

THE BENCH

CONTACT INFORMATION

Paula Fell
(310) 497-6684
paulafell@cox.net
3520 Fifth Avenue
Corona del Mar, CA 92625

BIOGRAPHY

My experience in the theatre includes playwriting, acting, and producing. My black comedy *Trust Me*, then called *Acceptable Risk*, was chosen as a winner of the Long Beach Playhouse New Works Festival and the Ashland New Plays Festival and received staged readings at both of these festivals. It was also a semi-finalist in the Dayton Playhouse Future Fest and the Trustus Playwrights contest. My play *The Hive* was a winner in the Panndora's Box Festival of New Works and has been produced by the Not For Primetime Players. My plays *Irresolution*, *We Three Extras*, *The Bench*, and *Special Ops* were produced by the New Voices Playwrights. *Special Ops* was also selected for the Santa Fe Playhouse's Benchwarmers Play Festival.

THE BENCH PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Bench was produced by the New Voices Playwrights for their Holiday Voices 2012. *The Bench* has not been published or is under consideration for publication.

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 exits.)

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.

JOSIE

Don't want to share with me? That's okay. I got a funny one for you. See this blouse?

FRANK

Yes, ma'am.

JOSIE

Your wife Peggy tried it on. It's too small for her. Even though it's her normal size.

FRANK

Oh god no.

JOSIE

She asked me to get her the next size up. Made her kind of sad, asking for that bigger size.

FRANK

Lord have mercy, don't do it. I'm begging you.

JOSIE

Got to bring back another blouse. It's my job.

FRANK

There must be something you can do. If you don't, she'll go on a diet. She'll want to juice. I'll have to juice too. I'll have to be supportive. I can't do it. I can't do the juice again.

(FRANK hands JOSIE some money.)

JOSIE

All right, don't get all blubbery. I'll tell her these blouses run a size small.

(FRANK hands JOSIE more money.)

JOSIE

Two sizes small. Just cause I like you Frankie.

(JOSIE exits.)

ROBERT

You bribed her?

FRANK

You can't be too proud on the bench.

ROBERT

Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

(ROBERT LAUGHS at his own joke.)

FRANK

Yeah it's all one big joke. Until it's not. Can I tell you something? On the down low?

ROBERT

Sure, why not.

FRANK

You can't snitch to your wife. Can't have this getting back to the ball and chain.

ROBERT

How would it? My wife doesn't know your wife.

FRANK

Women know when another woman knows something they need to know. They can sense it.

ROBERT

That's crazy.

FRANK

Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Look over there. Right across the way.

ROBERT

Okay, I'm looking.

FRANK

It's the contemporary clothing section. Where the young women shop. Young, pretty women.

ROBERT

Frank, you can see young women all over this mall---oh my god, she's almost naked.

FRANK

Swimsuits. The young ones got to come out and parade around. My Lord, whatever I've done, don't strike me blind for another couple of minutes.

ROBERT

Wow, have you ever seen such long legs. Lead me to your ladder, I'll see your leader later.

FRANK

I prefer redheads but that does give a man pause. Sorry, I'm a grouch.

ROBERT

That's okay. Who knows, we might get out early. On good behavior.

FRANK

Not if we keep this up.

(LIZ sticks her head out from the dressing room door.)

Robert.

LIZ

Oh, hi hon. Are you ready?

ROBERT

Do I look ready? I need to try on those other clothes.

LIZ

That lady that's supposed to bring them to you went to get someone a blouse.

ROBERT

I know. Peggy needed a bigger size.

LIZ

You know Peggy?

ROBERT

No we got talking about juicing. Her clothes are too tight also.

LIZ

Told you. They know, they just know.

FRANK

I was thinking we should try juicing.

LIZ

We? For how long?

ROBERT

Relax. It not a life sentence. You want to support me don't you?

LIZ

Of course, of course. I don't think you need to go to such extremes.

ROBERT

But you do think I need to diet.

LIZ

I didn't say that.

ROBERT

In any case I still have to find something for your company's party. Bring me what you have.

LIZ

Don't do it.

FRANK

ROBERT

I have to.

FRANK

Then be quick about it. Before Big J gets back.

(ROBERT exchanges the clothes with LIZ.)

ROBERT

Should I hold on to these?

LIZ

No just put them on the rack.

FRANK

No, no, no.

ROBERT

I meant what I said. You don't look fat.

LIZ

That's sweet, but I'm not going to your company's party unless I can find a decent outfit.

ROBERT

How about an indecent one.

LIZ

Then it will look like I'm trying to compete with all the young girls from your office.

ROBERT

Don't worry about that. Only a couple of them have good figures.

(LIZ exits.)

ROBERT

Just like you do honey. I love you.

FRANK

Give it up punk.

ROBERT

I don't understand. She's usually not so sensitive.

FRANK

It's this place. It's the count.

ROBERT

The count?

FRANK

That's all this place is. One...long...count. The benchies count the hours, the women count the sizes, Big J counts the money.

ROBERT

You make it sound hopeless.

FRANK

Let me tell you something my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane. It's got no use on the bench. Some men are destined never to leave the bench...alive.

ROBERT

Oh come on now.

FRANK

No really. Last week, a benchy had a heart attack and died. Right where you're sitting.

LIZ
(off stage)

Robert, I need to try that red top again.

ROBERT

Okay, just a minute, let me find it.

FRANK

Are you crazy. Get away from the rack. Wait until Big J gets back.

(ROBERT goes to the rack and searches through the clothes for the top. JOSIE enters.)

JOSIE

What are you doing?

FRANK

Oh god.

ROBERT

My wife needs the red top she tried earlier. I was just going to take it to her.

JOSIE

What we've got here is a failure to communicate. Six items go in. Six items go out. That's the maximum allowed. And no men.

ROBERT

Yeah but---

JOSIE

No buts about it. That's the way it is. I don't like it anymore than you benchies do. We got rules here and they're going to be followed. You got that Benchy?

(JOSIE exits with the top.)

ROBERT

This is ridiculous. She can't talk to me like that. I'm telling management.

FRANK

You'll want to see Joe Warren. He's the manager for this department. He'll probably look familiar. He's Josie's brother.

(JOSIE enters carrying clothes.)

JOSIE

Hey, Benchy. Look what I got here. All the clothes your wife was trying.

ROBERT

So we are done here. Great.

JOSIE

Not great. It means she didn't find anything. Except finding out you think she's fat.

ROBERT

I did not say that.

JOSIE

I told her I knew of a dress that would look good on her. Real good.

ROBERT

So get it already.

JOSIE

Do you like the bench, Benchy? Because you're going to rot on it for a long time.

FRANK

Give the kid a break Miss Josie. It's his first time in.

JOSIE

Yeah, okay. Here's what I can do. I've got some very special dresses, see, pretty dresses. But that's not what makes them special. They were mislabeled. Three sizes wrong. So the size twelve is labeled size six. The size ten is labeled size four. Makes a lady feel nice and svelte.

ROBERT

She'll know it was just a label mistake.

JOSIE

But she won't know how much. It will make her feel good. I got some other dresses. Also mislabeled. But it goes the other way. How will it make her feel when the dress that fits her is a much, much bigger size?

(ROBERT hands JOSIE money.)

JOSIE

Best money you've ever spent, Benchy.

(JOSIE exits.)

ROBERT

I feel sick.

FRANK

Everyone does the first time.

ROBERT

I've got to get out of here. Somewhere safe like menswear. Why don't you go with me?

FRANK

What? Now? No one has ever escaped from the bench and no one ever will.

ROBERT

I think it's time to change that.

FRANK

But my wife...Big J...

ROBERT

I guess it comes down to a simple choice. Get busy living or get busy benching.

FRANK

God, you're right. Let's make a break for it.

(ROBERT and FRANK exit. LIZ sticks her head out the dressing room door. JOSIE enters.)

LIZ

Robert. Robert. Excuse me. Did you see where my husband went?

JOSIE

Nope. Looks like he made a break for it. With Frankie of all people. Didn't think old Frank had it in him.

LIZ

He has my purse and my phone. How will I find him?

JOSIE

Don't worry about it. I've been here a long time. All my little Benchies try to fly away, but they always come back to the bench.