

28 Plays Later – Challenge #12

Let's do a time restriction exercise

Decide how much time you want to write today... Get your timer out and programme into it half of the time you set for today... Start writing about anything.

Once the timer beeps - stop writing.

Take a short break and then set your timer again for the second half, in which you are to edit the play, make sure it has an extraordinary ending, get the formatting right, Etc.

THEORIES OF EVERYTHING

By

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(a play in one act... and five lattes)

ACT I

SCENE 1

The set is designed to look like a café. Envision the average Starbucks; it looks like that. At rise, ERIK the barista (27, affable, guy-next-door handsome) is behind the bar. There is a clock on the wall behind him, above the sink. There is a bell on the door. It rings every time the door opens or closes.

At precisely 10:37 AM, ERIK pauses in whatever he's doing behind the counter, and glances at the door.

SAMANTHA (21, college-student freshness about her) enters carrying a messenger bag that probably holds books and a laptop.

ERIK: You're late.

SAMANTHA: (grinning at him) I am not! (beat) Well, maybe a little. Class ran long. (beat) Could I get a gr –

ERIK: -ande nonfat latte and a slice of lemon pound cake.

SAMANTHA: You know me too well.

ERIK busies himself getting a plate and taking a slice of lemon cake from the glass case, presenting it with a fork. Then he starts her latte.

ERIK: (over the sound of the frother) How was class today? Professor Murdoch still out sick?

SAMANTHA: No, she was back, but she has no voice. I mean, seriously, it was like having Freddy Krueger's sister teaching class.

ERIK: Ouch, that doesn't sound good.

SAMANTHA: It wasn't. But, the discussion was good, even so. She quoted some vintage actress. Rosalind... something.

ERIK: Russell?

SAMANTHA: Yes! Anyway, she quoted her: 'Acting is standing up naked and turning around slowly,' and we ended up having this great discussion about emotional truthfulness in writing and acting, and how, as artists we have to treat our vulnerabilities as tools.

ERIK: Sounds wise.

SAMANTHA: I thought so. Scary though.

ERIK: Scary?

SAMANTHA: Letting a bunch of strangers see your deepest self in your words or your performance. Yeah. Scary.

ERIK: I suppose.

SAMANTHA: Speaking of scary... I have this theory...

ERIK: (interested) Okay, lay it on me.

SAMANTHA: Most stories would be interesting if we saw them from the villain's point of view.

ERIK: (skeptical) The villain?

SAMANTHA: Yes. Heroes are pretty much interchangeable. Villains – dark characters in general – are more complex.

ERIK: (hands SAMANTHA her latte) Interesting. I'll have to watch something with a good villain in it and see if you're right.

SAMANTHA: (laughing) Do that. (She picks up the plate and carries her drink and snack to a table, where she gets comfortable with her laptop.

Lights fade down.

Scene 2 **The same café, a few days later. ERIK has a different shirt on other his apron. At 10:35, SAMANTHA comes in. Her hair is different – a little nicer.**

SAMANTHA: Coffee, coffee, coffee! Please?

ERIK: The usual grande, or you need something bigger?

SAMANTHA: Venti today, please. And something chocolate.

ERIK: We have this double fudge brownie... (trails off teasingly)

SAMANTHA: Yes... that. Please, that.

ERIK: Bad morning?

SAMANTHA: No... just... okay, my roommate is a bigger sci-fi geek than I am, and she introduced me to this show called 'Stargate SG-1.'

ERIK: (animated) I love that show! I've been watching it on HULU. Don't you like it?

SAMANTHA: I do, it's just...

ERIK: Here, sip this before you talk. (hands her a venti latte)

SAMANTHA: (sips) Thank you; this is perfect.

ERIK: Go sit. I'll bring your brownie.

SAMANTHA goes to the table she occupied in Scene 1, and gets settled. ERIK delivers her brownie on a plate, and then grabs the chair opposite hers and flips it around so the back is toward the table. He sits on it, straddling it and resting his arms on the back.

SAMANTHA: Okay, I have this theory.

ERIK: (amused) Of course you do.

SAMANTHA: I think there are only thirty-one Canadian actors.

ERIK: Thirty-one?

SAMANTHA: Yes. I mean, think about it. You only ever see the same people in every Canadian-made television show, even if the production company is from the U.S.

ERIK: That's true, but... thirty-one? That's a pretty specific number.

SAMANTHA: I believe theories should be as specific as possible.

They chat for a while, as the lights fade out.

Scene 3

The same café, several weeks later. SAMANTHA enters at her usual time, but she's in sweats with the name of her university on them, her hair is in a messy pony tail, and her nose is red.

ERIK: Hey, you okay?

SAMANTHA: (congested) Do. (frowns) I mean *no*. I have a cold.

ERIK: But you still came for coffee?

SAMANTHA: I'm a creature of habit. (beat) I think maybe I should have a chai instead of coffee.

ERIK: Probably a good idea.

SAMANTHA: With honey.

ERIK: Right.

SAMANTHA: And a molasses cookie, please?

ERIK: I'll bring both in a moment.

SAMANTHA goes to sit down at her usual table. ERIK brings her chai – in a mug – and the cookie she asked for.

SAMANTHA: Thank you.

ERIK: For you? Any time.

He looks like he's about to join her, but the door opens and a group of other university students and he has to go deal with them.

ERIK: (reluctantly) Duty calls. (beat) Feel better, okay?

SAMANTHA: I'm trying to.

ERIK doesn't have time to return to SAMANTHA's table, but as she's heading out of the café, she stops back at the bar.

SAMANTHA: I have a theory about chai, you know.

ERIK: (chuckling) Why am I not surprised?

SAMANTHA: (rolling her eyes) Because I'm your *favorite* customer, even when I'm sick?

ERIK: I thought it was because you have a new theory to share at least once a week. Maybe you should be majoring in philosophy.

SAMANTHA: (fake huffy) *Maybe* I should find a different café.

ERIK: Oh, come on. You know I didn't mean it (beat) So your theory about chair?

SAMANTHA: Okay, so, 'chai' is the root word for 'life' in Hebrew. But it's also the Russian word for 'tea'- all tea – so, my theory is that tea is life. That's why it makes you feel better when you're sick.

ERIK: Where do you come up with these?

SAMANTHA: I like to think about things, how the world works... and try to connect the dots.

Lights fade out on the café as they continue to chat.

Scene 4: **The same café, but this time, SAMANTHA already has her drink and pastry, and ERIK is straddling a chair, and chatting with her... the lights come up mid-conversation. Time has passed, though: both are wearing warmer looking clothing.**

SAMANTHA: ... anyway, I had two choices. Run off stage crying, or try to fake it. I'm betting no one's ever seen Maria von Trapp do Ophelia's mad scene instead of singing "My Favorite Things," before.

ERIK: (laughing) You didn't.

SAMANTHA: Oh, I did.

ERIK: (changing tone a little) Listen... I... um... my band has a gig tomorrow night at the Purple Turtle.

SAMANTHA: Really? I heard record company scouts are at the Turtle, like, *a lot*.

ERIK: I don't think we're good enough to record – yet – but I want to make a good impression. You know... not look like...

SAMANTHA: ... like drippy college kids?

ERIK: (embarrassed) Yeah. So... what do I wear that makes me look reputable but still cool?

SAMANTHA: (thinks about it for a moment) Well... I do have a theory about that.

ERIK: Please share?

SAMANTHA: Of course. I think people look best and feel the most confident when they're wearing colors that make them happy. (beat) What color makes *you* happy?

ERIK: (laughing) Plaid. Definitely plaid.

SAMANTHA: Well, then... wear a plaid shirt over a blue t-shirt. (she falters slightly) The ladies will love it.

ERIK: Speaking of ladies...

SAMANTHA: You want me to dress your girlfriend, too?

ERIK: Uh, no. Actually, I don't have a girlfriend at the moment.

SAMANTHA: Oh.

ERIK: I was wondering if you'd like to come. To the gig. You can bring a couple friends if you want. I just need to leave your name at the door.

SAMANTHA: (beaming, blushing) Oh, I'd love to.

ERIK: I need to tell them more than 'Samantha, my favorite customer.'

SAMANTHA: Oh... Burgess. My last name is Burgess.

ERIK: I'm Erik Rheingold. (beat) Well, you told me *your* last name.

SAMANTHA: Thank you. I'll... I'll see you on Friday. (beat) I – uh – I have to go. I'll see you tomorrow morning... I mean... both... I'll see you both tomorrow morning and Friday and...

ERIK: Go. I'll bus your table.

SAMANTHA gathers her things and leaves in a flustered, nervous mess.

Fade to black.

Scene 5

The café, but this time it's evening. ERIK is actually locking up, but SAMANTHA appears outside the door, and bangs on it. He goes to let her in.

SAMANTHA: I'm sorry... I didn't know you'd be closing. I... (she trails off)

ERIK: You've been avoiding me? You hate my music that much?

SAMANTHA: No, I loved the music. I just... my roommate and I had a huge fight and I've spent the last week trying to patch things up with her while studying for finals.

ERIK: You could've called.

SAMANTHA: The only number I had for you was here.

ERIK: Oh.

SAMANTHA: I'm sorry. I didn't mean... I really enjoyed your gig. I didn't expect your bandmates to know who I was.

ERIK: Well, you make an impression...

SAMANTHA: So, I have this theory...

SAMANTHA raises her hand – cutting off anything ERIK might have been about to say.

SAMANTHA: I think that people who are funny or smart or whatever... the people who always know what to say? I think they have a team of invisible writers – people on breaks from writing for sit-coms – who follow them around whispering witty comments in their ears so they know how to handle...situations.

ERIK: Situations?

SAMANTHA: Yeah, like, when a guy you see almost every morning invites you to hear his band, and you think maybe he likes you, and you like him too and...

ERIK: (cutting her off) Samantha?

SAMANTHA: Yes?

ERIK: Did I ever tell you that I have a few theories of my own?

SAMANTHA: *You do?*

ERIK: Uh-huh. Like, I have this theory that we should be dating. And I have this other theory that kissing you would taste like heaven.

SAMANTHA: Maybe we should test that one.

ERIK: Which one?

SAMANTHA: Both.

ERIK smiles. He drops the keys on the table and steps close to SAMANTHA. He brushes a stray strand of hair from her face, and then cups her face in his hands and kisses

ber. They break apart after a few minutes, then she slides her arms around him and they kiss again. Finally, they step away from each other, breathless.

ERIK: (gently) Yeah. I was right. Heaven.

SAMANTHA: Guess we should test my theories more often.

ERIK: We should get going. Did you walk here?

SAMANTHA: Yeah, but my apartment isn't far.

ERIK: (picking up keys locking the front door.) My car's out back. Let me drive drive you. Do you have time for dinner?

SAMANTHA: Definitely.

ERIK flips off the lights and the stage is in darkness.

Scene 6

A sunny apartment kitchen/dining room. Time has clearly passed, as ERIK is making espresso on a home machine, and is wearing only boxer shorts. SAMANTHA enters wearing a plaid shirt that's clearly ERIK's. There is a small round table with two chairs.

SAMANTHA: Mmm. I smell coffee.

ERIK: Nonfat latte, just the way you like it.

ERIK hands her a cup, and she sits in one of the chairs. He brings a second cup over for himself, joining her at the table.

SAMANTHA: Have I told you my theory about coffee?

ERIK: It has the power to bring couples together?

SAMANTHA: (laughing) Other than that.

ERIK: Tell me?

SAMANTHA: Okay, I have this theory that caffeine hits your system faster when it's hot.

ERIK: That explains a lot.

SAMANTHA: Oh?

ERIK: Yeah: *You* are always hot. Therefore, you are always well-caffeinated.

SAMANTHA: Erik, I love you, but *your* theories need some work.

ERIK sets down his cup and takes SAMANTHA's away from her. Leaning across the table, he kisses her.

Blackout

THE END