

Swim Song

INT. SMOKEY JOE'S BAR - NIGHT

A small stage is front and center in a dark empty bar. Equipment is set up and an electric guitar is propped up on a guitar stand.

WAITERS and STAFF wipe tables and make any necessary preparations for a bustling night to come.

MARK, 35, sits alone at a small round table, occasionally sipping from his domestic beer bottle. He wears a ragged leather jacket and his hair is pretentiously disheveled.

He's heavy in thought.

The

DOUBLE DOORS

open and JEN, 28, appears. She's typical pretty blonde with blue eyes. Jen and Mark look like the personification of night and day.

Mark sees Jen. He sits for a brief moment more, wondering if what he sees is actually real.

Jen innocuously smiles as she approaches him.

Mark slowly gets up and step by step, he goes in to greet an old friend.

They exchange a hug. While both are receptive, there is a bit of alienation that resonates from each other.

MARK

Long time, no see.

JEN

Hey! Good to see you again.

They release from their embrace.

Mark pulls a chair out, motioning for Jen to take a seat. She accepts it.

As he sits down in his own chair, Mark studies her.

MARK

You look great.

JEN

As do you.

Mark leans forward on his forearms, twiddling his thumbs. Both wait for the other one to make the encounter a little less awkward. No such luck.

After a few moments of deafening silence:

MARK

Listen, Jen. I appreciate you in coming tonight. It means a lot to me.

JEN

I'm happy to come, although I'm sad that you're deciding to give it up.

MARK

Well, I'm not getting any younger.

JEN

But it's been your dream to play music.

Mark nods apathetically -- nods of defeat.

MARK

Yeah.

He takes a swig from his beer.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hey. Can I get you something to drink?

JEN

No, it's quite alright. I'll order something later.

He takes another swig, but a more substantial one, like he's filling the void with his beer-drinking prowess.

MARK

I turned thirty five last week.

The conversation turns solemn and dark.

JEN

Yeah, I know. Happy Belated.

She flashes a grin, hoping to rectify the fact that she didn't wish him a Happy Birthday on his actual date.

MARK

Thanks.

He slumps back in his chair, with his arm hanging over the corner. He takes a deep sigh.

MARK (CONT'D)

When I was twenty-two, I told myself that when I would make it at twenty-eight--

Mark flops his head sideways as he recounts the empty promises he made to himself.

MARK (CONT'D)

--So, when I turned twenty-eight, I told myself that I have till I turned thirty-two, and then when I turned thirty-two--

Mark takes a deep sigh, wondering where the time had been spent.

MARK (CONT'D)

--I told myself that I have till I turned thirty-five -- no reprieves.

He takes a swig from his bottle.

MARK (CONT'D)

--And now, Happy Birthday to me. I'm thirty-five and still chasing after a pipe-dream.

JEN

Oh, Mark.

MARK

Well, let me ask about you. I see a pretty ring on your finger.

She flashes her finger, revealing a brilliant SOLITAIRE. She quickly moves her hand out of sight, afraid to be overly ostentatious.

JEN

Derrick and I are getting married in four months.

Mark raises his beer and drinks.

MARK
(wryly)
Mazel Tov.

JEN
Thanks.

Mark nods again, taking all this in.

Brutal silence to follow.

MARK
So, this is my last performance as
a wannabe musician. Tonight is my
swan song.

JEN
You sure you want to give it
up? You've worked so hard.

MARK
I just thought that if I kept
going, then something would pan
out. Sometimes, that was more of a
motivation than doing what I love.

JEN
It's a hard career path and only
the ones who really want it,
survive. It depends on how much
you want it.

Mark nods as if he's heard this many a times before. He
smudges his thumbs on the frosted beer bottle, leaving
imprints.

MARK
I love it, but I don't love how I
don't make shit and that I have to
get a "real" job in order to
supplement my income.

His brows knit as he's releasing some bitter sentiments.

MARK (CONT'D)
I don't love how shitty musicians,
suckier than me, getting rave
reviews on the Rolling Stones while
I would be lucky just to get a gig
at a boy's bar mitzvah.

Mark leans forward, elbow propped on the table as his hand
cradles his forehead, pushing back his black hair.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm thirty-fucking-five. I should
established in some regard. A
fucking monkey can do my job as a
bank teller.

Jen reaches forward to comfort him.

JEN

Hey. Don't beat yourself up.

Mark, dejected, doesn't move.

MARK

Jen. Can I ask you a question?

JEN

Sure.

He holds grabs a hold of her hand.

MARK

Would you have stayed if I have
followed a more...conventional
career path?

Jen recoils back in her seat.

Jen thinks hard on this, choosing her words wisely.

JEN

I don't know. I think I was at a
place where I needed something to
change.

He looks down and plays with the cardboard coasters that are
neatly stacked. He averts his gaze away from her.

MARK

You didn't like the fact that I was
a musician.

JEN

No, that wasn't it.

She inhales deeply, not liking where this is going.

JEN (CONT'D)

I needed something to move and it
didn't.

MARK

Like what?

JEN

I don't know. Our
relationship. It was stagnant for
a long while.

She slouches back in her chair and looks down at the
table. Her fingers curl at the edge, while her palm hangs
below.

JEN (CONT'D)

Other than music, you didn't have
much other aspirations in life. It
just seemed like you were just
coasting along.

MARK

I feel like I've wasted so much
time with this fucking
music-business. For fifteen years,
I've felt like a fucking loser.

JEN

Mark, you know you're not. You
were doing what you love.

MARK

I spent a long time loving
something that doesn't love me
back.

He comes to a revelation:

MARK (CONT'D)

Music is really like a bad
relationship. You know, the one
where you've been treated badly,
but you can't help but love her...
unconditionally.

From the coasters, he moves onto twirling his, now empty,
beer bottle on the table.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if I've treated you
badly.

JEN

It's all in the past.

MARK

The Derrick-guy is pretty smart. He's marrying you.

Jen blushes from Mark's ever-so-sincere comment, almost making her tear up.

JEN

Thanks.

MARK

He really is a lucky guy.

Jen changes the subject to avoid the tear-sheds.

JEN

Are you playing by yourself tonight?

Mark's mood seems to lighten up a bit.

MARK

No, this time I went all out. I hired some people to play with me. I think they're outside taking a smoke.

JEN

Great! I can't wait to see you perform.

Mark looks down at his watch. His eyebrows perk up.

MARK

Shit! It's almost time!

Mark starts to rise.

MARK (CONT'D)

I gotta get the guys. Please get a drink. I'll tell the bar to put it on my tab.

He puts his hand over to the side of his mouth.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'll tell them that you're my groupie.

He winks at her and leaves.

LATER

The bar is dark and smoky that a knife can cut through it.