

COMMON GROUND

by

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SETTING;

A coffee shop in Modesto, CA. Sunday morning.

TIME;

The Present

CHARACTERS;

Desti- mid twenties, a lip-stick lesbian who works at the coffee shop.

Joel- Early twenties, a struggling playwright.

Ann- early twenties, a college student.

Luke- mid twenties, a rich stoner who speaks Italian.

Bruce- Mid thirties, a regular.

Jim- Mid thirties, a regular.

Ed- Mid sixties, a dirty old man with a bad attitude.

Lonnie- Mid sixties, a kind old man with an optimistic view of the world.

Church Lady- early thirties, a brain dead, born again Christian.

Christine- early thirties, an admirer of Desti's

DESTI works behind the counter. BRUCE and JIM sit at one of the tables. ED and LONNIE sit at another table playing chess.

Shave!  
BRUCE

What?  
JIM

You heard me.  
BRUCE

What do you care?  
JIM

You look disgusting, you haven't shaved for at least two days, have you?  
BRUCE

I'm not shaving.  
JIM

I can't stand looking at that stubbly face of yours.  
BRUCE

How is that my problem?  
JIM

Can't you take a little pride in your appearance?  
BRUCE

I don't work today, it's not like I have a date or anything. And I sure as hell don't have to impress you.  
JIM

All I'm saying is\_-  
BRUCE

I'm just having coffee. What are we, in church?  
Hey, Desti, are we in church?  
JIM

(Does the sign of the cross)  
The bean, the espresso, and the full rich flavor. Amen.  
DESTI

Will you move for Christ's sake.  
ED

LONNIE

I'm thinking.

ED

Well think already.

LONNIE

You can't rush this, chess is a thinking man's game.

ED

Exactly, it's a game. You're not saving the frigging world.  
So be a man and think already. Move!

LONNIE

I have to make the right move.

ED

Like it's going to make a difference. You'll lose anyway. Why  
delay the inevitable.

LONNIE

You're on a streak, that's all. Streaks end. I'm gonna whip  
your behind, just you watch.

ED

Behind? Behind? That's your problem, my friend. Say ass! Say  
'I'm gonna kick your ass'!

LONNIE

Just you watch.

ED

I'm watching, and I'm waiting. Napoleon took less time  
conquering Europe!

BRUCE

Will you shave!

JIM

No!

BRUCE

Please, I'm begging you. Shave that crap off!

JIM

How am I supposed to shave? I'm in a coffee shop.

BRUCE

There's a store around the corner. Just go get some stuff and  
go to the bathroom.

JIM

No!

Fine.

BRUCE

Bruce gets up and exits through the front door.

ED

Will you move already you pussy?

LONNIE

Just wait, you impatient hick. And watch your mouth.

ED

You're gonna watch my foot go up your ass if you don't move.

LONNIE

(He moves a piece)

There. You happy?

ED

Yes. Checkmate!

LONNIE

Shucks!

ED

Shit, Lonnie. The word is shit.

Lonnie resets the board.

ED

Hey, Desti.

DESTI

What do you want?

ED

Why don't you and I go out tonight?

DESTI

Why Ed, what would your wife say?

ED

Ah, she won't care. She'd just be glad to get me out of the house.

DESTI

I don't think so, Ed. You're not my type.

ED

Why not?

DESTI

One, you're a pig, and two you've got a penis.

ED

It's not a penis. It's a dick!

DESTI

No Ed, you're a dick. That little thing between your legs is a penis.

ED

You know what you need?

DESTI

No, do tell.

ED

You need a real man.

DESTI

You don't say. Well, tell you what. You ever become one, let me know. I've never shot down a real man before.

ED

(To Lonnie)

That beautiful body wasted on other women.

LONNIE

That beautiful oxygen, wasted on you.

ED

Just move!

JOEL enters carrying a book, he takes a seat on one of the stools.

JIM

What do you know, Joel?

JOEL

Same thing I did yesterday, Jim. Where's Bruce?

JIM

Don't ask.

JOEL

What are you reading?

JIM

An article in this science magazine. Did you know they defined a second.

JOEL

A second?

JIM

Yeah.

JOEL

What is it?

JIM

It says, "A second is equal to the radiation emitted or absorbed by atoms of Cesium 133 when they undergo what is known as a hyperfine transition".

JOEL

What's Cesium 133?

JIM

Beats the hell out of me.

JOEL

Sounds like a breakfast cereal. Honey frosted Cesium 133, a part of this nutritious breakfast.

DESTI

What's a hyperfine transition?

ED

You're a hyperfine transition.

DESTI

I walked into that one.

JOEL

So what's goin' on with you?

DESTI

Same shit, different shift.

ANN enters, nicely dressed she carries a hard-back copy of "Foucault's Pendulum".

ANN

Can I get an espresso please? For here.

DESTI

Sure. Have a seat and I'll bring it out to you.

ANN crosses to an empty table.

JOEL

Hey, Desti.

DESTI

Yeah?

JOEL

Do you know her?

DESTI  
Nope. Never seen her before.

JOEL  
She's gorgeous.

DESTI  
I'd do her.

JOEL  
Knock it off. You don't think she's a - you know.

DESTI  
One of us?

JOEL  
Well, yeah.

DESTI  
How the hell should I know?

JOEL  
Well, I just thought -

DESTI  
Joel, I don't have gaydar. It's not like I sense a disturbance in the force and then we give each other a secret handshake. Why don't you go ask her?

JOEL  
Yeah, right. Like I'm just going to ask some woman if she's a lesbian.

DESTI  
You asked me.

JOEL  
Well, that's not the same thing. Ed told me you were one, and I didn't believe him. I mean, come on, you're hot.

DESTI  
Not all lesbians are butch dykes who listen to K.D. Lang.

JOEL  
That's not what I meant - It's just that - well I meant -

DESTI  
Joel, what does your foot taste like?

JOEL  
I'm sorry. You're the only lesbian I know.

DESTI  
It's all right.

JOEL

I suppose I'm entrenched in my cultural stereotypes. You know, lesbians are butch and straight women are feminine.

DESTI

Look, if you want my opinion, I don't think she is. I'm pretty good at reading people and she doesn't say dyke to me.

JOEL

I could fall in love with a woman like that. That is if her personality were as beautiful as her looks, of course.

DESTI

Of course.

Desti brings Ann her espresso.

Bruce enters with a paper bag, setting the bag on the table he goes to the counter. He fills a cup with coffee, goes back to the table, and drapes his paper around Jim's neck. Jim goes along with everything Bruce does.

BRUCE

Now sit still so I don't cut you.

Bruce wets Jim's face with the coffee, he pulls out the shaving cream and disposable razor from the bag. He applies the shaving cream to Jim's face and begins to shave Jim, rinsing the razor in the coffee cup.

ANN

Excuse me, Miss.

DESTI

Yes?

ANN

Are you aware that that man is shaving his friend over there?

DESTI

Oh, don't worry. They're harmless. Hey, you guys, clean up your mess when you're done.

BRUCE

You got it babe.

DESTI

Will you stop staring and go talk to her.

JOEL

She doesn't even know who I am. What am I supposed to say?

DESTI

I don't care what you say, just stop staring at her. There's a fine line between admiring a woman and staring her down like a psychopath.

JOEL

Well, you hit on women. What do you say?

DESTI

It's not quite the same thing Joel.

JOEL

Come on, what do you say to a woman you're attracted to who you've never met before?

DESTI

I really don't know. I don't usually hit on women, they approach me. And before you ask, no. You wouldn't want to use the pick-up lines I've heard.

JOEL

I need something. You know how bad I am at this.

DESTI

Okay, what's she reading?

JOEL

Foucault's Pendulum.

DESTI

You've read that haven't you?

JOEL

No.

DESTI

Just talk to her you pussy.

JOEL

Alright, here goes nothing.

Joel hesitantly crosses to Ann.

JOEL

May I join you? It's kind of a small place and there isn't any room to sit down.

ANN

Weren't you just sitting over there talking to that girl?

JOEL

Well, I decided I would much rather enjoy the company of a beautiful woman such as yourself.

ANN

Shot down were we?

JOEL

Shot down? No, no, not at all. Desti's a - you know?

ANN

A what?

JOEL

(Whispering)

A lesbian.

Besides even if she wasn't we're just friends. I'm Joel.

ANN

I'm Ann. It's nice to meet you, Joel. Do you come here often?

JOEL

Isn't that my line?

ANN

It wasn't a line, it was just a question.

JOEL

Yes I do, just about every day.

ANN

You're here every day? What's the matter, don't you have a job?

JOEL

Yes, I do. I'm a writer.

ANN

Really, what kind of writing do you do?

JOEL

I write copy for an ad agency in the city. They send me the ads and I fax them back the copy. Beats the hell out of commuting.

ANN

Do you like it?

JOEL

It pays the bills. I'm really a playwright.

ANN

Really, how many plays have you written?

JOEL

Well, nothing that's been produced yet. You see getting produced in this business is kind of a catch-22. You can't get produced unless you get an agent, but you can't get an agent without getting produced.

ANN

So how do you plan to do either?

JOEL

Do you believe in prayer? So what do you do, Ann?

ANN

I'm a student at U.C. Berkley

JOEL

Really? I went to Berkeley.

ANN

You did? What was your major?

JOEL

Well, I didn't actually take any classes there. I just went to the campus and walked around.

ANN

That's - funny.

JOEL

What are you studying?

ANN

I'm majoring in Liberal Studies.

JOEL

Oh, you want to be a teacher?

ANN

No, I don't know what I want to do, but Liberal Studies is better than undecided.

LUKE enters and goes to the counter

LUKE

Hey, Desti. What's up foxy lady?

DESTI

The sky, the birds, the sun.

LUKE

Huh?

DESTI

Nothing, how're you doing?

I'm doin' bitchin'.

LUKE

What can I get you?

DESTI

A cappuccino to go por favor.

LUKE

You got it.

DESTI

LUKE crosses to ANN and JOEL'S table.

Foucault's Pendulum, most excellent book.

LUKE

You've read Foucault's Pendulum?

ANN

Yah. Umberto Eco is a totally bitchin' writer. I totally dig his style. However, I prefer the original Italian texts myself. Way too much gets lost in the translation.

LUKE

You read Italian?

JOEL

Well, yeah.

LUKE

Have you ever been to Italy?

ANN

Sure. It's cool. Although Venice is a bit over-rated.

LUKE

Over-rated? Venice?

JOEL

Yeah. It smells like fish. I don't like fish.

LUKE

Here's your cappuccino, Luke.

DESTI

Gratsi.

LUKE

(To Ann)  
You should read that other book he wrote.

Which one is that?

ANN

LUKE

You know, they made a movie about it. It had those guys, James Bond and that dude from "Heathers", Christian whatever.

ANN

"The Name of the Rose".

LUKE

Yeah, that's it. "The Name of the Rose", cool book.

ANN

It starred Sean Connery and Christian Slater.

LUKE

That's right. You're a pretty smart chick.

ANN

Thank you.

LUKE

(To Joel)

And pretty hot too.

LUKE crosses to the counter and sits.

ED

Come on, Lonnie. My first marriage didn't last this long.

LONNIE

Too long for her if you ask me.

ED

Move!

LONNIE

All right, all right.

LONNIE moves.

ED moves.

ED

Check!

LONNIE

Gosh dangit!

ED

Jesus, Lonnie. Say Goddammit. Be a man for once and say Goddammit.

LONNIE

No. I don't believe in profanity. Profanity is poison to the soul.

ED

Don't quote your bambi books to me.

LONNIE

Maybe if you read some of that literature you wouldn't be such a pessimistic pig.

ED

Literature? You call that literature? I'd sooner call that shit religious nuts leave on my door literature than that bambi crap you read. Now move.

ANN

So what got you started in playwriting?

JOEL

The same thing that moves any artist into his field. The love, the desire, the passion for whatever it is they do.

ANN

I never really thought of writer's as artists.

JOEL

Well of course we are. You don't have to draw or paint to be an artist. An artist is someone who uses their imagination combined with their life experiences, their loves, their hates, their fears and their dreams to create something that shows other people what it is. It can be educational, entertaining or just make you think about what's going on around you.

ANN

I never looked at it that way.

JOEL

Art always moves you, in some way.

BRUCE

I saw a painting once that gave me a boner.

JOEL

I'm afraid to ask. Which one was that?

BRUCE

DaVinci painted it, you know that chick whose smiling.

JOEL

The Mona Lisa?

BRUCE

Yeah, that's it. She's a babe.

JOEL

Disgusting, but the eternal frat boy over there kind of proves my point. Art does move you, somehow. I need more coffee. I'll be right back. Would you like some more?

ANN

No thank you.

JOEL crosses to the counter.

JOEL

What are you writing?

DESTI

A fan letter.

JOEL

To who?

DESTI

Melissa Ethridge. I love her music. And no Dyke comments.

JOEL

I wasn't gonna say anything. You just don't strike me as the fan letter type.

DESTI

Well, I don't expect a response. I just like writing to artists who move me. I know if I were an artist I would love to hear from fans about how much they appreciate my work.

JOEL

I wrote a fan letter once. I was in high school, I wrote to KISS. All I got back was a form letter telling me how to join the KISS Army.

DESTI

So, did you?

JOEL

No, I started thinking about their uniforms. You know, black skintight jumpsuits, twelve-inch heel boots, and the make-up. I have a hard-time putting on chapstick.

LUKE crosses to ANN'S table.

LUKE

May I join you?

ANN

Certainly. So, how is it that you know Italian so well?

LUKE

My Grammy's from Italy, she taught all of us Italian when we were little. I guess it just stuck with me.

ANN

And that's how you got into reading Umberto Eco in Italian?

LUKE

One of his books was just lying around one day and I picked it up.

ANN

So what is it you do?

LUKE

Not much.

ANN

I mean, what do you do for a living? What's your job?

LUKE

I know what you meant. I said, not much. My Grammy left us some money after she died a couple of years ago.

ANN

I'm so sorry.

LUKE

Your thoughtfulness is like your beauty, perfect and never ending.

ANN

That's so beautiful, is it from a poem?

LUKE

Yeah.

ANN

Whose?

LUKE

Mine.

ANN

You write poetry?

LUKE

Like I said, I don't do much. I gotta pass the time away somehow. And traveling gets really boring when you're alone.

DETI

Will you say something. Don't just sit there and let him steal your girl.

JOEL

Oh, I'm not worried. I mean after all, it's Luke we're talking about here. What can he possibly be saying to her?

ANN

If you don't mind my asking, how much did you inherit?

LUKE

Oh, around thirteen-million.

JIM

You want to see a movie today?

BRUCE

Sure. What do you wanna watch?

JIM

I don't know. What's playing?

BRUCE

Let's see. Here we go. Okay we've got; Edward Penishands, When Harry Ate Sally, Total Reball, Fatliners, Space Ballers...

JIM

Stop looking at the porn houses, find some real movies.

BRUCE

All right, take it easy. I was just messin' around.

LONNIE

Checkmate!

ED

Bullshit! There's no way you could...

LONNIE

I checkmated you! Goddammit, I checkmated you!  
Uh oh. Oh my gosh!

ED

Lonnie! You cursed! I'm speechless.

DESTI

We should all be so lucky.

The phone rings.

ED

If that's my wife I'm not here.

DESTI

Hello, Common Ground...  
He sure is. Hang on a second.  
Ed, it's your wife.

ED goes to the phone.

ED

Thanks.

DESTI

My pleasure.

ED

(Into the phone)

Yeah...I don't know, maybe another hour...Today?...  
But the games on at...I said I'd do it tomorrow...  
Yes dear...Yes...Yes, of course...Yes dear...Right away...  
I love you too...I do too...Good-bye.

DESTI

Problems with the wife?

ED

Hell no. I'll stay here as long as I want.  
Hurry up Lonnie, I want to go home.

LONNIE

Wait, I'm thinking.

CHURCH LADY enters.

CHURCH LADY

Look at you people. This is Sunday. You should be in church.

JIM

I thought I was. I shaved and everything.

ED

Shit! Another brain-dead born-again.

CHURCH LADY

Today is Jesus' day. You should be celebrating Him.

ED

I am celebrating, by kicking his ass in chess.

CHURCH LADY

Profanity is poison to the soul.

LONNIE

See, I told you so.

ED

Shut up and move.

LONNIE

It's your turn.

ED

Oh.

DETI

Are you going to order anything, or not?

CHURCH LADY

Caffeine is a drug. All drugs are put here by Satan to destroy the weak.

DETI

Maybe what you want isn't on the menu.

CHURCH LADY

Your perverted homosexual ways make me want to vomit.

DETI

Well, don't do it in here baby. I don't want to celebrate Jesus by cleaning up your puke.

BRUCE

Excuse me, but why aren't you in church?

CHURCH LADY

I'm doing the work of the Lord.

BRUCE

Well, if today is a day of rest, why don't you give it a rest and just harass us Monday through Friday.

CHURCH LADY

You will all burn in hell.

ED

Lady, you've never met my wife. Hell is Club Med.

Church Lady runs out of the shop.

JIM

You know. If you loosened her up a bit she wouldn't be that bad-looking.

DETI

I'd do her. Hey, she's crazy, she's just my type.

JIM

Let's go have some lunch.

BRUCE  
Okay. Where do you wanna go?

JIM  
How about Chinese?

BRUCE  
Naw, I don't want to spend ten bucks on lunch just so I can be hungry again in an hour.

JIM  
Thai?

BRUCE  
Same difference.

JIM  
Fast food?

BRUCE  
That's just what I need. Five pounds of grease in my colon.

JIM  
Mexican?

BRUCE  
Gives me gas.

JIM  
Larry's Cafe has a special on French Dip sandwiches.

BRUCE  
Every time I hear those words I think of a dumb guy wearing a beret.

JIM  
Maybe we should start eating healthy.

BRUCE  
Pizza?

JIM  
What?

BRUCE  
Pizza. It's healthy. Think about it. Pizza covers all four food groups. Crust, bread group. Sauce, vegetable group. Cheese, dairy group, and pepperoni covers the meat group. Get a beer on the side and you've got the alcohol group.

JIM  
Sounds good to me, you wanna go now?

BRUCE

No. Mitch's place isn't open yet.

LUKE and ANN get up and exit together

JOEL

What the hell was that?

DESTI

I told you, Luke has a way with the ladies.

JOEL

I can't believe it. I was outdone by a pothead who speaks Italian.

DESTI

Don't forget he's filthy rich too.

DESTI gives him a shot of espresso.

DESTI

How about a shot? On the house.

JOEL gulps the shot.

JOEL

OWWWWWW!

DESTI gives him a glass of ice water.

Phone rings.

DESTI

Hello...

Yes, I'll tell him.

DESTI hangs up.

DESTI

Ed, your wife says stop playing with Lonnie and get home.

ED

She's not the boss of me. Hurry up Lonnie, I want to go home.

LONNIE

You mean you have to go home.

ED

Checkmate. Let's go.

LONNIE

That's a check, not checkmate.

LONNIE moves

LONNIE

Your turn.

ED

I don't have all day, Lonnie.

LONNIE

Well, you could always forfeit the match to me. Then you could go home.

ED moves

ED

There, now hurry up!

LONNIE moves

LONNIE

Checkmate! I did it again!

ED

My mind was on something else. I was distracted.

LONNIE

It doesn't matter. I beat you.

ED

It was a fluke. Let's go again.

ED resets the board.

LONNIE crosses to the counter to refill his cup.

DETI

Lonnie, I will never understand how you've managed to stay friends with that man.

LONNIE

I know, Ed's a prick, pardon my language, but here's how I look at it. I spend all day teaching fourth graders. Little people who have an optimistic totally innocent view of the world. If I didn't spend time with a complete a-hole like Ed, I'd go nuts and start talking to myself. Believe it or not, Ed keeps me in touch with reality.

DETI

But he's such an asshole.

LONNIE

Yeah, but we balance each other out. He has his moments, and I have mine. Like today when I won and rubbed it in. Today was my moment.

You see, Ed and I have been playing chess for years. But this is the first time I've beaten him. He needed a little humbling.

DESTI

You haven't been letting him win?

LONNIE

Goodness no. I was really surprised to win today. I just wanted to rub it in.

DESTI

You know something, Lonnie. If one of you guys was a woman, you'd be married by now.

LONNIE

That thought disturbs me more than you can imagine.

LONNIE goes back to the table and begins a new game with ED.

CHRISTINE enters. She goes to the counter.

CHRISTINE

Hi. May I have a mocha please. Extra whipped cream.

DESTI

Absolutely.

CHRISTINE sits.

DESTI

My God, Joel, She's gorgeous. I could fall in love with someone like her.

JOEL

That is if her personality is as beautiful as her appearance, right?

DESTI

Whatever. What do I say to her?

JOEL

Just talk to her you pussy.

DESTI brings the mocha to CHRISTINE.

DESTI

Here you are. Mocha, extra whipped cream.

CHRISTINE

Thank you very much.

May I join you?

DESTI

Please do.

CHRISTINE

I'm Desti.

DESTI

I know.

CHRISTINE

DESTI and CHRISTINE do the secret  
handshake.

END OF PLAY