

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

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KEEP ON TRUCKIN'**BY LAUREN ENNIS**

Scene 1: *March 16, 2020 Shirley's Temple Diner, Ottawa, Ontario Canada. There are several chairs and tables scattered throughout the diner, a countertop, and a television hanging from the ceiling playing a news broadcast on mute. One of the diner's elderly owner's, Shirley, is hanging shamrock decorations while her husband, Art, is cleaning the countertops. Shirley steps back to admire her handiwork and clucks her tongue in irritation.*

Art: *Without looking up* It looks fine.

Shirley: I didn't say that it didn't.

Art: You didn't have to. One click of that tongue of yours is all that I need to hear to know what's on your mind.

He pauses and looks at the decorations.

Shirley: Since when have I been so transparent?

Art: Since about oh ...nineteen sixty eight.

Shirley: Ha ha.

She scrutinizes the decorations.

Art: We're going to have to take them down at the end of the night, anyway.

Shirley: I know, but it's our last big hurrah before...

She pauses and looks down at the floor. He puts a hand on her shoulder.

Art: It's just a few weeks.

Shirley: I hope so.

Art: I know so.

She pulls away from him with a weary sigh and returns her attention to the decorations.

Shirley: Something's missing.

Art: Something, or—

Shirley and Art's teenage granddaughter, Danielle, rushes into the diner with a bag under her arm.

Art: *Under his breath* Someone.

Shirley: There's my girl; you made it!

Shirley rushes to Danielle and tries to give her a hug. Danielle anxiously steps back.

Danielle: Careful Gram! You know what they've been saying. We need to be six feet...

Shirley: I don't know who 'they' are.

Danielle: Gram, you know what I mean; the news, the doctors, even the Prime Minister—

Shirley: Clearly none of them are grandparents.

Danielle shakes her head disapprovingly.

Danielle: *To Art* Papa, can you please try to reason with her?

Art: I gave that up around nineteen...

They all turn at the sound of the diner door opening as Danielle's boyfriend, Jimmy, and his father, Rick, enter the diner with several of Rick's fellow truckers. Jimmy is wearing a green top hat and green party beads. Jimmy tips his hat.

Jimmy: *In a faux Irish brogue* Top o' the evening to you.

Rick: Happy Saint Patty's Day!

Shirley ushers the group in and starts seating them at the tables.

Shirley: Welcome lads and lassies.

Art steps behind the counter.

Art: I'll see how Valerie's doing with the coffee.

Art exits the stage. Rick and several of his friends take seats at one of the tables. Jimmy looks around to see if anyone is watching and tries to kiss Danielle. She anxiously steps back. He looks at her in confused dismay.

Jimmy: What's the matter?

Danielle: With the virus...

Jimmy: *Teasingly* So you're afraid that I might have cooties?

Danielle: That's not funny.

She takes a seat at a nearby table and he sits down opposite her.

Jimmy: So much for 'kiss me I'm Irish'.

Danielle: I'm sorry, I'm just so on edge with everything.

Jimmy: I know; we all are.

He glances over at Shirley taking the truckers' orders and chatting with them.

Jimmy: That's why we all needed a night like this so badly.

Danielle: I'm not so sure it's the best idea. They keep saying how dangerous it is and—

Jimmy: It's so dangerous that we could all wait until tomorrow to shut down.

Danielle: Now you sound like Gram.

Jimmy: She's a smart lady.

Danielle watches Shirley with a smile and then turns back to Jimmy with a weary sigh.

Danielle: My mom would kill me if she knew I was here.

Jimmy: Where does she think you are?

She shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

Danielle: She was in bed when I left.

Jimmy: Has she relapsed?

She shakes her head.

Danielle: She hasn't had so much as a drop in months, but with everything that's happening...

She sinks down into her chair with a sigh of defeat.

Danielle: And now that she won't be able to go to her meetings the next few weeks...Jimmy, I'm scared.

He reaches across the table and takes her hand.

Jimmy: I know. We all are, but—

The television shows Prime Minister Trudeau announcing his plans to stop the spread of Covid-19. Rick dismissively waives his hand.

Rick: That's the last face that I want to see while I'm eating.

One of the other truckers, Steve, takes the remote from the countertop.

Steve: I want to hear what he's saying.

Steve turns up the volume on the television.

Trudeau: "We have an outstanding...we have outstanding public health authorities who are doing an outstanding job. We will get through this together".

Rick leans back in his chair and does a golf clap.

Rick: *Sarcastically* Outstanding. Our brave and fearless leader, everyone.

Valerie enters from the kitchen wearing a mask and carrying trays with the customers' drink orders. Valerie hesitates and then approaches Shirley and takes her aside.

Shirley: Is it that espresso machine again?

Valerie: The coffee's fine, it's just—

Shirley breathes a sigh of relief.

Shirley: Thank God! The last thing that I need is to have it finally kick out on me when all of the stores are closed.

Valerie: I just didn't expect there to be so many people.

Shirley: It's only a few friends.

Valerie: I know, it's just that I don't think this is what the Prime Minister had in mind when he said 'small gatherings'.

Shirley: Then I guess that it's a good thing that the Prime Minister's orders don't go into effect until midnight.

Valerie: Shirley, you know that I have two kids at home...

Shirley: *Confused* What does that have to do with—

Valerie: And you know that I need to keep them safe.

Shirley: Safe?

Shirley nods to herself.

Shirley: I told you that if you didn't feel comfortable you were free to end your shift early.

Valerie: I know, but I'll need the extra money for the next few weeks. I'm sorry, I'm just...

Shirley reaches for the tray.

Shirley: You're just as much on pins and needles as the rest of us.

Valerie nods.

Shirley: Let me take these. You can bring the rest to the counter and I'll serve it.

Shirley starts serving coffee to the truckers.

Valerie: Thank you.

Valerie starts toward the kitchen but pauses when she sees the broadcast.

Rick: *Pointing to the television* Turn it off, Steve. Before we all lose our appetites.

Steve: I just wanted to make sure he didn't have any more rules for us to follow.

Rick: He will; just give him time.

Steve raises the remote to turn off the television.

Valerie: *Forcefully* Wait!

The customers all turn to look at Valerie.

Valerie: I just wanted to hear what the Prime Minister was saying.

Rick: Nothing that anyone wants to hear.

Valerie: Like it or not he's right about one thing, we're all in this together. The least that we can do is pull up our sleeves and act like it.

Shirley: We all came here to get away from politics.

Rick: Yea we're really in this together; just ask Trudeau in his mansion.

Shirley: *Sternly* Rick, that's enough.

Valerie: At least he's trying to keep us safe.

Rick: By shutting our schools and businesses?

Valerie: For two weeks. Two weeks isn't much to ask to save lives.

Rick: I don't remember anyone *asking* us.

Valerie: Is that really all that you can say? The whole world is facing a pandemic and all you can think about is yourself and *your* job and *your* life. How selfish can you be?

Shirley grabs the remote from Steve and turns off the television.

Rick: So selfish that I'll be out braving this virus every day just to deliver *your* food and groceries while you hide in your house behind a mask.

Shirley: That's enough politics for one night. And that goes for everyone. Now—

Art enters from the kitchen carrying a pie.

Art: Now would be the perfect time for Shirley's Temple's famous Saskatoon pie!

The truckers resume talking amongst themselves while Art serves the pie and Shirley follows Valerie to the kitchen as the lights fade.

Scene 2: *Later that evening at the diner the staff are closing for the night. The truckers have left except for Jimmy, who is helping Danielle put the chairs away. Valerie enters from the kitchen carrying her purse. Shirley is cleaning the counter while Art is sweeping the floor. Valerie approaches the counter.*

Valerie: Sorry that I can't stay to clean up, but the sitter couldn't stay.

Shirley: I understand. It means a lot that you stayed to help tonight.

Shirley retrieves a paper bag from behind the counter.

Shirley: And to show just how much I appreciate it, here's a little something for the kids.

Valerie: Thanks so much, you just made their night.

Shirley: It's the least I could do after keeping their mother out all of this time.

Jimmy approaches Valerie.

Jimmy: Valerie?

Valerie turns to him with a quizzical expression.

Jimmy: Sorry about earlier. Sometimes my dad...he means well...

He awkwardly looks to Danielle who nods to him to continue.

Jimmy: But he doesn't always know the right things to say.

Valerie: He seemed to know plenty of things to say.

Jimmy: What I mean is, I know that he didn't mean to upset you, and I'm sorry if he did.

Valerie: I appreciate your apology, but it's not about upsetting me. It's just that there are too many people like him who won't take this seriously.

Valerie turns to leave and waives to everyone as she reaches the door.

Valerie: See you all in two weeks.

Art: *(In unison)* See you then!

Shirley: *(In unison)* See you then!

Valerie: Stay safe!

Valerie exits through the door.

Jimmy: That didn't go exactly as I planned.

Art: It went about as well as could be expected.

Danielle: *To Jimmy* He's right, you know how Val is.

Shirley comes out from behind the counter holding a paper bag in her hand. She hands the bag to Jimmy.

Shirley: Before I forget, Jimmy here's a little something for the road.

Jimmy looks into the bag and then holds it out to Danielle.

Jimmy: Raspberry Danishes are *your* favorite, you should have them.

Danielle: *Teasingly* You'll be needing it more than me; after all your one of our essential workers.

Art: How's it feel being out on the front lines?

Jimmy: I'll let you know when I get there.

Jimmy closes the paper bag and puts it aside.

Danielle: The chairs are done. Is there anything else, Gram?

Shirley looks around the diner with a satisfied nod.

Shirley: It looks like a job well done to me. What do you think Art?

Art props his broom against one of the walls.

Art: I'd say you're right. *Teasingly* As usual.

Shirley retrieves a coat from behind the counter.

Shirley: Then I guess that the only thing left is to pack up and stay safe.

Art helps Shirley put her coat on. Jimmy turns to Danielle.

Jimmy: Is there anything that I can do to help?

Danielle: You heard my Gram, it's all done.

Jimmy: I mean over these next few weeks.

Danielle: I've got enough Netflix and snacks to last me at least a month.

Jimmy: I'm being serious. What about your mom and your grandparents?

Danielle: Mom...she'll figure things out. And Gram and Papa could use a couple of weeks off; it's probably the first vacation that they've had since they opened the diner.

Jimmy: What if it's not just a few weeks?

Danielle: What do you mean the Prime Minister said—

Shirley and Art approach.

Shirley: Ready?

Jimmy and Danielle start to follow Shirley and Art out of the diner. Danielle stops, checks her pockets, and looks around.

Danielle: I forgot my phone.

Shirley: We'll warm the car up while you get it.

Shirley and Jimmy walk out of the diner while Art lingers in the doorway. Danielle rushes behind the counter and then comes out holding up her phone.

Danielle: Found it!

Art: Well done!

Art looks around the diner with a sigh and pats his hand against the doorframe.

Art: Well, old friend, I'll be seeing you in two weeks.

Danielle rushes to the door, raises her hand to turn out the light switch, and pauses. She anxiously looks around the diner.

Art: Dani, are you alright?

She shakes her head as if coming out of a daze and nods. She starts to pull the door open but pauses and lets it close.

Danielle: I was just thinking; what if we aren't back in two weeks?

Art: The PHAC said it's just for two weeks to help the hospitals keep going.

Danielle: I know, but Jimmy was saying—

Art: Jimmy's a bright kid, but he's still young. Trust me, this will all blow over in a few weeks once everyone's moved on to the next big thing. I've seen it over and over.

Danielle: What if it doesn't?

Art: Then it will be a few more weeks.

He puts a hand on her shoulder.

Art: And we'll get through it together, like we always have.

Danielle: I hope so.

Art: A couple of hardy Canadians like us? I know so.

A car horn is heard honking offstage.

Art: That's our ride.

Danielle turns out the lights and follows Art out of the diner.

Scene 3: *June, 2020 mandates have started to ease and outdoor dining is now permitted. Art, Shirley, and Danielle are cleaning the diner and preparing to open for outdoor dining. The chairs are stacked on top of the tables and a 'Closed' sign remains in place on the door. Shirley is looking out the window and trying to plan how to coordinate outdoor dining. Danielle appears distracted.*

Shirley: And then maybe if we add another table over there...

She gestures to a spot outside of the window.

Shirley: But then that will cross over into Cindy's beer garden next door. Danielle?

Danielle: What?

Shirley: I'm trying to add one more table, but I can't seem to figure out where it should go.

Danielle joins Shirley at the window and scrutinizes the view outside. Danielle points to a place outside.

Danielle: *Halfheartedly* I don't know....maybe over there?

Shirley: You mean on top of the fire hydrant?

Danielle: *Blandly* Oh, right.

Shirley points to something out the window.

Shirley: What's the tent for? Don't tell me someone's brave enough to throw a party.

Danielle: Everyone's been getting them in case there's rain.

Art looks up from his work.

Art: It might not be a bad idea if we looked into getting one. After all, Ottawa's not exactly famous for its sunny skies.

Shirley: Just what we need, another bill.

Art: We're still only at 50% capacity; I'm not sure that we can afford to chance leaving the 50% of customers we still have out in the cold.

Shirley turns away from the window with a sigh of defeat. Danielle resumes her work. Art turns around and watches them both with an appraising look.

Art: After all of this work you two could use a cup of coffee. What do you say to putting on a pot?

Danielle shrugs

Shirley: I can put it on.

Art: You, my lady, can take a seat and have a break. You've earned it.

Art rushes behind the counter and exits. Shirley takes two of the seats stacked on the tables down and puts them on the floor.

Shirley: You heard the boss.

Danielle reluctantly sits down and slumps down into her chair. Shirley starts to take a seat and then walks back to the window.

Shirley: Something's missing. It's more than just the table...

Danielle looks around the diner.

Danielle: Something or someone?

Shirley leans her forehead against the window with a weary sigh.

Danielle: I'm sorry, Gram. But I keep looking around expecting to see her around every corner.

Shirley turns around.

Danielle: She should be here helping us reopen.

Shirley: She should be here for a lot of things.

Danielle: She was finally getting better. She hadn't had a drink in months.

Shirley slumps down in the chair next to Danielle.

Danielle: Not one drop!

Shirley puts her hand on Danielle's shoulder.

Shirley: Gently I know.

Danielle puts her head in her hands.

Danielle: They closed the diner, my college, Mom's office, and her meetings. They shut down our whole lives.

Shirley: Dani, it was an emergency. I—

Danielle: But they never closed the liquor stores, not once.

Shirley embraces Danielle.

Shirley: I wish to God that they had.

Danielle: I miss her, Gram. I miss her so much.

Danielle sobs into Shirley's shoulder while Shirley tries to console her.

Scene 4: *Later that day. Shirley is seated at the counter filling napkin dispensers. Art enters from behind the counter offstage carrying a clipboard.*

Art: I'd say that's a wrap on the inventory.

Art places the clipboard down on the countertop in front of Shirley. Shirley picks up the clipboard and starts scanning the pages clipped to it.

Shirley: Looks like we have our work cut out for us.

Art: You can say that again. Not that I'd let on to Dani about that.

He sits down at the counter with a weary sigh.

Shirley: Where is she?

Art: She's out back calling Jimmy. She says there's no service in here.

Shirley: Or privacy.

Art nods.

Art: That too. *Pause* He seems like a good kid.

Shirley: I'm glad that she's got him. She needs someone to lean on.

Art: She'll always have the two of us.

Shirley: I wish that were enough.

Art: We're her family.

Shirley: And we're her only family as long as that border stays closed.

Art: Mark hasn't exactly been father of the year.

Shirley: I'm no fan of him either, but if there's any time that Danielle needs him this is it.

Art: She's confused enough without him whisking back into her life and then pulling another one of his signature disappearing acts.

Shirley: At least they could have let him come up for the funeral.

Art: With the stories that I've been hearing I'm just glad that we were able to hold it at all.

Shirley angrily picks up the clipboard and resumes reading the pages. Art gently pulls the clipboard away from her.

Art: Heather wouldn't have wanted him there. After everything that happened between them... she wouldn't have wanted him to remember her like that.

Shirley reluctantly nods.

Shirley: I was talking to Dani earlier...I'm worried about her, Art.

Art: She needs time.

Shirley: That's not all that she needs. She needs something to focus on—

Art: Which is why we agreed to let her try waiting tables here.

Shirley: She needs her friends.

Art: She still has Jimmy.

Shirley: *Voice breaking* She needs her mother.

Art reaches for Shirley's hand but she pulls it away.

Shirley: How are the two of us supposed to make up for all of that?

Art looks down and nods to himself.

Art: *Quietly* We can't. *Pause* All that we can do is be there for her, guide her, and love her.

Shirley: I don't know if that's enough.

Art: It's what being a family is all about. And right now she needs her family more than ever.

Shirley: I'm just so worried.

Art: I'm not.

Shirley: You're not?

Art puts his arm around Shirley.

Art: No. Not while I have two of the toughest gals in Ottawa by my side.

The lights fade.

Scene 5: *December 2021, the diner is decorated for Christmas. Art and Shirley are seated at a table huddled over several sheets of paper as they review the diner's accounts. Danielle and Valerie are cleaning the tables and stacking chairs for closing. Shirley sits back in her chair with a sigh.*

Shirley: I'm not much for math, but something tells me that even Einstein wouldn't be able to make these numbers work.

Art removes a calculator from his pocket and starts typing numbers in, occasionally glancing back at the papers on the table. He shakes his head and resumes typing into the calculator.

Shirley: Well?

Art puts the calculator back into his pocket.

Art: It would have been a lot easier if they didn't pull us back to 50% capacity again.

Shirley: *Sarcastically* That order was just the Christmas present that we needed. *Pause* How bad is it?

Art: Bad enough.

Shirley: What if we try cutting back the menu again? It's probably not a bad idea with how crazy trying to get supplies has been lately.

Art: It's going to take more than cutting back on bacon and eggs.

Shirley: How much more?

Art meets her gaze and then dismissively waives his hand

Art: *With forced optimism* It should start to get better once the holidays are over. They'll have to start loosening up the restrictions come January.

Shirley: What if they don't?

Art glances at Danielle and Valerie talking and laughing.

Shirley: Art?

Art turns back to her as if awoken from a daze.

Art: We'll...we'll take another look in January.

Shirley glances down at the paper.

Shirley: Are you sure that we can afford to wait that long?

Art: Things are bound to start looking up by January.

Shirley: But—

Art: *Firmly* We'll talk about it then.

Art and Shirley resume reviewing the accounts. Danielle helps Valerie stack the chairs on top of one of the tables.

Danielle: Are your kids ready for Christmas?

Valerie: They're excited, but it's been hard for them. This will be the second year that they can't celebrate with my parents.

Danielle: But I thought that even with the new orders we could still have up to ten people for a private gathering?

Valerie: At their age it's just too risky.

Danielle: *With forced cheerfulness* At least there's Zoom.

Valerie: The kids don't see it that way. *Pause* But at least I have one ace up my sleeve.

Danielle: What's that?

Valerie: I'm taking them to see the drive-in light show this weekend.

Danielle: They'll love that!

Valerie: *In a conspiratorial whisper* I'm hoping it will be a good way to break the ice.

Danielle: For what?

Valerie: I met someone.

Danielle: *Excitedly* And you've been holding out on me?!

Danielle leads Valerie to one of the tables that still hasn't been cleaned and signals to her to sit down.

Danielle: Details please...

Valerie: We lost power at the apartment a few weeks back and of course our flashlight was out of batteries.

Danielle: Of course.

Valerie: So I went out in the hall to see if anyone had any. Before I could even start knocking on doors this guy comes down the stairs.

Danielle: *The* guy?

Valerie nods

Valerie: He was checking to see if the little old couple down the hall needed any help.

Danielle: And here I thought that chivalry was dead. *Pause* Go on.

Valerie: Well, we got to talking and he asked me out to dinner.

Danielle: And...

Valerie: And we've been seeing each other ever since.

Danielle: Does this man of mystery have a name?

Valerie: It's Greg.

Danielle: And what's he do?

Valerie: He's with the city police.

Danielle: I do love me a man in uniform.

Valerie: And God does he look good in it. *Pause* Tonight we're supposed to...

She removes her phone from her pocket.

Valerie: Damn it!

Danielle: What?

Valerie: I'm supposed to meet him in twenty minutes. But I've still got to change my clothes and my hair's a mess, and...

Danielle: And I can finish cleaning up.

Valerie: You don't mind?

Danielle: Of course not.

Valerie: You're sure?

Danielle: I'm sure that if you wait much longer you'll run the risk of turning into a pumpkin. Now get going!

Valerie stands and rushes behind the counter offstage. She emerges moments later wearing a winter coat and rushes to Danielle.

Valerie: I owe you one!

Danielle: *Teasingly* And I'll hold you to it.

Valerie rushes to the door as Jimmy enters.

Jimmy: Hi Val.

Valerie: Can't talk, I'm running late.

Jimmy watches in confusion as Valerie runs out the door.

Jimmy: What put a fire under her?

Danielle: More like who.

Jimmy looks confused. Danielle laughs.

Danielle: Let's just say she's given 'love thy neighbor' a whole new meaning. I'll just get my coat.

Danielle exits behind the counter offstage. Shirley waives at Jimmy

Shirley: *Jokingly* There's our essential worker!

Art: What's the latest from the front lines?

Jimmy shrugs

Jimmy: It's alright, at least the inventory seems like it's getting back on track.

Shirley: How's your dad doing?

Jimmy: He'd be a lot better off if he listened to his doctor.

Art: Still not slowing down?

Jimmy: You'd think he never had to have a pacemaker put in.

Shirley: It'll take more than a few wires to slow that one down.

Jimmy: I just wish that for once he'd listen and—

Danielle rushes onstage from behind the counter with an anxious expression on her face.

Jimmy: Dani?

Danielle: Do we have any towels?

Shirley: We might have a dish towel out back, why?

Danielle: Something's leaking.

Art leaps up out of his seat.

Art: Where?

Danielle: This way.

Art follows Danielle behind the counter. Shirley retrieves a mop and bucket from behind the counter and hands them to Jimmy.

Shirley: Take this out back for them and I'll see if I can find any towels.

Art and Danielle enter from behind the counter.

Shirley: And?

Art shakes his head.

Art: It's that damn water heater. She just kicked out on us.

Shirley: You're sure?

He nods.

Danielle: There's a huge puddle coming out from under it.

Art: We just had it replaced three years ago!

Shirley: That was almost ten years ago.

Art: No, it was...

Shirley gives him a knowing look.

Art: Either way it shouldn't just start leaking out of nowhere.

Shirley: What parts do we need to fix it?

Art: Fix it?! This thing is beyond fixing.

Art storms offstage. Shirley anxiously watches him leave.

Shirley: I'll clean up.

Shirley takes the bucket and mop from Jimmy.

Shirley: You two should get going before the Christmas Market closes.

Danielle: Gram, I—

Shirley: Have fun. *Pause* While you're still young enough to.

Jimmy takes back the bucket and mop.

Jimmy: We'll help.

Shirley: By the time that we finish the market will be closed.

Danielle: Then we'll take a rain check.

Shirley shakes her head.

Jimmy: It'll get done faster if we work together.

Shirley: If you insist...

Danielle: We do.

Shirley: Then I'll see where Art needs you.

Jimmy and Danielle start to follow Shirley offstage. Danielle pulls Jimmy's sleeve and he turns to her in confusion.

Danielle: You didn't have to do that. You could have gone on ahead.

Jimmy: *Teasingly* And miss all of the fun?

Danielle: The fun hasn't started yet. Just wait until we get the bill to replace it.

Jimmy: How much will it cost to replace?

Danielle: I'm not sure, but the way that my grandfather was talking...

She throws her hands up in defeat.

Danielle: It was the last thing that we needed right now.

Jimmy puts his arm around her.

Jimmy: We'll figure something out.

Danielle: Sure.

Danielle pulls away from him.

Danielle: Till then, let's hope for a miracle.

She exits behind the counter. Jimmy pauses and shakes his head.

Jimmy: Yea, a miracle.

He looks around the decorated diner with a thoughtful expression and nods.

Jimmy: And this is just the season for it.

He rushes offstage after Danielle.

Scene 6: *December 31, 2021 Art and Shirley are taking down the Christmas decorations while a New Year's Eve special is playing on the television.*

Television: We'll be right back to our First Night coverage in Ottawa in just a moment. We're going live to Quebec where a surge in cases of the Omicron variant has forced residents to ring in the New Year a little bit differently this year.

Shirley picks up the remote and points it at the television.

Shirley: Let me guess...at home the same as last year.

Shirley turns off the television.

Art: Hey, I was watching that!

Shirley: *Dismissively* It's just more of the same.

Shirley reluctantly holds out the remote to him with a sigh. Art raises the remote and points it at the television.

Shirley: Listening to more bad news is the last way that I want to start a new year.

Art lowers the remote without pressing any buttons and puts it aside.

Shirley: I'm sorry, you can put it back on.

Art shrugs.

Art: You've seen one ball drop you've seen them all.

Shirley looks down at her watch.

Shirley: Are you sure? Its five minutes to countdown.

Art: I'm sure. Just enough time to get some champagne and share some resolutions.

Shirley: Aren't we a little old for resolutions?

Art: The year will only be new once...

Shirley: *Wearily* These days it seems like I could use a resolution to get through every new day never mind every New Year.

Art: Let's see...this year I resolve—

Art and Shirley both turn as Danielle enters through the front door carrying a bag.

Danielle: Happy New Year!

Art: *Enthusiastically* Happy New Year!

Shirley: *Half-heartedly* Happy New Year.

Danielle removes party hats and blowers from the bag and hands them to Art and Shirley.

Danielle: Goodbye twenty-twenty one.

Shirley: And good riddance.

Danielle blows one of the blowers.

Danielle: But before we ring in twenty twenty-two...

She removes an envelope from her coat pocket.

Danielle: Here's a belated Christmas present.

Danielle hands the envelope to Shirley. Shirley opens the envelope, removes a check, and hands it to Art.

Art: Where did you get all of this?

Shirley: This is your tuition money, isn't it?

Danielle: It was. But you don't need tuition if you aren't enrolled.

Art: Since when aren't you enrolled?

Danielle: Since I realized that I was wasting *my* time and *your* money.

Art: That money was supposed to be invested in your future.

Danielle: The diner *is* my future.

Shirley: Your future is your education.

Danielle: Which I'm not getting sitting home on a Zoom call with my eyes glazing over.

Art: The online classes can't last much longer—

Danielle: And what happens when I go back to campus? I'll still be learning out of a bunch of books that won't teach me half of what I learn behind that counter every day. *Pause* When you gave me this money you said to invest it wisely; if you ask me paying off the bills that have been piling up is a better investment than a degree that I might not even use.

Art: I know that you're trying to help us—

Danielle: I'm not! *Pause* Or anyways I'm not *just* helping you. For almost two years I woke up every day wondering how I was going to get out of bed.

Shirley: I know that it's been hard, but—

Danielle: But I did it. I did it because I had a job to do and a place to be.

Danielle looks around the diner.

Danielle: And I'm not going to lose it now.

Danielle puts the envelope down on the table between Art and Shirley.

Danielle: It's my money and my future, and I'm spending them both here.

Shirley starts to push the envelope across the table towards Danielle, but Danielle puts her hand down on it and shakes her head.

Shirley: I'll call your advisor and—

Art picks up the envelope and puts it in his pocket.

Art: And in the meantime this will be set aside for when you re-enroll. In the bank, where it belongs.

Danielle: But—

The bell over the door rings as it starts to open.

Shirley: Sorry we're closed for the night.

Rick, Jimmy, and Steve enter through the door. Jimmy is carrying a bottle of champagne.

Steve: We'll be right on our way.

Jimmy: We just wanted to wish you a happy new year

Rick: And to thank you.

Art: What is there to thank us for?

Rick: Not much. Just helping keep all of us sane for the last year and a half.

Rick turns and looks at the neon sign in the window.

Rick: All of these months Shirley's Temple has been just that for us guys.

Shirley dismissively waives her hand.

Shirley: You'd think we were pouring gold instead of coffee.

Steve: You'd be surprised how hard it is to find good coffee out on the road.

Rick: And good friends are even harder. *Pause* Jimmy told me you've been having some trouble...

Shirley turns to Danielle with a reprimanding look.

Art: No more than anyone else is these days.

Rick: We truckers have a motto, when a friend's down, you give him a lift.

Rick removes an envelope from his coat pocket and hands it to Shirley. Shirley opens the envelope and removes several bills.

Shirley: We can't accept this.

Rick: It's just a helping hand, not a hand out.

Art: We'll pay you back, with interest.

Rick: Art, we've known each other a long time; too long for you to insult me by saying something like that.

Shirley: I don't know what to say.

Danielle: Say thank you.

Art shakes Rick's hand.

Art: Thank you. All of you.

Rick shrugs.

Rick: It's what friends do. Who knows, maybe we'll need a lift ourselves someday.

Jimmy: And in the meantime, let's celebrate.

Jimmy pops the cork of the champagne bottle and Danielle starts pouring it into coffee mugs. Danielle raises her mug.

Danielle: To good friends.

Jimmy puts his arm around Danielle.

Jimmy: And to twenty twenty-two; let's make her one for the history books.

Danielle: It's almost midnight!

Danielle turns on the television and everyone begins counting down to the New Year as the lights fade.

Scene 7: *January, 2022. Rick and Steve are sitting at the counter drinking coffee. Shirley is working the counter while Danielle and Valerie are serving tables. Art enters from behind the counter carrying a tray of fresh pastries.*

Art: *To Rick* Well look who's back.

Shirley takes the tray from Art and puts it on the counter.

Shirley: Rick just came back from doing deliveries in the states.

Art: And how have the Yanks been treating you?

Rick shrugs.

Rick: They were alright.

Steve: Which is more than we can say for some of our own these days.

Rick turns to Steve with a reprimanding look.

Shirley: What do you mean?

Rick: Nothing, just more of the regulations. You know how it is.

Steve: It's more than that.

Rick shakes his head at Steve, signaling him to stop talking.

Steve: Now they've started mandating proof of vaccination to cross the border.

Art: But you've been driving without it all of this time; what's the point of mandating it now?

Steve: Exactly!

Shirley: What about people who were already sick?

Steve: No exemptions; I checked. Plenty of us already caught the damn thing, so where's the science in forcing a vaccine on us now?

Shirley: They said on the news that some people are having allergic reactions to it, what about them?

Steve: Doesn't matter.

Art: What if you have health problems? My own doctor doesn't recommend it for anyone with heart trouble.

Rick: *In a low voice* Neither does mine.

Art and Shirley exchange wary glances.

Rick: Not that Trudeau cares, or my own boss for that matter.

Danielle passes Valerie as she carries away dirty plates while Valerie cleans a table. Danielle almost bumps into Valerie.

Danielle: Sorry!

Valerie: Don't worry about it.

Danielle: So, what's this I hear that Katie has a birthday coming up?

Valerie: Ten years old. Can you believe it?

Danielle: Double digits; that's a big one. Do you have anything exciting planned?

Valerie: We're going to have to lay low this year. It's so hard to go out with them fidgeting with their masks and I'm just not comfortable having them around crowds if they aren't vaccinated. She keeps begging to have a party for her friends, but I just can't yet.

Valerie looks dejected.

Danielle: Some of the best birthdays I had were just me, my mom and my grandparents. After all, friends come and go.

Valerie nods and regains her composure.

Valerie: You're right, we'll make our own fun.

Valerie finishes cleaning the table.

Valerie: Here's hoping that they have the twelve and under vaccine approved in time for Will's birthday this summer. He's already bugging me about a pool party with six months still to go.

Danielle crosses her fingers with a forced smile.

Danielle: Fingers crossed.

Valerie exits behind the counter. Greg enters in his police uniform and looks around the diner as though searching for someone.

Danielle: Is there something I can help you with, Officer?

Greg: Does Valerie Lavoie work here?

Danielle: Is she in some kind of trouble?

Valerie enters from behind the counter and rushes to Danielle and Greg.

Greg: Just the girl I was looking for. Did you report a phone charger missing?

He removes a phone charger from his pocket.

Valerie: Where did you find it?!

Greg: On my kitchen counter. You must have left it at my place Friday.

He hands her the phone charger.

Valerie: My hero.

She takes the charger and kisses him. Danielle starts to walk away, but Valerie signals to her to stay.

Valerie: Greg, this is Danielle; the co-worker I was telling you about.

Greg: I've heard a lot about you.

Valerie: Danielle, this is Greg.

Danielle: It's great to finally meet you.

Jimmy enters through the front door and takes a seat next to Rick at the counter.

Danielle: I've been looking forward to meeting the guy who's made Valerie so happy. I—

Greg: Excuse me, ladies.

Greg follows Jimmy to the counter.

Greg: I'm going to need to see your proof of vaccination.

Jimmy: Excuse me?

Greg: Your proof of vaccination.

Jimmy: What?

Greg: You entered a public establishment without showing proof of vaccination.

Jimmy: I've been coming here since—

Greg: If you can't provide proof of vaccination I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

Jimmy gets up to go.

Jimmy: Then I guess that I'll be...

Danielle gives him a pleading look and shakes her head. Jimmy looks to Rick and Rick half-heartedly nods. Jimmy reluctantly retrieves his phone from his pocket and shows Greg his vaccine pass. Greg nods in approval and then turns to Art and Shirley.

Greg: Do you let all of your customers come in without showing proof of vaccination?

Shirley: This is a private business, not—

Greg: A private business that is still subject to the rule of law.

Shirley: *Under her breath* Law, not mandates.

Greg: What was that?

Art steps between Shirley and Greg.

Art: We've been following the guidelines and mandates from the beginning, Officer.

Greg: Except for five minutes ago, you mean.

Art: Jimmy's a regular; we've seen his pass so many times that I could do a police sketch of it by now.

Greg looks skeptical.

Art: You saw yourself that he has a valid pass.

Greg looks from Jimmy to Art and Shirley.

Greg: Just try to be more careful. We're in the middle of a case surge, you know?

Shirley: *Tartly* Oh we know.

Art: We'll be sure to be vigilant.

Greg exits through the front door. Danielle glares at Valerie. Valerie looks away and resumes waiting tables.

Steve: *Sarcastically* Barney Fife sure showed us.

Shirley: Whose bright idea was it to give that tyrant a badge?

Art: He was just following his orders.

Shirley: *Sardonically* Where have I heard that line before?

Danielle rushes over to Jimmy.

Danielle: I'm proud of you.

Jimmy: For bowing down at the first sign of trouble?

Danielle: For putting all of us first. You could have walked out and gotten off with just a fine. But you didn't.

Jimmy: *Bitterly* I sure didn't.

Danielle: You put all of us first.

Jimmy turns to Rick.

Jimmy: I know what you would have done. You would have spit in his eye and told him to go—

Rick: I don't have an old man without a vax pass to worry about, or a girlfriend's family business to look out for.

Jimmy: That's exactly the kind of thing that's gotten us into this mess. Everyone has kids, or jobs, or bills and everyone says 'no, not me, I'd better sit this one out'.

Art: Your dad's right. You have to pick your battles carefully.

Jimmy: And in the meantime they keep taking more away from us.

Danielle: Jimmy—

Rick: Jimmy's right, if we keep sitting on the sidelines pretty soon there isn't going to be anything left to stand up for.

Jimmy: So what are we going to do about it?

Art, Shirley, Danielle, Rick, and Steve exchange uncomfortable glances.

Jimmy: *Bitterly* That's what I was thought you'd say.

Jimmy shakes his head in disappointment as the lights fade.

Scene 8: *Shirley is cleaning the counter while Valerie and Danielle clean the tables and stack chairs for closing. Jimmy is seated at the counter with a coffee while he waits for Danielle. The television is broadcasting a weather report.*

Valerie: Can you turn that up, Shirley? I'm supposed to go out Saturday, but I'm worried that there might be snow.

Shirley looks for the remote.

Shirley: It's around here somewhere...

Shirley continues to search while Valerie cleans a table. Valerie rushes over to the counter.

Valerie: Let me try and help you look.

Shirley finds the remote and holds it up.

Shirley: Here it is!

Shirley turns up the volume just as the weather report ends. The broadcast continues with a news update.

Broadcaster: And, coming up, a so called ‘Freedom Convoy’ has assembled in locations across Canada vowing to travel to the nation’s capital. What this convoy could mean for Ottawa residents.

Shirley turns down the volume.

Shirley: Looks like we missed the weather.

Valerie: I’ll check my phone later.

Valerie anxiously looks back at the television.

Valerie: You don’t really think they’ll come here, do you?

Shirley: Who?

Valerie: *Pointing to the television* The convoy.

Shirley shrugs.

Shirley: We’ll see.

Shirley exits behind the counter.

Danielle: It could mean more customers if they do.

Valerie: *Scoffs* Customers?! There won’t be *any* customers if this thing turns into a super spreader and there’s another shutdown.

Danielle: There’s not going to be another shutdown.

Valerie: Have you seen the case numbers? We’ve been in a surge for weeks.

Jimmy: It’s pretty hard to do much spreading or super spreading from the inside of a truck.

Danielle gives Jimmy a warning look.

Valerie: And they even admitted that they want to disrupt the supply chain.

Jimmy: *Under his breath* No more than the lockdowns already did.

Danielle: It’s just a few trucks. It’ll be over in a few days.

Valerie: And how much damage will have been done by then?

Danielle: Relax, Val.

Valerie: Relax? How am I supposed to relax when my children’s health and my ability to feed them is being held hostage by—

Jimmy: *Scoffing* Hostage?

Valerie: By a bunch of anti-vax lunatics.

Jimmy: *Quietly* They're not anti-vax, they're anti-mandate.

Valerie: What?

Danielle: *Reproachfully* Jimmy...

Jimmy: I said that they aren't against vaccines just corrupt bureaucrats forcing them on people.

Valerie: Anyone who refuses to think of the people around them and take the vaccine is...

Jimmy: Is someone I would be proud to work alongside.

Valerie: Your father has pre-existing conditions, you of all people should know better.

Danielle: Val, lay off.

Jimmy: My father is a grown man who can take care of himself a lot better than a half-baked 'expert' on tv can.

Valerie: Like it or not those experts are the only chance we have to get through this pandemic.

Jimmy: Then good luck to us.

Danielle: That's enough.

Valerie: They would have gotten us past this a long time ago if those anti-vaxxers would just get out of their way.

Jimmy: It's not 'those anti-vaxxers' that are in the way, it's the rights of those anti-vaxxers. The same rights that belong to every—

Danielle, Jimmy, and Valerie turn as a car horn is heard outside.

Valerie: That's my ride.

Danielle picks up Valerie's coat hanging on one of the chairs.

Valerie: Thanks.

Valerie puts on her coat.

Valerie: I'll see you tomorrow.

Valerie looks past Danielle and glares at Jimmy.

Danielle: See you then.

Jimmy takes his seat at the counter while Danielle watches Valerie leave.

Jimmy: Saved by the horn.

Danielle starts wiping down the counter.

Jimmy: I'll raise a glass to that.

He raises his mug. Danielle takes the mug out of his hand.

Jimmy: Hey!

Danielle: It's empty and I need to run the dish washer.

She turns to exit behind the counter.

Jimmy: Dani, I didn't say anything that wasn't true. I'm sorry if that upset your friend.

Danielle: I have to work with Val every day. Every time that you pick a fight with her—

Jimmy: I didn't start that just now and you know it.

Danielle: But you had no problem finishing it.

Jimmy: What do you want me to do, keep my mask on and my mouth shut?

Danielle: You know how Val is...

Jimmy: I'm learning.

Danielle: Then you know that you're better off just letting things go with her.

Jimmy: Meanwhile she can say what she wants when she wants consequence free.

Danielle: That's not what I said.

Jimmy: But it's the truth. People like Valerie can attack anyone they like. They demonize, dehumanize, and blame anyone who doesn't act or think just like them and no one dares question them.

Danielle: She wasn't talking about you—

Jimmy: She was talking about my dad and people just like him. *Pause* I'm sorry, but I couldn't stand by and listen to her do it.

Danielle sighs in defeat.

Danielle: Maybe I'm the one who should be sorry.

Jimmy: I'll let you make it up to me.

Danielle: Oh yea?

Jimmy: Yea.

Danielle: And how would I do that?

Jimmy: Remember that show that I told you about?

Danielle: *Groans* Not the karate thing.

Jimmy: Just one episode, that's all that I ask.

Danielle pretends to think about it and then extends her hand.

Danielle: Deal.

Jimmy takes her hand and then leans in and kisses her.

Danielle: I'll be right back.

She walks behind the counter.

Danielle: *Calling out* Gram, we're leaving.

Shirley: *Offstage* Have fun. Make sure that you're back by eleven.

Danielle: *Calling out* I promise.

Danielle retrieves her coat from behind the counter.

Danielle: Do you really think they'll come to Ottawa?

Jimmy: The convoy?

She nods as he helps her put on her coat.

Jimmy: Would it be such a bad thing if we did?

She turns to him with a questioning expression.

Danielle: We?

He nods.

Danielle: *To herself* We...

She turns away and rushes to the door.

Danielle: We'd better get going. My grandfather will read me the riot act if I miss curfew again.

Danielle rushes out of the door and Jimmy follows after her.

Scene 9: *Art and Shirley are seated at a table reviewing the diner's accounts. Art is punching numbers into a calculator and making notes.*

Art: It doesn't leave a lot of wiggle room...

Shirley picks up his notes.

Shirley: More like *any* wiggle room.

Art: But we should get through the month. *Pause* As long as nothing comes up, anyway.

Shirley knocks on the table.

Shirley: That sounds like a jinx waiting to happen.

Art: If we've made it through almost two years we can make it through a few more weeks.

Danielle enters with a clipboard in her hand. She hands the clipboard to Shirley.

Danielle: That should be it on the inventory.

Shirley reviews the notes on the clipboard and then hands it to Art. Art scans the contents.

Art: Time to call it a night then.

All three turn at the sound of a car horn outside.

Shirley: What is it about getting behind the wheel that makes people forget any manners or—

Another horn is heard outside. Danielle runs to the window as car lights stream in through the diner's windows.

Danielle: *Quietly* They really came.

Shirley stands and follows Danielle to the window as car lights continue to stream through the diner and car horns echo from outside.

Shirley: What in the world—

Art stands and follows them to the window.

Danielle: It's the convoy.

Shirley: Well I'll be...*Pause* I never thought that they would actually do it.