

A LIVELY OUTFIT

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

- THEO                      A young man, perhaps late teens, who is looking to bring in a little money.
- FRANK                     Owner of Stein Mart, and a scientist on the verge of a great discovery.

## SETTING

A back room in a department store.

## TIME

Modern day.

SCENE

*(It is a back storage room of a department store. An older gentleman is standing near a table considering some clothes laid out upon it. Behind him are more clothes, perhaps on racks or just in piles.)*

THEO

Hello? Mr. Stein? They told me to come back he—

FRANK

Yes, yes! Come in, come in.

THEO

Are you Mr. Stein?

FRANK

Call me Frank. And you are?

THEO

Theogore Maclovski.

FRANK

Theodore Mac—

THEO

Actually, it's Theogore. It's an old family name. But everyone calls me Theo.

FRANK

I see. So, Theo, are you from the area?

THEO

Yes sir. I grew up on Estero Island. We used to live off of Meadowlark, but—

FRANK

Fine, fine. Now tell me, Theo... *(he suddenly becomes very intense...)* Why do you want to work at Stein Mart?

THEO

Well, my mom said that I should try to get a job at Carl's Jr., but when I saw that you were looking for an assistant, it just sounded like it was a good fit. You see, I'm trying to earn some extra money in—

FRANK

Bah! Money!? This is just about money? Off with you. Out, out!

THEO

Wait! Mr. Stei— Frank, wait. Just give me a chance. I mean, the ad didn't really say much about the assistant job, so... so it's hard to get real excited when you don't know what you'd be doing.

FRANK

I'm looking for someone... *(trailing off, because he isn't sure he's ready to finish with "who will help me with my publically unacceptable research".)*

THEO

Yes?

FRANK

*(Assesses Theo, then...)*

Do you know what we do here at Stein Mart?

THEO

Uh... you sell cheap clothing—

*(Frank gives a grunt of derision.)*

N- n- no, I didn't mean *cheap* clothing. I meant you sell clothes cheaply. Like at a discount. *(Frank is clearly not won over.)* Please, sir, just give me a chance.

FRANK

*What would you say...* if I told you that what I really do here is to bring clothes... to life?

*(There is a long pause, as a myriad of expressions go across Theo's face. First the "ah ha" of someone being told a secret, then the fear of realizing that you've just been told it but have no idea what it means, then the concern that maybe you're talking to a psycho.)*

Nothing! Apparently you'd say nothing if I told you that. Not gonna lie, son, that's a little disappointing. I think we're through here.

THEO

Wait! No! Wait. I'm just... I was just... digesting what you said. So you mean that it isn't just about fabric, but finding what works together and making new fashions and... stuff.

FRANK

No! I don't give a rat's toenail about fashion!

THEO

You own a chain of clothing stores.

FRANK

I'm following a higher purpose! The stores are just a cover for my *real* work.

THEO

Whoa. What's your real work?

FRANK

Just what I told you. I am searching for a way to bring clothes... to life!

THEO

When you say...

FRANK

Yes! Yes yes! Life! Up and dancing around! Life! Talking, thinking, feeling! Liiiffefe!!

THEO

Clothes?

FRANK

*Living* clothes!

THEO

You're messing with me, aren't you?

FRANK

Just imagine it! No longer will clothing be something you just wear and discard, something to keep you warm. They'll be true companions on your journey through liiiffefe!

THEO

So like... friends.

FRANK

Oh so much more than friends! They'll... they'll... they'll... Well, yeah, um, actually a lot like friends. (*Pause, then conspiratorially.*) But softer.

THEO

Soft friends.

FRANK

Right...

THEO

That you wear.

FRANK

Oh yes...

THEO

And that talk to you.

FRANK

Quietly...

THEO

I see. And, um, what would these clothes say to you?

FRANK

How should I know? I'm still in the research phase. You can't expect me to have all the answers at the get go.

THEO

So you haven't actually brought any clothes to life...

FRANK

Yet!

THEO

Yet.

FRANK

But I'm getting close. Very close.

THEO

And you're looking for an assistant to...

FRANK

Help with my experiments! I'm so close! (*Beat...*) Theo, I've got a good feeling about you. The enthusiasm you've shown for my work, it's clear you're the right man to help me usher in this new world!

THEO

I've shown enthusiasm?

FRANK

Compared to everyone else. And I want to offer you the job.

THEO

I don't know...

FRANK

It pays nineteen dollars an hour.

THEO

(*Pleasantly surprised...*)

Nineteen!?

FRANK

And time and half after thirty five hours.

THEO

That would be... (*working out the math.*)

FRANK

Plus a ten percent discount in the store.

THEO

(*Suddenly making the decision...*)

You know what, Mr. Stein? You've got yourself an assistant!

FRANK

Excellent! Excellent! You know, my boy, I had a good feeling about you right from the start! Together we are going to make history! People will remember us along with all the scientific giants. Tycho Brahae! Archimedes! Douglas Filman!

THEO

Douglas Fil—

FRANK

My sixth grade science teacher. Brilliant man. (*Getting back “on a roll”...*) People will sing ballads about Frank Stein, and his faithful servant Theogore Maclovski!

THEO

Servant?

FRANK

Stein and Maclovski! Frank and Theogore! (*Weighing the name...*) Theogore... Theogore... I don't suppose we could just shorten that to Eogore instead?

THEO

No!

FRANK

Very well, then. Frank and Theo! To the precipice of Godhood, and beyond!

THEO

Beyond the precipice? Wouldn't that be—

FRANK

Now, Theo, let me show you what I have been working on.

*(Frank leads Theo over to a table where a shirt and pants are lying. There's some science-y looking equipment nearby if possible.)*

THEO

I think I have that shirt at home.

FRANK

It's a nice cotton-poly blend. Very comfortable.

THEO

It breathes well.

FRANK

It really does, doesn't it? (*Conspiratorially...*) That's why I chose it.

THEO

I never thought about pairing it with slacks like those, though.

FRANK

Oh?

THEO

I see the shirt as being more casual. I just wear it with jeans.

FRANK

Interesting. Very interesting. I wonder...

*(Frank roots through a pile of clothing nearby, finally pulling out a pair of faded blue jeans.)*

Something like this, perhaps!

THEO

Yeah. That could work, I guess.

*(Frank discards the pants that are on the table, and puts the jeans in their place. He starts to tuck the shirt in...)*

No, no. I'd leave the shirt out.

*(Frank whips his head around to stare at Theo in surprise.)*

Over, so you can't see the belt.

*(Frank stares at him with a bit of stylistic suspicion.)*

Trust me. It's how people are wearing them.

FRANK

*(Weighing his inputs, then...)*

Very well. What have we got to lose?

THEO

So... how does it... how do we...

FRANK

The secret is... electricity!

THEO

Of course. So do we... what? Do we plug them in somewhere, or—

FRANK

Oh no! It can't be alternating current. Only direct current will do. And you know what that means, my faithful servant!

THEO

Can we just stick with 'assistant'?

FRANK

Batteries!!

THEO

Batteries.

FRANK

*(Pulling out two nine-volt batteries and holding them aloft...)*

Batteries!!

THEO

Are those...

FRANK

But before we begin, we must prepare our subject. You see, the cotton-poly blend is not a natural conductor of electricity, so we must help it along with...

*(He pulls out a bottle of Gatorade, and then, as if introducing the secret ingredient...)*

Electrolytes! Here...

*(Frank hands the batteries to Theo, and then sprinkles Gatorade over the shirt. Theo watches in confusion. Once the sprinkling is done, he closes the bottle, puts it down, and then takes a sleeve in either hand.)*

Are you ready?

THEO

Wait wait wait! What am I supposed to do?

FRANK

You will use the batteries to infuse our shirt with electrical power, while I train it in the basics of motion so it understands what it is supposed to do. *(Theo clearly doesn't follow.)* Like this.

*(Frank flaps the arms of shirt around for a moment.)*

Got it?

THEO

So I just touch the battery to the shirt like this?

*(He reaches forward with one of the 9V batteries, and almost reaches the shirt when Frank shouts out...)*

FRANK

Whoa whoa stop! Stop! What are you trying to do!? Kill us both!? This is science, and we're working with dangerous equipment.

THEO

W- w- what did I do wrong?

FRANK

You need to yell 'Clear!' before hitting the shirt with all that electricity.

THEO

So you can jump back?

FRANK

What are you, stupid? I can't jump back. I need to show it how to move.

THEO

Then why do I yell 'Clear'?

FRANK

Because that's what you do! Are you ready?

*(Theo, still clearly confused, nods yes. Frank takes the sleeves again.)*

Okay... Go!

THEO

*(A little hesitantly at first, as if some part of him realizes just how stupid this is.)*

Clear.

*(Theo touches one of the batteries to the shirt while Frank flaps the sleeves around.)*

FRANK

Again!

THEO

*(A little louder/stronger...)*

Clear! *(As he touches the other battery to the shirt.)*

FRANK

Again!

*(The pace quickens. All the while that Frank is flapping the sleeves, Theo is reaching out with both batteries, calling "Clear!" more energetically each time as he 'shocks' the shirt with the 9V batteries. The pace quickens and the excitement grows until it is a steady stream of "Clear! Clear! Clear!...". For the first few times, Frank calls out "Again!" between the shocks, but after Theo gets into it, alternating hands/batteries in a steady stream of shocks, Frank switches to calling out...)*

FRANK

Live! Live, my creation! Life! I give you life! Liiiiiffefeee!!!

*(At last, Frank collapses over the shirt, which, oddly enough, has not come to life. He lays there for a time, motionless, spent, devastated. After a few awkward moments...)*

THEO

Frank? *(No response.)* Uh, M- Mr. Stein? *(No response.)* Are you okay? *(Still no response. After another beat, he reaches out with one of the batteries and touches it to Frank while softly saying...)* Clear?

FRANK  
*(Still laying there.)*

It's no use. It's no use.

THEO  
Maybe we didn't use enough Gatorade?

FRANK  
It's hopeless. Hopeless, I tell you.

THEO  
No. No, don't give up. Maybe the shirt's just really tired or something.

FRANK  
*(Raising his head to look at Theo...)*  
Do you think that could be it?

THEO  
Could be. Or maybe we should just use a different kind of Gatorade. They sell lots of flavors.

FRANK  
They do?

THEO  
Sure they do. Come on. We'll go find some. And you've got to be hungry.

FRANK  
I... I am kind of hungry.

THEO  
Of course you are. Come on. We'll go get a falafel, and then stop at the grocery store for some more Gatorade.

FRANK  
Yes. Yes indeed.

THEO  
And we'll try again tomorrow.

FRANK  
You don't think it's hopeless?

THEO

Of course not!

*(They begin exiting.)*

FRANK

Can we get some french fries too? I haven't had french fries in years.

THEO

Of course we can. Maybe even some onion rings.

FRANK

Ooooh. I love onion rings. Let me tell you about the time I...

*(The voices fade off as they have exited. The lights go down on stage everywhere except the table, where (ideally) they brighten. Slowly, one sleeve of the shirt hesitantly starts to rise on its own (either pushed using a slender stick in the sleeve by someone behind the table, or perhaps pulled by a thread from above). The sleeve then lowers itself back to the tables, and the lights go out.)*