

The T . E **N** A . N { T_{enant} } . .

By Dana . . L Hall

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Just when you thought that you never wanted to see another virtual play, this is one that'll make you reconsider. The Tenant by Dana Hall is a tidy full-length-ish script that never drags and isn't just Zoom-ready but was veritably and unapologetically created for the platform. The Tenant is a virtual play that exploits the form with cool angles, creative cutaways, and clever locales ensuring that every character can interact from their own panel. Even a necktie gets a cameo. True, when I first read the script, it must've pissed me off a little because as inclusive as it was to my own personal zeitgeist, I nearly overlooked its splendor. Let's just say that this play about a couple willing to resort to all sorts of hijinks to get their dream home, may have hit a little too close to, well, home. Indeed, it was in the throes of the pandemic, which you may have noticed we're still in (albeit different throes), and yet even though COVID isn't mentioned in the play, I felt it swirling around in the related themes of everything being without precedent including a real estate market that's next to impossible to break into unless you're willing to forgo the inspection and throw in a kidney along with the underlying and/or ensuing threat of homelessness. Add in the fact that it's a made-for-Zoom play (and can't be parsed out from the context in which it was created), but we already talked about that. This post-modern bordering on Faustian tale about the lure of lower mortgage payments spins a dynamic romp that goes from madcap to creepy along with characters that would be unsympathetic in their wanton materialism and obsession with double vanities (a double entendre no doubt) if they weren't so – resourceful? Adaptable? Funny? Something? How about all of the above, and all qualities we need to survive in and beyond the current apocalypse. Sure, “traditional theatre” (i.e., everyone clapping and breathing the same air) is back on the radar and will possibly be relevant in days to come, but The Tenant is a beacon in the emerging realm of virtual live performance and I'd like to ensure that the talented Dana Hall will go down in these digital pages as one of its*

progenitors. I'd add that we (as in the royal editorial we) appreciate a script that provides opportunities for flexibility in casting and gives its actors a chance to do some major chomping of the virtual scenery.

Here's Diana's declaration of love to her prospective new home:

DIANA: (OS) Where's that listing? There it is.
Diana pulls up a picture of the potential new home. It's cute, neat and traditional. Diana is talking to a picture on the screen. We just see the image of the house, not Diana.

The Tenant

By Dana L Hall

Synopsis:

A virtual play written for streaming. In this comedy a young couple purchases a home that comes with a renter. The tenant lives in the basement and when odd things keep happening around the house the Harlings' suspicion grows. Driven by fun banter and clever antics we learn the Harlings may have gotten in over their heads - even if the place has double vanities.

Cast:

Diana Harling: *Ted's wife, 30s, Polish, she appears young for her age, witty yet imaginative, she has bought into the American Dream.*

Ted Harling: *Diana's husband, 30s, (any ethnicity), myopic, traditional, handsome in a way that isn't easy, business-minded.*

Elliot McAlister: *Charismatic middle-aged, always on to the next best thing, they are known around the office for saying, 'they don't sell homes-they sell people on houses.'* (any ethnicity) (gender flexible)

Ronald Dietch: *30-50s, he enjoys junk food, personable,*

unkempt, the kind of roommate you had in college. (any ethnicity) (physical comedy/accents/impressions would be a huge bonus)

Notes:

-- Are indications that dialogue is being interrupted by overtalk from another actor at each of the points indicated.

()... At the end of actors' lines, indicates what the actor would say if they were not interrupted.

/ Breaks in dialogue where character interrupts

OS Off Screen

SCENE I - DIANA-HOME ON LAPTOP MIDWEST. TED-HOTEL ON LAPTOP CALIFORNIA -DAY/March

We open to a video conversation between a married couple. DIANA, 30s, Polish, she appears young for her age, witty yet imaginative, she has bought into the American Dream. She sits on a shabby bed in a dreadful, small, dank apartment. Her husband, TED, 30s, myopic, traditional, neat, is out of town on a business trip. (March)

DIANA: *(Dreamy)* Can you even believe it...A double vanity!

TED: *(To self)* Here we go.

DIANA: I mean- Who are we? Are we double vanity people?
(realizing) No more washing stubble out of the sink--

TED: And don't get me started on the counter space/

DIANA: I know!

TED: *(Mocking playfully)* There's room for my razor **and** my toothbrush. *(realizing)* I could put them both right there on the counter *at the same time!*

DIANA: You're lucky you're 3,000 miles away.

TED: But why stop there? I'd have room for... wait for it...a toothbrush holder. I mean I have space why not?

DIANA: It's fine-make fun. You'll wonder how we lived without it.

TED: You're right, I have taken for granted the importance of double vanities on a marriage.

DIANA: Seriously, I don't want to lose this house Teddy, has Elliot heard back from the seller's agent yet?

TED: Nothing yet. Their agent said they needed time to consider- but Elliot said it's looking "promising."

DIANA: That's Elliot spinning 'nothing' into something positive. I can't stand this waiting-

TED: Oh, you're kidding? YOU -Mrs. Patience?!

DIANA: I opened one Christmas present early three years-ago and for the rest of my life, I'm '*impatient*'.

TED: You rewrapped the watch then slid it back into its hiding spot. Then were all (*mocking*) '*really for me*' in the mirror!

DIANA: Well, I didn't want you to feel insulted--

TED: Wait-You didn't like it?

DIANA: I am just saying the nightstand is not a 'hiding spot' it's just a...SPOT--

TED: --and I'm just saying maybe you shouldn't open things that aren't yours.

DIANA: Technically it WAS mine...just a matter of timing really... (*notices*) Hey- you're wearing the tie I gave you for our anniversary!

TED: Does it say, "invest in us, we can get your premium at below market value?"

DIANA: I don't know. Move it closer to the camera.

Ted holds the tie up to the screen. We only see the tie.

DIANA: The overall color looks fine--

TED: Good....

DIANA: But the pattern looks a little--

TED: Like my wife bought it?

DIANA: I was going to say 'last season.'

TED: You're right! **(defeated)** Damn it! Paisleys? What was I thinking! Paisleys don't close deals!

DIANA: **(Comforting)** Ted... Teddy. Hey, it's 'ok.' You're going to get this contract and we'll be picking out curtains for the house soon enough. Oh remember- that bench we got on our trip Galena?/ Wouldn't it make the cutest window seat?//I know, I know- Mrs. Impatient over here--

TED: /Hun//**Honey**--Cliff just texted he's on his way up. I gotta get going, we have to review numbers. All they need is one small reason to pass on our program.

OS, Ted is getting his 'power tie.'

If we get this account we can expand into the California market. It'll be huge for us.

Uses the computer as a mirror to straighten his necktie.

DIANA: I know... **(Trying to Keep Ted on the line)** but I hate being alone in this apartment. Oh... you know the kid above us in 3B has a skateboard now...

TED: **Uses the camera to make sure he has nothing in his teeth. He cont. Primping for his meeting throughout these exchanges.**

...Oh yeah, that's nice.

DIANA: Nice? Tony Hawk up there rides that thing all day and night- on the wood floors! I'm half awake at work. Did I tell you, yesterday I put in the wrong billing code?

TED: **(Generic, half listening)** Everyone makes mistakes.

DIANA: Tell that to Dr. Dingles! Wait until he sees I billed insurance for a lobotomy instead of precocious puberty.

TED: You'll get it right next time.

DIANA: I hate being alone in this apartment.

TED: You're not alone you've got Tommy and his precarious puberty thing.

DIANA: (Correcting) It's precocious--

TED: (Attending) --Hun. I know you're frustrated. I'm doing the best I can. We'll be in OUR home soon enough, fancy face.

Ted hears a knock. (Yells OS) Come in! **(To Diana)** Gotta go, Cliff is here I'll call you tonight. Love You.

He shuts the laptop abruptly; Ted is gone. Video is still on.

DIANA: (To screen where Ted was located) Love you too.
Diana opens a picture of the front of the new home.

DIANA: (OS) Where's that listing? There it is.
Diana pulls up a picture of the potential new home. It's cute, neat and traditional. Diana is talking to a picture on the screen. We just see the image of the house, not Diana.

DIANA CONT: Hey new house, it's me. Just checking in. What's that?... Uh-huh, yes, I DO love your open floor plan that's not too open. Oh sure, I love your walk-in closet-- and look at your... mature landscaping! But that's not why I'm here, we both know the real reason. Where is it... come on...

She opens a picture of double vanities.

Well, hello beautiful. I know, I know... you're right I'm just making all this waiting worse by looking. But I just needed a little peak. **(Deep breath)** Ok. I'll put you away for now.

Closes the computer window, and checks her cellphone.

Come on Elliot. Make this happen.

(LOGS OFF)

INT. Scene II- DIANA- HOME ON LAPTOP MIDWEST/ TED-INT. HOTEL ON LAPTOP CALIFORNIA/ ELLIOT OFFICE ON LAPTOP(also phone)

Later that week. Diana is logged on from their shabby apartment in Chicago. Ted is on a business trip and joins the call from his California hotel room. They are in a virtual meeting with their real estate agent ELLIOT, charismatic, middle-aged, always on to the next best thing, he is known around the office for saying he doesn't sell

homes-he sells people on houses. They have contacted Elliot for an update about the property they want to purchase in their hometown.

ELLIOT: Elliot is on his cell phone with another agent. He is also on a zoom call waiting for the Harlings to log on. Yeah- I heard ya' loud and clear but I can't do nothing with it. The 'Must-have list' is ridiculous, there's nothing like that in their price range...Oh look further out... how about 1948 cuz that's about how far I'd have to go. Too harsh? Ha. Oh, come on you know I'm right...If they're in the market for a new agent I'll give em' your number! *(laughing)* That's what I thought. Hey, I gotta get off the line. I'm waiting to chat with some kids about a closing... You know me selling hopes and dreams over here. Hey-you ever close on that penthouse?... What? They're afraid of *heights!*? Well tell em' to put up some damn curtains- Bam! Alright listen I see they're logging on I gotta go...uhhuh...ok... yeah sure reserve *Le Bistro* for next Thursday but hey- pull. the. trigger. on. the. listing- cuz' steak is for closers! Laterz.
Elliot hangs up cell phone call. Harlings enter the virtual call. Elliot Multi-tasking throughout the conversation.

Elliot Cont: Hey Harlings, glad to see you...well virtually. They say the camera adds 10lbs. Is it true for these zoom things? *(laughs)* Ted, Teddy my man- you're looking like you got some sun, how's the weather over there in the Golden State?

TED: California is nice. Sunny and warm- haven't gotten out much with work but--(thanks for asking)

ELLIOT: --Oh Diana did you give more thought to those cabinets? Ya still want to paint them or what?

DIANA: (Excited) Are you saying what I think you're saying Elliot...?

ELLIOT: Well, I do have some news...hold for a sec- Let me send this message off...

Elliot talks to himself while sending a message on his cellphone. Million-dollar property and they want to make the deal contingent upon inspection *(scoffs)*. What was I saying?--

DIANA: The news...is it about the contract--

ELLIOT: Right, the contract. Oh by the way the cabinets are real wood, not that composite crap so if you want to paint them/

DIANA: I can -yup thanks. So what did they say?

TED: Sorry, Elliot. We've been waiting by the phone for days-did the sellers respond to our offer? We thought you might be calling to tell us some--

ELLIOT: Good news? Well, we have a bit of a 'good news-bad news' situation. I like to rip that band-aid right off. Bad News- they countered your offer. Good news- I was able to get the account manager to *finesse* the financing a bit to give you more wiggle room on the mortgage payments...so *(pauses)* **double** good news, you got the house! You are the proud owners of 14272 Cherry Tree Lane ***(rattles off the last bit under his breath)*** *if you accept the counter and the tenant agreement, (To Harlings)* Congratulations Harlings!

Ted/Diana/ Elliot overlap each other on the next set of lines.

TED: Wow/ Can't Believe it.

DIANA: It's ours/ It's official!

Elliot: Yup/It's yours

TED: It really does check all of our boxes. The neighborhood, the extra bedroom--

DIANA: --Double Vanities!

Harlings share a look.

ELLIOT: It's all there folks! So, we just have to officially accept the counteroffer *and bing-bang there we have it--*

TED: Wait...The *tenant* agreement-I'm not sure I like the sound of that--

ELLIOT: Just some extra income, no biggie. It won't affect you lovely kids in the least. Let's get this locked down, shall we?

TED: But we never even met the tenant--

ELLIOT: No need, they come pre-approved with a pre-set lease agreement. They've been with the previous owners for years. Just another bonus really! You know how you and Diana love the separate living space on the lower level, with the kitchen and full bath and bedroom-

DIANA: Yes!

ELLIOT: That kind of space costs *(indicate money)*. You couldn't afford it without the tenant. You're getting a real- deal- *(into camera)* trust me.

Elliot is texting while Diana speaks.

DIANA: Oh Ted, you know we need that space. What about starting a family? My mom could come to stay with us and help out. The full apartment is perfect for her.

Ted: It really is- isn't it.

DIANA: She won't stay in our guest room because she *(mocks her mother)*"refuses to be locked away in a cell with no windows" this way she can come and go as she pleases. It's perfect. *(She glares at TED as if to say 'please agree')*

TED: The extra space would be nice/

ELLIOT: **He overhears Ted's line and interrupts like an auctioneer.** Sold! It's yours! Just give me the 'ok' and I'll have the contract drawn up and sent over to their agent by dinner- starting to get a taste for some steaks.

TED: Wait. How long do we have to live with this stranger?

ELLIOT: *(Spinning the tale)* Oh the benefit of the extra income? Let's see-that lasts until the termination of the lease agreement, looks like they have...*(checks document)* 8 months left. Then you are free to move about the *lower level* as you desire. You kids are going to love this property, and I'm not just saying that for the commission check! Hey, Diana-get your mom one of those fancy recliners like we saw at that listing back in November.

DIANA: Oh yah, Ted you remember... The divorce attorney was in the middle of a divorce. *(Sad)* Those two leather recliners just sitting there staring up at an empty wall/

ELLIOT: We should've made an offer on them! Damn. Probably

would've got them real cheap too. They would've looked great by your new fireplace.

DIANA: It's the perfect spot for my mom to watch her shows! She's obsessed with the home buying channel.

ELLIOT: (*Triggered*) Don't even get me started. Those shows have destroyed my life! They got every Joe blow out there thinking they could afford granite countertops and cathedral ceilings. You should see these 'must-have' lists- Who do they think I am Houdini? Where do they expect me to pull a home office, movie theatre, and "man cave" outta? Let's be real- it ain't happening folks. You know what? I can tell when my clients have been watching the home buying channel-cuz next thing I know it's '*open floor plan this*' and, '*is this a load-bearing wall*' that- **enough already!** Besides don't they know those shows are fake?!

His Cellphone rings.

Speak of the devil- I gotta take this call-one-moment Harlings...yeah you got Elliot here...

Elliot takes the call from a client, remains on with Diana and Ted. Elliot's call with a client can be improvised as they are on mute with video on.

DIANA: I can't believe after all this looking it's finally coming true.

TED: (*Concerned*) This doesn't bother you at all.

DIANA: No, I knew they were fake--

TED: No, not the stupid shows. You're completely fine with some rando living in our basement?

DIANA: You know what I'm not fine with? The smell of urine from Mrs. Beecher's six cats.

TED: Don't you think we should at least talk this over--

ELLIOT: --Alright cats and kittens- the offers on the table. Take 24 and talk it over. *You don't want to lose this opportunity. (*Painting a picture with his words*)* I can just imagine you beautiful kids in this house- enjoying the neighborhood, barbecuing in the backyard, little Harlings running around. Not a care in. the. world/

TED: (*anxious*) But the tenant what about/

Elliot: Shhhh... no worries Teddy my boy, just think, you'll be sipping Moscato in the backyard by summer.
(points at phone) I gotta work some magic. Call me at the office tomorrow with your decision. Congratulations!
Elliot leaves the call, Ted and Diana continue the conversation.

TED: So, what do you think?
(Ted is texting as Diana talks.)

DIANA: His face looks less punchable than I remember.

TED: Can you take this seriously? We are about to enter into a legally binding contract with someone we don't even know.

DIANA: He's hardly a stranger. We've seen every property in town together.

TED: Not *Elliot*, the potential homicidal maniac you want to curl up in your jammies with.

DIANA: Lots of people have rental properties, Ted. It's only for a few months. Besides, how dangerous could he be? He lived there for years before we came along. We met the owners at the open house, remember?

TED: Yah, so?

DIANA: So- we know they're *still* alive. *(Smirks)*

TED: Laugh now but I just sent a text to Elliot asking for the counter offer. The numbers he so innocently forgot to share...check your phone I forwarded the text...I'll wait...Not so funny now, is it?

She picks up her phone to read the text.

DIANA: I don't think I've seen a number with that many zeros before. Well, Elliot said the account manager *finessed* the financing, right? That's gotta count for something.

TED: The tenant concerns aside, Diana, this house is already at the top end of our budget. Even after Elliot's

wheeling and dealing, we're coming up short...and that's with the new account. We can't afford this house.

DIANA: We just have to cut back a bit, right? I can use the coffee pot at home so that saves an extra 25 bucks a week--
Diana is texting Elliot.

TED: I appreciate your sacrifice but skipping out on your mocha-frappe-cappa-what's-it-called isn't putting us over the finish line...sorry, hun.

DIANA: So what do we do, stay here in this tiny, mold-infested crap hole?

TED: It's not *that* bad.

DIANA: We talked about starting a family. How are we going to do that here?

TED: (Flirty) We still have a bed.

DIANA: Are you freaking' serious? I can't spend another winter fighting with the landlord about moving the thermostat up 5 degrees or waiting on him to fix the oven when it goes out--

TED: (Casual) We can order out.

DIANA: You know what? It's fine, just fine. Hey, I hear Tommy upstairs is dying to get a BB gun. Maybe he will get one for Christmas and I can stay in shape and stay warm by dodging stray bullets.

TED: (Jovial)--see you found a bright spot!

DIANA: You're not funny, Ted! I want this house--Come on Teddy, it's not like he's going to be here forever...with the change in price, we could use the help with mortgage payments--

TED: --Who says they have good news and bad news but doesn't let you pick which you hear first? Seriously, who does that? I'll decide what "good" is thank you very much.

DIANA: Did you hear a word I said--

TED: Sorry Diana, I'M thinking about our future.

DIANA: I sent Elliot a message too.

TED: You did?

DIANA: Yup, I asked how much the tenant is paying in rent... I just sent it to your phone.

Ted picks up his phone and looks.

TED: Whoa-Really?

DIANA: Really, really.

TED: I didn't realize it was *this* much. This-for one person?

DIANA: One lone person. Separate entrances. We'll never even see him. What do you think, Teddy?

TED: You'll feel safe when I am away?

DIANA: Yes, we can put in a full security system for peace of mind so you can see everything is fine when you're away on business.

TED: Alright--

DIANA: So, Yes?

TED: Yes. I'll call Elliot and let him know.

DIANA: I can't believe it, our own house. Well, ours *and* the stranger occupying our basement apartment.

TED: Funny--

DIANA: Ohhh, we can make the walk-in closet a nursery Teddy...Awww--

TED: Whoa, I said yes to the *house*, let's not push it. I'll call you after I talk to Elliot. Bye hun.

Ted awkwardly stares for a few seconds and pushes buttons...

DIANA: Did you just try to hang up?

TED: Yes, I thought I did.

DIANA: Obviously, you didn't. Teddy, you have to hit 'leave meeting'. Do you see the red button?

TED: Where? I don't see it. If I did would I still be here?
We see Ted's face up close in the camera as he struggles.

DIANA: Hey, don't get upset with me. I'm trying to help/

Ted has put himself on mute by accident so we don't hear these next lines but we read his lips.

TED: What the hell is wrong with this thing?!

DIANA: Ted.

TED: This is super frustrating.

DIANA: TED! You're on mute.

TED: (On Mute) How do I get off this damn thing!

Diana is talking slower and gesturing pointing at her own screen as if it will help him.

DIANA: Settle down. It's the Reeedd buuttton-it's a square *(makes a square with her hands)*- push it.

TED: They can take this technology and...

The sound comes back on full blast with Ted right up in the camera.

AND SHOVE IT WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE!

DIANA: (pause) Ok then.

TED: I didn't mean you. I uhh...I'll just close this window. Bye.

He shuts the top of the laptop. Ted is gone but the video is still online.

DIANA: Bye. Let's hope he sells insurance better than he works a computer or we're both screwed.

Scene

End.

INT. SCENE III - DIANA- HOME ON LAPTOP MIDWEST/ TED- HOTEL ON LAPTOP CALIFORNIA

It is two months later. Harlings have closed on Cherry Lane. They are still in the process of moving in. There is a box in sight and Diana is video calling Ted from the bed. Day.

DIANA: Hi sweetheart I miss you. I hate that you had to go back before we could settle in. How are things in out there-

TED: Good, I miss you too-

DIANA: It's pretty chilly over here-

TED: It's overcast, a little fog and drizzle over here, good ol' May Gray.

DIANA: Is that a thing people say there-

TED: (*shrugs*) I think it's a nice way to say pollution. What do you have on the agenda for today?

DIANA: Started unpacking more of the small boxes. Still can't find Grandma Carrie's bracelets. I know I packed them because I specifically put them in the small jewelry box with her letters.

TED: I am sure they will turn up, hun.

DIANA: I remember how she would always wear them. As a little girl, I used to pretend I was Wonder Woman blocking stray bullets.

TED: They'll turn up.

DIANA: Ya know-I wore one on our wedding day...

TED: You did? I don't remember seeing it--

DIANA: While I was getting ready. It made me feel like she was there.

TED: It has to be here somewhere.

DIANA: Yes, Ted- all things are *somewhere*. That's the problem, they aren't *here*. I found her letters and no bracelets!

TED: Hey, hey -Diana- look at me...hey, there you are. It's 'ok' we will find them.

DIANA: You're not here to help me look, or you would know I went through everything--

TED: I'll email the movers to see if any boxes were left behind.

DIANA: Thanks. *(settling herself)* That's a good idea. I suppose I could take a break from looking. Oh while you're emailing the movers ask them if they saw that antique suitcase your Uncle gave you- I can't find that either!

TED: There's got to be boxes we are missing.

DIANA: Hope so- oh while you're on there take a look we got an email from Homeseure. The security system is officially up and running.

TED: Oh yeah, I saw the message pop up, I'll pull it up. Have you tried it yet?

Ted is opening his email.

DIANA: No, not yet. They say we can log in from anywhere and get footage from any of the cameras in the house. There's audio too if you turn that feature on.

TED: So someone is just sitting around at HomeSecure just watching our house?

DIANA: Pretty sure it stores the footage in the cloud. Do you want to see how it works?

TED: Sure. I think I've been getting better with this technology stuff. Let's see, the email says all I have to do is just hit the SecureHome link here...ok... oh now it says I have to create a password. Hmmm... **(Pauses, then pecks at the keyboard says...)** T..E..D.

DIANA: Don't just use your name.

TED: Let me finish...R..U..L..Z..!!/1..2..3

DIANA: What? What does that even spell? r-u-l-z? Rulz?

TED: Ted Rules but with a Z at the end instead of an E. The rest is in case of, you know, hackers.

DIANA: You're a real Steve Jobs these days...

TED: We haven't seen the basement since we moved in. We should check and just make sure it looks ok down there-right?

DIANA: Don't open it yet. Are we sure we want to do this? I mean, isn't it an invasion of Ronald's privacy?

TED: The guy has barely said two words to us in passing since we moved in. We really know nothing about him other than hearing him play his games at all hours - aren't you curious?

DIANA: Of course I am! Are you sure he won't notice?

TED: I'm sure - besides it's our house we should know what's going on.

DIANA: True, and the security system is for everyone's protection really. Oh- maybe we could see if our missing stuff is down there.

TED: You think he took it don't you... *(seeing how serious Diana is about this matter)*...Hun-The gamer community really isn't noted for high fashion accessories and luggage. We're lucky he takes a break to use the bathroom. Remember- the cameras are for peace of mind Diana, it's not a Dan Brown novel.

Ted opens the video and we see into the basement apartment. We see a slovenly RONALD, he has let himself go, he is wearing gaming headphones, he is in a comfortable chair eating chips and wearing pajamas. He drops a chip on himself and eats it. He licks his fingers then wipes them off on his undershirt. Realizing there were some crumbs left, he licks his shirt. We see a Patriot's football poster hung like a college dormitory.

DIANA: I feel safer already.

TED: The only thing not safe is our pantry.

DIANA: Make sure the volume is off Ted.

TED: (yelling) HEY, PATRIOTS STINK! YEA... ANYONE CAN WIN WITH THE STRONGEST COACHING STAFF AND THE MOST TALENTED AND HANDSOME QUARTERBACK EVER TO GRACE THE FIELD. **(Watches for Ronald's reaction)** Volume is off.

DIANA: Was that supposed to be an insult?

TED: Yea, well, what do you want, it's Tom Freaking Brady?! **Ronald winces in pain.**

DIANA: Oh no- quiet...

We hear an audible gas release. Ronald looks pleased.

DIANA: Nevermind. It's like staring at a pile-up on the side of the road. It's terrible but I can't look away.

TED: Good thing we don't have smell-a-vision.

DIANA: Yeah, silver-linings.

TED: Did we find out anything more about this guy?

DIANA: Not really-Ronald Deitch paid his lease in full though. The previous owner sent the check with their attorney to closing.

Ronald is scratching himself.

He's a real enigma.

TED: Is that someone that dresses up and goes to conventions?

DIANA: I think you're thinking of someone that's into anime Ted. Our guy isn't really into dressing up. We're lucky he's wearing pants.

Ronald at this point realizes his pants are uncomfortable and is now disrobing to cartoon boxers. Ronald does some light stretching and a little cardio over the next few lines.

DIANA: Spoke too soon.

TED: I've had enough of this, how do I turn this off?

DIANA: Where did you tell them to put the camera?

TED: You know that singing bass fish that your Uncle Larry gave me for Christmas? Yeah it's right in the mouth.

DIANA: Oh nice, no one would think to look there.

TED: Right. Oh- here's the log out button-Found it.

He turns off security footage.

See I told you I'm getting better. Well, I gotta get going. We have a meeting with the loss prevention specialist to get some final numbers for the proposal.

DIANA: I hate being here alone.

TED: You aren't alone, you have Ralph the enigma for your viewing pleasure.

DIANA: His name is Ronald. I hate that you have to go back and forth. I get so bored and lonely here I swear my mind is playing tricks on me! Last night I thought I heard a woman's voice.

TED: You think Chester CheesePuff down there is *entertaining*?

DIANA: I realize especially in light of this footage, it's highly unlikely.

TED: It was probably the TV or his video game. Don't those gamers chat with each other or something?

DIANA: I don't know I was on the phone with my mom when it happened. I couldn't really hear what they were saying but it sounded heated. Mom said I should go check it out. See if he had anyone over, "Diana, it's your house you have the right to check to see if the doors are locked." I guess I have the cameras now I could check things out if I needed to.

TED: It's like watching reality TV but entertaining.

DIANA: Do you think he took our things?

TED: Diana. Come on.

DIANA: I know, I know. I could just ask him.

TED: I am sure they'll turn up.

DIANA: You just don't want me to upset the paycheck in the basement.

TED: Are you serious? Do you think that's why I wouldn't want you confronting a complete stranger alone in the house? Besides his check cleared by now. Cleared and spent.

DIANA: Ok. Ok. I won't say anything. But I'll be watching and if one more thing goes missing I can't promise you I won't--

TED: Accuse a complete stranger of stealing things without any proof or evidence? Let's give it a little time and see what the movers say. ok?

DIANA: Fine. I'll invoke Holy Tony, in the meantime.

TED: Ah yes, Saint Anthony- aka The Polish person's lost and found. I'm sure he's just sitting up there in Heaven waiting for someone to lose their keys or phone to dust off his wings and fly into action.

DIANA: He's a Saint, he has a halo-no wings. Remember when I couldn't find my passport before our honeymoon-

TED: Yeah-

DIANA: Holy Tony!

TED: *(mocking, prayer hands)* The Lord works in mysterious ways.

Connection cuts off- lose video of Ted.

DIANA: Ted? Teddy. *(pushes some buttons to no avail)* Lost him. Must be a bad connection. *(quietly/sing-song)* Holy Tony look around, something is lost and can't be found. (Pause)

Looks off towards the door, nothing. Then there is some creaking outside the door.

What was that? *(listens intently)* Someone on the stairs? Hello? Hello? Anyone there...

She leaves the screen. We hear her open the door to the bedroom and say hello? No answer. She returns to the bed and sits down in disbelief. She is holding the bracelet.

HOLY. Fricking. TONY.

(End

Scene)

INT. SCENE I III - DIANA- INT. HOME ON LAPTOP MIDWEST/ TED-
INT. HOTEL ON LAPTOP CALIFORNIA/ - NIGHT

Diana has been trying to reach Ted for hours. She has barricaded herself into the bedroom. We join them in the middle of their video call.

TED: Scissors and packing tape? What are you gonna do wrap him a Christmas present?

DIANA: **Eating a pizza slice. (Mouthful)** It's all that I had, ok Ted. I've been locked up in here for hours moving supplies are all I had--

TED: Is that a pizza?

DIANA: I'm stress eating Ted, ok. I'm stuck up here with a psychopathic-robber-thief!

TED: I'm pretty sure it's one or the other--

DIANA: Oh- ARE YOU Ted?--

TED: Hey, don't get mad at me. I was against this from the start remember?

DIANA: I KNEW YOU WOULD SAY THAT--

TED: Just saying--

DIANA: Ya I deserve to be murdered for wanting double vanities!--

TED: I'll be there as soon as I can.

DIANA: Can you get on the next flight, or not? I can't stay up here forever--

TED: -- soon.

DIANA: So like on the red-eye or--

TED: --Soon Diana. We don't even know what happened. Before I rush outta here and leave Cliff, we should consider it's likely nothing to worry about. You said you were looking in

boxes all day...It could've fallen out of a box and you just didn't see it.

DIANA: I told you I heard a noise right outside the bedroom door and then I found it just laying there. It was right after we were talking about it. I would've seen it there earlier. What are the chances?

TED: The chances of you finding a bracelet that you knew you packed? I'd say it's not breaking news--

DIANA: Oh really?

TED: Diana, is it possible you are overreact--(ing, because you're alone)--

DIANA: --do not even finish that sentence, Ted. You don't hear what I do. Strange voices in the middle of the night. They sound like they're arguing sometimes, yet I never see anyone coming or going.

TED: It's probably the TV. He doesn't seem like the type to be entertaining at all hours. You said you popped on to check and he was just sitting there...shoveling food into himself like Jabba the Hutt. Not a care in the--

DIANA: (*Blurts it out*) --There was blood.

TED: What? Blood, where?

DIANA: I didn't want to say it because I knew you'd think I was making it up./ and tell me that I was (sign for crazy)...But there was blood--

TED: (**Concerned**)-Where? --Where did you see blood Diana?!

DIANA: A little on the stairs. It was smeared in like it was on his shoes.

TED: No wonder why you're hold up in the bedroom your imagination is going wild! Did you try to wipe it up? Did it come up?

DIANA: You're worried about carpet stains now--

TED: --think about it. With the way this guy lives, he

probably tracked something up there. I can see why you would be scared but it's likely some ketchup or...

DIANA: It's blood. I know what blood looks like Ted.

TED: You have to be reasonable Diana. It's more likely to be something explainable...

DIANA: --Ted.

Long pause, she stares off-screen.

TED: What. What! You're freaking me out. Do you hear something?

DIANA: No. I was thinking about when we watched him..

TED: Ya, that stays in my mind too.

DIANA: No not that- what if he heard you Ted? He had to have heard you. All the things YOU said--

TED: I seem to recall you were there too/

DIANA: That's not the point, he heard us Ted--

TED: -- even if he did so, what's the big deal?

DIANA: Maybe returning the bracelet was a message. His calling card. He was telling us 'I hear you, I...I--

TED: (Scary tone) I know what you did last summer--

DIANA: It's time for jokes over there in Pacific Standard Time while I'm over here locked away with--

Diana is reaching for another slice of pizza.

TED: What looks like a deep dish with extra olives--

DIANA: Stress eating Ted. I wish you would take this seriously--

She reaches for a drink.

TED: --Did you also get a shake?

DIANA: My last meal. I snuck down when the delivery guy showed up and ran right back up here.

Uses Ted's tie as a napkin.

TED: Did you see him? Did he look--

DIANA: --like someone looking for revenge? No, I didn't see him but, SEE you think he's **(sign for crazy)** too.

TED: I think there could be other explanations for the bracelet.

DIANA: What?

TED: Well... there's... Holy Tony!

DIANA: I'm hanging up!

TED: No. Don't hang up...let's talk this through. Let's log on and check on him. Hold on... let's see...

Ted is logging in to HomeSecure.

Hello Ralph. Where are you?

Empty screen.

DIANA: It's Ronald!

TED: Where?

DIANA: I don't know Ted.

TED: He's gotta be down there.

Long pause. Empty screen on basement. Diana and Ted are staring at the screen when out of nowhere Ronald appears. Ronald jumps out dressed in a dark bathrobe and startles them.

Ronald: (using a dracula voice)

Flesh of my flesh. Blood of my blood. Death of my death. This life is no longer than the space between two heartbeats. Come into the night, the darkness. Come to me my love.

Leaves camera view.

Diana

What the shits was that!

TED

Was that my bathrobe?

Ted logs them out of homesecure.

Diana: That's not normal behavior.

TED: Ok. He's quirky.

DIANA: Quirky? Didn't you hear him 'blood' 'death!'

TED: Yeah but he sounded like Count Chocula.

DIANA: It's not funny Ted I'm going to my Mom's I don't want to be here alone.

TED: No, come on don't.

DIANA: Call me when you decide you're coming home. I'm going to pack a bag. I gotta go Ted.

TED: Fine, drive safe. I love you.

DIANA: I'll see you whenever you get here - I guess. Bye Ted.

-Diana logs off the

call-

TED: She doesn't have anything to worry about. She just hates being home alone. Might as well see what's going on down there.

Ted logs back on to HomeSecure. The basement is visible. We see chip bags, a roll of toilet paper, and an empty chair.

TED: Ok...I don't even see him.

Long pause. Ronald comes into the camera view holding his behind, grabs the toilet paper and hurries out of shot.

TED: See, the only thing he is murdering is the toilet. *(Laughs to himself)* That's a good one. This is the guy she's so afraid of...

Audible bathroom noises followed by a flush of a toilet. Ronald reappears.

TED: Well look who it is...looks like it's just me and you Ronald. Just you and/

RONALD: /Hello? **Ronald is looking around.**
Is someone there?

TED: Mute! Mute... Oh no. How do you mute this thing...

RONALD: Is someone there?

Ronald inspects the TV remote, then is out of sight. Ronald re-enters he must think there is an intruder, picks up a hammer and is stalking around in and out of frame. Turning quickly as if to catch someone behind him.

RONALD: Hello? Come out, come out wherever you are...Don't let this physique fool you I do not know krav maga or karate but I do know hammer time.

Ted hits mute. Ronald is practicing his moves with the hammer as Ted is texting Diana.

TED: Found it. Mute. Wait-Diana is still in the house. This isn't good.

Starts dialing Diana's cellphone.

Pick up, pick up! (*anxious*) Terrible timing for her to not be talking to me! Ugh straight to voicemail. (*puts down the phone*) Do I leave a message? (*practicing as he redials*) What do I say? "Hey honey, you know how you were afraid of that creepy guy in the basement-yeah uh... he definitely now knows we've been watching him sooo.." No answer. Ok, I'll text... (*texting*) call me it's important. Important? ugh (*texting*) Call me urgently! Too much. (*texting*) Call me it's something. Ok no. Calm down Teddy-boy. Now you're the one overreacting.

Ted looks at the screen.

Hey, where'd he go? It's fine. He's probably just back in the bathroom.

Ted is watching the screen intently. He sees something on the floor that looks odd.

TED cont: Hey what's that...a full garbage bag just laying there. Geez this guy is a mess. We're lucky we don't have mice. (*pauses*) Oh, I think I heard a door slam must be Diana leaving. Phew ok. Well...

Ted looks closer.

Wait, that's not food that's *hair*. Long women's hair hanging out of that bag. Ok. That's strange...Diana mentioned voices arguing.. No one coming or going...

We are zoomed in on the basement all is quiet then after a long beat Ronald jumps back into the shot with strange 'karate' moves. Ted jumps and is so started he reacts. Ronald bangs the hammer on his hand like he's thinking of using it, then puts down the hammer right next to him. He sits down to resume his evening of gaming.

TED: What are you hiding Ronald? Could Diana be right about you? I can't take the chance. I can just hear it now-
(reporter voice) Channel 5 news here with Ted Harling- Ted, did you know Ronald was a homicidal maniac sir? **(in a voice of a fool)** Uhhh well my wife did voice concerns about him. Did you rush home to protect her? Uhhh... No. I told her she was overreacting. I'm an idiot. Don't worry Diana I'll be on that red eye tonight. I never should have left you alone.

-Ted

leaves.-

We see only HomeSecure footage of Ronald. Ronald pauses the game and picks up a mirror.

As himself: "I'm fat and foolish to look at."

Ronald voice of a woman: "Oh honey no you're not."

As Himself: They laugh at me. I gotta overcome it.

Ronald voice of a woman: Darling, you are the most handsome man I know.

Puts down the mirror, picks up the game remote and keeps playing.

-Scene

Break-

Scene v: TED IN GUEST ROOM LAPTOP/ RONALD BASEMENT CAMERA/ DIANA IN PARENT'S KITCHEN

Ted has arrived home from California. It is noon and he is leaving Diana a video message.

TED: (exhausted) Hey, I know you're not talking to me. I get it. I don't blame you. I was a jerk...epic jerk. I'm home now Diana. I'm home for real. I should've listened to you. I believe you now. I'm going to make things right. You deserve to be happy, feel safe, **and** have double vanities. I don't know exactly how this is going to go but I know it's time for me to stand up for you. So...wish me luck, I'm going to confront Ronald and get our house back. I love you, fancy face.

Ted is in the guest bedroom upstairs. The guest bedroom doubles as an office. He is on a laptop logged on to HomeSecure his camera is on as well as the basement camera. We open to hearing Ted on the computer typing.

TED: Ok...I'm on and I don't see him. Where are you Ronald?

Ted studies the screen.

Come to think of it, I didn't see his car. Fine- a little rehearsal time, I guess, as I wait... ok... **(Preps)** So, when I see him I'm just going to ask him to leave, call the police, and lock this place up tight so he can't come back. What am I talking about? I can't just 'ask' him... **(He practices his 'tough guy' voice.)** "Get out or I'll throw you out!"

I should just call the police now and let them sort this out? No! This is *my* house. I can do this! Where could he be? He can't possibly have a job..

Ted looks away from the camera, listening.

Ok. I think I heard the back door any time now he should be visible... **He watches the screen for Ronald.**

Here he is - in all his glory...

Ronald has a trench coat covering a briefcase in his hand. Leaves them both on the floor. He is wearing work clothing. A button-down shirt with a loosened tie and khaki pants with dress shoes. The clothing is wrinkled, looks like he slept in it. We see him scratch his rear as he turns on the TV. He yawns, he sits down and untucks his shirt. He takes off his shoes. He smells his own feet and is visibly taken aback by the smell.

TED: Ronald. Hey Ronald.

Ronald doesn't seem to hear him.

Hey!

RONALD: Hello? Who's there?

Turns off the TV set, and looks around.

Hello. **He is looking around.**

TED: I need to talk to you.

RONALD: Me?

TED: Yes, you! It's time we got to know one another.

RONALD: God?

He looks to Heaven.

Is that you?

TED:--No, it's Ted. I'm in the camera. We need to talk.

RONALD: Ted? Where's the camera?

TED: It's on the shelf behind the TV. You see that singing bass-- look into its mouth.

RONALD: Ohh..

He looks directly into the camera and takes it out of the bass.

I see the little light now... Hey Ted- am I holding this thing right? It's me Ronald, didn't expect anyone to be down here.

TED: I have so many questions for you--

RONALD: I thought I was hearing voices. I didn't know this camera was down here. That explains a lot-Phew! I can't see you though...

TED: You have to turn on the screen.

RONALD: Oh...

He examines the camera.

Let's see... **He fumbles around and we see a close-up of his eye.**

TED: On the top of the camera to the right there is a little button. Can you find it?

RONALD: Ohhh Yah, ok I feel it. **We see him up close to the camera.** I just push that and... **We are all up in Ronald's nose.**

Hey there you are. **(trying to be funny)** Come here often?

TED: Cut the innocent act. I see how nervous you are, you know you're caught don't you?

RONALD: **(Nervous laughter)**...What are you talking about? Come down here and let's talk face to face, I don't want to talk over this device.

TED: Oh you'd like that wouldn't you? WOULDN'T YOU! You know I know so why don't you just spill it?

RONALD: I'm not sure what you're talking about. Why don't you come down here and we can talk this out. I feel like I'm on a date with Alexa.

TED: Talk it out, good one. I'm not coming down there, I know how these things go- I watch movies.

RONALD: Are you ok, Ted? You seem off, oh no are you sick?

Is that what you want to tell me?

TED: I'm not the sick one Ronald.

RONALD: It's Diana isn't it? I knew all that fast food would catch up to her, that's terrible Ted. Just terrible/

TED: /LEAVE MY WIFE OUT OF THIS RONALD!

RONALD: Okay okay man whooaa. Chill out--

TED: --WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE GET BACK FROM THE CAMERA So I can see your lying face!

RONALD: Sounds like you're yelling? Does this thing have volume control?

We see Ronald's face all up in the camera.

Too bad this isn't a 'tuna' fish. Get it- ahhhh.

TED: WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE! WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU. WE KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING--

RONALD: (*reality hits*) Whoa. I...I... can't believe you figured it out. I mean I thought maybe Diana would eventually but by then I would be gone. I was so careful.

TED: NOT CAREFUL ENOUGH. How did you pull it off for so long?

RONALD: Well I had some help.

TED: Someone else was in on this?

RONALD: Yes, they're dead now, but without them, I wouldn't have thought of this. Listen, I didn't mean to upset anyone. I'll do whatever you want to make this right. No one needs to know?

TED: NO ONE NEEDS TO KNOW! I should've already called the police!

RONALD: Police! No, no there is no reason to involve the law. Oh I'm sweating so bad Ted. This basement is like a sauna. Jeez I think the furnace kicked on. It's like 90 degrees down here. (*pulling at shirt*) Do you think you could adjust it a bit from up there?

TED: (*Frustrated but compliant*) Fine. But only because, I don't need you passing out before I get to the bottom of this...Hold on.

Leaves screen and comes back.

There.

Ronald is wiping their face with a towel, the towel is covered in a red substance that is transferring onto Ronald's face.

RONALD: I'm sweating so bad- phew. (*fans himself*) Maybe you're used to the heat in California but not here in Chicago!

TED: Your face has something on it.

RONALD: Here? Did I get it?

TED: You're just smearing it more. It's red...Is that blood? Did you cut yourself or something?

Ronald looks at his own hands, they have blood on them as well as his face.

Ronald: It always gets all over everything. Such a pain! So hard to get off too.

TED: BLOOD!? Blood gets everywhere and that's ok with you?

RONALD: Gross no... I never said I was Ok with it. But I guess it comes with the job. So you get used to it.

TED: Used to it! You have no remorse. - You act like you can do whatever you want and you have for too long! You're a dangerous person.

RONALD: Dangerous? I mean I agree I can be a bit thoughtless and maybe a tad selfish but *dangerous* Ted? It's not like anyone died. Ok, well besides the *one* person.

TED: ONE PERSON!

RONALD: Come on down, I hate hearing you so upset. Let's have a beer and talk things through.

TED: Oh no I'm not coming down there! And DON'T YOU EVEN

BOTHER COMING UP here to find me. You can't see it but I'M LOCKED TIGHTLY IN MY PANIC ROOM WITH...WEAPONS...LOTS OF WEAPONS.

We see office supplies -staplers etc.

--and... and... the police are on the way.

Looks at the phone, sees Diana is calling, she has been calling repeatedly but he missed the calls.

Again.Hold on a minute I have to take this... DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE. WE ARE NOT DONE!

Ronald nervously tries to get comfortable, shifting around, trying to listen in to call.

TED: Hey, honey...what? yah, no I'm ok...fine. Uh huh... I shouldn't confront Ronald alone. It's not safe... Honey, I've got this. You were right and I am going to secure our home for us...in the basement still...uh huh...no, in the guest room on the laptop...I'm handling it Diana...

Ted turns away from the screen as if to hide this from Ronald.

No, I'm not calling the police yet, not till I get an answer...

Ronald sees a bag of cheese puffs in the distance. He eats them like he is at the movies watching a show. His hands are covered in blood, still eats the cheese puffs and licks his fingers. He is very loud with the cheese puff bag.

TED Cont: Will you just let me handle this?.... uh huh...We haven't gotten to that part yet...uh huh... I will let him know...I'm not going to forget!...No, I don't know...why?...because it hasn't come up Diana... ok...You want to do it? You think it's so easy. Oh you do... Ok FINE but I'm still doing this but you can listen. I'll invite you on... hold on...

DIANA ENTERS video call. She is at her mother's home at the kitchen table.

DIANA: Hi Ted. Ronald--

TED:Let me-

DIANA: I've got this- wait Ronald, are you covered in blood?! Ted why haven't you called--

TED: I'm handling this Diana.

DIANA: Where is the blood from!?

TED: *(Taking charge)* Yeah Ronald where is that blood coming from?

RONALD: **He breaks away from the cheese puff bag.**
Hey Diana, is that you? *(waves)* Well when I was taking the garbage bags to my car a towel must've fallen out and I picked one (up to wipe my face) --

TED: OH I KNOW ABOUT YOUR GARBAGE BAGS. You think you can hide things from people but you are not that smart.

RONALD: *(Jovial)* Have you been talking to my ex-wife or something? Nah, you couldn't have been - she's not been around anymore either.

TED: His EX-WIFE must be DEAD!

RONALD: No, she's in Minneapolis with her new husband Steven, he's in finance and has a 'real' job. Are you ok Ted? You seem stressed or something. Diana, Ted told me you were sick, how ya feeling?

DIANA: What? Ted you told him I was sick? Why?

TED: He misunderstood me--

DIANA: --you're supposed to be confronting him not sharing personal details. I'm surprised you're not down there drinking a beer with him--

RONALD: --Oh I offered and--

DIANA: --Seriously Ted. I'll do it myself. *(Firm)* Ronald, I just have to know-how does stealing my grandmother's bracelet play into your scheme?

RONALD: Steal? Steal what- a bracelet you said? I have no idea what you are talking about. I may be a lot of things but--

DIANA: --does this refresh your memory!
Diana is wearing the bracelet in question, she holds it out of camera view.

Ronald is looking but can not see the bracelet she is showing him.

RONALD: *Uhhhh...*Are you trying to show me something? I...I... can't see what you're doing.

DIANA: How about now?

We see Ronald up close to the camera.

RONALD:

Nice bracelet. That doesn't look like upstairs? Where are you?

DIANA: At my mom's...

RONALD: You look upset. Are you and Ted having problems?

DIANA: Well, actually we had a bit of an argument/

RONALD: */I noticed he's been a little (Gestures angry/like a bear)*

TED: *(Clears his throat.)*

Ted motions-'Still here guys.'

DIANA

Right. Focus. Look at this bracelet!

She holds the bracelet up to the camera.

Remember it? How did my grandmother's bracelet get into your hands?

RONALD: Great Caesar's Ghost!

TED: I think he's losing it.

RONALD: It looks just like a piece of armor-like Julius Caesar--

TED: Should I be getting this?

DIANA: **(To Ted)** Sometimes sickos have a 'calling card' they take something from their victims as a reminder/

RONALD: Ohhh Diana, I know what you're talking about! Did you see that on the new episode of True Killer Minds?

DIANA: No!...maybe...yeah.

RONALD: --I love that show! I saw we had a few saved on the TV. When you're home you should pop down and watch a few with me. It always shocks me that some people can be so disturbed.

He continues eating with bloody hands.

TED: WE. "WE" HAVE THEM SAVED! You're not even paying for cable...

RONALD: **Gestures angry bear and points at Ted.**

He's awfully angry is this why you left him Diana?--

TED: She didn't leave me, she went to her mothers!

DIANA: Ted focus. Anyway, how did you end up with the bracelet?

RONALD: How did I... hmmm (**recalls**) how did I... Oh yea, Tim, the pizza guy. He saw it on top of a box by the door. Nice guy. He's in Homewood Park Community Theatre's production of Julius Caesar so he asked to borrow it for his costume.

TED: That's ridiculous. You expect us to believe that nonsense.

RONALD: Yeah I know right? I was critical of their taking on such a classic too! Pretty bold for community theater, right? What kind of budget do they have over there!! Amiright? Anyways... he returned it the other day, said at rehearsal Caesar's wife told him it might be valuable. Nice kid. I should tip him more. I won't but- I really should. Once I realized they might be valuable I tried to give them back. I heard you talking and didn't want to bother you so I left them outside your bedroom door.

DIANA: Oh. You could've knocked.

RONALD: It was late. I didn't want to bother you. I checked the next day and they were gone. Figured you got them.

DIANA: I did. But there was blood on the stairs and there's blood on your hands. Who's blood is it?!

RONALD: (**Realizing**) Wait, you guys think this is someone's blood? That's why you're confronting me? You think that I

could have **(He indicates murdering - gesturing stabbing)**
REET. REET. REET.

TED: --that's disturbing.

RONALD: I'd say.

TED: **(mustering his strength)** You may want us to believe you're this 'nice guy' but you are also a cable-stealing-murderer and you have to answer for what you've done.

RONALD: Whoa--wait! Guys that's not true...well ok the cable yes, but we all know cable companies are the real criminals. **(disbelief)** Me a murderer? Come on it's just me *Ronald*.

TED: Well, what are we to think? Things were going missing and we got suspicious of you so we started watching you. Then we see garbage bags with hair, we hear voices late in the night. My briefcase is probably being used as a part of your scheme.

(disgusted) What did you use it to store?

RONALD: Briefcase...uuuhhh this? I didn't know the briefcase was something special. It's right here - no harm to it. **He shows it to the camera.** It was in this box the movers left down here. **(gestures- we see a moving box)** I assumed it was one step away from Goodwill. Besides, I needed it for something important.

TED: Why would you need a briefcase? Do you even have a job--

RONALD: **(explaining)** You see, Willy Loman--

TED: --Is this another "actor" friend or yours?

RONALD: No, well, he's a character--

TED: Yah, I bet your friends are real characters--

RONALD: No, he's an actual character - character. Death of a Salesman--

DIANA: He's dead?

RONALD: Well, yes- but No. You guys, seriously, you need to stop watching these true crime tv shows -Jeez. My agent got me this part, I was the understudy for the understudy for Willy Loman at the Goodman.

DIANA: Understudy-You're an actor?!

Ronald stage bows.

DIANA: No. Ted? You believe this?

TED: So, either he's a liar or he lies professionally.

RONALD: *(Shakespearian)* All The World's A Stage-- (and all the men and women)

DIANA: What's with the blood then, it's not real?

RONALD: It's the perfect blend of corn syrup, powdered sugar, and some food dye.

TED: Sounds like quite a recipe.

RONALD: It's actually pretty sweet. *(licks fingers)* I took this gig, an actor friend of mine died unexpectedly, so I'm filling in for him. I miss him dearly but he's lucky he's gone I tell ya. It's a Dracula adaptation. The writer/director is full of himself; he wants things as authentic as possible. Here I am at night blending this 'blood' mixture. It stains everything! Between me and you guys this version of Dracula both bites and sucks. I wouldn't be surprised if he died to get out of it!

TED: Ok. Say we believe you- Well that explains the blood- I guess. But I saw the hair in the garbage bags--

RONALD: --Just wigs. The first act requires these ancient looking wigs. I told you this guy is super full of himself. I tried telling him audiences are way too cynical for this kind of stuff. He don't listen--

TED: --The voices? Let me guess, just some acting buddies rehearsing lines right?

RONALD: Wrong.

DIANA: What? Then who/

RONALD: All me. I do all the voices- it's part of my process.

TED: But you were acting so funny and you even said someone died?!

RONALD: Well, my actor friend did die-natural causes - the eternal stage left poor guy (*takes bow*). I thought for sure you were on to me. (*realizing*)...I mean on to my (*thinks on his feet then whispers*) secret project. Yeah... uhhh...I'd really like to tell you both more but I can't. You see I'm really not supposed to be talking about this, if my agent finds out he will literally kill me. It's so completely confidential the agency even had me (*thinks*) sign a NDA.

TED: Wow, that's serious. If you die on stage they just let ya go huh?!

DIANA: Ted seriously? You're thinking of a DNR. He signed a NDA- a non-disclosure agreement. He can't share any proprietary information or he could be sued.

TED: Ok. Well, it's fine we don't have to know the details. So, all the blood, voices, missing objects, wigs, weird hours, is all because you're an actor?

RONALD: As you can see, it's a really glamorous lifestyle.

DIANA: If you're an actor, where's your headshot?

Ronald rifles through the desk. He holds up a picture of a much, much younger version of himself (or a very photoshopped version). He holds up headshot to the camera.

Ronald: It's a few years old.

TED: Jeez, and to think I was going to call the police. You really had her going!

DIANA: Me?! Oh really. I think I have your farewell voicemail saved right here you want me to play it?

TED: Not necessary.

DIANA: I'm curious what kind of show caused all this! Can

you tell us anything at all...

TED: I've never known an actor before, unless you count my Uncle he was in Chicago Med.

RONALD: (*Impressed*) Really?

DIANA: They were filming on his block and he ran out because he left his wallet in his car.

RONALD: Well, since we are all friends here, I'll tell you this much- it could be my big break- "Are They Dead Yet?". It's a one man show where I do impressions of famous people that may or may not be dead. Here's the script right here. **Gestures to a stack of white computer paper stapled together, he quickly puts something on top of it.**

TED: What? I don't get it--

RONALD: (*impression of William Shatner*) "Mr. Scott, an alien object of unbelievable destructive power is less than two days away from this planet. The only starship in interception range is the *Enterprise*. Ready or not, she launches in twelve hours."

DIANA: --(*guesses the impression*) William Shatner! I was just saying to mom... (*calls off-screen*) Hey mom, weren't we just asking Dad if Shatner died.? Ha!

TED: Can you do anyone else?

RONALD: (*Impression of Conery*) "For your eyes only...Trebek"

TED: Sean Conary! Is he..you know (*indicates dead*)?

RONALD:Yes.

DIANA: Wait-Roger Moore played Bond in 'For Your Eyes Only'.

RONALD: Also dead.

TED: This is fun! Let's do another round! Who else is dead!?

RONALD: I wish I could but I really can't.

DIANA: We really are sorry Ronald. We should've just talked it out with you when we became suspicious.

TED: You must think we are crazy for thinking you were a murder... you looked awfully nervous...

RONALD: Ohhh, I thought you were mad about something else...

TED: What?

RONALD: *(Thinking fast)* Ohhh uhhh... my using your cable or raiding the fridge upstairs or when I borrowed your robe when my washing machine broke or *(Fishing for info)* the rent check maybe you didn't get it or something...you did get it right?

DIANA: Yup we got your check, paid in full at closing.

TED: Wait...I was right- It WAS my robe! *(visualizes it)*

RONALD: Listen, I know I'm not easy to live with and I have a lot of body hair that clogs shower drains-- a plumbing nightmare really but I digress-being accused of murder is a first,I'll give you two that- but hey it's all a big misunderstanding. What a relief-*(aside)* Could've been worse.

TED: Not sure how it could be-

RONALD: Just a saying I suppose...

TED: But that's very kind of you Ronald. Maybe I'll pop down for that beer sometime soon. You could even keep the robe.

RONALD: *(Trying to rush them off)* That'd be nice. Hey, as long as we have a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs, life is good right? I'm sure, in time, we'll laugh about all this nonsense!

DIANA: I hope so! I look forward to your show, not the Dracula thing but the one-man show.

RONALD: Yeah, really? Thanks. Well, I hate to break up the party but I have to call my agent in a few...

TED: Oh yeah of course. Sure. We'll leave ya to it.

RONALD: I think I'll just turn this off... then. (*Gestures to security camera*) I mean now that I know it's here it's just a little--

DIANA: Creepy.

RONALD: I was going to say really invasive and possibly illegal but yeah creepy.

DIANA/TED: (*Overlapping alternating*)

Yeah/ yup / of course/unplug

RONALD: Well, bye guys.

RONALD EXITS he disconnects the camera.

Diana and Ted remain on the line with each other.

DIANA: Wow. That was intense.

TED: What just happened. Seriously? Did I just accuse a man of murder and in the same conversation agree to beers? You really got me all worked up, and for what?

DIANA: I got you worked up? Maybe if you didn't work so much my mind wouldn't have created this fantastical--

TED: Nope. We are not doing this-

DIANA: You're right. No more bickering.

TED: Agreed.

DIANA: Hey, I never did thank you.

TED: For what?

DIANA: For coming home.

TED: I shouldn't have left you, were right Diana. Well, not right about Ronald but right about me. I need to be here more with you, what's the point in getting these accounts if I lose you?

DIANA:How about tonight we open a bottle of wine and order from that new Chinese place? I'll pick it up on the way home. It's off Main street right?

TED: It's just north of 111th ave on the east side of the street.

DIANA: Seriously, who am I Lewis & Clark could you just tell me what it's next to?

TED: It's across from that hair salon you won't go back to because they talk too much.

DIANA: Oh yeah, I saw they were putting something in there. I'll put in the order and finish up here, text me what you want.

TED: Hey, hun you were right. It's terrible being here alone.

DIANA: Be there soon.

off)

(They log

Recorded video call. Ronald talking to his agent.

RONALD: Yah Stan...I wanted you to see how serious I am. You ready? I'm done. I mean it this time. I'm tired of these community theatre roles. I need you to get me in front of some real producers. I just had a great idea...It's a game changer- you ready-It's for a one-man show called -'Are they dead yet." It practically writes itself. Call me when you get this...

SCENE VI INT. DIANA IS IN THE NEW KITCHEN ON LAPTOP/ TED IS IN HIS CAR - AFTERNOON (OCTOBER)

DIANA: Hey.

TED: What's up honey?

DIANA: Nothing-thought you were going for a run on the trails.

TED: I did. I just stopped for a little extra fuel.
Holds a coffee travel mug.

DIANA: Coffee? How can you run and then drink coffee?

TED: I can't imagine you called to ask me about this..

DIANA: Maybe you can just describe the coffee to me since I have been sticking with my plan to cut back/

TED: You want me to bring you one...

DIANA: No no... it's totally fine.

TED: So this is the hill?

DIANA: What?

TED: That you're willing to die on huh?

DIANA: I don't even want to think about climbing a hill let alone dying on one.

TED: Nice. So what's up over there? The painters come by yet?

DIANA: No, not yet. I'm glad we're doing this, painting just makes it feel like it's our own place.

TED: Paying the mortgage plus the PMI kinda does that for me.

DIANA: You're sure you are fine with the color? **She holds up a paint sample.**
I'm just calling to give you one last out.

TED: Yeah, it's fine. I agree the old girl could use some lipstick.

DIANA: Who says that?

TED: Ted Harling. I've been told I'm witty.

DIANA: I can't with you. You've been hanging around Ronald and his acting buddies too long!

TED: Nah, though that reminds me I said I would run by the theatre tonight-

DIANA: Again, Dracula is still running?

TED: No- but did I tell you how they had the Dracula head just laying around? Yeah they served it on a platter during the curtain call.

DIANA: No? You're making this up.

TED: Nope. The cast would take it out to the dinner after rehearsals during tech week. It was tradition. I guess theatre people are really superstitions/

DIANA: Oh what are you seeing then?

TED: They're having a preview of Noises Off.

DIANA: Oh yah, I've heard of it... it's a comedy right?

TED: Yah. From what I've heard- the cast thinks it's hilarious and "meta" but it seems like a lot of slamming doors and missing sardines to me.

DIANA: Maybe it's one of those 'had to be there moments."

TED: Well, I'll be there-the cast gets free drinks at McNally's so I guess I can make myself available to appreciate the arts. **Ted is distracted by something on the phone while he's in the video call.**

DIANA: Awfully kind and cultured of you. The least you can...

She notices he's staring at something else on his phone.
Hey you ok?

TED: I just got a message from Ronald.

DIANA: You look like you're about to cry. They're not doing another run of Dracula are they? **(pauses he doesn't laugh)**
Hey...hun..

TED: He says his agent called he's heading to New York as soon as this run is over. Says they may have a producer for his one man show.

DIANA: That's great for him. We knew he was waiting to hear back. This is his dream come true.

TED: I know.

DIANA: Who would've thought the two of you would've gotten so close in the last couple of months.

TED: I'm glad he told me now instead of tonight with the cast. I'm seriously bummed. I mean I knew he was leaving soon-ish but wow.

DIANA: I know. It stinks. I'm sorry. He's been really great. He started cleaning more, bringing in our mail, he even watched the dog for us when we went for that long weekend in Geneva.

TED: I think I'm going to give him the briefcase.

DIANA: Your uncle's? It's been in the family forever.

TED: I just feel like it's fitting, ya know?

DIANA: That's really sweet hun. Really. *(OS doorbell)* Oh, that must be the painters. Talk soon - bye. **TED and DIANA log off.**

INT. PRE - RECORDED VIDEO CALL FROM Elliot TO TED. - Ted listens to Elliot's pre-recorded call about a week after Ronald has moved out.

ELLIOT: Hey Harling family. I wanted to touch base with you kids. How's the new property treating ya? I know it was more than you planned to spend but it really was a steal. Ted- I have to tell ya I was thrilled for you when we got the tenant's check and you didn't have to deal with some guy living in your house for 8 months! Ha lucky you! Don't get me wrong- it's sad that Ronald died from a heart attack before you moved in. But that kinda money goes a long way- it's not like he could take it with him. Ahhh-those contracts are a doozy they don't care what happens- no refunds.

Poor Ronald Dietch- but that's the way the world turns! Diana- I hope mom is enjoying that lower level! Hey, I just thought of something, I guess I was wrong I didn't just have double good news it turned out to be 'TRIPLE' good news! Well, not for Ronald but anyways... ahh I do surprise myself sometimes. Well- I'm off to a listing-Don't forget to refer friends and family to McAlister Reality!

End

Call

SCENE VII Ted is on a video call with Diana. Diana is visiting her Mother. Ted is in the new home kitchen. A few days later. October/Day

TED: Did you listen to the message I forwarded you from Elliot?

DIANA: Of course, he's all about marketing himself. Well, Elliot was right about the house. It's great. *(yells off)* Mom, it's Ted I'll be there in a minute. *(to Ted)* Sorry about that. I gotta get back to her before she bags up those leaves herself.

TED: Sorry to bother you, I just had to get your take on this.

DIANA: On what?

TED: Elliot's message. He said that Ronald never moved in. How is that possible?

DIANA: It's not possible. We know Ronald. You played video games with him like every night. He was very very real and very alive.

TED: Don't you think the message is strange though.

DIANA: Ted, we didn't imagine him. I knew all this theatre would get to your head. You shouldn't have seen Harvey. Instead of a bunny, you think you imagined a grown man?

TED: I am not saying that--

DIANA: I have the cheese puff-stained towels to prove he was here. Elliot must have his wires crossed.

TED: Yeah, that's gotta be it.

DIANA: Speaking of Ronald, I haven't heard from him since he left last Tuesday. Have you?

TED: No, I assumed he's busy with show stuff.

DIANA: Yeah he's not Mr. Responsibility, remember when he was running late for the plane and we made the joke about running late to his own one-man show.

TED: Right. The script. I thought I saw a copy of it around here.

DIANA: Well, throw it out. You can't read it, he has that NDA. Where are you going?

Ted is walking around.

TED: No one is here but us. I'm just looking at the title page, "Are They Dead Yet?"

DIANA: I wonder which celebrities he'll choose...ohhh now I want to know. You know if I was there I'd have to peek. But we can't!

TED: *(Looking at the script)* Huh...

DIANA: What?

TED: *(reads out loud)* Written by Anthony Belmonte. **Ted turns the script to the camera.**

DIANA: Anthony Belmonte? Who's that?

TED: Our Tenant! - He made them all keep his secret, Anthony was pretending to be *Ronald Dietch* all along. You can't trust actors!

TED: Here's your proof.

Ted turns to the second page of the script. He reads the dedication out loud.

Right here in his script. "Dedicated to the late Ronald Dietch. I'll miss you, buddy. I had to fill your role in *Dracula* but your leaving did give me a place to crash, we're even." Signed Anthony Belmonte.

DIANA

(Spit take optional)

Holy. Fricking. Tony!

END SHOW

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

AUTHOR BIO: