

TOLLBOOTH

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Janice Fronczak

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SYNOPSIS: Three drivers' humorous experiences with three very different tollbooth operators. Randall, the tourist, has serious financial dealings with his toll operator. A helpful psychiatrist, David, tries to calm down an angry ex-telephone company employee turned toll operator and sweet housewife, Karen, faces off with a stalking tollbooth operator.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(THREE WOMEN, THREE MEN)

SELINDA (F).....A twenty-year veteran tollbooth worker, serious about her work.

RANDALL (M)A forty-something tourist, on his way to New Jersey from Louisiana with no cash on hand.

DAVID (M)A helpful psychiatrist on his way to work.

LOLITA (F)Thirty-year-old woman recently fired from the telephone company; new tollbooth worker. Unsteady, angry, scary.

ART (M)Twenty-five-year-old tollbooth worker for five years, nosy, thinks he's sexy, plays mind games with customers.

KAREN (F).....Thirty-year-old average housewife who teaches at a local community college; on her way to work.

SETTING

All six characters will eventually be on stage at the same time. There are three sets of two chairs representing three different tollbooths; present day. SELINDA, LOLITA, and ART sit in their booths. One passenger (tollpayer) comes in at a time.

SOUND EFFECTS

Outdoor car sounds, horns, etc.

PRODUCTION NOTES

All six characters will eventually be on stage at the same time. All characters freeze or bow their heads while the other characters are talking. All props can be mimed or used minimally (checkbook, business card, pen, etc.).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play was performed at the *Last Frontier Theatre Conference* in Valdez, Alaska and worked wonderfully with just six chairs and the actors. Everyone has a toll road story!

AT RISE:

RANDALL enters and sits next to SELINDA.

SELINDA: That will be fifty cents, please.

RANDALL: What? Fifty cents? That is outrageous!

SELINDA: Fifty cents, please.

RANDALL: Gee, it looks like I don't have any change.

SELINDA: Do you have any bills? I can make change.

RANDALL: No, as a matter of fact, I do not have any cash on me at all!

SELINDA: The toll is fifty cents. You need fifty cents to get through.

RANDALL: Look, I'm from Louisiana, and I'm on my way to New Jersey. We don't have tolls in Louisiana or anywhere in the South. Couldn't you just look the other way and push the button for the lever and just let me go through? Nobody would ever see . . .

SELINDA: Do you think I would go against the laws of our fair state for a transient?

RANDALL: Well, what am I going to do? I was going to cash a check at the next available exit. Pleeeasee, let me go through.

SELINDA: *(Pause.)* Do you have a check? You could write me a check.

RANDALL: A check? For fifty cents? It costs me seventy-five cents every time I write a check.

SELINDA: Well, I could cash it for you, I guess. You'd have to write me a check for a dollar twenty-five to cover the fifty-cent toll plus your seventy-five cent charge plus another two dollars and fifty cents for my handling fee.

RANDALL: Well, I guess that sounds fair. But, well, you see . . . there's a problem.

SELINDA: Not like I have anywhere to go. What is it?

RANDALL: What is what?

SELINDA: *(Leans in.)* Your problem!

RANDALL: Hey! No reason to get hostile—

DAVID enters the second tollbooth, sits next to LOLITA. SELINDA and RANDALL bow their heads. When one "tollbooth" has dialogue, the other characters freeze with their heads bowed.

DAVID: Thank you. Have a nice day.

LOLITA: Nice day? I never have a nice day.

DAVID: Well, I'm sorry. I am sure you do a real nice job here at tollbooth number, eh, oh, number 275, and the job seems like it suits you.

LOLITA: Yeah, well, I had to take this job. I was fired from my last job.

DAVID: Fired?

LOLITA: Fired. Because I hurt people. I hurt people real bad. But I only hurt people if I haven't taken my medicine.

DAVID and LOLITA freeze.

SELINDA: Look, just write a check for a total of let's see . . . fifty cents, a dollar, twenty-five cents, two-fifty, for a total of four dollars and twenty-five cents and make it out to Selinda. I'll fill in the last name. I have a stamp. That way you can be on your way to Rhode Island.

RANDALL: New Jersey!

SELINDA: Whatever.

RANDALL: Oh. I forgot. I would have to ask you to hold my check. Actually, I don't have any money in the account right now. You see, I have two checking accounts. And the one I was going to write you a check from is empty. I was going to transfer funds today. So, I'd have to ask you to hold the check for at least ten business days. That all right?

SELINDA: Well! That's a different story altogether. Now we're talking about me paying for your fifty-cent toll, holding your check for ten business days . . . mmmh. There would definitely have to be an extra surcharge of oh, say, twenty-two fifty added for all my inconvenience. And since I was going to be so kind and

considerate of your needs, I was going to ask you for a small loan of thirty dollars—just until payday. I need to pay my satellite dish upgrade bill, and I'm a bit short this month.

RANDALL: Well . . . I would certainly like to do the gentlemanly thing. Thirty dollars, you say? I would like to oblige you. Of course, there will be short-term interest on any loan I make, especially to a complete stranger from the North.

RANDALL and SELINDA freeze.

DAVID: (*Cautiously.*) Soo . . . have you taken your medicine today?

LOLITA: Oh my, yes. I take it every day now. It is not a pleasant experience to be fired. You know? Being hit with a phone can really mess you up. At least no one died.

DAVID: Ah, yes! Be glad for that. Guess I'll be going now. If you need someone to talk to, I'm a psychiatrist. Call me anytime. Bye!

LOLITA: How about tonight?

DAVID: What?

LOLITA: You said anytime. How about tonight? I get off in twenty minutes. I do need to talk to someone. To you. How about you pull over there where those phones are and wait for me?

DAVID: Umm . . .

DAVID and LOLITA freeze. KAREN enters and sits in the third booth next to ART.

ART: (*Real sexy.*) Hi. Going to work?

KAREN: Yes. Can't be late for my class.

ART: No. Don't want your students to wonder where you are. And you're running late tonight. You've got about eighteen minutes to get there on time.

KAREN: You know where I work?

ART: Yes.

KAREN: But I never told you. Did I?

ART: I know a lot of things about you. You would be very surprised to learn what I know about you.

KAREN: I have to go.

ART: Yeah. I know, for instance, that you live in a two-story saltbox house that needs paint, has a gravel driveway, and oh yeah, you have two little boys.

KAREN: My God! How do . . . why . . . ? Have you been following me?

ART: No. It's a simple matter of being interested in license plates. Take yours for example. "LUV2TCH." Doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out you're a teacher, and since you teach at night, that's when I see you, you obviously teach at a college or some kind of night school. Yeah, your little boy is real cute. Real cute.

KAREN: Joshua? You have met Joshua? My little guy?

ART: He goes to a nice preschool. I hear St. Anthony's has real nice ladies that run the place.

KAREN: Look, this is making me very uncomfortable. Why are you stalking me and my children? I knew you were attracted to me, but look, please don't, just don't say any more. Please, I have to go.

ART: School bell's ringing!

KAREN: You should not be hounding people.

ART: Hounding? Is that what you call it? Can I help it if your husband leaves you and the children alone for hours on end and I happen to be a man who feels strongly towards you? Just think of me as a guardian angel. You do believe in angels, don't you? I'll be watching you.

ART and KAREN freeze.

RANDALL: I think I've figured it out. If I write my check for sixty dollars, that ought to cover my toll, your loan. You know? We need an accountant. This is getting complicated.

SELINDA: Excellent! My cousin is an accountant. He's right out of school, so he'll probably only charge seventy dollars an hour. Add that onto the total.

RANDALL and SELINDA freeze.

KAREN: I don't even know your name and you know everything about me. I am going to ask you to please not take any more interest in me. Leave me alone. You are really scaring me.

ART: Hey! I cannot help being attracted to you. You led me on.

KAREN: Led you on? What you are talking about? All I ever did was give you my toll money and occasionally ask you for change.

ART: What about all those, "How are you tonight?" and, "The weather's not too bad tonight?" Every night, the same thing. I know you must like me. You are trying to lead me on. You like me and want me to be your boyfriend.

KAREN: Boyfriend? I'm married. Been married for fifteen years. I don't have boyfriends.

ART and KAREN freeze.

LOLITA: Oh, you're just like the rest. You never say what you really mean. I think that is what makes me so angry. So really, really angry. My anger is frightening. I can't control it when it gets going. It is like it has a life of its own. I guess that is when I—

DAVID: Hurt people?

LOLITA: See, you do understand.

DAVID: What is your name?

LOLITA: Lolita. My friends call me Lilly.

DAVID: Well, Lilly—

LOLITA: YOU'RE NOT MY FRIEND!

DAVID: Sorry. Please calm down. You don't want to get fired from this job, do you?

LOLITA: I haven't hurt anyone here . . . yet.

LOLITA and DAVID freeze.

RANDALL: I was thinking. You could be getting a kick-back from your relative, the accountant. It's been done. Just because I'm from Louisiana doesn't mean that I was born yesterday.

SELINDA: Are you accusing me of unethical behavior?

RANDALL: Just to be on the safe side, I think we should also hire a lawyer. This time my cousin is a lawyer. Tell your cousin, the accountant, to fax the spreadsheet to my cousin, the lawyer, just to make sure everything is on the up and up. We'll split the accountant and lawyer's fees.

SELINDA: Sounds fair. Of course, there will be the charge of the long-distance fax and any secretarial work needed.

RANDALL: How about you write me a check for your portion or just send yours on with mine and they can both be in escrow?

SELINDA: I would feel good with my money in competent hands. Like an investment.

RANDALL: Excellent idea. Tell your cousin, with my cousin's approval, to invest our money on the securities bond market until the whole thing get flushed out. I love to talk business!

RANDALL and SELINDA freeze.

ART: Come, come now. I told you, I know more than you think I know. I know . . .

KAREN: Yes?

ART: Ralph?

KAREN: What?

ART: You know exactly what I'm talking about. Ralph?

KAREN: What do you know about Ralph?

ART: Plenty.

KAREN: Look. What is it that you want? What do you want?

ART: Nothing. I'll see you tomorrow night. Karen.

KAREN: But—

She drives off confused. ART freezes.

DAVID: Are you sure you took your medicine tonight?

LOLITA: I know my own body, don't I? How do I know you didn't take your medicine? Huh? How do I know that you're not some highway-deranged maniac? Huh? How do I know that?

DAVID: I'm a doctor. A psychiatrist. I wouldn't hurt people. Oh, I'm sorry I said that.

LOLITA: I have taken my medicine. *(Pauses, sees DVD player, angry.)* Is that a portable DVD player in your car? Do you think you are better than me because you have a portable DVD player in your car? I'm sick to death of seeing people drive up to my tollbooth right in the middle of a climactic scene of Batman or whatever on their woopy-doo portable DVD players. Like they are just way too busy to even look at me, much less have a pleasant banter with me. Do you think that might get to a person? You had better pull over and wait for me.

DAVID and LOLITA freeze.

SELINDA: *(As she writes a check.)* Okay. I think I have got a total for both of us. You write me a check for five hundred dollars and I'll write mine for two hundred dollars.

RANDALL: *(Finishes writing his check.)* Here you go. Oh, and here's my cousin's name and fax number. *(Hands her his check.)*

SELINDA: And here you go! Enjoy our state.

RANDALL: I will! *(Exits.)*

SELINDA freezes.

DAVID: I don't usually do this the first time I meet people. But I'm going to invite you to a group therapy session I'm holding tonight. I'm on my way now. I think you could get what you're looking for there.

LOLITA: Tonight? I'd love to come. Where is it?

DAVID: Here is my business card. It's being held on the second floor of the Municipal Hospital on Twenty-fifth Street. I'd like to have you there. We could talk further there.

LOLITA: Nobody ever took an interest in me the way you do. I get off soon. I'll be there. Oh, never mind the toll. You have given me more than enough. See you later.

DAVID: Bye. (*Exits.*)

LOLITA freezes.

ART: Oh, here comes that retired Army Lieutenant Colonel. Can't wait to talk to him tonight.

BLACKOUT.

THE END

NOTES

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