

BRING ME THE HEAD
OF DUFRESNE FISH

A Ten-Minute Play

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CHARACTERS

Cruz	Fisherman, 30s, of Panamanian descent, in over his head
Frank Dufresne	Businessman, 40s, dominates the West Coast seafood economy
Frances	Recent widow, 70s, rough around the gills

SETTING

A remote shack.
The present.

A weathered room. A wooden chair. A crate. Night. A smoky window through which yellow light filters. In the corner is a dark recess where the shadow of a hiding person might be seen. Occasional foghorns blow, damp bells clang.

The door bursts open with such force it's nearly unhinged. A small but powerful man in dark wool, Cruz, pulls a bigger man through the door. The big man, Frank Dufresne, resists. His hands are tied behind his back. His screams are muffled by a stocking cap that has been pulled over his face and tied there with a gag of thick rope. Cruz pushes Dufresne onto the chair.

CRUZ

(More panicked than pissed.) Stop it! Stop screaming!

Cruz punches Dufresne, who doubles over.

Nobody can hear you here! Jesus, what's wrong with you? Screaming like a little girl. What's up with that? I thought you were supposed to be larger-than-life or something. A real man's man.

Dufresne catches his breath and says something too muffled to understand.

What?

Dufresne repeats.

I can't understand you! Wait. *(Unties the gag and rolls up the cap to Dufresne's nose.)*
Okay, what?

DUFRESNE

(Defiant.) What do you want from me?

CRUZ

What do I want from you?

DUFRESNE

This is a kidnapping, isn't it? Kidnappers usually want something.

CRUZ

Yeah, they do.

DUFRESNE

So what do you want?

CRUZ

It's not ... exactly a kidnapping ... exactly.

DUFRESNE

Not a kidnapping? You attack me from behind, blindfold and gag me, and it's not a ...
Wait. Aikins? Are you Aikins?

CRUZ

No.

DUFRESNE

Yonemura? Is that you?

CRUZ

Do I sound Japanese?

DUFRESNE

Are you the guy from Tillamook? The guy who defaulted on the oyster farms?

CRUZ

How many enemies do you have?

DUFRESNE

None.

CRUZ

Oh, yeah? (*He backhands Dufresne.*) Guess again!

DUFRESNE

Tell me who you are, you fucking asswipe! Let me see your face!

Cruz hesitates, then removes the cap. Dufresne looks him over.

You're pretty tough for a shrimp. I've never seen you before in my life.

CRUZ

You can call me Cruz.

DUFRESNE

Cruz.

CRUZ

And I'll call you Dufresne.

DUFRESNE

I am Dufresne.

CRUZ

Yeah, head of Dufresne Fish. Frank Dufresne. Let me ask you something, Mr. Frank Dufresne, president of Dufresne Fish: Do you own the Pacific Ocean?

DUFRESNE

No.

CRUZ

No, you don't. But you act like you do.

DUFRESNE

You're a fucking fisherman.

CRUZ

No, I'm a fucking third-generation *Pacific Ocean* fisherman.

DUFRESNE

Indians been here longer. You've got no claim.

CRUZ

I bet that helps you sleep better at night. You can screw all the guys you want, all the companies you want, all the hard working families you --

DUFRESNE

Just tell me what you want, Cruz.

CRUZ

I haven't sold a fish in six months.

DUFRESNE

You never know ... your luck could change.

Cruz pulls a revolver out of his coat pocket.

CRUZ

Don't fuck with me.

DUFRESNE

(Afraid for the first time.) Uh ... all right. There's no need to ...

CRUZ

Need? You're talking to me about need? You done any fishing lately? Huh? Do you ever drop a line in the drink? Even for sport? My grandfather, that's all he did for a living for sixty fucking years. Thirteen years old, you know where he was? Off the coast of Panama on a tuna clipper, standing in the rack waist deep in fish blood, holding onto a bamboo pole, a hand-tied squid on the end of the line, lifting tuna after tuna over his head for four, six, eight hours straight. Arms and legs working through cramps that would make Schwarzenegger cry like two-year-old. Hands so bloody ... the scars were there till his dying day. My *dad* never took a week off in his life. Most days he left for the boat at four in the morning, didn't get home till after dark. Sometimes out for days. Used to call us from the water, ship-to-shore. Tell us to do our homework. Make kissing sounds into the mic to wish us goodnight. Hard working man. Sold his fish down at the harbor. Took a few groundfish around to the restaurants. Nobody stopped him. This was America, land of the free, his adopted home. Nobody ever tried to stop him.

DUFRESNE

Nobody's stopping you.

CRUZ

So just by magic, everybody stopped buying my fish. Not on anybody's orders. Just out of the blue.

DUFRESNE

So what? It happens all the time. You don't play by the rules, you get punished. That's business. Look, you want to sell to me, I'll buy your goddamned fish.

CRUZ

Too late.

DUFRESNE

What, your wife leave you? You lose your house?

CRUZ

I don't have a wife and I rent!

DUFRESNE

I don't get it, Cruz! I'm offering you work!

*Cruz sits on the crate and lays the gun on his knee,
fingering the trigger.*

CRUZ

See. It ain't gonna come down like that.

The truth washes over Dufresne.

DUFRESNE

This *isn't* a kidnapping, is it. It's a hit. Who's paying you?

CRUZ

No one. You just piss me off.

DUFRESNE

Bullshit! Whatever they're paying you, it's not enough. Don't do it. Look, you don't know me. Whatever you've read about me in the paper, whatever the gossip is, you never walked in these shoes. I've had to fight for everything I have ... *just like you*. The first company I ever owned, Deluxe Seafood ...

CRUZ

In San Diego? That was you?

DUFRESNE

Yeah, you knew the place? (*Cruz nods.*) Just a tiny distributor, wouldn't threaten anybody. But Ocean Beauty didn't care. They came in and crushed us. You don't think that was a setback? In debt up to my ears. I had to go work for my old man again. They wanted to crush him, too. A hole-in-the-wall fish market. But I wouldn't let that happen. I swore I'd get Ocean Beauty. I bought my folks out. Went deeper in debt. Leveraged my own sweat and blood to get on top, where I am today. So if you think you're killing a bad guy, Cruz, you're not. I've worked as hard as anybody else.

Cruz seems moved.

Look, whatever they paid you. I'll double it. You'll work for me.

A shadow moves in the room's dark recess. Cruz jumps to his feet and pulls the cap over Dufresne's eyes.

CRUZ

What are you doing here?

DUFRESNE

Who is it?

CRUZ

What, are you checking up on me? I said I'd do it. I'll do it!

A hooded figure comes out of the dark. Its hands reach up and pull the hood away to reveal the face of an older woman, Frances Dufresne. She's obviously chased down a hard life with a few stiff drinks.

FRANCES

I knew he'd try to talk you out of it. You should have left the gag in.

DUFRESNE

Mom?

She goes to Dufresne and pulls off the cap.

FRANCES

Frankie.

DUFRESNE

Are you ... behind this?

FRANCES

(Patting his cheek.) Yes, honey.

DUFRESNE

You, you ... paid someone to kill me? *(She nods.)* How much?

FRANCES

How much? Most people would want to know *why*.

DUFRESNE

Okay, why?

FRANCES

Do you really have to ask?

DUFRESNE

(Honestly confused.) What? Is it about Dad? I *sent* flowers.

She slaps him.

FRANCES

Your own father's funeral! You couldn't take ten minutes out of your stinkin' --

DUFRESNE

It's not like it was a big surprise, Mom. The man's liver was pickled. We knew it was coming. I had a mission critical meeting in L.A. I couldn't get out of.

FRANCES

You're all about the money, aren't you? That's why, Frankie. That's why!

DUFRESNE

Okay, now take it easy. You're still in mourning. Untie my hands and --

FRANCES

Be quiet! Now you listen to what I have to say! (*Laughs sourly.*) Fish. A whole life, all these lives, ruined ... all because of fish. Fish should be a bounty and a blessing, a fundamental nourishment. Jesus Christ fed five thousand people with two fish.

DUFRESNE

You're not religious.

FRANCES

And I'm not sentimental.

DUFRESNE

(*To Cruz.*) She doesn't get a thing when I die. I don't know what she told you, but --

Dufresne and Frances yell over each other.

FRANCES

Don't interrupt --

DUFRESNE

-- she's got all she's going to get! We went to court --

FRANCES

(*To Cruz.*) He's just fucking with you. I told you, I get eight million when he kicks --

DUFRESNE

There was a settlement! SHE DOESN'T GET ANY MORE!

Cruz raises the gun at them.

CRUZ

Shut up! Shut the fuck up, both of you! (*They shut up.*) Who's telling the truth?

DUFRESNE

I am.

The look on Frances's face confirms it. Beat. Cruz heads for the door.

FRANCES

I'll contest his will in court! I'll get the money!

DUFRESNE

It's all in trusts! She won't get a dime!

CRUZ

(Stops at the door. To Frances.) And you wanted me to kill him anyway? Why?

FRANCES

He killed his father. *(Off Dufresne's reaction.)* You did! You killed him! You didn't "buy us out"! What bullshit! It was a hostile takeover. Your father would have run that business till the day he died. He loved that market. But that didn't fit into your plans, did it? That was your way back into seafood. And so you browbeat that poor man, bought out his debt. You promised you'd take care of him and me, which you welched on! You welched on --

DUFRESNE

You took me to court, didn't you? You got your settlement! Set me back two years.

FRANCES

Two years! Two fucking years! You *broke* your father.

DUFRESNE

I didn't pour the vodka down his throat. He did that to himself. Mom --

FRANCES

Don't you Mom me! I *quit* being your mom!

CRUZ

I'm out of here. You guys got issues!

He pockets the gun and opens the door.

FRANCES

Wait, leave me your gun.

CRUZ

No fuckin' way.

He exits. Frances and Dufresne look at each other a long while. She sits on the crate facing him.

DUFRESNE

(Smug.) Tough break. Untie me, would you?

Frances pulls a pistol from her coat pocket.

FRANCES

I brought this just in case. I'll do it myself.

DUFRESNE

Better not. Don't you watch Crime Scene Investigation on TV? The cops are smarter than you are. They'll trace the gun.

FRANCES

Not this one. Your dad brought it back from the war.

DUFRESNE

They'll find it.

FRANCES

There must be ten thousand fisherman who'd love to drop this gun in the middle of the Pacific Ocean after I use it.

DUFRESNE

Come on. What do you want? Name your price.

Pause.

FRANCES

Daddy. I want your dad back.

DUFRESNE

You can't have that. (*Beat. Rises slowly.*) Going out on a limb here. I don't think you'll shoot me.

Frances stands.

FRANCES

I *am* going to shoot you. Don't even question that.

She pulls a small vinyl book from her other pocket.

I brought this, though. What do you say we look at some photos first, huh?

They sit slowly. She opens the album and laughs at the first photo. She holds it up for him to see.

My word. This was taken at the market. Remember how you and Dad used to clown around? Toss fish to each other from one end of the case to the other? Look at those sideburns you had back then. Glad you got rid of those.

DUFRESNE

I thought you said you weren't sentimental.

FRANCES

Oh, I'm not. I just want see you flip and flop and suffocate a little before I do it.

She turns the page. He stares at her.

Oh, and the house on Agate. The roses! The roses in that yard!

The lights slowly fade.

Was all that fish mulch made 'em so beautiful.

Blackout.

End of Play