

# **THE REAL GRANOLA**

by Chris Van Strander

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### **CHARACTERS**

MARY, male, thirties, a folk singer. Idealistic, paranoid.

MAID, female, twenties to thirties. Not what she seems.

### **SETTING**

A hotel room in Toronto.

(An economy—but not unpleasant—hotel room in Toronto. A bed with twisted-up sheets, night stand, phone, mini-fridge (containing courtesy bar). A man in a denim jacket, MARY, is sprawled on the floor in the middle of the room, unmoving. Pause. A knock at the door.)

MAID (off)

Maid service. (knocks louder) Maid service.

(Sound of keys; the door opens. A MAID in uniform comes in, pushing a small upright vacuum, plugged by a long cord into an outlet in the hallway. She halts, regards MARY, then begins vacuuming the floor skillfully around him. After a few passes of the vacuum directly next to his head, MARY rouses. He sits up, looks around—at the room, at the MAID, at everything—with complete confusion. After a while the MAID sees this and turns the vacuum off.)

MARY

Where am I?

(The MAID looks at him.)

MARY

Please.

MAID

What do you mean?

MARY

What hotel is this? I know it sounds crazy. Just. Humor me.

MAID

Didn't you read the sign when you checked in?

MARY

The name!

MAID

The West End Hotel.

MARY

West End Hotel... West end of what?

MAID  
What?

MARY  
West end of where?

MAID  
What?

MARY  
In what—don't think I'm crazy—in what city?

MAID  
(turning to go) I should come back.

MARY  
No, wait.

MAID  
(still going) That's all right.

MARY  
Stop!

(The MAID stops.)

MARY  
Why can't you just answer? It's a simple question.

MAID  
What's the question?

MARY  
What city is this?

MAID  
Toronto.

MARY  
Toronto?

MAID  
Toronto.

MARY  
Oh, man. That's... this is bad. What time is it?

MAID  
Two-thirty.

MARY  
Two-thirty?

MAID  
Two-thirty.

MARY  
PM?

MAID  
Uh-huh.

MARY  
What day?

MAID  
Thursday.

MARY  
And what date?

MAID  
The nineteenth.

MARY  
Of April?

MAID  
May.

MARY  
[Current year], at least?

MAID

Are you all right?

MARY

Have you seen me before?

MAID

I just came in now.

MARY

No, yesterday. Did you come in here yesterday, on your rounds or whatever you call them?

MAID

You had the sign out all day. "Don't Disturb." So I skipped you. I was gonna come back when you took it off but you didn't. I can't skip two days in a row though. Fresh linens—there's a rule. So I knocked. No answer. I thought it was empty. I saw you were sleeping. I tried to be quiet. But that's hard with a vacuum. There's things I have to do, on my checklist... I know what you're thinking. People think we knock and clean just to be annoying. That's the furthest thing from the truth. At least in my case. I just want to do the bed, do the floor, put the linens in and get out. Were you sick?

MARY

No, asleep.

MAID

For how long?

(He's silent.)

MAID

Haven't you waked 'til just now?

(He's silent.)

MAID

You should call somebody. Your family. This isn't good, being like this. You don't have amnesia, do you?

MARY

I don't remember.

MAID

You want me to call somebody? Do you want me to get, bring somebody? The manager? A nurse?

MARY

Why'd you act so scared of me just now? When I was obviously confused and needed your help, and just asked a couple of questions? Why does everyone act like everyone else is going to inject them with a needle of poison whenever they're approached, when maybe someone just wants a question answered? A question that that other person might not understand, that might not be that important to that other person, but could be VITALLY IMPORTANT to THAT person!

MAID

(pause) Which person am I?

MARY

Leave me alone.

MAID

I'm getting the manager.

(The MAID leaves.)

MARY

See what I care... crack junkie.

(MARY goes through his pockets. A loose smattering of brightly-colored pills spill from various places as he does this. He pulls out a couple crazily folded carbon copies of a contract, a harmonica, an eye patch, a thick thick roll of money, and a bottle cap. He tries the eye patch on, completely puzzled as to why he's carrying it, then puts it and all the rest of the things back into his pockets, goes to the phone, and dials a number. Hangs up, scans the phone.)

MARY

How do you dial out from these phones?

(He dials 9, then the number again. It works.)

MARY

Wayne Blaine please... It's Mary Stuart... Yes, really!

(He holds. The MAID comes back in. She has fresh towels.)

MAID

I didn't get the manager. Are you calmer now?

(He nods.)

MAID

Are you on hold?

(He nods.)

MAID

I'm going to clean the room.

(He nods. She takes the towels into the (off-stage) bathroom. MARY hangs up the phone, re-dials the same number. The MAID comes out of the bathroom with a bunch of damp towels.)

MARY

I was holding for Wayne Blaine and you disconnected me... *No*, I didn't hang up... It's Mary Stuart... *No*, I *won't* hold!

(He holds again.)

MAID

That's your name?

MARY

Stage name.

MAID

Oh.

MARY

Is there a courtesy bar?

(She points to it. Phone still at his ear, MARY tries to open the door to the fridge, shaking it violently.)



MAID  
You need the key.

MARY  
Where?

MAID  
It should be right there.

MARY  
I don't see it.

MAID  
Look around, it should be right there.

MARY  
Well it's not.

MAID  
Did you use it already?

MARY  
Why the fuck would I ask?

MAID  
Don't swear.

MARY  
Do *you* have a key?

(The MAID comes over with a master key and unlocks it.)

MARY  
What's the lock for anyway?

MAID  
Children.

(MARY takes out a couple of miniature liquor bottles, drinks one down quickly, then another in quick succession. He turns—she's watching him.)

MARY  
What?

(She walks out with the damp towels. He hangs up and tries another number on the phone, waits, and leaves a message:)

MARY  
Sam. It's Mary. Why aren't you on your cell? You're *always* on your cell. I called Wayne at Oakie-Doke but they don't believe it's me. What's going on? How long have I... Look, the second you get this, PLEASE call back. Apparently I'm in Toronto. The number's 809-453-2708. I don't know if there's a country code.

(He hangs up. The MAID returns with her checklist in hand, checking off her completed chores.)

MARY  
I just called Sam.

MAID  
Great. (pause) Who's Sam?

MARY  
The answer man.

(The MAID nods and turns on the vacuum again.)

MARY  
No! No!

(She turns the vacuum off.)

MARY  
No more vacuuming!

MAID  
I only did half—

MARY  
Get out!

MAID  
I can't leave halfway through.

MARY  
Go!

MAID  
This is my *job*, you know!

MARY  
Fine. Just... don't vacuum. I couldn't take it.

MAID  
But the checklist.

(He grabs the checklist, marks a big check next to "floor vacuumed.")

MARY  
There. Vacuumed. (conspiratorially) We will never speak of this. (pause) Do have *any* idea how long I've been here?

MAID  
I've been off. Yesterday was my first day back since the sixth. You weren't here then.

MARY  
How do you know?

MAID  
Because when I came to clean there was a great big fat man in here. Drinking schnapps in his underwear. I'll never forget it as long as I live. He made me work around him.

MARY  
Where were you when you were off?

MAID  
Visiting my grandmother in Brazil.

MARY  
Are you close?

MAID  
No, I never see her.

MARY  
Why not?

MAID  
She lives in Brazil.

MARY  
Must have been nice to visit.

MAID  
Sure.

(The phone rings. MARY jumps to answer it. The MAID leaves briefly, then returns with a bucket of cleaning supplies. She sets it down, takes out a little spray bottle and rag, and wipes down the fridge and night stand as MARY goes on talking:)

MARY  
Yeah?... Sam! What happened? I can't remember anythi—... Oh, no... Oh, no... Oh, no... OH, NO! Tell them not to worry... Yeah, I *bet*... Okay, right. Call me back.

(He hangs up.)

MARY  
They think I'm dead. They think I've been murdered, or suicide. Apparently I walked out of an industry party in Boston and nobody's heard from me in five days.

MAID  
What industry?

MARY  
Huh?

MAID  
Industry party. What industry?

MARY  
You don't know who I am?

(No answer.)

MARY

Mary Stuart. The folk singer? Mary Stuart, The Man So Tender Has To Go By A Woman's Name? I'm with Oakie-Doke Records? A division of Time Warner?

MAID

Never heard of 'em.

MARY

They represent... you remember Wall of Voodoo? "Mexican Radio"? *(sings) "I'm on Mexican radio... I'm on Mexican—whoa-oh—radio..."*

MAID

Uh...

MARY

A guy who was in that. He's on the label, as a solo artist. Or... hey, you know Kate Wolf?

MAID

Kate Wolf is dead.

MARY

Right, but do you know her?

MAID

Yeah.

MARY

Someone who used to play bass with her... he's on the label too. (pause) You really don't recognize me? I had a single... I don't remember how high it went in the Canadian charts, but it went to 198 on the Billboard Hot 200 in the States, and #33 on the folk charts... "Sand in the Box"? February of '94? Never heard of it?

*(sings) Sand in the box*

*Dustin' over rocks...*

No?

*Cuttin' through crust*

*Runnin' through rain*

*Drivin' through dust*

*On a midnight train...*

Nothing, huh?

MAID

I don't listen to the radio.

MARY

Guess it wouldn't matter. I don't get airplay anyway. All the major markets are R&B-based, you know. "The Thong Song," crap like that. Remember that shit? Thong thong thong!

MAID

*"Thong-thong-thong-thong-thong."* Yeah! That was a good song!

MARY

Boston, though. They love me in Boston. Back when I first started to play out, in coffeehouses, using my real name, guys would heckle me for singing too sweet and tender, so I decided to run with it, push it to the extreme, you know? "Take the one quality you possess that you are ridiculed for, and cultivate it, for that is the one original thing about you." Jean Cocteau.

MAID

Is he one of the Cocteau Twins?

MARY

No. You gotta have a gimmick, right? Like that song in "Gypsy"? I wear a dress in concert. It's my trademark, you know? Sensitive guy, walking sight gag, something to set myself apart... nobody doubts my sexuality though. 'Least not in Boston. Boston's a nice crop. Lots of colleges. More colleges than... not.

(MARY downs another mini-bottle of liquor.)

MAID

The courtesy bar's a rip-off, you know. Each bottle costs ten dollars Canadian. I wouldn't drink any more.

MARY

If you were me. Which you are not.

(The MAID takes a little garbage bag from her pocket, picks up the empty mini-bottles, puts them into it.)

MARY

You're not gonna charge me for those, are you?

MAID

I have to.

MARY

I'll give you a signed photograph.

MAID

It's my job.

MARY

Fine. It's not like I don't got money.

(He pulls out the thick roll of cash.)

MARY

An advance on my next album. Gonna be my crossover, you know? Already picked my first single. It's hot! So gimme a beer, if you got one in there. Gimme two. I'll buy your WHOLE BAR out! (peeling off cash) Ten dollars... twenty... thirty... forty... tally it, sucker.

MAID

Just calm down, will you? If you're gonna drink something, drink something to chill yourself out. Here—this is good sparkling water. I won't even charge you for it.

(She grabs a sparkling water bottle from the fridge and offers it to him. He lets out a cry, aghast, and knocks the bottle out of her hand.)

MAID

You got something against sparkling water?

MARY

How can you offer that to me?!

MAID

Sparkling water?

MARY

That's Twine Spring Sparkling Water!

MAID

Yeah, that's what we stock here. We can't afford more expensive stuff. It's good, though. (reading another bottle or reciting from memory) "Bottled fresh from a spring in the heart of—"

MARY

Ontario, just a stone's throw from Toronto. No additives, no preservatives, just crisp refreshing Canadian goodness, straight from the spring to our family-run plant to your mouth.

MAID

(pause) You're frightening me.

MARY

(turning away) You couldn't've known... you couldn't have known...

MAID

Known what?

(Pause; his eyes roll heavenward.)

MARY

How all occasions do inform against me! (little pause) I was *not* a success—in albums or bookings. I mean, ranking 198 on Billboard is like... ranking 400 in the world in tennis. You still get to play, but who really gives a fuck. So I said screw it. Time to stop making music you think might cross over. Take it back, Mary. Back before the record deal, before the coffeehouses even, back before birth, to that jook joint in the womb, to the flatbed pickup of your unconscious, to the tiny speck of matter you were when you were still a part of your great-great-grandfather, riding out to Missouri for the great land rush a century ago... My *roots*, you know? The roots of folk. The real granola. In fact that's what the album's called. "The Real Granola." I wandered the Badlands. I hiked Appalachia. I sailed the Great Lakes and ate grits in the Corn Belt with people who knew Woody Guthrie. And I recorded what I soaked in not with my hands, not with my voice, but with the worn stubs of my fingertips, with my guts, my groin, my tear ducts, my bile. Sam—he's my bass player—Sam said, "This album is the TRUTH, MARY. This is FOLK. You did it." So they listened to the album at my label, Wayne Blaine (my a&r guy) and all the top brass, and they said it's great, you're gonna win a Grammy, modern classic, blah blah blah... what song're you gonna release first? I said "Spring," this song "Spring," a riff on an old Irish tune...

(He pulls out his harmonica, gives himself a note, and sings:)



MARY

*Spring has come again  
And fresh life may be with it  
Where everything we drink is pure  
And all our eyes are moonlit.*

MAID

That's *pretty*.

MARY

They said so too. They said let's do a video. They said how 'bout a tour? I said great! What's the catch? They said no catch! We're your label! But by the way. We got a company here, whose product we use, whose product we like, who'd like to use "Spring", your song, to endorse it. What's the company?

MAID

Twine Spring Sparkling Water.

MARY

They want to run a series of t.v. and radio spots using your song as their theme. They think it fits perfectly. They represent everything you're about and nothing you're not—freshness, back to basics, homegrown roots, no corporate frills. They said they'll help bankroll a tour—the opportunity to get tons of new fans. I said I don't drink that water and I don't want to endorse it. Any tour of mine would be brought to you by *me* and the roots of folk music, not Twine Spring Sparkling Water! They said try the water, you'll probably like it. We've got crates around the studio. I said I drink TEA, you bastards! They said one sip, you'll be hooked. I said up your ass. They said take a week. I took the week. I didn't budge. Then last week at this industry party in Boston... they cornered me in the bathroom.

MAID

The bathroom? Who?

MARY

Wayne Blaine. And the Twine Spring people.

(He pulls the carbon copies out from his pocket, unfolds them.)

MARY

They put a pen and a contract in my hand giving them the rights to use the song. They gave me this.

(He holds up the money roll.)

MARY

Maybe I was high. Maybe I blacked out. Maybe I just sold out. I don't know. I'd done a little speed before the party, sure... AND during... all of a sudden they were shaking my right hand and showing me the pen in my left and my signature on the line, saying thanks, Mr. Stuart, we'll keep you in sparkling water for the rest of your life! The last thing I remember, I said "Oh yeah? Well, I'm going up to Toronto to that precious spring of yours, and I'm going to piss in it!" And I'm screaming and sobbing, and my nose is starting to run, and other guys are in there trying to go to the bathroom, and I'm standing there screaming "Twine Spring Sparkling Water is fuckin' going DOWN, man! I'm going to bomb that place!" Next thing I knew, I wake up here.

(Pause.)

MAID

...Wow.

**To read the rest of this play, please contact me at:  
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