

The Actors

A new play by
Ronnie Larsen

The Actors

A new play

Characters

Ronnie

Jean

Clarence

Actor Jay

Real Jay

1 SCENE: THE AUDITION

1

Lights fade to black.

Sound Cue: Theme to the Six Million Dollar Man

Lights come up on an out-of shape middle-aged man eating a bowl of Apple Jacks. The box is on the table.

VOICE OVER

Steve Austin. Astronaut. A man barely alive. Gentlemen, we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first bionic man. Steve Austin, will be that man. Better than he was before. Better. Stronger. Faster.

The theme song ends as he continues to eat in silence.

He stares forward blankly and eats the cereal. Maybe he reads the back of the box. He checks his phone.

It is soooooo quiet in his very organized and sterile one bedroom apartment.

He is done eating. He clears the table.

He makes sure his house is ready.

There is a knock at the door.

He answers it.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

 RONNIE
Jean?

 JEAN
Ronnie?

 RONNIE
That's me, come on in...

 JEAN
This is your office?

 RONNIE
No, it's my apartment.

 JEAN
I thought I was coming to your office.

 RONNIE
No, it's just my apartment.

 JEAN
You don't have an office?

 RONNIE
I don't actually...

 JEAN
Aren't you the producer?

 RONNIE
Well, sort of...

 JEAN
Sort of...

 RONNIE
Yes, I'm the producer...

 JEAN
But you produce out of your home?

 RONNIE
I'm not a real producer...I'm just
producing this project but I'm not an
actual producer per se...

 JEAN
Okay, I did not know that so I'm not
totally sure about this.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (2)

JEAN (CONT'D)

I assumed I was meeting a real
producer...at his real office...with like
a real secretary and all that stuff...

RONNIE

I'm really sorry if I was unclear...

JEAN

Very unclear. I'm sorry, I don't
audition for things in people's living
rooms.

RONNIE

I'm really sorry for not being clear.

JEAN

Well I shouldn't have assumed but
still...

RONNIE

I really want you to be comfortable.
(beat)
Do you want to come in...or...?

JEAN

I'm really not sure...actually...I'm
sorry.

RONNIE

I promise, I'm not a weirdo...I'm
not...we can even leave the door open if
you want.

She looks at him for a while.

JEAN

It's a paying gig, right?

RONNIE

Absolutely.

JEAN

Okay, just leave the door open.

RONNIE

The door stays open.

They cautiously enter. Jean looks around, nervously.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Do you want something to drink.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (3)

JEAN

What do you have?

RONNIE

Um...I have...ummm...water?

JEAN

What else?

RONNIE

Just water.

JEAN

Oh.

(beat)

Ok...um...I'll have water.

He goes and comes back with a glass of water.

JEAN (CONT'D)

You don't have it like in a bottle?

RONNIE

No. I'm sorry.

JEAN

It's okay I'm not thirsty.

RONNIE

Okay.

JEAN

Sooooo, tell me about your movie.

RONNIE

It's not a movie.

JEAN

I thought it was a movie.

RONNIE

No, it's not a movie.

JEAN

Oh, the listing said it was for a movie.

RONNIE

No, I'm pretty sure it just said
"project".

JEAN

I thought it said movie.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

It definitely did not say movie cause
it's not a movie, it's just a project.

JEAN

Is there a script?

RONNIE

No. Sort of...not really...no...it's a
lot of improv...your resumé said you have
improv experience...

JEAN

I hate improv.

RONNIE

Oh, cause your resume said improv is one
of your skills.

JEAN

Ronnie, every actor puts that on their
resumé. There are two items on every
actor's resumé under skills: Improv and
"I can drive a stick shift." "I can drive
a stick shift?!?" Who the hell would
hire an actor just cause they can drive a
stick shift? "I'm a horrible actor but I
can drive a stick shift". "Oh you can
drive a stick shift! You're hired...to
play Hamlet." Ridiculous. Anyway, I
hate improv but tell me about your
project?

RONNIE

Okay...well...it's...

JEAN

And it pays, right?

RONNIE

It pays...yes...not a lot but...

JEAN

It pays.

RONNIE

It pays.

JEAN

Ok, so...what is it exactly?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (5)

RONNIE

It's weird...it's a weird project...

JEAN

Weird like artsy fartsy or weird like illegal?

RONNIE

Unique...it's unique...it's uh...I've never heard of anyone doing a project quite like it so it's difficult to describe and I'm not really sure I quite understand what it is myself and to be honest I'm a little embarrassed about it but basically the project is...

JEAN

The project is...?

RONNIE

The project is...

JEAN

The. Project. Issss...?

RONNIE

My mother died 12 years ago. Cancer. She was sick for a very long time. It was brutal. Every Christmas we thought would be her last but she kept holding on...she was very strong...but she finally passed and I was devastated...I mean really devastated...I don't remember the year after she died...it's a total blur...I just miss her so much...then a few years later my Dad died, walking off a cruise ship, heart attack, just gone...so the one-two punch of that...losing both my parents just a few years apart...it was just, we'll still is...just devastating...and the further away I get from their deaths...I keep expecting the pain to subside...and it has, I guess, somewhat...but the hole is just, always there...it just sits there...this big hole...and I miss them both very much...so the project is...

JEAN

The project is...?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

You would be my mother...

JEAN

I would play your mother?

RONNIE

No. You would be my mother.

JEAN

I don't understand.

RONNIE

You would come over, once or twice a week and you would be my Mom. We'll cook dinner, watch TV, argue, ignore each other...act out scenes from our life together...and just be a family...for a few hours a week.

JEAN

What kind of scenes...

RONNIE

Just scenes from my life...like when I was a kid and we'd bake a cake together...or when she gave me a present for my birthday...happy memories...boring memories...comforting memories...maybe you'll make me do my homework and you just sit and watch tv and I'll do homework at the kitchen table and you can just ignore me...we might not even speak but I'll know you're my Mother and you'll just be here...just scenes from my life...nothing big...nothing dramatic...no script, really...just random scenes...and I'll give you key words and phrases and the backstory and maybe we'll fight one day...and maybe you'll send me to bed without getting to watch tv or we'll pray together and you'll just...ummmm...you'll just...um...love me...that's it...just a few hours a week. You'll come over here, you'll be my Mom and you'll...love me...aaaannnd, that's it. That is the project.

JEAN

When you say, "family" do you mean other actors or just you and me?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Possibly other actors...I don't know...I haven't officially cast anyone else yet...

JEAN

But the other actors who've auditioned...did they like...how did they...what was their...did the other actors...react...when you told them about this project?

RONNIE

Actually, you're the first actor I've met. I wanted to cast my Mom first. You're the only person I'm seeing for my Mom...so far. Cause you looked perfect. Your picture looked perfect. I figured if it didn't go well I'd keep looking for another Mom but I'm sort of hoping you work out cause you look very similar to my Mother...plus her name was Jeanette and your name is Jean, sooo...

JEAN

I see...okay...well...hmmmmmm.

Jean is speechless...she thinks for a long time...

RONNIE

Jean, I really miss my Mother and I'm an Atheist...I don't believe in God or an afterlife...I don't believe we're gonna be reunited after I die and I just want my parents back...in some form...any form...that's all I want...I just want 'em back...it's become an obsession for me, unfortunately. I'm being totally honest. There are days where I'm not sure how much longer I want to stay on this planet without them.

JEAN

Are you saying you're suicidal...

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

No, not at all...possibly...a little...no...not suicidal...just...just...lost...you know..some days, many days I just feel very...lost...I wander around stores looking at the things she would have bought...things that connect me to her...yarn...she loved to knit...I spend a lot of time in the yarn department...

Jean thinks...unsure of what to say...finally she speaks...

JEAN

Ronnie. My Mother died when I was 12. It was devastating. I totally understand. I miss my Mother every day. But this is weird, Ronnie. It is. I'm not even sure it's healthy.

RONNIE

I'm not hiring you for your opinion, I'm hiring you to do a job. I'm not looking for your feedback I'm looking for your skills. I'll pay you by the hour. I'll pay you very well. I have money. We'll have a contract and rules and it will just be another acting job. I know it's weird but theater is weird, isn't it? You go on stage and pretend to be somebody else for a room full of strangers all thrust together for one night...all sitting in the dark and staring at you and you can't even see them but they laugh and cry and clap for you and then everyone goes home and you never see each other again and you're never all together in the same room again but you've all made a memory together. That's like a family in a way, sort of, theater is like a family, sort of...strangers in a room trying to connect with each other and lots of time just disconnecting...making each other laugh and cry, making memories together, good memories, bad memories...theater is weird...families are weird...this project is weird...but not that weird, right, not much weirder than a normal play, no? So just think of it like you're doing a regular play but without an audience.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Well, I've actually done that before. Arsenic and Old Lace, The Pittsburgh Players, 1962. We only had two people in the audience but we were troopers and the show must go on. So we did it. They left at intermission but no one bothered to tell us. We did Act Two for no one and we kept saying to each other, "they're so quiet but you can tell their really listening." Then we took our bows and no one clapped and it was a big cast, too. We all had individual bows. It was the world's longest curtain call. And no applause. Just crickets. Life in the theater.

RONNIE

So there you go? Just imagine you're back in Pittsburgh. And you don't have to learn any lines. Just certain key phrases...and the family backstory...I just need to believe that you love me...if it's gonna work...cause my Mother loved me very much...and I want to feel that again...I want you to understand her so you can really become her...and the clothes that she wore...she wasn't into fashion so...she wasn't stylish...I have some of her old clothes. I'd like you to wear them if that's okay. You won't have to do anything but just come over here and just be Jeanette for a few hours. That's it.

(beat)

You're very skeptical?

JEAN

When you say you'll pay me very well what exactly does that mean...and how many hours a week...and for how many weeks?

RONNIE

I'm thinking 80 dollars an hour. Two or three hours a week. Four at the most...we'll do a few weeks and see how it goes...

JEAN

How bout 100 an hour

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (10)

RONNIE

Fine.

JEAN

How bout 120 an hour.

RONNIE

How bout 100?

JEAN

How bout 110?

RONNIE

How bout 100?

JEAN

100 is fine.

RONNIE

So we have a deal.

JEAN

We have a deal. Ronnie, come give your mother a hug.

They hug. She steps back. Takes his face in his hands.

JEAN (CONT'D)

(sincere, tender)

Ronnie, I've missed you so much. I love you, Ronnie.

Ronnie is taken aback and oddly moved with how quickly she became his Mother.

RONNIE

(impressed, sincere, cautious)

I love you, too, Mom.

Beat.

JEAN

So do you pay in cash, check...how will this work?

An older man appears in the doorway.

CLARENCE

Excuse me. I'm looking for Ronnie Larsen. I have an audition at 2 o'clock for the role of Claire, is this the right place?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (11)

1

JEAN

Ah, Claire, you must be my husband. I'm your wife, Jeanette. Come on in and meet our son.

Clarence is confused but game.

CLARENCE

Well...hello, son.

RONNIE

Well...hello, Dad.

JEAN

Just a big happy family.

CLARENCE

And this is definitely a paying gig, right?

Blackout.

Music Cue: The Love Boat Theme Song

2 SCENE: THE LOVE BOAT

2

Jean and Clarence sit on the sofa watching TV. Jean knits and Clarence reads a newspaper. Ronnie enters in little kid Superman pajamas.

JEAN

Ronnie, go to bed. Ronnie, go to bed.

CLARENCE

Ronnie, don't make me get up.

RONNIE

I wanna watch Love Boat.

CLARENCE

It's past your bedtime.

RONNIE

I'm not tired.

JEAN

Well you will be in the morning when I have to get you up for church.

CLARENCE

Go to bed.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

RONNIE

Can I please watch Love Boat.

CLARENCE

No, you may not watch Love Boat.

RONNIE

Why not?

CLARENCE

Because we said no.

RONNIE

Why????

JEAN

We're gonna count to three.

RONNIE

Please...I'll get up in the morning.

CLARENCE

1.

RONNIE

It's my 2nd favorite show.

JEAN

I thought Six Million Dollar Man is your favorite show.

CLARENCE

2.

RONNIE

The Hulk is my favorite show. Love Boat is my second favorite show and Six Million Dollar Man is my third favorite show.

JEAN

Go to bed, Ronnie

RONNIE

I'm not tired.

CLARENCE

3.

RONNIE

Okay. I'm going.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Ronnie, if you get up for church in the morning right away you can stay up tomorrow night til 9 and watch the Six Million Dollar Man.

RONNIE

You promise?

CLARENCE

We promise. Now go to bed.

RONNIE

I love you.

JEAN

We love you, too.

He goes and gets a hug from Jean.

CLARENCE

Come on, Superman, let's go to bed.

Clarence walks him into the bedroom.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Did you say your prayers.

RONNIE

Yes.

CLARENCE

Are you sure?

RONNIE

Yes.

CLARENCE

Well we can say two prayers.

They get down on their knees and pray.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for watching over us and for keeping our family safe. We thank you for providing a home and food and shelter for us. We pray that you will make sure Ronnie doesn't have any nightmares tonight. And we pray for all of our relatives in other cities that you will keep them safe and sound as well. Amen.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Amen.

CLARENCE

Ok, get in bed.

Clarence tucks Ronnie into bed and turns off the light.

RONNIE

Dad, when I get older can we go on vacation on the real Love Boat?

CLARENCE

Son, we are never gonna go on the Love Boat.

RONNIE

Why?

CLARENCE

Because it's not real. It's only on tv. Go to sleep.

RONNIE

So what boat does Julie work on?

CLARENCE

She doesn't work on a boat. They're just actors. None of it's real.

RONNIE

But the Hulk is real, right?

CLARENCE

Yes, the Hulk is real but the Love Boat is fake. Okay. No more questions. Go to sleep. I love you.

Clarence heads to the door.

RONNIE

Dad, who would win in a fight, the Hulk or The Six Million Dollar Man?

CLARENCE

You. You would win. You're my Six Million Dollar Man, you know that. Now go to sleep.

RONNIE

Don't close the door all the way.

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

Go to sleep.

RONNIE

Dad, I love you.

CLARENCE

I love you, too. Go to sleep.

Clarence goes back to the living room and sits next to Jean on the couch.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Jean. Can I ask you a question? Have you told anyone that you're doing this job?

JEAN

Just my son.

CLARENCE

What did he say?

JEAN

It sort of creeped him out. But I think he's also a little jealous cause he likes being my only son so I think he feels a little threatened. Is that weird? Listen, I'm gonna take off. You going?

CLARENCE

No. I'm doing an all-nighter. He wants to do the pancake scene in the morning.

JEAN

What does an all-nighter pay? I can't do all-nighters but I'm curious, does an all-nighter pay pretty well or...?

CLARENCE

Jean, you know we cant discuss our pay. Read your contract.

JEAN

I don't really care I'm just curious about the whole all-nighter thing cause I could really use the extra money.

CLARENCE

You want to do an all-nighter with me, Jean? I'd do an all-nighter with you for free.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (5)

JEAN

Gross. Zero interest. Never gonna happen.

CLARENCE

Come on, Jean. It would make us more realistic. We'd be better parents. I'm not ugly, am I?

JEAN

Clarence, let me say this one last time. Never. Going. To happen.

Ronnie enters.

RONNIE

I'm not tired.

CLARENCE

You get in your bed or you're gonna get a spanking. I will not say it twice.

JEAN

We have church in 7 hours and you're gonna be a bear in the morning and I don't wanna fight with you first thing in the morning.

CLARENCE

Go! Now! I will not say it again.

Ronnie goes. They sit in silence for a while. She knits, he watches her.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

I swear this is the easiest job I've ever had.

JEAN

I gotta go.

CLARENCE

Jean, do you think I'm a good Father.

JEAN

Are you serious?

CLARENCE

I want to know. Do you think I'm a good Father to our son.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (6)

JEAN

I think you're an idiot. Good night.

Jean leaves. Clarence sits in silence. Ronnie comes out.

CLARENCE

Young man, what are you doing?

RONNIE

No...it's okay...

CLARENCE

No, it's not okay...we have church in the morning and you're not gonna wanna wake up...

RONNIE

No, I mean, the project...we're done for the night...you guys were great. Did Jean take off?

CLARENCE

Yep.

RONNIE

Okay. Listen, Clarence, I changed my mind. I don't want to do the pancake thing in the morning. I'm gonna sleep in...so you can take off if you want...

CLARENCE

Oh...you sure?

RONNIE

I'm sure.

CLARENCE

Cause I don't mind staying.

RONNIE

No, you were great tonight. When we prayed it felt like the spirit of my Dad was really in the room. It was really moving. And I'm an Atheist so, great job...you're an awesome Dad.

CLARENCE

Really??? Thanks! And you're a great..."son". So listen, I'm curious am I still gonna get paid for the all-nighter even though it's cancelled?

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (7)

RONNIE

I hadn't really thought about that.

CLARENCE

Well like on a movie if they call you in but they don't use you you still get paid or in the theater if they cancel a show the actors still get paid cause most of the time we get paid by the week and not by the hour...

RONNIE

But I'm paying you by the hour...

CLARENCE

True, true, I know...but I turned down other work to be here...

RONNIE

Oh no, that's not good...I'm so sorry...what work did you turn down?

CLARENCE

Well I don't mean I turned down work, I just mean I could have done other work but I blocked out this night for you...

RONNIE

Ohhh...no, no, I get it, I get it...

CLARENCE

Plus, Ronnie, I really need the money. Things are not going my way this month. I'm three weeks behind on my rent...my phone is due tomorrow...things are just piling up...

RONNIE

I understand...no problem...I'll totally pay you for the night...

CLARENCE

Oh man, I really appreciate it...you're a really good son.

RONNIE

Ummmm, Clarence, when we aren't doing the "project" could you not refer to me as your son...I would prefer this father/son thing didn't bleed into our real lives. I don't want things to get weird. Do you know what I mean?

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (8)

CLARENCE

No.

RONNIE

You don't know what I mean or you don't mind? I'm confused.

CLARENCE

I'm confused.

RONNIE

What are you confused about?

CLARENCE

I thought you wanted a Dad.

RONNIE

I do, but just a few hours a week.

CLARENCE

I thought you wanted a family.

RONNIE

I do, but not all the time.

CLARENCE

But I thought you wanted it to feel real?

RONNIE

I do...a few hours a week.

CLARENCE

But that's not really how families work, ya know. You don't get to choose when to be a son and when not to be a son. Once a son always a son. Whether you like it or not?

RONNIE

But you're not my real Dad, Clarence.

CLARENCE

But I thought you needed a real Dad.

RONNIE

No, I don't "need" a real Dad. I want my actual Dad back. There's a big difference.

CLARENCE

But you want your Dad back full time, right? Not just a few hours a week.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

I'm not sure what were talking about right now.

CLARENCE

I just want to make sure you're getting what you need. I wanna do a good job for you.

RONNIE

You're doing a great job. You're perfect. I am getting what I need. It's very interesting. I'm learning a lot...I feel less lonely when you guys are around...it's very nice...it's going better than I thought it would. The hole inside of me feels smaller when we're doing the scenes...I'm actually sort of surprised how well things are going...

CLARENCE

So don't push me away, son. When you push me away it hurts a little. I was looking forward to making my boy pancakes tomorrow morning before we go to church. I never had a son, Ronnie. It's a very nice feeling.

RONNIE

Maybe you should be paying me...

CLARENCE

So no pancakes tomorrow? You sure? Even though you're paying me anyway? You love my pancakes, right? I can sleep on the couch.

RONNIE

Okay, fine, pancakes tomorrow. But not too early. I need to sleep.

CLARENCE

Great! I'm excited. Pancakes with my boy!

RONNIE

I'm going back to bed now.

CLARENCE

Do you want me to tuck you in?

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (10)

2

RONNIE

No, I'm fine.

CLARENCE

Come on kiddo...time for bed...we got a big day tomorrow...

He leads him to the bedroom, puts him in bed, tucks him in...

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

You're gonna dream of pancakes tonight, I bet. Close your eyes. Go to sleep. And remember, Ronnie, your Daddy loves you very much.

He kisses him on the forehead. Returns to the living room. Sits on the couch. Thinks. Time passes. After a while he gets up and goes to check on his "son". He watches him sleep. The house is at peace.

Music Cue: Here Comes the Sun by The Beatles

The lights fade to black

3 SCENE: MORNING PANCAKES

3

Lights slowly come up.

Clarence is setting the table. He comes out with a big stack of pancakes. Goes to Ronnie's room.

CLARENCE

Up and at 'em. Up at 'em. Your pancakes are gonna get cold.

RONNIE

Clarence, what time is it?

CLARENCE

6:30. We have church at 8. Get up, sleepyhead.

RONNIE

Clarence, I can't do this this morning...

CLARENCE

"Dad", I can't do this.

RONNIE

What?

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

"Dad", I can't do this. Not Clarence.

RONNIE

Dad, I can't do this this morning.

CLARENCE

Well you are doing it, kiddo. Get up.
Come on.

He pulls the blanket off him.

RONNIE

Clarence, Dad, dude, come on...this isn't
funny...

CLARENCE

I'm not joking. Get out of bed.

RONNIE

Enough, seriously. I got like 5 hours of
sleep.

CLARENCE

And your Mother predicted this but no,
you wanted to watch Love Boat. Get in
that kitchen right now or you're not
gonna be seeing the Six Million Dollar
Man tonight. It's your choice.

RONNIE

I'm gonna pass on the Six Million Dollar
Man...I'm choosing sleep.

CLARENCE

I don't like your attitude this morning
young man.

Clarence stops and thinks. Goes and gets a glass of water
and comes back.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

You know when I was a kid and I wouldn't
wake up my Dad would throw a glass of
water in my face.

Ronnie turns over, sees the glass of water.

RONNIE

Clarence. This is not funny.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED: (2)

CLARENCE

Are you gonna wake up?

RONNIE

Put down the glass, seriously.

CLARENCE

Get out of bed.

RONNIE

This isn't funny, Clarence.

CLARENCE

I won't say it again.

RONNIE

Clarence, I'm not joking, put down the...

Clarence throws the glass of water in his face. Ronnie is stunned. He doesn't speak for a while. Clarence is nervous and not nervous. Finally, after a long confusing and suspenseful pause...

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Wow. That's incredible. On one of my birthdays, I forget which one...12 maybe...maybe 10...I'm not sure...it fell on a Sunday...and I never wanted to get up for church and I said, "it's my birthday so I shouldn't have to go to church" and then I rolled over so my Dad woke me up by throwing water in my face...he thought it was so funny...and all day at church when someone wished me a happy birthday my Dad would say:

CLARENCE

Tell 'em what you got for your birthday, Ronnie. Tell them what a great Dad I am. Tell 'em what your Dad gave you for your birthday this morning.

RONNIE

How'd you know?

CLARENCE

It's what a Dad would say. And what did you say?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

I said, "he gave me a glass of water in my face cause I wouldn't wake up." And they'd laugh. And then he'd laugh. And then he'd put his arm around me and say, "Happy Birthday". You're a good sport. You know your Dad loves you, right?"

Clarence goes and sits next to Ronnie on the bed and puts his arm around him and says:

CLARENCE

Happy Birthday. You're a good sport. You know your Dad loves you, right?"

RONNIE

I know. Thanks, Dad. I totally forgot about that. Wow. Thank you. Can we do it again? Will you throw water in my face again. I'm gonna close my eyes and pretend that I'm asleep.

Clarence goes and gets another glass of water.

CLARENCE

Rise and shine.

RONNIE

It's my birthday, I shouldn't have to go to church.

He throws the water in Ronnie's face but Ronnie does not react. He just absorbs the feeling...and remembers...he has gotten exactly what he wanted...he feels his Dad in the room and his face is a myriad of emotions. Finally, he opens his eyes. Looks at Clarence.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Clarence reveals another glass.

CLARENCE

You want another one.

RONNIE

No, I'm...

CLARENCE

Too late.

Clarence throws another glass of water in Ronnie's face.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED: (4)

3

Blackout.

4 SCENE: HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO RONNIE

4

In the darkness we hear a woman singing Happy Birthday and bringing on a cake with lighted birthday candles.

JEAN
(singing)
Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to
you.

JEAN AND CLARENCE
(singing)
Happy Birthday dear Ronnie, Happy
Birthday to you

CLARENCE
(singing)
And Scooby Doo on channel 2 and
Frankenstein on channel 9...

JEAN
Enough, enough, make a wish and blow out
your candles...

He blows them all out!

CLARENCE
And don't tell anyone or it won't come
true.

JEAN
Lights, lights.

Clarence turns the lights on.

JEAN (CONT'D)
Ronnie, do you want to open your present
first or do you want to eat some cake?

RONNIE
I want my present.

JEAN
Here you go. I hope you like it.

CLARENCE
He's gonna love it.

Ronnie looks inside the gift bag. He is in shock. This is
the happiest day of his life. He almost hyperventilates.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

No way!!!!!!! I love you, I love you, I love you...

He pulls it out. It's an album...

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Saturday Night Fever!!!!!!! Yes!!!
Yes!!! How did you know I wanted this?

CLARENCE

Because you told us a hundred times.

RONNIE

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!!!! Saturday Night Fever!!!!!!!
This is the happiest day of my life!

Blackout

Music Cue: Staying Alive

In the blackout we hear 10 seconds of Staying Alive starting at the 32 second mark.

LYRIC

Whether you're a brother or whether
you're a Mother you're staying alive,
Feel the city breakin' and everybody
shakin', we're staying alive, staying
alive.

As the lights come up, the music fades out and Ronnie stares at the album thoughtfully. After a few moments, Jean enters...

JEAN

Is Clarence gone?

RONNIE

Yep, he just took off.

JEAN

Okay...I'm gonna take off, too...are you okay?

RONNIE

Yeah, I'm great...today was great...best birthday ever...thank you...

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Really?

RONNIE

Yeah, great...seriously...it was fun...

JEAN

So, Ronnie, is the...uh..."project" doing what you want it to do? I mean is it actually working...

RONNIE

Absolutely. 100% Best money I ever spent.

JEAN

Good. I'm so glad. So I'm giving you what you want and all that?

RONNIE

100%.

JEAN

Ok. You know, it's just...it's weird not getting any reviews or outside feedback...even friends...I don't do theater for myself, ya know, I do it for the audience...so it's just weird to be doing work that you're proud of and nobody sees it...have you ever stood on stage and had a room full of people applaud you?

RONNIE

No. I'm not a performer.

JEAN

It's amazing. All that love being directed at you. From absolute strangers...who paid money to see you..it's like a drug.

RONNIE

This isn't a play, Jean, I told you that.

JEAN

It absolutely could be.

RONNIE

It absolutely could not be.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Why not?

RONNIE

Why not, what???

JEAN

Why not share it? Invite people. It could be like one of those site specific shows for really limited audiences. I bet critics would be intrigued.

RONNIE

Jean, this isn't theater, it's my life...I'm not a writer or a director or a producer or an actor...

JEAN

But you're acting when you're playing yourself...you're acting like a little kid...you're quite good, actually...and you tell us how to act to be more like your parents and that's called directing...and you write scenarios for us so you're a writer...and you pay us which is what a producer does...maybe this could be a hit play. A play about a lonely and depressed man who hires actors to play his dead parents cause he misses them so much. That's interesting...and sort of creepy...creepy in a good way...it's theater.

RONNIE

Jean, we are very different. You're a performer, I am not. You crave attention. I do not. You want love from an audience. I just want love from two people who happen to be dead. You're doing this for a paycheck. I'm doing it to have a family again. I'm not creating entertainment here, I'm trying to do something to keep from throwing myself off a bridge. Is it normal to have so much pain 10 years later? Is it normal to wake up crying? Sometimes I have the most beautiful dreams. One dream...nightmare, actually...my Mom and I are together. We're talking. We're laughing. She's beautiful. She's young. She's practically floating. I'm so happy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Then she says, very matter-of-fact, "I'm gonna leave you now." And I start screaming, "No, no, no, no." And she just turns and walks away and I run after her screaming "no, no, no, no, no" but I can't stop her, I can't catch up and she turns a corner and I run as fast I can and I get to the corner but she's already gone...and I keep screaming "no, no, no, no, no" and I'm sobbing and I wake up and I'm still sobbing and screaming "no, no, no, no". And I'm fully awake now and I can't stop crying and I'm wide awake but I keep repeating "no, no, no, no" cause I realize it was just a dream...a cruel dream...I'm paralyzed...maybe for 30 minutes...and it's so painful but yet I'm so happy, cause I got to be with her again...even if it was just in a dream...I got to hear her voice again. Do you know how long I thought about this project before I did anything about it? 2 years? Maybe 3? That first day you came here was humiliating. I feel what I'm doing is pathetic. If my siblings knew I was spending my inheritance on this "project"...paying people to be my family...I can't imagine...I went to therapy...it did nothing for me...I just want my parents back...it's that simple. And I don't know how else to make that happen. I'm open to suggestions.

JEAN

Art can heal. I truly believe that. Theater can heal you. What if I wrote something...what if I wrote a play or something inspired by my experiences here...and I changed the names so nobody knew...what if I wrote a play and the play was a hit and it was performed all over the world and hundreds of actors played you and your parents in different productions. And you could go see the productions and see your parents on stage. They could live on thru the play. It's a way of bringing them back to life, in a way, don't ya think? Theater is life. Film, paintings, books...they get finished and frozen at some point but a play is a living thing and it could be performed forever.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JEAN (CONT'D)

You and your parents could live together on stage even after you die. Isn't that a beautiful thought? Would I have your blessing?

RONNIE

You would absolutely not have my blessing, Jean, which is exactly why you signed a non-disclosure form promising that you would not discuss the project with anyone...should I be worried here? Have you discussed it with anyone? Jean? Have you?

JEAN

Of course not.

RONNIE

I don't believe you.

JEAN

I swear.

RONNIE

Jean?

JEAN

What?

RONNIE

Jean? Who did you tell?

JEAN

I told no one.

RONNIE

How many people have you told?

JEAN

I've told no one.

RONNIE

You're lying, Jean. I know you, Jean, I know when you're acting.

JEAN

I promise I haven't told anyone.

RONNIE

Jean, for the last time you tell me who you told or we are done here.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I will fire you right now for breach of contract...if I can't trust you...there's a lot of other actresses in this town...I'll find another Mother tomorrow, I swear, I will...if you won't follow the rules...if you...Jean, I want to know right now...who did you tell? Jean! Look at me. Who did you tell?

JEAN

You're just like your Father. Arrogant. So arrogant. Arrogant and condescending. I'm going.

RONNIE

I don't think so.

He blocks the door.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

You tell me who you told or you're fired. Who did you tell? Last time, who did...

JEAN

My son. I told my son. I'm sorry. I told my son. I knew it was wrong. But I had to tell someone. I was going crazy. I booked a job. An acting job. I wanted him to be proud of his Mother. He thinks I'm wasting my time doing this acting thing. I want him to believe in me. He's a very judgmental kid. I love being a working actor. I'm proud of myself. I'm proud of the work I do here. I wanted him to proud of me, too.

RONNIE

And is he proud of you?

JEAN

No.

RONNIE

What did he say?

JEAN

He thinks it's creepy.

RONNIE

He thinks I'm creepy.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

He doesn't know you.

RONNIE

But he thinks I'm creepy.

JEAN

Not you, the project. He thinks the project is creepy. He can't wrap his head around it. He just doesn't understand it.

RONNIE

Of course he doesn't understand it...because his Mother is still alive. Once his Mother dies he'll understand the project very well...and how many of his friends has he told...I can imagine the jokes..."you won't believe what my Mom is doing for work. This weird guy pays my Mom to go to his house and pretend to be his Mom and he acts like a little kid." I can just hear the conversation. I can just hear your son making fun of me. Thanks a lot, Jean. If I wanted an "audience" for this project I would have rented a theater and sold tickets. I don't want people to see this. Why would I want anyone to see this? You think I'm proud of the fact that I can't seem to put my Mothers death in a little box and put it away and think about her on Mothers Day and Christmas and the rest of the time just go on with my life like a normal person...like my siblings do...my siblings who have their own families by the way...my siblings who are so happy...my brother Jay has two great kids, super smart...a lovely wife...my two sisters have kids and grandkids...one day Jay will have grandkids...you have kids...you will probably have grandkids...I have me, that's it...it's just me...the bachelor Atheist Uncle, you think that's fun?

JEAN

I'm sorry. Ronnie, I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

You know when my Mother was dying all us kids would get together and rally at the hospital...but she wouldn't die...she was too tough...she always got better...but then she'd get sick again and we'd all rally together back at the hospital. But she wouldn't die. She got better. Then she'd get sick again. And we'd all rally together at her bedside...then she'd get better...It went on for like 10 years, maybe 12...I don't know...I lost count. But, finally she actually did die. And once again we all rallied together at the house and the funeral and the gravesite...and then we all went home. And that was the last time we were all together...until my Dad died 4 years later...he was perfectly healthy...he jogged 5 miles a day every day of his life...I thought he'd live another 20 years. He was walking off a cruise ship in Alaska and bam, heart attack, gone...just like that. My Mother's illness was the glue that held our family together...I had no idea that when she died our family would die with her. If it wasn't for Facebook I would have no idea what any of my siblings are doing. I want a family, Jean. I want a family. I want kids and grandkids and in-laws. I want a big family that comes home for the holidays and fights and laughs and throws water in your face. I want a family to drive me crazy. I get so lonely here. I want to jump out the window. It's not funny.

JEAN

So why don't you go visit your siblings?

RONNIE

Because we don't really like each other. We love each other but we don't really like each other. All we do is fight. No one listens. Everyone talks at the same time. Everyone gets offended. It always goes bad.

JEAN

Well that's a family, Ronnie! That's what a family is. Families are messy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JEAN (CONT'D)

Families are difficult. Families are infuriating. But you know all that cause you already have a family. Go be with them. Why are you doing all this? Go see them. Go visit them. Go fight with them. Go love them. I'm sure they love you.

RONNIE

I like this family. I like what we do here. This family works for me. You're a great, Mom. Most of the time.

JEAN

But this family isn't real, Ronnie. You know that. We're just actors on your payroll. It's all about you. It's all on your terms. That's not a real family. You can't control a real family. You don't get to direct your real family. With real families you have to accept that you're just one piece of a bigger puzzle. Families are compromise but comfort. You're an only child here but it's not reality. Ronnie, you have siblings and Aunts and Uncles. Your Mom and Dad are alive in them. Go see your relatives if you're so lonely. Go see your brother. Go see your sisters. My heart breaks for you but part of your isolation is self-inflicted. I worry that you enjoy the pain. I think maybe you like the drama. Actually, I think maybe you love the drama. You certainly love being the center of attention but maybe it's time to stop looking inward and start looking outward. My first acting teacher would always say, "get out of your own head and focus on the other actor." I thought it was great acting advice but it's really great life advice: "Get out of your own head and focus on the other actor." You spend way too much time in this apartment. I really think you need to get out of this apartment more often, Ronnie. That's my opinion.

RONNIE

Jean, we're done for today. Please don't discuss any of this with your son...please, or anyone for that matter...I'm asking you nicely.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (9)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Please, just honor your contract. Can you do that?

JEAN

I'll try.

RONNIE

Try harder. I don't want to fire my Mother. But I will. Have a good night.

JEAN

You can't fire your family, Ronnie. You're stuck with 'em. Whether you like...

Knock, knock, knock. She is interrupted by a a knock at the door. No one ever knocks on this door. It's weird.

JEAN (CONT'D)

You want me to open it?

RONNIE

Please, look thru the peephole first.

JEAN

Are you in hiding?

RONNIE

There's some really weird people in this building.

Knock knock. Jean looks thru the peephole.

JEAN

It's your father.

RONNIE

Clarence?

JEAN

Do you have more than one? Should I not open it?

RONNIE

We don't have anything scheduled and the contract specifically states actors may not show up unannounced for any reason.

JEAN

I thought that clause was especially cold.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (10)

RONNIE
It's called boundaries.

Knock, knock, knock.

JEAN
He has suitcases.

RONNIE
What?

JEAN
He has suitcases.

RONNIE
How many?

JEAN
Three. No. Four.

Ronnie goes to the door. Looks thru the peep hole. Opens the door.

RONNIE
Why do you have four suitcases?

CLARENCE
Can I come in?

RONNIE
Why do you have four suitcases?

CLARENCE
May I please come in?

RONNIE
One suitcase would make me very nervous
but four suitcases...

CLARENCE
Can I please come in. These things are
very heavy.

RONNIE
Clarence, you're making me very nervous
right now.

CLARENCE
I'm coming in.

RONNIE
Why do you have four suitcases?

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

It's everything I own. She kicked me out. She cut off my phone. She cancelled my bank cards. I've got 260 dollars in my wallet and that is it. She changed the locks. Where am I supposed to go? She said, "go live with your fake son."

RONNIE

You told her about me?

CLARENCE

She's my girlfriend. We've been together 6 years. I tell her everything.

RONNIE

Clarence, your contract specifically states...

CLARENCE

So sue me. I'm officially homeless. I have 260 dollars to my name. Sue me.

RONNIE

It also states that you must never come here unannounced.

CLARENCE

Seriously??? I'm your Dad for Pete's sake. I can't show up unannounced to my son's house???

JEAN

Clarence, why did she kick you out?

CLARENCE

(to Jean)

Because of you.

(to Ronnie)

Because of you. I tell her how much I enjoy the project. I tell her how much fun I have over here. I tell her how much I love my new son and my new wife. She's a very jealous person. Crazy jealous. She says I care more about my fake son than I do my stepson. But her son is not really my son. We've never really connected. Not the way you and I have. She said she's tired of supporting a deadbeat actor and a deadbeat Dad.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

We've been fighting a lot these past few months but the last few weeks have gotten really bad. I told her about the pancake scene. She said, "you can make pancakes for that creepy guy but not for your own stepson"? And when I got home tonight my suitcases were in the hallway. She's a very jealous person. I should never have told her about us. It's my fault. I screwed up.

RONNIE

You're absolutely right you shouldn't have told her. But both my "actor-parents" seem incapable of taking direction. No wonder neither of you ever work. I told you when we signed the contracts that you're not allowed to discuss the project with anyone, not your families, your friends or your spouses! No one. What is wrong with you guys? Your jobs are so simple...come over a few times a week, love me, go home and don't talk about it...how hard is that??? How can you guys be actors if you can't even take direction.

CLARENCE

Well I haven't worked for a while, I'm rusty.

RONNIE

(to Jean)

And what's your excuse?

CLARENCE

Jean, who did you tell?

JEAN

I don't wanna talk about it.

RONNIE

She told her son.

JEAN

And my son told my husband.

RONNIE

What???

CLARENCE

That's not good.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

And my husband told my sister. And my sister told my brother. And my brother told his son. And his son put it on Facebook. I'm really sorry.

RONNIE

Whose Facebook?

JEAN

His Facebook. My brother's son put it on his own Facebook...but he mentioned my name so it went on my Facebook, too. All my friends saw it. I was not happy. Hashtag crazyaunt.

RONNIE

Why are you telling me this, you should not be telling me this.

JEAN

I'm sorry. I can't keep secrets.

RONNIE

How many Facebook friends do you have?

JEAN

Not that many. Like 600. Less than 600.

RONNIE

How many friends does your son's brother have?

JEAN

My brother's son?

RONNIE

Your nephew. How many Facebook friends does your nephew have?

JEAN

I don't know...he's very cute.

RONNIE

How many?

JEAN

I don't know...he's very popular...he's class-President.

RONNIE

How many?

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (14)

JEAN
About 4,000.

RONNIE
"About 4,000?"

JEAN
Give or take a few hundred...

RONNIE
How many does he have?

JEAN
4700, I think.

RONNIE
I'm literally gonna kill my parents right now. People are gonna read about this in the paper tomorrow. "Depressed man kills fake parents."

CLARENCE
Fake news.

JEAN
I'm sorry, should I not have told you?

RONNIE
I don't know.

JEAN
I thought we were getting everything out in the open.

CLARENCE
What did your husband say?

JEAN
The same. Jealous. Very jealous. I made the mistake of telling him that you're a great Father. He didn't like that. He's not kicking me out or anything crazy like that but things are very tense now. He wants me to quit this project and I told him I'm not quitting.

RONNIE
No. Maybe he's right. Maybe that's a good idea. Let's take a break. I'll just go away to college or something and you two get divorced. End of story.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (15)

CLARENCE

Don't say that. Come on. We're a family.

RONNIE

Clarence, stop, seriously...maybe we should just go away, take a month off, let things cool down.

CLARENCE

And go where? I have 260 dollars. I'm basically homeless. Where do I go?

RONNIE

Well you can't stay here?

Jean and Clarence are shocked by the coldness. Silence.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Are you serious? You thought you would stay here.

CLARENCE

Just til I figure out what to do...son.

RONNIE

Absolutely not.

JEAN

Wow, that's cold. He's your Father.

RONNIE

He's your husband, he can move in with you. You adopt him. See how well that goes down with your other husband. I look forward to reading about that on Facebook. Hashtag couchsurfer, hashtag polygamy, hashtag divorce.

CLARENCE

Ronnie. Your Father was deeply religious, correct? You said he would do anything for anyone. If he were here right now and it was his house and I told him I had nowhere to go. What do you think he would do? I bet he'd let me sleep on his couch. I bet he'd say, "whatever you need." Just based on what you've told me about him.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

You always say, "My Dad was a saint, he would do anything for anyone." I bet if he were here right now and he saw the way you're speaking to me, I bet he'd be very disappointed in you, son. One of the ways we stay connected with our parents is by doing things the way they would want us to do them. What would your Dad tell you to do if he were here right now. Imagine his voice. Maybe we should pray about it.

JEAN

Yes, let's pray about it.

Jean and Clarence kneel.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Come on, Ronnie.

Ronnie reluctantly kneels. They all hold hands.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to you in this time of crisis as a family needing guidance. We ask you to open Ronnie's heart and remember what the Bible teaches us about "do unto others" and obeying thy Mother and thy Father. We pray that you will soften Ronnie's heart and that you will help our son decide the best path forward in this time of family crisis. We thank you for all of your bountiful blessings, dear Father. We love you and we strive to be like you in every way, every day. Amen

ALL ACTORS

Amen.

They all rise.

RONNIE

One night.

Ronnie goes to the bedroom.

JEAN

That was very manipulative of you. You're a very good actor. Good acting always excites me. Bravo.

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

I wasn't acting.

JEAN

Acting, manipulating, whatever. We have nothing to apologize for. You can only manipulate someone who wants to be manipulated. He's paying us to manipulate him. I was just doing my job. And helping you in the process. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. I haven't prayed in decades, you're lucky I remembered how. I thought the prayer was especially effective.

CLARENCE

I wasn't manipulating him. I was speaking from the heart. I think he felt closer to his Dad tonight. Just now when we were praying I felt a closeness I've never felt before with the two of you. Like a real family. It was nice, Jean. It was sweet. Did you feel it? Jean, sometimes I imagine how different my life would be if you were my real wife.

JEAN

Oh, stop.

CLARENCE

I'm serious. You're patient. You're loving. You're funny. You're tough. You're smart. You're honest. You're quite a looker. You're a perfect wife.

Suddenly he kisses her.

JEAN

And I'm married.

They kiss again.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Clarence. Stop. I can't. I'm married.

CLARENCE

You're married to me. Don't you remember our wedding day. In Pocatello, Idaho. You were so beautiful that day. And our honeymoon at Klamath Falls. Don't you remember our wedding night? How nervous we both were. Two virgins.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (18)

They kiss again.

JEAN

No, I really can't. I have to go. I'm married, Clarence. This isn't funny.

CLARENCE

Relax, relax relax...it's just improv...its character work...we're just rehearsing...it's just a stage kiss between two actors. It's not real. It's only for the project. We're just acting. The more we believe it, the more he'll believe it. We're just doing a job. It's work. It's rehearsal. Come on. He's sound asleep. The house is finally quiet. And you are so beautiful. Let's "rehearse".

They kiss again. Ronnie enters. He sees them kissing. They see him. They stop. All three are shocked. Ronnie has no idea know what to say.

RONNIE

I wanna watch Love Boat?

CLARENCE

Go back to bed, Ronnie. It's way past your bedtime. Go back to bed.

JEAN

Ronnie, please go back to bed.

RONNIE

Dad, can you tuck me in, please. Please. Like now!

Clarence and Ronnie go in the room.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

What is going on out there?

CLARENCE

I'm in love with my wife.

RONNIE

Your wife is already married, Clarence.

CLARENCE

"Dad". Not Clarence, "Dad".

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Clarence, Dad, you can not sleep with your wife. That is sick.

CLARENCE

We're just rehearsing...for the project...we want to be good parents for you.

RONNIE

You can rehearse without kissing.

CLARENCE

We want to be like real parents for you.

RONNIE

Then don't fall in love. If you guys fall in love you will destroy this entire family. She's married, she has a son. I need you both and if this project blows up and I lose my parents I'm holding you both responsible. Tell her good night and send her home. Please. Clarence, Dad, please. I'm begging you. Do not fall in love with your wife.

CLARENCE

Go to bed, son. You have school in the morning. It's your first day of kindergarten. You don't want to be late. Are you excited?

RONNIE

I'm not 5 years old right now.

CLARENCE

Yes, you are. Sit down, son.

Clarence sits. Pats the bed. Ronnie reluctantly sits on the bed and Clarence puts his arm around Ronnie. Clarence runs his hand thru Ronnie's hair. Pats his back.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Are you excited about your first day of kindergarten tomorrow?

RONNIE

(5 years old)

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

I remember my first day of kindergarten. I was so scared. Your Grandmother Larsen walked me to school and held my hand the whole way. As we got to the school I started crying and I couldn't stop crying. I was the only kid who was crying. The teachers and kids tried to comfort me but I couldn't stop crying. Your Grandma stayed with me for the first hour. I wouldn't let go of her hand. Finally, she said, "you have to let go. You have to let go." And she pulled her hand away and walked out the door. And when school was over I went outside and there she was waiting for me. I ran to her and I hugged her so hard. And she said, "you learned a very important lesson today, son." She said, "your Mother can't be with you all the time but she'll never leave you forever. At the end of the day, I will always be here for you. Always." And she was. Every day after school she was out there waiting for me. And now she's up in heaven, still waiting, waiting for us, and one day we'll all be together. You, me, your Mom, your Grandma, your Grandpa and Jesus.

Ronnie is deeply moved. Maybe crying.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Now go to bed, Ronnie. Go to bed. And remember this...

He tucks him in, he leans in close and whispers...

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

It's no fun being an Atheist. Goodnight, son.

Clarence turns off the light. Exits.

JEAN

What did he say?

CLARENCE

Nothing. He's fine. He said he overreacted. He apologized. He said it was a nice touch seeing his parents be affectionate with each other.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (21)

5

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

He said it would be a beautiful thing if we all lived here together like a real family. He said we make him very happy.

JEAN

Wow. Great. Okay.

CLARENCE

It would be a beautiful thing. Don't you think? Wouldn't you like to have a loving family?

JEAN

I have a family.

CLARENCE

A loving family. A husband who loves you unconditionally and a son who treats you with respect. Wouldn't your other son be happier with two parents who are really in love? Is your other husband a good Dad?

JEAN

I have to go.

Music Cue: Incidental Music

Clarence goes and gets blankets and pillows from a hall closet and makes a makeshift bed on the couch. Gets undressed down to a t-shirt and Spongebob boxers. Opens his suitcases. Unpacks all of his stuff and puts it all around the living room. His stuff is suddenly everywhere. He has taken over the living room. Then he goes out to the kitchen and gets a bowl, Apple Jacks cereal, milk and a spoon. He pours a bowl of cereal. Pours the milk and empties the carton. Puts it back in the fridge. Eats his cereal while wandering around looking at his new home. Finishes the cereal. Turns out the lights. Goes to bed.

Blackout

Music Cue: Good Morning Good Morning by The Beatles

6 SCENE: ANOTHER MORNING

6

Lights slowly up. Ronnie gets out of bed. Goes to the kitchen. Gets a bowl. Pours some cereal. Pours the milk. A few drops come out. He is very annoyed. Purveys the filthy living room. Even more annoyed. Clarence sits up.

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE
Hey, good morning.

RONNIE
You finished the milk.

CLARENCE
What?

RONNIE
You finished the milk.

CLARENCE
Oh, I did.

RONNIE
You did.

CLARENCE
Sorry.

RONNIE
I can't pour "sorry" on my cereal.

CLARENCE
I'll buy you some more.

RONNIE
With what money?

CLARENCE
Did someone wake up on the wrong side of
the bed?

RONNIE
My living room looks like Puerto Rico.

Jean bursts thru the door.

JEAN
Good morning! Rise and shine. I have
doughnuts.

CLARENCE
I'm starving.

JEAN
Good morning, darling.

Jean takes off her coat to reveal she has a huge stomach.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN (CONT'D)

Good morning, Ronnie, come give your Mother a hug. This is a big day. I have huge news.

RONNIE

What are you wearing?

JEAN

Come come, everyone sit down, I have a big announcement.

They all sit.

RONNIE

Jean, seriously, what are you wearing?

JEAN

Shhhhh...let's all hold hands.

(beat)

I'm pregnant.

CLARENCE

Yes!!!!

JEAN

I'm pregnant.

RONNIE

This isn't funny.

JEAN

It's not a joke, I'm pregnant. You're going to have a little brother.

CLARENCE

Another son, yes!!!!

RONNIE

This is not funny. I'm going back to bed.

JEAN

Oh, no, I just felt him kick.

Clarence plays along. Ronnie is not amused.

CLARENCE

I can feel him moving.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Ugh...he just kicked again. Ronnie, come here...don't be jealous...you'll always be our first born...come feel your brother...you can feel him moving...come here...

Ronnie is slowly softening. He realizes this could be a beautiful scene if he just gives in and goes with it. Slowly he goes over.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Touch right here. Very gently. Do you feel it? Do you want to listen?

She guides his head down to her stomach.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Do you hear him? Can you hear his heartbeat?

Ronnie is skeptical but softening. He sits up.

RONNIE

What's his name?

JEAN

Jay. We're naming him Jay. Ronnie, you're going to have a beautiful younger brother named Jay.

RONNIE

My brother Jay is 6 years older.

JEAN

So you're gonna have a beautiful older brother named Jay. Are you excited?

RONNIE

I am not.

CLARENCE

Don't be nervous. You two are going to be best friends. Our family is growing. Isn't that a beautiful thing, Ronnie.

RONNIE

No, it is not.

JEAN

He's jealous.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

I am not jealous.

JEAN

It's very natural to be jealous when you're the first born.

RONNIE

I wasn't the first born. He's 6 years older.

CLARENCE

There's no need to be jealous.

RONNIE

I'm not jealous.

JEAN

You and Jay are going to be best friends.

RONNIE

We actually didn't get along. He was 6 years older. I thought he ignored me and he thought I was annoying.

JEAN

Well now you get a second chance. A do-over. Isn't that nice?

CLARENCE

I think it's wonderful. I always wanted two boys.

RONNIE

And that was an interesting scene. I'm going back to bed now. Goodnight.

JEAN

(screaming)

Oh noooooooooo. Ahhhhhhhhh.

CLARENCE

What's wrong?

JEAN

(in great pain)

Aggggghhhhhhhhh. I think my water just broke. I need to go the hospital. Claire take me to the hospital. Ronnie you stay here and get everything ready. Ohhhhhh, it hurts...

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED: (5)

6

Ronnie is perplexed, amused but sort of over this scene.

JEAN (CONT'D)
Hurry, Claire, he's coming. I can feel
it. Aaaaagggghh.

They rush out the door. Ronnie is alone. He thinks. He looks around and thinks. Suddenly the door swings open. Jean, Clarence and some random guy, Actor Jay, appears with them.

JEAN (CONT'D)
Ronnie! Come meet your brother. This is
Jay!!!

All eyes on Ronnie.

RONNIE
Oh, hell no.

Blackout.

Song Happy Birthday to you.

7 SCENE: HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ACTOR JAY

7

In the darkness we hear the whole family singing Happy Birthday and lighting birthday candles.

Ronnie is in shock and detached.

JEAN AND CLARENCE
Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to
you, Happy Birthday dear Jay, Happy
Birthday to you.

CLARENCE
And Scooby Doo on channel 2 and
Frankenstein on channel 9...

JEAN
Enough, enough, make a wish and blow out
your candles...

Jay blows them all out! Clarence goes and turns on the lights.

CLARENCE
And don't tell anyone or it won't come
true.

(CONTINUED)

ACTOR JAY

I wished for a sister.

JEAN

Oh, Ronnie, wouldn't that be wonderful?

All eyes on Ronnie who does not say anything but his opinion is clear.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Ronnie?

RONNIE

It's not in the budget.

JEAN

Jay, do you want to open your present first or do you want to eat some cake?

ACTOR JAY

I want my present.

JEAN

Here you go. I think you're gonna be happy.

CLARENCE

Oh, he will be.

Actor Jay looks inside the gift bag. He is in shock. This is the happiest day of his life. He almost hyperventilates.

ACTOR JAY

No way!!!!!!!!!! I love you, I love you, I love you...

He pulls it out. It's an album...

ACTOR JAY (CONT'D)

Pink Floyd!!!!!!!!!! Yes!!! Yes!!! How did you know I wanted this. I love you guys.

CLARENCE

There's more!

Actor Jay pulls out another album.

ACTOR JAY

No way! Led Zeppelin?!?!? Yes!!!!!! Thank you, thank you, thank you! Ronnie, look, Led Zeppelin. Stairway to Heaven.

(CONTINUED)

Ronnie is so annoyed and jealous. He doesn't understand why his brother got two albums.

ACTOR JAY (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!!! This is the happiest day of my life!

CLARENCE

But, wait, there's more!

ACTOR JAY

No way!

He reaches in and takes out another album.

ACTOR JAY (CONT'D)

Sgt. Peppers!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Yes!!!!!!!!!!

RONNIE

Oh, no way! That is it! Seriously, three albums? I got one.

JEAN

Don't be jealous, Ronnie.

CLARENCE

Maybe when you turn 16 you'll get three albums, too. You never know.

RONNIE

This is not happening. Stop, stop, stop, I didn't hire you guys to try and make me jealous. This is ridiculous. And don't even think about giving me a receipt for those albums.

ACTOR JAY

Dude, chill out, it's my birthday. Why you gotta ruin everything.

RONNIE

You chill out.

ACTOR JAY

You chill out.

RONNIE

You chill out.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Stop, stop, stop we're not gonna fight today.

ACTOR JAY

Well he started it.

CLARENCE

Both of you, knock it off.

RONNIE

Tell him to knock it off.

CLARENCE

I did tell him. I just told you both. Knock it off.

RONNIE

He started it with "chill out, dude".

JEAN

Everybody stop. We are not fighting today. I'm sick of the fighting. Every time we try to do something as a family...I can't take the fighting...I just want us to have one nice day...

CLARENCE

Ronnie, do you like seeing your Mother upset? Are you happy now?

ACTOR JAY

Hey, Mom, I'm sorry. Don't cry. I love you. This is a great birthday.

CLARENCE

See, Ronnie, that's how you treat your Mother. Maybe when you're 16 you'll have a little maturity and not throw a jealous fit just cause someone gets something you don't have. You owe your brother and your Mother an apology.

Ronnie is super confused.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Well?

RONNIE

You want me to apologize?

(CONTINUED)

CLARENCE

Say you're sorry for ruining your
brother's birthday and for making your
Mother cry.

Ronnie is paralyzed.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

You're not getting any cake and ice cream
unless you apologize.

RONNIE

What flavor ice cream?

CLARENCE

It doesn't matter.

JEAN

Let's just drop it, please.

CLARENCE

No, we aren't dropping it.

Ronnie is silent.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Are you gonna apologize?

ACTOR JAY

Ronnie, just apologize.

Ronnie does not.

CLARENCE

Go to your room.

Ronnie goes to his room. The lights shift to his room. He
is experiencing a million emotions. Finally, Actor Jay
enters.

ACTOR JAY

Do you want to listen to Led Zeppelin.

RONNIE

No.

ACTOR JAY

Ok.

RONNIE

You know I didn't ask them to find a
brother for me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (5)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

When I started this project I wasn't counting on a brother. My brother is still alive. He lives in Reno. If I wanted to argue with my brother I could just fly to Reno.

ACTOR JAY

So why don't you?

RONNIE

Do you have a brother?

ACTOR JAY

Yeah, you.

RONNIE

No, seriously.

ACTOR JAY

You're my brother.

RONNIE

Forget it.

ACTOR JAY

You know I wanted you, right? When Mom told me I was gonna have a little brother I was so excited. I couldn't wait for you to get here. I use to hold you, and feed you, I even helped change your diaper. You were my best friend. I couldn't wait for you to grow up so we could play together, have adventures. I loved you, Ronnie. I still love you. I want us to be friends. But you're just cold to me. What did I do to make you hate me? Why can't we be friends?

RONNIE

I'm probably gonna fire you because I am way over budget on this project and it keeps getting more expensive by the day and I didn't do this project to reconnect with my brother I did it to reconnect with my parents. I'm sorry if that sounds cold but you're expendable. So I wouldn't get use to the paycheck.

ACTOR JAY

That's weird. My Mom said you wanted a family...not just a Mom and Dad.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

What do you mean, "My Mom said".

ACTOR JAY

I mean *our* Mom said. *Our* Mom.

RONNIE

But you said, "My Mom." You wouldn't say that, you'd say, "Mom" or "Our Mom", you wouldn't say, "My Mom" unless she was really your Mom.

ACTOR JAY

I meant "Our Mom".

RONNIE

I don't think you did. Is Jean really your Mom?

ACTOR JAY

No, I barely know her.

RONNIE

Where did she find you?

ACTOR JAY

From the casting place.

RONNIE

What "casting place."

ACTOR JAY

The place where the actors go.

RONNIE

What's your last name?

ACTOR JAY

That's *our* Mom.

RONNIE

Tell me your last name.

ACTOR JAY

Why does it matter?

RONNIE

Unbelievable.

Ronnie goes into the living room.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Mom, Jeanette, Jean...can you come in here, please?

Clarence is on the couch reading a paper.

CLARENCE

Are you ready to apologize?

RONNIE

You shut up. Jean, get in here, right now.

Clarence stands up.

CLARENCE

You can't talk that way to your Dad.

RONNIE

Shut up and sit down. I'm not playing.

Jean enters.

JEAN

What is going on in here?

RONNIE

Is this your real son?

JEAN

You're both my real sons.

RONNIE

I'm not playing. We aren't playing. We aren't acting right now. I'm serious. Is this your real son? The one you told me about? The one who told everyone on Facebook about...? The one who thinks I'm a creep.

ACTOR JAY

I don't think you're a creep.

RONNIE

I'm not talking to you.

JEAN

Ronnie, I don't like your tone.

RONNIE

Is this your real son?

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Why can't we have just one day without fighting.

RONNIE

Stop acting! Tell me the truth. Did you drag your own family into this project? Is this your real son?

JEAN

Yes. That is my real son.

ACTOR JAY

But I don't think you're creepy. I really don't. I think this is a really cool project. And for the record, I didn't tell anyone on Facebook. I told my cousin and he told everyone on Facebook.

RONNIE

This is a mess.

JEAN

This is a family. You got what you wanted. You got a family. I know you're feeling a lot of things right now, Ronnie, but I bet one thing you're not feeling is lonely. Am I right? So be grateful. Families are unpredictable. That's what makes them exciting. I thought having your brother would shake things up and I was right. You're shaken. That's a good thing. You should be thanking me. You're no longer focusing on yourself you're focusing on the other actor. You're getting out of your head.

RONNIE

My head is spinning.

JEAN

That's a good thing. It means you're alive. And you're surrounded by people who love you. Be happy. Just stay in the moment. Trust your scene partners. That's what we work on in acting class. I need you to trust me. I have something very important to tell you. There's something we need to discuss.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (9)

JEAN (CONT'D)

Can we please sit down, calmly, as a family and discuss something. Come on.

They all sit at the table.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Ronnie, I need you stay calm. Please. I can't take anymore fighting. Will you please stay calm.

RONNIE

Please don't tell me your pregnant again.

JEAN

With twins.

(beat)

I'm kidding. No. I'm not pregnant. I'm in love. I've fallen in love with your Father.

CLARENCE

We've been afraid to tell you.

RONNIE

Are we acting now or is this real cause I'm very confused.

JEAN

Ok, I'm speaking as Jean now, not Jeanette. I'm speaking as the actress on your payroll. I'm not your Mother right now I'm your employee. Here's what's going on. Over the past few months my husband and I...

RONNIE

Your real husband.

JEAN

Correct.

RONNIE

The one I haven't met.

JEAN

Correct. My real husband. His real Dad. Since I started this project things have become increasingly strained at our house.

ACTOR JAY

My Dad's a very jealous person.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Jay, let me talk, his Dad's a very jealous person. And things have been going downhill for a while, way before this project...this project just brought everything to a head because I forgot what it was like to live in a house full of love. You gave me that gift, Ronnie. You reminded me how nice it is to come home and feel love. You've been paying me to love you but you've been loving me in return. And Clarence is such a good Father. This family. This is what I want.

CLARENCE

Me, too.

They all look at Jay.

ACTOR JAY

I just got here but it seems cool. I always wanted a younger brother.

RONNIE

I'm 48.

JEAN

Ronnie, three weeks ago we moved in with my sister. Just til we figured out what to do. But it's not a long term solution. I was thinking that it might be really nice for all of us if...maybe...just think about it...what if all four of us lived here together. I would be a stay at home Mom. Clarence could go on auditions. Jay is in school. We could be a real family. Under one roof. What do you think? Your Dad and I will take the bedroom and you and your brother can share the fold-out couch. It'll be cozy. We'll all be so close. No loneliness, no isolation. What do you think?

CLARENCE

I think it sounds awesome.

ACTOR JAY

I can sleep anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

We love you, Ronnie?

CLARENCE

Your Mom and Dad love you very much.

JEAN

What do you think?

RONNIE

I'm just really confused. Before you all showed up I was so lonely. I had a huge hole inside of me. Now I never think about that hole and I never feel lonely but I'm always on edge...nervous...I miss being alone. I miss the quiet. I miss my living room. I miss my money. You guys are very expensive. I don't know what I want anymore. Every day is a mystery with you people. I never know what's gonna happen next. It's exciting. But exhausting. I keep waiting for you to walk in here with my two sisters Kathy and Debbie and our family dog, Sagebrush. I just can't take anymore surprises.

ACTOR JAY

You named your family dog Sagebrush?

Knock, knock, knock.

They all jump. Look at the door. Look at each other.

Knock, knock, knock.

ACTOR JAY (CONT'D)

Is someone gonna answer that?

RONNIE

No.

From off stage a voice says:

REAL JAY

Ronnie, you in there?

Ronnie is in shock. Goes to the door. Opens it.

REAL JAY (CONT'D)

Surprise!!!!!!

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

What are you doing here???

REAL JAY

I'm here for a conference. I wanted to surprise you.

RONNIE

That's crazy. Is Evelyn here?

REAL JAY

No, she had to work.

RONNIE

Wow. That's amazing. Come in. Come in.

REAL JAY

Dude, your house is a mess.

RONNIE

I know, I'll explain later.

Real Jay sees the other people.

REAL JAY

Oh, hey, did I interrupt? I can come back later.

ALL ACTORS

No, no, no...join us...come on in...

RONNIE

Uh, Jay, these are...uh...my friends.

JEAN

Hi, I'm Jeanette.

REAL JAY

Oh, cool, beautiful name, that's our Mom's name.

JEAN

Nice to meet you.

CLARENCE

And I'm Claire.

REAL JAY

Claire? Are you serious? Are you guys joking? Is this a joke?

(to Actor Jay, half-joking)

So you must be...Jay, right?

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (13)

ACTOR JAY
Hi, nice to meet you.

REAL JAY
No, really, what's your name?

ACTOR JAY
Jay.

REAL JAY
Jay?

ACTOR JAY
Jay.

REAL JAY
(to Ronnie, confused)
Jay?

RONNIE
Jay, that's really his name. Jay meet
Jay.

REAL JAY
Hi, Jay. I'm Jay. Well I feel right at
home now. Where are Kathy and Debbie?

RONNIE
Do you want something to drink?

REAL JAY
(looking around)
Do you all live here?

RONNIE
No.

CLARENCE
Yes.

ACTOR JAY AND JEAN
Hopefully.

REAL JAY
Dude, what is going on here?

RONNIE
It's complicated. Guys, why don't you go
get some food so I can have some alone
time with my brother. Here, take my
debit card.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY
Your debit card?

RONNIE
You know the code.

REAL JAY
Why do they know the code?

ACTOR JAY
Actually, can I stay? I really want to hear this conversation.

RONNIE
No. Go. Now. Gimme an hour. Please. Go.

They all go. Jean pops back in.

JEAN
Don't fight, boys.

RONNIE
Jean, please.

They are alone. Real Jay is looking around. Fixes his stare on Ronnie. Ronnie is experiencing a million emotions. Deeply embarrassed.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
So where are you staying?

REAL JAY
Well, I thought I'd stay with you. I assumed you still lived alone. You didn't mention on Facebook that you're running a homeless shelter for people with really ironic names.

RONNIE
They aren't homeless. Well two of them are homeless. One lives here.

REAL JAY
Which one.

RONNIE
Claire.

REAL JAY
The older guy?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Yep.

REAL JAY

So weird. I've waited my whole life to meet another man named Claire, besides Dad, but I didn't expect it to be in your living room this afternoon.

RONNIE

His birth name is Clarence. Claire is short for Clarence.

REAL JAY

How does he spell it?

RONNIE

Clarence?

REAL JAY

Claire?

RONNIE

I really don't know...you'd have to ask him...so where are you staying?

REAL JAY

I have a room downtown but I thought it would be more fun to stay here. I've missed you. We haven't been in the same room since Dad's funeral. Can you believe it? That's horrible.

RONNIE

I agree.

REAL JAY

The time flies by.

RONNIE

It really does.

REAL JAY

It'd be nice if we were on the same coast.

RONNIE

It really would be.

Ronnie gets emotional. Jay gives him a hug.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY

Dude, dude, dude...what is going on here?

RONNIE

I miss you so much. I miss Mom. I miss Dad. I miss Kathy and Debbie. I miss Sagebrush. I miss our family.

The continue to hug. After a while. They step apart.

REAL JAY

What is going on here?

RONNIE

It's sick. It's really sick. I'm deeply embarrassed. You wouldn't believe it. I just wasn't doing well. I was deeply depressed. I needed a family. They're actors. I hired them to be my family. They're just supposed to come in a few times a week and do nice family stuff and get paid. Just like an acting job. But it got messy. My Mom and Dad starting falling in love. My brother showed up unannounced. Not you, well, yes, you showed up unannounced but my other brother showed up unannounced, too. The guy playing you. He wasn't part of the plan. He was an unwanted pregnancy. Well my Mom wanted it, I didn't want it. She just showed up and she was pregnant, I thought she was joking, I didn't know what to do, she gave birth in the hallway. It just got out of control. And very expensive. They're wonderful actors but their lives are a mess. They have no money. And they can't take direction. But they helped me a lot. They really did. Things got a lot less lonely around here but it's just out of control now and I don't know what to do.

REAL JAY

Do you want me to get rid of them for you?

RONNIE

No, it's not like that.

REAL JAY

Just change your locks.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (17)

RONNIE

They have nowhere to go.

REAL JAY

That's not your problem.

RONNIE

I think I love them. On some level I think maybe I love them. I know...it's really weird.

REAL JAY

It's really weird.

RONNIE

Please don't judge me.

REAL JAY

Well, it's really weird. How much do you even pay them?

RONNIE

It doesn't matter.

REAL JAY

It matters to me, I wanna know.

RONNIE

It's not important.

REAL JAY

Dad saved his whole life to give his kids a good inheritance and you're throwing it away on a bunch of homeless actors? That's crazy. How much have you spent?

RONNIE

Too much.

REAL JAY

This is crazy. They have to go.

RONNIE

Stop it. It's not about them. It's about me. I made this mess. I wanted a family.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY

Yeah, well you're crazy, too...I can't imagine how much money you've spent on this...what do you even call it...therapy...performance art...emotional prostitution...I'm sure it's not cheap.

RONNIE

It's not.

REAL JAY

Well, you could have used some of your money to send your nieces a few Christmas presents once every few years, you could have flown out for Sasha's graduation.

RONNIE

And you could have flown out here, too...why do I always have to be the one to travel.

REAL JAY

I'm here now.

RONNIE

You're here for work, you're not here to see me.

REAL JAY

Then why am I in your living room? I'm here for work and to see you. Don't lecture me about travel. Who do you think racked up the most miles every time Mom was back in the hospital. Let's add up those miles. Plus I have two kids. You just have you. I have a full time job. I can't just fly around the country visiting family. I get three weeks off a year if I'm lucky. My house is always open to you. A round trip to Reno is 500 bucks. If I'd known how bad things were I would have bought you a ticket, myself. Heck, you can move in if you want. I've got an empty room. I didn't know you were miserable, Ronnie, I'm sorry. You make everything on Facebook seem so happy.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Everybody does that. No one wants to hear about a middle-aged guy wandering the yarn department at Wal-Mart cause it reminds him of his Mother.

REAL JAY

You do that?

RONNIE

Sometimes.

REAL JAY

Wow. Me, too.

RONNIE

No, you don't.

REAL JAY

I do. Mom had so much yarn. Yarn and romance novels. Ya know after Dad died I changed my shaving cream to Barbasol because that was his brand and it makes me feel close to him when I shave. I do a lot of little things like that. I've never told you this but I write letters to Dad all the time. I write them. I seal them. I put a stamp on them, I file them away...I picture him reading them. Is that weird? After Mom died I thought I'd have Dad around for another 20 years. Grandma lived to be 92. Dad was in great health. You know he still jogged every morning.

RONNIE

I know.

REAL JAY

Everybody was devastated, not just you. I still cry a lot. I never met anyone who lost a parent and said, "oh, it's no big deal." You never really get over it. It's just something that stays with you and you accept it but the pain's always there. It reminds you to keep loving the people who are still here. But you don't hire a bunch of actors to pretend to be your family. That's insane. You gotta get rid of these people. Come to Reno.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

I don't know.

REAL JAY

How long have you been doing this...what do you even call it?

RONNIE

The project. I call it the project.

REAL JAY

And how long have you been doing "The Project".

RONNIE

A while.

REAL JAY

How did you even find them?

RONNIE

It's a long story.

The three actors return and open the door.

ALL ACTORS

Knock knock. Hey. Too soon?

They all enter. No one says anything for a while.

RONNIE

How was lunch?

ACTOR JAY

It was good.

REAL JAY

How much was it?

JEAN

Are we supposed to answer that?

REAL JAY

Did you leave a big generous tip with my brother's money?

RONNIE

Jay, please don't.

CLARENCE

Here's your debit card.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (21)

RONNIE

Thanks.

No one speaks for a long time.

REAL JAY

Well this is awkward.

(beat)

Just like a real family. They're very good actors.

JEAN

I don't like you.

RONNIE

Jean, please.

JEAN

Are you just gonna let him disrespect your Mother?

REAL JAY

Is she for real?

RONNIE

Can we please not do this?

REAL JAY

Ronnie, you know this is creepy, right?

RONNIE

Can we all just be respectful, please?

REAL JAY

Is it respectful for you to be taking my brother for a ride?

RONNIE

They aren't taking me for a...

JEAN

A ride??? Do you know how bad your brother was before we started this project? He said he thought about throwing himself out the window. We saved your brother. You should be thanking us.

RONNIE

Jean...

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY

Is that true...were you suicidal?

RONNIE

For the last time, Jean, you signed a non-disclosure agreement...

REAL JAY

You have signed contracts with these people?

JEAN

Your brother wanted to throw himself out the window? Where were you then? Updating your Facebook with pictures of your lunch?

REAL JAY

I don't post pictures of my lunch on Facebook.

ACTOR JAY

No, you just post pictures of robots. You barely even post pictures of your family just robots, robots, robots...

RONNIE

How do you know he puts robots on Facebook.

REAL JAY

What's wrong with putting robots on Facebook?

RONNIE

Are you following my family on Facebook.

JEAN

It's called research. When you play a real person you're supposed to research them.

REAL JAY

They just get creepier and creepier. Is this our family or the Addams Family?

ACTOR JAY

It's not creepy to follow someone on Facebook. I'm playing you and I wanna do a good job. What's the big deal? If you don't like it you can change your settings to private.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY

You don't think it's creepy that your fake family are spying on your real family on Facebook?

JEAN

The point is you should spend less time on Facebook posting pictures of robots and more time on the phone with your brother. If your parents knew this was the first time you two have been in the same room since your Dad's funeral they would be incredibly disappointed in both of you boys?

REAL JAY

Lady, you don't know anything about me or my parents. I use to call him all the time. He never picked up. He always had some excuse. Tell 'em, Ronnie, back me up. I did call you.

RONNIE

Can we all just be civil...

REAL JAY

I called you so many times...you know I did...Evelyn called you...you almost never picked up...for the first year after our Mom died our Dad called all his kids every week...and Ronnie almost never picked up...Dad use to call me and say, "I wish Ronnie would pick up his darned phone. I worry about him." Ronnie, tell them that's not true.

CLARENCE

Why didn't you take my calls?

REAL JAY

He became a really crappy son. Let's be honest. After Mom died you turned your back on Dad. You turned your back on the family. You stopped communicating. Nobody knew why. Dad didn't know why.

RONNIE

I didn't turn my back on anyone. I was deeply depressed.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY

And you were loving your depression. You embraced it. Instead of focusing on the people who are alive and who love you you put all your focus on mourning Mom.

CLARENCE

Were you depressed when I died?

RONNIE

Not as much.

CLARENCE

Well that hurts me.

REAL JAY

You were never as close to Dad as you were to Mom. That's why I don't understand why you hired this guy. I sort of understand you hiring a Mother but you weren't even that close to Dad. Why hire a Dad? You and Dad loved each other but...

CLARENCE

You said you wanted your Dad back. You said we were really close.

RONNIE

We were really close. But not as close as Jay and Dad. It was an open secret that Dad loved you the most.

REAL JAY

I would agree with that.

ACTOR JAY

Is that why you were so jealous when Mom had me.

JEAN

Did you want to be an only child?

CLARENCE

He loved you. You said they gave you Saturday Night Fever for your birthday and you said it was the happiest day of your life.

REAL JAY

Saturday Night Fever? No one in our house had Saturday Night Fever.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY (CONT'D)

That was one of your biggest fights. You wanted to see the movie but it was rated R and they wouldn't let you see it so you begged them for the album and they wouldn't give it to you. Dad said, "if you're too young to see the movie you're too young to have the album."

RONNIE

That's simply not true.

REAL JAY

Can you picture Mom and Dad at the record store buying Saturday Night Fever.

RONNIE

I'm telling you they bought me Saturday Night Fever. You weren't even there.

REAL JAY

There is no way my parents went out and bought Saturday Night Fever for anyone.

RONNIE

They bought it for me.

JEAN

Kid's, let's just agree to disagree.

REAL JAY

Did you just call me "kid"?

CLARENCE

What about the water? Did your Dad throw water in your face to wake you up?

RONNIE

Okay, enough.

CLARENCE

I want to know.

REAL JAY

I was the oldest. He threw water in my face and said, "You're the oldest. Set an example. Get up. Get your siblings up." I was the one who got the water in the face then the other kids jumped out of bed. He used me to scare them.

CLARENCE

Is that true?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

He absolutely did throw water in my face.

REAL JAY

When?

RONNIE

Many times. Sunday mornings.

JEAN

Have we been acting out lies? I thought it was all real. I thought we were a real family. Not a fantasy family. Did they watch the Love Boat? Six Million Dollar Man? Is any of it true?

REAL JAY

The Love Boat??? Nobody in our house watched The Love Boat. We didn't watch anything cause we didn't have a TV.

ACTOR JAY

You didn't have a TV? How is that possible?

REAL JAY

Tell 'em what happened to the TV.

RONNIE

Of course we had a TV.

REAL JAY

No, we didn't. My sister Debbie was crazy. She use to chase us around the house with a baton. She would throw this baton at us. My Dad bought us our first TV and on day one her baton went right thru the screen. So we got another TV and after a week it happened again so my Dad said, "oh well, no more TV in this house" and that was it.

RONNIE

Jay, that's just not true. Debbie broke the TV like a year after we got it.

REAL JAY

No she did not, it happened on the first day.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

I remember watching Love Boat with Mom and Dad.

REAL JAY

You never watched Love Boat with Mom and Dad because even if we had a TV Mom and Dad would never have let you watch Love Boat. I had to watch it at Byron's house and Dad found out and called Byron's Dad and said, "please don't let Jay watch Love Boat at your house. That show doesn't share our values."

RONNIE

Oh, that's ridiculous. That's the first time I've even heard that story.

REAL JAY

There is no way you watched Love Boat with Mom and Dad.

JEAN

Well you can't both be right.

ACTOR JAY

My money's on Jay.

CLARENCE

Do you two ever agree on anything?

RONNIE

Not much.

REAL JAY

That's not true, we agree on things all the time.

RONNIE

Almost never.

REAL JAY

That's not true. We agree all the time.

RONNIE

When?

REAL JAY

Always.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Never. Tell me the last time we agreed on anything.

REAL JAY

We're both Agnostic.

RONNIE

Actually, I'm an Atheist.

REAL JAY

When did that change?

RONNIE

After Trump got elected.

REAL JAY

And we both hate Trump.

RONNIE

That's true, we both hate Trump.

JEAN

What's wrong with Trump?

CLARENCE

He's draining the swamp.

REAL JAY

Oh no. Seriously? Did you know they were Republican when you cast them?

RONNIE

No, actually. You're Republicans? Seriously? You didn't put that on your resumé's.

REAL JAY

Perfect casting. You cast real Republicans. Mom and Dad would be so proud.

ACTOR JAY

Actually, I'm Libertarian.

REAL JAY

Of course you are.

JEAN

Did your family actually bake cakes together? Is that true?

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (29)

REAL JAY

Yes.

RONNIE

Yes.

JEAN

Did you all pray together?

REAL JAY

Yes.

RONNIE

Yes.

JEAN

Did you all fight a lot?

REAL JAY

Yes.

RONNIE

A lot.

JEAN

Okay, so some of it's true and some of it isn't.

RONNIE

It's not important what's true. It's not an autobiography. It's about what I wanted to feel, okay. I hired you all to make me feel things that I wanted to feel. You did your jobs. That's all you need to know. You're not entitled to the truth. You're just actors. I'm the writer. Just act.

(to Jay)

And you were 6 years older, Jay. You don't know everything that happened in the house. You're not the expert on our family history. You couldn't even stand being home, you were gone all the time, and you had that full-time job at Pizza Hut.

REAL JAY

Domino's. Part-time.

RONNIE

Jay, you worked at Pizza Hut on Oswell. We use to come visit you there.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (30)

REAL JAY

There was no Pizza Hut on Oswell it was on Fairfax.

RONNIE

Ok, whatever. You delivered pizza.

REAL JAY

I didn't deliver pizza, I made pizzas.

RONNIE

I can't argue anymore. I can't, I'm done. Every time we get together.

JEAN

(to Real Jay)

And, Jay, were you really the first born? Is that much accurate?

RONNIE

Yes.

REAL JAY

Yes.

JEAN

Good, you agree on that, and then Ronnie was born?

REAL JAY

No. Kathy. Our sister Kathy was next.

JEAN

And then your Mom had Ronnie?

RONNIE

Yes.

REAL JAY

(to Ronnie)

"Yes"? Really??? "Mom *had* you next?"

RONNIE

(stern, to Jay)

Yes. Really. Mom *had* me next.

JEAN

I thought Debbie was the youngest.

RONNIE

She is.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (31)

REAL JAY
So you didn't tell them everything?

CLARENCE
Tell us what?

REAL JAY
Why didn't you tell them?

JEAN
Tell us what?

RONNIE
I don't think it's important.

REAL JAY
You don't think it's important?

JEAN
It sounds very important.

REAL JAY
Do you want me to tell them?

RONNIE
I don't care anymore.

REAL JAY
Ronnie was adopted. Jeanette wasn't his birth Mother. Our Mom couldn't have any more babies after Kathy but she wanted four kids so we adopted Ronnie and Debbie from two different Moms and all we know is that Ronnie's birth Mother got pregnant at 14 and she gave him up for adoption and he spent 6 months in foster care til we brought him home. I actually picked him out. We chose him. We wanted him. He was loved. He never talked about wanting to find his real Mother.

RONNIE
Cause I consider the woman who raised me to be my "real Mom".

REAL JAY
Okay, fine, his birth Mother. But I always felt...and I've never told him this but I think Ronnie always felt deep down, on some real deep level, that he'd been discarded. Abandoned. Rejected.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Chosen. I prefer to focus on the fact that I was chosen. I try not to focus on my birth Mother. I loved the woman who raised me. I loved her very much. End of story.

JEAN

But it's not the end of the story because she might still be out there.

CLARENCE

Aren't you curious about your birth Mother a little?

RONNIE

No.

REAL JAY

Not true, he's a lot curious. But he's afraid they won't like each other. You're afraid of being rejected a second time.

RONNIE

I'm not afraid of...

REAL JAY

Then open the letter.

JEAN

What letter?

CLARENCE

Did I miss something?

ACTOR JAY

I'm really confused.

RONNIE

Okay, I think we're done.

JEAN

No, I'm intrigued.

CLARENCE

What letter?

REAL JAY

Open the letter.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

What is the point of this, Jay?

CLARENCE

What letter?

REAL JAY

He has a letter from his birth Mother but he won't open it. He might have siblings. A Dad. He may not need you guys. He might have a whole second family waiting for him.

ACTOR JAY

Well technically a third family, we're the second family.

REAL JAY

The fake family. Ronnie, you might have another real family out there waiting for you but you won't open the letter.

CLARENCE

What is this letter?

REAL JAY

The way that it works, correct me if I'm wrong...the way that the adoption worked is that when the kid reaches 18 the birth Mother is allowed to send a letter telling the agency how the child can contact her but the child has to send their own letter and once both letters arrive in the office the agency forwards the Mom's letter to the child. Am I right?

RONNIE

Jay, you're always right.

JEAN

So you have the letter?

RONNIE

No. My younger sister, Debbie, was also adopted but from a different Mother. She went to the agency in person with her letter but there was no letter waiting for her.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

But the guy at the desk said, "does your brother want to meet his birth Mother?" She asked him if there was a letter for me and they said we can't tell you, he has to contact us himself. I thought it was weird for him to say that so I called him up and asked him if he had a letter for me and he said, "I can't tell you, you have to send a letter." So I did. I sent a letter and a week later I received a letter from my birth Mother and I chose not to open it. And that's it. End of story.

JEAN

Why?

CLARENCE

Yes, why?

ACTOR JAY

I'm just super confused.

JEAN

Why not open it? You might have another Mother out there waiting for you.

REAL JAY

Do you still have the letter.

RONNIE

I don't have the letter. I threw it away. I didn't want another Mother.

REAL JAY

No, you prefer to pay for love from a homeless out of work actress who voted for Trump.

JEAN

Your brother is incredibly rude. You wanna talk about Hillary?

ACTOR JAY

Let's talk about Benghazi.

CLARENCE

Let's talk about the e-mails.

ACTOR JAY

Let's talk about Benghazi.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Let's talk about the Clinton foundation.

CLARENCE

Let's talk about the fact that they killed Vince Foster and got away with it.

ACTOR JAY

Let's talk about Benghazi.

REAL JAY

Let's talk about the fact that the three people you hired to play our family are clinically insane.

RONNIE

Can we be nice, please?

JEAN

If you were my son I would never allow you to talk that way to me.

REAL JAY

But I'm not your son so shut it.

JEAN

Well if your real Mother allowed you to talk that way to her I guess she really wasn't much of a Mother at all.

The room goes silent. A line has been crossed.

JEAN (CONT'D)

I feel like I understand your Mother's soul after playing her all these months...and knowing what I know about her and what a wonderful woman she was...I can't imagine how a sweet woman like her felt knowing that her only sons grew up to be Atheist's and Democrats. My heart breaks for her. She must have been so disappointed in you kids when she died?

The room goes silent again.

RONNIE

Jean. I have some very bad news for you. You have stage 4 cancer.

REAL JAY

Yes!!! Awesome!

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

It's spreading fast. We're moving you into hospice today. Go to the bedroom, please. You only have an hour to live.

Jean is in shock, annoyed. She is not happy but she goes in to the bedroom and lies down.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Jay, congratulations, you're going away to college. You can wait for your ride in the lobby. I'll call an Uber for you. Good luck with your studies. And finally, Dad, good news, you're going on a trip. I'm moving you into a hotel tonight while I book you a two week cruise to Alaska. Unfortunately, at the end of the cruise you will have a sudden heart attack and die.

CLARENCE

I'm not coming back?

RONNIE

No. But you'll die a very happy man. Alaska is beautiful. Please pack up and get ready for your trip. I'll call an Uber for you, too. Please wait in the lobby.

CLARENCE

That's not cool.

Ronnie looks at his brother and heads into the bedroom. He sits down next to her and takes her hand.

JEAN

Can I just say one thing.

RONNIE

No, you may not. You're in hospice. You're very weak. Your breathing is very heavy. You fade in and out of consciousness. One by one your kids gather around to say goodbye.

He sits and watches her, holding her hand.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

You were a great Mom. You were a perfect Mom. I'm gonna think of you every day. I love you so much.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for everything. The last words she said to me were, "I need you to...believe...so we can all be together again one day."

JEAN

(struggling)

I need you...to...believe...so we can...all...be together again one day.

Ronnie kisses her goodbye. Jeanette quietly dies. Ronnie stands up and moves to the door. He opens the door for her to go. Jean sits up. Looks at him. Sad...angry...she loves him...she needs the job...it's complicated.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Is it fun being an Atheist? Do you enjoy it? My heart breaks for you, Ronnie. There is a God. Your parents are waiting for you in heaven. It's not what I believe it's what I know. Your parents are watching you right now. They're still loving you. They're still hoping you believe. They're still praying for you. They're together right now and they're happy and they look forward to the day when you and your siblings are reunited and your whole family is together again. It's going to be beautiful, trust me.

RONNIE

Anything else?

JEAN

Are you offering any kind of severance package here because I'm really short on funds this week and that would really...

RONNIE

No.

(beat)

Anything else?

JEAN

I'm gonna miss you, Ronnie.

RONNIE

And anything else?

JEAN

I hope you find what you're looking for.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE
Take care, Jean.

She leaves. Ronnie and his brother are the only ones left behind.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
All gone.

REAL JAY
I love you, Ronnie.

RONNIE
I know you do. I love you, too. You're a great brother. You're a complicated brother, you're an argumentative brother, but you're a great brother. And I know you love me.

REAL JAY
Do you want company tonight or...?

RONNIE
I don't know. I think I need a night to myself. Is that okay?

REAL JAY
Absolutely.

RONNIE
When do you fly back?

REAL JAY
Friday.

RONNIE
Do you mind if I go with for a few weeks.

REAL JAY
I would love it. Do you need me to pay for the ticket? Do you have any money left?

RONNIE
Barely. But I think I can swing it.

REAL JAY
Your nieces would love to see you.

RONNIE
Okay. It's a deal.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY
You gonna be okay?

RONNIE
Yep.

They hug.

REAL JAY
I love you, crazy man.

RONNIE
See you tomorrow.

Real Jay leaves.

Ronnie sits, exhausted. Stares forward.

He goes off stage. Gets a bowl, a spoon, a gallon of milk and a box of Apple Jacks. He sits. He pours. He begins to eat. He is finally alone again. He stares forward expressionless. The only sound in the theater is the sound of his cereal crunching. The whole audience should hear that crunching breaking the silence. The audience aren't sure if Ronnie feels peaceful or empty and neither does he.

Suddenly there is a knock at the door. He freezes. He is both terrified and relieved. He goes to the door. Answers it. His brother, Real Jay, is there.

REAL JAY
Did you miss me?

RONNIE
(amused, sarcastic, sincere)
Very much.

REAL JAY
Ronnie, I need to tell you something.

Real Jay enters.

REAL JAY (CONT'D)
I need to tell you something I've never told you. It's something I don't talk about it with anyone. I haven't told Debbie or Kathy or even Evelyn or my kids...but after today...I feel I owe it to you.

There is a long awkward suspenseful silence.

(CONTINUED)

REAL JAY (CONT'D)

I still talk to Dad. We talk about once a week. And I don't mean like I imagine what he would say if I asked him questions. I mean I literally talk to Dad like we're talking right now. I close the door. I turn off my computer and the phone and the TV...I put the dogs in the backyard...I make sure the house is empty...and I sit and I wait and I listen...I really listen...and he starts to talk me...sometimes he doesn't show up for an hour...so I just wait...but eventually he always arrives and we always talk...I can feel him in the room, so strong. So loud. Ronnie, I know he's still alive. I know there's something more. I know it sounds crazy. But it's true. I know it. I know it.

Silence. Ronnie isn't sure what to say.

RONNIE

Do you talk to Mom?

More silence, Jay doesn't want answer.

REAL JAY

No.

Ronnie is incredibly confused and sad by this.

RONNIE

Why?

Jay is also confused and sad by this.

REAL JAY

I don't know.

Ronnie doesn't know what Jay's "I don't know means" and he is afraid to ask. There is another long, painful silence. Maybe they hug. Maybe they just stand there and think...but they are suddenly both closer and farther apart than they've ever been before.

REAL JAY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go, okay. But I love you. And I'm here for you. And that's it.

They hug one last time.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (41)

RONNIE

Jsy, can you tell Dad I miss him.

REAL JAY

He knows.

Real Jay leaves. Ronnie shuts the door.

Ronnie is shaken.

He's still an Atheist.

But he is shaken.

He is alone on stage.

He exhales.

After a while, he goes off. He comes back with a sealed envelope. He stares at it. He opens the envelope. He removes a letter. He reads it. He takes out his phone. Dials a number.

RONNIE

(on phone)

Uhhh...hi...my name is Ronnie Larsen and I'm calling for...ummmm...this is too weird to leave on a voicemail so I'm gonna call this other work number I have for you.

He hangs up. Waits. Thinks. Nervous. Dials another number.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Uhhh...hi...yes...I'm calling for Cindy Stover...she gave me this work number...is she still working...could I?...great...yes...no problem...thank you...I'll wait...

He waits. Trying to remain calm.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Uh...hi...ummmm...is this Cindy Stover...hi...um...my name is Ronnie Larsen and I'm the son you gave away for adoption 48 years ago...

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (42)

7

His Mother screams with joy on the other line. Ronnie reacts...laughing, fighting back tears...

RONNIE (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Yep...that's me...I got your letter from the adoption agency...yep...I liked the part right here where you say, "we celebrate your birthday every year and your sisters know they have a brother out there, somewhere, waiting to meet them. We hope and pray that one day we will all be reunited and be a complete family again." That's incredibly sweet.

He listens while she talks and talks...he nods his head.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Yep.

(listens)

Yep.

Music Cue: I Never Can Say Goodbye

RONNIE (CONT'D)

(listens)

Absolutely.

(listens)

I would love that.

The lights begin to fade black as the music plays and Ronnie listens to his Mother talk with a huge smile on his face.

Black Out.

Music continues to play thru the curtain call and as the audience exits.