Peter Morris: Pancakes

Characters: Sam, a businessman, late 20s–early 30s. Buddy, an unemployed man, late 20s–early 30s.

Setting: An apartment.

Time: The present.

*Lights up on the table and two chairs. On the table are a butter dish, a knife and fork, a bottle of syrup, a glass of milk and a plate with an enormous stack of pancakes—four dozen at least. Sam sits at the table eating. He wears a blue business suit with a white shirt and red tie. Buddy enters, running in and sliding to a stop. He wears boxer shorts and a tee shirt and has a severe case of “bed head.” He takes a deep breath, inhaling the pancake aroma, then crosses to the table and sits. He stares at Sam. There are several moments of silence with nothing being heard but the sound of Sam eating.*

Buddy: Good?

Sam: Uh huh.

Buddy: They look good.

Sam: (His mouth full.) They are good.

(Silence.)

Buddy: Make ’em from scratch?

Sam: (Mouth still full.) Bisquick.

Buddy: Bisquick is good.

Sam: I like Bisquick.

Buddy: Makes a lotta pancakes.

Sam: I guess.

Buddy: That’s a lotta pancakes.

Sam: I like pancakes.

(Silence. Buddy watches Sam pour more syrup on his pancakes. Buddy stands and exits. Sam continues to eat.)

Buddy: (Offstage.) There’s no more Bisquick.

(No response. Sam just smiles.)

Buddy: I said, there’s no more Bisquick.

Sam: (His mouth full.) So?

(Buddy re-enters with empty Bisquick box.)

Buddy: You used it all up.

Sam: I know.

Buddy: You could’ve left me some.

Sam: Well, I didn’t.

Buddy: That sucks. I live here too, you know.

Sam: Just barely.

Buddy: You gonna bring that up again?

Sam: Just reminding you.

Buddy: I don’t need to be reminded.

(Silence. Buddy sits at the table opposite Sam.)

Buddy: Why won’t you give me some of those pancakes?

Sam: Because they’re mine.

Buddy: You can’t possibly eat them all.

Sam: Just watch me. (He shoves an entire pancake in his mouth.)

Buddy: It’s not fair.

Sam: Says you.

Buddy: You have to give me some.

Sam: I do not. Who said I do? It’s not a law. It’s not in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. Nowhere do they say I have to give you some of my pancakes. What they do say is that everyone—everyone—is entitled to his own pancakes. This is a land of opportunity. Anyone is free to go out and get all the pancakes he can get his hands on.

Buddy: What about the Bible?

Sam: What about it?

Buddy: “Love thy neighbor”?

Sam: That only means you have to love him, not feed him.

Buddy: You’re taking it too literal. You’re missing the spirit of the thing.

Sam: Spirit, schmirit, it doesn’t say a fucking thing about pancakes.

Buddy: I can’t believe you’re not going to give me any.

Sam: Make your own.

Buddy: There’s no more Bisquick.

Sam: Then eat something else.

Buddy: There is nothing. Nothing but some pickle relish and a box of baking soda. I can’t make anything out of that.

Sam: Not my problem.

Buddy: Is that your attitude? “Not my problem”? You’re satisfied so to hell with everybody else? Sam: Not everybody else—just you. (He resumes eating.)

Buddy: Look at you, stuffing your face. You should be ashamed.

Sam: Leave me alone. I’m trying to eat.

Buddy: So am I! Only I have no food!

Sam: (Stands and confronts Buddy.) Then do something about it. Don’t stand around begging. That’s all you ever do and I’m sick of it. You want some food? Go get it.

Buddy: Fine! I will! (Buddy storms out. Beat. Sam sits back down and resumes eating.

Buddy storms back in.) Do you have ten bucks?

Sam: What?

Buddy: Can you loan me ten bucks?

Sam: On top of the back rent you already owe me?

Buddy: I said I’d pay you.

Sam: How? You have no job.

Buddy: I’m looking.

Sam: Look harder.

Buddy: I just need a little loan.

Sam: What about the big one I’ve already given you? I’ve been carrying you for months now but I’m through with it. Do you hear me? I work hard for my money, Buddy.

Buddy: I’d be happy to work for mine too if someone would just let me. But I can’t find a job, OK? I’ve looked and I’ve looked and I can’t find a job. There’s just not a big market these days for philosophers.

Sam: Then do something else.

Buddy: But I was a philosophy major in college.

Sam: People don’t need philosophers.

Buddy: Yes, they do. They just don’t know it. But they will. One day they’ll wake up with a spiritual malaise, then they’ll need me.

Sam: What the hell is a spiritual mayonnaise?

Buddy: Malaise! Not mayonnaise! Spiritual malaise! And people like you are gonna get it bad! Trust me! Then I’ll be in big demand! You wait and see!

(Pause. Buddy, realizing he is becoming unhinged, pulls himself together. He sits on the floor and begins meditating in the lotus position. Sam just looks at him.)

Sam: You don’t wanna work, do you?

Buddy: (In the Same rhythm as his chanting.) Yes, I do.

Sam: You don’t. If you did, you wouldn’t be sitting around unwashed, unshaved and undressed on a weekday.

Buddy: It’s eight o’clock in the morning.

Sam: Early bird catches the worm.

Buddy: I don’t want worms. I want pancakes.

Sam: Then earn them.

Buddy: How?

Sam: You can do a little job for me.

Buddy: What kind of little job?

Sam: You can shine my shoes.

Buddy: You want me to shine your shoes?

Sam: I’ll give you a pancake for each shoe.

Buddy: One pancake for each shoe.

Sam: That’s the offer.

Buddy: Is that what you want, to humiliate me? Demean me? Well, forget it! I won’t do it! I won’t! I want at least two pancakes per shoe!

Sam: Deal.

Buddy: Deal.

(They shake hands.)

Buddy: Take off your shoes.

Sam: No. Buddy: Then how am I supposed to shine them?

Sam: Get down on your knees.

Buddy: What?

Sam: Get down on your knees and shine my shoes.

Buddy: Are you serious?

Sam: You want some pancakes, don’t you?

Buddy: You know I do.

Sam: Then get down on your knees.

Buddy: Sam, please.

Sam: Down!

(Silence. Buddy gets down on his knees.)

Buddy: What do I use to shine them with?

Sam: (Deliberately, biting each word.) Your tongue.

Buddy: No.

Sam: (Dangling a pancake in Buddy’s face.) Mmmmm, these are so good.

Buddy: I won’t do it.

Sam: They’re so light and fluffy, sweet and delicious. Mmmm-mmmm-mmmm.

Buddy: You’re a pig.

(Sam pushes Buddy over with his foot.)

Sam: (Seething.) Watch your mouth, Buddy. You’re only here thanks to my good graces. I could’ve thrown you out months ago. I could throw you out right now. But I won’t. Because I pity you. Do you hear me? You’re pathetic. Look at you, about to kiss my feet for some lousy pancakes.

Buddy: I’m hungry. All I’ve eaten in the last week were some stale Saltines.

Sam: Those were my stale Saltines. Bought and paid for with my money. And you didn’t even say thank you, did you?

Buddy: (Weakly.) Thank you.

Sam: What was that?

Buddy: Thank you. I said thank you.

Sam: That’s better. (Sam sits. Buddy slowly gets up off the floor.) What is it with guys like you? You’ve always got your hand out. Soft, fleshy hands that haven’t seen a day of work.

Buddy: I need help.

Sam: “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” Now there’s a Bible quote for you.

Buddy: That’s not from the Bible.

Sam: Well, it should be. Now stop bothering me.

Buddy: How can you be so heartless when you have so much? Look at you, you have all the pancakes.

Sam: That’s right. They’re all mine. And what, I should just give them to you?

Buddy: You could share them.

Sam: Why in hell would I want to do that?

Buddy: It might make you feel good.

(Sam bursts out laughing. Buddy watches in silence.)

Sam: That’s the stupidest thing I ever heard.

Buddy: Some people find great solace in charity.

Sam: What they find, Buddy boy, is a tax deduction. No one does anything without getting something in return. Now, can all the philosophical mumbo jumbo. I have to finish eating. I have a morning conference. They’re putting me in charge of the national ad campaign for Good Will. (He resumes eating.)

Buddy: Good Will. They’re putting you in charge of “good will.” Well, that’s just perfect. It’s like putting a fox in charge of the hen house.

Sam: (His mouth full.) Very funny.

Buddy: It is. It’s hilarious. But I just can’t bring myself to laugh. It’s a very amusing paradox but I just can’t laugh. I’m too weak. I’m hungry and light- headed and I just don’t have the strength to laugh. But it is funny. Not slap-your-thigh funny but wry and ironic. Only God could make a joke like that. The Same God that gets a kick out of holocausts and plagues and famines. What a sense of humor that guy’s got. He gave you all the pancakes and he gave me none.

Sam: That’s life. Some of us have pancakes and some of us have not.

Buddy: Yup, and you have them. You’re the pancake king.

Sam: That’s me.

Buddy: Here, your majesty, why don’t I give you some more syrup?

Sam: I don’t want any more syrup.

Buddy: Sure you do. Everybody wants more syrup. (He picks up the bottle of syrup and begins pouring it on Sam’s head.)

Sam: What the fuck!

Buddy: And butter? What about some more butter? (Buddy picks up the butter knife and plunges it in Sam’s gut—one, two, three times. Sam falls to the floor.) You want pancakes? Here, eat some pancakes! (Buddy begins shoving pancakes into Sam’s mouth. He coughs and hacks and begins choking.) Have another! And another! And another!

(Suddenly, Sam’s body goes limp. Buddy sits in his chair and begins ravenously eating pancakes.)

Buddy: Hungry. So hungry. (After a moment he looks down at Sam’s body.) You were right, the Lord does help those who help themselves. (He kicks the life- less body then resumes eating the pancakes.)

(Fade to black.)