

TEMPORARY HEROES

A Play in Two Acts

by

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

This play takes place in Vinnie's Coffee Shop. It's a small place with only three tables, located in the Little Italy section of New York City. When the play opens, it is a late evening in January. A blizzard is due to hit at any moment.

Three tables are on stage, each covered with red and white checkered table cloths, salt and pepper shakers, menus and sugar containers. Off stage left is the entrance. Off stage right is the kitchen. There is also a small counter where a cash register sits. Somewhere on the set should be a small Italian flag and a photo of the owner, Vinnie, with his family.

For the last five years, SHELBY SANTELLA and SALVATORE VISCONTI have worked at the coffee shop, side by side. SHE is a waitress and HE is a cook and a bus boy. Business has been slow the last couple of years and the décor has started to fade.

When the lights come up, MRS. LLOYD is seated at the first table. Her glasses are on and SHE is diligently working through a book of crossword puzzles. SAL is seated at the last table, writing furiously in his journal. A few moments pass before SHELBY enters from the kitchen carrying a sandwich and a cup of coffee for MRS. LLOYD. Both SHELBY and SAL should wear aprons, but no type of uniform is necessary.

SHELBY: Here you go, Mrs. Lloyd. It's your favorite. Turkey on toasted wheat and a cup of black coffee.

MRS. LLOYD: *(without looking up from her book)* Thank you, dear.

SHELBY: How's the crossword puzzle coming along?

MRS. LLOYD: Oh, this one is a bit tougher than usual. Do you know a five-letter word for love?

SHELBY: Try *music*. That's my love.

MRS. LLOYD: Well, it does fit. But I have a feeling that's not exactly what I need.

SHELBY: Sal, do you know a five-letter word for love?

SAL: *(still writing)* Money.

SHELBY: *(to MRS. LLOYD)* Don't listen to him. He gets like this when the weather gets cold.

MRS. LLOYD: I heard on the radio that there's a blizzard coming tonight. You two thinking about closing up early?

SHELBY: Are you kidding? Vinnie would never allow it. He'd make us work twenty-four hours a day if he could. I'm already scheduled for six days a week now. I had to beg him to hire a new girl just so Sal and I could finally get some time off.

MRS. LLOYD: The two of you work too much.

SAL: *(looking up)* It's not permanent.

MRS. LLOYD: No?

SAL: Shelby and I don't plan on spending the rest of our lives here.

MRS. LLOYD: I hope not. It would make me so happy to see the two of you get out of this place.

SAL: We're planning on it, aren't we, Shel'?

SHELBY: *(feigning certainty)* Of course.

MRS. LLOYD: What are your plans?

SAL: I'm gonna be a writer. Shelby wants to sing.

MRS. LLOYD: Well, she does have a beautiful voice. When you sang at my grandson's wedding, tears came to my eyes.

It was just gorgeous, Shelby. You've got the voice of an angel.

SHELBY: Thank you, Mrs. Lloyd.

MRS. LLOYD: I just don't understand why the two of you just don't get married. I mean, you spend so much time together; morning, noon and night. You're both beautiful young people and you have dreams and ambitions. *(pause)* I think of you as my own.

SAL: Mrs. Lloyd, Shelby and I are just friends.

SHELBY: I could never marry Sal. My mother thinks he's crazy.

SAL: I *am* crazy.

MRS. LLOYD: That's because you're a writer dear. They're very crazy people. Absolutely insane. My Edward was a writer. He loved his words more than he loved me. So many nights, I thought about picking that typewriter up and just dropping it on his head and saying, "There you go, honey! No more writer's block! I found the cure!" **(pause)** But the cancer beat me to it. Don't get me wrong, I do miss him and marriage can be a wonderful thing. But it's the beginning that's the best. When you're both young and full of adventure and you feel like you could go anywhere and survive as long as you have each other. But then, the time starts moving real quick and before you know it, it's too late to become a figure skater or a reporter for *The New York Times*. So you settle and then you just wait. And you try not to get nostalgic or get into that what-if-I stage. You know, what if I married someone else? What if I was born without arms or my eyesight? How would things be different? But the two of you are smart. As much as it would warm my heart to see a romance blossom here, it's wise what you're doing. Being somebody's friend is much simpler. Emotions just complicate it. And no matter how much you love someone, they just never love you back as much as you need. **(pause)** I still need that five-letter word for love. **(pause)** Maybe there isn't one.

SHELBY: I'm sure there is. You just have to keep searching.

MRS. LLOYD: So do you, dear.

SAL: How's your grandson? I haven't seen him since the wedding.

MRS. LLOYD: He just hit the what-if-I stage. They'll be divorced soon. I can just tell. They got married for all the wrong reasons. It was too convenient. No one gets married for love anymore. Everyone just wants the honeymoon and the time off from work. It's a real tragedy. **(checks her watch)** I should get going soon before that blizzard hits. I don't wanna get stuck here.

SHELBY: It's probably a false alarm anyways. They always do this. The weather reports get everyone all excited and worried and then nothing happens. Nothing at all.

SAL: Who cares if there's a blizzard? It's not like Shelby and I have much of a life anyways. If we're not here, we're at the movies. If we're not at the movies, we're with our families. If we're not with them, then we spend too much time sitting around and getting all dreamy eyed, thinking about our futures. See, I wanna write a song, a really good song. Probably a ballad. Then we'll record Shelby singing it and then *wham*, she'll be famous. They'll have a huge billboard of her up in Times Square.

SHELBY: I'd settle for a subway station.

MRS. LLOYD: Well, you should do it. Both of you. Don't wait too long. **(pause)** How old are you now?

SHELBY & SAL: **(in unison)** Twenty-one.

MRS. LLOYD: Twenty-one?! You mean to tell me, the two of you have been working here for five years? That's madness. Seems like five months.

SHELBY: The time just went by really fast. But it's been good. I've been saving up my tips. I'll either go back to school or have a wonderful vacation. Maybe I'll go to Sicily. See my great-grandmother while she's still alive. I was named after her. My mother says we're both stubborn. I want to meet her and talk to her and see how much alike we really are. The practical thing for me to do is go back to school. I could audition for NYU.

MRS. LLOYD: What about Julliard?

SHELBY: **(shrugs)** Maybe.

SAL: Don't worry, Shel'. It'll happen soon. For both of us.

SHELBY: Yeah, I hope so. **(SHE pauses)** Hey, Mrs. Lloyd, would you like some more coffee?

MRS. LLOYD: I'll take just a little more. Otherwise, I won't be able to sleep tonight.

SHELBY: I'll go get it. **(exits to the kitchen)**

MRS. LLOYD: **(once SHELBY is gone)** Tell me the truth, Sal Visconti. I've known you since you were a child, so don't lie to me.

SAL: What do you want to know?

MRS. LLOYD: Are you really in love with Shelby?

SAL: What?

MRS. LLOYD: Come on, now, be honest. I'm just a nosey lady that wants to know.

SAL: Mrs. Lloyd, no, I'm not -

MRS. LLOYD: You're lying.

SAL: Why would I do that?

MRS. LLOYD: Not to me. To yourself. I see a lot in this place. You two think I'm just sitting here, on the edge of Alzheimer's, doing my crossword puzzles. But I watch the two of you. Always smiling and laughing and standing real close to each other. And the eyes...that's where it's all at. Have you ever seen the way Shelby looks at you? It's like she's staring her future right in the face. Don't be dumb, Sal. Marry that girl. Now. Make a life together.

SAL: I'm terribly sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not in love with Shelby. I mean, yeah, she's my best friend and she's a great person, but as for anything intimate between us, it's just not going to happen.

MRS. LLOYD: I think you're wrong, Sal. The two of you are perfect for each other. You just haven't seen that yet.

SHELBY: **(enters from kitchen with a coffee pot)** He hasn't seen what yet?

SAL: **(recovering quickly)** My name in print.

SHELBY: You will, Sal. I know you will. **(pours coffee for MRS. LLOYD)** Have you ever read his stuff, Mrs. Lloyd? The boy is amazing. He wrote this one poem. I swear, it made me cry for two hours. It was so beautiful. All about

somebody being your tomorrow. You know, how you can just meet somebody and you know down deep that you would give anything just to have them look at you and say "You are my tomorrow." Gosh, I'm getting chills just thinking about it. **(pause)** Sal, I know you're gonna be a famous writer someday and then Vinnie will hang your picture in the front window and tell all of his poker buddies that you used to work here and that you and he were the best of friends. You know he will. He'll probably call you up and ask to borrow fifty bucks to fix that leaky pipe in the bathroom.

SAL: Yeah and I'll say, "Vinnie my man, you should have thought about that raise you promised me for five years."

SHELBY: And that Christmas that he made us work. While our families were at Mass, we were here drinking eggnog and singing Christmas Carols until we almost passed out.

MRS. LLOYD: I remember that. I brought cookies for you both. Little Christmas cookies with white chocolate chips and pecans. And we sat here-

SAL: And Shelby sang.

SHELBY: We all sang. You just won't admit it.

MRS. LLOYD: It was a wonderful Christmas.

SHELBY: I long for more holidays like that. You know, simple but fun.

SAL: So do I.

MRS. LLOYD: Well, I'm sure you'll both live to see your best Christmas. I just hope I'm around to share it with you.

SHELBY: Of course you'll be around. Mrs. Lloyd, you've been so sweet to us, that we could never forget you. No matter what. I think of you as my second mother. In fact, you're even a little nicer than my first mother. I mean no disrespect against her. She just keeps going on and on about tradition and how I need to find a husband before I end up alone like her.

SAL: You're not alone.

MRS. LLOYD: Of course not. None of us are. And if that blizzard hits, we might be stuck together for the rest of winter.

SHELBY: That wouldn't be so bad.

SAL: If we get stuck together, Shelby has to sing again.

SHELBY: No way, Sal.

SAL: Why not?

SHELBY: This is a coffee shop, not a cabaret.

MRS. LLOYD: I hope it snows like mad. Of course my daughter and my grandson won't even bother checking on me. I think they pray for snow, hoping it kills me, buries me alive.

SHELBY: That's not true. Your family loves you very much.

MRS. LLOYD: Yeah, when I'm writing a check.

SHELBY: Why don't you leave from this place, Mrs. Lloyd? You could pack up and move to Florida or California.

MRS. LLOYD: Because dear, this is my home. I've lived here all my life and I have no intentions of leaving. Besides, I hate Florida. I get sunstroke. And those women down there with their gaudy jewelry and money from their dead husband's. My Edward would crawl out of his grave if I moved to Florida. He hated the place also. He used to say that there was no place like New York City. And I tend to agree with him.

SHELBY: So do I. I wish I could have known him... Edward, I mean.

MRS. LLOYD: Oh, he was a lazy good-for-nothing bum. But I loved him. I really did. But, he's up in Heaven now. Probably spying on me and cracking jokes at my expense. He knows I'm lonely. He knows I come around this place to visit with the two of you because that apartment feels so empty. He understands. He would have admired the both of you. Working so hard. Six days a week. Wasting your youth away in this place.

SHELBY: I think I come here for the same reasons you do.

MRS. LLOYD: What do you mean?

SHELBY: Just to have some place to go.

MRS. LLOYD: Shelby, that's crazy.

SHELBY: It's true. I haven't found my place yet. You know, a place in life where you feel like everything is just right and you want nothing to change. I'm not there yet.

MRS. LLOYD: You will be. You'll find it. So will you, Sal. **(SHE pauses and takes a long look at both of them. Finally, SHE stands up, collecting her things. SHE pulls out a five-dollar bill from the front pocket of her jacket. SHE hands it to SHELBY.)** Keep the change. Save your tips. Go buy yourself your dream. **(SHELBY takes the money from her, smiling. SHE tucks it into the front pocket of her apron. MRS. LLOYD exits. SHELBY puts the coffee pot away, at the counter.)**

SAL: I'm serious, Shelby. I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna sit down and write a book.

SHELBY: You should. You really should.

SAL: You think I could publish something?

SHELBY: What about your poems? That magazine in Greenwich Village loved your poetry. They told you that you were brilliant.

SAL: I don't think so. I mean, I haven't lived yet. You know, all the famous writers - they've traveled around the world and they've gathered up experience. Then they write about it. That's what I need to do. I need to live.

SHELBY: We both do.

SAL: Hey, you wanna go to the movies on Sunday?

SHELBY: Sure. But I have to go to Mass with my mom first. I promised her I'd start going back to church.

SAL: Yeah, my mom's trying to do the same. She won't take no for an answer. She wants us to go pray for my father.

SHELBY: **(crosses a coat rack to get her purse, her jacket, a scarf and a hat)** How is he?

SAL: He's still having chest pains. He won't go to a doctor though. My mom will beg and scream and cry and he still won't go.

SHELBY: He's stubborn like you. **(starts to bundle up)**

SAL: Yeah, no kidding. That's about all we have in common though. He keeps at me about trying to convince Vinnie to let me buy this place.

SHELBY: Maybe you should. You practically run this place now without any help.

SAL: Hey, I got you, don't I?

SHELBY: Of course you do. **(pause)** What are friends for? If I didn't work here, I'd probably be holed up at home, sitting in that apartment and listening to my mother ramble on about all of her friends and their scandals. It would be slow suicide.

SAL: My dad doesn't really understand. He wants me to be some rich guy who bosses everybody around. He can't figure out why I just want to be a writer.

SHELBY: You don't need to explain it to me. I'm the one with the mother who swears the solution to everything is to find a man and get married.

SAL: Your mom's okay. She's just a little wild.

SHELBY: Yeah, just a little. **(waits for SAL to put on his jacket)** What are we going to see?

SAL: What?

SHELBY: When you take me to the movies on Sunday, what are we going to see?

SAL: You make it sound like a date, Shelby.

SHELBY: If I needed a date, it wouldn't be with you. You're too cheap, Sal. You'd probably bring me *here* for dinner.

SAL: That is not true.

SHELBY: Come on. Let's go.

SAL: Hold on. Let me get the lights. Then I'll walk you home.

SHELBY: All right. But hurry. I've been in this place long enough. **(nears the exit; an idea hits her)** A door...A five letter word for love...*adore*. **(They exit.)**

(Lights fade.)

ACT 1
SCENE 2

As lights come up, SHELBY is traveling from each table with a washrag, cleaning. SAL is standing on a chair, with his journal open in his hands. It is the next evening.

SAL: **(reading from his journal)** I have kissed regret and bathed in shallow ends and in the tidal pull of my heart, I find myself swimming to a memory that will not be buried at Coney Island. If you feel the ache of what is missing, I will meet you there. **(waits for a reaction from SHELBY)** Well, what did you think?

SHELBY: **(looks up at him)** Sal, it's beautiful. You're just able to take all these words and make them so powerful. It's amazing.

SAL: You don't think it's stupid, do you?

SHELBY: No. Of course not. I love it. You know that. I love... everything you write.

SAL: Think I should make a copy of it and give it to Mrs. Lloyd the next time she comes in?

SHELBY: I think she'd love it. I want a copy also. So when you're off somewhere rich and famous, I'll have something to remember you by.

SAL: What are you talking about? **(starts to exit)** You'll be with me. **(exits to the kitchen)**

(Alone on stage, SHELBY starts to hum a few lines from a song. Slowly, SHE begins to sing. TINA and GEORGE enter from stage left, silencing SHELBY's song. TINA is wide-eyed and literally speaks without stopping. GEORGE looks completely miserable. Both are dressed for cold weather.)

TINA: Hi! We just want some hot chocolate. Is that alright? Oh you poor thing. Having to work here all alone. George, isn't that sad? Isn't that just downright-rip-your-heart-out-send-you-to-the-shrink depressing? Couldn't you cry? You sweet thing. What's your name? I'm Tina. This is George. We've been married for two weeks. And everyone said it wouldn't last. Fooled them! Gosh. This place is small. Not much business, I guess? Well, it's that time of year. Post holidays and stuff. So, can we have a table?

SHELBY: **(smiles faintly and nods)** Sure. Uh, sit wherever you want.

TINA: George?

GEORGE: Yes, love?

TINA: (*whispers loudly*) Doesn't our waitress look sad? I'm really concerned for her. I really, really am, George.

SHELBY: I'm fine, really. It's just been a long day.

TINA: (*to SHELBY*) Do you have children? A lazy husband to support? Or is this an experience to build character?

SHELBY: Actually, I work six days a week.

TINA: Six days a week?! George.

GEORGE: Yes, love?

TINA: Did you hear that? This poor, sweet thing works six days a week.

GEORGE: I heard her.

SHELBY: Oh, it's no big deal. There's a new girl starting tomorrow actually. She was supposed to come in last night, but because of the big blizzard scare...well, you know how people in this city love to overreact. They hear the word *blizzard* and they go nuts.

TINA: Did you say a *blizzard*?! Oh George, isn't that just frightening? Our first week in New York City and there's a blizzard coming. Isn't that just perm-your-hair-and-paint-your-nails-with-glow-in-the-dark-neon-orange scary?

SHELBY: Don't worry about it. You'll be okay.

GEORGE: Thanks for your concern. Can we have two hot chocolates?

SHELBY: Sure. I'll be right back. I'll go let Sal know you're here. (*exits to the kitchen*)

TINA: Oh, George, isn't that cute? She's so lonely that she has an imaginary friend. Couldn't you just die?

GEORGE: I could die.

TINA: Well, this place is just as charming inside as it was from the outside. It's a bit small and simple, but I think it's just right for us. Everything is just right for us. Isn't it, George?

GEORGE: Yes, love.

TINA: Are you happy, George? Are you really happy you married me?

GEORGE: (*deadpan*) I'm happy, love.

TINA: No, I'm serious. Like cereal-at-midnight-donuts-in-the-morning-and-sweet-dreams-all-night happy? I want to make you happy. I want us both to be happy, George. Happy, happy, *happy*. That's what life is all about. Happiness. And change. Lots of changes. For both of us. You're almost finished with law school. Since we got married, I haven't taken my medication. And we're newlyweds. Wasn't the honeymoon grand? Didn't you just love it? I mean, wasn't it just a spin-around-and –

GEORGE: I loved it, dear.

TINA: Oh, George. I'm so glad we're here. In Little Italy. In New York City. At Vinnie's Coffee Shop. Just us. Together. *Forever*.

GEORGE: Forever, dear.

SHELBY: (*enters from the kitchen, carrying a tray with two cups of hot chocolate on it*) Here you go. (*serves their drinks*) Sal's got the TV on in the kitchen. The weather report says the blizzard might not hit until tomorrow.

GEORGE: Well, that's good news.

TINA: (*looking into her cup*) Look, George. Little tiny marshmallows. Reminds me of camping trips with my family when I was just a little girl. We'd pack up the car and head to the mountains. Find just the perfect place and set up our tent. Dad would go fishing. Mom would play cards. My brother would take me hiking. But you know, I always got lost. We'd go out to the middle of the woods and then my brother would just disappear. And it would take me five or six hours to find my way back again. But I always did. Then my mother would scold my brother for having such a bad sense of direction and then she'd make me hot chocolate, just like this. With tiny marshmallows in it. God I love nostalgia.

GEORGE: I love it, dear.

SHELBY: So, you've been married for two weeks now?

(*SAL enters from the kitchen. HE listens.*)

TINA: Yes, we have! It was a beautiful wedding too. I wish I would have known you. I could have made you a bridesmaid. None of mine showed up. It was just me. And George, of course. My brother couldn't make it. He had a problem with a root canal. Good thing my Dad's a dentist. Mom wasn't there either.

SHELBY: Oh, how sad.

TINA: But I couldn't really blame her. I mean, can you imagine having chicken pox and measles in the same week? Poor thing. I'm sure she'll make it up to me. She always does. My parents just spoil me. They've sent me on thirty-seven trips. Can you believe that?!

GEORGE: I believe it, dear.

SAL: Shelby, are you hungry? I could make us some dinner before we close up?

(*SHELBY shakes her head "no".*)

TINA: He's real! Look, honey, our waitress really does have a friend!

SAL: What did you put in her hot chocolate?

TINA: Little tiny marshmallows. See! Aren't they cute? So, are you two dating, brother and sister, man and wife, or playing hard to get?

SHELBY: No, we're best friends.

TINA: Oh, isn't that cute? You work together and play together. That's just adorable.

SAL: Yeah, we even ride our tricycles to work together. In the snow!

TINA: Oh, don't be silly! **(suddenly stands up)** Excuse me, where's the ladies room?

SHELBY: Oh, I'll show you where it's at. Follow me. **(SHELBY and TINA exit to the kitchen.)**

GEORGE: **(after TINA is gone)** I married that maniac two weeks ago.

SAL: I see.

GEORGE: Can I give you some advice? You know, man to man?

SAL: Sure.

GEORGE: Don't ever get married. I don't care how blinded you are by love. Don't surrender. Don't give in, no matter how great the temptation is. I'm married now. I'm a newlywed. My honeymoon just ended. And you know what? I'm in law school right now. My last semester. And I have actually been counting down the days until vacation is over so I can go back to school. So I can get away. So I can make a clean escape. Freedom! That's what I want.

SAL: If you don't love her, then why did you marry her?

GEORGE: **(matter-of-factly)** Vodka.

VICTORIA: **(enters from stage left)** Hello. I'm Victoria.

SAL: Who?

VICTORIA: Victoria Sheppard. Are you Sal?

SAL: That depends.

GEORGE: Say no. Say *no*.

SHELBY: **(enters from the kitchen, notices VICTORIA)** Hi.

VICTORIA: You must be Shelby.

SHELBY: Yes?

VICTORIA: Vinnie didn't tell you I'd be stopping by? He said I was to pick up an apron and fill out some paperwork.

SHELBY: I'm sorry. Sal, this is the new girl Vinnie hired to help out.

SAL: Oh, hi. **(Shakes her hand, but stares into her eyes just a moment too long, obviously attracted to her. SHELBY notices his reaction.)** It's nice to meet you.

VICTORIA: Likewise. I would have stopped by sooner, but I was at the library studying and I lost track of time.

SAL: So, you're a student?

VICTORIA: **(laughs a little)** Yes, I am.

SHELBY: Well, Victoria, come with me and I'll show you around. Are you starting tomorrow?

VICTORIA: Yes, I'll be here after school. By three o'clock. I'm a little nervous. This is my first job.

TINA: **(enters quickly from the kitchen, breathless and panicked)** George! George, call a plumber!

GEORGE: What, dear?

TINA: My ring! My wedding ring!

GEORGE: What about it?

SHELBY: What happened? Is everything okay?

TINA: My wedding ring is down-the-drain-disappeared-kiss-my-diamonds-goodbye-forever-I'm-going-to-freak-out-if-somebody-doesn't-find-it-watch-me-suffocate-gone! Someone help!

SHELBY: Sal, will you help her? There's a wrench in the toolbox in the kitchen.

SAL: I know where it is. **(starts to exit, with TINA following him; turns to her.)** You better not try anything funny, lady. You're a nut. **(They both exit.)**

GEORGE: **(stands up and pulls out his wallet)** How much do I owe you for the hot chocolate?

SHELBY: **(confused)** Two dollars.

GEORGE: **(throws a few bills on the table)** That should cover it. **(takes a pause)** Can I catch a cab from here?

VICTORIA: Where to?

GEORGE: To the airport.

SHELBY: Wait. You mean, you're just going to leave her-

GEORGE: She's all yours. **(exits)**

VICTORIA: Who are these people?

SHELBY: Oh, they just got married.

VICTORIA: Are they regulars here?

SHELBY: We only have two regulars. Her name is Mrs. Lloyd and his name is Frank. I'm sure you'll meet them tomorrow. I think you'll really like working here, Victoria.

VICTORIA: Thanks. I must admit, I'm really nervous. I've never had a job before. Vinnie was great to give me a chance. My friends at school...well, none of them work. Their parents all have tons of money. In fact, I didn't tell any of them I was going to start working here. It's not that I'm embarrassed, because I think this place is great. It's just...

SHELBY: You don't have to explain. I started working here when I was sixteen. Sal was the only friend of mine that didn't make a big deal about it.

VICTORIA: Thanks. And you can call me Vicki if you want.

SHELBY: Okay. So what's your major, Vicki?

VICTORIA: My major?

SHELBY: Yeah, in school?

VICTORIA: Oh, I'm not in college.

SHELBY: You aren't?

VICTORIA: No, I'm in high school. I'm only a junior.

SHELBY: **(suddenly smiling)** You are? **(VICTORIA nods.)** Well, thank goodness. Well, let me make it official. Welcome to Vinnie's Coffee Shop. Once you start working here, you'll never leave.

VICTORIA: Thanks.

SAL: **(rushing in from the kitchen)** I need a paper bag.

SHELBY: What for?

SAL: That woman. She's hyperventilating. I think she's going to pass out.

SHELBY: Well, do something, Sal! The bags are in the kitchen by the dishwasher. Hurry. She might talk herself to death. **(turns to VICTORIA)** Can I get you some coffee?

VICTORIA: Hot chocolate would be great! **(pauses)** But no marshmallows.

(Lights fade.)

ACT 1 SCENE 3

Later that night. As lights come up, TINA is slumped over a table with her face buried in her arms. SHE is sobbing. SAL enters from the kitchen. HE stops, stares at her and then clears his throat. SHE doesn't respond.

SAL: Hey, come on. It's time to clear out. We're closing up.

TINA: **(muffled)** Nobody cares about me.

SAL: What?

TINA: **(sits up; her face is streaked with tears and make up)** You weren't even listening. I said nobody cares about me!

SAL: Look, lady, I'm sorry you lost your ring.

TINA: And I lost my husband too! He just left me here! He just took-a-cab-see-ya-later-cry-me-a-river-you're-a-fool-I-don't-love-you-no-more *disappeared*.

SAL: I'm sorry to hear that, but-

TINA: That's alright. Because you know what...you know what I'm going to do?

SAL: I have no idea. But if you hurt me, I'll be really mad.

TINA: You think I'm crazy, don't you?

SAL: Just a little.

TINA: Well, I'm not. But I'm going to go back to the hotel and gather up all of George's things and throw them into the Hudson River. I need to. For therapy. I need closure. I need the you're-a-bum-I-hate-your-guts-you-did-me-wrong-I'll-find-a-lawyer last word! Do you understand? See, I made a lot of sacrifices for George. I tried to be happy and talkative and pay lots of attention to him, but that just wasn't good enough. No. While my hand is stuck down some drain trying to fish out my wedding ring, he's catching a cab to the airport. Abandonment is the cruelest insult, don't you think?

SHELBY: **(SHE enters from the kitchen with VICTORIA. They are both holding cups of hot chocolate.)** Well, now that you've got the tour, I guess we'll see you tomorrow afternoon.

VICTORIA: I'll be here around three.

SAL: It was nice meeting you, Victoria.

VICTORIA: Yes, it was nice meeting you also, Salvatore.

(All three of them stop and look at TINA who has crawled onto a chair and started making machine gun noises.)

SAL: What are we gonna do with her?

SHELBY: Well, we can't just throw her out.

SAL: Why not?

SHELBY: She's upset, Sal. Can't you see?

SAL: She's a lunatic.

SHELBY: She's just...different. I mean, her husband just left her. What do you expect?

VICTORIA: I'll handle this. **(moves to TINA)** Tina, is that your name?

TINA: All men must suffer now, die *quick*!

VICTORIA: Tina...Tina, I want you to listen to me. **(TINA looks up at her.)** I'm going to take you to back to your hotel.

SAL: Alone?

VICTORIA: **(to SAL)** Hold on. Let me deal with this. **(turns back to TINA)** I will take you there. You just need to go outside and get into the cab and I'll ride there with you, okay?

TINA: **(thinks about it)** I want you to be my friend. **(pause)** My best friend.

VICTORIA: Whatever you say. **(crosses back to SAL and SHELBY)** I'll make sure she gets somewhere safe.

SAL: Yeah, try a hospital.

VICTORIA: **(crosses back to TINA)** Come on, Tina. We can share a cab.

TINA: What about my ring? I want my ring. I need something to remember George by.

VICTORIA: You'll have your memories.

SHELBY: If we find your ring, we'll telephone you at your hotel.

TINA: My name is Tina Brew. I'm staying at the Plaza. And I'm terribly sorry for my behavior. This is the third husband that's done this to me. And I don't know why I let them get away with treating me like this. I know you think I'm crazy...but I just want to say that you've all been so sweet. Please call me if you find my ring. I would be so grateful to you. **(pause)** I really love New York. **(turns to VICTORIA)** Let's be going now. A blizzard might hit soon. **(VICTORIA and TINA begin to exit.)**

SHELBY: What a day, huh?

SAL: There's nothing like life in the city.

SHELBY: Got any plans tonight?

SAL: Supposed to help my Dad down at the garage for awhile. My Mom's worried because he's been working so much.

SHELBY: Wanna meet me after?

SAL: For what?

SHELBY: Just to hang out. My Mom's got a new boyfriend. I'm sure she'll be out late. She always is.

SAL: Sure, I guess.

SHELBY: If you don't want to - .

SAL: No, of course I do. I'll pick up a movie at the video store.

SHELBY: Don't bother. The t.v. is broken again.

SAL: Maybe I can fix it.

SHELBY: I was thinking that we could make some apple cider and sit out on the fire escape, just like we used to.

SAL: Shel', we were like twelve when we did that.

SHELBY: I know. But it'll be fun. You can read me some of your poetry.

SAL: Okay, but only if you promise to sing me at least one song.

SHELBY: I'll try. But the last time I sang on the fire escape, Mrs. Matucci from across the way tried to kill me with a potato. She threw it right at my head. Said I woke her up with my annoying voice.

SAL: She doesn't have any taste.

SHELBY: Yeah, but her son is kind of cute.

SAL: I'll be over in two hours. Maybe sooner.

SHELBY: It's a date.

(Lights fade.)

ACT 1 SCENE 4

One week later. When the scene opens, FRANK is seated drinking a cup of coffee and reading a newspaper. VICTORIA enters from the kitchen, carrying a plate of food for FRANK. SHE's very cautious as if SHE's scared SHE might drop the plate.

VICTORIA: There you are, sir. Enjoy your dinner.

FRANK: Who are you?

VICTORIA: Excuse me?

FRANK: You're new. I've been coming here for seven years and I've never seen you.

VICTORIA: I'm Victoria. Eat your manicotti. **(SHELBY enters from the kitchen.)** Shelby, what's wrong with Sal?

SHELBY: What do you mean?

VICTORIA: I was in the kitchen with him and he nearly bit my head off. He's been grumpy all afternoon.

SHELBY: He got a rejection letter. He sent a couple of poems to a magazine and they sent him back a letter. It was kind of harsh. I feel bad for him. But don't take it personal. He's mad at his father. I think they've been fighting.

VICTORIA: Are you really close to his family?

SHELBY: Very close. I've known the Visconti's all my life. His mother is my Godmother. My mom and her are best friends. They went to school together and grew up here in this neighborhood.

VICTORIA: So, how come you and Sal don't go out? I'm just curious.

SHELBY: We're just friends, Vicki.

VICTORIA: You don't like him?

SHELBY: Yeah, I like him. I mean, we spend a lot of time together.

VICTORIA: I think he's cute.

SHELBY: He's okay.

VICTORIA: I think he likes you.

SHELBY: I think you've been spending too much time with Mrs. Lloyd. She's the matchmaker of Little Italy. If she had her way, Sal and I would have been down the aisle a long time ago. But it's not going to happen. We've never dated. We've always been just really good friends. Besides, I don't think he likes me in that way. He doesn't like anybody, actually. He hardly ever dates.

VICTORIA: Maybe he's just shy.

SHELBY: Sometimes he is. He just works a lot. We both do. It takes our mind off of things.

VICTORIA: Like what?

SHELBY: Oh, like the fact that he'd rather be a writer and I'd rather be - Well, we'd do anything to get out of this place.

VICTORIA: So why don't you?

SHELBY: **(doesn't answer, instead, SHE crosses to FRANK)** Hey, Frank. How's it going? Your wife still mad at you?

FRANK: She'll get over it. It was just one little anniversary.

VICTORIA: You forgot about your anniversary?

FRANK: **(laughs)** Wouldn't be the first time. **(pause)** Hey, Shelby, I saw your mother the other day. She's looking pretty good. Not as good as you, of course. You're still my favorite waitress.

SHELBY: Thanks, Frank.

FRANK: So when do you want to get married?

SHELBY: Don't start that nonsense again.

VICTORIA: Shelby, is he being serious?

SHELBY: Frank's never serious, are you, Frank?

FRANK: **(Grins at her)** Only about you.

VICTORIA: Excuse me, Frank? You've got a little tiny piece of manicotti right here... **(indicates her front tooth)**

FRANK: Oh, sorry. **(HE covers his mouth. VICTORIA starts laughing.)**

VICTORIA: Gotcha!

FRANK: I like her, Shelby.

SHELBY: Well, she's off limits. This one is still in high school.

FRANK: High school? Good Lord!

VICTORIA: It's very nice to meet you, Frank. I'm Victoria. And you really should remember your anniversary.

FRANK: Hey, don't get me wrong. I love my wife. I love her very much.

VICTORIA: Well, that's good.

FRANK: But I think I love Shelby more. **(laughs)**

SHELBY: Frank, you're too nice to me. You better be careful, though. You spend too much time around here and your wife's gonna start suspecting something.

FRANK: I hope she does.

VICTORIA: **(to FRANK)** You're crazy.

SHELBY: Get used to it, Vicki. Frank comes in at least three times a week.

FRANK: Not just for the manicotti either! **(pause, to VICTORIA)** Hey, have you ever heard Shelby sing?

VICTORIA: You're a singer? I didn't know that.

FRANK: She's incredible! It'll give you chills, especially when she sings a love song.

VICTORIA: No wonder why you like her so much, Frank.

FRANK: Oh, she stole my heart the moment I saw her. But when I heard her voice...Man, it's pure magic.

VICTORIA: That's cool, Shelby. I used to wanna be a singer, but I'm not good enough.

SHELBY: Neither am I.

CARMEN: **(enters from stage right, carrying a casserole dish covered with aluminum foil)** Shelby?

SHELBY: **(rushing over to her to hug her)** Carmen, how are you?

CARMEN: Great! Well the kids are driving me a bit mad, but that's motherhood for you. Never a dull moment. I brought you some pasta. You look pale, Shelby. You need to eat more, honey. I'm calling Vinnie. I'll tell him you need a vacation.

SHELBY: Victoria, this is Carmen Visconti. This is Sal's mother.

VICTORIA: Oh, hi!

SHELBY: This is Vicki Sheppard. She just started here to help us out a little.

CARMEN: It's nice to meet you, Vicki. **(pause)** I should have brought more pasta. **(to SHELBY)** Is Sal here?

SHELBY: He's in the kitchen.

VICTORIA: I'll go get him. **(exits to the kitchen)**

CARMEN: How've you been, Shelby? Is your mother still on your back about getting married?

SHELBY: Of course she is. Maybe you can talk some sense into her.

CARMEN: I doubt it. She says she's in love with a new man. She's crazy about him. **(to FRANK)** Hi, Frank.

FRANK: Hi, Carmen. Wanna join me for lunch?

CARMEN: Wish I could. I gotta run Tony over to the doctor's.

SHELBY: He finally agreed to go? **(CARMEN nods.)** Oh, that's great.

FRANK: Is Tony sick?

CARMEN: He's been having chest pains. I told him he works too much. Like his son. **(SAL enters from the kitchen. VICTORIA follows behind him.)**

SAL: **(crosses to CARMEN, kisses her cheek)** Hi, Mom.

CARMEN: Hi, honey. I brought you and Shelby some pasta. Share it with the new girl, too. **(SHELBY takes it into the kitchen. VICTORIA follows her.)**

SAL: Mom, what are you doing here?

CARMEN: What? I can't visit my son at his job? Vinnie won't care. He still plays cards with your father on Wednesdays. He loses every time.

SAL: Mom, you know what I mean. You're not here to visit.

CARMEN: Of course I am. I came down to see you and Shelby and even Frank. **(acknowledges her by toasting his coffee cup at her)**

SAL: No, you didn't.

CARMEN: All right, fine.

SAL: This is about the fight, isn't it?

CARMEN: Honey, your father was upset. You know how he gets. He's been working all the time and he's worried about going to the doctor's.

SAL: Mom, he doesn't want me to be a writer. He said that. Those were his words.

CARMEN: I know. But if you would just hear him out. Your Uncle Bobby has made you a nice offer.

SAL: I don't wanna listen to him, Mom. He wants me to be somebody that I'm not. He wants me to sell insurance for a living.

CARMEN: Sal, listen-

SAL: I'm serious. I know he's disappointed, but I can't help it. All I wanna do is write.

CARMEN: And you're a good writer, Sal. You are. You're wonderful.

SAL: And I'm going to do it. Mrs. Lloyd even got me an appointment with a literary agent next week.

CARMEN: She did what?

SAL: She has connections because of Edward. From when he was alive.

CARMEN: She did that for you? She really got you an appointment like that?

SAL: Yeah, she did. Because she believes in me. Because she wants more for me than this lousy coffee shop.

CARMEN: What does Shelby think?

SAL: About what?

CARMEN: Does she think you should go to this appointment?

SAL: Of course she does. Mom, listen to me. I want you to go home and I want you to tell Dad that no matter what he says or what he does, I'm still going to be a writer and if he can't handle that-

CARMEN: I will. I will, Sal. I'll tell him. **(pause)** I should go. You're busy. You've got work to do. Just make sure you eat.

SAL: I'll see you at home tonight. **(hugs her)** We can talk about this some more if you want.

CARMEN: There's no point. Your mind's made up. And I know you'll do it. **(pause)** Go to that appointment and make your father proud.

SAL: I will. I'm gonna try. **(pause)** But I'm not doing it for him, Mom. I'm doing it for me.

(CARMEN nods, says goodbye to FRANK and then exits. VICTORIA enters from the kitchen with a coffee pot. SHE crosses to FRANK and refills his cup.)

VICTORIA: You should have been here the other night. We had this strange woman in here. She lost her wedding ring in the bathroom. It fell down the drain. Complete tragedy. She was nuts.

FRANK: **(raises his coffee cup)** Isn't everybody?

SHELBY: **(enters from the kitchen; takes a moment, trying to sense SAL's mood)** You okay? I heated up some of that pasta your mom brought over. You want me to fix you a plate?

SAL: I'm fine. I'm not really that hungry.

SHELBY: Oh.

SAL: **(suddenly; spontaneous)** Let's go out tonight, Shelby.

SHELBY: Out?

SAL: Yeah, we can go dancing or something. Come on. We'll close up early, go change our clothes and catch a cab.

SHELBY: Sal, are you serious?

SAL: Yeah, let's do it.

SHELBY: **(thinks about it; excited)** Okay. Let's go.

VICTORIA: I can stay and close the place up if you want. I just need a key.

SHELBY: No...we'll stay and close. **(to SAL, smiling)** This is a great idea. **(SHE exits to the kitchen. SAL follows.)**
VICTORIA: I give it a year before they're married.
FRANK: You wanna put money on it?
VICTORIA: I wish I had some.
FRANK: You remind me of someone.
VICTORIA: If you say your wife, I'm calling my father.
FRANK: No. A girl I used to know. Her name was Heather. She used to work here. Before Shelby. One day, she just up and left. Didn't tell a soul she was leaving. Didn't even say good bye.
VICTORIA: You miss her?
FRANK: Can you tell?
VICTORIA: I might only be sixteen, but I've been through a lot. I know heart ache when I see it.
FRANK: Same thing she used to say.
VICTORIA: I don't have any big plans. No exciting future for me. I'll probably die here. **(pause)** This girl. Heather. She was lucky. She escaped. I doubt the same thing will happen for me.
FRANK: It will happen if you make it happen.
VICTORIA: Thanks for the pep talk, Frank. I've got dishes to do and homework to finish. My glamorous life awaits me. **(exits)**

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 5

It is late the next evening. When lights come up, SHELBY is alone on stage. SHE is dancing and singing, reliving the previous evening SHE spent with SAL dancing. A few moments pass before ROSEMARY makes her entrance. SHE comes in, shaking and freezing.

ROSEMARY: Excuse me?
SHELBY: **(startled)** Yes? We're closing soon. **(takes a closer look at her)** Are you okay?
ROSEMARY: I just wanted to know if I could bother you for a bowl of soup.
SHELBY: Soup?
ROSEMARY: It's really cold outside and I've been walking for a while. **(pause)** I'm really hungry and I wouldn't ask...
SHELBY: No, don't worry about it. Here. **(indicates a table)** Have a seat. I'll get you some soup.
ROSEMARY: I don't have any money.
SHELBY: **(smiles; comforting)** That's okay. Just have a seat. I hope you like split pea with ham. It's all we got.
ROSEMARY: **(relieved; sits down)** That would be wonderful.
SHELBY: I'll be right back. **(SHE exits. ROSEMARY begins to sing the same song that she heard SHELBY singing. SHE rubs her hands together, trying to get warm. SHE reaches into the pocket of her tattered coat and pulls out a snapshot. SHE stares at it for a while. When SHELBY enters from the kitchen with a bowl of soup and a spoon, ROSEMARY hides the photo back into her jacket.)** If you want some more, just let me know. **(puts the soup down)** Would you like some crackers?
ROSEMARY: No. No, this is fine. Thank you so much.
SHELBY: **(as ROSEMARY starts to eat, SHE rushes back to the kitchen)** I'll get you something to drink!
ROSEMARY: **(SHE closes her eyes, praying)** Thank you, Lord. **(SHE continues to eat. SHELBY enters again, with a glass of water.)** You're so nice. Thank you so much.
SHELBY: Don't worry about it. It's cold out there. They've been promising a blizzard for weeks now.
ROSEMARY: I heard you singing, when I came in.
SHELBY: **(embarrassed)** Oh, it's a bad habit.
ROSEMARY: It sounded nice. I liked it.
SHELBY: Thanks. **(There's a moment of silence. SHELBY just stands there, wanting to say something, but not sure what the words are. Finally, SHE sits down across from ROSEMARY.)** Do you mind if I sit here with you?
ROSEMARY: Not at all. I hate eating alone.
SHELBY: Me too. **(pause)** Do you live around here?
ROSEMARY: Sort of. I'm...in between places right now.
SHELBY: You mean-
ROSEMARY: Yeah. I'm homeless.
SHELBY: I'm...I don't know what to say.
ROSEMARY: People usually don't. Don't worry. The soup said more than enough. I really appreciate it.
SHELBY: It's no problem. Really. **(pause)** I'm Shelby. Shelby Santella.

ROSEMARY: My name is Rosemary.

SHELBY: What a pretty name.

ROSEMARY: Thanks.

SHELBY: So...where do you sleep...at night, I mean? It's awfully cold this time of year.

ROSEMARY: I get by okay. I usually find a place to sleep. Here or there.

SHELBY: I'm sorry I keep staring. It's just...you look so young. Do you have family in New York?

ROSEMARY: Not anymore. I was married. **(pause)** I had a baby girl. But my husband died.

SHELBY: He died?

ROSEMARY: He got shot.

SHELBY: By a gang?

ROSEMARY: I don't know who did it. But I didn't handle it very well. Then some lady from welfare came and she took my baby girl. **(pause)** I got a picture of her. You wanna see?

SHELBY: Sure.

ROSEMARY: She looks like her daddy. She's got his eyes. **(takes the photograph out and hands it to SHELBY)** Isn't she pretty?

SHELBY: She's beautiful. I bet you really miss her.

ROSEMARY: I just got kind of lost for a while, you know. I spent all my money so my husband could have a nice funeral. Then after they took my baby girl, I just didn't care anymore. So, I just gotta get back on my feet and get things right and then I'll get her back again. So I can hold her. Watch her smile and tickle her little feet and make her laugh.

SHELBY: **(there's a long pause before this line)** Would you like some more soup?

ROSEMARY: No, I should be on my way. I know you're closing soon. You probably wanna go home to your husband and your children. **(pause)** Do you have a baby girl at home waiting for you?

SHELBY: No. **(pause)** No, I don't. **(ROSEMARY starts to get up to leave.)** Listen, Rosemary, you don't have to go just yet. I mean, if you want to sit here and warm up some more. I could fix you a plate of food...or wait! I could fix you up some stuff to take with you.

ROSEMARY: You're a kind woman. And people say there are no heroes. But I don't want to bother you with my problems. My home is on the streets and that's just the way it is.

SHELBY: Where will you sleep tonight?

ROSEMARY: Don't you worry about that. I'll find some place. **(pause)** You know what I don't understand? How the rest of the people in this world think that us living in New York don't care about anybody. But that's not true. I've met some of the nicest people here in this city. People do care. They really do. I believe that.

SHELBY: So do I.

HEATHER: **(enters from stage right dressed very fashionably, glamorous)** Excuse me, is this still Vinnie's Coffee Shop?

SHELBY: Yes it is. Can I help you? **(stands)**

END OF FREE PREVIEW

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Temporary Heroes