

BEYOND THE CART
by
Sally Connors
Act 1

FADE IN:

EXT. LOWER WACKER DRIVE - MORNING

Inactive parking meters run along the underground Chicago street. Behind each meter are the tattered and dirty bedrolls, old broken furniture and full-to-overflowing shopping carts of the HOMELESS, a mixture of ages, genders and nationalities.

Street lights provide light 24/7. Warm grates dot the sidewalk.

ED MULHONEY, 53, tall, thin, greasy black hair, unshaven, dressed in dirty shirt and pants rises from his bedroll, puts on a long, worn, warm coat and takes a pull from a wine bottle. Turns it upside down, empty. Shakes his head in dismay.

Looks at the bedroll next to him and nudges JAY, a 45 year old version of Ed. Dirty long red hair falls in his eyes as he looks up. A beat up dresser is next to Jay's bedroll.

JAY

Go 'way.

ED

Okay. You'll be sorry when my belly is full and you're starvin'.

Jay turns to the bedroll on the other side of him and pokes HEDDIE, a woman of undetermined age, dirty blond hair on a tattered pillow. Beside her bedroll is a cracked mirror.

JAY

Up an' attum' Heddie. Boss man says it's breakfast time.

Heddie flails her hands in Jay's direction and turns away.

Ed starts walking away pushing his shopping cart.

Jay rolls out of his bedroll and pokes Heddie again.

JAY (CONT'D)

You know we need your good looks to get an extra biscuit. Move it beautiful.

Heddie smiles up at Jay. She crawls out of her bedroll. She has on multiple dresses and warm socks. Pulls on old tattered boots and a wool hat. Puts on a long coat.

HEDDIE
You sure know how to sweet talk a
gal, Jay.

Jay and Heddie get their carts and follow after Ed.

EXT. HOPE MISSION - MORNING

A grey one-story building with a small sign over the door. THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE. The elevated train track runs overhead with a train rumbling by every 5 minutes.

Ed, Jay and Heddie park their shopping carts and join the line of homeless trailing down the sidewalk.

INT. HOPE MISSION - MORNING

Ed, Jay and Heddie are in the food line in front of GEORGE, 57, dressed in layered clothing. George, agitated, tries to get in front of Ed and Jay.

GEORGE
Hey. Leave some food for me.

ED
Take it easy, George. Stop shovin'.

Homeless sit on benches at long tables eating. Jay, Ed, Heddie and George get their food and sit with others: FRED, 35 year old version of George; LARRY, 26, buff, with a bat resting along side of him; LUCY, undetermined age, layers of clothes, rail thin body; BETTI, 53, tired looking.

Heddie sits between George and Ed.

HEDDIE
Good mornin'.

Larry bounces the bat on the floor. Scowls.

LARRY
What's good 'bout it?

GEORGE
Leave Heddie alone.

FRED
Yeah, leave Heddie alone.

Larry shrugs, rests the bat against the table and concentrates on his food.

Jay looks out the window.

JAY
Looks like snow today.

HEDDIE
I hate the snow and cold. I'm gonna
move to Florida when I win the
lottery.

George sidles up to her.

GEORGE
Until you do, I can keep you warm.

Heddie ignores him. Moves closer to Ed.

JAY
I hear there's an empty corner up
by the Trade. We can make enough
there to buy lots of lottery
tickets.

ED
I hate panhandlin'.

JAY
You're never gonna get rich with
your cans and bottles.

ED
Better to be poor than take
charity.

HEDDIE
What's wrong with a little charity?
Nobody'll pay for this body no
more. Gotta eat somehow.

JAY
You know that I'd still pay for
that body, beautiful. Just don't
have any money and probably not any
juice left in the old pecker.

HEDDIE
You or Ed would never have to pay.

GEORGE
What about me?

HEDDIE

'Fraid not. I'd squish your puny little ass.

Lucy and Betti laugh. Jay and Fred high-five each other over the table.

ED

I'm on my way. Anyone with me?

HEDDIE

Sorry. Gotta go with Jay. He knows the good spots.

Ed gets up and walks out.

GEORGE

What's with the boss man?

Jay shrugs.

JAY

Maybe makin' music tonight'll mellow him out.

HEDDIE

The Blues Brothers without the suits.

Everyone laughs. Jay, Heddie and several others leave.

EXT. ALLEY - MORNING

Alley lined with garbage cans.

Ed scavenges every garbage can. Cans and bottles go into a plastic bag hanging from his cart. Food is carefully put in a plastic Dominick's grocery bag. He drinks from wine bottles and puts them on top of the heap in his cart.

At the end of the alley he takes his trumpet out of its case and fondles it lovingly. Reaches into his coat pocket for his mouthpiece. He plays a scale and then a riff from one of his favorite jazz pieces. Dries the mouthpiece, puts it in his pocket and puts the trumpet back in its case.

EXT. LOWER WACKER DRIVE - AFTERNOON

Ed sits on his bedroll, takes off his shoes and rubs his feet, grimacing. He turns a shoe over and sticks his finger through a hole in the sole.

He digs around in the cart, finds a piece of cardboard and with a knife he shapes it to fit the shoe. He fishes two wine bottles out of the cart and drains them.

Jay pushes his cart and sits on his bedroll.

ED
How'd the Trade go?

Jay holds up an orange and green argyle sock.

ED (CONT'D)
Where'd ya get that awful lookin' thing?

JAY
Found it in the garbage off State Street. Makes a statement don't it?

Ed shakes his head.

ED
Hope ya got more'n that out'ta the afternoon.

Jay jingles the sock and raises his eyebrows. He pulls a sign out of his cart. HOMELESS. WON'T WORK. WANT MONEY. IF YOU LAUGH, PLEASE PUT SOMETHING IN THE HAT.

Ed chuckles.

Heddie prances in pushing her cart wearing a beautiful red pillbox hat.

ED
Where'd ya get the hat?

JAY
That's even funnier. Heddie went up to this classy dame and accused her of stealing her hat.

Ed high-fives Heddie.

JAY (CONT'D)
The woman looked at Heddie. Tore that hat off her head, threw it on the ground and got out of there as quick as she could.

Jay stands up and mimics the woman's actions.

HEDDIE

(laughs)

She's looking around to see if anyone heard me. I just walked up to that hat and put it on my head.

JAY

I had a hard time gettin' it off her long enough to collect some money.

Heddie sits down.

ED (CONT'D)

Hope you spent some of that money on food.

Heddie violently shakes her head no.

HEDDIE

That's gonna buy Jay a bus ticket home.

Ed shakes his head. A dark SUV pulls up to the stoplight and honks. Ed and Jay look at Heddie. Her face drops.

JAY

Go Heddie. She just wants to know you're alive.

The car parks at the curb. Heddie approaches the passenger side, tears streaming down her face. HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER, a blond, 39 year old, well dressed woman speaks to Heddie through the window.

HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER

Hi Mom. Love your hat.

Heddie snuffles and wipes her face with her hands.

HEDDIE

You shouldn't come down here.

HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER

I love you Mom. I have to know you're still alive.

She holds up a container.

HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER (CONT'D)

I brought you some of your favorite soup. Made it just like you taught me.

Heddie's daughter cries. Heddie leans in the window.

HEDDIE
Don't cry baby. I'm okay.

She points to Ed and Jay.

HEDDIE (CONT'D)
See, I've still got my two strong
guys to take care of me.

Her daughter wipes her eyes.

HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER
I wont argue with you. I love you.
If you ever want to come home, you
know how to reach me.

Heddie takes the container from her daughter and holds it up
to Ed and Jay.

HEDDIE
Thanks, baby. Always know I love
you.

Heddie's daughter starts the car. She speaks through her
tears.

HEDDIE'S DAUGHTER
See you next week, Mom.

Heddie waves as the car moves down the street. She is crying
when she reaches Ed and Jay. She sits and puts the soup down.
Ed and Jay look away.

JAY
Isn't it about time for a visit
from your special lady?

ED
Why do they keep doing this to us?

Heddie looks up, drying her tears. She waves at the nearby
homeless.

HEDDIE
Let's eat the soup while it's hot.

EXT. STATE STREET SHELTER - LATE AFTERNOON

Large red brick building. Cement steps leading into the
shelter. JESUS SAVES in neon lights.

Sign on door: TODAY - Counseling 10 a.m.; Job Skills 3:00 p.m.; AA 7 p.m.; NA 9 p.m.

JEREMY, 48 years old, cleanly dressed in jeans and a Northwestern sweat shirt is talking to Larry, who is swinging his bat at an imaginary ball.

JEREMY
Put that bat down before you kill
someone.

Larry takes a vicious swing.

LARRY
Could'a made it to the bigs.

Jay walks up and almost gets hit by Larry's bat. He ducks in time.

JEREMY
See.

Larry looks sheepishly at Jay.

LARRY
Sorry man.

Jay pats Larry on the shoulder.

JAY
No problem.

Jeremy gets in Larry's face.

JEREMY
Either put it down or swing it
somewhere else.

Jeremy turns around and walks up the steps. Larry walks away swinging his bat. Jay looks at Jeremy and walks behind him, putting his hand on his shoulder. Jeremy whirls around.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Larry --

Jeremy pushes Jay who falls and hits his head on the steps. Jeremy looks down.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Jay?

He kneels down and tries to revive Jay who doesn't respond.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Oh my God. What have I done.

Jay groans.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Can you hear me?

Jay sits up and rubs the back of his head. His hand comes away with blood on it. Jeremy starts to call 911. Jay puts his bloody hand on Jeremy's phone.

JAY

No. No cops.

Jay attempts to stand. Loses his balance and sits back down again, groaning. Jeremy starts for the door.

Jay puts his hand out and pulls on Jeremy's pants leg as he is going by.

JAY

I'm okay. Just help me up.

Jeremy helps Jay to stand. Jay is wobbly but remains standing.

JEREMY

Please let me take care of that cut.

Jay takes a few tentative steps.

JAY

I'll take care of myself like I always do. Now just go back in your shelter and help someone else.

Jay staggers down the street heading towards the alley. Jeremy looks after him. He looks at the blood on the steps.

EXT. STATE STREET SHELTER - EVENING

Ed, wine bottle between his legs, and Heddie, in the red hat, are sitting on the steps. The blood has been washed off. Ed has his trumpet out.

ED

Where is he?

HEDDIE
He'll be here. Don't worry. He was
lookin' forward to it.

ED
Don't make excuses for him, Heddie.

HEDDIE
He wouldn't do that, Ed. He
wouldn't.

ED
We won't see him til mornin'.

HEDDIE
He wouldn't do that Ed.

Ed gets up dejectedly. Puts the mouthpiece in his pocket and
the trumpet back in its case.

HEDDIE (CONT'D)
Don't give up on 'em Ed. He'll
show.

ED
You can sit here all night but he
won't show.

Heddie reluctantly gets up. She looks all around and follows
Ed.

EXT. LOWER WACKER DRIVE - MORNING

Ed looks at Jay's empty bedroll.

ED
Heddie, wake up.

No reply. He walks over to her bedroll and gives it a kick.

HEDDIE
(mumbles)
Lemme 'lone.

ED
Wake up Heddie. How much money was
in that sock?

Heddie sits up and looks over at Jay's bedroll. Lays back
down. Ed reaches down and shakes her.

ED (CONT'D)
 Jay's still missin'. How much money
 did he have to spend on booze?

HEDDIE
 (whining)
 We only made about twenty bucks.

ED
 Not much for a hard drinker like
 Jay. He shoulda been back before
 now.

Ed walks to his cart.

ED (CONT'D)
 I'm goin' for breakfast and look
 for Jay. Comin'?

Heddie shakes herself and rolls out of the bedroll. She puts
 on her coat and the red hat. Takes her shopping cart and
 hurries after Ed.

EXT. HOPE MISSION - MORNING

A MAN, 40, dressed in layered, dirty clothing watches Ed and
 Heddie park their carts. Heddie gets in line. Ed walks up and
 down the line.

ED
 Seen Jay?

No response from crowd. Most people avert their eyes and
 shuffle their feet. Ed takes his place in line.

INT. HOPE MISSION - MORNING

Heddie sits with Betti and Lucy. Ed walks through the room
 and stops at a table.

ED
 Seen Jay?

Shake of heads. Walks to next table.

ED (CONT'D)
 Lookin' for Jay.

No response. Ed stands on a bench and shouts.

ED (CONT'D)
Anyone seen Jay?

He gets no response.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Snow is piled up around a Park and Ride car lot. Heddie, George and Fred, are huddled around a warm trash can. Ed parks his cart and approaches the group with food in his hands.

HEDDIE
Find Jay?

Ed shakes his head no and hands out the food.

FRED
Somthin' stinks.

He smells the food Ed gave him.

FRED (CONT'D)
This smells good.

He walks towards Ed's cart. He pinches his nose and looks at Ed.

FRED
whatcha got in there?

Ed walks over to his cart and steps back.

ED
Must've picked up somethin' rotten.
Gotta clean it out.

HEDDIE
D'ya need help?

ED
No, stay here, stay warm.

GEORGE
I'll keep you warm.

George pinches Heddie's butt, Heddie whimpers. Ed turns and glares at George who puts his hands up in surrender. Ed walks away.

EXT. GRANT PARK - AFTERNOON

In a secluded area Ed inspects each item in his cart.

He looks into the half empty cart and then at the things he has spread on the ground.

ED

Damn.

He looks in the cart once more.

ED (CONT'D)

Where's my suitcase?

He scratches his head and goes back to unloading the cart. He pokes at a large zippered black bag. He jumps back. He looks at the bag and puts his hand on the zipper.

A POLICEMAN, elderly Caucasian, comes up behind him.

POLICEMAN

Whatcha doing here?

Ed quickly straightens up to face the policeman.

ED

I'm on my way, Officer. Just restin'.

The policeman comes closer to Ed. Ed steps away from his cart. The policeman puts his nose in the air and sniffs.

POLICEMAN

What's that smell?

Ed steps closer to the policeman.

POLICEMAN

For God's sake, man, you stink!

He backs away from Ed

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Don't be here when I come round again.

The policeman walks away. Ed quickly packs his cart and pushes it towards the hedge in front of him.

EXT. GRANT PARK - AFTERNOON

Behind the hedge that separates the park from the railroad track. Snow piled high along the tracks.

Ed tips the cart on it's side and pulls the black bag out. He slowly unzips it. He jumps back and gasps. He sits on his haunches and examines the body inside.

The cart shields the black bag from the hedge. Ed goes over to the snow bank and starts digging a hole in it.

THREE BOYS, all about 8 years old, dressed for snow, poke their heads above the hedge.

CHILD #1
Whatcha doin', mister?

Ed looks up. He stands up between the children and the cart and puts his finger over his mouth.

ED
Shh. I'm an undercover cop on a very important job.

Child #2's eyes get big.

CHILD #2
Really?

CHILD #3
Ya gotta gun?

Ed walks very close to the children. They back away from him.

ED
Where ya goin'? I was just going to show you my gun.

CHILD #3
You smell.

ED
Of course I do. I'm undercover. It's my job to smell.

Child #3 holds his nose.

CHILD #3
You're doin' your job real well.

CHILD #1
Let's go. I don't like the smell.

Ed puts his head across the hedge, close to the children.

ED
(menacingly)
Don't tell anyone you saw me.

He glares at them, uses his finger like a gun.

ED (CONT'D)
I know what you look like.

All three children scream and run off. Ed puts everything back in his cart and mutters to himself.

ED
What'm I gonna do with you?

EXT. GRANT PARK - AFTERNOON

Snowbank between back of band shell and hedge. Black bag on the ground.

Ed uses a wine bottle to dig a hole in the snowbank, drags the black bag over to the hole, pushes it in and fills it with snow. He pats it down and looks at it.

ED
Sorry, buddy. Best I can do.

EXT. RECYCLING CENTER - AFTERNOON

Recycling Center with bins for cans, bottles and other recyclables. The building has large double doors.

Ed stands on the outskirts of the Center and watches a MALE CLERK, 25, dressed in jeans and a warm jacket, chase Larry, carrying his bat, out of the Center.

CLERK
Get out'ta here. No bums allowed.

The clerk moves on to another customer. Ed pushes his cart, towards a bin. Clerk comes over to Ed. Looks everywhere, but in Ed's eyes.

CLERK
Didn't ya hear me? No bums allowed.

He makes shooing moves at Ed. Ed moves back towards the edge of the Center. The Clerk goes into the building.

Ed sidles up to a can bin. He stops and stares into the bin. His mouth opens in surprise. He reaches in and slowly takes out an orange and green argyle sock. He looks over to where he saw Larry swinging his bat. Shakes the sock and puts it in his coat pocket.

He takes out a few cans and puts them in his plastic bag. The clerk comes running over.

CLERK

That's it. I'm callin' the cops.
Put those cans back. That's
stealing.

Clerk pulls out phone and calls the police. He pushes Ed to the side of the building. Ed tries to push his cart away but is subdued by the clerk. A siren is heard approaching. Two POLICEMEN come into the Center.

CLERK

(shouting)
Over here.

They approach Ed and the clerk.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Arrest this man. He's stealing cans
from the recycling bins. I warned
him.

POLICEMAN #1

You want us to arrest someone for
stealing empty cans?

CLERK

Yes. These homeless are always
trying to get something for
nothing.

(to Ed)

Just get a job why don'cha? And
take a bath once in a while.

Clerk holds his nose.

POLICEMAN #2

You're willing to press charges?

CLERK

Yeah.

Clerk waves his hands around indicating the homeless in the Center.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Just get the likes of him outta here.

The officers escort Ed and his cart out of the Recycling Center.

INT. POLICE STATION - DESK SERGEANT'S DESK - AFTERNOON

Ed is sitting on a bench facing the DESK SERGEANT, a 23 year old policeman. Ed takes the argyle sock out of his pocket and fingers it. Turns it inside out. Places it back in his pocket.

VICTOR SPURGEON, a 45 year old police detective dressed in street clothes, approaches the Desk Sergeant.

DESK SERGEANT
Hi Victor. How can I help you?

VICTOR
Looking for Ed Mulhoney.

Sergeant points to the bench. Victor looks at Ed.

VICTOR
Ed?

ED
Vic.

VICTOR
My God.

Hands paperwork to Sergeant.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(to Ed)
The clerk didn't show so you're free to go.

Ed gets up.

ED
Need a ride back to my shopping cart.

VICTOR
Sorry, we don't run a taxi service.