

Fritz  
+  
ARPAD

ACT III

Scene 1

7

*(Two weeks later. Early morning of the 24th of December. The shop is still closed. Outside the street is covered with newly fallen snow. HORVATH and ARPAD are seen through the window. They unlock the shop door and enter. ARPAD is wearing a flashy, new suit, overcoat and derby. He has been promoted to clerk.)*

HORVATH. *(Switches on the lights. First the windows, then the shop.)*  
Light the heater, Arpad.

ARPAD. *(Goes behind counter and lights heater.)* It's a quarter to eight and Fritz isn't here yet. That boy needs some discipline.

HORVATH. I don't remember you being terribly punctual.

ARPAD. That's different, when I was late in the morning it was always because I was either helping at home or running the Hammerschmidt's personal errands. During all the four years I've been here, I wasn't late as much as this new boy has been in two weeks. But it's your fault, you're too easy with him. You leave it to me, I'll teach him...

*(HORVATH goes into stockroom and FRITZ, the new errand boy, enters from the street.)*

FRITZ. Good morning, Mr. Novack...

ARPAD. You're late again. What do you think this is, a movie house? Late to start and come and go as you please?

FRITZ. It isn't eight yet, Mr. Novack.

ARPAD. What do you mean, it isn't eight yet? Did I or did I not tell you to arrive here at 7:30 each morning in anticipation of my arrival.

FRITZ. *(Timidly:)* You did, Mr. Novack.

ARPAD. Well then, when I said seven-thirty, I meant seven-thirty. When I was learning this business, I got here at six every morning. *(Shaking his head:)* Fritz, Fritz...you'll have to improve because at this rate you're not going to last very long.

FRITZ. I'm sorry, Mr. Novack.

ARPAD. Well alright. Now go to the Café Ferdinand and get four cheese buns. Do you have money?

FRITZ. Yessir.

ARPAD. Including now, how much do I owe you?

FRITZ. Five coffees and four cheese buns. Oh, and then you had that one knockwurst.

ARPAD. Knockwurst? Are you sure?

FRITZ. Yes Mr. Novack. Last week when I was eating my knockwursts at lunchtime, you asked me to give you one.

ARPAD. How many did you have for lunch?

FRITZ. Four.

ARPAD. Knockwurst. Hmmmm, I don't remember it. I'm not sure that I've ever eaten a knockwurst in my whole life. Now Fritz, don't try to cheat me.

FRITZ. But Mr. Novack, you don't think I'd try to cheat you and for a knockwurst?

ARPAD. You know now that I come to think of it, if you had four knockwursts for lunch and I joined you in eating one, wasn't that just the act of a gracious host? And now you want to charge me money for what I assumed was a kindness. *(Shakes his head and makes the "tsk, tsk" sound.)*

FRITZ. Ohhhh, forget it.

ARPAD. No, now I don't want to forget it. I am hurt, but I want you to write it up with the rest all the same. It's alright; I can afford to buy your knockwurst. I'll just have to remember where things stand the next time. But hurry now with that coffee. We have to clean up the back room and the office this morning and I have much work for you to do.

FRITZ. Yes, Mr. Novack.

*(Hurries off into the street.)*

*(HORVATH comes from stockroom wearing white coat.)*

ARPAD. Mr. Horvath.

HORVATH. Yes?

ARPAD. I'd like to ask you something.

HORVATH. What?

ARPAD. Are you going to visit, Mr. Hammerschmidt at the hospital tonight?

HORVATH. Of course. Haven't I been going every night?

ARPAD. Do you think I could go with you?

HORVATH. Well, I don't know. He expressly told me that he'd rather not have any visitors.

ARPAD. *(Quietly.)* Mr. Horvath, I haven't seen Mr. Hammerschmidt in two weeks. Maybe he needs me for something and just hasn't thought of it yet. Please take me tonight.

HORVATH. Alright. But not a word about it to the others.

ARPAD. *(Elated.)* Of course not...thank you.

*(Exits stockroom.)*

SIPOS. *(Enters from street.)* Good morning, Horvath.

HORVATH. Good morning, Mr. Sipos.

SIPOS. *(Shaking snow from his hat)* We're going to have a nice white Christmas after all.

HORVATH. Looks like it. It snowed all night.

SIPOS. Heaven help us when it all starts melting again. We'll be canceing up and down Vaci Street. That's the trouble with snow. In the end it has to melt.

*(Exits to stockroom.)*