

EASTERN STANDARD
by Richard Greenberg

NYC restaurant - Present - Ellen (20's) - May (50-60)

Ellen - A waitress

May - A schizophrenic street person

Six people meet in a restaurant in New York City and become friends. Stephen, an architect who despises his job, falls in love with Phoebe, a Wall Street broker. Drew, Stephen's gay friend, is attracted to Phoebe's brother, Peter. Ellen and May are drawn into the group who gather at Stephen's summer home on Fire Island. Here, Ellen tries to expel May, who is drinking Perrier and screeching at the customers, from the restaurant.

(May is at the R. table. Her hair is snarled; her looks untinged; her clothes ragtag and dirty. She nurses a Perrier. She mutters obscenities to herself, a low, steady litany.)

MAY: Fuckin' goddamn piss-ant shit, I'll kill him he gets a fuckin' son-of-a-bitch pisspot shitheel...[etc.] (May notices Peter looking at her, looks at him fiercely.) You lookin' a me? FUCK YOU! What? Am I CONSPICUOUS? You mother-fuckin' piece a — (She notices someone at another table, D.L.) And what are you lookin' at, lardass? What the fuck you think you're doin' here, huh, you look like a RHINOCEROS! Can't a woman just drink a Perrier in peace, GODDAMNIT! (The waitress, Ellen, enters.)

ELLEN: Excuse me?

MAY: What?

ELLEN: Would you please—?

MAY: (Suddenly sweet.) What, sweetheart?

ELLEN: Would you please lower your voice?

MAY: I don't know; what you're talking about, sweetheart.

ELLEN: From its previous volume.

MAY: Sweet as a songbird.

ELLEN: Thank you.

MAY: You mother-fuckin' cunt!

ELLEN: I'm sorry, you're going to have to stop that or leave, you're

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having a chaotic effect on lunch.

MAY: (All of a sudden weepy.) All I wanna do is sit here and drink my Perrier, nobody ever gives me a goddamn break, I just wanna sit here and I'm bein' heaped with this abuse, I don't ever get a break

ELLEN: I'm sorry, it's just that—

MAY: I gotta go out in the cold, I gotta fend for myself, I gotta find a place to

ELLEN: (Contrite.) I know, I know, I'm sorry—

MAY: I got no future, no one to take care a me, you understand, don't you, sweetheart—

ELLEN: Of course, I'm—

MAY: You revoltin' snatch.

ELLEN: We have a five-dollar minimum.

MAY: ...What?

ELLEN: At lunch, a five-dollar minimum—

MAY: I can pay, you got no grounds for throwin' me out—

ELLEN: Actually, we do.

MAY: Yeah?

ELLEN: Your conversation; it's disturbing to the people around you.

MAY: My conversation is disturbin' to the people around me? I'm disturbin' them? Have you listened to their conversation?

ELLEN: I'm afraid—

MAY: Well, I suggest you do—

ELLEN: You'll—

MAY: —because it's all PRETTY INSIPID!

ELLEN: The manager would like you to leave.

MAY: Yeah? Well, why'n't he say so himself?

ELLEN: The manager, who is a chickenshit, would like you to leave and has delegated the responsibility for getting rid of you to me—

MAY: Honey, there's somethin' I gotta tell you—

ELLEN: Yes?

MAY: You're oppressed.

ELLEN: Thank you, I know.

MAY: We got that in common.

ELLEN: Yes, well—to tell the truth, I'd probably have a greater feeling of solidarity if you hadn't stolen my tip...

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MAY: Are you acusin' me of somethin'?

ELLEN: The guy who was sitting there before you? He comes every day, orders the same thing, leaves the same tip. Twenty-two percent.

MAY: T'oday he stifed you, sweetheart.

ELLEN: He would not stiff me—~~somebody~~

MAY: He stifed you—

ELLEN: He would not stiff me because for months now he's been hoping to stiff me in another way, *capish?*

MAY: Fuckin' disgustin' men, my heart goes out to you, cookie.

ELLEN: (*A little gingerly.*) The manager would like you to leave.

MAY: Goddamn it, wherever I go it's the same thing—I

ELLEN: --I—

MAY: I'm on a grate, I'm in an alley, I'm in a hallway—train tracks, benches, vestibules, islands in the middle a' Broadway, I'm tryin' to sleep. I'm nursin' a cold, I'm tryin' to look like somethin' ya might possibly not wanna kill—somebody always comes along and says, "Move on." Well, where, where—where should I go? Tell me where to go and I'll go there. No, no, that's right, it's always, "Move on. Outta my sight. Wherever's not here." Trouble is, every place I get to's just another *here*. Well, I only got so much movin' in me. Somewhere along the line, somebody's gotta say, "Rest."

ELLEN: ...I'll be back.

MAY: Bless you, cookie... (*Ellen walks over to Peter and Phoebe, gives them menus.*) You miserable hooker... (*May guzzles Perrier. Ellen returns.*) So how are you, sweetheart-doll-angel?

ELLEN: Listen, I'm breaking every rule here.

MAY: Whattya talkin', sweetie?

ELLEN: Never fraternize with the customers—~~she's~~

MAY: Babydoll, I understand'—from my own waitressin' days—

ELLEN: You used to waitress?

MAY: What, you think I was born on the street? You think I spent my whole *life* in these clothes?

ELLEN: Well, I—~~somebody~~

MAY: No way! I useta be lower middle class.

ELLEN: Uh-huh.

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MAY: And you?

ELLEN: I'm an actress.

MAY: I figured.

ELLEN: Everybody does.

MAY: So what's your decision, honey?

ELLEN: ...What?

MAY: You're movin' toward, you're movin' away—

ELLEN: Oh, I—~~somebody~~

MAY: So— Whaddya want—you wanna to hear my story?

ELLEN: Oh, I—~~somebody~~

MAY: Uh-huh—

ELLEN: It's against the rules—I'm working now, I—~~somebody~~

MAY: But it's what you want.

ELLEN: Let me take this table's order first. (*Peter has dropped his bombshell. Phoebe is stunned.*)

MAY: Go, sweetheart, go. (*Ellen goes to their table.*) You little bitch-in-heat. (*Ellen returns to May.*)

ELLEN: I'm back.

MAY: So, you wanna know about me?

ELLEN: Well... I've always been interested...

MAY: In me? I just got here.

ELLEN: I mean, not you specifically—

MAY: Sure, cookie—

ELLEN: This may sound, like, I don't know, dumb or something, but for a long time now I've wanted to sleep in the street, you know, like for a night? To see how it feels?

MAY: Yeah?

ELLEN: Yeah.

MAY: Well, the night you do that, honey, you give me the keys to your apartment, 'cause I'll be sleepin' in your bed—

ELLEN: It's no big improvement, believe me—~~somebody~~

MAY: Yeah, where ya live?

ELLEN: Amsterdam and 105th

MAY: I sleep in better neighborhoods than that—

ELLEN: I figured—~~somebody~~

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MAY: Probably you do, too, some nights—
 ELLEN: Well that's—
 MAY: Like probably whenever you sleep out, it's in a better neighborhood, right, like that's the whole point, huh?
 ELLEN: We're supposed to be talking about you.
 MAY: Oh, right, my story.
 ELLEN: Well, I mean, that sounds ridiculous when you put it like that, I just want to talk.
 MAY: Fabulous, sweetheart, fabulous. How much?
 ELLEN: How much?
 MAY: Yeah.
 ELLEN: ... Very much....
 MAY: How much are you gonna pay?
 ELLEN: ... What?
 MAY: You can get the whole story for a lump sum—
 ELLEN: Are you for real—?
 MAY: Or I could charge you per episode—
 ELLEN: I don't believe this—
 MAY: I figure there's maybe fifteen, sixteen really important episodes in my life; I could give ya each one for like three bucks—
 ELLEN: Not one red cent. *(Beat.)*
 MAY: What?
 ELLEN: I'm not paying for some talk—
 MAY: This is not talk, Cookie—this is the story of my life. 'I give that away, what've I got left to sell?
 ELLEN: *(Starting to leave.)* All right, forget it, I have customers anyway—
 MAY: *Wait one goddamn minute—!*
 ELLEN: ... What?
 MAY: Now, let me get this straight—you are seriously suggestin' that I tell you intimate secrets about myself—
 ELLEN: I'm going—
 MAY: Which you will use as the basis for charmin' conversation with eligible bachelors who are supposed to marvel at your sensitivity and buy you presents?

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ELLEN: Goodbye.
 MAY: And out with this whole profit-makin' situation, I get nothin'?
 ELLEN: The manager would like you to leave—
 MAY: Screw the manager—
 ELLEN: Listen—
 MAY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, why'n't you just go wait on those faggots at the next table—that whore and that fag—give them the gift of your presence—
 ELLEN: Go—
 MAY: Goddamn fuckin' Bloomindale faggots—
 ELLEN: I'm getting the manager—
 MAY: *(Yelling at Peter and Phoebe.)* You stinkin' pigs! *(She hurls her Perrier at them.)* Take that, you fuckin' faggots!
 ELLEN: Listen, you'd better get right out now or—
 MAY: OR WHAT? *(She turns over the table.)*
 ELLEN: I'm getting the manager— *(She exits.)*