

Turn Out To Knead
~a play in 12 slices~

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~for Frank, sorry about that~

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Characters:

FRANK: Somewhat ageless, the play spans his middle-age and all the attending persistence, determination, ambition, acceptance, let-downs, stubbornness, and confusion that it entails. He owns his own business: Frank's Pizzeria.

BOBBY: Younger, the play spans his youth and all the hope, limitless potential, destruction, joy, anger, enthusiasm, and spirit it entails. He's a neighborhood kid who likes pizza.

One man and two woman should play the remaining parts. ethnicity and age is fluid.

MERCEDES: Aspiring investment banker.

LIZZIE: A neighborhood kid, sometime girlfriend of Bobby turned social worker.

PAULA: Bobby's mother, addicted to shopping.

MIGUEL: Sometime partner of Bobby's.

BROWNIE: An older man, and longtime friend of Frank's. He and his wife own the business next to Franks: Brown's Watches and Jewelry.

SOCIAL WORKER: Bobby's "placement specialist."

Place:

Frank's Pizzeria on an ever-changing city block. This is an old-school neighborhood with a mix of residential and business. Sure, think of New York, yeah, ok, Carroll Gardens, Bed-Stuy, Crown Heights, but don't stop there. Philly, we're talking Northern Liberties, Chicago we're in Wicker Park, Saint Louis we're in Dogtown; Nashville we're in 12South. Hell, even in Houston we're in Greenway or Upper Kirby.

How detailed the interior of the restaurant is rendered is less important than how it's essential nature never seems to change, yet certain aspects continue to reveal itself like a friend over time. Has that gumball machine always been there? When was the Little League jersey with the sponsor of "Frank's Pizzeria" on the back put up?

What's next door, outside the restaurant is equally important. Perhaps there's a projection or some other means on which the identity of the storefront next door is revealed. This will aid in the storytelling.

Time:

A series of Tuesdays over roughly thirty years.

Slice 1:

Next door: VitaMen.

Bobby 34; Frank tense and tired. Bobby is missing his left hand.

BOBBY

Come on, Frank. You kidding me? Slice me.

FRANK

\$2.50.

BOBBY

You close in 10, so who cares, yeah?

FRANK

I care. \$2.50.

BOBBY

Hey Frank, Frank: Knock, knock. Knock, knock?

FRANK

Not in the mood for joking around, Bobby.

BOBBY

Knock, knock. Knock, knock. I'll keep knocking till you let me in, Frank. Knock, knock. Knock, knock. Knock, knock. Knock, knock.

FRANK

Who's there?

BOBBY

Duck.

FRANK

Not the duck, Bobby. I'm not doing the duck.

BOBBY

It's your all-time favorite. Come on, Frank, lighten up, don't got to be this way. I knock you; you knock me. Knock, knock.

FRANK

(...) Who's there?

BOBBY

Duck.

FRANK

Duck who?

(Bobby swats Frank on the head—hard enough.)

BOBBY

Ah, man, I told you to duck!

(Bobby finds this hilarious; Frank is not amused.)

BOBBY

Now you do me. Payback, a little reciprocity. Give it to me good. I know you want to, Frank.

FRANK

Not how things work any more, you know that.

BOBBY

How about that slice?

FRANK

Still \$2.50.

BOBBY

Told you, I forgot my wallet. Come back with it tomorrow. You don't think I'm good for it?

FRANK

(...)

BOBBY

You gotta let some things go, Frank. Give a little.

FRANK

Don't insult me, I've given plenty.

BOBBY

So what's one more slice?

FRANK

A slice, a watch, a job—it's all the same to you; I give, you take.

BOBBY

The watch, the job. All ancient history, Frank. Time marches forward, in a straight line.

FRANK

Seems like it goes in circles with you, Bobby.

BOBBY

One slice? Please, Frank, haven't eaten since yesterday.

FRANK

We agreed. You wouldn't come here when you're like this.

BOBBY

Then I'd never see you, Frank. And I miss you, and I'm starving. Really starving. Come on, Frank, one slice then I'm gone, out of your life. Poof the Magic Dragon, all it takes: one slice.

FRANK

\$2.50 is all I'm saying.

BOBBY

Yeah, that's funny. Cause I hear a whole lot more. \$2.50. All he's saying. You believe this, guy? My own father.

FRANK

Like a father. Not your father, *like* a father.

BOBBY

What are you running for Senate? Like father, like son, isn't that the truth, eh, *chicha*?
(*out, to someone unseen*)

Yeah, *chicha bonita*, I'm talking to you, don't look at your phone like you don't hear. Take them buds out of your pretty, pretty ears and talk to me.

FRANK

Bobby—

BOBBY

Leave it Frank, I'm making friends here. What you doing all by yourself tonight, pretty thing? You move into that fancy glass building down the block?

FRANK

Bobby, the customer—

BOBBY

I see the customer, Frank, and my God, how they keep changing—everything keeps going up, up, upscale! Just like the block. What we got next door now, Frank? VitaMen?

FRANK

It's a specialty vitamin shop for men.

BOBBY

VitaMEN! That's why we got the likes of *chicha* here. All put together with her shiny things and yoga posture, out looking for some VitaMen! Damn. And at closing on a Tuesday.

BOBBY (*cont'd.*)

Hey *chica*, you know what used to be next door? And I'm not talking about Pancho Villa Taquería, that was Frank's pet project—he come up with that name all by himself, trying to help a couple new kids on the block. Frank's always helping out the kids.

FRANK

Can you let it go for once—

BOBBY

I'll let the whole world go for a slice, Frank. Slice me, and WHOOSH! It's all gone.

FRANK

You know the price for a slice.

BOBBY

Price of a slice, yeah, yeah. Anyway *chicha*, back before Pancho Villa Taquería—I'm talking back in the day—you know what was sitting where your VitaMen sits today? Hey *chicha*, I'm asking you a question!

FRANK

Leave her alone, Bobby.

BOBBY

Chicha Ponchita can talk for herself, Frank. She's a modern girl: tough, taut, tatted. Nothing like what used to be, God, best looking thing we had in here was Lizzie. Lizardly Lizzie—

(*Frank pokes Bobby with a...*)

Ow. Jesus, Frank, put the bat down.

FRANK

Don't start trash talking, Lizzie, she doesn't deserve that.

BOBBY

What are you going to do, Frank? Call her up, warn her? "Hey Lizzie, Bobby's on bended knee, trash-talking you."

FRANK

Stop it, now. And stop messing with my customers.

BOBBY

Or what, you'll whack me upside the head with that? (. . .) Go ahead, Frank, take your best swing. I'm a slow curve, hanging right over the plate. Knock me out of the park. Do it! Swing, batter-batter, swing! (. . .) And the curveball freezes him folks! Tally another strike-out for Frank. Another broken promise, another disappointing day at the park.

FRANK

(. . .) Sorry for the trouble, Miss. Can I get you a refill on the Coke?

BOBBY

Refill of Coke? You're not running a soda shop. Keep in step, Frank, get some booze in here.

FRANK

I don't need that kind of trouble.

BOBBY

That kind of trouble is all I need, right *Ponchita Bonita*? Get ourselves a bottle, get the party going, tie me up in your garlic knots—

FRANK

Bobby, the customers.

BOBBY

Frank, the slice.

FRANK

\$2.50.

BOBBY

I don't got my wallet.

FRANK

I don't care.

BOBBY

That's not true, Frank. All you do is care. You're a care-package tied up in string. All those homeless guys we used to feed—"manna from Franken"—made your eyes pool up, all blood-shot from the long hours, the heat in the kitchen. But no matter how much blood in those pools, every Tuesday after closing, you'd let em in: a sit down meal. Flatware. Plates. "Dignity for the forgotten." And here I am, five minutes to close, Tuesday, and you won't even give me "the gift of a slice"?

FRANK

\$2.50, Bobby.

BOBBY

What happened to the gift of a slice, Frank?

FRANK

Taken away when it's abused.

BOBBY

But the gift, Frank. Gift changes everything. We are only as much as we give, right Frank?

Lights.

Slice 2:

Next door: Brown's Watches and Jewelry.

Bobby 15; Frank restless.

FRANK

It's not a big deal.

BOBBY

Seems like a big deal, dragging me out of school.

FRANK

Just for an hour, you'll be back by 1:30.

BOBBY

It's Tuesday, I don't want to miss Spanish.

FRANK

I know, I know.

BOBBY

I like the way it sounds: it's *muy bueno*.

FRANK

You *like* Ms. Contreras.

BOBBY

The way she talks, it's like listening to rain on the street. But she's not all soft, either, she's *fuerte*—you know, like fierce? She got up these posters of all these rugged Mexican dudes, and tells us all about Zapata, Madero, Pancho Villa—*la revolución*!

FRANK

You're really taking to it then?

BOBBY

I want to, like I don't know, maybe be a teacher like Ms. Contreras. But like, not to teach kids Spanish, but teach kids who speak Spanish to like read English.

FRANK

You stay in school, Bobby, you can do that.

BOBBY

Not if you keep pulling me out.

FRANK

I know. But you'll do this for me, yeah? Simple favor, all I'm asking.

BOBBY

If I do this, you teach me to throw dough?

FRANK

Bobby, you know I don't do that.

BOBBY

I know you *did* that. At Fiories.

FRANK

Fiories. Worst pizza in town – still is.

BOBBY

Yeah, but they sure make it look good.

FRANK

Marketing, that's what they do. Make you throw dough for show.

BOBBY

And *you* put on a pretty good show.

FRANK (*grabs a bowl of pizza dough*)

Yeah well. For me, real deal pizza is stretched and beat—

BOBBY

The funny looking pizza, I know it—

FRANK (*making a pizza crust*)

That's right. You get your nice yeasty bowl of dough, turn it out to knead. Give it the old slap or two to pound it out, then you pull it—perfection.

BOBBY (*considering the crust*)

Still looks more like an amoeba than a pizza. Pizza only my biology teacher could love.

FRANK

No, no, this is real pie for real people.

BOBBY

People like circles, perfect pizza circles.

FRANK

Boring people like circles.

BOBBY

And pizza.

FRANK

Maybe you're right, maybe should start throwing a little, could use the business.

BOBBY

That why you want me to lie to this guy?

FRANK

It's not lying, it's stretching the truth. Like a good dough, should be able to pull it out.

BOBBY

Still, I'm not your son.

FRANK

No, but *like* a son. Practically live here.

BOBBY

I like it here—the smell, the way you and Brownie talk, the amoeba pizza.

FRANK

And I like having you around.

BOBBY

Yeah, but still. Doesn't seem right, saying I'm your son.

FRANK

Who taught you the value of a dollar? Huh? Who taught you if you have to jiggle the handle, there's something wrong inside the toilet? Who taught you how to prune a Bonsai tree?

BOBBY

Yeah, yeah, Mr. Miyagi: wax on, wax off. Who *hasn't* taught me how to throw dough?

FRANK

Bobby, I told you—

BOBBY

I know, you only throw for show. But still, seems like something father and son would do together. Like playing catch? You can totally see the scene in the movie: lots of flour, sticky dough landing on the kid's face, close-up of dough spinning in the air as the father holds his breath, seeing if his boy will catch it this time.

FRANK

You got one active imagination on you, kid.

BOBBY

I want to do movies, you know? Not like be in them, but do them. Produce or whatever. Cause that's how I see things: Boom. Boom. Boom. You know, like piece by piece?

FRANK

That's great, you do that, Bobby.

BOBBY

So this guy who's coming at one? You owe him money?

FRANK

No. Not yet, anyway.

BOBBY

He Mafia? Coming to break your fingers till you pay?

FRANK

There's that active imagination.

BOBBY

So why you want me to say I'm your son?

FRANK

Boring, grown-up stuff, you don't need to worry about.

BOBBY

He police? Witness protection?

FRANK

Where do you get all this? Look, I don't what he is – he's a ghost as far as I know.

BOBBY

A ghost! That's better than I could think of!

FRANK

Not a ghost-ghost. Money ghost, from a bank, development something: Ferguson & Platt.

BOBBY

The Man.

FRANK

Right. The Man. Bought the whole block. Renegotiating leases, specifically said they would work to "keep the neighborhood feel intact and especially valued **family** businesses"—

BOBBY

And I'm family.

FRANK

Bingo.

BOBBY
(. . .) So what do I call you?

FRANK
Huh?

BOBBY
I mean, like, what do I say when the ghost man comes in? "Hey Dad, can I go rollerblading?"

FRANK
You rollerblade?

BOBBY
Naw, but Mom keeps buying them for me. She says it's what *all* the kids are doing, and I want to make the ghost man comfortable, seem like an average kid. So, do I like call you Dad or Pa? Or Papi? Or what do you want to be called?

FRANK
What'd you call your dad?

BOBBY
My dad, seriously?

FRANK
Do you remember?

BOBBY
Fuck-Nuts.

FRANK
"Hey Fuck Nuts, can I go rollerblading?" Probably not going to make a good impression...

BOBBY
That's what I'm thinking. And you should watch your language, Frank.

FRANK
You should watch your language.

BOBBY (*trying the word on, like a shoe*)
Thanks, *Dad*.

FRANK
There, just call me dad.

BOBBY

Sounds too square: DAD. DAD. DAD. DAD.

FRANK

Circles and squares, where do you come up with all this?

BOBBY

So, are you like married to my mom?

FRANK

What kind of question is that?

BOBBY

You don't like my mom?

FRANK

I like your mom, fine.

BOBBY

But do you *like*, like her? Cause she likes you.

FRANK

Bobby, I'm not the one in high school, ok?

BOBBY

I just don't get why you won't ever take her on a date. She could use to get out.

FRANK

We tried, Bobby.

BOBBY

So try again. You, Brownie, and the UPS guy are about the only guys she ever sees.

FRANK

She shopping again, rollerblades, huh?

BOBBY

That why you won't date her? Cause she's crazy, 'fraid she'll spend all your money?

FRANK

Bobby, don't talk that way about your mother.

BOBBY

Everyone knows it. What sane person owns four different kinds of waffle-irons, and she doesn't eat waffles.

FRANK

She's a lovely woman.

BOBBY

Cuckoo lovely. Gave you this tacky cuckoo clock to prove it. You don't have to keep it up.

(Bobby points to a cuckoo clock on the wall. When did that go up?)

FRANK

It's a gift, Bobby. Gesture is what counts; your Mom likes her things.

BOBBY

So, I'll tell the ghost man you're with my mom?

FRANK

Bobby, I already told the ghost I was a widower with a teenage son.

BOBBY

Oh, wow. That sounds hard.

FRANK

It is. Son and the business is all I got. Hoping to leave it to him someday.

BOBBY

Damn, that would be great!

FRANK

Language, Bobby, language.

BOBBY

Yeah, yeah ok, Pops.

FRANK

Sounds right—Pops.

BOBBY

Pops pops, yeah?

FRANK

Yeah. So you'll do it?

BOBBY

You teach me to throw dough? We play catch, Pops, like father and son?

FRANK

Ok, already, I'll teach you how to throw some dough.

BOBBY

All right, love you, Pops!

FRANK

Love you too, son.

(Store bell tinkles.)

FRANK

Ok. Game time.

BOBBY

That's the ghost man?

FRANK

We'll find out.

BOBBY

Pops, she's finer than Miss Contreras.

(MERCEDES enters – young, with a briefcase.)

MERCEDES

Good afternoon, I'm Mercedes Alvarez from Ferguson and Platt. You must be Mr.—

FRANK

Frank, yes. Nice to meet you Ms. Alvarez. Uh... so, um...

(Awkward pause, Bobby comes to the rescue.)

BOBBY

Wow, your name really Mercedes? That's so dope!

FRANK

Bobby—

MERCEDES

It's ok, I get it all the time, and it is—*dope*.

BOBBY

Hey Pops, you cool if I rollerblade back to school? Don't want be late for Spanish.

FRANK

Just wear your helmet, like we talked about, ok?

BOBBY

Will do, Pops!

FRANK

Glad we could have lunch, Bobby. You know I love you son.

BOBBY

Pops, you're embarrassing me.

FRANK

That's what Dads specialize in—embarrassment. Speaking of, you "studying" with Lizzie again after school?

BOBBY

Ew, Pops, no. Besides, you promised you'd teach me to throw dough after school. Hey Mercedes, my Pops can toss a pizza better than anyone in the business. Show her, Pops.

FRANK

Bobby, she doesn't have time to watch me make a pizza.

MERCEDES

Oh no, I love that, they do it at that great place across town—

BOBBY

Fiories!

MERCEDES

Yeah, that's it. So much fun to watch, and great pizza.

BOBBY

My Pops used to be the top twirler there.

MERCEDES

Really, so is this an expansion? That would be a great anchor for the block.

FRANK

No, wanted to start my own, *family* business. Something I could leave to Bobby.

MERCEDES

Oh, well, yes. That's nice too.

BOBBY

Time to flash some dough, Pops.

FRANK (*working with some dough*)

Ok, it's pretty basic, you start with the classic New York slap, then you just toss it up, and catch it. Toss it up, and catch it.

BOBBY

And now spin it!

FRANK (*twirling dough*)

If you want to add a little flash, sure, you can twirl it on your fingers, or any other tricks.

BOBBY

What did I tell you?

MERCEDES

Very impressive.

BOBBY

That's what I said. I'm out, Pops, catch you after school for some more lessons.

(Bobby exits.)

FRANK

Sorry about that. They have this lunch off campus for gifted and talented kids, and he just loves being here, our restaurant.

MERCEDES (*pulling out a binder*)

Yes, so, let's talk about the restaurant—

FRANK

You got kids?

MERCEDES

I'm focused on my career right now.

FRANK

Well, they change you, I tell you that.

MERCEDES

I'm sure. Now, here's your current lease, which I'm sure you know is up for renewal end of this calendar year.

Lights.

Slice 3:

Next door: High Culture.

Frank in the morning.

Frank enters. Locks the door behind him. Peers out on the street. Clearly there's some sort of commotion. Frank moves around the place with familiarity, performing daily rituals: starts the coffee, lays out the complimentary paper, carefully trims a Bonsai tree, has it been there the whole time?

He's distracted though by the sirens bouncing off the shop window. He looks out on the street again. Shakes his head and moves to ready the kitchen: washes his hands and then punches down the dough. He turns the dough out to knead. He tests it for feel and elasticity. He tears off a piece, pounds it, and makes a pie. He throws the dough up, expertly catches it. He throws it a little higher, again.

As he throws the dough, Bobby, 20, staggers out of the backroom, bloody.

BOBBY

And you promised you'd never throw dough without me.

FRANK

Jesus Bobby! What are you doing?

BOBBY (*checks pocket watch*)

7:30 on the nose. Never miss a morning, do you Pops?

FRANK

What's all over you?

BOBBY

Be cool, just your secret sauce. Got an early start on the prep for you, just toss me an apron?

FRANK

Bobby you don't work here anymore.

BOBBY

I don't *don't* work here either. Still got keys.

FRANK

You're in school.

BOBBY

Got your message about Mr. Brown, wanted to pay my respects. Brownie was a class act.

FRANK

That's decent, but you could of just called.

(A siren from outside.)

BOBBY

That doesn't look good, somebody get killed?

FRANK

Not sure, but there's a lot of cops standing around for a busted front window.

BOBBY

Yeah, so toss me an apron, will you?

(Frank throws Bobby an apron; he quickly puts it on, and laughs strangely.)

FRANK

Bobby, next door, you know something about that?

BOBBY

Maybe, maybe not.

FRANK

You do that? Bust in High Culture's front window?

BOBBY

High Culture, you kidding me with that? Hated that yogurt place. Pushing Brownie into an early grave.

FRANK

He was sick way before High Culture moved in.

BOBBY

He was *sick*, could fix a broken heart if you gave him the right tools.

FRANK

Brownie had emphysema, Bobby. He was dying.

BOBBY

Death by yogurt. So yeah, I fucking did it.

FRANK

Language, Bobby. Please.

BOBBY

I got your message, and I just, I felt sad, alone, and then the thoughts came, boom, boom, boom—a storm of waffle-irons raining down on me—Mom, Brownie. And I don't know, I had to be here, see you. I didn't know what else to do.

FRANK

It's ok, Bobby.

BOBBY

So I hopped a bus. Boom. Just before dawn, I'm out front, looking into that window, remembering Brownie hunched over his operating table, tiny gears and springs all 'round him, smoking his pipe. And I got to thinking about how they used to think of God as the Great Watchmaker. Newton, I'm talking Sir Isaac, said so himself: "the watchmaker is God."

FRANK

Tell me what happened last night.

BOBBY

I'm telling you about my state of mind—it was one of peaceful contemplation on the bigger purpose, about how we, these tiny springs, fit into the infinite. It's almost dawn, quiet, and me alone with my thoughts about Brownie and the hidden meaning of it all. And suddenly there's this guy next to me, looking into the shop. And he's smoking a corncob pipe. But not smoking it smoking it, but like ironically smoking it. And he's with this wafer-thin girl teetering on the cobblestones on spike heels taller than a wine bottle. And they're all bummed High Culture is closed. Like it would possibly be open? And she says: "I was so in the mood for some yogurt flavored yogurt." And he takes a big fake drag from his pipe, raises and eyebrow, and says: "I have *passion*-fruit yogurt at my place." So, I turn to the guy and I say: "Knock, knock." He goes: "who's there?" And I say: "Duck." And he goes: "Duck who?" And I don't know what happened after that, Frank, honestly, I just know I LOST IT ON THEM, ok? I just went blind, Pops. Then, later, I wake up in back with this beside me.

(Produces a corncob pipe, a high-heel shoe, a huge wad of cash.)

FRANK

Jesus, Bobby.

BOBBY

I know, who walks around with this kind of cash? Drug-dealer or a banker, right?

FRANK

What did you do to those people, Bobby?

BOBBY

I went blind, Frank, ok, I don't know! But judging on the amount of cops out there, must have been more than a peck on the cheek.

FRANK

Let's go to the police, Bobby—

BOBBY

Police? You see how much money this passion-fruit banker guy's got just in his pocket? He'll have lawyers for his lawyer. They lock me up for sure, Frank.

FRANK

I don't know, Bobby, but this is clearly something emotional, misplaced grief—

BOBBY

Makes it sound like I lost my wallet: "Pardon me, judge, I just seem to have misplaced my grief." I didn't misplace anything, Frank, I was furious, *fuerte!*

FRANK

You know what I'm talking about, Bobby. You were upset, it would be a first offence.

BOBBY

That's not exactly true.

FRANK

Bobby?

BOBBY

Nothing on the record. But at college they got these tables—sorry, *kiosks*—seems like every twenty feet for credit cards: Chase, Visa, MasterCard. The banks are more important than the books. Just teaching us how to spend. And behind said kiosks sit these very clear co-eds—clear like the credit cards they're pushing—hands politely folded over their type-A three-ring binders. Clear little Sirens, singing their Siren song: "Hey, sign-up with Visa and get a free water bottle." "Express yourself with American Express and you'll get a free Frisbee and an early start on establishing your line of credit!"—like that's the best thing in the world that could happen to you outside of getting a blowjob from the mascot.

Anyway, there was an incident at one of these kiosks. The clear people filed an *incident report* with *campus* police. There was an *investigation*, which led to a *disciplinary action*. And I did an anger management program, course, regime. I can start again *under conditions* next semester.

FRANK

Wait, you were suspended?

BOBBY

That's what they call it. Suspended. But basically kicked out, they pulled my scholarship.

FRANK

Bobby, this is terrible. When did this happen?

BOBBY

Couple months back.

FRANK

Why didn't you tell me?

BOBBY

Something to do with disappointment.

FRANK

Bobby, you know I got your back. And we'll get you back in? Financial aid if we have to—

BOBBY

I'm not going into debt to learn how to go into debt from the clear credit cards. Mom already gave me a master class in that.

FRANK

Your mother was compulsive.

BOBBY

She was lonely, sad—

FRANK

She was sick—

BOBBY

Made her easy pray for easy pay plans. And QVC, HSN raped her. The singing Elvis phones, rollerblades, the charm bracelets that so charmed her, closet full of waffle-irons and boy did she get her money's worth there. Brownie drowned in yogurt, Mom in useless crap.

FRANK

You need help, Bobby.

BOBBY

I need your help, Frank.

FRANK

Professional help, Bobby.

BOBBY

Just be cool, let me lay low here, get my plan together, next week I'll be gone.

FRANK

You need to take responsibility for whatever you did to those people.

BOBBY

They'll eat their yogurt and be fine. I've got at least eight grand here in cash, I just need a couple days to make a plan.

FRANK

They'll catch you, Bobby. There's dozens of cops out there.

BOBBY

I'll go off the grid.

FRANK

Bobby.

BOBBY

You won't help me, Pops?

FRANK

I want to help you in the right way.

BOBBY

After Mom, you promised you'd be there for me.

FRANK

I am; I'm here for you, Bobby. Always.

BOBBY

So let me lay low. A week. I'll make the sauce, sleep in the back. Then I'll be gone: Poof the Magic Dragon.

FRANK

Maybe I don't want you gone.

(A siren.)

BOBBY

I don't want to go to jail, Pops.

FRANK

You won't. You got anger issues and a lot of reason behind it. Get the help you need, get back on track. Best thing for you is to come clean. You run now, you never stop running.

(There's a knock at the door.)

BOBBY

Turn myself in?

FRANK

It's the only way, Bobby.

(Another knock.)

BOBBY

Just cover for me; I'll be in the walk-in.

(Bobby exits quickly as a Cop knocks on the door.)

FRANK

Ask for mercy, you of all people deserve it.

BOBBY *(off)*

Just holler when it's all clear.

(Frank goes and unlocks the door. The tinkle of the store door opening.)

Lights.

Slice 4:

Next door: Brown's Watches and Jewelry.

Frank and Paula in the restaurant. Frank considers a Bonsai tree.

PAULA

Course, if you hate it, you can just throw it away.

FRANK

I don't hate it, Paula. It's *interesting*.

PAULA

I know, right. I've been trying to figure out a gift to give you for the longest time, and then last week this was the featured item. It was cute, and little, and I instantly thought of you— Not that I think you're cute and little, how embarrassing!

FRANK

It's not a problem.

PAULA

What I meant was, how good you are with Bobby. He's cute and little, and you've been so great with him. Letting him hang out here after school.

FRANK

He's no trouble. He helps out. Folds boxes, buses the tables—

PAULA

Eats your pizza.

FRANK

He's a growing boy.

PAULA

Like a weed in the walk, I tell you. Can't believe he's 13. Time, it just goes.

FRANK

When he's old enough, I'll hire him for real. He's a good worker.

PAULA

See, you're like a father to him, and it's almost Father's Day, and I know you don't— I mean I know what happened with— God, why am I talking? I'm sorry.

FRANK

It's ok. Everyone knows what happened with Jessica.

PAULA

Yeah, so I've been meaning to get you something, show my appreciation. And this was small, not so much trouble. And maybe when you look at it, you think of me and Bobby.

FRANK

Bobby the Bonsai?

PAULA

Ha, that's good one, Frank. Oh, and it came with a book, and this little tool set: miniature rake, clippers, even a tiny broom! Isn't it just adorable!

FRANK (*looking at the back of the book*)

"Bonsai is an art that focuses on long-term contemplation and cultivation techniques like pruning to produce miniature versions that mimic full-size trees." Sounds interesting, but really, you don't have to give me gifts.

PAULA

You don't like it?

FRANK

It's not necessary is what I'm saying. Bobby's good to have around.

PAULA

But I want to give you gifts, Frank.

FRANK

Ok, well thank you.

PAULA

And I'm not talking just about Bonsai trees, I'm— Well— There's another type of gift I'd like to give you, Frank.

FRANK

Paula, it's late.

PAULA

Best time for this type of gift, Frank. Bobby's got a sleep-over, we could be at my place in—

FRANK

Got an early day tomorrow.

PAULA

We can stay here, I don't mind.

FRANK

Paula.

PAULA

What is wrong with you, Frank?

FRANK

Paula—

PAULA

I'm a reasonably attractive woman, reasonably, and I've been coming in here for I don't know how many years, and never once can get a rise out of you.

FRANK

Paula, I— Bobby—

PAULA

Are you like into boys, that why you're so into my Bobby and all the other little leaguers?

FRANK

Paula, that's—

PAULA

The truth?

FRANK

I lost my wife.

PAULA

We all know the story. Brownie can never stop talking about how beautiful your Jessica was, "with a voice like spring rain."

FRANK

Brownie exaggerates.

PAULA

Not about the tragedy he doesn't, the double tragedy, your boy—

FRANK

Paula, please.

PAULA

Ok, Frank, it's ok. We don't have to talk about it, just know, *I know*. I know what it means to carry a heavy heart. My ex nearly killed me before he up and Poof the Magic Dragon on us. I know what it is to suffer, and I see you suffering, see us both, suffering, and think why are we suffering alone, when we could suffer together? And maybe just maybe, after some time, that suffering would turn into something else—like joy—cause we would be together.

FRANK

Did he abuse Bobby, your ex?

PAULA

Did you hear what I was saying, Frank? I want to be with you. Don't make me totally throw myself at you.

FRANK

I just, I'm concerned about Bobby, today he blew up for no—

PAULA

Again with Bobby. Clearly more attracted to him than me.

FRANK

Stop saying that.

PAULA

Roll me in flour and prove it, Frank.

(She kisses him, feels under his pants.)

Well, well, that's quite a Bonsai you got there.

FRANK

Paula, this is embarrassing.

PAULA

Embarrassing to be loved?

FRANK

Paula, stop.

PAULA

You don't like? (. . .) There you go, Frank. Leave it all behind. Today is today. Now matters more than yesterday. Love me, Frank.

FRANK

I want to, Paula, I do, but I just, I can't.

PAULA

You can, Frank. You will. Try for me, try it now. Now. Now.

(Frank ends his self-imposed drought, suddenly, greedily drinking in her advances and coming to life. They fall behind the counter. I imagine there's moaning...)

Lights.

Slice 5:

Next door: Raphael's Salon.

Bobby 24, shows Frank a ring.

BOBBY

(...) Say something, Frank. I mean if you think it sucks, say: "*it sucks, Bobby.*"

FRANK

Sorry, I'm just surprised, I didn't realize things were so far along with you and Lizzie.

BOBBY

Come off it, Frank, we've been crazy about each other since sixteen.

FRANK

Sure, but I mean—

BOBBY

Yeah, yeah, I know, since I've been clean.

FRANK

Yeah, of course.

BOBBY

Seven months, come yesterday.

FRANK

Congratulations, Bobby. It's great.

BOBBY

And I couldn't have done it without her, and of course, you, but no offense, I don't want to fuck you for the rest of my life.

FRANK

Language, Bobby, language.

BOBBY

Sorry. Turns out it's nice, sleeping with the same woman night after night.

FRANK

What did you think it would be?

BOBBY

I don't know. When she let me move in after rehab, I was thinking: "*huh how's this going to work out?*" But surprise-surprise, turns out it's nice.

FRANK

Good. So, you guys have discussed this?

BOBBY

What's to discuss?

FRANK

Getting married?

BOBBY

She's crazy in love with me, always has been, she's been waiting ten years for this.

FRANK

You haven't talked it over with her?

BOBBY

It just came to me this morning.

FRANK

This morning?

BOBBY

I woke up, and she was sleeping beside me, and the sun was coming in through the trees hitting her, and shining on me, and I just felt like light, content, happy to be just lying there, with her next to me, the sun on me.

FRANK

It's called joy.

BOBBY

Yeah, I guess that's what that is. Joy. And all the bullshit I used to have, all the crap I pulled as Pancho Blanco, it just seemed like it was another person, a different life.

FRANK

You were a different person.

BOBBY

So, there I was lying there, feeling these feelings, these actual feelings. Then, boom, I remembered Mom's ring. And I thought, what am I waiting for?

FRANK

Wow.

BOBBY

I know. And Frank, I know I put you through it, but I want you to stand up, represent with me.

FRANK

Whoa, whoa, Bobby, grab for the reins.

BOBBY

I understand why you might not want to—

FRANK

Bobby, it's not that, it's just— let her say “yes” before you start planning the—

BOBBY

She's crazy for me, she's going to say yes.

FRANK

Bobby, this is all so sudden—

BOBBY

You trying to jinx this for me?

FRANK

I'm not jinxing it, I'm just trying to contain your, I don't know, thoughts.

BOBBY

You don't want me marrying Lizzie?

FRANK

That's not what—

BOBBY

Rather have me back on the streets, using—

FRANK

That's not fair, Bobby. I want to help you figure out the best approach.

BOBBY

Not to worry, I already got that all figured out. Tonight, she's coming here after her shift at the shelter, she knows I'm closing the store—

FRANK

You're doing it tonight?

BOBBY

Yeah. Here, if you're cool with letting me close a little early. She gets off at 9, figure she'll be here by 9:30.

FRANK

Here?

BOBBY

I was thinking maybe doing it at one of the fancy places, Café Matisse, or whatever, but then I was like, no. Talk to Frank, do it here. We got history here. Had some pretty hot times in that walk-in.

FRANK

No need to remind me.

BOBBY

But I'm not going to low-class it. Got fine linen for the tables, candles, chilled sparkling cider, music, flowers, Swiss chocolate, Italian cheese, French baguette, Russian caviar. I got a coat and tie, and I'm making her favorite: Love Pie.

FRANK

White roasted garlic with sundried tomatoes.

BOBBY

"Cause only your lover will kiss you after you eat it." Classic, Frank.

FRANK

Only served on Valentine's day, and I guess...tonight.

BOBBY

Then boom, I hit her with Mom's ring.

(Pulls out ring; Frank steps away from it.)

Fetches it from the safe deposit Brownie set up. Go on, check it out, not going to bite.

FRANK

Sorry, I just, I'm surprised is all, surprised that you still have it.

BOBBY

Me too. Fucking credit card companies took everything, I had nothing of hers, except some key to some safe deposit box, that I couldn't get into, even though, man all I wanted to do was pawn this ring for a bag of something.

FRANK

How come you didn't?

BOBBY

My inner Pancho Villa was riding so high and so paranoid, I shredded all my IDs, bank almost had me arrested all the times I went in there to try and get it.

FRANK

Right, going off the grid.

BOBBY

Going off the deep end more like it. You wouldn't believe half the shit I pulled, what I'd do or give to get high; I'm not proud of it, Pops.

FRANK

Well, you made it through, and managed to hold on to the key.

BOBBY

Somehow, some way. It's an heirloom, hard to shake I guess. You think Brownie knew I'd fuck up? Like he knew I need to be protected from myself.

FRANK

Brownie had a gift for seeing inside things.

BOBBY

The great Watchmaker. (. . .) She'll like it, yeah? It's not much, certainly not safe deposit box worthy, but it's nice, yeah?

FRANK

It was your mom's.

BOBBY

It was, yeah.

FRANK

(. . .) Bobby, you sure you're ready to take this step?

BOBBY

I felt joy, Frank. Joy. It was like a gift. Yeah, I'm ready.

FRANK

And Lizzie?

BOBBY

She loves me.

FRANK

As long as you're sure.

BOBBY

I'm not sure, Frank, but I feel this joy with her, with us, and I don't know what else I could do with that, but I know I don't want to lose it. I want to hold on to it, her.

FRANK

Ok.

BOBBY

It cool if I close early? Tuesday, pretty slow anyway?

FRANK

Sure, of course.

BOBBY

And hey, you mind if I run next door get my hair cut? Raphael said he could work me in.

FRANK

You're letting Raphael cut your hair?

BOBBY

I want to look nice, do this right. Lizzie deserves that.

Lights.

This play is not complete!
To request a full copy please contact the author's agent
or the author.