

Real Estate, Act One, Scene One

The phone rings. And rings.

Enter Joel Hopper. He is unshaven and wearing pyjama pants, (note to the rest of the play – his appearance improves as the play progresses) and darts around the room looking for the phone. He moves into the rooms off the living room and looks behind the backs of the couch cushions. He checks a plant. The phone stops ringing. He stands in the living room in defeat. The phone begins to ring again.

Joel Come on! Where are you?

He listens for the ring and moves towards the chair. He hears the ring. He reaches into the chair and feels around. It hasn't been cleaned down there in a while.

He pulls out (something out of the ordinary like a shoe, egg beater, snorkel mask, or a rubber boot). The phone stops ringing.

Answering machine picks up. A man's voice.

V.O. Joel? Joel pick up. I know you're sitting there. Joel? Joel? (beat) Joel. It's Harry.

Joel No kidding.

V.O. Pick up Joel...**(Joel starts to walk away)** At least don't walk away. I've got the publisher breathing down my neck for a first draft. They want to see something in 2 weeks, and I'm sorry but they're going to hold your second advance until they do. So I'm hoping you're not answering the phone because you're busy writing something down.

Joel starts to chew his fingers.

V.O. Now don't chew your hand off or anything. That nervous habit is going to rip you out of your livelihood. Just write a damned book for Pete's sakes and get a phone you can find.

He hangs up. Joel seems to get an idea and grabs a hand recorder out of a drawer and presses play.

Joel It's 2am. Commissioner John Goads hears a noise outside his cheap Tokyo motel room. Like any other evening the air is thick with moisture and fear (**reconsiders**) fog and fear (**reconsiders again**) Fear and Heat...the kind of heat that steams up the room like a kettle on full blast. Like a dog reaching for a bone he tracks down his gun in a matter of seconds. (**He grabs a lint brush from the drawer**) His phone seems to be another story. It's nowhere to be found. Headquarters insists on contact before action so this could prove to be a problem. Again he hears the noise. It seems to be getting closer. His trained intuition informs him that he may be in for a fight he just can't win. As he searches through the room he throws objects to the side in desperation to find his cell phone. Again he hears a noise.

A noise is heard off stage like something is being dragged.

Joel He hears something dragging. Perhaps a body. Droplets of sweat appear on his brow, as he fears the worst. The enemy has found out about.. Ester, Ariel.....Emily. Emily, he only woman that he has been able to love since the tragic death of his wife..... and the brutal Chinese torture of her.....midget lover.

A large bang is heard outside the door and a woman's voice yelling.

Emma (offstage) OW!

Joel He moves towards the door and listens. He reaches for the window and tries to see something. (**As he moves his head away we see Emma's face in the window trying to see if there is anyone home**). The commissioner realizes he has no choice but to confront the enemy head on even though the chance of seeing his lover with an on-slaught of bullets in her chest and a Tokyo death stick pointed at his head is a real possibility. He knows this is the risk he takes being the CIA's secret tool in uncovering the ancient codes of the Asian underworld. He cocks his gun (**Joel cocks the lint brush slightly getting stuck on it**) and throws open the door to find -

The wooden pointed end of a real estate sign pokes in through the door. Joel jumps back in surprise.

Joel - Ah!

Emma Good Afternoon!

Enter Emma through the door revealing a “landmark realty” sign. She is smartly dressed and well groomed. She is overzealous and a firecracker right out of the gate.

Emma Didn't mean to catch you by surprise. Hopefully I'm not interrupting anything important.

Joel **(Defeated, he throws the voice recorder in a drawer)**
No. Nothing. Zip.

Emma Your shed was locked and I wanted to store an extra realty sign just in case the other gets stolen. They're taken all the time around here lately: put in different locations...on the highway, in front of the town hall..... Its realty vandalism at it's greatest. Could be the competition or a bunch of really bored teenagers. Hard to tell. So I've added this “please don't steal this sign” which I'm hoping, fingers crossed, will keep the thieves at bay!

(beat)

Joel Who are you?

Emma I'm Emma Bard. Your Real Estate Agent **(pause)**....from Royal Landmark Realty. **(pause)**.....doesn't ring a bell?

Joel What happen to Frank Toggle?

Emma Oh right. Yes. He's dead.

Joel Dead?

Emma Yes. Dead. It's tragic. I came over to replace his sign.

- Joel** I noticed it wasn't there this morning.
- Emma** Looks like someone stole it already. At least now he'll never know. Oh! I'm vibrating. **(she pulls out her pager and reads it)**
- Joel** So you took over Frank's listing?
- Emma** Hmm? Oh yes – we put his listings in a punch bowl and all got to pick one – I don't mean: "Oh hurray Frank is dead! Let's have a party". I mean, I'm sad for his death. He was a very successful Real Estate Agent. Won the Platinum Award every year. We thought it was the most logical way to divide his listings. Of course Barry Settler got that huge estate down at the river, you know the one that looks like a pop-up castle with an indoor pool? But life isn't always fair so there you have it!
- Joel** Well, at least you're not dead.
- Emma** You're absolutely right! What I meant to say is: **(extends her hand)** Hello, I'm Emma Bard – And you must be **(looks at file)** Joel Hopper. I'm taking over your listing to ensure that everything goes smoothly and that you'll have this house sold in no time. Now according to my, well, Frank's files, God bless his heart - even though it failed on him - this house has been on the market for...14 months! ...**(under her breath)**... I knew I should have let Mary pick before me.
- Joel** Listen, I know it's in bad shape. My father wasn't really into selling the house before he moved into Sunset Village. **(pause)** That's really bad news about Frank-
- Emma** -The retirement home?
- Joel** Huh?
- Emma** Sunset Village?

Joel Uh, yeah, it's a ridiculous name especially since it faces north and you can't see a sunset unless you roll yourself out into the parking lot.

Emma So are you saying it's possible that this house can sell?

Joel Well, that's your job, isn't it?

Emma Well, yes it is! And there's no doubt in my mind that this house can sell. It was Frank's listing after all. And Frank always used to say, "there are no small homes, just small agents." **(she goes to the window)** It's on a beautiful lake front property.... And with a little bit of elbow grease, some vacuuming and a dose of Feng Shui we'll be on our way! Is that another exit?

Joel Yes.

Emma **(She pulls out a measuring tape)** Oh goody!

She exits down the hallway.

Joel **(Call out to her)** So when did Frank pass away?

Emma enters.

Emma This morning. Let's make a plan. It's important to start with a plan otherwise it's easy to get side tracked. "Planning ahead is planning for the future: and planning for the future is making a plan: A plan for life."

Emma sits on the couch and pats the seat next to her.

Joel I thought we were just selling the house.

Emma There is never a "just" selling of a house Mr. Hopper. Houses need to radiate a quality that screams to people on the street, "I am the dream you've been looking for all your life". I will make all your fantasies become a reality. Why else do you think they put the "real" in real estate?

Joel Uh..

- Emma** What is your “reality” Mr. Hopper? What state of life do you want to achieve?
- Joel** This is stressing me out.
- Emma** Often the greatest achievements in life are born out a state of ultimate lows and sheer panic.
- Joel** I feel like I’m getting a heart palpitation.
- Emma** That’s why I see every house as a treasure trove. “A buried treasure hidden under hideous furniture and bad lighting.” I’ve got that quote taped up in my car.
- Joe** You’ve lost me.
- Emma** Have you ever wanted to turn your life around Mr. Hopper? Start over? Wipe that slate of pathetic excuses clean. Well now you can. That’s what selling this house is going to do for you. A new beginning. A new start. A plan for the future!
- Joel** I don’t remember having this conversation with Frank.
- Emma** Surprisingly, Frank mustn’t have had a vision for this place since you’ve been trying to sell it for over a year.
- Joel** Well I only got in touch with him a few weeks ago to let him know I was really serious about letting it go
- Emma picks up a VERY dead plant in the centre of the coffee table. She looks at Joel.**
- Emma** Oh, I think you’ve let it go.
- Joel** I actually did water that plant this week it’s just that I used -
- Emma** Beer?
- Joel** Too much fertilizer
- Emma** Let’s be honest with each other Mr. Hopper.

- Joel** Please call me Joel.
- Emma** Do you have a drinking problem Joel?
- Joel** What?!
- Emma** A drinking problem? Do you find that your intake of alcohol exceeds –
- Joel** I understand what the definition of a drinking problem is. And no, I don't have one.
- Emma** It's 2 o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Hopper.
- Joel** And?
- Emma** You're still wearing your pyjamas.
- Joel** That's why you think I'm an alcoholic?
- Emma** It's a pattern Mr. Hopper. My Uncle Gissepe stayed in his pyjama pants for 14 years before he died. His liver was the size of a watermelon. I only bring this up because "YOU are an extension of your home." And Frank always used to say -
- Joel** Okay. Emma! It's Emma right? I don't have a drinking problem. I'm a writer. I write professionally for a living. This is what makes me most comfortable to write in. It's an extension of my work. Some days I even go without having a shower. It's MY pattern. It helps in my writing.
- Emma** A writer?
- Joel** Yes. And I'll be in that room there when you're showing the house. **(pointing to door off of room)** – that's where I write.
- Emma** Well that's an interesting profession. I always wanted to be an actor. I took a couple of classes. My uncle Mario was an actor. He had Alzheimer's. Being an actor was the only thing he could remember and as far as I know he only did one show - The King and I. He spent 40 hours in a

tanning bed trying to look like Yule Brenner – which, when you think about it, probably contributed to him losing his memory. **(pause)** What do you write?

Joel Fiction.

Emma **(she finds a pack of cigarettes).** You smoke?

Joel Hey! My emergency smokes. I've spent the last 2 weeks looking for those. How did you do that??

Emma I'm a Real Estate Agent.

Joel **(offers her a cigarette)** Do you smoke?

Emma Me? Nooooo. No. Never tried it. I find it repulsive. Halitosis, Gingivitis, smelly clothes, stained carpets **(she takes the pack back from him and throws it in the waste paper basket)** yellow fingers, unattractive skin scaling... tongue cancer.... losing your ability to speak –

Joel Yeah imagine that. **(He retrieves his cigarettes from the garbage and puts them in a drawer)**

The phone begins to ring. Joel doesn't move. Emma reaches under the couch cushion and holds up the phone.

Emma Did you want to answer this?

Joel Uh...no. It's going to be my agent.

The call goes to the answering machine and we hear a woman's voice.

V.O. Hello Mr. Hopper this is Cecile Basting calling from the Town Hall, again, regarding your father's property at 742 Davidson Blvd. As we've discussed, several times, the taxes on the property have been in arrears for 4 years at a total of roughly 12 thousand dollars and we're giving you until the end of the month before we repossess the home. I have drafted you an official letter that you should be

receiving in the next few days. **(beat)**. Oh and have a lovely day.

Emma Oh.

Joel Before we repossess the home?? What kind of monsters are they? Don't they understand my father is dying? How many times do I have to tell them that?

Emma checks her day timer

Emma The end of the month is in a week.

(pause)

Emma I have to sell this house in a week?

Joel No. You don't. Screw them. It's my father's house, not theirs.

Emma That's not exactly how it works Mr. Hopper.

Joel Call me Joel

Emma That's not exactly how it works Joel.

Joel What are they going to do? Board up the windows and throw me out? Make me live in the shed?

Emma Actually yes.

Joel That's ridiculous.

Emma Did Frank know about this?

Joel Yes.

Emma So why hasn't it sold?

Joel I kept declining any offers.

Emma Why?

- Joel** Because I thought I could come up with the money to pay them back. My father built this house. Every square inch of it. I don't have it in me to tell the old man his home is gone.
- Emma** It's bad energy to play games with your Real Estate Agent Mr. Hopper.
- Joel** It's not so easy being forced to sell your family home.
- Emma** Why wasn't your father paying his property tax?
- Joel** He's a stubborn man. My mother took care of pretty much everything to do with the house. When she died, he had to figure it out on his own. So he figured, after 40 years of living on this property and caring for it, they should start paying HIM tax.
- Emma** That's illegal.
- Joel** Yet it does sound logical.
- Emma** Mr. Hopper...
- Joel** Look. I get it. Okay? The town only called me a month ago. I wasn't happy about it either. **(notices Emma is hyperventilating)** Are you okay?
- Emma** I'm just feeling a little bit faint.
- Joel** Have you dealt with one of these cases before?
- Emma** No.
- Joel** Have you ever had to sell a house in a week? I mean, worse case scenario?
- Emma** Nope.
- Joel** Are you hyperventilating?
- Emma** Yep.

Joel Is it possible?

Emma Yes, I've hyperventilated before.

Joel I meant to sell the house in a week.

Emma Maybe

Joel Maybe?

Emma Well. You See- I've never - I've never quite been involved in - I've never quite had to - Exactly - Sell a house before.

Joel You're kidding? What about the feng shui? The vision? The vacuuming? The plan?

Emma I've been dying to say that ever since I decided to become an agent.

Joel Oh this is perfect.

Emma I didn't say I couldn't sell this house. I just said I've never sold one before. I do have clients. Well, one. Sort of

Joel Hey, I'm all for giving the under-dog a chance. But as you heard - I'm running out of options and to be completely honest, I'm running out of money as well.

Emma You're firing me?

Emma puts her head in her hands and starts to cry.

Joel Oh no. Please don't do that.

She starts to cry harder.

Emma I'm sorry. I just can't believe I'm being fired from one of my first gigs!

Joel No! It's not you!

Emma No. No. It's me. It's usual old motor mouth Emma. More talk than action Emma. I've already brought up too many

sensitive topics. Not to mention your alcoholism and addiction to nicotine. Why would you want me here to sell your house?? Your right. Get another agent! Go ahead! It's for the best! Here's my business card! Call the office!

Joel begins to dial the number. Emma dives to stop him.

Emma You mean your really going to call?

Joel I thought –

Emma Please don't call!! Please give me a chance. You only have a week to sell this place. Another agent wouldn't want this gig. But I know I can do it! Plus you'd have my full-devoted attention. I only have one other client and it's my mother's distant cousin who I'm convinced is just using me as a pawn to get back in with the family.

Joel I don't think so. I think it's best if I get a senior agent in the office. **(he goes to dial the phone)**

Emma Wait! Wait! Do you want to sell this house??

Joel Yes. That's the whole point. You heard the message.

Emma Well if you really want this house sold – I'm your gal! I won't get in your way and I won't comment on your drinking during the day. I only bring it up because not stopping my uncle Giseppe from making his own home brew is one of my mother's biggest regrets. He was still bloated when we buried him.

Joel pauses and returns to dial the telephone. She takes the phone out of his hands and buries it back in the couch.

Emma Look at it this way! This house needs a little bit of work to get you a decent price. Plus you need to pay off your tax on this property. Twelve thousand dollars is a lot of money. I'll do most of the work so that you can focus on.... whatever it is you do all day.

Joel I write.

Emma And If I can't sell this house in a week – I'll forfeit my commission.

Joel Why would you want to do that?

Emma I can't bear to walk into that Real Estate office and admit I couldn't fill the shoes of a dead guy. A dead Frank no less. The only reason they keep me around is because I finally have a legitimate listing. I need this job. And I think you need me. What do you say?

Joel Only on the condition that we stay out of each other's way.

Emma You'll hardly know I'm here.

Joel And that you don't do much to change this house. I still want it to look like my parents place. No wallpapering or painting...

Emma I'll only do what is absolutely necessary. I promise you won't be disappointed.

Joel We only have 7 days. That's it.

Emma I'll do it in 6.

(pause)

Joel Okay. Fine. I'll give you a shot.

Emma Really?!? **(She hugs him and then corrects herself)** All right. Excellent. I'm officially ripping out a new page of paper and we are going to start from square one. This time let's do it right. It's so important to clear the energy in a room to make a fresh start. I read in a book that many people burn sage but I think that's for extreme cases. So let's just start over. Let's have some fun with it. I actually learned this in one of my acting classes. Let's turn back time.

Joel What about Frank?

Emma For the sake of this exercise we'll keep him dead.

Joel Okay.

Emma starts to leave

Joel Where are you going?

Emma To knock on the door.

Joel Is this really necessary?

Emma It's got to feel like a fresh start. I promise you it works. You should lock the door behind me. It'll feel more realistic. Actors do this kind of stuff all the time.

Emma leaves and then knocks at the door. Joel just stands there looking at it.

Emma **(offstage)** Hello? It's your Real Estate Agent. Emma Bard. Hello...Mr. Hopper?

Emma looks through the window into the house to see Joel moving to sit on the couch.

Emma **(offstage)** I can see you Mr. Hopper, you can open the door now.

Joel I'm choosing to pretend I wasn't home..... I'm at the grocery store.

Emma **(offstage)** Oh fair enough! Interesting choice. Can I get the key for the shed? I need to do some...Real Estate stuff.

Joel It's on a nail next to the door.

Emma **(offstage)** Is there any old paint in there?

Joel Yeah, Yeah, help yourself....

Emma **(offstage)** How about a power drill?

Joel It's right next to the ladder.... I think it needs to be charged.

Emma **(offstage)** Perfect.

Beat.

Joel Paint? What does she need a power drill for?