

The Bread Winner

By VALERIE BIRCH

(Scene 1)

CAFETERIA FOR THE WORKERS OF A LARGE BAKERY. THERE IS MUBLING, SNIFFING, TRAYS CLANGING. THE SOUND OF THREE COINS GOING INTO A VENDING MACHINE. A BUTTON IS PUSHED. NOTHING HAPPENS. THERE IS AN UNRELATED UPROAR OF LAUGHTER WHICH QUICKLY DIES DOWN.

BENNY: (half to himself) You're asking for a kick if you ask me. (P) (THERE IS THE SOUND OF KICKING THE MACHINE. IT RATTLES. **BENNY SPEAKS A LITTLE LOUDER**) You'll groan a lot more than that if you don't give me my soup. (THUMPS IT WITH HIS HAND. IT RATTLES AGAIN) One more nickle, that's all you're getting from me. You hear? (SOUND OF ONE COIN) I'll see to it that you get sent to the junk yard if you don't give me my soup, you...
MORTON: (A STRONG SOLID VOICE) Easy, my friend. Take it easy. Vending machine giving you a hard time?
BENNY: This thing can smell me coming from across the cafeteria, and then it takes to eat my mon... (SURPRISED) Morton. Morton Scavitch! What brings you to this end of town?
MORTON: (PRETENDING TO BE SURPRISED) Benny Little. If it isn't my old chum. (P) What? Don't tell me you are in a fight with a machine?

BENNY: I'll fight anything that tries to take me for a ride.
MORTON: Still a tough guy, eh? (LAUGHS) Well. Please, allow me. (P) (A SERIOUS VOICE) Machine, now you listen to me.
BENNY: (HUSHED BUT ENJOYING) Lower your voice!
MORTON: (IGNORING HIM) This is my old pal Benny Small standing here beside me, and it appears that he has just given his last five cents to you. (TO **BENNY**) I over-heard, is that true?
BENNY: (EMBARASSED) Morton. I work in this bakery.
MORTON: Excuse me Benny. (IN A STREET VOICE AGAIN) For that meagre gesture you should at least have the courtesy to grant him - what is it - a cup of chicken soup? (P) Nothing.
BENNY: You still have a fancy way with words, Morton. I can see your talking got you far. White shirt, fancy suit - nice shoes.
MORTON: (LAUGHS) You like the image?
BENNY: Well believe me, words won't get you anywhere with this thief of a machine.

MORTON: Oh?
BENNY: One more kick is the only way to release anything from the bowels of this tin tunnel. (SOUND OF A KICK).
MORTON: (LAUGHING) Well, well. Look hard and see who is throwing his weight around with fancy words now. But wait. Don't kick anymore. Remember, it was me who always did the kicking in this neighbourhood. So please, allow me to try again. (SOUND OF A COIN. THE VENDING MACHINE PURRS AND THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF A CUP FILLING WITH WATER) I think it likes my style. Money still speaks the finest language. (P) Chicken soup my friend.

BENNY: Thanks. (SIPS)
MORTON: Enjoy. (P) Now come. Let's have a seat and talk.
BENNY: Talk?
MORTON: Sure Benny. With words. (LAUGHS) Like old times, right?
BENNY: Times have changed, Morton. Look at you, I hardly recognize you.
MORTON: What is it? The suit? (LAUGHS) It's hand woven; tailor made. I had to have four fittings, isn't that something? Four fittings.

BENNY: (IMPRESSED) That is really something.
MORTON: Yes. Once I got myself out of these streets I... but look at you, you look the same as ever. You have really settled down haven't you?
BENNY: Well, I'm still here.
MORTON: That's good. Yes, I'm glad I found you. So now you can bring me right up to date on all that I have missed. Come now. Tell me, how is your family?
BENNY: My family? You want to know about my family? You really amaze me.
MORTON: Why is that Benny?
BENNY: Look at yourself. You have such a nice suit. And you want to know about my family?

MORTON: The suit? I have to wear it because of my business. But you, Minnie and I go back. We go back a long way.
BENNY: Those were the old days.
MORTON: The old neighbourhood still interests me. I like to come back now and again to get - caught up.
BENNY: To look in on the peasants once in a while eh?
MORTON: Ah, Benny. You're a cynic. I grew up here too, if you recall. These buildings. These streets. It's like stepping back. They give me inspiration.
BENNY: Inspiration?
MORTON: Look at this. I even have a business card.
BENNY: Well, boy from the street makes big. And your name in print too. (HE READS) "Morton Scanner"... Scanner? You changed your name?
MORTON: What kind of a name is Scavitch in the business world? I needed something that sounded - how should I say it - smooth. Scavitch was just too jagged.
BENNY: And now you're a real smooth talker, is that it?
MORTON: Go on and read the rest of the card.
BENNY: (HE READS) "Morton Scanner". That does sound smoother.

MORTON: Yes. I like it too.

BENNY: "Scanner. Fashions." Fashions?
MORTON: Go on.
BENNY: "Photography Department". Well, well. "In charge of locations". (P) "Cunningham Incorporated". (P) Fashions and photography. You have really come up in the world Morton. No more deadend streets for you.
MORTON: You got me started in the business Benny.
BENNY: Me?
MORTON: Yes, you. I owe you one for that.
BENNY: Yeh?
MORTON: You gave me the interest in pretty faces, didn't you?
BENNY: Ah. We were kids back then.
MORTON: Kids. (P) Where does the time go? (P) You and Minnie have, how many kids now?
BENNY: Just the one.
MORTON: A son wasn't it?
BENNY: A girl.
MORTON: How could I forget. (P) Mandy. Is that right?
BENNY: Misty.

MORTON: Of course, Misty. (P) Beautiful child she was - last I saw of her. I used to take her on my lap and then toss her up in the air. She must take the number one spot now - what? (P) Growing too, I bet. Why, she must be, how old now, six? Seven?
BENNY: Eleven.
MORTON: Eleven! Imagine that. Kids grow up so fast now, don't they. Changes overnight, I suppose, does she? Yes. Makes you want to give her everything you can before she's grown. When kids grow up, what have they got but memories? Isn't that right? It doesn't take long. (P) Do you have a picture so I can see what kind of job you have done in raising Misty so far? You know how I am for pretty faces.
BENNY: (QUIET, SUBDUED VOICE) A picture?
MORTON: Come now Benny. Don't tell me you haven't got a picture of your daughter in that wallet of yours. Remember the old days? Your wallet was always full of pictures. What was it we used to call you? (P) "Benny and his picture show".
BENNY: "Benny and his one man show". (CHUCKLES)
MORTON: That was it. And I was probably one of your biggest fans too. A wallet full of beauties, Benny. This neighbourhood had some beauties.
BENNY: We had them all.

MORTON: (QUICKLY) I remember your hip pocket - do you remember that? It would bulge because of your big fat wallet. I remember the material too - it was actually stretched over that wallet so the pocket faded a lighter colour than the rest of your jeans. (LAUGHS) My. The things that stick in your mind. (LAUGH TOGETHER) How could you ever afford all those prints? I don't recall you ever charging for the showings Benny?
BENNY: No. That's right. I never did.
MORTON: Why is that? It wasn't as though your work wasn't good enough. Take it from me, it was good.
BENNY: Yeh? Well I never could bring myself to charge my friends. Thought it would be bad business.
MORTON: Bad business? Come on, making money - that is business.

BENNY: Off my friends? No. I couldn't do that. (P) Funny, I had crazy dreams when I was a kid. I told myself that I was doing it - do you believe this - for public relations. (EMBARASSED LAUGH) Used to think I would make it big, get into photography full scale some day - you know, professionally. Hal (P) In the meantime, I would work here, delivering bread after school. To make some pocket money, so to speak. (LAUGHS MORE EASILY. PAUSES. AND THEN ADDS SADLY) Ah - now look at me. I'm still here.
MORTON: You're a hard worker Benny. That's rare. It's something you should be proud of. And honest too. If only I had people on my staff like you. (P) And talented. You're too much.
BENNY: You really think I've got talent?
MORTON: Indeed. This bakery is lucky to have you. (P) Tell me. What would you do with this place if you were in my shoes?
BENNY: I'd walk out of it - no, I'd run.

MORTON: (IGNORING HIM) Look around at the faces in here. Look, lean and hungry faces. (P) In a bakery. (TO HIMSELF) This place has potential. (PAUSE. BACK TO NORMAL VOICE) Look at your own face. Did you know that you have flour dust under your eyes? You're incredible. (LOWER VOICE) We could do a feature in here.
BENNY: Do you remember the features I used to give?
MORTON: What's that?
BENNY: My weekly feature.
MORTON: How could I forget...
BENNY: (QUICKLY) I haven't done any photography work in a while, but as you say, it is a talent.
MORTON:... The best of the blocks.
BENNY: Yes. Robin the Redbreast - now there was honesty.
MORTON: And Bertha Rhinestone...
BENNY:... and Joanna's Jump. A whole film to get that one, and only one shot. You must remember that one.
MORTON: The Great Fall. How could I forget. But you know, you wouldn't have even had that shot if it wasn't for me.
BENNY: What? (LAUGHS) What's wrong with your memory? I was doing O.K. until you walked into the scaffolding.
MORTON: Scaffolding? You call a plank balancing on top of two soggy cardboard cartons, a scaffold?

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the incompetence, they left out the creamed chicken."
 "Please," smiled Prudence, "I'm on a diet anyway." The nurse grinned and placed the tray on Prudence's lap.

"I'll be back in half-an-hour," she said walking into the hall. Prudence looked at her meal. She wasn't hungry. She wanted sleep. After setting the tray on her night stand, Prudence rolled on her side to face the window. The sun streaked her face. She could feel her tensions unwind. She was safe.

"Excuse me," Prudence was thrown back into reality. "Are you Mrs. Johnson? Prudence Johnson?"

"I am." He was an orderly. Neat and handsome.

"Your vitamin shots were scheduled for eleven, I'm sorry that I'm late." He carried a small tray to Prudence's bed.

"I don't recall the nurse mentioning anything about a vitamin shot." Prudence was panicked at the sight of the syringe. "I don't really need one anyway. In fact, I don't want one." The orderly's determined silence was terrifying. "I'll call the nurse." Prudence reached for the cord, but the orderly whipped it from her hand. "Dr. Lockley will hear about this," Prudence stated mechanically as the orderly pushed the needle into the bottle and pulled back on the plunger. Prudence screamed as the orderly clamped hard onto her wrist. A vein began to swell. "Let go of me! Who are you? How dare you!" She froze at the sight of his cold empty eyes.