Home at Seven

LauraSue Epstein

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Home at Seven

A Play by LauraSue Epstein*

Characters:

DENNIS: 30-35. No longer physically fit. Tired. Shelter staff.


JULIA: Late teens to early 20's. Thin, wiry, strong. Well kept. Guest.


LEE: 60'ish. Looks younger than her years. Tall, broad, warm. Guest.


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* LauraSue Epstein Schlatter is a second year J.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota Law School. Before starting law school, she worked as a playwright, with productions and readings of her work in Minnesota, Boston, New York, and Colorado. Her involvement with the issues of homelessness began in 1983 when Joe Skeikey, Paul Kiley, and Fr. Edward Flahavan at St. Stephen's Church in Minneapolis commissioned her to write a play based on the St. Stephen's emergency shelter. Her experiences in the shelter and with the shelter community played a major role in her decision to pursue a legal education. Home at Seven has been produced twice—in 1984 it ran for two weeks at the Hennepin Center for the Arts in Minneapolis, and in 1985 it toured five cities in Minnesota over a period of seven weeks.

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This play is dedicated to "Fast Eddie B.," who tried a little too hard and a little too often to get home; and to Ron Schlatter, who made the second production a reality in the face of impossible obstacles.


CAMERAWOMAN: 30'ish. Practical, earthy, sensible, competent. Accompanies anchorman.

NEIGHBOR: Resident of neighborhood in which shelter is located.

STRANGER: Unfamiliar shelter guest.


The action takes place during winter and early spring in and around an emergency shelter for homeless people. A large U.S. city.

"The Swimming Song"

This summer I went swimming,
This summer I might have drowned.
But I held my breath, and I kicked my feet
And I moved my arms around,
Yeah, moved my arms around.

This summer I swam in the ocean,
Then I swam in a swimming pool,
Salt my wounds, chlorined my eyes,
I'm a self-destructive fool,
A self-destructive fool.

This summer I did the backstroke
And y'know that that's not all,
I did the breaststroke and the butterfly
And the old Australian crawl,
The old Australian crawl.

This summer I swam in a public place,
And a reservoir to boot,
At the latter I was informal,
At the former I wore my suit,
I wore my swimming suit.

This summer I did swandives,
And jack knives for you all,
And once when you weren't looking
I did a cannonball,
I did a cannonball.

Words and music by Loudon Wainwright III
SCENE I

Lights up on the shelter area. Early evening, 6:30 or so. The Shelter is empty; the tables sit deserted, chairs pushed under them. There is no clutter in the room at all. To the far right is an office area with a desk, two chairs, a coat rack, and filing cabinet.

It is winter time and the only lights in the room are the street lights and passing car lights streaming through the high basement windows.

DENNIS enters, carrying a briefcase stuffed to bursting and shabby. He also carries a stack of blankets, used but clean, and a medium sized stuffed animal, one-eyed with some opened seams, a bit dirty. He comes in from outside—it is cold and blowing out and he seems to be blown in on the wind. His momentum carries him to a table, where he collapses, dropping his burdens, then slipping into a chair and letting his head drop into the blankets. Beat, silence. Gradually, from just beyond the edges of the shelter walls come voices and figures, shadowy at first, then gradually more distinct. They move into the shelter fairly quickly, heedless of physical boundaries such as walls. These are the manifestations of DENNIS' awareness of the people he sees daily. They speak, sometimes consecutively, sometimes overlapping, always to DENNIS who never looks directly at any of them.

CASSIE

Singing
This summer I did swandives,
And jack knives for you all,
And once when you weren't looking
I did a cannonball,
I did a cannonball.

Speaking
You remember that, don't you? Of course you do! You taught it to me!

JULIA

They taught me to milk a barn full of cows and fix a stalled combine, but they never taught me to survive. Never taught me to write a resume, or say just the right things at a job interview. They never taught me how to know who to believe.
JULIA

Does it make sense to you, Dennis, why I'm here? Now?

BERNARD

Believe me, Denny-boy, I appreciate everything ya do for me. Ah mean, invitin' me ta your house for m'birthday is above an' beyond, hey? An' believe me, Denny, ah never intended ta come smashed. Hell, if a guy can't get smashed in honor of his fortieth birthday, then what? The big four-oh, Denny—see if you don't feel like a big celebration when it hits you, Denny-boy.

JULIA

Certain parties who shall remain nameless—for now—have not shown proper respect—I am a woman of independent but limited resources. I am generous to a fault but I will not supply liquor or cigarettes!


JULIA

Anyone seen my backpack? I need my emory board. Broke my nail.

BERNARD

Starts scratching and thumping like a dog.

BERNARD

Packin' us in here like eggs in a basket, huh Dennis? Being so close to so many folks makes me itch!

BERNARD starts rustling through his belongings—an old athletic bag full of newspapers, bottles, mementoes, toiletries, etc. The rustling, scratching sound grows louder.

LEE

Pack up an' leave an' they'll follow you wherever you go.
That's what I learned, Dennis. You think you've gotten clean away, you open your bag, and there they are—your loyal baggage—just try to lose 'em.

LEE laughs.

CASSIE

Lost my knitting. All I've got left is the needles.

CASSIE clicks the needles together. The scratching, clicking, and rustling grows louder, joined by noises at the window, a scratching and tapping. DENNIS sits up, focusing. The phantoms fade away and the scratching at the window is clearly heard. DENNIS is riveted to the sound, silent and unmoving.

DENNIS

Hello? Who's there? Bernard . . . ?

As DENNIS heads for the window, the phantoms steal out of range of his sight. DENNIS looks up at the window, gets a chair, climbs on it.

DENNIS

Bernard? Ike?

No clear response. More jiggling and scratching. DENNIS finds his courage, unlocks the window, yanks it open. TOM's head pops in.

TOM

This the shelter?

DENNIS    Stunned.

My God!

TOM

Doesn't look like a shelter. Where're the beds?

DENNIS

You scared me to death. Who are you?

TOM

Tom. Is this where I come to get a place to sleep?

DENNIS

Not in the window!

BERNARD's voice shoots from the shadows.

BERNARD

Let me in, you asshole, or I'll break every window in the place!

DENNIS turns, but sees no one.

DENNIS

Clean it up, Ber—

BERNARD is gone.
TOM
Who you talkin' to, man?
DENNIS
No one. Now listen, you want a place to sleep, right?
TOM
Just one night; just passing through. Goin' to Boston to see my sister.
DENNIS
Be at the side door at seven o'clock. People who were here last night get first picks. Then it's first come, first serve.
TOM
Man, it's cold out here!
DENNIS
We can't open up until seven o'clock. I'm sorry.
JULIA

From the shadows
Seven o'clock! Seven o'clock! Hey! I know a word game called seven o'clock! Anybody wanna play?
TOM
So I just wait out here?
DENNIS
It's warm at the Free Kitchen. You can get some dinner there; it's just around the corner.
NEIGHBOR
Free beds, free kitchens—the bums on Mars are hearin' this is the place to come if you wanna freeload. Who needs it? This was a solid neighborhood 'til you folks moved in with your free-for-all flophouse!
DENNIS
Ignoring the neighbor, to TOM
Why'n't you go get some dinner? Come back at seven.
TOM
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
TOM disappears. DENNIS sticks his head out, watching him go. LARRAINE enters from the hallway, sees DENNIS.
LARRAINE
Excuse me?
DENNIS
Oh! Hi!
LARRAINE
I'm looking for Dennis Hill?
DENNIS
Disentangling himself from the window
I'm Dennis. Are you the volunteer for tonight?
LARRAINE
  Yes. I'm Larraine.
  DENNIS steps down. They shake hands.

DENNIS
  Have you been trained?
LARRAINE
  One session.
DENNIS
  You're a pro.
LARRAINE
  I'm sorry I'm late. I know I was supposed to be here by six, but—
  HATTIE emerges from the shadows, speaking over LARRAINE.

LARRAINE
  —my roommate had some car trouble, then I got caught in a traffic jam, you know that only seems to happen when you're in a terrific hurry. I couldn't believe it. Well, where do I start?
HATTIE
  Six o'clock Dennis, don't forget. I'll get Annie from the sitter, but you've got the car, so stop by my sister's by six at the latest and get the baby. She's got class at 6:30 and I don't want to make her late, okay? Six?

DENNIS
  Shit!
LARRAINE
  Pardon me?
DENNIS
  I'm sorry, Larraine, I just remembered something. I've gotta make an urgent phone call. Here.
  DENNIS digs for a large batch of keys, throws them at LARRAINE, who catches them.

DENNIS
  One of those'll open the kitchen at the far end of the hall. Get some coffee going, will you? The big forty-cup urn. I've gotta call my wife.
  LARRAINE looks at the keys and DENNIS, shrugs; exits. DENNIS is on the phone.

DENNIS
  Hattie? Do you have the baby? I know, I know. I'm sorry, Hat, I just forgot to pick him up. I don't believe it finally happened. I really just forgot. It shouldn't—it won't happen again. Is everything okay there? Yeah, I've got him here. (He picks up the

DENNIS hangs up, stares at the phone.

DENNIS  To himself

It's gone too far. People climbing in through windows, forgetting the baby—Dennis, you forgot your own son! Well, I knew he was in good hands. Lighten up a bit, huh?

BERNARD's phantom enters, dribbling a basketball.

BERNARD

Lighten up, Denny. Don'tcha know how to play no more? C'mon, le's shoot a few. Bet Ah can beat the crap outta ya. Ah'll even do it sober! Ha!

DENNIS smiles to himself, puts his hand to his nose.

DENNIS

He broke my fuckin' nose. Talk about sober.

LARRAINE dashes in. She is damp. BERNARD moves into the shadows.

LARRAINE

Hey Dennis?

DENNIS

Yeah?

LARRAINE

The hot water faucet—came off in my hand. (She holds up the fixture.) There's hot water spraying all over the place.

DENNIS

Shit! (To the shadows) Anything else?

He dashes off, leaving LARRAINE, who looks around, puzzled.

LARRAINE

Is someone there? I thought the shelter didn't open until—

She is drowned out by BERNARD, who is pounding on the door, shouting.

BERNARD

Seven o'clock! C'mon, it's seven o'clock an' it's bitchin' cold out here!

LARRAINE hesitates, panicky. DENNIS reenters, holding a piece of faucet. He is wet.

DENNIS

Larraine, could you— (Seeing her hesitation) You haven't opened before?
LARRAINE
There's always a first time.

DENNIS
It's that or the floods.
LARRAINE  On her way to the door
You're already wet.
They exchange smiles. LARRAINE goes to the door, puts her hand on the knob, draws a breath.
End Scene I.

SCENE II.

The action continues from the end of Scene I. LARRAINE opens the door and the guests enter: IKE, LEE, CASSIE, TOM, JULIA, WAYNE. They move in slow, stylized movement. LARRAINE greets them, they get settled. The blankets get distributed. The stuffed animal disappears among CASSIE’s belongings in the confusion.

LARRAINE changes her scarf, or some piece of clothing to help indicate a passage of time. DENNIS is not present. It is 7:15 PM in the shelter, one week later. There are pads spread out on all available floor space, each pad defining a small, distinct territory. LEE is lying on her pad, playing solitaire. TOM is on his pad, reading. JULIA, IKE and WAYNE are at the tables. JULIA and IKE are playing backgammon. WAYNE is watching TV. CASSIE sits off to one side, knitting and watching the comings and goings, singing to herself. TV note: The TV faces upstage, so that the picture cannot be seen, but the sound, at a low level or louder when specified, is constant throughout the scenes when the shelter is in operation. Presently, there is a hockey game on.

LARRAINE closes the door, moves into the room, a little uncomfortable. She goes to a central spot, looks at a notebook lying on the table, listens for a moment to CASSIE’s song.

CASSIE
This summer I went swimming,
This summer I almost drowned,
But I kicked my feet, and I held my breath,
and I moved my arms around,
Yes, I moved my arms around.

CASSIE continues her song. LARRAINE holds the notebook up.

LARRAINE
Has everyone signed in?
No response, except from CASSIE, who stops her song, looks at LARRAINE.

JULIA Playing backgammon with IKE
Haha! Double fours!

IKE
Shee...it.....

CASSIE
Sign you life away.

LARRAINE To CASSIE
Excuse me?

LARRAINE timidly moves toward CASSIE, who looks at her suspiciously. LEE intercepts.

LEE
Don’t mind her.

LARRAINE
No?

LEE
Cassie wasn’t exactly talking to you. If you know what I mean.

LARRAINE Confused, looks around. No one is forthcoming with confirmation. She turns back to LEE.

Have you signed in?

JULIA
That guy all the way around?

IKE
Yup. An’ look who’s followin’.

LEE
Yes, I signed in. Weren’t you here last week?

LARRAINE
Yeah—the night the plumbing broke.

LEE
And you’re back! Congratulations, Miss! Or is it Ms?

LARRAINE
Larraine is just fine.

LEE
Larraine. Pretty name, Larraine.
LARRAINE
   Well, thank you. (Loudly, to the room at large) Is there any-one who hasn't signed in?
IKE
   No! Julia! Wha'd you do ta those dice? Huh?
LEE
   I'm collecting pretty names. My daughter's pregnant.
LARRAINE
   Congratulations! I won't sign nothing . . .
   Sign your life away.
   LARRAINE attempts a smile, but loses her ability to maintain it; she lets it go, replaces the book on the table. There is a pounding on the door. She jumps up to get it. While she is gone, other conversations continue.
IKE
   New volunteer, Lee?
LEE
   She was here last week. You ought to try to remember peo-ple, Ike. Good exercise for your brain.
IKE
   Yeah. He rolls the dice.
   Shit! Can't take it.
IKE looks back to LEE; JULIA rolls.
IKE
   I make it a point not to remember someone 'til they've been around at least three weeks. I'd justa soon never meet another new volunteer. I'd justa soon be outta this place b'fore I git ta know another soul.
JULIA
   In with three and send that one back.
IKE
   What you doin' ta me, girl?
JULIA
   Beating the pants off you.
IKE                 Grinning
   I hope not. These're the only pants I got.
TOM
   Way I see it, there's two ways to get out of here.
JULIA               To IKE
   Take your turn.
   To TOM
We’re not in jail, you know.

TOM

Ever heard of a priori knowledge?

IKE LEE

Huh? Kant.

JULIA

Sounds Italian to me.

TOM rolls the dice.

CASSIE

Run your life on a roll a the dice.

TOM

It means knowing something because you figured it out; deduced it. Not because you experienced it.

IKE

Shit. Stuck again.

JULIA laughs.

LEE

So?

TOM

So I figure that in order—look, if you really want to get outta this place, you either sweat your butt off doing shit work for minimum wage or less—and wind up back where you started. Or . . . or, you deduce the way out. Make the quantum leap into possibilities that come out of reasoning, not out of experience. This isn’t just another desperate job hunt. There’s more to it than that.

JULIA

Double sixes.

IKE

Fuck you.

CASSIE

Roll of the dice and a spin of the wheel . . .

LEE

What’s that you’ve been reading, Tom?

TOM

Ever hear of Immanuel Kant?

BERNARD enters, followed by LARRAINE.

BERNARD carries a package.

BERNARD

M’friends! M’friends!

Everyone looks up except WAYNE, who remains glued to the TV.

WAYNE Muttering
Watch the volume!

BERNARD

M'brothers an' sisters!

CASSIE

I'm no one's sister.

TOM

Where's he been?

BERNARD

I want everyone's undivided attention.

IKE

You got it, Bernard!

JULIA

I'll finish you off later, Ikey.

BERNARD

I see some stragglers.

BERNARD crosses in front of the TV, halts, effectively blocking the picture.

WAYNE

Git outta the way ... I'm watching.

BERNARD

A minute a yer time, tha's all Ah'm askin', friend.

WAYNE

Wait 'til the commercial! C'mon, I jus' missed that goal!

CASSIE

Rude ... rude ... rude ...

BERNARD

Jus' one minute!

TOM

Aw, lay off him, man!

IKE

The main man has somethin' ta say, Tom! Listen ta him!

BERNARD

Ah did some shoppin' today.

CASSIE

He means stealing.

LARRAINE has been watching all this closely, and is the only one actually paying attention to CASSIE.

BERNARD

I got a present for everyone here.

JULIA

Bernard, with your first paycheck!
BERNARD
Twenny one dollas cash ain't quite a paycheck, Jules.

LARRAINE Drawn in
Where did you get it?

LEE
Bernard spent yesterday cleaning out an old woman's apartment.

IKE
I saw it, man, it musta been sixty years a garbage.

LARRAINE
I meant the present.

BERNARD
It's for everybody!

JULIA
What a lovely gesture.

IKE
So what is it?

BERNARD withdraws a cartoon section wrapped package from the bag as he speaks.

BERNARD
Somethin' I've heard many people wishin' for lately. People wantin' a break from Backgammon an' TV. Somethin' which we have the Tri-State regional champion of right here in our midst.

JULIA To herself
Ah . . . no . . .

CASSIE
Somebody knows something.

LARRAINE
What is it?

LEE
Who gets to open it?

TOM
Julia.

JULIA
No, not me—someone else.

BERNARD
Here! Someone open it!

*Silence. A moment of awkwardness. BERNARD goes to TOM.*

BERNARD
Here, schoolboy, put away yer books an' open this.

BERNARD takes TOM's book; TOM jumps up.
TOM

Hey, give that back!

BERNARD

Jus' holdin' it while ya open the present. Hell. Ah ain’t gonna steal yer (BERNARD looks at the book) James Bond. “On Her Majesty’s Secret Service,” huh?

TOM snatches the book.

CASSIE

Ever hear of Immanuel Kant?

IKE

He didn’t write that! Did he?

TOM glowers at CASSIE, embarrassed; TV fills the silence. Finally, LEE takes the package, breaking the tension.

LEE

Okay, okay! I’m elected!

BERNARD holds the package out to LEE who takes it, begins to rip the paper.

JULIA

Save the paper!

IKE

It’s just newspaper!

TOM

Maybe she wants to read the comics.

JULIA

I don’t read that kind of junk.

The package is unwrapped—it is a Scrabble set.

LEE

Scrabble! I don’t remember the last time—well, yes I do.

IKE

Wow! Who plays?

BERNARD

Julia is a champion at Scrabble.

JULIA

Those are expensive, Bernard, you shouldn’t have.

LEE

I love word games. Used to do crossword puzzles by the stack. I did the Times puzzle in ink! Good. I was getting tired of cards and dice.

CASSIE

Thief!

During the following sequence of dialogue, TOM
creeps back to his pad with his book, squirrels it away in a knapsack full of books, extracts a different book, a large hard-bound version of the collected "Buck Rogers In The Twenty-Fifth Century" comics, casually leafs through it.

The dialogue is spoken very quickly, each person stepping on the lines of the person before.

IKE
    You wanna teach us how ta play, Jule?

JULIA
    We're not finished with this game.

IKE
    I'm a goner—I'll concede.

JULIA
    No. We'll play it out.

CASSIE
    He stole it.

BERNARD
    Come on, let's play?

IKE
    It's really boring to watch your empire dissolve.

LARRAINE
    Bernard?

JULIA
    No, I can't play—I don't want to!

BERNARD
    Why not?

CASSIE
    He couldn't afford that.

LARRAINE
    I'd like to speak with you, Bernard.

JULIA
    I don't feel like it!

BERNARD
    I bought it for you, girl!

CASSIE
    Lifted it!

JULIA
    I hate Scrabble!

LARRAINE
    Bernard!
BERNARD
What!
LARRAINE Surprised at her own boldness
Could we talk?
BERNARD
I am talkin'! You are interruptin'!
LEE To IKE
What's going on?
IKE
Somethin' bigger than Backgammon.
BERNARD
Julia!
JULIA
What?
BERNARD
What's goin' on?
LEE
You know how to play Scrabble?
IKE
I think so.
LEE
I can teach you if you've forgotten.
IKE and LEE put aside the backgammon set, start to open the Scrabble.
JULIA
Nothing, Bernard, it's not you! I just don't want to play!
BERNARD
Since when?
WAYNE goes to the TV, turns up the volume several points.
LARRAINE
Whoa!
WAYNE
Can't hear m'self think!
TOM
That's because you don't know how! Turn it down!
LARRAINE
Hold it!!!
Silence, except for the TV, which blares into the vacuum. LARRAINE is stunned at her own effect.
LARRAINE
There are people trying to sleep, or read. We have to consider them.

WAYNE turns the TV down a notch.

LARRAINE
A little more, please.

WAYNE
Shit. Reluctantly he turns it down a hair more.

LEE
C'mon Wayne, grow up.

LEE goes to the TV, turns it down to a respectable volume.

BERNARD
That's why I thought a nice, quiet game like Scrabble would be jus' the ticket—

LARRAINE
It was a real nice gesture.

BERNARD
It was a complete act, not just a gesture.

JULIA
It was fine, but—

BERNARD
I paid for it!

JULIA
I know you did.

BERNARD
Did you hear? I paid for it!

JULIA
So I heard!

BERNARD
Here! (He grabs the bag, delves into it) Here's the fuckin' receipt! It's clean, you can play!

JULIA
I said I believed you!

BERNARD
So?

JULIA
So I've got to get some laundry done.

JULIA exits off left. A beat of silence. TOM looks up into the silence.
TOM
Hey! Anyone ever heard of Flash Gordon in the twenty-fifth century?
BERNARD Still angry
Jus' you, Space-man.
TOM
I'm no spaceman.
BERNARD
Yeah, then how'd the hell you land here?
LEE
Leave him be, Bernard.
BERNARD
Fuck off, Grandma.
LEE
Don't call me that!
The door to the outside opens very slowly, tenta-
tively. A nicely dressed woman peeks around the
door. It is GAIL.
BERNARD
You're not gonna tell me yer too young, are ya? You're not
gonna lie?
GAIL
Excuse me?
LEE Can I help you?
LARRAINE Gail!
GAIL
Larraine, I've got to talk to you.
LARRAINE meets GAIL in the doorway.
LARRAINE
I didn't expect to see you here.
GAIL
It's not a social call.
LARRAINE
No.
IKE To LEE
Is that a word?
LEE
Look it up!
GAIL
I just came from the house.
LARRAINE
Is everything okay?
CASSIE
  Brew, trouble, brew, brew.
WAYNE
  Sshh!
GAIL
  I was going to take a shower.
LARRAINE
  So?
GAIL
  I was going to take a shower and I happened to pull a damp
towel off the rack. What do you think I found?
CASSIE
  Simmer and bubble, I smell trouble.
LARRAINE
  Tell me.
IKE
  Hold it! You mean you can take tone and turn it into stone?
LARRAINE
  All it takes is an “s”.
GAIL
  Lice, Larraine.
LARRAINE
  Lice? Are you sure?
GAIL
  I know lice. I am a beautician. Look—maybe this is no big
deal for you, but I’ve got a business to worry about. Maybe it’s
okay if you bring lice into your office, maybe they won’t hurt your
word processing. But if you bring them into our apartment and I
carry them to the salon, I’ll be up the creek!
LARRAINE
  Me? I brought them home? You don’t know that.
GAIL
  Well where do you think they came from? Look around you,
huh?
LARRAINE
  Gail! Sshhh.

          JULIA reenters, looks around, speaks to TOM.

JULIA
  Who’s she?
TOM
  Sshh . . .
LARRAINE

Look, it doesn't matter where they came from. If we've got lice, we'll deal with them. We won't let this get out of hand; you won't take them to work. Perfectly respectable people get lice all the time.

GAIL

These lice did not come from respectable people! I don't understand you, Larraine. I mean, I care as much as you do about poor people. Why do you have to go sleep with them, for God's sake?

LARRAINE turns, terrified that the guests have overheard. Only TOM and JULIA seem to be listening. LARRAINE looks right at JULIA for a moment, as though searching for and finding her answer.

LARRAINE

At 6:30 this place is just a church basement with hideous yellow cafe curtains. But look—an hour later—it's home. It happens every night. A miraculous transformation. I can't figure it out—they live out of knapsacks and paper bags. What do they bring to the place?

GAIL

Looking directly at TOM

They bring vermin!

LARRAINE grabs GAIL by the arm, pulls her outside.

LARRAINE

Is that all you can think about? Look, I'll pay for the fumigation!

GAIL

It's not the money!

LARRAINE

Exactly! So what is it?

GAIL breaks away, leaves. LARRAINE calls after her.

LARRAINE

What is it, Gail? Answer me!

GAIL is gone. LARRAINE takes a moment to compose herself.

BERNARD

Ever had lice, Wayne.

WAYNE

Lice're my best friends—they don't make any noise.
CASSIE
Vermin are living creatures!
IKE
Hey! What a great word—V-E-R—shit! Not quite.
The door opens, LARRAINE steps in. Silence.
Beat. JULIA moves first, toward LARRAINE.
JULIA
Hey, Larraine, you know how to make that stupid washing machine work?
LARRAINE
Well I can look. I'm not much with plumbing though.
They exit together. The room breathes.
TOM
My sister got lice once.
She was a VISTA volunteer.
She worked with poor people in the Appalachian Mountains.
I'm on my way to Boston right now, to see her. She's got a three thousand volume library.
Right in her own house. No more lice for her!

Last summer I almost drowned,
But I held my breath, and I kicked my feet,
And I moved my arms around,
Yeah, moved my arms around.
Oh, I held my breath and I kicked my feet,
And I moved my arms around.

Quiet settles over the shelter. End Scene II.

SCENE III.

Silence, except for the TV. Slowly, everyone begins to move—the same stylized movement used earlier.
Blankets are unrolled, the TV turned off, etc. The lights dim to black as the last stragglers lie down on their mats; LARRAINE sleeps on a pad near the door. Silence, except for the noise of sleeping, coughing, groaning, shifting, turning. These are not deep sleeps. A scratching sound. Moonlight reveals JULIA, sitting on her pad, filing her nails.
She has a tiny disposable flashlight which she uses to inspect her handiwork. Finally she puts away her file, gets a folded piece of paper from under her pad. Carefully, silently, she gets up and, avoiding stepping on anyone else's pad, she makes her way to TOM's, where she crouches.
JULIA  *Whispering*
    Tom. Tom?
TOM
    Uh? *(Not waking)* Get out of here with that stuff. I don’t want any more.
JULIA
    Tom, it’s Julia!
    *A loud snore from WAYNE makes her jump.*
JULIA
    Tom!
TOM  *Rousing*
    Wha . . . Who is it?
JULIA
    Julia.
TOM
    ‘Sa middle a th’ night.
JULIA
    Yeah—I don’t know.
    *TOM sits up, yawns, squints at JULIA.*
TOM
    ‘Sthere a fire, or what? It’s three AM, Julia!
JULIA
    I need your help!
TOM
    My help? Now?
JULIA
    Can you come and talk?
TOM
    I’m asleep!
    *Another snore from LEE; a groan from IKE.*
JULIA
    Come on—just for a minute. Please?
TOM
    Okay, okay. Go on. I’m coming.
    *TOM rises, clutching a blanket around himself, follows JULIA into the office.*
TOM
    Yeah?
JULIA
    I need your help.
TOM
    My help? Why?
JULIA
You're my friend.

TOM
I am?

*Pause. A sneeze from CASSIE.*

JULIA
Sure. I have a lot of respect for you, Tom.

TOM
What sort of respect?

JULIA
Well—your reading, your imagination . . .

TOM
Yeah?

JULIA
So I wondered—But you mustn't tell a soul.

TOM
Tell them what?

JULIA
That I asked you.

TOM
Asked me what?

*Pause. JULIA gathers her courage.*

JULIA
Well, most people around here think I know a lot about a lot of things.

TOM
Reaching to her
You're just a kid, Julia. That's okay.

JULIA
Pulling away
It's not that!

TOM
It's not?

JULIA
Look at this.

JULIA reaches into a pocket, withdraws a folded envelope, then a sheet of paper from the envelope: a blank form.

JULIA
It's an application for a job.

TOM
What kind of job?

JULIA
Doesn't matter. Housecleaning.
TOM
  Can't you do better?
JULIA
  What are my choices?
TOM
  You're smart, Julia!
JULIA
  Smart enough to be a whore? I had some friends into that. What a life—plenty of cash, pimps who treat 'em fine. Could be me. But it's not!
TOM
  I didn't mean that.
JULIA
  No. What did you mean?
      *An awkward silence.* TOM reaches out, takes JULIA's hand, gentle.
TOM
  I'm sorry.
      *Another silence, less awkward.* IKE stirs and moans. JULIA lights her flashlight.
JULIA
  Don't laugh.
TOM
  Me?
JULIA
  I need help filling this out.
TOM
  What kind of help?
JULIA
  You read me the questions, I'll tell you the answers, you write them down. Neatly. Like you were a girl.
      TOM looks at JULIA, realizing her illiteracy and shame.
TOM
  But the Scrabble?
      TOM censors himself.
JULIA
  Bernard is not my father! It's none of his business whether I play Scrabble or not!
      TOM nods, understanding, looks at the application, picks up a pen, leans in to the beam of the flashlight.
TOM

Last name?

JULIA relaxes, leans forward to TOM. Lights fade, the flashlight goes out. End Scene III.

SCENE IV.

The lights return—morning light. In transition movement, the guests put away pads and blankets, etc., and clear out. A beat. Empty shelter. DENNIS enters, immediately begins searching for something. LARRAINE follows quickly.

LARRAINE

What are you looking for? Can I help?

DENNIS

Were you here the night the sink broke and I forgot to pick up my baby son?

LARRAINE

One month ago today. Today is my anniversary.

DENNIS

Is it? Well, Bunny-boo, who has been my daughter Annie’s constant bedmate since she was born, disappeared that night.

LARRAINE

And she hasn’t slept in a month?

DENNIS

We tried a replacement. Annie didn’t like him because he had too many eyes (two!) and he’s scratchy. We pulled off one eye and washed him half a dozen times, but she’s not easily bought. In the interest of future restful nights I thought I’d better look here. Who knows, maybe he followed me in.

LARRAINE

Good idea.

They both look in silence for a minute.

DENNIS

What are you doing here in the middle of the day?

LARRAINE

I had the day off. Found myself at the church door. Do you think he’d have gotten stuck at the back of the filing cabinet?

DENNIS

Who knows? It’s worth a try. You’ve been here a lot in the past month. You better be careful. I don’t want to lose you to burnout.

LARRAINE

I thought about that. It’s funny—but each time I come here I
find it harder to leave. I keep getting tangled up in these lives, these relationships. Suddenly, they're my life, my relationships. I know they don't have anything, but I keep thinking they have more than I do. In some mysterious way. Nothing but files in there.

DENNIS
    No. You're being pretty romantic for someone who sits at a computer all day.

LARRAINE
    It isn't a computer, it's a word processor.

DENNIS
    Pardon me.

LARRAINE
    Computers are a little more romantic. More possibilities. I need some romance, I guess.

DENNIS
    Is that why you come here?

LARRAINE

DENNIS
    Shoot. No Bunny-boo. Peace—do you want to trade places?

LARRAINE
    Do you type?

DENNIS shrugs. DENNIS and LARRAINE exit.
End Scene IV.

SCENE V.

Outside the shelter, downstage of it, CASSIE runs on, breathless, carrying a handful of money—bills—and a pack of Marlboros, in addition to several bags full of miscellaneous food and clothing. LEE hurries on in pursuit.

LEE
    Cassie! Cassandra!

CASSIE
    Ssshhh. . .

LEE
    Wait!

    LEE reaches for CASSIE, who pulls away.

CASSIE
    Hush!
LEE

Why'd you take off like that? I was still looking at the birthday cards.

CASSIE

I had to.

LEE

Why? What did you do?

CASSIE

Cigarettes . . .

LEE

No! You didn't!

CASSIE

I needed cigarettes.

LEE

But you can't go around stealing, Cass.

*She waves the crumpled mass of bills at LEE.*

CASSIE

I didn't steal! I paid for the cigarettes.

LEE

So what's the matter?

CASSIE

I gave them a twenty, and they git so mad when I do that. But I got scared they'd ask me for the right change or something, or say I didn't pay enough. But twenty's more than enough, I know Marlboros cost less than that, so I jus' dropped the twenty on the coun' er an' got outta there as fast as I could! An' the guy yelled after me to count my change, and I can't do that! I can't! I hate money!

LEE

You paid twenty dollars for a pack of cigarettes?

CASSIE

It's not the money. I don't care about the money. He yelled at me. I can't stand people yelling at me.

LEE

I want to go back and find a card for Larraine, and I can get the change for you.

CASSIE

I don't want the change!

LEE

Okay. Okay.

*CASSIE pulls a few bills from the wad, stuffs the rest into her pocket.*
CASSIE
Here, pay for the card with this. It's from me, too. I've gotta go.

CASSIE turns to go.

LEE
Wait.

CASSIE
What?

LEE
Why do you hate money so much?

CASSIE Shrugs
Makes people mean.

LEE
I used to have money, you know.

CASSIE
So?

LEE
I let it all go—gave it away, or let people take it, like you do.

CASSIE
Why?

LEE
Thought what you think, I guess. I blamed all my problems on it.

CASSIE
Yeah? How much did you have?

LEE
Four bank accounts, money market accounts, mutual funds, stock portfolios, CDs, IRAs. I lived in a split level ranch house on a private drive. Sundeck, pool, two cars. Husband. Four great kids.

CASSIE
What're you trying to tell me?

LEE
My daughter calls me a derelict. Won't let me near my grandkids. Maybe she'd feel differently if I had held onto some of that money.

CASSIE
So? That's your problem!

LEE
And it's yours, too.

CASSIE
Mine?
LEE

Seems like it's a sin wasting all that money.

CASSIE

Don't talk sin to me!

LEE

You gotta count your money, Cassie, and put it in a bank. Use it to help get what you need.

CASSIE

You think I can buy that?

CASSIE laughs, a robust, uncharacteristic laugh. She exits, still laughing.

LEE

Twenty bucks for a pack a Marlboros. Five lives for a double martini.

LEE exits. End Scene V.

SCENE VI.

The shelter, about 6:45 PM  FATHER J., the senior priest of the parish, enters, looks around.

FATHER J.

It's really not very large, Dennis.

DENNIS, following, carrying his briefcase.

FATHER J.

Tell me.

I mean, twenty pre-schoolers need a lot of room.

DENNIS

Considerably more than thirty adults?

FATHER J.

You know what I'm saying.

DENNIS

Why are you so set on this pre-school idea? I've fought the city, the neighbors and universal apathy to keep this place going, Father. I never thought I'd have to fight you.

FATHER J.

The parish has other commitments and priorities, Dennis. I have obligations to them, too. Maybe this is the push you need to get looking for a twenty-four hour house.

DENNIS

A push. Just what I need. The question is, Father, where do you imagine I'm being pushed to?
FATHER J.
Is that a veiled threat?

DENNIS  Smiling
Read my lips, Father.

FATHER J.
I think I hear you.

LARRAINE enters, carrying a small brown paper lunch bag aloft.

LARRAINE
Dennis! What is this? I went to the freezer to get the cof-
fee—

DENNIS
There was a hands-off sign on that, Larraine.

LARRAINE
I was curious.

DENNIS
Immediately after this morning's budget meeting, where I watched twenty-five percent of our funding disappear and saw plans to put a day care center down here, I collided with three members of the Neighborhood Coalition, headed up by Mrs. Dempsey, who (DENNIS snatches the bag from LARRAINE) was wildly waving this brown paper bag in my face, yelling "Human feces on my front steps! What has this neighborhood come to?" I explained that we have warm clean bathrooms in the shelter and that taking a dump outside in sub-zero January winds isn't anyone's idea of fun. I wanted to look her straight in the eye and say "Shit, Mrs. Dempsey."

FATHER J.
Instead you saved the bag.

DENNIS
I thought it might come in handy.

FATHER J.  Reaches for the bag
May I?

DENNIS
You have a plan?

FATHER J.
I have several. First I'm going to dispose of this.

DENNIS
Shit.

FATHER J.
Exactly. I've got a meeting at seven. I'm late. We'll talk more later, Dennis. Good night, all.

FATHER J. exits.
DENNIS and LARRAINE
   Good night, Father.
DENNIS
   Thanks for doing the dirty work!
FATHER J.  *Off stage*
   Don’t mention it!
   DENNIS and LARRAINE are laughing.
DENNIS
   I would have thrown it away, you know.
LARRAINE
   You’re an incurable gentleman.
DENNIS
   Just a gutless professional social service provider. Tactful to my teeth.
   DENNIS sits heavily, a bit of a collapse.
DENNIS
   What I’m longing for at this moment is three days alone in a luxurious hotel suite. Thick towels, bathtub, featherbed, stereo—and a punching bag.
LARRAINE
   Would that solve everything?
DENNIS
   I never said it would.
   DENNIS stands, ready to go.
DENNIS
   Well, maybe I can at least go home and spend an evening and a night with Hattie and the kids. I think I need that. Do you feel ready to spend the night alone? The other volunteer cancelled.
LARRAINE  *Less certain than her words*
   Sure. I can handle it. I’ll hardly be alone, with thirty other people here. Don’t worry. Go on home.
DENNIS
   I don’t know what I’d do without you lately, Larraine.
LARRAINE
   I have a feeling you’d manage.
   *There is a pounding on an inside door, offstage.*
DENNIS
   Who the hell could that be? I don’t think I want to know. Would you get it?
LARRAINE
   Sure.
   LARRAINE hurries off. While she is gone, DEN-
HOME AT SEVEN

NIS begins to set up coffee, etc., listens to the voices that soon come from offstage.

LARRAINE
Does he know you're coming?

ANCHOR
We spoke about coming out sometime during the day, oh, maybe a week ago. But then we thought how much more interesting an evening would be.

LARRAINE
What did you say your name was?

ANCHOR
Lister. Fred Lister. (Pause) Of course—now you recognize me!

DENNIS
Shit.

LARRAINE
Just wait here a moment, please.

LARRAINE appears, unaware that ANCHOR and CAMERA have followed her, are already "scoping the place out."

LARRAINE
Some people from Channel Six News are here—Dennis, how do we get rid of them?

DENNIS
Larraine—

ANCHOR
You must be Mr. Hill.

LARRAINE whirls around, astonished.

LARRAINE
I asked you to wait!

ANCHOR
We just wanted to get a glimpse—so where is this shelter?

LARRAINE
This is it!

ANCHOR
This?

DENNIS
Mr. Lister.

ANCHOR
Oh, Fred, please.

DENNIS
Fred.

ANCHOR
And this is Sue Evans.

DENNIS
Hi...

CAMERA
So good to meet you, Mr. Hill.
DENNIS
Dennis.
CAMERA
Dennis.

_They shake hands. A feeling of absolutely false warmth. Pause._

DENNIS

Look, Fred, it's just great So—shall we get down to that you want to do a story on business?

ANCHOR

So shall we get down to business?

DENNIS

Awkward pause. Each defers to the other.

Look, we really can't have you in here with your camera and microphone without any advance notice. It's not fair to the guests.

ANCHOR

We're doing these people a favor, we're giving them a break. You yourself mentioned the need for some positive publicity. It's bound to stir up some responses in town, get you some donations, and some political support. I gather a City Council hearing on the homeless problem is coming up.

LARRAINE

But you don't just invade people's—

DENNIS

Larraine!

ANCHOR

We did a story last month on a family of ten burned out of their house. Lost the father and two kids. Those folks are safe and warm in donated shelter and clothing that poured in after our story was broadcast. Folks want to help.

DENNIS

That's true. But you have to ask people's permission before you move in with the cameras.

ANCHOR

I'm asking your permission now.

DENNIS

Yeah, but I'm not the one—

ANCHOR

And nothing will be aired unless the subject signs a release form.

DENNIS

I understand that, but—
ANCHOR

Listen, there are plenty of other stories to cover in this city tonight. We chose this one because we think it's important, and it's human. It's always good to hit the viewers with a reminder that there are others less fortunate—keeps us all honest, right? You can't afford to lock out the public. You need them to keep up this fine work.

A pounding on the outside door. LARRAINE glances at her watch.

LARRAINE

It's 7:05, Dennis.

ANCHOR

Just say the word, and we'll be gone. And I assure you—we won't disturb you again.

Another pound.

LARRAINE

It's five below without the wind.

DENNIS is caught for a moment, unable to decide. Finally, he moves.

DENNIS

Please, try to respect their privacy. Remember, they're not expecting you. Some will not want to be filmed.

ANCHOR

Sure. Okay, great, let's go Sue!

ANCHOR

Try going for this angle, catch them as they're coming in the door. Kind of a give-me-your-tired image. Then we'll go for the individuals, the close up one on ones.

DENNIS

Look, when you open up, try to catch as many people as you can and warn them about this. Don't scare them away—just try to get them informed.

LARRAINE heads for the door.

LARRAINE

Okay.

DENNIS

Ready?
LARRAINE opens the door. Immediately the camera and lights come on. LARRAINE tries to speak to the guests, who are too cold to stop and listen.

LARRAINE  To the passing stream 
There are some TV reporters inside—

DENNIS  To CAMERA 
What about respecting privacy?

ANCHOR 
We need a sense of the group entering, the floodgates opening. Great!

CASSIE is the first person in. She covers her head and face with her coat, scoots past the camera, which swings around to follow her. But she remains covered. The camera turns back, catching IKE and BERNARD head on.

IKE  BERNARD  
Don't point that thing at me!

IKE  
Ain't we gonna get some warning b'fore the camera rolls?  
They turn their backs to the camera, blocking traffic.

BERNARD  
Hey! Larraine! Larraine!  

LARRAINE  From the door; LEE next to her  
Yeah?

BERNARD  
Tell this asshole to call off the public eye!

LARRAINE  
Bernard, they have permission.

BERNARD  
Permission to do what?

LARRAINE  
Kill the camera, would you?

IKE  
Before someone kills it for you!

LARRAINE  
Ike, I told you there were reporters—
The camera is turned off.

IKE

We figured they'd ask us if we wanted our pictures took.

BERNARD

I'd call this an invasion of privacy.

TOM has entered behind BERNARD and IKE.

TOM

Whoever's invading my privacy can please step aside. I got places to go and books to read.

CASSIE

What privacy?

ANCHOR Latching onto TOM, who is trying to get past.

Sir? Sir?

TOM

Who the hell're you?

ANCHOR

I'm with the News Action Mobile Investigative Team. So good to meet you.

CASSIE

Good to meet who?

ANCHOR

Tell me, sir, how do you consider our genuine concern for people like you an invasion of privacy?

CASSIE

I'm not like him! I want a cigarette!

TOM

You're in my space and that's my pad, and you're taking pictures of me without my consent.

ANCHOR

We asked for and received permission from the church to be here—

BERNARD

Do you see any church sleepin' down here? This may be their buildin', but it's m'face you're usin' and I don' wan' it on TV.

IKE

Shit.

CASSIE

I want a cigarette; any one have a cigarette?

BERNARD goes to the TV, turns it on, settles in.

DENNIS reappears, watches from a distance.

ANCHOR To IKE

Sir?
IKE
Yeah.

ANCHOR
I'm wondering if you could share the story of how you came to these circumstances for me, and the viewers at home.

IKE
Home? Huh!

Pause. Others are nearby, watching, reluctant to get involved. IKE looks at DENNIS, then at LARRAINE. DENNIS shrugs.

LARRAINE
Say what you like, Ike. You're standing up for us.

Silence.

CASSIE
I want a cigarette.

ANCHORMAN digs into a pocket, produces a cigarette, hands it to JULIA.

ANCHOR
Give that to the—woman—over there, would you?

JULIA
Smiles.

Sure.

JULIA hands the cigarette to CASSIE, who inspects it closely.

ANCHOR
To IKE

Well? Have you made a decision?

CASSIE
It's not the right one!

CASSIE tosses the cigarette. JULIA, TOM and LEE laugh. LARRAINE suppresses a smile.

CASSIE
I wanna cigarette!

IKE
You want ta know my story? You wouldn't believe my story if I told ya! Okay, okay. Well, to start, I was born a dope addict. Didn't grow into it, I was that way from the time I was still curled up inside my Momma. Got it from my Momma. Pure as Mother's milk? Shit . . . you know I'm a loser from the start, right? Wrong! Went cold turkey, age ten, got m'folks d'clared unfit, and beat my ass to a foster home where I grew three inches in six months and got all A's in school. M'foster Mom used to say "You watch Ikey when everthin's quiet an' still, an' you cin see his brain a-churnin' an' his lages a-growin'." She was real proud a me, she sure was.
As IKE tells his story, there are growing signs of hilarity behind the ANCHOR and the CAMERA, from the others.

ANCHOR
I don't understand, then, if you were overcoming those odds—what terrific odds. You're a very strong person, Mister . . . ?

IKE
Ruther not have m'name in all them reports. It's not important. 'Cause my story is the story of every man, woman and child here.

Burst of silent applause and hysteria from upstage observers. DENNIS has been drawn into their activity.

ANCHOR
I'd like to hear that story. We'd all like to hear the story, and to see the man who is willing to speak.

ANCHOR signals CAMERA, who resumes shooting. DENNIS starts to intrude, but LEE holds him back, gesturing for him to wait and see. ANCHOR tries to interrupt IKE, unsuccessfully.

IKE
Man, I worked my fuckin’ sweaty ass off, every fuckin’ day, ass lickin’ an’ shit shovelin’ to stay on top in that lousy shit school. An’ what the hell happens? I git fuckin’ framed. Damn fuckin’ framed. Lousy stinkin’ goddamn narcotics were after me. My asshole “best friend” helped ’em. So all of a fuckin’ sudden, I’m shittin’ in a fuckin’ hellhouse of detention with a buncha asshole narcotics suckin’ my brain for a bunch a shit names I never heard of—

ANCHOR finally succeeds in interrupting, when IKE slows down.

ANCHOR
Excuse me.

IKE
As if waking

Yeah?

ANCHOR
Your language is a bit—harsh—for our purposes. Do you think you could tone it down a bit?

IKE
Too loud? Yeah, I'll try, but I got this voice from tryin’ to make m’self heard in that goddamn stinkin’ hellhole detention house. Had a carton fulla stinkin’ good citizenship an’ scholarship awards. M’fuckin’ foster brother stole ’em. Pawned ’em. Shit—
wanted the money to impress some little pussy so he could git into her hotpants.

ANCHOR signals CAMERA, who stops the filming. Long pause.

ANCHOR
Well, thank you anyway, Mister . . . uh . . .

IKE
'Snot important. Don'tcha wanna hear the rest?

ANCHOR
Another time. Actually, we do need your signature on this release form here.

IKE takes it, looks at it, hands it back.

IKE
Shit, man, I can't sign this.

ANCHOR
Oh?

IKE
No. All these years a not doin' nuthin', m'brain's just withered away. Don't know how to write no more. A mind is a terrible thing to waste, don't you know?

IKE grins, turns, walks away, and joins BERNARD at the TV, turns up the sound. Silence among the gathered guests. ANCHOR and CAMERA are stunned. Slowly, the guests move to their own pursuits. A phone rings, LARRAINE goes to answer it. DENNIS approaches ANCHOR.

DENNIS
Got yourself some good material, huh? Glad to be of help to you, I hope you can present it in an objective manner.—

ANCHOR
They both stop, embarrassed. LARRAINE reenters.

LARRAINE
It's your producer. Phone's in the office.

LARRAINE gestures. Anchor hurries off. Awkward silence. LEE approaches, addresses CAMERAWOMAN.

LEE
I always wanted to try my hand at that.

CAMERA
You?
Of course women weren't encouraged in that kind of job when I was getting started.

You don't think I've spent my whole life in places like this, do you?

Real estate. I was the top woman broker in the ten state region. I used to personally own five buildings. I've still got my key ring. Solid gold.

She pulls out the key ring, which hangs on a string around her neck.

No keys. Not one door I am trusted to unlock. Keys used to be the hub of my days. The empty ring feels heavier now than it ever did then.

What happened?

You think: you make a mistake, you can always go back, correct for it, change, repent, abstain. Sometimes the mistake is letting the door slam behind you when you've left the keys inside. You find yourself owning five buildings and having no place to go. Nowhere to be alone. But completely isolated.

Sounds scary.

It's the panic that'll make you really crazy.

Beat. Suddenly, LEE leans forward, grabs the CAMERAWOMAN by the arm.

You have a husband? Kids?

Yes—well my husband has custody.

Don't! Don't let anyone take them away? Get them back! Fight for them and keep them! Your children are more important than anything—or anyone. Don't let them go.
LEE is shaking the CAMERAWOMAN by her shoulders, speaking directly into her face.

CAMERA
Yeah. I'm working on that.
LEE relaxes, lets go, moves back.

ANCHOR returns.

CAMERA
Yeah. Me too.
LARRAINE and DENNIS exchange looks.

DENNIS
I did.

BERNARD
Whose side you on, man?

DENNIS
Yours.
BERNARD

How kin you say so when you invite asshole r'porters inta our place? This may be jus' a job ta you, but it's th' closest thing ta home we have.

DENNIS

One news spot reaches a lot of people—more than I can talk to in a year. Where do you think we get the bucks to run this place? Where do you think we find the volunteers, the donations, the political support?

BERNARD

I don't care, man. Tha's yer job, not mine! But if you wanna use me as yer poster boy, you better plan on checkin' with me first!

DENNIS

Yeah, next time I'll ask you, Bernard. You and everyone else. Next time I'll interview the interviewer first! I made a fuckin' mistake!

But you better think about something. You better not expect me and Larraine and the rest of the world to do it all for you forever if you aren't going to take some responsibility yourself.

To everyone

You all could have cooperated! You know how soon we'll get their help again?

BERNARD

Help! Man, Ike was crackin' you up with the rest of us!

DENNIS

Yeah. Ike's a clown. We're all a bunch of clowns. I laughed until I remembered I've got a wife and kids waiting at home for me. Kids I haven't seen in a week b'cause I've been here working my ass off to keep this place open.

BERNARD

Hey ol' man, Ah'll take m'pack and m'blankets and m'obligations elsewhere! Yer thinkin' about yer family, while Ah'm here thinkin' 'bout where I kin spend twelve hours to-morrow an' get me some food an' not get treated like rat shit. Don' talk ta me 'bout obligations, man! Don' start pullin' strings on me now!

BERNARD goes to his corner, assembles his belongings, preparing to go. IKE turns the TV up. CASSIE groans.
IKE
  Tom! “Goldfinger’s” on!
DENNIS  To LARRAINE
  I've got to get home. You need anything?
LARRAINE  Sad; a bit guilty
  I'm fine. G'night Dennis.
DENNIS
  Asshole reporters.
  LARRAINE goes to DENNIS, gives him an awkward hug.
DENNIS
  Thanks.
  DENNIS starts out, stops near BERNARD, who is about to leave.
DENNIS
  Don’t be an idiot, Bernard. I’m leaving. You don’t have to freeze to death to spite me.
  DENNIS exits.
LARRAINE  To DENNIS' back
  Thank you.
  LARRAINE catches CASSIE's eye from where she sits knitting. They smile. CASSIE looks away, uncomfortable with the contact. LARRAINE returns to the desk, sits, tired. End Scene VI.

SCENE VII.

Scene transition should indicate the passage of time, perhaps a month. The scene begins with LARRAINE seated at the desk, talking on the phone. There is some hushed activity in the shelter, from which LARRAINE is turned away. CASSIE, IKE, LEE, JULIA and TOM are huddled together, in conspiracy.

LARRAINE
  I know. I know it was important and I wanted to be there. Sure, let me talk to her. Hi. Cat? Listen, Cathy, I’m sorry to be missing the party. Let’s have lunch tomorrow, okay? Sure I mean it, Cathy, you’re the only sister I’ve got. Were you surprised? Of course I knew, silly, I planned it all. Yeah! Well, your birthday’s kind of hard to forget, you know. Twinsy. I love you too. No. No. Listen, Cathy, you’re not listening to me! I can’t leave now. The other volunteer never showed up, he’s got the flu, the neighbors are threatening to call the police, there’s a lot to get done. It just
happened to be February 17th. Yes. Just happened. Cat—don't get angry at me! I can't just pick up and leave. We'll talk about it tomorrow. I am here because I want to be. I have to be. Okay? No. No, I know it's not. Yeah. Listen, enjoy the party. Half the candles are for me, huh? Yeah. Yeah. Good night.

*She hangs up the phone, buries her head in her arms on the desk. Suddenly, a burst of light.*

**JULIA, LEE, IKE, TOM and CASSIE burst in,**

**JULIA carrying a small cake with candles.**

**ALL**

Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday, Larraine,
Happy Birthday to you!

*Wild applause. LARRAINE, caught entirely off guard, bursts into tears.*

**LEE**

Now don't cry, just when we're about to present the gifts!

**LARRAINE**

Who . . . ?

**LEE**

Just hush and listen.

First, to help you escape and forget the smells—some apple scented bubble bath!

*Wild cheers.*

**LARRAINE**

I don't know what to say.

**CASSIE**

Don't say anything. My turn.

From all of us to all of you—your very own voice-saving whistle on a chain.

*CASSIE blows the whistle. More cheers.*

**LARRAINE**

You guys!

**CASSIE**

We're not all guys!

**IKE**

And last, to go with the whistle. Come here, Larraine. Come here.

**LARRAINE does so.**

**IKE**

Your official badge. We now dub you the Sheriff of Shelter!
IKE pins a toy police badge on her. More excited applause.

LEE

Now, Sheriff, your first official duty is to cut that cake!

Laughter, applause. End Scene VII.

SCENE VIII.

Movement into middle of the night places. LARRAINE leaves, and is replaced by DENNIS. BERNARD is not present. DENNIS is asleep near the door. Snoring, coughing, etc. Suddenly, the telephone on the desk rings. JULIA sits bolt upright and screams. DENNIS struggles to his feet, stumbles across the room, accidentally stepping on TOM's pad. TOM sits up, furious and awake. The phone continues to ring.

TOM

Hey!

DENNIS

Sorry.

TOM

Fuck off!

DENNIS Lungs for the phone, picks it up.

Yeah? Hold on.

DENNIS puts down the phone, whispers to anyone who is awake.

It's okay. Just try to go back to sleep.

DENNIS Picks up the phone, whispers.

Bernard, why the hell are you calling? Yeah? Great, Bernard, what'm I supposed to do? Bail you out? Shit. (Pause. DENNIS listens.) I won't ask whose fault that was.

CASSIE sits up on her pad, begins to knit in the dark.

DENNIS

Where are you? Which precinct? (Pause) Christ, how'd you get all the way out there? Never mind, it doesn't matter.

Look Bernard, you get comfortable there, because I'm working by myself tonight, so I can't leave here 'til the morning. So I'll be out there first thing. (Pause) Listen, Bernard, you don't like it, you just call your other best friend—maybe someone else'll jump to get you out. I've got a responsibility to be here. I'll see you in the morning!

DENNIS hangs up, droops on the desk. Silence, ex-
cept for the click of CASSIE's knitting needles. CASSIE calls to him, very softly.

CASSIE
Dennis?

DENNIS
Yeah, Cassie?

CASSIE
I have to talk to you, Dennis.

DENNIS
Cassie, it's 2:30 in the morning.

CASSIE
Almost coy
Just take a month.

DENNIS
Well, come here then, so you don't keep everyone else up.

CASSIE stands, her blanket wrapped around her like a robe, and picks a path to DENNIS.

DENNIS
What's so important?

CASSIE
You have to promise not to be mad.

DENNIS
Cassie, how can I—? Well, okay. I'll just listen. Tell me.

CASSIE
I saw him and I thought of Lee and her grandchildren. I thought she'd maybe like him for them. If nobody owned him.

DENNIS
Bunny-boo! Cassie, where'd you find him?

CASSIE
He was on the floor near my pad, Dennis. I didn't steal him, you know I don't steal, don't you? I just kept him safe—he might have been stolen or thrown away. Is that his name, Bunny-boo? I was calling him Clancy, just in the meantime. Clancy was my father's name.

DENNIS
He belonged to my daughter, Annie. But his eye—did you fix him?

CASSIE
I fixed him up. I gave him a new eye and I stitched his seams and washed him. Does Annie want him back?
DENNIS
Annie has a new toy.

CASSIE
So maybe we can give Clancy to Lee. He's almost like new.

DENNIS
Sure. That's a good idea. You give him to Lee.

CASSIE
Thank you Dennis. Lee has no money to buy presents.

DENNIS
You'll make her rich.

DENNIS rises, hands Bunny-boo back to CASSIE.

DENNIS
Let's get some sleep.

DENNIS and CASSIE creep back to their pads. End Scene VIII.

SCENE IX.

Stylized movement as the shelter empties, with pads, etc., put away. Guests begin lining up outside the shelter door. It is bitter cold and IKE, BERNARD, TOM, and JULIA are bundled in layers of acquired coats, sweaters, and scarves. TOM sits huddled, in the doorway. BERNARD and IKE are talking, JULIA is hopping up and down, alternating feet, chanting quietly, rhythmically, as an undertone to IKE and BERNARD.

JULIA
A my name is Alice and
My husband's name is Arthur,
We live in Alabama
Where we sell
Alligators!
B my name is Barbara and
My husband's name is Bob,
We live in Boston
Where we sell
Baked Beans!
C my name is Cathy
and my husband's name is Caleb,
We live in California,
Where we sell
Catheters!

IKE
I ain't goin' back to that lousy Lysol office again. Place stinks of disinfectant. They can't wait to get rid of what they figure we must be bringin' in with us. Boy, no wonder the goverment's goin' broke, buyin' all those cleanin' supplies.

Y'know, I filled out every lousy form they gave me last week, Larraine helped me, and I waited an hour on that everlastin' line today, and what did the bitch say when I finally handed in the form?
D my name is Desdemona, and my husband’s name is Dennis, We live in Duluth Where we sell Diamonds!
E my name is Esther And my husband’s name is Ed, We love in Edmonton, Where we sell Eggs!
F my name is Franny and my husband’s name is Fred, We live in France Where we sell Forks!
G my name is Grace and My husband’s name is Gregory, We live in Greece Where we sell Grenades!
H my name is Holly and my husband’s name is Harry, We live in Houston Where we sell Hats!
I my name is Irma and My husband’s name is Ike, We live in Ireland Where we sell Ice!
J my name is Jane and My husband’s name is John, We live in Jamaica Where we sell Jam!

JULIA continues her hopping and chanting through the beginning of BERNARD’s seven o’clock speech, but slowly winds down, focusing on BERNARD, (Imitating) “These must be filled out in black ink only, sir.” Well, I about took the roof off that building. An’ she showed me her straightened gray teeth an’ she says, “It states very clearly on the top of every form, sir, THESE FORMS MUST BE FILLED OUT IN BLACK INK.” Well, hell, I says to her, Hell, why don’t ya give me an F in “Follows Instructions” and take the lousy forms. I need to get these checks goin’. And the fuckin’ robot jus’ looks at me hands me another stack and says, “Fill these out in black ink, sir, an’ bring them back with you next week.” My God, Bernard, I never hit a woman, but I thought this is it, Issac, this woman is no woman at all anyway, so punch her lights out and get the hell outta Dodge. Might have, too, if a cop hadna walked in jus’ then. Fuck if I’m goin to jail on accounta the government. Or that hippo-bitch.

BERNARD
Man, when is someone gonna open the door?
IKE
Soon as they’re ready man, you know, at seven o’clock.

BERNARD
Seven o’clock, seven o’clock! Who the fuck cares about seven o’clock? Never cared if seven o’clock came or went ’til I got ta this place. Now my whole life’s wound around seven o’clock. Sign in at seven o’clock, back on the
although never altogether stop-
ning her efforts to stay warm by
jumping up and down. Finally,
she speaks to BERNARD.)

street at seven o'clock, the fuck-
in' town could be blown off the
face a the earth, and we'd be
kicked outta here at seven
o'clock!

JULIA

You aren't going to be kicked out at seven o'clock tomorrow,
Bernard.

BERNARD

Huh?

JULIA

You will be expelled by 7:05 at the latest tonight. You are
intoxicated.

BERNARD

Get outta m'face, bitch!

JULIA

I am not a female dog!

BERNARD

Get outta m'face, bitch!

JULIA

Almost teary

He ought not to talk that way to me. I thought we were
friends.

BERNARD

Yeah, friends. Since when d'friends accuse their friends a
drinkin' an' stealin'?

JULIA

I never accused you of stealing! And you have been drinking.

BERNARD

Go play Scrabble, little bitch!

JULIA

Angry

I don't like Scrabble!

BERNARD

Tri-State Regional champ!

JULIA

Sometimes you believe all the wrong things, Bernard.

BERNARD

Must run in th' family.

JULIA

I am not your family!

BERNARD

Hurt

I oughtta spank you.
IKE
  C'mon Bernard, cool out.
BERNARD
  Cool out? That some kinda joke, kid?
TOM
  I almost froze to death once. Last—no, woulda been the winter before. But I didn’t—know why? I chose the other option.
IKE
  Ya went indoors?
  BERNARD has moved away from JULIA and IKE. JULIA follows him, not too closely.
JULIA
  Bernard, I’m sorry.
BERNARD
  Leave me alone!
JULIA
  I never thought you stole the Scrabble. That was Cassie who said that.
TOM
  To IKE
  The way I saw it—there’s a lot of pain involved in freezing to death.
IKE
  Man, I know it!
TOM
  So I look at the options, and I say, killing yourself is a better option than freezing to death. (Ironic laugh) If you do it right. Tom makes another lousy decision.
JULIA
  To BERNARD
  So it wasn’t that I thought you were stealing.
BERNARD
  What then?
JULIA
  I can’t tell you.
IKE
  To TOM
  I been through a lot, Tom, and I never thought of killing m’self.
TOM
  Stares at IKE.
  Then you’re either crazier than I thought, or you’re lyin’.
IKE
  I can’t help it. There’s nothin’ I love more than livin’. Sometimes I think it’s unnatural how much I love life.
BERNARD

Girl! You ain't never gonna be worth dirt in my book long as ya keep playin' games wi'me. I may be too stoned ta walk, but I see who you are.

JULIA

You don't see shit!

BERNARD   *Eyes opening, he laughs and reels.*

Ooooeee! Miss Muffett swore?

JULIA

Fuck off!

TOM

While you were prayin' at the altar of life, I went out an' stole a pack of Wilkinson Sword Edge razor blades. First time I ever successfully lifted anything.

IKE

Yer a danger, man.

TOM

Not that time, I wasn't.

JULIA

I'm not going to tell on you about being drunk, Bernard.

BERNARD

Thanks for nuthin'.

JULIA

It *is* nothing. Because you'll give yourself away.

BERNARD

You steppin' over th' edge, girl. I ain't responsible.

TOM

I found a spot in the park where I could watch the horizon, sliced my arm with those sword edges, hopin' to set with the sun. But cold slows down the circulation in your limbs, you know that, Ike? It's why you get frostbite. The blood doesn't flow as fast. There I sat in the fuckin' dark, freezing my ass off, trying to squeeze the life out of myself. Next time—lengthwise cuts in a nice warm tub.

IKE

But then you wouldn't be freezin' ta death.

JULIA

You want to know the great secret? If I tell you, will you believe me? No games. Okay. Deal.

I lied about being Tri-State Regional Scrabble champ.

BERNARD   *Sarcastic; sneering.*

Sheeeit . . .
JULIA

I can't read, Bernard. I can't read or write! That's why I couldn't play Scrabble. I can't fuckin' read the damn forms at the Welfare Office! I learn all my big words by listening! I go to the library and listen to every recording they've got of novels, plays, poetry, everything!

BERNARD

Some princess.

JULIA

And what really hurts is I've told you all that before!

BERNARD returns to the door, pounds and yells.

BERNARD

Seven o'clock! Seven o'clock!

JULIA Mostly to herself

And you promised me you'd teach me to read. Just a secret between us.

IKE Trying to ignore BERNARD

Is it seven?

JULIA

I had a watch. Lost it in October.

IKE

Too bad.

BERNARD pounds again.

BERNARD

Hey!

JULIA

I am almost positive it was stolen.

IKE

From where?

JULIA

From where I left it in the lavatory. I always took it off to wash my hands. My sister Donna gave it to me once.

TOM

Lavatory?

JULIA

It's a little more refined than washroom, don't you think?

BERNARD

What's wrong with head, or can, or toilet, Miss Muffett?

JULIA

I will only go so far when it comes to adjusting my vocabulary to suit the mentality of the people I must associate with here. I was taught to say lavatory.
BERNARD
Sat on her tuffett,
Reading her books and plays—

JULIA
Shut up!

BERNARD
Along came a—

JULIA
I didn’t tell you a thing! You never heard a word from me, for me, or about me!

IKE
Hey now, stop—

TOM
If I saw a watch sittin’ all alone in the lav-a-tory, I’d sure pick it up. Finders keepers.

JULIA
Yeah, well, losers weepers. I cried for two days because of that watch. Did you ever think of that?

TOM
Well, now you got nothing to lose, so you got nothing to cry over, so someone did you a favor.

BERNARD
And frightened Miss Muffett away.
Damn, it’s cold!

BERNARD pummels the door.

BERNARD
Seven o’clock!!!

IKE touches Bernard from behind; BERNARD spins around, there is an instant confrontation.

IKE
Treading water.

They’ll open it as soon as they can. They know it’s cold out.

BERNARD
It’s just another way a shovin’ our noses in it: they’re doin’ us a favor.

IKE
Shoulda stayed at dinner longer.

BERNARD
Dinner? Canned soup an’ ol’ bread with three hunnerd assholes worse off’n we are?

IKE backs off. A pause. In the silence, the winter night sounds. JULIA jumps, startled.

JULIA
You hear that?
IKE
    What?
JULIA
    Noise. Sounded like a scream.
BERNARD
    You got paranoid ears.
JULIA
    No.
IKE
    I didn’t hear anything.
TOM
    I did.
JULIA
    You heard it?
TOM
    Sounded like a pinknoise to me.
JULIA
    A what?
TOM
    A pinknoise.
        TOM makes an eerie, high pitched whistling sound.
TOM
    Like that.
JULIA
    Taking him very seriously.
        Kinda like that.
        TOM repeats the sound.
JULIA
    That’s weird.
TOM
    Yeah. (Another sound) That one’s a white noise. You hear the difference?
BERNARD
    That’s bullshit man, and bullshit sounds like bullshit. That’s all.
        BERNARD rattles the doorknob.
TOM
        Sotto voice
    White noise is sharper, shriller.
JULIA
    You have a noise for every color?
TOM
    ’Cept black.
JULIA
    Black?
TOM
    Which ain't to say it's not there.
JULIA
    But what are they all for?
TOM
    I paint with them. I highlight my environment with color.
    Audial color.
BERNARD
    I cannot deal with psychotic individuals.
TOM
    The wonderful thing about psychotics, Bernard, is that at least half the time you cannot tell who they are.
BERNARD
    You step one step closer, an' you'll know who I am.
IKE
    Hey, Bernard, Tom m'friends—
    The tension is released by the unlocking and opening of the door by LARRAINE, who holds it open from inside. CASSIE appears, scoots in first.
BERNARD
    's about time.
    IKE and TOM automatically step aside to let JULIA go first. She defers.
JULIA
    Go on.
BERNARD
    Miss Muffett don't want to play Princess no more?
LARRAINE
    Isn't anybody coming in?
TOM
    Shit . . .
    TOM hurries in, followed by IKE, JULIA, and BERNARD, who is suddenly intently focused on her.
BERNARD
    Hey! You din't really tell me what you said you tol' me, did ya! I mean, b'fore tonight?
    JULIA pretends not to hear, hurrying inside. Lights crossfade to the inside of the shelter, where DENNIS is setting up the coffee pot. LARRAINE
HOME AT SEVEN

watches while people start to take off their things, chats with IKE who is nearby.

LARRAINE
Where is everyone?
IKE
Most of 'em stayin' over at dinner a little later, so they wouldn't have ta wait outside.
LARRAINE
Good move. Were you out there long?
IKE
Not too bad. Ten minutes maybe.
LARRAINE
Why didn't you hang out at dinner?
CASSIE speaks directly to IKE.
CASSIE
I don't want you sitting at my table ever again, you hear that?
IKE is taken aback for only an instant.
IKE
Fine, Cassie.
CASSIE goes to her place.
LARRAINE
What was that about?
IKE
God knows. Y'know, you ask me what I want more than anything in the world. I want to live in my own place, where I say who comes and goes. I want to sit down at my own table, to eat my own dinner, with no one, or someone I choose to eat with. Is that too much to ask, Larraine?
LARRAINE and IKE exchange a hug.
IKE
I think someone's wantin' ta talk ta ya.
LARRAINE turns to speak to the STRANGER, but their conversation is immediately drowned out by the raised voices at the other end of the room. BERNARD and DENNIS are arguing.

BERNARD
You can't tell me to go out there and freeze my ass off tonight.
DENNIS
You are drunk, Bernard. You know the rules.

BERNARD
Man, I had one lousy drink.

DENNIS
You’re drunk.

BERNARD
Anyone else—

DENNIS
We’re talkin’ about you!

LARRAINE breaks away from the stranger, focuses on DENNIS and BERNARD, ready to spring into action. Likewise, IKE. CASSIE, JULIA and TOM hang back, watching, but not so alert.

BERNARD
Shit, man, I thought you was m’ friend!

DENNIS
This is not about friendship, Bernard, it’s about fairness and consideration.

BERNARD
I ain’t botherin’ nobody!

DENNIS
If we let you stay now, we’d have to let others stay. I’m telling you the same way I’d tell anyone, Bernard.

BERNARD and DENNIS lock eyes; BERNARD breaks away from Dennis’ gaze, goes to his things, begins to gather them. TV news blares into the silence. BERNARD puts his packed satchel on a table, looks again at DENNIS, unable to let go.

BERNARD
Ya let anyone else stay if they suck up ta ya.

DENNIS
Get out, Bernard!

BERNARD
Man, you ain’t got no right!

DENNIS, almost in tears, finally loses control.

DENNIS
You’re the one without rights here, Bernard! Get the fuck out of here!

DENNIS moves toward BERNARD to move him out physically. But BERNARD stands up to him. Neither backs down, and the fight is about to start when LARRAINE propels herself between them.
LARRAINE
    Stop it! Both of you!
    BERNARD looks from DENNIS to LARRAINE, focuses on DENNIS.

BERNARD
    I'm glad you said that, man. No rights here, let's get down and dirty. It's about time someone tol' the truth 'bout who's got rights.
    BERNARD turns, slams out the door. DENNIS yells after him.

DENNIS
    No! Man, you know that's not—Christ!
    DENNIS follows BERNARD out. They are both out on the steps, riveted on one another. Inside, a terrified silence has settled.

DENNIS
    Damn you, Bernard—never has anything like this happened before. In all the years I've worked with—
    BERNARD
        Burns like me?
    DENNIS
        I've thrown a hundred drunks out on their asses, but you know just how to get to me.
    BERNARD
        We been through a lot, man.
    DENNIS
        Yeah. And where has that gotten me?
        I see you being good to people, to Julia, to Ike. Then you get wasted and you hate me. You hate me so loud and clear I start to hate back. I want to yank my name, my face, my fucking address and phone number outta your head, make sure we never see each other again. I want to lose all memory of you, to have you evaporate.
    BERNARD
        I'm real disappointed in you, Dennis.
    DENNIS
        You're disappointed in me?
    BERNARD
        I've seen you go through bad times, man, and you've never let anyone down. The day the call came sayin' you an' Hattie lost yer baby, I saw you stay here for an hour after that, welcomin' people, makin' them feel at home, like yer heart wasn't breakin'. Ah was with you the night the p'lice closed this place down, an Ah was
right here the next day when you opened it up again, smilin' an' wavin' at cops an' r'porters. Ah've never been moved to r'spect much in m'life, Denny, but you were one thing Ah thought Ah could count on.

DENNIS

Yeah, well, I'm tired of you and everyone expecting so much of me. Let me make that simpler: I'm plain tired.

BERNARD

You go home to bed every night.

DENNIS

Yeah! A bed I can't sleep in. I toss and turn 'til Hattie asks if I can't control myself. So I move to a mat on the living room floor. Home! Where my ability to welcome barely extends to a hug for the kids. Annie turned and ran from me the other day. I didn't even know she could run. I have a hard time believing that's what anyone means by home. I know it's not what I had in mind. These days home seems like a lost cause for me, Bernard. Even when I'm there, I'm not there.

BERNARD

Don' tell me about believin' in nuthin, man. Don' tell me about los' causes, an' los' children. Ah fought in th' bigges' los' cause of the century in Nam. All Ah got outta that was a dead man fer a bes' frien' an' a stranger where m'wife useta be. Full time nuthin' but headaches an' nightmares. Little girl who didn' even know Ah was her father. We all got our los' causes, man. An' we live with 'em, one way er another.

DENNIS

Yeah, but how? You come in here, drunk, you antagonize the people who have the resources to help us, you refuse to speak up for anyone about what's happening down here, and out there—

BERNARD

Don' preach at me, man! They've heard the story b'fore. They don' need ta hear mine. Ah don' need ta go bare ass in public an' say Ah failed, Ah fucked up. Shit—you wanna call me weak, er lazy, go 'head. Ah been called worse.

DENNIS

It's not weak or lazy. It's taking responsibility!

BERNARD

Hey! Ah'm r'sponsible fer m'self. Tha's 'bout all Ah kin handle. But Ah accept that r'sponsibility.

DENNIS

It's more than that, Bernard.
BERNARD
Shit! Ah am what Ah am! Ya don' like it, tha's cool. Ah sure don' need yer grief!

BERNARD exits.

DENNIS
Bernard!!!

DENNIS remains on the stoop, shivering. Gradually, JULIA, IKE, TOM, LARRAINE, LEE, and CASSIE bleed through the walls into DENNIS' awareness. This is much the same process as in the first scene.

JULIA
A job, Dennis! They said they'd let me have an interview! Part time at first but steady. Washing windows. And I found the apartment of my dreams—I can't get it, though. I don't have money for first month's rent plus a whole nother month's for a damage deposit. I never heard of such a thing—I don't keep pets or anything. What kind of damage will I do?

IKE
I see a lotta damage bein' done 'round here, Dennis. You an' Bernard're friends, you gotta keep rememberin' that. What Bernard's goin' through is just a phase. This tearin' each other apart ain't helpin' anyone. It ain't right here.

TOM
I don't belong here. I know I don't. Something's wrong with this picture when I'm in it. Got a sister in Boston I'd better go visit. She's got a library—ten thousand volumes. Haven't seen her in seven years.

LARRAINE
Shit, Dennis, I thought I was dead, stepping between you two. I was moving on instinct—instinct and adrenalin.

TOM
Bitch probably thinks I'm dead.

LARRAINE
But I did okay, didn't I? You'd tell me if you thought I was doing something really crazy, huh?

JULIA
It's crazy. No one trusts anyone up here. Where I grew up, people trusted in one another. Who do they think they are, anyway?

TOM
No one here knows who the hell I am, anyway.
TOM exits. DENNIS turns to look at TOM, just missing sight of him. LEE holds out Bunny-boo.

LEE

Cassie says this came from you. Thank you Dennis. I brought it to my daughter’s house to give to Mandy—the little girl. My daughter wouldn’t let me in the house. I don’t have the key. She called me a drunk and a murderer right in front of the kids. I haven’t had a drink since the night of the accident. Not one. I can’t lose control for a minute. I lost three children and my husband that night! Does she think I could forget that even if I tried? Does she think if Mandy takes my present and gives me a hug that I’ll pretend it never happened? I caught myself looking at my only surviving daughter, wishing she had died too. Then at least I’d have her kids to take care of. At least I’d have a family.

But I want to hold onto this. (She strokes the toy.) If it’s okay with you. And I want to thank you and Cassie for trying to help. Maybe give it to the new baby.

LEE freezes. CASSIE speaks. She gives the impression of being both brave and vulnerable.

CASSIE

I know you don’t want to be bothered anymore, Dennis, but I got another one of those checks today, and I’m trying to do the right thing; but I don’t remember how to open a bank account. I don’t think I ever did that before. That’s what Lee said I should do with the money, right? So I’m trying, Dennis.

CASSIE delves into a bag, draws out a window envelope with a check in it. She holds the check up gingerly as if it will explode.

CASSIE

See? Here it is—it’s made out to Cassandra M. Duvall.

Pause. CASSIE adds, after a thought.

CASSIE

M is for Mercy. That’s my middle name. Mercy.

CASSIE freezes. A pause. Suddenly all the voices start again, rising in intensity and volume until DENNIS can stand it no longer. DENNIS runs back into the shelter, but the others follow (except TOM), moving through walls, talking at DENNIS, back to where they were when DENNIS and BER- NARD confronted one another. DENNIS busies himself with his desk and briefcase, trying to ignore the noise which gradually has become the
standard shelter activity sounds. Still, it is too much. He stands and calls out.

DENNIS

Can't you all just be quiet? Quiet! I can't think around here anymore!

A hush falls over the room. Someone turns down the TV. DENNIS sags, goes to the desk, slumps over it. Activity picks up slightly. HATTIE enters through a wall near DENNIS, speaks. She is a phantom.

HATTIE

It was the craziest day today, Dennis. All over town, teeny tiny accidents stumbling into each other. And bumping into me. I don't know when I've seen so many sprained ankles and broken noses. Like the world's just getting chipped away, granules of things dropping and crunching underfoot. No one can get comfortable. Lost my keys—I've never done that before. Nursing Supervisor almost bit my head off. And I got home, and the kids were cranky and tired. I wonder where the moon is?

You're being awfully quiet, my love. Maybe we both need a little wine and soft music, huh? C'mon, Dennis. You can relax. Dennis. Dennis?

DENNIS slowly rises and, exhausted, puts on his coat and leaves the shelter by the door. HATTIE disappears. End Scene IX.

SCENE X.

Movement into nighttime sleeping places. LARRAINE is asleep at the desk. Into the silent darkness intrudes an alarm clock noise, something fairly loud and obnoxious. Lights up slowly on the shelter area where all of the guests are asleep. The alarm is ringing on the desk. LARRAINE wakes, scrounges for the clock, holds it, still ringing, near her head. JULIA who has been wakened by the sound, comes to the doorway, watches. After a moment of watching, she speaks, softly.

JULIA

You trying to ruin your hearing with that?

LARRAINE does not hear. JULIA speaks up.

JULIA

Larraine!

LARRAINE  Startled, jumpy, still half asleep.
Yeah!

LARRAINE looks, sees JULIA, turns off the clock.

LARRAINE
What's wrong?

JULIA
I asked if you're trying to ruin your hearing with that?

LARRAINE
Didn't want to fall back asleep.

JULIA
It's one of the few things I just can't get used to. Sunrise comes and I'm listening for roosters and chickens.

LARRAINE
You got up early on the farm?

JULIA
It never seemed early then.

Awkward pause.

JULIA   LARRAINE
Larraine, can I have the          Is something bugging you?
supply cabinet keys?

LARRAINE
Supply keys? What for?

JULIA
It's personal.

LARRAINE
Do you need something?

JULIA
I wouldn't ask if I didn't.

LARRAINE
Yeah—okay.

LARRAINE digs for the keys.

JULIA
I hate this—everything locked up.

LARRAINE
Things have a way of disappearing.

JULIA
I need some Tampax, okay? I never thought I'd have to be begging for Tampax!

LARRAINE
You're not begging!

JULIA   A challenge.

You're the keeper of the keys, aren't you?
LARRAINE
Yeah. Okay. I see your point.
LARRAINE stands, heads toward the pads to start waking people.

JULIA
Guess what? I've got a job interview today.
LARRAINE Stops; turns back to JULIA.
Great! Julia! What's it for?

JULIA
Cafeteria line. Public hospital. I ironed a blouse last night. It's hanging in the bathroom.
LARRAINE
Good luck. Let me know what happens.

JULIA
Yeah, I will. Thanks, Larraine.
JULIA exits to the bathroom. LARRAINE looks around, exits to the kitchen. Activity is slowly becoming contagious. LARRAINE returns with a bowl full of hard boiled eggs, puts it on a table. LARRAINE wakens those who haven't woken on their own. People begin to put things away, dress, pack up, little is spoken at first. CASSIE has emptied a coin purse and is attempting to count her change. JULIA reenters in a fresh blouse, carrying a purse, goes to IKE.

JULIA
To IKE
You see Tom?

IKE
No. Did he come back last night?

CASSIE
Count the money, go to the bank.

JULIA
I figured he came back.

LEE
To CASSIE
Watcha doin?

IKE
Naw. He left around eight or so. Said he'd be back, I guess.
LARRAINE exits to the kitchen.

CASSIE
Counting my money, going to the bank.

JULIA
Shoot.
IKE
  Why?
LEE
  Can I help?
CASSIE
  No! I can do it, if I have some peace an’ quiet.
LEE
  Okay, okay.
  LARRAINE returns with juice and paper cups. Guests take eggs and juice as they pack and clean up. LEE takes care of TOM and BERNARD’s pads.
IKE
  What?
JULIA
  I’ve got an interview, then I’m going to see an apartment. I was going to ask Tom—well, do you want to come?
IKE
  Tom, huh? Sure. I’ll come. Sounds okay. Where should we meet?
JULIA
  Library at two?
STRANGER   To Lee
  We get any breakfast b’fore we go?
LEE
  Whatever’s on the table.
LARRAINE    To LEE
  Lee, I got a call the other day. I’ve been asking people to come to next week’s city council hearing on joblessness. Will you come and testify?
LEE
  Gee, Larraine, I don’t know too many people without jobs. I heard things are looking up—the stock market’s been bullish this last year or so.
LARRAINE
  Great! I’ll let you know when.
STRANGER
  That all there is for breakfast?
IKE
  Hey, we do what we can do.
  CASSIE drops her change on the floor, watches it
JULIA  Looking up at CASSIE
        How much was there, Cass?
CASSIE  Panicked at the question.
        I don’t know. I hardly had time to count it. I don’t know what happened. Was like a big gust of wind came along an’ pulled it outta my hand.
        JULIA nods, the search resumes. The STRANGER looks at CASSIE, makes a judgment and a decision. He puts a handful of change into his pocket, hands just a few coins to CASSIE.
STRANGER  Here.
        CASSIE accepts the coins, realizing what he’s done, but unable to act. LEE sees also, and jumps up.
LEE  There is no monetary reward for picking up Cassie’s change.
IKE  Cassie gets all the money back.
        JULIA and IKE have risen, handed CASSIE her money, and surrounded the STRANGER.
STRANGER  I dunno what you’re talking about.
JULIA  We don’t steal from each other here.
CASSIE  He’s a thief!
IKE  He made a mistake.
CASSIE  A killer an’ a thief!
LEE  He’ll give it back.
CASSIE  He’s a criminal!
STRANGER  It’s between her and me.
JULIA  She’s my sister.
LEE  And mine.
IKE
And mine.

JULIA
Return her money.

IKE
Or we'll kick the shit out of ya.

LEE
And then call the police.
  Pause while the STRANGER considers. CASSIE
  hisses at him.

CASSIE
He's a sinner and a thief!

LEE
You make your choice.

IKE
Now!
  Pause. STRANGER looks around. Everyone else,
  including LARRAINE, who watches, ready to
  move in. No one moves to interfere, though.

STRANGER
Digging into his pocket
Here's her damn money!
  JULIA takes the money.

LEE
All of it?
  STRANGER retrieves a few stray coins, hands
  them to JULIA.

STRANGER
That's it.

LEE
Thanks for your honesty.
  JULIA gives the money to CASSIE.

IKE
You can go now.

CASSIE
To STRANGER'S back, as he exits
God go with you!
  STRANGER halts, looks back at CASSIE, puzzled
  and startled. She smiles. He leaves hurriedly. The
  room sighs.

LARRAINE
It's almost seven, crew. Better eat something and clear out.
  The room is cleared, people grabbing eggs and juice
  on the run. End Scene X.
SCENE XI.

The shelter is empty. TOM is alone, just outside the shelter, hiding in the shadows, watching the others leave. After the last person is gone, TOM speaks, addressing the shelter door.

TOM

Anybody notice I wasn't there last night? I slept in the train station. Dreamt I was driving to Boston. In my own car. Convertible Rabbit. Packed with books, munchies and cassette tapes. Talking Heads and Mozart. AM/FM Stereo. Buzzing the highway, going to see my sister.

Cop woke me up, poked me with a stick to see if I was dead. Found out I wasn't and kicked me outta the last warm place I could find.

Just a place where I could sleep as late as I wanted. Could dream. A place where I could unpack my books and leave them all over the floor. No one could tell me to move along.

Every day I watch it get further away.

TOM fades back into the shadows. End Scene XI.

SCENE XII.

Lights up on the shelter area. FATHER J. enters, followed by DENNIS.

FATHER J.

We can look at the budget, but I really don't see how you can afford another salary. A living wage is a lot of money.

DENNIS

What if we phased out my salary?

FATHER J.

Why do I think you're trying to tell me something?

DENNIS

Larraine is good. Right now she's a lot better than I can be. I think she'd be better for the shelter than I am.

FATHER J.

What happened?

DENNIS

Last night I told Bernard he has no rights here.

FATHER J.

What you need is a vacation.

DENNIS

Father—
FATHER J.

Don't make any sudden decisions, Dennis. We'll find some money for Larraine for a month. You take three weeks away.

DENNIS

A month?

FATHER J.

It's all I can promise now.

DENNIS

I'll ask her. And I'll think about the vacation.

FATHER J.

Just take it.

DENNIS

I'll let you know.

FATHER J. exits, leaving DENNIS, who sings, softly, to himself.

DENNIS

Last summer I went swimming,
Last summer I almost drowned.

CASSIE and HATTIE, in the shadows, join him.

DENNIS, CASSIE, HATTIE

But I held my breath
And I kicked my feet
And I moved my arms around,
Yeah, moved my arms around.

End Scene XII.

SCENE XIII.

Transition to nighttime light. The shelter is dark. Outside the door, on the steps, BERNARD is sprawled, drinking and singing. It is a warm evening, for winter.

BERNARD

Tell ol' Bill when he come home
This mornin'\nTell ol' Bill when he come home
This ev'nin'.'
Tell ol' Bill when he come home
To let that stinkin' gin alone
This mornin's this ev'nin' so soon.
Ol' Sal was bakin' bread
This mornin'
Ol' Sal was bakin' bread
This ev’nin’
Ol’ Sal was bakin’ bread—

BERNARD is interrupted by a sound, some movement in the shadows. He freezes, listening. Silence. He cautiously takes a swig from his bottle. Then, from the shadows, comes the sound again—what he hears is what we hear—the sound TOM made that scared JULIA outside the shelter—the pinknoise.

BERNARD remains frozen, listening, trying to focus. The sound registers on his memory. We hear TOM’s voice.

TOM
That’s a pinknoise. I paint with them. I highlight my environment with color.

BERNARD waits, the sound repeats, faint.

BERNARD
That you, Tom?
No response. BERNARD pockets his bottle, turns to look for the source of the noise.

BERNARD
Tom?

TOM
While you were prayin’ at the altar of life, I lifted some Wilkinson sword-edged—

BERNARD
Tom, that you?

BERNARD is beyond the lit area. In the darkness, we hear BERNARD stumble, his stifled scream.

BERNARD
Holy God, man, what you do to yourself?

BERNARD strikes a match, the area grows slightly brighter. TOM is slouched on the ground, huddled. There is fresh blood on his clothes; he is bleeding heavily where he has slit his wrist.

BERNARD
How long you been here like this?

TOM
Smiling; wan.

Long ’nough to know better.

TOM makes another shrill, piercing noise.

TOM
Blue noise helps the pain.
BERNARD

Man, stay here, I'm gonna call the ambulance.

TOM grabs BERNARD's arm.

TOM

Save the taxpayer's money, Bernard.

TOM shifts, in tremendous pain.

TOM

I'll pass out b'fore I die. Shit—another failed adventure.

A pause. BERNARD rips away layers of clothing, taking off his shirt.

BERNARD

Hold on, Tom, they on their way. I remembered about a tourniquet—was that it?

TOM waves him away. BERNARD is insistent.

BERNARD

I gotta stop the bleedin'!

TOM

Why? So I can live longer? What's the point, Bernard? I've already gone through the pain. I don't stand out in a room full of drunk, crazy bums. Let me go.

BERNARD Trying the joke tack

Man, it's hard to stand out in that crowd.

BERNARD is trying desperately to stop the flow of blood, but doesn't know how to apply even elementary first aid. His hands are shaking. He looks up as TOM passes out.

BERNARD

I'm sorry it was me found ya, Tommy. Maybe someone else coulda helped.

BERNARD gives up, sits helpless beside the lifeless body, tears coming to him. Softly, he sings to TOM. End Scene XIII.

SCENE XIV.

Lights fade on BERNARD and TOM, up to full on DENNIS and LARRAINE in the shelter. Next morning.

DENNIS

Father J. guaranteed a month. I figure we'll work together for this month, then you'll step into my position.

LARRAINE

So I'm supposed to handle it all on my own? The coordinat-
ing, the fundraising, the politics. If you can't do it alone, how do you expect me to?
DENNIS
I've done it alone for almost three years. You're starting fresh.
LARRAINE
Well that gives me something to look forward to.
Have you definitely decided then?
DENNIS
Yes! No! I don't know. Not yet. But in either case, will you work full time for at least this month?
LARRAINE
So much for romance with the word processor.
DENNIS
You're a miracle!
LARRAINE
I'm a masochist!
*They laugh; embrace. The door opens, slowly. BERNARD, still bloody and dazed, enters.*

BERNARD
Denny?

DENNIS looks up.
DENNIS
Bernard, what the hell—?
BERNARD
The door was unlocked.
DENNIS
I'm getting very tired of patching your wounds every time you spend a night on the town. You look like you need an emergency room anyway. Christ, whose blood is that?
BERNARD  *Breaking down; tears.*
Ah tried ta save him, Denny. Ah tried, but Ah fucked up. Couldn' r'member a sling from a band aid.
DENNIS
Bernard, we don't have time for this.
LARRAINE
Dennis!
BERNARD
Ah cared, Dennis! Ah cared ta make him live! Ah hated ta see him take his own life b'cause a me, b'cause a you, b'cause a this!
DENNIS
Who? Bernard, who??

BERNARD
Ah'm talkin' 'bout Tom, man, his blood's all over me. He killed hisself las' night, man.

DENNIS        LARRAINE
Oh God.        No—
DENNIS stumbles backward, pale. LARRAINE steadies him. BERNARD approaches, stands very close to DENNIS.

BERNARD
Ah know what it's like ta give up, Denny, an' Ah couldn' stand ta see him do it. Ah tried ta save him!

DENNIS
You tried to save him? How? Did you think if you got drunk enough Tom would live?

BERNARD
Ah had a drink! Yeah! He died in mah arms! Ah had ta forgit how that felt.

DENNIS
Forget! Why should you? You want Tom to matter at all, you remember!!

BERNARD
Ah know ya hate me, Denny, but it's important—Ah tried ta save Tom.

BERNARD has put his hands on DENNIS' shoulder. DENNIS pulls away.

DENNIS
Did you call the police, Bernard? Where is Tom now?

BERNARD
Outside. In the bushes. He's all alone, Denny.

DENNIS
Well, come on then, and show me. Lorraine, call the police, please. And then you'd better start thinking of yourself as employed here on a full time permanent basis.

BERNARD and DENNIS start to exit.

LARRAINE
Dennis! You can't!

DENNIS
I have to.

DENNIS and BERNARD exit, then carry off TOM's body. End Scene XIV.
SCENE XV.

Transition: the opening of the shelter. Clothes are lighter, it is spring. The shelter fills up. Last to enter is an unfamiliar young man. STEPHEN, who stands to the side.

LARRAINE
While you're signing in, I need volunteers to testify at the City Council hearings on homelessness.

Silence. No response. Not even shelter noise.

LARRAINE
Hey, come on! No one? Julia? Ike? Hey, listen to me! We need witnesses!

The response this time is hurried, off the cuff, casual.

JULIA
Hey, I've got a job now, Larraine, I don't have time. B'sides, I won't be a homeless statistic for long. I'm moving next month!

IKE
Gee Larraine, I'm no good with authority-types, y'know? An' I'm not really typical. I mean, who is?

LEE
Naw, they bring TV cameras into those meetings. Last thing I need's for my grandkids to see me on the six o'clock news.

CASSIE
I don't think so, Larraine. They'll make me sign my name and ask a lot of embarrassing questions. Like they did at the bank.

LARRAINE
I don't understand. It's a chance for you to be heard!

BERNARD
They hear us. They see us every day, they can't miss us. We are testimony, just by living how we live. Hey! They wan' ta talk to someone, tell 'em ta talk ta Tom.

Silence. Beat. TOM, a phantom, drifts through a wall, speaks.

TOM
If you really want to get outta this place—you deduce the way out. Make the quantum leap.

STEPHEN
Excuse me, I'm hunting for Larraine. Is anyone around here Larraine?

LARRAINE is pulled back to the present by STEPHEN's voice.
LARRAINE
    Huh?
TOM
    This isn't just another desperate job hunt. There's more to it than that.
STEPHEN
    I'm looking for Larraine.
LARRAINE
    I'm Larraine.
STEPHEN
    My name's Stephen. I'm a new volunteer. I'm sorry I'm late. My roommate had some car trouble, then I got caught in a traffic jam.
LARRAINE
    A traffic jam . . .?
STEPHEN
    Larraine? You okay?
LARRAINE
    No. Not really. Come on, I'll show you around.
    LARRAINE and STEPHEN exit. CASSIE begins to sing the swimming song. Slowly, the others join her. They all sing it all the way through except for TOM, who watches, silent. Blackout. End.