

THE PHILADELPHIA

By David Ives

CHARACTERS: Al: California Cool; 20s or 30s
Mark: frazzled; 20s or 30s
Waitress: weary; as you will

SETTING: A restaurant.

A table, red-checkered cloth, two chairs and a specials board.

AL is at the restaurant table, with the WAITRESS

WAITRESS: Can I help you?

AL: Do you know you would look fantastic on a wide screen?

WAITRESS: Uh-huh.

AL: Seventy millimeters.

WAITRESS: Look. Do you want to see a menu, or what?

AL: Let's negotiate, here. What's the soup du jour today?

WAITRESS: Soup of the day you got a choice of Polish duck blood or cream of kidney.

AL: Beautiful. Beautiful! Kick me in a kidney.

WAITRESS: *(Writes it down)* You got it.

AL: Any oyster crackers on your seabed?

WAITRESS: Nope. All out.

AL: How about the specials today, spread out your options.

WAITRESS: You got your deep fried gizzards.

AL: Fabulous.

WAITRESS: Calves' brains with okra.

AL: You are a temptress.

WAITRESS: And pickled pigs' feet.

AL: Pigs. feet. I love it. Put me down for a quadruped.

WAITRESS: If you say so.

AL: Any sprouts to go on those feet?

WAITRESS: Iceberg.

AL: So be it. *(WAITRESS exits, as MARK enters, looking shaken and bedraggled.)*

MARK: Al!

AL: Hey, there, Marcus. What's up?

MARK: Jeez!

AL: What's going on, buddy?

MARK: I don't get it, Al. I don't understand it.

AL: You want something? Want a drink? I'll call the waitress...

MARK: No! No! Don't even try. *(Gets a breath.)* I don't know what's going on today, Al. But it's weird.

AL: What, like...?

MARK: Right from the time I got up.

AL: What is it? What's the story?

MARK: Well—just for an example. This morning I stopped off at a drug store to buy some aspirin. This is at a big drug store, right?

AL: Yeah...

MARK: I go up to the counter, the guy says “What can I do for you?” I say, “Give me a bottle of aspirin.” The guy gives me this funny look and he says, “Oh, we don’t have that, sir.” I said to him, “You’re a drug store and you don’t have any aspirin?”

AL: Did they have Bufferin?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: Advil?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: Extra-strength Tylenol?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: But no aspirin.

MARK: No!

AL: Wow...

MARK: And that’s the kind of weird thing that’s been happening all day. It’s like, I go to a newsstand to buy the DAILY NEWS, the guy never even heard of it.

AL: Could have been a misunderstanding.

MARK: I asked every place—nobody had the news! I had to read the TORONTO HAIRDRESSER. Or this. I go into a Deli at lunchtime to buy a sandwich, the guy tells me they don’t have any Pastrami. How can they be a Deli if they don’t have Pastrami?

AL: Was this a Korean deli?

MARK: This was a Kosher from Jerusalem Deli. “Oh we don’t carry that, sir.” He says to me. “Have some tongue.”

AL: Mmm.

MARK: I just got into a cab, the guy says he doesn’t go to 56th street! He offers to take me to Newark instead!

AL: Mm-hm.

MARK: Looking at me like I’m an alien or something!

AL: Mark. Settle down.

MARK: “Oh, I don’t go there, sir.”

AL: Settle down. Take a breath.

MARK: Do you know what this is?

AL: Sure.

MARK: What is it? What’s happening to me?

AL: Don’t panic. You’re in a Philadelphia.

MARK: I’m in a what?

AL: You’re in a Philadelphia. That’s all.

MARK: But I’m in—

AL: Yes, physically you’re in New York. But, *metaphysically*, you’re in a Philadelphia.

MARK: I’ve never heard of this!

AL: You see, inside of what we know as reality there are these pockets, these black holes called Philadelphias. If you fall into one, you run up against exactly the kinda stuff that’s been happening to you all day.

MARK: Why?

AL: Because in a Philadelphia, no matter what you ask for, you can't get it. You ask for something, they're not going to have it. You want to do something, it ain't gonna get done. You want to go somewhere, you can't get there from here.

MARK: Good God. So this is very serious.

AL: Just remember, Marcus, this is a condition named for the town that invented the Cheese Steak. Something that nobody in his right mind would willingly ask for.

MARK: And I thought I was just having a very bad day...

AL: Sure. Millions of people have spent entire lifetimes inside a Philadelphia and never even knew it. Look at the city of the Philadelphia itself. Hopelessly trapped forever inside a Philadelphia. And do they know it?

MARK: Well, what can I do? Should I just kill myself now and get it over with?

AL: You try to kill yourself in a Philadelphia, you're only gonna get hurt, babe.

MARK: So what do I do?

AL: Best thing you can do is wait it out. Someday the great cosmic train will risk you outa the City of Brotherly Love and off to someplace happier.

MARK: You're pretty mellow today.

AL: Yeah, well. Everybody has to be someplace.

(WAITRESS enters.)

WAITRESS: Is your name Allen Chase?

AL: It is indeed.

WAITRESS: There was a phone call for you. Your boss?

AL: Okay.

WAITRESS: He says you're fired.

AL: Cool! Thanks.

(WAITRESS Exits.)

So anyway, you have this problem...

MARK: Did she say you got fired?

AL: Yeah. I wonder what happened to my pigs' feet...

MARK: Al---!? You loved your job!

AL: Hey. No sweat.

MARK: How can you be so calm?!

AL: Easy. You're in a Philadelphia? I woke up in a Los Angeles. And life is beautiful! You know Susie packed up and left me this morning.

MARK: Susie left you?

AL: And frankly, Scarlet, I don't give a damn. I say, go and God bless and may your dating pool be Olympic sized.

MARK: But your job. The garment district is your life!

AL: So I'll turn it into a movie script and sell it to Paramount. Toss in some sex, add a little emotional blah, blah, blah, pitch to Jack and Dusty, you've got a buddy movie with a garment background. Not relevant enough? We'll throw in a hole in the ozone, make it E.C.

MARK: E.C.?

AL: Environmentally Correct. Have you heard about this hole in the ozone?

MARK: Sure.

AL: Marcus, I love this concept. I embrace this ozone. Sure, some people are gonna get hurt in the process, meantime everybody else'll tan a little faster.

MARK: So this is a Los Angeles...?

AL: Well. Everybody has to be someplace.

MARK: Wow.

AL: You want my advice? Enjoy your Philadelphia. Sit back and order yourself a beer and a burger and chill out for a while.

MARK: But I can't order anything. Life is great for your out there on your cosmic beach, but whatever I ask for, I'll get a cheese steak or something.

AL: No. There's a very simple rule of thumb in a Philadelphia. Ask for the opposite.

MARK: What?

AL: If you can't get what you ask for, ask for the opposite and you'll get what you want. You want the DAILY NEWS, ask for the TIMES. You want Pastrami, ask for Tongue.

MARK: Oh.

AL: Works great with women. What is more opposite than the opposite sex?

MARK: Uh—huh?

AL: So. Would you like a Bud?

MARK: I sure could use a ---

AL: No. Stop. Do you want a ... Bud?

MARK: No. I don't want a Bud.

(WAITRESS enters and goes to the specials board.)

AL: Good. Now there's the waitress. Order yourself a Bud and a burger, but do not ask for a Bud and a burger.

MARK: Waitress!

AL: Don't call her. She won't come.

MARK: Oh.

AL: You're in a Philadelphia, so just figure, she can get lost.

MARK: She can just get lost.

AL: You don't need that waitress.

MARK: That waitress can get lost. Hey, waitress! Get lost.

(Waitress turns to him.)

WAITRESS: Can I help you, sir?

AL: That's how you get service in a Philadelphia.

WAITRESS: Can I help you?

MARK: Uh—no thanks.

WAITRESS: Okay, what'll you have? *(Takes out her pad.)*

AL: Excellent.

MARK: Well—how about some O.J.?

WAITRESS: Sorry. Squeezer's broken.

MARK: A glass of milk?

WAITRESS: Cow's dried.

MARK: Eggnog?

WAITRESS: Just ran out.

MARK: Cuppa coffee?

WAITRESS: Oh, we don't have that, sir. *(MARK and AL exchange a look at nod, the waitress has spoken the magic words...)*

MARK: Got any ale?

WAITRESS: Nope.

MARK: Stout?

WAITRESS: Nope.

MARK: Porter?

WAITRESS: Just beer.

MARK: That's too bad. How about a Heineken?

WAITRESS: Heineken? Try again.

MARK: Rolling rock?

WAITRESS: Outa stock.

MARK: Schlitz?

WAITRESS: Nix.

MARK: Beck's?

WAITRESS: Next.

MARK: Sapporo?

WAITRESS: Tomorrow.

MARK: Lone Star?

WAITRESS: Hardy-har.

MARK: Bud light?

WAITRESS: Just plain Bud is all we got.

MARK: No thanks?

WAITRESS: *(Calls.)* Gimme a Bud! *(To Mark)* Anything to eat?

MARK: Nope?

WAITRESS: Name it.

MARK: Pork Chops.

WAITRESS: *(Writes down.)* Hamburger...

MARK: Medium.

WAITRESS: Well don...

MARK: Baked potato.

WAITRESS: Fries....

MARK: And some Zucchini.

WAITRESS: Slice of raw. *(Exits calling)* Burn one!

AL: Marcus, that was excellent.

MARK: Thank you.

AL: Excellent. You sure you've never done this before?

MARK: I've spend so much of my life asking for the wrong thing without knowing it, doing it on purpose comes easy.

AL: I hear you.

MARK: I could have saved myself a lot of trouble if I had screwed up on purpose all those years. Maybe I was in a Philadelphia all along and never new it!

AL: You might have been in a Baltimore. They're practically the same.

(WAITRESS enters with a glass a beer and a plate.)

WAITRESS: Okay. Here's your Bud. *(Sets that in front of Mark.)* And one cheese steak. *(Sets that in front of Al and starts to go.)*

AL: No. I ordered Cream of Kidney and two pairs of feet.
WAITRESS: Oh, we don't have that, sir.
AL: I beg your pardon?
WAITRESS: We don't have that, sir.
AL: *(Small pause...to Mark)* You jerk! I'm in your Philadelphia.
MARK: I'm sorry, Al.
AL: You brought be into your Philadelphia!
MARK: I didn't know it was contagious.
AL: Oh, God, please don't let me be in a Philadelphia! Don't let me be in a...
MARK: Shouldn't you ask for the opposite? I mean, since you're in a Philad---
AL: Don't you tell me about life in a Philadelphia.
MARK: Maybe you're not really—
AL: I taught you everything you know about Philly! Don't tell me how to act in a Philadelphia!
MARK: But maybe you're not really in a Philadelphia!
AL: Do you see the cheese on the steak? What do I need for proof? The liberty bell!?
Waitress, bring me a glass of water.
WAITRESS: Water? Don't have that, sir.
AL: *(To Mark)* "We don't have water"--? What, you think we're in a sudden drought or something? *(Suddenly realizes)* Yikes, I just lost my job...! Susie left me! I gotta make some phone calls. *(To Waitress)* 'scuse me, where's the pay phone?
WAITRESS: Sorry, we don't have a pay ph—
AL: Of course you don't have a pay phone, of course you don't! Let me outa here!
(Exits.)
MARK: I don't know. It's not that bad in a Philadelphia.
WAITRESS: Could be worse. I've been in a Cleveland all week.
MARK: A Cleveland. What's that like?
WAITRESS: It's like death, without the advantages.
MARK: Really? Care to stand?
WAITRESS: Don't mind if I do. *(She sits.)*
MARK: I hope you won't reveal your name.
WAITRESS: Sharon
MARK: *(Holds out his hand)* Good bye.
WAITRESS: Hello. *(They shake.)*
MARK: *(Indicating the cheese steak)* Want to starve?
WAITRESS: Thanks! *(She picks up the cheese steak and starts eating.)*
MARK: Yeah...everybody has to be someplace...*(Leans across the table with a smile.)* So...

BLACKOUT

WAITRESS: Oh, we don't have that, sir.