

FONDUE

10 Minute One Act

Joe Neri

3047 E Los Cerillos Drive
West Covina, CA 91791

Phone: 626-222-1143
Email: josephfrancisneri@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

SAM, A HIGH STRUNG BOY OF 12.

AILENE, A MIDDLE AGED WOMAN OF DRAMATIC BEAUTY.

FRANK. AILENE'S OLDER EX.

ALI, A YOUNG WAITRESS.

ISH, THE CHEF.

1. INT. CAFE

Enter Sam, 12, and an older couple, Ailene and Frank. They are greeted by Ali, a young waitress who seats them.

SAM

Want to see a card trick?

FRANK

Show Ali.

ALI

(handing out
menus)

Be right back, Sam.

Exit Ali

Sam rummages through his vest pockets looking for his deck of cards. He empties all sorts of other small items on the table.

FRANK

That's a boss hat.

SAM

It's not boss; it's the
bomb.

FRANK

Boss, bomb, whatever. You
know what I mean; what
difference do the words
make?

SAM

They make a lot of
difference. Bomb is newer
than Boss...but it's old now.

AILENE

Maybe, you could invent some
new words, Sam.

SAM

(scowling)

You can't invent words; you
just change the ones you
know into something new.

Ali enters and sets down water glasses.

FRANK

Here's Ali; show her your
card trick.

ALI
For the missus...

AILENE
We're not married.

ALI
Oh. Sorry.

AILENE
I didn't want to be married;
neither did he.

SAM
Got it! Pick a card!

Ali reaches for a card but has a hard time getting it from Sam tight grip. Finally, she pops it loose and looks.

SAM
Did you look at it?

ALI
Wow, you're pretty strong; I
could hardly...

SAM
(louder)
Did you look at it?

ALI
(startled)
Yes, yes. Should I put it
back?

Sam nods his head, furiously, but when Ali returns the card face down atop one half of the deck his mood changes rapidly to delight. He pretends to shuffle the cards.

ALI
Something from the
bar, folks?

AILENE
We'll have the usual.

Exit Ali

AILENE
I see. Now you're sober?

FRANK
No, now I'm sleepy.

SAM
Where's Ali? I'm ready.

AILENE
She'll be right back

SAM
But I'm ready!

Enter Ali with drinks.

SAM
How did you know I wanted
apple juice?

ALI
Magic. How about your trick?

For a moment Sam looks Ali up and down, wondering. Showing her the card. Ali's face slowly brightens.
Wow! How did you do that?

SAM
Magic.

ALI
Really?
(laughs and exits)

FRANK
Not bad, boy. She was
impressed. How did you do
that?

Sam simply shakes his head no and continues shuffling his cards. He drinks his juice greedily and steals a glance after Ali.

I'll figure it out; I know
some tricks, too.

AILENE
I'll bet. She's too young
for you, you know.

FRANK
They all are.

AILENE
I'm too young for you, too.

FRANK
In case you hadn't noticed,
she's flirting with your 10
year old grandson, not me.

AILENE
So, you were watching her?

FRANK
I was talking to her like
any other customer would -
because I'm ordering. What
do you care?

AILENE

I don't.
(drains her glass)

Sam drains his glass and leaves the table.

AILENE

Where are you going?

SAM

Bathroom!

Sam exits

FRANK

Easy trick. She places her card face down on one half of the deck but it's right next to the deck that's face up. He finds the card he sees, first, and then he knows the one next to it is the card Ali picked. Clever.

Ailene slams her menu down on Sam's empty seat.
What! What was that?

AILENE

You're watching her!

FRANK

What's the matter with you?
I was watching to make sure Sam didn't take any side trips, like he sometimes does.

AILENE

Right

FRANK

Yes, right. He's done it before.

AILENE

Not in a restaurant. He behaves in a restaurant.

FRANK

You're right. I know you've been working hard with him. He's been behaving except...

AILENE

Except? And how do you know how hard it's been?

FRANK

I imagine...

AILENE
Oh, you imagine?

FRANK
Where is he, anyway?

AILENE
He'll be back. Unlike you.

FRANK
Stop it. I'm here now.

AILENE
Are you? You haven't said a
word to me. You've been
flirting with Ali all
evening.

FRANK
What? She's been talking to
your grandson all evening!

AILENE
You've been talking to her
through my grandson all
evening! Don't you deny it.

LIGHTS DOWN ON AILENE AND FRANK.

2. SCENE 2

Ali in the kitchen. Servers rush in and out shouting orders in English to Ish the cook, who answers in Spanish. Ish is short but strong looking despite appearing to be almost as old as Frank, though not quite as grey. Sam enters and walks up quietly beside her. She almost drops plates in fright. He holds out his deck of cards to her.

SAM
Pick

ALI
Again?

SAM
Pick!

Drawing a card, she looks at it then places it back in the deck. This time, Sam shuffles the cards after she places the card back, impressing her. Then he produces her card.

ALI
That's it! How did you do
that? Ish! Did you see this?
The first trick was just a
trick but this is...

SAM
... real magic.

ALI
Yes, real magic.

SAM
I gotta go back. I want
fondue. Hey, how come all
the cooks speak Spanish in a
French restaurant?

ISH
(laughing from the
kitchen)
Estamos en America! Todos
somos mexicanos en la
cocina! Quieres francés? Ir
a Francia!

SAM
I will! Adios, Ish!

ISH
Adios, nino!

LIGHTS DOWN ON THE KITCHEN

3. SCENE 3

Sam enters but does not return to the table watching and listening instead.

FRANK
Where is that kid, anyway?

AILENE
Don't worry about him. Where
could he go?

FRANK
Nowhere, I guess. There's
only one way out of here.

Ali enters but Sam holds her back. They both watch the scene unfold.

AILENE
Are you leaving again?

FRANK
(exasperated)
Stop it, will you? I'm not
leaving again.

AILENE
Sure, not now. You'll wait
until you get home and never
return, just like last time.

FRANK
Last time? What last time?

AILENE

My daughter, Frank! My daughter died! His mother, my daughter - she died! You left me. Sam left. I wanted to kee him but...

FRANK

... but he has a father! Sam always had to go home with his father.

They both grow quiet and stare into their drinks

AILENE

Everybody left. January died, you left, Sam left.

FRANK

For the record, I didn't leave after January died. I left before January died.

AILENE

That's better?

FRANK

It's not better; it's different. We had problems before January died.

AILENE

What wasn't happening with us, you mean.

FRANK

Alright, what wasn't happening with us.

AILENE

Should have left years ago before my bed went cold.

FRANK

That's not fair.

AILENE

It is fair! You left. No matter which way you spin it - you left!

Frank stands and begins pacing back and forth

FRANK

Goddamnit.

AILENE

Goddamnit?

FRANK

Goddamnit! What am I -
Abraham's lamb? I pay for
everyone's sins, as well as
my own?

AILENE

You got plenty of your own.

FRANK

I've been paying for someone
else's sins.

AILENE

Sure, you have.

FRANK

Tim goes, Tim comes back,
Tim dies. John leaves or you
leave - I don't know which -
Molly comes, Molly goes;
Molly cries, Molly leaves.

AILENE

What's your point?

FRANK

You blame me because they're
not around to blame. Their
sins are now my sins. Can't
blame Tim - he's dead. Sean?
He vanished. Molly's the
kicker. She says you're gay
and then decides she isn't.

AILENE

I don't blame you for that!

FRANK

My history, their histories
until it's all my history!

AILENE

Yes, because you are all of
my history! You're all I
have left but go ahead -
follow everyone out the
door. Coward!

FRANK

I backed away. I keep my
distance but I didn't leave.
I'm still close by.

AILENE

Not close enough. That's not
the truth. You stayed close
enough to be loyal but not
close enough to be true.

FRANK

Then what should I do? What do you want from me?

Ailene looks away, crying silently. Frank looks away in the other direction then rises from the table and takes a step away. They turn to look at each other then both quickly look away. Both begin to chuckle. Finally, Frank walks over and hugs Ailene from behind.

FRANK

Is this close enough?

Ailene nods silently and wipes her tears as Frank sits. Sam makes a move to rejoin them but Ali holds him back this time and motions him to wait. She then approaches the table.

ALI

Ready to order?

They mumble their orders, giving Ali back the menus. As Ali passes Sam she sends him back to the table.

FRANK

Long time in the bathroom.

SAM

I couldn't find the toilet tissue...

AILENE

Oh Sam...

SAM

But I found some! It was behind the seat. I dropped my magic cards and they scattered behind the seat.

FRANK

What do you think is more important: Truth or Loyalty?

SAM

(mischievously)
Can you handle the Truth?

FRANK

Wiseguy. I can handle the Truth.

SAM

Well, don't they work together?

AILENE

What do you mean, honey?

SAM

I mean, it's like my trick:

One card faces up and the card that's picked is face down but next to the one I saw. So, if I find the card I saw, I know the card next to it is the card I'm looking for. I need to know one card to find the other.
(pauses)
They work together.

LIGHTS DOWN

4. SCENE 4

The restaurant is closing; everyone has left. Ali is cleaning their table as Ish enters. She stops.

ISH
Que pasa, Hija?

ALI
Why can't they stay in love?
Don't they know what they've got?

ISH
Si, lo saben. They know.

LIGHTS DOWN