

OVERNIGHT PARKING BAN, IN EFFECT

by

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(NOTE: Minimal settings -- maybe just two pairs of chairs to denote the different cars. It would be great if there were ambient, naturalistic noise noting the various parts of the tow pound environment THE DRIVER passes through until the final, quiet moments. But hey, it's a quick short play festival, so that's not a necessity.)

(There is only one actor, though his actions imply the presence of other characters. THE DRIVER, an angry, stubbly man in his thirties, is standing in line in the administrative trailer at the Chicago impound lot at 701 N Sacramento. Initially, he talks to the person in front of him in line.)

#### THE DRIVER

How long you been waiting?

(Beat.)

It's some bullshit money making scheme, is what it is. "No parking, three AM to seven AM, December first to April first, or when snow is over two inches." Can't put a snowflake sign ten feet up on a lightpole and expect people to read it. We assume the snowflake is some decorative holiday thing, but no, it's Chicago's fuckin' -- draconian-ass overnight towing regulations, can't be parked there past three AM in case the plows need to come through. Look at us. Should be at work. Instead we're in the line at the Sacramento Tow Pound, waiting for the -- they're calling you. You're up.

(Takes a step forward. Now that the person in front of him in line is otherwise occupied, he gradually starts to direct his monologue to the person behind him in line.)

Oh boy, I get to be next! Lucky me! Overnight parking ban due to possible snowfall. Fuckin' nonsense. Tom Skilling said it was sixty eight degrees last night. I'm pretty sure my minivan was not going to disrupt the workflow of the snow plows, because none a those plows left the garage last night. The plowdrivers were all back in their compound using the rock salt to rim their margaritas while they watched teevee. This plus the meter deal, it's like, who lives here? Who is the city for if a man can't park overnight in front of the drug store in his own neighborhood? I'm not inconveniencing anybody. I was not blocking the public way. Nobody's doing a drive through, buyin' aspirin from my local pharmacy at 3 am -- the pharmacy which I patronize in lieu of the 24-hour CVS up on Chicago because I believe in supporting local business. There were no spots on my street, because people on my street don't know how to park, they leave half a car length between themselves and the corner--- Should I just drive around all night until I find a spot, spitting out tons a greenhouse gases? I parked there with my community's best interests in mind, but apparently the best interest is to give a hundred fifty dollar ticket to a working man who can't afford to buy a parking space instead of the jackasses with the BMWs and the out-of-state plates, don't

even pay for a city sticker? Fuck that.

(Turns forward.)

What? Oh, my turn. Excuse me.

(Steps to the window. Takes out his ID. Shows it to the clerk.)

Ninety four Plymouth Voyager, red. I was parked on Western at Potomac, west side of the street. Do I pay you, or? This way? Thank you very much.

(Takes three steps to the left.)

Does she give YOU the receipt? Or okay. Do I get the keys now? No, I still have my keys. Well, I guess I'm a little disorientated. I should be at work by now. 'Stead I'm taking the mythical South California bus to get my ass to the ghetto-car-towlot-processing, dignity-free bullshit center, waiting half-an-hour in line when there's only two people in front of me. City bureaucracy bullshit. What's the next rung up on the ladder for you? Is there a high class tow lot downtown where they you don't have to do any of this menial shit cause it's computerized and there are, like, fancy fuckin' *snacks*?

(Beat. A longish one -- the person he's talking to has a lot to say. He nods, listens attentively. Then:)

Can I use my debit card?

(He gives the clerk his debit card. Beat.)

I'm sorry if I... I'm just a little frustrated with the situation and the money, it makes a dent.

(He retrieves his debit card and his ID.)

Thank you very much. Do I go out this door? Or? Okay.

(He walks outside. He looks around. He finds the attendant outside.)

Sir? Excuse me? How do I find my car? Sir, there's hundreds a cars out here? How do I--Sorry. Here you go. Oh, that's fancy. You call the car on a walkie talkie?

(Shouts into the man's walkie talkie.)

Hello, my beautiful red nineteen ninety four Plymouth Voyager. Don't worry, baby. I'll get you home soon!

(He goes back on his heels a bit.)

Okay. Okay. I'll let you do your job. I'll do mine. I'm waiting here. That is my job.

(Beat.)

That's a job I would like. Being the guy who drives around the impound lot, chauffering poor knuckleheads to their impounded cars. He can probably listen to music and talk on his cell phone and do whatever the fuck he wants. Like going on a carnival ride for a living. Gets a pension, probably. Is that his car? No.

(Beat. The other car goes by.)

I'm sorry, I mean no disrespect.

(Beat.)

Is that him? That's him. Thank you, sir.

(THE DRIVER gets in the passenger seat of the car that shows up. 80s music is playing -- maybe Tiffany's cover of "I Think We're Alone Now." Tries to hand off the receipt.)

Do I give this to you? Just show it or? Yeah.

(Beat.)

It's a red, nineteen ninety four Plymouth Voyager.

(Beat. He bops his head to the music. Sings along.)

This seems like a fun job, yeah? Drivin' around listenin' to music and--?

(No response. He looks out his window. The driver draws his attention to something out the driver side.)

No, I told you, my car is a RED Plymouth Voyager, not silver, or brown, or---oh waitwaitwait that WAS it. That was it! Go back!

(As soon as possible, THE DRIVER hops out of the car.)

What the fuck!?! How dirty is my car? You had to park it right next to the Metra tracks so it's takin' a dirt shower for the past twelve hours? Jesus H. You guys couldn't put up a screen? Defend people's personal property that you're making money off of? And how do you get these scribbly-ass numbers -- can you even read these? How do you get this chicken scratch shit off the windshield?

(He scratches at the numbers with his thumbnail.)

Is this lipstick? This blocks the driver's vision. It's very unsa--

(He turns around. The other car is gone. He looks around. The wind blows. He talks to his car.)

Oh. He left. I think we're alone now.

(He scrapes at the windshield numbers with his thumbnail for a bit. He gives up. He unlocks the car, opens the door and eases himself into the driver's seat. He puts the keys in the ignition. The car makes warning beeps. He finds the musical tones soothing. He closes the door. Silence. He goes into his jacket pocket, takes out a small travel bottle of Aleve. He pops two pills and swallows them, with a little difficulty, without water. Quiet. He lovingly touches the surfaces of the car: the rearview mirror, the dashboard, etc. The pace of his speaking slows.)

It's quiet in here. It's nice. Chicago is so loud. I'll take you, get you a wash. You are such a piece of junk. Running all herky jerky. You cause me so much trouble, you know. Repairs, insurance. And when I pick up the kids and they leave their little crumbs and flamin' hot bags in the back. And when you get dinged in the parking lot at work. And when Linda ran out of gas and I had to walk to the Citgo and back in the rain to save her. But still. The city is so big. So spread out. So overwhelming. So heavy. So cold. For a second in here, though, when I sit down, before I turn the key, it's quiet, it's cozy. It's just me. Despite everything, still: I need you.

BLACKOUT - END OF PLAY