

SOMEWHERE NEARBY

By Mary Ruth Clarke

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Lights up on Lucy sitting in a broken arm chair looking out her front window. Her living room is as old as she is and she surrounds herself with half a dozen wind up alarm clocks. She is wearing a dirty ratty neck brace and by her side is a bag which she frequently spits in to. There is also a porch area, as close to the audience as possible, which is dark when the living room is lit.

She peers out the window and watches the world. A sectioned orange sits on a napkin on the TV tray in front of her. Her phone is ringing, but she doesn't hear it.)

She's not going to come.

(She spits into her bag, then wipes her mouth with a ratty old tissue.)

She's not going to come. 2:00 she said she was coming.
She's not going to come.

(Half the clocks should say 1:30, the other half says 2:30.)

What am I going to do? Ooooooooooh! What will become of me? I need meelk. What will become of me?

Marget Wheeze. That girl. She never comes on time. I tell her "you come at 2:00", she comes 3:00 3:30. Today, she's not coming. I need meelk, corn flakes, can of peas. What am I going to do?

And she don't never get me what I tell her. 2 days ago I say you get me rigotta cheese and she brings me a tub. I thought it was margarine. I said "No! From the deli! Rigotta from the deli! Not in this tub. What, are you stoopid?" But I took it anyway. Beggars can't be choosers.

(Lucy lets a big fart rip. She doesn't acknowledge it. She looks out the window.)

That's me. I'm a beggar.

Hey -- you. You there. Do you think you could get me a can of peas? Not a big can -- that's for a family. I like the small can. Could you get me a can of peas? Hey -- you? Never mind. I won't bother you again. Never mind. Never mind. I'll get Marget Wheeze to do it. She's coming at 2:00.

(She eats a section of orange.)

This is a good orange. Good.

(Light shift to the porch. Evening. Lucy sits and waits.)

Oh God Almighty it's hot in this collar tonight. I got a broken neck. It pains me when I go like this.

(She opens her mouth incredibly wide.)

You know, everybody use to sit on their porches in the summer in the evening in the heat and the people would walk by and you knew them and they'd stop have a little chat. It was nice that way. Now....now it's all differentish. Now the yubbies -- they don't have time to talk. They're so busy, running with their sneakers on. They don't have time. Always going and going. The yubbies sit in their backyards behind the tall fences they built so you can't see them. You can't see them back there. They don't want you to. I asked that man lives 2 doors down in that big boat -- I asked him why he built that fence so tall and he said because it's dangerous.

When we moved here it was all Germans. Then all Polish. They got crazy names.

(She sees someone walking by.)

Hello! Hello you. I got a broken neck. They put me in a halo. Oh. Okay. Bye. Bye.

He lives over there. He's a Mexican boy. That's who moved in after Polish. Mexicans. Now they got a Mexican mass at the church, no more Polish. Spanish. Spanish mass. And they got a Mexican nun. Sister Corita. She's Mexican. That Sister is a saint. She lets me help her. Sometimes I go over to the church, she lets me help her. That sister is a saint!

But this boy here -- he won't cut my grass. He cuts his Mother's but he won't cut mine. He says "My Mother pays me." I say "What, I'm an old lady, I ain't got no money to pay you cut my grass, are you crazy?"

God didn't send Ned and I no children. I ain't got nobody.

Do you think maybe you could fix my gate? Could you fix my

gate? Never mind. I won't bother you. You're busy. I know. My friend Stuart - he fixed my gate. I thought he would do a good job because he's a man. But it's broken again. I won't bother you.

The Yubbies bought most of the Mexican houses. Ooooooh! You should see. One time the lady over there she let me come in. Now I knew that house because Marie use to live there and she was my friend. Marie loved Elvis and she had everything Elvis in her house. Everything. She gave me a picture of Elvis. I don't like Elvis so much but I put it on top of my television set because Marie gave it to me and she was my friend. She moved way out west. California. California and Diversy Avenue. That's when the lady bought that house -- ooh, what she did! When she got done, you couldn't even tell it was Marie's house. The walls weren't in the house. It was all just big. Lofty she said it was. Lofty. Except for the bathroom. There was a door on the bathroom. I used it. The door had a nice lock. She had everything in that bathroom. Every kind of bathroom thing you could think of she had in there. And a phone. Radio. Little microwave you could warm your coffee up. Soaps and lotions and shavers. Two different scales. I weighed myself. I'm not tellin'. In the shower she had 6-7 different kinds of shampoo. And all different kinds of medicines in the cabinets. Visine, Maalox, pain pills, ointments, pregnancy test.

Nobody sits on their porches anymore. Me. I sit on the porch. I don't know why.

Her husband -- the money he makes. They give big donations to the Church, get their name in the bulletin. She don't let me come in now. She got a little newborn. Michael. Michael. She says "No Lucy, not with the baby."

(Light shift to the living room. Morning. Lucy puts a sweater on over her house dress, sits in her chair and opens a church bulletin.)

Pray for sick. Ah -- see -- see. Lucy Taglione. That's me. That's my name.

(Lucy giggles like a thrilled 5 year old.)

Pray for sick. Lucy Taglione. I got a broken neck. I tell you about it. I was coming home from Married Ladies Rosary Society at 8:00 at night. I walked up my back

steps. I don't got a light on back there. Too much money, having a light on back there. And I fell up the steps. Oh God Almighty, I'm yelling "Help. Help me. I fell. I fell up the stairs!" Someone called for the ambulance. I don't know who. I think it was the lady next door, but she says no, but I think it was her. She don't talk much to me and I think she called the ambulance.

That ambulance took me to Grant Hospital and they told me I had a broken neck and they put me in a halo. Great God. I said -- look -- I can move my arms. I can move my legs. I'm going home. I don't want no halo in this life. They said I had a hairlined fraction and they put me in a halo. Look -- see the holes --

(She holds up her hair on both sides of her head. There are deep maroon scars the size of nickels on each side.)

My neck -- it pains me when I go like this.

(Lucy opens her mouth incredibly wide.)

Then it pains me.

(She goes back to the bulletin.)

Stuart brought me this bulletin. You just missed him. I like him. Every Sunday I would move a little closer to him at church and I would smile at him. Then he became my friend. He was so handsome. Woo-woo!

(She laughs girlishly and spits in her bag.)

I'm a shy lady. Stuart found out I broke my neck -- I don't know how -- he brought me over the bulletin. Every week he brings me over the bulletin now and he sits in Ned's old chair and we have a chat. He's handsome. He's aboutmaybe 14 - 15 inches taller than Ned. Works at business downtown. Stuart works downtown in his suit. He's important.

(She reads from the bulletin.)

Thought for the week. That Father Doyle -- ever week giving us some new thought to think. "Guardian Angels are all around us. We need only to look."

Yeah. Right. Throw that thought in the garbage. What

good is it? Throw that one in the garbage. I pray at Married Ladies Rosary Society and then I walk home and fall up my own back stairs break my neck. Where was my guardian angel? Taking lunch? Was my guardian angel taking lunch? Throw that one in the garbage.

(She spits, and looks out the window.)

Marget Wheeze don't come on Sunday. She goes visits her mother. She's a good girl.

Would any of you have a Hershey Bar? Do you got a Hershey Bar? No al-monds. No? Then I'll go get my cereal, my milk is heating up. Should be done by now. Don't go away.

(She shuffles off stage to her kitchen but keeps on talking.)

Sometimes I have Cheerios. Sometimes Corn Flakes. Sometimes I have -- what you call them -- Krispies. Snap Crackle Pop. I warm up my meelk and I put some Maxwell House in there and then I pour it over my cereal. Makes it nice and soft. Then I count out 10 raisins, put them on the top. Every morning. Makes my bowels nice and soft. Delicious.

(She shuffles on with her bowl, sits in her chair with the TV tray. She eats voraciously as she talks. Lucy always eats voraciously.)

I use to get up at 5:30 6 o'clock. Now I get up 9 o'clock 9:30. I would get up and make Ned a nice breakfast before we went to work. Pancakes or scrambled eggs.

Ned worked at the shoe factory. Red Cross shoes. He stayed there for 35 years. He worked hard. He was one of the favorite men there. I worked for the bread company -- Butternut Bread company. They moved their factory -- it use to be right down there -- but now it's in the suburbs. Now where the factory was is Webster Place movies. You can see 9 shows there. All different times. I would like to go to the show there. Once I would like to go to the show there.

Would you like to take me and go to the show? You think about that.

(She giggles, drinks the milk from her bowl and pushes it aside.)

But now I don't get up so early. What's the point? I'd just be up longer then. Just more time to spend.

I'll clean my bowl later. Give me something to do.

(She goes over to the table and takes her pill, marks it down. She picks up a Church Calendar.)

Every day I mark this X so I know. Then I wind up my clocks good. This one here and this one here are an hour fast so when we jump ahead, I'm already there. They make fun of me, but if I didn't do it like this, I would worry. I worry a lot. All my life I been a worrier. My family -- they would yell at me "Lucy, what good is worrying?" I don't know how I got this way. God made me this way. Ned -- he was a worrier too. We'd sit and worry together.

(The phone rings very loudly.)

Oh God Almighty.

(Lucy scruffles over to answer it. Lucy always answers a phone as if she is in great pain.)

Hello? Not so good. About the same. What time you coming tomorrow? Yes I heard the phone. Jesus God.

(To audience.)

Marget Wheeze fixed the phone louder.

(Into phone.)

What time you coming? You don't come Sundays, I know. I'm all along Sundays. What time -- oh. Okay. You got a pen? Okay. I need meeelk, bread. White kind. Pound loaf. I need dinners. Blankets. Blankets dinners. In frozen foods. Get me spaghetti, meat patty, and spaghetti. I need peanut butter for my snack at night.

(To audience.)

I like to have a little snack at 9 9:30.

(Into phone.)

And Hershey bar. No al-monds. And Marget Wheeze -- I

would like to have an apple pie. They got apple pie at Jool dollar twenty nine. Where are you going? TOO MUCH! TOO MUCH MONEY? GO TO JOOL! Oh. Okay. What time you coming? THAT'S TOO LATE!! I HAVE MY DINNER AT 2:00. I NEED MEEELK. WHAT WILL I DO? WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME? Oh. Okay -- noon. I see you at noon. I'll be waiting. Okay.

(She hangs up.)

She's not gonna come.

(She sees a smudge on the floor. She gets down on her hands and knees and starts to scrub with a ratty tissue.)

What is that? God, it's so dirty in my home. I didn't do this stain.

Al -- he lives with Marget Wheeze. They're not married. They live in sin. I say "What -- you're going to hell you live in sin like that." She don't believe in hell. She believes in tribes. She says we need to take care of our tribe. I said "Tribes! That's wild people!" She says yes.

She says the whole world is one big tribe. That girl is crazy. But I let her help me anyway. What else can I do? Beggars can't be choosers.

People are never what you think. You think that this man is trouble, he's a cowboy. And then he gives you a treat.

(She giggles.)

I told her, Marget Wheeze, you think too much. I know someone got a hemorrhage thinking too much.

Almost every day she comes visits me. I told her "You're not getting my money." "I don't want your money," she says. (I got a little money in the bank.)

I don't always be nice to her. I don't mean to be bossy, but I get nervous. I like things to be done my way because that is the right way. She's a good girl. It's too bad she's going to hell.

People never are what you think.

(She scrambles over and spits in her bag. She tries to get up

but can not.)

Sons of bitches. I need.....I need..... I need....

(Lights narrow to a close spotlight on Lucy. She is kneeling in a confessional. She blesses herself and whispers:)

Name of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Amen.

(She starts to get up.)

Oh Father -- one more thing. I was wondering. You know those nice chairs you got that sit in the rectory when you come in the door? I was wondering that maybe I could have one. They're so nice and short. They have a nice seat. I need a chair like that with a nice seat. I was wondering.

(Lights widen to reveal Lucy in her living room riffling through bills. Rainy day.)

Oh God. Oh God. I'm nervous today. I got worries you wouldn't believe. No one could bear this life except for me. No one.

You got any pain peels? I got pain you wouldn't believe.

I don't know. I don't know what will become of me. What will become of me? What?

I got a dirty sheet and a dirty pillow case and 2 sweaters need to be washed.

I got worries you wouldn't believe.

I'm not going to ask you to wash my sheet. I know. You're too busy. I know. I'm not going to ask you.

(She waits expectantly, hoping someone will volunteer to wash her sheet.)

I got to walk to the bank cash my social security check. Everybody -- they say "Lucy, take a cab, " they say, "it would only be \$2-\$3." I say "I'M NO CAB LADY." Payin' like that. No thank you. I will walk. I got a guardian angel. If he's not takin' lunch.

Maybe some time you could walk with me? What do you think?

Look -- look at this. Look. Grant Hospital. \$14,028.31. Jesus God. I called Shirley at the bank -- she's the only one I go to in line -- and I told her quick to come over here it was an emergency and she came over when she was suppose to be taking lunch to look at this, and she told me this wasn't a bill, it was a statement. She said insurance pays it. Still -- I look at this, it gets me nervous. But I keep looking at it. I can't help it.

(Lucy lets a big fart rip.)

I got gas.

No one can bear this life.

What time you got? What time you got? Oh God, I got to get ready. Friday I go to the church for Senior Luncheon. They don't give you much. But I go. Afterwards we play cards or do an activity. On Tuesday Sister Corita has arts and crafts. I don't go -- I'm no crafts lady. On Monday and Wednesday she does exercises. 9:00. Too early. But I go to Senior Luncheon. They don't give you much. Maybe hamburger, maybe a little stew. Fruit cup.

(Go to black. In the dark we hear an answering machine pick up.)

Peg: Hi, Neither Margaret Louise nor Al can come to the phone right now --

Al: BECAUSE WE'RE CRAZY CREATIVE COMEDIANS!

Peg: But we would love to hear from you --

Al: NO WE WOULDN'T!

Peg: So please leave a message --

Al: OR SEND MONEY. WHAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

Peg: Al -- (The machine beeps.) We hear Lucy's voice:

Attention. This is Lucy Taglione. Attention. Please have Marget Wheeze to call me. I'm sorry I yelled at her.

(pause) What -- do I hang up now? Hello? Oh God. What do I do now? Do I hang up? Good bye. **She hangs up.)**

(Lights up on Lucy scruffling down the aisle.)

Could you put these drops in my eyes? I went over to that lady next door but she's not home. I ain't got nobody now. Could you put these drops in my eyes? Please. You can do it. I trust you -- you're educated. Put these drops in my eyes. Here. Come on. I know -- you're sittin there being part of your chair so nice and here I come make you stand up put drops in my eyes.

(Assume someone puts drops in her eyes.)

Good. Good. That's good. Here -- give that to me. It's mine. Good. You did a good job.

(She starts to leave, comes back.)

I would say to you that I would go away and not bother you again only I know me and I'll be back.

(She scruffles on stage as the lights shift to her living room. Night. Dim bulb in the little lamp. She's tired and sits down.)

Marget Wheeze called Department of Aging for someone to come over help me clean because I told her she don't clean good like I tell her to. Department of Aging sends a man over for an interview. I thought I was suppose to interview him -- see if he's a good cleaner. No -- he's suppose to interview me -- ask me questions none of his business. I told Marget Wheeze to be here in case that man was a killer or a raper. So many questions he asked. When he found out I got money in the bank, he left fast. "I can't help you.", he says. Boom. Out the door. Marget Wheeze says "Lucy, what are you doing begging off people?!? You got \$200,000 in the bank" I told you I got money in the bank, I said back to her. "I didn't know you had so much! What are you saving it for? A rainy day?"

(Lucy gets up, lights a candle on the coffee table and says a silent little prayer. The candle casts a big flickering shadow on the wall.)

Every night I light a candle for Ned, say a little prayer.

Nights are hard-like. I worry about water in the basement. Rapers. If I'll have enough meelk for in the morning.

(She starts to scruffle back to her chair. Her shadow startles her.)

Oh, Jesus God! I thought I was a monster!

(She makes it back to her chair.)

" You live like a bag lady, Lucy. Why?" She says "I've been

paying out of my own pocket for your groceries because I thought you needed help, and all this time you've been lettin' me. How can I help you when you're so ungrateful? How can I help you when you're so ungrateful?"

Well I got mad at her back. "You get out of my house. You're going to rob me. You get out now.! And don't you come back!" You leave me alone! You!

She's not ever gonna come again.

I don't got nothing else to say today.

I don't know how long I'm gonna keep living. That's why I got that money in the bank. Look. Look at me. HOW MUCH OLDER CAN I GET? How many more wrinkles can get on this face? How much shorter am I gonna grow? Do you know? I didn't think -- when Ned died -- I didn't think I'd live 7 more years. But look at me. What if I live another 7 and another 7? I could live to be 110 years old dribbling all over myself. God. I would need that money then. Who would be living in the neighborhood then? Moon people? They would have to have a special mass for Moon language, get rid of Spanish Mass. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'M GONNA LIVE. Do you?

Also, I'm stingy. All my life I've been like this. I don't know how I got this way. God made me. Ned -- he was stingy, too. We were stingy pinchen' pennies together.

Are you coming tomorrow?

(Quick black out. Church bells. Lights up in the living room. Brighter bulb in the lamp. There is a newer, shorter chair by the window but her old chair is nearby. Lucy carries on a tall glass of milk and a big piece of cake.)

Sister Corita brought me a pound cake. De-licious! That woman is so good. That woman is a saint. I'm gonna freeze half of it.

This evening I took my walk. I like to take a little walk then I come home have my snack. I stopped at the pool hall say hello to Winnie and Mabel. You know, Paul Newman did a movie there. Yeah he did. Winnie and Mabel were busy tonight. They are busy a lot now because all the yubbies -- they want to play pool now. Billards. The yubbies are all over there with fancy sticks playing billards like Paul

Newman. Woo-Woo!

So I went to Burger King. The man there says "You can sit here for a while, but don't you be bothering the paying customers." I don't buy nothing at Burger King. Too expensive. So I sit quiet don't bother nobody. Some people know me. Some say hello back to me. But I don't bother them.

You know, some people, they are funny with me. Scaredish. What they think I'm gonna bite them? What? Marget Wheeze says "You dress like a bag lady!" But I'm not buyin' no new clothes. I'm an old lady.

Do you like my chair? Look. Look how nice my feet touch the ground. Look. Look how nice this seat is.

(Lucy stands up to show the seat.)

See -- it fits good. When the boys from the church come with it they tried to take my old one. Oh no, I said. I might need that!

(Lucy goes over to the coffee table and lights a candle. She scruffles back to her chair.)

You know, Marget Wheeze -- she bought me new blue loafers in the spring and they fit good but I don't wear them. I like this shoe because it has a cuban heel, and I like this one because I like it.

(Lucy sits down.)

So. I get hungry sitting at Burger King and I knew about this pound cake. I left and went through the community park Father Doyle built with all that money he's been collecting. In the park was the lady from across the street who's house don't got no walls. She was sitting on one of them benches and that baby she got -- Michael -- he's lying in his little blue carriage screaming his lungs out. Right there under that new crooked tree they planted. I said, "Lady, you're baby is screaming!" She didn't look too good, sitting there like yesterday's lunch. She says "I don't know what to do with him. All he wants to do is nurse but when I try to pick him up and feed him all he does is push me away and then he starts screaming because he's hungry." She says "He's pushing and pulling and he

won't stop crying. I can't make him understand. "Don't get too close, Lucy, you'll scare him." Well I didn't, but I said to her, "Lady, you just got to let him cry. But don't you be puttin' him down because he needs you. No matter how bad he screams, he needs you."

(Lucy finishes her tall glass of milk in one try.)

Does anybody got some floss? I need some floss for this tooth. Anybody got some floss? Maybe in your purse there -- you got some floss? No? How 'bout maybe some gum? A good kind?

(Light shifts to the porch. Day.)

You know about those last tomats in your garden in the Falltime? Nobody got a taste for them. You did your canning already, you're all set with your gravy for Sunday Dinner spaghetti, and then you look out the window and there's that ripe old tomat and nobody got a taste for her. Sometimes you pretend to forget about her -- I know that about you. I know. Sometimes though, you pick her because oh you feel so guilty. And you know soon you're gonna miss that taste. In the wintertime you're gonna miss that taste.

I know all about that old tomat.

(Light shifts to the living room. Night. Lucy is on the phone. Some roses sit in a vase.)

I need you go to currency exchange pay my gas bill. I got to have that tomorrow. Okay. And ham. I need some ham. Sliced kind. I pay you first. Okay. What time you coming? Good. That's good. Okay. Good night. Oh -- are you coming day after tomorrow too? Oh. Okay. Good bye.

(She hangs up. She takes her pill, marks it, winds her alarm clocks and sits in her chair and looks out the window.)

Marget Wheeze is coming tomorrow. Noon. Noonish.

You should have been here earlier! That Mexican boy cut my grass! Yeah -- he did. He did a good job. I gave him 50 cents.

Stuart -- he came by 4:00 4:30 and I said "Oh, it's not Sunday, what are you doing? Who died?" He brought me peels. Vitamin peels. For health. I took them because

he brought them, so nice in his suit, but I don't know. I know a woman went deaf taking vitamin peels. Do you want these?

(She holds out a container of vitamin pills.)

He stopped by on his way home from work downtown and he told me sitting in Ned's chair and having a little chat with me is his favorite thing in the week.

(She laughs girlishly.)

Then Marget Wheeze came knocking on the door. She's not mad at me anymore. She says money is a stoopid reason to stay mad at a person and she missed me. She missed me! She brought me a big box full of Lunch Buckets! What a treat! And you'll never guess this thing -- Marget Wheeze and Stuart -- they **know** each other. Yeah. From downtown. From business. Only he called her Peg and I said "No no. That's my friend Marget Wheeze." So now he calls her Marget Wheeze too. Stuart took me and Marget Wheeze to the bank cash my social security check. In his speedster. Woo-woo! I didn't have to cross no streets. They were just closing but Shirley let me in. She counts the money out good for me. 3 times she counts it out for me.

I'm a pain in the ass. That's me!

(She looks out the window. She lets a big fart rip.)

Do you got maybe a little piece of linoleum? I need a little piece of linoleum to put over my coffee table on top. Just a little piece. I don't care about color. Do you think maybe you could check see if you got that maybe in your basement? Never mind.

Sometimes I think I should disappear. Some people would like me better then. I might like me better if I disappear. But here I am. Asking you for a piece of linoleum.

Some people are kindish. Some people quick cross the street when I come because they are afraid, but some people say hello. You never know about people.

Are you afraid of me?

Marget Wheeze -- she says she needs me. "What are you

crazy?" I said to her. And Stuart and Sister Corita and Father Doyle and Shirley at the bank and lady across the street and the man at Burger King. She says they need me too.

She says the only thing worse than putting up with me would be not putting up with me.

Then she started talking that tribe stuff again and I said "Oh, God, don't you be tellin' me about that. I'm a good Catholic woman all my life. It's what I know.

What do you know?

(She gets up to light a candle.)

Marget Wheeze says I'm a reminder.

I think Stuart should marry Marget Wheeze and save her from going to hell with that Al. And then they should take me to the fireworks on the 4th of July!

(She lights the candle.)

Did you ever see that crazy bum man walks out in the traffic with his arm up like this? He walks right out in the middle of the cars. All over he walks. He's saying things nobody can understand. He don't get hit. I seen him on Fullerton Avenue and Ashland. But many years ago I seen him other places. All over.

You coming tomorrow? If you got time, stop by, I'll be here. I won't be going nowhere. If I'm not here when you come you look around. I'll be somewhere nearby.

(Lucy stands up, turns toward the phone. Her shadow on the wall reveals a pair of angel wings.)

The End