KIMBERLY

(gesturing off-stage)

Ms. Pirpin?

SILMERA

Yeah, yeah.

(They move aside again.)

KIMBERLY

I can see that you are well-intentioned, and you've made your personal philosophy very clear. But may I speak honestly with you?

SILMERA

Sure, shoot.

KIMBERLY

To you, this may simply be another one of your frivolous excursions, but to me, it's more than that. I'm sure it sounds silly to be sentimental over a television program, but it's *my* program, Ms. Pirpin. You're a craftswoman; if I tossed a seat of yours into the mantle, well, that might hurt your feelings. So perhaps you could try taking the game a bit more seriously?

SILMERA

Oh. Gee, I'm sorry.

KIMBERLY

It's quite alright. You don't have to apologize. It would have done me well to communicate the etiquette to you from the onset, I suppose.

SILMERA

I did get here late, not much chance for that.

KIMBERLY

In any case, lecturing a stranger on manners wouldn't have been a good first impression, I'm afraid.

SILMERA

Am I not still a stranger?

KIMBERLY

Not so much. That's what this program's all about, after all.

(lightening the mood)

And now that I think on it, this episode has become quite special. In an unforeseen sort of way. You are quite the personality, Ms. Pirpin. I can't say we've ever had such an expressive contestant before.

SILMERA

Why, thank you.

KIMBERLY

Of course. Credit where it's due and all that. It's no wonder you had so many nominations to come on. You seem prone to making friends wherever you go.

SILMERA

You are too kind.

(KIMBERLY gets a notification from his earpiece.)

KIMBERLY

We're going on in just a moment. Are you ready?

SILMERA

You know it, Mr. Lindtmire!

KIMBERLY

Back onstage we go, then.

(They return once more to their seats.)

KIMBERLY

In 5, 4, 3, 2 . . . Welcome back everyone to the centennial episode of Earl Grey Matter! Our first ever American guest, Ms. Silmerra Pirpin, has revealed to us her adventurous spirit and fun-loving way of life, but can she translate that evergreen passion into a win here tonight? I think it's time to find out. Ms. Pirpin, are you ready for your final question?

SILMERA

Aren't I always, Mr. Lindtmire?

KIMBERLY

That you are. Here comes question five. This one might be a bit *tough*, Ms. Pirpin.

(SILMERA adjusts her cap with determination.)

SILMERA

Lay it on me.

KIMBERLY

"Which of these artists was known to sleep with a key in their hand above a metal plate, such that when they fell asleep, the key would fall upon the plate, waking them immediately?" Is it "A: Salvador Dali," "B: Omillette Dartón," or "C: Mark Rothko?"

SILMERA

(focused)

Let's see. I think I've heard of that Omillette guy somewhere. My great, great, great, whatever grandma knew him or some such. They say he was an early bird, but he liked his naps. Can't be him. Mark Rothko? Never heard of him. Sounds sensible though. But Salvador Dali, I know he was a kook. He was the guy that did the, uh, melting clocks, right? Anyone who can think of that's gotta be some kind of unhinged. 'Course, maybe Mark is actually a nut and I don't know. Hmm . . .

(SILMERA thinks for an extended period.)

SILMERA

Mr. Lindtmire?

KIMBERLY

Yes, Ms. Pirpin?

SILMERA

I'm going to go with my gut.

KIMBERLY

Your gut?

SILMERA

Yep. And my gut . . .

(She picks up the “A” cup)

SILMERA

. . . is telling me: “Salvador Dali.”

(She sips from the cup and places it down triumphantly.)

KIMBERLY

Do you trust your gut?

SILMERA

It's never wrong, most of the time.

KIMBERLY

We'll see. Now is the moment you've all been waiting for, for now we reveal Ms. Pirpin's final score! Let's get right into it! On question one, you answered, “A: Aperol,” which was . . . incorrect! The correct answer was “B: Sambuca!” On question two, you answered quite confidently, “A: Tylenol,” which was . . . correct! You're one for two. On question three, you answered, “A: Taiga,” which was . . . incorrect! The correct answer was “B: Swamp.” So, Ms. Pirpin, now we've a situation.

SILMERA

Why's that?

KIMBERLY

You currently have a score of one out of five. In order for you to go home 5000 pounds – or 6900 dollars – richer, you need to have answered both of the last two questions correctly. Do you feel confident?

SILMERA

Pretty much.

KIMBERLY

Then let us continue. On question four, you answered . . . “C: Kinchin.” Which was . . .

(An extended, dramatic pause.)

KIMBERLY

. . . Incorrect! Oh, no! That is a heartbreaker, ladies and gentlemen! Ms. Pirpin, I am sorry to say that you are no longer eligible to win the cash prize.

SILMERA

Hey, it happens. Not like I’m leaving here any poorer than when I came in.

KIMBERLY

You know, I think we could all learn something from that shining attitude of yours. But let’s not throw in the towel quite yet, because we still have one more result to reveal, and here it is. On question five, you answered, “A: Salvador Dali,” which was . . . correct!

(Music begins to play.)

KIMBERLY

That leaves you with a final score of two out of five! An admirable performance. Is there anything you’d like to leave our audience with before we depart?

SILMERA

I’d just like to say that this was wonderful! I didn’t win, but I did what I came here to do, which was try something new and have fun doing it. And hey Mr. Lindtmire, now we’ve both got friends on the other side of the pond. So, thank you,

(to the studio audience)

and thank all of you for a great experience!

KIMBERLY

And thank you for being a fantastic guest! We wish you a safe trip back to the States.

(to the camera)

That’s our show for tonight everybody! Thank you so much for joining us for this special 100th episode of our humble program, and for every other moment you’ve spent with us, here on Earl Grey Matter. Good night!

(A transition.)

BILLIE

If this was recorded on VHS, then how do you know what happened backstage?

ALEX

The last thing that Silmera put on her “Rusty Bucket List” was to write an autobiography. She cites that story as one of her favorites; she goes into the backstage details there.

BILLIE

That's convenient. But you don't think she embellished the story just a bit? She seems to be the type.

ALEX

There's always the video evidence, eh?

BILLIE

Guess I'll just have to take your word for it. It's plausible enough, although that cap didn't really seem all that lucky.

ALEX

I think it's all about your point of view.

BILLIE

That I can accept.

Scene D – Trekking Pole

(BILLIE leans on one of the tables. The trekking pole that was resting against the table falls over. BILLIE picks it up and examines it. It is made of driftwood that has been painted with colorful patterns. A large crack runs its length, and several etchings are carved into it.)

BILLIE

Mrs. Pirpin, I think this walking stick may be broken. Or was it like this already?

ALEX

Yeah, don't worry! It's driftwood, it's supposed to look like that.

BILLIE

I see. I like the paint job.

ALEX

It's nice, isn't it? Wish I could say it was my handywork, but I prefer a pen to a paintbrush. This was a trekking pole used by great aunt Aurora. She loved exploring the wilderness, setting foot where no one ever has. That's what she loved most. She was like a modern-day pioneer.

BILLIE

Not much that's unexplored these days. You've got to go to the extremes for that. Did she do these etchings too? What are these supposed to be? Hieroglyphs? Kanji?

ALEX

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

BILLIE

Come on.

(BILLIE realizes what ALEX might be getting at.)

BILLIE

No. No way . . .

ALEX

I think I know what you're thinking, but just bear with me on this one.

(A transition. AURORA enters. She wears thick winter clothes and a pair of snow goggles. She holds her trekking pole with strength and dignity, as a queen would her scepter. She has covered a long distance to reach this summit, and as she looks out across the landscape she reflects on her journey. AURORA removes her goggles to take in the majesty in its full glory. She inhales and exhales deeply, the weight of her satisfaction being carried on her breath. She sits in the snow with her legs crossed and rests her pole on her lap. She closes her eyes gently and allows herself to "feel" the environment around her. In this moment, AURORA is totally at peace. The warm sun bathes her in an almost divine light, and she remains completely still despite the cold wind that blows around her. She remains this way for an extended period. In her trance-like state, she doesn't notice the wind growing stronger and the sky growing darker. Gradually, the weather transforms into the early flurries of a snowstorm. At this point, AURORA opens her eyes. She stands with pole in hand, having the look of a powerful wizard who senses a disturbance in the universe. She puts her goggles back on and surveys her surroundings. She checks her watch against a weather chart; there wasn't supposed to be a storm today. The weather quickly worsens. Visibility has been reduced to a few yards and the whistling of the wind has become a malevolent hiss. AURORA determines the direction she must take to return to her camp and marches forward. The wind works against her. A sudden gust blindsides her and she is knocked to the ground. She stands, disoriented. Visibility is no more than a few feet, and the hiss of the wind has evolved into a roar. AURORA plants her pole into the snow to stabilize herself. She summons forth great focus to "see through" the storm and reorient herself. She is devoid of panic, her stoicism almost statuesque. Behind her, the silhouette of a FIGURE

materializes from the within the storm. An otherworldly sound cuts through the noise. AURORA is alerted and turns to see the FIGURE. She removes the garments obstructing her mouth and calls to them. "Hello? Are you here to help?" Only the motion of the words are seen; the words themselves are swallowed by the storm. The FIGURE stands motionless. AURORA waves her arm in broad arcs. The FIGURE waves back. "Here," AURORA beckons fruitlessly, "come this way!" The FIGURE once again stands unmoving until suddenly a pinpoint of light radiates from one of its limbs, at which point it begins to draw shapes with it in the air. When it seems to finish a shape, the light disappears and then reappears, at which point it begins a new shape. AURORA watches this for a number a repetitions. She is puzzled but fascinated, forgetting for a brief time the circumstances that she has found herself in. It is only after another gust of wind threatens to knock her down that she regains lucidity. She procures a flashlight from within one of her pockets and with it flashes "SOS" in Morse code. The FIGURE ceases their drawing and becomes idle once again. It flashes its light rapidly with increasing brightness until AURORA is forced to look away. When she turns back around, the FIGURE has vanished. She peers into the snow to spot the mysterious subject with no success. However, she realizes that the snowstorm is rapidly subsiding around her. She is amazed; as quickly as it came, it went. AURORA jogs from one end of the summit to the other, searching for a hint of the FIGURE's presence. She scans the skyline and looks above her head. She looks inward, asking herself if what she saw was real or some kind of illusion. She quickly abandons this line of questioning, choosing instead to accept her experience and find meaning in it. AURORA stands tall and closes her eyes. She inhales and exhales deeply. She finds her way and exits.)

ALEX

. . . and as soon as she returned to her camp, she carved the shapes into that pole to the best of her memory. She never figured out what the figure was or what the shapes meant, nor has anyone else. To this day it's one of the most mysterious stories in our family.

(BILLIE is very annoyed. He decides he no longer wants to humor ALEX. He sets the pole in its original position.)

BILLIE

You'll really say anything to sell this stuff . . .

ALEX

I'm only telling it how I was told.

BILLIE

With all due respect, Mrs. Pirpin, aliens aren't real. I like a good story but come on. My suspension of disbelief has its limits.

ALEX

Bu—

BILLIE

Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to browse your wares, as I came here to do.

Scene 2 – Alex's Yard Sale

(BILLIE walks away and looks around the sale in silence. ALEX deflates a bit. She goes back to unpacking and cataloguing her items. KARAH enters from the house. In one hand she is holding a bottle of water and in the other a stack of labels.)

KARAH

We cut some labels out for you, mommy! And here's some water, too.

(She hands the items to ALEX proudly.)

ALEX

Thank you so much, sweetie! You were careful with the scissors, right?

(KARAH looks back towards the house to see if her dad is watching from the window. She looks back at ALEX and giggles.)

KARAH

We used the butcher knife, blindfolded!

(She pantomimes the action and laughs.)

ALEX

Wow. These were cut pretty good for being blindfolded!

(looking towards the window)

I don't even think we own a butcher knife.

(KARAH laughs some more.)

KARAH

(as if revealing a big secret)

I'm just kidding mommy! I was just joking! I used scissors and I didn't have a blindfold on.

ALEX

I know sweetie, your daddy just likes to be funny doesn't he?

KARAH

He-he, yeah.

ALEX

Plus you're way too smart to do something that dumb.

KARAH

Yeah! I'm really smart!

(KARAH notices BILLIE who is kneeling in front of and examining the rocking horse.)

KARAH

Hi, mister!

BILLIE

Hm?

KARAH

Hello!

BILLIE

Hello.

ALEX

This is my daughter, Karah. She's helping me out today, right?

KARAH

Right!

ALEX

Karah, this is Mr. Billie. I've been telling him all kinds of stories about the things we're selling.

BILLIE

She sure has.

KARAH

I want to hear a story!

ALEX

Doesn't daddy still need your help inside?

KARAH

He can wait, he'll understand.

(ALEX chuckles and looks at BILLIE as if to say, "kids, right?" BILLIE gives an amused scoff and smiles softly.)

ALEX

Okay, Karah, but only if Mr. Billie wants to hear one too.

KARAH

Please, Mr. Billie? Mommy tells fun stories!

BILLIE

I guess I've got time to spare. How about this rocking horse? You have a story for this?

ALEX

Actually, I happened to hear a great story about a rocking horse just earlier today. But I should warn you, it's pretty scary.

(KARAH gasps then hops with excitement.)

KARAH

That's my story!

ALEX

You know what? It sure is! Do you want to tell it for Mr. Billie?

(KARAH suddenly clams up and shakes her head "no.")

ALEX

Oh, but sweetie, you tell it so well!

KARAH

I don't want to.

ALEX

Why not?

KARAH

He's going to laugh at me.

ALEX

No, he's not. Am I right, Mr. Billie?

BILLIE

That's right. I wouldn't laugh at you. Hey, if you're anything like your mom, I'm sure that you're great at telling stories.

ALEX

See, Karah? He's nice.

BILLIE

I'm really excited to hear your story, Karah.

(KARAH thinks it over.)

KARAH

Hmm. Okay! But it's scary!

BILLIE

I'll brace myself.

KARAH

“The Girl and Her Rocking Horse!” Chapter one. “There once was a pretty girl in a big house. And her family had a lot of money and bought her all the toys in the world! And even though the girl was pretty and had a lot of toys, she was also mean. She loved her toys more than her mommy or daddy. And her favorite toy was her rocking horse.”

BILLIE

You mean . . . this one, right here?

KARAH

Yeah! “One day she rode her rocking horse into the big toy room, and she got lost in toys because there were so many toys. And her mommy and daddy tried to find her, but couldn't find her. And so then they ordered a bunch of people to find her, but they only found the rocking horse, but not the girl. And they think that the rocking horse is haunted by the girl's ghost, and that she rides it when she feels like it.” End of chapter one.

BILLIE

Wow. That was really good. In fact, I think I felt a chill run up my spine!

KARAH

Thank you.

ALEX

Chapter one? Since when did it have chapters?

KARAH

Daddy said I should write a book and books have chapters, mommy.

ALEX

Right, of course.

BILLIE

So you're telling me this rocking horse is . . . haunted?

KARAH

Well . . . it could be . . .

(BILLIE secretly moves his hand behind the rocking horse.)

BILLIE

Wait! Did you hear that? I think I heard the pretty girl's voice!

KARAH

Really?!

BILLIE

You have to listen really close.

(KARAH focuses intently on the rocking horse. The tension builds. Suddenly, BILLIE rocks the horse with his hidden hand and says "boo," prompting KARAH to yelp and exit back towards the house, laughing.)

ALEX

Thanks for playing along.

BILLIE

There really isn't a ghost? Thank goodness.

(beat)

Your daughter is very sweet.

ALEX

Yeah, I know. She's pretty awesome.

BILLIE

Mrs. Pirpin, I'd like to apologize if I was rude before.

ALEX

Hey, I get it. You probably just expected a quick round of yard sale'ing today; you don't need some crazy lady spinning you a tale for every thingamajig.

BILLIE

That's the thing. I'm not really in any hurry. And your stories have been entertaining. I wonder though: do you really have one for every single thing on this lawn?

ALEX

Is that a challenge, Mr. Billie?

Scene E - Safe

(BILLIE walks briskly around the yard searching for an item to choose. He stubs his toe on the safe's door, which is slightly ajar.)

BILLIE

Ouch! Darn thing!

(He swabs some dust off the top of the safe with his finger.)

BILLE

You know what, how about this? You don't have a tale for this dusty old safe, do you?

ALEX

As a matter of fact, Mr. Billie . . .

(She shuts the safe's door.)

ALEX

. . . I do.

(A transition. A small fishing boat sits in the water in the late afternoon. DARON and RONNY enter on the pier behind the boat carrying the safe. With some effort, they set it down onto the deck of the boat. DARON is still wearing his work uniform. RONNY wears a rain jacket.)

RONNY

Holy crap! That thing is heavy!

DARON

About three or four hundred pounds if I had to guess.

RONNY

What's in there?

DARON

Shouldn't be anything in there.

RONNY

Geez. Sure felt full.

DARON

Well I'm telling you it's empty! Nobody's bought me my rifle yet.

RONNY

Don't look at me; ask mom. She's got all the money, right?

DARON

(chuckling)

I've taught you well, son.

(RONNY looks up at the darkening sky.)

RONNY

Dad, are you sure this is a good idea? The weather is supposed to get bad.

DARON

Ronny, I don't like to repeat myself! It's a quick trip there and back. Look, you can see his house on the other side of the lake!

RONNY

Barely.

DARON

We'll make it before the rain hits, just calm down. You trust your dad, right?

RONNY

Dad, come on.

DARON

You do, don't you?

RONNY

Yes, I trust you. We could just drive there and avoid the risk though, you know?

DARON

Ronny!

RONNY

Just saying.

DARON

And I hear you, but I know what I'm doing! It'll be quicker this way, and it's good for the boat to actually run it every once in a while.

(DARON prepares the boat for departure and starts it up.)

RONNY

(hesitantly)

Hey, uh, what's the weight capacity of this thing?

DARON

For the love of— Why don't you just wait here at the house if you're so worried, huh? If you're going to complain the whole time then I don't want you coming along.

RONNY

No, I want to help. I'll just shut up.

DARON

(exasperated)

Come on. I don't want you to be pissy the whole time, either!

RONNY

I'm fine. Let's get this thing done.

DARON

Alright.

(They depart. The weight of the safe causes the boat to struggle as it starts but soon returns to normal operation. DARON takes note of RONNY'S concerned look.)

DARON

Like I said, we haven't used the boat in a while. It's just "de-rusting," is all.

RONNY

I didn't say anything.

(There is silence between them for a period.)

RONNY

Hey, Dad.

DARON

Yeah, Ron?

RONNY

What exactly did Chuck say was wrong with the safe?

DARON

I don't know. Something about the locking mechanism or something.

RONNY

How'd it break? You've barely used it. You said it was new, right?

DARON

No, not new. New to *me*. The admin ladies are getting their offices renovated. Made me move the thing out but said I could keep it. Guess I know why.

(grimacing)

Mel. Figures she'd let me haul a three hundred pound piece of junk all the way home.

RONNY

Well, Chuck said he could fix it so . . . joke's on Mel, right?

DARON

We'll see. When he looked at it the other day he seemed to think it was pretty bad.

RONNY

Is that the same day he came over to watch the game?

DARON

Yep.

RONNY

I was wondering why he left so late.

DARON

He wanted to see the safe for himself. We got up there and just couldn't get it open.

RONNY

Hm.

(Another period of silence. The weather has since progressed into a light drizzle. The engine of the boat begins to sputter.)

RONNY

What the heck?

DARON

What's the matter now?

RONNY

You don't hear the engine?

DARON

I'm you, son: we haven't run the boat in a while so there's going to be a few hiccups while it's—

(The engine gives a few loud pops before falling silent. The boat begins to decelerate; they've run out of fuel.)

DARON

(to self)

You gotta be kidding me.

(RONNY stares ahead, doing his best to maintain a neutral expression. DARON attempts to restart the engine. After a few fruitless attempts, he checks the fuel gauge. He gives it a couple knocks before slamming it in frustration.)

DARON

God—

(DARON kicks the boat.)

DARON

Dang it! Stupid thing!

(DARON aggravatedly slouches into his seat. RONNY waits until he has cooled down some to speak.)

RONNY

We ran out of fuel?

DARON

What do you think? The one time I forgot to fuel the f—

(a moment to breathe)

Yeah, we're empty. I forgot to fuel the boat before we left.

(The weather has progressed into proper rainfall.)

DARON

And now the weather doesn't want to cooperate either!

(RONNY wants to say, "I told you so," but knows better than to do so.)

RONNY

Do we have any extra tanks?

(DARON gets up and checks.)

DARON

No. I can't believe this!

(DARON goes to drop the anchor.)

DARON

We're stranded out here. And with a storm coming in too!

(The anchor is dropped. RONNY checks his phone.)

RONNY

I've still got service. I'll call mom, tell her we're stuck out here.

DARON

What's she going to be able to do?

RONNY

I just figured she'd like to know.

(DARON checks his own phone.)

DARON

I've still got service too. You call mom and I'll call the harbormaster.

RONNY

(afraid)

Oh, man . . .

DARON

Ron?

(Dread begins to overtake RONNY. DARON holds him by the shoulders.)

DARON

Hey. Ron, listen to me. Stay calm. Panicking isn't going to help. Take a breath. We'll probably get a little wet, but we'll be fine, okay?

RONNY

Okay. I'm going to make this call now.

DARON

Attaboy.

(DARON and RONNY dial their respective people and seem to connect at the same time. Their speech is staggered over each other.)

DARON

Hello—

RONNY

Hey, mom—

DARON

Me and my son are stranded on lake Pascreetiwok—

RONNY

No, we got caught out in the lake—

DARON

Our boat is out of fuel—

RONNY

We ran out of gas—

DARON

We have no extra fuel onboard, and our anchor is away. We have heavy cargo—

RONNY

Yes, we checked. The anchor is down too. We're just going to hunker down until help arrives—

DARON

He's on the phone with his mother—

RONNY

He's on the phone with the harbormaster.

RONNY/DARON

Do you need to talk to him?

RONNY

Ok, we'll try to stay safe. Love you, mom—

DARON

Thank you, we're not going anywhere.

RONNY/DARON

Buh-bye./Goodbye.

(They hang up their phones. The weather has gotten rougher.)

RONNY

She said she's watching us from the window.

DARON

We'll see how far that gets her through this mess!

RONNY

What did the harbormaster say?

DARON

The Pascreetiwok Lake Authority's going to come out to us soon.

RONNY

Thank God!

(An enormous crack of thunder ushers in even nastier rain. The boat rocks with alarming ferocity. The safe shifts dubiously. RONNY begins to unravel again.)

DARON

The hell did this come from? Let's the life vests on!

(DARON rummages for life jackets.)

RONNY

Why didn't we do that before?!

DARON

We didn't need them then.

RONNY

Well, we sure as hell do now, don't we?!

DARON

You better stop shouting at me, boy! What did I say about staying calm?

RONNY

Just give me the jacket already!

(DARON passes a jacket to RONNY. They put them on.)

DARON

There, see? We're fine. The worst that could happen is that we go for a swim..

RONNY

Yeah, in a white capping lake in the middle of a rainstorm. Not to mention the junk that could be sloshing around in there!

DARON

What junk?

RONNY

I don't know! Fishhooks, needles, broken glass . . . grenades—

(A crack of thunder.)

DARON

Grenades? What in the world are you talking about?

RONNY

Do you remember that time we went to Uncle Bug's house, and we—

(Thunder.)

RONNY

Never mind, I'll tell you later.

(A large wave causes the safe to slide towards DARON, who stumbles out of the way.)

RONNY

Dad! Are you alright?

DARON

I'm fine. That thing's become much more trouble than it's worth!

RONNY

So much for "safe," am I right?

DARON

(smirking)

Shut up.

(The safe slides towards RONNY.)

DARON

Ron!

(RONNY clumsily dodges it. The safe tips over and falls on its side. A yelp is heard from within. RONNY returns quickly to his feet, paralyzed.)

DARON
(laughing)

Was that you?

RONNY

No.

(DARON'S smile fades.)

DARON

Then who . . .

(They both look at the safe. They stand silently in the rain until DARON grabs a makeshift weapon and kicks the safe's door.)

DARON

Who's in there?

(DARON hits the safe with his weapon.)

DARON

Come out and show yourself! Ronny, behind me, now.

(The worst of the storm seems to have passed. DARON readies his weapon. The door opens slowly.)

MEL

Okay, I'm coming out! Don't hit me, I'm unarmed!

DARON

Is that . . . ?

(MEL emerges with her hands up in surrender looking haggard and slightly frenzied.)

DARON

What the hell? Mel?!

RONNY

That's Mel?

MEL

Yeah, it's me. Now give me a jacket before we sink!

DARON

You were in there the whole time?

MEL

I don't have to tell you anything.

(DARON makes a slight advance towards MEL with his weapon raised. MEL retracts.)

DARON

You were *hiding* in my safe on my boat; you better tell me everything!

MEL

Daron, I know you wouldn't hit an old lady. You're better than that, right?

(DARON casts his weapon aside and backs off.)

DARON

Wow. That's high praise coming from you.

MEL

So, can I have a jacket or what?

(DARON scowls at MEL.)

RONNY

There's only two, ma'am.

DARON

Don't call her that. Besides, we're not sinking. The worst has passed.

MEL

Well, do you have anything to eat? I've been starving in there.

RONNY

Sorry, Ms. Mel, we didn't bring any—

DARON

Oh, we got plenty.

(DARON tosses a fishing pole at MEL'S feet.)

DARON

Just got to catch it, that's all.

MEL

I don't think you should be so rude to me, Daron. I work in admin. I can have you fired!

DARON

I don't think you're going back to the office, Mel. You have been on my private property, and in my private property, without my permission for who knows how long. The Pascreetiwok Lake Authority is on their way right now, and I don't think they're going to care who you are when they turn you over to the police for trespassing!

(DARON advances towards MEL again.)

DARON

You're going to have to explain yourself one way or another, so why don't you tell me what is going on here?

MEL

Screw you, Daron!

(MEL looks away but DARON continues to stare her down.)

MEL

It was Chuck, okay? Chuck put me up to it! Stop looking at me!

DARON

Chuck?

RONNY

What? I thought Chuck was one of your buddies.

DARON

Yeah, he is. You sure you're not making things up?

MEL

Honest! The chainsaw; it's about the chainsaw!

(DARON is initially confused but remembers what she is talking about. He is hit with a combination of amusement, embarrassment, irritation, and relief.)

DARON

The freakin' chainsaw!

RONNY

What chainsaw? Is there a story here?

DARON

Just a dumb thing that happened at work, it's not important. What does this have to do with that?

RONNY

No, wait. What happened with the chainsaw? I want to know.

DARON

Seriously, Ron?

MEL

Yeah, Daron, why don't you tell him?

DARON

Mel! Hmph. Okay. Basically, Chuck bought a new chainsaw for the shop, he left it laying around, and I accidentally backed up over it with my work truck.

RONNY

You ran over Chuck's chainsaw?

DARON

I did not "run it over!" That makes it sound like I did it on purpose, and I didn't! Maybe he shouldn't have put it in the middle of the— Whatever, point is he told me to pay him back, which I plan to, but I keep forgetting to bring the cash to work.

RONNY

That is pretty dumb.

DARON

Yeah, thanks. Now as I was saying: Mel, what does the chainsaw have to do with this?

(MEL rummages in her pocket and produces a handful of cash. She hands it to DARON shamefully. DARON snatches it.)

DARON

Unbelievable. So you're a thief, too.

RONNY

Why?

MEL

Chuck was tired of waiting for your dad to bring the cash, so he asked me to help steal it.

RONNY

And you agreed?

MEL

I owed him a favor!

RONNY

For what?

MEL

That's . . . besides the point.

DARON

A favor. I know I'm not your favorite person, but this is low.

MEL

I know. I'm sorry.

DARON

How and when did you get into my house? I keep my cash on the second floor.

MEL

I climbed up with a ladder while Chuck distracted you with the game. I was supposed to get in and get out, but the ladder fell, and . . .

(MEL sheepishly glances at the safe.)

RONNY

No . . .

DARON

You've been hiding in that safe, in my bedroom, for three days?!

MEL

I panicked! I changed the combo and locked myself inside. I texted Chuck to help me. Look!

(MEL shows DARON the text conversation on her phone.)

DARON

That's why it wouldn't open! That son of a gun.

RONNY

This is insane. We were your escape plan.

MEL

I'm just glad to be out of there. Oh, I'm so stupid, I'm so sorry!

RONNY

Geez.

(beat)

Ms. Mel, would you like my coat?

MEL

Yes, please.

(RONNY gives MEL his raincoat. There is silence among them. It is broken by DARON'S phone ringing. He checks the caller ID.)

DARON

It's Chuck.

(They all look at each other. DARON answers.)

DARON

Hello? . . . No, I didn't forget . . . We were on our way, but we ended up getting caught in the weather . . . No, we took the boat . . . Yeah, we're fine, but the cargo got a bit banged up. She'll be okay, though.

(The sound of the Lake Authority boat can be heard approaching.)

DARON

Yep, we're still out here. Can you see us?

(DARON waves in the direction of Chuck's house.)

DARON

Who's with me? Do you mean my son and Mel, or the officers? . . . Don't play stupid with me, Chuck. Mel told me everything . . . He hung up.

MEL

Looks like the lake guys are here, thank God.

DARON

(to the offstage Lake Authority officers)

Hey, fellas. Thanks for the help. Have I got a story for you.

RONNY

You know this means you have to tell them about the chainsaw, right?

DARON

Ah, sheesh. Maybe I should have you do the talking.

RONNY

Ha-ha, sure, Dad. Just as long as the grenades stay between us.

(A transition.)

BILLIE

Wow. I'm impressed. To come up with something like that on the fly; it takes some talent.

ALEX

Why, thank you. But you don't still think I'm pulling your leg, do you?

BILLIE

I can't help being skeptical, but . . . maybe it doesn't really matter.

ALEX

Fiction or nonfiction, a good story is a good story. Probably best to be upfront about it though. Orson Welles learned that the hard way, am I right?

BILLIE

I would hope we can tell the difference nowadays, but I can agree with that in some cases. So?

ALEX

No, Mr. Billie. I'm afraid that today is not one of those cases. You'll just have to wonder.

BILLIE

Darn. Hey, so, you're an author. You've clearly got some chops; how come you don't sell some of your books here while you're at it? I'd be interested.

ALEX

Thank you so much! I appreciate that. Unfortunately, I haven't landed on a publisher yet.

BILLIE

Shame. I'd love to know when you do. Do you have a card or something? I'd like to keep in touch.

ALEX

Oh. Yeah, I have a business card. Let me just fetch one from inside. I'll be right back.

Scene 3 – Alex's Yard Sale

(ALEX exits to the house. BILLIE meanders around the yard until his eyes land on the lantern. He moves closer to observe it. ALEX enters with a business card in hand.)

ALEX

Here you go! It's got my website and business email. If there's any updates, you'll be one of the first to know!

BILLIE

Awesome, thanks. How much for this lantern?

ALEX

Sorry, but that's actually the one thing that is not for sale.

BILLIE

Ah, that figures. Nice lantern, though. Looks vintage.

(ALEX unhooks it from the tree and handles it with melancholy reverence.)

ALEX

It is. It belonged to my dad, who got it from his dad, who got it from his dad, and you get the picture. He's . . . not around anymore, but I keep it hung up out here to remember him by. We light it up every year on his birthday and camp out underneath it, to keep his memory alive, you know?

BILLIE

That sounds nice. I'm sorry for your loss.

ALEX

Thank you. Gosh, he loved camping. More than anything else in the world, except for his family of course. He would always look forward to telling scary stories around the lantern light.

BILLIE

Was he an author, too?

ALEX

No, but he should have been. We would always tell him: "You ought to write an autobiography!" And he'd always say: "Eh, maybe." Drove us crazy. Because his life was wonderful.

(beat)

He was my greatest inspiration to start writing. I can remember the exact moment where I knew I wanted to tell stories for a living. It was over summer break. My friends and I were about Karah's age and all of our parents took us on this big camping trip out in the woods. One night my dad gathered us all around the lantern and sat us down for one of his tales. He used to be a hunting guide on this huge ranch, and he met all kinds of important people. This time, he was taking George Bush on a deer hunt. To our young selves, his descriptions were so vivid. "Me and the president slunk through the deep, dark woods, the leaves crunching under us with every step." And he'd get up and act it out and make all of the sound effects. We were enthralled. "They heard a sound behind them, and when they turned around . . . Boo!" He jumped out at us and made monster noises; scared us half to death! "And of course, they barely escaped with their lives." After the initial shock had passed one my friends said: "Monsters aren't real. You made that up." And my dad said: "Well when you were screaming like a banshee, it sure felt real, didn't it?" That's the part that stuck with me. Because he was right. It did feel real. For at least a few minutes, we *were* hunting with George Bush, and there *was* a monster behind us. That is why I write. For the magical experience in which, if even just for a moment, you feel something as someone else, in a different time and a different place, and come back to reality just a little bit different.

BILLIE

You know, I think that's been my favorite story so far.

(BILLIE checks his watch.)

BILLIE

Hey, I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got to head home and get dinner made. I'll be looking out for your books!

ALEX

Thank you! Sorry you couldn't find anything.

BILLIE

Maybe I did. You have a good evening, Mrs. Alex.

(BILLIE exits.)

ALEX

You, too, Mr. Billie!

(ALEX hangs the lantern back up on the tree, making sure it rests just right. The smiles at it warmly, and without a

word seems to say: “Thank you, dad.” She breaks away and returns to unpacking and arranging items onto the tables.)

End of Play