



Art Shulman

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

Joe Carbone's Job

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Big Dog Publishing

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*To Rebecca,
who was the first Angie,
and is the first lady of my life.
For her inspiration, encouragement,
and willingness to "play."*

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Joe Carbone's Job was first produced September-November 1994 at the No-Ho Studios, North Hollywood: Jodie Colombo, director; James DeCola, assistant director; Andrew Wise, lighting.

JOE CARBONE:	Michael Schoenfeld Sal Rendino
ANGIE:	Rebecca Westberg Terrie Silverman
THERESA:	Carrick Bartle Jennifer Schofield
LOUDMOUTH:	Greg McDonald Marge Windish
COMPUTER SCIENTIST:	Dick Rosenblatt James Dillon
BUSTER FINDEL:	Spencer Scofield Del Monroe
ASTROLOGER:	Renee Parent Deanne Bringle
TONY:	Tim Sullivan Andre Johnson
CABBIE:	Don Mack James DeCola
GRAVEDIGGER:	Michael Groves Michael Melvin
GAS ATTENDANT:	Jolene Yale Amy Edlin
CUSTOMER REP:	Therese Lentz Wendy Hunter
RABBI:	Jerry Weil (both casts)
COUNSELOR:	Ronny C. Coleman Don Short
BIOLOGIST:	Taylor Halberstam Laura Granick

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COMEDY. Everything seems to be going just fine for Joe Carbone, the owner of a poultry plant, until one day, he finds that he just doesn't have the stomach to kill chickens anymore. Joe keeps his problem a secret from his workers at the slaughterhouse and decides to moonlight as a waiter at Angie's Coffeehouse. Unsure whether he should sell the business and change his profession, Joe asks a host of wacky coffeehouse customers about their jobs. Along the way, Joe meets a gravedigger, an astrologist, a rabbi, and a suicide-prevention counselor. Will the loveable Joe Carbone continue to slaughter chickens for a living, or will he find a new job? This character-driven comedy satirizes the absurd workplace situations people face every day.

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

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Characters

(7 m, 6 w, 2 flexible, extras)

JOE CARBONE: 35-45; owner of a chicken slaughterhouse by day and waiter at Angie's Coffeehouse by night.

ANGIE: 30-40; owner of Angie's Coffeehouse; vegetarian, animal-lover.

BUSTER FINDEL: 45-60; self-taught, distinguished-looking rich businessman.

THERESA: 12-25; a pleasant, outgoing flower girl.

LOUDMOUTH: Obnoxious, brash; flexible role.

TONY: 35-50; earnest blue-collar slaughterhouse worker.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: 25-45; writes computer-software user-manuals; lonely.

CABBIE: Oily, yet likeable.

ASTROLOGER: 25-45; sexy sex astrologer.

GRAVEDIGGER: 40; literate, dresses like a laborer.

GAS STATION ATTENDANT/CASHIER: 20-25; ditsy.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS REP: 28-40; frustrated with rude customers.

RABBI: 40-60; lecherous and comical.

SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNSELOR: 25-35; flexible role.

BIOLOGIST: 25-35; mousy, likes Sweet'N Low.

EXTRAS (optional.): As coffeehouse customers.

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Setting

Angie's Coffeehouse is located in a cosmopolitan area. It has an eclectic atmosphere and is furnished with well-worn tables, chairs, bookcases, etc. There is a chessboard on one table, a dartboard on the wall, and a goldfish bowl on the bar/counter.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Evening, Angie's Coffeehouse.

ACT II: Angie's Coffeehouse, a few moments later.

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Props

Bunch of roses
Goldfish bowl
Chessboard
Sweet'N Low packets
Sugar packets
3 carafes, matching
Money

Teddy bear
Paper bag
Coffee cups
Dartboard
Bagel
Teacup

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Act I

(AT RISE: Angie's Coffeehouse. No one is on stage. Angie enters from the kitchen and begins tidying up and arranging things. Shortly, Loudmouth enters.)

LOUDMOUTH: Hey, waitress, where's the crowd?

ANGIE: It's early. Why don't you take a seat? I'll be right with you.

LOUDMOUTH: No thanks. I never drink alone.

ANGIE: Suit yourself.

(Theresa enters.)

THERESA: Hi, Angie.

ANGIE: Hi, Theresa. What a pretty bunch of roses you've got tonight!

THERESA: Guess I'm a little early. Your customers aren't here yet.

LOUDMOUTH: Hey, I'm a customer!

(Theresa holds up a rose to Loudmouth, who sneezes on it.)

THERESA: Would you like to buy a rose?

LOUDMOUTH: No thanks. I'm not exactly the rose type!

THERESA: Well, Angie. I'll be back later, when some real customers come in.

ANGIE: See you later, Theresa.

(Theresa exits.)

LOUDMOUTH: Don't you just love those people walking around selling flowers! Like that girl!

ANGIE: What's wrong with selling roses?

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LOUDMOUTH: Nothing, if you don't mind street peddlers who pay no business tax and take trade away from legitimate merchants.

ANGIE: Excuse me, she helps support her family. She's got five younger brothers and sisters. Besides, how do you know she doesn't pay taxes?

LOUDMOUTH: Those types of people never do. Just like the people who sell oranges on the streets. At least you can eat an orange. You can't eat a flower, unless you include rose hip tea!

ANGIE: Flowers are not meant for eating.

LOUDMOUTH: Yeah, they're meant for making people sneeze, with all the pollen they shoot in the air.

ANGIE: A lot of people love flowers.

LOUDMOUTH: Yeah, they're the same ones whose existence is so drab they need something to add color to their lives. Besides, why buy a flower when you can snatch one from someone's hedge?

ANGIE: How can anyone not like roses?

LOUDMOUTH: Why should anyone like something with thorns? I say, if you're going to buy anything, get something that lasts, not something that dries out and falls apart in a few days.

ANGIE: You are not a sensitive person!

LOUDMOUTH: The truth sometimes hurts, huh lady? Hey, I'll be back when you get more people in here.

ANGIE: Don't rush!

(Angie exits to kitchen. Joe enters as Loudmouth nears exit.)

LOUDMOUTH: Don't bother going in there, it's dead. *(Loudmouth exits.)*

JOE: *(Aside.)* This place has more character with no customers than most places with customers like that. I'm Joe Carbone. I work with chickens. In a poultry plant. I been there 20 years. After all this time, suddenly I got a conscience problem. The

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poor chickens! Day after day, I'm surrounded by chickens. On one side of me, there's live ones, chirping, peeping. On the other side, the chickens are closer to being part of someone's dinner. Much closer. It's quieter on that side. Much quieter. A chicken comes in there, he don't leave, except shrink-wrapped. He don't die from old age. Some of the guys affectionately call the place the "House of Death." How'd you like to work in the House of Death, even if it wasn't your death they were talking about? You know the expression, "Running around like a chicken without a head." Well, it refers to when you chop their heads off, they do this cute chicken dance before they die. One thing making my job hard is recognizing that different chickens have different personalities, and that each chicken is an individual in his own right, even if they all do the same dance step before they finally die. Working there you realize that chickens can communicate with each other. They talk to one another. Sometimes you get the feeling they're talking to you. Their sounds are not random noises. Each puk-puk-puk has a purpose. In a way, I think of chickens as I do little children, making their little noises, playful, and somewhat intelligent, but not real smart. If they were real smart, the chickens on this side would notice what happened to the chickens on the other side, talk it over with each other, and they'd be much more nervous than they are. When new workers start, we stress to them, "Don't make friends with the chickens." Signs all over say, "Don't make friends with the chickens." But some chickens are so cute you just can't help it. That's when it's real hard...when you have to kill one of your little pals, who you've spoke to the past few weeks, and you wonder if he'll end up boiled, fried, or fricasseed. Some of my workers still let themselves get away with rationalizations for killing another living being. Don, who has been "born again," he says, "You have no problem swatting a fly or stepping on a roach. If you don't feel bad about killing them, why worry about chickens? All animals are equal in God's eyes." Herbie, he says, "Chicken

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soup makes sick people better. How else you gonna make chicken soup unless you kill the chicken?" *(Pause.)* Chickens were my father's life work. His name was Nick Carbone. He founded the poultry plant 30 years ago, just the other side of the river. Six months ago he died. Before he passed, I was just in charge of production. I run it all now. Or, closer to the truth, it runs itself. The only place I worked in my whole life, until last week, is the poultry plant. I loved my father. He was my idol, my buddy. He always put his big hand on my shoulder, told me I did good. But since his passing, things have changed. *(Pause.)* I have an offer to sell the place. Buster Findel wants to buy me out. He owns a restaurant chain we sell chickens to, plus lots of other businesses. My father never liked him. My father, who rarely said bad things about anyone, called him a pompous moneygrubber. I don't know if I could sell my father's poultry plant to someone he didn't like. And if I sell, I can't be on the company bowling team. The league championship tournament is next month. Still, given how hard it is for me to continue at the poultry plant, I might have to sell and change careers. But what career should I go into? I don't want to make a mistake and have my new career give me regrets, like at the plant. *(Pause. Angie enters, goes to goldfish bowl on bar.)* A week ago, I was passing by this coffeehouse and saw a sign in the window saying, "Waiter needed for evenings." I said to myself, "Hey, Joe, why not! You like to talk to people. A coffeehouse could be the perfect opportunity to meet different kinds of people and ask them about what they do for a living. Who knows what you might find out?" So, I applied for the job. Of course at first I didn't tell Angie, the owner, what I did during the day, though it came out later. She hired me right away. So far I'm still working on what to do with my life. I been talking to the customers, but I haven't figured the answer yet. Sell the poultry plant to Findel? Find a new career that's just for me? Or what? Nothing seems right. *(Pause. Computer Scientist enters, sits at table with*

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chessboard.) So here I am, waiting tables, cleaning up, and most important, when it's not too busy, conversing with customers, picking their brain about their career. I come in, I put on a clean apron—all white, no red splotches on it—and I'm ready for work. All kinds of people come in. People like coffee. We got different kinds—espresso, cappuccino, regular, and decaf. Coffee beans. Tea also, herbal and regular. Scones, danish, muffins. A good place for people to relax, play some games, maybe read a bit, or have a conversation. That's Angie. Isn't she pretty! We get along. I'd like her to be my girlfriend, but yesterday she told me she couldn't be serious with someone who ran a poultry plant.

ANGIE: (*Aside.*) I love animals. I keep four cats, three dogs, two guinea pigs, and a parakeet in my apartment. None of them is in a cage. I think it's cruel to keep an animal in a cage. Some people say my apartment stinks, but when I come home, there's no sweeter smell to my nose. Once I thought of getting a boa constrictor, but I get real cuddly with my pets, and I was afraid that one night he'd creep under the covers with me in my bed, and when I woke up in the morning, I'd find myself accidentally strangled to death. (*Pause.*) I'd never have a place that served cooked animals. When we serve bear claws and alligator pastries, we're honoring animals, not actually eating them. I won't eat anything with a soul. That's where I draw the line. And I think all animals have souls. As far as fruits and vegetables having souls, I think that's ridiculous. They have pits, not souls. I wonder if pits have souls? (*Pause.*) So, I'm a vegetarian. I think eating meat makes people too aggressive and violent. And it's not right for humans to take advantage of animals, who can't stand up for themselves against human cruelty. I feel really strongly about animal rights. I'm willing to do anything necessary to fight for them. I'd even consider joining a terrorist organization that would blow up laboratories that victimize helpless animals. But I'm no fanatic. I used to be.

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Once, I got lice in my hair and I shaved my head bald so I wouldn't have to kill any of the lice, who have to live too, somehow. Nowadays, I'd use a shampoo to put them to sleep. When I see a cockroach crawling around here, I don't let him have the run of the place. I kindly pick him up and show him the door. (*Angie throws imaginary cockroach out the door.*) Oops, sorry mister! As a symbol of my sense of oneness with animals, sometimes I sprinkle parakeet seeds on my salad. And every Saturday afternoon, I have a sandwich of vegetarian dog food on wheat—a very small sandwich. Personally, I like canned Veggie Kibbles. (*Pause.*) My customers really like Joe. I could tell. They give him nice tips. He's an okay waiter. He talks a little too much with customers, and sometimes I get the feeling he talks to himself. We have some good conversations, and he's very sweet, and I think I could really get to like him. But I told him I could never be serious about anybody who ran a slaughterhouse. So, right now, my personal life is on hold.

JOE: (*Aside.*) What Angie said about the poultry plant is in my mind. But she doesn't know everything about me. Like the meaning bowling has for me... (*Pause.*) I like being here. There's always something going on, always someone to talk to. Someone who can give you a good perspective on the profession they're in. And it's amazing how many of them mention an animal when you ask about their career. My ear listens for that, given my current one-sided relationship with chickens. (*Joe approaches Computer Scientist, who is playing chess against himself.*) Hi, I'm Joe. I'm your server tonight.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Hello.

JOE: What's your name?

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Why do you need to know my name?

JOE: I don't, really. I was just going to ask you a question, and I thought it would be nice to know your name.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: What type of question?

JOE: Well, see, I'm thinking of changing careers, and I'm working

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here temporarily, talking to people about what they do to help me decide what I should do.

(Computer Scientist moves chess piece.)

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Oh, another I'm-not-really-a-waiter waiter. *(Moves another chess piece.)* Checkmate! I won!

JOE: No, really. I own a poultry plant, and I'm thinking of selling and getting into something new.

(Computer Scientist turns chessboard around.)

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: *(To himself.)* But I also lost. Drat! *(To Joe.)* So, you own a poultry plant. Well, well. I write manuals for computer software. We must have a lot in common.

JOE: You're in the computer business? There's a similarity right there. We're both concerned with *bites*. Could you tell me what it's like?

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: You want to know what my job is like? In my position—preparing computer-software user-manuals—you've got to understand both computers and people. Understanding computers is much easier. They're logical, they have no imagination, no moods to drive you crazy. They're consistent, reliable. Click on "Format," and it does the same thing it did the last time you clicked "Format." When people make a big mistake on the computer, they usually blame the computer or the program, not themselves. I'm sick of it! I guess I'm down on people right now. Including my co-workers. Especially my co-workers. I used to enjoy my life until some of my co-workers began to preach that I couldn't possibly reach my full potential unless I became an enlightened member of their consciousness-raising group. One promises if I join his group, I'll develop a positive cosmic energy flow. Another says his group has a 12-step program to put me in touch with my

personal heavenly angels. Another, involved with fasting, wants me to join him in cleansing our bodies of poisons inhibiting personal growth. Besides, I'll be less likely to develop colon cancer. Yesterday, a colleague glances at specifications I've just written for a user's manual and tells me I'm holding back. If I attend his group's meeting, I'll learn to let go, and I'll be surprised how my writing will improve. When I say I'm writing a technical book, not a novel, he lets me know I lack the ability to express myself emotionally, and unless I change, I'll always be a computer person rather than a people person. They all tell me how much fun it is to be a member of their group. But if I wanted to have fun by attending seminars and meetings, I'd rather go to ones like "How to Pick Up Girls" or "How To Get Rich Buying Penny Stocks." So many of them have tried to convince me to join their group, I figure something must be wrong with me. I wish I could get away from some of them. I think if I could be an animal right now, I'd be one with such dignity and inner serenity that others wouldn't even think of trying to change me. I think I'd like to be a giraffe, an animal with no enemies and the instant ability to get above it all by merely raising his head, and who does it so naturally, he's not accused of being defensive. An animal who doesn't talk, and so is not constantly taunted to open up, or accused of withholding feelings. *(Pause.)* I had an idea about how I could get people off my neck. I've observed you're usually considered fair game to those who want you to join their group, only if you're not currently involved with another self-improvement group. So, my idea was to ask them to enlist in my own group, which raises consciousness by trying to pick up girls and buying penny stocks. The only problem is that my group sounded so good that most of them decided to join, and the first meeting is next Wednesday. Meanwhile, I'm a little hesitant to see any of them while I still have this stiff neck. According to them, a stiff neck rarely has physical causes. Rather than accept explanations like

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cold breezes or car accidents, they blame it on stress. They'll say my stiff neck is due to my being unable to handle stress, and if I only become a member of their group, I'll learn how. Well, the only recent stress I've had is dealing with my friends who want me to join up with them. Besides, they'll never accept the real explanation—that I got my stiff neck after pretending I was a giraffe.

JOE: Thanks for telling me all that. What can I serve you? Would you like some ice for your neck?

(Theresa enters, carrying flowers.)

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: I'll have a cappuccino.

(Joe goes to counter. Cabbie enters, rushes into restroom offstage, carrying carafe of pale yellow liquid.)

ANGIE: So, Joe, did Gilbert tell you much about the computer field?

JOE: He wants to get away from people. That's not me. I need a job where I'm around people. *(To Theresa.)* Can I buy a flower, Theresa?

THERESA: Sure. *(Picks out a flower.)* This is a nice one, Joe. *(Hands it to him.)* I like selling flowers here. This place feels like an immense living room. So relaxed. Like working here, Joe?

JOE: I truly love it here. Being able to banter with customers, the atmosphere, Angie and all.

THERESA: You own a chicken slaughterhouse, huh Joe? Angie told me.

JOE: Yeah. A poultry plant.

THERESA: You like owning a slaughterhouse?

JOE: I don't like the killing part anymore. But I like the idea I'm supplying people with food to eat. It's a public service.

THERESA: I'm like Angie. I don't eat chicken. People can get

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along without eating meat.

JOE: Maybe you and Angie don't eat chicken, but almost everybody else does. And most people think chicken is a native dish of their nationality. Like Americans think chickens are American. But chickens are truly international. Who eats chickens? Everybody! The Italians, the Chinese, the French, the smorgasbords. The smorgasbords love their chicken. There's always a chicken dish on the menu when the smorgasbords put out their buffet! I can't think of a single nationality that doesn't eat chickens, except maybe the Eskimo.

THERESA: You eat a lot of chicken yourself?

JOE: No, not anymore.

THERESA: Well, I've got some business to take care of. See you later, Joe.

(Theresa heads to restroom offstage.)

JOE: See you later, Theresa. *(Buster Findel enters and sits.)* Hey, Angie, is that who I think it is who just walked in?

ANGIE: If you think it's Buster Findel, it's who you think it is. He comes in about once a week. Reads his paper. Usually takes espresso and a napoleon.

JOE: A napoleon. I'm not surprised.

ANGIE: Know him?

JOE: He's the big shot who offered to buy me out. I think he means to tear down the plant, build an industrial park. *(Astrologer enters and sits. Joe approaches her table.)* Hi! I'm Joe. Would you like some peanuts?

ASTROLOGER: Hi! Has anyone ever read your palm, Joe?

JOE: No, they haven't. What's your name?

ASTROLOGER: Jill Joysong.

JOE: Is that with one "L" or two?

ASTROLOGER: Two!

JOE: Before I take your order, I wanted to say, I just work here as a

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waiter temporarily, and I need a new career. If you have a few minutes, would you mind telling me what you do for a living?

ASTROLOGER: I'll talk about astrology anytime.

JOE: You an astrologer?

ASTROLOGER: It's my life. You know what? Not everybody believes in astrology. Some people actually believe God controls their fate, not the positioning of the stars. And some so-called scientists got together a few years ago and proclaimed astrology had no scientific basis. You know what? Four centuries before that, Nostradamus analyzed the stars and predicted a group of scientists would make the proclamation in 400 years. Our biggest nemeses are astronomers who think they know more than we do. If they're so smart, why can't they predict the future like we do? They readily admit they can only see the past. They seem to take pride in observing events they admit took place light-years ago. Their scopes take in what happened. Our scopes predict what *will* happen...and on a much more personal level than they ever get to. Horoscopes are much more useful to the average person than telescopes! Astrology works. Too many things happen that can't be coincidence. How come just about every Cancer is mellow? And have you ever met two opposite-sex water signs faithful to each other for more than a year? And if astrology didn't work, why would there be an astrology column in just about every major newspaper in the country? The profession of astrology has matured as the public has become educated and familiar with its nuances. While there's still room for generalists, astrology professionals have now developed specializations. And just like you wouldn't visit the proctologist if you had an earache, you'd want to visit the astrologer who specialized in the area of life you wanted to know about. For example, you might visit your financial astrologer, your health and safety astrologer, your political astrologer, or someone like me, your sex astrologer. *(Pause.)* You know what? I have so many animals...I like...crabs,

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scorpions, rams, bulls, fish, goats. I wish all of the signs could have been animals. For example, it probably wouldn't have been too difficult for someone to have drawn different lines between the stars, in what's known as Gemini, and outlined a bear. A bear would make a lovely sign, especially a Kodiak bear. We columnists could have fun with it calling it the "Kodiak of the Zodiac." *(Pause.)* I'm a Leo. Yesterday my column advised Leos to "Prepare yourself for action." Last night, both I and the prediction were fulfilled. You know what? Today's message is "Aries is rising and may be ready for ramming." *(Pause.)* Even though some people seem so negative you'd suspect they were born under a minus sign, you just might have caught them on a bad day under the cusp, and you can't really blame the stars, since all the signs have more positive than negative to them. Very rarely do my columns predict something negative. Even if the stars indicate rubber items may cause rashes today, I won't put it in...in my column. Astrologers have morality and decency! We rarely attack the ethics of anyone, no less a whole profession, like astronomers do to us. They'll learn. You know what? Just like physicians gradually had to accept that chiropractors could cure backaches they couldn't, sooner or later the scientific community will accept us. Meanwhile, I think the only thing I have in common with astronomers is that we both believe in the big-bang theory.

JOE: That was fascinating. What may I serve you?

(Loudmouth enters shaking a paper bag. Theresa enters from the restroom.)

LOUDMOUTH: *(To paper bag.)* Down boy! Down! I said down! *(Loudmouth slaps bag hard. Theresa gasps. Loudmouth tosses empty bag at Theresa. Theresa exits, fuming.)* Lighten up, honey!

(Cabbie enters from restroom with empty carafe. Angie approaches Joe at

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Astrologer's table.)

ANGIE: I'll serve the horoscope lady, Joe. Louie XYZ! *(Joe goes behind the bar.)*

CABBIE: *(Shouts.)* Thanks, Angie. *(Cabbie zips fly, goes to bar. To Joe.)* Got anything greasy?

(Customer Relations Rep enters, sits in chair near dartboard. She begins playing darts.)

JOE: *(To Cabbie.)* You like your job?

CABBIE: Sure. I drive a cab.

JOE: So what's it like to drive a cab?

CABBIE: What's it like? The word I'd apply to most cabbies is "decent." Decent people making a decent living. None of us is rich, but there's food on the table, a bed to sleep in, and thank God, a bathroom at home. One thing for sure is cabbies can't have weak bladders. Sometimes you're caught in traffic and can't pull over. Even if you haven't got a fare, it's hard to find a place to relieve yourself in this city. There's always people around, even in the alleys, some of who are sleeping in what you want to relieve yourself of. *(Cabbie shows Joe the empty carafe.)* Most of us carry jars, but it can be embarrassing when a truck driver in the next lane looks down and sees what you're doing. Or a passenger in the back leans over, especially a woman. So it's not unusual for us to walk into restaurants, pretending to be customers. *(Pause.)* I'm in my cab more than in my home, so I try to keep it nice. Okay, it has some dents. All cabs have dents. But I wash the windows each day. I keep it neat. I try to make it comfortable for my fares. I used to smoke cigars, but I stopped when I realized some people mind the smoke. Besides, with the type of food I eat, sitting in my stomach, I get gas, so there's already a strong aroma in the cab. The main skill in being profitable, besides driving fast and knowing when to cut off

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other drivers, is gauging the customer. Your ideal customer's an out-of-towner airport pickup you take the long way, showing him the sights. Driving a cab's a dollar-and-cents proposition. You can tell how well you did each day by the total on your meter and by the tips in your pocket and out of sight of the IRS. I keep a family picture in the cab where my fares can't miss seeing it. There's two smiling kids with their mother. The kids are the cutest. I cut it out from a magazine and framed it, but I let my passengers think it's my wife and kids. It's harder for fares to stiff me on the tip if they think I have a family to support. I think I make more money from that picture than by claiming I ain't got change. I been almost everywhere in the city. Sometimes the passenger says the destination, I pull down the flag, and I feel I'm on automatic pilot. I sometimes think I'm like the smart rat in the maze, driving between tall buildings, going from start to finish without hitting any dead ends or taking wrong turns. Of course, some wrong turns I take intentionally to build the total on the meter. When I reach the end of the maze, the passengers' destination, I get my reward. My nickname is "Rat" because of this long thin face. Rats are misunderstood. They do what they have to survive in today's world. Like cabbies. Believe me, if they could get enough food in the sewer, they wouldn't show up in people's homes. Once I had this lady passenger I took all the way from the airport to the suburbs. It happened to be one of those times I had to...once or twice, what I call, "let some air out of the tire"...from the chili I ate. Her clothes said she was rich. She gives me a dime tip. I say, "You sure this is all?" "That's all you deserve," she says. "Why?" I ask. "It's smells like a pigsty in there," she says. So I go, "Lady, you're wrong. The only pig in the cab was you! But you should know you've been sitting in a Rat's cab filled with road dents." *Road dents. Get it? Road dents?*

JOE: Here's your large coffee to go.

CABBIE: Thanks. See you later.

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(Cabbie exits. Findel notices Joe.)

FINDEL: *(Shouts across the room to Joe.)* Joe, is that you? I can't believe it's you working here.

JOE: I'm helping out my friend, Angie here.

(Findel approaches Joe.)

FINDEL: Oh, I see. Well, have you decided on my offer?

JOE: Not yet, Mr. Findel.

FINDEL: It's a good offer, Joe. It includes a contract for you to run the place...under my overall guidance, of course. You'd have enough money to buy yourself your own coffeehouse, and you wouldn't have to wait tables. Now, remember, my offer expires at noon tomorrow. Don't accept by then, I take it off the table.

JOE: I'm still working on it, Mr. Findel. My lawyer will call your lawyer when I decide.

(Findel heads back to his seat.)

FINDEL: *(Aside.)* If Joe has to work here evenings, maybe the slaughterhouse isn't as profitable as I thought.

(Angie approaches Joe.)

ANGIE: I know it's your table, Joe, but I'll take Findel's order if you want.

JOE: Thanks, Angie.

(Angie goes to Findel's table.)

ANGIE: *(To Findel.)* Buster, the usual?

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(Findel nods to Angie. Findel then approaches Customer Relations Rep, who is playing darts.)

FINDEL: *(To Customer Relations Rep.)* You know, I almost bought the company that made the dartboard.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: *(Unimpressed.)* That's nice.

FINDEL: I own lots of companies. I buy 'em and I sell 'em. And I make 'em profitable. I bought a company that made compasses. It was going under, and I turned it around. They called me the "magnet magnate." Once I bought a ski resort and made it so profitable, they called me the "mogul mogul." You get the idea.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: *(Bored.)* Yes, I do.

FINDEL: When you grow a business empire, the people you hire need to get involved with their job, have the drive and initiative to surmount difficulties, and not give a flying crap about things like some spotted owls.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: *(Uninterested.)* Interesting.

FINDEL: I'm no bloodsucking takeover artist who makes fortunes on the prices of the stocks of companies they buy and sell. When I buy control of a company, it's because I can make money operating that company! I never graduated high school, but I know a lot more about running a business than those MBA types. I'm can be a real jerk, when I have to be.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: You got that right.

FINDEL: Well, I think I'll leave you to your darts.

(Findel sits and begins reading a newspaper. Angie delivers Findel's order. Joe comes to take Customer Relations Rep's order.)

JOE: Hi, I'm Joe. I'm your server.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: Joe.

JOE: What's your name?

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: Sue.

JOE: Is that with one "O" or two "O's"?

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CUSTOMER RELATIONS: Neither. It's S-u-e.

JOE: I knew that. I was just kidding. If you have a few minutes, would you do me a favor?

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: What?

JOE: Tell me about what you do for a living.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS: Listen. I listen for a living. I listen until my ear turns red. I'm a customer-relations representative at Winthrops, the department store. So-called "service" seems to be the keyword of today. The store management thinks it's more important to keep customers happy than to keep them honest, so they let them walk all over us. The customers aren't dumb. If they know the store will let them get away with everything, they'll do it time after time. When the new management took over last year, they changed the name of my department, calling it "Customer Relations," which sounds softer than "Complaint Department," so customers would feel at ease about complaining. No matter what the name, it's still the same old job I've had for 15 years. And it gets old telling some of the "cute" men that Customer Relations doesn't necessarily involve my engaging in sex with them. I'm near the edge of quitting! It's partly the frustration of dealing all day with rude people. It's partly an ethical problem—reconciling the store's policy of keeping customers at virtually any cost, versus doing what's right and not letting them get away with blatant deception. Like those who return a dress still stained from a party they went to, or who want to replace an item they broke because they couldn't follow simple assembly instructions. When the new management took over at Winthrop's, Personnel told me I'd be serving as the store's ear to the public. I feel more like the store's kicked ass. More and more, I have an urge to scream back at customers. But I've got to stay calm, polite, retain my composure, remember that no matter how a customer acts, no matter how outrageous the customer's request, I am a nice person. *(Pause.)* When I was a little girl, I always went to bed

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with a teddy bear my daddy – I loved my daddy – had given me before he'd gotten his fill of my mother nagging at him and moved out. The little critter became ragged over the years, losing an eye, his nose, and some stuffing, but he was all I could rely on for comfort when my mother yelled at me for not cleaning up neatly enough, or for getting dirt on my dress. I'd just go in my room and squeeze up my teddy. He was my buddy, my buffer, my confidante. I pretended we lived together, two bears in our own little place, far away. And so, to calm myself and deal with the harsh reality of working in Customer Relations, I again visualize that I'm a bear, but being mature now, I'm a grown-up bear, not small like my old teddy...but still cute. Soon, I tell myself I'll be hibernating, isolated from a hostile world, in serene relaxation. It's all a fantasy. The closest I get to hibernation is plunking down in the employee's lounge on breaks. *(Pause.)* I can't quit. I'm not trained for anything else and can't afford a cut in pay to start a new career. So I do what I can to get through the day, resorting to silly motivational expressions. I give myself a pep talk, telling myself to "bear down," smiling at how ridiculous I sound. When customers rant at me, my inner voice says, "Bear up, forbear, and grin and bear it." When I'm just about to burn out, I think of Smokey the Bear. Sometimes I feel ashamed of how I'm fooling myself. I've never done it before, but one day, if everything I say fails to placate an idiotic customer, and she continues her raving and threats, when I've finally had it, I'll just rear up on my haunches, open my jaws, bellow loudly, and whack her with a paw.

JOE: I don't know how you do it. I wouldn't last a week. What can I get you?

(Astrologer approaches Computer Scientist at the chessboard.)

ASTROLOGER: Hi!

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COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Hi!

ASTROLOGER: Want to play chess Ouija?

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: I'm already engaged.

ASTROLOGER: That's okay, I have a boyfriend, too.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: That's not what I meant. I don't know how to play chess Ouija.

ASTROLOGER: I'll teach you.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: No thank you!

ASTROLOGER: Well, if you change your mind, we have a chess Ouija group that meets every Tuesday evening at my apartment.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Ahhh!

(Computer Scientist storms offstage to restroom.)

ASTROLOGER: *(Aside.)* He must be a Libra.

(Joe approaches Angie at the counter.)

JOE: Coffee for the customer-relations lady. Better make it decaf. She don't need no more stimulation.

ANGIE: Coming up. *(Angie starts preparing coffee order.)*

JOE: No wonder she works in a complaint department. All she does is complain! I don't want a new career where all I do is complain. She does have a point though. You can't let people run all over you. *(Joe looks over at Findel.)* No matter how rich they are! *(Tony enters. Joe approaches Tony. To Tony.)* Oh no! Thursday night. I forgot. I didn't think! It's because I gotta help Angie here. She needs me.

TONY: I think there's more going on than helping Angie. We need you too, Joe. Not just at bowling.

JOE: Sit down, Tony. Have a cup of coffee.

TONY: I can't sit down. At the slaughterhouse you're my boss. Here you're a waiter. You run the slaughterhouse, and you take a job as a waiter! I can't sit and let you be my waiter. It don't

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feel right. What's wrong, Joe? We all noticed how you been moping around the slaughterhouse, like you don't want to be there no more. We want you there. A *whole* Joe Carbone, not a Joe whose mind is floating, not paying attention. You belong in the slaughterhouse. Not some cockamamie coffeeshouse waiting tables.

JOE: I'm finding it hard to kill chickens anymore, Tony. I got a problem.

TONY: I don't got no problem. I gotta make a living. It's either the chicken, or my wife and kid! If you didn't notice, things haven't been all that smooth at the slaughterhouse. Twice the line stopped because you forgot to order supplies. That never would have happened if your father was here. And we hear you might sell to Findel. Do that and who knows what'll happen to us? We won't have jobs no more. Don't do it, Joe! Don't do it!

JOE: I don't know what to do, Tony. Don't know.

TONY: Get your mind back on running the slaughterhouse. A lot of families are depending on you! That's what to do. And tomorrow, at the slaughterhouse, bring your brain!

JOE: I will, Tony! (*Tony exits. Gravedigger enters and sits down. Computer Scientist re-enters from bathroom. Aside.*) I missed bowling! I can't believe I missed bowling. And my workers! My friends' jobs! (*Joe approaches Gravedigger.*) Evening, sir. My name's Joe.

GRAVEDIGGER: Evening!

JOE: What's your name?

GRAVEDIGGER: Why do you need my name? I'm glad you asked my name. I was just wondering why.

JOE: I wanted to ask a favor, so I thought I'd ask your name first.

GRAVEDIGGER: Warren.

JOE: Two "R's," or one?

GRAVEDIGGER: Two.

JOE: I'm just working as a waiter here temporarily, and I'm searching for a new career. So I wanted to talk about what you

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do for a living. You have a few minutes?

GRAVEDIGGER: Yes...but I'm a gravedigger. You sure you want to talk to me about my job?

JOE: Definitely!

GRAVEDIGGER: How wonderful! I believe in living life 100 percent. And I love people. You can truly call me a "people person." I feel a pang every time I dig a hole. I feel I'm honoring the person by preparing his final resting place. And I constantly have to suppress the urge to console mourners at the cemetery. I'm an optimist. I believe spirits live on, even after the body is disposed of. This is what I'd tell a mourner, if one of them asked what I think. But no one ever has. They react to me like I'm a non-person, an impersonal graveyard fixture. Even away from the cemetery, only rarely does someone ask a gravedigger for his opinion. Much less over for dinner. So I'm very grateful for the opportunity to talk about myself. To talk about anything, really. We're stigmatized. Because our clothes are old and dirty, our shoes caked with mud, people think we're not very intelligent. But wouldn't we be much less intelligent if we wore our best clothes to work? We give the impression of being fit only for unskilled manual labor, and spooky, as if we have some evil communion with the spirits of the bodies we bury. Put it this way, we're generally not looked up to...except by corpses. *(Pause.)* I could be something else, if I wanted. In fact, once I was something else. But the pressure of being a librarian got to me. I never could figure why people couldn't understand the Dewey Decimal System! I finally got off the juice and dried out, but there was no way I was going back to the stacks! So I started working at the cemetery. Not that this line of work is associated with being on the wagon. Most people think we have nothing better to do than get drunk after we get off work. *(Pause.)* I'm a specialist in my own way. Lifting those mounds of dirt can be strenuous, and so I lift carefully, with proper form. Elephants serve as my model. I often visualize their large trunks moving in

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a swaying rhythm, back and forth, lifting heavy loads. When I'm digging a grave, I imagine myself in the smooth cadence of an elephant, with my shovel like his trunk, reaching down to the ground, picking up the load, and then tossing it aside. Like the elephant, I take my time, but I get the job done. I think I was miscast as a librarian. Not enough interaction with people. There's not that much interaction in this job either. After a while, you stop bantering with your fellow diggers, and if I start talking with the stiffs, I'm in real trouble. But at least when I speak, I can talk in a normal voice. I can even yell if I like, as long as a funeral's not nearby. Singing on the job's against policy, but I can get away with it as long as I sound like it could be a hymn. My job is regular, unaffected by recessions. It's outdoors, so I'm not confined to a desk. It keeps me in shape, and I don't need to shave but once a week!

JOE: Thanks for sharing what you do. I can really dig it! Can I bring you something?

GRAVEDIGGER: I'll have another coffee with ice. Heavy on the ice.

(Computer Scientist crosses to bar to pay Angie.)

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: These groups people belong to! I can't stand it! All I want is a nice, quiet one-on-one relationship.

(Joe overhears Computer Scientist and Angie. Angie looks at Joe.)

ANGIE: I'd like a nice, quiet one-on-one relationship, too.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST: Well...goodnight, Angie.

ANGIE: Goodnight, Gilbert.

(Computer Scientist exits. Joe approaches bar.)

JOE: *(To Angie.)* Coffee on ice for the gravedigger. Heavy on the

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ice.
(Angie goes to work preparing the order.)

ANGIE: Gravedigger? In a coffeehouse?

JOE: Why not? He's a nice person. One of the thousands in the death industry—coroners, funeral-home owners, hangmen, clergymen, SWAT teams.

ANGIE: Slaughterhouse owners?

JOE: He's proud of his work, like he's a craftsman in what he does. If I go into a new line of work, I want to be like a craftsman.

ANGIE: Joe, I do not consider killing chickens skilled labor!

JOE: You have nothing good to say about the poultry plant, do you?

ANGIE: I'd say that's about right. There's no justification for killing animals!

JOE: Angie, what do you expect me to do? It's not just me. I got workers. They have families. They rely on the paycheck the plant makes out. If I sell to Findel, what happens to them?

ANGIE: Sometimes people have to sacrifice for a greater cause.

JOE: Yeah, tell that sacrifice stuff to my workers, to their wives and kids.

ANGIE: Joe, if you keep the slaughterhouse, you sacrifice yourself. We all have to make hard decisions sometimes. Find a better life, Joe. *(Hands him the iced coffee.)* Here's your coffee on ice.

(Cabbie enters with a full carafe of yellow liquid and heads to restroom offstage. Rabbi enters.)

JOE: Rabbi! Rabbi Persky!

RABBI: Shalom, Joe!

JOE: Angie, look who's here! Rabbi Persky! He's my rabbi!

ANGIE: Your rabbi? Pleased to meet you, Rabbi.

JOE: How's your wife, Rabbi?

RABBI: It's a long story. You're working here? How come?

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JOE: It's a long story. You don't know this, Angie, but I'm Jewish.
I'm an Italian Jew.

ANGIE: You're Jewish, Joe?

JOE: Since I was born. I know most Italians are Catholic, but there's some of us Italian Jews around. Italian Jews are truly the "Chosen People." How do you choose? Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. "Eeny, Meeny, and Miny" – obviously Italian!

RABBI: "Moe," short for "Moses." Definitely Jewish.

ANGIE: An Italian Jew!

JOE: Know how to tell the difference between an Italian Catholic and an Italian Jew? When Italian Catholics cross, they touch themselves four times. But when you see an Italian touch six times, you know it's the Star of David, and they're Italian Jews.

ANGIE: And what most Italians call "manicotti," Italian Jews call "blintzinis"!

(Angie walks to kitchen.)

JOE: How did she know? Rabbi, I wonder if I may ask you a question. Maybe you could give me an idea of what being a person of the cloth is like.

RABBI: A man of the cloth? I suggest you speak with my brother for the answer to that question. He's the one in the garment business.

JOE: You don't understand, Rabbi. I'm interested in finding out about the life of a spiritual leader, so I might get some direction for my life.

RABBI: It will be a pleasure. What do you want to know?

JOE: How's it like...being a rabbi?

RABBI: The nature of a rabbi's work has changed over the years. Once, a rabbi was a teacher who studied the Torah and conducted services. And that was it! He had time to sit down to a bowl of borscht. Now a rabbi's job is much more complicated. He virtually has to have an MBA in addition to his degree in

Rabbinical Science. He must raise funds, sometimes fibbing that all the money will be used to repair the synagogue, when part of it will find a home in his pocket—for living expenses, naturally! He must fraternize with clergy of other religions, and in the interest of brotherhood, hold his tongue from bragging what he knows—that the Jewish God is superior to their gods and could outwit them if there was a contest...even on television...*Jeopardy*, *The Price Is Right*...definitely! He must listen to his congregation's *feckocktah* personal problems. He has a choir to keep happy...sermons to prepare. I'm not like other rabbis, whose sermons give you recipes on how you should live life. "Take a quart of love, throw in laughter about the size of a matzo ball, *schpritz* in mercy, add a smidge of charity, and mix well." Rabbi Persky doesn't go for recipes. I'm different from other rabbis, who every once in awhile toss in a Yiddish word the congregation doesn't understand, which they then translate into English. For example, "In society today, the unfortunate often have to go around in *schmatas*—rags. Some of them are *meshugenas*—nut cases. We in the concerned Jewish community wish them *mazel tov*—good luck!" When I give a sermon, I never translate. If they want to know what I said, let them go to Hebrew school. A good one is the Persky Talmudic Academy. *(Pause.)* My specialty is bar mitzvahs. At age 13, the boy sings some ritual prayers and becomes a man. Nowadays girls also get bar mitzvahed. At the age of 13, they too say ritual prayers and become a man. Nowadays when Jews celebrate a bar mitzvah, the parents think there must be a theme. But the themes have nothing to do with the religion. Like baseball, or pirates. Pirates! The centerpieces on tables are treasure chests filled with candy. The Jolly Roger skull-and-crossbones flag hangs next to the Israeli flag. Are they *meshugenah*? What have pirates got to do with being Jewish? Could you think of a single Jewish pirate? Okay, Blackbeard, but that's it! Can you imagine a Jewish pirate? Yo ho ho and a bottle of schnapps! *(Pause.)* A

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few weeks ago, I attended a bar mitzvah with my wife. At least the theme came from the Bible—the Ten Commandments. Would you believe they assigned us the “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery” table? I left my wife at the table and marched over to the hostess and demanded, “Mrs. Schwartz, I’m a rabbi, and I’m assigned to this table...” “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery”! How...did you find out?” Mrs. Schwartz answered me, “Rabbi Persky. The whole congregation knows for years...your wife’s been fooling around on you behind your back.” *(Pause.)* So, now that I’m living the single life, maybe I’ll get more of an opportunity to visit the zoo. I remember when we studied the story of Noah’s ark way back in rabbinical school. Our teacher surprised us with a snap quiz. I did very well. My only mistake was misidentifying one of Noah’s sons. Who’d think there’d be a Ham in the Jewish Bible? *(Pause.)* By the way, did you know that Noah had a daughter? Her name was Joan. She lived on his boat. She was known as Joan of Ark. *(Pause.)* As a rabbi, I love all animals. But my favorite is found not at the zoo but at the ocean—the seagull—because of its big beak. On the few occasions I’m free to visit the beach, after I say the prayer for applying suntan lotion—“*Barooch atah adoshem, elohaynoo melech hawowlom, hamowtzy Coppertone*”—I like to relax by watching seagulls soar. My second favorite animal is the gefilte fish!

JOE: Can I take your order, Rabbi?

(Cabbie enters from restroom with empty carafe and exits coffeehouse. Angie returns from the kitchen. Flirtatiously, Astrologer takes Rabbi’s palm.)

ASTROLOGER: The Jewish stars are burning bright tonight, aren’t they, Rabbi?

RABBI: *(To Joe.)* How did she know?

(Angie approaches Astrologer. Astrologer takes Angie’s palm and

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examines it.)

ASTROLOGER: Angie, you have long deep love lines across your palm. But where did the chickens come from?

(Lights fade to blackout. Intermission.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]