

at me because I know that I'm something to look at as well as someone to look up to.

(He smiles. Beat.)

MARLENE: What?

JERRY: Nothing. It's just . . . you are. *(He kisses her and starts to leave.)*

MARLENE: Hey, where're you going?

JERRY: Booking our tickets to New York—what do you think?

FLYIN' HIGH

Tommy and Agnes, 29, went to high school together twelve years ago. Today, they run into each other in a cooling center in a bad section of New Jersey on a hot evening. Both have been on different paths and ended up in the same place. Tommy was the star basketball player destined for the big time; Agnes was an overweight overachiever who expected to and did take care of her sickly parents for years. Somehow forces bring these two opposites together to reanalyze what it means to be successful.

TOMMY: Hey, uh, Miss, do you have fifty cents on you? I want to pick up a cup of iced coffee.

AGNES: *(Still reading her newspaper.)* No. Sorry. I don't do that.

TOMMY: What do you mean you don't do that? I'm just talkin' fifty cents.

AGNES: *(Barely looking up.)* Hey, I don't need to get hassled here. I don't do it cause I've seen too many people in this neighborhood, including family members, who use every penny to buy drugs and alcohol. So just forget it!

TOMMY: I wasn't going to do that. *(Beat.)* Fine. *(Sits.)* I understand. *(Sighs.)* Man, it's hot, huh?

AGNES: *(Putting her paper down.)* It's horrible. I had some stupid kid throw a brick at my air conditioner this morning. I coulda killed him. I had to drag the damn thing to the repair shop on a wagon you pull behind you. I hate coming here. It makes me feel poor.

TOMMY: Well, at least it's cool. It beats sittin' in a room that's a hundred degrees. My air is out too.

AGNES: It just stinks in here. Do you know when this place closes? *(He shakes his head no.)* You look familiar. Do you play bingo?

TOMMY: Do I look seventy? *(Beat.)* Ya know, I think this place stays open all night.

AGNES: *(Putting her paper down.)* They can't. It's not a shelter. They need permits for that.

TOMMY: It's an official cooling center. It's run by the city.

AGNES: So. That doesn't mean it stays open all night.

TOMMY: So what do they think? People don't need to get cool at night? It's been ninety-eight degrees for the last four nights for God's sake.

AGNES: Hey don't get snippy in my direction. I was just asking a question. If you don't know when it closes, fine. The weather gets a little warm and everybody has an attitude. Are you sure I don't know you?

TOMMY: I said I don't know. Do ya?

AGNES: *(Seeing him.)* Oh my God. You're . . . Are you . . . You look exactly like . . . You're not Tommy Ramsey, are you?

TOMMY: *(Beat.)* Yeah, yeah maybe. Why?

AGNES: Maybe?

TOMMY: Yeah, yeah, I'm him. So?

AGNES: *(Laugh.)* Tommy Ramsey is asking for some change?

TOMMY: No. No, I wasn't. *(Chuckles.)* Oh. I was kiddin' with ya about that. I knew I knew you from somewhere. And I knew that right from the start. So I was teasin' you with that askin' for the change bit. I just left my house in a rush—left my wallet there.

AGNES: Wow. This is amazing.

TOMMY: Nah, it's not that amazing.

AGNES: I didn't know you lived in this neighborhood.

TOMMY: I don't. Well, I moved back.

AGNES: Get out! Nobody moves *into* this neighborhood. They only move out of it.

TOMMY: Well, it's not that bad.

AGNES: What? Every other building is burnt out. I'm the only one on my block with a legit job. That's why I don't have any money of course. Not that I'd ever resort to selling

drugs like them. So what's happenin' with you? Do you still play basketball?

TOMMY: Some.

AGNES: Oh God. *(Hits her head.)* I'm so stupid. You probably don't remember my name. I'm Agnes Hawthorne. I was a junior when you were a senior? I headed up the Spanish club. I carried the flag for big class assemblies too? *(He nods.)* They used to call me fat Agnes.

TOMMY: Oh. Yeah. I remember. I mean, not cause of that. The flag thing. So you still live here?

AGNES: Yeah. Yeah. I never moved out of my mother's house.

TOMMY: Yep.

AGNES: I never saw you around before tonight. Not that I go out much.

TOMMY: I'm not big on goin' out either.

AGNES: You move into one of those ritzy houses on Park Street?

TOMMY: Yeah, yeah. Got a place on Park. *(Chuckles.)* How'd you know? You must be psychic.

AGNES: Where else would you move? So. Um, I don't know much about basketball, so I don't know what to ask. Did you ever get in with a team?

TOMMY: Yeah.

AGNES: Oh. Which one?

TOMMY: Well, ya know . . . Not professionally exactly. But I did play for Duke.

AGNES: Oh. Good. You got a scholarship there, right? *(He nods.)* So what did you study?

TOMMY: Umm. I guess you could say "Women Studies" mostly.

AGNES: No kiddin'? Really?! How crazy. That sounds really—

TOMMY: No! I'm jokin'. I meant, I played around a lot—dated a lot of women and . . .

AGNES: Oh. So what did you get your degree in?

TOMMY: Well . . . uh, I—didn't. Hell, I don't know why I'm

not tellin' the whole truth. I mean, what do you care? I didn't even get to stay on the team after the first half of the year.

AGNES: What happened? You were so good. I remember it seemed like you flew when you made baskets.

TOMMY: Ya know, I don't feel like talking about it. People always want to talk about me. Why can't we talk about the weather or them? Let's talk about you.

AGNES: Me? My life's boring.

TOMMY: Why? You look good, Agnes. Pretty—like you settled into your self more.

AGNES: Oh yeah, several things have settled that's for sure.

TOMMY: No, I mean, you look good—happy.

AGNES: (*Flattered.*) You think? (*He nods. She smiles.*) Thank you. I never heard anyone say something like that before . . . especially someone like you. Course you're like a ladies' man so you probably say that all the time.

TOMMY: No. Not anymore. (*She smiles shyly.*) So what have you done with your life?

AGNES: Huh. Taken care of my sick parents for the past twelve years. First my mother then my father—boom, boom. She died six months ago now.

TOMMY: Oh. I'm sorry to hear—

AGNES: (*Waves his sorry away.*) Nah. She wanted to. But I'm sure glad he went first. He woulda been so mean without her. Course he was mean anyway. He was an alcoholic. That tends to make people mean. I can spot an alcoholic like that. (*Snaps her fingers.*)

TOMMY: Yeah?

AGNES: Is that what happened to you, Tommy?

TOMMY: Where the hell did that come from?

AGNES: It was just a question.

TOMMY: It sounded more like an accusation.

AGNES: Well, you gotta admit it's kinda obvious. Here you are—good looking, a natural talent, with this golden opportunity to get out of trashville. And you blow it—real fast.

There's only two possibilities really—drugs, or alcohol? So which was it?

TOMMY: Look, I told you I didn't want to talk about it.

AGNES: So you still do it?

TOMMY: What do you want from me? I've been through three programs, okay?!

AGNES: (*She flashes him a look.*) Easy.

TOMMY: (*Beat.*) I'm tryin' to quit it. I don't need you to harp on it.

AGNES: Well trying doesn't cut it, Tommy. You either do it or you don't.

TOMMY: Look, Agnes, I don't need a lecture. I don't know you. Just cause you cheered for me in high school doesn't mean we know each other or that you can talk to me like that. I know you're probably all lonely living in your mother's house but I don't need—

AGNES: Lonely?! You have a lot of nerve. I certainly don't need the company of a washed up, drunk guy who still thinks he's a big high school hotshot if that's what you mean?

TOMMY: I'm not acting like I'm some big hot anything. I didn't walk up to you to say, "I was this hotshot basketball player from your high school. Remember me?"

AGNES: No, you just came up to steal my hard-earned money.

TOMMY: I told you before I was only kidding about asking you for money.

AGNES: Yeah, like hell. Like you really recognized me from the start. You don't even remember who I am now I bet. Do you?

TOMMY: (*Beat.*) Give me a break, okay? I've had better times, okay? I wish I knew you back then. You seem real. You know how it is with the booze. It ruins things. I just wanted some iced coffee. I left my wallet at home. Coffee can help sometimes.

AGNES: I wouldn't give you one cent especially now that I know who you are. You make me sick. You had a golden opportunity in your hands. There were tons of people in this

neighborhood, including me, who would have given their right arm to find a way out of this trap. And you were handed it on a silver platter. You want some change for coffee? Get real—be honest. You don't live on Park Street. I don't even think you have a place.

TOMMY: I have a place.

AGNES: Where? *(Beat. Looks at him.)* Oh, right, I forgot, your air's out, right? Then go home and get some change, Mr. Park Street.

TOMMY: At least I tried to do something with my life. Maybe I didn't make it, Agnes. Maybe I had some problems, but at least I tried to get out. That's more than you and a lot of people did.

AGNES: You don't think I tried to get out? That I still don't try every day? I'm workin' sixty hours at Walgreen's for piss. Nobody ever gave me anything in my life.

TOMMY: You got a house to sell, what's your problem? I'm not the only one with opportunities.

AGNES: What's my problem? My problem is the roof's a mess, there's something wrong with the foundation, there's some question as to whether the dump three miles away has toxic waste left there. These are my problems. That and then there's this gang that gives the place it's little charm. My mother's house—it's just a golden opportunity for me.

TOMMY: Your mother's dead, right?

AGNES: Yeah. I told you that.

TOMMY: So why do you still call it her house?

AGNES: *(Beat.)* Oh, how deep. You want to get deep on me. How do you go through three programs and still say you're tryin' to quit? Just quit. Forget the tryin'. Get a clue. Tryin' hasn't worked!

TOMMY: *(Beat.)* You're right.

AGNES: I am? Course. Damn right, I am.

TOMMY: Why does everyone who runs into to me from high school feel angry? Why do they care? Even Martin Hays,

the dealer—he almost knifed me when he realized what had happened.

AGNES: Don't you get it? You stood for hope. Whether you chose to or not. If you couldn't do it, hell, nobody can. There is no hope. Definitely no hope for him or any of us.

TOMMY: *(Realizing.)* I didn't know I was carrying everybody's hope then. That's a lot of weight on someone's shoulders. I guess I should have known. I was too young and stupid to be carrying everyone's hope. I was an idiot.

AGNES: *(Sighs.)* Oh well. We never do what we think we will in high school. Otherwise I'd be a translator traveling all over the world instead of working as an assistant manager at Walgreen's.

TOMMY: Do you think there's some happy medium? Some place in the middle between what we dreamed and what we are? Something that would be better than here but possible?

AGNES: Yeah. Maybe. If you're older and smart enough to make a commitment. I think pretty good exists.

TOMMY: I never had anyone talk to me like this. I mean, they adore me or hate me. You're just kinda yourself or something. It's cool. You got me talking. That doesn't happen much.

AGNES: Oh God, is this your little womanizer routine? Cause you aren't stayin' at my house.

TOMMY: No, no! I'm just sayin' I don't really have a good friend. I may have had a "golden opportunity" like you call it, but I never had a real friend. My mother drank herself to death. And she was closest thing I ever had to that. Anyway . . . *(Points.)* it looks like you were right. Things are closing up here. I guess I should get going.

AGNES: Where? Where you headin' to?

TOMMY: Why? You want to know that I don't have a house on Park Street? Well, I'm sorry for lying. I have a room over on St. John's. Going there.

AGNES: No, I was just . . . uh . . . You want to grab a cup of coffee? Iced coffee?

TOMMY: *(Looks around jokingly.)* With me? It'd be on you I'm afraid.

AGNES: I know. Tell you the truth? Things do get a little lonely. Besides, I think I'm gettin' a kick out of the fact that I'm hangin' out with Tommy Ramsey. Even if he ended up a drunk loser.

TOMMY: *(Smiles.)* Ha. Ha. Failure isn't so bad sometimes. It levels you. The people I met since I've fallen are much nicer people by and large than those when I was flying high—like a bird.

AGNES: *(Beat.)* Very deep. You comin'?

TOMMY: Yeah. Yeah, I'm comin'.

THE BEAUTY OF LIFE

Garth, mid 20s, an ambitious reporter for National Public Radio, has come to speak to Ms. Li Huirong in hopes of writing a feature on the recent AIDS crisis in China. His article would bring to the forefront the Chinese government's lax infection control measures in taking the blood of rural Chinese peasants. These conditions have produced thousands of new AIDS infections across the country. More specifically, they have caused the pain and anguish of families like Ms. Li's. However, when Garth comes to the door, he is met by Ellen, an English teacher and good friend of Ms. Li. Ellen, an American, mid 20s, has a very different plan for Garth.

GARTH: I'm here to see Ms. Li Huirong. My name's— *(Starts to reach out his hand.)*

ELLEN: Mr. Diggs. *(Waves him in.)* Come in. We've been expecting you.

GARTH: We?

ELLEN: Yes. Can I get you some tea? Or maybe you want something more leaded—I have coffee.

GARTH: That would be great. My Mandarin is pretty bad, so I'm glad you're here to translate. So are you a friend of Ms. Li's?

ELLEN: That would be me. I understand you're from NPR.

GARTH: Yes.

ELLEN: I love NPR. I'm a junkie.

GARTH: Well, thank you, uh—I think I missed your name.

ELLEN: No. You didn't miss it. I never said. *(Hands him his coffee.)* Ellen Holt. Ms. Li told me all about you the day you visited the hospital. Is your wife still here?

GARTH: *(Surprised by her mentioning his wife.)* Uh . . . yeah.