

## OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

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SETTING: Hank's Go-Go Rama. A strip-joint bar in Nevada. The open road. Various McDonalds: Liberal, Kansas; Mount Rushmore; Chernobyl. As always, the inside of the McDonalds is the same -- we know it's a different place by the backdrop or one specified signifying icon. No elaborate set changes, just unveilings. No elaborate sets for that matter either.

OPEN: Hank's. Babe appears on the runway stage and performs her striptease with an air of listlessness. She scans over the crowd's heads with her eyes. She moves out of the reach of a groping hand. She shakes her butt and a hand moves out and tucks a bill into her bikini bottom. She moves her ass closer and closer to the giver, almost grinding it in his face.

## BABE'S LAST NIGHT

## BABE

I know how you like it, Jimmy.  
*(She laughs at the look on his face)*  
 She can speak!  
*(She turns back around)*  
 Kiss it, baby!  
*(He leans in and she pushes his face back with her ass. Raucous laughter)*  
 You have to put up with my shit tonight, don't you boys?  
 Here to celebrate my last night, fellows?  
 I'm hitting the road. Me and my baby, we're off for a better life.  
 Give me some money, honey.  
*(She gyrates towards one man)*  
 There's a trailer park in Beaver Kill, N.Y....it has a swimming pool and a satellite dish  
 with two million channels.  
 My Aunt May --- you remember my Aunt May, boys.....silver tassels.  
 I'm going to work in her shop doing electrolysis. Don't see any unsightly hairs on me.  
 Who's buying me a drink when this is over? One....two...Harry.  
*(To a different man)*  
 What, no hand? You're new. Don't you like what you see?  
 Baby needs shoes, boy.  
*(jiggles at him)*  
 Car needs tires.  
 I could use a new g-string. Don't you think?

BABE *(Continued)*

This one might snap. Then where would I be?  
 This one might snap.  
 Broke a heel yesterday.  
 Might want some Mickey D's on the road.  
 Did I tell you --- I'm going to stop at every single golden arches from here to the East  
 Coast --Kansas, Miami, Denver  
 I'm thinking guinness book of world records.  
 My own yellow brick road lined with quarter pounders, hot apple pies.  
 Chocolate shakes.  
*(leans into him)*  
 I gotta eat!  
*(no response)*  
 I sent my Aunt May my tips -- put a down payment on a home for me at this place on  
 Route 17. The dealer's sign says Homes with Integrity.  
 Click my heels three times and I'll be there.  
 That's what I'm getting book-o-records and a home with Integrity.

They say where-ever you go, there's a Mickey D's....go inside and could be anywhere.  
 Don't you want to buy me a cup of coffee even?  
 Will you guys miss me, maybe?

*(From the back of the room, a young man, CAL, charges in)*

CAL

Babe?

BABE

Oh shit.

CAL

Get off of that stage, Babe!

Who's taking care of Cara?

*(Cal rushes the stage. Babe disappears out the back. He stops on the runway, temporarily blinded by the spotlight, a deer in headlights.)*

That's some welcome home!

*(rushes off after her)*

*Light change: Babe sits in a chair as if driving. On the seat next to Babe is a large rag doll or marionette; this is Babe and Cal's four year old daughter, Cara.*

### THE OPEN ROAD

(sound -- cachunk, cachunk of a car on the highway)

BABE

(mesmerized)

There's nothing around for miles and the land's stretching out flat until the hills and you think you're alone in your car, all alone in the world. Others have been here before -- trucker with a load of dead chickens, oil men and their wives, recreational vehicles, old town old time Mexican family. There was someone who built this road. But you're the only one in the right here and the right now, you're all alone in the world until you see it, rounding a curve, high above the next town, suspended in the air, like a sun -- the golden arches.

CASHIER

Welcome to the Golden Arches. May I take your order?

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE GOLDEN ARCHES

*(Lights up on a McDonald's counter. The Cashier, uniformed, stands at the ready. Babe stands holding Cara, at the counter)*

BABE

Hi. Say hello to the nice lady, honey. She's shy.

*(Cal leaps out from behind a booth)*

CAL

Stop right there.

BABE

What are you doing here, Cal?

CAL

You're coming with me, Babe. Coming home where you should be. There's something to be said for the ways of this country. There's something to be said for the family.

CASHIER

Are you ready to order?

BABE

Family?

CASHIER

And I bet you, cutie, would like a happy meal.

CAL

Our family.

BABE

You walked out.

CAL

Our home.

BABE

Repossessed.

*(Silence. The Cashier poised at the ready at the counter. Babe and Cal have nothing to say. Babe breaks it.)*

BABE

I'm on a mission here, Cal. I'm about to do something important with my life. You'll be reading about me in the pages of the book of records. I'm going to be a featured item in the museum hall of fame. Headlines, news stories, movies of the week. About me.

CAL

Stripper drives through across America.

BABE

C'mon, honey.  
(Grabs Cara)

CASHIER

Would you like something to go?

CAL

This is not the way you're supposed to be behaving. You're a mother. That's a privileged title. Mothers don't act this way.

BABE

We'll be the first mother and daughter team. Our two names printed for history. I should have sponsorship from the corporation. We'll take two of those happy meals.

CASHIER

One per child under twelve only!

CAL

You looked damn good up on that stage.

BABE

I have to tell you. I have a new sense of purpose. Life now has meaning. You wish you had thought of it first.

CAL

I've been watchin the news. Every 18 minutes I see what's happening in the world. They've dug up nuclear waste used as landfill under an eskimo town. TV cameras showed me twentyfour guys shot in the back in Africa. I was thisclose. I'm thisclose and I can't do anything to help so I change the channel. And on the Coast, authorities are baffled by the sudden rash of pelican mutilations, that included several ritualistic crucifixions. Big fucking birds dying like Christ. They blame the weather. Crazy winds. Do you think pelicans understand what's happening to them? They showed pictures! And I'm thinking don't they know that kids are watching cartoons right now. What if they changed the channel? These things are happening out in the world. I need to protect my daughter from this.

BABE

You left.

CAL

But I've come back.

*(Pulls out a gun and grabs Cara, holds to the gun to her head. The Cashier dives behind the counter.)*

CASHIER

Oh not again.

CAL

Come with me.

BABE

Cal. Don't do this, Cal.

CAL

These are things I just can't allow her to see.

*(He runs out with Cara. The Cashier rises from behind the counter with the Dorothy dress from the Wizard of Oz on, topped by his uniform hat)*

THE CHASE

CASHIER

Welcome to the Golden Arches, Liberal Kansas. Home of Dorothy and Toto. May I take your order?

BABE

Have you seen this man? This child?

*(She holds out a milk carton with Cara's and Cal's faces on them)*

BABE

His full name is California Bentley the fifth. Maybe you've seen her.

*(The Cashier rips off the Dorothy dress and puts mini-replica of Mount Rushmore on the counter)*

CASHIER

Welcome to the Golden Arches, Mount Rushmore. May I take your order?

BABE

Small girl short with tall man. She likes to eat french fries. Do you know anyone who fits that description? He wouldn't give me money for an abortion. He talked about love, he talked about family and house and someone to wake up to before they go off to work the next morning. He talked about food and sex and IRAs and pension funds. So late there

were only a few months left to bear and over his head I saw a neon sign flashing "this way out". He talked me into it.

CASHIER

Oh I don't think so.

BABE

He talked about love.

CASHIER

You just missed him.

*(Babe runs out. Cal in the car with Cara. Ca-chunk, Ca-chunk)*

CAL

Your great great great great grandfather moved all his family west on the wagon train. He was thinking about gold, new land, a clean life. America was even bigger then. Took a year and a half to get across it. A year and a half. No telephones, no planes. He and his wife had their first child on the road and they named him California because that was going to be their new home. The two of them died in Nevada, trampled somehow -- truth got lost a long time ago. We passed down the name California, like inheriting a dream. although none of the other Cal's ever made it there -- war, heart attacks, cancer. Something always happened to them first. That's why I was hoping you'd be a boy. To carry on.

*(The Cashier with uniform unbuttoned slightly and hauls out a big fan and turns it on. Cal runs in with Cara.)*

CASHIER

Welcome to Golden Arches, Death Valley. May I take your order?

CAL

Where's your bathroom?

*(Cashier points)*

CASHIER

You've got to buy something, you know. That's the way it works. Company policy.

*(Cal stops short)*

CAL

Death Valley. Are we still in Nevada?

CASHIER

California.

*(Cal whoops with excitement and rushes off. Babe enters. Shoves the milk carton in the Cashier's face. Cashier points. Babe runs off towards the bathroom and runs back on.)*

BABE

Gone.

CASHIER

Isn't that always the way? What can I get you?

*(Babe in her car; Cal and Cara in his. Dialogue overlaps)*

BABE

The miles are dropping back fast. I round the next curve hoping for his taillights, hoping for a skid mark.

CAL

I never knew there was so much space in the world.

BABE

Some sign. I am quite sure at this moment I am the only human being left on this earth.

CAL

Straddling the white line. Melted tar. I could get into this.

BABE

Driving.

CAL

Driving.

BABE

Where are they?

CAL

Adventure!

BABE

I didn't think what I was asking for was too much.

I thought I could put it all behind me. But every time I think I've outrun my past I look into the side view -- to check my blind spot -- and it tells me objects in mirror are closer than they appear. So I look to the future and I can just make it out way up in the sky casting light over it's own town and as I pull off the exit ramp I can barely make out the words underneath --- billions and billions sold. And I'm just one.

*(Lights out on Babe. Cal and Cara in his car)*

CAL

Everyone will know who we are, Cara. Headlines. News stories. Movies of the week. You'll tell her grandchildren. There will be legends. We are legends.

*(Spotlight on the Cashier, diving behind the counter and coming up with a new prop for each new place)*

CASHIER

Welcome to the Golden Arches, Da Bronx, What do you want?  
 Welcome to the Golden Arches, Waco, Texas, check your automatic at the door.  
 Welcome to the Golden Arches, Paris, France, What do you want from me?  
 Welcome to the Golden Arches, The Vatican, Present your petitions here.  
 Welcome to the Golden Arches, Kobe, Japan. No shakes today.  
 Welcome to the Golden Arches, the Outback. Koala burgers today mate.  
 Ho Ho Ho welcome to the Golden Arches, The North Pole. What can my elves bring you today?

*(Back in Golden Arches. Babe stands at the cash register dressed in a white radiation suit and scrub mask. Cal and Cara, years older, enter; Cara can be either a full grown doll or mannequin or a live person.)*

BABE

Welcome to the Golden Arches, Chernobyl. May I take --  
*(She recognizes them; Cal doesn't recognize her)*  
 Oh.

CAL

This is it. This is the last one, Cara. I thought I had seen everything. And then they'd build another. So we kept going. I thought I'd seen everything. Me and my girl. We did it.

BABE

Finally.

CAL

Yes. Finally.  
 I don't know what we do now. Cara thinks luxury is red formica tables with yellow plastic chairs. Her vocabulary's kind of limited but she can order a quarter pounder with fries in 16 different languages. She doesn't have many friends, do you, honey? I'll miss this place. Beginning to feel like home, y'know?

BABE

I know.

CAL

At least she'll have the satisfaction of knowing that she was the first. That's something to boast about.

BABE

If she could make that claim. But she can't.

*(Babe stands on the counter)*

*(Music plays)*

*(Babe begins to dance, doing a strip by teasing off her radiation garb, underneath is her bikini. She does the mask last.)*

BABE

I know how you used to like it, Cal.

*(She laughs at his look)*

You thought you had done me in.

Didn't you know that that even though you stole my future I would have another?

Kiss it baby.

Would you look at my little girl.

You're so beautiful. Just like your mommy.

*(She takes off the mask last. She looks sickly; the beginnings of radiation poisoning.)*

I got here. And I thought, I can go home now.

I want to go home -- but, really, I have no home.

*(She clicks her three times. Nothing happens)*

END PLAY