

THE CONSTRUCTION WORKER

A Play in Two Acts, by Joanne Mercer
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P.O. Box 62, Birdsboro, PA 19508
Cell (484) 802-4309 URL: www.jomercer.biz mail: jojo@jomercer.biz

MIKE: My grandfather was the last of the Maloni's to drink on the job. He was one hell of a guy. Tough as nails. A real steel man. He helped build downtown Manhattan. You drive by The Chrysler Building? Gramps built it. Thirty Rock? Gramps was there, 1932. But he was too tough, you know? Thought he'd never get hurt.

JESSE: I know the type.

MIKE: Yeah, lots of them bozo's around. Anyway, Gramps was working the Empire State Building, the noon whistle blows, so Gramps and his buddies, they head on down to the corner joint to snort a few, then they all head back on up to the construction site. Gramps was working girders, see, way up on the fifty-ninth floor, guiding them down to where they belong so the riveters can rivet them into place. And then, all of a sudden, he starts to lose his balance, see, cause he's had a few too many. He wobbles back and forth on the girder, waving his arms so's he can try and catch his balance, cause no one wants to fall fifty-nine stories, right? Fall from that height, and pppppppppp!!!!!!! (MIKE makes a "splattering" noise tongue) You'd be splattered from Harlem to Battery Park in ten seconds flat! Hey, flat, get it? Flat! Yeah, so, anyway, there he is, weaving back and forth, arms waving like a pair of windmills on overdrive and all the guys come running towards him yelling, 'Harry! Harry!'... uh, that was Gramps' name, Harry... and he's going, 'Wooahhh....!', when all of a sudden, just like some kind of freakin' cartoon, this pigeon flies down and lands plop! right on Gramps' hard hat!

JESSE: No!

MIKE: Yeah! And Gramps, he loses control but good! Down he goes, head over heels, flying through the sky like a sack of potatoes when bam! He lands on a girder rising up on a crane! So his pals, they call to the crane operator, and he stops the girder and the reach out and get Gramps and see that he's not dead, he's just out cold!

JESSE: Wow!

MIKE: They splash cold water on his face, and Gramps comes out of it. He's kind of groggy at first, right? He tries to sit up and he feels this sharp pain on his right side. He looks down, and there's this piece of rib bone stickin' right out of his shirt!

JESSE: Oh, gross! Did the doctor fix him up?

MIKE: Doctor, schmactor! Them guys never went to the doctor! They took care of things themselves.

JESSE: What?

MIKE: Yep. That's what Gramps did, too. He wadded up his hanky and bit down on it real hard, see? Four of his buddies held his legs down, and two of them held his shoulders, and they twisted him with a real hard yank! And the rib bone just slipped right back inside of him.

JESSE: But what about the wound?

MIKE: Oh, they poured a beer over the hole in his side where the bone came out, to sort of sterilize it, you know? Then they stuffed a clean hanky in so's it wouldn't bleed no more. And then they all went back to work.

JESSE: He didn't even go home to rest?

MIKE: Nah. In them days, once you started a job, you finished it. It was right around the Depression, see? Gramps couldn't stop working for something like a broken rib. That wasn't no excuse. Besides, soon as he went home, there would be some other poor schmo, just waiting to take his place. Getting hurt on the job was a good way to get fired back then.

JESSE: Geez.

MIKE: Yeah. Those were the days. When men were men, and women were... (MIKE hooks his fingers around JESSE's wheelchair and draws her closer to him.) So, how'd you wind up in this wheelchair, anyways?