can't stand it any longer, who never really could, gentle
gentle people, infinitely injured people, lost souls,
ghouls, ghosts, descendents, shades, shadows, future
ancestors. Ladies, Gentlemen, I know I'm forgetting
somebody, friends, likenesses, darknesses, citizens,
people, hopeful people, hopeful people, everybody,
evry last lone dying and inconsolably lonely person,
fellow human beings, breathing people, breathers,
breathers... welcome. The fire exit's over there. I
think you can also get out this way.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Average evening, Middletown. COP enters and strolls
across the dimly-lit stage. He comes to the window
of a house, upstage. Through it, illuminated, MRS.
SWANSON is seen unpacking boxes, hanging a painting
on the wall, etc. COP stands outside, looking in. He
strolls a bit more, comes to another window of another
house, upstage. Inside, JOHN DODGE, illuminated, is
seen sitting at a table, building a pyramid of playing
cards. COP stands outside, looking in. He strolls a
little more, twirling his police baton. He arrives at
MECHANIC, who is sitting on a bench, downstage,
drinking out of a bottle in a paper bag. MECHANIC eats
something and throws the wrapper on the ground, as
COP nears. MECHANIC hurriedly hides the paper bag
upon seeing COP approach.)

MECHANIC. Evening.

COP. Maybe. (referring to the bottle:) I saw that. You think
I'm a cop? I look like a cop. I walk like a cop, so, you
figure, case closed. I'm a cop.

MECHANIC. You're not a cop?
COP. No, I am a cop. You were right.

MECHANIC. Well, that's what I –

COP. (interrupting) That's what you thought. Everything is as
everything seems, I guess. Good for everything. What
about you?

MECHANIC. What do you mean?
COP. What about you?

MECHANIC. I don’t know. I mean, who knows, you know?

COP. No. What are you doing here?

MECHANIC. I don’t know. I was just walking around. Later tonight, I thought I might –

COP. (interrupting) Forget about before and after. I mean now.

MECHANIC. Well, I don’t know, because I was –

COP. (interrupting) You don’t know because you don’t know. That’s the trouble, the beauty, the trouble. So let’s just leave it at that. (motioning to the wrapper MECHANIC threw on the ground) I think you dropped something.

(MECHANIC picks up the wrapper.)

The problem with people like –

MECHANIC. (interrupting) I was just sitting here, minding my –

COP. (interrupting) Don’t interrupt.

(Long pause, as MECHANIC waits and does not interrupt.)

MECHANIC. Was there something else you were –

COP. (interrupting) I thought I said, don’t interrupt. You know what, I should just goddamn… (Long pause. To audience) Welcome. Hi, hello. Welcome to the little town of Middletown. Ordinary place, ordinary time. But aren’t they all? No. They are not, all. (to MECHANIC) Say something nice.

MECHANIC. (to both the audience and to COP, with some unease) I’m just sitting here. I don’t know what else. Um… (He tries to think of something else.)

COP. (to audience) Right. Anyway, Middletown. Population: stable; elevation: same. The main street is called Main Street. The side streets are named after trees. Things are fairly predictable. People come, people go. Crying, by the way, in both directions.

MECHANIC. Ain’t that the truth.

COP. (immediately) Why don’t you get out of here.

MECHANIC. (defensively) Why? I’m not doing anything.

COP. And that’s a reason you should stay? Let’s go, move.

MECHANIC. Where?

COP. A different bench, I don’t know, another perspective. Just not here, okay? In fact, you know what – here, allow me. I want to help you make a little speech.

(COP moves behind MECHANIC and begins to choke him with his baton, pulling it with both hands against MECHANIC’s throat, from behind. MECHANIC struggles, unable to breathe, unable to get free.)

Say, “This is my hometown.” Say, “My life’s a mystery to me.” Say it! Be a good human. Be filled with humility. With wonder and awe. Awe!

(MECHANIC tries to speak, but is unable to breathe. COP continues to choke him.)

It’s not easy, is it. Well, that’s life. Listen, I’m sorry for what I’m still doing to you. Truly. But, don’t worry. It’ll be over in three, two, one…

(COP continues choking MECHANIC for three or four more seconds, and then releases him. MECHANIC tries to breathe, tries to recover. He begins to exit.)

(to MECHANIC:) Hey, no, I didn’t mean you had to –

(MECHANIC mutters something.)

(to MECHANIC:) Wonderful, great. (brief pause to audience:) Excuse me. I’m not exactly sure what I was hoping to… I apologize. I was just trying to imitate nature. Anyway, welcome. Honestly. Middletown.

(COP exits.)