

ENOUGH TROUBLE IN THE WORLD

Written by

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INT BEDROOM. STOOL, MAKE-UP TABLE WITH SMALL MIRROR. CHAIR WITH WOMAN'S CLOTHES DRAPED ON IT.

Paula sits on a stool in front of her make-up table, brushing her hair. She wears a tattered bathrobe. She's a woman who talks to herself because she has no one else to share her thoughts.

PAULA

I've always wanted to help people. My whole life. That's all I ever wanted to do.

*(Continues to brush hair.
Puts down brush.)*

That comes from me being the oldest, I s'pose. My mother never had enough hands to take care of everyone, so she used my hands. I was glad to help her. I was good at it, too. My brothers turned out all right. No one went to jail. They all finished high school. Jimmy finished college. Something I would have liked to do. Course he's still paying it off.

*(Stands. Examines self in
unseen full-length
mirror)*

I never hear from them now. But that's okay, I s'pose. The important thing is they all made it into adulthood, more or less intact.

(pause)

Momma's gone. ... Six years now. ... All I've got is me. ... I did my raising kids when I was a kid. Don't want or need no more.

*(returns to table.
continues getting ready)*
(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

What was it she used to tell me?
"There's enough trouble in the
world without adding to it."

Enough trouble in the world. She
got that right.

(pause)

Yesterday was Day One of our new
routine. I didn't like it one bit.
Knew I wouldn't. It was harder than
I thought it would be.

If this is helping people, I'd hate
to have a job where I'm hurting
'em. Lord.

We had training last week. Everyone
had to do it. No excuses. We had to
train on each other, 'cept for Jake
Simmons, cause he's the only man
and there wasn't no one for him to
train with.

One of us acted the role of the
clerk, which is what we are, and
the other acted the role of the
applicant. Shirley was applicant to
my being clerk. So she walked up to
me with what was s'posed to be her
paperwork in her hands and I looked
at it and said it all looked in
order and then I told her, like I'm
now s'posed to tell everyone, "In
order to complete this application,
you got to come with me into the
rest room where I will need you to
give me a sample of your urine."

Not one of us could get through it
without laughing ... though there's
nothing funny about it.

Then we had to practice a bunch of
'scenarios' where the applicant
objects in this way or that, and we
had to just keep smiling and tell
them that it's the law and there's
nothing we can do about it. If they
want food stamps from the Great
State of Wisconsin they have to pee
in a cup. If they don't pee, they
don't get food, and that's that.

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

It's up to them.

If those sorry politicians had to work here just one day, they'd see what these people need has nothing to do with peeing in cups. They're good folks. All of 'em. They're my neighbors and some of 'em are my friends. Most all of 'em have jobs, they just don't pay much, not even benefits. A lot of 'em have kids they're trying to take care of. Some of 'em are old people on social security and nothing else to live on. That's what the politicians ought to be paying attention to. How much people make or don't make working their butts off and they still can't afford food.

Well, Shirley didn't raise any objections of course, cause she's not really applying, but I did have to take her in the rest room to complete our training and I had to watch her pee in a cup. That's about the worst experience I ever had at work, except for what came right after, when we reversed roles and I had to pee for Shirley.

I couldn't do it. No way.

There we were, alone in the rest room and time going by and nothing happening. Finally Shirley said, Listen, Paula, I've still got some pee in me, why don't I just pee for you and we won't tell anyone.

And that's what we did.

*(She stands. Removes robe.
She's wearing a slip
underneath.)*

So. Yesterday. Day One.

We were getting ready to open when I realized I hadn't seen Shirley yet.

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

Shirley is always the first person in the office, aside from our super who has to unlock the place. Shirley sits in her car in the parking lot waiting for the super to show. I know, cause sometimes, when my car's not working or in the garage, Shirley gives me a lift and plenty of times I've sat in the parking lot with her.

Well, she hadn't shown up, so I looked in the parking lot just in case. I was afraid she might have gotten sick or something waiting for the doors to open but her car wasn't there. I asked the super where Shirley was and she said Shirley quit.

Quit? I said. She didn't say nothing about it to me.

She did to me, the super said. Right before she left. Said she wouldn't be coming in again. We'll be short-handed today, she said, so look alive.

Look alive. How am I supposed to be able to look alive when my best friend at work quit and didn't say anything about it to me?

Can't blame her though. I'd quit myself if I could. But then *I'd* have to go on food stamps, and I'm not going to put myself through that.

(She begins to dress for work.)

I can't believe my very first applicant was poor Mrs. Jenkins.

Known her all my life. My mama bought her eggs at the farmers market when I was a little kid, before the Jenkins lost their farm. Lots of people round here lost their farms.

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

Dated her youngest for a while - Tommy, or Teddy ... whatever - before I decided I didn't like men. Don't like women either, not in that way anyhow. Oh, I don't dislike people, I just don't want ... relations.

Our families went to the same church. They always sat in front of us. My momma always said Mrs. Jenkins had the prettiest voice, and a lot of women in our church had pretty voices.

Mrs. Jenkins is the sweetest woman. When my momma died, she brought over a fresh baked pie every week for a month. She's like that to everyone, not just me. Always thinking of someone else and what they need and what she can do to help them.

Now she needs help. Lives by herself in those rundown schoolhouse apartments. Ought to be torn down. Lucky she can afford that, I s'pose. Had some heart trouble I heard. Not getting by too well.

When I had to tell Mrs. Jenkins to 'accompany' me to the rest room I was blushing so bad I thought I'd die. It felt like ants were biting me all over. I just wanted to scream.

She said she knew. She read about it. Heard it on the tv. She told me not to worry. It wasn't my fault.

We're s'posed to watch 'em pee. Not s'posed to take our eyes away for a minute. That's our job. That's what they drilled into us.

I couldn't do that to Mrs. Jenkins.

I turned my back on her. By the time I heard her little tinkle in a cup, I was crying so hard I could hardly see.

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

She left her cup on that table we
put there for that purpose and she
let herself out. She touched me ...
right here ... on the shoulder ...
as she passed me by.

*(pause ... Grabs coat,
purse; ready to leave for
work)*

All I ever wanted was to help
people.

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