

# **DON'T BANK ON IT**

(A Comedy in One Act)

by

**GEORGE FREEK**

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DON'T BANK ON IT

THE CHARACTERS

ALFRED SHIPMAN, A Bank President, 40s

ANITA SHIPMAN, His wife, 30s

ROGER HIRSH, A Vice-President, 50s

ANNA MERKLE, A Bank Customer, 30s

KAREN STEEL, Alfred's Private Secretary, 30s

THE PLACE

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ALFRED's Office

THE TIME

Recently

DON'T BANK ON IT

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**(ALFRED SHIPMAN'S office; At the moment, ROGER HIRSH is by himself)**

ROGER

(Shouts into an adjoining room) Send someone to the pharmacy. I need some aspirin! (He picks up a pitcher off the desk, tips it, assuming it is empty; but some water spills onto his shoes) What the...! And bring me a fresh pitcher of water! (He sits down) Good grief, I'm worn out! And I'm shivering in this *heat*! I must have a fever! (He waves his fingers in front of his face) And now I'm seeing spots! And that idiot, Shipman, insists on reading this report today at the general meeting! My God, I hate that man! And to think he got the Presidency over me! And to lord it over me he has me working as hard as a galley slave! Well, if everything comes off all right today, he's promised me a nice bonus. I'll retire soon. But if it doesn't come off—Well, I can be nasty, too! My wife can verify that!

**(From the other room, there comes the sound of applause, cheering, etc.; we hear ALFRED's voice: "Thank you, I'm very moved;" He enters with a golf putter)**

ALFRED

(Still speaking into the other room) I will treasure this, I can tell you that. Thanks again. (He waves the putter, then comes over to ROGER) Ah, my friend! This is quite a day.

ROGER

(Sourly) Yes, it certainly is. And let me congratulate you, too, sir.

ALFRED

Sir! Good heavens, Roger, I know it's a special day, but there's no need to be so formal!

**(And then KAREN, ALFRED's Secretary enters, with some papers for him to sign)**

KAREN

You forgot to sign these, Alfred, and they have to be in the mail tomorrow!

ALFRED

(Signing them and smiling, to ROGER) How would I get along without Karen?

ROGER

(Deadly serious) We all ask that question.

KAREN

(Shrugs, To ROGER) He'd be fired.

ALFRED

This isn't the time to be facetious.

KAREN

Who's being facetious?

ALFRED

(Hands her the papers) You can get these in the mail now.

KAREN

Finally! (She exits, shaking her head with exasperation).

ALFRED

Sometimes I think I let Karen become too familiar.

ROGER

(About the putter) You don't play golf, do you?

ALFRED

It's time I took it up. I need some exercise.

ROGER

Do you have any idea how many men take up golf in their middle years and drop dead on the golf course?

ALFRED

(Irrked) Have you finished that report yet, Roger?

ROGER

I'll have it finished in less than half an hour.

ALFRED

I hope so. That's when the Board of Directors is due.

ROGER

Have no fear.

ALFRED

You realize this is very important to me? You're sure you'll have it done in time?

ROGER

It's in the bank.

ALFRED

Let me see what you've done. (He looks at the report, rubs his head) You know I hardly slept a wink last night and then with all the excitement today, I feel terrible. (He sets the report down) But I'm sure you've done a superb job.

ROGER

Only a few pages to go. (He sits at his computer, begins working on the report) I've got a devil of a headache myself. In fact, it's making me dizzy! (He rubs his eyes, etc.).

ALFRED

Something else unpleasant happened this morning. Your wife called me.

ROGER

I suppose she was complaining again.

ALFRED

In a way...

ROGER

That woman! She's never happy!

ALFRED

She said you were chasing her around the house with a loaded shotgun.

ROGER

Ridiculous nonsense!

ALFRED

I'm certainly glad to hear that.

ROGER

It was not loaded.

ALFRED

Good grief, man! What next!

ROGER

Listen, I know this is a big day for you.

ALFRED

It is, and I hope you're not going to make a shambles of it for me.

ROGER

No. But I would like to ask you a small favor.

ALFRED

You'll get your bonus, I promise you.

ROGER

(Angrily) I mean please keep your nose out of my personal business!

ALFRED

Listen to me, my friend. You really need to keep that temper of yours under control. And when it comes to women, you're like a senior citizen Jack the Ripper! I don't know why you hate them so much.

ROGER

And I don't know why you don't!

ALFRED

Now, now, let's not bring *my* wife into this discussion.

ROGER

Let's drop the subject altogether.

ALFRED

You're right. Why put a damper on such a magnificent day. The employees have given me this beautiful putter, and I believe this afternoon the Board is planning to give a speech in my honor and present me with a gold watch.

ROGER

Who told you?

ALFRED

No one had to tell me. I bought the watch and wrote the speech myself. Frankly, I was afraid none of them would think of it. And anyway, I couldn't trust them to do it properly. I mean who would know better than I do all the improvements I've made in my five years? Don't I have a right to be proud of myself?

ROGER

No one knows that better than you do.

ALFRED

True! I have developed for this bank a reputation for trustworthiness, for, um, what?

ROGER

(Hesitantly) Honesty?

ALFRED

Absolutely so! And for—neatness. (He picks up a piece of paper from the floor and, giving ROGER a nasty glance, throws it in the wastebasket).

ROGER

Sorry, sir!\_

ALFRED

And for goodness' sake, look at you, Roger. Your tie is askew, there's a coffee stain on your shirt, your shirttail is hanging out, your shoes need a shine, and that jacket! Good grief, what color is that!

ROGER

I think they call it salamander.

ALFRED

What is wrong with you?

ROGER

I'm a slob.

ALFRED

But the Board will be here in less than half an hour. Do something about it!

ROGER

Yes, all right. (He starts to tuck in his shirt, etc.)

ALFRED

And I've got to have that report!

ROGER

I can't do two things at once!

ALFRED

Sometimes I wonder if you can do one thing at once!

ROGER

DON'T NAG ME! I'm working myself to death! My ankles are swollen as thick as tree trunks. My fingers are inflamed, and my head feels like someone is trapped inside it, and he's trying to punch his way out through my eyeballs!

ALFRED

Is that any excuse for wearing such an ugly jacket?

ROGER

(He works for a few seconds) There are so many distractions.

ALFRED

What now?

ROGER

(A few drunken cheers from the other room; 'To the Boss!' 'Hear, here!' etc.) Well, those maniacs, for one thing!

ALFRED

They're simply celebrating my anniversary. It's natural they'd be happy for me.

ROGER

And then last week your wife said something about some Internet shares and how worried you were about them.

ALFRED

Good Lord, I must be talking in my sleep again!

ROGER

If my wife had said something like that! (He draws his finger across his throat).

ALFRED

Let's think of something more pleasant, please.



ROGER

Your wife should be here any minute.

ALFRED

(Sarcastic) Thank you!

ROGER

Been to visit your in-laws, hasn't she?

ALFRED

Yes. She was planning to spend a few extra days, but it didn't work out. I suppose she wanted to be here for the party. Of course I'll be glad to see her. (A sudden facial tic) It's just that I'm rather tired and she'll expect to go out tonight, and originally I had some plans with a couple of the Board members. Now I imagine I'll have to listen to stories about her dragon-lady mother and her hare-brained sister. But of course, I'll be extremely glad to see her. As long as I'm well prepared.

ROGER

You had better be prepared.

ALFRED

What do you mean?

ROGER

I hear her now.

ALFRED

That can't be! I thought I had another hour! (He looks at his watch)...

**(And then ANITA SHIPMAN enters, as the saying goes 'Like a Freight Train').**

ANITA

Darling! (She rushes to ALFRED, kisses him). It's good to be home! How much have you missed me?

ALFRED

(Pathetic smile) You'll never know how much.

ANITA

(To ROGER) Hello, Roger, how are you?

ROGER

You don't want to know.

ANITA

The same, I see.

ALFRED

Well, my dear, how was your little vacation?

ANITA

(She sighs) Oh Alfred, there's really just too much to tell you—

ALFRED

Good, because we're very busy—

ANITA

But I'll *try* to tell it all. Well, first off, on the way to Ohio, we suddenly hit this incredible storm. I was sure the wings were going to blow off the plane. This nice young man sitting in the next seat assured me that was impossible, but I promise you I honestly believed it was all over. I saw my entire life pass in front of my eyes. I actually saw the Barbie doll I had when I was seven years old—

ALFRED

Well, thank God you're all right now. (He turns away) Now then Roger—

ANITA

And then, when we finally *did* arrive, nearly an hour late, no one was there to meet me. For some reason, they were under the impression the plane was due at eight o'clock in the evening, not the morning... (She looks at ALFRED) However it seems you don't care, so maybe I'm simply wasting my breath.

ALFRED

No, no, it's nothing like that. It's just that... (He shrugs and looks to ROGER for help).

ROGER

Maybe you know about the celebration, Mrs. Shipman? It's Alfred, Mr. Shipman's, fifth year as President, and the members of the Board will be here in a short while.

ALFRED

(Interrupting with a strained smile) In a very short while! Now then, Roger, about that report.

ROGER

All right, sir! I was just being polite to your wife. (He retires to his desk and begins working on the report again).

ANITA

Naturally, I'm excited about all that, Alfred. I remember that excellent speech you wrote for the Chairman of the Board. Is he planning to read that today? (ROGER pointedly clears his throat).

ALFRED

(After wasting an irritated glance at ROGER) Listen, my dear, I'm sure you are incredibly tired and you'll no doubt want to go somewhere for dinner tonight. Why don't I ask someone to give you a lift home so you can take a little nap before this evening?

ANITA

I think you're right.

ALFRED

Fine! I'll call Karen.

ANITA

But first I really have to tell you all about my trip. I think I mentioned the young man sitting beside me on the plane? He was a graduate student in anthropology, I believe. But the point is he was flirting with me the entire trip. Can you imagine that—an old woman like me! I swear he was young enough to be my—Well, my much younger brother. But I simply couldn't shake him. And talk! Good Gracious, I swear to you, I couldn't get one word in edgewise! You wouldn't believe it—

ALFRED

I'm sure I wouldn't.

ANITA

At the airport I had to go to the ladies' room, and I finally lost him.

ALFRED

How fortunate...

ROGER

(Mutters under his breath) For him!

ANITA

(Rushing on, heedlessly) But the real problem is my sister, Charlene. I'm afraid she's going to give Mother a stroke! Her behavior, even in this day and age, well, I can hardly bring myself to talk about it—

ALFRED

Then maybe you shouldn't.

**(Then from the other room KAREN is heard. 'No! You can't go in there. Please wait!')**

KAREN

(Now entering) I'm really sorry, but there's a woman here who absolutely *demands* to see you personally.

ALFRED

Now? Who is it?

KAREN

(Shrugs) Well, here she is. Ask her yourself.

**(And at that point, ANNA MERKLE enters the room. She is small but assertive)**

ANNA

Ah. *Here* he is.

ALFRED

I'm very sorry, Miss or Ms. But we're extremely busy today. My secretary—

ANNA

I came right up to you, because I could tell immediately that you were the person in charge. You *are* the President, are you not?

ALFRED

(Flattered) That's right. But—

ANNA

How do you do, I'm Anna Merkle, wife of Herman Merkle, who was a loan officer at your Briar Valley branch. That is until his unfortunate accident.

ALFRED

(Mildly alarmed) His accident!

ANNA

Of course the police said it was *his* fault. Can you believe it? They insisted he was drunk! But then small town policemen aren't the brightest human beings in the world! We all know that!

ALFRED

Of course I'm sorry, Mrs. Merkle, but we are incredibly busy today. Now if you'd like to make an appointment, this is my secretary, Mrs. Steel—

ANNA

This won't take a minute. I'm sure you'll be able to straighten everything out. My husband has told me so many times what a kind, generous and understanding man you are.

ALFRED

(Flattered) Well, I probably have a minute. (He scowls at ROGER) I'm waiting for a report.

ANNA

If you can just give me sixty seconds—

KAREN

(Noticing ANITA) Oh, hello there, Mrs. Shipman. It's good to see you here today. (Anna glares at them)

ANITA

It's nice to be back, Karen, let me tell you. My, you look especially nice today.

KAREN

Thanks. It's because of the anniversary party. But you've been to visit your mother, haven't you? I hope she's all right? (ANITA looks dubious).

ANNA

(Watching them with annoyance, now clears her throat) The point is in that accident, Herman ruptured a disc in his back. And then a month ago he began to receive only two-thirds of his pay every two weeks! (KAREN and ANITA now look at her)

ALFRED

I'm sure he explained. That happens after a certain number of months. (He shrugs) Or is it years?

ANNA

Oh, I understand that. Naturally, I don't think it's fair. But nevertheless—

ALFRED

Of course, that's not under my personal control. Still, there are ways to appeal. I assume his medical expenses are being taken care of?

ANITA

(Now looking with annoyance at ANNA, she takes KAREN aside somewhat) Mother is fine. But my sister, Charlene, now that's another story! Maybe you remember? She was here with mother a couple of years ago? (ANNA glares at her once more)

KAREN

Of course I do. She was a beautiful young woman.

ANITA

Maybe a little *too* beautiful, if you know what I mean?

ANNA

(Looking annoyed at ANITA) The insurance isn't what I'm complaining about. The problem is when I received Herman's check last Friday five hundred dollars had been taken out of it!

ALFRED

Five hundred dollars...

ANNA

That's right! I was told he'd withdrawn that money from his retirement account, but how could he have done that?

ALFRED

Well, I would agree with you that it's not necessarily a wise thing to do, but it is permissible.

ANNA

Without *my* approval!

ALFRED

He didn't tell you he was withdrawing the money?

ANNA

No! And I think it's disgraceful that a man is permitted to withdraw money from a fund that has been created for the future protection and security of his family, his WIFE, without her even knowing about it, much less giving her approval! How can that be, Mr. Shipman! But then, maybe I'm asking the wrong person. (Whimpering) Maybe you can't realize what money means to someone in my position.

ALFRED

Believe me, Mrs. Merkle, you have my deepest sympathy.

ANNA

Now that's what I was hoping you'd say. Herman has always told me how understanding you are.

KAREN

(Another annoyed glance at ANITA) But Mrs Shipman, is your sister in trouble?

ANITA

(Sotto voce, as ANNA is glaring at her) I don't know if I can even talk about it.

KAREN

Oh. Well, I'm sorry I brought it up.

ANITA

But maybe it will help to tell someone—

ALFRED

(Tactfully diverting ANNA) I'm very sorry about your problem, Mrs. Merkle, but I really don't see how I can help you.

ANNA

Of course that's the response I should have expected! My son-in-law, Wilbur, told me I would be wasting my time!

ALFRED

I hope that's not true.

