

the Coffee Hut

ACT I

Scene 1

Noonish. AMY and JASON are in a small art house/coffee shop. It is old and homey, but in a stellar location. There is a small raised stage set up for a slam poetry reading tonight. JASON, early 20s, doesn't wear an early 1900s Newsies-type hat, but he wouldn't look out of place in one. AMY, late 20s, wears beads and calming neutrals and scans the room with fidgety hawk eyes.

AMY
Jason?

JASON
Everything is ready.

AMY
The stage?

JASON
The stage.

AMY
The fruit bowl?

JASON
The fruit bowl.

AMY
The chairs?

JASON
The chairs.

AMY taps a pencil against her temple rapidly and glances down at her phone.

AMY
I don't have patience for the whole issue like last week, okay. I'll be reading my new piece. It's called "Manual Labor."

JASON
I know. Everything will be perfect. I've

thought of it all.

*AMY leaves, looking at her phone.
JASON goes to the corner to make a
call.*

JASON

Are you reading tonight? Have you written anything new?... Well what's the point of being a poet if-... Please Elijah we don't have time for what happened last week... I just need you to be here and ready by 7:30 with something new to read... Okay, I understand. And Maxine?... Yes, I know. I don't care. Bring her.

AMY walks over to JASON. She looks angry.

AMY

Jason! I have bad news. Manuel is dead.

JASON

Who?

AMY looks down at her phone in confusion.

AMY

Sorry, I meant Norman. Norman is dead.

JASON

This can't be happening.

AMY

You have to fix this. My cousin is coming tonight. She's a psychologist. Or something psychologist adjacent. Either way, fix it!

JASON

Eliza will be here any minute. She has been waiting for this for years.

*As if on cue, ELIZA, early 40s,
enters. Norman's much younger widow.
She wears obnoxious heels. She does
not take off her oversize sunglasses.
A young man in a suit trails behind
her.*

ELIZA

Jason, Amy, so good to see you.

Unfortunately you won't be able to have your little show tonight.

The besuited young man inspects the space, making notes on a clipboard. Not the flimsy kind.

AMY

Just give us tonight, Eliza, please. I need this. "Manual Labor" needs this.

ELIZA

Manual what?

JASON

Elijah's coming! And he's bring Maxine!

ELIZA

Maxine?

AMY

Elijah's girlfriend. She owns an art gallery.

ELIZA

I don't care. I have interior designers coming in tonight to inspect the space. I ordered all the tile months ago.

AMY

What are you going to do?

ELIZA

This place is going to be a burrito/fro-yo place. No name yet. No more coffee and pastries! Except in the mornings. And it won't be hosting your little show ever again. I don't know why Norman let you people invade every Tuesday. You scare away all the decent customers.

JASON

Norman was a good man! He appreciated our art.

ELIZA

Obviously not good enough! He still left the place to me.

AMY

He would've understood "Manual Labor!"

ELIZA

Please.

AMY

Did you kill him?

ELIZA

Ha! Darling, I've been in Belize for weeks!

AMY

How do we know that?

ELIZA

He'd been sick for months. That's when I started ordering all the tile. It's going to be tile everywhere! Every surface will be easy to wipe down with a damp cloth! Burritos get messy, you know. And I'm going to see that the fro-yo station is right there.

ELIZA points to the stage.

In impassioned anger, AMY begins to recite "Manual Labor."

AMY

"Though I toil / under several bleeding
suns—"

JASON

Amy.

ELIZA

Tweens will put kit-kat bits on cake batter
fro-yo where you once recited your inane
"poetry."

JASON

How dare you.

AMY

You can't stop this show. You can't stop
"Manual Labor." We're going to be here
tonight either way. We're going to convert
your swarm of interior designers. They'll
be enraptured by performance! All thoughts
of design, interior or otherwise, will
vanish from their minds!

ELIZA

We'll see tonight, I guess.

ELIZA, heels clicking, leaves with the besuited man following in her wake.

AMY
She can't get away with this.

JASON
Legally—

AMY
We have to call everyone. The big names. Albert. And Albert, the French one. Adriana? Hmm. Oh! Can we get Nicholas de Fink?

JASON
Nicholas de Fink? But he wrote "Moon Birth!"

AMY
Precisely. He's just the kind of big shot we need.

JASON
I'll see what I can do.

JASON retreats to the corner to call ELIJAH back. AMY now has two pencils. She taps each against both of her temples.

JASON
Do you by any chance know Nicholas de Fink?... I know he wrote "Moon Birth"—Really? She does?... Can she ask him... Elijah you are saving my life... Six unsliced cantaloupes? I can do that.

AMY
Where are we?

JASON
I need to go get six unsliced cantaloupes.

AMY
So you mean whole cantaloupes?

JASON
Yes.

JASON begins to walk out the door.

AMY

Why would you say unsliced?

JASON is already gone.

AMY leans over a chair in front of the stage, thinking.

AMY

We're going to pull through tonight, we have to. For art. For friendship. For "Manual Labor!"

AMY is visited by the ghost of NORMAN.

NORMAN

You can't let her get away with this, Amy.

AMY is unfazed by ghost-NORMAN. She listens intently.

NORMAN

I know Eliza probably didn't love me, but I never thought she would take away the Coffee Hut. I always loved this place. You have to save it for me, Amy.

AMY

I will, I will, I'll do it for you!

JASON enters with six unsliced cantaloupes.

JASON

Who are you talking to?

AMY runs up to him as if in a fit of madness. He jerks back. The bagged cantaloupes swing.

AMY

We have to save this place.

He gestures to the cantaloupes.

JASON

What do you think I'm trying to do!

AMY

So Nicholas will be here tonight?

JASON
Elijah said he could get him here.

AMY
Beautiful.

AMY checks the time.

AMY
Where has the time gone? It's almost 7:30!
People will be here any minute. I have to
practice "Manual Labor."

*AMY leaves. ELIJAH enters with
MAXINE.*

JASON
So good to see you!

ELIJAH
Good to be here. I have a piece prepared.

JASON
And Nicholas?

ELIJAH
Do you have the cantaloupes?

JASON nods.

ELIJAH
He'll be here.

*More people come in and sit down. AMY
returns, looking determined. JASON
stands next to the stage as most of
the seats are filled. AMY stops to
greet her cousin, then goes to the
microphone.*

AMY
Thank you all for coming. I have some
disturbing news. Norman, the owner of the
Coffee Hut, has died this morning. His
widow, Eliza, now technically owns the
Coffee Hut. And she wants to turn it into a
hybrid burrito/fro-yo place. As if just one
of those wouldn't be bad enough. She's
going to be here tonight. And we need to
make her see reason. With our art!

The crowd cheers.

JASON

Now, our first poet, Bryan.

BRYAN begins slamming his poetry.

ELIZA enters with a team of interior designers. She does not remove her oversize sunglasses. The room is silent. AMY and ELIZA stare each other down from opposite sides of the room. The crowd does not know what to do.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So that's her?

ELIZA

I am her. And you all have to leave.

No one moves to leave.

AMY

Stay where you are!

A man gets on stage.

NICHOLAS

I have something to say.

ELIZA

Nicholas de Fink? But you wrote "Moon Birth!"

NICHOLAS

That was years ago, but yes. You shouldn't turn this into a burrito/fro-yo place. People need somewhere to practice their art.

AMY

Save the Coffee Hut!

NICHOLAS

Amy. Your late husband saw something in these people. He loved poetry.

ELIZA begins to cry.

JASON

(whispering to the man
next to him)
It wasn't *that* beautiful of a speech.

ELIZA

I... I always wanted to be an artist. I used to write poems. No one ever supported me. My dad *laughed* when he read my first real piece. It broke me. Then I realized I was pretty, so I married for money. I'm sorry, Norman. I didn't mean to be so cold.

At some point during her speech, GHOST NORMAN has appeared. Everyone accepts his presence unquestioningly.

ELIZA

I always wanted to be like you people. Broke, and passionate. I had things to say! And I couldn't say any of them when I designed my line of handbags. It was *hell*. "Moon Birth" was my favorite book growing up.

NICHOLAS

I wrote it fifteen years ago

ELIZA

I'm a woman in progress.

The crowd is staring at her. One of her interior designers has shed a tear.

ELIZA

Okay! Okay. I'll just make it a burrito place. And I'll keep the name "Coffee Hut."

INTERIOR DESIGNER

That doesn't make any--

ELIZA

And you can keep your poetry night! On one condition: I get to read too.

AMY

Of course!

The crowd cheers.

GHOST NORMAN faces the audience to begin narrating.

GHOST NORMAN

Amy and Eliza made peace that night. Amy was able to collaborate with the interior

designers to keep the Coffee Hut's charm authentic. Only half of Eliza's tile was used in the end. The rest she donated to charity. They had no idea what to do with it. Jason wrote a book about that night. Nicholas de Fink went on to take the six unsliced cantaloupes home with him, for reasons still unknown.

GHOST NORMAN steps to the side.

AMY is reciting "Manual Labor."

AMY

"Though I toil / under several bleeding
suns..."

GHOST NORMAN

Such is the story of how the Coffee Hut
started selling burritos.

*The crowd applauds AMY's poem. Fade
to black.*

END OF PLAY