

DADDY'S GIRL

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Gary Ray Stapp

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 female, 4 male, 1 either; gender flexible)

- BENARD.....Fifty year-old cook and proprietor of Maudie's Diner. A short-tempered, grouchy man, but underneath his harsh exterior he is a kind, caring person. *(384 lines)*
- BOB.....Known as "Shirtless Bob," he is a regular customer of the diner. He's slightly argumentative, but generally compliant with the "no shoes, no shirt, no service" rule. In his 40's give or take 10 years. *(42 lines)*
- WALTER.....Late 20's to early 30's. A PHD candidate, he is a stereotypical professional student-type: glasses, simple hair cut, never without a textbook. He's intelligent and articulate except when he tries to speak to Betsy. *(136 lines)*
- MAUDIE.....In her 20's, she is Benard's deceased wife, and has for 25 years hung as a "portrait" on the center of the upstage wall. A little feisty with some "blonde" traits, she enjoys goading and lecturing her husband. *(119 lines)*

BETSY.....A cheerful, hardworking, twenty year-old simple waitress, but lacks confidence. She's a little dowdy and disheveled, but loyal and eager to please her boss. (192 lines)

MICHAEL/MICHELA.....An angel with a dry sense of humor. A mischievous type who likes to dangle the proverbial carrot. Could be played by a male or female; any age. (95 lines)

DARLYNN.....A sweet, bubbly woman who doesn't hesitate to call things like she sees them. In her late 40's to early 50's. For 25 years, she's tried to get Benard to the altar, but hasn't got him to first base yet. Refusing to accept defeat, she constantly tries to get his attention by varying her attire daily sometimes hourly. (153 lines)

E.L.....In her 20's, she is a classy, but cold, career-centered woman, who oozes with conceit and confidence. A writer of local notoriety, she has her own regular column in the *Kansas City Star* newspaper. (167 lines)

ALEX.....Late 20's to 30's, he is a confident, likeable guy with a long resume of ex-girlfriends, one of whom is E.L. who has turned him into a "yes-man." (129 lines)

DADDY'S GIRL

DAISYA sweet, but somewhat daffy old lady nearly joined at the hip with her best friend, Violet. They are like yin and yang only geritol style. Each rarely speaks a complete sentence without the other one to finish it. (74 lines)

VIOLETA sweet, delightful old lady, but a little less patient than her friend, Daisy. (79 lines)

LIZZYIn her 20's, she is an obedient, well-mannered mouse of a girl, but with a unique split personality. When hidden behind her glasses she is timid and meek. But when her glasses come off, she is a dazzling one-woman stage show. (59 lines)

BIG EARL ELLAMid 40's. A motorcycle mama complete with tattoos, body piercings and wildly colored hair, she is Lizzy's mother. She's loud and intimidating, but beneath her leather and chains exterior, she is a diamond in the rough - well, not really! (148 lines)

PLACE: Maudie's Diner, downtown Kansas City.

TIME: Summertime, the present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act One, Scene 1: Late in the evening on the 25th anniversary of Maudie's death.

Act One, Scene 2: Early afternoon, the next day.

Act Two, Scene 1: A moment later.

Act Two, Scene 2: Two weeks later.

SETTING

The play takes place in a popular little “mom and pop” diner. A simple, utilitarian room consisting of small dinette tables with chairs and a café counter seated with three bar stools. With the exception of a large, framed “portrait” of Maudie, which hangs near the center of the US wall and is the focal point of the room, the walls of the diner are otherwise plainly decorated with logistically located signs reading “Restrooms,” “No Shoes, No Shirt, No Service,” and “No Smoking.” There are three entrances in the floor plan. SR is a glass-paned exterior door complete with a door jingle and an “open/closed” sign hanging on it. USR is a hallway that leads to the bathrooms and backrooms. USL is a set of double-hinged swinging doors that open into the kitchen. Left of the door is a “serving window and ledge” where menu orders are hung and plates picked up and where a service bell sits. Stage left is an angularly-set eating counter with three bar stools placed in front at right, center, and far left. On the stage left wall behind the eating counter is a service counter. Down stage right is a small dinette table with two chairs. Down stage center is a small dinette table with two chairs. Down center stage left is a small dinette table with two chairs. Up center stage right is a fourth dinette table set with two chairs. The tables are set with napkin dispensers, salt and pepper shakers, sweetener bowls, silverware, and condiment bottles.

DEDICATION

*To my mom, from whom I learned about faith
To my dad, from whom I inherited my sense of humor*

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *It is late evening, about thirty minutes before closing time at Maudie's Diner. The UCSR table and the DCSL table are cluttered with used napkins, empty plates and drink glasses. MAUDIE is seated in the portrait wearing a beautiful dress with a golden locket. Her hair of a style popular 25 years ago. (NOTE: For the opening scene, she should appear as statuesque as possible until she is "awakened" by BENARD.) BOB, wearing shorts, shoes and a buttoned shirt, sits at counter on SL barstool eating a piece of pie. WALTER sits alone at DSC table, reading a college textbook and sipping a soft drink. BENARD, in a cook's apron, is in the kitchen behind the serving window USL. HE puts a plate on the "pick up" shelf and dings the bell.*

BENARD: Pick-up! *(HE disappears.)*

WALTER, sitting alone at DSC table looks toward the service window, then glances around. BENARD returns.

BENARD: Pick-up! *(HE dings the bell again.)*

WALTER looks around, shrugs and steps behind the bar and reaches for his plate.

BOB: I wouldn't do that, if I were you.

WALTER: *(Pulls back.)* Why not?

BOB: It's against the rules.

WALTER: Rules? What rules?

BOB: Benard's rules. *(With mockery.)* And he's so picky about people following his rules. *(HE points his thumb toward the "no shoes, no shirt, no service" sign.)*

WALTER: But the waitress is gone and - and it is my sandwich.

BOB: It's against the rules.

WALTER: That's dumb. *(HE reaches for the plate. Suddenly, a hand reaches out and grabs him.)*

BENARD: Hold it right there, buster! What are you doing behind my counter? And where is Betsy?! BETSY!!!!?

WALTER: Ahhh - - I'm just getting my sandwich. I - - I thought maybe you went to self-serve.

BENARD: Self-serve? Self-serve? *(HE releases WALTER and disappears from the window, then immediately enters USL through the kitchen door.)*

BOB: I told you so.

BENARD: You listen to me, buster. Maudie's never was, ain't now, and never will be self-serve! In my diner, the customer is king! He's waited on hand and foot! Treated with kindness, courtesy, and respect! NOW GET BACK ON THE OTHER SIDE OF MY COUNTER! *(WALTER takes a giant step backward to put himself on the customer side of the counter.)*

WALTER: Y-Yes, sir!

BENARD steps to the bell and begins to ding it incessantly.

BENARD: BESTY?! BETSY!!! BETSY!!!!!!!

WALTER: Sir, I don't think she's here - right now - in this room anyway.

BENARD: You don't say? You must be college educated, right?

WALTER: Yes, I mean, yes, sir. Graduate student actually. I'll graduate next year with a PHD in Primordial Pseudorandom Biomolecular Engineering Physics.

BENARD: The PHD I got. The rest of it sounded like BS.

WALTER: No, I already have that degree.

BENARD: No kiddin'? *(With sarcasm.)*

WALTER: My name is Walter. *(Holds out his hand.)*

BENARD: I didn't ask you for your name, did I, Professor?

WALTER: No, I was just trying to be - -

BENARD: That's because I don't care. *(HE turns to the bell again and starts dinging.)* PICK UP!!!!

WALTER: Uh, sir?

BENARD: What?!

WALTER: I can carry the plate myself.

BENARD: Get your butt over there to your table and sit down!

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WALTER scurries for his table and sits.

BENARD: Dadgummit! Where is that girl?!!

WALTER: I wish I knew.

BENARD: Huh?

WALTER: Well, sir. She - - Betsy - - is just - - breathtaking!

BENARD: What did you say?

WALTER: I said she - your waitress - is breathtaking.

BENARD: Now you listen to me, buster. *(HE crosses over to WALTER, looking very stern.)* I don't hold to you college professors coming into my establishment E.U.I.

WALTER: E.U.I.?

BENARD: Eating Under the Influence.

WALTER: Eating under the influence? Influence of what?

BENARD: Alcohol!

WALTER: Alcohol? Sir, I'm not inebriated.

BENARD: I didn't say you were. But I suspect you're intoxicated.

WALTER: Yes, I am.

BENARD: I knew it!

WALTER: I'm intoxicated by the radiance of a waitress.

BENARD: What waitress?

WALTER: Your waitress! Betsy.

BENARD: Betsy?

WALTER: Uh-huh. Betsy - - you know, Betsy - - it's on her name tag.

BENARD: I know what's on her nametag! Now, are you here to eat or are you here to just oogle at my waitress.

WALTER: Mostly just to oogle, sir.

BENARD: Professor, stand up here right now.

WALTER: Why? *(HE stands and follows directions.)*

BENARD: Walk a straight line, toe to heel!

WALTER: What is this? A sobriety test?

BENARD: Now, turn around. Well, you don't walk drunk. Now, let me get this straight. Are you telling me you find Betsy - attractive?

WALTER: Yes, sir. I think she's, well, hot!

BENARD: Hot? An opened-face roast beef sandwich with brown gravy is hot.

WALTER: Yes, sir. Uh, do you have anything on your menu that is - beautiful?

BENARD: No.

WALTER: Then Betsy, I think she's beautiful.

BENARD: Sit down. You need some food. You're not getting enough nourishment to your brain. *(HE crosses to the counter and retrieves the plate and returns it to WALTER at the table. HIS manner is now totally different. HE is polite, friendly, and mild.)* Here you go, young man. I'm very sorry about the delay. I hope everything is to your satisfaction. May I get you anything else?

WALTER: No - - no thank you. Everything looks fine. Um, why are you being so nice all of a sudden?

BENARD: I'm your waiter. Diner policy.

BOB: *(Overhearing.)* I told you he had rules.

BENARD: *(Instantly agitated.)* Bob, who shook your tree?! Ain't nothing wrong with rules!

BOB: Humph!

BENARD: *(Resuming a mild demeanor.)* As I was saying, it is diner policy that the employees of this establishment treat every customer with kindness, courtesy and respect. In Maudie's Diner, the customer is king.

WALTER: Ah - - well, you might mention that to your cook.

BOB: *(HE laughs out loud.)* Good one, Walter.

BENARD: *(Agitated again.)* Bob, you can leave now, before I throw you out.

BOB: *(Still laughing.)* I'm going, I'm going. *(Continuing to laugh, HE reaches into his shorts pocket and lays money on the counter. BENARD exits USL into the kitchen as BOB crosses USR and removes his shirt and shoes and hangs them on the hook attached to the wall. HE then exits SR.)*

BENARD enters USL and crosses to the "portrait" of Maudie. WALTER is oblivious of the conversation. NOTE: Diner patrons are at all times oblivious of Maudie's speech and movements, as she is only a painting to them.

BENARD: It's been a long day, Maudie. *(HE speaks with a tired voice.)*

MAUDIE: That's all I get? - - It's been a long day? Benard, you've been here at the diner for - let me see - *(SHE checks her watch.)* for thirteen and a half hours. You have walked by me countless times without saying a word and now, when you do finally speak to me, all you can say is "It's been a long day." *(SHE speaks the quote in a low, masculine pitch.)*

BENARD: Maudie, did I ever tell you about that horse I almost bought?

MAUDIE: A horse? No, I don't recall you ever mentioning a horse. When did you buy a horse? And where did you keep it? And, Benard, why didn't you tell me?

BENARD: Maudie! *(HE knocks on the picture frame.)* I said "almost."

MAUDIE: Oh. So, what changed your mind?

BENARD: I don't like old nags.

MAUDIE: Very funny, Benard, point taken. Let's rewind the clock and start over - - Hello, Benard.

BENARD: Rewind the clock? Humph. I'd like to rewind it all right.

MAUDIE: Oh? How far? An hour? A day? Three days?

BENARD: More like a quarter of a century - plus a day or two.

MAUDIE: Oh, Benard! I knew you would remember.

BENARD: How can I forget? July 22nd [or current summer day] has haunted me for more than 20 years - -

MAUDIE: Twenty-five to be exact. And, Benard, today is her birthday! Isn't that exciting! Our little girl is 25 years-old! Where did the time go?

BENARD: Twenty-five years since I signed those adoption papers. Twenty-five years since - - since you died. *(HE sighs.)* Oh Maudie, I think about you everyday. Every - single - day.

MAUDIE: That's a lot of days, Benard.

BENARD: Tell me about it.

MAUDIE: Nine-thousand one-hundred and twenty-five to be exact.

BENARD: What are you? □one of those fancy computer gadgets?

MAUDIE: Nope. I'm just a nagging memory you can't let go of.

BENARD: You got the nagging part right.

BENARD moves away toward the kitchen as the diner door jingles and BETSY suddenly enters SR. She is without make-up and dressed in an unflattering waitress uniform. Her hair is in a hairnet, her apron is slightly soiled and hangs crookedly.

BENARD: Betsy? Where have you been? You can't just leave in the middle of your shift!!

BETSY: I'm sorry, Mr. Muloovy, but I had to try and catch up with my customer at table four - I mean table three - - (*SHE looks around and begins to count.*) - - no, make that table five. No it's table four, I was right the first time.

BENARD: What difference does it make what table it was?!! Why did you run out after him?

BETSY: He left without picking up his change.

BENARD: His change? His change? How much was it?

BETSY: One dollar and seventeen cents.

BENARD: Betsy, that was your tip.

BETSY: Yes, that's what he said. I wish I could remember that.

BENARD: Yi, yi, yi. (*HE looks at WALTER.*) We sure know how to pick 'em, don't we?

WALTER: Oh, sir, could I get another soda, please?

BENARD: What do I look like, a waiter? Betsy, the professor here needs another soda.

BENARD exits USL into kitchen.

BETSY: (*SHE hurries to WALTER'S table.*) Hi - you need a refill?

WALTER: (*Nods his head, struggles to talk but can only make forced guttural utters.*) Uhhhhh-

BETSY: What did you have?

WALTER: Uhhhhhhh-

BETSY: Was it diet?

WALTER: Uhhhhhhh-

BETSY: Oh, I remember - - crème soda, right?

WALTER: Uhhhhhhh - (*HE nods.*)

BETSY: Everything taste okay? *(HE nods.)* It's a wonderful sandwich isn't it? Mr. Muloovy makes up this secret kind of sauce that he only uses on the Maudie Special - - that's the sandwich - - and his wife too - - he named the sandwich after her. *(SHE points to the portrait.)* Isn't that romantic? *(HE nods his head.)* And to have a sandwich named after you is a real honor, don't you think?

WALTER: Uhhhhg - uhgggg - *(HE nods again.)*

BETSY: I just realized, I didn't bring your sandwich out to you, did I?

WALTER: Uhhhhhhh -

BETSY: Oh, Mr. Muloovy must have brought it to you. I am so sorry, I didn't mean to abandon you like that. Can I get you anything else besides a refill on your cr me soda?

WALTER: Uhhhhhhh - -

BETSY: Are you okay? *(HE nods his head and turns away. SHE exits USL to kitchen as HE shakes his head back and forth.)*

WALTER: *(HE exhales a powerful burst of air and speaks to himself.)* Am I okay? No, I'm in love, and I think I'm going to be sick! *(Quickly HE pays for his meal with several bills and a few cents from his pocket, but with a second thought he fondly looks toward the kitchen and then places another bill on the table. HE quickly exits SR as MICHAEL enters the open door simultaneously and casually sits at the UCSR table. HE is impeccably groomed and dressed in a white suit and tie. BETSY enters from kitchen and crosses to Walter's table with the soda, looks around, shrugs, then picks up the money, glances at the bill, then back at the money and holds up a "fiver.")*

BETSY: Uh oh - - he paid too much! *(SHE starts for the door to catch him as BENARD enters USL from kitchen.)*

BENARD: Betsy! It's your tip!

BETSY: But Mr. Muloovy, he left five dollars extra, that has to be a mistake.

BENARD: *(HE smiles knowingly.)* I don't think so. *(Then HE gets stern.)* Now look Betsy, you can't be running out the door every time a customer leaves you a tip. You gotta concentrate on your responsibilities.

BETSY: Yes, sir.

BENARD: You've been here how long now? Eight, nine months?

BETSY: Just five weeks, Mr. Muloovy.

BENARD: Oh, is that all?

BETSY: And a day - - and a half.

BENARD: Well, you're still on probation. Being a so-so waitress won't cut it.

BETSY: (*Hurt.*) I'm just a so-so waitress?

BENARD: (*Seeing her chin quiver.*) No, no you're better than so - so - - you're - - okay.

BETSY: I'm just okay?

BENARD: You're - you're doing fine - - considering - -

BETSY: Considering? (*SHE begins to softly weep.*)

BENARD: You're doing great, kiddo, keep up the good work!

BETSY: Oh, thank you Mr. Muloovy. (*SHE gives him a big hug around the neck, but catches herself in the awkwardness of the embrace and pulls away. Embarrassed, SHE hurries back to the table and clears it as BENARD looks on.*)

DARLYNN enters SR like a breath of fresh air. She is dressed in a rather bright, bold outfit, obviously unafraid to push the boundaries of being fashionably overstated.

DARLYNN: Hello Benard!

HE ignores her and hurries for the kitchen.

DARLYNN: Benard! Now, don't you run off. I know you heard me.

HE stops and reluctantly turns around.

BENARD: Darlynn, I heard you - I saw you - and I smelled you. Take your pick.

DARLYNN: I'll take all three! So, Benard, how do I look? (*SHE strikes a provocative pose.*)

BENARD: You look like you gained about ten pounds since the last time I saw you.

DARLYNN: That answer is beginning to get old.

BENARD: Not any older than the question.

DARLYNN: Then let's try a new one. Do you like my new perfume?
(*SHE slinks around him, wafting with her hands so he can smell better.*)

BENARD: I can't really smell it, Darlynn, but I'm sure it's - - okay.

DARLYNN: Oh, then I'm obviously not close enough. (*SHE leans into him as HE leans back away.*) So, how do you like it now?

BENARD: I don't. You smell like over-fertilized marigolds.

DARLYNN: Oh pooh! What do you know about perfumes anyway?
The only thing you have a nose for is food.

BENARD: That's right. I might actually find you appealing if you'd dab some mustard behind your ears.

DARLYNN: If that's what it takes, I'll do it. I'll use the hot and spicy kind. The next time you see me, Benard Muloovy, I'll be painted yellow from head to toe.

BENARD: Woman, I wasn't serious!

DARLYNN: Neither was I. Now, tell me, honestly, what do you think of my new outfit?

BENARD: Well, to be honest, it makes you look like you gained ten pounds since the last time I saw you.

DARLYNN: Benard, if I didn't know you were kidding, I'd never speak to you again.

BENARD: Who says I'm kidding?

DARLYNN: You ole grouch. Do you know what your problem is?

BENARD: May we start with you.

DARLYNN: You won't admit it, but you, Benard Muloovy, are a lonesome man.

BENARD: Who says I'm lonesome?

DARLYNN: I do! And, well, I'm lonesome too!

BENARD: So? Nothing I can do about that.

DARLYNN: Ohhhhhhhhh, yes there is! (*SHE purrs and growls.*)

BENARD: Look, Darlynn - -

DARLYNN: Benard, I just love it when you call me that!

BENARD: Darlynn's your name.

DARLYNN: Yes, but it sounds like, I don't know, a - - a "sweet-nothing," when you say it.

BENARD: That's because it is nothing - - sweet or otherwise. Now, I've got to go. I've got something cooking on the stove.

DARLYNN: Liar. I know you. You never leave that kitchen with a fire on. *(SHE slinks over to him.)* However, if you want, WE could sneak in there and cook something up! *(SHE giggles.)*

HE stares at her for several beats dealing with the "mental picture."

DARLYNN: You're thinking about it, aren't you, Benard?

BENARD: *(HE snaps out of it.)* Oh, I'm thinking about it all right! Woman, stay out of my kitchen. *(HE exits hastily USL through the swinging kitchen door.)*

DARLYNN: Hide in there if you want, but I'm not giving up on you! *(SHE sits at DSC table.)*

BETSY: *(Crosses to DARLYNN.)* Hello again, Miss O'Brian.

DARLYNN: Hi Betsy! *(SHE sits at DSC table.)*

BETSY: Can I get you something to drink?

DARLYNN: Just the usual. And please, I told you this morning to call me Darlynn. We see each other so often, we really should be on a first name basis.

BETSY: Yes ma'am - - Darlynn.

DARLYNN: That's better, Betsy.

BETSY: Darlynn.

DARLYNN: Betsy.

BETSY: Darlynn.

DARLYNN: Betsy. *(Beginning to get annoyed.)*

BETSY: Darlynn.

DARLYNN: BETSY! Never mind. You may call me Miss O'Brian if you want.

BETSY: Thank you, ma'am, Miss O'Brian. I'm sorry, I'm not very comfortable addressing my elders on a first name basis.

DARLYNN: Elder? Why, I'm not that old. I could be your sister. *(BETSY gives her a polite, but doubtful look.)* Who am I fooling? I'm old enough to be your mother. You must think I'm a dotty old maid?

BETSY: Oh, no, Miss O'Brian, you don't act like an old maid at all. You certainly don't dress like one.

DARLYNN: Why, thank you, Betsy. You don't think this dress makes me look ten pounds too heavy, do you?

BETSY: Absolutely not! You could be a model.

DARLYNN: A model? You just earned yourself a big tip!

BETSY: (*THEY laugh.*) I'll get your drink and a menu. (*SHE hurries behind the counter.*)

DARLYNN: Please, I don't need a menu. It hasn't changed in twenty-five years! You know, it wouldn't hurt Benard to offer something different - - like himself! Oh, that man! I don't know what else I can do to get his attention! I come in here to see him at least three or four times a day. Sometimes five.

BETSY: (*Returns with an ice-water with lemon.*) Yesterday you were here seven times.

DARLYNN: I was? Are you sure?

BETSY: Yes, ma'am. I only know that because I liked all the different colors of outfits you were wearing. There was the orange dress, the blue dress, the green dress, the yellow dress, the peach suit, the red leather mini-skirt, and the pink and purple polka dot muu muu. You change clothes a lot, don't you?

DARLYNN: Apparently.

BETSY: May I ask why?

DARLYNN: Okay, but keep it between us girls. (*Motions BETSY to sit beside her.*) I was watching Oprah last week and her show was about catching the hard-to-catch man. One of her expert guests adamantly believes that because of clothing, men and women are not just one species, but instead a plethora of sub-species that exceeds the innumerable varieties of the remaining animal, bird, and insect worlds. Anyway, her point was, a woman needs to outwardly present herself with a variety of fashion statements, until the illusive man finally identifies with the clothing of the woman of his own sub-species.

BETSY: That sounds kind of weird.

DARLYNN: Yes, well, she is a fashion consultant with a background in zoology! But it's always the weird ones who have discovered the successes of life. Anyway, I went shopping again this weekend and I am determined to shroud myself in something - - anything - that will catch Benard's eye!

BETSY: You really like him, don't you?

DARLYNN: Yes. Very much. And even though we both know he can be a grouch, hidden beneath the “grump” is a very wonderful man. Maudie, God rest her soul, was the luckiest woman in the world.

BETSY: Did you know her? Maudie?

DARLYNN: Oh yes, child. She was my best friend! Now listen, bring me a house salad with a vinaigrette dressing. I’ve got another new dress I want to spring on Benard and it’s a little snug. Then, on the other hand, a Maudie Special would taste pretty good right now. I don’t know what’s in that secret sauce, but it sure keeps me coming back for more. And I’m not just talking sandwiches here. Tell you what, I’m going to go powder my nose. I’ll decide what I want when I get back.

BETSY: *(Laughs.)* Yes, ma’am.

DARLYNN: Don’t let anyone have my table.

DARLYNN exits USR to hallway as BETSY begins to clear and “re-set” MICHAEL’S table, without acknowledging his presence. MAUDIE suddenly notices MICHAEL.

MAUDIE: Michael? Is that you?

MICHAEL: It’s me alright. It took you forever to notice I was here.

MAUDIE: Forever? It did not. Besides, forever is a long time.

BETSY exits USL to kitchen.

MICHAEL: You’re telling me? I’m an angel, I know all about forever.
(HE stands and crosses to MAUDIE.)

MAUDIE: *(SHE laughs.)* Of course you do. I would imagine you know all about almost everything, wouldn’t you?

MICHAEL: Almost.

MAUDIE: Good, because I have a couple of questions I’m just dying to ask you.

MICHAEL: Too late, you’re already dead.

MAUDIE: *(SHE laughs.)* Yes, don’t remind me. Now, my question is -
- How old are you?

MICHAEL: I don't know if I have an age, but I'd guess that I'm - - older than dirt.

MAUDIE: Wow, you sure don't look older than dirt. Which brings me to my second question. How old do I look?

MICHAEL: Not a day over twenty-three years, five months, and two-point-seven-one weeks.

MAUDIE: Really? That's how old I was when I died!

MICHAEL: I know.

MAUDIE: Oh, of course you do, you -

BOTH: - know everything.

MICHAEL: You realize, Maudie, in heaven, age is irrelevant.

MAUDIE: I know, it's just that when I look at Benard, I can see how he's changed over the years. It's not fair that he's getting older, while I'm still young and beautiful.

MICHAEL: Who said you were beautiful?

MAUDIE: Michael!

MICHAEL: Just kidding. Now, are you finished with your questions?

MAUDIE: Yes. No.

MICHAEL: No?

MAUDIE: Actually, I have one more, and it just occurred to me. What on earth are you doing here in our diner?

MICHAEL: I'm on a mission.

MAUDIE: A mission? For whom?

MICHAEL: I thought you would have guessed by now?

MAUDIE: (*SHE gasps.*) For me? You're here for me? Oh, thank you LORD! My prayers have been answered!

MICHAEL: You might say that. This event will actually answer a lot of prayers.

MAUDIE: I can't believe it! I am so excited!!! Benard will be so excited! Tell me - when?

MICHAEL: Very soon. (*HE winks at her, then looks and points upward.*) He's been working on it for a while.

The diner door opens with a jingle and E.L. enters SR. She is an attractive young woman, sharply dressed in a dark business skirt and jacket and carries a leather business satchel. SHE stops and looks around with a scowl.

MICHAEL: *(HE checks his watch.)* Right on time.

MAUDIE: *(SHE gasps.)* Is that her?

MICHAEL shrugs his shoulders and lifts his hands, returns to his table, takes a palm pilot from his coat pocket and begins to update it. BETSY enters USL and addresses E.L.

BETSY: Hello.

E.L. barely manages a cold smirk.

BETSY: Grab a seat anywhere. I'll get you a menu. *(E.L. crosses to DARLYNN's table, DSC.)* Oh, except there. Sorry, that table is saved.

E.L.: Saved? For whom?

BETSY: Miss O'Brian - she's powdering her nose - back there. *(Points.)*

E.L.: Fine. *(SHE crosses and sits at the next table, DC SL.)*

BETSY: *(SHE follows E.L. to table.)* Would you like something to drink?

E.L.: Eau de minerale, chilled. Preferably a Perrier.

BETSY: *(SHE stares for a moment trying to figure out what E.L. asked for.)* Ummm, could you repeat that?

E.L.: An Eau de Perrier?

BETSY: Ummm, I don't think we have any of that, I don't think.

E.L.: You don't "think"? Don't you know?

BETSY: Ummm, well, I've only worked here a few weeks and to be honest, no one has ever ordered that before.

E.L.: *(Looking around at the establishment.)* I'm not surprised.

BETSY: And to be perfectly honest, again, I don't know what an "Awe-D - - Pair-of-A" is.

E.L.: *(Looking BETSY over.)* I'm not surprised by that either.

BETSY: You're not surprised by much are you?

E.L.: No. *(With condescension.)* But then, I am educated.

BETSY: One day, when I've saved enough money, I'm going to college.

E.L.: But until then, you can continue to eke out an existence working here - in a position of which you are obviously well-suited.

Now, about my water - -

BETSY: Water? Oh, we have that.

E.L.: Of course, but do you serve it in a bottle?

BETSY: Nooo, I usually just put it in a glass. Do you want it in a bottle? I could probably rinse out a ketchup bottle or something.

E.L.: I don't think so! Just bring me a diet soda, in a glass, with ice!

BETSY: That we have!

BETSY exits USL to kitchen as DARLYNN returns from USR hallway.

DARLYNN: *(Sees E.L.)* Hello. *(Then sits herself at her table.)* How are you?

E.L.: *(With open sarcasm.)* I'm simply ecstatic to be here in this middle-class diner, sitting upon the edge of what would be a meaningless conversation with a total stranger. But, I'm not going there. *(SHE turns aside.)*

DARLYNN: Well, somebody's had a bad day.

BETSY enters USL from kitchen without water, gets a menu from counter and returns to E.L.

BETSY: Here you go, miss. I'll be back soon to take your order.

E.L.: *(With an air of disgust, SHE flicks her hands at the menu and doesn't open it.)* Perhaps you could just recommend something. I'm not too hungry, but I am very particular.

BETSY: Oh, sure I can do that.

E.L.: Did I mention I'm VERY particular.

BETSY: Yes, ma'am, you did. We have a sandwich that's really popular - -

E.L.: A sandwich?

DARLYNN: The Maudie Special. You must try it. It's absolutely delicious.

E.L.: Excuse me? *(Obviously annoyed by DARLYNN'S intrusion.)*

BETSY: It's the name of the sandwich.

DARLYNN: It's named in honor of her -- (*Points to portrait, Maudie shows a big exaggerated grin.*) -- Maudie Muloovy.

E.L.: How -- ghastly quaint. I don't - oh - when in Rome -- (*SHE glances around with a scowl.*) -- do as the Romans. Or in this case, do as the little people. I'll try it. However, if I don't like it, I don't pay for it.

BETSY: You won't be disappointed. Miss O'Brian, did you decide what you wanted?

DARLYNN: Bring me a Maudie Special. I'll squeeze into that dress somehow!

BETSY: You got it. (*SHE exits USL to kitchen.*)

DARLYNN: Isn't she just adorable?

E.L.: I think she's - common - to be perfectly honest.

DARLYNN: You know, you look so familiar to me. Do I know you?

E.L.: No. I'm positive we have never met.

DARLYNN: Wait a minute! I think I've seen your picture some place!

E.L.: Again, the ugly side of celebrity.

DARLYNN: I knew it! You're famous, aren't you?

E.L.: Famous is so -- cliché. And no, I'm not Gwyneth Paltrow, in spite of the resemblance.

DARLYNN: No, no you're not an actress, your cheekbones are wrong for that. But don't tell me, let me guess.

E.L.: (*Annoyed.*) I'm a writer. I do a weekly column for the *Kansas City Star*.

DARLYNN: That's it! That's where I've seen your picture! On the sides of buses, and on billboards and in the newspaper. You write that column on Kansas City restaurants.

E.L.: That would be me. *The Art of Cuisine* by E. L. Edinbary.

DARLYNN: I read you all the time. I rarely agree with what you write, and I'm often appalled at some of the things you say, but I still read your articles. (*SHE gasps.*) Are you here to review Maudie's Diner?!!

E.L.: I hardly think so. I critique cuisine created in the finer metro area restaurants, not pathetic little sandwiches thrown together in ordinary little mom and pop holes-in-the-wall.

DARLYNN: That's a relief. Not that you could find anything negative to say about the food here. Benard Muloovy is an excellent chef.

E.L.: *(SHE laughs with mocking condescension.)* Chef? Please, don't use that word so loosely. Especially on a small-time fry cook.

DARLYNN: Miss Edinbary, I have done my very best to be friendly toward you, and interested in you, because that's the way I am. I like people. And just to be polite, I have sat here and smiled and looked the other way, and have acted as if I haven't heard or caught on to your little put-downs. You have insulted my dear friend Maudie with "how ghastly quaint." You have insulted Betsy with "I think she's common." And now you have insulted the most wonderful and dearest man I have ever known by calling him a "small-time fry cook." And though you may be "simply ecstatic to be here in this middle-class diner, sitting upon the edge of what would be a meaningless conversation with a total stranger," I, as a representative of the little people, find myself compelled to give you a piece of my mind!

E.L.: Don't give me a very big piece, you can't afford it.

DARLYNN: You're a -- you are not a nice person.

E.L.: I'm not paid to be nice.

DARLYNN: May I ask, what are you doing here?

E.L.: *(SHE looks around.)* I don't really know. Obviously it was an extreme lack of judgment on my part. And since we're speaking our minds, I think you are an over-sensitive old maid without an ounce of fashion sense and totally clueless on the proper application of lipstick.

DARLYNN: Well! Well! I-I-I -- *(SHE stands up.)* You - You - You

E.L.: Oh, and you st-st-st-stutter too! How embarrassing for you.

DARLYNN: *(SHE glares at E.L. and is so mad she can't speak.)* Oh! -- Oh! -- *(SHE quickly grabs her things and abruptly exits SR.)* -- OH!

E.L.: Ta-ta!

BETSY enters USL from kitchen with the two plates and crosses to E.L.

BETSY: Here you go, miss. Ummm -- where's Miss O'Brian?

E.L.: She left.

BETSY: Without her sandwich? Why?

E.L.: Do I look like a zookeeper?

BETSY: Pardon me?

E.L.: Never mind. Where is my soda?

BETSY: Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot. *(SHE hurries behind counter as BENARD enters USL from kitchen.)* Mr. Muloovy, here's Miss O'Brian's sandwich.

BENARD: *(HE takes the plate.)* What's wrong with it?

BETSY: Nothing. She was gone when I got out here.

BENARD: That crazy woman. She drives me nuts.

MAUDIE: Bravo Darlynn! It's time somebody drove Benard nutty.

BENARD: Ha-ha - - very funny.

BETSY: What's funny?

BENARD: Nothing. *(HE checks his watch.)* Betsy, flip the sign. Get these two customers taken care of. I'm ready to call it a day.

BETSY: Two?

BENARD: Yeah, one *(Points to E.L.)* - - two. *(Points to MICHAEL.)*

BETSY looks curiously toward Michael's table.

BENARD: Is there a problem?

BETSY: No, sir. *(SHE glances curiously at BENARD, then takes soda to E.L., clears Darlynn's water glass, then crosses to door to flip the sign.)*

MAUDIE: Benard? See that young woman over there?

BENARD: Of course I see her.

MAUDIE: I think she might be someone special!

BENARD: Every customer is special, Maudie. That's the rules.

BETSY has walked past MICHAEL without "waiting" on him. BENARD becomes instantly annoyed, and pulls her aside.

BENARD: Betsy! You passed right by him! And from what I can tell he doesn't have a drink, a menu, nothing!

BETSY: Who? *(SHE looks around confused.)*

BENARD: Table Four! Oh, for crying out loud, I'll take care of it! Go and take the trash out. Surely you can handle that!

BETSY: Yes, sir. *(SHE whispers. Then exits USL into kitchen.)*

DADDY'S GIRL

BENARD grabs a menu and heads for MICHAEL, but E.L. stops him.

E.L.: Excuse me!

BENARD: *(Re-routes himself to her.)* Yes?

E.L.: This sandwich - - *(SHE'S at a loss for words.)*

BENARD: What?

E.L.: This sandwich is divine!

BENARD: Thank you. *(HE starts to leave.)*

E.L.: Wait! The flavor - - it's positively wonderful! What is it?

BENARD: Can't tell you - - family secret. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm very short handed right now. *(HE heads for MICHAEL.)*

E.L.: But - - *(SHE takes another savoring bite of the sandwich and then takes her cell phone from her satchel and makes a pantomimed call.)*

BENARD: *(To MICHAEL.)* I'm sorry, sir, I hope you haven't been waiting long.

MICHAEL: You might say I've been waiting an eternity.

BENARD: I'm very sorry. That girl - my waitress - she's new - and a little goofy. I apologize for the lack of service.

MICHAEL: It's not her fault. She can't see me Benard.

BENARD: *(After a beat.)* Okie dokie. *(Rolls his eyes.)* What would you - - do I know you?

MICHAEL: No, but I know you.

BENARD: You know me, but I don't know you?

MICHAEL: Correct.

BENARD: *(HE looks around and rolls his eyes.)* What can I get you to drink?

MICHAEL: Nothing.

BENARD: Would you like a menu?

MICHAEL: Nope.

BENARD: Okie dokie. *(HE looks at MICHAEL suspiciously.)* We close in ten minutes, in case you change your mind. *(HE backtracks for the kitchen as BETSY returns carrying a sack.)*

BETSY: Mr. Muloovy, I found this sack of carryout sitting outside the backdoor.

BENARD: Betsy! Why did you bring that inside?

BETSY: I - - I thought you would want to know.

BENARD: I already know. I'm the one who put it out there. Now, just put it back where you found it.

BETSY: Yes, sir. But it's perfectly good food!

BENARD: Of course it's perfectly good food. I made it! *(HE sighs.)*
Oh, I guess it's time I explained a few things to you - - *(HE leads HER into the kitchen, USL.)*

E.L.: Alex, I'm telling you, this is absolutely the best sandwich I've ever tasted! It's called the Maudie Special, or something like that. The proprietor says it's a secret, but when I get the chance I'm going to snoop around for the recipe - - this has the aroma of a terrific story - exposing a fabulous secret recipe and then introducing the man behind the apron to the world! Listen, meet me here tomorrow at one o'clock. I want you to taste this sandwich - - make the time! - - Maudie's Diner, downtown, 2022 Grand Boulevard. I have to find out what I can about this Benard Muloovy - I have a feeling he's not going to be very cooperative - - I can handle him. Tomorrow. One o'clock! Sharp!

SHE ends her call, canvasses the room, then quickly sneaks behind the counter and starts snooping. SHE finds a few miscellaneous envelopes and an old notebook and begins to thumb through it. MICHAEL crosses over and stands across the counter from her.

MICHAEL: Finding anything interesting?

E.L. is oblivious of HIM.

MAUDIE: Why won't she answer you, Michael?

MICHAEL: She can't hear me, or see me for that matter. I get a kick out of talking to people even if they are oblivious of me.

MAUDIE: Well, she better be careful. Benard does not like anyone behind his counter. Is that Benard's old notebook of recipes she's looking at?

MICHAEL: It appears so.

MAUDIE: She's going to be in so much trouble. This is no way to start things off. Stop her, Michael!

MICHAEL: I can't. I'm not allowed.

BENARD: (*Offstage.*) Betsy, put away those dishes while I finish cleaning up out front.

BETSY: (*Off stage.*) Yes sir.

E.L. quickly takes the notebook and a couple of letters and hurries to her table and stuffs them in her business satchel. BENARD enters USL and gives MICHAEL a wary look, but before he can speak to him, E.L. takes his attention.

E.L.: Mr. Muloovy?

BENARD: Jeez. Does everybody know my name? (*HE looks at MICHAEL who shrugs, and exits USR without Benard seeing him.*) Look, miss, I'm about to close up here, and it's been a long day, you understand? (*HE gets a towel and a service tub from under counter and begins to clean and clear the tables.*)

E.L.: Mr. Muloovy, (*SHE follows him.*) my name is E.L. Edinbary. (*SHE extends her hand.*)

BENARD: Nice to meet you. (*HE says over his shoulder.*)

E.L.: Perhaps you have heard of me?

BENARD: Nope.

E.L.: I'm a writer for the *Kansas City Star*. I write a popular column called *The Art of Cuisine*.

BENARD: Congratulations.

E.L.: I generally cover the finer dining establishments in the city, but when I stumble upon something extraordinary, I will not hesitate to leave my comfort zone and review other places, for example - - your diner.

BENARD: Not interested.

E.L.: Mr. Muloovy, I want to do an article on you and your diner.

BENARD: Not interested.

E.L.: Mr. Muloovy, I don't think you know what you have here. You should let the world know of your culinary abilities.

BENARD: Not interested.

E.L.: I want to do a story on your Maudie Special. I guarantee I can double or triple your business with the publication of my story.

BENARD: Not interested.

E.L.: Mr. Muloovy, you must share with the dining community the secret of your sandwich.

BENARD: No.

E.L.: Why not?

BENARD: *(HE crosses to the door and opens it for her.)* I have my reasons.

E.L.: But - -

BENARD: Goodnight.

E.L.: *(SHE retrieves her satchel and sandwich, then crosses to him and through the door, then turns in the threshold to face him.)* I'll be back.

BENARD: Good. That's what keeps me in business, happy customers.

E.L.: I like you, Mr. Muloovy. *(SHE exits SR.)*

BENARD closes the door behind her.

BENARD: Can't say I feel the same way about you.

MAUDIE: Benard!

BENARD: What?! I'm not running for public office.

MAUDIE: You're too honest for public office.

BENARD: God Bless America.

BETSY enters from kitchen. She has her apron over her arm and a worn purse.

BETSY: Are you sure I can't help you clean up out here?

BENARD: I'm sure.

BETSY: I don't mind, really I don't.

BENARD: I said I'm sure. Just run along home.

BETSY: Yes, sir. *(SHE hurries past him a few steps then turns.)* Mr. Muloovy, I just want to say, I think what you are doing for them is very admirable and humanitarian. I'm honored to work for you.

BENARD: Betsy, please. Just - just - - *(HE sees that a table has been set wrong.)* Betsy! Look at this table! You have it all set wrong again!

BETSY: I have? Oh, well, I'm sorry Mr. Muloovy. Here, let me fix it.
(*SHE begins to re-arrange things.*) I'm trying, really I am!

BENARD: It may not seem important to you, but little things like this matter to me. And what's important to me is important, got that?

BETSY: Yes, sir. What's important to you is important to you.

BENARD: No, you still don't have it right. (*HE demonstrates.*) The spoon goes here, the fork here, salt on this side of the pepper, napkins here and the sweetener bowl in the middle.

BETSY: I'm sorry Mr. Muloovy. I don't know why I can't remember that.

BENARD: What's your name?

BETSY: (*SHE points to her nametag.*) Betsy.

BENARD: Okay, if you can remember your name, you can remember this. It ain't rocket science. Now go home. I'm tired.

BETSY: Yes, sir. Good night, sir. (*SHE exits. HE locks the door behind her.*)

MAUDIE: What was that all about?

BENARD: Nothing. Maudie, I think I'm going to have to let her go.

MAUDIE: Why? She is so sweet and she works hard to please you. Don't you see that?

BENARD: No, yes, I don't know. All I know is she's driving me nuts.

MAUDIE: Driving you nuts? That must explain why you talk to me all the time.

BENARD: Ha-ha-ha, very funny.

MAUDIE: I'm serious. For 25 years I've sat here and listened to you feel sorry for yourself. I've watched countless people come and go and you have never made an effort to get close to anyone! Darlynn comes here to see you every day. Every day, Benard! And you don't know her any better now than you did when I was alive! You have known Bob for seven years - and shirt or no shirt, he's been one of your most loyal customers! But do you even know his last name? No! And now you're ready to give Betsy the boot when the girl practically worships the ground you walk on. I've said it before and I'll say it again. You are a lonely, unhappy man and it's time you got on with your life!

BENARD, who has been trying to ignore her, just stares at her for a few silent beats.

MAUDIE: Aren't you going to say anything?

BENARD: Looks like I bought that old nag after all.

MAUDIE: *(Mad and frustrated SHE neighs.)*
Neeiiiiiiiiiiiiiggghhhhhh!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *It is early afternoon, next day. MAUDIE is perched in her "portrait" doing her nails. WALTER is seated at table at DSC, reading a textbook and sipping the remains of a soda. ALEX is standing at the SL end of counter talking on his cell phone.*

ALEX: *(Talking into his cell phone.)* It's me again. I'm still waiting here at the diner, and by the way, you are now 30 minutes late. You're right, the sandwich is fantastic. I know I said that on my 11 previous messages, but just in case you thought I wasn't sure I thought I'd make it an even dozen. Did I mention I'm serious here? I'm serious here! Call me! *(HE hangs up and looks around and calls over to WALTER.)* Hey, bud.

WALTER: *(Looks around the diner and realizes ALEX is talking to him.)* Hello.

ALEX: Can I ask you something?

WALTER: *(Wary.)* I suppose. As long as you don't ask me for my phone number.

ALEX: *(HE laughs.)* Don't worry, that ain't gonna happen. Listen, do you eat here often?

WALTER: Why?

ALEX: Just curious. Hey, I'm Alex. *(Offers HIS hand and THEY shake.)*

WALTER: Walter.

ALEX: Nice to meet you, Walter. So, you come here often?

WALTER: As often as I can.

ALEX: Yeah? *(HE sits at WALTER'S table.)* You like the food here, huh?

WALTER: Not really. I mean, it's satisfactory, but I haven't actually given the food much thought. It's mere sustenance. I can get that anywhere.

ALEX: Interesting. So, what brings you back?

WALTER: *(BETSY enters USL and busies herself behind the counter.)* The ambiance.

ALEX: Ambiance? In here?

WALTER: Yeah, in here. *(HE says with a smile, his gaze focused on BETSY.)*

ALEX: Listen, have you ever eaten this Maudie Special before?

WALTER: Huh?

ALEX: The Maudie Special, the sandwich.

WALTER: Captivating.

ALEX: Yeah, that's one way to describe it, I guess. It's one heck of a sandwich! I've never tasted anything like it. And I know food. I eat out a lot - - all the best places. My dates are always impressed with the restaurants I take them to. Have you ever been to Palo's on Twelfth Avenue? Best Italian in town. Do you like Italian?

WALTER: Huh?

ALEX: Do you like Italian?

WALTER: Uh, Italian what?

ALEX: Dude, you have the attention span of slug. What - - *(Sees BETSY and sees WALTER watching her.)* Ah, I think I see the "ambiance" you mentioned.

WALTER: Yeah, isn't she beautiful?

ALEX: Well, I guess, if hairnets do it for you. So, is she your girlfriend?

WALTER: I wish.

BETSY crosses to their table.

ALEX: So, what's stopping you? Ask her out.

WALTER: I can't.

ALEX: Why not?

BETSY: Here you go sir, your ticket. Anything else I can do for you?

ALEX: Yes, you can tell me what it is about that sandwich that makes it taste so darn good.

BETSY: It's the sauce.

ALEX: The sauce?

BETSY: Well, actually it's the, let me think, what's he call it? The lemonade - no - no - the mermaid - no - the marmalade - no, that's not it either - -

ALEX: Marinade?

BETSY: That's it! The marinade.

ALEX: What's in it?

BETSY: What's in what?

ALEX: The marinade, what's in the marinade? *(To WALTER.)* Gee, no wonder you like her. Neither of you can keep up with a conversation. *(WALTER kicks ALEX in the leg.)* Owww!

BETSY: Pardon me.

ALEX: Howww - can I find out the ingredients of this marinade? Can you tell me?

BETSY: Oh no, I can't tell you that. It's Mr. Muloovy's secret recipe.

ALEX: Mr. Muloovy? He's the cook?

BETSY: Yes, sir. But I can already tell you it won't do any good to ask him. People ask him all the time. He doesn't tell.

ALEX: Oh.

BETSY: So, anything else?

ALEX: No - yes! My friend here has something he wants to ask you. *(WALTER glares at him with horror.)* Go on - - ask her.

WALTER: *(Turns to face ALEX.)* I told you I can't!

ALEX: Its' easy - - just turn around and ask her out. *(HE turns WALTER around toward BETSY.)*

BETSY: Yes?

WALTER: *(HE opens his mouth to talk but only guttural noise comes out.)* Uhhhh - - uh uh uh uhhhh ah - -

BETSY: Are you okay?

WALTER: Ahhhhh - ah-ah-ah-ah - whhhhhhhwww whw whw whw - -

BETSY: Is he okay?

ALEX: I don't know. I just met him. Excuse us for a second. *(HE pulls WALTER to face him.)* What's wrong with you?

WALTER: I told you I can't talk to her!

ALEX: You didn't tell me that. You told me you couldn't ask her out.

WALTER: That's because I can't talk to her!

ALEX: Of course, you can. See, you're talking fine. Now, just tell her your name. *(HE spins WALTER around toward her again.)*

WALTER: Wa - ah ah - - Wa - Waaaaa - -

BETSY: Oh! You want some water! I'll get it for you. *(SHE goes behind counter and pours a glass of water.)*

ALEX: Dude, you really dumb down around girls don't you? I mean, that's a serious communication problem. Are you like that with all girls?

WALTER: No! Just her!

ALEX: Really? Hmm, well, maybe it's just your mind's way of overriding your heart.

WALTER: What is that supposed to mean?

ALEX: I don't mean to sound rude, dude, but, look at her, she's not exactly a trophy.

WALTER: I think she's perfect.

ALEX: Guess it's true, love is blind, or at least near-sighted and complicated by a severe case of cataracts. Either way, you need some help.

BETSY brings over the water. At same time, DAISY and VIOLET enter and sit at DSR table.

BETSY: Anything else I can get you?

ALEX: Yes, as a matter of fact you can. I would like another Maudie Special.

BETSY: You want another sandwich?

ALEX: Yeah.

BETSY: You must be hungry.

ALEX: No, actually I'd like to get it to go. Do you have take-out containers?

BETSY: Sure. No problem. *(Then to WALTER.)* What about you, sir? Would you like anything else?

WALTER looks at her with a boyish yet frightful smile, shakes his head and grabs his water and starts to drink.

ALEX: Yes. He'd like some of your pie.

WALTER throws Alex a horrified look.

BETSY: Sure. We have apple, cherry, chocolate crème - -

ALEX: Cherry. (*HE grins mischievously, as WALTER chokes and spews his water on ALEX'S face.*) Uh, better make that chocolate crème - - to go.

BETSY: Okay. That's a Maudie and a chocolate crème to go. I'll get it to you shortly.

BETSY crosses to hang order, then takes menus to DAISY and VIOLET as BOB enters, shirtless and shoeless. HE crosses to rack and proceeds to get dressed, then moves to counter and sits.

WALTER: If that was your idea of help, I don't want any.

ALEX: No, that was my idea of funny. But, you do need some help.

WALTER: No I don't.

ALEX: Oh, yeah, you do.

WALTER: Okay, okay, I need help. But, I doubt seriously that you can help me.

ALEX: You never know. I've got a few minutes to kill, let's try to figure out your problem.

WALTER: I'm more desperate than I realized.

THEY fade into a pantomimed conversation.

BETSY: Good afternoon ladies. How are the two of you today?

DAISY: Hello -

VIOLET: - Betsy dear.

DAISY: We're feeling just -

VIOLET: - splendid for a couple of -

DAISY: - old ladies. (*THEY giggle.*)

BETSY: (*SHE laughs.*) Miss Daisy, Miss Violet, you two are so much fun. I'm really glad to see you today.

DAISY: Why, thank you dear, we -

VIOLET: - are very fond of you, too.

DAISY: Violet, it looks like we arrived just in time -

VIOLET: - to miss the big lunch crowd.

DAISY: I like this table, it's much -

VIOLET: - nicer than the one's in the back, don't you think, Daisy?

DAISY: Yes, Violet, my thoughts -

VIOLET: - exactly. (*THEY giggle.*)

DAISY: Not to mention this table has a nice view today. Look at those two -

VIOLET: - men over there! Oh, Daisy, they look like very nice young men.

DAISY: Yes, they do, but I'm not sure which one -

VIOLET: - I like best. Which one do you like, Daisy?

DAISY: I don't know. They both look - what is the word -

VIOLET: - they use now-a-days? Groovy? (*SHE asks BETSY.*)

BETSY: You're about three decades off, Miss Violet.

DAISY: I told you so. Young people don't say -

VIOLET: - groovy anymore.

DAISY: No -

VIOLET: - they say little things like -

DAISY: - "hip" and "trippin'." Don't they Betsy, dear?

BETSY: That's closer.

VIOLET: I do some trippin' when my hip goes out. (*THEY look at each other and laugh.*)

DAISY: Violet, which one do you think -

VIOLET: - is trippin'?

DAISY: I like the one wearing -

VIOLET: - glasses. Yes, he would be my first choice.

DAISY: He's very handsome -

VIOLET: - and smart -

DAISY: - and kind -

VIOLET: - and polite -

DAISY: - and he'd make a perfect beau for you -

VIOLET: - Betsy, dear.

BETSY: Looks like I have a couple of matchmakers on my hands.

DAISY: You do like him, though -

VIOLET: - don't you?

BETSY: Have I been that obvious?

DAISY: Yes -

VIOLET: - you have! (*THEY giggle.*)

BETSY: Well, it doesn't matter. I'm pretty sure he isn't interested in me.

DAISY: And what makes you -

VIOLET: - think that?

BETSY: He's been coming in here for two weeks and has yet to even say a single word to me, much less say hi or even tell me his name. Besides, he probably already has a girlfriend.

DAISY: Oh, dear -

VIOLET: - I hope not.

BETSY: Okay, enough of this silly matchmaking stuff. What can I get you today?

DAISY: Oh, our usual -

VIOLET: - of course. One Maudie sandwich -

DAISY: - cut in half. With two -

VIOLET: - plates. We can't afford -

DAISY: - two sandwiches, not on our social security.

VIOLET: (*SHE just stares at her for a blank moment.*) That's not what I was going to say. I intended to say we can't afford -

DAISY: - two sandwiches, not at these prices!

VIOLET: (*SHE, again, stares at her for a blank moment.*) No, that's not what I was going to say, either. I was politely trying to point out that we can't afford -

DAISY: - two sandwiches, because -

VIOLET: - BECAUSE WE'RE TRYING TO WATCH OUR WEIGHT!

DAISY: Oh. Are you implying that we're plump?

VIOLET: No, Daisy, of course not. At least I don't think so. Betsy, do you think we're -

BETSY: - fat?

VIOLET and DAISY gasp.

VIOLET: Oh dear, do you really think we are - -

DAISY: f -

VIOLET: - a -

DAISY: - t?

BETSY: Uh, no. You two are perfect. Now, can I get you a couple of coffees to go with the Maudie Special?

DAISY: Well, of course. We're not going to sip -

VIOLET: - out of the same cup! That wouldn't be -

DAISY: - very mannerly.

BETSY: No ma'ams, it wouldn't. *(SHE grins.)* I'll be back as soon as I can.

VIOLET: No hurry, dear. We brought our -

DAISY: - crossword puzzles to work on -

VIOLET: - while we wait.

BETSY: Okay. *(SHE starts to move away.)*

DAISY: Wait dear, about that boy over there, what do you really -

VIOLET: - think about him?

BETSY: *(SHE glances at WALTER.)* I think he's - - *(Glances back at the ladies.)* - - groovy.

THEY giggle as BETSY smiles and winks at them, then crosses to hang up the order. VIOLET and DAISY work on their crossword puzzle as BETSY pantomimes a brief conversation with BOB.

ALEX: You know, Walter, it's all about confidence. Of course, I've never had that problem. I have dated a lot of women.

WALTER: Really?

ALEX: Oh, yeah.

WALTER: How many?

ALEX: Hundreds! And I've always been able to talk to them.

WALTER: Maybe you haven't met the right one yet.

The diner door opens with a jingle as BIG EARL ELLA and LIZZY enter SR with MICHAEL slipping in behind them and fades to the back of the room to observe. HE is now shabbily costumed as a homeless person. LIZZY is wearing a buttoned sweater over a simple, plain dress. A golden locket hangs around her neck. BIG EARL ELLA wears black leather and chains, her hair is spiked and multi-colored, and she is adorned with piercings and tattoos.

ALEX: Well, I can't argue with you there.

WALTER: Take my word for it. The right one can slip right up behind you before you even realize it. She could be behind you now. *(HE nods toward the two women.)*

ALEX: *(HE looks behind him at LIZZY and BIG EARL ELLA.)* If you mean Miss Mousie, I'm pretty sure that's a no. And as far as the other one is concerned, I'm not so sure she's even a woman.

ALEX and WALTER fade into pantomimed conversation.

LIZZY: Mother, don't make me do this again!

BIG EARL ELLA: Lizzy, I don't wanna hear any arguing. Besides, we gotta eat. Might as well kill two birds with one beer bottle.

LIZZY: It's a diner!

BIG EARL ELLA: So? I like diners.

LIZZY: But if I have to do it, I'd rather go to a place where there's at least a piano. A club or restaurant, any place where there is typically entertainment. That's the only way I'm going to be discovered. Not in a diner.

BIG EARL ELLA: I told you, Lizzy, people are discovered in unexpected places everyday. Didn't I tell you about that movie star who was discovered in a diner by a talent agent. This may be your diner! We need to expose you at every opportunity. You're a singer, Lizzy, you have a voice that is a gift.

LIZZY: American Idol didn't think so.

BIG EARL ELLA: Don't get me started on American Idol. If I ever find that smart mouth Simon alone somewhere, I'll teach him how to be polite. *(SHE punches her fist in her hand.)* I'll show him who has some personality! *(SHE punches her fist in her hand again.)* We'll see if he can sing with his underwear pulled up over his ears. *(SHE mimicks the action as ALEX and WALTER react.)*

LIZZY: Mother, please don't let your temper get away from you.

BIG EARL ELLA: I won't. HEY WAITRESS! CAN WE GET A TABLE OVER HERE?

LIZZY: Mother, please.

BIG EARL ELLA: PLEASE!

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