

SOMEBODY'S BABY

A Play in Two Acts

by
David-Matthew Barnes



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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

This play is set in Chicago in Della's Diner, a quiet place that is never busy. There are three tables, a counter with four stools and a jukebox. There are three entrances and exits: downstage left is the main entrance from the street, upstage right leads to the restroom, downstage right leads to the kitchen.

The restaurant was built in the early 50's and the décor hasn't changed much since then. On the main counter, there is a black telephone, with a rotary dial. Present are the usual restaurant items; bottles of ketchup, mustard, sugar containers, creamers, coffee cups, menus, etc.

When the play opens, it has been raining non-stop for nineteen days. MILVIA, who has worked at Della's for the last twelve years of her life, is sitting at the counter, drinking a cup of black coffee and reading a current issue of an entertainment magazine. Her hair is frosted blond and ratted and teased, giving her a "messy" look. SHE wears silver hoop earrings on both ears and her nails are painted a bright, bubble-gum pink. Around her left wrist is a charm bracelet. Her entire appearance should suggest that SHE is desperately trying to look younger than SHE is, which is 37. SHE speaks with a slight, non-specific, Southern twang.

WILLIAM, who is just 19, is sitting at the middle table, with his back to the main entrance. HE has a guitar case and a backpack, sitting next to him. HE is wearing a green, military jacket that belonged to his father. The jacket has big front pockets and a hood. In one pocket HE has a pack of cigarettes and a gold lighter with his initials engraved on it. In the other pocket, HE carries a small, hand-sized Bible. Around his neck, on a gold chain, HE wears a gold cross. WILLIAM has thick, dark hair of medium length and even darker eyes. It is possible that HE is of Italian, Latin or Portuguese heritage.

When we first see WILLIAM, HE is bent over an open notebook, writing furiously and diligently as if HE can't keep up with his own thoughts. HE is finishing the last stanza of a four-page poem. There is a bowl of banana pudding near his right hand and a cup of hot chocolate near his left.

As the lights come up slowly, we can hear the rain falling outside, WILLIAM writing and MILVIA humming a song by Patsy Cline. A few moments pass before the dialogue begins.

MILVIA: *(looking up from her magazine)* You want some more hot chocolate?

WILLIAM: *(HE shakes his head; not looking up)* No...I'm fine.

MILVIA: *(bored with her magazine; craving conversation)* What'cha writin'?

WILLIAM: Just a poem.

MILVIA: A poem? You write poetry?

WILLIAM: As of last week I do.

MILVIA: I wrote a poem once. It was kinda dumb...about the sunrise. *(SHE waits for a reply from him)* You ever write about the sunrise?

WILLIAM: No...I'm writing about the rain.

MILVIA: *(SHE thinks about it)* I don't like it. In fact, I hate the rain.

WILLIAM: *(HE stops suddenly. Slowly, HE raises his head and puts his pen down. HE looks over at MILVIA, who is thumbing through her magazine again.)* Why do you hate the rain?

MILVIA: *(shrugs)* Just do, I reckon.

WILLIAM: But why?

MILVIA: *(realizes SHE has captured his attention; puts her magazine down)* It's kind of lonely.

WILLIAM: The rain?

MILVIA: Yeah...See, when it rains, nobody ever comes in here. So there isn't anybody to talk to or visit with.

WILLIAM: *(HE looks around as if HE's seeing the restaurant for the first time)* You work here by yourself?

MILVIA: No. Roy works here also. But he stays in the kitchen mostly. His wife bought him this portable black and white television, so he doesn't like to talk much. He gets mean if I try to talk to him when the television's on. I have to wait until a commercial.

WILLIAM: That's too bad.

MILVIA: But I really do hate the rain. *(SHE waits)* You hate it also, don't cha?

WILLIAM: *(returning to his poem)* Actually, I love the rain.

MILVIA: *(defeated)* Oh. *(SHE returns to her magazine)* I guess you're not lonely much either.

(They both fall silent, absorbed by their escapes. A few moments pass before TABITHA enters, suddenly and quick. Her presence is so strong, that both WILLIAM and MILVIA seem startled when SHE appears. TABITHA stands in the doorway, wet from the rain. SHE is breathing hard, as SHE has just run four or five city blocks. SHE is dressed for a party. SHE is clutching a purse and a button-up sweater. Her hair is shoulder length. Her most striking features are her eyes. They are soft, sincere and somewhat wistful. SHE is 16, but looks 20. SHE stands for a moment. Her eyes dart back and forth from WILLIAM, who is looking at her over the back of his shoulder, to MILVIA, who looks frozen. TABITHA wraps an arm around her waist, trying to regain her composure. Once her breathing has slowed down a little, SHE clears her throat before SHE speaks. SHE directs her words to MILVIA, feeling WILLIAM's eyes on her.)

TABITHA: I'm sorry to bother you, but do you have a telephone?

MILVIA: *(still dazed, SHE nods, then snaps back into reality)* Sure. It's right here.

TABITHA: Thank you. I just need to call my father.

MILVIA: *(pushing the phone towards TABITHA)* That sure is a pretty sweater you have.

TABITHA: Thank you.

(Picks up the phone and starts to dial and glances over nervously at WILLIAM. HE realizes HE's been staring at her and returns to his poem.)

MILVIA: You want some coffee, hon?

TABITHA: *(shakes her head)* No, thank you. *(Her attention returns to the phone)* Mom? Dad? Are you guys back yet? This is Tabitha. I'm at – *(SHE suddenly stops. SHE covers the phone with her hand and turns to MILVIA.)* Where am I, exactly?

MILVIA: You're at Della's Diner.

TABITHA: *(into the phone)* I'm at Della's Diner. I'm downtown. I need you to come get me. *(SHE gets flustered; not sure what to do or say)* I guess I'll call back in a while and see if you're home. *(SHE hangs up the phone; to MILVIA)* I got the answering machine.

MILVIA: Oh.

TABITHA: *(with a need to explain)* It's my parents' anniversary. They should be home soon.

MILVIA: *(taking a closer look at TABITHA)* Are you okay? You look a little shaken up.

TABITHA: I'm fine. Well, I just had a fight with my boyfriend. He was being kind of a jerk, so I got out of his vehicle and came here. He was supposed to take me to this party. *(realizes SHE's rambling to a stranger)* Anyways, I'm just gonna wait for a little while and then call my parents back.

MILVIA: That's fine. Just have a seat.

TABITHA: Thanks.

MILVIA: You sure you don't want something warm to drink? You look awful cold.

TABITHA: I don't drink coffee.

MILVIA: How about some hot chocolate?

TABITHA: That sounds good, actually.

(SHE turns away from the counter to move to a booth. Suddenly, SHE stops and looks at WILLIAM, contemplating if SHE should sit with him. HE looks up and meets her eyes. MILVIA exits to the kitchen.)

WILLIAM: You can sit here...if you want.

TABITHA: I don't want to interrupt you. I can tell you're working on something important.

WILLIAM: It isn't that important. It's just a poem.

TABITHA: Are you a writer?

WILLIAM: *(HE smiles at her)* If you sit down, I'll tell you.

TABITHA: *(SHE moves slowly at first, as if SHE's cautious. Then SHE quickly slides into a chair, tossing down her purse and sweater. SHE runs her hands through her hair, pushing it out of her face.)* I look awful.

WILLIAM: No, you don't.

TABITHA: Are you kidding? I'm a mess!

WILLIAM: I'm not a writer.

TABITHA: Neither am I.

WILLIAM: I've always wanted to be. I started writing poems about a week ago. I've written almost a hundred.

TABITHA: A hundred poems? *(HE nods)* In one week? *(nods again)* I guess you have a lot to say.

WILLIAM: Yeah, I do.

TABITHA: Then you probably are a writer. I mean, if you can write that many poems in a week, you must be good at it.

WILLIAM: I don't know about that. **(HE leans closer to her.)** What's your name?
TABITHA: Tabitha.
WILLIAM: Tabitha?
TABITHA: Yeah, why? You don't like it?
WILLIAM: No, I do. It's a great name. I don't think I've ever met a Tabitha before.
TABITHA: So what's your name?
WILLIAM: William. But don't call me Bill or Billy. I like William.
TABITHA: Alright, William. It's nice to meet you.
WILLIAM: So what's your story?
TABITHA: Excuse me?
WILLIAM: What are you doing at Della's Diner on a Friday night?
TABITHA: It's a long story, actually. I just wanna get home.
WILLIAM: Do you live in the city?
TABITHA: No, I live in Harmonville.
WILLIAM: Ah, a girl from the suburbs.
TABITHA: Yeah, and I'm stuck here until my parents get home. **(SHE smiles, for the first time)** Thanks for letting me sit with you.
WILLIAM: No problem.
TABITHA: So, what's this poem you're writing? Can I read it?
WILLIAM: Sure. When I finish it.
TABITHA: What's it about?
WILLIAM: It's about the rain.
TABITHA: **(SHE relaxes a little)** Oh, I love the rain.
WILLIAM: **(HE sits up)** Really? **(SHE nods.)** It's nice to meet you, Tabitha.
MILVIA: **(SHE enters with a cup of hot chocolate and puts it down on the table in front of TABITHA)** You two know each other?
WILLIAM: Not yet.
TABITHA: He's been nice enough to let me sit with him until I can get a hold of my parents.
MILVIA: **(to WILLIAM)** The world needs more men like you.
WILLIAM: No, they don't.
MILVIA: **(to TABITHA)** How about some pudding? Would you like some banana pudding also? It's real good. I made it this afternoon. I even put vanilla wafers in it.
WILLIAM: Try some.
TABITHA: I'm not really hungry.
MILVIA: I'll just get you a small bowl. Otherwise, I'll have to take it all home and eat it myself.
TABITHA: Fine. I'll try some.
(MILVIA exits back to the kitchen.)
WILLIAM: So, what happened?
TABITHA: What do you mean?
WILLIAM: Tonight. How'd you end up here?
TABITHA: You really wanna hear about it?
WILLIAM: Yeah. Maybe it'll inspire a new poem.
TABITHA: **(SHE takes a deep breath, then:)** Well, I have this boyfriend. His name is Josh. We've been going out for about four months now. We got together on the fourth of July. Independence Day. It was at this stupid company picnic my Dad took us to. I wasn't expecting to meet anybody, but I did. So he asked me for my number and I gave it to him and he called and we went out and you know, at first, I really liked him. He seemed...sensitive. But now –

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