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Food Insecurity In Perspective
Writing Food Access Into The Everyday

Colin James Lamusta

Submitted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for
Commonwealth Interdisciplinary Honors in Political Science and Theatre

Bridgewater State University

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Food Insecurity In Perspective

Writing Food Access Into The Everyday

The phrase ‘food insecurity’ has taken on a whole new meaning in the social consciousness. All around us, the media and research have focused on the issue. In light of the past two years especially, where the conditions of the pandemic, inflation, and unemployment have lifted the issue to a larger cross-section of American society. In consideration of this, I sought out an element of current research on food insecurity and the programs serving these individuals to serve as a basis for a stage play. The research that proved most valuable in providing a base of inspiration for both the characters as well as the plot was Schneider and Ingram’s theory on the social construction of populations and the resulting sentiments present in the policy designed for them. As an additional element of personal research, to connect the research of Schneider and Ingram with conditions around me, I visited food pantries surrounding the Bridgewater area and South Shore of Massachusetts, this served the design of the food bank in the set of my production. It also served the dialogue creation between characters in those scenes. Additionally, it helped connect current sentiments into some of the common themes of discussions with people volunteering at these community food banks and donation centers, as well as those who use their services. The use of this crucial research in the political science arena as the core of a stage play is the culmination of my undergraduate study in Political Science and Theater Arts. In my stage play, *Taste*, the reality of food-insecurity, and the programs that serve those who require the resources to support themselves or their family.

While far different disciplines, they can serve one another and aid in proliferating the spread of research-based knowledge into popular consciousness. In a world of misinformation,

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the marriage of entertainment and research is the needed direction for popular entertainment in all its forms. In live theater especially, which has proved an excellent environment for challenging social norms and presenting critiques of government and society in the United States and abroad in its rich history, this research can take root and inspire entertainment with a purpose. In Schneider and Ingram's work they provide an examination, demonstrated through a visual matrix, diagramming four sections of society based on their positive or negative 'social construction', which is defined as the group's value-based cultural image as well as their political power, defined by their voting power and their lobbying affiliations, in other terms, their strength in terms of swaying politicians into promoting legislation that benefits them as a group. While the research outlines many groups within society, the crucial group that was the focus of my play was the group described as "Dependents", these individuals are not a strongly active voting bloc, as their accessibility to voting and their ability to collaborate and promote legislation is not as strong as the "Contenders" and the "Advantaged", two other groups described in the research of Schneider and Ingram. The dependent group, who include those who are food-insecure, are socially constructed positively as opposed to criminals and felons, who are viewed more negatively in their social construction. The importance of determining where a group falls in this model determines the way legislation is created and provided for them. For the dependent group, this means legislation is provided to them through agents and benefits systems, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and WIC, a program focused on Women, Infants, and Children, which provide funds for spending on food. The issue of accessibility and information, as well as challenging application systems not always user-friendly and intuitive to navigate, nor immediately responsive in providing support, prove an obstacle for the resources directed towards this group. This also has the subsidiary effect of reducing

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participation by these groups, as the processes give little control to participants, and this paternalistic policy makeup can pressure individuals to not pursue receiving these benefits. The model provided by Shneider and Ingram provided inspiration for the core of characters making up the play. The setting, providing a backdrop of individuals with varied socio-economic conditions applying to them, displays the persuasive nature of food-insecurity, not just applying to the housing insecure, but to individuals in diverse sets of circumstances. Using artists, and the world of art, an industry driven by the love of money and the importance of image and appearance, allowed characters to embody the varied individuals outlined in categories described by Shneider and Ingram. The main character Don Lang, a young photographer out of a public university struggling to pursue his passion and a life of moral and ethical significance, grows quickly impatient with the lavish and wasteful ways of those around him. He contrasts directly with his manager, Hanson, an older jaded individual with sway in the art world, but invested very little in the life and well-being of his clients, his embodiment of the advantaged group seems to dominate, while the other characters including Don's friends, Allison and Fred, as well as the weekly regulars at the food pantry, Jim and Lucia. Most important is the agent of change, the pantry owner John Deed, who is constantly pushing to ameliorate the relationship of governmental interest and benefits for those who need it most. In the first act, the challenges of serving his community overwhelm him, culminating in the combined effort of Don and his art gallery, the adjacent building to the pantry, with the pantry, in the unified pursuit of social awareness for food insecurity through the power of imagery, art, and community. The representation of Shneider and Ingram's research on Social Construction and Policy Design pairs well into creating a consciously aware piece of entertainment that leaves audience motivated to participate politically, and grow more aware of their role in a participatory and inclusive

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community that serve its members and is well connected to the resources provided by its
government.

TASTE

A Play in Two Acts
Staged Reading Excerpt

by

Colin Lamusta
4/26/2022

DRAMATIS PERSONAE / Cast of Characters

Don- A young photographer: played by Ryan Boudreau

Hanson- His manager: played by John Capodilupo

John - Food Bank Manager: played by Steve Nelson

Sandy - Don's girlfriend: played by Madison Bradbury

Frederick - Don's Friend, A Writer &

Jim - A Food Bank regular: played by Andrew Mortarelli

Allison - Don's friend, A Dancer &

Lucia - A Food Bank regular: played by Tessa Tropeano.

ACT I

At Rise: Two small brick faced storefronts along a city street, S.R is a small art gallery, with large windows along the front. The face of this aging relic of the city lifts, revealing a rustic interior of stunning landscape photography in exhibition, and small standing tables. At C.S is a small tree, the city kind, with an ornate metal grate protecting its roots, and beneath it a three seat bench. At S.L is a smaller, older brick faced building, far more cracked and aged. The downstage wall facing the street has a small service window to the S.L of the ancient wooden door to the interior, the face of the store lifts revealing a back wall of shelving full of assorted canned and dry goods, and a small deep freeze. In the right corner of the store is a small table with three chairs, and a large radio on top, this should not be fixed to the floor as it is replaced later.

Scene 1

Dim lights up on C.S, DON exits the S.R door and sits on a bench, opening a newspaper.

DON

He got me half a page... Half a page, on a sunday paper!

Hanson enters S.L, creeping up to Don.

HANSON

Well, Whaddya think?

DON

Think? This is...unbelievable. You know how many people - What am I gonna do?

HANSON

Exactly what you said you were going to do yesterday, a month ago, and last year.

DON

Well, yeah - sure I will.

HANSON

You're right there! They're done. They're framed. They're hung!

You even got the little lights around them - you've done it all.

Now, let's put a bow on this thing.

DON

You're right - I'm just crazy

HANSON

No you're just close to something you way back then. - and barely I could see,

DON

We met in the mornings then too.

HANSON

Only client that does it, I figure that's why I took you on.

DON

Really?

HANSON

I mean there's no shortage of photographers in this world... in this city even. Not to mention photography is not my particular -

DON

Medium?

HANSON

Cup of tea. Certainly happy t warehouse - o finagle crowds into your

DON

Studio.

HANSON

Right, studio warehouse.

DON

It's not really a warehouse, all I do is edit and develop in there, there's no conveyor belts.

HANSON

Sure, but there's no paint and coffee cups all over the place, you hardly ever leave trash around. Allegra, the painter with that small gallery by the water, now that's a studio. She's got paint buckets, brushes everywhere. Canvases hung on every wall.

DON

Just because I'm not a slob doesn't mean it's not a studio.

HANSON

A clean and tidy artist studio, find me a better oxymoron.

DON You think people will turn out...for this?

HANSON

Have you seen the nonsense exhibits on at the C.A.M? Sure they will, nature photos are hot right now.

DON

The Contemporary Art Museum? I've been meaning to go... I never knew photography art had, well, trends like that.

HANSON

Trending in or trending out, it's a two town, the paintings up at the museums. who wear all the fancy clothing?

- way street. The shows in Hell, even those dancers

DON

You mean the ballet?

HANSON

Sure, they all got a producer who reads plenty of magazines, watches a lot of daytime television... to know just that will make people dump money on a ticket.

what it is

DON

Yeah, I guess you're right -

HANSON

But you're different.

DON

I'm glad you've grown to see it - I always thought photography felt a lot more permanent, like a permanent imprint of a moment in time -

HANSON

Eh. Because it's your name on the frames, by the door... in the paper.

DON

Right.

HANSON

On the inside looking out at everyone else.

[*They sit on the bench silently for a moment*]

HANSON

Feels good doesn't it?

DON

Good?

HANSON

To get a leg up on folks.. to be moving forward. Think of every artist that never in their life gets to show off a single thing they've made, and you've got a building full.

DON

Honestly, that sort of bums me out. But just a little nervous, maybe worried. What if people don't see the ad, what if it's all exactly like

- This is all great, I'm *last time* ?

HANSON

Don't worry about the paper, don't worry about a thing
price everything out and get the place ready.

- just

DON

But how do I know, what if prices are too high, what if no one
comes, what if they hate it all, hate me...

[*Silence*]

HANSON

Is that it?

DON

There's definitely more.

HANSON

More what?

DON

What- ifs.

HANSON

And what are those?

DON

Nothing good.

HANSON

Nothing good is right, take some time today, get a haircut, or
comb it at least, looks like you've been up all night.

DON

I kinda was.

HANSON

Shower, get yourself ready, then come back this afternoon
polishing the frames and tables until the fumes kill you

- no use

DON

You're right, I'll just get out, away from here, for a while.

HANSON I'll see you tonight, be ready for photos before we open
the doors.

DON

(*meekly*) Always ready for a photo.

HANSON

Save it for the papers, Don. By the way, I'll bring the food.

DON

Food? For what?

HANSON

The show of course, people will stay and chat... and buy if there's something to eat. I'll pick it all up don't worry.

DON

I don't really want people eating and touching the frames, leaving a mess.

HANSON

Oh please, if they feel inclined to lay their hands on a picture of a tree they're going to buy it anyway.

DON

We've never done that before.

HANSON

(*Exiting S.L*) Something tells me things will be different.

DON

(*Exiting U.S into the gallery*) It better be.

Scene 2

Lights fade up on the storefront to the left, John Deed enters and walks inside, he is seen turning lights on and exits with a broom. John sweeps as Jim enters.

JIM

Enters S.L, heading towards the pantry door

Morning, John.

JOHN

Morning, Jim. Head on in. I'll be inside in a second, just start grabbing up what you need.

John goes over to the large poster on his wall, matching the ones from the front of Don's gallery. He carefully peels and rolls it securing it with an elastic from his wrist, before heading towards the door, where Jim slips out

JIM

Before you head in, could I chat, well, talk with you for a minute?

JOHN

Talk and not chat? Why don't we sit?

They both sit C.S on the bench

JIM

Sure, something's just been bugging me. Frankly, I'm at my wit's end, I have no idea how I'm supposed to deal with this, or face it.

JOHN
A decision, a tough choice?

JIM
Sadly, It's not that.. simple.

JOHN
And is it about you or someone else?

JIM
[*beginning to get emotional*] Both. The boys.

JOHN
Now, I'm sure you have the ability to solve whatever this is,
they ad ore you, you know. Far easier to see from my perspective
than yours. You're the world to them. You three are inseparable.

JIM
I just don't know how much longer.

JOHN
You're doing very well, making the best. The new teaching gig
close - by, it's all very stable. It's great for them and you, Jim.

JIM
Temporary John, it's all temporary.

JOHN
How do you figure?

JIM
They're growing so fast - too fast. The days into weeks, into
months. Like the doors on the Green Line when they skip by the
station, blurred, so close and still out of your reach.

JOHN
You're doing your very best for them in respect for your
circumstances. You've worked very hard to bring them into a
family.

JIM
They're going away this weekend. Apple picking, with two of their
friends... spending the weekend.

JOHN
That's fantastic, why -

JIM
What will I tell them?

JOHN
Oh-

JIM

How do I tell them? About this place, why we do what we do. I have to tell them. What will they think of me?

JOHN

They'll understand, because it's the truth. There is nothing wrong with this place, with what people come here for.

JIM

But what if they're old enough now to question it all, question me... blame me.

JOHN

What if?

JIM

Yes! What if they figure out I can't provide for them, that going to the free grocery store every week isn't what everyone else does, that not every other family has to wait for their card to 'recharge' before 'shopping day' each month?

JOHN

And what is that, is that so bad really?

JIM

My worst nightmare —

JOHN

Leave your nightmares in bed. Let me lay a little truth on you. They're going to find out what this place is and that it's not any old debit card you're using, if they haven't already, it's bound to happen one day, even if it's not this weekend.

JIM

But shouldn't they hear it from me?

JOHN

Maybe, either way, no matter who from or how they discover this, you can't choose how it will make them feel.

JIM

I just can't bear the thought of it, their disappointment.

JOHN

I think you've focused on one highly unlikely choice of infinite outcomes. Thoughts are good, thoughts are bad, and most?

JIM

Closing his eyes and breathing

Never happen..Just a thought...

JOHN

(*walking Jim to the door*)

Now when the time comes, you will know exactly what to say, even though you can't know how they'll react. You'll know you can all trust each other, just like you always have.

JIM

Right, just like we always have.

JOHN

Let's grab you some shredded wheats before the rest of the folks snap em' up.

Both exit inside

Lights Dim to Blue Wash over S.L, Lights up S.R. Don is inside, two of his friends enter S.R Frederick, Allison.

They stand around the poster on the edge of Don's gallery.

FREDERICK

Well?

ALLISON

Have you ever been to a photography expo?

FREDERICK

Well...I think once...or maybe a few months...I hardly remember the decorum - I was going to follow your lead.

ALLISON

You're ridiculous, let's go inside and help him set up.

As they enter the front door, the gallery wall lifts revealing the interior

DON

You came early!

ALLISON

Had to see if you needed any help with the ribbon - tying.

FREDERICK

Tying, don't you mean cutting...or decorating?

ALLISON

I meant tying.

DON

Am I supposed to do the whole ribbon and scissors thing?

FREDERICK

I guess...

ALLISON

Enough of that. Just here to help you prepare. How are you feeling? We all saw the ad, it looked great... I didn't know you smoked though.

DON

Hanson said smoking has an artistic allure, he's all about image and perception.

ALLISON

Your manager? Isn't that what you say?

DON

Well, yeah, I mean it for photos, frames, lights. He means it for ... me.

ALLISON

For you?

FREDERICK

The artist is his art. How profound.

ALLISON

Please turn off your MFA conservatory filter when you're among friends, or in public.

FREDERICK

Sorry, I came from class, you know how that shit can slip into your subconscious.

ALLISON

Anyway, how are you feeling?

DON

Terrified, nervous, but at least the place is spotless.

ALLISON

It's the cleanest I've ever seen.

DON

I've vacuumed and mopped the floors four times.

FREDERICK

Why would you do that?

DON

I just couldn't stop touching things up and moving the photos figured the floor was a safer way to spend my nervous energy

, I
-

What do you think of the lights, too shadowy?

FREDERICK

The first thing I looked at after the tables was the pictures, which look very... intense?

ALLISON

I think everything looks great, you got some of your best stuff up, and the frames look great. Must have been tough to choose

DON

You don't even know. You look at groups from the same location and every photo blends into the next. They all look the same. Somehow you begin to experience each one differently after a few hours of looking. It's not the difference in how they look, just how they feel. That might sound crazy, but I don't know any other way to say it. It's like I'm judging each picture by feel. more I see it, I don't see the differences in each image, but the sameness in each location: the way the leaves point; or how the grass and rocks seem to agree. It's not just the flecks on the camera in one, or the way a rock or leaf is out of place. Just how they all belong, in the room, right now. And any other night might have called for something else.

FREDERICK

Damn

ALLISON

When you take it all in, it's like we're not even in the city anymore, just far away in every season at once.

Frederick and Allison move around the studio

ALLISON

We're so proud of you, of all this, nobody deserves it more.

DON

Thanks. What did you mean by the tables Fred?

FREDERICK

Things like this, or similar to this. I was sort of looking forward to this all week. I didn't even eat today

DON

What?

FREDERICK

Food?

ALLISON

You're unbelievable, he just means there's food at exhibitions sometimes.

DON

Really? Hanson is bringing food, he made a whole deal out of that this morning.

ALLISON

Deal?

DON

I don't know, when I'm out taking pictures or hiking to a good spot, it's never about anything else. The picture is the product of that labor, not appetizers and punch - and trays of salad that end up right in the trash.

FREDERICK

You're right, I never really have the salad.

Allison

It just seems to be a nicety, one that people expect.

DON

What is a nicety? How is that wrapped up in all this? In studio rent, in posters, interviews, clove cigarettes that make my mouth taste like a holiday candle? Who are we to dole out niceties for these people who's entire life is a nicety? I'm sick of how nice and comfortable all this has to be for *them!*

ALLISON

Just seems like the rules of the game -

DON

I just hate the food everywhere, little toothpicks. All these artsy types who all came from a four - course meal to nibble spinach pockets. It's mocking...indulgent.

FREDERICK

What do you mean? It stimulates conversation, the art buying, a detail you want to expound on as much as possible tonight I might add.

DON

You're right. I'm starving. I haven't eaten all day.

ALLISON

Why not?

DON

Nerves, and coffee, you know how it goes. A whole meal in a cup!

FREDERICK

Sure do, I never eat in the morning.

ALLISON

Gotcha, well if you ever need someone to make you eat breakfast we're happy to come by in the mornings, Fred and I don't work until 9 -

FREDERICK

She's right, we could all use so me help getting past our one meal a day hurdle.

DON

I eat in a window, trying to watch my weight.

ALLISON

You haven't put on a pound since high school.

FREDERICK

She's right, if anything you slimmed up beanstalk.

DON

I don't think I've had a bean since high school, pretty basic diet - pasta, and um - a lot of peanut butter crackers.

FREDERICK

Do you think he'll bring spinach pockets? They're deceptively good for resembling seaweed.

Scene 3

Lights fade on S.R, S.L is illuminated. The front of the store lifts, revealing John behind the counter, Lucia at the table by the radio, and Jim sorting goods into bags. John enters the back storage room accessed through a door near the counter, and back out again with a jar of ground coffee.

JOHN

Did you find what you needed? And don't worry, I'm working on the Donut Shop blend, it seems like everything is tough to get coffee. And everyone getting it has an excuse these last few weeks, well, more like months now.

- even

JIM

Grounds make the world go round, they're probably saying the same thing in Yemen.

LUCIA

I doubt they drink much coffee there.

JIM

They drink coffee everywhere, how do you think they got out of the Dark Ages?

LUCIA

Seriously! I doubt it, and the Dark Ages were in Europe.

JIM

What do you mean?

LUCIA

It's like 100 degrees in the shade. Who wants a smoking hot cup of coffee?

JIM

Well, they have tea before and after every meal anyway.

LUCIA

Plus, they wear alot of white.

JIM

Now don't turn coffee, or tea, into a fashion trend.

LUCIA

Judging by the stain on your shirt, you already did.

JIM

Stands and surveys the stain on front of his shirt

You're not kidding, No way I'll ever get this stain out.

JOHN

I'll ask the dry cleaner.

JIM

Don't bother, I don't really spend much time at the dry cleaners,
I wouldn't even know where it is. Are you picking up your
cleaning?

JOHN

No, he comes by every sun day after he closes up. He's always got
stain advice. YOU two usually just miss him.

JIM

Oh.

LUCIA

Small world

JIM

You ain't kidding.

JOHN

I might have some already made in the pot out back, I'll go nuke
a cup in the meantime (*He exits*).

JIM

Thanks I - tha nk you.

LUCIA

Turning on the radio lowly and scrolling through static

In the mood for anything Jim? You've been quiet this morning.

JIM

Yeah, I've just been in a mood these last few days.

LUCIA

Work?

JIM

Everything but work, teaching has the luxury of routine. Although every time we get around to the French Revolution I always feel odd.

LUCIA

Odd?

JIM

Talking about people starving and rioting to a deaf government and whatnot, makes coming here every week seem more -

LUCIA

Significant?

JIM

Just part of the history book.

LUCIA

And the boys?

JIM

They're great as ever, older by the day - by the minute even.

LUCIA

Always seems that way, glued to your hip one week, stuffing their two - door sedan on two spare tires for school the next.

JIM

I can't even imagine.

LUCIA

You won't have to soon enough.

JIM

How is Lindsay?

LUCIA

She's better than ever, won't see her until she's home in the summer- maybe. She always finds ways to keep herself busy over winter break - usually somewhere warm. I don't know how she does it, she didn't get her skills of persuasion from me.

JIM

I've been thinking about that alot. About what we teach our kids. If we have any choice, or if they'll learn what suits them.

LUCIA

Always a teacher, they're our children not our students.

JIM

All my students are my children.

LUCIA

But only two call you Dad.

John enters, putting the coffee down and again stocking shelves, out of earshot of the two, while Jim gets the coffee and returns to the table

JIM

Could I ask you something?

LUCIA

Now we're getting somewhere.

JIM

How did you explain this to her?

LUCIA

Here? To Lindsay? I always said it was the grocery store.

JIM

And when you had to bring her along?

LUCIA

The same thing.

JIM

I just don't know what to tell them. They're going away this weekend

LUCIA

And?

JIM

And everything could change.

LUCIA

I remember when Lindsay went away for the first time, like really away. One of those AAU basketball teams, she fundraised every dollar for it, so I couldn't say no. I didn't sleep for two weeks until the day she got on the bus. I thought everything was going to come undone, what the other girls on her team would say. Her coaches even. Every Friday I would call, terrified of what she would say, what everyone else thought about how we live, what they would say. It went on like that for three weeks.

JIM

What did she say?

LUCIA

Nothing Jim. For better or for worse, it didn't matter to them about how we live, how the three - square ends up on the table each day. She's been friends with them ever since. Played with them in middle school, high school. Now she's playing for her college team.

JIM

Have you ever asked? When she realized?

LUCIA

I like to think it never came up because we still had things other families didn't. And no matter what, we ate. Plus, all my four dollar recipes save her money while she's away at school.

JIM

Four dollar recipes?

LUCIA

Sure, (*grabbing two cans and a package of noodles from Jim's bag*)
See these? Ever try stewing them together?

JIM

No, I usually just heat the soup.

LUCIA

Now where's the fun in that? I'll jot down the directions so you don't burn the house down.

Lucia grabs a pad of paper and jots down the recipe with Jim, while a followspot focuses on John who is finishing stocking shelves and turns to the counter

JOHN

No way this will stretch two weeks...

He pulls out a paper and pen and begins to narrate his letter writing

Dear Mayor's Office. Happy Monday! I hope my last letter found a safe spot in your incoming mail drop, along with the ones I've been sending for the last few [*pausing*]. I'll spare another introduction as you know me by now. Again reiterating my frustration with the change in non - profit food bank allotments. The goods from local sources hardly stretched for a week, and with adjusting the city's donations to every two weeks, many of my regulars are feeling the pinch. I don't need to remind the office that many of them are not providing for soley themselves. Many of them depend on coming here to supplement their weekly household meals, and it pains me to ration canned goods as if we are entrenched in a world war. I humbly request, in light of many of my good friends being forced to shutter their pantry doors because of rising costs and diminishing donations and financial support, that the allotments return to a weekly schedule. In light of serving the community that feels isolated from many of the city's resources, short of their WIC and SNAP benefits, I hope we can discuss the improvement of this situation for the food - insecure. Most humbly, John Deed.

The lights return to illuminating the food bank

JOHN

I actually got to close up early folks, tidy up, take care of something I've been meaning to for awhile now.

JIM

Exiting out the door and Off. SL

Loud and clear, thanks for the coffee, John.

LUCIA

Can I talk with you before I go?

JOHN

Sure, I have a few minutes.

LUCIA

Do you ever feel the same, like an inescapable sameness. Crushing even?

JOHN

I'm not sure. I like to believe we're all a bit different each day, maybe a bit better.

LUCIA

Lately, I just feel like coming here, then to work, then home. It's a repetition, waxing and waning. Sometimes in a rush, sometimes on time, sometimes early - but always the same.

JOHN

Well, I can't make any of that different. Except when you're here that is.

LUCIA

Lately, here seems the only place anything is real. Once a week feels like the only thing different. Ever since I switched jobs, started living on my own, it all feels wrong.

JOHN

Find the moments in each day that make you realize you're different than you were, which shouldn't be hard. You've changed quite a bit as of late.

LUCIA

I just hope it's for the better.

JOHN

We're all creatures of habit, Lucia. Good and bad habits, healthy and unhealthy routine, we'll stay in a groove if we can find it. You're just finding your new groove.

LUCIA

I just feel like no matter what I do, it's all going to be the same tomorrow. That everything is just a task on an endless list, a great illusion. Like that movie with the simulation and the

robots. The Matrix, like that. I'm just wondering if it would be better to go back, work on things. Maybe fixing what I had is better than trying to figure out all of this alone.

JOHN Well, Matrix or not, you have to live for yourself. Going back to where you were, living where you were, being with that guy. Just because that's what you know doesn't make it what's best. There's a difference between seeing yourself the way you do in the mirror, and knowing yourself and what exactly it is you're living for, trying to achieve, fighting for each day.

LUCIA I'm not exactly sure what it is I'm after besides something else. Part of me just wants the old way, as bad as it was. At least I was a part of something there, even if it was a one-sided relationship. I just miss that comfort.

JOHN

I think you miss the idea of that comfort, how many times would you come in here strung out from that guy, he drove you up the wall. Plus you said he never cleaned.

LUCIA

No, he never did.

JOHN

Would you like to know something? Something rather difficult, perhaps the most difficult thing I've ever faced.

LUCIA

Mayor's Office turned you down again?

JOHN

I'm afraid my lesson in letter writing rejection each week hardly gets to me anymore.

LUCIA

I wouldn't believe that for a second.

JOHN

There are far more pressing issues I'm afraid.

LUCIA

Nothing means more to you than this place, and what you're trying to do, to build it up. How could anything get in the way of that?

JOHN

I am facing my own mortality.

LUCIA

You're not that old -

He kneels down revealing his slight thinning on the top of his head .

LUCIA

Well it's hardly begun -

JOHN

Hardly begun is right. Lucia, promise me this. You won't just keep hoping for something else, but find what it is you're after. We've all got something in this world, something that makes every dull purposeless moment feel like we're moving towards something. Something greater than ourselves, worth more than just our name. For me, it's making sure these bricks last longer than I do.

LUCIA

I just wish I knew what it was.

JOHN

Consider yourself lucky, figuring it out is half the fun.

LUCIA

I guess I have something else to do today before work, see you next week, John.

Sandy walks from the door of Don's gallery and sits on the bench, as Lucia exits and stops by the bench.

LUCIA

Sandy! How are you?

SANDY

I'm great, well - good. Things are good.

LUCIA

I'm so glad, how are you liking the new gig?

SANDY

Fine. Just fine, so much closer to home which you never appreciate until you're not walking thirty blocks every morning.

LUCIA

Can't beat that exercise. How's Don?

SANDY

Don's great, so busy with his new show.

LUCIA

That's so exciting. I can't wait to see it. He really has such a way- that last show with the ink and the altered development.

SANDY

Yep, he really knows his way around that camera.

LUCIA

More than that! It's just so *intangible*, the whole picture is a thousand words thing, that last show was like a novel, with the author sitting right next to you.

SANDY
Can I ask you something?

LUCIA
Sur -

SANDY
And you don't have to answer if you don't want to.

LUCIA
Sure.

SANDY
How did you know you'd be better off doing your own thing?

LUCIA
My own thing? I was just really unhappy with my job, and where I was living, so the temp agency just fit me, there's something about staying in one place so long...

SANDY
No I mean, personally?

LUCIA
Are you trying to ask me how I left my ex?

SANDY
Maybe, or maybe I'm just asking how you knew you wanted to.

LUCIA
Well (*She sits joining Sandy on the bench*) I think it becomes about love and fear, and if you're growing in the place you're in or - .

SANDY
Shrinking?

LUCIA
Maybe dying, like a plant that's overwatered, or left by the windowsill too long. When you try to make the best of where you're at, things are better, things are worse, yet you're still never moving forward. For me, I just hit a certain point. When the scale tipped that far... that way, it didn't even seem like a choice. But, thankfully it's not really about them at all, it's one of those selfish things.

SANDY
And how were you sure?

LUCIA
Never was - still not.

They sit quietly until Lucia offers her a piece of Fruitstripe Gum. They both unwrap and chew.

LUCIA

It's about what you're living for
someone else, but it's really just you.

– that could be something,

SANDY

Right, just me.

LUCIA

I don't know if any of that is what you wanted to hear. I'm still
trying to figure it all out myself, there's no self
after packing up your stuff and moving out... in case you didn't
know.

- help book

SANDY

I don't even know what I wanted to hear. I was just
say something I didn't already know. Or some revelation.

hoping you'd

LUCIA

Sadly, I think we only reveal these things to ourselves.

The two sit quietly on the bench.

LUCIA

Give me a call later, I'll be up. Maybe I'll see you at Don's
show tonight?

SANDY

I'll give you a call.

*The two hug and Lucia leaves, Sandy is alone on the bench,
eventually she gets up and pulls some leaves from the tree.
Sitting and shredding them slowly as the lights fade.*

*The lights rise on Hanson as he walks in with take out trays
of food bringing them into Don's gallery as the face of the
gallery lifts revealing Don, prepared and well
inside. The interior is prepped and red cloths cover the
small standing tables where Hanson places the food.*

- dressed

HANSON

Now you're rolling with the big shots.

DON

It just doesn't seem all that different from last time.

HANSON

Exactly, but everything's different - Sunday paper, Sunday show.
Nobody goes to an art gallery on Fridays.

DON

If you say so.

HANSON

Moving around, looking at the different landscapes.

This place is gonna be slammed tonight, and I think you picked out some good ones. Funny -

DON

What is?

HANSON

All of these (*gesturing to a group of four images in a large frame.*) It's like the tree is in the same place, even though they're all taken in different places.

DON

That's the point.

HANSON

It just seems like a coincidence.

DON

Its intention, the design of all of them.

HANSON

I just don't know who would want four pictures with the same thing.

DON

They're not the same, everything besides the tree is different.

HANSON

Huh, well the tree is in the middle. That's all they'll really see.

DON

What do you think of the -

HANSON

I don't really care for landscapes, I'm more into the type of art like the guy up the street with the little gallery, he's always out drawing right in front of his clientele. Now that's an artist.

DON

You mean the guy who draws caricatures?

HANSON

Right, I just mean he's out there with him, and that's what you gotta do tonight.

A pause as Hanson spreads out the trays of food

HANSON

This is quite the setup, kid. You've done real good, twice as good as the other exhibitionists I got.

DON

Exhibitionists? Um -

HANSON

You know, art kids who went to real fancy schools. Most of my clients, exhibit at different galleries all over town.

DON

Oh- right, definitely. Did you... go to school?

HANSON

Doesn't matter, I dropped out. I'm sure if I had been dumb enough to waste four years with my head in books I wouldn't be able to remember where I went anyway. Living is the only school I ever had. No homework, no reports. Just tests, plenty of tests, so many damn tests you fail one you'll find a few more to make em up.

DON

I was going to ask if you thought the um - prices seemed alright.

HANSON

You know how much Number 5 sold for?

DON

What? Like Jacks on Pollock - probably well over a hundred million.

HANSON

140 million. Have you ever seen it?

DON

Sure, it's massive, sort of sucks up all the air in the room.

HANSON

A piece of cardboard with drips and drabs.

DON

I guess you're right.

HANSON

I'm gonna dip in on these spinach pockets, they'll be the death of me - I eat myself sick on em'

He opens a food container and starts to eat.

Looks like you got it all figured out, I'll catch you later kid.

DON

You're not going to stay?

HANSON

I've seen the m.I got to swing by my office for something, just a meeting.

DON

A meeting? Who meets on a Sunday night.

HANSON

Not a single one of my current clients, that's for sure.

DON

Weird.

HANSON

Maybe- Remember keep em talking, and keep em' [
of spinach pockets for the road]

Grabbing a fistful

EATING!

DON

See you.

Don reaches for one of the containers but stops, stepping back and sliding down a wall, sitting as the lights fade down S.R and up S.L, as the face of Don's gallery falls and John's pantry lifts revealing Jim sorting through canned goods all over the floor with John writing and moving cans to shelves and boxes.

JOHN

So if it's one week out, just one slash on the top. If it'll last longer give it an X.

JIM

But what about all these other ones - that are closer.

JOHN

If it's only a few days put them up here on the counter.

JIM

Got it.

Jim hands John an armful of cans and he puts them on the counter.

JOHN

I'll grab these, just work on the ones you can read the dates on.

John writes for a moment looking at the cans.

JIM

All the ones in these crates have a line through the date

JOHN

Those must be the donations from the Mayor's office.

JIM

This wooden crate looks the same, it's from St. Adelaide's up the road by the look of it.

JOHN

Jesus.

John writes more furtively before going to move cans, he moves to the middle of the room holding two cans which he

puts down and moves the two spoiled can crates to the door, moving through and adding cans to the pile by the door. Eventually he stops.

JOHN

Keep marking through these, we'll head out in a few minutes. All those dented ones, well, just put them by the door.

John exits and Jim moves a pile of cans by the door before exiting. John stands beside him, rubbing his face and breathing deeply for a few moments.

JOHN

Jim, I just don't understand.

JIM

We'll get through it, only a few crates left.

JOHN

Who are they lying for? Their god? Their families? Themselves?

JIM

Donations are always down until the holidays.

JOHN

5 Years. That crate of cans they sent down are 5 years past date. It wasn't good enough for them, their family, their fucking dog. But food for us. Their pantry clean - out. Chickpeas, Sauerkraut, and all the damn pasta sauce you could drink. LET ME FILL A POOL WITH THEIR MOLDY SAUCE. IT'S STILL NOT FOOD.

Jim puts his arm around John.

JIM

Plenty of good, don't count the bad - the radio spot and the ads in the paper. People will come around. Before you know it they'll be filing in to give donations, the edible kind.

JOHN

I hope you're right. They have to. You know the pantry right across the footbridge?

JIM

Over by the train station, across from that old - timey diner - yeah the boys and I stop there now and then, she's run that a long time. All those shelves she stacks and something like half the town in there. I heard she was running those community potlucks when St. Adelaide's stopped because of everything. She runs herself ragged over there with -

JOHN

Ran.

JIM

Oh.

JOHN

Three months tonight she's been gone. No money, no donations,
city cut her stipend. Didn't renew her non - profit status, only
lasted a month or so then.

JIM

Nothing but rent and for sale around here. Seems more shops empty
than full anywhere you look.

JOHN

Shelves too. Well, let's head in and finish what we can.

Jim and John enter, filing away the cans left on the floor.

*They step back, aghast at the shelves , the look they share
is a grave one.*

JOHN

See you next week, Thanks again.

Jim heads out the door

JIM

See you.

*John barely manages to begin sweeping before tossing over a
stack of spoiled cans and falling into a chair by the door,
he rises and falls wi th quiet sobs.*

*The lights S.R and S.L fade to a dim wash as Lucia enters,
walking by the gallery and stopping at the poster, before
crossing to John's food pantry. She goes to the door
knocking lightly.*

LUCIA

John, just seeing if you needed a hand with wh atever came in
tonight.

*She pushes it open and enters, seeing the cans on the floor
and grabbing them up before turning to the door and seeing
John.*

LUCIA (CON)

Are you okay?

*She pulls the other chair to him and sits closely, grabbing
his hand and holding it with her own.*

JOHN

They told me three weeks. Every three weeks.

Where?
LUCIA
Here.
LUCIA
With how everything is right now - things are just hard for everyone

JOHN
Every week, sometimes twice. Sunday nights always, and maybe Wednesday. Like clockwork. That back room had twice the shelves, and it didn't hold papers and old cassettes. These shelves behind the counter were just the fresh stuff.

LUCIA
Fresh?
JOHN
Mayor's office had a truck, used to bring all the extras from the market southside of town, make the rounds, all the little stuff, potatoes, radishes, whatever they weren't selling. We even had one of those little recipe books, everyone brought in the recipe cards and you'd be able to use stuff here, all you needed was the stuff here. Not now. Good luck for us! Budget cuts - reallocation they call it. Reallocate the food somewhere and all the expired chickpeas [*He grabs the dented cans*] Even the damn church, reallocates it all here like we're a big brick garbage disposal.

LUCIA
John -
JOHN
I sent letters then. They stopped responding when it was cut back to just twice a week, then no truck, then less. Then every two weeks. I spent more time in court fighting to stay here, 'building up the neighborhood' the judge said. 'A more salient use of the building'. I couldn't face the folks who came then, a whole lot more. I'd just leave their stuff on the counter and I'd be in the back writing, back when I had a phone in the wall. Talking, pleading, trying to get the others to go. We called ourselves Food Bankers then, me and the other food pantries, a little joke for us. All gone now.

LUCIA
I never knew.

JOHN

Not a letter back, half the pantries closed, maybe two left in town. And more space for paper, and letters but nothing to eat. No shortage of space, more every day. Every three weeks those shelves. Jim just left, what's he gonna do? I can't bag up pasta sauce and act like he'll be able to go home and eat. What about when his boys ask me why the shelves aren't organized and why they don't need to come by and help anymore. How can I face them, anyone, like this.

- look at

LUCIA

We'll find a way.

JOHN

There's nothing to find.

LUCIA

Survival has a funny way John.

JOHN

Funny how?

LUCIA

Funny like the solution is probably right in front of us and we don't see it yet. Call it a night John, sleep on it. Want me to walk you home?

JOHN

I need to close up, I'll see you tomorrow.

LUCIA

(*Moving to the door*)

Want me to take any of these?

JOHN

I'll find somewhere for them.

LUCIA

Mind if I grab these?

JOHN

They might be older than the dirt they were grown in.

LUCIA

Canned goods go bad? [*She laughs.*] These lima beans still got some mileage.

She leaves S.L as John grabs a small cart from behind the counter and stacks the cans by the door in the cart.

S.R lights fade up as the face of Don's gallery lifts now bare except for two frames on the floor near packing materials, as Allison folds up the table cloths.

DON

Just as I was starting to like the layout of everything in here.

ALLISON

You'll like paying rent with something other than scratch ticket money a whole lot more.

DON

Technically it's birthday money - I got the scratch tickets instead of a cake. "One won't make you fat, just your wallet" I swear I'm less like the man I call my manager every day.

ALLISON

But he remembered your birthday.

DON

It was my first exhibition here, he thought it would be a good publicity stunt.

ALLISON

Nothing but plans from that guy, speaking of, I'm surprised he's not here for his cut.

DON

Me either, he just said he had to be at his office. I'm sure he didn't forget. Enough tidying. I'll have all day to clean, and invent my next snake oil sale.

ALLISON

Just be lucky you don't have to wear a unitard for 80 year olds to pay your rent.

DON

At least you pay your rent, the only paying exhibition I have is called 50 hours a week at The Gap.

ALLISON

And now this.

DON

Oh yeah - and now this.

ALLISON

See you, big shot

DON

Spare me.

Allison walks out the door, exiting S.R.

Don gathers the food trays and walks outside, heading to the bench and sitting exhausted. The lights focus on the bench and tree as John wheels his cart and sits beside him.

JOHN
Long day?

DON
And most of the night.

JOHN
Something about this time of year, dark, cold. Shorter days,
endless nights.

DON
(*Offering him the trays*)
Hungry?

JOHN
(*Taking an appetizer from the tray*)
I could always eat. So, how'd it go?

DON
Huh?

JOHN
Oh (*Pulling poster from cart with goods*) Saved this for ya,
figured you'd hardly remember to save one.

DON
Wow, thanks. Very well, actually. Much better than last time
anyway.

JOHN
Never saw the poster for that one.

DON
I didn't have my Black Friday bonus to put into that one.

JOHN
I've seen you over at The Gap, or Gap. No, The Gap.

DON
Right, yeah I've worked there a few years now.

JOHN
Great sweaters.

DON
Oh yeah, great...patterns, I guess.

JOHN
I didn't have time to stop by, were they single, multi seasonal?

DON
My...Photos?

JOHN
Of course your photos. I think the poster said landscapes.

DON
Didn't think you'd have noticed.

JOHN
It was on the front door of my building.

DON
What is it you do over there?

JOHN
There? It's the Eastwick Food Pantry.

DON
Really? I had no idea, like a soup kitchen?

JOHN
We haven't served soup in a very long time.

DON
Oh. I figured churches were where you'd go for things. Like that.

JOHN
You mean food?

DON
Yeah. They had one at my school too, a closet tucked away.
Stocked with random things, fruit cups, the occasional sleeve of
pb crackers. Lots of pasta - the rigatoni, farfalle, elbow
macaroni, penne, spaghetti, angel hair, shells, cavatappi -

JOHN
You eat a lot of pasta.

DON
I have a very simple diet, some would say.

JOHN
Bit lavish then don't you think.
(*Grabbing and eating another spinach pocket from the trays
of leftovers next to John*).

DON
Lavish is right, these were courtesy of my manager.

JOHN
No kidding, seems more like a wedding planner than a manager.

DON
Don't worry there weren't any centerpieces, he just thinks food
is an important addition to the event.

JOHN
Interesting.

DON
Usually, half of it ends up in the trash unless I take it. Which,
well, I don't mind.

JOHN
Nothing like a free meal.

DON

Or a few. These things will last all week.

(*Silence*)

JOHN

I think about that alot. What you said about the trash. It's crazy how much - pounds, bags, people just throw away. All that food, wasting away in a heap.

DON

Crazy how much people have to waste.

JOHN

And some people couldn't bear to waste a single lima bean.

DON

You ain't kidding. I can't remember the last time I had a lima bean, or any bean at all.

JOHN

Consider this a formal invitation then, come on down for some beans if you ever need. It's one thing we always have plenty of.

DON

I'm not sure if that's for me, I'm living in an apartment right now, and working, so.

JOHN

You can't eat rugs in your apartment or sweaters from The Gap, and plenty of working folks with four walls and a roof use our pantry. At least stop by for a neighborly chat then.

DON

I'll do that at least. By the way, some of your mail got dropped by my door, it's Hanson's office address so I hardly check it. Most of it was junk, but this seemed pretty important. I think it was from a State office, or office of the mayor, maybe? (*Handi ng him a letter*) I would have brought it by earlier but today really had me against the wall.

JOHN

Not a problem at all, I've been waiting a long time to hear back, so a few hours isn't a big deal.

DON

I'm sure you deal with a lot of city government hullabaloo running that food pantry, meeting with representatives, the mayor's office, or whoever funds a ll the donations.

JOHN

That's certainly what you would think about a place that serves the city. Haven't had much attention in the last decade...two decades really.

DON

Oh, it must be tough going it alone.

JOHN

Only way to go sometimes. Sorry to keep you Don, congratulations again on the exhibition, I'll be sure to make the next one. Feel free to drop some posters once you get the next one all planned out.

DON

Thanks John, it's nice knowing there's neighbors in the city. Neighbors who care. I'll stop by tomorrow.

JOHN

Looking forward to it. So long.
(*Rises and leaves*)

Don sits on the bench, closing the trays of food and placing them on the seat where John was. Sandy enters.

SANDY

(*Beside the bench*)

Long night?

DON

I was just heading home, I was just talking with - a friend.

SANDY

Cold night for that.

DON

After being trapped inside all night I hardly noticed.

SANDY

How'd the big night go?

DON

Big is right, practically every single one.

SANDY

That's amazing.

DON

Just one or two of the evening ones, with the shadowy trees, were left up.

SANDY

You stayed out for three nights to take those ones, scouting the spots in the dark. Getting that weird travel hammock.

DON

So strange hearing people talk about them. They have this weird way of asking questions about nothing in particular. Asking me, "What emotion is this capturing?", "Are the trees or the ground speaking more loudly in this one?". I'd try to give them an answer but frankly, most of the stuff they asked I had never really considered.

his weird

er

SANDY

Weird.

DON

It seemed they were just asking questions that couldn't really be answered, like they were testing to see if I would go along with it. With whatever artsy intellectual quip they'd ooze out to the murmurs of approval from their 'colleagues'.

SANDY

Sounds like you made some lifelong friends.

DON

They bought them, more importantly, they enjoyed being around, so if that's a lifelong friend then so be it. Even if it was just for spinach pockets.

SANDY

Spinach Pockets?

DON

Hanson brought all these trays of food for people, he says it's what separates us from all the other arts, you can eat during it.

SANDY

He has quite the way with words.

(*She sits and the food trays are between them on the bench*)

DON

It just makes me feel strange, with everything going on next door, and what I do. Like I'm part of the problem.

SANDY

Problem?

DON

I'm not sure what it is exactly, a supply problem, a social problem. Just a perception problem.

SANDY

What do you mean? You're helping all those e art types with their high brow style and privilege see what they never have, artists without an education costing them a quarter of a million dollars. How people different from them, humbler than them, can still inspire them.

DON

It's more than my photog raphs, or the frames I pick out, and the title of the show and the publicity poster and all of that...fluff. Maybe the whole damn art world is the problem.

SANDY

Just what is it they do next store?

DON

It's a kitchen, or a pantry.

SANDY

Like a church? With d onations and all that.

DON

No, it's not a church, it's a food bank.

SANDY

I never knew there was a soup kitchen in this part of town.

DON

He said they hardly have soup anymore.

SANDY

He?

DON

The guy next door, you just missed him. He's been doing it for a long time, helping people out, trying to provide for all of them. It seems like he feels responsible for them.

SANDY

Must be hard.

DON

What?

SANDY

Building your entire life around other people.

(Silence)

DON

Did you eat?

SANDY

Haven't eaten all day.

DON

I'm bringing these home anyway, feel free. Unless you'd rather come over and eat, it's getting pretty cold out here.

SANDY

Don.

DON

We can take the last train if you want, we should make it to the station by midnight.

SANDY

No, I -

DON

Or we could grab a taxi, there's a few up by the stand if you want.

SANDY

Don, I don't want a train or a cab, I just want an answer.

DON

An answer for what?

SANDY

What's next?

DON

Next?

SANDY

We've been right here for months. We left school and had our ambitions and that's all they seem to be. Here we are again, you strung out for this show for four months, after doing the same thing last time. Is this just some type of sadistic life cycle of self - torture? Cashing out your check each week and giving it to Hanson for the rent on an art gallery that's a thirty minute walk in all directions from decent society? Stuck between a homeless shelter and a vacant lot? Why are you doing this to yourself? To us?

DON

No, this is just the way things are. This place is exactly where I'm supposed to be. I know all of this is impossible now, with no end in sight. But we're growing in ways we both can't see.

SANDY

Just apart, that's all. See you

The lights go black on Don, alone.

END ACT 1 EXCERPT