

Laundry Day or Bookends

written by

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for Ken

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Characters:

Cynthia - beautiful long hair, scarves, hats, glasses.

Ken - mustache, glasses, perhaps balding

Setting:

A Laundromat in the West Village, New York City.

Tables to fold laundry.

Carts to wheel the clothes around.

A bench with three bucket seats.

SCENE 1

2020, Spring

Cynthia, 59, seated on the bench, wearing an N95 mask, latex gloves, a hat, glasses, and her prerequisite scarf. (she always has a scarf either on or nearby, and often also a hat). Her empty wheeled folding laundry cart beside her.

She is reading a book.

Enter Ken, 62, wearing an identical N95 mask, latex gloves, glasses, and an identical wheeled folding laundry cart.

KEN

Sorry! My bad! I know I'm late.

CYNTHIA

It's fine.

She continues reading, to not stop mid-paragraph.

KEN

Motivation these days is not at a high point. How far are you?

He looks to her washing machines.

KEN (CONT'D)

You're almost done.

She closes the book.

KEN (CONT'D)

What have you got there?

She holds up the book.

Ken looks at the book but his glasses have fogged up.

KEN (CONT'D)

These stupid things. How do you wear this and not fog up your glasses? Driving me crazy.

He removes his glasses.

She hands him the book.

KEN (CONT'D)

(reading)

Camus. The Plague. Really?

CYNTHIA

What? I've never actually read it.

He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and a spritz/perfume bottle from another pocket and proceeds to spray and wipe down his glasses and then her book.

KEN

I bet you're one of these people who reads the book after seeing the movie.

CYNTHIA

What is that?

KEN

My own secret formulation. Two parts Isopropyl Alcohol, one part Hydrogen Peroxide, boiled water, and a dash of Lavender. I watched a YouTube. Here.

He hands the book back to her. She smells it.

CYNTHIA

Smells good.

KEN

Never doubt the Coronaqueen.

CYNTHIA

Apparently you're the only Coronaqueen who needs to do laundry.

KEN

Truly. Where is everybody?

CYNTHIA

Well, all the rich people left.

KEN

Yet you remain.

CYNTHIA

Very funny.

Ken loads his clothes into a washing machine.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I've gotta be out by the end of the month.

KEN

What?! How is that even possible?

CYNTHIA

I checked. Cuomo deems movers Essential.

KEN

These people are ridiculous! How can you be expected to move, to move across the country no less--

CYNTHIA

South Carolina--

KEN

When there's a Global Pandemic going on! I'm wearing this stupid thing and these gloves which are chapping my hands like crazy and yet you can move all of your Earthly possessions out of a building with no working elevator!?

CYNTHIA

They fixed the elevator.

KEN

Oh joy! Hallelujah, Gods of Otis! Let's all move to Timbuktu!

CYNTHIA

They're paying for it.

KEN

All of it?

CYNTHIA

And my first month down there...

KEN

Oh, well, then...Congratulations.

CYNTHIA

Thank you very much.

KEN

(under his breath)

And the rich get richer.

CYNTHIA

What was that?

KEN

Nothing.

CYNTHIA

Pretty sure I heard something--

KEN

Not at all--

CYNTHIA

Sounded like venting--

KEN

(explodes)

They all run away to their summer homes and leave us peons to fend for ourselves. Well my summer home is the same as my winter home, autumn house, and spring retreat: a five hundred square foot New York City apartment, thank you very much!

CYNTHIA

Rent-stabilized.

KEN

You bet your ass. I can't afford to live here anymore.

CYNTHIA

Who can?

He has finished loading the washer. He pulls out a laundromat debit card which he inserts into the machine to pay.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

What'd you bring, everything?

KEN

Unlike our fellow neighbors, I require clean sheets. Even in times of crisis I refuse to repose on dirty Egyptian cotton.

CYNTHIA

Didn't you buy those off the street?

KEN

Quality does not only apply to Bed, Bath and Beyonce. Also closed, by the way.

CYNTHIA

Not essential.

KEN

No, ma'am. I'll have you remember another item I once purchased "off the street" as you say just happened to be a little Keith Haring, and how'd that work out?

CYNTHIA

You sold it.

KEN

Yes! But the point is it was a fantastic purchase. How was I supposed to know he'd become "Keith Haring." It was just a baby and doodles.

CYNTHIA

I guess I can kind of understand how movers are essential. I mean if you've got to move, you've got to move. But how are they still continuing to work on these mega-mansions? That is just a blatant--

KEN

The one on Perry?

CYNTHIA

Yes! And the one over on Jane and the SJP double-wide on Eleventh.

KEN

How dare you speak ill of SJP, she's a National Treasure.

CYNTHIA

Good news is I can park wherever I want.

KEN

See, that's positive. I'm sure your Vulva is very happy.

CYNTHIA

Volvo. How are any of these places gonna come back?

KEN

I don't know.

CYNTHIA

Piccolo? Bon Bon? Cowgirl?

KEN

Gaetana's.

CYNTHIA

Right. How's that place gonna return? It was empty before all this.

KEN

It's a Shitshow.

CYNTHIA

(gets revved up)

And all the money's going to Shake Shack and Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, and Harvard. Fucking Harvard! Are you kidding me? Their endowment is more than most third world countries!

And everyday Cheeto-head gets on and tells us everything's tremendous, what a great job he's doing and patting himself on the back over and over--calling any woman reporter who dares ask him a question Nasty and meanwhile they're turning the Javitz into a hospital, that Comfort ship just docked, everything everywhere is Closed, including all libraries, schools, and daycare which means poor kids and poor families can't get any food and people are Dying for no reason whatsoever!

She breaks down into tears and sobs, sits on a bench seat. Ken's initial reaction is to go to her but he catches himself: six feet social distancing.

KEN

(holding out his arms as if to
hug, an "air-hug")

I am comforting you. I am holding you. I am hugging you. I feel your pain. I too am spent. And now you've got me crying. So if you could just...

She wipes her eyes, got it out of her system.

KEN (CONT'D)

(to the universe in general)

New York, you're killing me. I love you but damn. All we wanna do is go out to a restaurant...see a movie...get a drink in a bar...

Ken sits down on the bench, leaving the middle seat open between them.

CYNTHIA

I'm okay.

KEN

Good.

Pause.

KEN (CONT'D)

What am I gonna do when you leave me?

CYNTHIA

Move to Connecticut.

KEN

I may have to. Before there was no work. Now, there's Really no work. I love this city but I feel like my joy used to be ninety percent. Then it was seventy, fifty, now it's down to about five. Every so often magic happens. But that magic used to be on a daily basis.

CYNTHIA

We could rob a bank.

KEN

I'm in. Which one are you thinking?

CYNTHIA

You can't touch anybody. We're all wearing masks. The streets are empty.

KEN

You don't have to convince me. Could it be Citibank? That's my bank and I really hate them. Shittybank.

CYNTHIA

The one on Sixth Avenue?

KEN

That's my Go-to.

CYNTHIA

We'll need a weapon.

KEN

I've been banging on my pots and pans every day at seven.

CYNTHIA

Oh, I love that.

KEN

Pretty sure my cast iron skillet is a deadly weapon.

CYNTHIA

Okay, that sounds good. Are we going for the cashiers or are we gonna hit up the vault?

KEN

The vault, of course. I didn't spend two years in the French foreign legion for nothing.

CYNTHIA

You didn't spend any years in the French foreign legion.

KEN

Precisely. We're going for all of it. The motherload. And then we're gonna stuff it all in your Vulva--

CYNTHIA

Volvo--

KEN

--and head west to open up a bookstore slash apothecary slash gay bar.

CYNTHIA

That's a pretty good combo.

KEN

It really is. We should do that here. In Williamsburg. All the hipsters would love it...

Pause.

CYNTHIA

I'm scared.

KEN

I know. Me too.

Blackout.

SCENE 2

1985, Summer

Ken, curled up on the bench, taking up two seats and wearing sunglasses, sleepy. His empty laundry bag on the floor next to him.

Enter Cynthia, book in hand, full black garbage bag slung over her shoulder. She takes off her sunglasses and checks out the place.

She walks over to Ken and deposits her bag down into a cart.

She sits on the open bench seat with her book and purse in her lap, searching for cash.

The bench leans and creaks to one side as if the bolts underneath need to be tightened.

CYNTHIA

Sorry.

Ken wakes but keeps his sunglasses on. He notices her and her garbage bag.

KEN

She's gonna yell at you.

CYNTHIA

What? Who?

Ken motions back towards the front of the laundromat, and just as he does...

A Pause as Cynthia takes in someone yelling at her.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

She removes the black garbage bag from the cart and puts it on the floor.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I didn't know. Jeez. You'd think I murdered her cat.

Ken smirks.

Cynthia sees the change machine and walks over to it. She pulls out a crumpled up dollar bill and attempts to flatten it.

KEN

Doesn't work.

CYNTHIA

What? This? At all?

KEN

(nods)

Nope.

CYNTHIA

How am I supposed to get change?

Cynthia moves to the front of the laundromat...

KEN

No, don't...

CYNTHIA

Excuse me, do you have change for--

And she gets berated again.

She is forced to retreat back towards Ken.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(to the owner)

I just--

How am I--

Where--

I gotta go--

Okay--

Okay!

She sits. The bench leans, then creaks. She looks at her black garbage bag.

KEN

I'm guessing you're not from around here.

CYNTHIA

No, that's not true. Now I am from around here. Now I live here. I am here.

KEN

Here.

He pulls a handful of quarters out of his pocket and hands them to her.

CYNTHIA

Oh my god, you're amazing. I'll pay you back.

KEN

Yes you will.

Cynthia scurries around putting her laundry in a washer. She puts the quarters in, is ready to push in the quarters and start the load when she realizes...

CYNTHIA

Oh shit.

Ken simply holds up his box of Cheer or Fab laundry detergent. He shakes it. Cynthia's head turns.

She runs over and grabs it from him.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You're a lifesaver.

She runs over, puts the laundry detergent in and starts her load.

Then she looks around and walks back to Ken.

She sits. The bench leans and creaks again. She opens up her purse, hands Ken a crumpled up buck.

Ken simply stares back, balking at the offer.

KEN

I'm running you a tab. Settle up after.

CYNTHIA

Okay.

Where is everybody?

KEN

Everybody's hungover.

CYNTHIA

Not you?

KEN

I'm an early bird. How else am I going to catch a worm?

He removes his sunglasses, smirks, and they make eye contact for the first time.

CYNTHIA

Oh, you're trouble.

KEN

You know it. But harmless trouble like smoking a joint for breakfast. Or Ed Koch.

CYNTHIA

I'm not sure how harmless he is from what I've seen.

KEN

That man is as gay as a parade on Judy Garland's birthday.

CYNTHIA

I was speaking more towards his crime policy.

Ken picks up her book from the middle seat between them. It's a library hardcover of Robert Caro's The Power Broker, all 1300 pages of it.

KEN

(he uses both hands to pick it
up)

A little light reading?

CYNTHIA

It was this or Breakfast at Tiffany's. Gotta learn about my new city.

KEN

I prefer the movie.

CYNTHIA

Never seen it.

KEN

That's it, be gone. New York says no. Back to...Ohio?

She nods No.

KEN (CONT'D)

Wisconsin?

CYNTHIA

Nope.

KEN

Michigan.

CYNTHIA

Un un.

KEN

Idaho?

CYNTHIA

Minnesota.

KEN

Back to the snow drifts of Minneapolis.

CYNTHIA

Saint Paul.

KEN

Back to ice fishing and football. What do you even do in Minnesota?

CYNTHIA

Drink.

KEN

Well we do that here. Oh my god, we have so much in common.

He holds out his hand.

KEN (CONT'D)

Ken.

CYNTHIA

Cynthia.

KEN

Yes you are.

They shake hands.

KEN (CONT'D)

First order of business is we have to show you Breakfast at Tiffany's.

CYNTHIA

I'll have to read the book first.

KEN

Oh, you're one of those, aren't you?

Ken holds the book.

KEN (CONT'D)
This thing's a weapon. I thought you said you just got here.

CYNTHIA
I did. Last Monday.

KEN
How do you have a library book?

CYNTHIA
(slight pause)
I got a library card.

KEN
How?

CYNTHIA
What do you mean?

KEN
They need an address, a bill, an electric bill, proof of residence, something.

She thinks.

CYNTHIA
I showed them my uh...

He looks at her.

KEN
Your what?

CYNTHIA
My, um...

KEN
You stole it.

CYNTHIA
What?! No I didn't.

KEN
You did. You stole this book.

He likes her more immediately.

CYNTHIA
I would not, I am not a thief--

KEN
You're a book thief.

CYNTHIA

I am not! How dare you?! I am--

She's about to say "not" but stops herself.

They look at each other.

They burst out laughing.

Then, after they've finished a good shared laugh together...

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(dead serious)

I'm going to return it.

KEN

(still laughing)

I'm sure you are.

During their laughter the bench keeps leaning to one side: creak, leaning to the other side: creak, etc.

CYNTHIA

Do they know that this bench...

KEN

No, I don't think so. Why don't you go tell her.

CYNTHIA

I haven't been yelled at like that since Misses MacLemore in sophomore year Phys Ed.

KEN

Well, Welcome to New York! Where we yell at you like sophomore year Gym Class. Don't worry, you'll get used to it.

CYNTHIA

I might start yelling back.

KEN

Oh no, you're not ready for that yet. That's Year Two where you learn How To Order A Bagel at a Bodega and that it's Houseton Street not Houston.

CYNTHIA

How long have you been here?

KEN

I am deeply offended by that question.

CYNTHIA

Are you a Native New Yorker?

He thinks a moment about which way to take this question.

KEN

In Spirit, yes. I have been coming to this city my whole life.

CYNTHIA

But...

KEN

But...I summered in Connecticut.

CYNTHIA

Okay?

KEN

And wintered.

CYNTHIA

Un hun.

KEN

Autumned.

CYNTHIA

I'm sure it's pretty--

KEN

Oh it's so beautiful you have no idea, the colors are a vibrant explosion of yellow and ochre, that's orange--

CYNTHIA

I'm aware.

KEN

And amber and burgundy...

CYNTHIA

So you grew up in Connecticut.

KEN

Basically...technically...yes.

CYNTHIA

I've never been to Connecticut.

KEN

We will most definitely not go sometime.

CYNTHIA

Are you a wanted man?

KEN

Yes, but not in Connecticut.

CYNTHIA

Well look at you now!

KEN

Yes, look at me now. Hungover in a laundromat with a girl from Minnesota.

CYNTHIA

Sounds like a Bob Dylan song.

KEN

You are sooo...white.

CYNTHIA

You're not exactly Tina Turner.

KEN

Did you see--

CYNTHIA

I did. It was really amazing. And I hope they raised a lot of money.

KEN

Freddie Mercury is a God.

CYNTHIA

His voice is amazing.

KEN

The

(he attempts to sing the A Cappella "A-O!")

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa--

He ends up coughing.

CYNTHIA

Where did you watch it?

KEN

I had a little viewing party at my new place which turned into a big viewing party which turned into me telling everyone to get the fuck out.

CYNTHIA

Sounds like fun.

KEN

It was. You'll have to come to the next one. I have what you can almost consider a walk-in closet.

CYNTHIA

Fancy.

KEN

And a bear claw tub.

CYNTHIA

Where you keep your bears.

KEN

Not my type. This is in fact my first place completely solo.

CYNTHIA

I just moved into a fifth floor walkup with three roommates.

KEN

Yikes.

CYNTHIA

Railroad.

KEN

That is a crime against humanity.

I once lived in a storage space at Macy's, behind the bedding department.

CYNTHIA

How? Why?

KEN

Ah, the folly of youth.

And now I am doing their windows for the Labor Day Weekend Sale! Well, me and a team. Part-time.

CYNTHIA

Washing the windows?

KEN

You really are from the sticks.

Window displays! Dressings! The Looks!

CYNTHIA

Oh!

KEN

Stories! Adventure!

CYNTHIA

That sounds like fun.

KEN

It beats moving pianos, I'll tell you that.

CYNTHIA

Do you play?

KEN

No. Just move them.

CYNTHIA

I need a job.

KEN

Yes you do.

CYNTHIA

I have a friend who said she might be able to get me some quick stewardess work.

KEN

Stewardess? No no no. You just got here. Why would you want to be flying all over the place?

CYNTHIA

A little thing called money. I don't have any.

KEN

How do you feel about the nightlife? Fancy parties? Black tie affairs?

CYNTHIA

That sounds fantastic.

KEN

Good. All you have to do is smile, hold out the tray and say, "Pigs in a blanket?"

CYNTHIA

I can do that.

KEN

Stick with me, kid, we're going places. But first, do me a favor: go and fetch daddy a Tab. My throat is parched.

CYNTHIA

Watch my stuff.

KEN

(putting on sunglasses)

My eyes are wide open.

She leaves the book, takes her purse, gets yelled at as she leaves but laughs it off. She's gone.

Ken slowly and without moving opens the book still face up on the middle seat and begins to read the interior dust jacket description.

He flips it closed.

KEN (CONT'D)

It's too much.

He returns to his cuddled up fetal position nap.

Blackout.

SCENE 3

1987, Winter

Cynthia is loading her laundry into the washer out of her laundry bag.

Ken sits on the bench looking at the book he's holding. His empty laundry bag on the floor.

KEN

I don't know who Victoria Lucas is.

CYNTHIA

Exactly. Most people don't.

KEN

Then I guess I'm most people.

(reading)

Victoria Lucas, The Bell Jar.

CYNTHIA

Right? Get it?

KEN

No. Should that mean something to me?

CYNTHIA

(slowly)

The Bell Jar...

KEN

(slowly)

I Don't Know...

CYNTHIA

(irritated)

Ugh! Who wrote The Bell Jar?

KEN

(looking at book)

Apparently Victoria Lucas.

CYNTHIA
(wrong answer buzzer)
Ehn! Please try again.

KEN
Well now I just don't care.

She closes the washer door.

*He's waving the book around without regard for its
wellbeing.*

CYNTHIA
Ah ah ah.

She takes it from him.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
(holding the book up)
Do you know what this is?

KEN
Victoria's memoir about collecting bells...in a jar?

CYNTHIA
No!

She pulls her quarters jar out of her purse.

KEN
Just ring a ling ding all through her day--

CYNTHIA
It's Sylvia Plath!

KEN
I've heard of her.

CYNTHIA
This is a first British edition with the Original dust
jacket.

KEN
Why'd you bring it here?

CYNTHIA
To Show You!

Pause. He stands. The bench leans and creaks.

KEN
And I'm very impressed.

He gently takes the book from her.

He runs his fingers over the dust jacket.

He smells the book.

KEN (CONT'D)

Ooo, yes. An imposing scent. Nicotine and cedar. Pungent.

Ken opens up the book.

KEN (CONT'D)

And look...all the pages are...
(he flips through them)
...pages.

CYNTHIA

Give it back to me before you mess it up.

He hands it over.

She fingers quarters into the washing machine, then pushes them in and starts the cycle.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You'll see.
Found it at the Strand for two bucks!
Just happened to find it in a cart. Totally random. Complete luck. Probably came in with a bunch of other stuff and some NYU kid didn't realize that Victoria Lucas is Sylvia Plath.

KEN

How could he work in a bookstore and not know that?

She shoots him a dirty look.

She returns the quarters jar to her purse.

KEN (CONT'D)

What? That would be like me not knowing who Andy Warhol is.
Rest in Peace.

(he makes the sign of the
cross)

Unfathomable.

CYNTHIA

You'll see. I'm gonna have Morgan look at it. This is worth money. Real money.

KEN

How much?

CYNTHIA

If I had to guess?

KEN

Yes.

Cynthia thinks.

CYNTHIA

At least...

She examines the book, checking condition, spine, pages, etc

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Eight hundred, maybe a thousand.

KEN

(shocked, flabbergasted)

What?! That book?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

KEN

Right here?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

He pulls off his sweater, has a hard time getting it over his head, lays it down on the bench. He kneels down.

KEN

Gimme.

CYNTHIA

What?

KEN

Come on! Gimme, Gimme!

She hands him the book. Ken delicately wraps it up in his sweater, folds it, ties the arms together, makes sure it is completely protected on all sides and corners and "presents" it to her with a bow of his head, perhaps a genuflection.

CYNTHIA

Thank you.

KEN

Don't scare me like that. You've gotta tell me these things first off. A thousand dollars! And you just casually bring it to the laundromat. It's fine. No big deal. What could go wrong? There's only Water and Soap and Hot Dryers Everywhere!

CYNTHIA

I appreciate your concern.

KEN

Someone has to protect this baby. You are dangerous. You are a dangerous little bookworm.

CYNTHIA

I tried to tell you--

KEN

Ah dat dat--

CYNTHIA

That it was a big--

KEN

Ah dat dat--

CYNTHIA

Deal.

KEN

It's over. Tragedy averted. Let us move on.

Ken sits down on the bench: lean, creak.

My poor little heart can't take much more of this.
(fanning himself)

The key word there is Poor.

CYNTHIA

I think I get it.

KEN

Just do me a favor and the next time, if you're planning to bring in the Magna Carta or the Declaration of Independence or the Shroud of Turin! Kindly give me a heads up. Thanks.

CYNTHIA

There's the Christmas spirit.

Ken's washer is done. Ken stands, Cynthia sits. Bench: lean, creak. Ken removes his wet clothes from the washer and puts them in a cart.

KEN

And, if you're looking for something to get me I'm suddenly very interested in books written by last name, Lucas, first name, Victoria, sounds like the perfect name for my new boyfriend.

CYNTHIA

What about Stephen?

KEN
I think he would be fine if I brought home a Lucas Victoria.

CYNTHIA
What are you getting him?

KEN
Well, even though my presence should be presents enough I have arranged two tickets to Radio City followed by a horse-drawn carriage ride through the park.

CYNTHIA
Do you shit candy canes?

KEN
Yes I do. It's not my fault you're a Grinch. I'd say come along and bring...

CYNTHIA
Dennis.

KEN
Yes, Dennis. He of frosted tips and tight white denim.

CYNTHIA
You don't like Dennis?

KEN
I don't like Dennis for you.

CYNTHIA
That's too bad I was gonna invite you to do a double date, go see Three Men and a Baby.

KEN
I prefer Three Men and No Baby.

Ken wheels his wet clothes towards the dryers.

As he's about to open a dryer...

KEN (CONT'D)
Did you just see that?

CYNTHIA
You snooze you lose.

Ken fakes like he is deeply offended at the Little Old Lady who just jumped in front of him and stole his dryer. He'll wait, it's no big deal.

KEN
(he knows it's Minnesota)
You're not going home to Michigan?

CYNTHIA

Minnesota. No.

KEN

Okay...

He lets it hang a moment...

KEN (CONT'D)

(he knows it's Saint Paul)

Something wrong with Minneapolis?

CYNTHIA

Saint Paul. No.

KEN

Okay...

Good talk.

CYNTHIA

It's too far and too expensive.

Okay?

He looks at her and decides to let it go.

KEN

Okay.

Well, if you need somewhere to celebrate--

CYNTHIA

I'd love to--

KEN

I'm sure any of these lovely ladies would be pleased to have you.

(to someone, unseen)

Oh, yes? Thank you very much.

He can now load his wet clothes into a dryer.

CYNTHIA

We haven't talked about your birthday. The big--

KEN

Don't say it.

CYNTHIA

Three...O.

KEN

It is one of the nice things about having your birthday fall between Christmas and New Year's, if you want to pretend it's not happening, it's actually pretty easy.

CYNTHIA

Well that's not very festive.

KEN

We will celebrate Christmas: the presents, the eggnog, Baby Jesus, stockings stuffed. Then we will skip right on over to new year's: champagne, confetti, regrets, resolutions, and that will be it.

Ken pulls quarters out of his pocket and thumbs them into the dryer.

CYNTHIA

Will it?

KEN

It better.

CYNTHIA

What if it wasn't?

KEN

What if I stabbed you to death with a candy cane?
(to Little Old Lady)

Sorry.

Ken starts his dryer.

CYNTHIA

Bah Humbug.

KEN

(moving towards her)

Seriously, if you and Stephen are planning something, please don't. I want no recognition of anything anywhere by anyone.

CYNTHIA

(pause, she smiles)

This is gonna be great.

She stands, allowing one of the little old ladies to have her seat. Bench: lean, creak. She moves away from Ken. He follows her.

KEN

I'm not kidding. I will run away Shrieking for all to experience during this holiday season.

Cynthia laughs.

CYNTHIA

Did I tell you how much I really enjoyed your windows this year?

KEN
Yes you did. But thank you again--

CYNTHIA
I especially loved those Santa bears and their high flying adventure!

KEN
It is a slow piercing dagger to my heart--

CYNTHIA
Who knew that Santa had bears?

KEN
Nobody. That's who. No one.

CYNTHIA
And that bears could talk and walk and fly airplanes!

KEN
Enough! Enough! I yield. Please.

Cynthia is enjoying this.

They stand next to each other, leaning against a machine.

CYNTHIA
You know what I want for Christmas?

KEN
No. What?

CYNTHIA
(matter of fact)
World Peace.

Ken laughs.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
And a normal family.

KEN
Get in line.

CYNTHIA
What do you want?

KEN
(pause)
World Peace.

She hits him.

KEN (CONT'D)

Ow. All right, all right.
I want...

He thinks.

KEN (CONT'D)

A new sweater...
An industrial shower head for like washing baby elephants.
The pressure is killing me...
A spa day...

CYNTHIA

I'm sensing a theme here...

KEN

And a cure...

She holds his hand and squeezes it.

CYNTHIA

And a big birthday party!

KEN

No, no, no. Seriously, Cynthia, so help me, God, Santa Clause, Bette Midler, I will murder both of you if--

Blackout.

SCENE 4

1997, Winter

Cynthia seated on the bench, book in hand: Accordion Crimes by E. Annie Proulx. Both of their empty laundry bags on the floor next to her.

Ken is handing out fliers to anyone in the laundromat, mostly little old ladies.

KEN

You are all invited. If you're in town between Christmas and New Year's, stop on by, it's going to be a good old-fashioned Village rent party. Just kidding, it's free. My life might be chaotic but my rent is stabilized. Just pop on over. There will be festive drinks, a Yule log, who knows? Maybe even chestnuts roasting by an open fire--but my Super would probably close us down for that considering I do not have a fireplace in my apartment.

Here you go: that's right, it's Ken's Fortieth Gayride, I mean, sleigh ride. Don't be scared, it will be pure holiday fun until it isn't.

Misses Gennaro, I hope you will make an appearance.

Gifts are not necessary but I will not refuse a fruit cake or bottle of vino, especially not one of your famous scarves, that is beautiful.

Cynthia runs her hand over her own scarf which was perhaps a prior Mrs. Gennaro gift.

KEN (CONT'D)

Spend Christmas with your family, take a couple days to recover, then swing on over to a birthday bash the likes of which hasn't been seen since Caligula's Sweet Sixteen. And yes, Misses Yang,

(handing her a flier)

You too are invited. I find your yelling at us over truly trivial infractions oddly endearing. So grab that stocky chain-smoking husband of yours and come on by. But no smoking in the house please, I am a delicate flower and cigarettes are impossible to get out of cashmere, which is a staple of my daily life. Call me sentimental but nothing matches it for warmth and softness against the cheek. Well, you would know this of course. All you do is clean cashmere and wool and silk...cotton...polyester...

Ken meanders over to the bench.

CYNTHIA

Question. How do you plan on holding the party of the year--

KEN

Century.

CYNTHIA

The party of the Century. In your five hundred square foot apartment?

KEN

First of all, it's five fifty.

CYNTHIA

Oh, well, I apologize.

KEN

Plus, all of my neighbors are invited, so we have their apartments also--

CYNTHIA

Are they aware of this arrangement?

KEN

Likewise, the hallways will serve as areas of hang.

CYNTHIA

That's a new term I've never heard before.

KEN

That's because I just invented it. Areas of hang.

CYNTHIA

So basically you're taking over the entire floor.

KEN

Legally: no. Philosophically: maybe.

CYNTHIA

Technically?

KEN

Yes.

CYNTHIA

Does your Super know?

KEN

My plan has already been set in motion.

CYNTHIA

Which means I'll be visiting the Sixth Precinct to bail you out.

KEN

A pizza from Joe's, two bottles of fine chianti, and my own personal copy of Braveheart will be delivered to his basement abode the afternoon of my gala.

CYNTHIA

You own a copy of Braveheart?

KEN

Everyone at some point in their life should experience Mel Gibson in a kilt.

CYNTHIA

So the plan is to get him stuffed full of carbs, drunk, and then pass out.

KEN

Hence the four hour movie.

CYNTHIA

It's not a terrible plan.

KEN

Thank you very much.

CYNTHIA

And if it doesn't work?

KEN

I will offer him you as his personal sex slave.

CYNTHIA

Again?

I don't know if Ted would approve of that.

KEN

You can't marry a Ted.

CYNTHIA

Well he hasn't asked so...

KEN

And will... Ted be joining you at my grand jubilee?

CYNTHIA

After his show he'll come by.

KEN

In full costume and makeup? For me?!

CYNTHIA

Stop.

KEN

Does he ever wear it home? I've always thought of you as more of a dog person but what do I know? Here, Kitty, Kitty? Do you purr?

CYNTHIA

What is your problem?

KEN

Relax, sassafras. So touchy. I'm just teasing you.

Ken's washer is done, he transfers the wet clothes to a cart and then pushes it towards the dryers.

CYNTHIA

I'm not talking about that. You're going a mile a minute since I got here. I can barely get a word in.

KEN

I don't know what you're implying--

All the dryers are currently running so Ken waits.

CYNTHIA

I'm not implying anything--You're just having a go at me, and Ted. I know you don't like Ted.

KEN

That is not true. I think Ted is a very sweet guy who does all of the things a boyfriend is supposed to do: open up doors for you, tell you you look nice, sing show tunes in the shower--

CYNTHIA

He's not gay!

KEN

I don't think he is!

Ken notices a dryer is done. All the others are full and running. He's next in line with his cart of wet clothes.

KEN (CONT'D)

Well, this is great.

Hello? Anybody?

Dryer Four?

Who's Dryer Four?

Anyone? Dryer Four?

Who just puts their stuff in and leaves?

No consideration for the rest of us.

(pointing to little old lady)

You would never do that, Misses Lowenstein.

I would never do that.

Isn't this lovely?

CYNTHIA

I'm sure they'll be right back.

KEN

Oh, sure, why not? Let's just wait for them. Like my time means nothing. Their time is so much more valuable than my time.

We don't have a lot of time, ya know?

Can't touch the clothes.

Those are the rules.

I'm well aware, Misses Yang!

You scolded me, more times than I care to remember.

No touching!

My hands are off.

Looks like some briefs.

Some Jockeys.

Shorts.

Corduroy.

Who puts corduroy in with their underwear?

Not only do they not know how to observe proper laundry etiquette but--

A Young Guy arrives, oblivious.

KEN (CONT'D)

Oh, yes, here we go.

Ken applauds him.

KEN (CONT'D)

Please, take your sweet ass time. It's not like the rest of us have anything to do--Can I get you a cup of coffee? You want some crackers, you little NYU piece of shit!
That's right, I called you a piece of shit.
An entitled arrogant but handsome piece of shit.

Cynthia stands. The bench leans & creaks. She gets between what appears to be almost a physical confrontation.

CYNTHIA

Hey! That's enough!

Ken continues to stare at the young guy.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

He doesn't mean it. It's...

(sings badly, jokey with jazz hands)

"The most wonderful time of the year."

Ken blinks his eyes a few times, coming out of his rage. Cynthia pushes him away. Ken wanders over to the other side of the laundromat, his back turned to them.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Everything's fine, Misses Yang. It's fine!

Cynthia takes Ken's cart full of wet clothes. The Young NYU Guy has now removed all of his clothes from the dryer, bagged them and is about to go.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(re: the dryer)

Thanks. Sorry about that.

She watches the Young Man go to make sure Ken doesn't try anything. Ken remains in the corner by himself, back to her.

Cynthia loads Ken's wet clothes into the dryer, puts in quarters, and starts it up.

Cynthia looks over to Ken. He remains in the corner, back to her, maybe arms hugging himself, head down.

Eventually she walks over, puts her hand on his back and hands him her small thermos. He takes it, turns to her, and drinks.

KEN

(face scrunched up like a
raisin in disgust)

Jesus. What the hell is this?

CYNTHIA

It's green tea.

KEN

What else?

CYNTHIA

Turmeric, ginger, apple cider vinegar--

KEN

Oh my god, it's awful. Why would you do that to me? Do you have anything else?

CYNTHIA

Sorry.

KEN

A lifesaver? Certs? Anything?

She rummages through her purse and finds a plastic snap-pack of Tic-Tacs. He dumps a bunch in his mouth and then hands them back to her.

KEN (CONT'D)

I thought the party would cheer me up.

CYNTHIA

I know.

KEN

I miss him so much.

And there's nothing I can do about it.

CYNTHIA

Nope.

KEN

(to her)

Aren't you supposed to be comforting me?

CYNTHIA

It's the truth. He's not coming back.

KEN

I know.

CYNTHIA

It's been two years.

KEN

(slightly stern)

I know.

I have no one.

I'm a forty year old gay man with no one.

At least you have a dog.

CYNTHIA

And Ted.

KEN

Right, and Ted.

Pause.

She brings him back over to the large washing machine they like to lean on.

CYNTHIA

I'm thinking about going out on my own.

KEN

Sans Ted?

CYNTHIA

No! Professionally! Business-wise. I think it's time. BEA's coming up. I could launch there.

KEN

But you like your job.

CYNTHIA

Yes. But I think I could do just as well, if not better, on my own.

KEN

How would that even work? Don't you need office space? A desk? A phone?

CYNTHIA

Jerry's got a free office he said I can use for now. I've gotta incorporate. All the other stuff is easy.

KEN

It's a big risk.

CYNTHIA

Big reward.

I'm sick of being under the thumb of all the stupid bureaucracy. I want to call my own shots. Pick my own finds. The internet is changing things.

KEN

It's books. How much can it change?

CYNTHIA

Better to be ahead of the curve than behind it.

KEN

Well, as always, I will support you in whatever you do.

CYNTHIA

Excellent. I need a logo. So start thinking.

KEN

What does it pay?

CYNTHIA

I'll take you to a movie.

KEN

And dinner.

CYNTHIA

Fine. And dinner. Speaking of which:

I have an idea. Old school matinee tomorrow. Double feature.
Film Forum? Waverly? Angelika?

KEN

Village East.

CYNTHIA

Tub of popcorn...

KEN

Lots of butter...

CYNTHIA

Not too much butter.

Giant overpriced sodas.

KEN

Barq's Root Beer.

CYNTHIA

Junior Mints.

KEN

Jack Daniels.

They share a laugh.

CYNTHIA

You...Me...and Titanic!

KEN
(sarcastic)
You really know how to cheer a guy up.

CYNTHIA
It's got Leo...and Billy Zane.

KEN
I do like me some Billy Zane.

CYNTHIA
And afterwards we can sneak into something else, like a couple of crazy teenagers.

KEN
Ooo, I hope we get thrown out.

CYNTHIA
I knew you were gonna say that.

Blackout.

SCENE 5

2001, Autumn

Ken has a laundry bag. Cynthia a folding laundry cart.

Ken stands over a pile of his clothes in a cart.

Cynthia reads on the bench. Her book: Wislawa Szymborska Poems New & Collected.

Ken brings two handfuls of clothes up to his face and smells.

He smells again.

KEN
Smell this.

He turns his head and looks at her. She is lost in a poem.

KEN (CONT'D)
Hello?
Does this smell funny to you?

She walks over (bench: lean, creak) and smells the clothes he's holding up.

CYNTHIA
Define funny.

KEN

Not normal. Strange. Unusual.

CYNTHIA

No. They smell dirty. Sweaty. B.O. You're a disgusting creature.

KEN

Ha ha.

You don't smell that?

It smells like...

CYNTHIA

(loading Ken's clothes into a washer)

If you wash them, they won't smell. It's a novel idea.

KEN

They still don't smell right.

CYNTHIA

And what do you think they smell like?

KEN

Dust...Ash...Death.

They smell like death.

CYNTHIA

I think that's in your head.

KEN

You really don't smell anything?

CYNTHIA

No.

She closes the washer, adds detergent, pops in quarters, and starts it up.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

What are you going to be for Halloween?

KEN

What? I don't know.

CYNTHIA

You don't know!

You've got four days, buster.

KEN

Is the parade even happening? You really think it's gonna go on?

CYNTHIA

That's what they say. You better figure it out because I'm attending and I'm not going alone.

KEN

You can just dress up Ted.

CYNTHIA

Ted's still stuck in LA. He won't be here for the parade. You're my date, deal with it.

KEN

Isn't it too soon? Doesn't it feel too soon?

CYNTHIA

Too soon? It's been six weeks. I, for one, am sick of being afraid. I want to dress up and dance!

KEN

It's still smoldering down at Ground Zero. There's thousands of bodies--of people that need to be recovered--it's basically a giant burial site! And you want to dance?

CYNTHIA

Yes I do. So, I will ask again, what are you gonna be?

KEN

I don't know! I don't care! Why do you care?! It's just a stupid parade!

CYNTHIA

(face horrified)

Wow. "A stupid parade." I don't even know who you are anymore.

KEN

I am a man living in reality, under attack. It is time for retaliation. Revenge. Vengeance. I want Bin Laden's head on a stick! That's what I want.

CYNTHIA

So why don't you turn that into a costume?

KEN

What?!

CYNTHIA

Why don't you Take all of this Anger you have inside Here,
(she motions to his chest)

And put it Here.

(she motions to his head)

And make something fabulous.

KEN

Hold on a second.

You just want me to come up with a costume so I can make you a costume.

CYNTHIA

That is--this is outrageous talk. I am perfectly capable--

KEN

What are you going as?

CYNTHIA

(pause, eyes darting,
thinking)

KEN

Ah Ha!

You don't have a costume!

CYNTHIA

I have a costume! I have a great costume.

KEN

All right. What is it?

CYNTHIA

It's...

(Ken's eyebrows)

It's...

(Ken's eyebrows)

All right. Fine! I don't have anything! Happy?!

KEN

I knew it.

CYNTHIA

I'm not a big sewer--I don't even own a sewing machine. You have Two!

KEN

How dare you! Three. My Bernina. Brother. And the Singer workhorse.

CYNTHIA

Come on. Please.

KEN

(thinking)

Ted's stuck in LA, eh?

CYNTHIA

Yes, definitely. Indefinitely. Pretty please?

KEN

I don't know. I don't have any ideas. My creative well is dry.

CYNTHIA

What about--We could be the actual Patriot Act, manifested?

KEN

(not feeling it)

Hmmm...

CYNTHIA

Oh, uh, the Twin Towers: reborn! No, that's a terrible idea. What else...

Ken thinks.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Something with Giuliani...Pataki...Maybe Anthrax? I don't know...

KEN

(slowly)

Mister and Misses America. American Gothic. Grant Wood. I actually have a pitchfork somewhere.

CYNTHIA

Of course you do.

KEN

Misses and Mister America Go To War.

CYNTHIA

O-kay?

KEN

You know it's not actually his wife in that painting.

CYNTHIA

Oh, no?

KEN

No, it's his daughter.

I will be the Daughter, and you will be Mister America!

CYNTHIA

All right. Or,

KEN

Fine, you can be the daughter and I'll be Mister America. Feasting upon Taliban body parts. Blood over all of us. Blood everywhere!

CYNTHIA

What about--

KEN

We'll use red food dye, or maybe ketchup, no that stains. Not actual blood.

CYNTHIA

Wasn't concerned about that but thanks for clarifying.

KEN

We will be the Embodiment of Capitalist Militarist Nationalist America seeking revenge for our fallen Americans.

CYNTHIA

Love the creativity. Or we could be the Addams Family. Morticia. Gomez. I've already got the hair. You've got the mustache. And no blood required.

KEN

(processing everything, then,)

Fine.

CYNTHIA

Excellent!

We will get dressed up, we will have a night out on the town, we will march in the parade, get some food, drinks, and try to have a normal fun night in New York City! Sound good?

Ken sits.

KEN

I think I need to get out of here for a little while.

CYNTHIA

Good idea. Get some air. I'll move your stuff over to the dryer.

KEN

No, out of here.

CYNTHIA

Oh.

Where would you go?

KEN

Anywhere that doesn't have dust and debris and national guard troops and anthrax letters being delivered to Tom Brokaw. Probably Connecticut.

CYNTHIA

Hey! The Yankees are in the World Series.

KEN
(flat)
And I am beyond thrilled.

CYNTHIA
Go see your Dad?

KEN
Instead of yelling at each other we can yell at the TV together.

CYNTHIA
How is he doing?

KEN
Mentally he's fine unfortunately. Physically, so-so. He needs a new hip.

CYNTHIA
Take him down to the new Hip District.

She cracks up, really enjoying her joke.

Ken is over it before she even delivered the punchline.

KEN
Are you finished?

CYNTHIA
Oh my god, I'm crying. Whew.
(wiping her eyes)
I think that's a good idea, for you to get out of here for a while.

KEN
I think I'm still in shock. We all are. One minute, one day, one plane, the whole world changes.

CYNTHIA
Two planes. Four planes actually.

He shoots her a look.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Sorry.

KEN
I feel so much anger and hate. Which I can usually reserve for rightwing Republicans, tourists, and NYU students--

CYNTHIA
Understandable--

KEN

But now it's directed at people I don't know from a land I've never been.

Bin Laden. Al Qaeda. Taliban.

Two months ago that meant nothing to me. Now it means everything. Now I truly want to see his head on a pike. I'm not kidding. And I know that's awful. But I know I'm not alone in feeling this. I gotta deal with it. I can't carry this around...

CYNTHIA

It's a stressful time.

KEN

We're At War!

CYNTHIA

I know.

KEN

Do you?

CYNTHIA

What do you want me to do?

Pick up a rifle? Enlist? Paint my face Red, White and Blue?
We're at war.

But this isn't World War Two.

Or the Civil War.

Or even Vietnam.

This is a bunch of maniacs in caves who just so happened to pull off this psycho genius plan and in the process killed three thousand of our neighbors.

I am going to Mourn.

I am going to be Angry.

I am going to Remember.

But I'm not going to let Them Dictate how I live.

I'm gonna Dress Up and Dance.

Pause.

KEN

No Ted?

CYNTHIA

No Ted.

KEN

(thinking)

You do have perfect hair for Morticia.

CYNTHIA

Right?!

KEN
(thinking)
I've got a hand that could be Thing.

CYNTHIA
Excellent. Accessories always make the costume.

KEN
And Ted can be Lurch.

CYNTHIA
You just won't let it go, will you?

KEN
No. Never.

Blackout.

SCENE 6

2004, Autumn

Ken sits in the middle, Cynthia at another bench seat.

Ken is uncomfortable, as if scrunched or his space is being invaded. He can't move.

Cynthia and Ken have matching folding laundry carts to transport their clothes. The empty carts stand next to Cynthia.

Book on Cynthia's lap: An ARC (Advanced Reader's Copy) of Gilead by Marilynne Robinson.

CYNTHIA
I can't believe he lost.

KEN
All good things must come to an end.

CYNTHIA
It really wasn't that hard. He just had a brain fart.

KEN
Yes. He also lost both Daily Doubles.

CYNTHIA
Which never happens.

KEN
No.

CYNTHIA

And then She loses the very next game! Finishes third!

KEN

The world makes no sense anymore.

CYNTHIA

The world is a Mess! Mission Accomplished, my ass! Normally Ken is the voice of reason. The North Star. The one constant we can rely on, and now he's no more...

KEN

It's not like he's dead.

CYNTHIA

(aghast at the suggestion)

Of course not. He'll be back for the Tournament of Champions. Which he will win.

KEN

You're pretty confident--

Cynthia stands. Bench leans and creaks.

CYNTHIA

(to someone, she approaches
the washers)

Hey!

What are you doing? You can't just take out clothes. There's rules here.

Pause. She listens.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(she pulls her clothes out)

Well, I'm sorry. I didn't realize they were done. I was talking to my friend here.

She motions to Ken.

KEN

My bad. Blame me.

Her wet clothes in a cart, she rolls them over to a dryer.

CYNTHIA

(to Ken)

NYU.

KEN

Always! They're everywhere! Like ants! I should start carrying Raid.

Finally, whoever was sitting next to Ken gets up and goes to tend to their wash. The bench leans and creaks upon the person's departure. Ken stretches out.

CYNTHIA

(over her shoulder)

You all right there?

KEN

I hate the middle seat.

Cynthia laughs.

CYNTHIA

That's expensive real estate.

KEN

I know. What's with all these people?

Ken slides over to Cynthia's seat, takes her book off of it, the bench leans and creaks again.

CYNTHIA

It's a laundromat.

KEN

I know. It just seems especially populated.

Two people immediately sit down in the free seats.

CYNTHIA

Lots of early birds.

How was turkey day?

KEN

He's nuts. My whole family is nuts.

CYNTHIA

Makes sense.

KEN

Oh, thank you very much.

CYNTHIA

Just saying. You're not exactly a placid lake yourself.

KEN

Compared to them I am. I am placid water.

(to someone trying to get by,
Ken pulls his legs in, out of
the way)

Sorry.

Stagnant. Neither moving east nor west.

CYNTHIA

Nor north, nor south.

KEN

The man insists on backseat cooking. He doesn't know anything about cooking a turkey, he's never cooked a turkey in his life but he'll just sit there, drinking his endless Miller Lites, telling me how to baste it, how to stuff it, how I'm turning it wrong. It's exhausting.

CYNTHIA

Sounds like someone I know.

She pops a dryer sheet in, closes the dryer, puts quarters in, starts it up.

KEN

I am not a backseat chef.

CYNTHIA

(noise: "Ehhh")

You've been known to have opinions.

KEN

I make suggestions.

Ken rises to give Cynthia his seat. Lean, creak. She places her hand on his shoulder to stay seated.

CYNTHIA

Ehhhhhhhhhh.

KEN

What? When?

CYNTHIA

You said I should never again attempt to make meatloaf or you will boycott speaking with me.

KEN

And have you made meatloaf since?...

CYNTHIA

No.

KEN

No you have not. And I appreciate that about you. You know how to take a note. Not like Captain Miller Lite. Sure, invite all your bar buddies over. More mashed potatoes, Fred? Why sure. Candied yams? Bon appetite. I barely got a drumstick from those vultures. There was no plating, just grabbing. Like a bunch of fourteen year old boys. I swear the older you get the closer you get to becoming a baby.

CYNTHIA

It was nice of you to go up.

KEN

Of course it was!

Especially after all the shit--

Sorry.

Why do I feel obligated to take care of this man when he has shown me nothing but disgust and disappointment for my entire life? It's maddening. I must be insane. Or enjoy torturing myself.

CYNTHIA

He's your dad.

(to someone, she waves)

It's nice to see you.

KEN

In bloodline. But that's about it. I had to go through his Will, with Roger. Guess how that breaks out?

CYNTHIA

You get the house, Roger gets the bar?

KEN

Nope.

CYNTHIA

You split the bar, Roger gets the house?

KEN

(Jeopardy)

Ehn. Wrong answer.

CYNTHIA

I don't know.

KEN

This is what I get:

He makes a zero with his hand.

CYNTHIA

Wow.

Ken rises and gives up his seat to a little old lady.

KEN

Here, Misses Schultz, please.

Bench: lean, creak. Ken and Cynthia lean against a big washer.

KEN (CONT'D)

It's fine. Rog and I have already talked about it and to his credit, he's gonna give me the house and I guess he'll sell the bar. He doesn't need any of it.

CYNTHIA

He's down in Houston, right?

KEN

Yes.

And I'm here caring for a man who Deliberately cut me out of his will because his head's still stuck in some nineteen fifties version of America.

CYNTHIA

(head on his shoulder or
squeezing his arm)

You're a good egg.

KEN

Oh, yeah. I won't have any eggs in my basket but I'm a great egg.

CYNTHIA

Your windows look good.

KEN

Yes, my seasonal windows look amazing now that I'm a "seasonal" employee.

CYNTHIA

It does offer you the opportunity to summer in Connecticut.

KEN

I mean I usually summer on the Cape or Southhampton but I guess I can make an exception.

CYNTHIA

Fucking Macy's. What are they doing?

KEN

They don't know what they're doing.

CYNTHIA

Neither does Barnes.

(to someone)

No, I'm not waiting. Go right ahead. You need to get the key from Misses Yang, she's at the front desk.

KEN

You still talk to people over there?

CYNTHIA

That's how I got this.

She holds up the book.

KEN

Any good?

CYNTHIA

So far.

KEN

Maybe I will leave.

CYNTHIA

Where would you go?

KEN

I don't know. Not Connecticut.

CYNTHIA

Key West?

KEN

Key West...San Fran...

CYNTHIA

Too expensive.

KEN

L.A.

CYNTHIA

L.A.?

KEN

Yeah. I love L.A.

CYNTHIA

You love L.A. How much time have you spent in L.A.?

KEN

I don't know. Total?

CYNTHIA

Yes. In aggregate.

Ken thinks.

KEN

Total?

CYNTHIA

Yes! Total.

KEN

Maybe a month. Two months.

CYNTHIA

And you feel that gives you enough of a frame of reference to exclaim that you "love L.A."?

KEN

I'm a beach bum at heart.

She laughs at that statement.

CYNTHIA

Fuck L.A.

KEN

Well, you have reason to be biased.

CYNTHIA

Yes I do.

Can you believe he's trying to get the apartment?

He's suing Me?

He cheated. He's suing me.

How does that make any sense?

The apartment I bought and paid for with my own money, thank you very much.

KEN

Yes you did.

CYNTHIA

My work. My toil. My in the trenches finding that first Gatsby. That signed Dick. That's what paid for that apartment--

KEN

Signed Dick?--

CYNTHIA

--And now you're trying to take it from me? I don't think so, buster.

KEN

Oh, Ted.

CYNTHIA

Don't speak his name. It doesn't deserve to be spoken, by anyone, anywhere, ever, for any reason...

She's got jillions. Do you know how many books she's sold?

KEN

A lot.

(to someone)

You need to get in here? Sure.

Ken and Cynthia move.

CYNTHIA

A gajillion.

KEN

That is a lot.

CYNTHIA

And has the gaul to ask me for alimony? The gaul!

KEN

So much gaul.

CYNTHIA

I hate L.A.

It's smoggy. It's dirty. Oh, it's dirty.

It's just hidden under all the smoke and mirrors of
(jazz hands)

Hollywood!

But it's dirty to its core. You get it out in the sunshine
you'll see what I mean. Full of fake people making fake
promises to fake dreams.

"Oh, hey, I just got off the bus. I'm here to be an actress.
Discover me!"

"Here you go, honey, have a seat on my casting couch."

"Oh, sure, we'll put you in a movie. Sure we will. Just give
us a little kiss."

And everywhere you go everyone looks like they just came from
the beach or they're going to the beach or they're thinking
about maybe heading to the beach.

KEN

Sounds lovely.

CYNTHIA

It's not! It's phony. Phony baloney.

And their coffee's garbage.

And you gotta drive everywhere.

Ugh.

KEN

How much time have You spent in L.A.?

CYNTHIA

Oh I've been to L.A.

(to someone)

No, we're not using that. Go right ahead.

KEN

How much?

CYNTHIA

Believe me, I know L.A.

KEN

Yes?...

CYNTHIA

I was there for BEA in, uh...Ninety-six? Ninety-seven?
Ninety-six.

KEN

That's it?

CYNTHIA

Yeah, that's all I needed.
More than enough.
More...than...enough.*Ken laughs.*

KEN

(to someone)

Oh, is it? Okay. Thanks.

His wash is done. He goes and gets it to move it to the dryer. Cynthia follows him.

CYNTHIA

By the way, Stupid Miss Romance Novel got me thinking:
(Alex Trebek voice)
The bestselling novelist of all-time.*Ken thinks while pulling out his clothes, moving them.*

KEN

(thinking, over his shoulder)

God, the Bible.

CYNTHIA

Please phrase your answer as--

KEN

Who is God, the Bible?

CYNTHIA

Religious books don't count. No Bible, no Koran. No political books. No Mao. No Communist Manifesto.
Novelist. Bestselling novelist of all-time.

KEN

I feel like this is a trick question.

CYNTHIA

I assure you it is not.

Ken thinks. Ken pulls out his Ziploc bag of coins.

KEN

Who is Shakespeare?

CYNTHIA

Playwright. Not novelist.

KEN

Stephen King. Who is Stephen King?

CYNTHIA

No, sir. But good guess.

(someone yells out a guess)

Nope. Sorry. But thank you for phrasing it as a question.

KEN

Who is Charles Dickens?

CYNTHIA

(she makes buzzer "wrong" noise)

KEN

Who is Mark Twain?!

CYNTHIA

Lady Mallowan.

KEN

Who?!

Ken thumbs quarters into the dryer.

CYNTHIA

Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa...

*She figures he's got it, but he hasn't.**His face displays so.*

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Christie! Agatha Christie, you numbskull!

KEN

Really?! Hm. It's like Murder She Wrote.

CYNTHIA

It is not like Murder She Wrote!

Ken's dryer is running. He stands.

KEN

What's wrong with Murder She Wrote?

CYNTHIA

Nothing is wrong with Murder She Wrote!

KEN

You don't like Angela Lansbury?

CYNTHIA

I like her fine,

KEN

(to Mrs. Schultz)

Who doesn't like Angela Lansbury, right?

CYNTHIA

But she has nothing to do with Agatha Christie!

KEN

Except Murder. They're both all about murder...

Ken has moved over by the tables and now realizes he's trapped among people folding their clean clothes.

CYNTHIA

(takes a deep breath, lets it go)

Fine. They're both all about murder. I guess that technically is true.

Ken points for Cynthia to follow him to the other side of the room where there are less people.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Three of the top four are ladies. How do you like that?

KEN

I will sleep well tonight.

CYNTHIA

Barbara Cartland and...

KEN

Who?

CYNTHIA

Romance novels. You see them at the airport. All those paperbacks.

KEN

(sarcastic)

How did I never notice?

CYNTHIA

And...

KEN
(he gives up, tossing his
hands in the air)

Harry Potter lady.

CYNTHIA

No. Although I do love her.

Danielle Steel.

Both hacks. Not Miss Rowling, she's a delightful writer. But anyway, three of the top four all-time are ladies. Christie, Cartland, and Steel. And soon Miss Rowling may eclipse them.

KEN

Did you see Cedar closed?

CYNTHIA

No! When did that happen?

KEN

This week.

CYNTHIA

(genuinely feeling the hurt)

Oh, man...

KEN

It's gonna be condos.

CYNTHIA

Ugh, that makes me sick.

KEN

(singing like the commercial,
maybe jazz hands, poking fun
at her)

"I...love...New York."

Come on, Everybody!

(leading the crowd)

"I...love...New York!"

Arms crossed, a stern look from Cynthia.

Blackout.

SCENE 7

2009, Spring

*Cynthia seated on side bench seat. She reads her book:
Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout. Next to her is
her empty laundry cart.*

She notices a Little Old Lady struggling to get her clothes out of the dryer. Cynthia springs into action. Bench: lean, creak.

CYNTHIA

Let me help you with that. Please...

She gets inside the dryer, pulls all the clothes out.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

It's no trouble at--

She dumps all the clothes in a cart.

She looks at the Little Old Lady, Cynthia has tears in her eyes.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

No, I'm fine, really.

It's nothing. Just the heat.

And everything. Thanks.

She sits back down. Bench: lean, creak. She wipes her eyes. She finds the place she left off with in the book.

Her cellphone rings. She flips it open, looks at it, answers it.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I've got no one to fold my fitted sheets.

Ken appears on the opposite side of the stage. He has a mug of coffee.

KEN

I just put in a load in solidarity. How do you still not know how to fold a fitted sheet?

CYNTHIA

And yet my life goes on.

KEN

What's the status this week?

Cynthia looks around the room, counting.

CYNTHIA

Four.

KEN

Wow. This recession has finally hit the lucrative world of laundry. What was it last time? I don't remember.

CYNTHIA

It was busy. I had to wait for a machine.

KEN

Oh My God. The horror.

CYNTHIA

That never happens.

How's he doing?

KEN

Same old same old.

Fulfilling my nurse-like duties.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry. Is Roger coming?

KEN

Who knows? He says he is but we'll see. At least he puts money in the account. That's something.

CYNTHIA

That's the least he can do.

KEN

Oh, I've made sure to guilt-trip him.

CYNTHIA

That's what brothers are for.

KEN

Exactly.

CYNTHIA

And the hospice, they're...

KEN

Excellent. Magdalena. She's a Godsend. Amazing.

CYNTHIA

I can come up.

KEN

No.

CYNTHIA

It's no problem.

KEN

I know. Not yet. I appreciate it. Really.

CYNTHIA

Soon?

KEN

Soon.

CYNTHIA

Promise?

KEN

I promise.

So what's going on in the hood? Give me some gossip.

CYNTHIA

Gossip...let's see...Do you see they buzzed Lower Manhattan?
Fighter jets and Air Force One?

KEN

What? No.

CYNTHIA

Scared the hell out of people.

KEN

What happened?

CYNTHIA

It was a Photo Op and they didn't tell anybody.

KEN

Crazy.

CYNTHIA

They thought, "Oh, Air Force One, fighter jets buzzing lower Manhattan, nobody'll notice." Well, everybody noticed. It was stupid.

KEN

Sounds like it.

CYNTHIA

Florent closed.

KEN

Oh no.

CYNTHIA

Oh yes.

KEN

I love that place.

CYNTHIA

It's going to be condos.

Cedar.

Chumley's.

Minetta Tavern.
Provincetown Playhouse too. NYU.

KEN
How long have I been gone?

CYNTHIA
But you'll be happy to know Magnolia Bakery and those Sex and the City Tour buses: still going strong!

KEN
Maybe I can get a job as a Tour Guide.

CYNTHIA
No, you would kill those people.

KEN
I can point out Carrie's apartment. Friends.

CYNTHIA
So stupid. It's not like they "lived" there. It's an exterior. Visit eighty-two Jane. Alexander Hamilton actually died there.

KEN
You're just filled with fun facts. How are you single?

CYNTHIA
Well...

KEN
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

CYNTHIA
It's fine.

KEN
How is...

She waits...

CYNTHIA
Gary?

KEN
Yes, Gary. How is old Gary?

CYNTHIA
You don't remember his name.

KEN
Of course I do.

CYNTHIA

Your dad's rubbing off on you.

KEN

Yeah...

CYNTHIA

That came out wrong.

KEN

It's okay.

So how is old Gary? The key being old.

CYNTHIA

He's not that much older than you.

KEN

(laughing)

Oh, really?

CYNTHIA

No. Just a bit.

KEN

A bit.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

KEN

Does he remember when they turned on all the 'lectricity?

I bet he voted for Eisenhower.

Can he tell us what it was like when they built the Brooklyn Bridge?

CYNTHIA

Ha ha. Get it out.

He is a lovely man.

Distinguished. A full head of hair I might add.

KEN

What's that supposed to mean?

CYNTHIA

He's very Virile.

(she looks around)

KEN

Oh is he?

CYNTHIA

Yes. Yes he is.

KEN
So he can still perform, there's no performance issues.

CYNTHIA
None whatsoever.

KEN
Well good.

Her face and attitude display otherwise.

KEN (CONT'D)
I'm happy for you.

Her face and attitude display otherwise.

KEN (CONT'D)
Gary sounds--

CYNTHIA
Okay, fine, there are...some things.

KEN
Do be more vague.

CYNTHIA
He's just, uh, you know.
It takes, uh.
He takes.
So we wait...for...

KEN
Yes...

He's enjoying this.

CYNTHIA
You know...it.

KEN
Could you be more specific?

CYNTHIA
I hate you.
(too loud)
What, you never have performance issues?!

She looks around.

KEN
I'm like Meryl Streep. Even when it's bad, it's good.

CYNTHIA
(sarcastic)

I'm so happy for you.

KEN

I'm happy for myself.
I'm just pleased you have a Sugar Daddy.

CYNTHIA

What?!

KEN

It's about time. You deserve it, after all you've been through.

CYNTHIA

He's a Book Editor! This isn't John D Fucking Rockefeller! I don't need a man to take care of me!

She catches herself, shyly looks around the laundromat.

KEN

(smiling)

Of course you don't.

Cynthia sits back down.

KEN (CONT'D)

What are you reading?

CYNTHIA

Olive Kitteridge.

KEN

Good writer?

CYNTHIA

That's the title. It won the Pulitzer. And yes, it's good.

KEN

(looking out the window)

It is really beautiful here.

CYNTHIA

Yes. Here too.

I took a walk along the river this morning: glorious.
Went all the way to the end of the pier, like we used to do,
and watched the sunrise.

KEN

Oh the things that happened on those piers. That feels like another lifetime.

CYNTHIA

Well I wasn't there for that.

KEN

Makes me think of Stephen.

CYNTHIA

In a good or bad way?

KEN

I still think of him every day. In a good way. Always a good way.

CYNTHIA

Did you see about Vermont and Iowa?

KEN

Yes. Good news.

CYNTHIA

Exactly. Some good news.

I think New York's gonna happen soon.

KEN

I better get in a relationship. Quick.

CYNTHIA

Any news?

KEN

I had a lovely fellow over here the other day.

CYNTHIA

Oh, really? There? At the house?

KEN

Yes. Why?

CYNTHIA

I just figured, you know, with your dad.

KEN

Oh, he's awake maybe two hours a day and all he does then is complain or hit on Magdalena or think Magdalena is mom. That's the most endearing moment.

CYNTHIA

So what's his name?

KEN

Trevor.

CYNTHIA

And is it...

KEN

What?

CYNTHIA

(excited for him)

A thing?

KEN

Uh, a thing in the sense that he's got a great big old thing and I like to service that thing all over this house as payback for all the shit I've had to put up with.

CYNTHIA

And your dad doesn't...

KEN

It's not like I'm doing this in front of him. I do have certain standards, you know.

CYNTHIA

Of course.

KEN

It's nothing. It's just to blow off steam. I need something. I've got no job. Stuck in this house. Something's gotta give.

CYNTHIA

Do you think that Macy's would--

KEN

No, I don't even know if they're gonna survive this. Fucking Amazon.

CYNTHIA

Fucking Amazon.

KEN

Fucking Amazon.

CYNTHIA

Could you--

KEN

I may look into doing some landscaping up here for the big estates. Darien, New Canaan, Westport. But that would pay, you know...nothing.

CYNTHIA

You know if you need, all you have to do is ask. It's no--

KEN

I know.

CYNTHIA

Problem. Please don't feel weird, these are strange times,
I'm happy to--

KEN

I know!

Pause.

CYNTHIA

(trying to put a positive
spin)

At least you'd be outside. With the landscaping.

KEN

That is true.

(looking out)

Everything's turning green...

Ken gets lost looking.

CYNTHIA

Hey, are we still on for Lou Reed? It's July something. The Beacon.

KEN

What about Gary?

CYNTHIA

Gary's idea of rockin' hard is the Everly Brothers.

KEN

Oh dear lord.

CYNTHIA

So, are you my date? I mean, barring anything, you know, with your dad.

KEN

Uh,

(looking around)

Yeah, I'm sure we can find a way to swing it.

CYNTHIA

This is my treat. Don't worry about any of it.

KEN

That's very sweet of you.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, it'll be fun. Ya know.

She sings some Lou Reed or Velvet Underground.

KEN
(laughs)
You really should never sing.

CYNTHIA
Oh, come on. And after we'll hit Marie's. How 'bout that?

KEN
You're insane. Totally insane.
Well, look I gotta go. I hear him, uh, moving, so I need to
go check that.

CYNTHIA
Oh, okay, of course, of course. I'll call you this week.

KEN
Okay, sounds good.

CYNTHIA
I love you.

KEN
I love you too. Talk soon.

CYNTHIA
We'll talk soon?

KEN
Yes!

CYNTHIA
Don't be a stranger.

KEN
I won't, Mom.

CYNTHIA
Hey! Okay. Bye.

KEN
Bye.

They each hang up.

Ken does not move and looks out the window.

Cynthia looks around the laundromat and thinks.

Blackout.

SCENE 8

2012, Autumn

They just arrived at the laundromat with their matching carts and have put their clothes in the washing machines.

Ken pulls out his Ziploc bag of change.

KEN

What is this?

CYNTHIA

There's a new system.

KEN

What?

Cynthia motions to the sign on the wall.

KEN (CONT'D)

(reading)

Purchase a refillable card for five dollars--

CYNTHIA

You buy the card and then you put money on it.

KEN

Where's the change machine? The change machine's gone.

CYNTHIA

They made a change.

Ken misses the joke. Cynthia enjoys it.

KEN

So hold on: I have to pay five dollars just to get a card I can then put money on? What am I supposed to do with this?

He holds up his Ziploc change bag.

CYNTHIA

I forgot to tell you.

KEN

This is ridiculous. Outrageous! We just spent a week with no power--we're literally in a crisis. And now laundromats won't take quarters?! What world am I living in?

CYNTHIA

It's actually pretty easy--

KEN

Only bills! Oh I see how it is. Forget the poor people who carry around change. We're only catering to the clientele with bills! Big rolling wads of cash, right? Of course!

Five dollars. The system wins. The little guy loses. I'll buy the damn card. How does this even work?

CYNTHIA

You can use mine.

He thinks about it. Finally...

KEN

Fine.

She uses her card to get his machine started and shows him how. He couldn't care less.

KEN (CONT'D)

(to the new owner, no longer
Mrs. Yang)

I know, I know. New neighborhood. Gentrification. I get it.
(over his shoulder)

You know there's still some of us left here. Some of us that aren't hedge fund billionaires.

CYNTHIA

They build these mega-mansions and then don't even live in them. Have you seen the one over on Washington?

KEN

It's ridiculous. Obscene.

CYNTHIA

That could be a building with multiple families living in it.

KEN

For sure. Five or six families could live in that.

CYNTHIA

What a waste.

KEN

A total waste of space.

CYNTHIA

I mean, what young people can afford to live here now?

KEN

The kind who buy five dollar laundry cards.

(to the owner)

I'm not having a go at you, I know you're only trying to make money too.

CYNTHIA

We could never have afforded to live here. Back in the day. If it was now.

KEN

I can't afford to live here now. If I wasn't stabilized, there's no way.

CYNTHIA

And my bunions are so bad.

KEN

Oh, I've got this sharp pain in my lower back: awful.

CYNTHIA

I try soaking them, and scraping them--

KEN

And the rash, not only does it look awful, it radiates a smell not unlike a homeless man clipping his toenails.

They share a laugh.

CYNTHIA

God, when did we become such complainers?

KEN

It's what a week without hot water will do to you.

CYNTHIA

I had gas at least.

KEN

Luxurious. What was the first thing you did?

CYNTHIA

When the power came back on?

KEN

Yeah.

CYNTHIA

I screamed.

KEN

Ha. Did you really?

CYNTHIA

I had no idea that all my stuff was on. The lights, TV, alarm clock, microwave. Everything just erupted at once. I screamed. Ahhh!

Ken laughs.

KEN

I took a shower.

CYNTHIA

Oh My God, it was the greatest shower I think I've ever had.

They sit on the bench: no lean, no creak.

They try to get it to move or make a noise but nothing: it is bolted solid.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Wow.

KEN

I can't believe it.

CYNTHIA

Has it ever...

KEN

No.

That's it. Neighborhood: Over.

They are even fixing the benches, people! I don't know where I am anymore.

CYNTHIA

(trying to get the bench to move)

It's really solid.

KEN

It is a new day.

(shouts to the new owner)

You fixed it! Finally!

Yeah, it doesn't move at all! Solid!

It's a new bench, you said it!

I don't know if I'm allowed to sit on this new bench, am I?

It's too nice...

Cynthia pulls her book out of her laundry cart: Bring Up The Bodies by Hilary Mantel.

KEN (CONT'D)

(to Cynthia)

Who is this guy?

CYNTHIA

(head in her book)

It's the new owner.

KEN

Misses Yang had the right idea. Get out!

CYNTHIA

She moved to Tampa.

KEN

Did she?

CYNTHIA

Yep. Her daughter's down there.

KEN

Good for her.

Pause.

KEN (CONT'D)

At least Obama.

CYNTHIA

At least Obama. The only good news going.

KEN

But we'll take it.

CYNTHIA

You betcha.

Did you see Penguin and Random House are gonna merge?

KEN

No I must've missed that when I spent the last week Without Power.

CYNTHIA

Makes them the world's largest publisher.

KEN

I couldn't even boil water to bathe. I was eating canned tuna by flashlight.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry.

KEN

It sucked.

What does that mean for you?

CYNTHIA

Oh, nothing really. It's just interesting. I can work from wherever.

KEN

Just get on the old internet and find some old books.

CYNTHIA

Do you even understand what I do?

KEN

Of course! You find old books that are worth a lot of money.

CYNTHIA

No. I find Rare books that are worth a lot of money. Just because a book is old does not make it valuable.

KEN

You're a treasure hunter. You're like a Lady Indiana Jones, battling forgers and collectors and Nazis.

CYNTHIA

There's no Nazis.

KEN

That you know of.

So if this merger doesn't mean anything, then what?

CYNTHIA

I've just been thinking that with the internet and travel, I can pretty much run my business from anywhere.

KEN

You are a true twenty-first century woman.

CYNTHIA

So then...What am I still doing here?

KEN

You gotta do laundry somewhere.

She looks at him.

KEN (CONT'D)

You're serious.

CYNTHIA

Nine eleven, recession, this storm, the bench,

KEN

It really is blowing my mind.

CYNTHIA

The city is...

KEN

Too much.

CYNTHIA

It's too much. I don't know.

I'm just thinking about it.

Sandy's got my head all messed up.

KEN

Sandy is a cold bitch, and I would say that right to her face.

CYNTHIA

I mean, what's keeping me here?

He fakes deep offense.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You know what I mean.

KEN

Where would you go? Have you even thought about--

CYNTHIA

Charleston, South Carolina.

KEN

Apparently you have. Wow. I'm just...
You've never mentioned this before. I didn't know you were so
unhappy. I mean aside from the Sandy stuff.

CYNTHIA

I'm not. I'm just...

Her body language says stuck in the mud.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Charleston is...incredible.

There's oysters and books and the Naval history and the
Spoleto, Rainbow Row--you'd like Rainbow Row--

KEN

I'm sure I would.

CYNTHIA

I'd pay a fraction of what I do now.

KEN

But you own your place.

CYNTHIA

I'd sell it.

KEN

Wow. Just like that

He snaps his fingers.

CYNTHIA

No not just like that. It's something I'm thinking about.
Been thinking about. That's all. I'm not doing anything.

KEN

I for one am deeply disappointed. I always thought someday
you'd move back to Minneapolis.

CYNTHIA
(correcting him)

Saint Paul.

KEN

You can take the girl out of Minnesota but you can't ever fully remove that godawful accent.

CYNTHIA

(Minnesota accent)

Oh, yeah, don'tcha know.

KEN

I always thought you and I would go out together and leave this city like Thelma and Louise: convertible, holding hands, right off the GWB.

CYNTHIA

And we still can. Nothing's definite. I'm just thinking. What about you? You could've stayed up in Essex.

KEN

We've still got the house. I'm holding on to it. Roger left it up to me. I'm sure if it was him we'd have sold it by now. But to his credit he hasn't pressured me.

CYNTHIA

He's got more than enough money.

KEN

True.

No, you're right. It's definitely my security blanket, my fall back. It's just the thought of being back in Connecticut, back in that house, permanently...

CYNTHIA

Terrifying.

KEN

But then, you're right. Why am I still here? For what purpose? I used to feel...useful.

CYNTHIA

You are useful. Very useful.

KEN

I don't have any practical skills anymore. Where's the job listing for "fifty-four year old gay man with extensive window display knowledge, a love of exotic antiquing, and knows the lyrics to every song on Bella Donna?"

CYNTHIA

My only worry with Connecticut is it's so isolating for you.
It's fine in the summertime when you're outdoors with people,
but in the winter it can be--

KEN

Bleak.

It's true. Not a lot going on in the old nine five nine.

Silence for a bit.

CYNTHIA

You could come with me.

Ken laughs.

KEN

To Charleston?

(he laughs again)

You're serious.

CYNTHIA

Why not?

KEN

'Cause I live here. You live here.

CYNTHIA

I want to be happy.

I deserve to be happy.

You do too.

KEN

I can't just leave New York.

CYNTHIA

Why?

KEN

Because I can't!

CYNTHIA

Why?!

KEN

Because Stephen's here!

I see him when I go get a coffee at Bon Bon.

Sitting at a table outside Cowgirl.

On the Christopher subway platform.

Planting tulips in Abington Park...

Silence.

KEN (CONT'D)

If I leave here for good,
 I leave that.
 And I'm not ready to leave that.
 I can't.

Cynthia hugs him.

Cynthia sees the new Owner coming over to inquire.

CYNTHIA
 (to the new owner)

Fuck Off.

Ken turns his head and looks behind him.

KEN

Bookworm...

Ken smiles through tears.

They hug.

Blackout.

SCENE 9

1986, Spring

KEN
 (joyous)

I'm a Sellout!

Ken drops his laundry bag down, does a happy dance/spin move.

Cynthia sits on the bench reading: Jeanette Winterston's Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit.

CYNTHIA

I don't think they heard you across the street.

KEN

Sellout! Sell Out! Sellllllllllllll Ouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuut!
 (Misses Yang yells at him)

Oh, you love it.

CYNTHIA

You got the job.

KEN

I am a part of Corporate America!

CYNTHIA

I don't think window displays would be considered corporate America.

KEN

It's Macy's! The Biggest store on the planet! I think that's Corporate America. Where do You shop, Kmart?

Ken pulls his laundry out from the bag and stuffs it in a washer. It's too much for one machine but he is determined not to use two.

KEN (CONT'D)

Oh, screw it! I'm splurging. Two machines!

He uses two washers.

CYNTHIA

So decadent.

KEN

Get used to it. This is the new me. Nine-to-five Ken. Watercooler Ken.

CYNTHIA

Two-washer Ken.

KEN

Exactly.

CYNTHIA

Well I am very happy for you.

She stands. Bench: lean, creak.

She gives him a quick congratulatory hug.

KEN

Thanks, babe. We should celebrate.

CYNTHIA

I was just going to say that.

KEN

My mother is coming down for a few days and I would love for you to meet her.

CYNTHIA

As what?

KEN

My friend, the little bookworm.

CYNTHIA
(trying to be subtle in the
laundromat)

Does your mom know...

KEN
(not at all subtle)
She's known longer than I've known.

CYNTHIA
And she's...

KEN
She is my loving doting put-up-with-a-lot-of-shitty-things-
from-my-father Mother.

CYNTHIA
That's good. That you get along. Not the other stuff.
When is she coming?

KEN
Today!

CYNTHIA
Today?

KEN
So clear your schedule. We are going to see a show and paint
this town. Momsy deserves the best: I'm thinking La Cage or A
Chorus Line. Something with Tits!
Maybe dinner beforehand at Peter Allen's or Sardi's.
Somewhere classic. Mom will like that.

CYNTHIA
Is she staying with you?

KEN
That is why my sheets are here today. I can't have her
sleeping on the kaleidoscope of sin.

CYNTHIA
I thought you were being careful.

KEN
I am. We're all supposed to suit up in full body armor.

CYNTHIA
I can never tell if you're joking or taking me seriously.

KEN
I Always take you seriously. You're a very serious person.
You work in Publishing.

CYNTHIA

I don't think being a secretary is working in Publishing.

KEN

How is Handsy--Oh, wait! Before we get to that, I forgot: How was Hands...Across America!?

CYNTHIA

See, you're making fun of it. I'm not gonna tell you.

KEN

Oh come on, please please please. I'm just teasing. I really want to know. Pretty please. I'll give you a massage...

CYNTHIA

Shoulders?

KEN

Feet.

CYNTHIA

(eyebrows raised in surprise
at his offer)

Fine.

*Ken sits, the bench leans and creaks worse than ever.
He massages her feet while she speaks.*

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

It was...Incredible. The whole West Side Highway. All the way down to the Battery. People joining hands, there was singing, dancing--You would have loved it--

KEN

I'm sure. And you just joined in with whoever?

CYNTHIA

No. That's not how it works. You make a donation. A small donation.

KEN

How much?

CYNTHIA

Ten dollars and that gets you a place in line--

KEN

And who does that go to?

CYNTHIA

Is this a cross examination? Do you want to know about the day or just try to pick apart every--

KEN

I'm sorry! I'm curious. Continue.

CYNTHIA

Three o'clock rolls around and we all join hands. I look left and it goes all the way downtown. Look right: and there's people as far as I can see. It was such a beautiful moment. You could feel the energy going through that line. You really could. It's like electricity. A positive electrical current.

She sees his face. He's doing his best to hold it in and not laugh.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Nevermind.

She stands. Bench: lean, creak.

KEN

No! I'm sorry. Really, I am. I'm sorry. It sounds amazing.

CYNTHIA

It was.

KEN

A truly moving moment.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

KEN

My only question,

Her face says, "fine, ask it."

KEN (CONT'D)

Was Kenny Rogers there and was he drinking a Coke?

CYNTHIA

You know what, you just don't get it. You're just a cynical bitter person who can't possibly appreciate something so innocent and pure at its core. It's raising money for homeless children for Christ's sake! People holding hands! That's it! That simple! Ya jerk...

(she gets yelled at)

Sorry, Misses Yang.

KEN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You're right. I am a jerk. I apologize. Please. Come. Sit. Tell me about:

(reading)

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit.

Cynthia slowly reluctantly returns to her seat. The bench: lean and creak.

Ken plays it up like he is super interested in the book.

CYNTHIA

It's a Coming of Age Story,

KEN

Ooooo.

Cynthia: a look.

KEN (CONT'D)

Sorry.

CYNTHIA

About a Lesbian girl in a Pentecostal community in England...You would like it.

KEN

Do I look like a lesbian?

CYNTHIA

Do I? You know what, don't answer that. Quit while you're ahead.

KEN

No you do not.

How's the arms dealer?

CYNTHIA

Art dealer.

KEN

Same difference.

CYNTHIA

He's fine.

KEN

Is it serious?

CYNTHIA

No. Not yet.

KEN

How many dates?

Cynthia thinks.

CYNTHIA

Three. Four.

KEN

Where does he live?

CYNTHIA

Soho.

KEN

Where?

CYNTHIA

I don't know.

Ken shakes his head.

KEN

You need to get laid.

Cynthia looks around the laundromat embarrassed.

CYNTHIA

I don't see how that is your concern.

KEN

You're too tense. Look at you. It's summer and you're all wadded up. Even your feet: they're like wood.

CYNTHIA

I...Pff. This is ridiculous...I get...You don't know what a woman needs.

KEN

What you need and I need are pretty much the same thing.

CYNTHIA

Oh, yeah?!

KEN

Yeah!

CYNTHIA

Well maybe if I didn't hang out with you Gay Boys all the time I'd meet some decent straight men!

*She immediately slaps both hands over her mouth, embarrassed that she just shouted that out. She feels bad. She retreats to her seat. Lean: creak.**Ken is not mad at her reveal at all. He lets her go sit. Ken waves to Mrs Yang as if to say, "Don't worry, I've got this." and then he joins Cynthia on the bench. Lean: creak.**They sit in silence. She acts like she's reading her book. Then...*

KEN
How's Handsy Across America?

She can't help it, she bursts out laughing. They both laugh.

CYNTHIA
He grabbed my ass the other day.

KEN
Really? A full-on goosing?

Cynthia nods Yes. They are still laughing.

KEN (CONT'D)
What did you do?

CYNTHIA
I let him go down on me in the Remainder Room.

Now she's really laughing.

KEN
You've got to keep it down.
(looking back towards Mrs Yang, he smiles to her)
No you didn't. Did you? Really?

*She turns and looks at him and smiles: she's got him.
She laughs.*

KEN (CONT'D)
You are a mischievous little bookworm. It's always the quiet ones you gotta watch out for.
But seriously, how's that going?

She looks at him like he's crazy.

CYNTHIA
Terribly!
The guy is an awful human being.
"You know, I discovered Brett Easton Ellis."
If I have to hear that one more time I'm gonna scream.

KEN
I can call my friend, Eric over at Grove.

CYNTHIA
(tone shifts completely)
Oh my God, could you? That would be amazing. Do it. Do it now. Do it immediately.

KEN
Okay. I will. I promise.

They sit a moment.

KEN (CONT'D)

I met somebody.

CYNTHIA

Ricardo. Six two. Dominican. Probably a dancer or drag queen.

KEN

Wow. You really know my proclivities.

CYNTHIA

I've been taking notes.

KEN

That would not surprise me.

No. No Ricardo.

Stephen. His name's Stephen.

CYNTHIA

He sounds...not exotic.

KEN

No. He's a social worker actually.

CYNTHIA

Oh my God.

KEN

A good person. I know. What am I thinking?

CYNTHIA

What's He thinking?

KEN

Nice one. Exactly.

CYNTHIA

Where'd you meet him?

Ken sighs like he doesn't want to tell her.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

What? You know I'm serious about the piers, meatpacking. You gotta be careful.

He sighs again.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You need to take this seriously. I feel like I know more about this than you do and it doesn't really effect me. Directly anyway. Where? Do I want to hear this? Do I Not want to hear this?

She puts her hands over her ears.

KEN

At...

Cynthia uncups her ears so she can hear.

KEN (CONT'D)

The library.

CYNTHIA

(confused)

Is that a new club?

KEN

No. It was at the actual library. Where there are books.

Cynthia is still trying to understand.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry. You were at the library?

KEN

Yes I was.

CYNTHIA

And you met...

KEN

Stephen.

CYNTHIA

Stephen, there.

At the library.

KEN

Correct.

CYNTHIA

What were you doing at the library?

KEN

I don't know how to tell you this but--

CYNTHIA

You know what! I don't want to know. Some things are sacred. Places that should be treated, in our minds at least, as sacred, and I don't want to know.

Pause.

KEN

You know how they have those reading nooks...

CYNTHIA

(fingers in her ears)

La la la. Not listening, not listening. La la la.

KEN

At least I never stole anything from the library.

CYNTHIA

That is not fair, and you know it. That was one time. Once!
And I was new, and I returned it. I returned the book, thank
you very much!

KEN

I want you to meet him.

CYNTHIA

First your mother, now Stephen, people will talk.

KEN

He's really...something.

CYNTHIA

I'd be happy to meet him.

KEN

Good.

CYNTHIA

You're paying.

KEN

Okay.

CYNTHIA

It needs to be somewhere straight. Somewhere I can look
beautiful. And you can talk me up to everybody. And I'll
leave with my pick of the litter.

KEN

You are Always beautiful.

CYNTHIA

That is a good start.

KEN

Thank you.

CYNTHIA

Any time.

Ken stands. Bench: lean, creak.

KEN

You wanna learn how to fold a fitted sheet?

CYNTHIA

(pause)

No!

KEN

Okay then. How about a coffee?

CYNTHIA

Cappuccino.

KEN

Fancy pants.

CYNTHIA

And go to the Italian place on Seventh. Not the bodega on Christopher.

KEN

I know! Jeez. Be right back.

CYNTHIA

And a croissant.

KEN

As you wish, my love.

Ken blows her a kiss and exits.

As he goes he also blows Mrs Yang a kiss.

Cynthia watches him go, feels good, then returns to her book with a smile on her face.

Blackout.

SCENE 10

2020, Summer

Ken seated on one side of the bench.

Cynthia seated on the other side.

They are trying to keep their social distance but obviously not six feet apart because of the size of the bench. The bench is solid: no lean, no creak.

No longer wearing N95 masks, they now each have stylish scarves/bandannas over their noses and mouths. And being at the laundromat they have latex gloves on their hands. Each has their empty laundry cart next to them.

CYNTHIA

We need to figure out a time for you to come visit.

KEN

Probably twenty twenty-four.

CYNTHIA

I have a lot of room. Three bedrooms. One will be my office. Three porches!

KEN

Three porches? How is that even possible?

CYNTHIA

A back porch that's open with a little garden. A second floor balcony off the master bedroom. And then a sun room in the front with amazing light.

KEN

It sounds very...porchy.

CYNTHIA

I would say it's the complete opposite of my apartment here. I've got a fireplace! A real working wood fireplace. Hardwood flooring, granite kitchen countertops, washer dryer.

KEN

This is your last wash.

CYNTHIA

I hadn't really thought about it but you're right. No more laundromat for me!

Oh it will be so convenient. I'm too old to be schlepping this thing around. I swear I spend half my life just moving stuff from Point A to Point B. I'm like a sherpa. Now I'll be able to live like a normal person.

Ken removes his glasses and is about to wipe his eyes but catches himself and doesn't use his latex gloved hands but instead his shirt sleeves.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Are you all right?

KEN

I'm fine. It just all kinda hit me.

CYNTHIA

Oh, I didn't mean to upset you. We can talk about something else. The Protests! The establishment. Oppression. Real change. I think it might happen. The people are speaking, and it's beautiful. What do you think?

KEN

I can't believe you're leaving. It's actually happening.

CYNTHIA

Only took a global pandemic.

KEN

You know what I mean.

CYNTHIA

No, yes. I had planned this before the coronavirus.

KEN

Everybody's left. I'm gonna be like Will Smith in that movie, I Am Legend. Just me and my dog, Scraps.

CYNTHIA

You should totally get a dog. Adopt. I can put you in touch with my friend, Sam.

KEN

I don't even recognize this place anymore.

CYNTHIA

It's gonna get bad.

But I have hope with the young people. They're really engaged.

The whole reason we live here, choose to live here, on top of each other is because of things like culture, diversity: in restaurants, bars, theatres, music. It's all--

KEN

Gone.

CYNTHIA

For now, yes. Unfortunately.

But it will come back. It'll just take time. Maybe this will drive all the rich people out. Venues empty, boarded up. The city bankrupt. Go back to how it was in the seventies and eighties. When we first got here. Remember?

The change will happen. New places will open. If you're in your twenties, like all these kids out there marching, it'll be glorious. If I was their age I'd stay and wait it out. The wave will crash and then another one will come to ride.

But I'm almost sixty. I can't wait for that next wave.

I want Nature. I want to breath again. I don't think I've had a full breath in this city for years. I want to smell the Ocean. Feel the sand between my toes. Walk down new streets that I don't really know. Don't know what's around the next corner. What I might find. Something new...

KEN

I feel like I'm living in this weird bizarro alternate universe. Can't go anywhere, do anything, see anyone. I'm living off Zooms and rallys.

CYNTHIA

You know NASA just discovered a parallel universe.

KEN

Can I go live there?

CYNTHIA

I'll see if they're accepting applications.

KEN

This is crazy! I can't touch anyone! I can't even see faces. We're all covered up!

Ken pulls down his bandanna.

CYNTHIA

What are you doing?

Ken removes his latex gloves.

KEN

I am sick of being bottled up like an invalid.

CYNTHIA

No, don't do that.

KEN

There.

The bandanna and gloves off, he feels better. He looks at her.

KEN (CONT'D)

Now. Much better.

They are folding their dry clothes.

CYNTHIA

You need to at least put your mask back on.

KEN

Why? I'm sick of being afraid.

If you get me sick, so be it. I'm fine with that.

You're my best friend. I've known you my entire adult life.

My entire time here in the city. If you get me sick, I will gladly retire.

Cynthia looks around, there's no one except the Owner and he's busy on his phone.

*Cynthia pulls her scarf down from covering her face.
She smiles. Ken smiles.*

Ken walks up to her.

Ken hugs her.

*Cynthia is hesitant at first but then gives in to the
hug and hugs him back.*

*They break apart but continue the embrace, face-to-
face, smiling.*

*Then Ken moves away, returning to his folding. He puts
his gloves back on.*

Cynthia leaves her scarf down and returns to folding.

KEN (CONT'D)

Crab. Crabcakes. A crab man. A Man of the Sea. Bearded. Wears
lots of flannel. Fifty-something.

CYNTHIA

(jumping in)

Lives with his mother.

KEN

Nice touch.

CYNTHIA

My future fisherman.

You'll definitely have to come visit.

KEN

Are you sure?

CYNTHIA

Absolutely.

KEN

All right. But don't blame me when I steal him away from you.

CYNTHIA

So confident.

KEN

Fishermen love me.

CYNTHIA

How many fishermen do you know?

KEN

Lots.

CYNTHIA

Lots? How? From where?

KEN

I have a whole other life you don't know about.

CYNTHIA

Apparently.

KEN

I am acquainted with all types of Sea Men.

CYNTHIA

That was bad.

KEN

But you didn't see it coming.

CYNTHIA

That's even worse. But no, I didn't. Well, speaking of Sea Men...

KEN

Yes, please.

She removes a wrapped brown paper item from her cart and hands it to him.

KEN (CONT'D)

What's this? For me?!

Ken holds it up, looks at it, shakes it.

KEN (CONT'D)

What could it be? Should I open it now?

CYNTHIA

Sure.

Ken tries to open it carefully at the edges to save the wrapping paper but she has done such a thorough job taping it that he finally gives up and just tears.

KEN

A book!

CYNTHIA

What else.

KEN

How perfectly...perfect.
What have we got here...

He finishes fully unwrapping it.

KEN (CONT'D)
Ooo, this looks like my kind of book.

Ken opens the book.

CYNTHIA
It's--

KEN
Pictures!

CYNTHIA
It's the piers. Seventies and eighties. Taken by this wonderful black photographer, Alvin Baltrop.

KEN
You know me better than I know myself.

CYNTHIA
He was down there. Obviously. You might have known him.

KEN
The name does not ring a bell but that doesn't mean anything.

CYNTHIA
He wasn't known, his work, until recently. After his death.

KEN
Typical New York story. They love you after you're gone.

CYNTHIA
There's some great pictures in here.

Ken flips through the book.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Seventy-two, that's a good one...

Ken flips.

KEN
Wow.

He flips.

KEN (CONT'D)
These are incredible.

Ken arrives at page seventy-two.

Ken stops and stares.

Cynthia smiles to herself.

KEN (CONT'D)

How did you...

CYNTHIA

Is it...

KEN

Yeah. I mean if not, it's his twin. And Stephen didn't have a twin, that I know of.

CYNTHIA

Before all this, I was at the Whitney and...

KEN

He's so young. He's a baby.

CYNTHIA

Very striking. Beautiful.

KEN

You bet yer ass.

This is...

Thank you.

Ken hugs Cynthia. She lets him and joins the hug immediately.

Ken's face towards the front door, the Owner is obviously scolding them for breaking social distancing rules.

KEN (CONT'D)

All right! Relax!

(pointing to the owner)

I'm coming over there and hug you next.

You know you want it.

Cynthia places her folded clothes into her cart.

Ken does the same.

KEN (CONT'D)

(re: the book)

This is pretty great.

You know I might get into old books.

CYNTHIA

(correcting him)

Rare books.

KEN

(playing with her)

What's the difference?

They continue to put folded clothes in their carts.

KEN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go up to Essex for a while, give up the apartment, there's no reason to stay down here when there's nothing.

CYNTHIA

You're giving it up?! For good?!

KEN

I might be crazy but I'm not insane. That's a rent-stabilized New York City apartment. It's like a golden unicorn with a walk-in closet! I'm letting Timmy sublet it from me. The kid's a sweetheart.

CYNTHIA

He really is. Oh, good. That makes me happy. You scared me there for a minute.

KEN

(smiling)

What do you care? You don't even live here anymore.

CYNTHIA

Harsh.

KEN

Fuck you, I'm a New Yorker.

Cynthia laughs.

KEN (CONT'D)

You ready to go?

CYNTHIA

I'm waiting on you.

Cynthia leads the way. She pulls her scarf back up over her mouth and nose, turns and motions for Ken to do the same.

Reluctantly, Ken pulls his bandanna up over his nose and mouth.

KEN

Say goodbye, Cynth.

CYNTHIA

Goodbye, Cynth.

Cynthia does not look back, she exits pulling her cart after her.

KEN

Well played.

*Ken looks back, and then turns and follows her out,
pulling his cart behind him.*

Fade to Black.