

Steven Barkhimer
from *Windowmen*

Scene 1

Joe and Steve are standing side-by-side in a booth, nine or ten feet wide. They are behind a sheet of thick clear plastic, like bank tellers. They are “window men” at a stall in the Fulton Fish Market beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. It is 1981, before the city “sanitized” the area.

There is a counter that spans the length of the booth. Joe works the higher, left, half of the counter; Steve works the lower, right half. Two holes in the plastic allow them to pass money and receipts in and out to the sales floor.

The sales floor is beyond the window; it should suggest a huge vault filled with barking salesmen and huge metal trays heaped with fish.

The booth is purely functional, humorless, devoid of any concession to looks or comfort; perhaps a sad calendar with pictures of busty women sitting on tires. Spartan, yet somehow shabby and messy. An ancient metal desk, used more like a chair. Bits of paper and a chart tacked on impossibly-cheap grey walls; hanging from a few nails are crusty-looking tools of the trade, such as the grappling hooks that salesmen use to toss fish around, or the larger nastier-looking hooks that journeymen use to haul boxes off the trucks.

Joe is 36, large and slovenly. Steven is 22, slight and slovenly.

On the counter in front of Joe is a large ledger in which he dutifully records orders that come in on the overhead speaker; a smaller ledger in which he records only orders from the owner, Leo, and an electric machine that stamps “PAID” on receipts with a loud THUNK! There is a cash drawer below the counter that contains a huge amount of money.

On the counter – slightly lower, obviously the “junior” counter -- in front of Steve, is: a metal cash box, a rubber “PAID” stamp and an inepad, and a phone with at least four lines that are continually lighting up and blinking.

Above their heads, on an extendable cord, is a bull-horn speaker. Through this blare orders from the salespeople on the floor; Joe and Steve must pull down the horn to speak with them. The incoming voices are harsh and electric; when Joe and Steve speak into the horn, their voices reverberate on the sales floor.

The atmosphere is alert, business-like, the tension of closely-controlled chaos. The clock reads 3:59 (a.m.).

Joe, pencils behind ears, is busily preparing his pad and drawer and machine. He is already gearing up. Steve has evidently just arrived and is trying to settle in.

JOE
So you got here alright.

STEVE
My god, four in the morning and the place is already insane!

JOE
Just wait.

STEVE
Out of control.

JOE
You gotcher coffee?

STEVE
No, I didn't have ...

JOE (barking violently through the window-hole)
Jimmy! Coffee!

STEVE
That's all right...

JOE
Anything to eat?

STEVE
No, that's ok...

JOE (through the window)
Jimmy! Donut! (to Steve) The hour is at hand. You ready?

STEVE
Sounds fun.

JOE (through the window)
Jimmy! Make it two! (to Steve) Horse is at the startin' gate...

LOUDSPEAKER (Julius' voice)
Joe, we got two-twenty-six Lunch Wagon...

JOE
And we're off.

STEVE

Wow. Four o' clock. On the dot.

LOUDSPEAKER (Julius)

Two twenty-six Lunch Wagon with three-by-one-twenty-five mix flounder, comin' in at Y-C-A.

JOE (writing)

Dollar forty-five.

LOUDSPEAKER (Julius)

That's three seven five flounder for two two six. Did what's-it, Steven make it in?

JOE (pulls down horn, speaks into it)

Right here, Julie. (Steve waves through the window)

STEVE

Three seven five?

JOE

Pounds.

STEVE

Serious.

JOE

As a heart attack.

LOUDSPEAKER (Leo)

Joe, Joe, four box a mackerel Y-X, Joe.

JOE (swiftly writing)

Five hundred mackerel, buck-fifty. You comin from uptown?

STEVE

Sixty-first and Second.

JOE

Oh yeah?

STEVE

Well, the place is a little

JOE

Oh, right there at the bridge.

STEVE

Yeah.

JOE

Yeah, well, you'll find somethin.

LOUDSPEAKER (Augie, Portuguese)

Mornin, Joe. Joe, gotta hundred pound a porgie straight up, twenty-four
Fulton Dock.

JOE

Roommate?

STEVE

Huh?

JOE

Live by yourself?

STEVE

Girlfriend.

LOUDSPEAKER (Augie)

Howza new guy, Joe? (Joe raises a thumb to Augie, "ok"; Steve waves)

JOE

You train it down here?

STEVE

Subway, yeah.

JOE

That's balls.

STEVE

That's no money.

JOE

Yeah, well. Just keep an eye out.

STEVE

Oh, I do.

JOE

You don't know who's out there.

LOUDSPEAKER (Augie)
Eh, Stevie! Don' let Joe f___ you now! Right, Joe? Joe, he like to f___
people! (laughing uproariously)

JOE (pulls down horn, speaks into it)
Hey, Augie. (He gives him the finger.)

LOUDSPEAKER (Augie)
Got that, Stevie? (laughing) Good man!

JOE (to Steve)
So, she can handle that schedule?

STEVE
Who?

JOE
Your girlfriend.

STEVE
Well, you know...

JOE
You gotta start sendin' it in before you go to bed, you know?

LOUDSPEAKER (Seymour's voice)
Joseph, we got 75 Beekman Dock with ... you want the medium, the large...

JOE (to Steve)
Send it in while you got the energy, know what I'm sayin'?

LOUDSPEAKER (Seymour)
Large, Joe. Two hundred hake at Y X for 75 Beekman.

JOE
Dollar fifty. I don't care how old you are, no one gets used to this schedule.

STEVE
I can imagine.

JOE
It ain't human. We're evolved to be asleep at this hour. Ah, here's comes your
first collect.

STEVE
This guy here?

JOE
Right, you're the collection man.

STEVE
I'm the collection man.