

# HEADS UP

A play in two scenes

February 1, 2023

CHARACTERS

MARY, 35

JOE, MID-50S

PATTI, 70S

FRED: EARLY 40S

(NOTE: JOE/FRED COULD POSSIBLY BE DOUBLED. WILL NEED MINOR ALTERATIONS IN SCENE 2.)

TIME

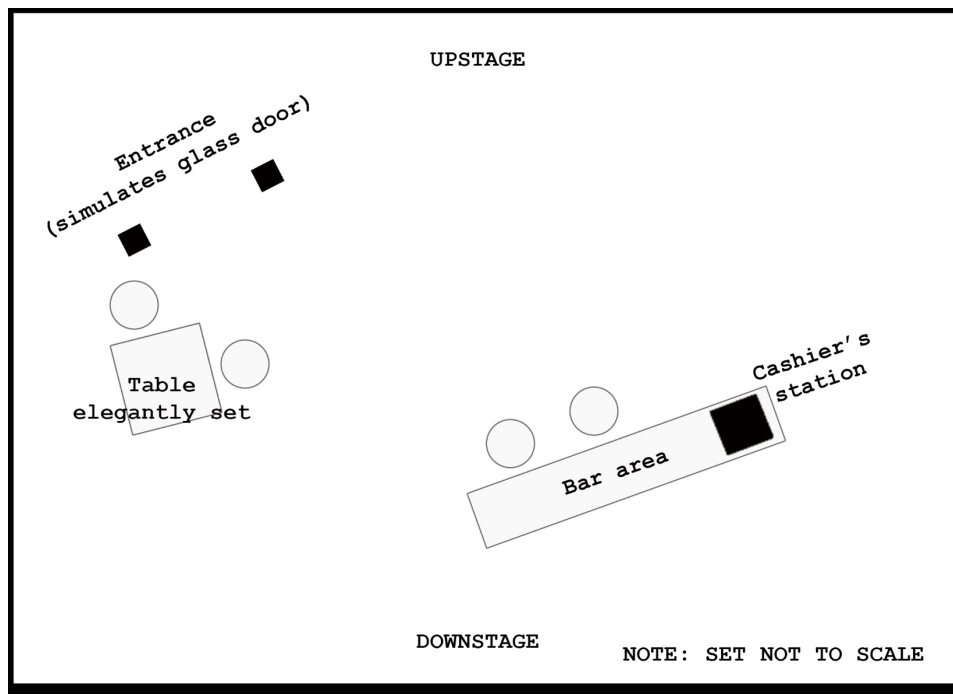
The present, late evening

PLACE

USR: The simple set indicates a glass door entrance opening upon a small, intimate, well-appointed bistro in Tehachapi. A small table set with white linen and gleaming stemware smacks of 'Trendy'.

DSL: A small bar with two bar stools that face the proprietor's station.

(set)



## Scene I: INT: Joe's Bistro

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(JOE, the proprietor, busies himself at the cash register with closing receipts. His back toward the audience.)

MARY sits facing the audience, nursing a half-finished goblet of wine.)

MARY

(Gesturing with her glass.)

This always helps. Merlot, my favorite 'bring-me-down-from-the-brink' drink.

(JOE reaches for an open bottle and indicates "does she want a refill?")

MARY

Joe, you're such a class act. Thanks.

(JOE tops off her glass.)

The commute to L.A. is like no other, and never even comes close to the week I planned when I left on Monday.

(She swirls the liquid around in the glass.)

Too many variables, distractions, complications, and by the end of the week, I, personally, am frazzled. The wine helps. TGIF and Thank God for TEHACHAPI.

(USR: In walks PATTI. Almost a bag lady, but not quite. She is wearing run-down running shoes, carrying a grocery sack filled with miscellaneous papers and junk. There is a sad-looking backpack on her back and her right arm is in a sling.)

She takes in the elegantly set tables in the empty restaurant, seems confused as to what to do. PATTI looks around, then notices two people at the bar/cashier's station and heads their way.)

PATTI

Is it too late? Are you closed? I just got off the ol' Kern to Bakersfield 'Love' bus. Do I have to order a full dinner, or could I just get a drink?

JOE

Just a drink, is fine.

MARY

(patting the only other bar stool.)  
Why don't you sit right here?

PATTI

Thank you.  
(PATTI clabbers right on up. Her stuff scatters everywhere.  
She leans down to neaten up the chaos.)

MARY

(whispers to JOE almost apologetically.)  
I didn't want her to disturb any of your beautiful tables. Are  
you sure you want her in here?

PATTI

(squiggles herself back up and arranges  
herself on the stool.)  
Do you have tonic water and lime?

JOE

Yes, mam, as a matter of fact I do.

PATTI

This may seem eccentric, but could I have it served in a wine  
glass like this lady's here?

JOE

Why not?

MARY

Oh, excuse me, I was being presumptuous. Perhaps you would  
rather enjoy your drink privately at one of Joe's elegant  
tables.

PATTI

Oh, heavens no. This will be lovely. Have you been here  
before? I didn't even know this place was open.

JOE

(Smiles fondly.) I consider her a regular.  
(JOE serves PATTI her tonic and squeezes in some fresh lime.)

PATTI

Could I bother you for some ice on the side?

JOE

Yes, Mam.

(The women sit in silence for a while.  
MARY watches as PATTI adds several ice  
cubes to her drink with her left hand.)

PATTI

Naturally, I'm right-handed and can't drive. Can't shift.

MARY

(sees an opening)

That's why you were on the bus?

PATTI

Yup. Doctor's appointment that ran late. Broke my wrist. Actually, the radius, they tell me, and that little bone that sticks out on the side. I won't need surgery, they said. If I was young, like maybe twenty, they would consider it, But, with us old people, the doctors don't want to waste their time.

MARY

How did you break it?

PATTI

(a pause) You want to hear? Huumm, OK. It's a *Blue Bird of Happiness* story.

(PATTI swings her encased arm to MARY, to show her off her baby blue cast complete with the 'tattoo' of a swallow.)

*The Blue Bird of Happiness*. A friend of mine says you should always search for *The Blue Bird of Happiness*. Isn't this great? It's a temporary tattoo. You can get them on line. My daughter is always pushing me to get a real tattoo, but I couldn't make up my mind. Naturally, I would choose a Blue Bird. So, when I found these temporary tattoos I was hoping that that would satisfy her. I didn't get a chance to try them out on my own skin before this happened. But, it looks pretty cool on the cast, doesn't it?"

MARY

I have to admit it does.

PATTI

Well, my daughter felt I needed more exercise and suggested I needed to bicycle or to swim more. And on my birthday, she got all my friends together and surprised me with a new bicycle. I could ride it to the pool. White. 8-speed. Her theme? *The Blue Bird of Happiness*. The helmet even had bumblebees and blue birds on it and came from a company called NUTCASE. The line on the back read, 'I love my brain'. How great is that? It even had a bike lock with a blue bird and a blue ringy-thingy bell. Delightful.

MARY

You fell off?

PATTI

Not like you think. I prefer to say I was brushed by the wings of an imaginary blue bird who must have decided I should no longer be biking.

MARY

Really?

PATTI

Yup. I was standing next to my bike and showing it off to a neighbor. Wasn't even on it! I stepped back, slipped on the loose gravel or was brushed backward by my guardian angel's wing. I did break my wrist in the fall, though. The bird brain wasn't capable of thinking ahead.

(MARY doesn't get it)

Perhaps I should I just sip my tonic.

JOE

Let's hear more.

PATTI

(looks JOE over curiously.)

Sometimes fate just seems to step in. Do you have some vanilla ice cream?

JOE

Yes, but I only have vanilla.

PATTI

Yes, vanilla. That's what I asked for. That would be perfect. Could I have some?

JOE

Certainly. I can put chocolate sauce on it.

PATTI

No, just the ice cream will be fine. Really.

JOE

Lime and tonic and vanilla. Sure you don't want some chocolate sauce?

(Joe sets down a dish with a double scoop of vanilla.)

(PATTI)

(dips her spoon into the ice cream, scoops up a dainty bit, and washes it down with a sip of her tonic.)

Are you Sicilian?

JOE

Basque - family's been here a long time.

PATTI

Not Italian? - Bistro? Sounds Italian. It is your restaurant, isn't it?

MARY

(MARY chimes in proudly.)

It certainly is.

JOE

I'm Joe.

MARY

Mary.

PATTI

Patti, with an 'i'. Well, I would have thought Sicilian. It takes balls to open a restaurant. My second husband wanted to be Sicilian.

MARY

How many husbands have you had?

PATTI

Four. And, how about you?

MARY

(slightly shocked)

Four? I've only had one, and that didn't work out. It's been nine years and I'm still not over him. So, I come here on the weekends. It's my little ritual to smooth off the edges and leave me warm and fuzzy. Makes it easier to go back to my empty apartment and hibernate for the weekend. And, come Monday, I can get up ready to head back down the hill to 'fight the good fight'. I'm a costumer, freelance and mostly in commercials. I do pretty well for myself. Been doing it for 17 years. It's all former clients and word of mouth. Sometimes, I work a lot. That's why I moved to Tehachapi. Gotta get out of the city. And, right now that the weekend is here, I'm mellow. Hey, here's a good alliteration: Mellow in my Merlot. Ok, so, not so good. Never did claim to be a writer. And, why did I tell you all this?

(PATTI smiles. JOE goes back to the kitchen. He's heard this before. MARY pours it all out.)

I still love him. He was the one who wanted out. I can't get over it. He's all I think about. No one can compare.

PATTI

How's he doing?

MARY

He lives in North Carolina now and I haven't seen or heard from him in years.

PATTI

Seems he's moving on with his life. (Slightly astonished) And, you really still love him?"

MARY

Yeah. (Thinks long and hard.) Yes, I do.

PATTI

You don't seem very happy about it.

MARY

I'm not very happy about it. I'm alone with nothing but my work and a lonely apartment. Not even a cat or a trophy dog.

(Joe is back and smiles knowingly.)

PATTI

What would make you happy?

MARY

Well now, that's a very good question.

PATTI

I used to think being married would make me happy. I thought I was good at it. Did it four times. I guess I considered myself like Ado Anne in OKLAHOMA! - just a girl who can't say 'no'. If I was married and got unmarried, I'd do it again. I always thought of myself as 'good marriage material'. So many times, a bride, but never a widow! There were moments when I thought being a widow might make me happy. (beat) For a time, I felt like I was the Fountain of Youth. Marry me and live forever. And they're all still around! There was a time when all four of them lived within a one-mile radius of each other. I call 'em my Four-Roses, you know, like the whiskey my granddad used to drink. Well, I've had my fill.

MARY

Are you married now?

PATTI

Yup. For 30 years. Yup. Widowhood would not be a good thing.

(The THREE of them ponder this a bit.)

MARY

And, you stuck with this one?



PATTI

Decided to find out what a 'long-term relationship' was all about. Seems this one's a 'keeper'. Durable. Eats when fed. Responds well to love. So, I'm sticking it out. So, is he.

JOE

And?

PATTI

It's pretty damned hard, but it's good. We're there for each other. We can laugh at the indignities of ageing. Like when you seem to drop everything. You know, there's two ways to look at it: We can think of gravity as our enemy or that God has found a good way for us ol' geezers to exercise. Mary, it seems you are stuck in a 'long-term relationship' that's going nowhere. You might want to break free and find someone who is actually there for you.

(PATTI raises her empty ice cream dish. MARY raises her empty wine goblet. The GALS clink glasses. JOE refills MARY'S glass. MARY paused, then downs it.)

PATTI

I think it's time for my check.

(PATTI drags up her backpack, digs into it with her good hand and comes up with a small zippered change purse that she struggles with. The zipper is stuck. In exasperation PATTI hands it to Mary who frees the zipper and hands it back.)

JOE

It's on the house.

PATTI

(Beat) I guess I should say 'thank you' and accept things people want to give. It doesn't come easy for me. So, I guess there must be a lesson here. Damn, I'll just say it, 'Thank you'. Maybe there is something I can give you in return.

(PATTI digs around in the coin purse again, selects a penny and places it on the counter.)

See, I placed it tails up. (aside to MARY) I love this. This is what you do. When you come upon a penny, if it's face up, you pick it up and keep it. It means you will have good luck. If you come upon a penny and it's tails-up, you turn it over and leave it there, so that the next person who comes along

will find it. See? You will have given him some good luck. She turns the 'tails-up' penny 'heads-up' and pushes it toward JOE.

JOE

(JOE considers the gesture, playing with the penny, flipping it heads and tail.)

I like that.

(He slides it over to MARY.)

This is something you could use.

PATTI

(PATTI considers JOE's gesture then turns to MARY)  
Hey, I know what you could do. Find some water: a glass, a fountain, a puddle or a pond. It should be water. It's a universal solvent you know. Dissolves a lot of things. Maybe it can wash all your tears away. So, you take that penny, put all the misguided love you have for your former husband on it, then give that penny the biggest, most full-of-love kiss you can muster. Kiss that sucker good-bye and toss it in the water. It might well take a weight off your shoulders.

MARY

I could go to the Santa Monica Pier.

PATTI

There you go.

MARY

I just might do that.

PATTI

(PATTI'S phone beeps. She gathers up her things. . .)

Wouldn't hurt to give it a try, she shrugged. It just might make you happy. Seems my ride is waiting. That makes me happy.

(. . . and disappears out the door. MARY and JOE are left studying the penny.)

BLACKOUT

## Scene 2: At the end of the Santa Monica Pier

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LIGHTS UP (follow spot)

(DSL: MARY stands at the end of the pier, takes a deep breath and with a last ounce of lonely-heart grieving, blesses the penny with a big, sloppy kiss and flings it into the sea.)

MARY

What a relief.

(as she walks back along the pier MARY spots a penny. "Tails-up." She stoops down and turns it over. FRED enters DSR. As MARY straightens up she finds herself looking straight into the eyes of a curious stranger.)

If you pick up that penny, you'll have good luck.

FRED

Looks like I already do.

FADE TO BLACK.