

EXCELLENT SERVICE

Written by

James David Donahue

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FROM BLACK:

MALE VOICE

It's criminal for Jess not to let the new register girl wear shorts in this weather.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DELI COUNTER - DAY

It is the hottest day of the year, 1968, in a small, coastal college town.

A young girl stands behind a register sweating. She plays with her hair. Tugs at her shirt.

Golden sunlight floods through the storefront windows behind her.

MALE VOICE O.S.

I mean really criminal.

SAMMY, 19 leans on the deli counter next to MAX, 24, both sweating and gawking at the register girl, ALANA, 15.

MAX

I'm boiling just looking at her.

SAMMY

Alright calm down. I can't believe I'm here right now, I could be writing, painting, swimming-

MAX

I didn't know you could do any of that.

SAMMY

Well I can't. But anyway I'd have more time to learn-

MAX

Look it's the horseradish lady.

An old lady pushes a carriage along. There is a cat in the child's seat. She stops in front of a stack of horseradish.

MAX (CONT'D)

It's the hottest day of the year she won't. She can't.

SAMMY

So the cat is her husband?

She is showing the cat bottles of horseradish.

MAX

No the cat is her mister. That's her husband.

Four aisles down, an elderly man examines eggs individually.

MAX (CONT'D)

He has no idea his wife thinks the ghost of her secret dead lover lives on in that cat.

Suddenly, a man, PERRY, 46, bursts through a set of french doors behind them carrying armfuls of cabbages.

PERRY

It's so fucking hot I can't think. The cabbages were starting to steam. Did none of you think to get the cabbages? Shouldn't you be stocking shelves?

SAMMY

Marques can stock the shelves when he gets here.

PERRY

When does he get here?

SAMMY

Four minutes ago. I'm off.

The clock shows 11:34.

PERRY

You're on. Until he gets here you're on. And I'm melting.

SAMMY

I can't stay here. What if I had a girl waiting at the beach for me?

PERRY

Do you?

SAMMY

I can't stay.

PERRY

You're already on thin ice.

SAMMY

Perry. Can I have my check please?

PERRY

You know I'm not supposed to.

SAMMY

I know they came in. I don't understand the rule, I don't understand why I should wait-

PERRY

It's Jess' rule.

SAMMY

Jess isn't here. You're my manager. The Sea is fresh. The world is on fire, actually I think the flowers in the front display actually are.

PERRY

(running away)

Stock your shelves and wait until Marques gets here, I'll think about it.

Perry leaves with his cabbages. The two men ready themselves.

MAX

What's it at?

SAMMY

(looking in deli cooler)

38. Is that higher than the last time?

MAX

I don't know but we better be quick.

Sammy turns a timer to 25 seconds. They kneel behind the counter, throw open the deli-meat cooler door and thrust their faces in. Relief.

The timer goes off and they stand back up, startled by the horseradish woman standing right at the counter.

HORSERADISH WOMAN

You know, horseradish helps with the heat.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - AISLES - DAY

Sammy is stocking shelves.

Outside the store front windows, he watches as a group of teens walk past the store. They strip shirts off and toss pages into the air.

As Sammy walks along mindlessly placing items on the shelves and staring outside, a little boy follows behind him removing each item he leaves and placing it back on his rolling cart. Sammy never notices.

His field of vision is interrupted by a beautiful woman, SANDY, 39, who crosses the aisle.

He turns and the kid runs away.

Sammy walks one aisle over in time to see the old woman drop cup of hot CLAM CHOWDER on the floor and struggle to clean it while her cat leaps from its seat to get licking.

Quickly, Sammy keeps going and nearly bumps into Sandy.

SAMMY

Hello. Can I help you with that?

She has a hand basket with about four items in it.

SANDY

(giggling)

Um, sure.

SAMMY

They're saying it's the hottest day of the year.

SANDY

I've never been so happy to live by the sea. The breeze is wonderful, for now.

Sammy is looking at her breasts. Sandy grabs her necklace.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Louis Vuitton. I got it for my mother but she never wore it. So when she died I took it back.

SAMMY

I haven't seen you in here before. I know everyone in this town, unfortunately.

SANDY

What's your name?

SAMMY

Sammy.

SANDY

Hi Sammy, I'm Sandy. Isn't that funny. Sandy, Sammy. I traded one sea for another, Sammy. When I moved here last week.

Sammy bumps into a rack of salsas.

SANDY (CONT'D)

What do you do, Sammy?

SAMMY

I'm a personal shopper obviously. I provide excellent service.

The old woman is still struggling as they pass.

SANDY

Only to shoppers you're attracted to?

SAMMY

No, no, no.

SANDY

I mean other than this. Do you go to the University? Are you an artist? An activist? Do you fuck?

SAMMY

I used to be in the circus.
 (he picks up some oranges,
 juggles them for a moment,
 and drops them)
 They fired me.

She giggles.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I don't know what I'm doing. Other than not much. I'm almost 20. I don't want to be here forever. But I'll figure it out. What do you do?

SANDY

I'm an adult film actress.

Sammy drops the basket and picks it up, embarrassed.

SAMMY

Like pornography?

SANDY

Tasteful pornography. Yes.

SAMMY

Will you go out with me?

SANDY

No. I will not. But the little girl at the register has seemed increasingly annoyed since we started talking.

Alana quickly looks away.

SANDY (CONT'D)

You should ask her out. Or anyway you should do something with yourself.

SAMMY

Sometimes I really want to.

SANDY

Life is too short for wanting. There's only time for doing. I moved here to direct my first adult film.

SAMMY

Woah. Director. Maybe I could do that.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - REGISTER - DAY

Sammy bags for Sandy while Alana rings her up. He sneaks glances up at Alana frequently.

ALANA

That's the wrong bag.

SAMMY

Oh yeah.

ALANA

You're gonna get in trouble.

SAMMY

I don't care. I was already saying, I was saying to uh, Max, how criminal, just criminal, it is that they're making you wear pants.

ALANA

It's so hot.

SAMMY

Sandy's boss never makes her wear pants.

ALANA

Who?

Sammy points to Sandy who smiles.

SANDY

It's true.

Sandy is finished and thus is Sammy. He stands there looking at Alana as though waiting to say something.

SANDY (CONT'D)
 (while leaving)
 You don't have as much time as you think.

He makes to say something to Alana when suddenly-

PERRY
 Sammy. Back to the deli. There are three people in here, Alana can handle it by herself.

SAMMY
 What about my coverage?

PERRY
 We're making calls. You're here for now, you're being paid, go.

Sammy looks toward Sandy who is nudging out the door. Disappointed, he stalks off.

The little boy arrives at the register, he puts down a cap gun and a lemon.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Alana, go cool off.

Perry takes over the register, rings up the kid.

KID
 A pack of Chesterfield lights.

Perry rings it up.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROCERY STORE - STORE FRONT - DAY

Sammy is sweeping the sidewalk in front of the store while Max stands smoking.

SAMMY
 I should be down there.

Left of the grocery store, the harbor and beach is in sight.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
 I could be reading under an umbrella.
 Drinking Arnold Palmers.

MAX
 What's an Arnold Palmer?

SAMMY

What? It's a new thing. A new drink. It's perfect.

(then)

We should really be involved in more things. Do you ever feel like time is running out?

MAX

What? Running out?

SAMMY

Running up.

MAX

Running up?

SAMMY

Yes.

MAX

Well. That's what time does, or anyway it's not up to me.

SAMMY

Yes but we could be doing more.

MAX

So register for some classes. Move out of your parent's house. This is one of the most groovy college towns there is and you work full-time at the Piggly-Wiggly.

SAMMY

Well so do you.

MAX

Hey I've seen it all man.

Sammy shrugs and turns up the radio.

FEMALE RADIO VOICE

Well the air is just sweltering. Be careful on that asphalt everybody. We are reaching record highs today.

MALE RADIO VOICE

That's right I'm getting reports that several hundred inland dairy cows have collapsed perhaps to death and the refrigeration units keeping all that milk fresh don't stand a chance. How about you pop a button or two, Eloise?

FEMALE RADIO VOICE

(giggling)

Oh, Paul.

MALE RADIO VOICE

They can't see.

He clicks it off.

SAMMY

That mother fucker should be here by now.

Young adults begin walking by in swimsuits. One young man paints something on a young woman's belly.

A young man, STEVE in swim trunks stops in front of Sammy.

STEVE

You're with them?

SAMMY

With who?

STEVE

The administration. The man. Who else jack-off?

SAMMY

I just work here.

STEVE

Take off that uniform and read a banned book my friend. Things are changing. Watch.

Steve takes off his moccasins and puts his bare feet on the asphalt. He dances like a cartoon cowboy, his toes sizzling on the hot road.

SAMMY

Shit. Put them back on.

STEVE

Ok.

(he does)

But now you understand.

SAMMY

What?

STEVE

It's a revolution Jack!

Steve leaves toward the beach just as a siren rings out. The two boys look up, across the street.

SAMMY

I'm not with them.

On a fire escape, stands a young woman, AIKO, 19, wearing a bright red beret and a scissor cut bob. Her clothes are militant. There is a cherry blossom painted on her vest.

She strikes a match on the brick and lights a cigarette.

She speaks into the megaphone.

AIKO

To the beach students! To the beach until
they give us what we want!

A young girl walks by with a picket sign that reads:

LES ENFANTS CHAUDS

MAX

What do they want?

GIRL

To wear swimsuits in class. It's a
walkout.

Sammy looks back up to the fire escape and she is gone.

FADE TO BLACK.

FROM BLACK:

SAMMY

Alright, cut!

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sammy is sitting in a director's chair with the waves crashing on the surf behind him.

SAMMY

Alright, that's enough talking. I'm
sweating my ass off.

Opposite Sammy, there are two women and a man under an umbrella, half naked, framed in front of a camera, and clearly on set of a porn film.

Sammy walks up to them.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Less philosophizing, more fucking. When
this yacht gets here we're-

A production assistant steps in:

P.A.

Sir, the yacht is here.

SAMMY

Goddamnit-lookit that thing. Thank you.
 (to the actors)
 We're behind schedule and over-budget.

ACTRESS

Isn't this a student project?

SAMMY

We'll all get incompletes. One more take.

Sammy walks back to his chair. Wipes sweat from his brow.

P.A.

(holding swatches of fabric)
 Sir, they'd like you to approve the
 outfits for scene 12.

SAMMY

Well, how long are they gonna be wearing
 them? Oh- Action!

ACTRESS

Why don't you speak to me?

ACTOR

Speaking is fatal.

ACTRESS

Speaking is a resurrection. Speech is
 another life from when one does not
 speak.

ACTOR

I have trouble saying what I want to say.
 The more one talks, the less words mean.

ACTRESS

There is an ascetic rule that stops one
 from talking well until one sees life
 with detachment...

(beat)

How do you like my tits?

A fisherman walks into frame with two gigantic tuna.

SAMMY

Who are you, you're not in this scene?

The porn actors start stroking the fish and all of a sudden-

INT. GROCERY STORE - FISH COUNTER - DAY

SAMMY

(waking up)

Cut.

CUSTOMER

Are you listening to me? Honestly, they shouldn't hire disableds to work with food.

Sammy had been daydreaming. An angry customer is gesticulating with a large fish on the counter in front of him.

SAMMY

Sorry.

He begins wrapping it up but sees the beret girl, Aiko, standing outside. The crowd of students has gotten larger.

When he runs up to the-

INT. GROCERY STORE - REGISTER - DAY

Aiko is gone. The kids in their bathing suits are getting rowdy.

A guy in a cowboy hat with a single flower pushes past Sammy.

CHESTER WHEELMAN, 46.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Those kids and their swim trunks-

MAX

(to Sammy)

It's that creep that brings the register girls flowers. He's like 50.

Perry appears.

PERRY

Sammy. Walk with me.

Sammy tears himself away from the register where Chester is approaching Alana.

SAMMY

(pointing outside)

Have you seen this? It's amazing. I mean it's different than this, the people that shop in here...

Old people make lines.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Sheep.

PERRY

(not listening)

Yeah, look. I'm going to get your check. This once. I don't want you telling your coworkers.

Max peaks from around the corner.

PERRY (CONT'D)

I don't need everyone asking for this. But we appreciate you staying for close.

SAMMY

For close, no, Perry. I can't-

PERRY

Do you see this? It's picking up. People are afraid of this heat. What's more, they're afraid of the kids. I need you, you're a pillar of this establishment.

(beat)

You have management in your future. Hold on, I'll be back with your check.

SAMMY

Perry I have things I want to do.

Perry leaves.

Sammy notices a group of swimsuit clad college girls come flowing into the store. They're looking through the produce, the freezer section.

MAX

They're making formal demands. I'm going out there. Shit, it's her!

Sammy finds her in the crowd. She is waving a red, white, and blue bomb pop in the sky and speaking into a megaphone.

An old man in tweed comes through the door. He is a professor.

PROFESSOR

The students have lost their mind. I wear tweed every day. Some days suede. Do you see me complaining?

(He is sweating bullets)

And what about you? What do you think?

SAMMY

I think I'm in love.

PROFESSOR

I think I'm going to faint.

Sammy walks away.

Chester Wheelman is leaning into Alana who looks uncomfortable.

MAX

Sammy are you coming?

Suddenly, Max is wearing pastel colored face paint and no shirt.

Old people keep coming into the store, faculty or otherwise.

They congregate in their layers of polyester, smell gallons of milk that have turned, inspect canned peaches, commiserating while the young take over the town in a blur of skin.

Sammy watches in awe, thinking about making a decision.

GIRL

I like your uniform.

She is sucking a popsicle and wearing a bikini.

They're just so enticing. Blonde girls and tanned girls, brunette girls, black girls, reach for potato chips and liters of sticky cola, chewing bubble-gum or ice. The girl with her popsicle winks and runs off with her crew.

PERRY

Hey!

Perry comes running from the office, holding Sammy's check.

SAMMY

Perry, can I please leave?

PERRY

Are those girls wearing bathing suits?
Barefooted. They can't be in here dressed
like that.

He runs off after them.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Come on sweetheart. You seem like such a
mature young lady.

Alana smiles awkwardly.

CHESTER WHEELMAN (CONT'D)

Honey, I'm a friend of the owner.

He grabs at her hair.

ALANA

Hey! Don't.

Alana looks toward Sammy who takes a step to act but changes direction and hides behind a shelf.

AIKO

Why didn't you defend her?

She was standing just beside him.

SAMMY

What the fuck?

AIKO

I know you wanted to, I watched you think about exactly how you would do it. And I also saw the moment it went from you being her hero to her sucking your cock.

SAMMY

That is not (what I was-)

AIKO

Are you observing or are you participating?

SAMMY

In what?

AIKO

Life.

Sammy straightens himself and grabs Aiko by the elbows looking absolutely enamoured.

Aiko looks uncomfortable.

The bathing suit girls are running from Perry.

A kid with a megaphone bursts in.

BOY

We've got the mayor holed up in his office! Our intel shows his refrigerant is going to run out within the hour! He'll have to listen to us!

Perry grabs at the megaphone.

PERRY

Gimme that. Attention girl-children in two piece bathing suits and bare feet. I'm going to ask that you please leave the store.

Just then, students with picket signs tip over an ice machine outside the front window. They start throwing bags of ice in the air.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

I'm Chester Wheelman. I used to be a race car driver. This is a peony I think. Will you help me find Cooper Extra Sharp cheese? It's the only one I can eat with this ulcer. The usual girls know how I like it.

Alana tries to leave the register.

AIKO

What are you gonna do?

SAMMY

I can make you an Arnold Palmer.

AIKO

Are you kidding?

SAMMY

It's half iced tea half lemonade.

AIKO

What are you gonna do about that old asshole? Sit around until you become him?
(tugging his clothes)
This smock says you provide excellent service. Well?

The bathing suit girls find their way into Sammy's aisle. The leader, QUEENIE, 18, steps up to Sammy.

QUEENIE

Where can I find Kipper Snacks?

AIKO

(to Queenie)
Walk slow and hold yourself straight.

SAMMY

You can never know for sure how girls minds work can you?

Sammy stands up straight and marches toward the register. He WINKS at Aiko. He grabs Kipper Snacks from a rack and TOSSES them to Queenie. He pulls a cigarette out of the little boys mouth and sticks it in his own. He TEARS OFF his APRON.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Hey, Chester Wheelman-

CHESTER WHEELMAN

(turning around)
Huh?

Sammy pick up a large cup of CLAM CHOWDER from under a warmer.

SAMMY

Fuck you and your race car!

He tosses the hot chowder all over Chester. Alana looks mildly shocked. Sammy looks back to see his flock, expecting admiration but sees only Perry, holding each girl by a shoulder and chastising them. None of them saw what he did.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

I'm gonna fuck you up.

Chester punches Sammy in the stomach so hard he falls back on a display of donuts and knocks the entire thing down. When he stands up, Chester Wheelman is storming out and Perry is coming over with the girls.

PERRY

Did you throw clam chowder at Jess' close friend? I'm trying to make you manager what is (wrong with you)?

SAMMY

He was harassing-

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Jess is gonna hear about this! I am gonna kick your ass every time I see it!

PERRY

What were you thinking?

Sammy looks toward the register but Alana is being relieved by a frumpy older cashier. Alana quickly takes her pants and name tag off and runs out the store.

Aiko is not with the other girls who are waiting behind Perry.

SAMMY

I've been trying to leave all day. Just once I wanted not to keep doing whatever I'm doing. Everything else is changing all the time, Perry.

PERRY

This is one of those rare good places that stays.

The girls snicker.

PERRY (CONT'D)

(to the girls)

Look I'm not going to argue with you. It's just against our policy. Protest the university all you want, this is a place of business, girls. We need you to be decent.

Perry sticks his hand out-

PERRY (CONT'D)

For the Kipper Snacks.

-and Queenie takes out a dollar bill from between her breasts. Perry leans over the belt, places it in the register and returns to her a quarter.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Off you go.

Sammy starts looking up and down the aisles. Looking for Aiko. He looks out the window, Alana is tossing a beach ball around. Max is hammering away at a fire hydrant.

The swimsuit girls are walking off.

SAMMY

I quit.

PERRY

Excuse me?

All the old folks lining up at the registers stop and listen. The professor is teaching a class behind the meat counter using the black board where prices are drawn.

SAMMY

I said I quit.

He looks to see if the girls heard him, but they are walking out the door.

PERRY

The great painter who never paints. Big shot movie director. College drop-out.
(beat)
I'm hot too Sam. Everyone gets old and ugly. I'm hot too. Think about what you're doing. Think about how your parents got you this job.

Sammy watches as the last of the girls exits the store without so much as glancing back at him.

He watches as the crowd moves down the street past the store. The sounds of their fun fades away.

He looks sad but satisfied.

SAMMY

I've thought about it.

PERRY

The worlds is going to be hard on you.

SAMMY

That's fine.

Sammy walks out into the white heat.

THE END

"Désolé"