


The Porch Room presents

***The Fruppum,
Alabama
Chamber
of Commerce***



A Play in One Act

By John P. Dowgin

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of works by The Porch Room *must* give credit to the Author(s) of the Play and to The Porch Room as the original producer. These credits must be listed in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for the purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise related to promoting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author(s) *must* appear in a separate line on which no other name appears, immediately following the title of the play and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent of the size of the title type.

Whenever the play is produced, the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: “Originally created and produced by The Porch Room – www.porchroom.com.” A Porch Room logo graphic is included in your licensing agreement and may be used on programs and advertising.

Whenever biographies of the cast and crew of a production are to be included in programs, websites, printed materials or other related promotional or archival materials, the provided official biographies of the Author(s) and The Porch Room must be used. Headshots of the Author(s) are available upon request.

LICENSING AGREEMENT

To perform this work, you agree to the following payment terms, payable in advance:

1. ONE ACT PLAYS: \$35 per performance
2. TWO OR MORE ONE ACT PLAYS PERFORMED TOGETHER: \$50 per performance.
3. FULL LENGTH PLAYS: \$75 per performance

Upon receipt of a signed licensing agreement, the producing party will receive a printable digital copy of the play. Printed copies are available upon request at \$9 per copy.

Licensing for this work is granted exclusively by The Porch Room at the author’s discretion. Licensing applications can be found at <http://www.porchroom.com/scripts>

The Fruppum, Alabama, Chamber of Commerce

Characters

Zeke – Male, 55+

Rufus – Male, 55+

Drivers 1, 2 and 3 – Gender and age indifferent

The Kinderschmecken Boy – Male, 25-30



***Author's Note:** Elaborate sets are unnecessary for this play. Chairs with makeshift price signs next to them will suffice, and any other signage referred to in the play may be referred to offstage. Also, please note that these characters are yokels. They aren't disabled in any way. We don't have a 'Sling Blade' situation here. But they are **old** yokels, and they should (at least in my opinion) be cast with elderly actors. Drivers 1, 2, and 3 may be cast with one actor or actress. Ideally the Kinderschmecken boy should be a different actor than he playing the driver(s) but, in a pinch, can also be played by the same actor.*

Lights up.

A country highway, early morning. Pair of gas stations stand on opposite sides of the road, facing each other. A folding lawn chair sits in front of each station. On stage right stands 'Rufus's Gas-O-Rama', on stage left sits 'Zeke's Fuel Stop'. Both stations display identical chalkboard signs reading 'Regular: \$2.40'.

Zeke sits in his chair, a wad of chaw in his mouth. Except for his jaw, Zeke barely moves throughout the play. Rufus sits in his rocking chair. While Rufus sits during the entire play as well, he is downright frenetic compared to Zeke. Both are dressed similarly (jeans, flannel shirt over a white tee, work boots) and have that weathered, working old man look that could conceivably place them anywhere between 60 and 195 years old.

Rufus: Hot 'un today.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: Done come to expect it I have, I suppose.

Beat.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Beat.

Rufus: Kinderschmecken boy is back. Saw him in town yesterday. Showin' his face round here 'gain.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: Can't get it through my head, Zeke. 98 degree weather and sure as I'm sittin' here, dressed head to toe in black leather. How the boy didn't combust in front of my eyes, I don't know. You thought he was a damned freak five years back, you oughta see now. Tattoos. Not a dab of color anywhere on that boy's face. And to top it all, the goddamned top of the goddamned freak heap, a metal ring sticking out of his nose. *(Beat)* Twenty-nine years old. By the time his daddy was his age, he was owner and sole proprietor of Kinderschmecken Sheet Metal. Could've been all his long time since by now. But no. Granted, his daddy was only sole proprietor cause Petey Hendershuck done tried to fix that drill press with a half bottle of Old Grandad in him, but he was sole proprietor at twenty-nine nonetheless! A fine business, fine town, fine customers, and that boy turned his pierced nose right up at it! I was his daddy, I'd have done a Hendershuck on that boy the day he told me he was moving to See-attle, I would've.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: And I'd have been right, too.

Zeke: *(Beat)* Mm-hmm.

Rufus: I said, 'Boy', I done said, what's that ring fer? So they can track you down at the lab?!
(Explodes into a huge laugh. Zeke nods a bit to acknowledge the joke) The lab, I said! I done said it as sure as I'm sitting here telling you now! Hoo boy, Cole and I laughed a good long while at that...

A long pause

Rufus: Hot 'un.

Zeke: (Beat) Mm-hmm.

Pause

Rufus: Almost as hot as that stretch in '76, it is. That stretch when old Tom Gizzardorf's pigs broke themselves into Thelma's greenhouse, trying to get their hides out of the sun? Eh? And then they ended up helping themselves to a whole heaping mouthful of them azaleas she been spent six months raisin' for the Bicentennial Fourth of July *(pronounced JOO-lie)* fair. *(Begins laughing again)* You remember? Oh lord, I laughed harder than a plum-drunk mason when she came running out of that house in her flannel robe, towel on her head, and she's wavin' that rolling pin over her head, trying to club a 700 pound hog away from her azaleas! Hoo brother, that was a sight *(his laughter turns into a cackle, and eventually into a cough, then eventually into phlegm, which Rufus none-too-subtly spits off to the side of his porch.)*

Another pause.

Zeke: 78, that was.

Rufus: Huh?

Zeke: 78, that was. Not 76.

Driver 1 enters stage right.

Driver 1: *(To Rufus)* Excuse me, sir?

Rufus: Good day to ya.

Driver 1: Yeah, hi... listen, do you by any chance sell maps?

Rufus: Maps?

Driver 1: Yeah, you know? Road maps? Trying to find my way back to the main highway, just wondering if you had a map.

Beat

Rufus: Whatcha see up there, son? *(He nods offstage, in an upward direction.)*

Driver 1: Uh... your sign.

Rufus: What's my sign say?

Driver 1: Rufus's Gas-o-Rama...

Rufus: Gas-o- Rama.

Driver 1: Right.

Rufus: Say 'map-o-rama' anywhere on that sign?

Driver 1: Well, no...

Rufus: See any form of the word 'map' on my sign?

Driver 1: No, I don't.

Rufus: Don't sell maps, son. Sell gas. This here is Rufus's Gas-o-rama, I'm Rufus, and I sell gas. And if you need a map in Fruppum, Alabama, you got bigger problems, cause we only got one road! (*Laughs himself silly as the driver walks across the street to Zeke.*)

Driver 1: (*Fully expecting identical treatment*) Sir, do you by any chance sell maps?

Zeke: (*A beat*) Mm-hmm.

Driver 1 is pleasantly surprised, and Rufus's laughter slowly begins to fade.

Driver 1: You do?

Zeke: Two dollars. By the register.

Driver 1 disappears inside, quickly returns with a map. He hands Zeke money.

Driver 1: Much obliged.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Driver 1 heads off. Rufus's laughter has now come to full stop. He looks at Zeke with some puzzlement for a brief second, but Zeke continues to stare off into relative space. A pause.

Rufus: Well. That's one. (*Waits for a reply he does not get.*) I said that's one.

Zeke: Hm?

Rufus: You see them plates? On map boy's car? The plates?

Zeke: (*Beat*) Missouri, I believe...

Rufus: Damn right. Missouri plates in Fruppum at 9 AM on a Thursday morning. You ever see such a thing? (*Beat*) I know you ain't cause you and I been sitting here day in and day out for damn near 47 years and I ain't never seen such a thing. And six months now, strange folk passing through at all hours. And you, me, the whole damn town knows why! (*Beat. Then, with building emphasis*) It's that blight they done put up not fifteen miles down this here road in Fendersonville. I said it the day they broke ground, I said it every time a lumber truck or a sheet rock truck or a cement mixer rolled by, I said it the day that boil on the mankind's face opened its doors! It is a disgrace, a defilement of everything what's good and decent and right and wholesome on this planet! It's foul, disgusting, obscene, and goddamn Zeke, pardon my French, it sucks.

Long pause.

Zeke: You referring to the Wal-Mart?

Rufus: You're **GOD-DAMNED RIGHT** I'm referring to the Wal-Mart! And the worst of it is? Absolute worst of it all? It's the beginning. Ho yes, just the beginning. You remember that summer you, me and Ol' Greek Geezelschmidt went fishing down in Six Forks Creek? And we spent the whole day hip-wading, and we didn't know there was chiggers and shit in that water, and when Greek got home he had little red spots all over his unmentionables? Not a week later, that boy was laid up with rashes and scabs and god-knows what else? Doc Pritchard had to shave that boy's... (*beat*) had to shave that boy and he had to use that lotion that done smelled like an old-fogey's home for near six months? Well that's what that there Wal-Mart is, nothing but the red spots on Ol' Greek! And pretty soon scabs and rashes called Target, and, and, and Staples, and the god-damn Olive Garden will be poppin up all around it, and this town, this county, this state... won't be nothing more than a...

Zeke: Shaved crotch?

Rufus: Exactly! This town is turning into Greek Geezelschmidt's shaved crotch! (*Pause*) And it was 1976, as I sit here.

Zeke: 1978. Azalea contest wasn't for the Bicentennial. Was for Knocachokee County Garden Queen.

Rufus: (*Realizes Zeke is right.*) I'll be damned. I told her to save the azalea seeds for the next fair...

Zeke: Never crowned a Garden Queen again. Canceled it in 79.

Rufus: Yep, yep you're right. I'll be damned. Zeke, boy, you got a mind like a steel trap!

Zeke: Mm-hmm. Rusty and...

Together: ... illegal in most states!

Rufus laughs. Zeke cackles a very slight bit.

Rufus: Ho, damn, it was funny though, her swatting Tom's pigs with that rolling pin! Oh... (*the laughter dies slowly, then for good.*) Since when you sell maps?

Driver 2 enters stage right.

Driver 2: Hey there y'all! How you doing?

Rufus: Been better, but I ain't one to complain.

Driver 2: Oh, that's the only way to be!

Rufus: Well, what can I do you for today?

Driver 2: Um, listen, I was wondering if you had, you know, like a little market in there? Like a Tiger-mart?

Rufus: A what-mart?

Driver 2: A Tiger Mart? Exxon's have 'em up north. You can get, sandwiches, and hot dogs, sodas, you know? Me and the wife and kids are pushing through to the State Park to do some camping this weekend, and we just wanted to load up on some snacks before we make the last push-on through!

A long pause.

Rufus: A Tiger-Mart?

Driver 2: That's right.

Rufus: Look at me dead in the eye, son. Ain't no marts here. That's what's wrong with this world. Everyone's obsessed with marts!

Driver 2: Hey...

Rufus: There is not now, never has been, and never will be, food for sale at Rufus's Gas-o-Rama! Gas! I sell Gas! I'm Rufus, this my Gas-o-Rama, I say what gets sold here, and I says gas gets sold here! Now please move you and your mart-crazy family on away from my station!

Driver 2: There's no need for such hostility, sir!

Rufus: When you get your own Gas-o-Rama, son, you can judge the hostility a situation requires! Till such time, shove off!

Driver 2: Well, I never... (to Zeke) excuse me, sir, does Zeke's Fuel Stop carry food, or is it nothing but a fuel stop?

Pause

Zeke: Got some hot dogs. Slim Jims. Couple of drinks.

Driver 2: Really! Well, that sounds scrumptious.

Driver 2 heads into the store. Rufus looks at Zeke in much the same way he did following the Driver 1 incident, but more pointed. Driver 2 returns and hands Zeke some money. Zeke makes change.

Driver 2: Thanks so much!

Zeke: Welcome.

Driver 2: No, really, thank you! I haven't been able to get an Evian since Chicago!

Driver 2 heads off. A pause.

Rufus: Evian?

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

A longer pause.

Rufus: What in the name of Stonewall Jackson is Evian?

Zeke: Water.

Rufus: Drinkin' water?

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: What's the difference between that tap water?

Zeke: Two bucks suggested retail is what.

Rufus: That man paid you two bucks for water?

Zeke: Suggested two. He paid three.

Pause.

Rufus: Is it special water?

Zeke: Nope. Just water.

Rufus: What's it taste like?

Zeke: Dunno. Never tasted it. *(Pause)* Water, I s'pose.

Pause.

Rufus: Now since when you been selling Evian and maps and franks and shit? Huh?

Zeke: A while.

Rufus: A while. For a while now, Zeke's Fuel stop has been Zeke's Fuel and Evian and Map stop, huh? This what you're tryin' to tell me?

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: Well. You're gonna need a new sign, then, won't you? *(A beat)* You own a gas station, you fool. You sell gas. I own a gas station, what do I sell? Gas! I buy it at a fixed price, I sell it for two forty a gallon, and the money that comes in just enough to put food on my plate and to keep buying more gas! And I don't waste my gross income on magic water and maps, I'll tell you that!

Zeke: T'aint magic. It's water.

Rufus: Somebody's paying three bucks for it, it's magic, no matter what you say! *(Beat)* You know who you are, Zeke? You're Icarus, is who you are.

Zeke: *(Beat)* Outfielder for the Mariners?

Rufus: No, Icarus! He was a Carthaginian or some shit, and he invented the airplane! But then he tried to fly too damned high...

Zeke: *(Interrupting)* Wright brothers invented the airplane.

Rufus: Well, Icarus is a story, you fool. It's a fable.

Zeke: A fable?

Rufus: It's a story that explains nature. Like if there wasn't no more sharks, them 'Jaws' movies would be fables. But you're getting off track. So Icarus tried to be more than he was, and he tried to fly too high and he crashed his fancy-ass plane right into the sun! So you're Icarus, and you're gonna fly Evian right into the sun and into bankruptcy court, you fool. That's what you're gonna do.

A long pause.

Zeke: Greek Geezelschmidt didn't get them scabs and rashes at the creek. He slept with your sister Cora night before we went fishin'.

Before Rufus can respond to this, Driver 3 enters stage right.

Driver 3: Hey, how ya doin!

Rufus: *(A dead, cold silence, then Rufus nods.)* Hot 'un, 'eh?

Driver 3: Eh, yeah, yeah, sure is.

Rufus: On a day like this you could use some Evian, huh?

Driver 3: What? I look crazy enough to pay two bucks for tap water to you?

Rufus: That so? *(a sideways smile at Zeke)*

Driver 3: Yeah.

Rufus: How bout a map? You need any maps?

Driver 3: Uh, no I got one in the car...

Rufus: All righty son, then, how now can I help you here at Rufus's Gas-o-Rama?

Driver 3: Listen, got a little bit of a problem down the road there, do you carry spark plugs?

Rufus: What kind of car you drivin' there, sonny?

Driver 3: A Sentra.

Rufus: Sentra, huh?

Driver 3: Yeah. *(a pause)* Nissan Sentra.

Rufus: I know what brand of car a Sentra is, sonny.

Driver 3: Oh... well, all right...

Rufus: Whatcha see up there, son? *(he nods towards the sign.)*

Driver 3: Uh, a sign. Says Rufus's Gas-O-Rama.

Rufus: Say anything about spark plugs?

Driver 3: *(Sees where this is going)* Listen, I didn't...

Rufus: Fact of the matter is it don't, now does it? And if the sign don't say anything about spark plugs, you think the proprietor of the establishment, being me, is gonna have anything to say about spark plugs?

Driver 3: Well...

Rufus: Let alone Jap spark plugs?

Driver 3: *(Wishing he'd never said anything in the first place)* Hey, either you've got spark plugs for a '97 Sentra or you don't. It's a simple question...

Rufus: To which the answer is 'don't'.

Driver 3: Sorry to bother you. I'll be going.

Rufus: I think you will.

Driver 3: *(Notices Zeke)* Don't suppose you carry Sentra plugs over there, do ya old timer?

Zeke: *(A beat)* '97?

Driver 3: Yeah. *(Rufus look at Zeke in a somewhat angry manner)*

Zeke: *(Another beat)* Mm-hmm.

Driver 3: *(Smiles, looks at Rufus, and heads into Zeke's store)* Thank you very much.

Silence until the driver returns with a spark plug in hand, and hand Zeke some cash.

Driver 3: Keep the change. *(exits)*

A beat.

Rufus: Does the sound keep you up at night?

Zeke: *(A beat. Then, confused.)* Sound?

Rufus: The sound of your papa and your uncle Clement spinning in their graves since you started carrying god-damned **Jap car parts!!** They must be spinning fast enough to turn the wheel down by Stuckbender's Creek!

Zeke: That so?

Rufus: Surprised the sound don't keep the town up to ungodly hours of the night. *(Beat)* Your daddy fought at Iwo Jima for chrissakes...

Zeke: Don't see no harm in it. We won the war...

Rufus: Yeah, and they won everything else. *(Looks offstage)* Oh of all the damn...

The Kinderschmecken boy enters stage right. He appears exactly as described earlier.

Rufus: Hey there boy! *(The Kinderschmecken boy walks past him unfazed)* See that Zeke? When Seattle faggots get engaged they were the ring in their nose!

Rufus break out laughing at his own joke. However, the Kinderschmecken boy walks right up to Zeke.

K Boy: Morning, Zeke.

Zeke: Morning, Phil.

K Boy: Hey, I can only put in about four hours today, but I'll work late tomorrow, ok?

Zeke: Fine with me.

The Kinderschmecken boy heads into the store. Rufus sits in stunned silence.

Rufus: Mine eyes have seen the glory of the end of the world! Zeke, you gone clear round the bend! You hired help?

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: The *Kinderschmecken* boy???

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: What in the name of all holy hell for? He gonna clean your spigots with the metal in his face?

A beat.

Zeke: He's building my web site. *(Pure, stunned silence.)* Successful businesses must cultivate and maintain a defined web presence.

The Kinderschmecken boy heads out of the store, crosses to Rufus, and hands him a piece of paper. He blows Rufus a kiss and heads back into Zeke's Fuel Stop.

Rufus: *(Reading aloud)* www.zekesfuelstop.com. A commerce and travel portal for lower Alabama. Visit to plan your vacation and learn about the rich history of Knocachokee County.

Also the location of Hadleysburg State Park. *(Beat)* Funded in part by Groogsfeld Web Ventures and the Wal-Mart Corporation.

A beat.

Zeke: Some computer guy hired the Kinderschmecken boy to work on his web site. Up in Seattle. Site for travel agents, it was. The boy said he knew this guy from home with a steel trap brain. Knew everything about these parts. Boy got a job, capital, a plane ticket. Came home. Asked me to work with him on this here site. *(Beat)*. Said he thought to help me cause I never said nothing mean to him. *(Beat)*. Come to think, I never said nothing to him while he was growing up. *(Beat)* But considering what he was used to, I guess that was enough.

Rufus: So you're a big man, now, huh? And now you got some dollars so you're gonna start selling Evian. That's it?

A pause.

Zeke: Mm-hmm.

Rufus: You old fool. *(Beat)* You don't know jackrabbit shit about none of what you've got yourself into.

Zeke: That so?

Rufus: That's **so!** *(Beat)* You'll be flat broke, outta business, welfaring and begging me for help in a month flat.

Zeke: You know, Rufus? I don't think that's the case.

Zeke stands. This is a monumental feat in and of itself, but he then walks over to the chalkboard, wipes the '.40' off the '\$2.40' and writes in a '.30'. He sits back down. The meaning of what just happened sinks into Rufus.

Rufus: Why would you do that, Zeke?

Pause

Zeke: Don't like you. Never have. *(Beat)* You talk too much.

Lights out.