

(DRAFT: 10 Dec 2021)

LOST IN PLACE
RHONDA & DANIELLE
By Craig Houk



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Two or more years into a world-wide 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. *(Beat.)* 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. *(Beat.)* 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.

RHONDA: True enough.

(They drink.)

DANIELLE: So, that leaves what? All the houses on that side of the road empty now.

RHONDA: No. Trina Patterson's still 'round. Saw her this mornin'.

DANIELLE: Trina Patterson?

RHONDA: Yeah. She lives in that gray ramshackle house about a hundred yards that direction.

DANIELLE: I don't think I ever met her.

RHONDA: Oh. Well, she's always kept to herself. She's one of 'em... whatta you call 'em...? introverts. A recluse. Good thing too. It's probably what's gonna keep her alive in the long run.

DANIELLE: In the long run? Hell, I'm not sure I'd actually wanna be here when the long run comes 'round.

RHONDA: Hm. Well, I hear that. *(Beat.)* Anyway, so looks like we got Trina on that side of the road, and I guess you, me, and then Marlene Lumley and her mother-in-law, Ginny, three houses over on this side of the road. Everyone else is gone.

DANIELLE: As far as we know.

RHONDA: As far as we know.

(They drink.)

DANIELLE: Marlene and Ginny. I heard they was always at each other's throats. Hard to believe since it seems like they're gettin' along just fine now.

RHONDA: Well, they don't have much of a choice, now do they. All they got left is each other. *(Beat.)* Oh, and do you remember? Oh, no, that's right. You and your husband just moved to town 'round that time, so you probably didn't know. Anyway, I guess it was two years ago. Maybe longer. I've lost track of time. Anyway, so Ginny – allegedly - tried to hire someone to kill Marlene.

DANIELLE: Get outta here.

RHONDA: I shit you not. And Ginny was sorta friends I guess with this woman who used to stock shelves over at the local Walgreens. Can't remember her name. No, wait. I do remember. It was Barbara... Barbara somethin'. Guess it don't matter anyhow. So anyway, this Barbara lady was married for a short time to a hitman in the 1970s, and so Ginny thought Barbara still had connections with the mafia. Well, Barbara was flabbergasted by Ginny's declaration that she wanted Marlene dead. And Marlene was almost nine months pregnant with her youngest son, Dwayne, at the time. So, 'course Barbara went to the police. And they asked her to go undercover for 'em. So, she did. And they wired her up and she met Ginny in her car in the Sonic parking lot over on Highway 27. Well, 'course Ginny didn't have a penny to her name. So, she

told Barbara that she could offer the hitman a Smith and Wesson 9 mm, a buck knife, one of ‘em iPads, four bottles of gold dust, and a Ronald Reagan Commemorative Coin as down payment. But then he’d have to wait until after Marlene had the baby before takin’ her out.

DANIELLE: You have got to be kiddin’ me.

RHONDA: I ain’t.

DANIELLE: So, what happened then?

RHONDA: Nothin’.

DANIELLE: Nothin’? Whatta you mean, ‘nothin’?

RHONDA: Well, not long after that, the pandemic kicked in real hard. Knocked the whole country on its ass. Ginny was livin’ with her son and Marlene at the time, so when the governor issued a total lock-down, they were all stuck in the same house together. So, nothin’ ever came of it.

DANIELLE: Well, that’s just plain crazy. I mean, how in the world do you live with a woman who intends to kill you?

RHONDA: I don’t know. But I’d start by puttin’ a lock on my bedroom door, that’s for certain.

DANIELLE: Ain’t that the truth. (*Beat.*) So, why’d she do it?

RHONDA: Well, Ginny didn’t much like Marlene from the start. And Marlene was threatenin’ divorce. Said she’d fight tooth and claw for custody of those three boys. And I guess Ginny was worried she’d never see her grandchildren again.

(*They drink.*)

DANIELLE: I’ve been thinkin’.

RHONDA: Oh yeah? About what?

DANIELLE: Well, it don’t take a medical degree to figure out that men are more likely to get infected and die.

RHONDA: That’s been my take on it as well.

DANIELLE: So, I guess I was just wonderin’. Why do you think your lady friend...?

RHONDA: My wife.

DANIELLE: Sorry. Your wife. Why do you think she succumbed so early on?

RHONDA: Look, I appreciate that you’re a kind person. And a good neighbor. And I like you and I enjoy talkin’ to you. But even durin’ times like these, some things are still just nobody’s business. You understand?

DANIELLE: I didn’t mean to upset you. I mean, we was just talkin’ about the chair. And I know that was a tough decision for you to...

RHONDA: And that's all it really is, isn't it? It's just a chair. A placeholder. It don't serve as a substitute. It was just markin' the spot where Adele used to be. And it took me until just this afternoon to figure that out.

(They drink.)

DANIELLE: So, you think maybe I should do the same with this chair here?

RHONDA: You should do what's right for you. Don't matter much what I think.

DANIELLE: What you think matters a lot to me. *(They drink.)* I miss Teddy. Desperately. It was him who convinced me to move here. We was plannin' on havin' kids. And we wanted to raise 'em somewhere quiet. Somewhere safe. But I guess that was never meant to be. And you know, he wasn't just my husband. He was my friend. Maybe not by best friend, but he loved me with all his heart. And he treated me with respect. And my God, he was so funny. Made me laugh all the time. I mean, I'm not gonna share with you some of the awful things he said because they were just not proper. But boy did I laugh so hard until sometimes I nearly threw up. He was a good man.

RHONDA: Men are like corpse flowers. They bloom rarely and only for a short time. And they stink.

DANIELLE: Well, that don't sound very nice.

RHONDA: I guess that's my way of sayin' that I liked your husband too. He was different than most. And he was decent company. Though he had shitty taste in beer. He and I got along just fine, though. *(They drink.)* Adele did not die from the virus.

DANIELLE: No?

RHONDA: No, she did not. Adele... well, she was always sort of a sad woman. I mean, she got through life just fine, I guess. She was able to enjoy herself. And we were able to enjoy each other. But she had finally reached her limit. She didn't much like the idea of hangin' 'round and watchin' the world collapse. And since it seemed that no one was ever gonna take responsibility; that no one was ever gonna make an effort to put things right; she didn't see the point. And of course, she did what she could. She made sure we recycled. And that we conserved water. And that we planted trees. And that we started handwashin' our clothes and hangin' 'em on the line to dry. But no matter what we did, it was never gonna be enough for her. I knew that. She knew that. And so, she took matters into her own hands. And that's all there was to it.

(They drink. Danielle rises out her chair, takes the other chair and walks off with it. Rhonda drinks her beer as she watches Danielle go. Danielle returns. She puts her boxed wine and cup on her chair, carries it over and places it next to Rhonda. Danielle sits. She pours herself another cup of wine. She raises her cup. Rhonda raises her beer. They clink. They drink.)

(End of play.)