

# “LOW BATTERY!”

a play in one act

by Chris Minichino

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## Characters

A pair of newlyweds in their early 20s:

Johnny Rainey

Janey Rainey

Hotel staff:

A bellman

A steward

A handyman

## Place

The bridal suite of a deluxe hotel

## Time

The present

Casting note: The three hotel employees are basically gender-neutral and enter and exit one at a time. So with costume changes, a single actor or actress can play all three parts.

LOW BATTERY

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(The scene: A bridal suite in a 4-star hotel. There is a door for entry upstage center; another door leads to the bathroom stage right. A row of three windows stage left looks out to a dark nightscape. A few city lights are twinkling in, lending a romantic quality to the setting even before the newlyweds show up. The room is dominated by a canopied king-sized bed with white lace bedspread and delicate coverlets; it features four large pillows which seem the epitome of comfort. Dangling from the apex of the canopy is an ornamental winged Cupid blowing a trumpet with puffed cheeks.)

(On the left side of the bed, facing the audience, is a table painted white with a telephone atop it. The telephone is extremely fancy, with a French-style receiver and gold trim. Next to the telephone is an alarm clock-radio. The table has one drawer. Against the right wall is a vanity with chair. The vanity features a mirror with movie-star-style lights dotting its perimeter.)

(An old-fashioned key turns in the lock. The door opens, and in comes JOHNNY RAINEY carrying his bride JANEY

RAINEY across the threshold. She is dressed in a wedding gown of virginal white; he is wearing a black tuxedo with gleaming shoes. Once they're inside, Johnny dexterously kicks the door shut with his foot.)

Johnny--

JANEY

Huh?

JOHNNY

The man with the bags--

JANEY

Oh! Right!

JOHNNY

(During this exchange, even before Johnny and Janey enter, the audience hears the words "low battery" mechanically emanating from a smoke alarm fixed to the wall behind the bed. The alarm is high up and a bit to the left of the bed so that it is clearly visible; the audience will understand that it is near the ceiling. Its message consisting of two simple words--"low battery"--will repeat at 30-second intervals for much of the play. It is loud enough to be heard by the characters and the audience, but not so loud that it makes a distinct impression. Its function is like a kind of aural itching powder, as it were.)

(Johnny puts his beloved down and opens the door, where a BELLMAN is waiting. This

individual is well past 50,  
with a lined face suggesting  
years of drudgery, a few dark  
strands of hair slicked back  
and an over-large nose. The  
bellman puts the bags down  
and Johnny tips him  
generously.)

BELLMAN

Thank you, sir!

JOHNNY

Oh, not at all! My pleasure!

(There is a pause in which  
both the bellman and Johnny  
appear to be waiting for the  
other to do something.)

BELLMAN

Is everything to your liking, sir?

JOHNNY

Everything is wonderful, thank you.

(to Janey)

How 'bout you, sweetie? Everything a-okay?

JANEY

(giving the "okay" sign)

Perfecto.

BELLMAN

(with smooth formality)

We hope you enjoy your stay.

(The bellman leaves, gently  
closing the door behind him.  
Johnny and Janey embrace  
passionately.)

JOHNNY

I never thought I'd see the day--

JANEY

What day?

JOHNNY

The day I could call you "Mrs. Janey Rainey."

JANEY

(smiling)

Silly, I was always there. Waitin' for you to notice me.

JOHNNY

But so many times you seemed so far away ... lookin' at hedge trimmers at Crandall's Discounts, walkin' down Main Street with that man-eatin' Alsatian Rottweiler bodyguard ...

JANEY

You mean Bunny? He wouldn't hurt a fly!

JOHNNY

Flies I don't know about. But he had no trouble clamping his jaws on would-be suitors he didn't take a shine to.

JANEY

Well, you passed the test, didn't ya?

JOHNNY

Do ya know how much money I spent on hamburger from Tony's Diner?

JANEY

(genuinely surprised)

Ya mean you bribed Bunny?

JOHNNY

It was the only way I could make him like me!

JANEY

I wondered why he was puttin' on weight. And to think that I owe my happiness to a few pounds of hamburger.

JOHNNY

Well, it worked, didn't it?

JANEY

Maybe it did and maybe it didn't. Bunny always knew the difference between the fakers and the real men.

JOHNNY

I had to be a pretty brave man to come within ten feet of him. But it's all over now. Bunny is layin' up at the kennel hotel where they're feedin' him like a king, and here we are together. 'Til death do us part.

(taking her hands)

Janey, I'm the happiest guy in the world.

JANEY

(giggling)

Likewise.

JOHNNY

(seductively)

How 'bout some champagne? Or would you like to go to bed?

JANEY

A little bubbly never hurt anyone.

(Johnny strides to the phone  
and picks it up.)

JOHNNY

(into phone)

Hello, room service? A bottle of your best champagne for the bridal suite, please. Oh, and would you mind sendin' up some of them little sandwiches you were servin' at the reception? You know, the ones with the Eye-talian salumeri and provoloni ... Oh, they're only served at tea time? Okay then, just the champagne. Thank you.

(to Janey)

If we feel like it, we can get a bite later on, sweet cakes.

JANEY

I ain't hungry.

(They embrace again.)

JANEY

(enraptured)

Oh, Johnny, is it really true? Or am I just dreamin'?

JOHNNY

Maybe both.

(reconsidering his  
words)

I mean, uh ... when you think of all the fine things that could happen to fine people ... I can't think of anyone who could be happier than the two of us ...

(an unpleasant thought  
creeping into his head)

'cept maybe Larry Rockwell--

(They break the embrace.)

JANEY

(uncomprehending)

Larry Rockwell?

JOHNNY

Who won that Dodge Caravan at the state fair last month.

JANEY

Oh, are you still thinkin' about that?

JOHNNY

Well, you have to admit it was a honey of a prize.

JANEY

But Johnny, it's ancient history. Let's concentrate on us.

JOHNNY

Yeah, I realize it was just a dumb fluke.

JANEY

Right!

JOHNNY

I mean ... it wasn't any kind of happiness that he earned just by bein' Larry Rockwell. Me, on the other hand, I'm the guy you said yes to, and the hell with Larry Rockwell and his damn winnin' lottery ticket.

JANEY

I'd rather have you than all the Larry Rockwells in the world.

JOHNNY

Not to say he didn't try. Yeah, I can remember a few heavyweight bouts between him and Bunny over the years.



JANEY

Well ... yes, I suppose.

JOHNNY

Did he ever reach first base?

JANEY

Bunny guards first base, honey.

JOHNNY

You know what I mean. Did he ever get fresh with ya? I'm just curious.

JANEY

(shrugs)

He took me out a couple times. But what difference does it make now?

JOHNNY

No difference. That's why I'm askin'. I feel like I can ask now that we're hitched. You know what they say: between a husband and wife, no secrets.

JANEY

Oh, is that what they say? And what fortune cookie did ya get that out of?

JOHNNY

Look, Janey, if you don't want to talk about Larry Rockwell and the way he went after ya, I'll understand. I guess I'll have to understand.

JANEY

I don't want to talk about it. I mean, the fact that I'm here with you should put all your worries to rest.

JOHNNY

I guess ya could call that lottery win his consolation prize.

JANEY

(a bit annoyed)

Yeah, why not do that?

JOHNNY  
 (briefly in his own  
 world)

And what a prize. Dodge Caravan 7-seater ... heated steering wheel ... pop-up tweeters ... God, do them tweeters pop up, right on cue. Just when ya want 'em to. 28 grand on the open market. Choice of color, even.

JANEY

Ughh ... I see you have to get it out of your system, before we can get down to the business of bein' married. Unless you're sayin' that you'd like a fancy new car better than you'd like me.

JOHNNY

I ain't sayin' that. Whatever gave you that idea?

JANEY

Cuz you haven't stopped harpin' on that "Dodge Caravan" since the fair left!

JOHNNY  
 (genuinely perplexed)

I haven't?

JANEY

Johnny, look at it this way. I'm brand new, just like that car, right off the showroom floor. But I'll last a hell of a lot longer than some gas guzzler that some hayseed won in a damnfool drawin'. Meanwhile the guzzler will break down. It's only a matter of time 'til it breaks down. But, God willin', I'll keep on tickin' for the next 60 years or so!

JOHNNY  
 (glumly)

60 years?

(perking up)

Oh, right! That's what they mean by forever and ever! In sickness and in health. I mean ... they don't use those words in any auto contract.

JANEY

They sure as hell don't!

JOHNNY

Still, I guess we'll need a big car like that when we start havin' kids.

JANEY

Yeah, yeah. One thing at a time. What was the list price, 28 grand? What a ripoff! We can pick up a barely used SUV for half that!

JOHNNY

But Janey, don't ya see, that fancy jalopy didn't cost Rockwell a cent! He didn't pay a plug nickel for it! And he's toolin' around Sickler's Corners like he owns the town--

JANEY

Oh, brother.

JOHNNY

And it just showed up in his driveway like a ripe apple fallin' out of a tree!

JANEY

It coulda hit him in the head like a ripe apple, too.

JOHNNY

Huh? Whaddya mean?

JANEY

I mean that if it fell out of a tree like a ripe apple, how do we know it don't have worms in it?

JOHNNY

Worms?

JANEY

Yes, worms! Flaws. Bugs. Mechanical issues! So what if Larry Rockwell wins a new car at the state fair; it could have all kinds of problems! And he won't be too happy pourin' cash into it to fix those problems.

JOHNNY

Well, Janey, I--

JANEY

I'll bet that I'll require less upkeep than a dumb Dodge Caravan, I'll tell ya that much.

JOHNNY

What was it ya said at the reception? That we could live on love?

JANEY

Love and some more of them finger sandwiches.

JOHNNY

Mmm, provoloni and salumeri.

(with renewed clarity;  
focusing on her)

Oh, honey ... oh, Janey ... I'd rather have you than all  
the Dodge Caravans in the world!

JANEY

Good! Keep tellin' yourself that.

JOHNNY

(focusing on the car  
again)

Plenty of storage space ... refrigerated glove box ...  
chill zone in the glove box--

JANEY

Johnny!

JOHNNY

I just don't understand how a corn-pone idiot like Larry  
Rockwell could win first prize in a state-wide drawin',  
particularly when his dad is assistant assemblyman of  
Sickler's Corners.

JANEY

What's his dad got to do with it?

JOHNNY

I thought, and a lot of other people thought, that he  
shoulda been disqualified from even participatin'. I mean,  
his grand ol' pappy, his own flesh and blood, is in the  
town government! He's on the "ins," ya see, honey?

JANEY

Well, he may have some crummy job stampin' picnic permits,  
but Larry don't!

JOHNNY

No, but he's in the family. All them government types,  
they run the world! They control everything, right down to  
the traffic lights! They know what's under every rock!  
Who's to say Old Man Rockwell didn't give his boy some kind  
of advantage in that drawin' that we don't know about? He  
mighta spotted him two numbers out of four.

(Janey turns away in disgust.  
He follows her.)

JOHNNY

Or maybe three numbers out of six! So how can we be sure  
it was all on the up-and-up?

JANEY

Johnny ... I don't like to say this, but nobody told ya to buy  
85 lottery tickets at two bucks a pop. I think that's what's  
really buggin' ya. I told ya to go easy on them tickets cuz you  
were just settin' yourself up for a letdown.

JOHNNY

(stewing in his own  
juice)

I hope he drives that car off a cliff.

JANEY

(finally fed up)

Listen, Johnny Rainey. If you'd like to wrap me up in a  
bundle and trade me in for a Dodge Caravan seven-seater,  
I'll stick a bunch of stamps on my butt and mail myself to  
Larry Rockwell. Maybe he knows how to treat a woman on her  
weddin' night.

JOHNNY

Honey ... what are ya sayin'? Are ya upset about  
somethin'? I wanted to make this a magical day for ya!

JANEY

I'm sayin' that you don't seem to be payin' any attention  
to me!

JOHNNY

(contritely; reaching  
for her)

Oh, I'm sorry, dearest. C'm here.

JANEY

(permitting herself to  
be seduced)

Now, that's a little better.

(embracing him)

Let's stay here a week, Johnny. Let's forget about Larry  
Rockwell and Sickler's Corners and the state fair and all  
them other silly things. Let's never go back.

JOHNNY

What do we do about Bunny?

JANEY

Put him on a permanent hamburger diet.

JOHNNY

(chuckles; looks around  
the room)

You like it that much, huh? Yeah, it is a swell room.

JANEY

(vaguely disturbed)

Johnny--

JOHNNY

Yes, my dearest?

JANEY

Do you hear that?

JOHNNY

Hear what, my sweet petunia?

JANEY

That noise.

JOHNNY

(listening for a moment)

Noise? No, I can't say that I do.

(trying to keep up the  
pretense)

All I hear is the beatin' of my heart. Of our two hearts  
together.

(He attempts to kiss her.  
She is having none of it,  
still focused on the noise.)

JANEY

No, it's somethin' else. Johnny, knock it off for a minute,  
would ya?

(disentangling herself  
from him)

Be quiet for two gosh-dang seconds. Don't ya hear it?