

*PLACE: A small prison cell block in an unknown place.*

*TIME: Now.*

*SETTING:*

*Prison. Two cells, one s.r, the other s.l. Each cell has a cot, a stool and a small table. A chair sits between the cells, facing down stage.*

*AT LIGHTS:*

*JOEY is seated on a stool in his cell. AL sits in an adjacent cell. The door to the cells are closed. HARRY enters with a tray of food, opens the door to JOEY'S cell and enters.*

HARRY        Here it is, Joey.

JOEY         I told you I didn't want anything, Harry.

HARRY        You have to have it.

JOEY         Why?

HARRY        It's the rules.

JOEY         Whose rules? They ain't my rules.

HARRY        I don't know whose rules, Joey. Maybe the state. I think it's a state rule you have to have the meal.

JOEY         Well, you know me, Harry. I never was one for rules. That's how come I wound up in this place. Now, you tell me why I should eat it.

HARRY        Because it's for your own good, Joey. Vitamins and all that. I don't know what else to tell you. It's the rules and it's got vitamins. That's it, I think.

JOEY         Is it going to get me out of here?

HARRY        It's just food, Joey, not some sort of miracle. Ice-cream never sprung no-body. Look what you got here. You got your steak. You got your mashed potatoes with butter on 'em. You got your piece of apple pie. You got your chocolate ice- cream. You got your coffee. I mean, I don't eat as good as you got it.

JOEY         Yeah, well, if it can't get me out of here, I don't want it.

HARRY        Am I not mistaken, or did you not order this stuff?

JOEY         I did.

HARRY So?

JOEY So I had a change of heart. I figured at this point I'm entitled.

HARRY See, there's your problem, Joey. My shrink calls it "a sense of entitlement." Like you're owed something. My wife's got the same problem. Makes me nuts.

AL You see a head doctor?

HARRY Despite what you think, Al, this job ain't exactly a walk in the park. My life has it's ups and downs, too, you know. I mean, could you imagine having to deal with guys like you every hour of every day and needing ten years for retirement.

JOEY What do you talk about with the shrink, Harry?

HARRY It's called venting.

AL Venting. Like, a fan over an oven that pulls out the bad smells?

HARRY More like bad thoughts, but you wouldn't understand. *(to JOEY)* All I'm saying, Joey, especially at a time like this, is how important it is for you to go along, get along with folks instead of causing problems. In fact, now that I think of it, there were always problems managing you. Always little things, but annoying, you know?

JOEY No. Like what?

HARRY Well, your library books, for example. You never got them back on time. Things like that. They pile up after a while. You never just went along.

JOEY Yeah, you're right. I know. That's how come I'm in here, remember?

HARRY But it's not to late to change, Joey.

JOEY Yes it is, Harry. And besides, I hate change.

HARRY Yeah, me too. I'm with you on that. That's how come I'm here ten years, married twenty. You kind of get yourself locked in, if you follow me.

JOEY I think I follow that, Harry. Change can be a bitch. I been here now, what, fifteen years, and in all that time I never changed nothing including my underwear.

HARRY No, that's not true. Underwear change every Friday. You know that.

JOEY That was a joke, Harry. I was making a joke about change. Listen, I can't keep explaining this stuff to you.

HARRY You don't have to explain nothing to me. I'm explaining it to you. If you had only followed the rules...

JOEY           That's why you got a good job here, Harry. You know the rules and you stick with 'em. "Right down the middle Harry," we call you.

HARRY         Is that right? Geez, I didn't know that. "Right down the middle Harry."

JOEY           Oh sure. (*confidentially*) We have names for all you guys.

HARRY         That right?

JOEY           The guard over in C block. We call him Barney on account of his kind of purplish skin. Then there's...

HARRY         Listen Joey, I'd love to stand here and shoot the shit about this, but I gotta move on. Lotta guys waiting for their meal. So you going to eat or what?

JOEY           What, Harry, and please don't take it personal.

HARRY         Maybe you'd like something different. Maybe you're a vegetarian all of a sudden. I don't know.

JOEY           Nah. It's just that I kinda lost my appetite.

HARRY         I'm with you on that, Joey. In your situation, I guess I'd feel exactly like you. But you know, I gotta tell ya, this never happened before.

JOEY           No kidding?

HARRY         No kidding. In my ten years, every guy in your place eats like a wolf when they got to this point.

JOEY           I guess I'm all wolfed out, Harry.

*HARRY begins to exit the cell.*

HARRY         Well, I gotta report this to the Sarge. He always wants to hear about problems. Poor guy, as if he doesn't have enough on his mind.

JOEY           Give him my best.

*HARRY exits.*

AL             Ya could of taken the food, you know.

JOEY           Yeah, but I didn't want it, Al. No point taking it and not eating it. Then I'd feel guilty about my wasting the food.

AL             Yeah, but you could have just taken it and then passed it over to me. Who would have known?

JOEY           Me. That would be like stealing and I don't need any more aggravation in my life, not at this point. I got enough going on.

AL Still, what's coming up, on an empty stomach...

JOEY Shut up, Al.

AL Oh, yeah, I'm sorry, Joey.

JOEY Don't matter what you say, Al. It won't change a thing. Eat, don't eat; talk, don't talk. In the end...

*They sit and contemplate.*

JOEY *(cont'd)* Okay, maybe you're right. I'll call Harry and get the food. No reason it should go to waste.

AL It would be real nice of you, Joey.

JOEY HEY, HARRY.

*HARRY enters with the tray of food.*

HARRY I knew you'd change your mind.

JOEY Well, you're wrong. I want you to give the food to Al, here.

HARRY Can't do that.

JOEY  
AND AL Why not?

HARRY Well, it's a special meal for Joey. Al ain't special. Yet. When's your date, Al?

AL None of your business.

JOEY So it's me or the garbage?

HARRY That's it.

AL I think you're lying. I think you're taken it for yourself.

HARRY Swear to God.

JOEY Let me see that tray.

*HARRY brings the tray to JOEY.*

JOEY *(cont'd)* Did you nibble on that apple pie?

HARRY Just a little of the crust. I couldn't help myself.

AL Ya see, that's the problem with this place. Everyone is out for themselves. And they lie. They swear to God and then they lie. I'm tellin' ya, I can't wait to get out of this place.

HARRY All in good time, Al.

JOEY Yeah, Al, I wouldn't rush this if I was you.

HARRY So is that it? Your final word?

JOEY Final word, Harry. *(to AL)* Sorry, Al.

*HARRY exits.*

AL I gotta tell ya, Joey, I admire your stand on this. Right to the end you never let them push you around.

JOEY Gee, thanks, Al. Nice of you. I mean, I got my pride. Just because...well, just because of...you know...doesn't mean I have ta knuckle under. Someone has to stand up to the big guys.

AL On the other hand, I think just this once you could have put up more of a fight for me. Pride is good, but a steak. Geez. A steak. And I saw it, Al. It was this thick. And the ice-cream. Pie ala mode.

JOEY Could you please knock it off already with the food? This is a time to be serious.

AL I'm being serious. I mean, being here ain't no picnic for me, either. We been together a long time. Now I'm going have to break in a new guy. No offence, Joey, but that's the facts. I figure I need to fortify myself for this.

JOEY What the hell does that mean?

AL Fortify myself? It means I need to be strong in order to handle the...well, to deal with...never mind.

*HARRY enters with SARGE.*

AL *(cont'd)* Oh, oh!

SARGE Okay, Joey. What's this all about?

JOEY Just what Harry told you.

SARGE That's why I'm here. I don't like what he told me. What I want to know is, what's going on?

JOEY Didn't you explain it to him, Harry?

SARGE But you understand the rules of this thing.

JOEY Harry told me the rules, but that don't mean I gotta go along. Like I said to him, I never went much by the rules.

HARRY Yup, that's what he said, Sarge.

JOEY            So there's no point going along now. I mean, if I was hungry, well then maybe that's a different story. Then there's no problem. But you can't expect a man to eat when he ain't hungry.

SARGE           But I can expect a man to play along. I run this cell block and I can't allow one of you guys to flout the rules.

HARRY           I think that's flout the rules, Sarge.

SARGE           What did I say?

HARRY           Flute.

SARGE           Are you sure?

AL                That's what you said, Sarge. You said flute. Harry's right. It should be flout, not flute.

SARGE           You mind your business over there. I ain't talking to you.

AL                I just trying...

SARGE           Never mind that. Just pipe down. And I don't care if it's flout, flute or tuba, you were brought your meal and by God you are going to eat it.

JOEY            I don't think so, Sarge. In fact, I'm sure of it.

HARRY           See? What did I tell ya? He's a tough one.

SARGE           Never mind that. I've been here twenty-five years and dealt with the toughest. Murders, rapists. Guys who would rip your eyeballs out...

AL                You talking about me, Sarge?

SARGE           I'm talking about guys who would make Joey, here, look like a pansy.

JOEY            I am a pansy, Sarge.

AL                That right?

HARRY           Ya know, I had I hunch on that one.

AL                Might have been a good idea to let me know about this hunch of yours, don't you think, Harry?

HARRY           Well, I mean it was just a hunch. Unless you're caught...

SARGE           (*angry*) Does anyone know what the hell I'm getting at?

AL                I believe you're trying to make the point that Joey has to eat his veggies.

SARGE           Exactly the point. Thank you, Al.

HARRY Have you any ideas about how to get this to happen?

AL Yeah, Sarge. I'd be interested to see how you're going to get this done.

SARGE Joey, this is your last warning. I'm chancing you.

*HARRY whispers into SARGE'S ear.*

SARGE (*cont'd*) Joey, this is your last chance. I'm warning you.

JOEY All my life I never believed in waste. This is no time to start. I don't want it, I won't eat it. Period. Give it to Al.

SARGE Al has nothing to do with this. Do you have any idea how bad this is going to look to the Warden, that I can't handle my cons? Are you trying to make me look bad? Ruin my career? Do you care that by you not eating I may not be able to put food in my kids' stomachs?

AL How many kids you got, Sarge?

SARGE That's none of your business.

HARRY (*to AL*) I think it's three, right Sarge?

SARGE I said it was none of his or your business how many kids I have. The point here is that Joey is out to ruin my reputation and chance for promotion. All I ever wanted in life was to make Captain, to be a leader of men. You think the Warden is going to consider me for promotion when I can't even get one of my cons to eat his last meal?

AL Hey, can it with that last meal stuff. You don't know that. Joey got appeals in. Right, Joey?

JOEY That's okay, Al. Fact is, first, middle or last, I don't want the meal.

SARGE I have a dream, Joey. I will not allow you to shit on my dream.

*SARGE lunges for JOEY through the bars, but his arms can't reach him. As this develops, HARRY slowly exits.*

SARGE (*cont'd*) Harry, get me the keys. I'll show this guy who's in charge of this cell block. If he thinks...Harry! The keys.

AL You might want to try the men's room, Sarge. Harry hangs out there a lot.

SARGE (*to JOEY*) You think this is over? This isn't over. This is just the beginning. You think you won this fight? You didn't win this fight.

AL What round we in, Sarge?

SARGE You stay right there, Joey. I'll be back.

JOEY        I guess you'll know where to find me, Sarge.

*SARGE exits.*

JOEY            *(cont'd)* The Sarge seems to be a bit perturbed. Never figured him to be such a hot head.

AL              Well, I guess we all have our breaking points. I never figured that a steak would cause such a commotion. What do you figure he's going to do?

JOEY            Don't matter. My head's made up. I got principles and once I figure out what they are, I stick with 'em. I think I got this one lined up pretty good.

*SARGE and HARRY enter with the CHAPLAIN.*

SARGE         This is the guy, Chaplain.

CHAPLAIN     Oh, sure. I know him. Hi, ya, Joey.

JOEY            Been a while, huh, Chaplain? You don't get down here much.

CHAPLAIN     So many souls, so little time. I'm sure you understand.

JOEY            No one understands that better than me. So, how ya been, Chaplain?

CHAPLAIN     Prostate acting up, but otherwise, okay. My knees, of course, are shot. All that...

*CHAPLAIN kneels halfway, then slowly pushes himself up-right.*

JOEY            Yeah, I can see how that could happen. I once knew a couple of guys that had the same problem. Ever try knee pads, Chaplain?

CHAPLAIN     Well, thank you, Joey. That's a great idea. Now, about the...

JOEY            Not that I'm comparing you to these guys, of course.

CHAPLAIN     Perish the thought, Joey. Perish the thought. Now about the...

AL              Hi, ya, Chaplain.

CHAPLAIN     I don't think I know you.

AL              My name's Al.

CHAPLAIN     How come I haven't seen you for confession, Al?

AL              I'm Jewish, Chaplain. Not really much point in having you stop by.

CHAPLAIN     I could ask the Rabbi to visit.

AL              I don't think the jail has a Rabbi, Chaplain.

CHAPLAIN     Is that right, Sarge?

SARGE         It appears so.

CHAPLAIN Why is that, Sarge?

SARGE Not enough Jews in jail to need one.

CHAPLAIN Fortunately there are plenty of other sinners, though, right, Sarge?

SARGE All I'm worried about right now is this one.

CHAPLAIN Right you are, Sarge. So, Joey, let's talk about the food.

JOEY Not much to say, really. They brought it...

HARRY You ordered it.

JOEY I didn't want it...

SARGE Then why did you order it?

AL A guy can change his mind, Sarge.

SARGE Are you going to shut up, or will I have to come in there?

AL You know, you sounded just like my father did when I was a kid. Gee, he was a nice guy.

HARRY I'm sorry to hear he died, Al.

AL Oh, he didn't die. He just stopped being a nice guy. In fact, he...

SARGE Harry, if you don't mind, can we stick to the issue at hand here. Remember? The food?

CHAPLAIN Go ahead, Joey. So what happened then?

JOEY So then Harry, here, he took it away. End of story until Sarge popped in.

SARGE I didn't just pop in. I was doing my job. I am trying to keep avenues of communication open so that we could come to an understanding, perhaps, if necessary, a compromise.

AL Like maybe eat only the meat and leave the veggies. Eat the ice-cream, but toss the pie. Is that what you mean?

SARGE *(to JOEY)* I MEAN YOU PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I'M SAYING. I'M SAYING THAT IF YOU DON'T EAT YOUR FUCKING MEAL IN THE NEXT HALF-HOUR I WILL KICK YOU 'TILL YOU'RE DEAD AND SAVE THE STATE THE COST OF ELECTRIC. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, MISTER?

JOEY So, in other words, you want me to cash in my principles, to knuckle under, to go against my conscience...

SARGE Conscience? Listen to him. Conscience?

CHAPLAIN It is possible, Sarge. I don't know his record, but I know people and I think Joey is good people. Family people.

*HARRY whispers in the CHAPLAIN'S ear.*

CHAPLAIN *(cont'd) (looks at JOEY, stunned)* He did that?

HARRY And that's only what we know of. Not that I'm anyone to throw stones. I could tell you some stuff about my family that would...

SARGE Can we get on with this.

CHAPLAIN Certainly. Joey, I think you have to look at the broader picture here.

JOEY Broader picture? Chaplain, tomorrow morning the picture goes out.

CHAPLAIN Exactly my point, Joey. Your picture goes out, but Sarge has a picture, he wants a promotion, and Harry has a picture, he needs to feel his rules are being met, even Al probably has a picture, although since he's a Jew I'm not even sure what his picture might be...

AL I got a picture, okay, Chaplain, but I got a feeling it's a cartoon.

CHAPLAIN See, Joey, although Jewish, even Al has a picture. So when I'm talking about the bigger picture, I think you have to look past yourself.

JOEY What's your picture, Chaplain?

CHAPLAIN Making everything right with God, Joey. Making as sure as I can that God is right with the world. And you know how I do that, Joey.

JOEY Can't imagine, Chaplain.

CHAPLAIN Whenever I have a decision to make, I ask myself, what would Jesus do? And you know what I'm sure Jesus would do if he were in your situation?

JOEY Haven't a clue, Chaplain, but I bet you're going to tell me.

SARGE No, I'll tell you. He would eat the fucking meal, is what He would do. He would eat the fucking meal.

CHAPLAIN He would try and do the right thing for everyone, Joey. And yes, I think He would eat the meal. He was a man of great love and compassion for mankind. He would understand the needs of Sarge, Harry, and, although doubtful, even possibly Al. One thing He wouldn't do, Joey. He wouldn't make waves. He would simply and humbly eat the meal.

JOEY But if he didn't make waves, why was he nailed up?

CHAPLAIN *(thoughtful)* Good, point, Joey. Very good point. Hmm. If he didn't make

waves, why was he nailed up? I'll have to think about that one.

JOEY

Take your time, but not too much, if you get my drift.