

# *The Waste Reduction Plot*

By  
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## Characters

**Mr. Hopper** 40's – 50's Long term city employee

**Jenkins** 20's A new hire

## Scene

**Mr. Hoppers office. Hopper is behind his desk. There is a knock on the door.**

**Hopper:** Come in.

*Jenkins enters*

**Jenkins:** I've finished the schedule Mr. Hopper. You said you wanted to look it over before we sent it upstairs.

**Hopper:** Yes, yes let me see.

*Jenkins hands Hopper four or five pieces of paper and sits in a chair beside the desk.*

*Hopper reads the papers making a grunting sound occasionally. He looks at Jenkins a few seconds before speaking.*

**Hopper:** I realize you're new to city hall Jenkins, but frankly I expected better than this.

**Jenkins:** I don't understand sir.

**Hopper:** This is totally unacceptable.

**Jenkins:** In what way sir?

**Hopper:** In every way Jenkins. As soon as I looked at this I knew it wasn't going to work.

**Jenkins:** But, I've looked at all the....

**Hopper:** It may work, but it won't "work"

**Jenkins:** Work?

**Hopper:** (*making air quotation marks*) No, "work"

**Jenkins:** But I've run the simulation, done the cost analysis, taken into account extraneous factors, depreciated the assets...

**Hopper:** (*interrupting*) Of course you have. But that's only what they teach you in school. Here, in the real world where it's a constant battle to maintain our slice of the budget pie, which means my job and yours, there's a lot more to it than that.

**Jenkins:** A lot more than what?

**Hopper:** How old are you Jenkins?

**Jenkins:** Twenty three sir.

**Hopper:** Twenty three! Ahhh twenty three. Would it surprise you to learn that just like you, I was once twenty three?

**Jenkins:** Not really sir.

**Hopper:** And I was a lot like you. Young, about five ten and a half, more hair though. But I'll tell you something I wasn't.

**Jenkins:** And what would that be sir.

**Hopper:** Behind this desk.

**Jenkins:** Neither am I sir.

**Hopper:** Being behind this desk gives me a whole different perspective. A different view. For instance... from where you're sitting, can you see the window?

**Jenkins:** No sir.

**Hopper:** Well I can.

**Jenkins:** I see.

**Hopper:** No, I see. And that's my whole point.

**Jenkins:** I see.. I mean... um.. what do you see sir?

**Hopper:** I see the big picture. The way the game is played, the lay of the land, the thrust and parry of public service. The game Jenkins, the game.

**Jenkins:** It's a game sir?

**Hopper:** You're green. I like that about you. As I bend the twig, so grows the tree. I will be your Mrs.Grimstone.

**Jenkins:** She bends your twig sir?

**Hopper:** When I first arrived here at city hall she took me under her wing and showed me how things really work. How to *make* things work. She was kinda like the city hall black ops. Did you ever hear of Agnes Shaw-Cowan who ran for Mayor four times promising to build landing pads for alien spaceships?

**Jenkins:** I read about her. That was back in the eighties wasn't it?

**Hopper:** She was Mrs. Grimstones invention. Genius! Agnes Shaw-Cowan made the pablum spouted by the real politicians sound brilliant by comparison. Made a lot of borderline people appear acceptable.

**Jenkins:** Really!

**Hopper:** Oh, you'd be surprised. (*pause*) Dale TV, that's hers too.

**Jenkins:** Wow. And Stephen Orser?

**Hopper:** Now you're catching on!

**Jenkins:** So where's Mrs. Grimstone now?

**Hopper:** Toronto.

**Jenkins:** That explains a lot.

**Hopper:** Just remember, I didn't tell you that.

**Jenkins:** Right... black ops.

**Hopper:** I didn't tell you that either.

**Jenkins:** No you didn't.

**Hopper:** Yes I did, but I didn't.

**Jenkins:** So, those two cancel each other out.

**Hopper:** Exactly. Now let's get back to this schedule you've put together.

**Jenkins:** As I mentioned, I ran the simulations....

**Hopper:** Stop right there! That's linear thinking! You're thinking in straight lines. You have to think in trapezoids.

**Jenkins:** Trapezoids?

**Hopper:** Angular, zig zag, keep them off balance.

**Jenkins:** Who's "them" sir?

**Hopper:** Anyone who's not us.

**Jenkins:** Should I write this down?

**Hopper:** Don't write any of this down!

**Jenkins:** OK.

**Hopper:** Green. So green.

**Jenkins:** Sorry sir.

**Hopper:** That's OK. I was once green too. Does that surprise you?

**Jenkins:** Yes sir.

**Hopper:** Well I was, but I'll deny it. Now.. what was the first thing you said to me. Never mind, I'll tell you. You said "I ran the simulations" Correct?

**Jenkins:** Correct.

**Hopper:** That tells me your primary concern is the functionality of the schedule.

**Jenkins:** Well... yes.

**Hopper:** How it works doesn't matter! What matters is how it appears.

**Jenkins:** How it appears.

**Hopper:** The *perception*. Let's start with the title. "Garbage Pick up Schedule". What do you see wrong with that.

**Jenkins:** Nothing. It's the simplest way to describe exactly what it is.

**Hopper:** Lesson number one. Never, ever describe anything in the simplest possible terms. Remember, a confusing description impresses. This will now be known as the "2013 – 2014 Waste Reduction and Conservation Calendar."

**Jenkins:** But it's a timetable for picking up trash from the curb and that title doesn't say anything about that. Its not a timetable for reducing trash, it's a timetable for picking up trash.

**Hopper:** That's not the point. It sounds good Jenkins, it sounds good and that's all that matters! And notice how I included the word "Conservation"? It makes it sound like we're saving stuff when we're actually throwing stuff out, a total reversal!

**Jenkins:** But there is the recycling program.

**Hopper:** That's right. We put the trash in two big piles. One pile gets buried now and one pile gets buried later. It just gets to be reincarnated a few times first.

**Jenkins:** Why don't we call it the "Trash Reincarnation Calendar"

**Hopper:** I like the way you're thinking, but it may sound a little too spiritual. People might start seeing religious figures in their trash. It's bad enough we have people lined up to pick bottles out of the bins, the last thing we need are pilgrims too.

**Jenkins:** Right. I see what you mean. And I like the use of the word "waste". It sounds so much cleaner than "garbage" or "trash". "Garbage" and "trash" sounds like stuff you want to throw away, but "waste"... "waste" is something you don't want to do... you don't want to waste things... it almost makes you want to keep it.

**Hopper:** Now you're getting it! Let's move on to the picture you've proposed for the cover of the calendar.

**Jenkins:** It's one of the garbage trucks used for pick up, I thought it represented what the calendar was about.

**Hopper:** It represents garbage! Nobody wants to think about garbage. Here's what we'll put on the cover. A nice middle class guy with two sweet little girls standing at the end of a driveway by two recycling bins. No garbage.

**Jenkins:** No garbage?

**Hopper:** Nope. **We** want to avoid the perception of garbage. We want to be associated with turning stuff that's garbage into non-garbage by not throwing it away. Then we turn the non garbage into stuff that becomes garbage which we don't throw away, therefore turning it back into non garbage. The city needs the perception of being green.

**Jenkins:** So why do we exercise being green by putting stuff into a *blue* bin?

**Hopper:** Well, that was a mistake.

**Jenkins:** So the only garbage we want to talk about picking up is garbage that isn't garbage.

**Hopper:** Exactly. In fact, I'm trying to work on a system where we refuse to pick up anything that's garbage on garbage days.

**Jenkins:** So, no garbage on the cover, just a man and his two daughters?

**Hopper:** Notice I didn't include a mother in the scene?

**Jenkins:** I was going to ask about that.

**Hopper:** It might offend somebody. A typical depiction of a typical family will make somebody somewhere go off the deep end. This way, it's totally open to interpretation. Oh... he's a single parent, or Oh... his wife has just left for work, see what I mean?

**Jenkins:** And the two little girls is a stroke of genius! "recycling is so easy, even a toddler can do it!" I have so much to learn. The perception... not the reality! This is all off the top of your head?

**Hopper:** Hell no, I've been doing this for years.

**Jenkins:** In the same job?

**Hopper:** Nope, I've been in every department at city hall, spent a few years in provincial government, E-Health, Ornge. That's the secret... keep moving around. That way you can benefit from STGFLTP.

**Jenkins:** STG....

**Hopper:** STGFLTP ... Short Term Gain For Long Term Pain. You see, back in the day when people spent most of their lives in the same job, they would tend to make decisions with an eye to the long term effects. But now, when the average stay in a position is only about five years, you can make decisions and enact policies and care only about how it will make you look in the short term. You see? Even if it blows up ten years down the road, you won't care because you'll be somewhere else!

**Jenkins:** So everybody is busy chasing ghosts.

**Hopper:** As long as you're smart enough to delete all your emails before you leave. You would think that'd be a no brainer.

**Jenkins:** So it's just a matter of staying two steps ahead of the... pardon my language sir... the "shit tsunami"

**Hopper:** Now you're really catching on. You're a fast learner, I like that.

**Jenkins:** That means you'll be leaving here soon?

**Hopper:** More than likely. I'm at the top of my pay scale. Ninety nine thousand Nine hundred and ninety nine dollars a year. (*he senses Jenkins is confused*) Gotta stay off the sunshine list.

**Jenkins:** Ohhhh...

**Hopper:** You've got a lot to learn kid, but I have faith. I think you're a keeper. In fact, there are a couple of things on this schedule that look OK.

**Jenkins:** I think my suggestion for green bin compost recycling is a keeper.

**Hopper:** Nope, I think someone in Waterloo beat you to that.

**Jenkins:** Can't we do it too?

**Hopper:** No, because somebody in Waterloo grabbed the glory. By the time Waterloo realized it was costing them five times as much to recycle kitchen crap as it would to dump it as garbage, it was too late. If you go into council suggesting something that's a proven money pit, they'll probably implement it but you won't get the glory, you'll get the blame.

**Jenkins:** Wow, there's a lot to this isn't there. (*he thinks*) OK, how about this. Same day garbage pick up every week.

**Hopper:** You realize that would cost one point five million dollars a year?

**Jenkins:** But wouldn't we be able to...

**Hopper:** Do you realize what this city could do with one point five million dollars?

**Jenkins:** Put on another light show?

**Hopper:** No! We could bring in forty five more city councillors! That would give us fifty nine councillors plus the mayor for an even sixty. Think of the good that would do the city! (*pause...Jenkins looks confused again*) I'm kidding! You've got to know when I'm kidding! Look, I like your same day pickup idea because it's giving some of the people what they want.

**Jenkins:** Some of the people?

**Hopper:** Because some people are seemingly unable to perform the onerous task of consulting a calendar once a week. But!! You'll be seen as obeying the voice of the people, and you'll be golden!

**Jenkins:** Because.... a few years down the road when it turns out to actually cost much much more than the estimates....

**Jenkins & Hopper:** Because it always does!!...

**Jenkins:** ....I'll be somewhere else!

**Hopper:** If you play your cards right.

**Jenkins:** This could actually work!

**Hopper:** You're close....

**Jenkins:** Ahhhh.... this could actually (*make air quotation marks*) "work".

**Hopper:** You see, never confuse what works for them with what works for you.

**Jenkins:** I'm smellin' what you're cookin'!

**Hopper:** So they'll pick up garbage every single day including statutory holidays?

**Jenkins:** Nope, not on stats.

**Hopper:** So what happens if your garbage day is on a stat, say on a Monday.

**Jenkins:** Then your garbage will be picked up on Tuesday.

**Hopper:** What about Tuesdays garbage

**Jenkins:** That'll be picked up on Wednesday.

**Hopper:** Wednesdays garbage?

**Jenkins:** Picked up on Thursday

**Hopper:** Thursdays garbage?

**Jenkins:** Friday.

**Hopper:** Fridays garbage?

**Jenkins:** Saturday.

**Hopper:** And this will happen roughly ten times a year?

**Jenkins:** Yep.

**Hopper:** (*pause*) How will they keep track of that?

**Jenkins:** They'll have a calendar.

**Hopper:** Beautiful! How long did it take you to put together this original garbage pickup calendar?

Jenkins: About a week sir.

**Hopper:** Great. (*handing the original calendar back to him*) Work on it for another week then scrap it. Then get busy making up the new Same Day Waste Reduction and Conservation Calendar!

**Jenkins:** (*starting to leave*) I'm on it sir!

**Hopper:** Wait a minute kid. (*Jenkins stops*) I like you. You're a lot like me when I was your age except younger. Here, take this. (*tosses an object to him*)

**Jenkins:** (*catches and examines it*) Wow!! Are you sure you want me to have this?

**Hopper:** Yeah... the process got so screwed up that by the time the dust had cleared and they were all handed out, I had five.

**Jenkins:** Thanks Mr Hopper! My own Queens Diamond Jubilee Medal!! (*he leaves*)

The End