

A TABLE IS A TABLE

Based on the story by
Peter Bichsel

Adapted by
Diego Quemada-Diez

5/22/01

Diego Quemada-Diez
1006 Echo Park avenue, #7
Los Angeles, CA 90026
Phone: 213-250 3241

1 INT. BOX - 1

OLD THEATER CURTAINS OPEN.

A RED CLAY TABLE inside a square box.

A LITTLE GIRL'S HANDS enter and pick it up.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.)
"A Table Is A Table"

2 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - DAY 2

GIRL'S VOICE
I want to tell the story of an old man,
of a man who has given up talking.
A man who has grown tired, too tired to
smile, too tired to frown.

An OLD MAN in a small, depressing studio apartment. He sits
at a table, his back to us. A wardrobe, a bed, alarm clock.
Everything is old, covered with dust. We PUSH IN to him.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)
He lives at the end of the street, near
the crossroads. So little distinguishes
him from others.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PHOTO

Old-fashioned black and white photo of kids at school,
dressed formally. MOVE IN closer to one BOY.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)
Once he was a child...

CLOSE UP of Old Man. His grey clothes, white shirt, collars
to wide for him, dry wrinkled hands, his mouth.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)
Once he was married and had children.
Once he had a job in a factory. Once he
lived in a different town.

Now we see his face. We PUSH IN towards the Old Man sitting
at table.

He looks at an alarm clock. We HEAR the clock TICKING.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)

Now he lives in one room.

Wide shot of the room. The room is still, static.

THE OLD MAN looks at all the objects in his room: chair, picture on the wall, bed, wardrobe, photo album, carpet, newspapers, mirror.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)

And everyday is the same as the last, and everyday is the same as the next.

Wind lightly ruffles old curtains by window.

He rises slowly from the table, puts a heavy grey coat on, opens door, goes out. He seems unexcited -- this is routine.

3 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - DAY 3

The Old Man trudges down the stairs. We HEAR his FOOTSTEPS.

4 EXT. STREET - DAY 4

The Old Man walks down the street: It is grey, industrial. He passes three OLDER MEN who chat, read newspapers, watch the world go by in folding chairs. He passes them and exchanges a few polite words.

He continues past them, alone, silent.

5 EXT. STREET - LATER 5

The Old Man returns from his walk, passes the OLDER MEN again, nods.

6 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - NIGHT 6

The Old Man trudges back up the stairs...

7 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CORRIDOR - NIGHT 7

As he passes the neighbor's door, a LITTLE GIRL (9) peers at him through a half-open door. She closes the door, hiding, shy. Old man enters his apartment.

8 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 8

He takes off his coat, sits at the table, tired.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.)
This never changed, even on Sundays it
was the same.

We hear the alarm clock TICKING.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(cont'd)
Then, one day, there was a special day.

THE OLD MAN looks at all objects around him: chair, bed,
alarm clock, mirror, wardrobe. We HEAR the clock TICK. Gets
louder and louder.

He looks down, desperate. Then he rages, grabs the alarm
clock, stands up throws it at the door. The clock stops
ticking.

Silence.

A knock on the door.

The Old Man opens the door. Nobody out there.

A small box full of clay figures sits at his doorstep.

He picks it up and stares at the work of art, thinking.

It shows happy people in a sunny, gorgeous day. Sun, flowers,
a red table, green trees, blue sky, different objects of
different sizes arranged in a surreal way.

THE OLD MAN observes all the details, the colors are
saturated and magical. He marvels at the way the kid has seen
reality, full of imagination, inspiration, creativity. He
feels inspired, happy and excited.

He walks back into the room.

The old man's eyes roll looking nervously around the room.

He then looks at all objects around him with naughty eyes:
chair, bed, alarm clock, mirror, wardrobe. He turns sad.

Bulbs in the room start flickering.

He smiles slightly. Stares at the bed.

GIRL'S VOICE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Then he had an idea. "Why isn't the bed
called picture?"

He smiles, and starts laughing, full of joy. His laughter
gets louder and louder.

8 CONTINUED: (2)

8

We hear the neighbors banging on the wall.

GIRL'S VOICE (CONT'D)
He laughed and laughed until the
neighbors shouted "Quiet!"

9 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

9

Little girl peeking through keyhole.

10 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

10

GIRL'S VOICE
And from then on, he called the bed
"picture."

He smiles, proud of his idea. His hair is messed up. He looks
at the chair.

GIRL'S VOICE (CONT'D)
He called the chair "alarm clock."

Smiles, looks at the mirror. Unbuttons his shirt.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He called the mirror "chair."

Series of fast cuts: We see each object as he renames it -
wardrobe, picture, alarm clock, radio.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Newspaper... Table... Photo album...
Lamp...

He looks around the room, excited, like a kid playing. He
grabs the photo album.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Mirror.

He opens the photo album and finds an old picture of his mom.
He smiles at her like a little baby.

11 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

11

The Old Man lies in bed, awake. He rises quickly. He's more
animated, excited.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.)
So: In the morning the photo album rang,
the old man got out of the picture and
took his clothes out of the newspaper.

He gets dressed fast, eager to begin the day.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He thought this was fun. He practiced all day long and impressed the words in his memory.

The Old Man spins in the middle of his room.

Intercut with him spinning, we see still images of objects: ice cream truck, boat, tree, duck. About 60 stills in 10 seconds.

He slowly stops spinning and looks at himself in the mirror, smiling.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He wasn't a man any more -- he was a foot, and his foot was a morning and the morning a man.

12 INT. STORE - DAY 12

He receives several blue notebooks happily.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.)
The old man bought himself blue notebooks and filled them with the new words.

13 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 13

The Old Man writes in his notebooks busily, excited.

GIRL'S VOICE
It kept him very busy... and he was rarely seen in the street.

He finishes writing on the last page of his notebook. Closes it and puts it in a pile of five other blue notebooks.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The more new words he learned, the more he forgot the old ones. He now had a language that belonged to him alone.

14 EXT. STREET - DAY 14

The old man looks at a BILLBOARD. He seems confused.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.)
Before too long, he had almost forgotten his old language.

15 INT. STORE - DAY 15

The Old Man asks for something. A HAND gives him a head of lettuce. He returns it, shaking his head "No."

GIRL'S VOICE

He had to search his mind for a long time
for the names that people call things.

16 EXT. STREET - DAY 16

Old man walking into the distance. Small in frame. Turns around a corner.

He walks looking down. The little girl looks at him as he passes by.

GIRL'S VOICE

And he became too frightened to talk to
people.

Old man walking. Very small in frame.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

His picture people call bed.
His carpet people call table.

17 OMITTED 17

18 EXT. BRIDGE - DAY 18

Old man walking across fenced bridge.

GIRL'S VOICE

His alarm clock people call chair.
His bed people call newspaper.

19 EXT. STREET - DAY 19

Old man nodding to a NEIGHBOR walking by, looking away.

GIRL'S VOICE

His newspaper people call wardrobe.
His table people call picture.

The Old Man's eyes: frightened, looking around.

GIRL'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The old man couldn't understand people
any more; that wasn't so bad.

20 EXT. STREET - DAY 20

The old man passes the three OLDER MEN. He avoids talking to them.

GIRL'S VOICE

What was much worse was -- they couldn't understand him anymore.

21 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - DAY 21

He slowly goes up the stairs.

22 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CORRIDOR - DAY 22

He opens the door to his apartment. He is about to go inside when he feels someone behind him, pulling his coat. He turns.

LITTLE GIRL stares at him, smiles shyly.

OLD MAN looks at her, wants to reach out to her. He hears a man walking. Afraid, he pulls away. He goes inside apartment. Closes the door.

LITTLE GIRL looks through keyhole.

GIRL'S VOICE

He kept quiet, spoke only to himself.

23 INT. OLD MAN'S APARTMENT - DAY 23

The Old Man in silence. All the objects in the room are interchanged. A big ball of messed up objects sits in the middle of room.

Old theater curtains close.

24 OMITTED 24