

JAMIE. It is, it is.

(JAMIE walks over by MAN at the jukebox.)

I got him to put a few classics on there. At the bottom, on the right . . .

MAN. Oh yeah. Some great choices. Nice. Here, I'll play this . . .

JAMIE. Careful, that thing is temperamental, steals quarters.

(MAN puts a quarter in the jukebox. Nothing plays. He pounds it a little bit.)

JAMIE. Well, I guess you don't have the touch, after all. Sorry.

MAN. Oh well . . .

JAMIE. I'm going in back for a minute. We going to be OK out here?

MAN. What? *(Beat. Looks around and then looks at ABBY, getting it.)* Oh sure, sure. But I'm deducting it from your time! Kidding! *(He laughs.)* Go ahead, no funny business. I swear to God!

(JAMIE exits. MAN comes over by ABBY. They both sip their drinks.)

MAN. You love Rice Krispie treats, huh?

ABBY. I'm trying to quit. I've got a marshmallow on my back!

MAN. *(They laugh a bit.)* Hey, I'm sorry if this seems odd. I hope I'm not making you uncomfortable.

ABBY. Well, yeah but, don't worry about it. Next to a lot of my customers, you don't even move the needle. Besides, it can take me months to save a thousand bucks. And I didn't even have to dance on a pole! "Bow, chicka, bow, bow . . .!"

(She takes out the money again and fans it out, trails it down her front, funny/suggestively.)

MAN. My eyes, my eyes! We said no "funny business!"

(They laugh a bit and she puts the money away and nonchalantly gets up and moves a bit away. She's not actually all that comfortable with things.)

ABBY. OK, so what did you want to talk about?

MAN. Oh, you know, everything, nothing. How long have you known Jamie?

ABBY. A while.

(Pause.)

MAN. I don't mean to pry.

(Pause.)

MAN. You know, I've been married thirty-five years.

ABBY. Uh huh.

(Pause.)

MAN. You're with someone that long, it feels . . . sort of like it's an accomplishment. You never want to break that winning streak, you know?

(Pause.)

ABBY. Jamie and I have been seeing each other about two years, right around.

MAN. How'd you meet?

ABBY. He used to stop off to eat before going home.

MAN. At the IHOP.

ABBY. Yeah. We'd talk, like that. Every time we'd talk a little more. Nothing special but he seemed different than the late-shift crowd.

MAN. How different?

ABBY. Well . . . sober.

MAN. A plus.

ABBY. Two in the morning at the IHOP, that's like waiting on Jimmy Hoffa. Oh, and on our first date, he took me out dancing.

MAN. Yeah? Disco?

ABBY. Oh no, far from it.

MAN. What's far from disco?

ABBY. He showed up in a nice suit. I thought we were going for pizza! But I ran back in and changed into this red dress I had, and we were off! He took me to this club where they play older music with a live band. They even had a mirror ball! It's so corny but I loved it, it was like going back in time, like those old movies with "supper clubs"? We danced!

MAN. What did you dance to?

ABBY. Oh, some, I don't know, big-band stuff, forties music. What was that one song . . . ? Something about having a crush or something? It was . . . great, magical.

MAN. I bet.

ABBY. . . . I totally fell for it.

MAN. That's nice. That's very nice.

ABBY. (Pause.) Oh and soup.

MAN. I'm sorry?

ABBY. Soup.

MAN. You like soup?

ABBY. Well, one time he tried to make dinner for me. It was a nightmare, like they had to call FEMA. But, he happened to have some of those big cans of soup that people share, you know?

MAN. Right . . .

ABBY. So, we split one and that's become . . . you know how couples have their "things"? Splitting a can of soup is one of ours.

MAN. Huh . . .

ABBY. "Chicken and stars."

MAN. "Chicken and stars . . ."

ABBY. Stupid, huh?

MAN. No, it's nice.

ABBY. (Beat.) And I like his vocabulary.

MAN. His vocabulary?

ABBY. You know how people say, "awesome" or "amazing" and it can mean anything or nothing? I guess I'm kind of a snob about that stuff. I was an English major. It just seems lazy. Jamie went to college, you know.

MAN. Yeah, he told me, Eastman school, at Rochester. You were an English major?

ABBY. I was.

MAN. Who's your favorite writer? Wait, don't tell me . . . Dylan Thomas.

ABBY. "Rage, rage against the dying of the light!"

MAN. I was right!

ABBY. I think that's his most famous. I miss those classes, I'll definitely go back some time.

MAN. You didn't finish?

ABBY. My dad got sick so I moved back to take care of him. He needed a lot of help for a few years. He passed six months ago.

MAN. I'm sorry.

ABBY. Thanks. But, Jamie was there for me. He's a solid person, you know?

MAN. Are you going to go back? To get your degree?

ABBY. Boy, I am earning this money!

(They laugh a bit.)

MAN. OK, sorry, I'm being too nosy.

ABBY. No, it's OK, it's your dime. I'd like to. I think I'll just have to wait and see.

MAN. OK, this is one of "those" questions: Where do you see yourself in ten years? Twenty?

ABBY. Huh . . . OK . . . I'd like to have my degree. Maybe be a teacher. I like to write. The dream is a life of tea and literature, maybe some kids? Not a real big dream, I know . . .

MAN. No, it's great. And kids . . . kids are huge, important. And Jamie?

ABBY. Don't tell him but . . . I hope we're together in ten years. I really hope so. But there's a lot between here and there.

MAN. Like?

ABBY. No, I think we're really good, I do.

MAN. What about him?

ABBY. What about him?

MAN. Well, he's got that plan, you know, to take time off and practice, like that. He wants to be great. He told me about seeing that "In Memoriam" thing on the news?

ABBY. Boy, he told you a lot of stuff! That "In Memoriam" thing? Between us, it's a little creepy . . . But seriously, I want him to do that sabbatical, isn't that a great idea? And you just helped us with it, a LOT!

MAN. So, he's chasing his dream. That OK with you?

ABBY. OK?

MAN. Yeah.

ABBY. Well . . . I'm not going to stop him. He can play all he wants. I think he could be great.

MAN. Do you?

ABBY. I do.

MAN. So you'll do everything to . . . you'll help him. Might mean taking a back seat?

ABBY. I want him to succeed, I really do. It's just— I've always heard that a lot of really successful people are . . . I just don't know that he's selfish enough to be great.

MAN. I see . . .

ABBY. Oh, I know, another thing I love? A lot of times, when he closes the bar, we turn down the lights, have a drink, and we'll sit here for a while. And he plays, just for me. Just us. We sit here and it all goes away . . . the drunks at IHOP, the garbage on the street, the smell of kitchen grease in my hair. And pretty soon . . . it all fades and it's just . . . us. I love it . . . those late-night private concerts, how many people get those?

MAN. (Beat.) You love him.

ABBY. (Beat.) I do.

(Pause.)

MAN. Quick story . . . I knew a guy once.

(JAMIE reenters.)

JAMIE. What are we talking about?

MAN. I was about to regale Abby with a story!

JAMIE. Is this a private regale?

MAN. Not at all! Group regale! Get a drink . . . OK, here goes . . . I knew this guy.

(JAMIE goes behind the bar and gets a drink. MAN stands and sort of acts out the story.)

MAN. A baseball pitcher. I mean, he was the goods, a pitcher, lights out. This guy was going places. Drafted, first round. They started him out in the minors, like everybody . . . but he was a lock. I mean, a lock.

ABBY. And?

MAN. And he got married. Bam, pregnant! The minors don't pay much and even with his signing bonus . . . he was moving up fast but in the off-season, he got a job, loading trucks, midnight shifts for Canada Dry. Responsible, right? Good guy, right? One night, maybe he was tired, whatever, he caught his throwing hand under

a full palette, sixty cases. Smashed it. Baseball? (Gestures like a bubble bursting.) Poof . . .

ABBY. That's terrible.

MAN. Yeah. He got a job at a sporting goods store. And he coaches a high school team. He's even had a couple of his players go to the pros. But not him. Never him now.

(Pause.)

ABBY. But he's got a child. That's important, too.

MAN. It is. No question.

ABBY. We can't always have . . . I mean it's sad but it's not the end of the world—

MAN. No, it's not the end of the world. Not at all. No one is saying that.

(Pause. A special may fade up for the next sequence.)

But sometimes . . . at night . . . he dreams he's pitching. The stands are full, the grass is fresh cut and he's punchin' everybody out, "Stee-rike three!"

Then the catcher throws and it hits his mitt, slap, and the stands are empty. The park is deserted. He wakes up. The alarm reads 3:14 and he's got tears in his eyes . . .

He never tells his wife. Never. But it eats at him. And it always, always will. For his life, for his whole life. It'll never go away. That's all I'm saying . . .

JAMIE. That's not a real happy story . . .

MAN. Whoops, sorry, brought the room down. Hey, got to hit the john.

(MAN exits upstage right.)

JAMIE. It's right over . . .

(MAN doesn't hear him but exits easily to the bathroom.)

JAMIE. (To ABBY:) Is this all right?

ABBY. Fine . . .

JAMIE. You don't seem . . . want me to shut this down?

ABBY. I'm not giving back the money so we're holding up our end!

JAMIE. OK . . .

ABBY. OK.