

“LOTTERY PLAY”

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 110 MINUTES

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“He who trusts all things to chance, makes a lottery of his life.”

–Proverb

CHARACTERS

NATHAN SHERMAN, mid 20s

BOB SHERMAN, 62 to the day, Nathan’s Uncle

AGNES SHERMAN, early 60s, Bob’s Wife, Nathan’s Aunt

NORMAN LIPSCHULTZ, 40s, friend of Bob

GUNTHER GUDMUND, late 30s, Bob’s tenant

VARIOUS RADIO ANNOUNCERS

TIME

The present.

SETTING

An industrial warehouse. Minneapolis, MN.

SCENES

ACT I. Friday morning.

ACT II. Saturday afternoon.

ACT III. Tuesday morning...and a year later...

THE STAGE

We see the industrial warehouse of the Sherman family carpet cleaning business. The Sherman warehouse is part of a two-part industrial strip, including the Sherman warehouse and an abutting small office. However, we don't see the small office. What we do see are water tanks. Steam cleaning tools. Faucets and hoses. Machinery for servicing the company van. Plastic tubs. White cloths strewn around. Suds and spills. Storable units stacked high.

Nothing is modern. All old equipment. Some might consider it junk. And it's been piling up for years.

A shop radio sits atop one of the storable stacks.

Taking up space is a playing card table at stage right. At start, the card table is covered by a sundry tarp, under which rests both the card table and three wooden box crates substituting for seats.

Towards stage left is a small chemistry workstation on which several liquid-filled vials are scattered. At the floor of the workstation are many square scraps of soiled carpet.

A light fixture hangs capriciously from the ceiling.

PRELUDE.

*Over dark we hear a fanfare amalgam of
radio ads.*

RADIO ANNOUNCER VOICES [OVER]

Play the lottery, the big state lottery, have you played today?, can't win unless
you play, win thousands, mega-thousands, millions, odds improve if you play,
record payouts, just by playing you beat everyone who isn't playing, change your
life, are you playing yet?, think about those losers who aren't playing, don't be a
loser!, I played every day for forty years, I won so much money I bought
Uruguay, you-will-win-guaranteed-see-disclaimer, I won so much money I
bought the sequel to Uruguay, what if you win, what if you win, what if you win,
what if you win...

END OF PRELUDE.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Friday morning.

BOB enters, in uniform yellow work shirt, whistling, exhibiting a little happy morning dance while flicking on switches to various lights and steam cleaning machines.

A light fixture hanging capriciously from the ceiling gives BOB agitation, a non-cooperative fixture that doesn't stay lit, flickering in and out, putting a halt to BOB's happy dance. BOB eyes the lighting fixture and then stomps on the floor until it stays lit.

BOB turns on the shop radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Rise and whine, Twin Cities! An inglorious start to Memorial Day weekend. Seven and change in the ante meridian and you're waking up to a gusty greet of wind and sleet.

BOB opens the warehouse back door, to a gusty greet of wind and sleet.

As the radio continues, BOB fills up pails and water tanks, his preparation involving a disdainful wariness of the chemistry workstation.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

National Weather Service predicting up to three inches of mixed snow and ice by the end of morning rush hour. High of thirty with winds gusting up to twenty-five. Yikes. Not the way to kick off the busy holiday travel weekend. Traffic already backing up.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

And that's the state of the weather, which has got nothing on the state of the economy.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Uh-oh.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Latest Twin Cities economic report has home prices down another ten percent. Double-dip drop tops the top twenty nation’s metros. Governor has announced a plan for a new...oh, man...

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Let’s have it.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

A new depression hotline.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

So economists will have someone to talk to?

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Economists want to get cheery just call China. There’s a booming economy.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Do our economists speak Chinese?

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Our economists don’t even speak English. But here’s uplifting! Gopher Madness, the state lottery’s top prize is now at seven hundred fifty thousand dollars. Some lucky Minnesotan is going to take that home.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

If they don’t slide off the roads.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

We’ve got a hard out, you’ve got Twin Cities morning zoo on KS95.

A radio ad starts with a girl squealing.

ADVERTISEMENT [OVER]

Ohh, ahh! Spring is here and that means rubbing it out with the lustiest carpet cleaning care in the Midwest. Call the Lusty Steamer to take advantage of our annual spring cleaning bonanza. From downtown to around town the Lusty Steamer is ready to make your carpets shine like new.

BOB rushes to the radio and turns harshly the dial to elevator music. Then the lighting fixture flickers again.

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

Agnes. Agnes! AGNES!

AGNES [OFF]

Relax, you'll wake up Nathan.

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

Light's flickering again. What are you doing?

AGNES

[Entering] I was getting messages off the machine but the tape got all wound up.

BOB

Oh, no. Stop. Let me fix it.

AGNES

You don't know how to fix it.

BOB

The machine works fine when I do it.

AGNES

I don't want you banging on every machine we've got left in here that still works.

BOB

Agnes, you've got the whole thing twisted up.

AGNES

We should listen to Nathan and get digital voice.

BOB

Not today. I don't want to hear about anything new or modern today.

AGNES

Of course, because today is about old and decrepit. Happy Birthday.

BOB

Thank you.

AGNES

Sixty-two.

BOB

Like a deck of cards.

AGNES

Including the ten aces and one-eyed jacks you sneak in.

BOB

Speaking of, the boys are coming over to play some early morning hands in honor of my birthday.

AGNES

The Professor and Gunther come over every Friday morning to play cards.

BOB

Well, since it's my birthday, I'm going to have you go without bitching about it.

AGNES

You'll be lucky if either shows with this weather.

BOB

They'll show. Professor never misses cake.

AGNES

Cake? Was there supposed to be cake?

BOB

Cards at 7:20. Cake at 7:30.

AGNES

Served with freshly-squeezed orange juice. You need to think about your health now that you're not in your sixty-ones anymore.

BOB

Forget that nonsense. I want double-chocolate cake. And tell Vera none of her chopped salad.

BOB puts on a winter coat, grabs a flimsy snow shovel.

AGNES

What are you doing?

BOB

Got to clear a walking path for the boys.

AGNES

With that thing?

BOB

You ever hear of Paul Bunyan?

AGNES

You ever hear of John Deere?

BOB

And to think we've stayed married this long.

AGNES

I remember when you were the perfect gentlemen. Gentle and genteel. Waited until our wedding night to have sex.

BOB

We had sex long before we got married.

AGNES

Really? Where was I?

BOB

Sleeping.

AGNES

The only way you've gotten any since.

BOB

I'm going to clear a path. And when I come back I want double-chocolate cake presented by you in something see-through and laced.

AGNES

What about Nathan?

BOB

Nathan's old enough now he should get used to the idea of getting married and having sex once a year on his birthday.

AGNES

I meant: with your health shouldn't Nathan clear off the path?

NATHAN emerges from behind the workstation. Science goggles around his head half askew.

NATHAN

I'm up. Start the world, I'm up.

AGNES

Morning, Nathan, dear. Just in time.

BOB

Nonsense. You're up late.

NATHAN

Because I was up late.

BOB

I told you, I don't like you falling asleep from working on your science.

NATHAN

On my own time, like we said.

BOB

Fatigue reflects on the customers.

NATHAN

I'm young. I'll sleep when I turn sixty-two.

BOB

Ha ha.

NATHAN

Happy Birthday, Uncle Bob.

BOB

Thank you.

NATHAN

Is that your birthday suit? Turn old, get cold?

BOB

He's got his head so deep in his science, he doesn't even know the weather around him. I'm going out to shovel.

NATHAN
Shovel what?

BOB
Memorial Day blizzard.

NATHAN
You’re kidding.

BOB
This is Minnesota. We never kid about the weather.

NATHAN
But the snow tires are in storage.

BOB
Van will be fine.

NATHAN
Uncle Bob—

BOB
Van will be fine.

NATHAN
Aunt Agnes—

AGNES
Van will be fine, Uncle Bob said.

NATHAN
If we still had the main van, we’d be fine. The puke-lilac van can’t even stay straight in the rain.

AGNES
Well, it’s just the backup van now. Maybe you’ll turn your inventions towards a new kind of tire that can repel snow.

NATHAN
What is that?

AGNES
It’s tape.

NATHAN

From the answering machine?

AGNES

Maybe.

NATHAN

Uncle Bob, we can't live in the dark ages anymore.

BOB

Hey. Today is my birthday. Day of my birth. Not day of my death. On my death-day you can squawk all you want about your modern ideas. But not today. Today will be a Nathan-idea-free day. We're going to go one whole day without digital this or chemistry that, okay?

NATHAN

Maybe you should let me shovel.

BOB

Nonsense. I shovel, you get gear equipped. Hi-ho, May snow!

*BOB is out. AGNES turns off the radio as
NATHAN goes to inspect vials at the
workstation.*

AGNES

He make you listen to that elevator music in the van?

NATHAN

Traffic reports. About the only thing we agree on.

AGNES

You can listen to whatever you want today. Bob isn't going out with you.

NATHAN

Today's a three-person job.

AGNES

You have to handle the schedule by yourself. It's your Uncle's birthday and I'm giving him his first day off in I don't know how many years.

NATHAN

What's wrong?

AGNES

Nothing.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes, what's wrong with Uncle Bob?

AGNES

He's gone all these years without a day off. I'll work the office, you take the houses.

NATHAN

A whole day in the field by myself. Gee, I won't have to hear me introduced as the little sidekick.

AGNES

He does not call you that.

NATHAN

He does call me that.

AGNES

Your Uncle Bob thinks of you as more than a little anything.

NATHAN

When I started here, he promised I'd be made a partner when he turned sixty. He turned sixty and nothing. Now it's him saying when he dies.

AGNES

Nathan, I won't play broker between you two anymore. You need to learn the most important lesson about family business: honest and direct.

NATHAN

Honest and direct.

AGNES

Yes.

NATHAN

Like you hiding from me what's going on with Uncle Bob.

AGNES

I'm not hiding anything.

NATHAN

He's been coughing a lot, Aunt Agnes. Wheezing.

AGNES

Bob's always been a strong man.

NATHAN

He can't lift the equipment.

AGNES

He just gets tired more easily.

BOB comes back in, shaking snow off his coat, coughing.

BOB

That's not sleet. You call that sleet! That's rain with a jealous streak.

NATHAN

I'm getting the snow tires.

BOB

Nathan.

NATHAN

To shield property and ensure it's still around when I get my share of the business.

BOB

The hell has gotten into him?

NATHAN

Uncle Bob—

BOB

Will take you ninety minutes minimum to get 'em on. I want us to be at the Showers house first thing. That man wouldn't otherwise clean his carpet even if his daughter needed open neurosurgery on it. Besides, while I'm having a nice, quiet card game with the boys I don't want Little Nathan making a racket.

NATHAN

I need to be honest and direct about the Little Nathan thing.

AGNES starts sneezing. Brutal sneezing.

BOB

The what?

NATHAN

How you call me little—

BOB

Oh, no, Agnes.

NATHAN

How you call me little—

BOB

The potions again?

AGNES

I’m fine.

BOB

Nathan, she’s allergic to your potions.

NATHAN

They’re not potions. I’m not doing alchemy.

BOB

Stare into the light, Agnes.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes, I’m sorry, I’m still working out mixtures.

BOB

Stare into the light, Agnes.

AGNES

I’m fine.

BOB

Agnes, stare into the light!

NORMAN enters, wearing a large fur trapper hat, silly coat, shielding his large weight.

NORMAN

Do you believe this? Do you believe this weather?

BOB

Hey, Professor!

NORMAN

Spring is a tease. A wicked tease. She baits you with a little flower bud. You can plant your garden. You can feel renewed in my earthy soil. You can buy baseball tickets. And then she unfurls her sleety wickedness. And Agnes, what the hell are you doing?

AGNES

Staring into the light.

NORMAN

That makes one of us. Happy Birthday, my friend! I can't believe you people really put up with this weather.

BOB

You're part of the people now, Professor, you've been here long enough. You bring me my birthday present?

NORMAN

Ahh-ah-ahh. You get when it's time to give. In the meantime, I need to warm up. Where's the drink?

AGNES

No drink. We need to look out for Bob's health now.

BOB

Was even out shoveling this morning.

NORMAN

Saw Gunther outside his end of this place, shoveling, too. Of course, he's not looking out for his health, he's looking out for his deductible. Why don't you guys hire a service like normal people?

BOB

We're the service industry. We are the service. Our bodies never stop moving.

NATHAN

Professor, how were the roads?

NORMAN

A disaster.

NATHAN

I'm getting the snow tires.

NATHAN goes.

NORMAN

Roads were fine for me, though, because I drive Florida: half the speed limit and everybody in my rear view.

AGNES

Classes canceled?

NORMAN

I had canceled all research classes earlier in the week to take in the ball game. Only one thing to do. In honor of Bob's birthday, I shall go down the street, take in some Shakespeare.

GUNTHER enters, wearing a sleek suit. He carries a tray holder with three cups.

GUNTHER

Here I am! Late as usual!

BOB

As long as it's not with the rent check. Get in here Gunther! Look at this man, Professor. No coat, no gloves. We're fitted to the freezing by birth.

AGNES

Hold on. Is that really orange juice?

GUNTHER

Yah, Agnes, like you said, only O.J. for the b-day.

AGNES takes a sip.

AGNES

It's clean. You boys get to it. I need to get this tape fixed. Positive thinking says lots of orders from customers.

BOB

That's my Agnes! Cards first, then double-chocolate cake. We gotta tight schedule today.

AGNES is out.

*BOB whips off the cover from the card table.
BOB, GUNTHER and NORMAN take seats
on the three box crates.*

*NATHAN is back on, now in work shirt
uniform, having a hard time lugging even
one snow tire.*

NORMAN

You got yourself a good woman there, Robert.

BOB

That I do. Little Nathan should do the same.

NORMAN

I'd like to do the same.

BOB

Alright, boys. Grab your chairs and say your prayers. Same rules as always. Bets within the realm of possibility. Are you going to knock that off? Forget the snow tires, just help Agnes with the answering machine.

NATHAN is out.

BOB

And stop moping! These kids today, always moping when a little something doesn't go their way. When I was your age moping was illegal. What the hell are you doing?

GUNTHER

Dealing.

BOB

I think not. My table, my deal. And my birthday, Gunther, so don't cheat.

GUNTHER

At least not on the first hand.

BOB

Okay, boys, here we go, no wild and no bitching.

BOB deals cards.

NORMAN

Bob Sherman. The big sixty-two.

BOB

Sixty two years old and I still put the F-U in fun.

NORMAN

I'm still trying to figure out if there's life after forty.

The office phone rings offstage.

GUNTHER

How's he doing?

BOB

Who? Little Nathan?

AGNES [OFF]

Robert!

BOB

He's still stretching his brain around the fact he's gonna be cleaning carpets for the next sixty-two years of his life.

AGNES [OFF]

ROBERT!

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

WHAT?

AGNES [OFF]

PHONE!

BOB

Damnit. Don't let her touch my cards.

BOB is out as AGNES comes in and sits down at the table, phone continues to ring.

AGNES

We pass left or right?

GUNTHER

Left.

AGNES passes three, takes three, is pleased.

BOB [OFF]

Sherman’s Cleaners. Yeah, yeah, stop, stop, listen, LISTEN. Take us off your list and don’t ever call again.

BOB enters.

AGNES

Who was that?

BOB

Your sister.

AGNES

What did Vera want?

BOB

Probably to mock I’m old. I may be old, but at least I made it. Did you touch the cards?

AGNES

The only thing I’m touching of yours today.

AGNES puts down the cards and goes out.

BOB retakes his seat, is pleased with his hand.

BOB

Bets, gentlemen? Realm of possibility.

NORMAN

Loser yodels like a pregnant yak for twenty seconds.

GUNTHER

I see your yodeling and raise you both losers shovel snow off the winner’s car.

BOB

Can't believe you'd let anybody actually touch your precious white Mercedes.

NORMAN

I think it's a Buick with an identity problem.

GUNTHER

The bet is shoveling off the winner's car.

BOB

Call.

NORMAN

If it isn't the pot calling the kettle black.

BOB

If it isn't the pussy calling the tampon red.

NORMAN

Such abuse would be easier to take if we ever played for real money at this table. Because then I'd make a college professor's salary plus whatever your carpet cleaning business earns.

GUNTHER

Would you boys show down cards? I got people to put on the street.

They lay down cards. GUNTHER wins.

NORMAN

Every time, this guy!

BOB

I don't know what you Fins did on the boats coming over here, you got so good at cards. What's your secret?

GUNTHER

Not losing. Actually, the secret is bringing along a little Old Buck.

BOB

That's my Gunther! Hurry up, pour it in, before Agnes comes back.

GUNTHER

Alcohol the leading cause of Finnish deaths. Old Buck whiskey the leading Finnish alcohol. You figure it out.

NORMAN

What should we toast?

BOB

Three things. Peace. Quiet. And Oral Sex.

NORMAN

I didn't know you could shut up long enough to please Agnes.

BOB

Ha! Clink and drink!

They drink, they wince.

BOB

Don't knock too hard there, Gunther! Keep your knuckles fresh for the doors.

GUNTHER

These knuckles have been knocking less and less. Used to be if you were in foreclosure you were seeing me knock three times a week, wondering when the sheriff was going to finally put you out. The courts got wise to what's been going on. They got the banks for illegally processing. Now the entire process could take banks sixty-two years before they get around to repossessing all their homes in foreclosure. Set back the knock-and-notice guys like me even further. I used to be out there twelve hours a day. Sheriffs in five counties were doing lunch and dinners with me. I don't know what's going to happen.

BOB

What's going to happen is we stop complaining. One person complains, the second person complains, and before you know it we've got a bitch-and-moan orchestra. All we need's a little positive thinking. Take Professor here, canceled his classes to catch the ballgame. Now both ain't happening, so he's going to see Shakespeare.

NORMAN

Bob, Shakespeare's my code for nudie bar.

GUNTHER

Oh, yah. Been a while for you, huh?

NORMAN

Many years.

GUNTHER

That’s not against your...?

NORMAN

Like my Rabbi says, don’t do anything dirty. But if you happen to do something dirty, take off your yarmulke.

BOB

City wants to clean up that whole block, get rid of Shakespeare with it.

NORMAN

You guys don’t get any impact from that stuff?

GUNTHER

Nah, the first time I know anything’s happened is by reading the morning Strib. Somebody’s been shot on B1.

BOB

We’ve been in business here over fifty years and never seen a bullet. Whatever cleanup costs the city, that’s sales tax we have to pass on to customers. Agnes won’t shut up about it. I’m sure if there were any ideas, my nephew would spout off, though. Kid thinks he’s got the world figured out.

GUNTHER

You don’t listen to him?

BOB

C’mon, Gunther, you know these kids. All ideas, no experience. It doesn’t matter. The economy’s setting everyone back. It started for us with people foregoing luxury cleanings, now only bringing us out for major spills. It costs us more to service the little spills than we make charging customers. My nephew, this kid, all day long, spending his time mixing potions on customer floors. I’m there working the machines, and he’s lying on the floor, trying to mix potions to fix the deep stains. With a big smile on his face. And when he’s not mixing potions, he’s talking to me about what if we changed this? What if we tried that? This is carpet-cleaning, it’s not that complicated. We get called, we drive out, deliver the best value we can and hope we get called back next year. The way it’s been since his grandfather started this business. What’s there to try?

GUNTHER

Just saying you might be receptive to him.

BOB

I told Nathan, none of his cockamamie chatter today.

NORMAN

Bob, seriously, you okay?

BOB

If you think nobody's watching try missing a payment.

GUNTHER

Don't lose the building. I'd hate to find another place to rent.

BOB

I'll figure a way.

NORMAN

Everything's down it seems.

BOB

I'm telling you, one news report, three people bitching, a whole country feels like it's lost. But look at us, we've got it good, don't we?

AGNES enters, holding an envelope.

AGNES

Alright boys, I got cake coming! Let's do presents first.

NORMAN takes out an envelope of his own.

NORMAN

From me and Gunther.

GUNTHER

Picked it out myself.

BOB

Gopher Madness. A scratcher.

GUNTHER

Sixty four squares total on the card. Only fifteen of the sixty four have gopher heads. You scratch until you miss. The big winner hits fifteen gopher heads before scratching off an empty square. Seven hundred fifty thousand dollars.

BOB

We keeping buying lottery tickets for our birthdays. But we never talk about what happens if one of us wins.

NORMAN

You can't talk about it. You talk about it and it doesn't happen. You have to pretend like it doesn't exist.

BOB

This is what I'm saying, this is our problem. Nobody prepares for what happens when they win. Everybody spends their life preparing for that rainy day, that snowy day in May. Well, not me. I'm not living the deficit mentality. You always got to be ready for a little victory.

AGNES

Here you go, sweetie.

BOB

[Taking] Doubling my chances! Wait. This isn't a lottery ticket.

AGNES

Of course not. When have I ever bought a lottery ticket?

BOB

What is this?

AGNES

Doctor's appointment. You're long overdue on getting checked up for a lot of things. Including the bend and poke.

BOB

The bend and what?

AGNES

You're seeing Doctor Divine.

BOB

Yeah, so?

AGNES

Bring your own glove.

NATHAN enters carrying a covered tray platter. They sing.

NATHAN

Alright, Uncle Bob, make a wish.

BOB

To the last of the middle class. To the practical practitioner. And my birthday present representing our snub to it all. The American Dream: getting rich without having to work for it. Clink and drink!

The three drink their Old Buck orange juice, trying to mute their wincing in front of AGNES, who is not pleased, and takes the cover off the tray platter.

AGNES

Since that orange juice is so strong.

BOB

Where's my cake?

AGNES

Oatmeal. Doctor bend-and-poke says.

BOB

A doctor's appointment and oatmeal. Gee, honey, you really went out of your way.

NATHAN

Uncle Bob? I got you a present as well.

GUNTHER tries to wave NATHAN off.

BOB

Potions to bring back my hair?

NATHAN

I know what you said. About today. But I've been working on compiling all my ideas in sort of a business plan.

BOB

You did.

NATHAN

With Gunther’s help.

BOB

With Gunther’s help.

AGNES

Bob, please.

BOB

With Gunther’s help.

NATHAN gets note cards and a small vial of liquid from the chemistry workstation. Excited.

NATHAN

In honor of Uncle’s birthday I would like to present: The Sherman Steam Cleaning Future Plan. My plan proposes to transform the Sherman family business into an industry-leading force by leveraging existing infrastructure to build new product for satiating, as yet, uncorked demand.

BOB

I don’t know what you just said, but I bet there’s medication for it.

NATHAN

[Flipping cards] Carpet-cleaning businesses today are focused on cleaning customer carpets.

BOB

What needs cleaning is my gene pool.

AGNES

Bob, please.

NATHAN lifts up the small vial of liquid.

NATHAN

I present to you my newest invention: CarpetSoft. A secret acidic soap which extracts dirt faster and better than any carpet rinse currently in the market. With the ability to infuse special deodorizer scents. Smells like ‘Happy Bunny’! Smells like ‘Fluffy Aphrodisiac’!

BOB

Aphrodisiac? Who wants their carpet smelling like crabs?

NATHAN

Smells like 'Fresh Casino'! Crazy gamblers like you would love this.

BOB

He's serious.

AGNES

Bob.

NATHAN

We advertise CarpetSoft on the internet. Turn this old warehouse into a fulfillment center. Maybe join forces with the Lusty Steamer as distributors.

BOB

Alright, that's enough, I will never join with those vultures. You hear me: NEVER. The internet. You know how this place makes money? When real people spend real money on real us cleaning real carpets. The internet doesn't pay us. People pay us. See this? First nickel I ever made in business.

NATHAN

You mean the first nickel my Grandfather made.

BOB

I was born into this business, kid. Riding around the back of your Grandfather's truck since the day he started it. Sixty two years. How long you been doing this?

NATHAN

Long enough to know that's the only nickel we've got left.

NATHAN is out. Beat.

GUNTHER

C'mon, Professor, I'll clean off your car.

NORMAN

My Hyundai won't make it out there. Give me a ride in your dream machine.

GUNTHER

C'mon. Happy Birthday.

NORMAN

Yeah, Happy Birthday, Bob.

NORMAN puts his yarmulke on his crate seat before going out with GUNTHER.

AGNES shakes her head, takes the tray platter, and goes out.

BOB alone, holding his lottery ticket.

BOB

At least now I get the peace and quiet.

END OF SCENE.

ACT I. SCENE II.

BOB alone with his oatmeal. Tries to eat but can't. Gags. Pulls out the Old Buck. Pours in a little. Tastes. Not bad! Pours in a lot more Old Buck. Tastes. Much better.

BOB looks to make sure nobody else is around. Holds up the lottery ticket. Holds up his first-ever nickel. Begins a series of physical movements, a silly, pre-scratch superstition. Chants. Then holds.

BOB

Lord, if you're there, I realize plenty of the world's evils occupy your attention.
War, famine, internet.

AGNES [OFF]

Robert!

BOB

But if you could somehow make this ticket a winner.

AGNES [OFF]

Robert!

BOB

Fifteen little gopher heads in the right scratches.

AGNES [OFF]

ROBERT!

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

WHAT?

AGNES [OFF]

What are you doing?

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

SCRATCHING.

AGNES [OFF]

Well don't scratch off anything the doctor can't fix!

BOB

Sorry, God. I didn't mean for you to hear that. Sometimes I wish you would put back the rib.

AGNES enters.

AGNES

Who did the Williams house on south 34th?

BOB

[Thinks] Kyle.

AGNES

The check bounced.

BOB

Oh, no.

AGNES

That's why Vera was calling. She was reconciling the bank statements and caught the discrepancy.

BOB

Let me think.

AGNES

Nathan's been telling you we need to start accepting credit cards.

BOB

Revolving accounts are the last thing we need.

AGNES

These smartphones now can scan credit cards and take payment right there at the customer homes.

BOB

We don't need to be charged outrageous fees by some credit vultures in New York. Why should somebody in New York be collecting my crumbs? This is Minnesota. I collect my own crumbs. That's it, I'm getting out there.

AGNES

You are going to make your doctor's appointment.

BOB

We can't let the bank account go under.

AGNES

Vera is taking care of it.

BOB

Vera does our accounting. She doesn't deal with the bank.

AGNES

Sit. I said SIT. Eat.

BOB

Did you tell Nathan?

AGNES

He knows something's wrong.

BOB

Yeah, well, that's what I've got insurance for.

AGNES

What good's insurance without the health?

BOB

Insurance means we don't pay for it.

AGNES

Tell that to the Professor. He's still fighting with insurance to pay for his Mother's operation.

BOB

Guy's probably stowing away everything he makes and then borrowing the rest to pay for it. That's what's unhealthy. Debt. Splinters a man's mind, knowing he's always behind. No matter what you do you keep falling further and further behind. Laid off Kyle. Told Nathan we sold the main van. He doesn't know they took it. No doctor's appointment can fix this.

AGNES

What would you do if you won the lottery?

BOB

No.

AGNES

What would you do?

BOB

Don't tease yourself.

AGNES

What happened to mister-no-more-deficit-mentality?

BOB

Visions of riches make a man blind.

AGNES

This card, this scratcher right here wins it all. What would you do?

BOB

Pay off those SOBs. I know how I'd do it, too, I'd walk right into their office and dump buckets of pennies onto their floor. Paid in full. Take the rest and go someplace sunny and warm. You can come, too. Buy you all the luxury I've always wanted you to have.

AGNES

What about Nathan?

BOB

Give him the business.

AGNES

Just give it to him?

BOB

Nathan still doesn't know.

AGNES

The business is rightfully his.

BOB

Don't start, okay?

AGNES

You used to talk to Tom about your ideas. As if every sunrise was a winning ticket. And now we're hearing it from Nathan. When customers call, they request him, you know.

BOB

Send out the science steam cleaner.

AGNES

All I've ever wanted was to see you a success.

BOB

That's all you've ever wanted. Nothing for yourself.

AGNES

My reward will be seeing your years of hard work pay off.

BOB

So if this lottery ticket won?

AGNES

I wouldn't want a dime.

BOB

What would I do with the rest of the winnings?

AGNES

Penile enlargement. Go to the doctor's, okay?

BOB

Alright, fine. I'm going. Just let me have my ticket moment first.

AGNES goes out.

BOB

Hi, God. I'm back.

BOB scratches the first square.

BOB

One little gopher head!

Closes eyes. Scratches. Peeks.

BOB

Two!

*Closes eyes. Scratches. Peeks. Stares.
Crumbles the ticket. Tosses it onto the floor.*

BOB

Well, God, that’s why I buy my own.

BOB pulls out a second, clean lottery ticket from his pocket.

AGNES [OFF]

Are you going to the doctor’s?

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

I don’t hear you when you talk nag!

AGNES [OFF]

You’re already late!

BOB scratches.

BOB

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

Pause. Scratch.

BOB

Six.

Big pause. Another scratch.

BOB

Seven.

BOB stops. Looks up towards God. Takes the yarmulke from NORMAN’s seat. Puts it on. Scratches.

END OF SCENE.

ACT I. SCENE III.

BOB alone, sitting in a chair.

We hear a van pull up outside, rickety noises. Sound of a van door shutting.

NATHAN enters. Totally disheveled. Hair a wild mess. Glasses broken.

NATHAN

Where are you? Where are you? Oh, here you are. Uncle Bob. Well, guess what? Guess what happened? No guess? There I was, driving in our lovely May blizzard, wipers flapping back and forth across, the sound of traffic reports buzzing from the radio. And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, puke-lilac just started sliding sideways. All by itself, the van just sliding sideways. Slid across three lanes of oncoming traffic. Nice little guard rail saved me from sliding off into lake number ten thousand and one. A tow pulls up and the driver screams over the wind, ‘you really should get some snow tires on this thing,’ Tow driver sees our name on the van. Turns out we did his carpets several years back. We’re both there shivering on the side of the road wondering if the van is still drivable. Miraculously, it is, sort of. The crash into the guard rail shorted puke-lilac’s dashboard electronics. No front wipers. No heat. So it’s sleeting and I’m on the side of the highway with no wipers and no heat. Get it towed? Can’t! No time! Uncle Bob says I have a schedule to keep. I physically force down the driver window, eeeek!, and stick my head out the side of the car. Tow gets me off the highway and now I’m on back streets driving with my head out the window and a Memorial Day blizzard firing into my face. I make it to the Showers house with my entire face frozen. Hi mithah showerth, terrabuh weafa we’re havan. I start lugging hardware out the back of the van. What’s that, Mr. Showers? You don’t have a scheduled cleaning? Showers doesn’t have a scheduled cleaning.

Beat.

NATHAN

He has a daughter. Her name is April. Her name is April Showers. Did you or did you not conspire with Showers, telling him I was coming to rescue his daughter from her surname? That's fine. I mean, turns out April's hot. Capital H-ot. I guess I can't be that furious at you for wanting to set me up with her. Except half my face is thawing and my hair is frozen back and April is scared of my presence. And meanwhile all this is happening while we're incurring revenue loss at thirty cents a square foot, which means our business continues to lose money and vans and van electronics by the minute. So this is what I want to tell you. I've been here for five years. Five years ago I told Vera I was dropping out of college, going into the family business. Vera said no but I said I was going to help Aunt Agnes and Uncle Bob. And for five years I've taken no vacation, no sick, nothing. Work all day and sleep in the back. I haven't seen an April Showers or even a May blizzard because this is all I've had. And now I want what's right. What you said. What you said. You said you would give me a stake in the business once you turned sixty. A real stake. No more little sidekick, no more Little Nathan. Okay? We start cooperating as equals. Okay? Okay? And I'm fine, thanks for asking.

BOB gets up, kisses NATHAN full on the mouth.

BOB

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

NATHAN

You just kissed me.

BOB

HA.

NATHAN [TOWARDS OFF]

Aunt Agnes! Uncle Bob just kissed me!

BOB

HO DEE HO DEE HO DEE HO DEE HO DEE HO DEE HO DEE.

NATHAN [TOWARDS OFF]

Something with the oatmeal!

BOB

JOYFUL HAPPY JOYFUL HAPPY JOYFUL HAPPY JOYFUL HAPPY.

NATHAN

What'd that doctor do to you?

BOB pulls out the lottery ticket.

BOB

Sixty-four squares. Scratch off squares. Fifteen gopher heads before scratching empty square wins big prize. Big prize is seven hundred fifty thousand dollars.

NATHAN slowly examines the card.

BOB & NATHAN

HHHHAAA. HAHAHAHAHA.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.

Crazy victory dancing all over the warehouse.

AGNES enters.

AGNES

What's going on? What's wrong? Nathan, what happened to your face? Did you get a haircut? What? What's this? What are you showing me? Your lottery ticket? What am I looking at? Sounds like what? One word? Count? Count what? Count the card? One, two, three, four, five, six...

AGNES counts the rest of the way.

BOB, NATHAN & AGNES

HHHHAAA. HAHAHAHAHA.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.

Even more crazy victory dancing.

They crash in exhaustion.

BOB

Oh, boy.

NATHAN

Out of breath.

Pits are sweating. AGNES

Joyful happy! NATHAN

Forgot what that felt like. BOB

Better than sex. AGNES

Way better. BOB

You sure? NATHAN

Oh, I'm sure. BOB

I mean the ticket. It's for real? NATHAN

It's for real. BOB

This is amazing! NATHAN

Sensational! AGNES

Incredible! BOB

Honey? AGNES

Yes? NATHAN

Sorry: ugly? AGNES

BOB

Yes, my spring petunia?

AGNES

Does this mean we can go someplace sunny and warm?

BOB

How much is that going to cost?

AGNES

Depends on how far the dollar goes in South Dakota.

BOB

After the doctor's appointment.

AGNES

Forget the doctor's appointment. Nothing sexier than a rich man with a bum ticker.

BOB

So what do you say we go in the office and play stuff the muffin?

AGNES

Forget that, too. Now you can go down the street and pay for it like the Professor.

BOB

Right now I can't pay for anything. I'm carrying around a piece of paper worth nothing. We've got to cash this in or who knows what could happen to it. The ticket gets lost and we lose it before we win it.

NATHAN

The van.

BOB

Is the van going to make it?

NATHAN

Snow tires.

BOB

Yes! Snow tires. No. No snow tires.

NATHAN

No snow tires?

BOB

Think! A random meteor could be on its way from outer space to wipe us out while we're sitting around monkeying with snow tires.

NATHAN

Uncle Bob, if the world's about to blow up, what's the point of even winning the lottery?

BOB

Because anyone who's worked a day in their life wants to win the lottery before the world blows up.

NATHAN

I don't think the world blowing up has anything to do with snow tires.

AGNES

Will you two SHUT UP and focus? Protect. The. Ticket.

BOB & NATHAN

Protect the ticket.

AGNES

We need something that can stop all forces either on or hurtling towards earth from harming the ticket.

BOB & NATHAN

Protect the ticket.

AGNES whips out a piggy bank.

NATHAN

That's a piggy bank.

AGNES

Put it in.

BOB

How do we get the ticket out?

AGNES

Break it when you get to the lottery counter.

BOB

Genius. If there's one thing this family is, it's a bunch of lottery-ticket-protecting geniuses.

NATHAN

And then we'll have seed capital. Don't you see? This lottery money can put my business plan in motion. We'll transform from being hundred thousandaires to super millionaires.

AGNES

After Uncle Bob pays off all the debt.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

I'll hold the piggy bank. You drive.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

Wait, I need to call the boys. I want to see their faces when I bring back the money.

AGNES

Right. The boys. Their birthday ticket.

BOB

Actually, it wasn't their ticket. It was my ticket.

Beat.

AGNES

Your ticket?

BOB

I bought this ticket.

AGNES

You bought.

BOB

Myself.

AGNES
You personally bought that ticket.

BOB
Yes.

AGNES
Where’s their ticket?

BOB
Crumpled up.

AGNES
That’s your ticket.

BOB
Yes.

AGNES
Not their ticket?

BOB
No.

AGNES
So the money is all ours?

BOB
Oh.

AGNES
That’s your ticket.

BOB
Yes, but—

AGNES
The money is ours.

Beat.

BOB
We don’t have money yet. We have a ticket.

AGNES

That you bought.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

Look, all this is moot unless we make it to Povlitski's. Okay? C'mon, Nathan, get the van ready. We're going back out there! The end of average awaits!

END OF SCENE.

ACT I. SCENE IV.

AGNES sits at the card table, surrounded by a mound of mail-order catalogs. The office phone is up to her ear, the cord stretching from her ear all the way off stage left.

AGNES

You only have it in a five? I'm a six. Would I fit a five? Just send a couple of each. I need them for someplace sunny and warm. Ah, I don't have one of those, my husband doesn't believe in New York. What about COD? Well, I just won the lottery. I did. Any of your competitors send COD? Hello?

The sound of a van outside. BOB enters. NATHAN's hair and face even more warped. AGNES drops the phone handle and the long cord snap-retracts the dangling handle unit to offstage.

AGNES

Oh, no. Where are the bags?

BOB

What bags?

AGNES

The bags full of money. What's wrong? Where are the bags?

BOB

Van is sliding all over the road. Nathan leaning halfway out the driver's window, sleet up his nose, holding the wheel. I'm in the driver's seat holding Nathan's legs down in one hand and the piggy bank in the other. We slide into Povolitski's. We slosh inside to the lottery counter. I smash the piggy bank. Boom! Pennies and piggy pieces everywhere. I hold up the winning ticket! Girl behind the counter rings security. Place goes madhouse.

AGNES

Yeah? And?

BOB

It's too high a claim.

AGNES

It's too high a claim.

BOB and AGNES start giggling, which grows into conspiratorial chortling.

BOB

Lottery retailers pay out only to six hundred.

AGNES

Well, we're talking seven hundred and fifty thousand.

BOB

Paid out only at state lottery headquarters.

AGNES

So you two drove to headquarters.

BOB

Closed Memorial Day weekend. We have to wait until Tuesday.

AGNES

Four days with the ticket?

BOB

We got it on camera. Me and Little Nathan and the girl behind the counter and security. Big picture holding up the ticket.

AGNES

Where's Nathan?

BOB

Made him go back to ask out the girl behind the counter. What's all this?

AGNES

Resource material on being rich.

BOB

'Living Like A Queen While Putting Up With The King'.

AGNES

That's for me.

BOB

'Being Rich For Dummies'.

AGNES

That's for you. Where's the ticket?

BOB

We need to stash it someplace safe.

AGNES

Stuff it down my bra.

BOB

Your stubble could scratch off the rest of the card. Where could we stash it? The Professor's smart. Maybe he'll have an idea.

AGNES

You called them.

BOB

They're both on their way.

AGNES

You didn't tell them why, right? You didn't tell them why?

NORMAN bangs in through the back door.

NORMAN

SHALOM, BITCHES! I quit my job! I quit my job! I quit my job! You know what I told my boss? The Northscott P Grounsell Chair Of Historical Statistics. I told him: you can take this adjunct job and shove it.

BOB

No way.

NORMAN

You're right. What I said was: I need to take a leave of absence. For infinity! You hear stories of people crashing out before cashing in. Guilty! Hired a limo to take me back over here. Where's Gunther? Does he know?

BOB

Maybe.

NORMAN

I can't wait to see the look on that Finn's face. You know what I did? Right after I cleaned out my desk, waiting for the limo to arrive. Booked a Jews Cruise. A Caribbean cruise. Single ladies of the Torah trapped on a boat for a whole week with me.

AGNES

You didn't.

NORMAN

Called Mother, told her the news, said we are booked. Me and Mother and all those women. Hopefully shaved and under sixty. I do have some standards left. Women flock to the money. Find a wife and then pay for Mother's operation. So happy for you, for us! Isn't this fantastic?

GUNTHER knocks on the door, enters.

GUNTHER

Usually when I knock it's the hour of doom!

NORMAN

Gunther, Gunther, Gunther! Isn't this incredible!

GUNTHER

Incredible! Let's see it. Let's see it. Can I touch it? Ooohhhhhhhh.

NORMAN

This is divinity! God is looking out for you, Bobby. Proof He still cares about you Jesus people.

GUNTHER

You're going to do the lump-sum payout, right? You have to do lump-sum.

NORMAN

Works for me.

GUNTHER

We never even talked about it. Who thinks they're going to win? Seven hundred fifty thousand. Our birthday ticket!

AGNES

Actually, it wasn't your ticket. It was Bob's ticket.

Beat.

AGNES

A personal ticket. That he bought for himself.

Beat.

GUNTHER

Bob, what's she talking about?

BOB

Yeah. Um. Boys. See, this winning ticket? It's a ticket I bought myself.

Long beat.

GUNTHER

I don't understand.

BOB

I bought this ticket.

NORMAN

What are you saying?

BOB

[Slowly] I'm saying the winning ticket wasn't the birthday ticket you bought me. I bought this ticket. Myself.

NORMAN

Where's our ticket?

BOB

It wasn't a winning ticket.

NORMAN

Where is it?

BOB

The loser ticket?

NORMAN

Yes, the loser ticket.

BOB

Here. Crumpled up. See.

GUNTHER

Yah. I see.

NORMAN

Where’s the winning ticket?

BOB

Gunther’s holding it. See.

GUNTHER

Yah, I see.

NORMAN

How do you know this is your ticket?

BOB

I scratched your ticket first and it lost and then I took out my ticket and it won. At least I think that’s what I did.

AGNES

What do you mean, you think that’s what you did?

NATHAN enters. It hangs for a bit.

NATHAN

She said no. Who says no to a lottery winner? Am I that ugly?

GUNTHER

How do we know which ticket is whose?

BOB

Doesn’t matter. This ticket is life-changing money. More than any one person knows what to do with.

NORMAN

Life changing? Bob, seven hundred fifty thousand isn’t even life insurance.

They all start talking to BOB at once. It grows to a din.

AGNES

What about sunny and warm? You were going to take me away to someplace sunny and warm. You promised.

NORMAN

What am I supposed to tell Mother? I just quit my job. You promised.

GUNTHER

Think about our friendship. I've been a tenant here forever. Money shouldn't be the only thing. But you promised.

BOB

ALRIGHT, STOP EVERYONE. STOP. You know what's missing? A little integrity is what's missing. Should be a wanted sign at the post office with the national border outlined and the word integrity glossed in the middle. We're middle class chuggers, adding to savings accounts and hoping they hold when something bad happens. Well, this ticket is something good. We should be driving fortune, not the other way around. Professor, you got an operation to pay for. Gunther, you've got Sheriffs to pay off. I will make it right for all of us. You all trust me, right?

General mumbling: 'Sure. Fine. I guess.'

BOB

Good. Because what happens next is Tuesday morning. Agnes and I holding up the big winning check on lottery TV.

AGNES

Lottery TV?

BOB

All the old customers will see me and say: Bob Sherman, that's how it's done. He worked hard right up until the day he got lucky.

AGNES

I'll be on TV?

BOB

And into the camera I'll say something about my good friends Professor and Gunther who just reached the American Dream. Saying the American Dream makes people think you've conquered a lofty ambition, even if nobody knows what it is.

AGNES

I've got to get my hair done.

BOB picks up NATHAN's vial of liquid.

BOB

And to Agnes, who on our first wedding anniversary looked into my eyes and said: here's to one more.

AGNES

What will I wear?

BOB

And Nathan. Sixty-one years ago your grandfather started this business. Your father and I used to ride side by side in the back of his van, and while Tom is no longer with us on this earth, his son is. So it's time for the family business to succeed to the next generation. Today, I am selling my and Agnes' entire interest in the business to you.

NATHAN

You're going to sell me the business?

BOB

Not going to. I am. Right now. For one dollar.

NATHAN

I'm going to have a stake in the business?

BOB

Not a stake. The whole thing.

NATHAN

Me running the whole thing?

BOB

Everybody here is a witness. Do you accept?

NATHAN

I guess.

BOB

No guessing. Do you accept?

ACT II. SCENE I.

The following afternoon, Saturday.

We hear the sound of a baseball announcer coming from the shop radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 3 [OVER]

Just tipping eighty degrees as the Saturday sun pierces the downtown skyline.

The light fixture flickers on.

We see BOB sitting in a fold-out chair.

We also see NATHAN's chemistry workstation depicting tremendous activity. More vials. More tube holders. Near BOB's feet is an elongated tube.

Additionally, surrounding the workstation are bits of cardboard and heavy stock paper littering the floor. A laptop is precariously positioned on the stack boxes, with an extension cord leading to off.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 3 [OVER]

Coming across right field is a light afternoon breeze. Any flurries still trying to hang around from yesterday are hereby melted. Brilliant baseball weather to help the Twins end their thirteen game losing streak.

BOB gets up, coughs hoarsely, turns off the radio, lumbers back in the chair.

NATHAN enters from the outside door, in full chemist smock and goggles, holding a smoldering vial. NATHAN puts down the smoldering vial and taps on a second tube. Pulls the second tube up from the tube holder and gives it a shake.

BOB

You gonna leave the door open?

NATHAN pours liquid from the smoldering vial into the second tube and watches.

NATHAN

Wow!

BOB

I said: you going to leave the door open?

NATHAN shakes a tube.

BOB

See you grew more potions. Now that Uncle Bob's been forced into retirement, now you own the business, you're marking territory with more potions.

BOB kicks over one of the vials with his foot.

BOB

Oops. Did I do that? Mess of a shop you're running. I'm out one day and this place becomes an above-ground landfill. Sloppy wasn't how I ran things.

NATHAN pours again, one tube into another.

NATHAN

Whoa!

BOB

The messes you don't even know about. Handling the bank. Filing sales tax. Reconciling the books.

NATHAN

Nobody uses actual books anymore.

BOB

We do. Excuse me, you do.

NATHAN

I'm not talking to you when you act like this.

NATHAN back to pouring.

BOB

Say, Mr. CEO, are guests of your esteemed establishment allowed to use the facilities?

NATHAN

Bathroom's broken.

BOB

I'll just go in one of your tubes.

NATHAN

Good luck.

BOB

I'm not that old. Although, sixty-two and a day. Could fall off at any moment. Where should I toss it when it falls off?

NATHAN

We don't have a trash can. We don't even have a van.

BOB

The van works fine.

NATHAN

That's a puke-lilac, wheels-and-no-brakes deathtrap, and you know it.

BOB

It's not lilac, it's mauve.

Phone rings off stage.

BOB

Uh-oh. You even know how to answer? He's got his big business words, but he's never used the language of sales to convert a call into a customer.

NATHAN stomps off, returns with the phone unit up to his ear, dangling cord trailing to off stage left.

NATHAN

Hello? Hello? Hi. No, this is Nathan. I mean, yes, thanks for calling Sherman's Cleaners, hope can it be helped, we helping you, how can we be helping you?

BOB

Holy God.

NATHAN

Yes, it's Little Nathan.

BOB

Little.

NATHAN

Bob? He's out getting his asshole polished.

BOB

I'm going to kill you.

NATHAN

Yes sir, Mr. Mayor, certainly the nicest asshole you'll ever meet. I'm sorry, for what date? Um. I think so.

BOB

He thinks so.

NATHAN

Our scheduling calendar. Do we have a scheduling calendar? You said by when? Um....ummm.....will you help me?

BOB

How much you gonna pay me?

NATHAN

C'mon!

BOB

My help costs.

NATHAN

Please!

As BOB rises to take the phone he coughs, wheezes, hobbles.

BOB

Bob Sherman. Hey, Gene. You're calling for the convention? I told you cleaning isn't the hurdle, it's removing and replacing all the City Hall furniture in time. You want us to refer a third-party or just handle the whole thing? Sure, we can make it turnkey for you. Next Friday, no sweat. Fifty percent down. Because I need the upfront to secure the furniture crew. You can trust Sherman's Cleaners, Gene, we've been doing this a long time for you. Trust is truth over time. Good, I'll call you to finalize.

BOB hangs up: dropping the phone to the floor. The cord retracts to off.

NATHAN

Was that so hard?

BOB

Apparently for you.

NATHAN

Can you stop acting this way so we can get back to work?

BOB

I don't work here anymore.

NATHAN

Yes, you do.

BOB

You took the business and left me with nothing.

NATHAN

I didn't take anything. You asked for a dollar. You shook my hand.

BOB

On good faith.

NATHAN

And bad debt.

BOB

Your problem now. You want me to help, you're going to have to hire me. You even know anything about hiring, firing, managing people?

NATHAN

No.

BOB

Of course not, you just scream indignation when I let Kyle go.

NATHAN

Kyle needed the job.

BOB

We're in the business of cleaning carpets.

NATHAN

We're in the business of helping people.

BOB

Have fun with the state unemployment folks. I'm filing first thing Tuesday.

NATHAN

First thing Tuesday we're going to the lottery office.

BOB

With what?

NATHAN

I'm working on it.

BOB

First thing Tuesday you better get some people hired because, second thing, I'm finished.

NATHAN

I'm hiring you back.

BOB

You don't know how.

NATHAN

I now pronounce you hired.

BOB

That's not how it works.

NATHAN

Of course that's how it works.

BOB

You have to interview.

NATHAN

I'm not interviewing you.

BOB

Because you don't know how. You better learn, you're running your own business. You have to sit at a table. You're going to have to ask me questions, Mr. CEO. Sit. SIT.

NATHAN

Fine.

BOB

Gee, Mr. CEO, terrible shack of despair you've got going here at Sherman's Cleaners. I think I'd fit right in. Is there an opening for a guy like me?

NATHAN

Uncle Bob, you don't need to—

BOB

Uh-oh! No standard application!

NATHAN

Would you stop being such a weirdo?

BOB

Nathan, that's not the first question you ask. A business owner has to look at physical appearances and make split-second evaluations to determine whether there's a fit. In my case, you should think here's someone clearly too old, too outdated, someone who couldn't possibly function in today's world. You ask: how old are you? ASK.

NATHAN

How old are you?

BOB

ERRR! Age discrimination! Oh, I'm sorry, but now I'm suing you! Big lawsuit for seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

NATHAN

My ideas we could be making so much more.

BOB

Your genius which fizzled our fortunes in one flash.

NATHAN

I didn't plan for Agnes to spill all over the lottery card.

BOB

Of course not! It just worked out that way for good reason. Fine, Bob Sherman, you're hired. Yay! Come here, you sick old man, let's put you on phone duty. You know how to work a phone? Smart phone, dumb user. What about computer skills? How many minutes per word? Oh, that's lousy. Maybe you could just clean carpets. You don't know how to do anything else. And you're here just for the health insurance, anyway. And even then, too late! Insurance can't save you now.

NATHAN

Why are you acting this way?

BOB

Wake up, Nathan. You've going to have to let me go. Fired again! Tough love. In business you have to be focused on the bottom line.

NATHAN

You always talk about focusing on the top line.

BOB

Will you stop contradicting me?

NATHAN

I would if you ever made any sense!

BOB

Godamnit, Tom!

BOB inhales in shock, then succumbs to a coughing spasm. BOB separates from NATHAN. Tries not to fall over.

NATHAN

Uncle Bob. Uncle Bob. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Okay?

BOB

What the hell are you sorry for?

NATHAN

I don't know. Just, look, here. Drink it.

BOB

The hell is that?

NATHAN

Antacid.

BOB

It looks like Old Faithful met a smurf.

NATHAN

Drink it.

BOB

Kill me off like you did the lottery card.

NATHAN

Drink it.

BOB drinks. Sputters a cough.

BOB

That's...that's better.

BOB able to sit down.

NATHAN

You never really talked much about him.

BOB

Hope you're not plugging for the 'gee, you remind me of your father' thing because you can forget it.

NATHAN

Vera never talked much about him. As if talking about him invoked some fear of bringing him back.

BOB

Fear is nothing but a painful memory. Besides, you never asked.

NATHAN

I'm asking.

BOB

Your grandfather was stuck in second gear. Tom was a driven man. Tom took over and put us into overdrive. He just walked up to your grandfather one day and said, you're done, the business is mine. Stubborn. There were rough patches, of course, but Tom was never flustered. A tyrant right up until the day he died swinging a cleaner. Swinging and swinging and swinging...bleh.

NATHAN

My father died on the job?

BOB

This crazy lady's house. She had all these cats. I'm carrying Tom up her stairs, stepping on all these cats, and she's screaming at me: you missed the corners! You missed the corners!

NATHAN

I thought my father died from a heart attack.

BOB

Yes, technically, he died of a heart attack, but that's not what killed him. Cleaning carpets killed him. Tom's funeral was a mess.

NATHAN

I was too young to remember.

BOB

We're all so angry while we're alive. Tom and I, did we ever fight. The money was flowing and we went at it almost every day. He wanted things his way and I saw opportunity! We never realized we were fighting about something that probably happened when we were ten years old. Then he died and Agnes and I took over. You think you're handed things. You think you end up where you end up because where you end up is where you're supposed to be. I always said they were going to have to carry my body out of here. But not like this. Not as a failure.

NATHAN

You're not a failure.

BOB

What else do you call this place?

NATHAN

Everybody knows you. You're an underground celebrity.

BOB

Tom measured success by one scoreboard: money. How much you take in and how much is left over. By that standard, if Tom were here today, he'd call me a failure. But then...maybe Tom is here, watching over, still trying to get at me, offering the golden cusp of promise. One lottery ticket. Overnight reversal of the score. Just kidding, Tom says, spilling his son's potions all over my escape card.

NATHAN

Stop talking like this.

BOB

We have to accept fate.

NATHAN

That's fatalism.

BOB

Funny how fate works that way. You got all these ideas for how to make money. That's the Tom in you. But if I could get a little Bob in you then listen: stop thinking about how you can make a living and start thinking about how you can make a life. Don't overcommit like Tom and I did. There are no more Edisons, no Picassos, nobody willing to devote an entire existence to a single purpose. The world now has sweetened coffees and first class upgrades and a million other instant happinesses I was too focused to enjoy.

NATHAN

I've got nothing expect a business I don't know how to run.

BOB

All I had was this business. And Agnes. And Vera. And now I have you. A family.

NATHAN

I have a family.

BOB

Potions are not a family.

NATHAN

They're like little people to me. Each little mixture has its own personality. See this one? He's shy. This one's, he's temperamental. This little guy here, he's explosive.

BOB

How come all your potions are guys?

NATHAN

And then there's CarpetSoft. One toughie to figure out. She wants to love but agonizes over potential finality. She's caught in the middle, simmering in desperate agony.

BOB

Have you been eating the oatmeal?

NATHAN

Then I realized: what if I have the right solution for the wrong problem? Her desperate agony becomes courage. Her courage leads to inspiration. I've been trying to create a CarpetSoft that takes out. She says reverse the purpose: what if she isn't an extract but a restorant? And not just for carpets, but for any surface.

BOB

Any surface.

NATHAN

Even scratch-off cards.

BOB

Scratch-off cards.

NATHAN

I think we can get the card back.

BOB

By pouring this Carpetsoft on it?

NATHAN

More like timed layers of application.

BOB

Nathan, messing with a lottery card is forgery.

NATHAN

We’re just getting it back to where it was after you first scratched it.

BOB

Lottery fraud is a crime.

NATHAN

We’re not frauding. We’re repairing.

BOB

We can’t go to a lottery office with a bogus card.

NATHAN

It’s not bogus, it’s your card. The same card we captured on camera at Povolitski’s.

BOB

It’s over.

NATHAN

It takes two of us, working together. You and me.

BOB

Tom is definitely in the room. Where are you, Tom? You laughing at me?

NATHAN

One holding, the other mixing. My two families.

BOB

Nathan! It’s done! It’s over!

NATHAN

You always talk about integrity, Uncle Bob. I’m trying to make things right.

BOB

Walking into lottery headquarters with a bogus card is not integrity. Integrity is what you do when no one else is watching.

NATHAN

Well, when have you ever watched me, Uncle Bob? When? I’ve been here, right here in front of you, trying to make something of this place. I want to give you that success back. I’m doing this for you.

BOB

Did Vera put you up to this? Nathan, I never asked anything from you. Neither did Agnes. We're both happy the way things are.

AGNES enters, tripping over herself. Slinky dress. Hair designed. Gaudy jewelry. Heels. Who is this woman?

AGNES

Don't say anything. Don't. Say. Anything! Is it bad? Don't say anything! You say something I will shove a hair braid right through your face! Does it look okay? Have the twisty-shard things hardened? Shush! Don't say anything! Is there a mirror? You have a mirror? Will somebody get me a mirror!

NATHAN

You don't want a mirror.

AGNES

The best stylist in town! Six month waiting list! Can't get in unless you know someone who knows someone! Well, ole' Agnes got Enrique on the phone first try and said: I just won the lottery. Squeeze me in for Saturday. Because I'll be going on TV first thing Tuesday and need to look like someone who should be collecting big winnings. Enrique understood. He says: come to Enrique, my lair of hair on top floor of IDS. A man in a special elevator pushes a hidden, silver button to get the elevator to the top. That's who I'm dealing with, a man pushing a button in an elevator to take me to a stylist with a six-month waiting list.

BOB

How did you pay for Enrique?

AGNES

With this.

BOB

That's...

AGNES

Mastercard! Went to the bank and yanked Bill from his weekend golf outing. I said: Sherman's Cleaners just won the lottery. Get me a credit card. And a lollipop. The name alone sounds glorious. Master. Card. Mastercard. Swipe now, pay later. Because I'm rich.

BOB

How much did Enrique cost?

AGNES

Rich people don't ask about price. We get handed a golden receipt at the end and sign our name.

BOB

But you signed your name next to a number?

AGNES

The number was written out in words. Long and curvy word numbers. The first word was one. The second word was thousand.

BOB

Holy God.

AGNES

I wept. My head converted to visual art. And when the tears ran out, when the heaving sobs ended, I knew there was only one place in the world, one place, that could restore peace to my follicly-devastated soul.

BOB

The electric chair?

AGNES

The mall.

BOB

No!

AGNES

Oh, yes! Retained the services of a personal shopper. Whipped out Mastercard and said: this baby goes to six thousand.

BOB

You bought that dress.

AGNES

Among others. Nathan, you're still a young man, but let me ask you: how many purses are too many purses?

BOB

Agnes, what have you done?

AGNES

What all rich, delusional people probably do to themselves when their firms are raided by the SEC or their horses come in second: express sadness through grotesque levels of commerce.

BOB

But that's all you bought, right? That's all you bought?

AGNES

On the first Mastercard. Bill didn't expect to see me again so soon.

BOB

Oh, my God.

NATHAN

It'll be okay, Aunt Agnes.

AGNES

Will it? Will it be okay? You're a science person. Can you make it Thursday again? Get us back to Thursday and it will be okay. Thursday we were poor but happy. Today we're poor and vapid. I have to go lie down. I have Georgina at three for a massage.

AGNES stumbles out.

NATHAN

She seems vulnerable. Uncle Bob? Uncle Bob?

BOB

This new CarpetSoft?

NATHAN

Yeah?

BOB

Show me how we do this.

END OF SCENE.

ACT II. SCENE II.

Later that day.

NORMAN and GUNTHER at the card table.

NORMAN

He said meet at four, right?

GUNTHER

Right. Old Buck?

NORMAN

Got to pick up Mother.

GUNTHER

How's she doing today?

NORMAN

Not so hot. Knowing Mother, it's probably because of something I ate.

GUNTHER

Play one?

NORMAN

Why not.

GUNTHER shuffles his deck of cards.

NORMAN

After you dropped me off at campus, the insurance company finally called with their auditors on the line. So sorry, they say, we're not paying for the operation. My heart is crushed. How can I hold class? How can I do anything anymore? Then Bob called with the big news. Mother doesn't know I quit my job.

GUNTHER

Lily still thinks I'm a rich man, too.

NORMAN

Give me some before you take down the whole bottle yourself.

GUNTHER

What's all this research you do?

NORMAN

You mean, what I did. A mathematical proof that exact occurrences can occur in otherwise impossible odds.

GUNTHER

In English.

NORMAN

Whether something impossible can happen twice.

GUNTHER

Like a person winning the lottery twice?

NORMAN

More impossible. In the history of baseball, have there ever been two identical games? Same number of pitches, same stats for each player, attendance, weather, the works. If I could prove two identical games occurred in a sport so statistically detailed as baseball, it could have enormous implications for the human continuum.

GUNTHER

This is what goes on at college?

NORMAN

You and I each hold a deck of cards. We both draw the first thirteen cards from our decks. The odds of us drawing the exact thirteen cards are over six hundred twenty billion to one. Has that ever happened?

GUNTHER

All games have one feature in common: luck.

NORMAN

Luck is just another way of saying odds. God. I used to think my career mattered. I was going to be Dean. Married to a beautiful woman. Married to a woman. She hosts parties at our gardened house while I entertain post-graduates at reserved tables in posh restaurants. Some secluded Southeast campus where the weather turns slowly. I was young enough not to know any better. Now I'm old enough not to know any worse.

GUNTHER

Bob's going to screw us over.

NORMAN

With what? A damaged card?

GUNTHER

They got it on camera.

NORMAN

We're all in post-screwed mode now.

GUNTHER

I don't like this feeling. I don't like it one bit. Know what I'm saying?

NORMAN

I quit my job.

GUNTHER

We had a fortune, and it was taken away, then it was really taken away, but I feel like I've never lost it. I feel like it's still mine.

NORMAN

Money can't buy all the things we want.

GUNTHER

But it sure can lease it. Six hundred twenty billion to one, huh?

NORMAN

Plus or minus a couple billion.

GUNTHER takes out a fresh, new lottery card.

GUNTHER

You want to scratch?

NORMAN

No thanks, I'm trying to quit.

GUNTHER scratches and tosses a losing ticket in disgust. Pours.

NORMAN

What would you do if Bob had actually brought in that card?

GUNTHER

If we won.

NORMAN

What would you do if you won the lottery?

GUNTHER

What I've always wanted to do. Croupier.

NORMAN

You mean a dealer?

GUNTHER

Only in this country it's called dealing.

NORMAN

Gunther, you don't need to be rich to work in a casino.

GUNTHER

Can't make the wife happy working minimum wage. It takes a rich man to work a poor job. Bob is going to screw us. When it comes to money, everyone's out to screw each other.

NORMAN

Gunther, nobody's out to totally screw you over. People are mostly good souls trying to partially screw you over.

GUNTHER

You tell me, which one is Bob.

NORMAN

Right after we moved here, eight years ago, Mother called up Sherman's on a referral. Bob showed up, we talked. We laughed. How do people become friends these days? I don't think he'll leave us out.

GUNTHER

What if he does?

NORMAN

I don't know.

GUNTHER

We should take matters into our own hands. That's our money.

NORMAN

What do you propose?

GUNTHER

Call the lottery office. Tell them it was our ticket. What if that wasn't the real ticket he had fizzled in front of our eyes? What if Bob staged that whole thing?

NORMAN

Don't do this.

GUNTHER

He collects and keeps it all for himself.

NORMAN

Bob's our friend. We're friends.

GUNTHER

Yah, everyone's so nice. Just like your boss at the college. Just like the insurance company.

Long beat.

NORMAN

You already called the lottery office, didn't you?

BOB enters, wearing science smock and goggles.

BOB

Hello boys! Not a flurry of snow left outside. To match the evaporating flurry of brain activity going on in here, I see. Sorry I'm late.

Beat.

GUNTHER

How was the doctor?

BOB

Tremendous. He took out his magic glove and prepared to invade. I bring out the finger in everybody. Doctor reached below to tackle the beast, but then recoiled in a terrific fear. He'd never seen anything so big in his life! And I'm talking about my soul, bursting from nobody knows where.

GUNTHER

I could make a guess.

BOB

Look, I know you guys are sucking on desperate air here. But I got a surprise for you.

GUNTHER

A dollar sign followed by six digits?

BOB

How quickly they despair! My boys, my friends, a little wind out of their lucky sails and they're back to woe-and-oh. How about a little spirit in those lips to match whatever you've been taking from those cups?

NORMAN

We've been playing cards.

GUNTHER

Talking.

NORMAN

Talking.

BOB

Talking.

NORMAN

About my cruise.

BOB

You're still going?

NORMAN

Non-refundable.

BOB

When?

NORMAN

Tonight.

BOB

You can't leave tonight.

NORMAN

Figured whatever you had to tell me was important enough to risk missing my flight. Won't change the fact the women will push me overboard since I'm no longer rich.

GUNTHER

You could always lie to them.

BOB

I don't think The Professor's going to need to lie. I think The Professor is going to be able to flaunt the news of his wealth in honesty. Oh, Nathan!

NATHAN enters, delicately carrying a lottery card on a couple cloths.

NATHAN

This thing is like so tender I'm afraid to breathe.

BOB

Get it under the light! Boys, don't breathe.

NORMAN

What's going on?

NATHAN

Slowly.

NORMAN

What is that?

BOB

You'll see.

NATHAN

Everybody back off. Just, QUIET!

BOB

Gunther, don't even think about breathing.

NATHAN

We don't want air hitting this thing the wrong way. There. It's safe. Shhh. It's okay, little card.

BOB

Shhh! It’s resting.

NORMAN

Why are we whispering?

BOB

Because the card is resting.

GUNTHER

What card?

BOB

SHH!

GUNTHER

[whispering now] WHAT CARD?

BOB

The lottery card.

NORMAN

[loud] HOLY MOSES!

BOB and NATHAN clamp their hands over NORMAN’s mouth. NORMAN squeals excitedly through their hands clamped over his mouth. They pull their hands away when they think it’s safe.

NORMAN

[Whispering] It’s. The. Lottery. Card.

Quiet victory dance from BOB, NORMAN and GUNTHER.

BOB

Like it was before the spill. All the little gopher heads.

GUNTHER

You got it back!

NATHAN

It still has to dry.

GUNTHER

It's gorgeous. It's all there.

NATHAN

We need a little luck.

BOB

Or divine touch. Professor, do a little blessing for us. One of your Jewishy prayers.

NORMAN

Jewishy.

BOB

Go Hebrew on it.

NORMAN

Why don't you use one of your Jesusy blessings?

BOB

Jesus never blessed a lottery card.

NORMAN

And Moses did?

BOB

You people have blessings for everything.

NORMAN

Jews don't bless lottery cards.

NATHAN

Shh! You're upsetting the card.

BOB

Professor, please, a blessing?

NORMAN

Fine. But you can't pray to God without head cover. Everybody get under the yarmulke.

The four try but obviously fail.

BOB

This is ridiculous. Nathan, get the shop umbrella.

*A dusty, patterned umbrella is retrieved.
They all gather under.*

BOB

Professor, do your thing.

NORMAN

Baruch Atah Adonai.

ALL

Baruch Atah Adonai.

NORMAN

Eloheinu Melech.

ALL

Eloheinu Melech.

NORMAN

Ha Lottery Card.

ALL

Ha Lottery Card.

NORMAN

Amen.

ALL

Amen.

*AGNES enters, now more gaudily dressed
than before, hair everywhere, eyeing the
four men under one umbrella, stalks past
them and slides out the side door.*

BOB

She probably needs a blessing, too.

NORMAN

I don't do wives.

BOB

You will soon! The card is back.

GUNTHER

Yeah, but for who?

BOB

For us. All of us.

GUNTHER

All of us.

BOB

Equal share.

GUNTHER

Really.

BOB

Really.

GUNTHER

But before?

BOB

A man has to respect his wife. You think I would really leave you boys out there?

GUNTHER

I...I...I...

NORMAN

Gunther and I never thought that for a second.

GUNTHER

Agnes is on board?

BOB

She's coming around. Two hundred fifty thousand each is a monster load of cash.

NATHAN

Don't touch. It's still drying.

GUNTHER

How'd you do it?

BOB

CarpetSoft.

GUNTHER

It's working?

NATHAN

Maybe. I don't know.

BOB

Nonsense! Positive thinking!

NATHAN

We still have to press iron the card flat.

GUNTHER

Amen to that. I've got an iron and flat board in my office.

GUNTHER is out.

BOB

Big news to share with your Mother.

NORMAN

I'm not telling Mother anything until money is physically in hand. Otherwise, it's all conjecture. We might have, tentative hold, a possibility: that's today's language of keeping you interested. It's a sin to overcook patience with promise.

BOB

You're not really leaving.

NORMAN

No phones at sea.

BOB

Don't go.

GUNTHER is back, leaping over stage items, carrying an iron.

GUNTHER

Got 'it!

BOB

Gunther, the Professor is leaving.

GUNTHER

Yah, bye.

NORMAN

Classic avoidance. Maybe that's been my problem all along. I'm the guy that can't look when the batter is at the plate, swinging for the go-ahead run.

GUNTHER

We're about to win the lottery.

NORMAN

Even if the trip isn't paid with real money, I can experience on credit. The American Dream.

BOB

We won't let you down Professor.

NORMAN

I've got to pick up Mother.

NORMAN struggles out.

GUNTHER

Let's plug this in and press flat.

NATHAN

It needs more time. For the acidic to set.

BOB

Just enough time for you to call April.

NATHAN

April Showers?

BOB

Nathan, don't you see? Tom is here. Sometimes I don't even feel like it's me talking, that his soul moves my mouth and forms the words: call her.

NATHAN

The first time April saw me my face was frozen shut.

BOB

You're taking her out, Gunther's treat.

GUNTHER

Hey!

NATHAN

So I can go on a first date, fall in love, buy an overpriced diamond, get married, have kids, lose my hair, gain too much weight, work my life away, and then die?

BOB

Exactly.

GUNTHER

Can we focus on the ticket?

NATHAN

I'll call April and risk further embarrassment, you go see Doctor Divine.

BOB

Fine.

NATHAN

Now.

BOB

Now?

NATHAN

And you take the business back. For a dollar.

BOB

I pay you a dollar, take back the business and go to Doctor Divine right now, and you go marry April?

NATHAN

Ask out April.

BOB

Same thing.

NATHAN

Deal.

GUNTHER

No doctor is open Memorial Day weekend.

BOB

I clean carpets in my sleep, this guy should be open. Weekends ain't for the leisure class anymore! Gunther, guard the ticket while we're gone.

GUNTHER

Definitely.

BOB hands NATHAN the dollar.

BOB

Nathan, someday this business is going to be yours. But before that happens there are things I have to tell you. Things you don't know. About you and your father.

NATHAN

I remind you a lot of my father.

BOB

I told you, that is garbage people yammer when they reach for closure. We'll never have closure. Family is never final.

NATHAN

Give me the keys. I'm driving mauve.

BOB

The end of average awaits!

BOB and NATHAN are out.

GUNTHER stares at the lottery card.

END OF SCENE.

ACT II. SCENE III.

Couple hours later.

AGNES and GUNTHER at the card table.

AGNES reclining in a spa robe, hair up.

Both with cups. Old Buck on the table.

AGNES

This stuff really calms you down.

GUNTHER

Wanna play?

AGNES

Eh. Two player games.

GUNTHER

Many interesting games with two people.

AGNES

I only play when the odds are even.

GUNTHER

All a game of chance.

AGNES

Not the way you deal it. You get sloppy with your right hand, when you deal from the middle.

GUNTHER

You never said anything to Bob.

AGNES

You boys never played for real money.

They drink. GUNTHER pours again.

GUNTHER

Lottery card looks good over there.

AGNES

Sure does.

GUNTHER

That nephew of yours is talented.

AGNES

Nathan's gifted.

GUNTHER

Wish I had a member of my blood family with that kind of talent.

Something about the way GUNTHER said it.

AGNES

Bob must have told you some pretty radical stories about Nathan.

GUNTHER

They didn't sound radical. Let's see. Your sister, Vera, raised him after Tom died?

AGNES

I don't remember you getting anointed as a member of the family.

GUNTHER

I guess that process is only reserved for gifted individuals.

AGNES

You know, Gunther, every family has dirt under the carpet. If you search long and hard enough you'll find the dirt. Like the shenanigans between you and those sheriffs. Would hate for that kind of dirt to get exposed. Shouldn't you be out greasing palms instead of sitting around here and annoying me?

GUNTHER

I'm guarding the card.

AGNES

And I'm guarding you.

GUNTHER

Bob made a promise.

AGNES

Was it, 'I do'?

GUNTHER

He made a promise.

AGNES

I don't care. I'm scheduled every other week at Enrique's. It costs a lot of money to be rich.

GUNTHER

It was Bob's ticket.

AGNES

And Bob is married to me. That ticket is married to me.

GUNTHER

Yah, well, I'm married to my wife. And my Wife was married to the ticket before it was given to Bob.

AGNES

That ticket is one fine polygamist. But the money won't be.

GUNTHER

Whatever you say, Nathan's Aunt.

Beat.

AGNES

What about The Professor?

GUNTHER

He's a nice guy but let's not hold that against him.

AGNES

You are such a lottery...

GUNTHER

What?

AGNES

For a second, I thought I saw someone. Standing there. By the card.

*NATHAN enters. Walks over to the table.
Tries to talk. Can't. Sits down.*

GUNTHER

Guess she said no, huh? Never liked her anyway.

NATHAN

She said yes.

GUNTHER

No wonder. Girl says yes, you're screwed.

NATHAN

But then Doctor Divine said no.

GUNTHER

You weren't supposed to ask out the doctor.

NATHAN

Doctor Divine said no.

GUNTHER

What?

AGNES

Nathan, where's Bob?

NATHAN

Doctor Divine said: Uncle Bob's dead.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III. SCENE I.

Tuesday morning.

The light fixture flickers on.

GUNTHER, in a dark suit, sits on a crate at the card table. GUNTHER now wears an eye patch covering one eye.

AGNES, wearing formal black, carries over to the card table the tray platter. The tray platter is now carrying sliced meats. AGNES places the tray platter on the card table and turns to briskly tidy up the warehouse. She's arranging, adjusting, keeping busy.

Once AGNES moves away from the card table, GUNTHER sneaks cold cuts from the tray platter, clandestinely pouring salt with each slice ensnared.

AGNES stops at a flower bouquet in delivery wrapping. She tries to put the flower bouquet on NATHAN's workstation, trying to move it a little bit in each direction, as if finding the perfect spot. She then sees there's a greeting card buried within the flowers. She takes out the card, opens, reads, reacts.

AGNES

Cold cuts are for the guests.

GUNTHER

I'm not a guest?

AGNES

I don't know what you are. What are you doing?

GUNTHER

The meat needs my special Scandinavian vitamin.

AGNES

What’s that?

GUNTHER

Salt.

AGNES

Stop touching things. The shop needs to retain some semblance of tidy.

GUNTHER

Flowers look nice.

AGNES

From Doctor Divine, of all people. What am I going to do?

GUNTHER

You need some cash for the funeral?

AGNES

Raided his insurance policies, bled savings, could barely keep up with bills, and the man still had enough left to pay for a funeral. Ugh! The floor is sopping! Help me move the table. We don’t want people standing in a puddle.

GUNTHER

Lily and I can host the post-gathering at our place.

AGNES

Bob would want everyone here, celebrating his accomplishments. Everything he’s worked so hard to achieve.

GUNTHER

No leaking at our place.

AGNES

Everything he’s done. Everything.

GUNTHER

Our bathroom’s working.

AGNES

Vera is instructing people to come here.

GUNTHER

Tell your sister to un-struct them.

Beat.

AGNES

Fine, I'll get Nathan to help move the table. [to OFF] Nathan!

GUNTHER

Get this platter in the chilly.

AGNES

We don't have a refrigerator. Pour more salt on it. Nathan!

GUNTHER

He's probably finishing up his eulogy. Been helping him with it.

AGNES

You've gone from business plans to eulogies.

GUNTHER

Just helping out with what to say.

AGNES

Stay away from Nathan.

GUNTHER

He's going to talk about how Bob died cleaning carpets.

AGNES

Well, we know the truth.

GUNTHER

Bob didn't die because he lost the lottery.

AGNES

He died because he won the lottery.

GUNTHER

Who else knows?

AGNES

Only you, me and Nathan. And whoever Vera told. Bob should be remembered for what he was, not what he wasn't.

GUNTHER

I'll watch for the limo.

AGNES

The limo is for family.

GUNTHER

I'm not family?

AGNES

You're a pallbearer.

NORMAN enters, decked out in ostentatious beach wear, shades.

NORMAN

He's back, he's back, he's back! Surprise! Back early! Whew, what a trip! The buffets: splendid. The rooms: spacious. The women: heh heh heh! Smart. Accomplished. Sixty eight. Eh. Dean of American Studies at Florida State. Retiring. Looking to replace. We hit it off. Huge baseball fan. Spent the first three days discussing my baseball theory. I told her I would marry her if she were three years younger. This salami is too salty. That's when I realized, meeting this woman: my research theory proved itself. I won the lottery and hit the female jackpot in the same week. The universe is clear. A sense of humanity has crystalized. I'm finally alive! Well, I needed to be here Tuesday morning to bring in the ticket with the team. To swing at the plate. De-boarded at Nassau, paid the penalty airfare and I made it a three day cruise. Mother stayed behind with Dean Laura. Once the cruise is done Dean Laura and Mother are looking at houses in Florida. What's with the dress up?

AGNES

Attending a service.

NORMAN

Good. I always told Bob a little God action never hurts the luck. Where is Bob? Got him a present.

AGNES

On the way to the service.

GUNTHER

In the back of a car.

NORMAN

He has the lottery ticket?

AGNES

Clasped in his hands.

Beat.

NORMAN

Wait.

AGNES

Bob's dead.

NORMAN

No. No. Dead? No. He was just here. Bob was just here, alive, what do you mean, dead?

AGNES

My Robert is gone.

NORMAN

What happened? Agnes, what happened?

AGNES

He died cleaning carpets. That's the party line. He died cleaning those damn carpets.

AGNES breaks down. NORMAN tries to console.

GUNTHER

Saturday. Right after you left. Heart attack in the doctor's office.

NORMAN

Chances of surviving two hearts attacks in one lifetime is four hundred and sixty thousand to one. Sorry.

AGNES

We didn't know how to reach you.

*NORMAN mouths, nodding towards the
back of the warehouse: 'Nathan?'*
GUNTHER shakes his head.

AGNES

I'm glad you're here, Professor. Bob had a lot of customers, but not many friends.

NORMAN

Agnes, this is incredibly tacky to ask but...about the ticket...

AGNES

We're burying the ticket with Bob. The ticket is going to stay with him for a long time.

NORMAN

We never found out what it was worth.

AGNES

It was worth pittance compared to the man it's getting buried with.

NORMAN

You're right. I shouldn't have even brought it up.

AGNES

Service starts at ten. You, Nathan and Gunther are pallbearers.

NORMAN

I need to change.

AGNES

I need to find Nathan before the limo gets here. Nathan!

AGNES is out.

GUNTHER

Quick, before she comes back!

NORMAN

The hell is that?

GUNTHER

The ticket!

NORMAN

The ticket.

GUNTHER

Yah.

NORMAN

There’s hair all over it.

GUNTHER

I broke into the funeral home last night.

NORMAN

You broke into the funeral home?

GUNTHER

Didn’t know funeral homes turn off their lights at night. I stumbled around in the dark until I found the right casket. Ran my eye right into Bob’s nose.

NORMAN

Put this back! Before Agnes finds out.

GUNTHER

That’s going to look a little suspicious.

NORMAN

And a lottery ticket with dead body hair all over it isn’t?

GUNTHER

Shhh! Bob wouldn’t want the ticket to go down with him. This is our ticket. Group play. We bought him this ticket. Let the funeral happen, we pay tribute, then right after we sneak over to lottery headquarters and cash in. Let’s say we give a third to Nathan and Agnes. After deducting expenses for our medical troubles.

NORMAN

Damnit, Gunther. I didn’t ask you to raid the casket. Dead body hair carries disease.

GUNTHER

Go on. Hold it tight. Feel the power of money. That ticket is still alive.

AGNES enters. NORMAN shoves the ticket into the meat on the tray platter while GUNTHER tries to block AGNES' view.

AGNES

The limo's outside and Nathan's nowhere to be found.

GUNTHER

I'm sure he's already at the service.

AGNES

Excuse me. Change of plans. Vera wants to make her chopped salad. Excuse me.

NORMAN

I can carry the platter.

AGNES

I...can...carry...MYSELF. Let's all be...give...me...that...let's all be together for Bob. Norman, jump in the limo with us. You can change clothes at the church. Gunther: you come, too. Maybe you're right. Nathan's probably at the church.

AGNES goes out, carrying the tray platter.

GUNTHER

You need to get that ticket back.

END OF SCENE.

ACT III. SCENE II.

Three hours later.

The exterior door opens and AGNES, NORMAN and GUNTHER shuffle in, shaking off umbrellas. Sound of rain pelting outside. AGNES in a daze. GUNTHER walking, almost doubled over, clutching his stomach.

NORMAN

It was a beautiful service.

AGNES

He wasn't at the funeral.

NORMAN

Standing room only. Even the Mayor was there. And he delivered on short notice, well, the shortest eulogy I've ever heard.

GUNTHER

'Bob was great. Let's eat.'

AGNES

He wasn't at the funeral.

GUNTHER

Even April Showers was there. What kind of guy stands up a date at his own Uncle's funeral?

AGNES

Where could he be?

NORMAN

Agnes, it was a beautiful service.

GUNTHER

Truly filling.

NORMAN

You okay?

GUNTHER

I ate too much chopped salad.

NORMAN

There wasn't a thing missing, Agnes. I mean, except, Nathan.

AGNES straightens herself out.

AGNES

Nathan wasn't the only thing missing. I had some alone time with Bob before the service. Where is it?

Beat.

NORMAN

We should call the police about Nathan. Since he's missing.

AGNES

Don't change the subject. I'm talking to you.

NORMAN

Me.

AGNES

Where is it?

NORMAN

Where's what?

AGNES

The ticket. Why you came back early.

NORMAN

You're serious.

AGNES

As a heart attack.

NORMAN

I'm not going to talk about this.

AGNES

It's missing.

NORMAN

Nathan is missing.

AGNES

You must have thought we engineered some chicanery to off Bob for the ticket. That's why you're here.

NORMAN

I understand Bob's passing has you upset.

AGNES

Upset. More like furious. Big job in Florida?

NORMAN

Yep. About sixty warmer degrees that way.

AGNES

Your Mother there looking at houses?

NORMAN

Sure.

AGNES

Your Mother is sitting in your condo. She just called to express her condolences. Only sickos read the obits on their vacation. Or were you checking to see if a death happened to be your Mother?

NORMAN

THAT'S ENOUGH. You don't know, okay? What it's like. Watching your mother crumble and not being able to do anything about it. Watching my life go by and not being able to do anything about it. Terrible thing is I've been thinking how I'll meet someone when I get my condo back to myself. I saw Bob's obituary online. It all came crashing down on me.

AGNES

Give it back.

NORMAN

I don't have the ticket.

AGNES

You. Hand it over.

GUNTHER

If your bathroom was working, I'd gladly provide.

AGNES

Bob is dead but I won't let you take what's his. That ticket is the only thing left and I will defend.

AGNES lunges for GUNTHER. NORMAN tries to pull her off. A melee of shouts and swings.

NATHAN enters from the exterior door, in a dark suit, hair wet.

NATHAN

Hello. Hello. Hello. Heard I could get a card game around here. Yeah. I was planning to go to the funeral. Of course. But I got stuck. Waiting. At lottery headquarters. I wasn't going to do it. Bob said I should have integrity. I wasn't going to defy him. Out of respect. But we're talking about seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And CarpetSoft was talking: first thing Tuesday morning, she says, you can rush over, Nathan, you collect the big prize and get to the funeral on time. I'll help you make Uncle Bob's funeral seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars nicer. The lottery people put me in a small, white room. No windows. Gave me stacks of paperwork. Some lady takes the ticket and leaves. I'm sitting there alone. After ten minutes, I thought: what's wrong? Why aren't the alarm bells of victory ringing, tuxedo guys spraying confetti everywhere, handing me buckets of money? And now some lady has our lottery card somewhere deep in her office and I'm just sitting, waiting, alone. An hour goes by. Uncle Bob's funeral is about to start. What am I supposed to do? I'm missing the funeral for the only father I've ever had. I'm stuck. I can't leave while they have our ticket. The lottery lady finally came back with two security experts who determined one of the ticket squares was tampered. They knew. Somebody called ahead and tipped them off.

AGNES and NORMAN look at GUNTHER.

GUNTHER

What?

NATHAN

It was Uncle Bob. He called. He knew I was going to try.

GUNTHER

See? It wasn't me.

NORMAN

Knock it off, Gunther.

AGNES

You missed the funeral.

NATHAN

I left the lottery office and drove to Povlitski's. I was so damn thirsty. Guess crying a lot makes you thirsty. I was standing in checkout with my diet pop and boxes of tissues, and that's when I learned what I'd do if I ever won the lottery. If I won millions for myself. Each day I would shop a random store around town and pay for the person behind me in line. Pay for that person and walk out before they even knew it happened. Give the joy of shock happiness to someone who never saw it coming. So I did. I paid for the person behind me in line. That's what I would have said at the funeral. Uncle Bob cared about what he did. Seeing the same people, year after year, seeing their kids grow from second grade to middle school. He took pride being the same thing every day. Rich is regularity. I don't want winning the lottery to define me as a person. Hitting the jackpot is not going to be the big thing in my life. I want to do something good. And I will. Because I have a responsibility. I have a responsibility to my family.

AGNES

You missed the funeral for nothing.

NATHAN

Not for nothing. We won.

AGNES

We won.

NATHAN

They gave me fourteen out of fifteen squares.

GUNTHER

We won?

NATHAN

Second prize. A quarter of a million.

GUNTHER

Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

AGNES

With Bob's card? You took Bob's card?

NATHAN

I used the birthday card, the card the Professor and Gunther gave Uncle Bob. The first card Uncle Bob scratched and crumbled. I kept it, just in case. The pulp paper and latex never yielded. CarpetSoft works.

AGNES

Who has Uncle Bob's card?

GUNTHER

Who cares. You won with our birthday ticket.

AGNES

Family money.

GUNTHER

Family. Like Aunt Agnes, family.

AGNES

Can it, Gunther.

GUNTHER

Aunt Agnes.

AGNES

Gunther, shut your mouth.

GUNTHER

Go on, Aunt Agnes, since our lies are being shown to the top of the deck. Since Bob never got to tell him.

AGNES

Nathan, there are some things Uncle Bob wanted to tell you.

NORMAN

Maybe we should leave.

AGNES

Stay. This concerns us all. Because we're family now, all of us, whether we want to be or not.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes?

AGNES

Nathan, I'm not your Aunt. Bob isn't, wasn't, your Uncle. Your grandfather adopted Bob when Bob was young. Called him and Tom brothers. You act like family long enough and it starts to stick.

NATHAN

You're not Sherman?

AGNES

Komisky. Agnes and Vera Komisky. I'm not sure about Bob's original surname. But he's always been a Sherman as long as I've known him.

NATHAN

You're not my blood Aunt?

AGNES

That doesn't mean I never stopped thinking of you as my son.

GUNTHER

It should be split three ways.

NORMAN

Gunther, now is not the time.

GUNTHER

Well, when is? That's the problem with family: talk gets delayed, talk gets taken to the grave. And once in the grave cleanup is impossibly ugly. Bet you didn't know my wife comes from major wealth. She and her six brothers got loaded the old fashioned way: inheriting it. The first generation made it. The second generation was embarrassed by it. By the time the third generation came around, Lily's generation, her brothers did nothing but bicker. Who deserves what and how it gets split. Most families get together on the holidays, Lily's family send their lawyers. There's your American dream, lawyers fighting for scraps over holiday meals. Lily didn't want to be part of the unhappiness. She resigned her fight for a stake early and in the end we got just enough to pay our monthly mortgage.

NORMAN

So you don't have to knock on your own door.

GUNTHER

Screw you.

AGNES

Driving around in a fancy Mercedes. What is that, showboating false vanity?

GUNTHER

Like you were so different.

NORMAN

To love money is to never be satisfied by it.

GUNTHER

I say get what you can, while you can.

AGNES

I hope there's an afterlife, I really do, so when I get there I can watch Bob kick your ass.

NORMAN

This isn't right. What we've done.

GUNTHER

Speak for yourself.

NORMAN

This is the American curse. The American curse is getting something for nothing.

GUNTHER

Well, mister run-and-hide, what should be done now? We've got two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

NATHAN

I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to split the money three ways. You three. I don't want a cent. That's it. Anybody has a problem, I'm going back to the lottery office.

GUNTHER

No, no, no, no problem here.

NORMAN

I'll take a third only to pay for Mother's operation.

AGNES

How we behaved, it makes me sad for Bob.

GUNTHER

But we're cool, right? A third each?

NATHAN

I'm going to take over the business.

AGNES

It's what your father wanted.

NATHAN

Although I'm sure he didn't want me exposed to the nasty side of carpet cleaning.

AGNES

What do you mean?

NATHAN

Uncle Bob sweating.

They all chuckle, a moment of release.

NATHAN

It's time to take the business in a new direction. This is my time.

NORMAN

Good for you, Nathan.

GUNTHER

You're going.

NORMAN

I don't know where, but I'm going. I don't know if I can be in this place anymore.

NATHAN

I'll get you your share.

NORMAN

Take care of yourself.

GUNTHER

Yah. Take care of yourself, Professor.

AGNES

Professor. I'm sorry.

NORMAN

Me, too.

AGNES

You don't have to go.

NORMAN is out.

AGNES and NATHAN embrace. GUNTHER clasp the ticket. This holds.

An unnatural aura illuminates the science workstation. Friendly, warm light, not spooky.

The shop radio crackles.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

...reporting a honey-bee caravan jackknifed just before the Lowry tunnel.
Thousands of bees now swarming the highway.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

A stinging traffic report.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Please do not say anything ever again.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Gopher Madness big winner finally announced. State lottery officials confirm top prize of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars...claimed yesterday by...Vera Komisky of northeast Minneapolis. Says she found the ticket while making chopped salad for her brother-in-law's funeral.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Okay.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Vera works as an accountant.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Not anymore. She just won the lottery.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Seven hundred fifty thousand?

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Yeah.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

You can't quit today on anything less than five million.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

I could absolutely quit on less than five million.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Not after half is given to your favorite charity.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Who's that?

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

The IRS.

Audio and lighting fades over their banter.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

You're saying you couldn't retire on five million.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

Interest on the principle couldn't even cover my cable bill.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 1 [OVER]

Life is not that expensive.

RADIO ANNOUNCER 2 [OVER]

You know how much my Starbucks habit costs?

Full fadeout and blackout.

END OF SCENE.

ACT III. SCENE III.

A year later.

The warehouse has boxes everywhere.

NATHAN and GUNTHER standing by the main chemistry station. GUNTHER still wearing the eye patch, in a suit. NATHAN in a sporty shirt and nice slacks.

GUNTHER

Nathan, you can't calculate an intangible of this potential.

NATHAN

Our strategy is manufacturing.

GUNTHER

And a year has passed.

NATHAN

Give it more time.

GUNTHER

It's time to shift strategy.

NATHAN

Let the distributors figure out the brand.

GUNTHER

We wither by giving up brand control.

NATHAN

Listen—

GUNTHER

Brand is what leads the market.

NATHAN

We've been prospering as back-end manufacturer.

GUNTHER

Private-labeling ultimately gets squeezed out. Don't you want your new bride to have it all?

Beat.

NATHAN

How big was their offer?

GUNTHER

Bigger than anything we've imagined.

NATHAN

That big?

AGNES enters with flourish.

AGNES

Here she is! With the new look.

NATHAN

Very political, Aunt Agnes.

AGNES

Need to look sharp for TV tonight. Enrique is magic. Vera wants to make him First Stylist once I win.

NATHAN

Let's see the lawn signs.

AGNES holds a poorly-stenciled sign.

AGNES

'A woman's place is in The House'.

NATHAN

Catchy.

AGNES

Like the Mayor told me: politics is what rich people do when they get bored. I cleaned carpets, now I'm gonna clean up this district.

GUNTHER

Vera wins top prize, we win second prize, a million bucks between us all, and we still can't get working lights in here. Can you clean that up?

AGNES

This country’s great peril is that anyone can get elected. And with a heavily-financed campaign, I can’t lose!

GUNTHER

You’re distracting Nathan from an important decision.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes, the big brand opportunity came in.

AGNES

The Lusty Steamers?

NATHAN

Gunther is the miracle’s salesman.

AGNES

I’m still keeping my eyes on you.

GUNTHER

And I’m keeping my eye on Nathan. We’re going to make a fortune!

AGNES

We’re going to change this town!

NORMAN enters.

NORMAN

Knock, knock.

NATHAN

Professor?

NORMAN

Surprise.

GUNTHER

Professor?

AGNES

Professor! Look at you! What are you doing here?

NORMAN

My old condo is closing. Flew in for the day to do final paperwork in person. Figured while I'm here I'd stop by and see if everything I've heard about this place is truly true.

AGNES

How's your mother?

NORMAN

Recovering. They're giving her another five years.

AGNES

Wow, that's great.

NATHAN

Hey, get in here, Professor, sit down.

GUNTHER

Want something to drink?

NORMAN

Can't. Flight leaves in a couple hours.

GUNTHER

What, you're flying the plane?

NORMAN

Alright, one sip of the Old Buck.

GUNTHER breaks out the Old Buck.

NORMAN

You guys look great.

AGNES

You look...tan.

NORMAN

I know, I know. Being Dean does not make you lean. Too many dinners.

GUNTHER

How's the new gig?

NORMAN

No time for research but my name’s on letterhead.

GUNTHER

Is that good?

NORMAN

And Houston is way too hot.

NATHAN

I can’t believe you’re here. How about one hand?

NORMAN

Absolutely.

NATHAN

Alright! One hand!

AGNES

Wish I could but I’m off to the studio. Channel Nine wants a follow-up interview.

GUNTHER

No problem. Couple sheriffs I can call to take your seat. Sure Channel Nine would love learning about that. C’mon, wouldn’t feel right without all of us.

AGNES

Fine, one hand.

They take seats at the card table, with drinks.

GUNTHER pulls out a deck of cards.

NATHAN

I’ll take those. My table, my deal.

EVERYBODY: ‘Uh-oh! Look out!’, etc.

NATHAN majestically unsheathes a long, smooth one hundred dollar bill and places it on the middle of the table.

NORMAN

We're playing for money?

NATHAN

Since we're all men and Aunts of wealth and leisure.

AGNES

What's the game?

NATHAN

In honor of Professor's return, a little Day Baseball.

NORMAN

Norman. Norman Lipshultz. The Professor died with Bob.

NATHAN

In honor of Norman's return, a little Day Baseball.

AGNES

How do you play?

NATHAN

It's easy. Everybody antes a hundred bucks and I'll teach you.

GUNTHER

This kid, just like Bob, always an angle.

NORMAN

No. Bob was the most honest man any of us will ever know.

AGNES

Amen to that.

NATHAN

Clink and drink!

They all drink, they wince.

NORMAN

You know you guys can come visit me. Whenever it snows. My home will always be a place for family.

NATHAN

Okay. Okay. One hundred dollars ante, we learn as we go.

As NATHAN starts to deal, the light fixture begins to flicker, flicker, flicker...and we're out.

END OF PLAY.