

Home Sweet Home

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Characters

Rita: 70+ : A new resident in the nursing home. Poor physical condition but mentally sharp.

Fiona : Early 30s to early 40s. A nurse in the home. Bright, light hearted, caring.

Kate: 70+ : A long term resident. Suffers from Alzheimer's but physically strong.

The play is set in a nursing home and tells the story of Rita who has been reluctantly placed in the home by her daughters. She feels helpless, angry and rejected but help comes from the most unlikely place with the realisation that there's always someone worse off.

A bedroom in a nursing home. All that is specifically needed is a chair for Rita and a small folding table that could be used for serving meals. Ideally, there will be a second chair. There is a single exit from the room.

The play opens with Rita seated at the table. There is a tray of food on the table with plates, cutlery, beverage etc. Rita sits for a while and dejectedly looks around her. She pushes the table gently away from her and tries to stand with great difficulty. Her legs are very weak. Exhausted from the effort, she carefully lowers herself back onto her chair and slumps as if asleep. Fiona, the nurse enters.

FIONA: Rita?

RITA: Yes.

FIONA: I thought you were asleep.

RITA: No such luck.

FIONA: Are you finished your dinner? *(no answer, looking at tray)* It looks like you haven't even started.

RITA: I'm not hungry.

FIONA: You haven't been hungry all week.

Rita shrugs

FIONA: You have to eat Rita. You have to keep your strength up.

RITA: For what? I'm not planning any marathons.

FIONA: You'll get sick.

RITA: *(Harshly)* I thought I was sick. Isn't that why I'm here? *(pause)* Sorry Fiona, I shouldn't take it out on you.

FIONA: But Rita, you have to ..

RITA: I don't have to be here. I don't want to be here!

FIONA: But, your family ..

RITA: My family dumped me here!

FIONA: That's not fair Rita. They really care for you.

RITA: So in the week I've been here, I get two visits! I wouldn't call that caring!

FIONA: In fairness, you hardly made them feel welcome.

RITA: Why should I? They move me in here without any consultation and they expect me to be happy about it?

FIONA: You couldn't go on living on your own especially after you had that fall.

RITA: I am more than capable of looking after myself.

FIONA: They were worried about you.

RITA: Hm!

FIONA: I've met your two daughters. They are more upset than you are. They hate seeing you like this.

RITA: That's terrible. Mustn't upset them!

FIONA: They had to do something.

RITA: They could have discussed it with me. Had they never heard of home help?

FIONA: You know they're looking at that but it takes time. This is only a temporary measure until they get something sorted. They told me that you wouldn't move in with either of them?

RITA: I want to stay in my own home.

FIONA: But it would only be for a short time.

RITA: Most permanent things begin as a temporary fix!
Particularly when you get to my age!

Pause

FIONA: I don't want to argue with you Rita. This is a discussion you must have with your family.

RITA: They've made up their mind.

FIONA: But at worst, you'll only be here for a few weeks so while you are here, why not make the most of it. You'll need to keep your strength up for when you go home. The food's not bad. Even I eat it and that's saying a lot.

RITA: *(softening slightly)* I'm sure!

FIONA: And why not come down to the dining room for your meals. You'd enjoy the company.

RITA: And go as cracked as the rest of the crowd? No thanks.

FIONA: There's some lovely people here .. and a few eligible, available men!

RITA: I've survived twenty years without a man in my life. I think I can survive what little time I have left.

FIONA: Sure, you're only a young one! Think about coming down. Tomorrow afternoon, we have bingo.

RITA: Bingo!

FIONA: Yes.

RITA: You've just convinced me not to go down!

FIONA: Why?

RITA: Why does everyone assume that when people reach a certain age, they will suddenly love bingo? I have never liked bingo and I never intend to like bingo! As a matter of fact, I will give you my full permission to shoot me if you ever see me playing bingo!

FIONA: That was only an example. We have choirs come in and do sing alongs. The local drama group sometimes perform short pieces. We do all sorts of arts and crafts. There's a book club that runs every week and one of the ladies who was a successful writer in her day is talking about setting up a writers group. You could write your life story.

RITA: *(Maybe a slight interest)* Oh there are plenty of things I could write about but I think I'll stay where I am.

FIONA: Well, we have lots of wheelchairs here. Just say the word and I'll have you down before you realise you've left the room.

Pause

RITA: You're a good girl Fiona.

FIONA: All part of the service ma'am! If you're not going to eat this, I'll take it away.

RITA: That's fine.

FIONA: I'll bring you up a cup of tea later.

RITA: That'd be nice.

FIONA: And think about going down. It'll be good company for you.

Fiona exits with tray. Pause. Rita again looks around her

and struggles with great difficulty to stand up. When she is standing, Kate enters the room

KATE: Hurry up! We'll be late.

RITA: What?

KATE: The lads will be waiting. If we're late to the cinema, they might think we've stood them up.

RITA: Sorry, I

KATE: Ah Maureen, you haven't even got your hair done!

RITA: Maureen?

KATE: Will you come on.

RITA: I'm not Maureen!

KATE: I don't want to ruin things with Michael.

RITA: Who's Michael?

RITA: I really like him and I think he likes me and your Tom is a lovely fella.

RITA: Who?

KATE: You're always the same, dragging your heels. I want to be out before daddy gets home.

Rita realises the situation and hesitantly, plays along

RITA: They're delayed.

KATE: What?

RITA: Tom ... rang earlier to say they got delayed and they would meet us for the later screening.

KATE: The later screening?

RITA: Yes (*uncertain*) The cinema is showing the film again two hours later.

KATE: That'll be over very late.

RITA: No mother said it's OK.

KATE: Oh.

RITA: So we have plenty of time.

KATE: That's grand so. I just thought (*trails off*)

RITA: Why don't you sit down.

KATE: (*changing*) Who are you?

RITA: I'm ...

KATE: Why is there a strange woman in my house?

RITA: No, no, I'm

KATE: It's you? Maureen? It is. It's been so long. Why did you leave me?

RITA: I ... I ... don't know. I..

KATE: Did Jenny let you in?

RITA: Jenny?

KATE: I suppose she thought she'd surprise me.

RITA: I don't know

KATE: Wait until I see her. Well it is a surprise. I've missed you!

Fiona bursts in

FIONA: There you are Kate. I've been looking all over for you. You know you shouldn't be in here.

KATE: Jenny, you never told me that your aunt Maureen was here.

FIONA: Come on Kate, let's get you back. Sorry Rita.

Rita, who has been standing through this carefully sits down

KATE: But I need to talk to Maureen.

FIONA: Maureen is not going anywhere but she needs to get her rest after the journey. You can talk to her later.

KATE: Promise?

FIONA: I promise. Come on. I'll get Paula to bring you back to your room.

KATE: OK.

Fiona leads Kate out. Pause. Rita looks troubled.

Fiona re-enters

FIONA: I'm really sorry about that Rita.

RITA: That's it. I need to get out of here!

FIONA: What?

RITA: If I stay here any longer, I'll end up like her!

FIONA: For goodness sake Rita. It's not contagious! (*silence*) I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I apologise.

RITA: (*Pause*) It's OK.

FIONA: You have to understand that Kate is like that because that's the way she is. She came in like that four years ago and if she's lucky, she won't get any worse for a while anyhow.

RITA: Maybe I'd be better off like her lost in her own world not knowing where she is not understanding. In her own way, she even seems happy.

FIONA: No Rita. Don't say that. You can still enjoy doing things. You can still have fun with your family. Enjoy a good book, a movie, a play. OK, so you won't be doing any hill walking and strictly come dancing is definitely off the menu ... but up here (*tapping her head*). This is where you can live!

RITA: It's just so sad. Who is she?

FIONA: Kate? She's been here four years. Her family tried to look after her as best they could but it just became too difficult. She is constantly on the move. I don't know what she said to you or what you saw but her mind goes everywhere. It's hard to keep track.

RITA: She called you Jenny.

FIONA: That's her daughter. She thinks that I'm her. And you know what the really sad thing is? Jenny could be in the room with her and she doesn't recognise her. As soon as I walk in, I'm Jenny. It's hard for a family to cope with that. She rarely recognises any of them. She has a son, Tony who is in Australia. Her husband is still alive.

RITA: Michael?

FIONA: So you heard about Michael? No, her husband is Brian.

RITA: Who's Michael?

FIONA: I've got to know Kate's family quite well over the last four years. It must be so tough on them to see her like this but they love to reminisce and remember her in the good times. I feel like I know her so well.

RITA: So, who is Michael?

FIONA: Michael was an old boyfriend. Her first love.

RITA: She talked about going to the movies.

FIONA: She keeps going back to that. Strange, because I don't think the relationship lasted that long but I suppose it was a more innocent, less complicated time with all the possibilities of life stretching out before her.

RITA: And Maureen?

FIONA: Maureen was her twin sister. Died young in a car crash. Only thirty five.

RITA: Ah.

FIONA: She used to go out with one of Michael's friends.

RITA: Tom?

FIONA: You heard? By all accounts, Kate was a very intelligent woman. Did very well in her leaving cert and went to university. Not many women back in the early sixties did that. Studied

science. When she went away to college, she and Michael drifted apart and it just fizzled out.

RITA: That would have been over fifty years ago?

FIONA: Close enough.

RITA: And she still goes back to that time. How does her poor husband feel about that?

FIONA: It must have been upsetting at the start but he's got used to it. He jokes about it now. Often asks me how the other man is doing.

RITA: Sad.

FIONA: After college, she became a teacher. That's where she met her husband. He was teaching at the same school. They must be married at least forty five years.

RITA: And she taught all her life?

FIONA: Yes. Retired only about ten years ago. I heard she was a great teacher. Very popular. Some of her past pupils still drop by to visit her. She doesn't know them of course but you can see the love and respect they have for her.

RITA: So whats ...?

FIONA: Her future? At the moment, she's as strong as a horse. She can move fast when she wants to.

RITA: So I've noticed. We'd make a good team.

FIONA: How?

RITA: My mind, her body.

FIONA: I suppose! But eventually, her brain will let her body down. It could take years or months. As she is now, she could outlive the lot of us.

Pause

RITA: You're very fond of her?

FIONA: I am. She reminds me of my grandmother. She had Alzheimers too.

RITA: I hate being old.

FIONA: I know .. but you can't just give up. *(silence)* You know, don't you, that your daughters hate to see you here as much as you hate being here? It was a tough decision for them, but believe me, they are working hard to sort it out and they'll have you home as soon as possible. Don't make it harder than it already is. Just work with them. See this as a little break and who knows, you might enjoy it.

RITA: You make it sound so simple.

FIONA: It is simple!

RITA: You know Fiona, you should have been a politician.

FIONA: That is in my job description.

A gentle laugh between them. Kate enters

KATE: I need to talk to Maureen!

FIONA: Ah Kate! *(to Rita)* I don't know how she does it. Nothing wrong with her sense of direction.

KATE: Maureen!

FIONA: Come on Kate. Let's get you settled for the night. You can talk to Maureen in the morning.

KATE: No, I have to talk to her now.

FIONA: No, Maureen is tired and has to rest.

RITA: It's OK Fiona. She can stay for a while.

FIONA: Are you sure?

RITA: Yes. At least you'll know where she is!

FIONA: That's true. I'll come back in a few minutes. *(to Kate)* Now Kate, you sit down. I'll come back in a while and bring you to bed.

Fiona settles Kate in the chair and starts to exit

RITA: Before you go Fiona.

FIONA: Yes?

RITA: Will you be working in the morning?

FIONA: Of course. Sure I never leave. Part of the furniture!

RITA: Maybe you'd bring up one of your wheelchairs. I... I might go down for breakfast.

Slight pause

FIONA: Right .. your wish is my command.

RITA: But remember, I draw the line at bingo!

FIONA: Duly noted.

RITA: Fiona. Thank you.

FIONA: I won't leave you too long.

Fiona exits. Pause

RITA: Hello Kate.

KATE: *(Stands)* Why did you leave me Maureen?

RITA: Why?

KATE: You went away and never said goodbye.

RITA: I'm sorry Kate.

KATE: I couldn't find you.

RITA: I had to go away. I couldn't help it.

KATE: But you're back now.

RITA: Yes.

KATE: I have you and Jenny and everything is *(drifts)* I don't recognise this room. You're Maureen?

RITA: Why don't you sit down Kate?

KATE: Sit down?

RITA: Yes, have a rest.

KATE: You won't go away again?

RITA: I'll try not to.

KATE: Promise.

RITA: I promise to visit you as often as I can.

Kate gazes out smiling but with a vacant look

KATE: Where will we go now?

RITA: Sit down Kate. You must be tired. *(pause)* Sit down.

Kate sits

KATE: I'm tired.

RITA: Tell me about Michael, Kate.

KATE: Michael?

RITA: Yes.

KATE: Michael, Oh, he is *(pause, confusion, perhaps a slight realisation)* He was a handsome boy. I've never seen blue eyes like his. Such a handsome boy.

Rita gazes at Kate as the lights slowly fade

END OF PLAY