

FRANKIE'S KILLER COMEBACK

by David Dietz

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FRANKIE'S KILLER COMEBACK

A Full Length Comedic Murder Mystery

By David Dietz

SYNOPSIS: Frankie Avonlea—a once-famous child television star—is set to make the biggest show business comeback ever. But when the lights go up, Frankie makes his final curtain call – with a huge knife stuck in his chest! It's up to Jake Bullet, Frankie's square-jawed, manly-man bodyguard, to determine who could have caused Frankie's star to fall. With an outrageous cast of hilarious suspects and a deliciously twisty plotline, this is one backstage Whodunnit that will keep your audience on the edge of their seats and rolling over with laughter!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 females, 3 males, 0-1 either; gender flexible, doubling possible)

JAKE BULLET (m)..... mid-30-ish; A tough, no-nonsense bodyguard hired to protect Frankie Avonlea. Because he has a silly, overly macho name (that he insists is always mispronounced), his sense of confidence and bravado comes off as bit ridiculous. Although he serves as our “detective,” could he have, in fact, killed Frankie? (173 lines)

MISS KELLY (f) late-20-ish/early 30-ish; Murray Silverberg's long-suffering secretary. Highly intelligent for someone her age, she seems to know how to run the theatrical agency better than her boss ever could. Why would she ever kill Frankie? (Then again, why wouldn't she?) (71 lines)

- MURRAY SILVERBERG (m)..... mid/late-50-ish; A seemingly shiftily theatrical agent whose most well-known client (Frankie) is looking to make his big comeback. Unfortunately, because of his financial situation, his biggest concern seems to be cutting costs wherever he can. Did his dedication to “saving a dime” ultimately spell curtains for Frankie? (136 lines)
- LANCE BOYLE (m)..... late-20-ish/early 30-ish; An aspiring performer seeking representation from Murray. Arrogant and overconfident in his own abilities, he certainly seems like the kind of guy who would do anything to be a star; even kill! Also plays the non-speaking character of FRANKIE AVONLEA. (55 lines)
- ANNE CONDON-AVONLEA (f)..... mid/late-50-ish; Frankie Avonlea’s “better half.” Despite her protestations, her husband has decided to go ahead with what she sees as an ill-advised return to the spotlight under the auspices of Murray Silverberg. Could her overprotectiveness—and desire to make a name for herself—actually lead to her husband’s untimely demise? (68 lines)

CAROL HINGLE (f) mid-30-ish; Self-proclaimed president of the Frankie Avonlea fan club (of which the total membership consists solely of her). Her entire life seems to revolve around her idol, but could she secretly be the obsessed fan who tries to elevate her own notoriety by killing the object of her adulation?
(57 lines)

VOICE (m/f) Offstage or pre-recorded voice.
(2 lines)

DOUBLING OPTIONS

MURRAY (or a female cast member) can double as VOICE.

DURATION: 75 minutes.

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: Initially in Murray's office, then in the theatre.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The show is designed to be performed with as few props as possible and minimal set requirements so that, for the most part, the action can take place in and among the audience. This also helps keep the production highly portable to relocate to different venues: restaurants, theaters, and hotel multi-purpose rooms to name but a few.

Because the characters are well-defined, it should be easy to find wardrobe pieces for each of them. Only the actor playing Lance/Frankie needs something to distinguish the two characters. We used dark sunglasses and a bad Elvis Presley pompadour wig (available at most costume/party stores); but don't be afraid to be creative with how you distinguish the two characters.

Note on the Butcher's knife that sticks out of Frankie's chest. There are tutorials available online. However, it's not entirely necessary to have one. Frankie could just come out wearing a bloody shirt.

SET

OFFICE: A small desk and chair for Murray's office (a small serving table can also fill this role)

STAGE: A microphone stand and microphone for Frankie's death (optional; great if you have access to it, but not completely necessary)

PROPS

- ☐ three-ring binder full of paper (binder of music)
- ☐ contract
- ☐ butcher's knife (wrapped in a cloth napkin)
- ☐ handcuffs
- ☐ two business cards

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Having the lights go out is very cool and adds to the suspense of the show. If you don't have access to a light set, having Frankie just freeze after he is stabbed will give the same effect. You could also make a bit out of getting him offstage to change. (Breaking the fourth wall is totally fine in a production like this. In fact, I daresay it's encouraged!)

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *It is dark. A voice comes over a speaker system and a SFX: tympani drum roll is heard.*

VOICE: *(Offstage.) Ladies and gentlemen, the _____ [Insert venue name] is pleased to present—after a nearly ten-year absence—the triumphant return to the stage of one of the greatest entertainers of all time. Ladies and gentlemen... please put your hands together... for the one, the only Frankie Avonlea!*

Lights up on a tiny stage with a glittery curtain backdrop. FRANKIE is on the stage standing in front of a microphone stand staring blankly ahead with a butcher's knife stuck in his chest. FRANKIE then collapses in a heap on the stage. CAROL screams from offstage. Lights go down on the stage. A spotlight comes up and JAKE steps into the light.

JAKE: That's when it all came to a head. A once-famous superstar entertainer, striving for a comeback, is given the hook before he ever warbles an off-key note or utters his first bad joke. They say that, in show business, for every star on the rise, another one must fall. And tonight, I guess it was Frankie Avonlea's turn to face "the final curtain." If I sound a little too Rod Serling-ish to you right now, it's because I'm still trying to make some sense out of it all myself. After all, when I was assigned to Mr. Avonlea, I had no idea I'd be ending up in the gnarled, twisted plot of a *Twilight Zone* episode. I probably should have guessed something was up the minute I walked into his manager's office. But, back then I wasn't being paid to ask questions...

Lights transition back to a more open office expanse. MURRAY enters and crosses to JAKE.

MURRAY: Ah, good. You're here at last. (*Whips out his business card and hands it to JAKE.*) Murray Silverberg's the name, theatrical management's the game. (*Looks JAKE over.*) Well, you certainly have an... interesting look. Kind of Ricky Martin meets Steven Seagal. Not the sort of thing you see every day, but I think I can make it work. Now, I just need some information to try and figure out where you might fit in. What's your highest range?

JAKE: 100 yards.

MURRAY: I beg your pardon?

JAKE: I can hit a quarter at 100 yards. Assuming, of course, I'm not using a scope.

MURRAY: Well, that may come in handy... If we get one of those private militia recruitment videos, but what I was asking you was do you sing?

JAKE: No.

MURRAY: Oh. Well then, do you dance?

JAKE: Does Ju Jitsu count?

MURRAY: No.

JAKE: Then, no.

MURRAY: (*Growing frustrated.*) OK. Well then, have you ever acted before?

JAKE: I played a snowman in a Christmas play once.

MURRAY: (*A little more encouraged.*) Oh? Good, good. When was this?

JAKE: Fifth grade.

MURRAY: (*With growing annoyance.*) I see. Well, would you have any credits that would be... oh, I don't know... a little more recent?

JAKE: Well, there was that time I went undercover as a Klingon at a *Star Trek* convention.

MURRAY: (*Incredulously.*) And why, pray tell, were you doing that?

JAKE: Mr. Shatner insisted on round the clock protection, even while he was on stage talking to the Trekkies.

MURRAY: Wait a minute! You're not here looking for representation, are you?

JAKE: No, sir. In fact, you called me.

JAKE takes out his business card and hands it to MURRAY.

MURRAY: (*Reading.*) “Jake Bullet – Security, Personal Protection.”

JAKE: Uh, actually it's pronounced “Boo-Lay”.

MURRAY: (*Beat.*) Oooohhh! Now I get it. You're that bodyguard I hired!

JAKE: That's right.

MURRAY: Oh. Sorry about all that nonsense a minute ago. But you wouldn't believe how many pretty boys come in here off the street thinking they're gonna become the next Brad Pitt.

JAKE: I have no doubt. That's why I'm in the business. It's my job to protect the Brad Pitts of the world from the wanna-be Brad Pitts of the world.

MURRAY: Well, that's exactly why I'm interested in hiring you. Can you keep a secret?

JAKE nods.

MURRAY: Good. I've got a great deal of money invested in a big show coming up and I need someone to help make sure it goes off without a hitch.

KELLY: (*Enters.*) Mr. Silverberg... (*Notices JAKE.*) Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were in a meeting.

MURRAY: That's all right, Kelly. Say hello to Mr. Jake Bullet. He's going to be working with us.

KELLY: (*Clearly taken by JAKE.*) Oh? Charmed, I'm sure.

JAKE: Likewise, Miss. And... it's “Boo-lay.”

MURRAY: What was it you wanted to see me about, Kelly?

KELLY: Oh. Well, it's really not that important. If you're in conference, I'll just tell him to come back another time.

JAKE: Who?

MURRAY: One of those pretty boys I mentioned before, I'm sure.

KELLY: Yes sir. Our favorite repeat customer.

MURRAY: Oh, boy. Yes, Kelly, please tell him to come back another time.

LANCE: (*Bursts in, irate.*) Oh, no you don't, Mr. Silverberg!

KELLY: Mr. Boyle, you can't just barge in here! This is a private meeting!

LANCE: I'm not going anywhere until I have a contract in hand, Mr. Silverberg!

JAKE steps in between MURRAY and LANCE.

JAKE: Why don't you just calm down, pal?

LANCE: *(Looks over JAKE.)* Is this the kind of thing you're signing up now, Mr. Silverberg? Lunk-head, ex-pro-wrestler slash action-movie-hero wannabes?

MURRAY: Please calm down, Mr. Boyle. Don't get him upset.

JAKE: It's all right. I never get upset. Can't afford to in my line of work.

MURRAY: Mr. Jake Ballet, please meet Mr. Lance Boyle.

LANCE: Jake... Ballet? *(Sniggers.)* With a name like that it's no wonder you're like the albino Mr. T experience. Probably took more than your fair share of beatings in high school, huh?

JAKE: It's "Boo-lay," actually. And, if you don't mind my saying so, you're a fine one to talk with a name like Lance Boyle.

LANCE: Well, I do mind! And, not that it's really any of your business, but it's not my real name.

JAKE: You changed your name? Why? Who are you hiding from? The mob? An ex-wife? The IRS? Maybe I can help.

LANCE: *(Exasperated.)* It's my stage name, if you must know! I picked it out myself. After all, if you're going to go anywhere in show business, you have to have a name that the public will always remember.

JAKE: Well, you've got me there. I don't think anyone could ever forget someone with a name like Lance Boyle.

LANCE: Although, you sure have been trying to forget about me haven't you, Mr. Silverberg? Every time I come in here, this business-school reject you call a secretary always seems to have cooked up some new excuse as to why I can't see you.

KELLY: I'll have you know that I'm a fully accredited graduate of the East Side Associates Weekend Business Management and Beauty Academy!

JAKE: Really? A fine school. You know, I was accepted there.

KELLY: *(Flirting.)* Oh? Why didn't you go? Maybe we could have helped each other out in lab.

LANCE: Well, as fascinating as this little conversation has been, we seem to be straying from the purpose of our being here.

MURRAY: I couldn't agree with you more, Lance. (*To JAKE.*) Now Jake, as I was saying, we have an important...

LANCE: I WAS REFERRING TO ME!!!

MURRAY: (*Giving in.*) Oh, all right. I'm not really supposed to be letting the cat out of the bag to the general public, Mr. Boyle. But here's the thing: I have a big show in the works for a very important client of mine. I mean this show is going to be huge! Bigger even than when Elvis came back from the Army!

LANCE: Well... (*Reluctantly.*) congratulations, Mr. Silverberg.

MURRAY: Yes. Now, I've been so wrapped up in arranging this show—what with finding musicians, sponsors, a venue, the whole nine yards—that I really haven't been seeing any other clients.

LANCE: (*Dejected.*) Oh. I... understand...

MURRAY: But you know... now that I think about it, I haven't really had time to line up a whole lot of guest performers for the thing. And I gotta admit, I think you got chutzpah. So, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do: I'm gonna give you a shot at an audition.

LANCE: (*Brightening up.*) Really? Oh, that's wonderful, Mr. Silverberg! Thank you!

MURRAY: Don't mention it...

LANCE: As a matter of fact, I have my portable stereo, I can run out and get it for...

MURRAY: NO!! (*Catching himself.*) I mean, uh... no, no, no. I can't have you auditioning in here. The acoustics are terrible. And I want to make sure I hear you under the very best possible conditions.

LANCE: Oh. Well, where would you suggest we do it?

MURRAY: Are you familiar with the _____ [Insert venue name]?

LANCE: Familiar? I've only been the headline act at their dinner and drinks cabaret for the past six months.

MURRAY: Yeah, that's great. Well, there's a dress rehearsal for the show going on there tonight, complete with a live audience. Why don't you come down at 6:30 and show me what you've got.

LANCE: (*Excited.*) Oh, yes! Thank you so much, Mr. Silverberg! You won't regret it, I promise you! (*Exits.*)

MURRAY: Thank God for that.

KELLY: Why would you tell him that?

MURRAY: Tell who what?

KELLY: Why would you give Mr. Boyle an open audition on a show that's already booked?

MURRAY: Look, he'll come down, give us whatever it is he's got, and we'll tell him he just ain't what we're looking for. Then he'll be out of our hair for good.

JAKE: That's a little cold, don't you think?

MURRAY: Hey, that's show biz for ya!

JAKE: So, who's this client of yours trying for a comeback?

MURRAY: (*Being purposely mysterious.*) Oh, I don't know if I should tell you. You might not be able to contain your enthusiasm!

KELLY: It's Frankie Avonlea.

MURRAY: Aw, now why'd you go and tell him that, Kelly? Don't you know half the fun of surprise is the anticipation?

JAKE: You don't mean the Frankie Avonlea who was on that kids' show back in the 70's?

MURRAY: (*Nods.*) *Cap'n Pete's Riverboat Carnival.*

KELLY: Yeah. Then when he got older, he tried to parlay his stardom from that show into a singing career. Only it hit a bit of snag.

MURRAY: So, the public wasn't ready for him back then. Ah, but look at now. Nostalgia's a big thing. Cable TV, reunion movies, even disco's risen from the grave!

KELLY: Some things should have just stay buried.

MURRAY: I'm telling you, Frankie Avonlea's set to make the biggest comeback since... John Travolta!

JAKE: You mean, before *Battlefield: Earth*?

MURRAY: (*Thinks a moment.*) You're right. Bad example.

JAKE: So, why do you need me? Frankie Avonlea's been living quietly for the past ten years. Unless he's made some of the heifers on that Montana ranch of his irate, I don't really see why you need me.

MURRAY: Well, you know how it is with celebrities. Even the fringe celebs like your Dan Haggerty or your Country Joe McDonald have fanatical fans who'll do anything to get close to them.

JAKE: I see. Well if, as you say, there are any fanatics who try to get close to Mr. Avonlea, they'll have to answer to me.

ANNE: (*Offstage.*) Silverberg!

MURRAY: And then, of course, there are some fanatics who are already close!

ANNE: (*Enters.*) We need to talk!

MURRAY: When don't we?

ANNE: (*Noticing JAKE.*) Oh. And who's this delectable piece of fine sirloin?

MURRAY: This is our head of security, Jake...

JAKE: (*Interrupting.*) ... "Boo-lay"!

ANNE: Anne.

JAKE and ANNE appear momentarily taken with each other.

MURRAY: Uh, this is Frankie's wife, Jake.

JAKE: (*Realizing.*) Oh? Pleased to make to your acquaintance, Mrs. Avonlea.

ANNE: Oh please, don't call me that. You don't think I go around calling myself Anne Avonlea, do you? I always use my maiden name.

JAKE: Which is...?

ANNE: Condon.

JAKE: What?

ANNE: Anne Condon.

JAKE: Anaconda?

ANNE: No. (*Enunciating.*) Anne Condon.

JAKE: I think I'd stick with Avonlea.

MURRAY: So, what is it you want to talk to me about now, Anne?

ANNE: I wanted to talk to you again about the choice of venue for the performance.

MURRAY: We've been over this a hundred times already, Anne. I'm telling you the _____ [Insert venue name] is the perfect place for Frankie's comeback.

ANNE: The _____ [Insert venue name] is a run-down, two-bit ramshackle excuse for an auditorium that not even Shakespeare's ghost would set foot in to haunt!

KELLY: That's not entirely true, Ms. Condon. Our research shows that the _____ [Insert venue name] is a very popular venue among the general public.

ANNE: Only because it's the only theater in town that renewed its liquor license on time this year. But never mind that, look at the kind of shows they've staged for the past three years. I wouldn't exactly call them *Hamlet*.

KELLY: *Murder by Death* was quite well received.

ANNE: Because it had a man in drag and was riddled with more sex jokes than the average episode of *Married... With Children*.

MURRAY: I've told you before, Anne. The general public doesn't want to spend the evening watching a man in leotards and a codpiece spouting dialogue that makes no sense to them.

JAKE: That certainly would explain why *Batman & Robin* bombed.

ANNE: But a musical/comedy variety show? Frankie has far too much talent to be wasting on that.

MURRAY: Look, Anne. I know you're Frankie's wife and you only want what's best for him. But I'm his manager and I know people. And what they want is entertainment, pure and simple. If they wanted Shakespeare, they could read *Macbeth*.

ANNE: (*In shock.*) What are you doing? Don't you know you never say the name of The Scottish Play in a theater? It's bad luck.

MURRAY: Come on! That's a totally ridiculous superstition with no basis in reality.

KELLY: Besides, we're in the office, so it doesn't count.

ANNE: Mr. Bullet. You seem to be a man of some breeding and education. Let me ask you, do you really think something like this show can help resurrect my husband's career?

JAKE: Well ma'am, considering that up to this point his career has consisted of a mugging in front of a camera at age ten followed by twenty-five years of checking his feet for cow patty residue, I certainly don't think it would hurt it.

ANNE: All right, then. We'll do it your way, Mr. Silverberg. But I warn you, if this show turns my husband into a laughing stock, I'll make your life so miserable you'll long for the days when you were managing plate-spinners and dog trainers!

ANNE shakes JAKE'S hand, flirtingly.

ANNE: A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Bullet. I look forward to seeing a great deal more of you. (*Turns and exits.*)

MURRAY: You see what I've gotta put up with?

KELLY: Just remember, she's paying our salaries. And yours too, Mr. Bullet.

JAKE: Don't worry about that. I've handled far more demanding celebrities and their significant others before.

MURRAY: Good. Well then, we'll see you down at the _____ [Insert venue name] tonight for the final dress rehearsal. Kelly, would you please show our new associate out the door?

KELLY indicates the exit. She and JAKE turn and begin to exit.

MURRAY: Oh! One more thing...

JAKE and KELLY turn back to MURRAY.

MURRAY: ...what we were talking about when you came in—you don't actually carry a gun on you, do you?

JAKE: (*Shakes head.*) I haven't needed one for three years.

MURRAY: Oh, good. OK then. I'll see you tonight.

MURRAY turns to exit the opposite direction from JAKE and KELLY.

JAKE: (*To KELLY.*) What was that all about?

KELLY: Oh, he just gets a little nervous when someone brings up the subject of guns. You see, he got mugged last year.

JAKE: Oh, I get it. He doesn't like someone waving guns around because he was threatened with one.

KELLY: No. Actually, he said the mugger pulled a knife on him.

JAKE: Then what's his hang-up about guns?

KELLY: Look. Everyone in show business is a little wacky, right? And it's not easy for someone with my background and education to find a decent job in this town. As long Mr. Silverberg's signature is still valid on my paychecks, I try not to ask too many personal questions. Shall we?

JAKE: Thanks, but I can find my own way out. I'm sure you have more important things to take care of right now.

KELLY: I don't mind taking care of people. Especially someone with whom I share so much in common.

JAKE: You know what they say, Kelly? "Never mix business with pleasure." They're right, it only leads to disaster.

KELLY: In my line of work sometimes you have to flirt with disaster in order to get what you want.

KELLY exits. JAKE turns to address the audience. Lights change to a single spot.

JAKE: So that's basically where I came in. Like I said, at the time I didn't think much about it, and I'm sure you probably aren't either. But just wait! The wildest is yet to come! *(Exits.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *Lights up. The scene is an auditorium of the theater. The stage with glittery curtain can be seen in the background. MURRAY steps into the scene, momentarily regards the stage, and finally addresses the offstage lighting person.*

MURRAY: Nah. I think that's a little too soft for the opening number.

The lights change on stage — slightly brighter.

MURRAY: Better, better. Let's try to bring it up just a hair more.

The lights change again — very bright.

MURRAY: *(Aggravated.)* No! Now it's too harsh! When I said bring it up just a hair, what did you think I was talking about? Look at those shadows! They're worse than in a triple X flick, for crying out loud! I'm looking for mood here; for atmosphere. Not a frickin' operating room! Now, bring 'em down just a little.

Lights out.

MURRAY: *(Almost under his breath.)* Why do I even bother?

Scene freezes in the dark. Spot on JAKE as he enters the scene.

JAKE: To say that Murray Silverberg was nervous about the evening's final dress rehearsal would be like saying that the Grand Canyon was a big hole in the ground. Or that Mozart wrote a couple peppy tunes. After all, the return of Frankie Avonlea was going to be the event that finally put Murray's name on the lips of Americans everywhere. He would be the Colonel Tom Parker to Frankie Avonlea's Elvis. Unfortunately what neither he, nor the Colonel, could have ever possibly predicted was the dire finale that awaited their superstars.

Lights change back to as before. This time, the lighting person has gotten the balance on stage just right.

MURRAY: Finally! All right, set that and then let's move on to the Marlin fishing sketch. (*Notices JAKE.*) Ah, good. You made it. Any trouble finding the place?

JAKE: No, but have you seen the parking rates over at the garage? I feel like I just fed an underprivileged nation for a month.

MURRAY: Yeah, I know it can be a real killer. Don't worry, just take your ticket into the library next door, and they'll validate it for you.

JAKE: Isn't that just a little dishonest?

MURRAY: So, take out a copy of *The Cat in the Hat* if it makes you feel better.

JAKE: Well, I must say, Mr. Silverberg, I'm impressed with what you've done here. Given the reputation this place has, I was expecting something much more... rustic.

MURRAY: Oh. You mean like a cozy little Vermont bed-and-breakfast?

JAKE: No, I mean as in the orange color of the water you might get from the drinking fountains. (*Mimicking.*) "Rust! Lck!"

MURRAY: Hey, all of that's been taken care of. Brand new plumbing, state-of-the-art heating and cooling system. Why, we even managed to get most of the asbestos removed.

KELLY: (*Enters coughing.*) No easy feat, either! You try crawling around in a ceiling with only a napkin over your mouth.

MURRAY: Come on! All those liberal "watch-dog" groups tell you the air you breathe is bad for you anyway.

KELLY: You could have at least gotten us cloth napkins!

JAKE: You mean you didn't hire someone to take care of all that?

MURRAY: Wasn't in the budget.

KELLY: I think what Mr. Silverberg's trying to say is that when he sat down and calculated the amount of money to spend on this show, he didn't take the costs of repairs or improvements to the theater into account.

MURRAY: Hey, this place was a steal. I almost felt bad taking it off the hands of the original owners.

KELLY: Oh? Is that why they were laughing so hard when they left the office?

MURRAY: Look, every old building has its little problems. A broken window here, a missing ceiling panel there. My dear old mother—God rest her soul—always used to say to me, "Murray, there's no better feeling in the world than when you've done the job yourself."

KELLY: This is the same woman who made you pay rent to live in your own house when you were only six.

JAKE: Hey, you two! Come on, you're acting like a couple of kids. Put it in the happy box! Look at it this way, at least the hard part's over and done with.

KELLY: You've obviously never been involved with a show before. What we were doing before was a cakewalk compared to this.

JAKE: What do you mean? Your band's rehearsed, the numbers have been choreographed, and the star's ready to go out there and wow the audience. What could possibly be so hard about now?

LANCE enters carrying a three-ring binder stuffed to the gills.

LANCE: Mr. Silverberg!

MURRAY: You had to ask!

LANCE: Hello, Mr. Silverberg, Miss Kelly... (*Distastefully.*) Mr. Buffet. It's 6:25 and here I am ready for my audition. I wanted to be here a whole five minutes early so I'd have time to prepare.

MURRAY: Yeah, that's great, kid. Thing is though, we're still trying to set the lights for the finale and not all of the orchestra's arrived yet, so what do you say Monday we...

LANCE: Monday? What do you mean Monday? You said you'd give me the audition here! Tonight!

MURRAY: Did I? When?

LANCE: This afternoon.

MURRAY: Yeah, well you know, so much was happening this afternoon that it's all become a bit of a blur to me. *(Hinting.)* Kelly, did I say that I would give Mr. Boyle an audition here this evening?

KELLY: Yes, sir. You did.

MURRAY: *(Under his breath.)* You're a big help! *(To LANCE.)* All righty Lance, my boy. I'm going to do something right now that goes completely against the theatrical agent's code: I'm going to level with you.

KELLY: Are you sure that's a good idea? You might give yourself the bends!

MURRAY: Can't be helped, Kelly. The thing is, Lance... we've only cleared a certain number of songs for this show and this venue. And those songs must only be sung by Frankie. We have it in writing.

KELLY: We do?

MURRAY: Ixnay, Kelly. Ixnay!

LANCE: *(Showing them his binder.)* Well, I did bring my big binder of Broadway ballads and belters. There must be something in here that won't cause you any problems.

LANCE hands the binder to MURRAY, who begins flipping through the pages.

MURRAY: No. *(Flip.)* No. *(Flip.)* Nope. *(Flip.)* Nada. *(Flip.)* Negatory.

MURRAY hands the binder back to LANCE.

LANCE: Come on! Are you seriously telling me there isn't one song I could sing for you?

MURRAY: Well, you could always do...

MURRAY whispers in LANCE's ear. After hearing it, LANCE gives MURRAY an incredulous look.

LANCE: You cannot be serious.

MURRAY: You see this face? This is my serious face. If you want an audition, ya gotta do what ya gotta do.

LANCE sighs reluctantly. He places the binder on the floor and turns his back to the audience. He ruffles his hair, flaps his arms, shakes off the tension and begins making noises like a motor boat. After a couple of seconds of this...

MURRAY: Hey, kid! Are you gonna sing or taxi down Runway Four?

LANCE stops and turns to face the audience, slightly annoyed.

LANCE: OK. Here goes.

LANCE begins singing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" a cappella.

MURRAY: *(Cutting after first verse.)* Great. Now, do it like Marilyn Monroe.

LANCE is taken aback, but presses on singing the second verse as requested. ANNE enters in the dark and watches from the shadows.

MURRAY: *(Cutting in after second verse.)* Now do it like a Death Metal Screamer.

After the song is over, JAKE and KELLY lead the audience in applause. MURRAY stands impassively. Once the applause dies down...

LANCE: Well? What do you think?

JAKE and KELLY lead the audience in encouraging LANCE. Finally MURRAY stops them.

MURRAY: *(Grunting.)* Meh!

LANCE comes down from the stage.

LANCE: "Meh?" What do you mean, "Meh?"

MURRAY: I mean... "Meh." Not bad, just... "Meh."

LANCE: Four years at Julliard followed by a successful Broadway run as the second understudy to Rum Tum Tugger in *Cats*, deserves a little more than "Meh."

MURRAY: I'm not saying you don't have potential, kid. What I'm really trying to say is, I'm not sure whether your talent will fit in with this show.

ANNE crosses into the scene.

ANNE: Well, I think he was absolutely wonderful!

LANCE: Thank you! You see?

ANNE: As a matter of fact, Mr. Silverberg, I think you should consider cutting that rabies-infected dog act you have in the middle of the show and putting Mr. Boyle in their place.

MURRAY: What? You can't just tell Dougie's Dobermans that they have to pack up their juggling pins and go back to Punxsutawney!

ANNE: Why not?

MURRAY: For one thing, they signed a contract. And for another... you never, *ever* get on a Doberman owner's bad side.

ANNE: It's the nature of show business, Mr. Silverberg. Dougie's a professional. I'm sure he'll understand.

KELLY: (*Enjoying herself.*) Oh, he'll understand, all right. It's the Dobermans that'll take a little convincing, though!

MURRAY: You don't seem to understand, Anne. This is *my* show!

ANNE: No, it's my *husband's* show. That makes it more *my* show than yours. I say Mr. Boyle is going on. And if he doesn't, you can bet neither will my husband!

MURRAY: But two singing actors on the same bill? How am I gonna make that work?

ANNE: They do it all the time on Broadway, Mr. Silverberg. Surely a manager with your background and experience can handle it.

ANNE takes LANCE by the arm and leads him out.

ANNE: Come, Mr. Boyle. You and I have much to discuss. I can see you have a big future ahead of you.

LANCE and ANNE exit.

MURRAY: How do you like that? One song and a couple blinks of his twinkling eyes and Mr. “Wouldn’t-Last-Three-Weeks-on-a-deep cable-Sitcom” is in the show!

JAKE: Like the lady said—and I believe, you did too, Mr. Silverberg—that’s show biz!

MURRAY: Yeah? Well, we’ll just see about that! No one tells me how to run my show, except me!

MURRAY storms out. JAKE turns to regard KELLY.

JAKE: Are you all right, Miss Kelly? You look a little tense.

KELLY: *(Distracted.)* Huh? Oh! *(Snaps back.)* Sorry. It’s just that I... hate to see him when he gets like this.

JAKE: Mr. Silverberg, you mean?

KELLY: *(Suddenly defensive.)* Of course, Mr. Silverberg. Why? Did you think I meant someone else?

JAKE: No. It’s just that you used a common noun. I was just looking for a little clarification.

KELLY: Oh. I see. Well, if you’ll excuse me, I’d better go make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid. *(Turns to exit.)*

JAKE: Mr. Silverberg, you mean?

KELLY: *(Unsure.)* Yeah. Right. Him. *(Exits.)*

JAKE: I wouldn’t consider myself particularly lacking in the smarts department, but even the most prolific fool would have realized that the first threads of the Oriental rug were beginning to unravel. Ms. Anne Condon-Avonlea, once adamant about her husband appearing in a musical/variety show of this nature at all, was now dictating the show’s line-up to Murray Silverberg. I’d seen conflicts like this arise hundreds of times before, but never with the ferocity I saw here.

CAROL enters. She walks about the theater, surveying it with some awe as JAKE continues.

JAKE: To say that Ms. Condon and Mr. Silverberg disagreed was like saying you had to remember to bring your mittens on your trip to the Antarctic. Or that Apollo 13 had experienced some “technical difficulties.” Never the less, after that frosty exchange in the theater, I felt a few degrees colder than I did just moments before. And somehow I knew we were getting on the path towards a big blow up.

CAROL crosses to JAKE.

CAROL: Excuse me. Who are you talking to?

JAKE snaps out of his reverie and notices CAROL for the first time.

JAKE: Huh? I beg your pardon?

CAROL: Who are you talking to?

JAKE: *(Indicates audience.)* Them.

CAROL looks out among the audience—not really seeing them.

CAROL: Who?

JAKE: *(Indicates audience again.)* Them!

CAROL looks out among the audience again. She looks back at JAKE, then to the audience again. She gives the “cuckoo” sign to one audience member before turning back to JAKE.

CAROL: Oh, I get it! Soliloquy, right?

JAKE: Yeah. Sure. Whatever.

CAROL begins to stroll around the theater again.

CAROL: Wow! I can’t believe that I’m actually here! *(Indicates stage.)*
Look at that!

CAROL runs up onto the stage and stands in front of the microphone stand.

CAROL: This is the microphone stand! His microphone stand. To think he's actually breathed on this microphone! Isn't it amazing?

JAKE: (*Incredulous.*) Yeah. It's really something.

CAROL: I can't believe I'm actually standing on the same stage where the Frankie Avonlea is going to be performing just a few hours from now! Isn't it just the most incredible thing you've ever seen?

JAKE: Yeah, I suppose. Not counting that time I drove by a farmhouse and saw two cows getting all jiggy with each other, of course.

CAROL: Well, what was so odd about that?

JAKE: They were both bulls. Listen, I don't personally have any objections to you being up there on stage—God knows the lighting guys could use someone to focus on—but some other people might not be as forgiving. So, could you come down from there, please?

CAROL, still enthusiastic, steps down from the stage and beside JAKE.

CAROL: No problem. Say, do you work here? I'll bet you know Frankie personally!

JAKE: Know him, yes. Personally, not quite.

JAKE takes out a card and hands it to CAROL.

CAROL: (*Glances at the card.*) Oh! Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Beaujolais.

JAKE moves to correct her, then thinks better of it and addresses the audience.

JAKE: Eeh! Close enough.

CAROL: So, what is it you do here, exactly?

JAKE: A good many things. Mostly, I'm here to make sure that Mr. Avonlea's personal safety is never compromised.

CAROL: (*Romantic.*) Just like in that movie, *The Bodyguard*, right?

JAKE: I suppose. Just... don't expect to me carry Mr. Avonlea out of the theater to the chorus of "I Will Always Love You."

CAROL: No, I really think it's great that there are guys like you around to protect guys like Frankie. Sometimes I don't think you guys get enough credit. You're all real heroes in my book.

JAKE: Well, thank you. You know, it's refreshing to meet someone who actually understands the perils a guy like me faces every... (*Catches himself.*) Wait a minute! Who are you and how'd you get in here?

CAROL: I thought you'd never ask. My name's Carol Hingle, and I'm President of the Frankie Avonlea International Fan Club!

JAKE: President, huh? Well, that's impressive.

CAROL: Yep. I have every episode of *Cap'n Pete's Riverboat Carnival* that Frankie was in, every album and single he released—European and domestic versions—and I'm also mistress of the Temple of Frankie Avonlea website.

JAKE: Geez. I guess you must be a fan. So, how big is your fan club's membership?

CAROL: Well, it's difficult to pin it to down exactly, but according to my most recent estimates I would say that our total membership amounts to... neeeaaarllllyyyyy... one.

JAKE: I'm gonna go out on a limb and say that one is you?

CAROL nods.

JAKE: Fine. Well, how did you know about this place? I mean, it's not exactly public knowledge that this event is even happening.

CAROL: Never underestimate the power of the Internet, Jake. Somehow an email announcing the event found its way to my inbox. Naturally, I had to come down here and find out for myself if it was true.

JAKE: I see. And how did you get past security? This is supposed to be an invitation-only dress rehearsal.

CAROL: Well, no offense to you, Jake, but so far, you're the only security I've seen in this whole building. That seems to tell me that they're not really that concerned whether or not someone just comes in here to watch. Oh please, can't I stay?

JAKE: Well, I really don't think I should let you...

CAROL: I won't be any bother, I promise. It's just that I couldn't get a ticket and since I am his biggest fan, it would just be wrong for me not to see him. Please?

JAKE: All right, all right. I'll tell you what....

JAKE leads CAROL over to an empty seat ["reserved" for her] at the back of the audience. He plops her down in it.

JAKE: Why don't you sit back here? That way no one will be able to see you and neither one of us will get into any trouble!

CAROL: Oh, thank you so much, Jake! (*Kisses JAKE gratefully on the cheek.*) You won't regret this, I promise!

JAKE: Just try to curb your enthusiasm a little and I'll be more than happy.

LANCE enters, followed closely by ANNE.

ANNE: I don't understand what you're so upset about, Lance!

LANCE: What I'm upset about is having to play second-banana on the same stage on which I've headlined for the past six months!

ANNE: But Lance, darling. It's only for one night. And after that, you won't care about headlining on this rinky-dink little set of collapsible platforms they call a stage. You'll be a star! The Great White Way will glitter with the name of Lance Boyle!

JAKE: (*To audience.*) I don't know about you, but I feel nauseous already!

ANNE: Trust me, Lance. When the lights go up on you tonight, the audience won't be thinking about Frankie Avonlea. They'll only be overcome by a craving for more of you! And we're going to give it to them!

KELLY enters opposite from ANNE and LANCE observes them from the shadows.

LANCE: But what about Frankie? Where does he fit into all this?

ANNE: (*Disgusted.*) Oh, he can go back to that drab little cattle ranch in Montana for all I care. He never listened to me when I said he should strive to become a serious actor! But you, Lance. I see something in you. Something that reminds me of... well, of Frankie, when he was younger and... (*Lustfully.*) hungrier.

LANCE: And believe me, I have a ravenous appetite.

ANNE: Then, strap on your... bib, Hot Pants. Because the feast is only just beginning!

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