

THE BENCH

Paula Fell

CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANK STROUD...man, 60s

ROBERT MORRIS...man, 40s – 50s

JOSIE...woman, 30s to 60s, store clerk

LIZ...woman, 40s – 50s, Robert's wife

Place: Department Store

Time: Present

(FRANK sits on a bench outside a women's dressing room. Shopping bags sit around his feet. Near the bench is JOSIE is sorting a rack of clothes. ROBERT and LIZ enter. ROBERT is carrying several shopping bags. LIZ is carrying several items of clothing.)

LIZ

Are you sure you don't mind?

ROBERT

Take your time. We're in no hurry.

LIZ

You are such a dear. Don't worry, I'll be quick.

(FRANK stifles a LAUGH. LIZ starts toward the dressing room.)

JOSIE

Only six at a time.

LIZ

Oh right. Sorry. Here honey, hold these. And my purse too.

(LIZ hands ROBERT a few items of clothes and her purse and exits. ROBERT sits on the bench with bags and clothes.)

FRANK

First time on the bench?

ROBERT

Excuse me?

FRANK

Haven't seen you here before. First time shopping with the wife?

ROBERT

My wife just needs one thing. Then we're going to catch a movie.

FRANK

If you get done in time.

ROBERT

We will. Liz just has to find an outfit for my company's party. It won't take her long.

FRANK

Uh huh. If I had a nickel.

(LIZ enters wearing a different skirt and top.)

LIZ

Honey, how does this make me look?

ROBERT

I like the top.

LIZ

Don't you like the skirt?

FRANK

Here it comes.

ROBERT

I think if you like it, that's all that matters.

LIZ

You don't like it?

ROBERT

I didn't say that. I think it's a little tight, that's all.

FRANK

Punk.

LIZ

You mean I look fat.

ROBERT

I didn't say that. Clothes can look too tight even if you're skinny. I mean, I mean--

LIZ

Relax, I know what you mean. I want your honest opinion.

(FRANK LAUGHS.)

ROBERT

But if you like the skirt...

LIZ

I have other ones to try on. I'll need those tops.

JOSIE

Only six.

LIZ

Right. Honey, I'll call you when I get this off and we can exchange the clothes.

JOSIE

No men in the dressing room. I'll make the swap for you.

LIZ

Oh okay. If you don't mind.

JOSIE

All part of the job.

(LIZ and JOSIE exit.)

ROBERT

Seems a little ridged with the rules.

FRANK

First thing you new birds need to learn. Don't rile Big Josie. She can make or break your time here. Frank Stroud.

(FRANK holds out his hand. ROBERT shakes it.)

ROBERT

Robert Morris. Been here before, Frank?

FRANK

Too many times to count. You'd think I'd learned by now. I get out, get a second chance, and then bam, I'm back on the bench.

ROBERT

Sounds like you don't like shopping.

FRANK

This isn't shopping. This is hell. At first it doesn't seem so bad. Almost seems easy. Till you find yourself getting irritable, twitchy, ready to snap. You think you'll never get off the bench. But you do. It's a miracle. You quickly forget all the pain and suffering. You're carefree and happy. Until one day, when your defenses are down, you hear that sweet, seductive voice say 'Honey, I just need to pick up a few things', and bam, there you are, back on the bench. Minutes turn into hours, hours into days, days into months, months into years.

ROBERT

Oh come on Frank, it's not that bad. I'm sure they'll be out in a few minutes.

(FRANK LAUGHS. JOSIE enters.)

JOSIE

Something funny Frankie?

FRANK

Nothing. Nothing important, Miss Josie. Just passing the time with the new benchy.