

“LOTTERY PLAY”

A PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 80 MINUTES

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## **SUMMARY**

What would happen if you won the lottery and then lost the lottery and then won the lottery again...all on the same card?

Bob Sherman is the owner of a small carpet cleaning business which is long on laughs and short on profit. After Bob scratches off a winning state lottery card, he prepares to claim the big prize, but a mishap destroys the card, spurring schemes of desperation. When a way appears to revive the card back to life, Bob and his family must reconcile if winning it all is truly the American Dream.

And what happens next is anyone's luck.

## **CHARACTERS (4M, 3F)**

BOB SHERMAN, 64 to the day

AGNES SHERMAN, early 60s, Bob's Wife

NATHAN SHERMAN, early 20s, Bob's nephew

GUNTHER, 40s

NORMAN, 40s

VOICES, RISE & WHINE, two radio announcers, female

## **TIME**

Memorial Day weekend.

## **SETTING**

A carpet cleaning warehouse, Minneapolis.

## **SCENES**

ACT I. Friday.

ACT II. Saturday.

## **THE STAGE**

The stage is the industrial insides of the Sherman carpet cleaning warehouse.

Water tanks, split hoses, steam canisters, colored cartons, gasket caps, plastic tubs, cloths, mops, brushes, used tires, suds and spills, and storable unit containers. All stacked high. All old equipment. Some might consider it junk. And it’s been piling up for years.

A shop radio sits atop one of the storable unit stacks.

A table is at stage right. At the start of the play, the table is covered by a tarp, under which rests both the card table and three box crates substituting for seats.

Towards stage left, atop another storable unit stack, is a small chemistry workstation. Many liquid-filled vials are perched atop soiled carpet scraps.

A dangling light fixture hangs capriciously from the ceiling.

## **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

*Lottery Play* was first staged at the New York Theater Festival at the Hudson Guild Theater (NYC) during August 2016 as directed by Victoria Grazioli, with costume design by Traci DeAngelis, sound design by Tom Slot, and stage managed by Krystal Wilson, and with the following cast:

BOB SHERMAN, Marc Gettis; NATHAN, Matthew Dean Wood; AGNES, Sue Ellen Mandell; NORMAN, Larry Gutman; and GUNTHER, Bill Barry.

*For my uncles Al and Paul, who ran the  
family business and lived to tell.*

**ACT ONE: FRIDAY.**

**ACT I. SCENE 1.**

*Friday morning.*

*BOB enters, in uniform work shirt and an old fur coat. He whistles, exhibiting a happy morning dance.*

*As BOB turns on the shop radio, RISE and WHINE appear.*

RISE

Rise and Whine, Minneapolis! Seven and change in the ante meridian and you're waking to a gusty greet of wind and sleet!

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

*As RISE and WHINE continue, BOB turns on the light fixture hanging from the ceiling, which is non-cooperative, flickering in and out, agitating BOB.*

RISE

Yes, the *hysterical* folks at the Gopher Weather Service predicting nonstop sleet through morning rush. Looking at a high of thirty-five with winds blowing the same!

WHINE

Nice start to Memorial Day weekend.

RISE

And that's the state of our beautiful May weather, which has nothing on the state economy! Latest report has Twin Cities unemployment up another...oh, God.

WHINE

One of these years we'll get something fun to report.

RISE

Let's go to break.

WHINE

I'm moving to St. Paul.

RISE

Keep it tuned to Rise and Whine here on WWTF, your Minneapolis home for—

*BOB turns off the radio.*

BOB

Ear vultures. Agnes! AGNES!

AGNES

[Entering] I heard you the first time. Quit shouting. You'll wake up Nathan.

BOB

The light's flickering again.

AGNES

Maybe you should shout at it some more.

BOB

What are you doing?

AGNES

Getting messages off the machine but the tape got wound up.

BOB

Let me fix it.

AGNES

You don't know how to fix it.

BOB

The machine works fine when I fix it.

AGNES

I don't want you shouting and fixing on every machine we've got left in here that still barely works. We should listen to Nathan and get that digital voice.

BOB

Oh, no. Not today. I don't want to hear from little Nathan about anything new or modern today.

AGNES

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

BOB

Thank you.

AGNES

Sixty-four.

BOB

Remarkable, huh?

AGNES

That you made it, yes.

BOB

What needs making is my cake. The boys are coming to give cards at seven-twenty. Birthday cake at seven-twenty-five. Then little Nathan and I out the door by seven-thirty. We’ve got a schedule to keep and customers need their carpets cleaned!

AGNES

You’ll be lucky if the boys show with this weather. They don’t have to walk down a flight of stairs to get here like we do.

BOB

We never miss cards on our birthdays. [Grabs a small, cracked plastic snow shovel] Gonna get out there and clear a walking path.

AGNES

With that thing?

BOB

Ever hear of Paul Bunyan?

AGNES

Ever hear of John Deere?

BOB

Nothing’s going to ruin my birthday, Agnes. Not sleet. Not machines half-working. Not even talk from little Nathan.

AGNES

I’m saying, with your health, shouldn’t Nathan clear the path?

BOB

My health is fine. Besides, the more little Nathan sleeps, the more I don’t have to listen to him.

*NATHAN emerges from behind the workstation, wearing a wrinkled t-shirt, science goggles around his head half askew.*

NATHAN

Start the world. I’m up.

AGNES

Morning, Nathan. Just in time.

BOB

You’re up late.

NATHAN

Because I was up late.

BOB

How many times I gotta tell you no more falling asleep playing science with your potions. Fatiguery reflects on customers, the ones who pay us to clean their carpets.

NATHAN

Relax, Uncle Bob, I’m young. I’ll sleep when I turn sixty-four.

BOB

Ha ha.

NATHAN

Happy Birthday.

BOB

Thank you.

NATHAN

What’s with the...[coat and shovel]?

BOB

He’s got his sleep-depraved brain so deep in play science—

NATHAN

[Correcting] Deprived.

BOB

I’ll have you know I’ve had this since your Aunt Agnes and I got married forty years ago, ain’t that right?

AGNES

As hideous today as it was then.

BOB

I thought you liked this coat.

AGNES

I’m talking about you.

NATHAN

Why the shovel?

BOB

Memorial Day slizzard.

NATHAN

You’re kidding.

BOB

This is Minnesota. We never kid about the weather. We may complain about it but we never kid.

NATHAN

But I put the snow tires in storage.

BOB

The backup van will be fine.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes—

AGNES

I’ve got enough to worry about fixing this tape.

NATHAN

If we still had the main van, we’d be fine. The antique auxiliary backup van can’t even stay straight in the rain. Uncle Bob, we can’t live in the dark ages anymore.

BOB

Hey. Today is my birthday. On my death-day you can squawk all you want about little science ideas. But today will be a No-Nathan-Idea day. We’re going one whole day without digital this or potion that. All that noise, all that chirping in my ears, rattles my Euthanasian tubes.

NATHAN

Let me at least shovel. You’re not in your sixty-threes anymore.

BOB

Nonsense. I shovel, you load the backup steamers in the backup van, Agnes fixes the backup tape, we’ve got a schedule to keep! Hi-ho, May snow!

*BOB is out the warehouse back door.*

AGNES

[Handing NATHAN the tape] Here.

NATHAN

Yet another thing that needs fixing.

AGNES

Well, you won’t have to fix Bob. He doesn’t know it but I’m giving him his first day off in sixty-four years.

NATHAN

What’s wrong.

AGNES

Why does something have to be wrong?

NATHAN

Is something right?

AGNES

I’ll work the office, you handle the schedule.

NATHAN

Gee, a whole day alone in the field. You know when he drives us around he doesn't talk to me. Like if he talks to me it's going to unleash something. He just shifts the radio between weather and...weather.

AGNES

Bob talks to you.

NATHAN

He talks *at* me. When I started here, he promised I'd be made a partner. It's been five years and nothing. Now it's him saying I'll become part of the business when he dies. Meanwhile, what's left of the business is...[the tape]...getting wound around itself.

AGNES

Nathan, I won't play broker anymore between you and Bob. This is something the two of you have to work out for yourselves. But I will say you still need to learn the most important lesson about family business: honest and direct.

NATHAN

Honest and direct.

AGNES

Yes.

NATHAN

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

AGNES

...

NATHAN

He's been coughing a lot. Wheezing.

AGNES

Bob's always been a strong man.

NATHAN

He can't lift the equipment anymore.

AGNES

He just gets tired more easily.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes, what’s wrong with him.

BOB

[Re-entering] That’s not sleet!

AGNES

His sense of timing.

BOB

You call that sleet! That’s rain with a jealous streak!

NATHAN

I’m getting the snow tires. To ensure at least one van is still around whenever I happen to get *my* share of the business.

BOB

The hell’s gotten into you? I’m trying to be punctuous so we can arrive at the Showers house on time, first stop on the schedule, sleet be damned!, and your still filling// my ears with...

*AGNES starts sneezing, brutal sneezing.*

BOB

Oh, no. The potions again?

AGNES

I’m fine.

BOB

Nathan, she’s allergic to your potions.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes, I’m sorry, I’m still working out the mixture levels.

BOB

That’s it, I want those things out of my warehouse.

*NORMAN enters, wearing a coat and yarmulke.*

NORMAN

Shalom Shermans! You believe this? You believe this weather?

BOB

Hey, Norman! You made it!

NORMAN

Spring is a tease. A wicked tease. She baits you with a tug of sunshine. Come outside, Norman. Revel in earth’s glory, Norman. Forget your problems, Norman. And once you start feeling the strange sensation of happy she unfurls her sleety wickedness and turns everything back to dark and mournful. Happy Birthday.

BOB

Yeah, well, it’ll be the happiest of them all once I get my birthday cards.

NORMAN

Wait until Gunther comes in. He’s just about finished shoveling your walkway.

AGNES

Oh he is, is he.

NATHAN

Say Norman, how were the roads?

NORMAN

Perfect if you like bumper cars. I’ve always wanted to live someplace where the temperature’s higher than the speed limit. Ah, figure I’d stop by, hand over Bobby’s birthday card and reminisce about the good old days.

NATHAN

Which days were that?

NORMAN

Beats me.

*GUNTHER enters, wearing a cheap suit, wet with sleet. He carries a real shovel.*

AGNES

Oh Gunther, look at you! Get in here.

GUNTHER

Yah, morning.

AGNES

You didn’t have to shovel our walkway.

GUNTHER

Yah, you’re letting me live in your back office. Figure I can be a full-service tenant and make a good shovel. Happy birthday ‘dere, Bob.

BOB

Get on down here, Gunther! Time’s wasting and Sherman’s Cleaners has a tight schedule. Cards at seven-twenty. Cake at seven-twenty-five, then Nathan and I hit the road to clean the land’s carpets of dirt. Those orders will be blasting through our phone!

AGNES

Once we get the answering machine fixed.

NATHAN

And the backup van.

*AGNES and NATHAN go to off.*

BOB

C’mon boys, grab a seat and prepare to lay those cards across the lifeline!

*BOB whips off the cover from the table, revealing as seats three box crates.*

GUNTHER

Vacuum store closed today?

NORMAN

I wish. My tyrant boss, the Hoover queen herself, wants me there. Bob’s been to the store enough for repairs, you’ve seen her in action. As if customers would actually show in this mess.

BOB

Sure they’ll show! You miss one day and the dirt of the world piles up that much higher. We’re the cleaners, they all need us to keep the world clean!

GUNTHER

I hope I’m still needed when I make the big six-four.

BOB

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

GUNTHER

Actually...[revealing a bottle]...the fun is bringing along a touch of the Old Buck.

BOB

That’s my Gunther! Hurry up and pour before Agnes comes back. She’s been on my case lately about my health.

GUNTHER

This will not please her then. Alcohol de’ leading cause of Finnish deaths. Old Buck de’ leading Finnish alcohol. You figure it out.

NORMAN

What should we toast?

BOB

The two great things life offers at my age: peace and quiet. Clink and drink!

*They tap shop cups and guzzle, then wince,  
GUNTHER rapping his knuckles on the  
table.*

NORMAN

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

GUNTHER

Ah, d’ese knuckles barely knock anymore. Used to be rapping front doors all week long, cleaning people out ‘dere homes. Courts got ‘de banks for illegal foreclosures. Now could take banks sixty-four years before ‘dey get around to repossessing properties. Bank laid me off. Sheriffs felt sorry for me, got me cleaning out bail skippers, alimony evaders, dangerous misfits, who don’t take kindly to seeing d’ese knuckles. I don’t know how long I can do this anymore. I don’t know what’s going to happen.

NORMAN

Same with my insurance company. Hey everyone, it’s the poor vacuum repairman who thinks we actually approve his mother’s operation! This May feels like the longest year I’ve ever had.

BOB

C’mon, let’s take a small pause from our worries, huh? One person complains, the second person complains, and before you know it we’ve got ourselves a bitch-and-moan orchestra. All we need’s a little positive thinking!

NORMAN

What I love about you Bob, always polishing the bright side of life. Customers always leave loose change jingling about the vacuum bag. Maybe if I started keeping some of that change...

GUNTHER

Dat's not against your...?

NORMAN

Like the Lord says, don't do anything dirty. But if you happen to do something dirty, take off your yarmulke.

*Which NORMAN does, placing it on the table.*

BOB

Ah. Agnes is worried, too. She doesn't say it but I can tell. She's been potioned by my nephew. Kid thinks he's got the world figured out. These kids, all ideas, no experience. All day long I'm swinging the cleaner and he's lying on customer floors dabbling liquid nonsense. With a big smile on his face. And when he's not mixing potions that cause Agnes to sneeze half to death he's talking to me about what if we changed this or what if we tried that. This is carpet-cleaning, it ain't that complicated. The way it's been since his grandfather started this business.

GUNTHER

Bob, seriously, you okay?

BOB

If you think everything's fine try skipping a debt payment.

GUNTHER

Everything's down it seems.

BOB

I'm telling you, one news report, two people bitching, a whole country feels like it's lost. But look at us, we've got it good enough, don't we? We may not be the investment class but we got it good enough.

*AGNES and NATHAN reenter. NATHAN carries several note cards. AGNES carries a small wrapped box.*

AGNES

Alright, here we go! Cards first!

*NORMAN and GUNTHER each take out a lottery card.*

NORMAN

From me and mother.

GUNTHER

Picked this baby out myself.

BOB

[Fingering the two cards] We keep buying lottery cards for our birthdays. We never talk about what happens if one actually wins.

NORMAN

You can't talk about it. Otherwise, you face statistics which give a one in no-way, no-how, never in a million years' chance.

BOB

This is what I'm saying, though. Everybody spends their life expecting that rainy day in April, that slizzard in May. Well, not me. I ain't living the deficit mentality. C'mon, what would you boys do if we won the lottery?

NORMAN

Pay for mother's operation.

BOB

That's it?

NORMAN

Seeing with how much operations cost, I'd probably still have to borrow money from your winnings to help pay for it, yeah.

BOB

What about you?

GUNTHER

Stop knocking down doors and deadbeats. Find something that suits my suits. What about you?

BOB

Clean carpets. What else is there?

AGNES

Here you go, dear.

BOB

This a lottery card?

AGNES

Doctor’s appointment. You’re overdue on getting checked for a lot of things...[as BOB unwraps to reveal a white plastic glove]...Doctor said to bring your own glove.

NATHAN

Uncle Bob? I got you some cards as well. I know what you said. About today. But in honor of your birthday I present...[note cards]... Sherman’s Cleaners Future Business Plan!

BOB

What needs cleaning is my gene pool.

NATHAN

I propose to transform the family business into an industry-leading force by creating new product for untapped demand.

BOB

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

AGNES

Bob, please.

NATHAN

[Grabbing a test tube] The Lusty Steamer! My newest invention which extracts dirt faster and better than any rinse in the market.

BOB

Uh-huh.

NATHAN

We license The Lusty to large distributors. Then sell this place and get a fulfillment center.

BOB

Alright, that’s enough! I will never sell this place, you understand? NEVER. See, this is why I can’t talk to you because when I do you start playing potions with reality. This place makes money when real people spend real money on real us cleaning real carpets. See this? First nickel I ever made in business.

NATHAN

You mean the first nickel my grandfather made.

BOB

I was born into this business, kid. Riding ‘round the back of your grandfather’s van since the day I was born. I’ve been on the ride the whole time, sixty-four years. How long you been doing this?

NATHAN

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

*NATHAN tosses on his coat, storms out the warehouse door.*

GUNTHER

Well.

NORMAN

Yeah, I should, uh, open the vacuum store.

GUNTHER

Happy birthday ‘dere, Bob.

NORMAN

Yeah. Happy birthday.

*GUNTHER and NORMAN go out.  
NORMAN has left behind his yarmulke.*

*AGNES shakes her head and goes, leaving  
BOB with his cards.*

BOB

At least I get the peace and quiet.

*Lights shift.*

**ACT I. SCENE 2.**

*RISE and WHINE appear.*

RISE

Say Whine, here’s something to report.

WHINE

What’s that.

RISE

The great state Eight-by-Eight lottery scratch-off! On each eight-by-eight lottery card are sixty-four covered squares. Only eight of those sixty-four covered squares contain hidden gopher heads. Scratch off the eight hidden gopher heads before scratching one empty square and win top prize: eight million dollars and eight cents!

WHINE

If they don’t slide off the roads first. I bet it never sleets in St. Paul.

RISE

You’re somehow still listening to Rise and Whine!

*A bumper jingle plays: ‘W-W-T-F!’*

*Lights shift.*

*BOB alone at the table. He holds the two birthday lottery cards in one hand. In the other hand he holds the first-ever nickel.*

BOB

Lord. If you’re there. I’m sure plenty of the world’s evils have your attention.  
War. Famine. Little Nathan.

AGNES [OFF]

Bob!

BOB

But if you could somehow see it in your heart to guide my hand.

AGNES [OFF]

Bob!

BOB

To scratch eight hidden gopher heads.

AGNES [OFF]

Robert!

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

What?

AGNES [OFF]

What are you doing?

BOB [TOWARDS OFF]

Scratching!

AGNES

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

*AGNES enters, dressed in outerwear, and carrying a covered tray platter.*

BOB

You know I don't hear you when you talk *nag*.

*AGNES removes the cover off the platter.*

BOB

This isn't cake.

AGNES

Oatmeal. Doctor bend-and-poke says.

BOB

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

AGNES

You eat. I'm getting the mail.

*AGNES opens the warehouse door to a gusty greet of wind and sleet, goes through and out.*

BOB

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

*AGNES back on, covered in sleet, reading an opened letter.*

BOB

Fan mail?

AGNES

From the bank. A customer check bounced.

BOB

Damnit.

AGNES

Nathan's been telling you to start taking credit cards.

BOB

The last thing we need.

AGNES

These modern phones can now accept credit right there at customer homes.

BOB

So we can be charged ungodly fees by some vultures from New York? Why should New York be collecting my crumbs? This is Minnesota, I collect my own crumbs! I'm going over there.

AGNES

You are going to your doctor's appointment.

BOB

We can't let the account go under.

AGNES

It's already under.

BOB

I'll straighten this out.

AGNES

You're getting something straightened out alright and it's what you've been keeping under far too long. Your back, your knees, your coughing, your...pain. You can't put this off anymore. I'm worried.

*Beat.*

BOB

You tell little Nathan?

AGNES

I didn't have to. He can tell something's off.

BOB

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

AGNES

What good's insurance without the health?

BOB

Insurance means we don't pay for it.

AGNES

We're always paying for it. Look at Norman. He's still fighting with insurance to pay for his mother's operation.

BOB

Poor guy's probably stowing away everything he makes and it still ain't enough. That's what's unhealthy, debt! Splinters a man's mind knowing he's always behind. Filling one hole just to dig another and running out of dirt in between. No matter what you do, how fast you dig, how much you shift between one hole to another, you keep falling further behind. Told Nathan we sold the main van. He doesn't know they took it. And still too young to collect social security! Too old to try and regroup. No doctor's appointment can fix this.

AGNES

Maybe we should think about selling.

BOB

You know I can't do that, Agnes. I promised my Dad. And Tom. They're both still here.

AGNES

The city’s trying to clean up this block.

BOB

Clean us out. For condos.

AGNES

[Correcting] Condominiums.

BOB

I may not be who’s who but I know what’s what. Tom said to buy, to take over the lot and never let it go. He had this whole place running like a charm. Profitable.

AGNES

Your brother isn’t here to boss you around.

BOB

But his son is. With potions. What we need are customers.

AGNES

[Holding a lottery card] What would you do?

BOB

Don’t tease yourself.

AGNES

What happened to mister no-more-deficit mentality?

BOB

Missus bank-sent-a-letter showed up.

AGNES

Someone has to win, right? It’s always some custodian or librarian popping the Powerball.

BOB

How do you know all that?

AGNES

Been through enough birthdays, haven’t I? C’mon, this card. This scratcher right here wins it all. What would you do?

BOB

Pay off those S.O.Bs. I know how I'd do it, too. I'd march right into their fancy office, stride across their level loop carpet and dump buckets of pennies right on their greedy little heads. Paid in full.

AGNES

What about Nathan?

BOB

Guess I'd need him to carry the buckets for me.

AGNES

Bob.

BOB

Give him the business, I guess.

AGNES

The business is rightfully his.

BOB

The business is a dead anchor tied to a sinking ship.

AGNES

You used to talk about your ideas. As if every sunrise was a winning ticket. Every afternoon the prize. And now we're hearing it from Nathan. When customers call, they request him, you know. Send the funny boy with the potions.

BOB

Hmpf.

AGNES

You don't remember but you used to be just like him.

BOB

He and I are nothing alike.

AGNES

We never see ourselves as we used to be. We only see ourselves as we want to be. Even if they're the same thing. All I ever wanted to see is you a success.

BOB

That’s all you’ve ever wanted, huh? All these years of answering phones.  
Sleeping upstairs. Dealing with pains. Nothing for yourself.

AGNES

My reward will be seeing all the years of your hard work finally pay off. Always  
putting customers first, always putting the positive first.

BOB

So if this lottery card won.

AGNES

You pay off those S.O.Bs. I wouldn’t want a dollar.

BOB

But if there did happen to be a little extra lying around...

AGNES

We can’t leave this place. Just go to the doctor’s, okay?

BOB

Alright. Just...let me have my birthday card moment.

*AGNES goes.*

BOB

Hi, God. I’m back.

*BOB takes one of the two birthday lottery cards, undergoes a series of physical movements, a pre-scratch superstition, then scratches with the first-ever nickel.*

BOB

One little gopher head!...two!...empty square.

*Crumbles the first card, tosses it to the floor.*

*BOB takes the second birthday card, scratches.*

BOB

One little gopher head!...empty square.

*Crumbles the second card, tosses to the floor.*

BOB

Well, God, that’s why I always buy my own.

*BOB pulls out a third lottery card from his pocket.*

*BOB repeats the physical movements, begins scratching.*

BOB

One little gopher head!...two!...three!...four!...

*Pause. Another scratch.*

BOB

Five.

*Pause. Another scratch.*

BOB

Six.

*BOB stops. Looks up. Takes NORMAN’s yarmulke and puts it on his head.*

*Leans over to scratch again...*

*Lights shift.*



RISE

More swell vibe and May gaiety after this!

*We hear a van approach outside, rickety noises. Sound of the van door shutting.*

*Lights up on BOB alone as NATHAN enters, totally disheveled, hair a complete mess.*

NATHAN

Well. Uncle Bob. Guess what? There I was, out driving in our May slizzard, the antique auxiliary backup van wheels barely staying straight, the steering handle barely holding steady, the horn going off every time I hit an ice patch, the largest of which causing me to start heading sideways, across oncoming traffic until a nice little guard rail saved me from bounding onto still-frozen lake number ten thousand and one. Should I wait for a tow? Sorry! Uncle Bob says I have a schedule to keep. So I hop out of the van to make sure nothing underneath fell off, when I realize the gear shift never made it from drive to park. How do I know this? Because the van is starting to drive away from me. Yes, the backup van moving along with me still standing there. I start panic running and just barely grasp the rear panel, which falls off as I haul myself into back storage. I scramble up to the driver’s seat just in time to swerve-avoid slamming into many Minnesotans ransacking some jackknifed beer truck blocking the whole freeway. Should I stop and see if anyone needs help? No time! Uncle Bob says I have a schedule to keep! Miraculously, the backup van is still drivable, sort of. The crash only shorted all dashboard electronics. No front wipers. No heat. So I physically force down the driver window and stick my head out the side with a Memorial Day slizzard firing into my face. I make it to the Showers house. I lug our backup steamers to the front door. What’s that, Mr. Showers? You don’t have a scheduled cleaning? Showers doesn’t have a scheduled cleaning. He has a daughter. Her name is April. Her name is April Showers. Did you or did you not conspire with Showers telling him I was coming to rescue his daughter from her surname? Turns out April’s hot. Guess I can’t be that furious at you for setting me up with her on your birthday, except my face is thawing and my clothes are ripped and my hair is frozen back and April is scared of my presence and meanwhile this is all happening while we’re incurring revenue loss at thirty cents a square foot which means our business continues to lose money and backup vans and backup van electronics by the minute. So this is what I want to tell you. I’ve been here for five years. Five years ago I decided not to go to college. Five years ago against my dead father’s wishes I came into the family business. To help Aunt Agnes. And you. And for five years I’ve taken no vacation, no sick, nothing. [CONT.]

NATHAN [CONT.]

Work all day and sleep on the floor in back at night. For five years. I haven't seen an April Showers or even a May slizzard because this is all I've had. And now I want what you said. What you said. A stake in the business. A real stake, as partners, okay? How's that for honest and direct? And I'm fine, thanks for asking.

*BOB kisses NATHAN on the mouth.*

BOB

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

NATHAN

You just kissed me.

BOB

HA!

NATHAN

What'd that doctor do to you?

BOB

Squares. Scratch off squares. Eight gopher heads before empty square wins big prize. Eight million dollars and eight cents.

*NATHAN examines the card.*

BOB & NATHAN

HA!

*Crazy victory dancing all over the warehouse.*

*AGNES enters, carrying answering machine tape.*

AGNES

Why all the shouting? Did the doctor say you're going to live? What. What are you showing me? What am I...count the card? One, two, three, four, five, six...

*AGNES counts the rest of the way.*

BOB & NATHAN & AGNES

HA!

*More crazy victory dancing. They crash.*

BOB

Oh, boy.

NATHAN

Out of breath.

BOB

Forgot what that felt like.

AGNES

Better than sex.

BOB

Way better.

NATHAN

You sure?

AGNES

Oh, I'm sure.

NATHAN

I mean the card. It's for real?

BOB

Very real.

NATHAN

This is incredible!

BOB

Spectacularable!

NATHAN

That, too!

AGNES

Honey?

NATHAN

Yes?

AGNES

Sorry: ugly?

BOB

Yes?

AGNES

Get ready for sunny and warm!

BOB

Where's that?

AGNES

Who cares as long as we're gone by tonight!

*More cheering.*

BOB

Right now we're not rich anything. Don't you see? This is paper, a token. We've got to cash this in or who knows what could happen to it. The card gets lost or destroyed and we lose it before we win it! We've got to get to a lottery counter.

NATHAN

The backup van!

BOB

Yes! Is the backup van going to make it?

NATHAN

Snow tires.

BOB

Think Nathan! A random second slizzard could be on its way from St. Paul to wipe us out while we're sitting around monkeying with snow tires instead of cashing in the winning card.

AGNES

Will the two of you SHUT UP. [Grabs one of NATHAN's test tubes] Roll the card up and shove it in here.

NATHAN

How do we get it out?

AGNES

Break it when you get to the lottery counter.

BOB

Genius. If there's one thing about the Shermans it's that we're a bunch of winning-lottery-card-protecting geniuses! Eight million dollars and eight cents!

NATHAN

Seed capital. Our share of the winnings can put my business plan in motion.

AGNES

After Bob pays off all the debt.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

I'll hold the potion tube. You drive.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

Oh, this is it! I can't wait to see the boys' faces when I bring back the money!

AGNES

Right...Norman and Gunther...their birthday card.

BOB

Actually...it wasn't their card.

AGNES

How do you mean.

BOB

I mean...I bought it.

*Beat.*

AGNES

Your card.

BOB

Yeah.

AGNES  
You bought it.

BOB  
Yeah.

*Beat.*

AGNES  
You technically bought that card.

BOB  
Yeah.

AGNES  
With your own technical money.

BOB  
The pennies we have left, yes.

AGNES  
Where'd you technically buy it?

BOB  
Povlitzki's.

AGNES  
Povlitzki's.

BOB  
Yesterday.

AGNES  
So where's Norman's card?

BOB  
Crumpled up.

AGNES  
And Gunther's card?

BOB  
Crumpled up.

AGNES

So...the money's all ours.

*Beat.*

BOB

Well, wait—

AGNES

You said that's your card. Not theirs. So the money is ours.

*Beat.*

BOB

Look, we don't have money yet. We have a flimsy little helpless card.

AGNES

That you bought.

NATHAN

What debt?

BOB

C'mon, Agnes! All this talk about who bought what card means bupkulus unless we somehow make it to Povlitzki's in the backup van and cash it in. Otherwise, the world is gonna end and centuries from now apocalyptologists are gonna dig up our bones and go, gee, look how the ancient human stood around in old warehouses holding worthless pieces of paper.

AGNES

But you're not going to tell them until we cash it in, right?

BOB

C'mon, Nathan! Stop moping and get the backup van ready already! We're going back out there! The end of average awaits!

*Lights shift.*

**ACT I. SCENE 4.**

*AGNES alone at the card table, surrounded  
by fashion magazines, talking into a phone.*

AGNES

You only have it in a five? I’m more... five-and-a-half. It’s the first new dress I’ve bought in *years*. Oh, uh, I don’t have one of those, my husband doesn’t believe in New York. But I did just win the lottery. Hello?

*GUNTHER enters.*

AGNES

Gunther!

GUNTHER

Yah.

AGNES

You’re here!

GUNTHER

Yah, hi.

AGNES

Again!

GUNTHER

Oh, yah.

AGNES

Why is that!

GUNTHER

‘De party.

AGNES

What party.

GUNTHER

‘De surprise birthday party.

AGNES

For who?

GUNTHER

Bob.

AGNES

There’s a surprise party for Bob?

GUNTHER

‘Dat you wanted.

AGNES

Oh, yes! I’m sorry, when was that for?

GUNTHER

Tonight.

AGNES

Yes, tonight!

GUNTHER

You okay?

AGNES

Yes! No. I mean, nothing’s happened, really, since we last talked.

GUNTHER

Norman spilled, huh?

AGNES

Oh, no. No-no-no-no, I think the secret is still very-very-very intact.

GUNTHER

Yah.

AGNES

Yes, fantastic!

GUNTHER

‘Dis is weird.

AGNES

Weird? No. It wasn’t weird until you said this is weird. Now it’s weird! I was just cleaning.

GUNTHER

You never clean.

AGNES

Gunther, just because you don't see me cleaning doesn't mean I don't clean. I mean, we're the cleaners!

GUNTHER

So.

AGNES

So.

GUNTHER

So I'm here to help set up for 'de party.

AGNES

Oh, you didn't have to do that.

GUNTHER

You asked me.

AGNES

Right! My mind must be *whoo!*, but, um, since we last talked, since we last spoke to each other about the...

GUNTHER

Party.

AGNES

Since we spoke about it something unexpected happened.

GUNTHER

What's wrong with Bob?

AGNES

He's coming home, soon! That's all. Here.

GUNTHER

After 'de doctor's.

AGNES

Something like that.

GUNTHER

‘Be Rich & Stay Rich’... ‘Retired & Sexy’... ‘Live Like A Queen While Putting Up With ‘De King’...

*AGNES grabs the magazines.*

GUNTHER

Somethin’s off.

AGNES

Not at all! Cards at seven twenty. Oatmeal at seven twenty-five. And then another machine-breaking and pain-filled day here at nothing much happening Sherman’s Cleaners!

GUNTHER

You seem skippy. I knock down skippy for a living, Agnes. Like this one vagrant from last week, tried to skip out on obligations owed to people, friends actually. I found him. Bottom of the Mississippi. Want me to hang some streamers?

AGNES

Bob probably won’t be feeling up for a surprise.

GUNTHER

Yah. I guess ‘dese kinds of parties can sometimes remind us how little we got. I remember ‘de first time I met Bob, knocking on your door. Nicest guy, made you forget your troubles. Felt so bad for feeling so good I misreported to the collector. And now I’m living in your back office. Funny how things work out. And now look at ‘dese, huh! A man’s story is his hands. Scraped fingers ‘de crumbling walls, split webbing ‘de cracked blacktops, knuckles ‘de grime and palms ‘de crime. Bought Bob his lottery card then myself fifty more. Scratched ‘em off with what’s left of my nails. Don’t ‘dese say it all! You ever think about packing up? Running away, saying forget who I owe, hoping people like me never find you.

AGNES

Bob’s coming home.

GUNTHER

Probably stopping at Povlitzki’s first.

AGNES

...

GUNTHER

To buy some more cards.

AGNES

Right.

GUNTHER

Does Norman know? About canceling ‘de party?

*The sound of a van outside.*

AGNES

Gunther, please. There’s a small family thing we’re dealing with.

*BOB and NATHAN enter, NATHAN’s hair and face even more warped.*

BOB

The heroes have returned! What a scene! Oh Agnes, you should’a been there at Povlitzki’s!

AGNES

[Gunther is here] Bob!

BOB

Total and complete madhut. I mean, nobody knew how to handle it, craziest thing I bet to ever happen to that place!

AGNES

[Gunther is here] *BOB!*

*Beat.*

BOB

Hey. Gunther.

AGNES

Yes! Gunther is here!

BOB

Gunther. Buddy.

GUNTHER

Told you he’d hit up Povlitzki’s.

BOB

You told him?

AGNES

Never mind, where are the buckets?

BOB

What buckets?

AGNES

*The buckets full of...*

BOB

So there we were, the backup van sliding and bouncing and the skies sleeting and howling and little Nathan halfway out the passenger’s window giving me directions, and I’m spinning the wheel with one hand, the other hand cradling the potion tube. We make it to Povlitski’s. We slide into the parking lot. I keep the van running while little Nathan slides oh so delicatessenly through the lot, other cars spinning out all around him. Nathan slides through the door and sloshes his way to the lottery counter...

AGNES

Yeah? And?

BOB

Lottery retail can only pay out to six hundred dollars.

GUNTHER

Is this about ‘de surprise party?

AGNES

Where does ours pay out?

BOB

Lottery headquarters.

AGNES

So you drove to headquarters.

BOB

Not at first. I made Nathan slide back in and get me something ‘cuz I started to feel a little chest pain.

AGNES

Never mind that, what happened when you drove to headquarters?

GUNTHER

You got a winning card?

BOB

We sure did.

GUNTHER

Who's we?

AGNES

Who's *we*?

BOB

Me and Nathan.

AGNES

Right! Nathan!

NATHAN

Hello.

AGNES

So what happened at headquarters?

BOB

Closed for Memorial Day weekend.

AGNES

No.

BOB

Gotta wait 'til Tuesday.

AGNES

That's...that's four days.

NATHAN

Maybe my face will thaw by then.

BOB

Hey, how many times I gotta tell you to stop with all this negativitization! I mean, the world just woke up and turned itself on and RSVPed for the first-ever Shermans have won party!

GUNTHER

So ‘de party’s back on.

BOB

The challenge we’ve all faced our whole life. The world laughs at you, then fights you, then forgets about you, and then you win. In spite of it all, or maybe because of it all, this card!

GUNTHER

Good for you, Bob. After all ‘dese years, finally somebody won a little something. What’d you get, a couple gopher heads? A thousand bucks?

NATHAN

Eight million dollars and eight cents.

*Long beat.*

GUNTHER

What.

*BOB shows GUNTHER the card.*

GUNTHER

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

BOB

What can I say, Gunther? A man gets to a certain age and knows just where to scratch.

GUNTHER

I don’t believe it! Does Norman know?

BOB

Ehh...

AGNES

You told him.

BOB

Maybe a smidge.

AGNES

Define smidge.

BOB

You know, come on over, wear something to celebrate.

AGNES

But you didn't tell him why, right? You didn't tell him why?

*NORMAN blasts in through the warehouse door.*

NORMAN

SHALOM, BITCHES! HAHAHAHAAAAHA! I quit my job, I quit my job, I quit my job! You know what I told my boss? I told her: you can take this vacuum and suck where I've had to kiss for all those years!

AGNES

No.

NORMAN

You're right. What I said was...I need to take a leave of absence...FOR INFINITY! You hear stories of people crashing out before cashing in? Guilty! You know what I did? Right after I told that tyrant the next time I'll see her is when my chauffeur pulls up before I'm off for a bite of pheasant?

NORMAN/GUNTHER

Haha! Oh, yeah!

NORMAN

Booked a Jews Cruise. Oh, yeah. A loooong Mediterranean cruise to the promised land for me and mother. Show her a slice of the international nice and then come back home and pay for her operation.

AGNES

You didn't.

NORMAN

Did! Told Mother the news and said don't bother packing your bags...*I hired someone to do it for us!*

NORMAN/GUNTHER

Haha! Oh, yeah!

NORMAN

Tell you, I’m already getting used to this!

NORMAN/GUNTHER

[Touching the card] Ooohhhhhhhh.

GUNTHER

How much is eight million and eight cents split three ways?

NORMAN

Two million, six hundred sixty-six thousand, six hundred sixty-six and nine cents.  
*Not that I was counting!*

NORMAN/GUNTHER

Haha! Oh, yeah!

GUNTHER

Can you believe it? *Our* card!

AGNES

Actually, it wasn’t *your* card. Or [to NORMAN] *your* card. It was Bob’s card.

GUNTHER

What’re you talking about?

AGNES

This isn’t your card.

*Beat.*

NORMAN

What’s she...what’s she talking about.

AGNES

It’s a personal card.

NORMAN

That we bought for Bob.

AGNES

That Bob bought for himself.

GUNTHER

Bob? What's she talking about?

*Beat.*

BOB

Yeah. Um. Boys. Men. This winning card, see, it's, it's not ex-spifically one of the birthday cards. It's a card I just happened to buy for myself.

*Beat.*

NORMAN

I'm seeing your lips move but I'm not hearing what you're saying.

BOB

This winning card wasn't one of the birthday cards you gave me.

NORMAN

Where's my card.

BOB

It wasn't a winning card.

NORMAN

Where is it?

BOB

The loser card?

NORMAN

Yeah. The loser card.

*GUNTHER finds a crumpled up card in the corner of the room.*

BOB

See?

GUNTHER

Yah. I tracked it down. What about my card?

BOB

It was another, you know, loser card.

*GUNTHER picks up the second card.*

BOB

See, I scratched your card first and then Gunther’s card next and then I took out my own card and this won.

NORMAN

But that’s still the birthday card, right? I mean in spirit it’s still...

GUNTHER

My way out.

NORMAN

Mother’s operation.

AGNES

Bob’s card.

NORMAN

I just quit my job. I just told my boss to go suck herself.

GUNTHER

How do you know this isn’t my card? Did you switch the cards?

AGNES

Hey, back off! This is our card! The Shermans!

NATHAN

Uncle Bob, this card can save the business! We can use this money to turn the business around!

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

NORMAN [TALKING OVER]

What am I supposed to tell Mother? How am I going to pay for her operation?

AGNES [TALKING OVER]

You’re not his wife. And you’re not his wife! And you’re not his wife! We’re going someplace sunny and warm!

NATHAN [TALKING OVER]

This can save the business! We can use this money to turn the business around! I have ideas!

GUNTHER [TALKING OVER]

Don't be trying to hide anything from me! I know people who can put you at the bottom of the river!

*BOB shuts it down.*

BOB

ALRIGHT, STOP EVERYONE. JUST STOP. You know what's missing around here? A little integrity. Should be a wanted sign with the national border outlined around that word. You've all known me a long time so when I say I will make it right for all of us that's just what I mean. Because what happens next is Tuesday morning. Agnes and I holding up the big winning check on TV. All the customers will see me standing there and say: Bob Sherman, that's how it's done. He worked hard right up until the day he got lucky.

AGNES

I'll be on TV?

BOB

And into the camera we'll say something about Norman and Gunther. Who also reached the American Dream, even though nobody really knows what it is.

AGNES

I'll be on TV.

*BOB picks up NATHAN's vial of liquid.*

BOB

And to Nathan. Whose grandfather started this business. Whose father Tom and I rode side by side in the back of the original van. And while Tom is no longer with us, his son still is. So it's time for the family business to succeed to the next generation. Today, I am selling my entire interest in Sherman's Cleaners to you.

NATHAN

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

BOB

Not a stake. The whole thing. For one nickel.



**ACT TWO: SATURDAY.**

**ACT II. SCENE 1.**

*We hear a sound collage, an audio melding of various lottery advertisements, brash and gaudy.*

ADVERTISEMENT [OVER]

Play the lottery, the big state lottery, have you played today?, can't win unless you play, win hundreds, mega-hundreds, mega-thousands!, odds improve if you play, mega-record payouts!, kids play free!, someone's gotta win it might as well be you, I played every day for thirty years, got wallet envy?, buy your future...

*As the audio fades, RISE and WHINE appear.*

RISE

...just tipping sixty-four degrees as the Saturday sun lights up the Minneapolis skyline! Any sleet hanging around from yesterday is hereby...

WHINE

What's wrong?

RISE

This just in: a winning Eight-by-Eight card was spotted at Povlitzki's. According to our insider source—

WHINE

Which source?

RISE

Random person.

WHINE

Very reliable.

RISE

Was at Povlitzki's yesterday when some kid with sleet-for-hair shattered a test tube containing the winning card but then left and then sloshed back in to buy aspirin and then left again.

WHINE

Where’s the card?

RISE

Nobody knows. The general peace-loving public is now being asked by authorities to find that card.

WHINE

Which authorities?

RISE

Us!

WHINE

Finally some real news!

RISE

So keep it locked on WWTF, your Minnesota home for puzzling antics and lottery whodunits!

*The light fixture flickers on.*

*BOB sits on one of the box crates, staring at the covered tray platter.*

*We see the chemistry workstation evincing activity. More vials, more tube holders, more scrap carpet parts littering the area.*

*BOB un-lids the tray and peels off from the platter the partially dissolved lottery card.*

*NATHAN enters from the warehouse door, wearing chemist smock and goggles. He holds a smoldering vial.*

*NATHAN goes to the workstation and taps a second tube. NATHAN pours liquid from the smoldering vial into the second tube.*

BOB

You gonna leave the door open?

NATHAN

Whoooooaaa!

BOB

I said: you going to leave the door open?

NATHAN

Think I got it!

BOB

You're letting sunshine in.

NATHAN

[More to himself] It's working.

BOB

See you grew more potions. Now that Uncle Bob's forced into early retirement, now that you own the place, all yours for a nickel, you just couldn't wait to mark territory with more potions.

NATHAN

It's really working.

*BOB knocks over one of the vials.*

BOB

Oops. Did I do that? Mess of a shop you're running. I'm out one day and this place turns into an above-ground landfill. Sloppy wasn't how I ran things. Things might have been broken, things might have been unfixable, but they weren't a mess.

*NATHAN pours again, one tube into another.*

NATHAN

Ohhh, yeah.

BOB

The messes you don't even know about. Debt. Managing debt. Consolidating debt. Reconnoitering the books.

NATHAN

Nobody uses books anymore.

BOB

Oh, he is listening! Must be those ears. Given our genetics, I just assume you suffer from the same blockage.

NATHAN

What I’m suffering from is a series of loud screech.

BOB

Well, get used to it. The screeches you don’t even know about. Banks, collectors, nephews.

NATHAN

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

*NATHAN back to pouring.*

BOB

Say Mister CEO, are guests of your little establishment allowed to use the facilities?

NATHAN

Bathroom’s half-busted.

BOB

I’ll just go in one of your tubes, then.

NATHAN

Good luck.

BOB

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

NATHAN

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

BOB

The backup van works fine.

NATHAN

That’s a lilac-colored deathtrap without brakes and you know it.

BOB

It’s not lilac, it’s mauve.

NATHAN

Nobody works in these conditions.

BOB

We do. Excuse me, you do. The armpit of life sans deodorant! Got a complaint form I can fill out?

NATHAN

I'm sure there used to be some in the main van.

BOB

Before they took it. Yep. A tragedy unfolds. A tragedy because this place managed to survive this long on my hustle and lower back. Nice job, one of us.

NATHAN

[The tube] Amazing.

BOB

Hey ears, you open?...for business?

NATHAN

I'm working on something.

BOB

I don't know what you're working on but it sure ain't what customers pay for. So you better figure out another way to survive. Maybe you could arrange tours, a living museum, come see the withered old man and his broken dream! Charge at the door that's still open and still letting in sunshine!

*BOB knocks over another vial, lumbers back onto the crate.*

NATHAN

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

BOB

I don't work here anymore.

NATHAN

Yes, you do.

BOB

You took the business and left me with nothing.

NATHAN

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

BOB

On good faith.

NATHAN

And bad debt.

BOB

Your problem now.

NATHAN

I want to show you something.

BOB

No, thank you.

NATHAN

Can you hold this?

BOB

Lot of liability asking random strangers to help.

NATHAN

C'mon.

BOB

You need me to help, you're gonna have to hire me. You even know anything about hiring people?

NATHAN

I'll figure it out.

BOB

Yeah? It's been five years and you haven't even figured out you're in the business of cleaning carpets.

NATHAN

You always said we're in the business of helping people. That it's more than carpets. That we're there to wash the stains and spills from their life.

BOB

That’s nice. That’s what I’ll say to the state unemployment office where first thing Tuesday I’m filing.

NATHAN

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

BOB

With what? A half-dissolved backup piece of paper, a former lottery card now caked with potion juice? First thing Tuesday you better get some people hired because second thing, I’m finished. We’re all finished.

NATHAN

You’re not finished, Uncle Bob.

BOB

Terrible thing to put a man on the street, Nathan. Putting a man on the street is putting a man in the ground. I told customers you’ll get me until I’m an obituary. You’ll know I’m retired when I’m dead! And they’d come from all over, the first Minnesota funeral in state history where the weather didn’t keep people away. In droves they’d flock through the sleet, to line up at the open door, to stand right here at the holy hole of dirt and say: Bob Sherman, he spent his whole damn life preserving this...business.

NATHAN

Which is hiring you back.

BOB

You don’t know how.

NATHAN

I now pronounce you hired, okay?

BOB

That’s not how it works.

NATHAN

Of course that’s how it works.

BOB

You have to interview.

NATHAN

I'm not interviewing you.

BOB

Because you don't know how. You better learn, you're running your own shop. You have to sit at a table. You have to ask a candidate questions. If you want me to help.

NATHAN

Fine.

BOB

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

NATHAN

Uncle Bob, you don't have to—

BOB

Uh-oh! No standard application!

NATHAN

Would you stop being such a weirdo?

BOB

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

NATHAN

How old are you?

BOB

ERRR! Age discrimination! Oh, I'm so sorry, but I'm now going to have to sue you for eight million dollars and eight cents!

NATHAN

With my ideas we could be making so much more.

BOB

Your genius which fizzled our fortune in one sneeze.

NATHAN

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

BOB

Of course not! It just worked out that way for good reason. Fine, Bob Sherman, you're hired. Come here, you sick old man, let's put you on answering machine duty! You know how to work a basic machine? What about computers? The only thing I've double-clicked is my heels, waiting for something good to happen. Well, maybe you could just clean carpets since you're here just for the health insurance anyway. And even then, too late! Insurance can't save you now!

NATHAN

Why are you acting this way?

BOB

Wake up, Nathan! The world's a dirty place! You've going to have to start cleaning it by letting me go! Forced out for the second time in as many days! Good for you, showing some early promise as a man of commerce. In business you gotta be focused on cleaning straight down to the bottom line.

NATHAN

You always talk about focusing on the top line.

BOB

Will you stop contradicting me?

NATHAN

I would if you ever made any sense!

BOB

DAMNIT, TOM!

*BOB inhales in shock, then succumbs to a coughing spasm.*

NATHAN

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

BOB

What are you sorry for?

NATHAN

[Grabbing a different tube] Here.

BOB

The hell is that.

NATHAN

Something else I’ve been working on. For you.

BOB

Looks like Old Faithful met a Smurf.

NATHAN

Drink it.

BOB

Kill me off like you did the lottery card.

NATHAN

Just drink it.

*BOB drinks.*

BOB

That’s...that’s better.

*Beat.*

NATHAN

You never really talked about him.

BOB

Hope you’re not angling for the ‘gee you remind me of your father’ thing ‘cause you can forget it.

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes never talks about Dad, either. I tried a couple times, asking her, but it’s like she’s afraid talking about him might bring him back.

BOB

Fear is nothing but a painful memory. We got plenty of those around here.

NATHAN

I’m asking. I’m asking.

*Beat.*

BOB

Your Dad was a driven man. And your grandfather was stuck in second gear. Tom walked up to your grandfather one day and said: the business is mine, old man. Took the keys right out of your grandfather’s hands, literally. Put us in overdrive, figurative. There were rough patches, of course, but Tom never faltered. Never listened either. Didn’t care much about what I thought. Or what I had to say. All Tom saw was that prize, the illusive prize, and he never wavered. Kept going right up until the day he died swinging a cleaner.

NATHAN

I thought Dad died from a heart attack.

BOB

Technically he died from a heart attack but that’s not what killed him. Wanting more killed him. Resenting me killed him. We’re all so angry while we’re alive. Tom and I, did we ever fight. Really fight. Often at the customer’s. Agnes used to wonder why we’d sometimes come back bloody, the steamers busted. Tom and I never realized we were probably fighting over something that happened when we were kids riding around your grandfather’s van. Maybe it was over this nickel. It was at the old Foshay Tower where I found him, the sun setting behind him, filling up the city behind him, and Tom was kind of leaning, gripping onto his steamer, like he knew what was happening and wouldn’t go down. Agnes and I took over. You think you’re handed things. You think you end up where you end up because where you end up is where you’re supposed to be. I always said they were gonna bury me here. But not like this. Not as a failure.

NATHAN

You’re not a failure.

BOB

What else do you call this place?

NATHAN

Everybody knows you. You’re like a local celebrity.

BOB

Only to the people who know me. Tom measured success by one scoreboard: money. All those thousand-dollar nickels wadding up his ears. By that standard, if Tom were here today, he’d call me a failure. But then maybe Tom is here, watching, still trying to get at me, offering the golden promise. One lottery play. Overnight reversal of the score. Just kidding, Tom says, as he spills his son’s potions over my escape card.

NATHAN

Stop talking like this.

BOB

We have to accept fate.

NATHAN

That’s fatalism.

BOB

Funny how fate works that way. You got all these ideas for how to make money. That’s the Tom in you. But if I could get a little Bob in you then stop thinking about how you can make a living and start thinking about how you can make a life. Don’t overcommit like your Dad and I did.

NATHAN

This is all I care about. Everything I care about is here.

BOB

This place? Nathan, wake up! There are no more Edisons, Picassos, nobody willing to devote their every everything to a single purpose. The world now has sweetened upgrades and right-now enjoyments and eight million other instant happinesses that I’ve been too focused to enjoy. It takes a rich man to work a poor job. You can’t do something like this alone. Get what I’m saying?

NATHAN

That why you married Aunt Agnes?

BOB

If I didn’t marry her she’d have divorced me.

NATHAN

Dad was never really there. He divorced me for this place. But...five years of driving around with *you*. Cleaning with *you*. Sharing every meal. You’re not just my Uncle, you know, you’re like...my only friend. But you kissed me yesterday and that was a little weird.

BOB

Tom didn’t want you to go into the business because he wanted you somewhere else. For years I figured Tom wanted you to stay away because he never liked me. But I’ve come to realize Tom wanted you to stay away because he didn’t want you to die here. You see, I still carry a promise. A promise that I would never sell this place.

NATHAN

Okay.

BOB

But now that the business is yours...you know where your Dad is? Where he's buried?

NATHAN

The graveyard?

BOB

That's his marker, sure, but not where his body is. His body's here. We buried him here. Tom's below us. So's your grandfather. Spend our whole life working a place, tending to it, occupying it, and then get dumped into some spot we've never been? Everything that I've done, everything I've worked for isn't just to protect the business. It's about preserving our spot, where they still are. This place is our family. Anyway. Before I die, before this place becomes a bunch of condoms...I need to show you exactly where to dig.

NATHAN

Stop talking like that.

BOB

Nathan.

NATHAN

This place isn't going anywhere. You're not going anywhere because I need you here. You're going to be part of what we do next.

BOB

Your potions.

NATHAN

Money's only important to money. Money's only important to me because it lets me do what's important, to me. My mixtures have become like extended family, little Shermans. With their own personalities. See this one? He's shy. This one's, he's temperamental. This guy, he's explosive.

BOB

How come all your potions are guys?

NATHAN

Aunt Agnes sneezing on the card yesterday made me realize: what if I have the right solution for the wrong problem? I’ve been trying all this time to create a solution that takes out. Reverse the purpose: what if The Lusty Steamer isn’t an extract but a restorant?

BOB

A restaurant.

NATHAN

A restorant. Not just for carpets, but any surface. Even scratch-off cards. I think I can get the card back.

BOB

By pouring this on it?

NATHAN

More like timed layers of application. In the sunlight.

BOB

Nathan, messing with a lottery card is forgery.

NATHAN

It’s not forgery. We’re just getting it back to how it was before you first scratched it.

BOB

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

NATHAN

It’s your original card. Restored. As long as the card doesn’t change from current shape or form.

BOB

It’s crime.

NATHAN

It’s two of us, working together. One holding, the other mixing.

BOB

Tom is definitely in the room! Where are you, Tom? Is this you? You still laughing at me?

NATHAN

Uncle Bob—

BOB

Nathan! *It's over!*

NATHAN

You're the one who talks about integrity. I'm trying to make things right.

BOB

Frauding the state lottery is not integrity. Integrity is what you do with your life when facing the odds.

NATHAN

Like sitting here at night and wondering about tomorrow? I've been here, right here for five years, trying to restore this place. Let me get back your card.

BOB

Agnes put you up to this.

NATHAN

No. I'm doing this for you.

BOB

I never asked you for anything. And neither has Agnes. She's perfectly fine the way things are.

*AGNES enters. Her hair vigorous and uncivilized. Slinky dress. Gaudy jewelry. Heels. Sucking on a lollipop. Who is this woman?*

AGNES

Enrique! The best hair stylist in town! With a six month waiting list! Well, Agnes got ole' Enrique on the phone and I said: lottery winner! Going on TV. Enrique says: mi amor.

BOB

Where did you go.

AGNES

Lair O’ Hair, top floor of the I.D.S. A man in a special elevator pushes a gold button that whisks me to the top. That’s who I’m dealing with, a hair stylist with his own elevator.

BOB

So you paid for that?

*AGNES nods, hair flailing.*

BOB

How?

*AGNES pulls out a credit card.*

AGNES

Went to the bank first and said: Sherman’s Cleaners won the lottery. Get me a credit card. And a lollipop.

BOB

But we lost the lottery!

AGNES

The name alone sounds glorious: Master. Card. Swipe now, pay later.

BOB

How much did you pay...[her hair]...for that?

AGNES

Lottery winners don’t ask price. Enrique explodes your scalp and then hands you an embossed receipt and you sign with a stroke of the manicured hand.

BOB

But you signed next to a number.

AGNES

Long, curvy words. The first word was one. The second word was thousand.

BOB

This isn’t happening.

AGNES

And then I saw. What I’d done to myself, what I’d let happen to me. And when the tears ran out, when the heaving sobs ended, I knew there was only one place in the world that could return peace to my follically-devastated soul.

BOB

The electric chair?

AGNES

The mall.

BOB

Oh, no.

AGNES

Oh, yes! Retained the services of a personal shopper. Whipped out Mastercard and said: this baby goes to eight million. Nathan, you’re still a young man, but let me ask you: how many purses are too many purses?

BOB

Agnes, what have you done?

AGNES

What all rich people do when their lives fall apart: express sadness through grotesque levels of shopping.

BOB

But that’s all you bought, right?

AGNES

On the first Mastercard. The bank didn’t expect to see me again so soon. Anyone can be poor, Bob, being rich takes practice.

NATHAN

It’ll be okay, Aunt Agnes.

AGNES

You’re a science person, Nathan. Can you make it Friday morning again? Friday morning we were poor but happy. Today we’re fake-rich and miserable. I have to go lie down. I have Georgina at three for a massage.

*AGNES goes.*

BOB

This new Lusty Steamer?

NATHAN

Yeah.

BOB

Show me how we do this.

*Lights shift.*

**ACT II. SCENE 2.**

*RISE and WHINE appear.*

*Sounds of a big crowd, mob noise.*

RISE

And we are coming to you live from Povlitzki’s, the center of lottery madness!  
Thousands have come direct from ransacking a jackknifed beer truck to join the  
most extensive missing item search in state history!

WHINE

Let’s find that card!

RISE

Minneapolis are overturning garbage dumps, tearing apart frozen foods  
sections—

WHINE

And even speaking directly to each other!

RISE

Causing leering, jeering, and even sneering!

WHINE

And that’s just between you and I!

RISE

At the nexus of delirium, this is the all-new weather-free Minneapolis home for  
total lottery chaos!

*Crowd noise fades.*

*Lights flicker to NORMAN alone, seated at  
the table, on his cell.*

NORMAN

Boss! Norman here! Figured I should probably follow up from the last time we  
spoke. Which wasn’t really speaking, more like exclaiming. At you. Some might  
call it taunting. No.

*Punches a button on the cell.*

NORMAN

Boss-ette! Sorry to call you on a Saturday, the Sabbath, which my people consider the day of forgiveness. No.

*Punches a button on the cell, waits.*

NORMAN

Hel-lo lovely! I...uh-oh...um...not sure if this is the first or third message you're getting, not that I've left three, unless you've gotten three, and then maybe you could disregard the previous two, except what I said about forgiveness, that was kind of...um...I'd like to have my job back? This is Norman.

*Hangs up. NORMAN takes the cover off the tray platter to reveal Bob's lottery card, still a drippy mess, but an intact drippy mess.*

NORMAN

I was gonna be cleaning the big machines. Brand-name. My own shop. I'd have comfort money. The kind you take for morning walks, the kind you tuck in at night, count when no one's looking. Mother would have been proud. I was young enough not to know any better. Now I'm old enough not to know any worse.

*NORMAN accidentally rips the card. It tears into two pieces, and then as he tries to contain the mess it rips again, crumbles into many pieces.*

NORMAN

Oh. Uh...

GUNTHER

[Entering] Yah! You're here!

*NORMAN scrambles to conceal the card crumbles by slamming the lid on the platter.*

GUNTHER

You sitting down? Good. Ready for 'de big news? Nathan can get back 'de card.

*Beat.*

NORMAN

What.

GUNTHER

Nathan’s chemicals. Restore Bob’s card. To the way it was before.

NORMAN

Before...

GUNTHER

Bob scratched it off.

NORMAN

So...

GUNTHER

Bob can scratch off again.

NORMAN

Which...

GUNTHER

We’ll then take to ‘de lottery.

NORMAN

For...

GUNTHER

Eight million dollars and eight cents!

*Beat.*

NORMAN

Interesting.

GUNTHER

Yah! Nathan’s testing it on our two loser cards before he does it for real on Bob’s card in the tray there. I tell you, felt like the world collapsed on my head. But that was yesterday!

NORMAN

Yeah.

GUNTHER

You know the first thing I’m gonna buy? I don’t even know, what is there to buy with that much money! What about you? I mean, after your mother’s operation?

NORMAN

You know, Gunther, I've been thinking. Don't you feel restoring the card carries a certain moral...what's the word?

GUNTHER

Stinking richness?

NORMAN

Tearing! A certain moral tearing.

*BOB enters, with NATHAN behind.*

BOB

It works! I can't believe it, but it really works!

GUNTHER

So what's 'de word, Nathan?

NATHAN

I think we got it.

GUNTHER

You hear that, Norman? We got it.

BOB

Norman, good, you're here to see the revival of Sherman's Cleaners! We're gonna take my card from inside that platter—

GUNTHER

Apply Nathan's potion—

BOB

And once the card is dried—

GUNTHER & BOB

Scratch it off again!

*NORMAN clutches tighter the covered tray.*

GUNTHER

Maybe we should note where you scratched first. So you don't forget where 'de gopher heads are.

BOB

Don't worry about that, Gunther, I got a photogenic memory.

GUNTHER

We only get one chance, right Nathan?

NATHAN

One chance.

*GUNTHER moves to take the tray but  
NORMAN avoids.*

NORMAN

You know! Have we really thought this through? About what we're doing here?

GUNTHER

We're about to win the lottery, can we have 'de card?

NORMAN

I mean, is this the world now? One scam follows another?

GUNTHER

We're getting 'de card back to where it was before Agnes sneezed. Nathan's potions took out and now his potions are about to put back in.

NORMAN

But that's what cheating cheaters do, right? And we're not cheating cheaters. I mean, you know what happens if you visit lottery headquarters with this card?

BOB

Norman, if it was any other card I wouldn't even think about doing this. But in there's the original card. The one I bought. The one that's still intact. What Nathan's done, you can't even tell.

NORMAN

Yes, but, what-what-what-what is money anyway?

GUNTHER

Something all of us never had.

BOB

We all got debts, Norman, and mine's to Agnes. I've been borrowing from her dream long enough. What's in that tray is gonna give back everything she gave up sticking with me all these years. I'm doing this for her.

NORMAN

Yes, but greed doesn't make you rich, right? Greed makes you convicted.

GUNTHER

It sounds like someone's against us.

BOB

Hey, don't start that talk in here.

GUNTHER

Give us 'de card.

NORMAN

But it's not our card anymore. I mean, isn't it Nathan's card?

BOB

That I bought.

NORMAN

And then sold! For a nickel. Everything in here was sold to Nathan so...Nathan should decide. Nathan, surely you see the proper choice here.

NATHAN

Sure I do. We cash that baby in for eight million dollars and eight cents!

ALL BUT NORMAN

Yeah! Right on! Let's roll!

NORMAN

Then what? Then you'll walk into lottery headquarters. Some receptionist will say in that money tone: can I help you? You'll stammer out in practiced speech about how you just happened to scratch off that winning card, the missing winning card that everyone is looking for. A stern looking man who doesn't give his name will come out and take the card. He'll say: why don't you sit down while we examine this card? After an hour waiting you'll think, what's wrong? Why aren't they handing you your money? [CONT.]



**ACT II. SCENE 3.**

*Night.*

*AGNES alone at the table, with the bowl of oatmeal. She wears a robe and slippers, her hair now more contained.*

*AGNES takes a bite of oatmeal. Not good.*

*AGNES opens the platter tray and sees crumbled pieces of the card. AGNES takes these pieces and sprinkles them on top of the oatmeal. Takes another bite. Not bad.*

*BOB enters and turns on the light fixture hanging from the ceiling, still non-cooperative.*

Hey. BOB

*AGNES swallows.*

Feeling better? BOB

Not really. AGNES

Feeling worse? BOB

Feeling hungry. AGNES

Feeling worse will do that. BOB

Then I'm feeling pretty hungry. AGNES

BOB

Want me to get you something to dr—

*AGNES takes the Old Buck and splashes the oatmeal, continues eating.*

BOB

I actually like your hair.

*AGNES gives a look.*

BOB

I can get the backup steamers from the backup van to clean it. If you want.

AGNES

I'm coping.

BOB

Mind if I cope with you? I'm a good copper.

AGNES

Yeah?

BOB

Yep. Some might say an expert.

AGNES

Hmm.

BOB

Got a lot of experience with coping. Forty years to be exact.

AGNES

Forty years.

BOB

Forty years of you and I.

AGNES

That's a lot of coping.

BOB

I know it. But not all bad. There’s the year we first met. When I screwed up and discolored your Dad’s whole downstairs. How I kept coming back over and over to clean it until you finally talked to me. There’s the year we got married. Right over there. Then the year you first came to work for the business. Also the year we’d take the original main van and go out at night. Get lost on a frozen lake under the northern moon. Get lost in the back of the van on the frozen lake. Scramble out of the back of the van just before it fell into the frozen lake. Probably still buried down there.

AGNES

The year we found out we couldn’t have kids.

BOB

The year Tom died.

AGNES

The year Nathan came to us.

BOB

Well. In my defense. I told you. Before we got married. I said this is gonna be it. Cleaning. This is all it’ll ever be. You still said I do.

AGNES

Yes I did.

BOB

And you’ve been waiting this whole time, Agnes. I know you have. Coping along until the moment where maybe all this becomes all that much...cleaner. But if you knew then. That it would be this life.

AGNES

What else would it have been?

BOB

All I know is cleaning.

AGNES

Could have been windows.

BOB

I don’t do heights.

Clothes. AGNES

You’ve seen me do laundry. BOB

Air ducts. AGNES

Gutters. BOB

Dishes. AGNES

Cars. BOB

Hotels. AGNES

Pipes. BOB

Cells. AGNES

Teeth. BOB

Still like carpets. Least we’re not irrelevant. AGNES

Yet. BOB

No machine to do it all. Yet. AGNES

BOB  
But you know, I’m starting to see things. After forty years it takes the last two days to really see things. Like when I clean the I.D.S. downtown, how the tall and tan workers at their handsome desks just lift their pressed pants and polished shoes when I swing by. Like I could be gone tomorrow and it wouldn’t matter.

AGNES

You sound like you could use some oatmeal.

BOB

Would you miss me.

*Beat.*

AGNES

You still haven't gone to the doctor's.

BOB

Agnes: would you miss me.

*Beat.*

AGNES

I've loved two men in my life. Nathan. And your Dad.

BOB

Here I thought I'd make the list.

AGNES

Business, family, fights, success, aches, pains, the slow days, the fast years. All forty of them. All with you. There isn't a word for it. It's more than love. But I do miss your Dad. I used to play the lottery with him. You didn't know that. Every year on my birthday while you and Tom were off cleaning your Dad would grab his lucky nickel and I'd put the calls on hold. And we'd walk the winter streets, staring for signs on the way to Povlitzki's. We'd see ice patterns on crystal tress. How the snow curves off that branch, like a three! And that cloud, a nine! How old are you today, Agnes? Thirty. Good. We'd go see Povlitzki himself. Card three-nine-thirty, please. And your Dad and I would scratch my birthday card. The first number, we got it. The second! The third! We could pay off bills, repair the van, get my hair done. But then we'd scratch the fourth number. Every year the numbers appear before our eyes before getting scratched away, a promise, an escape. Next year we'll win, your Dad said. He never made it to my next birthday. But you always did.

BOB

The last two days has really made me see things, Agnes. Things I never saw before. And I’m starting to see what Tom and I were always fighting about. All those years, rug to rug, steamer to steamer, we were fighting about what I had and he didn’t. I had you. No matter how bad things got I had you.

AGNES

Well...[sliding the bowl and spoon towards BOB]...you can cope with me over a nice stale bowl of oatmeal.

*NATHAN enters.*

NATHAN

Hey!

AGNES

Hello, Nathan.

NATHAN

You told her?

BOB

We’re coping.

NATHAN

So she doesn’t know?

AGNES

Forty years later I know all there is to know. I know we won then lost then won then lost the lottery.

NATHAN

But Gunther and Norman are on their way!

BOB

Listen kid, you know what we got here? We got ourselves a little peace and quiet. When have the three of us ever had that? Just sitting, you know? Taking time to see all the things we’ve been too angry to really see.

NATHAN

On the radio they’ve got Powlitzki’s torn to shreds, the National Guard called out, total panic in the streets.

AGNES

All because I sneezed.

NATHAN

The state lottery just announced they’re planning special hours tomorrow. For the winning card to show up.

AGNES

Won’t they be disappointed.

NATHAN

You really didn’t tell her.

BOB

I’m *trying* to tell about the things I’m seeing. You wanna run a business you gotta learn when to share information!

NATHAN

Apparently Norman told his ex-boss we have a winning lottery card that got sneezed on, spilled over, then torn apart. Turns out Norman’s ex-boss has a lead on some special recovery tool for documents shredded by vacuums. Foolproof. Norman and Gunther are heading there now, with the sheriffs giving an escort. Get that recovery tool, bring it here, and put the lottery card pieces back together!

AGNES

The torn card pieces.

NATHAN

The ones in the platter, yes. Once back together we pour the Lusty Steamer on it. Then Uncle Bob scratches off again. Bam! Then we win the lottery!

AGNES

...really...

BOB

Really.

AGNES

Stop eating the oatmeal.

BOB

But that’s what I’m trying to tell you, I’m seeing the future! Not the lottery winning tomorrow morning future, I mean the real future. Never been able to see that before. Know what I saw? I saw the present. And it made me see that what we got here, now, how we didn’t need the card to get there, then. No really, the three of us, the Shermans, with our [NATHAN] brains, our [AGNES] heart, and our...[BOB]...what the doctor’s gonna grab. We got that now. We’re like a cause. And I’ll tell ya’, causes never die!

NATHAN

Preach, Uncle Bob!

BOB

Oh, I saw the future!

NATHAN

Tell it, Uncle Bob!

AGNES

Please stop eating the oatmeal.

BOB

I saw one year from today! And it was like the card never got recovered, like it was really torn and gone forever!

NATHAN

No.

AGNES

Yes.

BOB

Yes! And I saw this place still here. I saw over there a long and beautiful workstation, like a monument over the place where Dad and Tom are at rest. And I saw little Nathan in a new science uniform holding shiny silver tubes. And next to him I saw Gunther, his knuckles clean and smooth, the two of you arguing, but good arguing, about Gunther tracking down, knocking down the big sale! And doesn’t Nathan want his new fiancée to have it all?

NATHAN

This oatmeal’s pretty good.

BOB

And I saw you burst through the door, Agnes, saying how you need to look sharp for TV. How politics is for rich folk when they get bored with all their money!

AGNES

Oh, God.

BOB

And then I saw Norman. Visiting from Florida, back to see if everything's he's heard about our place is truly true. Mother's recovering, Norman says, and wouldn't you know his new document recovery shop is taking off? Norman hardly has a minute to sleep with all the orders coming in! And to mark the occasion Norman gives me our old lottery card, saying Happy birthday, old friend!

AGNES

The lottery card.

BOB

I saw how Norman pieced it back together, as a memento, the bits in that platter he accidentally tore apart.

NATHAN

The bits in that platter we're about to win with!

BOB

But are we though?

AGNES

No.

BOB

Exactly. I mean, look at us. We never got tore apart, did we? We're still here. Our place for family. Even with all the years of losing, all our dirt under the hood, we're still here. Winning the lottery makes it sweeter of course, a lot sweeter, but I see the important thing. I see us like we already won, like we've always had what it takes to win. That we can win at anything. Without having to scratch off to get there. I never said it before, but...I love you guys. But I have to tell you...

*BOB reaches to take the cover off the platter tray.*

*The light fixture begins to flicker.*

BOB

I love this, too!

*They all reach for the platter tray cover as...*

*Blackout.*

ALL

AHH.

**END OF PLAY.**