

LOST IN PLACE

ANTHOLOGY

Six Intersecting Playlets

By Craig Houk

SAMPLE

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SAMPLE

BARBARA & JODY

Synopsis

A few weeks into a worldwide pandemic, Barbara is called into a police station to provide a witness statement. Jody, the detective assigned to the case, has a special request.

Characters

BARBARA, Female, Late Sixties

JODY, Any Gender, Thirties or Older

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Winter. Evening. Witness Interview Room at a Police Station.

AT RISE: A witness interview room with a table and a chair. Barbara meanders in. She is wearing a mask. She appears puzzled. She looks around. Suddenly, a voice over the intercom.

JODY

Have a seat, Barbara.

BARBARA

(Startled.)

Oh! Christ on a cracker! You scared the hell out of me. You should never sneak up on an old lady. You know that, right?

JODY

Sorry about that.

BARBARA

And call me Barb.

JODY

My apologies, Barb. We're, uh... we're just gettin' used to the new procedures 'round here. I mean, I prefer to be in there with you, 'course. But well, uh... you know, what with all the new health and safety guidelines, etc., etc.

BARBARA

Yeah, no I understand. I get it. So, I should have a seat here?

(She points to the only chair available.)

JODY

Unless you see another chair in there you'd favor.

BARBARA

(Looking around.)

Uhhhhh... no, I do not. This appears to be the only one.

JODY

All right then. So, then if you don't mind settlin' in, that'd be great. Oh, and if you're, uh... comfortable takin' off your mask, then feel free to do so.

BARBARA

I think I will. Thank you kindly.

(She sits and takes off her mask.)

It's kinda sparse in here, don't ya think?

JODY

Yeah, well, uh... we, uh... we try not to make things too cozy, you know? The holdin' cells are fully furnished, though. So, uh... let me know if you'd like to check out the inside of one of 'em sometime.

BARBARA

Haha. That's very funny— I'm sorry, what's your name?

JODY

Jody.

BARBARA

Yeah, well that's very funny, Jody, but I think I'll pass on your generous offer.

JODY

Fair enough. So, uh... do you need anythin' before we get started? Water? Coffee? Soda?

BARBARA

No, I'm good. Thinkin' maybe it's best we just get this over with.

JODY

Understood. Well, this shouldn't take too long.

BARBARA

Good to hear. My programs start in about an hour.

JODY

Mm hm.

BARBARA

And it'll take me about ten minutes to get home.

JODY

Gotcha.

BARBARA

And to be perfectly honest, I shouldn't be drivin' after dusk. I've got that nyctalopia.

JODY

I'm sorry, you've got what?

BARBARA

Night blindness. So, I'm hopin' maybe we can get this all wrapped up in about fifteen to twenty minutes or so, give or take, but mostly take.

JODY

Well, uh... no offense, Barb, but you're the one who seems to be holdin' us up here.

BARBARA

Huh. Hard not to take offense when you phrase it that way, Jody. But I do get your point.

JODY

And if it's any consolation, I've got what they call deuteranopia.

BARBARA

Oh, yeah?

JODY

It's a form of color blindness.

BARBARA

I didn't realize this'd be a competition, Jody.

JODY

Oh, uh... Well, it's not. I just thought—

BARBARA

Seems like you might be the one holdin' things up at this point.

JODY

You're right. So, uh... so, why don't we just get down to business then. Hm?

BARBARA

You got it.

JODY

Okay then. So, accordin' to my notes here, you stated that, uh... Ginny Lumley approached you recently. Is that right?

BARBARA

S'right. Over at the Walgreens.

JODY

And you're employed there.

BARBARA

Mm hm. I work there part-time, stockin' shelves.

JODY

And Ginny spoke to you there?

BARBARA

That's correct. Just Tuesday mornin' last. 'Round eight thirty or nine, I guess. In the sexual wellness aisle.

JODY

I see.

BARBARA

We got a new shipment of lubricants in, so I was just puttin' 'em up.

JODY

Right. Well, I, uh... I think we can skip those particulars if you don't mind. And maybe just, uh... focus on what Ginny said to you.

BARBARA

'Course. Well, she asked me if I might know someone who'd be willin' to kill her daughter-in-law.

JODY

Mm hm. And that's all she said?

BARBARA

For the most part, yes. Except she also said she didn't know who else to ask, but she heard I might have "connections".

JODY

Connections? How do you mean?

BARBARA

Oh, boy. Okay, so, listen. I don't much like talkin' about it, but, well, a long while back I was married to this fella went by the name, Mabry-Five-Second-One-Shot. They called him that on account his name was Mabry, and he gave you five seconds to run before he could kill you with one shot.

JODY

Really? So, he, uh... he was what? Some kinda gangster?

BARBARA

S'right. But we parted ways a very long time ago. Turns out, I wasn't mobster wife material. Mostly because it was just too much work. I mean, I enjoyed the money and livin' in the big city and all, but there was some "expectations" that came along with it, if you know what I'm sayin'. And I just did not have the inclination nor the energy. Anyway, so for some reason, Ginny got it into her head that I might still have "associates" in those "circles".

JODY

I see. And did Ginny say why she wanted Marlene dead?

BARBARA

She really didn't go into any details as such. Just said, "Can't stand that bitch no more."

JODY

Right. And, uh... how did you respond?

BARBARA

Well, the first thing I asked her was, "Isn't Marlene pregnant?"

JODY

I'm sorry, what? Marlene's pregnant?

BARBARA

Exactly! Now why on earth would anyone wanna kill a pregnant woman?

JODY

And what'd Ginny say?

BARBARA

She said, "Well, I ain't no animal. It'll have to happen after the baby's born."

JODY

Jesus Christ.

BARBARA

I know. She's awful.

JODY

So, then what'd you say?

BARBARA

Oh. Well, I just said, "Let me think on it a bit and I'll get back to you."

JODY

And that was it?

BARBARA

Mm hm. She left and then I called here. To report what happened.

JODY

That was surely the right thing to do, Barb.

BARBARA

Was it, though? I mean, it's all kinda sad, don't you think? Because I'm wonderin', "What've I gotten myself into here?" Some crazy old bag wants to kill the woman carryin' her grandbaby. It's unthinkable. And who does she come to for help? Me. And you know, I'd like blame Mabry for all of this. But what good would that do? 'Cept maybe take a little bit of the guilt away. It's all bullshit, though. Because I knew who and what Mabry was when I met him. And I fell for him anyway. And that's the bed I made and laid in for nearly eight years. I never meant anyone no harm. But the choices I made over five decades ago brought Ginny Lumley to me in the sexual wellness aisle over at the Walgreens. So, in many ways, I suppose I'm an accomplice to her dumbass scheme. Maybe I should take you up on your offer to put me in one of 'em holdin' cells.

JODY

No, well that's not gonna happen, Barb. We, uh... we don't arrest innocent people. Not around here anyway. I am curious though.

BARBARA

What's that?

JODY

How does a woman go about partin' ways with a gangster? Seems like that might've been a dangerous move on your part.

BARBARA

Oh. Well, perhaps I wasn't clear. Turns out, even Mabry wasn't able to get very far in five seconds.

JODY

(Chuckling.)

Okay, well say no more, Barb.

BARBARA

So, you get my meanin' then.

JODY

No, I do not entirely get your meanin'. That's why I'm askin' you to say nothin' more about it. I think we can just let that sleepin' dog lie.

BARBARA

Yeah, that's what I thought at the time.

JODY

(Chuckling.)

All right then. So, listen, Barb. I'm gonna need you to do somethin' for me.

BARBARA

Oh yeah?

JODY

Yeah. And it's gonna involve you and Ginny. And it might be a little tricky, but I'm confident that you're gonna do just fine. And if you agree to it, then maybe it'll help ease some of that guilt you're feelin' 'bout all this.

BARBARA

Hm. Well, okay. So, lay it on me, Jody. Whatta you got? Oh, and make it quick. It's nearly sundown.

(Lights to black.)

SAMPLE

HANK & TEDDY

Synopsis

Early into a worldwide pandemic, good-natured Teddy, from across the road, checks in on his surly neighbor, Hank. A delicate exchange results in a bad decision.

Characters

HANK, Male, Early Fifties

TEDDY, Male, Mid Thirties

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Summertime. Early Morning. Hank's porch.

AT RISE: Hank is sitting on an old, rusted metal chair and drinks from a bottle of whiskey. Maybe he smokes. Teddy approaches but keeps his distance.

HANK

Somethin' I can help you with?

TEDDY

It's Hank, right?

HANK

S'right. Who's askin'?

TEDDY

Yeah. Sorry. My name's Teddy. Me and my wife, Danielle, we moved here a few months back. We're just across the road here. The yellow house with the gray trim.

HANK

Aw, damn. Looks like you drew the short straw, Teddy, livin' next to 'em lesbians.

TEDDY

Oh, well, they seem all right to me. Adele pretty much keeps to herself and, Rhonda... well, she's a character for sure, but she's harmless. She's got shitty taste in beer, though.

HANK

Well, my condolences, nonetheless. So, what can I do for you, "Teddy from across the road"?

TEDDY

Nothin' really. Just thought maybe I'd check in on you. What with the pandemic and all. Felt like it might be the neighborly thing to do.

HANK

Ah. Well, I appreciate your concern, but I think I got everything under control over here.

TEDDY

You sure?

HANK

I just said as much, didn't I?

TEDDY

You did, yes.

HANK

So, maybe our business here is finished.

TEDDY

If you say so.

HANK

I do.

(Teddy lingers.)

You ain't gonna leave, are you?

TEDDY

Yeah, no I'm leavin'. It's just that...

HANK

What?

TEDDY

Listen. It's a small town, you know. And people talk.

HANK

They sure do.

TEDDY

Right. And look, I get it. We don't know each other. And truth is, ain't none of it any of my business really...

HANK

Accurate on all accounts, Teddy.

TEDDY

It's a tough time to be on your own, though. Don't you think?

HANK

Like I said. I got everything under control.

TEDDY

Understood. Sorry to have bothered you. You have a good day, Hank.

(Teddy starts off.)

HANK

It's a hoax, you know.

TEDDY

What's that?

HANK

This... virus. It's all bullshit.

TEDDY

You think so?

HANK

I know so.

TEDDY

Lots of people are sick. And lots of 'em are dead.

HANK

It's just the flu. Okay? People get sick every year from the flu. And people die from it too. It is what it is. But all of a sudden, here we are on lockdown. I mean, come on now. When in the history of this country did we ever quarantine healthy people. Huh? You quarantine sick people, not healthy people. It's a joke.

TEDDY

I ain't sure I follow. I think it's a little more complicated than that, don't you?

HANK

Hey, listen. You want the government regulatin' what you do, you go right ahead. Okay? You like havin' your brain washed, that's your problem. But that ain't how I live my life. And anyway, I don't see you wearin' a mask, Teddy. So, somethin' tells me you might be a little skeptical yourself.

TEDDY

Honestly, I can't make heads or tails of nothin' no more. I'm just doin' what I can to protect me and my wife.

HANK

You're plenty young enough. You ain't got nothin' to worry about.

TEDDY

Well, we're tryin' to start a family, you know. So, I guess I'm just bein' a little extra careful right now.

HANK

All the more reason to steer clear of that garbage vaccine they been peddlin'. That shit'll mutate your sperm.

TEDDY

What? Noooo. You're puttin' me on. That can't be right.

HANK

All I know is, it does more harm than good.

TEDDY

Oh, I don't know about that, Hank.

HANK

Look, I'm just providin' you with the facts. Okay? Feel free to take heed or don't. Your choice.

TEDDY

Well, I appreciate the information.

HANK

My wife left me.

TEDDY

Oh. I, uh...

HANK

All right now, you don't have to make like you didn't know. That's why you came over here, ain't it? That's what you meant when you said, "Now's a tough time to be on your own." Am I right?

(Teddy nods.)

Thought so. Yeah, she took the kids and ran off a few weeks back. In the middle of the night.

TEDDY

I'm sorry, Hank.

HANK

She left a note, though. You wanna hear it?

TEDDY

Uh... No, I'm sure it's...

HANK

I don't mind. Got it right here.

TEDDY

All right

(Hank pulls a letter from his pocket and reads it.)

HANK

Dear Hank, I suppose there ain't no easy way to put this. Your test came back positive. For sheer stupidity. Sadly, it's just what I expected. A very rare strain of foolishness has crept inside your nasal cavity, dug its way through the soft tissue, and has settled inside your brain. In the coming weeks, I imagine you'll find yourself expostulating out loud and to no one in particular, insisting that your rights are being violated and that the ice bucket challenge was in fact a satanic ritual meant to cleanse large numbers of people in preparation for the greatest human sacrifice in recorded history. Should you come across anyone who voices an opposing viewpoint, you will likely defend your position shamelessly and with remarkable ignorance. I also expect you'll be dead within a few months. Or at least, one can only hope. Meantime, the kids are safe with me. Or more to the point, safe without you. Yours in perpetual bewilderment, Charlene.

TEDDY

Damn, Hank. That's... that's rough.

HANK

Charlene thinks I'm a whack job.

TEDDY

Well, there's two sides to every story. Right? So, what? So, you've got... sophisticated opinions. I mean, just because you view the world a little different than others, don't mean you're altogether wrong.

HANK

Aw shit, Teddy. You just twisted yourself into a pretzel there tryin' to pacify me, didn't you?

TEDDY

Well, I'm just aimin' to be neighborly, I guess.

HANK

So, you've said.

(Hank offers the bottle to Teddy.)

You want a swig?

TEDDY

Uh... No, I think I'll pass. Thanks, though.

HANK

Come on now. Might help you to loosen up.

TEDDY

No, I'm not really into the hard stuff.

HANK

You worried I got it?

TEDDY

I'm worried we all got it.

HANK

Fair enough.

TEDDY

We're hopin' for a girl.

HANK

Sorry, what?

TEDDY

Danielle and me. We'd like to have a baby girl.

HANK

Oh yeah? Well, most men want boys. I know I did. But, well, three strikes and I was out.

TEDDY

Oh, come on now. It can't have been all that bad.

HANK

Be careful what you wish for, Teddy.

TEDDY

To be truthful, I don't much like how I turned out. As a man, I mean. You see, my dad was a real hard-ass, and my mom... Well, she sorta faded into the background most of the time. Easy for her to do I guess, bein' surrounded by mostly boys and an overbearin' husband.

My oldest sister – my only sister – Carol, she, uh... Well, I guess – though I'm not entirely sure – that she had a lot in common with Rhonda and Adele across the way, if you know what I mean.

She died several years back. Long before... all of this. We were never real close. Partly because she was nearly twenty years older than me, but mostly because my family treated her like an outcast. Maybe I was too young to really know any better, but I took part, nonetheless.

HANK

You can't hold yourself responsible for the choices other people make.

TEDDY

Well, I don't think Carol had much choice in the matter. Though I know I sure did. I failed her. So, I suppose – selfishly – I'm wishin' for a little girl, so that I can maybe somehow make it up to her. By givin' my daughter somethin' my sister never got. Unconditional love.

HANK

I miss the old days.

(Teddy smiles knowingly.)

TEDDY

Right. Well, I won't keep you any longer, Hank.

HANK

Startin' to warm up anyway. I'll probably head back into the house to cool off.

TEDDY

It was nice to meet you.

HANK

Likewise.

(Teddy turns to go, but then stops.)

TEDDY

Before I go though...

HANK

Yeah, what?

TEDDY

I suppose I'll take you up on your offer for a swig of that whiskey. And only because it seems like the neighborly thing to do.

(Lights to black.)

MARLENE & GINNY

Synopsis

Early into a worldwide pandemic, Marlene and her mother-in-law, Ginny, decide to get fancy and make martinis. Their fun, however, is interrupted by that damn lesbian from next door, who's hell-bent on stealing their rutabagas. Seems Dwayne, Marlene's infant child, has slept through the whole ruckus.

Characters

MARLENE, Female, Late Thirties

GINNY, Female, Late Fifties

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Autumn. Dusk. The Lumley living room.

AT RISE: Two armchairs several feet apart. Ginny sits in one of them. She's absentmindedly watching TV; the volume is on low. A landline phone sits on a small table nearby. A moment passes before Marlene enters. She has a fresh spit-up rag draped over her shoulder and a full bottle of baby formula in her hand. She sits in the other armchair. Silence.

MARLENE

Whatta you watchin'?

GINNY

What's that?

MARLENE

I asked you what you're watchin'. On the TV here.

GINNY

Can't you see for yourself?

MARLENE

Well, I can see there's a commercial on, but I ain't got no idea what program you're watchin'.

GINNY

Oh. I guess I wasn't payin' attention. I think it's, uh... whatta you call it...? Well, it's that cop show. Always ends with a courtroom scene.

MARLENE

Law and Order

GINNY

That's the one. Anyway, they got a marathon goin'. Every episode over the last – shit, I don't know – fifty thousand seasons.

MARLENE

I like that show. Oh, and that fella who plays Lennie Briscoe is a goddam comedic genius.

GINNY

Jerry Orbach. Damn fine actor. Dead, though.

MARLENE

Oh yeah? I didn't know that.

GINNY

Yep. He died years ago. Some kinda cancer, I think.

MARLENE

That's too bad.

GINNY

Yep. Sounds like Dwayne finally settled down.

MARLENE

Yeah, well he's restin'.

GINNY

His fever break?

MARLENE

I believe it has.

GINNY

Oh, well that's good. Poor little guy. He's been sick for weeks.

MARLENE

Almost four months now.

GINNY

That long? S'awful. Just awful. Virus don't care about who it infects, not even an innocent little baby.

MARLENE

He's all right now. Have you talked to Barb, lately?

GINNY

Dammit, Marlene. That ain't funny and you know it?

MARLENE

I agree. It ain't.

GINNY

And besides, Barb hasn't spoken to me since... well, you know damn well since when.

MARLENE

Can you blame her?

GINNY

Shit, you're never gonna let that go, are you?

MARLENE

Oh, I don't know, Ginny. Maybe someday, I suppose.

GINNY

Well, I've apologized about a million times now. I don't know what more I can do.

MARLENE

Thanks to you, I've learned to sleep with one eye open.

GINNY

Oh, for... Ain't I the one who went ahead and put a lock on your bedroom door? And a loaded gun in your nightstand? For your protection?

MARLENE

Yeah, that was you.

GINNY

I mean, come on. It's not like I'm gonna try and kill you again. What would be the point? And you know, maybe I oughta be the one worryin' about whether you're gonna try and kill me.

MARLENE

You're nuts.

GINNY

It ain't so farfetched. Maybe you wanna get back at me, you know? Payback and all that?

MARLENE

I suppose I haven't ruled it out.

GINNY

See there. You've got the gun. And you've got the means and the motive.

MARLENE

Is that your closin' argument, Mr. McCoy?

GINNY

As a matter of fact, it is. So, do you think we could just drop it altogether? Hm? And maybe never speak of it again?

MARLENE

Hell no.

GINNY

Fine then. I don't give a rat's ass anymore, anyway. I need a drink. You want one?

MARLENE

Sure.

GINNY

What'll you have?

MARLENE

Surprise me.

GINNY

Well, I used to make a mean martini. Haven't had one of 'em in ages. Whatta you think? We can be all classy and shit.

MARLENE

Sounds good.

GINNY

Gin or vodka.

MARLENE

Gin.

GINNY

Good. I prefer gin too. Vermouth or prussic acid?

(Marlene shoots Ginny a look.)

I'm just screwin' with you. Vermouth it is.

(Ginny exits. Marlene sits quietly for a moment. The phone rings.)

MARLENE

Well, who the hell'd be callin' us?

(She gets up and answers the phone.)

Hello...?

(She puts her hand over the receiver and calls off to Ginny.)

Aw, Jesus. It's one of 'em lesbians!

GINNY

(Off.)

Which one!?

MARLENE

Rhonda!

GINNY

(Off.)

Well, what the hell does she want!?

MARLENE

(Back to the phone.)

No, yeah, I'm here, Rhonda... Yeah, sorry about that. My mother-in-law was just hollerin' at me about somethin'. You know how she gets...

GINNY

(Off.)

Go to hell, Marlene!

MARLENE

(On the phone.)

Mm hm... Well, no, I ain't seen Adele at all today. Didn't realize it was my day to keep track of her... My apologies Rhonda, I was just tryin' to be funny... I'm sorry, what? Check where...? Our backyard...? Are you serious...? Well, ok.

(Calling off to Ginny.)

Ginny!

GINNY

(Off.)

Keep your pants on! I'm just about finished with these drinks!

MARLENE

It's not about the drinks! I need you to look out the kitchen window! See if Adele is fumblin' about in the backyard!

GINNY

(Off.)

Why the hell would she be back there!?

MARLENE

I don't know! Just take a look!

(Back to the phone.)

Hang on, Rhonda. We're checkin'.

GINNY

(Off.)

Well, I'll be damned! She sure is back there! Looks like she's makin' off with a bunch of our rutabagas, stuffin' 'em into her cargo shorts!

MARLENE

You're lyin'!

GINNY

(Off.)

I am not! Come see for yourself!

MARLENE

(Back to the phone.)

Rhonda... Yeah, well listen, your... your lady pal is hijackin' our rutabagas. I'm gonna head out back now, but I suggest you get your ass over here asap... Yeah, all right. Bye.

(She hangs up the phone. To herself.)

Dammit.

(She heads off. We hear a screen door opening and slamming shut. The stage is empty. Off.)

Hey Adele! Yeah, I'm talkin' to you, old lady! Put 'em rutabagas back where you found 'em and get the hell off my property, you hear me!? Now listen, I am deadly serious! Just empty your pockets and go home! Yeah, well you can give me the bird all day long, I don't care! Just get the fuck outta here! Go!

(Ginny enters with two martinis. She sets hers down somewhere near her chair and Marlene's down somewhere near hers. She then settles in and begins sipping her drink. We hear a screen door opening and slamming shut. Marlene enters in a huff.)

MARLENE

Can you believe that bitch?

GINNY

Ok, now. Sit down and enjoy your martini. I found some olives, so I decided to make 'em dirty.

MARLENE

That took some real balls.

GINNY

What's done is done. Just sit down and relax.

(Marlene relents and lets out a big sigh. She then settles into her chair. She begins to sip her drink.)

Did she leave the rutabagas?

MARLENE

She did not.

(Marlene looks to Ginny, exasperated. Ginny starts to laugh quietly. Her laughter gets louder and louder until Marlene joins in. Their shared laughter lasts a moment and then subsides. They both let out a sigh and continue to drink.)

GINNY

We should check on Dwayne, don't you think?

MARLENE

Let him rest, Ginny. He's fine.

GINNY

You sure? I mean, I just can't believe we haven't heard a peep outta him. Especially considerin' all the ruckus.

MARLENE

Leave him be. I'll look in on him in a bit.

GINNY

(Skeptical.)

All right.

(They drink. Ginny rises out of her chair.)

You know what? I'm just gonna peek in. Just to make sure he's okay.

MARLENE

What did I just say?

GINNY

Yeah, I heard you, Marlene, but there ain't no harm in it. So, why don't you just shut up about it? Okay?

MARLENE

Fine. Suit yourself.

(Ginny exits. Marlene drinks quietly. A long moment passes before Ginny re-enters. She is pale and appears spooked.)

GINNY

(Quietly.)

Marlene.

MARLENE

Yeah, Ginny?

GINNY

What have you done?

(Marlene takes another sip of her martini and then turns to Ginny.)

MARLENE

I think he's suffered enough. Don't you?

(Lights to black.)

TRINA & ADELE

Synopsis

A year or so into a worldwide pandemic, Adele pays Trina a visit to follow up on a commitment she made.

Characters

TRINA, Female, Mid Sixties

ADELE, Female, Late Fifties

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Summertime. Midday. Trina's porch and living room.

AT RISE: Trina is sitting in a very worn armchair. She appears to be asleep. A basket of dirty laundry sits nearby. Adele approaches the porch. She looks on the porch and around it, searching for something. She crosses to the screen door and taps lightly on the frame.

ADELE

Trina? Trina, you home? What the hell am I sayin'? 'Course she's home. She's always home. Dumpty little hermit...

TRINA

I can hear you, Adele.

ADELE

Aw shit.

TRINA

I'm in my chair.

ADELE

Okay, well it's noon, Trina. And your wash ain't on the porch.

TRINA

I know.

ADELE

It's supposed to be on the porch.

TRINA

I know.

ADELE

So, where the hell is it?

TRINA

It's in here with me. On the floor. Just a few feet from where I'm sittin'.

ADELE

A lotta good that does me. How am I supposed to get your wash done if it's in there with you?

TRINA

(She winces.)

My back went out.

ADELE

What's that?

TRINA

My back. It went out. I was bringin' the basket out to the porch, and it just seized up. I barely made it to the chair. And my gout's been flarin' up.

ADELE

Well, that sucks for you, don't it? Guess you'll have to go without clean clothes for another few days then.

TRINA

Guess so. I would've called to let you know, but well, I'm stuck in this goddam chair.

ADELE

Hopefully, your back will sort itself out.

TRINA

It usually does.

ADELE

You know I can't come in there and help you, right?

TRINA

I know. It's fine. I'll be fine. I can't make it to the fridge neither, so I suppose it's really a blessin' in disguise.

ADELE

I hear that. Oh, and by the way. Rhonda and me, we got that vaccine. But apparently it don't work too well. Thought you should know.

TRINA

Yep. Saw that on the news. Sneaky little virus keeps mutatin'. Can't keep up with it.

ADELE

End times for sure.

TRINA

I suppose that's true.

ADELE

I should also probably let you know that I'm gonna start handwashin' your things and hangin' 'em out to dry.

TRINA

Now, why on earth would you do that when you got a perfectly good washer and dryer set at home? I mean, the whole reason you offered to do it in the first place was because my set broke down.

ADELE

You're lucky I'm doin' it at all.

TRINA

Exactly my point. You're just makin' more work for yourself.

ADELE

Well, I'm tryin' to do my part, you know. Conservin' water, and savin' the environment, and all that fuckin' nonsense.

TRINA

Okay. Well, it don't matter to me either way. Though I expect my delicates'll be happy to have your gentle touch.

ADELE

Yeah, well don't get me started on your delicates because they're anythin' but.

TRINA

Right. Sorry about that. It's rough bein' an old lady.

ADELE

Anyway, I'm just lettin' you know in case your things come back all stiff and stretched out.

TRINA

Well, there's an easy fix for that, you know. The trick is to shake the clothes out before you put 'em up on the line. And anythin' heavy you just lay out on a rack to dry.

ADELE

Yeah, so like I said, "Don't" be surprised if they come back all stiff and stretched out."

TRINA

Duly noted. Thanks.

ADELE

Happy to help. Okay then. I guess I'll just head on home...

TRINA

Why do you do it, Adele?

ADELE

(Disproportionately defensive.)

All right. Now there's no need to get belligerent with me, Trina. I steal vegetables from everyone's garden 'round here. And truth is, it's slim pickins' at your place. You don't exactly have a green thumb, now do you?

TRINA

Well, I wasn't talkin' about that. But since you just confessed, may I ask, "What the hell is the matter with you, stealin' from peoples' yards?"

ADELE

Aw shit. Okay, well, let's not get off topic now. I think maybe you was askin' about somethin' else I might be doin' that I'm hopin's a little less criminal in nature?

TRINA

You are somethin' else, Adele.

ADELE

Ain't that the truth.

TRINA

No, it's just that... Well, I been wonderin'. Why do you come visit? And why're you helpin' me out? You know I don't much like bein' 'round people.

ADELE

Well, that's somethin' you and me have in common then, ain't it? 'Cept whereas you keep to yourself, I generally tell people to their face that I don't like 'em.

TRINA

You haven't answered my question, Adele.

ADELE

Listen, it ain't no secret that I'm an unpleasant woman. But bein' unpleasant is all I know. Okay? It's all I can muster. There ain't never been real joy for me in my life. Except for Rhonda, I suppose. Other than that, it's just been sorrow mixed with rage. Some days it's like pushin' through quicksand just to get out of bed. And it feels like my skin has fallen away. And like I'm on fire all the time. Always burnin' up with no way to put out the flames.

TRINA

Well, that sucks for you, don't it? But what's any of that got to do with me.

ADELE

Well, Trina... Bein' 'round you is like if a bird shit on my head. It turns my stomach, but it's considered good luck when it happens.

TRINA

It's hard to take somethin' like that personal when the feelin's mutual.

ADELE

So, have I answered your question?

TRINA

You have.

ADELE

Good. So, can I go now?

TRINA

Not before I clear somethin' up first. For the record, I don't dislike people. There was a time, though, when I didn't like myself. So, I decided that I needed to be alone to sort things out. To maybe find a way to learn to love myself. To get away from it all. To mend. To heal. But then after a while, I realized how peaceful life was bein' alone. So, I purposely chose to just settle into it. I'm content now, Adele. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

ADELE

Well, goody for you, Trina. So, I'm gonna head on home now. Before Rhonda starts to worry.

TRINA

All right.

ADELE

I'll check in on you tomorrow.

TRINA

Sounds good.

(Adele starts off.)

Hey, Adele.

ADELE

What the hell is it now?

TRINA

You ain't actually gonna do it, are you?

ADELE

Oh, I don't know, Trina. I might.

TRINA

Well, I prefer you didn't. But if you do decide to go through with it, make sure you get my laundry done first.

ADELE

If it's the last thing I do.

(Lights to black.)

RHONDA & DANIELLE

Synopsis

Two or more years into a worldwide pandemic, next door neighbors, Rhonda and Danielle, gossip with one another while dealing with the loss of their significant others.

Characters

RHONDA, Female, Late Fifties

DANIELLE, Female, Mid Thirties

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Summertime. Late afternoon. Property line between two yards. Four lawn chairs arranged in pairs at least six feet apart.

AT RISE: Rhonda enters and carries a six pack of beer. She sets it down on the ground next to one of the chairs on her side of the lawn. She looks to the other chair, reaches for it, folds it closed and then carries it off. Danielle enters. She carries boxed wine and a plastic cup. She sits in one of the chairs on her side of the lawn and pours herself some wine. She drinks quietly, looking off. Rhonda reenters. Danielle turns to Rhonda, nods and smiles. Rhonda nods back and smiles. She sits and opens a beer. She drinks and looks off.

DANIELLE

I see you took the chair away.

RHONDA

I think it was about time.

DANIELLE

Good for you.

RHONDA

And you?

DANIELLE

Oh. Well, I suppose I'm not ready just yet. I mean, what's the rush anyhow?

RHONDA

True enough. I was thinkin' I'd might make a ceremony of it.

DANIELLE

Whatta you mean? A ceremony how?

RHONDA

Well, you know. I've been agonizin' about it for a long time now. And I've been thinkin' about what might be the right way to do it.

DANIELLE

To do what? To get rid of the chair?

RHONDA

Mm hm. My first thought was that maybe I'd just put it up on a pile of sticks and then set it on fire. Or maybe dig a hole out back, bury it there, cover it in dirt and soil, and then plant some nice jewelweed on top of it. Maybe say a prayer over it.

DANIELLE

Aren't you an atheist?

RHONDA

I'm kind of agnostic now. Though I might be a full-on Christian by tomorrow. Who knows?

DANIELLE

That's funny.

RHONDA

Well, it was meant to be.

DANIELLE

No, not that. It's just that I feel like I've been headed the other direction lately. Losin' my faith in God. I mean, what's the point? We're all bein' punished. Every last one of us. Ain't no one gettin' spared.

RHONDA

Maybe it's God's way of tellin' us that She meant every word when She said we were all equal in Her eyes.

DANIELLE

You really think God's a woman?

RHONDA

There's no man smart enough or ruthless enough to pull off somethin' like this.

DANIELLE

Fair enough. And you know, God never said that by the way. About everyone bein' equal.

RHONDA

No?

DANIELLE

Not exactly, no.

RHONDA

Oh. Okay. Well, I'm new to this.

(They drink.)

DANIELLE

So, what'd you decide?

RHONDA

Hm?

DANIELLE

The chair. What'd you do with the chair?

RHONDA

Oh. I just put it out with the trash. At the end of the driveway there. By the road.

(Danielle rises a little out of her chair and looks to the road.)

DANIELLE

You sure did. Well, you know damn well it's just gonna sit there. They haven't collected garbage in... How many months do you think it's been now?

RHONDA

I've got no idea how long it's been.

DANIELLE

Well, the smell is awful when the wind starts comin' through, that's for sure.

RHONDA

I've gotten used to it.

(They drink.)

DANIELLE

Oh, hey. I put together a basket of vegetables for you from the garden. Some carrots, cabbages, red and yellow peppers, radishes, tomatoes, beans, lettuce... All the usual suspects. I did real good this year.

RHONDA

Sounds nice.

DANIELLE

I'll scrub 'em down and leave 'em on your porch before I go to bed tonight. You should probably give 'em another scrub before you go cuttin' 'em up and cookin' 'em though.

RHONDA

I will. Thanks.

DANIELLE

'Course. I mean, it's the least I can do. With all the preserves you been sendin' my way, I been bakin' up a storm over here. Muffins, cakes, bread... Oh, and I made a scrumptious vinaigrette the other day. I'll leave some of that for you as well. You can make a nice salad with it.

RHONDA

I'm happy that you're makin' good use of 'em.

DANIELLE

Well, there's a million different things you can do with preserves. So, they're not gonna go to waste, that's for sure.

(They drink. She looks across the road.)

I see they finally pulled Hank Ouellette out of his car.

RHONDA

Yeah. Just yesterday actually. Two women in hazmat suits came for him.

DANIELLE

He was in there a long while.

RHONDA

Yep. Dropped dead in the driver seat. And on display for all the world to see. Or at least for those passin' by on the main road here. I suppose he was tryin' to get to the hospital.

DANIELLE

Well, even if he made it there, I doubt he woulda been able find someone to help him.

Lost In Place: Rhonda & Danielle is available for purchase as part of Smith & Kraus's [The Best Ten-Minute Plays 2022](#).

Please scroll down to page 41 to read the rest of the anthology.



JODY & CHARLENE

Synopsis

Several years into a worldwide pandemic, Charlene – looking for shelter – shows up on Jody’s doorstep with two of her three daughters.

Characters

JODY, Any Gender, Thirties or Older

CHARLENE, Female, Late Forties

Time

Present.

Setting

A small American town. Springtime. Late morning.

AT RISE: Charlene enters cautiously.

CHARLENE

Hello? Hello, is there anyone here? Hello?

(Jody appears, seemingly out of nowhere. They carry a revolver in a holster on their hip.)

JODY

Excuse me, / can I, uh...?

CHARLENE

/ Oh, Jesus.

JODY

...Can I help you?

CHARLENE

Sorry. Sorry, I just need to catch my breath. You scared the heck out of me.

JODY

Certainly not my intention.

CHARLENE

No, no. ‘Course it wasn’t. Hoo.

JODY

You, uh... You okay?

CHARLENE

Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Thank you.

JODY

You know, it's not a good idea what you're doin'...

CHARLENE

I know.

JODY

...Showin' up here unannounced. Showin' up anywhere unannounced.

CHARLENE

You're right. But listen. You see, I'm a little desperate right now. And I've got my girls—

JODY

Your girls?

CHARLENE

S'right. My, uh... my daughters. Two of 'em. They're waitin' for me in the car.

JODY

I see.

CHARLENE

We don't have any place to go at the moment. We're nearly out of gas. And there's a big storm comin' through.

JODY

Yeah, I, uh... I heard about it on the radio.

CHARLENE

So, you know it's gonna be bad.

JODY

High winds, heavy rains, some floodin'...

CHARLENE

Mm hm.

JODY

...Frankly a relief from this dry heat if you ask me...

CHARLENE

And it's only just Springtime.

JODY

...But I understand. It's not safe for you and your girls, that's for sure.

CHARLENE

No, it's not. And look, I know it's a big ask but—

JODY

Are you sick?

CHARLENE

Sorry?

JODY

Are you sick?

CHARLENE

Oh. No. No, none of us is. And in fact, we dropped by one of those drive through testin' facilities just a couple of hours ago. I've got the papers right here.

(Charlene pulls three pieces of paper from her pocket.)

Do you have a workin' phone?

JODY

I do. You can just put 'em on the ground there, and maybe just, uh... maybe just step back a little if you don't mind.

CHARLENE

'Course.

(Charlene lays the papers neatly on the ground and steps back. Jody pulls out their phone, manipulates it and then squats down. They scan each paper.)

JODY

I take it you're Charlene.

CHARLENE

S'right. Tammy and Tracey are my girls.

JODY

Name's Jody.

CHARLENE

It's nice to meet you.

JODY

Everything looks in order by the way.

(Jody rises and steps back a little. Charlene retrieves the papers.)

Do you have any other kids?

CHARLENE

Uh, yes. As a matter of fact, I have another daughter. How did you—?

JODY

I was a police officer. Well, technically still am, but I guess not in any official capacity per se. Not anymore, that is. I, uh... I've got the badge, the uniform, the gun... but none of it's really useful, I suppose. Not to anyone but me of course.

CHARLENE

I see.

JODY

Yeah, so, I guess what I'm gettin' at is, I, uh... I'm pretty good at pickin' up on things. So, I figured maybe you had another kid.

CHARLENE

Theresa. My oldest.

JODY

She okay?

CHARLENE

I've no idea.

JODY

She on her own?

CHARLENE

No. She left with some young man. He seemed nice enough, I guess. But I worry.

JODY

‘Course.

CHARLENE

I could’ve stopped her from goin’. I wanted to stop her, but I didn’t.

JODY

How do you mean?

CHARLENE

What I mean is, I suppose any of us can pretty much do whatever we like anymore. Isn’t that right? Isn’t that how the world works now? And, you know, all I wanted was to keep my daughters with me, by my side. Just the four of us. I wanted to protect ‘em. And so, I didn’t much like the idea of Theresa runnin’ off with that fella. You know, because all I have left is those girls. So, I pulled that young man aside, and I was plannin’ on sayin’ whatever it took to make certain he’d just walk away and never turn back. But instead, I just asked him to take care of her as best he could and to keep her safe.

JODY

You’re a better human than me.

CHARLENE

Oh, I don’t know. I feel like a better human wouldn’t have left her husband to fend for himself, to leave him to die alone.

JODY

I’m sure you had your reasons.

CHARLENE

Well, he was a total dumbass, and he was probably gonna get us all killed if we didn’t leave.

JODY

You did the right thing.

CHARLENE

Anyway, so that’s why I didn’t make a fuss. I mean, what right did I have to interfere? Tomorrow could be the end of all of us, so if Theresa was gonna have the chance to maybe live her own life and to find some happiness, I needed to let it happen. I needed to let her go.

JODY

Fair enough. So, uh... So, listen. I really don’t have much to offer. Very little in the way of food, though I got plenty of water stocked up. And I gotta tell you, I think you better get your car tucked out of the way. It’s a precious commodity at times like these, and someone’s gonna snatch it up if you’re not careful.

CHARLENE

True enough. ‘Cept I–

JODY

We can lock it in the barn. A couple hundred yards that way. I’ve got some gas in there as well, so we can fill up your tank. And then you and your girls can join me here at the house. At least until the storms pass.

CHARLENE

You really mean it?

JODY

‘Course. But just for the time bein’.

CHARLENE

‘Course. And I’m sorry, but I have to ask...

JODY

Right. Well, I’m good. You can scan here.

(Jody holds up their left hand and faces their palm at Charlene.)

It’s part of an upgrade they’ve rolled out. Same idea as the papers, ‘cept you get the code tattooed on you. That way you can’t lose it. Unless you lose your hand, ‘course. So, uh... So, go on. You can keep your distance. It’ll still read just fine.

(Charlene pulls out her phone, manipulates it and then aims it at Jody’s palm. She then turns the phone around to review it.)

CHARLENE

Thank you.

JODY

We can only take care of each other by takin’ care of ourselves, right?

CHARLENE

Right.

JODY

Hey, so listen...

CHARLENE

Mm hm.

JODY

I, uh... I don't want to get your hopes up, but, uh...

CHARLENE

What is it?

JODY

...Well, there's a chance that I saw your daughter recently...

CHARLENE

Oh, God.

JODY

...Now, I can't be sure, but a young couple did stop by a few weeks back. They, uh... they were on foot. Both healthy. I gave 'em somethin' to drink, a little somethin' to eat, we talked a bit, and then they, uh... they went on their way. I didn't get their names, though. So, could've been anyone really.

CHARLENE

Can you at least tell me what they looked like?

JODY

Both of 'em were young. Late teens, early twenties maybe. He had dark hair, medium length, unkempt, some scruff on his chin. She had dirty blond hair, a little taller than him—

CHARLENE

Do you remember her eyes?

JODY

Her eyes?

CHARLENE

The color of 'em.

JODY

Oh, uh... Blue maybe. Maybe hazel.

CHARLENE

Her eyes are green. Emerald green. And they're hard to miss.

JODY

Right. Well, I'm sorry. I mean, they might've been green, but I don't recall exactly. But, you know, like I said, I didn't want to get your hopes up....

CHARLENE

‘Course not.

JODY

...And ‘course it could’ve been ‘em but–

CHARLENE

I’d like to think that it was.

JODY

Understood. Okay, so why don’t you get your car and drive it on over to the barn there? I can follow on foot.

CHARLENE

And you’re sure you’re okay with all this?

JODY

I’m sure.

CHARLENE

Thank you. And I can promise you we’ll make ourselves useful for the brief time we’re here.

JODY

I appreciate that. So, uh... So, go on. I expect the weather’s gonna turn soon.

CHARLENE

All right.

(She turns towards the car. As she heads off...)

Darn it, Tracey. Now, I told you to stay in the car with your sister. You really need to listen to me when I tell you to do somethin’. I mean, my goodness...

(Charlene disappears off. We hear car doors opening and closing, and then the car starting and driving off. Jody watches them go before pulling their revolver from its holster. They open the cylinder and check the number of rounds inside. They pull two rounds from their pocket and load those into the cylinder. They close the cylinder and then hold the gun low and just out of view as they head to the barn. Lights to black.)

END OF ANTHOLOGY