

# The Clerk



Written by  
Jeffrey Gold

**THE CLERK**

by Jeffrey Gold

Characters:

Train Clerk (M, late 30s/40s/early 50s)  
A simpleton with brief flashes of insight.

Jeffrey Gold  
213.787.6077  
jgold@jeffreygold.com

## THE CLERK

*Softly, we hear a steam locomotive in the distance fading away.*

*A lonely clerk sits at a small table, stamping documents.*

*He looks at his watch, then looks around [for his boss]...paranoid.*

*He gets up, approaches the audience.*

*As if letting them in on a secret...*

CLERK

If you're thinking here is nothing but a lowly clerk, you would be right.

(beat)

Ending up as a clerk was not my dream, of course, but life has a way of surprising you. We're like bowling pins. Some of us get knocked over; others remain standing. I guess life is under no obligation to bowl a perfect game.

*A quick glance off-stage.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

The job is adequate, but its difficult to get promoted. It's thankless. If people thank you, they are not really thanking you personally...it's like they're making a down payment for some future event.

*Looks around.*

*He spies a child's shoe at the edge of the stage, picks it up...then holds it up for everyone to see.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

Anyone missing a child's shoe?

(beat)

No?

(beat)

It must be someone from the last group of passengers.

*He walks back over to his small table and puts it in a conspicuous corner nearest the audience.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

You'll let me know if you see my boss returning, won't you? He could come back from over there.

(dramatic, going for the laughs)

Or, from over there.

(dramatic)

Or, from back there.

(beat)

He doesn't like it when I talk to you passengers.

(beat)

You might have seen him earlier...the one with the sour face and those glasses which make him look like a stingy accountant.

(beat)

Have you seen his wife? Of course you haven't. But you know what? I have a sneaking suspicion we all can paint that troubling picture. He has a way of looking at people through his eyebrows. And a habit of being there one minute, hanging over your shoulder, and then disappearing the next.

*He hears a noise offstage.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

What was that? Did you hear that?

*He quickly makes his way back over to his desk, sits down, looking left and right, ready to look like he's working. Once he feels safe again, like a hesitant turtle he slowly makes his way back to the audience.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

I thought he might be back.

(beat)

I'm sorry about the wait. The next train should be coming along soon. I know they're in a hurry to get you on the train...on your journey. It's rare they aren't punctual. I'm sure that's why my boss has left...to check on the holdup.

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

(beat)

I don't think he's a bad person.

(beatlet)

My mother used to say I always see the best in people. She also said I'm very loyal, which really is just a nice way of saying I'm a "useful idiot", isn't it?

*Awkward pause, as he waits for a reaction from the audience.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

The truth is, once I get you on the next train, I get to go home. You see, there is this girl I'm interested in. She's very pretty, and comes from a very well-to-do family. But, there's this really good-looking, well-heeled gentleman who has been courting her...for a year! She was kind enough to grant me an audience, so you can imagine...I can't afford to mess this up. This is my one chance to find happiness in this world. Isn't that what we are all trying to do? But what is a mere clerk to do with a girl like this? I want to win her heart, of course, but I'm inexperienced in these ways. But, I've got two ideas...like two marbles rolling around in my head.

(brightens)

Maybe you can help me. Maybe you can help me decide which idea is best.

*Goes back over to his table and grabs his lunch and flask.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

I grew up in a small town. Very provincial. We're very different...you and me. You are all so sophisticated compared to someone like me...and so patient! Even someone in my lowly station can appreciate your value to society.

*Returns to his lunch box to retrieve a cloth napkin and wipe his mouth.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

My apologies, my mother told me that if I ever went to the big city that

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

I should not speak with my mouth full. But I don't know what to do. I want to do both...eat...and talk.

(beatlet)

We have very limited time in this world. Right? Some people have told me I'll have a very long life. It's a wonder how a bunch of cards and a line in your palm can say all that. Then there are others who tell you that life is short. Well, which is it? Long or short? So, please forgive me if I talk and eat at the same time. You could say I'm...what do you call it?...hedging my bet? I feel like I need to pack two lives into one. Do you ever feel like that? Life is strange isn't it? There's got to be more to life than being a clerk and chasing a girl, but I haven't the faintest of what that would be. I've got a little time left to figure it out. Hey, maybe you have already figured it out.

(looks out to the audience)

No?

(beat)

I already know what I won't do.

(beat)

You want to know?

(again, awaiting their approval; counts with his finger)

I know I won't discover a new vaccine. I know I will never pilot an airplane. And I know I won't invent a new kitchen appliance.

(sad)

Maybe getting that girl is the biggest thing I'll ever do in this world.

(realizing the poverty of that remark)

What if that were true?

(beat, sheer delight)

Wouldn't that be great?

*If laughter, wait, then...*

*a noise off stage.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

That's not him coming back is it?

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

(beat)

He kind of scares me, if you can't already tell. He's very strict. He doesn't really like me. I made the mistake of telling him about my plans with Ariel...that's her name...Ariel with the pretty hair...and he poo-pooed the idea...practically spitting...said I didn't have a chance in hell...that I'm doomed to fail.

(looks off-stage)

Thanks for the confidence boost.

(back)

I guess that's what you get when you try to confide in other people. My mother always said that "You deserve the abuse you seek." I only reached out to him because I was trying to connect with him on a human level...after all, we're at work so much of our lives. It was a mistake...I know it now. I'll be honest: it shook my confidence, and this dark feeling hasn't yet quite faded.

*He looks around, checking in the wings to see if his boss is coming.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

(shakes his head)

I think we're safe.

(beat)

I'm thinking I want to take her to the opera. I personally could not care less about warbling sopranos. But she's sophisticated, so I expect that is what she would like. Four hours of opera is a small sacrifice for a potential lifetime of happiness, isn't it?

(beatlet)

The things we do for love.

(beat)

My mother died a few years ago, and so I moved to the city to live with my uncle. He's known me for his entire life...what am I saying...he's known me for my entire life. I don't know why my mother insisted I live with him. I can live on my own, despite what they all say. I would rather live independently.

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

I don't know how this could work out with Ariel if she took my hand in marriage. All of us living under the same roof...there would be no privacy.

(beat)

Oh, the other thing I could do is take her to the lake. Kind of like one of those French paintings...you know the guy who uses little dabs to make his paintings. We could have a nice picnic by the lake, with sandwiches and an inexpensive bottle of wine...last year's. We can lay out on a blanket in the sun and outline the passing clouds. And we could watch the sail boats.

(seized by an idea)

That's it! I should take her sailing. I mean, I wouldn't be sailing the boat myself, I'm not a mariner...but hire one to take us out on the lake. We could look at that huge mansion on the island. We could dream about what it would be like to live in a place like that.

(beat)

I'm getting ahead of myself. I still need to save up a lot of money for the opera or the sailboat. The other suitor doesn't have these kinds of worries. I'm told he inherited a fortune. So, he could do just about anything with her, for her...to her.

*He imagines something dark or something he wishes he could do to her.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

Which one do you think I should do? Which do you think would win her heart more? The opera or the picnic by the lake?

(waits, snaps his fingers)

You're right. The picnic by the lake is much better. That makes me breathe more easily, knowing I made a good decision. Thank you.

*About to turn...he turns back.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

I have a small confession to make.

(MORE)



CLERK (CONT'D)

Truth be told, I already went on the outing with her, and you were right: the picnic by the lake was the better idea. We both had a wonderful time. So, another set of passengers helped me make the best choice. I hadn't been so sure...let me explain.

(beat)

A week after our wonderful outing, I went back to call on her again, but she wasn't there. The family vanished one night...so I'm told. None of the neighbors could say where. I just hope I didn't have anything to do with her leaving. I don't think her family approved of our courtship.

(beat, introspective)

Someone mentioned they might have fallen on hard times.

*A train can be heard approaching in the far distance.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

That sound is good news!

(clasps his hands)

No more waiting.

(rubs his hands)

You finally get to travel to that new terminus.

*Music faintly fades in.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

It's getting a bit chilly, isn't it?  
The sun casting such a long shadow  
now. Brrr.

*He ambles over to his table,  
leafs through some papers,  
puts his finger on a spot.  
Carefully unfolding and putting  
on his circular wire-rimmed  
Himmler glasses, he cranes his  
neck in to read it.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

Yehude Garrai.

*He walks over to the office  
door in the back, reaches  
inside, has his coat in hand,  
and puts it on as he makes his  
way back to the table.*

*It now becomes apparent his coat is emblazoned with a red arm band and black swastika on white circle.*

CLERK (CONT'D)

Yehude Garrai.

(pause)

You're next. Please step forward.

(pause)

I know you're here somewhere, because your name is on this manifest.

(pause)

You wouldn't want to miss your train, would you?

(beat, to the audience)

I wish you all a safe trip to Theresienstadt or whatever is your final destination.

(beat, he grabs the shoe from the table)

Perhaps one of you could kindly take this shoe with you and return it to its rightful owner. A child must be missing it terribly.

(beat)

Oh...if you ever happen to run into an Ariel Sonnenschein...please tell her I'm still thinking of her.

*The tableau freezes with him holding out the shoe. The music plays for a while and then is overtaken by the sound of a terrifying locomotive blasting by.*

*The lights dim very slowly on this tableau as the sound of the train dies away.*

*Curtain.*