

Abandoned Luncheonette

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Musical Scenes

from

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inspired by

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Scene 1

“Spring slipped up on us again,” Amie said, hurrying along uninhibited by the waist high underbrush. “It’s crazy how fast the weeds grow.”

“It’s a welcome surprise. My mom kept me cooped up in the house too much during the winter. I love getting out,” Daryl said, just as a tree branch flipped smacked him on the forearm while his friend doggedly marched through the dense overgrowth.

“Ouch!”

“Sorry,” she said with a giggle, but didn’t stop moving forward.

Daryl broke off the branch in a puerile act of revenge. “This would make a great hickory switch for my dad.”

“Did he get his own or send you out for one?” she asked.

“Dad picked his own, and they were dandies, like this one,” Daryl said, while whipping the branch through the air.

Destination in sight, Amie ditched the conversation and charged onward. She grabbed at the aluminum door handle of the luncheonette and gave a tug, to no avail.

“This really needs to be fixed. How do they expect customers to enter?”

“Let me give it a try,” Daryl said.

“I’ve got it,” she said, as she clenched her teeth and pulled it open. She needled her way through the door first, unfettered by the many dust-covered cobwebs. Amid the detritus, mold and mildew, Amie and Daryl beamed with delight. Their pleasure belied the location.

“Ah, our table is available.”

“Perfect,” Amie cooed.

“After you,” the gentlemanly Daryl stepped aside and stood until Amie took a seat in the abandoned luncheonette.

“Same old, same old,” she said. “This place never changes. I can’t believe the menu items and prices are still the same. How do they do it?”

“It’s part of their charm.”

After ordering imaginary colas, Daryl asked, “Are you doing spring cleaning?”

“No, I thought I’d draw faces in the tabletop dust while we wait.”

Scene 2

“More cola, please,” Daryl requested, still holding his glass after sipping the last little bit ever so carefully to avoid freezing his teeth, as he had with the previous cup.

“We dine here year after year and you manage to get a brain freeze every time.”

“It’s our spirited conversations. I get caught up…”

“Spirited? Doesn’t that have something to do with church or ghosts?” Amie puzzled.

“My mom says I’m a spirited child when I being hyper,” Daryl replied.

“She’s right, you know,” Amie said. “Anyway, here comes your cola refill. Be careful this time.”

“I love it this place. When I grow up I’m going to get a job here.”

“Boys can’t cook,” she quipped.

“I know that. I thought I could do stuff like clean off tables and wash dishes.”

“That’s a good idea,” Amie agreed. “I’d like to work here, too.”

“Do you want to work in the kitchen?”

“No, silly boy, I’d say hello to the people as they come in and ask about their meal and take the money when they leave.”

“You’d be good at that,” Daryl said.

“You bet.”

Return Scene

“With all the doom and gloom forecasted I hoped you’d come home,” Amie admitted.

“My folks are stressing ‘cause of the media hype and chaos. I wanted to calm them down.”

“You’re always so thoughtful,” Amie said. “No one has faith anymore. People have truly gone mad. I came home because needed something a little more familiar.”

“Do you want to do lunch?”

“There’s no way it’s still out there.”

“Yes ma’am, it is. I checked as soon as I got into town. It’s hard to see from the road, but it’s back there.”

Charged with the giddiness of school children, the two tore out on a nostalgia trek.

“I can’t believe how quickly these hitch-hickers attach themselves and how many there are,” Amie said, hurrying along uninhibited by the waist high underbrush. “They never bothered me as a kid.”

“You wouldn’t have noticed. Year after year you raced through these woods like a bulldozer.”

“I wanted to be first,” she snapped.

“If memory serves correct, you usually did arrive first, just like today.”

“How did we even know about this place?”

“It seems to me it was here when the world began,” Daryl commented as they approached their final destination. “May I get the door for you?”

“Always the chivalrous man, thank you, but I’ve got it,” she said, as she clenched her teeth and pulled it open.

Heavy and loud, the door opened, sending flecks of rust airborne. Amie forced her way through the narrow opening unfettered by ivy, webs and various floating particles. Daryl followed close behind.

“Ah, our table is available.”

“Perfect,” Amie cooed.

“After you,” the gentlemanly Daryl stepped aside and stood until his lifelong friend took a seat in the abandoned luncheonette.

“Same old same old,” she said. “This place never changes. I can’t believe the menu items and prices are still the same. How do they do it?”

“It’s part of the magic,” Daryl explained.

“What’s your magic? You look good,” Amie said with an impressed smile.

“Thanks. It’s all that PT.”

“Seems like This Man’s Army has been good to you.”

“Pretty much,” Daryl agreed. “I’ve seen a little piece of the world, or otherwise I surely would have missed.”

“I received all your postcards. I must admit, I’m more than a little envious.”

“Don’t be,” he said. “We could only afford to eat Army chow and our bases were mostly way out in the boondocks. Even though I got to see an inch of it, I haven’t really set the world on fire.”

“Not to worry. There’s plenty of time for that even if they say sparks will be flying any day now,” Amie said. “So, what exotic place will you ship off to next?”

“I’m out,” Daryl said flippantly. “Once I made sergeant I found I didn’t have the stomach for all the hollering and screaming. It gave me high blood pressure and a craggy voice.”

“I noticed the voice,” she said, with the same impressed smile. “It falls on the ears somewhere between stately and sexy. It’s a good sound for you.”

“Too much about me,” he said embarrassedly. “What mark have you made on the world?”

“I made one all right,” Amie said. “I think I stood in the way of the earth’s rotation or revolution, one. Either way I left a grease spot on the road where the world crushed me.”

“Stop it,” Daryl said. “You’re radiant and the only thing that matches your beauty is that stunning, eye-popping diamond wedding set you’re sporting.”

“I did marry a fine man,” she said happily. “His name is John. Oh, Daryl, he’s supportive, funny, loving and ever so considerate.”

“Wow! You hit the trifecta.”

“Technically it’s a quadfecta, if that’s even a word.”

“To hear you tell, it absolutely is a word and John’s the short form,” he said with a grin.

“You never change,” Amie said, and glanced at his hand. “I knew you’d make some woman proud. How long have you been married?” she asked, gliding a finger over his wide gold band.

“Four years now. I’m sorry I didn’t write about it. I wanted to tell you in person.”

“Do tell.”

“We met in Istanbul. Sara had been in the civil service. Now she’s an airline stewardess.”

“I can’t wait to meet her,” Amie said genuinely.

“You’ll have to wait another day. She’s off on a turn around to Las Vegas.”

“Fine, then you’ll just have to tell me all about her after you order our colas,” she said, and pretended to look at the menu. “Same old, same old,” she repeated her standard line with a lighthearted giggle in her voice. “This place never changes. I can’t believe the menu items and prices are still the same. How do they do it?”

“It’s all part of the charm and mystique of this place.”

After ordering colas, Daryl played his part, “Are you doing spring cleaning?”

“No, I thought I’d draw faces in the tabletop dust while we wait and you tell me all about your Sara.”

“She dreams of making music.”

“Does she sing, play an instrument or both?” Amie asked.

“Neither, she writes songs.”

“Hmmm.”

“She writes every day and sends lyrics to producers, agents, artists and anybody loosely related to the music business,” Daryl explained with pride.

“Sounds like she’s the type to make dreams come true,” Amie said. “What’s your life’s dream?”

Daryl didn’t hesitate even an instant before replying. “I still daydream of working in a diner, this one in fact.”

“You’re never going to believe this!”

Scene 4

“We’ll do everything exactly the same as this place. We’ll have some items as mainstays on the menu. You know, patty melt, breakfast anytime and a classic blue plate special, a meat and two sides, not to mention the ubiquitous bottomless pot of hot coffee,” Daryl raved.

“And supplement with specials of in-season fruits and vegetables and really whatever fun meals we feel like cooking.”

“That’s exactly what I had in mind.”

“You really want to do it, don’t you?”

“More than anything else,” Daryl declared.

“How will this affect Sara’s song writing?” Amie asked curiously.

“She has a top of the line typewriter. Mostly Sara gets inspiration out on her daily walks. When that doesn’t work, she goes to the market where she watches and listens to people living life as it happens. When all else fails, she rides the bus,” he said excitedly. “She can do all that here in town. She’ll be happy, we’ll be happy.”

“Maybe we can finally set the world on fire.”

Wrapped in the moment, the two spun around and visualized the potential of their brainstorming.

Elapsed Time Scene

“My mom brought me here when I was just a baby. I think then the diner had probably been around twenty years by that point.”

“Remember the day I first told you I wanted to work here?”

“What a magical day of imagination and inspiration.”

“Yep, and here am I, the dishwasher.”

“Oh Daryl, you’re much more than that.”

“I know. Bus boys don’t usually find themselves busy in the back with their hands covered with gravy,” Daryl said.

“You’re some boy, with that television newsman head of hair, all black and wavy. I mean, it’s brilliantine slick.”

“I don’t know about all that. But if I do say so myself, I’m a pot cleaning dandy,” Daryl said playfully. “Not bad for a former Army sergeant who’s still young and randy.”

“See, now you went too far,” Amie laughed.

Day to day, they gave service with a smile.

“Check it out, it’s the *real thing*,” Daryl said, as he loaded a tray of colas.

Grease perfumed the kitchen and dollars clogged the till.

Day to day they grew older, living life, not letting it slip away. Day to day, a day who’s to say, if month to month or year to year.

Scene 6

“Since we were kids we’ve sat together in this empty diner.”

“Maybe it’s the tango between fate and destiny that left us as the very last ones here.”

“The last ones anywhere.”

“Remember when you bought that china for the restaurant?”

“Yes,” Amie said dreamily. “I wanted people to feel like they were eating elegantly while they were eating cheaply.”

“Tons of people made a big fuss over those dishes,” Daryl said. “I think your idea worked.”

“I also remember you never let even a miniscule speck of a dust collect anywhere inside or out of the diner, and now that same paper has littered the floor for I don’t know how long.”

“Nothing but old news pressed on those pages.”

“Bad news.”

Amie fell into the arms of her partner. Draped in the darkness, time ran together only measured by the peeling paint of the diner’s walls.

Last Scene

Clattering, shuttering, the earth shook, quaked and exploded. Glass shattered; smoke pushed out the light of day and choked life to the brink. Unexplainably, the initial impact of devastation fell short of the diner, leaving Daryl and Amie haplessly alone, sequestered in emptiness of their stainless steel bunker. Holding on desperately in fear and trembling, they clung to one another.

“I didn’t think that it would happen so soon.”

“No one did. I wanted to believe it’d never happen at all,” Daryl confessed, and took Amie by the hand and moved softly closer.

Spinning on the dusty floor, Daryl released Amie from his love embrace. She tingled with mad physical sensation raging through her body, yet her heart ached for John. She had thought of his tender hands all the way to the point of climax.

Daryl's familiar touch eased the pain, or at least kept the shame at bay. Back in high school he and she had been friends and lovers, but always friends more than lovers. That fact remained the same.

"What if they..."

"Dear, Amie," he paused. "They can't."

"But what if?"

"Come here." Daryl wrapped himself around her. Amie's soft whimpers succumbed to wails and her eyes streamed.

In the unlit and lonely diner the two played pretend just as they had as children. Holding on to each other the days slipped away. Day to day. Day, today.

"How long can we keep up this farce?"

"Until the imaginary colas aren't enough."

Day after day. They stopped counting the days.

Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid Scene

An unmarked hour found Amie and Daryl sweat-slicked and stripped down to their underwear.

"The heat's coming."

"I feel the heat, too. It's only a matter of time."

"I guess it's time we finally set the world on fire."

"Do you want to go out, or what?"

Daryl looked at the door. He read the sign aloud. "This way out." That's all he said.

Daryl thought of Sara, remembering her sensual eyes and how he had pledged to make her smile forever. He once had held her hand on a plane as they watched the sun set like a blazing inferno on the horizon. It looked a lot like that outside. He continued to ponder as he re-hooked Amie's bra.

Amie dressed while offering her daily prayer for John. She missed him so. What a good man, and what a shame they had met so late and loved so lightly.

Daryl donned his soiled chef's garb. He slicked back his damp gray hair. Amie had readied herself. They clasped hands and gazed at the sign on the door. Still not a word was said. Daryl and Amie abandoned the luncheonette.