The Development and Production of Justin Blasdel's Play Your Last Friend, Inc.

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF JUSTIN BLASDEL'S PLAY
YOUR LAST FRIEND, INC.
THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF JUSTIN BLASDEL'S PLAY
YOUR LAST FRIEND, INC.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

Justin Morgan Blasdel
University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in English and Anthropology, 2008

August 2011
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This thesis details the process of the creation of the new script, *Your Last Friend, Inc.*, a play about two conmen who realize that selling death isn't nearly as easy as selling life to the hopeless. It follows the many evolutions of the script; from the first version developed in the Graduate Playwriting class all the way to the final production at *Boar's Head Players 2010 New Play Showcase* at Nadine Baum Studios at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The playwright's choice to add humor to a serious topic is challenged, the characters actions face outside opinions, and the beginning Studio 404 production and the Nadine Baum production generates critiques. Included in this thesis are multiple-drafts of the play, photos, and promotional materials.
This thesis is approved for
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the hard work and persistence of one Dr. Roger Gross, who consistently helped me to write better material. Also, I'd like to thank the Drama Department of the University of Arkansas for their efforts to help new play development. With the help of Boar's Head Players, I hope that they continue to do so for the new generations of playwrights, keeping up the reputation that the Graduate Program of the Drama Department has acquired over the years.

Thank you Michelle, for believing in my abilities more than I do.

Also, I'd like to thank myself for never accepting cold, hard logic over my need to dream.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this play to the many people of the world who have to live through the pain of sickness and old age in a world of enforced longevity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..................................................................................................1  
Chapter One: History and Development.......................................................3  
Chapter Two: Script-in-hand Performance....................................................12  
Chapter Three: Summer Playwriting Workshop..........................................16  
Chapter Four: Auditions and Rehearsals....................................................27  
Chapter Five: The Debut.............................................................................46  
Chapter Six: 8th Version...............................................................................51  
Conclusion.....................................................................................................56  
References.....................................................................................................58  
Appendices  
A. First Draft..............................................................................................App. A  
B. Seventh Draft (Production Draft)..........................................................App. B  
C. Eight Draft............................................................................................App. C  
D. Cast Page in Production's Program.......................................................63  
E. Production Poster, Signed by Cast.........................................................64  
F. Becca Martin's "New Play, New Love" article........................................65  
G. Production Pictures (taken by Justin Blasdel).................................66
INTRODUCTION

*Your Last Friend, Inc.* sheds some light and humor on the very controversial topic of assisted suicide/euthanasia. I wrote this play for two reasons. One, I felt the issue of assisted suicide needed to be discussed through a humorous style, rather than the political and religious shouting matches it usually receives. Of course, Sam and Jonny are not the purest of characters, and the juxtaposition of having conmen help the hopeless to find purpose in living provides much needed levity to this serious subject. The second reason for this play is I wanted to write a realistic play that would be more acceptable to the Fayetteville theatre-going audiences than my previous non-realistic works. I have a tendency to write in unusual forms or have risqué subject matters, and this play was specifically designed to be accepted by the Drama Faculty as well as the public. My thesis will detail my composition of *Your Last Friend, Inc.*, its changes through the workshop class, how the actors, director, and designers approached my work, and how it was received by the public. This thesis will consider my ability to cater to the demands of the public and not lose my style in the process.

Following this introduction, chapter one will detail the process of the new script development, beginning before the idea was even formed. Chapter two will relate the experience of the script-in-hand performance. The third chapter will discuss the summer New Script Development Workshop, providing journal entries which detail the process of critiquing and revising for a three week period. The fourth chapter will provide journal entries focusing upon the audition and rehearsal experience. The fifth chapter will document the *Boar's Head Players* production. The sixth chapter will be a critique of the
production script and a description of the changes made in the post-production script.
There will be a critique and conclusion after the final revision, expressing my play's
overall development as well as my own.

The appendices will contain the cast list, the *Boar's Head Players* brochure,
production poster signed by cast, Becca Martin's online review, and photographs taken of
the production. The first, seventh, and eighth versions of *Your Last Friend, Inc* will also
be included.
HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Inspiration

Before detailing the path of Your Last Friend, Inc., I need to tell about the events leading up to its creation. In the Summer of 2009, I was a Second Year Playwriting candidate, and it was time for the play selection of that year’s Boars Head Players New Play Showcase. An unusual number of playwrights were in attendance during that summer: myself, Adam E. Douglas (the other Second Year Playwriting Candidate), and Larry Mitchell (the Third Year Playwriting Candidate who stayed enrolled that summer). There were only two slots available, so we three playwrights wrote and developed our plays during the three-week workshop class, knowing that one of us was not going to be selected. Adam E. Douglas wrote a play about people hiding out in a church during a zombie-apocalypse, Larry Mitchell wrote a Non-realistic piece about people being sold on entering a mysterious door, and I wrote a modern retelling of how the legendary serial murderer “Jack, The Ripper” could have become who he became. It was titled No Touching.

Adam’s play was the most acceptable, as it was theatrically realistic. Larry’s was a difficult choice, because the second act required that an enclosed room onstage be slowly filled with water. Mine was psychologically difficult, because I was attempting to bring horror onstage. I thought that by keeping it quite realistic, it would be a natural choice. However, having someone violently murdered onstage by a transgendered psychopath is
too much for the general audience members of Fayetteville, Arkansas…apparently. It was concluded by the Faculty that Adam’s play and Larry’s play were more acceptable choices, and I was restricted to a staged, script-in-hand performance. Fewer than thirty people came to the one performance.

During the three week workshop class, I reconstructed the play and took out every “Jack, The Ripper” element (at Professor Roger Gross’ advice), and made it a play about sexual identity. Although the revised version was superior, I believe that the original elements could have been kept and revised just as thoroughly to create a good play. Yet, even with just as much work done to it, I’m quite certain that the serial killer play would not be acceptable to Fayetteville. While Sweeney Todd did quite well for itself, I doubt many theatres would be willing to produce a non-musical, humor-lacking version of the same script.

From this experience, I learned that while I can write whatever my heart wishes, a play is not a play until it finds its audience. If designed to be more popular, such a play would gain more validation. So, I decided that my next summer play would be more mainstream. I did not want to risk having my potential thesis play turned down due to its content.
During the Winter Break of 2009 between Fall and Spring semesters, I took the time to write a new full-length play for my thesis. The Fall semester’s playwriting class had focused upon adaptations, and I was not fully convinced that my final for the class was up to my standards. So, I wrote a completely new play with the intention of it being accepted for production by the Drama Faculty. I did not want to completely restrict my own tendency to write about the unusual, because I feared that the lack of soul would be felt. I wanted a socially acceptable story that still retained my identity.

Something that has always bothered me is this country’s tendency to force life on its citizens. Those who are in unbearable pain, faced with terminal sicknesses, or have in effect, reached the end of their lives are generally looked at unfavorably if they desire to end their lives. These people, who can no longer contribute to society, are required to continue their unpleasant lives until medical sciences can no longer keep them alive. Of course, there is the DNR (“Do Not Resuscitate”) order, but what about people doomed to live years or decades alone and in pain?

When I took the class “On Death and Dying” in Fall ’05, a Humanities class taught by Professor John E. King about the social concepts and psychology of dying, I learned that a few states had legalized "The Right to Die With Dignity" act, giving certain terminally ill patients pills that would effectively kill them. However, (and this is from memory of the class, not studies I have seen) I learned that ninety percent of the patients
who received their pills did not take them. They simply wanted to have control over their lives. They wanted the choice for themselves.

I started questioning the validity of the argument for suicide in certain situations. I imagined what it must be like to die of a very advanced age in the United States. With the coming of old age, certain physical attributes naturally fail: eyesight, muscle strength, bone density, hearing, et cetera. Everything that allows the mind to directly interact with its surroundings slowly dissipates, leaving behind a mind trapped in an organic prison. It's quite a nightmare, but it is not a dream. This actually happens to most people. These individuals can no longer be a productive citizen or even generate enough creative output to occupy their minds. They must sit quietly in one spot and listen to television until the day they fall into a coma and/or die. There is an alternative to this. They could slowly lose their minds before they die. Memory naturally fades away, the perception of reality eventually gets blurry, and soon they suffer mental illness. I've heard and seen health care patients suffering from amnesia so harshly that they revert to who they were as a child. Imagine playing checkers with your own parents and having them look up to you as if you were the older adult.

I am not blind to the dangers of enforcing "The Right to Die With Dignity". Mentally ill yet curable individuals might try to manipulate this to end their suffering; those with physical limitations might see this as an easier alternative to living as a burden on their families, and (the most frightening) the government might impose this policy on individuals without their expressed consent. That last possibility is the least likely, but it
is a publically shared fear nonetheless. Another danger, the one that my play relies upon, is the likelihood of deceitful individuals using this new law as a way to steal money. Those suffering from pain are easy targets, and those not wanting to wait to die naturally would definitely fall into this category. It is not uncommon either. The mortuary business makes a fortune off of family members wishing to send off their relatives in fashion and with dignity. Foreign faith healers who remove cancer and tumors with their bare hands make a fortune too, until the locals realize that these "doctors" are using sleight of hand and chicken organs.

So, I combined into one play my desire to explore assisted suicide/euthanasia and the natural fear of being scammed. This could have been a very serious and morbid play. If I had written such a play, I do not think it would have been received as well as it was. Suicide is a very big issue, especially when it is applied to those who live practically as comatose patients without the blessing of permanent unconsciousness. It also is a topic slightly related to the Pro-Choice/Life argument, and I knew that giving a strong opinion one way or another would have been ill advised. This was a lot of conflict to put into one script, and the only way I could see it working was to make it a comedy. If a playwright can get the audience laughing while they're watching the show, then later they can debate the issue on their own time. If I forced my audience to experience these tremendous conflicts and controversial issues, I would alienate those who didn't share my opinions as well as those who would rather remain neutral. Focusing more on the comical happenstance of my exaggerated characters, I hoped to bring a sort of calming effect and divert attention from the issues at hand long enough to not earn the wrath of the public.
The First Draft

In Spring of 2011, I presented my new play to Dr. Roger Gross as my selection for the coming Boars Head Players' showcase. Due to my late submission, we did not have enough time to revise it much before a script-in-hand reading. Therefore, it was my responsibility to take in all that I could and revise it as much as possible before then.

The setting was in Tucson, Arizona; a state I knew had not approved the "Right to Die With Dignity" act. I also liked the idea of placing a play about death in a setting where life is rare and precious, such as the deserts of Arizona. The Time was the present. The play starts off with one criminal, Sam Phillip, working on a current scam when his partner, Jonny Long, rushes in with a new and brilliant idea. Sam is an anti-social computer nerd whose expertise is in computer hacking. Jonny is the silver-tongued salesman who can close any deal. Jonny rushes into their office and exclaims that he has a new and foolproof idea: selling assisted suicide insurance in a state where assisted suicide is illegal. Sam, the level-headed one, can't believe that Jonny would think of such an impossible and morally irresponsible scam as this one. However, Jonny explains that since Arizona will probably never legalize assisted suicide, Jonny and Sam will never have to actually kill anyone, and no one will technically be scammed, because the customers understand that they'll probably never be able to receive service anyway. Sam is convinced, and their new scam is underway. Yet, the laws of Arizona do change, and the two crooks are put into the position of either convincing customers to enjoy life or run away from a very lucrative business. Of course they go for the money, but their unusual and insane customers make them work for the money. Todd McNeal wants to die,
because he lost his job and doesn't want to disappoint his mother. Beulah Seiwert can't bear the thought of being a financial burden and accepts her inevitable fate. Rebecca Tener is deprived of her parents' love and believes her death will finally get their attention. Fortunately, Jonny's creativity and Sam's intelligence create a solution for each customer, and all go home happy. That is until Jonny's sister comes calling to end her life before pancreatic cancer does. This close-to-home blow makes Sam realize how immoral he's becoming, and he wants to change. Jonny doesn't want to lose his partner in crime and friend, but Sam wants to be a better person, even if it means giving back all the money. Jonny accepts his friend's life choice, and the two part ways.

The issues with this version are the same ones that exist all the way to the last version. I take a little bit of pride in the fact that the overall storyline never changed, except for the very ending. I had a strong story, interesting characters, and a nice dramatic arc. What caused me the most frustration about the play was the details and fine tuning. I've never had a play before that I had to work this hard to correct so many little issues. I will admit that this is probably because I wrote a present-day play with a few twists on reality. When a fictional story has to seem plausible, suddenly every little thing about it means ten times more than before. I accept that. I was, after all, trying to write a Realistic play that the audience could accept. I would cater to their wishes.

First, Jonny and Sam were not linguistically different. They were effectively the same person in different situations, rather than two identifiable characters. Dr. Gross suggested that I dwell more upon Sam's nerdiness. Use his unique abilities as a definer of his character. So, I attempted to raise his language more to that of a nerdy computer
technician mostly through sci-fi pop-culture references. The second issue was how easily everything came to the two crooks. This went along with the believability factor; how would they be able to pull off such an elaborate con without the authorities checking in on them? I ran through a couple of possibilities, but mostly went with the idea that Sam knew how to hack into local court computers to legitimize without ever having to come face to face with an official. A third issue was the dialogue of the characters. There was too much exposition and not enough activity onstage. My solution to this was to add in an extra section in the first scene were Sam and Jonny would act as customer and salesman to explain to Sam how the whole sales pitch would work. It was very exaggerated on both parts, and I believed that it allowed the audience to understand their scam a little better. I also decided to go through and slim down long dialogues throughout the play.

The fourth issue was the last scene of the second act. This would turn out to be the biggest problem of them all, but specifically in this first version there needed to be more verbalized conflict between Sam and Jonny. Originally, the scene opened with Jean Avery (Sam's sister) calling their answering machine and saying she wasn't going to go through with their services. I changed it: Sam and Jonny get into a fight about Jonny not being able to accommodate Sam's need for a moral cleansing; it looks like the friendship is over until Jean's call comes at just the right moment. There were many other smaller issues, but those four were the bigger ones I tried to correct before the script-in-hand performance.
Also, I changed Jean Avery's character name to Jessica Phillips, due to the concept of possible different mothers which I never addressed.
SCRIPT-IN-HAND PERFORMANCE

2nd VERSION. What always amazes me the most as a playwright is to watch the auditions for my plays. Up until that moment, it's all text. The mere notion of someone trying to jump into the mind of one of my characters makes me feel as if the effort I put into my work is validated. Auditions for the Script-in-Hand performance were done in Kimpel Hall room 402 on January 21st with Dr. Roger Gross and myself present. It was Dr. Gross' call on who got what part, but he valued my opinion and consulted with me after the auditions were over. Sam Swanson was cast as Jonny, Kirk Dixon as Sam, Forrest Jessing as Todd, Frances Wilson as Jessica, and Rachel Holt as Rebecca. Kate Frank was cast as Beluah at a later date. Sam Swanson's ability to act sleazy played off of Kirk Dixon's nervous computer geek act quite well. Forrest Jessing played a moderately pathetic Todd, which downplayed the hilarity of the character's sad nature. Frances Wilson's defensiveness played well for a independent Southern girl, and Rachel Holt's childishness did the same for a spoiled, creative girl. Kate Frank jumped into the part with the cheeriness and curiosity demanded of Beulah.

Starting on January 26th, rehearsals went well, for the most part. I remember having a conversation with Kate Frank about how she was having trouble depicting an old lady with a strong libido. She was able to draw upon her experiences with women she already knew. Also, this was a good time for me to realize exactly what wasn't working. Specifically, certain jokes. It's hard to gauge which jokes on paper will hit the audience just right. One such joke which I immediately regretted writing was right after
Sam saved Beulah with his Viagra idea: Sam-"I don't know what came over me. It just popped into my head", Jonny-"And in a day or two, Mrs. Yorn will have a head pop up in her." I edited that out before the reading. However, it made me wonder exactly how sleazy I should make Sam. After the show, Professor Michael Riha of our Drama Department again pointed out that a character who casually visits strip joints and is a constant alcoholic might alienate my audience members. Jonny might be too much of a degenerate. Again, I worried much about this, because I wanted to make mostly everyone happy in every way with this script. However, I decided against making Jonny too clean, because then he wouldn't be such a polar opposite to Sam and it would downplay many of my now working jokes.

I assumed the performance went very well, because the audience laughed at almost every point I wanted them to and their feedback to me and each other was overall positive. However, there were still many issues with the script as it was. For one, not everyone could understand exactly what the scam was right away. I'll admit, I had some problems explaining the storyline within a single sentence to others. "Two criminals try to sell assisted suicide insurance in a state where it is illegal, but then it becomes legal, and they have to save all their customers, so they don't lose their business or have to kill anyone." Quite a mouthful, and it usually brings up more questions. This particular problem I would have to work on more in the future. Another was the Deus ex machina ending. Everything is wrapped up neatly with Jessica not going along with the assisted suicide, Sam paying back all the customers with the money that Todd gifts them with at the end, and Rebecca becoming Sam's replacement in Jonny's schemes. It was all too
much, and it definitely felt pushed. I still did not feel I had a reason to keep Sam and
Jonny in the business rather than skipping town immediately. I wanted them to have to
stay with the business no matter what, and I currently didn't have that. All these things
would be worked over and over again in the New Script Development during the
Summer.

Until that point came, I had a workable script that gained the approval of the
Drama Department Faculty for the New Script Development Workshop and the full-scale
summer production. I had accomplished my goal of acceptance without stripping the
play of my style.

The other notable occurrence before the Summer was a meeting I had with
Professor Patrick Stone, Technical Director of the Drama Dept. He was very valuable in
solving some of the issues that I was trying to solve. For one, he helped me focus more
on the commercialism of the business. Why choose a total of one thousand dollars for
assisted suicide insurance? You can shoot yourself for almost free. This had me
thinking more about how Jonny would actively convince his customers to buy into the
scam, and therefore prove his abilities to change their opinions right around when the
laws changed. He suggested that I watch the classic film, "Soylent Green," and focus on
its style of assisted suicide, which I did and enjoyed. Another thing was that he pointed
out that all of my onstage patients except for Jessica had their minds changed with the use
Having too much sex could paint a bad picture for my play, so I changed Todd and
Rebecca's solutions enough to allow the humor with Beulah's not to be overshadowed. Finally, he pointed out that Rebecca's Goth-wear might not be with the current times, and that Punk-wear might be more fitting. Also, Gothic wear is more expensive than Punk. One piece of advice that he suggested that I didn't follow through with was the title. He suggested that it wasn't catchy enough, and that I could do better. Honestly, Your Last Friend, Inc. is in my opinion quite catchy already. It might not jump off of the page, but it's something that people will think about later and question. Since I'm generally unsuccessful with titles (I had to go through more than six titles to get to "No Touching"), I stayed with the original.

Probably the biggest lesson I had learned during this phase of the play's development was characterization. When one hears their characters talk inside their head, it's a very different experience than actually hearing other people try to bring out a unique identity for them to work with. In the first draft, Jonny and Sam were different, but not unique. Through the help of the Graduate Playwriting class and watching my characters alive on stage, I was able to identify the problem. Jonny and Sam's speech were too similar to my own, and thus too similar to each other. After the Script-in-Hand Production and hearing the advice of two professors, I decided that this would be the problem I would focus the most upon when the New Script Development class began.
I kept an audio journal during the workshop, and I have included a summarized version of each entry. However, I would like to say a few words about the experience as a whole. It is hard to allow everyone an equal chance to both praise and scorn your creative work; especially to scorn. Yet, the scorn is what allows one to learn the most. I’ve always been a firm believer in pointing out everything that is wrong before moving on to the right. Too many happy thoughts and one becomes too complacent with their flawed work.

I have also learned from this workshop class that everyone has an opinion, whether it be good or bad. Or worse, it is their opinion on how my work would be better for them. This was especially hard for me to detect, because I was so worried about pleasing everyone that I assumed any criticism deserved my entire consideration. This drove me a little mad. Yes, it is best to hear everyone and everything, but worrying about pleasing everyone is ridiculous. For the future, I will follow Dr. Roger Gross’ advice about the workshop, (Paraphrased) "Listen thoughtfully to everything, ignore what you wish." My journal notes will express how I came to this.

For those unfamiliar with the Playwright's Workshop method, the playwright brings in multiple copies of the same script. Everyone present receives their own script to write notes on, certain participants are selected or volunteer to read for certain characters, the playwright reads stage directions, and the entire script is read aloud. Then everyone participated in oral critique. The class was set up where one day, Adam’s and my summer plays would be workshopped, and then the next day would be two different
plays, also by us. This was done to give both playwrights a mental break. So, the fifteen workshop days were broken in half.

My notes are written as pieces of advice from all the participants in the workshop. My own personal responses will be in parentheses. Opinions of others that were written to me instead of spoken in class are included separately. My journal entries focusing on my revisions will not need this, as they are reports on my work before the workshop.

The following are journal entries, created during the rehearsal process. They are presented as primary historical documents in hopes of getting as close as possible to the actual creative process. As such, they have not been corrected or polished for purposes of academic or cosmetic propriety but are presented as they were created in the moment.

May 17th – First Day

Introducing 3rd VERSION. They noticed that the first scene is mostly exposition. Needs movement and less information directed at audience. Sam needs to talk more about morals in last scene (I might not do it, due to already long length). Might need to downplay Jonny’s humor (but that might be an influence due to Adam’s suggestion to remove comedic style). Roger sees Jonny as Vince Vaughn, “What would Vince say if I handed this script to him?” His answer, “Not enough complications”. (To do this, I will work in more danger of customers leaving.) At end, give Jonny a legit con job to move towards (Humorous piece of advice, but I might not follow). The end does need change. (I hate the magic money solution.) Rebecca’s turnaround is too fast just by a little bit. Roger’s advice is to make Jonny’s part in the scam being a doctor (not likely, as the current Jonny probably wouldn’t be that convincing as a doctor). Roger says that I say
Sam is a computer wizard, but I give no evidence of such. Sam is more of a tool than a character. He needs more personalization. (To do this, I will increase nerdiness even more.) There is a problem with Jonny’s lack of knowledge about legalization of assisted suicide law. It stretches the believability factor. (I might give a call to a lawyer to check on speed of law changes.)

Adam: Deus ex machina remark about Jessica's call in the last scene. (However, I believe it’s earned.) Overall, little activity. Lots of sitting. (It’s an interview situation. Action is within the dialogue rather than action of blocking). Again, Adam believes I should make this whole play serious. Roger does not agree. (I agree with Roger.)

Brandi Hoofnagle: Jonny is always going to sleep (It’s because he’s a drunk, so I need more drinking references.) There’s a greater need Jonny and Sam's motivation to be conmen, mostly Sam. Why is Sam a crook? (This has been downplayed, since Sam changes his life, but I still need to push this element.) Patients are repetitive. (Solve with more risk.) Should be a bigger arc with Sam (character work).

Esteban Ibanez: I never establish what the last chance session is. I explain it with every patient, but I never explain it beforehand. (A danger of exposition overload if I do this.)

May 20th

4th VERSION. Overall Focus: build up complications. I’m trying to solve the legal problem by having Jonny accidentally not know that the law passed two months ago. He called a hospital and asked a doctor if assisted suicide was legal. Once the doctor said "no," he hung up before possibly being told that it will be legal soon enough.
To keep Sam and Jonny there a month, I added a money laundering business partner named Huarez, who then says to give 100,000 now or wait a month. To keep Sam from running, Huarez says they’ll get their money back eventually. This shows Sam’s greed. Todd: He wants to be killed before he loses his job, because his mom will kill him once Todd has to put her in a home. Beulah: Her son is going to come by next week and forcefully make her move back. Rebecca: Made her father the best lawyer in town, turning her into a threat if she blames Jonny and Sam for her death. Jessica: More attitude. End Scene: Took Rebecca out of the ending. It was a gimmick anyway. Pushed Jonny’s drinking habit to explain sleeping.

Each patient is still a similar gag. I probably will not break away from that. Due to Adam’s complaint about little activity, I will wait to see if everyone else agrees. Pushed the Vince Vaughn-ness in Jonny, and thought of Justin Long as Sam.

May 24th

[SIDE NOTE: Watched "Soylent Green." Focusing on the lawyer character who wanted to go home, where home was the white building where they catered to the comforts of the to-be-assisted suicide patient. Built to be a very calm, pleasing atmosphere. Helped me to rethink Beulah’s character. Might have her ask for things off the website, things that Sam and Jonny are not prepared for.]
Jessica is too soft spoken for a Southern drug addict going through chemo treatment. (I need to change her without losing her much needed wisdom and softness.) Maybe make her a heroin addict. Legal problem: military checks pass on to widows. (I will rethink this element.) I added complications, but they were all OS ones. Roger wants me to add more onstage complications-activity. Rebecca should bring her own killing instruments. Huarez connection was a little unclear. The audience doesn’t need to know everything about the deal. No one saw the gradual breaking of friendship up to the point of Jessica. Needs more friendship arguments. Row asked if I can make Sam a woman. (For every play I write, I wonder if the gender of each character can be switched. However, I believe it would bring in a sexual tension between these two friends, and I don’t want this.)

Explain why Sam is talking to the customers. At one point, Jonny should hand over a customer to Sam and say “You do it” as a way to put tension on the friendship. More hints for Jessica’s arrival. Jonny is such a powerful character that he needs to be balanced out by another powerful character. Sam is lacking as a control freak. (I didn’t want a stereotypical nerd, and Roger asked “Do you have anything better?” I still feel that I can have a Sam that’s not ridiculous character. Plan B to this, turn him into a woman, seems like a quick fix. This is yet another time when I have to consider the audience’s needs rather than my own instincts.)
May 27th

5th VERSION

To make Sam a real nerd, I added more sci-fi pop culture references in his dialogue, but I stayed away from computer metaphors. Todd: turned his mother into a possibly murderous stalker to give Todd more blocking as he constantly checks the windows. Beulah: Fixed military check issue by replacing complication. The taxidermist she wants to preserve her body will be drafted to war soon. She also asks for camera shots of herself for the taxidermist to work from, and Jonny turns this process into a seductive tactic. Rebecca decides to commit suicide in the office with her own knife. Made Jessica less of an easygoing person and more irritable.

Replies to Version 5

Sam’s new characteristics are appreciated, but more are needed: Family history for Sam. (The actors are looking for motivation.) Sam needs to be as energetic as Jonny. Roger suggested I take one scene and experimentally make him as much of a technical computer nerd as I can. (I don’t like this, but everyone’s agreeing with Roger.) Express more clearly that pictures of Beulah are for the taxidermist. “Why does Sam want the money?” This question still feels unanswered. (I was going to push Sam being antisocial, but Roger warned that this could mar Sam’s character.) Stress the Sam and Jonny friendship bonds. Huarez’s name was changed to Rodrigo. Rodrigo: Why do they need him? Why couldn’t Sam do all this work? Might rewrite and say they owe the Latin Kings the money. Will make the ending more dangerous. Roger wants Sam to be a
coffee-head to express his heightened energy. Act II seems a little boring. Bring in a
cuteness at the end. Roger suggests this be brought in by Sam. Also, possibly bring
Rebecca back at the end. Overall, better without the gift money at the end. This takes
away from the *Deus ex machina* feeling. (Everyone’s opinions are starting to feel less
beneficial and more “opinions”.)

May 31st

REVISION: Rewrite of the first scene of the first act. Done to test
characterization of Sam. Pushing nerdiness, agitation, energy, demanding, etc., but in a
humorous manner.

Overall, they said Sam lacked motivation, due to lack of history with Sam and
Jonny. (I will add a little more to this, but the actor’s need for motivation was starting to
be counterproductive, says Roger, to playwriting. Since all actors agreed that they have
no idea why Sam is there, I will help it along a little bit, but I will not detail the history of
the friendship.) Sam doesn’t sound computer-hacker like, due to Sam not enjoying this
work. (I’ll push his need to accomplish greater tasks.) Jessica: push the “I’m needing
store credit” option. Also, express how her hospitalization pointed the cops towards her.
Everyone felt okay about the gift money exclusion at the end. Reference to Sam as a
little annoying barking dog, and everyone thought that was cute. Jonny isn’t phased by
Sam’s pop-culture references. (I believe this is a hint of their experienced friendship.)
Someone thought it was odd that Sam was working with Jonny on nickel and dime jobs
instead of super hacking scams and getting more money. (I think they are overestimating
the abilities of an average computer hacker. Might make it clearer that he’s not a super
genius.) Change of scams in the first scene seems sudden. Change to Sam preparing for
something else rather than being in the middle of a scam.

June 2\textsuperscript{nd}

6th VERSION-Audition Version

Overall, more focus on Sam’s character based on the one scene experiment.
Didn’t require strong changes on how Sam interacts with Jonny. Roger wants more
colorization with Sam to level off energy with Jonny, but I believe doing so will lose
depth for first act, especially with the transition from act one to act two. I do not want
Sam to become a caricature. There are many opinions about how to improve my story. I
thought they’d be decreasing over time.

WORKSHOP

Actors want motivation, but Roger suggests that I shouldn’t concentrate too
much on this (once again). I’m frustrated with the task of judging if all these opinions are
constructive or not.

Esteban: Too much fighting between Sam and Jonny in first act. They should work more
together. (However, I do not want to downplay the conflict. I bring them together in A1,
SC.3 anyway.) What if Sam didn’t back away too fast from Beulah? (I have enough of this already.) Jonny gave up too easily at the end of the play.

Brandi: Need to develop the Rodrigo situation. (Did so by making Jonny owe the Mexican mafia a lot of money, thus Sam wants to help out Jonny. At the end, Sam uses his friendship to get Jonny to give up the money at the end. Redeems both characters.)

Write more about Sam and Jessica’s history, pushing the fact that Jonny knows about it too.

Adam: Believes there is too much exposition. (I do not believe I will ever be able to clear my play completely of exposition.)

Becky Rivas: The ending is kind of heavy. Should end it on a happy note. (I will have Sam log onto computer and talk to a girl, who then asks him to have sex In Real Life.)

Rowe: Rewrote my lines, but not beneficial to my characters.

(I believe that there will be fewer changes to this script in the future.)

June 3rd

WORKSHOP on 6th VERSION.

(Mostly a repeat of advice that I’ve decided against. Generally, more talk about motivation. Class went on longer than usual, and it stressed me out. Sam needs more motivation, Jonny needs more need for conning other than the thrill of it, etc.) The new ending was funny, but not really that great. (I will rewrite it.) Rodrigo situation is still a little odd. (Considering taking it out completely.) Adam said, “If I want to write characters that can work, then that’s okay, but I think you should try and push yourself to be great.” (This annoyed me greatly. It suggests that I wasn’t trying as hard as I could.
After everyone left, I expressed my frustration to Roger. Roger said he had no idea where the conversation was coming from. If I add much more, I’m going to be concentrating on Jonny and Sam’s friendship rather than the situation I put them into. This is a story about two conmen who have to be good people, not two friends about their changing relationship. I can’t add anymore personal history in this. I have a lot more to concentrate on than what the table is needing from me. Roger said I could still work a little more on Sam.) Adam wants less exposition and more motivation, and everyone agreed with him, except for Roger. (For my next revision, I will have to ignore the whole table except for Roger. I know I should concentrate on everyone, but I feel as if they want characters that will dominate the actors rather than allow the actors to make choices with the characters. I’d rather have a better story and allow leeway to the actors. If this allows more danger, then tough. I know I wrote this play with the intention that it should be completely acceptable to the University, and I went into the class with the idea of taking every piece of information to heart, but now I’m having to go against it. I will now revise towards Roger’s wishes rather than the table’s and specifically Adam’s. I don’t want to put him down. He does help a lot, but his help is becoming more opinion than beneficial advice. I apologize for my negativity.)

NOTES ON WHOLE WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

Overall, the workshop helped me pinpoint the places in my script which were too odd or unexplained to allow believability in my play. Also, the humor was tempered to the story, the characters were more fully developed, and the "saving" moments of the story were earned and not forced upon the play. At this point, I was still figuring out
another ending, but my next revision will solve that. I was still troubled by the class' demand for more motivation, but I still wasn't going to do anything about it. I had to let go of my script a little and see if what I think would succeed would do so in practice.

The possibility of having written a failed script haunted me. I was well aware that this play was going to be the focus for my thesis, and I didn't want to have a thesis over a play that fell short in the ticket box office. I had to start believing in myself and my work. This was the hardest part for me, even more so than realizing not every piece of advice I was given was beneficial. Failure of the show would mean a failure of my abilities. Yes, I knew that sometimes a show has problems that aren't even remotely connected to the script, but this was my first true production ever. It had to work.
AUDITIONS

Once again, whenever I hear someone else try to be the characters I've written on paper, it gives me much pride. It somehow validates my work. If my characters are worthy of someone else's concentration, then they are worthy of being in existence. The summer auditions did not go as well. Yes, Roger and I were able to find a good cast, but there were issues. The biggest issue to me is the fact that in the summer, the actors with the most talent either go to summer theatres or go on vacation due to exhaustion. This means that Adam and I had to call in favors and gather new actors for our auditions, not to mention that most of the seasoned student actors staying in Fayetteville were already involved in the mainstage play "The Good Doctor". On top of that, many of the actors who auditioned specifically did so for Adam's play and not mine.

My journal entries listed here are transcripts of the audio files. Auditions were done in Rooms 404 and 402 in Kimpel Hall with Roger and myself.

June 5th
1ST DAY OF AUDITIONS

Sheridan Hall-(as Sam) Had a lot of confidence, which is something, but he isn't a trained actor.

Vincent Berrios-(as Jonny) Not sure.
Drew Bullock-(as Todd) Did pretty well. Very weepy, pathetic. Took direction from Roger. Hope he gets the part.

Ian Galloway-(as Jonny) Wasn’t greasy or sleezy enough, but that can be learned. Perfect Jonny smile. Experienced actor; accepted into the Masters Acting course, but turned the offer down.

Danielle McKnight-(as Rebecca) Seemed good.

John (O’Connel?)-(as Jonny) Not there. (as Sam) Clicked when he worked with Ian as Jonny, but he pushed Sam as being stereotypically gay.

What I got from auditions: I found myself wanting to grind my teeth, because I knew they weren’t up to level with the characters yet. To be fair, hardly any actor gets it perfect when reading the part for the first time. Playwrights don't get it perfect the first time they write it either. Roger suggested I add something to the first scene that suggests Sam and Jonny are not arguing but bouncing ideas off of each other. I believe any director would get the idea that they are not arguing with each other, but I’ll put in a little bit to protect against this. “Banter, not problem solving.” I need to look over the beginning where they name-drop Jessica. Takes away from Jonny being very drunk. I need to take away “The Kid” remarks. They don’t make sense and are kind of stupid. Jessica referenced how she was very, very truthful and honest and was kicked out of the trailer park at seventeen. When they were reading it, I felt as if it was another history piece to satisfy the Summer Playwright’s table. Told Roger that I was going to hack away at all the useless history references. Roger says it was one of the few earned history
references, so I’m not sure what to do now. Out of six parts, I only saw three actors who could fit the parts.

June 6th
AUDITIONS

Shaun Tompson-(Sam) He could act well, but wasn’t the character.

Emily Tomlinson-(Beluah) She actually did what I asked her to in the script, i.e. reading the lines quickly. Her lower voice is also a bonus. Not too sure if I’ll be able to get her, because she has an incredible English accent, which puts her up in the running for Adam’s play.

Christen Saunders-(Beulah) Okay, but her voice is far too young.

Sarah McBride-(Beluah) Sounds far too young.

Catherine Guinevine-(Beluah) Could do it, but we would have to teach her to have more energy. I could be convinced of her performing that character.

Joshua Koherst-(Sam) Didn’t have a caffeine addict personality. Read lines carefully. Perfect Todd. Did the convincing acting of crying without tears. I hope he gets the part.

Anna Hasslett-(Jessica) Good. She could be a more convincing less stable person.

(Beulah) Not sure.

The one part we were looking hard for was Sam, but we were not able to find one. We’re also calling Catherine Witherspoon to attempt a Rebecca. Between both auditions, there was only one actor who was devoted to my play only, and Adam’s play had seven.
Roger said it’s best not to think about these things. I’ll take his advice. For the future, I’ll think about calling in more personal favors when auditions come around.

THE PRODUCTION SCRIPT-2nd half of journal entry

Rodrigo was changed to a money laundering front instead of overall involvement. It might seem like this is something Sam could do on his own, but it will simply have to be a flaw within the play. Without it, I don’t think the play will work for the one month limitation. Changed ending again to Sam playing a joke on Jonny by getting a call from Beulah and making a secret date between Beulah and Jonny. Ends on a high note. Adam felt that a lot of the jokes were gratuitous, and I agree. I did them to push Sam’s personality, but I cut a few of them out. Still ninety pages overall. I believe this one is good to go. It has its problems, but I’m willing to continue without stressing about them. I believe every playwright has to deal with this kind of stress, and although this is a master’s thesis, I’m still learning. Hopefully, it will be a better experience than last Summer. Having a full production for the first time will be nice.
June 10th

CALL BACKS

Even though we didn’t get a lot of people, I was still impressed by the level of talent from young and inexperienced actors.

Ian Galloway was able to get the humor of Sam better than anyone else. Joshua Coherst was our other option for Sam, so we had a little bit of a dilemma. Ian was also the best Jonny. Roger suggested that the other Jonny could be Vincent Berrios. I didn’t believe Vincent was a good fast-talking, fast-thinking man. He looked the part physically, but not mentally. He was probably the best Jonny other than Ian. Ian also brought more to Sam than he did to Jonny, so Roger and I agreed that he would be best for the part.

Sean was the third-place Jonny. He still has a nerd attitude, and we could work with him on that.

Danielle as Rebecca is good. I saw the qualities needed in her, as did Roger. Roger had Danielle and Catherine do a lot of physical exercises to see who would be the better Rebecca. Catherine was the best Jessica. It was the best moment of the night when she was Jessica and Ian was Sam. It was very emotional, and she brought in a weakness and wisdom to the character that I appreciated. She was the only one to take Roger’s direction of Jessica being physically weak.

Roger and I were agreeing a lot this night.

Note to self: Actor’s auditions are not a clear reflection of my writing. The better actors were able to pick up on my characters better.
Emily Tomlinson did a good Jessica, neurotic and hippy. I thought it was very good, because I didn’t want to hate Jessica, the drug addict. She didn’t take Roger’s direction to play Beulah as an old person. Sarah McBride was the best Beulah, but Roger wanted to search for an actual older actor. Sarah still has a young face and a child’s voice, but she seems to be the best so far. I can still hear Kate Frank’s voice when I hear Beulah’s lines. Anna is good, but she wasn’t able to be anyone else but herself.

Overall, my opinions on the casting: Sam, definitely Ian. If not Ian, Joshua. Jonny, Ian again. If not Ian, then Vincent. Todd, we had a no-call, no-show, and Drew didn’t show up. I suggested to go with Joshua, and Roger thought that was preferred over making a third callback for an actor who didn’t listen to details. Rebecca: my choices were Danielle and then Catherine, and so were Roger's, so we went with Danielle. Beluah, I think Sarah McBride is the best so far, but Roger is going to continue his search. Jessica, I had Emily Tomlinson, but now I think it is definitely Catherine’s part. Roger may change this later, and that’s his right.

I’m happy with my cast, and I’m going to rely on Roger from here on out.

(END TRANSCRIPT)

THE CAST

There were a few issues before this could be figured out. They will be described in my "Rehearsals" journal entries, but I'll quickly explain them here too. The biggest one was that Ian Galloway decided to drop out after he had been cast. Apparently, he
was offered a better job in television (I think) and decided to go with them instead of my play. I was very angry about this. He was the best and practically only Sam we had found so far. Roger used his own connections to bring in Justin Cunningham and simply gave him the part. This made me very happy. I've always liked Justin Cunningham, and I trusted him to bring a lot to the character. It was a nice save.

Second issue was that Roger never found a good older actress to play Beulah. Our selection was limited, and time was running out. We could have gone with Sarah McBride, but Roger believed that Anna Haslett would be a better choice. Anna has the tendency to need to be moved around like a marionette, and thus is a little difficult to direct. However, she was the most experienced, and Roger and I believed she could do it. So, Anna Haslett became our Beulah.

Third issue was that Joshua Koherst apparently fell off the face of the planet. He was nowhere to be found, so Roger called back Drew Bullock. This time, Drew was available and very eager to perform. So, Drew became our Todd.

I wish I could say I was surprised by this. However, I'm not. As I said before, summertime in Fayetteville is a horrible time to find actors, and I was sharing with another playwright and succeeding to a main stage show. I am more than thankful to have had this chance, but I think there would be many fewer casting troubles if the shows weren't done during a time when the students are absent from the university.
With Justin Cunningham, Drew Bullock, Danielle McKnight, and Catherine Witherspoon I was happy. With Anna Haslett, I wasn't completely sure, but I was willing to give a chance. With Vincent Berrios, I was unhappy. He was the best that we had. If he reads this, I hope he continues to read the rest of my thesis. With Dr. Roger Gross as my director, I felt that the show would come together in the end. He would eventually suggest during rehearsals that I change Jonny's name to Gianni, so as to express Vincent's Italian heritage.
REHEARSALS

I did not sit in for every rehearsal, because I thought it would be counterproductive for me to observe every single thing as it was being developed between Director and Actor. I felt that my constant presence would be disruptive to the supreme authority that a Director should have over his show. I also had a few conflicts being Ticket Box Office manager, which later kept me from watching the beginning of every performance. If there was a question that needed answering, I was always available and responded to Dr. Gross as soon as I could.

My journal entries listed here are exact transcripts from the audio files. They have not been summarized or modified. They were recorded after I watched a rehearsal and wrote notes down.

June 23rd

I was only there for the last hour, because I was selling tickets. Unfortunately that's the way it had to be, and I could only go to one of these last-hour readings because of my hypoglycemia and needing to eat. For that one hour, I didn't have much to say other than at that point the actor playing Todd was not present, and no one knew why. He went to the first reading, but disappeared. So at that point we were just trying to get in contact with him. It was the basic reading. It was the first time I believe I heard Anna speaking the part of Beulah, and she was okay. It was just a reading, so I couldn't judge how people were getting their characters. One thing that Roger said that I really liked, he said for this script, "the funny is in the attitude of the people." And I completely agree
with that for this story. The humor is situational. These characters are not necessarily comedic by nature but by happenstance. The humor is going to be relying on these actors quite a bit. So, we will see how that works. Also at this point, I was still unsure of Vincent Berrios as Jonny, but it was a reading, so I didn't look too much into it.

June 23

Ian Gallaway dropped out for the part of Sam, because apparently he got a very limited chance to be some sort of specialist editor in an independent movie. So he just quit on us, which I was incredibly annoyed by because he was one of the few people actually immediately did the humorous character, and I thought we were going to be in a lot of trouble. But Roger was able to convince Justin Cunningham to be Sam. I trust in Justin's performance. Really wish we would have kept Ian, though.

June 28

The part where Sam said that he was picking an Irish name, Justin Cunningham decided that he would play the character pretending to be Irish in front of customers. So whenever Sam is with these customers, Justin Cunningham is speaking in an Irish accent. It is funny, and it's him adding something funny to the character rather than the character having to be there for him. I'm not sure if it's completely necessary, but it's funny, and if it helps Justin Cunningham bring this character out, then so be it. Vincent, he's not really a salesman. I mean, he's working the lines, he's working his blocking, he's doing all the functions first, which I can't blame him for. It's good for an actor to know his lines and to know his blocking by heart. I suggested to Roger to watch a film called
"The Goods". It's just an overblown, humorous movie about car salesmen, and I thought that if Vincent sees it, he might get a better feeling for Jonny.

By this day, we learned that, I believe his name is Joshua (Actor for part of Todd), was nowhere to be seen. Never replied and practically fell off the face of the Earth, so Roger called in Drew, who was our first pick for Todd, but didn't show up at the callbacks. Drew, he's at the point where he's still getting a lot of character notes from Roger, but he just came in, so I don't blame him. He's doing a good job already, which we knew he would. So maybe, the whole "not coming for callbacks" situation will teach him a lesson...or not.

At this point, Vincent is still not familiar with all of his lines. Oh yeah, and he got a haircut without informing the costume designers or even the director. He just did it on his own. He got talked to for it, or so I was told. Roger was immediately annoyed with that, which was well within his rights. Hopefully Vincent will not do something on his own like that anymore.

Talking about the actual staging of it, it's a little bit different than what I kind of imagined in the script, but I'm not put off by it. Like what I envisioned was that there was a door to the back wall and then to stage right, there was the entryway and on stage left there was the hallway to the other room. Roger combined the doorway in the middle with the hallway. He just combined it to simplify it, which I don't blame him, but it's creating a little bit of blocking issue, and he's moving around it. I don't have a fear about that, but it's not what I intended, and I'm kind of wondering if I should be clear, so I'll just see how this works for the future. Another thing is that the sofa is far, far right. The desk instead of being stage left is the kind of center. I didn't know if this was good idea until I
realized that it would help the audience bend reality where whenever Johnny and Sam are
talking to the side, since they have this little area to talk, they wouldn't be overheard
unless they wanted to be. It was a nice touch.

June 29th

Roger is really concentrating on how Rebecca is supposed to move like a dancer
at all times, and I appreciate his effort. However, I don't think it's going to be very
beneficial to her until she learns her lines. And those are difficult lines. With that script
in her hand and the camera in the other, she's not really allowing herself the freedom that
she should. I think that she should learn her lines very very soon. She's also not being
very sexual, either. I didn't mean for her to be sort of promiscuous, but I definitely mean
for the character to use sex as a weapon in her mind. And she does so. Maybe
subconsciously, maybe consciously against Johnny in this scene. It's not working. In
fact when it came time to do the forceful kiss, nothing was done. We had a lot of giggles
and kind of like "we'll do that later" attitudes. I don't know. Making two characters kiss
is odd for the actors, I always kind of notice that for new actors. They don't want to kiss.
They don't want to do it, and I'm wondering if I should refrain from that in the future. I
mean, this is the only time it happens in the whole play, but they didn't want to do it. I
don't know, I'll just have to hope in the future that I'm not dealing with recently-
graduated-from-high school actors.

At one point, when Sam's character says "I'm not going to let her kill herself" and
the following paragraph, I was meaning it at some point he's directly talking to Rebecca.
Since I didn't make that absolutely clear, Roger had make the decision, with which I am
completely fine. I think the little details of the characters should depend upon the personalities of the actors. And for me as a playwright to restrict them, it seems a little unnecessary and counterproductive. Some of the words, they weren't pronouncing correctly. Danielle (actor for Rebecca), I thought by now she would be able to say "misogynistic" correctly. She hadn't been. We corrected her on that. I never in stage directions realized that when Johnny takes the knife away, what he would do with the knife. I thought maybe he put it in the bag, maybe he put it in his pocket, I don't think this the best. It was never dealt with on my side, and I felt kind of bad about that. I'm going to have to keep it in mind for the future.

With Beulah (Anna), she was actually doing a pretty good job with it and so was Roger. I helped Roger to be okay with the fact that Beulah is not being played by an actual elderly person. Another mistake on my part; they added many camera shots to give some more motion on stage. It brought in an element of Beulah that I never really dealt with, which was her being a little bit more voluptuous, maybe even a little crazier than what she had been. It's just odd right now, but I suggested to Roger that maybe the reason why she asks them (Sam, Jonny) to take the pictures is because she bought a new digital camera and doesn't know how to operate it. I think that way I can save the sweetness of the grandmother. I need a contrast between her and Rebecca. Beulah is an old sexual vixen, it's not much of a contrast. It's just a change in age and circumstances.

June 30

There wasn't much change for me on this one: mostly practicing their blocking, practicing on their characterization. One change in the stage directions is instead of Sam
sweeping, what we have is Johnny taking off his clothes and ironing his pants before putting them back on. I think it is odd, because he goes right back to sleep in them later. Roger thinks it's a good visual to have Johnny mess up the area and have Sam have to clean everything up. And once again, I have a man getting mostly naked on one of my shows, and in this I didn't even ask for it. I think I'm going to be known for that. I mean, it's kind of funny, but I don't want people to immediately kind of attribute, "Oh, he likes to get the male actors nearly naked on stage: oh, and they're usually handsome." Don't know where that will go for me.

Well that was it. I didn't go to the other rehearsals because it's more the older stuff. I think I will go a few times this week. I believe Tuesday, because if I'm there every day, I feel like possibly Roger's going to restrict it. Catherine Witherspoon, she's been asking me to help her with something, and so did Anna at one point, and I keep telling them, "I'm the playwright. I cannot answer these questions for you. You have to go to the director first." Might seem lazy, might seem overprotective on my part, but Roger's chewed me out for it in the past, so I won't make that mistake again. If the director says to me, "Okay, tell me this," I will do that. Until then I'm not going to. This is the end of this Journal report. I will be doing more whenever I go back this week. And then the week after that is a bunch of tech rehearsals, so I will be kept informed on that, however I kind of get the idea that they don't really need me there when it's tech related. I mean I want to be there for the experience, but I'm not necessary.
July 6th

There was a stage direction change. The beers were opened off stage, so they could have that fizz. Made me a little bit more aware of props and what their requirements are. I mean, I've always been aware that if there's a onetime use prop, then it better be cheap. I never thought that the sound of the opening can would have to be offstage. So that the illusion of the beer's not broken when a fake can of beer like O'Doul's is opened on stage so that actor's aren't getting drunk. It was kind of interesting to think about.

Wrote down, "Might be a problem with the resolution between Johnny and Sam and transition to friend talk." I think that there was a problem with Act 1, Scene 1, and Roger kind of explained to them and through them to me why that was. I kind of felt like they weren't being really friends, nor were they really people who could work well with each other. Kind of freaked me out a little. Note to self: Not a good idea for playwrights to sit in when actors are just getting off book, they will rephrase much. And that's a good lesson for me. A very good lesson. I mean, not the fact that I shouldn't be there, but listening to them read their lines off book for the first time I...and I don't mean to do this, but I had to grind my teeth a lot, because they were getting them wrong. They were rephrasing them so that they could be more familiar with the meaning of lines. But because they were rephrasing, many of the jokes were misunderstood. A lot of things didn't make sense, and their characterization kind of suffered for it. You know, it's the first time they're off book, and I realize that's what they're going to do, because it's not a perfect process. I still felt a little unnerved by that.
July 7th

A general loss of energy connected to memorization of lines, again. Instead of rephrasing, they were getting them correctly, but because they were looking in the back of their heads for each and every word, they were losing their characters. But once again it's, "Okay, well at least they're memorizing their lines, so I will just sit down and be quiet and think about it for the future." There seems to be a few stage direction changes within the directors discretion. One example is in Act 1, Scene 3, Sam enters with mimed space battles. This is a little more of the actor Justin Cunningham's needs. When he enters, he decided that one of the things that keeps him from realizing that Beulah was sitting there in the office was he was reenacting some sort of sci-fi battle in his head. And it works. It works well. And I like it.

July 8th

(I was present, but I apparently had no need to make notes. I guess I didn't see anything new from last time.)

July 13th

Actors are still having problems speaking my lines. I don't hear problems with my writing, but actors don't seem to know how to read broken sentences alongside proper ones. And that's something of my style. When I'm writing, I try to write down on the paper what I hear in my head. Roger actually noticed this as well, and we're not exactly sure what I should do about it, because I write the lines down and I can hear in my head. And when I explain it to Roger, he knows how it's supposed to be said, but...when
someone outside of the playwrights read those lines, it takes them a while to get the meaning. It goes a little bit beyond just normal reinterpretation. It's something to do with how I expect certain words to be emphasized. All I can really say to myself is if this continues to be a problem with everything I do, I might have to stylize my plays where I mark certain words that are supposed to be stressed. Don't know if I should do that this point in my career, but if everything I write gets reinterpreted and emphasized incorrectly where no one understands it, then I'm going to have to do something about it.

Well, I wrote down something entitled "brilliant idea: always put cheap-ass plays in offices. No one is in short supply of desks, computers, and chairs." This is because I believe this was the first day I saw the set, and I was actually quite amazed that I got a real set. The summer before I didn't get anything but stools, papers, and a bit of costuming. And this time, I had a set. It was something physical, something people could look at it, and it looked like a like a crappy office just as I expected. And then I thought to myself, it might have been easy for them to decorate this place, because it's an office. Any business has offices and thus office-supplies. So if, in the future, I write stuff that might relate to business office, I might include it more in the stage direction than others, just so I know that it's going to look the way that I intend it to.

July 14th

First full run through at Nadine Baum Studios. They had two in a row. This was Thursday's, and Thursday they could still ask for lines, and Friday they couldn't. So I decided not to go till Friday, because, as the playwright, if all they're doing is continuously calling out for lines, my purpose there would be useless.
I still felt that Vince is still stumbling over his lines somewhat badly and missing the strong desire to convince. He's supposed to be the convincing personality, but he didn't have the quality yet. Now, I felt this mostly in Act 1, Scene 1, and after everything was done, Roger reran the scene and he directed Vincent that this was the scene that tells everyone that this play is supposed to be a comedy. And once he thought about that, he started correcting his behaviors in his acting. He does take direction, but he also is forgets his lines more than anyone else and rephrases them quite a lot. In fact, I heard two lines that unless corrected it just don't make sense. I went over to Asa, Stage Manager, and told him these things. And he asked me, "You want me to tell him whenever he's not getting it right, or whenever it sounds bad." If he had to correct everything Vincent was getting wrong, it would have been a lot of information. I kind of broke down and said, "You know what? It's not my call." If it sounds right, then I don't care. As long as the meaning gets across.

Anna's performance of Beulah, she moved back into the "I don't express emotion. I'm more reading the lines and pushing emotions" act, but when Roger corrected her, she went back into a good performance, so I'm not feeling uneasy about her. She just needs to remember to play the character rather than push for performance. And that's it overall. As for rewriting stuff, there wasn't much, but there were a couple of lines I had to correct. Act 1, Scene3 near the end where Vincent has to come in and he says he needs to use the restroom, it doesn't make sense. It just seemed odd, so I rewrote it and used a bit of my own life experience. Instead of the diarrhea, he comes in and asks Sam "Did you throw away my pillow?" Which he follows up with, "I've had it for seven years and it's still good." That as a joke between my wife and me about how I can keep
sleeping on a pillow even if it's almost to dust, and she thinks that's disgusting. And she's right. I'll correct that soon, but it was a good fix.

There was also another situation, in Act 1, Scene 3, where Rebecca's stuff is on the ground and she has just been convinced not to kill herself and Sam is having to put all the crap in the bag. Based on what Roger was doing, he was having Sam clean halfway through the monologue that I intend to start cleaning up at the beginning. So, Roger said "He's going to be improvising like he has been, or do you want some lines written?" I wrote some lines, not much, but when he played that scene again, Justin ad-libs were actually funnier than what I wrote. But I'm not going to keep what he said, because it was more based on his personality than it was the character in my writing.

The first show is soon, and I'm a bit nervous, but I believe it will be good.
THE DEBUT

The show opened Wednesday July 21, 2010 in Nadine Baum Studios and ran through Friday July 28, all 8pm shows. I will be honest right now and repeat what I've said before; I usually don't trust praise alone. We live in a society where saying something positive about someone else's work is expected rather than earned. So, I usually pay close attention to the audience. The audience sees themselves as hidden, anonymous observers of a live story unfolding right before them. That is when they reveal their true feelings about the performance.

These are summarized notes from my audio journal entries.

July 21st-1st Performance

Overall, it was considered to be a success according to everyone I talked to after the production. I can't gauge how much gratitude is obligatory and how much was genuine, so I'll have to go by my instincts on this one. I had a lot of patrons looking for me to shake my hand and they said "It was written very well and was brilliant." Michelle's family (my in-laws) were there and said they could tell that the dialogue was written by me. It's good that my writing is already gaining an identity. The only disturbance was that someone stood up and made a few rude remarks at the beginning (and was escorted out), but people still liked the play. Cunningham's ad libs worked so well, people congratulated me on his lines specifically. When I told them he ad libbed,
they inquired as to how much of his dialogue was ad libbed. It was hard to make Sam's lines unique, and if Cunningham's lines were the favorites, I might have to put them in.

Audience laughter speeds up actor's performance. The actors talked over many laughs, which stomped over some of the humor. Audience didn't get to laugh as long as they wanted. Vincent as Gianni was acting more Gianni than I had ever seen before. Yet, some of my friends still thought I could have got someone better. Rodrigo's call is an issue. Does it need to be taken out? I don't think so. I believe the problem was that the phone call was hard to hear, especially since the Spanish accent was thick. I don't see another way to solve it for now.

Good idea to give actors a chance to improv. Audience liked seeing the actors bring more of themselves to the part (Sam not seeing Beulah), which is what I had in mind. Anna played Beulah as a contained, quiet, not-exciting grandmother, which made her lines slower than intended. I put it in the character description that Beulah is a quick talker, so it might just be Anna. Poetry with Rebecca is downplayed, but I think it's due to Danielle's childlike, soft voice, which makes it hard to take her seriously. The body moved perfectly, but the voice wasn't slam poetry enough. Her overall acting was good.

Act 2, Cunningham immediately gets attention. I could tell some people were waiting for the act break at the end of Act 1, and at Act 2 everyone was focused on Jessica. Even when the yelling started, everyone was involved. Between Act 2 scenes 1 and 2, Gianni and Sam are arguing. Might give a bit of a rest in the next revision. The Borg joke from Sam, I always thought it might not work, but I got a little bit of laughter from it.
After the show, I tried to fish for comments about improvement, and I didn't get any, because everyone thought it was good. I felt good about it.

July 22nd-2nd Performance

There was a total of 20 people there. Actors used this chance to be a little more loose with their characters. This was the only one I got to be there for the opening of the show. I liked Roger's speech. It explained how hard it is to make these plays. In response to Justin's ad libbed lines, I'm either going to have to keep them or suggest within the script to the actor to ad lib at certain parts. In the beginning scene, it feels like Sam's lines are exposition heavy. Everyone I talked to liked Justin Cunningham's character the best. As of right now, Sam overshadows Gianni. I need to be more aware that the actor's are yelling so much. Justin Ad libed about the tissues "these are expensive" and calls the slurpy "strawberry", should I keep them? I'll look into it.

July 23rd – 3rd Performance

Nearing fifty in audience. Rebecca Martin, part of the NWAonline staff, made a comment to me on the homoeroticism of the first scene. Said it took away focus from the play and didn't add anything to the story. This might be a little bit my fault, because I didn't think the blocking all the way through. Possibly give Gianni more trouble thinking up all of his ideas in the first scene. The boy scout line: cut it. The Sookie joke is not mainstream enough: fix it. After the call from Todd, Gianni needs to react a little more freaked out. When Gianni is convincing Rebecca not to commit suicide, Gianni uses three references to cars. It seems odd.
July 24th – 4th Performance

Mr. Testicles joke, people didn't know if I should keep it, but the audience kept laughing at it. I'm keeping it. Act 1, Scene 2 "Sounded kind of sad" gives too much away about Jessica's future appearance. Gianni's and Jessica's diction is too big. Too eloquent for what they're talking about. Little things that I could correct. Again, everyone I talked to loved it. I didn't hear too many things bad about it other than the scene with the coats. We even got a good review from Rebecca Martin on her online blog. It seems like an overall success.
PRODUCTION REVIEW

I feel it was a good production. Of course there were elements I wished I could have changed. For example, the "example customer" bit in Act 1 Scene 1 was a dud. Only after seeing it before an audience did I realize this.

As for the comment cards that the audience could volunteer to fill out, they were generally positive. I even had one person write that she had a friend who died of cancer, and that this play spoke to her experience. Of course, they had questions and suggestions about the play as a whole, and most of them were related to either the "example customer" bit or the length of the play. There were three comments in total that were completely negative, one saying "This play has no redeeming quality whatsoever". You can't please everyone. A lesson that I have learned over and over again.

I cherish the experiences I got from this production. Mostly because they'll prepare me for the future. I now have a better idea of what can go wrong and what can go right. It'll probably be a long time until so much money, time, and work is put into another one of my plays. I think this one will be able to carry me over until that time comes again.
These are summarized notes from my audio journal entry.

September 21, 2010

It was a really good idea that I did this revision after I read the replies from the public. Their advice was mostly beneficial, and if something was said repeatedly, it generally was correct. First, in Act 1 Scene 1, they felt that the first scene went on too long, specifically the explanation. I think that some of it was due to actor and director choices, but I think the majority was due to my blocking directions with the jackets. So, I cut the scene out completely. It felt pushed in order to make the coat joke work. I originally thought it might help bring in some humor and give more time to explain the scam to the audience, but it's not needed. I called Roger to confirm this choice, and he agreed. Hopefully, this will also make the first act seem considerably shorter.

I returned Gianni's name back to Jonny. I know it's a small thing to change, but it means a lot to me.

I took Rodrigo out as a character. Many people were wondering exactly what that was all about, and the actual voice was distracting. It broke the illusion of the theatre a little bit, because of the booming, slightly-inaudible voice. I originally had it as a threat to keep Sam and Gianni in town, but I changed Rodrigo into a loan shark that Gianni owed money to. Jonny guilt-trips Sam into playing along with the scam to save his own hide.
Beulah's dialogue is shortened a little bit. I'm disappointed that Anna didn't rush through those lines, even though Roger told her to. I suspect she went slow to help herself memorize her lines better. So, I slimmed Beulah's lines down. I simplified Jessica's lines, because she still sounded too eloquent for a drug addict from the South.

I shortened the last scene. In Act Two, Scene Two, I added a tense moment of unspoken issues rather than go immediately into a shouting match. This was done because of my own suspicions as well as some of the comments on the comment cards. Switching from one scene of yelling to a second of yelling risks pushing away my audience. Overall, I went down from ninety to eighty six. Not much, but I think I slimmed it down where it needed it the most.

I took away the Last Chance Session. Because I cut the coat-dance bit in the first scene, the Last Chance Session's explanation was cut. However, I think Gianni would have already figured this one out on his own. It seemed a little too organized a thought for him to think of on the spot. Instead, I went with a "mandatory therapy session". Besides, Last Chance Session has too many "S"s.

It was also said that I wasn't being clear enough on the scam. I think that was due to my need to over-explain their methods and reasons. By being as thorough as possible in describing the scam, I brought up more questions than I answered. I believe by giving less, less is required by the audience. I hope so, anyway. There were some complaints that my humor was simple and my style was poor, but they weren't the majority. There will always be someone who doesn't like what you like.
MY CRITIQUE

The goal I set before myself when I wrote this play was to make one that was generally acceptable to the Fayetteville audience. I believe I achieved that goal, at least for that part of the Fayetteville's audience which attended our Boar's Head Players production. If I hadn't, then I'm sure I would have received much more criticism for having con artists play one over on the sick and dying. I'm also sure I would have someone bring up the debate about suicide, and that I had made a mockery out of a serious issue. That didn't happen.

When I look back on my first version, I truly realize how beneficial the workshops and rehearsals have been for me. Through the workshops, I was able to spot inconsistencies in my elaborate schemes and a lack of depth and separation of my characters. The scam I had created was always hard to explain in a few words, and by having people point out its flaws over and over again, I believe I've simplified it enough to where it won't slow down the plot anymore. As for the characters, I started to treat them more as individuals and less as fractured representations of my own personality. After doing this, their dialogue sounded like two completely different people, thus aiding in their complementary personalities.

Through the rehearsals, I gained two things: how to improve the dialogue, and what was and wasn't funny. Like many writers, I envision all my characters speaking with a higher level of grammar, even if the characters are meant to be less educated. Being that the highest level of grammar I can write is my own, all my characters will inevitably sound like me and lose their own identity. By hearing other people speak my
words, I was able to figure this out and try to correct the perfectionist in me. Secondly, when writing a comedy, I have a tendency to rely heavily on my wit. Sometimes this works to my benefit, but other times I create jokes that feel out of place or aren't deserved. Seeing the jokes played out before me gives it context. A joke on its own can be funny, but it might not be when incorrectly placed.

As for my use of the New Script Development class, I feel like it was a good idea for me to enter it expecting to make my play better for others instead of just for myself. I listened to everyone equally and didn't outright contest their opinions on my work, which allowed them the freedom to say whatever was on their minds. However, I feel this also harmed me. I tried to figure out how to satisfy everyone at the table, and it caused me much frustration. It would have been better if I had more confidence in myself as the author, rather than trying to figure out how to make each voice/actor completely happy with their individual roles.

The production was the most beneficial for my experience as the playwright. It was a physical realization of my work, and it helped me witness how others can interpret my words and materialize them. It gave me the chance to understand where my directions on blocking were inefficient, and I changed them immediately to fit the pace of the production. It also taught me to have more faith in my directors. I'll admit that as a writer, I constantly compared the actors to the characters I had in my head. In the future, I'll rely more on the director's vision on the actor's finished product rather than interpreting individual choices and styles as deviations from my ideals.

Overall, I believe my play worked. It wasn't perfect, but nothing ever is. The actors, generally, were able to fulfill their roles quite well with the help of the legendary
Dr. Roger Gross. Dr. Gross as the director was able to pick up on almost every subtext in the dialogue and understand how I intended the blocking to be (again, with one exception: the coat/customer bit, which was my fault). The costume and set design fit the play quite well, and the props performed above average. Other than the issues of my play that I believe I addressed in my final revision, this play is close enough to a finished product to be sold and performed elsewhere.
CONCLUSION

I believe the Playwrights Workshop helped me in ways that just are not possible alone. Each human brain is capable of generating a fantasy world and an endless numbers of stories within it. The problem is that what might be just right for the creator doesn't make any sense to someone else. It is the playwright's duty to create a story that the majority of his/her audience can relate to. No matter how eloquently one might write their story, if no one else can enjoy it, it fails to be a good story.

When I entered the Playwriting Program, I began by writing overly complicated "Ancient Greek" plays with gods speaking in historical witticisms that meant absolutely nothing to someone who wasn't versed in Ancient Greek mythology and history. I realize my mistake now. Your Last Friend, Inc. was my attempt to prove the lesson I had learned. However, this type of play is not what I yearn to write in the future. I am proud of it, and I have put a piece of myself within it, but I do not feel it fully represents what I am capable of.

Your Last Friend, Inc. is a play about the social consequences of suicide and when such an act is truly necessary. It's a comedic drama that attempts to bring a little levity to a serious topic. It is also a play I designed specifically to be accepted by the Drama Faculty and the local Fayetteville audience. I did not stint on my abilities as a playwright when I constructed this play, but I did deny my desire to move away from Realism and sociological debates and move towards Abstract and Farcical notions of true human nature. This past year, I have indulged in the latter, and I am happier for it. Yet, it may do me well financially that I can suppress my own creative desires and write for
the public without feeling I have sold my soul. Playwriting and the Theatre business as a whole is struggling, and a writer who only wants to write for himself should not expect to be paid anytime soon.

This might seem like a very negative thing to say. Admittedly, it is. It is also realistic. Not every actor can play their first choice role. Not every director can select the plays that they feel only they can do justice. Not every scenic, lighting, or costume designer can produce the perfect construction for their favorite plays. Not every playwright can write the play their inner beings demand. The theatre is a business. It is also art, so I write this thesis in hopes that in the future, my plays, like Your Last Friend, Inc., will gain enough attention that someone will trust me enough to write the stories that I want to write. Until then, I believe I have gathered the tools I need in order to survive in this business.
REFERENCES


APPENDICIES
APPENDIX A.

First draft of the play *Your Last Friend, Inc.*, for comparison from my beginnings on my own to the finished results after being workshopped and produced.
Your Last Friend Inc.
By
Justin Blasdel
Characters

**Sam Phillip:** 30yrs, cautious hacker and forger  
**Jonny Long:** 31yrs, edgy but charming con-artist  
**Todd McNeal:** Late 20s, lonely bank accountant  
**Beulah Seiwert:** 70s, old and forgotten grandmother  
**Rebecca Tener:** 19yrs, ignored gothic teenager  
**Jessica Phillip:** 34yrs, drug-addicted cancer patient

Time

Winter, Present

Location

Tuscon, Arizona
ACT I, SCENE I

A small business building office. There's a desk with a computer on it and a printer, a few chairs, a trash bin, boxes labeled "letters" and "travel brochures", a coat rack with two dry-cleaned business suits hanging on it, a table with a coffee pot on it, and a phone with an answering machine.

SAM PHILLIP is sitting at the desk and putting Bolivian 1 (cent) centavos in addressed letters along with forged documents of authenticity.

SAM is what happens when you put a genius through a lifetime of bullying in an underprivileged school system. HE's had to make the best of what was given to HIM, which became a life of computer crimes and easy money. HE's very dedicated to what HE calls "the craft of forgery", not allowing the glamour of crime tarnish HIS professionalism.

"And another coin to another customer. Mrs. Stenson, I hope you enjoy your budding rare foreign coin collection worth a fraction of what you paid for."

SAM licks the envelope, puts it to the side, and starts on the next letter. Before HE licks it, HE takes a moment to reflect on what HE's doing.

SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.

SAM

JONNY (OS)

Sam! Sam, I got this great idea!

JONNY enters, holding a beer in HIS hand. JONNY has the look of a sleazy door-to-door salesman whom you'd swear hasn't bathed in two days.
However, there's something attractive about HIS confident smile and buddy-buddy attitude that keeps this professional scam artist in business. HE's been in the trade since he was two-years-old, and he doesn't have the mental capacity or focus to do anything else.

JONNY
Sam, there you are. Here, listen to me real quick.

SAM
Jonny, where have you been? We have work to do.

JONNY
I know, I know. Selling foreign pennies to old farts, our bread and butter, I know, but I got this new idea.

SAM
Are you drunk?

JONNY
What? No. Why?

SAM points to the beer in JONNY's hand.

JONNY
This? So? I can't have a drink to wake me up in the morning?

SAM
It's three-thirty.

JONNY
It is not...

JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch in disbelief, but realizes SAM's correct.

JONNY
Huh. Guess that's why the bars are open.

SAM
Get rid of it and start helping me. My tongue's getting paper cuts on the paper cuts.
JONNY

Use water and a sponge. Don't be stupid.

JONNY opens the door and throws the beer outside. HE gets one of the boxes and thumbs through the papers.

JONNY

So we got Bolivian centavos or Romanian bani this time?

Beat.

What?

JONNY

Your idea?

SAM

Oh, yeah! I got this great idea for a new scam when I was watching TV at the “Candy Cane”.

SAM

The strip bar?

JONNY

They have a TV.

SAM

I'm not wondering about that. I'm wondering why you were watching TV instead of...never mind. What's the idea?

JONNY

Okay, so there's this show about scams, right? And they're not showing the old tricks, like the lottery emails from Nigeria, but the new stuff that's not illegal yet.

SAM

Okay. I'm interested.

JONNY

And they talk about this one insurance agency in Nevada that sells alien abduction insurance near Area 51. Alien abduction insurance. Yeah.

Beat.
That's stupid.

I know, right?

I'm not doing that, Jonny.

Wait, hear me out. The guys that made the company "High Hopes" have a few lawsuits against them, not a surprise.

No.

But what is a surprise is they're winning their case.

That's ridiculous.

They say that if someone does get abducted, then they'll pay out, so technically they're not robbing anyone.

No, what's ridiculous is that the founding members didn't skip town once the law got wind of them. It's totally unprofessional. Armatures.

Yeah, but they still made a lot of money.

Money they'll lose in court fees. Are you going to help me send these letters out or not?

SAM goes back to mailing coins.

Dude, just listen. So a little latter, I'm getting a lap dance--

At the Candycane.
JONNY
Whatever. I'm getting a rubdown from Iwana Dickenson, and she's telling me about how her sick grandmother's got leukemia and wants to die, and--

SAM
What?

JONNY
What?

SAM
She talks about her grandmother as she's strips for you?

JONNY
I might be a dude, but I'm a dude who listens. I care about people.

SAM
How much did you care about those women we convinced to pay a hundred dollars for our new dating software that paired them up with men looking for affairs?

JONNY
Good point. Can I keep going? Thank you. Iwana keeps telling her story and then starts crying, because assisted suicide isn't legal yet. Yet.

SAM
So...what big idea did you get from this crying stripper?

JONNY
Yet.

SAM
Yet?

JONNY
Yeah, yet. Assisted suicide isn't legal yet. But...

SAM
One day it might?

JONNY
But in the meantime....
JONNY

In the meantime…

SAM
You want to sell assisted suicide insurance?

JONNY
Yes! Yes, I do.

SAM
Jonny.

JONNY
Mm-hmm?

SAM
Let's go down the list of horrible and immoral scams we've pulled off since we were teenagers.

JONNY
Okay.

SAM
There was the fake scooter parking for the elderly at the nursing home.

JONNY
I still have one of those.

SAM
There's the luxury vacation tickets we sold in Korea when SARS broke out.

JONNY
SARS isn't any worse than the flu, medically speaking.

SAM
We once started a psychic hotline where you convinced nineteen people to donate to our fake endangered species charity.

JONNY goes into HIS Jamaican persona.
JONNY
The Majestic Monsieur Jomamma cares very, very much about the flying blue koalas of Madagascar.

SAM
Yeah, that was kind of funny.

JONNY
It was.

SAM
But now you want to put assisted suicide scams on our track record? I have very little morals left, but stealing money from the sick and dying isn't me. We're not doctors.

JONNY
Man, it's not that bad. Most of the people we'll get will die in a few weeks anyway.

SAM
Let me rephrase: stealing money from the dead and the grieving isn't me. We're not morticians.

JONNY
I hear what you're saying, but I investigated this stuff today--

SAM
At the bar.

JONNY
At the bar, they have free wireless now, and studies show most people who want the right to suicide would never take it.

SAM
Really?

JONNY
Yeah, really. This place in Oregon...or maybe it was the whole state...anyway, they allowed hospitals to send out death pills to the terminally ill and dying. Only ten percent took the pills. The others just wanted the right to off themselves. They were never going to do it.

SAM
Really?

JONNY
Yeah, really!
SAM
Interesting. What were you thinking of doing?

JONNY
Okay, cool, uhm...

*JONNY looks around and finds the suits. HE takes them off the rack and lays one over HIS chest.*

JONNY
We dress up in suits, we clean this place up, and we start a real business.

SAM
Selling assisted suicide in a state where it's illegal.

JONNY
Yeah.

*JONNY dances the other suit from the door and over to a seat.*

JONNY
People come in after hearing our advertisements and reading our pamphlets in doctors' offices--

SAM
Nice.

JONNY
Thanks. We all sit down and talk about our feelings, then we charge a thou' for services yet to be tendered. They're happy. We're happy. They die. The law's still in place, and no one can complain. It's perfect.

*As JONNY's thinking, HE takes the suits and puts them back on the rack.*

SAM

JONNY
Totally legit.
SAM
Hmm. We'll need business permits. I can forge some easily. Hack into the City Hall’s records, make it look like we have all the licenses, and we’re set. So…are we going to have to talk to these people? I’m not good person-to-person.

JONNY
Don’t worry. I know you. You’re the egghead. The brains of our team. And I’m the balls.

Beat.

SAM
How are we going to deflect the bad publicity we’re sure to get?

JONNY
I…don’t know.

SAM
That’s a problem.

JONNY
Yeah.

SAM
I guess I’ll have to do some of my best work yet and make sure no one catches us. With every Mormon, church fanatic, and pro-life nut after us, it’ll be hard to keep people from finding out we’re not authentic.

JONNY
You in?

SAM
What’s our pitch?

JONNY
Awesome! Okay, so we put out brochures all over town and some after-midnight TV advertisements explaining to people that it’s okay to let go, sometimes living in pain isn’t living at all, yadda-yadda and whatever, and that once Arizona legalizes assisted suicide, we’ll be here waiting.

SAM
Why wouldn’t they wait to buy our services until Arizona does legalize it?

JONNY
I don’t know. We’ll make up something like “Lower prices now for a cheaper future”.

71
Like our condo job in Orlando.

JONNY
Yeah. It won’t be hard. All we have to do is spread the word and wait for the money to roll in.

SAM
How much money do you think we’ll get? Per month?

JONNY
If we get a thou’ per customer, and we get ten customers a week, that’s forty grand a month.

SAM
Almost half a million a year, assuming we’d get ten customers a week, or even that we’d stay open that long before leaving.

JONNY
Ten a week is like the minimum. You know they’d rush in that first month. It’s Winter, the most depressing of the four seasons.

SAM
It’s eighty degrees outside. What winter?

JONNY
It’s still Winter, Sam! Seasonal depression knows no temperature.

SAM
It all sounds good. Just one problem.

JONNY
What?

SAM
What if Arizona legalizes assisted suicide? What’ll we do then?

JONNY
Then we’ll have to start killing people.

SAM
What the hell is wrong—

JONNY
Dude, I’m joking you. We’d get the hell out of here like we always do before a bust. I’m not killing anyone. Just taking their money.
SAM
It’s…it if we do this, then this will be the worst thing we’ve ever done. To anyone.

JONNY
Yeah, if you keep thinking we’ll get caught. Look Sam, we’re giving these people hope. It’s not like the used car dealership we worked at ten years ago. What we’re selling, these people will never use. They’ll know this. We’ll be upfront about it. If they still pay us, then what’s the problem? I wouldn’t even call it stealing.

SAM
I guess you’re right.

JONNY
I know I’m right. You ready to start?

SAM
Sure. I’ll finish mailing these off, and then we’ll start the usual.

JONNY takes the letters and throws them into the trash.

SAM
What the hell, Jonny?

JONNY
Don’t waste your time with those. We have a bigger, better scam to work on.

SAM
Well, okay, but we could have at least taken the coins out and get our money back.

JONNY
What, the whole dollar bill we spent at the currency exchange in Mexico?

SAM
You’re right.

JONNY
Cool. Let’s get this show on the road!

JONNY raises HIS hand to high-five SAM.

JONNY
Come on, man. It’s tradition.
SAM raises HIS hand. JONNY swings, but misses horribly and falls down. JONNY stands up.

Maybe I should sober up first.

Good idea.

Night.

JONNY exits into one of the office rooms.

There isn’t a couch in there for you to lie down--.

I said “night”!

SAM shakes his head and goes back to the desk. HE sweeps the pile of Bolivian centavos into a shelf, puts the empty envelopes into the appropriate box, and stands in the middle of the room, staring at the door. HE practices what HE thinks will be the first customer.

Come on in, sir. I know it must have been hard for you, but…but realize how brave you are to take this step. Please, sit.

SAM pulls the chair for the phantom customer, and then HE sits down.

Need something to drink? My associate can get a bottle of water for you. Jonny, please get Mr. Sick and Dying something to drink. Thank you. So Mr. Sick and Dying, I understand that you’re sick and dying. Well, here at...at...”Kicking the Bucket”, no....”Final Resting Place”. No, that sounds like a funeral home. “Final”...”Your Last Stop”...”Final Stop”...”Your Last Stop”...”Your Last Friend”. Yeah, that’s good. “Your Last Friend...Incorporated”. Here at “Your Last Friend Incorporated” we like to think of us as not ending your life, but releasing you from your mortal shell and onto the next world.
SAM’s proud of thinking of such a good company name, but the act is broken by another moment of personal reflection. HE gets up, takes a folder out of the desk, and exits.

END ACT I, SCENE I
ACT I, SCENE II

The boxes have been replaced with a couple of plants, a table with business pamphlets, and a small sofa. The overall atmosphere has changed from a hideaway to a welcoming dentist office.

JONNY is wearing a business suit and enters holding a large picture of a setting sun. HE finds the nail in the wall and balances the picture. He steps back, thinks about it, and then readjusts the picture on more time.

JONNY

Perfect! Yeah, this is an awesome idea. We’re practically swimming in doe already.

SFX: the phone rings.

JONNY shakes away his excitement and becomes somber. HE picks up the telephone.

JONNY

Good morning, my name is Mr. Bill Teetonka and you’re calling “Your Last Friend Incorporated”, where we try to help when no one else can. How may I help you today?...Yes...Yes...Good for you...Once you submit your information on our website, it takes us about two to three days to process it. After that, we’ll call you about payment methods and set up your account as quickly and as discreetly as possible...No, it’s not necessary to meet us in person. This can all be handled anonymously...I’m glad I could help. Take care, and the state of Arizona willing, one day your needs will be met...You’re welcome.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY

Another sale! Ring the bell!

Beat.

JONNY

We need a bell.

SAM enters wearing a suit as well.
Teetonka? Really?

I'm just honoring my one sixty-fourth Navajo heritage.

You don't look Native American at all.

Well, you don't look that Irish, Mr. Henry MacDougal.

That's fair. Why are yelling?

I got another sale.

I know that, but why are you yelling?

It's exciting, man. We're making money like crazy, and we're doing it legally. Can you believe it?

Actually, we forged all our licenses and permits, so we're not doing this legally.

You know what I mean. This is something we can get away with forever. I think we've found our calling.

Business is doing pretty good.

And we haven't had to meet hardly anyone in person. Good job on the website by the way.

Thank you, but without your people skills, we'd be nowhere.

I know.
Why the sunset?

JONNY
You like it? I thought it’d be good for business. You know, sort of like a metaphor.

SAM
And what’s the metaphor?

JONNY becomes somber again.

JONNY
Like a beautiful sunset, you too must pass. (breaking character) I made that up myself.

SAM
Nice.

JONNY
You done funneling all our money to our offshore accounts?

SAM
I'm holding off on that for now. We're still getting customers, and the less electronic paper trail we have, the better.

JONNY
Smart.

SAM
I know.

SAM sits down at the computer.

SAM
How many customers did we get today?

JONNY
Twenty.

SAM
Twenty?

JONNY
Check it.
SAM searches their accounts on the computer.

SAM
That’s the most we’ve ever got in one day. It’s a little weird. Perhaps that oncologist started handing out our pamphlets to his patients.

JONNY
Why'd he do that? Seems like bad business to me.

SAM
It's the only new place I can think of that we've advertised in the last few days.

JONNY
Check their reasons for needing assisted suicide. They got to fill that part out in the form. If they're all cancer people, then we'll know where to advertise in the future.

SAM checks the files.

SAM
No. No. Yes. No. It's all a bunch of mixed reasons. I don't understand. Why this boom in business?

JONNY
The economy?

SAM
Don't be stupid. Well...there's another customer, and no cancer. What is this?

SFX: phone rings.

JONNY goes to the phone, goes into HIS somber character, and answers the phone while SAM looks over customer files.

JONNY
Good morning, my name is Mr. Bill Teetonka and you’re calling “Your Last Friend Incorporated”, where we try to help when no one else can. How may I help you today?...Hello, Mr. McNeal....Yes, I remember you. We remember all our clients on a personal level...Sir, we would be happy to help you journey to the next world, but unfortunately Arizona state law prevents us from doing so...Huh?...You what?...What?!...No, sorry sir. I didn't mean to yell. I stubbed my toe. I'm not use to these rotating chairs...Now?!...Uhm, sure. We can schedule your last chance session for tomorrow...Please, we're not prepared.
Let us schedule you tomorrow and...No, there's no need to ask for a refund. We'll be ready for you when you get here...You're on your way now. Good. Good. See you in a moment then. Have a good day.

_JONNY hangs up the phone._

We're fucked!

What was that all about?

We got a customer coming over for his last chance session in like ten minutes.

We don't actually give those out. Those are set up for people who want to go through with assisted suicide.

Guess what's just been legalized.

Beat.

Is this a joke?

No.

I swear, if you're putting me on, I'll--

It's no joke! Mr. McNeal told me on the phone that it was legalized this morning by Governor Jan Brewer herself.

No. No, no, no, no. If there was a bill being passed like this one, then you'd know about it, because it was your job to keep an eye on it while I was setting up our finances and customer support! Do not tell me you didn't look into this!

I...did look into this.
And?

JONNY
There might have been a movement or a bill trying to get passed, but there was so many people against it, I never thought I’d get passed.

Beat.

SAM
Shit! Is he coming over right now, Mr...Mr..?

JONNY
Mr. McNeal.

SAM
Yes, Mr. McNeal. Is he?

JONNY
I tried to get him to come tomorrow.

SAM
Son of a...he might be wrong.

JONNY
Yeah.

SAM
He might have misheard.

JONNY
Maybe.

SAM
Perhaps he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about.

JONNY
Happens all the time.

SAM checks the internet on the computer.

SAM
Shit!
JONNY
He knew what he was talking about, didn't he? Look, there's probably a way out of this.
Let me see.

*JONNY looks on the computer screen.*

SAM
Of all the stupid things you've done to me, Jonny, this wins you the Darwin Award.

JONNY
Hah! Here, look. It's only a temporary thing. It's like a month long.

SAM
Oh, so we only have to kill people for a month. Great thinking. Goddamnit!

JONNY
Sam, calm down. I can work with this?

SAM
Really? You really think so?

JONNY
Remember what I said about Oregon? Only ten percent off'ed themselves.

SAM
Jonny, we have over seventy customers as of today. Are you suggesting we go through
with our promises and kill seven of them?

JONNY
No, I'm saying I only have seven people to convince not to go through with it. I can do
that.

SAM
You can?

JONNY
Sure.

*SAM checks the customer files.*

SAM
So if Louise Manuel, a paraplegic, rolls in through our doors and asks for assisted
suicide, you are totally confident that you can make her see the beauty of life?
JONNY
It's worth a try, Sam. Look, we've made almost a hundred thou' in two weeks. We've never done that before, and if we don't lose our cool, we can keep making more. Hell, in three months we're millionaires.

*SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.*

JONNY
Just stay calm, let me handle this, and all will be okay.

*TODD MCNEAL enters. TODD is the adult version of the kid picked last for every sports team. HE looks like a born loser whose mother dresses HIM, and her taste is a few decades out of touch.*

*TODD is crying and sobbing heavily.*

TODD
Is this "Your Last Friend Incorporated"?

JONNY
*(whispering)* Stay cool. Trust me. *(to TODD)* Hello, Mr. McNeal. It's nice to meet you in person. My name is Mr. Bill Teetonka, and my fellow associate here is Mr. Henry MacDougal.

TODD
I'm here to end it all.

JONNY
End your life?

TODD
Yes, yes my life! My pathetic, good-for-nothing, never amount to anything life.

JONNY
Please sit and try to remain calm. Everything will be taken care of, but it's best if you can keep control of your emotions. Can you do that for me?

TODD
I can try.

JONNY
That's all I ask.
TODD sits down. SAM sits behind the desk and hands over a tissue to TODD.

SAM

Here.

TODD

Thank you. Who are you again?

SAM

Henry MacDougal.

TODD

You don't look Irish.

JONNY

Mr. MacDougal, would you please bring up Todd's file? Thank you.

SAM brings up the file on the computer screen.

JONNY

Todd, you don't mind me calling you by your first name, do you?

TODD

No.

JONNY

Thank you. You can call me Bill. Todd, why exactly have you decided to end your existence on this planet?

TODD

I need a reason?

SAM

It's part of our policy.

JONNY

Since our services are permanent, we ask that during the required last chance session, you reveal exactly why it is that you wish to leave your life. It helps you to decide if this is really what you want, and it also helps protect us legally. You understand, right?
I guess.

Good. So why do you want to die?

I'm such a loser. I have a dead-end job I'm about lose, I've never had a girlfriend since fifth grade, and I live with my crazy mother in an apartment. I'm pathetic!

Alright, alright. Let's talk about those three problems. Where do you work?

I'm a security technician for my banks online transactions.

That sounds like an important job. I bet you have many people counting on you.

I'm getting fired! No one relies on me for anything.

That's unfortunate.

What about your love life? Women are attracted to confidence. Maybe you're not trying hard enough.

I'm not trying hard enough? Look at me! I'm ugly. The closest I've ever been on a date is SIMULATORS.

What?

Are you from Mars or something? SIMULATORS is the best online virtual world to ever hit the internet.

Oh. I hear that more and more people are meeting each other online every day. The same thing can happen for you too.

Yeah, with online dating services, but with my face, I'd have to be rich, and I'm not. And only guys looking for affairs use online dating services anymore.
JONNY
That's very true. Okay, let's move onto the third problem: your mother. Is it really all that bad supporting the woman who brought you into this life?

TODD
No. I love my mom, but she's got dementia and can't take care of herself anymore. I'd put her in a home, but she's crazy. She'd escape and kill me in my sleep.

SAM
I'm sure that's just the dementia talking.

TODD
She showed me the knife she'd use to cut my throat if I ever put her in a home. I don't know what to do!

_TODD completely breaks down in tears._
_JONNY pats TODD on the shoulder._

JONNY
There, there. It'll be alright.

_SAM and JONNY have an inaudible argument until TODD regains HIS composure._

TODD
That's why I'm here. I want it all to end. Today, if possible.

SAM
Well...there has to be something you'd miss leaving behind. Right?

TODD
Not anymore. I sold my SIMULATORS character on eBay as soon as I heard the ban was lifted on assisted suicide. I have nothing to lose.

SAM
I guess not.

_TODD stands up._

TODD
So when can I get the treatment?

SAM
Uhh...we're not finished with the session yet. Right, Mr. Teetonka?
JONNY
Actually, I have one more question to ask Todd here, and then we can figure out a good
time to schedule his next and final appointment. Todd, do you mind if I ask you a little
about your job?

TODD sits back down.

TODD
Basically, I keep all online transactions between my bank and all the others secure. I get
to stay in my little cubicle all day. No one bothers me, not even my boss. He wouldn't
know if I was really working or playing SIMULATORS all day long, anyway. It was
perfect. But not anymore. They gave me a week to prepare all my current projects and
allow them to revoke my security clearances. A bad economy hurts everyone. They said
they could give me a position as a teller. I can't do that. I have ulcers and irritable bowel
syndrome. I can't stand to meet new people. Everytime I do, I feel like I could...I could...

TODD is about to throw up. SAM
quickly finds a trash bin and hands it to
TODD. After a few dry heaves, TODD
is able to calm down.

TODD
My life is over.

JONNY
So...you probably have lots of security codes and passwords to other people's accounts,
right?

TODD
I won't much longer.

JONNY
And if you really needed to, I bet you could use those codes and passwords to funnel
other people's money into your own bank account, right?

TODD
I'm not supposed to be able to do that, but I'm incredibly overqualified for my position.

JONNY
Now, I'm not suggesting you do anything illegal, but seeing as how you're wanting to die
soon, and the law can't bring a man back to life to put him in jail, a person might see this
as your chance to steal lots of money and get away with it.

TODD
I suppose.
And if they did catch you, so what? With all that money, you'll have more experiences than you've ever had in your life.

Like what?

You can visit Hawaii.

Buy a really nice car.

Put your mother in a nursing home she can't possibly escape from.

Afford clean prostitutes who don't talk unless you want them to.

Really? Like...I don't have to go out on a date or meet their friends? We can simply do our thing and never see each other again?

That's their job.

Wow. I guess I could steal from the bank if I felt the need to.

Remember, "Your Last Friend Incorporated" does not condone illegal activities, but we do suggest you get all from life you can get before you leave it behind.

No reason to end your life before you live it.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah! I'm going to rob my bank and live the dream! I'm going to put my mom in a maximum security prison! I'm going to live in a boathouse in Hawaii! I'm going to buy prostitutes and have sex with them! I'm going to rob the bank I--

Shh. You probably don't want everyone knowing that. They might turn you in.
TODD stands up and vigorously shakes THEIR hands.

TODD
Oh, okay. Thank you Bill. Thank you Mr. MacDougal. You have no idea how better I feel right now.

SAM
Not nearly as much as I do, I'm sure.

TODD
Okay. Okay. I'm going to do this. Thank you.

TODD exits.

JONNY
(to TODD) Tell your friends about us!

A sign of relief exit TODD and JONNY.

SFX: a car turns on and drives away.

JONNY
See, I told you I could do this.

SAM
No, you got lucky this time. I doubt every person who walks in here will be in the position he's in. And what possessed you to tell him to rob banks?

JONNY
I thought it was a good idea.

SAM
Jonny, what if he gets caught and tells the police who gave him the idea?

JONNY
So? He doesn't have anything on us. If the coppers ask about it, we'll deny everything like we always do.

SAM
That's not the point. We don't need any more attention that what I'm sure we're about to get. I already saw one picketer at our parking lot, and where there's one, there's sure to be more.
JONNY
Look, I won't tell anyone else to do anything illegal, but I can do this. Let me read their files before each last chance session, and I promise you we won't have one single death here.

SAM
Jonny, I'm not sure it's worth the risk.

JONNY walks over to the computer and checks the company bank account.

JONNY
We just got four more customers, and they all paid up front. We made four thou' in the last ten minutes. Jonny, dude, think of the money!

Beat.

SAM
If even one customer doesn't buy your bull, we're out of here and going underground for a long time. Agreed?

JONNY
Not underground, again. It sucks. I like going out and picking chicks up at the bars.

SAM
It's the only way I'm agreeing to this. It's all or nothing, Jonny.

JONNY
Fine. It's cool, because I know I can do this. Whether you like it or not, we found a gold mine, and I'm not backing away.

SAM
You will if we have to.

JONNY
You'll see, Sam. The kid always has his eye on the prize.

SAM exits to one of the offices.

SAM
That's what I'm afraid of. You never see anything else.

END ACT I, SCENE II
ACT I, SCENE III

It’s 12pm, three days later. The office is just as it was before.

SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.

SFX: light knocking on the front door.

BEULAH (OS)

Hello?

BEULAH enters. BEULAH SEIWERT is the nicest grandma every little kids wishes to have. SHE’s polite, cares about other people’s feelings, and always goes out of HER way to avoid upsetting others. In fact, SHE’d give all HER money and the shirt off HER back to a perfect stranger if the stranger asked politely enough.

BEULAH

Hello? Anyone here?

Beat.

BEULAH sits down on the customer’s chair in front of the computer desk and calmly waits.

SAM enters from one of the offices with a coffee mug in hand. Without noticing BEULAH, SAM walks over to the coffee machine and fills the mug. HE tastes it, and then walks back to the office HE came from.

BEULAH

Coffee’s a nice way to follow a good lunch, don’t you think?

SAM

It’s okay.
SAM stops and quickly looks at BEULAH in surprise.

SAM
Who are you?

BEULAH stands to shake SAM’s hand.

BEULAH
Oh, quite right. Introductions first. I’m Mrs. Seiwert. Nice to meet you.

SAM
Nice to meet you too. What are you doing here?

BEULAH
I’m here for my appointment, my last chance session. I'm right on time, but if it’s a bad time, I can come back later. It’s no problem.

SAM
Oh, you’re here for your session. I’m sorry, I’m Mr. Henry MacDougal. Nice to meet you.

BEULAH
MacDougal? You don’t look Irish.

SAM
It’s on my mother’s side.

BEULAH
Ah. Hmm.

SAM
If you don’t mind waiting here, I’ll go wake up my fellow associate, the one in charge of scheduling these meetings, so I can him to apologize for not meeting you at the door.

BEULAH
No one needs to apologize to me. I’m fine.

SAM
Please, have a cup of coffee while you wait.

SAM exits.

BEULAH
Don’t mind if I do.
BEULAH pours a cup of coffee and sits down. Offstage, SAM and JONNY can be heard arguing with each other.

JONNY enters, followed by SAM. It’s obvious JONNY was still sleeping and was perhaps awakened too early.

JONNY
I don't know what the hell...hello, ma'am. How are you doing today?

BEULAH
I'm fine. Thank you for asking.

JONNY
My name's Bill Teetonka, and we welcome you to "Your Last Friend Inc". You say you were scheduled for your last chance session today?

BEULAH
Yes, but like I told Mr. MacDougal, I can come back another time.

JONNY
No, that's not necessary. I just didn't remember I had someone scheduled this early.

JONNY goes to the computer desk and checks his schedule.

BEULAH
Early? Good gracious, the sun's already starting its way back down behind the horizon.

SAM
He means earlier than most our sessions are scheduled.

BEULAH
I don't like to contradict anyone, but I got a call yesterday saying to be here today, and here I am.

JONNY
Okay, yeah. I see the problem now. You are suppose to be here at noon...

BEULAH
I know I was.

JONNY
Next week.
BEULAH
Oh. I'm sorry. I must have heard it wrong. I didn't mean to impose. I'll go now.

SAM
You don't have to leave. We can have your last chance session right now. It's not a problem.

JONNY
(to SAM) We have an appointment for someone else in ten minutes.

And you were still sleeping?

I set the alarm.

SAM
Mrs. Seiwert, would it be a problem if you come next week?

BEULAH
Well, it kind of might. I was hoping to be dead before next week.

JONNY
Why next week?

BEULAH
It has to do with why I'm doing this in the first place.

BEULAH sits back down. JONNY goes pour a cup of coffee.

BEULAH
You see, I'm old. I've lived my life, and it's been a beautiful life. My dear Vernon, we were made to be with each other. He was my high school sweetheart, and we married very young. That's the way they used to do it back in the day, and we stayed married. Vernon went off to be a soldier, and I stayed at hometown working the post office and raising our three boys. Our boys are the most handsome men you ever set your eyes on, and they married young too. They left me and Vernon to live on our own, and that's the way it was until he passed away about ten years ago. Heart problems. Runs in his family. But I've got six grandchildren now. Five boys and Susie. She's the baby girl of the family. Won a beauty pageant this last spring, and I--

JONNY
Sorry to interrupt you, but it seems you have a wonderful life, except for your husband passing away.
Vernon.

Yes, Vernon. Why do you want our services.

I'm sorry. I must not be making much sense, talking about how good my life is and coming to you two to end it. I have a big family, but they never come to see me. My boys are soldiers too, and they live all over the world. Since Vernon left me, I don't have anyone to keep company with anymore.

Why not try to make new friends?

I have friends. Many of them. I go play bridge with Louise and Ellen every Saturday night. Louise's husband is a retired fireman. He quit, because he hurt his spine in a burning feed mill. Ellen's a widow, but her son Aaron still lives with her. He's living off his welfare and her social security. I swear, why she doesn't kick that boy out is beyond me.

Then you do have company.

I do with friends, but my boys are almost never home. Pete was the only one to visit me on Christmas, and his wife is a prissy, stuck-up know-it-all.

So...have you talked to your sons about what you're planning to do?

No, I wouldn't burden them with my problems. That's why I'm here.

Why?

I told them how the bills are piling up since Vernon's social security isn't coming in anymore, and Jeffrey, the oldest, said he'd put me in a nursing home near where his family lives.

That's nice of him.
BEULAH
He can't afford that. None of my boys can. He'll end up in the poor house before I even get the chance to move.

SAM
You could live in his house, couldn't you?

BEULAH
I have medical problems. Osteoperosis, Lupis, Diabetes, and some others I don't want to mention. I need my personal nurse Joseph to come over every day and feed me, bathe me, and make sure I take all my pills. Jeffrey would never allow me to pay someone else to take care of me while I was living with him. He'd feel like he was disappointing me or something.

JONNY
You drove yourself here without any help. You sure you need Joseph at all?

BEULAH
I can walk and drive. I'm not too old, but that day's coming closer and closer. I'll have to go to a nursing home soon, whether I want to or not. Unless you can help me with my problem.

SAM
You want us to end your life, because you don't want to be a financial burden on your family?

BEULAH
Yes.

JONNY
Okay, Mrs. Seiwert, I understand that. However, I'd hate to assist you in your request purely because of financial reasons. Is there anything you wish you could do before you pass on?

BEULAH
Nope. Had a wonderful life, and I'm ready to end it.

SAM
What about a vacation?

BEULAH
Been everywhere I want to be. There's nothing one town has for me this one doesn't have.
JONNY
What about your boys? Won't they miss you?

SAM
And your friends?

BEULAH
They'll miss me just the same if I leave now as when I leave later.

JONNY
Anyone you want to get revenge on?

BEULAH
What? That would be un-Christianly of me.

SAM
What about your faith? Isn't there something in there about--

BEULAH
Don't you preach to me, boy. I've read the good book twenty times back and forth, and I know my faith. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get cross with you.

JONNY
Isn't there anything you want? Something you just had to have, but life wouldn't give it to you? Something you could almost taste, touch, feel, but people kept you from having what you needed more than life itself? Anything? Come on, there has to be something.

BEULAH
Well...

SAM
What?

BEULAH
No, I can't say that. It doesn't matter, anyway. It's too late.

SAM
What's too late?

JONNY
Mrs. Seiwort, Beulah, you can tell us. We're your friends.
BEULAH
It's silly, but Vernon and I married so young. We were made to be with each other, straight from birth, but...he was my only boyfriend I ever had. He's all I needed, but I always wondered what another man would have been like. Oh, I shouldn't have said that. It's not like I can do it anymore.

Who says?

BEULAH
Mother Nature.

JONNY
Mother Nature says a lot of things, like the elderly must die, and you're doing that. But don't you want one last fling before you go off into the darkness of the night?

BEULAH
I do, but Mother Nature turned off the faucet in this old woman along time ago, if you get what I mean.

Viagra.

SAM
What?

JONNY
Viagra. You can take Viagra.

BEULAH
Isn't that for horny, old men needing to please their young trophy wives?

SAM
And women. I mean, it works on both sexes. It's been proven.

BEULAH
I'm not comfortable taking a medicine meant for men.

JONNY
If they have Viagra for men, they must have something for the women. Right, Mr. MacDougal?

SAM
I'm sure of it.

*Beat.*
BEULAH
It'd be nice. Old Tucker's been giving me eyes for the past five years, asking me to breakfast at Denny's and giving me flowers. I think I'd like to have a little fun before I go. That's not selfish, is it?

JONNY
No. Not in the least.

SAM
It would be selfish not to.

BEULAH
Okay. I'll do it.

JONNY
Good for you. Enjoy all from life that you can, and we'll be waiting here for you when you're truly ready to pass on.

BEULAH stands up and shakes SAM and JONNY's hands.

BEULAH
Thank you two very much. You're good boys. Now, where do you think I can buy this "women" Viagra?

SAM
Your gynecologist.

JONNY
Any doctor will be able to tell you. We're happy we could help you.

BEULAH
I'll save you two a prayer next Sunday. Be good.

SAM
We will, Mrs. Seiwert.

BEULAH exits.

JONNY and SAM exhale from relief. SAM refills HIS cup of coffee.

JONNY
Good save, man.
SAM
I don't know what came over me. It just popped up in my head.

*SFX: a car turns on and drives away.*

JONNY
And in a day or two, Mrs. Seiwert will have a head pop up in her.

What are you...oh, funny.

I know. I'm going back to sleep. Night.

Jonny.

What, Sam?

Our next appointment?

*JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch.*

Damn.

When will she get here?

*JONNY sits down in front of the computer and looks at the file.*

SAM
I can't believe you were right.

About what?

SAM
We have over ninety customers now, and only a handful have come in.
Told you.

I almost thought you lost it with Mr. Howard, but you saved him just like the others.

Who?

The multiple-amputee veteran.

Oh, yeah. Who knew he had a career in gambling just waiting to be started.

SAM is looking incredibly happy with HIMSELF.

Okay, what's the deal here?

Huh?

That shit-eating grin on your face. What's up?

I feel like we could pull this off. Like, I wouldn't mind doing this for a living.

Speak for yourself. I'm the one keeping us from murdering people.

Hey! I thought up Viagra, didn't I?

True.

SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.

She's here.
JONNY
Good. We can see if she's as hot as her picture. Can't tell you how many times I've been burned by Photoshop.

SAM
Please don't hit on her. Remember the goal.

JONNY
If the goal is keeping her alive, then wouldn't it help me if I got a prize at the end of the race?

SAM
Jonny, can you keep it in your pants till--

REBECCA enters wearing elaborate gothic ware and holding a hand-held video camera. SHE is the ignored child, the generation "X" refugee, and the self-made artiste of coffee shops and online poetry blogs.

SHE walks as if floating in the wind, mostly to attract even more attention with improvisational dance moves.

SHE is recording everything.

REBECCA
And now I enter society's convenient slaughter house, adorned with all the necessities to calm the sheep to the slaughter.

JONNY
Hello, my name is Mr. Bill Teetonka, this is Mr. Henry MacDougal, and I assume you're Rebecca Tener, right?

REBECCA
I...am...darkness wrapped around melting show, dripping with tears and falling into bliss.

SAM
So...you're Rebecca?

REBECCA
I am.

JONNY
Good. If you don't mind, we have a policy against recording devices in our place of business.
Wrong.

I'm wrong?

On your website, it explicitly says I can take photographs or video recordings of my travels to the beyond.

That's only for when you are actually passing on.

The devil is into the details, and I can film or record anything I want to.

We'll have to inform our web designers of that little typo soon. Please sit down, and we'll start your last chance session now.

I can't sit down. I won't. I must move freely, as a torn spider web caught in a storm.

REBECCA dances even more extravagantly.

(whispers to JONNY) Are you sure about this?

So Rebecca, you know what the last chance session is all about, right?

It's the last chance to allow myself to be caught in the illusion of reality and deny myself the ultimate release.

That's one way of saying it. Another way is that we must make sure that you'll have no regrets about going through with our services.

If I'm dead, I'll be unable to regret anything. I'll be unable to do anything. I will simply be unmade.
SAM

That doesn't scare you?

REBECCA

Hah! What have I to be afraid of? Thousands of people die every day. One by one, their stars burn out of the sky. Why should one be afraid of the inevitable?

JONNY

It's not inevitable for everyone. It says in your profile that you're not ill or suffering any kind of pain. In fact, you look very healthy and very young...and very hot--

*Sam shoves JONNY.*

REBECCA

Only my body is young. My soul is forever, and my mind is beyond time. The flesh is fleeting...and I'm nineteen years old, which makes me a legal adult and capable of making this decision for myself.

JONNY

Wow. Only nineteen.

SAM

Why do you want to die, Rebecca?

REBECCA

Why? Why not? Must I live in this boring, useless world any longer than I choose to? All us humans existing like ants trying to outrun the boy with the magnifying glass, only to die unappreciated and alone. Never having a true connection with one another, not even our parents. Parents who are self-centered, egotistical, and don't give a damn about their daughter as long as she doesn't embarrass them too much to their rich friends. I mean, what kind of a person do you have to be to tell your daughter you won't go to her slam poetry contest because you don't want to miss your weekly wine-tasting party? Losers.

JONNY

You're doing this to get back at your parents?

REBECCA

Not *just* them.

SAM

However, you're doing this so your parents will finally pay attention to you?

REBECCA

Not *only* that...but yes. Is that so bad?
SAM
I'm sorry, but we're not helping anyone with suicide simply to get back at their parents.

SAM walks over to the computer desk and starts typing on REBECCA's file.

REBECCA
What? You...you have to. I paid you.

SAM
We'll refund you immediately.

REBECCA
You can't do this!

JONNY
I'm sorry, but policy is policy.

REBECCA
I want to speak with your supervisor.

SAM
I'm the only supervisor here, and I say "Denied".

REBECCA
That's not fair!

JONNY
I know it isn't. Life isn't fair. We wish for something so much, and then it's taken away from us.

REBECCA
I'll kill myself then! I don't need you!

SAM
Go ahead, but "Your Last Friend Inc." will not be a part of it.

JONNY
Rebecca, calm down. You don't want to kill yourself, do you?

REBECCA
I'll...I'll videotape it, and after I tell my parents off, I'll tell the world how you two turned me down. I'll put in clips from today to show everyone what you guys look like, that way the police will know who to blame for my death.

JONNY
Woah! Woah, woah, woah.
SAM
You have no reason to do that, you vengeful little--

JONNY
Sam! I mean, Henry. Calm down. (whispered) Shut up and let me do my thing.

(whispered) But she--

SAM
(whispered) Shut up! Shut it.

Beat.

JONNY
Now, Rebecca, you don't really want to kill yourself off, do you?

REBECCA
Yes, I do!

JONNY
I understand. You want to get back at your parents. Kill yourself, and they'll be crying their eyes out for months, right?

REBECCA
More like a year.

JONNY
Good. A whole year. And then what?

REBECCA
What?

JONNY
Then what?

REBECCA
Then...they'll still be sad?

JONNY
After a whole year of grieving? Not likely. After the funeral, your parents will already start to forget you. People will tell them to do it. Part of the "moving on" process, you know? Yes, they'll cry at first, but they won't cry forever. Eventually they'll start having parties again, inviting all their friends over for a good time, and they'll forget all about you. That is until someone brings you up in a conversation.
JONNY (CONT.)
Your parents will look a little sad, tell the story of their misguided daughter, and then off
to get a new glass of champagne. Is that really the revenge you wanted?

REBECCA
No.

JONNY
I didn't think so.

REBECCA
Then what? What can I do?

JONNY
How about this. Instead of being depressed, get angry. Next time they have a party, start
a fire in the house. They try to ignore you more, get arrested streaking in front of a police
station. They try to send you away, steal their car and crash it into a tree. Don't get sad.
Get mad. Get even.

REBECCA
Yes. Yes! Why should I end my life? I didn't do anything wrong.

JONNY
Not a thing.

REBECCA
They're the ones who did something wrong!

JONNY
You know it.

REBECCA
They should suffer for making me...suffer. Yeah!

JONNY
Payback's a bitch, and so are you!

REBECCA
You're damn right!

REBECCA kisses JONNY, mashing HER
face against HIS.

REBECCA
Thank you for helping me see the light. How can I ever repay you?
JONNY
Well, I can think of a few things.

*SAM walks over to REBECCA and rushes HER to the door.*

SAM
Glad we have an understanding. We'll refund your money, and you won't say anything bad our company. It was nice to meet you, and as always, you have a friend in "Your Last Friend Inc."

REBECCA
Be seeing you, Bill.

JONNY
You know it.

*REBECCA exits.*

SAM
I can't believe you.

JONNY
What?

SAM
You're thirty-one. And she's suicidal.

JONNY
So? I gotta takes what I can gets. I don't see the women hanging off of your shoulders, you thirty-year-old.

SAM
Oh, yeah? If I wanted a woman...I wouldn't start at high school students.

JONNY
She's nineteen. What, you want me to hit on Mrs. Seiwert?

SAM
That's now what I mean.

JONNY
Because I'd be happy to be the one to reintroduce her into the world of dating.

SAM
Stop it. Please?
Fine. That's two down in one day.

Yes. You're amazing.

That's what she said.

How do you do it? How do you convince suicidal people to love life again? How?

It's not hard. Just give them the confidence to go after what they think they can't have.

SAM goes over to the computer and checks on the daily customer reports.

What are you doing?

Seeing how many more customers we got today.

I'm taking a nap.

You're taking a nap after being awake for twenty minutes?

I'm tired.

Okay. I'll wake you up at three.

Thanks.
JONNY opens the office door and is about to close it when SAM finds something very startling on the computer.

SAM
What? No, it can't be.

JONNY
What?

SAM
It's a coincidence. It has to be.

JONNY
What's a coincidence? Sam, what's a coincidence? Do we have a problem or what?

JONNY looks as if HE's seen a video recording of the death of a loved one.

Dude!

SAM
It's Jessica.

JONNY
Jessica who?

SAM
Jessica.

JONNY
You mean Jessica Jessica? Your sister Jessica?

SAM nods HIS head.

JONNY
She send you an email or something?

SAM shakes HIS head.

JONNY
Then what? What about Jessica?
She's a customer.

Of ours?

As of today.

Why? What's her problem?

She's dying of cancer. My big sister's dying of cancer, and she wants us to give her assisted suicide.
ACT II, SCENE I

The office, the next day. SAM is sitting at the desk and staring off in the distance, trying to solve an unsolvable moral dilemma. JONNY is drinking a cup of coffee, being with HIS friend for moral support.

JONNY
So...she's going to be here any minute. Okay.

Beat.

JONNY
How are we going to do this, Sam?

SAM
I don't know.

JONNY
I mean...I could sling my usual bull, but I don't know if you want me to do that or not. You want me to?

SAM
No.

JONNY
Probably better not to. I haven't met her in a while, but I bet she remembers me well enough to know when I'm not myself.

SAM
Probably.

JONNY
What are we going to do then? We got a real problem here. What if she figures out our scam? You did tell her who we really are.

SAM
I know! I know. Don't worry about it. She still thinks our pyramid scheme six years ago fell to pieces because of her.

JONNY
Guess she was never the smartest of the Phillips. I didn't mean that. I'm sorry.
It's okay.

SAM

We have to get her to change her mind.

JONNY

And how do we do that?

SAM

I don't know. I'd spin it like I do for the other customers, but you don't want me to do that.

JONNY

No, I don't.

SAM

Well, I guess it's your job then. You change her mind.

JONNY

I don't know if I can.

SAM

You have to.

JONNY

She has cancer, Jonny! How do I convince her everything's alright, when there's no way out of dying?

SAM

You remind her of her family. You remind her of her loved ones. You ask her what she's always wanted to do, but never could before. You ask her if she has any regrets. Come on, Sam, you know how this is done.

JONNY

Yes. You're right. I'm sorry. I'm not thinking straight.

SAM

I understand why. No one knew she was dying, until you found out, and that was an accident. It's natural to get the jitters from a piece of info like that, but you have to push through it. If you don't, and she wants to go through with suicide, then we lose our business.

JONNY

And I lose my sister.
SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.

JONNY

Here she is. Ready?

SAM gives JONNY a stern look.

JONNY

Get ready.

JESSICA PHILLIP enters, wearing very baggy clothing and a ratty wig. JESSICA is a party woman to HER core. If there's a party, SHE's already there downing all the beer, picking fights with the men, and destroying the furniture. That was until SHE got cancer and HER body started to shrivel away. SHE still goes to parties, but the sickness mixed with other people's pity usually pushes HER off.

SAM

Jessica?

JESSICA

That you, Sam? Don't you looks sharp in that nice suit of yours.

SAM

You look...great. You look great.

JESSICA

Yeah. Who knew chemo was the only thing that could make me this thin? I haven't been this thin since...never.

JONNY

You could stand to use a few pounds.

JESSICA

Why, is that "always in trouble" the kid Jonny? Come over here and give me a hug.

JONNY

I sure will, now my arms can reach all the way around you.
JESSICA and JONNY hug.  SAM stands up.

JESSICA
Not too tight.  I don't want you straining your little twig arms.  Sam, come over here.

JESSICA and SAM hug.

JESSICA
It's been a long time.

SAM
Too long.

JESSICA
That's my fault.  Ever since I found out about the cancer, I've stayed away from the family.

SAM
If I would have known, I'd of--

JESSICA
Now see, that's exactly the reason why I didn't tell you.  I don't need anyone's pity.  Keep it to yourself.

SAM
I'm sorry.

JESSICA
For what?  You didn't shove all that alcohol down my throat or give me Daddy's bad genes, did you?

JONNY
He did give you that scar across your back from that time you rode a shopping cart down the street.

JESSICA
You still remember that?

JONNY
No one could forget that high-pitched girly scream Sam let out right before he jumped out the basket and pushed you into the ditch.

JESSICA
You two laughed your heads off about it 'till I caught Sam here and gave him a black eye.

115
Two black eyes.

JESSICA
Who knew you two would be best friends later in high school and on to still be friends today?

SAM
Guess you never know what the future has in store for you.

Beat.

JESSICA
If you don't mind, I want to get this meeting over with as quickly as possible. I have a hospital visit to make later.

JONNY
Sure. Please take a seat.

JONNY helps JESSICA sit in the customer chair, and SAM sits behind the desk.

Beat.

JESSICA
I'm waiting.

SAM
Right. Sorry. The point of the last chance session is to determine if you are indeed ready to...pass on. We...It's company policy to help our customers make the right decision, and I don't want you going through with this before you've settled your life out.

JESSICA
What do you mean?

SAM
What about Mom and Dad? Or Ray, or Marshal, or Tony, or Walter? Were you going to tell any of us?

JESSICA
No. Didn't feel like the right thing to do.
SAM
What? What do you mean--

JONNY
I think Sam's trying to ask you if you'd feel bad if anything was left unsaid between you and your family.

JESSICA
You know me, Jonny. I don't hold back ever. I say and do what's on my mind all the time. There's no secrets about me. I didn't want to tell anyone, because I didn't want them worrying about me till the day I die.

SAM
We could have helped you.

JESSICA
How? I got pancreatic cancer, the kind you can't remove. I'm also a drunk and a drug abuser. My body's gone through hell, and there's no hope for me.

JONNY
Is that what the doctors said?

JESSICA
Yes, along with a lot of other stories about how I'm gonna die.

SAM
How much longer do you have?

JESSICA
Not much longer. I stopped the chemo a month ago.

SAM
Why did you do that?

JESSICA
I don't need to live in sickness and in pain my last days on Earth. If I'm gonna die, then I'm gonna die my own way.

SAM
But...you don't know you have to die. We can take you to another doctor. Get some other treatments for you. You don't know everything about your condition. You--

JESSICA
Sam!
JESSICA takes off the wig, revealing very shortcut hair. SAM stands and moves away, ashamed and scared.

JESSICA
I didn't want to have to do that. I didn't want you to know at all, but God works in mysterious ways, and I didn't have a choice.

JESSICA stands and walks over to SAM.

JESSICA
Sam, I'm dying, and nothing's gonna change that. Come here.

JESSICA hugs SAM until HE hugs back.

SAM
I'm sorry.

JESSICA
There you go apologizing again.

SAM
I'm sorry.

JESSICA
You mean sorry-looking.

JESSICA and SAM laugh.

JESSICA
I'm gonna leave now. You phone me and tell me when I can get the treatment done.

JONNY
You're not going to reconsider? You sure you're ready to go through with this?

JESSICA
Jonny, I'm not very bright, but I know when to give up.

JONNY
Your last chance session is over yet. Maybe you should--

SAM
Let her go.
JESSICA
I'll be fine, Jonny. You'll see. A couple nights of liquor and high-dollar pain medications, and I'll be so hung-over, I'll be begging for someone to put me out of my misery.

JONNY
I guess.

JESSICA hugs JONNY.

JESSICA
That's the spirit. Always keep looking on the bright side. Sam?

SAM
Yes?

JESSICA
I am very sorry you had to learn about this. Very, very sorry.

JESSICA discretely wipes away some tears.

JESSICA
I'm off. Talk to you boys later.

JONNY
See you, Jessica.

JESSICA
Bye.

JESSICA exits.

SAM
Bye.

SFX: a car turns on and drives away.

JONNY goes over to the phone and starts dialing.

SAM
Who are you calling?
JONNY
U-Haul. We got to start packing and get the hell out of here.

SAM
Why?

JONNY
Why? Because your sister walked out of our office today thinking we'd give her some assisted suicide. Your sister, someone who can ID us, is expecting us to hold up our part of the bargain. We got to get the hell out of here.

SAM
No, we don't.

JONNY
You going to talk to her later and convince her to live?

SFX: someone is talking on the phone.

(to phone) Never mind. Wrong number.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

Are you?

Beat.

JONNY
Sam, are you going to make Jessica change her mind?

SAM shakes HIS head.

Then we have to leave. Now.

JONNY dials again.

JONNY
I knew we should have put our base of operations outside our hometown. (to phone) Hello, yeah I can hold.

SAM
We're not leaving, either.

120
JONNY
What are you talking about? We have to leave.

SAM
We're not leaving.

SFX: a man on the phone.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY
You're not thinking what I think you're thinking, are you?

SAM
She's my sister.

JONNY
I'm not a murderer. You're not a murderer. We're not doing anything to Jessica, except leaving her out in the cold like all our other customers.

SAM
I can't do that to her.

JONNY
So you're going to kill her?!

SAM
I...I don't know what I'm going to do, Jonny. My sister told me she was dying and asked me to assist in her suicide. I'm a little confused right now.

JONNY
Sam, think about this. Really think. Our services here are a scam. It's a hoax. "Your Last Friend Inc" is an imaginary thing we made up to steal other people's money.

SAM
Steal from people suffering with pain and disease, I know.

JONNY
It isn't our fault if the state of Arizona changes the laws on us last minute.

SAM
But it is our fault! We're thieves, Jonny.
JONNY
Sam, listen to me, and listen real good. I've done some things I'm not proud of, but I am not going to help you kill your sister. Got it?

Beat.

JONNY
Good.

SAM
Then I'll expose you.

JONNY
Say that again.

SAM
If you don't help me, then I'll tell the Feds about our operations.

JONNY gets very close to SAM.

JONNY
If you do that, we'll go to jail. Federal prison, and we'll stay there a long, long time. Our friends and families won't visit us there. I know how your father can be, and he'll tell all your brothers to stay the hell away from you. All our jobs will be brought to light, and we'll have hundreds of people wanting us beaten up or dead. Now, I'm not a man of morals, but Jessica will get no help from me. If that means I go to prison, then that's what happens, but are you willing to sacrifice yourself for the sake of Jessica?

SAM steps back.

JONNY
Well, are you?

END ACT II, SCENE I
ACT II, SCENE II

The next day. There are boxes piled on each other with labels like "brochures", "documents", and "supplies" against the wall, and some mail is lying on the computer desk. The plants, coffee pot, and sofa are gone, returning the office space to its ragged, unorganized appearance before the invention of "Your Last Friend Inc".

SFX: The phone rings until the answering machine picks up.

JONNY (OV)
Hello, my name is Mr. Bill Teetonka and you're calling "Your Last Friend Incorporated", where we try to help when no one else can. Unfortunately, we are helping another customer and could not answer your call. If you would please leave a short message along with your name and phone number, we will call you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience.

SFX: The answering machine beeps.

JESSICA (OV)
Uh, hey Jonny. Nice voice you got there. It's all respectable and whatnot. Anyway, I was calling, because I'm not going along with your services.

SAM enters, listening intently to the message.

JESSICA (OV)
I'm still going to die, but I thought it wasn't fair to ask Sam to help me out with it. I don't know. Seems like too much responsibility for one person to hand over to someone else. I'll probably go with another company eventually, but I wanted Sam to know that I miss him, and I'll try and visit him more. You hear that, Sam? Your big sister Jessica's gonna mooch off you next time I get the chance. I guess that's about it. Machine's probably gonna cut me off pretty soon. Take care and--

SFX: The answering machine beeps.

SAM walks over to the answering machine and quickly disconnects it and the phone, and then puts it in a box. Once again, He has another moment of personal reflection, and this time it takes a deeper toll.
JONNY enters.

JONNY
Guess we were worried about nothing after all.

SAM
Yeah.

JONNY
Still too late. Website's down and all our money's been transferred out of the country.

SAM
I know.

JONNY
It's too bad. I hear Arizona's putting the ban back up on assisted suicide. They got too much heat from churches, and Governor Brewer said she'd never allow this to happen again as long as she's in office.

SAM
Good move on her part.

JONNY
Probably.

Beat.

JONNY
I'll start separating the boxes we keep from the ones we burn.

SAM
Jonny.

JONNY
What?

SAM
If Jessica didn't really want to go through with it, if we convinced her to keep living, what would have happened?

JONNY
We probably wouldn't have closed shop.

SAM
No, I mean what would of happened between us and Jessica?
JONNY
I don't understand. I guess she'd still be a client.

SAM
We'd keep her money, knowing that she was depending on us to end her life when the moment came. Every time I'd have looked at the customer reports, I'd see her name and remembered how much trust my sister put in me. She trusted me to do for her what no one else would have. And what do I do? The day actually comes when she needs me to be there for her, and I run away with her money.

JONNY
Don't be hard on yourself. It's not like we haven't stolen from her before.

SAM
It's not about the money, damn it! Money is some little piece of paper or coins of metal with numbers and dead presidents on it. I'm talking about when it actually matters. This wasn't some bad online investment or a fake lottery ticket. We were selling the right to die with dignity. Who are we to try and take that away from people?

JONNY
We weren't taking it away. And who says we were selling death? I started this idea with the purpose of selling hope, and I sold it by the ton. You only saw their names and their credit cards. I got to talk to these people, all one hundred of them. Do you know how many of them cried for joy? I was thanked over and over again for giving them something the law denied them, and it made me feel pretty damn good.

SAM
What about now?

JONNY
What about now?

SAM
We're packing up and leaving town. You're not giving those people their money back. Are you?

JONNY
Hell no.

SAM
What do you think those people are going to say when someone tells them that they've been hustled?
JONNY
That wouldn't have happened if you kept your sister from asking us to cut her wrists for her!

SAM punches JONNY. JONNY rubs HIS chin, then punches SAM. THEY fight until JONNY holds up HIS hands.

JONNY
Okay! Dude, stop!

SAM backs down.

JONNY
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. That was too far.

You're fucking right it was.

SAM and JONNY nurse THEIR wounds.

JONNY
Okay, so all those people who thanked me probably will want to kick my balls soon. I accept that. That's fair, but I never thought I had to be.

Be what? Fair?

SAM

JONNY
Yeah. You said it yourself, man. We're thieves. We screw people over for a living. I always knew that, but you didn't.

SAM
Whatever.

JONNY
No, not "whatever". You always thought the people we stole from were rich bastards with too much money on their hands or people who bullied you in high school for being smart and poor. Not everyone deserves to get screwed over, Sam.

SAM
If it's so obvious, then why didn't I realize this before?
JONNY
Because. You're the brains of the team. You sit at a computer and add numbers. You don't look into these people's eyes and lie right to their faces. I do that for us. That's why I'm the balls.

SAM
I use to lie to their faces, just like you, until we went big and one of us needed to push the paper work twenty-four hours a day.

JONNY
Then what the hell changed? You tell me.

SAM
You want to know what changed?

JONNY
I sure do.

SAM
It started about three years back, when we were running from those detectives in Los Angeles.

JONNY
Our phony stars endorsement scam?

SAM
We were this close to getting arrested, but we dumped all our stuff and hid in the streets for over a week.

JONNY
With those bums. One of them gave me crabs.

SAM
I remember each one of their faces staring up at us with those desperate eyes. I had to think to myself, "How many people did we push out into the streets?"

JONNY
Oh, Sam! Don't be stupid.

SAM
I'm serious! How many average, normal families did we push into bankruptcy? How many senior citizens have to live with their kids, because we drained their savings accounts? Are there homeless people cursing our names as they freeze to death? Is that our fault?
JONNY
It never gets below sixty in California.

SAM
And all of that was just for money. We destroyed lives for profit.

JONNY
Sam, I get what you're saying, but who cares? People screw over each other every day. We're no different.

SAM
But I want to be different. I stole, because I thought someone out there was getting what they deserve. It scares me to think what we've got coming to us.

JONNY stretches as HE walks around and thinks.

JONNY
So what are you saying? You want to quit? Over ten years working together, and you want to throw it all away?

SAM
What is there to throw away?

JONNY paces around and kicks one of the boxes repeatedly and then calms down.

JONNY
It was a good idea.

SAM
It was.

JONNY
It was like gold in my hands. Perfect. You really quitting the game?

SAM
The game's not worth playing anymore.

JONNY
You're totally sure about this? I can't have you quit now and a month later want back in. It doesn't work that way.

SAM
I know. I'm still giving it up.
JONNY
Damn, Jessica, coming in here and screwing all our shit up. I'm going to miss her.

SAM
She'll be around for a little while longer. You should take a vacation soon and visit my family. I guess I should start visiting them too.

JONNY
Probably. I'm not visiting if you're not there.

*JONNY holds out his hand.*

JONNY
It was a good run.

*SAM shakes JONNY's hand, and JONNY pulls in SAM for a hug. Eventually, JONNY pushes SAM off.*

JONNY
Okay, enough grab-assing. We have to put all of this in the truck and get the hell out of here. Just because you're retiring doesn't mean you can get out of helping me clean this mess up.

SAM
I know.

*JONNY exits.*

JONNY (OS)
Son of a...Sam, are you missing a shoe? Because I found one.

SAM
No.

JONNY (OS)
It's probably one of mine then. Never mind.

*SAM disconnects the computer and puts it in a box.*

*SFX: a car pulls up to the building and parks.*
SAM doesn't hear the vehicle.
REBECCA enters. SHE's dressed in more punk rather than gothic clothing, and SHE no longer dances around erratically. SAM is frozen in panic.

SAM
Uhh...hello, Mrs. Tener. What brings you to our offices today?

REBECCA
What are you doing? Are you moving away or something?

SAM
Yes. Yes, we are. We are relocating.

REBECCA walks over to the box labeled "documents" and starts shuffling through them.

What is this?

REBECCA

SAM rushes over and pulls the documents out of her hands.

SAM
Nothing. Those are nothing. You need to go now. We don't want to be held reliable if you hurt yourself tripping over stuff.

REBECCA
That looked like a receipt for an offshore bank account. Are you a crook? Did you steal all my money?!

SAM
Uhh...Jon-Mr. Teetonka! Get here quick!

REBECCA
I'm calling the cops!

SAM runs and blocks the doorway.

SAM
Please, don't do that.

REBECCA
Get out of my way, or I'll tell the cops you're kidnapping me too!
JONNY enters.

JONNY

What the hell is she doing here?

SAM

I don't know. She walked in and saw our papers and found out we're hustling her and...

REBECCA and JONNY start laughing.

SAM

She was threatening to turn us in...

REBECCA and JONNY laugh even louder.

SAM

Then she said we were kidnapping her. What the hell is going on?

REBECCA

Relax, Sam. I know all about your little operation.

SAM

You...(to Jonny), how the hell does she know my name?

I told her.

SAM

You what?!

JONNY

She found out about us anyway. She's a whiz on the computers. Looked into our business license and permits and figured they were fakes.

SAM

She...(to REBECCA) How did you do that? I worked my ass off on those.

REBECCA

They were pretty good, for a man born before the technological revolution. Those raised in the post-apocalyptic trash heap called the future can tell when fossils are trying to act evolved.

SAM puts HIS arm around REBECCA.
Isn't she great?

What the hell, Jonny? Were you ever going to tell me about her?

I am now. Got her to help us move.

Don't be furious. He wasn't aware that I was aware until he opened a file on my computer.

I was looking for porn.

I was looking for porn.

Beat.

What were you doing at her house?

Having a good time.

With a suicidal teenager?! (to REBECCA) No offense.

I'm beyond labels.

It's all cool, Sam. She's going into the business with me.

Becoming a criminal: the ultimate revenge against my parents.

(to JONNY) Are you fucking out of your mind?!

REBECCA wanders over to the desk and starts opening the mail piled up on it.
SAM
It's a good thing I'm leaving, because you're going to get caught any day now running around with a juvenile.

JONNY
She's nineteen. The age of consent.

SAM
Do you realize that when she was born, you were going through puberty?

JONNY
Kids these days are much more mature than we ever were. You know that.

SAM
She just graduated high school. How mature can she be?

JONNY
Mature enough to see past your forgeries.

REBECCA opens an envelope and is immediately surprised by its contents.

REBECCA
Wow!

REBECCA reads the letter.

SAM
I doubt she did that all by herself.

JONNY
What are you getting at? You think I helped her discover our shit?

REBECCA
Guys, you need to see this.

SAM
It wouldn't be the first time you did something stupid for the opposite sex.

JONNY
And when's the last time you did anything with the opposite sex?

REBECCA holds the money order SHE got from the envelope and holds it directly in front of JONNY's vision.
JONNY
What's...wow.

SAM
What is it?

REBECCA hands over the money order to SAM, and JONNY reads the letter.

SAM
This is a money order for two-hundred thousand dollars.

REBECCA
Who's Todd McNeal?

JONNY
"Thank you Mr. Teetonka and Mr. MacDougal for opening my eyes and see the world. I did as you said and stole all the money I could from my bank. I'm going to live out the rest of my life in Hawaii, far away from my mother and her kitchen knives. Here's a little of what I got as a thank you. I'll always remember you." He did it. He stole from the bank.

SAM
Mr. McNeal?

JONNY
Yeah. I guess that two hundred thou' there is a gift.

REBECCA
He gave you guys one-hundred thousand dollars? You must have given him a gift worth more than the material gain possible with that much money.

JONNY
We saved his life. Right, Sam?

SAM
You could say that.

JONNY
We both saved his life, so you can have half of that.

SAM
Really?
Yeah. It's a going away present. I'd hate to come back around here some day and see you flipping burgers behind a grill.

Beat.

I can't take this.

Why not? It's yours.

No, it isn't.

Okay. More for me.

JONNY goes to reach for the money order, but SAM pulls away.

Actually, I will take my half.

Whatever you want.

And I'm going to refund all our customers in full.

Really?

Really.

Guess you're getting a head start on your whole redemption thing, aren't you?

It's the least I can do.

You're getting old man. Now, I'm going to take a ten minute break from moving and have sex with my new nineteen year old girlfriend, if you don't mind.
I don't mind.

You ready?

Can we make it a twenty minute break?

*JONNY and SAM give each other a look.*

Life just keeps getting better and better. See you in a little while, Sam.

Enjoy yourself, Jonny.

You know I will.

*JONNY and REBECCA exit into one of the offices.*

*JONNY laughs to HIMSELF. HE picks up a box and looks around the office. HE has another moment of personal reflection, but this time it's a positive one. HE exits to the parking lot.*

**END ACII, SCENE II**

THE END
APPENDIX B.

Seventh draft of the play. The draft deemed worthy after the summer New Script Development class.
Characters

Sam Everett: 30, cautious hacker and forger
Jonny Long: 31, edgy but charming con-artist
Todd McNeal: Late 20s, lonely bank accountant
Beulah Yorn: 70s, old and forgotten grandmother
Rebecca Tener: 19, ignored gothic teenager
Jessica Everett: 34, drug-addicted cancer patient
Rodrigo: (VO) foreign embezzlement outlaw

Time

Winter, Present

Location

Tucson, Arizona
ACT I, SCENE I

A small business building. There's a desk with a computer on it and a printer, a few chairs, a trash bin, a broom against the wall, a coat rack with two dry-cleaned business suits hanging on it, a table with a coffee pot on it, and a phone with an answering machine.

SAM EVERETT enters with a couple stand-alone pamphlets about Philippine real estate investments, which HE positions carefully around the desk. HIS clothing style betrays his antisocial behavior: obscure pop culture icon t-shirt, short shorts, flip-flops, etc.

SAM is what happens when you put an intelligent person through a lifetime of bullying in an underprivileged school system. HE's had to make the best of what was given to HIM, which became a life of computer crimes and easy money. HIS greatest vice is not greed but caffeine addiction, which HE drinks almost non-stop to make HIS brain work as fast as the computers he loves so much.

SAM
Okay. We have our Philippine brochures, the office is dust free, and Jonny's suit is clean and...well, clean enough to look expensive. We are ready...and with time to spare.

SAM suspiciously stares at the front entrance as HE sits down at the computer, making sure someone isn't around to see HIM in a moment of shame. Soon, HIS focus is consumed by whatever's on the computer screen.

SFX: Sci-fi sound effects from computer.
The Captain of the U.S.S. Deep Explorer is fully loaded and ready to dock. Minions of the universe beware of--

Sam! Hey, Sam!

_JONNY enters wearing large black-tinted sunglasses and holding a beer in HIS hand, but not looking very drunk._

_JONNY has the appearance of a sleazy door-to-door salesman whom you'd swear uses a pound of pomade in HIS hair. However, there's something charming about HIS confident smile and buddy-buddy attitude that keeps this professional scam artist in business._

_SAM quickly exits the computer game before JONNY has a chance to realize what's going on._

Hey, listen real quick. I got a good idea, and I think you're going to like it.

Where have you been, Jonny? Are you going to make me organize the office all by myself?

How does surfing for porn all day long organize the office, hmm?

Wha...I...For the last time, I don't surf for porn! It's online interactive role-play. I've told you this a hundred times.

You have no idea how much better I'd feel if you were searching for porn, instead of playing computer play games with guys who still live with their moms.

Hey! It's nothing to be ashamed of.

_JONNY takes off HIS glasses._

Hey, listen real quick. I got a good idea, and I think you're going to like it.

Where have you been, Jonny? Are you going to make me organize the office all by myself?

How does surfing for porn all day long organize the office, hmm?

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You have no idea how much better I'd feel if you were searching for porn, instead of playing computer play games with guys who still live with their moms.

Hey! It's nothing to be ashamed of.
No, not at all. I mean, you got low rent, free meals, and hey, if there's a party going on somewhere, you've already have a date waiting for you.

Have you been consuming alcohol?

What?

Drinking?

No. Why?

SAM points to the beer in JONNY's hand.

This? It's empty.

Then why is it in your hand?

I don't like to litter. What, I can't have a drink without you busting my balls? I know its morning, but you don't--

SAM

No it's not. It's three-thirty-five in the afternoon.

JONNY

It is not...

JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch in disbelief, but realizes SAM's correct.

JONNY

Guess bars in Tucson don't have last calls. Hmm. The more you learn. Hey, your sister lives around here. Why don't we invite her to hang out with us sometime? Been awhile since we seen her, and that woman can drink!

SAM

Jessica does a whole lot more than drinking. After all the drugs she's put into her brain, she practically has the CPU of an elementary school's Macintosh.

JONNY
Lucky me, I'm only a drunk. But seriously, you don't know if she's like that anymore. Let me give her a call and see if she's--

SAM

Jonny...your idea?

JONNY

Oh, yeah! I almost forgot. I thought up this new enterprise when I was watching TV last night.

SAM

In a bar?

JONNY

No, this was before the bar. I was in a strip joint.

SAM

A strip joint? Do you have any idea of how many contagious diseases are in a place like that? Did you even wash your hands?

JONNY

Nope. Not once.

JONNY plays like HE's going to touch SAM, who dodges HIS moves.

SAM

Quit it! You'll give me "Brittany Spears Syphilis" or something!

JONNY

Calm down. My hands didn't go anywhere near the strippers. They have rules against touching. I mostly watched TV.

SAM

TV? Why were you watching public television in a strip bar instead of--wait, wait. No. I don't want to know. Tell me your idea.

SAM logs onto the computer and starts organizing files.

JONNY

Are you going to listen?

SAM
I'm double-tasking. Go.

JONNY and SAM begin their usual banter of ideas, working off of one another instead of simply arguing. For THEM, this is how work is done.

JONNY
Okay, so there's this show about scams, right? And they're not showing old tricks, like lottery emails from Nigeria, but the new stuff that's not illegal yet. And they talk about this one insurance place in Nevada selling alien abduction insurance near Area 51. Alien abduction insurance. Yeah, you heard me right.

SAM
That's massively stupid. Like, legendarily stupid.

JONNY
I know! Right?

SAM
We're not doing that, Jonny. I just started preparing for our current enterprise of selling non-existent plots of land in the Philippines, and I'm not in the mood to start all over to sell peace of mind to acid-tripping rednecks hiding out in the desert.

JONNY
That's no way to talk about your relatives...and me.

SAM
I consider myself a mutation.

JONNY
Yeah, because you're one of a kind. Last I heard, lonely computer nerds were an endangered species.

SAM
You know what? I don't want to listen to you anymore.

JONNY
Wait. Hear me out, first. Okay? This company, "High Hopes", has tons of lawsuits against them. Not a surprise.

SAM
Negative.

JONNY
But what is a surprise is they're winning their cases.

SAM

Are you serious?

JONNY

They say that if someone gets abducted, then they'll pay out, so technically they're not robbing anyone.

SAM

Obviously, they're idiots. If they were professionals, they'd have left town before the media put their business on television. Noobs.

JONNY

Yeah, but they're still making money. Lots of money.

SAM

Money they'll lose in court and lawyer fees. Are you going to help me today or not? We have a lot of heavy boxes move, and I--

SAM stands and walks to the door, but JONNY holds HIM by the arm.

JONNY

Dude, listen. I stayed up all night thinking this out, and you'll think it's awesome too. Trust me.

SAM

Trust you? You? I wouldn't trust you with my Battlestar Galactica BlueRay Discs. But fine, whatever, tell me your ridiculous idea.

JONNY

So a little later, I'm getting a lap dance, and this girl knows exactly what she's doing. I mean she's getting all up in my--

SAM

T.M.I., man! Way too much info!

SAM moves to leave, but again JONNY pulls HIM back.

JONNY

You promised! So, this stripper Bambi's rubbing up on me, and she's talking about her grandmother getting leukemia and wishing for death. So I--

SAM
What?!

What?

She told you about her grandmother while she was m-molesting you?

I might be a guy, but I'm a guy who listens. *(presentation)* I care about people.

Just like you cared about those women who bought our online dating service enterprise...and then you used it to sleep with most of them. Before I even had a chance!

Yeah. Good times. *(half-beat)* Anyway, Bambi shares her story and starts crying all over me. "If only someone would stop my grandmother's pain, I'd pay them all the money I have." So, I ask her why her doctor just didn't do her a solid and off her grandmother. She says because euthanasia isn't legal in the state of Arizona...yet.

So what genius idea did you get from Bambi, the crying stripper?

*I checked it out, and she's right. Euthanasia or even assisted suicide isn't legal here...yet.*

Yet?

Yeah, *yet*. It isn't legal here, yet. But...

One day it might be?

And in the meantime...

*Sam gives a hard, long look at Jonny.*

In the meantime…
You'd like to do it illegally?

JONNY

No! I want to sell insurance for it like the alien abduction guys did. Kind of like a "Pay for it now and hope for laws to change in the future" sort of deal. You get me?

SAM

Wow. That's...wow. That's...more wow than "World of Warcraft" wow.

SAM gets the broom and starts sweeping the floor.

Sam?

JONNY

SAM

You really outdid yourself this time. Assisted suicide insurance? What's your malfunction?!

JONNY

Sam, don't be like that.

SAM stops sweeping.

SAM

Are you really considering this? I mean, it's all fun and games when we're draining bank accounts owned by jerks, but stealing money from the sick and dying isn't me, Jonny. We're not doctors.

JONNY

We're not that bad. Most of the people we'll deal with will die in a few weeks anyway.

SAM

Okay, I'll say it another way. Stealing money from the dead and the grieving isn’t me, Jonny. We're not morticians.

JONNY

I hear what you're saying, but I looked into this stuff online today--

SAM

While intoxicated?

JONNY
Yeah, at the strip joint. Like I said. They have wifi.

SAM

I should have never taught you how to use that.

JONNY

And studies show most people who say they want to kill themselves never actually do when they get the chance.

SAM

Where did you read that?

JONNY

Online. In Oregon, hospitals actually send out death pills, but only ten percent of patients take them. The others just want the right to off themselves. They're never going to do it.

SAM

And this was a real medical journal? This isn't another funny story from "The Onion", is it?

JONNY

Yeah, it's real! Yahoo doesn't lie.

*SAM goes back to sweeping.*

SAM

I...I'm just not positive. This seems like we'd be dealing with a lot of...average people, you know? Not the kind of clientele who deserve to get fragged.

JONNY

Can you stop sweeping for a sec?

*JONNY takes the broom away.*

JONNY

I hear what you're saying, but I have something to say back. I know you've been getting moody lately about our line of work. You've got a conscience, and I don't blame you for that? We've done a few questionable jobs in the past--

SAM

Example, the luxury vacation tickets to Korea we sold just as SARS started spreading.

JONNY
Hey, SARS isn't any worse than the flu. Whatever, my point is we've screwed over a lot of people, but this is different. This time we're giving something back: hope. What we’re selling, these people won't use. They can't. It's illegal. But we can sell them this promise; a promise to help them when the law changes in their favor, which will never happen. They'll feel better, we'll get richer, they'll die, and no one will care. I wouldn’t even call it stealing. It's a victimless crime, and it'll be the greatest scam we've ever done. The greatest scam you've ever done.

SAM

Really?

JONNY

Plus, we'll make a lot of money.

SAM

Hmm. How much?

JONNY

Tons of it.

SAM

Exactly how much?

JONNY

A...thousand? A thousand a customer.

SAM

A thousand dollars a customer? I'm assuming on average about five customers a week, that'll be-

JONNY

More like ten customers a week. That's ten grand a week, forty 'K a month.

SAM

Five-hundred and twenty thousand dollars in a year, assuming we actually do get ten customers a week.

JONNY

That's like the lowest number possible. You know they’d rush in the first month. It's winter, and seasonal depression's on the rise.

SAM

We're in Arizona, and it's eighty degrees outside.

JONNY
Dude, try and think positive.

SAM
I could use the challenge. And if this works, and it's as long-term as you say it is, it would give me a lot of time to myself. I could stay here, do my fair share of work, and no one would ever bother me.

JONNY
Not even me.

Beat.

SAM
Okay. I'm game. So how will your end of this operation work?

JONNY
Yeah! I knew you'd like it. Okay, cool, uhm...

JONNY looks around and finds the suits. HE takes them off the rack and lays one over HIS chest.

JONNY
I dress up in a suit, we clean house, and we start a real business.

SAM
Selling assisted suicide in a state where it's illegal.

JONNY
Exactly.

JONNY dances the other suit from the door and over to a seat.

JONNY
The customer walks in, wondering about all these TV ads they keep seeing and the business pamphlets we'll leave in doctors' offices. I mean, we are offering a medical service.

SAM
How very Dr. Kevorkian of you.

JONNY
Thanks. Then we all sit down and talk about our feeelings.
JONNY gives the other suit to SAM to act out the part of the customer.

JONNY
Welcome to our place of business. How may I help you?

SAM
Uhh...My life is horrible, I'm in so much pain. The pain! And I want you to end my life.

JONNY
I know you do, and we promise as soon as the law changes, you'll be one of the first ones to go.

SAM
But why do I have to wait? I want to die right now. If you don't help me, I'll commit suicide. (breaking character) What's your retort?

JONNY
That's a good point. (Back in character) You could try to kill yourself, but if you're not a trained soldier or a doctor, you'll end up at the hospital with enormous bills you can't possibly pay off. Let the professionals do it the right way, the first time. Die with dignity.

SAM
How are you going to extinguish my life? What if I don't want to die in a hospital?

JONNY
I...I...hmm.

SAM
What about at my house? Can I die there?

JONNY
Yes. Yes, we can do that. Our services are as mobile as you are, going wherever you go, so you can be as comfortable as possible down to the very last second.

SAM
What about a medically trained professional? What if something goes wrong?

JONNY
Actually, I am a doctor--

SAM
No.
A nurse?

Possibly. I wouldn't rely on it.

The very best in the business.

SAM nods.

And I promise I won't talk medical jargon or dress in a lab coat. What you see is what you get. I doubt any hospital can promise you the same.

What about your competition? What do they offer that you don't?

What competition? We're the only ones in business. The other guys will take months or even a year to set up shop. Do you really want to wait that long? And I doubt they'll give you the personal touch and low prices we offer. For example, if you decide after the law changes that you do want our services, we have something we like to call a "last chance session", where we all decide together if this is the right thing for you. We don't want anyone having second thoughts, now do we? So what do you say? Are you ready for us?

I am. Thank you, Mr...Whoever. Here's my check.

You won't regret it, sir!

JONNY and SAM drop the act.

And that's how it's done.

As SAM's thinking, JONNY takes the suits and puts them back on the rack.

A real business. A real, long-term business. We've never attempted this before.
If we don't do it, someone else will.

SAM
(Rapidly) We'll need permits. I can forge some easily. Hack into the City Hall’s records, bypass their joke of a firewall, do this during the day for a 40% chance less likelihood of being noticed with all the online traffic, modify a pre-existing insurance permit and make it look like our own, pre-approve it with a date from three months ago, list our favorite dummy corporation from the Cayman Islands as the founding investment company, do all this with a randomized IP Address generator, aaaaaand then we’re set. So…are we actually talking to these people in person, or is it just you?

JONNY
No worries, pal. You let me do all the talking, and you can do all the business stuff. 'Cause you’re the egghead. The brains of our team. And I’m the balls.

SAM
You're the balls?

JONNY
Who else?

SAM
Well, Mr. Testicles I have a question for you. Why wouldn’t they wait to buy our services until after Arizona legalizes it? Why purchase a plan now?

JONNY
I-uhhh--Because...when killing's made legal, everyone'll be lining up for miles. You think they'll want to wait with everybody else? No, they want a First Class ticket to the "Promised Land". All we do is spread the word and wait for the money to roll in.

Beat.

SAM
And you swear, swear on the Tolkien Trilogy that assisted suicide is illegal here? Did you even research it?

JONNY
Of course I have. I swear. Scout's honor.

SAM
You were never a boy scout.
JONNY
So? You were. Loser. You on board or what?

SAM
Well, you've been ever so kind to me...(beat) Affirmative.

JONNY
Awesome! Let’s get this show on the road!

JONNY raises HIS hand to high-five SAM.

JONNY
Come on, man. Don't leave me hanging.

SAM reluctantly raises HIS hand.

JONNY swings and hurts SAM's hand.
JONNY releases all the energy HE reserved for this talk and looks like HE's finally ready to pass out.

JONNY
I’m going to take a nap.

SAM
It's three in the afternoon. Are you suffering from narcolepsy or something?

'Night.

JONNY exits into one of the office rooms.

SAM
We don't even have a chair in there for you to lie down on...

JONNY (OS)
I said “'night”, Sam!

SAM shakes his head and goes back to the desk.

SAM (to HIMSELF) I have a drunk vampire for a partner. It's like I'm a waitress in Louisiana named Sookie.
HE throws the brochures in the trash, and then walks around the room while trying to think of a good name.

SAM

What's the name for this enterprise, I wonder. Anything I'll come up with has to better than he will. (Beat) "Final Resting Place". No, that sounds like a funeral home. "Final"…"Your Last Stop"…"Final Stop"…"Your Last Stop"…"Your Last Friend". Yeah, that’s good. “Your Last Friend…, Inc.”. Here at “Your Last Friend, Inc.” we like to think of us as not ending your life, but releasing you from your mortal shell and into the next world.

SAM’s proud of thinking of such a good company name, but the act is broken by a moment of personal reflection.

END ACT I, SCENE I
ACT I, SCENE II

The coffee table has some business brochures on it with the theme of "letting go".

JONNY enters, wearing a business suit and holding a large picture of a setting sun. HE finds the nail in the wall and balances the picture. He steps back, thinks about it, and then readjusts the picture one more time.

JONNY

Perfect! Yeah, this is a great idea. We'll be swimming in money in no time.

SFX: the phone rings.

JONNY shakes away his excitement and becomes somber. HE picks up the telephone.

JONNY

Good morning, thank you for calling "Your Last Friend, Inc.". We help when no one else can. My name is Bill Teetonka. How may I help you today?...Yes...Yes...Good for you...Once you submit your information on our website, it takes us two to three days to process it, and then we'll set up your account as quickly and as discreetly as possible...Huh?...No, it’s not necessary to meet us in person. This can all be handled over the internet...I’m glad I could help. Take care, and the state of Arizona willing, your needs will be met...You’re welcome.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY

Ha-ha! Another sale! Ring the bell!

Beat.

We need a bell.

JONNY

SAM enters, still wearing HIS usual attire.

SAM

Teetonka? Really? That's the name you want to go with? You sound like a Ferengi selling long distance phone service.
JONNY
I'm honoring my one sixty-fourth Navajo heritage. Don't make fun of my people.

SAM
That's not even enough heritage to fill your pinky.

JONNY
Well, you don't look that Irish, Mr. Henry O'Connell. Shouldn't you be wearing a kilt and eating haggis or something?

SAM
The Scottish eat haggis. The Irish...drink too much, like you. Why were you yelling?

JONNY
I got another sale.

SAM
I get that, but why yell? Are you afraid I'm not going to hear you?

JONNY
It's exciting, man! We're raking in the dough, and we're doing it legally. Can you believe it? Legally!

SAM
Actually, I forged all our licenses and permits, so we're not doing this legally at all.

JONNY
You know what I mean. This is something we can get away with. Forever! I think we've found our calling.

SAM
Well, business has been on the rise.

JONNY
And we haven't met one single nutcase. By the way, good job on the website. I totally loved that whole fade in thing from the field into the main page. It was slick.

SAM
Thank you. Only took me an hour. Whatever. Not a big deal.

JONNY
Don't sell yourself short. You know your stuff.

Yes, I do.
Beat. JONNY coughs as a signal for SAM to compliment HIM too.

SAM
But without your excellent people skills and...other valuable qualities, we’d be nowhere. So, props to you too.

SAM gives JONNY an awkward bumped fists, then does the "explosion" move. It doesn't work out that well.

JONNY
Thanks. Hey, I gave Jessica a call yesterday, you know to relive old times, and she--

SAM
I told you not to do that.

JONNY
I called her for me, not you. She was my friend long before you were.

SAM
We all make mistakes, don't we?

JONNY
Anyway, I called her, but she kind of blew me off.

SAM
Why did you call her? What reason in this entire universe, or any other dimension for that matter, did you have to call her?

JONNY
She drinks. You don't.

SAM
I do too.

JONNY
That stupid Transylvanian wine you drank on Halloween doesn't count.

SAM
No, I suppose it doesn't when compared to the experimental "prison wine" you use to make in high school.

JONNY
Hey, don't knock it. That was some good stuff.
SAM

What did Jessica say?

JONNY

I offered to buy her beer, man. She said no. The Kegger Champion of '03 said no to free beer.

*Beat.*

SAM

That is odd. Is she sick? Going through rehab? Having a relapse? Needing to borrow money with no intention of ever repaying me?

JONNY

Wouldn't say. Sounded kind of sad. Never heard her talk like that before.

SAM

I...might give her a call...sometime.

JONNY

You should. It kind of speaks badly of you that I called your sister before you did. Guess that's because I'm the more considerate one.

SAM

What's with the sunset picture?

JONNY

Huh? Oh, you like it? I thought it’d be good for business. You know, sort of like a metaphor.

SAM

And what's the metaphor?

*JONNY becomes somber again.*

JONNY

(*business character*) Like a beautiful sunset, you too must pass. (*breaking character*) I made that up myself.

SAM

No, you didn't. You stole that from the Mormon magazine we found when we were cleaning up.

JONNY

I'm sure they don't mind as long as their message is getting out. You done funneling yesterday's money into that fake company Rodrigo made? What was it, "Baker's Dog Soaps" or something?
SAM
Not yet. The less paper trail we have to our money laundering front, the better.

JONNY
Smart.

SAM
I know.

SAM sits down at the computer.

SAM
How many customers did we get today?

JONNY
Twenty.

SAM
Twenty?

JONNY
Check it.

SAM searches their accounts on the computer.

SAM
That's our highest so far by eight. That's highly unusual.

JONNY
Someone must be spreading the word.

SAM
Yeah, I'm sure it's a hot topic on everyone's Twitter page

JONNY shrugs HIS shoulders.

JONNY
Check their "Reasons to die". See if they're all the same.

SAM checks the files.

SAM
No. No. Yes. No. They're mixed. There's no connection.
SAM notices something on the computer screen.

SAM
Well...there's another customer. What is this?

SFX: phone rings.

JONNY goes to the phone, goes into HIS somber character, and answers the phone while SAM looks over customer files.

JONNY
Good morning, thank you for calling "Your Last Friend, Inc.". We help when no one else can. My name is Mr. Bill Teetonka. How may I help you today?...Hello, Mr. McNeal....Yes, I remember you. We remember all our clients on a personal level...Sir, we would be happy to help you journey to the next world, but unfortunately Arizona state law prevents us from doing so...Huh?...You what?...What?!...No, sorry sir. I didn't mean to yell. I stubbed my toe. It's these new rotating chairs. They've been sticking a little...Now?!...Uhm, okay. We can schedule your last chance session for tomorrow...Please, we're not prepared. Let us schedule you tomorrow and......You're on your way over? Good. Uh, good. See you in a moment then. Have a good day.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY
Go online and check the news, now!

SAM
What was that all about?

JONNY
We got a customer coming over for his last chance session in ten minutes!

SAM
Excuse me? We don't give those out. Those are for people who want assisted suicide, and as far as I have been informed, that's illegal.

JONNY
Guess what's just been legalized.

Beat.

SAM
Is this a joke? Are you joking with me? Is this like your own special brand of "Punk'd" or something?
JONNY
I don't know. Just check the internet. Now! Mr. McNeal told me that the bill was passed this morning.

SAM
No. That's not possible. If there was a bill being passed like this one, then you'd know about it, because it was your job to keep an eye on this while I was setting up our finances and customer support. Do not tell me you didn't look into this!

JONNY
I did.

SAM
And?

JONNY
Look, I called the hospital before we started this and asked a doctor if assisted suicide was legal yet. He said no, so I assumed--

SAM
You didn't actually check?!? You didn't go to city hall, you didn't go to the library, you didn't even read a newspaper?!

JONNY
I called a hospital! They're supposed to know these things. Aren't they?

Beat.

SAM
Oh, my god. Oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god. Is he coming over right now, Mr...Mr.? 

JONNY
Mr. McNeal.

SAM
Yes, Mr. McNeal. Is he?

JONNY
I tried to get him to come tomorrow.

SAM
MOTHER...Calm down, Samuel. Calm down. You can deal with this. (to JONNY) He might be wrong.
Yeah.

He might have misheard the news.

Maybe.

Perhaps he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Happens all the time.

\textit{SAM hastily checks the internet on the computer.}

So? Is he right?

Stop talking!

Dude, I'm so sorry if I messed this up for us.

Shut up! Just wait a moment and...oh no.

What?

\textit{SAM reads the bad news.}

He was right. We're screwed. We're totally, utterly screwed...like a Storm Trooper on the Death Star.

You're reading it wrong. Let me see.

\textit{JONNY moves SAM out of the way to read the damning news.}

Well...I guess it did go through. Why didn't that doctor lie to me?
SAM
Jonny, you idiot, it takes months for laws to go into effect once they've passed!

*SAM picks up a pen and throws it at JONNY.*

JONNY
Hey, don't take your anger out on me. I'm just as mad as you.

SAM
What the hell are we going to do?!

JONNY
Sam, calm down. I can work with this.

SAM
Really? You really think so? You think can work with this? Really?

*JONNY and SAM notice TODD outside and walking to the door.*

SAM
Oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god--

JONNY
Dude, stay calm, let me handle this, and everything will be okay. Believe in me. Go hide in the back room or something.

SAM
I'm not leaving. I'm staying and making sure you don't mess this up anymore than you already have.

JONNY
You're not even wearing a suit. You look like you're here to fix the printer.

*TODD MCNEAL enters. TODD is the adult version of the kid picked last for every sports team.*

*HE looks like a born loser whose mother dresses HIM, and her taste is a few decades out of touch.*

*TODD is crying and sobbing heavily.*
Is this "Your Last Friend, Inc."?

(whispering) Fine, but stay out of my way. (to TODD in business voice) Hello, Mr. McNeal. It's nice to meet you in person. My name is Bill Teetonka, and my associate here is Henry O'Connell.

Hey...sir. How are you feeling? Good?  

Beat.

Hello. I want to end it all. As soon as possible.

End your life?

Yes, yes my life! My pathetic, good-for-nothing, never-amount-to-anything life.

Please try to remain calm. Everything will be taken care of, but it helps if you can keep control of your emotions. Can you do that for me?

I can-I can try.

That's all I ask.

SAM sits and hands over ten tissues to TODD, one after another, until SAM takes the tissue box away.

Thank you. Who are you?

Henry O'Connell. My name is Henry O'Connell. People call me Henry.

You don't look Irish.
JONNY
Mr. O'Connell, would you please bring up Todd's file? Thank you.

_SAM brings up the file on the computer screen._

JONNY
Todd, you don't mind me calling you by your first name, do you?

TODD
No. I don't care about anything anymore.

JONNY
Thank you. You can call me Bill. Todd, why have you decided to end your existence on this planet?

TODD
I need a reason?!

SAM
Yes, you do! It's part of our policy. We have to know!

JONNY
Since our services are permanent, we ask you to retell exactly why it is you wish to end your life. It helps you decide if this is really what you want, and it also helps protect us legally. You understand, right?

TODD
I guess.

JONNY
So why is it you're needing to die?

TODD
My mother's going to kill me.

_Beat._

JONNY
I'm not sure I understand. You want assisted suicide, because your mother's going to kill you?

TODD
And I want you to kill me first.

_Beat._
What? Why? Why would she do that?

I was fired from my job. I take care of both of us, but now that I'm out of work, I'll have to apply for unemployment. We're already three months behind on the mortgage, and if we lose the house, I'll have nowhere to put her but a home.

That doesn't sound so bad. I hear Tucson has one of the best senior citizen care programs in the country.

That doesn't matter to her. She's crazy! She's got dementia. She takes her pills, but they don't work. She beats me with her cane, breaks the dirty dishes if I don't wash them fast enough, and chases away any girl I can get to come to our house. I'm...I'm afraid.

She might be following me.

Why can't you put her in a crazy house--err...a mental hospital. They have locked doors, straps, officers, everything you could practically think of to keep patients locked inside.

My uncle tried that once. My mom escaped.

No one knows.

TODD breaks down and sobs.
JONNY
Hey, hey. There's no reason to cry. We can think of something. How about you get a lawyer and have her arrested.

TODD
I..I could never do that to my mom. I love her. What kind of son would I be if I put her in jail? No, the only way to make it right is for me to die.

SAM
Uhm...Is that your only reason for our services?

TODD
Do I need more? I'm a bad son, a total failure, and I haven't had a real girlfriend since Christy Emerson slept with me because she was so drunk she thought I was the college mascot. I'm...I'm...I'm pathetic!

TODD sobs into JONNY's coat. JONNY awkwardly pats TODD on the back.

JONNY
There, there.

SAM and JONNY have an inaudible argument until TODD regains HIS composure.

TODD
So that's why I want to die. Today if possible. Before she gets me.

SAM
Today? You don't need to think about it for just a little more? Possibly a day more?

TODD
I've been thinking about nothing else for a week. I have a desk job at a bank, and I'm so overqualified that I finish the day's work by ten every morning. I do nothing but sit and play "Mystical Warriors" all day long.

JONNY
"Mystical Warriors"?

TODD pulls at JONNY's coat in disbelief.
TODD
Are you from Middle Earth or something?! "Mystical Warriors" is the best online roleplaying game ever!

SAM
People are calling it the new "Evercrack"...or I've so heard.

JONNY
Okaaaay. Is there nothing you’d miss in life if you passed on? Like a pet or something that you’ve spent a lot of time on? Anything?

TODD
Not anymore. I sold my online character on eBay as soon as I heard the ban was lifted on assisted suicide. I have nothing to lose.

SAM
How much did you sell it for?

TODD
Enough to pay for your services.

SAM
That's a good price for a seasoned "Mystical Warriors" character. You must have been a level 82 red orc warrior...or something. I wouldn't know. Never mind.

TODD
So when can I get the treatment?

JONNY
Well--

TODD
Shh! Did you hear something?

TODD moves to open the office doors, but SAM runs and moves in the way.

SAM
We're not finished with the session yet! You have to finish your session first. Right, Mr. Teetonka?

JONNY
Actually, only have one question for Todd here, and then we can figure out when to schedule his next and final appointment. Todd, can you tell me about your job? Come on, no one's back there. Talk to me. We're your friends.
TODD stops trying to open the office doors.

TODD
Basically, I keep all online transactions between my bank and major companies secure. I get to stay in my little cubicle all day. No one bothers me, not even my boss. He wouldn't know if I was really working or playing Mystical Warriors all day long. It was perfect. But not anymore.

TODD (CONT.)
They gave me two weeks to prepare all my current projects and allow them time to revoke my security clearances. They said they could give me a position as a teller. A teller! I can't do that. I have ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome. I can't stand to meet new people. Every time I do, I feel like I could...I could...

TODD is about to throw up. SAM quickly finds a trash bin and hands it to TODD. After a few dry heaves, TODD is able to calm down.

TODD
My life's over.

SAM
And you're absolutely sure your mother would kill you if you put her in a hospital?

TODD
She showed me the knife!

JONNY
So...you probably have lots of security codes and passwords to other people's accounts, right? At your job?

TODD
I won't much longer.

JONNY
And if you really needed to, I bet you could use those codes and passwords to funnel some companies' money into your own bank account, right?

TODD
I'm not supposed to be able to do that, but like I said I'm overqualified for my position.

Again, TODD checks the main entrance.
JONNY
Now, I'm not saying you should do anything illegal, but seeing as how you're wanting to
die soon, and the law can't bring a man back to life to put him in jail, people might see
this as your chance to obtain lots of money and get away with it.

TODD stops checking the main entrance.

TODD
I suppose.

JONNY
And if they did catch you, so what? You'll kill yourself before you serve out your
sentence. And think of the experiences you can have with all that money.

What kind of experiences?

SAM
You can take a vacation. Hawaii, maybe.

Buy a really nice car.

SAM
Meet some sane people for a change.

JONNY
Pay a doctor to keep your mother sedated till Jesus comes home.

TODD
Really? Like...will doctors do that sort of thing?

JONNY
I'm only a registered nurse, so I don't know absolutely everything about doctors...but yes
they do. They do it all the time. Where do you think my mother is right now?

TODD
Really?

JONNY
Been on cloud nine for a decade. God bless our medical professionals.

TODD
Wow. I guess I could steal from the bank if I felt the need.
JONNY
Remember, "Your Last Friend, Inc." does not suggest to do anything illegal, but we do suggest you get all from life you can before you leave it.

SAM
No reason to end your life before you really live it. Ha, ha, ha!

TODD
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah! I'm going to rob my bank! I'm going to put my mom in a maximum security nut house and keep her drugged forever! I'm going to live in a boathouse in Hawaii! I'm going to buy prostitutes and have lots of sex with them! I'm going to --

JONNY
Shh. You don't want everyone to know. Your mom might be listening.

TODD gives JONNY a nod and a wink.

TODD
Riiiiight.

TODD vigorously shakes SAM's hands and hugs JONNY. SAM stands to wave TODD away.

TODD
Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Mr. O'Connell. You have no idea how much better I feel right now.

SAM
Not nearly as much as I do.

TODD
Okay. Okay. I'm going to do this. Thank you.

TODD exits.

JONNY
(to TODD) Tell your friends about us!

A sign of relief from JONNY and SAM, then THEY move fast.

SAM
We need to pack up and get everything out of here before another Nike-shoe-wearing, punch-drinking mental case comes knocking on the door.
JONNY goes to the phone and starts dialing.

SAM

Who are you calling?

JONNY

Rodrigo. I'm telling him to close his business front.

SAM

We have more important things to think about! Such as escaping possible incarceration for fraud! We can call him later.

JONNY

If we close shop without telling Rodrigo, what do you think he'll do to us? We have a business contract with the man. You want to wake up at the bottom of the river wearing cement shoes?

SAM

Then let me reason with him. You'll just downplay the severity of the situation.

SAM pushes the speakerphone button before JONNY can stop him.

SFX: Phone ringing.

JONNY

What do you think you're--

RODRIGO (OS)

Hello, you've reached "Brighton's Canine Bath Accessories". You'll never see a shinier, fuller coat of fur--

JONNY

It's us, Rodrigo

RODRIGO (OS)

Jonny? Hola! ¿Cómo has estado, hermano?

SAM

We're fine.

RODRIGO (OS)

If it isn't the egghead himself! Yo, I've been meaning to thank you for that pirating software. I'm burning knockoff DVDs like crazy.
Glad you like it. We have a problem?

What problem?

It's not that big of a problem. It's a bump in the road, really. You know how these things happen. Sometimes you have to--

Shut down the business front! We're getting the hell out of here.

What's he talking about?

Sorry, Rodrigo. Sam's a little freaked out right now, but he's telling the truth. We ran into a little situation here, and we have to close up shop. Is that possible?

JONNY motions to SAM to be more careful and sensitive to the situation.

Oh, man. De ninguna manera. You promised me you'd bring mucho dinero. If I close the business, mis hermanos will get angry. Like, so mad they find you in your sleep and you never wake up. ¿Comprendes?

But we have to close--

How much will it take, Rodrigo?

I don't know. A hundred G's for our troubles. You get your fair share back after we make investments.

A hundred thousand dollars?! You're practically robbing us of our hard earned--

Thanks Rodrigo—we'll be in touch—You were always my favorite Latino-Bye.

JONNY hangs up the phone.
SAM
Why did you do that?! We have to leave!

JONNY
No we don't.

SAM
We don't?

JONNY
No. I think we're okay.

SAM
We owe a Hispanic gang lord a "hundred G". A situation we'd never be in if you wouldn't have convinced me of this stupid assisted suicide scam. We are not okay!

JONNY
Dude, chill!

JONNY stares down SAM.

JONNY
Listen to me. We're okay. All we have to do is wait until we get a hundred grand. That's not going to be hard to do with business as good as it is.

SAM
I'm not killing anyone.

JONNY
Neither am I. Do I look like a murderer to you?

SAM
So...what? You're going to convince every person who walks through that door to not commit suicide?

JONNY
Yeah. I can do it. Easy.

SAM checks the customer files.

SAM
So hypothetically, if... Luis Manuel, the paraplegic, rolls in through those doors and asks for us to help her die, you are completely confident you can make her see the beauty of life?

JONNY
I think so.
SAM
We're doomed. We're worse off than a red shirt on the Enterprise.

JONNY
It's worth a try, Sam. Look, we've made seventy grand in two weeks. And Rodrigo will pay us back some of the money...eventually.

SAM
In *Pesos*.

JONNY
Sam, you saw how good I was with Todd. Don't you believe in me?

SAM
You told him to commit a federal crime!

JONNY
I thought it was a good idea.

SAM
Jonny, if he gets caught, he'll tell the authorities who told him to do it. That's us!

JONNY
So? He doesn't have anything on us. If the cops ask about it, we'll deny everything like we always do.

SAM
That's not the point.

JONNY
Look, I won't tell anyone else to rob a bank, but I can do this. I'll read their files before we meet each client, and I promise you, on my mom’s grave, we won't have one single death here.

SAM
You hated your mother.

JONNY
On my grandma's grave.

SAM
You hated her more.
Come on, man. I need your help on this.

JONNY walks over to the computer and checks the company's bank account.

JONNY

Look, we got four more customers in the last ten minutes. We made four grand without even doing anything. Sam, dude, I can pull this off!

Beat.

SAM

If even one customer slips though your fingers, we're out of here and going underground, like a sand worm on Saturn. Agreed?

JONNY

That's not going to happen. And I'm not ever going back to hiding from the cops in your cousin's basement and eating refried beans out of a can. You can count on that.

SAM

It's the only way I'm agreeing to this. What's your answer, Jonny?

JONNY

Fine. It's cool, because I know I can do this. We found a gold mine, and I'm not backing away.

SAM

You will if I say we have to.

JONNY

Oh-ho-ho! Big threat from the little man.

SAM

I'm serious!

JONNY

I know you are, but you'll see, Sam. I'm right on this one. (Beat) I'm going to get something to eat. You want a taco or some fries or something?

SAM

I'm not...Get me a corndog...and a slushie.

JONNY

You got it. Don't worry, Sam. We're still good. Be back later.
JONNY opens the door and steps out, but then leans back in.

JONNY

Remember, I always have my eyes on the prize.

JONNY exits.

SAM

That's what I'm afraid of.

END ACT I, SCENE II

ACT I, SCENE III

It’s 12pm, three days later. The office is just as it was before.

SFX: light knocking on the front door.

BEULAH (OS)

Hello?

BEULAH enters. BEULAH YORN is the nice grandma every little kid wishes to have. SHE’s polite, cares about other people’s feelings, and always goes out of HER way to avoid upsetting others. SHE does have a habit of rambling on at an incredible speed, but it's a natural reaction to loneliness.

BEULAH

Hello? Anyone here?

Beat.

BEULAH sits down on the customer’s chair in front of the computer desk and calmly waits.

SAM enters from one of the offices with a coffee mug in hand. Without noticing BEULAH, SAM walks over to the coffee machine and fills the mug. HE tastes it, and then walks back to the office HE came from.
BEULAH
Coffee’s a nice way to follow a good lunch, don’t you think?

SAM
Hah. Who can stop drinking coffee is the real question. If I had a penny for every cup I've--

SAM stops and quickly looks at BEULAH in surprise.

SAM
Who are you?

BEULAH stands to shake SAM’s hand.

BEULAH
Oh, right. Introductions first. I’m Mrs. Yorn. Nice to meet you.

SAM
Nice to meet you, too. What are you doing here? Not that you don't belong here, I mean you have a right to be here, it's not like you don't but...what are you doing here?

BEULAH notices SAM's shabby attire.

BEULAH
I’m here for my appointment, my last chance session. I'm right on time, but if it’s a bad time, I can come back later. It’s no problem.

SAM
Oh, you’re here for your last chance session. Okay. I’m Mr. Henry O'Connell. It's nice to meet you.

O'Connell? You don’t look Irish.

SAM
Black Irish. My mother's side?

BEULAH
Ah. Hmm. I don't think it--

SAM
I'll go wake up my associate. He's the one in charge of scheduling meetings. I'm sure he'll be very sorry he didn't meet you at the door.
BEULAH
No one needs to apologize to me. I'm fine.

SAM
Please, have a cup of coffee. Relax. Be comfortable. Make yourself at home.

SAM exits.

BEULAH
Don’t mind if I do.

BEULAH pours a cup of coffee and sits down. Offstage, SAM and JONNY can be heard arguing with each other.

JONNY enters in full suit, followed by SAM. It’s obvious JONNY was still sleeping and was perhaps awakened too early.

JONNY
I don't know what the hell...hello, ma'am. How are you doing today?

BEULAH
I'm fine. Thank you for asking. My, aren't you a well-dressed, handsome man?

JONNY
Thank you. (whispered to SAM) Seriously, buy a suit. (to BEULAH) My name's Bill Teetonka, and we welcome you to "Your Last Friend, Inc". You say you were scheduled for your last chance session today?

BEULAH
Yes, but like I told Mr. O'Connell, I can come tomorrow.

JONNY
No, that's okay. I just didn't remember I had someone scheduled...this early.

JONNY goes to the computer desk and checks his schedule.

BEULAH
Early? Good gracious, the sun's already starting its way back down the sky.

SAM
He means earlier than our normal sessions...most sessions. Earlier than most of our sessions.
BEULAH
I don't like to contradict anyone, but I got a call yesterday saying to be here today, and here I am.

JONNY
Ooooh. Okay, yes. You are scheduled for today.

BEULAH
I knew I was.

JONNY
I apologize for not being prepared. Ever since the ban was lifted, the phone's been ringing off the hook all night long. You understand, don't you?

BEULAH
You sleep in the same building you work?

JONNY
Yes. Yes, I do.

JONNY yawns too strongly to focus on what BEULAH has to say.

BEULAH
Good for you. There's absolutely nothing wrong with a man taking pride in his place of business.

JONNY
I'm sorry. What?

SAM
Mrs. Yorn, could I have a word with Mr. Teetonka privately?

BEULAH
It doesn't bother me none.

SAM
Thank you.

JONNY pulls SAM to the side.

SAM
What the frak? You were going to sleep right through an appointment? What if she were an inspector or a crazy picketer come to burn the building down?
Dude, I'm pushing through a serious hangover right now, and we have an appointment in like ten minutes. I don't know if I can do this twice today.

Wha...you...What's wrong with you?!

Shh!

You know what? I'm taking care of Mrs. Yorn. You can, I don't know, sit back and rest for our second appointment.

You sure you can handle her?

How hard can it be? You do it.

JONNY smiles, nods approvingly, and gives SAM a friendly, hard slap on the back.

Oww.

She's all yours.

SAM and JONNY go back to BEULAH.

Mrs. Yorn, could we--

If you don't mind taking pictures of me, I'd greatly appreciate it. I'm trying to get as many good pictures of me before I go, and I can't do it all by myself.

BELUAH hands over a camera to SAM.

Uhm...sure. It's not a problem.
BELUAH

Thank you.

BEULAH constantly poses in modest, fashionable poses and doesn't change them until SAM has taken a picture. JONNY can't help but smile.

SAM

Mrs. Yorn, could we move your appointment to a few weeks from now? We are completely booked for the rest of the week, and I promise if you wait...we'll give you a fifty percent discount for being patient. How does that sound?

BEULAH

Well, I love saving money, but I was hoping to be dead before next week.

Why?

BEULAH

It has to do with why I'm doing this in the first place.

JONNY goes to pour a cup of coffee and watches the show.

BEULAH

You see, I'm old. I've lived my life, and it's been a beautiful life. My dear Vernon, we were made to be with each other. He was my high school sweetheart, and we married very young. That's the way we used to do it back in the day, and we stayed married. Vernon went off to be a soldier, and I lived here, working the post office and raising our three boys. Our boys are the most handsome men you ever set your eyes on, and they married young, too. They left me and Vernon to live on our own when they were old enough, and that's the way it was until Vernon passed away about ten years ago. Heart problems. Runs in his family. But I've got six grandchildren now. Five boys and Susie. She's the baby girl of the family. Won a beauty pageant this last spring, and I--

SAM

I'm sorry, but if you have a large family who loves you--

BEULAH

Does this pose look respectable?

SAM

Yes, very much. Why do you need our services?
BEULAH
I'm sorry. I must not be making much sense, talking about how good my life is and coming to you two to end it. I have a big family, but they never come to see me. My boys are soldiers too, and they live all over the world. Since Vernon left me, I don't have anyone to keep company with anymore.

SAM
Don't you have other old people...friends to hang out with?

BEULAH
I have friends. I go play bridge with Janet and Ellen every Saturday night. Louise's husband is a retired fireman. He quit, because he hurt his spine in a burning feed mill. Ellen's a widow, but her son Aaron still lives with her. He's living off his welfare and her social security. I swear, why she doesn't kick that boy out is beyond me.

JONNY
Then you do have people to keep you company.

BEULAH
I do with friends, but my boys are almost never home. Pete was the only one to visit me on Christmas, and his wife is a prissy, stuck-up know-it-all.

SAM
So...have you talked to your family about this? Do they know what you're planning to do?

BEULAH
No, I wouldn't burden them with my problems. That's why I'm here.

SAM
What?

BEULAH
I told them how my health isn't what it used to be, and Jeffrey, the oldest, said he's coming soon to put me in a nursing home near where his family lives.

JONNY
That's nice of him.

BEULAH
I raised my boys right, thank you. But I don't want to be a burden on him. I look fine right now, but soon my age will catch up to me. I have Osteoporosis, Lupus, Diabetes, and some others I don't want to mention. I know what'll happen to me soon, whether I want it to or not. I've seen it happen to my friends. I'll need a personal nurse to help me take my pills, feed me, and even wash me. But I know Jeffrey, and Jeffrey would never allow me to pay someone else to take care of me while I was living with him. He'd feel like he was disappointing me or something.
You seem to be very healthy to me.

And very pretty too.

You're so kind.

Are you that certain your health is going to fail you soon?

I'm not old as dirt yet, but that day's coming closer and closer. I'll have to go live with my boy and let him treat me like a little baby. Unless you can help me with my problem.

You want us to end your life, because you don't want to be a burden on your family?

Yes.

Well...that won't happen anytime soon. Why do you need to...end your life this week?

I'm getting stuffed next week.

Come again?

I'm getting stuffed.

With what?

With stuffing, I suppose.

Thanksgiving's in half a year.

No, not with food. I'm getting stuffed, so my family can keep me forever.
Beat. SAM stops taking pictures.

SAM

BEULAH
I realize that my time on earth is small, but I don't want to leave my grandchildren. I also don't want them to remember me as a sickly, old person who wore diapers. So, I talked to a friend of mine. (to JONNY) A mortician.

Oh.

BEULAH
We go back a long way. His son Jeremy is a taxidermist. Beautiful work. Seven of my cats owe their good looks to his skills. Anywho, I asked he could do the same for me, and he said yes, but Jeremy is being shipped off to the Middle East next week. That means if I'm going to get stuffed, I have to die this week. That's why I'm here. That's also why you're taking the pictures. I want to look my best, and Jeremy needs as many good photos he can get.

SAM tries to process this information, but looks like HE's more likely preparing to have a stroke.

SAM
But...you can't...your family...I...

JONNY walks up to SAM and takes the camera.

JONNY
Let me take this one for you, buddy.

SAM
No, no. I...I have this under control.

JONNY
No, you don't. I'm taking charge. Now, sit.

SAM
But--

JONNY
Sit.
JONNY takes pictures of BEULAH as SAM sits down and ponders over the weirdness of the situation. As JONNY continues taking the pictures, HE tempts BEULAH to pose in more provocative manners, though not totally improper ones.

JONNY
Okay, Mrs. Yorn, I can understand that. You want your family to know that you're never going to leave them.

BEULAH
That's exactly right.

JONNY
However, I'd hate for you to make any rash decisions. That's what the last chance session is all about. Is there anything you wish you could do before you pass on?

BEULAH
Nope. Had a wonderful life, and I'm ready to end it.

JONNY
Give the camera a little more love. Come on, I know you can.

BELUAH pouts HER lips.

JONNY
There you go. What about a vacation? I hear Florida's very popular this time of year.

BEULAH
Been everywhere I want to be. There's nothing other towns have that this one doesn't.

JONNY
What about your boys? And your friends? They'll miss you not being here in the living flesh, won't they? (half-beat) Can you blink at me like you want me to notice you from across a room? You're doing great, Beulah.

BEULAH
Thank you. They're going to miss me no matter when I die.

JONNY
Isn't there anything you want? Something you just had to have, but you couldn't get your hands on? Something you could almost taste, touch, feel, but people kept getting in the way? Anything? Come on, there has to be something.
Well...

Go ahead and say it.

No, I can't say that. It doesn't matter, anyway. It's too late.

What's too late?

Mrs. Yorn, Beulah, you can tell us. We're your friends.

It's silly, but Vernon and I married so young. We were made to be with each other, straight from birth, but...he was the only boyfriend I ever had. He's all I needed, but I always wondered what another man would have been like. Oh, I shouldn't have said that. It's not like I could do it anymore.

Who says?

Mother Nature.

Mother Nature says a lot of things: grow up, have kids, grow old, and on and on. Don't you want one last fling before you go off into the darkness of the night?

I do, but Mother Nature took that special pleasure away from this old woman a long time ago.

Are you sure?

JONNY moves the camera much closer to BEULAH, who blushes.

Viagra!

What?
SAM
Viagra. You can take medically prescribed Viagra.

BEULAH
Isn't that for randy, old men with young trophy wives?

SAM
And women. It works on both sexes. It's been medically proven.

BEULAH
I'm not comfortable taking a medicine meant for men.

JONNY
Uhhh...if they have Viagra for men, they must have something for the women. Right, Mr. O'Connell?

SAM
They have to!

Beat.

BEULAH
It'd be nice. Old Tucker, Vernon's war buddy, has been giving me the eye for the past five years, asking me to breakfast at Denny's and giving me flowers. I think I'd like to have a little fun before I go. That's not selfish, is it?

JONNY
No. Not at all.

SAM
It would be selfish not to do it.

BEULAH
Okay. I'll do it.

JONNY
Good for you. Enjoy all you can, and we'll be waiting here when you're finally ready to pass on.

JONNY hands BEULAH back HER camera.

BEULAH
Thank you two very much. You're good boys. Now, where do you think I can get this women's Viagra?
SAM
A gynecologist?

JONNY
Any doctor can get it for you, I bet. We're happy we could help you.

BEULAH
So am I. You two be good now. Especially you, Bill.

JONNY
We sure will, Mrs. Yorn. And hey, give me a call when Old Tucker gets tuckered out.

JONNY winks. BEULAH blushes again.

JONNY
Yeah, you know what I'm talking about.

BEULAH exits.

JONNY and SAM exhale from relief.
SAM refills HIS cup of coffee.

JONNY
Man, that was awkward.

SAM
Awkward? Awkward? When Luke Skywalker and Leia learned that they were brother and sister who French kissed, that was awkward. This is a whole new world of very, very wrong.

JONNY
I don't know. She looks like she still has some spunk. You know what I mean?

SAM
I think I'm going to be sick.

JONNY
I'm pulling your leg, man. I mean, I'm all for being an active Senior citizen, but there's an age limit on this ride. I don't want to even picture it in my head. By the way, good save on the Viagra thing.

SAM
I-I don't know what came over me. "Viagra", it just popped up in my head.

JONNY
Good one.
SAM

What?

JONNY

Never mind. I'm going back to sleep. Night.

Jonny?

SAM

What, Sam?

JONNY

Our next appointment?

JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch.

Damn.

JONNY

When is she scheduled for?

SAM

JONNY

Should be here already. Guess I'll look at her file

JONNY sits down in front of the computer and looks at the file.

You were right.

SAM

About what?

JONNY

We have almost ninety customers and hardly any walk-ins. You're doing it. You're actually making this work. We're almost home free.

Told you.

SAM is looking incredibly happy with HIMSELF.
Well, God be praised. A miracle!

What?

You're smiling.

I smile...on occasion.

No, you don't. Tell me what's up?

It's...we could really pull this off. Not here, but once we relocate to a different state. Like, I wouldn't mind doing this for a living.

Speak for yourself. I'm the one keeping us from becoming murderers.

Hey! I thought of the Viagra solution while you were shooting photos for the "Mentally Deranged Grandmother's Calendar".

True. You did do that.

I feel positive. Like we're doing something good. I like this. It's a nice change.

SAM notices REBECCA walking to the door.

She's arrived.

Good. I hope she's as sexy as her picture. I can't tell you how many times I've been burned by Photoshop. A hundred-thirty pounds and a natural blond my ass, SexySHIM69.
SAM
What are you doing? Please don't hit on the suicidal customers.

JONNY
Worked on Mrs. Yorn, didn't' it?

SAM
That was pure coincidence--

REBECCA enters wearing elaborate gothic wear and holding a hand-held video camera. She throws down a full backpack on the ground next to the desk. SHE is the ignored child, the generation "X" refugee, and the self-made artiste of coffee shops and online poetry blogs.

SHE walks as if floating in the wind, mostly to attract even more attention with improvisational dance moves. JONNY can't help but notice HER every move and bodily curvature.

SHE is recording everything.

REBECCA
And now I enter society's convenient slaughter house, adorned with all the necessities to charm the sheep to the slaughter.

JONNY
Helloooo, my name is Bill Teetonka, this is my associate Henry O'Connell, and I assume you're Rebecca Tener, right?

REBECCA
I...am...darkness wrapped around melting snow, dripping with tears and falling into bliss.

SAM
Do you also go by the name Rebecca?

REBECCA
I do.

JONNY
Good. Now, we have a policy against cameras in our place of business, so I'm afraid you'll have to turn that off and erase everything you recorded.
Wrong.

I'm wrong? How's that?

On your website, it explicitly says I can take photographs or video recordings of my travels to the beyond.

That's for when you're actually passing on.

The devil is in the details, and I can film or record anything I want.

We'll have to inform our Web designers of that little typo soon, won't we Mr. O'Connell? Please sit down Rebecca, and we'll start your last chance session now.

I can't sit down. I won't. I must move freely, as a torn spider web caught in a wind storm.

_REBECCA dances even more extravagantly._

(whispers to JONNY) Oh, frell. We have another crazy one.

(to SAM) Shh! I got this. (to REBECCA) Rebecca, you know what the last chance session is all about, right?

It's the last chance to allow myself to be caught in the illusion of reality and deny myself the ultimate release.

That's one way of saying it. We have to make sure you won't regret going through with our services.

If I'm dead, I'll be unable to regret anything. I'll be unable to _do_ anything. I will simply be unmade.
SAM
That doesn't scare you? Not even the slightest bit?

REBECCA
Hah! What have I to be afraid of? Thousands of people die every day. One by one, their stars burn out of the sky. Why should one be afraid of the inevitable?

JONNY
It's not inevitable for everyone. It says in your profile you're not sick or in any kind of pain. Actually, you look good...really, really healthy...and verrrrry hot--

*SAM shoves JONNY.*

JONNY
(to *SAM*, whispered) What?

REBECCA
Only my body is young. My soul is forever, and my mind is beyond time. The flesh is fleeting...and I'm nineteen years old, which makes me a legal adult and capable of making this decision for myself.

Wow. Nineteen, huh?

SAM
What's your reason for dying, Rebecca?

REBECCA
Why? Why not? Must I live in this boring, useless world any longer than I choose? All us humans existing like ants trying to outrun the boy with the magnifying glass, only to die unappreciated and alone. Never having a true connection with one another, not even our parents. Parents who are self-centered, egotistical, and don't give a damn about their daughter as long as she doesn't embarrass them too much to their rich friends. I mean, what kind of a person do you have to be to tell your daughter you won't go to her slam poetry performance because you don't want to miss your weekly wine-tasting party? Losers.

JONNY
You're doing this to get back at your parents?

REBECCA
Not just them.

SAM
But they are some of the reason. This isn't just a way to get their attention, is it?
REBECCA
Not only that...but yes. Is that so bad? (to JONNY) Am I a bad girl?

JONNY
Uhhhhhh--

SAM
I'm sorry, but we're not helping anyone commit suicide, because they want to get back at mommy and daddy.

*SAM walks over to the computer desk and starts typing on REBECCA's file.*

REBECCA
What? You...you have to. I paid you.

SAM
We'll refund your money immediately.

REBECCA
You can't do this!

JONNY
I'm sorry, but policy is policy. I guess.

REBECCA
I want to speak with your supervisor.

SAM
I'm the only supervisor here "Ms. Smells-like-teen-spirit", and I say "Denied".

REBECCA
That's not fair!

SAM
I know it isn't. Life isn't fair. Please come back when you have a life-threatening illness. Thank you, and have a nice day.

REBECCA
I'll kill myself then! I don't need you! I've tried it before: pills, drowning, wrist-cutting. See! Here, look at my scars.

*REBECCA holds up HER wrists.*
JONNY
(to SAM) I don't know why, but I think I'm getting turned on right now.

REBECCA
But every time I try, the house servants go and do something stupid like mouth-to-mouth or call 911. I wanted the professional touch, but I'll go jump off a bridge if you won't help me.

SAM
Go ahead then, but "Your Last Friend, Inc." will not be a part of it.

JONNY
(whispered to SAM) What are you doing? Remember the hundred grand?

SAM
We can turn down at least one customer, and I'm not spending all day listening to a little girl whine about how daddy didn't give her a Corvette for her eighteenth birthday. I can tell she's not going to kill herself.

JONNY
Rebecca, he didn't mean that. Please, calm down. You don't really want to kill yourself, do you?

REBECCA
Yes I do! I'll...I'll do it right here! Right now!

REBECCA goes to HER backpack and opens it. SHE then takes out wilted rose petals, a black cloth with arcane symbols on it, and a small stereo.

SAM
Oh, no you're not!

REBECCA
Watch me!

REBECCA folds out the cloth and sits on it, and then plays gothic rock music on the radio, such as by The Rasmus.

JONNY
Woah! Woah, woah, woah!

SAM
Are you completely insane?!
JONNY
Sam! I mean, Henry. Calm down. *(whispered)* Shut the hell up and let me do my thing.

SAM
*(whispered)* But she--

JONNY
*(whispered)* Shut up! Shut it.

REBECCA scatters the rose petals around HER.

JONNY
Rebecca, I apologize for my associate. He's going through a nasty divorce right now, and he doesn't take well to strong willed women.

REBECCA
*(to SAM)* I should tell my daddy to sue you right now, you misogynistic pig!

SAM
On what charge?!

REBECCA
On the charge that you're stupid!

SAM
Oh yeah, that's mature.

REBECCA
*then takes out a long knife out of HER backpack and waves it around as if in a ceremony. JONNY and SAM jump away.*

JONNY
Oh, shit!

SAM
Watch out, she has a curtana!

JONNY
I can see...a what?!

SAM
A curtana! You know, a ceremonial short sword used during the Roman--
REBECCA
Oh, dark spirits of the night, my spirit comes to join you in bliss!

REBECCA moves to cut HERSELF.

JONNY
Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!

Beat.

Why?

JONNY
Can you give me a chance to talk you out of this? One chance. That's all I'm asking for.

REBECCA
Why should I? You and your friend are practically pushing me into it.

SAM is about to say something, but JONNY motions HIM to be quiet. JONNY pushes through HIS fear and flirts with REBECCA, and it actually works.

JONNY
Please? Please listen to me. I'd really appreciate it. I'll listen to every little word you have to say after I'm though. I'll even help film it. Promise.

Fine. Whatever.

JONNY
I understand where you're coming from. You want to get back at your parents. Kill yourself, and they'll be crying their eyes out for months, right?

REBECCA
More like a year.

JONNY
They'll look so sad at the funeral. Your father will wear his best black suit.

REBECCA
Mom will probably buy a new dress as gaudy as her personality is banal.
JONNY
The casket will look like it was carved out of stone.

REBECCA
Marble. It'll be marble with a glass window on top, so everyone has to look at how lifeless I've become, like a gothic Snow White endlessly waiting for true love.

JONNY
The family preacher will give the best sermon he's ever given in his whole life.

REBECCA
He'll see my perfectly adorned corpse and question his belief in his cruel maker.

JONNY
And everyone will cry and feel sorry they didn't do anything to help you.

REBECCA
Yes. That's what I want. You understand me.

JONNY
I certainly do. And after the funeral, when everyone goes home to rest, then what?

REBECCA
Huh?

JONNY
Then what?

REBECCA
Then...they'll stay sad forever?

JONNY
I doubt it. After the funeral, your parents will start forgetting you. People'll tell them to do it, too. Part of the "moving on" process, you know? Yeah, they'll cry at first, but they'll eventually stop. They'll throw parties again, inviting all their friends over for a good time, and they'll forget all about you, until someone brings you up. Your parents will look a little sad, tell their story about their wild and crazy daughter, and then off to get a new glass of champagne.

REBECCA
Oh, my God. You're right. You're so right. I'll be their little conversation piece.

JONNY
Is that the revenge you want?
REBECCA

Hell, no.

JONNY

Didn't think so.

*REBECCA stops moving the blade around, totally focused on JONNY.*

REBECCA

Then what? What can I do?

JONNY

I'll tell you what you can do. You can stop caring what they think.

REBECCA

I don't care what they think about me.

JONNY

Then why are you doing this?

REBECCA

I...I need to shake off this mortal coil and become the magnificent spirit I know am fated to become.

SAM

*(whispered)* Ridiculous.

JONNY

Before you do that, why don't you have some fun?

REBECCA

Fun?

JONNY

Yeah. You know, some real fun.

REBECCA

Like what?

JONNY

If your parents really don't care about you, then you can do whatever you want. You can make your own TV show on local cable and share your poems with everyone. You can rebel against the "Man" and spray-paint skull heads on police cars. You can join NASCAR and smoke crack and ram your car into a wall, for all you care. Wait, no...for all your parents care. The best way of living is not caring about other people's opinions about you. Do whatever the hell you want. Am I right?
REBECCA

Yes. Yes! Why should I end my life? I didn't do anything wrong.

JONNY

Not a thing.

REBECCA

They're the ones who did something wrong!

JONNY

You know it.

REBECCA

They should suffer for making me...suffer. Yeah!

JONNY

Payback's a bitch, and so are you!

REBECCA

You're damn right!

REBECCA kisses JONNY, mashing HER face against HIS.

REBECCA

Thank you for helping me see the light that is my core. How can I ever repay you?

JONNY

Well, I can think of a few things.

SAM grabs all of REBECCA's stuff and shoves it into HER backpack, all except the knife.
When it's all in, HE rushes over to REBECCA and pushes HER through the door, along with HER bag.

SAM

Glad we came to an understanding--We'll refund your money, and you don't report us to anyone.--Agreed?--It was nice to meet you, and as always, you have a friend in "Your Last Friend, Inc."--Goodbye, now.

REBECCA

Be seeing you, Bill.
JONNY

You know it.

REBECCA exits.

SAM

You're unbelievable.

JONNY

What?

SAM

She was going to kill us!

JONNY

No, she wasn't. She was going to kill herself, and I don't think she was that serious about it.

SAM

Are you kidding me?!

SAM remembers to lock the door.

JONNY

We're fine, Sam.

SAM

I should call the cops on her.

JONNY

Now you're just being stupid. Whatever. That's two down in one day.

SAM

Yes. Another day of safety. (Beat.) You're very good at this. Actually, you're amazing.

JONNY

That's what she said.

SAM

Ha-ha. I mean, you practically saved our lives. How do you do it? How do you convince these kinds of people, losers, the elderly, the crazy, to want to live again? How's that possible?
It's not hard. Just give them the confidence to go after what they think they can't have.

I...Hmm.

SAM goes over to the computer.

What are you doing?

Looking over our new customers. Preparing for the future. Trying to slow my heart beat. You know, work stuff.

You do that. I'm taking a nap.

You just had your life threatened. You're still tired after that?

The day you drink five shots of tequila with beer chasers is the day you can tell me when I can and can't sleep.

I'm sorry I asked. I'm assuming you want me to wake you at three?

Thanks.

JONNY exits into the office. SAM takes a moment to breathe, which turns into a smirk.

I don't think I'll need to drink coffee ever again.

SAM looks through the customer files, making mental notes of who is who and on what day they're coming. Suddenly, HE comes across a very familiar name. JONNY enters and goes for the restroom.

Stupid extra-spicy burritos giving me the runs.
That's odd.

I know. I ate them hours ago. You'd think my stomach would have trouble as soon--

Not that.

Then what?

No, this has to be incorrect.

What?

It's a coincidence. That's what it is.

What's a coincidence? Sam, what's a coincidence? Do we have a problem?

*Sam looks as if he's seen a video recording of the death of a loved one.*

Dude!

It's Jessica.

Jessica who?

Jessica.

You mean Jessica Jessica? Your sister Jessica?

*Sam nods his head.*
JONNY
She send you an email or something? She want to hang out? Your crazy mom found out where you live, and she's giving you a head start?

SAM shakes HIS head.

JONNY
Then what? What's the big deal with Jessica?

SAM
She's a customer.

JONNY
Of ours?

SAM
Yes.

JONNY
Why? What's her problem?

SAM
She has cancer. My big sister's dying of cancer, and she wants us to kill her.

END ACT I, SCENE III
END ACT I
ACT II, SCENE I

The next day. SAM, this time in a suit, is sitting at the desk and staring off in the distance, trying to solve an unsolvable personal dilemma. JONNY is drinking a cup of coffee, being with HIS friend for moral support.

JONNY
So...she's going to be here any minute. Okay. (Beat) How are we going to do this, Sam?

SAM
I don't know.

JONNY
I mean... I could be my usual spin doctor self, but you don't want me to do that.

SAM
Not really.

JONNY
It's your job then. You change her mind.

SAM
If I can.

JONNY
You have to.

SAM
She has terminal cancer, Jonny! How do I convince her everything's alright in the face of something like that?

JONNY
You remind her of her family. You remind her of her loved ones. You ask her what she's always wanted to do, but never could. You ask her if she has regrets. Come on, Sam, you know how this is done.

SAM
If I couldn't get her to stop the drugs, then how am I going to get her to stop this? How am I going to solve this problem?
JONNY
It's not your fault. No one knew she was dying, until you found out from her profile, and that was an accident. Getting the jitters is natural, but you have to push through it. If you don't, and she wants the suicide, then we lose our business.

And I lose my sister.

JONNY notices JESSICA walking to the door.

Here she is. You ready?

SAM gives JONNY a stern look.

JONNY
Let's do this.

JESSICA EVERETT enters, wearing very baggy clothing. JESSICA is a party woman to HER core. That was until SHE got cancer and HER body started to shrivel away. SHE still goes to parties, but the sickness mixed with other people's pity usually pushes HER off.

SAM
Jessica? Is that really you?

JESSICA
Hey, Sam. Don't you look sharp in that nice suit of yours?

Thank you.

SAM

JESSICA
Yes, I remember. Thanks. I mean....you look good too. You look thin...I mean lean or...uhm...fit?

JESSICA
Yeah. Who knew chemo was the only thing that could make me this thin? I haven't been this thin since...never.
JONNY

You could still lose a few pounds.

JESSICA

Why, is that Jonny? After all these years! Come over here and give me a bear hug.

*JESSICA and reluctant JONNY hug.*

JONNY

Hey, look at that. My arms can finally touch.

JESSICA

Not too tight. I don't want you straining yourself.

*Beat. A silence filled with unease and awkward resentment from SAM.*

JESSICA

Sam, come over here.

*JESSICA and SAM hug uncomfortably at first, but SAM eventually gives into it.*

SAM

Yes, it has.

JESSICA

That's kind of my fault. Ever since I found out about the "Big C", I've stayed away from people I know.

SAM

Jessica, why didn't you tell anyone? Why didn't you tell me? If I would have known, I'd have helped you. Are you taking care of yourself? Do you even know what medications you're--

JESSICA

Now see, that's exactly the reason why I didn't tell you. I don't need anyone's pity. I never have. Keep it to yourself!

SAM

I wasn't trying to make you angry.
JESSICA
Well, you did and you are!

SAM
I'm sorry.

JESSICA
For what? You didn't pour all that alcohol down my throat or give me Daddy's bad genes, did you? Did you?!

JONNY
Of course he didn't. Say, Jessica, how are you handling yourself? You good? You on Medicare or something?

JESSICA
Yeah. I'm poor as hell, so the government still takes care of me.

JONNY
Good. Glad to hear it.

JESSICA
Hey, Sam?

SAM
What?

JESSICA
I...uh, I need...some money...again.

SAM
You do? I'm guessing the last amount I lent you didn't help much.

JESSICA
Kind of had things to spend it on. Like food and whatnot. You know how it is.

SAM
Food. Right. How much do you need this time?

JESSICA
Really? No interrogation or shouting or--

SAM
How much do you need?
JESSICA
About a thousand. Just enough to cover the services here.

SAM
I guess you'd want that in store credit, wouldn't you?

JESSICA
Yeah. I do.

Beat.

SAM
Jessica?

JESSICA
What?

SAM
Why are you here? You don't have to throw away--

JESSICA
If you don't mind, I want to get this little thing over with. I have an appointment at the hospital later.

SAM
Sure. Whatever you say.

Beat.

JESSICA
I'm waiting.

SAM
Sorry. The point of the last chance session is to determine if you are indeed ready to...pass on. We...It's company policy to help our customers make the right decision, and I don't want you going through with this before you've settled your life out. Have you settled your life out?

JESSICA
What do you mean by that?

SAM
What about Mom and Dad? Or me? Were you going to tell any of us?

JESSICA
No. Didn't feel like it.
SAM

What do you mean you didn't--

JONNY

I think Sam's trying to ask you if you'd feel bad if anything was left unsaid between you and your other relatives.

JESSICA

You know me, Jonny. I don't hold back. Ever. It's why daddy kicked me out of the trailer at seventeen. I say and do what's on my mind all the time. There's no secrets about me.

SAM

Then what do you call this? I had a right to know. I could have found a way to help you. Another doctor, better health insurance--

JESSICA

I got pancreatic cancer! The kind you can't remove. You get it, you die. That's it. The End. I would have OD'd all on my own, just to get it over with, but...I don't know. I couldn't do it. It's not in me to give up, you know? I need someone who'll do it for me. Someone I can trust.

Beat.

JONNY

Pancreatic Cancer. Is that what the doctors diagnosed you with?

JESSICA

Yeah, that's what they said, along with a lot of stories about how I'm gonna die.

SAM

How much longer till you...you know?

JESSICA

Not much longer. I stopped chemo a week ago.

SAM

Why would you ever do that? You're just going to lay down and die?

JESSICA

I don't want to live my last days sick in a bed and crying from pain. If I'm gonna die, then I'm gonna die my own way.
SAM
But...you don't know you have to die. We can take you to another doctor. Get some other treatments for you. You don't know everything about your condition. You--

JESSICA
Sam! I can either die as a pile of skin and bones, or I can die in peace. If you were in my shoes, which one would you chose? Huh? You like rotting away in a hospital bed? Because I sure as hell don't! And screw you for telling me what to do!

SAM stands and moves away, ashamed, angry, and scared.

JESSICA
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Sam. I didn't mean to be so mean about it. I...I didn't want you to know at all, but God works in mysterious ways. You know?

JESSICA stands and walks over to SAM.

JESSICA
Sam, I'm dying, and nothing's gonna change that. Come here. (Beat). I said come here.

JESSICA hugs SAM until HE hugs back.

I'm sorry.

JESSICA
There you go apologizing again.

I'm so, so sorry.

JESSICA
You mean sorry-looking.

JESSICA and SAM laugh.

JESSICA
I'm gonna leave now. You phone me and tell me when I can get the treatment done.

JONNY
You're not going to change your mind? You sure you're ready to go through with this?

JESSICA
Jonny, I'm not smart, but I know when to give up.
JONNY
Your last chance session isn't over yet. Maybe you should--

SAM
Jonny, let her leave.

JESSICA
I'll be fine. You'll both see. A couple nights' drinking, and I'll be hurting so bad, I'll be begging for someone to put me out of my misery.

JONNY
Lucky you found us. Right?

JESSICA hugs JONNY.

JESSICA
That's the spirit. Keep happy, no matter what. Sam?

SAM
Yes?

Beat.

JESSICA
Please, don't hate me. This is the only thing I can do.

JESSICA discretely wipes away some tears.

JESSICA
Talk to you boys later.

JONNY
See you, Jessica.

JESSICA
Later.

JESSICA exits.

SAM
Goodbye.
JONNY goes over to the phone and starts dialing.

Who are you calling?

U-Haul. We got to pack and get the hell out of here.

Why?

Why? Because your sister walked out of our office today thinking we'd give her assisted suicide. Your sister, someone who can ID us by our real names, is expecting us to hold up our part of the bargain. We have to go.

We're not leaving.

You going to talk to her later and convince her to live? (to phone) Never mind. Wrong number.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

Are you?

Beat.

Sam, can you promise me you can make Jessica change her mind?

SAM shakes HIS head.

Then we're leaving. Now.

JONNY dials again.

I knew we should have never done business near family. (to phone) Hello? Yeah, I can hold.
SAM

We're not leaving anywhere.

JONNY

What are you talking about? We have to leave.

SAM

We're...not...leaving.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY

You're not thinking what I think you're thinking, are you?

SAM

I have to help Jessica.

JONNY

I'm not a murderer. You're not a murderer. We're not doing anything to Jessica, except leaving her out in the cold like all the rest.

SAM

I'm not doing that to her.

JONNY

Good God, Sam! Are you telling me you're going to kill her?

SAM

I...I don't know what I'm going to do. I...I...My sister told me she was dying and asked me to kill her. I'm a little confused right now!

JONNY

Sam, think about this. Really think. This is a scam. It's not real. "Your Last Friend, Inc" is a thing we made up to steal some people's money.

SAM

Steal from people suffering from pain and disease.

JONNY

It isn't our fault if the state of Arizona changes the laws on us at the last minute.

SAM

But this is our fault!

JONNY

Hey, I'll take the blame for not looking up Arizona's laws better. I accept that, okay? My bad. So now that it isn't your fault, will you please move your ass?
SAM

No.

JONNY

No?

SAM

I can't do this alone. You have to help me.

JONNY

Sam, listen to me, and listen real good. I've done some things I'm not proud of, but I am not going to help you kill your sister. Got it?

Beat.

Good.

JONNY

I'll turn you in.

SAM

Say that again?

JONNY

If you don't help me, then I'll inform the Feds about our operations.

JONNY gets very close to SAM.

JONNY

We'll go to jail. Federal prison. And we'll stay there a long, long time. All our enterprises will be found out, and we'll have hundreds of people wanting us beaten up or dead. Not to mention that Rodrigo will probably kill us if we can't pay the ten grand we're short. Now, I'm not a man of morals, but Jessica's not getting any help from me. If that means I go to prison, then that's what happens. Are you okay to give yourself up for Jessica?

SAM steps back.

JONNY

Well, are you?

END ACT II, SCENE I
ACT II, SCENE II

The next day. There are boxes piled on each other with labels like "brochures", "documents", and "supplies" against the wall, and some mail is lying on the computer desk.

SFX: The phone rings until the answering machine picks up.

JONNY (OV)
Hello, you've reached “Your Last Friend, Inc.”. We help when no one else can. Unfortunately, we are helping another customer and cannot answer your call right now. If you would please leave a short message along with your name and phone number, we will call you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience.

SFX: The answering machine beeps, and the caller hangs up.

SAM enters with more mail in HIS hand. HE looks through them slowly, then drops them on the desk and has another moment of self reflection. This one looks like it might break HIM.

JONNY enters with another box.

How are we doing on time?

SAM
Were ahead of schedule.

JONNY
Really? Good. Let's take a break.

JONNY exits, then reenters with a can of beer. HE opens it and takes a drink.

JONNY
Here's a toast to all those poor bastards who wanted our services. May they find the end they all deserve.

JONNY takes another swig.
This isn't right.

Well, you drink your coffee when you're stressed, and I drink my beer. To each his own.

I can't do this.

What are you talking about? (Beat) Sam, you okay?

Sam, are you cool?

No, I am not cool. I'm as far from cool as one person can possibly be right now. Okay?

Okay, okay. I was just saying a little prayer, but now I'm finished. No need to attack me for it.

Beat.

Maybe I want to. What would you do about it?

Do about what?

I took some taekwondo in high school. I bet I could make you hurt if I wanted to. What would you do about it if I kicked you right in the face? Hmm?

Where's all this coming from?

SAM can't even stand to look at JONNY.
JONNY
Sam? Sam? You need to pull yourself together. I know you're feeling bad, but hold it in. We need to get the hell out of here before--

SAM
You're the worst friend I've ever had. You know that?

JONNY
I'm the only friend you had, and what the hell do you mean by that?

SAM
You want to know what I mean by that?

JONNY
Yeah. Spell it out for me.

SAM
Okay. I needed your help, and you said no.

JONNY
What the hell was I supposed to say? You wanted me to kill Jessica!!

SAM
I ask you for one thing--

JONNY
Are you crazy? You're losing your mind--

SAM
One thing! I've never asked you for anything personal before, and the single time I do, you bail on me. Thanks a lot, friend.

JONNY
So what now? We're not friends anymore? We split up? End of friendship?

SAM
Maybe. Maybe.

JONNY
What, you mean this for real? You know...never mind.

SAM
Say it.

JONNY
No.
SAM
Say it!

JONNY
I might not be a good friend. I'm pretty sure I'm a bad one, but I'd never ask you for what you asked me. No real friend would ever ask that. Ever.

SAM
Who else do I have to ask, Jonny? I've got no one but you.

Beat.

JONNY goes back to drinking HIS beer. 
SAM starts putting stuff from the computer desk into a box.

SFX: The phone rings until the answering machine picks up.

JONNY (OV)
Hello, you've reached “Your Last Friend, Inc.”. We help when no one else can. Unfortunately, we are helping another customer and cannot answer your call right now. If you would please leave a short message along with your name and phone number, we will call you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience.

SFX: The answering machine beeps.

JESSICA (OV)
Uh, hey Jonny. Nice voice you got there. It's all respectable and whatnot.

SAM and JONNY stop and listen.

JESSICA (OV)
Anyway, I was calling, because I'm not going through with it. I'm still going to die, but I thought it wasn't fair to ask Sam to help me out. I don't know. Seems like too much to ask from your family. I want Sam to know that I miss him, and I'll try and visit him sometime. You hear that, Sam? Your big sister Jessica's gonna mooch off you when I get the chance. Have a couch ready for me to sleep on. I guess that's about it. Thing's probably gonna cut me off pretty soon. Take care and--

SFX: The answering machine beeps.

Beat.
JONNY chuckles a little at the ridiculousness of fate, and SAM eventually chuckles too.

JONNY
Guess we were worried about nothing after all.

SAM
It seems so.

JONNY
Still too late. Website's down and we still owe Rodrigo the money.

SAM
I know.

Beat.

JONNY
I'll go back to packing.

SAM
Jonny?

JONNY
What?

SAM
If Jessica didn't really want to go through with it, if we convinced her to continue living, what would have happened?

JONNY
We probably wouldn't close the shop.

SAM
No, I mean what would have happened between us and Jessica?

JONNY
I don't get it. I guess she'd be a client.

SAM
Every time I looked at the customer reports, I'd have seen her name and remembered how much trust she put in me. Jessica trusted me to do for her what no one else would have. And what do I do? The day actually comes when she needs me to be there for her for something other than money, and I run away.
JONNY

Don't be hard on yourself.

SAM

Why shouldn't I be? You realize what we were doing? This wasn't a bad online investment or a fake lottery ticket. We were selling the right to die with dignity. Who are we to take that fundamental right away from people?

JONNY

We weren't taking it away. And who says we were selling death? I started this idea to sell hope, and I sold it by the tons. You saw their names and their credit cards. I got to talk to these people, all eighty-seven of them. Do you know how many of them cried for joy? They thanked me over and over again, and it made me feel pretty damn good.

SAM

What about now?

JONNY

What about now?

SAM

We're abandoning the business. You're not going to refund their money. Are you?

JONNY

No.

SAM

What do you think they're going to say when they realize what happened?

JONNY

Okay, so all those people will want to kick in my balls. I accept that. That's fair, but I never thought I had to be.

SAM

Be what? Fair?

JONNY

Yeah. You said it yourself, man. We're thieves. We screw people over for a living. I always knew that, but you didn't.

SAM

Whatever.

SAM goes back to packing, but JONNY knocks down whatever's in SAM's hands.
JONNY
No, not "whatever". You thought all the people we stole from were rich bastards with too much money on their hands...or the jerks in high school who beat the shit out of us. Not everyone deserves to get screwed over, Sam.

SAM
If it's so obvious, then why didn't I realize this before?

JONNY
Because. You're the brains. You sit at a computer and add numbers. You don't look into these people's eyes and lie right to their faces. I do that for us. That's why I'm the balls.

SAM
How many families did we bankrupt?

JONNY
Oh, come on, man.

SAM
How many senior citizens have to live with their children and grandchildren, because we drained their savings accounts? Are there homeless people cursing our names as they freeze to death?

JONNY
It never gets below sixty in Arizona. Remember?

SAM
And all of that was for money. We destroyed lives for profit. We're no better than mercenaries. Or the Borg. At least they're honest about it.

JONNY
Sam, I get what you're saying, except for the Borg thing, but who cares? People screw each other every day. We're no different.

SAM
But I want to be different. I stole, because I thought if someone was stupid enough to fall for our lies, then they got what they deserved. I'm scared to think what we have in store for us.

JONNY stretches as HE walks around and thinks. HE goes to take another sip from HIS beer, but HE puts it down

JONNY
So what are you saying? You want to quit? Over ten years working together, and you want to throw it all away?
What is there to throw away?

JONNY paces around the office. Once again, HE has to chuckle about the ridiculous situation.

It was an awesome scam.

JONNY

It was.

SAM

It was like gold in my hands. Perfect.

JONNY

I know.

SAM

You really quitting the game?

JONNY

I'm really quitting.

SAM

You're totally sure about this? I can't have you quit now and a month later want back in. It doesn't work that way. If you're out, you're out. No crying about it later.

JONNY

I know. I'm still retiring.

SAM

Damn. Jessica, coming in here and screwing all our shit up. I'm going to miss her.

JONNY

I will too.

SAM

JONNY holds out his hand.

SAM and JONNY shakes hands.
It was.  

*THEY shake, but SAM stares at JONNY.*

What?  

SAM  

I'm going to need the money.  

*JONNY laughs.*

You're what?  

JONNY  

I need all the money we made.  

JONNY  

What the hell for?  

SAM  

I'm going to give our customers a refund.  

JONNY  

I'm sorry.  I can't hear you.  Are you speaking English right now? *Refund?*  

SAM  

Yes.  We're giving it all back.  

JONNY  

Why the hell would I ever do that?  

SAM  

It's not ours.  

JONNY  

That's usually the case when you steal it.  

SAM  

I won't be able to live with myself if we don't give it back.  I won't.
JONNY
Sam, you've just retired from the con-business. You need this money, trust me. The job market right now is in the crapper.

SAM
I don't care. We're giving it back. You owe me this.

JONNY
No, I don't. Not this much.

SAM
Yes, you do.

JONNY looks like greed and conscience are having a battle in HIS cranium.

JONNY
Jonny.

SAM
No.

JONNY
Jonny!

SAM
I said no!

JONNY
Beat.

JONNY
You're not going to let this go, are you?

SAM
No.

JONNY walks over to SAM, looks HIM directly in the eyes, then walks back to HIS beer and takes another swig.

JONNY
Rodrigo's going to be pissed.

SAM
I know. Blame it on me.
JONNY
I am! I'm going to tell him you stole it and ran off.

SAM
Will he actually believe that?

JONNY
No! I'll have to sleep with one eye open for half a year, but...hell, you said he was screwing us over with fees anyway. And his odd "investment plans". I don't like it when people take advantage of me. You should probably watch your back, too.

SAM
Okay. Will do.

JONNY
Then fine. Take the money. I guess you earned it, anyway.

SAM
Thank you. We're doing the right thing.

JONNY
First time for everything, isn't there?

JONNY drinks the rest of the beer, crushes the can, and throws it into the basket.

SAM
What are you going to do after this?

JONNY
After everything settles? I don't know. That girl Rebecca and I hit it off last night in some crazy goth/poetry bar.

SAM
Rebecca Tener? Our client? The one who tried to kill us?

JONNY
Yeah. She's the one. She's crazy as hell, but she keeps me on my toes. Actually, last night she kept me on my knees. She's got this crazy leather--

SAM
Woah! Way TMI, for real!
I've got a little bit of money on the side. Might rent an apartment, see how things turn out. She asked me to be her manager.

Her manager?

She has a band. "Ripped Asunder".

Are they talented?

*JONNY shrugs.*

What are you going to do?

*Beat.*

I'm going home.

*Your home?*

Yes.

Tell everyone at the trailer park I said "Hey". Your mom and dad, too.

They'd freak if they knew I was still friends with you.

Then tell them I said, "Go to hell."

*THEY laugh.*

I'm going to miss having you around nagging all the time.

Can't say the same.

*SAM smiles.*
JONNY
Hey, look at that. Looks like I rubbed off on you after all, you jerk.

*JONNY picks up a box.*

JONNY
Get back to packing.

*JONNY exits.*

SAM
Be there in a minute. Still have some files to organize.

*SAM goes to the computer and types away.*

*SFX: Phone rings.*

*SAM answers the phone.*

SAM
Uhm...(to HIMSELF) Why'd I answer the phone?! (to the phone) Hello, you've reached "Your Last Friend, Inc.". We help when no one else can. This is Sa--Henry McLon--McConnell. How can I help you?...Mrs. Yorn! How have you been?...Good, good. You're not calling for another last chance session, are you?...Uh-huh...Uh-huh...Your friend Tucker died? How?...No, I realize that's a little too personal to talk about over the phone...Uh-huh...Uh-huh...Uh-huh. (An evil thought occurs to SAM) I suppose Bill isn't seeing anyone at the moment...No, I don't think that's too forward at all. In fact, I'm betting he'd be very interested...Where?...Denny's is fine. I'll make sure he gets the invitation...No, thank you, Beulah...Goodbye.

*JONNY enters, holding a box.*

Who was that?

JONNY
Telemarketers.

SAM
Oh.

JONNY
Hey, after this, do you want to go eat somewhere? Denny's? I'll pay.
JONNY
Damn right, you'll pay, after the hell you put me through today.

SAM
It's only fair.

JONNY
Cool.

JONNY exits out the front door.

SAM
It's a date.

SAM goes back to working on the computer.

END ACT II, SCENE II

THE END
APPENDIX C.

Eight and latest draft of the play. The draft that most represents my abilities as a playwright after experiencing a full production of my play.
Your Last Friend, Inc.
By
Justin Blasdel
Characters

Sam Everett: 30, cautious hacker and forger
Jonny Long: 31, edgy but charming con-artist
Todd McNeal: Late 20s, lonely bank accountant
Beulah Yorn: 70s, old and forgotten grandmother
Rebecca Tener: 19, ignored gothic teenager
Jessica Everett: 34, drug-addicted cancer patient

Time

Winter, Present

Location

Tucson, Arizona
ACT I, SCENE I

A small business building. There's a desk with a computer on it, a few chairs, a trash bin, a broom against the wall, a coat rack with two dry-cleaned business suits hanging on it, a table with a coffee pot on it, and a phone with an answering machine.

SAM EVERETT enters with a couple stand-alone pamphlets about Philippine real estate investments, which HE positions carefully around the desk. HIS clothing style betrays his antisocial behavior: obscure pop culture icon t-shirt, short shorts, flip-flops, etc.

SAM is what happens when you put an intelligent person through a lifetime of bullying in an underprivileged school system. HE's had to make the best of what was given to HIM, which became a life of computer crimes and easy money. HIS greatest vice is not greed but caffeine addiction, which HE drinks almost non-stop to make HIS brain work as fast as the computers he loves so much.

SAM
Okay. We have our Philippine brochures, the office is dust free, and Jonny's suit is...clean enough to look expensive. We are ready...and with time to spare.

SAM suspiciously stares at the front entrance as HE sits down at the computer, making sure someone isn't around to see HIM in a moment of shame. Soon, HIS focus is consumed by whatever's on the computer screen.

SFX: Sci-fi sound effects from computer.
The U.S.S. Deep Explorer is fully loaded and ready for hyperspace. Minions of the universe beware of--

JONNY (OS)

Sam! Hey, Sam!

JONNY enters wearing large black-tinted sunglasses and holding a beer in HIS hand, but not looking very drunk.

JONNY has the appearance of a sleazy door-to-door salesman whom you'd swear uses a pound of pomade in HIS hair. However, there's something charming about HIS confident smile and buddy-buddy attitude that keeps this professional scam artist in business.

SAM quickly exits the computer game before JONNY has a chance to realize what's going on.

JONNY

Hey, listen real quick. I got a good idea, and I think you're going to like it.

SAM

Where have you been, Jonny? Are you going to make me organize the office all by myself?

JONNY

How does surfing for porn all day long organize the office, hmm?

SAM

Wha...I...For the last time, I don't surf for porn! It's online interactive role-play. I've told you this a hundred times.

JONNY

You have no idea how much better I'd feel if you were searching for porn...instead of playing computer games with guys who still live with their moms.

SAM

Hey! It's nothing to be ashamed of.

JONNY takes off HIS glasses.
JONNY
No, not at all. I think it's a good idea to shack up with dear old mom. I mean, you got low rent, free meals, and hey, if there's a party going on somewhere, you've already have a date waiting for you.

SAM
That's not what I was meaning. Have you been consuming alcohol?

What?

JONNY
Drinking?

SAM
No. Why?

JONNY
This? It's empty.

SAM
Then why is it in your hand?

JONNY
I don't like to litter? What, I can’t have a drink without you busting my balls? I know its morning, but you don't--

SAM
No it's not. It's three-thirty-five in the afternoon.

JONNY
It is not...

JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch in disbelief, but realizes SAM's correct.

JONNY
Guess bars in Tucson don't have last calls. Hmm. The more you learn. Hey, your sister lives around here. Why don't we invite her to hang out with us sometime? Been awhile since we seen her, and that woman can drink!
SAM
Jessica does a whole lot more than drinking. After all the drugs she's put into her brain, she practically has the CPU of an elementary school's Macintosh.

JONNY
You don't know if she's like that anymore. Let me give her a call and see if she's--

SAM
Jonny...your idea?

JONNY
My what? Oh, yeah! I almost forgot. I thought up this new enterprise when I was watching TV last night.

SAM
In a bar?

JONNY
No, this was before the bar. I was in a strip joint.

SAM
A strip joint? Do you have any idea of how many contagious diseases are in a place like that? Did you even wash your hands?

JONNY
Nope. Not once.

JONNY plays like HE's going to touch
SAM, who dodges HIS moves.

SAM
Quit it! You'll give me syphilis or something!

JONNY
Calm down. My hands didn't go anywhere near the ladies. They have rules against touching. I watched TV.

SAM
TV? Why were you watching public television in a strip bar instead of--wait, wait. No. I don't want to know. Tell me your idea.

SAM logs onto the computer and starts organizing files.

JONNY
Are you listening?
SAM

I'm multi-tasking.

JONNY and SAM begin their usual banter of ideas, working off of one another instead of simply arguing. For THEM, this is how work is done.

JONNY

Okay, so there's this show about scams, right? And they're not showing old tricks, like lottery emails from Nigeria, but the new stuff that's not illegal yet. And they talk about this one insurance place in Nevada selling alien abduction insurance near Area 51. Alien abduction insurance. Yeah, you heard me right.

SAM

That's massively stupid. Like, legendarily stupid.

JONNY

I know! Right?

SAM

We're not doing that, Jonny. I just started preparing for our current enterprise of selling non-existent plots of land in the Philippines, and I'm not in the mood to start all over to sell peace of mind to acid-tripping rednecks hiding out in the desert.

JONNY

Wait. Hear me out, first. Okay? This company, "High Hopes", has tons of lawsuits against them. Not a surprise.

SAM

Negative.

JONNY

But what is a surprise is they're winning their cases.

SAM

Are you serious?

JONNY

They say that if someone gets abducted, then they'll pay out, so technically they're not robbing anyone.

SAM

Obviously, they're idiots. If they were professionals, they'd have left town before the media put their business on television. Noobs.
JONNY
Yeah, but they're still making money. Lots of money.

SAM
Money they'll lose in court and lawyer fees. Are you going to help me today or not? We have a lot of heavy boxes move, and I--

SAM stands and walks to the door, but JONNY holds HIM by the arm.

JONNY
Dude, listen. I stayed up all night thinking this out, and you'll think it's awesome too. Trust me.

SAM
Trust you? You? I wouldn't trust you with my Battlestar Galactica BlueRay Discs. But fine, whatever, tell me your ridiculous idea.

JONNY
So a little later, I'm getting a lap dance, and this girl knows exactly what she's doing. I mean she's getting all up in my--

SAM
Woah! Way too much info! I'm not listening to this.

SAM moves to leave, but again JONNY pulls HIM back.

JONNY
You promised! So, this stripper Bambi's rubbing up on me, and she's talking about her grandmother getting leukemia and wishing for death. So I--

What?!

SAM
What?

JONNY
She told you about her grandmother while she was m-molesting you?

SAM
I might be a guy, but I'm a guy who listens. (presentational) I care about people.
SAM
Just like you cared about those women who bought our online dating service enterprise...and then you used it to sleep with most of them.

JONNY
Yeah. Good times. (half-beat) Anyway, Bambi shares her story and starts crying all over me. "If only someone would stop my grandmother's pain." So, I ask her why her doctor just didn't do her a solid and off her grandmother. She says because euthanasia isn't legal in the state of Arizona...yet.

SAM
So what genius idea did you get from Bambi, the crying stripper?

JONNY leans in closely to SAM.
JONNY
I checked it out, and she's right. Euthanasia or even assisted suicide isn't legal here...yet.

Yet?

JONNY
Yeah, yet. It isn't legal here, yet. But...

One day it might be?

SAM
And in the meantime....

JONNY
Sam gives a hard, long look at Jonny.

SAM gives a hard, long look at JONNY.

In the meantime...

JONNY
You'd like to do it illegally?

SAM
No! I want to sell insurance for it like the alien abduction guys did. Kind of like a "Pay for it now and hope for laws to change in the future" sort of deal. You get me?

SAM
Wow. That's...wow. That's...more wow than "World of Warcraft" wow.
SAM can't focus on HIS computer work, so HE walks around to blow off steam.

SAM

Wow, wow, wow. Wow.

JONNY

Sam?

SAM

You really outdid yourself this time. Assisted suicide insurance? What's your malfunction?!

JONNY

Sam, don't be like that.

SAM

Are you really considering this? I mean, it's all fun and games when we're draining bank accounts owned by jerks, but stealing money from the sick and dying isn't me, Jonny. We're not doctors.

JONNY

We're not that bad. Most of the people we'll deal with will die in a few weeks anyway.

SAM

Okay, I'll say it another way. Stealing money from the dead and the grieving isn't me, Jonny. We're not morticians.

JONNY

I hear what you're saying, but I looked into this stuff online today--

SAM

While intoxicated?

JONNY

Yeah, at the strip joint. Like I said. They have wifi.

SAM

I should have never taught you how to use that. Where's my coffee?

SAM prepares another pot of coffee.

JONNY

And studies show most people who say they want to kill themselves never actually do when they get the chance.
SAM
Where did you read that?

JONNY
Online. In Oregon, hospitals actually send out death pills, but only ten percent of patients take them. The others just want the right to off themselves. They're never going to do it.

SAM
And this was a real medical journal? This isn't another funny story from "The Onion", is it?

JONNY
Yeah, it's real! Yahoo doesn't lie.

SAM
I...I'm just not positive. This seems like we'd be dealing with a lot of...average people, you know? Not the kind of clientele who deserve to get fragged.

JONNY
I hear what you're saying. I know you've been getting moody lately about our line of work. You've got a conscience, and I don't blame you for that? We've done a few questionable jobs in the past--

SAM
Example, the luxury vacation tickets to Korea we sold just as SARS started spreading.

JONNY
Hey, SARS isn't any worse than the flu. Whatever, my point is we've screwed over a lot of people, but this is different. This time we're giving something back: hope. What we're selling, these people won't use. They can't. It's illegal. But we can sell them this promise; a promise to help them when the law changes in their favor, which will never happen. They'll feel better, we'll get richer, they'll die, and no one will care. I wouldn't even call it stealing. It's a victimless crime, and it'll be the greatest scam we've ever done. The greatest scam you've ever done.

SAM
Really?

JONNY
Plus, we'll make a lot of money.

SAM
Hmm. How much?
Tons of it.

Exactly how much?

A...thousand? A thousand a customer.

A thousand dollars a customer? I'm assuming on average about five customers a week, that'll be-

More like ten customers a week. That's ten grand a week, forty 'K a month.

Five-hundred and twenty thousand dollars in a year, assuming we actually do get ten customers a week.

That's like the lowest number possible. You know they’d rush in the first month. It's winter, and seasonal depression's on the rise.

We're in Arizona, and it's eighty degrees outside.

Dude, try and think positive.

Beat.

If we do this, AND we get as much money as you're saying...you're paying Rodrigo back.

You didn't think I was going to do that anyway?

Seeing as how you were the one who ran up a gambling debt in Reno and paid it off with a loan shark, a loan shark who's part of the Mexican Mafia nonetheless, you could say I'm a little worried that you won't.

Trust me. I will. He threatened to sick his dogs on me if I didn't pay him back soon.
It would serve you right.

JONNY


Beat.

SAM

I could use the challenge. And if this works, and it's as long-term as you say it is, it would give me a lot of time to myself. I could stay here, do my fair share of work, and no one would ever bother me.

Not even me.

Beat.

SAM

Okay. I'm game....I guess.

JONNY

Yeah! I knew you'd like it.

SAM

A real business. A real, long-term business. We've never attempted this before.

JONNY

If we don't do it, someone else will.

SAM

(Rapidly) We'll need permits. I can forge some easily. Hack into the City Hall's records, bypass their joke of a firewall, do this during the day for a 40% chance less likelihood of being noticed with all the online traffic, modify a pre-existing insurance permit and make it look like our own, pre-approve it with a date from three months ago, list our favorite dummy corporation from the Cayman Islands as the founding investment company, do all this with a randomized IP Address generator, aaaaaand then we're set. So...are we actually talking to these people in person, or is it just you?

JONNY

No worries, pal. You let me do all the talking, and you can do all the business stuff. 'Cause you're the egghead. The brains of our team. And I'm the balls.

You're the balls?
JONNY
Who else?

SAM
Well, Mr. Testicles I have a question for you. Why wouldn’t they wait to buy our services until after Arizona legalizes it? Why purchase a plan now?

JONNY
I-uhhh--Because...when killing's made legal, everyone'll be lining up for miles. You think they'll want to wait with everybody else? No, they want a First Class ticket to the "Promised Land." And don't worry, I'll advertise the hell out of us. A few commercials about how clean and friendly we are, pamphlets left at hospitals saying how dangerous it is to try suicide on your own, and then all we do is wait for the money to roll in. It's that easy.

Beat.

SAM
And you swear, swear on the Tolkien Trilogy that assisted suicide is illegal here? Did you even research it?

JONNY
Of course I have. I swear. Scout's honor. You on board or what?

Beat.

SAM
Affirmative.

JONNY
Awesome! Let’s get this show on the road!

JONNY raises HIS hand to high-five SAM.

JONNY
Come on, man. Don't leave me hanging.

SAM reluctantly raises HIS hand. JONNY swings and hurts SAM's hand. JONNY releases all the energy HE reserved for this talk and looks like HE's finally ready to pass out.

JONNY
I’m going to take a nap.
SAM
It's three in the afternoon. Are you suffering from narcolepsy or something?

JONNY

'Night.

JONNY exits into one of the office rooms.

SAM
We don't even have a chair in there for you to lie down on...

JONNY (OS)
I said ‘'night”, Sam!

SAM shakes his head and goes back to the desk.

SAM
(to HIMSELF) I have a vampire for a partner. It's like I'm a little teenage girl in Twilight.

HE throws the brochures in the trash, and then walks around the room while trying to think of a good name.

SAM
What's the name for this enterprise, I wonder. Anything I'll come up with has to better than he will. (Beat) "Final Resting Place". No, that sounds like a funeral home. “Final”…”Your Last Stop”…”Final Stop”…”Your Last Stop”…”Your Last Friend”. Yeah, that’s good. “Your Last Friend…, Inc.”. Here at “Your Last Friend, Inc.” we like to think of us as not ending your life, but releasing you from your mortal shell and into the next world.

SAM’s proud of thinking of such a good company name, but the act is broken by a moment of personal reflection.

END ACT I, SCENE I
ACT I, SCENE II

The coffee table has some business brochures on it with the theme of "letting go".

JONNY enters, wearing a business suit and holding a large picture of a setting sun. HE finds the nail in the wall and balances the picture. He steps back, thinks about it, and then readjusts the picture one more time.

JONNY
Perfect! Yeah, this is a great idea. We'll be swimming in money in no time.

SFX: the phone rings.

JONNY shakes away his excitement and becomes somber. HE picks up the telephone.

JONNY
Good morning, thank you for calling "Your Last Friend, Inc.". We help when no one else can. My name is Bill Teetonka. How may I help you today?...Yes...Yes...Good for you...Once you submit your information on our website, it takes us two to three days to process it, and then we'll set up your account as quickly and as discreetly as possible...Huh?...No, it's not necessary to meet us in person. This can all be handled over the internet...I'm glad I could help. Take care, and the state of Arizona willing, your needs will be met...You're welcome.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY
Ha-ha! Another sale!

SAM enters, still wearing HIS usual attire.

SAM
Teetonka? Really? That's the name you want to go with? You sound like a Ferengi selling long distance phone service.

JONNY
I'm honoring my one sixty-fourth Navajo heritage. Don't make fun of my people.
SAM
That's not even enough heritage to fill your pinky.

JONNY
Well, you don't look that Irish, Mr. Henry O'Connell. Shouldn't you be wearing a kilt and eating haggis or something?

SAM
The Scottish eat haggis. The Irish...drink too much, like you. Why were you yelling?

I got another sale.

JONNY
I get that, but why yell? Are you afraid I'm not going to hear you?

SAM
Actually, I forged all our licenses and permits, so we're not doing this legally at all.

JONNY
You know what I mean. This is something we can get away with. Forever! I think we've found our calling.

SAM
Well, business has been on the rise.

JONNY
And we haven't met one single nutcase. By the way, good job on the website. I totally loved that whole fade in thing from the field into the main page. It was slick.

SAM
Thank you. Only took me an hour. Whatever. Not a big deal.

JONNY
Don't sell yourself short. You know your stuff.

SAM
Yes, I do. I do.
Beat. JONNY coughs as a signal for SAM to compliment HIM too.

SAM
But without your excellent people skills and...other valuable qualities, we’d be nowhere. So, props to you too.

SAM gives JONNY an awkward bumped fists. It doesn't work out that well.

JONNY
Thanks. Hey, I gave Jessica a call yesterday, you know to relive old times, and she--

SAM
I told you not to do that.

JONNY
I called her for me, not you. She was my friend long before you were.

SAM
We all make mistakes, don't we?

JONNY
Anyway, I called her, but she kind of blew me off.

SAM
Why did you call her?

JONNY
She drinks. You don't.

SAM
I do too.

JONNY
That stupid Transylvanian wine you drank on Halloween doesn't count.

SAM
No, I suppose it doesn't when compared to the experimental "prison wine" you use to make in high school.

JONNY
Hey, don't knock it. That was some good stuff.

SAM
What did Jessica say?
JONNY
I offered to buy her beer, man. She said no. The Keystone Champion of '03 said no to free beer.

Beat.

SAM
That is odd.

JONNY
She sounded kind of weird. Like she was lonely or something.

SAM
I...might give her a call...sometime.

JONNY
You should. It speaks badly of you that I called your sister before you did. Guess that's because I'm the more considerate one.

SAM
What's with the sunset picture?

JONNY
Huh? Oh, you like it? I thought it’d be good for business. You know, sort of like a metaphor.

SAM
And what's the metaphor?

JONNY becomes somber again.

JONNY
(business character) Like a beautiful sunset, you too must pass. (breaking character) I made that up myself.

SAM
No, you didn't. You stole that from the Mormon magazine we found when we were cleaning up.

JONNY
I'm sure they don't mind as long as their message is getting out. You done funneling yesterday's money into that fake offshore company?

SAM
Not yet. The less paper trail we have to our money laundering front, the better.
JONNY Smart.

I know.

SAM sits down at the computer.

How many customers did we get today?

Twenty.

SAM searches their accounts on the computer.

Twenty?

Check it.

SAM That’s our highest so far by eight. That's highly unusual.

Someone must be spreading the word.

Yeah, I'm sure it's a hot topic on everyone's Twitter page

JONNY shrugs HIS shoulders.

Check their "Reasons to die". See if they're all the same.

SAM checks the files.

No. No. Yes. No. They're mixed. There's no connection.

SAM notices something on the computer screen.
SAM
Well...there's another customer. What is this?

*SFX: phone rings.*

JONNY goes to the phone, goes into HIS somber character, and answers the phone while SAM looks over customer files.

JONNY
Good morning, thank you for calling "Your Last Friend, Inc.". We help when no one else can. My name is Mr. Bill Teetonka. How may I help you today?...Hello, Mr. McNeal....Yes, I remember you. We remember all our clients on a personal level...Sir, we would be happy to help you journey to the next world, but unfortunately Arizona state law prevents us from doing so...Huh?...You what?...What?!...No, sorry sir. I didn't mean to yell. I stubbed my toe...Now?...Uhm, okay. We can schedule your last chance session for tomorrow...Please, we're not prepared. Let us schedule you tomorrow and......You're on your way over? Good. Uh, good. See you in a moment then. Have a good day.

*JONNY hangs up the phone.*

JONNY
Go online and check the news, now!

SAM
What was that all about?

JONNY
We got a customer coming over right now for us to kill him!

SAM
Excuse me? We don't actually do that. That would be called assisted suicide, and as far as I have been informed, that's illegal.

JONNY
Guess what's just been legalized.

*Beat.*

SAM
Is this a joke? Are you joking with me? Is this like your own special brand of "Punk'd" or something?
I don't know. Just check the internet. Now! Mr. McNeal told me that the bill was passed this morning.

No. That's not possible. If there was a bill being passed like this one, then you'd know about it, because it was your job to keep an eye on this while I was setting up our finances and customer support. Do not tell me you didn't look into this!

I did.

And?

Look, I called the hospital before we started this and asked a doctor if assisted suicide was legal yet. He said no, so I assumed--

You didn't actually check?!? You didn't go to city hall, you didn't go to the library, you didn't even read a newspaper?!

I called a hospital! They're supposed to know these things. Aren't they?

Beat.

Oh, my god. Oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god. Is he coming over right now, Mr...Mr.?

Mr. McNeal.

Yes, Mr. McNeal. Is he?

I tried to get him to come tomorrow.

MOTHER...Calm down, Samuel. Calm down. You can deal with this. (to JONNY) He might be wrong.
Yeah.

He might have misheard the news.

Maybe.

Perhaps he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Happens all the time.

SAM hastily checks the internet on the computer.

So? Is he right?

Stop talking!

Dude, I'm so sorry if I messed this up for us.

Shut up! Just wait a moment and...oh no.

What?

SAM reads the bad news.

He was right. We're screwed. We're totally, utterly screwed...like a Storm Trooper on the Death Star, were screwed.

You're reading it wrong. Let me see.
JONNY
Well...I guess it did go through. Why didn't that doctor lie to me?

SAM
Jonny, you idiot, it takes months for laws to go into effect once they've passed!

*SAM picks up a pen (or anything that can fit in one fist) and throws it at JONNY.*

JONNY
Hey, don't take your anger out on me. I'm just as mad as you.

SAM
What the hell are we going to do?!

JONNY
Sam, calm down. I can work with this.

SAM
Really? You really think so? You think can work with this? Really?

*JONNY and SAM notice TODD outside and walking to the door.*

SAM
Oh-my-god, oh-my-god, oh-my-god--

JONNY
Dude, stay calm, let me handle this, and everything will be okay. Believe in me. Go hide in the back room or something.

SAM
I'm not leaving. I'm staying and making sure you don't mess this up anymore than you already have.

JONNY
You're not even wearing a suit. You look like you're here to fix the printer.

*TODD MCNEAL enters. TODD is the adult version of the kid picked last for every sports team.*

*HE looks like a born loser whose mother dresses HIM, and her taste is a few decades out of touch.*
TODD is crying and sobbing heavily.

TODD
Is this "Your Last Friend, Inc."?

JONNY
(whispering) Fine, but stay out of my way. (to TODD in business voice) Hello, Mr. McNeal. It's nice to meet you in person. My name is Bill Teetonka, and this is my...associate.

SAM
Hey...sir. How are you feeling? Good?

Beat.

TOOD
Hello. I want to end it all. As soon as possible.

End your life?

JONNY

TODD
Yes, yes my life! My pathetic, good-for-nothing, never-amount-to-anything life.

JONNY
Please try to remain calm. Everything will be taken care of, but it helps if you can keep control of your emotions. Can you do that for me?

TODD
I can-I can try.

JONNY
That's all I ask.

SAM sits and hands a tissue over to TODD. And another. And another. TODD continues to grab at every tissue handed to HIM.

SAM
(mumbled) You know these are expensive.

JONNY

Shh!
SAM

(mumbled) Had to get them at a discount. Whatever...Take the whole thing.

*SAM hands over the box of tissues to JONNY, who hands it over to TODD.*

TODD

Thank you. Who are you?

SAM

Henry O'Connell. My name is Henry O'Connell. People call me Henry.

You don't look Irish.

TODD

JONNY

Mr. O'Connell, would you please bring up Todd's file? Thank you.

*SAM brings up the file on the computer screen.*

JONNY

Todd, you don't mind me calling you by your first name, do you?

TODD

No. I don't care about anything anymore.

JONNY

Thank you. You can call me Bill. Todd, why have you decided to end your existence on this planet?

TODD

I need a reason?!

SAM

Yes, you do! It's part of our policy. We have to know!

JONNY

Since our services are permanent, we ask you to retell exactly why it is you wish to end your life. It helps you decide if this is really what you want, and it also helps protect us legally. You understand, right?

TODD

I guess.
JONNY
So why is it you're needing to die?

TODD
My mother's going to kill me.

Beat.

JONNY
I'm not sure I understand. You want assisted suicide, because your mother's going to kill you?

TODD
And I want you to kill me first.

Beat.

SAM
What? Why? Why would she do that?

TODD
I was fired from my job. I take care of both of us, but now that I'm out of work, I'll have to apply for unemployment. We're already three months behind on the mortgage, and if we lose the house, I'll have nowhere to put her but a home.

JONNY
That doesn't sound so bad. I hear Tucson has one of the best senior citizen care programs in the country.

JONNY shrugs at SAM.

TODD
That doesn't matter to her. She's crazy! She's got dementia. She takes her pills, but they don't work. She beats me with her cane, breaks the dirty dishes if I don't wash them fast enough, and chases away any girl I can get to come to our house. I'm...I'm afraid.

TODD gets out of HIS chair and looks out the office entrance, making sure HIS mother hasn't followed HIM.

What are you doing?

JONNY

TODD
She might be following me.
SAM
Why can't you put her in a crazy house--err...a mental hospital. They have locked doors, straps, officers, everything you could practically think of to keep patients locked inside.

TODD
My uncle tried that once. My mom escaped.

JONNY
What happened to your uncle?

TODD
No one knows.

TODD breaks down and sobs.

JONNY
Hey, hey. There's no reason to cry. We can think of something. How about you get a lawyer and have her arrested.

TODD
I...I could never do that to my mom. I love her. What kind of son would I be if I put her in jail? No, the only way to make it right is for me to die.

SAM
Uhm...Is that your only reason for our services?

TODD
Do I need more? I'm a bad son, a total failure, and I haven't had a real girlfriend since Christy Emerson slept with me because she was so drunk she thought I was the college mascot. I'm...I'm...I'm pathetic!

TODD sobs into JONNY's coat. JONNY awkwardly pats TODD on the back.

JONNY
There, there.

SAM and JONNY have an inaudible argument until TODD regains HIS composure.

TODD
So that's why I want to die. Today if possible. Before she gets me.
SAM
Today? You don't need to think about it for just a little more? Possibly a day more?

TODD
I've been thinking about nothing else for a week. I have a desk job at a bank, and I'm so overqualified that I finish the day's work by ten every morning. I do nothing but sit and play "Mystical Warriors" all day long.

JONNY
"Mystical Warriors"?

TODD pulls at JONNY's coat in disbelief.

TODD
Are you from Middle Earth or something?! "Mystical Warriors" is the best online roleplaying game ever!

SAM
People are calling it the new "Evercrack"...or I've so heard.

JONNY
Okaaaay. Is there nothing you'd miss in life if you passed on? Like a pet or something that you’ve spent a lot of time on? Anything?

TODD
Not anymore. I sold my online character on eBay as soon as I heard the ban was lifted on assisted suicide. I have nothing to lose. (half-beat, for sobbing) So when can I get the treatment?

JONNY
Well--

TODD
Shh! Did you hear something?

TODD moves to open the other office doors, but SAM runs after HIM and pulls HIM back.

SAM
We're not finished with the session yet! You have to finish your session first. Right, Mr. Teetonka?
JONNY
Actually, only have one question for Todd here, and then we can figure out when to schedule his next and final appointment. Todd, can you tell me about your job? Come on, no one's back there. Talk to me. We're your friends.

*TODD stops trying to open the office doors.*

TODD
Basically, I keep all online transactions between my bank and major companies secure. I get to stay in my little cubicle all day. No one bothers me, not even my boss. It was perfect. But not anymore. They gave me two weeks to prepare all my current projects and allow them time to revoke my security clearances. They said they could give me a position as a teller. A teller! I can't do that. I have ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome. I can't stand to meet new people. Every time I do, I feel like I could...I could...

*TODD is about to throw up. SAM quickly finds a trash bin and hands it to TODD. After a few dry heaves, TODD is able to calm down.*

TODD
My life's over.

SAM
And you're absolutely sure your mother would kill you if you put her in a hospital?

TODD
She showed me the knife!

JONNY
So...you probably have lots of security codes and passwords to other people's accounts, right? At your job?

TODD
I won't much longer.

JONNY
And if you really needed to, I bet you could use those codes and passwords to funnel some companies' money into your own bank account, right?

TODD
I'm not supposed to be able to do that, but like I said I'm overqualified for my position.
Again, TODD checks the main entrance.

JONNY
Now, I'm not saying you should do anything illegal, but seeing as how you're wanting to die soon, and the law can't bring a man back to life to put him in jail, people might see this as your chance to obtain lots of money and get away with it.

TODD stops checking the main entrance.

I suppose.

JONNY
And if they did catch you, so what? You'll kill yourself before you serve out your sentence. And think of the experiences you can have with all that money.

What kind of experiences?

SAM
You can take a vacation. Hawaii, maybe.

JONNY
Buy a really nice car.

SAM
Meet some sane people for a change.

JONNY
Pay a doctor to keep your mother sedated till Jesus comes home.

TODD
Really? Like...will doctors do that sort of thing?

JONNY
I'm only a registered nurse, so I don't know absolutely everything about doctors...but yes they do. They do it all the time. Where do you think my mother is right now?

TODD
Really?

JONNY
Been on cloud nine for a decade. God bless our medical professionals.
TODD
Wow. I guess I could steal from the bank if I felt the need.

JONNY
Remember, "Your Last Friend, Inc." does not suggest to do anything illegal, but we do suggest you get all from life you can before you leave it.

SAM
No reason to end your life before you really live it. Ha, ha, ha!

TODD
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah! I'm going to rob my bank! I'm going to put my mom in a maximum security nut house and keep her drugged forever! I'm going to live in a boathouse in Hawaii! I'm going to buy prostitutes and have lots of sex with them! I'm gonna...I'm gonna...I'm gonna --

JONNY
Shh. You don't want everyone to know. Your mom might be listening..

TODD gives JONNY a nod and a wink.

TODD
Riiiiiiight.

TODD vigorously shakes SAM's hands and hugs JONNY. SAM stands to wave TODD away.

TODD
Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Mr. O'Connell. You have no idea how much better I feel right now.

SAM
Not nearly as much as I do.

TODD
Okay. Okay. I'm going to do this. Thank you.

TODD exits.

JONNY
(to TODD) Tell your friends about us!

A sign of relief from JONNY and SAM, then THEY move fast.
SAM
We need to pack up and get everything out of here before another Nike-shoe-wearing, punch-drinking mental case comes knocking on the door.

JONNY
No we don't.

SAM
We don't?!

JONNY
No. I think we're okay.

SAM
You think so? You really think so, do you? We have a business where our customers can now legally ask us to kill them. A situation we'd never be in if you wouldn't have convinced me of this stupid assisted suicide scam. We are not okay!

JONNY
Dude, chill!

*JONNY stares down SAM.*

JONNY
Listen to me. We're okay. All we have to do is wait until we get a hundred grand. That's not going to be hard to do with business as good as it is.

SAM
Why a hundred grand? Is that how much you own Rodrigo? A hundred grand?!

JONNY
I...he...it's the interest. He stopped it at a hundred "G".

SAM
And why would he do that?

JONNY
Because...

SAM
*Because...*

JONNY
If I don't pay him back in a month, then he said he'll find me and chop off my legs.
SAM
Jesus, Jonny! Why'd you ever get involved with a guy like that in the first place?

JONNY
That's not the issue. If we can last long enough to get the money, then he'll leave me alone. I'll be safe, and you'll have a clear conscience.

SAM
Hey! That's not fair to put that on me.

JONNY
I know! I'm sorry, man, but I need you. Hey, anything we make over a hundred grand is yours. No matter how much it is, it's yours. I promise.

Beat.

SAM
An actual promise? Not a "Jonny" promise?

JONNY
I swear. Are you going to help me?

SAM
I'm not killing anyone.

JONNY
Neither am I. Do I look like a murderer to you?

SAM
So...what? You're going to convince every person who walks through that door to not commit suicide?

JONNY
Yeah. I can do it. Easy. Well even make up some new mandatory meeting policy, so they're not thinking they're going to die right away.

Sam checks the customer files.

SAM
So hypothetically, if... Luis Manuel, the paraplegic, rolls in through those doors and asks for us to help her die at a later date, you are completely confident you can make her see the beauty of life?

JONNY
I think so.
SAM
We're doomed. We're worse off than a red shirt on the Enterprise.

JONNY
It's worth a try, Sam. Look, we've made seventy grand in two weeks. That's thirty away from the goal. Sam, you saw how good I was with Todd. Don't you believe in me?

SAM
You told him to commit a federal crime!

JONNY
I thought it was a good idea.

SAM
Jonny, if he gets caught, he'll tell the authorities who told him to do it. That's us!

JONNY
So? He doesn't have anything on us. If the cops ask about it, we'll deny everything like we always do.

SAM
That's not the point.

JONNY
Look, I won't tell anyone else to rob a bank, but I can do this. I'll read their files before we meet each client, and I promise you, on my mom's grave, we won't have one single death here.

SAM
You hated your mother.

JONNY
On my grandma's grave.

SAM
You hated her more.

JONNY
Come on, man. I need your help on this.

JONNY walks over to the computer and checks the company's bank account.
JONNY
Look, we got four more customers in the last ten minutes. We made four grand without even doing anything. Sam, dude, I can pull this off!

Beat.

SAM
If even one customer slips though your fingers, we're out of here and going underground, like a sand worm on Saturn. Agreed?

JONNY
That's not going to happen.

SAM
What's your answer, Jonny?

JONNY
Fine. Whatever. It's cool, because I know I can do this. We found a gold mine, and I'm not backing away.

SAM
You will if I say we have to.

JONNY
Oh-ho-ho! Big threat from the little man.

SAM
I'm serious!

JONNY
I know you are, but you'll see, Sam. I'm right on this one. (Beat) I'm going to get something to eat. You want a taco or some fries or something?

SAM
I'm not...Get me a corndog...and a slushie.

JONNY
You got it.

SAM
Raspberry.

JONNY
Okay. And don't worry, Sam. We're still good. Be back later.
JONNY opens the door and steps out, but then leans back in.

JONNY
Remember, I always have my eyes on the prize.

JONNY exits.

SAM
That's what I'm afraid of.

END ACT I, SCENE II
ACT I, SCENE III

It’s 12pm, three days later. The office is just as it was before.

SFX: light knocking on the front door.

BEULAH (OS)

Hello?

BEULAH enters. BEULAH YORN is the nice grandma every little kid wishes to have. SHE’s polite, cares about other people’s feelings, and always goes out of HER way to avoid upsetting others. SHE does have a habit of rambling on at an incredible speed, but it's a natural reaction to loneliness.

Hello? Anyone here?

Beat.

BEULAH sits down on the customer’s chair in front of the computer desk and calmly waits.

SAM enters from one of the offices with a coffee mug in hand. HE doesn't notice BEULAH at all, because HE's totally consumed in HIS own world. Perhaps HE's reenacting his favorite sci-fi movie moment (i.e., the attack of the Death Star in "A New Hope") . HE finally gets HIS cup of coffee, tastes it, and then walks back to the office HE came from.

BEULAH

Coffee’s a nice way to follow a good lunch, don’t you think?

SAM

Hah. Who can stop drinking coffee is the real question. If I had a penny for every cup I've--
SAM stops and quickly looks at BEULAH in surprise.

SAM
Who are you?

BEULAH stands to shake SAM’s hand.

BEULAH
Oh, right. Introductions first. I’m Mrs. Yorn. Nice to meet you.

SAM
Nice to meet you, too. What are you doing here? Not that you don't belong here, I mean you have a right to be here, it's not like you don't but...what are you doing here?

BEULAH notices SAM's shabby attire.

BEULAH
I’m here for my appointment. I'm right on time, but if it’s a bad time, I can come back later. It’s no problem.

SAM
Oh, you’re here for your mandatory therapy session. Okay. I’m...Mr. Henry O'Connell. It's nice to meet you.

BEULAH
O'Connell? You don’t look Irish.

SAM
Black Irish. My mother's side?

BEULAH
Ah. Hmm. I don't think it--

SAM
I’ll go wake up my associate. He's the one in charge of scheduling meetings. I'm sure he'll be very sorry he didn't meet you at the door.

BEULAH
No one needs to apologize to me. I’m fine.

SAM
Please, have a cup of coffee. Relax. Be comfortable. Make yourself at home.

SAM exits.
BEULAH

Don’t mind if I do.

BEULAH pours a cup of coffee and sits down. Offstage, SAM and JONNY can be heard arguing with each other.

JONNY enters in full suit, followed by SAM. It’s obvious JONNY was still sleeping and was perhaps awakened too early.

JONNY

I don't know what the hell...hello, ma'am. How are you doing today?

BEULAH

I'm fine. Thank you for asking. My, aren't you a well-dressed, handsome man?

JONNY

Thank you. My name's Bill Teetonka, and we welcome you to "Your Last Friend, Inc". You say you were scheduled for your mandatory therapy session today?

BEULAH

Yes, but like I told Mr. O'Connell, I can come tomorrow.

JONNY

No, that's okay. I just didn't remember I had someone scheduled...this early.

JONNY goes to the computer desk and checks his schedule.

BEULAH

Early? Good gracious, the sun's already starting its way back down the sky.

SAM

He means earlier than our normal sessions...most sessions. Earlier than most of our sessions.

BEULAH

I don't like to contradict anyone, but I got a call yesterday saying to be here today, and here I am.

JONNY

Ooooh. Okay, yes. You are scheduled for today.

BEULAH

I knew I was.
JONNY
I apologize for not being prepared. Ever since the ban was lifted, the phone's been ringing off the hook all night long. You understand, don't you?

BEULAH
You sleep in the same building you work?

JONNY
(Half-beat) Yes. Yes, I do.

JONNY yawns too strongly to focus on what BEULAH has to say.

BEULAH
Good for you. There's absolutely nothing wrong with a man taking pride in his place of business.

JONNY
I'm sorry. What?

SAM
Mrs. Yorn, could I have a word with Mr. Teetonka privately?

BEULAH
It doesn't bother me none.

SAM
Thank you.

JONNY pulls SAM to the side. BEULAH takes out a digital camera and tries to operate it like it was some piece of alien technology.

SAM
What the hell? You were going to sleep right through an appointment? What if she were an inspector or a crazy picketer come to burn the building down?

JONNY
Dude, I'm pushing through a serious hangover right now, and we have an appointment in like ten minutes. I don't know if I can do this twice today.

SAM
Wha...you...What's wrong with you?!
JONNY

Shh!

SAM

You know what? I'm taking care of Mrs. Yorn. You can, I don't know, sit back and rest for our second appointment.

JONNY

You sure you can handle her?

SAM

How hard can it be? You do it.

BEULAH is having some trouble with the camera and accidentally flashes the camera right in HER face. JONNY smiles, nods approvingly, and gives SAM a friendly, hard slap on the back.

SAM

Oww.

JONNY

She's all yours.

SAM and JONNY go back to BEULAH.

SAM

Mrs. Yorn, could we--

BEULAH

If you don't mind taking pictures of me, I'd greatly appreciate it. I'm trying to get as many good pictures of me before I go, and I can't do it all by myself.

BELUAH hands over a camera to SAM.

SAM

Uhm...sure. It's not a problem.

BELUAH

Thank you.
BEULAH constantly poses in modest, fashionable poses and doesn't change them until SAM has taken a picture. JONNY can't help but smile.

SAM
Mrs. Yorn, could we move your appointment to a few weeks from now? We are completely booked for the rest of the week, and I promise if you wait...we'll give you a fifty percent discount for being patient. How does that sound?

BEULAH
Well, I love saving money, but I was hoping to be dead before next week.

Why?

BEULAH
It has to do with why I'm doing this in the first place.

JONNY goes to pour a cup of coffee and watches the show.

BEULAH
You see, I'm old. I've lived my life, and it's been a beautiful life. My dear Vernon, we were made to be with each other. He was my high school sweetheart, and we married very young. That's the way we used to do it back in the day, and we stayed married. Our boys are the most handsome men you ever set your eyes on, and they married young, too. They left me and Vernon to live on our own when they were old enough, and that's the way it was until Vernon passed away about ten years ago. Heart problems. Runs in his family. But I've got six grandchildren now. Five boys and Susie. She's the baby girl of the family. Won a beauty pageant this last spring, and I--

SAM
I'm sorry, but if you have a large family who loves you--

BEULAH
Does this pose look respectable?

SAM
Yes, very much.

SAM takes a photo.

Why do you need our services?
BEULAH
I'm sorry. I must not be making much sense, talking about how good my life is and coming to you two to end it. I have a big family, but they never come to see me. Since Vernon left, I don't have anyone to keep company with anymore.

SAM
Don't you have other old people...friends to hang out with?

BEULAH
I have friends. I go play bridge with Janet and Ellen every Saturday night. Louise's husband is a retired fireman. Ellen's a widow, but her son Aaron still lives with her. I swear, why she doesn't kick that boy out is beyond me.

JONNY
Then you do have people to keep you company.

BEULAH
I do with friends, but my boys are almost never home. Pete was the only one to visit me on Christmas, and his wife is a prissy, stuck-up know-it-all.

SAM
So...have you talked to your family about this? Do they know what you're planning to do?

BEULAH
No, I wouldn't burden them with my problems. That's why I'm here.

SAM
What?

BEULAH
I told them how my health isn't what it used to be, and Jeffrey, the oldest, said he's coming soon to put me in a nursing home near where his family lives.

JONNY
That's nice of him.

BEULAH
I raised my boys right, thank you. But I don't want to be a burden on him. I look fine right now, but soon my age will catch up to me. I have Osteoporosis, Lupus, Diabetes, and some others I don't want to mention. I know what'll happen to me soon, whether I want it to or not. I'll need a personal nurse to help me take my pills, feed me, and even wash me. But I know Jeffrey, and Jeffrey would never allow me to pay someone else to take care of me while I was living with him.
You seem to be very healthy to me.

And very pretty too.

You're so kind.

*BEULAH encourages SAM to take another photo.*

Are you that certain your health is going to fail you soon?

I'm not old as dirt yet, but that day's coming closer and closer. I'll have to go live with my boy and let him treat me like a little baby. Unless you can help me with my problem.

You want us to end your life, because you don't want to be a burden on your family?

Yes.

Well...that won't happen anytime soon. Why do you need to...end your life this week?

I'm getting stuffed next week.

(Half-beat) Come again?

I'm getting stuffed.

With what?

With stuffing, I suppose.

Thanksgiving's in half a year.
BEULAH
No, not with food. I'm getting stuffed, so my family can keep me forever.

_Beat. SAM stops taking pictures._

SAM

BEULAH
I realize that my time on earth is small, but I don't want to leave my grandchildren. I also don't want them to remember me as a sickly, old person who wore diapers. So, I talked to a friend of mine. (to JONNY) A mortician.

JONNY
Oh.

BEULAH
We go back a long way. His son Jeremy is a taxidermist. Beautiful work. Seven of my cats owe their good looks to his skills. Anywho, I asked he could do the same for me, and he said yes, but Jeremy is being shipped off to the Middle East next week. That means if I'm going to get stuffed, I have to die this week. That's why I'm here. That's also why you're taking the pictures. I want to look my best, and Jeremy needs as many good photos he can get.

_SAM tries to process this information, but looks like HE's more likely preparing to have a stroke._

SAM
But...you can't...your family...I...they love you, and you can't....you can't just--

_JONNY walks up to SAM and takes the camera._

JONNY
Let me take this one for you, buddy.

SAM
No, no. I...I have this under control.

JONNY
No, you don't. I'm taking charge. Now, sit.

SAM
But--
JONNY

Sit.

JONNY takes pictures of BEULAH as SAM sits down and ponders over the weirdness of the situation. As JONNY continues taking the pictures, HE tempts BEULAH to pose in more provocative manners, though not totally improper ones.

JONNY

Okay, Mrs. Yorn, I can understand that. You want your family to know that you're never going to leave them.

BEULAH

That's exactly right.

JONNY

However, I'd hate for you to make any rash decisions. That's what the last chance session is all about. Is there anything you wish you could do before you pass on?

BEULAH

Nope. Had a wonderful life, and I'm ready to end it.

JONNY

Give the camera a little more love. Come on, I know you can.

BELUAH pouts HER lips. JONNY takes the picture.

JONNY

There you go. What about a vacation? I hear Florida's very popular this time of year.

BEULAH

Been everywhere I want to be. There's nothing other towns have that this one doesn't.

JONNY

What about your boys? And your friends? They'll miss you not being here in the living flesh, won't they? (half-beat) Can you blink at me like you want me to notice you from across a room? You're doing great, Beulah.

JONNY takes the picture.

BEULAH
Thank you. They're going to miss me no matter when I die.

JONNY
Isn't there anything you want? Something you just had to have, but you couldn't get your hands on? Something you could almost taste, touch, feel, but people kept getting in the way? Anything? Come on, there has to be something.

BEULAH
Well...

JONNY
Go ahead and say it.

BEULAH
No, I can't say that. It doesn't matter, anyway. It's too late.

SAM
What's too late?

JONNY
Mrs. Yorn, Beulah, you can tell us. We're your friends.

BEULAH
It's silly, but Vernon and I married so young. We were made to be with each other, straight from birth, but...he was the only boyfriend I ever had. He's all I needed, but I always wondered what another man would have been like. Oh, I shouldn't have said that. It's not like I could do it anymore.

JONNY
Who says?

BEULAH
Mother Nature.

JONNY
Mother Nature says a lot of things: grow up, have kids, grow old, and on and on. Don't you want one last fling before you go off into the darkness of the night?

BEULAH
I do, but Mother Nature took that special pleasure away from this old woman a long time ago.

JONNY
Are you sure?
JONNY moves the camera much closer to BEULAH, who blushes.

SAM

Viagra!

JONNY

What?

SAM

Viagra. You can take medically prescribed Viagra.

BEULAH

Isn't that for randy, old men with young trophy wives?

SAM

And women. It works on both sexes. It's been medically proven.

BEULAH

I'm not comfortable taking a medicine meant for men.

JONNY

Uhhh...if they have Viagra for men, they must have something for the women. Right, Mr. O'Connell?

SAM

They have to!

Beat.

BEULAH

It'd be nice. Old Tucker has been giving me the eye for the past five years, asking me to breakfast at Denny's and giving me flowers. I think I'd like to have a little fun before I go. That's not selfish, is it?

JONNY

No. Not at all.

SAM

It would be selfish not to do it.

BEULAH

Okay. I'll do it.

JONNY

Good for you. Enjoy all you can, and we'll be waiting here when you're finally ready to pass on.
JONNY hands BEULAH back HER camera.

BEULAH
Thank you two very much. You're good boys. Now, where do you think I can get this women's Viagra?

SAM
A gynecologist?

JONNY
Any doctor can get it for you, I bet. We're happy we could help you.

BEULAH
So am I. You two be good now. Especially you, Bill.

JONNY
We sure will, Mrs. Yorn. And hey, give me a call when Old Tucker gets tuckered out.

JONNY winks. BEULAH blushes again.

JONNY
Yeah, you know what I'm talking about.

BEULAH exits.

JONNY and SAM exhale from relief.

SAM refills HIS cup of coffee.

JONNY
Man, that was awkward.

SAM
Awkward? Awkward? When Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia learned that they were brother and sister who French kissed, that was awkward. This is a whole new world of very, very wrong.

JONNY
I don't know. She looks like she still has some spunk. You know what I mean?

SAM
I think I'm going to be sick.
JONNY
I'm pulling your leg, man. I don't want to even picture it in my head. By the way, good save on the Viagra thing.

SAM
I-I don't know what came over me. "Viagra!" Must be all those commercials.

JONNY
The commercials. Sure. I'm going back to sleep. Night.

SAM
Jonny?

JONNY
What, Sam?

SAM
Our next appointment?

JONNY
JONNY looks at HIS wristwatch.

Damn.

SAM
When is she scheduled for?

JONNY
JONNY sits down in front of the computer and looks at the file.

Should be here already. Guess I'll look at her file

SAM
You were right.

JONNY
About what?

SAM
We have almost ninety customers and hardly any walk-ins. You're doing it. You're actually making this work. We're almost home free.

JONNY
Told you.
Well, God be praised. A miracle!

What?

You're smiling.

I smile...on occasion.

No, you don't. Tell me what's up?

It's...we could really pull this off. Not here, but once we relocate to a different state. Like, I wouldn't mind doing this for a living.

Speak for yourself. I'm the one keeping us from becoming murderers.

Hey! I thought of the Viagra solution while you were shooting photos for the "Mentally Deranged Grandmother's Calendar".

True. You did do that.

I feel positive. Like we're doing something good. I like this. It's a nice change.

SAM notices REBECCA walking to the door.

She's arrived.

Good. I hope she's as sexy as her picture. I can't tell you how many times I've been burned by Photoshop. A hundred-thirty pounds and a natural blond my ass, SexyBabe69.
SAM
What are you doing? Please don't hit on the suicidal customers.

JONNY
Worked on Mrs. Yorn, didn't' it?

SAM
That was pure coincidence--

REBECCA enters wearing elaborate gothic wear and holding a hand-held video camera. She throws down a full backpack on the ground next to the desk. SHE is the ignored child, the generation "X" refugee, and the self-made artiste of coffee shops and online poetry blogs.

SHE walks as if floating in the wind, mostly to attract even more attention with improvisational dance moves. JONNY can't help but notice HER every move and bodily curvature.

SHE is recording everything.

REBECCA
And now I enter society's convenient slaughter house, adorned with all the necessities to charm the sheep to the slaughter.

JONNY
Helloooo, my name is Bill Teetonka, this is my associate Henry O'Connell, and I assume you're Rebecca Tener, right?

REBECCA
I...am...darkness wrapped around melting snow, dripping with tears and falling into bliss.

SAM
Do you also go by the name Rebecca?

REBECCA
I do.

JONNY
Good. Now, we have a policy against cameras in our place of business, so I'm afraid you'll have to turn that off and erase everything you recorded.
Wrong.

I'm wrong? How's that?

On your website, it explicitly says I can take photographs or video recordings of my travels to the beyond.

That's for when you're actually passing on.

The devil is in the details, and I can film or record anything I want.

We'll have to inform our Web designers of that little typo soon, won't we Mr. O'Connell? Please sit down Rebecca, and we'll start your mandatory therapy session now.

I can't sit down. I won't. I must move freely, as a torn spider web caught in a wind storm.

REBECCA dances even more extravagantly.

(whispers to JONNY) Oh, frell. We have another crazy one.

(to SAM) Shh! I got this. (to REBECCA) Rebecca, you know what the last chance session is all about, right?

It's the last chance to allow myself to be caught in the illusion of reality and deny myself the ultimate release.

That's one way of saying it. We have to make sure you won't regret going through with our services.

If I'm dead, I'll be unable to regret anything. I'll be unable to do anything. I will simply be unmade.
SAM
That doesn't scare you? Not even the slightest bit?

REBECCA
Hah! What have I to be afraid of? Thousands of people die every day. One by one, their stars burn out of the sky. Why should one be afraid of the inevitable?

JONNY
It's not *inevitable* for everyone. It says in your profile you're not sick or in any kind of pain. Actually, you look good...really, really healthy...and verrrrry hot--

*SAM shoves JONNY.*

JONNY
(to *SAM*, whispered) What?

REBECCA
Only my body is young. My soul is forever, and my mind is beyond time. The flesh is fleeting...and I'm nineteen years old, which makes me a legal adult and capable of making this decision for myself.

JONNY
Wow. Nineteen, huh?

SAM
What's your reason for dying, Rebecca?

REBECCA
Why? Why not? Must I live in this boring, useless world any longer than I choose? All us humans existing like ants trying to outrun the boy with the magnifying glass, only to die unappreciated and alone. Never having a true connection with one another, not even our parents. Parents who are self-centered, egotistical, and don't give a damn about their daughter as long as she doesn't embarrass them too much to their rich friends. I mean, what kind of a person do you have to be to tell your daughter you won't go to her slam poetry performance because you don't want to miss your weekly wine-tasting party? Losers.

JONNY
You're doing this to get back at your parents?

REBECCA
Not *just* them.

SAM
But they are some of the reason. This isn't just a way to get their attention, is it?
REBECCA
Not only that...but yes. Is that so bad? (to JONNY) Am I a bad girl?

JONNY

Uhhhhhh--

SAM
I'm sorry, but we're not helping anyone commit suicide, because they want to get back at mommy and daddy.

*SAM walks over to the computer desk and starts typing on REBECCA's file.*

REBECCA
What? You...you have to. I paid you.

SAM
We'll refund your money immediately.

REBECCA
You can't do this!

SAM
I'm sorry, but policy is policy. I guess.

REBECCA
I want to speak with your supervisor.

SAM
I'm the only supervisor here "Ms. Smells-like-teen-spirit", and I say "Denied".

REBECCA
That's not fair!

SAM
I know it isn't. Life isn't fair. Please come back when you have a life-threatening illness. Thank you, and have a nice day.

REBECCA
I'll kill myself then! I don't need you! I've tried it before: pills, drowning, wrist-cutting. See! Here, look at my scars.

*REBECCA holds up HER wrists.*

JONNY

Damn!
REBECCA
But every time I try, the house servants go and do something stupid like mouth-to-mouth or call 911. I wanted the professional touch, but I'll go jump off a bridge if you won't help me.

SAM
Go ahead then, but "Your Last Friend, Inc." will not be a part of it.

JONNY
*(whispered to SAM)* What are you doing? Remember the hundred grand?

SAM
We can turn down at least one customer, and I'm not spending all day listening to a little girl whine about how daddy didn't give her a Corvette for her eighteenth birthday. I can tell she's not going to kill herself.

JONNY
Rebecca, he didn't mean that. Please, calm down. You don't really want to kill yourself, do you?

REBECCA
Yes I do! I'll...I'll do it right here! Right now!

*REBECCA goes to HER backpack and opens it. SHE then takes out wilted rose petals, a black cloth with arcane symbols on it, and a small stereo.*

SAM
Oh, no you're not!

REBECCA
Watch me!

*REBECCA folds out the cloth and sits on it, and then plays gothic rock music on the radio, such as by The Rasmus.*

JONNY
Woah! Woah, woah, woah!

SAM
Are you completely insane?!

JONNY
Sam! I mean, Henry. Calm down. *(whispered)* Shut the hell up and let me do my thing.
(whispered) But she--

SAM

JONNY

(whispered) Shut up! Shut it.

REBECCA scatters the rose petals around HER.

JONNY

Rebecca, I apologize for my associate. He's...going through a nasty divorce right now, and he doesn't take well to strong willed women.

REBECCA

(to SAM) I should tell my daddy to sue you right now, you misogynistic pig!

SAM

On what charge?!

REBECCA

On the charge that you're stupid!

SAM

Oh yeah, that's mature.

JONNY

(to SAM) Stop making the situation worse!

SAM

I'm only saying what's true--

REBECCA then takes out a long knife out of HER backpack and waves it around as if in a ceremony. JONNY and SAM jump away.

JONNY

Oh, shit!

SAM

Watch out! She's crazy!

JONNY

Don't say that word around her!
REBECCA
Oh, dark spirits of the night, my spirit comes to join you in bliss!

REBECCA moves to cut HERSELF.

JONNY
Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!

Beat.

REBECCA
Why?

JONNY
Can you give me a chance to talk you out of this? One chance. That's all I'm asking for.

REBECCA
Why should I? You and your friend are practically pushing me into it.

SAM is about to say something, but JONNY motions HIM to be quiet. JONNY pushes through HIS fear and flirts with REBECCA, and it actually works.

JONNY
Please? Please listen to me. I'd really appreciate it. I'll listen to every little word you have to say after I'm though. I'll even help film it. Promise.

REBECCA
Fine. Whatever.

JONNY
I understand where you're coming from. You want to get back at your parents. Kill yourself, and they'll be crying their eyes out for months, right?

REBECCA
More like a year.

JONNY
They'll look so sad at the funeral. Your father will wear his best black suit.

REBECCA
Mom will probably buy a new dress as gaudy as her personality is banal.
JONNY
The casket will look like it was carved out of stone.

REBECCA
Marble. It'll be marble with a glass window on top, so everyone has to look at how lifeless I've become, like a gothic Snow White endlessly waiting for true love.

JONNY
The family preacher will give the best sermon he's ever given in his whole life.

REBECCA
He'll see my perfectly adorned corpse and question his belief in his cruel maker.

JONNY
And everyone will cry and feel sorry they didn't do anything to help you.

REBECCA
Yes. That's what I want. You understand me.

JONNY
I certainly do. And after the funeral, when everyone goes home to rest, then what?

Huh?

REBECCA
Then what?

Then...they'll stay sad forever?

JONNY
I doubt it. After the funeral, your parents will start forgetting you. People'll tell them to do it, too. Part of the "moving on" process, you know? Yeah, they'll cry at first, but they'll eventually stop. They'll throw parties again, inviting all their friends over for a good time, and they'll forget all about you. Until someone brings you up. Your parents will look a little sad, tell their story about their wild and crazy daughter, and then off to get a new glass of champagne.

REBECCA
Oh, my God. You're right. You're so right. I'll be their little conversation piece.

JONNY
Is that the revenge you want?
REBECCA
Hell, no.
JONNY
Didn't think so.

REBECCA stops moving the blade around, totally focused on JONNY.

REBECCA
Then what?  What can I do?
JONNY
I'll tell you what you can do.  You can stop caring what they think.

REBECCA
I don't care what they think about me.
JONNY
Then why are you doing this?

REBECCA
I...I need to shake off this mortal coil and become the magnificent spirit I know am fated to become.

SAM
(whispered)  Ridiculous.
JONNY
Before you do that, why don't you have some fun?

REBECCA
Fun?
JONNY
Yeah.  You know, some real fun.

REBECCA
Like what?
JONNY
If your parents really don't care about you, then you can do whatever you want. You can make your own TV show on local cable and share your poems with everyone. You can rebel against the "Man" and spray-paint skull heads on a police station. You can join NASCAR and smoke crack and ram your car into a wall, for all you care. Wait, no...for all your parents care. The best way of living is not caring about other people's opinions about you. Do whatever the hell you want. Am I right?

REBECCA
Yes. Yes! Why should I end my life? I didn't do anything wrong.

JONNY
Not a thing.

REBECCA
They're the ones who did something wrong!

JONNY
You know it.

REBECCA
They should suffer for making me...suffer. Yeah!

JONNY
Payback's a bitch, and so are you!

REBECCA
You're damn right!

REBECCA kisses JONNY, mashing HER face against HIS.

REBECCA
Thank you for helping me see the light that is my core. How can I ever repay you?

JONNY
Well, I can think of a few things.

SAM grabs all of REBECCA's stuff and shoves it into HER backpack, all except the knife.
SAM
Glad we came to an understanding--We'll refund your money, and you don't report us to anyone.--Agreed?--It was nice to meet you, and as always, you have a friend in "Your Last Friend, Inc."--(to HIMSELF) What's with all this stuff? Does Tim Burton know you're borrowing his dress? You look like a gothic Oompa-Loompa.

When it's all in, HE rushes over to REBECCA and pushes HER through the door, along with HER bag.

SAM
Goodbye, now.

REBECCA
Be seeing you, Bill.

JONNY
You know it.

REBECCA exits.

SAM
You're unbelievable.

JONNY
What?

SAM
She was going to kill us!

JONNY
No, she wasn't. She was going to kill herself, and I don't think she was that serious about it.

SAM
Are you kidding me?!

SAM remembers to lock the door.

JONNY
We're fine, Sam.

SAM
I should call the cops on her.

JONNY
Now you're just being stupid. Whatever. That's two down in one day.
Yes. Another day of safety. (Beat.) You're very good at this. Actually, you're amazing.

That's what she said.

Oh, ha-ha. I mean, you practically saved our lives. How do you do it? How do you convince these kinds of people, losers, the elderly, the crazy, to want to live again? How's that possible?

It's not hard. Just give them the confidence to go after what they think they can't have.

I...Hmm.

SAM goes over to the computer.

What are you doing?

Looking over our new customers. Preparing for the future. Trying to slow my heart beat. You know, work stuff.

You do that. I'm taking a nap.

You just had your life threatened. You're still tired after that?

The day you drink five shots of tequila with beer chasers is the day you can tell me when I can and can't sleep.

I'm sorry I asked. I'm assuming you want me to wake you at three?

Thanks.

JONNY exits into the office. SAM takes a moment to breathe, which turns into a smirk.
I don't think I'll need to drink coffee ever again.

SAM looks through the customer files, making mental notes of who is who and on what day they're coming. Suddenly, HE comes across a very familiar name. JONNY enters.

Did you throw away my pillow?

SAM

That's odd.

JONNY

It is not! I've had that pillow for five years. I've never had a better pillow than--

Not that.

SAM

What? Then what are you talking about?

JONNY

No, this has to be incorrect.

SAM

What is?

JONNY

It's a coincidence. That's what it is.

SAM

What's a coincidence? Sam, what's a coincidence? Do we have a problem?

JONNY

SAM looks as if HE's seen a video recording of the death of a loved one.

Dude!

SAM

It's Jessica.
JONNY
Jessica who?

SAM
Jessica.

JONNY
You mean *Jessica* Jessica? Your sister Jessica?

*SAM nods HIS head.*

JONNY
She send you an email or something? She want to hang out?

*SAM shakes HIS head.*

JONNY
Then what? What's the big deal with Jessica?

SAM
She's a customer.

JONNY
Of ours?

SAM
Yes.

JONNY
Why? What's her problem?

SAM
She has cancer. My big sister's dying of cancer, and she wants us to kill her.

END ACT I, SCENE III

END ACT I
ACT II, SCENE I

The next day. SAM, this time in a suit, is sitting at the desk and staring off in the distance, trying to solve an unsolvable personal dilemma. JONNY is drinking a cup of coffee, being with HIS friend for moral support.

JONNY
So...she's going to be here any minute. Okay. (Beat) How are we going to do this, Sam?

I don't know.

JONNY
I mean... I could be my usual spin doctor self, but you don't want me to do that.

SAM
Not really.

JONNY
It's your job then. You change her mind.

SAM
If I can.

JONNY
You have to.

SAM
She has terminal cancer, Jonny! How do I convince her everything's alright in the face of something like that?

JONNY
You remind her of her family. You remind her of her loved ones. You ask her what she's always wanted to do, but never could. You ask her if she has regrets. Come on, Sam, you know how this is done.

SAM
If I couldn't get her to stop the drugs, then how am I going to get her to stop this? How am I going to solve this problem?
JONNY
It's not your fault. No one knew she was dying, until you found out from her profile, and that was an accident. Getting the jitters is natural, but you have to push through it. If you don't, and she wants the suicide, then we lose our business.

And I lose my sister.

SAM

JONNY notices JESSICA walking to the door.

JONNY
Here she is. You ready?

SAM gives JONNY a stern look.

JONNY
Let's do this.

JESSICA EVERETT enters, wearing very baggy clothing. JESSICA is a party woman to HER core. That was until SHE got cancer and HER body started to shrivel away. SHE still goes to parties, but the sickness mixed with other people's pity usually pushes HER off.

SAM
Jessica? Is that really you?

JESSICA
Hey, Sam. I didn't believe it, but here you are. I didn't think I'd really see you here. And don't you look sharp in that nice suit of yours?

SAM
Thank you.

JESSICA

SAM
Yes, I remember. Thanks. I mean....you look good too. You look thin...I mean lean or...uhm...fit?
JESSICA
Yeah. Who knew chemo was my ticket to getting thin? I haven't been this thin since...never.

JONNY
You could still lose a few pounds.

JESSICA
Why, is that Jonny? After all these years! Come over here and give me a bear hug.

_JESSICA and reluctant JONNY hug._

JONNY
Hey, look at that. My arms can finally touch.

JESSICA
Not too tight. I don't want you straining yourself.

_Beat. A silence filled with unease and awkward resentment from SAM._

JESSICA
Sam, come over here.

_JESSICA and SAM hug uncomfortably at first, but SAM eventually gives into it._

JESSICA
Been awhile.

SAM
Yes, it has.

JESSICA
That's kind of my fault. Since I found out I had the "Big C", I've stayed away from family.

SAM
Jessica, why didn't you tell anyone? Why didn't you tell me? If I would have known, I'd have helped you. Are you taking care of yourself? Do you even know what medications you're--

JESSICA
Now see, that's the reason why I didn't tell you. I don't need anyone's pity. I never have. Keep it to yourself!
I wasn't trying to make you angry.

Well, you did and you are!

I'm sorry.

For what? You didn't pour all that alcohol down my throat. Or give me Daddy's bad genes, did you? Did you?!

Of course he didn't. Say, Jessica, how are you handling yourself? You good? You on Medicaid or something?

Yeah. I'm poor as hell, so the government takes care of me.

Good. Glad to hear it.

Hey, Sam?

What?

I...uh, I need...some money...again.

You do? I'm guessing the last amount I lent you didn't help much.

Had things to spend it on. Like food and whatnot. You know how it is.

Food. Right. How much do you need this time?

Really? No questions or shouting or--
How much do you need?

JESSICA

Enough to cover your bill.

SAM

I guess you'd want that in store credit, wouldn't you?

JESSICA

Yeah. I do.

Beat.

JESSICA

What?

SAM

Why are you here? You don't have to throw away--

JESSICA

If you don't mind, I want to get this over with. I have things to do later.

SAM

Sure. Whatever you say.

Beat.

JESSICA

I'm waiting.

SAM

Sorry. The point of the mandatory therapy session is to determine if you are indeed ready to...pass on. We...It's company policy to help our customers make the right decision, and I don't want you going through with this before you've settled your life out. Have you settled your life out?

JESSICA

What do you mean?

SAM

What about Mom and Dad? Or me? Were you going to tell any of us?
No. Didn't feel like it.

SAM

What do you mean you didn't--

JONNY

I think Sam's trying to ask you if you'd feel bad if anything was left unsaid between you and your other relatives.

JESSICA

You know me, Jonny. I don't hold back. It's why daddy kicked me out of the trailer at seventeen. I say and do what's on my mind all the time. I don't have any secrets.

SAM

Then what do you call this? I had a right to know. I could have found a way to help you. Another doctor, better health insurance--

JESSICA

I got pancreatic cancer! The kind you can't remove. You get it, you die. That's it. The End. I would have OD'd on my own, just to get it over with, but...I don't know. I couldn't do it. It's not in me to give up, you know? I need someone who'll do it for me. Someone I can trust. Like you.

Beat.

JONNY

Pancreatic Cancer. Is that what the doctors diagnosed you with?

JESSICA

Yeah, that's what they said.

SAM

How much longer till you...you know?

JESSICA

Not long. I stopped chemo a week ago.

SAM

Why would you ever do that? You're just going to lay down and die?

JESSICA

I don't want to live my last days sick in a bed and crying from pain. If I'm gonna die, then I'm gonna die my way.
SAM
But...you don't know you have to die. We can take you to another doctor. Get some
other treatments for you. You don't know everything about your condition. You--

JESSICA
Sam! I can die as a pile of skin and bones, or I can die in peace. If you were in my
shoes, which one would you chose? Huh? You like rotting away in a hospital bed?
Because I sure as hell don't! And screw you for telling me what to do!

SAM stands and moves away, ashamed,
angry, and scared.

JESSICA
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Sam. I didn't mean to be so mean about it. I...I didn't want you
to know at all, but God works in mysterious ways. You know?

JESSICA stands and walks over to SAM.

JESSICA
Sam, I'm dying, and nothing's gonna change that. (Beat). Come here. I said come here.

JESSICA hugs SAM until HE hugs back.

SAM
I'm sorry.

JESSICA
There you go apologizing again.

SAM
I'm so, so sorry.

JESSICA
You mean sorry-looking.

JESSICA and SAM laugh.

JESSICA
I'm gonna leave now. You tell me when I can get the treatment done.

JONNY
You're not going to change your mind? You sure you're ready to go through with this?

JESSICA
Jonny, I'm not smart, but I know when to give up.
JONNY
Your last chance session isn't over yet. Maybe you should--

SAM
Jonny, let her leave.

JESSICA
I'll be fine. You'll both see. A couple nights' drinking, and I'll be hurting so bad, I'll be begging for someone to put me out of my misery.

Lucky you found us. Right?

JESSICA hugs JONNY.

JESSICA
Sam?

Sam?

Yes?

Beat.

JESSICA
Please, don't hate me. This is the only thing I can do.

JESSICA discretely wipes away some tears.

Talk to you boys later.

JESSICA
See you, Jessica.

Later.

JESSICA
Later.

JESSICA exits.

Goodbye.

JONNY goes over to the phone and starts dialing.
SAM

Who are you calling?

JONNY

U-Haul. We got to pack and get the hell out of here.

SAM

Why?

JONNY

Why? Because your sister walked out of our office today thinking we'd give her assisted suicide. Your sister, someone who can ID us by our real names, is expecting us to hold up our part of the bargain. We have to go.

SAM

We're not leaving.

JONNY

You going to talk to her later and convince her to live? (to phone) Never mind. Wrong number.

JONNY hangs up the phone.

JONNY

Are you?

Beat.

JONNY

Sam, can you promise me you can make Jessica change her mind?

SAM shakes HIS head.

JONNY

Then we're leaving. Now.

JONNY dials again.

JONNY

I knew we should have never done business near family. (to phone) Hello? Yeah, I can hold.

SAM

We're not leaving anywhere.
What are you talking about? We have to leave.

We're...not...leaving.

*JONNY hangs up the phone.*

What are you thinking of doing?

I have to help Jessica.

I'm not a murderer. You're not a murderer. We're not doing anything to Jessica, except leaving her out in the cold like all the rest.

I'm not doing that to her.

Good God, Sam! Are you telling me you're going to kill her?

I...I don't know what I'm going to do. I...I...My sister told me she was dying and asked me to kill her. I'm a little confused right now!

Sam, think about this. Really think. This is a scam. It's not real. "Your Last Friend, Inc" is a thing we made up to steal some people's money.

Steal from people suffering from pain and disease.

It isn't our fault if the state of Arizona changes the laws on us at the last minute.

But this *is* our fault!

Hey, I'll take the blame for not looking up Arizona's laws better. I accept that, okay? My bad. So now that it isn't your fault, will you please move your ass?
SAM

No.

JONNY

No?

SAM

I can't do this alone. You have to help me.

JONNY

Sam, listen to me, and listen real good. I've done some things I'm not proud of, but I am not going to help you kill your sister. Got it?

Beat.

JONNY

Good.

SAM

I'll turn you in.

JONNY

Say that again?

SAM

If you don't help me, then I'll inform the Feds about our operations.

JONNY gets very close to SAM.

JONNY

We'll go to jail. Federal prison. And we'll stay there a long, long time. All our enterprises will be found out, and we'll have hundreds of people wanting us beaten up or dead. Not to mention that Rodrigo will probably me if I can't pay the ten grand we're short. Now, I'm not a man of morals, but Jessica's not getting any help from me. If that means I go to prison, then that's what happens. Are you okay to give yourself up for Jessica?

SAM steps back.

JONNY

Well, are you?

END ACT II, SCENE I
ACT II, SCENE II

The next day. There are boxes piled on each other with labels like "brochures", "documents", and "supplies" against the wall, and some mail is lying on the computer desk.

SFX: The phone rings until the answering machine picks up.

JONNY (OV)
Hello, you've reached “Your Last Friend, Inc.”. We help when no one else can. Unfortunately, we are helping another customer and cannot answer your call right now. If you would please leave a short message along with your name and phone number, we will call you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience.

SFX: The answering machine beeps, and the caller hangs up.

SAM enters with more mail in HIS hand. HE looks through them slowly, then drops them on the desk and has another moment of self reflection. This one looks like it might break HIM.

JONNY enters with another box.

How are we doing on time?

JONNY

SAM

Were ahead of schedule.

JONNY

Really? Good. Let's take a break.

JONNY exits, then reenters with a can of beer.

JONNY

Here's a toast to all those poor bastards who wanted our services. May they find the end they all deserve.

JONNY takes another swig.  

310
SAM
This isn't right.

JONNY
Well, you drink your coffee when you're stressed, and I drink my beer. To each his own.

SAM
I can't do this.

JONNY
What are you talking about? (Beat) Sam, you okay? Sam, are you cool?

SAM
No, I am not cool. I'm as far from cool as one person can possibly be right now. Okay?

JONNY
Okay, okay. I was just saying a little prayer, but now I'm finished. No need to attack me for it.

Beat.

JONNY
Sam? Sam? You need to pull yourself together. I know you're feeling bad, but hold it in. We need to get the hell out of here before--

SAM
You're the worst friend I've ever had. You know that?

JONNY
I'm the only friend you had, and what the hell do you mean by that?

SAM
You want to know what I mean by that?

JONNY
Yeah. Spell it out for me.

SAM
Okay. I needed your help, and you said no.

JONNY
What the hell was I suppose to say? You wanted me to kill Jessica!!

SAM
I ask you for one thing--
JONNY

Are you crazy? You're losing your mind--

SAM

One thing! I've never asked you for anything personal before, and the single time I do, you bail on me. Thanks a lot, friend.

JONNY

So what now? We're not friends anymore? We split up? End of friendship?

SAM

Maybe. Maybe.

JONNY

What, you mean this for real? You know...never mind.

SAM

Say it.

No.

JONNY

Say it!

SAM

Say it!

JONNY

I might not be a good friend. I'm pretty sure I'm a bad one, but I'd never ask you for what you asked me. No real friend would ever ask that. Ever.

SAM

Who else do I have to ask, Jonny? I've got no one but you.

Beat.

JONNY goes back to drinking HIS beer.
SAM starts putting stuff from the computer desk into a box.

SFX: The phone rings until the answering machine picks up.

JONNY (OV)

Hello, you've reached “Your Last Friend, Inc.”. We help when no one else can. Unfortunately, we are helping another customer and cannot answer your call right now. If you would please leave a short message along with your name and phone number, we will call you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience.
SFX: The answering machine beeps.

JESSICA (OV)
Uh, hey Jonny. Nice voice you got there.

SAM and JONNY stop and listen.

JESSICA (OV)
Anyway, I was calling, because I'm not going through with it. I'm still dying, but I thought it wasn't fair to ask Sam to help me. I don't know. Seems like too much to ask your family. I want Sam to know that I miss him, and I'll try and visit him sometime. You hear that, Sam? Your big sister Jessica's gonna mooch off you when I get the chance. I guess that's about it. Thing's probably gonna cut me off pretty soon. Take care and--

SFX: The answering machine beeps.

Beat.

JONNY chuckles a little at the ridiculousness of fate, and SAM eventually chuckles too.

JONNY
Guess we were worried about nothing after all.

SAM
It seems so.

JONNY
Still too late. Website's down and I still owe Rodrigo the money.

SAM
I know.

Beat.

JONNY
I'll go back to packing.

SAM
Jonny?
What?

JONNY

If Jessica didn't really want to go through with it, if we convinced her to continue living, what would have happened?

SAM

We probably wouldn't close the shop.

JONNY

No, I mean what would have happened between us and Jessica? How would I feel whenever I looked at her and knew she was depending on me to give her what no one else could? How could I ever look her in the face ever again?

JONNY

Don't do this. Don't be hard on yourself, man.

SAM

Why shouldn't I be? You realize what we were doing? This wasn't a bad online investment or a fake lottery ticket. We were selling the right to die with dignity. Who are we to take that right away from people?

JONNY

We weren't taking it away. And who says we were selling death? I started this idea to sell hope, and I sold it by the tons. You saw their names and their credit cards. I got to talk to these people, all eighty-seven of them. Do you know how many of them cried for joy? They thanked me over and over again, and it made me feel pretty damn good.

What about now?

JONNY

What about now?

SAM

We're abandoning the business. You're not going to refund their money. Are you?

JONNY

No.

SAM

What do you think they're going to say when they realize what happened?
JONNY
Okay, so all those people will want to kick in my balls. I accept that. That's fair, but I never thought I had to be.

SAM
Be what? Fair?

JONNY
Yeah. You said it yourself, man. We're thieves. We screw people over for a living. I always knew that, but you didn't.

SAM
Whatever.

JONNY goes back to packing, but JONNY knocks down whatever's in SAM's hands.

JONNY
No, not "whatever". You thought all the people we stole from were rich bastards with too much money on their hands...or the jerks in high school who beat the shit out of us. Not everyone deserves to get screwed over, Sam.

SAM
If it's so obvious, then why didn't I realize this before?

JONNY
Because. You're the brains. You sit at a computer and add numbers. You don't look into these people's eyes and lie right to their faces. I do that for us. That's why I'm the balls.

SAM
But I want to be different. I mean...the whole reason why I started stealing was because I thought if someone was stupid enough to fall for our lies, then they got what they deserved. I'm scared to think what we have in store for us.

JONNY stretches as HE walks around and thinks. HE goes to take another sip from HIS beer, but HE puts it down.

JONNY
So what are you saying? You want to quit? Over ten years working together, and you want to throw it all away?

SAM
What is there to throw away?
JONNY paces around the office. Once again, HE has to chuckle about the ridiculous situation.

It was an awesome scam.

SAM

It was.

JONNY

It was like gold in my hands. Perfect.

SAM

I know.

JONNY

You really quitting the game?

SAM

I'm really quitting.

JONNY

You're totally sure about this? I can't have you quit now and a month later want back in. It doesn't work that way. If you're out, you're out. No crying about it later.

SAM

I know. I'm still retiring.

JONNY

Damn. Jessica, coming in here and screwing all our shit up. I'm going to miss her.

SAM

I will too.

JONNY holds out his hand.

JONNY

It was a good run.

SAM and JONNY shakes hands.

SAM

It was.

THEY shake, but SAM stares at JONNY.
What?

I'm going to need the money.

*JONNY laughs.*

You're what?

I need all the money we made.

What the hell for?

I'm going to give our customers a refund.

I'm sorry. I can't hear you. Are you speaking English right now? *Refund?*

Yes. We're giving it all back.

Why the hell would I ever do that?

It's not ours.

That's usually the case when you steal it.

I won't be able to live with myself if we don't give it back.

And I won't be able to live without my legs!

We're giving it back. You owe me this.

No, I don't. Not this much.
Yes, you do.

_JONNY looks like greed and conscience are having a battle in HIS cranium._

Jonny.

No.

Jonny!

I said no!

_Beat._

You're not going to let this go, are you?

Jonny's going to be pissed.

I know. Blame it on me.

I am! I'm going to tell him you stole it and ran off.

Will he actually believe that?

No! I'll have to sleep with one eye open for half a year, but...hell, it's not like I don't have five other loan sharks hunting me down. What's one more...even if he is part of the Mexican Mafia. But...I figure I owe you more for getting you into this situation. After this, we're even, okay?
Okay.

Then fine. Take the money. I guess you earned it.

Thank you. We're doing the right thing.

First time for everything, isn't there?

_JONNY drinks the rest of the beer, crushes the can, and throws it into the basket._

What are you going to do after this?

After everything settles? I don't know. That girl Rebecca and I hit it off last night in some crazy goth/poetry bar.

Rebecca Tener? Our client? The one who tried to kill us?

Yeah. She's the one. She's crazy as hell, but she keeps me on my toes. Actually, last night she kept me on my knees. She's got this crazy leather--

Woah! Keep it to yourself.

I've got a little bit of money on the side. Might rent an apartment, see how things turn out. She asked me to be her manager.

Her manager?

She has a band. "Ripped Asunder".

Are they talented?
JONNY shrugs.

What are you going to do?

Beat.

I'm going home.

Your home?

Yes.

Tell everyone at the trailer park I said "Hey". Your mom and dad, too.

They'd freak if they knew I was still friends with you.

Then tell them I said, "Go to hell."

THEY laugh.

I'm going to miss having you around nagging me all the time.

I can't say the same.

SAM smiles. JONNY picks up a box.

Get back to packing.

JONNY exits.

Be there in a minute. Still have some files to organize.

SAM goes to the computer and types away.
SFX: Phone rings.

SAM answers the phone.

SAM
Uhm... (to HIMSELF) Why'd I answer the phone?! (to the phone) Hello, you've reached “Your Last Friend, Inc.”. We help when no one else can. This is Sa--Henry McLon--McConnell. How can I help you?...Mrs. Yorn! How have you been?...Good, good. You're not calling for another last chance session, are you?...Uh-huh...Uh-huh...Your friend Tucker died? How?...No, I realize that's a little too personal to talk about over the phone...Uh-huh...Uh-huh...Uh-huh. (An evil thought occurs to SAM) I suppose Bill isn't seeing anyone at the moment...No, I don't think that's too forward at all. In fact, I'm betting he'd be very interested...Where?...Denny's is fine. I'll make sure he gets the invitation...No, thank you, Beulah...Goodbye.

JONNY enters, holding a box.

Who was that?

JONNY

Telemarketers.

SAM

Oh.

JONNY

Hey, after this, do you want to go eat somewhere? Denny's? I'll pay.

JONNY

Damn right, you'll pay, after the hell you put me through today.

SAM

It's only fair.

JONNY

Cool.

JONNY exits out the front door.

SAM

It's a date.
SAM goes back to working on the computer.

END ACT II, SCENE II

THE END
APPENDIX D.

The cast page in the production's program.
APPENDIX E.

The Production Poster. This poster was designed by Masters Directing Candidate Kiara Pippino and circulated by Theatre Business Manager David Wright. It has been signed by the cast.
APPENDIX F.

Becca Martin's (of the NWA Times) review of the play.

The Other Way
Becca Martin's award-winning column about life, the arts, travel and motherhood returns as a blog.

Jul 23  New Play, New Love

Seeing a new play is like falling in love with a gorgeous man in pants. You know you might never see him again, might not even remember his name, but he's quick, charming, enchanting, funny. And even if you leave on a bittersweet note, it's an experience you wouldn't have missed for the world.

Such was "Your Last Friend, Inc.: A Comedy," one of two offerings in the Boar's Head Players 2010 New Play Showcase.

Written by Justin Blasdel, a third-year student in the M.F.A. playwriting program at the UA, "Your Last Friend" introduces two con men (played by Justin Cunningham and Vincent Burros) who have hit on a great new get-rich-quick scheme. They're selling assisted-suicide insurance policies — no problem since Arizona, where the play is set, hasn't legalized assisted suicide.

And then, Arizona does.

SPOILER ALERT!

The comedy comes in watching Sam and Gianni talk clients out of killing themselves. They convince Todd (Andrew Bullock) to rob a bank and have the life he always wanted. And Rekash (Anna Haslett) decides she wants to play the dating scene. Even Goth girl Rebecca (Dannah McInerney) chooses to annoy her parents by living instead of dying.

Then the name of Sam's sister pops up in the client list. And the funny stuff is over. Jessica (Catherine Watherspoon) is dying of pancreatic cancer, and there's no whimsical way to change that.

The script is solid, even if the punch is a little predictable. And it delivers what Blasdel promised in a What's Up Q&A:

"My purpose of writing this play is to help bring some humor to a very serious topic. When people are enraged and fighting one another, I don't feel that a true resolution is possible. What I want my audience to feel after the show is a need to share their personal opinions without having to shout to be heard."

FAQ
Doer's Head Players
New Play Showcase
"Your Last Friend, Inc."
WHEN — 8 p.m. July 23-24
AND
Adam E. Douglas
'Murder and the English Gentleman: A Comedy
WHEN — 8 p.m. July 28-31
WHERE — Visiton Arts Center's Nadine Bean Studios in Fayetteville
COST — $10; UA students free on Wednesday-Thursday
INFO — 575-3946 or 575-4752
APPENDIX G.

PICTURE 1

Sam (Justin Cunningham) in A.1, SC.1. A view of the full stage. Sam surveys the new business office for perfection.
PICTURE 2

Todd (Drew Johnson) at left and Gianni (Vincent Berrios) at right in A.1, SC.2. Todd is in despair about his mother while Gianni tries to console him.
PICTURE 3

Sam (Justin Cunningham) at left and Beulah (Anna Haslett) at right in A.1, SC.3. Beulah is relaying her wishes to be stuffed after death, and Sam cannot mentally process this information.
Rebecca (Danielle McKnight) at left and Gianni (Vincent Berrios) at right in A.1, SC.3. Rebecca is ready to commit suicide as a means to get attention, and Gianni is trying to smoothly convince her to rethink her choices.
PICTURE 5
Sam (Justin Cunningham) at left and Jessica (Catherine Witherspoon) at right in A.2, SC.1. Jessica is swallowing her pride and asking for money, and Sam is trying to control his temper.