

UNFAMILIAR FACES

By Glenn Alterman

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SYNOPSIS: It is a cold winter night in an apartment in Greenwich Village in 1985. Nat is awake looking out the living room window, lost in thought. His partner Joe joins and as the two talk we discover the painful events that are keeping Nat awake. This play offers a realistic look at how the landscape of two lover's lives have changed over the years.

CAST OF CHARACATERS*(2 males)*

NAT (m)..... 40's or 50's, a few years
younger than Joe. *(42 lines)*

JOE (m)..... 40's or 50's. *(42 lines)*

TIME: Winter, 1985.

SETTING: An apartment on the 15th floor overlooking Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York City.

AT START: *It is a winter night in 1985. It's nearly 4 A.M. NAT is sitting at the living room window in his pajamas. The room is lit by the light of the lamp next to him and the moonlight. He is smoking a cigarette, lost in thought. On the table next to him is an address book. The room is quiet. After a moment JOE enters, also in his pajamas. He sees NAT, watches him for a moment. NAT turns around, notices JOE watching him.*

NAT: What?

JOE: Nothing.

NAT: Mattie sleeping?

JOE: *(Smiling.)* In our bed, snoring. ...You alright?

NAT: *(Turns back, looks out the window.)* Stopped snowing.

JOE: I see.

NAT: Was really coming down.

JOE: I saw.

NAT: Then it just stopped, like all of a sudden, suddenly.

JOE: You're smoking.

NAT: *(Putting it out in the ashtray.)* Just one.

JOE: *(Joins NAT at the window.)* I love how the city looks after it snows.

NAT: Yeah, I know.

JOE: So clean, white.

NAT: Sal just opened up.

JOE: Didn't think he opened till six or so.

NAT: Guess he's got to set up the coffee, butter bagels, y'know.

JOE: *(Looking out the window, down towards the street.)* Look at them all down there.

NAT: Hm, yeah.

JOE: Bars must be getting out.

NAT: Soon, yeah; last call.

JOE: *(Looking at NAT, playfully.)* "Last chance, ten cents a dance."

NAT: Oh, God, will I ever live that down? I was DRUNK.

JOE: *(Smiling.)* You were "very" drunk. *(Playfully imitating.)* "Where have you been all my life?"

NAT: I never... Nobody's ever that drunk!

JOE: Verbatim, that's what you said.

NAT: Never!

JOE: Nat.

NAT: What?

JOE: I was stoned, I really don't remember. To be honest, I don't even remember what bar we...

NAT: The Stud.

JOE: The Stud, you sure? Thought it was Julius'.

NAT: Julius'?! Julius' is bright, lively, lit up. The Stud was dark, cruisy. And all that sleazy back room action, how could you mix them up?

JOE: I dunno, my brain cells are almost all gone. Smoked a lot of dope in those days.

NAT: Yeah, was different back then.

JOE: 'Nother time.

NAT: 'Nother world. (*Smiling.*) The Stud? Shit.

JOE: Shoulda seen you sitting there. Cigarette hanging from your lips, looking so—lost.

NAT: Oh I was out of it. But I thought I was lookin' so sexy. Had been out with my friends, got plowed. Ended up at the Stud, went directly to the back room. Musta been in there.... Shit, who knows. Stumbled out, tucked my shirt in... I was a mess. Found a bar stool, sat, stared. Then I saw this guy, way over on the other side of the bar. Cute, kinda sexy. We made eye contact, started cruising each other. Y'know the games, but then it got like "real intense." So then I winked, and he winked back. I smiled, he smiled back. I waved, and... suddenly, SUDDENLY, it hit me, I realized that this guy, the one I'd been cruising so intensely...

JOE: Yeah?

NAT: ...was me!

JOE: What?

NAT: Was a mirror. I'd been cruising myself!

JOE: NO!

NAT: Yeah, cracked me up, couldn't stop laughing. I almost fell off the bar stool. But then I looked up and...

JOE: (*Softly, friendly.*) "Hi, my name's Joe."

NAT: (*Smiling, sweetly.*) "Nat. I'm Nat. How ya doin'?"

JOE: "Good—now." And then the lights came up in the bar, was closing time. And you said...

NAT: "Last chance, ten cents a dance."

JOE: *(A playful aside.)* We have contact Houston.

NAT: Looked around for my friends, but they were all gone. So was everyone else. Place was nearly empty. *(His mood becomes more somber.)* Was just you and me. We were the last two people in the bar. Closing time.

JOE: *(Sensing NAT'S change in mood, JOE sits next to him.)* What, what is it, Nat?

NAT: Nothing, go back to bed.

JOE: It's four in the morning, what are you doing up?

NAT: *(After as moment, looking at JOE, almost a whisper.)* Where'd everybody go?

JOE: What?

NAT: There's no one left, Joe. All our friends, they're gone. Mel was... *(A beat.)* I was walking around the village this afternoon after Mel's memorial. Just... And everywhere I looked... strangers, unfamiliar faces. 'Mean we use to know everyone down here. Every shop, a hello. Ever bartender in every bar. Couldn't pass a store without knowing someone inside. But it's all changed. I kept walking around, block after block, looking, but no one. Went down to the piers. Was crowded, lotta people. But no one I knew. Not one person! Saw faces that looked sort of familiar, but they were just "look-a-likes." And then I realized, dawned on me, no one's left. They're all dead, all our friends. S'become like a city of strangers. S'like I'm a tourist here, visiting for the first time. Wondering, "Who are all these people? Who lives here, huh? Who, Joe?! WHO?!"

JOE: *(Softly.)* We do.

NAT: The kids who come into our shop every day, haven't you noticed? All new faces, "replacements!"

JOE: Don't.

NAT: *(Picking up the address book.)* I'm tired of crossing off names!

JOE: I know.

NAT: *(Tosses the phone book, pages fly all over.)* Pulling out pages from the phone book!

JOE: NAT!

NAT: Disconnected phone numbers!

JOE: DON'T!

NAT: WHO'S NEXT?! WHO'S LEFT, HUH?!

JOE: STOP IT! (*Pulling him tightly, holding him.*)

NAT: I'm asking you, who?!

JOE: (*Comforting NAT, holding him tightly.*) Don't do this. Shhhh.

NAT: (*Exhausted.*) Who?

JOE: Me. You. You know me, right? My face, I'm familiar. And I'm not going anywhere, I swear. We're here. Home. Safe. We'll make new friends, Nat. Start over. Be just like it was, you'll see. And this "plague" will end, someday, I swear. (*They sit quietly for a moment. JOE holds NAT in his arms. Then, smiling.*) "Where have you been all my life?"

NAT: (*Looking at JOE, then smiling.*) I told you, I never said that.

JOE: I know.

NAT: What?

JOE: I did.

NAT: You?!

JOE: Right after you asked me to take you home.

NAT: Thought you didn't remember.

JOE: Some nights Nat, you never forget. (*Kisses NAT. They sit quietly for a moment.*) Okay, c'mon, bed. Tomorrow's... well today's a workday. We gotta open the store in a few hours. (*They both get up. NAT looks at JOE, smiles.*) What?

NAT: God, I love you.

JOE: (*Smiling, playfully.*) And so you should young man. Now go in there, and get that damned dog off our bed. Between his snores and bad breath... I'll clean up here. Be right in.

NAT kisses JOE, then leaves. After a moment, JOE stops smiling. He moves a book from the bookcase, takes out a joint, lights it, takes several deep drags on it, sits down in the chair, looks out the window for a few moments, his face expressionless.

NAT: (*Then, from the bedroom.*) Joe, you coming?

JOE: Be right in.

JOE quickly puts the joint out in the ashtray, then puts the rest of the joint back behind the book on the bookcase. Then he bends down, picks up the pages from the address book, puts them back in the book. He places the book on the table, looks at it for a moment. He

goes over to the window, opens it, stands there, feeling the cool night air. He takes a deep breath. Then he closes it, pulls himself together. He turns off the lamp. The light from the moonlight shines in the window.

JOE: *(Calling to NAT.)* Nat? Just started snowing again. S'really coming down. God, I love this city when it snows.

JOE leaves for the bedroom. The room is empty, quiet, just the light of the moonlight.

THE END

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