

Hester

Theres so many things we need. Food. New shoes. A regular dinner with meat and salad and bread.

Reverend D.

I should give you some money right now. As a promise to you that I'll keep my word. But Im short of cash.

Hester

Oh.

Reverend D.

Come back in 2 days. Late. I'll have some then.

Hester

You dont got no food or nothing do ya?

Reverend D.

Come back in 2 days. Not early. Late. And not a word to no one. Okay?

Hester

— K.

Reverend D.

Hester

Reverend D.

Hester

(Rest)

Reverend D.

You better go.

Hester goes.

SCENE 4

With the Welfare

Outside, Jabber, Trouble and Beauty sit in the dirt playing with toy cars.

Trouble

Red light. Greet light. Red light. Green light.

Jabber

Look, a worm.

They all study the worm as it writhes in the dirt. Welfare enters.

Welfare

Wheres your mommie?

Beauty

Inside.

Jabber

Mommie! Welfares here.

Welfare

Thank you.

Hester enters.

Hester

You all go inside.

The kids go inside.

Begin

Welfare

Hands clean?

Hester

Yes, Maam.

Welfare

Wash them again.

Hester washes her hands again. Dries them.

Welfare

The welfare of the world.

Hester

Maam?

Welfare

Come on over, come on.

Hester stands behind Welfare, giving her a shoulder rub.

Welfare

The welfare of the world weighs on these shoulders, Hester.

(Rest)

We at Welfare are at the end of our rope with you. We put you in a job and you quit. We put you in a shelter and you walk. We put you in school and you drop out. Yr children are also truant. Word is they steal. Stealing is a gateway crime, Hester. Perhaps your young daughter is pregnant. Who knows. We build bridges you burn them. We sew safety nets, rub harder, good strong safety nets and you slip through the weave.

Hester

We was getting by all right, then I dunno, I been tired lately. Like something in me broke.

Welfare

You and yr children live, who knows where.

Hester

Here, Maam, under the Main Bridge.

Welfare

This is not the country, Hester. You cannot simply—live off the land. If yr hungry you go to the shelter and get a hot meal.

Hester

The shelter hassles me. Always prying in my business. Stealing my shit. Touching my kids. We was making ends meet all right then—ends got further apart.

Welfare

“Ends got further apart.” God!

(Rest)

I care because it is my job to care. I am paid to stretch out these hands, Hester. Stretch out these hands. To you.

Hester

I gived you the names of 4 daddys: Jabbers and Bullys and Troubles and Beautys. You was gonna find them. Garnish they wages.

Welfare

No luck as yet but we’re looking. Sometimes these searches take years.

Hester

Its been years.

Welfare

Lifetimes then. Sometimes they take that long. These men of yours, theyre deadbeats. They dont want to be found. Theyre probably all in Mexico wearing false mustaches. Ha ha ha.

(Rest)

What about the newest child?

Hester

Baby.

Welfare

What about “Babys” father?

Hester

—. I dunno.

Welfare

Dont know or dont remember?

Hester

You think Im doing it with mens I dont know?

Welfare

No need to raise your voice no need of that at all. You have to help me **help** you, Hester.

(Rest)

Run yr fingers through my hair. Go on. Feel it. Silky isnt it?

Hester

Yes, Maam.

Welfare

Comes from a balanced diet. Three meals a day. Strict adherence to the food pyramid. Money in my pocket, clothes on my back, teeth in my mouth, womanly parts where they should be, hair on my head, husband in my bed.

*Hester combs Welfares hair.***Welfare**

Yr doctor recommends that you get a hysterectomy. Take out yr womans parts. A spay.

Hester

Spay.

Welfare

I hope things wont come to that. I will do what I can. But you have to help me, Hester.

Hester

((**Dont** *make* me hurt you.))

Welfare

What?

Hester

I didnt mean it. Just slipped out.

Welfare

Remember yr manners. We worked good and hard on yr manners. Remember? Remember that afternoon over at my house? That afternoon with the teacups?

Hester

Manners, Maam?

Welfare

Yes. Manners.

Hester**Welfare****Welfare**

Babys daddy. Whats his name?

Hester

You wont find him no how.

Welfare

We could get lucky. He could be right around the corner and I could walk out and there he would be and then we at Welfare would wrestle him to the ground and turn him upside down and let you and yr Baby grab all the money that falls from Deadbeat Daddys pockets. I speak metaphorically. We would garnish his wages.

Hester

How much would that put in my pocket?

Welfare

Depends how much he earns. Maybe 100. Maybe. We take our finders fee. Whats his name?

Hester

I dunno.

Welfare

You dont have to say it out loud. Write it down.

*She gives Hester pencil and paper.
Hester writes. Welfare looks at the paper.*

Welfare

"A."

(Rest)

Adam, Andrew, Archie, Arthur, Aloysius, "A" what?

Hester

Looks good dont it?

Welfare

You havent learned yr letters yet, have you?

Hester

I want my leg up is all.

Welfare

You wont get something for nothing.

Hester

I been good.

Welfare

5 bastards is not good. 5 bastards is bad.

Hester

Dont make me hurt you!

Hester raises her club to strike Welfare.

Welfare

You hurt me and, kids or no kids, I'll have you locked up. We'll take yr kids away and yll never see them again.

Hester

My lifes my own fault. I know that. But the world dont help, Maam.

Welfare

The world is not here to help us, Hester. The world is simply here. We must help ourselves.

(Rest)

I know just the job for you. It doesnt pay well, but the work is very rewarding. Hard honest work. Unless yr afraid of hard honest work.

Hester

I aint afraid of hard work.

Welfare

Its sewing. You can do it at home. No work no pay but thats yr decision.

(Rest)

Heres the fabric. Make sure you dont get it dirty.

Hester

Can I express myself?

Welfare

Needles, thread and the pattern, in this bag. Take the cloth. Sew it. If you do a good job therell be more work. Have it sewn by tomorrow morning, yll get a bonus.

Hester takes the cloth and notions.

Hester

I dont think the world likes women much.

Welfare

Dont be silly.

Hester

I was just thinking.

Welfare

Im a woman too! And a black woman too just like you. Dont be silly.

Hester

Welfare

(Rest)

Hester puts her hand out, waiting.

Hester

Yr shoulders. Plus I did yr hair.

Welfare

Is a buck all right?

Hester

Welfare

Welfare

Unless yll change a 50.

Hester

I could go get change—

Welfare

Take the buck, K? And the cloth. And go.

Welfare owes Hester more \$, but after a beat, Hester just leaves.

END

SECOND CONFESSION: THE WELFARE

"I Walk the Line"

Welfare

I walk the line
between us and them
between our kind and their kind.
The balance of the system depends on a well-drawn boundary line
and all parties respecting that boundary.

I am

I am a married woman
I dont—that is have never
never in the past or even in the recent present or even when I look
look out into the future of my life I do not see any interest
any *sexual* interest

in anyone

other than my husband.

(Rest)

My dear husband.

The hours he keeps.

The money he brings home.

Our wonderful children.

The vacations we go on.

My dear husband he needed

a little spice.

And I agreed. We both needed spice.

We both hold very demanding jobs.

We put an ad in the paper: "Husband and Bi-Curious Wife, seeking—"

But the women we got:

Hookers. Neurotics. Gold diggers!

"Bring one of those gals home from work," Hubby said. And Hester,
she came to tea.

(Rest)

She came over and we had tea.

From my mothers china.

And marzipan on matching china plates.

Hubby sat opposite in the recliner

hard as Gibraltar. He told us what he wanted and we did it.

We were his little puppets.

She was surprised, but consented.

Her body is better than mine.

Not a single stretchmark on her.

Im a looker too dont get me wrong just in a different way and

Hubby liked the contrast.

Just light petting at first.

Running our hands on each other

then Hubby joined in

and while she and I kissed

Hubby did her and me alternately.

The thrill of it—

(Rest)

I was so afraid I'd catch something
but I was swept away and couldnt stop.

She stuck her tongue down my throat

and Hubby doing his thing on top

my skin shivered.

She let me slap her across the face

and I crossed the line.

(Rest)

I was my first threesome

and it wont happen again.

And I should emphasize that