

TEMPORARY HEROES

A Play in Two Acts

by
David-Matthew Barnes



BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS, LLC

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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.

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