

Scene opens with PAUL and MARY sitting in a booth of a coffee shop. It is early evening. MARY is wearing glasses, her hair is tied back and she's wearing baggy sweats. Hanging on a pole connected to the booth is an old army coat, scarf and hat. An oversized bag sits next to her. PAUL is overweight, middle-aged and balding; he wears a button down shirt, polyester pants too short for him and velcro sneakers. A METS jacket hangs from the pole on his side.

MARY

My last driver, Louie? I always had to order for him because he couldn't say the word Shrimp. Swimp, he'd say. I just couldn't accept that. We would sit in his car, practicing. Now Louie, I'd say, I'm not ordering for you this time. I know you can say shrimp. Shhhrimp, I'd repeat over and over, but all I ever got out of him was swimp. I think he did it on purpose. For some reason he liked me ordering his food for him.

PAUL

But you don't ride with him anymore, do you?

MARY

No. I think, no, I *know*, Louie had a crush on me. It started to get weird.

PAUL

Can you blame him?

MARY

(Looks at him pointedly) Yeah, I can.

Pause.

PAUL

Thanks for coming and having a sandwich with me.

MARY

Sure. I gotta eat too.

PAUL

You want anything else? You hardly touched your sandwich.

MARY

Too much mayo. Only in New Jersey would they put mayonnaise on the bread when there's already mayonnaise in the tuna salad. It's overkill.

PAUL
Why don't you order something else?

MARY
No. (Sits back and checks her watch) I really got to get home. I have an audition tomorrow.

PAUL
Oh yeah? For what?

MARY
Just a stupid play.

PAUL
How come you do that?

MARY
Do what?

PAUL
You know, down-play everything?

MARY
So when I get rejected I won't feel so bad. Why should it bother me if I'm not cast in a *stupid* play?

PAUL
Well they can't all be stupid.

MARY
It's just a game I play. It's like reverse psychology with fate. You know, every time you drive me home I say to myself, we're going to crash.

PAUL
You say that?

MARY
I think it. It works doesn't it? We haven't crashed yet.

PAUL
Maybe because I'm a good driver.

MARY

Maybe.

Pause. MARY begins to mash her tunafish with her fork absentmindedly.

PAUL

What's the matter?

MARY

(Drops the fork in disgust) Just tired. You know how long I've been doing this now Paul? Eight years. I used to think everyone pays their dues, this is me paying mine. But after eight years, I can't kid myself any longer. This is what I am. I'm a stripper, and my sideline is acting.

PAUL

Come on Mary, don't be like that. That's no way to think. You are what you think, you know.

MARY

That's a scary thought.

PAUL

This guy on this t.v. show the other night kept impressing that. He was selling these tapes that have sayings on them. Real inspirational, like, I am rich, much loved and have attained my heart's desire. You're supposed to say it like you already got whatever it is you want over and over until you can't believe otherwise. It's like brainwashing yourself. Anyway, this one woman had cancer and she cured herself by telling herself for one solid year she didn't have it. One day she woke up . . . and she didn't. I sent away for one but I'll make a copy for you when I get it. I think you could really use something like that Mary.

MARY

You're something else Paul.

PAUL

Gotta keep upbeat Mary. Don't let the bastards get you down.

MARY

The bastards. You got that right. Some guy today asked me how old I was. I said twenty-eight and he laughed. Fucker.

PAUL

Those guys don't know anything Mary. First time I saw you I said to myself, what's she doing here? I turned to the guy sitting next to me and actually asked him that. You were better than anything I'd ever seen on t.v. You know what you do tonight before

you go to bed? You visualize yourself getting that part. That's another thing they show you how to do on these tapes. They call it Constructive Visualization.

MARY

Did they get you to buy a bottle of car wax too?

PAUL

Go on. Mock me. But within one year I'm going to be rich, much loved and will have attained my heart's desire.

MARY is digging out crumpled dollar bills from her bag and unrumpling them.

MARY

Uh huh.

PAUL

Tonight, you visualize step by step the audition tomorrow. Getting the part, rehearsing it, you take it all the way to the standing ovation.

MARY

Okay. Sure. Shit, I should have done this in the bar . . . look what this one guy does. (Holds up a dollar-bill swan) I mean it's nice and all, he makes swans out of dollar bills. When you pull on its tail, the wings move, but they're a bitch to undo.

PAUL reaches for his wallet.

PAUL

Let me get this Mary.

MARY

No.

PAUL

Come on.

MARY

Paul I agreed to come with you as long as I paid for my own meal.

PAUL

Why?

MARY

Because that's the way I want it.

PAUL

Okay, okay. Don't get upset.

He pulls out a bill and lays it down.

MARY

I'm not upset. I just want to go home. I'm tired. (Gestures offstage) Miss, check?

PAUL

I'm sorry. I'm just enjoying sitting here, talking. I'm working the graveyard shift tonight. Sometimes I climb the walls it gets so quiet.

MARY

(Still unraveling bills) Don't you get scared?

PAUL

It's a department store. What's there to get scared of?

She stops to look at him.

MARY

The mannequins! Being alone with those dummies all night would scare me. Ever see the Twilight Zone episode where this girl goes shopping in a department store and she gets locked in accidentally after it closes?

PAUL

I don't like creepy shows.

Sets aside the money.

MARY

This one's cool. This girl goes shopping for a thimble, and she asks this salesgirl where are the thimbles, and the girl tells her (different voice) 'Thirteenth floor miss', so she goes up to the thirteenth floor, and it's absolutely deserted except for this one counter. The thimble counter. Well, you'd think that would set off some bells right? One whole floor to sell thimbles? And there's this really bizarre looking saleswoman just standing behind it, like she'd been waiting for this girl to show up all day. (Short pause) I think the girl does think it's weird, but she decides, what the hell, she has to get this thimble for her aunt or something. Anyway, she buys the thimble from this saleswoman who keeps staring at her in such a strange way the girl can't wait to get out of there, so she takes the elevator back down but just as she's about to leave the store, she notices the thimble is scratched. So, *back* up she goes to tell this creep of a saleswoman off only . . . there's no one on the floor. It's completely empty and dark. She goes back down and starts to make a real stink, only everyone thinks she's crazy because there is no

thirteenth floor, or maybe there is but it's not in use, (shakes off confusion) I can't remember, but she works herself up into such a state they take her to the president's office to lie down, but for some reason they forget about her and everyone goes home.

PAUL

That could never happen.

MARY

What do you mean?

PAUL

There's no way that would ever be able to happen. We do a clean sweep of the premises.

MARY

It's a t.v. show Paul. In the fifties? They weren't so suspicious back then. In this store they didn't have a watchman.

PAUL

I'm just telling you it couldn't happen now.

MARY

Okay, fine. So, now she's locked in and she can't get out.

PAUL

Why doesn't she just call for help on the phone? They must have had phones in the fifties.

MARY

Because then it wouldn't be the Twilight Zone. Can I go on?

PAUL

I was just wondering.

MARY

Where was I?

PAUL

She's locked in and can't get out.

MARY

Right. She's running all over the place trying to get out and at the same time, these dummies, mannequins, start to call out her name. Marcia . . . Marrrrrcia. I think that was her name, except you don't know if the voices are in her head or what because

every time the camera pans to a dummy, they're you know, dummies. Now she *really* starts to freak out and decides to go back up to the thirteenth floor to get away from these mannequins.

PAUL

Are they moving or anything?

MARY

No. Wait. Actually, I think they do move slightly, only you don't see them. Like the camera will show them one way and a second later it'll pan back and something will be slightly off? Like they'll have been smiling and now they're not. Anyway, she goes back up to the thirteenth floor and they're all waiting for her. The voices get louder and there are more and more of them and this time . . . they *do* move and they all come at her until she screams bloody murder and passes out!

PAUL

I'll bet she's a dummy herself, right?

A beat.

MARY

Well if you've seen it how come you let me run on about it?

PAUL

I didn't see it. I just came to my own conclusion.

MARY

Really? Then what happens after that?

PAUL

I don't know. I swear. But I can't wait to find out.

MARY

Yeah right.

PAUL

Okay, maybe I did see it once but I really didn't remember. Not until you got to the part where they all attack her.

MARY

They don't attack her.

PAUL

See? Go on Mary. I swear that's all I remembered of it.

MARY

Well. Alright. They don't attack her, but they are *pissed* because they take turns going out into the world to live for one year, but because this one overstayed her turn they had to trick her into coming back.

PAUL

But I don't think she did it on purpose. She probably just forgot. Like she had amnesia or something.

MARY

You know what, you're right. I totally forgot that part but you're right. I think she was enjoying herself so much out there that she developed amnesia, but then it does; it slowly comes back to her that she's a mannequin.

PAUL

Otherwise she wouldn't have come within a mile of that store.

MARY

Hmmm. Anyway, she starts apologizing and all is forgiven so the next dummy can go out and live for a year. But the creepiest, I'd even say most profound part, is the end scene. It's morning and the store is open and back in business and you see her . . . back on her little stand, real still. And it's so perfect because when you first see her she looks really fake. Big false eyelashes, she has a mole and bleached blond hair but you just think, okay, this is the fifties; everyone looked fake back then, but when she goes back to being a dummy, it is *un-canny* because when the camera goes to close-up on her face you see, really see . . . there's nothing going on inside. But, it's okay. Because at least she got to live, even if it was for only one year. (Stares off, deep in thought) Man, that Rod Serling was a genius. He was a modern day Edgar Allen Poe. . . . What? Why are you looking at me like that?

PAUL

Because you tell a story real good. I'll bet you're a really good actress.

MARY

I'm okay. I liked that episode though. It had a moral; it was saying grab life by the balls while you can and, and . . .

PAUL

Don't buy thimbles from strange saleswomen.

MARY

Ha ha very funny.

PAUL

Yeah well thanks for reminding me of that episode. I'll be looking over my shoulder all night.

MARY

I don't know why I thought about it. (Laughs) Maybe I'm a dummy and don't even know it. I look alive but there's nothing going on inside.

Pause.

PAUL

Hey you ever watch Touched by an Angel?

MARY

(Resumes with money) You mean touched by an asshole? I saw it once. It was so sappy it made me want to vomit.

PAUL

But see that's the kind of show you should be watching. Not shows about psycho mannequins
or . . .

MARY

Oh please! You know the truth is, if my life wasn't going down the drain I wouldn't have time to sit around watching t.v.

PAUL

I watch t.v. all the time and I don't think my life is going down the drain.

MARY

No reflection on you Paul I just . . . (looks around) what happened to that waitress? How difficult can it be to add up two tunafish sandwiches!

PAUL

Especially since I've met you Mary. Because of you life has gotten to be really good.

MARY

Paul . . .

PAUL

What?

MARY

I mean come on, how can that be? You drive me home from the clubs maybe once,

twice a week.

PAUL

Mary you don't know how much pleasure I get in just driving you home; making sure you get home safe, seeing you to your door . . .

MARY

Paul, you're a nice guy. You really are. And you're doing me a big favor because a regular car service would eat up half my pay . . .

PAUL

You know I don't do it for the money Mary.

MARY

Well you should because to be honest I'm not looking for a buddy.

Pause.

MARY

What I'm trying to say is that this go-go shit really complicates things. Even now I don't feel like I'm being real with you. See you can't stop being fake when you do this job.

PAUL

Are you saying you don't . . . you don't even really like me?

MARY

No I do, I do like you! But it can never be anything more than a driver/passenger thing because I will always associate you with New Jersey and go-go dancing and the bars and the men and the mess I've made of my life and, and . . . all of which I try really *really* hard to forget about when I'm not here. You understand? When I get home tonight I will open a bottle of wine and try to erase everything that's happened today. If I'm lucky I'll pass out in front of the t.v. and if the wine, or dope or whatever I can get my hands on does its job, I'll wake up in the morning with everything being if not erased then at least a very dim, fuzzy memory.

A beat.

MARY

I'm sorry but you asked. It's not that I don't like you so much as I don't like me.

She resumes counting out her money.

MARY

There's fifteen for the ride plus toll. God *please* don't look at me like that.

PAUL

I never expected to be anything other than your driver Mary. I mean, look at me. I'm fat and boring and you're . . . gorgeous.

MARY

You're not fat and boring. You're husky and . . . stable.

PAUL

I feel bad.

MARY

See, this is why I had to stop driving with Louie. Look you don't have to drive me anymore. Just drive me to State St. I can catch the 165 there.

PAUL

Are you crazy? I'd never let you do that. I just meant I . . . feel bad for you Mary, because you must be real lonely.

MARY

I'm not. Christ let's just go pay at the register.

She gathers up her things, but PAUL doesn't move.

MARY

Ready?

PAUL

You're going to need a ride from Knockers next Thursday, right?

MARY

Oh uh . . . no.

PAUL

How come? You always dance at Knockers Thursday night.

A beat.

PAUL

Mary you're not thinking of calling that Louie for a ride are you? Because if I upset you in anyway I'm sorry . . .

MARY

You didn't upset me.

PAUL

Then why won't you let me drive you from Knockers?

MARY

Because I don't need a ride!

Beat.

MARY

I got fired today okay?

PAUL

They fired you? They can't do that. You're the best dancer they got!

MARY

Apparently they don't agree.

PAUL

Well did they say how come?

MARY

Who knows . . . some bullshit about I wasn't holding the crowd.

PAUL

Are they crazy? I watch the guys watch you. No one can take their eyes off you when you're on the stage!

MARY

Paul, my best set all day I made fifteen dollars, seven of which came from the same guy. The waitress waiting on us probably made more money than me today and she gets to keep her clothes on. They watch for those things you know?

PAUL

It was a slow day. When I got there, there was maybe five guys around the bar.

MARY

We had a busy lunch. And it didn't help I was dancing with Josie.

PAUL

Josie! Now *she's* fake. Anyone tips her under twenty bucks doesn't exist for her.

MARY

Josie's *smart*. She makes a shit load of money; I heard she owns two homes. That girl's going to go far in life.

PAUL

But she's not a very nice person.

MARY

That's not the point. The point is she knows what she wants and she gets it. You got to admire people like that. They don't sit on the sidelines of life whining.

PAUL

Yeah well that Josie couldn't *pay* me enough money to drive her home.

MARY

She doesn't have to she drives a Mercedes.

Pause.

MARY

Anyway. They said they'd consider hiring me back if I got a tan and a tit job.

PAUL

Oh Mary!

MARY

I am *not* going to get a tit job. For those pigs? **Fuck them.**

PAUL

Good for you!

MARY

Yeah, good for me. Now I'm out a club. Two with the Treasured Chest getting busted.

They both stare down at the remains of their dinner for a moment.

PAUL

Hey . . . I got an idea. Why don't we take an afternoon and I'll drive you around to audition. There's a whole bunch of clubs down the shore . . .

MARY

The Jersey shore? Are you out of your mind? That's way too far. I'd never be able to afford that.

PAUL

I'll drive you for the same fee.

MARY

No way Paul. I can't let you do that. You'd spend fifteen dollars in gas alone!

PAUL

With my car? On a full tank I could drive to Canada without stopping. Come on. Tell you what, once you start getting booked more and you build your popularity back up, I promise I'll raise the fee. Mary, all you need is a fresh environment. It'll build your confidence back up.

MARY

And what about your work?

PAUL

Just take bookings on the weekend.

A beat as MARY seems to be thinking it over.

PAUL

What do you say?

MARY

Everyone does seem to be tired of me around here. Maybe it would be good to go where I'm a fresh face.

PAUL

Sure. Plus they're friendlier down there.

MARY

How do you know that?

PAUL

I don't know. I just gotta imagine people laying around in the sun all day gotta be more relaxed. (Pause) How about Saturday? I'll pick you up in the city.

MARY

(Sliding out of the booth) No, I'll take the bus out and we'll meet at our usual spot.

PAUL follows.

PAUL

Whatever you say.

MARY

If anything changes I'll leave a message with your mom.

PAUL

Yeah but don't . . . don't say anything specific, okay?

MARY

(Wraps scarf around her throat) She still doesn't know you're chauffeuring a go-go dancer back and forth to the city, does she?

PAUL takes her coat and holds it up for her to slip into.

PAUL

Eh. You know. She's old school. I'm forty five and she still thinks I need looking after. She says she can't die until she sees me married.

MARY

Don't worry. I've never said anything to compromise you yet.

PAUL

And besides, you're not just a go-go dancer. You're a . . .you're my passenger and I'm your driver. That's okay, right Mary?

MARY turns around to face him. Their eyes meet.

MARY

Sure. That's okay.

Uneasy, she begins to button up her coat.

MARY

Come on let's get out of here. You know, I think maybe I will do that visualizing when I get home. What was that you say again?

PAUL

(Putting on his coat) I am rich, much loved and have attained my heart's desire.

MARY

(Pulls her hat on, tucks her hair underneath it) I'll just settle for being rich and getting my heart's desire, like a gig on All My Children. I don't give a shit if anyone loves me or not.

PAUL

I don't believe that Mary. Everyone wants to be loved.

MARY

Not me.

PAUL

Well you have to say the whole thing otherwise it won't work.

MARY

(Reaching into her coat pocket) Hey how much tip you think we should leave? The soda was flat, she never gave us a check . . .

PAUL

Promise me you'll say the whole thing.

MARY

–(Counting out change in her hand) Alright alright. I'll say the whole thing, over and over and over. Happy?

PAUL

I wouldn't tell you to do it if I didn't think this is a good thing. I'll be doing it too. Who knows? Maybe in a year, we'll both get what we want.

MARY

–A year?! I was just hoping it'd put me asleep tonight.

She sets a pile of change down onto the table and sets the swan on top of it.

MARY

There. I'm leaving her all my change plus the swan. Let someone else spend a half-hour undoing the thing. (Pulling on her gloves) Come on now let's . . . what are you doing?

PAUL

(Getting a dollar out of his wallet) I thought I'd leave her another dollar. Just in case she can't figure out how to undo the swan.

MARY

That was a statement on the service. I left her at least fifteen percent there.

PAUL

But maybe she didn't make much money today, like you, and she's upset and hiding in a backroom. Or maybe they fired her on the spot and that's why we haven't seen her.

MARY looks at PAUL a moment, then reaches back into her bag.

MARY

Oh alright. There. There's another dollar and I'll take back the swan. (Holds it up) I'll have you know I have twenty of these at home.

PAUL

So give it here and I'll give you back one of the dollars you gave me. It'll give me something to do at work tonight.

MARY shakes her head as she exchanges the swan for the dollar.

MARY

I'll say it again Paul: You are something else.

PAUL

You mean that in a good way don't you?

She hoists her bag onto her shoulder and looks at him a moment.

MARY

Yeah. I do. I really do.

Lights fade. End of play.