

## Highlights

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DRAFT 1.0

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

MARIE-JOSEPH DEMERS  
 STEPH WATSON  
 BITSY

The play takes place on the street. Up left there is a row of houses and an apartment building which might be represented by a doorway with a sign above it. Down left there is a bench next to a bus stop.

**SCENE:**

(Lights up but dimly, as before dawn.)

SOUND: BIRDSONG AND  
 DISTANT TRAFFIC

(STEPH sits on the bench, ass on the back and feet on the seat. A streetlight shines over the bench. A book lies open on STEPH's lap and there is a knapsack on the seat. STEPH sits reading, turns a page, then yawns, looks up as one does when someone enters the room, and addresses the audience.)

**STEPH**

Another day another dollar.  
 I'm on late shift this week. I don't  
 mind. It means I get to see all the  
 midnight crazies and then watch the  
 daytime world wake up.

And I like it in there at night. It's a  
 way different clientele from in the day,  
 that's for sure.

(The door of the Apartments opens and a woman, Marie-Joseph, exits with a small yappy dog on a lead. The woman looks both ways and then walks down toward the bench.)

SOUND: DOG YAPPING +  
 DISTANT TRAFFIC

**STEPH**

That's Mademoiselle Mary-Jo and her  
 little dog Bitsy. Y'know, as in  
 ITSY BITSY SPIDER  
 CLIMBED THE WATER SPOUT,  
 ALONG CAME THE RAIN,  
 AND WASHED THE SPIDER OUT,  
 OUT CAME THE SUN  
 AND DRIED UP ALL THE RAIN  
 AND ITSY BITSY SPIDER  
 CLIMBED UP THE SPOUT AGAIN

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Good morning

(STEPH leaps up, makes an exaggerated bow, pats the dog, gestures MJ to sit.)

**STEPH**

Bonjour Mademoiselle! And how are you and your beast today?

(MJ wraps the leash around a corner of the bench and sits down.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

We are very good Steph, very good.

Have I told you my cousin is coming to visit? Eleanor McLean. That was her husband's name, McLean. She lives in Boston. We used to visit every year, she and I, back and forth. We traveled together as well. We had very good times.

**STEPH**

Oh yes, well that'll be nice for you. When did you say she's coming?

(MJ laughs and continues talking. STEPH opens the knapsack, pulls out a thermos and 2 mugs, pours coffee for both of them.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH (CONT'D)**

Except I spent a lot of money! I liked Vegas too much and we went too often. Don't ever gamble Steph! Take it from me.

SOUND: DOG YAPPING +  
TRAFFIC NOISE GETTING  
LOUDER

(MJ gives the dog a treat. STEPH speaks loudly.)

**STEPH**

I promise Mary Jo, I will never do as you have done and go to Lost Wages to throw away my hard-earned fortunes. I find it hard to even sit in the Tavern where they have the VLTs in the back room. Makes me too uneasy and sad to see the poor folk go back and forth from the machine that spits out the money to the machine that eats it up. It's like watching hard cases shoot up.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Well, it wasn't only that Steph. We had plenty of fun besides gambling. Plenty.

Ellie was a real firecracker back then. She and I did all kinds of things, went all kinds of places too: San Francisco, New Orleans, Florida, Manhattan - oh what a place it was! And what a time we had, what a time...

(MJ trails off and takes a sip of coffee.)

**STEPH**

Didn't you say you lived there? New York?

(Softly, under the breath)

NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
THESE VAGABOND SHOES

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

New York? Oh yes and what a place it was, Manhattan. I did live there. I had a two year nursing practicum, through St Mary's, training as a surgical nurse. It was the time of my life!

**STEPH**

As a nurse? Oh, I thought you worked as a bookkeeper?

No. That was Superior Windows. Much later. This was when we were barely twenty. When we were both still free. Ellie came up to see me and liked it so well she took a job as a shopgirl. We shared a flat with two other girls, both from Connecticut. They left to go back home most weekends so Ellie and I would throw shindigs, invite a few musicians and girls from the club. I never knew how I managed to live through all that and finish the nursing but I did. Then my father arranged an offer of a job at the Royal Victoria. So I came back.

**STEPH**

And you've lived here, in Montreal, ever since?

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

No. No, not always. I moved around a bit. Went to New Mexico for a while.

**STEPH**

With Ellie?

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Ellie? No. Now where was she?

I think when I was in New Mexico, Ellie was already married to Bob. I never understood why she wanted to get married at all and especially why she chose him but she did. People make their own decisions. I mean he was a nice enough man alright but a bit dull. Too dull for someone like Ellie. Too dull for me. But she disagreed.

(MJ sighs. STEPH sets the cup on the bench and does a few toe touches and other gentle stretches while chatting and listening to MJ.)

**STEPH**

uh huh So how long were you at the Royal Vic? Did you and Ellie live together in Montreal also?

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Oh no! We couldn't have done that. My father would have been furious. We did almost go to Paris together though. But then it fell through and then came Bob and so we never did.

(wistfully)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Paris.  
That's where I would go now, if i could still travel. It's where Ellie and I used to dream of moving to, when we were 15. You know, i thought it was maybe 2 or 3 years since I have seen her but she told me on the phone that it has been 12. Twelve years!

(STEPH straightens up and looks searchingly at MJ.)

**STEPH**

Twelve years. It's a long time. You must miss her.

(MJ nods and wipes a tear from her cheek.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Yes, yes it is. You are quite right. It is a long time. And I do miss her.

(MJ pulls a kleenex from her sleeve and, snivelling, dabs at her nose. STEPH touches her shoulder gently.)

**STEPH**

Are you okay Mary Jo?

(MJ snuffles and dabs and snuffles and dabs.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

I'm sorry my dear, yes I'm fine. Just indulging in some maudlin melancholy. Lamenting my losses and all that nonsense us old fogeys are prone to. Pay no attention. Your turn. Distract me.

**STEPH**

Distract you?

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Oui, oui. Tell me something you. You are never talking, always listening but never talking. Why not? Now it is time. Here I am always busy with myself and my old stories. I do not even know if you have sisters or brothers. Did you ever fall in love? Do you have children?

(STEPH sits on the bench next to MJ and leans forward, face in hands.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH (CONT'D)**

All I know is every time you are reading, a new book every time. To me you are simply the one who reads because it is all I know. No you must make me know more. I am listening. You tell. Please. Tell me a little.

Please.

(STEPH looks up, takes a big breath, exhales.)

**STEPH**

Okay. Well. I, I love dogs and mushrooms and I am allergic to fish. I still like real paper books better than e-books and I've never bought a tv but now that you can get movies on the computer, I watch all kinds of things.

(MJ gives STEPH a stern look.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Aaand?!

**STEPH**

Okay, okay.  
 I was born here in Montreal.  
 In 1959.  
 I have five,  
 had five, brothers, and uh,  
 three sisters.

Two of my brothers died when they were  
 boys still and one of my sisters last  
 year.  
 Cancer.

(MJ pats STEPH on the knee.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Passed on dear, passed on. And I'm sorry.  
 I know it is terribly hard to lose ones  
 siblings. There were 11 of us when I was  
 a girl, and now, I am the last, the last  
 of my father's children. There are some  
 cousins left but - what about you dear?  
 Do tell me Steph? Do you have children?

(STEPH looks at MJ and smiles.)

**STEPH**

I do, yes. I have two. Jamie and Jess.  
 Both went away to school. MBA at UWO for  
 Jess. Jamie is studying clinical  
 Psychology at U of T. Jess might move  
 back here someday but Jamie really loves  
 it in Toronto. Tells me it is waaaay more  
 cultured and interesting than here. First  
 time I ever heard that. Maybe it is true  
 or maybe it is just the glamour of being  
 somewhere new. I miss them both.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Married?

**STEPH**

Divorced. We lasted 5 years. So did our  
 divorce. What about you? Married?  
 Children?

(MJ sighs)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Hmmm. I would have married but I was born  
 in the wrong time and that's the truth of  
 it. And now it's too late. Ell- No, I  
 will not start, this is truly a story for  
 another day. I won't tell you now but do  
 ask me again. I want to tell you.

**STEPH**

I will. I will ask. Because I want to know. More coffee?

(Pours.)

Would you like me to take little Bitsy around the block?  
I have time.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

No. Not yet. First talk to me. I am such a lonely lady. After this I will only go back up to my little apartment and sit in my chair and work on my jigsaw. the next person I will speak to is the boy who delivers the groceries. Do you know I get deliveries twice a week just because I like the visits. Tell me anything you want. Tell me if your parents still live in Montreal? Your brothers? Sisters? Are you still working in that factory? Do you like it? Or if you don't want me to know your life, just tell me something you do for fun.

**STEPH**

I don't mind you knowing my life Mary-Jo. But it isn't very interesting.

(MJ bats her eyes coquettishly at STEPH.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

It's interesting to me.

**STEPH**

Okay well, my father lives in a residence on Sherbrooke Street, near Westmount Park. You know that nice one attached to Victoria Hall and the Library.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

hmmmp. I think none of them are nice. Waiting rooms for the dead and soon to be. Why hurry it up!?  
Besides, I never was fond of Bingo and when it comes to macaroni, I have no talent.

**STEPH**

It really isn't like that Mare. This place is really good and Dad likes it. he's made friends, plays chess, joined a book club, goes to shows at the hall and can go from there to the greenhouse. You on any waiting lists? If not, you should be. At least then you have some choice.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

No thank you. I've been in that apartment for 42 years and I plan to be there the rest of my life. The whole idea is ludicrous. Tell me, where is your mother?

**STEPH**

She left when I was 11. Ran off with the dentist. I didn't know that then and we never heard anything for years. When I came back from summer camp that year, Kamp Kanawana. My brothers sat me down and told me she was hit by a bus and that she died on the way to the hospital. My sisters were still little, 2, 3, and 5. They didn't remember her hardly at all but in the end it was my sister who died, Lise, who figured it out and tracked her down. My brother Jack was furious. Said to him she would always be dead. Called her a worthless slut. Of course before she left, he was her favourite. Probably why he hates her so much. Anyway, she lives in Victoria with Dr Dan the dithpickable dentitht.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

I used to have a very nice dentist. I didn't do like so many used to and get them all knocked out for dentures even though my father offered to pay. My dentist always told me what good teeth I had.

(STEPH looks at a wristwatch.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH (CONT'D)**

So I looked after them. Brushed and flossed and rinsed. But then the osteoporosis came on and, well... that's also why I have this horrible hump. So now I am a proper toothless dowager and after 15 years of these ridiculous dentures i still can't put them right half the time. And do you know, sometimes when I am walking with my Bitsy in the park, the children call me 'witchy witch'.

(STEPH looks at a wristwatch.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH (CONT'D)**

When younger, I might have been pleased to be called a witch. At least I would have thought it was funny. But now, now it makes me sad. I don't know why.

**STEPH**

I have to go soon Mary Jo. Are you sure you wouldn't like me to walk Bitsy around?

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

No dear, not today. I need the exercise. And maybe there will be someone to talk to in the park.  
Will you be here tomorrow?

**STEPH**

Yes, tomorrow and the next. Then I have three days off. Maybe you'd like to have lunch with me on Thursday? My treat. There's an Italian place my Dad likes on the corner of Grosvenor. It would be fun to introduce you. I'm sure he would love to meet you!

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

umm, you know dear, I am not so interested to meet a man. At my age especially.

(STEPH laughs.)

**STEPH**

I didn't mean it that way! But if you did want to meet someone, you know there are lots of smart and interesting people living in that place. You might find someone to talk to.

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Yes, yes, push around an old lady why don't you.

(STEPH laughs more and stands and packs up the thermos and cups while MJ talks.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH (CONT'D)**

Trying to bully me into an early grave already and we hardly know each other yet!  
Still, I will accept the invitation for lunch and I will meet your father if he wishes to join us. But for the rest, just please leave it alone. I like it fine where I am.

(STEPH laughs more and gives MJ a small hug and a peck on the forehead.)

**STEPH**

It's always a pleasure to talk with you Mare. The highlight of my day.

(MJ beams at Steph. Steph grins back and waves while leaving stage right.)

**MARIE-JOSEPH**

Me too dear, me too.

(MJ waves as STEPH exits, lights fade to black.)