

Scratch-Off

Johnny-Boy Fumagallini is a guy who loves to hate gambling. The nearer he gets to fifty years old, the more it seems his only ticket out has "New Jersey Lottery" printed on it. But Johnny-Boy isn't lucky lately. He's divorced and estranged from one of his two college-age sons. He works two crumby jobs for an old high school buddy and can only afford to live with his mother, Connie. Worst of all, he can't resist those addictive instant lottery games, where you have to scrape off silvery latex with your last coin to discover you've lost again.

His Aunt Fenny, who lives down in South Carolina, is terminally ill. Johnny-Boy has a dream of eating meatballs at her house so he plays her address, 140, in the Pick 3 game. He wins big, so big, that he can pay some debts and take time off from his crumby jobs. He offers to drive Connie, and his aunties, Ray and Tonie, down to visit their sister Fenny. He intends to broker an Italian-American armistice between them before Fenny dies.

By the third hour of his roadtrip with three old ladies, Johnny-Boy wants to crash the car into a Baltimore toll booth. At least he gets to stop off at South Of the Border, the Vatican City of roadside attractions. He drives to the hospital that night and they arrive in time for a brief reconciliation between the Sisters moments before Aunt Fenny has an episode that leaves her comatose.

Johnny-Boy, Connie, Ray and Tonie spend long hours over a few days with Fenny. They actually play Poker right under her nose to stimulate her. The Sisters drive Johnny-Boy crazy whilst he drives the Sisters back and forth from the hospital to Fenny's house where they're staying, with nagging detours to play the South Carolina lottery. Again he imagines wrecking the car.

A young Indian woman, Doctor Prasad, catches Johnny-Boy's eye when she makes her rounds. Johnny-Boy's cousin Laura, Fenny's daughter, often spends the nights in a cot next to her mother. Johnny-Boy urges her to go home and sleep in her own bed; however, he does so only to have a place to hook up with Doctor Prasad.

With nothing else to do, Johnny-Boy searches the want-ads and discovers some good employment opportunities in South Carolina. He decides to relocate and asks Laura if she'll let him stay at Fenny's house whilst he looks for a job.

Johnny-Boy's luck may be changing but his Aunt's condition unfortunately is not. The Sisters decide to go home. On their last day, they cook dinner at Fenny's house so that Laura's husband and daughters have a chance to get to know their New Jersey aunties. Johnny-Boy also invites Doctor Prasad. As they sit down to lasagna, Laura tells Johnny-Boy that she knows what he and the Doctor have been up to. She not only forbids him to stay in Fenny's house, she forbids him to visit her mother ever again.

In a McDonald's parking lot, just before they set off for New Jersey, Doctor Prasad calls Johnny-Boy to tell him that Aunt Fenny has died. They stay in South Carolina for the burial and then drive home. Pleased that he has reconciled the Sisters, enjoyed some southern comfort and resisted vehicular homicide, Johnny-Boy feels like his luck has changed for the better.

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