

SONS OF TUCSON

Pilot

by

Greg Bratman and Tommy Dewey

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JQTV[®]

COLD OPEN

INT. BIG FIVE SPORTING GOODS - MORNING IN TUCSON

RON SNUFFKIN (30, scruffy, does he cut his own hair?) stands behind the customer service desk, TALKING ON THE PHONE.

A long line has formed in front of him. DISGRUNTLED CUSTOMERS clutch a variety of sporting goods. Ron's not in too much of a hurry to meet their needs.

The CUSTOMER in front holds an armload of SLEEPING BAGS.

RON

(into phone)

Look Tony, they must have been damaged during shipping. All of my items are in mint condition when they leave my collection. (Beat) Okay, well I'm out of the serving trays with the floral inlay, but how about I send you a gravy boat from the Truman White House?

(Beat) What about porcelain dolls?

(Beat) Fine, are you into fireworks?

The customer in front reaches the end of his rope.

CUSTOMER

This is ridiculous!

Ron covers the phone receiver.

RON

Tell me about it. Total jackass. Big money in collectibles though.

CUSTOMER

Can I speak to your manager?

RON

You don't want to do that.

CUSTOMER

I would like to speak to your manager. Now.

Ron and the customer lock eyes for a moment.

RON
 (back into phone)
 I'm sorry, Tony, I'm volunteering
 at a soup kitchen right now and a
 man is choking on our gazpacho.
 I'll have to get back to you.

Ron hangs up, faces the customer with a smile.

RON (CONT'D)
 What's up? Trouble in the woods?

OVER TO THE STORE'S FRONT ENTRANCE:

GARY GUNDERSON (14) enters the store ahead of brothers ROBBY
 GUNDERSON (8) and BRANDON GUNDERSON (16).

Gary, their articulate leader, blazes a trail through
 browsing CUSTOMERS as the impish Robby races to catch up.
 Brandon wanders in slowly, captivated by the overabundance of
 sporting goods.

They gather near the service counter and stare at Ron.

GARY
 (whispering)
 This is the guy I was talking
 about.

BRANDON
 He's got the right look.

ROBBY
 He's a loser. Let's go.

GARY
 We've been through over a hundred
 people, Robby. We can't search
 forever. Let's just spread out,
 watch him for a bit. You'll see.

The boys move apart, trying to monitor Ron surreptitiously:

Robby tests PUNCHING BAGS, Gary checks out TENNIS RACKETS,
 and Brandon tries to put on a SWIM CAP. They all keep an eye
 on Ron.

AT THE COUNTER:

CUSTOMER
 (on his last nerve)
 You told me these sleeping bags
 were rated to 10 below!

My family nearly froze to death -
my kid can't feel his face, my
wife's been slurring her words--

RON

And you all wore the thermals?

CUSTOMER

Excuse me?

RON

Please tell me you wore the
thermals.

CUSTOMER

Thermals?

RON

Sir, as we discussed when you first
came in here, the bags are rated at
10 below *if* you're wearing a full
thermal underlayer while you're
"bagged". In all honesty, you have
no business camping if you're not
familiar with the basic concept of
layering. I can't believe you'd
endanger your family like that.

CUSTOMER

You never mentioned the thermals.

RON

Unfortunately, I've got to pass
this along to another service rep
because I'm dealing with a personal
crisis.

CUSTOMER

(about to burst)
Yeah, and what's that?

RON

I just got some news.

Ron takes a deep breath...

RON (CONT'D)

My brother's wife - they live in
Seattle - went on a rampage. One
moment he sees her fly into the
room with a sword - not shitting
you, a real sword - next thing he
knows he's in the ICU.

CUSTOMER

My God.

RON

So, I gotta catch a flight, make sure his kids are okay. But I will make damn sure you get the attention you deserve on this...you have my word.

The brothers have migrated back together...

CUSTOMER

Oh. Please, take your time. I'm sorry.

GARY

(to his brothers)
Told you.

They nod in agreement.

RON

(to customers)
Service counter is closed folks!

GRUMBLING FROM THE SHAFTED CUSTOMERS.

The boys walk over. Gary stops Ron as he leaves the counter.

GARY

Pardon me, sir. Got a minute?

RON

On a break, boys, you'll have to wait.

ROBBY

How do you feel about lying for money?

Beat.

RON

Keep talking.

BRANDON

Have you ever stolen from children?

RON

(now curious)
Where are you headed with this?

Beat. No answer.

RON (CONT'D)
Alright then.

Ron starts to go. Robby punches him in the thigh.

RON (CONT'D)
What the--

ROBBY
Just listen to what the kid has to say.

Ron is confused. Robby nods at Gary.

ROBBY (CONT'D)
I'm talking about him.

GARY
We need a dad for the day.

RON
Join the club.

BRANDON
There's a club?

GARY
We'll give you two hundred bucks for an hour's work.

Ron perks up instantly.

RON
Two-hundy? What do I gotta do?

BRANDON
You gotta fake out a principal. Pretend to be our dad and sign us up for school.

RON
Which school?

GARY
East Tucson High.

RON
Great debate team.

GARY
They're okay.

Ron's manager, ERIC (30s, earnest and self-important), emerges from a back room.

ERIC
Ron! Is there a problem out here?

RON
Nope. All good.

ERIC
There are several people just
standing--

RON
Have you checked the suggestions
box today, Eric? I think someone
filled out a comment card.

ERIC
NICE!

GARY
So, you in? Ron?

RON
Slow down, I don't even know your
names.

Gary nods at Robby, who hands Ron a manila envelope.

GARY
Gary, Brandon, Robby. Details are
all in there. Be there at noon.
Wear a suit.

RON
I don't have a suit.

BRANDON
We can give you one of Dad's old
ones.

Beat. Ron looks around...is he being punked?

RON
Just to be totally honest here, you
kids are scaring me a little bit.

GARY
No problem. We'll find someone
else.

Gary grabs the envelope, and the boys head for the door. Ron
scrambles to catch them before they exit...

RON
 Hang on. (Then, quietly:) Look,
 I'm interested, but what's the deal
 with your real dad?

Brandon and Robby look to Gary for guidance.

RON (CONT'D)
 Is he...okay?

GARY
 We're not getting into that.

RON
 You guys didn't kill him, did you?

BRANDON
 No!

RON
 Where is he?

GARY
 It's not that big a deal. Our
 dad's a banker.

ROBBY
 He's big time.

GARY
 And he's unavailable.

RON
 Meaning what? He's in prison?

No response. But their silence says it all...

RON (CONT'D)
 Wow. They get him on mail fraud or
 what? He play it a little loose
 with the mortgages?

The brothers exchange glances.

BRANDON
 It was a stock thing. Twenty-five
 years--

GARY
 Brandon! Shut up! And it's not
 gonna be twenty-five years--

BRANDON
 That's what the judge said.

ROBBY

He's gonna escape anyway!

GARY

(to Ron, sincere)

Look, man, we don't wanna end up being foster kids, so please keep your mouth shut. We've already made it out here all by ourselves from Jersey...our dad kept an investment home over in Paloma Ridge, so we've got a place to stay and a nice stash of cash. (Beat) He was prepared.

RON

(impressed)

What about your mom?

GARY

She left a long time ago. (Beat) Make or break time, Ron. Whadya say? Two hundred for an hour's work.

Robby shoots Ron a frightening look. Brandon shoots him a more desperate one. Gary raises his eyebrows: "Well?"

RON

Alright, boys. Let's play house.

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - NOON

Ron, wearing an ANCIENT, ILL-FITTING SUIT, sits with the boys in a small waiting area. He flips through papers, signing as he goes.

RON
(quietly, to the boys)
This suit isn't cut well.

GARY
So buy your own.

BRANDON
Dad looked fine in it. But he's big-boned.

A SECRETARY (unattractive, smacking her gum) enters.

SECRETARY
Hiya.
(then, flirty:)
You look too young to be these boys' dad.

Ron counters quickly, doesn't miss a beat.

RON
We started early, the wife and I.

SECRETARY
Even so, you can't be over--

RON
It's kinda how people do it in the Big Easy. New Orleans. (Mustering a little emotion:) Heard of it?

The boys exchange glances - time for Ron to earn his paycheck.

SECRETARY
Umm. Yeah.

RON
Too bad we had to move. Great town. But nonetheless, a town that now haunts our every moment. The boys dream of floodwaters. I've struggled with addictions to anti-psychotics and methamphetamines.

(a tear)
 When Mandy - their mother, my bride
 - passed, we just...

He holds out his hand. She grasps it, not knowing what else to do. This is NOT the conversation she wanted to have.

SECRETARY
 It's...OK...?

RON
 Is it?

SECRETARY
 Um, just give me a shout when you're done and you guys will be good to go. So happy to have some new folks in town.

RON
 (a whisper)
 Thank you.

She smiles, feels weird, leaves. Ron shoots a sly grin to the boys.

BRANDON
 (quietly to Ron)
 Awesome job. Sorry about your wife.

ON RON: Is Brandon kidding? ON BRANDON: Nope.

EXT. SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Ron exits the school building, triumphant. The boys follow.

GARY
 Thanks, Ron. It's been a pleasure.

Gary checks to see that nobody is watching and hands Ron a WAD OF BILLS.

GARY (CONT'D)
 Take care.

BRANDON
 Stay clean, Ron. Meth can kill you.

RON
 ("What the hell?")
 Thanks.

He looks over to a scowling Robby.

RON (CONT'D)
 Alright, little man, you--

Robby sticks his fingers in his ears and HUMS LOUDLY.

Ron looks at the three of them, wheels turning. Then:

RON (CONT'D)
 Be glad to give you guys a ride
 home.

GARY
 Nah. We're good. We walked
 here...we can walk back.

RON
 You walked all the way here?

BRANDON
 My feet are bleeding a little bit.

Beat.

GARY
 Fine. We'll take the ride.

INT. RON'S CAMRY - MOMENTS LATER

Ron flies down the road. Gary sits in the passenger seat,
 Brandon and Robby in the back.

BRANDON
 You just missed our turn.

RON
 Gotta make a quick stop.

GARY
 Ron, this was not part of the deal.

RON
 Just need you to help me with one
 little thing. It'll only take a
 minute.

ROBBY
 I'm outta here.

Robby OPENS THE CAR DOOR, STICKS A LEG OUT!

RON
What the hell?

Brandon yanks Robby back into the car, closes the door.

RON (CONT'D)
You got some kinda death wish?!

ROBBY
I was gonna do a stunt roll!

RON
Let's all settle down here. We just need to pay a quick visit to my great aunt.

GARY
Can't you do that on your own?

RON
Here's the deal - and I really hate to drag you guys into it - but Aunt Ethel is at death's door. We fell out of touch a few years back - little disagreement over where the country was headed - but there's still a lot of love there. And she always said she hoped to live to see the day that I had children. I know it's a little weird, but if you guys could just smile and say a cute thing or two about being my kids or whatever, it would warm her heart before she goes.

INT. RON'S CAMRY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ron pulls up to a RICKETY, MOLD-STAINED HOUSE.

RON
Let's make this quick.

ROBBY
I'm not going.

GARY
We'll wait here. Point to us, we'll wave and smile.

Ron looks to Brandon.

BRANDON
Sorry.

RON

Fine.

He gets out of the car in a huff...

EXT. MOLD-STAINED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ron strolls up the walkway, RINGS THE DOORBELL.

The door opens to reveal ETHEL WALKER (100+, tiny, still feisty), quite possibly the oldest woman alive.

ETHEL

Hello?

RON

Ethel? I'm Ron, we spoke on the phone.

ETHEL

I don't need my carpet cleaned!

RON

No, I called about your Civil War-era toy soldier collection.

ETHEL

Oh yes.

RON

I'd love to take a look at them. Maybe make you an offer right now.

ETHEL

I told you I'm gonna be choosy about who I sell them to. Those soldiers have been in my family for ages. My two brothers and I used to play with those little men for hours on end. And they would be so disappointed if I didn't pass them along to a good family that would love them as much as we did.

RON

(bullshit smile)

Not to worry, ma'am. My boys will treat them with respect, as they do all their antique toys.

ETHEL

How many boys you got?

RON

Three. They're with me today,
actually. (Then:) I love them so
much. They open my eyes to new
things every day, and they just...

He turns to look back at his car just as it SCREECHES AWAY -
the kids have bolted.

RON (CONT'D)

...stole my car. Unbelievable.

EXT. GUNDERSON HOUSE - A COUPLE HOURS LATER

The boys sit on the front steps. Ron's car is in the
driveway.

Ron, peeved and sweating profusely, pulls up on a beach
cruiser. He lays the bike in the grass and approaches.

He takes notice of their SIZABLE HOUSE and stops for a beat,
impressed...then, back to business:

RON

Alright, guys. You stole my car.
And really disappointed Aunt Ethel.

GARY

You said one minute. You were gone
for two.

Ron pulls the WAD OF BILLS out of his pocket.

RON

And you're twenty bucks short.
This is one-eighty.

Gary cuts a look at his brothers - busted.

GARY

Weird. Here ya go.

He forks over a handful of dollar bills. Ron counts them.

RON

Twenty-one. Cute.

GARY

That's for the gas to get you home.

Ron eyes an AIR-CONDITIONING UNIT at the side of the house...

RON

Pretty decent setup you got here.
Looks like about three thousand
square feet. What's the temp like
inside?

ROBBY

We're busy, Ron.

The brothers head towards the front door.

RON

Mind if I hang for a bit? The AC's
out in my apartment.

Nothing.

RON (CONT'D)

Guys, I had to take a sick day to
help you, the least you could do--

Gary turns to face him, cuts to the chase:

GARY

Ron. It's been a pleasure doing
business with you. We'll see you
around. When we need to buy some
crappy sporting goods.

Ron frowns. Dissed by kids - humiliating. But, reluctant to
let this opportunity pass him by:

RON

Who's gonna be your dad?

GARY

We're fine on our own.

ROBBY

Yeah! Loser!

BRANDON

Sorry, Ron. We're kind of a
private family. You'll make a
great father one day.

RON

Tell you what, let's sit down and--

GARY

Ron! Our dad was a major player in
the banking world. You sell balls.
See a difference there? Little
bit, maybe?

Ron stares at the boys for a beat.

Then he picks up a rock and THROWS IT THROUGH THE NEIGHBOR'S WINDOW.

A NEIGHBOR (40's, nasal, annoying) runs out.

NEIGHBOR

What in the--

RON

Ma'am, I am SO sorry. My boys were playing stickball in the street.

NEIGHBOR

With a ROCK?

RON

I know, right? They are going to replace that window. Are you around tonight?

NEIGHBOR

Well...yes, after seven.

RON

They'll be over at seven-fifteen, right after Bible Study.

NEIGHBOR

They better do a good job.

RON

Oh they will. They're Boy Scouts. Sorry again, and great to meet ya.

He looks back at the stunned boys as he walks away. Touche.

RON (CONT'D)

Have fun with that.

INT. RON'S APARTMENT - LATER

The living room is packed, floor-to-ceiling with a variety of SPORTING GOODS, COLLECTIBLE DISHES, DOLLS, ETC.

Ron enters to find his girlfriend, GINA (30, focused), sitting on the couch. She seems a little miserable.

GINA

Where have you been?

He proudly tosses her the roll of cash.

RON
That's two hundred-and-one dollars.

GINA
(suspicious)
Where did you get this?

RON
Some kids paid me to pretend to be
their dad.

Long beat as Gina tries to process this.

GINA
Right.

RON
Great. I was helping children.
And now you're mad again.

GINA
I'm not mad. I'm confused. You
can't just--

RON
Oh, come on! You know how many
gravy boats I'd have to sell to
make that? All I did was tell one
lie to a secretary--

GINA
My God, Ron!

RON
--and - wait a minute - now that
she thinks the kids are hurricane
refugees, they'll probably get free
books or something.

GINA
I don't want to know any more.
(Beat) Did your boss talk to you
about that management training?

RON
I *told* you: I don't consider
becoming a junior executive at a
mid-level sporting goods store a
good career move. Look, I'm
juggling several things here -
positive things - and--

GINA

What are you juggling? Doll collections? Your investment in a face cream company? Importing mayonnaise?

RON

Yes, yes, and not anymore.

GINA

Look, this is getting really old. I'm going home, Ron. I'm sweating through my pantsuit.

RON

It is hot in here, I'll give you that.

Gina stands up to leave, sighs.

GINA

Goodbye Ron. If you ever grow up, call me. (Beat) I'll probably be old enough by then to introduce you to my grandkids.

They stare at one another. Nothing left to say, really - this relationship's clearly been dead for quite some time.

GINA (CONT'D)

By the way, this was under your door. It's an eviction notice.

She hands him the notice and leaves.

RON

(to himself)
That went well.

EXT. BACK-TO-SCHOOL FAIR - EVENING

WE PAN ACROSS A ROW OF BOOTHS AT A BACK-TO-SCHOOL FAIR: "Balloon Animals," "Guess Your Weight," "Face-Painting," etc.

We reach the end of the row to FIND ROBBY FIDDLING WITH A MINIATURE WEBER GRILL, trying to cook hotdogs. A cardboard sign reads "Robby's Meats - \$1.50. Girls Eat Free."

A GROUP OF KIDS ENCIRCLES HIM.

YOUNG BOY #1
 (spitting out a bite)
 It's raw!!

YOUNG BOY #2
 Because your fire sucks.

ROBBY
 Shut up idiots! I'm gonna fix it.

Then, eyeing a CUTE GIRL (8):

ROBBY (CONT'D)
 You get the next one.

From a backpack, Robby produces a can of CAMPING FUEL, shows it to the girl...

ROBBY (CONT'D)
 Camping fuel. You can get it at
 Big 5.

CUTE GIRL
 Cool.

ROBBY
 And here. We. Go.

He dumps an enormous amount of fuel on the grill...A HUGE FIREBALL ROARS UPWARD - FLAMES SHOOT TOWARDS THE FACE-PAINTING BOOTH, IGNITING IT.

KIDS AND TEACHERS RUN AWAY from the growing conflagration. SCREAMS. The cute girl starts sobbing hysterically.

ROBBY
 Oops.

PANDEMONIUM at the fair...other booths catch fire. SIRENS. Robby bolts.

ACT TWO

INT. BIG 5 - DAY

Ron talks to a CUSTOMER about basketballs:

RON
...and that's why Spalding actually
went back to leather after a brief
flirtation with synthetics in '06.

ERIC (O.S.)
Hey Ron! We've got a problem!

RON
Excuse me for a second.

WE FOLLOW a peeved Ron over to the register where he finds Eric, standing with a BOY (12), and his DAD (40). The boy's arm is in a sling, and he holds a broken crossbow.

ERIC
(steaming)
Did you sell a crossbow to a little
boy?

RON
You mean to this *young man* right
here?

ERIC
He's twelve. You know we don't
sell weaponry to anybody under
sixteen. Fifteen for shotguns.

RON
He told me he was twenty and he had
one of those pituitary conditions.

DAD
He's twelve.

RON
Really? A twelve-year old who was
here shopping with his *wife*?

KID
That was my sister.

RON
I'm tired of the lies, kid.

ANGLE ON boy, teary-eyed.

ERIC
(to Ron)
You're fired.

RON
EXCUSE ME?!

A HUGE SECURITY GUARD appears next to Ron.

ERIC
And I'd like the scuba gear back.
That's no longer yours to borrow.

RON
I lost that during a rescue dive.

EXT. BIG 5 - MOMENTS LATER

Ron throws open the doors and storms outside. The brothers intercept him as he arrives at his car.

RON
What do you want?

GARY
We need you again. Tomorrow. Same drill as before. Little small talk with a principal. You know..."nice weather we're having"... "sorry about the mix up"... firm handshake, and you're outta there.

RON
What happened?

BRANDON
Robby stole some camping fuel from your store and started a fire at the Back-To-School Fair.

RON
Perfect.

ROBBY
The stupid face painters set up too close to me!

RON
Look, Robby, you wanna survive school? Don't draw attention to yourself. Kiss a little ass on occasion, and don't act like an idiot.

Robby scowls. Ron thinks for a beat.

RON (CONT'D)

I should tell you to go screw yourselves after the way you treated Aunt Ethel. But you clearly need me, so I'm gonna say a thousand bucks.

GARY

No way. Three hundred.

Beat.

RON

You know what? I like you kids. And I know you're up against the wall here. So let's say five hundred.

GARY

Three-fifty.

RON

Four. Plus a little favor.

GARY

What would that be?

RON

I need to use your house for like ten minutes - with you guys in it.

GARY

Deal. You'll need this again.

He hands him the Dad Suit. As they walk off towards his car, Ron pats Gary on the back:

RON

You guys settling in okay otherwise?

INT. RON'S CAMRY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ron drives, wearing the suit. Brandon sits in the passenger seat, Robby and Gary in the back. A few moments of silence.

BRANDON

Spacious glove compartment.

RON

Thank you.

BRANDON
Thank you, for helping us out.

RON
Sure thing. It's better than most
of my other jobs.

BRANDON
It's gonna be a long time before
dad comes back.

RON
Well, lawyers are pretty crafty.
And I'm sure your dad didn't--

BRANDON
Yeah. He did. He did all of it.

Beat.

RON
Don't sweat it, Brandon. My dad's
a jerk and I turned out alright.

BRANDON
They'll be obsolete soon.

RON
Dads?

BRANDON
Glove compartments.

ON RON: "Who the hell is this kid?"

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A PRINCIPAL (50s) and A TEACHER, MAGGIE WILLIAMS (late 20s,
cute and witty, but tired of the grind) sit at a table.

MAGGIE
John, I don't need another
hyperactive monster in my
classroom. I already have Glenn
Jones...he glued Carol to her seat
last year.

PRINCIPAL
You're the only second-grade class
with room for another student.

MAGGIE
You're killing me.

Ron enters the room and takes a seat across from them. He notices Maggie immediately, struggles not to stare at her, sneaks quick glances.

RON

Hello.

MAGGIE

Hi.

PRINCIPAL

(frowning, to Ron)

I've gotta tell you Mr. Johnson, we're a little concerned about enrolling Robby here. I run a tight ship and I can't have a troublemaker like your son turning us into the wind.

RON

I understand completely.

PRINCIPAL

As the captain of this little vessel, I am responsible for the safety of the kids.

RON

Gotta keep a strong hand on the tiller. I'm with you there.

PRINCIPAL

(nodding)

Sounds like we're speaking the same language.

Ron leans forward onto the desk, whispers:

RON

You know - and I hate to digress, but it'd be criminal of me not to tell you this - I have a one-of-a-kind, antique ship-in-a-bottle from Spain that I may put on the market.

MAGGIE

Can we just get on with this?

RON

(to Maggie)

You're right. (Beat) That is a *cool* sweater.

Blank stare from Maggie.

RON (CONT'D)

Let me start by apologizing. My boy took that cooking fuel from our pantry. We've kept it around since the hurricane, just in case we had to cook rats on the camping stove again. I never thought he would take it and do something like that, that's just not like him.

Ron "thinks back"...

RON (CONT'D)

Poor kid. You gotta understand where he's coming from. He was trapped on the screen porch when the rains came in. I was trying to find a way to get to him, but I was underwater in the basement...

FADE TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MEANWHILE

The boys hang out on the steps in front of the school. Brandon reads "The Farmer's Almanac". Robby punches himself in the shoulder. Gary checks his watch:

GARY

You think the principal suspects anything?

ROBBY

Who cares?!

GARY

We do, Robby! You wanna go live with some weird lady with a bunch of cats?

ROBBY

Whatever.

BRANDON

(looks up)
What kind of cats?

FADE TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

We pick up at the end of the meeting. The Principal CHUCKLES HEARTILY. Ron is on a roll...

RON

...and I told him, now hang on!
The floodwaters haven't even
receded yet and you want me to
WHAT? I mean I've lost EVERYTHING!
I'm not opening a hot dog stand!

PRINCIPAL

That's unbelievable!

Maggie rolls her eyes - not buying it.

MAGGIE

It really is unbelievable.

Ron smiles nervously at her.

RON

Tell me about it! FEMA.

PRINCIPAL

Well. We're glad to have you
Johnsons here in Tucson. We'll
chalk up that adjustment problem of
Robby's to pre-first day jitters.

RON

Great. Thanks again, Dr. Smith.

PRINCIPAL

Please, call me Mr. Smith.

RON

How about "Captain"?

PRINCIPAL

(big smile)
That works just fine.

RON

(going for it)
And if it's okay with you, I'd like
to set up a weekly meeting with
Miss Williams...just to be sure
Robby is adjusting all right.

MAGGIE

That's not necessary.

PRINCIPAL
Let's give it a shot, Maggie.

RON
Excellent!

MAGGIE
(to principal)
You're paying me overtime.

RON
It's a date - not a date - a
meeting on a date, to be
determined.

Maggie nods and rises, eager to get on with her afternoon.
As Ron follows her out, the principal calls after him:

PRINCIPAL
Thanks again for the deal on that
ship-in-a-bottle!

RON
I'll drop it off next week!

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Ron catches up to Maggie.

RON
Hey, we got off on the wrong foot
with the whole Robby thing.

MAGGIE
It's fine. See you next week.

RON
(indicating his outfit)
And I know, not the best-looking
suit.

MAGGIE
I've seen worse.

RON
The kids bought it for me. Don't
want to hurt their feelings, so...

The boys appear.

ROBBY
 You get me back in?!
 (notices Maggie)
 Dad?

MAGGIE
 (to Ron)
 Quick tip: grind up some Ritalin
 and put it in his cereal. (Beat)
 Have a couple bites yourself.

RON
 Will that make me less awkward with
 my kids' teachers?

MAGGIE
 Nope. (Beat) But hang in there.
 You'll figure it out.

She smiles - just a little - and leaves.

GARY
 Did you get him back in?

RON
 Of course. I'm a great dad.

GARY
 You're okay.

RON
 What time is it?

GARY
 4:30.

RON
 Get in the car, we gotta go.

EXT. GUNDERSON HOUSE - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Ron and the boys whip into the driveway, hurry out of the car. ANGLE ON Ethel (the 100-year old lady from earlier) waiting impatiently at the door, with the BOX OF TOY SOLDIERS.

As they arrive at the door:

ETHEL
 (sharp)
 We agreed on 4:15.

RON
I'm really sorry, Ethel. We got
hung up at a United Way event.

ON THE BOYS: "What is he up to this time?"

RON (CONT'D)
Let's step inside.

He goes to open the door - it's locked.

RON (CONT'D)
(whispers to Gary)
Keys.

Gary hands them over. Ethel looks confused.

RON (CONT'D)
Gary is "key manager" this week.
We rotate...helps imbue them with a
sense of responsibility.

He opens the door...

INT. GUNDERSON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The group gathers in the living room.

ETHEL
(to the brothers)
So where are you boys going to be
keeping these special toys?

RON
We cleared a shelf in their room.

GARY
You're giving us toys? That's
really sweet, Aunt Ethel.

ETHEL
I'm not *giving* anything to anyone.
What did you call me?

RON
Gary, why don't you go get us some
Wheat Thins?

Gary's onto him:

GARY
We ran out.

Robby pipes up:

ROBBY
When will you finally die?

ETHEL
I...I don't know. That's a bit
rude, don't you think?!

ROBBY
I don't think. I just do stuff.

RON
He's our little jester.

Ron grabs Robby by the arm, pulls him into the dining room.

RON
Be right back.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RON
Just sit down and chill out.

ROBBY
What's in it for me?

RON
I'll get you out of school for a
day next week.

ROBBY
Fine.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ron returns to find Gary and Brandon examining the soldiers.

BRANDON
These should be in a museum.
They're probably worth thousands.

RON
No, no, no! Ethel wants you boys
to have them.

ETHEL
Thousands?

RON
 (quickly to Ethel)
 We agreed on four hundred.

ETHEL
 Yes, but--

BRANDON
 We can't accept all of these. But
 I'd kill to keep a regiment.

RON
 Brandon, can I see you in the
 dining room?

He drags Brandon out...

RON (CONT'D)
 (to Ethel)
 Just a second.

TO THE DINING ROOM:

Ron and Brandon enter to discover that Robby is missing.

RON
 I need you to find Robby and keep
 him sitting down. This will all be
 over soon.

BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM:

Growing frantic, Ron re-enters to find:

GARY
 (to Ethel)
 How did he find you? E-Bay?

ETHEL
 Oh no, I haven't been sailing in
 years!

RON
 Excuse me!

He drags Gary into the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN:

Gary and Ron stand next to the counter.

RON
 You guys are killing me!

GARY
You're ripping off an old lady!

OFF CAMERA: WE HEAR A CRASH IN THE LIVING ROOM, then SCREAMS FROM ROBBY.

ETHEL (O.C.)
Get your mitts out of my purse!

BRANDON (O.C.)
Robby! Put her checkbook back!

RON
(grabbing Gary, desperate)
I'll cut you in for five percent!

GARY
Ten percent, or I deep six this thing right now.

RON
FINE!

BACK TO LIVING ROOM:

Ron and Gary re-enter. Brandon holds Robby down with one arm, stuffs things back into Ethel's purse with the other.

ETHEL
(to Robby)
You're a horrible child! I will never leave my soldiers here!

GARY
ROBBY!

THE RUCKUS GRINDS TO A HALT. Ron raises an eyebrow at Gary:

GARY (CONT'D)
("emotional")
Ma'am, let me apologize for our behavior. Today's the anniversary of us losing Grandpapa. (Beat) Those soldiers would mean the world to us. The other kids can have their video games...we will gladly spend our quiet afternoons with our imaginations and with toys that really *mean* something.

ETHEL
(moved)
You remind me so much of my brother Earl...

EXT. GUNDERSON HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Ron (box of soldiers in hand) and the boys wave goodbye as Ethel makes her way (unbelievably slowly) down the walkway and towards an ancient Studebaker.

RON

See? That wasn't so hard, was it?

The boys start to head back inside.

RON (CONT'D)

You know, we work together pretty well. We should think about making this a regular gig.

GARY

That's a pretty big step, Ron.

RON

You're gonna need me more than you think. There will be days you want a doctor's note. Or a ride to the mall. And I can buy beer. Not that you should be drinking. You should not be drinking. I mean, it is fun - sometimes - but you'll do regrettable things.

GARY

What's your offer?

RON

I make myself available whenever you need me for five hundred a week and a room in the house. (Beat) Who knows? We might even enjoy each other's company.

Did Ron just open up a bit?

GARY

We can't afford that. We'll find somebody else when we need a dad.

RON

(stung)

Okay. (Beat) Another guy might draw suspicion, though. Pretty sure your neighbor got a good look at me when you guys threw that rock through her window. Principal saw me. Other people at your school.

But, just go ahead and track down
my identical twin and you should be
fine.

Gary takes a moment to consider this...Ron looks to him: "So?
We got a deal?"

GARY

Three hundred a week and you live
in the tool shed. We can't have
you in the house.

RON

Okay. Too soon. I get it. We can
always renegotiate down the road.
(Then:) I'll start moving stuff
over tonight!

FADE TO:

INT. GUNDERSON HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The boys hang around in the kitchen. We catch them mid-
conversation:

GARY

He stays in the shed. We don't want
him to hear everything we talk
about.

BRANDON

Can we at least get him a new suit?
He keeps wearing that one we found
in the trash.

GARY

He can buy one himself. He just
got a great job.

BRANDON

It'd be a nice thing to do for
somebody who's gonna be our dad.

ROBBY

We already have a dad!

BRANDON

Yeah, and what's he doing for us?

RON (O.C.)

Hey guys.

PAN OVER TO RON, AT AN OPEN WINDOW. It's unclear whether or not he's been listening to this conversation...

RON (CONT'D)

Just wanted to let you know: Gary,
I called the school, gave my
permission for you to stay late for
debate team.

GARY

Really? Thanks.

RON

Grabbed this for Brandon.

He hands Brandon A HANDFUL OF THE TOY SOLDIERS.

BRANDON

(wide-eyed)

Awesome. Are you sure?

RON

It's just one regiment.

Ron tosses something to Robby.

RON

And I bought Robby here a T-shirt.

Robby unfolds it, revealing a PINK UNICORN on the front.

ROBBY

Jerk.

Brandon walks over to Ron.

BRANDON

Thanks.

He gives Ron a CLUMSY, UNCOMFORTABLE HUG through the window.
Ron drops away quickly:

RON

Yeah, well...goodnight, boys.

INT. TOOL SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Ron enters the shed. He has transformed it into an "apartment": half-bachelor pad, half-warehouse jammed with antique collectibles, porcelain dolls, sporting goods, etc. He picks up "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu, turns on some CLASSIC ROCK.

Before he can sit down and relax, A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

Ron opens it, revealing the NASAL NEIGHBOR from the day before. She glares at him.

RON
Hello neighbor. My boys take care
of your window?

NEIGHBOR
If you think for a second that I am
going to let three boys with
childhood arthritis perform manual
labor, you're sorely mistaken.

RON
What?

NEIGHBOR
They told me everything, Mr.
Johnson. About your drinking, your
gambling--

RON
Who told you all that? The middle
one? He has a vivid imagination.

NEIGHBOR
My window still needs fixing, so
I'll expect you tomorrow morning.

Beat. Ron grits his teeth, decides not to fight this one.

RON
Sounds good. See you then.

NEIGHBOR
And Mr. Johnson...I'll be watching
you.

As she leaves, we see Gary on the back porch, arms crossed,
holding back a laugh.

GARY
Have fun with that!

Ron shakes his head, retreats into his shed, and SLAMS THE
DOOR.

END OF PILOT