

LARRY: Dust-mop thing?

GRETCHEN: (*Looking at Larry.*) Huh? . . . Oh, oh I'm sorry. My training instructor is giving me a hard time about how I described —

LARRY: (*Waving his hands.*) No, no, no!

GRETCHEN: (*On the phone.*) Can you hear that? He's really uptight . . . So anyway . . . What? Hardwood floors? You do?! But it's really overpriced.

(*Larry ducking down, mouthing — "Are you crazy?!!"*)

GRETCHEN: But it does have this doohickey reach thing for hard-to-reach areas . . . You do? . . . Then you could really use that. Hey, everybody has hellishly high corners to clean, right? (*Larry hitting his head.*) Gives you a nosebleed up that high.

LARRY: (*Whispers.*) No bleeding. No blood.

GRETCHEN: It really restores the total luster to them — like brand new . . . Huh? Uh, well, it's uh . . . fifty-nine ninety-five. (*Larry squints, bracing himself.*) You will?! . . .

(*Larry jumps up and declares victory in several poses.*)

GRETCHEN: (*In phone.*) Great! (*Larry gives her a thumbs-up.*) And since you're such a valuable customer, Mrs. Handson, there's a few extra items some of our preferred partners are offering that I'd like to tell you about . . . Oh, now, just think of me as a best friend giving a recommendation — (*Larry kneels and kisses her hand as she continues.*)

## SPARE SOMETHIN'?

*Sammy, thirties, a drunk who always has a story to get some spare change, spots the well-dressed Lorna heading toward the train station and grasps the opportunity to hit her up for some money. His story today is simple — his car ran out of gas while he was here visiting his poor, sick mother in a run-down nursing home. Now, he has no gas to take his mother back to his home so that he can care for her. The problem with his story is that no one will stop long enough to hear it. It's been a rough morning for Sammy. Last night, he had to sleep on a steam grate in front of the library. And now, most of the early morning business people are ignoring his pleas for help. But Lorna's different. She takes an interest. Unfortunately, Sammy is in for a lot more than he bargains for when he realizes that Lorna is a mental patient at the nearby Rock Creek Facility.*

### CHARACTERS

Sammy: 30s, a drunk on the street

Lorna: 30s, a mental patient at the nearby Rock Creek Facility

### SETTING

Urban street near subway station

### TIME

The present

SAMMY: (*Quick wave good-bye to someone.*) God bless ya anyway. (*Seeing Lorna.*) Hey, ma'am, can I ask ya something?

LORNA: That depends entirely on the something, doesn't it? I can't be expected to answer all questions at all times.

SAMMY: No, I wouldn't expect, I don't expect you to —

LORNA: If you asked me a geographic question — for instance,

where is Zimbabwe in proximity to Mozambique — I wouldn't be able to answer it, would I?

SAMMY: No, I guess . . .

LORNA: And that wouldn't be any good. If you were looking for Zimbabwe.

SAMMY: Oh, ma'am, I'm not gonna ask ya nothin' geology-like.

LORNA: Geology? That's not geology. Geology is quite different from geography.

SAMMY: Geology, geography. I get that all confused.

LORNA: I loved geology class. I loved the earth, and it's burning center. The fiery oven inside. Burning and churning. Didn't you love that? The center of the earth. The fire. We all learned about that in grade school. Remember the fire?

SAMMY: No. I remember when this dude Roger pulled the fire alarm and the nuns got really pissed.

LORNA: Geology is the study of the rocks, the minerals, the fossils, the . . . (*Change in face.*) stones. I say no to stones. I don't like stones. Not any of them. Too plain and hard. (*Singsongy.*) Sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you. Have you heard that before?

SAMMY: Uhh —

LORNA: It's completely untrue, you know. Absolutely. Names can hurt you. *Words* can hurt you.

SAMMY: Are you playin' with me?

LORNA: Especially if they're elongated. Long, elongated words can make you absolutely crazy.

SAMMY: Oh-kay. *Not* playin'.

LORNA: (*Intensely to him.*) Are you crazy?

SAMMY: Uh, no. I'm broke, ma'am. Just broke. Not crazy. (*Waves.*) And I think I best be going now 'cause I don't want to keep ya. (*Waves and starts to move.*) Bye.

LORNA: (*Following him.*) Going? Where?

SAMMY: Where? I'm just, just on the go. Going to see my mother.

LORNA: Your mother? How sweet.

SAMMY: Sweet? Yes! I'm sweet. (*Realizes it still might be worth a try.*) It's just my poor, sick mother. Too bad my car broke down, and I don't have any money — none to take her home with me. To my warm, comfy home where I'd care for her every minute of every day. I just miss her so much.

LORNA: I wish they'd taken me home. I have lots of money. I always hated staying at my aunt's. I hated her wallpaper.

SAMMY: Yes, that's terrible. What did you just say?

LORNA: I wish they'd taken me home.

SAMMY: Oh, I know, ma'am. They should have. They should be shot. No, after that, what did you say?

LORNA: I hated her wallpaper. It talked too much.

SAMMY: I understand. I had the same problem with my ex. No, I meant *after* you said you wanted to go home. *Before* the freaky wallpaper.

LORNA: Oh. (*Thinking.*) Um. I have lots of money.

SAMMY: That's it! That's what I thought you said. So, you do? Well, isn't that strange?

LORNA: Is it? Strange?

SAMMY: Well, just 'cause I happen to be able to use a little money right now. Just, just for my mother. I wasn't gonna ask, but since you say you have lots. She's very sick.

LORNA: Oh, my mother was sick too. Very sick.

SAMMY: Oh. That's terrible. So you know how it is then. I'm sorry about that.

LORNA: Yes. She watched too much TV. Too many commercials.

SAMMY: Oh, I know what you mean. Then you sit and rot all day — no exercise — get stains on your teeth.

LORNA: The waves from the TV and the commercials made her very sick.

SAMMY: Uh huh. The waves. (*Thinking.*) They's tricky, them waves.

LORNA: What is your mother sick with?

SAMMY: Sick with? Well, she would be sick with, uh . . . she's got a bad, a bad . . . a bad . . . heart.

LORNA: What's so bad about it?

SAMMY: It's uh, it's uh, uh, not pumping as it should be.

LORNA: It isn't?

SAMMY: No. It's a little slow. The doctor says it's just a little slow.

LORNA: (*Suspiciously.*) Slow?

SAMMY: Or it might be fast. Now that I come to think of it, it's fast. It's real fast —

LORNA: High blood pressure?

SAMMY: High blood pressure! That's it! High blood pressure medicine.

LORNA: I've heard of that condition. It's not good.

SAMMY: Nope. Not good. She needs constant care. That's straight from the doctor. I just want to bring her home to be with me. To love her and take care of her and nursery her.

LORNA: That's good-hearted of you. You are a good man.

SAMMY: Oh well, that's kind of you to say. But I am her only son and she's not well.

LORNA: Is your place decorated warmly?

SAMMY: Oh. Yeah. Real warm. Cozy like a bug. And no wallpaper. All my walls are silent.

LORNA: That's great. I'd be happy to give you *all* of my money.

SAMMY: All? Well, I, I, I don't need *all* of it, ma'am. I don't want —

LORNA: I don't need it. I have family money.

SAMMY: Oh? Yes, but I don't need — I am not a greedy man — how much are we talkin' about?

LORNA: Millions.

SAMMY: Millions?!

LORNA: I have hundreds of thousands myself.

SAMMY: Really?! Oh well, isn't that's nice? Still I wouldn't want — You wouldn't happen to have a bankcard handy?

LORNA: No. We have to go to the graveyard first.

SAMMY: Grave-what?

LORNA: My father would like to meet you first.

SAMMY: Meet me? For what? He's in a grave?

LORNA: Yes! He died. And he *still* insists on approval of all men I date. It's ridiculous.

SAMMY: Date? I — this — we are not. Things are gettin' freaky here. Let's rewind the tape.

LORNA: Then we could ask my nurse or my day-worker at Rock Creek for the bankcard. I'm off to work . . . it's supervised, but it's very important work.

SAMMY: The nurse or the day-who at Rock Creek? Rock Creek? (*She nods. He steps back.*) Ohhh. Rock Creek the place for really, really . . . They let you out in the public? I mean, you have a job? How nice. I don't know what's wrong with me. You're all dressed up. I don't want to keep you from your train.

LORNA: But what about the money for the medicine?

SAMMY: I forgot. I think I have some in my pocket here. (*He searches.*) I, look, I do.

LORNA: So why did you stop me?

SAMMY: I was gonna ask somethin'. Maybe the time. But I can see the clock on the tower now.

LORNA: You said you'd ask me a question. The only question I can't answer is a geology question because it reminds me of stones, which remind me of my childhood. I didn't have a very good childhood.

SAMMY: Yeah. I figured. Mama got sick on TV waves and Daddy in the grave telling you who to date. That's tough. That's harsh. I understand, but I got to go now.

LORNA: But any other question, any other question is fine. I want to answer.

SAMMY: I don't remember my question anyway. I was probably just asking for directions to the drugstore. And now I see the drugstore. (*Points.*) See. I'm fine. I'm good. Have money in my pocket. There's the store. I'm happy. I found the store. Nice talkin' to you.

LORNA: That store is northeast from here though.

SAMMY: Uh-huh. Yes. Thank you.

LORNA: Sometimes if I walk northeast for too long I burst into hysterical fits of laughter. *(Laughing.)* You know how it is. So you were saying . . . ?

SAMMY: I wasn't saying anything. I didn't say nothin'. I'm mindin' my own business. Askin' no questions. No questions here. None.

LORNA: You may ask me what I want in life.

SAMMY: Oh, no, I'm not. I'm not askin'. I'm not nosy.

LORNA: Oh come on. You'd like to know what I want. But how would I answer? My conversation would be a series of pauses because it's hard to know what you want. Long pauses. And then I'd finally answer. But after that answer, I would get sad and desperate and sorrowful. *(Tearfully.)* Because generally there is a great gaping canyon between what people want and what they can manage to get in life. Don't you think?

SAMMY: Ya know what I think? You want to know what I really think?

LORNA: What?

SAMMY: You're crazy. You are one crazy bird. You look all dressed up, like you're steppin' out of a Christian Du Jour Catalogue, but you are one crazy loon-toon lady, OK. *(Long pause. Lorna doesn't move. She appears frozen.)*

SAMMY: I'm sorry. I didn't mean any offense, really. I just . . . I'm sorry, I had a bad morning. I didn't mean to take it out on you. It's just none of them folks say they can even spare a dime or nickel. Come on. I know you had a hard childhood, but I had a hard night. I slept on a steam grate. And that's bad for your back. You got to go to a gynopractor to fix it. You see, my car ran outta gas here when I was visiting my sick . . . Are you OK? *(He whistles to try to get her eyes to follow him. He goes to touch her but she stands frozen.)* Oh, I'm very sorry. *(Bending down to look in her eyes.)* I hope I didn't do this to you. Hello? *(Waves his hand over her eyes.)* Hello? *(He looks at her.)* Hi. It's, it's just my

car broke down and my mama is . . . *(She moans quietly.)* OK, OK, I'm lyin', OK. You're right. You got me. You called me out now. God's gonna get me too. I'm a little bit of an alcoholic, it's true, but I'm workin' on that. I didn't want to harm you now. I just. Ya know, I just, I just wanted a little bit of spare change. But that was rude. And I don't need it now. Especially since I know you're, no offense there, very, very mentally crazy. So I hope you're all right. I'm gonna go over by the store now. Nice talkin' to you. Have a good day. *(He starts to leave.)*

LORNA: That wasn't a question.

SAMMY: Oh God, good. You're alive. Good!

LORNA: That was not phrased as a question. Are you aware of that? Ask the question!

SAMMY: *(Starts to move.)* I don't want to. I'm gonna go, ma'am. I don't want to bug you. *(Waves.)* Bye now. Bye.

LORNA: *(Following him, grabbing his hand.)* You're not bugging me! I love you!

SAMMY: What? You — no, no, no, you don't! Let go of my hand. You don't even know me, ma'am. Did I tell you I'm an alcoholic? No money. I have bad habits. Bad. I eat very poorly. I don't shower. And my breath don't smell too good neither.

LORNA: I want you to meet my dad.

SAMMY: Well, but see, but see here, I don't want to meet him. He's dead, lady. Dead! He's dead! For two, me, you — no, no — no together. *(Looking at how she's gripping his hand.)* I'm no good. Did I tell you I'm homeless? I got nothin'. I'm an alcoholic! I'm a li-ar too! No sick mother, no car, no high blood pressure. Except maybe mine right now.

LORNA: I don't care about any of that. I love you. I want you to have my money.

SAMMY: *(Trying to shake her off.)* But I don't want your money! Please, I don't want it! Please, leave me alone. Go on — get! *(She releases him.)*

LORNA: *(Trying to hand him her money.)* Take my money.

Take all my spare change. Take my body too. *(Trying to reach out to him as he starts to move away.)*

SAMMY: No! Stay away now. You are freaking me out. *(Pointing to her.)* I don't know this lady. I swear! I asked her for nothing!

LORNA: *(She persists.)* We'll run off together. Daddy will love you!

SAMMY: *(Starting to back away.)* Now, don't be followin' me! Cut that out. I ain't headin' nowhere but trouble. You stay back! Stay back now! Lady, you are scarin' me. I'll call the police. *(To himself.)* I'm calling the police?

LORNA: But . . . *(Looks longingly in Sammy's direction.)* I love you.

SAMMY: *(Calling out, running.)* Mr. Officer?!! Mr. Officer?!! Heeeeeelp!!

## OPPOSITE SPIRITS

Frank, seventeen, is one of the finest young adults at St. Mary's High School in Rhode Island. Besides being a straight-A student, he's won the school science contest, presided over the treasury portion of the faculty-student council and is the student most responsible for his Mind Bender Team making it into nationals three years running. It's Frank's senior year, and the faculty is seriously considering him for valedictorian of his class. The only problem is Frank has been getting in trouble all of a sudden — skipping classes, throwing regular trash in the recycle bins, even smoking. He has no real friends. He's fallen into a funk because he's realizing he's never gone to a big dance, a party, or even a football game. Jessie is Frank's antithesis. She's a straight-C student, though she tests way above her grades. The only class she excels in is English, and that's because she's an avid reader. She has a regular seat saved in detention because she tends to rile teachers. Unlike Frank, Jessie, seventeen, never misses a social event. She goes to all major dances, parties, and football games, typically accompanied by her boyfriend, Kip, of the famed high school band, the Shampoo Boys. It is the end of the day, and Jessie and Frank are caught in detention together alone. Sister Pat has gone down the hall to attend to some things in her office. She informed them that she would return shortly.

### CHARACTERS

Larry: 17, straight-A student, loner  
Gretchen: 17, straight-C student, social

### SETTING

St. Mary's High School; a classroom used for detention

### TIME

The present