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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# Paper or Plastic?

**Comedy by Werner Trieschmann**



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# Paper or Plastic?

Paper or Plastic?

Werner Trieschmann

Dramatic Publishing



**Comedy. By Werner Trieschmann. Cast: 6m., 6w., 3 either gender.**

For her first job, teenage Sarah thinks she's easily qualified to check out customers at Puritan Foods, her local grocery store. At least it has to be better than greasy fast food, right? But Sarah isn't prepared for Carl, the assistant manager, who refuses to deal with unruly customers because he's too busy putting up Christmas displays in August. And she isn't ready to deal with the customer who can't put down her cell phone long enough to acknowledge that Sarah is there. Or the two dudes who use their time in the checkout line to launch into an existential argument about the environment. And what about the mysterious cowboy or, even worse, Angus, the person whom Carl warns Sarah about the day she's hired. Then there are her crazy co-workers who put on camouflage to hunt down stray grocery carts or live in closets and subsist on Twizzlers to avoid Carl. All Sarah wants is the answer to the simplest question in the world: *Paper or Plastic?* High-school performers will love this zany comedy as it is great both for public performance and as competition material. *One single set. Approximate running time: 40 minutes.*

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# PAPER OR PLASTIC?

A comedy

by

WERNER TRIESCHMANN



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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# PAPER OR PLASTIC?

## CHARACTERS:

SARAH . . . . . the new girl who wants to succeed

CARL . . . . . the manager who doesn't want to be bothered

REGINA . . . . . the smart-aleck

KENNY . . . . . the wild man, getting away with as much  
as he can

LITTLE SAM . . . . . the small girl who wants to be taken  
seriously

CART HUNTER #1, male or female

CART HUNTER #2, male or female

ANGUS . . . . . the mystery

IN-STORE ANNOUNCER, male or female

SOCIAL WOMAN . . . . . oblivious, rude and a snob

GREENIE #1 . . . . . clueless hippie

GREENIE #2 . . . . . clueless hippie

CRACKED EGG WOMAN . . . . . passive aggressive to the point  
of being mentally unstable

COWBOY . . . . . a weirdo

TABLOID WOMAN . . . . . another mystery

PLACE: Puritan Foods grocery store.

TIME: Now.

SETTING: Two grocery store checkout counters.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE:

*Paper or Plastic?* is set in a grocery store. Grocery stores, at least the ones I shop, are loaded with stuff. Really, that's what they are: big places to go and get your stuff. So there's no way that you, average, mild-mannered, underfunded and overtaxed theater producer, can replicate a grocery store. You could come close, probably. You could ask everybody working on the play to bring in spare canned goods and other stuff and dress the set nine ways to Sunday. But here's my advice: DON'T. I would bet every lucky soul who's going to attend *Paper or Plastic?* will have been to a grocery store. They know what they're like and don't need lots of stuff to remind them. All the audience needs to believe they are seeing a grocery store are small cues—that beep that comes from the scanner, a grocery cart or two and paper and plastic bags. The best plays are about characters. Not to say sets aren't important, but, as the old saying goes, people don't come away from a night in the theater humming the sets. Audiences hopefully walk away talking about the many ways the characters intrigued and surprised them and, even better, reminded them of themselves.



# PAPER OR PLASTIC?

*(Lights up on CARL and SARAH at a register.)*

CARL. OK, this is your register, Kelly.

SARAH. It's Sarah.

CARL. Yeah. You watched the training video and so this is all familiar to you and I don't need to tell you any more.

SARAH. I did watch the video but—

CARL. Yeah. What else? Scan the groceries, get the money and get on to the next customer. If you don't have a bagger, then you have to do it yourself. Ask them if they want paper or plastic. They'll want plastic but we have to offer them both because it's corporate policy and I don't need to tell you any more.

SARAH. This is my first job.

CARL. Yeah. I've been here at Puritan Foods for five years and now I'm assistant manager which is a very important job with lots of responsibilities. Today I have to organize the Christmas displays.

SARAH. It's August.

CARL. I know. I'm late.

SARAH. Me and my mom always shop at this store. Working here seemed better than working fast food. I want to do a good job. I really do. I dug out of our attic this toy register I had when I was a girl. I practiced on it

over the weekend. I found all my little vegetables and fruits and lined them up. I got to be pretty fast.

CARL. Yeah, that would be great story if I cared. You won't last a month anyway.

SARAH. Yes I will.

CARL. None of you high school kids last.

SARAH. I will.

CARL. Enthusiasm really doesn't impress anybody at Puritan Foods, Tracy.

SARAH. It's Sarah.

CARL. Yeah. OK, you get a fifteen-minute break every four hours but not if there is anybody waiting to check out. You get a two-percent discount on some food, there's a list in the break room but it's mostly just old canned goods so I wouldn't worry about it. There are security cameras up there (*CARL points to the ceiling*) and they watch if you steal food. That's one way to get fired. Another way is to hassle me and bug me with questions and complaints.

SARAH. What if a customer has a problem?

CARL. Deal with it. One more thing. Watch out for the Cowboy.

SARAH. The Cowboy?

CARL. And, whatever you do, this is very important, don't make Angus mad.

SARAH. Who is Angus?

CARL. So. Yeah. Welcome to Puritan Foods.

SARAH. Wait. Who's Angus?

CARL. I don't need to tell you any more.

*(CARL exits. SARAH is left at her register, bewildered. Lights out.)*

IN-STORE ANNOUNCER. Attention Puritan Food shoppers, attention. Due to an accident at our fresh fish counter, we will no longer have Maine lobsters for sale. But any customer who happens to find a lobster on a shelf or in a grocery cart can have that lobster for half off. That is just our way of saying thank you for shopping at Puritan Foods!

*(Lights up. SARAH is at the register. SOCIAL WOMAN is ready to check out. She has her cell phone at her ear.)*

SARAH. Did you find everything OK?

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to SARAH)*. Oh God, you're new, aren't you?

SARAH. Yes I am.

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to phone)*. They've got a new girl at the register! And I've already been here it seems like days!

SARAH. I'm sorry. I'll go as fast as I can. Did you find what you needed?

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to phone)*. I don't know why it takes so long!

SARAH. I guess you did.

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to phone)*. I know! They're just kids!

SARAH. OK. Do you want paper or plastic?

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to phone)*. I know!

SARAH. Ma'am? Paper or plastic?

SOCIAL WOMAN. Yes, I have much better things to do with my time!

SARAH. Paper or plastic?!

SOCIAL WOMAN *(to SARAH)*. What is the holdup? Can you start checking me out?

SARAH. It's corporate policy. I have to ask you—

SOCIAL WOMAN (*back on phone*). I cannot believe in this day and age that this store doesn't have one of those automated checkout thingies! To never deal with a person, that would be so much more efficient!

SARAH. Ma'am?

SOCIAL WOMAN (*on phone*). I know! I am very sympathetic! Empathetic, whatever.

SARAH. I'm sorry.

SOCIAL WOMAN (*on phone*). I know! I am very aware of what's happening around me!

SARAH. If you could just tell me—

SOCIAL WOMAN (*on phone*). It's almost like a curse, really. I know! I am just so in tune! And you know I could really make a difference if I only had the time. If I wasn't stuck doing these menial tasks like standing in line for who knows what reason in the grocery store. You know what I could do? I could be a counselor. I really could! I like to listen to people. My listening skills are excellent and it's not—no, wait, I'm not finished! I could listen to people tell me their problems all the live long day. I could! I am the most empathetic person I know. What?! Well, I don't know her! But I am very good at that—hell...hello? (*SOCIAL WOMAN looks at her phone in disbelief. To SARAH.*) I think the battery died.

SARAH. I know.

SOCIAL WOMAN (*to SARAH*). Is there something wrong?

Can I get checked out please?

SARAH. Sure. Paper or plastic?

SOCIAL WOMAN (*back on the phone*). Oh. Are you there? I know! I don't know what happen. What!? No, I'm still stuck at the store...

*(Lights out.)*

IN-STORE ANNOUNCER. Attention Puritan Food shoppers, attention. Due to mixup at the manufacturing plant, the cartons of Mr. Salty Salt are not, as the label says, Toxic Dreams Rat Poison. Also, cans of Big Boy Chili are in fact Good Boy Dog Food. We are sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you for shopping at Puritan Foods!

*(Lights up. SARAH is at her register, studying the chart with the produce numbers. REGINA is at her register, doing nothing except staring at SARAH.)*

REGINA. You know you don't hafta memorize the numbers. There's stickers on the apples or bananas or whatever. And you can look at the sheet.

SARAH. I know. But when there's so many people in line...

REGINA. This is Putrid Foods. Do you think anybody cares?

SARAH. This is my first job.

REGINA. I also like to call it the Barf and Bag. Or the Wilted Lettuce Store. I'm Regina.

SARAH. Hi. I'm Sarah.

REGINA. Oh the New Girl! Yeah, I heard you sent a customer to complain to Carl. Ha!

SARAH. Yeah, I did, but she wouldn't...

REGINA. The last cashier that did that Carl made her mop the freezer and she got double pneumonia.

SARAH. She did?

REGINA. Yeah, then she quit and like went to the hospital.

*(KENNY dressed head to toe in camouflage, boots and maybe some big safety goggles walks in.)*

KENNY. TIME TO DO SOME CART HUNTIN'! WOOO WOOO!

REGINA. Oh wonderful. The great cart hunt. Whooptee-woo.

KENNY. LOOK, IT'S THE NEW GIRL! REGINA, DID YOU SEE THE NEW GIRL?

REGINA. Saw her. Told her she was a fool. All over it.

KENNY. YOU'RE THE ONE THAT SENT A CUSTOMER TO CARL. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

REGINA. Dang, dude, why you got to yell like that?

KENNY. HUH?

KENNY *(realizes he has earplugs in his ears)*. OH, I HAVE EARPLUGS IN MY... *(KENNY takes out his earplugs)* ...ears. I have earplugs. I forgot.

SARAH *(to KENNY)*. Are you Angus?

KENNY. Angus?! You are the New Girl! Everybody at Puritan Foods knows who I am! I am Kenny, the great cart hunter!

SARAH. The cart hunter?

KENNY. Every once in a while Carl lets us go hunt for grocery carts that have wandered off.

REGINA. Kenny, why don't you be quiet and bag groceries instead of acting the crazy fool while other people work.

KENNY. These carts are expensive, couple hundred bucks each. BUT I AM THE GREAT CART HUNTER! I WILL TRACK DOWN AND CAPTURE ANY WILD CART! WAAOOGHA!

REGINA (to SARAH). You know Kenny is like the craziest of all.

*(LITTLE SAM, a short and young-looking girl, walks in. She's carrying a toolbox and wears a hunting outfit.)*

LITTLE SAM. Yeah! Are we going to get that cart under the bridge?

REGINA (to SARAH). Oh. That's Little Sam. She's kinda hyper but she's cool.

LITTLE SAM. Kenny, I brought some tools to help get that cart.

KENNY. That cart has been under the bridge for maybe a hundred years. If I'm not getting that cart—and I am not getting that cart—then there is no way you are getting that cart.

LITTLE SAM. I bet Carl would give us a bonus if we got it.

KENNY. He might, but I tried to get that cart last time. It's wedged in that pipe under the bridge. Forget it.

LITTLE SAM. We could get it together.

KENNY. Carl isn't gonna let you go anyway.

LITTLE SAM. Why not?

KENNY. 'Cause you're Little Sam, you're a girl and you're little and you might get hurt.

*(CARL and two CART HUNTERS wearing camo and masks walk in.)*

CARL. Yeah. OK, Kenny, you have an hour—

KENNY. An hour?!

CARL. Yes, you have one hour on your little survivor excursion and I don't need to say any more. Wait, yes I do. Stay out after one hour and you're off the clock. Take these two with you.

KENNY. Yes sir. (*KENNY puts his earplugs back in. To CART HUNTERS.*) WAAA OOOGHA!

CART HUNTERS. WAAA OOOGHA!

*(KENNY makes an elaborate gesture to the CART HUNTERS indicating they are to follow behind him. The CART HUNTERS respond with an equally elaborate gesture and fall in behind KENNY.)*

KENNY. KICK THE TIRES AND LIGHT THE FIRES, CART HUNTERS! LET'S GO! (*KENNY and CART HUNTERS run off.*)

LITTLE SAM. What about me? I can go too.

CARL (*to LITTLE SAM*). Uh, no. Go put on your real clothes and get a smock. You're going to bag for Regina.

REGINA. About time I get some help. I can't do all this by myself.

LITTLE SAM. Carl! She isn't doing anything!

CARL. I don't need to say any more. (*LITTLE SAM walks off.*) Shelia, come here. (*Nobody moves.*) Angie. Kim. Kelly. Freeda. (*Nobody moves. CARL points at SARAH.*) You. Come here.

SARAH. Sarah. I'm Sarah.

CARL. Oh I remember.

SARAH. Listen, can I say I am sorry about sending you that customer but she wouldn't answer the question and put down her cell phone for two seconds. I am trying to



do the best job and I'm even studying the sheets with the produce numbers so I can be that much faster. I haven't made Angus mad. Nobody will tell me who he is!

CARL. You're coming with me.

SARAH. What are we doing?

CARL. You're going to mop the freezer.

*(Lights out.)*

IN-STORE ANNOUNCER. Attention Puritan Food shoppers. Are you feeling blue? Down in the dumps? Are you ready to take a long, hot bath with a hair dryer? If that's the case, then Puritan Foods is here to help with special discount prices on all depression medication including Zoloft, Zanax and malt liquor. This is just one way Puritan Foods is turning our customers' frowns upside down. Thank you for shopping at Puritan Foods!

*(Lights up on SARAH, at a register. GREENIE #1, a hippyish guy, is in line.)*

SARAH. Paper or plastic?

GREENIE #1. Uh. Plastic.

*(Now GREENIE #2 pops up beside GREENIE #1.)*

GREENIE #2. Plastic? No, dude, paper.

GREENIE #1. No, dude, like deforestation.

GREENIE #2. Dude, like plastic baggie handles around little birdies' necks.

GREENIE #1. No dude, you are like thinking of the dolphins.

GREENIE #2. Dude.

GREENIE #1. Dude.

GREENIE #2. Oooh. Yeah. Dolphins. Right. Sorry, dude.

SARAH. Paper or plastic?

GREENIE #2. Paper, yeah. That'll work. Hey, do you like know if it's like acid-free paper?

GREENIE #1. Oh yeah, dude, is it acid-free?

SARAH. What?

GREENIE #2. Or is it made out of hemp?

GREENIE #1. Did you say hemp?

GREENIE #2. Yeah I did. (*The GREENIES giggle.*)

GREENIE #1. Oh, dude, did you get the cookies?

GREENIE #2. Yeah they're right there.

GREENIE #1. Oh you got the chocolate centers. Cooool. Love those.

*(SARAH clears her throat, coughs, and does something to get GREENIES' attention.)*

GREENIE #2. Right. OK, checkout girl, we're about to get it together here.

SARAH. My name is Sarah. Wait, are you Angus?

GREENIE #2 (*to GREENIE #1*). Dude, she thinks I'm Angus!

GREENIE #1. Angus?! Oh freak!

GREENIE #2. Like I know!

GREENIE #1. Of all the things I would have to contemplate in the natural world that would be like whoa "does not compute."

GREENIE #2. That will not boot!