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THANKSGIVING DINNER

A One-Act Play

by

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Cast of Characters

Abbie: Early thirties. Abbie is an intense Sandra Bullock. She is the kind of person Jimmy Porter talks about when describing Madeline, his previous lover: “She had more animation in her little finger than you two put together. . . . Her curiosity about things, and about people was staggering. It wasn’t just a naïve nosiness. With her, it was simply the delight of being awake, and watching. . . . Just to be with her was an adventure. Even to sit on the top of a bus with her was like setting out with Ulysses.”

James: Early thirties. James is Holden Caulfield meets Jack Kerouac. Think Ewan McGregor. A lapsed idealist. “After I got out of college, I was all fed up with capitalism and greed and the “machine of society”, and I decided I was going to build myself a log house and grow all my own food. Not buy anything. Not use electricity. And refuse to pay taxes. But I got blisters trying to cut down the trees and I was hungry and I missed television. About the only thing I did right was not pay taxes. Then the government found out about that, and I didn’t feel like getting into a mess, so I paid for that too. And now I’m working at a gas station.”

(A gas station. A counter and a cash register. JAMES is behind the counter by the cash register in his gas station uniform. ABBIE stands in front of the counter, with her purchases: a bottle of Coke and some other assorted snack items. JAMES is frozen in place, in mid-action.)

ABBIE

I feel the weight of your arm, resting on my belly.
 You are sound asleep.
 Your breath comes in and goes out
 Like the ocean
 Like laundry in a washing machine.
 You are my phoenix, waiting to be reborn—
 My sleeping dragon,
 And I
 Am your pile of ashes,
 Your hoard of gold.

(JAMES unfreezes.)

JAMES

Anything else for you today ma'am?

ABBIE

Yeah. Come with me. Just leave work and come. We'll get into my red pickup truck and drive west. Just get out on the highway and drive. Until we get too tired to drive. Then we'll pull off on the side of the road and fall asleep in a field. Curled together to keep warm like thistle seeds on their stalk.

JAMES

Okay. Well, um, then your total is \$5.37.

(SHE hands him a ten.)

ABBIE

Luke. Your shirt says your name is Luke. My name is Abbie, Luke. Let's leave together.

JAMES

Six, seven, eight, nine and seventy-three cents makes ten. You have a nice day now. Happy Thanksgiving.

ABBIE

Luke, you haven't heard a word I said, have you, Luke. You haven't heard a word I said. But take a look around. There's no one in line. There's no one else here. It's just me, Luke. Just me and you. And I had a vision, over by the soda bottles. Okay?

JAMES

My name's not Luke. They fired him last week. Hired me to take his spot—haven't had time to get a new order of shirts in yet.

ABBIE

Okay. Okay.

JAMES

My name is James.

ABBIE

James. I'm Abbie.

JAMES

Well, pleased to meet you Abbie. You have a nice day now. Aren't you gonna leave?

ABBIE

We could go north? Head up to the boundary waters. Visit Canada. Sit out under the stars, invent new constellations.

JAMES

I think you've been eating a little too much turkey today, Miss. They say it's got this chemical in it . . .

ABBIE

Please come. Please. You have to. I can't deal with rejection right now.
(SHE has started to cry.)

JAMES

Hey now. Hey there. Here.
(HE hands her a little Kleenex pack from the display next to the register.)
On the house.

ABBIE

Thanks.

JAMES

You from around here?

ABBIE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I feel like such a fool. You're not going to just leave your job and come with me. What was I thinking? It was a crazy impulse. I'm not usually like this you know. Thanks for the Kleenex, here, let me . . .
(SHE reaches for money to pay.)

JAMES

No. No. I said it's on the house now.

ABBIE

Thank you. I'll be leaving now.

(SHE turns to leave and then changes her mind.)

Do you—do you mind if I stay and talk to you? Just for awhile? It doesn't look like you're going to be too busy today, and I just . . . I can not go back out there alone right now. The last twenty miles I've been feeling like I'd just wander into the oncoming lane when a big truck was coming my way—only there's no trucks out today. I'm the only one on the highway. Do you mind?

JAMES

It's okay.

ABBIE

Thank you.

JAMES

What's got you so upset?

ABBIE

James, are you a feminist?

JAMES

Am I a feminist?

ABBIE

Are you?

JAMES

I suppose I am. Don't think I ever called myself that before, but I think women should have the same opportunities as men.

ABBIE

I am too, James. I am too. And I do not need a man in my life to be fulfilled. I don't. I am a whole person and my sense of self-worth does not come from whether I am or am not with a man.

JAMES

Well, that sounds like a, like a good outlook.

ABBIE

I know. But you know what I found out today, James? I'm a hypocrite. I've been living a lie.

JAMES

I'm sure that's not true.

ABBIE

It is though. I went home, back to Enid, drove six hours straight to get there in time to help with the meal, had to get up at four in the morning. And I get there and all my sisters are there with their husbands and their kids, except for Kate and you know she just got engaged so her fiancée is there and he won't stay out of the kitchen, he's trying to help too, chopping the celery into little celery sticks only mostly they're just kissing and touching each other you know, letting their arms brush. And Gloria's talking about how little Jackie's first word was "Da-Da" and how Keith is so good with the children. I'm sitting there cutting up the cranberries telling myself over and over that I am a successful, smart, articulate woman. And I'm doing fine.

Then we all sit down at the table. I'm at the kids table because I'm the popular aunt and all the kids want to sit with me, but really it's because I don't have a man in my life so my family doesn't consider me grown up—never mind I've got a higher level of education than any one of them. And I'm doing fine.

Then we all start going around saying what we're thankful for. Celia says she's thankful for Doug, Gloria says she's thankful for Keith, Kate says she's thankful for David, Mom and Dad say they're thankful for their marriage and their wonderful children and grandchildren. Then it's my turn to say what I'm thankful for.

And at that moment I realized I'm not a feminist. Because I don't care about my job or my education or breaking the glass ceiling. I just want to have one damn date. I just want to have someone to bring home for Thanksgiving and kiss in the kitchen. I just want to have someone kiss me. Do you know how long it's been? I don't even know how to kiss anymore!

So my whole family is staring at me, the turkey's getting cold, they're waiting for me to say something I'm thankful for and I'm just sitting there and my mother, who doesn't deal well with silence turns to me and says, "Oh honey, I've been meaning to ask, did you ever go out on that blind date?"

And that's when I started screaming at them: you have no right to make me feel less than you. Then little Jackie started crying and everyone looked embarrassed for me and so I ran out of the house and got in my truck and started driving.

And then I stopped here.

And I saw you were reading Kerouac—and I knew they scheduled you to work because you were probably the only person who didn't have anyplace to go for Thanksgiving anyway—

Do you have a girlfriend, James?

JAMES

No.

ABBIE

No?

JAMES

I did, but she broke up with me about four months back.

ABBIE

I'm sorry.

JAMES

Yeah, well . . . She moved to Texas. Met another guy down there.

ABBIE

Do you miss her?

JAMES

Not so much anymore.

ABBIE

Yeah.

JAMES

Actually, when she moved down there, we were gonna do the whole long-distance thing. And then, she hasn't been there more than a month, and one time when I call down to her place, this guy answers the phone. His name's Leonard.

ABBIE

He wasn't . . . ?

JAMES

Yeah. They're living together. Less than a month—he's never even heard of me although Shelia and I had been together for two and a half years—and they're already living together. Leonard. He was a cowboy. I didn't even know there were cowboys anymore. Shelia had never liked cows. She wouldn't drink milk. Wouldn't buy anything made out of leather. She was a vegan.

ABBIE

She hadn't said anything?

JAMES

Nothing. I'm thinking everything's fine, and she's living with this cowboy-Home-on-the-Range-Leonard-guy.

I drove her U-Haul down, I helped her find an apartment, I helped carry in her couch and her solid oak bookshelves, I was the one who was extra careful with all the boxes she'd marked "fragile". But it's not even a month and it's Leonard who's sitting on her couch, and looking at her oak bookshelves.

ABBIE

What did you do?

JAMES

I call her back, ask her who's this Leonard, and why hasn't she told me anything, and just what was it that was so bad about our relationship that she has to go shacking up with the first cowboy comes around. She says I was just too nice. I wasn't exciting anymore. What does she want, I ask. Well, I was too stifling, she said. I was living eight hours away from her and I was too stifling. So what, do you want me to yell at you? You want me to come down there and slap you around a few times? Be mean? Would that make you feel less stifled? Or are you just a whore who's too embarrassed to say your pussy's making all your decisions for you.
I'm sorry, if that offends you.

ABBIE

No, it . . .
Do you smoke.

JAMES

What?

ABBIE

Do you smoke?

JAMES

Not usually. Sometimes when I'm out drinking.

ABBIE

Yeah. Do you want to have kids some day.

JAMES

Yeah.

ABBIE

Democrat or Republican?

JAMES

Green Party.

ABBIE

Religious?

JAMES

Grew up Catholic.

ABBIE

Education level?

Bachelor's degree. JAMES

Pepsi or Coke? ABBIE

Coke. JAMES

James, is there anything you want to know about me? ABBIE

What is this? JAMES

Anything at all? ABBIE

Umm, bra size? JAMES

Yeah, right. ABBIE

What are you thinking? JAMES

Let's get married. Wait, hear me out. Everything's gonna be closed today, but we get married, say tomorrow. We head south. Stop by Enid and show up at my parent's house. Surprise, I'm married. You're cuter than any of my brother-in-laws. And Kate will be furious. The scandal of us will take all the focus off her wedding. We get back in the truck and head to Texas. Where does your ex live? ABBIE

Galveston. JAMES

We stop by Galveston. Show up at her place. Hi, you say, just wanted to introduce my wife. You make up something like we were engaged while the two of you were dating. And then we spend the day at the beach. Maybe two days. And then we decide from there. What do you say? ABBIE

Hah, hah. Very funny. JAMES

ABBIE

No. Think about it. Why not. Why not?

JAMES

You're not serious.

ABBIE

Why not? I want to be married, you're single. What's the problem?

JAMES

Well, I've got this really great job at this fabulous gas station . . .

ABBIE

Right. Has anybody else stopped by all day? I'll bet I've been the only person that's stopped all day.

JAMES

Yeah.

ABBIE

Is your boss gonna check on you?

JAMES

No.

ABBIE

Okay, so? It's reckless . . .

You know the best roommate I ever had was in college, and we were randomly assigned, based on questions like, how messy are you. We didn't know each other at all, but it was great.

JAMES

So how messy are you?

ABBIE

Messy. You?

JAMES

Yeah.

ABBIE

Look at that, we're compatible.

(Pause.)

JAMES
Do you . . . what do you do?

ABBIE
How do you mean?

JAMES
Do you have a job?

ABBIE
Yeah. I have a job. I hate my job, but I have a job—in the male dominated world of an advertising firm. I design, I, I do the layout for advertisements.

JAMES
That's nice.

ABBIE
You think?

JAMES
Honestly?

ABBIE
No. Please lie to me.

JAMES
Well, no offense, but I think the advertising industry is despicable. It thrives on making people discontent with their lives so that they will go out and buy some *product* which will never fulfill them—and will only add to the already rampant over-consumption of American society.

ABBIE
Okay, okay, agreed. But, you know, you know, who are you to talk? You're working in a *gas* station. Doling out the one commodity that makes this country go to war. And making it convenient for people to eat over-processed, wastefully packaged junk food.

(JAMES looks at her purchases.)

ABBIE (continued)
I left before dinner.
I'm hungry.
Okay, so I'm a hypocrite. You found me out.

(Pause.)

JAMES
Me too.

ABBIE
What?

JAMES
No. I'm a hypocrite too.

ABBIE
Really—you just want to get married and have kids too?

JAMES
Um—after I got out of college, I was all fed up with capitalism and greed and the “machine of society”, and I decided I was going to build myself a log house and grow all my own food. Not buy anything. Not use electricity. And refuse to pay taxes. But I got blisters trying to cut down the trees and I was hungry and I missed television. About the only thing I did right was not pay taxes. Then the government found out about that, and I didn't feel like getting into a mess, so I paid for that too. And now I'm working at a gas station.

(Pause.)

ABBIE
I think I love you.

JAMES
Yeah, right.

ABBIE
No. I think I do.
What do you say? Should we go? Change our lives?

JAMES
Get married?

ABBIE
Why not?

JAMES
Well, for one thing, you haven't formally proposed.

ABBIE
James, will you marry me?

JAMES

No. No, no. You've got to get down on you knee.

(SHE kneels.)

ABBIE

James, will you marry me?

JAMES

Don't I get a ring?

ABBIE

Ha, ha. No wait a second.

(SHE goes over to a vending machine and buys a twenty-five cent ring. Alternately, if a vending machine is not feasible, SHE picks up a candy ring from the counter. Alternately, if a candy ring is not used, SHE can use the key ring with her car keys.)

I hope you like it. I got you a ring.

JAMES

Wow, what can I say?

ABBIE

Well, aren't you gonna give me a kiss?

(What the hell, HE decides, and gives her a kiss. Surprisingly, it's good—really good for both of them. THEY kiss awhile longer. Then finally, stop, look at each other.)

JAMES

I should, I should get back to work here.

ABBIE

You weren't doing anything but reading.

JAMES

Yeah, well, I need to fill the Slurpee machine. And clean the coffee-maker. But it's been, um, it's been real nice talking with you.

(Silence.)

You should go back home to your family.

(Silence.)

ABBIE

Yeah.
Okay. Yeah.
I should.
Well . . .
Happy Thanksgiving.

(SHE turns to go. Walks out the door. JAMES stands for a moment, then starts going about his duties. We may hear a car start up. JAMES runs out the door.)

JAMES

WAIT! WAIT! HEY—WAIT!

(JAMES re-enters the shop. No ABBIE. He picks up Kerouac, tries to read. Throws the book down. He looks at the coke and the snacks that ABBIE had come in to purchase. They're still lying on the counter. He unscrews the Coke bottle and starts drinking, when ABBIE comes back in.)

ABBIE

Hey. I forgot my Coke.

(HE hands her the bottle, but just as SHE is reaching for it, pull it away, and pulls her into an embrace.)

JAMES

I wanna go.

ABBIE

What?

JAMES

I wanna go with you. North, South, East, West, to your parent's for Thanksgiving, to Texas and my ex. I don't care. You are . . . Look at you. I wanna go with you.

(HE kisses her. Picks her up and swings her around.)

I WANNA GO WITH YOU! YOU HEAR THAT, WORLD? GAS STATION, DO YOU HEAR THAT. I'M GONNA GO WITH ABBIE.

(SHE is laughing.)

JAMES (continued)

Yeah?

(HE extends his hand—an invitation to dance. THEY begin dancing to a song on the radio. Preferably the song is “Hey Sweet Man, Who You Give Your Lovin' To?” as sung by Madeleine Peyroux.)

ABBIE

Happy Thanksgiving.

(THEY continue to dance. HE dips her and LIGHTS fade.)

THE END.