

There's Always Tomorrow

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Characters

PETER – Male, 70

KEN – Male, early 20s, PETER's grandson

SARAH – Female, 30

Having received devastating news at her mother's deathbed, Sarah is seeking answers and her search leads her to Peter. She decides to approach him in a public park but is she prepared for what she might uncover.

An empty park bench. Two men slowly come into view from SR. Peter and his grandson, Ken. Peter is carrying a small plastic bag containing a few slices of bread. Ken has 2 or 3 envelopes in his hand. Ken is animatedly explaining the basis of a TV programme to Peter.

KEN: You'd really enjoy it Granddad

PETER: Oh, I don't know. I'd find it hard to keep track of who's who and what's going on.

KEN: But that's the beauty of this one. Every episode is a different story and they only last about 30 minutes.

PETER: Anyway, I've gone off the TV.

KEN: There's a good one on late tonight. It's a story about a time when Bob Dylan visited a friend in London and called to the wrong house. I've seen it before. You're a big Dylan fan, you'll love it. I'll record it and we can watch it together.

PETER: Go on so. I can hardly stop you!

They approach the bench.

KEN: Right. Here we are. All to ourselves.

Peter sits down

PETER: There's not many around today

KEN: I just want to drop these letters in the post box for Mam. I'll see if Mr. Softee is in his spot - grab a couple of 99s. Mums the word.

PETER: I don't need anything.

KEN: When have you ever refused a 99? You wait there. Feed the ducks. I won't be long.

PETER: Take your time.

Ken exits SL. Peter sits quietly. Unseen by Peter, Sarah tentatively enters from SR. She is carrying a shoulder bag. She stands quietly observing Peter for a while. After a few beats, Peter removes a small hardback notepad from his pocket. Sarah unsure of how to proceed takes a few deep breaths and slowly approaches the bench.

SARAH: Is it OK if I sit here?

Peter looks at her vaguely then smiles.

PETER: Of course, I'm waiting for my wife but there's plenty of room for us all.

SARAH: Thank you.

She sits. Awkward silence. Sarah takes out her mobile phone and pretends to be checking something.

PETER: They say those things are bad for your eyes.

SARAH: Sorry?

PETER: Mobile phones.

SARAH: Oh.

PETER: Everyone seems to have their face stuck in one nowadays.

SARAH: Hard to avoid them.

PETER: I gave up on them years ago.

SARAH: Right.

Another awkward silence.

PETER: So, how are you getting on?

SARAH: Sorry? (*Puzzled*) Oh ...oh I'm fine.

PETER: Lovely day.

SARAH: It is. Yes.

PETER: Aye. Long may it last.

SARAH: Not bad for August, I suppose.

PETER: (*Vague*) August? Oh yes, that's for sure, not bad at all.

Silence again.

PETER: August is my favourite month. (*Pause*) Do you know why?

SARAH: No.

PETER: Have a guess.

SARAH: The weather?

PETER: My birthday!

SARAH: Oh ... happy birthday.

PETER: I haven't had it yet. It's (*thinking*) ... near the end.
Hold on, let me see.

He takes out the notebook and skims through it.

PETER: Ah, here we are. The 30th of August 1953. And this is ... 2022?

Sarah is taken aback.

SARAH: It's 2023. Congratulations, you'll be 70.

PETER: That's it. They keep saying that; just like the fella on the radio, a roundy birthday! Between you and me, I think they're planning a party. I don't really like parties.

Uncomfortable silence. Sarah takes a deep breath and

steels herself. She reaches into her bag and takes out an old photo album.

SARAH: Actually, I wanted to show you /

PETER: *(Interrupting)* You were shopping?

He indicates her bag.

SARAH: No ... no, I wasn't.

PETER: Did you see my wife there? I've been waiting for ages.

SARAH: Sorry, I don't know your wife.

PETER: *(Looking closely at her)* Oh, I thought you did ... but you're ... no, no, maybe I'm mistaking you for someone else. Should I know you?

SARAH: *(Slight pause)* I don't think so.

PETER: I thought I recognised you but ... *(drifts)* I wonder what's keeping her. You're sure you didn't see her?

SARAH: *(Confused)* No, I'm sorry.

PETER: I can't feed the ducks until she comes. She always insists on bringing some bread for the ducks. This is her favourite spot you know. I always sit here and she sits beside me ... but don't worry. You won't be in the way.

Sarah, beginning to feel uncomfortable, nods with a slight smile.

PETER: Are you sure I don't know you? You do look familiar.

Sarah seizes the opportunity.

SARAH: Perhaps you're mistaking me for my mother. We look alike.

*She opens the photo album and shows him a photo.
Peter just barely glances at it.*

PETER: Very nice, no but you ... I feel like I've met you before.

SARAH: No.

She puts the photo album back in the bag and stands.

SARAH: I'm sorry I have to go.

PETER: Are you going so soon?

SARAH: I need to be somewhere else.

PETER: Sure, you only just sat down. *(Laughing)* Anyone looking would think I said something to offend you. Not that there's many around to see.

She stands still.

PETER: I never introduced myself. My name is Peter, Peter Shelly.

Sarah looks at him and nods.

SARAH: *(Quietly)* I know.

PETER: What?

SARAH: That's not a common surname.

PETER: Not many around here. *(Pause)* Like the poet.

SARAH: And his wife.

PETER: His wife?

SARAH: Mary Shelly. She wrote Frankenstein.

PETER: She was his wife? I never knew. I must make a note of that.

He takes out the notepad and a pencil and scribbles in it while Sarah looks on.

PETER: I used to write poems when I was young – at school. The teacher would say “don't be fooled by the name Shelly, you're no poet” He was probably right. I wonder where they are now. They were in a copy book. I must look for them.

He makes a note in the book.

PETER: Did you tell me your name?

Sarah sits.

SARAH: Sarah, Sarah Joyce. I'm not from around here. Just visiting.

PETER: I'll put that in here.

He writes in his book.

PETER: So, if I meet you again, I'll know you. That's grand.

SARAH: That's a good idea.

PETER: They tell me I'm forgetting things but I always had a great memory for faces and I don't think I'd forget a pretty girl like you. I'm probably confusing you with ... (*drifts*) I sit here most days. My ... grandson ... is around here somewhere. He went to get ice cream, I think. Sure, I don't want ice cream but I couldn't refuse. He's a good lad. Very generous.

Pause.

PETER: So, you're not from around here?

SARAH: No.

PETER: You have friends here?

SARAH: This is my first time.

PETER: Just a tourist then?

SARAH: I suppose you could say that.

PETER: It is a lovely spot. Even after spending all my life here, I still love the place.

Pause. Sarah decides to proceed.

SARAH: I'm from a little place called Woodenbridge. Do you know it?

PETER: Woodenbridge? Now, there's a place I haven't been to in years. That's near Arklow, isn't it? Me and the lads had some great weekends there.

SARAH: My mother used to work in the hotel.

PETER: It's in a lovely setting.

SARAH: Maybe you remember her?

PETER: What?

SARAH: My mother. You might remember her? She worked on reception. Her name was Catherine, Catherine Joyce but most people called her Kitty.

PETER: It's a long time since I was there.

SARAH: I showed you her photo.

PETER: You know, I might go back there for a visit. My wife was never there. I think she'd love it.

She picks up the album and finds the photo and hands it to Peter.

SARAH: See. That's me and her a few days after I was born.

Peter looks at it more closely this time. Looking from the photo to Sarah, shaking his head.

PETER: This is you?

SARAH: My mother Catherine.

Peter examines it closely.

PETER: Kitty.

He looks at Sarah.

PETER: Kitty?

He continues to stare at the photo. A faint flicker, a slight unease perhaps.

PETER: I don't think so. No....

He hands it back. Long pause as he thinks. Sarah is studying him.

SARAH: You do recognise her.

PETER: I don't know. Maybe.

SARAH: Her hair may have been shorter.

She shows him the photo again.

SARAH: Have another look.

PETER: (*Slightly angry*) Why do you keep asking me all these questions? (*Agitated*) Maybe there's something in here.

He frantically starts looking through his notebook. Then suddenly stops and stares blankly. Sarah observes him.

SARAH: My mother died in May.

PETER: Sorry to hear that.

SARAH: Two nights before she passed away I brought her supper. She was crying. I never saw her cry before, even when my dad died. When she saw me she said ... sorry ...sorry. She just kept saying it. Then ...then she told me that my dad, the man I called dad for 18 years, wasn't my real father.

PETER: What?

SARAH: At first, I thought it was a joke.

PETER: That's ... terrible.

SARAH: The words poured out of her after that – it was only one night - a man she met at the hotel – she never told my father – they'd been trying so long for a baby – it was always on her mind She kept on talking. I felt like the room was spinning around me. I just wanted to scream but I couldn't say anything. I left the room. All I could hear was .. sorry Sarah, sorry.

She is close to tears. She stands. Peter doesn't know what to do.

PETER: You're upset ...

Sarah remains standing.

SARAH: I was thirty years old and suddenly I had no idea who I was.

PETER: I don't know what to say. Maybe you should sit down.

Sarah sits.

SARAH: My dad ... I don't even know what I should call him now ... He never knew. He always called me his miracle baby.

Pause. Peter searches for something safe to remember.

PETER: My wife used to call our daughter a gift from the Pope.

SARAH: The Pope?

PETER: We were married in ... the year escapes me (*he takes out his book*) I don't think I've written it down ... but it was the year the Pope came to Ireland. When was that?

SARAH: I'm not sure. Sometime in the late 70's.

PETER: I should know that. We were married a few months after his visit. I haven't thought about that in a long while. We saw him in the Phoenix Park. That was some day ... it's coming back to me now.

SARAH: Nearly forty five years ago.

PETER: We went up the night before. My brother had a flat in ... in ... Rathmines. Yes, that's it. We stayed with him on a mattress on the floor. It was our first time away together. There were a few others there too. We sat up most of the night drinking beer and singing songs. I remember like it was yesterday.

SARAH: Maybe you should write it down.

PETER: Ah no. I'll remember that. The next year, our daughter was born, our gift from the Pope.

SARAH: What's your daughter's name?

PETER: My daughter? It's ... em ... wait now ... Karen, yes, yes, It's Karen.

SARAH: Karen.

PETER: The Pope didn't send us any more gifts. That made my wife sad. She would have liked, you know, but it wasn't to be. Where is she anyway? She always does this.

SARAH: I'm sure she'll be along soon.

PETER: Maybe I should go looking for her.

SARAH: Better not. If she came back and you weren't here, she might be worried.

PETER: I hadn't thought of that.

SARAH: I'll stay for a while longer.

PETER: You don't have to do that.

Pause.

SARAH: I asked my mother who my real father was. She wouldn't tell me at first.

PETER: What's that?

SARAH: She said it wasn't important. He was a stranger and it wouldn't help me to know. Eventually she did tell me but she said she didn't know anything else about him. *(Pause)* Except, he was a keen golfer.

PETER: I was fond of the golf myself. Couldn't get enough of it. My wife used to say that she thought I loved golf more than her.

SARAH: Did she?

PETER: I was good at it too. I had a very low ... low ... you know ... the number?

SARAH: Handicap?

PETER: That's it. Handicap. How could I forget that?

He takes out his notebook and considers writing.

PETER: Ah! I don't think I'll bother. Sure I haven't played in years. I have a bad back and my hands get sore sometimes. They give me tablets but I don't think they're doing me any good.

He stares at an entry in the book.

SARAH: After she died, I was looking for her will. She kept all her papers in an old biscuit tin; her secret box, she called it. I

found these in a sealed envelope.

She produces a small piece of paper and a newspaper clipping.

SARAH: This .. (*She holds up the newspaper clipping*) .. is from our local newspaper in 1992.

She hands Peter the clipping. He studies it carefully.

SARAH: That is you. Isn't it?

PETER: Where did you find this?

SARAH: She kept it all these years.

She takes the clipping back from him and reads.

SARAH: "Peter Shelly, winner of the Woodenbridge open week receives the trophy from the club captain"

Peter looks puzzled. Sarah holds up the other piece of paper.

SARAH: And this has your name and address.

PETER: I don't understand.

SARAH: Do you not see?

PETER: What's that?

SARAH: You were the man.

PETER: What man?

SARAH: You are my father.

Looks at her, confused.

PETER: I am?

SARAH: I'm your daughter.

PETER: Daughter?

SARAH: Yes.

Peter looks at her closely.

PETER: My daughter. No, you can't be ... Karen is ... (*Almost to*

himself) Is that why I thought ...? My ...?

They share a brief moment. He reaches out his hand as if to touch her. Suddenly stops, the moment is gone, he is again confused

PETER: No ... no, no. I know my ...

He looks again. During the following, he becomes more distressed.

PETER: No, I couldn't mistake ... I know I forget things but not this ... I don't know ... Karen? ... no ... I'd never ...

Seeing his distress, Sarah now regrets what she has done and goes to him.

SARAH: I'm sorry; I didn't mean to ... maybe you should sit down.

Peter looks more closely at her.

PETER: You do look familiar, so maybe ... I'm just not sure ... I don't think I ever ...

SARAH: It'll be fine. Sit down.

Peter remains standing, shaking his head, staring blankly. Ken, Peter's grandson enters SL. He is holding a choc ice.

KEN: All the ninety nines were sold out so I got you a choc ice.
Spotting Sarah.

KEN: Hello.

Sarah nods and gives a weak smile. Peter is still staring blankly.

KEN: Granddad?

Peter suddenly responds to Ken's voice.

PETER: Ken? Is it Ken?

KEN: Yes, it's me Granddad.

PETER: *(Indicating Sarah)* I think this is my daughter.

KEN: No granddad, mam is at home, cooking dinner and probably wondering where we are.

PETER: But she ... she does look ... I wasn't sure ...

KEN: Sit down for a minute. *(To Sarah)* Sorry about this.

Ken gently takes Peter by the arm and helps him sit down.

PETER: What's going on ... I didn't think ... but I'm not ... I don't feel ...

Peter gets more upset, his breathing becomes faster, his voice breaking almost whimpering. Ken sits beside him.

KEN: It's fine granddad, just relax.

Peter's fast breathing continues.

KEN: Remember when I was little and whenever I got nervous or frightened, you'd tell me to take deep breaths. Remember?

Ken turns Peter to face him and fixes his gaze.

KEN: Now, with me. Breathe in ... and out. In and out.

They continue for a while as Sarah looks on. Peter starts to relax.

KEN: Now, that's better.

PETER: What's wrong with me Ken?

KEN: You'll be fine Granddad. It was just a mistake.

PETER: A mistake?

KEN: That's all

PETER: So, she's not /

KEN: No, she's not.

PETER: Are you sure?

KEN: Your daughter, Karen, my mother, is at home waiting for us.

He takes out his phone and taps a few times.

KEN: Look. Here's a photo of you and Mam. It was taken at her birthday last June. See.

PETER: But how could I ... *(to Sarah)* so, you're not my daughter?

Sarah is unsure how to answer.

SARAH: I ... I'm not Karen.

KEN: See. It's alright granddad. We all make mistakes. Here's a nice cold choc ice for you. You have to promise not to tell mam. She'll kill me if she finds out that I gave it to you before dinner.

PETER: I don't feel like it.

KEN: You better eat it while it's cold.

PETER: I'll bring it home and eat it later

KEN: It'll be all melted by then.

PETER: Did you get one for yourself?

KEN: *(Lying)* I ate it on the way back. You have yours now. It'll cool you down.

*He hands the choc ice to Peter who holds it, gazing at it.
Ken stands and moves to Sarah*

KEN: I'm really, really sorry about that.

SARAH: It's fine.

KEN: He's not normally as bad as this but he's gotten himself into a right state there.

SARAH: He said he was waiting for his wife.

KEN: My grandmother died two years ago.

SARAH: I guessed that.

KEN: Sometimes he remembers, but mostly, well ...

SARAH: They must have been close.

KEN: They had their moments but yeah ... he was devoted to her. He began to go downhill after she died. Sounds like the two of ye

had a great conversation.

SARAH: Yeah. I didn't realise at first that he had ... you know?

KEN: Most people never guess when they meet him. He certainly hasn't lost any of his charm.

Sarah nods, smiles.

KEN: I hate seeing him like this. He was ... he is a fantastic grandfather. He was like a father to me. The one consolation is that he always knows who I am.

SARAH: Long may that continue.

KEN: Sometimes he doesn't recognise my mother. It doesn't happen that often but I've never seen him mistake someone else for her. I don't think I'll tell her. It might upset her.

SARAH: She's better off not knowing.

Ken looks closely at Sarah.

KEN: You know, you do have a look of my mother, the hair, the eyes. *(He shows her photo on the phone)* See.

SARAH: *(Almost afraid to look)* Yeah.

KEN: I can understand how he might confuse you. *(Sarah nods, Pause)* My name is Ken by the way.

SARAH: Sarah.

They shake hands. Peter who has been staring at the choc ice vacantly during the above suddenly comes alert on hearing Sarah's name. He is back to the way he was as if the preceding events hadn't happened.

PETER: Yes, Sarah, that's it. Wait 'til I see.

*He takes out his book and begins going through it.
Ken and Sarah exchange smiles.*

SARAH: His book!

KEN: That was my idea. Not sure if it does any good but it gives him something to hang on to.

SARAH: He consults it a lot!

PETER: Yes, I knew it. Here we are, Sarah Joyce, pretty girl, visiting. And you say I'm forgetting things.

KEN: *(To Sarah)* You see, a charmer. Granddad, your choc ice!

PETER: I'll put it in my pocket.

KEN: But /

PETER: It'll be grand.

KEN: OK, whatever! *(To Sarah)* At least he hasn't opened the wrapper.

SARAH: That's true!

Ken crosses to Peter

KEN: Right, let's get you home.

Ken helps Peter up.

KEN: *(To Sarah)* Apologies again and thanks for being so understanding.

SARAH: It was nice to meet him.

PETER: She's a nice girl. She's lost her father you know.

KEN: *(To Sarah)* What's that about?

SARAH: It's nothing.

PETER: She's all alone.

KEN: You certainly made an impact.

Extending his hand

KEN: It was nice to meet you Sarah and thanks again for looking after the old man.

PETER: Less of the old, you pup!

Sarah smiles, moves to Peter

SARAH: Peter, it was ... lovely to meet you (*shakes his hand*).
You mind yourself.

Impulsively, she hugs him and breaks away quickly.

PETER: You've made an old man happy.

KEN: I thought you weren't old?

PETER: I can say it, not you. (*To Sarah*) It's been a while since
I got a hug from a pretty girl. Thank you ... (*thinks*) ... Sarah.

SARAH: I'll be off.

PETER: Will you not stay for some dinner?

SARAH: What?

Ken smiles at Sarah

KEN: I'm sure Sarah has lots of other things to be doing.

PETER: Just a bit of dinner. She's all on her own.

SARAH: Thank you Peter but I've stayed too long as it is.

PETER: Are you sure. You'd be most welcome

SARAH: I'm heading off this evening. I'm back in work
tomorrow.

PETER: If you're ever back this way, feel free to call. Ken could
give you our address.

KEN: Now Granddad. Sarah's in a hurry.

SARAH: It is a beautiful place Peter but I've seen everything I
came here to see.

PETER: Well, safe journey

SARAH: I'm not one for re-visiting things. (*Pause*) I'll be off.

She starts to go, then turns back to get her bag.

SARAH: Nearly forgot this. (*She picks it up and heads SL. She
turns and waves*) Bye!

KEN: Goodbye Sarah and thanks again.

Sarah pauses briefly for a final look, then exits.

KEN: We'd better make a move.

PETER: She was a nice girl. You could do with a girl like that.

KEN: I think I might be too young for her. Right, let's be off.

Peter notices the bread on the bench.

PETER: Ah! We forgot to feed the ducks.

KEN: Take it with you and you can feed them tomorrow.

PETER: Yes, there's always tomorrow.

He picks up the bread.

KEN: Lead on.

PETER: Your granny can do it then. She loves feeding the ducks.

Ken smiles and nods. Peter stands, unsure of which way he should go. Ken indicates SR. Peter exits followed by Ken.

END OF PLAY