

Toppings

A comedy sliced to serve in two Acts

By Tim A. Pullen

The cast (in order of appearance.)

Mrs. Janet Vennellie: Seventy two years old (Bartolo's wife.)

Mr. Bartolo Vennellie: Seventy-five years old (Owner of the pizzeria.)

Celeste Mavelo: Ninety-two years old Head chef. An Italian dominatrix (in personality)

Charles (Chuck) Phillips: Thirty-one Pizza delivery driver/ Waiter.

Cindy Walters: Thirty-three year old waitress: Over worked and over educated for this job.

Marie Portman: Twenty-eight years old. Meek, timid, paranoid waitress. Very plain, over works constantly. On the verge of homicide or suicide, but chipper.

Brett Douglas: Fifty-four. A career business owner.

The customers can be double cast to suit as many or as few as you like.

Norman Thomas: Thirty-six. Returning a used pizza.

Mr. Jefferies: Thirty-two. Patron

Mr. Haste: Thirty-five. Patron

Mrs. Haste: Thirty-four Patron

Griffin Cassidy: Fifty-two Patron

Patricia Carlson: Forty-three Woman that Works at a bank.

Steve Turner: Eighteen year old patron.

Amy Rines: Seventeen year old. Steves girlfriend. (she does not say anything in this show.)

Lt. Scott Madden: Twenty-seven patron

Lisa Madden: Twenty-seven Scott's Wife

Veronica Winslow: Twenty-seven (Voice from the television.) Meteorologist.

Act One Scene one

Friday January 8th 2010

(The pizzeria is set up like many, a large window made up of smaller pains, with a door next to it. A long counter with a register at one side, on the other side of the stage and behind the counter a door to the kitchen, and an opening with an order spindle dangling from above, a bell below. Whether or not the audience can see any part of the kitchen is up to producers or directors- the writer happens to see some very funny mimed moments possible though a larger opening, but I don't write mime. From the front window we should see a small but bustling little town. If possible a tree should be just in view to show the changing seasons. As the story opens its late morning in January, bright but cold. A fabric sign is draped across the permant sign just above the front window of the restaurant with the lettering: "Our Pizza is fifty years old." Janet Vennellie is standing reading the sign, her husband enters from the back to put money in the register.)

Janet: I'm not sure that's the message you want to send.

Bart: What do ya mean?

Janet: Our pizza is fifty years old?

Bart: The pizza hasn't changed in fifty years.

Janet: I know dear.

Bart: The recipe hasn't changed, it's made the same as when I opened this joint, that's my message.

Janet: But this sign implies it's the same slice of pizza.

Bart: To hell with it then, do ya know it cost me eighty bucks to have that made?

Janet: Can I see if we can fix it?

Bart: Fix it? How much is that gonna cost?

Janet: I won't spent any money on it.

Bart: Do what ya want. (he storms back into the kitchen, rambling aloud) I'm no good at sendin' messages anyway, just say what I mean, it's never good enough-

Celeste: (Walking in) What's wrong with him?

Janet: He's a man.

Celeste: Grumpier every day. Must be outta de Viagra.

Janet: No Celeste, I'd be the grumpy one. It's the new medications they put him on. He's not allowed to drink anymore. It would kill his liver.

Celeste: Risk it, slip a little vodka in his coffee.

Janet: Can't have caffienee, with the heart meds.

Celeste: And they wonder why old people are so bitchy, half the stuff we can't do no more the other half the doctor tells us we shouldn't do no more. Never mind his being mean, I'll just smack him. Janet! I no look at you for a while, are you putting on weight?

Janet: Yes, as a matter of fact I have. Thanks for noticing. Stupid European honesty, you need to learn some American tact.

Celeste: Tact? You mean bullshit.

Janet: Call it what you will, just call it without pointing out how fat I'm getting.

Celeste: It looks good on you- you look healthy.

Chuck: (Entering front door) Good morning Celeste, good morning Mrs. V.

Both: Morning Chuck.

Chuck: Wow, the sign looks.-Well how do I put this? I don't think we should have that up.

Janet: I was hoping I could get you to take that down for me so we can see if we can fix it.

Chuck: Okay-dok. I'll grab the ladder. You going to teach me to toss the dough again today Celeste?

Celeste: I'll try but you better keep it off the floor this time. You know what they say...

Chuck: No, what?

Celeste: I was hoping you knew, I'm too old to remember that crap.
(they both head to the back, Cindy enters)

Cindy: Morning.

Janet: Good morning Cindy.

Cindy: Why do we have to specify good? It's a morning, that much we can agree on.

Janet: Really it's half past eleven, it's almost noon.- Wait a second, why are you here so early? I thought you were closing tonight, don't you come in at four?.

Cindy: I wish. I wanted the overtime so I offered to come in early and help with the- what moron put that up?

Janet: My husband.

Cindy: Maybe this fiftieth thing won't be a big deal after all. He expected us to be busy today.

Janet: Chuck and I are going to fix the sign. (Chuck enters with a ladder)

Chuck: Hey Cindy.

Cindy: Chuck. (She goes to the back, and returns in an apron.)

Chuck: You just want this down, right?

Janet: Yes please, I'll grab the scissors. (She exits)

(Chuck takes the sign down revealing a more permanent sign that reads: Bartolo's Family Pizzeria and subs.

Chuck: If I cleaned out behind the back counter do you think I might be able to find a fifty year old piece of pizza that fell back there.

Cindy: Why do you try to talk to me before noon? You know I'm not a morning person.

Chuck: Why are you here so early?

Cindy: The fifty thing. Would you please shut up, your voice hurts.
(Janet re-enters with scissors, flyers, and a bundle of balloons)

Chuck: Were you drinking again last night?

Cindy: What part of shut up did you miss?

Janet: Cindy could you put these flyers up around the place? and put a stack on the counter for the to-go orders.

Cindy: You got him to go for this?

Chuck: What? What's it say?

Cindy: (Handing him one) Uh.

Chuck: Fifty percent off all weekend, wow that's a good deal.

Janet: We're hoping to get some fresh customers with this fiftith anniversary celebration. There you go, now Chuck if you could just hang this up right under our Bartolo's sign.

Chuck: Oky-dok(He does, it now reads Bartolo's family pizzeria is fifty years old)

Janet: Just a little lower, there you go, perfect.

Chuck: Much better.

Janet: Thank-you. Now toss these balloons and streamers up.

Chuck: Just anywhere?

Janet: You have creative liscense on this one (she exits)

Chuck: Cool. Did you hear that? Creative liscense.

Cindy: I thought you were dangerous with a drivers liscense.

Chuck: I can decorate with ballons, I'm not incompetent (As he says this he releases a bundle into the air) Oh great. Lucky, I have the ladder. (he grabs the ballons) Just think, it was fifty years ago that these doors first opened. Changing our lives forever.

Cindy: What did I say about your voice?

Chuck: Can you imagine what it was like to be here back then?

Cindy: I'm trying to imagine not being here now.

Chuck: This place has made countless people happy.

Cindy: I'm not one of them.

Chuck: Come on, this place makes people happy.

Cindy: It's a pizza parlor, it makes people fat.

Chuck: Think of the smiles we've brought.

Cindy: The heart attacks we've caused.

(Marie enters, she sees Cindy and stops abruptly)

Chuck: Good morning Marie. Cindy is just here to help because of the fiftieth celebration.

Marie: Okay.

Cindy: I'm not tring to take your job.

Marie: I didn't think that, I'm not threatened by you. Do I look threatened? Well, I'm not.

(She continues on to the back to dawn her apron, passing Bart and Janet as they enter)

Janet: Good morning Marie.

Marie: She's just here to help this morning, its not like she wants my job.

Bart: No one can do your job like you can Marie.

Janet: What do you think?

Bart: Yeah. Okay it looks better.

Chuck: Mr. V, What was running through your mind fifty years ago today when you first un-locked those doors?

Bart: How the hell am I gonna make the rent?

Chuck: (Laughs) No, really.

Bart: You haven't squashed his enthusiasm for today yet, have you?

Cindy: Let me finish my coffee, I'll get on it.

(Marie enters with a bucket and begins scrubbing thr restaurant)

Janet: Someone is proud of your business Bart, tell him.

Bart: I did, that is really what I was thinking. I didn't want a pizzeria. I wanted to open a car shop, but I was a lousy mechanic.

Chuck: Then why'd you open a restaurant?

Cindy: He already bought the grease.

Bart: I had a great loan offer from the VA after the war, and my uncle's place was closing in Detroit. My father and Celeste needed a place to work, so bam-pow- I own a pizza shop. (Celeste enters from back or sticks her head from the kitchen if the window complies.)

Chuck: I Didn't know you were in a war. Which war?

Cindy: Civil.

Bart: Ha, ha, very funny. Korean.

Chuck: Did you see any action?

Bart: Oh yeah, I saw a lot of action. Mostly Gashia girls, I was stationed in Japan.

Chuck: You must've been a cook in the army.

Celeste: Are you kidding? He can't fix a bowl of cereal.

Bart:When she worked for my uncle's place I always loved her pizza, so I hired her to make it here after my uncle died. Of course I've learned how to make it through the years.

Chuck: And now thanks to fate, Cindy, Marie and I get to be part of that legacy.

Celeste: If anyone wants to learn about this legacy they better get back here to help me.(She exits)

Bart: Chuck, my boy, do you know why we've had Celeste teaching the three of you to cook the pies?

Chuck: As trusted employees we are the only ones you rely on to help keep the secret of your success.

Bart: Celeste is ninety something, she's not going to make it another fifty years. I don't want to spend every minute of my life in this dump, and I'm hopping one day the three of you can just run the place, make me money, and cook the pizza while I go home and lounge by my pool.

Chuck: Like passing the torch.

Cindy: More like passing the buck. When we're making your money, and you're living the life of Hue Heffner, we get raises right?

Bart: If you can start making any money with this place.

Chuck: This place makes tons of money.

Bart: Used to. Pizza dough was the dough back when ya started working here.

Chuck: Have I done something?

Bart: Nah, it's got nothing to do with ya.

Janet: You're part of the charm we've got around here.

Bart: Ten years ago there wasn't five dollar pizzas, unlimited toppings. How can we compete with that?

Janet: With our friendly and reliable staff, and our one of a kind brick oven pizza.

Cindy: You want me to be friendly?

Janet: No dear, you're reliable, Chuck's friendly.

Cindy: Just so we're clear.

Marie: (She starts scrubbing tables) What does that make me?

Cindy: Some kind of masicast as far as I can see.

Chuck: You're the hardest working most dedicated one of us all.

Marie: You're just saying that.

Bart: He's right. Really, If ya had a life I'd be doomed.

Marie: I was instilled with a sense of duty as a child, excuse me, I need to change this water. (she exits for a new bucket of water)

Janet: See, you just boosted moral Bart.

Cindy: She's so nuts.

Bart: Probably abused by her parents.

Janet: Now Bart.

Bart: Cindys right.

Cindy: She's going to snap one day and kill us all.

Bart: Probably.

Chuck: Can I flip the sign?

Cindy: We don't open till noon.

Bart: I always flip the sign.

Janet: You should let him Bart.

Chuck: Let's start this anniversary weekend off right, I'll turn on my charm, you activate the reliability, we'll let Celeste and the brick oven crank out incredible pizzas, and Marie will do the rest. Let's put those big chains outta business.

Bart: It's ten till, go ahead and flip it.

Chuck: Really?

Bart: Yeah, why not. You can use another duty- I been doing that for fifty years.

Chuck: I get to do it? Are you sure I'm ready for this kind of responsibility?

Bart: Is it something in the water? Why do I get all the nuts?

Janet: Now Bart.

Chuck: I feel so honored.

Cindy: It's a piece of cardboard on a string.

Chuck: It's the open sign, it's like the sun rising or setting on our place of business. With one turn we signify to all humanity that we are ready to serve them, the joy that is a Bartolo's pizza is now within their grasp.

Bart: Good lord.

Cindy: I'm gonna flip you, quit being so damned happy about it and flip the flippin sign. (He does)

Marie: We're opening early today?(She re-enters with the bucket and sponge) I haven't finished in the men's room, I'd better hit that first.

Cindy: It's ten minut- nevermind.

Chuck: I'll help you.

Grace: No, I'll just work faster, you won't do it right anyway. (She exits to the men's room)

Janet: That's dedication.

Bart: If she ever sees a therapist they could cure that dedication, but she hasn't asked for a raise yet, when it works for ya, don't fix it.

Cindy: One day she's going to drown us all in her mop bucket.

Chuck: Maybe we could start opening earlier everyday for breakfast.

Bart: Its a pizza joint Chuck. (He exits, his wife follows)

Chuck: A lot of people like pizza for breakfast. We could serve it cold.

Cindy: I don't believe I still work here.

Chuck: I'll put the sign board out.

Cindy: Let me put the specials on it first.

Chuck: I can do that, you just relax, have your coffee.

Cindy: Knock yourself out. (Hands him a paper)

Chuck: How do you spell specials?

Cindy: This is going to be a long day.

(Lights Out.)

Act one scene Two

Monday August 9th 2010

(The summer sun is setting by the front windows of the pizza store. Perhaps as the scene goes on fireflies begin to twinkle in the darkness. The tree in view is green . Cindy sits on the counter at the register drinking beer from the tap (if the tap is visible, just a mug to imply it if it's not). Watching a small TV she has plugged in behind the register. Marie is mopping the floor, and scraping the gum off the bottom of tables as she passes. We can hear the weatherman on Cindys tv. Chuck walks in wearing shorts, a Bartlo's t-shirt and hat carrying a pizza delivery bag.)

Weatherman: Bringing thunderstorms for Thursday, some of them could be severe. In the meantime expect more of the same, hazy hot and humid- (she turns the tv down as Chuck enters)

Chuck: My air conditioner broke on the way out. We don't have to stick the next order in the oven, I'll just cook it on the way.

Cindy: The sun's setting, it'll cool off soon.

Chuck: I don't know, that air is so thick you swim through it.

Marie: It's not the heat, it's the humidity.

Chuck: Hey, why are you still here?

Marie: Why? Don't you want me here?

Chuck: I don't mind at all but you've been stuck here all day. I just thought you'd have other things to do.

Marie: I do, I have plenty of better things to do. You don't think I have anything better to do?

Chuck: I didn't mean -

Marie: I thought I'd get some work done while it was slow. Is there something wrong with that?

Chuck: No.

Marie: Would you flip this table over for me? It's easier to scrape the gum off.

Chuck: Sure thing, sounds like fun. (He flips a table) Just let me cash in I'll get the others.

Cindy: Are you ever in a bad mood?

Chuck: Well sure. Everyone has bad days sometimes. My favorite tv show was canceled last night, I was so mad I didn't watch tv at all.

Cindy: I'm glad I wasn't there to feel your fury.

Marie: You watched Beyond the Darkness?

Chuck: Every Tuesday night, you watched that?

Marie: Yes! Don't you hate it when they just stop a show like that.

Cindy: Wasn't that one of those stupid ghost hunter things?

Chuck: Yeah, who knew we had so much in common?

Cindy: I've known for a while, you're both morons.

Marie: Oh, I don't believe in ghosts, they don't exist- it says so in the bible. I just thought that one guy was cute.

Chuck: You don't believe in ghosts but you believe in an invisible (as he looks sky ward Cindy clasps her hand over his mouth.)

Cindy: Let's not talk religion.

Marie: Grandma always says religion and tongues should be kept to one's self.

Cindy: Words of wisdom.(aside to Chuck as Marie goes back to scraping gum) If you want to send her on a homicidal bloodbath you wait till it's my day off.

Chuck: Okay. (He hands Cindy the money)

Cindy: Seriously Chuck, you work in nintey eight degress, your car brakes, they cancel your favorite tv show and you think scraping gum off tables would be fun.

Marie: I think that was sarcasm.

Chuck: No, it wasn't. (He flips the other tables over. One by one, then back as needed.)We can have a contest to see who can collect the most gum.

Marie: You want to scrape?

Chuck: Why not? Many hands makes light work.

Marie: You'll scrach up the table.

Chuck: What could I hurt on the underside?

Marie: Just flip it over, and let me do it right.

Chuck: Okay. Did you have another order for me?

Cindy: Nope, that was it. Would you please tell me how you are always so damn happy? Are you on some medication?

Chuck: No, its easy- I love my job, all my friends. What's not to be happy about? Did you know my dad used to bring me here every Friday night for the pizza buffet, then when I got a license I drove my high school friends here, and next thing you know, here I am every day.

Cindy: Every day. Wait, what friends do you have? I've never seen anyone visit you.

Chuck: You and Marie. And the customers like me.

Cindy: Marie quick what's Chuck's birthday?

Marie: Uhm, I- wait, it'll come to me- I know it-

Cindy: See! I don't know it either, you've got lousy friends, and the customers are just nice to you so you won't spit in their food.

Chuck: Why are you always so miserable?

Cindy: I live in a little place called reality, and I have to put up with your damn happiness all the time. (Bart comes out from the back, and heads to the front window to look for customers.) That and I hate my job, I'm disappointed with life in general-

Bart: Leave the boy alone. The customers like him.

Chuck: See.

Cindy: You don't understand, he gave me a ride in to work this morning, and this guy coming the wrong way down a service road pulls in front of him honks his horn and gives him a nasty look as he speeds by, and what does Chuck do?

Bart: What?

Cindy: Nothing. He didn't honk the horn, didn't lift a middle finger. Didn't even swear at the guy.

Chuck: What good would any of that do?

Cindy: It'd make you feel better.

Chuck: I wasn't upset. How do you know the guy didn't have some emergency to get to?

Cindy: The nasty face.

Chuck: Maybe he was born like that. Maybe he was concerned over his emergency. I'd hate to think the worse of people.

Cindy: You see what I'm saying? It's perpetual optimism.

Marie: There's nothing wrong with optimism, as long as you don't mind disappointment.

Bart: He'll grow out of it.

Cindy: It's just sick.

Bart: He gave ya a ride? Ya still ain't got that liscense back?

Cindy: Its not my priority.

Chuck: Look at how lucky you are. How many places can you work where you get paid to watch television and drink beer?

Bart: (Notices what Cindy's doing) Cindy, Get your ass off my counter or I'll slap pepperoni on it and sell it by the slice.

Cindy: Sure, I'm lucky. (She hops down) I went to college for this?

Bart: I thought you were making deliveries.

Chuck: All done for the moment sir.

Bart: Marie? Why are you here. I thought you went home. You clocked out an hour and twenty minutes ago.

Marie: I'm just taking the opportunity to catch up on the cleaning. (Bart and Cindy look at each other, to show their acknowledgment of her insanity.) It's not easy to scrape gum from under the tables when we're busy.

Bart: I'm runnin' an assylum. (Said to himself.)

Chuck: I'm sorry.

Bart: Me too.

Chuck: No, I didn't catch what you said.

Bart: Good. Look, I've only heard the phone ring twice the past hour.

Cindy: One was a wrong number.

Bart: Good to know.

Marie: We had a group of ten this afternoon, a women's club, I seated them myself.

Bart: That's great Marie. (He makes his way to Cindy, and speaks to her aside.) Can you put her back on the clock? I don't want to get in trouble for taking advantage of mental handicaps.

Cindy: Will do. (She exits to the back a moment then re-enters.)

Chuck: I'll go and see if Celeste needs a dough flipper.

Bart: Don't bother. There aren't any orders right now. I told her not to make pizzas for us to toss out.

(Mrs. Vennellie enters from front door with two large bags and a hat box.)

Janet: Oh Bart! I'm glad I caught you. You've got to see these new outfits I found on summer clearance.

Bart: Oh good god. (He sits in a seat.)

Marie: Chuck, could you tighten a few screws for me?

Chuck: Sure, let me grab the tool box. (he does, it's behind the front counter.)

Cindy: I knew she had a screw loose.

(The bustle for the next few moments.) Chuck and Marie are working on the bottoms of chairs. Janet is showing off clothing that Bart has no interest in and Cindy has gone back to her tv.)

Chuck: So Marie, why did you start working here?

Marie: My grandma asked them if they needed another waitress, and got me the job.

Chuck: But you went to college?

Marie: Yes. I have a bachelor's degree.

Chuck: Still, you're happy here right?

Marie: Happy as I would be anywhere else.

Chuck: What's your degree in?

Marie: French poetry. Why?

Chuck: Just curious.

Janet: Are you even paying attention to me Barty?

Bart: Doll, ya look terrific in rags to me, ya know that.

Janet: Maybe if I try them on for you, come on. (She exits dragging him along.)

Bart: Fine. (They exit.)

Chuck: I can't tighten these two, the wood snapped.

Cindy: Oh yeah, just chuck those Chuck. A customer broke them last night.

Marie: We need seats for the small table.

Chuck: I'll ask Mr. V what he wants to do. Cindy, What's your degree in?

Cindy: What degree?

Chuck: Your college degree?

Cindy: Why? Are you getting me a new job?

Chuck: Just trying to figure out what you don't like about this job.

Cindy: Look around.

Chuck: You're a smart young woman, there's no reason-

Cindy: Chucky, Don't try fixing me, I'm too complicated.

Chuck: I don't like being called Chucky.

Cindy: I know, are you mad?

Chuck: Naw, you can call me that if you want.

Cindy: (She sighs) Have I mentioned your mother's fat?

Chuck: She could stand to lose a few pounds.

Cindy: Do you see?

Marie: He is unusually good tempered.

Chuck: So what is your degree in?

Cindy: Communication.

Chuck: Really?

Cindy: Yep.

Chuck: You hate communicating.

Cindy: Look, it's not just the job, I. I screwed up a bunch of stuff in life. I missed a-you know -chances.

Marie: Chances.

Chuck: Did you miss chances too?

Marie: I wanted to teach French to high school.

Cindy: I can see why such lofty ambitions were never met.

Marie: My father always told me "teaching was dumb, it don't pay enough." Then, after he died, my grandmother needed help, I had to stay nearby. Just never had the chance.

Chuck: Life isn't supposed to give you chances, you're supposed to go out and take them.

Cindy: It's for the best you don't teach, the students would've hated you.

Marie: And I don't like younger people that much either.

Chuck: What did you want to be?

Cindy: None of you're business.

Marie: Are you telling us you wanted to be a pizza delivery boy?

Chuck: I wanted to be a superhero millionaire, but that faded as I got older, not like my job here. I can't imagine super powers being much more exciting.

Cindy: Then you don't have much imagination.

Marie: Can I order a pizza?

Cindy: Really? From here?

Marie: Please. A large with onions, green peppers, and pepperoni on half.

Grandma likes pepperoni, but you know I try to stay away from the red meat.

Chuck: You know it's not really red, it's dyed.

Marie: I know. (She sits at a table, and notices it wobbles) that's part of the reason to stay away from it.

Cindy: (Dings a bell and puts a slip on the wheel behind her) Order up!

Celeste: I'm coming! I'm a coming! (She appears in the window and takes the ticket) Don't everyone move at once, let the old lady do the work.

Marie: Can we do something about this wobble Chuck?

Chuck: I think there's a shim somewhere around here. (He begins to look) So what chances did you miss? Did you want to be an actress? A model? I bet you'd be a good model.

Cindy: Why would you think that?

Chuck: You're pretty.

Cindy: Oh come off it. I'm just bitchy. If I were a millionaire's kid I'd be complaining about something.

Chuck: You know I remember the first time we met.

Cindy: Yeah, so do I. I asked you for an application. One of my first big mistakes.

Chuck: That wasn't the first time we met.

Celeste: Hey! Apprentice boy! Do you want to learn this flippin pizza or no?

Chuck: Coming! I gotta learn the flipping pizza thing. (He runs to the back.)

Marie: I think he likes you.

Cindy: He likes everybody. I'm pretty sure he shits rainbows.

Marie: You think he's gay?

Cindy: No. He's happy all the time, that's all.

Marie: Still, he's not seeing anybody, and he is kind of cute.

Cindy: We're cute and single, does that make us lesbians? We work seven days a week in a pizza shop. We don't have time to meet many people, and when we do their interested in the pizza, not us.

Marie: You don't know I'm not seeing anyone. I leave here at six every night.

Cindy: Except when you stay late, and all the stories you ever tell are about your re-painting the living room for your grandma, or deep cleaning the carpet for your aunt. You work here, then you go do chores for every available relative you can find.

Marie: I am a good worker. My father always told me what a good worker I was.

Cindy: Was that the only thing he ever praised you for?

Marie: What do you mean?

Cindy: Maybe that's why you're nuts. Didn't he ever say what a good dancer? Or artist, or tell you how pretty you were?

Marie: I don't know. Not that I can recall. Why? Should he have? You really think I'm nuts?

Cindy: It's none of my business, but- well, you seem to have more to you than you know.

Marie: Is that a good thing?

Cindy: I don't know, but it's meant to be a complement.

Marie: Thank-you?

Cindy: That first time I met Chuck- He's remembering a time I came in this place to meet a guy on Christmas Eve. This was what- thirteen years ago now. I was an idiot, Chuck was the only waiter and delivery boy I think.

Marie: Chuck's been here a long time hasn't he?

Cindy: Since high school, or so I've heard. Sixteen years? Maybe seventeen?

Marie: He doesn't look that old.

Cindy: It's the bad skin that makes him look younger. Anyway, he accidentally dumped a pitcher of beer down the pants of this guy I was with. He's tried a couple different times to say he knew it was me, I think he's embarrassed.

Marie: Then why would he want to bring it up?

Cindy: To apologize. That guy went into a rage, almost punched poor little Chucky, but the scene caused a fight it was humiliating. I think he wants to say he's sorry about that.

Marie: Was it the end of the relationship? Did your boyfriend dump you?

Cindy: No, it wasn't like that at all. I had just met the guy, he offered to buy me a drink.

Marie: So you're not still mad about it?

Cindy: No, not at all. I can't even remember the guy's name, Travis or Trevor, maybe Troy.

(Norman walks in carrying a pizza box.)

Cindy: This is new. We're supposed to give you pizza. Not the other way around.

Norman: I'd like to return this pizza.

Cindy: (Taking the box) Was something wrong with it?

Norman: I didn't like it.

Cindy: Do you want a different one? (She looks in the box.)

Norman: No, just my money back.

Cindy: There's one piece left, and it's got a bite out of it.

Norman: I didn't say I didn't eat it, I said I didn't like it.

Cindy: Okay.

(Chuck enters with another pizza box)

Chuck: One made to order Marie style Pizza, extra spun.

Cindy: Chuck, can we give refunds for this?

Chuck: A refund? No one's ever asked for a refund.

Norman: Says right there on the side of the box, money back guarantee. If you're not completely satisfied-

Cindy: I've read the box.

Chuck: Let me get the boss. I've never heard of anyone unsatisfied with our pizza. The service yes, but not the pizza. (He opens yells to the back.) Mr. Vennelli! We've got a customer that would like a refund!

(After a few moments, Bart and wife re-enter. Janet in her new outfit.)

Bart: A what?

Chuck: A refund. He wants his money back for -

Bart: I know what a refund is Chuck. We do have a satisfaction guarantee.

Cindy: This is what he wants to return. (She hands him the open box, he looks in and raises his eyebrow.)

Bart: Ya didn't get it this way, did ya?

Norman: I didn't say I didn't eat it, I said I wasn't satisfied.

Bart: Alright, this was a medium. Cindy, can I have ten dollars and twenty-six cents from the register? (He yells to the back room, while Cindy hands him the money) Celeste! Can ya come out here a minute?

Celeste: (Entering, wearing an apron and waving her hands) What am I supposed to be waitress now too?

Bart: Celeste there's someone I'd like ya to meet. This is Celeste Marvol, she's the head chief here, our pizza from sauce to dough is her recipe, she makes most of our pies with her own two hands. Here's your refund, all ya have to do is tell her ya don't like the pizza.

Celeste: He no like the pizza? I'm Ninety-two years old next week, seven grandchildren, three great grandchildren! I make pizza five hours a day six days a week! I brought the recipe for the sauce straight here from the old country. I bring the crust recipe from my time in Chicago! Thin crust I learned from husband from New York! I win awards for that pizza, I make him use the good cheese even if it's a little more expensive, and that's hard to do cause he's a cheap SOB believe me. Seventy one years of cooking experience, and you no likea the pizza? You wanna tell me to my face you no likea my pizza?

Norman: I loved your pizza, I just wanted more of it. The mediums should be bigger. That was my compliant. I came back to tip you. (He hands her a bill and walks out quickly.)

Bart: That went well, and we made some more money.

Celeste: We who? This is my tip, he give it to me.

Bart: Fine, at least I saved the refund.

Celeste: You mean I saved your refund.

Bart: Whatever.

Celeste: I used to do your job Cindy, would you believe that?

Chuck: She worked at the register when I applied.

Cindy: Great, I'll let you resume your post for old times sake. I'm gonna use the bathroom. (She exits to the restroom door.)

Celeste: When I was young, I was up front all the time. I could hop up on that table and shake my money maker, a good time or two. You remember don't you Bart, you had that jute box, Janet and I used to dance. Do you remember that one night-

Janet: (Laughs remembering) We were both trashed, that was right after we put in the beer taps. What was that Bart? Sixty-three?

Celeste: We climbed up on the tables and danced topless. The boys were a hoopin and holering and cyoete whistling.

Bart: Wolf whistling, wolf not cyoete.

Chuck: I wasn't alive in sixty-three.

Bart: Greatful for that now, huh?

Chuck: Sort of.

Bart: It wasn't a bad sight at the time. Nowadays, however- yeah.- Stay off the tables ladies, We don't need any broken hips around here.

Chuck: Speaking of broken, we're going to need two new chairs.

Bart: Why what's wrong with those?

Chuck: The legs snapped here, and here.

Bart: I opened this place with those chairs, they've held strong for half a century. How did they brake two chairs in one night?

Chuck: I'm not sure, maybe an overweight person, one for each cheek?

Janet: These chairs were from your uncle's resturant. They were old when we started.

Chuck: Should I just toss them in the dumpster?

Bart: Don't you dare, we can fix them. I've got some wood glue and duct tape in the back room. Go and fetch them for me. Oh, and two coat hangers.

Chuck: Yes sir. (he exits)

Janet: Your not really going to wire another chair together.

Bart: No one looks at the bottom of a chair.

Janet: Just Buy new ones, these are fifty years old.

Bart: They don't make them like this anymore. We can fix them up so no one will know.

Marie: What are you going to do? Don't you have to have a license for this? I hope we can't see the duct tape.

Janet: I've got to see this. (Janet, Bart, Chuck, and Marie exit to the backroom. Leaving Celeste in the resturant. Brett walks in.)

Celeste: I remember too, those men that came in for installing the taps put money in my shorts. Boy, my Thomas, he was so mad.- where the hell you people go? - Io

sono nel mezzo di raccontare una storia, e camminano su di me! (Which is Italian for "I'm in the middle of a story and you people walk out on me!")

Brett: You all open?

Celeste: No, I'm standin here for my health.

Brett: Give me whatever you got ready to go, with no red onion.

Celeste: Im ready to go, with no onion at all.

Brett: Something edible (she opens her mouth, but closes it as he finishes the sentence.) And fresh. Did I mention I'm in a hurry?

Celeste: Have you never heard saying? You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinager.

Brett: That would be great, if I was a frog, and I ate flies, but since I don't eat flies I need a damn pizza. You ever heard the saying, you get money for pizza not old world advice?

Celeste: I got large pepperoni right here.

Brett: Sounds great!

Celeste: Thirty bucks.

Brett: For one pizza?

Celeste: It's fifteen for the pizza, and fifteen for me talking to an asshole.

Brett: Take it.(He puts the money down, snatches the pizza and heads for the door)

Celeste: Enjoy your pizza. (She spits in his direction and does hand movements while she mumbles)Fungula chooch malavole. (which is a curse: fungula is pronounced fungoola. The curse translated roughly means: you fucking dumbass.)

Brett: What was that?

Celeste: Sisilan curse, may your lover be horny.

Brett: Some curse, thanks. (He exits.)

Celeste: And may that onion give you gas while your lover is horny.

(Bart, Janet, Chuck and Marie Re-enter. With chairs that are apparently repaired.)

Chuck: Not bad, they look like new.

Marie: From this side.

Bart: Whoever looks at the bottom of a chair?(Bart sits the chairs down and they all stare at them.)

Marie: When I'm cleaning them.

Janet: You clean under the chairs? We should get her over to our house one day.

Cindy: (Returning.) Whoa this is a slow night. And the sun hasn't even set yet.

Why are we staring at empty chairs? You're not selling pizza to Chucks imaginary friends, are you? Should I take their order?

Chuck: These are the broken chairs, we just fixed them.

Bart: I wouldn't let anyone sit on them for at least a day.

Cindy: It'll be another week before we have any costumers, everyone's on vacation.

Chuck: I'll set them by the back table. (he does.)

Bart: How would you all like the evening off?

Celeste: See you latter! (She starts for the back.)

Marie: Technically,I am off. -Where's my pizza?

Celeste: I sold it to some jerk in a hurry. Chuck can fix you another.

Chuck: I'd love to, I could practice that spin I just learned.

Marie: No thanks,

Chuck: It won't take long, I didn't drop that last one once.

Marie: I don't hae time, I'll just stop and get grandma burger. I've gotta get home.

Chuck: I thought you didn't eat red meat.

Marie: It's fine, I've got bread at home. (she exits.)

Cindy: She'll never get married.

Chuck: Why not?

Cindy: She can't go near a church.

Chuck: Do you think she's a vampire?

Cindy: No. Get her around a cross she's liable to nail herself to it.

Bart: How bout you? evening off? -

Cindy: (who has already gathered her things) You don't have to ask me twice, bye!
(She exits.)

Celeste: (Already coming back through) Can I ride with you?

Cindy: Sure, but I'm taking a bus.

Chuck: What if you need us tonight?

Bart: Janet and I can handle things, the doughs made up. It'll be just like old times.

Chuck: Okay, guess I can find something to do. Just call me if you need me, I can be back in about fifteen minutes. Hey ladies! I can give you a ride.

Cindy: No thanks, you've got no AC.

Celeste: Are you kidding? In Europe we got no AC on the whole damn continent.

Chuck: Good night. (He exits)

Janet: You sent everyone home.

Bart: We'll save on payroll.

Janet: I wasn't planning on being here all night.

Bart: Me either, I'm too old for this. Let's just lock up and go home. Save on the electric bill too.

Janet: You're really getting cheap. Will the lawsuit be worth what you save on those chairs?

Bart: We've got to make the profit somehow.

Janet: We can afford it, all that saving we did. We could buy new chairs and start doing some traveling. Wouldn't a cruise be nice? Bart?

Bart: What? Yeah, I'm sure a cruise would be fun. What do ya want me to do with the restaurant? Just shut it down for the week?

Janet: Cindy can handle it, she closes up every night anyway.

Bart: And she sleeps in every day, we'd have new hours. Probably after lunch.

Janet: You're closing up for a slow day. What's the difference? Marie and Chuck could open, just give one of them a key. You really need to relax.

Bart: I'd be very relaxed, leaving an idiot kid, a physco path, an alcoholic and an Italian nazi- domenetrex in charge of my livelyhood, while I galivate around the ocean eating and spending too much. Why don't ya go on the cruise and tell me about it when ya get back.

Janet: Fine, I'll send you the pictures of me and my cabana boy in the Carabeain.

Bart: Look, I didn't mean to-

Janet: Celeste was never a nazi, Chuck is no kid anymore, and Cindy is at least a functioning alcoholic, they'd be fine.

Bart: So ya will admit Marie's a psycho?

Janet: Just retire. You've had your nose to that brick oven for fifty years. I think it's time you gave the business to Billy, like we intended.

Bart: Yeah, I wanted to talk to ya about that.

Janet: Yes?

Bart: I had that little heart to heart with him.

Janet: You're going to finally give up the reins?

Bart: I was willing-

Janet: Thank-God!

Bart: He doesn't want it.

Janet: Doesn't what?

Bart: He doesn't want it.

Janet: That un greatful little!- (she picks up the phone) You work your life away to give him a business that-

Bart: (taking the phone from her and hanging it up) He's doing better with the advertising agency then I ever did here.

Janet: But this is a family business, Your father was a cook here. This business saved us!

Bart: And our son is making far more money doing something else. We've got to think of what's best for him. Our profit has been slipping you know that. The landlord plans to raise the rent after the first of the year. Ya don't want our worries to become his do you?

Janet: Then what happens to us? Are we just stuck here till we die?

Bart: No, we'll have to close the restaurant, it's as simple as that. I have been going over every way possible in my head. I was thinking we would finish out the lease in January then, just stop.

Janet: But what about Celeste ? Or Chuck or Cindy or-

Bart: Just stop. You can plan that cruise for March, okay? Everything should be in order by then.

Janet: Then I'd feel guilty. We put all those people out of work for a cruise.

Bart: We can't go on forever anyway. At the rate business is going with the recession and all, we're going to have to use our savings just to keep the doors open.

Janet: Things are supposed to be getting better, and-

Bart: We compete with four major chains that give away pizzas. There's no way we can do that.

Janet: We have our regulars.

Bart: If every one of them ate here every night for dinner, we'd be fine, but.

Janet: Donny Norwood, every Friday night-

Bart: Had his second triple bypass last Tuesday. He won't be in for a while.

Janet: Okay, I'll tell everyone.

Bart: Don't ya dare. I want the best we can get out of them for the last few months, they don't need to be depressed yet.

Janet: That's not fair, they need time to find other jobs.

Bart: I wasn't going to tell you yet. Just give me till Christmas, okay?

Janet: Okay. You think you know best. Let me get my clothes. (She exits to the back.)

Bart: Turn the oven damper off while your back there, would ya?

(Bart turns off half the lights, flips the sign and starts putting chairs on top of tables. Brett comes in.) Sorry, buddy, we're locking up for the night.

Brett: I already had a pizza this evening. Are you Bartolo Vennellie? The Bartolo? The owner of this place?

Bart: Yeah, that's me, but most people call me Bart.

Brett: All right then, Bart, may I speak with you? It should only take a second.

Bart: Sure, why not, as long as you don't expect me to make you a pie.

Brett: My name is Brett Douglas I was served this evening by a crass, rude elderly Italian woman-

Bart: That would be Celeste.

Brett: She charged me thirty dollars for a large pizza and insulted me-

Bart: Her asshole fee? Look buddy I can give ya the fifteen back for the pizza, but she pockets the rest-

Brett: Keep the money, that pizza was worth it! That was the best pizza I've had in years, maybe in my life. It had red onions, and I hate red onions, I've got horrible gas, but I loved it!

Bart: The gas?

Brett: The pizza.

Bart: Really? Well, thank-you.

Brett: I'd like to buy the business from you.

Bart: Say again?

Brett: I'm a wealthy entrapanure, I've owned three beauty shops, a nail salloon and an ice cream shop over the past twenty years. I've been retired for a while, but I'm bored and driving my wife crazy.

Bart: Your wife? You're married, to a woman?

Brett: Yes, why wouldn't I be?

Bart: Ya owned beauty shops- nevermind. Let me get this straight. Ya liked the pizza so much ya want to buy the business from me?

Brett: Does six hundred thousand sound like a fair offer?

Bart: Sound fair? Wait a minute, ya don't want to by this place just to fire Celeste do ya?

Brett: No, no.

Bart: That wouldn't be the first time I've had that offer. She is-you know - European -but she's the cook. Really, she's not supposed to be where the customers can see her.

Brett: If she made that pizza, she can stay. All of your employees can stay, at whatever rate you're paying them. This place is perfect, just the way it is.

Bart: Is that so?

Brett: I wouldn't want to change a thing.

Bart: It's a family business, I'll have to talk it over with my wife.

Brett: Fine, fine. Here's my card.

Bart: And you said eight hundred thousand?

Brett: I said six, but I'll go to seven if that's easier to remember.

Bart: Must have flour in my ears, Seven sounds good. I'll be in touch.

Brett: You do that. Good night, it was nice meeting you.

(Brett exits)

Bart: Nice meeting you.

(Lights out)

Act one scene three

Sunday Oct.31st 2010

(Lights up on the pizza parlor, cobwebs have been draped over the sign and orange and black streamers go across the counters. From the outside window we see it is night. There are three couples and one family of three sitting around the restaurant. Marie is standing at the register dressed as a witch. Cindy walks in wearing an orange baseball cap that says this is my costume.)

Cindy: Sorry I'm late, had to stop and TP my neighbors place. Then I missed my bus.

Marie: Why don't you just get your liscense back?

Cindy: The judge said I had to give up drinking or driving. I'm happy with my decision.

Marie: Wait, you tee peed the neighbors? I thought you had an apartment.

Cindy: I do, I'm more creative than you think. There's a ten year old two doors down that'll take the heat. He was grounded for a month from the bottle rockets I set off on the fourth.

Marie: Of July?

Cindy: No, of October. Yes fourth of July.

Marie: It's been fairly busy tonight, you should do well.

Cindy: Is Mr. V's mood any good?

Marie: I've seen it better, but for a work night-not bad.

Cindy: Always best when Halloween lands on Fridays or Saturdays, come to think of it, anything is better on a Friday or Saturday.

(Chuck enters with his delivery bag, in his usual outfit but with jeans. Over that he has a red and white gingum table cloth with a hole cut out over his neck and a pizza pan with a hole cut out for his face on his head, his face is then accordingly made up to look like a pizza.)

Cindy: Now That's scary.

Marie: Oh yeah, Chuck's costume, he's been in that all day. He hasn't gotten the reactions he wanted.

(As Chuck walks in a customer comments)

Mr.Jefferies: Hey Chuck, nice sunflower costume.

Chuck: Thanks.

(As Chuck passes the family of five, three girls, a mother and father. The father comments)

Mr. Haste: Hey Chuck, Nice costume.

Chuck: Thank-you.

Mr. Haste: I've never seen a satiliget dish delivering pizza's before.

Chuck: Yeah, thanks.

Mrs. Haste: He's playing with you Chuck, ignore him.

Chuck: I could never ignore him.

Mr. Haste: I'm just messing with you Chuckster.

(Chuck goes over to Cindy and Marie at the counter.)

Chuck: What do you think?

Cindy: About what?

Chuck: My face?

Cindy: That's a loaded question.

Chuck: The make-up.

Cindy: Looks like you're having a break out, I told you not to drink so much soda.

Chuck: It's my Halloween costume. I made it myself.

Cindy: I can tell. You supposed to be a hubcap with road kill, right?

Chuck: I'm a pizza.

Cindy: Around here, what's the difference?

Chuck: Cheese.

Cindy: Oh, yeah, okay- I can see that.

Chuck: Isn't it obvious? Why can no one see that?

Cindy: It's a good costume Chuck, people are just playing with you.

Chuck: You think?

Cindy: Those that aren't are idiots, it's obvious.

Marie: I'm off, I've got to go hand out candy. Grammy almost had three kids arrested last year. God help us if she finds out where I hid her shot gun shells. (She heads for the back to grab her purse then starts for the door.) Happy Halloween!

Chuck: (Handing Cindy a large wad of cash) Here's from the last five. Got any more?

(Bart and Janet enter from the back with Celeste. Bart and Janet are dressed as Frankenstein and his bride.)

Cindy: Don't know, were there any more deliveries Marie?

Marie: Two, but they're not up yet.

Bart: Marie! Wait up a minute, would you?

Marie: (She stops at the door) Okay, a minute. Grandma might start shooting at the trick or treaters if I'm not home soon. What do you need?

Bart: I need to talk to ya a moment.

Marie: What'd I do wrong?

Janet: Nothing dear, we need to speak with all of you. (They all gather round.)

Bart: Nice costume Chuck

Chuck: Thank-you. Do you know what I am?

Bart: A wagon wheel of course. As ya all know, business hasn't been doing that great-

Celeste: This is where we all get fired!

Bart: No, no. Please just listen to me. I turned seventy-five last month, ya all know that-

Chuck: We baked the cake.

Cindy: Actually, you baked the cake, kiss-ass.

Bart: I know, I know, and I really appreciated that.

Marie: I did get the card, I personally chose the card.

Celeste: I signed on it.

Bart: This has nothing to do with my birthday.

Cindy: Then why'd you bring it up?

Janet: This is really hard to say, and sort of exciting. The landlord wanted to raise the rent, the money hasn't been coming in like it used to and-

Marie: You're letting me go? Aren't you? I knew eight-fifty an hour was too much to ask-

Bart: For god's sake listen to us! We found the way we can all win. I get to retire and hold on to my savings, Janet gets to book cruises around the world and y'all get to keep your jobs. All of ya!

Cindy: You're getting money and going on crusies, and I get to stay here? I suddenly feel like I'm not at the right end of this stick.

Bart: I've sold the restaurant.

Chuck: You what?

Janet: We sold the place. Tomorrow morning Bart is no longer your boss.

Bart: We've been going over details for over a month now, I agreed and signed the papers this afternoon.

Marie: Does my salary stay the same?

Bart: Yes, everyone keeps the same pay, he likes this place just the way it is.

Janet: He thinks it's charming.

Cindy: We still get our discounts on Pizza and beer?

Bart: You still have your employee discount.

Cindy: On the beer?

Bart: Yes Cindy, on everything.

Cindy: It better be on the beer.

Celeste: Does he give more raises than you? I work for you fifty years and I only get five raises, he give raises once a decade too? I don't know how many decades I got left.

Bart: I didn't ask about that.

Marie: Will my uniform stay the same?

Celeste: Is he cute? Is he single? Is he cute enough I don't care if he's single?

Janet: I wouldn't say cute. I think he's married.

Bart: Mentioned a wife, I never met her. Ask him yourself, y'all get to meet him. He's coming in tonight in about (he looks at his watch) Well- should be any minute now.

Chuck: You're not the boss any more Mr. V?

Bart: No, you can call me Bart now. (He hands out envelopes) These are your last paychecks under my command. You'll each find a little bonus in them.)

Cindy: Hot damn! (She takes her envelope and opens it, then peeks inside.)

Marie: Thank you, so much.

Cindy: You weren't kidding were you? It is a little bonus. Good to see retirement hasn't changed you.

Chuck: I, I- but - I -

Celeste: What's wrong with you boy?

Cindy: Chuck?

Chuck: This is just, it's a big thing for me, that's all. I've never had another boss. Everything is going to change.

Celeste: I was a little girl in world war two, I out lived two husbands and one mortgage, and I learned one very important thing. The only thing in life that don't change is the fact that everything is gonna change.

Bart: No, no. Ya don't get it. I've been promised nothings gonna change.

Chuck: We're going to have a different boss.

Cindy: How many times have we wished for that?

Chuck: I've never wished for that.

Cindy: Then I used your turns too.

(Brett enters through the front door with a canvas bag, large enough to hold t-shirts.)

Bart: Speak of the devil.

Chuck: You sold us to the devil?

Bart: That's a figure of speech boy, get a hold of yourself. Everyone, this is Brett Douglas. Brett, this is everyone. Chuck, Marie, Cindy, and Celeste.

Marie: Pleasure, I'm sure.

Celeste: I know you from somewhere.

Chuck: Nice to meet you Mr. Douglas.

Brett: Please, no formalities needed, call me Brett. It's wonderful to meet all of you. Very nice costumes, a witch, Frankenstien's bride, and you must be- Kennedy on the half dollar.

Chuck: That's it. (He takes the costume off.) I was supposed to be a pizza.

Bart: This one's my wife, that one is Celeste, believe it or not she's not wearing a costume- (Celeste hits Bart in the back of the head.) Hey! What was that?

Celeste: You no sign my paycheck anymore, you now have the same rules as everyone else. Just be glad I had no pepperoni log in my hand. Where have I seen you before?

Brett: I think I've seen you around here. I've eatten here quite a few times. I have some really big ideas for this place, I hope you'll all like them.

Chuck: Mr. Vennellie just said nothing was going to change.

Brett: And nothing will change Chuck, I want the pizza recipe to stay the same, I want the name to stay the same, I want the crew to stay the same. I just have a few ideas for the inner workings of the business, like new tables and chairs.

Marie: That would be nice, one's that aren't held together by duct tape and coat hangers. No offense.

Bart: None taken, I'm glad you'll get along.

Chuck: I suppose we've needed new chairs.

Bart: Ya see? What ya needed was an owner that was young enough to care.

Chuck: What other ideas do you have?

Brett: I will run every one by the crew, and I'd love to hear all the things you'd like to do. Just give me your thoughts and well look into every possibility. We'll really make this restaurant ours, and well do it together.

Cindy: Maybe increase the discount we get on beer, or increase the money we get in our paycheck, or both.

Brett: I'm leaving every option open, so lets make a mental note of that for now and tomorrow morning I'm going to crack into those books, and see what we can put on paper.

Costumer: Excuse me Chuck, could I get a refill?

Chuck: Of course. (Taking the empty pitcher) Regular Coke right? (He goes to refill it.)

Costumer: Yep. Please. (Takes his seat.)

Brett: The customers know him by name?

Cindy: He knows the names of most of them too.

Bart: I told you Brett, you won't regret it, you're getting a great business, with a loyal hardworking crew.

Marie: It's a pleasure meeting you Mr. Douglas, but I really must be going. I can't afford to have my grandmother sued again for traumatizing toddlers.

Brett: Just let me give you this. (He pulls out a shirt with a logo on it that is a new and improved version of the one on the sign.) And please Marie call me Brett.

Marie: Very nice, thank- you. (Chuck returns to the huddle, as Brett reaches in for the name badges)

Brett: And a badge that has Marie engraved on it.

Marie: Thank-you, I'll look forward to working with you Mister - um - Brett. (She heads for the door) Happy Halloween, everyone. (She exits. Brett continues to hand out the shirts and badges.)

Chuck: This isn't our logo.

Brett: Oh, yes yes, you're right. I just thought you all only had T-shirts, and it is fall. These have long sleeves for cooler weather.

Bart: Ya see? He cares more than I ever did.

Cindy: Logo Looks better too, we should just change the sign.

Chuck: Name badges? We've never worn name badges.

Brett: Soon, we will all be just as popular with the customers as you are.

Chuck: Can I wear the same hat? I've had it for years.

Brett: Of course Chuck. You seem so nervous.

Janet: He's the second senior employee, only Bart, Celeste and I have been here longer, how long has it been?

Bart: He was in high school.

Chuck: Sixteen years next month, on November 22nd- I started working right after Thanksgiving. I don't mean to be rude or anything, this is just all so strange right now.

Brett: Don't you worry a bit, you and I will be great friends and everything is going to stay just as it is, don't you worry.

(Lights out)

Act Two Scene One

Friday Dec. 24th 2010

(The restaurant has blue tinsel garland strung wherever orange and black streamers were in the previous scene, but not as heavily decorated. There are a few snowflake decorations in the window and the tree outside is now decorated with lights. Two couples are sitting at separate tables eating pizza. And a man stands in front of Cindy paying for a pizza. The tables and chairs are different, either booths or just with different fabric over the seats.)

Griff: I know I've got it here somewhere. Why'd you guys stop takin' checks?

Cindy: New management.

Griff: Take this? (Pulls out a card.)

Cindy: We can do that. (She takes the card and swipes it.) Ah- no, it says declined.

Griff: (Putting that card away then grabbing another.) Try this one.

Cindy: (Tries the next card.) We have a winner. (The machine prints out a slip.) Sign here please.

Griff: Thanks. Merry Christmas. (He plops a quarter in the tip jar)

Cindy: To you too. (The customer exits with pizza. Brett appears from behind the backroom door. He is carrying a stack of new menus)

Brett: Now Cindy, did I hear correctly? Did you just wish a customer merry Christmas?

Cindy: No, I just said you too. That's a generic response that works for everything from happy holidays to blow it out your ass.

Brett: Let's try to stick with the Happy Holidays. Just make a mental note of it and keep it in your head, okay?

Cindy: I'll try.

Brett: These are the new menus, fresh off the press. (Brett hands them to Cindy and she looks one over.)

Cindy: Nice, embossed lettering and everything.

Brett: Thank you, those details are always so important to a first impression.

Cindy: They forgot some stuff.

Brett: They missed entries? Which ?

Cindy: The spaghetti, the meatball sub, the chicken thing with spinach, I don't remember what it was called- I didn't like it.

Brett: Those are no accidental omissions, we've just decided to take those items off the menu.

Cindy:-We?-

Brett: You know, to focus more on the signature dishes of pizza, and lasagna. That way, we can just keep getting better at what we're good at.

Cindy: I see. These were all of the cheaper meals anyway.

Brett: You see, so we aren't losing anything by not offering them. Think of this business like a bush, every now and then you have to prune a bush to keep it healthy, take the dead limbs off, so the sturdy branches can prosper.

Cindy: Yeah, I get that. I'll make a mental-

Brett: A mental note! (He laughs a totally fake laugh) you're getting the hang of it. Have you seen Chuck?

Cindy: Went out on a run, should be back any minute.

Brett: Our delivery radius only allows a fifteen minute travel time. Which should mean he returns within the half hour. I hope he's not venturing out of our radius again.

Cindy: How long has he been gone?

Brett: Thirty-two minutes- twenty three sec- (Chuck walks in the door. He's wearing a Santa hat) Ah! Good! You're safe Chuck my boy.

Chuck: Yeah, I'm safe. Thanks.

Brett: We do get worried about you while you're out.

Cindy: We?

Chuck: Sorry, just had bad luck with the lights.

Brett: I'll make a mental note of that, and consider those darn lights next time before I start to fret. That's an awully nice hat Chuck. You know I love Santa, but let's not show the customers that we prefer Christmas to Hanaka or Kwanza or Ramadan- let's keep them guessing. That way no one gets offended, okay? (He pulls the Santa hat off Chucks head.)

Cindy: Ramadan isn't even in December this year, and if it were it's a time of fasting- I doubt they'd be here.

Brett: How do you know so much? I wish I was as smart as you.

Cindy: You and me both.

Brett: Now we've made sure those flyers are on every box right?

Chuck: Yes Mr. Brett, all the customers know, the delivery will only be offered on the weekends, starting next year.

Brett: Good man! Good man. Any old pizza place has delivery, we are a little above that. (He exits.)

Chuck: You wanna ring this in?

Cindy: Sure. You know I think our new boss has multiple personalities. He keeps referring to himself as we.

Chuck: He just thinks he's royalty.

Cindy: Good one- wait. You okay?

Chuck: Of course, why?

Cindy: That was a dry bitter joke, I liked it, and your smile.

Chuck: What about it?

Cindy: It isn't there.

Chuck: You should like that too.

Cindy: You know, I thought I would, but it seems so strange without it.

Chuck: Everything seems strange anymore. (A woman walks in.) So fake.

Patricia: Hey Chuck, hey Cindy. Merry Christmas.

Chuck: Hey.

Cindy: Happy Holidays to you too.

Patricia: What's wrong Chuck?

Chuck: Nothing.

Patricia: What happened here? I thought tonight was the big Christmas party. Where's your hat? You're always dressed like an elf or reindeer or something.

Chuck: The new owner likes to keep business nondenominational, and we should celebrate our traditions at home, with our families.

Patricia: No more Christmas Eve parties?

Chuck: Nope.

Patricia: I suppose that's a common business practice.

Cindy: Yeah, Mr. Vennelli blew a fortune on free booze every year for us, this guy doesn't even want us exchanging cards.

Chuck: We're closing in a few minutes.

Patricia: You're kidding.

Cindy: We stayed open late on Christmas Eve for the party, not for business. Believe it or not, they're aren't many people that want pizza on Christmas eve.

Patricia: At six? Wow I'd better order. Large spinach, artichoke and feta please.

Cindy: (Writing down.) Order- (Chuck raises his hand)

Chuck: I'll get it. I made a mental note. I've got to stay useful for something. (He goes to the back.)

Patricia: That's not like Chuck. He seems depressed.

Cindy: It's the new boss, he's having trouble adapting. I think he had the daydream of inheriting this place from Bart. I think maybe Charlie thought this place was his chocolate factory. Last week the new owner announced we'll only be offering deliveries on Fridays and Saturdays. He wasn't really happy to hear that.

Patricia: Changes can be rough.

Cindy: Oh no, nothing's going to change, don't worry. We've been promised everything will stay the same.

Patricia: (laughs) Right, they always tell that one.

Cindy: That'll be twenty-three fifty one.

Patricia: He raised the pizza prices?

Cindy: No, a large is still fifteen dollars, the toppings have just doubled in price.

Patricia: Clever. So everything stays the same price on the big board, but oh yeah, I see it. In the small print. \$2.50 a topping? Any topping?

Cindy: And cheese is a topping now.

Patricia: You mean extra cheese?

Cindy: No I mean cheese.

Patricia: (Paying the money.) That's highway robbery, if this wasn't the best pizza in town he wouldn't get away with that.

Cindy: Just wait until sauce counts as a topping. I am sorry.

Patricia: Don't be, I understand. I started as a loan officer at a bank, I've worked for seven different banks over my career and I never left the building. I know all about new management.

Celeste: (Walking out from the back with her purse and coat) See you next year Cindy, merry Christmas.

Cindy: Happy Holi-

Celeste: Oh, pooh on happy holidays, merry Christmas.

Cindy: Why won't I see you until next year?

Celeste: I get week off, for seniority. Isn't that a treat?

Cindy: What about, the New Year's party, what happens- ?

Celeste: You haven't heard? No New Year's celebration for employees, he's getting champagne on menu for customers only, at forty-dollars a bottle so I hear.

Cindy: At least it's the good stuff.

Celeste: If I eavesdropped correctly, and I usually do. It's cheaper crap than Barty ever had. Forty bucks is just what this guy is charging for it.

Cindy: Great.

Celeste: Where's Marie? I needed a ride home.

Cindy: Sorry, she got sent home at noon, when I came in.

Celeste: Listen Cindy, you do something to cheer our Chuck up, all righty? From the day that kid came in and misspelled the high school he went to on his application, I never seen him frown, and now he don't do nothing else.

Cindy: I noticed.

Pat: He misspeled his highschool on the application, and you hired him?

Celeste: This is a pizza shop lady, not a brain surgery store. See ya next year.

Cindy: Good night. (Celeste walks out)

Chuck: (Entering from back with a pizza box) From the brick oven to you.

Patricia: Wow that was fast.

Chuck: The oven is gas now, it gets a little hotter.

Patricia: Hang in there Chuck, it's almost the dawn of a brand new year.

Chuck: Thanks. (The woman exits) Another year just like the last one.

Cindy: That's what I was thinking. You're supposed to say: "Yeah, a New year with new opportunities" or some optimistic crap like that.

Chuck: I'm just not all that optimistic at the moment.

Cindy: Maybe Santa will cheer you up tonight.

Chuck: If there is a Santa I'm sure Brett will be shooting him out of the sky later this evening.

Brett: (entering from the back with a neon open sign) I have a little holiday gift for the shop here. (He sets it up in the window then takes down the flip sign)

Chuck: A light up sign? But -

Brett: And it's on a timer, so you don't even have to think about it anymore. During our hours of operation the public will always know we're open.

Chuck: But- I -

Brett: Yes Chuck?

Chuck: May I have that? For sentiments sake?

Brett: Sure, it'll save me from throwing it away. (Hands him the sign and heads for the back.) Happy Holidays.

Chuck: Yeah, happy.

(Lights Out)

Act Two Scene Two

Friday, Feb 11th 2011

(The streamers are now changed to pink and red, there's a tacky cupid tossed about here and there and a couple sits at a table. The decorations are even more sparse than at Christmas. Brett enters with a large brown bag. Cindy close behind. Four more people in couples stroll in during the dialogue.)

Celeste: I don't know what this world is coming to.

Marie: You all right?

Celeste: Bartolo Vennellie is rolling in his grave right now.

Marie: He's still alive, I think they're in Acapulco.

Celeste: Then he's rolling over in his cabana. His legacy...fish-twa.

Marie: I don't even know what you said. (She notices Cindy's smile.)

Marie: Why are you smiling? Do I have something in my hair?

Cindy: No, you're good and I'm not happy. Service with a smile, that's our new policy. Did you want to waitress? Or shall I?

Marie: I'd love to get out from behind this thing.

Cindy: Good, I can't wait to hide behind it.

Brett: Marie, I was just telling Cindy about the importance of a happy work-place. I think I came up with a way to make it a little brighter, with every time I see a smile, you'll get a special treat. Like Cindy has said she'd like the beer on tap for half price. I can do that for you, or a free pizza every Friday night. I'll make a mental note of every time I see you smile then at the end of the week add it up for a prize.

Marie: What happens when you don't see a smile?

Brett: We'll start off with warnings, before I start docking pay, but I'm sure you can all find plenty to smile about. Now, when business starts to dip, I'm going to let you ladies decide when to send Chuck home. I know Valentine's Day is supposed to be busy, but I think two of you can handle it, you know after the big dinner rush.

Cindy: I'll let him know. Thanks again for the ride.

Brett: Think nothing of it. It was on my way. Celeste! Can I speak with you a moment?

Celeste: I can't seem to stop you. Coglione.

Brett: What does that mean in English? You say that every time I see you, and I really need to learn some Italian, Rome is on my bucket list you know, I've always wanted to meet the pope.

Celeste: Coglione means I respect you a lot. You ever meet the pope you say chooch coglione and you salute him like this. (She brushes her fingers from under her chin...Coglione is Italian for jerk, chooch is equal to suck it and the hand

gesture is an Italian insult close to the middle finger.) You start doing that to everyone as soon as you land in Rome, you'll be a big hit. Just remember, the louder you say it the more you mean it.

Brett: Chooch coglione ! (He mimics the gesture.)

Celeste: That's it.

Brett: Thank you Celeste, I'll make a mental note of that. Now, you're going to like this.

Celeste: You want me to smile all the time or else? I got away from Hitler, I can still out run you.

Brett: No, no. You're such a card. No, you stay in the kitchen, you don't worry about that. I've found something special for you.

Celeste: For me?

Brett: I've found a mozzarella that doesn't cost half as much as the stuff you've been using, but it's got the same taste.

Celeste: You changed the mozzarella? I thought I said no screwing with the recipe.

Brett: I've got to cut corners somewhere if I'm going to make this budget work, would you rather I cut into salaries?

Celeste: I've noticed in my paychecks, all these holidays for senior staff , they have been shrinking my checks.

Brett: Then a pay cut wouldn't help, now would it? So let's say we give the cheaper cheese a chance, shall we?

Celeste: Let me taste this cheese. (she does) Not bad, slightly different, but the customers couldn't tell. It still comes in the same block right? To fit in the greater?

Brett: Better yet, this company sells it pre-shredded, so all you have to do is open a bag.

Celeste: The block is what we've used for years, its tradition.

Brett: I can get you the block.

Celeste: Good.

Brett: Of course, you'll have to come in early and shred it on your own time, I don't pay for traditions. (Celeste exits to the back as Chuck comes from the back with a pizza and a pitcher of soda for couple already seated. Marie goes and helps the other couple.)

Steve: What happened to the heart shaped pizzas?

Chuck: I- um I don't know, let me go ask Celeste

Brett: Don't bother; we got rid of the pans for those.

Steve: Aw, bummer-

Brett: Those heart shaped pizza pans take up a lot of storage space to use once a year. I was thinking it would be more appreciated and be much more romantic to have a "two for two" offer, two toppings for the price of one when you order as a couple. Valentine's Day only of course.

Chuck: Of course. Let me know if you need anything else.

Steve: Thanks Chuck.

Chuck: (Going over to a different couple) What can I get you?

Scott: Heart shaped pepperoni with-

Chuck: Sorry, I've just been told no more heart shaped pizzas.

Scott: We missed them?

Chuck: Looks like we don't do them anymore.

Scott: Oh, well just a large pepperoni with mushrooms on half please. Deep dish.

Chuck: Will do, and to drink?

Scott: Can we have beer?

Lisa: Why not? Once in a blue moon won't hurt.

Scott: Fine then, we'd like a pitcher of Blue moon beer.

Chuck: On its way. (He exits to the back.)

(Bart and Janet enter, both looking a little sun burned. Both dressed like tourists to a tropical climate.)

Bart: Hello hello.

Cindy: Hello.

Bart: Table for two please, the romantic one, in the back corner. Wow, you seem happy.

Cindy: Seems that way doesn't it. The romantic table went in the dumpster two days after you left. You seat yourself now, and don't expect service from me, I know you're a lousy tipper.

Janet: Look at that. All the tables are new.

Bart: So a few things did end up changing after all.

Cindy: No, nothing's changed. Bartolo's Pizzeria is a family institution as constant as the sunrise. (she fakes a broader smile) "been the same for fifty years!" (drops smile)- That's what I'm supposed to say.

Bart: Oh. (Cindy weakly smiles again)

Janet: We just got back from our Latin American cruise yesterday, but we just had to come here for Valentine's Day. Every year for the past fifty years we've shared a heart shaped pizza on Valentine's Day.

Cindy: Well you won't this year. The heart shaped pans are in the trash next to your romantic table.

Bart: We made them without the pans. Celeste made them before they invented pans. I'll go talk to her. (He goes into the back.)

Janet: I take it things aren't the same around here.

Cindy: We still sell pizza, people still eat it.

Chuck: Can you take someone's head off with a cheese wire? Wrapped tightly around their neck?

Cindy: What happened to your hopeless optimism?

Chuck: (Forces a smile) You think it would work? Hi Mrs. Vennellie, you look nice.

Janet: Oh Chuck, you look awful.

Chuck: Thanks for noticing. (Another couple walks in) I gotta go look busy, or I have to go home. (He goes to wait on another table. We hear the customers greet him with “Hi Chuck and How’s it going Chuck.”)

Janet: So is the new boss as bad as Barty was?

Cindy: In comparison, I’d rather work for your husband.

Janet: That bad?

Cindy: I can’t say bad. He treats us nice, sort of- Celeste and Chuck have been declared senior employees, so when things are slow they get the opportunity to go home early.

Janet: Oh, yes they were the highest paid.

Cindy: Yeah, and that quarter raise we got every January- we didn’t.

Janet: But he is nice enough?

Cindy: He gave me a ride into work today. Which was nice, but he listens to smooth jazz in his car which- honestly - I didn't think anyone really did that.

Janet: You still haven’t got your license back?

Cindy: I had to give up drinking or give up driving. I think I chose wisely, considering. I have been drinking more frequently though. It helps with the smile. (Brett and Bart enter from the backroom)

Bart: I can understand that, but what can you do with that cupboard anyway?

Brett: Store the sauce supplies, if I get the sauce whole sale it lasts for months.

Bart: We always made our sauce from scratch once a week. Celeste isn’t going to like using jarred sauce.

Brett: She was relieved to have the work load lightened. As a matter of fact she was very happy to hear it.

Bart: Celeste was very happy? I never saw that in fifty-years.

Brett: So far the profits have been increasing compared to your records from last year.

Bart: You better be careful. The customers came here for the originality, we had pizza that was like no other.

Chuck: (Talking to Cindy) Two medium, one deep, one regular, both veggies.

Brett: Don’t worry, it’s the same pizza, I’m not changing a thing. (Chuck hears this)

Chuck: How can you say that with a straight face?

Brett: Excuse me?

Chuck: Are you that good of a liar? Or are you just that stupid?

Brett: What?

Bart: Chuck? Are you okay? I've never seen you look -like this. What's that expression on his face?

Cindy: Bitterness and anger, I recognize it from the mirror.

Brett: Chuck, do you have issues we need to address in my office?

Chuck: I'd like to address my issues right here. Lick them stamp them and shove them in the box. Bend over.

Brett: Maybe we should make a -

Chuck: If you stick another mental post it on my head, I'll stick a mental flamethrower up your ass! You've changed everything! Am I wrong Marie?

Marie: We have needed new tables, and-

Chuck: I've got to admit the new tables and chairs are nice, and the gas oven is much easier too, but you've changed everything, every chance you could get. You've stopped doing parties, you've stopped doing deliveries, you raised all the prices.

Brett: Now Chuck, that sounds like slander or liable in a public place. I have not raised the prices. A large pizza is still-

Chuck: The Toppings! It's the toppings! Everyone, do you realize the only price he's raised is on the toppings? The only thing he thinks you won't notice! Because it's in the small print on the side! (Chuck is making a scene, and everyone watches.)

Brett: I don't think it needs to be justified, we are in business to make money-

Chuck: The toppings! The insignificant little things, that you can add or subtract depending on your budget and taste. Mushrooms, onions, pepperoni-

Brett: I can't eat onions, divertic-

Chuck: The toppings make the pizza what it is! They can't have pizza without toppings and you know that! That's how you stick it to them without them noticing! The toppings are the most important part! They together are the pizza! The stupid insignificant little things like our Christmas party, the decorations, the way every customer knows my name! The way Cindy always acts like you interrupted something she was doing that was much more important than you. That's what makes this place what it is- what it was. You think you can just come in here and make changes like no one's going to notice. You just screw with our schedules and our traditions like we're your property! I can't be bought or sold, I'm not Uncle Ben!

Steve: The rice guy?

Chuck: The famous slave with the cabin.

Cindy: That's Uncle Tom.

Chuck: Whatever! You may have bought the business, but my loyalty is not for sale! Marie! Tell him how you feel about the changes.

Marie: I really-um- I like the new tables and chairs. And he does let me do that cleaning schedule-

Chuck: Sure we've got new tables and the bathroom is clean, but the whole point of this place is gone! Cindy? Do you know what I mean?

Cindy: As long as I keep this smile on my face, I get a free beer once a week.

Chuck: What have you done with Cindy?! She's an alcoholic stepford wife! Stop fucking with my toppings! This isn't the pizza I wanted anymore!

Brett: If you don't like the changes, you can quit.

Chuck: I wouldn't give you the satisfaction.

Brett: Then you're fired.

Chuck: I'm fired?

Brett: Yes, you're fired. You can keep the outfit, I've got new ones ordered, but I would like the insulated bag. (Chuck hands him the insulated bag) thanks.

Chuck: You're customers aren't going to like this. My coworkers aren't going to like this. You'll see!

Brett: You don't have any coworkers, you're unemployed.

Chuck: You'll see!

Brett: I'll see what?

(Chuck looks around the room desperately for a friend, either in his former coworkers or in the customers that once called him by name. He finds none and realizes the hard truth that we as human beings are always ultimately alone in the universe, but he holds back the tears and anger.- *Yeah, I know I usually don't write specific acting directions, but there's no room for any other interpretation here, that is how it feels.*)

Chuck: You'll see!

(He storms out. Cindy hesitates a moment then follows. I imagine they exit the front of the pizza parlor then the lights go out on stage and they walk back into down center with a spot.-but as I said before: I might not be the director.)

Cindy: Chuck! Wait! Chuck!

Chuck: What? does he want the hat? It's our old logo- he won't need it! I'm keeping the damn hat!

Cindy: He didn't send me! This is just me.

Chuck: Sorry.

Cindy: Should I go quit?

Chuck: I can't ask you to do that, this job is your whole life.

Cindy: I still have my booze.

Chuck: Yeah, like I said.

Cindy: I feel like I should do something.

Chuck: You offered to quit, that was nice enough.

Cindy: Are you okay?

Chuck: That was the part where they were all suppose to back me up. All the customers, you and Marie. You know, like in miracle on 34th street, when they all decided you can believe in Santa Clause or in Spider man three, when all those people on the subway stand up against Doc Occ to protect spider man.

Cindy: I think that was spider man two, three had sandman and-

Chuck: You know what I mean. I thought you guys were my friends. The costumers always say hi to me, I thought they would stand up for me.

Cindy: That just proves you watch too many movies. You wanted us all to quit our jobs for you?

Chuck: No, well, yes- yes honestly I did. But if I wanted that, that doesn't make me much of a friend either does it?

Cindy: Well, if Celeste was unfairly canned would you have quit?

Chuck: Yeah. Yes, I really think I would have.

Cindy: Then wishing we had done that for you, doesn't make you any less of a friend. You just have higher standards. You won't take orders from some rich yuppie asshole.

Chuck: No, but I took orders from a old rich asshole, I actually liked that.

Cindy: You're particular about which type of asshole, that's what sets standards.

Chuck: It's not like I lost a job that was worth anything anyway I barley made anything, no one made any real money there.

Cindy: That's a positive, Why do you still looked bumbed?

Chuck: I worked with you people for sixteen years, we laughed together, cried sometimes, we celebrated birthdays and Christmas, and your minimum wage dead end jobs were worth more to you than me.

Cindy: I should quit.

Chuck: No, no you shouldn't.

Cindy: So, this has nothing to do with the job, does it?

Chuck: It's the friends -I-I guess I never really had. Maybe, friends don't exist, maybe that's just another damn lie to make the world seem nicer.

Cindy: I'm going to go quit.

Chuck: No, don't. Thanks. It's a nice gesture, but if just you and I left, it would just save him money. If we all walked out at once, and all the costumers-

Cindy: That would kill the business he just bought.

Chuck: Which would make him re think the way he's treated me.

Cindy: Or just get us all replaced next week. Either way, we wouldn't have jobs. You don't want to work for that asshole anyway. Whether we all join hands and sing cumbyay or not, he's still going to be the owner.

Chuck: I know.- I just.- What was here, it meant a lot more to me than a pizza place, it was more than just a pathetic paycheck to me. Maybe that's where I messed up. Thinking it was something more than it was.

Cindy: It is kind of sweet of you, to give a bunch of losers that kind of credit.

Chuck: I didn't call you a loser.

Cindy: You're absolutely right, we are clinging to dead end no pay jobs and taking orders from an asshole while he rips a part everything we know, and we do it for the paychecks, the pathetic miniscule paychecks at that. We aren't just sell outs, we're cheap sell outs. And you thought of us all as something more, that's sweet.

Chuck: Cindy.

Cindy: Yes?

Chuck: I dumped that beer on that guys lap.

Cindy: What are you talking about?

Chuck: The first time I ever saw you, that Christmas Eve- like twelve years ago.

Cindy: That guy that was hitting on me?

Chuck: You do remember?

Cindy: Vaguely.

Chuck: That was no accident. It was on purpose. His girlfriend paid me to do it. It was six months or so before you applied for a job here. I didn't think you recognized me.

Cindy: I never mentioned it, I was hoping no one remembered, but I always thought you did. I thought you were too embarrassed to bring it up.

Chuck: He yelled, You cried. I never thought I'd see you again. I never felt guilty about dumping anything on that jerk. But- I- I- never meant to make you cry. I hate seeing a beautiful girl cry. You need to know, you deserved better than him- you deserved better than a slimy womanizer. You deserve a man that could make you happy.

Cindy: You know I'd be miserable if I was happy.

Chuck: See? That's exactly what you need, I know you love being miserable, so you deserve to be happy. Does that make sense to you?

Cindy: Oddly enough, yes.

Chuck: Good, I'm not sure I followed.

Cindy: Chuck.

Chuck: Yeah.

Cindy: I wanted to be an actress, and a model. Things didn't work out like I planned, and I just- I don't know. I gave up. That's why I'm so miserable, I don't hate your optimism, I want it. I've always envied you, you're kind of my role model. I always wished I could find the bright side to living -you know this hum drum life I got stuck with. You were the best thing about this place. Well, aside from the beer.

Chuck: Get back to your pathetic job, before you get fired too.

Cindy: Okay. Bye. See ya around?

Chuck: Sure. (Chuck exits, lights out slow.)

Act Two Scene Three

Memorial weekend 2011

(Cindy is at a bus stop with a suitcase, a backpack and a plane ticket in hand. The outside of the pizza shop and the green tree are in the background. Chuck, dressed in a suit approaches and sits next to her.)

Chuck: So, where are you headed?

Cindy: Chuck? Oh my God is that you?

Chuck: Yeah.

Cindy: I haven't seen you in months. You look great. Have you been on vacation?

Chuck: I've been around.

Cindy: Your new life suits you.

Chuck: Are you skipping town?

Cindy: Headed to Iowa. I don't think anyone skips to Iowa.

Chuck: Does the county connector go that far?.

Cindy: It goes to the airport, I'll use my plane ticket from there.

Chuck: Can I ask, why Iowa? The beach is nicer in the summer.

Cindy: I'm giving up completely and moving back in with my mother.

Chuck: Terrific, that's great for you.

Cindy: Are you kidding?

Chuck: At least you'll have a good reason to hate your life.

Cindy: You always had a knack for finding the bright side of things. How have you been?

Chuck: Pretty good, you?

Cindy: Well, I'm thirty- three years old, everything I own is here in this tiny suitcase, and I'm heading back to my mother's house, so I've been better. Did you know Bartolo's closed?

Chuck: I heard.

Cindy: Mr. Vennellie sold the recipe to a guy opening a new place though. Heard he made a mint, but I can't remember the name of the shop.

Chuck: I thought Brett had him in a contract so he couldn't do that.

Cindy: Brett's dead. Didn't you know?

Chuck: (Smiling broadly) Dead? You mean dead, dead?

Cindy: Wow, that's a creepy grin. I thought everyone knew.

Chuck: I would've gone to that funeral! I would've been sitting in the back row laughing. I've been out of town.

Cindy: It was in all the papers. I didn't go to the funeral, I was afraid I couldn't fake the tears. There's still a big trail over his death.

Chuck: Sounds exciting. I hope that's not why you're skipping town.

Cindy: The place being closed yes, the guy being dead no. No jobs left for me around here, so it's kinda hard to make rent. I'm surprised you didn't know, it's in all the papers.

Chuck: I've been a bit preoccupied. I did hear Celeste passed away. I was sorry to hear that.

Cindy: Yeah, but she made it to ninety nine with all the marbles she ever had still in tact, that's more than most people get. I saw your name in the guest book at the viewing. You know he wouldn't even close the restaurant a few hours for us to attend together. Marie didn't like that.

Chuck: So she killed him?

Cindy: Not for that. It was a week or so after that.

Chuck: Marie killed him?

Cindy: (Shakes her head)

Chuck: You're kidding me.

Cindy: I know a time bomb when I see one. He gave her a book on being more efficient, and she snapped.

Chuck: You always said she was going to.

Cindy: Did she ever. Sliced his jugular with a pizza cutter.

(Chuck laughs then stops himself.)

Cindy: Chuck. The man died, and Marie was arrested.

Chuck: Sorry, I know that's not funny. Is Marie okay?

Cindy: I only went to visit her once, she seemed to like it in jail. She said she didn't have to work or listen to her grandmother for the first time in her life. The trial is next month -she's going with an insanity plea- which I think will work.

Chuck: You're not going?

Cindy: Her lawyer didn't think my testimony would help. I was telling him anyone should've seen that coming.

Chuck: I hope the best for her. Wow, he's dead. I thought the sun seemed a little brighter recently.

Cindy: You know it was his restaurant, he didn't do anything really wrong.

Chuck: I know, I've got a mental note about that somewhere in my brain. It wasn't a business thing, I hated him on a personal level. (they both chuckle at that)

Cindy: I quit drinking. Almost two months now.

Chuck: Congratulations, any special reason?

Cindy: Without a job I don't get my discount on beer. Or paychecks, so -you know.

Chuck: Sounds like you have a chance to start fresh, live a brand new life.

Cindy: Yeah, that's a lot harder than you think.

Chuck: No, not really- you just sort of do it.

Cindy: What life did you pick?

Chuck: I haven't quite picked one yet.

Cindy: What have you been doing with yourself?

Chuck: All sorts of things. I've got a cab over there, that's my cover. I'm actually a secret agent working with the government to save the world on a daily basis. I've spent the past four months in Cancun stopping a hacker from selling the codes to U.S. nuclear weapons to some guy in Pakistan.

Cindy: I've told you I thought you watched too many movies haven't I?

Chuck: Yeah, you mentioned it before.

Cindy: Do you like cab driving?

Chuck: Sort of, I hang the old open sign on the rear side window when I'm on duty, but I'm thinking of trying something new.

Cindy: Do you get to see any of the old costumers?

Chuck: Of course, and sometimes I get that look of vague recollection, but rarely ever get that "Hi Chuck" I used to.

Cindy: Sorry to hear that.

Chuck: Makes no difference, have you ever been to Hollywood?

Cindy: No, always wanted to but never did.

Chuck: I drove a producer to the airport a few days ago. He was looking for a woman like you to fill a part in this movie he's shooting in the fall. I told him all about you, he said if I got you out to Hollywood before October he'd give you an audition.

Cindy: Really?

Chuck: Of course, you know how friendly I am with customers. Everybody loves Chuck- well -not hackers or the Pakestaines. I got his card. (he holds up the card.) Granted, I thought you were thirty-two when I was describing you.

Cindy: Are you remotely serious?

Chuck: Yeah, you look younger than thirty three.

Cindy: Chuck.

Chuck: I'm ready to order a new life, that is, if you'd like an agent that's perpetually optimistic.

Cindy: Why would you want to be my agent? You've never even seen me act.

Chuck: You acted like you hated working at the pizza place.

Cindy: Guess I did. Since it's been gone, you know - since the real place was sold- I do miss it. I've missed you, and your annoying smile.

Chuck: Just like high school, you hate it while it's happening, but once it's gone- it's like a first love.

Cindy: Leaves you bitter, but it means something more than you thought.

Chuck: And life goes on, and with a new day, comes a new shot at life.

Cindy: There's that trademark optimism.

Chuck: It never left, it was just hidden behind the anger and hate.

Cindy: A new life might be just what I need to order too.

Chuck: Then let's go, The cab has a full tank of gas. One new life, extra large, your choice of toppings.

Cindy: You're going to drive me to Hollywood?

Chuck: You know I deliver.

(Lights out as they exit)

(Now flip the sign to closed, and get over it.)

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