

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

by

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APA

Based on the true story of Fred Rogers' New York years.
And on make-believe.

Pittsburgh. 1956.

EXT. WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - DAY

Young men in jackets and ties tote Bibles across the quad. Preparing for the priesthood. Deep in conversation. Or at least pretending to be.

INT. ADMISSIONS OFFICE, WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - DAY

CLOSE ON: Clunky church shoes. We travel up a dark navy suit and striped tie. A camera around a thin neck.

Meet twenty-eight-year-old FRED ROGERS. Thin, but handsome. Mostly because of those pond-still eyes.

He leafs through the seminary's welcome packet. A smile. He sits on a lone wooden chair near the closed admissions office door. A cracked, pale-blue leather suitcase rests at his feet. The kind grandmas use.

Seated before an oak desk a few feet away, Fred's MOTHER (Nancy) and FATHER (James) murmur with REV. RJ KENDALL, the seminary's academic Dean.

A TIGER strolls across the hardwood floor. Nobody seems to notice it except Fred, who doesn't seem appropriately worried considering the size and proximity of the carnivore.

Fred's father nods, extending a calloused hand toward Rev. Kendall for a firm shake. Fred's mother smiles, a little forlorn. They look toward Fred.

Who's gone.

FRED'S MOTHER

Fred?

Rev. Kendall glances at the office door. Which is shut. Fred stands on the other side of the glass.

FRED'S FATHER

Fred, goddamit!

(then)

Sorry, Father. The boy has--

EXT. HALLWAY, WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CONTINUOUS

Fred stands in the faculty lounge doorway. Inside, PRIESTS and NUNS crowd around a black and white television.

They watch Norman Dello Joio's *The Trial at Rouen*, an opera broadcast as part of the *NBC Opera Theater*.

PRIEST
(sarcastic)
Captivating.

He turns the dial to a new channel. It's a slapstick program. People throw pies in each others' faces. The priests and nuns laugh. Fred watches.

As his parents bang on the glass, mutely mouthing Fred's name, we notice the chair wedged beneath the door's knob.

Fred lifts his grandma suitcase. And walks out the door.

EXT. PENN STATION, NEW YORK - DAY

Fred stands in the middle of it all, a pebble in a churning, indifferent river.

INT. TROLLEY (MOVING) - DAY

A trolley chugs its way uptown through crowded streets. Men and women in conservative attire cross its path, only a few feet from its nose.

A businessman reads the *Times* on the crowded trolley. He looks up to see Fred seated across from him, camera around his neck, smiling. The businessman looks back down.

Then, a few seconds later, looks back up. At Fred. Who is still smiling at him. Fred takes a picture.

EXT. RKO BUILDING - DAY

A magnificent Art Deco building located at 1270 Avenue of the Americas (part of Rockefeller Center). A buzz of activity.

Fred marvels as a continuous stream of people pass through its revolving doors. He watches each person's face. Attempts to smile at them. But is mostly met with downcast eyes. Sunlight bounces off the spinning glass.

INT. ELEVATOR, RKO BUILDING - DAY

Fred stands in the crowded elevator. BETTY ABERLIN dashes up, toting her violin case, a handful of loose sheet music tucked under her arm.

BETTY ABERLIN
Shit! Hold it, Charlie, would you?

Betty is late 20s with pale blue eyes. A restless energy. Fred stares, smitten. But quickly looks down at the floor as she steps in.

LIFT OPERATOR
Just in time, Miss Aberlin.

BETTY ABERLIN
You're a prince.

LIFT OPERATOR
22?

BETTY ABERLIN
Only if I have to.

Fred laughs.

FRED
Excuse me.

The lift operator presses the button for the 22nd floor.

LIFT OPERATOR
And for you, sir?

Fred looks at the elevator buttons.

FRED
May I? I've never ridden in an
elevator.

This gets some looks.

LIFT OPERATOR
Of course, sir.

Fred presses 1. Then 4. Then 3.

FRED
One, four, three.

Other passengers glance at one another. Betty's intrigued as the elevator rises. Fred clears his throat. Wishing he could control that sort of thing.

The elevator stops on the third floor. The door opens. The tiger rests in the hallway, purring as tigers do.

Betty and the lift operator look at Fred, wondering if he's going to get out, not seeming to notice the tiger.

He doesn't. The door shuts, and the elevator continues its ascent.

FRED
(re: Betty's violin case)
The violin is my third-favorite instrument.

BETTY ABERLIN
Oh.

The elevator travels another floor in silence. The door opens on 4. Fred still doesn't get out. Betty ventures:

BETTY ABERLIN
It's my second. Favorite that is.
But it's easier than lugging around
a piano.

Fred smiles.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

This is the realm of receptionist MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE, outspoken and a bit cranky. Fred stands before her.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Do you have an appointment, Mr...

FRED
Rogers. But please...
(reading her nameplate)
Miss Elaine Fairchilde, call me
Fred.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Very well, Fred. Do you have an
appointment?

FRED
I don't have an appointment. I'm
sorry.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
And this is in regard to...

FRED
I'd like to host a television
program.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Wonderful! I'll just draw up the
paperwork and we'll get you into
hair and makeup.

Fred blinks.

FRED
I think you're teasing me, Miss
Fairchilde.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
No! Have you got a CV, Fred?

FRED
I do not.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Of course not. Why should you?
Well. Have a seat.

FRED
Thank you very much, Miss
Fairchilde. And isn't that a
beautiful brooch.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
It was a my grandmother's.

FRED
Did you have a very loving
grandmother, Miss Fairchilde?

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Why don't you just have a seat.

Fred sits on the waiting room chair.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Can I offer you anything? Before
you get swept up in the chaos of
life as a big TV star?

FRED
I'd like a cheese sandwich.

Miss Elaine Fairchilde stares at him. Fred notices the
aquarium in the office.

FRED
Oh my.

He puts his face up to the tank. Smiles at the fish.

FRED
Hello, fish.

REVEAL: Betty Aberlin has watched all this from around the corner, intrigued. RAYMOND FRIDAY, 40s, handsome, a regal composure, hurries by in an elegant suit, puffing a pipe.

MR. FRIDAY
Betty!

Fred looks up as Friday hurries her along by the elbow, spotting Betty.

MR. FRIDAY
Jesus, they're already ten minutes into rehearsal.

BETTY ABERLIN
I couldn't help stopping for a croissant. Or three.

MR. FRIDAY
Come on, come on...

As time passes in the waiting area:

-Fred snaps a photo of Elaine Fairchilde with his camera.

-He borrows a pair of scissors. Kneels on the floor and makes a collage on the floor of cut-out magazine images.

-He helps a CUSTODIAN empty the trash cans. The custodian is wary at first, looking at Elaine Fairchilde like "I didn't ask him to do this."

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND THE RKO BUILDING - DAY

Outside, the Custodian stands in front of a large dumpster. Suddenly a dirty CAT PUPPET appears over the ledge, "talking" on a discarded telephone. The Custodian laughs. Fred pops his head out, smiling.

-The Custodian writes something on a slip of paper. Hands it to Fred.

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - DAY

Fred rides a bus through the city. In awe.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE - DAY

Fred walks cautiously through Manhattan's Lower East Side. Its grime in stark contrast to Rockefeller Center's corporate elegance. The Cadillacs replaced by decrepit junkers, the occasional gypsy cab, bikes, even horse-drawn carts.

He stares in terrified wonder at an Italian butcher shop, carcasses dangling in the window. A fish monger, the bodies of fish staring up from their ice tombs.

A gaggle of children crowd around a bodega, pointing and shouting at the candy (wax lips, candy cigarettes).

A big-eared FEMALE JUNKIE hobbles past, spooking Fred.

A FLAT-NOSED ALCOHOLIC sits on a decrepit ROCKING CHAIR by an alley. Rocking back and forth as he plays with himself, muttering with a Scottish accent.

FLAT-NOSED ALCOHOLIC
Ya bas. Ya deid bas. Come on then!

Fred hurries off, scared, as the man glares at him.

EXT. THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

Fred finds himself before a dirty brownstone. He glances at the piece of paper the custodian gave him. Its address matches that of the three-story walk-up called The Oak Tree.

INT. LOBBY, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

It's a shithole. Stairs that look like they could give at any minute. A sofa jammed in the stairwell, abandoned.

Fred ducks under the sofa, walking upstairs.

INT. MENDEL & HENRIETTA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A small apartment, filled with books, jazz LPs, and shelves and shelves of tchotchkies. We hear a tentative knock. Then a louder one.

HENRIETTA (late 30s, anxious, a fast talker) opens the door as Charlie Parker's "Ko Ko" blasts on the record player.

HENRIETTA
...Knock knock knock knock knock I
heard ya the first time!

Fred stands there, nervous.

FRED
Hello.

HENRIETTA
If you're here to tell me about
Jehovah, it ain't worth it. Last
time I saw God he was on the tail
end of one of my shits after a big
spaghetti dinner.

MENDEL
Blasphemy!

That's MENDEL (friendly; droopy eyed; slow and scholarly),
Henrietta's husband. He reads Heidegger's *Being and Time*.
Some cats mew over a sardine tin on the counter.

Henrietta makes a fart sound in response to her husband.

MENDEL
Forgive her. The Heathen knows not
of what she speaks.

FRED
(still very nervous)
I'm not here to tell you about
Jehovah. Raoul sent me.

HENRIETTA
Raoul? Who the hell is Raoul? Are
you on drugs?

MENDEL
Specifically what *kind* of drugs?

FRED
I don't take drugs.

MENDEL
Oh! Oh.

HENRIETTA
What?

MENDEL
Raoul!

HENRIETTA
Huh?

MENDEL
Raoul. You know, Tiff's boyfriend.

HENRIETTA

Raoul!

FRED

Yes, Raoul.

MENDEL

Raoul.

FRED

He said you may have an apartment I
could rent.

HENRIETTA

You got cash?

MENDEL

Always so tactful.

Henrietta makes a rude gesture toward her husband.

FRED

I have \$150.

Henrietta looks Fred up and down.

HENRIETTA

That oughta cover the first month.

MENDEL

Henrietta! Shame on you.

HENRIETTA

All right, all right, the first
two. What's your name, young man?

FRED

Fred.

HENRIETTA

Henrietta Golden. This piece of
shit is my husband, Mendel.

Fred looks down at the floor.

HENRIETTA

Aren't we the social one? Come on.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

Henrietta opens the door to Fred's new apartment. Light
shimmers off the dust.

There's a broken grandfather clock with no hands. A mattress on the floor. A burner and an icebox. No bathroom door. A hole punched into the wall.

HENRIETTA

Yeah, the last tenant... Well, if you need anything, ah, you'll figure it out.

Fred looks into his slightly terrifying new place. Sets down his suitcase.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Fred, in pajamas, hangs his three dress shirts in the narrow closet. Neatly folds some undershirts. He places a scale in his bathroom. He hangs a plaque. On it is carved a single word: *xapis*.

Outside, we hear screams of laughter, sirens, traffic. Nightmarish. He opens the window. His view is of a stoplight. The light blinks perpetual yellow.

He BLINKS and suddenly his walls are TRANSFORMED into a warm blue. A bright sun shines through his multicolored curtains. Gentle jazz piano shimmers in the background. He smiles. Sucks in a deep, cleansing breath.

And WAKES UP on his grimy mattress. He glances at his wristwatch: 4:44am. Seconds later, the watch timer BEEPS: 4:45am.

He walks into his bathroom. Steps on the scale. 143 lbs.

FRED

1-4-3.

-He returns to his mattress, now dressed in his suit and tie. Glances at his watch: 4:59am. He kneels. Folds his hands, closes his eyes, and begins murmuring in prayer.

-He glances at his wristwatch. 7:00am. He smiles.

INT. YMCA SWIMMING POOL - DAY

It's empty this early in the morning, except for the geriatrics swimming in lanes separated by gender.

Fred approaches the pool's lip with an ATTENDANT. Fred wears a white robe.

ATTENDANT

We just ask that you shower before swimming.

FRED

Oh yes, I've already showered.

ATTENDANT

Then go right ahead.

FRED

Thank you very much, Stephen.
You've been very helpful. Would you like to come over for dinner?

ATTENDANT

Um... tonight?

FRED

Tonight would be terrific.

ATTENDANT

I can't tonight.

FRED

Then maybe another time.

ATTENDANT

Maybe.

Fred pulls down his swimming goggles. Then removes his robe. He is completely naked. This draws some GASPS from the elderly women and some laughs from the men as Fred jumps in the pool and begins his slow laps.

The attendant watches in shock.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

The southern-accented receptionist, Miss Elaine Fairchilde, looks up at Fred, back in his suit.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

You again.

FRED

Good morning, Miss Elaine Fairchilde. How is your grandmother?

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

She's very much dead.

FRED

Would you like a hug?

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

Thank you, I'll pass. May I ask
what brings you here this fine day?

FRED

I'd like to--

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

--to host a television program.
Yes, I recall. But when I summoned
you yesterday to meet with Mr.
Friday -- a man not known for his
copiously open schedule -- you had
disappeared like grits down a fat
man's gizzard.

FRED

I'm sorry. Raoul was showing me the
dumpster. We found a cat puppet and
I got a bit carried away.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

I'm sure wonderful does not even
begin to describe your cat puppet.
But unfortunately, I'm afraid Mr.
Friday--

MR. FRIDAY (O.S.)

Afraid of Mr. Friday? Why, I hear
he's gentle as a kitten.

Mr. Friday, the regal head of NBC television whom we saw
whisk Betty to rehearsal, walks in, removing his hat.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

Mr. Friday! Good morning!

MR. FRIDAY

Good morning, Elaine. Don't you
look fetching.

(to Fred)

Frank Rogers, I presume?

FRED

Fred.

MR. FRIDAY

Raymond Friday. You know, Fred,
it's not often I get stood up.

FRED

Maybe you spend too much time
sitting down.

Miss Elaine Fairchilde is horrified. Friday chuckles.

MR. FRIDAY

Walk with me, my boy.

EXT. NBC HALLWAYS - DAY

Friday leads a fascinated Fred through the NBC hallways.

MR. FRIDAY

*Today is on your right. Kraft
Television Theater, of course.*

Friday approaches two large doors. A red light bulb indicates when a live broadcast is in progress.

MR. FRIDAY

And here are our stages for the
Opera Theater.

He pulls open a door. From Friday's POV we just see the lights, the cameras, the coffee-ringed production tables. From Fred's perspective, we're in another world.

FRED

Figaro.

MR. FRIDAY

Indeed.

We hear the ghostly soprano of the piece's "Sull'aria" haunting the lavish sets of Spanish courtyard and palaces. Costumes of lace and silk.

Friday shuts the door. Abruptly cutting off the aria.

MR. FRIDAY

Don't mention this to Rudolph, but in my humble opinion we make The Met look like a grammar school auditorium.

FRED

I won't mention it to Rudolph.

They continue along the hallway.

MR. FRIDAY

Kirk and Peter work down here.

They approach a corner office.

MR. FRIDAY
And here's my little corner.

A plaque hangs on the door: RAYMOND FRIDAY. HEAD OF TELEVISION.

COLLETTE, Mr. Friday's attractive personal secretary, greets them from her desk nearby as she clacks away at her typewriter.

COLLETTE
Good morning, Mr. Friday!

MR. FRIDAY
'Morning, Colette. See that we're not disturbed.

COLLETTE
Of course.

FRED
How do you do?

COLLETTE
Very well, thank you.

MR. FRIDAY
Come along, Fred.

INT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is luxurious. The finest mahogany. Tiffany glass. Original Audubon drawings of wrens and mockingbirds on the walls. As well as taxidermic version of the same.

FRED
Oh my.

MR. FRIDAY
She's something, isn't she.

FRED
This office is almost as big as my mother and father's whole house.

MR. FRIDAY
Thank you.

FRED
You must get lonely in here.

Mr. Friday laughs.

MR. FRIDAY
It is lonely at the top.

Fred approaches a cello against the wall.

FRED
Do you play cello? It's my second-favorite instrument. It sounds just like a man humming to me.

MR. FRIDAY
Not in ages, I'm afraid. Can I offer you a drink, Fred?

FRED
Oh yes, please.

MR. FRIDAY
Good man. Not a bad way to start the day, yes?

Fred smiles. Mr. Friday pours him some scotch.

FRED
I'm sorry. I don't drink spirits.

Friday looks at Fred. Then presses his buzzer.

MR. FRIDAY
Collette?

After a moment, we hear her voice over the INTERCOM.

COLLETTÉ (O.S.)
Yes, Mr. Friday?

Fred smiles at the intercom.

MR. FRIDAY
Some water for Fred here.

COLLETTÉ (O.S.)
Yes sir.

FRED
May I?

MR. FRIDAY
Ah--

FRED
(presses the button)
Thank you, Collette.

A moment's pause. Then.

COLLETTÉ (O.S.)
You're welcome. I'll be in just
a moment with your water.

FRED
(presses the button)
Thank you.

Mr. Friday looks at Fred.

MR. FRIDAY
So. I hear you're to be our next
big star.

FRED
Oh no. Not a star. I'd just like to
host a program is all.

MR. FRIDAY
Is that all. And what sort of
program, may I ask?

FRED
I'm not quite sure, Mr. Friday. A
good one.

MR. FRIDAY
You're still sorting out the
details.

FRED
Yes. I do like your opera program
very much.

Collette brings in his water.

FRED
Thank you, Collette. That's very
nice of you.

COLLETTÉ
You're welcome.

MR. FRIDAY
Tell me, Fred, where are you from?

FRED
Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Near
Pittsburgh.

MR. FRIDAY
You go to college?

FRED
I went to two colleges, Mr. Friday.
Dartmouth College and Rollins
College.

MR. FRIDAY
Ivy League.

FRED
For a bit, before I left to study
music at Rollins.

MR. FRIDAY
And what brought you here?

FRED
A program where people threw pies
in each others' faces.

Friday chuckles.

FRED
It seemed... it seemed to me that
we can do better. That people
deserve better.

MR. FRIDAY
You know, we're not in the habit of
handing out TV shows.

FRED
Of course. But I was hoping if I
worked here...

MR. FRIDAY
You could get your foot in the
door, as they say.

FRED
Yes.

Friday leans back in his chair.

MR. FRIDAY

Our artistic director, Peter Herman Adler, he's gone through about five personal assistants in the past month. You think you could handle a man like that? See to his every need? It wouldn't be glamorous. Fetching coffee. Make photocopies. Women's work, really.

Fred nods.

MR. FRIDAY

Are you married, Fred?

FRED

No, I'm not.

MR. FRIDAY

You mentioned your mother and father. What do they think of your being here?

Fred looks at the floor.

MR. FRIDAY

Fred, this is an industry that chews up young men like you and spits them out old and bitter. There are so many other choices out there. Good jobs. Honest jobs. Say back in Latrobe, working in insurance or a bank. You'll find a girl. Start a family. Start a life. You really want to risk all that to fetch a man his coffee?

FRED

I do.

MR. FRIDAY

You are determined aren't you.

Fred smiles.

MR. FRIDAY

But I'm afraid being determined isn't enough. I receive dozens of resumes a week. Tell me, what's special about you?

Fred thinks about this.

FRED

Mr. Friday, I'm no more special
than anyone else.

Mr. Friday looks quietly at Fred.

Then presses his intercom.

MR. FRIDAY

Collette. Have Miss Fairchilde draw
up some paperwork for Fred here,
would you?

COLLETTTE (O.S.)

Yes, sir.

Fred smiles. Presses the intercom.

FRED

Thank you, Co--

But Friday pulls it away.

MR. FRIDAY

I think that's enough intercom for
one day.

INT. HALLWAY, FRED'S APARTMENT BUIDLING - NIGHT

Fred, pleased, strolls to his apartment. He hears SCREAMING
from Henrietta and Mendel's room.

He approaches the door, which is cracked open, just in time
to see a glass SMASH above Mendel's head.

MENDEL

She-devil! You could have taken my
cornea out!

Henrietta swigs from a bottle of whiskey.

HENRIETTA

Ah, your unibrow would've protected
your cornea, ya cunt.

Fred touches his eyebrows, then continues to his apartment.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - MORNING

Fred wakes up on his mattress. He glances at his wristwatch:
4:44am. Seconds later, BEEP BEEP BEEP.

-He walks into his bathroom. Steps on the scale. 143 lbs.

FRED

1-4-3.

-He kneels and prays. Moments later, he hears a KNOCKING.

MCFEELY (O.S.)

Speedy delivery!

Fred returns to praying. But the KNOCKING continues. Fred frowns slightly.

MCFEELY (O.S.)

Brian! Motherfucker! I said, speedy delivery!

More banging. Fred peeks out the door to see MCFEELY.

As a man (she was born with male organs), McFeely would be a little rough around the edges. As a woman, she's a sight to behold. She wears a soiled, once-glamorous third-hand dress and Army boots. A USPS postal worker delivery bag slung over her shoulder. Heavy bags under her eyes.

FRED

(door cracked)

I'm afraid I don't know Brian.

Almost as soon as they lock eyes, McFeely turns and BOLTS down the stairs.

MCFEELY

Shit!

Fred tilts his head, confused. McFeely trips over her bootlaces and CRASHES down the stairs out of frame.

Fred walks down the stairs. He rounds the corner to find McFeely wedged against the sofa stuck in the stairwell. He stands back, a little afraid.

MCFEELY

Well. Go ahead, pig. Arrest me.

FRED

I don't have any handcuffs. Or a police car. Or a jail.

MCFEELY

What kind of cop are you?

FRED

I'm not a policeman.

MCFEELY
You sure dress like a cop.

FRED
Thank you. Are you hurt?

MCFEELY
Terribly.

Fred looks at McFeely. Wary. Then extends a hand. She looks at it. Takes it.

As Fred helps McFeely back upstairs, Henrietta, the landlady, pokes her head out her door. She scowls and slams her door.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

McFeely lies on Fred's mattress. Fred kneels by her legs, running a cool washcloth along her ankles.

MCFEELY
That feels sublime.

FRED
(sings)
*I'm taking care of you, taking good
care of you...*

MCFEELY
What the fuck.

FRED
I'm sorry.

MCFEELY
You're not some kind of deviant,
are you?

FRED
I don't think so.

MCFEELY
So Brian high-tailed it? Figures.
The parsimonious bastard owed me a
hundred and seven bucks.

FRED
Would you like to me hold onto
whatever is in your mail sack in
case Brian returns?

McFeely almost loses it with laughter.

MCFEELY

I don't think Pandora's "sack" is
one in which you'd want to dabble.

FRED

Okay.

MCFEELY

And your name, oh knight in shining
armor?

FRED

My name is Fred. What's your name?

MCFEELY

(almost a challenge)

McFeely.

FRED

I'm happy to meet you. May I... may
I take your picture?

MCFEELY

Come again?

FRED

I've never seen a woman like you.

MCFEELY

Fred, I hate to say it, but you're
starting to sound quite a bit like
the weirdo you swore you weren't.

FRED

I'm sorry, Miss McFeely.

MCFEELY

"Miss McFeely." Now you're toying
with me.

Fred looks at her blankly.

MCFEELY

Very well. But the second you ask
me to slip into something more
comfortable, I'll tear off your
ballsack and use it as a
handkerchief, you understand?

FRED

Yes, you'll use my scrotum to blow
your nose.

MCFEELY
Correct.

Fred gets his camera from the dresser.

MCFEELY
Shall I smile?

FRED
You already are.

Fred snaps a confused McFeely's photo.

MCFEELY
Do me a favor, Fred, and run some
more warm water over that cloth,
would you?

Fred sets his camera down.

FRED
Okay.

INT. FRED'S BATHROOM

Fred runs steaming water over the washcloth.

FRED
(calls)
You know, Miss McFeely, you're my
first visitor.

MCFEELY (O.S.)
What an honor!

Fred wrings the cloth over the sink. Watches the water spiral
down the drain.

When he walks back to out to his apartment, McFeely is gone.
As is Fred's camera.

Fred blinks.

INT. NBC OPERA THEATER STUDIO - DAY

PETER HERMAN ADLER, an Austrian-born, mouselike man with a
bow tie and round eyeglasses conducts the NBC orchestra.

Beads of sweat drip down Adler's forehead. He's
simultaneously conducting and adjusting the *Marriage of
Figaro* score, scribbling changes.

Fred stands beside Adler's elbow. Very intentionally *not* looking at Betty Aberlin, who is concertmaster (i.e. leader of the first violin section).

Raymond Friday watches from the front row of the empty studio-audience chairs, arms crossed, puffing on his pipe.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Dammit! Stop.

MR. FRIDAY
Everything all right, Peter?

PETER HERMAN ADLER
No, Raymond, everything is not "all right." This bar is giving me nightmares. Everything's off-balance.

Fred looks at the score. He HEARS THE MUSIC in his head. This is his moment to shine.

FRED
Maybe--

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Boy!

FRED
Yes, Mr. Adler.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Fetch me a Coke, would you?

FRED
Oh yes, Mr. Adler. Ice or no ice?

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Excuse me?

Some chuckles from the orchestra.

FRED
Mr. Friday told me I should look after your every need.

Fred looks to Friday for approval. Friday nods.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Ice, of course.

FRED
How many cubes, Mr. Adler?

More Orchestra members laugh. Including Betty, who smiles at Fred. Fred blushes. Friday notices.

Adler blinks. Then THROWS his score at Fred.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Just get me a goddamn Coke! Run!

With that, the joyous overture to Mozart's opera plays.

FRED
Right away, Mr. Adler!

Betty watches Fred go.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Fred dashes by Miss Elaine Fairchilde's desk.

FRED
Good morning, Miss Elaine
Fairchilde!

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Where on earth--

FRED
Mr. Adler needs a Coke.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
There's a refrigerator--

But it's too late. Fred is already out the door.

EXT. AVE OF THE AMERICAS - DAY

Fred bursts out of the revolving door.

We LINGER for a moment on the door. Watching the various men and women spinning in and out, going about their day.

Fred runs back in the door, a bottle of Coke in one hand and a Styrofoam cup of ice in the other.

INT. ELEVATOR, RKO BUILDING - DAY

Fred hurries into the elevator.

LIFT OPERATOR
That was quick.

FRED
It was quick, Charlie.

Fred catches his breath. Then presses:

FRED
One. Four. Three.

The lift operator looks at Fred.

INT. NBC OPERA THEATER STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Fred hurries back into the studio, where the orchestra is in the midst of rehearsing.

He pauses, enraptured as he watches Betty play violin during the opening Duettino. Not just playing. Revealing something through the music. She's a vision. Fred smiles.

So enraptured, in fact, that Peter Herman Adler's Coke slips from his hands. SMASH.

FRED
Oh dear.

Peter Herman Adler throws his baton, nearly taking out one trumpeter and hitting another.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Shit on my face!

Fred looks confused. Betty tries to keep it together. Fred looks at her, and she can't help it - she starts LAUGHING.

FLASH FORWARD as Betty's laughter... turns to the SOPRANO'S singing during the NBC Opera Theater's LIVE BROADCAST.

Fred, in his suit, has grown more comfortable, standing beside the tuxedo'd Peter Herman Adler. Fred turns the page of the score.

Mr. Friday watches from backstage. Beside him stands KATE SMITH, a large, cherubic woman in her late 30s, dressed lavishly in a mink stole.

KATE SMITH
It's terrific. It's goddam
terrific.

Fred notices a bead of sweat working its way down Peter Herman Adler's forehead as he conducts... Fred quickly dabs it with a handkerchief.

Kate Smith gives Friday an impressed look.

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - NIGHT

The performance after-party. Cast and above-the-line crew swig celebratory drinks in the chic hotel.

Fred steps into the bar. And as soon as he locks eyes on Betty, we hear the magical piano sprinkle of JOHNNY COSTA's "My Funny Valentine." It's the same sound that will someday grace every single episode of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Betty takes a bite of an hors d'oeuvre. Then makes a grossed-out face and spits it into a napkin.

FRED

That was a wonderful performance.

BETTY ABERLIN

Mm. Thank you. Hungry?

She offers her spit-out food in the napkin.

FRED

No, thank you. My name is Fred.

BETTY ABERLIN

I know. My name is Betty.

FRED

I know, Miss Aberlin.

BETTY ABERLIN

Let's get a drink, Fred.

FRED

Okay.

They approach the bar.

BARTENDER

What'll it be?

BETTY ABERLIN

Schlitz, please. Bottle's fine.

The faintest blink from the bartender over a woman ordering a beer. But he rolls with it.

BARTENDER

And for you, sir.

FRED

Some water, thank you.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred! Really?

FRED

Oh, what the heck. I'll have a ginger ale, please.

BETTY ABERLIN

You're a wild man.

FRED

(grins)

I am.

BETTY ABERLIN

You are.

Mr. Friday, pipe in mouth, approaches with his wife, Sara. Friday tries to conceal his displeasure at Fred and Betty's flirtation. Sara's got a lovely, dignified air about her.

MR. FRIDAY

Betty!

BETTY ABERLIN

Hello, Raymond!

He gives her a peck on the cheek, which she returns.

MR. FRIDAY

Betty, you remember my wife Sara.

BETTY ABERLIN

Of course. How nice to see you, Sara.

SARA FRIDAY

You were wonderful.

Betty and Sara peck cheeks too. Though we may notice the slightest hesitation from Betty as she glances at Friday.

BETTY ABERLIN

I'm so glad you liked it.

MR. FRIDAY

Fred, what a pleasant surprise. I didn't realize below-the-line crew were invited.

Friday extends a hand. But Fred smooches Mr. Friday on the cheek. Which weirds him out a little.

FRED

Yes, Mr. Peter Herman Adler was nice enough to invite me.

Fred waves to an already drunk Peter Herman Adler, who shouts his name

PETER HERMAN ADLER

FRED!

MR. FRIDAY

Did he?

FRED

I hope that's okay.

MR. FRIDAY

Of course. Well, congratulations on surviving your first performance.

FRED

Thank you, Mr. Friday.

MR. FRIDAY

This is my wife, Sara.

FRED

I'm happy to meet you, Sara.

He kisses her on the cheek too.

SARA FRIDAY

Likewise.

The bartender brings them their respective bottles. Betty, eyes darting at Sara, takes a long plug.

MR. FRIDAY

Hey! 'Atta girl!

A LITTLE LATER

Several mostly-empty beer bottles are in front of a tipsy and laughing Mr. Friday, Sara, and Betty. Fred is really enjoying their company, if a bit lost in the conversation.

MR. FRIDAY

Ed Sullivan didn't even want the boy on his show until Steve trounced him in the ratings. Of course it's all so vulgar.

SARA FRIDAY
I don't know. I enjoyed it.

MR. FRIDAY
Sara! You didn't!

SARA FRIDAY
Is that bad?!

BETTY ABERLIN
Did you think Elvis' performance
was vulgar, Fred? The gyrations and
the thrusting?

FRED
I'm not sure I know whom you're
talking about, Miss Aberlin.

BETTY ABERLIN
Elvis.

Fred has a blank look.

BETTY ABERLIN
Elvis Presley? You don't know
Elvis? From his TV performance?

FRED
I don't watch television. But he
sounds wonderful.

They laugh. Fred smiles.

MR. FRIDAY
Unbelievable.

FRED
May I show you something?

BETTY ABERLIN
I would absolutely love to see what
you have to show us, Fred.

Fred lines up the beer and ginger ale bottles. He pours a little bit of his ginger ale into them so they're at various levels. Then begins blowing over their mouths. It's hard to hear anything.

FRED
It's much too loud in here.

BETTY ABERLIN
Wait! Wait.

INT. LADIES' BATHROOM - BAR

They've arranged the five bottles atop the closed toilet seat. Fred blows on the bottles. He makes a little tune.

FRED

Does Elvis's music sound anything like that?

MR. FRIDAY

Precisely.

FRED

Would you like to try, Sara?

SARA FRIDAY

Oh, I'm no musician.

FRED

We all have music inside of us.

MR. FRIDAY

Go on, Sara.

SARA FRIDAY

Fine.

She blows on the beer bottles. At first there's no discernible tune.

SARA FRIDAY

See! I told you.

FRED

It's okay.

Betty watches the way Fred interacts with her. His patience. His kindness. Sara sighs. Then proceeds. Her tune turns into something: simple, but lovely.

FRED

Do it again, won't you?

SARA FRIDAY

I think once is enough--

FRED

I'd like to sing a song.

MR. FRIDAY

Dear Sara! You'll do it, won't you?

She sighs. As she blows into the bottles, Fred starts to compose a song, making up the words as he goes along.

FRED

*There are many ways to say I love
you. There are many ways to say I
care about you.*

As they compose it, Sara of course hits a wrong note or two, but Fred just smiles the whole way. Betty watches.

FRED

Many ways,

BETTY ABERLIN

Many ways...

FRED

Many ways to say I...

BETTY ABERLIN

love...

FRED

You.

Fred smiles at Betty.

BETTY ABERLIN

You are a dummy aren't you.

Mr. Friday sees the look she gives Fred. And has a hard time concealing his displeasure.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

Fred strolls home, happily humming his new tune under his breath.

MCFEELY (O.S.)

Speedy delivery!

Fred looks up to spot McFeely rapping on a tenement door across the street, postal bag slung over her shoulder.

FRED

Ms. McFeely! Hello, it's Fred!

MCFEELY

Shit.

FRED

*I think you may have accidentally
walked off with my camera! How's
your ankle?*

McFeely sprints off.

FRED
It must be better.

Fred steps across the street, nearly getting RUN OVER by an ASIAN MAN tugging a cart behind him.

ASIAN MAN
Watch it!

Fred, startled and disoriented, hurries across the street. A young man and woman in dressed in black laugh from their stoop, faces illuminated by the ember of their cigarettes.

He glances down the alley. But McFeely is gone. Instead he's face to face with the flat-nosed alcoholic Scottish masturbator. Who's doing his thing. It's terrifying.

When, suddenly, the man turns into a large, DUCK-BILLED PLATYPUS PUPPET wearing eyeglasses. They stand in a BRIGHT FIELD, with the gentle jazz piano in the background.

DUCK-BILLED PLATYPUS PUPPET
The feck you lookin' at?

Fred blinks and the man turns back to a normal Scottish alcoholic diddling himself.

FRED
Excuse me.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Fred sits on his bed. He looks at the cat puppet from the dumpster.

FRED
Hello.

The cat puppet doesn't move. Fred puts the puppet on his hand. Tries out a number of voices for it.

CAT PUPPET
(normal voice)
Hello.
(deep voice)
Hello.
(Southern voice)
Hello.

Fred looks at the puppet.

INT. NBC OPERA THEATER STUDIO - DAY

Fred walks into work to find the stage being dismantled, the fake columns being toted out on crew's shoulders. Musicians mill about, whispering to one another. Fred spots Betty.

FRED

Oh boy, what's the next opera?

BETTY ABERLIN

Nothing. Raymond got word from above. We're done.

FRED

Done?

BETTY ABERLIN

We just weren't getting ratings. Half the orchestra's being let go.

Fred watches in horror as teamsters dismantle his dream. A couple large men prepare to remove a baroque chaise longue from the stage.

FRED

No!

Fred runs up and throws himself on the couch. The large men look down at him.

FRED

I'm sorry.

They glance at each other, then tip the couch, sending Fred to the floor. Betty approaches.

BETTY ABERLIN

Can I sit next to you?

FRED

Yes.

FRED

I like it here, Miss Aberlin.

BETTY ABERLIN

I like it too.

Raymond Friday approaches from behind them. Notices Betty's hand rubbing Fred's back.

FRED

Do you think I'll have to go?

BETTY ABERLIN
I don't know.

MR. FRIDAY
I'm afraid you do, Fred. Now be a
good man, would you, and get on up.

BETTY ABERLIN
Raymond--

MR. FRIDAY
I wish it didn't have to be this
way. I'll be glad to write you a
letter of reference.

FRED
Thank you, Mr. Friday. You're a
nice man.

Friday shakes Fred's hand.

BETTY ABERLIN
There isn't anything--?

Friday takes Betty by the hand.

MR. FRIDAY
You just be thankful for your
extraordinary gift.

She pulls her hand away. Peter Herman Adler walks by in the
opposite direction, headed out the door with dignity.

FRED
Mr. Adler? Where are you going?

PETER HERMAN ADLER
Home. I'm going home, Fred. Far
away from this Gomorrah.

FRED
I'm happy to have learned from you,
Mr. Adler.

Peter Herman Adler nods.

MR. FRIDAY
Peter...

Peter Herman Adler spits at Friday's feet. Then barks in
Austrian at a group of elderly women, who tote boxes of
musical scores and Adler's personal items.

PETER HERMAN ADLER
(in Austrian)
Hurry it up.

EXT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

Fred walks toward the exit, his heart broken. Miss Elaine Fairchilde looks up over her glasses. Unconsciously playing with the brooch her grandmother gave her.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Fred. You're to report to room
1132.

FRED
1132?

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Kate Smith's dressing room.

INT. KATE SMITH'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Fred sits on Kate Smith's couch. She's the large, cherubic woman who watched Fred from the wings.

KATE SMITH
I saw the way you took care of that
weenie of a conductor.

FRED
Mr. Adler.

KATE SMITH
That's right. Not enough people
take their responsibilities
seriously enough.

She examines him closely.

KATE SMITH
Tell me, Fred. Are you now or have
you ever been a communist?

FRED
I don't remember being a communist.

KATE SMITH
(whispers)
A homosexual?

FRED
I'm sorry?

KATE SMITH

Do you have... unnatural thoughts
about men?

FRED

One time I thought a man was a
platypus.

KATE SMITH

(smiles)

You love this country and
everything she stands for?

FRED

What does she stand for, Kate?

KATE SMITH

Precisely. It's hard to say
anymore. The Reds'll turn us into a
wasteland if they have their way.

FRED

Red can be a very angry color. I
prefer blue.

KATE SMITH

That's right, Fred. That's right.
Red on its own, without the blue,
without the white, well... then we
might as well've let the Nazis won.

FRED

I'm glad they didn't. Mendel is a
Jew, I think.

KATE SMITH

Is he in corporate?

FRED

I'm not sure.

Kate smiles. Satisfied.

KATE SMITH

You think ya could floor manage,
Fred?

INT. KATE SMITH SHOW STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Kate's set - lavishly decorated with painted backdrops -is
bustling with activity. DOROTHY DANIEL, a no-nonsense but
kind producer, approaches, shaking Fred's hand.

DOROTHY DANIEL
Fred. Dorothy Daniel. Kate's
producer.

FRED
It's nice to meet--

But she's already walking in the opposite direction.

DOROTHY DANIEL
Out on the floor, you're my eyes,
ears, and mouth, you understand?

Fred hurries after her. Betty spots him from where the trimmed-down orchestra settles into place. She leaps to her feet, joining a none-too-pleased Raymond Friday.

FRED
Mr. Friday! Miss Aberlin! Miss
Smith offered me a job!

BETTY ABERLIN
That's terrific, Fred!

She hugs him.

MR. FRIDAY
Delightful.

CONTROL ROOM

DOROTHY DANIEL
You get an order from the director
in the control room.

Fred slides a a sound mixer's knob.

DOROTHY DANIEL
Don't touch that.

STUDIO FLOOR

DOROTHY DANIEL (O.S.)
Out to the crew on the studio
floor.

Fred looks at the busy floor, mystified and nervous.

DOROTHY DANIEL (O.S.)
And vice versa.

Fred dashes up to the director, handing him a script page.

DOROTHY DANIEL

You spot anything funny on stage,
you tell someone. You see Kate
forgetting a line, you tell
someone. Got it?

FRED

Ah... maybe I should just...

DOROTHY DANIEL

Fred. Relax. You're gonna be great.

She slaps him on the back. Fred turns to the studio, which suddenly has an AUDIENCE.

Betty's there in the orchestra with her violin. Mr. Friday's standing by the director's chair, smoking his pipe.

We're in the midst of a LIVE PERFORMANCE of Kate Smith singing her show-stopper, "God Bless America." A kinescope records the performance directly from the monitor.

The Director whispers something to Fred, who's dressed, as always, in his suit and church shoes. Fred dashes around to pass the message along to a lighting guy, his shoes CLACKING the whole way.

While he's back there, Fred notices that from Kate's POV, smoke from Mr. Friday's pipe keeps wafting up toward her, causing her eyes to burn.

Fred runs back to Mr. Friday.

FRED

(whispers)

Could you please put out your pipe,
Mr. Friday?

MR. FRIDAY

You're joking.

FRED

I'm sorry. But I think the smoke is
getting in Miss Smith's eyes.

Not pleased, he places his thumb over the pipe's chamber and inhales, extinguishing it.

Relieved, Kate Smith continues her song.

EXT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a beautiful home in Connecticut. Crickets chirp. Stars twinkle. A train of taxis pull into the driveway.

INT. LIVING ROOM, RAYMOND FRIDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The above-the-line crew and their guests raise their glasses to Kate Smith.

MR. FRIDAY

Kate, your voice is a beacon from the heavens, full of angelic timbre.

KATE SMITH

Raymond, your voice is full of shit. But it does make me so very happy.

The crew laughs.

MR. FRIDAY

And so very rich, I might add.

KATE SMITH

If I don't choke to death from that goddam pipe of yours.

Everybody clinks glasses. Betty touching hers to Fred's.

BETTY ABERLIN

You like dancing?

FRED

Yes, Miss Aberlin, I like dancing very much.

LATER THAT NIGHT

As a dance number plays on the record player, Mr. Friday dances elegantly with his wife, Sara.

MR. FRIDAY

Betty, I'll have to show you that new painting.

SARA FRIDAY

The Philip Guston? Oh you'll love it, Betty.

Next to them, Betty tries her best not to laugh as Fred dances. He's not much of a dancer, but he is having a great time.

BETTY ABERLIN

Later, if that's all right. Right now I need to make sure Fred's not in the middle of a stroke.

MR. FRIDAY

You may be too late.

FRED

I'd like to see your painting. You've got a beautiful home, Mr. and Mrs. Friday.

SARA FRIDAY

Thank you, Fred! You're welcome to stop by any time.

FRED

Thank you, I will.

MR. FRIDAY

Jesus, what have you gotten us into, Sara?

SARA FRIDAY

Raymond!

MR. FRIDAY

I'm kidding! Fred knows that.

Fred smiles at Mr. Friday. A very drunk Kate Smith hobbles over to Fred, leaning on producer Dorothy Daniel's shoulder.

KATE SMITH

There he is. There's the greatest floor manager there is in the whole entire world.

Betty looks at Fred. Impressed he's already made such an impression.

FRED

(still dancing)

Hello, Kate!

KATE SMITH

Fred Rogers.

FRED

Thank you for sharing your voice
with us.

KATE SMITH

You talk funny. You sure you're not
a homo, Fred?

DOROTHY DANIEL

Okay, Kate, let's get you home.

KATE SMITH

Ah, put a sock in it ya bull dyke.

Dorothy shakes his her head, like you would to a child.

KATE SMITH

Kidding. I love ya.

Kate gives Dorothy a big kiss on the lips.

DOROTHY DANIEL

Okay.

KATE SMITH

You loved that, devil woman.

Dorothy leads her off.

KATE SMITH

Wait. Wait. Jesus. Fred. Fred
Rogers. Wear a goddamn quieter pair
of shoes, would ya? I can hear ya
clunkin all over the set like a
runaway horse.

Fred looks down at his dress shoes.

FRED

But my mother bought me these
shoes.

He looks up. Betty and Kate explode with laughter at him.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred. I'll get some shoes with you.

FRED

Okay.

MR. FRIDAY

Excuse me. I think I'll lie down
for a minute.

SARA FRIDAY
Raymond? Don't you feel well?

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Fred, in his pajamas, opens the grandfather clock's face and puts the cat puppet inside there, inside a little bed he's made of a dish towel.

FRED
Goodnight... Daniel. Daniel Cat.
Yes, that's a nice name.

Fred lies in bed. Turns off the light.

A quiet moment in the dark.

DANIEL CAT (O.S.)
Goodnight, Fred.

EXT. BETTY'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's a nice building in mid-town. Betty smiles as she steps outside and greets Fred. She's dressed casually in black pants and a large sweater.

BETTY ABERLIN
Howdy!

But Fred, wearing his suit, looks nervous for his date.

FRED
Hello.

Betty immediately senses it.

BETTY ABERLIN
Well don't you look handsome.

FRED
Thank you.

EXT. FIRST AVENUE, MID-TOWN - DAY

Fred and Betty approach the large shoe store. Fred's still nervous.

BETTY ABERLIN
Do you know the city very well?

FRED

No.

BETTY ABERLIN

Oh.

Fred sees a SCARED BOY who looks terrified as his MOTHER tries to coax him into the store.

SCARED BOY

Can't I just wear socks?!

BOY'S MOTHER

No, Frederick, you can't just wear socks.

SCARED BOY

They're nice socks!

Fred relaxes a little. Addresses the boy:

FRED

It's scary going new places, isn't it?

The boy ducks behind his mother's leg.

FRED

Lots of us are afraid of things.
Even adults. Though we sometimes try not to show it.

BETTY ABERLIN

Shall we try going in together, all four of us?

SCARED BOY

Okay.

Betty smiles. The mother is slightly weirded out.

INT. SHOE STORE - DAY

Fred looks at the rows and rows of shoes.

FRED

Oh my.

Fred walks along the aisles, admiring them.

BETTY ABERLIN

See? It's not so bad.

FRED

Have you ever seen anything so wonderful, Miss Aberlin?!

BETTY ABERLIN

Well, I don't know about wonderful.

FRED

A man or a woman imagined each of these. Then other men and women worked together, making the leather and canvas and rubber, threading the laces through the eyelets just so, making sure they're all sturdy and handsome and lined up in nice rows.

BETTY ABERLIN

Well, I suppose if you put it that way...

SCARED BOY

It'd be neat to visit a shoe factory.

FRED

It would be neat!

The boy's mother smiles at Fred. Betty holds up a pair of navy-blue canvas Topsiders.

BETTY ABERLIN

These are smart!

Fred palms a sneaker, admiring its lightness.

FRED

Oh yes. Yes they are.

EXT. FIRST AVENUE, MID-TOWN - DAY

Betty looks at Fred. Who struts along in his suit and his new canvas boat shoes.

FRED

I feel like the belle of the ball.

She smiles. Fred takes her hand.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Gray clouds creep along the sky as they approach the park's Alice In Wonderland sculpture. Alice sits on a toadstool, reaching toward the White Rabbit's pocket watch. Children climb on the sculpture.

FRED

Goodness.

BETTY ABERLIN

It's brand new.

They read the sculpture's inscription (from Lewis Carroll's "The Jabberwocky").

BETTY ABERLIN

"'Twas brillig, and the slithy
toves did gyre and gimble in the
wabe." Would you like to climb this
sculpture?

FRED

I don't know if we're supposed to.

BETTY ABERLIN

Of course we're supposed to.

She does. Fred follows, joining some children.

BETTY ABERLIN

You know why I like this sculpture,
Fred?

FRED

Why, Miss Aberlin?

BETTY ABERLIN

Because among the sculptures of
philanthropists and generals on
horseback and other quote-unquote
"great men," they've got the good
sense to pay homage to a young girl
who takes drugs and tells the
monarchy to fuck off with a
flamingo.

A breeze blows through the park's trees, rippling the pond in the melancholy New York autumn.

FRED

Miss Aberlin, look!

Fred spots two coffee tins connected by a string. He hurries off the sculpture, over to them.

BETTY ABERLIN
Where are you going?

FRED
Some children must have left this!

BETTY ABERLIN
What is it?

FRED
Come here. Hold it up to your ear.
(she does)
If the string is very straight and
tight, it will work best.

He quickly runs as far as the string will allow.

FRED
Hello, Miss Aberlin! Over.

BETTY ABERLIN
Hello Fred! Over.

FRED
Can you hear me? Over?

BETTY ABERLIN
Yes I can! Over.

FRED
It works! It really works!

BETTY ABERLIN
Let's talk some more. Over.

FRED
I'm not sure I have anything to
say.

BETTY ABERLIN
I know what you mean.

FRED
But I'm happy our walkie talkie
works.

BETTY ABERLIN
I'm happy you asked me to spend
time with you today.

Fred looks at his shoes. Then at the sky.

FRED

How's the weather over there?

BETTY ABERLIN

Well. It looks kind of cloudy. Very
cloudy.

FRED

I think my head just got a drop of
rain on it. Over.

A drizzle begins to fall.

BETTY ABERLIN

Me too. Over. I can go under this
bridge here. Over.

Betty hurries under a little footbridge, tugging Fred along
with her via the string. But he keeps at a distance.

FRED

I can stand under my umbrella here.
Over.

Fred pulls an umbrella from his jacket. Pops it above his
head. Betty smiles at him.

FRED

Did you always want to play violin
for television, Miss Aberlin? Over.

BETTY ABERLIN

Oh it's been a dream of mine since
I first picked up the violin. You
know I majored in commercial
jingles at Juilliard.

The rain keeps coming down.

FRED

You're upset with me.

BETTY ABERLIN

Not with you. I always imagined
myself playing with the Royal
Concertgebouw, The Berlin
Philharmonic. My God, the New York
Phil's right at my doorstep.
Touring the world. Bringing them
this gift.

FRED

You do have a gift.

BETTY ABERLIN
Not my gift. Beethoven's.
Shostakovich's. I thought we might
have something with the *Opera*
Theater, is all.

FRED
You still could. I've listened to
you play, Miss Aberlin. Really
listened.

BETTY ABERLIN
Fred, will you please stop calling
me Miss Aberlin?

FRED
I'm sorry, Gertrude.

She laughs. Fred smiles.

FRED
I don't know why I said that.

BETTY ABERLIN
I'm very warm and dry. Over. But
not over. I want to be with you.

FRED
Okay.

Betty dashes through the rain to stand under Fred's umbrella.

FRED
Hello.

BETTY ABERLIN
It's really nice to be here alone
with you in the rain.

FRED
Let's not be in a hurry to go
anywhere else.

They stand under the umbrella.

FRED
Ugga mugga, Betty.

BETTY ABERLIN
I'm sorry?

FRED
Ugga mugga. It means... I don't
know what it means.

BETTY ABERLIN
Ugga mugga, Fred.

She rubs her nose against his in an Eskimo kiss. He glances up at the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is spinning like a merry-go-round.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Intertwined on Fred's mattress on the floor, Betty takes Fred's virginity.

FRED
Oh dear.

The cat puppet lays slack against the glass window of the grandfather clock.... as night turns to DAY.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

"It's A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood" launches with a jazzy roll. Fred is up and at 'em, singing.

FRED
*It's a beautiful day in this
neighborhood, a beautiful day for a
neighbor...*

He brushes his teeth, humming the tune in progress.

BETTY ABERLIN
Fred! Jesus Christ! It's 4 in the morning!

FRED
Isn't it wonderful? There's a whole day ahead of us! A whole life ahead of us!

Betty rolls over, covering her head with her pillow. Fred steps on his bathroom scale.

FRED
1-4-3. Betty?

But she's back asleep.

She wakes up some time later to find Fred kneeling beside the bed, eyes closed, murmuring in prayer.

INT. YMCA SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Fred stands on the cement lip before the men's lane. Betty by the women's. An ELDERLY MAN waves from the pool.

ELDERLY MAN
Morning, Fred!

FRED
Good morning, Jerry!

BETTY ABERLIN
Is it cold?

FRED
Oh yes.

Fred drops his robe. Betty covers her mouth as he dives into the pool. She looks at the attendant nearby.

BETTY ABERLIN
You don't have a policy about that?

ATTENDANT
We're working on it.

SMASH TO:

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

Fish, swimming through the aquarium. They pass Fred, whose face is pressed to the glass, beside a girl in a wheelchair.

Fred's in his suit and boat shoes. Dorothy Daniel, Kate Smith's producer, hurries around the corner to summon him.

DOROTHY DANIEL
Fred--

But she stops to watch the interaction. The girl is wearing the same visitor's badge as a tour group down the hall.

FRED
What do you think they think about all day long, Sophie?

GIRL IN WHEELCHAIR
That they're stuck in there?

FRED
Maybe. Or maybe they think how lucky they are that they never have to swim very far to find a friend.

GIRL IN WHEELCHAIR
Maybe....

The girl's MOTHER calls her.

WHEELCHAIR GIRL'S MOTHER
Sophie! Come on!

GIRL IN WHEELCHAIR
(wheeling off)
Goodbye, Fred.

FRED
Look at you go. Your mom and dad
must be really proud of you.

The girl looks up at Fred and smiles. Dorothy watches.

INT. KATE SMITH SHOW STAGE - DAY

Fred stands on stage, testing a mic. Behind him, a set: nighttime-themed. Kate Smith stands backstage, warming up her voice as Dorothy Daniel walks her through some notes.

FRED
Test test test test test. I like
you. I like you.

He smiles at Betty in the orchestra. Who gives him a quick, slightly awkward wave.

Fred catches something out of the corner of his eye. It's his OWN IMAGE, up on the monitor. He looks at it more closely. Tilts his head. Watches himself tilt his head. He smiles. He's on TV. Sort of.

MR. FRIDAY
Let's give this a shot, shall we?

FRED
Mr. Friday! My show. I know what
I'd like it to be.

Dorothy looks up.

FRED
A children's show.

MR. FRIDAY
(doesn't care)
Terrific.

DIRECTOR
Places!

Fred hurries off stage. As he dashes by Kate, he points at his shoes like *see how quiet these are?* She gives him a thumbs up.

The director nods to the orchestra's conductor, who launches his musicians into "If It Were Up To Me." Kate emerges from stage left, walking out toward the audience's empty seats.

KATE SMITH
If it were up to me, I'd bring the moon and stars to you...

With that, a group of men and women in glittery costumes DANGLE DOWN from the ceiling, singing background.

BACKING SINGERS
To you....

Fred looks up at them, his face giving away his displeasure. Kate notices.

INT. THE RAINBOW ROOM - NIGHT

Men and women in their evening finest (most of the men in dinner jackets, some in suits) dine in the exclusive Art Deco restaurant.

Mr. Friday, Betty, Dorothy Daniel, and Kate Smith raise their cocktails. Fred raises his water.

MR. FRIDAY
It is one of life's greatest pleasure to treat your friends to the finest things.

They clink glasses, cheering.

FRED
I do wish Sara could join us, Mr. Friday. I feel bad that Betty and I are the only lovers here.

Betty chokes on her drink.

KATE SMITH
No shit! 'Atta boy!

BETTY ABERLIN
Fred! Jesus.

FRED

Yes, Betty?

BETTY ABERLIN

I'm sorry, I didn't...

Mr. Friday's smiles at Betty, trying and failing to conceal his anger.

MR. FRIDAY

Unfortunately Sara's not been feeling well.

FRED

I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Friday.

KATE SMITH

Having you as a husband'd make anyone sick, Ray.

Dorothy Daniels laughs. Fred is confused.

FRED

Are you sick, Mr. Friday?

A WAITER approaches.

KATE SMITH

Oh very!

WAITER

Gentlemen. Ladies. Are we ready to order?

BETTY ABERLIN

I think I'll stick to cocktails.

Mr. Friday places a hand on Betty's thigh. She shifts.

KATE SMITH

Excellent decision.

WAITER

Very good. Ma'am?

DOROTHY DANIEL

The Dover sole for me.

WAITER

Excellent. Miss Smith?

KATE SMITH

Jumbo shrimp cocktail. Roast veal chop.

(MORE)

KATE SMITH (cont'd)
And let's go ahead and get two of
those, to be on the safe side.

WAITER
Wonderful choice, and may I say, I
watched your performance on televisi--

KATE SMITH
Yeah yeah yeah, swell.

Fred frowns.

WAITER
A thousand apologies. I was out of
line. Sir?

MR. FRIDAY
I shall have the terrine of pâté de
foie gras with gala apples,
followed by the baby rock lobster
armoricaine.

WAITER
Impeccable. And you, sir?

FRED
Oh my. How can I choose? Everything
looks so tasty.

WAITER
Indeed.

FRED
Would it be okay if I ordered
something that's not on the menu.

WAITER
Of course.

MR. FRIDAY
Ah. A gourmand. Fred, the Oysters
Rockefeller are to die for.

FRED
Oh my. May I have a sandwich on
wheat toast with lettuce, cheese,
tomatoes, and mayonnaise?

CUT TO:

LATER IN THEIR MEAL

Fred chews on his sandwich. Betty still looks like she'd like to disappear.

KATE SMITH

Fred. Tell me. Whaddya think of the new number?

FRED

Oh the song is just wonderful.

MR. FRIDAY

See?

KATE SMITH

What about the performance?

FRED

I don't like it one bit.

MR. FRIDAY

Fred! Dammit, Kate this is what I was saying--

KATE SMITH

It's okay. Go on.

FRED

I don't think you need all those people on wires, Miss Smith, or all those fancy camera tricks. It's confusing. Your voice is all that matters.

DOROTHY DANIEL

You see, Raymond?

MR. FRIDAY

Of course. Of course! It's always been entirely about your voice. You know that.

KATE SMITH

Mmm-hmm. Goddamit Fred, that sandwich looks just delicious.

FRED

Would you like a bite?

KATE SMITH

Yes I would.

Fred holds out his sandwich. Kate takes a bite while it's still in his hand.

FRED
I like sharing with you, Kate.

KATE SMITH
Me too, Fred.

Mr. Friday's pressing down so hard with his fork that his plate SHATTERS.

WAITER
Sir, I'm terribly sorry. I'll replace your plate right away.

MR. FRIDAY
I would hope so!

DOROTHY DANIEL
Everything okay, Ray?

MR. FRIDAY
I'm fine. I'm fine.

KATE SMITH
(re: the sandwich)
And waiter, let's get a few more of these.

EXT. SIDEWALK OUTSIDE OF THE RAINBOW ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Friday shuts the door to Kate's town car. She and Dorothy sit inside.

KATE SMITH
You sure you don't want a lift?

MR. FRIDAY
I could use some fresh air.

KATE SMITH
Fred, Betty? Need a ride to your lover's den?

FRED
No, thank you.

BETTY ABERLIN
There's no lover's den.

FRED
It's more of a mattress on the
floor, really.

Mr. Friday tips his hat to them.

MR. FRIDAY
Goodnight.

He walks off into the night, leaving Fred and Betty.

FRED
Would you like to look at the stars
and name one thing we're thankful
for on every star we see?

BETTY ABERLIN
No, Fred. I'd like to be alone.

FRED
Alone? But, Betty... we're going to
spend the rest of our lives
together.

BETTY ABERLIN
Excuse me?

FRED
That's what people who love each
other do.

BETTY ABERLIN
"Love?"

FRED
Betty, we fornicated.

BETTY ABERLIN
Oh my God. Please don't use that
word.

FRED
I thought you liked me.

BETTY ABERLIN
I did. I mean I do. But it's not
that simple. I wish it were. Now I
think I'll say goodnight.

She walks off. Fred watches her go.

FRED
Goodnight.

INT. KATE SMITH SHOW STAGE - NIGHT

It's dark in there for the night. Until we hear the CLUNK CLUNK CLUNK of the stage lights flipping on, one by one.

Fred turns on a camera. And the kinescope that records each performance. This is it. This is what he wanted. His own "show."

He stands on the stage, before the cameras, looking at himself on a monitor.

He waves, tentatively. Watches himself wave back.

He feigns the enthusiasm of the hosted programs of the day.

FRED
Howdy, Jim!

He does a little tap dance up on stage.

He pretends to shoot a gun like a cowboy.

Nothing.

He walks over and turns off the camera.

INT. NBC HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Fred walks along the studio halls, admiring the photographs: FDR first's broadcast, the 1947 World Series, Gian Carlo Menotti's first opera ever written for television, *Amahl and the Night Visitor*. An early pantheon of television.

Fred hears an odd gasp from down the hallway.

INT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Raymond Friday is wedged on a couch in his office between a rather large prostitute and Collette, his secretary.

Friday's dressed in a baby's bonnet and silk bathrobe fashioned into a makeshift diaper, sucking his thumb.

MR. FRIDAY
Baby's hungwy, Mommy.

LARGE PROSTITUTE
Have you been a good boy or a bad boy, Raymond?

MR. FRIDAY

Baaaad...

COLLETTTE

Very bad.

FRED (O.S.)

It's fun to pretend, isn't it?

Then look up to see Fred standing above them. The prostitute covers herself up.

PROSTITUTE

Shit!

COLLETTTE

Hello, Fred.

FRED

Good evening, Collette. You look pretty.

MR. FRIDAY

Well, go on then.

FRED

I'm sorry?

MR. FRIDAY

Tell me what a bastard I am. What a disappointment I am to the innocent Fred Rogers. Judge me.

FRED

Why would I judge you?

Mr. Friday leaps to his feet, charging Fred.

MR. FRIDAY

You son of a bitch!

He's got Fred on the ground, punching him in the face.

COLLETTTE

Raymond!

The prostitute slips out the door.

MR. FRIDAY

Don't pull this "holier than thou" bullshit with me, Fred! Tell me what you really think!

(MORE)

MR. FRIDAY (cont'd)
That you're some pure man of
integrity while I'm living, walking
fecal matter. Say it! Say it!

Fred, bloodied, speaks.

FRED
I don't think you're fecal matter,
Mr. Friday.

This infuriates Mr. Friday.

MR. FRIDAY
Get out!

Fred looks up at Mr. Friday. Who's turned into the PUPPET of KING FRIDAY - the somewhat ridiculous and asinine monarch. Fred, bloodied, starts laughing.

KING FRIDAY PUPPET
Out!

FRED
I'm sorry.

He waves goodbye to Collette. Who is now a somewhat sultry COLLETTE THE TIGER puppet.

INT. TROLLEY (MOVING) - NIGHT

Fred smiles, not quite realizing how much he's bleeding. Men and women avoid him. In the background, we hear a plaintive, jazzy version of "It's you I like."

FRED
Good evening.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

Fred, stumbles along the lower east side streets. He's following the jazz tune, which is growing louder. People keep their distance.

FRED
This song. It's wonderful!

A CHILD hurries out to him.

CHILD
What song?!

FRED

I don't know what it's called.

But the child's mother pulls her back.

INT. FIVE SPOT CAFE - NIGHT

This is where the jazz is coming from. Among the mostly black crowd, a disheveled young Jewish man in thick eyeglasses, corduroy shirt and wool sweater struggles for words as he writes neatly in his notebook:

ALLEN GINSBERG

I saw... I saw...

In walks Fred. Looking like hell.

ALLEN GINSBERG

...the best minds of my generation
destroyed by madness, starving
hysterical naked...

Fred walks past him and approaches the stage. Where Johnny Costa - the same man Fred saw play uptown at the Algonquian - plays what will become a seminal Mr. Rogers tune, "It's You I Like."

FRED

I like your music very much.

Johnny nods at Fred.

Fred falls over. Nobody really seems to notice. The rest of the club continues in fast motion as Fred lies there.

Until a pair of hairy-knuckled hands drags him off.

MCFEELY (O.S.)

*I'm taking care of you, Taking good
care of you... How's the rest of it
go?*

Fred finds himself beneath a rather beautiful McFeely, surrounded by light. She holds a compress to his head.

FRED

Hm?

MCFEELY

Your song. The one you sang to me.

(sings)

I'm taking care of you...

FRED

*Taking good care of you. For once I
was very little too...*

MCFEELY

Now I take care of you.

Fred drifts off.

INT. MCFEELY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Fred wakes up the next morning as he sees a large, tattooed sailor leaving McFeely's apartment, buttoning up his pants.

His eyes drift around McFeely's apartment. It's small. But lovely. A couple wigs draped atop empty wine bottles. Scuffed women's shoes. Coins from around the world. A framed photo of an actress. Fred reaches for it. Looks closely.

MCFEELY

You're up.

McFeely walks in with a bottle of gin, wearing a kimono.

FRED

(re: the photo)

She's beautiful.

MCFEELY

Ingrid Bergman. A woman. An artist.
Not like that dwarf slut, Veronica
Lake.

FRED

Miss McFeely! That's not a very
friendly thing to say.

MCFEELY

You're right.

FRED

Thank you for taking care of me.

MCFEELY

Let's not make a habit of it.

McFeely takes a swig. Fred sits up. Winces.

FRED

Have you got any aspirin, Miss
McFeely?

MCFEELY

No. No I don't, Fred. But I've got something much better.

MUSIC CUE: "Location" by Freelance Whales.

EXT. ROOFTOP OF MCFEELY'S BUILDING - DAY

A hatch on the rooftop lifts. Out pops McFeely in a dress, scarf, and large sunglasses. Fred, nervous, follows closely behind, the mail sack slung over his shoulder.

MCFEELY

Don't you ever change out of that suit, Fred?

Fred looks down at himself. McFeely reaches in the sack. She lights a joint. Takes a puff. Hands it to Fred.

FRED

I don't smoke cigarettes.

MCFEELY

It's not a cigarette.

Fred hesitates.

MCFEELY

Trust me.

Fred holds it. Takes a tentative puff. Coughs.

MCFEELY

Breathe deep.

Fred does. McFeely smiles.

They look out over the city. Watching the life below.

A brother and sister dressed as pirates stick their head out the window on the floor below them.

FRED

Hello.

The girl waves her curved sword at Fred, piratically. Fred giggles. The boy pulls her back inside.

McFeely reaches in her mail sack. Holds out Fred's camera.

MCFEELY

I think you misplaced this.

FRED

I must have. Thank you.

Fred holds the camera to his eye. We see the city through its lens. He snaps a photo. Fred turns slowly to McFeely, still looking through the camera.

FRED

I feel very good.

MCFEELY

It's called being high.

Fred SNAPS a photo. And suddenly they're in an ALLEYWAY.

Fred takes a marker and scribbles on a paper grocery bag: **Hi.**

FRED

"Hi."

McFeely giggles. So does Fred. McFeely guides Fred into the scruffy beauty of the Lower East Side. The parts that terrified him previously. And still do, though less so.

-They dance with prostitutes. Fred takes a picture.

-They play with a bunch of Chinese children out in the street. Fred picks up a discarded vacuum tube. Fred dangles it from his nose, then drapes a towel over his head and stomps around like he's an elephant.

-They sing and play guitar with men camped out beneath a bridge.

-They admire the rainbow inside a fire hydrant's blasting water.

-They eat Ethiopian (vegetarian) food with their hands. Shoving the delicious beans and dough into each others mouths, trying not to spit as they laugh.

-They pass a beautiful black woman, Ella Jenkins, on the street. She places both her thumbs against her lips and pretends like she's blowing up an imaginary balloon.

ELLA JENKINS

Blow the balloon.

She blows into her thumbs.

ELLA JENKINS

Blow the balloon.

She and Fred and McFeely blow into their thumbs.

ELLA JENKINS
Blow and blow and blow and blow...

CLAP, as she smacks her hands together, startling Fred and McFeely as the imaginary balloon POPS.

ELLA JENKINS
Where did my balloon go?

Fred sees the bright red latex scraps of a popped balloon on the street.

INT. MCFEELY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

McFeely walks in with a glass of gin. Finds Fred looking out the window.

MCFEELY
What's the matter?

FRED
I think I did a bad thing, Miss McFeely.

MCFEELY
What?

FRED
Smoking that.

McFeely smiles. Not cruelly. Genuinely.

MCFEELY
Did you like it?

Fred looks up at McFeely. A little afraid of the answer.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Fred retrieves the cat puppet from the grandfather clock. Puts it on his hand. And speaks through him.

FRED
Hello, Daniel Cat.

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER
Mmmmm. Hello.

FRED

Wait a second. You're not a cat at all, are you?

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER

No. I'm not a cat.

FRED

What are you, then?

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER

A tiger.

FRED

You seem awfully shy for a tiger.

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER

Yeah. Sometimes I get angry, though. And I worry I might do bad things.

FRED

Well. We all get angry sometimes.

Fred looks up to find his landlady Henrietta standing there. Eyes narrowed.

FRED

Hello, Henrietta.

HENRIETTA

Hello, Fred.

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER

Hello, Henrietta.

She looks at Daniel.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

Fred, still banged up from the incident in Mr. Friday's office, walks into NBC. Nervous. His camera is back around his neck.

FRED

Miss Elaine Fairchilde. May I hug you?

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

I don't think that's a good idea--

Fred hugs her. She's stiff. Then relaxes.

FRED

Your grandmother must have been a
terrific hugger.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

She was.

INT. NBC HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Fred passes Betty in the hallway.

FRED

Good morning, Betty.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred.

He takes a photo of her.

BETTY ABERLIN

My God. What happened to your face?

Mr. Friday stands watching. Filled with jealousy as Betty holds a hand to Fred's cheek.

FRED

Would you like to go on a picnic?

BETTY ABERLIN

What?

FRED

We could make sandwiches.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred...

MR. FRIDAY

Fred? Join me in my office, would you?

FRED

Okay. Excuse me, Betty.

They pass Collette's desk. A NEW SECRETARY is in her place.

INT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Raymond's office has turned entirely into a castle. Stone walls. Flags. But with some artifacts from his real office still there -- the liquor cabinet, the desk, the cello.

MR. FRIDAY
Fred. Have a seat.

Fred looks at the couch where Mr. Friday did his thing with Collette and the prostitute. Not really wanting to sit there.

Mr. Friday clears his throat and proceeds with Fred standing.

MR. FRIDAY
I'm taking you off Kate's show,
Fred.

FRED
I understand.

Mr. Friday smiles, having come up with something he knows that's even worse than firing Fred.

MR. FRIDAY
After all, I can't have one of my
producers wasting his time as a
floor manager.

FRED
Producer?

MR. FRIDAY
We're launching something new. *Your Hit Parade*. A countdown show of the week's seven best sellers. It'll be marvelous. Big numbers. Funny costumes. Lots of set changes. We've already got Dorothy Collins, Russell Arms, Snooky Lanson...

FRED
I don't think I'm ready to be a
producer, Mr. Friday.

MR. FRIDAY
I'd be concerned if you did. Don't worry, you'll have a great team working with you.

FRED
I think I'd much rather stay with Miss Smith, if that's all right.

Mr. Friday hands Fred a check.

FRED
What's this?

MR. FRIDAY

You don't think producers get paid
the same as floor managers, do you?

Fred looks at the check.

FRED

I couldn't--

He looks up at Friday. Who is now a large King Friday puppet.

KING FRIDAY

Fred. You want to work in
television, yes? Maybe have your
own show one day?

FRED

Yes...

KING FRIDAY

Lucky Strike really believes in
this one. Don't let me down.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - DAY

Fred finds himself in the control room of their new show,
with the other show heads. On a darkened stage, we see the
silhouette of a HOUSEWIFE.

Fred watches Betty in the orchestra.

DIRECTOR

We're live in 3, 2, 1..

A sweaty ANNOUNCER leans into a microphone, speaking a mile a
minute.

ANNOUNCER

Richard Hudnut, makers of Quick,
the new home permanent with a 10-
minute waving lotion, in
cosponsorship with Lucky Strike,
the cigarette that tastes better,
cleaner, fresher, smoother
presents: *Your Hit Parade!*

Spotlights burst on the housewife, who dances with joy as we
hear the jingle for Richard Hudnut's hair product. Betty
leads the violin section in the tune.

On stage, the housewife is joined by others. The audience laughs as a black milkman "slips" on the floor when he sees the main housewife's beautiful hair. Raymond Friday nods, happy to see it's going well so far.

Fred rubs his eyes.

But it's not over yet. The Announcer comes back in.

ANNOUNCER

Tonight, Richard Hudnut presents *Your Hit Parade*. The top tunes all over America as determined by Your Hit Parade survey, which checks the best sellers on sheet music and phonograph records, the songs most heard on the air, and most played on the automatic coin machines. An accurate, authentic tabulation of America's taste in popular music. *Your Hit Parade*.

The Richard Hudnut jingle/live commercial picks up yet again as the housewives do their choreographed dance...

INT. 92ND STREET Y - NIGHT

...In stark contrast to the modern dance premiere of Alvin Ailey's "Blues Suite." The 13 dancers, all friends from the emerging modern-dance scene, working for free, moving in ways that are brand new.

Fred and McFeely are in the small audience. Enraptured.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - LATER THAT NIGHT

Fred and McFeely walks along the streets after the performance.

FRED

They moved like bodies that didn't have bodies.

MCFEELY

Wasn't it marvelous?

They pass a group of pre-teen girls teasing a friend for her frizzy hair in front of a display for Richard Hudnut's Quick.

GIRL'S FRIENDS

You need that!

FRIZZY HAIR GIRL

Oh yeah?

GIRL'S FRIENDS

Yeah! 'Cause ya look like ya got
pubes growing out of your head!...
EWWWW!

FRIZZY HAIR GIRL

Sluts!

McFeely sees their interaction bothers Fred. She shouts:

MCFEELY

Ladies! Exercise some dignity,
would you?

McFeely approaches them.

MCFEELY

This is just what *they* want us to
do.

The girls take one look at McFeely and run off screaming.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

McFeely lights a joint in Fred's mouth as

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(pre-lap)

Off we go to survey song number
3...

INT. HALLWAY, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - THE NEXT MORNING

Fred peeks out his door to find one of Mendel and Henrietta's cats staring at him. He stares back at it, red-eyed.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(pre-lap)

The back woods

He looks up to find Henrietta looking at him.

HENRIETTA

It's Wednesday.

FRED

Is that right?

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
(pre-lap)
As Virginia Gibson and The Hit
Paraders try their hand at magic
with the number 3 song.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - DAY

An elaborate "woods" set. Frenetic brass. Lots of cuts. A woman dressed as a witch.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
"Witch Doctor," brought to you by
Lucky Strike. Lucky Strike: it's
toasted.

VIRGINIA GIBSON
*I told the witch doctor I was in
love with you...*

The audience goes nuts.

INT. FRED'S NEW OFFICE - NBC - LATER THAT DAY

It's a small, undecorated office. Fred rubs his eyes, looking at set design concepts for the next show. Sips a glass of water. Suddenly he hears a CRASH.

He hurries to the hallway to find a lamp on its side. Kate Smith, in sunglasses and a scarf, storms down the hall. Dorothy Daniel, her producer, hurries behind her with her personal items.

FRED
Dorothy--

DOROTHY DANIEL
We're canceled.

FRED
Oh no.

KATE SMITH
Oh yes.

FRED
Where are you going?

KATE SMITH
The nearest drinking establishment.

Mr. Friday hurries around the corner.

MR. FRIDAY
Very dignified, Kate!

KATE SMITH
Kiss my dignified anus, Ray.

Kate topples the fish tank. CRASH. Fred gasps. The receptionist Miss Elaine Fairchilde covers her mouth.

DOROTHY DANIEL
(to Fred)
I'll call you.

Fred scoops up the fish, dropping them into his water glass.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - NIGHT

A group of 8-year-olds pass around Lucky Strike cigarettes. Fred, horrified, walks past.

8 YEAR OLD BOY
You know, Frank Gifford smokes
Luckies.

BOY'S FRIEND
They just taste better.

8 YEAR OLD BOY
They're toasted.

Fred turns around.

FRED
May I?

8 YEAR OLD BOY
It'll cost a nickle.

Fred digs in his pocket. Hands it over.

8 YEAR OLD BOY
Just one.

Fred grabs the box of cigarettes from the boy and runs off down the street.

8 YEAR OLD BOY
Hey!

Fred tears up the cigarettes and throws them in the trash.

8 YEAR OLD BOY
Son of a bitch!

INT. BETTY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Betty reads a gossip magazine, drinking a hefty glass of wine. She hears a frantic knocking at the door. Opens it.

FRED

Hello. You've got a neat apartment.

It is neat. A piano. A record player. Tons of records. Betty seems oddly cheery.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred! How are you?

FRED

I'm feeling very sad. And like you've been avoiding me. And that you hate my guts.

BETTY ABERLIN

Okay, wow, that's a lot of feelings. Come on in. Would you like a Coke?

FRED

No, thank you. I'd like to play you a song.

Fred sits at the piano.

BETTY ABERLIN

All right--

He lays out a little piece of paper with hand-written lyrics.

FRED

It's called "It's you I like."

(plays)

It's you I like--

Betty quickly drops the happy facade.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred.

FRED

Shush, please.

(sings)

It's not the things you wear, it's not the way you do your hair--

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred, stop. Now.

Fred looks up at her.

BETTY ABERLIN

Let's get this straight. It's not me you like. You think just because I play violin and we had a nice time at the park that I'm some angel. Well I'm not. I'm as fucked up as the rest of the world.

FRED

I don't think you're... screwed up.

BETTY ABERLIN

Oh right. Playing commercial jingles for a living. Having an... why am I even arguing with you?

FRED

What about your dream? Of playing with a symphony? It's not too late. You could keep trying. Boston. Berlin. I could go with you.

BETTY ABERLIN

It's called growing up, Fred. This is who I am.

FRED

There's so much more to you, Betty. I can see it.

BETTY ABERLIN

You don't see the real me.

Fred quietly offers:

FRED

What if you don't see the real you?

BETTY ABERLIN

You should leave. Please don't come back.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - MORNING

Fred's watch BEEPS. 4:45am. He turns it off. Rolls over.

LATER THAT MORNING

Fred weighs himself. Looking awful.

FRED
One-four...

But then his eyes widen. As he realizes he weighs 145.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - DAY

Fred walks to work in a bit of a haze. He stops, hearing music he's never heard before coming from a corner.

He approaches OTHA TURNER, an American fife blues player who looks like if an Egyptian mummy came to life and started playing the blues.

It's Otha blowing his fife, a wild-haired woman banging on a snare drum, and a fat man keeping the beat on a bass drum, there on the sidewalk.

It's some of the most raw and beautiful music you'll hear.

OTHA AND HIS BAND
*Glory glory, hallelujah, when I lay
my burden down... Glory glory,
hallelujah, when I lay my burden
down.*

FRED
Oh my goodness.

INT. NBC HALLWAYS - DAY

The fife and drum blues band marches funereally through the NBC hallways. Heads pop out of offices. Ms. Elaine Fairchilde recoils at the wild-haired woman's toothless smile.

OTHA AND HIS BAND
*Burden down, Lord, burden down,
Lord, when I lay my burden down...*

Betty Aberlin shakes her head at Fred. Mr. Friday rounds the corner.

MR. FRIDAY
Fred. A word.

INT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Raymond sits at his desk.

FRED

It's... there's so much there. You do hear it, don't you, Mr. Friday?

REVEAL: Otha and his band, who stand there. Not as awkward for them as it is for Mr. Friday, as Otha explores Friday's stuffed birds.

MR. FRIDAY

There is a lot there, yes. But it's not our... brand, you understand?

FRED

I'm very sorry to have taken up your time, Mr. Turner.

OTHA TURNER

(almost incomprehensible)

S'aright.

FRED

I think your music is very special.

Otha shrugs. He tucks a stuffed mockingbird in his coat pocket.

OTHA TURNER

Les be onowa way den.

MR. FRIDAY

(re: his stuffed bird)

Mr. Turner, if you'd just...

FWACK, the wild-haired drummer bangs her snare, jolting Friday. They shuffle out, leaving Friday and Fred.

MR. FRIDAY

What, precisely, do you think you're doing?

FRED

I used to run home every day after school to listen to *Vic and Sade*. Do you remember *Vic and Sade*? That old radio program?

MR. FRIDAY

The, ah, accountant and his wife...

FRED

That's right. And their adopted son, going about their lives, having some fun with one another. And for fifteen minutes a day

We get just the briefest FLASHBACK to the opening scene... of Fred's parents sitting with the reverend at the seminary...

FRED (O.S.)
No matter what...

...of Fred's father's thick, calloused HAND.

FRED
You could go to "the small house"

MR. FRIDAY
(finishing the tagline)
"... halfway up in the next block."

FRED
When you hired me, I told you I thought we could do better than people being cruel to one another for entertainment. I'm beginning to believe I was wrong.

Friday smiles. Not angry. More like when a parent finally has to confirm it to a kid that Santa isn't real.

MR. FRIDAY
Do you know how much the cost of a television has gone down over the past two years? 22 percent. Five years ago, our audience was different. Affluent, cultured. Today... well today the *majority* of Americans own a television.

FRED
You don't think they deserve good television? All this confusing cutting, all these ads about needing to look prettier or more sophisticated, all this distraction... it makes a person feel very alone, doesn't it?

MR. FRIDAY
A content audience doesn't buy cigarettes, Fred. Or vacuum cleaners.

FRED
I see.

Friday sighs. About to admit something he doesn't share with most people.

MR. FRIDAY

Early on, I tried to do a
television adaptation of *Ulysses*.
James Joyce, not Homer.

Fred nods.

MR. FRIDAY

I spent my whole development budget
on that damn teleplay, trying to
crack one of the greatest works of
literature of our time. Trying to
put art on the air. And you know
what happened? I nearly put 200
people out of work. 200 carpenters,
cameramen, script girls, craft
services, musicians, actors...
regular people, good people.
Because of my vanity.

Friday takes a sip of scotch.

MR. FRIDAY

My responsibility, our
responsibility, Fred, is not to
decide what's good or bad. Our job
is to keep our sponsors happy while
figuring out what the audience
wants and giving it to them.
Because once you start deciding
what's good for them and what's
not, then you're putting yourself
in somebody's shoes you ought not
to.

Mr. Friday points up at the ceiling. Fred looks up.

EXT. UPTOWN - NIGHT

Fred and McFeely walk out of an art gallery.

MCFEELY

Well you're no fun tonight.

FRED

I'm sorry, Miss McFeely.

They pass a slightly drunk MAN IN A SUIT, who's out with a
couple of his friends.

MAN IN SUIT

Nice skirt, brownie.

His friends chuckle as they continue along. Only McFeely doesn't let it go.

MCFEELY
Excuse me?

MAN IN SUIT
You people make me sick.

FRED
That's an awfully mean thing to say. I think if you got to know her, you and Miss McFeely would get along grandly. Just grandly.

MAN IN SUIT
Right. You and your "friend" are gonna bring down this country.

MCFEELY
And how, precisely, is that?

MAN IN SUIT
You lavenders in the government. The commies'll blackmail you and turn you against us.

MCFEELY
Well, my dear, I hate to break it to you, but I am neither a government employee, a homosexual, nor a man.

MAN IN SUIT
Is that right? What do you say we take a look then?

MCFEELY
Pardon me?

He lifts up McFeely's dress.

FRED
Hey! That's not very--

McFeely PUNCHES the guy, breaking his nose. He crumbles to the ground as a crowd gathers.

MAN IN SUIT
Faggot!

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

McFeely trembles.

MCFEELY

I shouldn't have hit him.

Fred nods. McFeely tears up. Fred hugs her. Holds her close.

FRED

I wish I could show it to you, Miss McFeely.

MCFEELY

Show me what?

FRED

Where I go sometimes.

MCFEELY

Tell me what it's like.

FRED

It's very warm. And blue.

Suddenly, a bright sun shines outside through his multicolored curtains. Gentle jazz piano shimmers in the background.

FRED

And the people there. Well, they're not people exactly. But they're nice.

We see the various PUPPETS Fred's encountered so far (King Friday, X the Owl, Henrietta Pussycat, Daniel Tiger), talking and laughing and hugging in Fred's apartment.

MCFEELY

It sounds perfect.

FRED

It's not perfect. But it's a place where people aren't trying to be perfect. They're just happy to be with one another.

In a blink, it's gone.

FRED

I don't think I'm explaining right.

McFeely wipes her eyes.

MCFEELY
What is it called?

FRED
It's called... The Neighborhood.

MCFEELY
I'd like to go there some time.

FRED
I'd like that too.

LATER THAT NIGHT

As McFeely sleeps in Fred's bed, Fred rummages through her mail bag, pocketing whatever pills he can. Whispers:

FRED
I'm sorry.

INT. FRED'S NEW OFFICE - NBC - DAY

Fred washes down some pills with ginger ale. He looks out his office window to see a puppet neighborhood below.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - DAY

Fred and the other producers, along with Mr. Friday, watch rehearsal from the audience seats.

Fred gives some encouraging feedback to a singer. She nods. But then Mr. Friday nixes it.

INT. FRED'S NEW OFFICE - DAY

Fred sees Betty walk past, in her coat. A few seconds later, Raymond Friday passes in his.

Fred sits there for a minute. Then gathers his things.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Fred, alone, wanders through Central Park. Slows as he approaches the Alice in Wonderland sculptures.

Where he sees Mr Friday kissing Betty.

Fred laughs as it turns into the King Friday puppet kissing Betty. They turn to him.

BETTY ABERLIN
Oh my God. Fred!

King Friday turns toward Fred, slowly. A nightmare.

BETTY ABERLIN
Wait!

She tries to go to him, but Friday holds her arm.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET

Fred stands alone on the stage, before the cameras and kinescope, watching himself on a monitor.

He looks at the stage around him. There's white picket fence surrounding a little house.

FRED
Well well! Good evening, folks!

He tries a new approach.

FRED
Have I got a show for you!

Finally, he just tries:

FRED
Hello, neighbor.

He opens the fence's gate.

FRED
How are you feeling today? Is that right? You know, friends sometime promise "I'll see after school" or "I'll play with your tomorrow." But then they sometimes forget. That's just something that happens every once in a while. It doesn't make you any less special. Anyway, come on in. I'll show you around!

He opens the door to the set house. Steps inside.

To find there's nothing on the other side but the cables and detritus of backstage.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - DAY

They rehearse "They Yellow Rose Of Texas." A confederate flag draped over the white picket fence. Men in Civil War uniforms, women on drums.

MR. FRIDAY

Perhaps we ought to have a few negroes escape to freedom in the background. What do you think, Fred?

Mr. Friday squints pasts the stage lights into darkness.

DIRECTOR

I don't think Fred's in today, Ray.

MR. FRIDAY

I see.

Betty looks up from the orchestra. Mr. Friday won't meet her eyes.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Fred, eyes heavy and red, sits cross-legged on the floor in his underwear. He gnaws on a large sheet of peanut brittle.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Fred stares at the broken grandfather clock, at the Daniel Tiger puppet inside the glass. Not hearing the KNOCKS.

The door opens to reveal Dorothy Daniel.

DOROTHY DANIEL

Fred. Jesus.

FRED

Dorothy! Hello! My goodness! Can I offer you some peanut brittle?

DOROTHY DANIEL

No, thank you.

FRED

Why I haven't seen you since Kate's show.

DOROTHY DANIEL

I'm in Pittsburgh now.

Fred cocks his head. Definitely on drugs.

FRED
Am I in Pittsburgh?

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Dorothy drinks coffee. Fred adds about a gallon of honey to his camomile tea, watching it swirls into the mug.

FRED
I'm from Pittsburgh, you know.
Outside of it.

DOROTHY DANIEL
I do know that, yes.

FRED
Are you going to divinity school?

DOROTHY DANIEL
What? No. I'm building a station.
From the ground up. WQED.

FRED
In Pittsburgh?

DOROTHY DANIEL
First of its kind. Community-
sponsored. That means no ads, no
overly elaborate sets, nobody from
corporate telling us what we can
and can't do.

FRED
What about Kate?

DOROTHY DANIEL
Kate's... getting into cooking,
believe it or not.

FRED
Well that all sounds wonderful. I'm
very happy for you, Dorothy.

DOROTHY DANIEL
I want you to help.

Fred looks up at her.

FRED
You need someone to get you coffee?

DOROTHY DANIEL
I need someone to be my program
director.

FRED
Program director.

DOROTHY DANIEL
Someone to help me decide what
should and shouldn't go on the air.
Maybe you could even create
something of your own.

FRED
Me?

DOROTHY DANIEL
You.

FRED
Why?

DOROTHY DANIEL
I like the way you see things.

Fred sips his tea. Thinks about it.

FRED
Dorothy, I'm so touched that you
would ask me.

DOROTHY DANIEL
But you're saying no.

EXT. HALLWAY, FRED'S APARTMENT BUIDLING - DAY

Mendel and Henrietta stand outside Fred's apartment, Mendel
timidly knocks on Fred's door.

HENRIETTA
Afraid you'll chip a nail?

MENDEL
Fred? You in there?

HENRIETTA
You're two weeks late on rent!

Nothing. They look at each other. Henrietta pulls out her key
and opens the door.

HENRIETTA
Your cock better not be anywhere
near that cat puppet.

MENDEL
Henrietta!

HENRIETTA
What?! We don't know what he does
with that thing.

She turns the key. They open the door to find Fred passed out on the floor breathing very slowly, his skin a faint tint of blue. A bottle of McFeely's pills empty beside him.

HENRIETTA
Call an ambulance.

MENDEL
And narc him out?

Henrietta nods as they launch into action mode.

INT. LOBBY, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

Henrietta is on the payphone.

HENRIETTA
Yeah, I need a delivery. Speedy as
possible.

MOMENTS LATER

McFeely hurries in.

MCFEELY
Are you fine people running low?

As soon as McFeely sees Henrietta and Mendel's faces:

MCFEELY
What's wrong?

INT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Fred strolls on the grass of the heavenly Neighborhood of his dreams. He walks past a giant oak tree, where Henrietta Pussycat and X the Owl live.

HENRIETTA PUSSYCAT
Meow meow to the Neighborhood, Meow
Rogers.

FRED

Thank you, Henrietta Pussycat.

X THE OWL

Oh boy, we do so like having
guests.

FRED

Actually X, I think I'll be here
for good.

X THE OWL

Terrific!

Fred approaches King's Friday's CASTLE.

KING FRIDAY

Fred Rogers, I presume?

FRED

Correct as always, Your Majesty.

QUEEN SARA

It is so wonderful to have you
here.

KING FRIDAY

Indeed, it is the great pleasure of
a king to welcome a new subject.

FRED

You mean you're not angry with me?

KING FRIDAY

Angry with you? Nonsense!

FRED

Good. I'm not angry with you
either.

QUEEN SARAH

Do come by later.

KING FRIDAY

We shall throw a welcome feast the
likes of which the Neighborhood has
never imagined!

FRED

I can't wait.

Fred walks up to a grandfather clock without hands. Yet its pendulum still sways. Perched inside the clock is Daniel Striped Tiger.

FRED

Daniel?

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER

Welcome home--

Suddenly Fred sees his own face inside the clock:

DANIEL TIGER / FRED

--Mr. Rogers.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Fred blinks into consciousness, thanks to the syringe full of naloxone McFeely just injected into his butt cheek. Henrietta and Mendel stand by, concerned but relieved he's okay.

FRED

I was there, Miss McFeely. I was in
the Neighborhood.

And now McFeely can allow herself to be furious.

MCFEELY

(re: the pills)

Where the fuck did you get these?

FRED

Speedy delivery...

MCFEELY

You son of a bitch!

She slaps Fred, who slumps over. She storms out. Fred watches her go.

HENRIETTA

You're late on rent.

MENDEL

Reti!

HENRIETTA

Well he is!

MENDEL

Not now!

FRED

It's okay. I'm very sorry,
Henrietta. I'll forward you a check
right now.

Fred reaches in a drawer, where there's a stack of his undeposited paychecks. He signs the back of one. Writes:

FRED
This ought to take care of the next year. "Pay to the order of Henrietta Pussycat."

HENRIETTA
Excuse me?

She looks at the amount of the check.

HENRIETTA
Oh my God.

MENDEL
Fred. What's going on with you? I don't want to find you dead in here.

Fred lies back down on the floor.

FRED
You sure are a friendly Owl.

Mendel looks at Henrietta, concerned.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - DAY

Fred, eyes red, watches from the control room during a live broadcast. On stage, a female singer leads a rendition of "Tweedlee Dee" from inside a giant cuckoo clock setpiece, men and women in lederhosen circling around her.

Mr. Friday introduces Fred to TWO MEN in suits.

MR. FRIDAY
Ah. Fred, I'd like you to introduce to Andy Foster and Jason Cotes from Lucky Strike. Fred here is one of our producers.

Fred shakes their hands.

FRED
How do you do?

LUCKY STRIKE EXECUTIVE
You guys are doing terrific work.
Just terrific.

FRED

Oh dear.

MR. FRIDAY

What is it?

FRED

The tiger.

Fred stares at the stage (this time we won't actually see the tiger he sees).

LUCKY STRIKE EXECUTIVE

Pardon me?

Fred hurries out of the control room. The Lucky Strike men look at Friday for an explanation.

MR. FRIDAY

It's a, ah, showbiz term. Excuse me, won't you?

Fred hurries past security guards, who nod as he passes. Suddenly he's on dashing onto the stage.

FRED

Look out!

Betty Aberlin looks up from the orchestra.

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred! Get down from there!

The singer keeps going, looking into the spotlight for what the hell to do as Fred circles one of the guys in lederhosen.

INT. FRED'S PARENT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fred's father's eyes widen as he sees his son on television.

FRED'S FATHER

Nancy...

His wife calls from the kitchen.

FRED'S MOTHER (O.S.)

Hold your horses! The cherries jubilee are just--

FRED'S FATHER

Fred's on TV.

She walks in with a plate of cherries jubilee. Which CRASHES to the floor.

INT. YOUR HIT PARADE SET - CONTINUOUS

FEMALE SINGER

*Tweedlee tweedlee tweedlee dum /
You're as sweet as bubble gum.*

FRED

Stay. Perfectly. Still.

The audience isn't sure whether to laugh or be alarmed.

DIRECTOR

What the fuck is he doing? Get him down from there!

Fred lunges. The man jumps out of the way and Fred CRASHES a hole in the giant cuckoo clock.

FEMALE SINGER

*Mercy mercy pudding pie / You've got something that money can't buy /
Tweedlee tweedlee tweedlee dum.*

Fred gets stuck in the clock set, flailing and screaming. Security yanks him out, trying to restrain him.

FRED

He's right behind you!

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Fred is restrained in his hospital bed. A television in the corner of the room plays another silly show.

Fred looks up at the sound of footsteps.

FRED

Betty!

BETTY ABERLIN

Fred. How are you feeling?

FRED

I'm happy now that you're here.

She smiles, sadly.

FRED

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be?

BETTY ABERLIN

This really isn't the time.

FRED

Anywhere at all.

BETTY ABERLIN

It's embarrassing.

FRED

It's okay.

BETTY ABERLIN

The Eiffel Tower.

FRED

What's embarrassing about the Eiffel Tower? Were you mean to someone there?

BETTY ABERLIN

No, it's... it's just so cliche. It's so corny.

FRED

(confused)

Corny.

BETTY ABERLIN

Yeah, corny, you know. Like a piece of music is corny. Something that's so good or nice, that it's obvious.

FRED

So corny is something you like, but are embarrassed to say you like.

Betty just looks at Fred.

FRED

Am I in trouble?

BETTY ABERLIN

I don't know.

Fred nods.

BETTY ABERLIN

You have to learn to control it, Fred.

FRED
Control it?

BETTY ABERLIN
Please.

She kisses him on the forehead, then leaves.

INT. RAYMOND FRIDAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Raymond sits in his darkened office. He watches Kinescopes of Your Hit Parade performances.... when suddenly he sees Fred playing around on the set, projected onto his wall.

FRED
(on kinescope)
Hello, neighbor. How are you
feeling today? You know, friends
sometime promise "I'll see after
school" or "I'll play with your
tomorrow." But then they sometimes
forget.

Raymond lights his pipe.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - DAY

-Fred wakes up.

-Weights himself: 139.

-Attempts to pray. But the words won't come.

-Swims, nude, in the YMCA lanes. Watching puppets swim by in the opposite direction.

-Walks home. The entire east village keeps shifting into a grotesque puppet land. The alcoholic man morphs into Dr. Bill Platypus.

-Fred stands on the ledge outside of his apartment, looking over the puppet world below. He closes his eyes. Takes a breath.

And STEPS off the ledge...

When a hand yanks him back inside. Fred finds Mr. Friday standing over him, panting.

FRED
Mr. Friday! Can I offer you some
peanut brittle?

MR. FRIDAY
Thank you, I'll pass.

FRED
What brings you to my neighborhood?

MR. FRIDAY
I wanted to give you something.

He hands over a worn copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

FRED
Is this--

MR. FRIDAY
The book. The one I tried to adapt.
I think you'll like it.

FRED
Am I fired?

MR. FRIDAY
Certainly.

FRED
Thank you.

MR. FRIDAY
You're welcome.

Friday walks to the door. He turns.

MR. FRIDAY
Fred?

FRED
Yes, Mr. Friday?

MR. FRIDAY
You think James Joyce would have
given a damn what people like me
told him he could or could not do?

Fred looks up at Friday.

INT. MCFEELY'S APARTMENT - DAY

McFeely opens her door. Peeved.

MCFEELY
Well look what the cat dragged in--

Fred's in tears. McFeely immediately softens.

MCFEELY

What happened?

FRED

I tried... I thought I could go
there. To the Neighborhood.

She takes Fred in her arms.

MCFEELY

You don't have to go away, you
know. We could have it here. It
could be just as nice.

Fred nods.

MCFEELY

I have something I'd like to give
you.

McFeely reaches into her closet. Retrieves a CARDIGAN.

MCFEELY

It belonged to... a friend of mine.
I think it will look good on you.

FRED

It's beautiful. May I?

MCFEELY

Please.

Fred takes off his suit jacket. And slips on the cardigan. He
smiles.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

McFeely sleeps beside Fred. Not necessarily sexually. Snaps
awake as she hears:

FRED

The tiger!

Fred is edged up against the headboard. Terror in his eyes.

MCFEELY

There's no tiger!

FRED

He's right there! His eyes! They're
glowing!

McFeely trudges out of bed over to the grandfather clock.

FRED
Miss McFeely, look out!

MCFEELY
Here! Here's your tiger!

He jams the Daniel Tiger puppet on Fred's hand. And the "real" tiger is instantly gone.

MCFEELY
See? Nothing to be scared off, ya goddam weirdo. Now let me sleep!

Fred looks at the Daniel Tiger puppet in awe. Then up at the room around him. Fred speaks to McFeely through Daniel Tiger.

DANIEL STRIPED TIGER
Sorry, Miss McFeely.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fred reads *Ulysses*. Absorbed.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - DAY

Fred goes out for a stroll during a blistery December day, wearing a heavy coat over his slacks and cardigan (which he'll wear for the rest of the movie, except for when he's not wearing anything).

He tentatively approaches the flat-nosed alcoholic from across the street. Who's turned into the Bill Platypus puppet.

FRED
Hello, neighbor.

DR. BILL PLATYPUS
Take another step, I'll bite your fucking ear off.

Fred pulls out a sketch book. Begins to sketch Dr. Platypus.

FRED
Dr. Bill Platypus, shame on you!

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - DAY

Fred holds up a Dr. Bill Platypus puppet in progress he's constructing. Shows it to McFeely. He speaks through it:

DR. BILL PLATYPUS PUPPET
I'm sorry I cursed at you, Fred.
But sometimes I think nobody knows
what it feels like to be a
platypus.

MCFEELY
I know the feeling, Dr. Bill.

FRED
Me too.

There's a knocking at the door. Fred looks up to see Mendel standing there.

INT. MENDEL & HENRIETTA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fred and McFeely eat spaghetti dinner with Mendel and Henrietta.

MCFEELY
This is marvelous.

Fred's a little quiet. A little nervous. A cat stares at him.

FRED
May I feed your cat a spaghetti?

HENRIETTA
You may.

Henrietta smiles into her gin.

FRED
Mendel, have you ever read a book
called *Ulysses*?

MENDEL
Have I read *Ulysses*? "Come up,
Kinch! Come up, you fearful
Jesuit!"

HENRIETTA
Jesus, here we go.

MENDEL
What?

MCFEELY
Now now, let's not say anything
we're going to--

HENRIETTA
You and your books!

MENDEL
You and your gin!

HENRIETTA
What about my gin?!

She flips the table over.

MENDEL
Oh terrific.

MCFEELY
I guess dinner's over.

Fred, not sure what to do, feeds the cat another spaghetti from off the floor.

MENDEL
You know, Fred, it's just if she'd just stop being so damn excitable for a second and really listen to me.

HENRIETTA
"Excitable." Ha.

FRED
You don't like how passionate Henrietta is.

MENDEL
Well, I'm not saying I want a dullard for a wife.

HENRIETTA
How could I not be excitable? All day long he's with those goddam books.

FRED
He spends the whole day looking at books and not spending any time with you.

HENRIETTA
Not *all* day.

FRED
But you two don't love each other anymore.

MENDEL
Of course we love each other.

HENRIETTA
Of course.

MCFEELY
Shall we clean up?

They do.

FRED
I've found sometimes it's easier to
wish other people would be
different to make up the fact that
we really wish we were different.

Mendel and Henrietta look at one another over the mess on the floor.

FRED
Like for instance, when I'm scared,
sometimes Mendel you turn into a
owl.

MENDEL
Excuse me?

HENRIETTA
Fred, I hope you won't take this
the wrong way. But sometimes I
can't tell if you're Jesus
incarnate or a mentally handicapped
person in a cardigan.

MCFEELY
Who says he can't be both?

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - DAY

A Christmas tree lot is set up in an abandoned lot. Fred approaches the FEMALE JUNKIE nearby, who turns into DONKEY HODIE.

DONKEY HODIE
Gimme a dollar, I'll suck your
cock.

Fred raises his eyebrows.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - DAY

We see the junkie lady on her knees.

FRED
Yes. That's nice.

REVEAL: She's cutting out strips of fabric to finish the Donkey Hodie puppet.

FRED
Won't she make a nice puppet?

Fred erases a bit of a drawing with his pencil.

FRED
Do you ever wonder where the erased part goes?

She looks at the eraser. Then points to the little smudges of graphite on the rubber.

JUNKIE LADY
It goes right here.

Fred nods.

INT. MENDEL & HENRIETTA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's decorated for the holidays. Mendel and Henrietta, and McFeely and Fred slow dance to jazz, several empty cocktails and stuffed ashtrays around them.

HENRIETTA
So you mean to tell me this was all over a girl?

MENDEL
Retti!

FRED
It's okay. It was a lot of things. But yes, I did like Betty a lot. I still do.

MCFEELY
Fool.

HENRIETTA
That's so romantic! Mendel would never kill himself over me.

MENDEL

You'll do it for me first.

HENRIETTA

That's right.

MENDEL

You want my advice, Fred? From what you've told us, the best thing you can do is just let her be.

FRED

Let her be?

HENRIETTA

He's right.

MENDEL

No! Did you just say what I thought you said?

HENRIETTA

Don't let it go to your head.

(to Fred)

You've let this broad know how much you care about her. If she's too dumb to accept it, then fuck her.

FRED

I wish you wouldn't say that about Betty.

HENRIETTA

Well it's the truth.

MCFEELY

You've got plenty of people who love you right here.

Fred smiles. He leans his head on McFeely's shoulder as they dance.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT, THE OAK TREE APARTMENTS - DAY

MUSIC CUE: The Pogues' "Fairytale of New York."

Snow falls on the city.

McFeely, Fred, Henrietta, and Mendel unjam the SOFA from the apartment stairwell.

They prop it up in Fred's apartment, upside down. Then, begin constructing a curtain around it. Turning it into a makeshift puppet stage.

Under the Pogues' song, we watch Fred put on a puppet show with many of the puppets that will soon be on his show: King Friday, Henrietta Pussycat, X the Owl, Miss Elaine Fairchilde, Donkey Hodie, Dr. Bill Platypus.

As the puppet stage's curtains close, Fred's friends clap for him. Fred pops up from behind the "stage," smiling. He takes a bow.

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Fred wakes up on his mattress. He glances at his wristwatch: 4:44am. Seconds later, the watch timer BEEPS as it becomes 4:45. McFeely rolls over.

Fred walks into his bathroom. Steps on the scale. 143 lbs. He smiles. Back where he belongs.

Fred looks over. McFeely is in her kimono. But no wig. No makeup. Fred smiles at the man who stands before him.

FRED
Good morning.

MCFEELY
You must think I look ghastly.

FRED
You know what 1-4-3 is in sign language?

McFeely shakes her head.

FRED
One finger for "I"; four fingers for "love"; three fingers for "you." Isn't that wonderful?

McFeely nods.

FRED
1-4-3. I love you. Just the way you are.

McFeely is close to tears.

MCFEELY

Other people need to hear that,
Fred. Before it's too late for them
to believe it.

Fred nods. He hugs McFeely.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, NBC OFFICES - DAY

Fred heads out of the NBC office, wearing his khakis, cardigan, and sneakers. He carries a small box of his stuff.

FRED

Thank you for letting me get my
things.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

The puppet show. The children loved
it.

FRED

I'm glad.

Miss Fairchilde removes her brooch.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

I'd like you to have this.

FRED

I couldn't--

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

Fred.

FRED

Goodbye, Miss Fairchilde.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

Goodbye, Fred.

Fred nods. Then pauses at the door.

FRED

You know, If you don't mind, I
think I'd prefer it if you called
me Mr. Rogers.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE

Okay, Mr. Rogers.

He nods, walks off. She rolls her eyes.

MISS ELAINE FAIRCHILDE
Well la-di-da.

INT. TROLLEY (MOVING) - DAY

Fred sits on the trolley. His suitcase at his feet.

SMASH TO:

INT. MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD SET - DAY

A toy trolley making its journey through the very first set of *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*.

We start inside the living room. A stoplight blinking yellow. The "Hi" piece of paper, framed. The aquarium.

Fred stands "outside" his set door. Takes a deep breath. Dorothy Daniel gives him the signal.

We hear the famous theme, as the first episode begins.

And in he goes:

FRED
(sings)
*It's a beautiful day in the
neighborhood.*

CUT TO:

A KNOCKING at the set door.

FRED
I wonder who that could be.

MCFEELY (O.S.)
Speedy delivery!

Fred opens the door to reveal a mustached McFeely, dressed as a man in a postal worker's uniform.

FRED
Why it's Mr. McFeely! How are you today?

MCFEELY
Oh, tootin' along, Fred!

CUT TO:

We follow the trolley from the living room set through to the Neighborhood Of Make Believe, where we get a puppet show on a massive scale. And as it happens, we INTERCUT with the people who've impacted Fred's life, watching the show on TV:

-Mr. McFeely (he is one of the few characters in the show's history to pass between Mr. Rogers' "real" world and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe) delivers a package to X the Owl and Henrietta in the Great Oak tree.

-As Henrietta and Mendel watch Fred and McFeely, Henrietta overjoyed. Mendel turns and picks up a book. She flips out and starts attacking him with the remote control as he shields his face.

-King Friday's Castle, a Friday and Sara puppet interacting.

-Raymond watches Fred's show intently, his face close to the kinescope projection in his office. REVEAL: he is bent over his desk. Getting spanked by his new secretary and grinning.

-The Museum-Go-Round, with Lady Elaine Fairchilde.

-Elaine watches from her desk, rolling her eyes and smiling.

-Daniel Striped Tiger strolling along beside a lovely actress portraying "Betty Aberlin," beside the Eiffel Tower.

-The real Betty Aberlin watches the television as she zips up a suitcase. Her violin in its travel case. On the table: an invitation to audition for the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

CUT TO:

Mr. Rogers feeds his fish, signaling the end of the show.

FRED

You know, television neighbor,
everybody makes mistakes. You may
want to think about the people who
love you and take care of you, even
if you do make mistakes once in a
while. Even if they do too.

Fred smiles.

FRED

It's such a good feeling to know
that people can love us, even when
we're not perfect. I like you just
the way you are.

He launches into "It's You I Like." And as we INTERCUT between Fred's set and the following shots, we watch Fred getting OLDER using ACTUAL FOOTAGE. His hair graying. His set getting slightly more elaborate. Yet, in the most important way, he remains exactly the same.

FRED

It's you I like. It's not the things you wear. It's not the way you do your hair --

INT. AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS - DAY

The NBC custodian and his children watch TV, the man pointing enthusiastically at the guy who dug a raggedy puppet out of his dumpster. His children are enraptured. As are children in MANY HOUSEHOLDS over 30 YEARS: the Chinese kids from down the block. White kids. Black kids. Hispanic. Handicapped. Everybody.

FRED

But it's you I like. The way you are right now. The way down deep inside you. Not the things that hide you. Not your toys -- They're just beside you. But it's you I like, Every part of you. Your skin, your eyes, your feelings, whether old or new. I hope that you'll remember, even when you're feeling blue, that it's you I like, it's you yourself, it's you. It's you I like.

INT. MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD SET (FIRST BROADCAST) - DAY

Fred turns to the CAMERA, back on his first broadcast.

FRED

I do like you. I'm so lucky to have you as my neighbor.

Fred nods at Johnny Costa, his on-set pianist, who launches into "It's Such A Good Feeling," signaling the end of his show.

FRED

It's such a good feeling to know you're alive....

EXT. PUBLIC SWIMMING POOL (PITTSBURGH) - DAY

Fred approaches the lip of a public swimming pool. Pulls on his goggles. Prepares to drop his robe when he sees:

BETTY ABERLIN (O.S.)
Hello, Fred.

Betty, standing there in a robe.

FRED
Betty?

BETTY ABERLIN
I'm supposed to be in Budapest. For an audition.

FRED
Budapest? That's wonderful! But what are you doing here?

BETTY ABERLIN
I asked the cab to stop so I could pick up a croissant. And I didn't get back in.

FRED
You hurt my feelings very badly.

BETTY ABERLIN
I know. But I've got to start somewhere, don't I. So here I am.

FRED
Betty I--

Betty drops her robe. The old folks in the pool gasp.

FRED
Oh my.

BETTY ABERLIN
Let's go swimming.

INT. MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD SET - DAY

We end in the neighborhood, Fred signing off:

FRED
You always make each day such a special day, by just your being you.
(MORE)

FRED (cont'd)
There's only one person in the
whole world like you. I'll be back
next time. Bye-bye.

SMASH TO:

BLACK

A Beautiful Day In the Neighborhood

OVER THE CREDITS

Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood aired on PBS for three decades. During that time, Fred received a Presidential Medal of Freedom, a Peabody Award, forty honorary degrees from a variety of educational institutions, and five Emmy awards. His red cardigan is part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian.

When he was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame, Fred asked the stars in attendance to take ten seconds of silence to think about the people who'd loved them throughout their lives, providing the support and encouragement they needed. He kept time.