

THE GARBAGEMAN

A Full-length Play

by Rosemary FrisinoToohey

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CHARACTERS

3 male, 4 female, with doubling

LARRY: male, 30s, any race. Sanitation worker.

MOM: female, 60s, any race. Nursing home resident.

MRS. JOHNSON: female, 30s, any race. Nursing home supervisor.

JACK: male, 30s-40s, any race. Larry's buddy, a bus driver.

DIANE: female, 30s, Larry's sister, any race. A realtor married to a successful lawyer.

{LACEY, GIRL, JUDY: female, 20s, any race, doubling. Women who share Larry's bed.

{PETE, POLICE SERGEANT, VOICE OF ALLAN: male, 40s, any race, doubling.

SETTING

Various, all minimally suggested.

TIME

The present.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Readings

Baltimore Playwrights Festival, Baltimore, Maryland

FutureFest, Dayton Playhouse, Dayton, Ohio

Excerpt, Kennedy Center Page to Stage Festival, Washington, D.C.

Productions

Uncommon Voices Theater, Baltimore, Maryland, 7/23-8/9/2009

Towngate Theatre, Wheeling, West Virginia, 1/15-1/23/2010

Awards

Finalist, Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre (now VIVID Stage) Summit, NJ 2021

Semi-Finalist, Southwest Theatre Play Competition, Austin, TX 2020

Individual Artist Award, Maryland State Arts Council, 2012

First Prize, Carol Weinberg Award, Baltimore Playwrights Festival, 2009

Winner, Oglebay Institute Towngate National Contest, Wheeling, WV 2009

Finalist, FutureFest, Dayton Playhouse, Dayton, OH 2009

Semi-Finalist, New Play Festival, Centre Stage, Greenville, SC 2009

ACT ONE

Lights up on LARRY & LACEY in bed.

LARRY

So there's this woman yesterday. She's sitting there in her champagne-colored Mercedes, so impatient for us to get out of her way, so she can get on with her life. But it's a busy morning, sometimes that's how it is, and the traffic's backing up. Finally, she gets out of her car, slams the door and marches up to me, waving her manicured fingers in my face. "Do you realize," she says, "that I have an appointment with my financial advisor this morning and because you people and your truck are blocking the street, I will most likely be late?"

LACEY

What did you say?

LARRY

I was about to say, "No, lady, I did not realize that. Maybe you could have cards printed with the details of your daily schedule so that before we drive down this particular thoroughfare, we could check and see if maybe you had somewhere important to be, like a meeting at the White House or a conference at the UN or, whatever." But, before I say a word, before I even open my mouth, like right on cue, a rat jumps out of a hole in the bag I'm carrying, scampers up my arm and sits on my shoulder like he's planning his next move.

LACEY

A rat? A real live...rat?

LARRY

Oh, he was definitely among the living. Not that this sequence of events happens all the time but once in a while you do encounter the occasional four-footed creature who is---

LACEY

You mean this has happened before? A rat running up your arm, sitting on your shoulder?

LARRY

Well, they're not all programmed to do the exact same thing, but from time to time you might run into a similar situation.

LACEY

O. M. G. What did you do?

LARRY

To tell you the truth, because Madame Mercedes was standing there in front of me, I have to admit that I paused just for a moment. For effect, you know what I mean? Then, I smacked the son of a bitch off my shoulder and in my best drop-dead voice I said, "Madame, do you see what I've got to contend with here?"

LACEY

What did she say?

LARRY

Oh, that shut her up. Her mouth was open but she was in shock. Finally, she spins around, goes back to her car, gets in and sits there, like a statue, waiting for us to finish.

LACEY

Wow. So that's what it's like, huh? Being a, a...

LARRY

Sometimes, yeah. A G-man. That's what I call myself.

LACEY

G-man?

LARRY

Garbage man. You can say trash collector, sanitation worker. All means the same thing.

Pause.

Do you want to go? You can go if you want to.

LACEY

No, no, I didn't mean anything, it was just...I was surprised to learn that you...well, you know.

LARRY

Yeah. I know. Hey, we moved right along last night. I never found out anything about you either.

LACEY

You were the one putting up walls.

LARRY

I don't see any walls. I'm lying here practically buck naked.

LACEY

It's Larry, right?

LARRY

That's what it is. And you're Lacey. Nice name.

LACEY

It's a nickname, of course. My real name is Stephanie Anne. But that's kind of old-fashioned, so everybody calls me Lacey. Even at work.

LARRY

Where do you work?

LACEY

I'm a receptionist for a dentist. People have about a million problems with their teeth, I guess. Anyway, I've never met a...I mean I've never been with a, a...

LARRY

Technically, you could say I'm a relocation specialist.

LACEY

A relocation specialist?

LARRY

I relocate materials. I take away stuff nobody wants. Environmentally speaking, that is.

LACEY

Oh, I really believe in protecting the environment and all. I think that's one of the most important things ever. I mean if we don't, what kind of a world are we going to leave for our children?

LARRY

You have kids?

LACEY

No, not yet. Do you?

LARRY

I've got a stepdaughter. My ex's. But I don't see a lot of her these days.

LACEY

I'm sorry.

LARRY

Yeah, one of those things.

LACEY

It's just that...well, I've never really thought about somebody being...

LARRY

A garbageman.

LACEY

Is it hard? A job like that? I mean, dealing with what you just told me and...everything?

LARRY

It's all in how you look at it. We collect trash from a thousand houses a day. I mean, if you thought about the number of cans you have to pick up, you wouldn't even get out of bed in the morning, I guess. But you don't count, you just hustle. That's the key. It's all in the way you move. Then there's the weather. Sanitation work is all about weather. You've got to be able to take it, whatever it is. Hot in the summer, cold in the winter, snow, sleet, rain, you just move and you keep on moving. When it's wet out there, you really move. That's your heat.

LACEY

How long have you been doing it?

LARRY

Nine years.

LACEY

Really?

LARRY

Yeah, really. Look, I know it's not exactly high on anybody's list of careers. But I like it. It's an okay job. There's a lot of pluses to being a garbageman.

LACEY

Like what?

LARRY

Well, working outdoors, having a goal and meeting it, keeping things neat.

LACEY

Okay, that sounds nice, but, you know, rats and, and...I just wonder why somebody would want to...do something like that.

LARRY

You do.

LACEY

Yeah.

LARRY

Well, maybe because, it's an important job.

LACEY

I guess.

LARRY

You...guess. You mean you're not sure it's important?

LACEY

I never really thought about it.

LARRY

Not many people do. What gets me is, people act like their trash has nothing to do with them. You know, everything in those bags comes from somebody's house. But, right around the time they tie those plastic strings into a little bow, it becomes somehow "not theirs." Maybe pixies made it appear, maybe an alien spaceship landed in the alley and men from Mars dropped it off. But them? No way. I'm pointing out the obvious here but, I don't bring the trash. I don't deliver it. I take it away.

LACEY

Well, sure you take it away, Larry, but it's just trash. What are you getting so worked up about?

LARRY

I'm not worked up. I'm just saying, if I didn't do what I do, where would everybody be? Like that woman yesterday, where would she be?

LACEY

The woman in the Mercedes? What do you mean? She'd be behind the wheel of her car.

LARRY

No, Lacey. If I didn't do my job, she'd be living with cholera, maybe, or dying of the...

LARRY (Cont'd.)

...Black Plague. Does she ever think of that?

LACEY

Of course, she doesn't. Who goes around thinking about stuff like that? The Black Plague? That's back in caveman days.

LARRY

Not exactly.

LACEY

So. Did you ever think of doing something else?

Pause. Sarcasm increasingly colors his lines.

LARRY

Nope. I guess I never did.

LACEY

Really?

LARRY

Yeah, ever since I was so high, I wanted to be a garbageman. I couldn't wait to grow up so I could spend my days strolling down the street after a trash truck. Gathering up the the debris, the detritus of people's lives, the sights, the sounds, the smells of the city, man, it's a thrill.

He moves away from her.

LACEY

What?

LARRY

I don't know, Lacey. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm beginning to get the idea that going to bed with a garbageman doesn't exactly melt your butter.

LACEY

Oh, come on, we don't have to have a whole big thing about it.

LARRY

Oh, I think we do have to have a whole big thing. What's going on? Care to spell it out?

LACEY

It's a little hard to put into words.

LARRY

How about if I give it a try? It's not that I'm not an okay guy, not even that I'm not a lot of fun, in bed, out of bed, but when it comes to actually hanging around with somebody who spends his days upending cans into the maws of a great big smelly garbage truck...

LACEY

I never said that.

LARRY

Rancid meat, rotting tomatoes, dirty diapers, when you get right down to it, going to bed with a guy who makes his living picking up other people's shit, you know, I'm bettin' that was maybe never high on your list of things you always wanted to do. In fact---

LACEY

Look, Larry---

LARRY

It's probably not on the list at all, right? I mean, when you're chatting it up with your co-workers in that nice, white, dentist's office, how's it going to sound if you say...hey, I was screwed by a garbageman last night.

LACEY

You don't have to put it that way.

LARRY

No, I don't. You could say you've been fucked by a sanitation engineer. Does that sound better to you?

LACEY

You know, Larry, you've got kind of an attitude.

LARRY

So they tell me.

LACEY

I think I will go home.

LACEY exits.

LARRY

Yeah, sometimes things work out better than others. So, the week started out like any other week. Monday, I punched in at six and knocked off by one. It's clocked as an eight-hour day but it's understood that once you finish your route, you're done. I like working mornings. You finish up and you've still got the whole day in front of you. It's another plus to being a garbageman. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I go to the nursing home. It's not a bad place, this nursing home, but it's like all the rest, there's always a challenge. Always some issue that has to be dealt with. So, I take a little time at the coffee shop to get in the right frame of mind. The flower shop's next door. I always take her flowers. I figure the flowers might help her remember that I've been there.

LARRY picks up a bunch of flowers.
Lights up on MOM in a wheelchair as
LARRY crosses to her.

MOM

Are you...are you cold, Lawrence?

LARRY

No, Mom. Are you? Where's your sweater?

MOM

My...

LARRY

You had a sweater. You had a couple of them. What happened to the blue one?

MOM

I...I don't...

LARRY

Blue, remember?

MOM

Blue...oh! I left it...the concert.

LARRY

The concert, huh? That's a new one.

MOM

It wasn't new. We heard...Ralph Vaughan Williams. Fantasia...a theme by, by...Thomas Tallis.

LARRY

How you can remember that stuff.

MOM

And...The Lark Ascending. Your father loves The Lark Ascending.

LARRY

Yeah. So, what did you have for lunch today? Something good?

MOM

Lunch? Lunch was...oh, I've got to fix supper. Your father wants supper and I haven't...started...and then, then...

LARRY

Man, we are single-tracking today.

MOM

You know your father comes in the door, hangs his coat...he wants...and if it's not...if I don't...

LARRY

Don't worry about it, Mom, it's okay. How do you like your flowers?

MOM

Oh, flowers. Yes...yes. This, this one...lovely. The ones...that don't open right away... they're the best. It's going to open and then---Lawrence, your hand! What did you...?

LARRY

This? It's nothing, Mom.

MOM

You should...take care.

LARRY

It's no big deal.

MOM

You...gloves. You should always...always...

LARRY

I had gloves.

MOM

But how...?

LARRY

It was just a piece of metal in a bag, that's all. Don't worry about it.

MOM

You shouldn't...pick up...tell them you don't want...to handle...

LARRY

Mom...

MOM

Tell them...so you won't get hurt.

LARRY

Yeah, that'll go over real well. I'll tell Pete I only want to pick up certain garbage bags. Just the nice ones, right?

MOM

Not the bad things, Lawrence. I don't know why...you shouldn't...

LARRY

Okay, Mom. Take it easy.

MOM

Tell them...

LARRY

All right, I'll tell them. Don't worry about it.

MOM

Your father...when he sees that...

LARRY

Him again.

MOM

His hands...they're smooth, they're...

LARRY

Yup. Dad had the smoothest hands in town.

MOM

Even when...he was older but...his hands...

LARRY

Yeah, every time he slapped me I could feel how smooth they were.

Lawrence...he's trying to...
MOM

It's all right, Mom.
LARRY

Are you cold? I feel...feel...
MOM

Here, let's put this around you.
LARRY

He puts a blanket around her shoulders.

But that's...on the bed...
MOM

So when you go to bed, they'll put it back. No big deal.
LARRY

MRS. JOHNSON crosses.

Oh, Mrs. Johnson?

Hello, Mr. Lucas.
MRS. J
(to MOM)
Good afternoon, Cora. How are you today?

I...I'm fine.
MOM

She's fine but she's cold. Do you know what happened to her sweater?
LARRY

She's missing a sweater?
MRS. J

LARRY

She's missing a lot of sweaters. The latest one was blue, buttoned down the front. She had it Friday and now she doesn't.

MRS. J

I'm sorry to hear that.

LARRY

It's dark blue.

MOM

Robin's egg blue...my favorite.

LARRY

Mom.

MRS. J

You know, Mr. Lucas, it's very difficult for the staff to know the whereabouts of every single item belonging to every resident.

LARRY

I understand that, but it seems like every time I come in here, something else of hers is gone.

MRS. J

I'm sure that's very frustrating for you.

LARRY

Frustrating doesn't begin to cover it, Mrs. Johnson. If we ran things downtown the way this nursing home is run...

MRS. J

Yes, Mr. Lucas, you've told me many times how poorly Swan Hill compares with the efficiency of the sanitation department.

LARRY

Just pointing out the obvious.

MRS. J

May I remind you that our first priority, as always, is not the resident's possessions but the resident herself.

LARRY

Well, this resident says she's cold. How's that for a priority?

MRS. J

You do know that sometimes things are deliberately hidden, if you get my meaning. Possessions are liable to end up in the most unlikely places.

MOM

Your father says...a place for everything...and everything in...

MRS. J

Very good, Cora.

LARRY

Come on, Mrs. Johnson. She can't even get out of the wheelchair.

MRS.J

Was it labelled? Was the item clearly marked?

LARRY

I put her name on everything. I know the drill.

MRS. J

With indelible ink? Sometimes when things are washed---

LARRY

Do you know what it's like to carry stuff in here week after week and then it just disappears?

MRS. J

Are you implying that someone on staff is deliberately taking things, Mr. Lucas?

LARRY

I'm not implying anything.

MRS. J

If you'd like to register a formal complaint, I'll be happy to meet you at my office and you can fill out the form.

LARRY

You fill out the form. I just want to know where in the hell her sweater is.

MOM

Lawrence! Oh...you...you never...

LARRY

I'm just trying to get some help here. Is that too much to ask?

MRS. J

No, of course it isn't.

MOM

He didn't...didn't mean to...

LARRY

Mom.

MRS. J

It's all right, Cora.

LARRY

Look, she used to have a sweater and now she doesn't, and she's cold.

MRS. J

All right. I'll look for her sweater just as soon as I finish my paperwork.

LARRY

Well, we wouldn't want to get in the way of that, would we?

MRS. J

Mr. Lucas, one of our critical care residents passed this morning and there are a great many forms that have to be dealt with.

LARRY

Okay, okay. I'm sorry.

MRS. J

It's all right. I'm...sorry if I sounded unconcerned about the sweater.

MRS. J starts to exit.

LARRY

But, you know...

MRS.J

Yes?

LARRY

The way I see it, you can't do anything more for the one who died. But you've got a live one right here. And she's cold.

Pause.

MRS. J

All right. You've made your point. I'll look for the sweater right now.

LARRY

Thanks, Mrs. Johnson. And I'm sorry about the woman who died.

MRS. J

It was a man. Leonid Kapinski. He'd been with us seventeen years.

LARRY

Long time.

MRS. J

Yes. It was.

MRS. J exits.

LARRY

Okay, Mom. Now I've got to run.

MOM

You're not having...dinner, we're going to...it's chicken. I, I...

LARRY

Well, you enjoy it. I gotta go.

MOM

Diane never rushes.

LARRY

Yeah. Right.

MOM

Diane stays and stays and...

LARRY

Sure, she does.

MOM

Diane is always...

LARRY

Well, I'll be back Wednesday. Love you, Mom.

MOM

Your hand...Lawrence! What...you did to...

LARRY

It's okay, Mom. I got to go now.

MOM

Gloves. Your father...always gloves. He...he...

Pause. LARRY watches as lights go
down on MOM.

LARRY

Evenings I hang out with my buddy, Jack. He drives a bus. I mean, we both deal with the public but on different levels.

Lights up on JACK at the bar.
LARRY crosses & sits.

JACK

Hey, buddy. How goes it?

LARRY

Pretty good. What's new with you?

JACK

Aw, you know how it is, Larr. They get on the bus, they get off the bus. You're the one with all the stories. Got any good ones?

LARRY

Well, we had one character today. This woman with a rattan chair.

JACK

Rattan?

LARRY

You know, bamboo, one of those big jobs with the round back like you see in an old oriental movie.

JACK

Now that's the thing. I always wonder about...what do people mean when they say "the Orient"? What country is that?

LARRY

It's not a country, Jack, it's a bunch of countries. You know, it's the Far East.

JACK

But where is the Far East? I mean, where does it start?

LARRY

Well, it's the other side of the earth. China, Japan, places over there.

JACK

And when does it stop being the Far East and become something else?

LARRY

Are we doing a geography lesson here or you want to hear the story?

JACK

Okay, Larr, I get it. You see, the thing is, if I don't ask right then, questions go by like I just missed a bus or something. Know what I mean?

LARRY

Yeah, Jack, okay. So, anyway, we're coming down the street and there's this big rattan chair sitting at the curb. And I'm about to throw it in the truck when this woman in a bathrobe comes rushing up to me. "That's a papa-san chair," she says, like it's the Holy Grail or something. And then she says, "I thought maybe one of you boys might want it."

JACK

Boys?

LARRY

Yeah, that's the word, boys. Like we're all twelve years old and we've never seen a chair before. So, I say, "Want it for what?" And she says, "I thought you might like to sit on it or something."

JACK

Was it a nice chair? I mean, did it look nice?

LARRY

Hell, no, it's all beat-up. The guy who put it together is probably dead by now. Maybe his grandkids are dead.

JACK

Once upon a time I bet it was nice.

LARRY

Once upon a time, I bet it was lovely. But we're not talking once upon a time, we're talking today, and I'm telling you, the thing is falling apart.

JACK

Could you sit on it?

LARRY

If it was the last thing between you and the sidewalk, yeah, you could sit on it. So, I said to her, "Lady, you don't want it, what the hell makes you think we do?"

JACK

You said that? Right to her face?

LARRY

Sure. She thinks I'm going to be overwhelmed by this big piece of bamboo junk. Like my house is furnished with stuff people like her leave on the street.

JACK

You got to be careful, Larr, with that kind of attitude.

LARRY

What? What was I supposed to say? "Thank you, sweetheart, for this priceless gem. Up until now I didn't have a chair to sit on but since you've given me this worthless piece of shit---"

JACK

Come on, Larr, you got to have a little...what's the word? Finesse.
(He mis-pronounces it "fine-ness.")

LARRY

What?

JACK

Fine-ness. You know, when you talk to people. You could say... "Thanks very much, ma'am." Then you take the thing, stick it on the side of the truck and when you get around the corner, you throw it in the truck. How hard is that?

LARRY

Jack, I'm not going to play stupid games with people. I'm not going to pretend something means something to me when it doesn't just to make some rich bitch happy.

JACK

But you got to be cagey, Larr. Maybe she'll call and report you.

LARRY

Let her. What do I care? If it's garbage to her, what makes her think it's a prize to me?

JACK

You want to keep your job, don't you?

LARRY

I'm keeping my damn job.

JACK

Okay, okay. I'm just trying to be helpful. Take it easy. Want a cheeseburger? I'm in the mood for a cheeseburger. How about you?

LARRY

Maybe, I don't know. First, I got to make a phone call.

JACK

Who you calling?

LARRY

My sister.

JACK

Diane?

LARRY

I only got one, Jack.

Lights down on JACK. LARRY pulls out his cell & dials. Lights up on DIANE.

DIANE

Hello.

LARRY

Hi, Di. How goes it?

DIANE

Oh, Larry. Busy, you know, always busy, per usual. How are you? Everything all right?

LARRY

Great. Look, I wanted to let you know. I don't think I can come Thanksgiving.

DIANE

Why on earth not?

LARRY

A friend of mine asked me to come over and watch the game and...

DIANE
What friend?

LARRY
Jack. You met Jack.

DIANE
Oh. The bus driver.

LARRY
What? You got something against bus drivers?

DIANE
Come on. An invitation to your sister's on Thanksgiving? That should certainly carry more weight than, I mean, really.

LARRY
I told him I'd be there, Di.

DIANE
Look, if it means that much to you, bring him along. I told the caterer forty. One more won't make any difference.

LARRY
You're having that many people for Thanksgiving dinner?

DIANE
It's more of a party than a dinner. But, look, he's perfectly welcome.

LARRY
Thanks, but, I don't know that Jack would fit in exactly.

DIANE
Why? We've got TVs all over the house and...what does he drink? Beer?

LARRY

Yeah. He drinks beer.

DIANE

Well, we'll have some beer along with the wine. I think it's fun to bring new people into the mix. And Allan 'll be...delighted to meet him.

LARRY

Oh, sure. Jack 'd be a big change from those lawyer types your husband hangs out with.

DIANE

Really, Larry. That was uncalled-for.

LARRY

Come on, Di. You expect me to believe Allan's dying to meet the guy who drives the number fifty-five bus?

DIANE

Look, if you're ashamed of your friends---

LARRY

I'm not ashamed of my friends, I just...let's drop it, okay?

Pause.

DIANE

Look. I need to see you. It's been months. I've got some news and...

LARRY

What kind of news? You going to have a baby?

DIANE

No. Don't be silly.

LARRY

Just a thought. People do have babies, you know.

DIANE

There's a lot going on. I want to tell you about it in person, okay? If you can't come Thanksgiving, all right. Can you at least come out here one day soon?

LARRY

Okay. How about Monday?

DIANE

Monday. Ahh, no, no I can't do Monday. Tuesday's no good either. Wednesday?

LARRY

Yeah, sure.

DIANE

Of course, I never know if a client's going to need me, but...

LARRY

If something comes up, give me a call.

DIANE

All right.

LARRY

See you then.

LARRY hangs up. Lights down on
DIANE, lights up on JACK.
Lights up on GIRL at a table.

Who's that?

JACK

Her? I think maybe that's Joann's sister.

Joann the nurse? LARRY

Yeah. JACK

I'll be back. LARRY

That's what they all say. JACK

Lights down on JACK as LARRY
crosses to GIRL.

Hi. Mind if I sit down? LARRY

I don't own the chair. GIRL

I heard you're Joann's sister. LARRY

Could be. GIRL

Does Joann's sister have a name? I mean, besides "Joann's sister"? LARRY

Sure. I got one. GIRL

Mind if I ask what it is? LARRY

Go ahead. Give it a shot. GIRL

So, what's your name? LARRY

That the best you can do? GIRL

LARRY starts to leave.

Look, if you don't want to talk... LARRY

Man, you give up fast. GIRL

LARRY turns back & sits. Pause.

So. She couldn't make it?

Who? LARRY

The girl. On the phone just now. GIRL

No girl. I was talking to my sister. LARRY

Really? GIRL

Yeah. Really. LARRY

GIRL

Didn't look like you and she hit it off.

LARRY

We don't. Sometimes, once in a while maybe, but...

GIRL

Not tonight.

LARRY

No. Not tonight.

GIRL

Same thing with me. Sometimes Joann and I are like...

LARRY

Sisters?

GIRL

Yeah. Other times, forget it. We're on two different planets. So, what's your name?

LARRY

Larry.

GIRL

Pleased to meet you, Larry.

LARRY

Same here. Look, if you don't want to tell me your name, that's okay. We can play the game that way.

GIRL

You like to play games?

Depends. LARRY

On...? GIRL

Who wins. You...want to go for a drive? LARRY

Maybe. GIRL

Think about it. Take your time. LARRY

Pause. GIRL stands.

So, I've thought about it. GIRL

GIRL starts to exit, looks back at him.

You comin'?

Yeah. LARRY

GIRL exits. Pause.
LARRY turns to audience.

And...things took what you might call their natural course. Anyway, life goes on. The days go by like any other week, until the next Wednesday. We hose the trucks down Wednesday and that makes it a later day and then, just as I finished and took a shower, they said Pete wanted to see me.

Lights up on PETE at his desk.
LARRY crosses to him.

PETE

(on the phone)

Look, I said I would, didn't I?...yeah, sure...I know you got left high and dry...well that's what you get for leavin' it up to politicians. What do they know about picking up trash?...it's simple math, Dave, all you need is the men with the muscles...

LARRY

Hey, Pete...

PETE

(To LARRY, annoyed)

What?

LARRY

Can we talk about whatever it is tomorrow? I'd like to get going.

PETE

You catching a plane or something? Sit down.

LARRY sits.

(on the phone)

Take it from me, buddy, nobody cares so long as the stuff gets picked up...sure, it'll be okay...yeah...hell, yeah...so we're on it...absolutely... right, take her easy, buddy.

PETE hangs up & shuffles papers.

LARRY

What's up?

PETE

What's up is, we're makin' a change. Startin' tomorrow, you're working afternoons, two to ten.

LARRY

Afternoons? What the hell for? It's not about that woman, is it?

PETE

What woman? You got woman problems?

LARRY

No, Pete, but I've been here nine years. I got a right to know what's going on.

PETE

Now he's talking rights.

LARRY

Come on, what's the deal?

PETE

The deal is...it's like this, Larr. You punch in on time, you're quick, you get along okay with Pepe, you work hard. You're not a slacker.

LARRY

Yeah, so?

PETE

We're picking up the Frederick line route.

LARRY

Isn't that the county?

PETE

You're aces at geography, Larr. Yeah, it's the county but right now we're coverin' it. And I need to move some people around.

LARRY

Well, why not shift Delaney or Nick or---

PETE

Look, I don't know if it's gonna be ours permanent-like, that's all up to City Hall, but like I said, right now I got to cover it. And I need you on that run because I can count...

PETE (Cont'd.)

...on you to do the job without somebody looking over your shoulder.

LARRY

I'm working alone? Jesus.

PETE

Just for a while. We're spread a little thin. If we keep it, if they write it in stone downtown, everything opens up and we put on more guys. But right now...

LARRY

And because I'm such a swell worker, I get the shaft?

PETE

Look, if it's still ours the first of the year, you get a raise. How's that?

LARRY

I don't need a damn raise. I want my old run.

PETE

No can do. Jimmy's got it.

LARRY

Pete---

PETE

Jimmy's got to be home with his kids now in the afternoon. His wife just got a job.

LARRY

What do you mean? Jimmy's wife's gets a job, so I get screwed? I thought you said---

PETE

Hey! I'm not payin' you to think, I'm payin' you to pick up the fuckin' trash. What's wrong with working afternoons? You can't meet your pals at the country club, maybe?

LARRY

No, it's just...I go to see my mom in the afternoons.

PETE

So, you'll see her in the morning.

LARRY

That's not a good time for her. She's in therapy then and---

PETE

Look, I do not have time to sit here and talk about your personal problems. This does not come under the heading of stuff I give a good goddamn about. I changed your shift. You don't like it, there's the door.

Pause.

Look, Larry, just do us both a favor and work the goddamn shift.

LARRY

Okay. But it's a hell of a way to treat somebody.

Lights down on PETE.

I head off to the coffee shop, pissed off about the whole job thing, and all of a sudden, I've got something else to be pissed about. My truck dies right there on the expressway. Yeah, it's a wonderful day all around. I fool with it a while, figuring maybe it's the timing belt, but who knows? Finally, I call to get it towed, wait around for them to come and they take it to the shop. The head mechanic's out of town but this other guy thinks he can figure it out. Couple of hours later, though, he still doesn't have a clue. The sun's going down and I don't know any more than I did when it conked out. No time for the nursing home now, but I promised Diane I'd go see her. Just so the whole day's not a complete washout, I grab a quick bite and take off.

Pause.

Diane lives pretty far away, nice neighborhood, big expensive house. A "gated community." Takes me two buses plus a mile and a half walk on the other end. By the time I get there it's late.

LARRY crosses to DIANE.

DIANE

Larry! I didn't think you were coming. I was just about to go upstairs.

LARRY

You go to bed this early, Di?

DIANE

Well, we've got a giant TV up there now and a wine cooler. Allan's under a lot of pressure at work. It helps him relax.

VOICE OF ALLAN

(offstage)

Who is it, Diane? Who's down there?

LARRY

(calling upstairs)

It's Larry, Allan.

ALLAN

(offstage)

Larry?

DIANE

(calling upstairs)

My brother, Larry.

ALLAN

(offstage)

Oh. That Larry.

LARRY

How many Larrys does he know?

DIANE

(to ALLAN)

He just stopped in.

ALLAN
(offstage)

This late? It's a quarter to nine.

LARRY
(to ALLAN)

Got a news flash for you, Allan. Some people actually roam the earth at this hour.

DIANE
(to ALLAN)

Sshh.

I'll be up soon, okay?

LARRY

You want me to leave, Di?

DIANE

Don't be silly. You came all the way out here. Where's your truck?

LARRY

In the shop. Something's wrong with it but I'm picking it up tomorrow. I hope.

DIANE

How did you get here?

LARRY

Couple of buses.

DIANE

Buses? That must have taken forever.

LARRY

No big deal. It's a nice ride. Saw lots of scenery.

DIANE

Is everything okay?

LARRY

Yeah, everything's fine. They just changed my shift, that's all. Starting tomorrow I'm working evenings, two to ten.

DIANE

They change it just like that? They don't give you time to re-arrange your life?

LARRY

It's the sanitation department, Di.

DIANE

But you're okay with it?

LARRY

It's just the way it is.

DIANE

For heaven sakes, you don't have to do this. I'll talk to Allan...

(calling upstairs)

Allan.

ALLAN
(offstage)

Larry still there?

LARRY

I've told you before, I don't want you to do that.

DIANE
(to ALLAN)

They changed his shift at work. He's working nights now.

LARRY

Not nights, evenings.

DIANE
(to ALLAN)

Maybe you could find him something.

ALLAN
(offstage)

Do we have to talk about it tonight?

LARRY
(to ALLAN)

We don't have to talk about it at all.

(to DIANE)

Look, Di, I'm not asking my brother-in-law for a job.

DIANE

You're not asking him for a job. You're using his connections.

LARRY

Well, maybe I don't want to use his connections.

DIANE

Don't be ridiculous. It's the way the world works.

ALLAN
(offstage)

Might be tough, Larr. The people I know might not have jobs that line up exactly with your...skills.

LARRY
(to ALLAN)

It's okay, Allan, forget it.

(to DIANE)

I've got a job, Di, they changed my shift, that's all.

DIANE
But you don't have to---

ALLAN
(offstage)
You want me to forget it?

LARRY
(to ALLAN)
That's what I said.
(to DIANE)
You said you wanted to tell me something. What's up?

DIANE
A lot, actually. Allan's firm is opening up a branch in France and they want him to head the investment division over there.

LARRY
France, huh? How long will he be gone?

DIANE
Three years.

LARRY
Wow. So, it's not a business trip.

DIANE
We're moving to Paris, Larry.

LARRY
And what happens afterwards? You come back here?

DIANE
We're not sure. The firm's expanding the whole international division. Right now Allan's boning up on his French. After that he's going to tackle Japanese.

LARRY

You mean...?

DIANE

Tokyo, potentially. It's in the picture. But that's really getting ahead of ourselves.

LARRY

Geez. What about you? You going to sell real estate in Paris?

DIANE

For starters I can't work at all over there, it's part of the legal entanglements. Later on, we'll see.

LARRY

That is big news.

DIANE

Believe me, it's been a nightmare putting this thing together. The firm is buying the house so I don't have to worry about that, but I'm spending every waking minute packing. My goal is to have us completely settled in by the end of the year. You know, New Year's Eve, the City of Lights? It's insane but that's what I'm shooting for.

LARRY

Oh, you'll pull it off. You've always been organized.

DIANE

Well, this is a real test of my skills. We've got a beautiful apartment just off the Rue de Rivoli, but when they painted it the colors got mixed up in translation. They did the bedroom in the mandarin red I wanted for the dining room and they put the cerulean blue for the bedroom in the hall. You cannot imagine how long it took me to straighten that out.

LARRY

Yeah, I bet. Sounds like you've got a lot happening.

DIANE

I do. That's why...look, I want you to be her guardian. Allan's drawing up the papers. It doesn't make sense for me to be guardian anymore. If it ever did. And of course, if anything happens, you're right here.

LARRY

Right. I'm not going to Paris or anything.

DIANE

You don't mind?

LARRY

No. Why should I?

DIANE

Thanks.

LARRY

It's okay, Di. Take it easy.

Pause.

DIANE

You still go every week?

LARRY

Yeah. Couple a times.

DIANE

I don't know what you think of me, Larry, but I can't. I just cannot bring myself to....

LARRY

I'm not making judgements. Do what you want.

DIANE

But if you can do it, I ought to be able to. It's just...

LARRY

What do you want me to do? Stop going because it makes you feel guilty?

DIANE

Does she even remember you were there? I mean, is there any point at all to---

LARRY

I don't care, okay? Whether or not she remembers, that's not what it's about.

DIANE

She still talk about Dad?

LARRY

Sometimes.

DIANE

You know if it were the other way around, if it were him in there, wild horses couldn't keep me away. God, I miss him.

LARRY

Yeah.

DIANE

I just...I wish you could remember him the way I do.

LARRY

Hey, we've been over this territory lots of times. How about we skip it tonight?

DIANE

All right. Whatever you say. I'm just juggling so much right now.

LARRY

I see that. Try and take it easy.

DIANE

There's so much to handle. To top it all off, next week we're going to San Francisco. Allan's got a conference and I've got a real estate convention.

LARRY

Maybe you two can relax out there.

DIANE

Oh, please!

LARRY

I mean it. Maybe you can kick back a little.

DIANE

You don't understand. It's work, nothing but work. Meetings, committees, sessions...

LARRY

Well, there must be some time when you can---

DIANE

It's impossible. We'll both be going all day long, then in the evening, we have to drag ourselves through cocktail hours and dinners and banquets. You have no idea.

LARRY

Okay, I guess I don't. San Francisco 'll be an absolute living hell, is that it?

DIANE

For Christ's sake, Larry! Why do you always have to---

ALLAN
(offstage)

You coming up, Diane?

DIANE
(to ALLAN)

Yes, Allan. Soon.

ALLAN
(offstage)

Do you want me to come down there? If you need me or anything, just let me know.

LARRY
(to ALLAN)

Yeah, she'll have you paged. You keep that pager on your silk pajamas, right?

DIANE

Larry!

(to ALLAN)

You don't have to come down, Allan. Just go to bed.

ALLAN
(offstage)

I'm in bed.

DIANE
(to ALLAN)

Then turn on the tube or something.

LARRY

I guess I better go.

DIANE

There's one other thing.

LARRY

Yeah?

DIANE

The hospital's dedicating a new wing in Dad's honor.

LARRY

That's nice.

DIANE

It's going to be a big ceremony, a very big deal. The Board will be there, a delegation from the Legislature, I think the mayor's coming. It's a week from Tuesday, two in the afternoon.

LARRY

Great. Have a good time.

DIANE

Look, I know they just changed your schedule, but you can get the day off. You've been there for years. Certainly, if you ask---

LARRY

I'm not asking.

DIANE

Larry. What possible reason can I give them for your absence?

LARRY

I don't know, Di. How about telling them I got to pick up the trash that day?

DIANE

The man had two children. They want us both there. They're going to introduce us. It's an honor. Besides, I put your name on the gift. You've got to come.

LARRY

What gift?

DIANE

I made a contribution to the building fund. I put it in both our names.

LARRY

That was sweet of you.

DIANE

It wasn't that much. I'm not asking you to pay me back. But this is a major event. You know what they thought of him. You know he was revered by everyone at that hospital.

LARRY

Yeah, but they didn't live with him. They weren't there when he came home, barking orders at Mom like she was a hospital orderly and he was head of the Mayo Clinic, laying down the law to me every day of the week.

DIANE

Larry, please----

LARRY

Aw, what's the matter with me? This is what you always wanted, isn't it? A monument to him. And you can sit there and bask in the glory of all the---

DIANE

You're his son. You ought to be there. You owe him---

LARRY

I owe him nothing. I don't owe him a goddamn thing.

DIANE

He was your father.

LARRY

Well, he was lousy at it.

DIANE

Maybe you were just a lousy son.

Pause.

LARRY

Are we going to have it again, Diane?

DIANE

A man like that, at the pinnacle of his profession. It was such a disappointment to him.

LARRY

I told you before, I didn't come all the way out here to listen to---

DIANE

His only son stealing a car? It was as if you stuck a knife in him.

LARRY

I guess that's why he argued with the judge to have me put away.

DIANE

He wanted to make an impression on you. He wanted you to see---

LARRY

Oh, I saw all right. Him center stage in that courtroom, arguing why it made perfect sense to put me in a home for juvenile offenders. Christ, the worst thing I'd ever done up to then was bring my library books back late.

DIANE

He could not understand why you did it.

LARRY

Who the hell knows why I did it? I was fourteen. Jimmy said, here, hold the flashlight, I'll hot-wire the Mustang. It happened, okay? Kids do stuff.

DIANE

But you hurt him so. He was terribly, terribly hurt.

LARRY

Yeah, he was hurt. What about me?

DIANE
You?

LARRY
Did it ever occur to you that if I hadn't done that one damn thing, maybe, just maybe, things might have worked out a little bit different for me?

Pause.

What the hell. It's all water under the bridge. I've got my work. I've got my "profession." Maybe it's not as all-fired important as his was, but---

ALLAN
(offstage)
You coming to bed, Diane, or is little brother spending the night?

DIANE
(to ALLAN)
I'll be up in a minute.

ALLAN
(offstage)
It's after nine o'clock.

LARRY
(to ALLAN)
What are you, the town crier up there, announcing the time?

DIANE
Larry.

LARRY
(to ALLAN)
You ought to have a lantern to swing back and forth. "Three o'clock and all is well."

ALLAN
(offstage)

Your sister gets up at five-thirty, Larr. She needs her sleep.

Pause.

DIANE

I've got to go up. I'll send you the papers next week.

LARRY

Okay.

DIANE

Thanks for coming out.

LARRY

Yeah.

Lights down on DIANE.

So. Next morning, first day on the new shift and I wake up real early. I try to go back to sleep, but it's no use. Call the shop about the truck and when I finally get through, they say it's the on-board computer. Two days at least, by the time they get a new one from the dealer, and I'm looking at three-hundred-and-eighty-five bucks. After hearing all that good news, it's time to take the bus and go to work.

Pause.

Of course, it's a brand, new route, just me and the driver. And with me working alone, there's no chance we're going to get done early, but I'm handling it. Picking up bags off this street, and the next and the one after that. Trash is trash, right?

Pause.

Starts to gets dark and we're getting some rain. I try to speed up but the streets are slick. I don't want to fall, break an ankle, something stupid like that. Part of the route is houses on one side, trees on the other. And this one road narrows down to a dead end with a big storm drain at the bottom. It's too tight for the truck to turn so he waits up at the top and I'm dragging the bags up to him.

Pause.

LARRY (Cont'd.)

It's just garbage, of course, just the stuff people put out. And then...

LARRY stops, focusing on
something on the ground.
He moves forward a little. What is it?
He goes down on one knee and reaches
out to touch something.
Then he pulls sharply back.

Oh, god, no, not...oh sweet Jesus...

Lights slowly down.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Lights up on JUDY in bed. LARRY is turned away from her, sitting on the side of the bed. She sits up. Pause.

JUDY

Do you want some eggs? I could make us some eggs.

LARRY

That's all right. I don't want you to go to any trouble.

JUDY

Aren't you hungry?

LARRY

Not much.

JUDY

I'm starved. I always wake up starved. No matter what time it is. I mean it's weird about the time. Working all night at the diner of course, the sun's coming up by the time I get home and that's when most people are thinking about breakfast, but not me. When I wake up, that's when I've got to have breakfast. Right now, it's almost, what? One o'clock in the afternoon? But that's how I am. I sleep like a baby and then bam. Bring on the scrambled eggs. Or maybe pancakes. You want some pancakes?

LARRY

Like I said, I don't want you to go to any bother.

JUDY

It's no bother. And anyway, I'm doing it for me, see? Did you sleep okay?

LARRY

Yeah. Some.

JUDY

Funny thing about me. I can sleep no matter what. Summer, winter, hot, cold, whatever, I always go right off.

LARRY

That's good.

JUDY

You bet it is. It's not good if you don't get enough sleep. But you're okay? I mean, you seem a little, ah...

LARRY

I'm fine. Just...fine. But I think I'll go.

JUDY

You don't have to rush away. Didn't you say you were off today?

LARRY

Yeah, they told me to...I'm taking a couple days off.

JUDY

Must be nice. I got to go to work. Not until ten tonight, though. Lots of time 'til then. How about some coffee? I could make us coffee.

LARRY

Whatever. It's up to you.

JUDY

Now look here, mister-I'm-not-hungry and I-think-I'll-just go...you know, you really shouldn't let it bother you.

LARRY

You mean...?

JUDY

Things like that just happen. They happen to everybody sometimes. You can't always go off like a firecracker on the 4th of July. Human beings are not machines, right?

LARRY

Right.

JUDY

I was with a guy, when was it? Let me see, maybe it was last Tuesday. Or was it Wednesday?

LARRY

Look, ahh, ah...

JUDY

It's Judy. Remember?

LARRY

Yeah, sorry. Look, Judy, you don't have to tell me about---

JUDY

Come on, Larry, it's the twenty-first century, isn't it?

LARRY

Yes, that's what it is.

JUDY

So, if it's the twenty-first century and everything, I think it's helpful to, you know, just talk about things, get stuff out in the open, know what I mean?

LARRY

Ah-huh.

JUDY

Now I know. You do not have to tell me, but I know that when one guy talks to another guy, there's all this big macho stuff going on.

(affecting a male voice)

"So, who'd you screw last night?" "Well, I screwed these two broads one right after the other." "That's nothin'. I screwed three. All at the same time."

(normal voice)

Isn't that exactly how guys talk? You don't have to tell me. I know it is.

LARRY

Well, it may be that sometimes, guys---

JUDY

Larry, do not, I repeat, do not sit there and tell me that is not exactly how guys talk. Because I know. I just know, okay?

LARRY

Look, I really think I want to head home.

JUDY

Now, you hold on a minute and listen to me. Are you listening?

LARRY

Yes. Yes, Judy, I'm listening.

JUDY

I think, I mean, I know for a fact, that it's got to be helpful to a guy who doesn't sleep with other guys...you don't sleep with other guys, do you?...to understand that everybody's got the same problem. Which is why it's not really a problem. Because how could it be a problem, if everybody has the same problem? That's not a problem, then, that's just normal, right?

LARRY

Ah-huh, but---

JUDY

What I'm saying is, not being able to get it up is just the natural course of events. If the same thing happens to every single guy on the planet, is that a problem? Of course, it's not, right?

LARRY

Well...

JUDY

That's it. No problem. Noooo problem. It's just as natural as, as---

LARRY

You know, Judy, I'd really like to---

JUDY

Listen to me, Larry, I am absolutely not going to stop talking about this until you see it for what it is.

LARRY

Okay.

JUDY

I figured out a long time ago that this was gonna be my way of bringing people to a kind of understanding about stuff. I mean if a guy knows that other guys have trouble getting it up too, that should make guy number one feel better, right? Tell me I'm right.

LARRY

Well, in a manner of speaking, you're---

JUDY

See? Now don't you feel better?

LARRY

Better? Oh, yeah, I feel...

JUDY

I mean if I'm telling you that three, four, five guys...no, wait...

(She hesitates, remembering)

him...and then, him...no, four guys, yes, four, in my personal experience in the last couple of weeks alone have had a hard time, no, that's not really what I want to say. A hard time, geez! Wow! Hard time!

LARRY

Look, hon, I know you're trying to help, but---

JUDY

The point is, if that many guys are not performing the way they want to perform, then this is something other guys need to know about. Now, nobody's going to put this on the evening news or anything but being unable to complete the pass is just, well, that is simply going to be the way it is sometimes. And if a guy knows that other guys, not just one or two, but a lot more than that fumble the ball, then, maybe he won't feel quite so, you know, all upset and everything. Because being upset over something like this only makes it harder. Uh! Harder! There I go again.

LARRY gets out of bed.

Lights slowly down on JUDY.

JUDY

And then next time around there's a vicious circle of not getting it up and trying to get it up and still not getting it up and on and on and on...

Pause.

LARRY

I got the bright idea of taking in a movie. Thought it would be good to get my mind off things. I went to the multiplex, ate some popcorn, watched one flick and walked out of that into another, walked out of that into a third.

Pause.

It didn't help. I thought I'd call Jack.

Lights up on JACK in his "car."

LARRY crosses to him & sits.

Hey, buddy, I appreciate you picking me up.

JACK

Sure. You did the same for me when my old car was in the shop. How about we grab a couple of bacon cheeseburgers over at Jolly's? How's that sound?

LARRY

Whatever you say. You're driving.

JACK

Then, Jolly's it is, my man. Nice you got the day off.

LARRY

Yeah, I, I got home pretty late last night.

JACK

Aw, it's tough getting used to a new route. Hey, I heard some garbageman found a kid's body in a bag. Did you know him?

Pause.

LARRY

No, I don't...no.

JACK

That must have been something. Too bad they changed your shift though. I know you like to see your mom in the afternoons. How's she doing?

LARRY

Oh, she's...she's okay. She's got her good days and her bad days.

JACK

She talk much?

LARRY

Some days, you can have a real back and forth with her, a real conversation. Other days, not so much.

JACK

That's tough, buddy.

LARRY

It's just what it is.

JACK

Had an uncle was in a home like that. Nineteen years. Never said a word. Just sat there. You'd ask him questions, he'd kind of look up, you'd think he was going to say something, and then, zippo. Got so, I couldn't see the point in going. I mean, I understand *you're* going. I can see that. It was just, with my uncle, I mean, what was the point? There was no point. Get my meaning?

LARRY

Sure.

JACK

I mean, anybody can understand you're wanting to see your mom. She's your mom and all. It's just, if somebody don't even know you been there...

LARRY

She knows. I mean, she kind of knows.

JACK

Well, that's good. That's something. Because if she didn't know, I mean, what would be the point? Like I said, no point.

LARRY

Ah-huh.

JACK

You do what you want to do. But all I'm saying is, if it was me, I don't know. See what I mean?

LARRY

Yeah, Jack. I see what you mean.

JACK

But hey, we all got our reasons, right? I mean, that's what life is. Guys are doin' stuff for reasons other guys don't know. I mean, take him over there.

LARRY

Who?

JACK

That guy. The one on the corner with the gray jacket. I mean he's got a green light, but is he goin'? Is he steppin' right out there? Hell, no, he's standin' there lookin' up and down like maybe he's expectin' Mario Andretti or somebody to come whippin' around the corner. Now I ask you, why is he doin' that?

LARRY

I don't know.

JACK

That's my point. A guy standin' there on the street corner, waitin' for a light, but maybe he's not waitin' for a light. Maybe he's waitin' for...who knows what he's waitin' for? I guess he's got his reasons. That's it. He's got his reasons, you got your reasons.

LARRY

You're finding some similarity between me and some guy who's too stupid to navigate the intersection?

JACK

Well, that's what we don't know.

LARRY

What don't we know?

JACK

Maybe he's stupid, maybe he ain't. The point is, he is doing what he's doing for some reason. A reason, could be, you and me, well, we're in the dark about it.

LARRY

And what's that got to do with me?

JACK

It's this way, Larr, it's just...you know, things fall into a con-tin-U-um.

LARRY

A what?

JACK

A con-tin-U-um. You know, like along a line, and some people fall into your path and maybe you have a connection with them and maybe you don't.

LARRY

Jack, are you or are you not comparing me to some guy who doesn't know whether or not to cross the street?

JACK

Hey, I'm your buddy, right?

LARRY

Yeah, but is that---

JACK

Oh, look, he's crossin'. Guess he figured it out. Boy, I can almost taste that bacon cheeseburger, you know?

LARRY stands. Lights down on JACK.

LARRY

So, maybe meeting Jack wasn't such a great idea after all. He got his cheeseburger and I had a beer but then I took off. Thought I'd visit the home. It was after seven but I hadn't seen her since Monday.

Lights up on MOM, dozing in her wheelchair as LARRY crosses.

Hey, Mom.

Lawrence... MOM

Yeah, it's me. Little late for a nap, isn't it? LARRY

Late? Is it... MOM

Kind of late, yeah. It's a funny time for me to be here but I thought I'd stop by. LARRY

Did you...eat dinner? MOM

Yeah, sure. What did you have? LARRY

That's good. That's a good one. MOM

What? Something you didn't like? LARRY

Look. MOM

She points to the trash. He looks.

Why did you throw it in the trash, Mom? You'll get sick if you don't eat. LARRY

Get sick if I do. MOM

LARRY

What was it? A hamburger and green beans and...you shouldn't do that.

MOM

Not eating it.

LARRY

Why? What's the matter?

MOM

It's the same, Lawrence.

LARRY

What's the same?

MOM

Last night.

LARRY

You mean, it's the same thing you had last night? Aw, Mom, I don't think they would do that.

MOM

You...you don't know.

LARRY

They wouldn't give you the same thing as yesterday.

MOM

But...hamburger and...beans. Old. Sick-looking.

LARRY

And it's what they brought you yesterday?

MOM

The same. Why don't you...? Your father...he would...he would talk to...and find out...and, and...

LARRY

All right, all right, Mom. I'll go see the---

MRS. JOHNSON crosses.

Mrs. Johnson. Can I see you?

MRS. J

Of course, Mr. Lucas. You're here a little late today, aren't you?

LARRY

Yeah. Good thing, too.

MRS. J

Hello, Cora.

LARRY

It's about her supper.

MRS. J.

What's the problem?

LARRY

The problem is, it's what she had yesterday.

MOM

Same...it's the same...

MRS. J

Oh, Mr. Lucas, I don't think---

LARRY

She says it's the same.

MRS. J

Well, I understand she believes that to be so, but it's not possible.

LARRY

Not possible, huh?

MRS. J

No indeed. The dietitian plans all the menus and she is most meticulous about balancing the nutritional needs of our residents and maintaining a variety. Believe me, when she copies the meal plans, she's very careful to---

LARRY

Well, maybe she was so crazy about this one she copied it twice.

MOM

Day after day, the same...

MRS. J

Mr. Lucas, how long do you think we would keep our license if we gave our residents the same meal two days in a row?

LARRY

I don't care about your license. I'm asking you what the kitchen sent up here for my mother to eat.

MRS.J

I can assure you they would never---

MOM

Your father...he would...

It's downstairs, right? LARRY

What? MRS. J

The kitchen. LARRY

Mr. Lucas--- MRS. J

I'm going to go have a look. LARRY

I'm afraid you can't do that. MRS. J

You don't have to be afraid. I'm the one who's going. LARRY

The kitchen is off limits to visitors. You know that. MRS. J

But residents are allowed down there? LARRY

Of course. This is their home. MRS. J

Well, this resident can't go, so how about if I go instead? LARRY

MRS.J

You must understand. I cannot permit you to---

LARRY

No, I don't understand at all. I don't understand one little bit.

MOM

We're old and we have to eat old...

MRS. J

Visitors may not go roaming through the building.

LARRY

I'm not exactly a visitor.

MRS.J

Of course, you are! You're not a resident and you're certainly not staff. There's only one other category.

LARRY

I'm in here every other day.

MRS. J

I'm well aware of that but you are still a visitor. I cannot let you go barging into the kitchen. The staff is gone for the night anyway. But even if they were there, you can't. It's against regulations.

LARRY

Oh, but feeding people the same food for three days straight, that's okay, huh?

MRS. J

Can we talk about this in my office, please?

LARRY

Is your office anywhere near the kitchen?

MRS. J

Mr. Lucas, as I have explained, I will not allow you to go to the---

LARRY

Well, that's where I want to go. Do you hear me?

MRS. J

Of course, I hear you. Everybody on the floor can hear you. There is no need to raise your voice. You cannot go to the kitchen. I won't permit it.

LARRY

What's the difference between her and me?

MRS. J

What?

LARRY

What's the difference between a resident and a visitor?

MRS. J

You're asking me for a definition?

LARRY

Yeah! That's what I'm asking.

MRS. J

Well, obviously, a visitor comes for a time and leaves. A visitor makes his or her home in some other location. A resident, as the name implies, resides in this building, sleeps in this building, takes her meals in this building---

LARRY

Sleeps and eats here, you mean?

MRS. J

Of course.

LARRY

Okay.

(Pulls out a bag of candy and eats)

So now I'm eating here.

MRS. J

Mr. Lucas, please.

LARRY

And tonight I'm sleeping here.

MRS. J

What on earth are you trying to do?

LARRY

I'm going to sleep right here on this floor. And tomorrow I'm going to find out what kind of a crazy place it is that they send up the same food day after day.

MRS. J

Do you want me to call the police?

LARRY

Call anybody you want. Like I said, I'm sleeping here and then I'm going down to that kitchen to find out what the hell---

MRS. J

I'm going to ask you one more time. Would you please come to my office so we can discuss this in a mature fashion?

LARRY

And I'm telling you one more time. I don't want to discuss anything. What kind of a friggin' place is this, lady, that you can't even---

MRS. J

I will not be addressed in that manner.

LARRY

I'll address you any goddamn way---

MRS. J

That's it.

MRS. J pulls out her cellphone & dials.

LARRY

Go ahead. Call anybody you want. I don't give a damn.

MRS. J

(into phone)

I want to report a disorderly person...

LARRY

Yeah, I'm disorderly, all right. And I'm not movin' an inch.

MRS. J

(into phone)

Swan Hill Nursing Home...783 Stormer Road...

MRS. J. exits.

LARRY

(yelling)

Tell 'em to bring backup. They're going to need it.

Lights down. Pause. Lights up.

LARRY sits facing the SERGEANT.

SERGEANT

Let's see. We've got disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, resisting arrest. Had yourself quite a time, didn't you, Mr. Lucas? Want to tell me how this whole thing started?

LARRY shakes his head "no."

SERGEANT (Cont'd.)

The complainant, that would be, ah, Miss...Miss...

SERGEANT studies the report.

LARRY

Mrs. Johnson.

SERGEANT

Mrs. Johnson. She says you were yelling your head off that you were going to spend the night on the floor at the nursing home. That accurate?

LARRY

Yeah.

SERGEANT

You have any reason for wanting to spend the night on the floor at a nursing home, Mr. Lucas?

LARRY looks away.

How many bars did you hit before you went there?

LARRY

No bars. Oh! I forgot, I had...

SERGEANT

Ah-huh.

LARRY

I had a beer.

SERGEANT

One beer, huh?

(writing)

At a time?

LARRY

Look, you can ask 'em at Jolly's.

SERGEANT

Jolly's. Okay.

(writing)

So, the next question would be...are you on some kind of medication?

LARRY shakes his head "no."

You sure you're not forgetting that too?

LARRY

No medication.

SERGEANT

Should you be on some kind of medication?

LARRY just looks at him.

Okay. This Mrs. Johnson says you're a regular visitor at the home, that you go there to see your mom. She says you're in there three, four times a week, every week, without fail. Although she says you usually come during the daytime. You want to tell me why you went there tonight?

LARRY shakes his head "no."

SERGEANT

You're not giving me a whole lot of help here, Mr. Lucas.

LARRY

Look, whatever it says there...

SERGEANT

In the report?

LARRY

Yeah. Whatever she says, that's what happened.

SERGEANT

What about Officer Lohinski? You want to agree with everything he says too?

LARRY nods "yes."

Okay. Next step would be, you go before the commissioner. Problem is, the commissioner's got a stack of disorderlys he's plowing through. Bunch of college kids over at Lakeside went a little crazy after their basketball team won the trophy. What that means regarding you is, there's a pretty good chance you're going to spend the night with us.

LARRY

Whatever.

SERGEANT

You got anybody you want to call?

LARRY

Like who?

SERGEANT

Like a lawyer, for starters. Know any?

LARRY

Yeah. My brother-in-law.

SERGEANT

Might want to give him a ring.

LARRY

Not doing that.

SERGEANT

Look, buddy, the way I see it, a guy who spends half his days goin' to see his mother in a nursing home has got at least some part of his life going in the right direction. Might be good to have a little professional advice. You're gonna need---

LARRY

No. Just...do whatever you have to do.

Pause.

SERGEANT

Okay. Have it your way.

(calling)

Lohinski? Give the gentleman a single overlooking the pool.

SERGEANT exits. Pause.

LARRY

Yeah, it was quite a weekend. When I finally got out of there, I went home and took about three showers to get the smell of the place off me. By the time Monday rolled around, I was starting to feel normal. Almost normal. Still wasn't going to work though. Couldn't think about that yet. I wanted to visit the home, but I knew I had to be on my best behavior. No more run-ins with the powers that be. I stopped in the coffee shop to get in the right frame of mind.

LARRY sits at a coffeeshop table.

That's where I was when she walked in.

MRS. J enters.

MRS. J

Hello, Mr. Lucas.

LARRY

What are you doing here?

MRS. J

Would you mind...would it be all right if I...sat down?

LARRY looks annoyed.

It's all right. Sorry I bothered you.

MRS. J turns to go.

LARRY

Mrs. Johnson.

LARRY gestures toward a chair.
She sits.

Thank you. MRS. J

I've never seen you in here before. LARRY

I've never been in here before. MRS. J

Want some coffee? LARRY

I don't drink coffee. I just came in on a hunch. MRS. J

A hunch? LARRY

You said once you always stop in a coffee shop before you come to the home. MRS. J

How'd you know it was this one? LARRY

I already tried the other two. MRS. J

That's a lot of trouble to go through for a cup of coffee. Especially when you don't drink coffee. LARRY

MRS. J

I had something I wanted to say and...I can't talk to you over there. Not when I'm on duty.

LARRY

What is it?

MRS. J

Well, first, I wanted to tell you how sorry I was about Friday night.

LARRY

Wasn't your fault.

MRS. J

Maybe some of it was. I've already spoken to the police. I'm withdrawing the charges.

LARRY

You didn't have to do that.

MRS. J

No, you didn't hurt anybody and...maybe you were just upset about something.

LARRY

Look, Mrs. Johnson---

MRS. J

I'll go in a minute, please, just hear me out. I thought...I thought maybe I could talk to them about the other charges against you. If that's all right.

LARRY

It's not all right.

MRS.J

But you didn't---

LARRY

I'm not your responsibility. Resisting arrest is resisting arrest. I'm not some kid too dumb to know the rules. I'll get my day in court, like everybody else.

MRS.J

If you won't let me help you---

LARRY

I don't need your help, okay? I'm fine. Anything else?

MRS. J

If I could just...Mr. Lucas, I always wanted to tell you...you know, your mother is really one of the lucky ones.

LARRY

Lucky?

MRS. J

To have you. Some of our residents have no visitors at all. She's very fortunate to have you in there every week, tracking down her missing things, complaining about her meals.

LARRY

Well, that's a shock, coming from you.

MRS. J

Believe me, you are quite the advocate. You don't let me or the home off the hook about any of it. That's a wonderful thing, that kind of devotion to a parent.

LARRY

I never thought that *you* thought it was so wonderful.

MRS. J

Well, at times, in that building we're practically adversaries. Look, I'm the first to admit that a lot of things get shortchanged. It shouldn't be that way, but that's how it is. We're always understaffed. Most of the folks who work there do the best they can, but I know we come up short. If there weren't people like you to take us to task, give us a hard time..

MRS. J (Cont'd.)

...now and again, I...I just don't know what would happen.

LARRY

Mrs. Johnson, I have the feeling that if the roof caved in over there, you'd figure out how to handle it. You always seem completely in charge.

MRS. J

From two to ten, anyway. Speaking of which...

(She checks her watch)

I have to go, but...just one more thing, I...

LARRY

Yeah?

Pause.

MRS. J

Maybe I'm way out of line saying this...but I wanted to tell you how sorry I am...how very, very sorry...that you were the one who found that little girl.

LARRY

What?

MRS. J

The story in the news. The garbageman who found the dead child in the trash bag.

LARRY

What makes you think...?

Pause.

They didn't put my name in, what makes you think it was---

MRS. J

Oh, Mr. Lucas. It was you. Wasn't it?

Pause.

LARRY

Yeah. Yeah, it was me.

MRS. J

Must have been awful, something like that. Were you alone when you found her?

LARRY nods.

I thought you always worked in pairs?

LARRY

No, we were...short-handed and...it was just me.

MRS. J

I can't imagine what that would be like. To find a little child like that.

LARRY

Nine years I've been doing this, nine years and nothing like that ever...and now, I...I can't get her out of my mind.

MRS. J

Of course, you can't. Maybe you shouldn't try.

LARRY

What?

MRS. J

You're grieving for her, Mr. Lucas, that's exactly what you're doing.

LARRY

But that's...that's just crazy. I don't even know who she was.

MRS. J

Doesn't matter. A person's life ought to mean something to somebody. Maybe you're the one.

LARRY

The one...? I don't even know her name. All I know is what they tell me. They say she was two, maybe two and a half.

MRS.J

What I meant was, maybe that child matters more to you right now than to anybody else on earth. That's why you feel the way you do. That's why you're grieving.

LARRY

What kind of sense does that make? Somebody else ought to feel...a little girl like that.

MRS. J

What if there is nobody else? What if nobody else loved her enough?

LARRY

Jesus. I can't even wrap my head around that.

MRS. J

It's this way, Mr. Lucas. At the home, when one of our residents dies, we try to take time to let it sink in, the fact that they've passed. But, you know which ones I really stop in my tracks for? The ones who didn't have anybody. It may sound strange, but when they go, I try to give myself over to grieving for them, if only for a little while. It just feels as if... somebody needs to recognize that they've gone to another place. A person's life should matter. Whether it's one of our old people at the home or...a two-year-old whose name nobody knows.

Pause.

LARRY

You're saying...you think what I feel for that little girl is a good thing?

MRS. J

In a way, I am. Maybe nobody else was touched by her. I don't know how that could be. This is such an awful world sometimes. But at least her little life touched yours.

LARRY

But it's so...man, it's so goddamn hard, I can't...I can't sleep, I can't eat, it's like I'm...

LARRY (Cont'd.)

...I'm lost somewhere and I can't find my way out. I just keep seeing her little hand. She could have wrapped all her fingers around my thumb. She was that small.

MRS. J

When a person grieves, sometimes the best thing is just to wade into it, let it wash over you. For a while, anyway. You're never going to forget her, you know that. But little by little, the time will come when you can start to let her go. Try to remember that she's at rest. Whatever her life was, whatever it wasn't, now she's at peace.

Pause.

LARRY

Of all the garbagemen in the city, what made you think it was me?

MRS. J

I got to thinking about the way you were Friday night. You've never come to the home like that. We've had our moments, but you've never spoken to me that way before. And then I read the story in the paper. I just sort of put the pieces together. So, what happens now? Not that it's any of my business.

LARRY

They said I should take some time off. I've got a lot of vacation days coming.

MRS. J

Did they offer you any kind of help? Did they suggest you go see somebody?

LARRY

They gave me the name of a doctor, you know, a shrink, but...I don't know that I can talk to some stranger about it.

MRS. J

You're talking to me.

LARRY

Yeah, but, the thing is, I can't face the thought of going back to work. Of course, not working isn't doing me much good either. There's nothing else to focus on. Picking up trash isn't such an awful job, you know. I never thought it was anyway. A lot of people...

LARRY (Cont'd.)

...look down on it, but...

MRS.J

Oh, it's a very important part of municipal services. If we didn't have refuse collection, where would we be? Living with disease, maybe.

LARRY

That's what I always thought, but now...I don't know. Maybe I need to find something else to do.

MRS. J

Well, you have to make the right decision. For you.

She checks her watch.

Speaking of jobs, I better get over there. You're coming to see your mom today?

LARRY

Yeah. I've got to stop and get her flowers.

MRS. J

They're always so pretty.

LARRY

It was...real nice of you to stop by. Have a good shift, Mrs. Johnson.

MRS. J

Thanks.

Pause.

Oh, for goodness sakes. My name's not really Mrs. Johnson.

LARRY

It's not?

MRS. J

When I got divorced I just kept the “mrs.” part for professional reasons. My name’s Dolores.

LARRY

Dolores. That’s a nice name. I’m Larry.

MRS. J

Larry. Now I’ve really got to run.

MRS. J exits. Pause.

LARRY

My day in court worked out better than I thought. Pete came and said a lot of nice things and that helped. I got probation before judgement. So, everything’s good just as long as I behave myself. And I can do that.

Pause.

Afterwards I thanked Pete for all he did but...there was no way I could go back to the department. Just couldn’t do it. He was great about it. Even wrote me a letter of recommendation. That’s what I used to get into electrician school. It’s a year-long program, you work as an apprentice and you go to class. I’m the oldest guy in the room, of course, but I can handle it. When I get my license, I’ll be a lineman. I’ve always liked working outdoors.

Pause.

Over at the nursing home, Mom’s about the same, she still has her good days and her bad. I’m in there three, four times a week, just like always. And I still take her flowers. But I bring an extra bunch now.

Lights up slowly on MRS. J.
There are flowers on her desk.

Took me a little time to make that happen, I want to tell you. Dolores is not the kind of woman to jump into something without thinking about it for a while. She let me know that right away. But little by little, we started to connect. And now...things are good.

MRS. J touches the flowers fondly.

Real good. Like Mom said, it’s the ones that take their time opening that turn out to be the best of the bunch.

Lights slowly down.

END OF PLAY