**Regional Distributor**

**Based on a story my father told me long ago**

by

**David K. Farkas**

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## Characters:

Major characters are indicated with boldface.

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| **Al Farkas:**  A young sales rep for the low-end manufacturer of bedroom sets, Colony Furniture. | Mr. Atkinson: The New York State Sales Manager for the Frigidaire Company. |
| **Al Farkas’** **Doppelgänger:** Invisible to everyone, but he can speak privately to Al. | Stewart: Abe’s son. |
| **Abe Goldberg:** The owner of a struggling furniture store in Utica, New York. | **Narrator** |

## Suggested Casting:

**Al Farkas/Al’s doppelgänger**

Abe

Narrator/Mr. Atkinson/Stewart

# Scene 1

(Lights.)

(The scene is the interior of the small, run-down furniture store. ABE GOLDBERG, the owner, is lounging on an one of two white or light-colored upholstered chairs, part of a living room set. He is smoking a cigar and looking bored.)

(The NARRATOR enters.)

NARRATOR: It is 1936, in the depths of the Great Depression. Al Farkas, a young, energetic furniture salesman, has just stepped into Main Street Quality Furniture, in Utica, New York. He is paying a sales call on the owner, Abe Goldberg. Al represents the Colony Furniture Company, in Linden, New Jersey. His territory is New York State and Northern New Jersey.

(The NARRATOR exits to return later as MR. ATKINSON. *AL, carrying a sample book, enters with big strides.)*

AL: Hiya, Abe.

ABE: Come on in, Al.

AL: Good to see you. Ya sellin’ any furniture these days? (Chuckles.) No one else is.

(ABE stands up to meet AL just and shakes his hand warmly. He is unimpressively dressed in a casual shirt and slacks.)

ABE: I figured it was about time for you to be stoppin’ by. Where did you come here from?

DOPPEL: Gee, this place looks awful. I wonder if Abe will hang on much longer.

AL: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse. From here, it’s Albany and then home. Been out a week.

(With his cigar fully noticeable, ABE sits himself back in the upholstered chair and gestures for AL to sit in the matching chair.)

ABE: Well, take a load off.

DOPPEL: My God, he sits there with his lit cigar in a chair he’s trying to sell to customers.

AL: Sure, Abe.

(They both sit.)

ABE: Ya wanna drink?

AL: No, I’m OK. But thanks.

(ABE pulls out a whiskey bottle and a shot glass that were tucked between the upholstered chair and a table lamp. He pours himself a drink and does not return the bottle.)

DOPPEL: This will look great if a customer comes in. But the odds are riding with Abe on that.

AL: How’s Marge?

ABE: Marge is doing a lot better. The doctor is encouraging now.

AL: That’s good, Abe. On top of business being lousy, you sure don’t need to be worrying about Marge. What about the boys?

ABE: They’re doing great. Good in school. Good on the sports teams. Just real good.

AL: Well, that’s terrific.

(ABE nods.)

AL: What’s that Frigidaire doin’ over there?

ABE: Long story. Hey, Al. I sold two of your dark maple bedroom sets last month.

AL: Hey, that’s *good*. We got a new smoky maple now. (Opens sample book.) We never did a finish like that before.

(AL shows ABE a page from the sample book.)

ABE: You like it?

AL: I don’t know. If it sells, I’ll like it. Maybe I’ll ship you one dark maple and one smoky maple. See what happens.

ABE: Sure. You know what? I’ll take a medium maple too. You know, the regular one.

DOPPEL: Hmmm. I’ll probably take a dollar cut on my commission for the free night tables. What the hell.

AL: OK, with an order of three bedroom sets, I think we can throw in the second night table for free.

ABE: That’s great. Thanks. Customers like that second night table. Can I count on that? Ongoing?

AL: Yeah, if you phone or mail in any order of three or more bedroom sets, we give you get the second night table. I’ll tell the girls in the office.

ABE: OK! OK!

AL: So what’s with the Frigidaire? You trying to sell refrigerators?

DOPPEL: What’s Abe thinking? Whose gonna come in here to buy a Frigidaire? I don’t even think it’s plugged in. If a customer was interested in a refrigerator, wouldn’t they want to feel inside?

ABE: Well, six weeks ago this fella walks in. A goy. Well-dressed. Sure not a customer.

(ATKINSON enters and stands at the periphery, isolated and unaware. ABE stands out of respect for his visitor. He is facing ATKINSON, although he is clearly addressing AL.)

ABE: He tells me he’s the New York State sales manager for Frigidaire. Mr. Walter Atkinson, based in Manhattan. He says he needs a regional distributor for Oneida County. He says there’s not a lot of businesses around here selling durables. He sure got that right! Would I like to be the regional distributor for Frigidaire? He says ice boxes are a thing of the past. I say, “This is a *furniture* store.”

(ATKINSON “comes to life,” steps forward, and picks up the dialog with ABE. AL just observes.)

MR. ATKINSON: Yes, it’s a furniture store, Mr. Goldberg. But that’s OK. You don’t really need to have customers come *in here* and buy Frigidaires. You get a commission whether the customer comes in or not. To become our regional distributor, you have to have one unit in your store. That’s the requirement.

ABE: A Frigidaire is pretty *big*—huh. I think it would confuse my customers. When they come in they won’t know if it’s a furniture store or what.

MR. ATKINSON: Well, it doesn’t need to be in any special location. You can put it anywhere in the store.

DOPPEL: (Breaking in.) This is one strange story.

ABE: What’s it gonna cost me?

MR. ATKINSON: thirty-five dollars. That’s the wholesale price, of course. We cover shipping.

ABE: Mr. Atkinson, that’s a lot of money. These are hard times. I can’t take that kind of money out of the business.

MR. ATKINSON: (Looking at his watch.) I understand. How about this? We’ll ship the unit, and you can pay for it out of your commissions.

ABE: Really? Well, I don’t see how I can lose on that deal.

MR. ATKINSON: No, I don’t see how you can. . . OK, so we’ll sign some papers, and my work here is done.

*(After a pause, ATKINSON exits.)*

ABE: Well, that’s it. No one has *come in* to look at a Frigidaire. Most of my customers don’t even ask about it. Maybe they don’t see it there. A few walk over and take a look. No reason to waste money on electricity, so I keep it shut down.

(AL stands, getting ready to leave.)

AL: That’s quite a story. (Chuckling.) Well, I got a few more calls to make this afternoon. (Laughing.)Hey, Abe, if you plugged it in, you could keep your sandwiches and cola nice and cold. . . Well, good luck to you and your Frigidaire. And good luck with the smoky maple.

(Exits.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 2

(Lights.)

(NARRATOR enters.)

NARRATOR: Al is making another sales call on Abe Goldberg. It’s about one year since the day he saw the Frigidaire in Abe’s store.

(NARRATOR exits.)

(AL, carrying his sample book, steps inside. ABE is lounging on what looks like the same chair and is smoking a cigar.)

AL: Hiya, Abe. How’ya doin’. Ya sellin’ any furniture these days?

ABE: Al, nice to see *you*!

(ABE stands for a warm handshake.)

ABE: You should come by more often.

AL: I’ll try to, but I do most of my business now in New Jersey and Brooklyn.

DOPPLE: Abe’s lookin’ healthy. The store isn’t any better.

ABE: Well, take a load off.

AL: Sure.

(ABE sits himself back in same chair and gestures for AL to sit in the matching chair. He sits.)

AL: So what’s goin’ on?

ABE: Al, I can’t give you no business. Nothing’s moved off the floor in two weeks.

AL: That’s OK. I get some orders. We shipped *you* three smoky maples two months back.

ABE: Johnson Brothers, in Franklin, closed three weeks ago. Some of their business might come to me, but it won’t be much. They were not my favorite people, but—still—it’s sad to see another business go under.

DOPPLE: Well, there’s that Frigidaire. Whatya know, it’s plugged in. I guess Abe is keeping his sandwiches cold.

AL: (Laughing.) How’s the Frigidaire?

ABE: It’s a *new* model. Take a close look. (Points.) A truck brought it in here and took out the other one. You know, I’m making some money on that thing. People come in here now specially to look at my Frigidaire. A few buy, most don’t. I’m not the only store in the area selling refrigerators. But, I’m still the regional distributor for the Frigidaire Corporation, and whenever a Frigidaire sells anywhere in Oneida County, I get a cut. Check from New York comes every month. Saw Mr. Atkinson just once. He asked if everything was OK. I said it was.

AL: You get checks from New York. How ‘bout that! . . . How’s Marge? How’s the family?

ABE: They’re good. Marge says we should think about a vacation. Maybe go to Miami Beach after New Year’s.

(ABE and AL trail off into pantomime. Blackout. Or, they freeze to become actors rather than characters, and they stand and exit.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 3

(Lights.)

(The stage is bare. AL enters and freezes. He is not carrying his sample book. The NARRATOR enters.)

NARRATOR: Ten years have passed. It is 1947. Al has just stepped through the doors of a much larger and more modern incarnation of Abe’s store. This is not a sales call. Abe stopped carrying furniture shortly after the war ended. This will be Al’s last trip through New York State. He’s about to narrow his sales territory to Brooklyn and New Jersey.

(The NARRATOR exits to return shortly as STEWART).

DOPPLE: Be nice to see Abe again. Wow, some place he has now!

(STEWART GOLDBERG, in a sport jacket, enters and greets AL. The DOPPELGÄNGER becomes AL as STEWART enters.)

STEWART: Good morning, sir. Welcome to Main Street Appliance. How may we help you?

AL: Hi. My name’s Al Farkas. I’m an old friend of Abe’s. Is he in?

STEWART: Mr. Farkas! I’m Stewart, Abe’s son. I don’t think we’ve met, but Abe talks about you. You’re from the furniture-store days. Really nice to see you. I’m the store manager now. Let me take you back to see Abe.

(STEWART and AL exit. AL throws interested glances all around, suggesting a busy store. A desk and two chairs are brought in. ABE, as actor, takes a seat at the swivel desk chair. STEWART leads AL to the entrance to ABE’S office.)

STEWART: Hey Dad, you have a visitor.

(STEWART exits to return to sales floor. ABE turns his chair to face AL.)

ABE: So good to see you, Al!

(ABE sets down his cigar and rises to shake hands.)

AL: I was driving through from Syracuse. Thought I’d drop in and say hello.

ABE: That’s great. Thanks for makin’ the time. You know, you’re lucky you caught me in. And *I’m* lucky you caught me. I’m actually not here that much. The kid pretty much runs the place.

(ABE sits in his swivel chair. AL, taking the cue, takes a seat in the guest chair.)

AL: I’m sorry about Artie.

ABE: Yeah, time passes, but the pain doesn’t really go away. Toughest on Marge. You can imagine. And it wasn’t much before V-J Day. Just three weeks. *You* were in the Pacific, right Al?

AL: Yes, I was. . . Well, this place is hoppin’.

ABE: It is. We got customers in here all day. But a lot of our money comes from new construction. People order their refrigerators through the builder when they’re planning out the kitchen. We never even see those folks. We’re just “regional distributor.” It can’t last forever. But Frigidaire has its way of doing things, and they like to follow it . . . I was lucky. Mr. Atkinson just *walked* in here. But I *did* know how to seize an opportunity.

DOPPLE: (Looking at ABE.) I think Opportunity seized *you*.

AL: I guess you did, Abe.

DOPPLE: (Addressing Al.) One of the worst businessmen you ever sold to! Sometimes lucky is better than smart. But he’s a good guy, and Stewart seems like a real nice kid. And hep, too.

ABE: Atkinson actually retired. There’s a new guy. I think he’s come in twice.

AL: Stewart, he’s a real nice boy. That’s a blessing. You know that.

ABE: Yeah, Al. That’s a blessing.

AL: Abe, I’m married. About a year. I have a son, three months old. I’m gonna give up the travel. I can do plenty of business close to home.

ABE: I’m happy for you. I betcha found a good woman.

AL: Yeah, I think I did. And we’re gonna move soon. Down from the Bronx right into Manhattan. Big new housing development—"Stuyvesant Town” they call it. Hard to get in, but I got “veterans’ preference.”

ABE: Good for you! I think I heard of that place.

(AL rises and starts to leave.)

AL: Well, I got a few more calls to make this afternoon.

ABE: So nice that you stopped in to see me. It was always really nice when you came in here. More than business. A lot more than business.

(Al steps close to ABE, and reaches down to put an arm over his shoulder.)

AL: That’s right. A lot more than business. My best to Marge. Take good care.

ABE: Take good care.

(Exits.)

(Blackout.)

## The End