

[PROVIDENCE & PROFLIGACY PTD. LTD]

by

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CHARACTERS

RECEPTIONIST - *Young woman, mid-thirties, clean-cut professional*

DENISE - *Middle aged aunty-type, mid-forties, loud and tacky*

CARRIE - *Young teenage girl, sixteen, smart and reserved*

A spacious room, what looks like the office of an insurance company.

The receptionist stands at the center of the room, staring at her computer. She is busy typing away. Denise comes into the scene, stage front. Between them lies a table with a single phone atop it. The receptionist makes brief eye contact with Denise and carries on typing on her computer.

Denise: Er, Hello. (Denise fidgets and scratches her mop of hair.)
Receptionist: Hello.

Denise: Er, so my friend told me... I don't know if it's complete bullshit la but I'm desperate okay, and I heard my friend say that, oi are you listening?

Receptionist: Your name please.

Denise: Huh?

Receptionist: I need your name, madam.

Denise: For what?

Receptionist: I need your name, madam.

Denise: Tsk, okay. Call me Denise.

Receptionist: Full name, please.

Denise: *rolls eyes* Denise Khoo Yong Mei.

Receptionist: Okay, hold on (types furiously on the computer). I'm

sorry madam you do not have an appointment.

Denise: Huh?

Receptionist: We can't see you without an appointment, Madam.

Denise: HUH?

Receptionist: Is "Huh" the only response you have in your repertoire, Madam?

Denise: okay what- the shit, zha bor I tell you, I came all the way down here and now you tell me I need some kind of blardy appointment? I thought this one just a "walk-in" kinda-

Receptionist: I'll appreciate if you would keep the profanities to yourself, Mrs Khoo. And yes, I'm afraid I'm telling you that you need a *bloody* appointment, Madam.

Denise: okay miss receptionist whatever, appointment or not you gonna see me ok. Today. Tell your manager come out.

Receptionist: You're looking at the manager, Madam.

Denise: YOU? But you just a frickin' receptionist! You can't help me. I NEED SOMEONE WITH POWER HERE, HELLO?

Receptionist: Language, Madam. And okay, sure. That's what the phone's there for. *gestures to phone in between them* Direct call to the guy up there, the 'Big Boss', the helpline, yada-yada.

rolls eyes

(Receptionist resumes typing)

(Denise looks over at phone skeptically, and picks it up.. then

realizes the phone cord is not connected to anywhere)

Denise: WHAT? EH Miss you joking is it?! This thing is not even on! I say I want to talk to your boss, not some PROP leh!

Receptionist: Just dial, 1800-4357-63, you know 1800-HELP-ME. It works.

Denise: (deep breath) Okay zha bor seriously, I have no time for your jokes ok, I'll tell you what I need help with la okay? What I need now is MONEY, a lot of MONEY! Not some blardy helpline to cry my problems to okay? So would you *please* just-

Receptionist: Hmm, of course, money is the answer to all problems right? Everyone seems to think like you.

Denise: HUH?

Receptionist: Again with the use of "HUH".

Denise: What the sh-

Receptionist: Fine. Since you said please. *Please* take a seat, Madam.

Denise: ... I stand, thanks.

Receptionist: Your choice, Madam. *Please* give me a moment (types furiously)

Denise: So, like hor, my friend told me that (fidgets with fingernails, looks incredibly uncomfortable). That like, yall can give me cold hard cash in exchange for-

Receptionist: Here you go Madam (Pushes a slip forward)

Denise: Huh what's this?

Receptionist: This is your valuation.

Denise: Wait, Three thousand dollars and ... ninety cents?

Receptionist: In exchange for the rest of your lifespan, we at P & P are willing to give you a grand total of (looks at computer) three thousand dollars and ninety cents, that is correct.

Denise: What on earth-

Receptionist: Of course, if you accept this deal, we will offer you 3 days; that is, 72 hours to finish up whatever unfinished business you have in this world, *Madam*. You can return the money if you wish before the three days, but if you don't and three days are up, there is no going back. You *will* die.

Dennis: Walao ??? HECK THIS THING LA, I knew this was bullshit. I could win more in 3 days of gambling lor. And you, little atas zha bor, shit you. (Leaves for stage left)

Receptionist: You graduated Singapore Polytechnic with a GPA of 1.8 (Denise freezes upstage far right). Your parents died when you were 18 years, 3 months, and 4 days old. You have been in one unsuccessful relationship after another, men who come in and out of your life, abuse you, screw you, treat you like dirt. You are broke from squandering your money away on shopping and ...guess what? Gambling.HA. You have multiple fears: clowns, failure, furry things, your violent uncle, disappointment, empty promises-

Denise: WHAT...EH, How the *heck* do you know this?! Who the hell make you do this, huh? (walks towards receptionist, grabs her by wrists) Did that idiot Madam Bubble give you all this information?

Receptionist: (face inches from Denise) You have only one daughter. She is 16 years, 7 months, and 21 days old. She is regarded as highly intelligent with an IQ of 127. She is diagnosed

with Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. You need twelve thousand dollars for her surgery or the doctor says she will die in one month. You also-

Denise: (screams in her face) YOU DON'T BLARDY TELL ME SHE'S GOING TO DIE IN TWELVE DAYS WOMAN, SHE IS GOING TO LIVE A LONG LIFE, YOU UNDERSTAND?? A FREAKING. LONG. LIFE.

Receptionist: (pauses, wipes Denise's saliva off her face) Twelve thousand, nine hundred, eighty-six dollars and ninety cents, including the administrative fees, *Madam*.

Denise: (lets her go)

Receptionist: Our valuation is as accurate as it gets, *Madam*. This system judges based on how the world values your POTENTIAL- your money, your face, the work you are doing, or going to do.

Denise: EH, how, how is this possible? I'm only forty years old, I have at least 50 years ahead of me.

Receptionist: I'm sorry-

Denise: No, no, you see, I'm still healthy! High blood pressure, diabetes, ya la. But I quit smoking 2 years already, never drink anymore! I still can work, can do more good things! I should be worth much, much more...

Receptionist: I'm afraid, I am not allowed to change how the World sees your worth for you, *Madam*. I am after all, *just a receptionist*.

(silence, Denise collapses into the chair)

Receptionist: (Pauses) Okay *Madam* You are, however, in luck, as the world would say. Given that I understand the urgency; You can

choose to cut down your 72-hours given and retrieve a larger sum.

(Denise looks up and scowls)

Denise: Really? How?

Receptionist: For people who have made up their minds, P & P gives the necessitated amount for their problems. They will, however, only have 24 hours to settle all unfinished business in this world, and they will not get to reconsider their decision. There will be, strictly speaking, no return policy.

Dennis: How-

Receptionist: We will ensure a natural death, Madam. You will die how any normal person might die, when your time is up (walks to the back, comes back with a brief case). If you are agreeable to the earlier stated terms, please sign on this line and you will receive the stated amount, immediately.(flashes the money)

Denise: Omg, that's-

Receptionist: Yes, that's exactly the amount of money you need for your daughter's operation. In cash.

Denise: okay you know what, I don't know what kind of weird ah long you are, but whatever, I just need the money. (grabs the pen)

Receptionist: (Grabs her hand) Do note that once you sign on the line, we have an official agreement. We do not have a return policy.

Denise: Whatever la, I just need to save my daughter. Let go of my hand!(shakes off the receptionist hand, signs the paper)

Receptionist: Twelve thousand, nine hundred, eighty-six dollars and ninety cents as agreed. You may take the next five minutes to

count the amount, it will not be included in your 24 hours.
However, I can assure you that-

Denise: (grabs the briefcase) You are one freaking siao zha bor.
You know that?

Denise stomps off the stage with the briefcase.

The receptionist goes back to her computer and continues typing furiously.

The sound of a phone ringing is heard

Receptionist walks towards the phone on the table in the middle of the room and picks it up.

Receptionist: Hi, Old Man. Yes, she just left. Yes, she didn't believe me, about the phone...Why don't you want to make yourself more obvious to these dense HUMANS?! Right, all that jazz about Free Will, ugh.

Oh and yes, she made up her mind, chose to take the money with no return. I don't know why you waste your time on these people.

(pause)

Receptionist: *Quietly* No, Boss. No I don't think she would have if she knew. But I don't think she would have believed anyway... if you told her the doctor would tell her tomorrow... it was a misdiagnosis.

(pause)

Reception: Oh well, her loss. She didn't want to seek Your help. One more life to Profligacy. *bitter laughter*

Receptionist hangs up and turns back to her place.

After a brief moment, Carrie comes on stage.

Carrie: Hi, um, is this Providence and Profligacy Pte. Ltd.?

Receptionist: Ms. Carrie?

Carrie: Yes, I made an appointment. A ... Mr. Demas recommended me here.

Receptionist: Ah, Mr. Demas is a friend of mine. *smiles*

You're here for a Profligacy consultation, I see. Here you go, Miss (pushes slip forward).

Carrie: Wow. Um... this amount...? Can I ask, I don't understand-

Receptionist: I am sure that you are aware of our trade. This is the amount of money you will receive in exchange for the rest of your life, miss. I see you have pre-indicated that you will be going for the no-return policy. That means, you will be given only 24 hours to settle all unfinished business in this world. And this, is your immediate cash remuneration for your Life's potential, Miss.

Carrie: How can this be? The doctor told me that I only have one more month to live-

Receptionist: Here at P & P, we understand your situation. We may even understand more than you know. However, if you choose to exchange your valuable life, we will give you how much the world sees you're worth. All I can say is that our valuation is as accurate as it gets (pause, heads to the back and returns with a suitcase). Are you sure this is the answer to your problems?

Carrie: Yes, I'm...mainly doing this for my Ma. She's lived such a hard life, you know. Never had much herself, but still gives me everything she can get. Works her butt off to feed me, and now she has to pay for my medicine. *sighs*

I once told myself... I'm going to work hard, get rich one day, to let her retire in bliss, you know. But now... Hah, fate's a cruel thing.

Carrie: So anyway this... this money is all I can ever do for her

now, to clear the debts.

Receptionist: *remains silent for a moment*

Receptionist: Well, money seems like the answer to everything, ain't it! Ha, anyway. *sighs*

Receptionist: Miss Carrie... Khoo... Please sign here if you are agreeable to the stated amount.(realizes the link) You may ... verify the amount in this suitcase before you... proceed.

Carrie: (looks at the suit case, contemplates, grabs pen)

Receptionist: WAIT!(Grabs her hand) Do note that once you sign on the line, we have an official agreement. We do not have a return policy.

(Pauses)

Miss, this is a serious matter, why don't you say, take a day- just, 24 hours- to think it through? It's not too late to come back then?

Carrie: One day... what difference does that make. One more day of feeling sorry, angry, of questioning my existence. One more late night seeing Ma come home tired and sometimes, beat up.

Receptionist: Well, Miss Carrie, it is not my place to say this, but why not give it a chance, how ... how are we to know what will happen right? Why take matters into our own hands?

Carrie: This is the only way I know, the easiest way. (Pauses and thinks for awhile) It's okay-

Receptionist: No, I mean, Miss Carrie-

Carrie: -I've made up my mind.

(Carrie signs)

Lights fade to a dim.

Silhouettes of two ladies enter, stage left and right, mother and daughter, and stop at the center, facing each other.

Carrie: No work today, Ma?

Denise: Not today girl, I thought of... taking a break.

Carrie: For once. Ma, you work too hard.

Denise: No la. No school today ah girl?

Carrie: Not today... Ma, wanna... do something special today?

Denise: Ya let's go out... nice dinner want? Ma treat you eat good food.

Carrie: No Ma, I treat you. I saved up abit... for special days like today.

Denise: Okay, I buy dinner you buy dessert okay?

Carrie: Okay, Ma. I'll buy you the best dessert.

Denise: Anything also can lah. Let's go.

The two silhouettes step towards each other and hold hands, turn and walk towards the back of the stage, slowly.

Lights fade.

THE END