

ACCOUNTABLE

A Play in One Act

by
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CHARACTERS

DENNIS PRUITT — About 30. Fixes small engines. Two Yuenglings in. Does bits.

JACOB PRUITT — Late 50s. Dennis's father. Secretary of the lodge. Runs the tip boards, and a little more.

FRANK MOSS — 50s. A regular. Nurses one beer all night. Stops for everybody.

DUKE TALBOT — 40s. Owner of Talbot Pawn & Loan.

STAN SZABO — 40s. Part-time night officer. Works days at the mill.

CODY TALBOT — Late 20s. Duke's younger brother.

Also heard: a voice on the lodge P.A., and Dale, on the police radio.

SETTING

Three playing areas, side by side, in a small town somewhere in the Rust Belt:

The back office of an Elks lodge. A desk, an adding machine, a phone, a window with blinds onto the parking lot.

The police outstation next door. One room. A counter, a radio, a window onto the same lot.

The lodge parking lot. A car, suggested by two chairs. A bank bag on the passenger seat.

TIME

A Thursday night in June, during the fish fry. Real time, about twenty-five minutes.

PRODUCTION NOTE

All three areas are occupied throughout. Light shifts focus; it never stops a room. Areas out of focus play on in low light and silence. Sound carries between them: laughter, the P.A., the phone, the car. No blackout until the end.

Lights up on all three.

THE LODGE OFFICE. DENNIS PRUITT sits on a folding chair, helpless with laughter. Beside him, an empty chair and an empty Yuengling bottle. At the desk, JACOB PRUITT counts small bills into stacks. FRANK MOSS stands at the blinds with a beer he hasn't touched in a while.

THE OUTSTATION. DUKE TALBOT stands at the counter. STAN SZABO sits behind it with a report form, a pen, and the evening paper folded to the crossword.

THE LOT. CODY TALBOT sits behind the wheel of a parked car, engine off, radio low. On the passenger seat, a zippered bank bag.

DENNIS

Pop. Pop. Did you hear what Kistler said?

JACOB

I was counting.

DENNIS

He goes — he's in insurance now, with his dad —

JACOB

I know where Kistler is.

DENNIS

He goes, "Pruitt, I ran your numbers. Safest bet in the county. Nobody ever died of being boring."
(He's gone again.)

JACOB

Forty. Forty-one.

DUKE

Twenty-two thousand.

STAN

Dollars?

DUKE

No, Stan. Pesos.

STAN

It's on the form. "Currency."

Cody looks at the lodge door. He doesn't move.

P.A.

Last call on the fish, folks. Last call on the fish.

All three rooms hear it. Cody looks at the bag.

Light narrows to the lodge office.

DENNIS

Frank. Frank. Nobody ever got boring from dying.

FRANK

That's not it.

DENNIS

Nobody ever — died. Of boring.

FRANK

Being boring.

DENNIS

Of being boring!
(Gone.)

JACOB

It's not that funny.

DENNIS

It's about me.

JACOB

That's why it's not that funny.

FRANK

(At the blinds.)
Kistler's gone.

JACOB

Good.

FRANK

Took him two tries on the key.

DENNIS

He'll make it. He always makes it.

JACOB

How a man drives is his business. How a man pays is mine.

The phone on the desk rings. Jacob answers.

JACOB

Lodge.

(Nothing.)

Hello.

(He hangs up.)

Third time tonight.

DENNIS

Breather?

JACOB

Customer.

In the lot, in low light, Cody snaps a flip phone shut and drops it on the seat.

Light up on the lot.

Cody takes a breath. He opens the car door and gets one foot out.

P.A.

Kitchen's closing, folks. Kitchen's closing.

He pulls the foot back in and shuts the door.

CODY

(To the bag.)

Okay. You walk in. You put it on the desk. You say, "We're square, Mr. Pruitt." You have some fish.

(Beat.)

You don't even have to have the fish.

He dials. In the office the phone rings, and the light comes up there with it. Jacob answers.

JACOB

Lodge.

CODY

Mr. Pruitt.

JACOB

Cody.

(He parts the blinds with two fingers.)

I can see your car from here.

CODY

I know.

JACOB

You've been out there an hour. Come in. They'll hold you a plate.

CODY

I've got it.

JACOB

Then bring it in. Eight-four, and we're square.

CODY

Eight-four. Yeah.

JACOB

(Pleasantly.)

Heard your brother had a nice gun show.

Cody goes still.

Saturday and Sunday both. Packed, I heard.

CODY

Who'd you hear that from?

JACOB

Everybody, Cody. It's a small town. That's what I like about it.

Cody hangs up. Jacob sets the receiver down, unbothered, and goes back to his stacks.

DENNIS

Breather?

JACOB

Customer.

Light down on the office.

CODY

He knows.

(Beat.)

He knows it's Duke's. I walk in there with Duke's money, he's got me. Every Thursday. "Heard your brother had a nice —"

(He can't finish the impression.)

And the first time I'm short, he doesn't call me. He calls Duke.

He opens the glove box. Owner's manual, napkins, a road map. He unfolds the map. It keeps unfolding.

CODY

Ridge road to the interstate.

(He traces it.)

Interstate to —

(He turns the map over.)

— more interstate.

He holds the map and looks at the bag.

Light shifts to the outstation. Through the wall, Dennis's laugh.

STAN

Describe the bag.

DUKE

It's a bag.

STAN

Color.

DUKE

Bank-bag color. Zipper. Says Talbot Pawn and Loan on the side, in my handwriting.

STAN

(Writing.)

"Handwriting."

DUKE

Gun show take. Saturday and Sunday. It was supposed to go in the night drop at six. I put it under the counter at five-thirty to lock the cases, and at a quarter to six it wasn't under the counter.

STAN

Twenty-two thousand. You're sure.

DUKE

I counted it twice. I always count it twice.

STAN

Who's got a key?

DUKE

Me. My brother. And Ray Kistler.

STAN

Your brother —

DUKE

Does the books with me every Sunday. He's the one counts it twice with me.

STAN

And Kistler.

DUKE

Gave notice in March. Going to his old man's insurance business. Two more weeks and he walks out my door for good, and today my bag walks out ahead of him. You do that math.

STAN

I do math at the mill, Duke. Here I do quiet. Six in the morning I'm at the mill. Six at night I'm here. Nights, nothing happens. That's the job. I sit here and make sure.

Dennis's laugh comes through the wall again.

STAN

Except that.

DUKE

That's the Elks?

STAN

Other side of the wall. Thursday. Fish.

DUKE

Kistler's there every Thursday.

STAN

Half the county's there every Thursday.

DUKE

So go look.

STAN

I can't leave the station. I'm the station.

DUKE

Then send your car.

STAN

My car is Dale, and Dale is at the Dairy Queen, and Dale is not leaving the Dairy Queen to look at a man in a parking lot.

DUKE

He'll be sitting in his car. That's what he does. He sits out there and gets his face right before he goes in anyplace.

STAN

(Writing.)

Kistler. K-I-S —

DUKE

T-L-E-R.

STAN

I know how to spell Kistler. His mother taught me Sunday school.

Light shifts to the lot, and holds, lower, on the outstation.

Cody has the map open across the steering wheel.

CODY

Pay him and stay, he owns me.

END OF EXCERPT