

THE TENANT

By Dana Hall

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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, 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 McALLISTER: 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)

PLAYWRIGHT NOTES:

-- Are indications that dialogue is being interrupted by over talk 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

AT RISE: We open to a video conversation between a married couple. DIANA, 30s, Polish, witty yet imaginative, she has bought into the American Dream. She sits on a shabby bed in a dreadful, small, dank apartment in Chicago. Her husband, TED, 30s, myopic, traditional, neat, is in California 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. 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 the space why not go nuts right?!

DIANA

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

TED

You're right, I have taken for granted the importance of bathroom counter top space on a marriage.

DIANA

Seriously though, 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. Ugh 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 and slid it back into the drawer. Then practiced your 'surprised-face' in the mirror.

DIANA

Well- I didn't want you to feel bad-

TED

Wait! You didn't even like it?!

DIANA

I'm just saying the nightstand table is not a 'hiding spot.'
(*trying to change topics*) Hey- is that the tie I gave you for our anniversary.

TED

It is- does it say, 'invest in us, we can get your premium at below market value?'

DIANA
I don't know bring it closer to the camera. The overall color looks fine--

TED
Good...

DIANA
But--

TED
What?

DIANA
The pattern looks a little/

TED
Like my wife bought it?

DIANA
I was going to say last season-

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

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

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

OS- TED is getting his 'power tie.'

TED (CONT'D)
If we get this account we can expand into the California market. It'll be huge for us.

TED uses the computer as a mirror to straighten his necktie.

DIANA

I know...but I hate being along in this old apartment. Oh... you know the kid above in 3B has a skateboard now...

TED uses the camera to make sure he has nothing in his teeth. TED continues primping for his meeting throughout these exchanges.

TED

Oh yea-- that's nice.

DIANA

Nice? Tony Hawk up there rides that thing all day and night-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 dear/

DIANA

Tell that to Dr. Dingles! Wait until he sees I billed insurance for a lobotomy instead of a precocious puberty. Are you even listening- ugh I hate this place--

TED

Yes, I'm listening-- you're not alone you've got Tommy and his precarious puberty thing- see.

DIANA

Precocious!

TED

Hun. I know you're frustrated but I'm doing the best I can. We'll be in OUR own home soon enough, fancy face.

Ted hears a knock.

TED (CONT'D)

(Yells OS) Come in! (To DIANA) Gotta go, Cliff is here I'll call you tonight Love you.

TED shuts the laptop abruptly; he's gone. Video is still on.

DIANA

(She speaks to the screen)

Love you too...Where's that listing...here 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'D)

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...

She opens a picture of double vanities.

Well, hello beautiful. Shhh... I know, I know I'm only making the waiting worse by peeking. (*deep breath*) Ok. I'll put you away for now.

Closes the computer window, and checks her cellphone.
Come on Elliot. Make this happen!

DIANA logs off. Blackout.

SCENE II

At Rise: 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 is on his cell phone with another agent. He is also on a zoom call waiting for the Harlings' to log on.

ELLIOT

Yea- I heard ya' loud and clear but I can't do nothing with it.

(MORE)

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

The 'must-have list' is ridiculous, there's nothing like that in their price range. (pause) Oh look further out huh? How about 1948 cuz that's about how far I'd have to go. Too harsh? Ha. Oh come on you I'm right though (laughs) If they're in the market for a new agent I'll give em' your number! Ya ya 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 out here. Hey- you ever close on that penthouse? (pause) What! They're afraid of heights!? Well, for that price tell em' to put up some damn curtains- Bam! Alright listen I see they're logging on gotta skedattle. Uhhh ok.. yeah sure reserve Le Bistro for next Thursday but hey- Pull. The. Trigger. On. The. Listing my friend- cuz steak is for closers! Laterz.

ELLIOT hangs up the cell phone call. The HARLINGS enter the virtual call. ELLIOT multi-tasks throughout the conversation.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Hey Harlings, glad to see you...well virtually at least. They say the camera adds 10lbs. Is it true for these zoomie 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

--Uh-huh, Oh Diana did you give any 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...oh hold
for a sec-let me send this message
off

ELLIOT talks to himself while sending a message on his
cellphone.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Million-dollar property and they
want to make the deal contingent
upon inspection (scoffs). What was
I saying now?--

DIANA

The news- is it about the contract--

ELLIOT

Right, the contract. Oh- by the way
the cabinets are real wood, not
that fake composite crap so if you
do what to paint them--

DIANA

I can...yup thanks. So what did
they say?

TED

Sorry, Elliot its just we've been
waiting by the phone for days- 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 the band-aid right off.
So- 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! (under his
breath quickly) If you accept the
counter and the tenant agreement,
(big and bright 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/Yuppers It's all yours

TED
It does check all the boxes. The neighborhood, the extra bedroom--

DIANA
Double vanities!

The Harlings share a playful look.

ELLIOT
It's all there folks! So, we just have to officially accept the counter offer and bing-bang boom there we have it--

TED
Wait...The tenant agreement- what's that about- we never discussed 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 this tenant person--

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

DIANA
Yes!

ELLIOT

Well, that kinda space costs some serious cash 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're going to need that space. What about starting a family? My mom could stay with us and help out. The full apartment is perfect for her.

TED

Once the lease is up it would be nice to have the extra space/

ELLIOT

(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-- hmmm ya know I'm starting to get a taste for some steak.

TED

Wait- How long do we have to live with this stranger?

ELLIOT

(spinning the tale)

Oh- how long does the benefit of the extra income last...let's see- that lasts until the termination of the lease agreement, looks like they have (still checking documents) 8 months left. Then you are free to move about the lower level as you please. Aww you kids are gonna love this property-- Oh Diana get your mom one of those fancy recliner chairs we saw at the listing back in November.

DIANA

Oh yea, Ted you remember, the divorce attorney in the middle of his own divorce. (Sad) Those two leather recliners just sitting there staring up at an empty wall/

ELLIOT

Damn! I knew we should've made an offer on them! Probably would've got em real cheap too. They would've looked great by your new fireplace.

DIANA

Oh! They would've been perfect for my mom to sit and 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' list is- who do they think I am Houdini? Where do you they expect me to pull a home office, movie theatre and "man cave" outta? Let's be real- it ain't happening folks. (laughing) You know what? I can tell when my clients have been watching that crap 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 anyway?!

ELLIOT's cellphone rings.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Speak of the devil- I gotta take this call-one moment Harlings. (to phone) 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)

It 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 the basement?

DIANA

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

TED

I think we should at least talk this over--

ELLIOT

ALRIGHT cats and kittens - the offer is on the table. *(sees Ted's face of concern and tense in the air)* Yah know what-take 24 and talk it over but you don't want to lose this one. *(painting a picture with his words)* I can just imagine you beautiful kids now- enjoying the neighborhood, barbecuing in the backyard, little Harlings running around...not a care.in.the.world/

TED

Except the guy in the basement/

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

Can you believe that guy?

DIANA

His face actually looks less punchable than I remember...

TED

Can you take this seriously? We are about to enter 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's lived there for years before we came along. We met the owners at the open house remember?

TED

So-

DIANA

So- they're still alive. (smirks)

TED

Laugh now but I just sent a text to Elliot asking for the counter offer. Ya know -the numbers he so innocently forget to share...check your phone I sent you the text...I'll wait... not so funny now, is it?

DIANA 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.

(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

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 what- 25 bucks a week--

DIANA is texting Elliot.

TED

I appreciate your sacrifice but skipping out on your mocha-frappe-cappa-whatever-its-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 freakin' serious? I can't spend another 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

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 the tenant is gonna be there forever...with the change in price, we could use the help with mortgage payments--

TED
(mumbling to self in frustration)
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
Yah-well 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
Ohh, 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
If I did would I still be here?

TED's face up close in the camera as he struggles. TED has put himself on mute by accident so we don't hear these next lines but we read his lips.

TED CONT
What the hell is wrong with this thing, I pushed it!!! (improvised frustration)

DIANA
TED! You're on mute. Unmute- unmute Teddy!

TED
They can take this technology and...

Just then the sound comes back on full blast with TED right up in the camera.

TED CONT
AND SHOVE IT WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE!!!

DIANA
(pause) Ok. Then.

TED
Not you- I uhhh...I'll just close this window. Bye sweetie.

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.

Blackout.

Scene III

At Rise: It's 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.

DIANA (CONT'D)
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-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'm 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?

DIANA

Mhmm-While I was getting ready. It made me feel like she was there.

TED

Well it'll turn up- it's 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

Ok. (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 Homesecure. 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.

(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

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...

RONALD looks pleased as we hear an audible gas release.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Never mind. 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.

DIANA (CONT'D)

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 (CONT'D)

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.

TED turns off security footage.

TED CONT

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

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.

Just then connection cuts off- we 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)

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

DIANA CONT

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

DIANA 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.

DIANA CONT (CONT'D)
Holy. Fricking. Tony.

Blackout.

Scene IV

At Rise: 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 is eating pizza.

DIANA
It's all 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--so what 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 fell 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--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
(blurting 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
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...

DIANA stares off screen. There is a long pause.

TED

What. What! Diana- you're freaking me out. Do you hear something?

DIANA

What if he knows we were watching him...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

(whispering)

He heard us Ted--

TED

Even if he did so, what's the big deal?

DIANA

He's sending a message...(holds up bracelet) A calling card- to say 'I hear you, I...I...--

TED

(mocking scary tone)

Know what you did last summer-

DIANA

Oh-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--

DIANA 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.

DIANA uses one of 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.

TED CONT
 Hello Ralph. Where are you?

There is an view of the basement with no Ronald.

DIANA
 It's Ronald!

TED
 Where?

DIANA
 His name is Ronald-

TED
 Whatever his name is he's gotta be
 down there somewhere.

There is a long pause. Empty screen on basement. DIANA and TED are staring at the screen when out of nowhere RONALD jumps into frame dressed in a dark bathrobe and startles them.

RONALD

(imitating Dracula)

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.

RONALD runs off from camera view.

DIANA

What the shits was that!

TED

Was that my bathrobe?

TED logs them out of homesecond.

DIANA

That's not normal behavior.

TED

Ok. He's quirky.

DIANA

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

TED

Yeah 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 (CONT'D)
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 (CONT'D)
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 (CONT'D)
Well, look who it is...looks like
it's just me and you Ronald. Just
you and/

RONALD
Hello?

RONALD is disturbed and is looking around.

RONALD CONT
Is someone there?

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

RONALD
Is someone there?

RONALD inspects the room a bit then is out of sight. RONALD
re-enters he must think there is an intruder, he has a hammer
and is stalking around in and out of frame. Turning quickly
as if to catch someone behind him.

RONALD (CONT'D)

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. (he listens and hears movement upstairs) What's that? (He starts slinking away.)

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.

TED starts dialing Diana's cellphone.

TED CONT

Pick up,pick up! (anxious) Terrible timing for her to not be talking to me! Ugh straight to voicemail.(puts down 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.

TED CONT (CONT'D)

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 (CONT'D)

Hey, 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/zooms in.

TED CONT (CONT'D)
 Wait, that's not food that's hair.
 Long women's hair hanging out of
 that trash 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. Ronald bangs the hammer on his hand, then puts down the hammer right next to him. He sits down to resume his evening of gaming.

TED CONT (CONT'D)
 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.

RONALD
 (as himself)
 I'm fat and foolish to look at.

RONALD (CONT'D)
 (voicing a woman)
 Oh honey no you're not.

RONALD (CONT'D)
 (as himself)
 They laugh at me. I gotta overcome
 it.

RONALD (CONT'D)
 (voicing a woman)
 Darling, you are the most handsome
 man I know.

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

Blackout

Scene V

At Rise: TED has arrived home from California. It is noon and he is leaving Diana a video message. This can be a pre-recorded message from his car.

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 (CONT'D)

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

TED studies the screen.

TED CONT

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.

TED

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. He 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 CONT

Ronald. Hey Ronald.

RONALD doesn't seem to hear him.

TED CONT (CONT'D)

Hey!

RONALD

Hello? Who's there?

RONALD turns off the TV set, and looks around.

RONALD CONT

Hello.

RONALD is looking around.

TED

I need to talk to you.

RONALD

Me?

TED

Yes, you! It's time we got to know one another a little better.

RONALD

God?! *(looks to the heavens)* 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

Ohhh...

RONALD looks directly into the camera.

RONALD CONT

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

TED

Yes well--(we have some things to
discuss)/

RONALD

Hold on Ted let me get this thing
positioned better.

RONALD sets the camera down and sits in a chair.

RONALD CONT

Hey ok there you are. (poses
awkwardly/trying to be funny) Come
here often? (nervous laughter) Ya
know I thought I was hearing voice.
This explains a lot!

TED

Yeah I bet it does-

RONALD

(confused)
What?

TED

Oh 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.

DIANA

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 whoaaa. 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 a volume control.

RONALD's face is all up in the camera.

RONALD CONT

Too bad this isn't a 'tuna' fish
camera anymore- right? Ha 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 It's not like I didn't have
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 by compliant)
Fine. But only because, I don't
need you passing out before I get
to the bottom of this...Hold on.

TED leaves screen and comes back.

TED CONT

There.

RONALD is wiping 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
Calm 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 me
but I'M LOCKED TIGHTLY IN MY PANIC
ROOM WITH...WEAPONS...LOTS OF
WEAPONS.

We see office supplies -staplers etc.

TED (CONT'D)
...and...an the police are on their
way!

TED looks at the phone, sees DIANA is calling, she has been
calling repeatedly but he missed the calls.

TED (CONT'D)
Again? Ugh 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 (CONT'D)
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.

TED (CONT'D)
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 continues his call with DIANA.

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 breaks away from the cheese puff bag.

RONALD

Hey Diana, is that you? (waves)
Well when I was taking the garbage bags to my car a towel must've fell 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

Uhhh...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 and gestures 'still here.'

DIANA

Right. Focus. Look at this bracelet!

DIANA holds the bracelet up to camera.

DIANA (CONT'D)

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
No, it looks just like a piece of
armor-like Julius Caesar--

TED
Yeah so--

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!...Well 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.

RONALD continues eating and gesturing with bloody hands.

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

RONALD gestures 'angry bear' and points at Ted.

RONALD
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.
(MORE)

RONALD (CONT'D)

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 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 the 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 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 of yours?

RONALD

No, 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 (CONT'D)

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, 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.

(MORE)

RONALD (CONT'D)

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.

(MORE)

RONALD (CONT'D)

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.

RONALD

So you can see why I was so nervous...

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 or even a young celebrity everyone knows). 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, we're sharing as friends,
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.

RONALD gestures to a stack of white computer paper stapled
together, he quickly puts something on top of it.

TED
Really- I don't know--

RONALD
(Impression of William
Shatner)
Mr. Scott, an alien object of
unbelievable destruction is less
than two days away from this
planet.

DIANA is smiling and TED is confused.

TED
What?

RONALD
The only starship in interception
range is the Enterprise. Ready or
not, she launches in twelve hours/

DIANA
 (excitedly guesses)
 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?

Open to any impressions the actor may favor.

RONALD
 (Impression of Conery)
 "For your eyes only...(TED doesn't
 get it so RONALD uses the SNL skit
 to help him.) 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)

Ohh.. 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...

RONALD is nervous thinking TED has figured him out.

TED (CONT'D)

I was right- It WAS my robe!
(visualizes it)

RONALD slightly relieved. Trying to smooth things over.

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 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 doesn't recall.

TED (CONT'D)

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.

(MORE)

DIANA (CONT'D)

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.

DIANA and TED log off. Recorded video call. RONALD is 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...

BLACKOUT

SCENE VI

At Rise: 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.

TED 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

I'll stop on my way home. (Smiles)
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...

DIANA notices he's staring at something else on his phone.

DIANA (CONT'D)

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 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
It feels 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.

Time has passed. RONALD has been moved out for about a week.
TED listens to ELLIOT's voice mail.

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!

BLACKOUT

SCENE VII

AT Rise: TED is on a video call with DIANA. DIANA is visiting
her Mother. TED is in the new home kitchen.

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'm 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

I just want to see something, hold on a sec.

TED leaves the screen for a moment. The script is in the drawer. He returns with the script.

DIANA

Is that the script? Should we tell Ronald he left it. You think he has others? Sure, he must stash them all over, I read somewhere that's what actors do when they are learning lines...

TED is playing with the corner of the script.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Hey, don't open it Ted. Don't you think we violated his privacy enough these last few months!

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
 (reading out loud)
 Written by Anthony Belmonte.

TED turns the script to the camera.

DIANA
 Anthony Belmonte? Who's that?

TED
 I think that was...the first
 "Dracula?!"

DIANA
 Dracula- what?

TED
 He said he had a friend that died
 unexpectedly. Remember?

DIANA
 Yeah,so terrible. Sounded like they
 were close.

TED
 (Puts it together)
 So...Ronald Dietch is the dead
 dracula. Elliot was right - He's
 dead. Gone. Adios. He never lived
 here while we were here.

DIANA
 (realizing)
 Anthony was The Tenant all along.

TED
 Here's the proof.

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

TED (CONT'D)
 Right here in his script.
 "Dedicated to the late Ronald
 Dietch. I'll miss you buddy.
 (MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

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

Holy. Fricking. Tony!

BLACKOUT

END SHOW

OPTIONAL: During the credits we may see some of ANTHONY'S one man show. This can be improvised and based on the actors ability to do impressions etc. Have fun with it. A banner reading "LIVE one night only ARE THEY DEAD YET? STARING ANTHONY BELMONTE" would be a great touch.