

Condo Christmas Caper

A Play

by Kim E. Ruyle

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Condo Christmas Caper

A Holiday Farce

Cast of Characters

<u>HOLLY</u>	Female. Competent and professional; relatively new resident.
<u>LUIS</u>	Male. Condo resident; crushes on Holly.
<u>PHYLLIS</u>	Female. Devious, dictatorial, narcissistic board president.
<u>GUNNAR</u>	Male. Maintenance staff; gullible; prone to conspiracy theories.
<u>CASSIDY</u>	Female. Former rodeo queen; flamboyant and flirtatious.
<u>BART</u>	Male. Rodeo cowboy with a dark past; distant relative of Phyllis.
<u>LINDA</u>	Female. Articulate but insecure board member.
<u>DINO</u>	Male. Resident with an activist bent; a natural leader.
<u>DOROTHY</u>	Female. Disgruntled board member; has a sensitive side.
<u>EDNA</u>	Female. Another disgruntled board member; has a sharp tongue.
<u>MRS. HARTSNAGGLE</u>	Female. A cat lady; <u>doubled</u> with Phyllis.
<u>MR. PONDSCAB</u>	Male. A fisherman; <u>doubled</u> with Bart.

CASTING NOTE: Holly, Luis, Linda, and Dino should be about the same age. All four are unattached grandparents, perhaps very young grandparents. Gunnar, Cassidy, and Bart are younger, perhaps in their 20s or 30s. Otherwise, the director has discretion as to the characters' ages. Gunnar should be about the same size as Bart so that he can coopt Bart's cowboy attire. Ethnic diversity is encouraged.

SYNOPSIS: A dysfunctional condo association wrestles with a dictatorial board president, her cowboy and rodeo queen accomplices, the commotion caused by draconian restrictions on holiday decorations, a wacky maintenance worker, an insurrection led by a resident, and burgeoning romances.

SET: The Shady Palms Condo Clubhouse. The set is split three ways – two meeting rooms left and right and a narrow foyer between. The smaller room, identified with signage as Harmony Hall, has a table and chairs, perhaps nothing more. The larger room, identified as the Boardroom, has a conference table, chairs for six, and a coffee station. The foyer between the rooms serves as the entrance to the clubhouse. For the most part, visible entrances and exits by actors are through the foyer which should have at least one chair. Dress the set as you see fit, but keep in mind that furnishings and artwork should reflect the tone of a condo association trying but failing to impress.

SETTING Fictional town of Shady Palms, Wisconsin (or choose your state). The Shady Palms Condo Association governs the premium condo residence in the community, and that's not saying much.

TIME: The Monday following Thanksgiving last year.

RUNTIME: ~100 minutes

NOTES: - Scene transitions should be rapid, many seamless with crossfading.
- Brackets [] indicate sentiment expressed by unspoken words.

If we only obey those rules that we think are just and reasonable, then no rule will stand, for there is no rule that some will not think is unjust and unreasonable.
~ Isaac Asimov

The world is made up for the most part of morons and natural tyrants, sure of themselves, strong in their own opinions, never doubting anything.
~ Clarence Darrow

Nothing says holidays, like a cheese log.
~ Ellen DeGeneres

ACT I
SCENE 1

Monday morning. Phyllis, Linda, Dorothy, and Edna face off at the conference table in the Boardroom. Before each sits a notepad and perhaps a coffee cup. As the ladies talk, Linda repeatedly but unsuccessfully tries to interject until, finally, she does.

EDNA

Eviction?

DOROTHY

For dear Mr. Pondscab?

EDNA

That's it! The last straw!

DOROTHY

Please. Have heart. He's not hurting anyone.

EDNA

A heart? The cow's got a lump of coal in her chest.

PHYLLIS

Watch yourself.

Phyllis leans in with a threatening glare. Edna doesn't yield an inch, leans in, too.

DOROTHY

But you have to admit, your rules are arbitrary.

EDNA

Totally unreasonable. The parking restrictions.

DOROTHY

And the clubhouse rules are –

EDNA

Where we can and can't walk! *Really?*

DOROTHY

And I, uh... Can you really tell people what kind of vehicles they can drive?

EDNA

The HOA fees! The fines! Preposterous!

DOROTHY

And now you want to evict a sweet little old man from his home?

EDNA

For *fishing!*

DOROTHY

And taking away Christmas, is just, well it's/ [shameful].

EDNA

Tyrannical! *Who do you think you are?*

PHYLLIS

Everything is based on recommendations from our management company for liability/ [reasons].

EDNA

/Right! The management company which is owned by *your boyfriend.*

DOROTHY

Jerry is her boyfriend?

PHYLLIS

Jerry has nothing to do with –

EDNA

Admit it! You're just screwing with us.

PHYLLIS

If you don't like it, you can always resign from the board.

Uncomfortable pause, Phyllis glaring at the others who exchange concerned glances.
Linda finds her voice and stands.

LINDA

Wait! Don't let her intimidate you.

EDNA

Intimidate? No, she doesn't intimidate me. She disgusts me. The arrogance.

DOROTHY

We're supposed to be looking out for our residents, and I –

EDNA

The narcissism! I can't work with her.

DOROTHY

What are we supposed to do?

EDNA

Quit. That's what.

LINDA

Oh, please don't. Don't leave me all alone with [her].

EDNA

(Stands and looks to Dorothy)

Are you with me?

Dorothy vacillates between the threatening glares of Phyllis and Edna but finally stands, and she and Edna exit with their notepads as Linda calls after them.

LINDA

You're really quitting? Don't you see? This is just what she wants.

An uncomfortable silence, Phyllis gloating, Linda distraught.

LINDA (CONT.)

It is, isn't it? Just what you wanted.

PHYLLIS

No problem. I can appoint replacements.

LINDA

Appoint? You can't just *appoint* board members. We have to –

PHYLLIS

Can't? I CAN'T?!

Phyllis stands and gets in Linda's face. Linda shrinks from the aggression, stumbles and falls back, trembling, into her chair.

PHYLLIS (CONT.)

Why don't you just resign, too? I'll replace all three of you with directors who know how the game is played. Directors who know how their bread is buttered.

LINDA

Bread buttered? What?

(Halting attempt at assertion)

I believe our bylaws call for free and fair elections.

PHYLLIS

Who do you think wrote our bylaws? But either way, appointed or elected, I'll get people who I can work with. Don't mess with me, Linda. You'll be sorry.

And with that, Phyllis spins and exits.

LINDA

Christmas. What's that woman got against Christmas?

Linda sinks, head to her arms.

CROSSFADE TO NEXT SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 2

Later that Monday afternoon. Gunnar, wearing a whoopie cap, a felt fedora with a scalloped, upturned brim (think Goober from Mayberry), sits at the table in Harmony Hall. He whistles as he attaches a clay mountain to a handmade flat earth model. He lifts the model, which measures several feet in diameter, to admire his handiwork. Unnoticed by Gunnar, Holly stands in the doorway holding a very large evergreen holiday wreath. She takes in Gunnar's flat earth model. As Gunnar tilts the crude model, the clay mountain falls to the floor.

GUNNAR

Son of a biscuit.

Gunnar yelps and touches his back as he bends to retrieve the clay mountain.

HOLLY

What are you doing?

GUNNAR

(Straightening to display his model)

Oh, Holly. Ya gotta see this. I call it. *Terra Numbone.*

(Sharing a highly classified secret)

Didja know, terra means earth? And this here is a... *Accurate.* Model. Of earth. Pretty much to scale. Yeah.

HOLLY

Terra *what?*

GUNNAR

Named for the scientist. *Jed Numbone.* The *earth* scientist.

HOLLY

Really? *Planet* earth?

GUNNAR

Yeah. Me and Earline went to Pine Bluff last week for our vacation. Ya know, they got the museum for aliens and UFOs and such. And. Ya shoulda been there!

GUNNAR (CONT.)

There was a meetin' of a bunch a scientists. Got the straight scoop about, ya know... The *misinformation*. About globes and such. Better than any revival meetin', I tell ya. I got plum inspired.

HOLLY

Scientists. Uh, huh.

GUNNAR

This feller. Jed Numbone. Yeah. He's a *real* scientist. Feller splained how the sun and moon move in big ol' circles over the earth which, a course, is a *disk*. Like this. Not no giant beachball. Now I'm fixin' to add them heavenly bodies to my model.

Gunnar groans and rubs his back as he sits.

HOLLY

Are you, uh... Are you okay?

GUNNAR

Oh. Yeah. Just twerked my back at the funeral.

HOLLY

Twerked? Oh... I, uh, didn't know you... You were at a funeral?

GUNNAR

Earline's Uncle Elmer. After the science meetin' we went to ol' Elmer's birthday party. Earline's kinfolk live in Pine Bluff, so we pretty much hadda go.

HOLLY

Okay. But I thought you said –

GUNNAR

Dint go so well. The party. Twas the butterflies killed him.

HOLLY

Butterflies? Uh... What butterflies?

GUNNAR

In the birthday card. See, Claudine – that's ol' Elmer's wife – thought it'd be cool he opens –

HOLLY

Butterflies? In a birthday card?

GUNNAR

Naw. Not really a card. More like some kinda little box. Some fancy schmancy deal where when ya open the box, a flock a butterflies leaps out atcha. Sposed to be fun. A surprise.

GUNNAR (CONT.)

But fer Elmer, jes too much fer the ol' ticker. Guy gits swarmed by butterflies/ and –

HOLLY

/Real butterflies?

GUNNAR

Naw. They was some kinda hard paper with spring-loaded flappin' wings. Whatever they was, scared the crap outta Elmer. Ol' guy did a faceplant in his birthday cake.

HOLLY

Oh, my God.

GUNNAR

Yeah. Good thing he'd already blown out the candles.

HOLLY

So, Earline's uncle died on his birthday?

GUNNAR

Face down in buttercream frosting.

HOLLY

That's tragic. I'm so sorry. How old was he?

GUNNAR

Guy was gittn' up there. In his fifties, I guess.

HOLLY

Well, that's, uh... That's not. Not very old.

GUNNAR

Gotsta unnerstan'. Earline's family don't have the bes' genes.

HOLLY

But, uh... How'd you hurt your back?

GUNNAR

Twerked it. Yeah. Her family don't have no money, so the funeral tweren't no picnic.

(Off Holly's confusion)

See. Family dint have no money for a proper cemetery plot. But there's a field next t' the graveyard where the poor folk can... Ya know...

HOLLY

You mean a *potter's field*?

GUNNAR

Naw, I dint see no *ceramics*. Jes a reglar ol' field. Earline's cousins slid ol' Elmer into a pine box. Nailed it up tight and hauled it out to the field.

HOLLY

Oh, my God.

GUNNAR

Funeral home borrowed 'em a shovel. But guess who hadda dig the frickin hole.

HOLLY

You? You had to dig a [grave]? You dug Elmer's grave? You can't be serious.

GUNNAR

Got down 'bout three feet and twerked my back. Figgered, three feet. Deep enough. All ol' Elmer's gonna git.

As Holly stands there digesting Gunnar's story, Linda enters and addresses Holly.

LINDA

You're intelligent. Just what we need.

Gunnar looks up from his model, a goofy grin from under his whoopie cap.

GUNNAR

Thank you.

LINDA

I meant, um...

(Awkward pause before turning back to Holly)

Holly. I need your help.

HOLLY

Okay. Sure. I just need to find a place to hang this. My grandson made it.

(Pausing for Linda's reaction)

Gunnar, would you be able to hang this up in the foyer¹?

GUNNAR

What's a four-way?

LINDA

The lobby. But. Before you do. There's something we need to talk about. It's Phyllis.

¹ Pronounced as foy-ay by Holly.

GUNNAR

Oh, no! She ain't here, is she? Tell me she ain't lookin' fer me.

LINDA

I don't think so. But she's asked me to place this notice in the condo newsletter.

Linda passes a sheet of paper to Holly.

GUNNAR

Don' tell me. Phyllis got her knickers in a twist agin.

HOLLY

(Reading)

In order to preserve the dignity and prestige of Shady Palms Condos... *Dignity? Prestige?*

(Sharing eyeroll with Linda)

In order to preserve the dignity and prestige of Shady Palms Condos, the board of directors has voted to amend our bylaws to ban the display of holiday decorations of any kind. This includes Christmas trees, lights, tinsel, garlands, snowmen, reindeer, stars, snowflakes, mistletoe, candy canes, menorahs, dreidels, mangers, candles, angels, wise men, shepherd boys, bunnies, Easter eggs, witches, spiders –

LINDA

I hate spiders! That one's okay!

HOLLY

(A questioning look)

Okaay...

(Continuing to read)

Witches, *spiders*, Elvira, jack o' lanterns or... *Pumpkins of any kind?*

Holly shares a puzzled look with Linda, wags her head before continuing to read.

HOLLY (CONT.)

Pumpkins of any kind, gingerbread men, turkeys, pilgrims, and, uh... And *camels?*

GUNNAR

What's she got agin camels? What's this world comin' to?

Awkward pause.

HOLLY

Well, she didn't specifically ban holiday wreathes. Gunnar, will you please hang this for me in the foyer?

(Off Gunnar's confusion)

In the lobby.

GUNNAR

No way I'm gonna do nuthin to rile up that woman. Phyllis only got two sides. Bad and worst. I'm already on her bad side. Can't take no risk gittin' on her worst side.

HOLLY

But a wreath! For the Greeks and Romans, the wreath symbolized victory, but for us, it's a lovely, welcoming symbol of life. A wreath means hope, the joy we feel during the holidays.

LINDA

No display of holiday decorations of any kind. Can she do that? Is that even legal? To ban holiday decorations?

GUNNAR

I think I got this here mountain to stick. Maybe instead I hang up Terra Numbone. Yeah. Since she's lookin' for dignity and prestige, don't git no better than a model a science.

HOLLY

There's a thought. Maybe you can find a place to hang them both in, the uh... In the lobby.

GUNNAR

Welcome to Shady Palms Condo and. *Terra Numbone!* Yeah. Kinda makes sense. But anyone asks, tweren't my idea. If Phyllis jumps on this, she gonna land on you. Not me.

Gunnar gathers his model, takes the wreath, and pauses before issuing his warning.

GUNNAR (CONT.)

Yer new here, Holly, and I like ya. Wouldn't wanna see nothin' bad happen to ya. Watch out fer Phyllis. That woman's a monster. Yeah. Ya got no idea whatcher up 'gainst.

Holly brushes off the warning with a smile. The keys on a huge ring on Gunnar's belt jangle as he heads to the foyer and quickly hangs the wreath and flat earth model as Holly and Linda continue conversing. When his task is complete, Gunnar exits the clubhouse.

HOLLY

A wreath and a flat earth model. That's an odd pairing, isn't it?

LINDA

The wreath *is* a welcoming symbol. It's encouraging. Cheerful. Like you, Holly. It's fitting... You do know, you're very highly respected in our community.

HOLLY

Oh. Am I?

LINDA

You're intelligent. Reasonable. And. You've got moxie. We need moxie.

HOLLY

I, uh... I'm not sure what you're/ talking [about].

LINDA

/I imagine you've got some political experience, too.

HOLLY

Political? What makes you say/ that?

LINDA

/Leadership! You're a leader. A natural. People like you. People follow you. They *will* follow you. I'll bet you've run for office. School board maybe. Something like that.

HOLLY

I don't know where you're going with this, Linda, but I've got no interest or experience in politics. Being a fifth-grade class president hardly counts as political –

LINDA

That's perfect!

HOLLY

Fifth. It was. *Fifth*. Grade.

LINDA

For what I'm thinking, fifth-grade class president might make you overqualified.

Linda puts her arm around Holly and guides her to the table. They sit. Linda looks around then leans in, conspiratorially.

LINDA (CONT.)

You do like living here, don't you?

HOLLY

I guess it's, uh... It's fine. Not, uh... Not the *worst* place I've lived.

LINDA

That should be our marketing slogan. Shady Palms. Not the *worst* place to live.

HOLLY

No. I don't mean to be/ [critical].

LINDA

/It's okay. I get it. But here's the thing...

HOLLY

Yes.

Unnoticed, Luis enters the foyer and pauses outside Harmony Hall to listen in.

LINDA

Our condo bylaws call for a four-person board of directors. Two of them just resigned. Fed up with Phyllis.

HOLLY

Because of the memo?

LINDA

There will be a special election next week to fill the positions, and I can't stay on the board unless we elect at least one sane person to join me. I can't think of a better person than you. And here's the thing.

HOLLY

Yes.

LINDA

If we get lucky. If we get a groundswell of support. Maybe we can depose that dictator.

HOLLY

Depose Phyllis? That's, uh...

(Hesitating, considering the import)

Okay, but I'm not, uh... I only moved in a couple of months ago. I'm *new*. No way I'd get elected.

LINDA

New! Exactly! That's why you *would* get elected. New blood! That's a universal law in politics. Voters don't want a tired old guard running things. They long for a fresh face.

HOLLY

Right. Like US presidents.

(Pause)

There must be other residents. Long-term residents. Residents who are better qualified.

LINDA

The way you dealt with the microwave oven fiasco told me all I need to know about you. I'll campaign for you, Holly. Join me. Join the Shady Palms Condo Association Board of Directors.

HOLLY

I appreciate the invitation and your confidence, but I'm just not –

LINDA

Please. Your fellow residents need you.

Luis enters. His gaze settles on Holly.

LUIS

Sorry to interrupt. Hi Holly.

HOLLY

Hi.

Holly and Luis share embarrassed smiles.
Linda picks up on their vibe.

LINDA

Guess you two know each other.

HOLLY

Oh, we're/ just [neighbors].

LUIS

/Just neighbors... I was looking for, uh... Have you seen Gunnar? We've got no hot water.

HOLLY

Again?

LINDA

You just missed him.

(Standing to address Holly)

What we talked about. That woman wields way too much power. And it doesn't stop with Shady Palms Condos. She's got the entire city council in her pocket. Will you at least think about it?

HOLLY

I don't think I can. But, I'll, uh... Yes. I'll think about it.

Linda nods and exits.

LUIS

She's talking about Phyllis.

HOLLY

Wants me to run for a seat on the board of directors. Linda does.

LUIS

That's a great idea! You'd be terrific.

HOLLY

I don't know what I've done to give anyone that impression.

LUIS

Well. You're normal.

HOLLY

That's a compliment?

LUIS

Is anybody really normal? What is normal, anyway? Not weird. I think that's what it means. Normal is. Not weird.

HOLLY

Why, thank you, Luis. Such flattery. Wonderful to know that I'm. Not. Weird.

LUIS

Come on. You know what I mean. Compared to the other residents, you're not... I mean, you are... You are. *Normal*. Not weird.

HOLLY

You're thinking about Mrs. Hartsnaggle.

LUIS

The lady who walks her cat? That's weird. Cat people are just weird anyway.

HOLLY

Oh. You don't like cats?

LUIS

(Oops)

Oh, I just mean. You don't have a cat do you?

Luis squirms uncomfortably under a long stony glare from Holly

HOLLY

What if I did?

(Now a teasing grin)

No. But if I did, I wouldn't have more than one.

LUIS

(Sigh of relief)

No. I didn't mean, uh, it's okay if you have a cat.

HOLLY

But Mrs. Hartsnaggle has *multiple* cats. Who walks a *cat*? And every day it's a *different* cat. That is strange.

LUIS

No. It's the same cat. She likes to dress it up. Has a different outfit for every day of the week. Even dyes its fur for different holidays. Should have been here for St. Patrick's Day. Cat was green.

HOLLY

Okay. That is, uh...

LUIS

Weird. Yeah. Not normal. And what about Pondscab?

HOLLY

The fisherman.

LUIS

Sits on his balcony hanging a fishing line over the side.

HOLLY

(Amused)

Well, if you can't get to the lake.

LUIS

Yeah, but have you ever seen him when he hooks a big one?

HOLLY

Uh... [No.]

LUIS

Guy's sitting on his balcony and suddenly lets out a yelp, jumps up, and starts wrestling his fishing rod like he's hauling in a 40-pound muskie.

HOLLY

Okay. No fish. No water. But maybe Mr. Pondscab is just –

LUIS

Hallucinating?

HOLLY

Envisioning. Practicing. He's imaginative. Doesn't mean he's weird.

LUIS

And what about Gunnar? Conspiracy nut. A flat-earther. Face it, this place attracts, I don't know...

HOLLY

Us?

A pregnant pause. Luis smiling, sitting, getting close.

LUIS

You feel it, too. The attraction.

HOLLY

(Leaning back, embarrassed)

Luis, I, uh... I meant this place. Shady Palms attracted us. To live here.

LUIS

Oh! Right. Right. That's what I meant, too. We're attracted to... *We were* attracted to Shady Palms. Of course. That's what I was, uh,/ [thinking].

HOLLY

/And we're not weird, are we? We're both reasonably intelligent. Creative.

LUIS

Very intelligent. You are. And creative.

HOLLY

Like Mr. Pondscab and Mrs. Hartsnaggle.

LUIS

Well... Okay. Maybe. But they'll never get elected to the condo board. You will!

HOLLY

Oh, Luis. I don't know...

LUIS

The way you handled the problem with microwave ovens. You're a lock.

HOLLY

Really? But going up against Phyllis. I don't know. What's the punishment for treason?

Pause. Luis considering. Hesitating. Then,
out with it.

LUIS

Linda said they have two open spots, right?

HOLLY

The board of directors? Yes. I guess so.

LUIS

What would you think about me running, too? I mean. If you decide to run. Do you think, I...

HOLLY

Luis. I didn't know you're such a rebel. This is going to get dicey. You'd really do that?

LUIS

With you? Holly. I'd do anything with... With you.

(Awkward pause)

Have you, uh... Have you thought any more about Friday night? Dinner and a movie?

Holly and Luis share a moment considering
each other as lights fade and...

CROSSFADE TO NEXT SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 3

That same afternoon in the Boardroom, Bart leans against the conference table. He's outfitted in cowboy duds – boots, cowboy hat, and a huge belt buckle. Cassidy, in cowgirl attire, paces while imploring Bart.

CASSIDY

Please, Honey. She's beautiful. Only fourteen hands. More like a pony. Won't eat much.

BART

She's a horse! And she will. Eat like. *A horse*. That's a sayin' for a reason. They eat and shit twenty pounds a day. Who's gonna –

CASSIDY

I will! I can shovel shit with the best of 'em.

BART

Give ya that. But where we gonna –

CASSIDY

There's room in the maintenance garage.

BART

Like to see ya get Gunnar agree to that. 'Sides, Phyllis don't allow no pets other than cats and that's only cuz she got her own cat.

CASSIDY

A horse ain't just a pet. It's/ [my life].

BART

/More than an assload, what it is. And what if we gotta split in a hurry? What's gonna happen to yer pony? We can't be hightailin' it with a horse trailer in tow. Think, Gurl.

CASSIDY

I never been without a horse to ride. My whole life. I always had a horse. That's how I move. You need your boots, right? Ya wouldn't be Bart without those boots. *Boot scootin'*, Honey. That's how you move. And the ladies of the night walkin' Front Street need their platform shoes and fishnet stockings, right? *Struttin' their stuff*. That's how they move. I'm a rodeo queen. And I need a 600-pound mustang between my legs, Honey. That's how I move.

BART

Ya do gotta thing for horses, Baby. I get it. Why doncha let *me* move ya.

Bart straightens, neighs like a horse, prances to Cassidy and wraps her in a hug.

CASSIDY

(Breaking free)

Havin' you between my legs ain't the same. I need a horse.

BART

I'll be your horse, Baby. Ya can ride me anytime ya want.

CASSIDY

Yer statin' the obvious... But it ain't the same.

(Off Bart's disappointment)

Aah, don't look so heartbrokin'. I love ya, Honey, but I don't understand. Whydja hafta go and bring us here? Shady Palms. Nearest rodeo's a hunnerd miles away, and that ain't til August.

BART

Cool yer jets. Ain't nobody gonna look for us here. And we gotta us a good con in the works. Phyllis is gonna –

CASSIDY

What? Phyllis gonna what? Anyway, she's what? Yer third cousin?

BART

My *stepmom's* third cousin. But she gave us a place to hole up. And we can't stay on the run.

CASSIDY

But. Ya sure ya can trust her?

Phyllis enters and brings conversation to an awkward halt.

PHYLLIS

Well, that is a question, isn't it? What do you think, Bart? Can you trust me?

BART

Phyllis! I was jes tellin' Cassidy that ya got somethin' cookin'. What's the caper?

PHYLLIS

If you got a trust issue, you can pack up and hit the road. Good luck avoiding John Law. Only reason you're safe here is because I let you sign the lease with a fake name.

CASSIDY

A lease? I didn't sign nuthin'.

PHYLLIS

I signed for you. Here in Shady Palms, you're Cassidy *Longbottom*. Married to Bartholomew Longbottom.

CASSIDY

We're. *Married?*

Delighted, Cassidy bounces with a smile and looks to Bart who is not so thrilled.

BART

Oh. For appearances. I guess. Yeah.

CASSIDY

(Back to Phyllis)

But *Longbottom?* Why'd you –

BART

And *Bartholomew?* That's my *real* name. My legal name.

CASSIDY

Longbottom. Yuck.

BART

Well, yeah, that is kinda/ [different].

PHYLLIS

/Nobody's going to think that's a fake name. Nobody would make up that name for themselves.

CASSIDY

Ain't that the truth. But hey! I'm gonna need a ring.

BART

And why'd ya keep my first name?

PHYLLIS

If I gave you different first names, you'd mess it up. Forget to call yourself by the right name. Others might hear. You'd give yourselves away. So... Bart and Cassidy Longbottom. Mr. and Mrs. That's it. Your new names.

Bart, perturbed, and Cassidy, delighted, share a look, a shrug.

BART

Okay. But what's the plan.

PHYLLIS

It's all about the supply chain.

CASSIDY

What's that?

PHYLLIS

Starts with getting you elected to the condo board of directors.

CASSIDY

Awesome.

BART

Won't that attract attention? I mean, we're tryin' to lay low.

PHYLLIS

You can lay low after the election. As president of a four-person board, I have the tie-breaking vote, so I only at least one of you to get elected. Then, once elected, all you've got to do is vote with me.

CASSIDY

I never voted before.

PHYLLIS

To approve contracts.

BART

Okay. But. What's the haul?

CASSIDY

Can I get a horse?

PHYLLIS

I need two board members to vote with me to approve construction of the new clubhouse and swimming pool.

BART

How's that gonna line our pockets?

PHYLLIS

Use your head. I've got a deal with contractors.

BART

Somethin' under the table. I get it. How much?

CASSIDY

Should call this place *Greazy* Palms instead of Shady Palms.

PHYLLIS

You don't like it, you can hit the road.

CASSIDY

No, it's, uh... Okay, but can we build a horse barn?

PHYLLIS

Horse barn?

BART

What's our cut?

PHYLLIS

Thirty percent. Twenty-five for me. Five for you.

BART

Five each? Me and Cassidy?

PHYLLIS

Don't get greedy. I set you up in a condo. A place to hide out. Rent free, too. That should be enough.

CASSIDY

What about a horse barn?

BART

How big's the contract?

PHYLLIS

Big enough. But here's the deal.

CASSIDY

So, no horse.

PHYLLIS

I've got some rebellious residents. One of them blew up a sweet deal I had on microwaves.

BART

So, you need me to run some interference. I can do that.

CASSIDY

Whaddya mean, blew up? And, no, Bart! Last time you *ran interference*, you ended up with your hand all busted up.

BART

Yeah, well my hand busted up the guy's face pretty good, too, didn't it? Interference I can do.

PHYLLIS

Just keep Miss Smarty-pants in line. But let's avoid bloodshed.

(A wicked grin)

If we can help it.

CASSIDY

Miss Smarty-pants?

BART

Yeah. What's her problem? What's the sweet deal she blew up?

PHYLLIS

I got a hold of a gross of recalled microwaves when Jerry and I built this place.

CASSIDY

Who's Jerry?

BART

Her main squeeze.

Phyllis glares, gives an exasperated sigh.

BART (CONT.)

Uh... So, microwaves?

PHYLLIS

Yeah. Microwaves ovens. Got them for next to nothing. So, they leaked a little. No big deal.

CASSIDY

A leaking microwave. That could get messy when you're heatin' up your soup and it overflows. I had that/ happen.

PHYLLIS

/Micro. Waves. They leaked microwaves, not soup. No problem until Old Man Pondscab had a pacemaker acting up. Standing next to the microwave and the guy's heart started racing. Called an ambulance.

CASSIDY

And that's no big deal? I'd rather clean up soup.

PHYLLIS

Miss Smarty-pants heard about it and stuck her nose in. Found out all our microwaves were supposed to be recalled. Had to replace every one of them. Every damn unit.

PHYLLIS (CONT.)

We lost a bundle on that deal, and it's not going to happen again.

BART

So, what's the plan?

PHYLLIS

Tomorrow. It all kicks off tomorrow. Take a seat.

They all take a seat and lean in to conspire.

PHYLLIS (CONT.)

Here's what we're going to do...

FADE TO BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 4

Early Tuesday morning, light dawns. A sleepy Gunnar enters the foyer and turns on the lights. He pulls up short to stare at and react to the empty space on the wall where Terra Numbone, the flat earth model, and Holly's wreath had previously been hung.

GUNNAR

Son of a biscuit!

Gunnar, keys jangling, marches toward the Boardroom but is stopped by Dino who storms into the foyer with a sheet of paper.

DINO

Where is she? Have you seen this?

GUNNAR

Yeah. It's a tragedy. She done took the Terra Numbone.

DINO

The condo newsletter. Have you seen it?

GUNNAR

I seen it, Dino. Yeah. Don't mean I read it.

DINO

This injustice will not stand!

GUNNAR

What am I sposed to do? I worked fer days on Terra Numbone. A work a art what it is. And if that woman trashed it, I'm gonna... I don't know. What can ya do if a bully destroys a work a art?

(Pause, getting emotional)

Terra Numbone... A work a art.

DINO

I have no idea about any, uh, work of art. But I'll tell you this. When my granddaughter visits in a few weeks, she's going to see presents under a brightly lit Christmas tree. A Christmas tree! And I'm going to hang a wreath and string lights around my door. And God help any asshole who tries to remove the American flag hanging from my balcony. This is a free country! Shady Palms is not North Korea. I can leave if I choose to.

GUNNAR

Ya sure? Can folks leave North Korea they want to? Good luck sellin' yer unit.

DINO

We need a revolution! That's what we need! Hitler. Stalin. And now... Phyllis. Let's see how she handles it when the people revolt!

With that, Dino spins and storms out.
Gunnar turns to stare at the empty space on the wall. He sinks to the floor, moans, and continues to look at the vacant space.

GUNNAR

Terra Numbone. A work a art.

(Pause)

And what the hell Dino think he's gonna do?

SLOW CROSSFADE TO NEXT SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 5

Later Tuesday afternoon, Holly, Luis, and Linda sit in Harmony Hall with campaign flyers. Holly is sketching. Gunnar is in the foyer doing some cleaning chores.

LUIS

Do my eyes look crossed?

LINDA

Oh, no. It's a great picture, don't you think so?

HOLLY

Do we want just one flyer? Both of us? Together?

LUIS

What's wrong with that? What? You think I'm going to, uh [put voters off]? That I'll hurt your/ chances?

HOLLY

/No. I didn't mean that. We're a team.

LINDA

Not a team. A *ticket*.

LUIS

Uh...

LINDA

You represent freedom. The Freedom Ticket. Our party.

GUNNAR

(Inserting his head into the room)

Yer havin' a party?

HOLLY

No. We're having a meeting.

LINDA

A private meeting. Would you mind closing the door?

GUNNAR

Sure.

Gunnar enters the room and closes the door.

GUNNAR

(Conspiratorially)

This 'bout the... The *'missions*?

LINDA

What *missions*? No. We're, um, I'm not sure what you're, um... This is a/ [private meeting].

GUNNAR

Nocturnal 'missions. Yeah.

LUIS

What?

GUNNAR

Means nighttime. What *nocturnal* means.

LINDA

We know what that [means]... Look. We're in the middle of a meeting.

GUNNAR

From leckrick cars. Yeah. Those special LED lights they got on 'em generate 'missions on high beam that shrink yer. *You know... Yer privates.* Yeah.

Holly, bemused. Luis chuckles outright.
Linda scowls.

LINDA

This is a *private* meeting.

GUNNAR

Yeah. Zackly what I'm talkin' 'bout. *Yer privates.* I gotta source for special, ya know...

(Scratching his butt)

Kinda scratchy. But they got titanium wires to reflect the 'missions. Yeah.

LUIS

What are you talking about, man?

GUNNAR

Ya, know. Skivvies. Undercrackers. Tightly-whities for the guys. And bloomers for the ladies. Yer delicates. Yeah. Reflective. The titanium is. Yeah.

LUIS

You're wearing. Reflective. Titanium... *Underwear?*

GUNNAR

I gotta source. Yeah. Not gonna let no leckrick car shrink my grapes.

LUIS

Now? Right now? You're wearing metal underwear?

LINDA

This is not about underwear! This is a private meeting and we're, um... We're not talking about titanium underwear... We're talking about... Um...

Linda hesitates, unwilling to engage Gunnar.

HOLLY

Deposing a dictator.

GUNNAR

Son of a biscuit! Yer talkin' 'bout the 'lection.

LINDA

What have you heard?

GUNNAR

No. No way. I can't be involved.

Gunnar exits the room leaving the door open but then spins to lean in and give a warning wag of the head.

GUNNAR (CONT.)

Yer flirtin' with fire.

Linda points at the door which Gunnar firmly closes and then exits the clubhouse.

LUIS

He knows. About the election.

HOLLY

By now, everybody knows. That's not a surprise.

(Sliding a piece of paper over)

Your poster's very good, Linda. But what do you think about this?

LUIS

Wow! You drew this? It's beautiful. Perfect.

LINDA

You don't like my poster? You, um... You don't like it.

HOLLY

No. No. I do. I just thought we might consider/ something [different].

LUIS

/Holly's poster's got flair. It's so polished. With the holiday wreath as a graphic. And the message! Brilliant.

LINDA

(Reading in dismissive monotone)

We're celebrating, not cowering. Holly and Luis send best wishes for a holiday season filled with joy. Working for you on the Condo Board.

LUIS

No. You've got to put some feeling into it.

(Reading with gusto)

We're celebrating, not cowering! Holly and Luis send best wishes for a holiday season filled with joy! Working for you on the Condo Board!

HOLLY

Too much?

LUIS

No. A holiday season filled with joy. And the way you used special letters and made the word bigger. *Joy*. It's perfect.

Uncomfortable pause as Linda feels the hurt of being overshadowed by Holly.

LINDA

It's, um, it's okay... It's fine...

LUIS

Great. So, we go with Holly's poster. Then what? What's our election strategy?

LINDA

Um... Well... Posters.

HOLLY

Oh, we need a lot more than posters. How about this?

As Holly and Luis lean in, we...

CROSSFADE TO NEXT SCENE