

(DRAFT: 11 Jun 2021)

LOST IN PLACE: RHONDA & DANIELLE

A play in one act
By Craig Houk



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SYNOPSIS

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

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

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 think 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

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 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 another. 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.)