

THE ACCOUNTANCY

By Michael Soetaert

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THE ACCOUNTANCY

A Full Length Comedy

By Michael Soetaert

SYNOPSIS: Are you needing a career? Do you want job security? Peace of mind? Do you want to make the most amount of money for the least amount of effort? Then the Accountancy is the career for you! And it comes with an official certificate, suitable for framing. How can I be sure that the Accountancy is the right career for you? Because that is the career I recommend for everybody. And those wise enough to take my advice... all live right here. And woe be he who tries anything different. *The Accountancy*, a full length comedy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 3 male, 5 either; gender flexible)

- FRIDAY (m)..... Our hero. Mid-twenties. In Act I he will be wearing blue jeans, sneakers, and a T-shirt. In Act II, swap the T-shirt for a work shirt. And in Act III he will be wearing a tux with tails and a top hat, more or less, which will become increasingly less formal as the act progresses. *(448 lines)*
- SOOTHSAYER (m/f)..... Old, ragged looking person waiting on the roadside to town. *(17 lines)*
- MORDREAD CRUBB (m/f)..... Vocational Guidance Counselor. Middle-age. Couldn't talk without his hands. Wears a cheap suit, though he wears it well. *(85 lines)*
- AUBREY SPITZEL (f)..... An accountant; wife of Audrey. Middle age. A bit frumpy. Wears a long dress. *(87 lines)*
- AUDREY SPITZEL (m)..... Also an accountant; husband of Aubrey. Middle age as well. He's the type of guy who would wear a sweater vest with a tie. *(96 lines)*

- CHARLOTTE SPITZEL (f) Their daughter; Randolph's longtime girlfriend. 22, very pretty, and dresses very well. If you have a deep enough wardrobe, have her come out in something different every time. After all, there are more really cute outfits than there are days of the year, so there isn't time to waste. She will also need something a little bit more risqué that she will change into in the First Act. She has an ever-so-slight Southern accent that gets a bit thicker from time to time. *(103 lines)*
- RANDOLF KNOBLER (m) Randolph, with an F. The rival for the young lady's affection. Also in his 20s. Tries to dress smartly, but just doesn't quite pull it off. *(106 lines)*
- DABNEY LIEBOWITZ (m/f) Friday's apprentice. 20-something. Dressed as a Boy Scout, all the way to the scarf and the merit badge sash. If you really have time to kill, you could make all the merit badges accounting symbols. In the Second Act he will be wearing a stained T-shirt and tattered blue jeans, along with dark glasses. *(114 lines)*
- COSEMELL BRANCH (m/f) An accountant. Middle age. When he first comes on, he will be dressed in shorts, Hawai'ian print shirt, and dark glasses; thereafter, he should be dressed very sharply in a nicely tailored suit. *(83 lines)*
- WALDEN NORRIS (m/f) Branch's apprentice. 20-something. He, too, will be neatly dressed as a Boy Scout. *(34 lines)*

THE ACCOUNTANCY

PROPS

(In order of appearance)

FRIDAY — Piece of paper with directions on it, coin, magazine, yo-yo, nails, hammer, watch, pocket calendar, juggling balls, boomerang and a paper bag to put it in, small traveling bag.

AUDREY — Watch, key on keychain, newspaper, wallet with money in it.

DABNEY — Army blanket, slide rule, C-rations, magazine, a cup of coffee, dark glasses, an unlit cigarette (if you can get away with it).

SOOTHSAYER — Dollar bill.

CHARLOTTE — Picnic basket, gift box with an outlandish tie in it.

WALDEN — “Heavy” trunk, contract.

BRANCH — One of those drinks with an umbrella in it, an additional umbrella (at least), small notepad, pen, an envelope with a cheque inside, envelopes for Friday’s electric bill, water bill, and sewer bill.

RANDOLF — Two sticks, bandages and crutches, pocket calendar, wrist watch, starting pistol.

MORDREAD — Large piece of chalk, old-style box camera with flash, a roll of film, flip chart, a large gift box inside of which is a folded white shirt, a severe black tie, a cheap calculator, a pocket protector, and a gift certificate for a free breakfast buffet at Denny’s.

AUBREY — Handkerchief, old-style glass thermometer (don’t use a real one; they’re really quite dangerous), trading stamp book, stack of money.

GENERAL — Note in door frame, a sign that says “Closed Until Further Notice,” several empty C-ration cans, stepladder, painted sign for toy store, lawn chair, an “open” sign, a large number board with numbers that can be changed, four different banners to hang at various times in front of the toy store, saying “Grand Opening,” “One Week Anniversary Sale,” “Second Week Anniversary Sale,” “Three Week Anniversary Sale,” “Close Out / Something Must Go,” a table for toys, and a sign on the table that says “All Sales Final,” old-style adding machine, and various toys other than the specific ones listed above.

DURATION: 90 minutes

SET

Two basic sets: The store fronts and then inside the stores/homes. The idea is for characters to exit the stage into the shops/homes from the outside and then almost immediately show them walking into the stores/homes, as if they've just entered from the outside (or vice versa). There are several ways to do this, from building elaborate revolving sets to flying in scenery. However, if you don't have the time, money, or the stage to do that sort of thing, then perhaps the easiest way would be to erect a row of flats about a third of the way deep on the stage. Then paint the flats to resemble the various shops and homes, each with a practical door. When the characters go "inside" the various places, drop the lights and as quickly as possible, bring up a spot representing the inside, and just have the characters come back through the door. If anything specific is needed, such as chairs or other props, just have the actors bring them on with them, or quickly place them while the stage is dark. For the most part, though, the set should be fairly minimal.

In particular, for the "inside" sets, the Spitzel's house needs at least four chairs. Branch's office needs a desk (or a small table) and two chairs.

On the outside, overall, the idea is that there is no street. There should be a bush or two that can be set out, one of which needs to be big enough to hide behind. There needs to be a bench outside the toy shop, and eventually a table for the sidewalk sale.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

The Store Fronts and the pathway to town

AT RISE: *Bring the lights up on the set. Bring up a tight spot on Friday, who will enter from the back of the auditorium and make his way down the far right aisle, or whatever works. He will stop when he gets to the Soothsayer.*

FRIDAY: Excuse me, stranger, but can you tell me where Easton is?

SOOTHSAYER: Evil! Stay away! There's nothing there but evil.

Evil, I say! Evil!

FRIDAY: What? Easton?

SOOTHSAYER: *(Completely calm; rather casual.)* Oh! Easton. I thought you said, "Eaton." Easton is right down the path, about a half mile.

FRIDAY: Aren't there any roads to Easton?

SOOTHSAYER: Nope. Don't need 'em. Ain't got no car.

FRIDAY: But I do.

SOOTHSAYER: Then I guess that's your problem, then, ain't it?

FRIDAY: *(A bit tremulous.)* Uh... yeah. Thank you.

FRIDAY will continue onto the stage, entering from the right.

FRIDAY: *(Stopping and taking a piece of paper from his pocket, which he will read out loud.)* 4334 Main Street... *(He will check the addresses and stop at the right one, which has a "Closed Until Further Notice" sign on the door. He will knock several times, but nobody will answer. It is at that point he will see a note shoved into the door frame, which he will take out and read.)* "For key, please see next door." *(FRIDAY will look both right and left, uncertain which way to go, and in a moment of decision, he will take out a coin, flip it, check the call, and with a self-assuring nod cross to the right door and knock; MORDREAD will answer the door after a beat.)* Good afternoon, sir, my name is Friday...

MORDREAD: That's an unusual name.

FRIDAY: So I've been told. I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but I'm wondering if you can help me.

MORDREAD: Then wonder no more, my boy. My name is Mordread Crubb, and I am a vocational guidance counselor. It is a special calling to be a vocational guidance counselor, to guide others in finding the profession they are best suited for. And, more importantly, helping them find a career that will give them financial security. For being secure is more important than being happy. Don't you agree? Indeed, how could one even contemplate happiness if that person were not first secure? (*While making a pyramid with his hands.*) One need only look to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Self-Actualization, wherein the realm of happiness resides, is not even possible without having first met those very basic of concerns, hunger, thirst, protection, and, in Maslow's very own words, *security*.

FRIDAY: What?

MORDREAD: Security. Financial security. The security of knowing that the career you have chosen will provide for you and your family.

FRIDAY: I don't have a family.

MORDREAD: But you may. And when you do, how prepared will you be?

FRIDAY: But I don't even have a girlfriend.

MORDREAD: Though preferred, it is not a prerequisite. So tell me sir, what do you like to do for fun?

FRIDAY: What?

MORDREAD: Merriment. Joy. If you could picture yourself having a good time, what is it that you would be doing?

FRIDAY: Well... I would... Hey! That's none of your business!

MORDREAD: Of course it's my business. I'm going to help you find a career.

FRIDAY: But I didn't come here to find a career.

MORDREAD: Do you already have one?

FRIDAY: No... Not really.

MORDREAD: Then you need one. There's no time to wait. The quicker you can find a career, the quicker you can start planning for your retirement.

FRIDAY: Retirement?

MORDREAD: It won't plan itself. And that planning starts with a career. Do you know how I determine what career is appropriate for any given individual?

FRIDAY: No.

MORDREAD: Of course you don't. If you did, then you'd be the vocational guidance counselor and I would be the one knocking on your door seeking help. And the help that I would want, the one thing I'd want to know more than anything else, is how to earn the most money with the least amount of effort. Keeping in mind, of course, that "most" and "least" are highly subjective modifiers.

FRIDAY: What about happiness?

MORDREAD: Happiness is expensive, sir. But so is becoming a medical doctor. That, in itself, lowers the return of your investment. Yes, I said investment, because you are investing in yourself. And if one is investing, one should look for the best return one can find on one's investment. Don't you agree? It's a fact that is backed by empirical evidence. It's basic economics. Therefore, seeking a career as a poet, to give an example, would be financial folly, for there is no profit in posy. You can't even give poetry away. But then, becoming a nuclear physicist could also be financial folly, for there is no guarantee that after all that expensive education you still won't be delivering pizzas. So, do you know where we look, sir, when looking for the career that is right for you?

FRIDAY: No.

MORDREAD: Of course you don't. Same reason as above. But I'll tell you where we look, Mr. Friday. We look in the middle, somewhere between crafting sonnets and mass producing nuclear warheads. Therein lies the point of diminishing returns.

FRIDAY: The point of what?

MORDREAD: The point of diminishing returns. It's that point where increasing investments will no longer increase profits. It's the point of making the most amount of money with the least amount of effort.

FRIDAY: And where might that point be?

MORDREAD: The Accountancy.

FRIDAY: The Accountancy?

MORDREAD: Correct. Being an accountant. One who keeps accounts. A Certified Public Accountant. Not only does it pay well, but it comes with its own certificate suitable for framing. And that's what I want for you.

FRIDAY: Me?

MORDREAD: Yes, you.

FRIDAY: Why me?

MORDREAD: Because you're the only one here.

FRIDAY: No. I mean, why the accountancy *for me*? Why would you recommend that I – me – should become an accountant? You don't even know me.

MORDREAD: Because I recommend the same thing for everybody.

FRIDAY: Everybody?

MORDREAD: Absolutely. The Accountancy is the one career that you can't go wrong with. It requires only a minimum investment and guarantees a life-long steady rate of return. There will always be numbers that need to be crunched. It's out of the elements, no heavy lifting, 9-5, paid vacations, and all federal holidays off.

FRIDAY: But if everybody became an accountant, how would that be possible?

MORDREAD: Because everybody *isn't* going to become an accountant, Mr. Friday. This may be difficult to fathom, but many people find the manipulation of numbers to be dreadfully dull...

FRIDAY: Because it is.

MORDREAD: Which means that it is a low stress job. I scarcely need remind you of the vast medical evidence that supports how harmful stress can be. I ask you this: What's the point of making a million dollars if you're too dead to enjoy it? And I will answer that rhetorical question for you: None, sir. Now shall I sign you up?

FRIDAY: Sign me up? For what?

MORDREAD: For the Accountancy, of course. Unless, that is, you want to be called a doctor. Then I would recommend the chiropractry.

FRIDAY: I'm sorry. But I didn't come for career advice.

MORDREAD: Then you have me at a disadvantage, sir.

FRIDAY: *(Holding up the note that was on the door for emphasis.)*

The note on the office... *(Pointing.)* ...that office, said to check next-door for the key. You see, Marvis Applewine was my Great Uncle...

MORDREAD: Oh. Yes. We were all sad to see Marvis pass. He used to pass on hills and corners, so it was just a matter of time. You have my condolences.

FRIDAY: Thank you. But truth be known, I didn't even know I had a Great Uncle Marvis until I found out that I had inherited his business. *(Pointing.)* This business...

MORDREAD: And a fine business it was.

FRIDAY: What did my Uncle Marvis do?

MORDREAD: He was an accountant. Of course. Of the three accountancies on Main Street, he unquestionably had the best location.

FRIDAY: That's good to hear. I hope it's a good location for a toy store, too.

MORDREAD: Pardon me?

FRIDAY: A toy store. When I heard that my Uncle Marvis had left me a store... it was the first time in my entire life that I knew what it was I wanted to do.

MORDREAD: And what was that?

FRIDAY: Why, open a toy store, of course!

MORDREAD: *(Taking FRIDAY'S hand.)* Bless you, child, for I have found a new definition of folly!

FRIDAY: *(Yanking his hand back.)* Excuse me?

MORDREAD: Folly. Foolishness. Blithering Idiocy. Though I do admire your entrepreneurial enthusiasm. And without abject failures to stand in stark contrast to our modest successes, how would we know the difference?

FRIDAY: Are you saying I'm going to fail?!

MORDREAD: Let me explain it more succinctly. *(He pretends that one of his hands is a crashing airplane while making the sounds of an imminent crash, followed by an explosion as the "plane" crashes into his other hand.)*

FRIDAY: Well, I'll have you know! My business is going to be a success!

MORDREAD: And on what sound business principles do you base that prediction?

FRIDAY: Confidence!

MORDREAD: You're putting me on.

FRIDAY: My high school counselor told me that I could do anything if I had confidence. Why, she told me that if I had enough confidence, that I could walk into the zoo and ride out on an elephant.

MORDREAD: It's advice like that that gives all counselors a bad reputation.

FRIDAY: What's wrong with that advice?

MORDREAD: Where's your elephant?

FRIDAY: What? Oh! Just give me the key.

MORDREAD: Regretfully, I don't have it. You have the wrong next door. I would suggest trying down at the Spitzels'.

FRIDAY: *(As he turns to go; sarcastic.)* Thank you.

MORDREAD: It was my pleasure, sir. And now that we're neighbors, I'm certain there will time before you go bankrupt for a select amount of protracted conversations. I do so look forward to any conversation that doesn't feature numbers. *(He goes back inside and closes the door.)*

FRIDAY will cross to the office furthest DL and knock on the door. After a beat AUBREY will answer the door. AUBREY will sneeze loudly, blow her nose in a handkerchief, and then offer her hand for FRIDAY to shake, not realizing that she is still holding her handkerchief in that hand.

AUBREY: Welcome to Spitzel and Spouse. *(Immediately realizing that she's still holding the handkerchief, she will quickly put it in her pocket, but not offer her hand again.)*

FRIDAY: Spitzel and Spouse? Which one are you?

AUBREY: Both. My name is Aubrey Spitzel. My husband and I own the accounting agency together, so we call it Spitzel and Spouse. So I'm both Spitzel *and* Spouse, and so is he. We thought about using our first names, but his is Audrey and mine is Aubrey, so it was going to be confusing no matter what. And then when we had Charlotte, we thought about changing it to Spitzel and Daughter, but Audrey didn't think it had the right ring to it. "Besides," he said, *(Trying to assume his voice... poorly.)* "how can we be certain that she'll want to be an accountant?" That Audrey! Sometimes he says the darndest things!

Enter AUDREY down the street from Left.

AUBREY: Well, speak of the devil! Your ears must've been itching. I was just talking about you. Dear, we have us a visitor. What did you say your name was, dear?

FRIDAY: It's Friday.

AUDREY: *(Checking his watch.)* No... no, I believe it's only Wednesday.

FRIDAY: No, sir. Friday is my name.

AUBREY: Why, that's an unusual name.

FRIDAY: I come from an unusual family.

AUDREY: So what brings you here, son?

FRIDAY: Well...

AUDREY: Say... you're not trying to steal my gal are you?

FRIDAY: *(Takes just a second to realize AUDREY is talking about his wife.)* Why... um... No. No!

AUDREY: *(Punching FRIDAY gently on the shoulder.)* Ah, just kiddin'. I know that my Aubrey will never stray from my side. Isn't that right, dear?

AUBREY: That's what you always say.

AUDREY: You know, they say opposites attract, and I believe it. Me? I just love bifurcated polynomial fractions, and Aubrey is fascinated with Tupardic numbers.

AUBREY: But yet, here we are.

AUDREY: We'll be married 35 years two years from June.

AUBREY: Oh, he's quite the jokester. He means we've been married for 33 years. (*A brief view through her happy veneer.*) 33 really long years...

AUDREY: One thing I'm serious about, though, is the accountancy. And you must be in the market for an accountant.

FRIDAY: Why would you say that?

AUDREY: Because you're here! And I know you're not here for the floor show.

FRIDAY: No. I don't need an accountant.

AUDREY: Oh. So you have one already. What firm are you with?

FRIDAY: I'm not with any firm. I don't have an accountant.

AUBREY and AUDREY: (*Shocked.*) Don't have an accountant?!

FRIDAY: Well, I don't rightly have a job right now.

AUBREY: Oh! Then you need to be next door at Mr. Crubb's.

FRIDAY: Who?

AUDREY: Mordread Crubb. He's the vocational guidance counselor.

FRIDAY: No. I just came from there. You see, the thing is, I'm your new neighbor.

AUDREY: Oh! Then you already are an accountant.

FRIDAY: No, sir.

AUDREY: So then you must still be in training.

FRIDAY: No, sir.

AUDREY: Well, then, I am puzzled. If you don't need a career, and you aren't an accountant, and you're not training to be one, then I'll be darned if I know what it is you could want... unless it's insurance!

FRIDAY: Insurance?

AUDREY: That's right, insurance. Because nobody can have too much insurance. And that is a proven fact. Insurance is a little sideline of mine, you know. It's really just a hobby that gives me a modest return for a minimum amount of effort and requires virtually no maintenance. Unfortunately, the market is way too saturated for me to even consider doing it full time. That extra money, though, has been real nice. That's how I was able to finance a boat.

FRIDAY: Oh? You have a boat?

AUDREY: Indeed, I do. I call it "My Little Dividend."

FRIDAY: Do you get out on it often?

AUDREY: Nope. I've never been on it. In fact, I've never even seen it. Truth to be told, I'm not even sure where it is. It just gives me comfort knowing that it's there. And that's what insurance is all about.

FRIDAY: Having a boat?

AUDREY: Nope. Comfort. Knowing that things are taken care of, no matter what. Now what kind of policy are you in the market for?

FRIDAY: (*Definitely stalling.*) Uh... Actually, sir, maybe later we can talk about insurance. But what I'm wanting right now is the key to the shop next door. You see, Marvis Applewine was my Great Uncle, and he left me the shop. (*Holding up the note.*) The note said I could get the key next door, and since it's not at the Career Counselor's, I'm hoping you have it here.

AUBREY: Well I'll be! Marvis' great something or the other.

AUDREY: We were both just real sad to hear of your Uncle's passing.

FRIDAY: Thank you.

AUBREY: You know, if there had only been seven cars in that line of traffic, he might still be with us today. But this is exciting! You're going to be our new neighbor!

FRIDAY: That's why I need the key.

AUDREY: Your key? Well why didn't you say so? I'll go get it out of its file. (*He goes inside.*)

AUBREY: (*After a few awkward moments.*) If you'll pardon me, I best go help Audrey look. He can do a long form like it's nobody's business, but ask him to file that form, and the man is a complete... Well, if you'll excuse me...

FRIDAY: Most certainly.

AUBREY goes inside, leaving FRIDAY on his own. After a beat, CHARLOTTE enters L. She will pull up short, take in FRIDAY, and smile seductively.

CHARLOTTE: Why, hello. My name is Charlotte. I live here. And I have a boyfriend, but that's negotiable.

FRIDAY: (*Intrigued.*) My name is Friday.

CHARLOTTE: Friday, as in the day after Thursday?

FRIDAY: Or the day before Saturday.

CHARLOTTE: What a... wonderful name. It's so original. So fresh. It's so much better than Charlotte.

FRIDAY: Oh, I think Charlotte is a wonderful name.

CHARLOTTE: Do you? I think it makes me sound old fashioned. It sounds like I should be living (*Picking up a southern accent.*) on a big ol' Southern plantation, waitin' for somebody to come ridin' along and sweep me off my little ol' feet.

FRIDAY: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

CHARLOTTE: What? Wouldn't you like to come galloping in and sweep me off my feet?

FRIDAY: Tell me, Charlotte, are you usually this forward with the men you meet?

CHARLOTTE: (*Still seductively.*) I call it maximizing potential through dynamic investment. Opportunity doesn't come along every day. So when it does, you need to be prepared to act quickly. It's definitely more risky, but the bigger the risk, the bigger the return. I much prefer it over the slower, but more secure long term investment, but that's just a matter of personal taste. Don't you agree?

FRIDAY: I'm sorry, but weren't we talking about something else? I mean, we were on one subject... a quite intriguing subject... and now it seems like you're discussing... *economics*.

CHARLOTTE: I must confess that I find the similarities between love and the economy to be quite fascinating, but I try my best never to get the two confused. (*Moving in closer; quite sultry.*) I'd be willing to explain myself in more... detail... if you would like...

RANDOLF enters from right on the above lines, seeing enough to be quite indignant.

RANDOLF: Well! Well! Well! What do we have going on here?

FRIDAY: (*To CHARLOTTE; more an aside.*) Is this the negotiable part?

CHARLOTTE: Always.

RANDOLF: (*By now he's crossed over in-between FRIDAY and CHARLOTTE, who've both backed off a little bit anyway.*) I'll have you know, sir, that you appear to be making advances toward a woman who is spoken for. And the person who so spake is I.

FRIDAY: I'm sorry. I really wasn't... (To CHARLOTTE.) Was I?

CHARLOTTE: Hard to tell.

FRIDAY: (To RANDOLF.) And I'm sorry, but who are you?

RANDOLF: I, sir, am Randolph K. Knobler. That's Randolph with an F, and Knobler with a K. That being said, I demand to know what your intentions are with my significant other.

FRIDAY: I don't think we'd gotten that far yet.

CHARLOTTE: Speak for yourself.

RANDOLF: I will have you know, sir, that this woman and I are in a mutually agreed upon relationship, and we have even broached the possibility of discussing at a future time the possibility of possibly entering into a formal betrothal.

FRIDAY: What?

RANDOLF: We're going steady.

FRIDAY: Oh!

RANDOLF: And you, sir, have broken the Unwritten Code of Gentlemen's Honor. You have encroached upon another man's woman. (*Raising his fists and taking the classic boxer's stance; flipping his tie over his shoulder.*) Therefore, sir, I have no choice but to defend both my honor, the honor of every gentlemen everywhere, and the honor of my fiancée-to-be!

FRIDAY: (*Not responding physically at all.*) Are you serious?

RANDOLF: Indeed I am!

FRIDAY: Look, I didn't come here to get in a fight with anybody.

RANDOLF: Then why did you come here? (*RANDOLF will relax a bit over the next few lines.*)

FRIDAY: You see... Until last week, I didn't even know this town existed. I was going to junior college, working part time in a restaurant, and still living with my parents. I had my own entry and all, but... I was still living with my parents. So then I find out that my Uncle Marvis, rest his soul, moved on to better highways. And he left me this store. (*Getting caught up in the dream.*) A store of my own! Only, you see, it was empty. I could make it into anything that I wanted. And I knew. I knew immediately what I wanted to do.

CHARLOTTE: And what was that?

FRIDAY: I wanted to open a toy store.

RANDOLF: (*Laughing, derisively.*) What? A toy store? You can't be serious! Why, I've never heard anything so absurd!

FRIDAY: Why not a toy store? The minute I found out I had a store of my own, I took all the money I had, and some that I didn't, and I bought toys. And I shoved the toys into my van and I headed west.

RANDOLF: (*Sniggering.*) You drive a van?

FRIDAY: Lots of people drive vans!

RANDOLF: And what makes you think you could turn a profit with a toy store in our town?

FRIDAY: Because every town needs a toy store. Because everybody needs toys. A town without a toy store is just *wrong*. It's... it's like a town without a schoolhouse.

RANDOLF: We don't have a schoolhouse.

FRIDAY: What kind of town doesn't have a schoolhouse?

RANDOLF: A town without any children. If you would've done your research and studied your demographics, then you would know there isn't a child one in this town.

FRIDAY: Toys aren't just for children.

RANDOLF: Please! Show me one person over the age of 12 that still plays with toys.

FRIDAY: I do.

RANDOLF: Then I think someone needs to tell you that you're just a bit old to be playing with toys.

FRIDAY: To tell somebody they're too old to play with toys... why, that's just cruel.

RANDOLF: A stranger comes to town and tries to take another man's girl. What does that stranger think? That other man's going to be nice? You can add that any way you want, but it's still not going to come out even.

Enter AUBREY and AUDREY.

AUBREY: I'm sorry that took so long. Oh, hello Randolph.

RANDOLF: Ma'am.

AUBREY: We had a Dickens of a time finding that key.

AUDREY: And that's how I remembered where it was.

AUBREY: I said, "Isn't this the Dickens!"

AUDREY: And that's when I remembered that I had put it in my copy of *Great Expectations*. Because I knew if I forgot where it was, I'd have a Dickens of a time finding it.

AUBREY: (*Taking the key from AUDREY and starting to hand it to FRIDAY.*) Here you go, dear. And don't be a stranger.

CHARLOTTE: (*Taking the key from her mother and handing it to FRIDAY.*) No, don't be a stranger.

FRIDAY experiences an awkward moment where he doesn't know what to say, and instead gives an even more awkward wave and retreats to his shop next door, where, after fumbling a bit with the key, he'll disappear inside. As well, AUBREY and AUDREY, after a perplexing look at FRIDAY, will also return inside, leaving CHARLOTTE and RANDOLF on stage alone.

RANDOLF: (*After a beat.*) What a peculiar young man.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't be so quick to judge.

RANDOLF: I'm sure you're aware that that is a mathematical misconception. Statistics support that the quicker we assess a situation, then the quicker we can take the necessary precautions to avoid negative results. And so I've judged him, and I don't like him.

CHARLOTTE: Why, how very unlike you.

RANDOLF: What? For me to be concerned that another man might covet my beloved?

CHARLOTTE: No. For you to show any emotions at all.

RANDOLF: Oh, don't tell me you didn't notice how he talked to you more than he did to me.

CHARLOTTE: No. I didn't.

RANDOLF: 17 words. That's more than the expected deviation. That's significant.

CHARLOTTE: Why, Randolph! If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were jealous.

RANDOLF: Most certainly I am, but not without pretext.

CHARLOTTE: *(Taking his hands.)* Please, dear. Let me assure you. This is all silly. If I'm not interested in the advances of another man, it won't matter how sweetly he may come on to me. But if I *am* interested in that other young man, whether you're jealous or not won't matter a bit. So you see, either way, there's just no point at all in being jealous. Now, are we going to spend the rest of the day angry, or shall we get some lunch?

RANDOLF: *(Taking a second to unravel what she just said.)* I thought we had an agreement.

CHARLOTTE: For lunch? Don't be silly. That's just a spur of the moment thing.

RANDOLF: I meant an agreement about us.

CHARLOTTE: To be exact, we had an agreement to make an agreement. I'm not even sure what that means.

RANDOLF: But I thought it was agreed on what we would agree on.

CHARLOTTE: And what was that?

RANDOLF: That... we were dating. That we were going steady. That we were a couple. I thought we had something special.

CHARLOTTE: *(Tender.)* It was special, Randolph. You were the only boy in town, and I was the only girl. But now, with the addition of new assets, that equation needs to be recalculated.

RANDOLF: I don't need a calculator to figure out what's going on here! I'll have it here be known that I have no intention of allowing other men to flirt with... with my girlfriend!

CHARLOTTE: *(Calmly.)* Fine, then. If that is your decision, then consider our agreed upon period of monogamous courtship to be henceforth concluded.

RANDOLF: Are you breaking up with me?

CHARLOTTE: I don't think I could've made myself any more clear.

CHARLOTTE turns and walks off stage Right while RANDOLF watches her go.

RANDOLF: *(Just as she's finally exiting.)* Very well, then! But don't expect me to give up without a fight!

Drop the stage lights.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

Friday's Office

When the lights come up, which should be as soon as possible, only focus on the center office, but put it in subdued light. DABNEY will be asleep, completely under an army blanket, left of the door. There is a pyramid of small, green cans directly in front of the door. After a beat, there will be the rattling of a key in the lock, and then FRIDAY will enter and immediately knock over the pyramid of cans. DABNEY will immediately jump up and shout...

DABNEY: *(Holding out an old slide rule as menacingly as possible.)*

Halt! Who goes there!

FRIDAY: *(DABNEY will cause him to jump; after all, it would be quite a start; finally, still trying to get back his breath.)* Who are you?

DABNEY: Who are you?

FRIDAY: I asked first.

DABNEY: Yeah? Well, I'm the one who has the slide rule.

FRIDAY: Fine. My name is Friday. This store was left to me by Great Uncle Marvis.

DABNEY: *(Immediately snapping to attention; saluting by holding the slide rule against his forehead, but smartly; scared.)* Apprentice First Class Darby Liebowitz, sir. Please pardon my previous indiscretion, sir. I was only acting in a manner which I believed was in your overall best interest, though I do not pretend to know what your overall best interest might be, sir! *(He will continue to stay at attention.)*

FRIDAY: Don't worry about it. There was no harm done.

DABNEY: Sir, thank you, sir!

FRIDAY: Apprentice First Class, you say?

DABNEY: *(Still rigidly at attention, and still holding the salute.)*

Well... actually, I'm just an apprentice, sir. I added the first class. I thought it sounded better, but I could change it if you prefer, sir.

FRIDAY: Why would it matter to me?

DABNEY: Because I'm your apprentice, sir.

FRIDAY: I have an apprentice?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir. I come with the store, sir. I was Commander Applewine's apprentice...

FRIDAY: My Great Uncle Marvis?

DABNEY: If you insist, sir.

FRIDAY: (*Noticing that he's still at attention.*) Why are you standing that way?

DABNEY: Because I haven't been told not to, sir.

FRIDAY: Well... stop it. At ease. Whatever.

DABNEY: (*DARBY will snap to a crisp parade rest.*) Sir, thank you, sir.

FRIDAY: And why are you calling me, "Sir"?

DABNEY: Because you are my superior, sir.

FRIDAY: That's a first.

DABNEY: If you insist, sir.

FRIDAY: Just stand normal. And stop calling me, "Sir."

DABNEY: This is how I normally stand, sir, unless I'm at attention, sir. (*Snapping back to attention.*)

FRIDAY: No. Don't be at attention.

DABNEY: (*Snapping back to parade rest.*) As you wish, sir.

FRIDAY: And stop calling me, "Sir."

DABNEY: (*Snapping to attention.*) Sir, yes, sir! (*He will then snap back to parade rest.*)

FRIDAY: Um... As you were?

DABNEY: Which time, sir?

FRIDAY: Oh, never mind. (*Looking around the room.*) Have you been living in here?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir!

FRIDAY: Why?

DABNEY: I was waiting for you, sir.

FRIDAY: For me?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir. Only I didn't know that the person I was waiting for would be you, (*A bit messianic.*) only that you would come.

FRIDAY: What?

DABNEY: I was aware that Commander Applewine had a great nephew, sir. And I was aware that the office had been deeded to that great nephew. And therefore, since I was Commander Applewine's apprentice, then I would be your apprentice as well. I've been waiting for you, sir.

FRIDAY: For three months?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir!

FRIDAY: Here?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir!

FRIDAY: In the dark?

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir!

FRIDAY will step over to the door and “switch on” the lights. When he does, bring up the lights full on the “office.”

FRIDAY: *(Finally.)* Why?

DABNEY: Commander Applewine assured me that it was all part of my training to become an accountant, sir. He assured me that anybody who could live in the dark alone for months on end with only c-rations to eat would have what it takes to be an accountant.

FRIDAY: So you were here when I knocked the first time?

DABNEY: Yes, sir.

FRIDAY: Then why didn't you open the door?

DABNEY: *(Once more messianic.)* Because I was waiting for the one with the key. Only then would I know that it was you.

FRIDAY: You're kidding me?

DABNEY: Sir, no, sir!

FRIDAY: And would you quit calling me sir!

DABNEY: Sir, yes, sir.

FRIDAY: And why are you dressed like a Boy Scout?

DABNEY: Because all apprentices must be in uniform, sir.

FRIDAY: But why a Boy Scout?

DABNEY: Because the Army wouldn't let us have one of their uniforms. We offered to pay, but they still refused. *(Taking a can from a pocket and showing it to FRIDAY.)* But they would sell us all the c-rations that we wanted. They're really not bad if taste isn't important to you. And stacking the cans was a way that I kept my wits. I was making a scale model of the Federal Reserve building in Washington, D.C. That's what you knocked down, sir.

FRIDAY: Oh. I'm terribly sorry.

DABNEY: That's OK, sir. I was having trouble with the dome, anyway. And I should've known better than to build it in front of the door. Besides, now that you're here, I will need to devote my time to being your apprentice.

FRIDAY: What do Accounting Apprentices do?

DABNEY: Well, sir... mostly I fixed the Commander's lunch. I fixed his dinner, too. And breakfast. And then I did the dishes. And I did his laundry. And I cleaned his house. And the office. And his car.

FRIDAY: How long have you been his apprentice?

DABNEY: And the shopping. And minor automotive maintenance. And small engine repair.

FRIDAY: But...

DABNEY: And license renewal. And yard work. And...

FRIDAY: All of it. How long have you been doing all of it?

DABNEY: Six years, sir.

FRIDAY: Six years? How much actual accounting did you learn in all that time?

DABNEY: The Commander assured me that we were just getting ready to begin my formal training when he passed. I still believe if he would've had his lights on, that car could've gotten out of the way. And might I take this moment to extend to you my condolences.

FRIDAY: Thank you, but to tell the truth, I didn't really know him.

DABNEY: Let me say that it was a pleasure to serve under your Great Uncle, sir.

During the next lines RANDOLF will stick his head through the door, unseen by either, and listen in on the conversation.

FRIDAY: Why, thank you. But... I don't know how to tell you this... but accountants don't have apprentices.

DABNEY: Begging the sir's pardon, sir, but of course they do. After all, I stand here as proof.

FRIDAY: You've been duped.

DABNEY: *(A bit less military.)* Duped, sir?

FRIDAY: Duped. Lied to. Taken advantage of.

RANDOLF comes barging through the door, kicking a few cans in the process.

RANDOLF: Ah, ha! How dare you!

FRIDAY: How dare I do what?

RANDOLF: Whatever it is that you're daring to do. Sir! I have come to announce my intentions!

FRIDAY: By all means.

DABNEY: Should I leave, sir?

FRIDAY: No, that's OK. You can stay.

RANDOLF: You, sir, have disrupted a harmonious relationship. You have caused a rift between me and my betroth-ed to be betrothed.

FRIDAY: (*Taking interest.*) You don't say?

RANDOLF: But I do say! It is because of you that Charlotte and I are no more. And I blame you!

FRIDAY: Blame me? For what? Where I come from, we call that lady's choice.

RANDOLF: Well let me be the first to remind you, *Dorothy*, that you are no longer in Oz. And in this part of the free world we call that an affront to honor. And therefore, I challenge you!

FRIDAY: You challenge me? To what?

RANDOLF: I don't know! (*He turns to leave, but stops at the door and spins back around.*) But when I figure it out, my friend, you'll be the first to know! (*He exits.*)

DABNEY: (*After a beat.*) I have to admit, sir, that was far more entertaining than stacking c-ration cans.

CHARLOTTE enters. She's changed into something... more comfortable.

CHARLOTTE: Hello. I just thought I might come over and officially welcome you to the neighborhood.

DABNEY: (*Not taking his eyes off of CHARLOTTE; after all, it's been awhile since he's seen a woman.*) Would you like me to stay, sir?

FRIDAY: (*Not taking his eyes off of CHARLOTTE, either.*) No. That would be fine. Why don't you run along and... go do something.

DABNEY: I really don't mind staying, sir.

FRIDAY: I'm sure you don't. But why don't you not?

DABNEY will snap to attention.

FRIDAY: What are you waiting for?

DABNEY: I'm waiting to be dismissed, sir.

FRIDAY: (*With a shooing motion.*) Dismissed.

DABNEY turns and exits through the office door, dejected. When he's finally gone CHARLOTTE will cross to FRIDAY, who is still completely entranced, and kiss him, and she's no slouch of a kisser.

CHARLOTTE: (*Finally coming up for a breath, she will take a step away from FRIDAY.*) There. I always like to get the first kiss out of the way, don't you? I find that until you do, there's always that... *tension*. Sometimes it's hard to think about anything else. And besides, I had to know if you were a good kisser. After all, what's the point of pursuing a relationship with somebody who's not? (*She moves in and kisses him again, only this time, shorter; while stepping back.*) And you, sir, are a good kisser.

FRIDAY: (*Hopeful; takes a step toward her.*) I'll only get better with practice.

CHARLOTTE: (*Coyly turning away.*) Oh, don't you worry. There'll be plenty of time to practice. But right now I'd like to hear more about this toy store of yours...

Dim the lights.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

The Store Fronts

It's sunset, so light the set accordingly. AUDREY and AUBREY will enter from their door. After a beat, RANDOLF will enter from right, and then MORDREAD will enter from his shop. They will all meet DC. Where they will all just nod and grunt at each other, nobody really wanting to say what's on their mind, or even admit why they are all there.

RANDOLF: (*Finally.*) Well... if none of you won't say it, I will! I don't like him. Not one bit!

The proverbial ice has been broken.

AUDREY: I thought he had shifty eyes. (To AUBREY.) And did you see the way he looked at our Charlotte?

RANDOLF: I most certainly did!

AUDREY: And you say he wants to open a toy store? A toy store?

RANDOLF: I was witness to the utterance!

AUDREY: A fool and his money!

AUBREY: But I thought you liked the boy.

AUDREY: That was until I found out he wasn't buying anything. Why, I even heard that he's been telling his apprentice that accountants really don't need apprentices!

RANDOLF: I was a witness to that utterance, as well.

AUBREY: Of course they do! That's how I became an accountant.

AUDREY: That's not the point. The point is... well... it's just not right. He's just stirring up trouble.

RANDOLF: He's a trouble stirrer.

AUDREY: I think they got the point. No need to be redundant.

RANDOLF: Sorry.

AUBREY: Well, I don't see what the worry is. His silly business is going to fail, and then he'll go away, and before you know it, things will be back to normal. Just the way they always were.

MORDREAD: (Getting fired up as he goes.) It's not the eminent failure of his folly that worries me. Let me ask you this: What if he is successful? If he succeeds, then the next thing you know, people will want to move here. And if people move here, they'll undoubtedly want roads, and then they're going to want a traffic light. And I ask you *this!* Who is going to pay for that traffic light? No need to answer: We all will. Taxes! Taxes, I say! If we allow our town to prosper, then where will it end? I say we run him out of town!

AUDREY: Um... I don't think we're allowed to do that anymore.

MORDREAD: Seriously?

AUDREY: I'm afraid so.

MORDREAD: It almost makes me wish I would've died young, to live to see a day like this.

AUBREY: Well what are we going to do?

AUDREY: Maybe Branch will have an idea.

RANDOLF: Branch will know what to do.

AUBREY: Why do you think Branch will know what to do?

AUDREY: Because Branch is the richest man in town.

RANDOLF: And you wouldn't be rich unless you were smart. You just wait. Someday I'll be smart, too.

Curtain.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

The Storefronts

AT RISE: *There is a stepladder by FRIDAY'S shop, and a sign that says "Friday's Toys" waiting to be hung. FRIDAY will awkwardly be trying to pick up the sign, hammer, and nails, so he can climb the ladder, while DABNEY sits in a lawn chair reading a magazine. He's lost his sash and his shirt tail is out. This is clearly somebody who no longer cares. The SOOTHSAYER will enter from right, or possibly in the auditorium, and cross to in front of Friday's shop, unseen by FRIDAY.*

SOOTHSAYER: Evil! This business is Evil, I say! Stay away!

FRIDAY, startled, will drop everything.

FRIDAY: What are you doing?!

SOOTHSAYER: I'm saying sooths. It's what I do. After all, I'm a soothsayer.

FRIDAY: *Why* are you doing it?

SOOTHSAYER: Because a fella paid me a dollar.

FRIDAY: Who paid you a dollar?

DABNEY: *(Glancing up.)* Don't look at me. I don't get paid... remember?

SOOTHSAYER: I promised Randolf I wouldn't tell.

FRIDAY: That figures. So you're going to all this trouble for a dollar?

SOOTHSAYER: Times are hard. You take what you can get. Evil!

FRIDAY: OK. OK. Let's try this... give me your dollar...

The SOOTHSAYER will reluctantly give FRIDAY the dollar.

FRIDAY: Now I'll give you this yo-yo.

SOOTHSAYER: What do I want with a yo-yo?

FRIDAY: Because yo-yo's are fun. You can play with it. You can do tricks, like walk the dog, around the moon, and the flying trapeze!

SOOTHSAYER: I can do all those things without a yo-yo.

FRIDAY: But wouldn't you rather have a yo-yo than a dollar?

SOOTHSAYER: No.

FRIDAY: OK. So give me back the yo-yo.

SOOTHSAYER: (*Suspicious.*) OK. (*He does.*)

FRIDAY: (*Holding up the dollar.*) Now I'm going to pay you a dollar not to stand out here yelling "Evil." (*He starts to hand the bill to the SOOTHSAYER, who reaches for it, but then pulls it back.*) Deal?

SOOTHSAYER: (*After a pensive pause.*) Deal!

FRIDAY then hands him the money.

SOOTHSAYER: You drive a hard bargain. (*He then exits.*)

FRIDAY: (*After a beat.*) Say, Dabney... do you suppose, here in a bit, that maybe... you could help me hang this sign?

DABNEY: (*Looking up; after a brief contemplation.*) Naw.

FRIDAY: OK. That's fair. How about later today? Could you maybe help me carry the toys down from the road into town?

DABNEY: (*Looking up once again; after another brief contemplation.*) Naw. (*He goes back to reading.*)

FRIDAY: Naw? What happened to the "sir"?

DABNEY: Naw... sir?

FRIDAY: No. You don't have to call me sir. It's just that you always called me sir before.

DABNEY: Yeah... but... you know... whatever.

FRIDAY: So... um... you can't help me?

DABNEY: Naw. I've got stuff to do.

FRIDAY: Stuff? Like what?

DABNEY: You know... stuff.

FRIDAY: Oh.

DABNEY will go back to reading his magazine. FRIDAY will pick up the sign and lean it against the wall, and then be picking up the nails and hammer when CHARLOTTE enters carrying a picnic basket. DABNEY will ignore them both.

CHARLOTTE: Hello, stranger.

FRIDAY: You're just the person I was hoping for.

CHARLOTTE: And what were you hoping for?

FRIDAY: I was hoping you'd hold the ladder while I hang the sign.

CHARLOTTE: What? Work? *(Indicating DABNEY.)* What's the matter with him?

FRIDAY: Don't ask. Do you think you could help me?

CHARLOTTE: Oh... I suppose. But do we have to do it now? I was hoping we could go on a picnic.

FRIDAY: I was hoping to finish the sign before the grand opening.

CHARLOTTE: Oh. *(After a beat.)* I brought a picnic basket.

FRIDAY: Oh? What's in the basket?

CHARLOTTE: Nothing.

FRIDAY: Nothing? How's that work?

CHARLOTTE: I was hoping you had some food. So I brought my basket.

FRIDAY: I don't have anything for a picnic.

Without really looking up, DABNEY offers him a half-eaten can of c-rations.

FRIDAY: I don't need your help.

DABNEY: *(With a shrug.)* OK. *(Over the next few lines he will quietly gather up his lawn chair and exit into the shop)*

CHARLOTTE: *(Tossing the basket aside.)* If you don't have any food, then let's go to a restaurant!

RANDOLF: *(Stepping out from behind a bush.)* And what restaurant were you planning on taking her to?

FRIDAY: Would you stop doing that!

RANDOLF: I'm free to jump out from behind whatever I please. After all, this is America.

FRIDAY: Geography has nothing to do with it.

RANDOLF: Geography has everything to do with it. Because I happen to know that the nearest restaurant is in Eaton, and that's six miles away. Are you prepared to accept the responsibility of this young lady's safety on such an arduous trek?

FRIDAY: Not that it's any of your business, but if I were planning on taking Charlotte to Eaton, then we'd just walk a half mile to the road and drive there. Some towns do have roads, you know.

RANDOLF: Have you obtained her parents' permission to take her out in your van?

CHARLOTTE: I'm twenty-two years old, Randolph. I don't need to ask my parents for permission.

RANDOLF: That's not what you told me.

CHARLOTTE: Get a clue, Randolph.

AUBREY: *(Stepping outside with a sneeze.)* Oh, Charlotte. There you are. Could you come inside for a minute. Your father and I have something we're needing to talk to you about.

CHARLOTTE: *(More to FRIDAY.)* Will you be here when I get back?

FRIDAY and RANDOLF: Yes.

FRIDAY: *(To RANDOLF.)* No!

RANDOLF: Yes!

FRIDAY: Yes!

RANDOLF: No!

CHARLOTTE: Good! Then it's settled.

CHARLOTTE will go back inside her house, leaving RANDOLF to try to figure out what just happened. BRANCH and WALDEN, his Apprentice, enter Right. WALDEN is struggling with a heavy trunk he has balanced on his back, while BRANCH is only carrying one of those drinks with a little umbrella in it. BRANCH is dressed in shorts, Hawaiian print shirt, and dark glasses.

BRANCH: Ah... home at last. You! Walden! Make sure you get those supplies properly stored. And when you're done, run me a tub of hot water. And then stick around. I need somebody to help me shave my back.

WALDEN will sigh in resignation and move through the door, taking the trunk with him.

RANDOLF: (*Stepping forward; quite the suck up.*) Mr. Branch, sir.
How was your vacation?

BRANCH: Why, Randolph. I thought you'd gone away.

RANDOLF: No, sir. I've been here all along.

BRANCH: Well, then. Maybe it was me. I'll tell you what. Why don't
you go away now and I'll see if there's any difference.

RANDOLF: (*Eager.*) OK! (*He turns and happily exits Left.*)

FRIDAY: Wow. That really worked well.

RANDOLF: Years of practice, son. Years of practice. (*Extending his
hand.*) Cosemell Branch is the name. And who might you be?

FRIDAY: (*While shaking hands.*) Friday. That's my name. Friday.

BRANCH: Was your mother a fan of Daniel Defoe?

FRIDAY: Was he ever on Lifetime?

BRANCH: Probably not.

FRIDAY: Then I doubt it. (*Noticing BRANCH'S shirt.*) Were you in
Hawai'i?

BRANCH: Nope. Crawfordsville. They have an Hawai'ian Shirt
Discount Outlet there. And in the same shopping center I can get
these little umbrellas by the gross. I make an entire weekend out
of it. With coupons, you can eat quite reasonably, and with my
Auto Club card I can get a discount on my motel room. And to top
it off, I can write the entire thing off as a business expense.
(*Taking one out of his pocket.*) Here, have an umbrella. (*He
hands it to FRIDAY.*) I claim them as business supplies. So what
brings you to our little town, Mr. Friday?

FRIDAY: Well, actually, I've inherited the shop two doors down from
my Great Uncle Marvis.

BRANCH: Ah, yes. We all miss your Uncle Marvis. And it's a lot
easier now that he's gone. Still you have my heartfelt sympathy,
which, unfortunately, is not deductible. But neckties are. And
you're not wearing one. Therefore, I'm guessing you're not an
accountant.

FRIDAY: No, sir. I'm not. I'm planning on opening a toy store.

BRANCH: Here? In Easton?

FRIDAY: Yes, sir.

BRANCH: In that case, let me cut straight to the point.

FRIDAY: I didn't know there was a point to cut straight toward.

BRANCH: Exactly, and that's why it's easy to miss. I like your jib. The cut of your wharf. The sloop of your sail. And that's why I'd like to propose to you a business deal.

FRIDAY: Oh? And what would that be?

BRANCH: Were you raised on the farm, son? A man doesn't talk business outside. Step into my office!

BRANCH and FRIDAY will go into BRANCH'S "office." Dim the lights.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

The Spitzels

Bring the lights up first on The SPITZELS – AUDREY, AUBREY, and CHARLOTTE.

AUBREY: Dear... (*Beat.*) we'd like to talk to you about your love life.

CHARLOTTE: Mother!

AUDREY: Listen, dear, what your mother is trying to say is that... well... we know that Randolph can be a bit... unexciting... if not altogether a downright bore. And we know that Friday is young, attractive, and actually has a pulse. But sweetheart, what we want you to realize is that...

AUBREY: Dear, what your father's trying to say is that no matter how exciting it may seem now, it's going to get dull. Really dull. It will all fall into the same dry routine. And then one day you realize that you don't even care what the new fall lineup is on the TV, and the only thing you have to look forward to is retirement, where you'll have even less to fill the endless hours than you do now.

AUDREY: But how are you going to pay for that retirement? Sure, you can get by now, but some day your health is going to give out.

AUBREY: Oh, honey, you don't even know the half of it. I get indigestion just thinking about food. The doctors say it's just nerves, but they don't know. They don't know the half of it.

AUDREY: But they make you pay for all of it. And who's going to pay those bills?

AUBREY: And what if you have children?

CHARLOTTE: Mother!

AUDREY: Don't get us wrong. We never regretted our decision to have you. (*AUBREY shrugs in agreement.*) But had we chosen not to, we could've retired twelve years ago.

AUBREY: And that would've been twelve more years with nothing to do. So you see, dear, you really are a blessing.

AUDREY: But blessings are expensive.

AUBREY: And dear, you are a particularly expensive blessing.

AUDREY: You see, Charlotte, your mother and I are concerned about you and this new boy.

CHARLOTTE: But Friday's a really nice guy.

AUDREY: Being nice doesn't pay the bills.

CHARLOTTE: What's wrong with Friday?

AUDREY: Why, he doesn't even wear a necktie!

AUBREY: I wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't even own one.

AUDREY: And if a man doesn't own a necktie... why, there's a man who has no plans for his future.

CHARLOTTE: Friday has lots of plans. If you could just hear Friday talk about selling toys. He only plans on selling toys that make you use your imagination.

AUDREY: (*To AUBREY.*) See, dear. I told you the boy was an idiot.

AUBREY: Dear! Charlotte's sitting right here.

AUDREY: Well, it's about time she heard it. It's bad enough we have to support her. I don't intend to support her lazy husband, too.

CHARLOTTE: Husband?! We haven't even been on a real date yet. He's not even mentioned marriage.

AUBREY: They never do. But 33 years later, here you are just the same.

CHARLOTTE: You two are just not being fair. You don't even know him.

AUDREY: OK. We'll get to know him. And then he can go. Me and your mother will invite... what kind of name is Friday, anyway? I'll tell you what. It makes me suspicious.

CHARLOTTE: Father!

AUDREY: OK. We'll invite *Friday* over for dinner, get to know him, and *then* we'll disapprove.

AUBREY: (*To AUBREY.*) You know I can't eat anything between three and nine. And I especially can't smell it.

CHARLOTTE: We could just have him over then. We wouldn't need to eat anything.

AUDREY: Well that's probably for the best anyway. Not everybody likes squirrel.

Fade to black.

ACT TWO, SCENE 3

Branch's Office

Bring up the lights on BRANCH'S Office.

BRANCH: Tell me, young man, can I get you something to drink?

FRIDAY: That would be nice.

BRANCH: *(Handing him his drink.)* Here. You can finish mine. Mind you, watch your eye on the umbrella. So, you say your name is Friday. I'm sure there's a really interesting story behind that name if I cared. But we're not here to talk about you. We're here to talk about me. I was named Cosemell, best I can tell, after my cousin Mel. It was a mistake to ask my father to name any of the children. We never could understand a thing he said. But I was named Branch by divine providence. And you know what another name for divine providence is, don't you son?

FRIDAY: No.

BRANCH: It's opportunity. Son, let me ask what you see here?

FRIDAY: An office.

BRANCH: Exactly right. But what kind of office is it?

FRIDAY: Um... Accounting?

BRANCH: Half way home, son. I'll tell you what kind of office this is: It's a Branch Office. You're a man who knows how to dream. I can tell that. And that's why I know you'll appreciate my dream. My dream is to offer cut-rate accounting services at competitive prices... throughout the entire world. Don't aim small, son. And of course, they would be... *(Wait for it.)* Branch Offices. Clever is what sells, son. Let me give you a free lesson. And son, when somebody offers something for free, you had best take it. The customer can get whatever he wants just about anywhere. So what makes him come to you? It's because you're clever. And convenient. And a better price. But clever is the big one.

FRIDAY: That's it? Aren't you just using a clever name to sell the same services for more money?

BRANCH: It's what makes America great. Son, did you know that I once went on Safari with Hemingway? Of course you don't, because it's not true. And therein lies my point. You were willing to believe me, even though it would mean I'd have to be terribly old. But you believed me all the same. And that's why I want to buy your toy store.

FRIDAY: What?

BRANCH: That's right. And I'm willing to make you an offer right now. *(He will take out a small notepad, briskly write an amount on a page, tear out the page with a flourish, fold it in two, and push it across his desk toward FRIDAY.)* There.

FRIDAY: What is this?

BRANCH: That's the amount I'm willing to offer you for your business. Right now. I want everything. Inventory. The building. The name. Even the dust mites. Lock, stock, and barrel, if you have one.

FRIDAY: *(Reading the note; startled.)* That's... that's a whole lot of money.

BRANCH: Well over the market value, to be sure.

FRIDAY: Hey! Wait a minute. Do you know something that I don't?

BRANCH: Apparently. After all, you're opening a toy store in a town with no children.

FRIDAY: But not just children play with toys.

BRANCH: And you're delusional. The way I see it, son, you have two, maybe two and a half, strikes against you before you even open your door. The chances of your succeeding are right up there with finding good rare roast beef at a vegetarian buffet.

FRIDAY: Then why are you wanting to buy my store?

BRANCH: Two words, not counting when I said, "Two words." Outsourcing. It's so I can sell your toys to an overseas supplier and then shut the whole thing down and write it off as a tax loss.

FRIDAY: But... but... this is my dream!

BRANCH: And a healthy tax loss is my dream. The way I see it, it's a win/win situation. Given that your business is doomed for failure, you win by making more money in five minutes than the silly place was ever going to pay out, and I win by not having to pay taxes. It's a wonderful country we live in, don' cha think?

FRIDAY: *(Pushing the note back, but not before taking one last look.)* No!

BRANCH: No?

FRIDAY: No! My shop is not for sale.

BRANCH: I thought that was the entire point of having a shop. To sell everything.

FRIDAY: That is not what I mean! My shop is not for sale. Not now. Not ever.

BRANCH: I'll accept now, my friend, but we'll see about ever when it gets here. After all, my young friend, nobody can predict the future.

FRIDAY: I can.

BRANCH: Then screw this! Let's go to the track.

FRIDAY: That is not what I mean! Now, sir, if you will excuse me, I have work to do. My shop's grand opening is tomorrow.

FRIDAY will get up and exit. Fade to black.

ACT TWO, SCENE 4

The Storefronts

Bring up the lights on the store fronts. FRIDAY will enter from BRANCH'S door, and CHARLOTTE, after a beat will enter from her door.

FRIDAY: *(As close to furious as he'll ever get.)* Can you believe the nerve of that guy!

CHARLOTTE: What guy?

FRIDAY: That Branch guy! Do you know what he did? He just offered to buy my entire store so he could write the whole thing off on his taxes! Have you ever heard of anything so outlandish?!

CHARLOTTE: I don't know. What was he offering?

FRIDAY: That's not the point!

CHARLOTTE: Oh... OK. He can't make you sell, can he?

FRIDAY: No! Of course not!

CHARLOTTE: Then you have nothing to worry about.

FRIDAY: Oh, I guess you're right.

CHARLOTTE: *(Holding out a gift box.)* Here.

FRIDAY: *(Surprised; pleased.)* You got me a gift.

CHARLOTTE: *(Trying to be humble.)* It's not much.

FRIDAY: *(Opens the box and takes out an obnoxious, out-of-style necktie – the more obnoxious the better; trying to hide his obvious disappointment.)* You bought me a... necktie. *(After a beat.)* Why?

CHARLOTTE: Because you don't have one.

FRIDAY: I don't have a doghouse, either.

CHARLOTTE: That's because you don't have a dog, silly.

FRIDAY: But why would I want a necktie?

CHARLOTTE: *(Getting love-dovey.)* I just thought it would be nice if you wore one when you came over tonight.

FRIDAY: Came over?

CHARLOTTE: To dinner. At my house. My parents want you to come over for dinner. Actually, it's not really dinner. It's just drinks. But they don't drink. So mostly it's just sitting around.

FRIDAY: Why would I want to do that?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, sweetie. My parents don't know you like I do.

FRIDAY: But we've only known each other for two days.

CHARLOTTE: How long does it take? You see, my parents can't see your potential. And they're worried about their daughter getting serious with somebody who won't be able to provide for her. So I just thought if they could get to know you, then they wouldn't be as worried. So I invited you over for dinner.

FRIDAY: But there's no dinner.

CHARLOTTE: For drinks.

FRIDAY: But we're not drinking.

CHARLOTTE: For sitting around. And I just think it would be nice if you wore a tie. It would impress my parents.

FRIDAY: You bought me a tie just so you could impress your parents?

CHARLOTTE: I didn't really buy it. It's one of my father's.

FRIDAY: You want me to wear one of your father's ties? Don't you think he'll notice that I'm wearing one of his ties?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, don't be silly. Guys never notice those sorts of things. Besides, he's got so many. Oh! I've got to go. It's this evening at 5:48. And don't forget to wear the tie!

CHARLOTTE goes back in her house. FRIDAY will be holding up the tie trying to imagine wearing it when BRANCH and WALDEN enter from BRANCH'S office.

BRANCH: Ah, Mr. Friday. I was hoping to find you.

FRIDAY: No.

BRANCH: A little free advice, son. And you know what they say about free advice....

FRIDAY: Yeah. It's worth nothing.

BRANCH: *(Taking out his notepad and writing quickly in it.)* That's good. *(When he's done.)* Just one word: Interest. Either you're earning it or I'm earning it.

FRIDAY: No.

BRANCH: Very well, then. I'm off to do interesting things that are only possible because of my financial liquidity.

FRIDAY: No.

BRANCH: *(He'll start to head off right and then pause.)* And Walden...

WALDEN: (*Stopping, lowering his head in anticipation.*) Yes, sir?

BRANCH: When you finish washing and waxing my dental floss, I want you to go out into the storage shed and find my ball peen hammer. Then I want you to check my shotgun shells for duds.

WALDEN: (*With a sigh.*) Yes, sir.

BRANCH will exit right and WALDEN will cross to FRIDAY.

WALDEN: Excuse me, sir...

FRIDAY: You're Branch's Apprentice, aren't you?

WALDEN: Yes.

FRIDAY: (*Offering his hand.*) I'm Friday. I have the office next-door. What's your name?

WALDEN: Walden.

FRIDAY: Like the pond?

WALDEN: No. My name is Walden Norris. You know, Norris, like the guy who is so tough that he doesn't even need to make a memorable movie to be remembered.

FRIDAY: Are you related to Chuck Norris?

WALDEN: No. I'm sorry to bother you sir, but I was wondering if I could borrow a block of wax.

FRIDAY: Wax?

WALDEN: Peruvian honeybee wax, if you have it, but really, any will do.

FRIDAY: No. I'm sorry. I don't have any wax.

WALDEN: How about a chap stick?

FRIDAY: No. I'm sorry.

WALDEN: Oh, I suppose that's just as well.

DABNEY enters from the office carrying a cup of coffee. He is wearing dark glasses low on his nose, needs to shave, his hair is a mess, and he's in a stained T-shirt and tattered blue jeans. A cigarette would be nice. I mean, the guy looks like he's been out all night and is really trying to avoid loud noises and bright lights.

DABNEY: (*Perks up when he sees WALDEN; crossing.*) Walden! How the heck are you!

WALDEN: (*Shocked.*) Dabney?! Is that you? (*Not knowing what to do first.*) You can't be seen out in public like this! You're out of uniform! (*Fully taking him in.*) You're out of deodorant!

DABNEY: Listen, dude. Chill.

WALDEN: Chill! You're likely to get a Court-Martial! They'll take away your merit badges!

DABNEY: You know, I just don't care.

WALDEN: (*Gasping.*) Well... OK, then! If you don't care about yourself, then what about the Apprenticeship? What about your solemn vows to uphold the sacred tenets of the Accountancy?

DABNEY: Screw the accountancy.

WALDEN will gasp so hard that he loses his breath.

DABNEY: (*When he's done gasping.*) Listen, dude, we need to talk.

DABNEY puts his arm around WALDEN and the two of them go inside. FRIDAY, who was watching the above in wonderment, is left alone on stage for a beat. Enter RANDOLF Right, carrying two sticks.

RANDOLF: (*Crossing to center, where FRIDAY is.*) Touché!

FRIDAY: Touché?

RANDOLF: (*Handing FRIDAY a stick by shoving it against FRIDAY'S chest, which FRIDAY will reluctantly take.*) I have come to challenge you to a duel!

FRIDAY: A duel?

RANDOLF: A duel!

FRIDAY: With sticks?

RANDOLF: With sticks! Worry not! You will still get the proper thrashing that you so thoroughly deserve, and I will avoid the high liability premium on my insurance. Now, sir! It is time to tarry no more! We shall begin back-to-back! *(He will turn his back on FRIDAY and hold his stick up in the air. FRIDAY, with a shrug, will do the same, with FRIDAY facing Right and RANDOLF facing Left.)* Now, I shall count off ten paces, and then we shall turn and fight. *(RANDOLF will take a step with each number; FRIDAY, on the other hand, will not move at all, but he will lower his stick and turn and watch RANDOLF walk away; RANDOLF will never notice that FRIDAY is not moving)* One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six!

FRIDAY: *(When FRIDAY interrupts, RANDOLF will stop pacing and counting, but not look back.)* Why ten paces? Why not twenty? Or fifteen? Or even nine?

RANDOLF: Because that's not the way that it's done! It's always been ten! *(Trying to remember, to no avail; he will once again start pacing.)* One! Two! Three! Four!

FRIDAY: *(Once again, RANDOLF will stop.)* Is it ten paces total? Or ten paces each? Because if it's ten paces each, wouldn't that be twenty?

RANDOLF: It's ten paces each! Now be quiet! *(Pacing.)* One! Two! Three! Four! Five!

This needs to be timed so RANDOLF exits left and continues to count off stage, until there is a terrible crashing sound, a bit like a metal mop bucket being thrown down a flight of stairs, followed by the breaking of glass, and a loud "whump," or something close. FRIDAY will wince with every crash. When he's convinced it's through, he will turn right and be startled by MORDREAD, who has entered Right during the above.

MORDREAD: Ah, my boy. I want to apologize for my egregious behavior at our previous encounter. It was a bit hyperbolic of me to claim I had never met anybody more foolish than you, when undoubtedly there are others equally as foolish. And to show that there's no hard feelings...

FRIDAY: There aren't?

MORDREAD: Oh course there aren't. What would I have to be offended about? Therefore, I have found you a job!

FRIDAY: You found me a job?

MORDREAD: It's what I do, you know. *(Trying to shoo Friday off R.)*
Hurry! You've got no time to waste.

FRIDAY: *(Not letting himself be herded.)* I don't need a job!

MORDREAD: *(Ignoring Friday's protest.)* It's everything that you wanted in a career. Glamour. Excitement. And travel to new and exotic places.

FRIDAY: *(Slightly intrigued.)* Oh? And what would that be?

MORDREAD: A boxcar inspector.

FRIDAY: What?

MORDREAD: You inspect boxcars.

FRIDAY: For what?

MORDREAD: Why, for a railroad.

FRIDAY: No. What do I inspect the boxcars for?

MORDREAD: To make sure they're rectangle, of course. *(Handing him a large piece of chalk.)* If it's rectangle, you drawn a smiley face on the outside. And if it's not, you drawn a frowning face. *(Once more trying to shoo FRIDAY off stage.)* Hurry! You start immediately! If you hurry now you'll just be in time to hop the 5:30 train to Crawfordsville. Just head toward the road and go back the way you came.

FRIDAY: *(Tossing down the chalk.)* No! You're just trying to get rid of me!

MORDREAD: How can you travel if you don't leave? Sir, I'm offering you gainful employment.

FRIDAY: No!

MORDREAD: Very well, then. But be advised that I'm obligated to report any job offers to the unemployment office, and it may affect your status.

FRIDAY: I'm not unemployed!

MORDREAD: Not yet.

MORDREAD will return to his office. After a beat, enter DABNEY and WALDEN from FRIDAY'S shop. DABNEY is once again neatly groomed and in a spotless uniform. If this were science fiction, you'd think the Pod People got him. DABNEY crosses to FRIDAY, while WALDEN crosses back to BRANCH'S shop and goes inside.

DABNEY: *(Not making eye contact; trance-like.)* Sir, I would like to apologize, sir, for my behavior earlier this afternoon. I can only attribute such an indiscretion to lack of sleep and malnutrition, as well as light deficiency and paranoia from having to fight off mice in the dark with nothing more than a swizzle stick for the past three months. I know that doesn't pardon my transgressions, but I sincerely hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive me all the same.

FRIDAY: *(Concerned, and rightly so; trying to make eye contact, but there's nothing there.)* Dabney? Are you OK?

DABNEY: Aside from a vitamin deficiency and the occasional hallucination, I would classify my condition as copasetic, sir.

FRIDAY: But... but why are you... What are you doing?

DABNEY: My job, sir.

FRIDAY: But you don't have to.

DABNEY: Of course I do, sir. It is my job to do.

FRIDAY: *(Noticing his watch.)* Oh, my gosh! I have to go sit with Charlotte's parents...

DABNEY: We all must do what we all must do, sir.

FRIDAY: Listen! We'll talk later. Don't do anything crazy. Go back inside. Go lie down or something. You may need an MRI. Just don't do anything crazy!

FRIDAY, trailing the tie in his hand, will dash over to CHARLOTTE'S door and knock, while DABNEY heads back inside. Dim the lights.

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