

## Under the Fluted Lamp

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A 10 minute play

By Kym Fraher

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Janie and Johnny hate each other, which is unfortunate, because they are both members of the same homeless community. When one of them loses their spot on a prized bench, will they find a way to get along, at least for another day?

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

JANIE, an older homeless female, cynical and sour, been down-and-out for a significant amount of time

JOHNNY, an older homeless male, also has been around the park for awhile, sleeps in a tent

EARL, a homeless man of undetermined age, does not speak

## SETTINGS

Two benches facing each other under a lamp post at a public park.  
Can be anywhere.

Currently day

JANIE is seated on one of two park benches across from each other under a single lamp post, munching on an apple. JOHNNY approaches from off stage left. He ambles to the opposite bench and plops down.

JANIE

Oh, there you are, you old tit.

JOHNNY

And a top o'the morning to you, you cow. Don't tell me you were up at the arse crack of dawn today.

JANIE

I was not.

JOHNNY

So what then, you slept all night on that bench?

JANIE

Maybe I did.

JOHNNY

No one wants your rotten old bench, you know.

JANIE

It's not rotten, it's quite comfortable. It's got this great lamp post 'ere. I sleep well on it, and if I'm havin' trouble sleeping at night, I can read by the light.

JOHNNY

Well, aren't you an intellectual! *Reading, oooo*. Next thing ya know, you'll be abandoning us peasants to summer in Monaco, Your Highness Princess Grace.

JANIE

You're just jealous that I can read!

JOHNNY

You know, they're planning on putting arm rests on these things, to prevent soggy old crones from falling asleep across 'uhm.

JANIE

They'll hav'ta peel me off it first.

JOHNNY

That's a picture I don't need to start me day.

JANIE continues to gnaw at her apple as

JOHNNY watches.

Do you even have enough teef to chew that?

JANIE

Come on over 'ere and I'll show you what my teef are like.

JOHNNY

No, thanks for the courteous invitation, but I'll have to respectfully decline...But where d'you get that apple, if your fat bottom never left yer bench.

JANIE

That's none of your business.

JOHNNY

Did you get one of your familiars to bring it to you, ya witch?

JANIE

Some nice lady passing by offered it to me, from her lunch bag.

JOHNNY

I'd be careful if I were you, could be poison.

JANIE

At least if it is, I'll have the sweet taste of nature in me mouth. Apples are nature's toothbrush, you know.

JOHNNY

You need ta hav' teef for that to count.

JANIE

Did you sleep well in your tent?

JOHNNY

*Did I sleep in me tent? Where else would I be sleeping? The Ritz?*

JANIE

I asked if you slept *well* in your tent you old deaf fart.

JOHNNY

There was a bee by my ear. I couldn't hear you properly.

JANIE

Uhm hm.

JOHNNY

And yes, I slept like a baby.

JANIE

By “slept like a baby,” do you mean you were up 5 times during the night for a drink and discovered you’d messed in your diaper?

JOHNNY

Aren’t you the funny one.

JANIE

I am. And I also hear talk they’re fixing to come and tear down all the tents. Move everyone to the shelters, they’re planning.

JOHNNY

Nay.

JANIE

Nay?

JOHNNY

Just nay.

JANIE

Why not?

JOHNNY

They don’t have enough beds for us all in the shelters. Besides, the park smells better. I’m stayin’ ‘ere.

JANIE

No one cares what you prefer. When’s the last time they asked us anyfing about what we want? If there’re enough people who want us gone, we gone.

JOHNNY

Well, I guess they’d have to peel my bottom out of the tent, just like they have to do with you and your bench.

JANIE

They could be throwing your tent and all your stuff away this very minute, while you’re over here yapping at me, like the crow you are.

JOHNNY

Naw, I can see my stuff from here. I'll see 'em coming.

JANIE finishes her apple, core and all. She then rubs her hands together vigorously. They both look around at the park.

JANIE

A lot of dog walkin' going on today.

JOHNNY

It's getting warmer.

JANIE

Aye.

JOHNNY notices JANIE's hands.

JOHNNY

You still havin' trouble wif your circulation?

JANIE

Why? You gonna to make a comment about how my blood is too cold to mattah?

JOHNNY

No, I was going to say that a hot cup of coffee would warm your hands right up.

JANIE

And where would I find somefin like that?

JOHNNY

The free food truck is due to arrive around the corner soon.

JANIE

Oh no you don't. You just want me to get up for free coffee so as you can scoffeel me bench.

JOHNNY

What makes you think that I want your gammy old bench? Mine is solid, and I have a bettah view. You can't see squat from where you sit.

JANIE

(staring at Johnny directly)

I'm looking at squat right now just fine. Here comes Maggie now. Good day to ya, Maggie. Looks like they're handin' out somefin tasty from the truck this mornin'.

JOHNNY

Is she eating? What's she eating?

They both looks at a woman walking by. She remains invisible to the audience.

JANIE

Hey Maggie. What's that you're eating? Is that one of them breakfast burritos? Do they still have some? Maggie? Maggie!

MAGGIE is gone. JANIE and JOHNNY look at each other.

JOHNNY

Why don't we declare a truce so that we can bof go and get one of dem breakfast burritos an' a hot cup o'coffee from the outreach truck? Then we can continue havin' a go at each other when we return.

JANIE

If I get coffee and a burrito, I'mma gonna havta use the facilities.

JOHNNY

So what's your plan then, to never eat again?

JANIE

No well, that doesn't seem quite right.

JOHNNY

See? You can't think straight cuz you're hungry. C'mon wif me. We'll go togefah so neither of us is at an advantage.

JANIE

And you won't shuffle back to the benches ahead of me after we get our food?

JOHNNY

Cross my 'eart, hope to die.

JANIE

(suspicious)

Why're you being so nice to me all of a sudden?

JOHNNY

I can be mean an' I can be nice. I've got all kinds of range, you've no idea.

JOHNNY gets up off the bench with some difficulty and crosses the sidewalk to help JANIE get up. She has a harder time standing up but finally manages it. They shuffle off stage left. Beat. From stage right, EARL enters. Seeing the two unoccupied benches, he chooses JOHNNY's bench and lies down across it, falling asleep instantly. JOHNNY and JANIE reenter, each with a drink and a breakfast sandwich.

JOHNNY

What have we here? *Move your cheeks, in he sneaks.* Oi, Earl, ya dumb bastard, yer on me bench!

EARL stirs but remains asleep.

JANIE

(with a phlegmy laugh)

Lucky for me, he took your poxy bench and spared the better one--mine.

JANIE sits while JOHNNY remains standing.

JOHNNY

What am I supposed to do now?

JANIE ignores him as she starts to eat her sandwich.

JOHNNY

Are ya not even going to offer me a sit-down? Afterall, it was your arthritic limbs what took us so long gettin' back and caused me to lose me bench.

JANIE

It weren't my fault--it's fate.

JOHNNY

Fate?

JANIE

Yea, kismet. The good lord looked down to see who deserved a good kick in the arse, an' he chose you, not me. I'm just sitting 'ere, mindin' my own business, boferin' no one. I'm innocent--why should I suffer cuz you're being punished?



JOHNNY

Punished? Naught is gettin' punished 'ere. This tramp just took me bench, that's all. It's not some cosmic judgement, it's just Earl.

JOHNNY tries to sit on JANIE's bench but she moves to block him.

Move over you old cow and share the wealth.

JANIE

Nothin' doin'. Go sit in yer tent.

JOHNNY

My tent is for sleeping only. I need to sit during the daytime. On me bench.

JANIE

Yer like a bourgeois, you are, with two separate homes. Next thing, you'll be summering in St. Moritz an' leave us peasants far behind.

JOHNNY

I consider the whole of the park my 'ome an' the tent and bench different locations within it, like separate rooms.

JANIE

Well la-ti-dah, don't let me get in the way of your multi-acre mansion.

JOHNNY

And I'll have you know that I consider myself a socialist. So move over.

JANIE

Oh, socialist are we now? Do ya share yer tent, or is that considered yer own private property then, Mr. Socialist?

JOHNNY

Socialism is defined by the workers owning the means of production. I don't produce noffin' in me tent/

JANIE

/Except gas./

JOHNNY

/We should all learn to share cooperatively.

JANIE

Oh, you're full of the socialist agenda when it's something that you want, now?

JOHNNY

What about you, you old harpy? According to yer own rules, ya can't claim to be a socialist and not share yer own bench.

JANIE

Well I'm not a socialist. If you'd clean out the three stones o' wax in yer ears once in a while, you'd know ya didn't hear me say anyfing like that.

JOHNNY

What are you then? A Capitalist?

JANIE

I'm not capitalist. I'm unaffiliated.

JOHNNY

Oh, that's convenient.

JANIE

Do I look like a woman what has a lot of time on her hands for politics?

JOHNNY

Yea, yea ya do! Ya sit here for hours watchin' the grass grow.

JANIE

An you sit there, watchin' me watch the grass grow!

He attempts to move her over again and this time he is successful but spills her coffee with the effort, but he loses his breakfast burrito in the mud, under the bench.

Look what you did, ya brute! Me warm coffee!

JOHNNY

It's not my fault--you wouldn't move yer bum. Yer big, but ya don't take up the whole bench. Now look what you've done-- I'm likely to starve to death, and it'll be all your fault.

JANIE

Don't blame it on me, ya wanker. You're gonna outlive us all--operatin' on a regular diet of meanness an' spite that shows in yer ugly face.

JOHNNY

Well this ugly face is gonna stay right here, next to your ugly face. Here we are, two gargoyles on a bench.

They pause as JOHNNY takes a sip of his coffee and JANIE nibbles her sandwich.

Dat smells good.

JANIE

Keep yer eyes to yerself...I *am* getting a wee bit parched.

JOHNNY

(turning away from her)

Don't fink about it.

JANIE

(turning away from him)

You neither.

They both slow their consumption of their food/drink to small nibbles/sips.

JOHNNY

To honor my socialist values, I'm willing to offer you the last sip of me coffee in exchange for what's left of your sandwich.

JANIE

The coffee's grown cold.

JOHNNY

It hasn't. It's still warm.

JANIE

It's tepid.

JOHNNY

Fine, it's tepid. But it's no' cold.

JANIE

Alright, but just a minute.

JANIE takes a huge bite of her sandwich.

JOHNNY

Oi!

JANIE

Wha'? You only have a few drops in yer cup. I wanted to make it a more even trade.

JOHNNY

Okay, that's enough.

JANIE and JOHNNY both reach for their promised items tentatively, not fully trusting the other. The exchange is made. They each partake and finish their items.

JANIE

That hit the spot, it did. Exactly what I needed this chilly morning.

JOHNNY

That sandwich was tasty. What they put in there, bacon?

JANIE

Yea, or sausage. Sometimes I can't tell.

They sit awkwardly for a moment.

Would ya...would ya like a bit of chocolate to finish off yer meal?

JOHNNY

Chocolate? Now who's fancy?

JANIE

It's a special treat I've been keeping for meself. I just take little wee nibbles once in a while, when I'm feelin' low.

JOHNNY

Well, if you fink you can spare a small crumb, I've never been known to say no to chocolate.

JANIE turns modestly away from JOHNNY and produces a small portion of a chocolate bar, carefully wrapped, from the inner pocket of her coat. She breaks off a small piece, hesitates, and brakes off a bigger piece. She turns and holds out the bigger piece to JOHNNY.

JANIE

I figure we're neighbors an' all, so we should be more generous with what we've been given.

JOHNNY accepts the offering nimbly.

JOHNNY

I thank you kindly.

JOHNNY and JANIE sit together on the bench,  
chewing their chocolate and staring across the  
park.

END OF PLAY