

# JOEY'S LAST MEAL

By

HENRY MEYERSON

# JOEY'S LAST MEAL

© 2023 by Henry Meyerson

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **JOEY'S LAST MEAL** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **JOEY'S LAST MEAL** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to [genekato@nextstagepress.com](mailto:genekato@nextstagepress.com)

## SPECIAL. NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **JOEY'S LAST MEAL** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

*This work is dedicated to my family and waistline  
both of which seem to be expanding.*

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY:** Now about 35, JOEY has the attire and pallor befitting someone who has been on death row for the past 15 years. Despite tomorrow being the Big Day, JOEY'S demeanor is more resigned than depressed. He is a rotten guitar player and his singing voice is worse. His cell is overflowing with books.

**AL:** A little younger than Joey, AL is in the next cell awaiting the same fate as Joey down the line. Since he has some more time on his calendar, he is a little spunkier than Joey.

**HARRY:** Just past 40, looking slightly disheveled in his prison guard uniform, HARRY might look befuddled, but he knows enough to stay above the fray. HARRY just wants to do his job and get his pension.

**SARGE:** Now in his mid-40's, SARGE is trim and neat, all spit and polish, in his uniform. He is never seen without his club and it's clear he knows how to wield it. SARGE is no nonsense and not above violence to maintain control.

**CHAPLAIN:** With his cherubic, unmarked angelic face, one that has never doubted his calling, CHAPLAIN'S age could range from 20-50. Although initially dressed in casual civvies, CHAPLAIN dresses into his robes with solemnity as the big moment for Joey nears.

**WARDEN:** Now in his 50's, WARDEN, ever the bureaucrat with an eye on political advancement, has always run a tight ship, WARDEN'S attire befits a middle level bureaucrat who just as easily could have been middle management in an accounting firm.

**BETTY:** Not having much money, Joey's wife BETTY, about 35, buys her clothes at the bargain tables at the local Sears. Her out of control hair and her tough as nails approach attest to the hard life BETTY has led.

**MOTHER:** Joey's MOTHER, now pushing 60, may dress the part of a nice little old lady in a simple black dress and comfortable shoes, but this lady is a survivor and has her own checkered past.

**PLACE:** A small prison cell block in an unknown place.

**TIME:** Now.

JOEY'S LAST MEAL

# JOEY'S LAST MEAL

*Prison. Two cells. Each cell has a cot, a stool and a small table. A chair sits between the cells, facing downstage.*

*JOEY is seated on a stool in his cell, reading. The cell is chock full of books. AL sits in an adjacent cell, Spartan in comparison to Joey's cell. The door to the cells are closed. HARRY enters with a tray of food, stands in front of Joey's cell.*

**HARRY.** Here it is, Joey. Put down the book.

**JOEY.** I told you I didn't want anything,

**HARRY.** You have to have it.

**JOEY.** Why?

**HARRY.** It's the rules.

**JOEY.** Whose rules? They ain't my rules.

**HARRY.** I don't know whose rules, Joey. Maybe the state. I think it's a state rule you have to have the meal.

**JOEY.** Well, you know me, Harry. I never was one for rules. That's how come I wound up in this place. Now, you tell me why I should eat it.

**HARRY.** Because it's for your own good, Joey. Vitamins and all that. I don't know what else to tell you. It's the rules and it's got vitamins. That's it, I think.

**JOEY.** Is it going to get me out of here?

**HARRY.** It's just food, Joey, not some sort of miracle. Ice-cream never sprung nobody. Look what you got here. You got your steak. You got your mashed potatoes with butter on 'em. You got your piece of apple pie. You got your chocolate ice cream. You got your coffee. I don't eat as good as you got it.

**JOEY.** Yeah, well, if it can't get me out of here, I don't want it.

**HARRY.** Am I not mistaken, or did you not order this stuff?

**JOEY.** I did.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**HARRY.** So?

**JOEY.** So I had a change of heart. I figured at this point I'm entitled.

**HARRY.** See, there's your problem, Joey. My shrink calls it "a sense of entitlement." Like you're owed something. My wife's got the same problem. Makes me nuts.

**AL.** You see a head doctor?

**HARRY.** Despite what you think, Al, this job ain't exactly a walk in the park. My life has it's ups and downs, too, you know. I mean, could you imagine having to deal with guys like you every hour of every day and needing ten years for retirement.

**JOEY.** What do you talk about with the shrink, Harry?

**HARRY.** It's called venting.

**AL.** Venting. Like, a fan over an oven that pulls out the bad smells?

**HARRY.** More like bad thoughts, but you wouldn't understand. *(to Joey)* All I'm saying, Joey, especially at a time like this, is how important it is for you to go along, get along with folks instead of causing problems. In fact, now that I think of it, there were always problems managing you. Always little things, but annoying, you know?

**JOEY.** No. Like what?

**HARRY.** Well, your library books, for example. You never got them back on time. Things like that. They pile up after a while.

**JOEY.** *(looking around his cell)* Yeah, they surely do.

**AL.** He is a very learned man, Harry.

**JOEY.** Not yet, but getting there.

**AL.** Better read faster, Joey.

**JOEY.** Amazing what you can learn about life reading books, Al.

**HARRY.** But them books never educated you on how to get along in life, did they? You never just went along.

**JOEY.** Yeah, you're right. I know. That's how come I'm in here, remember?

**HARRY.** But it's not to late to change, Joey.

**JOEY.** Yes, it is, Harry. And besides, I hate change.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**HARRY.** Yeah, me too. I'm with you on that. That's how come I'm here ten years, married twenty. You kind of get yourself locked in, if you follow me.

**JOEY.** I think I follow that, Harry. Change can be a bitch. I been here now, what, fifteen years, and in all that time I never changed nothing including my underwear.

**HARRY.** No, that's not true. Underwear change every Friday. You know that.

**JOEY.** That was a joke, Harry. I was making a joke about change. Listen, I can't keep explaining this stuff to you.

**HARRY.** You don't have to explain nothing to me. I'm explaining it to you. If you had only followed the rules...

**JOEY.** That's why you got a good job here, Harry. You know the rules and you stick with 'em. "Right down the middle Harry," we call you.

**HARRY.** Is that right? Geez, I didn't know that. "Right down the middle Harry."

**JOEY.** Oh sure. (*confidentially*) We have names for all you guys.

**HARRY.** That right?

**JOEY.** The guard over in C block. We call him Barney on account of his kind of purplish skin. Then there's...

**HARRY.** Listen Joey, I'd love to stand here and shoot the bull about this, but I gotta move on. Lotta guys waiting for their meal. So you going to eat or what?

**JOEY.** What, Harry, and please don't take it personal.

**HARRY.** Maybe you'd like something different. Maybe you're a vegetarian all of a sudden. I don't know.

**JOEY.** Nah. It's just that I kinda lost my appetite.

**HARRY.** I'm with you on that, Joey. In your situation, I guess I'd feel exactly like you. But you know, I gotta tell ya, this never happened before.

**JOEY.** No kidding?

**HARRY.** No kidding. In my ten years, every guy in your place eats like a wolf when they got to this point.

**JOEY.** I guess I'm all wolfed out, Harry.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**HARRY.** Well, I gotta report this to the Sarge. He always wants to hear about problems. Poor guy, as if he doesn't have enough on his mind.

**JOEY.** Give him my best. *(Harry exits with the food tray.)*

**AL.** Ya could of taken the food, you know.

**JOEY.** Yeah, but I didn't want it, Al. No point taking it and not eating it. Then I'd feel guilty about my wasting the food.

**AL.** Yeah, but you could have just taken it and then passed it over to me. Who would have known?

**JOEY.** Me. That would be like stealing and I don't need any more aggravation in my life, not at this point. I got enough going on.

**AL.** Still, what's coming up, on an empty stomach...

**JOEY.** Shut up, Al.

**AL.** Oh, yeah, I'm sorry, Joey.

**JOEY.** Don't matter what you say, Al. It won't change a thing. Eat, don't eat; talk, don't talk. In the end... *(They sit and contemplate.)* Okay, maybe you're right. I'll call Harry and get the food. No reason it should go to waste.

**AL.** It would be real nice of you, Joey.

**JOEY.** HEY, HARRY. *(Harry enters with the tray of food.)*

**HARRY.** I knew you'd change your mind.

**JOEY.** Well, you're wrong. I want you to give the food to Al, here.

**HARRY.** Can't do that.

**JOEY and AL.** Why not?

**HARRY.** Well, it's a special meal for Joey. Al ain't special. Yet. When's your date, Al?

**AL.** None of your business.

**JOEY.** So it's me or the garbage?

**HARRY.** That's it.

**AL.** I think you're lying. I think you're taken it for yourself.

**HARRY.** Swear to God.

**JOEY.** Let me see that tray. *(Harry brings the tray to Joey).* Did you nibble on that apple pie?

**HARRY.** Just a little of the crust. I couldn't help myself.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**AL.** Ya see, that's the problem with this place. Everyone is out for themselves. And they lie. They swear to God and then they lie. I'm tellin' ya, I can't wait to get out of this place.

**HARRY.**, All in good time, Al.

**JOEY.** Yeah, Al, I wouldn't rush this if I was you.

**HARRY.** So, is that it? Your final word?

**JOEY.** Final word, Harry. *(to Al)* Sorry, Al. *(Harry exits.)*

**AL.** I gotta tell ya, Joey, I admire your stand on this. Right to the end you never let them push you around.

**JOEY.** Gee, thanks, Al. Nice of you. I mean, I got my pride. Just because...well, just because of...you know...doesn't mean I have ta knuckle under. Someone has to stand up to the big guys.

**AL.** On the other hand, I think just this once you could have put up more of a fight for me. Pride is good, but a steak. Geez. A steak. And I saw it, Al. It was this thick. And the ice-cream. Pie ala mode.

**JOEY.** Could you please knock it off already with the food? This is a time to be serious.

**AL.** I'm being serious. I mean, being here ain't no picnic for me, either. We been together a long time. Now I'm going have to break in a new guy. No offence, Joey, but that's the facts. I figure I need to fortify myself for this.

**JOEY.** What the hell does that mean?

**AL.** Fortify myself? It means I need to be strong in order to handle the...well, to deal with...never mind. *(Harry enters with SARGE.)* Oh, oh!

**SARGE.** Okay, Joey. What's this all about?

**JOEY.** Just what Harry told you.

**SARGE.** That's why I'm here. I don't like what he told me. What I want to know is, what's going on?

**JOEY.** Didn't you explain it to him, Harry?

**SARGE.** But you understand the rules of this thing.

**JOEY,** Harry told me the rules, but that don't mean I gotta go along. Like I said to him, I never went much by the rules.

**HARRY.** Yup, that's what he said, Sarge.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY.** So, there's no point going along now. I mean, if I was hungry, well then maybe that's a different story. Then there's no problem. But you can't expect a man to eat when he ain't hungry.

**SARGE.** But I can expect a man to play along. I run this cell block and I can't allow one of you guys to flout the rules.

**HARRY.** I think that's flout the rules, Sarge.

**SARGE.** What did I say?

**HARRY.** Flute.

**SARGE.** Are you sure?

**AL.** That's what you said, Sarge. You said flute. Harry's right. It should be flout, not flute.

**SARGE.** You mind your business over there. I ain't talking to you.

**AL.** I just trying...

**SARGE.** Never mind that. Just pipe down. And I don't care iit's flout, flute or tuba, you were brought your meal and by God you are going to eat it.

**JOEY.** I don't think so, Sarge. In fact, I'm sure of it.

**HARRY.** See? What did I tell ya? He's a tough one.

**SARGE.** Never mind that. I've been here twenty-five years and dealt with the toughest. Murders, rapists. Guys who would rip your eyeballs out...

**AL.** You talking about me, Sarge?

**SARGE.** I'm talking about guys who would make Joey, here, look like a pansy.

**JOEY.** I am a pansy, Sarge.

**AL.** That right?

**HARRY.** Ya know, I had I hunch on that one.

**AL.** Might have been a good idea to let me know about this hunch of yours, don't you think, Harry?

**HARRY.** Well, I mean it was just a hunch. Unless you're caught...

**SARGE.** (*angry*) Does anyone know what the hell I'm getting at?

**AL.** I believe you're trying to make the point that Joey has to eat his veggies.

**SARGE.** Exactly the point. Thank you, Al.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**HARRY.** Have you any ideas about how to get this to happen?

**AL.** Yeah, Sarge. I'd be interested to see how you're going to get this done.

**JOEY.** All my life I never believed in waste. This is no time to start. I don't want it, I won't eat it. Period. Give it to Al.

**SARGE.** Al has nothing to do with this. Do you have any idea how bad this is going to look to the Warden, that I can't handle my cons? Are you trying to make me look bad? Ruin my career? Do you care that by you not eating I may not be able to put food in my kids' stomachs.

**AL.** How many kids you got, Sarge?

**SARGE.** That's none of your business.

**HARRY.** I think it's one, right Sarge?

**SARGE.** I said it was none of his or your business how many kids I have. The point here is that Joey is out to ruin my reputation and chance for promotion. All I ever wanted in life was to make Captain, to be a leader of men. You think the Warden is going to consider me for promotion when I can't even get one of my cons to eat his last meal.

**AL.** Hey, can it with that last meal stuff. You don't know that. Joey got appeals in. Right, Joey?

**JOEY.** That's okay, Al. Fact is, first, middle or last, I don't want the meal.

**SARGE.** I have a dream, Joey. I will not allow you to rain on my parade. *(Sarge lunges for Joey through the bars, but his arms can't reach him. As this develops, Harry slowly exits).* Harry, get me the keys. I'll show this guy who's in charge of this cell block. If he thinks...Harry! The keys.

**AL.** You might want to try the men's room, Sarge. Harry hangs out there a lot.

**SARGE.** *(to Joey)* You think this is over? This isn't over. This is just the beginning. You think you won this fight? You didn't win this fight.

**AL.** What round we in, Sarge?

**SARGE.** You stay right there, Joey. I'll be back.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY.** I guess you'll know where to find me, Sarge. (*Sarge exits.*)  
The Sarge seems to be a bit perturbed. Never figured him to be such a hot head.

**AL.** Well, I guess we all have our breaking points. I never figured that a steak would cause such a commotion. What do you figure he's going to do?

**JOEY.** Don't matter. My head's made up. I got principles and once I figure out what they are, I stick with 'em. I think I got this one lined up pretty good. (*Sarge and Harry enter with the CHAPLAIN*).

**SARGE.** This is the guy, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** Oh, sure. I know him. Hi, ya, Joey.

**JOEY.** Been a while, huh, Chaplain? You don't get down here much.

**CHAPLAIN.** So many souls, so little time. I'm sure you understand.

**JOEY.** No one understands that better than me. So, how ya been, Chaplain?

**CHAPLAIN.** Prostate acting up, but otherwise, okay. My knees, of course, are shot. All this... (*Chaplain kneels, then slowly rises.*)

**JOEY.** Yeah, I can see how that could happen. I once knew a couple of guys that had the same problem. Ever try knee pads, Chaplain?

**CHAPLAIN.** Well, thank you, Joey. That's a great idea. Now, about the...

**JOEY.** Not that I'm comparing you to these guys, of course.

**CHAPLAIN.** Perish the thought, Joey. Perish the thought. Now about the...

**AL.** Hi, ya, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** I don't think I know you.

**AL.** My name's Al.

**CHAPLAIN,** How come I haven't seen you for confession, Al?

**AL.** I'm Jewish, Chaplain. Not really much point in having you stop by.

**CHAPLAIN.** I could ask the Rabbi to visit.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**AL.** I don't think the jail has a Rabbi, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN,** Is that right, Sarge?

**SARGE.,** It appears so.

**CHAPLAIN,** Why is that, Sarge?

**SARGE.** Not enough Jews in jail to need one.

**CHAPLAIN.** Fortunately there are plenty of other sinners, though, right, Sarge?

**SARGE.** All I'm worried about right now is this one.

**CHAPLAIN.** Right you are, Sarge. So, Joey, let's talk about the food.

**JOEY.** Not much to say, really. They brought it...

**HARRY.** You ordered it.

**JOEY.** I didn't want it...

**SARGE.** Then why did you order it?

**AL.** A guy can change his mind, Sarge.

**SARGE.** Are you going to shut up, or will I have to come in there?

**AL.** You know, you sounded just like my father did when I was a kid. Gee, he was a nice guy.

**HARRY.** I'm sorry to hear he died, Al.

**AL.** Oh, he didn't die. He just stopped being a nice gu.y. In fact, he...

**SARGE.** Harry, if you don't mind, can we stick to the issue at hand here. Remember? The food?

**CHAPLAIN.** Go ahead, Joey. So what happened then?

**JOEY.** So then Harry, here, he took it away. End of story until Sarge popped in.

**SARGE.** I didn't just pop in. I was doing my job. I am trying to keep avenues of communication open so that we could come to an understanding, perhaps, if necessary, a compromise.

**AL.** Like maybe eat only the meat and leave the veggies. Eat the ice cream, but toss the pie. Is that what you mean?

**SARGE.** (*screaming at Joey*) I MEAN YOU PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I'M SAYING. I'M SAYING THAT IF YOU DON'T EAT YOUR MEAL. IN THE NEXT HALF-HOUR I WILL KICK YOU 'TILL YOU'RE DEAD AND SAVE THE STATE THE

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

COST OF ELECTRIC. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, MISTER?

**JOEY.** So, in other words, you want me to cash in my principles, to knuckle under, to go against my conscience...

**SARGE.** Conscience? Lister to him. Conscience?

**CHAPLAIN.** It is possible, Sarge. I don't know his record, but I know people and I think Joey is good people. Family people.  
*(Harry whispers in the Chaplain's ear. He looks at Joey, stunned.)*  
He did that?

**HARRY.** And that's only what we know of. Not that I'm anyone to throw stones. I could tell you some stuff about my family that would...

**SARGE.** Can we get on with this.

**CHAPLAIN.** Certainly. Joey, I think you have to look at the broader picture here.

**JOEY.** Broader picture? Chaplain, tomorrow morning the picture goes out.

**CHAPLAIN.** Exactly my point, Joey. Your picture goes out, but Sarge has a picture, he wants a promotion, and Harry has a picture, he needs to feel his rules are being met, even Al probably has a picture, although since he's a Jew I'm not even sure what his picture might be...

**AL.** I got a picture, okay, Chaplain, but I got a feeling it's a cartoon.

**CHAPLAIN.** See, Joey, although Jewish, even Al has a picture. So when I'm talking about the bigger picture, I think you have to look past yourself.

**JOEY,** What's your picture, Chaplain?

**CHAPLAIN.** Making everything right with God, Joey. Making as sure as I can that God is right with the world. And you know how I do that, Joey.

**JOEY.** Can't imagine, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** Whenever I have a decision to make, I ask myself, what would Jesus do? And you know what I'm sure Jesus would do if he were in your situation?

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY.** Haven't a clue, Chaplain, but I bet you're going to tell me.

**SARGE.** No, I'll tell you. He would eat the damn meal, is what He would do. He would eat the damned meal.

**CHAPLAIN.** He would try and do the right thing for everyone, Joey. And yes, I think He would eat the meal. He was a man of great love and compassion for mankind. He would understand the needs of Sarge, Harry, and, although doubtful, even possibly Al. One thing He wouldn't do, Joey. He wouldn't make waves. He would simply and humbly eat the meal.

**JOEY.** But if he didn't make waves, why was he nailed up?

**CHAPLAIN.** *(thoughtful)* Good, point, Joey. Very good point. Hmm. If he didn't make waves, why was he nailed up? I'll have to think about that one.

**JOEY.** Take your time, but not too much, if you get my drift.

**CHAPLAIN.** Sarge, do you think you and Harry could leave for a while so that Joey and I could talk?

**SARGE.** *(suspicious)* About what? It better be about this meal. We ain't got all night to kick this around and I gotta get some sleep. Big day tomorrow.

**JOEY.** Sarge's right, Chaplain. Big day tomorrow.

**CHAPLAIN.** Not to worry, Sarge. I think I have a special feel for the problem here. It shouldn't take too long. So, if you would me so kind as to let me in the cell...

**HARRY.** That might not be a real good idea, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** Joey, if I come in there, you promise to behave.

**JOEY.** No problem, Chaplain. To me you're aces.

**CHAPLAIN.** Sarge. If you please.

**SARGE.** Harry If you please. *(Harry opens the cell door to allow Chaplain to enter the cell. Harry closes the door.)* Okay, but I'll be waiting right outside. *(Sarge and Harry exit.)*

**JOEY.** I don't have that much to say, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** Well, we'll see how we make out.

**AL.** Joey's right, Chaplain. He doesn't have much to say, but he sure uses a lot of words to say it.

**JOEY.** What's that supposed to mean?

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**AL.** I mean you never heard yourself from where I'm sitting.

**JOEY.** You saying I talk to much?

**AL.** I'm saying sometimes you babble like a chimpanzee.

**JOEY.** You're just angry I didn't give you the steak.

**CHAPLAIN.** Well, if it would make you feel any better, Joey, my parents used to tell me I babbled inanely.

**AL.** *(to Joey)* That's right. I'm still angry about the steak. I've been your buddy in here for years, but have you ever thought of me?

This was the icing on the cake, so to speak.

**CHAPLAIN.** I never understood what inanely meant. Either of you know...?

**JOEY.** You're wrong, there, Al, I think about you a lot.

Particularly when. I'm laying here at night and...well, you know...I have you in my mind...and I...well, you know.

**CHAPLAIN.** Then I read somewhere that successful people play up their strengths. Like babbling, for example.

**AL.** *(to Joey)* Yeah, well that does me a lot of good.

**CHAPLAIN.** That's when I decided on the ministry.

**JOEY.** *(to Al)* Gee, I thought you'd be pleased. It was a toss up between you and Brad Pitt.

**CHAPLAIN.** Then, of course, there was the opportunity to be around so many men. That's not easily turned down, if you know what I mean.

**AL.** *(to Joey)* Really? Me or Brad Pitt?

**CHAPLAIN.** Anyone know what sublimation means?

**JOEY.** *(raising his right hand, to Al)* You've been the one, Al. And you will be for as long as I...well, you have been, anyway.

**CHAPLAIN.** Yes, God works in mysterious ways.

**AL.** *(to Joey)* Gee, whiz, you make me feel like such a louse.

**CHAPLAIN.** Yes, God can do that to you sometimes. It's part of the deal.

**AL.** *(finally realizing Chaplain has been talking)* What are you talking about?

**CHAPLAIN.** God and his relationship to man. Because you know you're unworthy, you wind up feeling like a louse.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**AL.** We were talking about a steak.

**JOEY.** Yeah, and don't forget the... *(makes masturbatory motions)*

**AL.** I think I'd rather forget that, if you don't mind, Joey.

**CHAPLAIN.** And I'm pretty sure that's frowned on by God, Joey.

**JOEY.** Well, like they say, different strokes for different folks.

*(The WARDEN enters, trailed by Sarge and Harry.)*

**SARGE.** That's the one, Warden. As tough as they come. Move over, Chaplain. You've had enough time. Now it's time for the pros.

**WARDEN.** That's okay, Sarge, I'll handle this. Sometimes you tend to be too harsh, right Joey? Doesn't Sarge sometimes come across as too harsh?

**JOEY.** Not really. Actually, I think Sarge is an all right...

**WARDEN.** Too harsh, Joey, and judgmental.

**AL.** Yeah, that's the way I see it, Warden.

**WARDEN.** Who are you?

**AL.** Just an innocent observer.

**WARDEN.** *(laughing excessively)* Innocent. Did he say "innocent?" That is good, right, Sarge?

**SARGE.** *(not amused)* Yeah, yeah, really good. Now about the food...

**WARDEN.** So now, as I understand it, Harry, here, brought the food that the prisoner had requested and then the prisoner turned it down.

**HARRY.** That's it, Warden. You summed it up perfectly. Good job.

**WARDEN.** Why are there two men in the cell? You are specifically forbidden to have a cell mate in this cell block.

**SARGE.** That's not really a man, Warden. That's the Chaplain.

**WARDEN.** Ah. The Chaplain. I don't think I ever saw him when he wasn't on his knees.

**CHAPLAIN.** Good evening, Warden.

**WARDEN.** *(ignoring the Chaplain)* Joey, we need to talk.

**JOEY.** If it's about the meal, Warden, no offence, but...

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**WARDEN.** No, no. I understand your position in this matter. Could you open the cell, Harry?

**HARRY.** You're going in?

**WARDEN.** Are you crazy. No, I want the Chaplain out.. *(Harry opens the cell door, the Chaplain exits the cell, Harry closes the door.)* Okay, now we are getting somewhere.

**HARRY.** You're on the ball, Warden.

**WARDEN.** Joey, have you ever wondered what the basis of this whole system is about.

**JOEY.** Punishment?

**WARDEN.** *(disappointed)* Oh, so then you have thought about it some.

**JOEY.** *(winking at Al)* Yeah, when I'm not thinking of other matters. It really isn't a stretch to figure it out.

**HARRY.** Joey's not as dumb as he looks, Warden.

**WARDEN.** Thank you, Harry, but I am a great judge of character so I knew that as soon as I laid eyes on him. I said to myself, Warden, this Joey is a deep one. He's someone you can work with. A man with an intellect that makes him a worth adversary. No, let me correct that. He is a worthy friend and colleague.

**CHAPLAIN.** Colleague? I'm not sure...

**WARDEN.** *(to Joey)* Let me explain. You see, in order for prisons to work effectively, for Harry, Sarge, you, Chaplain, and even me, the Warden, to have our jobs, to earn our living, to support our families...

**CHAPLAIN.** I don't have a family, Warden.

**WARDEN.** Really? Why not?

**CHAPLAIN.** I'm not really sure, but there seemed to have been a meeting a long time ago in Europe that decided...

**WARDEN.** Yes, very interesting, but as I was saying, for us to maintain our standard of living, as it were, well, it all depends on having prisoners. You see? I mean, without prisoners, where would we all be?

**HARRY.** *(enlightened)* And in order to have prisoners...

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**WARDEN.** We need crime. That's right, Harry. I'm glad you're following me on this.

**SARGE.** You mean to tell me that I got my job because of slobs like Joey.

**AL.** Hey, don't forget about me, there, Sarge. Joey ain't the only slob in this pen.

**WARDEN.** I haven't forgotten you, Al. When I say colleagues, I mean we are all colleagues, everyone in this room. We are all in this together.

**HARRY.** And that's it? We owe this all to crime?

**WARDEN.** Except for one other important factor. And this is something you should be an expert in, Chaplain.

**CHAPLAIN.** (*tentatively*) Retribution?

**WARDEN.** Bingo!

**SARGE.** Well, that's something I know something about. That's how I got my stripes. But there's more, you know. There's just something about wooden clubs meeting flesh and bone.

**WARDEN.** Yes, well, the whole point of this digression is to point out that this whole system is built around what? (*Silence*). Come on, people, what have we learned here, what have I been talking about? (*All raise their hands.*) Okay, Al.

**AL.** A steak?

**WARDEN.** No. Someone else. Let's try... Harry.

**HARRY.** I think you've been talking about the last supper. Kind of a metaphor.

**CHAPLAIN.** What's a metaphor?

**WARDEN.** Never mind about that, Chaplain. How about you? Do you have a clue?

**CHAPLAIN.** Nope.

**WARDEN.** Anyone? Anyone?

**JOEY.** Not that I really care, but you've been trying to get me to understand the connection between crime and punishment.

**WARDEN.** Exactly. Thank you, Joey. Now, who can tell me how we get from one to the other?

**AL.** (*tentatively*) Laws?

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**WARDEN.** Very good, young man. You'll go far in this world, I guarantee. *(Harry whispers in his ear)* Oh, really. *(to Al)* Well, maybe not. In any event, you are absolutely correct. Laws, or to put it another way, rules. It is rules that connect crimes and punishments. One naturally follows the other but must first pass through the governance of rules. Am I clear?

**AL.L.** Yes, Sir.

**WARDEN.** And that is why our entire system is dependent on rules. Oh, not just in our own small little universe in this prison. Oh, no. Rules are what governs our nation. Without rules there is anarchy, there is chaos, there is destruction. And so, Joey, when you decided not to eat that meal you placed in jeopardy, not just the rules of this hallowed institution, but of the entire nation. Have I made my point, Joey?

**JOEY.** You have, Warden. You certainly have.

**WARDEN.** Well, then...

**JOEY.** I still ain't eatin' the bloody meal, Warden. *(after a brief pause to let this sink in)*

**WARDEN.** Well, I'm going back to my office, now. Okay Sarge. Kick the stuffing out of him. *(Warden exits. Lights down briefly, then up. It is a few hours later. Joey is seated in his cell, strumming a guitar. Al is standing at the bars of his cell. Harry is snoozing on a chair. Joey has an arm in a sling, some gauze wrapped around his head.)*

**AL.** Joey?

**JOEY.** Yeah, Al.

**AL.** I've been meaning to tell you something.

**JOEY.** Good a time as any, Al.

**AL.** You are the worst guitar player I ever heard.

**JOEY.** Is that it?

**AL.** And if you don't stop, I'll find a way of getting over there and break the thing over your head.

**JOEY.** I always thought you liked my guitar playing.

**AL.** I just never wanted to upset you, but, no, Joey. I never, ever liked your guitar playing.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY.** How about my harmonica?

**AL.** You don't play the harmonica.

**JOEY.** Never too late to learn.

**AL.** I think it is, Joey.

**JOEY.** Why do you think they always show harmonica or guitar playing in those old prison pictures? And all those black guys singing spirituals?

**AL.** Two reasons. The first as a warning to the youth of this country that if you're sent up you can expect to hear this kind of garbage. The other is to torture the cons already locked up.

*(Loud yelling O.S. Harry is startled awake.)*

**HARRY.** What the hell is that?

**AL.** Maybe it's a prison break, Harry. You'd better go take a look.

**HARRY.** No. I think I'll sit this one out.

**AL.** You been involved with a break-out?

**HARRY.** Oh, let me tell you about the time in '94. There was a bunch of these... *(The O.S. yelling gets louder and closer. There is a loud banging at the door. We hear a woman shrieking.)*

**BETTY.** *(O.S.)* LET ME IN THERE, YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH. OPEN THIS DOOR. *(The banging gets louder.)* JOEY, I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE. YOU'D BETTER OPEN UP.

**HARRY.** Who the hell is that?

**AL.** I don't know who that is, Joey, but I think you are really in trouble now. She means business.

**HARRY.** You know her, Joey?

**JOEY.** You better let her in, Harry. She ain't going away. *(Harry goes to the door and yells through.)*

**HARRY.** YOU GET OUT OF HERE. YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.

**JOEY.** I'm not sure about that, Harry.

**HARRY.** Who the hell is that banshee?

**BETTY.** Joey, open this door or so help me I'll kill you.

**AL.** She must have heard your guitar playing.

**HARRY.** *(to Betty)* Listen, you. Get the hell out of here. How did you get this far?

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**BETTY.** *(O.S.)* Who the hell are you?

**HARRY.** Straight down the middle Harry, the men call me.

**BETTY.** Well, isn't that peachy. Okay, straight down the middle, open this door or I'll part your head straight down the middle.

**JOEY.** You better open it, Harry. Hell hath no fury like a Betty scorned. *(Harry opens the door a crack and BETTY busts through it, looks around and darts for Joey.)*

**HARRY.** Hey, wait a second, there. You can't...

**JOEY.** Oh, yes she can, Harry. *(Betty is about to launch into a tirade when she spots Joey's bandages.)*

**BETTY.** *(to Joey)* What the hell happened to you?

**HARRY.** He had a problem shaving. Now you get out of here. You're not allowed...

**AL.** Wait a second, Harry. You can't talk to a lady like that.

**JOEY.** I'm not sure about the lady part, Al.

**BETTY.** *(to Joey)* Hey, is this the thanks I get for hauling my ass down here?

**AL.** And a very nice...

**HARRY.** Never mind that stuff, Al. *(to Betty)* Look, Miss, I don't know who or what you are, but....

**JOEY.** Good to see you, Betty.

**HARRY.** You know this person?

**AL.** Have you been chipping behind my back, Joey?

**JOEY.** Cut it out, Al. How'd you get in here, Betty?

**HARRY.** Exactly what I want to know.

**BETTY.** If you guys would shut up for a couple of seconds...

**AL.** I'm all ears.

**BETTY.** And mouth.

**JOEY.** Ignore him, honey...

**AL.** Honey? Wait a second, now, Joey. Who you calling honey?

**JOEY.** I really do appreciate your coming in like this, but where you been for the last five years, hon? I kept writing, but never got a letter back.

**BETTY.** *(evasive)* Well, I've been a little busy.

**JOEY.** For five years?

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**BETTY.** This and that. You know how it is.

**JOEY.** No, not really, Betty. Hey, Al. Any this or that around here? *(Al gives a quick look around.)*

**AL.** Must have used it all up.

**HARRY.** All right, Abbot and Costello, enough of that. *(to Betty)*  
And you beat it. Now!

**BETTY.** Or else, what? You going to call the cops.

**AL.** Good one, Betty.

**BETTY.** I came to see Joey before...well, before and I ain't leaving until him and me get to work out some stuff.

**AL.** I think whatever stuff Joey had was kicked out of him by Sarge.

**BETTY.** Sarge did that?

**AL.** Man's inhumanity to man.

**BETTY.** I don't believe Sarge would do such a thing.

**AL.** You wouldn't say that if you knew Sarge.

**BETTY.** Well, for your information....never mind.

**JOEY.** Never mind what, Betty?

**BETTY.** Just never mind, is all.

**JOEY.** You got something you want to tell me, Betty?.

**BETTY.** Well, I did wait those ten years, Joey.

**HARRY.** But he's been here fifteen.

**AL.** Now I get it.

**JOEY.** Yeah, Al. And I guess Sarge's been getting it the last five years.

**AL.** Sarge? That's how come you got in here?

**HARRY.** Will someone explain to me...

**JOEY.** Is that why you came here?

**BETTY.** I needed to set the record straight.

**JOEY.** And tonight is the night you decided to "set the record straight?"

**AL.** Now or never, huh, Joey.

**JOEY.** I think I would have voted for never on this one, Al.

**HARRY.** Do you mean to tell me Sarge and...?

**JOEY.** For at least five years, Harry.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**BETTY.** What do you mean "at least?"

**AL.** Well, it's a good thing you've had me around for the last five years, is all I have to say.

**BETTY.** What the hell does that mean? What's been going on here for five years?

**HARRY.** With them bars, if anything had happened, it would have been either a great trick or a phenomenon of nature.

**BETTY.** Joey, if I'd a known you had to put up with these guys all these years I'd a been here a long time ago. This must have been torture.

**JOEY.** Life has been a trial, Betty. And now you're here to add to it. **SARGE.?!** You've been seeing Sarge? If I'd a known you were going to spring this on me tonight, I'd a pushed my appointment up a day.

**BETTY.** Hey, a girl can get lonely.

**AL.** Forget lonely. If it's Sarge, you must mean desperate.

**BETTY.** That's because you don't know his good side.

**AL.** He wouldn't have a good side if he was an octagon. *(to Harry)* In case you didn't know, that's something with seven sides, Harry.

**HARRY.** I knew that.

**JOEY.** Please, Betty, I got an important date tomorrow morning so spare me the details about Sarge's poetic nature, what a lovely guy he is.

**BETTY.** He don't write poetry. He sings.

**AL.** Sings?

**BETTY.** The sweetest tenor voice. Whenever we're...you know...anyway, that's when he sings to me. Like a boid.

**HARRY.** Boid?

**BETTY.** What?

**HARRY.** You said "boid."

**BETTY.** No I didn't. I said boid. Like with wings.

**HARRY.** Oh, a bird?

**BETTY.** Yeah, what I said. He almost choips.

**AL.** Hey, Harry. Maybe Sarge'll lay an egg for us.

## JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**JOEY.** Harry, could you push her a little closer so I can get my hands around her throat.

**HARRY.** Now's not the time to do anything violent, Joey.

**JOEY.** You know I'm not usually a violent guy, Harry, but can you think of a better time or reason? Come on, Harry. Just push her to the bars. I'll take it from there.

**BETTY.** Look you. You're the one that left me, remember? All I ever wanted was for you to work a job, bring home the money, be a father to our kids.

**AL.** You got kids?

**JOEY.** I think you're going crazy. We got no kids, Betty.

**BETTY.** Exactly and that's because you've been in here. If you was out there, then maybe we would have had some kids.

**AL.** The way I look at it, you guys not having kids made this world a better place to live.

**JOEY.** So you've come here for me to forgive you?

**BETTY.** I came here to clean the slate so I could live with myself.

**AL.** I thought you were living with Sarge.

**BETTY.** In a manner of speaking, but that's not my point, moron.

**HARRY.** Now, now, no need to get in a fuss. I run a dignified cell block.

**JOEY.** You even imagining I'm thinking forgiveness, you crazier than Al ever hopes to be. As for cleansing your conscience, there's only one way to do that.

**BETTY.** How?

**JOEY.** Come closer to the bars and I'll show you. *(Harry places himself between Betty and the cell.)*

**HARRY.** I think what you've tried to do here is a very nice gesture, little lady. As I was telling the Chaplain just the other day, confession is good for the soul.

**AL.** I bet he was happy you cleared that up for him.

**BETTY.** *(to Joey)* Actually, it was because of little Joey I come here.

**AL.** I don't know when was the last time you seen Joey, but let me tell you, he ain't so little.

JOEY'S LAST MEAL

**BETTY.** Not this Joey. The other little Joey.

**JOEY.** Oh, oh.

**BETTY.** I gotta come clean, Joey.

**JOEY.** I don't want to hear this, Betty.

**BETTY.** I gotta, Joey.

**JOEY.** Harry, throw her out.

**BETTY.** I brung pictures, Joey.

**JOEY.** Harry! Out! Throw her out! *(Harry begins to struggle with Betty, trying to force her out of the cell block. Chaplain enters.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—  
ORDER A COPY AT [WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM](http://WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM)***