

**Willard Gunch and the Oracle of Billings, Montana**

a campfire song

by Kev Berry

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## Who

*Harold "Willard" Gunch* the patriarch of the Gunch family who has secrets  
*Cynthia Gunch* the matriarch of the Gunch family who is a low-key alcoholic  
*Morgan Gunch* the eldest son who is very much into guns  
*Henry Gunch* the middle son who is probably gay  
*Natalie Gunch* the pregnant daughter who is tryna get an abortion  
*George Gunch* the youngest son long disappeared  
*Nartha Gunch* Morgan's much younger wife who doesn't speak much English  
*Sniveling Iris* Henry's betrothed who is of the internet  
*Guildenstern Rosencrantz* Natalie's boyfriend who is sleeping with Sniveling Iris  
*Ted Ted* George's former lover who they keep around to keep George around  
*Marty Gunch* Morgan and Nartha's teenage son who has a girlfriend who's 14  
*Cousin Emiliano Gunch* Willard's cousin from Italy  
*Harold 1 Gunch* the ghost of Willard's father  
*The Oracle of Billings Montana* the oracle of Billings, Montana  
*Lucy* the housekeeper and secretkeeper

All roles are portrayed by one performer dressed as Willard

## When

Now around the campfire  
And Winter 2009  
Right after Obama's inauguration  
During the fiercest of blizzards

## Where

Billings, Montana

## What It Looks Like

A theatre  
A campfire  
A door

A black cube  
Three lightbulbs on the floor two red one orange which function as a campfire  
A white fluorescent bulb on a loose cord with power snap which functions as a lantern  
A door upstage right

This play is for Meghan Finn

-kb

The lights snap on  
A campfire  
Silence

Willard Gunch enters from elsewhere  
He holds a lantern  
He is dressed for a camping trip  
He sees the audience  
Takes them in

WILLARD

Shit

Takes them in

S'pose you're here for an explanation ain'tcha

Takes them in

Might as well

He sits

This  
Ain't gonna be easy  
The telling of it  
On my end  
This ain't no afternoon in the park  
Telling it to you  
For me  
It's  
Hard  
Those were  
Hard times  
There's a  
Reason  
I'm out here now and I've been out here since  
Well  
Since  
Since you know when don't you

Silence

Life is very hard yes  
It is  
Especially when you've been through what I've  
Been through  
Been through what  
The Gunch family of Billings Montana  
Has been through

Silence

Suppose I should start with my name  
Gunch  
Harold Gunch  
Everybody calls me Willard though  
Long line-a Harolds and the derivatives thereof  
Somewhere in my childhood someone started calling me Willard and it stuck  
Willard  
Willard Gunch  
Cept my wife Cynthia  
She calls me by my Christian name  
And that's where it all began isn't it  
With Cynthia calling me by my Christian name

The lantern snaps off

CYNTHIA

Harold  
Harold  
Harold come here Harold  
Look at the news Harold  
This storm Harold  
They say it won't let up for a week Harold  
Harold  
Can you believe it Harold  
Just after our entire family has arrived here Harold

WILLARD

January 20 oh 9

The week after Obama's inauguration  
And don't you remember the blizzard  
Billings Montana is a high desert so our summers are fierce hot  
And our winters mythologically monstrous  
And boy oh boy  
This blizzard  
You might remember  
Twenty five feet of snow over night  
Housebound us all for days  
Snow covering the windows  
Unable to tell what was day and what was night  
Cept by the tell of the clock  
Til the clocks got knocked out by the power lines getting knocked down by the wind  
Unable to tell what was day and what was night  
Cept by the beating of your heart and the gentle expansion of your chest with breath

CYNTHIA

Harold  
Harold you have to send Morgan out to the store  
Harold

WILLARD

What Cynthia

CYNTHIA

You have to send Morgan out to the store  
We need the bread we need the milk  
And not to mention we need more wine  
How do you expect me to make it through a weekend  
Housebound with my closest family members  
Without cases of wine

MORGAN

And how you spect me to get to the store for the bread the milk the wine  
Them snowbanks all highs an elephant's eyes Momma  
And we ain't got no snow plow  
We're stuck

CYNTHIA

What am I supposed to do then

Switch to Sauvignon Blanc  
What do I look like Harold  
What Morgan what do I look like

WILLARD

You could always switch to whiskey

CYNTHIA

Oh please Harold the situation is not yet that despairing

WILLARD

Just then my middle son  
Morgan being the eldest and harboring a deep obsession with hunting rifles  
My middle son Henry came bounding in from his childhood bedroom

HENRY

Oh boy oh boy I just love the snow  
Snow snow snow I am dah-reaming of a white Christmas  
Oh babes look at these snowbanks  
Wiiiiig  
Wig  
Can you believe

CYNTHIA

Henry what's gotten in to you  
We are housebound  
You go out in that snow you'll freeze to death  
And Mommy doesn't want to lose her baby now does she

SNIVELING IRIS

NO SHE DOESN'T

CYNTHIA

OH my God Iris you scared me

SNIVELING IRIS

I HAVE A WAY OF DOING THAT

WILLARD

Sniveling Iris

My middle son's Henry's  
Wife

NARTHA

What is wig

HENRY

It's  
Of the internet Nartha

NARTHA

Eh  
Morgan  
What is

HENRY

NARTHA  
IT'S  
OF  
THE  
INTERNET  
IT'S INTERNET SPEAK

SNIVELING IRIS

MEMES NARTHA MEMES

MORGAN

You better done stop yelling at my beloved wife about memes and gifs  
She don't know none no better

WILLARD

Nartha is Morgan's wife  
And she's not from here  
She's from elsewhere and doesn't speak very much American  
Name's Nartha because far as we all understand  
It was a clerical error on the hospital's part  
A misspelling  
Name was s'posed to be Juliet  
Somehow they misspelled that as Nartha

CYNTHIA

Who's gonna go to the store for Mommy  
Mommy needs her drinky

WILLARD

Cynthia you have a full glass of wine in your hand

CYNTHIA

Yes Harold and it will soon be gone Harold  
I do suggest you go because who knows what secrets I might reveal this weekend  
Housebound with my closest family members

WILLARD

Are you threatening me Cynthia

CYNTHIA

Mommy needs her drinky just sayin

HENRY

Oh babes what is this tea  
It sounds like it's piping hot and I need you to spill

SNIVELING IRIS

WE LOVE GOSSIP

WILLARD

My daughter comes tumbling down the stairs  
Belly all akimbo like she's pregnant but she ain't pregnant she's 16

NATALIE

I'm craving pickles and yogurt  
PICKLES AND YOGURT

CYNTHIA

Add it to the list  
Wine pickles wine milk yogurt wine bread wine  
Someone's about to go to the store

WILLARD

Cynthia no one ain't goin to the store

NATALIE

Hey Morgan can I talk to you

MORGAN

Not now sis I'm busy

NATALIE

Doing what

MORGAN

Things Natalie things

I got to clean this here musket I keep handy at all times

In case of intruders

Go talk to Guildenstern you can talk to him he's your boyfriend

NATALIE

He's up in the shower

GUILDENSTERN

Actually Natalie

I'm not

Actually Natalie I'm squeaky clean

And actually Natalie

I'm so happy to be snowbound with you and twelve members of your family this week

Because actually Natalie

I fucking love you Natalie you fucking bitch

And I can't wait for our family to start

NATALIE

No Guildenstern shut up

GUILDENSTERN

What Natalie

They actually don't know

WILLARD

Don't know what Guildenstern

GUILDENSTERN

Uh nothing

Nothing sir

I guess we  
I guess we all have secrets that are bound to come out this weekend  
As things fall apart in this frozen prison

WILLARD

My youngest son George disappeared moons and moons ago  
Many many moons  
And we keep his former lover Ted Ted around so that we may keep George around  
In our hearts and minds and souls  
Ted Ted is welcome here in our home as long as it stands  
And it doesn't hurt that he's a damn good good

TED TED

So tonight I've prepared for dinner  
A grapefruit and avocado salad

NARTHA

Eh what is  
Grapefruit

HENRY

Oh honey you don't grapefruit my older brother every damn night  
Oh honey

SNIVELING IRIS

OH HONEY

MORGAN

A dang grapefruit and a dang avocado  
That's a dang weird combo-nation  
What's for dinner  
Hot dogs with carrots

TED TED

Of course  
Look at you picking up on my tricks  
Citrus and avocado follows up by roots and processed meats

MARTY

Dad this salad is gross

NARTHA

Eh Marty be  
Eh nice

WILLARD

Marty is Morgan and Nartha's son

MARTY

I don't wanna eat it  
Marty doesn't want to eat the salad

MORGAN

Marty don't have to eat goddamned nothin he don't want to because Marty is what

MARTY

A man

MORGAN

A what

MARTY

A man

MORGAN

I cain't hear you you little pussy

MARTY

A man Marty is a man

MORGAN

That's my son

COUSIN EMILIANO

Ted-a Ted-a this is very-a good-a

CYNTHIA

Yes Emiliano it is very good  
Isn't it very good Nartha  
Pass the wine will you

WILLARD

I forgot to mention  
My Italian cousin Emiliano was here for the weekend  
And became housebound with us  
My wife likes to encourage his English with positive reinforcement  
As children we would visit Naples each summer and pick up where we left off  
Frolicking in the beach and dodging bullets of the Neapolitan crime families  
And let me tell you  
Ain't nothing like some frolicking and dodging to teach you how to be a man

GULDENSTERN

Yeah Ted Ted this salad is actually the most dope thing I've put in my mouth in ages  
It's like so touching that you're honoring the memory of George like this  
With this delicious carnival fairway of flavors

HENRY

Truly iconic

SNIVELING IRIS

ICONIC

TED TED

Wait until you try my grilled cheese

WILLARD

At just that moment  
Thunder crashes loudly  
And the lights go out  
Everyone screams

MORGAN

Oh fuck I just done wet my cargo pants

WILLARD

And I look around in the darkness  
And I my eyes adjust  
And I realize we are not alone

The lantern snaps on

My father is there  
At his spot at the head of the table  
Opposite end from me  
Staring at me and he says

HAROLD 1

Remember the Oracle  
Remember the Oracle  
Remember the Oracle

WILLARD

Daddy what the hell are you talking about  
Remember the Oracle

HAROLD 1

Remember what he said  
Remember what he  
He the Oracle  
Said to you

WILLARD

And with that my daddy was gone  
And with that the lights came back on

The lantern snaps off

NATALIE

Whoa  
Is anyone suddenly desperate for a bagel

CYNTHIA

You've never had a real bagel in your life Natalie

NATALIE

Mom yes I have

CYNTHIA

You've been in Billings since the day you came out of me  
You have never had a real bagel  
Back when I lived in New York

Back when I was young and beautiful

MORGAN

Still beautiful to me Momma

CYNTHIA

Back before I came here to  
Montana

Back before I met your father

We had real bagels there

We had

We had real bagels

Will someone pour me more wine

MARTY

Grandma you're sure drinking a lot of wine

CYNTHIA

AND SO WHAT IF I AM YOU LITTLE SWINE

SO WHAT IF MOMMY LOVES HER DRINKY

WILLARD

And with that I remembered the prophecy

I was down the general store the other day

Getting salts for the driveway

Not realizing how major this storm would be

And Blind Doyle who sits outside the general store

In a rocking chair and with a spittoon besides him

Stopped me and said

Do you know who I am

And I said of couse I know who you are you crazy old coot you are Blind Doyle

He looked at me as best a blindman could and said that's true but do I know

I looked at him crazy and he looked crazy back at me and said

ORACLE

UPON A SNOWY HOUSEBOUND EVE

SHALL BE REVEALED BUT SECRETS THREE

UPON THE REVELATION OF THE THIRD

SHALL OCCUR A PLOT TWIST TO ROCK YOUR WORLD

BACK TO LIFE OR BACK TO DEATH

UP TO YOU TO DECIDE WHAT'S NEXT

WILLARD

And Cynthia snapping at Marty was the first secret revealed

CYNTHIA

SO WHAT IF MOMMY LIKES HER DRINKY  
MOMMY HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO LIKE HER DRINKY  
WHEN YOUR GRANDPA KILLED YOUR UNCLE

WILLARD

You coulda done heard a pin drop

Yes everyone

I did kill him and George is dead but that's long gone

Buried in the past

It's over and done with

TED TED

Wait what

All the meals I've cooked for you

WILLARD

He pawned a valuable doubloon of mine and

Gambled it away and I couldn't bear the loss so I

MARTY

You killed George

WILLARD

I did

MARTY

Awesome

MORGAN

Sounds like he done did deserve it

SNIVELING IRIS

That's actually pretty messed up Mister Gunch

PRETTY MESSED UP

HENRY

Dad I can't like  
Believe this  
Your vulnerability is so  
Inspiring right now  
Wiiig

SNIVELING IRIS

HENRY HE KILLED YOUR BROTHER

GULDENSTERN

Whoa babe calm down

NATALIE

Who are you calling babe  
I'm your babe  
Not my brother's wife

SNIVELING IRIS

Guess what hot teen sister in law  
I'm sleeping with your boyfriend  
He's putting it in me  
Yes after all of that  
After all he's put in you

WILLARD

And Sniveling Iris revealing her affair with a teen was the second secret

You coulda done heard a pin drop

GULDENSTERN

Yeah bros  
It's actually true actually  
I am sleeping with Henry's manic pixie dream wife

NATALIE

I can not believe this

GULDENSTERN

Babe I can

You talk in that strange British accent all the time  
And you haven't put out in months  
Mister Gunch I think you'll be pleased to know  
That I haven't porked your daughter in ages

NATALIE  
IT'S BECAUSE I'M PREGNANT

WILLARD  
You coulda done heard a pin drop

The front door of our home flew open in the wind

The door upstage flies open to reveal  
Nothing

And in walks a shadowy figure  
Who slams the door behind him

The door upstage slams shut

The figure comes into the light  
And who is it but  
George  
My dead son

MORGAN  
Now hold on just a dang minute

CYNTHIA  
Oh my God  
Harold am I seeing things or  
Oh Harold  
Oh Harold  
Harold  
Harold  
Haold  
Haoold  
Hald  
Haro

Hal  
Haaa  
Ha  
Huh  
Ha

EMILIANO

I think it's a time-a you drank-a some-a water

CYNTHIA

I think it's a time-a I drank-a some whiskey  
Pass the Maker's

GEORGE

I'm back  
I drove through the night to give you something

WILLARD

If it's not my doubloon  
It's not welcome in this house

TED TED

George

GEORGE

Hi Ted Ted  
It's good to see you after all these years  
We can kiss and reunite later  
I have some business to attend to

SNIVELING IRIS

WAIT A MINUTE I THOUGHT YOU SAID HE WAS DEAD

WILLARD

I said he was dead to me  
Not that he was dead

HENRY

That is not the tea you spilled a little while ago  
This is the gag of the century are you kidding me  
This will go viral

GEORGE

I have returned not with the doubloon

WILLARD

Then you can get out of my

GEORGE

But with the money I invested from the pawning of that doubloon

You see

I took the doubloon to save you

I took the doubloon

WILLARD

You took my prized possession and sold it for

GEORGE

For fifteen dollars yes

But look at what it's grown into

With those fifteen dollars and a belief in the American dream

Those fifteen dollars have multiplied

One million times

MORGAN

You done did make fifteen mil off of some little plastic knick-knack

From the Disney Polynesian Hotel

GEORGE

You better believe I did

NARTHA

Eh this is

Good investment work

Good work

MORGAN

What do you know about investment

NARTHA

I own business online

I know investment

I am good businesswoman

So seems it too is he

MORGAN

Well if that ain't a secret

NARTHA

All you know is guns

There is much you don't know about Nartha Gunch

HENRY

Well if we're revealing secrets I am gay

CYNTHIA

George you turned fifteen dollars into fifteen million

GEORGE

I did

TED TED

And I actually can't cook either

That's my secret

Feels great to get it off my chest

WILLARD

I will not accept your money

GEORGE

I did this for you

WILLARD

I will not accept your money

GEORGE

I did this to save you from your poor little life

WILLARD

I threw you down the stairs

And out of my life

GEORGE

I did this to help you age comfortably

WILLARD

I will not accept the funds that are the profits of your theft

CYNTHIA

Yes we will

WILLARD

Do not defy me wife

CYNTHIA

We shall accept any help you have to offer  
We are destitute and we are out of Chardonnay

WILLARD

George handed Cynthia a check  
And she began to weep

I shall not set foot in this house  
So long as that money is in our joint account

The lantern snaps on

And here I am  
My wife Cynthia she  
She deposited that fifteen million long ago and  
I haven't stepped foot inside since

LUCY

I know Mister Gunch  
You've been living here  
In the backyard ever since

WILLARD

What are you doing here Lucy

LUCY

Mrs Gunch sent me out to see if you'd come inside

She's made a pot of your favorite soup

WILLARD

Minestrone

LUCY

Minestrone

We do this every night

I come out here to see if you'll come in

And you launch into this story this long story I know by heart

WILLARD

I refuse to step

LUCY

Refuse to step foot inside the house

So long as the funds derived from the purloined doubloon

Are being spent on the improvement of the Gunch homestead yes

But you have to come home some time

WILLARD

The Montana sky is my home now

The lean-to I've built against the fence my shelter

Go on back inside Lucy

I pay you to be our housekeeper and to be my secretkeeper

Not to do my wife's bidding as a nightly chore

Go on now

Git

The fire's dying and it's gonna get cold

The lantern snaps out

It's gonna get cold

The campfire snaps out

**End of Play**