

ACT ONE

Scene One

(It is the interior of a used bookstore in an old brownstone in a Manhattan neighborhood not yet taken over by development. The bookstore is shabby and worn. There is a comfortable old easy chair, a cabinet with an old radio on top and a coffee pot and cups etc. and of course bookshelves and odd books and magazines stacked about the shop. It is a Monday at a little after five in early December. Paul puts away some books and walks to the door of the shop and turns the open sign to closed. As he does so Mrs. G enters and walks to the box containing donated books for the community center. She is holding two romance novels.)

MRS. G

This place needs a good cleaning. All you need is a mop and a broom.

PAUL

Nice to see you too Mrs. G.

MRS G

And you better turn the heat up Paul; you'll get more customers. It's December already and it's almost as cold in here as out there. This one looks good.

PAUL

I've got all the customers I need.

MRS G

That's no way to run a business.

PAUL

A person taking books without paying doesn't help either.

MRS. G

Deposit two and take out one. I'd say that's a pretty good trade. The ladies at the center will love those two. There's enough romance in there to dream for a week. You want people to read you got to give them incentive, like cleaning up and putting some romance novels in the window.

(Mrs. G exits as Julie enters. Julie is wearing an overcoat over a business suit. She walks straight to a picture book standing up in the window and picks it up.)

JULIE

How much?

PAUL

I'm closing.

JULIE

I'll only be a minute. "Hidden Hollywood", how Much?

PAUL

Five dollars.

JULIE

Five dollars?

PAUL

Five dollars.

JULIE

I love books about Hollywood. This was put out in 1957. I'll take it. Maybe there's something else about the movies.

PAUL

I don't have anything else about Hollywood and I need to close my shop.

JULIE

(Julie removes her coat and picks up the sheet music from a shelf.)
"Follow The Fleet", Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. How much is the sheet music?

PAUL

Seventy-five cents or two for a dollar.

(Julie takes some sheet music and sits in Paul's chair.)
That's my chair.

JULIE

It's very comfortable. Aren't they wonderful? I'll take them all.

PAUL

I don't think so. I've got about two hundred.

JULIE

Twenty-five cents each if I take the lot.

PAUL

Are you a musician?

JULIE

I don't read music but I love Hollywood musicals; have since I was a kid. I've got nearly every musical ever put on videotape, and DVD of course, but I'm a little old fashioned. DVD isn't quite the same.

PAUL

That's all very well—(but I need to close.)

JULIE

(Julie flips through them reading the titles.)

Follow the fleet – Showboat – Funny Face – Broadway Melody 1936 – Singing In The Rain – Top Hat. It’s my favorite Fred and Ginger movie.

PAUL

I’ve never seen a video except in department stores. I don’t even have a television set.

JULIE

I have three. There’s the thirty-two inch in the living room, the little portable video combo for the kitchen and the nineteen-inch for the bedroom.

(Julie runs to the window.)

Damn! I missed my bus. I’ll wait here for the next one.

PAUL

But I need to close my shop.

JULIE

It’s cold outside. Please?

PAUL

Well you can sit there, but only till next bus comes.

JULIE

How about the sheet music?

PAUL

(Paul looks out the window for her bus.)

You can’t take two hundred of them on the bus.

JULIE

I’ll pick up a handful each day after work.

PAUL

But I like to close exactly at—(five thirty and if you come any later—)

JULIE

I’ll make sure I’m on time.

(Julie gives Paul the money and returns to the sheet music.)

Here’s five dollars for the book and another five for the first twenty.

PAUL

Yes, well—that will be fine then.

JULIE

(Julie looks through the sheet music.)

I love classic movies! My favorite is, “Gone With The Wind”.

PAUL

I don’t go to the movies either.

JULIE

I've even read the book three times. I don't know how often I've seen the movie. I mean some movies you watch so often you can't even count.

PAUL

I wouldn't—(know about that.)

JULIE

I've seen a few minutes of Top Hat a couple of times a day ever since I bought the video. I love the rain scene in the park where Ginger takes cover in the gazebo and Fred says, "May I rescue you?" and she says, "No thank you I'd prefer to be in distress", and he says, "Hmm, charming little spot you've got here. When does the concert start?" And Ginger says, "Just as soon as you and the rain stop".

PAUL

I think your bus is coming.

JULIE

Oh! I've got to go. And then they sing, "Isn't it a lovely day to be caught in the rain". Thanks. I'll be by tomorrow-same time.

(Julie exits. Paul sits in his chair and laughs sarcastically.)

PAUL

Gone with the wind.

Scene Two

(It is Tuesday, the next evening, same time. Paul looks out the window for Julie. He does not see her. He then takes the sheet music from shelf and makes a neat stack of it on the table next to his chair. Julie enters with an umbrella. She is wet from the rain and is carrying a wet package.)

JULIE

Hi. I was here yesterday, the sheet music?

PAUL

I remember.

JULIE

I have some of those frameless frames at home. They were the perfect size for the covers. I've already got three of them on the wall in the kitchen. "Follow the Fleet", "Moon Over Miami", and "Broadway Melody". I went to a frame shop on my lunch break today to get "Top Hat" framed. You can't just put, "Top Hat", in a frameless frame, can you?

PAUL

Well I suppose it—(would look better framed.)

JULIE

I hope it's all right. The wrapping is wet and I paid thirty dollars for it.

(Julie opens the wet paper and puts the picture on a shelf.)

It seems fine. Isn't it great? Well I'd better get started. I am serious about buying all of them and I was afraid you might not believe me so I've brought forty dollars with me today to seal the deal.

(Julie hands Paul the money.)

PAUL

That's not necessary.

JULIE

Please, I would feel better knowing they're paid for. I have a bit more time today to look through them.

PAUL

Well you have ten minutes before I lock the door.

(Paul picks up a handful of sheet music and hands them to Julie. As she takes them from him they drop to the floor.)

I'm sorry. I'll pick them up.

JULIE

(Julie sees Fred Astaire's headshot and drops to the floor.)

Oh my God! In this, "Bandwagon", sheet music, it's an autographed picture of Fred Astaire. It says, "Dear Dave, thank you for all the help, Fred".

PAUL

Well you've bought the sheet music so it's yours now.

JULIE

I'd feel bad just taking it.

PAUL

It's not important.

JULIE

It is to me. Fred Astaire wrote his name right here on his headshot. That's what they call them in show biz, headshots. Didn't you ever want someone's autographed picture?

PAUL

Well I do have a signed volume of poetry by Dylan Thomas.

JULIE

Who?

PAUL

He wrote, *A Child's Christmas In Wales* and *Under Milkwood*.

JULIE

Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor – nice movie – I love them. But I never forgave her for stealing Eddie Fisher from Debbie Reynolds. Then she dumped him for Richard. Of course that's different. I mean Richard Burton. Thank you very much for the picture. My feet are killing me in these new shoes.

(She takes them off.)

That's better. Now I can spread out the covers and get a better look. These are great musicals.

PAUL

I'm afraid you don't have time to go through them that way.

JULIE

(Julie starts spreading them out on the floor so she can see every cover.)

I won't take that long. I just need to see the covers so I can decide which ones to take first.

PAUL

Look I can't have you coming in here this late everyday and wasting my time with sheet music.

JULIE

I gave you forty dollars.

PAUL

(Paul hands her the money.)

Here's your money back. You can have the one's you pick today and the headshot but that's it.

JULIE

I don't want the money I want the sheet music.

PAUL

You want the covers. You don't read music. In fact I doubt if you read much of anything.

JULIE

(Julie stands up.)

I read plenty.

PAUL

Gone With The Wind?

JULIE

Keep your damn sheet music!

(Julie turns to exit then turns back to get in one last word.)

Snob.

(As she speaks she sees Paul about to tear Fred Astair's headshot in half.)

NO!

(Julie runs to Paul tackling him causing them both to fall to the floor. There is a moment of silence as they both get up and collect themselves.)

JULIE

I'm sorry.

(Paul continually backs away as Julie tries to justify her behavior.)

PAUL

It's OK.

JULIE

It's not OK. But imagine if someone tore your book of poems by Dylan what's his name apart.

PAUL

That would be very upsetting.

JULIE

You collect books, I collect things like headshots. I know it was stupid to jump at you like that but I couldn't help it. I don't mean that I'm stupid. I mean it was—(a stupid thing to do.)

PAUL

I understand.

JULIE

In high school I got pretty good grade.

PAUL

I'm sure you did.

JULIE

But I didn't like school. I was really skinny and I didn't get contacts till I was twenty-four. When you're skinny with thick glasses you don't get asked to do much. But I had the movies.

PAUL

I really understand—I mean really. I was a loner too but I had my books.

(Paul picks up the headshot, hands it to her, and then backs away again.)
Here you can keep the headshot no charge.

JULIE

Well you probably have to lock up and go home and my bus will be here any minute.

PAUL

I live upstairs.

JULIE

(Julie gradually moves toward the shop door.)

That's convenient. Thanks again for the picture. It's very nice of you.

PAUL

You're welcome.

JULIE

I do read—on the way home. It takes nearly an hour so I check off my TV viewing for the night and catch up on the headlines from the Enquirer and Entertainment Weekly. I read the papers too—in the morning. But by the end of the day I'm too stressed to deal with all the troubles of the world. Movies stars never let you down but politicians can get you killed.

PAUL

Your bus is coming.

JULIE

Oh!

(Julie exits forgetting her framed picture.)

Scene Three

(It is nine-thirty, Wednesday, the next morning. There is Correlli's concerto Grosso in G. playing on his old tape player. Paul is arranging books as Mrs. Thompson enters.)

MRS. THOMPSON

Good morning.

PAUL

I'm not open till ten o'clock.

MRS. THOMPSON

I saw you through the window so I thought perhaps—(it would be all right.)

PAUL

Well you're in now so you might as well look around. Is there anything in particular?

MRS. THOMPSON

I think this is the place. My daughter came in here yesterday looking for old sheet music, Hollywood musicals, that kind of thing.

PAUL

Yes, well I'm not selling that sort of thing anymore.

MRS. THOMPSON

It's not that.

PAUL

It causes too many problems.

MRS. THOMPSON

She said she forgot to take a picture she had framed.

PAUL

(Paul looks around frantically.)

Oh! Here it is. I wasn't trying—(keep it.)

MRS. THOMPSON

As I was in town today anyway she asked me to pick it up for her.

PAUL

I'll put it in a plastic bag for you.

(Paul puts the picture hurriedly into a bag and hands it to Mrs. Thompson.)

MRS. THOMPSON

Thank you. She said you were reluctant to sell the sheet music.

PAUL

It was the circumstance.

MRS. THOMPSON

Well perhaps I could purchase them for her. I have my car outside.

PAUL

I've put them in storage in the basement.

MRS. THOMPSON

Julie will be disappointed.

PAUL

It was the circumstance.

MRS. THOMPSON

Do you mind if I look around now that I'm here?

PAUL

Of course, please do.

MRS. THOMPSON

I love classical music.

PAUL

It's Corelli's concerto—(Grosso in D.)

MRS. THOMPSON

My husband and I used to go to concerts all the time. He's been gone since Julie was five. I do miss the good times—(we had.)

PAUL

I have an entire shelf that deals with the Baroque Period.

MRS. THOMPSON

I can't seem to get my daughter to pay attention serious music. It's always Broadway—(musicals.)

PAUL

I'll bring a few out for you to see.

MRS. THOMPSON

I'm not intending to buy any books today. But Julie, that's her name, really wanted that sheet music.

(George enters.)

GEORGE

Morning Paul, usual stack for you. Where's my coffee? I brought the Danish.

PAUL

Thanks George.

(Paul just stands there.)

GEORGE

Paul, the coffee, I can't hang around for long.

PAUL

I'll be right back.

(As he is about to exit he turns back and speaks to Mrs. Thompson)
Would you care for a cup of coffee?

MRS. THOMPSON

Thank you. I'd love a cup.

PAUL

Right.

(Paul exits to the hall.)

MRS. THOMPSON

It's a nice shop.

GEORGE

One of the last places down here that's made for people. Real people, you know what I mean?

MRS. THOMPSON

It reminds me of shops in my old neighborhood when I was young.

GEORGE

Paul couldn't care less if you spend but if you're interested in his books he'll take as much time as you want. He makes his money off mail order in rare books anyway.

MRS. THOMPSON

Really?

GEORGE

I keep telling him to join the computer age. He'd sell a lot more on the Internet and get better prices but to him computers are the enemy. He doesn't even watch TV. I bet there's a half a dozen checks in that bunch of letters I gave him. Would you like a Danish?

MRS. THOMPSON

That's all right I'm not really hungry.

GEORGE

You have to try these. They're from Desantos Bakery, the only other holdout business on the block. Real New York, the way it used to be.

(George gets old mugs, a jam jar with sugar etc., puts them on the coffee table.)
With so much development around here they're offering a lot of money for these places. Nearly all the old timers sold out.

MRS. THOMPSON

How much is a lot of money?

GEORGE

That luncheonette three doors over that's all boarded up now? It belonged old Mr. Goldstein. He died last year and his wife couldn't keep it up without him. Mrs. G sold for two million and it's no bigger than this.

MRS. THOMPSON

I do love books.

(Paul enters with a fancy serving tray, coffee pot, good cups and saucers.)

GEORGE

Well I'll be—here I'll clear these away.

MRS. THOMPSON

Let me help.

(George and Mrs. Thompson clear the table and Mrs. Thompson leans the picture against the coffee table.)

PAUL

Thank you.

MRS. THOMPSON

Shall I pour?

PAUL AND GEORGE

Yes, please.

MRS. THOMPSON

You're right. This is delicious.

GEORGE

This must be your first time here. The box on top of that bookshelf is empty.

PAUL

My regular customers nearly always deposit a book of their own into the box when they come in. It's a kind of ritual.

GEORGE

Paul collects books his customers donate and matches them book for book. He's set up a nice little library at the local community center brings a new bunch over every Saturday.

MRS. THOMPSON

I'll tell Julie to bring some the next time she comes.

PAUL

But I've given you the picture.

GEORGE

Julie?

MRS. THOMPSON

My daughter.

PAUL

There would be no reason for—(her to come again.)

MRS. THOMPSON

My Julie doesn't give up that easily. I'm sure she'll be back for the sheet music.

PAUL

I'll get them from storage while you finish your coffee. You can take them with you.

MRS. THOMPSON

No thank you Paul. It really is between you and Julie isn't it? A mother shouldn't interfere in such things.

GEORGE

What things?

PAUL

You want some more coffee George?

GEORGE

No thanks. Now it is getting late. Paul we have to talk. Nice meeting you.

PAUL

George!