

IT'S ALL IN THE GAME

by

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## SYNOPSIS

In the recreation room of the Shangri-la Senior Living Community, two residents, BABE and SHEILA, bond over ping pong, life after death...and Frank Sinatra. Part of the fun of this play is that the game is played in pantomime, with the actors making a clicking noise each time their "racket" makes contact with the "ball." In fact, there is no table, there are no rackets or balls. But the women are indeed speaking and playing the game.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

BABE: 90-something, former showgirl, still  
brassy and bold.

SHEILA: 80-something, former librarian, quieter.

**All ethnicities welcome.**

SETTING

Game room of the Shangri-la Senior Living Community,  
at the ping pong table, seen by the characters, but  
not the audience.

TIME

Today.

SETTING: Game Room at the Shangri-la Senior Living Community.

AT RISE: BABE and SHEILA in conversation.

BABE

You play ping pong?

SHEILA

Years ago. And I mean decades of years. You?

BABE

I was champion 5 summers in a row at the Hotel Beauclaire in the Poconos...when I used to dance in shows there. Ohhh, I guess that was...well, I don't have enough fingers to count back that far.

*(BOTH laugh.)*

SHEILA

Don't you find it amazing that you're this age?

BABE

How old do you think I am?

SHEILA

About my age.

BABE

I probably have a couple of years on you. I seem to have a couple of years on everyone around here. I danced into my mid-60s, but those days are gone too. Once in a while, I do a coupla chorus-line kicks, just to see if I still got it.

SHEILA

You were a professional dancer?

BABE

I was a showgirl, toots. High kicks in high heels. I sang too.

SHEILA

You've still got the build of a dancer.

BABE

My secret: foundation garments. I still get mine personally sized and made. Just because I feel ancient doesn't mean I have to sag.

SHEILA

When you're young nobody tells you about the sagging, do they?

BABE

We wouldn't have believed it even if they had. Am I right?

SHEILA

*(chuckles)*

Did you ever think we'd look ever be our grannies' when we got to their age?

BABE

I thought I'd sail from my frisky 40s straight into my elegant 80s, with maybe a wrinkle or two and an elbow twinge when it rains...but--

SHEILA

--it didn't turn out that way?

BABE

Look at me! I've got more wrinkles than a cotton shirt left overnight in the dryer! How the hell did *that* happen?

SHEILA

They say wrinkles give a face character.

BABE

Only the overly optimistic say that.

SHEILA

Don't forget the shaky skin on the arms...The marbled calves. Yechh!

BABE

No amount of weightlifting can prevent those.

*(sighs)*

I used to have beautiful arms.

SHEILA

I spent years as a librarian, and let me tell you, shelving books all that time does wonders for your biceps. I wore sleeveless shirts well into my 50s. This used to be a bicep.

*(laughs at HERSELF)*

BABE

Impressive. What do you say we play a game?

SHEILA

Oh, I don't know... I haven't done it since I was a kid.

BABE

Live a little. It's all in fun. I'm Babe, by the way.

SHEILA

Sheila, I'm not kidding about how bad I am. You might find a game with me very boring.

BABE

I've got time. I assume you've got time. There are the paddles. Let's do it. And may the best hag win.

SHEILA

Okay.

BABE

I need to warm up first.

SHEILA

For ping pong?

BABE

I always warm up before doing anything physical.

SHEILA

Ping pong is *physical*?

BABE

The way I play, it is.  
(grunts as she stretches)

SHEILA

(watches)  
You're not a ping pong hustler, are you?

BABE

Is that really a thing?

SHEILA

I have no idea.

BABE

Because if it isn't, I'd like to make it a thing. A little extra cash never hurt a retiree. I love the idea.

SHEILA

Done yet?

BABE

Not quite.

*(runs into place for a few steps)*

*Finito.* Wanna serve first?

SHEILA

You go. I need to get the feel of the game again. It's been so long.

BABE

Here we go.

*("serves," and each time the "ball" hits the "racket," whoever makes contact, makes a click sound.)*

SHEILA

*(hits it, clicks)*

You have got some serve!

*(Back-and-forth, they play, clicking away.)*

BABE

Look at you! Are you sure you're not the ping-pong hustler?

SHEILA

*(laughs)*

Do you think two hustlers have ever tried to hustle one another?

BABE

In general? Or in ping-pong?

SHEILA

In general.

BABE

That's what hustlers do. The trick is, not getting caught at it.

SHEILA

Remember that old?--

BABE

--that old Paul Newman movie, *The Hustler*? I loved that movie. And *him*, of course.

SHEILA

Isn't it awful when the romantic crushes of your youth die?

BABE

Makes you feel so old.

*(THEY bat the "ball" back and forth, clicking)*

BABE (again)

Ready to play a real game?

SHEILA

What's the prize for the winner?

BABE

Let's say...a box of wine?

SHEILA

Sounds good. To twenty-one?

BABE

Sure.

*(THEY play a few rounds, without comment, but) clicking)*

SHEILA

*(slightly breathless)*

This is a bit more arduous than I remembered.

*(keeps playing, BOTH clicking)*

Grandkids?

BABE

Never had kids so...no.

SHEILA

That's a shame. You would have been a fun grandma.

BABE

Never met the right guy to reproduce with. You?

SHEILA

Two kids. One of each. Four grandkids, two of each.

BABE

You see them much?

SHEILA

Not as much as I want. But I guess every grandmother says that. Do you keep in touch with friends from your dancing days?

BABE

A few. They're a hoot. We get together on our birthdays, holidays, vacation together--the usual for old single broads.

*(pauses)*

Lean closer.

*(stages whispers)*

I slept with Sinatra.

SHEILA

You. Are. Joking!

BABE

Nope. Did the deed with the dude. You ever heard the saying, "It's Sinatra's world, we just live in it." I promise you that it is true. But he was a real gentleman. Every...inch of him.

SHEILA

Really? You hear not-so-nice stories about his manners. Or used to.

BABE

I promise you--he knew how to treat a lady. First-class all the way.

*(pauses)*

Mmmm, that was some weekend. Probably the best in my life.

SHEILA

Too bad you never married.

BABE

I said I never met the right guy, I never said I didn't get married.

SHEILA

More than once?

BABE

Four times. Well, four-and-a-half.

SHEILA

Half?

BABE

One of those drunken Vegas things. We regretted it five minutes later. And had it annulled pretty fast. We hardly knew each other.

SHEILA

Do you ever regret the divorces?

BABE

Naaahhh...

*(thinks)*

Well, maybe the annulment sometimes. I've been alone a for long time now. It might have been nice to play the back nine of life with someone. How about you?

SHEILA

I married a white-collar criminal.

BABE

Get out!

SHEILA

I kid you not. When I married him, he was just a slightly shady accountant. With good hair. But he got in with the wrong crowd, cooked their books, and went to prison for it.

BABE

Did you stand by your man and wait for him to serve his time?

SHEILA

Fuhgedabouddit! He stole all my savings to pay back the government!

BABE

That is so low.

SHEILA

Brushed him off my shoulders like dandruff!

*(vigorous back-and-forth and clicking)*

BABE

He took advantage of your trusting face.

SHEILA

Do I really have a trusting face?

BABE

Definitely.

*(THEY play without speaking for a few rounds, clicking.)*

SHEILA

*("hits")*

My point!

BABE

Sorry. I wasn't concentrating. Thinking about Half-Man. That's what I call Mr. Annulment to myself.

SHEILA

What was his real name?

BABE

*(stops, thinks)*

You know, I can't remember. Wait a minute. I'll get it. I have only thought of him as Half-Man for so long...

*(thinks)*

Ah! I know it now. Hercules.

SHEILA

No!

BABE

His stage name. No last name. Just Hercules. He was a body builder in Mae West's show. We didn't know each other very long, so I never learned his real name. Isn't that sad?

SHEILA

Kind of.

BABE

I called him Herc. For the short time we were married, I called him Herc.

SHEILA

That's cute. I once had a little Yorkie that I named Herc. Tough little guy. Fought off a sewer rat once.

BABE

What was *your* husband's name?

SHEILA

Leon. I always hated that name. Then I hated *him*. He wanted to name our son Leon Junior, but I put my foot down to that. I named our boy Pablo.

BABE

Ooooh, I like that.

SHEILA

And our daughter, I named her Paloma.

BABE

Also, very nice. I think first names are very important. They can start a kid off for good or bad. Did I tell you I slept with Sinatra?

(hits)

Out!

SHEILA

You mentioned it.

(pauses)

Is your birth name Babe...or is that a nickname?

BABE

Nickname. I'm the youngest of seven kids. So, they called me "Babe." I didn't even know my real name until I was eight years old.

(pauses)

My sisters and brothers are all gone now, of course.

SHEILA

So, what's your real name?

BABE

(pauses)

Wilhelmina. Same as my mother.

SHEILA

Wilhelmina! Really! You do *not* look like a Wilhelmina to me. Not that it's an unattractive name or anything--

BABE

Please. It's a *terrible* name. I hate it. I always liked being called Babe. Still do. Makes me feel young. Besides, what kind of showgirl is named Wilhelmina?

SHEILA

Babe does sound a better fit for your line of work.

*(vigorous back-and-forth, vigorous clicking;  
BABE "hits.")*

SHEILA (cont.)

Out!

BABE

Are you sure you haven't played for years? You are very good.

SHEILA

I'm just coordinated, I guess.

*(plays)*

Can I ask--how long have you lived here at Shangri-la Senior Living Community?

BABE

A few years. You?

SHEILA

Three months.

BABE

And...?

SHEILA

And...what?

BABE

What's your take?

SHEILA

On which? The people? The place? The management?

BABE

All of the above.

SHEILA

The management, eh. The place itself, pretty nice. Most of the ghouls who live here are--how can I say this nicely?--

BABE

--bores. Just waiting to die. Or eat. Have you seen how early they line up for dinner? Like it's gonna be their last supper and don't want to miss a morsel.

SHEILA

Sad.

BABE

Not just sad. A waste. Of life. Here at Shangri-la, you can conversate, swim in the pool, play shuffleboard and whatnot till you're blue in the face, but hardly anybody takes advantage of the amen--what do you call them--?

SHEILA

Amenities?

BABE

That's it. Amenities. I saved up my whole life to live in a place like this. I want to make sure that every day I have left counts for something.

SHEILA

That is a great attitude. It really is.

*("hits")*

BABE

Thanks. Out!

SHEILA

I try to do the same, but it's not always so easy.

BABE

Did I say it was easy? No, it's not easy. But you gotta try. Am I right? While you're still breathing, you gotta try.

*(hits the ball)*

Out!

SHEILA

Have you been keeping score? I got so wrapped up in our conversation, I forgot to count.

BABE

*(laughs)*

Me too.

*(THEY keep playing, clicking.)*

BABE (cont.)

What do you say we make *this* game interesting?

SHEILA

*How interesting?*

BABE

Let's play for something more than a box of cheap wine.

SHEILA

*(nervous)*

Such as...?

BABE

I'm thinking...two boxes of cheap wine? *And* a pair of gloves. I'm always cold in this place.

SHEILA

It's a deal.

BABE

Do you play cards?

SHEILA

I always wanted to, but I never learned. Except for Solitaire. I play that.

BABE

Every old lady in the world can play Solitaire. How about Five-card stud? Texas Hold 'Em?

SHEILA

Sorry.

BABE

Know what would be fun? If they had gambling nights here. At Shangri-la.

SHEILA

I'd learn to play if they had that!

BABE

I used to play roulette and craps when I worked in Vegas. Didn't always win, but I mostly came out ahead. You ever play casino games?

SHEILA

I went to Vegas once for a conference--

BABE

A *librarian* conference...in Vegas?!

SHEILA

When they announced it, we thought it was nuts! But all of us mousey librarians ended up having the time of our lives! Free drinks, cheap meals, nice weather. Hanky-Panky...

*(BOTH laugh.)*

BABE

Did you gamble?

SHEILA

Not really.

BABE

Meaning...?

SHEILA

Slot machines.

BABE

That's just a waste of your money. Anyone could have told you that.

SHEILA

Now I know. But at the time, I kept thinking my luck would turn around if I only played long enough.

BABE

That's what they want you to think.

SHEILA

I was afraid to tell my children how much money I lost. They're worried I'll squander their inheritance.

BABE

I could teach you to play--poker, canasta, blackjack...if you want.

SHEILA

*(pauses)*

Is there such a thing as two-person poker?

BABE

Heads-up poker, yeh.

*(clicks)*

BABE (cont.)

My point.

SHEILA

(hits "ball")

My point.

BABE

Thing of it is, head's up poker is like bowling with only two people. The game's over too fast. You hardly have enough time to relax and enjoy yourself.

SHEILA

What if we invited a couple of other ladies to join us. That way I could meet some more--

BABE

--inmates...?

SHEILA

--I was going to say, "residents."

BABE

Are we thinking of inviting any gentlemen?

("hits")

My point.

SHEILA

Really, Babe? You're not done with that romance nonsense?

("hits")

My point.

BABE

I am. But you know what? The men never are. Never. And guys our age are not only old, they're old *school*. They think women are too stupid to play cards well. Once you learn, we could probably beat the pants off them.

SHEILA

Or back on.

BABE

("hits")

My point.

SHEILA

Even nowadays, men still think like this? Your point.

BABE

They all think they're Warren Beatty at 80. The dashing devils they were 50 years ago. Irresistible and enticing.

*("hits")*

My point.

SHEILA

*(worries)*

We wouldn't take advantage of them, would we?

*("hits")*

That's mine.

BABE

Maybe just a little.

*("hits")*

Mine.

SHEILA

But mostly just for fun and games, right? That's yours.

BABE

Mostly. Sure.

*(pauses)*

BABE (cont.)

*(breathless)*

Could we stop for a minute?

SHEILA

I was hoping you'd say that.

*(BOTH breathe deeply.)*

BABE

This is *some* workout.

SHEILA

I didn't think ping pong would be quite so...strenuous. I have a little...heart thing--

BABE

--We're just not used to it is all.

SHEILA

Can I ask...do you...um...think much about...dying?

BABE

Me? Never. Nope. Don't do it. Won't do it. Life is all about the journey, right? And we're still on the road.

SHEILA

To...where?

BABE

Who knows? That's the fun of traveling. You never know where the path will wander. Are you religious?

SHEILA

Not really. You?

BABE

Religion and sequins don't mix so good.

SHEILA

Right. Of course.

BABE

At this age, I like thinking that there might be something "on the other side," like they say. Maybe I'll meet my Herc again.

SHEILA

Nice thought. Maybe *I'll* meet...someone better than Leon.

*(BOTH chuckle.)*

BABE

You being a librarian and around books and all, you must have read about the afterlife...and things like that?

SHEILA

A little. But nothing really prepares you for getting there. All you can do is watch and wait. Just like everybody else has since the beginning of time.

BABE

That's why I'm in full hair and make-up every single day, ready for action. In this world. Or the next.

SHEILA

I remember when my mother was around our age, she told me that she would wake up every morning and say to herself, "Good, I'm still alive."

*(BOTH laugh.)*

SHEILA (cont.)  
Until the morning she wasn't.

*(BOTH pause.)*

SHEILA (cont.)  
I still miss her.

BABE  
Mine too.

*(pauses)*

BABE (cont.)  
Tell me--why do you think we were put on this earth? I'm talking big picture.

SHEILA  
Well, you have a gift for dancing, for giving people pleasure in spangles and sequins. Maybe that's the answer for you.

BABE  
Spangles and Sequins. That would be a good name for my memoirs. If I ever write them.

SHEILA  
I'd race through them like a hurricane with reading glasses on a lanyard.

BABE  
I'd dedicate them to my poor mother. Who died when she was only 55. Worn out with having too many kids. I never wanted her kind of life.

SHEILA  
And you didn't have it.

BABE  
No, I didn't. But even when I was living it up in spangles and sequins, I wondered if there was any point to any of it.

SHEILA  
I have wondered the same thing many times over the years.

BABE  
But you did something so useful.

SHEILA

I don't know about that...

BABE

I guess we've all got to make our own happiness in whatever way works. Eat, drink, and be merry, as Dean Martin used to say.

SHEILA

Dino said that? He certainly seemed merry.

BABE

It was an act, trust me. He was a sad soul. All those rat pack guys were. But performing made their lives worthwhile to them. That and the mountains of money they made.

SHEILA

So, it was only the money that kept them going? Nothing else? Not the love of performing, the beauty of the music, the attention of the fans...?

BABE

Those too. But for lives like ours, my advice is this: love your kids and grandkids as hard as you can for as long as you've got. Hug them tight so they'll always remember how much you cherished them.

SHEILA

How long do you think you've got?

BABE

I have no idea. And I don't think I would want to know even if I could.

SHEILA

I *am* a little afraid of dying.

BABE

Confidentially, so am I. Even though dying is a part of life.

SHEILA

I know people say that but--

BABE

--It's true! I mean, it's *got* to be true, right?

SHEILA

Tell me--did you really sleep with Sinatra?

BABE

I swear on a stack.

SHEILA

When could you have possibly--?

BABE

--I am 92 years young my next birthday.

SHEILA

*(shocked)*

I never would have guessed! You are *astonishing!*

BABE

The older I get, the more I think that everyone is astonishing.

SHEILA

I have always wanted to learn to play the piano.

BABE

Let's do it!

SHEILA

Could take years to get good. I doubt either of us have that much time left.

BABE

We don't have to get *good*, we just have to have *fun*.

*(pauses)*

Speaking of fun, did I tell you about Bing Crosby?

SHEILA

*The* Bing Crosby?

BABE

There was only one. And I knew him. What am I saying? Knew him? I *had* him. If you take my meaning.

SHEILA

Babe, when I grow up, I want to be just like you.

END OF PLAY