

COFFEE HOUSE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Leon Kaye

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CHARACTERS

HUGH, forty, ordinary, possibly bald, dressed in a gray sport jacket and white shirt and slacks

DAG, twenties, good-looking with spikey hair and neat, casual clothes

AMY, very pretty, long blond hair that sweeps back and forth with every bob or turn of her head, Amy wears a mini or perhaps a peasant skirt

PROP LIST

HUGH's files

Three coffee cups

Two small tables

Three to four chairs

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The actors should act/react as if many people in the coffee house are frozen. The audience must imagine this happens.

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(HUGH sits at a table center stage, sipping coffee. At the table in front of his sits DAG. HE sits alone at a table, sips a giant latte, and looks around. Unimpressed, HE draws in a huge mouthful of coffee, spills some, and wipes it up. AMY walks in and sits at the bar. Looking up, DAG is immediately impressed. Smiling, HE looks around to see if AMY is alone. Satisfied, HE stands, smoothly walks toward her.)

DAG: I don't think there's anything sadder than a girl sitting alone in a coffee bar.

AMY: **(politely)** I wasn't really looking to meet anyone. I'm sorry.

DAG: I'm not looking to meet people either. Just being polite. **(beat)** So, you're into coffee? Me too.

AMY: I was just gonna drink my coffee, you know, alone, and then leave.

DAG: Right, right. Yeah, you wanna be drinking your coffee alone. 'cause if you share it with any of these people, you're liable to pick up some of their germs, and who knows where they've been. **(AMY smiles.)** So... drink your coffee, and then rush off. You've gotta rush off and watch Survivor eight, right? Or Big Brother nine. I understand. That must-see-tv stuff is really important. You don't wanna miss any of that.

AMY: I was actually going to see a play.

DAG: See a play? Hey, she's smart. She's sensitive... probably been to college even. **(AMY sips her coffee.)** So a play? Nah, you don't wanna do that.

AMY: Why not?

DAG: Haven't you heard, theatre's dead?

AMY: Where did you hear that?

DAG: Saw it in a movie. You're much better off sitting here talking with me.

AMY: So you get your current events from movies? **(frowns and sighs)** And you were doing so well.

DAG: Nobody goes to the theatre anymore. Unless you're from out of town, and then they charge you - what - a couple hundred for each ticket.

AMY: You don't know what you're talking about.

DAG: Actually, I do. Ya see, I write plays. **(extends his hand to her)** My name's Joe, Joe Dagantonio. Everybody calls me Dag.

AMY: You don't write plays.

DAG: I'm ashamed that I do. There's nothing more "loser" that someone could do in New York. Except maybe be a bathroom attendant.

AMY: You don't write plays. You're not smart enough.

DAG: Oh, you don't have to be smart to write a play. You just have to be sick - sick for attention. "Look at me. Look at my play. I've got something to say."

AMY: Ya know, I'm beginning to believe you. You've got that whiney playwright voice. I hate that.

DAG: I try to write like David Mamet, only coarser and more violent.

AMY: Coarser than Mamet? Is there really such a thing?

DAG: Hey, if you want nice, watch the Hallmark Hall of Fame. People go to the theatre to have someone get in their faces. They want to be uncomfortable, or they want to be controlled.

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AMY: My name's Amy, by the way. And you make me uncomfortable, but in a good way.

DAG: That's good. So Amy, do you mind if I bring my big cup of coffee to the bar here? With you?

AMY: Okay.

DAG: Or you could just come sit with me. I mean, it's a very big cup, you know, a latté. And you know how heavy those get. **(AMY freezes as if in a trance.**

DAG smiles.) Amy? Hello?

(DAG looks around, then seems very concerned as HE seems to survey the whole coffee house.)

HUGH: You're doing far too well.

DAG: What? She's not moving. What do you mean, too well?

HUGH: Time's stopped for them.

DAG: What?

HUGH: I made everything stop for about three minutes. We don't have that much time.

DAG: What? Time for what?

HUGH: Listen, Dag, you have to leave Amy alone.

DAG: Who are you?

(HUGH stands, extends a hand for DAG to shake.)

HUGH: My name is Hugh.

(DAG shakes it.)

DAG: Why are they all frozen, Hugh?

HUGH: They're not really frozen. It's more like... **(beat)** Did you ever look at your watch and say, "Oh wow, where did all the time go?" Like five minutes passed and you only remember about one minute? What probably happened in that circumstance is a guy like me stopped everything.

DAG: That happened to me yesterday.

HUGH: Right. Some guy put a freeze on the vicinity for a few minutes so he could talk to someone privately... before he makes a calamitous decision.

DAG: Time stops?

HUGH: Time can't literally stop. Some people just stay suspended for about two or three minutes. That's all.

DAG: That's all?

HUGH: Right.

DAG: What calamitous decision?

HUGH: You're not supposed to be with Amy.

DAG: With Amy?

HUGH: Listen, Dag, people have a special person, a special someone they're supposed to spend all of their many lives with. And for you, it's not Amy.

DAG: I'm just having coffee with her.

HUGH: I know, but I was sent to stop it now, 'cause it's gonna get out of hand unless I put an end to all of it.

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DAG: Why? What's gonna happen?

HUGH: Unnecessary mess. She loves you. You love her. Problems, problems, divorce. Who gets custody? She comes at you with a knife. You want me to continue?

DAG: No.

HUGH: So it's best you don't pursue her, okay?

DAG: I don't know. A beautiful girl like that... maybe she's worth it.

HUGH: She's a little psychotic.

DAG: Yeah?

HUGH: Clingy... needy. You don't want that.

DAG: You can't tell by looking at her.

HUGH: Take my word. So you'll back off?

DAG: **(hesitates)** It's so against everything I stand for.

HUGH: Three years from now, you'll be rushed to the emergency room 'cause she put anti-freeze in your Gatorade.

DAG: **(stares at AMY)** Okay.

HUGH: Great. **(HE heads for his chair)**

DAG: So where's my perfect match?

HUGH: I'm sorry?

DAG: You said we all have one. So where is she? Is she just outside the door? Are you here to introduce us?

HUGH: No... Actually, she didn't make it this time.

DAG: Make what?

HUGH: You've been on the Earth seven times before this life. And so has she. And each time, you found each other, and had wonderful lives together. You were both very happy, trust me.

DAG: And now?

HUGH: Her parents weren't ready for children. So... you know.

DAG: Oh.

HUGH: Tough break. But after this life, hey, it's all gravy again.

DAG: So what do I do now?

HUGH: My suggestion is stay celibate.

DAG: Celibate?

HUGH: Yeah. Otherwise, it gets complicated.

DAG: I should never... again never -

HUGH: No. And you're in your late twenties, anyway. You don't have that much time left.

DAG: What do you mean?! I have my whole life.

HUGH: Oh... that's right. I forgot. You don't know.

DAG: Know what?

HUGH: It's better you don't know.

DAG: What? I'm gonna die?

HUGH: Well, we all die.

DAG: I'm gonna die soon?

HUGH: Please don't ask me, 'cause then I have to tell you.

DAG: Am I gonna die soon?

HUGH: Not too far off.

DAG: When?

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HUGH: And you'll have lots of good times before then. One of your plays will get produced. How do you like that?

DAG: When am I gonna die?

HUGH: Do you really want to know? Better you don't know. And the how, forget it. You really don't... the less you know, the better you'll sleep.

DAG: What? I'm gonna get hit by a car or something?

HUGH: Well, that's actually a good way to go. Most of the dead people surveyed found it to be an excellent choice. It made the top ten.

DAG: Getting hit by a car is top ten? I would think dying in your sleep.

HUGH: Number one. But everyone isn't that lucky. Dying in your sleep is, like, less than one percent, unless you're living in France. Then the number jumps up to fifty-four percent.

DAG: When you think of it, hit by a car is fast... you don't see it coming. It's not too bad.

HUGH: Much better than in some of the slower, well -

DAG: But I don't get hit by a car, do I?

HUGH: No, sorry. Hate to break the news.

DAG: How do I die?

HUGH: Did you ever read, "The Monkey's Paw?"

DAG: What?

HUGH: It's a short story... very macabre!

DAG: You know what? I don't wanna know. And just 'cause you can freeze every person in the coffee bar, I'm not convinced you can know what the future holds. 'cause you know what? Any decision I make changes everything. I can do one thing different... choose to walk down one street instead of another and alter my whole life from then on.

HUGH: I don't know. I'm not in that end. I came to give you the message. What you do with it is your choice. Just remember, there's a beautiful spirit up there waiting for you. After your death, you both will be reborn and you'll find each other again and again and again... for all eternity. Don't mess that up for some Levittown schizo named Amy.

(DAG ponders. Suddenly, AMY laughs, takes her coffee, stands.)

AMY: Oh, that's so funny.

DAG: I'm sorry.

AMY: Your latté is heavy. That's like something Chandler on "Friends" would say.

(SHE heads for DAG'S table. HUGH watches from behind.)

DAG: Yeah, me and Chandler. Did I mention we're identical twin brothers?

AMY: Is this your table?

DAG: Yeah.

(AMY looks at HUGH, does a double take, sits on the tables left side.)

AMY: I haven't laughed so much since my mother tried on bridal gowns for her third wedding.

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DAG: Oh, that would be hilarious, wouldn't it? (*sits on the right side, across from AMY*)

AMY: Yeah, it was... funny... (*preoccupied; SHE turns to HUGH*) Where do I know you?

HUGH: Me? We've never met.

AMY: Yes. Do you... no, that's not it. I'm sorry. (*turns to DAG*) So you write plays? Are you working on one now?

DAG: (*preoccupied*) Yeah. (*raises his coffee to his lips*)

AMY: What's the matter? Who died? (*DAG spills his coffee, nervously snatches napkins, cleans the spill.*) I'm sorry. I was trying to be funny. Did someone in your family die recently?

DAG: No. I just have a lot on my mind, that's all.

AMY: Listen, I was supposed to go to this play with my friend. But she got food poisoning. You know, Chinese restaurant, unsprayed cats...

(*AMY smiles; not smiling, DAG stands.*)

DAG: I'm sorry. I can't do this right now. Maybe I'd better just go.

AMY: I was kidding about the Chinese restaurant. I didn't mean to -

(*DAG looks to HUGH. AMY notices and turns to HIM while she speaks to DAG.*)

AMY: Wait a minute. I do know you.

HUGH: No. I'm new here.

AMY: Wait a minute... You sell Metro North tickets. At night sometimes at the Grand Central Terminal. (*HUGH looks away.*) I visit my Mom In Poughkeepsie every weekend. You made a joke about the change last time... a dopey joke. I remember.

HUGH: I don't think so. You've got me confused with -

AMY: Time for change. You tried to impersonate Clinton and you gave me back some coins and said, "Time for change." I've bought tickets from you at least four times. Don't deny it.

DAG: Is this true?

HUGH: (*foiled, HUGH frowns, spits out a quick explanation*) That's a part-time job.

DAG: Oh, my gosh! (*HE runs his hand over his face*)

HUGH: (*quietly to DAG*) I never claimed that I'm not a real human being. Just 'cause I can... you know... I still have certain monetary expenses.

DAG: And I'm here believing you!

AMY: You know each other?

HUGH: (*quietly*) I need health insurance. How am I gonna get health insurance unless I'm with a large organization?

DAG: (*sits, then to AMY*) This guy was trying to tell me to stay away from you.

AMY: What?!

DAG: That my perfect match was in heaven, and I should stay celibate for the rest of my life.

AMY: What? And you were going to walk out of here.... because -

DAG: He made time stop!

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AMY: What?!

HUGH: *(quickly stands, rushes over to the couple's table, sits facing the audience, between the two others; HE speaks quietly so other patrons won't hear)* Listen; I don't claim to be some mythic god or something. I've got a job and I just do what I'm told. I was told to give you the warning.

DAG: Who told you?

HUGH: We have a contract. We approach certain persons -

DAG: Who has a contract?

HUGH: We do.

DAG: The M-T-A?

HUGH: Yes.

AMY: Mass transit?

HUGH: Yes.

DAG: Has a contract with the city of New York?

HUGH: No! Well, the workers have a union contract but that's not what we're talking about here! This is bigger. This is a separate contract the M-T-A's made with... with...

DAG: Who, God?

HUGH: Oh, come on.

AMY: With who?

HUGH: You think God needs to make contracts?

DAG: Then who?

HUGH: This is not a joke, so don't laugh. Others I've related this to have laughed in my face.

DAG: Who does the M-T-A have a contract with?

HUGH: The stars. If you really want to know. It's the stars.

DAG: The Mass Transit Authority has a contract with the stars?

HUGH: Not the stars themselves. They have a representative.

AMY: The stars do?

HUGH: I don't know the details. I'm just a cog in the machine. Just like in the transit system - you could ask me about train schedules in Queens, and how would I know that?

DAG: You're saying the stars came to Earth and hired a lawyer or something -

HUGH: I really don't know.

AMY: Or the stars could have flown the lawyer out to them.

DAG: Like the people that sell land in the Poconos. They send you free tickets.

AMY: There you go.

HUGH: This isn't a joke. We were forced to take this contract because of budget cuts. This Mayor Bloomberg is a real hard liner. It was the contract or a lot of us workers would have gotten laid off.

AMY: I don't know about you two boys, but while this is infinitely entertaining... *(SHE stands, takes money from her purse)* It is getting a little weird for me. Dag, I'm sorry. You're a nice guy, but you've got some pretty weird friends. Good night.

(DAG is frozen.)

HUGH: Look around you. *(SHE does, seems spooked as her eyes shift left and right)* Okay, now Amy...

AMY: What's going... everyone is frozen!

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