

Over-Prepared

A 10-MINUTE PLAY

CHARACTERS

GENE - 30s+, male - plucky, wears a truly massive backpack that is full up of a variety of different objects.

ROBIN - 20s, any gender - a disillusioned barista who looks for any excuse to get out of work.

ALEX - any age, any gender - another customer, just wants to put their order in.

SETTING

A typical local cafe, with a counter and a table for two.

LIGHTS UP. A CAFE, WITH A COUNTER AND A TABLE FOR TWO. ROBIN IS STANDING AT THE COUNTER, WAITING FOR THE NEXT CUSTOMER. ALEX COMES FORWARD TO THE COUNTER.

ROB

Hi, welcome to Java Mama, would you like to try our new "Give 'Em The Old Razzle Apple" Frappuccino?

ALEX

Ooh, gosh, I'm not sure...What is it?

ROB

It's a Frappuccino with raspberry and apple flavoring, and a dollop of caramel syrup.

ALEX begins to get lost in thought, looking at the menu, and taking her dear, sweet time to decide.

ALEX

Hmmm...I just don't know...ooh, that looks good...oh, but I don't know...it might be too much for me...hmmm...

GENE WALKS ONSTAGE, NOTEBOOK-IN-HAND, WEARING A BACKPACK THAT IS TRULY MASSIVE, AND FULL TO BURSTING.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Oh, you go ahead. I'm not ready yet.

GENE

Perfect, because I am!

GENE walks up to the counter, startling ROB.

ROB

Hi, welcome to Java Mama, would you like to try our new "Give 'Em The Old Razzle Apple" Frappuccino?

GENE starts thumbing through his notebook.

GENE

Ooh, interesting question! Let's see..."O" for "order", then subsection "C" for "Cafe", then "S" for "special offers and drinks"...

Stopping at a point, reading off from the page.
No thanks!

ROB

(BEAT)

What can I get for you then?

GENE

Okey doke, now back to subsection "C", "U" for "The Usual"...
I will have a 16-ounce Mocha iced latte with 2 shots of
espresso, Italian Sweet Cream and whipped cream.

ROB

...Would you like any fresh pastries with that?

GENE

Oh! I don't know...will I?

Turns the page, continues.

...Yes, I'll also have a blueberry tart.

ROB

Okay, so, all told, it'll be ten dollars--

*GENE pulls out a small sandwich baggy with exact cash
in it from his pocket. He shakes it out onto the
counter*

GENE

And seventy-two cents. Here you go!

(BEAT)

ROB

Alright. DO you have a rewards account with us?

GENE

Hmmm, let me check.

GENE starts to thumb through.

"R" for rewards, "F" for food...It doesn't seem so!

ROB

Alright, well maybe I can check. What's a good phone number
for you?

GENE

You'd think I'd know, but alright. Try 775-555-1294. That's
my number.

ROB

Yeah, nothing came up. Would you like to sign up? It only
takes a-

*On "nothing came up," GENE begins scribbling something
in his notebook.*

GENE

(politely:)

-No thank you! I'll do it at home.

ROB

Then...can I get a name for your order?

GENE

My name's Gene.

GENE looks down at the notebook, looking for something in the pages. He looks back up.

And you?

ROB

Uh...Robin. I'm Robin.

(beat)

We'll have that right out for you, Gene.

GENE goes and sits down, setting his backpack down next to him. ALEX comes up to the front, but ROB is distracted by GENE.

ROB (CONT'D)

Welcome back to Java Mama; have you made a decision on the "Razzle Apple"?

During this trail-off by ALEX, ROB drifts off as well, distractedly inspecting GENE from the counter.

ALEX

Oh shoot, I should've been thinking about that! Oh, dear...give me just a second...well...I at least want a pan au chocolat...but maybe a muffin would be good--are your muffins good? Forget I said that, of course you're gonna say yes...Well, I think I'll just get a vanilla latte...oh, but do I want a medium or a large...hmm...do you think the large is a lot?

At this point, ALEX notices ROB has mentally checked out of this interaction.

...are you listening?

ROB

Huh...sorry, one second.

ROB goes offstage, brings out GENE's order.

ROB (CONT'D)

Order for Gene.

GENE

Thanks! That was quick!

GENE starts eating his tart. ROB lingers. BEAT.

ROB

I gotta ask, what's with the notebook?

GENE

Oh! Perfect, I haven't gotten to try this section yet:

GENE starts to flip pages again.

"Q" for Questions, subsection "N" for notebook...Here! "If someone asks "what's with the notebook, tell them this: the notebook is a helpful conversation guide, to never have to go unprepared in any given social interaction." Does that explain it?

ROB

Not really, I-

At this point, Alex walks up to the two.

ALEX

Hello? Could you please take my order? I'm ready now.

ROB

I'll be with you in a minute.

ALEX scoffs and walks back to the counter.

ROB (CONT'D)

So, you go into any situation, and that book tells you what to say?

GENE flips a page, reads from it.

GENE

Yes.

ROB

Any situation?

GENE nods. ROB thinks for a second.

Okay...so if you go into a job interview and they ask for your greatest weakness, what do you say?

Between GENE's following recitations, he flips through the book repeatedly to find the corresponding section.

GENE

"My greatest weakness is my tendency to over prepare."

ROB

What about if you're giving a best man speech at a wedding?

GENE

(stilted)

"I remember back when I first met 'bride's name.' before then, me and 'groom's name' got up to a lot of shenanigans. Like, this one time..."

Flipping pages.

And then to section "A" for Anecdotes, and--

ROB

--I get it! Well, what if you're...walking along, and God-- God himself walks up and says, "My child, all your questions shall be answered. Lay them on me." What do you ask him?

GENE

And we're saying this is the Abrahamic God?

ROB

Yes.

GENE

Well, that's a bit of a softball...

Flipping pages.

"F" for "First encounters," then "G" for "Gods," then "A" for "Abrahamic"...

Stops flipping.

"When I got in trouble for stealing Tommy Sheckman's lunch in the third grade, did I really suffer from sudden, acute, isolated amnesia, or was it actually Cindy Lehdecker like I suspected?"

ROB

Jesus Christ...--

GENE

Oh, well if we're talking about him the question might be a bit different...

GENE starts to flip through and search, but is stopped by ROB.

ROB

I get it! (beat) So you made that entire book? That must have taken ages.

GENE

Well, we all spent the lockdown differently.

ALEX walks up to the table.

ALEX

Hey, seriously? I have been waiting for minutes! Would you come and take my order already?

ROB

(actively blowing her off:)

Yeah, yeah, in a minute.

ALEX

Are you kidding?

GENE

Oh! Do you wanna know what I'd do in your situation?

ALEX

(hesitant:)

Sure.

GENE

Ok, so..."O" for Order, "C" for cafe, appendix "I" for "ignoring you to talk to someone else," my notebook says you should go to the bathroom and wait until maybe the conversation dies down.

ALEX

But I don't need to go to the bathroom.

GENE

You should try anyways.

(ALT: "Doesn't hurt to try.")

ALEX is getting fed up, but really can't bother getting into this right now, so they walk offstage.
See? There's something in here for everything.

ROB

Okay, I get it. *(beat)* then what's in the backpack?

GENE

"Additional materials."

ROB

Like, more notebooks?

GENE

Nope! The notebook needs me to have a lot of things on my person to be able to fully act out any scenario, so the backpack has everything the notebook says I might need.

ROB

That thing's gotta weigh like, a thousand pounds.

GENE

It's worth it. I never have to worry about needing anything and not having it.

ROB

I disagree. How do you go anywhere? You can't go out to drinks looking like you're about to scale Everest!

GENE

I'm not much of a drinker, so no love lost there. Though it does make hailing a cab a bit harder; the only people who'll stop are truck drivers because they think I'm a hitchhiker.

At this point, ALEX comes back onstage.

ALEX

I'm sorry to interrupt your lovely conversation, but I am in a bit of a hurry so if I could just order-

ROB

Right, no, I understand; look, just give me one second, I'm almost to the bottom of this.

ALEX

No! I'm a paying customer-

GENE

Not yet.

ALEX

What?

GENE

You aren't a paying customer, yet. You haven't ordered anything.

ROB points to GENE, a la "see?" ALEX is on her last shred of patience.

ALEX

You people are insane. Have fun exploring the endless possibilities of 80 college-lined pages.

ALEX storms out.

ROB

Was that in your notebook?

GENE

(surprised:)

Actually, no.

GENE starts scribbling something down.

ROB

No. No way are you writing that down now.

GENE

I've gotta be prepared.

ROB

But wasn't that a much more valuable interaction? That exchange came straight from the heart for you, it wasn't a pre-meditated conversation, that moment can never be replicated; isn't that beautiful?

GENE starts to look at the book, but ROB covers it with his hand.

No book, just answer me.

GENE

No, it's nerve-racking. When I do anything in life, everyone has all these assumptions about what I'm doing. And for some reason, I'm supposed to know in a split-second exactly how I'm supposed to react, or else they assume the wrong thing and then I'm, what, I'm weird? Or wrong? That's horrendous. No thank you. I decided a while ago that I wouldn't make myself go through that anymore. If I plan for everything, then there's no chance of me doing the wrong thing.

ALEX comes back in at this point, and throws a cup of water on ROB, dousing him in water, then storms out the other way. BEAT. GENE pulls out a towel from his bag, and hands it to ROB. ROB takes it and starts to dry himself.

GENE (CONT'D)

See, Rob? It's good to be prepared for anything.

ROB

I'm done! I can't do this anymore. You know what, I'm quitting. And I don't need a notebook to tell me to do it! I'm gonna run out, get in my car, and go somewhere. Where? I don't know! Because that's what's fun about living! Go do something! Be spontaneous! Try something new, eat somewhere you've never been, book a plane ticket same-day! Jesus, go to a bar and strike up a conversation with someone and have no clue what you're gonna talk about, or if you'll ever even see them again! It's not easy, and it might go wrong, but it'll be a unique experience. It'll be your experience. And no one else's. I'm out. It was nice to meet you, Gene.

ROB walks out. GENE considers ROB's words, gets up, puts his backpack on, and stands tall.

GENE

Be spontaneous, huh?

GENE starts to thumb through his notebook once more, speaking as he walks offstage.

"D" for Decisions, "S" for Spontaneous...

BLACKOUT. THE END.