

**Philadelphia's Slowly Facing Starvation**  
Mary Jones

**Characters:**

Connie: early 20s

Mark: early 20s

**Setting:**

Connie's one-room apartment—a bed (center) and a small table. A rocking chair. A hamper, other typical furniture.

**Time:**

Late at night, Christmas-time

*CONNIE enters, dressed in a winter coat, hat, etc. She carries a suitcase in one hand and mail in the other. She puts the suitcase down by the bed and starts to look through the mail.*

*MARK enters, carrying other assorted luggage. He is also dressed in a winter coat, hat.*

MARK

Where do you want these?

CONNIE

Hmm? Oh, um... anywhere I won't break my neck over them.

*MARK puts the other bags down and sits down on the couch. CONNIE opens an envelope and begins reading, pacing.*

MARK

Something the matter?

*CONNIE says nothing.*

MARK

Connie?

CONNIE

What?

MARK

What're you reading?

CONNIE

That was a long ride, wasn't it?

MARK

Yeah. Connie...

CONNIE

Just a bill. The holidays, you know.

*CONNIE puts the letter in her pocket.*

MARK

And that drive to top it off—I'm surprised you haven't collapsed.

CONNIE

I sat on my butt for nine hours. I'm fine. You look exhausted. You OK?

MARK

Yeah. Are... are you OK?

CONNIE

I'm fine. Fine. Normal. How about you?

MARK

Tired more than anything. I'm just gonna use the bathroom.

*MARK gets up, exits. CONNIE takes the letter out of her pocket as she sits down on the couch-bed. She's visibly upset as she reads to herself.*

*MARK re-enters, though she doesn't see him. He touches her on the shoulder.*

MARK

Connie?

CONNIE

I hate this time of year. There's just—you spend so much money, you know.

*He sits next to her.*

MARK

I know what you mean. You don't want to know how much I spent.

CONNIE

Hmm? Oh, yeah. Oh, hon, that was so sweet of you. I love the new hard drive.

MARK

Well, you've been complaining about the lack of space—

CONNIE

It's perfect. Now I can get all my songs off the four-track and start making cds. No more tapes for me! I can't wait to install it. Or, well, you to.

MARK

Tomorrow morning.

CONNIE

Great. Wonderful.

*CONNIE gets up and starts to root through the bags and packages, opening a suitcase and throwing clothes into a hamper.*

MARK

What're you doing? It's the middle of the night.

CONNIE:

I can't relax. I did nothing all day. I just sat there. I need to actually do something. I need to, look—if I leave these clothes sitting here all night, I'll be up all night thinking about them.

MARK

OK, fine, you win.

*CONNIE continues to separate clothes and put away other items in the bags—Christmas gifts, etc.*

CONNIE

You're parents—I liked them. At least, I think I liked them.

MARK

Huh?

CONNIE

They seemed to like me. So, I figure, I like them. Unless they were just acting like they liked me, at which point, I don't like them anymore.

MARK

*(Weary)* They liked you.

CONNIE

You think? I mean, really, did they?

MARK

Yeah. Sure. Otherwise, you'd've slept in the garage.

CONNIE

*(nervous laugh)* Right. Of course. Good. I'm glad they liked me. I mean, that's a good sign, right? You know?

MARK

Yeah. Of course. Look, why don't you actually sit and relax?

CONNIE

I told you, I'm not tired. My mind is going a mile a minute—

MARK

So's your mouth.

CONNIE

Don't be a jerk, Mark.

MARK

OK, I'm sorry. Look, I'm *really* tired—

Do you want to crash here?

CONNIE

You really want me to stay here?

MARK

You really want to leave?

CONNIE

I'm not saying that.

MARK

You haven't spent the night in a long time. Not to speak of Christmas. I mean, um, you, you don't seem to like... sleeping with me anymore.

CONNIE

*(Awkward pause)* No, no—it's fine. I'll spend the night here. With you. *(He kisses her on the cheek)* OK?

MARK

OK.

CONNIE

*They finally start taking off their winter coats, etc. MARK leaves his on the floor, while CONNIE picks up both his and hers and puts them on the rocking chair.*

Pretty funny, huh, all those people asking if you were gonna come back in the summer.

CONNIE

Hmm?

MARK

At your parents' church. They were all asking if you were moving back after graduation.

CONNIE

Oh yeah. Well, I couldn't just blow them off. I had to tell them something.

MARK

I just hope they aren't disappointed.

CONNIE

Disappointed?

MARK

When you don't move back.

CONNIE

MARK

*(slowly, distracted)* Right. When I don't move back.

*They both undress to get into bed, both in t-shirts and boxers or similar pajamas.*

MARK

Don't worry about it. Out of sight, out of mind.

CONNIE

Really? You think? How about your parents? Are they expecting you to move back?

MARK

To Ohio? I never gave it much thought. Huh. No, probably not. I hope not. Why?

CONNIE

I was just wondering.

MARK

Anyway, that's six months away. Not worth getting upset over. *(He looks at her now dressed for bed)* You should wear tight t-shirts more often.

CONNIE

*(distracted)* Ya think?

MARK

*(playfully)* Oh absolutely. *(Yawns)* Unfortunately, I'm exhausted.

CONNIE

Um. Sure. OK.

*They undo the bed and crawl in. MARK lays still, but CONNIE starts to toss and turn. She gets up and starts to pace, playing with various objects in the "room"—picking up a picture frame by the bed, messing with the clothes again.*

MARK

What're you doing?

CONNIE

I can't sleep. I'm still too wound up from the trip.

MARK

Look, I don't want to be rude, but I'm really tired, and you *did* ask me to stay. Just, whatever you're doing, do it quietly.

CONNIE

Yeah. Sure.

*CONNIE continues to nervously play with various items, until finally going to the pants she was wearing and gets out the letter. She doesn't attempt to re-read it, but only holds it in her hand, stands, and stares at MARK.*

CONNIE

Were you going to tell me about New Jersey?

*There is no answer. She begins pacing again, talking to him, even though there is no response.*

CONNIE

I mean, hey, I don't know why you would have, I'm only your girlfriend. I mean, why should I be interested in whether or not you're going to move all the way up to New Brunswick or wherever the hell it was. I mean, why should that interest me? Why should I care about that?

MARK

*(muffled)* I didn't want to ruin Christmas.

CONNIE

What?

MARK

*(sitting up)* I didn't want to ruin your Christmas, OK? I was trying to be nice.

CONNIE

Imagine how I felt, just overhearing the whole thing.

MARK

I wasn't aware that you had.

CONNIE

Well, I did. I heard you and your father in the kitchen. North Jersey? That's so far away! Mark—

MARK

It's just an interview. It's no big deal. I have other interviews in the area.

CONNIE

I mean, that's a whole state away. That's practically New York.

MARK

Nothing says I'm getting a job in Jersey.

CONNIE

It's so far away.

MARK

Connie! Look, it's only an interview. And New Brunswick isn't that far away! I mean, it's Jersey, for chris'sake! It's just over the river! You drive to Cape May all the time, and that's at least as far, if not farther. Why are you so upset?

CONNIE

I don't want you to... It's just that...

MARK

Who says I'm leaving you?

CONNIE

Huh?

MARK

I keep telling you—it's only an interview. It'd be stupid of me not to go, but that doesn't mean I want to work all the way up in North Jersey. Besides, it's expensive to live up there.

CONNIE

What if you did?

MARK

I'm not going to.

CONNIE

Then why're you going to the interview?

MARK

These days, you have to go on every interview, you have to go after every opportunity. It may end up being the only foot-in-the-door I get. Don't worry about it. Come back to bed.

CONNIE

Don't worry about it?

MARK

Right. Don't worry about it. (*pause*) What's in your hand?

CONNIE

Huh? Nothing.

MARK

Is that the bill?

CONNIE

Yeah. I don't know.

MARK



Connie, just think about it tomorrow. Not now. Come back and lay down. You're over-tired.

CONNIE

I'm not tired.

MARK

Yes you are. You're exhausted. I can see you yawning every other minute.

CONNIE

There's no such thing as being "over-tired."

MARK

Yes, there is. You're so tired you're wound up. Probably will collapse from exhaustion. (*laugh*)  
Heart'll stop beating. Trust me. Just lay down and relax.

CONNIE

Relax? In the past month, I've had three doctors and a Buddhist tell me to relax.

MARK

Buddhist?

CONNIE

Kate.

MARK

Kate's a Buddhist? When'd this happen?

CONNIE

Long story. Which you'd know if you were ever around.

MARK

So now Kate's enlightened? I find that hard to believe.

CONNIE

She's a *Buddhist*, not a *Buddha*.

MARK

Sorry, I'm just—

CONNIE

Being a smart-ass, I know.

MARK

Hey!

CONNIE

Oh, calm down. You'd have said it too.

MARK

Well, the doctors—and Buddhist—are right. You do need to calm down.

CONNIE

Yeah. Get rid of all that stress. It's so easy to tell someone to get rid of stress. Life is stressful! Just being awake is stressful. Stress is the only thing that's keeping me going. You know, if I wasn't stressed out all the time, nothing would ever get done. That's what keeps people going. I mean, would you go to work if you didn't have to pay your bills or rent or groceries?

MARK

If I liked my job.

CONNIE

*(pause)* Yeah. Yeah, that's... I hate getting up in the morning.

MARK

You don't have work tomorrow, Connie. It's Sunday.

CONNIE

I dread going to work.

MARK

Yes. I know you do. It's all you ever talk about. OK, now I'm up. What the hell is eating you?

*CONNIE pauses. She looks at the letter, then looks at MARK. CONNIE hands MARK the letter. He begins to read to himself.*

MARK

"We regret to inform you—" It's not a bill.

CONNIE

No. Baldwin's turned me down. I don't have enough experience. I'm... I'm not what they're looking for.

MARK

I'm sorry. Come here. Sit down.

CONNIE

I really thought that maybe this would be it. I was perfect for it—I have experience with books, I've worked in a library and two book stores. Why wouldn't they want to hire me? I'd be a great caretaker. I'm careful—you've seen, I never dogear pages. *(pause)* I really thought they'd want me. This is the third rejection letter. No—the fourth. I forgot about the diner. GOD! Why am I never what they're looking for? What do they want?

MARK

I don't know. Maybe they're just... They don't know what they're missing.

Don't give me platitudes.

CONNIE

Actually, that's not a plat—

MARK

Why don't they want me?

CONNIE

I don't know, Connie.

MARK

Bullshit. I know why.

CONNIE

(*under his breath*) Then why ask me? (*louder*) And will you stop pacing? You're making me nervous.

MARK

It's because I have nothing. I didn't go to a good school, I didn't do any internships, I didn't study anything useful, I didn't—I mean, what am I supposed to do? I have a lousy degree in a bullshit field. I screwed up. I don't know anything useful. I don't know anything about computers. I wasn't smart enough for a real field. I completely screwed up.

CONNIE

Repeating that over and over isn't going to help.

MARK

I'm a loser. That's the way it is. I fucked up in college, I didn't do anything. I have no future. I'm a waste—I'm a goddamned waste of my parents' money. I'm a stupid fat fuck who'll never get out of this hole—

CONNIE

All right, stop it.

MARK

Stop it? Damn it, you don't understand. I have nothing. I have—

CONNIE

Just shut up! I'm tired of hearing this shit!

MARK

Excuse me?

CONNIE

You heard me. This is stupid. Every time something doesn't go your way you scream and yell about how stupid and how horrible you are.

MARK

CONNIE

Maybe because I am!

MARK

Shut the fuck up! I can't take this.

*MARK gets up to get dressed. As he pulls his pants on, CONNIE grabs at him. He pulls away from her and continues to dress as they argue.*

CONNIE

What do you think you're doing?

MARK

I'm going home.

CONNIE

Who the hell do you think you are? You tell me to shut the fuck up—I would *never* say that to you—and now you're just running out of here? Like a coward? Who the hell do you think you are?

MARK

Someone who actually loves you, OK? Jesus Christ, do you even know what you sound like?

CONNIE

Do you know what *you* sound like? Telling me to—I never curse at you. I never tell you to shut up—and believe me, there are plenty of times I wish you would.

*MARK is now dressed to leave.*

MARK

Get your goddamned head together, Connie. Do you have any idea how you make me feel when you say those things?

CONNIE

Go to New Jersey. Go ahead. You're just going to leave at some point anyway, why not now?

MARK

Why can't you even listen to me? What is wrong with you?

CONNIE

I don't know. But don't you *ever* tell me to shut up again.

MARK

Are you going to stop? (*no reply*) Connie, you have to stop. OK? Look—I love you, and listening to you talk about yourself like that hurts. Do you understand? (*no reply*) If you were any other person talking that way, I'd hit you. Do you understand? If anyone else talked that way about you, I'd fight him. But I can't hit you. And I can't stand listening to you talk that way about yourself.

I'm scared.

CONNIE

I know.

MARK

I don't know what to do. I mean, I can't find a real job. I'm tired of working two jobs just to pay for this place. I need to do something with my life, but I can't. I don't know how.

CONNIE

I know.

MARK

And all this talk about New Jersey—

CONNIE

I didn't say I was going.

MARK

You're going to leave.

CONNIE

Why?

MARK

Because. Because I know there's nothing here.

CONNIE

Well, uh, there's you.

MARK

*(Derisive snort)*

CONNIE

*MARK sits on the bed, still dressed.*

Why do you want to stay here?

MARK

It's my home. It's all I have.

CONNIE

Don't you think it's possible to leave? To maybe go somewhere else?

MARK

Well, I... You know, my family's here. My friends are here.

CONNIE

MARK

There's such a thing as a telephone.

CONNIE

That's real cold, Mark.

MARK

That's realistic. Look—you know what it looks like out there. There aren't any jobs around here.

CONNIE

Oh? And where are all the jobs?

MARK

I don't know. That's not the point—the point is that we have to follow them wherever they are.

CONNIE

Doesn't matter where I go, no one will hire me.

MARK

Don't say that!

CONNIE

(pause) You know, my mom—when she was a kid, they had a saying. See, you know that building, the PSFS building? Those huge red neon letters spelled out over the skyline, day and night. I'm not even sure what it stands for—all I know is that it was a bank, became another, bank, became another bank—I'm not even sure who owns it now. Point is, it's been there since my mom was a kid, and they used to say that the letters stood for "Philadelphia's Slowly Facing Starvation."

MARK

Seems appropriate.

CONNIE

Goddamn it, I don't want it to be. Not for me. But it is. I can't find a job, and I'm stuck in this waste of a city. Everything is wasted.

MARK

So leave! Go somewhere else!

CONNIE

I can't!

MARK

Why not?

CONNIE

This is my home, Mark.

MARK

Christ, I'm getting *deja vu*.

CONNIE

You don't understand. It's easy for you. You don't care. You just pick up and leave your family, you come out East, and now you're talking about picking up and moving again. I can't do that. I can't—I can't make friends like you do, I can't just leave everyone behind. I can't. I need a home. I need friends.

MARK

And you can make new friends, you can find a new home—

CONNIE

But I don't want to! I want to stay here, with people I love. I'm tired of people moving. I'm tired of people leaving. It isn't fair!

MARK

You know what? Fine. You're right. You sound like a child. No one will hire you.

CONNIE

You're not funny.

MARK

That's what you want to hear, isn't it?

CONNIE

Shut up.

MARK

Ah! Now who's saying "shut up"? Huh?

CONNIE

You don't understand. I have maybe enough money to live here for one more month. After that...

MARK

After that?

CONNIE

I don't know. If I don't have a job by then, I'll... I'll have to move back in with my parents.

MARK

Well, at least you know you'll have a home.

CONNIE

Oh, sure, all the way out in Allentown. I'm sure to find a job at Wal-mart.

MARK

It's something anyway.

CONNIE

Unless there's a way I can stay in the city.

MARK

Like what? (*an uncomfortable pause*) Why are you looking at me like that?

CONNIE

You sleep on that fold-out futon. I mean, that fits two people.

MARK

Now, now wait a minute Connie—

CONNIE

You live right by the El, right by I-95—I could get a job downtown—

MARK

I don't think—

CONNIE

I mean, it could work, right?

MARK

No! (pause) I mean, no. No, I don't think that'll work.

CONNIE

Oh?

MARK

I mean, who's to say I'll still be living here in a year?

CONNIE

I thought you said you weren't leaving.

MARK

I'm not. I mean, I don't know.

CONNIE

What do you mean you don't know?

MARK

Haven't you been listening to me?

CONNIE

I hear you.



MARK

I don't think it would be right for us to move in together. (*pause*) We're too young for any kind of... you know.

CONNIE

What?

MARK

Look, I'm only 23. I'm still in college, I'm about to graduate—I can't be tied down. If you were to move in, I'd then have someone else on the lease. I'd have to worry about if I had to move—

CONNIE

I'm not just a roommate.

MARK

I know, I know—that's, that's even worse.

CONNIE

What do you mean, it's worse?

MARK

People don't get married just out of college. People don't get married this young.

CONNIE

Who said—who said anything about marriage?

MARK

No one, but—

CONNIE

But you don't want that level of commitment. You don't want me to live with you. That's too serious.

MARK

(*long pause*) Yes.

CONNIE

What do you want from me?

MARK

Me? What about you?

CONNIE

Mark—what do you want from me? I'm your girlfriend. What does that mean to you?

MARK

I don't know. I don't know. Look, it's late. We're both tired. Let's talk about this in the morning.

CONNIE

No! We're going to talk about this now.

MARK

No, we're not. I'm not. This is ridiculous. We should talk about it tomorrow, when we're thinking clear. Then you'll understand what I'm saying.

CONNIE

Believe me, I understand what you're saying. (*weaker*) I know what you're saying. I know... I know you're just forgetting.

MARK

What? I'm forgetting what?

CONNIE

We shouldn't be here. We should be somewhere else.

MARK

What? Why?

CONNIE

This place feels stifling. Stale air. I hate this time of year. I want to go down the shore.

MARK

Connie—

CONNIE

It's not too cold out—I've gone down the shore in winter before. I used to love it. Mom would take me down in February—we'd go to Cape May and stay at the Golden Eagle Inn. We'd just take a weekend. Just to get away from the city, just to get away from the house, the neighborhood. Just—remember when we went down?

MARK

Yeah.

CONNIE

That was such a fantastic day. (*She picks up the picture on the table.*) We didn't even know where we were going.

MARK

I thought you did. You were driving.

CONNIE

I didn't know until I got there.

MARK

Right.

CONNIE

I just closed my eyes and started driving.

MARK

What? No you didn't, you had me looking at a map the whole time.

*She stares at him, saying nothing. Uncomfortable pause.*

CONNIE

In my head, I don't know. I mean... There was a lot more to that day than just a destination. I didn't know where I was going... otherwise. What's it matter? I thought you—I thought you were telling the truth when you said you loved me.

MARK

I was.

CONNIE

That was one of the best days of my life.

MARK

It was. It was for me, too.

CONNIE

Then what happened?

MARK

I don't know. I still don't know. Sometimes... Sometimes people just...

*She hands TOM the picture frame and sits in the rocking chair. She doesn't look at him. TOM looks at the picture, places it back on the table, and starts to walk off.*

CONNIE

If you walk out—

MARK

Connie—Don't say anything you can't take back. We'll talk when you've calmed down.

CONNIE

I am calm!

MARK

No, you're not. And I—I can't take this anymore. You know what, fine. We're not talking about this later. We're done talking. I'm done talking. See ya, Connie.

*MARK picks up his bag and walks off. CONNIE gets up to follow him.*

CONNIE

Mark, I—

*We hear a door slam. CONNIE sits back in the chair, saying nothing, but slowly starting to cry.*

**END OF PLAY**