

Randall and Ward Attend the Theatre

A 10-minute play

by Rom Watson

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Cast

RANDALL, male, elderly
WARD, male, elderly

The location: outside a theatre in New York City.
The time: 1981.

RANDALL waits on the sidewalk in front of a theatre. He wears a dark three-piece suit. There is a carnation or other flower in his lapel. He checks his watch and looks down the street.

RANDALL

What if he doesn't show up? What'll I do? Go home? Too early. Go inside and watch the show by myself? Too depressing. What if something happened to him? He could have been hit by a car, or kidnapped by pirates, or. . .mutilated by flying monkeys.

Randall begins to pace.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

He'll be here. He's here every week. Stop getting worked up over nothing!

WARD enters. He also wears a dark three-piece suit.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Ah! There you are! You're late.

WARD

I am not. We have ten minutes till curtain.

RANDALL

Ward, I wish you would show up on time.

WARD

So stop arriving twenty minutes early. Old coot.

RANDALL

I can't help it.

WARD

Then don't blame me for being on time.

RANDALL

Stubborn old codger. Why do I even care.

WARD

I don't know! (Slight pause. His anger suddenly gone.) But I'm glad you do.

Ward smiles. Randall softens.

RANDALL

I'm glad you're safe.

WARD

Safe? What could happen to me on the streets of New York City?

RANDALL

You could be mutilated by flying monkeys.

WARD

Randall, there are no flying monkeys in Manhattan.

RANDALL

(Pointing upward.)

What do you call those?

WARD looks.

WARD

Pigeons.

Randall puts on his glasses and looks again.

RANDALL

Oh.

He takes off his glasses.

WARD

Silly old fool. Besides. I'm not the scarecrow.

RANDALL

You're *my* scarecrow.

WARD

Thanks, Dorothy.

RANDALL

(Glancing around.)

Shush.

WARD

You know what? Let's go somewhere else.

RANDALL

What?

WARD

We have a few minutes. We can walk to another theatre on this street and get a couple of tickets to something good.

RANDALL

No! I already bought the tickets.

WARD

Why? You know I can't stand this troupe.

RANDALL

I know.

WARD

So why do we keep coming to see them? They never get any better.

RANDALL

Because their shows are sparsely attended.

WARD

That's a selling point?

RANDALL

For us it is. We're less likely to be seen.

WARD

Ah.

RANDALL

Besides, if we saw anything else your wife might want to come with us.

WARD

Good point. She hates their shows even more than I do. At least the emcee is cute.

RANDALL

Cute, no, but endearing: yes. The emcee is endearing.

WARD

Though what he sees in that leading lady I'll never know.

RANDALL

Sometimes what attracts you to someone is . . . (He gazes at Ward.) . . .hard to describe. Or understand.

WARD

I'm not sure we need to understand it. I just know I want you to always look at me that way.

RANDALL

I will. (Slight pause.) Robert, do you ever wonder what our lives would be like if we had met before you married? Or if you left your wife?

WARD

No.

RANDALL

I do. A lot.

WARD

Why are you bringing this up again?

RANDALL

Because it's our anniversary.

WARD

What?

RANDALL

We met four years ago tonight. Oh, this boutonniere is for you.

He takes the flower from his lapel and transfers it to the lapel of Ward's suit.

WARD

Thank you.

RANDALL

Just make sure you throw it away before you get home.

WARD

Four years ago. Really?

RANDALL

At this very theatre.

WARD

I see. Well, I hate to say it, but our lives wouldn't be any different.

RANDALL

Why not?

WARD

Because . . . I would still marry.

RANDALL

What?

WARD

I'm afraid so.

RANDALL

Even with . . . the way we feel about each other?

WARD

Especially because of the way we feel about each other.

RANDALL

I don't understand you.

WARD

Being married is something I need. It protects me.

RANDALL

So you don't want to be with me.

WARD

Being together is a beautiful dream. But I live in the real world.

RANDALL

I live in the same world you do.

WARD

Then wake up and realize what the world is like.

RANDALL

The world is a lonely place. It's mean and it's cruel, and the only thing that makes it bearable is seeing you every Saturday night.

WARD

You know I feel the same way.

RANDALL

Then why would you choose to be apart?

WARD

Because I'm not as brave as you.

RANDALL

Brave? I'm not brave.

WARD

Yes you are. You never married.

RANDALL

How is that brave?

WARD

You left yourself open to speculation. And by speculation I mean gossip, rumors, and snickering behind your back.

RANDALL

Are there rumors about me?

WARD

Yes. There are rumors about all bachelors.

RANDALL

So . . .you would choose safety.

WARD

Not just safety. Security.

RANDALL

I see.

WARD

I can't tolerate being derided. I never could. (Pause.) I know that makes me a coward, but . . .that's how it is.

RANDALL

You deride everything we see on that stage in there.

WARD

They deserve being insulted.

RANDALL

They certainly do, don't they?

WARD

And there's no one I'd rather trade insults with than you.

RANDALL

Ahh.

WARD

But just because I can dish out the insults doesn't mean I can take them.

RANDALL

I always knew you had a marshmallow for a heart.

WARD

Besides, performers know that being heckled is a hazard if you choose to step on stage. But no one should be heckled in real life.

RANDALL

Hear hear. (Pause.) I'm not a bachelor on purpose, you know. I just . . .

WARD

Never met the right woman?

RANDALL

Never wanted to meet the right woman.

WARD

I wanted to meet the right woman, and I did.

RANDALL

Isn't it hard, living a lie every day of your life?

WARD

It's not a lie. We do love each other. Just not in a particularly passionate way.

RANDALL

Well, I'm glad you . . . have other passions.

WARD

And she has been a steady companion all these years. That counts for something.

RANDALL

(Thinking of Ward.)

It counts for a lot.

WARD
(Smiling at Randall.)

Yes it does.

RANDALL

We missed out, you know.

WARD

On what?

RANDALL

The way the younger men live now. More free. More open.

WARD

Yes, we're too old to be part of that. We're trapped by the era we were born into.

RANDALL

At least we're trapped together.

WARD

Though there is a positive side to being old.

RANDALL

What?

WARD

We're too old to have been promiscuous. Which might just save our lives.

RANDALL

Oh, you mean . . . the plague.

WARD

I hope it doesn't turn into a plague, but . . . that's where it seems to be heading.

RANDALL

I've always wondered what it would be like if our friendship was . . . physical . . .

WARD

. . . me too . . .

RANDALL

. . . but I guess it's for the best to keep things the way they are. At least we get to grow old together.

WARD

We're already old. But I know what you mean.

A pause.

RANDALL

How did you get out of having children?

WARD

She never wanted any.

RANDALL

Why not?

WARD

I didn't want children either, so I never asked.

RANDALL

Sounds like you have the perfect arrangement.

WARD

It's not perfect. But it works for us.

RANDALL

I suppose that's the best any of us can hope for. Something that works for us.

WARD

That's what you and I have.

RANDALL

I guess we do.

WARD

Of course you want more. So do I. (They look at each other.) But what we have will have to suffice. (Slight pause.) Happy anniversary.

RANDALL

Happy anniversary.

A pause.

WARD

What seats did you get us?

RANDALL

The same as always.

WARD

Why? Wouldn't you like to sit down front for a change?

RANDALL

No!

WARD

That was very emphatic. Why not?

RANDALL

Because I've checked the sight lines in there very thoroughly. That box we always sit in? It's the one place in this theatre where we can sit and nobody can see us holding hands.

Ward is touched.

WARD

Well then. Shall we take our seats?

Randall takes two tickets out of his jacket pocket and gives one to Ward.

RANDALL

After you.

They exit into the theatre. End of play.