

UNLIKELY HERO

a play about Fire Fighters

by Sam Stone

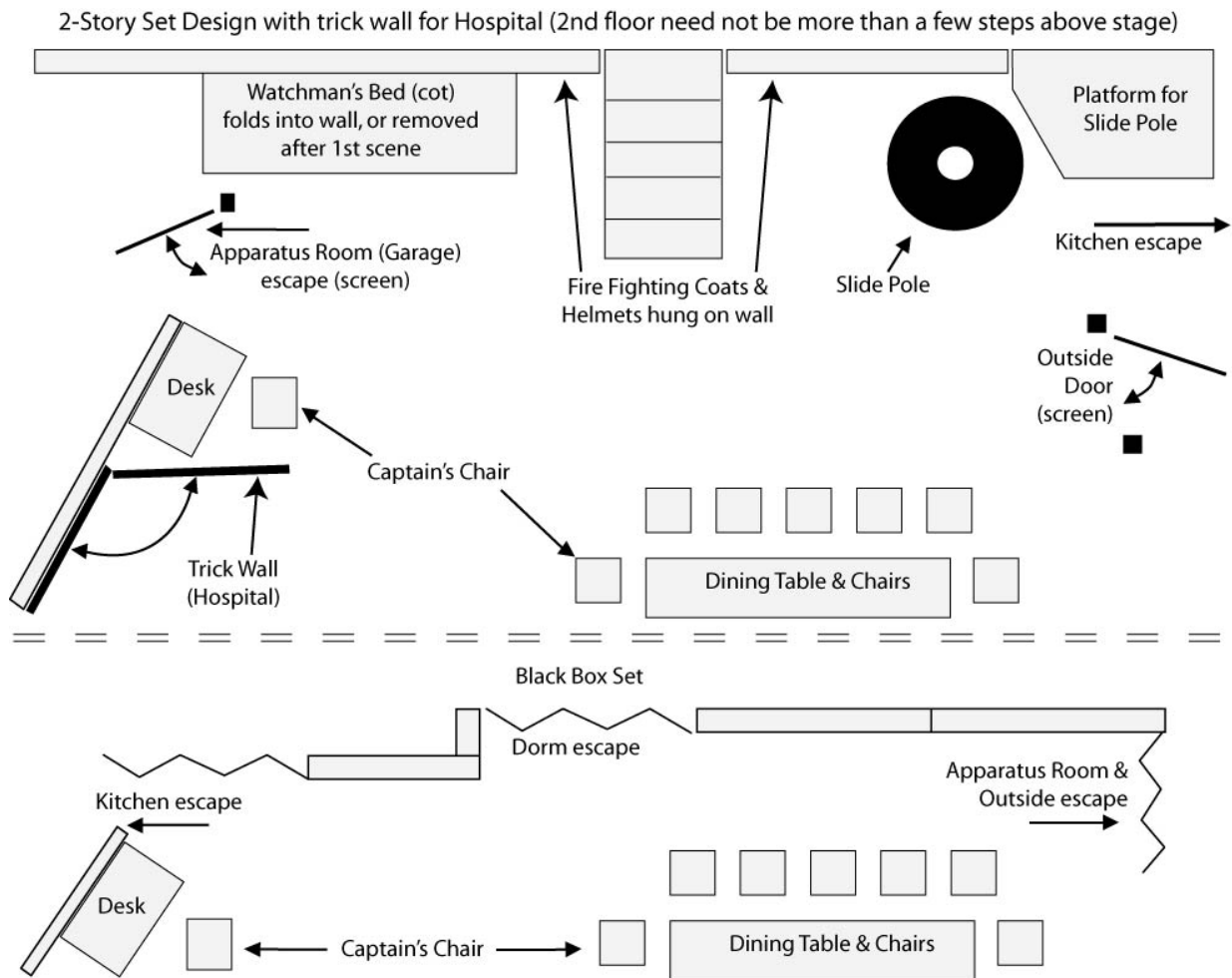
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Unlikley Hero



Special Technical Note: The word "Presignal" appears before the ringing of the fire station bell. This is a single "DING," then a short time (a second or two) should pass before the actual ringing of the bell. Considerable action can take place between the two sound cues.

Attention actor playing RENEE: Renee lives in a boat yard and has a thorough understanding of nautical terms. "Seafaring" means to go "far" upon the sea. Please don't use "seafairing" in scene 1.

Blocking/Action Notes: The blocking notes in the script were developed after considerable workshops, rehearsals and in collaboration with actors, techies and directors. Many were spontaneous actions by actors while "in character." They are taken from the Stage Manager's script following the play's third Showcase production.

Their purpose is to help the reader develop a "feel" for the characterization and are NOT intended as "rules."

New and different interpretations are encouraged.

Characters:

RENEE - Late 20's/early 30's. Female - possibly Latina.

MIKE DONNER - Renee's age (6 months older).

LOU PORTER - A few years older than Mike and Renee.

WATCHMAN ("Eugene Johnson") - African-American. Mature.

JOE ("Joseph Saperstein") - Jewish.

Note: JOE may be two characters; JOE (Fire Fighter) and "OLD JOE" (Narrator.) This play is JOE's story.

CAPTAIN - Fire Station Shift Commander. Male/Mature. Possibly Black or Latino.

MANDY - Rookie Fire Fighter. Early 20's. Jewish.

VOICES on the Fire Station Radio:

ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER - Female.

RESCUE THREE OFFICER - Male.

EXTRAS - Additional characters may be added and may assume some of the regular characters' lines. They should be male unless on the other shift. Possible nicknames may include Doozie, Axe, Grumpy, Hick-up, Moose or Jumper.

Time: February 1974 to February 1975.

Setting: Miami, Florida near downtown in the low rent district, a century-old fire station's office/dining area.

A hospital room (brief scene) - minimal/suggestive.

ACT ONE

Scene 1 - February, 1974, Before Sunup.

Scene 2 - Mid Morning.

Scene 3 - Late Morning (brunch).

Scene 4 - Afternoon.

Scene 5 - The Next Morning Before Dawn.

Act TWO

Scene 1 - A Moment Later.

Scene 2 - That Morning at Shift Change.

Scene 3 - A Week Later

Scene 4 - July... Hospital, then Station 2 the Same Morning.

Scene 5 - Late September.

Scene 6 - October Evening.

Scene 7 - February, 1975.

Dedication: To Ben Durfey whose fearless, cool-headed fire fighting is legend among Miami Fire Fighters who remember the "Black Coat" days. This play is a work of fiction based on a few MFD chestnuts from Ben's career, the author's and others. Ben's passing inspired this play. May he rest in peace.

ACT ONE
Scene 1

On Rise: WATCHMAN is sleeping.

Presignal. WATCHMAN wakes instantly, checks his watch and springs from bed to watch desk as the station bell rings twice.

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Ladder Two, water leak. Northwest First Avenue and Twenty-Second Street. Ladder Two, water leak. Possible broken main at Northwest One Avenue and Twenty-Two Street...

(In the shadows, several Fire Fighters pass from dorm to apparatus room. WATCHMAN writes the assignment, hands it to one of them and returns to bed. The truck starts and drives away as lights fade.)

(JOE's spot on. JOE Enters.)

JOE

Sleeping through the night was a rare thing at station two. If the bell didn't ring, I'd wake up around six o'clock thinking something had to be wrong. A busy fire station attracts a strange variety of people but, as different as they might be, they share one common bond. They love the action. Believe me when I say the action alone can make real heroes out of ordinary folks like you and me. A station like this one, near the outskirts of downtown in the low rent district, breeds some of the most dedicated Fire Fighters you'll ever find.

(JOE walks around as lights fade up onstage.)

This is Miami's Fire Station Number Two. Originally built for horses, it was redesigned for motor vehicles in the nineteen-twenties. This is the watch office. It's what you might call the nerve center of the station. It's where we receive our alarms and keep the records. Out there's the apparatus room, apparatus meaning Fire Truck. The stairs lead up to the dormitory and this... is the dining room. Lots of stuff happens in the dining room of a Fire Station, some of it official and some not, but a lot of it's fun. Years from now, this room and the things that happen here will be remembered with... reverence.

(JOE exits as lights fade to black.)

(Dawn breaks through the "outside" door. A car arrives and car doors slam. MIKE DONNER and LOU PORTER enter from outside carrying groceries [paper bags - this is the 1970's] and a bucket. They exit to the kitchen leaving the bucket onstage.)

(MIKE returns with a jar containing milk. Obviously tired, he collapses into a chair and drinks.)

PORTER

(Enters. Looks in bucket.)

Damn, Mike! These shrimp are huge! Last night sure knocks out that old theory.

MIKE

Huh? O...kay Porter, what old theory?

PORTER

How shrimp only run on cold nights and full moons. It never got below Seventy degrees last night.

(Examines a shrimp.)

MIKE

AND!... it was a crescent moon. I told you!

PORTER

Why do you think they run then?

MIKE

Personally, I think it's a breeding thing. Why else would they come up out of the protection of the grass beds?

PORTER

Sex huh? You might be right. Gets me out of the grass every time.

(Closer examination.)

Wonder how they tell the boys from the girls.

MIKE

I figure the first five pounds will go into the Creole and...

PORTER

(Returns shrimp to the bucket.)

I don't know why you don't call it spaghetti with shrimp! Just because you use Cajun spices doesn't mean...

MIKE

Who says Creole has to be made with rice?

PORTER

Mike, you're the only guy I've ever seen make it with spaghetti.

MIKE

Why don't you and Sandy come over tomorrow night and we'll fill up on shrimp and beer? We can throw the tails in the river and watch the fish fight for 'em and...

PORTER (interrupting)

(Rises.)

That's not likely. Wonder who's off today?

(Crosses to desk. Takes clipboard from wall and
flips pages.)

What day is it?

MIKE

Uh... Wednesday. (Beat.) What's going on with you and Sandy?

PORTER

Let's see... Here it is... Hey! Lieutenant Cosgrove starts his
vacation today.

MIKE

Hope they don't send the All American Hero to replace him.

PORTER

(Replaces clipboard.)

I think he's been riding Rescue Three lately.

(Looks in apparatus room. Returning, he notices
WATCHMAN.)

Ladder truck's out! Hey Mike, Watchman's here.

MIKE

Wonder who he traded time with. (Beat.) Okay! What's the
story with Sandy?

PORTER

I told you... yesterday.

MIKE

Bullshit! We've been together for more than twenty-four hours
and you haven't mentioned her name once.

PORTER

Really?

(MIKE gives him a look.)

I wonder if the coffee's done.

(Exits to kitchen.)

MIKE

That stuff'll rot your innards. Okay, what'd you do this time?

PORTER

(Returns with cup. Pours some of MIKE's milk in
cup.)

Why do you always think it's me?

(MIKE gives him another look.)

Yeah, I know... do you remember Monica?

MIKE
Who?

PORTER
The Barracuda.

MIKE
You mean your neighbor with the...?
(Hands at arm's length indicating enormous breasts.)

PORTER
Yeah, that's her. We've been fooling around for about a month now and...

MIKE
That kinda crap is gonna get you in big trouble some day.

PORTER
Well... some day... happened Monday morning. Sandy went to work and... (Beat.) I went next door. We were just getting, you know, comfortable when Sandy started hammering on the front door. She was pissed.

MIKE
I'll bet!

PORTER
I started for the back door and realized she would see me through the window so I jumped in the bedroom closet.

MIKE
Where was... what's-her-name.

PORTER
Sandy? She was at the front door.

MIKE
Not your wife, idiot! What's-her-name!
(Again, the gesture at arm's length.)

PORTER
Monica!

MIKE
Yeah, her! What did she do?

PORTER
She answered the door.

MIKE
Oh, boy! I can see it all now!

PORTER

Anyway, I don't know what happened at the door...

MIKE

I do!

PORTER

The next thing I know, Sandy opened the closet door and there I was pulling up my pants.

MIKE

You're lucky she didn't have a gun or you'd be minus a couple of parts.

PORTER

Sandy says, 'Do you have anything to say for yourself?' I said, 'I thought this was the express elevator.' She says, 'It is! To divorce court!' (Serious.) Then, she told me to move out before she got home or I wouldn't have anything left to pack.

MIKE

Oh, brother! Then what?

PORTER

Well, then, she went to work and... Monica helped me move into the sailboat.

MIKE

You are completely out of your mind!

(Presignal sounds. WATCHMAN checks his watch and hides his head under the cover.)

PORTER

(Checks his watch.)

Wake up bell.

(The bell rings 3 times. WATCHMAN rises sleepily.)

MIKE

Wish they could find a better way to wake us up.

PORTER

Yeah, a tall blond would be nice.

MIKE

Aren't you in enough trouble over that sort of thing?

PORTER

Well, yeah... So?

MIKE

Porter, sometimes I'm surprised you're still alive.

WATCHMAN

(Rises, steps into his pants/shoes.)

Mike Donner. Is that you?

MIKE

Yeah.

WATCHMAN

Did you make coffee?

MIKE

(Signals PORTER. PORTER hides his cup.)

No.

WATCHMAN

I wish you'd learn to drink coffee.

(Crosses to dining room. PORTER salutes with cup.)

I thought you said you didn't make any.

(Smells something. Looks around.)

MIKE

I didn't. Porter did. Who'd you trade time with?

WATCHMAN

Peanut Butter McClellan.

(Sees bucket - looks inside.)

Shrimp for dinner?

PORTER

Yeah. Better get some of that coffee you're whining about.

(WATCHMAN exits to kitchen.)

MIKE

Hey, Watchman, don't you have some rental apartments?

WATCHMAN (offstage)

Yeah. You need one?

MIKE

No, but Lou Porter does. He's back in trouble.

WATCHMAN

(Returns with coffee.)

How about that duplex on Fifth Avenue? There's a hooker upstairs and...

MIKE

Hey! Your kind of place!

PORTER

Would I have my own room or do I get to watch the action? Just what I need! More excitement.

MIKE

Too bad he can't create enough by himself.

(JOE enters from Dorm.)

PORTER

Joe! Did we miss something? Is our entire shift here?

WATCHMAN

No. It's only Joe and me.

JOE

Tommy Ling had to attend a wedding. I'm working his shift.
(Exits to kitchen.)

MIKE

The Chink? Couldn't you find someone else to trade with? That means we're going to have him here for a whole day on our shift. Let me know when so I can go fishing. Just what we need, the Jew boy and the Chink trading shifts! Aren't there any Americans left?

WATCHMAN

Mike, Tommy is an American! One of his ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War!

MIKE

Yeah, yeah... (Beat.) How's our girl doing?

WATCHMAN

She's back in practice. Nothing strenuous yet.

PORTER (sudden interest)

Something happen to Nancy?

WATCHMAN

Broke her collarbone in the Florida State game.

PORTER

When did that happen?

MIKE (thinks)

Uh... it was when you and Sandy went sailing to the Bahamas.

(To WATCHMAN.)

How's she coming along?

WATCHMAN

She'll be ready for the regionals.

(WATCHMAN rises, moves toward the dorm.)

MIKE

Great! They're gonna need her. Go on and do your thing. I'll take your place if the bell rings. Where are you riding?

WATCHMAN

Nozzleman.

(Exits to dorm.)

(RENEE enters from outside.)

MIKE

(Sees RENEE entering.)

Oh, no!

RENEE

Hey, 'Beached Whale Too.' Saw your boat outside.

MIKE

Around here, it's Mike. Why are you here?

RENEE

My Captain said you needed a warm body.

PORTER

Looks like the body we got was warmer than we expected.

RENEE

Bet your ass! Hi, Louie. How's the sailboat?

PORTER

Great Renee. I heard you were on the job. How's it going?

(JOE passes from kitchen to dorm, cup in hand.
Notices RENEE.)

RENEE

They've got me out west and it's slow as molasses. Boat yard's dead this time of year too...

(Smells something. Looks around.)

...It'll be nice to spend some time in a station where the bell rings for more than just roll call...

(Looks in bucket.)

...Wow! They must have run last night! Any coffee?

(PORTER points. RENEE exits to kitchen.)

MIKE

What the hell is she doing here?

PORTER

Filling in for Lieutenant Cosgrove I guess, which means the Captain will probably make you acting Lieutenant.

MIKE

Yeah, but why HER? Have you talked to anybody she works with?

PORTER

Jacobson said she's good around the station but she talks a lot.

MIKE

She's always talked too much. Did Jake say anything about her fire fighting?

PORTER

Didn't say but they don't have a lot of fires in that part of town. What's the problem? It wasn't that long ago that you...

MIKE

I just don't like the idea of women on the job.

PORTER

Oh, shit. Here we go again.

MIKE

What does that mean?

PORTER

It means what it means. It happens every time something new comes along. Besides, if you have a problem with women on the job, she ought'a be the last one you complain about.

(RENEE returns with coffee.)

Renee, how long have you been back in town?

RENEE

I don't know. A little over a year... Let's see... It was just before Thanksgiving, so...

(RENEE begins to mentally count using her fingers.)

MIKE

Fifteen months minus a couple of days.

(RENEE and PORTER look at MIKE, surprised.)

RENEE

Mike, are you cooking?

MIKE

Yeah.

RENEE

How much for the day?

MIKE

Tell you what. You don't talk for 24 hours, you can eat free.

RENEE

(Pulls wallet or cash from pocket.)

How much for the day?

MIKE

Five bucks.

(RENEE holds money out as the presignal sounds.)

Protect the shrimp.

(MIKE ignores money. Exits to dorm as the bell sounds twice.)

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Engine Two, vehicle fire behind the building at Northwest Third Avenue and Eighteenth Street. Police Officer on the scene. Engine Two, vehicle fire...

(WATCHMAN enters and crosses to the desk as JOE and one or two others pass from dorm to apparatus room. WATCHMAN writes on pad and hands paper to JOE.)

PORTER

I'm gonna get ready for work.

(Exits to dorm, cup in hand.)

MIKE

(Returns wearing fire fighting pants/boots. Speaks to RENEE.)

Watch the shrimp.

(Grabs his fire fighting coat/helmet from wall. Exits to apparatus room without waiting for an answer.)

RENEE

Okay! I'll... do it...

(Her words fade as he exits. Truck leaves.)

WATCHMAN

(Moves toward the dorm. Notices RENEE.)

Hey, look who's here! Somebody said you were back in town.

(They embrace.)

When did you hire on the job?

RENEE

April.

WATCHMAN

Where are you assigned?

RENEE

Airport South.

WATCHMAN

Not a lot of action out there.

RENEE

That's for sure. We almost never turn a wheel. I hate residential neighborhoods.

WATCHMAN

That's because you grew up on the river. That part of the world never sleeps.

RENEE

Tell me about it. When I left town it took me a month to get used to sleeping in a quiet bedroom.

WATCHMAN

You'll find this place more to your liking. Are you helping your folks run the boat yard?

RENEE

Yeah. It's even slow there. My whole life lately is waiting for things to happen.

WATCHMAN

Can you handle the watch while I finish cleaning up?

RENEE

Yeah.

(WATCHMAN moves toward dorm. Is called back by the next line.)

I get to baby-sit a bucketful of seafaring insects while that asshole goes on an alarm.

WATCHMAN

Sounds like you and Mike are picking up right where you left off. What is it this time?

RENEE

Hey, don't ask me. He's the one with the problem.

(Fade to gray. WATCHMAN exits to dorm. RENEE sits. PORTER enters in uniform, exits to kitchen, returns and sits at table. WATCHMAN returns in uniform and joins others at table. CAPTAIN enters, sits at desk, picks up phone and dials. Lights up full.)

PORTER

So, how did Nancy get injured?

RENEE

She tried to re-arrange the courtside furniture.

WATCHMAN

You saw the game?

RENEE

Yeah! Well... I saw it on television. Our shift was on duty, remember? Where were you?

WATCHMAN

Second alarm on Third Avenue.

PORTER

You missed it?

WATCHMAN

Yeah... BUT, I got to watch the game film the next week.

(Sound/light cue. Fire truck backs into station.)

PORTER

So! How did she get hurt?

WATCHMAN

She chased a ball and wound up wearing a folding chair for a necklace.

PORTER

That's it? No foul?

WATCHMAN

Nope! She just has to stay on the court... or... look where she's going.

(CAPTAIN hangs up phone as JOE, MIKE and others enter. JOE and others exit to dorm.)

CAPTAIN

Donner!

MIKE

Yes, Sir?

CAPTAIN

Lieutenant Cosgrove's off today. I need an acting Lieutenant. How about it?

MIKE

Do I have to Captain? I brought in shrimp for dinner!

CAPTAIN

You can still cook. I'll clear it with the rest of the crew.

MIKE

Okay. Who's on the Engine?

CAPTAIN

You mean, besides Watchman and Porter? Tell you what. I'll give you the extra man. You can have Joe or Renee.

MIKE

I can see the guys on Engine Five if I show up with a girl on board.

CAPTAIN

Jesus Mike! Is this gonna be one of those days?

MIKE

I'll take Joe. I'm gonna get dressed.
(Exits to dorm.)

RENEE

Boy! This sure promises to be a fun day.

WATCHMAN

It'll clear up.

RENEE

How can you say that?

WATCHMAN

Because I know you'll fit in fine. Mike just needs to get used to you being here.

RENEE

Yeah, sure!

WATCHMAN

Hold on! You just got here remember? It's not like when you used to hang around here drinking coffee and talking until sunup. You're on the job now and he feels threatened. You've never worked with him before. Give him a chance.

RENEE

How much of a chance?

WATCHMAN

You're going to have to figure that out on your own. I'm not in charge of that shit.

(Presignal. They rise.)

Where're you riding?

RENEE

Ladder truck I guess.

(The bell rings one long ring. RENEE takes the bucket and cups to the kitchen as WATCHMAN exits. Others pass through from dorm to apparatus room.)

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Building fire in a warehouse at Northwest Fifth Avenue and Twelfth Street. Engine Two, Ladder Two, building fire...

(CAPTAIN writes the assignment on the pad. When MIKE passes through, CAPTAIN hands him a copy.)

MIKE

(Sees RENEE returning from kitchen.)

The shrimp?

RENEE

In the refrigerator!

(All personnel exit to apparatus room. RENEE tosses her uniform shirt somewhere convenient. Two fire trucks drive away.)

(Cross-fade to JOE 's spot. JOE steps into spot.)

JOE

Lou Porter was right. Mike didn't like anyone or anything new or different. It threatened his homemade world and he hated it. This time, it's a woman in the station. For a short while, fire stations were exempt from the infusion of women in the work force... because of the common dormitories and bathrooms. When women finally overcame that hurdle, what bothered the guys then was the fact that some of the women weren't strong enough or motivated enough to do the job. Of course some of the men weren't motivated either.

(JOE exits as back-up alarm begins to sound and lights rise in dining room.)

- End of Scene 1 -

Scene 2
mid morning

On Rise: Two trucks back in.
PORTER and WATCHMAN enter.

WATCHMAN

Jeez! That was hot!

PORTER

I hope the entire shift isn't going to be this busy?

WATCHMAN

Yeah. It would be nice to have a quiet day for a change.

PORTER

I need some coffee.

(PORTER exits to kitchen as MIKE enters.)

MIKE

You should be glad you were at the pump. We were so deep in that warehouse we couldn't tell which way was out. It was so smoky I couldn't see a thing.

WATCHMAN

I hate it when that happens. I keep tripping over stuff.

MIKE

We heard some noise and moved toward the sound. Turned out it was that girl... all by herself, ventilating.

(CAPTAIN enters from apparatus room. WATCHMAN exits to dorm.)

Captain, what the hell's going on with that girl?

CAPTAIN

What about that girl? In case you don't remember, her name's Renee.

MIKE

I know, I know. She was a thousand miles inside that building without any help. Who was her buddy anyway?

(PORTER returns. RENEE passes from apparatus room to kitchen.)

Captain, I...

(Waits for RENEE to exit.)

...I don't even like the IDEA of women fire fighters BUT, if she's gonna be here, the last thing we need is for her to wind up dead! What are you going to do about it?

(JOE enters from apparatus room as CAPTAIN speaks.)

CAPTAIN

What do you want me to do Mike? You have the extra man on your truck. You wanna give me someone?

MIKE

Joe! He's a good man Captain! Joe, how about riding the ladder and keep Renee from getting killed?

CAPTAIN

Anything you say Mike, but Joe has to agree.

MIKE

What do you say Joe?

JOE

Sure. No problem.

(CAPTAIN signals acceptance. JOE and MIKE exit to dorm.)

CAPTAIN

Guess I'd better talk to her about working alone.

PORTER

I'll do it Captain... If that's okay with you?

CAPTAIN

Whatever. Just make sure she understands I do not enjoy filling out Injury forms.

PORTER

I'll handle it.

(CAPTAIN exits to dorm. RENEE enters with coffee.

PORTER points at a chair.)

Sit down!

RENEE

What? Now, what'd I do?

PORTER

Just sit down, will ya?

RENEE

(Sits. May remove her fire fighting pants/boots and put her shoes on during this conversation.)

What?

PORTER

I don't know what you thought you were doing at that fire. If you're not a hell of a lot more careful, you're gonna get hurt.

RENEE

What are you talking about?

PORTER

I'm talking about the fact that you were way too far inside that fire without a partner. You should never have been where Mike found you.

RENEE

Oh? And what do I do when there's work to be done? Stand around with my thumb up my ass?

PORTER

You see! That's the kind of stuff that'll get you killed. Dammit, Renee, you gotta be more careful and find a partner when you go that far into a building. Truth is you shoulda waited for somebody from Engine Five to work with. Anyway, the Captain's teamed you with Joe for the rest of the day.

RENEE

Isn't Joe riding the Engine?

(MIKE enters from dorm. PORTER signals him to stay out of the conversation.)

PORTER

Not anymore. The Captain put him on the ladder to watch your ass.

RENEE

(Looks behind her.)

Really? I sure hope he likes what he sees.

(PORTER gives her a look. She notices MIKE. Pulls money out of pocket. MIKE takes it as she speaks to PORTER.)

Okay! I'll stick with Joe.

(To MIKE.)

You need some help in the kitchen?

MIKE

No, Porter's all I need. What we all need is for you to look less like a girl. Clean up and get into something that doesn't look like you're pointing forward.

(Makes hand look like a gun.)

RENEE

What?

(Looks at her breasts. Her nipples have hardened due to the wet shirt she's wearing.)

You mean these? It's only because they're wet and cold.

(Shakes her chest with pride.)

I kinda like 'em that way. So does my boyfriend.

(Grabs her uniform shirt and exits to dorm.)

MIKE

(Shouts up the stair.)

I don't care how you or your boyfriend feel about them. This is a fire station. Cover them things up.

(To PORTER.)

Damn, Porter. I hope she brought a couple of bras. Really thick ones!

PORTER

I don't get it! Not that long ago you liked seeing her like that. What's going on with you?

MIKE

I don't know. It's different with her on the job.

PORTER

Sure is. So lighten up! Say, do you remember the time she flashed that guard and you won the game with a lay-up just before the buzzer? She took that guy completely out of the game. Jesus, that was so long ago but it feels like yesterday.

MIKE

Yeah...

(Remembers dreamily but is brought back to reality as PORTER speaks.)

PORTER

So, why don't you get off her ass? She just might be one of the best players to swing through here in years. She has great instincts.

MIKE

That doesn't make her a Fire Fighter. They shouldn't have sent a girl.

PORTER

What difference does that make?

MIKE

It makes a big difference!

PORTER

Bullshit! You're way out of line this time. I like her style. Always have, but she needs a nickname. Renee's too tame.

MIKE

She doesn't need a nickname! She needs to be...

PORTER (interrupting)

Jesus, you guys are like a couple of bulldogs. (Beat.) HOLD IT! What's the name of that bulldog in the cartoons? Uh... SPIKE! That's it! We'll call her Spike!

MIKE

Damn, Porter, that didn't take long. You know you're gonna piss her off with that one.

PORTER

No I won't! I'll blame it on you.

(MANDY enters from outside. MIKE reacts to MANDY's presence.)

MIKE

What is this? GIRL DAY?

MANDY

(Suddenly nervous/shaken.)

Uh... Hi! I'm... uh... Mandy. The Chief sent me here from Station One.

PORTER (enthusiastic)

YES! Hi there, and welcome. I'm Lou Porter. Stow your gear in the apparatus room. I'll get the Captain. This promises to be a fun day.

(Whistles toward dorm as MANDY exits to apparatus room.)

Yo! Captain! New meat! It's girl day!

(To MIKE.)

Guess I'd better go work on breakfast.

(Exits to kitchen laughing.)

I can't wait to see how this day turns out.

MIKE

Better make it 'Brunch' or we'll never get around to supper. We still have a bucket full of shrimp to clean.

(MANDY returns as CAPTAIN enters from dorm. MIKE sizes her up and holds his face in his hands, obviously discouraged.)

GIRL DAY!

(MANDY reacts nervously as lights fade.)

- End of Scene 2 -

Scene 3
late morning - Brunch

On Rise: All are seated at
table. A jacket is on the floor
by PORTER.)

JOE

(Tries to pour coffee - empty.)
Any more coffee, Lou?

PORTER

In the kitchen, Joe.

(JOE exits to kitchen with pot.)

PORTER

Shhh.

(Pulls a whoopee cushion from under the jacket and
places it on JOE's chair. JOE returns and sits,
making a farting sound. Everyone laughs. JOE holds
the cushion up inquiring. PORTER takes it from him.)

RADIO - MAN'S VOICE

Rescue Three! Can you give us any more information on this
alarm? We're having trouble finding the patient.

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Rescue Three, we're calling the number back now. Can you hear
a phone ringing in the building?

PORTER

Mike, did you notice who's riding Rescue Three lately?

MIKE

No...

(Suddenly alert.)
...not the savior of the free world?

PORTER

You guessed it!

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Rescue Three, will you verify the address? The caller insists
she never heard your siren.

ENTIRE CREW (Except MIKE.)

He's at the wrong address!

(CAPTAIN, finished eating, exits to Kitchen with
plate and hardware. Entire crew begins to talk.)

MIKE

Quiet!

RADIO - MAN'S VOICE

Rescue Three, we're at One twenty-five Northeast Thirtieth Street.

RADIO - ALARM OFFICE DISPATCHER

Rescue Three, the correct address is NorthWEST!

RADIO - MAN'S VOICE

Thank you, we're responding.

(Siren is heard before radio transmission ends.)

MIKE

He did it again!

PORTER (inspired)

Renee, could you help me for a minute?

(Grabs the whoopee cushion and goes to desk, blowing it up. He speaks silently to RENEE.)

Okay, now sit here.

CAPTAIN

(Returns from kitchen. Watches, curious.)

I don't think I want to witness this.

(Exits.)

RENEE

(Sits on desk. PORTER hands her the microphone from the station radio. She speaks into it sounding like the dispatcher.)

Rescue Three?

RADIO - MAN'S VOICE

Rescue Three! (Siren in background.)

(RENEE holds out the microphone as PORTER compresses the whoopee cushion. The crew all laugh and cheer, except MIKE.)

PORTER

(Kisses RENEE ceremoniously. Escorts her to table.)

Sometimes it's nice to have a girl around.

WATCHMAN

Jesus Porter, that was inspirational.

PORTER

(To RENEE.)

Thanks Kiddo.

RENEE

Don't mention it.

MIKE

Still isn't worth it.

RENEE

What are you talking about?

MIKE

You should be home watching your son and baking cookies.

(WATCHMAN stands, preparing to exit.)

RENEE

Why don't you kiss my ass!

MIKE

I think Porter just did.

RENEE

You pompous asshole...

(She moves toward MIKE but is caught by WATCHMAN.

JOE and PORTER help WATCHMAN shove her through the
outside door. MANDY withdraws.)

Lemme go! I'm gonna break his neck! DAMMIT, LET ME GO!

- End of Scene 3 -

Scene 4
afternoon

On Rise: MIKE, WATCHMAN and
PORTER are seated at the dining
table.

MIKE

There we were taking one-hour shifts. I was dead asleep and suddenly Porter was screaming at me to get my net. You never saw so many shrimp in your life. They only ran for a short while, but it was wonderful.

(RENEE enters from dorm.)

PORTER

There was nothing there. It was flat calm. You could see the bottom of the bay in the moonlight. All of a sudden there were so many shrimp you could walk home on 'em.

RENEE

Any coffee?

WATCHMAN

I was just going to make some.
(Starts to rise.)

RENEE

Don't bother. I'll do it.
(Exits to kitchen.)

WATCHMAN

(To MIKE.)
Whatever happened to you two anyway?

PORTER

Mike was afraid to commit.

WATCHMAN (sarcastic)

Really? Is that supposed to be something new?

MIKE

It wasn't that at all.

WATCHMAN

What was it then? You two were really tight for what?... Ever?

PORTER

Couldn't pry 'em apart.

MIKE

Forget it, will ya?

PORTER

By the way, we buffed a fire on our way in to the fish market yesterday afternoon.

WATCHMAN

When did you go fishing?

MIKE

Yesterday morning. Porter showed up at my house before dawn.

WATCHMAN

Sounds like you guys had a full day. Fishing all day, shrimping all...

PORTER

We caught a boatload by mid afternoon.

WATCHMAN

Oh, yeah?

PORTER

We were pulling out of the marina and we saw this column of smoke just a few blocks over. So... we decided to watch the county boys at work.

WATCHMAN

You don't have enough fires here in the City?

PORTER

I know, I know, but our timing was perfect. We get there and they had just finished pulling the hose into place. That building was so hot you could see through it, only they didn't go in! They just went up and threw water in the window. I was so involved in watching the action that I forgot to keep an eye on Mike. All of a sudden there he was. He just grabbed the nozzle out of their hands and he went inside and put the fire out... wearing nothing but shorts, a tee shirt and a pair of flip flops.

WATCHMAN

No kidding?

(MIKE shrugs.)

You guys are crazy!

PORTER

The next thing you know, out comes Mike followed by a cloud of steam. He throws the nozzle at the county boys, followed by a few choice words. Those guys were really pissed so we got out of there fast.

MIKE

Oh, shit! I'd better do some laundry if we're going fishing tomorrow.

(Exits to dorm.)

WATCHMAN

Are you out of your mind? You let him go in there with no protective equipment? You should have stopped him!

PORTER

Yeah, sure! Tell me the last time you tried to keep that guy out of a fire.

WATCHMAN

I guess you're right there.

RENEE

(Enters with two cups.)

Yours is still in the kitchen Lou. I didn't know how much stuff you put in it.

(Hands WATCHMAN a cup. PORTER exits to kitchen.)
Here you go. Black and strong.

(RENEE massages WATCHMAN's shoulders.)

WATCHMAN

Yeah... just like my women. Ahhh. How many years since you did that? So, how are your folks doing Renee?

RENEE

Same as ever.

WATCHMAN

What made you want to be a Fireman?

RENEE

I think they say Fire Fighter these days.

WATCHMAN

Yeah, well, you know. Old habits...

RENEE

The job has good benefits, AND... my son Josh can use a little stability.

WATCHMAN

How can working a twenty-four hour shift provide stability?

RENEE

Because I'm home two days out of three to take care of him. Mom's there when I'm not.

(PORTER enters with coffee. MANDY enters from Dorm.)

PORTER

Hey, Mandy! Fresh coffee.

MANDY

Thanks but I'm a tea drinker.

(Exits to kitchen. The others exchange looks.)

WATCHMAN

Oh... kay... You know, this is turning out to be a hell of a day. We haven't had any women assigned to station 2 before and...

PORTER

Yeah, but we're catching up quick!

WATCHMAN

That's for sure!

(To RENEE.)

How are they fitting in?

RENEE

It depends. Some women have worked tough jobs before and seem to slide right into place but others are coming straight out of college or some sort of lighter work. They're the ones that have the toughest time adjusting.

WATCHMAN

Why? Are they intimidated by the guys?

RENEE

No! It's the team thing. Some of them just don't get it.

PORTER

Get what?

RENEE

Too many women never got over being selfish little girls and just don't understand the business of being a part of something bigger than themselves. (Beat, becomes serious.) It didn't take me more than a heartbeat to realize two things about a fire station. One, if you wait to be told to do something that's obvious, you've waited too long; and two, nobody is going to say, 'Stand back lady, I'll do it!' Any woman who expects that kind of treatment needs to polish her nails and go shopping for a softer job. This is the only job I've ever found that's more exciting than working down below.

WATCHMAN

Down below... You were in Australia?

RENEE

No! Down a mineshaft! I was a miner out west.

WATCHMAN

Really?

RENEE

Yeah. It was great fun and terrific pay. It's a lot like a fire station.

PORTER

How's that?

RENEE

Whenever you have men doing hazardous work, something happens to the way they see the world. Everything becomes a source of humor. I like that! It's not natural to charge into a fire or ride an elevator a quarter mile down below. Eventually, you wind up looking at everything differently. The main difference is that here there's always something new going on where mining gets to be kind of routine.

(JOE enters from dorm with a box of car waxing supplies.)

WATCHMAN

You'd think mining was anything but routine. That kinda work is dangerous.

(JOE leaves the box on the table and moves toward the apparatus room.)

Joe! What's going on?

JOE

I'm gonna move my car into the shade so I can wax it.

(JOE exits. MANDY enters with tea.)

MIKE

(Enters from dorm with laundry.)

Porter, I'm going to do some wash. Do you have any laundry?

(PORTER indicates not. Mike moves toward apparatus room.)

RENEE

Mike, is that your dog tied to the boat?

MIKE

Yeah.

RENEE

What's his name?

MIKE

Have a drink.

RENEE

Have a drink?

MIKE

Don't mind if I do!

(PORTER and WATCHMAN join in with laughter. MIKE moves toward apparatus room again but returns during the following interchange.)

RENEE

That's it? Is that all you think about these days? Taking a drink? Maybe you should go for a drink now and the rest of us will take care of the business of protecting the citizens.

(Moves toward kitchen as she speaks - with disgust - but returns as MIKE speaks..)

Have a drink!

(MANDY, nervous, retreats against the wall.)

MIKE

Listen lady! Who are you to criticize what I call my dog? Last year Engine Two was the busiest fire truck on the eastern seaboard. Sometimes, we barely have time to grab a meal between alarms. Do I drink? You bet your ass! We work in a section of town most people don't even want to drive through but we're out there every day giving CPR to some guy who just might have T.B. or hepatitis and we don't let it keep us from doing our job. Look! If your dad has a heart attack over at that boat yard, you better pray that some hard working hard drinking guy like me responds... not one of those wimps you work with at that station by the airport.

(MIKE storms out apparatus room door growling to himself.)

RENEE

I guess I've been told.

PORTER

What did you expect? Say, while we're talking about names...

RENEE

Names?

PORTER

The dog, remember?

RENEE

What? Oh, yeah, his drinking partner. What about it?

PORTER

You'd better get used to the name, 'Spike.'

(Moves toward kitchen with cup. Sees MANDY.)

Are you going to spend the entire day holding up the wall?

(Exits to kitchen.)

(MANDY, nervous, joins the others.)

RENEE

What's he talking about?

WATCHMAN

Sounds like you've been given a new name. Get used to it.

RENEE

What...?

WATCHMAN

Hey, it's a compliment! If these guys didn't like you, they wouldn't even talk to you.

RENEE

Okay, so... how'd you get the name Watchman?

WATCHMAN

I hold all the night watches.

RENEE

Why? Mike doesn't want you sleeping in the dormitory with the white folks?

WATCHMAN

It's not like that at all. I don't like air conditioning so I sleep here and turn this unit off.

RENEE

Has Mike ever called you the 'N' word?

WATCHMAN

Once, about a week after I was first assigned here.

RENEE

And...?

(Pause, no answer. Becomes impatient.)

...what happened?

WATCHMAN

Well...

(Hesitant.)

...Engine Two had just returned from helping the rescue with a childbirth and...

(FLASHBACK. Truck backs into the station. MIKE and PORTER enter.)

PORTER

I wish those women didn't wait so long and then call for help just as they're about to give birth.

MIKE

It's the insurance thing.

PORTER

Huh?

MIKE

If they went to the hospital with labor pains they'd have to show proof of insurance. When the rescue brings them in, baby in hand, they're escorted right in. It's the welfare system's finest hour.

WATCHMAN

(Joins them.)

What if they can't afford insurance?

MIKE

They can't afford insurance because they refuse to work.

WATCHMAN

Perhaps they're caught up in a cycle that was created by the system itself.

MIKE

Yeah, sure! We hold a gun to their heads and make them sign up for the public dole.

(PORTER exits to kitchen.)

WATCHMAN

It might be a little more complicated than that. Once you're into that sort of thing, it's hard to get back out.

MIKE

So, we keep paying them out of our pockets generation after...

WATCHMAN

Maybe it's time we did something different, like educating them or...

MIKE

Yeah, I can see it all now. Bunch of dopies at the Junior College filling up classes that are already overloaded. Tell you what, nigger...

(BLACKOUT!)

...why don't you...
(LOUD SLAP...)

(Lights come back up in the dining room.)

MANDY

Wow!

WATCHMAN

Not really my finest hour.

MANDY

What do you mean? You had every right to...

WATCHMAN (interrupting)

That's true, but... if I'd simply hung out here for a few weeks without doing anything Mike probably would have stopped using that word around me anyway.

RENEE

How can you say that? He's totally prejudiced against everything!

WATCHMAN

Come on! You know that's not true. The man is a living contradiction. The bigotry isn't his. It's just something he was raised with and...

MANDY

Yeah, but that still doesn't...

RENEE

Right! That doesn't make him any better than...

WATCHMAN

The difference between him and some of the others is that his behavior doesn't agree with his words.

RENEE & MANDY

Really?

WATCHMAN

You watch. When we're on the street, he's always the first one in and the last one out. He's a different guy out there than he is behind these walls. Everyone gets the same treatment, no matter who...

MANDY

That's hard to believe.

(JOE passes from apparatus room to kitchen.)

WATCHMAN

Believe it. The easiest way to wind up in a fight with that guy is to show prejudice to a citizen on the street.

RENEE

How about Joe?

WATCHMAN

What? Oh... you mean the Jewish thing?

(RENEE and MANDY indicate, "Yes.")

When Joe first came here, Mike didn't like it. You see... Mike makes a lot of decisions based on fire fighting. Well, Joe's not afraid of fire. So, when Mike would get all the way into a fire there would be Joe right beside him. It didn't take long before he was asking for Joe when the Engine was a man short.

MIKE

(Enters excited. Looks around. Yells toward dorm.)
Porter! Porter! Where are you?

PORTER

(Enters from kitchen, cup in hand.)
What?

MIKE

Come here! I need you!
(Exits to apparatus room. Rapidly re-enters.)

NOW!

(Exits.)

PORTER

What now? Maybe his dime got stuck in the washing machine.
(Crosses to apparatus room door and opens it.)

What!
(Exits.)

(JOE enters with coffee. Sits, examines the box.)

RENEE

Okay. I'm having a little trouble getting used to his attitude.

WATCHMAN

Like I said, it's because you've threatened his homemade world. Remember when you two would sit here and talk for hours? Don't try to tell me you didn't hear him complaining back then.

RENEE

Yeah, but it didn't involve me so I didn't pay much attention. It sure hits home when it's pointed at you!

WATCHMAN

Welcome to the real world. It'll clear up. Behind all that prejudice there's a human being fighting to come out, I'm sure of it.

RENEE

I think I'll reserve judgment on that one. Do the citizens ever complain about you?

WATCHMAN

You mean because I'm black?

(RENEE indicates yes.)

Not much. They don't seem to care as long as the job gets done.

RENEE

Score one for the citizens...

WATCHMAN

(To MANDY.)

What made you take the test?

MANDY

What test?

(WATCHMAN and RENEE stare at each other dumbfounded.)

RENEE

The only test! Fire Fighter!

MANDY

My boyfriend's on the job, so I thought I'd try for it too. That way, we can take vacations together.

RENEE

That's it? The vacation thing?

MANDY

Well... the pay's good.

WATCHMAN

Oh... kay... Any coffee left?

JOE

Plenty.

RENEE

I need a refill.

(RENEE and WATCHMAN exit to kitchen as JOE repacks the box. MIKE and PORTER enter laughing. Seeing JOE, they become quiet. JOE exits to Apparatus room. MANDY, nervous near MIKE, follows JOE.)

PORTER

Did you see that?

MIKE

What?

PORTER

That girl's afraid to be in the same room with you.

MIKE

Really? (Beat.) Good!

(Indicates apparatus room.)

That was close.

PORTER

Ain't that the truth!

CAPTAIN

(Enters from dorm.)

What's the word on the weather? Supposed to rain today.

PORTER

Clear outside, Captain.

(JOE enters agitated.)

JOE

Mike! Porter! Get your asses out there and put my car back where it belongs.

PORTER

What's he talking about?

JOE

Don't get funny with me! It's gonna get dark and I want to wax that thing... Come on, dammit!

CAPTAIN

Okay, what's going on?

JOE

They turned my car sideways in the hose tower, Captain. There's no way I can get it out of there.

(WATCHMAN enters from Kitchen.)

CAPTAIN

Well?

MIKE

Captain, I don't have any idea what he's talking about.

JOE

(Angry, moves toward MIKE.)

You don't, huh?

CAPTAIN

(Interferes.)

Come on Joe. Let's take a look.

(CAPTAIN and JOE exit to apparatus room.)

WATCHMAN

What's going on?

PORTER

You don't want to know.

WATCHMAN

The hell I don't! Come on, what's happening?

MIKE

Well... you know... a Volkswagen Beetle doesn't weigh very much and if you push down hard on the bumper and pull it back up real quick, you can make the wheels come off the ground.

WATCHMAN

Well, yeah...? But what does that have to do with...?

PORTER

Well... somebody... turned Joe's car sideways in the hose tower.

(RENEE enters from kitchen.)

WATCHMAN (laughing)

I gotta see this! Come on... uh... Spike, you don't want to miss this one.

(Exits to apparatus room.)

RENEE

(At WATCHMAN 's back.)

What?

(Exits to apparatus room, speaking.)

I don't think I like this 'Spike' thing!

(MIKE and PORTER break into laughter as CAPTAIN and JOE return.)

CAPTAIN

Okay, here's the deal. I don't know how it happened but this caper has your names written all over it.

PORTER

Captain, we...

CAPTAIN

Not one word! Either straighten up that car or get ready to flush hydrants... (Beat.) Well, what's it going to be?

MIKE

It's just not fair, Captain! Can't we have a little fun once in a while?

CAPTAIN

Not fair? What if we had an alarm and another station needed hose out of our tower? What then...? Well?

MIKE

Okay, you win. Let's show them how it's done.

(MIKE exits followed by JOE.)

PORTER

Come on, Captain. It was a great idea, wasn't it?

CAPTAIN

You don't see me laughing, do you?

(After a long pause... PORTER exits. CAPTAIN sits at desk, studies a form then laughs as lights cross-fade to JOE's Spot. JOE enters spot.)

JOE

As you can already tell, meals at the fire station weren't just about the food. It's where we learned all the latest gossip... and sometimes had fun picking on each other. Well, the Captain came in that morning wearing a brand new uniform shirt. You see, he was a little vain about his looks and his wife always tailored his shirts for him, AND... when we ate something that might stain his shirt, he'd take it off and hang it neatly on the back of his chair. Well, that afternoon, Watchman showed me where battery acid had eaten a few holes in his dress uniform shirt and was complaining about having to replace it when I suddenly realized we were having spaghetti for supper with Mike's special Creole sauce.

(JOE exits. Lights up in Dining Room.)

(PORTER enters from kitchen with a pot. JOE and WATCHMAN enter from outside.)

JOE

Porter! Come here will you?

(The three hold a quick whispered conversation.)

PORTER

That's great!

(PORTER begins to exit.)

WATCHMAN

Wait! Help me with this.

(JOE and PORTER hold the shirt. WATCHMAN pulls scissors from a pocket, cuts the collar in half and cuts off the long sleeves at short-sleeve length. PORTER exits to kitchen. WATCHMAN exits to outside. JOE speaks to others as they enter. CAPTAIN enters last. PORTER helps him out of his shirt, exchanging it with WATCHMAN - sneaking through - hanging the replacement shirt on the back of CAPTAIN's chair.)

PORTER

Joe, let me cut up your spaghetti.

(PORTER uses his fingers to cut JOE's spaghetti as all watch and comment.)

JOE

You don't mind if I cut yours, do you?

(JOE does the same to PORTER's spaghetti. The entire crew is laughing, commenting and watching closely.)

CAPTAIN

(Moves his bowl away but watches the action.)

I'll cut my own spaghetti if you don't mind.

PORTER

You know Joe, I once thought of going into business as a professional spaghetti cutter. How's that?

JOE

Smaller pieces. You can actually get paid for this?

PORTER

Yeah! It's kinda specialized work though. Probably have to move to Italy.

(Looks at his hand covered with red sauce.)

Now what am I going to do? Oh! I know!

(PORTER jerks the shirt off the CAPTAIN's chair.)

JOE

Give me that.

(JOE grabs a handful of shirt and pulls. The shirt rips in half, both wiping their hands on the pieces.)

(CAPTAIN jumps to his feet and grabs the shirt piece from PORTER. WATCHMAN enters behind CAPTAIN.)

CAPTAIN

YOU SONOFABITCH! This was a new shirt! What do I tell my wife?

PORTER

Tell her it was a really nice shirt for about... that long.
(Thumb and forefinger about an inch apart.)
You should see the look on your face.

CAPTAIN

I'll show you a better look!
(CAPTAIN reaches back to throw a punch at PORTER.
WATCHMAN grabs the hand and stuffs the clean shirt in
it as all cheer.)
I guess you got me on that one. Here, wipe your hands.
(Gives the torn shirt back to PORTER.)
Say, that thing at the Stadium... is it Sunday?

PORTER

No! Next week.

JOE

What's happening at the Stadium?

PORTER

You're kidding! (Pause, looks around.) Is there anybody else that's not aware that we have a show going on at the Stadium?

MIKE

The hell with them Porter! Don't worry about it.

WATCHMAN

Wait a minute. What is happening?

PORTER

I give up. I don't believe you guys!

JOE

Hold it! Spring training right? The Grapefruit league! Are the Yanks playing the O's?

PORTER

You got it. AND... there's a pre-game show to benefit the Fire Fighters' Benevolent Fund.

RENEE

What kind of show?

PORTER

Fire in a log cabin. It's a western setting with cowboys and Indians. We've been practicing for a few weeks.

RENEE

Great! I'll bring Josh. He'll love it. You need some help?

PORTER

Sur...

MIKE

(Interrupts PORTER.)

No! We don't need no girl on the crew!

RENEE

(Begins to stand. Moves toward MIKE.)

Hey! Fuck you and...

(Whoever is sitting next to RENEE interferes.)

CAPTAIN

Okay, that's it! I've had enough of you two bickering with each other.

(RENEE, angry, begins to walk away.)

Renee, get back here. I'm not finished with you yet! You ride the engine until I say otherwise. Mike, I don't care how you feel about women in the station, you two are going to learn to work together... and that's an ORDER!

(Depending on whether there are spaghetti pieces that have spilled to the table or floor, CAPTAIN may include some language about cleaning up the dining room, "...before we get another alarm.")

(CAPTAIN, talking angrily to himself, gathers his shirt over his arm, collects his plate, tableware and drink, and exits to the kitchen. The crew cleans up after themselves laughing and joking as lights fade.)

- End of Scene 4 -

Scene 5
the next morning before dawn

On Rise: Dark outside. Both trucks back into the station. WATCHMAN and JOE enter, obviously exhausted. JOE sprawls in a chair. Lights slowly fade up outside during the scene.

WATCHMAN

(Checks papers on desktop.)

What time was that alarm anyway? Midnight! No wonder I'm tired.

JOE

YOU'RE tired? I almost fell off the truck. I still can't believe how Renee kept trying to get back in that fire. (Beat.) Who's gonna tell Mike's Mom? Hope she doesn't hear it on the morning news.

WATCHMAN

I knew it was all a show.

JOE

What?

WATCHMAN

Those two being pissed off at each other! Hell, I knew it wasn't over when she left town.

JOE

What do you mean by that?

WATCHMAN

Renee and Mike. They used to be a thing.

(CAPTAIN enters followed by MANDY.)

JOE

Oh, really! Hey, Captain. What made you jump on that line? You guys had that fire out in no time.

CAPTAIN

It looked like Renee was going in with or without me and I'd be damned if we were gonna let those guys from Station Five steal our fire, especially after what happened to Mike. I can still smell the burned flesh.

WATCHMAN

How long since you handled a nozzle?

CAPTAIN

I wasn't on the nozzle. I just backed Renee up. Who opened the back of the building?

JOE

(Indicates himself, MANDY and WATCHMAN.)

We did. Did it help?

CAPTAIN

Bet your ass!

JOE (rising)

There was a reporter at the fire. What time do they deliver the paper?

(Exits to outside.)

RENEE

(Enters, agitated. Crosses to CAPTAIN.)

How come I couldn't go to the hospital with Mike instead of Lou Porter?

CAPTAIN

Because you would have been in the way!

RENEE

What? Why...?

CAPTAIN

Renee, you were hysterical. If I had sent you, they'd never let you past the reception area.

RENEE

I wasn't hysterical! I was only concerned. Anybody would have been bothered by the way he was burned.

CAPTAIN

Bothered? Renee, take a look in the mirror! You can barely control yourself now!

JOE

(Enters the outside door with newspaper.)

Hey, I caught the paper!

RENEE

Give me that!

(Jerks front section of paper from JOE.)

JOE

Hey!

(CAPTAIN cautions JOE to relax.)

RENEE

(Becomes progressively more upset through remainder of the scene.)

Here it is on the front page. Wow, that's some picture! Okay, here we go. Fire Fighter burned in paint store fire. A fire in a paint store on Miami Avenue resulted in a Fire Fighter being critically burned while attending to the safety of a trapped occupant. Fire Fighter Mike Donner received first, second and third degree burns to his upper body when he used his fire fighting coat to protect the occupant while helping him out of the inferno. See Fire, page 2-B.

(RENEE looks up, obviously very worried.)

BLACKOUT.

- End of Act I -