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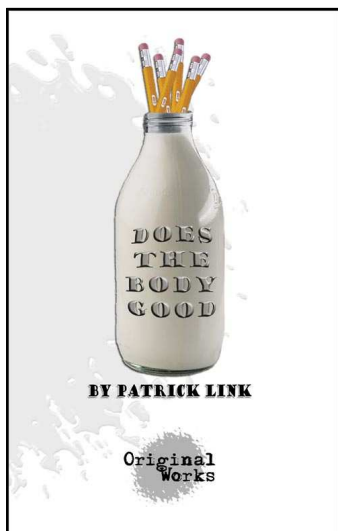
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Does The Body Good by Patrick Link

Synopsis: A seductive housewife entices a young milkman his first day on the job. A depressed middle school teacher struggles to extract himself from a sexual affair with the precocious 8th grade girl who idolizes him. In *Does The Body Good* these two seemingly unrelated liaisons divide the stage into a distorted mirror image of the other, build on each other's intensity, and finally collide into a perfect storm of unfulfilled yearnings.

Cast Size: 2 Males, 2 Females

Goodnight Lovin' Trail

A Play in One Act

By

John Patrick Bray

Characters:

Lee, 30's. A waitress trying to get by. Wears a standard waitress uniform, complete with apron (helps with various props; like a Mama Kangaroo).

Mr. Coffee and Cigarettes, a drifter, age uncertain (30-50). He has a youthful energy, but is held back by the grip of alcohol. Wears a red-neck tuxedo, and a hat (slouch hat, fedora, Skoal tobacco cap; any hat, really).

Setting:

Andy's Piggy Diner and Truck Stop, West Texas, near the mythic "Goodnight-Loving Trail"/ Not too long ago

Note:

The author did not compose music for the song. He has left it up to the imagination of the actor (or the actor and director in collaboration) and this has yielded some amazing results. Think about the characters, the world of story, and have a great time! For any questions regarding the lyrics (i.e., if you need to cut a syllable or two to make it fit your preferred meter) please contact the author. He's happy to help out.

The author does not hold the rights to the suggested song, "Drunken Angel" by Lucinda Williams. It is up to the producing organization to secure the rights, or to find a song in a similar style in which the producing organization can secure the rights.

History:

A ten-minute version of *Goodnight Lovin' Trail* had its world premiere as part of the 2001 Shandaken Playfair at the Shandaken Playhouse in Shandaken, New York. The production was directed by Gregory Bray and featured Violet Snow as Lee and Robert A. Stanley as Coffee.

Goodnight Lovin' Trail in its current form had its world premiere with the 7th Annual Actors Studio Drama School Rep. Season at the Circle in the Square (Downtown) in April, 2003. The production was directed by Dennis Wayne Gleason and featured Ellen Lichtensteiger as Lee and Jacques Maroun as Coffee.

The play ran in rep. for ten years with Rising Sun Performance Company in NYC featuring Nicholas Mevoli as Coffee. This play is respectfully dedicated to RSPC, and to the memory of “our Nic.”

SCENE ONE: ANDY'S PIGGY

(A truck stop diner in West Texas. Some greasy spoon you'd expect to find at the cross-roads. This is Americana forgotten. The Southwest as imagined by Edward Hopper. On the back wall, there is painting of the ocean (note: the painting can be on the "fourth wall"). There is a jukebox. Sad tables, lonely chairs. Lee, a waitress, is on the payphone.)

LEE: No, Austin, don't you talk to me like that.
You want a switchin' when I get home? Huh?
You tell Mr. Johnson, if he calls back, to call me here. Never you mind what I'm sellin.'

(Mr. Coffee and Cigarettes, hereafter referred to as Coffee, enters with a start.)

COFFEE: Did you see it?

LEE: See what?

(Lee slams the phone down, and jumps in front of the counter. Coffee moves a chair roughly, and looks under a table.)

COFFEE: Did you see it?!

LEE: See what? Get a hold of yourself!

COFFEE: Well, I was in here before, and I think I left something valuable -

LEE: What? Like a diamond?

(She crouches down on the floor near him.)

COFFEE: My guitar!

LEE: A guitar?

(She walks away and returns to the counter.)

COFFEE: Yessum. A big God damn guitar. I got to drinking earlier, and I know I had to have left it here.

LEE: I haven't seen any guitar.

COFFEE: You sure?

LEE: I'd tell you if I'd seen one! *(Beat.)* When were you here?

COFFEE: I don't remember.

LEE: You don't remember?

COFFEE: No.

LEE: Hours ago? Days? Weeks? Months?

COFFEE: Hours ago. It must have been before sunset.

LEE: Were you with anybody else?

COFFEE: I was drinking by myself.

LEE: Where?

COFFEE: Well, just outside. I usually keep a bottle with me in case I need a nip. And I got to feeling kind of lonely, and all by myself, so I went ahead and downed more than half the bottle.

LEE: That wasn't too smart, was it?

COFFEE: No, I reckon it wasn't. But then, I stumble in here, I remember, with Della, Della I call her, and, and the rest is just blank. I ended up down the road a piece with my sack weighing heavy, and me breathing in a face full of sand.

LEE: You sure you brought 'Della' in here?

COFFEE: I wouldn't have left her outside. I don't think I would have. (*Beat.*) But maybe.

LEE: I'm just saying it might be possible.

COFFEE: Shit. I'm destroyed. That's not fair. I mean, after all that I went through to...I'm like a, a conductor without a train. I'm a wave of the ocean hung out to dry. (*He walks towards the door.*) I gotta get into town. (*He burps and grabs his stomach and leans.*) Nope, I gotta sit.

LEE: You ain't pukin' in here.

COFFEE: If I'm still, nothing will happen. (*He poses, still. Lee helps him to a seat near the counter.*) Man, I'm feelin' green.

LEE: Drinking and pukin' go hand in hand. (*Lee pours a cup of coffee and brings it to Coffee.*) Here. Have a cup. (*Coffee bends over to reach into his pocket. Lee reacts.*) Oh, no, it's on the house. (*He nods, and sits back. His face is a wash with tears.*) Come on, what's with all the tears, ain't she just a guitar?

(*She places the coffee down in front of him.*)

COFFEE: No, you see, Della's pretty rare. She's called a National Style O. Came out in the twenties. Real old, see? It has an aluminum cone behind the strings. Causes her to resonate like a bitch in heat. (*Lee rolls her eyes and returns to the counter.*) Beyond that, it's got this dull, belly ache kinda echo in there. Sadness. It's the only thing I know that matches my kinda voice. Scratchy, like sand-paper. You got a match? (*Lee hands him a book of matches from near the cash register.*) Thanks. I'm sorry about cussin' such, ma'am.

LEE: Ain't like I never heard it before.

(*He starts striking unsuccessfully.*)

COFFEE: She was sand-blasted, and painted something beautiful once. There's no mistaking it if you see it. It's kinda, um, of a sea green, like that painting! I always imagined when I played, that I'd be out there, on that sand, right near the ocean. The ocean would call, and my National O, sweet Della, with her coyote bellow would call back for me. And me and the ocean would just sit there, talking. Just talking.

LEE: Well, if I happen to find a tropical guitar, I'll be sure to look for a drunken man in denim.

COFFEE: A lot of that around here?

LEE: Except for the guitar part. And the ocean.

(Tries striking another match. Lee continues diner business, such as filling salt shakers, etc.)

COFFEE: I've actually never been to the ocean. Not yet. I've always been afraid of the water. I was heading out there now, figure I'd stare my fears right in the eye.

LEE: Better late than never I guess.

COFFEE: I would love to see Hawaii.

LEE: You plan on walking on the water?

COFFEE: Well...no, but... (*indicates painting*)... you see, that's where I imagine this beachfront to be. Nothing that beautiful can exist on the mainland, not even our beaches.

LEE: That's for sure.

COFFEE: Yeah? You go to the ocean a lot?

LEE: Used to. All the time. Me and my old man would take the little ones to the Gulf. Then when my sister in law got her place in National City, we'd head out west to visit her. We'd lay out on towels that we got from the hotel, and watch the gulls eat the baby turtles coming out of the sand. Life after death, you know? Something's gotta die so something else can live.

COFFEE: I hear ya. Well, I guess I'll walk up into town.

(*Coffee starts to stand.*)

LEE: Your stomach can handle it?

COFFEE: Yeah. Got a book of matches?

(*She starts to hand him a lighter.*)

LEE: What's wrong with the book I just gave you?

COFFEE: The sandpaper is rubbed down clean.

LEE: Frankly, Mister, you look like you could strike a match on your cheek.

COFFEE: Feels that way.

LEE: Here, take my lighter.

COFFEE: I'm fine with matches. The way I see it, lighters are these like big ol' institutions. They create fire with a click, and floom! With matches, you strike, strike, maybe, damn, go to the next, strike, strike, there you go. Striking out like that builds character. And with lighters being anywhere from a sixty nine cents to a whole dollar fifty, I say stick with the little guy.

(He notices something. A matchbook under one of the tables.)

LEE: What is it?

(He picks up the matches.)

COFFEE: My matches.

LEE: Your matches?

COFFEE: These -- these are *my matches!* Yes, sir! Ha! I was in here!

(Beat.)

LEE: *I never doubted you were.*

COFFEE: No, but see, look, you see this blue thread here?

(He holds up the matches by the piece of thread, and it dangles in front of them.)

LEE: Yeah.

COFFEE: I keep these matches tied off of the E-string tuner, so I always know where they are. I'm terrible with pockets. That means Della was in here! *(He pauses.)* Ma'am, I hate to ask you this, but is your husband of a, well, musical nature?

LEE: I'm not sure I like where this conversation is going.

COFFEE: Well, is he?

LEE: The only thing he's suited for playing is a harp.

COFFEE: I'm sorry.

LEE: Yeah, three years now. I guess you could say that his heart exploded.

COFFEE: Exploded?

LEE: Yeah. Gave out on him completely.

COFFEE: I'm sorry to hear that.

LEE: Mmmm.

COFFEE: I don't imagine your children play --
(*She glares at him.*) Well, maybe it's behind
the counter. (*He walks towards the counter.*)
You have a lost and found here?

(*She blocks it off.*)

LEE: There's nothing back here but some coffee
pots cracked from the heat. (*He starts to move
around her, she blocks him off again.*) Do I
look like I'm sporting shades, a little white
cane, a tin cup?

COFFEE: No, ma'am.

LEE: And if the manager comes in and sees you
behind this counter, you know what happens to
me?

COFFEE: I guess you would see it...

(*Coffee looks at the matches in his hand. He looks
at a defiant Lee. He pauses.*)

LEE: There is one place in town I know of.

COFFEE: Yeah?

LEE: Antique store. Run by a guy named John-
son.

COFFEE: No kiddin'! It's gotta be closed by now.

LEE: You could at least look in the window, see if she's there!

COFFEE: Of course! And if she is, oh, man, I don't know what I'll do. Do you know him?

LEE: Not really.

COFFEE: Shit. Pardon. (*He rubs his stomach a bit as he speaks.*) There's gotta be some way to convince him that she's mine, just in case she's in there.

LEE: Here! (*She tosses him antacid.*) For your stomach.

COFFEE: Thanks!

(*He exits. Lee watches him. She takes a deep breath and picks up the pay phone again. She smacks it, as opposed to putting a dime in, then dials.*)

LEE: Austin, I know I raised you to answer a phone better. Don't you take that tone. Did Mr. Johnson call back? Yeah, well tell him to forget about it. No, I got nothing to sell him. Yeah. (*Shocked look.*) I'll be home someday, and when I do...don't you hang up on me! I'll whip your little...hello? Hello?

(She slams the phone and looks out the window. She pulls down the blinds. She flips over the closed sign. She goes to the off stage area and picks up the guitar. She emerges into sight for a moment and looks around. She goes off stage again, into the kitchen. She returns, takes a look around, smacks the jukebox, and a jazz tune begins. She removes her apron, and exits upstage. Lights change.)

SCENE 2: ANDY'S PIGGY, LATER

(The song changes. Another jazz number. Lee enters from the back with an unlit cigarette. She crosses to a stool at the counter, and picks up her lighter. She goes to light her cigarette but doesn't. She puts the lighter down. She picks up a book of matches, strikes a match, and lights her cigarette. She picks up another match, and strikes it, and puts it out. She repeats this several times, lost in thought. She stands up, ready to leave. She goes to the door, and unlocks it. She takes one last look around and sees that she has not dumped the coffee pots on the counter. She reacts. She takes one of the coffee pots and exits to the kitchen. Coffee enters and sits on a stool. He is no longer in a drunken stupor. Lee enters, and is shocked to see him.)

LEE: That was quick.

COFFEE: Didn't make it. Guess it's further than I thought.

LEE: Well, there's always tomorrow.

COFFEE: No. If someone picked her up, she could be in a thousand different places. Especially by tomorrow.

LEE: True.

COFFEE: But, that's the part I'm having trouble with ma'am. I can't remember seeing anyone.

LEE: Kind of hard seeing anybody when you're "face down with a mouthful of sand." (*Coffee doesn't respond.*) Come on, Mister. There are other guitars.

COFFEE: Not like this one.

LEE: I see. (*She picks up her keys from behind the counter.*) Stranger, I want to go home.

COFFEE: Isn't this place all night?

LEE: Not tonight. I'm having problems with my boy.

COFFEE: Ah.

LEE: So –

COFFEE: You been striking out?

LEE: Excuse me?

(Coffee walks over and picks up one of the matches off of the counter.)

COFFEE: These yours? Don't you use a lighter?

LEE: I'd really like to go –

COFFEE: Sticking with the little guy! See what I mean? Shit, you and I aren't so different after all.

LEE: Goodnight, stranger.

(She motions to the door.)

COFFEE: If I could just have a quick cup, before going.

LEE: Look, I really need to –

COFFEE: Just to wake me up, and then I'm gone.
A faded page of history.

(She considers.)

LEE: Okay, but this one you have to pay for.
Making me stay out all hours.

COFFEE: I'll get ya, don't worry.

LEE: Right.

(He pulls out a cigarette and a match.)

COFFEE: You know why it's so important for me to get to the ocean?

LEE: So you can take a bath?

COFFEE: I'm visiting my mama.

LEE: She a mermaid?

COFFEE: She was staying in Northern California. Right on the water. 'The view is nice', she says, 'come visit'. I meant to, but I never liked traveling. When Daddy died, she left Texas to be close to her brother. Then when he passed on, she moved into the retirement home. So, a month ago, I get the news. Mama died sitting at the beach, peaceful as Heaven. With her ukulele on her lap. She played ukulele, if you can believe it. Used to sing me lullabies when I was a kid. I just figured it was my turn, that's all. Go down to the beach sing something for her.

(Beat.)

LEE: That's something else.

COFFEE: What is?

LEE: Well, a man who wants to play guitar just for his mama.

COFFEE: What do you want to play it for?

(Beat.)

LEE: I don't play.

COFFEE: No?

LEE: But I used to see myself...well...singing.

COFFEE: Really?

LEE: Sure. I could see myself...oh, never mind.

COFFEE: No, let's hear it. You could see yourself what?

LEE: Naw, it's silly.

COFFEE: Silly? Come on, I'm about to strike a match on my cheek.

LEE: Oh. Well, I guess. I used to imagine myself, when I was a kid...you really want to hear this? *(He nods. She thinks about it. She might as well play along.)* I guess I could see myself as...some New York City Jazz Singer. You know what I mean?

(Coffee shakes his head.)

COFFEE: Never been out that far.

LEE: I see myself as this black woman, if you can believe it, all dressed in glitter, and twinkling under the lights. Oh, this is silly.