

WINTER
Scene One

(The lights rise on the interior of a diner at the beach. It is closing time on a winter, off-season day and the windows to the outside are dark.)

(At rise, BONNIE, a 60-something woman in a waitress uniform is putting clean coffee cups away behind the counter.)

BONNIE

(over her shoulder to the kitchen behind the counter) Let yourself out the back, Johnny. I'll lock up out here!

(beat)

Hey, Johnny! Did you hear...

(A door is heard slamming shut from the kitchen.)

...me. Well, good night to you, too! Rude little shit.

(SHE finishes putting cups away as the headlights from a car pulling into the parking lot rake the stage through the front windows.)

Why do people always show up at closing time?!

(SHE searches her pockets for the keys without success)

Where are my keys? Damn it...

(SHE exits into the kitchen.)

(off) Damn it!...

(Silence)

(off) Double damn it!

(SAM, a well-dressed 60-something man enters through the front door. Bells attached to door jingle as the door opens and closes.)

(Looking around) Hello?

SAM

(off) We're closed!

BONNIE

(entering) Kitchen's closed...

(SAM sits at the counter)

SAM

...

BONNIE

...

Hello, Bonnie.

SAM

Kitchen's closed. We're closed...

BONNIE

I heard.

SAM

...

BONNIE

It's me.

SAM

...

BONNIE

Sam.

SAM

I know.

BONNIE

Have I changed that much?

SAM

BONNIE
No... You look the same.

SAM
So, do you.

BONNIE
Hah!

SAM
I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. You know that.

BONNIE
I do?

SAM
You should.

BONNIE
I'm trying to remember.

SAM
It's only been a few decades. I can't believe I just said "decades" ...

BONNIE
What do you want, Sam?

SAM
Cup of coffee?

BONNIE
I told you...

SAM
I know, I know – you're closed. That's why I waited to come here now.

BONNIE
Why?

SAM
So, I could talk to you. Didn't want to bother you while you were working.

Considerate.
BONNIE

Thank you.
SAM

And a little scary – seems like stalker behavior.
BONNIE

I don't have your phone number. Or an address...
SAM

But you knew I worked here.
BONNIE

Chris told me.
SAM

My Chris from high school?
BONNIE

The one and only.
SAM

I know a lot of Chris's.
BONNIE

He was your Chris. Class of '74.
SAM

That would be him.
BONNIE

Yeah.
SAM

I don't remember seeing him here.
BONNIE

SAM

He said he just popped in for a moment. He saw you but you didn't see him. Or maybe you did but you didn't recognize him...

BONNIE

I think I'd recognize Chris.

SAM

Maybe not. He'd changed over the years.

BONNIE

As have we all. Except you. You gotta portrait growing old in your attic?

SAM

...

BONNIE

You know – like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?

SAM

I got it.

BONNIE

You always were a smart boy.

SAM

Not always.

BONNIE

Well, you wouldn't be human if you were always smart.

SAM

Oh, I'm human.

BONNIE

How has he changed?

SAM

Like most men our age, he physically resembled a brick. You know – the abdominal wall of muscle just seems to melt away and everything shifts forward. He looked like a thumb with feet.

(HE sticks out his thumb and “walks” his hand in the air.)

BONNIE

Stop.

SAM

Plus that thick neck he developed by playing center on the football team sort of melted, too.

BONNIE

I’d hate to hear you describe me.

SAM

You look great.

BONNIE

Yeah, yeah...

BONNIE

He tell you about what a failure I am – 66 years old and waiting tables? Well, I am the unofficial night manager.

SAM

Unofficial?

BONNIE

All of the responsibilities without the title or the pay.

SAM

He said you worked here. He didn’t say you were a failure.

BONNIE

But you probably think I am. Seeing me like this.

SAM

Like what?

BONNIE

Like *this*. No makeup -- ugly uniform that doesn’t fit covered in spilled coffee and food.

SAM

That's not what I think.

BONNIE

That's what most people think.

SAM

What people?

BONNIE

People who knew me.

SAM

I'm not most people.

BONNIE

No. You're nicer than most.

SAM

Thank you, but it's not a question of being nice. You're not a failure. What does that even mean, anyway?

BONNIE

I didn't aspire to waiting tables at my age.

SAM

It's honest work.

BONNIE

Stop. You're trying too hard.

SAM

I'm being honest. Anyway, he never said that about you. He always spoke very highly of you.

BONNIE

What else did Chris say?

SAM

Just that he found you here by accident. Came in on an impulse for diner coffee. He hated Starbucks.

BONNIE

I guess you two kept up with each other.

SAM

We did. Not every week or even month –but we kept in touch.

BONNIE

Why do you keep referring to him in the past tense?

SAM

...

BONNIE

...

SAM

...

BONNIE

What happened?

SAM

He got sick so fast...

BONNIE

...

(SHE sits at the counter)

SAM

Cancer.

BONNIE

He's gone?

SAM

I'm so sorry.

BONNIE

When did this happen?

SAM

Diagnosed last August and gone by the end of October.

BONNIE

I didn't know.

SAM

I'm sorry.

BONNIE

Is that why you're here – to tell me about Chris?

SAM

That's part of it. I wanted to see you.

BONNIE

Why?

SAM

When he told me he found you here...

BONNIE

Found me? I'm not lost.

SAM

When he told me he'd seen you again after all the years I knew I had to see you again too.

BONNIE

You had to?

SAM

I wanted to.

BONNIE

Mmm-hmm. You want a cup of coffee?

SAM

I thought you were closed.

BONNIE

I'm the night manager. I can re-open.

SAM

Then yes, please -- I'd like a cup of coffee. It's pretty cold outside with that wind.

BONNIE

The only thing we've got to offer you that's stronger is cheap beer and wine. The beer is cold.

SAM

Coffee's great.

BONNIE

I'm going to have a glass of wine.

SAM

Knock yourself out.

BONNIE

(SHE crosses behind the counter)

Have you had dinner yet? You want a sandwich or something? Or maybe some pie?

SAM

I'm good.

BONNIE

I usually wait to get home to eat. Not that the food here is bad. But I'm around it all day.

SAM

I'm sure it's not exactly health food here.

BONNIE

What do you mean?

SAM

Nothing... just that it is a diner.

BONNIE

So, you're a food snob now.

SAM

You know what I mean.

Maybe.

BONNIE

(SHE makes coffee behind the counter)

So...

SAM

So?

BONNIE

You still painting?

SAM

Never stopped.

BONNIE

I'm glad to hear that.

SAM

Why?

BONNIE

You were good back then. You must be great now.

SAM

I do manage to sell a few.

BONNIE

I'd like to see something of yours. If that's possible.

SAM

Why wouldn't that be possible?

BONNIE

Maybe you're sold out for the moment. Maybe you don't like to share work in progress. Maybe you're just as shy about your work as you were...

SAM

Back then? Yeah, I was more than insecure in high school.

BONNIE

SAM

Who wasn't?

BONNIE

Not you.

SAM

I was the worst. Now, Chris was always confident about everything.

BONNIE

He was good at everything.

SAM

But he wasn't a prick about it. He never acted like he was hot shit. At least not to me.

BONNIE

Those were good days.

SAM

You and Chris the stars at the center of things and me the perpetual third wheel.

BONNIE

I wouldn't say that. I always thought of us as the Three Musketeers.

SAM

I did feel safe with you two. Understood. Protected.

BONNIE

Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but my Mom said the three of us reminded her of that scene in *Rebel Without a Cause* where James Dean, Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo pretended to be a family.

SAM

In a way. Yeah. I guess so. You know – some are born to lead, some are born to follow and others are born to be a mascot. Maybe I was the pet.

BONNIE

I wouldn't say that.

SAM

It's kinda true.

BONNIE

I think that's harsh.

SAM

All I know is I was happy when I hung out with you guys. You took me seriously. I could share my poetry and my songs and not worry about being made fun of.

BONNIE

We did tease you.

SAM

But that was in fun. It was never mean. Made me feel part of things.

BONNIE

Still writing poetry?

SAM

Rarely.

BONNIE

Still writing songs? You were going to be the next Dylan or James Taylor or Jackson Browne or John Lennon or...

SAM

Neil Diamond? Or dare I say it, Cat Stevens?

BONNIE

You did know a lot of Cat Stevens.

SAM

And I'm not ashamed of it. Mostly though I wanted to be in the next Beatles. Seeing them on Ed Sullivan back in 1964 ruined my life. That's all I wanted for a long, long time. I did manage to play some acoustic in coffee houses. I even went to New York and stood on the corner of MacDougal and Bleeker and said, "Here I am!" The indifference was soul crushing. I guess I was hoping for magic.

BONNIE

What year was that? I may have been in the city.

SAM

1975.

BONNIE

Nah, I wasn't there yet.

SAM

Too bad. You could've rescued me.

BONNIE

I couldn't rescue myself back then.

SAM

I did play in a couple of bands. But neither went anywhere. No record deals. No radio play. No stadiums. I could hold my own but I didn't have that extra spark some guys had. We'd be loading in or out followed by the next band and they'd all be older guys talking the same shit about cutting a demo and having a record company A and R guy coming to see them. I finally made a conscious decision to stop. I wanted to find out what I was really good at – if I had a spark for something. So, I quit. Went to college after all.

BONNIE

I remember you swearing you'd never set foot in a classroom again.

SAM

I paid for that. The universe taught me not to taunt it.

BONNIE

What happened?

SAM

I decided I'm a writer. That writing is something I stand a chance at. I've been writing something my whole life.

BONNIE

Back to poetry.

SAM

I write short stories mostly. I did write one very bad novel that's never leaving the desk drawer.

BONNIE

I'd like to read it.

SAM

Maybe we can trade – my novel for one of your paintings.

BONNIE

Ok. Sounds fair.

SAM

I've published a few short stories – you know, those magazines that pay you in copies. I have to teach to pay the bills.

BONNIE

What do you teach?

SAM

I teach English at a private high school. Baltimore has several expensive private high schools. Somebody has money. But it isn't me.

BONNIE

So, you live in Baltimore. I was going to get upset with you if you've been avoiding me while living close by.

SAM

Oh, no. I live in Baltimore County. It's cheaper than the city.

BONNIE

You want cream and sugar?

SAM

Black is fine.

(SHE places a cup on the counter before him and pours him a cup of coffee.)

Thanks.

BONNIE

Taste it before you thank me.

(HE does)

SAM

Excellent.