

ONE MAN'S TRASH

by Glen Ellington



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A Small-Cast Play for Christmas

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SYNOPSIS: Two garbage collectors shoot the breeze over their lunch break, with plenty of good-natured ribbing between the pair. "Picker," so named because he unearths the best treasures at the dump, has one foot out the door and into retirement on the day before Christmas Eve. As they reflect on their lives during this last shift together, the conversation takes a turn. Life has beat Picker up, and he exists under a shadow of sadness, as broken as the cast-offs strewn around him. Junkman wants desperately to reach out to his friend, but he doesn't how to bridge the gap between their conflicting approaches to faith and life. Then a shocking discovery rattles them to the core, seemingly offering more questions than answers, yet igniting the faintest glimmer of hope. Two men carry the bulk of the script, simplifying rehearsals at this busy time of year. A deeply moving modern allegory.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(3 males)*

EDDIE (m).....Eddie "The Picker" Campbell; He is the older of the two garbage collectors, burdened by the hand he's been dealt in life. *(71 lines)*

FOSTER (m).....Foster "Junkman" Williams; Cares about his coworker, but isn't sure how to help him. *(59 lines)*

ANGELO DAY (m).....A new hire at the junkyard. *(21 lines)*

DURATION: 15-20 minutes

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: There is a fencing backdrop with a sign indicating that this is a landfill. There is an old cooler and two discarded chairs, upended plastic cartons, or some other makeshift seating items for the two main characters, as well as a wooden spool table to hold their lunches. There are newspapers and other recyclables or trash items strewn about.

COSTUMES: All three characters should be dressed in uniforms. Alternately, they may simply wear old, worn casual clothing, such as jeans and T-shirts. Smudge up their clothing if you wish, to reinforce their garbage collector occupation. Hats are optional.

PROPS: Cell phone and lunch items, including two lunchboxes, assorted food, thermoses, etc.

SOUND EFFECTS: Recordings of a cell phone's ring, a baby's cry, and a siren.

1 **AT START:** FOSTER "JUNKMAN" WILLIAMS and EDDIE "THE
2 PICKER" CAMPBELL are seated. It is lunchtime.

3
4 **EDDIE:** (*Indicating his lunch.*) Now that's a good lunch, bud.
5 Braunschweiger on whole wheat with hot mustard, a dill pickle
6 and, to round it out, a nutty bar. Best combination I ever found.

7 **FOSTER:** Hard to believe you've been eating that same lunch all
8 these years. I'd think you'd want something different.

9 **EDDIE:** Well, no matter what I brought, sooner or later I'd get tired
10 of that too, so it's easier to stick with what's worked for thirty
11 years.

12 **FOSTER:** Hard to believe this is it for you, Picker.

13 **EDDIE:** You're right there. When I started, I never thought this is
14 where I'd be at the end of it all.

15 **FOSTER:** (*Laughing.*) And just where did you think you would be,
16 Picker? Emptying trashcans for the President?

17 **EDDIE:** No, I—well, I just thought my life would—you know, be
18 different than it turned out, is all.

19 **FOSTER:** Things could have been worse, I guess.

20 **EDDIE:** Oh, sure. I mean, I'm not complaining. Things have been
21 real good for me and Sarah. Steady job with the county, good
22 benefits. I made leadman a few years ago. That's a few extra
23 bucks, you know.

24 **FOSTER:** Yeah, I know. I'm looking forward to 'em myself.
25 (*Laughs.*)

26 **EDDIE:** Not so fast, my vulture friend. The body's still warm and
27 the whistle doesn't blow for another hour.

28 **FOSTER:** Pretty good deal for today to be the last one. I mean,
29 with it being Christmas and all.

30 **EDDIE:** It is kinda special, ain't it? Like the county was giving me
31 an early present. "Eddie Campbell, in honor of your thirty years
32 of service to the citizens of Jackson County, your last day will be
33 Christmas Eve, and quittin' time is three o'clock instead of five."

34 **FOSTER:** We all get the same early present, you know. Not just
35 you.

36 **EDDIE:** Yeah, I know. But the difference is, (*Childlike.*) You gotta
37 come ba-ack!

- 1 **FOSTER:** Don't remind me. I'm just grateful Christmas is on
2 Saturday so we get the long weekend. Outta here at three today
3 and not back until eight a.m. Tuesday. Don't want to be late, of
4 course. A new leadman has to set a good example, you know.
- 5 **EDDIE:** Well, I couldn't leave this place in better hands, Junkman.
6 Play your cards right, and all of this can be yours. (*Laughs and*
7 *sits down.*) I am looking forward to sleepin' in some, but after
8 thirty years, well, there's some things I'll miss about this dump.
- 9 **FOSTER:** Like what? Besides my smiling face.
- 10 **EDDIE:** Yeah, buddy. I will miss your smiling face. And I'll miss how
11 we would take longer lunches than we were supposed to
12 sometimes and just sit and talk. I'll miss that.
- 13 **FOSTER:** But the job itself?
- 14 **EDDIE:** You know, I've been thinking about this place, and the only
15 thing I'll miss is finding things people didn't want. Every day for
16 thirty years, when I'd come to work I always wondered what we'd
17 find. There's been a lot of guys work here over that time, but
18 nobody could pick out the good stuff like me. That's why they
19 called me Picker.
- 20 **FOSTER:** Oh, I thought it had to do with your nose. (*Laughs.*)
- 21 **EDDIE:** You got me there, Junkman. I will miss that about you.
22 Making me laugh. No matter how I felt, you could always cheer
23 me up. Like when Sarah and I were on the rocks for a while,
24 there you were to give me encouragement. I really appreciated
25 that.
- 26 **FOSTER:** Well, you know where my joy comes from, Picker.
- 27 **EDDIE:** Now Junkman, I know it's Christmas, but let's not get into
28 that religious stuff again. You know how I feel about that.
- 29 **FOSTER:** I do, Picker, I do. But I can't help but hope that someday
30 you might want to think about God. (*Pause.*) He thinks about you
31 a lot.
- 32 **EDDIE:** How do you know that?
- 33 **FOSTER:** He told me.
- 34 **EDDIE:** (*Dispatch voice.*) "Roger, we got a crazy guy here. Thinks
35 he hears from God. Seems harmless, but advise caution."
- 36 **FOSTER:** If I'm crazy, then lock me up and throw away the key,
37 Picker, 'cause I know there's a God, and I know he hears me
38 when I pray.

- 1 **EDDIE:** I suppose you get voicemail from him too?
- 2 **FOSTER:** No, I don't. But he sends me texts.
- 3 **EDDIE:** What?
- 4 **FOSTER:** From the Bible. I'll be reading the Bible, and the words
5 sort of pop out like they were written just for me right then and
6 nobody else. It is weird but really cool when it happens.
- 7 **EDDIE:** That's great for you, Junkman, but you know why I can't
8 believe in God.
- 9 **FOSTER:** I know, Picker, I know. *(Beat.)* It was awful and tragic
10 and senseless, and if I were in the presence of God right now, I
11 would look at him and ask, "Why?" But you have to let it go.
- 12 **EDDIE:** That's easy for you to say. You've got kids in your house
13 at Christmas. It's just me and Sarah... again.
- 14 **FOSTER:** And I ask you every year to come spend Christmas Day
15 with us so you can listen to the kids playing and sit down and
16 have Christmas dinner with us. Eating turkey and dressing with
17 two preschoolers is a great adventure for sure.
- 18 **EDDIE:** I know... And I appreciate the offer every year, I really do.
19 *(Beat.)* You know, he would've been thirty in June. He'd probably
20 be married. Maybe I'd even be a grandpa.
- 21 **FOSTER:** Aw man, Picker. I won't tell you I know how it feels,
22 'cause I don't.
- 23 **EDDIE:** No. Only me and Sarah know how it feels.
- 24 **FOSTER:** I can't imagine how hard it was—is—on both of you. But
25 it has been a long time.
- 26 **EDDIE:** Doesn't make it any easier. *(Beat.)* Hey, it's Christmas,
27 right? Can't be sad on Christmas. No, Christmastime is great.
28 "Joy to the World," stringing up the lights, running up your credit
29 cards, throwing a dollar in the bucket by the ringing bell. *(He is*
30 *breaking.)* What's not to love?
- 31 **FOSTER:** Easy, Picker.
- 32 **EDDIE:** You're right, Junkman. No reason to let it get to me now.
33 And it's always harder on Sarah. The holidays, I mean. I guess
34 I just have to pull myself together and get through another one.
35 You know, that's one reason I stayed here so long. Ever since—
36 well, Sarah just couldn't ... I mean, well, I just can't stay home
37 like she does. Somebody has to pay the rent, right?
- 38 **FOSTER:** Sure, Picker. Somebody has to.

1 **EDDIE:** I dread the New Year, Junkman. I don't know what we'll
2 do, just the two of us.

3 **FOSTER:** Well, Picker, me and Molly will sure be praying for you
4 guys. And that invitation is always open.

5 **EDDIE:** Yeah, whatever... I'm sorry, Junkman. I know your heart's
6 in the right place.

7 **FOSTER:** Well, maybe we'll see you this year.

8 **EDDIE:** Yeah, maybe.

9 **FOSTER:** Hey, since it's your last day, how about a story?

10 **EDDIE:** What do you mean?

11 **FOSTER:** I mean, tell me about some of the things you've found
12 over your thirty years. I'll bet you've got some good stories. Give
13 me your favorite.

14 **EDDIE:** Come on, Junkman. You've seen most of the stuff I've
15 found. You were there too.

16 **FOSTER:** Not for your first fifteen, Picker. You never talk about
17 those years. Come on, what did you find? I can only imagine.

18 **EDDIE:** What's the difference? It's all junk, ain't it?

19 **FOSTER:** But like you said, nobody could find good stuff like you.
20 I remember what you used to say: "What looks like garbage to
21 most folks might be a treasure in disguise."

22 **EDDIE:** (*Softening a bit in remembrance.*) Yeah, well, there was
23 this one time I found a big sack made out of what looked like a
24 blanket. I almost overlooked it, but it was tied with a ribbon.
25 Imagine that, huh? Somebody tied a bright red ribbon to this bag,
26 and that's what caught my eye, you know. Otherwise—well,
27 anyway, I undid the ribbon, and what do you think was in it?

28 **FOSTER:** What?

29 **EDDIE:** Two of the cutest little kittens I ever saw. 'Bout half-dead
30 they were, but still alive. So I scooped up the blanket and brought
31 'em inside the trailer 'cause it was cold, you know. Yeahhhh,
32 come to think of it, it was right before Christmas. I remember
33 because when I brought the kittens home, Sarah thought they
34 were a present for her. It was the first time I had seen her happy
35 since... Well, she had to take care of them. You know, feed 'em
36 with a little bottle, make sure they stayed warm. (*Beat.*) That was
37 the best Christmas for her since... in a long time. She loved
38 those kittens like she was their mother, you know? And boy, did

1 she spoil them. Only the best food—that expensive canned stuff,
2 you know? And toys! They had balls with little bells in ‘em, and
3 catnip mice, and she even bought one of those climbing towers
4 for them. Brought it in one night and just looked at me.

5 **FOSTER:** I'll bet I know why.

6 **EDDIE:** Took me over three hours to put that thing together. Well,
7 no wonder. The instructions were written in Swahili or
8 something. And then some of the parts were missing. I finally
9 had to go to Home Depot to get extra-long bolts. Those cats
10 loved it, though, and that made Sarah happy.

11 **FOSTER:** You did a good thing, Picker, and that's a fact. What
12 happened to the cats, anyway?

13 **EDDIE:** Oh, they got huge, what with Sarah feeding them all that
14 rich food. Skeeter got up to twenty-three pounds and Mr. Fuzzy
15 topped out at twenty-seven.

16 **FOSTER:** Mr. Fuzzy?

17 **EDDIE:** Don't look at me. That was Sarah. Funny thing, too—about
18 the names, I mean.

19 **FOSTER:** How so?

20 **EDDIE:** Well, she didn't name them right away. I guess she was
21 afraid of—well anyway, about two weeks later they were doing
22 pretty well and I guess she felt like they were going to pull
23 through, and she came into the living room and sat down and
24 told me she had come up with names for the kittens.

25 **FOSTER:** So?

26 **EDDIE:** Well, I mean, the names were silly girly names, you know?
27 I'd have probably named them Bill and Bob. I mean, they're cats,
28 right? Not childr—. So she gets a real strange look on her face
29 and says that she was praying about what to call them.

30 **FOSTER:** Sarah? Praying?

31 **EDDIE:** Sounds crazy, right? But that's what she said. Funny thing,
32 though—she had the strangest look on her face. Kind of a—I
33 don't know, like a peace came over her. Like she wasn't fighting
34 things anymore.

35 **FOSTER:** I know that look, Picker. *(Beat.)* You could know it too.

- 1 **EDDIE:** Yeah, well, those cats did more to make her happy than
2 anything I could come up with. And they lived for a lot of years.
3 Skeeter made twelve and Mr. Fuzzy reached the ripe old age of
4 fourteen. It about killed her when we had to have the last one
5 put down, but it was cancer, and, well... Ever since, she—well,
6 the holidays are especially hard on her every year.
- 7 **FOSTER:** I know you do your best to help her.
- 8 **EDDIE:** I do what I can. I guess we're both happier when New
9 Year's comes.
- 10 **FOSTER:** Who knows? Maybe this Christmas will be different.
- 11 **EDDIE:** Yeah, who knows?
- 12 **ANGELO:** (*Off-stage.*) Hey, is there an Eddie Campbell around
13 here somewhere?
- 14 **EDDIE:** Who wants to know?
- 15 **ANGELO:** (*Entering.*) You Eddie?
- 16 **EDDIE:** That's right. What do you want?
- 17 **ANGELO:** The supervisor told me I could find you here. (*Out of*
18 *breath.*) I'm just glad I got here in time.
- 19 **EDDIE:** In time for what?
- 20 **ANGELO:** I just got hired. I start right after Christmas.
- 21 **EDDIE:** Congratulations, only you seem to be a few days early.
22 And it's a short day today.
- 23 **FOSTER:** And Eddie's last, besides.
- 24 **ANGELO:** Oh, sorry. I'm Angelo. Angelo Day.
- 25 **FOSTER:** Foster Williams, but everyone calls me Junkman.
26
- 27 *FOSTER and ANGELO shake hands.*
28
- 29 **ANGELO:** So I guess we'll be working together then. They told me
30 you were going to be the new leadman.
- 31 **FOSTER:** Yep. Ready to step into a whole new pile of garbage.
32 (*Laughs.*)
- 33 **ANGELO:** I look forward to working with you, uh, Junkman. In fact,
34 that's why I'm here right now.
- 35 **FOSTER:** How's that?
- 36 **ANGELO:** Well, the Sanitation Office said that if I wanted to learn
37 from the best, I'd better hurry before "The Picker" takes his last
38 pick.

- 1 **EDDIE:** You seem pretty ambitious, Angelo. You sure this is the
2 job for you?
- 3 **ANGELO:** Well, right now I'm sure that this is where God wants
4 me.
- 5 **EDDIE:** God wants a man to pick up garbage?
- 6 **ANGELO:** All I know is this is where I'm supposed to be—at least
7 for now.
- 8 **EDDIE:** I guess it's a good thing I'm leaving. Between you and the
9 Junkman, I'd get God from all sides.
- 10 **FOSTER:** Don't take offense, kid. Eddie's had some things happen
11 that, well, have made it hard for him to believe there's a God.
- 12 **EDDIE:** Now, I've only got a few more minutes in this dump, so how
13 about we can the God talk, OK?
- 14 **ANGELO:** Sure, Eddie, but hey—before you go, I gotta know why
15 you've been such a good picker all these years. I mean, I really
16 want to know.
- 17 **EDDIE:** How to be a good picker? Really?
- 18 **ANGELO:** Really. I mean, how do you know where to look for stuff?
19 It all looks the same to me.
- 20 **EDDIE:** Now, that's where you're wrong, kid. (*Pointing.*) Take that
21 pile of rugs over there, for instance. You see the dark stain on
22 the bottom? Well, that means they've been sitting on the ground
23 for a while, and it's a safe bet that they can't be used. But look
24 over there. See that other pile?
- 25 **ANGELO:** Yeah, I see it. It looks the same.
- 26 **EDDIE:** Not if you look closer. See how there aren't any flies over
27 it?
- 28 **ANGELO:** Yeah, but—
- 29 **EDDIE:** There are no flies because it hasn't been there long enough
30 for the carpet fibers to get wet enough to make a good place for
31 fly larvae to develop. Yep, that carpet still has some years left in
32 it. If I wasn't leaving, I'd throw it in the truck.
- 33 **ANGELO:** You mean you can just look out over all this and see the
34 good things mixed in with the trash?
- 35 **EDDIE:** Yeah. But it takes time to get good at it. Once you do, it
36 becomes real easy to see what's just garbage and what's worth
37 saving.

- 1 **ANGELO:** Let me see if I can catch on a little bit. What about that
2 big cardboard box besides the old refrigerator? Is it worth looking
3 at up close?
- 4 **EDDIE:** Well, I guess you'll have to go and see for yourself, kid.
5 Sometimes those boxes are full of rats and roaches, but one
6 time I found a suitcase inside a refrigerator that had two hundred
7 dollars in it. Remember, Junkman?
- 8 **FOSTER:** Sure do. *(Laughs.)*
- 9 **ANGELO:** Wow. That would be pretty cool, I admit. OK, just once
10 more, look out here and tell me what you see.
- 11 **EDDIE:** Look, kid, this has been fun, but it's getting late and I'm out
12 of here.
- 13 **ANGELO:** Wait a minute. What about that pile of foam rubber? I
14 see a little blanket over it. Might keep something warm, you
15 know.
- 16 **EDDIE:** Where do you see that?
- 17 **ANGELO:** Right past that old couch. Can you see it?
- 18 **EDDIE:** I looked right at it and must have missed it. I guess it is
19 time to retire after all. *(Laughs.)*
- 20 **ANGELO:** How about letting the new guy watch The Picker make
21 his final pick?
- 22 **EDDIE:** *(Exiting.)* All right. My last official act.
- 23 **FOSTER:** Pick a winner, Picker. Don't fail me now.
- 24 **ANGELO:** *(Cell phone rings.)* Oh, let me take this. I'll be back
25 before he finds whatever it is. *(Exits.)*
- 26 **FOSTER:** Come on, Picker! What have you got for your final pick?
27 Picker? Hey, what's the matter?
28
- 29 *EDDIE enters with something wrapped in a blanket.*
30
- 31 **FOSTER:** What? What is it, Picker?
- 32 **EDDIE:** *(Shaken.)* It's ... a child, Junkman.
- 33 **FOSTER:** Are you serious? *(He looks for himself.)* My God, my
34 God.
- 35 **EDDIE:** *(Sitting down, cradling the baby.)* They threw him away,
36 Junkman. Somebody just threw him away. How could they do
37 that?
- 38 **FOSTER:** I don't know, Eddie. I just don't know.

- 1 **EDDIE:** Look at him. He's—he's beautiful. A perfect little boy, and
2 somebody just threw him out like so much garbage.
- 3 **FOSTER:** We better call somebody, Eddie—like the cops or
4 something.
- 5 **EDDIE:** Yeah, sure. Hey, Angelo has a phone. Tell him to call.
- 6 **FOSTER:** Sure. Angelo? (*Starts to exit, looking.*) Angelo, where
7 are you, kid? (*To EDDIE.*) I don't see him, Eddie. He was just
8 here.
- 9 **EDDIE:** Then you better go up to the office. Call the cops from
10 there.
- 11 **FOSTER:** OK. You'll be all right?
- 12 **EDDIE:** Oh, sure. I'll—we'll just sit here until you get back.
- 13
- 14 *FOSTER exits.*
- 15
- 16 **EDDIE:** (*To the baby.*) How could they do this to you? Who could
17 think you were garbage? (*Looking up.*) Oh God, I don't know if
18 you're really there, but if you are, then why, God? How could you
19 let this happen? And why'd you let me find him? Christmastime
20 isn't bad enough for us without this, too? Why, God, why?
- 21 **FOSTER:** (*Enters.*) Help is on the way.
- 22 **EDDIE:** (*To baby.*) Help? Help for who? Not you, huh, buddy. I
23 hope you're in some better place.
- 24 **FOSTER:** He's with Jesus, Eddie. That's where he is.
- 25 **EDDIE:** Really, Junkman? Is that so? How can you be so sure?
- 26 **FOSTER:** Because I know how much God loves that little boy.
- 27 **EDDIE:** How much could God love him? He let him die, Eddie. Just
28 let somebody leave him out there! Don't talk to me about love. I
29 can't believe it.
- 30 **FOSTER:** Eddie, I know you think that God turned his back on this
31 little boy... and you. There's a lot I don't understand about God,
32 but this much I do know: God loves people. He sent his Son
33 Jesus to give his life for them—to take all their sins and failures,
34 to take the punishment we all deserve. And love made God do
35 that, Eddie. The incredible love of God. I don't have an easy
36 answer for you, Eddie. All I can do is pray. Is that OK?
- 37 **EDDIE:** Sure, go ahead. I guess it can't hurt.



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