

YOUR NUMBER IS UP

(A play in one act by Betty Prisendorf)

At rise: Government agency person (female) sits at desk sifting papers.
(man shuffles in holding a numbered card)

AGENCY PERSON

So you are Number 4...let me see here. Oh yes, here you are, number 4, right in order.

MAN

Good morning Miss... (holds out hand which she ignores) I am Mr....

AGENCY PERSON

Number 4—did I not just say that?

MAN

I wasn't sure if you needed my name.

AGENCY PERSON

Sir, did you see the number of people in the waiting room?

MAN

Well, yes. I was here very early and they just kept pouring in. Lots of people...

AGENCY PERSON

Lots of people—therefore, names are superfluous here. Like you, each of those assembled has been given a number. Each number represents a case... by 4 o'clock today I have to be finished with all of those cases.

MAN

Wow. That's quite a day.

AGENCY PERSON

Which leaves me with *no* time for useless pleasantries. (sets a clicking timer)

MAN

(nervously rubbing hands) Oh I understand...I understand.

AGENCY PERSON

Good. Now, let's proceed. According to this you have, let me see, four children.

MAN

Yes, Joseph, Judy, Jake and Julia---you see we used the first initial of Grandma's...

AGENCY PERSON

Sir, I thought we cleared this up... we have (shakes timer) a limited amount of time here--- the names of you or your children are immaterial to this case.

MAN

Sorry

AGENCY PERSON

These children are all unemployed?

MAN

Well yes, they are 2, 4, 6, and 8.

AGENCY PERSON

When I was eight I got up at 5 every morning and threw newspapers.

MAN

All taken, those jobs---I tried.

AGENCY PERSON

And your wife...?

MAN

The office she was working in closed down---the same place I was working for 10 years... that is why I've been up every morning looking for work, and there is none, and that's why I'm here because...

AGENCY PERSON

Had you considered any of this before you had *4 children*?

MAN

Well no... we were young, in love, and we love kids and...

AGENCY PERSON

Excuse me Sir--do not talk to me about Love. *Let me tell you about love Sir---* Love is an overrated emotion that needs to be curtailed--*big time, curtailed!* If you knew of all the damage that has been caused by LOVE!--- *Listen to me--* for five days a week, I sit here and deal with the car wrecks caused by this crazy, skewed emotion. Please Sir, spare me from your LOVE story.

MAN

But... but...love makes people happy---I'm sorry Mam but love makes....

AGENCY PERSON

So you're happy? sitting here, looking for a handout? your four kids waiting for Daddy to shower them with LOVE. "Basic Needs" first according to Maslow--- which I'm sure is over your head.

MAN

No, no --I remember Maslow's Hierarchy from Psychology in college. I have a college degree but still...no jobs.

AGENCY PERSON

So smart and yet not smart enough to not contribute to the overpopulation of Planet Earth!

MAN

Well we had one child, Joseph, and just thought an only child seems so... so lonely

AGENCY PERSON

I'm an only child.

MAN

Oh!

AGENCY PERSON

Yes, and as you can see, a gainfully employed productive member of society. Did you know that In China, families are allowed *one child only*?

MAN

I've heard that.

AGENCY PERSON

So what is it you want ?

MAN

(desperately) *Food, food! Vouchers for food. Please, please, any kind of food. Yesterday we had no food at all and the kids are crying and losing weight, and my wife and I don't know what to do. Please, please.*

AGENCY PERSON

Sir, let's go back to the number of people in the waiting room?

MAN

Yes, I know-- there are a lot...

AGENCY PERSON

(picks up and looks at timer) My point exactly. All of those people unemployed like you. (pulls vouchers from drawer) See this stack. This is all I have. So if I were to give each of you a food voucher I would be all out by lunch time. I am here till four. Do the math. I'm sure you'll find work soon. Have you thought of a garden?
(Picks up large DENIED stamp and gets ready to strike papers)

MAN

But, but you don't understand. I am desperate. We are starving...all of us, even the cat is starving. Please, please, pleaseeeee, have mercy.

AGENCY PERSON

(stops DENIED stamp in mid air) Did you say *cat*? *You have a cat?*

MAN

Well yes, Jasper, the "J" thing you know, like a member of the family...he has not eaten for over....

AGENCY PERSON

(total shock) *Wait a minute, wait a minute! You are letting Jasper starve? One of God's creatures, a darling little cat, a poor defenseless animal, and you are letting it... starve? Oh my god! Oh my God! Have I heard this right?*

MAN

Yes, all of us are starving— even Jasper. We have tried everything but...

AGENCY PERSON

(hands over ears) *Stop! Stop! Let me hear no more. What kind of people let their cat starve?... Oh I can't stand it. Jasper, Jasper poor starving kitty. Oh, the cruelty of people. Oh the horror, the horror.*

(reaches in drawer and pulls out a number of vouchers, shakily signs them, and pushes them across the desk to Man))

Here, here is a month's worth of food vouchers. Go to Safeway. They have the best cat, I mean, the best nutritious food for the family. *You will be stopping there on your way home won't you? Won't you?*

MAN

(Quickly gathers up vouchers, blubbing)
Yes, yes...on the way home.... thank you, thank you, my whole family thanks you. *Jasper thanks you. You have saved our lives. I can't begin to tell you how much...*

AGENCY PERSON

That's enough now. (dabs her eyes, passes Kleenex box to man, takes out calendar and makes note)

I want you back here the first of next month. I want to know how Jasper... I mean, how the family is getting along.

THE END