

Dinner With Susie

by

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FADE IN:

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

SAM sits alone at a candle-lit table in the center of a trendy, Italian restaurant. He is in his mid-30's, large, and wears plaid. Beneath thick-rimmed glasses, sweat billows down his acne-ridden expression of pure anxiety. He reviews the menu for the 100th time before setting it down again. He stretches his arms backwards as if trying to recall the routine of an athlete he once saw on television. He runs his fingers through his greasy hair. He checks his breath. He picks up the menu again. BARNUBUS takes the seat opposite him. BARNUBUS is a decade younger than SAM, short, and slender. He wears a tux.

SAM lowers the menu to look confusedly at BARNUBUS.

BARNUBUS

I catfished you.

SAM's expression drops. He lets out a sorry sigh.

Cut to a short while later.

BARNUBUS and SAM are eating their respective pasta dishes and drinking cocktails. SAM solemnly twirls his spaghetti while carrying his depressed face over his other palm. BARNUBUS stares eerily at SAM. He has not touched his food.

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)

Tell me about yourself.

SAM glances at BARNUBUS, astonished by his audacity.

SAM

Well for one, I'm straight.

BARNUBUS

(sincerely)

That's very interesting - tell me more.

SAM shoves his face with a forkful of pasta.

SAM

I'm a game designer.

BARNUBUS

What kind of games?

SAM

Computer games.

BARNUBUS
What kind of computer games?

SAM shrugs.

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)
What kind of computer games?

SAM
I heard you, and I did this.

SAM does an exaggerated shrug. He devours a another forkful of pasta.

SAM (CONT'D)
(chewing)
You know, this is only slightly better than getting stood up.

BARNUBUS
Can I pay you five-hundred dollars to come to my apartment?

SAM drops his fork on his plate.

SAM
Don't you guys have any standards? Look at me! Like, come on. Get yourself a gigolo, download an app, just let me sulk for fuck's sake.

SAM drinks his cocktail.

BARNUBUS
It's nothing sexual.

SAM
Oh good. That's great. Amazing. So what, you want to be friends?

BARNUBUS
No.

SAM
We going to watch cable? Bake? Play Monopoly?

BARNUBUS
I don't have Monopoly.

SAM
Good - It was a metaphor. I hate Monopoly. I hate this. I hate you.

SAM studies BARNUBUS' face. Suddenly, a horrible realization overcomes him.

SAM (CONT'D)

You know who I am?

BARNUBUS nods. SAM sighs. Again. He downs his cocktail. He holds up the empty glass to BARNUBUS. BARNUBUS calls over a waiter.

INT. BARNUBUS'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

The dim lights flicker over the dingy hovel that is BARNUBUS' apartment. The walls are lined with posters of a cute, cartoon girl. SAM sits on chair, awkwardly holding a cup of coffee. The sight of BARNUBUS' obsession horrifies him.

BARNUBUS leaves his room with a life-sized cardboard cut-out of said cartoon girl. He addresses a unnerved SAM.

BARNUBUS

You are the designer of the virtual dating simulator "Dinner with Susie". I have over a thousand hours logged in that game. I've played through every written scenario with this woman. I know all of her likes and dislikes. All that irks and inspires her. Her mind is an open book, and I've studied every page intensely.

SAM

You're in love.

BARNUBUS

Yes.

SAM

Shit.

BARNUBUS

About a month ago, I grew tired of the limited conversation pathways I could take with Susie.

SAM

Does this end with me getting murdered?

BARNUBUS

Tried to hire an escort to improvise some lines.

(MORE)

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)

Took her to brunch. She never quite got Susie's... innocence.

SAM

Please say it does.

BARNUBUS

I'd like to ask Susie to dinner with an original dialogue tree.

SAM

I'm not Susie.

BARNUBUS

No... But you did program her.

SAM looks around the dingy apartment.

SAM

Do I have to wear a dress?

BARNUBUS

That won't be necessary.

Cut to later that night in BARNUBUS' dining room. BARNUBUS sits at a table overlain with white tablecloth, across the cardboard cutout. He is still in his tux. SAM sits aside, in his own chair away from the couple. BARNUBUS reaches under the table. He grabs a bottle of red. He pours two glasses, gingerly sliding a glass over to the cutout. SAM watches - perplexed.

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)

This is a Tapiz Malbec from Argentina, 2015. Big and punchy on entry, yet quite smooth with the acidity and oak in balance.

SAM

Wow, you sure know your wine.

BARNUBUS

Higher.

SAM

(higher pitch)

Wow, you sure know your wine.

BARNUBUS

Higher...

SAM

(even higher pitch)

Wow, you sure know your wine.

BARNUBUS

Higher still.

SAM

This is really straining - not to mention demeaning.

BARNUBUS

I'll throw in an extra hundred if you get the voice right.

SUSIE (SAM AS SUSIE)

Woah, you sure know a lot! You must be really smart.

BARNUBUS

Well, I don't know about that. What I do know is that you, my dear, are a fan of red.

SUSIE

How - how did you know?

BARNUBUS

Oh, just a feeling. Red is the color of sunsets over Santa Cruz and fresh strawberries. It's the color of a campfire deep in the woods, surrounded by acoustic music, s'mores, and good company. It's the color of your grandmother's broche - the one she wore for your birthday every year. It's the color of passion.

SUSIE

Wow.

Beat. BARNUBUS glances over to SAM.

BARNUBUS

Ask me something.

SAM

Like what?

BARNUBUS

Ask me what I do.

SUSIE

So, uh...

BARNUBUS

Barnubus.

SUSIE

So Barnubus...

BARNUBUS

Barney.

SUSIE

So Barney, what do you do for a living?

BARNUBUS

Tonight's not about me, my dear.
Tonight's all about you.

BARNUBUS raises his glass.

SUSIE

Wow.

BARNUBUS

Tell me about yourself.

SUSIE

Well, you already seem to know so much about me.

BARNUBUS

Yet I find myself yearning to learn more. What do you do most other Friday nights?

SUSIE

Oh, nothing much. Just wait for you to call!

BARNUBUS

You're so sweet, but we both know that isn't true. Somebody as smart and beautiful as yourself? Come on, you must be seeing other people, right? Going on dates?

SUSIE

Not really.

BARNUBUS

None?

SUSIE

Well, I did go on one recently.

BARNUBUS

How was it?

SUSIE

Well, turns out I was catfished.

Beat.

BARNUBUS

Sounds rough.

SUSIE

Eh. Can't win 'em all.

Beat.

BARNUBUS

It'd be good to win some though.

SUSIE

... Yeah.

Both chuckle. For a brief moment, SAM's voice cracks.

BARNUBUS

I bet you worked real hard to get ready too.

SUSIE

I showered, got dressed up, picked the restaurant.

BARNUBUS

You really went all out.

SUSIE

But at the back of my mind, I knew - I knew something had to be up.

BARNUBUS

What makes you say that?

SUSIE

I don't know... Experience? If somebody shows any interest in me I tend to get a little suspicious. Oh! Sorry - silly me, being such a downer.

BARNUBUS

Go on.

SUSIE

I've been thinking: maybe it's just bad luck if I never find my "somebody", maybe I'm just built that way.

(MORE)

SUSIE (CONT'D)

In either case I'll never know for certain unless I keep trying. That's what they tell me.

But after a hundred rejections, a thousand unread messages, and a catfish, you eventually begin to get a pretty good idea of what you're worth to the world.

BARNUBUS

What happens then?

SUSIE

Well I guess first you learn to program and then you make a virtual dating simulator.

A silence lingers in the air.

SAM takes this as his cue and again reaches for the wine glass next to the SUSIE cut-out. BARNUBUS stops him, and offers him his own.

BARNUBUS

Can I suggest an alternative?

Cut to later that night - BARNUBUS and SAM are seated on a couch watching Titanic with SUSIE in between them. A few empty bottles of wine on a side-table next to them. It gets to the scene where Rose does her classic "draw me like one of your french girls" line.

SUSIE

His proportions are so off.

BARNUBUS

Well, he is working with three dimensions, which to me seems a little excessive.

SUSIE giggles. BARNUBUS wraps his arm around the cutout, pulling it closer. SAM glances towards BARNUBUS, blushing as if he were the cutout. He turns back and tries to focus on the movie. A little later and he begins to hear a curious sound. He tilts his head slightly to see BARNUBUS aggressively making out with the cutout.

SAM hesitates. A longing expression overcomes him. He drinks what remains of the wine.

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)

You like that, baby?

SAM closes his eyes.

SUSIE

Yeah.

BARNUBUS

I'm going to make you feel special.

SAM

Yeah?

SAM's hand crawls towards the cut-out, as BARNUBUS embraces SUSIE. It meets one of BARNUBUS' hands, and interlocks with the fingers. BARNUBUS stops. He looks down at his hand, holding SAM's. He looks up to see SAM gazing at him with endearing eyes.

BARNUBUS

Yeah. This... This isn't going to work. I'm sorry.

BARNUBUS stands.

BARNUBUS (CONT'D)

Believe me, it's not you, it's definitely not Susie, it's - it's me. But thank you for coming over. Let me... Where's my checkbook...

BARNUBUS goes into an adjacent room looking for his checkbook, leaving behind a bewildered SAM.

Cut to BARNUBUS closing the door on SAM as he stands in shock and awe outside of his apartment.

Cut to BARNUBUS' office. BARNUBUS turns on his PC and loads up the game "Dinner with Susie". He is greeted by the familiar face of the cartoon girl, as she says hello. He types hi back. A warm glow overcomes him as he passionately dives into a virtual conversation with his true love. Pan cut to SAM - typing enthusiastically on his computer as SUSIE. He drinks a glass of red wine.

Fade to black.

End.