

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

A full-length play

By Joe Correll

Contact:
Joseph Correll
6609 Langdon Ave.
Van Nuys, CA 91406
818-207-9468
Correll.joe@gmail.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LINDA
CAROL
MATT
TINA
CHARLIE
STAN
RENEE

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

ACT ONE: A SUBURBAN BACKYARD

Lights up on a typical American suburban backyard, somewhere in Ohio. The yard is completely fenced in with shrubberies and flowers lining the fence. There is a gate that leads to the front yard of the house, but it is closed. The back of the house is a nice modest but upscale suburban home with a small patio with a table for food, a back porch with a railing, and a nice barbecue grill. A door leads to the kitchen of the house. The backyard is half heartedly decorated for a party with a few streamers and balloons, some of which have not been placed yet.

Linda comes out of the house carrying a bowl of potato salad. Linda is around forty, white, pretty, and dressed in a light brown shorts, and plain off-white button down blouse. She puts the potato salad on the food table. She arranges a few items, and then Carol enters from the kitchen with a platter of buns. Carol is in her forties, pretty, demure, and seemingly very sweet. She places them on the food table. The women work on decorating. Carol hangs some streamers from the back of the house. Linda holds up a bowl of potato salad.

LINDA

Hey Carol, Do you think it's okay to leave this potato salad out? The label says it should be (reading) "refrigerated until it's consumed"...and it's gotten kind of hot out.

Carol is placing streamers with tape.

CAROL

It won't be out for very long. What kind is it?

LINDA

What kind is what?

CAROL

The potato salad. Is it the kind with mayonnaise? Or vinegar? Or is it German?

LINDA

I don't know, it's just potato salad. I got it at Kroger. They scooped it out of a plastic tub.

Carol puts down the streamer and comes over to Linda.

CAROL

Really? But it's so easy to make.

LINDA

It's also so easy to buy.

Carol picks up another bowl of potato salad from the table, and shows it to Linda.

CAROL

I made mine from scratch. It's a family recipe.

LINDA

(skeptical)

Does it really make a difference?

CAROL

I think it does.

LINDA

I've never really thought too much about potato salad. What kind do you like?

CAROL

Oh, I don't eat it. I don't really care for potatoes.

LINDA

I don't eat it either. I wonder if we'll have too much?

CAROL

Charlie eats it. He loves it. So, I make it for him.

Linda hands Carol a deflated balloon from a bag, and grabs one for herself. They both sit on the edge of the porch and start to blow up balloons. When Carol's balloon is about halfway inflated, she suddenly lets the air out of it. Phfffft. Not only is the balloon deflated, so is Carol.

LINDA

What's the matter?

CAROL

The whole thing just makes me a little sad is all.

LINDA

What makes you sad?

CAROL

Well, it used to be so much fun when people cooked for the potlucks, and they would have their own secret recipes and everyone would try to guess what was in them.

LINDA

(unimpressed)

People really did that?

CAROL

Oh yes, absolutely. The neighborhood used to make our own fun. But that was before you and Matt moved here.

Carol starts to inflate her balloon again. Linda just watches her, and then Linda lets the air out of her own balloon. Phfft...

CAROL

Oh no! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to imply that you moved here and things stopped being fun.

LINDA

I'm fun.

CAROL

Of course you are.

Linda tosses her balloon on the ground.

LINDA

Once we get the Neighborhood Association's new charter certified, we're all going to have a lot of fun. It's gonna be great for everyone.

CAROL

I don't think enough board members are going to vote for all those new rules, Linda.

LINDA

Have you read it? It's really not that many changes.

CAROL

I skimmed it. It's a lot.

LINDA

They're all great additions to the Charter.

Linda motions for Carol to help her with some streamers. They each get on an end, and twist two different colored streamers together. They hang them while they talk.

CAROL

Charlie is against the new Charter.

LINDA

Of course he is... but you're the one on the board. You're going to vote for it right?

CAROL

I haven't decided yet. (Looking at the streamer) Oh, this looks so pretty! I love how the two colors go together so well!

LINDA

What's to decide? It's going to keep the neighborhood safer, cleaner, friendlier!

CAROL

Charlie says there's going to be too many new rules.

LINDA

Do you just do everything Charlie says? It's a secret ballot. He'll never know.

CAROL

Do we really need all those new rules?

LINDA

There'll be some new rules, yeah. But they're good rules. And with this new Charter, when electing members to the board each family will get one vote no matter how big their property is. That's good for you and Charlie because your property is one of the smaller ones. The way it is now the Frasers have way too much power. You get that, right?

She motions to the streamer.

LINDA

Tape your side up over there.

Carol tapes her side up.

CAROL

I do like the idea of everyone having equal say.

LINDA

Exactly. Equality. It's really not that big of a change. It's just some new regulations to keep the neighborhood safe and beautiful is all.

CAROL

I guess.

Linda finishes putting up her streamer and speaks directly to Carol.

LINDA

I hope you vote for the new charter, Carol.

CAROL

I probably will.

LINDA
(emphatic)

I really hope so.

Linda hands Carol the end of a "Happy Birthday" banner with individual cardboard letters, but the "B" is missing.

LINDA

Help me with this banner?

CAROL

This says "Happy Irthday" what happened to the "B"?

They hang the banner.

LINDA

It's fine. Matt doesn't care about his birthday.

CAROL

He doesn't?

Linda goes over to the food table to assess the situation.

LINDA

No, we really don't do birthdays. Well, we do mine, but he doesn't care about his. We usually just go to Buca Di Beppo down in Columbus and he really enjoys that. Do you think we have enough hamburger buns?

Linda holds up two plastic bags of hamburger buns.

CAROL

It looks like it should be plenty.

LINDA

(sarcastic)

I'm sorry that I didn't bake them myself. But hopefully store bought will be okay with you.

CAROL

See, now I've hurt your feelings. I'm sorry I said anything about the potato salad. I know you have to work more now because of Matt and the...the...the thing. And you just don't have the time to cook, and I should have been more considerate.

LINDA

Matt will get another job.

CAROL

As a teacher? Do you think anyone will hire him again as a teacher?

LINDA

I don't know Carol. But thank you for bringing it up.

CAROL

I'll bet he was a good teacher.

LINDA

You would lose that bet. Why don't you put this bowl of gazpacho over on the other end of the table next to the bowls and spoons?

Carol moves the bowl of gazpacho.

CAROL

Next time, why don't you just call me and I'd be happy to make the potato salad for you.

LINDA

(dead pan)

Would you?

CAROL

(cheerful)

I would.

LINDA

Okay. Sure. Next time.

CAROL

I'd be happy to do it. See! Now that wasn't so hard. Anything to help out a neighbor.

Linda goes into the house.

CAROL

(speaking to Linda off)

I think there will be plenty of food since the kids aren't coming. It was nice of Denise to agree to take them to the park for the afternoon.

Linda comes back out of the house with a bowl of fruit salad, she places it on the table.

LINDA

Denise owes me.

A beat.

LINDA

She knows why.

CAROL

It's nice that she volunteered to watch the kids.

LINDA

She didn't really have a choice.

CAROL

She's on the board. Do you know how she's going to vote?

LINDA

However I tell her to.

Linda looks at the fruit salad
with disappointment.

LINDA

This fruit salad has SO much cantaloupe.

CAROL

Why didn't you and Matt ever have kids?

Linda stirs up the fruit salad.

LINDA

Because there are certain days when I just know I would want
to strap them into the back seat of the Prius and drive the
car into the lake.

Carol looks at her in horror.

LINDA

I'm kidding!

CAROL

Oh, that was a joke?

LINDA

Yes! ... You know I don't own a Prius.

Carol fake laughs. She abruptly
stops laughing.

CAROL

I just don't think drowning children is very funny.

Linda holds up a large, single serving spoon.

LINDA

I'm sorry. It was just a joke. We're gonna need more serving spoons for all this potato salad.

CAROL

Did you know, before you moved here, that happened?

LINDA

What happened?

CAROL

A child was drowned in the lake.

LINDA

By one of their parents?!

CAROL

No, it was in a swim class.

A beat.

CAROL

And apparently he wasn't a very good swimmer...Poor little Artie McBean. They named the new lifeguard tower after him though. It's okay. You couldn't have known. You're really missing out on a lot by not having children.

LINDA

What did you say?

CAROL

Oh, I mean- I know Matt wants to have kids.

LINDA

How do you know that? Did he say that to you?

Matt enters with a plate of raw hamburgers. Matt is around forty, good looking and charismatic.

MATT

It's burger time!

LINDA

Isn't it a little soon to start grilling?

MATT

I'm just getting things prepped. It's a whole thing to try to cook a bunch of hamburgers at the same time and not have them suck. I just want to be prepared.

Matt goes over to the grill and starts organizing the grilling tools. He pulls a very long match from a box and lights the grill with it.

CAROL

(sweetly)

Like a boy scout.

MATT

(making the scout salute,
three fingers)

Troop 444. Life Scout here!

CAROL

Happy birthday Matt.

MATT

Thank you, Carol. (To Linda) What was the final count?

LINDA

Well, aside from you and I... there's Carol here...

CAROL

(waving cheerfully)

Here I am!

LINDA

There should be the Carltons—Stan and Renee, and I think Tina is coming but I don't know about Jeff.

MATT

(to Carol)

What about Charlie?

CAROL

Sorry only one Weaver. Just me. Charlie isn't going to make it.

MATT

Wait, what? Why not?

CAROL
He's not feeling well.

MATT
What's wrong with him?

CAROL
He said his sinuses were flaring up.

MATT
He's faking right, to get out of it?

CAROL
Probably, yes.

MATT
He knows it's my birthday right?

CAROL
He knows.

MATT
I came to his birthday.

CAROL
You know things have just been a little "uncomfortable" since the...the ...the thing between you and him. I'm sorry Matt. He'll come around.

MATT
He's still hung up on that? Why won't people let it go? So stupid. I don't need Charlie here anyway. He always tries to be the center of attention.

CAROL
He just has that kind of personality.

MATT
(to Linda, cheerfully)
At least Ben is coming and he's bringing his cousin Roy. That should be fun.

LINDA
It would...but...uh- no, he's not.

MATT
What?

LINDA
He's not coming and neither is his cousin Roy.

MATT

When were you going to tell me?

LINDA

Right now... Ben and Roy aren't coming.

MATT

Why isn't he coming? Is he sick too?

LINDA

No, he's not sick. He said he's just been busy and he's a little tired.

Matt puts down the grilling tools. He knows something is up.

MATT

This thing has gotten out of control. It's ridiculous. Everyone is making such a big deal out of it!

LINDA

I'm sorry. Maybe this wasn't a good day for your birthday.

Tina enters from the side gate. She has a mountain of Tupperware bowls of different shapes, sizes and colors. They are filled with various foods. Tina is dressed in a flowing groovy dress. She has long hair with ribbons woven into it.

TINA

Knock, knock!

LINDA

Hello!

TINA

I didn't know if we were supposed to come through the front door of the house or through the side gate. But the front door was locked, so I took some initiative.

LINDA

Sorry, Tina. I should have put a note up to use the gate. You can put your stuff over there.

TINA

I brought potato salad!

LINDA

Oh, great. And it looks like a whole lot more than that! Help her Matt!

Matt helps Tina with her stack of containers and they take them to the table.

CAROL

What kind?

TINA

What kind of what?

CAROL

Potato salad.

TINA

Oh! It's German. My Aunt Lois's recipe.

LINDA

Just put it over there with Carol's and my shitty Kroger potato salad.

MATT

(to Tina)

Where's Jeff?

TINA

Oh, he's not going to make it. He said to tell you Happy Birthday!

MATT

He's not coming?!

TINA

No.

MATT

Did he say why not??

TINA

You know... he didn't. Just as well, I've got him on a diet. He'd be too tempted.

MATT

But it's my birthday!

TINA

He's gotten way too fat. His health isn't good. Did you know he weighs over three hundred pounds now?

MATT

He's a big guy.

TINA

He's super fat.

LINDA

(as if she knows more than
the others)

We all know why he really isn't coming.

TINA

And there's that, yes.

MATT

Are *none* of the guys coming?

LINDA

What did you expect would happen, Matt?

MATT

Now, we've got too many burgers, because you ladies are all just going to eat salad. I know it.

LINDA

You're being sexist again.

MATT

Are any of you actually going to eat a burger?

No answer from the women.

MATT

I knew it!

Tina looks over the bowl of
gazpacho.

TINA

What is this? Some kind of punch?

LINDA

I made gazpacho.

What's that?
TINA

You've never heard of gazpacho?
LINDA

I've heard of it. I just don't know what it is.
TINA

Charlie bursts in through the gate, raging. Charlie is in his fifties or so, he's dressed in a Hawaiian Shirt and long Khaki pants. He is furious about something!

Motherfucker!
CHARLIE

Charlie, you came!
MATT

Charlie goes right past Matt, and goes right up to his wife, Carol.

Look at this!
CHARLIE

He thrusts his hand out to Carol. He is holding a head of a statue about the size of a tennis ball

Look at this!
CHARLIE

What?
CAROL

My statue. Look at it.
CHARLIE

What happened to it?
CAROL

It was vandalized!
CHARLIE

Vandalized? Who would vandalize your statue?
CAROL

CHARLIE

A little black kid, that's who.

CAROL

What little black kid?

CHARLIE

I don't know his name. I saw him. He came into the yard with a golf club and took a swing right at Lamont's head. It can't be fixed. You know my Grandmother left that statue to me.

CAROL

Can't you just glue it back on?

CHARLIE

No, it's not a clean break. There's pieces everywhere. It's totally fucked.

CAROL

I'm sorry, honey.

LINDA

Why did you have to say little "black" kid?

CHARLIE

What?

LINDA

You said, little "black" kid.

CHARLIE

He was black.

LINDA

But, if it was a white kid, would you have said little "white" kid?

CHARLIE

Of course not.

LINDA

Why not?

CHARLIE

Most kids are white. It'd be redundant.

LINDA

Well, it's fucking racist, Charlie.

CHARLIE

What? I'm not racist! What the fuck? Fuck you Linda.

MATT

Whoa, whoa! Calm down. Linda, you know Charlie is not a racist.

CHARLIE

You're fucking right I'm not.

LINDA

You didn't need to use that adjective. You could have just said "kid".

CHARLIE

Okay, some "kid" broke my fucking statue. Next time I'll shoot the little bastard.

LINDA

You'd shoot a child for vandalizing a statue?

CHARLIE

(backing down...a little)

I don't know. Probably not.

LINDA

This is why I do not approve of my neighbors owning guns. One little annoyance and someone like you goes all trigger happy! In the new charter, Bylaw 26b says residents of Curtis Farms have to register all their weapons.

CHARLIE

I'm not registering shit. This is NOT a little thing! This neighborhood is going to hell. He just came right into my yard, smashed my statue in the head and kicked it over. Look at it!

He thrusts the head of the statue
at Linda.

LINDA

(horrified)

Is that a lawn jockey?

CHARLIE

A what?

LINDA

That's a lawn jockey. And that's really offensive. No wonder he knocked it down.

CHARLIE

What's wrong with a lawn jockey?

LINDA

I can't believe we're even having this discussion. It's racist. Duh!

CHARLIE

It's not racist. Look, I even painted it's face white. I'm not insensitive. Carol told me to paint it white, so I did.

CAROL

You never painted it's little black hands though. I told you to move it in the backyard, Charlie. It's a touchy subject for some people.

CHARLIE

Why do I have to move my statue, which was handed down to me, by my Grandmother, my family heritage by the way, to the backyard where nobody can see it? It's my yard, I can put what I want in it. It's been there forever.

LINDA

Then the whole neighborhood has to look at it.

CHARLIE

Not my problem.

LINDA

You know what? You can put whatever you want in your yard. Until the new charter passes. And then that'll be it with your racist little hand me downs.

CHARLIE

Stop calling me racist! I have nothing against black people. In fact, I love 'em!

LINDA

If you weren't racist, you would understand why you should have gotten rid of that statue years ago.

TINA

Was there ever really a time when it was okay to have one of those? I don't think so.

CAROL

(trying to make an excuse)

His Grandmother gave it to him. It's all she left him in her will.

LINDA

Well, I'm pretty sure your grandmother was also a racist.

CHARLIE

Hey!

CAROL

Linda, she wasn't. His Nana was a lovely woman. She didn't have a racist bone in her body.

CHARLIE

No, not really. She was racist as fuck- but I'm not. And I should be able to display whatever I want in my front yard. It's my private property!

LINDA

I can't believe I've walked by your house thousands of times and never noticed it.

Tina pipes up.

TINA

That's pretty racist Linda.

LINDA

What?

TINA

It's racist, because you let it go, didn't even notice it, and then didn't even acknowledge it was there, and that it was offensive. It was right under your nose. It's called passive racism. We learned about it at my sensitivity training at work.

LINDA

Why didn't you say something then?

TINA

I never go over to Elm street, so I wouldn't have seen his front yard. I only see their backyard, and that's over my fence.

CHARLIE

And by the way, I don't like you looking over the fence into my backyard!

TINA
(to Linda)

I didn't know about the offensive statue. But you should have said something.

LINDA
Wait a minute! This isn't about me- this is about him!

CHARLIE
(sarcastically chastising)
It's been there for years Linda. You should have noticed and said something if it was such a big deal for you.

LINDA
Fuck you!

CHARLIE
Fuck you!

MATT
Guys, guys- please- it's my birthday! Can we put this aside for now?

LINDA
Don't call us guys! We're not all men!

MATT
What?

LINDA
Why is this suddenly about me??

CHARLIE
Isn't everything about you, Linda? You and that stupid charter, that new bullshit is going to happen over my dead body. There's too many rules already in this neighborhood. Carol is not voting for it. Are you Carol?

CAROL
(tentative)
I guess not?

MATT
Charlie, do you want a burger... let me make you a burger...

He holds out the plate of meat.

LINDA
Don't you dare make him a burger!

She grabs the meat off of the plate with her bare hands and violently throws it on the ground.

MATT
You just ruined perfectly good meat!

LINDA
Who gives a shit!?

MATT
Hey! Come on honey, It's my birthday!

LINDA
Fuck your birthday!

An African American couple enter through the gate, carrying potato salad. This is Renee and Stan. They are in their forties, dressed nicely. Renee is very dressed up, with very fancy hair. Stan is dressed down, and he is just a little overweight.

RENEE
Hey all!

STAN
Happy birthday Matt!

Awkward pause, everyone is frozen. Then Renee breaks the silence. Everyone is overly cheerful.

RENEE
I brought potato salad!

CAROL
(overly excited, covering up the awkwardness)
Oh how wonderful! Charlie loves potato salad. Don't you Charlie?!

CHARLIE
I do!

CAROL

Let's put it right over here on the table. What kind is it?

RENEE

It's my Mother's recipe, and it's a secret. But everybody always loves it. I wrote out her recipe on some cards in case anyone wants to make it for themselves.

Carol picks up an index card off
of Renees potato salad container.

CAROL

Oh look at that! Such beautiful handwriting!

RENEE

Thank you.

CAROL

And your hair looks beautiful!

RENEE

You like it?

CAROL

It's beautiful.

RENEE

Thank you.

CAROL

Just beautiful.

Suddenly no one has anything to
say, and they all stand there
awkwardly for some time.

STAN

Did we interrupt something?

MATT

What? No.... No. No. No. Not at all.

STAN

Cause, I feel like we walked in and we interrupted something.

MATT

No, of course not. Can I get you a beer, Stan?

STAN

(patting his stomach)

I've been trying to cut back.

MATT

What? You? You're in great shape. It's my birthday.

STAN

Well, since it's your birthday...

RENEE

Oh live a little Stanley, have a beer. You've been losing too much weight lately.

TINA

I wish Jeff would lose some weight. You know, he's over three hundred pounds now.

The tension is palpable. Matt goes to a bucket and pulls out a beer and hands it to Stan. Then Matt stares at Stan with the bottle in his hand.

STAN

Bottle opener?

Awkward pause.

STAN

It's not a twist off.

MATT

Oh, yeah... right. Right! Linda do we have a bottle opener?

LINDA

There's one right there next to the beer.

MATT

Oh right! There it is. Right next to the beer.

He hands Stan the bottle opener

MATT

Here you go.

Thanks. STAN

You're welcome. MATT

Awkward silence.

Isn't the weather great today? CAROL

It's very nice. RENEE

Last week it said rain. But then it didn't rain. CAROL

It doesn't look like rain. TINA

It's not going to rain. That was last week. The forecast changed. CAROL

Forecasts always change. I barely check the weather. It's never right. LINDA

Sometimes it's right. It was right today. CAROL

Isn't it strange how sometimes it's very cold in Cleveland but in Columbus it can be a really nice day. TINA

That is strange. CAROL

They are pretty far apart. RENEE

Not that far apart. STAN

I'm glad the weather was nice today though. TINA

Carol holds up her phone displaying the weather.

CAROL

It is! 78 degrees and sunny. And that's what it is right now.

CHARLIE

It's not hard to predict what the weather is right now. Just look around. That's the weather.

CAROL

They did predict it correctly three days ago. I check it a lot.

CHARLIE

Why are you always checking the weather?

CAROL

I like to know what temperature it is.

CHARLIE

In Tokyo? You know the weather in practically every city.

CAROL

Not every city.

CHARLIE

Denver.

CAROL

Sixty eight degrees, partly cloudy.

CHARLIE

I knew you would know. And you don't know anyone in Denver.

CAROL

No, but it's good information.

CHARLIE

It's useless information. You're full of useless information!

Tina is looking at her phone.
Then she blurts out:

TINA

Oh my God!

LINDA

What is it?

TINA

The Rosenthal's cat died.

CAROL

Not Darlene!

TINA

Yes, she got into something she shouldn't have and now she's dead.

LINDA

Darlene shouldn't have been out of her own yard. But soon we won't have wild animals roaming the neighborhood.

TINA

She wasn't a wild animal.

CAROL

Linda did you invite the Rosenthal's?

LINDA

No. I didn't. They're not on the board.

MATT

Did you only invite people from the board?

Stan notices that Charlie is holding the head of the decapitated statue.

STAN

Whatcha got there?

CHARLIE

This? Oh. Uh. Paperweight.

STAN

Why do you have a paperweight at a birthday party?

LINDA

Yeah, why DO you have a paperweight at a birthday party, Charlie?

Awkward pause.

CHARLIE

Um. I Don't know. Honey, why do I have a paperweight?

Awkward pause.

CAROL

(getting an idea)

For... the napkins. They keep blowing away.

STAN

It looks like a head?

CAROL
(cheerful)

It is a head!

She grabs the head from Charlie,
walks over to the table of food
and slams the head down on a pile
of napkins.

CAROL

There we go! These paperweight heads are fantastic. Those suckers aren't going anywhere. So who wants a drink?

They all raise their hands.

CAROL

Charlie, help Matt get everybody a drink.

CHARLIE

I told you I'm not staying!

CAROL

Help Matt. It's his birthday, for heaven's sakes!

CHARLIE

All right, all right- but I'm not staying long.

CAROL

Go over there and help your friend!

CHARLIE

He's not my friend... (then nicely and loudly to Matt) Hey Matt! So, should I take some drink orders or what?

MATT

Sure. We've got plenty of booze in the house.

CHARLIE

What's everybody want?

CAROL

Chardonnay.

CHARLIE

Of course.

TINA

Nothing for me. I don't like to pollute my body with chemicals.

CHARLIE

But you smoke like, literally a ton of weed, don't you? I can smell it every night over my fence.

TINA

That's all natural. It's from the earth.

CHARLIE

It still has chemicals.

TINA

So do tomatoes.

CHARLIE

It's not the same thing.

TINA

Okay, then I'll just have a diet coke.

CHARLIE

Okay...anyone else?

RENEE

Do you have tonic? I'll have a gin and tonic.

CHARLIE

I don't know. Matt, do you have tonic?

MATT

We have tonic!

CHARLIE

(to Renee)

You're in luck, they have tonic. Is there ice?

LINDA

It's in the ice bucket on the table.

CAROL

That's a beautiful ice bucket!

LINDA

Thank you. It's an antique. My Great great grandmother brought it over from Ireland in 1847. Or sometime around then. We're not sure of the exact dates.

CAROL

Probably very expensive.

LINDA

Well it's silver, so yeah.

CAROL

It's so nice. I have a gold one.

A beat.

CAROL

But it's not as nice as yours.

LINDA

(to herself)

I knew this party was a bad idea.

CAROL

What?

LINDA

Our parties never go well.

CAROL

I think it's going well.

LINDA

What's going well about it?

CAROL

There's plenty of potato salad.

STAN

So, Charlie, it looks like the paint on your house is getting even worse. That sun really does a number on the siding. You should get that taken care of.

CHARLIE

It's fine.

STAN

I've got a guy who's great. He did our house a few years back and it still looks like new.

CHARLIE

For the last time, I'm not painting my house.

STAN

No, no. Of course not...But... it would look a lot better if you did.

CHARLIE

There's nothing wrong with it.

STAN

Have you thought about changing the color? Renee and I were saying it would look really nice if you painted it a nice dark Cape Cod gray.

RENEE

Stan, leave him alone. He doesn't have to paint his house if he doesn't want to paint his house.

CHARLIE

There is no law saying what color I can paint my house. You can't tell me what to do.

STAN

Not yet we can't. Right Linda?

LINDA

We'll see! Bylaw 37. Approved colors for residences.

STAN

I'm with Linda. I think we could use a few more rules to keep this neighborhood looking good and property values up.

LINDA

So you're with me?

STAN

There's some things I'd like to discuss, but in theory, yes.

LINDA

Great! Stan is a team player.

CAROL

Our house could use some new paint, don't you think so Charlie?

CHARLIE

No. There's nothing wrong with it.

STAN

Don't take this the wrong way but...Why did you paint it that shade of green?

CHARLIE

What's wrong with green?

STAN

Nothing is wrong with green. It's just that particular shade of green is very...uh...specific.

CHARLIE

Why are you on about me painting my house?

STAN

I'm only bringing it up because it was just mentioned to me in passing.

CHARLIE

By who?

STAN

Carl mentioned it.

CHARLIE

Carl??! It's none of his business.

CAROL

Charlie, don't get yourself all upset. Do you need a pill?

CHARLIE

I'm not upset. I just hate real estate agents. And Carl is the worst.

STAN

I know, I know. He's just terrible... Anyhow, He was showing Fran and Eric's house to this young couple, and they mentioned the color.

CHARLIE

They mentioned the color of my house?

STAN

Yeah. That's what Carl said.

CHARLIE

What'd they say?

STAN

They didn't like the color. It's okay, they decided not to buy Fran and Eric's house after all.

CHARLIE

You think they decided not to live in the neighborhood because of the color of my house?

STAN

No, no...

A beat.

STAN

Not just that.

TINA

I didn't know Fran and Eric were selling? Why?

CHARLIE

They told me, too many rules.

CAROL

I never liked that shade of green. I didn't pick it. It's like... like... I don't know... what's it like?

TINA

Anti freeze?

CAROL

Yes! Charlie maybe it's time to paint the house. It's starting to peel anyway.

CHARLIE

I'm not painting the house. It's nobody's business what color I paint my house.

CAROL

Well, I don't know. I mean everyone in the neighborhood does have to look at it. We don't see it as much because we're inside of it. I guess people really paint their houses for other people to look at. I never thought of that. But we should take it into consideration.

CHARLIE

Carol, you have never mentioned that you didn't like the color of the house!

CAROL

I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

CHARLIE

My feelings are not hurt!

CAROL

Do you need a pill?

CHARLIE

I don't need any fucking pill!

Carol reaches into her pocket, pulls out a bottle of pills and tries to give Charlie one.

STAN

I'm sorry I brought it up.

CHARLIE

No, you're not!

Carol keeps trying to shove a pill into Charlie's mouth.

CHARLIE

Let's drop it, alright? How are those drinks coming? (To Carol) Will you stop trying to shove that pill in my mouth???

CAROL

You know you're supposed to take them at the first sign of anxiety.

She shoves a pill into his mouth and massages his neck to get him to swallow it.

CHARLIE

We're way past that.

STAN

It's just, like she said, that the rest of us have to look at it.

CHARLIE

It's America. I can paint my house whatever color I want! We're not living in China where every house is the same color.

Long pause.

CAROL

Is every house in China the same color? I did not know that.

MATT

Communism. It's the fuckin' worst.

STAN

It's not a big deal.

TINA

I am sure Chinese homes come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Just like it's noble people.

CHARLIE

You're making it seem like a very big deal.

STAN

I just think there's a chance it's bringing the property values down in the neighborhood.

LINDA

It's not a nice color, Charlie. It's not on the list of the new approved colors, I can tell you that.

TINA

(sincere)

Why did you choose that color? Was it "oops paint" that you got a deal on?

CHARLIE

First, I can't have my statue, now I can't paint my house the color I want. Where are we? Russia??

TINA

I'm sure nobody in Russia has a house that color.

STAN

Nobody anywhere has a house that color.

MATT

I thought it was like China?

STAN

(passive aggressive)

It's fine for the time being.

RENEE

Stan, knock it off.

STAN

But if the board votes to be gated, and we get those new by-laws passed, there's going to be some new rules. And I don't think anti-freeze green is going to be on the list of approved colors. Will it Linda?

LINDA

It won't be approved. It's not on the list.

CHARLIE

You can pass whatever shit laws you want, but we're not going to be a part of it. You can't make me.

LINDA

Actually, I think we can. I've been doing some research. We have options.

MATT

Who had the gin and tonic?

RENEE

Over here. Quickly please.

Linda softens, and approaches
Charlie in a kind, if
manipulative manner.

LINDA

Charlie, the new charter is going to be good for everyone.

CHARLIE

Not for me.

LINDA

What about Ryan's yard? You've been complaining about it for months.

CHARLIE

He doesn't cut his lawn. He really doesn't even have a lawn, it's just weeds gone wild.

LINDA

Exactly. And if the new charter passes, we can all make him cut his yard back, and take care of it properly.

CHARLIE

Really? We could make him clean up his yard?

LINDA

Yes. Bylaw 42d. Grass must be no taller than 2.75 Inches. And shrubberies must be manicured and cannot encroach on the sidewalks or adjacent properties.

CHARLIE

You know he never comes out of the house? I'm not even sure he lives there anymore.

CAROL

He lives there.

CHARLIE

How do you know?

CAROL

I bring him some food every now and then.

CHARLIE

You bring him food? Why?

CAROL

Because I feel bad, he's going through a lot.

CHARLIE

That was over a year ago.

CAROL

These things take time. What if it was me?

CHARLIE

If you shot yourself in the head like Diane did, I'd be really pissed. But I'd get over it after a year.

CAROL

Give him time.

CHARLIE

(pondering)

I really would like to see that yard cleaned up.

LINDA

Think about it Charlie... when you and Carol are discussing how she'll vote.

RENEE

It was such a shock when Diane did that. I would have thought she'd be more of a wine and pills type of person.

TINA

You never know what's really going on inside people's heads. I wish I had been nicer to her.

RENEE

I always made an effort to wave if I saw her.

TINA

She had that beautiful garden she was always out watering and pruning. Such a shame.

RENEE

It is. It's been so sad just watching the yard become more and more overgrown.

TINA

It's like death has taken over that house.

RENEE

Linda, did you invite Ryan to come to the party?

LINDA

Nah. He's been so depressing lately.

MATT

And he's not on the board.

Renee walks over to Matt.

RENEE

So Matt. How's your birthday so far?

MATT

So far, I'm gonna say, not great.

Linda starts taking the lids off of Tina's Tupperware bowls on the table.

LINDA

Tina this is a lot of egg salad?

TINA

Thank you. It's organic.

LINDA

Do people still eat egg salad?

TINA

Of course. The eggs are from my chickens.

LINDA

I didn't know you had chickens.

CHARLIE

Oh, she has chickens all right. And they stink.

TINA

They do not stink.

LINDA

How many chickens do you have?

TINA

I have ten chickens.

LINDA

You're not allowed to have chickens in this neighborhood. That's already in the rules.

TINA

It's not. I checked.

LINDA

(to anyone who will listen)

How did we miss that last time?

CHARLIE

You know, their house backs right up to ours.

CAROL

I don't mind the chickens too much.

CHARLIE

Carol! Stay out of it! Who's side are you on?

CAROL

I'm not on any side regarding the chickens. (She motions to Charlie) I'm sorry Tina. I know you love those chickens. What are their names?

CHARLIE

Carol! People don't name chickens. They eat them. They don't name them. They're not pets.

TINA

Fluffy, whitey, yellow foot, brown eye, black one, crazy eye, pointy beak, yellow eye, Missin' feathers, and Carol Ann. But Carol Ann is missing. So I guess I really only have nine chickens.

CHARLIE

Those chickens make my whole backyard smell like shit!

LINDA

You know what would fix that? A new law regarding livestock.

CHARLIE

No, I'm just going to go over there one day and kill all those chickens.

TINA

Charlie Weaver, if you come in my yard, I will shoot you.

LINDA

I didn't know you owned a gun. Do you have a permit? Does everyone in this neighborhood own a gun? We need to have a list of all these guns. It's not safe.

TINA

It's none of your business, Linda!

STAN

I did not know about all these chickens. I can't believe there's no regulation for poultry.

LINDA

There will be Stan. There will be.

TINA

Why would they be against the law? They're perfectly legal.

CAROL

But Tina, why do you keep chickens?

TINA

We get eggs and occasionally another chicken from them.

CAROL

Isn't that a lot of work? Eggs are so cheap.

TINA

But not as healthy. And you don't know what's in a store bought egg.

CHARLIE

Sure I do. There's an egg in an egg.

TINA

It's good for the environment.

CHARLIE

Not for my environment. They're ruining the neighborhood, because the poop gets everywhere. I'm sure all the chicken shit is leeching into my yard. It's a God damned safety hazard.

CAROL

I am a little worried about the poop getting into the water and the kids drinking it.

TINA

You shouldn't let your children drink from water on the ground. Whether it has poop in it or not.

CHARLIE

That's disgusting. Your yard is WAY too small for chickens.

TINA

The yard is not too small, and who are you to tell me whether or not I can own a chicken? It's my right to own as many chickens as I want.

CHARLIE

If it's a health hazard to others in the neighborhood, then you're not being a responsible chicken owner. If you HAVE to own chickens, one chicken should be plenty.

LINDA

No one needs so many chickens.

TINA

It's not about whether I *need* them or not. It's my right to have them! You know nothing about being a responsible chicken owner!

CHARLIE

A responsible chicken owner doesn't let chicken shit get into all the water runoff and poison the community!

TINA

(defiant)

Actually I'm planning to get even more chickens! No one is going to tell me how many chickens I can have. They are not just for eggs, they are for pleasure, and those chickens please me...a LOT! I have every right to own as many as I want!!!

CAROL

I don't think getting more chickens is a good idea. Eggs are so cheap, those chickens must cost a fortune.

LINDA

(to herself)

I was sure there's a rule about chicken ownership.

CAROL

I'll buy you some eggs.

STAN

I really thought there's a rule against chickens in this neighborhood.

LINDA

Right?

STAN

It's not a chicken kind of place. You should have to have a permit to own a chicken. Take some tests or something. Chickens only belong on a farm where they can be free.

TINA

There's no rule against me having as many chickens as I want. It's in the Constitution! I mean the Charter... Maybe I'll just get a dozen more chickens, and just let them shit all over the place.

CAROL

Please don't get a dozen chickens.

CHARLIE

Nobody needs that many chickens!

TINA

Nobody needs a ugly green house!

Pause.

CHARLIE

Carol and I ate Carol Ann.

Silence.

CHARLIE

She came into my yard. So we ate her.

TINA

What??

CHARLIE

That chicken was trespassing.

TINA

Carol! Tell me this is not true! You know I named that chicken after you!

CAROL

I didn't know she had a name. I never would have eaten her if I knew her name was Carol Ann.

Pause.

CAROL

(trying to make it better)

She was delicious?

Renee has gone over to the table with the food and picks up the stone head being used as a paperweight.

RENEE

Is this a lawn jockey head?

Carol Ann runs over to her and takes the head from her hands.

CAROL

No, it's a paperweight. See?

Carol puts the head on different items to keep them from blowing away.

RENEE

That's a long jockey. Linda, why do you have the head of a lawn jockey at your house?

LINDA

Don't ask me. Ask Charlie.

CHARLIE

What is the big deal??! It was a gift from my Grandmother.

RENEE

She left you the head of a yard statue?

CHARLIE

No, she left me the whole statue, and it's been in my garden for years.

LINDA

Like I said, it's very racist.

STAN

(trying to make peace)

It has a white face, so is it really racist?

CHARLIE

See! I painted it white! I'm not racist!

STAN

You should paint your house white. Come on everyone, we don't think Charlie is a racist do we?

Silence.

RENEE

What happened to the rest of it? And why is it here at Matt and Linda's being used as a paper weight?

CHARLIE

Some black kid came into my garden and knocked it's head off with a golf club.

STAN

That sounds a little racist, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I'm not racist!

STAN

I know. Next time just say "kid".

CHARLIE

What is the big deal with this statue?? It's been there for years! No one said a word. Now all of a sudden I have to take it down? It's on my own property!

They all start to argue!

MATT

Wait a minute everyone! It's my birthday. Do we have to argue about everything?

CHARLIE

I'm not arguing. I'm pissed.

TINA

I think we all really want the same thing, which is to be left alone to live our lives.

MATT

Exactly. Right Linda?

LINDA

Not exactly.

MATT

Can we talk about something else?

STAN

What do you want to talk about?

MATT

I don't know. Let's not talk about the neighborhood political bullshit today. Let's just have some fun.

CAROL

Yes. We should have some fun. The neighborhood used to get along and have fun before you and Linda moved here.

Awkward silence. Finally Tina pipes up.

TINA

Has anyone gotten any unusual emails lately?

LINDA

What do you mean unusual emails?

TINA

I got one that was very interesting.

CAROL

What was it?

TINA

The subject line said "R.E. Your Amazon order", but the mysterious thing is, I didn't order anything from Amazon. I was just thinking about ordering some chicken feed, and then the next day I got that email. Like it knew I was thinking about making an order.

LINDA

Like who knew?

TINA

Like Amazon knew. It was very strange.

STAN

You didn't open it did you?

TINA

Of course, I just told you what it said.

STAN

Those're scams.

TINA

No, I don't think so. It was from Amazon. But I cleared it up. They said to fill out my account information, and give my birthday and my social and they would look into the matter. And as a "thank you" I'm going to get a years supply of popcorn.

CAROL

Oh honey, I think you've been scammed. They don't just give away free popcorn at Amazon.

CHARLIE

So stupid, Tina.

RENEE

Now they have all your information. Who knows what they'll do to you?

CAROL
You better call your bank and cancel all your credit cards.

TINA
No. This was real!

LINDA
Tina, it's not real.

TINA
If it's not real then how do you explain all of the popcorn?

LINDA
What?

TINA
Yesterday I got a big box of popcorn delivered just like they said.

CAROL
You did? You didn't eat it did you?

TINA
No, of course not.

STAN
What did you do with it?

TINA
I put some of it on the table over there with my egg salad and potato salad and a bunch of other salads. You can see for yourselves. It's real. If Amazon thinks you might order something, they send you free popcorn to entice you to buy it. It worked. I ordered two 50 pound bags of chicken feed.

Linda goes over to the table and picks up a container of popcorn. She brings it over to the group. They all stare at it.

LINDA
This just came in the mail? It didn't say where it was from?

TINA
It just said "Sorry for the misunderstanding. Please enjoy this delicious popcorn with our compliments".

LINDA
Really?

TINA
Why would I make this up?

They stare at it. Matt grabs some
and starts to eat it. Linda slaps
it out of his hand.

LINDA
Don't eat that! We don't know where it's from!

CHARLIE
Looks fine to me!

Charlie eats some.

RENEE
Charlie, I don't think that's a good idea.

CHARLIE
It's fine. It's actually pretty good.

RENEE
I wouldn't eat that if I were you.

TINA
Help yourselves. I have an awful lot of it.

Charlie eats some more popcorn.

CHARLIE
It's got some kind of flavor. Can't put my finger on it.

CAROL
Butterscotch?

CHARLIE
No.

He eats some popcorn.

CAROL
Caramel?

CHARLIE
No.

He eats some popcorn.

CAROL
Cheese?

CHARLIE

No.

He eats some popcorn.

STAN

Hey, where are all the other guys?

MATT

They all backed out at the last minute. Except you and Charlie.

CHARLIE

I also backed out. I'm only here because of the statue. I had no intention of coming.

STAN

Why not?

CHARLIE

I just don't feel like a birthday party.

CAROL

He and Matt have been having some issues.

CHARLIE

Carol! I don't want to get into it.

MATT

Yeah, please! Let's not get into it.

LINDA

I don't see what the big deal is. If I can get over it the rest of you can get over it.

Awkward pause.

TINA

(changing the subject)

Has anyone been to Walmart lately?

LINDA

What?

TINA

They moved everything around. It's impossible to find anything.

STAN

What's going on? Why are none of the guys here for Matt's birthday?

TINA

It's the internet. No good will come of it.

MATT

What kind of cake are we having?

LINDA

We're not having cake.

MATT

No cake???

RENEE

I don't get it. What's going on?

CHARLIE

Do we have to talk about this??

MATT

Yeah, do we? I thought we all agreed we weren't going to talk about it.

RENEE

Okay, now I really wanna know. What is this? Some kind of "don't tell the black people" neighborhood scandal?

CAROL

We know you're very religious, so we thought it best not to say anything.

STAN

What the hell is going on??

CAROL

Okay, okay, we might as well tell them. They might be on the internet one morning after church and find out on their own.

STAN

I'm not that religious.

CAROL

Charlie was surfing the internet late one night, and he clicked on this video and Matt was in it.

RENEE

What kind of video?

MATT

Porn! It was a porn video, okay? There. It was a long time ago. I was in Las Vegas for a conference. I lost some money and this guy said there was a way I could earn it back, and no one would ever find out. It was stupid, I know.

STAN

YOU did a porno?? I don't believe it.

CAROL

It's really easy to google.

MATT

Once! A long time ago!

CAROL

(in production make it 2
years ago)

March 2020.

STAN

Wow! What was it like? I've always wondered about the guys that did those, and actually got paid! Was she hot?

Silence.

STAN

What? What's the site?

CAROL

It's called "broke straight guys".

Silence.

CAROL

Type in "Daddy Does A Twink"

STAN

What's a "twink"??

CAROL

It's like a young, boyish guy.

Silence.

CAROL

Don't worry, they're all over eighteen. I've been doing some research. Matt is actually very good in it. He's a baseball coach, and you really believe that he wants this player to succeed. There's some decent acting on Matt's part.

TINA

Matt was way better than that skinny guy. I didn't believe he was a baseball player at all. He couldn't even throw a ball.

CAROL

Linda is a very lucky woman.

LINDA

Oh yeah. I'm real proud.

STAN

I don't believe this.

TINA

I have it on my phone.

CAROL

I have it on my phone.

TINA

Owe me a coke!

MATT

No!! Do not play that video! Please! No one wants to see that!

RENEE

I do.

Carol and Tina stand next to Renee, and show her the video on the phone. Cheesy music plays, we hear Matt's voice.

MATT VOICEOVER

(bad acting)

Hey Scotty! Can I talk to you for a minute? Were those guys picking on you? Because believe it or not when I was your age I was picked on too...

CAROL

You can skip this part. Go to about three minutes in.

They adjust the phone.

MATT VOICEOVER

Okay, you're doing much better! Now we better hit the showers! You don't mind if we try to save a little water do you?

They watch in interest as porno music plays. Then...

CAROL

Go to about seven minutes and thirty eight seconds that's when it gets good.

Renees eyes grow wide. She looks over at Matt.

STAN

Wait a minute. I'm confused. Charlie, you accidentally clicked on this by mistake and told your wife?

CAROL

Oh, he didn't tell me. I walked in on him. He was in his study putting on some hand lotion and watching the video. I came up behind him. I'm the one that recognized it was Matt. I'm like, 'Hey Charlie, isn't that Matt?' You should have see Charlie leap out of his seat. He's like, "yeah it is!" Charlie was googling all the neighbors names and Matt just popped up.

RENEE

Something popped up.

CAROL

I tried googling Matt's name, but it doesn't come up that way. He uses a stage name for his acting roles.

MATT

One time!!

CAROL

Google Blake Bonerz.

MATT

Don't google that. Look, I didn't want Linda to find out I lost all that money!

They told me only members could see it, and I don't know anyone who would be a member of a site like that!

CAROL
All porn eventually gets leaked onto the public internet...
I've heard.

STAN
My God?! How much money did you lose!?

MATT
I don't know. About three hundred dollars.

STAN
They only paid you three hundred dollars?

CAROL
Next time you should ask for more.

MATT
There's not going to be a next time. Linda and I agreed never to talk about this.

LINDA
I never agreed to that. You just said we would never talk about it.

RENEE
(to Linda)
And you were okay with this?

LINDA
I'm not okay with it. But it is something to bring up in an argument.

MATT
Everyone does stupid shit when they're in Vegas. What happens in Vegas... you know...

RENEE
Ends up on the internet.

STAN
So is Matt gay? Or bi? Or what?

MATT
I'm not gay! I just did it for the cash.

CAROL
It's called "gay for pay"

MATT

There's a name for it?

CAROL

It's a whole business model.

STAN

I don't know...This might be a problem.

MATT

What might be a problem?

STAN

I don't think we can have a porn star living in the neighborhood, can we Linda? Seems like there should be some sort of morals clause. Is there a morals clause in the new charter?

LINDA

(getting concerned)

He's not really a star.

CAROL

The video only has thirty nine "likes"

MATT

That's it??

CAROL

And a whole bunch of thumbs down.

MATT

How many thumbs down?

CAROL

Eight hundred and twelve.

MATT

There was nothing wrong with that video! Why are people giving it a thumbs down?

CAROL

I think it's for bad acting on the part of the twink. People are very complimentary of you in the comments.

MATT

(pleased?)

They are?

STAN

Why do you care??

MATT

I don't. I don't care.

STAN

You obviously do. We're going to have to think about how we deal with this when we're rewriting the charter.

CAROL

Maybe there should be a grandfather clause.

STAN

A what?

CAROL

A Grandfather clause... for people who did porn before the new Charter was passed.

TINA

I would agree to that if there can also be a grandfather clause about people who own chickens.

CAROL

That seems fair.

TINA

(pointedly)

I can't believe you ate Carol Ann.

MATT

Who wants cake? Should we just skip right to the cake?

LINDA

There is NO cake!

MATT

There has to be cake!

LINDA

Why?

MATT

I saw all the ingredients on the counter- flour, sugar, eggs.

LINDA

So?

MATT

And the cookbook was open to a page on chocolate cake.

LINDA

So?

MATT

So, you must have made a cake.

LINDA

But I didn't.

MATT

You're kidding right? There really is a cake, isn't there?

LINDA

Those ingredients were just a "potential" cake. Which is not, in fact, an actual cake.

MATT

But it's my birthday, and you have to make me a cake, like you usually do.

LINDA

Those ingredients will not be a cake, will never be a cake, unless I put in an awful lot of effort, and put them in the oven for an hour at 350 degrees. Until then there just a bunch of stuff from the grocery store.

MATT

So do that.

LINDA

I don't want to.

MATT

You have to.

LINDA

You can't make me have a cake, if I don't feel like making a cake, even if it is your birthday.

MATT

There should be some kind of law that says you have to make me a cake on my birthday. Especially if all the ingredients are there already.

LINDA

Take it up with the board... Oh wait that's me!

MATT

You're not the whole board.

LINDA

Not yet.

STAN

Wait a minute, is this conversation really about cake?

TINA

I don't think any person should be forced to make a cake even if it is someones birthday.

RENEE

I agree.

STAN

But I like cake.

RENEE

Then you should learn to bake.

CHARLIE

It's kind of a waste of ingredients, when it could be a delicious cake.

TINA

It could also be a disgusting cake, if I'm being forced to make it against my wishes. Nobody knows how a cake will turn out. There are plenty of really awful cakes out there.

STAN

Most cakes are delicious.

TINA

Most cakes are awful.

CHARLIE

Nobody's forcing you to make a cake.

STAN

Birthday parties are supposed to have cake. It's kind of the natural order of things.

TINA

Matt said he wanted to make it a law that men get cakes on their birthdays.

RENEE

It kind of takes the joy out of it, if we're being forced to bake cakes, just because it's our husbands birthday.

TINA

And my husband is WAY too fat to eat cake, so why should I be forced to bake him one on his birthday?

CHARLIE

You can just bake the cake and then give it away to someone else, who would really like a cake.

TINA

Why would I want to put all that effort into making a cake, just to give it away? I've got better things to do with my time!

CHARLIE

Like what?

TINA

Well I have a lot of chickens to take care of and I'd rather spend my time with them than making some stupid cake that will probably end up killing my fat husband.

MATT

Okay, maybe I will learn to bake for myself.

LINDA

You can't bake. Good luck with that!

MATT

I think I could be a pretty good baker.

LINDA

Without me, there will be no cake.

STAN

That's a chick thing, baking.

RENEE

Then next time bake your own fucking cake, if you want cake, Stan.

STAN

What happened?

LINDA

Look everybody, enough about whether making birthday cakes for our husbands should be obligatory or not. We have all this other food. Why doesn't everyone fix a plate, Matt do you wanna get those burgers going?

MATT

You threw the meat on the ground.

LINDA

There's more meat in the refrigerator.

Matt doesn't move.

LINDA

Go get it.

MATT

Ok.

Matt goes inside. Charlie and Renee are fixing plates at the table. Renee takes some potato salad.

CHARLIE

You like potato salad?

RENEE

Some kinds.

CHARLIE

I'm surprised.

RENEE

Why?

CHARLIE

I just didn't think you would like potato salad.

RENEE

I brought potato salad.

CHARLIE

So you're eating the potato salad that you brought?

RENEE

No. I don't like the kind that I brought. I only like the kind with Mayonnaise.

CHARLIE

You like mayonnaise?

They leave the food table and find seats. Carol and Tina fill their plates with food.

CAROL

Tina, I'm so sorry about Carol Ann. Honestly I didn't even know it was one of your chickens. But Charlie said-

TINA

Don't worry about it. I know it wasn't your fault. And Carol Ann was lazy anyway.

CAROL

She was lazy?

TINA

She just ate a lot of feed and I hardly got any eggs from her. Frankly, I was probably going to eat her myself, so forget about it.

CAROL

I thought you were a vegetarian?

TINA

Nah. Turns out, I really love meat after all, and apparently I have very little problem butchering animals if they really deserve it. I've learned so much about myself the last two years.

Matt comes out of the house with meat, and begins cooking it on the grill.

MATT

Who wants a burger?

TINA

Sure!

CHARLIE

I do, but hold off on cooking it because I took a lot of potato salad.

He has a mountain of potato salad.

LINDA

That's a LOT of potato salad.

CHARLIE

No one else eats it.

Renee looks over at him.

CHARLIE

Except Renee. And she only eats the kind with Mayonnaise in it.

TINA

Renee, you like Mayonnaise?!

RENEE

I do. Is there something wrong with that?

TINA

No, nothing.

LINDA

There's veggies and dip, and I also made gazpacho.

TINA

And please everyone help yourself to the popcorn. I have so much!

RENEE

Sure Tina, eat the random popcorn. Great idea.

Stan is with Matt at the grill.

STAN

(to Matt)

So you sucked a guys dick for three hundred dollars?

MATT

No! Of course not...

A beat.

MATT

He sucked mine.

STAN

How was it?

MATT

It wasn't awful, but it didn't do much for me.

STAN

It would take a lot more than three hundred bucks to get me to go gay.

MATT

How much more?

STAN

Three grand.

MATT

You'd go gay for three grand?!

STAN

You did it for three hundred!

MATT

I had been drinking, and I didn't want Linda to find out I lost all that money.

STAN

It's not a lot of money, Matt.

Linda is speaking with Tina.

LINDA

How's the fruit salad?

TINA

Too many grapes. I don't think grapes belong in a fruit salad.

LINDA

Carol made it.

TINA

It's not bad. I just like when there's more cantaloupe.

LINDA

So what way are you leaning?

TINA

Leaning about what?

LINDA

The new charter.

TINA

I know you're really for this Linda, but I'm not so sure. I really want to keep my chickens.

LINDA

(keeping her voice down)

We'll do the Grandfather clause. The chickens can stay! Just vote yes.

TINA

I don't know.

LINDA

I'm on your side, Tina. All the trees we got planted on your street last year? Doesn't the neighborhood look a whole lot better?

TINA

It does.

LINDA

Well, we can do more than that. With the new rules, we're going to take over that lot on the corner of Elm. I want to turn that empty lot into a community garden. Wouldn't that be fabulous?

TINA

It would. But don't Ginny and Bob own that property?

LINDA

Don't tell anyone, but they are behind on their dues. Way behind! And they haven't kept it up in over five years. The rules say after five years, the neighborhood can take it over. We don't even have to give them another warning. Isn't that great?

TINA

I guess. It sounds a little harsh.

LINDA

If we can get everyone on board, the annual dues could pay for that park. Of course the dues are going to go up quite a bit, but it'll be so worth it. It'd be great for the kids to have a place to play.

TINA

It would. I don't know. I'm gonna have to speak to my fat husband about it.

LINDA

Do you always do what he says?

TINA

Jeff actually likes the new charter, but I think he just hopes I'd have to get rid of the chickens. He doesn't like all the chickens.

LINDA

We can work things out with the chickens. Trust me! I'm on your side.

TINA

(abruptly spitting something out)

Blach!

LINDA

What's wrong?

TINA

Kiwi.

Charlie slowly approaches Matt at the grill. They have a very awkward exchange.

CHARLIE

Those look done.

MATT

Not quite.

CHARLIE

You're gonna overcook them.

MATT

Medium rare is 5 minutes. These have only been on there for three.

CHARLIE

You know, I wasn't watching the video.

MATT

A minute and a half left.

CHARLIE

I just didn't want you to think-

MATT

A minute twenty seconds left.

CHARLIE

Nice grill.

MATT

Thanks. It's a Napoleon Rogue XT 425.

CHARLIE

Never heard of it.

MATT

I hadn't either. I saw it in a commercial.

Stan comes up behind them unseen.

CHARLIE

Have you noticed how there's no white people in commercials anymore?

STAN

What?

CHARLIE

(loudly)

Oh! Stan! I didn't see you there.

STAN

Obviously. What do you mean there's no white people in commercials anymore?

CHARLIE

Obviously I didn't mean NO white people.

Renee comes over.

RENEE

What's going on over here?

STAN

Charlie says commercials have too many black people.

RENEE

What do you mean too many black people?

CHARLIE

I didn't mean it like that. It's just the woke crowd- you know-

RENEE

I don't know. Why don't you tell me?

CHARLIE

I think I'm gonna go. Carol! I'm gonna go!

RENEE

Do you have a thing against black people in broadcast advertising?

CHARLIE

NO! No. That's not what I meant.

CAROL

Why are you leaving?

RENEE

Your husband says there's way too many black people on television.

CAROL

Charlie! Are you on that again? I thought you were over it.

CHARLIE

It's not an issue!

CAROL

He gets so upset every time that Cheerio's commercial comes on.

CHARLIE

I do not get upset!

CAROL

And don't get him started on that Nyquil commercial.

RENEE

The one where the white husband has a sick black wife, and he brings her a cup of Nyquil?

CAROL

Yes. That's the one.

RENEE

I don't like it either.

CAROL

You don't?

RENEE

I'm not a fan of interracial marriage.

CHARLIE

Right?! Me either!

Linda and Tina come over.

LINDA

What's going on over here?

RENEE

We're just talking about television. And Charlie says there's too many black people on TV.

CHARLIE

No, no, no! I have nothing against black people! Denzel? He's great, right? We can all agree on that can't we?

Awkward pause.

CHARLIE

Can't we?

Awkward pause.

CHARLIE

Listen! These days, it's all kinds of people in those ads, Mexicans, Asians, Puerto Ricans... and even people who you don't know what the heck they are. And this just happened all out of the blue. One minute I'm looking at "white" Jake from State Farm, then I turn around and he's suddenly "black" Jake from State Farm. You can understand my confusion!

RENEE

The State Farm ad confused you?

CHARLIE

I think it's pretty shitty to fire the poor white guy and replace him with a black guy.

CAROL

The original Jake wasn't an actor.

CHARLIE

What?

CAROL

He was a State farm employee. So, when they wanted to do more commercials they wanted to cast a real actor. So they cast a black man. I like him. I think he's very attractive.

STAN

So you're letting television commercials effect your mental health?

CHARLIE

It's just gone over the top is all! That's just not representative of society.

STAN

Why not?

Stan starts to look at his phone.

CHARLIE

I have nothing against minorities. It's just most of the country is white, and I don't understand why there's all these commercials that are just pandering to the "woke" crowd.

STAN

You know, white people are only about 57% of the population now.

CAROL

That's just over half.

CHARLIE

That's not true. How do you know that?

STAN

I googled it while we were standing here.

TINA

I like when there are people of color in commercials. It's much more inclusive, and it says to under represented groups "we see you...please buy our stuff"

MATT

Does it really matter what actors they use in commercials?

CHARLIE

I'm just saying, things have gotten a little over the top with this PC stuff. That's all I'm saying.

RENEE

So, there are no white people in commercials anymore? None??

CHARLIE

I didn't say that! I said, not as many as there used to be!

RENEE

When it was all white people.

CHARLIE

That's not true, there's always been plenty of African American's in commercials.

RENEE

(offended, in his face)

Don't you "African American" me!

CHARLIE

Did I say something wrong? What's happening??

CAROL

I do think there have always been some black people in commercials. Even back when I was a kid.

RENEE

Yeah, as maids and waitresses.

MATT

These hamburgers are completely burned. Come on guys. It's my birthday!

RENEE

ALL birthdays matter, Matt.

They all start to argue. The conversation has gone out of control and everyone is screaming at one another.

Suddenly an EMERGENCY ALERT sound blares from all their phones. The sound should be deafening to the audience, making them jump.

TINA

What is that?

They all look at their phones.

LINDA

Emergency Alert!

RENEE

This can't be real.

STAN

A mistake right?

CAROL

I don't know.

RENEE

There's an alert for this now??

STAN

I've never seen this before.

CAROL

I've seen amber alerts, and weather alerts-

CHARLIE

An active shooter alert? There's an emergency alert for that?

CAROL

There's all types of Emergency Alerts. There's even one for ballistic missile attacks. One went off in Hawaii.

TINA

Hawaii was attacked by a missile??

CAROL

No, it was a mistake. Someone sent the alert by mistake, but people thought it was real. It was a real shit show.

CHARLIE

So, is this real or not?

LINDA

It's probably a mistake, like the missile.

RENEE

Wasn't there a shooter in Danville just last week?

STAN

No, no, that was months ago. Last week was Muncie.

TINA

Indiana?

STAN

Yeah, at that car dealership.

TINA

How many people was it?

STAN

Only three.

TINA

Oh right! I forgot about that. So sad. But not in this neighborhood. That's crazy!

MATT

Wasn't there one in Detroit a couple of weeks ago?

TINA

Well, Detroit- you'd expect that.

STAN

No, no, that was just a hostage situation. No one was hurt.

RENEE

Wasn't there something in Oklahoma or Kansas or one of those square states last month?

STAN

Topeka, but it was a false alarm- that kid at the Walmart with the toy remember?

TINA

I do think I read something about that, but I get them all so confused. But not here in Stoney Creek? This is such a nice town.

CHARLIE

I was gonna bring my gun, but I didn't think I would need it.

TINA

I didn't bring mine either. So stupid.

RENEE

We only take ours out when we're going down to the city, not casual neighborhood parties. I mean I didn't think we'd need it going to a birthday party.

CHARLIE

Won't make that mistake again.

STAN

Well, why would you? I wouldn't expect something like this to happen here.

RENEE

Right? In this neighborhood?

TINA

Who would do that?

MATT

Ryan.

TINA

Ryan Andersen?

MATT

Yup.

LINDA

He hasn't been the same since Diane offed herself.

CHARLIE

This is just nuts. I'll go out and see what's going on.

CAROL

You will not! It says shelter in place. We can't leave the backyard Charlie.

CHARLIE

This is stupid. There's not an active shooter walking down Maple street.

CAROL

Charlie!

CHARLIE

I'm just going to see if there's any police out there. If there are police, then I'll come right back. If there are no police, then it's probably just a mistake.

MATT

I don't think you should go out there.

LINDA

Wait a minute! I'll go peak out the front window. See what I can find out first.

STAN

I'll go with you.

RENEE

Don't do anything stupid.

Stan and Linda go inside. The others are all "googling" on their phones.

TINA

Is there anything on the news about this?

MATT

There's nothing I can see so far.

TINA

If it's real, it just happened.

CAROL

I don't see anything on any of the local news sites.

RENEE

Well, if there is a shooter out there, there is one thing for sure we know about him.

TINA

What's that?

RENEE

It's a white guy.

CHARLIE

Hey! That's racist!

RENEE

You ever heard of a black woman walking in and shooting up a Wendy's? No. That is strictly a white man thing.

Linda and Stan come back out of the house. Stan closes the door behind them.

STAN

Can't see anything out front. No sirens, no lights. All quiet.

CHARLIE

Cause it's not real. I'm gonna go look.

Linda and Carol get a text.

CAROL

Who's texting me? Oh, it's Denise. She said she and the kids are safe. She says she "brought her gun... thumbs up, heart emoji". Oh thank goodness! Linda, I'll bet in situations like this you are glad you never had children.

LINDA

What did you say?

CAROL

Well Matt said-

LINDA

Matt said what?

CHARLIE

Who cares what Matt said! There's nothing going on. I'm going out, and I'll report back.

CAROL

I really wish you wouldn't, Charlie!

He goes out the gate. It is
silent for a very long time.

A LONG time.

BANG!!!

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE

* The play may be performed with our without an intermission depending on the needs of the production and theater.

ACT TWO

Seconds later...

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Carol screams. Stan puts his hands over her mouth.

STAN

(in a low voice)

Be quiet! We don't want anyone to know we're back here!

CAROL

Charlie!

STAN

He's probably fine.

BANG!

Stan keeps his hand over her mouth restraining her.

TINA

Is this really happening? I should go check on my chickens.

RENEE

You probably should.

STAN

You can't go out there now! We have to stay back here and keep quiet!

LINDA

Maybe we should go inside?

STAN

Good idea!

LINDA
We can hide up in the attic.

TINA
In the attic?

LINDA
We refinished it. It's a game room now.

TINA
Oh, nice!

LINDA
It was just wasted space. You and Jeff should think about it.

TINA
He's too fat to go up flights of stairs.

STAN
Let's go!

They all go to the door. Stan
tries to open it. It is locked.

STAN
It's locked!

LINDA
Who closed it?

STAN
I did when we came out.

LINDA
Why did you do that?

STAN
Why did I close the door?

LINDA
Yes. You locked us out.

STAN
Why did you have the door locked in the first place?

LINDA
I didn't lock it on purpose. Someone must have turned the
little thingy.

STAN
Well, I didn't. I don't live here.

LINDA
Matt, did you lock the door?

MATT
Uh...no. I mean, yeah.

LINDA
Why?

MATT
You're always after me for not locking the door behind me, so I thought I'd just keep it locked.

LINDA
Great! Now we're locked out!

MATT
It's not my fault! Stan closed the door!

STAN
Don't blame me!

MATT
You're the one who closed the door.

TINA
So, we're just stuck here?

CAROL
Do you think Charlie is okay? I hope he doesn't do something stupid.

LINDA
It's Charlie. He'll definitely do something stupid.

TINA
I'm sure he's fine. The shots didn't sound that close.

CAROL
I can't believe this is happening in our neighborhood.

LINDA
If we had approved that enhanced neighborhood watch, this wouldn't be happening.

RENEE

I don't like the idea of uniformed people roaming the streets looking at me all the time. I get that enough at Walmart.

LINDA

The G.S.O.C. would be there looking out for you, not looking at you.

TINA

The way the resolution read it sounded pretty creepy.

LINDA

What sounds creepy about "Go Stop Ohio Criminals"? It would just be members of the neighborhood stopping anyone who looked suspicious.

TINA

It's a weird name though. What is it? Go stop oh-

LINDA

Go Stop Ohio Criminals. G.S.O.C.

STAN

I don't think a neighborhood watch would stop a shooter with a rifle.

LINDA

Enhanced neighborhood watch. They were going to be trained, and potentially armed if we all voted for that.

RENEE

I don't like it.

LINDA

Fine. Get robbed and raped. But then don't complain about it!

They all start to argue. Suddenly
Charlie bursts through the gate.
They all react!

CAROL

Charlie!

CHARLIE

(somewhat calmly)

So. Hard to tell. Not sure what's going on. Could be nothing.

TINA

Nothing?! What do you mean nothing?

STAN

We heard the shots!

CHARLIE

I'm not sure if those were actual gun shots. Could be fireworks.

STAN

Those were not fireworks!

LINDA

Fireworks are going to be forbidden. Bylaw 62.

CHARLIE

It sounds like everything is going to be forbidden!

LINDA

Not everything.

STAN

How can you say there is nothing going on out there? We all heard it. We got the alert.

CHARLIE

I've never seen an alert like that before have you? Sounds fake to me.

RENEE

If it's fake then why did it go to all of our phones?

CHARLIE

There's all kinds of hackers these days. Just trying to make us scared.

RENEE

So why did you come running back in here then?

CHARLIE

Well, I'm not 100% sure.

CAROL

Charlie, I don't think it's fake.

CHARLIE

I didn't see anyone out there.

RENEE

Then why didn't you just walk home? You said you didn't want to be here.

CHARLIE

I have all that potato salad to finish.

STAN

By running around out there, you put all our lives in danger. You could have led the shooter right back here to us if they saw you.

RENEE

He. If HE saw you.

CHARLIE

I didn't see anyone.

CAROL

This neighborhood is not how it used to be.

LINDA

Don't you dare say "Before Matt and I moved here".

CAROL

No. It started going downhill before you came. But back in the day, everyone was nice to each other. We all got along.

RENEE

To each others faces we got along. We didn't really get along.

CAROL

What?

RENEE

We pretended to get along. Frankly, I'm not surprised if Ryan is out there shooting up the place. There are days when I'd like to take my gun and go blow away some of the people in this neighborhood.

CAROL

You don't mean that!

RENEE

You people are nice to our faces but I know there's a whole bunch of stuff being said about us behind our backs.

CAROL

No one is talking about you being black, Renee.

RENEE

Who said anything about being black? I'm talking about the addition we want to put on the house.

LINDA

It's too close to the property line Renee. You have to be at least eight feet from the property line.

RENEE

Who says?

LINDA

Bylaw 22.7 says it, and in this neighborhood we follow the bylaws.

RENEE

Did you call the inspectors on us Linda? Because someone did. Now we can't get a permit.

LINDA

I didn't call the inspectors.

STAN

I called them, Renee.

RENEE

What?!

STAN

I don't want an addition.

RENEE

Why didn't you just say that then?

STAN

Because you would have done it anyway.

Then in the distance getting
louder...Police sirens.

CAROL

Thank goodness.

STAN

Hopefully they just shoot who ever this asshole is.

RENEE

Some white guy.... I'm just saying.

LINDA

Too many neighbors with guns. I've been saying it for years.

STAN

Too many bad guys with guns.

LINDA

We don't know for sure it's a "bad guy", do we?

STAN

I think we do.

LINDA

Maybe whoever it is, is protecting their family from something.

STAN

From what? What could it possibly be?

LINDA

That's my point. Isn't whether someone is a "good guy" or "bad guy" depend on your perspective.

RENEE

Sometime bad is just bad.

LINDA

Sure. Sometimes yes. But I think it often depends on where you're sitting.

CHARLIE

Liberal bullshit.

LINDA

I'm just saying hero's and villains mean different things to different people.

CAROL

She could be right.

CHARLIE

But she's not.

CAROL

She may have a point.

CHARLIE

Forget it. I'm going inside.

STAN

I thought you said the whole thing was fake?

CHARLIE

It is fake. I want to use the bathroom.

LINDA

We can't.

CHARLIE

Why not?

LINDA

Matt locked us out of the house.

CHARLIE

Why'd you do that??

MATT

I didn't do it on purpose.

CHARLIE

Now what are we supposed to do?

MATT

We stay put.

CHARLIE

I meant about the bathroom.

LINDA

We hold it.

MATT

We stay put, and hope he or she doesn't find us.

RENEE

He.

Awkward pause.

RENEE

It's not a she.

A voice over a bullhorn

POLICE VOICE OVER BULLHORN

Stay in your homes! Do not venture out into the street. An all clear will be given when it is safe. Do not answer your doors, and do not invite strangers into your home!

CHARLIE

Why would we invite a stranger into our homes?

CAROL

I'm sure this will all be over soon.

TINA

How do you know that?

CAROL

The police certainly know where this person is, and they will take care of it.

POLICE VOICE OVER BULLHORN

We do NOT know where the perpetrator is. He...or she are currently evading capture. Do not let a stranger into your home!

TINA

That *does* seem like very obvious advice. I'm calling my fat husband.

She dials her phone.

TINA

He's not answering.

CAROL

Maybe he has his phone on silent.

STAN

Maybe he's dead already.

TINA

What?

STAN

I mean, probably not.

LINDA

Do you think it's really one of the neighbors? Maybe it's someone who's a stranger.

MATT

Who knows who it is? Maybe some person was driving along and got road rage.

TINA

Or maybe it's some person who's a relative of someone in the neighborhood.

CAROL

Or somebody who works with someone in the neighborhood.

RENEE

Or some angry white dude shooting up the neighborhood just for fun.

CHARLIE

So, we're just stuck here. Carol, I told you we shouldn't come to this party.

MATT

Hey!

LINDA

You didn't have to come, you racist piece of shit.

CHARLIE

I'm not racist! Stop calling me that!

BANG!

MATT

(somewhat quietly)

Everyone get down!

They all crouch down, and loudly whisper the next exchanges to each other.

TINA

(whispering)

That sounded farther away. Maybe he's moving away from us.

CAROL

(whispering)

It sounded like it.

TINA

(whispering)

They'll probably capture him soon.

STAN
(whispering)
Hopefully shoot him.

CAROL
(whispering)
Anything on the news yet?

LINDA
(whispering)
There is something- but it's not much information.

TINA
(whispering)
Anyone hurt?

LINDA
(whispering)
It doesn't say.

CAROL
(whispering)
I can't believe this is happening in our neighborhood. It used to be so nice.

LINDA
(regular voice)
I know. Before Matt and I moved here.

Now they've started speaking in regular voices.

CAROL
Now, you know I didn't mean it like that.

LINDA
Then how did you mean it? You're so passive aggressive Carol.

CAROL
I'm sorry if you took what I said the wrong way. I shouldn't have said it, because I know how sensitive you are.

LINDA
There! Right there! Did you all hear that??

CAROL
What did I say?? I was apologizing.

LINDA
No you weren't. That wasn't an apology.

TINA

It really wasn't an apology Carol.

CAROL

I don't understand. I said I was sorry.

TINA

No, you said you were sorry that she took what you said the wrong way. You are a little passive aggressive Carol.

CAROL

What? This is the first time I'm hearing of this.

TINA

It's not a big deal. It's just something you should be aware of. Sometimes you hurt my feelings and you don't even know it.

CAROL

Well, now you've made me feel just terrible.

TINA

Just think before you say something stupid.

CAROL

I'm sorry. I know I'm stupid.

TINA

You're not stupid.

CAROL

I am. And now I'm probably never going to see my kids again.

TINA

Don't say that. It's not true.

CAROL

How do you know? How do you know this is all going to work out? I yelled at Brayden right before he went off with the other kids today. Because he ate some butter pecan ice cream I had bought for myself. How selfish is that?

She laughs painfully.

CAROL

So the last thing he's going to remember about me is that I didn't like to share. And that I was shot in the face. How great is that?

Carol cries.

TINA

He's going to see you again. You're going to see him again. You can't think that way.

CAROL

It doesn't matter. He hates me anyway.

TINA

I'm sure he doesn't hate you. He's thirteen. All thirteen year olds hate their parents.

CAROL

Brayden really does hate me.

TINA

He's a child. How do you know how he really feels?

CAROL

Because when I yelled at him about the ice cream, he said "I hate you. I really hate you. You may think I'm exaggerating but have no doubt that I do hate you".

She sobs.

STAN

Your thirteen year old said that?

CHARLIE

Here come the waterworks.

TINA

Charlie, Brayden doesn't really hate Carol, now does he?

CHARLIE

If he said it, he probably means it.

CAROL

(to Charlie)

He hates you too!

CHARLIE

I know, but I don't take it personally.

CAROL

Everyone hates me. I know it.

TINA

Who hates you?

CAROL

All of you.

STAN

I don't hate you.

CAROL

(brightening a little)

No?

STAN

I barely know you. You have said no more than three sentences to me since we moved here.

CAROL

That's not true. I say "Hi" to you all the time.

STAN

You say "Hi". That is not a sentence.

CAROL

I'm sure we've had lots of conversations.

STAN

Last August. You asked if you could borrow my garden hose, because yours had a hole in it.

CAROL

Yes, and I said thank you.

STAN

Last October you asked me if we had any extra Halloween Candy because you didn't buy enough.

CAROL

Yes, that's right. Thank you! And... I paid you back.

STAN

November 2nd. Sometime around dusk. You put an envelope with ten dollars under our mat, and tried to run away. I saw you. I came out and asked what you were doing, and you told me you were paying me back for the candy.

CAROL

Yes, of course I wanted to pay you back.

STAN

But you didn't knock on the door, you were trying to avoid me.

RENEE

And that was at least fifty dollars worth of candy by the way.

CAROL

Really? That much?!

RENEE

It was good candy.

CAROL

I'm sure it was. You always have to have the best candy, best Christmas decorations, best garden. I know it's important to you that people think you're the best.

RENEE

Wait a minute!

STAN

Renee, let it go. This isn't going anywhere.

MATT

You know! I would like to win the best decorations award at least once. You guys always win, every single year.

STAN

So, put up better decorations!

LINDA

We have tasteful decorations. Those inflatable elves or whatever they are, they are not allowed in the new charter.

STAN

Why not??

LINDA

They're very tacky. And when you put out that many decorations you're bringing in people from outside the neighborhood, who don't belong and just come here to stand and gawk at that yuletide abomination of yours. Cars are blocking the street. We have to get the police out to put a stop to it.

RENEE

You're the one who called the police on Christmas Eve?

LINDA

It was causing a traffic backup!

STAN

Our house looks fantastic! That's why we win every year.

TINA

Those're elves? I thought they were demons. I always found them kind of disturbing. Then I figured it was probably cultural.

RENEE

Cultural that we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior with Demons in our front yard? That's what you thought?

TINA

I said it was confusing to me. Why do the elves have horns?

RENEE

It's their EARS! Not horns! Elves don't have horns! What are you stupid?

TINA

I'm sorry. They'd be better at Halloween.

CHARLIE

Oh my GOD! My stomach is killing me.

LINDA

It's that popcorn. You ate popcorn that came in the mail and no one knows where it's from. Who knows what was on it.

CHARLIE

I can feel it moving down the line. It's not good!

TINA

Can we just all try being just a little bit nicer to one another?

RENEE

I'm nice.

TINA

We have to live together. So we might as well at least try to get along. Otherwise the neighborhood association will just fall apart and eventually we'll all go our own separate ways.

MATT

Wouldn't that be better?

LINDA

Oh shut up Matt! No one is breaking up my neighborhood!

MATT

Why do you always say "my" neighborhood?

LINDA

Because it IS my neighborhood.

MATT

But it belongs to everybody.

LINDA

Does it though? I'm the only one that keeps the car pools running on time, safe streets, beautiful landscapes. All good organizations need someone very strong at the top running things and having the final say. Otherwise it's chaos!

CHARLIE

You are right about that, Linda. You are always the first and fascist to get things done.

LINDA

Thank you! Things need to be done quickly and efficiently. Less meetings and more doings.

MATT

Are we all gonna die back here?

CHARLIE

I don't know but I may crap myself, and I don't want to be found like that.

MATT

But it's okay for you to be found jerking it to my video?

CHARLIE

What? I wasn't jerking it to your video.

Pause.

CHARLIE

I was jerking it to another video and then yours came up.

CAROL

There was a lot of lotion. More than just for dry skin.

MATT

But how did that video just come up if you weren't looking for something similar.

CHARLIE

Okay! Come on. All guys are a little curious.

STAN

I'm not. Not even a little.

CHARLIE

Okay, I watch a lot of porn. Like a lot, a lot. So what? I was looking for some variety.

MATT

Hey man, I'm not judging you. I just wish you wouldn't have watched it when you saw it was me.

CHARLIE

I have watched all the straight porn on the internet. And all the bi porn. I've pretty much watched every bit of porn the internet has to offer.

STAN

No one watches that much porn.

CHARLIE

I have. I've watched it all. I click on it. Seen it...Seen it...Seen it five times. And your video was something that I had not seen.

RENEE

You need to find Jesus and get some therapy.

CAROL

He's in therapy. We've been looking for Jesus, but we're having kind of a hard time finding him.

RENEE

You could come to our church.

CAROL

That's so nice of you. Thank you Renee.

RENEE

You're welcome. It's all black people. You have a problem with that?

CAROL

I have no problem with black people, that's Charlie, not me.

CHARLIE

I have no problem with black people! Stop saying that.

They all begin to argue. Linda grabs a giant spoon from the potato salad and bangs it on the porch railing to get everyone's attention.

Linda gives this following speech absent-mindedly holding the giant spoon occasionally in the manner of a microphone. She is behind the porch railing as she gives this speech, elevated ever so slightly above the others.

It looks vaguely reminiscent of a politician on a balcony speaking into a microphone.

LINDA

Hey! Hey! Up here. Look at all of you! At each other's throats. And do you know why there's all this chaos? Do you?

No answer.

LINDA

It's the lack of community! You don't respect one another because you have no boundaries. This neighborhood is running amok. It's like that famous old latin saying "cave a proxim o tuo quoniam interficient te cum caneris" And it's happening right now!

CAROL

"Beware your neighbor, for they will kill you when you're singing"

Everyone looks at Carol, who apparently speaks Latin.

LINDA

It is time for each of us to make a choice. What kind of community do we want to live in, and how we want to raise our children?! Do we want murderers killing us like dogs in the streets? Or do we want a nice park with a swing set for the kids? Right now someone is outside these gates literally trying to destroy us, and yet we sit here and argue with each other. There are people in this neighborhood, and I won't name names but it's Ben and Carrie Fraser who would rather see our community destroyed because it effects their perverted lifestyle.

CAROL

They're Methodists.

LINDA

But we have the power to take away THEIR power before it's too late. It is people like the Frasers, and the Millmans, and the Mackenzies, and the Capobiancos who would just as soon see our way of life destroyed rather than to see us come together for the common good! And also I forgot to mention the Nardoizzi's. There are those in this neighborhood who right now are plotting against us. And one of them has become violent, taken up arms, and is trying to destroy us from within.

She pauses to see if she gets a reaction, but there is none.

LINDA

We have tried to make everyone happy, and that, sadly is our mistake! Now it's time for us to look out for the common good. We have tried, in vain it seems, to live our lives however we want, no matter how it affects others, but it isn't working! It is time for change. Yes, Tina that may mean you can't keep dozens of chickens in your back yard. Yes, Charlie that may mean that you can't have racist tchotchkes littering your front lawn. And Matt!

Matt looks to see if perhaps she is speaking to someone else.

LINDA

Yes, I'm talking to you. You can't do immoral things that reflect badly on the rest of us. We have been living lives of appeasement. And it's NOT working. Now, all of that belongs to the past. So, now it's time for us to step up, think about our families, our children, and determine our own future.

Do we live in the past, with old ideas, doing what we've always done?..... Or do we step into the future, with new ideas, and new energy? We can win! We can have the greatest neighborhood in this country, if we are only willing to step up and make it happen. We are stronger together! Together, we can make this neighborhood the greatest neighborhood in Stoney Creek. So people of Curtis Farms, are you with me, or is it every man woman and child for themselves? It's time to make a choice! God Bless you all.

She waits for applause. There is none.

MATT

Can we all just have a drink?

STAN

I know that speech.

CAROL

You're quite the public speaker, Linda.

STAN

That's a Mussolini speech.

Silence... Then they all move to get a drink. Matt pours cocktails for each of them, but it is awkwardly silent for quite some time.

MATT

What should we drink to?

CAROL

How about to your birthday?

MATT

It's not really a birthday without cake.

LINDA

Okay Matt! Enough! There's cake inside, we can have it later! When this is over there'll be cake for everyone.

There's no cake inside. Carol proposes a toast.

CAROL

Here's to Matt's birthday. May it not be his very last!

Everyone Cheers! And then they
begin mingling, having forgotten
about the danger outside
completely.

CAROL

I'm so sorry I upset you Tina. I know you're going through a rough time with Jeff, and I should be more cautious with my words.

STAN

What's going on with Jeff?

TINA

Nothing. We're fine. We're just fine.

CAROL

You are so brave.

TINA

Okay. Stop. Just stop.

CAROL

I hope you don't blame yourself.

TINA

Carol, I told you something in confidence.

CAROL

It's nothing for you to be ashamed of.

STAN

What's going on?

TINA

Jeff is having an affair. At least I think he is.

STAN

Jeff is having an affair? At his weight?

TINA

Shouldn't we be thinking about the person with the gun roaming around somewhere out there?

RENEE

White man with a gun.

CHARLIE

That's racist.

RENEE

So?

STAN

I mean, I don't want to be rude, but who would want to have sex with Jeff? It just doesn't make sense.

TINA

You're not wrong. But I'm pretty certain it's someone from the neighborhood.

LINDA

Why do you think that?

TINA

I found some notes the woman had written, and they're definitely someone who lives in the neighborhood. They're fairly detailed. I think she may be mentally disturbed.

STAN

What did they say?

TINA

I really don't want to talk about this.

STAN

Those chickens must've really pissed him off.

RENEE

Stay out of the white folks business Stanley.

STAN

I'm just trying to picture the whole thing.

MATT

Why?

STAN

He's a very big guy.

CAROL

She was probably on top.

TINA

Can we stop talking about this and focus on the active shooter?

Charlie doubles over and holds his stomach.

CHARLIE

Aarg! What was in that potato salad?

LINDA

Which one did you eat?

CHARLIE

All of them. My stomach is killing me.

CAROL

You ate too much potato salad again.

LINDA

And you ate that mystery popcorn too.

CHARLIE

I don't feel great.

CAROL

Come over here and sit down, Charlie.

Charlie sits down in a lawn chair.

CHARLIE

What the heck was in that potato salad? Maybe I'm allergic to something.

LINDA

Mine came from Kroger. I have no idea what's in it. Maybe it's on the container.

Linda tries to read her container of potato salad but the words are too small. She squints to read them, then just gives up. Tina speaks up defending her potato salad.

TINA

Mine is just potatoes, onion, bacon, vinegar, sugar, salt,
and a little parsley

CAROL

Renee wrote down the recipe for hers.

TINA

What's in yours Renee?

Tina goes to look at the recipe.

RENEE

It's a herb potato salad. Lemon, onions, olive oil, a little
mustard. Nothing strange.

Charlie doubles over in pain.

CHARLIE

Aaaaaauug!

MATT

Are you okay?

CHARLIE

I'm cramping up. Damn!

Charlie falls to his knees, bent
over in pain.

TINA

(finishing up reading
Renee's recipe)

And garlic and black pepper.

Tina studies the recipe.

MATT

This isn't how I thought my birthday would go. Not at all.

LINDA

Matt! Stop making everything about you!

MATT

That's what a birthday party is supposed to be. Everything is about the person having the birthday.

LINDA

I think your birthday is canceled Matt. There's more important things happening if you haven't noticed.

MATT

I'm canceled?

Charlie grabs his stomach and
crawls in pain.

CHARLIE

AAugg!

CAROL

Honey, are you okay?

CHARLIE

(doubled over in pain)

Aliens in my belly.

TINA

Your handwriting is so distinctive Renee. Very beautiful.

RENEE

Thank you.

TINA

In fact, I don't think anyone could mistake your penmanship for someone else's.

RENEE

Thank you, Tina.

Tina suddenly flies at her in a
rage, ripping at Renee's hair. A
wig comes flying off Renee's head
and careens across the yard and
lands in the bowl of gazpacho.

RENEE

My hair!

CAROL

That's not your real hair??

Tina and Renee fight. Renee tries to run to the door forgetting that it's locked. Tina shoves her into the table full of food and it all goes flying. Renee gets up and rips down the "Happy Irthday" sign and tries to strangle Tina, but Tina gets away.

MATT

What's happening?!

TINA

Her handwriting! It's the same as the notes I found in Jeff's underwear drawer!

RENEE

My wig! You've ruined my wig!

Tina picks the wig out of the gazpacho and whips it at Renee.

TINA

You've ruined my marriage!

RENEE

That wig is made from my dead mothers hair! It's all I have left of her!

CAROL

You also have her potato salad recipe.

Stanley has just come to the realization that his wife is probably having an affair with Tina's fat husband.

STAN

(to Renee)

Wait a minute- are you?

LINDA

Will everyone keep it down, please! We don't want anyone to know we're back here.

CHARLIE

Auuugh! I have to use the bathroom.

Charlie runs to the door, not remembering that it's locked.

STAN
(to Renee)
But he's enormous!! I mean...How???

CHARLIE
It's locked!

LINDA
We told you that!

CHARLIE
I have to use it!

STAN
(to Renee)
I can't believe you're messing around with that fat bastard!

RENEE
What do you care? Just look at my mothers hair, it's covered
in tomato soup!

LINDA
Gazpacho.

CHARLIE
I have to use it RIGHT NOW!

Charlie starts to take off his
pants.

LINDA
Don't you take your pants off! You're not going to shit in my
backyard!

He takes off his pants and is now
in his boxers. He grabs the ice
bucket which is now laying on the
ground.

LINDA
Oh no you don't! Not my Antique Irish ice bucket!

Charlie runs to a corner of the
yard goes behind a bush, and
holds the ice bucket out in
defense.

CHARLIE
Look away! Look away!

LINDA

Don't you dare!

CHARLIE

I apologize to this ice bucket in advance... and Linda?

LINDA

What??

CHARLIE

I am not a fucking racist!

Behind the bush, He starts to sit
on the ice bucket.

Linda pulls out a gun out of her
pocket and aims it at Charlie.

LINDA

Drop my Antique Irish ice bucket!

CHARLIE

(is he smiling?)

I'm sorry Linda, it's too late. I can't stop now.

Matt runs between them.

MATT

Linda what the hell are you-

The gun goes off, shooting Matt
in the shoulder. He falls to the
ground.

MATT

Holy fuck! You shot me!

STAN

I thought you didn't believe in owning guns?!

LINDA

No, I just don't believe in my neighbors owning guns!

MATT

I'm shot!

LINDA

I just winged you.

MATT

But I'm bleeding.

CHARLIE

Ahhhhhhhhh! Ohhhhhh!....Oh. Oh. Oh... Ahhhh. There. I'm okay now.

LINDA

You better not have shit in my Great Great Grandmothers Irish ice bucket!

CHARLIE

You should've been nicer to me.

LINDA

(screams)

Aaaah!

Linda runs to Charlie and pushes him off balance and he falls over, pants around his ankles.

MATT

I'm bleeding!

LINDA

I barely hit you!

CAROL

What is happening right now???!!

TINA

I don't know!!!

RENEE

(to Tina)

My mothers hair is covered in gazpacho! Look what you did!

TINA

Why are you wearing your dead mothers hair?!! That's really, really weird!

RENEE

It's all she left me! She had beautiful hair!

CHARLIE
(about the ice bucket)
Can't you just wash it??

RENEE
(about her wig)
No, I can't wash it!

LINDA
Who's gonna eat ice out of that now?? Everything's ruined!

CAROL
Charlie, I told you not to eat so much potato salad!

CHARLIE
It's never had that effect before! What the hell was in there?

CAROL
There were a bunch of different kinds of potato salad? Did someone use spoiled ingredients?

LINDA
Mine was from the grocery store.

TINA
It's not mine! I know exactly what went in there!

LINDA
It must be Renee's! Your Mother has a bad recipe, or you let it sit out!

RENEE
There is nothing wrong with my Mother's potato salad!

LINDA
Yes, there is! It made that asshole shit into my antique Irish ice bucket!

RENEE
Will you stop saying antique Irish Ice bucket?? It wasn't the potato salad. It was the popcorn!

TINA
Not my Amazon popcorn!

RENEE
Amazon didn't send you that popcorn!

A beat.

RENEE

(furious)

I DID! I sent you that popcorn, and I put crushed up laxative on it!

STAN

You did what?

TINA

You couldn't have sent it! I got the email that I was getting free popcorn!

MATT

Hello?? I'm bleeding here!

RENEE

(to Matt)

You're not bleeding. Stop being dramatic. There's barely any blood.

She turns to Tina.

RENEE

(to Tina)

Do you know how easy it is to create an email account that looks like it came from someone else? Honestly I can't believe you fell for it, but Jeff said you were dumb. But you weren't supposed to bring it here.

TINA

But why did you do that to me?

RENEE

Because I don't like the way you treat your husband.

STAN

And I don't like the way you treat yours.

RENEE

Oh shut up Stanley, I know all about you and the woman at the returns counter at Walmart.

STAN

How do you know about that?

RENEE

Nobody buys and then returns so much useless stuff Stan. It's on the credit card statement. But don't worry I sent her popcorn too.

CHARLIE

You poisoned me!

RENEE

Oh shut up. Not on purpose. It was meant for her!

Motions towards Tina.

RENEE

(to Charlie)

I didn't poison you. You just had a little laxative! It worked so fast you probably already had diarrhea. Don't you feel better now? I'll bet it got that big stick out of your ass.

CHARLIE

I do feel better.

TINA

What's wrong with the way I treat my husband?

RENEE

You're always calling him fat and making jokes about his weight.

STAN

He is fat.

RENEE

It's not nice. And he doesn't look half bad with his clothes off.

MATT

I at least need a bandaid.

LINDA

Sorry, they are locked up inside the house. Just keep pressure on it.

MATT

(disappointed)

This is some birthday.

LINDA

(angry)

You want a birthday!? I'll give you a birthday! Come on everyone let's celebrate Matt's birthday!

She grabs a long match from the BBQ, lights it, and sticks it into a bowl of potato salad, which she carries towards Matt, presenting it to him.

LINDA

(singing angrily and aggressively)

Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you...

The others half heartedly join in.

EVERYONE

Happy birthday dear Matt, Happy birthday to you!

A beat.

CAROL

(singing)

For he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good fellow...
(her voice drops off) which nobody can deny.

LINDA

Go ahead, blow out the candle. Make a wish.

MATT

I wish you hadn't shot me.

TINA

You're not supposed to say your wish. It won't come true.

Matt blows out the match.

CAROL

Yay!

MATT

Thanks everyone.

TINA

Did you know you have to pay rights if you sing happy birthday?

LINDA

What?

CAROL

That's not true. There was a lawsuit in 2015. It's public domain now.

Bang! Bang! Bang! A barrage of gunfire.

Then the sound of sirens.

RENEE

What do you think happened?

STAN

I think they shot him.

LINDA

Good.

CAROL

Oh, I hope nobody was hurt.

STAN

I hope they shot that guy.

TINA

Do you think it's over?

CAROL

I hope so.

CHARLIE

It was probably nothing.

STAN

(laughs)

You wouldn't go back out there. You were scared shitless. Literally.

CHARLIE

Your wife poisoned me!

RENEE

You can't prove a thing.

MATT

Will someone look at my shoulder, please?

Carol goes over to Matt and
checks out his shoulder.

CAROL

It doesn't look too bad. It looks like it's just a scratch.

MATT

Then my wish came true. I'm not gonna die.

CAROL

So it is a happy birthday after all.

Carol kisses Matt... on the lips,
passionately.

The sound of sirens, they get
louder and closer.

POLICE VOICE OVER BULLHORN

It is now safe to leave your homes. This is an all clear. The
area is secure. The threat has been eliminated.

TINA

Oh thank goodness!

STAN

Sounds like they shot the guy. Or he shot himself. Either
way. It's over.

CAROL

I can't believe this happened in our neighborhood.

CHARLIE

Come on Carol, let's go home.

TINA

I better go check on my fat husband.

CAROL

Happy birthday Matt!

LINDA

Wait a minute! Before everyone goes. If there's anything this incident has shown us, it is the need for more neighborhood security, and a stronger Association.

MATT

Linda, don't. Not now.

LINDA

So, since all of the board members are here, I move that we vote on the new charter right away. Right now. Then we can immediately start implementing the new regulations, for everyone's safety.

RENEE

After everything that's happened, you want to have a board meeting?

LINDA

Why not? We've just been through a serious crisis. We need to act quickly and decisively.

CAROL

I haven't really decided how I want to vote.

CHARLIE

Oh, yes you have.

CAROL

No Charlie, I haven't. After all that's happened there's a lot to consider.

CHARLIE

You are not voting "yes" on all that bullshit.

CAROL

There's a lot of good things in there, Charlie.

TINA

But there's a lot of bad things in there, Carol.

LINDA

Oh come on people! Really?? Stan, back me up!

STAN

I don't know Linda. Do we really have to decide this right now?

LINDA

Yes! We have to show the neighborhood that we have control.
And that we are prepared to act.

STAN

I'm not sure if I really want that new charter anymore,
Linda.

LINDA

So you're changing your mind now? Why?!

STAN

I didn't say I changed my mine. I said I'm not sure.

LINDA

Tina??

TINA

Yes, I've decided how I'm going to vote.

LINDA

Great. How?

TINA

It's a secret ballot isn't it?

LINDA

Ugh! Yes. It's secret. Blah Blah Blah!

RENEE

Isn't Denise on the board? She's not even here.

LINDA

I have her proxy. I am voting in her absence.

STAN

Oh, God. We might as well get this over with. I don't want to
have to go to another meeting. Let's just get it done.

CAROL

But we don't have the official ballots printed out.

LINDA

Yes we do. I printed them last night.

Linda goes over to the table and
pulls out some ballots from under
the tablecloth.

MATT

This really wasn't about my birthday at all was it?

LINDA

It was part of it.

Linda distributes the ballots and pens to Stan, Carol and Tina.

RENEE

You were really prepared for this weren't you?

LINDA

I'm always prepared. That's why I'm a great President.

Carol, Stan, Tina, and Linda fill out their ballots. Linda holds up an extra ballot.

LINDA

And this one's for Denise.

TINA

How is Denise voting?

LINDA

It's a secret ballot Tina. I can't tell you that.

CAROL

Linda told me Denise was going to vote however Linda wanted her to.

Linda grabs a bowl and the board each puts their ballots in them.

LINDA

I was going to use my Great Great Grandmothers Antique Irish ice bucket, but now that's off the table.

MATT

I suppose you're going to be the one to count them.

LINDA

Absolutely not. Bylaw 7 specifically says that the President cannot count the ballots.

TINA

Let Carol count them. We all still like her, don't we?

CAROL

You want me to tally them?

RENEE

It's only five votes. Counting yours. You can handle it.

Linda hands her the bowl of
ballots.

CHARLIE

You better have voted the right way Carol.

LINDA

Charlie! No intimidating a board member. Bylaw 16.

CAROL

All right. Here goes.

Carol pulls out the first ballot,
reads it and smiles. She folds it
and puts it aside.

STAN

You're smiling. That must be your own vote.

CAROL

Maybe...

LINDA

Shhhh! Stan. It's supposed to be silent during the official
ballot count.

Carol pulls each of the other
ballots out, reads them, folds
them and puts them on the table.
She looks at the group.

RENEE

Well, what's the verdict?

Carol doesn't answer.

STAN

What's the decision?

CHARLIE

Come on Carol! Speak up! Don't take all day. What is it?
Freedom or a shit ton of new rules?

Carol takes a beat. Then...

CAROL

Well, it's not what I thought would happen.

LINDA

What?? What is it Carol? This is what's going to determine the entire future of the neighborhood.

CHARLIE

Stop being so dramatic. It's just one vote. If people voted for the stupid rules, we can get rid of them in the next election.

LINDA

Not exactly.

CHARLIE

What do you mean not exactly?

LINDA

Didn't you read the new charter?

CHARLIE

No, of course not. It was thirty pages long!

LINDA

Bylaw 57. The Charter may not be amended further without a unanimous vote from every resident, and must be signed off on, by the President.

TINA

I didn't read that part.

RENEE

Why didn't we make a new Charter that was somewhere in the middle?

LINDA

You had every opportunity to participate in the process Renee. I never got any feedback.

STAN

What do you mean "in the middle"?

RENEE

Rules that make common sense.

LINDA

They all make common sense to me.

RENEE

Who wrote this thing?

They all look at Linda.

LINDA

This is all for the good of the neighborhood.

MATT

Did none of you read the thing?! Seriously? You just let her write it?

TINA

I just assumed Linda had everyone's best interest at heart.

MATT

Have you met my wife?

LINDA

Does anyone have a bandaid for my husband? For his mouth?

STAN

If this thing passes...which it may not, this is just temporary. We'll just elect a new President next year.

LINDA

Oh, Stanley! The President is a lifetime appointment now. Bylaw 59.

RENEE

A lifetime appointment? Did anybody read this thing?

No one did.

LINDA

Okay Carol, tell us what's the verdict? Does the new Charter of Curtis Farms pass or not?

CAROL

Well, this is actually quite a surprise...

LINDA

(getting a little nervous)

What is the decision of the neighborhood Carol?

CHARLIE

Oh my God. We're so fucked aren't we?

TINA

Have a little faith in the system, Charlie.

LINDA
Carol!! Come on! Speak up!

BLACKOUT Carol opens her mouth to speak...

END OF PLAY