

Luz Acosta's Case

You are a visiting in-home volunteer with a program called "Checking In." You are scheduled to visit with Luz, a 75 year old Cuban widow living in a large retirement community with a mostly Jewish/Caucasian population. You notice that her hair is nicely styled, her makeup is done well, and she is dressed in a tasteful blouse and matching slacks. She is seated in a rented wheelchair she uses to get around in her home because she is unable to walk more than a few feet at a time. Luz's nails are shaped and painted and you notice that as she speaks, she gestures grandly from time to time, as if for emphasis.

After you greet her and the two of you are comfortable, you ask how she is today. Luz begins crying, blotting a tissue to her eyes and nose and tells you she is "so lonely." The agency file shows she has family living in the area but when you ask her about them she quickly tells you, "I don't speak to my brother anymore. We had a fight several years ago and I want nothing to do with him. I don't talk to my son because he married that harlot. I won't have low class people in my life." As she says this last phrase, Luz makes a spitting gesture to the side.

When you ask her about friends, Luz tells you, "I have no one. I feel so sad and so alone." Luz again begins to cry. "I am afraid I will die alone. I don't want to be so alone." You notice an open address book beside her phone with names of several residents in the retirement community. When you ask her about it, she is silent for a few minutes, clasping her hands together, not meeting your gaze, and finally whispers, "They're all liars and thieves. I don't speak to any of them." Luz again falls silent. You match her silence to give her a moment to compose herself.

Luz suddenly starts to wipe the table near her clean with a clean tissue and gestures around the room as if in disgust. She begins to complain loudly about the various aides that come to clean and cook and assist her with her bathing and daily care. "They never do things the way I like them, and they cook all their 'ethnic' food. Why can't they send me a nice Cuban girl instead of all these Haitians and Jamaicans?"