

Act 1

Scene 1

(LIGHTS UP on a hallway inside the Funhouse. ERIKA is heaving a duffle bag into a broom closet. She tosses the bag in, takes out a broom, and closes the door. She is dressed in slacks and a shirt with a nametag on it. She brushes out any wrinkles in her clothes, pats her hair and begins to sweep with the broom. A few seconds later, KEN enters from outside. He is dressed in similar clothes to ERIKA, but wearing an apron with the word “FUNHOUSE” emblazoned on it.)

ERIKA

I was wondering where you got off to.

KEN

I was just takin’ a smoke break.

ERIKA

This early?

KEN

It *is* an addiction. You should know that. I can’t help when the craving strikes.

ERIKA

Did you smoke the whole pack? You’ve been out there for a while.

KEN

I had to call my mom and wish her a happy birthday. It’s her birthday, y’know. I hope you appreciate that, Erika. A lovely Saturday and my mom, who carried me in her womb for eight months, is sitting alone in her apartment—‘cause my dad’s sure as fuck not there. He’s been gone the last 18 years, why would he show up for *this* birthday, right? She’s sitting there by herself. Probably with a candle stuck into a Hostess cupcake she bought at the 7/11, singing happy birthday to herself. Probably got tears running down her face, because the apple of her eye isn’t there to celebrate with her. Instead, he’s here: working from open to close at the Funhouse. She says to me “oh, that’s fine, dear. I understand. You have bills and rent to pay.” But I could tell she was crushed. Absolutely crushed.

ERIKA

Wait...did you say *eight* months?

KEN

I was a premie. Frankly, I'm lucky to be here. Well, not *here* here, but, y'know, here in general.

ERIKA

Listen, Ken. If you wanted to take the day off, you should've asked. Even a week ago. You could've gotten it off. I mean, your mom's birthday shouldn't have come as a surprise. She's had more than a few of them by now, I'm guessing.

KEN

No, it's not like that. I just want some appreciation for all I do here. The sacrifices I make. All my hard work.

ERIKA

I *do* appreciate all your hard work, Ken. I just need you to do some more of it, okay? Please?

KEN

Well, since you ask so nicely.

ERIKA

And because I'm signing your timecard this week. With Peter gone and all.

(ERIKA sniffs)

ERIKA

Jesus, you reek. You sure you didn't smoke the whole pack?

KEN

No, it wasn't the whole pack, *mother*. Jesus. Have you seen the price tag on those things lately?

ERIKA

That's one of the reasons I quit.

KEN

Yeah, you'd think we were rationing them or something. Like it's all part of the World War II civilian sacrifice—we cut down so our fighting boys can fill their lungs while the Krauts shoot at them. Hey, d'ya hear the one about that British writer during World War II?

ERIKA

Is this another joke, Ken?

KEN

No, no, this is a true story, Erika. This British guy. He was a writer—he wrote something. I dunno what he wrote. I just know he was famous for some story or other. Well, his buddy was smoking a cigarette and he said “put out that bloody cigarette.” Because, y’know the enemy could see the cherry of the cigarette? And then? A sniper got him. The writer, not the smoker. Well, maybe the sniper got both of them, but you only hear about the writer, because he was famous? Those were his last words, though! “Put out that bloody cigarette.” Isn’t that some bullshit? Here you are: a writer—and a sorta renowned one, too—and those are your last words. Not very elegant, I’d say. And you know what’s worse? You get shot and killed because of someone else’s stupidity. Though maybe it was his *own* stupidity for saying something when they were trying not to be seen? I dunno. Anyway, people bitch about secondhand smoke, right? But that's a lot worse. Maybe it's just not safe to be around smokers, y'think?

(Beat.)

KEN

“Put out that bloody cigarette.” Man. Bet he wished he said something a little more poetic, eh?

(Pause.)

KEN

Christ, I don't remember the guy's name. I know it wasn't Kipling.

ERIKA

Well, that really narrows it down.

(KEN shrugs)

ERIKA

As interesting as all that was, Ken, I was talking about *you*. This is a family restaurant. What kinda message are we sending to the kids when you come in, smelling like a Marlboro Factory?

KEN

Well, it's not like I'm blowing smoke in their faces, is it?

ERIKA

Why don't you try an e-cig or something? You'd probably at least smell better.

KEN

You're saying I should start *vaping*? No thanks, Erika. I may as well get the word "tool" tattooed on my fucking forehead.

ERIKA

Well, they're supposed to be healthier for you, anyway. E-cigs. That's what they say.

KEN

They—whoever the hell "*they*" are—also say it's *worse*. Or sometimes they say it's "maybe not *as* bad, but not that good for you either." Or it's...y'know, fuck it. Who the hell even knows, man? They flip-flop on the subject at least twice a week it seems. It all depends on whoever's funding the research. And how'd you quit, anyway? When I started here, you were smoking like a chimney.

ERIKA

I dunno. Lots of willpower, I guess.

KEN

Ah, bullshit.

ERIKA

Look, as much as I love these little chats, we've got customers to get ready for. We've got an hour or so before a birthday party shows up and...

KEN

...oh, Jesus Christ, goddamn it. You don't want me to put on the Buttfuck Bear costume again, do you?

ERIKA

Please don't call him that, Ken...

KEN

...I know. I know. But look at his face sometime—really look at it! It looks like he’s taking a pounding from behind. He really wasn’t expecting it, but he’s sure loving every minute...

ERIKA

...No! I don’t want you to wear the *Buddy Bear* costume. In fact, don’t worry about the party at all. Tiffany and I’ll handle it. I just want you to help set up and then see to the other customers. Hopefully Jerome’ll come in to give you a hand. I don’t know why he hasn’t come in yet.

KEN

You know we won’t be seeing him today, right?

ERIKA

Probably not, but I try to be optimistic.

KEN

Optimistic? Hard to be optimistic when you work *here*. This is the place where dreams come to die.

ERIKA

You’re exaggerating.

KEN

Am I? I know the sign outside says “Fun! Fun! Fun! At the Funhouse!” but I think that line from Dante’s *Inferno*, “abandon hope” would be better. At least over the back entrance. For the employees?

ERIKA

It’s not that bad.

KEN

We could be doing way better. You gotta admit that. This place is like one of those cheap store brand alternatives when you can’t afford the big name product. When parents don’t want to travel too far to get to Showbiz Pizza and can’t afford to really spoil their kids, they come to the Funhouse.

ERIKA

Peter says this place is older than Showbiz Pizza.

KEN

That doesn't surprise me. We haven't gotten any new arcade games since I've been here. Our pinball machines are wearing out; the Snorks one doesn't even light up anymore. And our other games are starting to show their age...hell, we may as well throw out that fucking whack-a-mole game, y'know. Half the moles don't even come out of their holes! Can't say I blame them...sometimes *I'm* embarrassed to be seen here.

ERIKA

You done?

(PAUSE.)

KEN

We got a birthday party then?

ERIKA

We have reservations for three of them today. The big one's around noon, and two smaller ones reserved for 3:00 and 6:30.

KEN

But no Butt-Buddy Bear, right? For any of those?

ERIKA

No.

KEN

Good, 'cause I really don't wanna put that costume on today.

ERIKA

I promise you. No Buddy Bear costume.

KEN

Great. Maybe this day won't completely suck. Three birthdays, huh? That's not bad, I guess. Better than how it's been lately.

ERIKA

Hopefully we have a decent flow of other customers, too.

KEN

Yeah, hopefully. Don't wanna get *too* bored, do we? Guess we better get to it then.

(KEN starts to walk away.)

ERIKA

Hey, Ken?

KEN

Yeah?

ERIKA

Why do you...never mind.

KEN

Why do I *what*? Come on.

ERIKA

Why do you work here?

KEN

Y'know? I ask myself that same question every morning.

ERIKA

Seriously, Ken. Why? You're obviously not happy here. I mean, you have a college degree, don't you? Hell, you were just quoting Dante's *Inferno*...

KEN

...Look, that's not impressive. It's like the one line everybody knows from Dante's *Inferno*...

ERIKA

...but most people here wouldn't even know what Dante's *Inferno* was. I'm just saying. You're what? 26? 27? Don't you think you could do better?

KEN

What? You don't want me here anymore?

ERIKA

It's not that.

KEN

What about you, huh? You told me you've been here for 15 years, right? You started working here the summer after your junior year of college and never went back.

ERIKA

I just needed some time off from school.

KEN

Some? Fifteen years?

ERIKA

It was complicated. Maybe it wasn't the best decision I've ever made in my life, okay, whatever, fine. But I made that decision. And one day, I'm gonna leave this place behind and never look back.

KEN

When?

ERIKA

I'm not 40 yet, Ken. And you're not even 30. We can still do something fulfilling with ourselves.

KEN

Yeah, sure we can. Anyway, to answer your question? Why am I here? I need the money. And that reminds me. My last paycheck hasn't come in yet.

ERIKA

What?

KEN

Yeah. I got direct deposit, y'know? I've been checking my bank account every morning this week. Nothing. And I'm not the only one. I was talking to Benny earlier and he said his paycheck hasn't gone through either. He said Tiffany got hers, which I'm not surprised to hear, but not the two of us. I'd ask Jerome, but I try very hard not to talk to Jerome about anything. Besides, I'm pretty sure Peter's paid him. I imagine things would get pretty awkward at the family Christmas if he skimmed payments to his own cousin, right?

ERIKA

I'll talk to Peter.

KEN

This isn't the first time, y'know. It took forever to get paid for the second week of March. Pete was all like "oh, these things happen every now and then. They're unavoidable" Bullshit, but whatever. Pete's able to treat his kids to pancakes shaped like Mickey Mouse and hobnob with Disney Princesses, while some of us have gotta scrape by to meet rent each month and buy our mothers nice birthday presents.

ERIKA

I'll call him later, during a break.

KEN

Thank you. Please. Do that.

ERIKA

I don't get it, though. My paycheck came through just fine.

KEN

Well, you're the assistant manager. You're near the top on the totem pole. We're not. I've been here five years, man. Anywhere else, I'd be a manager, too, and not even worrying about my paycheck. I should be a manager, y'know.

ERIKA

I know, but we've talked about this. There just hasn't been an opening.

KEN

No. I know that. There never is, is there? But if there ever is an opening and Tiffany gets it before me, I will fuck Pete up, okay?

ERIKA

You have seniority, Ken. You'll be first in line. She's only been here a year.

KEN

I know that. But Pete has a thing for his female employees, as you well know. Just look where his eyes go when he's talking to you next time. The guy's a creep, man. He's always touching you guys, rubbing your shoulders....

ERIKA

...Peter's never touched me.

KEN

Well, maybe you should feel jealous. 'Cause he's always rubbing up against Tiffany. And Monica. Even Grace, who, I might add, isn't even 18 yet. Not even outta high school. But Pete, he *loves* Tiffany! I could see that asshole giving her a promotion before me, because he thinks she'll blow him or something.

ERIKA

Ken, if you get passed over for any promotion or pay raise, maybe it's because of your attitude.

KEN

Oh, you have a problem with my attitude?

ERIKA

No, not me. I'm used to it...

KEN

...Pete does. I know he does, but I'm not gonna start kissing his ass. I'll just do my job. He just better hope that I get paid in full, on time from here on out. Otherwise, y'all have one disgruntled employee on your hands. I might just, y'know, snap one day and burn this place to the ground.

(ERIKA tenses at this, but KEN doesn't notice)

KEN

Fortunately, I got a little side-business. To help pay the rent.

ERIKA

What kind of side business?

KEN

Hmm? Well, I'd tell you but I'd have to kill you.

(ERIKA rolls her eyes and KEN laughs)

KEN

Nah, it's just freelance web design shit. For some small local businesses. Nothing too exciting.

ERIKA

You do that sorta thing?

KEN

Yeah. That's what I went to college for. I said that on my resume, but you probably don't remember that. It was five years ago, after all. Can't remember every little detail, right? I also minored in film studies. Nothing really pertaining to bussing tables or cleaning up after kids, y'know? What'd you go to college for?

ERIKA (embarrassed)

I was, um, still undecided. When I took my...hiatus.

KEN

All the way to Junior Year, huh?

ERIKA

Yeah.

KEN

Huh. But please call Peter, I mean, if he's not too busy looking down Minnie's blouse.

ERIKA

I said I would, didn't I?

KEN

Hey. That's all I ask.

ERIKA

We oughta get ready. Could you turn the music on?

KEN

Aw, c'mon. Nobody likes the music.

ERIKA

Ken...

KEN

...it's just public domain kids songs, and pretty shitty ones, too.

ERIKA

It's a tradition.

KEN

Pete's not here! We could play anything! Outkast? Slayer? Fuckin' Frank Sinatra? Anything we want. It's not like the kids'll even give a shit.

ERIKA

The music only changes for the holidays. You know this.

KEN

Y'know? We have *a bar*. We serve alcohol. I think we'd get more people drinking at that bar if we played normal music and not Nick-Nack-Paddy-Whack and shit. We'd make a whole lot more money, I guarantee it.

ERIKA

Go on.

KEN

Goddamn it! How can you even stand it?

ERIKA

I've tuned it out.

KEN

Bullshit.

ERIKA

Really. I barely even hear it anymore.

KEN

Bull. Shit.

ERIKA

Believe me or not. Either way, I *want* you to go turn it on, okay?

(Pause.)

KEN

Fine. I'll be sending you my psychiatrist bill later.

ERIKA

You do that.

KEN

Like either of us can afford to even *see* a psychiatrist.

(KEN exits. ERIKA watches him go. When he's gone, she sighs and looks around her surroundings. After a moment public domain children songs start playing. She flinches.)

ERIKA

Just get through this day, Erika. That's all you need to do.

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

Scene 2

(LIGHTS UP on a table at the Funhouse, a few hours later. We can hear the sounds of kids playing games, annoyingly cheerful music, and other things. MARCI HUNTER is sitting with a glass of water and an order of mozzarella sticks. She is dressed in a leather jacket and ripped blue jeans; she has an alternative look, possibly with dyed hair and some piercings. She takes out her cell phone, checks the time, and puts it away. She starts eating a mozzarella stick. HANK FRENCH enters, dressed in a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase. He looks around and sees MARCI sitting at the table. He slowly approaches.)

HANK

Excuse me, miss?

(MARCI looks at him. He takes out a piece of paper with a name written on it.)

HANK

Excuse me. Um, hi, miss...are you, uh...are you Marci Hunter?

(MARCI grabs the paper and crumples it, pockets it.)

MARCI

Sit down.

(Embarrassed, HANK sits)

MARCI

You're late, French. And not just a little. I mean, like almost an hour. Thought maybe you stood me up.

HANK

Sorry, I uh...

MARCI

...I played like eighteen games of ski-ball waiting for you. Spent about ten bucks on it and all I could get with the tickets I won was this goddamn pencil.

(MARCI takes out the pencil. It has a camouflage design.)

MARCI

I mean, look at this thing. It doesn't even have the name of the restaurant on it or anything. It's camouflaged, I guess, but it's really just your run-of-the-mill pencil. Could've gotten a pack of these things at Wal-Mart for a buck.

HANK (chuckling)

Well, um, heh, hopefully you don't lose it.

(MARCI looks at him blankly)

HANK

Because, it's camouflaged? And...

(He gives a brief nervous chuckle. MARCI gives a mocking one in return. KEN enters, with a pad of paper and a pencil. He seems surprised to see HANK. Neither HANK or MARCI see him.)

HANK

Well, um, sorry I'm late. Uh, the traffic out there was really, really bad and...

MARCI

...Well, you're here now, so let's get down to business.

HANK

Yes. Of course...

(KEN crosses over to the table.)

KEN

Good afternoon, sir. Welcome to the Funhouse. My name's Ken and I'll be taking care of you today. Have you been to the Funhouse before?

HANK

Yes.

KEN

A-ha, I thought you looked familiar. Welcome back. Would you like a menu or do you already know what you'd like?

HANK

No, I don't need a menu. I think I know what I want.

(Pause.)

KEN

Well?

HANK

Oh! Yes, um, I'll just have a glass of water.

KEN

Just a glass of water? Just so you know, if you purchase any appetizer on the menu, you get 10 free Funhouse tokens, good for any game, and...

HANK

...No. No, thank you. Just the water, please.

KEN

Excellent, sir! Very popular choice 'round here. Very popular! I'll be right back in less than a tic!

(KEN starts to exit. Before he leaves, he takes out his smartphone. He glances over at HANK, punches in a number and makes a call. He puts the phone up to his ear. After a few rings, KEN talks softly into his phone as he exits.)

MARCI

You should've ordered the mozzarella sticks, Frenchie. They're pretty good.

HANK

Uh, kinda pricey though, right? For what they are?

MARCI

Nine bucks, yeah. But you don't come to a place like this unless you want to spend a little money, right? Hell, you don't typically go to *any* restaurant unless you plan to spend at least *some* money.

HANK

Well, I...

MARCI

...unless it's someone like you, I guess. Mr. Cheapskate and his glass of water.

HANK

I'm not cheap, I'm...I'm just not all that hungry right now. That's all. This, heh, business of ours has kinda got my stomach in knots.

MARCI

Whatever.

(MARCI looks around the restaurant.)

MARCI

Tell me something, Frenchie.

HANK

Y-yes?

MARCI

Why are we here?

HANK

Huh?

MARCI

What are we *doing here*?

HANK

Oh, uh, I thought you knew. Didn't they tell you...?

MARCI

...I know what we're here *for*. I just wanna know why we're here, as in why the Funhouse of all places, and not someplace normal. Like a food court at the mall or a park bench or anywhere that isn't *this* place made for 5-to-8-year-olds and stoned teens.

HANK

Well, um, I thought it would be an ideal place to meet.

MARCI (flatly)

What?

HANK

Well, um, no one would know either of us in a place like this.

MARCI

That guy seemed to remember you. Said how you looked familiar.

HANK

Well, he doesn't know *who* I am.

MARCI

Ah. So we're just two childless adults meeting up for laughs and greasy food at a crappy kid's restaurant. Doesn't that sound kinda odd to you? Like maybe suspect behavior?

HANK

Well, they serve alcohol, too.

MARCI

Which we're not drinking. I don't know about you, but this sounds pretty fucking odd!

HANK (quietly)

Please!

MARCI

What?

HANK (quietly)

Do you really need to...Do you need to swear so much?

MARCI

Oh, fuck off, grandpa.

HANK

There are children...

MARCI

...So fucking what? Listen, don't pretend to be some holier-than-thou moral guardian with me, all right? You asked me here for a reason and it's not exactly a family-friendly reason either.

(MARCI takes a bite of a mozzarella stick.)

MARCI

Though when I say it like that, it makes it sound like you wanna fuck me, don't it?

HANK

Wuh...What!?!

MARCI (smirking)

You look red, French. You couldn't afford *that*.

HANK

Well, I, uh...I...

MARCI

...Y'know something? You stammer a lot. Anyone ever tell you that? Pretty much every other sentence you've said since you came in here has either had an "um" or an "uh" or something in it. I haven't been keeping score, but it's been a lot.

HANK

Oh...sorry...I admit, I'm, uh, kinda nervous and...

MARCI

...Forget it. Just an observation. Some women might think it's cute like, in a Jimmy Stewart sorta way, but I never liked that guy. But, we're not here to talk about that kinda trivial bullshit, are we? I know you're gonna be on the market soon, but A: you're not my type.

(Pause.)

HANK

And "B?"

MARCI

"B?"

HANK

You said what "A" was. I was, uh, just curious what "B" might be.

MARCI

What are—? I don't have a "B." Point A should be enough. Point A should be *more* than enough.

HANK

Oh.

MARCI

Now are we done dicking around, Frenchie?

HANK

Excuse me, um...I, uh, I don't like being called that.

MARCI

Huh?

HANK

I don't like being called Frenchie. Never have. It just...I don't like it.

MARCI

Oh, well, excuse the hell out of me.

(HANK nods. MARCI takes a bite of a
cheesestick, chews, and swallows.)

MARCI

So, this thing with your wife... You know, I gotta say, the sensible, normal thing to do would be to get a divorce...

HANK

...Yes...

MARCI

...Or, at least, a separation. Like a trial separation...

HANK

...Yes, I know...

MARCI

...Or counseling. Have you considered that?

HANK (with a humorless laugh)

No. She wouldn't go for counseling. She'd say "oh, why don't we just flush that money down the toilet!" or something like that. No. She...she definitely wouldn't go for counseling.

MARCI

Guess you'd know better than I would. You're married to her.

(Beat.)

MARCI

So, Big Spender, you just wanna jump right to murder, huh?

HANK

Please!

MARCI

What now? Did I say another naughty word?

HANK

No. Just...don't...don't call it that.

MARCI

Murder?

HANK

Do you have to...could you please...maybe use another word?

(MARCI looks at HANK for a moment and then shakes her head. She starts to get up.)

MARCI

You're wasting my time.

HANK

Huh?

MARCI

Your heart's not in this thing. Obviously.